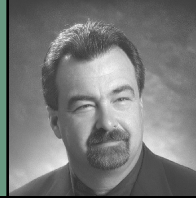


# Surveying 'Da Situation



By John D. Matonich, LS

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## Handing Down Traditions

**H**ere in Michigan we have a number of traditions. Watching the Wolverines play their fall classic against that school in Columbus is one. Continually holding up your hand to give someone a geography lesson about the “mitten” shape of Michigan, or trying to contort your hand to resemble the shape of the Upper Peninsula (UP) is another. Once you start with the hand thing it's hard to stop, even though it is practically impossible to make your hand look like the UP. But one of the oldest traditions is whitetail deer season. It only runs about 16 days, but it tends to involve a large percentage of the male (and a fair amount of the female) population in the state.

The central theme revolving around deer season is “deer camp.” Whether you are in the southern tier of counties or the extreme west end of the UP (where I hunt), camps spring up or are opened up for those 16 days to give shelter to those in search of the “big kahuna.”

Naturally, in places where men gather year after year, traditions evolve (or at least one tale of infamy will “live on” as long as that camp is around). Our deer camp is no different. The camp is as far west in Michigan as you can go (here is where we would normally try to insert the hand visual) and has not only yielded a fair number of deer, but stories and traditions as well. Not all of them can be put in print. Without violating the rule of “what happens in camp, stays in camp,” I'm sure I can share a few without too much retribution from the rest of the group.

As with most camps, someone assumes the role of camp cook and food is abundant. I have seen and partaken in many of these lavish meals. If some of the wives discovered how well these guys can



really cook, there might be change of duties on the homefront. Whether it's opening day “Rigs and Ravs” with the boys from “Rocky Creek,” or lamb chops at the “19th Hole,” everybody usually eats pretty well. I'm not much of a cook, so I typically share the clean-up duties. It's a small price to pay for the great meals Scotty makes for us.

After the dinner dishes are put away, a libation or two may be consumed. This can lead to the stories that make for a memorable trip. Last year was no different. The day before the season opener we had a fair amount of visitors from neighboring camps. One of the visitors asked Scotty for a haircut. Now Scotty's talents are not limited to cooking, mind you; he also tends the sauna fire, handles any electrical needs we may have, and is pretty handy with the barber shears. The type of haircut he specializes in resembles the military style for new recruits. That's

the style our guest wanted so that's what he got. Well, this inspired a few more guys to get haircuts as well, including my brother, my cousin, and his son. Fortunately for me, I value my hair more than the need to conform to the rest of the group, so I declined the invitation for a similar cut.

There were some good laughs that night as the mirror got passed around, but it was pretty quiet the next day when we headed out in the early morning to our respective deer blinds. Some were reaching for heavier stocking hats, while others grumbled about better judgement. A few days later my brother and I headed into town to take his wife out for lunch. My sister-in-law summed it up pretty well when she took one look at him and said with a shrug, “I guess when you wake up dumb, you're dumb all day.” After I stopped laughing, I saw the wisdom in that statement and knew this would be one of those events that would live on in the memories of those who were there. In case certain people try to forget, we do have photos, which are sure to make it onto one of the camp walls.

I've hunted well over 30 years, but of all the traditions and stories, none make me smile more than the tradition my son and I started last year. I brought him to camp later in the season to hunt with me for the first time. As we drove the 9½-hour journey to camp, we talked about a lot of things. I listened to one of his rap CDs, and he listened a classic rock radio station that I tuned into along the way. He was also a successful hunter. On the way back to camp he hugged me and said, “Thanks Dad. I'll never forget this.” All I could muster for a response was, “You're welcome...” but I was thinking, “Guess what, son—neither will I.”

And that is the situation as I survey it... *A*