



PETE WARNER | BDN

BDN assistant sports editor Pete Warner removes the primer cap from his muzzleloader recently after an unsuccessful two-week deer hunting stint.

## Hunt

*Continued from Page C1*

around. On the positive side, I didn't have to ask one of my hunting buddies to borrow a "smoke pole," because I finally had one of my own.

There had been some trepidation carrying around a borrowed muzzleloader in years before, especially because the only time it had been fired was to empty the gun when the season ended.

This year, the hope was that some cold and possibly snowy weather would move into eastern Maine and help bring the deer out from wherever they had been hiding during the unseasonably mild firearms season.

Among the benefits of hunting with a muzzleloader is the reduced human activity in the woods. Until this year, I had never even seen another hunter during the second season.

One gains confidence knowing it's basically you and the deer with little chance of having someone else walk in on you or bounce the deer in a different direction.

The successful 2014 foray provided what was a false sense of confidence this year. I deluded myself into thinking the deer somehow would be able to sense the hunting pressure was off and would let their guard down.

There is an added level of guilt that accompanies muzzleloader season. All those little projects in and around the house that did not get done during November remained uncompleted.

Luckily Annia, my patient and supportive wife of 31-plus years, has resigned herself to the fact I'm not going to be much help during hunting season.

She roots for a successful hunt, if only to regain my limited services sooner.

This year, I split my muzzleloading efforts between sites in Newburgh and Otis, and I saw nada. Even the red squirrels appeared to be hunkering down for the onset of winter.

I planned the final hurrah for Dec. 4. I figured I would head to Otis, where in recent months and weeks the woodcutters had transformed a thick, tangled jungle into a more viable hunting area.

With any luck, I reasoned, I would have to call my hunting buddies — two of whom don't hunt after regular firearms season — to help me drag out a buck.

Things didn't work out as planned.

Upon my arrival at the usual parking spot, I en-

countered a large pickup truck and a sizeable trailer, which had been unloaded save for a treestand. I was surprised to see a vehicle there but opted for Plan B.

I drove a few hundred yards down the road and parked at a small turnout, then walked down the road a bit farther where I planned to walk in. There was the four-wheeler, which clearly arrived on the aforementioned trailer.

Now I was miffed. I voiced my displeasure via text message to one of my hunting buddies as I walked back to my vehicle.

Just then, a pickup truck carrying two hunters rolled by and we exchanged waves. Why, suddenly, was everybody out hunting at this location during muzzleloader season?

Before I could get back in the car, I began hearing the repeated pop of small-arms fire from the other side of the road. Hunting over there was Plan C.

I improvised and drove back out toward the main road a ways. I pulled off to the side and finally started hunting.

The rest of the day was uneventful. The warm, moist conditions made for quiet walking as I made stops in strategic locations.

I saw nothing, save for some fresh boot tracks and some stray hoof prints. I explored an area close to a stream and marveled at the surroundings, disturbed only by the flapping tail of an angry beaver whose territory I had invaded.

During the last sit, I thought back on the events of the six weeks and lamented that muzzleloader season had been unproductive — for the fourth time in five attempts.

Even so, those two weeks provided several more chances to get out in the woods. The time will serve as motivation for next year when, hopefully,

the muzzleloader will remain in the gun cabinet.

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