

THE OCTOBER CELEBRATION

This weekend, American males (and a few hardy women) will take to the woods for the annual celebration of mighty manhood called the 'deer hunting season'.

These pseudo-Nimrods have taken to the local rifle range and tried to sight in their weapons, wasting many rounds of ammunition while trying to destroy a target that isn't moving, and isn't blending into the background. The fact that they haven't practiced since last year doesn't really matter, since their physical condition probably won't let them trek very far off the beaten path and no deer worthy of the species would be caught dead that close to these mighty hunters (no pun intended.)

They'll gas up their bright and shiny SUV's, attach their brand new trailer with that fancy ATV on it, load up their supplies that they just got from Cabela's, stop at the local store and top off the beer supply and be off for the deep woods. It goes without saying that they'll probably stay at a campground with toilet facilities and running water, and really rough it with their folding charcoal grills and portable refrigerators.

Come nighttime, they'll erect their four-person tent with folding side panels and built-in lighting, blow up their queen-size air mattresses and settle in for good night's sleep. But before that, they'll grill their T-bones over the charcoal grill and swill suds until late into the night. And all throughout the evening, they'll regale each other with tales of their previous hunts, where they brought down a twenty-four point buck at seven-hundred yards in the fog.

At first light (about seven-thirty or so), they'll fire up the gas stove and heat the water for their instant coffee and enjoy the Costco croissants that got squashed in the back of the SUV on the way up. They'll adorn themselves with the latest L.L. Bean camo fatigues and arrange their ammo belts (with the built-in special weapons knife sheath) to suit their ample frames.

Then it's off into the deep woods, looking for Bambi's father. Being careful to only step on dead branches that snap loudly, they sneak craftily through the woods, checking their GPS handhelds for where they think they are. Of course, the Stellar Jays have alerted any wildlife for a half-mile as to the updated location of the intrepid hunter.

At some point in the day, both fatigue and hangover will present a mirage that looks like something akin to a deer, whereupon the mighty shooter will loosen up their thirty-round AR-15 and empty a magazine in that general direction. They'll then head over there and spend a half-hour thrashing through the underbrush, looking for their non-existent

prey.

After a full day of this adrenaline-filled adventure, they'll check their GPS's and find that they're three miles away from where they thought they were, and it's getting dark. They'll fire up their 700 lumen head-lamps and noisily find their way back to their camp, arriving well after dark and hungry as hell.

It's then time to fire up the grill again (with beer in hand), grab a couple of sirloins from the fridge (with beer in hand), and light up the campfire in its iron fire ring (with beer in hand, of course). They'll bring out the Sportman's Warehouse latest version of the camp chair with lumbar support, and the bull will start flowing (and not necessarily downhill).

After a couple of days of this, supplies will run low (mostly beer) and it'll be time to return to civilization and family with tales of bravado about encounters with cougars and bear, and the three huge bucks that just barely got away because the rifle sights got nudged.

While I've super-exaggerated this tale for the sake of the yuck, in a lot of cases it isn't far from the truth. Let me cite some examples from my personal experience ...

There was a rancher in New Mexico that ran a few hundred head of cattle on government grazing land in the forest. Every year, he would round up the cattle, run them through a squeeze-chute and paint the letters "COW" on both sides of the animal. He still lost an average of seven to ten head every year to hunters.

There are several examples every year of hunters getting shot while moving through the brush in their bright orange hats and vests. One year, again in New Mexico, a motorcycle rider got nailed as he rode up a forest-service track. One has to wonder ...

A few years ago, a mile behind our property on the last day of hunting season, we were traveling on a BLM road in the late afternoon. What to our wondering eyes did appear but a late model pickup with at least five men in it ... two in the cab and three standing in the bed and all with weapons at the ready. It looked for all the world like a modern version of the Keystone Cops of silent movie fame coming down the road at us. Oh, and I didn't mention the three dogs providing musical accompaniment. Of course, no self-respecting deer would be within a mile of these Nimrods.

And the classic one that I remember from down south is this one:

Northern New Mexico attracts their share of Texans, who head up into the mountains to claim their trophies and venison.

I was keeping a friend of mine (who was a game warden) company at a checkout station just outside the forest service boundary one day. Up comes a shiny new Cadillac with Texas plates. Strapped to the fender, dressed out and tagged was a full-size, real, honest-to-God pack mule.

Jerry asked the guy driving, "Looks good. Do you know what you have here?"

The guy beamed, proud as punch. "Yep, I got me a mule deer."

Jerry managed to keep a straight face, and handed the guy back his tags and license. "Have a safe trip home, sir. Enjoy your trophy."

As the guy drove off in a cloud of dust. I asked Jerry, " You just let him go?"

Jerry grinned and said, "Yeah, just consider when he tries to cook it, not to mention the crap he'll take at the first gas station. That'll be punishment enough."

The autumn celebration continues ...