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# NZ HUNTER MAGAZINE

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## ALL EYES ON TAHR IS THIS JUST THE START?

Willie Duley goes through the tahr saga, from the National Parks Act to the recent high court ruling. Is this tahr cull just the start? What species is next?

## RELOADING BASICS NEW HUNTERS TIPS

Jared Hearsey begins an in-depth series on reloading and Hannah Rae relates her experience as a new hunter in just two of our detailed How To's

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NZ HUNTER MAGAZINE
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A tahr up close by Malte Nyholt

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# A Word from the Editor

**Tahrmageddon 2, it's hard to believe, but here we are again…**

I'm not going to go over the way this debacle has played out so far, as it's covered in other parts of this issue of the magazine.

Where to from here? By the time you read this DOC contractors will have completed the 60 hours of culling in National parks DOC has instructed them to do. Most of the DOC staff we have spoken to are also very unhappy about having to be involved with this culling program and are only doing their job.

There will be many, many bull tahr lying dead, completely wasted. The breeding nanny population will also have taken another huge hit both in and outside the National Parks, putting the future of the herd as a viable hunting resource in jeopardy. The population in Aoraki Mt Cook National Park in particular will be well on the way to eradication.

**It is no coincidence that this eradication campaign against the tahr herd commenced with the arrival of the current Minister of Conservation** using the vehicle of an outdated 27 year old Himalayan thar control plan that should have been reviewed a number of times by now and a 40 year old National Parks Act that does not reflect modern day reality.

It is pretty clear that any government that includes the greens will be bad for hunting. It will likely see a return of the current Minister of Conservation and an escalation of the campaign against our game animals.

**At this stage I cannot tell you who to vote for if you want to use your vote strategically.** We are lobbying all the parties to see who is going to stand up and support our cause, and who might actually be in a position to make a difference.

National has had two leadership changes within a couple of months and has discounted working with NZ First so this only leaves ACT as a possible partner. Act has said all the right things on firearms, and certainly Nicole McKee is a wonderful addition to their line-up. But with National polling so poorly is a centre right government a realistic option?

**Unless labour wins enough seats to govern on their own, they will need a partner(s) with the Greens being most likely first cab off the rank.** As we said above a Labour/Greens only government will be bad for hunting so we need NZ First in that mix to in some way temper the effects of having the Greens in government. Winnie love him or hate him, but NZ First are the only ones who have actually made a difference to things like the firearms legislation after doing some very good work behind the scenes. Remember as they are actually in government, they cannot grandstand and postulate in the media like the opposition can, and there's no denying that they have moderated the extremes of the Greens on several occasions. Inside government they have managed to get the independent firearms authority across the line, and pulled back a lot of the silly stuff in the second tranche, (the alternative without NZ First's input would have been a disaster). They managed to get farmers back their pest control firearms, but failed to get the 3 gun shooters their competitive semi autos back. However if they don't make the 5% threshold or Shane Jones does not win Northland, then it all may all count for nought.

**As they say 24 hours is a long time in politics and anything can happen between now and election day.** We will be reading the tea leaves closer to the time and will communicate our thoughts via social media to try and help you with this most important decision. Another three years of the current Minister of Conservation and the Green eco-fundamentalist ideology does not bear thinking about!

The **Spot the Logo** winners for last issue are **Scott Chapman** and **Astoria Delany.** The logos were on **page 19** in the Bushnell advert and on **page 96** in the Cavalier Green Ginger Wine advert.

***By the time I will be writing my next editorial, we'll have a new Government, so here's hoping it's better for hunters than the current one!***

**Greg**

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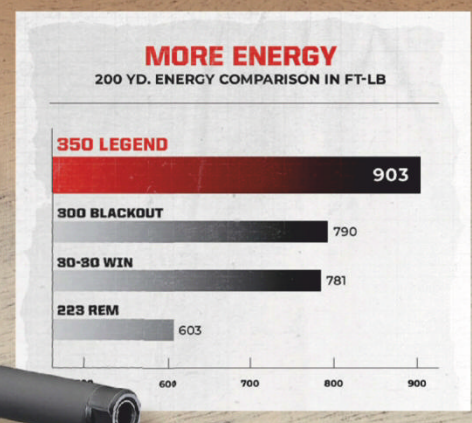


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# A Fancy Goat

— WRITTEN BY ~ **KIERAN ANDREWS | GARMIN NZ** —

## "That's a fancy goat" — direct quote from my wife

**Being the rep for Garmin comes with a lot of miles and a lot of work but it also comes with some great opportunities. In June 2019, along with Ian and Matthew, the outdoor and overall managers for Garmin in Australasia, I got to capitalise on one of those opportunities**

**When you get a call from Willie Duley asking whether you'd like to shoot ducks or tahr, you'd probably do what I did** – say 'yes' to the opportunity before you've spoken to the wife or anyone else. I chose tahr because I can't shoot a shotgun to save myself.

After a long drive south (I live in Tauranga) we all assembled in the carpark of a service station in Rolleston. Greg and Willie were in their fully loaded, aggressive and capable Mercedes. **I was in the trusty ute and Ian and Matthew arrived in an all-terrain Prado, that may or may not have been a rental vehicle.**

We set off on a mad dash down country to somewhere – please don't ask where – I really don't know even though I have the GPS co-ordinates.
What I do know is that they make hills much bigger in the South Island.

**We ditched my vehicle and as we bounced our way up the bouldery, braided river valley, it was a race to see who could spot the first tahr.** Here's where I'll throw in a tip I learned along the way: good glass is good! We'd managed to raid the NZ Hunter wagon and snare some Swarovski binos. I was using the entry level CL 10x30s and I rate myself as having pretty good eyesight, but the definition at distance with these binos was something I had neither seen nor really understood. Being able to make out the individual hairs on a bull's mane at nearly 1000 yards was

# 'WHAT I DO KNOW IS THAT THEY MAKE HILLS MUCH BIGGER IN THE SOUTH ISLAND'

**Kieran (L) and Matt with the big bull**
*'I'd never shot anything worth putting on the wall before...maybe this head was it?'*

an eye opener for me (excuse the pun).

**Greg marginally won the race to find the first tahr.** They were low. Fog, low cloud and fresh snow had pushed them down to the first bench above the river. We assessed the herd, and 'ummed and ahhed'. Well, I'd never seen wild tahr before so I just fizzed like a disprin, but the others made the sensible choice to move on, get the hut set up and then stretch our legs.

We quickly unloaded the vehicles and then packed our day packs. We paired our Garmin Rino 750s (shameless plug) to keep in touch and marked the location of the hut. I also set my InReach to 'track' so that my wife knew I was really in the mountains, and not at the pub. Communication in the backcountry is easier than ever with Iridium – no more lugging a mountain radio around.

**Greg, Matt and I headed west up a leading spur, whilst Willie and Ian forded the river and headed south up to a snow basin.** The climb wasn't particularly demanding but after a week of driving and no exercise, I was easily left behind. Too many pies and not enough cardio isn't good for you.

Greg was already glassing the bluffs as Matt and I met him near the tree line, or whatever you call it in the South Island where the tussock stops and the rocks start. After a short time, I spied a bull in the bluffs above us. Greg swung his spotter onto it, and 'ummed and ahhed' some more. While he was doing that, I spied another bull, and another, across on the next ridge. Time was getting on, and as Greg assessed the second bull, I fizzed a bit more. 'No' was the call on the second. The third bull was square in the middle of the spotter when Greg made the call – ***"We'd better go!"***

I quickly radioed Ian and Willie to let them know our intentions and make sure

On day two we explored and glassed some side creeks

Greg and Ian

Ian and his first ever NZ big game animal

they hadn't moved into the area where we intended to shoot. **We dumped everything back into our packs and moved quickly to close the distance to something shootable.** Judging distance is much harder in the alpine country; the Swarovski EL range binoculars were a golden tool.

We closed the distance and set up for the shot. Matt and I had a polite 'You shoot it, no you shoot it. No, I insist – you shoot it' argument, until Greg butted in with ***"Stop bloody mucking around, or I'll shoot it!"*** So I lay down on the cold rocks and tussock and tried to get my fizzing under control.

One thing I was quickly learning was that the gear I use for bush hunting in the North Island was not compatible with alpine hunting. I had assumed that I could fudge it and just make do. But the conditions are actually completely different, and to be effective you need the right tools…like the NZ Hunter 7mm FX.

Here's the thing: if I was a good shot, I could probably have made this with a 308 or something similar. Others do. **But I'm not, so having the right gear reduces the margin for error.** At the range we were shooting, Greg dialled in only 'x' MOA, which was a lot less than I would have thought possible.

I had my breathing under control, felt comfortable, and waited for a perfect shot angle. It felt like I'd merely breathed on the trigger when there was an almighty BOOM! It was a clean hit on the rock behind the bull, literally putting the projectile through the hairs on its back. I quickly reloaded but the tahr had moved up into the bluffs so we waited for another shot opportunity. It eventually came, but so did the darkness.

Did I mention that good glass is good? The light gathering ability of the scope was amazing. **I could still clearly make out the target, even in the near twilight.** I settled in behind the rifle, and even though I was getting cold, I managed to put the discomfort aside and focus on the target. BOOM! The bull was dead on his feet and within moments, he peeled off the cliff face. A few seconds later, the shooting light was gone.

There were congratulations all round, while subconsciously I was thinking 'This will be quite the recovery tomorrow'. That thought was quickly shattered by Greg's comment ***"It's going to be a late one tonight."***

I made a Rino call to Willie and Ian, letting them know we'd be late. Out came the head torches and off we went, down through the tussock and monkey scrub and across the stream, where we dropped our packs at the base with Matt (I marked his location in case he had a nana nap).

My bull tahr was a lot bigger than I'd expected – the width of his shoulders and his sheer bulk was impressive. Greg seemed to think I was more than just a little tin arsed. Little did I know, I was very lucky.

We set up for photos in the dark, and then I got a lesson in caping. **I'd never shot anything worth putting on the wall before…maybe this head was worth it?** Then it was time to put on our packs and head back to the hut. Good boots are a must! Night travel through boulder-filled streams on ice and rocks, showed the weaknesses in my 'bush hunting' boots. I can see why crampons, walking poles, gloves and even ice axes and ropes become standard equipment for alpine hunters. Also socks – good socks changed my life…

We navigated our way back to the hut with our Rinos, where we met up with Willie and Ian. Rifles were safely put away for the night, and as the fire cranked out some heat, we retold the story. **I know I work in the tech business, but the best times for me are actually when I'm away from cell phones, TV and the internet.** It's just nice to disconnect, though I did InReach a message to my wife, letting her know I was safe for the night…peace of mind for her.

We put away a couple of celebratory scotch whiskies and a solid feed and then stepped outside to take in the breathtaking scenery of the Southern Alps on a crystal clear -5°C night. In fact, that's about where the temperature stayed for the rest of the trip, night and day.

**On day two we explored and glassed some side creeks.** The tahr we saw had moved significantly higher with the now clear weather. Being a bush hunter, I was surprised at how much time is spent

sitting and glassing down south. We saw some young bulls, and some unreachable bulls – well for us anyway – Willie and Greg probably would have got them. **And in the evening, we moved back down into the main valley to glass some more.**

Greg and Matt spotted a bull high up under a bluff and made the decision to move to a suitable shooting position and have a crack. Matt isn't a bad shot, but he doesn't get to shoot at all back in Aussie, so he decided to use the best available tool to reduce the margin of error – the 338 Lunatic…

He got himself set up behind the rifle, some nifty ballistic calculations were made, dials were clicked, and then we waited for a drop in the slight breeze. I watched through the binos as the hair on the bull's mane sank straight down, and then for a split second he was obscured by the sizeable muzzle blast. The bull soaked up the shot, and though he was already dead on his feet, Matt cranked another round into the chamber and let loose. At the second shot, the bull involuntarily lunged to the right and it looked like he fell into what could only be described as a chasm.

**If you hunt tahr, you will come home in the dark.** That's almost a guarantee – and that night was no exception. I headed up the main riverbed to see if I could look into the crevasse from the bottom. Greg and Matt headed up the hill to see if they could find the bull.

From my vantage point, I saw the headlamps get further apart as Matt's 'office legs' couldn't keep pace with Greg. I also saw that there was no way the guys would be recovering the bull if it had indeed leapt off the ledge.

This did seem to be the case, and we were slightly subdued as we followed our waypoints back down the river valley in the dark. Having a track to follow back in the dark is golden when there are variable depth river crossings.

**On our final morning, we headed back out of the valley on another perfect winter's day.** We spotted a mob of nannies and a bull that was reachable in the time we had available (we had an appointment to hit in Twizel). Ian, Greg, Willie and I saddled up and made a beeline for a pre-determined vantage point. We were carrying a Ruger 300 Win Mag precision rifle with a Nightforce scope that was on loan for a test fire. **In short order, Ian put the bull on the ground and I did my part for the tahr cull by levelling a few nannies.**

We filled our packs to the brim with meat and just before we skedaddled down the hill to get to our appointment, I took a moment to take in some of the most beautiful scenery this country has to offer.

Nanny tahr is my new favourite game meat. My family has been enjoying everything from tahr casserole to tahr schnitzel, and my personal favourite, tahr kebabs. For a North Islander who usually eats Fallow/Red/Sika venison, tahr is a great variation. It doesn't dry out like venison, and can be used in any dish where you would normally use beef.

**As a footnote, I received an InReach message a week later from Greg.** He'd since climbed back in to the gut where we thought we'd seen Matt's bull fall. I know for sure that I wouldn't have been able to get in there safely, and the freezing waterfall would have made it not the nicest experience, but Greg did get in, and he was probably a bit frustrated when he didn't find the bull there. Being the top bloke he is, he retraced his steps to the top, replayed the video, and noticed something. Right at the edge, just before the 200m inverted drop to oblivion, was a single Spaniard, and tucked right in behind it was Matt's bull. The horns later measured a shade under 12".

I'd like to thank Greg and Willie for being great hosts. I learned more in one weekend with them than I would have in a year of hunting on my own. Being able to compare my own gear with the gear that really makes life comfortable and safer in an alpine environment was golden. I've got an itch to scratch now with alpine hunting, and I'm planning to return to the South Island next year.

Oh, and as for my fancy goat, it's with Tyron Southward in Dunsandel, who is shoulder mounting it for me. My wife doesn't know it's coming home. **With horns measuring 13¾", I've finally shot something worth putting on the wall.**

Matt's bull where Greg recovered it a week later

The magnificent valley that hosted us

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# ST JAMES

WRITTEN BY ~ **LUKE CARE**

For a long time Willie had contemplated doing a pig hunting episode on the TV Show. I was all for it, but it's one of those 'easier said than done' ideas!

Gary working hard to keep Nesee on the trail while Shaun carries her load

**To fit with our theme it had to be mainly a public land hunt with a bit of a journey to it. Not only that, but filming pig hunting for non-pig hunters is tricky**

Ideally it is open country so you can see everything that's going on and there has to be elements of interest that aren't just scruffy ol' boris's (myself included) to keep them entertained. And of course you have to use dogs on the softer end of the scale so you don't offend Karen and get kicked off telly!

**Over a few years I scouted around a bit of country always keeping an eye out but nothing really fit the bill,** not something I'd confidently tell Willie to commit a trip to. In 2019 we decided we were doing an episode regardless. That meant Willie, Greg and Emil spent the bulk of the year filming the awesome season 6 you've just watched, then we left a silly little two week window at the end for our pig hunting trip! It was a recipe for disaster and it made organization a nightmare. Willie had already left for Africa with Ash, so it was left to me to organise an episode … I'd only ever been in one!! Fortunately we'd involved Shaun Monk (AKA Monkey) in our plans, and even though plans A-Z fell over he had a hunt in mind as backup.

The St James Conservation Area is what Monkey had in mind, and it's a spectacular place. I'm going to go in to a lot more history and detail in a subsequent article, but in a nutshell it is a huge 193,230 acre high country station steeped in early settler history that was purchased by the government in 2008 for a whopping $40,000,000. It's made most famous for non-hunters by the St James cycleway that dissects the station down the Waiau River.

With an area decided, then came coordinating people, cameras, vehicles, dogs and even horses. We had to have it sorted before Emil flew overseas to go back and see his family for two months, and hope that the weather played ball. I'd made a comment to Greg about horses and he latched on to that idea so much so that we weren't going if we didn't have a horse! Fortunately, at the very last minute, we were given Gary Hebberd's details. Gary runs Pukatea Trails, a horse riding venture based at St James itself, which after all the running around seemed like a gift from above.

**Of course, after a winter of hunting I ended up with one dog injured and one on heat so I brought down just one dog, Mac,** who'd only just recovered from a broken tail – the poor bugger's big TV debut and he was coming straight off the couch and had an 8 inch tail! Monkeys main bitch M was on heat the day we left so he stole his mate Ferret's dog Bandit and took his small bitch L. Plan Z, dog pack C, and B-list characters – it was shaping up to one big blooper reel!
We left Hanmer Springs via Jacks Pass, bypassed the old St James woolshed and drove straight up to Fowlers hut, where we'd commence our journey. Gary and Nesee the packhorse were waiting at the paddock there and **after the introductions and sorting all the gear we made our way toward Fowlers Pass.**

Yet another element in this comedy of errors was the significant snow dump a week before we got there. Fortunately it had melted a lot, but there was still a lot of snow built up on the track in the lee of the wind, and one particular corner was very icy. We spent a while unloading Nesee, portaging that gear and tramping a path. A team who came in at a later date lost a horse over the edge there and spent a long time recovering it. At the pass Gary let us take Nesee on while he went back to run his business, he was going to come in a few days later and help us pack-out, hopefully laden with pork and venison!

We got down to switchback with little drama, that was the warm side and while it was steep and narrow there was no snow. The pack saddle was on backward though and caused us a lot of grief until we figured that out! **Sign was evident as soon as we hit the Stanley so Monkey and I perked right up with pigs in the offing.** Shortly after though we were dealt a sucker punch as we found quad

The Stanley Vale homestead

My kind of homestead decor!

Lake Guyon, the mountain mirror

bike marks in the mud. **A vehicle had poached all the way from Malings pass, all through the country we planned to hunt.** Everywhere we went for the next five days we found that bike's marks, through swamps and cut fences. Vehicles are not permitted from the mouth of the Edwards in the south and where the Malings pass track meets the river in the north. This rule-breaking and wanton vandalism does nothing for hunter's reputations.

We were still positive at that early stage though, and when we took a break Greg spied a chamois in a distant creek. They got the spotter set up and found a family group of beautiful black winter-caped chamois. Further down we kept seeing lots of pig sign, but all two weeks old. At that stage we thought any pig sign was good sign so hopes were high.

**Monkey spotted a hind and yearling we'd spooked on the opposite face, but they got into cover before we could do anything about it.** While we were looking for them ol' eagle eyes Monk also spotted a pair up a nearby creek, we contemplated chasing them but the warm hut was more appealing, rookie mistake that was!

**Stanley Vale Hut is the original 1862 two-roomed homestead, so bears some pretty incredible history.** It sits in what I'd call a true vale, a sheltered and hidden little valley with rolling country surrounded by craggy snow-clad peaks facing north over what would've been a fantastic place to call home, despite the hardships no doubt endured. The timber cladding, rusting patchwork of short-run iron on the roof, tongue and groove floors and smoke-stained sarking give it the real frontier feel. Its set amongst tall, weeping exotics: Willow, briar and giant Hawthorn with red berries bright against the leafless boughs dotted the horse paddocks behind.

The next day we got cracking on a big mission right across the faces above Lake Guyon and wrapped right around to the main Waiau. Lake Guyon is a gem, from high above it's a mountain mirror reflecting the ranks of North Canterbury peaks around it. There was fantastic pig sign in terms of volume, not so much for age. There had been at least one good boar come through but the sign was the same age as the day before. It took a bit of scrub bashing and sidling to get around and it was disheartening to still not find

fresh sign. Mac, Bandit and L had hunted well considering there was no scent for them to go on but they were looking up at the humans in askance.

After a quick spell on the ridge glassing the other side and noting more pig sign in the lower ferny faces we sidled into the manuka above the Waiau and turned down to follow a beech gut right down to the riverbed. I thought the sign at the bottom was a fraction fresher but no one else agreed. It would've made sense to push around the face further and Greg was eager to but we were miles from the hut and were still positive the pigs couldn't have been pushed too far from that area. We looped back around toward the lake and made a last minute decision to climb right up on the cold side and sidle around above Lake Guyon hut, we'd crossed old mate's bike marks again down in the valley. It was a hard blast up the face behind these mountain goats but we stopped for a brew right at the western end before beginning our sidle.

**The sidle was pretty rubbish, with six big gorgy creeks to cross on our way and no sign from this century to cheer us up.** Monkey had particularly limited time, so we couldn't linger on a brew back at the hut. We strode straight past and went to try find the Reds we'd seen on the way in. We glassed 'til right on dark but it was brisk winter weather, windy and cold, so nothing stepped out. That night we had a good feed, a whiskey or two (oh the luxuries with a pack horse!) and went to bed reasonably early as the rain began drumming down on the old corrugated iron.

We had such limited time that despite the miserable night's sleep and the rain the next day we suited up and headed down the Stanley River in search of Muddy Stream, where Monkey had bailed a good pig in February. We found no sign all the way down and it was too wet to stop for a glass. It turned out Muddy Creek was a great looking spot but the only sign was a stag and ancient pig sign. Despondent, we turned around and plodded back to the hut.

On the way back we climbed up Glencoe stream and around Observation Point to come down on the hut. Again, a great area, particularly for a deer, but held nothing but old sign. We were starting to figure out that the pigs had suddenly vacated but we couldn't make sense as to why. The snowfall shouldn't have done it and it would take massive, sudden hunting pressure to move so many pigs so far … **had we thought a little harder a local pig hunting competition might have been just the reason.**

There was no time to rest back at the hut,

**Chasing pigs in this grand country with a packhorse in tow was quite an experience!**

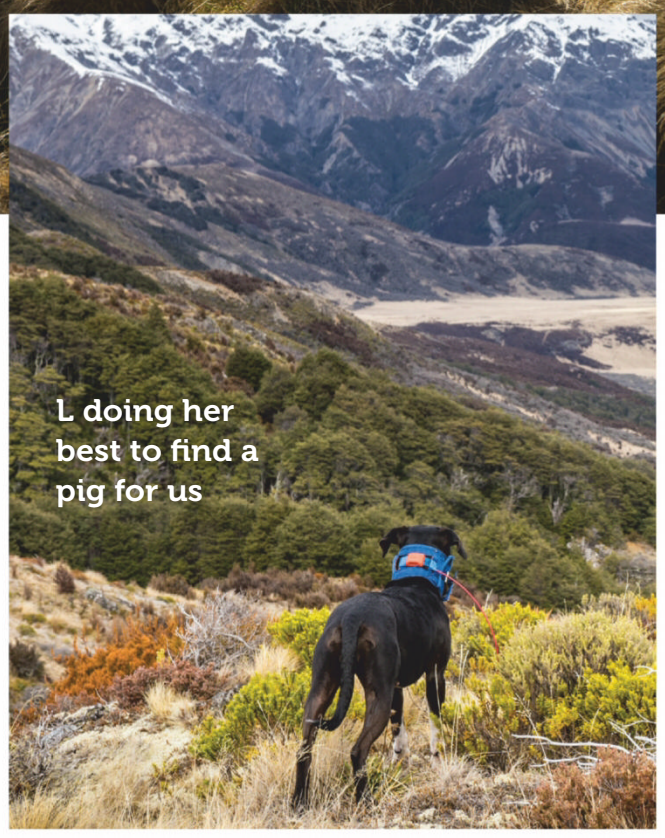
Greg Emil and I quickly gathered shooting gear and headed upriver. We got there late and try as we might we couldn't find a deer. After the sun had gone down and the gloom was well and truly gathering I had a cursory look over a small clearing up the head and spied the unmistakably deep chest of a Red stag. **It soon emerged that he was fighting with another stag as well, I saw a flash of respectable antlers but not much more.** Greg hurried to get the spotter on them and finally managed to get a few seconds footage of one of the stags, presumably the larger but possibly not. He showed impressive size, good length but very narrow. He carried a lot of weight in the tops, belying his Poulter heritage. It was too dark to do anything other than glass wistfully but they never showed themselves again anyway.

It froze overnight and snow lowered lightly right to the hut door, removing any possibility of the horses getting over the pass. Monkey had to leave that day to get back to a meeting, leaving us with just Mac. The last place worth checking out was further down the Waiau faces so that was the day's plan.

After an early start we began the trek around there. With the snow right down below the bushline the vista was magnificent. It was a brisk, clear morning still stained the purple pre-dawn hues and our breath fogged the air as we wove through the ancient hawthorns alongside the track. The mirror sheen of Lake Guyon was broken in several places by hundreds of Canada Geese, I could see Greg's mind whirring at what a neat hunt that would be.

We had barely passed our turnaround from days prior when we struck fresh sign. I knew what it meant so I was frothing, but I think Greg and Emil were a bit jaded to this pig hunting lark! It wasn't quite fresh enough for Mac to go on so we continued downriver a little

The St James country boasts some phenomenal scenery, all the better with horses in it



L doing her best to find a pig for us

bit and he soon took off. **He tracked away through the wet manuka and I watched on the Garmin Alpha as he took of, and sure enough some barks rang out not long after.** Crikey, finally! We all felt the excitement and sprinted off down the river. The bail broke for a bit then Mac pulled it up again, that meant one of two things. He'd either found a mob and they'd held tight for a bit then scattered or it was a better pig that had broken the bail and made some ground.

I wasn't sure how much to wait for Emil with his cumbersome camera but I decided dog safety (in the event of a good pig) and meat preservation (in the event of a little pig) took priority. I needn't have worried though, neither Emil nor Greg are left behind by many people! When we got closer the barking turned to grunting and I knew it wasn't going to be the mythical mountain blue boar. I was right, but it was a tasty weaner and we were on the board! As an interesting side note, these unique 'blue' Canterbury pigs are reputedly Pakistani in origin, brought back to NZ by ex-British Army officers returning from India who took up a lot of North Canterbury runs.

We dealt to the little pork roast quickly and tucked him under a manuka. **Chances were slim but Mac and I started trailing the mob again, we singled out a mark around 100lb but he would've gone like the clappers after that ruckus and unsurprisingly we never caught up with him.**

There was good country we'd walked past trying to get the wind right, and heading back the wind was in our faces so Greg and Emil took the pork along the track down the bottom while I cast a loop up higher in the tight manuka. It was some dense crap and I was forced up and down a few times. I finally made it to a few little clearings but they were only 300m from the ridge we came down a couple days ago, so I got to the next ridge and started heading down.

Soon I noticed Mac had done the opposite though and was swiftly tracking uphill, that was better! A bark rang out, then more, then a great crashing as dog and beast came hurtling through the manuka at a great rate of knots – half falling, half running. They surged past me and Mac grabbed it just there. **Despite my hopes for a decent boar it was a big, fat, feisty sow and she gave him a quick flick and raced downhill again.** I'd been frantically calling the guys on the radio as we had to get it on film or it would be all for nothing. I bashed down through the crap while they bashed up but we were bleeding elevation mighty fast, I worried we'd pass each other rather than collide.

At one stage Mac had it bailed nicely and I saw him side-eye me with an expression clearly saying 'what the hell boss, I've done my job you do yours, shoot the bloody thing!' But the pig wasn't hurt so I let them be while I waited for Greg and Emil. The radio had stopped working so I had to trust they'd hone in on the barks.

Of course the sow broke again, it was mighty steep, and this time ended up right down the bottom. Mac knew he'd won and grabbed her so I stuck her and waited for Greg and Emil to emerge from the scrub with blood and sweat streaked faces - all for nothing as they'd missed the action! They groaned when they saw the dead pig, but fortunately I'd grabbed some snippets of footage on my camera so it wasn't a complete loss. The worst part though was the expensive Garmin 360 camera that was lying up in the bush somewhere. It had been ripped off before Mac even got to me, and the tight scrub had even torn off the jacket that went with it. It was a shame, it would've been some cool footage!

**The radio crackled. Gary was rounding the corner, having come back in and seen our note that we were down the valley.** He'd picked up Nesee on the way past and asked did we have anything to load her with? Yes we did! I could get used to that! Five minutes later he rounded the corner with son Israel and his friend Hugh. We made the most of the offer and loaded the pigs and pack on Nesee and headed for home.

It was a much more pleasant experience than carrying it all on our backs, and we even took turns at riding in stages. **Gary lent me Valhanna for the stretch around the shores of the incredibly tranquil Lake Guyon.** We clip clopped along under boughs of beech with the water lapping a few feet away. Having finally actually caught a pig and preserved the reputation of North Island pig hunters things didn't feel all too bad.

Both that evening and the next morning we headed back upriver to look for the stag again, of course he was a no show. There were some hinds an awfully long way in the distance and I was quite pleased when they fed further away, it would've been a solid recovery under pressure as we had to head off that day as well, the aches of a big week on the feet had caught up with me.

**With two pigs on Nesee we still had a fair bit of weight on our own backs as we snaked out the high valleys that are the upper reaches of the Stanley and back over Fowlers pass.** The four horses sure-footedly led our convoy back down the far side and it was a relief to let the packs crash down back at the ute.

Nesee saved plenty of weight on our backs for the walk out

Mac having a well-deserved nap

We weren't finished yet though, Monkey had tee'd up a couple days hunting at the renowned Island Hills station, but that's a tale for another day. He also had solved the pig riddle – why had pigs, evidently camped in the area, up and moved significant distances away? The Waiau pig hunting competition. The comp had been on two weeks earlier, and a number of people had poached their way in from the two track accesses on bikes. At least it explained the conundrum we'd been wrestling with!

For now we were going to have a day's rest, sort out our gear and put the feet up for an hour or two, **they'd taken us over 100ks in search of a sow and a weaner – pig hunting NZ Hunter style!**

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BERETTA NEW ZEALAND

# MAUNGAPOHATU

WRITTEN BY ~ **BART BURGERS**

## The road up to Maungapohatu was covered with mud and landslides caused by the last two cyclones Cook and Debbie

**Boulders bigger than our trucks sat on the road and deep silt covered the bank like a ribbon to mark where the torrent and raging water had passed. Skeletal trees were mixed into the debris, pushed aside by the diggers and dozers that cleared our path, fallen warriors who had guarded the road and these foothills for years, if not decades. A silent message to never underestimate this land.**

Deeper we went, not sure if we'd get any further or would be halted by a 'stop/go' person and sent back, ending our mission. The good spirits were with Adrian and me, guiding us safely through. This was the fourth invite I've had to come here. The previous three I'd had to decline for various reasons…business is always calling…

***"What ya up to?"*** the call had come from Adrian. ***"I was thinking we should head up to the mountain on Tuesday."***

I had two days to convince my wife, whose birthday was on the Wednesday, and do all the necessary business things like adding a message to my cell phone.

***"All good to go?"*** Adrian asked the day before our departure. ***"Meet me at the Rainbow Mountain turn-off and we'll carry on from there."***

I had heard enough about this place to make me want to go and although business was some kind of pressing – it was my time – it felt right!

We met up with Richard, the chairman of the trust, a wonderful guy. Adrian did the talking and I stood back, all smiles – I was new and he was well known. The cyclones' handiwork was still very much visible and deep gashes lay in the sides of the hills, like claw marks pulling clay from the earth in an effort to clamber up the land. The washed out road was repaired where repair was non-negotiable to carry on traffic flow. No Auckland rush hour here...

We found our quarters for the next three nights – minus one as it was Adrian's mission to camp out under a rock face overlooking an ancient land slide. This area was the size of two football fields, with grass galore and sign all over.

We quickly set up camp, took our beds, spread out our gear and sorted it. We collected water and set up the fireplace for a quick light after a cold evening return.

Maungapohatu is an ancient place, a sacred valley with expansive skies, hovering mountains and a clear, fast-flowing river with delicate mountain streams that join it along the way. In 1908 the prophet Rua Kēnana Hepetipa

took up residence at Maungapōhatu, the sacred mountain of Ngāi Tūhoe, with his followers, creating a non-violent religious community. Their dream was to thrive and live with the land in peace. Peace they would not have. Those days are now gone, but the serenity of this place still holds.

Reds and Rusa are abundant here, each favouring their own habitat. ***"I'll take you to that little hill over there"*** Adrian said.

I saw it in the distance, and the river that meandered below. Some new landslides had appeared, brown as the clay that had surfaced, devoid of grass and of no interest to the deer or to us. Between the manuka trees there were patches of green…clearings. There were old paddocks with the fences hanging full of moss, still performing what they were built to do, but now to no purpose and broken in places.

Adrian dropped me off on a knoll opposite the area he encouraged me to hunt and pointed out a few clearings about 300 metres away as the crow flies.

***"Follow this fence line all the way up to the road"*** he said ***"easy to follow in the dark."*** He left me then, to go to his own 'stake out'.

With an hour or two to go before the sun set, I ventured down the hillock, eager to explore, following the river and finding some fresh deer sign; deep marks in the sand. I followed the prints, which led me up the hill and away from the fast-flowing river.

After a while, the noise I was making would have alerted any deer so it was time to head back up the hill and sit still. I scanned the land, the clearings and any other possible spots for deer. The light had gone and the sun was setting; its glow lit the bush edge, casting shadows. I left my pack and gun a little way up the hill as I was going from one position to another. I was high enough not to disturb any emerging animal below and my scent couldn't drift down there as the wind was blowing uphill.

I glassed back and forth and then moved further downhill, back the way I'd come. I recalled a couple of clearings along the ridge, not big but with plenty of grass.

There he was – a stag for sure – I could see his antlers through the scrub. He was head down, feeding. Running silently back uphill to retrieve my gun was not too far, but my heart was pounding and the blood was rushing through my veins. All kinds of things went through my mind – 'Stay calm…there's no rush...he hasn't seen me. No worries…it's all good.'

I moved back slowly, monitoring my feet so I didn't stand on any branches and alarm my prey. The spot where I'd first spotted my stag turned out to be not such a good shooting position as he had moved. He hadn't gone far though…and he was still feeding. Good.

I looked around for a better rest and a good angle. Right, that manuka and its forked branch will do. Only 15 feet lower... almost level.

**Adrian overlooking the clearing**

Owner - Allan Foot

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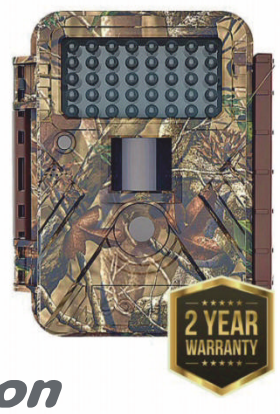


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# MY MIND WENT INTO FULL FOCUS...THE CROSSHAIRS MADE AN APPEARANCE... LOCKING IN.

The stag had his head in the scrub so it was impossible to take a head or neck shot. Then he took a step forward and a small area behind his shoulder came into the clear. I didn't hear the shot; nor was I conscious of the recoil from my 270 Parker Hale. I saw my quarry stumble and disappear behind a bush. He did not reappear. Yes! That was clean.

Energy left me and the sadness came. Highs and lows came and went in a split second. I sat down for a brief moment and let the feelings subside.

I pinpointed the location, memorized some trees and spotted an entry from below…cross the little creek that flowed into the river and follow it up. The place was littered with tracks made by roaming cattle and horses amidst the deer marks; no doubt a track would lead parallel to the stream on the other side. Bingo.

Darkness had set in and my headlight lit the way. I located the two cabbage trees I had memorized earlier and followed the trail a bit further downhill. The stag couldn't have gone far.

It hadn't – it must have taken two steps before collapsing in a small hollow, out of sight from where I'd been on the other side of the valley. Up to that moment I had no idea what a spectacular beast this was, and I couldn't believe what I saw – what a great set of antlers this stag wore – ten thick points with a good, even spread. Wow – what an incredible bush head!

I've always been a meat hunter; never targeting trophies, however I keep all my antlers as each and every one of them tells the story of an adventure, an exploration of our beautiful wild country.

In the meagre light of my torch I managed to turn the stag over, bracing my knees on the insides of his legs to gut him. The night was cool and I left my deer there to set overnight, planning to return the next morning and bone it out.

I met Adrian back at the road as agreed, the fence line an umbilical cord leading the way.

***"How did you get on?"*** was his welcome.

***"Yup I got one"*** I told him ***"a very nice stag."*** He had spooked a hind but never got a shot out.

Untouched and pristine, majestic rimus

I keep all my antlers as each and every one of them tells the story of an adventure, an exploration of our beautiful wild country.

hovered high, their canopy almost in the clouds. Moss dripped from their branches like long green beards. A thick cover of decaying leaves intertwined with fallen twigs and branches muffled our footsteps going uphill – there was no way our quad could make it through this dense forest. Manpower was the only means of transport, our GPS aiding us not to go astray. Adrian motored along as if chased by the devil and it was hard for a man with a knee replacement (and another to follow soon) to keep up with him. He was a man on a mission to set up fly camp under the sheer drop of the mountains above the slip. The forest was so thick in places that no light could penetrate and even in broad daylight, it was like walking at dusk.

***"You see that?"*** said Adrian as if reading my mind. ***"You see how dark it is now, you imagine this when it's actually dark…no way you would be able to come down safely."*** He went on ***"I always leave an hour before last light just to be safe. That's why we are camping out – so we can be here on last light."***

The climb was not long, just over an hour and it led us past a fresh water spring emerging straight out of the hills. The water tasted sweet and it was cold. We filled our bottles.

Early the next mornning Adrian mentioned ***"Not far to go now"*** looking at his GPS and pointing. ***"The slip is right there."***

So far the ground had been relatively even but now we were sidling the steep mountain side, negotiating rock ledges covered with slippery grass. We took purchase of shrubs and twigs to ease our way. It's recommended to look before you grab hold of a branch or bush as stinging nettle is not the best for this purpose… after more than a week I still feel its sting.

The morning had been crisp and clear with fog still in the lower parts of the mountains keeping the river obscured. We had parked our quad a fair distance away in the hope that on our way to my stag, we might bump into another one.

The de-boning was swift. With the help of Adrian it was done in a jiffy, the meat bagged and lowered into our backpacks, and the antlers tied on. Back at the hut it was time for a cooked breakfast, fit for a king.

We found the slip and it looked promising. Adrian ducked down almost at once and gestured me to stay low while he put a bullet up the breech of his trusted 308. He fired a shot over the top of a rock, aiming down below.

***"Ahh…I must have missed it"*** he pointed out in some frustration. ***"That hind had seen me and was about to head back into the bush…ah well."***

We found a big log that had come down when the slip was first initiated all those years ago. It was a good shelter and we had a rest while watching to see what might come out from below. At this stage it was three o'clock and we made a quick cuppa and had a biscuit. Adrian decided he would move on to the next slip a few hundred metres further. I was happy where I was, happy to make camp for the night next to that log. The sky was clear and no rain was forecast…good to go… or to stay, I should say.

An hour later I heard a shot coming from Adrian's direction. I hadn't seen anything but I wasn't worried. I could think of worse places to be than on the side of that sacred mountain. Thirty minutes later, Adrian appeared with bloody hands and sleeves.

***"You got one then"*** I noted.

***"Yes, got a stag"*** he said ***"just down the bottom of that other slip. I gutted it and we can pick it up tomorrow morning on our way out."***

We watched the slip and clearing below until it became too dark to see, then moved behind the shelter of the log to boil some water for our dehydrated dinners, followed by some Uisce beatha from a little hipflask I brought. Looking at a star-filled sky with no cloud and a soft breeze from my bivouac sack was the ultimate place to be.

The next morning we woke up just before daybreak and were greeted by first light emerging through the canopy. The sun rose over the mountains, casting its rays of orange and red down the valley where the fog was hovering in the lower parts, clinging to the sides of the valley, flowing like a river.

We spent some time glassing over the log that had been our shelter for the night, but we detected no movement below. Neither of us was worried; we'd bagged our deer…one for the freezer. Our wives would be happy.

Camp was dismantled in a quick manner and we looked at the breathtaking scene below us for one last time. ***"A true sacred place"*** Adrian said.

We were both in awe. What a fantastic hunt it had been and what a fantastic place to be. It had been a trip we'd remember for a lifetime…perfect.

# TAHR 101

WRITTEN BY ~ **WILLIE DULEY**

**DOC's new draft Tahr Control Plan which is poised to start on the first weather window after the 1st of July is without doubt our biggest battle yet**

**This proposed Plan is eradication in disguise. It WILL kill the tahr hunting resource as we know it, it WILL kill many jobs and people's livelihoods, and it WILL kill a passionate recreational pursuit enjoyed by thousands.**

## What are tahr and how did we end up in this situation?

**Himalayan Tahr, as their name suggests, are native to the Himalayas, where they are now considered a near threatened species.** They are their own genus and species, neither sheep nor goat, world renowned and admired for their ability to live high in the harshest mountain environments and for their amazing shaggy winter coats, being one of the few animals in the world other than the lion to have a mane.

They were first introduced to New Zealand, 116 years ago near Aoraki/Mt Cook by the Government Tourism board, for sport and to attract tourist hunters to New Zealand. Due to the absence of any predators (like the snow leopards that prey on them in the Himalayas), and the ideal mountain habitat provided by the Southern Alps, they thrived and spread to occupy today's feral range from the Landsborough river in the south, to the Rakaia river in the north.

Tahr were protected through to 1937 when there was a change in policy that saw them culled by government ground hunters until a commercial market for their meat was established in the 1970's. Commercial meat recovery by helicopters had nearly wiped out the entire tahr population by 1983. The government of the day prevented their elimination by placing a moratorium on the commercial harvest of tahr, and initiated a process to manage them, resulting in the Himalayan Thar Control Plan in 1993 (HTCP).

## Himalayan Thar Control Plan

**The HTCP was actually quite forward thinking for its time and given the available science and evidence of the day, sought to manage the impacts of tahr on our natural ecosystems, while also providing for recreational and commercial interests.** It cautiously identified a population of 10,000 tahr over the entire range as an acceptable maximum, which was a best guess scenario given the limited evidence they had at the time. It was experimental, cautious in its approach, required ongoing vegetation and population monitoring, and was intended to be reviewed in 5 years' time.

The HTCP stated:

***"The derivation of thar density and population size from the available***

DEREK JOHNSON

***data should be treated with caution. The figures are "best estimates" which for some management units are based on few if any thar counts. This initial attempt to quantify the parameters required for future thar control should be continually refined."***

***"More work is required over the breeding range to determine, on an ecosystem and biodiversity basis, exactly what an acceptable limit is"***

As time went on…

- ***DOC did not undertake a 5-year review of the plan as instructed***
- ***DOC did not undertake adequate vegetation monitoring***
- ***DOC did not undertake adequate tahr population monitoring***

What followed was sporadic search and destroy operations undertaken by DOC depending on the government, funding budgets, and empowered individuals and their agendas of the day.

For over 20 years this sort of regime continued – random by nature and continually met by conflict between those groups with an interest in tahr. Aside from anecdotal evidence of population and vegetation health (which varied considerably throughout the feral range), there was no valid research conducted by DOC to show any variables had actually been changed by tahr since 1993.

**But many other things did change over this 20 year period:**

- Recreational tahr hunting popularity and pressure on the herd surged, with thousands of Kiwis regularly partaking in the sport for their enjoyment, mental and physical wellbeing, and to put food on the table.
- Commercial hunting for tahr grew exponentially, with many hunting businesses, guides and jobs being created from the demand of largely overseas hunters and tourists wanting to bag themselves a majestic bull tahr from the only readily huntable population in the world.
- Subsidiary businesses grew and right across New Zealand, companies, individuals and livelihoods started to really benefit from the increased use of the tahr resource and rising popularity of hunting.

## Tahr Liaison Group

**To liaise with and seek compromise between those with an interest in tahr, DOC created the Tahr Liaison Group in the 1990's** (now called the Tahr Plan Implementation Liaison Group) which currently includes representatives from conservation boards, conservation and recreation interest groups, recreational & commercial hunters (who actually implement many of the Plan's provisions), and Ngai Tahu who now co-govern with DOC. For the most part, this group has been effective and found solutions to satisfy all stakeholders.

Fast forward to 2017, a new coalition government is formed between Labour, NZ First and the Greens, and Eugenie Sage is appointed the Minister of Conservation. Ms Sage was previously a Forest & Bird employee widely known for her opposition to tahr, having previously announced on a current affairs program on nationwide television that she would like to see tahr ***"exterminated and totally eradicated".*** It is fair to say she had tahr firmly in her sights.

Her justification for reducing tahr numbers; the initial guestimate of a 10,000 animal population limit in the 1993 Himalayan Thar Control Plan coupled with recent aerial surveys that estimated the tahr population on public conservation land to be 35,633, with a 95% confidence interval of 17,347 - 53,920 tahr. Notably, these recent tahr counts have been undertaken using methods likely to count far more tahr than the methods used to establish the number in the HTCP, systematic searching of 2km by 2km plots by two observers and a pilot in a helicopter.

All this conveniently ignored other parts

# Himalayan Tahr Control Plan 1993

"To determine, and review from time to time in accordance with evidence from monitoring, the population of thar which for any area is consistent with an ecologically acceptable vegetation and estate condition (the target level)"

**While the plan acknowledged that:**
"A thar population at or close to the habitat carrying capacity (ca. 50,000) will have unacceptable impacts on vegetation, and therefore on native insect and bird fauna. On available evidence a population of 10,000 over the entire range is identified as a presently acceptable maximum, at which impacts on vegetation may be tolerable, and which will provide sufficient hunter satisfaction and commercial opportunities to maintain hunting pressure." **(Note that hunter opportunity was based on 1993 usage not today's, much higher level of tahr hunting.)**

"There is little quantitative evidence describing thar impacts on flora and fauna"

"The derivation of thar density and population size from the available data should be treated with caution. The figures are "best estimates" which for some management units are based on few if any thar counts. This initial attempt to quantify the parameters required for future thar control should be continually refined."

"More work is required over the breeding range to determine, on an ecosystem and biodiversity basis, exactly what an acceptable limit is"

"The Plan will apply for an initial term of five years. It is experimental and changes necessary to protect conservation values will be made when required, including amendments to intervention densities and management unit boundaries should they be justified and feasible. Affected parties will be notified and consulted about any such changes."

"The Department is seeking to avoid boom-bust fluctuations in animal numbers as such events are intrinsically more difficult to manage. To sustain hunting pressure the Department needs to provide opportunities for all the potential control agents - achievement of such an aim requires a careful balancing exercise between competing demands, and acknowledgement of commercial reality."

**And finally, in the words of Dennis Marshall, the Minister of Conservation at the time:**
"I acknowledge that this plan is, in part, experimental. It acknowledges that information is inadequate in some areas but that all decisions are, of necessity, balanced in favour of protecting nature conservation values; in other words the plan is precautionary in approach. The plan recognises the need to continue monitoring and undertake further research."

of the plan that stated further research is needed to establish what exactly is an acceptable population limit, that ongoing monitoring is needed, and that the Plan should have been reviewed after 5 years (i.e. in 1998).

**The target -** 25,000 to 30,000 dead tahr, bulls and all, left to rot on the hillside by June 2019, when there was a real chance the population might not have even totalled the desired cull target, potentially crippling the tahr resource and the many jobs and livelihoods it supports.

**The impact –** a large debate between interest groups, DOC and Minister Sage that quickly turned political and was dubbed – Tahrmageddon.

**The result –** thankfully, political pressure meant compromise and for the most part, common sense was met. An effective tahr control regime with less direct impact on those with an interest in tahr was worked out between the Game Animal Council and DOC. It focussed on the breeding capacity of the herd, nanny/ female tahr, and left the highly valued bulls for the hunting community, not only for the commercial guides who make a living off the males, but also for the recreational hunters, as without bulls throughout the tahr range there is very little incentive for recreational hunters to get out there and do their bit for management.

What we instead saw from the starting population of approximately 35,000 animals in early 2018, was around 18,000 tahr removed through a combination of official control, commercial and recreational hunting.

This has left us with an estimated population of around 20,000 animals of which population modelling predicts there may be only 5,000 or so breeding nannies. With no new science or population counts available, anecdotal evidence from those in the hills suggests the population has been significantly reduced in many locations.

# National Parks Act 1980

**Enter Forest & Bird (the Minister's former employer) conveniently taking legal action against the Minister for not culling bulls in National Parks.** Just a coincidence, not likely. The National Parks Act 1980 states ***"except where the Authority otherwise determines, the native plants and animals of the parks shall as far as possible be preserved and the introduced plants and animals shall as far as possible be exterminated"*** and just like the Himalayan Thar Control Plan 1993, they argue laws are laws.

The reality is that the National Parks Act 1980 has long been inconsistent with the realities of our National Parks. To eradicate all non-indigenous species from National Parks is not practical. Tahr have also been in the Aoraki/Mt Cook region before it even was a National Park. They are an important reason why New Zealanders go to Aoraki/ Mt Cook and Westland Tai Poutini National Parks. Given that tahr hunters are one of the highest users of these remote National Parks, shouldn't their interests be considered?

You might have noticed the National Parks Act 1980 does actually state ***"except where the Authority otherwise determines".*** This refers to the New Zealand Conservation Authority, whose mission is ***"To ensure for the people of New Zealand, that the richness of New Zealand's natural and cultural heritage is valued, restored, maintained, and cared for by all, in order to enhance our environment and quality of life".*** It's easy to think any rational person trying to maintain NZ's cultural heritage and quality of life, would allow a managed population of animals that are highly valued and important to people's livelihoods to live in National Parks such as tahr, particularly bulls, and we wouldn't have a problem on our hands. In the National Parks Policy 2005, trout and game birds have been exempt from the eradication clause in the Act, so the precedent to allow managed populations of valued introduced species is there.

But guess what, the Minister of Conservation i.e. Sage – appoints all of the NZCA's members, and even one of the members is appointed on the recommendation of Forest & Bird… all while there is no requirement to have a hunter representative on there. Talk about being hijacked from the beginning!

# The Latest Attack

### DOC's draft 2020/21 Tahr Control Operational Plan

DOC released its new draft tahr control plan for the next 12 months just two days before the Tahr Plan Implementation Liaison Group meeting, and just two weeks before wanting to start control work on the 1st of July, making a mockery of their supposed consultation process.

The new plan stated a three-fold increase in flying and culling hours inside the feral range, from 80hrs during the previous plan to 250 hours; 110 hours inside the National Parks, 140 hours outside, and most significantly, targeting all animals including bulls in Aoraki/Mt Cook and Westland Tai Poutini National Parks.

At an average aerial culling rate of 30 animals/hr, they stand to remove over 4,000 nannies and juveniles from outside the National Parks, which is potentially crippling given the already low nanny numbers. Inside

the National Parks, they stand to cull over 3,000 animals, of which over half are likely to be bulls.

Make no mistakes, this magnitude of control could very easily spell the end to the tahr resource as we know it.

## Taking it to the High Court

**Left blindsided by DOC's new plan and their utter lack of consultation, the NZ Tahr Foundation (a group of volunteers) engaged legal help who wrote to the Minister of Conservation requesting that the draft Operational Plan for 2020/21 be rejected and the planned cull on the 1st of July would not go ahead.** Crown Law responded on behalf of the Minister and stated that the Government would not be undertaking the action requested by the Tahr Foundation – i.e. see you in court.

The Tahr Foundation was then forced to file an application with the High Court seeking a judicial review of the decision to implement the Operational Plan and declared it unlawful for a number of reasons. The court hearing took place on Friday the 10th of July and although the Tahr Foundation 'won' the court case on one of their grounds in that the judge ruled DOC did not properly consult with the hunting sector and requested them to get back to the table with stakeholders, it was a hollow victory of sorts as he still permitted DOC to go ahead with half the number of culling hours (125 hrs) and target all animals, including bulls, in National Parks.

The hunting sector again reached out to DOC in good faith and requested they consult and work together on a plan for the interim culling that would reduce conflict and impact on user groups, such as starting with the work they are all agree on - targeting Tahr outside the feral range and nanny/juvenile culling.

Sadly, DOC ignored this offer and have started their interim culling by heading straight to the National Parks targeting all animals, including bulls, and it seems they have no intention on consulting with hunters until they are forced to. It is a real 'kick in the guts' for the hunting sector, especially when DOC know just how critical the bulls are to the livelihoods, businesses, and the mental and physical well-being of many. There has been no empathy or compassion shown, and it seriously jeopardises the great working relationship DOC have with hunters, which up until our present Minister of Conservation's reign, had never been better, with hunters volunteering countless hours to running predator control operations to save native bird species, restoring back country huts and getting involved in many other conservation projects.

## What will the remainder of the culling look like?

No one really knows at this stage as things are continually changing, but rest assured, we will continue to do our best to get a sensible outcome.

## So what now?

**There is no conservation imperative or chance of a population explosion.** Around 18,000 tahr have been shot in the last two years, it's time to press pause, it's time to revisit the 27-year-old Himalayan Thar Control Plan 1993, and it's time to update it to our current environment – both ecologically, commercially and recreationally. We need an effective management plan going forward to keep on top of and manage the impacts of tahr, while also providing a resource for those who make a living and recreate off tahr.

The big problem DOC now faces is that tahr in New Zealand are highly valued – recreationally hunting them has become increasingly popular for everyday kiwis and is now enjoyed by thousands of people, while commercially hunting them with tourists and the flow on expenditure for subsidiary businesses has become a multi-million dollar industry, one that supports the livelihoods of Kiwis right throughout the country.

All stakeholders accept that the environment needs to come first – without a healthy eco-system, everything fails, our recreation and commercial businesses fail, so we want to protect and look after our environment just as much, if not more than most. Yes, tahr do eat and walk on tussocks and other native plants, and too many tahr will have an unacceptable impact on native vegetation. This has happened in some locations in the past, and we don't want to go back there. What we need to do is the science – how many Tahr can our Southern Alps hold with an acceptable amount of browse, while still providing a sustainable hunting resource?

## What is the solution?

**Halt the cull and allow all interested stakeholders to sit down, review the Himalayan Tahr Control Plan 1993** and put an adaptive management system in place for tahr going forward that is based on good science and protects native flora & fauna, while also allowing for recreational and commercial hunting. None of these are mutually exclusive or need to be at the expense of one another, we simply need the opportunity to think this through properly after 27 years of conflict and failed management.

## How can you help?

- **Sign the change.org petition - chng.it/pT7VSQXrHD**
- **Donate to the NZ Tahr Foundation on givealittle - givealittle.co.nz/cause/nztf**
- **Raise awareness of the tahr issue and write letters to MP's**

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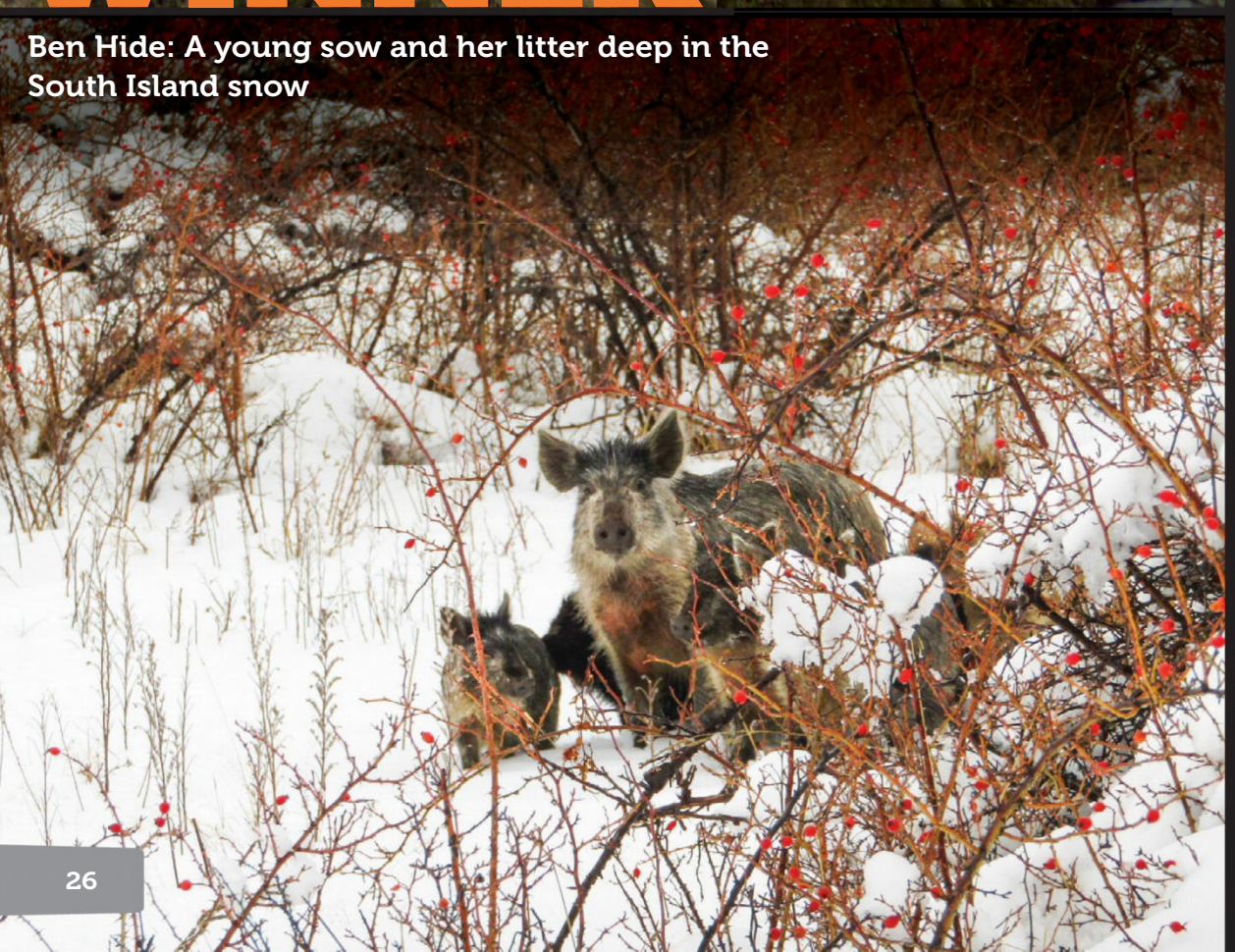
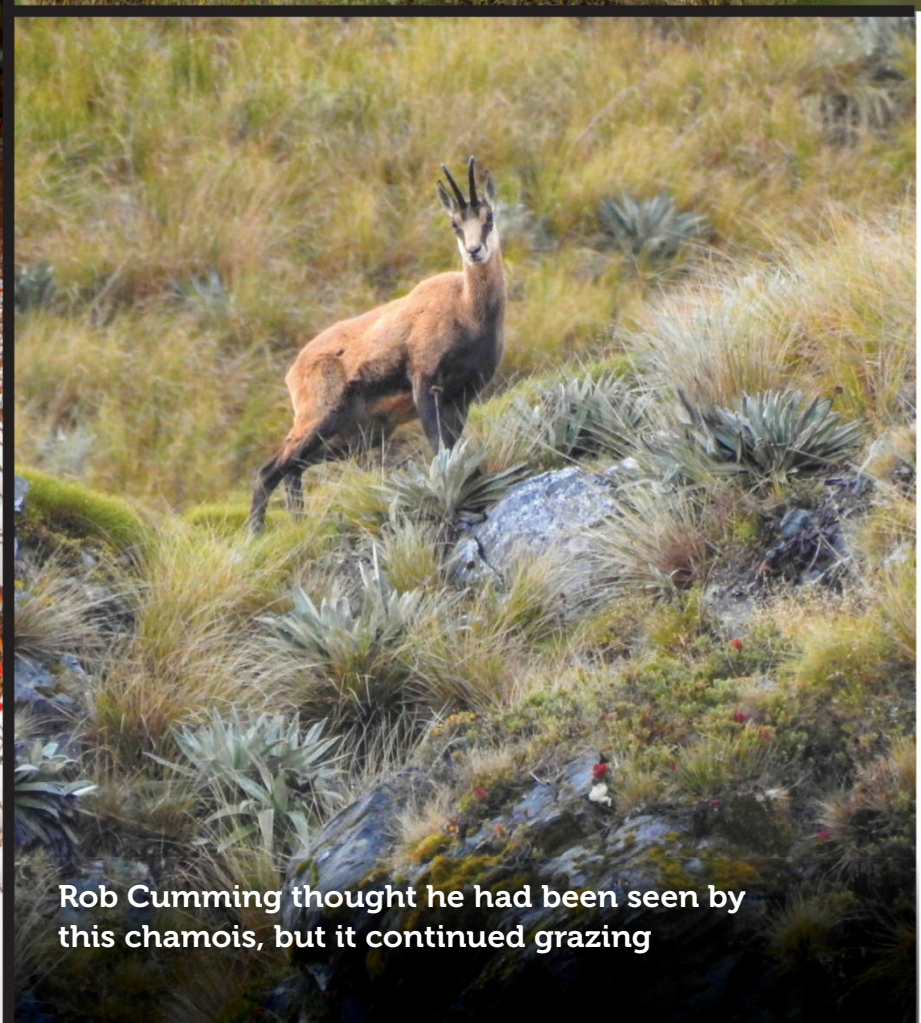
Ed Handyside with a photo of a young Rakaia stag after a snow storm

Some Red deer caught in the open by Andrew Christmas

Josh Wiggins photographed this Sika hind



Ben Hide: A young sow and her litter deep in the South Island snow



Rob Cumming thought he had been seen by this chamois, but it continued grazing

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# PORT PEGASUS PROVIDES

WRITTEN BY ~ **MIKE DOUGLASS**

**All booked. After selflessly staying up till midnight at the South Sea Hotel, Monty had caught the opening of booking season and secured the South Pegasus block on Stewart Island for the annual boys' trip**

**On the last day of March, we steamed south on the Aurora Australis. Our party this year consisted of Ty, Monty, Adam and I. Adam and I had not been to Port Pegasus before and were looking forward to exploring some new ground. We were not to be disappointed.**

The weather was great, so after getting our gear squared away in the hut, we fuelled the boat and headed out to get our bearings and catch a feed. Adam jumped in his wetsuit and quickly pronounced it the best diving he had experienced. It didn't take long to catch a feed of trumpeter, blue cod and moki.

**The mission for the next day was to get some camp meat.** The bush was still damp underfoot as I stalked my way around the coast towards a nearby headland. After an hour, the understorey started to open up and an area of pole rimu caught my attention. With the odd broadleaf and good visibility, it was the best spot I had come across so far and I sat down to wait.

After 20 minutes I was getting fidgety when a large grey leg moved into sight. Then a small head popped up. I raised the rifle and waited for the animal to appear. **At 30 metres there was no mistake and a quick second shot secured the doe's young one as well.** With most of the day left I carried on, spooking another doe and returning to the hut after dark. Adam had also had some luck, shooting his first Whitetail, a yearling doe.

With the pressure off, we dedicated the next few days to exploring the local history. **The lure of tin first attracted settlers to this area and when this failed, fishing took over.** The hub of industry is now based in Oban but signs of the past still remain for the intrepid to discover. The scenery also deserves a mention. The views from Gog and Magog are amazing. **The peaks rise above the surrounding landscape of native forest and granite slabs. In the west, the scrub is beaten low by the prevailing winds.**

It was time to get back to hunting. Before we left, a challenge had been laid down – return with four points or less and you had to keep a moustache until the following year. With this in mind, we planned to get away from the hut and packed for three nights

of camping. Monty and Adam would hunt one area while Ty and I would hunt another. We camped at the head of an inlet, favoured by sea lions as a resting area. They haul up into the bush and sun themselves after a night of fishing. Close to the tent a young female eyed us up, occasionally dashing in to sniff our legs. **After a while she decided we weren't that interesting and moved off to somewhere more peaceful.**

With a lot of feed around and plenty of sign, it was hard to know where to start so we split up to cover the ground. Some of the bush was really open with 100 metres of visibility. I followed a line of fresh rubbings and came across the beginnings of a scrape. It hadn't been used for a few days but at least I was in the right area. At mid-afternoon, a shot cracked out from Ty's direction. I wondered if he had a ticket to shave. The wind was non-existent and with all the fine weather, the bush was very dry. To remain quiet was painfully slow but at least you could hear the deer coming. I watched a young doe feed within a few metres of me before returning to camp. **Ty had shot a mature doe to add to the meat tally.**

The next day we hunted a more remote area of the block. It took a bit of getting to but was starting to look very promising. By 4pm we had covered a fair bit of ground and had only seen a yearling. The going was tight and the two of us were making a fair bit of noise getting around. I decided to head back to an area we had stalked through.

I hadn't been there long when the yearling from before shot past me and Ty bowled through with a deer on his back.

***"Did you get a four?"*** I called out.

***"Nah man, it's an eight!"*** He had been watching a doe and her fawn for an hour when the buck stepped out and presented a shot. The antlers were even and had great shape to them. We hurried back to camp, just beating the darkness.

I was feeling a bit of pressure the next morning and wondered if I was destined to have a moustache in a year's time. We split up again. Ty was now just hunting for meat but somewhere out there was a buck with my name on it, hopefully.

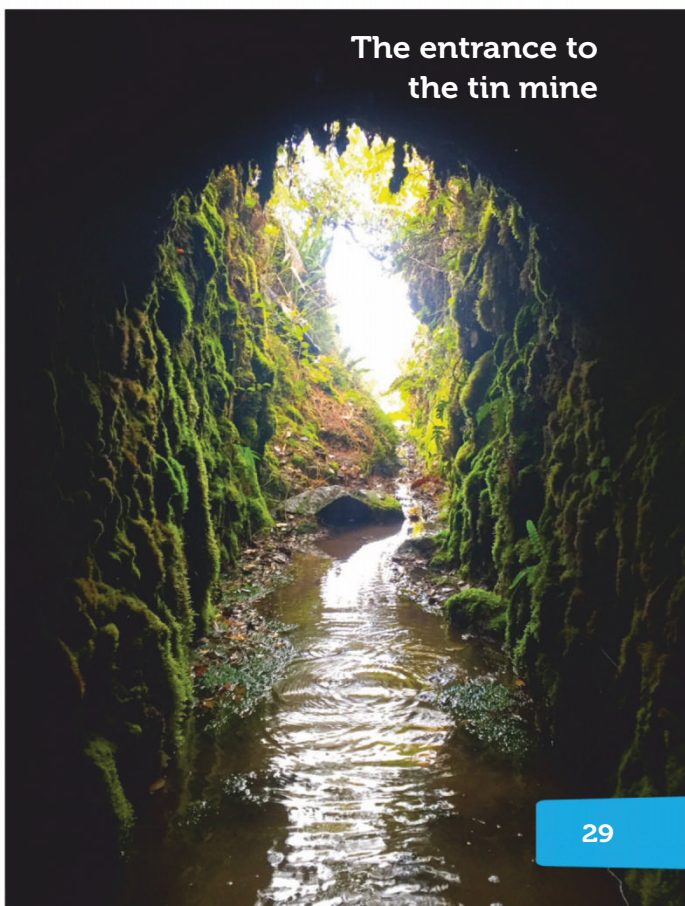
The morning sun was beaming in, the dawn chorus was in full swing and there was fresh sign everywhere, beauty. I slowed to a snail's pace. Then the spur ended and I was in a wet gut, surrounded by a sea of crown fern and stinkwood, great. **A stick broke! I froze, ears straining to hear over the racket of the birds. Was anything there?**

After 15 minutes of nothing, I decided it had been just that. I turned to move – and there he was – right there! He had a full neck, a mature-looking face and

Ty with his 8 point Whitetail

Mike's two meat animals

An abandoned tin mine



The entrance to the tin mine

Mike and his 7 point Whitetail shot only 300 metres from the hut

antlers. I couldn't believe it. My shot felt good but the buck broke downhill. He got caught in the supplejack and I fired again. Down he went but I wasn't taking any chances and put an insurance shot in his neck. ***"Yahoo!"*** I turned on the radio just as Ty called me.

***"It's a six – no it's a seven!"*** I told him as I unearthed another point. I was only 300 metres from camp so Ty came over to give me a hand. We had got what we came for so packed up early and headed back to the hut.

**We were due to pick up Adam and Monty the next day.** Unable to resist a ruse, we repacked all the gear into the boat and pretended we had got nothing. Monty had shot a yearling buck; Adam had jumped out of a tree onto a deer and shot a cat. They were surprised we had nothing. Monty took the first load of gear to the hut and moments later, he said ***"You bastards!"***

The game was up and we excitedly told them of our hunts. Our success spurred the others on and we dropped Adam and Monty off for an afternoon hunt. Despite seeing plenty of animals, no bucks showed themselves. Adam did manage to find a matching pair of cast antlers, equalling eight points. This was a loophole in the rules but it was never stated that the antlers could only be recovered from a live animal. That left only Monty with a potential moustache.

**Time was running out so Ty and Monty left for a last ditch effort to secure some points and camped in another hot spot.** The next day Ty had secured another meat animal but unfortunately Monty had only recovered a cast antler of three points. Tough luck.

Before we knew it, our time was at an end. The Aurora Australis was back to collect us, bringing another group into this piece of paradise. What a great adventure. **The best part was that we discovered more things that needed exploring**. In my opinion, the partnership between the Rakiura Hunter Camp Trust and DoC provides the best hunting facility New Zealand has to offer. The deer are challenging to hunt and the blocks provide for a range of hunting styles and budgets. All this wrapped up in a piece of the world you might not otherwise visit. **What could be better? Get into it!**

Sea lions haul up into the bush and sun themselves after a night of fishing.

Mike's Blue cod

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# PLAN B STAG

WRITTEN BY ~ **ADAM ROSS**

**Climbing high on the second day. It was about now that we realised we may be too high**

**Queens Birthday weekend had been in our hunting calendar for a while. Dad and I had big plans to fly in to the West Coast to chase tahr and chamois and having recently moved up to the North Island, this was going to be a real treat for me**

**Unfortunately, the weather gods had different ideas and James Scott told us outright we shouldn't bother going with a foot of fresh snow in the Landsborough riverbed. Having met James on a previous trip and knowing his reputation, we were happy to take his word for it..**

Having the leave and flights home already booked, we went back to the drawing board. We settled on a spot closer to home that Dad had been to 20-odd years before and we had always talked about checking it out. **Compared to the West Coast trip we had planned, this was going to be a lower-geared, stay-warm kind of trip.** While thoughts of a big old chamois buck or a good stag feeding up after the roar crossed our minds, our anticipation was muted by the fact that we (Dad especially) had hunted the general area repeatedly over the years and knowing that both of those animals were few and far between there.

In hindsight, the priorities at the start of the trip for both of us were more around checking out some new country, having a laugh and maybe putting an eater in the freezer. One of hunting's little ironies.

The trip started like many others; me forgetting something important (in this case the spotting scope) Wakefield pies and a long drive south. Soon it was one boot after the other on the DoC track. The fresh boot prints in front of us were a welcome sight; great to know we weren't the only ones mad enough to be up the valley that weekend. On the way we saw a couple of chamois and one deer up high but were focused on getting to the hut before dark. Soon the mud became snow and the boot marks became foot holes. **By the time it got dark we were in knee-deep snow and even more thankful for the tracks of the people ahead of us.** A couple of cold hours later, we were welcomed by a fire and two trampers who were somewhat surprised to see us at that hour, but happy all the same.

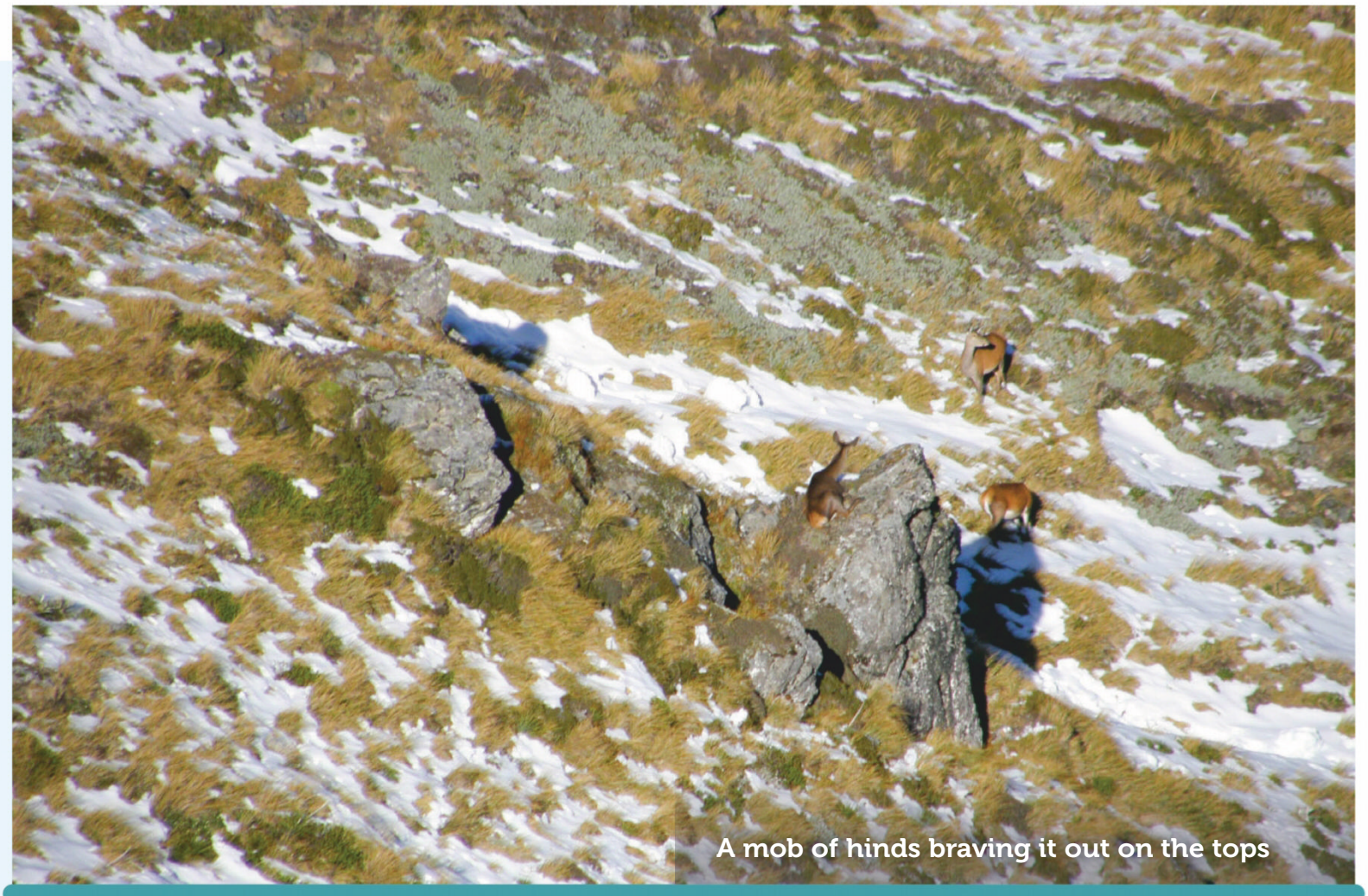
We woke early the next morning and climbed up to the bush line behind the hut. We spent the day sidling the warm side of the valley where most of the snow had melted off. After a lot of glassing we had picked up a handful of nannies and young bucks, and some cold-looking deer back down the valley. We raced off after these deer only to find they were young stags and hinds; a walk that could have been saved if I hadn't forgotten the spotting scope. **The ability to dry out some snow-soaked gear in front of the fire was a welcome luxury that night.**

Deciding we were too high, the following morning we started heading back downstream. We saw a handful of deer throughout the day including two 6 pointers, a solid 8 pointer and a handful

of chamois. The 8 pointer and a single hind were perched on top of a bluff overlooking a mob of four chamois about 200m below them. This tahr-like behaviour from the deer suggested that the valley had been forgotten by the WARO guys. On a pessimistic side note, we were back in the area the following summer and came across nine gut bags on a ridge. **Turns out our forgotten valley wasn't so forgotten after all.**

With the forecast worsening we decided to call the next day our last. We slept in, got a fire going and had as big a breakfast as we could stomach. When we finally rolled out of camp the sun had lit up the entire opposite hillside. We were just about ready to put our heads down and aim for the truck, but decided we'd better make sure there wasn't an easy freezer-filler out enjoying the sun. The face provided a mixture of alpine scrub and kanuka, small clearings and rocky outcrops. Just looking into this face from the cold side made me feel warmer. We weren't glassing for very long when a brown shape caught my eye. I remember thinking that it was the exact colour of a nanny tahr. Since we were in Marlborough however, I didn't think it was likely. In the time it took me to process this, the brown shape had moved. **We soon picked up another three deer feeding in amongst the scrub midway up the opposite face.**

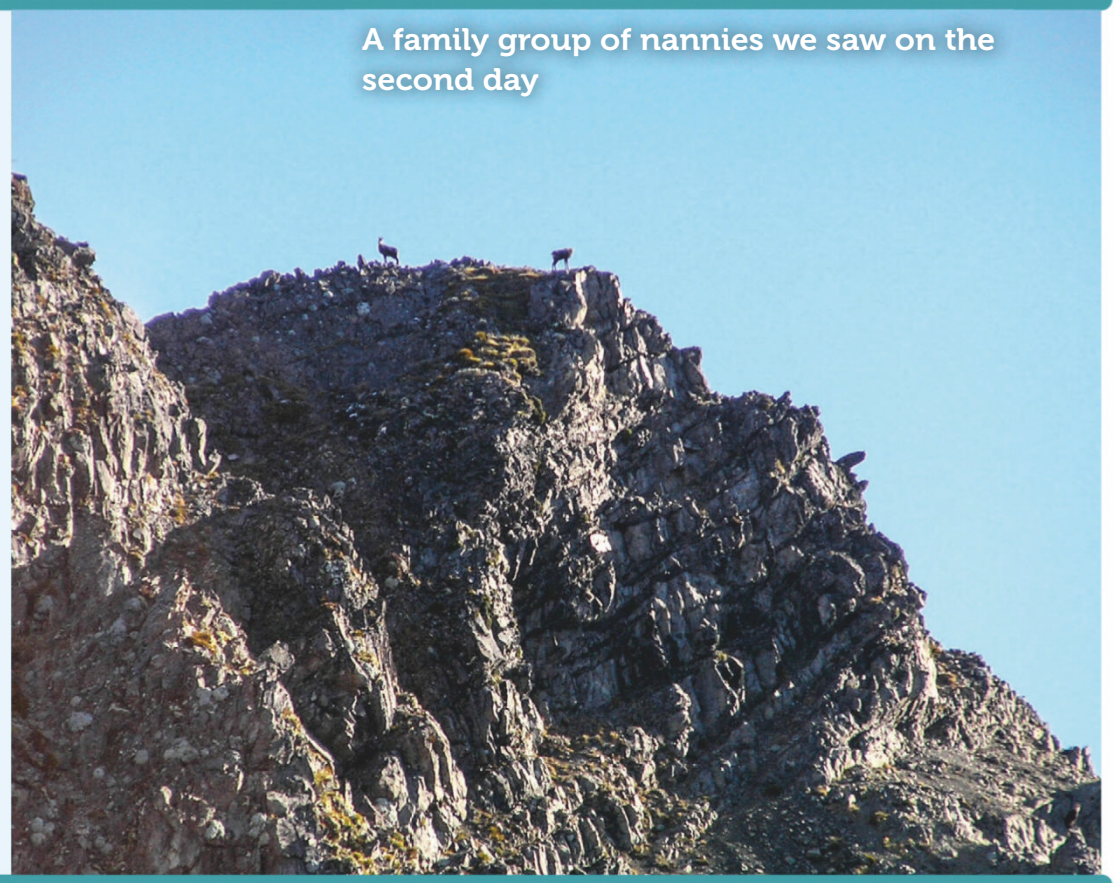
Given the deer we had already seen, the time of day and the proximity to the road end, neither Dad nor I thought there'd be anything special about them. Again, this is where the spotting scope would have been useful. We agreed that if they hung around long enough, we would put one in the freezer and took the path of least resistance in their direction.



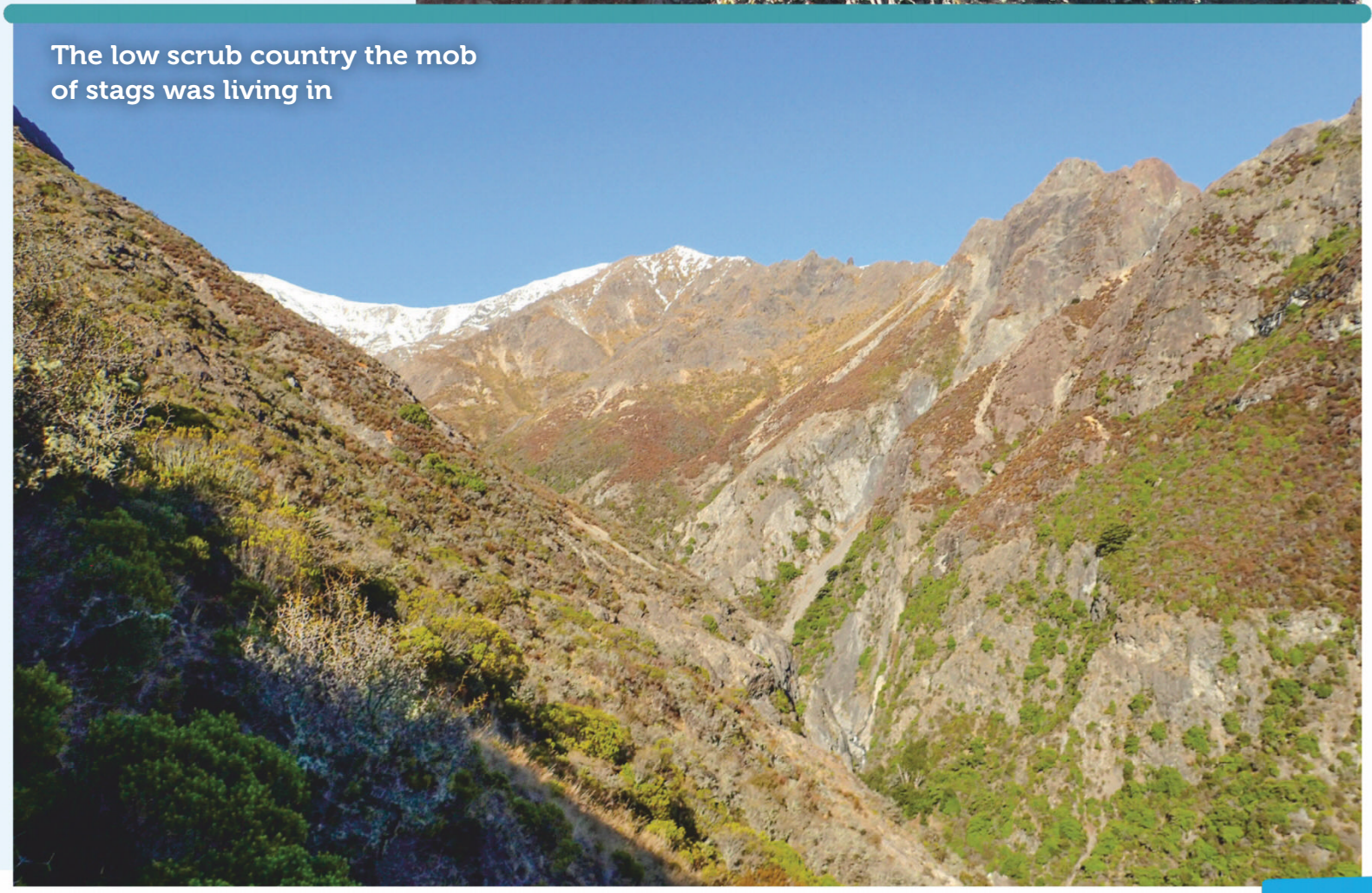
A mob of hinds braving it out on the tops

After 500 metres or so in the wide-open riverbed, in plain view, we reached the bush on their side**. I flicked the binoculars up long enough to see there were at least two stags.** Interested, I used the zoom on my video camera as a makeshift spotting scope and was blown away by the grainy image in the monitor. One of these deer was a big boy.

To this day I cannot believe how lucky we



A family group of nannies we saw on the second day



The low scrub country the mob of stags was living in

He was a big old boy with pedicles hard down on his head. Not the strongest of bez tines, but the fact he had any was a rarity for the area

got. Once we realised what he was, we went into full sneak mode, but to have remained undetected at 600-plus metres from a stag of that quality with our lazy morning blasé attitude was incredibly fortunate.

**We put our serious faces on and devised a plan.** We had two options: try to stalk in on the same scrubby face and get a chip shot, or climb up the other side of the side creek they were in and shoot across. We opted for the latter even though it would be stretching the capabilities of our rifles. We sneaked up through the bush and found ourselves on a bluff overlooking the face where the stags had been feeding. The big stag was the only one left in view. He was standing tall, quartering to us and surveying the country we had wandered across less than an hour before.

At 380m, Dad and I did our best back-of-an-envelope calculation for holdover and concluded that putting it on its backbone would be about right. **We both got comfy, wound up our scopes and rolled the bolts.**

Closing the bolt on a live rifle with an animal in the scope always seems to get my heart racing. The fact that this was a big deer and a long shot (for us) meant that my excitement levels were redlining. The five (felt like 50) minutes it took him to turn broadside didn't help. When he finally obliged, I exhaled and squeezed off on his backbone.

**The shot sounded good and the stag took off.** It was steep, thick country and as he paused to navigate, Dad fired. He lurched downhill but soon stopped again, starting to look sick. I sent another one his way and got another solid thud back. By the time I had another one in and found him in the scope, he had teetered over. All this happened in the space of about ten seconds.

**Getting down the gut and up the other side took the better part of an hour**. I have made enough bad calls on size assessments to develop a due sense of apprehension when approaching animals and experiencing the infamous 'ground shrinkage'. **This time though we were not disappointed. He was a heavy, even 14 pointer and we were over the moon.**

We had one empty pack which we loaded with both hindquarters, the back steaks and the head. Dad took the short route down the hill and I dropped back down to pick up the other pack and all the gear we had dumped out at the bottom. By the time I caught up, Dad had broken the back of the walk out. We swapped packs and it was my turn to groan under the load.

Had this head come from one of the iconic herds renowned for producing big deer (or even from farmland) I believe it would be considered an impressive head by today's standards. It was even sweeter that it came out of the old stomping grounds in public conservation land, Malborough.

**In the most unofficial of scorings, the stag went 277 DS with chips on just about every tine and a trez snapped off halfway.**

Heavy timber and good length. We were stoked!

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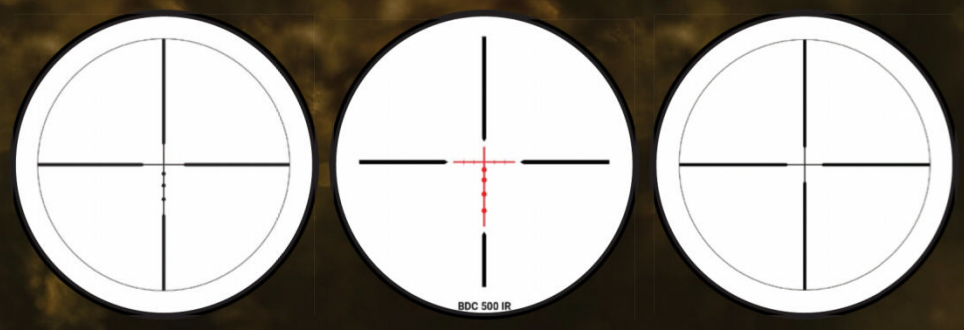


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# ADVICE FROM A HUNTING NEWBIE PART 2

WRITTEN BY ~ **HANNAH RAE**

Our grimy work clothes are tossed in the corner and we pull on some comfy camo. I pick up the backpack that's already loaded with extra layers, head torches and spotting scope, and sling the camera and binos around my neck. Meanwhile Scott grabs the rifle, a few snacks and water bottles. Within five minutes of coming in the door after a day's work, we're ready to head out again.

**Charles knows the routine.** He is attempting to sit patiently – his whole body shaking and front paws riverdancing as though he has just inhaled three cans of Red Bull. We pile into the ute and head off up the farm track with a cloud of dust billowing behind.

With the exception of the depths of winter, this is a standard weeknight for us. Over the summer months we're able to sneak in a quick run or mountain bike before we head out, but in the shorter evenings, it's purely a race against the sun to get up the hill before the light disappears. Once we reach the top there are route options to suit almost every wind direction. **Each route is dotted with lookouts to where the bush-clad faces give way to grass and patchy scrub – favourite hangouts for Red and Fallow deer.**

Scott cuts the engine and we coast to a halt at a bend in the track. We ease the doors open, step out, and close them with a muted nudge. This track is the access route to the rest of the station so the animals are well-accustomed to moving vehicles, and often won't bat an eyelid if you're driving past. But if the deer get any indication a vehicle has stopped or a human is moving on foot, they'll disappear in a flash into the safety of the bush. **From this moment we are in full 'stealth mode', communicating only in whispers and hand gestures.**

Now it is almost second nature, but I vividly recall my first weeknight hunt with Scott. The entire routine was an exhilarating mystery.

***"Just do what I do"*** was Scott's only instruction as we slunk off into the mist. I followed behind as quietly as possible, like my life depended on it. Fortunately, picking silent footsteps is a technique I perfected at a young age, growing up in a century-old villa with creaky hallway floorboards. Mind you, it's a skill I never anticipated putting to good use in my adult life.

We sneaked across to a clearing where Scott had seen deer grazing earlier in the week, hoping that we could get in close for a look. **The light had all but disappeared by the time we reached the clearing so we didn't manage to see anything.** But just as we were about to turn around and head for home, a hind barked from less than 30 metres away. Eventually she decided we were indeed a threat and

A stag I snuck in on when my hunting skills had developed

crashed off into the scrub. It was a real buzz for a rookie like me and I couldn't wait to try it again.

**As my visits to the station grew longer, until eventually I was living there, the weeknight hunts became an addiction.** After a long day at work, it might feel nice to collapse onto the couch for the evening but for us, sitting on the hill watching animals while the sun sets, with the refreshing breeze on our faces, is a type of bliss that's too good to miss.

Little did I realise the value in these weeknight hunts and how well it prepared me for longer, multi-day trips. It gave me regular opportunities to learn about deer behaviour, how to use wind direction, picking up animal sign, and stalking, all without the pressure of spoiling hours and kilometres of hunting if I put a foot wrong. It also taught me patience and that it's best to throw all your expectations out the window – **it's very rare that you can predict exactly how a hunt will pan out.**

Thanks to my rural upbringing I understand the meaning of 'from the paddock to the plate' and have always had a healthy respect for animals. (Hell – I even lived a vegan lifestyle for a year – but that's a story for another day!) I'm continually struck with awe watching a character stag through the binos, and I relish the thrill of stalking up close with a camera. I can only hope that over the coming years I don't lose this appreciation for the animals.

**When Scott first lent me an old set of binos, I scanned only the ridgelines for deer. It seemed futile to look anywhere else I thought, like searching for a needle in a haystack.** It's totally laughable now, but evidently at the time I did not know any better. Thank goodness my glassing technique has subsequently improved! I received my own pair of binos as a Christmas gift last year and since then I've certainly been clocking up the hours waiting for deer-shaped bushes and rocks to move. Through a combination of practise and drip-fed advice from Scott, I now find my eyes instinctively scanning grassy guts, clearings and bush edges without even thinking about it. **In fact, on a recent hiking adventure with a girlfriend, I made sure to pack my binos – you know, just in case.**

The weekends of the past few months have been in stark contrast to our first adventure/hunting date. Instead of lazily enjoying the dawn with coffee in hand, I've now missed countless sunrises with my attention glued to the glass. And at the other end of the day I've dozed off to sleep with the sweet ache of hours in the hills in my legs, and the outlines of deer imprinted on the backs of my eyelids. What I enjoy the most is experiencing the different version of reality that exists in the hills. It's where I feel most like myself. On numerous occasions, crawling through the scrub or scrambling up slopes held together only by the roots of beech trees, I've felt like a kid again. **All worries about work, a life plan and the state of the world are part of a distant existence.** If there is a meaning to life, I think it's tucked away somewhere in the hills. Those of you who hunt will know what I mean, and for those of you who don't, it's high time you got out there to try it for yourself.

Charles and I glassing the warm faces

# LEARN THE BASICS

**You might be tempted to go out there and just start shooting, however there's a lot more to hunting than that.** It takes time, and a hearty dose of patience, to learn and understand these basics, but ultimately it will set you up for being a better all-round hunter.

## MOVE QUIETLY

**Yes it seems obvious, yet I've observed some hunters who haven't mastered this yet and are about as subtle as a yeti in the confectionery aisle.** Be aware that every movement you make has a noise to go with it. This goes for your clothing and gear too – every little backpack creak and jacket rustle is amplified when stalking.

## USE THE WIND

**Most animals have a sense of smell that is hundreds – or thousands – times better than ours.** If you are upwind of an animal, it will smell you. Take into consideration the wind direction when you're planning your hunt.

As well as the general wind direction, pay attention to the air moving up the slope during the day as it heats up (anabatic wind) and air moving downhill as it cools in the evenings (katabatic wind).

## THINK LIKE A DEER

**Where is the feed most lush? On hot days, where is it cool and safe to bed down?** Or for the cooler days, where is it warm and safe to bed down? All hunting areas are different and learning where animals like to hang out will come with time.

## TUNE INTO YOUR SENSES

**Animals make sounds and leave behind scents too.** It might be the crack of a twig, a whiff of stag urine, or startled birds flying off in a hurry. It all goes together to paint the picture of what is happening around you.

## PRACTISE

**Hunting is not something you'll comprehensively understand overnight, so get out there as regularly as possible.** Enjoy the experience and learning too because often you won't even see any animals, let alone shoot something.

The epic trips away are great, but don't underestimate the value of hunting locally. These hunts require less preparation, less travel and it's easy to just pick up and go when the weather is right.

## KEEP LEARNING

**When you link up with experienced hunting companions they can point out animal sign like droppings, hoof prints and stag rubbing.** This all helps you to gain a better idea of what the animals are doing in that area.

Don't be afraid of what you don't know – ask questions. The flip side of this is to treat all advice with a grain of salt. Be sure to canvas a range of opinions on top of doing your own research.

## MEALS AND SNACKS

**For day hunts and overnight trips you want to make sure you're adequately fuelled and hydrated to keep you on your toes.** It's a huge topic but essentially you want a mix of carbohydrates, protein and fat. The carbohydrates keep your energy levels stable, protein keeps your muscles going, and fat helps you feel satiated. Males can thrive on a low-carb, high-fat regime, but our female bodies need carbohydrates for basic functions so don't skimp on these.

**Everyone is different – eat food that works for you**. It is definitely worth the effort of trying different things and experimenting to find what that food is. I like to take meals and snacks that are calorie-dense, lightweight, minimally processed, and budget-friendly. There are a couple of freeze-dried meal brands I enjoy that have great flavour and not too many things I can't pronounce on the ingredient list. Occasionally I make my own meals in the dehydrator, then I know exactly what's in them. For snacks I like homemade jerky, nuts, dried fruit, cold roast potatoes, muesli bars, peanut butter, and the classic tuna and crackers.

**Try not to rely on snacks that are high in sugar; save these for when you need a boost to get you up the hill or for the home straight.** Remember to actually eat the food you take too! We have a tendency to suppress those pangs of hunger in favour of just getting to that next ridge or we tell ourselves ***"We'll eat once we've found a good glassing spot".*** Having quick and easy snacks handy will help to keep up your energy levels throughout the day, and it also means you'll feel more energetic the next day too.

Consuming water regularly is crucial, particularly in warm weather but also in cool conditions. Adding a pinch of salt helps your body absorb the water. There are plenty of recommendations out there as to how much fluid you should be consuming, but simply drinking when you're thirsty is an easy guideline. Just don't ignore thirst – it's an early sign of dehydration – if neglected it can lead to more uncomfortable and serious problems.

**Enjoy the learning, new challenges and adventures. Happy hunting!**

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Cody with a trophy Rusa Stag - Being well prepared made all the difference, even on one of NZ's hardest game animals

WRITTEN BY ~ CODY WELLER

# BUSH HUNTING WITH A BOW AND ARROW

**I'd been standing there leaning against a tree for around ten minutes, with a heap of fresh Rusa sign at my feet and a light breeze lifting up the face**

**Feeling like I was right in their zone, I moved forward very tentatively, contouring my way around the face.**

I'd only made 20 metres from where I'd last waited and was standing still, listening. Quite some distance down and around the face from me, I could hear movement. Accompanying this movement was a blackbird's alarm call. I strained to listen, trying to gather more information and as time ticked by, this thing moved closer.

It was definitely coming up my way. I told myself ***"It's probably a pig, but just be ready."*** With an arrow nocked, I stood on the game trail looking to where the movement was coming from. Like some sort of magic trick, a Rusa stag appeared, sidling along 20 metres below me. This was what had been mooching its way up to my location!

Of course my heart rate went through the roof. But I had to remain calm. The stag

Here I have my release aid in an easy to reach position as I wait

Having all my gear organised made getting the shot on this Whitetail successful. All I had to do when he came walking through was pick up my bow with an arrow already nocked and make a quick stalk

My bow is positioned in an upright, ready-to-shoot state. Also, my lead leg is poised so I can easily move myself into a shooting position with minimal movement that could be detected

casually wandered along on a mission, totally unaware of my presence. There was no shot at this point, but I could see his line of travel and picked a gap that he was going to pass through. I'd hit full draw and was settled into the shot as he stepped into that very window.

**A quiet hind call stopped him in his tracks. Letting the pin settle, I built pressure on the trigger.** THWAK! The stag charged off around the face and I stood dead still and listened. The sound of a rapidly departing animal very quickly turned into the sound of rolling. You could cut the tension in the air with a knife – and this was all jammed into about 15 seconds after I'd first seen the stag. Bush hunting at its finest.

There was a whole raft of things in that particular hunt that made the stalk and shot run smoothly. In this article, I'll point out a few of the tricks to shooting in the bush that helped me.

Learning the art of moving through the bush and out-crafting your intended quarry is pretty difficult, but it is necessary. Why?

Almost anywhere that bush is present, there will be animals using it. It's their go-to place for all kinds of reasons – human pressure, weather, shelter – the list goes on. **Over winter the bush offers a good steady food source and this food can be accessed without having to move far from bedding or coming into contact with the danger of humans.** For a bowhunter, winter is probably one of the best times of the year to bush stalk. It's normally damp underfoot and the drop in temperature will have animals on their feet more times during the day than the warmer months.

**Putting it all together with a bow and arrow in the bush is not easy.** There are so many things you have to deal with: swirling wind, obscured kill zone, walking animals and super-close ranges. In the bush, these close quarters moments can make you feel as if time is running out before it even started.

First thing is practice. Why do you need to practise a 15 metre shot? Or even a 7 metre shot? Depending on your setup, it'll change how high your arrow will go. **A 7 metre shot on a very steep angle will be different to a flat ground shot.** The best way to know is to run through a few close range scenarios. This will confirm where your arrows are impacting and you want to be able to do this with your 20 metre pin.

I have a single-pin adjustable sight, so in the bush it's just set for 20 metres. I know if the animal is at roughly 10 metres as the shot becomes available, I just need to settle about 2" lower than where I'm intending the impact to be.

So you wouldn't think that two inches would be a big deal, right? Add some

A good boar that I picked off as he walked into a gap. A soft pig grunt made him pause for long enough to make a clean shot

obstructions into the mix, and then you'll see how important it is to know how much room you have to play with. **Arrows don't punch through hard objects, they tend to cartwheel or deflect on contact very easily.** On the other hand, soft vegetation close to the kill zone is OK. Knowing how to thread the needle can greatly improve your chances.

Making precise and quick shots is something that must be practised as well. It's a matter of getting onto that kill zone and settling, then being aggressive with your shot process. This needs to be practised. **There is a huge difference between what I've just talked about and the good old trigger-hammer.** Hammering down on your trigger because it's close and you're in a hurry only leads to bad things down the track. Keep your shot controlled, not dropping that finger through the trigger as the pin gets close to the zone.

Add a call to your shot sequence, because the ideal is to shoot something standing still. This helps with the 'not slamming through the trigger' thing. **Plus, it's a much safer bet that you'll hit your target well.** You want to be at full draw and settled in, then make a soft hind call or pig grunt to pause your intended quarry in the desired gap. Take up pressure on the release, building until it's gone.

Be organised. What I mean by that is know how to get an arrow from the quiver quietly but quickly. This is often overlooked. As the bowhunter locks eyes on something, cabbage head takes over. You are not in a quick draw situation on the dusty streets of some western movie. Rapid movement and the sound of an arrow being ripped from your quiver will do you no favours.

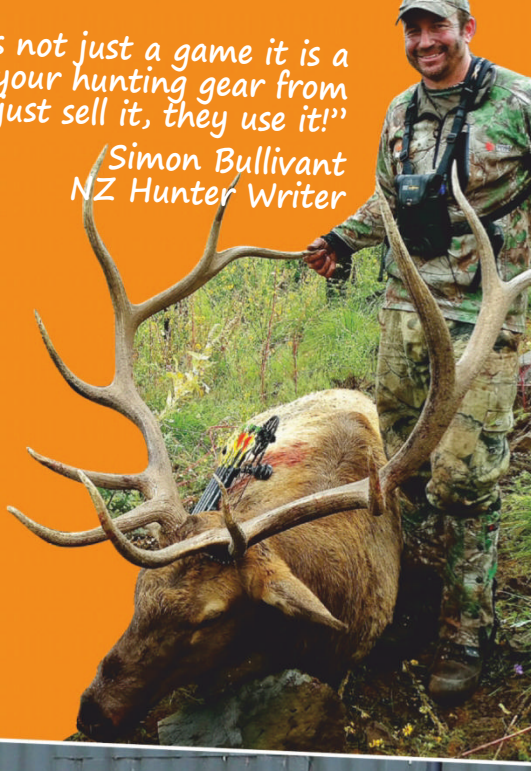
If the sign is fresh and the conditions allow, have an arrow nocked. This can't be done all the time, but where possible it's a definite time saver. When you stop to wait and listen, always have an arrow nocked. I like to lean my bow up against something so it's already upright and if possible, facing the most probable position. In my case, I use a handheld release so I also leave this in an easily reached place. Often these types of releases can be difficult to get from your pocket when you're in a sitting or crouched position.

**Getting that bow back to full draw should be done with minimal movement.** Being over-bowed is no good (having your draw weight set too high, not allowing for a fluid draw back). If you can't pull it back holding your bow out in front of you and coming back to full draw on a fairly even plane, you'll probably want to work on getting stronger or dropping a few pounds of draw weight. All these things save time or movement and in these close quarters situations, sometimes you have very little time and you will not get away with much movement.

**Next article I'll go over a few things that help me find and out-craft a few critters in the bush.**

"Bowhunting is not just a game it is a way of life. Buy your hunting gear from people who don' just sell it, they use it!"

Simon Bullivant
NZ Hunter Writer



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WRITTEN BY ~ **JARED HEARSEY | BLACKWATCH RELOADING**

# PART 1
# THE RELOADERS CREED
## KEEP IT CONCENTRIC, KEEP IT CONSISTENT.

**So you have a basic reloading setup and you are learning a baseline understanding of what contributes to a high performance load?**

**It's time to go 100% Alice in Wonderland on this new-found obsession and dive down the rabbit hole!**

What pill should you take and what should you pass on? What tools/techniques and skills are 'must haves' and 'must dos', and what can be kept in the bottom drawer?

First and foremost, let's look at the 'two Cs', which above everything else will get you the best results – consistency and concentricity.

## CONSISTENCY

**Consistency should be achieved at every stage of the reloading process, starting with component and tooling selection**. Let's begin with what you have direct control over and will contribute significant impactful benefits.

Quality measuring tools are absolutely essential and will not only massively improve your existing results, but also stop you chasing your tail, by eliminating inaccuracies at critical stages of the reloading process.

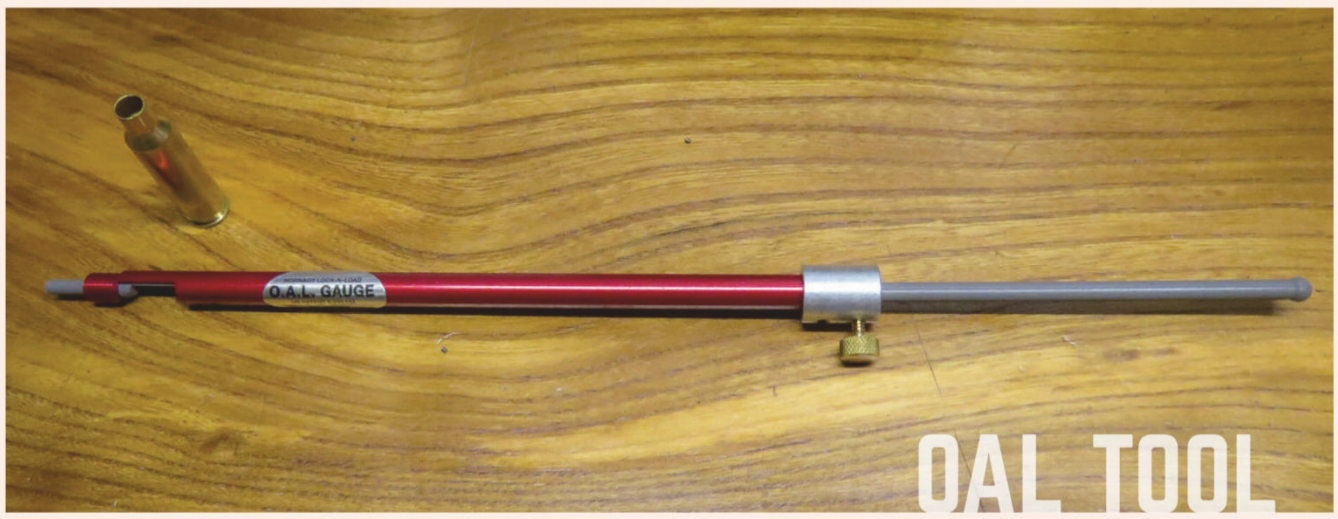
## SCALES

**A reliable scale that is calibrated and proven to read to 1/10gn accuracy is high on this list.** Like many guys and girls starting their reloading journeys, I got what gear I could to get started, all the while working to strict budget constraints.

This included a set of Smart Reloader battery-powered digital scales…as I write this it makes me want to give myself an uppercut for letting them within a mile of my bench. They were horrendous! They required constant recalibration and the drift on them made them basically unusable.

**Next was a set of Frankford Arsenal DS750 battery scales.** This unit served me well for what it did, but its use was limited. It didn't like to trickle charges, it was sensitive to battery charge and again, it was prone to drifting. Stepping up to an RCBS Range Master 2000 was an eye-opening experience. This unit is consistent, easy and fast to calibrate and 1/10gn accurate – it ticks all the boxes. The Hornady Bench Scale is a comparable

CALIPERS




OAL TOOL

option, but it doesn't have the capability to run on battery power like the RCBS, thus limiting portability for at-range load development.

The RCBS Range Master 2000 has the same load cell used in the RCBS Chargemaster Lite – a machine that has proven itself the best available for its price point bar none and has put the fun back into reloading benches all over the world. The absolute state of the art scales are those using magnetic force restoration instead of load cells, like the Sartorious GD503 and the A&D FX-120i. These do not drift like load cell scales, and are far faster to read, allowing fast and accurate trickling. They are simply a fantastic investment and the crown jewels on anyone's bench. For the traditionalist, the Redding #2 and RCBS M500 or M1000 are the standout beam options.

## Calipers

**The caliper is the most used tool on your reloading bench so it's critical to have a unit that you have 100% faith in.** Whether it's Vernier, Dial or Digital calipers, the reloader must have total confidence in the tool's calibration and in his/her own ability to use the tool correctly. I consider an entry level, reliable unit to be the Hornady Digital 6" caliper, then I would move up to the RCBS model. Both these units measure to .001" and are reliable, easy to use and easy to read – ideal for reloading. It's a big jump then to Mitutoyo and Starrett, which are true engineering instruments.

Hornady has a fantastic range of gauge tools that I would never be without – firstly their overall length gauge. This is the easiest way to find the lands of your rifle with any particular projectile. It is a tool that uses a modified case to allow you to seat the bullet snug to the lands, which then enables you to take an accurate measurement with your calipers.

## Comparator

**Going hand-in-hand with this gauge is the Hornady bullet comparator set.** I cannot stress enough the importance of this tool. All bullets have some variation due to their manufacture. These variations may be length, base to tip, weight, and critically, length of base to ogive (CBTO - Cartridge Base To Ogive). A comparator allows measurement from the base of either a bullet, or more importantly a case, to the ogive of the projectile, the ogive being the point where the bullet engages the lands of the rifle's bore. This is a critical measurement when tuning a round as it's the determining factor for the seating depth of the loaded round.

Using a comparator, you will quickly realise how much variation you get by using OAL as you primary measurement. This is also used to find variations in projectile base to ogive measurement. It is an excellent indicator of the precision and quality standard of manufacture of the bullets you are loading.

One important point to note when using comparator tools is that they are not made to any calibrated standard. With your gauge, the CBTO may read a .010" or greater difference than your mate's gauge. This is why reload data is always

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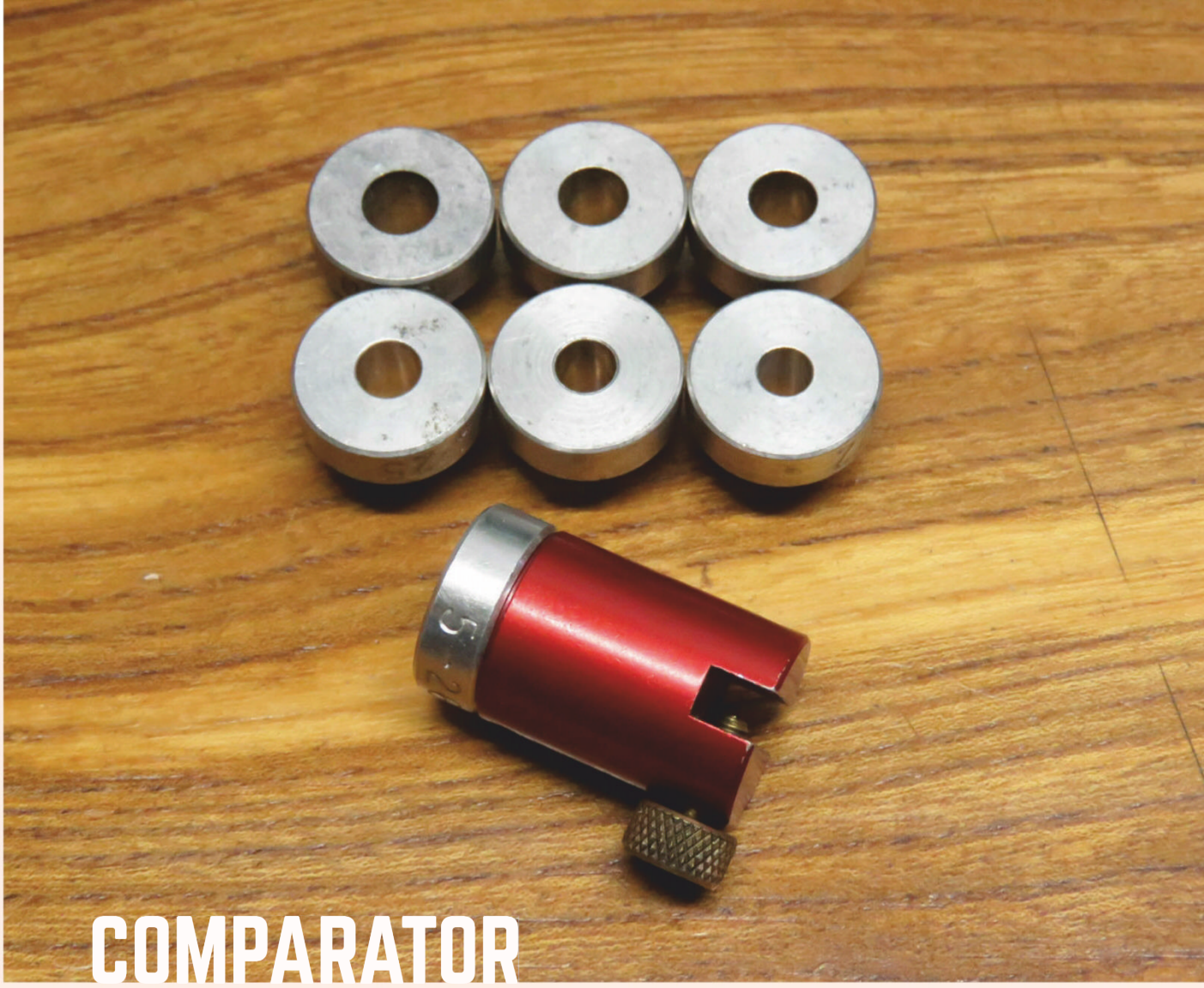
MEGA H2
OVERALL PERFORMANCE: 38 DB(C)
SILENCER WEIGHT: 596 g
DIAMETER: 64 mm
OVER BARREL LENGTH: 100 mm
ADDED LENGTH: 150 mm
TOTAL LENGTH: 250 mm
MAX BARREL DIAMETER: Ø23.7 mm
The H2 design prioritises maximum possible performance with high durability,

H2
OVERALL PERFORMANCE: 33 DB(C)
SILENCER WEIGHT: 410 g
DIAMETER: 49.4 mm
OVER BARREL LENGTH: 80 mm
ADDED LENGTH: 150 mm
TOTAL LENGTH: 230 mm
MAX BARREL DIAMETER: Ø23.7 mm

OPTIMA 60
OVERALL PERFORMANCE: 35 DB(C)
SILENCER WEIGHT: 440 g
DIAMETER: 60 mm
OVER BARREL LENGTH: 80 mm
ADDED LENGTH: 150 mm
TOTAL LENGTH: 230 mm
MAX BARREL DIAMETER: Ø23.7 mm
Made in Norway, A-Tec are extremely effective and tested to ISO standards. The modular d

OPTIMA 45
OVERALL PERFORMANCE: 29 DB(C)
SILENCER WEIGHT: 310 g
DIAMETER: 44.4 mm
OVER BARREL LENGTH: 80 mm
ADDED LENGTH: 150 mm
TOTAL LENGTH: 230 mm
MAX BARREL DIAMETER: Ø23.7 mm

A-TEC
WWW.A-TEC.NO
OPTIMA FRONT
OVERALL PERFORMANCE: 28 DB(C)
SILENCER WEIGHT: 260 g
DIAMETER: 44.4 mm
OVER BARREL LENGTH: 15 mm
ADDED LENGTH: 150 mm
TOTAL LENGTH: 165 mm
MAX BARREL DIAMETER: N/A
The Optima design incorporates an alloy body with light steel core to prioritise light weight with high performance.



# COMPARATOR

# LYMAN XPRESS TRIMMER

published to COAL (Cartridge Over All Length). Your CBTO measurement, whilst adding accuracy to the process, is only relevant to your specific gauge.

Now you are happy with the accuracy of your critical measuring tools and gauges and you are confident in using them competently, let's look at some variables to get a handle on.

## Brass

**Whatever calibre you load for, you will be using brass cases.** These cases have a pretty rough life – they are on the front line – exposed repeatedly to the heat and pressures generated by what essentially is a controlled explosion every time you pull the trigger.

These forces expand and stretch said cases, which will then require resizing and trimming. This process causes the brass cases to 'work harden'. This work hardening makes the brass less ductile and will contribute to split necks, increased chamber pressure, inconsistent neck tension and poor accuracy in cases that are repeatedly reloaded.

The experienced reloader tends to look at this issue from two angles. Some use techniques to limit the cold working of the brass, such as only neck sizing fired brass, and minimizing shoulder bump and head spacing. This is good practice anyway as it can benefit accuracy as well as limiting the primary cause of case head separation.

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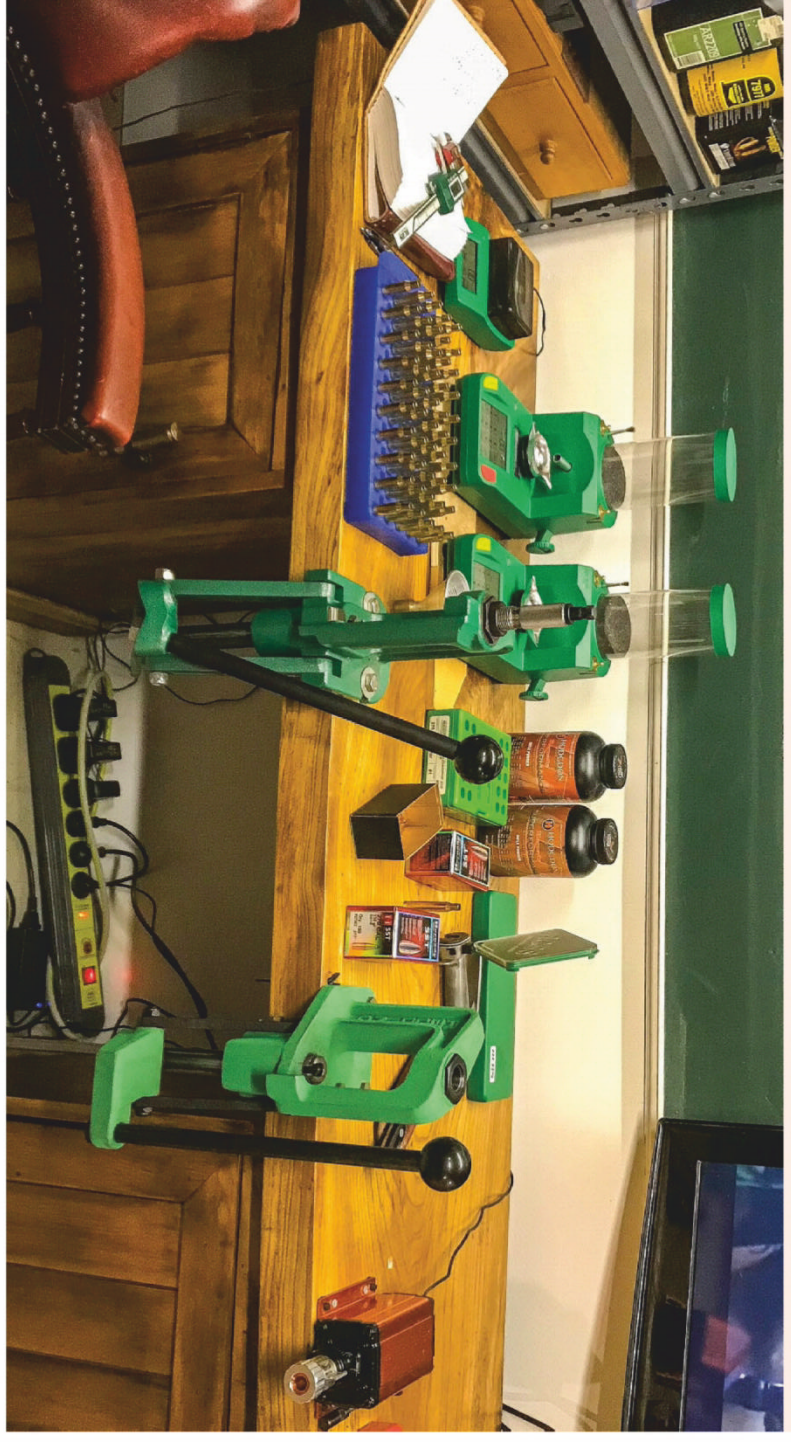

The work hardening issue can be alleviated by annealing the cases. Annealing relaxes the molecules in the brass and returns it to its original ductile state. This is common practice for many top competition shooters but for the majority of reloaders the easier option is to replace brass that is showing signs of wear.

Brass options can be confusing, but there are two brands that stand above all others for absolute quality of materials and manufacture. Lapua and Norma are without doubt the best available of those I have used. Every different brass manufacturer's end product varies. These variations are noted in wall thickness, usable case capacity, brass hardness, neck thickness etc. Always keep brass sorted by head stamp identification, lot, firings of that specific case and if you want to refine your process further, start sorting your brass.

This is always a topic of debate. There are two camps for how to sort brass. The first camp weighs each prepared case and sorts by weight. The second camp argues that weight has nothing to do with case consistency and the brass must be sorted by internal volume, as this is the direct measurement that affects case capacity, and thus load pressure etc.

So what's the correlation between weight and volume? Obviously it is a whole lot easier to simply sort brass by weight rather than measure volume. It comes down to one critical factor – the external dimensions of the case. If after resizing, cleaning, trimming, chamfering, deburring and primer pocket cleaning, all your cases measure exactly the same externally, then the difference in mass must be internal, therefore creating more or less volume in the case. Apples with apples, as they say!

So put simply, is sorting your brass by weight an effective way to determine case consistency? Yes – but ONLY if your external dimensions are exactly the same for the entire batch.

How beneficial is the process in the real world? Again, what we are talking about is consistency. We all strive for a perfectly repeatable load, and the volumetric capacity of a case does contribute to that. The smallest cases are affected most by variation in volume. A 5gn case weight variation will affect a small case like a 223 far more than a large 300RUM.

Is there a 'work around'? Using quality brass by batch/lot is the best way to avoid unpredictable inconsistencies. Lapua and Norma are the premium options, but if your budget doesn't stretch that far, consider Starline, made in the USA. In my experience it measures and weighs very consistently. The primer flash holes are punched and not machined like Lapua and Norma so you may want to deburr them, but other than that I have not seen or heard of any issues.

## CASE LENGTH

**Maintaining consistent case length is important.** The length of the neck combined with its tension will obviously affect the frictional force due to increased contact area of the projectile and the case neck. All cases have a +/- length tolerance that must be adhered to, but in the search for ultimate consistency, keep them the same.

Trimming, chamfering and deburring are no-one's favourite steps in the reloading process but they are necessary evils. There are several varieties of trimmers available, from a budget Lee case trim gauge to a variety of lathe-type trimmers to electric motor units that drive carbide cutters and size the case off the shoulder by using specific bushings.

Trimming can be made a heck of a lot faster and easier by using a machine like the Lyman XPress trimmer. This tool uses bushings that contact the


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case shoulder and the trimming blade is extended or retracted as required. Adjustments of .001" are simple and the blade cuts uniformly and cleanly. I have found trimming 30 rounds per minute easily achievable with the Xpress trimmer. Chamfering and deburring is then required. For those who hate the additional chamfer/deburring job, the RCBS Trim Pro II is a good option where their 3-way cutter can be used so the job is a one-step process.

## Neck tension

**Neck tension is also a major contributing factor towards consistency.** Quality dies built to exact specifications without question have an impact here. Redding and RCBS are my personal favourites. It's generally accepted that after sizing, the inside diameter of your neck should be about 0.001" to .002" smaller than bullet diameter. This is set for you in standard resizing dies by the combination of their neck section diameter sizing it down, and then the expander ball diameter sizing it back up again.

To go a step further, the Redding standard dies can be upgraded with a carbide size button kit. These replace the existing size button. They are a floating design to naturally line up with the case neck and don't require the inside case neck to be lubed. The other option is to invest in a set of Redding bushing dies where the neck tension is determined by the selected neck bushing. A bushing .002" to .003" less than loaded round neck diameter is about right. Variability in neck tension is due to variability in neck wall thickness or brass hardness. To address wall thickness variation, see the neck turning section under Concentricity. If you have variable hardness issues then you'll need to anneal or invest in some new brass.

The end goal, accurate shots on animals

## Powder

**Another variable that must be considered when we talk about consistency is the batch lots of powder you are using.** Powder manufacturing companies go to great lengths to minimize variance from batch to batch in their product, but some minor irregularity is unavoidable. This is highlighted when you review different sources of reloading data, for example Sierra may have velocity and pressures listed slightly different from Hodgdon with the exact same bullet/load. Batch-to-batch, powder variation is one of the contributing factors toward this.

## Projectiles

Projectiles of course have an effect on shot consistency. There is a reason why Hornady has invested so heavily in the development of its A-Tip Match bullet line, where the projectiles are packaged individually as they come off the production line. This is taking things to new extremes in the commercial bullet production world.

Traditionally, the more basic the bullet construction, the more uniform and constant its form would be. Early attempts at bonded bullets or bullets that required additional production steps were notoriously difficult to tune match-accurate, but we are now seeing

more and more with the evolution of modern production equipment these technically designed bullets are creeping into that match-accurate realm. This is a fantastic advance, especially for long range hunters. Typical bullets that exhibit match-accurate consistency in their construction are Berger, Sierra and the Hornady ELD range. Again, stick with the same pack/batch where possible.

## Primers

**Primers are often the least known about component of the cartridge.** The differences can be subtle between the top primer options, with CCI and Federal dominating the market. Much of what makes a primer premium/match grade is the quality control during the manufacturing process. The only legitimate issues I have seen with primers failing has been due to improper handling or storage.

Note: the primer contains pressure sensitive explosive. The inside cup of the primer should never be handled as oil from your skin can potentially contaminate the primer and lead to a misfire.

With these major factors that can affect the consistency of producing a round understood, let's look at the second 'C' – concentricity.

## Concentricity

**Concentricity by definition means 'having a common centre'. How this applies to a cartridge is in having every component lining up perfectly, from the primer flash hole, to the tip of the bullet, to the centre of the bore.**

Starting from the base of the case, the first factor affecting this is an off-centre primer flash hole. Again, the best way to minimize this is by purchasing quality brass. Moving on to the case itself, fire forming brass and controlling headspace when resizing again contributes to inherent accuracy. **Use of a Hornady headspace gauge makes easy work of maintaining the desired clearance.** This gauge uses the same anvil as the comparator gauge and has the same rules regarding interchangeability of measurements with other users of the same gauge. I like to aim for .002" headspace ie I push the shoulder back .002" from a 'feel' bolt close on the case. This gives enough margin to avoid issues with tight bolt closure etc but minimizes case growth.

Moving past the shoulder and up to the neck, we aim to have uniform case neck thickness, avoiding high spots that apply greater pressures to the diameter of the seated bullet. This is measured with a case concentricity gauge or ball micrometer. This can be minimized by outside neck turning if required, a laborious task not popular with most reloaders, as the benefits are argued by some to be minimal. Personally I feel that for precision loads, if you have neck thickness variation of more than .001 - .002", the necks will require turning to get the full potential of that cartridge. **I have seen it take a ½ MOA load to ¼ MOA with no other pieces of the puzzle being touched.**

Again, an initial investment in Norma or Lapua brass gives you the best chance of dodging the need to neck turn your cases.

Minimizing bullet runout is the next challenge. For target shooters who jam their bullets into the lands, this isn't a huge issue. But some bullets like a jump, and jamming bullets is not a great idea for hunting as you may suffer a stuck round in the field.

There is a variety of concentricity gauges on the market to choose from for measuring runout. The best can be used for various diagnostic measurements as a multipurpose instrument. Bullet runout can be greatly mitigated by case preparation techniques as previously stated. Using a quality cast press such as the RCBS Rock Chucker, Redding Big Boss or the Hornady Classic is a big step in the right direction, as is using quality dies; again Redding and RCBS are outstanding. The benchrest seaters with self-aligning sleeves are the best – especially the Redding competition seaters.

**If runout is still an issue, check your cases are coming straight out of your sizing dies.** You can't expect to seat a bullet straight in a crooked case. Switch to Type S Redding bushing sizing dies or even resort to the use of an expander mandrel rather than the neck expander ball used with standard resizing dies. Another trick I use is to rotate the case 180 degrees halfway through seating the projectile – sort of reversing any misalignment issues. All and/or any of these techniques may fix your runout issue. It is a process of elimination. Always check one process at a time to avoid chasing your tail.

The best option for the reloader in the pursuit of producing the perfect end product is to take extra time and care with brass prep. Invest in quality, proven components and tooling and accomplish each step in the process, knowing that if you maintain a high standard, **you are giving yourself the best chance of limiting issues further down the line.**

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2 George Vercoe aged 6 doing the business with a .223 Tikka superlite modified by Lee at M.O.A engineering



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4 Ayden Crews (9) shot his first Sambar with his Tikka 223

5 Asha Crews (7) shot her first goat with her brother's Tikka 223 and even ate the heart!

6 Steven Burt's proud pup with her first deer! Taken with a Tikka T3 in 270

Rico Groome (10) on his first ever hunting trip, lucky enough to bring home some pork for the family 7

8 Alisha (8) with her first tahr, on her birthday using a Tikka T3 270

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# The Art of the Fly-in

WRITTEN BY ~ **POINTS SOUTH**

**Helicopters have shaped our hunting opportunities here in New Zealand, although politics and ideology certainly seem to have been driving things lately**

**We have fairly free reign by being able to load up a few days' worth of gear into a helicopter and get dropped into one of those out-of-the way places (except for perhaps our wilderness areas) for 90% of the year.**

Now I'm certainly all about those hard yakka walk-ins from the road end or boat, but with limited time it often makes sense to shell out some hard-earned cash to get dropped straight into your desired hunting area, along with those few extra comforts the payload allows for.

**Those few extra comforts can make quite a difference, especially in winter.** You will appreciate that extra jacket or spare pair of socks, the small camp chair or the extra roll mat, the camp gumboots or even the second pair of hunting boots for when the first pair is frozen solid after days in the snow and sub-zero nights.

**A couple of years ago, I took some good mates for their first fly-in tahr trip, and stitched them up by telling them to pack really light and not bring any unnecessary crap.** This of course gave me more payload to bring all my extra junk. The trip with those guys has now become an annual, and needless to say they have wised up.

Hot tents such as the MIA have certainly changed the game with regards to comfort, especially in the winter months for tahr hunting. With short days and long nights, it makes a big difference having somewhere warm to cook and relax by the stove, compared with having to just get in your sleeping bag to keep warm. **Waiting out that storm while drying your socks by the fire is a whole bunch more appealing than just wearing your wet socks to bed to get them somewhat dry for the morning.**

The other game the helicopter changes is of course the food – I've often ended up eating better sitting on top of a mountain range than I do at home. With a little planning and pre-trip prep, it's super-easy to eat like a king, especially when compared to those days on end of freeze-dried meals, which is usually enough to remind us to pack the wet wipes (biodegradable of course).

**Machines do have their limits, so it's handy having lightweight mates.** This year's trip with my now switched-on hunting mates saw three of us managing to fit in one load with an MIA

A decent chamois seen on a recent fly-in trip

An interesting bull with narrow bases seen on the same trip

tent and a sack of firewood. We enjoyed three full days of hunting, while dining on back straps, whitebait and blue cod, all washed down with the appropriate refreshments. **Weighing yourself and your gear pre-flight is usually a good source of banter, and can require some quick thinking about what's actually a priority when you do have to lose a few kilos.** The payload available varies with the type and model of aircraft, as well as how much fuel is on board and how fond of pies the pilot might be. Typically, a Hughes 500 (depending on the above) will be able to shift 360-400kg, not including the pilot, and a Squirrel plenty more than that, but it's also a lot more expensive to run.

It's worth having your gear somewhat organised with all your small stuff packed into bigger bags, meaning less mucking around when you're loading the machine. I generally have everything packed into a good-sized duffle bag. Those 40 litre plastic tubs are handy too but the pilots much prefer soft bags. **Then it's just a hunting pack, hill stick and a small chilly bin of food to go.**

Spreading essential stuff across your team means you're not doubling up on things, for example you don't all need to pack a cooker and pots and pans. **Beware of the newish restrictions on how many gas canisters you can carry; a white spirits burner is a much more efficient option when the temperature is seriously low.**

Forgetting stuff is always amusing, unless it involves you. A few years ago we made the drive up the coast for a week of tahr hunting, and were literally about to load

the machine when a buddy asked ***"Hey have you seen that black tub?"*** and then realised it was still sitting on his garage floor at home. Luckily he still had his sleeping bag and tent, but it must have been a long week for him missing out on all his wife's packed lunches that were in the tub.

Last year another couple of buddies managed to fly off the hill and leave a pack lying in the tussock. I guess there can't have been too many tahr around if the tussock was that long. One of those same buddies had a few evening whiskies in a severe snowstorm, forgot to shut his tent door and woke up in a mound of windblown snow. **Technically, the open door may have been my fault as I was the last to leave when we all retired to our own tents that night...**

Making smart use of the available payload is key, and we will all have some different ideas around what that actually entails. Here's a short list of the more luxurious or super-handy items I find myself throwing in more often than not:

- EXTRA ROLL MAT
- FOLDING SAW
- BIG TENT/HOT TENT
- LIGHTWEIGHT TARP AND ROPE
- INFLATABLE PILLOW
- SOLAR LIGHT
- POWERBANK
- PULL THROUGH/GUN OIL
- CABLE TIES
- SALT
- BIODEGRADABLE WET WIPES
- BACON AND EGG PIE
- FIRST AID KIT WITH EPIRB/INREACH
- CAMP GUMBOOTS
- CAMP CHAIR

If time is your biggest limitation, then a few quality days of hunting hard is really achievable and actually pretty cost effective if you can fill the seats in the machine. So increasing your hunting time as opposed to your hike-in time can really make a lot of sense. **Support those good helicopter operators, as they will certainly be feeling the effects of having no international tourism, and you're sure to learn something about where you should be hunting.**

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WRITTEN BY ~ MICHAEL MCCORMACK | @CHASEANDGATHER

# MOUNTAIN MAN PLAN OF ATTACK

**We have covered the fundamentals of hunter 'conditioning' in the last six articles - mobility, core training, muscular strength and endurance, cardiovascular training and body composition. We can now create a well-balanced training plan**

**On the hill, how many times have we said or heard others say "I wish I had done more training for this!"?**

Without a set and written plan we can easily get distracted, waste a lot of hard work and potentially get injured through imbalances in our training programme. Setting up a single calendar (that you can see each day) for your training and hunting trips will help you stay on course and structure your training to perform at your best.

## Bang for Buck

**The most effective training plans must be specific, relevant, and translatable to the requirements of a hunter.**

Let's look at what a hunter's training plan needs to consider:

- Carrying loads over undulating terrain (strength/endurance/cardio).
- Manoeuvring through scrub/bush/rock formations (core/mobility/endurance/body composition).
- Stamina to hunt for multiple days – mind and physical. (endurance/cardio/mind/body composition).
- Steep technical climbs or explosive efforts (strength/core/body composition/mobility).

We can divide the seven days of the week to help us plan short-term, a month to plan mid-term and three months to plan longer-term. For example, some people train for up to three months before heading in to the Wapiti blocks.

## Your Work Ethic - do the work

**Self-discipline is the centre of all material success.** Show up and put the work in. Structure your workouts into your weekly planner – work it in with the whanau and do your best to make the timing consistent each day. Habit builds a platform for success. You will make the time if it is important enough to you. Find people who will encourage you and

create accountability. Use a training app to track details of your sessions. We use a free app on the phone called 'strava' which is really useful to track all of this.

## Move it Monday

**Overview** - pack training at 25-35% of your bodyweight* for 45-90 minutes, plus 10 minutes of stretching and foam roller work at some stage of the day – hips, quads, calves, lower/mid back.

*Calculated by your bodyweight in kg x .25 (for 25%) or x .35 (for 35%). I weigh 85kg so 25% of bodyweight for me is 85 x .25 = 21.25kg load and a 35% load for me is 30kg.

Or take a 'rest/rebound day' if you hunted hard on the weekend.

**Key details** - wear your hunting boots. Make sure your pack is load-capable and comfortable. Your hips should carry the majority of the load. Load your pack evenly with filled water bottles, weights or bags of rice and pad it out with old clothes. Start lighter and go for longer walks rather than starting heavy and walking shorter distances. Add more load every second week as you can (try to increase 1kg every second week) up to a maximum load of around 45% of your bodyweight. Include elevation where you can – slow down on the inclines.

## Tune up Tuesday

**Overview** - focus on your weaknesses. Have an exercise plan written down for what exercises, loads and movement patterns you need to focus on improving. Duration: 45-60 minutes.

**Key details** - target your weaknesses. Identify where you can improve – we all have weaknesses but we need to identify and address them.

**For example:**

**Hamstrings/glutes** - walking lunges, single leg pulse lunges, step ups, hip bridges, Swiss ball leg curls, lateral jumps. Use single leg options when possible.

**Power/speed** - skipping, squat jumps, quick push ups, boxing, fast burpees, sprints/shuttles, quick pull ups.

**Mobility/movement** - dynamic movements: lunges with rotation, hanging knee raises, back extensions, stiff-legged inchworm walk-outs, Swiss ball-based stretching to open up hips and adductors.

**Cardio** - catch-up session if this needs some improvement.

**Strength** - lower repetition exercises shifting heavier loads. Use your backpack for loaded squats, lunges, push ups, pull ups and planks for example.

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## Work it Wednesday

**Overview** - pack training. Pack training at 25-35% of your bodyweight for 45-90 minutes.

**Key details** - reduce the load if the body needs a lighter intensity session and aim for a longer walk instead. This can be swapped out for a steady-state undulating hill or trail run or bike ride for example when needed.

## Throw Down Thursday

**Overview** - circuit training: cardio, upper body and core for 40-50 minutes. Anaerobic training (interval training) using periods of moderate/higher intensity and short periods of rest.

**Key details** - circuit training. Cardio, upper body and core – example below.

**Warm up** - skipping, short run or inchworms.

**Six station circuit** - 40sec work at 80-90% effort: 15sec rest between stations.

1. **Core** - plank up downs.
2. **Upper body strength** - wide push ups.
3. **Cardio** - step ups/step or box jumps.
4. **Upper body strength** - pull ups or reverse flies with plates/weighted bottles.
5. **Cardio** - mountain climbers or shuttle runs.
6. **Core** - back extensions.

Use a free 'interval timer' app on your phone to set up these intervals. Change the exercises every three weeks. To add more intensity, increase the 'work' period or reduce the 'rest' period – don't change both at the same time. Aim for 35-45 minutes of consistent circuit training work each session.

## Flexi Friday

**Overview** - cardio. Choose your own cardio workout – aim for 60 minutes.

| Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday | Sunday |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Pack Training**<br>Pack training at 25-35% of your bodyweight for 45-90 minutes.<br>PLUS 10 minutes of stretching and foam roller work. | **Focus on your Weaknesses**<br>Have an exercise plan for the exercises, loads and movement patterns you need to get better at. | **Pack Training**<br>Pack training at 25-35% of your bodyweight for 45-90 minutes or a steady-state run or bike ride. | **Circuit Training:**<br>Cardio, upper body and core<br>40-50 minutes. | **Cardio:**<br>Choose your own way<br>60 minutes | **Circuit Training:**<br>Cardio, lower body and core<br>40-50 minutes.<br>PLUS 10 minutes of stretching and foam roller work.<br>TUF session once a month. | **Rest / rebound day:**<br>Stretching / planning |

**Key details** - this could be a bike ride, walk, swim etc. Keep it variable from what you have been doing during the week.

## Saturday Smash

**Overview** - circuit training: cardio, lower body and core – 40-50 minutes. Anaerobic training (interval training) using periods of moderate/higher intensity and short periods of rest, plus 10 minutes of stretching and foam roller work at some stage of the day - hips, quads, calves, lower/mid back.

**Key details** - circuit training: cardio, lower body and core.

**Warm up** - skipping, short run or inchworms.

Six station circuit - 40sec work at 80-90% effort: 15sec rest between stations.

1. **Cardio** - skipping.
2. **Lower body strength** - walking lunges (backpack weighted).
3. **Core** - rotational plank (side-front-side plank).
4. **Lower body strength** - wall sit.
5. **Cardio** - burpees.
6. **Core** - bicycle crunches.

Change the exercises every three weeks. To add more intensity, increase the 'work' period or reduce the 'rest' period – don't change both at the same time. Aim for 35-45 minutes of consistent circuit training work each session.

## TUF Session

**Schedule in your diary a recurring day/time for a TUF session each month (a tough hunt can replace the TUF session).**

A 'Chase and Gather' special (see more below) the 'Time under Fatigue' (TUF) session is an extended endurance and load-based session, designed to replicate a demanding day on the hill. This session is normally three times the length of a 'normal' training session. It includes some steady-state low and slow load bearing (pack walk at 35-45% of bodyweight) AND a higher intensity component such as working through some circuit training stations. You will gain self-confidence on the hill, build better mind resilience and will know where your limits are. We do this session once a month: record the load you carried, for how long, the elevation gain and the distance achieved.

## Slow down Sunday

**Overview** - rest/rebound day/stretching.

**Key details** - if you are not hunting, take some time to wind down, recover, rebound and have a low-key day. Recover to perform. Put your feet up and plan your next hunting trip – keep the motivation high for the next adventure and plan some exercises for next week's circuit training. Our 'Chase and Gather' YouTube channel has a few workout ideas, or search online for more options and exercise demonstrations.

## Post-workout Basic Nutrition Guidelines

**For every hour of exercise consume 1L of fluid after the session.** If possible try to consume an equal amount of fluid prior to the session over a period of time so you are well hydrated. After a workout consume at least 20-25 grams of protein and twice as much carbohydrate. The better your recovery, the better your performance the following day.

NZ HUNTER MAGAZINE How To

# AGE THE Bull

*This is the 28th in our series of guess the age of the bull.*

We are asking for anyone who has a good photo or series of photos of a Wapiti bull to email them in to us. Our 'expert' panel of Roy Sloan, Cam Speedy, Jeremy 'Jere' Deardon and the Editor will be giving their age estimates and reasoning.

**THIS IS ONE OF THE PHOTOS OF LAST ISSUE'S BULL AND THESE ARE THE PANEL'S OPINIONS:**

## >Cam

**At less than 40 inches and just ten points, this big boy doesn't really have the head-gear of a 'trophy', but he is a fair lump of a bull.** The thing the strikes me with this bull is that there is no distinction between his neck and his body – its just one big weight-up-front lump. Despite a bit of hollowing in the kidney area, he still looks to be in great condition. He has a bit of pedicle height still, so I would put him as a young mature Bull at maybe 6 years old.

## >Roy

**Man this is another hard one. But the beauty of these photos it shows how different angles change the perception of this bull.** Which actually happens in real situations. Even right down to coat colour. It's amazing how a Wapiti looking animal can change its appearance. Light, angles and moods change appearances.
So by light I mean sun or shade or even a wet coat, angle is the same. But moods, what I mean here is a relaxed deer can look like a nice Wapiti type, then stressed by something it can "puff" its coat up and all of a sudden it looks like a Red deer. When culling in the area I have been caught out by all of these many a time.

In the photo of him bugling he is filling out body-wise, starting to show some maturity. Big head and of course the old trap for young players, with head back and side on antlers he looks the goods. In the other photos he looks like a middle age bull and these are the photos that he should be judged by.
He's not ready for the wall so leave him to the FWF to judge at a later date. These are the bulls that need to be left for another year or two as there is two things that we know will happen. One -either he will push on and improve, or two, he will not. Yes we don't know and that's the reason why the FWF Wapiti program is based around age. Age tells all the stores. We just need to get these bulls to a mature age to actually know and not guess.

## >Jere

**It seems quite a while since our last series of photos but we are still feeding out and will be for at least another month.** The first thing I noticed about this bull is his antlers are out of proportion to his body. He appears to be well grown with good body length, an impressive mane and in great condition but his antlers lack length and the bey tines are weak and a bit high but they are of a nice style.
In my opinion he is a young bull with a lot of antler development in front of him. He is no trophy yet and another three or four years of age will see him realize his full potential. I estimate him to be five years old.

## >Greg

**Classic young but "getting there" bull.** He thinks he's the man but is at least 3 years off yet. I'd say he's 5 ½ years old, and may or may not ever make a trophy, but as usual, there's only one way to find out!

# THE WINNER

*OF OUR READERS GUESSES AND THE STONEY CREEK PRIZE FOR ISSUE 76 IS:*

# KERRY JOHNSON

STONEY CREEK

## REMEMBER

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## FOR THE NEXT ISSUE...

We have a series of pics taken by Hamish Gannon

WE NEED ONGOING PICS COMING IN TO KEEP THIS SERIES GOING **SO SEND THEM IN & WIN A PRIZE**

# LIFE FLIGHT MOUNTAIN RESCUE

WRITTEN BY ~ LIFE FLIGHT

## Hunter George Bailey swears he will never head into the bush again without a Personal Locator Beacon (PLB). Without one he may not still be alive today

**After many years hunting without one, during the 2019 roar George decided to purchase one. That weekend, on the same day he registered and set up the new PLB, he found himself trapped on a narrow ledge, after falling down a cliff face in the Nelson Lakes National Park.**

Badly injured, and unable to climb up or down, he set off the PLB, leading to a technically challenging but successful rescue by Life Flight's Westpac Rescue Helicopter.

***"I certainly believe that without the PLB, and the team at Life Flight, I wouldn't be here to tell my story,"*** he says.

George was on an annual hunting trip to Nelson Lakes with his dad, Peter, a ritual they had observed for many years. On the day of the accident, Peter remained at their remote camp as George headed out on his own. An experienced backwoodsman, this was something he had done many times before.

***"I've been hunting since I was young,"*** he says. ***"I've been on countless hunting trips and have spent many days in the Nelson Lakes National Park. This felt just like any other hunting trip."***

But it did not say that way for long.

While walking up a ridge, George slipped and fell eight metres down a sheer cliff face.

The impact knocked him unconscious. When he came to, it took some time before he understood just how bad his situation was. In a state of shock, he found himself on a tiny ledge, just big enough for him. Below was a fatal 100-metre drop to the valley floor.

George immediately realised he was in serious trouble. He was in excruciating pain and had no idea how long he'd been unconscious. He could see how far off the valley floor he was. A descent was out of the question, as was any hope of climbing back up to the ridgeline. He barely had anything to hold on to, and, was unable to move freely in case he slipped over the ledge.

Recognising the extent of his injuries and how dangerous his situation was, he gingerly got his hands on his new PLB, and pressed the button to activate it.

Now he had to wait.

Life Flight were alerted by the rescue co-ordination centre and their Westpac Rescue Helicopter despatched.

Chopper pilot Sam describes the rescue mission as the most difficult land rescue of his career.

Because of the steep, rugged terrain, the PLB's beacon was bouncing off the valley walls, making it near impossible to quickly locate George's position.

During their initial reconnaissance of the area the flight crew spotted Peter at the pair's campsite. Peter was totally unaware that George was in trouble until the chopper landed, and he was told his son was missing and in trouble. With a rough idea of the direction George had planned to head to, Peter clambered aboard the

The Life Flight helicopter on site before George's rescue

George after the rescue

chopper to assist with the rescue mission.

After a long search among deep valleys and sheer cliffs, Crewman Logan somehow spotted George – he wasn't much more than a dot on a tiny ledge.

Sam immediately realised the rescue would be technically very challenging. The chopper could not get too close to George because of the sheer cliff face – there was a real danger the helicopter blades could potentially hit the rocks. The crew were also concerned if they were too close to the ledge holding George the downdraft created by the chopper's rotors could nudge him off the ledge.

The team would need to use a winch from a much higher position above George than usual, lowering specialist Flight Paramedic Nigel down to him and then bringing both men back up to the chopper.

Adding to the challenge, the rescue plan had to be devised and agreed quickly because, thanks to the long search, fuel was now running low.

This was an extreme and potentially life-threatening situation.

It takes hundreds of hours of training and a life-time of experience to do what pilot Sam had to do next.

He remembers: ***"I had to hover the helicopter quite a bit higher than we would normally to maintain a safe rotor distance from the cliff at the point where the cliff slope shallowed out. Crewman Logan winched Flight Paramedic Nigel right on the ledge where he was able to secure George".***

With the injured hunter safely on board the chopper set off for Nelson Airport to refuel before heading to Wellington Hospital.

George has recovered in the year since his terrifying ordeal. He suffered broken ribs and a damaged spleen, but it's given him a new lease on life and great appreciation for Life Flight's work.

George's mum, Jude is a health worker and mother of three. She was terrified when she got the call that George had been in an accident.

***"It was just horrific. People will expect me to have handled this well because of my job, but I can assure you this was not the case. If something happened to one of my kids, that would probably be it for me. When I saw him, he'd had an MRI, was covered in blood, all his gear was on the floor. My heart just sank.***

And Jude told Life Flight: ***"You didn't just get a boy off a cliff, you got a boy that didn't want to die, off a cliff. A boy who was extremely scared, and very sore and didn't really know where to begin. He pushed his emergency beacon, but to be up there in that position and for people to be able to do something about it – that's amazing."***

Life Flight Chief Executive Mark Johnston says the charity has helped more than 35,000 people in their time of need.

***"For many of those, the emergency flight saved their life. Life Flight supporters help ensure that emergency aeromedical services remain available 24/7 and provide the best possible outcomes for patients."***

Mark says the charity has been hard hit by the COVID-19 lockdown, with many key fundraising events cancelled.

***"We rely on the support of everyday New Zealanders to keep flying, and to be there when Kiwis need us most – whether that's offshore, in the mountains or after serious accidents.***

***"When we have a successful rescue mission such as the one George was involved in, it's super special for everyone involved."***

# Is it Safe to Eat? Part VII

## Neoplasia

WRITTEN BY ~ COREY CARSTON

**Most of us will have heard of neoplasia even though we may not know why**

**This may be because we have heard about it on various medical programmes. Some of us unfortunately will have dealt with it directly or have had friends or family who have been affected by it. So what is neoplasia?**

Neo means 'new' and plasia means 'growth' so neoplasia is the abnormal growth of a tissue. The resulting growth is called a tumour – and a tumour is more commonly known as cancer.

**The cells that make up organs and tissues wear out and die and are replaced with normal cells.** This is a constant process and it is done by the adjacent normal cells dividing beside the cells that need replacing. This uninterrupted process is essential for the normal health of tissues and organs. Interference to the division of cells can lead to the replication of abnormal cells. These abnormal or defective cells will live and reproduce and manufacture more defective cells, thus creating a tumour.

### Benign Tumours

If the tumour is made up of harmless abnormal cells, the effect on an animal will be small as long as the growth doesn't interfere with the function of the affected tissue or organ and/or other nearby tissues or organs. These tumours are called benign tumours and they normally don't cause much immediate harm. They do cause problems however when they press against nerves, blood vessels and organs.

**A benign tumour is usually a growth protruding from the surface of an organ or tissue.** It can be soft like a sponge or dense and hard. It will appear to be growing out of the affected part. It has a fibrous capsule surrounding it and its internal structure can appear pale pink. These type of tumours grow slowly. This gives the body's defences time to encapsulate (surround) the tumour.

Warts are a type of benign tumour. Warts are not cancerous but they are contagious. Cattle can get a highly contagious growth of warts that grow on the skin and in the gastrointestinal (GI) tract. They are common in their mouths too.

**From a food safety point of view, an animal with a benign tumour will be safe to eat in most cases,** especially if the remainder of its organs are fine. Trim and/or remove the affected part and the surrounding area.

### Malignant Tumours

The other type of tumour is malignant. When I Googled the word 'malignant' to find its definition, the first thing that popped up was 'evil in nature or effect (malevolent)' and 'a disease that is very virulent or infectious'. This pretty much sums it up.

Malignant tumours are termed as cancers. Their characteristics are:

- **They are not encapsulated.**
- **They can spread to other organs.**
- **They have no defined borders.**
- **They can have necrotic (dead) centres and/or secondary bacterial infections.**
- **They can spread to other organs or tissues.**
- **They can grow along the spaces between tissues and into blood and lymph vessels.**
- **They can grow through and into other organs and tissues.**

Both individual and clumps of cancer cells can break away from a tumour mass and travel via lymph, blood and their vessels to other parts of the body where they can implant and form new tumours. This process is called metastasis.

More than one similar tumour growing in an organ like the liver or the lungs means that malignant neoplasia has spread on to another site. The lungs and liver have large blood supplies that travel through a dense capillary network. This tends to trap metastatic cancer cells.

The liver for instance gets a large amount of blood from the systemic circulation and the gastrointestinal tract. Cancers from the GI tract usually spread first to the liver where they show up as new growths.

Multiple tumours in the lungs are the result of groups of cancer cells arriving from a primary site. They embed in the lung tissue where they form new tumours. With an understanding of how blood and lymph fluid travel, you can often trace back to find out where the primary cancer site is.

If a tumour is fast growing it can rapidly destroy the organs or tissues where it's based, spread to other sites and eventually kill the animal. This happens as a result of:

**- producing toxic substances that lower the animal's ability to live**

**- destroying tissues, allowing infectious organisms to invade the body**

**- invading organ space**

**- eroding blood vessels, causing haemorrhaging and death**

**- compressing nerves**

**- pressing against blood vessels, causing necrosis or tissue death.**

In a live animal it can often be very difficult to see any clinical signs of cancer. I've often seen big ewes covered in fat and in great-looking condition, only to find at the inspection point they are absolutely full of cancer. At times it's beyond belief how badly off they are on the inside when they appear to be OK on the outside.

Metastasised tumours may cause pain and distress due to the speed they are growing. They can also cause pain by putting pressure on organs. Often an animal may try to rub the affected area and this can cause bleeding and a loss of hair around the area. There may be an infected area if the skin is broken. There could be signs of emaciation and/or oedema. This is a build-up of watery fluid. With oedema, the abdomen may be swollen and look rather large and wobbly. At times the abdominal cavity can hold litres of fluid.

## SO WHAT CAUSES NEOPLASIA?

**There are multiple causes:**

**- CHEMICALS**
**- BACTERIA**
**- INFECTIONS**
**- PARASITES**
**- VIRUSES**
**- OBESITY**
**- RADIATION**

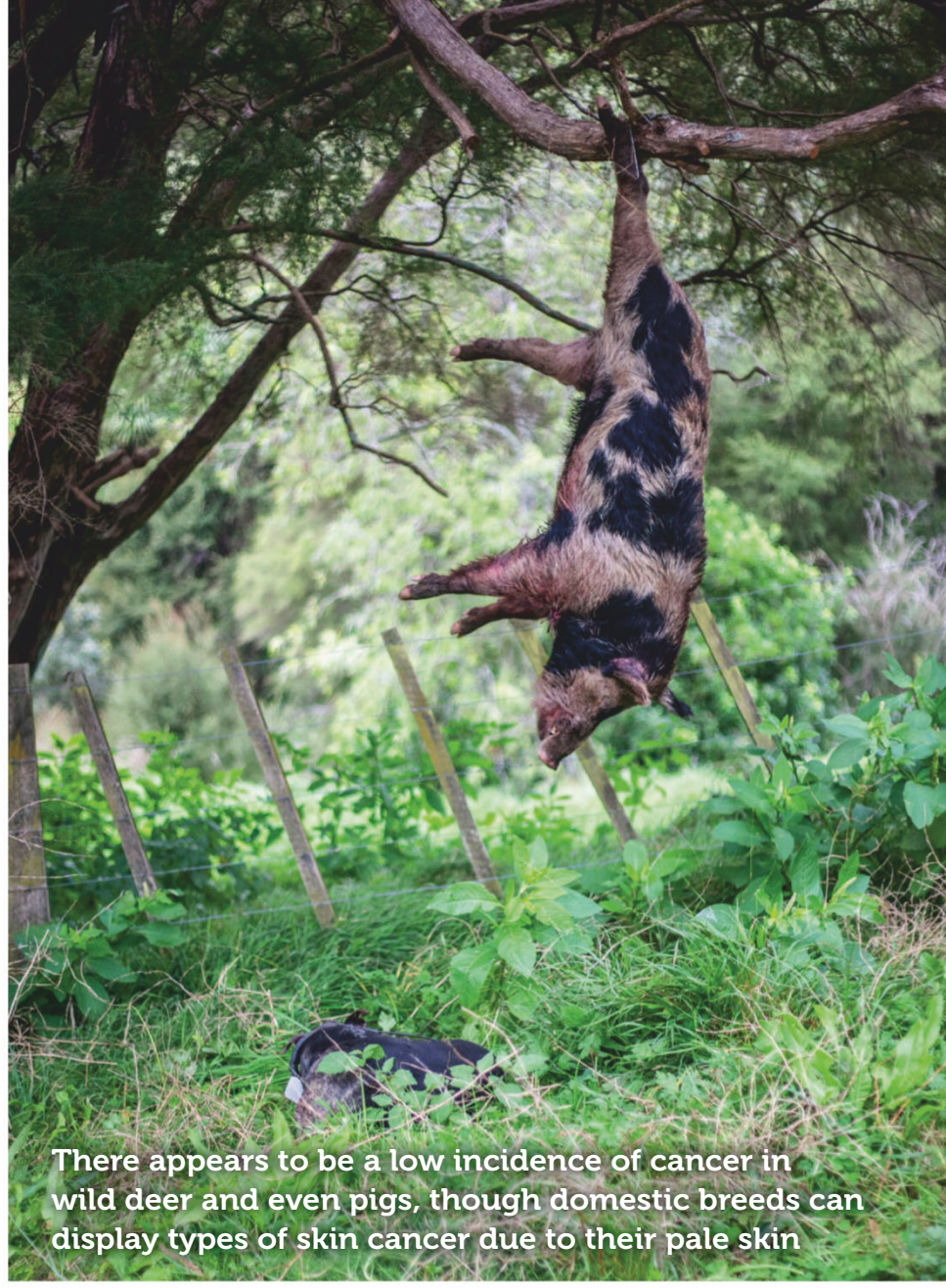
**ie exposure to ultraviolet (UV) light. Fish have been found with a type of melanoma thought to be from UV light.**

During my research for this article I came across some weird and wonderful facts such as that clams can develop leukaemia. Tapeworms can be affected by cancer and Tasmanian devils get a type of cancer that can be spread from the bite of a host devil to another. It's called Tasmanian devil facial tumour disease.

The most unique fact I found was that deer antlers may hold a cure to cancer. Scientist are studying the growth of antlers, trying to find out more about this. It appears that it is cancer-related genes that allow deer to grow a new pair of antlers every year. **Deer are rarely affected by cancer though as they have tumour-suppressing genes that keep aggressive cells in check.**

Incidences of cancer in wild pigs are pretty low as well. Tame white pigs do have a higher incidence of some types of skin cancer due to their pale skin.

If you think you have shot an animal with a malignant tumour – do not eat it – and don't feed it to your dog. The risk of transmission to humans is low but why take the risk, especially if you're not 100% sure what you're looking at. The tumour may harbour infective organisms and they won't be good to ingest. Remember my saying from the last article: If in doubt, chuck it out. Always try to wash your hands if you think you may have handled something unsafe. Even wiping them in the grass or on your pants will be better than nothing.



There appears to be a low incidence of cancer in wild deer and even pigs, though domestic breeds can display types of skin cancer due to their pale skin

To finish this up, I thought I'd add a little bit about how different tumours are named. These names vary due to the organ or tissues a tumour originates from and whether is benign or malignant. A benign tumour has the suffix 'oma'. Malignant tumours of the epithelial tissues have the suffix 'carcinoma'. For malignant tumours of connective tissues, the suffix is 'sarcoma'. Some examples of prefixes and what they mean are:

**- lipo/fat**

**- hepa/liver**

**- adeno/glands**

**- myo/muscles**

**- nephro/kidneys**

**- epitheli/epithelium.**

Combine the prefix and the suffix and you will come up with the tumour name. For example, a liposarcoma is a malignant tumour of fat and a lipoma is a benign tumour of fat.

**Until next time, Corey**

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| 222 REM | 50 | |
| 223 REM | 55 | |
| 22-250 | 55 | |
| 243 WIN | 100 | |
| 25-06 REM | 117 | |
| 270 WIN | 130 | |
| 7MM-08 REM | 140 | |
| 7MM REM MAG | 150 | NEW |
| 308 WIN | 123 | |
| 308 WIN | 150 | NEW |
| 30-06 SPRG | 150 | |
| 6.5 Creedmoor | 140 | NEW |

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| Calibre | Weight(Gr) |
|---|---|
| 6.5 Creedmoor | 130 |
| 6.5x55 SE | 130 |
| 270 WIN | 140 |
| 7MM REM MAG | 165 |
| 308 WIN | 165 |
| 30-06 SPRG | 165 |
| 300 WIN MAG | 165 |

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| Calibre | Weight(Gr) |
|---|---|
| 223 REM | 55 |
| 243 WIN | 80 |
| 6.5 Creedmoor | 120 |
| 270 WIN | 110 |
| 7MM REM MAG | 150 |
| 308 WIN | 168 |
| 300 WIN MAG | 180 |

### TRG PRECISION
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| 300 WIN MAG | 175 |
| 338 Lapua Mag | 300 |

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# Mid Styx Hut

WRITTEN BY ~ ANDREW BUGLASS | REMOTEHUTS.CO.NZ

Newton Range looking over to the Browning Range

Mid Styx Hut

**Mid Styx Hut is located in central Westland midway up the true left of the Styx valley and was one of Permolat's first community maintenance projects**

**. It was designated as minimal maintenance by DOC in 2004 and like many of the huts in this category no work had been done on it since the NZFS days and was unlikely to happen under the Department.**

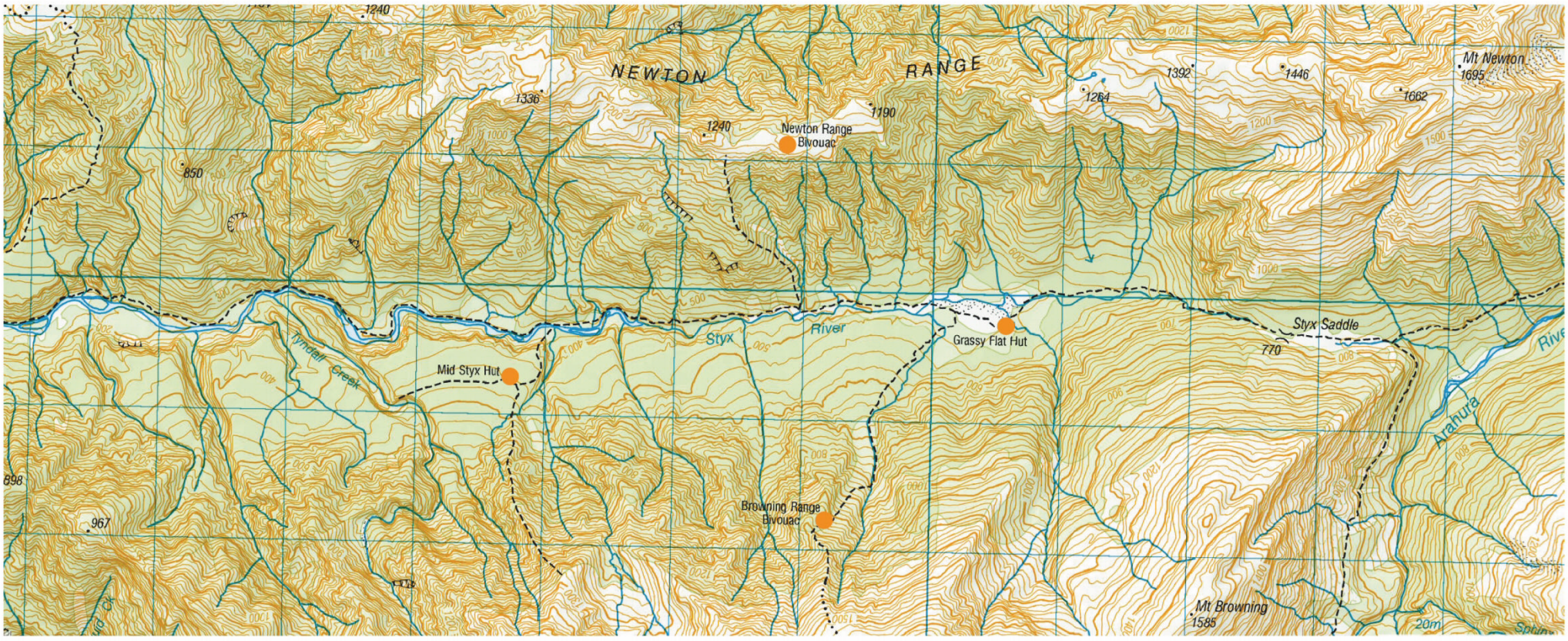
The original rimu framing, iron cladding and chimney were intact and in good shape, however its piles and floor had largely rotted out. In 2009 a Permolat work party led by Mark Mellsop-Melssen went in and re-floored and re-piled the hut. Volunteers recut the access tracks from the main valley and an old tops track up behind the hut onto the Browning Range was reopened. The hut was repainted in 2014.

Mid Styx is a standard NZFS S81 four-bunk design with open fire built in the 1960's and is largely unmodified apart from the new plywood flooring and removal of the end cupboards in 2009 to create more space. **The hut is located on a high bush terrace surrounded by mature podocarp, rata, hardwood forest and has a wonderful deep-bush ambience.** The bird life is prolific with tui, kakariki, pipipi, weka and ruru providing the soundtrack. Mid Styx is only a couple of hours from the roadend, but has historically been bypassed due to being on the opposite side of the Styx River to the main valley track. Despite being overlooked it is a great and relatively easy introduction to old-style tramping and open fire cooking.

**In 2019 a series of major floods seriously damaged the main valley route** and in February of this year DOC started rerouting the trail up the true left, including Mid Styx in the loop. Efforts were abandoned when the ford they chose back to the true right upstream of Mid Styx became unsafe after yet another extreme weather event. The valley is still officially closed but this isn't particularly relevant to the Mid Styx route which is on the true left of the valley and hasn't sustained any significant flood damage. Accessing the hut does require a ford of the Styx River however this is not usually problematic when flows are normal or low.

A reasonable ford at the upriver entrance of the Mid Styx track takes you back onto the true right of the valley and the remainder of the old benched route to Grassy Flat Hut. This last section is relatively undamaged and you'd be most likely to have these very comfortable lodgings to yourself at the moment. **At the first major side-creek downriver from Grassy Flat a track leads up a spur, onto the Newton Range, and to Newton Biv.** This is another Permolat maintained structure surrounded by easy open tops and tarns, with grand views of both the coastal plain and Main Divide. Remnants of the old deer trails from the middle of the last century cut grooves through the tussock here and are looking well used again in some places.

For hunters the Styx valley closure




presents a few advantages as there has been very little foot traffic this year due to it and the Covid lockdown. **The deer are definitely aware of the situation and have started using the undamaged sections of the main valley track as their private highway.** There are usually a few animals up in Tyndall Creek and sections of the main river that have blown out and filled with fresh gravel are showing plenty of sign. Chamois can be found in low numbers on the Browning Range above Mid Styx Hut.

River travel is possible on all the scoured-out sections of the main valley route except for around 400 metres just opposite Tyndall Creek which is still impassable. This can be skirted on by fording to the true left or by using the Mid Styx loop. DOC's strategy of keeping the valley closed to the wider public is consistent with their lack of appetite for risk, however as long as the fords are used sensibly, **neither side of the valley would currently pose any major challenges to experienced outdoor folk.**

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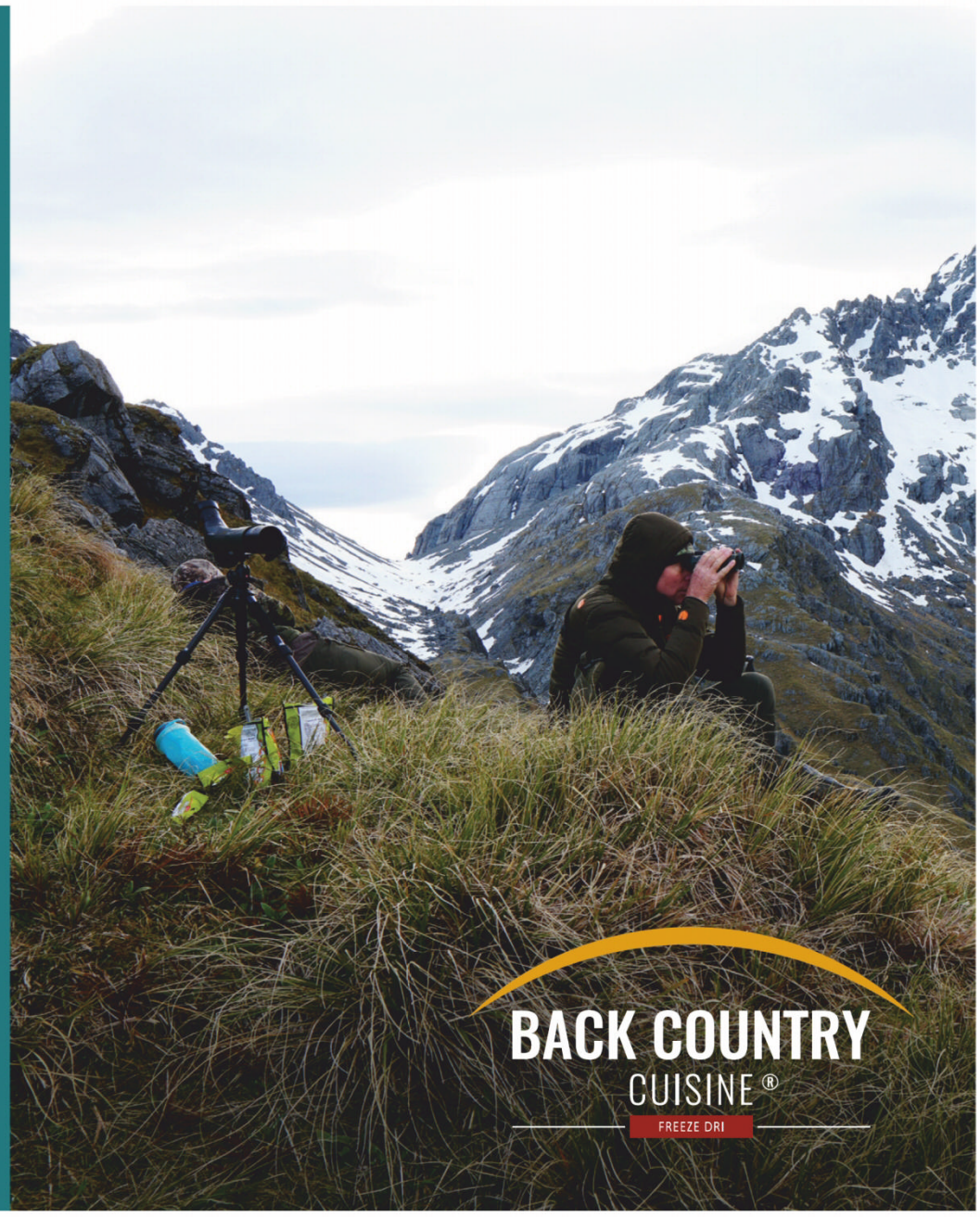

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# Photo Gallery

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***Note:*** *Photos must be of a suitable size for printing - a minimum file size of 1MB is preferred.*

**Grand Winner**
Kaylee Rae with her deer shot near Cattle Flat, Southland

An unexpected big 10 pointer shot when going out for a drive to check out new territory with my father. Wayne Lemin.

8 year old Mackenzie Carnegie out rabitting in South Wairarapa during the school holidays

Daley Jones after a couple of failed attempts I left the bow at home and shot him from the valley floor at 250m with my .270

Alessandro, 7, with his first Rainbow trout caught in the Wanganui River

Kaleb Hunt with a 135lb Wairarapa boar

Hank, 5, with his first rabbit on his first hunt. Shot with Dad's 17HMR after hassling Mum and Dad for quite some time

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# I WANNA BE THAT GUY

WRITTEN BY ~ **GREIG CAIGOU**

**It's the last part of the day and you've spotted something worth going after, but you've been stretching the binos a bit far, so it seems easier to get back to camp with a plan to catch the animal out first thing the next morning**

**Then someone says "Let's go for it now." Well…I wanna be that guy!**

**Or…**

You've got a good shooting platform right here, the animal is quite a long way out, but it's calm and you reckon you might just be able to pull off that shot. It's worth a crack. Then someone says ***"Let's get closer."*** Well…I wanna be that guy!

There are loads of these kinds of scenarios that play out when you're on the hill… when someone suggests something a little more edgy, more challenging perhaps, disruptive even.

I'd like to push the 'rewind' button to reflect on a typical moment when we're out hunting, and unpack a few lessons that have helped me to change up how I had been hunting…moments that might instruct the way you approach your hunting as well.

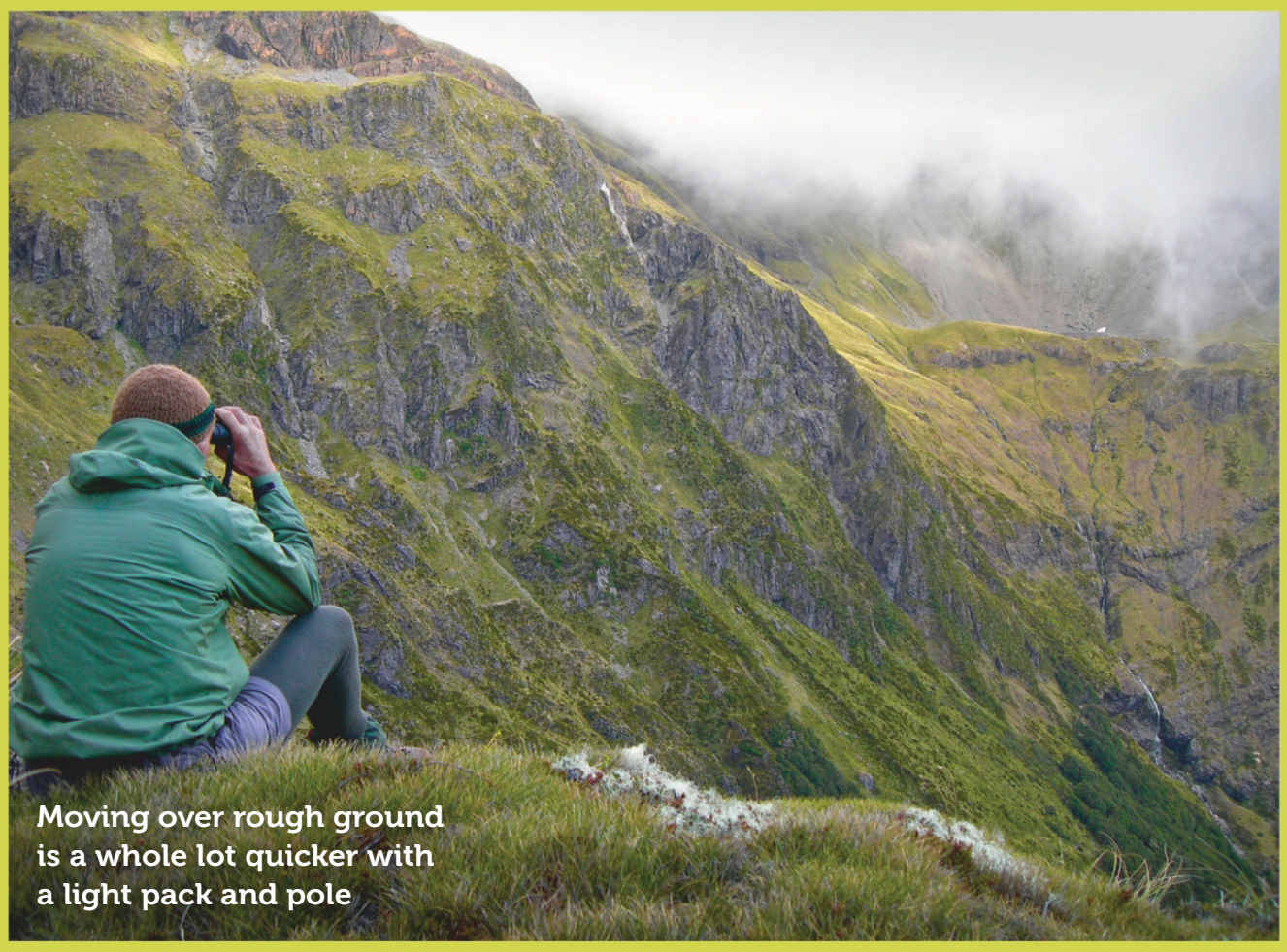
Some of the few things I've learned over the years have come by watching others who are successful…or not! Sometimes though, people change things up because they have already suffered enough doing things a certain way. (Others might just want to be a different type of hunter from the norm.)

**Flash back to a pretty standard hunt for a Wapiti bull, and a situation that might well be the same for a Red stag.** The moment is that classic end-of-day session on the binos.

My game plan in those days was to hunt out from camp during the day and to hunker down under the main ridge and glass a prime basin below, being especially vigilant for animals that emerged right on last light. **I figured they'd be the grand masters as they didn't get old by rushing out to the feeding grounds early – let the young, dispensable and silly ones do that!**

Several of those young 'uns did feed their way out of the fingers of bush that stretched up into the lush snowgrass far below me, but still I waited for the big guy. And just when the light was nearly gone, there he was. Suddenly. Big, bold and brash…climbing up a band of scrub after walking straight out of the bush with barely any caution in the half-light. He was by far the biggest 'Wap' I ever saw in Fiordland.

I figured I didn't have much time to close the gap, and would then face a big hike back to camp in the dark, so I naively talked myself into returning to camp to join my mates, with a plan to get back there by first light in the morning and catch the bull out, before he went back to



Moving over rough ground is a whole lot quicker with a light pack and pole

The use of a hill stick of some sort is now common amongst hunters

the cover of the bush.

Except that the next morning he was nowhere to be seen. Perhaps already back in the bush, perhaps in the next watershed. Who knows? Trophy gone.

And that is how the story goes. So often I see and hear that same scenario play out on YouTube. In one clip it was explained like this: ***"It took longer than expected to break camp next morning and get back around to the spot, and besides the wind was wrong and the animal wasn't there. Maybe it'd spooked."***

That kind of thing happened to me too. But I'm not that guy any more. I wanna be the guy who goes for it.

Nowadays in such situations, I take off straight away. I'll use the lay of the land and will be moving quickly to close the gap. When I'm out of sight, I'll really put the hammer down. Running. **Oddly enough, when still pumped with adrenalin from the quick pursuit, I most often still put away a good kill shot, even though I might be puffed.** Breathing control only has to matter for a few critical seconds.

Someone who shoots long and accurately can try and find a good platform, get set up and take the shot. I'm not that guy. I'm not a 'shooter' – it's the stalk that captures my energy and excitement, and challenges me.

**If I'd been more the kind of hunter who strived to go lightweight all those years ago, I would most likely have taken that big Wap.** Back then I let other considerations override that once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, which I didn't really appreciate at the time. The comfort of being back in camp for dinner with mates was calling on my decision-making, as was the thought of hunting in good light in the morning…and besides the harder option required way more gas in the tank. I realised then that I wanted to be the kind of hunter that was not held back in any way – by gear issues, the call of comfort, or by a lack of fitness.

So here is what I'd like to bring to the campfire on this matter: to be ready for success in these kinds of all-too-common situations, I suggest that many of us need to learn to 'un-comfort' our hunting. Comfort levels impact decisions more than we care to admit.

The human body gets used to a certain level of comfort. Imagine someone who is used to five-star hotel accommodation. A night in a tent would be a hardship for him, relative to what he's used to. **The same applies if, for example, you're used to sleeping the night by the warm glow of a fire, on a bunk mattress in a hut –** then a night in a fly camp seems rough – especially if it's raining and you're there for more than a few hours.

Many have used their rifle as a support pole – not such good practice

Experiencing hardship extends your comfort zone though – develops an edge – so that when you need to make decisions that will require some adversity, you'll be good to go.

**For me, hunting with a lightweight setup now means I can fang it across to the target in last-light scenarios, make the shot, and camp right there. I get there quicker**…but my camping is not as comfortable (ultralight gear is 'minimalistic'…deliberately). I've said it before – go get hard and learn to be more minimalist. That will help build some extra capacity and you'll be more like that guy who goes for it because you know you can cut the gap, hunker down and be OK. And have a better shot at taking the animal.

To get there quicker also requires having something left in the energy tank. That equates to fitness and familiarity, speed over broken ground. I suggest that you do some long trail runs to develop endurance, and some missions off-trail with just a tarp and sleeping bag, for example. Keep it simple and this will really help to develop your skills.

**Keeping it simple not only applies to what we carry, but also to how we think, and what we wear.** When I'm making those bursts to get to my quarry on last light, I don't need to worry about what camo pattern I'm wearing. I know I only need to think about staying upwind and out of sight.

Hunters want functional but lightweight gear for obvious reasons. Because many hunting brands are still playing catch-up in terms of lightness, some hunters have moved to mountain gear brands, or to gear more targeted at the long distance trail hiking fraternity. These hunters have opted for this gear in spite of its lack of camouflage patterns. (Where possible though, they have gone for earthy tones, in what are called 'solids' in terms of colour array.)

**Now we all know that scent is hands-down the number one reason animals discover us hunters.** Movement is probably the other big reason we get busted. But in terms of 'sneakiness', camo probably only matters at really close ranges…such as being aimed at by traditional bowhunters!

Personally, I like to be able to get multiple uses from my outdoor gear, rather than just having hunter-specific camo sitting in the cupboard that I might use only 20-30 days a year. However, solid colours can be worn anywhere and generally speaking will cost less than camouflage.

I'm not smashing the dedicated hunting brands, but I wanna be that guy who refuses to be told that I absolutely need to wear certain camo clothing if I want to hunt better. I do hunt in a mix of solids and camo myself, carrying several thin layers in solids, and sometimes a camo top layer, but function and light-layer weights come way higher up the decision matrix than any hunter-specific system or type of pattern. And our young or new hunters need to hear that message if we want to encourage them into the sport. Spend that money on getting to the hunting country more often instead.

And be prepared to adopt new thinking.

**I recall hunting with Jansen Travis back in 2009.** I was to meet up with him in the Karangarua Valley. He was using an Aarn pack (now that's a little thought-provoking) and both he and his mate Shaun both had hill sticks, such as a high country musterer would use. I was impressed with their ability to hold on to the hillside when sidling, and they managed to demonstrate that their manuka sticks didn't get in the way when it came time for shooting.

The rationale was easy to get my head around though: extra stability, especially with a pack full of meat over uneven terrain or when descending, and useful as a 'booster' to push from when climbing. Anyway I quickly understood the concept, especially as I'd already been boosting – but using my rifle instead! How much easier and lighter would a pole be, as well as being kinder on the rifle? I adopted one light, adjustable walking pole that same year and have never looked back. **The benefits are well-known, but it's the preparedness to adopt different thinking that sticks out here.**

In some instances, new technologies have made it possible for older concepts and approaches to surface once again. There was a time when most hill men had a pole, and that benefit is being replayed now via ultralight hiking poles. Once upon a time too, there were also those from the old school who hunted their way up the valleys and then floated their game back downstream on inner tubes… and sometimes themselves as well. New advancements in packrafts have now allowed those fun adventures to be re-imagined.

I love it when I see some unconventional strategies like these being applied, and hunters stretching themselves outside their comfort zones, not just physically, but also in their preparedness to buck the trends, and set new ones. This is disruptive thinking and some of these hunters are 'next generation'. Could you be that guy?

**In May 2011 I wrote my first article for this magazine.** The column has run without missing an issue, until recently. A change of job role to pastoring a church, combined with increasing time being spent as 'Poppa' to my six grandchildren has meant less expedition-style hunting and less time to write.

I've thoroughly enjoyed writing for you readers and the great team at NZ Hunter magazine. Thank you especially to Greg and Fi for supporting a range of Kiwi writers. **The time for this column has ended but I will reappear now and then. Enjoy our wonderful hunting – cheers, Greig.**

# HELP SAVE OUR KING OF THE ALPS

New Zealand TAHR FOUNDATION

**HIMALAYAN TAHR HAVE BEEN IN NEW ZEALAND FOR 116 YEARS AND DURING THAT TIME HAVE BECOME PART OF THE FABRIC OF OUR COUNTRY.**

For those that hunt them they are the ultimate hunting challenge, for those that don't they are a magnificent sight roaming our mountains.

Unfortunately, their place as king of our alps is under threat. The Minister of Conservation and DOC want to undertake a massive operation to cull many thousands of tahr. The operation will include the complete removal of tahr, including mature bulls, from Aoraki/Mt Cook and Westland Tai Poutini National Parks. This will significantly impact recreational tahr hunting for thousands of Kiwis and cost jobs and the future of many hunting-based businesses. The problem is that the Himalayan Tahr Control Plan 1993, which set an arbitrary herd limit of 10,000 animals, called for DOC to scientifically establish the number of tahr acceptable to our alpine environment while maintaining a viable recreational and commercial hunting resource.

Over the last 27 years DOC have not done this or reviewed the Plan as was required.
To ensure a sustainable long-term future for tahr and a much-needed review of the 1993 Plan we need the support of all those that hunt and fish in this great country. It may be tahr that are under threat today, **but there are plenty of other species enjoyed by hundreds of thousands of Kiwis that could be next.**

New Zealand TAHR FOUNDATION

**PLEASE SUPPORT THE NZ TAHR FOUNDATION BY JOINING OVER 50,000 OTHERS AT WWW.CHANGE.ORG AND SIGNING OUR PETITION. YOU CAN ALSO CONTRIBUTE TO THE CAUSE AT WWW.GIVEALITTLE.CO.NZ**

**KEEP UP TO DATE ON OUR FACEBOOK PAGE**

# THE dS

## SWAROVSKI'S STATE OF THE ART, ALL RANGE, ONE STOP SHOP SIGHTING SOLUTION

WRITTEN BY ~ GREG DULEY

**Putting a rangefinder in a scope is nothing new – in fact Swarovski were the first we saw to do this 10 or so years ago with their LRS**

**Since then others have tried it, and also Swarovski has leapt ahead in rangefinding technology with the release of their EL Range binoculars. A couple of years ago, they put what they had learnt developing the EL Ranges into a new, absolute state of the art rangefinding scope – called the dS.**

Now normally I prefer to keep my rangefinder and my scope separate, for the obvious reason of weight and bulk – incorporating a rangefinder into a scope is going to add both to your rifle. **First impressions of the dS is it's a big scope, but not as large as I was expecting.** The length is not excessive for a 5-25x magnification scope, nor is the bulk for a long range scope with a 52mm objective. So where have they hidden the laser and its associated electronics? The tube is 40mm, and the large diameter section of the objective bell is longer than usual, and the top turret while comparatively low profile is fatter than usual. So that's where all the extra bits are hanging out. Weight wise, at 38.4 ounces/1090gms, it is no heavier than plenty of other long range scopes I can think of – that don't even have a range finder in them. The lightest rangefinders of this sort of capability are around 7 ounces, so you could say you're effectively getting a 30 ounce scope.

**Technically, the dS has similar optics to the X5 – in other words very good,** but not quite the colour fidelity of the HD glass in the Z6 and Z8s - not that anyone would really notice. With the reticle in the second focal plane, the magnification range is 5-25 with a 52mm objective. It has a side parallax adjustment and fast focus eyepiece with 95mm eye relief. The maximum elevation and windage adjustment is 43 and 25 MOA respectively.

The rangefinder has the same engine as the proven EL Range binoculars. Now comes the trick stuff – the dS has a ballistic computer with temperature and pressure sensors and an inclinometer built into it. At the push of the ranging button, it calculates the

required hold-over for your particular cartridge taking into account the air density and angle of the shot, and displays a corrected aiming mark below the centre cross. It also displays hold-off aiming marks for two wind speeds as well. **The maximum range it will display an aiming mark for is 1024m/1120yds.** The actual maximum holdover the aiming marks can produce is 18.5 MOA on 25x – obviously progressively more as you back the power off as it's a second focal plane scope. So if you need more than the reticle can provide as you are on too much magnification, it displays an arrow pointing down at the bottom of the reticle signalling you need to go down in magnification until the aiming mark comes up. The maximum windage correction is 9 MOA on 25x, again you get more as you back the power off.

**To load your ballistic data into the scope, you first need to down load the Swarovski dS Configurator app onto your smart phone**, fill in the required ballistic information, then Bluetooth it to the scope – a quick and simple process. With the app you can set your preferences as either metric or imperial, input your sight height, zero range, G1 ballistic coefficient and muzzle velocity. Obviously the scope can only be as accurate as your inputs, so you will need to know an accurate BC and actually chronograph your ammunition - not just use the factory data on the packet. You can also choose wind strengths, display time-out time, aiming point size and line thickness. **There is also a knockdown power factor that you can choose to have displayed –** for use in some European countries where there are legal minimums you are required to exceed for any particular range shot. The battery which lasts 500 pulses is stored under the top cap, as are the tools for the elevation and windage adjustments - which are situated under flush fitting covers up front on the objective bell.

We mounted the dS in 40mm Tier One rings on a DPT one piece base on a Tikka T3x Aspire in 7mm Rem Mag. The raised cheekpiece of the Aspire was definitely an advantage as the scope sat quite high. A lower set of rings would have been preferable, but the selection in 40mm is somewhat limited. Talley make a 40mm bridge type mount now, and there will be others coming on line too.

Sighting in with the new Federal 155gn Terminal Ascent factory ammo was fairly painless, although the little tool to wind the adjustments is a little finicky for bumble fingers like mine. This factory load produces 2945fps and shoots under 3/4 MOA in this rifle. After entering the info into the app and bluetoothing it to the scope, we were ready to go hunting!

## The Hunt

**We were in the South Island fighting the tahr battle yet again, but Emil and I managed to sneak a day away for a racing trip through some east coast tahr country.** After a tricky walk up the creek bed in darkness including clambering round waterfalls, we finally started to climb just on day break. With the short day light hours of mid-July, you need to make the most of your day or you'll run out of time at the other end real quick! **After about an hour of climbing, we made our way up to a good vantage knob and started to spot the odd tahr.** We managed to find a couple of bulls still with a few nannies, but they were only 5 or 6 year old herd bulls, and nothing old enough to interest us. We thought we'd better get a nanny on the ground with the dS before it got too late

| | |
|---|---|
| Scope Weight | 38.4 oz (1090 g) |
| Scope Length | 15.87 in (403 mm) |
| Central Tube Diameter | 40 mm |
| Magnification Range | 5-25x |
| Focal Plane | Second |
| Effective Objective Diameter | 48-52 mm |
| Field of View | 21.9-4.5 ft @ 100 yds (7.3-1.5 m @ 100 m) |
| Eye Relief | 95mm |
| Light Transmission | 83% |
| Twilight Factor acc. to ISO 14132-1 | 14.1-36.0 |
| Impact Point Corr. per Click (in/100 yds / mm/100 m) | 0.25 in (7 mm) |
| Max. Elevation / Windage Adjustment Range (in/100 yds / m/100 m) | 43/25 (1.2/0.7) |
| Parallax Correction | 55-∞ yds (50-∞ m) |
| Laser Type | Class 1 EN/FDA |
| Operating Time | 500 pulses |
| Measurement Range | 33-1500 yds (30-1375 m) |
| Measurement Precision | ±1 yd (±1 m) |
| Angle Measurement (degrees) | ±60° |
| Max. Aiming Point Correction | 1120 yds (1024 m) |
| Display Duration | 40/60/80 seconds |
| Operating System | iOS 8.1+ / Android 4.4+ |
| Functional Temperature | +14 °F to +131 °F (-10 °C / +55 °C) |
| Submersion Tightness | 0.4 bar; 13 ft / 4 m water depth (inert gas) |
| RRP | $6490 |

Emil adjusting the reticle

in the day, as we knew the recovery was not going to be an easy one. A younger looking nanny presented a shot at 589 yards across the valley, and we got set-up with Emil on the dS equipped Aspire and he prepared to take the shot. Of course the young bull stood broadside all the time, while the nanny went from either front on to back on for nearly an hour before presenting the near broadside shot we were after. **Emil pulled the trigger, drilling her right through the shoulders, and she tumbled down into a scrubby gut behind the rocky promontory she was standing on.**

The less said about the recovery the better, involving a three hour return journey through very steep monkey scrub. Finally back up at our gear for a very late lunch, we tested the dS/Aspire combo further out shooting rocks to 1109 yards. There was what I guessed to be about a 10 mph cross wind blowing, and the hold-off hash marks worked perfectly. In fact we were pretty surprised by just how accurate the whole package was, from rifle and ammo, to the ballistic corrections by the scope. **Every shot fired hit within a couple of inches of where I was aiming.**

Is the dS the perfect long range scope for New Zealand hunting conditions? That depends on your particular hunting situation and ballistic knowledge. If you want the simplest, easiest solution that will get you reliably out to extended ranges, don't want to have to wind a custom dial or target turrets using information from a ballistic app, and aren't worried too much about the weight or the price, the dS could well be the scope for you. If you're trying to save every ounce on a lightweight mountain hunting rig, then the dS probably isn't for you. **For example if you use a set of EL Range binoculars, they only weigh a couple of ounces more than the EL binoculars, so your range finder is only costing you a couple of ounces.** Then you can use something like the much lighter Z5 (16 oz), and have a far lighter all up system. And I actually prefer having my rangefinder in my binoculars, so I can range things around me to work out which knob I'm going to have to stalk to etc to get in range. Having to use your rifle mounted range finder each time you want to do that would be a little tedious. If shooting on your own, and the animal keeps moving, the dS has the advantage of you don't have to come off the rifle and keep picking up your rangefinder to re-range. It is also very quick for target acquisition for some shooting applications like long range steel shoots.

Here you see what the display looks like

There was one other downside we haven't covered yet, and that is the aiming points grid does restrict light transmission, down from the usual 90%+ to 83% in the dS. You don't really notice it until you range something in low light, and then you'll see the whole grid so slightly lights up with reflection from the actual lighted aiming mark. The Burris Eliminator has the same issue. This is unavoidable if you want to have electronic aiming marks, as they have to get power to them via the set of very fine conductor lines in the grid.

All in all, I was pleasantly surprised with the job Swarovski have done with the dS. I never really thought it was something I would be interested in, but actually enjoyed using it. **It is certainly a cut above other ballistic correction electronic type scopes out there, and definitely has its uses!**

Emil and the nanny taken at 589 yards with the dS

# SIG SAUER 6-24X50MM TANGO4

WRITTEN BY ~ GREG DULEY

| | |
|---|---|
| MAGNIFICATION | 6-24x50mm |
| LENGTH | 15.4 in/39cm |
| RETICLES AVAILABLE | MOA/Milrad/Dev-L/Millin |
| LINEAR FOV (LOW ZOOM) | 14.7 ft/100 yd |
| LINEAR FOV (HIGH ZOOM) | 3.7 ft/100 yd |
| EYE RELIEF (HIGH ZOOM) | 3.3 in |
| OBJECTIVE DIAMETER | 50mm |
| TUBE DIAMETER | 30mm |
| ELEVATION ADJUSTMENT (MOA) | 60.00 |
| WIND ADJUSTMENT (MOA) | 30.00 |
| TRAVEL PER REVOLUTION | 25 MOA |
| WEIGHT | 23oz/644gms |

## Most of you should have heard of the SigSauer line of optics, based in Oregon USA, and we've testfired a few of their products in recent years

**They were the first we'd reviewed to come up with a scope that talked to your rangefinder and provided a ballistic solution in the reticle (the Sierra BDX range). They make a wide range of optics, from the entry level Whiskey3 line on up to their top of the range Tango6 with Japanese LOW HD optics.**

The Tango4 sits about amidships, and is made in the Philippines as are their other scopes below the Tango6 line.

The Tango4 is a FFP scope with image magnifying reticle. It has a 30mm main tube with a 50mm objective. Available with either MIL or MOA adjustments, the target style elevation turret includes a zero stop with 25 MOA per revolution and 60 MOA of total adjustment. **The side parallax knob incorporates an illuminated reticle adjustment and the CR2032 battery compartment.** The zoom ring is large, easy to grip and turn, and the eyepiece is of the fast focus style. The reticle is a duplex type with 2 MOA hash marks on the fine crosshairs inside the thicker outers. On 24x the outer 2/3rds of the reticle disappears leaving you with 24 MOA of available hash marks either side of the centre cross. The illuminated reticle has the Motac system that powers the reticle down when the rifle is stationary for some time, and back up again when it senses movement.

**Mechanically the scope performed well, with reliable tracking and positive adjustment clicks.** The adjustments proved to move true MOA. With 25 MOA per revolution, the clicks are very close together and require a little care to stop on the exact click you are after. Being a FFP there is no reticle shift through the zoom range of course. This also means the reticle is very fine and hard to see in low light on 6x, but due to the fact it has a dot with a 1 MOA clear section around it, it's not too thick on 24x. **Optically the Tango4 was about where I'd expect for a scope of this price bracket with Philippines glass and optical system.** Very good, but not up to the best European resolution and clarity, but most probably wouldn't even notice. The low light performance was again pretty good and certainly up to any application you might put this scope to. It's far from a low light bush scope in design or intended use. The eye relief on maximum magnification is 3.3 inches- a little short for a rifle with a bit of recoil.

## HUNTING

**We mounted the Tango4 in Hawkins rings on the same Tikka T3 Aspire we used for other testfires this issue**, but this time we were using the handload with the Federal 155gn TLR projectiles doing 3215fps. We zeroed the Tango4 at 100 yards, and then we were ready

for a day trip into the Kawekas looking for a post rut Sika stag. It was afrosty morning after a good spell of rain, and all the water droplets on the vegetation had frozen, as the day warmed up they melted making it a continual shower pushing through the bush. **At least all the sign we saw was fresh, and we did see a spiker and a hind first thing making the most of the sun's warming rays**. We elected to leave them until the return journey later in the day, and continued on intending to do a round trip gathering up our trail cameras that were still out there due to the Covid 19 lockdown. Late in the day we were making our way back along the ridge with the sun on the other face now, and spied a flash of something in the flax bushes round the face from us. Stags love eating the base of the flax fronds in winter, and they are always something worth checking out in scrub country. Finding a suitable knob to shoot from Fiona got down on the rifle while I got the spotter on it to have a better look. Sure enough, it was what looked like a 6 point Sika stag giving the flax a good working over**. Fi got comfortable, dialed the scope for the 400 yards, and we settled in to do a good evaluation.** I had the spotter on 40x, but even Fi with the scope on 24x managed to spot the slight ridging where the inner tops should have been when he turned his head in the good light conditions. **We hummed and haaa'd, but decided to give him the benefit of the doubt for another year to see if he could push out those inners,** as he only looked to be about 3 or 4 years old. Fi counted coup on him, then we left him in peace and carried on our journey back to the vehicle. It's always satisfying to find an animal of interest, evaluate, then decide to leave him for another day!

The 6 pointer we left in peace to see if he could push out those inner tops in future years

The Tango4 6-24x50 FFP is a good, value for money, tactical type scope for longer range target, steel or hunting usage. It is functional and reliable, optically good, and has all the features required for these purposes. The competitive steel gong shooters love the FFP scopes as the reticle subtends the same on any power, so they can use it for quick aiming corrections at any range instead of dialing. Personally, for hunting I far prefer a SFP scope, so the reticle is visible enough on low power, without being too thick on the highest magnifications where you are most likely to want to be aiming more precisely. **And I prefer to dial for elevation, but will use a reticle for windage.**

WRITTEN BY ~ GREG DULEY

# ADG BRASS & HAWKINS RINGS

**Cam McCallum from Alpine Precision is a passionate hunter and shooter, who likes using good gear and providing it for his customers. He is now importing into New Zealand a range of quality products, two of which we're reviewing here.**

## ADG Brass

**ADG brass is a comparative newcomer, but has been getting rave reviews overseas.** It is entirely US made using a double strike method to create harder case heads which provide longer case life especially at maximum pressures. Justin Hyer of Longrangeonly.com has done a pretty thorough review on it in 6.5 Creedmoor: **www.longrangeonly.com/adg-rifle-cartridge-brass-review-by-lro-editor-justin-hyer/**

Lapua brass has always had the reputation of having the strongest case heads, and brass like Hornady the softest. We have always found Norma to be the most dimensionally consistent with the least case wall runout, but depending on the caliber, it too is not as hard as Lapua in the head. With the reviews claiming Lapua type hardness we were really interested to see how the new ADG checked out.

**The ADG brass comes beautifully packaged in hard plastic ammo boxes with a foam insert to protect the case mouths.** We started off by weighing it, and it was immediately apparent it was quite heavy for caliber, weighing 239gns in 7mm Rem Mag. Norma weighs 216gns, and most others fall somewhere in between. The weight

Every notch around the rim is another firing. You can see the bright ring of the head seperation just above the belt (red arrow)

The brass in the wall thickness runout jig

consistency was good, with an extreme spread of only about a couple of grains – as good as any we've tested. The primer pocket flash holes are punched not drilled, but showed no signs of burrs and I wouldn't bother deburring them. The neck wall thickness was the common 7mm Rem Mag US brands brass average of 13.5 thou. The European brass usually measures more like 15 thou in 7mm Rem mag. The neck wall consistency was very good, with an ES of less than half a thou. The case wall thickness variation in the body of the case ahead of the web was pretty good with an ES of 4 thou, about the same as Lapua. Norma is always the best here with an ES of less than 2 thou. The case length had a very good ES of about one thou. So all in all, pretty consistent brass.

**Now to the case life test.** The load we used was 72gns of Reloder 26, a Federal 215 primer with a 155gn Federal TLR loaded to a 130thou jump. This load produced 3215fps and 65,000psi in the 7mm Mag Aspire, so is definitely a maximum load. I took the same case and loaded it over and over to see how many firings I'd get before either the primer pocket became too loose to hold a primer, or the neck split, or we got a head separation. I did not anneal the case at all, and alternated between neck sizing and full length sizing to start with, and then as it work hardened I needed to full length size every firing to maintain easy chambering. After 26 loadings, the head separated. I'd had to trim the length twice in that time to stop the bullet getting pinched by a case too long for the chamber. **The neck never split, so this attests to the brass quality.** The head eventually separating is exactly what I expected considering the taper and shoulder angle in the 7mm Mag case. This allows brass to flow forward more than a sharper shouldered and less tapered case design. As I'd had to trim twice, that brass flowing forward always comes from just ahead of the solid web, which is where you always get a head separation. **There was no brass flow in the head, no ejector marks at all and extraction was easy all the way through to the 26th firing.** The primer pocket was still tight enough to easily hold a primer, so this attests to the strength in the case head.

All in all, very impressive brass along the lines of Lapua for strength and almost as consistent as Norma, and certainly worth considering for any rifle you are trying to get the most out of. At $145 for 50, it is not cheap, but when you consider the case life is potentially three times your average brass, then it's actually very good value for money.

## Hawkins Long Range Hybrid rings

**Alpine Precision also brings in the beautifully made Hawkins rings.** These are available in the one piece Hybrid Long Range rings, which have the ring screwing directly to the receiver with no base needed. These are our favourite style of rings on lightweight hunting rifles these days. They make these with a 25 MOA slope built in, and also include a level bubble in the rear ring. They are available in 30mm for Remington 700s and the various clones, but also now for Tikkas. We used a set on the Aspire 7mm Magnum in the brass and scope testfire, and they are certainly some of the nicest rings we've seen and used. I hope Hawkins expand their line to include 1 inch versions of these in the near future, and also add a clamp style for the Tikka's integral dovetail.

Check out what else Cam has available at **www.alpineprecision.co.nz**

# THE GAC UPDATE

WRITTEN BY ~ **TIM GALE**
GENERAL MANAGER GAC

**The last column I wrote for NZ Hunter Magazine was just as New Zealand came out of lockdown and wow a lot has happened since then**

**Obviously, the impact of COVID-19 and the lockdown goes on and for our friends in the guided and commercial hunting sectors it remains an extremely tough time. The Game Animal Council is doing all we can to support them and make government aware of their plight.**

It has been extremely satisfying working with the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation and the Department of Conservation on the Fiordland Wapiti Area Venison Project. **This is a classic example of a win-win-win situation**. The 600 deer that were removed as part of the project will help maintain the quality of the Wapiti herd while protecting indigenous biodiversity. The 18,000 1kg packs of mince that are going to foodbanks are helping Kiwi families in need as well as maintaining local meat processing and helicopter industry jobs.

Obviously, the big issue at the moment is the 2020-2021 Tahr Control Operational Plan. It is unfortunate that we are in a situation where the various sides are battling things out in court, however, the recent High Court decision does provide the opportunity for a new round of consultation and a resolution to the impasse.

The GAC, which successfully brokered an agreement over the two previous control plans, is again working to find a solution that will provide for good conservation outcomes as well as a sustainable tahr herd. We are also working towards the development of a long-term management strategy, including a research and monitoring programme, that takes into account the value of tahr from a recreational and commercial perspective as well as their impact on alpine vegetation.

**We do not consider the current situation, where controversial plans are developed and then disputed on an annual basis, as sustainable.**

Finally, with the general election just around the corner GAC asked the five political parties currently represented in Parliament six questions of specific interest to hunters. This was undertaken as part of our ongoing role to provide information to the hunting sector. I want to thank Labour's David Parker, National's Jacqui Dean, Eugenie Sage of the Greens and David Seymour of Act for providing their responses. Unfortunately, New Zealand First failed to provide a response. All responses are included unedited and without commentary.

**If you have any queries about the work of the Game Animal Council you can contact us through our website, our Facebook page or at admin@nzgac.org.nz.**

***Happy hunting, Tim***

**David Seymour**

**Jacqui Dean**

**Eugenie Sage**

**David Parker**

# POLITICAL PARTIES ANSWER THE GAC'S QUESTIONS

***"For many New Zealand communities hunting is a way of life, contributes to positive mental and physical health, and provides food for the table. What will your party do to support the sector in improving the acceptance of hunting as a safe and traditionally important activity?"***

**LABOUR: Labour recognises hunting is an important part of life for many New Zealanders,** and in some cases a critical source of food. We're committed to working alongside hunters to increase understanding of hunting and foster participation.

**NATIONAL: I agree that hunting is a healthy activity and an important way of** life for many people. National is committed to acknowledging the recreational benefits not only to the hunting community but also to game animal control on public land.

Misguided comments from some are unhelpful but I think the Game Animal Council has done a good job to reflect the positive aspects of hunting as well as improving hunter education and safety.

There's been a re-emergence of New Zealanders' interest in spending time outdoors and that's something that should be encouraged and promoted. I want conservation land to be accessible and affordable and I want to see an improvement in the recreational opportunities available to all New Zealanders.

National believes that New Zealand's outdoor heritage is something we should all be proud of.

**GREENS: supports New Zealanders accessing the outdoors** and will continue to ensure Government invests in encouraging outdoor recreation, improving public walking and cycle access to public conservation land and providing and maintaining facilities such as huts, tracks and campsites for outdoor users to enjoy. The Game Animal Council has a role in promoting safety and ensuring the public is aware of hunting.

**ACT has several keen hunters in our ranks this election** who have an appreciation of the benefits hunting brings not only to their table but to the environment. Act started improving the acceptance of hunting within the wider community at our campaign launch where our #3 Nicole McKee spoke of the wonders of the wild game in our backyard and the benefits of that resource to the community. We intend to continue this positive advocation well past election.

***"Public access is of significant concern to recreational hunters as hunting requires the carriage of firearms and sometimes dogs. This sometimes precludes hunter access. Does your party agree that hunters should be on an equal footing when access is being considered, with the basic premise that firearms and dogs should be able to be carried unless there is a specific justification for them not to be?"***

**LABOUR: There are a range of complex challenges between hunting and conservation,** and, as a party, we believe there's a need to strike a reasonable balance. New Zealand's conservation land is vitally important and our native wildlife needs as much protection as we can provide, for example, many of our native birds are flightless and have few or no defences against predators, including dogs. That being said, Labour will continue to engage with a range of groups and organisations from across the hunting sector to further ensure we strike the right balance.

**NATIONAL: There needs to be a common sense approach here.** The question should be: Is there any justifiable reason why hunting with firearms and/or dogs cannot be permitted in this area? If it is inappropriate the reason should be made clear. If we start with positive intent, we are more likely to see favourable outcomes for hunters.

**GREENS: Dogs can harm protected native species** such as kiwi which are very vulnerable to dogs, so restrictions on dogs are necessary in order to protect indigenous species. One hunting dog was responsible for the death of potentially hundreds of kiwi in Waitangi Forest in 1987. Hunting may also conflict with other recreational users so equal access is not always appropriate.

**ACT: Our core principles include freedoms to act,** to be and to access as long as you adhere to the laws and do not interfere with others rights to privacy. Hunters and their activities play a vital role in conserving nature and should be a significant part of access discussions. Hunters consistently prove their ability to support wildlife by partaking in initiatives like the Kiwi Aversion Scheme.

***"Will your party commit to facilitating greater hunting sector input into game animal (deer, tahr, chamois and wild pigs) management and conservation programs, including by assisting the hunting community to contribute better scientific data to understand the impact of commercial and recreational hunting on game animal herds?"***

**LABOUR: Labour appreciates that the partnership between the hunting sector and DOC is vital** to game animal management in New Zealand, such as the Himalayan tahr control operations. We're committed to continuing to work with, and encourage greater input from, the hunting sector to control game animal herds and support important conservation work.

**NATIONAL: Absolutely. Government ministers and their departments should have a good working relationship** with key stakeholders including members of the hunting community. If you can get the key stakeholders around the table at the outset it saves time and money in the long-run and leads to better decision making. Government ministers and officials are not experts on every subject, we need to utilise the expertise of those willing to be part of the process.

National believes in taking a pragmatic approach to conservation decisions – they should be based on science not ideology. If the hunting community are willing to contribute to the gathering of scientific data that would be welcomed.

National would also stay true to any commitment it makes to the hunting community

**GREENS: The Game Animal Council and the Thar Liaison Implementation Group** have considerable opportunities to provide advice on the control and management of game animals.

**ACT: Act have committed to ensuring that the Game Animal Counci**l are empowered and financially resourced to achieve its statutory obligations and functions by writing it into our Hunting and Conservation policy. We believe that the GAC already have the mandate to facilitate, just not the funding. Act believes it essential this statutory body achieve its purpose.

***"COVID-19 has decimated the commercial hunting sector, which has historically been worth at least $50 million per year and helps support hundreds of jobs. What plan does your party have to support the sector through the recovery and will you commit to support the marketing of New Zealand as a premium hunting destination to international hunters once border restrictions are lifted?"***

**LABOUR: Labour invested heavily in a direct economic response to COVID**; this has cushioned the blow of the virus on our economy, saved tens of thousands of jobs and helped keep businesses going. But we know the road ahead will be challenging. That's why we're taking action to grow our economy, create new jobs and sustain people in alternative forms of work. For example, our Jobs for Nature programme will provide up to 11,000 jobs, and many of these can filled by workers temporarily displaced from the hunting and tourism sector. We're supporting our tourism sector to recover and restart with a $400 million targeted Tourism Recovery Fund, the Wage Subsidy Scheme, and a domestic tourism campaign, so we're ready to welcome back international visitors as soon as safety possible. We are working with businesses and the industry to re-imagine how tourism will operate in a post-COVID-19 world, that means short term focus on domestic tourism before looking at how we can target an international offering.

**NATIONAL: Hunting businesses have taken a massive hit with the border closure** and I pushed the Conservation Minister hard to waive fees for those concession holding businesses operating on conservation land. I have also taken the minister to task on the tahr cull and have publicly stated that Bull tahr should be left to recreational and commercial hunters. Overseas hunters pay around $14,000 per bull - we need that sort of premium tourism experience to assist in the post COVID-19 recovery.

I would be happy to discuss the marketing of New Zealand as a premium hunting destination with tourism colleagues should National win the election.

**GREENS: The Green Party is proud to be part of a Government** that acted quickly at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic to support businesses and workers through the wage subsidy scheme. Recently we supported the extension to the small business cashflow (loan) scheme. We have no policies to provide government funding to advertise New Zealand as a hunting destination.

**ACT: Act acknowledges the large revenue that guided hunting brings into the New Zealand economy** and values that input. We have committed to supporting the GAC to manage game numbers, education and work with the sector to revitalise this important tourism activity once our borders can safely open.

***"Fair firearms rules are extremely important to the hunting sector. Is your party willing to reconsider rules that seek to impose impractical and unworkable compliance for hunters without making a discernible difference to public safety?"***

**LABOUR: Labour's overarching position on firearms is driven by the need to ensure public safety** is as strong as it can be. That's why we moved to ensure that every part of our risk-management system – from licensing, to security requirements, and the firearms themselves – is robust. That being said, we appreciate that firearms are widely and safely used amongst our hunting and farming communities, and, we're committed to enabling their continued safe use for legitimate purposes.

**NATIONAL: In 2019, National released 13 changes we wanted to see in the second tranche** of gun reforms that address access to guns by gangs and those involved in criminal activity. The Government's Bill instead focused responsibility and regulation on law-abiding gun owners.

National has discussed firearms law and reforms with Gun Control NZ, individual gun owners and firearms organisations. Our focus would be on people who could pose a risk to society, rather than those New Zealanders complying with the law.

**GREENS: It is unclear which parts** of the new gun control laws you are referring to, but the Green Party supported both laws that were passed through Parliament in the last 18 months. These laws implement recommendations from multiple different reviews of our gun laws stretching over 20 years. The laws allow for fit and proper people to access firearms and provide for pest control needs, but also remove the ability of the general public to access military-style weapons and provide for a gun registry to be established. It was appropriate in the response to the March 15 terrorist attack that we tightened our gun regulations, which were very permissive in comparison to countries like Australia and the United Kingdom.

**ACT: Give us your party vote and Act will prioritise** the repealing of the Arms Legislation Act 2020. We will then set about writing a new Arms Bill that will ultimately replace the Arms Act 1983 and all its subsequent amendments. It's time to start fresh and produce a piece of legislation that addresses the safe use, control and public safety concerns with valued stakeholder input.

***"Private landowners, particularly deer farmers and game estate owners, have long faced the issue of illegal hunting on their land. Will your party consider legislative changes to enhance our trespass laws and provide Police with greater powers to prosecute illegal hunting?"***

**LABOUR: Labour has always been responsive to the needs of communities,** including rural communities. In 2018, we cracked down on livestock rustling after farmers spoke out about the toll it was having on their livelihoods and way of life. We believe the vital contribution farmers and rural communities make to New Zealand shouldn't be undermined by illegal activity.

**NATIONAL: Illegal hunting and stock rustling have been a growing problem**. It's dangerous, costly to landowners and their actions reflect badly on the hunting community. The recent case where a poacher was sentenced to 250 hours community work and had to forfeit his firearm and boat to the crown sent a strong message. The law needs to be enforced and resources need to be made available to identify those responsible.

**GREENS: We would hope that the current trespass laws** and rules around illegal hunting would be able to appropriately cover the issue of illegal hunting on private land. Evidence is needed that they are not working to support any case for legislative change.

**ACT: Successful future Arms legislation would require open dialogue** on a number of issues with those who are impacted by those issues. We expect real consultation be given to illegal hunting activities and its penalties with emphasis on what is making a difference to deterrence, what can be improved and how.

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# SOLSTICE SNOW DUCKS

WRITTEN BY ~ TRACEY MORROW

## It seemed a little ironic that the winter solstice saw us hunting ducks, in the snow, in the high country

### It turned out to be a super-sweet hunt with lots and lots of birds around and plenty of action to keep us busy and warm.

With a two-day-old, 10cm snow dump on the ground and temperatures below zero, it sure wasn't easy getting out of bed. It was even harder heading outdoors under several layers of clothing at 4am for a drive in freezing fog and icy road conditions to our hunt spot on the shortest day of the year. I asked myself several times on the journey north if I was really crazy enough to think this was a better option than a very warm bed.

**Building a relationship with landowners where birds are regularly sighted is key to having some awesome unexpected hunts.** This was one of them. In a phone call a week prior, the landowner had alerted us to a big bevy of ducks, both Mallards and Parries. A scout two days beforehand confirmed that the birds were still there in their hundreds on a large paddock of rapeseed oversown onto barley.

We arrived to find most of the team already there, trucks lined up and headlights on**. It looked like a runway strip for an alien landing movie with snow crystals glinting in the swirling mist and lights piercing the darkness.** The guys already had their layout blinds in place and were busy setting up the decoy spread.

It didn't take too long to organise a setup of seven layout blinds (with me set back in number eight as photographer) in the snow with a mix of dry grass, greenery and snow for camouflage with around 80 decoys out front. With a team of hunters who have shot together many times and know what works, the business end of the day was a no-brainer. A mix of GHG full-bodies and Dive Bomb silhouettes worked a treat, topped off with a couple of Lucky Duck spinners. **The colours on the silhouettes proved invaluable, standing out exceptionally well in a gloomy, foggy environment against a predominantly white backdrop.**

A quick coffee or two and it was simply a matter of waiting for the light to change. There was no sunrise on the shortest day of 2020. Freezing fog was holding a low line on the horizon and there was no sun to speak of during the

morning hunt. At around 8am there was the slightest change in the light and all of a sudden the birds started to move, their built-in radar of sunrise time working perfectly in tune. Officially, the sun rose at 8.11am.

The first 30 minutes of hunt time saw masses of birds flying. I had never been on a hunt where there were so many ducks on the move in a relatively small area. **One thing is for sure – they were easy to see against the white sky as they came into range.** It made a change from searching a blue and sunny sky, where sometimes the sound of the birds is easier to pinpoint than the sight of them until they actually turn up in the spread.

For me personally, sitting back from the calling and trigger action, it is always interesting to watch the ducks reacting to what's happening in the field. At first there were birds flying in twos, tens and twenties or more in every direction, attracted by the decoy set. The guys were spoilt for choice of target during those first 30-40 minutes of fly-time. **It looked and felt a little like city rush hour traffic on the way to work.**

After the first hour, the guys actually had to work for the birds although there were still plenty of mobs appearing out of the mist from every direction. It's great to watch the ducks react to the calls and also to note what they don't like or what might be making them flare off. This was happening quite a lot initially with a Tornado spinner in the field. The birds didn't appear to like so much action on the ground so this was taken away and hidden out of sight amongst a rock pile. **They seemed way more receptive to being 'talked in' after that.**

As a Mum in my 50s, it always feels like a privilege (not a right) to be asked by my family to join a hunt, especially when my two boys are hunting with mates of their own age. Friends often ask me why I do it. First and foremost, it is valuable family time and I've always figured

Luke putting all that brotherly calling tuition to the test in the field

Geoff keeping it light with a hen

When the dogs are taking a break the old man, Brett, makes a good retriever

The solstice crew keeping the farmer happy. L-R: Hunter, Geoff, Joe, Brett, Luke, Trent and Tim

that if 'you can't beat them, then join them', apart from the fact that I also genuinely enjoy the experience and the scenery. **Secondly, I love taking photos and recording the event for all involved.** The boys like the photos and the cooked product after the hunt but I never take being included on the day for granted.

I was really stoked to watch Hunter and Luke shoot together and enjoy some 'brother time'. Work commitments don't often allow the two of them to hunt together. Luke had been practising a lot and had really upped his game on the Hammond Arkansas so with him on that and Hunter, Brett, Geoff and Trent on the other calls, those birds were all in. Joe and Tim were guns-ready. **All the guys could honestly say they had at least a handful of epic shots apiece, and truth be told, they could all say they had some shockers too.** The far-fallen birds, well camouflaged in the melting snow and fodder, proved quite difficult to locate and pick up. The dogs had been given the day off after working hard on previous hunts so it was up to the guys to retrieve each and every bird. The station manager turned up for a look mid-morning to see how we were going, followed by the owner a short time later. T**hey were genuinely appreciative of having responsible hunters willing to travel for hours to help keep the bird numbers down.** Initially they had reported up to 400 birds on the crop and while the snow on the ground could have been a deterrent, the amount of print and poop on the snow suggested the ducks weren't put off feeding because of the white stuff.

It really was a win-win situation. We'd had a great morning's hunt with friends and family, and were taking home quality meat for many a meal to come. With 60 Mallards and 6 Paradise ducks – literally on ice – it was time to head to town for a hot meal and then home. **We processed all the meat the following evening, much of which went to friends who are slowly cottoning on to the fact that wild waterfowl make good eating.**

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# Sika Show

## Show to go ahead

**Unless things change drastically due to Covid-19, the Sika Show is set to kick off in Taupo on September 26 and 27.** The show has been running for 27 years and now attracts 6000+ hunters. A bumper crowd is expected as it will be the first major event of its kind since lockdown.

A few changes have been made to the competitions because the roar was missed this year. There's no big trophy. Instead, 3 major prizes worth $1000 can be won amongst all entries, regardless of category or size. The NZDA Douglas Scorers will be onsite along with around 120 exhibitors and hunting community interest groups.

Tickets to the Sika Show are available online now. You can also get them on the day, but if you pre-purchase them from the website you'll avoid the queues. More info on sikashow.co.nz and the event's Facebook page.

**www.sikashow.co.nz**

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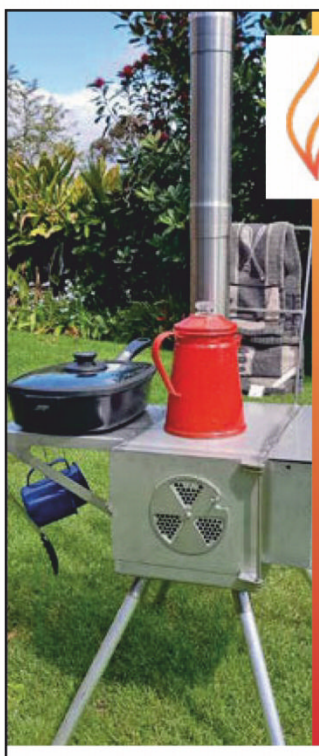

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# SLOW-COOKED BRAISED TAHR LEG
## WITH SAUTEED GNOCCHI

**Comfort food – what could be better than a slow-cooked piece of tahr leg?** WRITTEN BY ~ RICHARD HINGSTON

**The slow cooking means it is soft and tender and when pulled apart or slightly shredded, the meat combines well with the sautéed gnocchi (pronounced no-key)**

Gnocchi originated in the north of Italy where the cooler climate is better for growing potatoes than grain. Every village or region has its own variation of gnocchi and a specific sauce or serving style too.

In basic terms, gnocchi are small dumplings traditionally made from flour and cooked potato. They are rolled and cut into bite-sized pieces before being quickly cooked in boiling water to make them light and fluffy. They can then be sautéed in a pan or finished in an oven to resemble dumplings or pillows. If you don't want to make your own, you can always find gnocchi at the supermarket – the tahr on the other hand you will need to get yourself!

## Tahr Ingredients

- 1 x whole tahr leg, skin removed
- Salt and pepper
- 2 bulbs of garlic
- A large sprig or two of rosemary
- 2 tins chopped tomatoes
- 4 anchovy fillets
- 1 bottle of cheap red wine or beef stock

## Method

Preheat oven to 130°C. Bone out the leg and lay flat. Make a series of small incisions in the leg and place the cut anchovy into them. Place a pinched sprig of rosemary and some garlic into the cuts. Season the leg with salt and pepper.

Add the rest of the tomatoes, garlic and rosemary and red wine into a large roasting pan and place the tahr leg on top. Cover with tinfoil and place in the oven to cook for 4-5 hours, depending on the size of the leg.

Allow to rest before removing the meat from the sauce. Shred the meat with a fork and reserve. Reduce the remaining cooking juice until you have the correct viscosity for sauce.

See plate up below.

## Gnocchi Ingredients

- 750g potatoes (a waxy variety is best)
- 150g strong flour
- 1 egg
- 60g grated parmesan cheese
- Pinch nutmeg
- Salt and pepper

## Method

Steam the potatoes until tender and then mouli or sieve into a large bowl. Fold the flour into the potatoes and then gently mix in the parmesan, nutmeg, seasoning and the egg. Do not overmix at this point or the gnocchi will be tough to eat.

To shape the mixture, roll it out on a floured surface into cylindrical logs 2-3cm round. Using a floured knife, cut into 2cm widths.

Bring a large saucepan of water to the boil with a pinch of salt and a splash of oil. Add the gnocchi in small batches so as not to break up the shapes and cook for 4-6 minutes or until they float on the surface.

## Plate up

**In a pan on medium-high heat, melt some clarified butter and add the gnocchi.** Cook until golden brown on one side, then turn them over and cook until golden.

**Combine the gnocchi and meat and toss them together.** Add a ladle of your sauce to the mixture and toss again so it coats all the ingredients. Season and serve with freshly grated parmesan cheese and a glass of pinot noir or if you want to be traditional, choose a light Italian red like a Chianti.

**Note:** If you don't have any tahr, you could substitute a back leg of venison, remembering that the cooking time will differ. You could also use confit duck legs – in fact any meat that is slow cooked and shredded.

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