

CRUISING TIMBER SURE BEATS CRUISING ROUGH ROAD TO IT 10/10/00

The essence of this column began many years ago in the heart and mind of a young man from the Catskills. His love of the outdoors and remote wilderness led him to the Adirondacks. There, near Schroon Lake, he and three companions indulged their passion for hunting and fishing from a semi-remote hunting camp. They ranged about the area sampling the sporting life and whatever else the area had to offer.

The longing barely sated, he continued to cast about for the more complete wilderness experience that the Adirondacks still offer. The search and the dream finally culminated this past year with the purchase of one of the last remote tracts of woodland left in New York State. Consisting of 1,600+ acres, it sprawls along and across close to five miles of the West Canada Creek. Bordering the State's West Canada Lakes Wilderness Area, it truly represents the ultimate in true wilderness east of the Mississippi.

It remains nearly as inaccessible today as it did in the days of legendary French Louis, hermit of West Canada Lake. The early foot trails that paralleled West Creek gradually transited from horse traveled tote roads to today's modern all-wheel-drive nightmare.

Access begins with an exemplary 2.6 miles of Town of Ohio gravel road from Route 8 north along the West Creek. The next 8.3 miles ends in stark contrast and exemplifies the description oft used to describe something as looking like "ten miles of bad road." The unimproved road delineation assigned to it on current USGS maps is close to an exaggeration. The first 6.1 miles are over the Black River Wild Forest area and are lined with some of the finest manure and over-mature northern hardwood forest anywhere in the Northeast. Occasional views of the West Creek are interspersed with the above and can really not be appreciated unless one stops and takes them in. Driver and passengers alike are compelled to focus their entire attention on the roadbed and the dangers posed to both vehicle and occupant as you lurch from one boulder or depression to another. The several trips I have taken over it have shown that a flat one-hour interval to traverse it is the best one can hope for.

At the end is the southern end of the property now called the West Canada Preserve by owners Tom Williams and Mike Ostrow. A well-built two-story frame camp sits on the south bank of the stream. A smaller, less modest accommodation sets on the north shore of the creek at the far end of the holdings. It can only be reached by floatplane, all terrain rain vehicle, snowmobile or shanks mare. The first options is the one most preferred by all, especially yours truly.

It is an option that offers a unique experience to those able to avail themselves of it and one denied to many on vast areas of state lands – a questionable prohibition considering its several advantages and the fact that it leaves no trace of the prime mover's influence.

I mention the two means of access because for the purpose of my involvement in the preserve they will both have to be utilized to carry out my assignment. A comprehensive management plan of the property includes a forest inventory and timber sale in which I am an integral part. The inventory was completed in September, 1999, and the preparatory plans for the timber sale were finalized in July of this year.

On August 18, the marking of the trees to be selected for harvest began and it is the subsequent events since then that will be reported in this space.

The inspiration for the same was provided by a man named Ed Maunton years ago. I was impressed by his story on his exploits as a beaver trapper. The title was "Diary of a Beaver Trapper."

Forever at a lost for topics, it occurred to me that there may be many who would be interested in what a timber cruiser does. I will attempt to enlighten those so included starting with next week's missive titled, "Diary of a Timber Cruiser."