Log preserves history of Sawyer County lodge

By Joe Knight
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"Buck Pole Lodge Daily Log: 1972-2010" lives up to its title.

The book details the happenings through several decades at a cabin in the Sawyer County Forest, about 20 miles northwest of Ladysmith, which started in 1972 and was dismantled, under county orders, in 2010.

The editor, Jerry Coomer, is a retired professor of management at UW-Stout. Coomer also is the son-in-law of Clarence Leonard, a dairy farmer and dairy equipment salesman near Ladysmith who co-founded the camp.

The cabin door was always unlocked, the book state, and there was a tablet on the table with this note:

"Welcome to the Buck Pole Lodge.

1) Help yourself to a fire if you need to warm up.

2) There might be a few cans or other morsels of food you are welcome to have.

3) That milk jug of water or ice on the counter is clean for drinking.

4) Please make an entry in this log book and include your name(s) and the date."

The story actually begins in 1971, when Clarence Leonhard and Willis Hutnik, a businessman and former state legislator from Ladysmith, camped there for a couple of days during the deer hunting season.

They had decided the previous year the spot would be a prime location for a deer camp. They leased the land from Sawyer County until the county required them to move out after 38 years. Hutnik was the only camp member who was not related by blood or marriage.

The log contained many short entries from passers-by - grouse hunters, ATV riders, members of nearby camps and others who temporarily took refuge in the cabin. The log also contained entries from outside of the deer season for family visits or couples or short stays for bowhunting or grouse hunting.
But most entries detail various accounts about the gun deer season in late November. They describe brief stories of deer shot and missed, small deer drives that were successful or not, hunters lost or falling into creeks, vehicles mired in mud, encounters with wolves, memorable meals, winners and losers of card games, pranks played on other campers and the welcome warmth of a wood stove after a cold day.

People who recorded activities in the log named the tree stands and deer drives they made with such titles as "green swamp" and "black hole" that were understood only by the hunters involved.

The log is a testament to Wisconsin's fickle weather. Temperatures ranged from warm to frigid, and campers endured rain and snow.

The experiences of the Buck Pole Lodge crew probably were not that different from those of other longtime northern Wisconsin deer camps, and they are most meaningful to camp members or people who know members of the group.

But the enjoyable read preserves a bit of history. Camps like Buck Pole Lodge are becoming scarce.

But they haven't died off entirely. Coomer has purchased land near Black River Falls and is trying to start a new tradition with younger family members.

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