

## The Long Red Line

by Dr. Richard Craft

For weeks it was becoming evident that D-Day was approaching. The little nip in the air was a dead giveaway that Deer Day would soon be here. Restaurants, gas stations, stores, motels began putting out WELCOME HUNTERS signs. Deer sightings became more numerous, as were the road kills. The yearly cyclical desire to procreate took front stage as the *odocoileus virginianus* (Virginia or white tail deer) threw caution to the wind as the bucks sped across highways, over streams, through backyards in pursuit of the temporary loves of their lives. As some would say, they had to make hay while the attraction lasted.

All of a sudden, blaze orange and camouflage became the dress of the day as those so attired showed up in stores in preparation for the first offering of bow season. These sleuths of the forest were the first wave into the woods, hoping to get a shot off within bow range and bring home some venison. It's harder than you think, and more often than not, the white tail laughed as the deer ran from his or her encounter without a scratch. That's why they call it hunting.

The weekend before rifle season once again brought a flurry of activity to our town. Late Sunday afternoon before D-Day I drove onto **Rte. 44/55** en route to Sholam and noticed a steady stream of cars wending their way up **Honk Hill**. I apologized to my guest, who was from Long Island, for the traffic jam, and he just laughed. Then it dawned on me that this was not local traffic, these were hunters headed for "camp."

On the following morning, the alarm woke me at 4:30 AM and I sprang from my bed knowing exactly what was the matter. No new fallen snow either, but we will save that for the coming season. By 5:30, I had put on all my gear, made my lunch, and was met by my son-in-law, J.B. Gillette, for our traditional opening day breakfast at the *209 Diner*.

Upon arriving, I noticed more activity than in previous years. However, it wasn't until we began driving out of Napanoch, headed for Grahamsville, that I began to see the long, red line of tail lights ahead of us, all headed in the same direction. Again we viewed it as we went up **Rte. 55** and looked across the reservoir to **Rte. 55A**.

A steady stream of red lights was headed for Sholam, Yaegerville, Lackawack, and points north. They weren't sightseers... they were hunters.

For the past few years, the number of hunters has been decreasing, but according to the latest information, that number has tapered off, with some areas seeing an increase in the number of hunting licenses issued. I later found out from Town Clerk Jane Eck that this was a banner year for licenses with well over a thousand issued.

According to information I have read, the reasons for this turnaround can be attributed to several factors. Some of the reasons include excellent marketing by the hunting industry in the form of new products found in a growing number of outdoor/hunting magazines.

Other reasons include the growing number of specialized hunting groups, such as turkey hunters, bow hunters, waterfowl hunters, and an increased awareness of lodges, outfitters, hunting plantations which offer first class accommodations, and guides. There is more public land for hunting, and a trend has started where grandfathers are now introducing their grandsons to hunting for the first time. I could also mention the presence of the NRA and the TV channels that are now featuring hunting, fishing, etc. 24-7. Of course, the issue of second amendment rights has brought an increased interest to this arena.

The Town of Wawarsing has some of the finest hunting in the state. Just three years ago, our town and area was mentioned as a hunting hot spot by the New York Hunter Magazine. In my capacity as Supervisor, at that time, I wrote them and, in a return letter, they assured me that Wawarsing would be covered in a future issue. Well, it didn't happen but the potential is still there.

We have excellent trout fishing in the **Sandburgh/Rondout** stream, the **Beerkill** and the **VerNooykill**. Deer, bear, turkey and other small game abounds throughout the valley and mainly in the western portions of the township. Even the **Shawangunk Ridge** has much to offer. Truly, the DEC and Open Space Institute should be credited and thanked for opening their newly acquired lands to all forms of outdoor activity. Excellent fishing is also available at the **Merriman Dam** (by permit only, but it is free). Large lake trout and other game fish seem to thrive in that large body of water by the dam.

The peace and tranquility of our

streams and forests is usually taken for granted by us "locals." Bring someone in from New Jersey or Long Island, place them on a wood road deep in the forest and the first words out of their mouths are, "It's so quiet." They are absolutely awed by the immensity of the surroundings and can't take enough deep breaths. This truly is a unique and unforgettable experience for them and they relish every moment.

Yes, the long red line has returned, and we welcome them back. They, too, have come to appreciate a squirrel hiding acorns in the soil, or watching a flock of turkeys scurrying past, oblivious of your presence. Did I get a deer? Not yet, but I did observe a young doe peacefully grazing not 30 feet from where I was sitting. She spent more than a half-hour browsing the choicest of morsels from the forest floor, laying up fat for the coming winter. Or how about today's experience, when I sighted two coyotes, one jet black and one a patchwork of tan and black, float noiselessly in and out of the timber. They didn't stop to say hello.

We have it all here. There are still areas in our town that are unspoiled, untrampled, where tire marks have never marred the surface. This is indeed "God's Country" and I, for one, aim to keep it that way. I would encourage all true conservationists to join me. 🌿

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