

Chapter 12

Beginner's Luck; The Story of Roy Dietle's First Deer

By Roy Dietle with Lannie Dietle



I was born in 1932, and was raised on the mountainous Somerset County, Pennsylvania farm that was my birthplace. Deer weren't too plentiful, so I grew up hunting small game. Well.....sort of hunting small game. Daddy had strict ideas about the proper age for a boy to start toting a shotgun, so for the first 15 years I just tagged along with him. After age 15, however, I accounted for many rabbits, squirrels, and groundhogs on my own, and bagged my first turkey when I was 16.

I didn't get around to deer hunting until the fall of 1949, shortly after graduating from high school. Although money was scarce, I managed to buy a Wards bolt action 20 gauge, complete with a box and a half of shells, from my cousin Karl Dietle for nine dollars*. The shells came in handy that fall, because without school I had plenty of time to roam the home place in search of small game. When buck season rolled around, I decided to try my luck with the new gun, so I bought a box of five punkin balls from the Meyersdale hardware store. If you've ever tried punkin balls, you know that they're not too hot in the accuracy department. As opening day drew nearer, I consumed one shell in target practice, and managed a complete miss on a 2 ft x 4 ft target about 50 yards away. I didn't take a second practice shot, because there weren't many shells to spare, and I couldn't afford to waste any.

By the day before the season opening I was really raring to go, and didn't get much sleep that night. The reality of buck hunting wasn't quite what I had imagined, however. After 4 days I was getting a little bit discouraged, as I had seen only 5 deer, and three of them were about a mile away on another mountain. Daddy, rabbit hunter that he was, wasn't too sure about this deer hunting stuff, and constantly reminded me to be absolutely certain that a deer had legal sized horns before shooting. (A legal buck had to have at least 2 points on 1 antler.)

I couldn't start hunting right away the fifth morning because I had to help a neighbor butcher a large hog. We finished about 9:30, so I grabbed my trusty 20 gauge and headed out in the blowing snow to check my trap line. I didn't catch anything, but on the way home I spotted some enormous deer tracks. I knew they

* Dad sold this shotgun several years later to Irving Saylor.

had to be really fresh, because tracks don't last long in such weather. I thought I might as well follow them, because I had nothing better to do. Sometimes the tracks were nearly blown shut and hard to pick out, but I traced them up over a steep hill, across a field, then along a rail fence and into some Hemlock woods. There beneath a Hemlock stood the biggest buck I'd ever seen, and only 50 feet away. Up came the shotgun with a bang, and the deer ran off seemingly untouched. Given my lackluster performance at target practice, I figured I must have missed him for sure, but I vowed to myself that I'd follow that buck to the far end of the state if I had to. I was wrong about missing, however, because when I got to the Hemlock there was a good blood trail, and I found the deer piled up after about 100 yards. I drug it downhill for about 400 yards, but after that it was just too heavy for one person to drag, even over snow, so I hid it and went over to Jerry Saylor's farm for help.

We took it home and hung it out in the barn. I could hardly wait for Daddy to come home that night so I could show off, and I took enormous pleasure in asking him to come out to the barn to see if he thought the horns were legal. The deer had a beautiful 11 point rack measuring 22 inches inside, so Daddy allowed that it should be legal! Unfortunately we didn't weigh it in a field dressed condition, but completely dressed, without hide, legs, head, and internal organs, the carcass still weighed 125 pounds. It was definitely a b-b-i-i-g-g deer. By way of comparison, the average field dressed Pennsylvania deer goes about 90-100 pounds with the head, hide and legs still intact. Shortly after bagging it a city fellow from Pittsburgh offered me \$25.00 for the rack, which was a lot of money back in 1949. I told him he wouldn't sell it, even for a hundred dollars, and he gave up and went away. Many years later, I had the rack measured by the Game Commission and it made the Pennsylvania record book with a Boone & Crocket measurement of 140.9. Not bad for a farm kid with punkin balls!



Roy Dietle with his first deer, taken with a punkin ball.

