Read Deer Beds and Exit Tracks

One of the most natural blunders a beginner will make is to spend the middle of the day hunting around the oak ridges or wherever he sees the most tracks, when in fact most of the deer are half a mile or a mile away. I have already noticed the distinction between night-beds and day-beds, and between ground where deer feed and where they go to lie down. You must bear this ever in mind or you may lose much time in hunting where your game was two or three hours or more ago and a half-mile or more from where it now is.

Let us therefore leave the ridges, as it is ten o'clock and the majority of the deer are now lying down. Half a mile to the north are some very brushy ridges and windfalls, and just beyond them is a large piece of ground from which the pine has been cut out. This is known to the woodsmen and hunters as a "slash" or "chopping." A pine "slash" is about as rough a piece of ground as is possibly consistent with still-hunting. It is covered in all directions with tree-tops, logs too small or too broken by falling to make good lumber, small brush and trees crushed by the larger ones, stumps and branches of all sizes, and the whole is well covered with briers, saplings, and brush. But there is no other ground that the deer so loves to lie down in during the cool bright days of autumn and the sunny days of winter.

Here is a large windfall just ahead. It will bear inspection. Mounting one of the huge fallen trunks on the outside, we see nothing but great shafts of timber lying headlong in ruinous confusion, mixed throughout with great upturned roots, crushed tops, and shattered limbs, and throughout all a rank growth of

briers and young brush. But wherever we see the bare ground distinctly there are signs of deer. See that smooth oval depression in the ground on the sunny side of those great upturned roots of a pine. A deer lay there yesterday; and if he has not been disturbed it is not at all unlikely that he is here now.

Hark! Did your ear catch that faint crack of brush about a hundred yards off? No. Yet dull and untrained, your ear did not notice it. And if it had noticed it, it would doubtless have taken it for a squirrel or a bird.

We reach the other side of the windfall without seeing anything. Let us, however, take a circuit around the edge and see if anything has gone out. What is that mark on the ground about twenty yards ahead? Some leaves are upturned. They look moist on one side. The dirt, too, is dark, damp, and soft, and shows plainly the imprint of four feet that have come plunging into it from above. Look back over this log and see if you do not find some more tracks there.

You find them readily. And several feet farther back toward the main body of the windfall you find more.