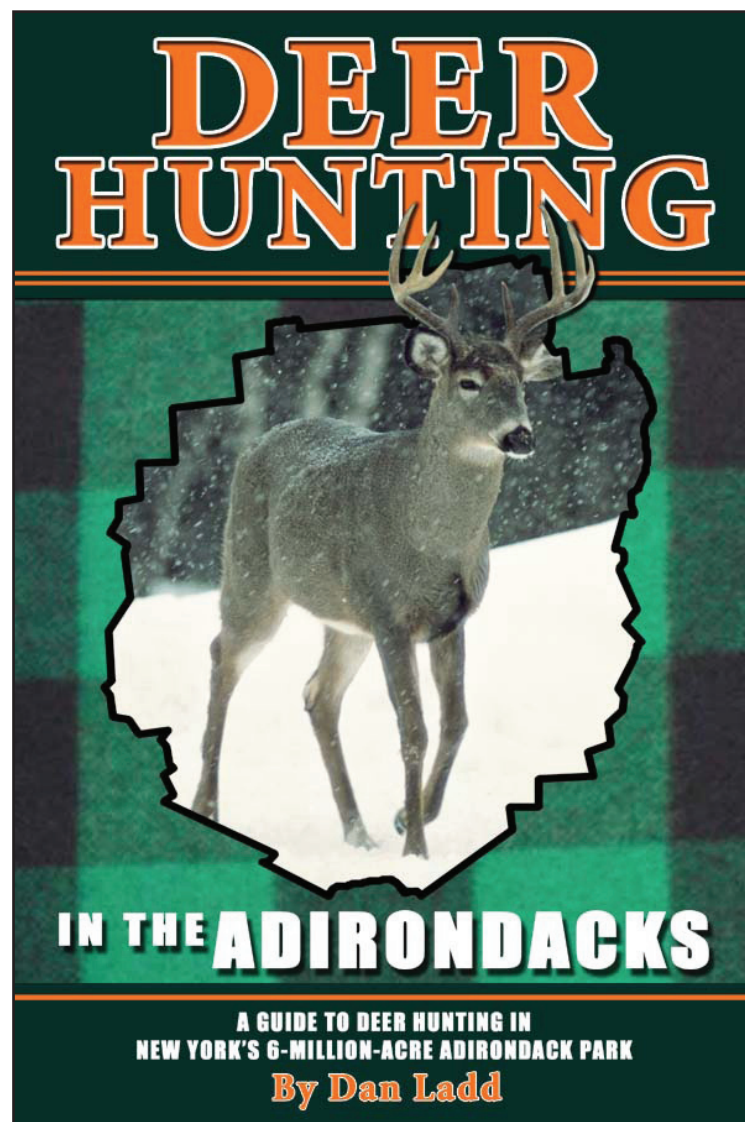


For the Beginning Hunter
An Excerpt from
*Deer Hunting
in the Adirondacks*
By Dan Ladd (2010)



www.ADKHunter.com

FOR THE BEGINNER

By Dan Ladd

I have to admit that the following section is something that should have appeared in the first printing of this book, and I can assure you that it will be in all subsequent printings and versions. It is a topic that seems to continuously arise no matter where I go and one that I am always happy to discuss and help where I can. The surprising factor is that I find myself discussing it with youth and adults alike who have never hunted before but feel they may be developing an interest in it. If you're one of those people who have always wanted to hunt but are not sure where to start, then read on. This section is for you, with the assumption that you have read, or will read, other chapters in this book.

First, I congratulate you on acting on your desire to learn more about hunting and perhaps putting yourself amongst the ranks with those of us who not only love to hunt, but are addicted to the sport. Not everyone is lucky enough to have had a mentor to take them along or teach them the ins and outs of hunting. In fact, in today's world there is less and less of that and I understand that it can be difficult for a newcomer who may not know where to begin. So here goes.

The first requirement for being a hunter is understanding that eventually you will likely find yourself in a situation where you will have to make the decision to take the life of an animal. There is no sugar coating this. These animals are God's creatures. They are beautiful and to be admired and with their death comes a bit of remorse. The taking of life is the means to the end of the hunt and when it happens I always make my peace with the creature that lies before me. I do this out of respect and gratefulness. There are people who simply can not contemplate killing an animal and that is understandable. Some find this out sooner than others. That said, respecting your quarry is one of the foundations of being a hunter. Each individual will have to figure out on their own that they are capable of following through on the hunt.

Once you decide you are going to act on your hunting interest you will need to purchase a hunting license to do so. To qualify for that in New York (and most anywhere) you will have to take a hunter-education course which will teach you firearm safety and basic hunting nomenclature. These courses are taught by certified instructors and are organized by area shooting clubs and other organizations. You can find out more specific information about these classes by keeping an eye on local newspapers, contacting local shooting clubs or visiting sporting goods stores. DEC also maintains a list of scheduled courses. Courses are usually offered in the spring as well as in the late summer and early fall. Some school districts have very active 4-H programs which are excellent sources for youth participation and education in shooting sports.

If you are going hunting you will obviously need a firearm or bow to hunt with. Hunting small game is a good place to start for beginners so a shotgun or a .22 rimfire rifle is usually the firearm of choice. The .22 is called a rimfire because the firing pin in the rifle hits the edge of the rear bullet casing as opposed to the primer in the center of a "centerfire" bullet. Shotguns are centerfire guns that shoot a spray of small BB-like projectiles known as "birdshot" which is used primarily on game-birds, squirrels and rabbits. They are classified by their size or "gauge" with the smaller the gauge numbers representing larger loads. A 12-gauge load of birdshot is much larger than a .20-gauge load, and so on. Many youths shoot .410- and 20-gauge shotguns saving the larger 12-gauge load for turkeys or for when they are more physically capable of handling the larger firearm. The smaller load also is more challenging, has less range and often teaches the art of responsible shooting.

That too can be said for the .22 rimfire rifle, that little bullet which is so popular among hunters and sport shooters. .22 bullets are cheap and quality rifles are a joy to shoot and hunt with. A .22 bullet is capable of traveling much further than a shotgun load and care must be taken with each shot. However, the challenge of squirrel and rabbit hunting with a .22 rimfire has proved as the training ground for many hunters who eventually become deer hunters.

To many of us, deer hunting is the ultimate challenge and experience. It is the sole reason that most people take up the sport of hunting and is also where the rules change. Deer are hunted with much larger centerfire rifles than the .22 rimfire. They are also hunted with shotguns where lead slugs are used instead of birdshot. Guns for deer hunting are as varied as the territory you hunt in and the way you go about it. The hunter who sits on a stand overlooking a field or open hardwoods may tote something like a fast shooting .270 or .243 caliber rifle, which is capable of shooting a distance of 100 yards or beyond with a flat bullet trajectory. This rifle is often a bolt-action model with a high-powered scope. On the other side of the coin, the hunter who still hunts an Adirondack swamp or sits on the end of a deer drive is more likely to carry a lever action 30-30, .308 or other caliber. They may have open “iron” sites, a peep site or even a low-powered scope. Pump actions and semi-automatics in .30-06 are also favorable. This hunter needs a fast handling gun for shooting a moving target inside of 100-yards or often much closer.

You, as a new hunter need to decide what type of hunting you want to do and get the gun that’s right for the job. There is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all. You may already have a deer rifle that belonged to a family member or that you hunted with years ago. If so, don’t worry that it’s obsolete. Just know what that gun is capable of, its limitations and what your shooting abilities are. Once in the field, apply this information to your hunt.

Archery hunting is a whole different ball game. If you have never shot a bow you will need to be fitted by your local retailer. We are all built differently and it is important that you get a bow that matches your physical stature. Whether it’s a gun or bow you’re after be sure to do your shopping well in advance of the hunting season. Visit local retailers and be sure to tell them that you are new at this and what type of hunting you want to do. They will welcome you to the hunting world and will recommend the proper equipment for the type of hunting you will be doing, be it big game, small game or even archery.

Once you own one or several firearms you’ll need a place to shoot them. The days of visiting the local sand pit are all but over. As is shooting in our back yards, unless you have a safe place to do so. One option is to invest in a quality air rifle and do some backyard plinking. Another option is to visit a local shooting, or fish and game club. Shooting clubs are all over but some offer different opportunities than others. You will need a place where you can shoot at least 100 yards to properly sight in your deer rifle. Other than that, regular .22 and shotgun practice will keep you in shape for hunting season. Joining a club can be expensive but it is worth it, especially if you use the club more than just the week before deer season. Like hunter education classes, be sure to keep an eye and ear on the local media for events and shoots and don’t be afraid to pop in and ask questions about joining a club. Most clubs hold monthly meetings and are recruiting new members and volunteers.

So, now you’ve had your training, you’ve purchased and practiced with your firearm and you want to go hunting. As mentioned previously, small game hunting is great training for big game hunting but is also an institution all its own. There are many rewards to small game hunting so be sure to give it a try. But our focus here is on deer so I’ll elaborate more on that. You’ll need to think about the type of hunting you want to do. If you prefer to hunt alone you may find stand hunting (sitting still) or still hunting to be your thing. There’s no reason you can’t share these techniques with a partner as well. Learning to track deer takes a lot of skill but we all have to start somewhere. If that is your passion, go for it. If companionship is what you seek then look for a group to join in with. Many of these groups make deer drives and/or belong to camps. Get involved and be prepared to learn the woods and carry your own weight. If you do so, you’ll be accepted in no time.

Like shooting clubs, many hunting camps and clubs often recruit members. Check them out and make sure they are right for you before you sign on the dotted line. If you are a parent with a child who is interested in hunting it is imperative that you contact either a shooting or hunting club and find

out what youth shooting programs they have. Some have mentoring programs just for that purpose. Be on the lookout for someone to take your youngster under their wing. Get to know and be comfortable with them.

One skill many new hunters lack is the ability to properly field dress a deer. Don't be embarrassed about this but be sure to learn how to do it as soon as possible. The only way is to get your hands dirty. If you hunt solo then find some articles or videos on the subject, study them and do the best you can when the time comes. It might not be a bad idea to carry a copy folded up in your pocket to follow along with. If you hunt in a group and another

member shoots a deer, then pay close attention to how they do it. Don't be afraid to help out. If you are the lucky hunter who gets the deer then also don't be shy about asking for help. It's better to do it right and teach a newcomer than to damage good venison. Over time you will learn how it's properly done.

As you can see there is a lot more to hunting than buying a license and learning how to safely handle a gun or bow. But if the new hunter takes the proper steps they will gradually gain the knowledge and lore needed and be on their way to being as good a hunter as a seasoned veteran. All you have to do is try. Good luck!



Every hunter has to start somewhere and for many hunters it is small game hunting with a mentor.

About the Author

Dan Ladd is a freelance outdoor journalist from West Fort Ann, N.Y. who has been published regularly in *The Chronicle* in Glens Falls, *The Press-Republican* in Plattsburgh, *Outdoors Magazine*, *New York Outdoor News* and *FishNY.com*. Dan is also the web author of the popular deer hunting website, www.ADKHunter.com.

A multi-generation Adirondacker, Dan is a graduate of SUNY Plattsburgh and is the Northern Region Vice President of the New York State Outdoor Writers Association (NYSOWA). In 2008 Dan self-published *Deer Hunting in the Adirondacks* which was updated for a second printing in August of 2010. In November of 2010 he released his second book entitled *Well Seasoned in the Adirondacks*, which is a collection of his newspaper columns about outdoor recreational activities enjoyed year-round in the Adirondack Park.

Dan is currently working on a script for the forthcoming video documentary, *Adirondack Deer Camp*.