

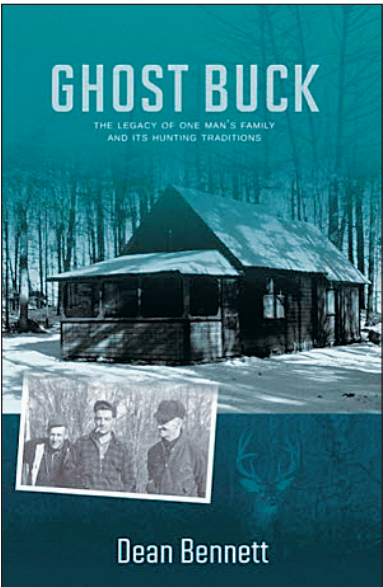
## ‘Ghost Buck’ a memoir worth reading

BY JOHN HOLYOKE  
BDN STAFF

During his adult life, Dean Bennett has worn a number of vocational hats: He has been a cabinet maker, a curriculum developer and a college professor.

Luckily for readers, he’s also a writer.

His latest book, “Ghost Buck: The Legacy of One Man’s Family and its Hunting Tradition,” is one that certainly will resonate with many Mainers who grew up, as he did, in a community where hunting was far more than a pastime.



“Ghost Buck,” Bennett’s 10th book, traces the Bennett family’s deer hunting tradition from the beginning of the 1900s onward. The writer explains that in the western Maine town of Locke’s Mills, deer season was so important that the local mill shut down on opening day.

To his family, deer hunting — and their own Camp Sheepskin — was a key part of life. Family members gathered at the rustic camp for special occasions throughout the year, learned about the woods and waters from their elders and eventually progressed to hunting.

The legend of the “Ghost Buck” is a thread that links generations, and mention of the biggest deer anyone had ever seen crops up regularly as new family members find monstrous tracks or catch fleeting glimpses of the spectral creature.

But while the “Ghost Buck” has lead billing on the book’s title page, this isn’t really what the book is about.

Instead, Bennett explores a few basic questions in what is essentially a memoir: How has deer hunting changed over more than 100 years? What does it teach us? How did it help keep our family close? And, perhaps most importantly, why is deer hunting important to us?

“[Time spent deer hunting] had come to have inestimable value for me, time that had to be guarded with the same kind of vigilance given to matters of national security, time around which a portion of my life had been organized for as long as I can remember,” Bennett writes.

One shortcoming: The pace of “Ghost Buck,” especially in its opening chapters, sometimes lags, as Bennett strives to give a full historical accounting of his family’s genealogy and the various roles the different characters played in each others’ lives. If all the readers were Bennetts or related to Bennetts, that’s a fine device.

But when you’re writing for a larger audience, that technique can bog down the story and leave heads spinning.

Luckily, after the groundwork has been laid, “Ghost Buck” takes off because of another technique the writer employs to great advantage. Bennett had access to decades of camp records and intersperses those log entries to illustrate the annual activities that took place.

When Camp Sheepskin was built in 1936, family members began logging their visits and observations in the camp register. Bennett mined those registers for facts and anecdotes that surely wouldn’t have survived had they not been written down and uses them to illustrate the role hunting and the camp played for all involved.

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## Rounding up moose

### Biologists add County site to collar research project

BY JOHN HOLYOKE  
BDN STAFF

For the past two years, helicopter crews involved with Maine’s ongoing moose research project have focused their efforts on an area near Greenville and Jackman. Last week, a new study area was added in Aroostook County, about one degree of latitude — or about 70 miles — north.

The state’s moose biologist said expanding the study to another area will bolster the data-gathering effort and allow biologists to better understand moose survival and mortality across the state.

That effort, which added 70 northern Maine moose to the study group, along with also adding another 36 moose calves located in the original study area, will help biologists better understand moose survival in the state. In addition, New Hampshire fish and game officials are conducting an identical study in

their state that will provide more data across the northeastern landscape, according to Lee Kantar of the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife.

Crews from Native Range Capture Services of Elko, Nevada, have been capturing moose with nets, then taking hair, blood and fecal samples from those moose and fitting them with GPS collars since last week, Kantar said. The crews rely on good snow cover, because it makes the moose more visible. Last week’s snowstorm came just after Kantar and a Maine Forest Service helicopter pilot did some recon work in northern Maine, and struggled to find moose for potential collaring.

“We were fortunate because we got that snowstorm,” Kantar said. “That first Saturday [before the snow] it was challenging. There was snow on the ground, but no snow in the trees, so the moose didn’t show up as well. And there were a number of ground seeps that looked like



MAINE DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

Lee Kantar (top left), the state’s moose biologist, and Matt O’Neal, moose project biologist, collect biological samples from a moose that will be fit with a GPS collar (above) and join others in the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife’s five-year moose research project during work in Aroostook County last week.

bedded-down moose from the air.

“[After the storm] it was night and day. We were just seeing moose everywhere,” he said.

Kantar said that the Nevada-based crew had never worked in the east before, but were very productive, even when conditions were nasty.

“This professional capture crew operates in conditions when it’s snowing and it’s windy, and neither you nor I would want to be up in those conditions in a helicopter,” he said. “They’re incredibly talented people.”

The movements of the moose  
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AISLINN SARNACKI | BDN

## 1-Minute Hike: Pleasant Lake Preserve

**Difficulty:** Easy to moderate. From the parking lot to the end of the main trail is 1.4 miles, and a side loop adds 0.4 miles to the trail network. Expect hills, uneven terrain, exposed tree roots and rocks as you follow the wide, well-marked trails.

**How to get there:** From Interstate 95 Exit 167 (for Etna), drive north on Route 143 for about 7 miles (passing straight through an intersection along the way) and turn right onto a short drive that leads to the preserve parking lot. A sign for the preserve is at the end of the drive, which is just past Cobb Road (also on the right).



AISLINN SARNACKI

**Watch the video**  
bangordailynews.com

**Information:** Pleasant Lake Preserve in Stetson began as a gift.

In 2010, Kent Hewitt donated a 100-acre wooded peninsula on Pleasant Lake to the Seabasticook Regional Land Trust, as well as a 50-acre wetland adjacent to the property. The land had long been enjoyed by boaters, fishermen, hunters and hikers, and he wanted to ensure public access well into the future. Now called Pleasant Lake Preserve, the property features 1.8 miles of hiking trails that lead through a mixed forest and wetlands to the edge of Pleasant Lake.

From the preserve’s parking area off Route 143, visitors can follow blue blazes along a woods road that crosses private woodlot

to reach the preserve. This blue-blazed route is called a “right-of-way” and is used by snowmobiles in the winter.

Descending a long, gradual hill, the woods road — surfaced with gravel and rock — weaves through a mixed forest for about 0.5 miles before entering into the preserve at the edge of a wetland area. A small sign posted on a tree to the right of the trail will let you know when you’re crossing the preserve boundary.

Entering the preserve, the trail crosses through the wetlands, which is a great place for bird watching year-round, then plunges back into the woods. Seabasticook Regional Land Trust completed a selective timber harvesting on the peninsula in 2013, and the preserve trails were completed in 2014.

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The water along the edge of Pleasant Lake is freezing into ice in Stetson. A hiking trail in Pleasant Lake Preserve leads to this view of the lake.

## Think a cold snap made the ice safe? Think again

After “suffering” through a December of mild weather, the state’s ice anglers have received a New Year’s gift with a cold snap that has surely begun to freeze up Maine’s lakes and ponds.

Notice I used the words “begun to.” That’s important.

That doesn’t mean that lakes or ponds are necessarily safe to fish, and it certainly doesn’t mean that anglers or snowmobilers ought to take their sleds onto the ice quite yet.

As the Maine Warden Service often warns: Check early. Check often.

On social media, including Facebook, I’ve seen plenty of photos from folks who have found fishing spots with ice that they trust. In some of those photos, I also see that there’s open water just a few feet away from an ice fishing trap.

Curious about conditions, and eager to write a cautionary column, I reached out to Wes Ashe, a fisheries biologist for the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife.

In his private time, Ashe also organizes a benefit ice fishing derby that lasts throughout the season, and he has been receiving entries from anglers around the

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