

If I looked back at December essays over the years, some written for this website and others for a newspaper to which I contributed weekly, I would probably find something that related to the annual “Christmas tree trip” every December. This is partly because going to the woods and finding a balsam fir Christmas tree is a December ritual that I never want to miss. And, besides, these excursions into the woods become examples of how much this tradition has stayed the same for decades, though the details may have varied from time to time.

I have been party to these holiday ventures for as long as I can remember. Tagging after my father through the woods looking for a good balsam began when I could do no more than toddle along on short legs. And year after year, those early outings were preceded by my mother’s admonition: “Don’t get such a big tree this year!” And, season after season, Dad would cut a tree that needed to be shortened both on top and bottom in order to have room between the farmhouse’s floor and its eight foot ceilings.

I remember feeling sorry that an uncle and aunt—without the children that are often the impetus for maintaining such traditions—did not have a Christmas tree. I don’t want any child to feel that way in our cabin, so I hope never to think that having a Christmas tree is “unimportant.” And, that tree will, if I have anything to say about it, be both a real tree and one that grew in the wild—not a plantation tree. This does not mean that I am unappreciative of others’ choices—whether they have artificial trees or evergreens grown specifically for Christmas trees. But, for us, I want a wild tree.

So, on this second Sunday of Advent, we took to the woods to find this year’s Christmas tree. The combination of beaver cuttings, a pulpwood operation, and the storm of late August made walking through the woods, especially now that we have about 6 inches of snow to cover fallen brush, a little more work than usual. And the trees Nature has decorated with inches of white meant that Runo had to knock off the snow from the branches before we could evaluate each possible choice. But, finally, we found a nice, dark green balsam fir with its characteristic smell of the forest and the outdoors. It is a big tree, and it will need trimming on both ends before it can stand in the cabin. As years pass and we change with them, much remains the same.