

# No Time for Winter Blues

## Keeping Your Hunting Edge

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It's early February, and with the Super Bowl being the only football game remaining and several months to go before the next archery season, this can be a recipe for a bad case of cabin fever. There's just simply not much to do if you're an archery hunter.

On second thought, maybe there are a few things we can do to keep our sanity until new antlers begin sprouting. From post-season scouting to equipment maintenance, it doesn't take long for the list of "to do's" to grow. Here are a few things that I like to do each year at this time to maintain my edge as an archery hunter.

### Post-season Scouting

One of the great things about winter is it is usually a really good time to locate deer sign that you may have missed during the previous season. Even if there is no snow on the ground, trails and abandoned scrapes are usually much easier to see. You may ask yourself, "What good is old sign going to do me in February?" Deer are creatures of habit more than we typically want to believe. Obviously, they're not totally predictable or hunting them would be much easier, but they do tend to return to and frequent areas they are comfortable in. Let's say, for instance, a mature buck that you were hunting established a home range and travel pattern during the rut that was good enough to keep him out of your sights. There's a good chance that he won't be too far from that same area during the upcoming season. I had the opportunity to witness this scenario last season as the big buck I was after in 2004 showed up in the same general location. Unfortunately for me, the score is 2 - 0 in his favor.



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**Finding large rubs in February can help you locate your trophy in November.**

By getting out and locating sign that you may have missed, you will likely be ahead of the game this fall. Be sure to take note of where you locate important sign, and if possible, transcribe it onto an aerial photo or topographic map. If you have a GPS unit, they work wonderfully for this task.

Winter scouting also provides the added benefit of getting some exercise, and maybe even shedding a few of those extra pounds gained over the holidays. And there's always the possibility of finding a shed antler or two.

### Equipment Maintenance

Chances are you haven't touched your hunting equipment since the close of the season. In fact, I'm sure many of you are smiling as you read this because visions of broadheads still on your arrows and half-used bottles of deer urine stuffed in your pockets have entered your mind. I like to shoot all year long, so I am continually going over my shooting gear. I know that isn't realistic for everyone.

What I suggest is that you go over your bow and give it a good maintenance service. Clean off dirt, lightly oil and tighten screws and sights, and wax your string. Be sure there are no cracks in the limbs or missing parts. If you need a new string, this is the time to replace it so that it is broken in by fall. I can't begin to guess how many people I see in pro shops getting new strings installed and their bows tuned in September. If you waited that long, you're probably not prepared to be in the woods.

There are plenty of other items you can go over as well. Check tree stands for wear and tear. Be sure tree steps are in a safe condition. Evaluate your safety harness for tears or weaknesses. I recommend making a list of items to look over, and checking them off as you complete them.

### **Conclusion**

Although the dull days of February don't offer much in the way of excitement to archery hunters, taking advantage of the free time to do some housekeeping is well worth it. Remember, everything we do is in preparation for that shot of a lifetime. What you do in February could translate into the deer of a lifetime in November.