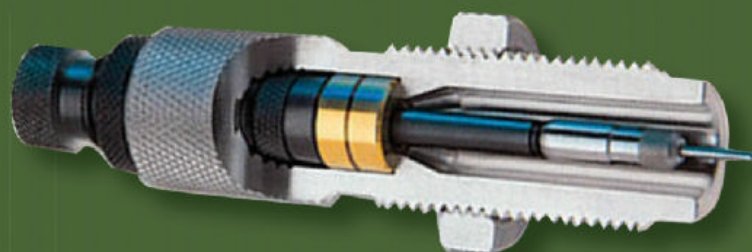


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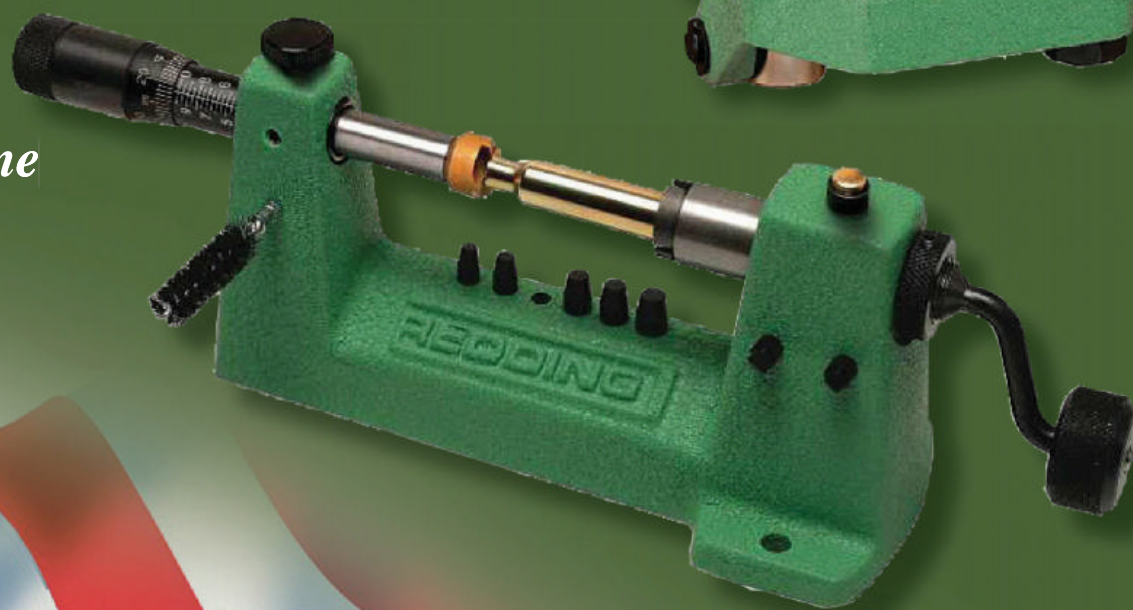
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M A G A Z I N E

OCTOBER / NOVEMBER 2020

WEST COAST TAHR

Two epic stories by
Brad Ramsay and Jarrod
McLauchlan about braving
the West Coast jungle

SPRING OPPORTUNITIES

Cam McKay from
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pointers on what hunting
spring has to offer



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COVER PHOTO

Adam McGrath's 10½ inch chamois in spectacular country

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AWORD FROM THE EDITOR

Most of you will be aware of the result of the new consultation the High Court ordered DOC to do over the second half of their 20/21 Tahr Control Operational Plan.

The whole hunting sector put a huge amount of effort into presenting facts, population modelling and options to the Department, but unfortunately it largely fell on deaf ears. We could not save the bulls in the National Parks, and DOC intend to continue to do all the hours they originally planned in their initial farcical consultation. Outside the NPs the GAC has been able to sit down with DOC and make suggestions based on the GAC's submission including population modelling showing areas DOC should spend their hours on and the areas they should leave alone - areas where the population is already low, or are very popular and accessible places for recreational hunters. There was no opportunity for any further input into the culling inside the NPs, which is a real shame. Hunters have the best information on where the odd population hotspots still exist in the NPs – not DOC.

There also needs to be some accountability for the cost of this whole tahr process. The hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees – both DOCs and ours, the real cost of the thousands of hours expended (the monetary value of DOC's time, and the huge personal cost for all us volunteers who have tried to work constructively with the department) and the total undermining of the relationship between the hunting sector and DOC on what the High Court judge agreed was a fundamentally flawed consultation process. Those DOC officials responsible for this fiasco **must** be held to account.

The Department of Conservation is well underway with its discussion document on controlling deer numbers in various parts of New Zealand. If we end up with the current Minister of Conservation back after the election, then be prepared for another fight over our valued deer species in National Parks, after the precedent set with tahr. There are, as we know, some areas with too many deer, and we hunters need to increase our efforts to control hind numbers in any areas where the population is medium to high. This is especially the case in the likes of some Recreational Hunting Areas, as we are the only ones currently who can control hinds in there. We cannot continue to allow numbers to sit above levels consistent with good environmental outcomes. A current case in point is the Lake Sumner RHA, where access is good and you are allowed to land a helicopter anywhere. There are also reasonably priced local helicopter operators who fly hunters in there regularly so you can fly your meat out. There are high hind numbers in there at the moment and too many hunters go in there looking for a trophy stag and don't shoot any hinds. A self-imposed rule of taking say three hinds per stag would help get numbers down, or if hunters won't do the job, we may need to get the GAC to look at other ways of getting hind numbers down.

We will be working with the Department once the document is out, trying to get a more sensible outcome for hunters than with the tahr, but for all our sakes guys – get out there and shoot some hinds wherever you hunt! It will give us a much better foundation to work from if we can show hunters are doing their best. There will need to be some official control in some areas if WARO doesn't start up again, and we need to be proactive about where and how this might happen. (None of us want uncontrolled, open slather, boom and bust WARO again either, but we need a means of controlling hind numbers) Obviously any government that includes the Greens and the



SPOT THE LOGO

The winners for last issue are **Shane Lambert** and **Glenda Dixon**. The logos were on page 17 in the Steiner advert and on page 31 in the RAB advert.

current Minister of Conservation will mean an escalation of the blitzkrieg campaign against our game animals.

At this stage I cannot tell you who to vote for. If you look at what all the political parties have said, Act stands out with Nicole McKee saying all the right things on hunting, firearms and conservation. Nicole has integrity and if she does make it into government, then we most certainly will have someone we can work with there. NZ First has been able to moderate to some extent the excesses of the Greens on some issues like firearms and Tahrmageddon round one, but were unable to persuade the Minister of Conservation to be reasonable this time round. As to the major parties, we rarely make any headway with either of them as they don't seem to see our votes as that important in the big scheme of things. National has been saying the right things on our issues such as reviewing the tahr plan but history shows they have been quick to forget us once actually in power and busy on major issues. We cannot find any Labour Party policy on outdoor recreation other than funding pest control and this could be interpreted as including deer etc.

One of the minor parties getting into a coalition government who will get stuff done for us is the only way we will make headway. Our recommendation is give your party vote to either Act or NZ First – depending on how good your crystal ball is as whether either of them can make it into government. As I said last issue, another three years of the current Minister of Conservation and the eco-fundamentalist ideology does not bear thinking about!

Spring is round the corner, so get out there and shoot some hinds and fill the freezer before another cycle of fawns hit the ground!

Greg

Q&A

HI GREG

I emailed you a while back and you said that you guys shoot the 145gn ELD-X over a starting load of 58gns of Superformance out of your .270 SuperPig. What would be a comfortable range for this load? I normally shoot inside 400 yards but would like to stretch that out if possible.

Also would this load be ok for closer range shots, should I be shooting in behind the shoulder for those to avoid hitting bone?

Would I be better off with a 140gr SST or would they not perform well past 400 yards? If so what starting load with the Superformance would you recommend for these? (or other powders, preferably ADI?)

Sorry for all the questions, but I know you guys know your stuff. I appreciate your help.

THANKS, GRAYDON

HI GRAYDON

Stick with the ELD-X Graydon. If shooting a really big animal up close then yes avoid the shoulder knuckle, but that's slightly forward of straight up the front leg on a broadside shot anyway. It's really only an issue if they are quartering towards you. Broadside is fine, as the bones angle forward to the knuckle, then the shoulder blade comes back higher up, which still leaves a good spot without big bone in the middle of the shoulder.

So long as you are getting 2900fps or so and the load shoots in your rifle, then the load is good for 500 yds.

Other powders wise, Reloder 23 would work, and still give pretty good velocity. Start at about 57gns and look for 2925fps or so as a maximum. With ADI 2209 would be what I would try, but they won't give you the velocity that Superformance will. Try around 54gns as starting load working up until you get in the high 2800fps. That's about it with 2209 and a 20 inch barrel.

CHEERS, GREG

HI GREG

Just wondering what brass are you using in your Sako Carbonlight to handle the stress of the hot load you're running in it.

CHEERS, HARRY

HI HARRY,

The pressure for the 180gn Berger /Reloder 33 load we are running in the Sako is only 63,000psi (measured on the Oehler 43 ballistic laboratory), so not over a safe operating maximum at all. And it's in Norma brass which would soon tell you if it was over pressure.

It is a superb load in the full length Sako 7mm Mag barrels, and works good in Tikkas as well but won't fit in the magazine.

CHEERS, GREG

HI GREG

Love your show I've watched every episode more than once! Just wanted to ask about one of the rifles in the latest episodes. Season 6, Episode 2, where the boys go after Fallow they are using a Tikka with a fluted barrel. I just wanted to ask what one is it and if the barrel has been shortened or is it factory? Also what suppressor are they using? I have a Tikka Elite 270 with 20" fluted barrel and want that same suppressor on mine as I like the look of your setup!

THANKS, RYAN

HI RYAN,

Yep, it's a factory Tikka 7mm Rem Mag shortened to 20" with one of our custom DPT cans on it. It has a different barrel thread and comes back further than a standard DPT magnum, so it finishes just in front of the forend. We build a lot of these now and they are very popular as they still produce around 3000fps with a 160gn out of the 20 inch barrel with the right powder.

CHEERS, GREG

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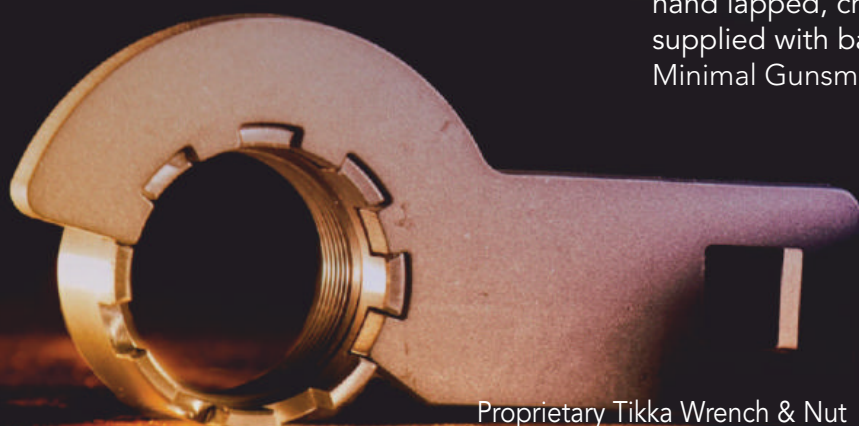
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WRITTEN BY ~ BRAD RAMSAY

NO GOOD YARN STARTS WITH A SALAD

After coming home from a season of wrangling/guiding in British Columbia, Canada and settling back into hunting at home, the festive season and New Year came around

I had a couple of beers down at the local to catch up with Jaycob, a mate who had also done a season in Canada. The beers turned into shots and an all-nighter with a whole lot of bullsh*tting. We woke up to find that we had booked the ferry in a week's time to go and chase tahr, a first for both of us. We figured that if we could travel across the world to chase 'goats', then surely we could do it here.

After a mad rush to find all my scattered gear, I had the D-Max packed ready for the trip south to Levin to pick up Jaycob. With an early start the next morning, we made it to the ferry for the boat ride across the strait.

With all the talk of tahr culls on the East Coast, we were hoping the culling hadn't started on the West Coast. We made the long drive with a few stop-offs until we got to the car park where there were already about ten other vehicles. We didn't hang around but went further down the highway to where there were only four. Given the amount of country up this valley, we figured we could find somewhere to ourselves.

Loading packs and swatting sandflies, we soon had our gear on our shoulders for the seven hour walk to the first hut. We'd left the truck late so we ran out of daylight and pitched camp in the bush beside the marked track. Under clear skies the next morning, we made it to the hut where there was only one occupant. A local hunter, he was very helpful and put us in the know about where some animals would be hiding.

We saw our first tahr feeding, a mob of nannies and young ones. Jaycob had brought his spotting scope along which proved its worth, spotting a

mob of bulls up high as well as good numbers of other tahr scattered around.

When we looked at the map we found there was a track up the closer valley that led up onto the tops towards where the bulls were, which confirmed our plan for the next morning.

Waking to drizzling rain, we decided to go ahead anyway and use the bad weather to travel, hoping it would clear when we got up there.

A cable car saved us from wet feet first thing but with beating rain, wet bush and high streams to cross, getting wet feet was always going to happen. **Two hours of walking put us at a wire crossing after which we could start the uphill slog to our quarry.** And what a slog it was! I take my hat off to whoever put the track up there, with ladders and chains going up cliff faces and cutting through thick scrub to finally get to the tops.

We were rewarded with clear skies, calm conditions and a suitable spot to glass and have a good feed.

Tahr were dotted across the valley but there was nothing accessible for today. Further up the ridge looked inviting so we loaded up again with drink bottles filled from a tarn and put in another solid climb to get to a better vantage point.

And as so often happens when you're hunting, more elevation just showed us that the ridge that looked like it ended was actually miles away – another couple of hours' climbing. Sneaking under and up over bluffs and passing each other packs and rifles got our hearts beating until the ridge flattened off amongst rocks and truck-sized boulders. We decided to camp there and threw some gear out of our packs before setting off for a look around before dark.

We spotted some nannies and kids grazing. It didn't take long for us to spot the first good bull; he fed out of a gut onto the face along from us and then joined some nannies.

A nanny and kid heading into the bluffs for safety



Mountain Daisy doing well

Jaycob glassing some promising country that held some good bulls



It's hard to beat West Coast rivers



New Zealand Stinkhorn Fungus



Studying him, Jaycob and I both thought he would be around the 12 inch mark.

We scrambled down to close the distance, keeping an eye out for other tahr. With cameras set up, I rested my little Tikka 308 bush pig on my pack. At 120m the bull fed his way broadside, opening up a perfect shot at the vitals. He ran a few metres at the shot before kicking his last. My first tahr

was a nice 12 inch bull and we had an epic photo session with stunning scenery in the background before heading back up the face to camp.

Fog was rolling in when Jaycob stopped mid-stride, raised his binos to his eyes and mouthed 'bull' to me. **I asked him if he was going shoot it and he replied he might as well, as it looked alright.**

Trying to make as little movement as possible in full view of the bull staring down at us from 200m, I got the camera set up on the tripod and waited for Jaycob's shot to ring out. **The bull had moved off the skyline and now stood with a rock face behind him when Jaycob's shot smacked him fair in the shoulder.** He ran down towards us, slowing up on a small flat where he got another



Brad with his old 12 inch bull in the magnificent West Coast scenery

shot just to be sure. He skidded down another 20m, perfect for a photo session. After a quick dash uphill, we were greeted with a big horned tahr that later measured 13 ⁶/₈ inches. We were stoked – we'd both got bulls only 20 minutes apart.

The pressure was off as we'd achieved what we hadn't thought was possible. Watching a misty backcountry sunset was a perfect ending to a hard but rewarding day.

We felt less guilty about sleeping in the next day when we unzipped the tent and saw our trophies. We spent the day looking for more bulls in case there happened to be any bigger boys around. Nannies and kids were spread around again and we also stumbled across two younger bulls, one of which may have been just over 12". We thought about trying for a double but after we got a few photos and tried to close the gap, the bulls spotted us and showed just how

agile and quick they can be when it's needed. Heading back to camp, we found a group of nannies close by so we had some fun taking photos and toying with them. We had an early night after admiring our surroundings once again.

The weather had closed in the next morning with no visibility up on top. We packed up the tent and started our journey back down with full packs. Travelling in the rain was slow, the wet tussock made for tricky sidling and we negotiated the rocks and logs down through the bush at a careful pace. We found a big fallen tree dry enough to boil the billy under and enjoyed a hot meal. **The last couple of hours down to the main river seemed to take forever but the cable car was a welcome sight, and the hut even more so.** The afternoon was spent replacing the energy we lost and

drying out as much gear as we could. Sleep came easy and fast.

Deciding that we had given the West Coast a good bit of attention, we packed all our gear and made for the truck a few hours away. It was a welcome sight, and stuffed, we almost collapsed when we finally got there. **After a quick scrub up, we headed for a steak and a beer at the local bar, reminiscing about the adventure we'd just had.** Finding a new hunting mate with the same love of the outdoors as you makes those missions easier to do. Jaycob and I will certainly be back for another go at NZ's 'goats'.

A full video of the hunt is up on YouTube – check it out. Also 'On Point NZ' Facebook and Instagram.



Twilight + Twelve

WRITTEN BY ~ STEVE GILLAN

For a number of years now, like a lot of other hunters I've hit the high country in late January onwards in search of big Red stags that have started to strip their antlers

It's a lot of fun at this time of year, especially if you're into saunas and perspiration.

Some of the Otago/Southland tussock high country gets temperatures into the 30s, which when you have a pack full of camping and hunting gear and sundries soon gets your attention on the steep bits.

The sweat blurs your vision, which is good as it's harder then to see how far you still have to go.

Over the last ten years or so the 'full pack' idea has had the Jenny Craig treatment in a big way and the lightweight theme is definitely the go these days, including the boots and rifle. They say there's no point in getting older if you're not getting wiser and at 51 years of age, the 'older'

feeling seems more prevalent with every passing year. In saying that, I make sure I'm fit enough for hunts in this terrain, with plenty of relevant fitness training when I'm not in the hills. I'm trying to convince myself that 51 is the new 30. We'll see how that goes later.

So on a hot summer's afternoon I set off to an area that at this time of the year has all the elements that Red stags require: feed, cover, remoteness and unfortunately for me later in this story – some very steep and broken country.

So all was going well initially with a light pack, rifle and boots and I was feeling very fit...no worries...I've got



this. Just to ensure I had the whole experience, the sun made sure the sauna effect was very much present, including the sweat in my eyes. Man, it was hot!

After a couple of hours of steep slogging, I finally reached the plateau I intended to drop off into the wind and sidle into the aforementioned stag country.

It was a good plan, it really was, however the wind decided to come and have a look at the good stag country with me and it changed direction just as I got there, moving faster than me. Not ideal. The only option now was to stay really high and out of the good area and put the hammer down to get far enough along the range to swing back around into the wind and the good country. As it was now late afternoon however, I would really need to hurry to make it there in time. No pressure!

Another couple of hours of one foot in front of the other got me above where I'd hoped my cunning updated plan might work. The only interlude along the way was when I saw a hind, a calf and a yearling doing warp speed away from the sweaty, smelly

and hot hunter making his way towards the promised land.

As stated, I hunt light and have all my gear with me on my back so I can hunt right until dark and then camp up on the spot. That also means I'm able to go first thing in the morning after a quick brekky and a pack up.

Unbeknown to me, this practice was going to need some adjustment after the next couple of hours as the 'camping on the spot' thing didn't work out... watch this space.

So upon reaching the desired spot and taking a well-earned but short break with a fuel up, it was time to start glassing. This area had all the criteria for a big stag but of course history has shown that quite often the big boys don't show themselves until that last half-hour of light. This can be their saviour at times, as



The hind before she hit warp speed

the fading shootable light puts the pressure on hunters. **Yup – you guessed it – things were about to get very interesting.**

The first two gullies produced two young stags. Nice to see, both had potential if they got some age so they were left to grow. Climbing up onto the next lookout was going to be another big effort. It was extremely steep and it felt like it had already been a fairly tough day with the extra distance I'd covered due to the wind, or as it should be known, bloody Murphy!



No world beater but he had all the traits of the Otago public land bloodlines his forefathers had passed on

So finally, there I was overlooking a steep face with good feed and broken gutters, and 20 minutes of light left. Glassing hard, I swung to an area directly below me about 900 yards away and the binos picked up a mature stag feeding. The light was fading fast but I could see three on each top, nice spread and low pedicle height.

MAN, HE LOOKED GOOD. WHAT I WOULDN'T GIVE FOR ANOTHER 30 MINUTES OF LIGHT RIGHT NOW!

He was feeding in a tight gut; two steps left and he would be out of sight for good. The distance was too far for the 6mm-284, so I was about to push the pain button some more. I took off downhill into a gutter, going as fast as my tired legs could carry me. I'd seen a good rock bench rest approximately 600 yards below me, so I had to go for it.

Don't ask me why the stag stayed where he did during this time, but he did. **At 292 yards I set up, took some deep breaths, dialled in and unleashed the 103 grainer.**

With the smack of the bullet hitting his chest, two things happened. The stag jumped and another, previously unseen stag, which also looked pretty good followed the big fella around the ridge and out of sight. Um OK, normally the 6mm-284 drops them on the spot. Crap, this race against time still isn't over, here we go again.

The light was almost gone by now. I ran down to where I'd shot him. Picking up his marks on the steep shingle slide, I tracked him past where he'd disappeared...50 yards, 70 yards...where the heck is he? Then cresting a rise at 80 yards from where I'd hit him, I saw the stag lying dead.

He looked awesome; no world beater but he had all the traits of the Otago public land bloodlines his forefathers had passed on. The symmetry of his head was amazing. I was stoked, tired but absolutely stoked.

I still couldn't believe it had all worked out, and before me was a beautiful 12 point royal Red stag. I reckoned I'd earned this one well and truly, my body was telling me so anyway.

Unfortunately my day wasn't finished yet. There was no good campsite in this area so after a quick couple of photos and some butchery, I strapped the head to my pack, put my head torch on and began the gruelling climb back up the gnarly face. **It was hand over hand at times with the load I had on board. This day had turned into a massive mission.**

Some time later, a very tired and sweaty hunter set up a fly on a little flat spot close to a creek, skulled a litre of electrolytes and ate a protein bar. I didn't have the energy or inclination to cook a feed – most unlike me that's for sure! I drifted off into a deep sleep, not long after dreaming of the big stag. Absolutely shattered would sum me up nicely.

So, getting back to the 'up at first light and into it' thing – not today man – not today. I had a lie-in and a leisurely

brekky with a coffee, took a few photos of camp, the head and the scenery and just relaxed and soaked it all in. It was just the tonic I needed to rejuvenate and prepare for the next part of the mission.

A couple of hours after daylight, I was packed up and began the slog out of there and back to the vehicle. My friend the sun came and went to keep me company, ensuring I had some sauna time. I stopped for a snack and a drink about halfway back and took a selfie with my custom Tikka and my trophy. It felt like something that should be done, another record of the hunt and a good excuse for a rest and time to get the sweat out of my eyes.

Getting a stag on the ground is often the easy bit, however there was nothing easy about the day before. Epic hunt would be two words I could use to sum it up – another two words would be knackered hunter! I had pushed the envelope well and truly on this one, but good fitness, stamina and



Getting a stag on the ground is often the easy bit, however there was nothing easy about the day before

the will to achieve had got me there in the end, even if the gas tank was nearly empty at the end of it.

And you know what? I wouldn't change a second of it for anything. Long after the sore muscles have recovered, I will look at my photos and my trophy and when I close my eyes, I'm back there watching the stag, looking at the fading light and wondering if I can do it in

time. I'm taking the shot, and of course then I'm getting my first close-up look at my trophy. One thing is for sure, I will be back next year at the same time, doing what I enjoy doing – hunting and experiencing the awesome environment where our game animals live. Hopefully the sun is on holiday and the wind is in my face. Knowing Murphy, I doubt it. **Oh well, mission on. How hard could it be?**



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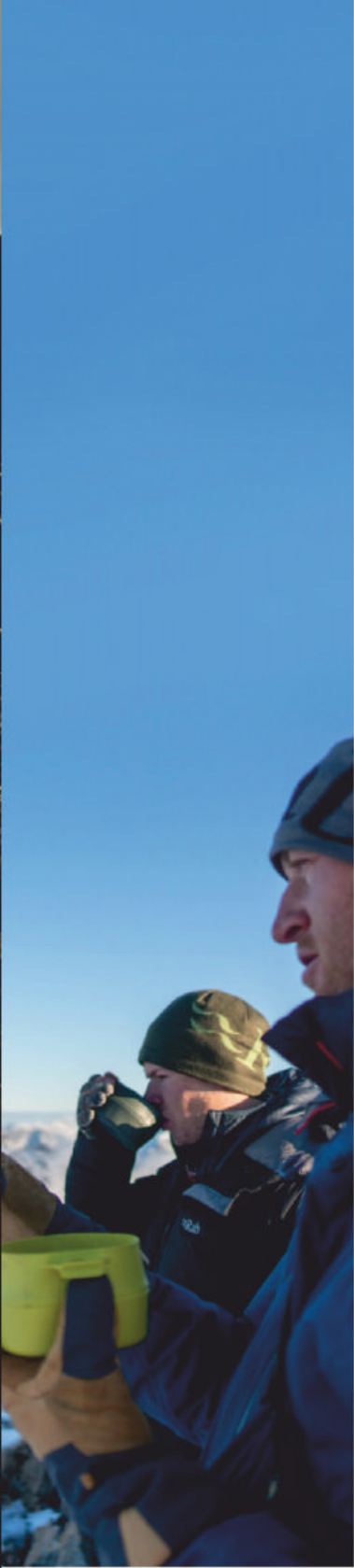
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FIORDLAND

— WRITTEN BY ~ ADAM MCGRATH —

CHAMOIS





We were only days away from starting our leave. Having spent many weeks preparing for our roar trip and with the whole month of April off, it was lining up to be a cracker until the unexpected happened

With the entire world facing a pandemic and NZ going into full lockdown, our dreams of finding a mature Fiordland Red stag in the roar were cut short.

The first few weeks of lockdown were stunning here in Fiordland and the bluebird days just seemed to go on and on. Knowing the hills were full of roaring stags made that time especially hard for keen hunters, so it was then and there that my good mate Aaron and I started working on a plan for as soon as lockdown lifted.

It was mid-May and the chamois were in rut mode so we decided to target them first as there was a resident mob we had been watching some months earlier. Then we'd hit the bush for a feeding

stag. With that decided, all we had to do was wait for the word...

We packed the truck the night before leaving with much excitement as it had been several weeks since we had hit the hills with guns in hand. Dreaming of 10" chamois bucks and big Fiordland stags, we were on the road early with high hopes. We arrived at spot X just before first light and the morning was frosty and clear – the perfect start to what would turn out to be an unforgettable trip.

We knew the general area the chamois were in so we wasted no time in donning our gear and beating the feet. Picking our way through a rocky riverbed, we finally laid eyes on a mob high up on a steep grassy spur. **"There they are bro, right where we last saw them"** I said to Aaron as we watched through the binos. We were still some

800 yards away and decided on a careful approach as we were in full view of them. There was little choice except to creep from rock to rock until we found the shelter of a steep creek that would lead us to within 400 yards of the chamois.

Getting to the creek undetected was a miracle. Once again we lifted the binos to our eyes and studied the mob for a while. There were eight animals in the family group spread across the steep rocky face, with one or two staring in our direction. We knew we had been spotted but the chamois seemed pretty docile so we hatched a plan to get within 300 yards. I pulled out the camera gear and loaded the rifle just in case – these things tend to happen quickly when they do. Spotting one that stood out clearly from the rest, I passed the rifle to Aaron as I wanted first crack at a stag. **"It's all yours bro"** I said, thinking it was 9½" or less.

"Na bro, it's yours" was his reply, so I reluctantly sneaked the last hundred yards or so with rifle in hand.

We couldn't find the perfect rest so we had to make do and as I set up the



Aaron's 9^{3/4}" doe



A doe curious about the ruckus

Tikka 270, Aaron was busy on the camera. The buck was now becoming uneasy so we readied ourselves with haste. As it was Aaron's rifle, he dialled me in and I settled behind the gun just as Aaron said he was ready. The buck was standing front on so all I could do was line up on his chest and squeeze off. Boom!

"You pulled to the left" Aaron said as I struggled to sight the animal.

"Oh no, no, no!" I muttered as the buck was on the run, but to our surprise he ran to within 220 yards and turned to look back. In the meantime in my haste to move my position, I kicked over the camera, which amazingly Aaron caught before it smashed on the rocks below. I dived onto the opposite side of the creek, found a rough rest and lined up the buck a second time. The Tikka barked

again and the animal dropped and then rolled off a steep grassy cliff.

Aaron patted me on the back. **"Well done bro you've got a cracker there"** he said as we looked over the footage. I wasn't convinced, still thinking the buck was just over 9" mark, but I was stoked all the same – it's a great feeling when it all comes together. On our way over to the animal we spooked the rest of the mob so I jumped behind the camera for a last photo opportunity.

"Aaron – there's another good one there" I muttered to him as I focused the camera. He was reluctant to shoot as he had secured a few goodies over the summer but I talked him around, so he shouldered the Tikka and let rip.

"Woohoo" I yelled somewhat uncontrollably. Not only had it been months since we had been out but

securing a trophy each in the same trip is a rare event.

Approaching Aaron's animal first, we could see we'd underestimated the size of the head – at 9^{3/4}" it was a real trophy and his best to date. After taking photos he set to skinning and breaking down the animal while I amused myself taking photos of a cheeky kea. With Aaron's buck all squared away we made our way over to mine, taking some time to find it as it had rolled some way from where it was shot. Aaron found it first. **"Holy s**t bro – it's a bloody cracker!"** he said as I gingerly made my way to where it lay.

"Yeah boy!" was my reaction as I inspected the hooks. At 10^{1/2}" the head was a real winner and by far my best to date. "This guy's going on my wall" I said as I caped him out.

After taking a few pics and sorting my buck, we clambered our way back down to the truck, taking our time to make the most of where we were. After weeks of being locked up at home this was a hunt to remember – with good company, great views, a few laughs and personal bests to boot – **it was a great adventure.**



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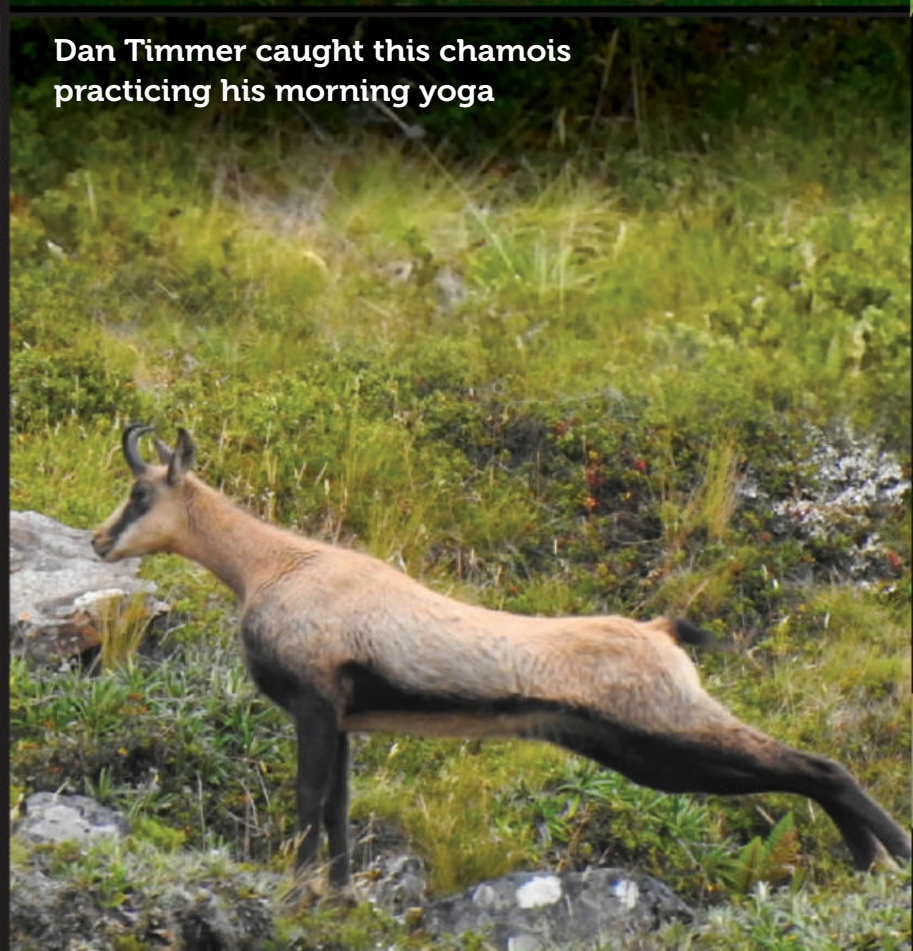
A high country Red hind and fawn
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Cohan Ryder snapped this
photo of two young stags,
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Jared Parker caught this billy off guard as
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FEW AND FAR BETWEEN

— WRITTEN BY ~ JARROD MCLAUCHLAN —





Jarrood at camp

It usually starts with a few average yarns being thrown around in a group chat, but every now and then a trip idea that is tossed into the pool will eventuate

This one was about me and the Mountain Goat himself, Jason Thomsen heading into some West Coast scrub country in late November in search of a big, mature bull tahr for Jase. With trips few and far between these days however, it's more about catching up and if a mature trophy ends up in the cross hairs, that's just an added bonus.

With one of our good mates Mikey based at Franz Josef to do some pilot training, I shot down from Nelson the night before Jase and I were due to head in to our hunting location, to catch up with him, have a feed and a yarn about hunting.

The next morning dawned with patchy drizzle coupled with the standard coast low cloud blanketing the nearby tops. With only three nights planned, we couldn't afford to bust into the hills a day late while waiting for the weather system to pass but it was not looking good

at this point. Jase turned up after his drive from Queenstown and we grabbed a coffee while yarning to the pilot about the chance of getting in, glancing at the same time at the low cloud swallowing the Franz glacier.

Mikey was flying out of Fox Glacier and once he reached the small township, he gave us a buzz and said *"Pretty good window down here boys"* so we quickly scouted the map for a plan B location somewhere out of Fox. We headed south in the ute and half an hour later we pulled in to the helipad, unloaded the gear, laced up our boots and jumped in the chopper before the break in the weather closed up.

After a quick flight into our desired area, we unloaded our kit and discussed our pickup plan with the pilot, then waved him goodbye as he pulled on the collective in the 500 and descended down the valley. Misty drizzle wet our jackets as we surveyed the surrounding country; our anticipation for what lay ahead for the next three days was high. Jase and I had been into the area before but we'd mainly focused on hunting high on that occasion. Because of the time of the year on this hunt,



A close encounter with a bull that didn't meet Jason's standard on day one

we knew our best chance at a mature bull would be downstream in the scrubby fingers. Having just flown over that area downstream, we decided to let it settle and hunt there on the last night to provide a pretty solid backup if we failed to locate a mature bull elsewhere. **The scrub area was small and two hunts in a short time would surely push those crafty old bulls further in if our scent was to work its way into the scrub...better to hit it only once.**

With the last of the weather system we were seeing due to pass overnight, we pitched camp on the highest ground we could find, anticipating some heavy rain after dark. Once the camp admin was all sorted, we loaded up some kit and punched up towards the head of the valley, navigating the soaking wet monkey scrub that engulfs the section of the valley we were pushing through. It was mid-afternoon by the time we made it up to a decent vantage point. We rugged up in our warm kit to protect us from the katabatic wind that was bringing with it chills from the ice and



snow high above us. **It didn't take long before Jase picked up a mob of nannies and juvenile tahr up in a nearby bluff system.** With no animals of interest among them and given that we were in a bit of a niggly spot for undertaking any herd management, we shifted our attention to working the glass on some nice scrubby faces above and across from us. More young bulls were caught transiting through the thick coast scrub but we



Young bulls in the same spot as the big fella in 2017

could see no mature bulls yet. When we'd been in the area back in 2017, we saw a big bull living up on a razorback

ridge for days – but typical for tahr hunting – recovery after a shot would not have been an option.

We wanted to see if that big bull had survived a few more winters, so when Jase whispered *“There’s a bull up where we spotted that big fella last time”* our excitement levels spiked. I frantically scurried into my pack to pull out the spotter to evaluate the animal.

“There’s more!” whispered Jase, and one bull turned into about eight as they jived for real estate on the razorback ridge. Once I got the spotter set up, it became clear that none of them was our big bull – it was just a mixture of young to middle-aged males – awesome to watch nevertheless.

Ice and snow covered the shale face that led up to the bulls. After about 20 minutes of watching and filming the mob, we realised that dinner was on their minds as they started to navigate their way down off the razor ridge to the feeding ground roughly 200m vertically below them. We had never seen anything quite like it as the mob of eight turned into roughly 25 and they playfully made their way off the snow and ice face and came down towards us.

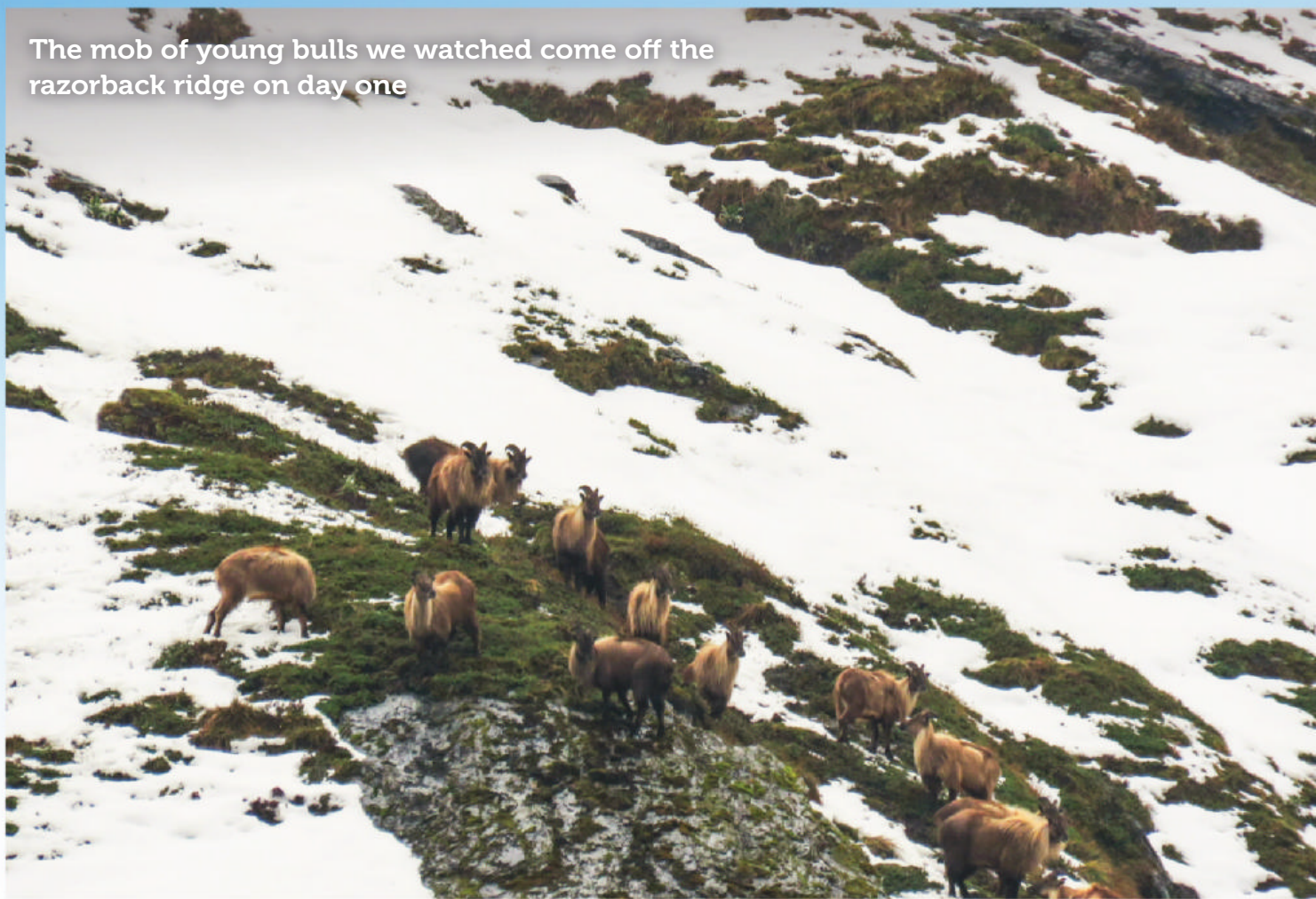
We anticipated where they were likely to end up for the evening and made a plan to move to a nearby ridge and cut them off. Moving through some of that alpine country can be slow, and by the time we made the ridge only one or two bulls were in sight. There was another gully nearby that we hoped they hadn’t started to travel down.

A few minutes went by with no action until we spied some bulls feeding their way into the anticipated zone. To our surprise, our plan had worked and we were now in the perfect spot to wait out the mob and try to find a shooter.

Sleet and rain started to fall, along with the temperature and we added more layers while we waited out the mob that was closing the gap on us to roughly 250 metres. We evaluated all of the 20-25 bulls over the next 45 minutes as some closed to within 20 metres. With the wind in our faces, the advantage was ours. Now sure there were no mature bulls in front of us, I asked Jase what he wanted to do.

“I’d rather shoot nothing than take one these young bulls” he replied so we backed out of there, leaving the mob undisturbed and started to make our way back to camp before darkness fell.

The mob of young bulls we watched come off the razorback ridge on day one



Jase's bull the first time we laid eyes on him



A reasonable two hour walk had us back at camp, and with the rain starting to come down steadily now, we decided on a tent dinner that night. **When the anticipated heavy rain hit early in the morning, the dry creeks on either side of our campsite began to rage and one of them came close to making an entry into my tent.** Luckily by about 8am the rain had eased, which meant the torrent beside my tent also eased, which was a relief as I was not super-keen on a tent pack-up halfway through my coffee and oats.

There’s nothing quite like that feeling of warm sun on your face after being tent-bound for a decent amount of time

due to bad weather. The cloud started to retreat back down the valley and it revealed the sun. Some close tahr also thought this wasn’t too bad and they started to make their way out of the damp scrub. We hatched a plan to head downstream but not right down to our back-up spot, just downstream a few kilometres to survey some nice grassy faces for the afternoon. **The previous night’s rain made us appreciate the fine afternoon as we worked the nearby country over with the binos.** Nothing of interest was spotted for the rest of the afternoon and right on schedule, the cloud rolled in from the coast, which ended the glassing for us. We did have a close encounter with



Jase with his bull

a nice chamois buck that we left for another day. We made our way slowly back to camp by headlight for a camp dinner outside the tent this time.

Day three was a cracker, with a crisp blue sky. We spun some average yarns and consumed far too much coffee for the morning as we knew we didn't have to rush downstream until the evening, which was when the mature bulls were more likely to make a mistake. The mob of nearby tahr was out again that morning so with no worries about disturbing the upper reaches of the block, we did our part in removing a few nannies and securing some beautiful meat.

With that detour completed we started our mission downstream, boulder hopping in the main creek for a few hours until we reached a fork in the creek that opened up into some beautiful grassy fingers. We set up on a nice rock overlooking prime bull tahr country. **Sometimes you just know you're in the right spot and this area had that feeling.**

Several hours went by and it was now late afternoon. We'd spotted a few animals, including two Red deer close by. The nerves were starting to set in as we were down to the last hour of light and we knew that if there were any big bulls in the area, they would

show themselves in this timeframe.

We were shifting from side to side on this rock outcrop to get different vantage points, and just as we were about to leave the western side, Jase lifted his binos for one last look into the scrub fingers. A blonde mane caught his eye, and he signalled me over with the spotter. **It didn't take long for us to see that Jase had found what we were looking for.**

With the light fading fast, we had to move higher to the next rock formation to get a better look down into where the bull was perched on top of a 50 metre bluff. We got Jase set up and hoped the bull would give us another look. The temperature was dropping and the wind that had been in our favour all day had spun a full 180 degrees and was now against us. We finally saw the bull again and he had one leg raised, ready to bolt – our scent must have reached him.

Jase didn't muck around – as soon as we knew it was our big boy he sent a perfectly placed round towards the animal and dropped him almost on the spot. It wasn't time for celebration just yet; we had to get down and



A great old 13^{1/2}" bull

find him while we still had enough light. A quick dash down a grassy face brought us to the bull and there was no ground shrinkage with this old battle axe – he was a real cracker. With plenty of winters showing on his horns and a length of 13½ inches, this bull was what Jase had been looking for. **We took the meat, some photos and the head and started our ascent upstream to camp.**

Some sub-par route choices by me had us back at camp around 12pm for some much needed food. Reflecting on a ripper day on the coast with a good mate while smashing a block of Whittakers is hard to beat.

Day four was another beauty. We packed up our gear and waited for the sound of the 500, signing off on another unreal trip. As I am writing this, we are in lockdown and recalling this trip reminds me how lucky we are to call New Zealand home. **Stay safe, look after each other and thanks for reading.**





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ADVICE FROM A HUNTING NEWBIE PART 3

WRITTEN BY ~ HANNAH RAE

Right from the start I've known that on the occasion when I choose to take the life of a game animal for its head, in addition to harvesting meat, I need to feel as though I've earned it. I want it to be an adventure and a challenge

In 1918 the owners of the station where Scott now works were forced off the place by a plague of rabbits. They literally dropped tools and left the stock to fend for themselves. Some of the hardy Merinos survived and bred in the harsh conditions to become the wild Clarence Merino flock.

Eventually, keen new owners came in and farming operations resumed, with small groups of wild Merinos continuing to survive in sheltered pockets near the Clarence River. From the moment I'd first heard about this rare flock, I was intrigued by the history. Coupled with the fact that wild mutton is quite tasty, a Merino made for the perfect objective for my first

animal.

One weekend Scott and I went in search of the wild woollies, notably a mature ram. It was a sweltering day in early autumn and the heat radiated off the rocks as we picked our way down a stream bed. There was enough of a breeze heading downstream that we hoped to sneak along below the hill faces undetected. **This would set us up to hunt into the wind, towards the gullies where the sheep were likely to be sheltering.**

A few kilometres later we reached our turning point, had one last splash in the creek, and began our ascent up an old farm track. Our dog Charles had another playmate in Trudy, a German pointer-spaniel cross, that was under our tutelage on a long-term babysit. And so it was that thirty minutes later the hunting party of

two sweaty humans and two panting canines emerged above the scrub line. We stopped briefly to glass (code word for catching our breath) but we couldn't spot any sheep with the distinctive features of the Clarence wild Merino – **shaggy wool, long tails and clean, white faces.**

Rolling with our original hunch that the animals would be hiding in a cool gully, we began to sidle across the faces. We approached each little hump and spur cautiously, and quietly peered over the edge. As we crested one spur, we finally saw them. Tucked amongst some patchy scrub about 250 metres away was a handful of wild sheep, including a couple of older rams.

This is where all the position setup practice, dry firing and range shooting paid off. I got into position and located the rams through the scope. Meanwhile, Scott had assessed their age through the binos, ranged and dialled in the distance for me. **"The one on the left,"** he said **"Remember, just behind the front shoulder."**

I spent an edgy few minutes behind the rifle, waiting for the ram to move fully into



Keep an eye out next season for a hunt we did with the NZ Hunter crew

a clearing. Finally, he took those last extra steps, and paused. I let out a long breath, then squeezed the trigger. The ram hit the ground and disappeared out of sight instantly. It took much persuasion from Spotter Scotty to convince me that I had indeed fired a successful shot. We sidled into the gully, and sure enough there was the animal, wedged under a matagouri bush.

Despite the slope and awkward position, I managed to manoeuvre the ram to the nearest flat spot for a photo, while Scott dug out the camera. Between Charles, who gazes defiantly anywhere but at the camera, and Trudy, who can't sit still even when succulent mutton ribs are on the line, we weren't able to snap a photo fit for the Christmas letter this time.

Several months later, on the eve of the surprise launch of the Tahrmageddon II eradication, our band of hunters in four-wheel drives bounced up a river valley in the Mackenzie, bound for tahr country.

The distinctive features of the Clarence wild Merino – shaggy wool, long tails and clean, white faces



Charles, Trudy and Hannah with their wild Merino ram

The idea that this could be my first and only tahr hunting experience was lurking in the back of my mind. I wasn't taking the opportunity for granted. After much haranguing from me, Scott had eventually agreed that I could join the boys' trip. This could be seen as breaking one of the sacred laws of mountain 'bromance', but hear me out. Just weeks out from departure, only three guys had confirmed their spot out of a possible six. The remaining invitees were dilly-dallying in the land of non-committal. I was enthusiastic, eager, and flexible with time off work – things that many of Scott's mates were not. **Thus, I was invited after all.** The boys were great sports about having me along. Any filter they had for female company was fading by day two, and long gone by the end of the

week. Nevertheless, I enjoyed devouring their hunting knowledge by day and their delicious camp oven creations by night.

The first couple of days were predominantly spent meandering in the valley floor, doing lots of glassing along the faces and creek head basins, getting a feel for where the tahr were hanging out. The boys shot a few nannies and one nice bull that we caped out. Scotty and I were itching to head further afield. We set off at daybreak on day three. Fresh snowfall on the valley floor meant carefully picking our way up the icy river flats until the sun rose over the hills. After three hours of (mostly) steady marching we reached the head of the valley and stopped for a hot brew and biscuits, glassing time, and map perusing. So many route options!



Practice on the range equates to confidence on the hill



representative first bull tahr. Notably, with the shallow basin below, its current position meant there was a high chance of retrieval.

With my heart pounding, I lay down in the snow behind the rifle.

Lining up on an animal still makes me nervous. It's the jittery excitement but it's also the crunch moment after all the hard work I've put in. One chance (normally!) to get it right. I had the scope focused on the bull for just a moment before he moved out of sight. Anxious minutes felt like hours while I waited patiently, hoping I'd still be able to feel my fingers if the opportunity came to pull the trigger. The bull came back into view, but only just. He was another 60 metres further away, and within a few steps of disappearing completely. Scott recalculated the ballistics and I made the scope adjustment. I waited again, the seconds dragging on.

Finally the bull stepped out onto a ledge, fully broadside. I pressed the trigger and hit him right behind the front shoulder. He stumbled a little, but remained on his feet. I reloaded and fired again. Another hit to the shoulder, but this time the shock sent him careering away from us, over a ridge and into the monkey scrub beyond. We spent a good hour scouting potential routes but the bluffs, ankle-grabbing monkey scrub, and rock fall chutes prevented us from even getting close to retrieving this bull. **This was a first-hand lesson in the fact that it's notoriously difficult to retrieve a bull tahr.** While I failed this objective, the trip was still a great success for me. I count any time spent in the mountains with great people as a success.

I'd tagged along on a couple of hunting trips with friends in the past, but before meeting my mountain man, I had never fired a rifle. I'm incredibly fortunate – not only is Scott a great hunting mentor but he is a superb shooting instructor too. He has taken me through the '101' in baby steps. It's still a work in progress but here's what I can share so far.



Breaking the secret laws of mountain bromance ... joining a boys tahr trip

We eventually agreed we'd had enough of rock bashing and opted to weasel our way up through a band of monkey scrub to get a look into some shallow basins. **We crested onto the intended 'cricket pitch' flat spot,** downed packs, and layered up for glassing in the snow. Neither of us had even sat down

when a rock clattering off a bluff stole our attention. Scott was the first to spot the source of the rock dislodgement – a bull tahr was traversing a bluff 300 metres away. Scott whipped out his binos and told me *"This one's for you."* He'd assessed it as approximately six years of age, and it would be a good

WHAT CALIBRE?

It's an infinite rabbit hole. There are more opinions out there than there are types of French cheese (1,600 according to one of my French sources). As with many things in life, probably the best thing to do is just start somewhere. You may not get the perfect rifle first go, but without simply going hunting with a rifle, you won't know what you need. Many experienced hunters still haven't found 'the one'. Get a feel for the type of hunting you enjoy eg bush stalking vs alpine adventures, and this will serve to streamline your options.

POSITION

Learn your stable, relaxed position behind the rifle, as it lays a good foundation for getting everything else right. It should allow the rifle to point naturally at your target, and ideally you'd be able to hold it for a while. A position that finds you with the 'plank for two minutes' shakes is highly undesirable. You don't even need to leave the house for this. When I first started, I spent a couple of evenings in the living room (bolt out) experimenting with position and setup.

In a good position the butt of the rifle is firm against your shoulder, and your head rests so you're looking directly down the scope. A clear picture in the scope is crucial – if it's focused and there are no black segments around the edges, you're well set up. Practise getting into this position smoothly and quickly. Again, this can be done in the comfort of your home. It will never be perfect in the field, but with practice, finding your position becomes automatic. If it's not solid or comfortable, you know what you need to do to improve it.

Don't rest your barrel on anything when shooting, no matter how good a rest that fence looks like it will make. Any external force on the barrel will affect the accuracy of the rifle.

FIRING

Dry firing (no round in the chamber) is a great place to start. If you set up the rifle on its own in the perfect position, it doesn't move. Put a human behind it and of course there will be movement. Dry firing allows you to practise holding those crosshairs as stationary as possible on your target, syncing your breathing, following through after the shot and getting a feel for the weight of the trigger.

Hone your shooting on a range. By shooting paper and targets you discover where your weaknesses are and gain consistency in your shooting. This is where

I got a feeling for what a good shot feels like, and it's something that can only be learned by doing. On the range is also where you can practise maintaining your shooting position as the shot is fired, and following it through with minimal disturbance to the rifle.

Check the zero on your rifle on a regular basis, and especially before any multi-day hunting trip. When you head out in the hills you want to be certain that your first shot out of the barrel is spot on.

HUNTING

You've spotted a target animal. Even before getting into a shooting position, consider taking a few seconds to look around. Is the animal in range? Where will give you the best view of the target? Are there any natural rests available? Any obstacles that have the potential to obscure your view?

SHOT PLACEMENT

Some more homework – animal anatomy. A quick Google search will show you exactly where the engine room is on your target species. You've done your shooting practice on the range so you're now confident in a well-placed shot. A quick, humane kill enhances your ease of animal recovery – whether you're in the bush or on the tops – you don't want the animal to travel too far.

CARCASE HANDLING AND MEAT PROCESSING

This is the topic in my hunting curriculum that I'm currently working through. It takes time to learn the appropriate and safe ways to handle a dead animal, to become proficient in good techniques, and pick up those tricks that make it easier. It's important to learn from someone who knows what they're doing to maximize the meat recovered, take a clean cape, and avoid subjecting oneself to the overpowering stench of a pierced gut bag. Meat hygiene is also critical, especially in summer when the flies are quick to get into the meat.

For me, the precision of my shooting is paramount. Yes, I'm a recovering type-A perfectionist, but this is about humane hunting and respecting the animal. When I get behind the rifle I want to know that it is shooting accurately and that my shooting is consistent.

There's still a lot I have to learn, and that's part of what I really enjoy about hunting. I'm frothing with anticipation for future adventures and look forward to spending more time with mates in the mountains.



Owner - Allan Foot

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A Long Time Coming **The Bracken Face Boar**

WRITTEN BY ~ JONATHAN FULTON

This story is really a tribute to a hunter who inspired me to get back into the sport of pig hunting after a period of time away from it

Pig hunting with dogs can be a roller coaster ride – and that’s in the settled times. Raising pups to become good pig dogs is not as easy as it sounds. There is a huge investment in time and energy, and depending on how high you set the bar, sometimes young dogs simply don’t make the grade you want

Then if they do make it but they get injured or killed while hunting, you can suddenly find yourself back at square one.

Starting again requires dedication and commitment, and five years ago, I realized I didn’t have the necessary drive to do this. My good old dog had been killed by a boar and the young ones in my kennels simply weren’t performing at the level I wanted them to, so I passed them on to other homes. Ironically, two of those three turned into good hunting dogs for their new owners, so I accept that

some of the blame lay with me.

I first met Dan Grimmett through a mutual hunting and fishing mate. After three or four years in a hunting wilderness, I began teaming up with Dan and we started chasing a few pigs together. Dan lived in Northland too – but at the Auckland end – and it wasn’t long before he began making the two hour drive to the far north with his dogs in tow to hunt my old haunts with me.

I soon learned that Dan’s dogs were a pleasure to hunt behind. Taking his chosen sport seriously as he does, Dan had set the performance bar relentlessly high, and his dogs were a reflection of that.

Throughout the time I wasn’t

hunting, I had tried to maintain all my friendships and connections with landowners, and this started to pay dividends with regular texts or phone calls informing me of pig sightings or sign. Dan always seemed keen to travel for good hunting, so usually a simple phone call was all it took to ensure that an action-packed weekend lay ahead.

At the tail-end of the time when I had my own dogs, a boar had been drifting through a property I regularly hunted, leaving his tell-tale sign on a steep, regenerating face adjacent to a huge area of virgin Northland forest. He would dig large holes in the soft, powdery soil, and I named him the Bracken Face Boar. The fact that I was unable to catch him was a compelling factor in 'clearing the kennels'. I threw everything but the kitchen sink at this boar but finally had to admit defeat and accept the bitter pill of reality – I simply didn't have the dogs skilled or capable enough to catch this elusive pig.

Then the boar disappeared. For a long time, he didn't visit the bracken face and I assumed that somebody had

caught him.

Then on a wet Sunday evening late in winter, I decided to go on a scouting mission to see if there were any pigs about. Parking the truck at the base of the hill below the bracken face, it was a simple matter for me to quietly walk up the steep track and drop down the other side to the forest edge beyond. There, in the soft clay-soil were fresh, deep holes that could only have been made by 'my' boar. Last-night fresh, even in the rain, the prints were clearly etched in the soil. He was back!

I called Dan later that night, and we organized a hunt for the coming weekend. Little did we know that this was to be the first of many hunts before we finally captured the boar. Here are two of the more memorable ones.

HUNT ONE

Dan arrived late one Friday night and in the dark on Saturday morning, we brewed a coffee, loaded the dogs into the dog box, and quietly drove out the gate, heading for the bracken face

and hoping for a rendezvous with the boar. Parking in the dip, we let the father and son team – Bruce and Murray – out, and walked the track in gathering light, to the sounds of the native forest waking up. The dawn chorus from the resident tuis was almost a din it was so loud, and it easily drowned the slight noise of two dogs pushing under the wires of the old fence and stealthily working their way down to the pig sign, noses testing the damp air.

Watching experienced dogs react to fresh pig scent is something I never tire of, and Bruce wasted no time deciphering the smells in the freshly turned mounds and melting into the gloom of a kahikatea grove lining the stream. The boar had been back last night. Bruce and Murray steadily tracked their way up the face directly opposite us through thick native bush, closing the distance (we hoped) on a cunning pig returning to his nest to sleep for the day. At any second we anticipated a bark, but, 45 minutes later and 900 metres above us the GPS reception was cutting in and out as the dogs crossed the main ridge.





Bruce, star of the show
and father to all the
dogs currently in my
kennels

way back into remote country to bed down and sleep. Either way, we had no choice but to put our heads down and slog uphill, following an ancient logging road that would take us to the top ridge.

Twenty minutes later, with sweat running freely, we reached the ridge and that wonderful sound so alien to the noises of the forest drifted up from below us – two dogs were bailing their hearts out. Wasting no time, we navigated a route down to them through the thickets of supplejack and kiekie, and closed in on the sounds of action. Just above a sheer-sided rocky creek, backed into some pongas and native ferns, the boar was contained by the dogs, and Dan went ahead with the gun to deliver the fatal blow.

Grabbing a thrashing back leg to knife the pig in the heart, I realized immediately that this was not the Bracken Face Boar.

Lying at our feet was an old pig with one long tusk, one broken tusk and fighting scars on his head, neck and shield, but his size – small and nuggety with a

print to match – put him well under what we anticipated our boar to weigh. However, this took nothing away from the hunt – the dogs had performed well, and the excitement of the last hour was recounted from all angles as we set about gutting and tying up a real character trophy for the carry back to the truck, home and glory.

How we managed to catch the boar we did from the sign we started with was a mystery to both Dan and I. All we could surmise was that two pigs had crossed paths during the night, therefore creating confusing scent trails and causing the dogs to track off on different quarry. Of course, the only way to test this theory was to go back to the bracken patch and try again, so the following morning – Sunday – seemed the perfect time to do this.

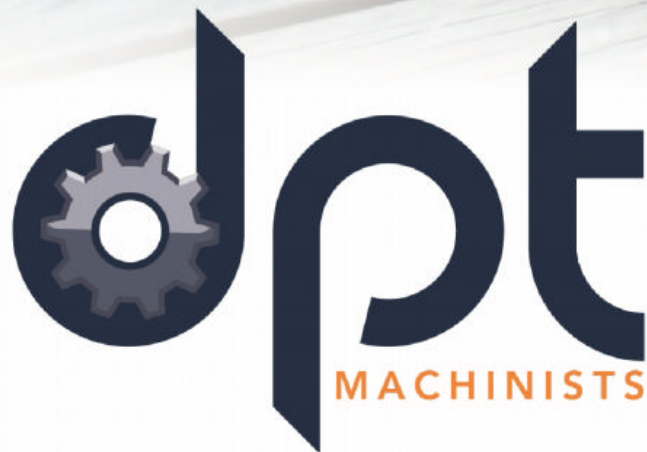
HUNT TWO

An equally early start and, in a repeat of day one, Dan and I quietly approached the rooting on another gloomy, overcast mid-winter morning. Sunday had dawned still, and apart from bird song, there wasn't another sound. Bruce rested in the dog box, and it was a chance for his two sons – Murray and Troy – to earn their stripes.

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A mature boar but not Bracken Face!



A boar wallow in the native

Pushing under the fence wires and silently nosing down the slope, this time the two dogs chose to go left at the creek – not right – which took them into fresh country. Another slow, tracking find ensued, meandering through gullies and showing on the Garmin screen as a morass of tangled coloured lines. After an hour of hopeful anticipation we lost signal for a second time, in a gully 700 metres above us in the gloom.

Twenty minutes later, we had not regained communication so Dan cut back to the ute and let Bruce out and we crossed the nikau-lined creek and began to climb in a more or less direct route to where we had lost contact with the two dogs. In situations like this many different outcomes are possible: the dogs might have caught a 'squealer', they might have nothing and be making their way back, or they might have chased a runner and gone a long way. To summit the ridge and hear them bailing in the distance is – for me anyway – always a pleasant surprise. Wild pigs that have grown up knowing the threat that hunters and their dogs pose, never give their lives away cheaply and will often do everything they can to evade capture. For me, the sound of Troy and Murray bailing was one of relief, for Dan – given all the time and energy he had put in to breeding, raising and training them – one of quiet satisfaction.

Wading up the swollen stream, thigh deep at times, was a much easier option than struggling through the parataniwha and supplejack that choked every hollow and depression. Bruce's arrival spurred the dogs to grab the pig, and Dan was quickly there to kill it with a knife to the heart. It was another mature native boar in his fighting

prime with shield and tusks to match, and we were happy that the young dogs had performed to their potential. However, at around 50 kilos gutted, he was not much bigger than the boar we had caught the day before, and this put him well short of our estimated size of the Bracken Face Boar. One can only keep trying!

Despite consistent hunting pressure from us, we still didn't cross paths with the Bracken Face Boar. Amazingly, we caught other mature boars that we hadn't known existed. In the course of these hunts, we deduced one important fact that would ultimately play in our favour – the boar we sought crossed a public (gravel) road in his nightly wanderings to and from his favourite feeding place.

HUNT THREE

Winter, then spring came and went, and suddenly summer was upon us.

In early January, Dan made the trek north and we spent a hot, futile day looking for pigs on a new block south of the Bay of Islands. Climbing hills with not a cloud in the sky, 30 degree heat and high humidity with two puffing dogs only reinforced

that pig hunting is my winter fun, and that the boat and ocean were probably a better option on such a hot day.

However, heavy overnight rain and a plunge in temperature was a game-changer, and the next morning we sat inside the house, drinking coffee, staring out the window at the scudding clouds and driving rain and debated our options. Pig hunting it was!

With wet weather gear packed, we loaded the dogs, climbed into the truck and pointed north into the wild weather. The rain hadn't eased and as we drove, we



Dan, Bruce and the second boar that wasn't Bracken Face

debated the futility of hunting a vast native forest in these conditions, and decided that maybe the crossing we had discovered on the metalled road was a better option to start with. **Any wild pig – we reasoned – would be tucked up under a log or in a dense bed of cutty grass escaping the storm, and finding them would be difficult.** If something had gone through on the pig run in the last few hours, there was a chance that enough scent had lingered for the dogs to work from.

Pulling up, Dan climbed out, quietly walked across and crouched down on the roadside, looking for prints in the soft mud. Overhead, giant native trees formed a canopy that almost closed over and allowed little natural light to filter through. After a few moments he stood up with a glint in his eyes and proclaimed it was our lucky day – a pig had walked through not long before, and left wet, sticky mud clinging to the fronds of the water ferns – **so fresh the persistent rain had yet to wash it away.**

We let the dogs out, put their collars on and, as one, Bruce and Murray put their noses to the ground and were swallowed up by the forest. We pulled

leggings and raincoats on and got the gun, knife, tracking unit and camera ready. We locked the truck and walked back down the road, GPS unit in hand and the familiar adrenalin stirring.

A story began to unfold as we watched the map on the tracking unit – 400 metres away Bruce had picked up the pace and began to leave Murray behind as he hit top gear – he had possibly laid eyes on the pig for the first time and was now chasing it. At 700 metres away and several ridges over – well out of earshot – he suddenly ‘treed’ and minutes later, Murray ‘treed’ beside him. **We were in business! No talking now, it was the usual head-down, get-there-quickly routine.**

Luckily, we were able to follow an old fence line through regenerating scrubby paddocks for several hundred metres, then, where a stream tumbled out of a gorge we turned and began to climb, initially through devil weed and pencil manuka, then dense pongas and finally more mature native. It was steep and slippery, and I realized it was a part of the forest I had never set foot in before. The sides of the gorge rose above us, clothed in ferns and parataniwha, with bare escarpments of exposed, crumbling rock falling into the stream.

Less than 200 metres from the action we finally heard the loud, consistent barking of two experienced dogs and our adrenalin levels spiked with the realization it was no weaner they had bailed.

Dan sneaked in ahead, gun loaded. Two metres behind, I followed his every step, and finally I was able to lay eyes on the Bracken Face Boar for the first time. Ten metres away, backed into the darkness of mature pongas, he stood, moving his head and shoulders back and forth to keep track of the dogs. Even in his short, sleek, summer coat he looked big, and without hesitation, Dan took aim and fired in one quick motion.

Turning him over to stick him, we found he was an old boar in prime condition, with a beautiful, even set of tusks extending out of his jaw nearly four inches on each side. Praising the dogs, we crouched over the pig in the gloom of the forest and quietly savoured the moment. It was tinged with a momentary hint of sadness – sadness for the death of an adversary that had done so much to stay alive, and for the fact that a hunt that had started years before had finally come to an end. **We had caught the Bracken Face Boar!**



Dan Grimm and the author with the Bracken Face Boar - at last!



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HUNTING WITH LLAMAS

WRITTEN BY ~ TOBY NICHOLLS

The semi-wild St James station horses

After a long morning lugging a hind and yearling out of a frosty Canterbury river valley, I remember thinking 'this is really a bit stupid, I'm going to hurt myself doing this'

I have back issues already from falling off a horse in my younger days so I am a bit conscious about making it worse. On this occasion, I was loaded up with boned out venison and there was no turning back.

A few months later, inspired by some serious time racked up watching YouTube videos I decided to embark on a journey to find someone in NZ who might be able show me how to hunt with pack animals. After just three phone calls I managed to find some people who hunted with llamas, and this is the story of the trip that followed.

I was heading into the St James conservation area with a new buddy Brad, who I'd met on a meat hunt last spring. Brad had seen one of my friends and I put the stalk on a hind up the hill from where he was hunting and he could also see that we were completely oblivious to a stunning 12 point stag sitting on the next knob above us. He met up with us the next day on the walk out and once we got the introductions done, we received a fair bit of ribbing from him about the night before. Over the next few months, Brad and I got talking about a future trip. When I called him and asked if he'd like to join me on a llama hunt, he laughed at how ridiculous that sounded and then quickly rearranged a few meetings so we could take off a day early.

DAY ONE

We headed off to meet Tony and Suzi from Hanmer Llamas. Tony has spent the last ten years roaming the hills with his specially trained pack llamas. When Suzi initially suggested that they get a couple of them, Tony wasn't that interested and begrudgingly went along to see what the fuss was all about. At the time, he was spending months on end possum trapping around the Canterbury high country. **Seeing a single llama loaded with 150 possum traps, Tony realised just what these animals were capable of and quickly changed his tune.** Flash forward to today and Tony and Suzi run a successful tour company guiding multi-day llama treks around the Hanmer area.

This was my second trip with llamas as I'd had the opportunity to tag along with Tony earlier in the year to learn the ropes, and he trusted me enough now to head out on my own. Arriving at 7am, we loaded our gear straight into the panniers (saddlebags) and fired



Brad and Toby with
Joey and Bandit

them onto the back of the Ranger. Then came the unusual part for most hunters in NZ – we loaded two fully grown fluff-ball llamas on the float. It is becoming more common in the US – there are even llama ranches that hire out hundreds of them each year to

hunters eager to go further for longer without lugging an overloaded pack.

On this trip we were to be hunting with Joey and Bandit, two very experienced pack llamas. Not all llamas are equal and while these boys might look like soft fluff balls, on closer inspection they are as muscly as racehorses, with legs built for climbing. Bred for carrying heavy loads in the Andes, they will carry 80-100lbs of kit all day long. **On top of their physical prowess, they are also hyper-alert – a great asset for the hunter – as they will quite often spot and indicate animals** well before you've even had a chance to get your glasses out. We were to witness this multiple times on our trip as they stopped, twisted their heads around and pointed their ears forward towards whatever caught their attention. I'd pitch them against a well-trained pointer any day. They definitely exceeded the skills of my vizsla!

While the main aim was for us to figure out how we could utilise these strange

beasties to better our hunting, we still intended to hunt as much as we could. The plan was for Tony to drive us up to the St James conservation area and drop us off at the bottom of the Maling Pass. Fortunately for us (well, less so for Tony) we didn't find a turn-around point and ended up having to drive right over the mountain pass into the Waiau. That knocked about 6 kms off our walk and so as we loaded up the llamas, our plan hastily changed to a longer walk right up into the Ada Valley. Since one of the points of using pack animals is to go further, we figured why not!

Llamas are incredibly social animals within their herd. As Tony's first llama, Joey was used to spending all his days in the hills possum hunting for months at a time with him. So as Tony drove off, Joey was a little distressed to be left in the wilderness with a couple of rookie hunters.

However fully loaded, the llamas were ready to stretch their legs so we set off on a 15km trek along the Waiau Valley. With the sun beaming down, huge grins on our faces and leads loosely in hand, we walked with the llamas cruising along behind. Incredibly, they would stop on



a dime whenever we stopped. For the whole trip, neither of us was trodden on once.

As we got closer to the hut to set up camp, we came across a mob of ex-station horses roaming the valley. If you've ever wondered how to rile up a mob of horses – just walk through their



If you've ever wondered how to rile up a mob of horses – just walk through their paddock with two llamas



paddock with two llamas. We ended up being trailed along the valley by these horses for about 2 kms before we slipped away through a gate and left them behind.

Approaching the hut around mid-afternoon, we saw a hind feeding out on the open tops. It was a good sign. We decided it would be best to leave the hut beds to the hikers as we had lugged tents in and the area was quite busy at the time. Once we set up camp, we split up for the evening hunt. After a tip-off from a fishing guide we'd

met earlier in the day, Brad headed upstream to check out an area that had been ripped to shreds by glaciers during the last ice age and still offers plenty of cover for deer as they move through the open glacial troughs.

I tethered the llamas together in a line and the three of us headed downstream to watch a promising face I had spied earlier in the day. Settling in under a clump of matagouri on the valley floor, the llamas nestled down to chew their cud while I silently battled the sandflies and glassed the clearings. About an hour before

dusk, the horses found us and started thundering up and down the valley before deciding we weren't a threat and disappearing off towards the Waiau. It was a slightly surreal experience watching a semi-wild stallion fearlessly leading his mob. Besides a distant spiker hoofing across the tops, it was a very peaceful evening.

Meanwhile, Brad's experience had been somewhat different. Stalking through a few bush patches and popping out above the rock formations, he had managed to get up close to a couple of

pigs and unfortunately spooked three deer, which he couldn't get a shot on.

We met back at the hut to sort out the llamas. **These animals are pretty low maintenance as far as pack animals go.** They spend any spare moment grazing throughout the day, so there is little need to carry food for them, besides the odd carrot as a treat. They are just as happy tucking into a spiky matagouri branch as they are a fresh tuft of alpine grass. All they needed was a quick brush and their water buckets topped up before we tethered them to a long rope for the night. Before long they were settled down, chewing their cud. With the llamas sorted, Brad and I tucked into a decent feed of Go Native and some ice cold beers thanks to Joey and Bandit.

DAY TWO

After a solid night's sleep we struck off at first light for a morning hunt, leaving the llamas tethered at base camp. While you wouldn't leave them alone for a whole day in case they get tangled in their leads, a short hunt like this is usually fine. We had hardly walked 100m from the hut when Brad pointed out two pigs feeding on new growth a wee way down the valley. They were oblivious to our presence and this was

stacking up to be one of the shortest hunts I'd ever been part of. Eager to secure some meat, Brad lined up on a fat porker with the 30-06. However with the tall grass and a less-than-optimal rest on the top of a pack, both of his shots went astray and the little piggies went home. We did however give the hikers a jolly good wake-up call.

Part of any hunter's education is disappointment and learning how to deal with it.

We took note of what went wrong and then happily continued on our hunt. After stalking a few clearings across the valley, Brad headed back to check on the llamas. I continued a few kilometres further up the valley to check out a nearby lake and some slips but soon turned back after sighting nothing.

Together again, Brad and I walked back up the valley, glassing along the way and stopping to chat with the occasional hiker or angler we came across. While we weren't going at any great speed, we certainly covered the miles and arrived at camp with fresh legs despite the distance we'd racked up.

We stopped at a nice spot by the river for a luxury lunch, loaded up the water, hid some beers in the creek and headed off into a clump of matagouri across the valley to set up camp. We planned on tethering the llamas beside the tents while we climbed to the tops for an evening hunt, right above our campsite.

After a brisk climb onto the tops, we spent the next few hours glassing two promising looking basins. I spotted a chamois at 600 yards a few gullies over. He looked quite young and wasn't recoverable without spending a whole day getting to him. A few years ago I would've opened fire and probably missed but with a bit more experience under my belt, I knew there was no point shooting that animal. I decided to go halfway and 'tag' a rock beside him. It was a good practical field test for a longer range shot with the 270. Settled behind the rifle with a good solid rest, dialled up and held over for windage, I was quite happy to see the rock I'd aimed at turn into a puff of dust. Hardly fazed, the young chamois ran only about 10 metres before going back to grazing on his favourite alpine shrub.

With the wind picking up two hours before dark, we decided to head back



A view down to the Waiau river and Lake Guyon



to check on the boys. Having llamas means you can carry a few more creature comforts and as we settled into our camp chairs at dusk with an ice-cold Moa beer in hand while glassing the hills above, I couldn't help thinking that this was going to be one of many future llama trips.

The next day we broke camp, loaded the llamas and headed off on the long walk over the pass. We definitely tested the boys a fair bit over the three days, covering upwards of 50 kms and were incredibly impressed with their ability to cover challenging terrain. As Tony explained to us, if you can get up a slope without crawling, the llamas can manage it too. It is important to remember though that they are carrying all the gear, so on big climbs we stopped regularly to glass while the boys caught

their breath.

Other than making sure we weren't getting into areas that were too tight (even then you'd be surprised what llamas can get through) the main thing we had to do was to check periodically that their packs hadn't slid sideways. Over the whole three days, we only had to reset the packs once and that was because we hadn't balanced the weight of the bags well enough.

While we didn't end up shooting what we came for, we took away awesome memories of a trip that stacks up as one of the best hunting experiences either of us have ever had. Would I do it again? Absolutely! **We have already started planning a five-day trip into the hills this spring. Watch this space.**





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WRITTEN BY ~ TROY MACKENZIE

A SURPRISING RUT TRIP

Every year, the week I look forward to the most is the one when Dad and I go with my good friend Dan to hunt our favourite block in the Kaimanawas, chasing Sika stags together

We've gone into the same block for the same dates for five consecutive years. Never did I think, even in early March this year that I may not be going on our trip but as the end of the month arrived, my anxiety level was rising.

Sure enough, all of April was lost to hunting and I spent it watching footage of other people's Sika ruts from previous years, and sulking at the same time.

I still held onto some hope that we'd be all go for level three and this kept me going through a very tough month at home. Although I loved being at home

with my wife and children (both of whom love hunting with me) I was ready to get amongst some roaring stags.

Well, what a disappointment that level three announcement was. I had to go back to work – and worse – I still couldn't go hunting! I'm sure you can all relate to this feeling.

The level two announcement came through in May and we were finally ready to go. Although I was concerned the best part of the rut was over, I was excited to hunt in a block that had not had hunting pressure since at least mid-March.

MAY 14

Up and off early, we were on our way to the waiting helicopter. When

Helisika rings you while you're travelling to their base it can go either way – they want you there earlier – or they have bad news. We were told that the East Taupo private blocks had not been signed off yet to fly into because of Covid-19. Unbelievable, after everything we had been through to get there, it had come down to an administrative issue by the landowner.

At this stage we didn't know if we would get to go in at all but we decided to continue to travel to the hangar to get the full run down and hear the options. On arrival we realized we weren't the only ones looking down in the dumps and waiting around. If the sign-off didn't come through today, it may not come through tomorrow either, so would it be Monday? We weren't risking it, so after a few discussions we decided that we would fly into the only block vacant till Saturday (one we'd never even heard of before) and then we could relocate to our booked block on the Saturday.



At the top of the ridge after a good solid grind back up



Dan snaps the memory of a great little morning hunt with some beautiful eating venison before we get picked up for our transfer flight

On arrival we headed ten minutes south of the hut and went up on the first bench for a very quick look before it got dark. Dan positioned himself just in front of me on a knob and Dad sat at the rear, watching the south view. I gave a single call with no response. I didn't realize it but Dan had immediately heard an animal loudly moving in from above. A 4 point stag came right up to within 4m of him and they stood there looking at each other for more than a minute. The stag slowly started moving around to where Dad and I were so Dan gave a quick mew to alert me and stop the stag. It came straight in behind Dad and me, and when I stood up, it nearly walked right into me. There was no time for a shot as the animal saw me before I saw him. He spooked but then stopped on the face where he'd come from. We were nearly able to make the shot but he moved off.

We heard a heehaw across the stream from the hut during the night, so it was a very encouraging first day – it seemed the rut was still on!

MAY 15

After some careful overnight planning, we headed up the main ridge behind the hut. We heard a few heehaws along the way but nothing close. We gave some roars in spots but got no responses. We continued on to our desired location to drop down off the ridge and managed to spook a hind off the side of the saddle on the way.

Once we got about halfway down the face, we heard a heehaw 100m down to our left, so we got the wind sorted and made our plan. I sat down and gave a single call. Dad was with me and Dan was above, watching the top view. I got an immediate response – an animal made what I can only describe as some sort of goat noise and it came straight towards us across an open area. I saw the hind first, and then I saw a stag tailing her very closely. I waited for a shot to present itself but as they were front on, I had only a head shot opportunity over the scrub.

I decided to take a freehand 60m shot before the animals got onto us. The stag dropped and the hind ran off. As we started to celebrate, he got back up so I gave him a second shot and we had a 5 point stag on the ground. He appeared to be an old boy going backwards but he was still in full rut mode, which really surprised me. It was a great feeling to bash our way back up to the ridge with all the meat on board.

When we got back to the spot where the 4 point stag had been the night before,



Father and son take a moment to celebrate Dan's 7 pointer

of anticipation for what we hoped was ahead in our much-loved part of the Kaimanawas. Our afternoon hunt above the hut was uneventful, with no noise and little sign, most of it old. Darn it – surely the stags were still around somewhere.

17 MAY

We started our hunt up behind the hut with an area in mind to head for. There wasn't much sign on the first bench there either and it was very dry but we did hear two separate heehaws on the other side of the creek so that was encouraging.

We continued walking and came across a bit of stag sign – yes! Then I heard the sound that every Sika hunter wants to hear – a heehaw on our side and only 150m away above us. We did a loop back around and saw a good scrape and more stag sign. We got settled in, with me staying back ready to roar. I let off a single call and instantly got a heehaw, this time it was even closer. I let off a quiet mew and the stag came straight in. Within seconds, I couldn't believe what I was hearing as he got louder, and closer and closer. Every year we've dreamt of a stag so into it that he comes charging in without a care in the world about being seen or heard. Dan had the animal on the ground as it came into full view. It was a beautiful 7 pointer. Awesome stuff.



Ross and Troy have an opportunity to celebrate finally getting into the bush on an unlikely rut trip and bag a nice old stag on day two

18 MAY

We set off on a stunning day to go after two of the heehawing stags we'd heard the day before. We covered both areas really well and did find good stag sign. We didn't hear any calling and spooked nothing all day apart from one hind that caught our wind as we were walking up our chosen ridge. There was no sign of any stags when we were single calling.

It seemed the bush had suddenly gone quiet and the rut was over.

The rest of the trip we put in some big days and were outsmarted by the Sika each day. Oh well, it had been one heck of a trip for us and one we will never forget.

We had a chilly bin jam-packed full of venison and memories of time together in an incredible slice of NZ that I now appreciate even more than ever. **We are so blessed to have the privilege to hunt freely in this country and I really value every second I have to spend time out there, having a laugh with good mates and family and learning about and respecting our bush and the wildlife that lives there.**



anhe was there again, this time with a hind. They moved off too quickly for a shot once again and I called but he didn't return.

As Dan quietly headed back to the hut (only five minutes away) he spooked a big-bodied animal, but unfortunately he only saw it from behind. This stag must have sneaked up in response to the mews we were making to the 4 pointer. Unbelievable – what an action-packed day.

MAY 16

This morning we walked up to what we'd now named '4 pointer bench'. Dan crept onto it while we hung back.

We heard an eruption of stag and hind squealing as soon as Dan got to the top. Unfortunately he'd broken one little twig and it was still a bit too dark to spot them dashing off. We were shocked that they were still in the exact same spot after seeing them there twice the day before.

We carried on to where we had heard a stag heehaw the night before. We picked a spot to set up on a beautiful open flat bench with loads of sign. I put up a single call and instantly a hind and yearling came straight up to Dan. As the hind squealed, he got the shot away. There was no sign of a stag with them.

At 1.30pm we were picked up and taken to the block we'd originally booked, full



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SPRING OPPORTUNITIES

WRITTEN BY ~ CAM MCKAY | POINTS SOUTH

Sure, the stags have dropped their antlers but there's a bunch of other hunting opportunities that open up as the days get longer

And besides, not all of us are interested only in trophies; there's always a few extra-curricular activities that can be included around those morning and evening hunts during warmer days.

In the low country, the longer days are the start of growth on the river flats, and if you have your timing right, these flats are magnets for deer. **November and December is prime time to fill the freezer, with hinds kicking off the yearlings as their new fawns drop.** Now on their own and lacking life skills, these yearlings often make an easy and

delicious addition to the freezer, with the added bonus of being a great way to keep your local deer population in check.

It's also a great time to get the kids out hunting, given that the higher success rate will keep them interested, and there will be fewer complaints about being cold. With the days getting longer by about two minutes per day through spring, we don't really have to get far into summer before the early starts and super-late evenings become taxing, especially for the kids.

Packing the fishing rod is a wise move, and a great way to fill in time between morning and evening hunts, once you've found a nice cool spot to hang the venison, that is.

These longer days also bring mid-week opportunities to get out for an evening hunt without having to knock off work early. If you're lucky enough to live reasonably close to one of your hunting spots, have your gear ready and get a wheel going straight after work. **The same can be said for extending those weekend missions; Friday evening is a great time to knock off those bigger walk-ins or climbs onto the tops.** This will set you up for a couple of good days further in the back country – you'll just be back at work on Monday even more stuffed than you were before you left.

We haven't had much in the way of snow





Spring time brings bachelor mobs of bulls lower than you would generally see over winter, but the manes lose their impressive bulk
Image - Derek Johnson

this year but as the snowline rises and the spring growth starts climbing up the mountainsides, it's a great time to be in the Southern Alps looking for chamois and tahr. It's usually warm enough by then to start taking the dog again too. **The only downside is that tahr and chamois capes are nowhere near as good as they are in winter, but the opportunity is there to be really selective and find an old buck or bull.** They're certainly less chewy on the BBQ than winter animals.

The tahr and chamois are often at much lower altitudes through spring, following that growth back up the mountainside as the season wears on. Mature chamois bucks are usually solitary and fickle to find anytime other than during the rut but in spring, bull tahr will be mobbed up and fairly predictable, giving you ample opportunity to assess them well, and to be selective.

Given the tahr situation at the moment, where the herd is very likely to be seriously smaller and structured quite differently, it no longer makes sense to shoot females the way we have been encouraged to in years gone by. By all means, take one for meat but gone are the days of shooting multiple females with the idea of managing the population. A revised Himalayan Tahr Control Plan (HTCP) and a bunch more research is needed so that

we can be sure what we are doing is sustainable.

There is lots of scope for four-wheel driving into some of our bigger East Coast catchments, camping by the truck and setting yourself up for a nice early climb in the morning.

Often my tactic is to spend the evening covering a heap of ground with the binos, hopefully to find something worth making a move on early the next morning.

Keep an eye on those rivers as the heat of the day and the warm winds can melt a heap of snow and push the rivers up substantially. And be aware of those spring avalanche paths as the day heats up. Keep an eye out for the smashed-up scrub from previous years' slides and don't stop for lunch in the bottom of those drainages.

For all the above reasons, spring is a great time to get out and explore some of the places you've been staring at on the map. Whether you find animals or not,

The days get longer by two minutes a day through spring - those mid-day siestas are just around the corner!



there is nothing better than coming up with a route that takes you through new country, then getting out and doing it and hopefully finding that future honey hole.

Having year-round hunting opportunities like we do is the envy of basically the rest of the world. With little hunting downtime and the next mission always in the pipeline, it really is a matter of making the most of the seasons and making the time to do it.





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Having the ability to extend my effective range allowed me to make a perfect shot on this Sambar stag



PART TWO: BUSH HUNTING WITH A BOW AND ARROW

WRITTEN BY ~ CODY WELLER

If there's one thing that gets me excited, it's a trip to hunt one of our seven deer species

The thought of a big Sambar stag or Whitetail buck giving me an opportunity for a shot in the bush definitely gets the mind racing.

These two species live at separate ends of the country; one is originally from India and the other from America but the same base skills can help you get

an opportunity at these deer and all the others in between.

Before I tighten up the laces on my boots or head away on an extended

trip, I always check the wind direction. When you have to get extremely close, knowing the predominant wind is paramount. A while ago, I discovered an app called 'Windy'. This has a mapping function that shows airflow in the specific area I'm intending to hunt. This definitely gives me something to work with before my day – or trip – even starts.



The orange line shows the most frequented game trail rather than the main ridge, which is just up to the right

GEAR

Now I know the wind direction and any likely changes, I can work my way into areas where it is going to be most favourable. Before setting off to stalk an area however, I always try to minimise gear according to the bush type. The more stuff you have packed into your day bag, the more bulky and less forgiving your movement is through the bush. Scaling things right back seems to help with balance and you're generally more bush dynamic. **Every time your gear snags on something, you're potentially giving away your location.**

Boots play a big part in how sneakily you can move through the bush. However, trying to make a nice lightweight pair of stalking boots work in steep bush country could have the opposite effect. It's just a matter of sussing out how close those contour lines are or how many terraces there are in your intended area. If it's steep, I tend to go for a boot with more support. If it's gradual and fairly easy country, sneaky boots would definitely be preferable.

It goes without saying that my clothing on close-quarters bush stalking missions are as absolutely silent as possible.

Drawing a bow requires movement and if your clothing rustles, it could be all over. But that's enough of the gear side. I'm keen to cover a few tricks that have put me onto game in the bush all over NZ.

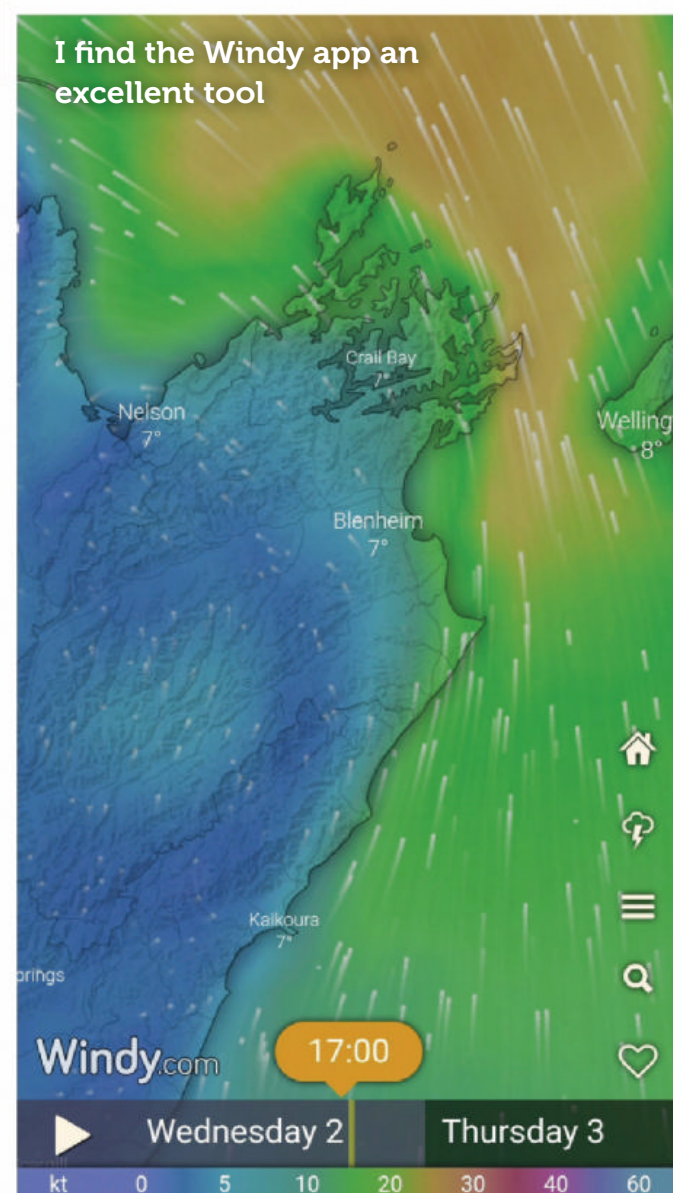
LOCATION

Hunting ridges in the bush has its place but for the most part, deer are down on the faces and bedded on little spurs or in sheltered guts – depending on the day. I find that deer travel along just off a main ridge more often than right on the ridge itself. There's definitely a lot more feeding and travelling going on over the side. However, some days have their moments for deer movement on the main ridges. A good ridge stalking day would be after a heavy dose of rain, when it has cleared off gradually and remained very calm. **If it's a nice open ridge with a bit of feed to pick through, it will be visited by deer to dry off and feed without getting wet again.**

Not all faces and guts are created equal though, some have more feed and better habitat than others. This can often be seen before you even leave the vehicle, boat or chopper. Big, old broadleaf trees and mahoe or five finger can be visible as part of the canopy and if you're bush hunting, this area is a great starting point. Slips create diversity, things like feed and sun all packed into one area. I tend to look for these types of things if I've never been to the area before.

I definitely believe that in our colder months, some of our deer species don't always head for the sunny, warm faces every day. It would seem that some of the colder guts still hold good winter feed so I don't ignore these

I find the Windy app an excellent tool



as options. This goes for bedding too. Not all deer species will be the same, but our hollow-haired ones can overheat easily and they are happy to bed somewhere cold even over winter.

STRATEGY

I don't tend to stalk everywhere. Just because the bush looks right and it's open



A Red stag that fell victim to the stag-mewing technique



A stag sparring pad. You can see where their toes have been digging in as they push each other around



Deer also don't only like browsing leaves, they definitely don't mind a good feed on Five-Finger bark

doesn't mean I'm going to get an arrow out and go into full stealth mode. If the sign isn't present, I tend to keep on travelling. **It's easy to get wrapped up in that 'looks good here' feeling and stalk and stalk, only to become jaded.** Then when you do finally get into sign, you have lost the fresh edge you had an hour and a half ago. I've definitely been guilty of this.

Look for that fresh sign and hen dial into super-stealth. During a full-on stalking session, I take plenty of breaks and drink plenty of water as I feel this helps to keep my senses fresh. It's easy to slip into a bit of complacency and then spook a deer. They value their lives and don't tend to hang about if you blunder into them.

CALLING

Calling doesn't end in the roar. This is a little trick I use to great effect when sneaking through an area that's a bit noisy underfoot or when it's calm and I'm struggling to get along in total silence. It definitely works on Reds. So if I've gotten to an area that's showing me there's Red stags wandering somewhere close by, I'll softly mew as I very slowly move through. Red stags do this sometimes as they wander along or get into little sparring sessions.

I do this only if I can't get through completely silently. My stag mew can only be heard at close range;

it's not to attract them, just ease their suspicion about that thing creeping around over there. It buys you time as a stag tries to work out how his stag mate just turned into something else.

Stag sparring pads are normally a good indicator that you're in their zone. And rubbing and multiple stag beds will tell you you're onto a bachelor group. This is when the calling option works best. I've yet to totally dial the same thing on other deer – that's a work in progress.

RANGE

Being adaptable definitely opens up options shooting-wise. Just because I'm bush stalking doesn't mean I'm solely prepared for a 30 metre shot and under. Some places lend themselves to shooting from a small opening into another opening. Shooting across small gullies and over to little spurs can also give you options. These sorts of shots seem to be around 60-70 metres, however that's really pushing it for a bow and arrow and conditions have to be perfect. Shooting form must be flawless and it might not be up every bowhunter's alley. Put the time in though and shots like that can be achieved.

Hopefully some of these things will assist you with your next close-quarters outing with the bow.



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Simon Bullivant
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Stopping for a tea break with Sami on a morning hunt in the Tarauas. We were probably 1 km from the road end in a straight line here and hot on the trail of a small hind group. Lots of fun handy to home.



WRITTEN BY ~ JOHNNY BISSELL

DAY HUNTER

My last article was about the hunting opportunities available to us closer to home. Too often, all we think about are the big trips, at the expense of hunting more regularly in between those trips as well

. Without realising it, we are often guilty of looking past what others around the world can only dream of. I want to repeat something here: often, we hunters want the best available option of a successful hunt. That is smart thinking really, but at times we are also in danger of missing out on other aspects of the hunt – the experience and the challenge.

If you want to increase the level of satisfaction from your hunting, then simply increase the challenge and stack the odds against yourself more. You can do this in a number of ways, such as bowhunting for example. The other option is to hunt places where the odds are in greater favour of your quarry, or where there are fewer animals. **I am talking about public land hunting folks.** This is available to all of us and where we actually have to have a

significant extra skill set to those of the farm hunter/shooter.

There are some real benefits of hunting public conservation land that you don't fully realise until you do it. **The fact is, the hunting is often harder there and to be consistently successful you have to be a better hunter.** You have to work at it! The benefit is that once you have become that hunter, it will stand you in good stead for the rest of your

hunting life. You can put a good public land hunter in farmland, and s/he will still be successful, but not always the other way around.

The other benefit is that your fitness and mental and physical health will be the winners. When it comes to the bigger trips, you will be a better and fitter hunter and so you will probably enjoy those trips more and be more successful.

It would be fair to say that I have done a bit of hunting over the years and I have a fair tally under my belt.

Shooting a deer these days is no longer quite the thrill it was, but I still enjoy it. My real pleasure these days is being out there in the ngahere and soaking it all up. For me, hunting has always been more about exploring and adventuring in wild places, though when younger, I was also very focused on putting something on the ground as part of that. I guess if I was really honest now, I would have to say I go hunting for the pleasure of hunting rather than with the express and sole purpose of killing an animal. Does that make sense? Don't worry though readers, I haven't gone soft. When I need an animal, I am

Sometimes you don't have to travel too far from the road end to find a treasure. This one was ten minutes in!

quite ready to let 'Dr Jekyll' out.

The fact is that life can be busy, and we can't always find the time to get 'way back'. And that is how we get to the title of this article – Day Hunting. Just because we can't go for more than a day doesn't mean we shouldn't go. I have realised that I can go into the mountains in any number of places and find myself fairly quickly where the terrain challenges are significant and the hunting challenge is often even greater. I can get up before daylight, have a nice breakfast and be somewhere neat not long after dawn. **I can spend as little or as long as I want exploring new places or retrying familiar country using my previously gained knowledge against animals that are often smarter and less numerous.** Then, when I am done, I can be back at home with my family, tired and happy and sometimes with good meat in the fridge/meat safe. What's not to love about that?

There is something else I have realised about this too folks. That thing is there are not a ton of people out there targeting the 'easy to reach but hard to hunt' country. Most go past it to easier and often more open country. Or they don't go at all. This is where hunting with an indicator dog has really helped me. Not just by increasing my chances in these areas; the fact is that because of my dog, I am actually going there and hunting them. As an older mate who is a very good hunter says *"I find I am always a lot more successful when I go out."*

It never ceases to amaze me though, how often I poke up a handy wee side creek and find myself in the middle of good sign, with very little indication that there have been many hunters in there. If you like the sound of this, you should. It really is great fun. But there are a number of things you will need to be ready for or to think about. The first is that this sort of hunting often involves bush. Now let's be frank here – many, many of us hunt the bush almost never. To be honest I don't really know why that is the case. Have we as hunters also got guilty of chasing the easy reward as with the rest of society? Which is quite hard case, as bush hunting can be more productive in some areas. The fact is though if you want to hunt handy and do well, you will often need to learn to bush hunt. Embrace the challenge. Trust me, you will love it.

The second thing you need to be aware of is your mindset. Don't just go out to shoot an animal, go out to explore new country and test yourself physically and simply be in the back country. If you hunt this way, then every hunt will be a success. Easy as that! By all means hunt to shoot an animal on every hunt, but also treat each hunt as a fact-finding mission. Join the dots, suss out the best access points and travel routes and piece together the puzzle of where the animals are and how they use and move through the area. I have a little equation that says that the knowledge gained in every hunt like this will double your chance of success in the next hunt. The fact is that there are game animals nearly

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My mate Bernd in the Aorangi's carrying a nicely set up rifle for this sort of country. Two hours from the road end and entirely doable

I had this day pack made by my saddler. About 25 litres and made of waterproof non scratchy vinyl. Works well, is really strong and comfortable with a load of venison on board and weighs nothing empty



If you are bush hunting you need to be manoeuvrable

everywhere. **The only thing that varies is the terrain and their numbers.**

The third and final thing you need to remember is this: if there is a deer in the area then you, yes you, can shoot that animal. All of you. I don't care how experienced you are. You can do it. I guarantee! The only variable is the time that it will take for you to do that. But here is the good news – the longer it takes, the more experience you will be gaining and the better the hunter you will be at

the end. Go back a few articles and find the one I wrote one called 'Five Pairs of Boots'. The fact is that the more real hunting you do, the better you will be at it. Nice! So, let's have a quick chat about a bit of gear.

You don't need to be dressed up like all the flashy adverts, but your gear does need to carry out some core functions. When I started out, we used cut-down school jerseys, Swanndris and lace-up Buller gumboots. And it worked well. Still does. We stayed warm and were quiet in the bush. So let's have a chat about the key boxes you need to tick.

SAFETY

What does that look like? Well you need to be able to spend an unplanned night out with the gear you have with you. You need to have a good raincoat (no exceptions) a first aid kit, a warm dry layer to put on if needed. Your clothing needs to be enough to handle the worst weather you might experience. A big issue with day hunting is that the weather is often nicer where you live. Don't base your clothing on the 25°C day at home. Many times, I have called my wife from a high point in a cold, howling gale and she is bathed in sunshine below at home.

I also advocate carrying a PLB for hunters. They are cheap insurance should you hurt yourself. More recently, InReach units actually enable people at home to log on and see where you are. They are gold! You can also send and receive messages re weather or if you are running late

carrying out an animal. For some this may be a bridge too far with regard to getting away from it all, but we are using them constantly at work in the back country these days and they are now our 'normal'.

This is also the place to discuss leaving good information about where you are heading and when you intend to return. I often go one step further and have a chat with a mate who knows the area I am planning to hunt. Food and water are two other important things to consider. Make sure you take it. Nuff said on that! Sun protection is another thing I see people get caught out on. Remember it can be bad news if you forget it, but light and easy to take along.

STEALTH

If you are hunting the bush as well as open country, you will need to be able to move through it quietly.

Straight away you can scratch some of the gear that many hunters seem to be carrying these days. Number one to take off the list is the big day pack that looks more like someone is heading away for the weekend. You want something trim but spacious enough to carry your gear and some meat. About 25 litres is right, in my opinion. I often wrap my coat around my waist to make more room for meat if I need it on the way out.

Now I am not anti-gear but when I look at what many people are wearing these days, I shake my head. Many people are hunting every situation and slice of country like they are tahr hunting in the alps. Think about what you really



I like a rifle that is compact, light and functional. And not just for day hunts either

need and what is simply there because it looked cool in an advert. Different country and situations need different gear approaches. You need to find the balance between moving freely through tough country, while being safe. When it comes to everything you use, you only ever need to ask yourself two questions:

1. Will it keep me safe?
2. Will it help me be more successful or will it hinder me more?

I met a guy who was going on a day hunt a while back and he was carrying more gear than I would for three days away! There is no way he was going to manage to get through the bush he was heading for, or do it all day long with that load on board. There is no doubt that less experienced people might need to carry more to be safe, but what I am talking about is the walking sherpa hunters. Think about everything you do and use and run it past the previous two questions. As an example, stuff up high and out in front is quickly found out in the first patch of supplejack. For the open country hunters, things will be different to us bush hobbits. The more gear you carry, the harder it will be on you. Find the balance.

FIREARMS

Right then, this is the bit where the experts roll up their sleeves and wait to pounce on little old me. Sorry, not happening. Like your other gear, your firearm and calibre should reflect what, where and how you will hunt. Too easy. By all means, have an 11-pound 7mm super-duper magnum something-or-other with

the associated huge scope but mark my words, in most parts of NZ, a nice trim 308 or 270 with a 3-9 or compact dial-up scope is a lot nicer to carry all day and will do 99% of what you need. Anywhere!

For me a rifle is more of a killing tool and not the reason I go. I go to explore and have adventures. I want something that won't hinder me more than one that will do anything at any range. If I can't shoot a deer humanely that I see at range, I go and find another one. Or to quote my answer to a 'fully equipped' hunter who asked what I do if the deer is further away— "I walk closer!" Use what is humane, reliable, easy to use and carry and fits you well. And what YOU like. You find out all about your rifle when you have to carry it plus a boned-out deer for five hours. We all have our own version of what the ideal rifle setup is, which is half the fun. Job done!

BOOTS

A quick mention here as boots are what can get you into and out of trouble. Like your rifle, use a makeup that suits where you go. But most importantly, your boots need to be absolutely 100% comfortable. If not, you won't enjoy your hunting at best and it can be downright dangerous at worst.

Right, we will leave it there as I have reached the 'word ceiling'. Till next time, stay safe and get out there. Spring has sprung. Don't waste it!

CHEERS, JOHNNY



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Gallery

WINNER



1 Chris Wilkinson's first chamois buck, just under 9 inches.
Taken with his Sako 85 Finnlight in 300WSM



2 Matty Moore (7) with his best billy goat
shot with Dad's Sako 85 Carbonlight 223



Jackson Didsbury with a nice Fallow
buck taken with a Tikka T3x 308

3

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4

Bradley Robb with a Sika hybrid 8 pointer. Grateful to
get on the board before C19 cancelled the roar. Taken
with my Greg Duley built 7mm RM Superpig Tikka T3

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5

John Gaudion long range goat culling in Central Otago with his Tikka T3x Aspire in 6.5 Creedmoor using Sako Gamehead Pro ammunition



7

Brooke Keen and her first Red stag shot with Dad's Tikka T3 308 Bush Pig



8

Midge van Boxtel with an Otago Fallow buck shot using a Tikka T3 270



6

Archie Riddell's pre isolation yearling nailed at 300 yards, Tikka 7mm Rem Mag



9

Aaron Dixon's chamois buck from Arthur's Pass. 93/4 inches and shot with a Tikka T3 in 7mm-08

PRONGHORN

OF WYOMING'S HIGH PLAINS

WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE



The area we hunted was mainly rolling country covered in grass and knee-high sagebrush, a very fragrant plant



Pronghorn are a spectacularly unique species

Sam and I saved up for a year after our wedding as we had a big honeymoon planned. We wanted to spend a whole month touring the western USA, and that's exactly what we did

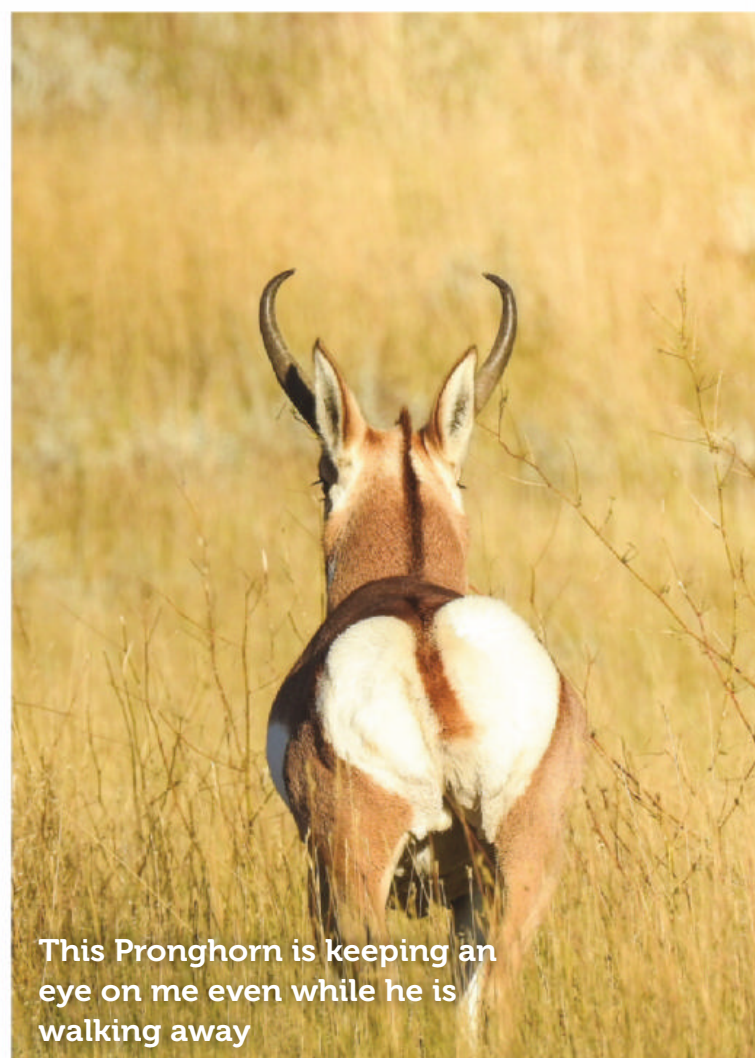
It was fantastic, we got within metres of bugling bull Wapiti, saw moose at a dozen yards, laid eyes on Grizzly bears and got a 10,000km taste of what the American landscape has to offer. I wasn't travelling all the way around the world and not going hunting somehow though!

We didn't have the time to do a full on backcountry trip, I was calling this trip a scouting exercise, but we would have time to try something completely new and chase some Pronghorn around the plains.

Pronghorn are a taxonomically unique

species, commonly referred to as an antelope. In ancient times there were five species of high plains antelope but Pronghorn are the only ones left. They're a funny looking animal that rely on incredible speed and eyesight. Few predators can get close undetected given they literally have eyes in the back of their heads, and the ones that do get close can't keep up when they take off. Their powerful hindquarters will push them along at 60 mile and hour (yes that's 100ks!) So it's not uncommon to have one keeping pace with you as you cruise along the freeways.

It's not predation that regulate Pronghorn numbers, it's winters. Central USA has brutal winters, they have cold and deep



This Pronghorn is keeping an eye on me even while he is walking away

snow unlike anything we see in New Zealand and the severity of those winters determines how many Pronghorn survive. When we visited there hadn't been a bad winter for a long time, and it



The central valley of the ranch we hunted with Kory Study

showed in the thousands of pronghorn! Setting management numbers is difficult because of that, if there's a lot and they issue heaps of tags and then a hard winter follows they could decimate the herd. I wouldn't like to be a wildlife biologist for Pronghorn, it's a constant gamble on the weather. **The highest concentration seems to be the line from Cheyenne north through Douglas to Gillette,** unfortunately from an aesthetics point of view this is the heart of the oil, gas and coal country. Lower populations can have better bucks though, and some areas are open public access while others are draw only. The American tag system takes a lot of getting your head around, so I won't go in to depth here but Pronghorn tags are some of the cheapest available at around \$550 NZD for all the relevant tags and stamps.

Our honeymoon started in LA and we snaked our way through California, Nevada, Utah and Colorado in 'Becky' the Chevy van. Even though I'd been straining my eyes for them it wasn't until just before the Wyoming border that we saw our first Pronghorn.

Between there and Douglas we saw a couple hundred more, there didn't appear to be any shortage this year! We camped that night at KOA campground in

Douglas so we could freshen up and not turn up looking like a couple of travelling hippies. KOA is an American chain kind of like our Top Ten and they're good value, \$27 (USD) for a campsite with electricity, including access to showers, wifi and coin operated laundry

We met our hosts Keith Metz and Kory Study at Kory's place in Gillette. Keith is a guide for Table Mountain Outfitters and Kory is the county trapper, employed by the state to trap problem animals, namely Coyotes, and manage nuisance wildlife like Mountain Lions around people. Over September/October though everyone is hunting mad (northern hemisphere remember, so that's their autumn/rut) and the countryside is crawling with hunters so he hangs up the traps and does a bit of guiding as well under his own business, 7-7 Outdoors.

Keith wasn't staying, just came to say hello and meet us strange Kiwis who flew across the world to cram themselves in a van and drive all day for 28 days! After he left we grabbed our gear and jumped in Kory's Tundra, no mucking around, straight in to it! Not after having a couple shots with Kory's Blaser though (a 6mm XC topped with a Leopold) to check I could still shoot.

I couldn't help but notice the AR15 tucked

in the passenger seat either - the coyote gun. Keith had one as well and it sounded like almost everyone did! Kory also has a pistol tucked down his side. Welcome to America baby. It makes more sense when I delve into the Coyote situation next issue though.

We didn't have go far, the 12,000 acre ranch began on the edge of town and we saw Pronghorn before we'd even left Kory's gate. The ranch had hay paddocks down low and we didn't even bother to look in there but it was filled with antelope. As we got over the back we bumped more and more and Kory would slow down to evaluate them.

They are hard case animals, it was still the rut so the does would be alert and moving and often the buck would just stand there looking at us for a long time then race off to catch his does.

There were a lot of animals around as we discussed earlier, but I think in general they're a very populous species. The area we were hunting in was not renowned for big bucks, probably the equivalent of hunting the Tararua's in the north. You'd be guaranteed some rutting action but if you wanted a big boy and a more wild experience you'd be better putting the miles in an area like the Main Divide Canterbury country, in this case the Red



Some alert Mule Deer check out those ears!



A badger, a low, powerfully built creature

Desert was talked about with the same aura of expectation. But, Sam and I had left our prep late, the hunting was only a couple days out of the whole trip so I was over the moon to be hunting at all, so a big thanks to Keith for putting us in touch with Kory and arranging it all, the power of social media!

We continued looking over animals, always driving as these antelope had become somewhat inured to driving traffic with all the mining activity in the area. As soon as they see a human shape they know it's out of place and bolt. With all of these antelope around a couple mobs speeding away from us would soon pick the others up and empty the valley. And man can they bolt, I've said it before but I'll say it again, they are incredibly fast!

They're quite funny in that they'd just run for fun, they had no trot, if they want to go somewhere they just start loping off in a very similar fashion to a dogs canter. One would be left behind by its friends and instead of the trot you expect from deer it launches into an easy long-strided, ground-eating run, just to make up 20 yards. Being a couple days into rifle season, following a month of archery, combined with the rut meant the animals were very transient. You'd see a buck one day and the next he'd be gone. So we'd have to make a

good play on one if we did see a shooter. There were a couple mule deer in the distance grazing near an old windmill so we looped around toward them. **There was a large group of pronghorn does and one buck there as well but he wasn't quite in the class we were looking for.** He had decent horns but they lacked strong cutters and curl. Similar to chamois the curl is very important in getting a few extra inches. But where they depart is that you have to consider cutter length as well as mass if you're interested in score.

Being later in the rut bucks were coming and going all the time. We were fortunate to be hunting such a highly populated valley, but it was hard to keep track of what we'd glassed and what we hadn't given they cover so much ground so quickly. After evaluating quite a few more animals and pushing a mob of does up I noticed a group of bucks get up out of the sage and quickly angle away. One in particular stood out, he had vastly more hook than anything we'd seen. He was well educated and showed the darker face and ever so slightly heavier body of a more mature animal, as I'm told anyway. The brutal winters, eagles, Coyotes and vehicle traffic mean these animals don't often get to a great age, but luckily like

Sika they can show a lot of their potential by the time they are 4-5.

This buck was definitely something different to everything else we'd seen so we decided to back out and race around to try cut off their escape and get another look at him. Kory gunned the Toyota (A v8 Tundra, of course) back around the ridge and we soon saw the younger bucks cutting across, already in front of us. We watched them but couldn't see the big buck. Typically, he was far more intelligent and recognised ours wasn't a regular oil and gas vehicle cruising along so he stayed down in the valley. In true American truck hunting style Kory got the window adaptor out and set the spotter on the drivers window while I checked him out with the camera. **I liked the look of it so suggested we make a stalk.** I made to open the door and cut the distance on foot but Kory said **'you're welcome to, but I wouldn't relish the odds.'** And if I stuffed it up I'd blow him out of the county once he saw my human shape. When in Rome...

Later in the trip we headed east to South Dakota, crossing Thunder Basin's beautiful landscape we saw fewer pronghorn. On the public land we saw plenty of parked vehicles, orange in the fields and people glassing. Kory's advice rang out as we observed a few blown stalks with people



Our cagey buck atop a nearby 'butte'



Note the translucent tips and the unusual rotation of his right horn

standing hand on hips with a mob of Pronghorn very quickly receding into the distance!

Our buck was already backing up the ridge so we took off to circle again. After another quick bash around we crested the ridge to find him already making his way up the opposite side, this wasn't his first rodeo. We reversed back over the horizon and angled around the ridge. We came up on him too quickly next time, just by the windmill, and I thought we'd blown it but Kory coasted it down behind the windmill to break our outline.

To our surprise he angled back towards us! What on earth? We grabbed the gun and frantically got set. Only then we noticed the dozen does off to our left only 250 yards away! The rut is a magical thing, he'd caught their scent and forgotten all about us and was trotting straight toward a hot doe. Unfortunately he wove in and out of the mob and I couldn't get a clear shot, it was hard keeping track of his body amongst all the others. Eventually he turned back and paused briefly with his vitals clear and I squeezed away a good

shot on Kory's Blaser. He ran 30 yards and tipped into the fragrant sage.

It certainly wasn't the most strenuous hunt I've had, but I'll always remember it with the completely alien animals and landscape, all those beautiful muted shades of brown and tan. It was fascinating watching the behavior of the Pronghorn, and in less populated areas I could see that they'd be very challenging animals to hunt, and archery would be a whole other level. **Particularly with the low maturity, you'd walk a lot of miles to find a good one with the ratios of immature to mature bucks I'd seen.**

It actually took us a minute to find him in the knee high Sage brush. When we did he was a delight to look at, just so absolutely different. Scientifically they are neither deer nor antelope. They grow keratin horns on a bone sheath, but shed them every year! Their face is prehistoric, and the horns outlandish. This one particularly so as one horn turned in almost 90 degrees to the other, an

uncommon deformation. The 'ivory' tips are actually clear, and illuminate if you look at them with the sun behind. The body size is similar to a Fallow buck, but surprisingly light when I picked him up. You have to take care shifting them if you want a headskin as the bristly, hollow fur slips very easily.

We took a couple photos as he lay but there wasn't much backdrop to really get a feel for Wyoming's high plains so we threw him on the Ute and whipped up the top of the butte - Western vernacular for a flat-topped hill, and no it's not pronounced butt, I found that out in Colorado when the coffee lady laughed!

You could see all the way across the plains to the west where the famed Bighorn mountains lurked below the horizon. To the east, out of sight in the dusty haze, lay the beautiful Black Hills of South Dakota. In between both were miles and miles of dry rolling grassy plains interspersed by strange features like buttes, cuts, draws and washes.

Sam and I savoured the moment. Breathing the dust, the fragrant sage and the unfamiliar smell of a rutted Pronghorn buck. Looking around there wasn't a tree in sight, just burnt hues of golden and green grass, pale sage and dusty earth fading into a very distant horizon



A chunky buck from another area. The does are smaller and don't sport horns but retain the elegant markings

crisscrossed by blood red 4wd tracks cut in to the clay. Above, the moon looked enormous with nothing to intrude on its space, no mountains lancing skyward or towering rimu and matai crowding in.

It was a delightful experience both in its own intrinsic way but also for how different it was. Here we were, a couple of twenty-somethings on the other side of the world hunting this spectacular creature. **So much was familiar - hunting is hunting to a large degree, and the great people of the West shared a lot with rural kiwis - but so much was unfamiliar as well.** You had to keep an eye out for rattlers, heard Coyotes howl at night, the air smelled and felt different - and everyone drives on the wrong side of the road!

I was sure we were going to crest the next hill and find a dozen better bucks but in all my travels in the next few weeks I never saw one like him. **We contemplated hunting a doe for Sam, the tags are even cheaper and readily available,** but we were travelling in a van for the next few weeks and one Pronghorn would keep us well fed. Sam won't kill it unless we're going to eat it, which I respect a lot. The next few days were spent Coyote hunting and enjoying the Study hospitality, but that's a whole new story. Next issue maybe.

We'll be back to hunt Wyoming on foot, to really experience that western backcountry, watching the sun rise and set with bugles and howls in the dusk.







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AGE THE Bull

This is the 29th 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

This one is hard to tell with him lying down or being hidden by vegetation but there are a few angles to work with. This bull looks pretty mature to me. He has clearly participated vigorously in the rut and lost a lot of condition. His kidneys are hollowed out, his spine is visible and his coat looks to have lost that filled out, early autumn 'shine' so many bulls come out of summer with. Combining features like his thick neck with a heavy mane; the solid shoulder hump which sticks well up; the obvious saddle in is back; and his low pedicles, it all points to a bit of age. My guess is that, at well over 40 inches with good tops (despite missing his bez tines), this character Fiordland bull has reached about the 8 year old age class.

>Roy

Right, a very popular bull, I am sure we have seen him before. He's starting to grow into a respectable boy and with the luck of covid-19 he will be still running around in Fiordland today. I only wish I can remember what I aged him at last time! But he's getting close to maturing and one's got to think that he will peak in the next two years.

If this is the bull we have aged a couple times before it is a refreshing story, not only is this bull maturing but are kiwi hunters also starting to mature and leave these type of animals to grow. It's going to be a hell of an interesting bugle in 2021. One, because of the covid-19, but more so on how brilliant the winter has been. It's the end of August and we have just completed our mince project and removed the remaining of our yearly totals. Never in the history of FWF managing this herd have we been able to conduct recovery in July and August due to snow in the area. Animals are still up very high, and most of the big boys have dropped their antlers now. Is 2021 going to be the dream season?!

>Jere

A fairly standard looking bull for Fiordland this one, and showing the signs of a busy rut. His lack of condition ages him but closer inspection reveals possibly some pedicle height which for me winds the clock back a bit. As far as his antlers go he is lacking the bey tines which is not unusual for younger Fiordland deer and in my deer farming world goes somewhat hand in hand with lack

of quality feed post rut and a genetic propensity for weak bottom gear. He is narrow but has nice tops development. This is a hard one to age from the photos but to beat that same old drum he's not for the wall yet so take some pics and keep looking for your dream bull.

I was yarning to a couple of good keen men on the ferry yesterday, one of whom is a hunting guide in Canada. If I'd been sharp enough I would have put him on the spot. Maybe next time I'll get Jim to give us his opinion along with a perspective on hunting in North America.

Applications for the ballot are open. Fingers are crossed and it's time to lose those covid kilos!

>Greg

Thanks to Hamish and Pete Gannon's perseverance in Fiordland, we have the same bull to evaluate 3 years in a row! Of course I didn't tell the guys this, but Roy thought he looked familiar. He's definitely a little harder to age in the pics this time, but you can see he has some age on him. So as 2 years ago we aged him at 5 ½, and 6 ½ last year, this year he must be 7 ½, and I think that's probably about right.



THE WINNER

OF OUR READERS GUESSES AND THE
STONE CREEK PRIZE FOR ISSUE 78 IS:

NO ONE!

We have no winner this time, no-one
got close enough! The pics of this bull
this year weren't easy. Most people had
him younger than we think he is.



**STONE
CREEK**



REMEMBER

All you have to do is email your answer
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FOR THE NEXT ISSUE...

We have a series of pics taken
by Ben Nielson-Vold

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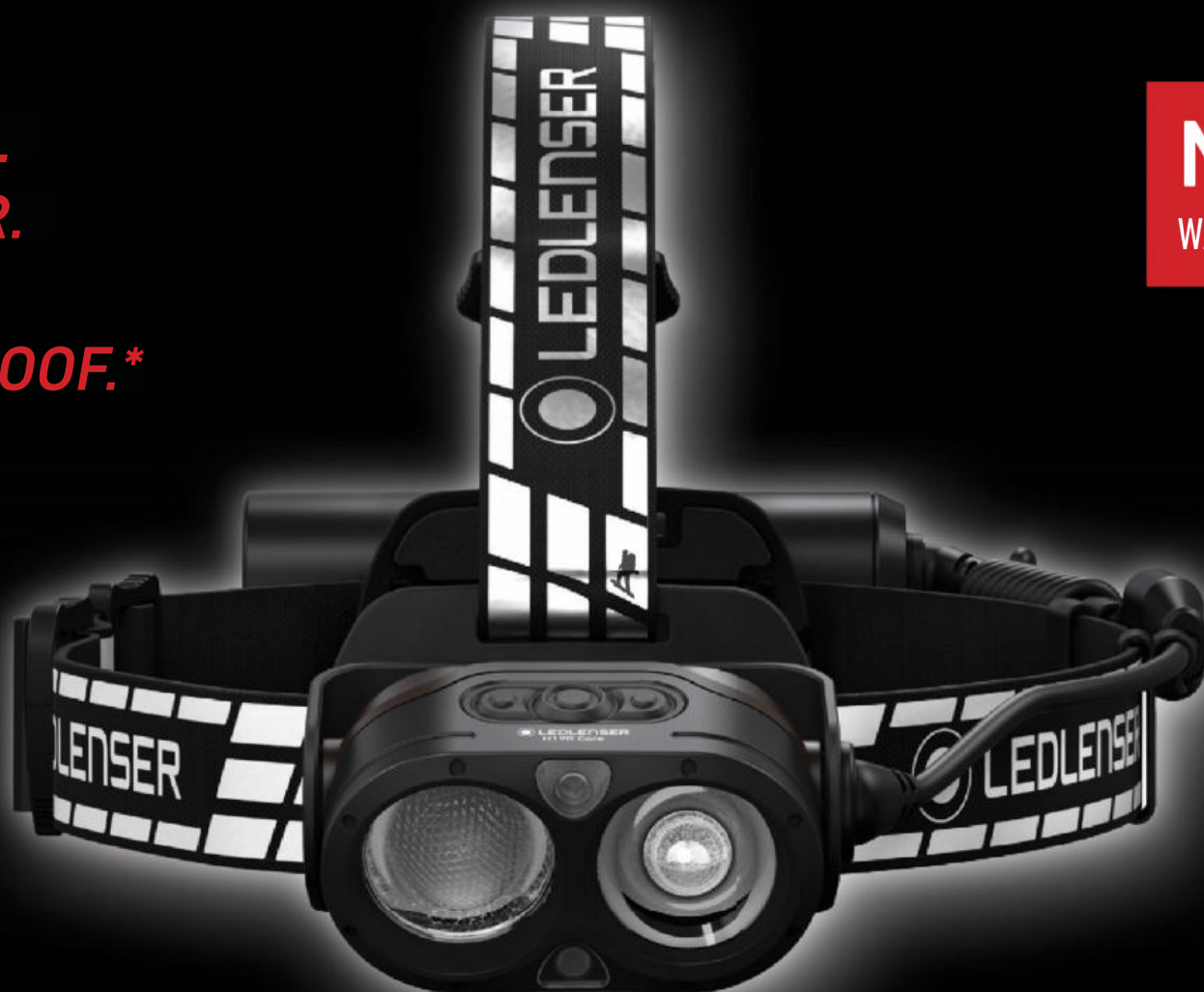
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WRITTEN BY ~ MICHAEL MCCORMACK | @CHASEANDGATHER

RECOVERY STRATEGIES FOR THE HUNTER

We have all experienced sore muscles and tired bodies after arduous and long days on the hill

Having the right recovery strategies can help us to hunt stronger for longer, recover faster and get ready for the next mission.

If our training simulates what we will be doing on 'game day' our body becomes 'conditioned' or familiar with those movements. Doing this preparation before we venture out is 'money in the bank'. Enhancing recovery times is not just about strategies we can put in place DURING or AFTER a hunt, but also how we prepare BEFORE the hunt.

Something as simple as hydrating and fuelling the body on your way to your hunting block can be a great easy win first up. Let's look at what we can do during

and after the hunt to recover faster.

FACTORS DURING THE HUNT

Carrying heavy loads over variable bush terrain is sure to take a real toll on the body. Slow down your commuting pace and be realistic, schedule frequent breaks to reduce the intensity and overload on muscles – **it is not a race.**

Spending time on the topo map planning a route of travel or your intended hunting

areas can massively reduce excessive physical exertion – planning the best tracks/campsite locations. Could the trip be broken up into 'legs' where you camp, hunt, and commute and so on making your way through an area rather than an all-out slog first up?

To reduce pack weight, get a list of essentials and then build the pack contents around that. Experience over time will help you thin out the non-essentials. Does your pack fit you properly? If it doesn't, you are most likely going to burn out certain muscle groups if you aren't distributing the load properly.

Avoid heavy exertion during the hottest times of the day if you can, or change your hunting style for that time frame. Bone out an animal for a long carry out or if you are closer to camp, let it hang and collect it the next day if you are already

exhausted. All of these strategies above will help you to avoid burnout and allow for a quicker recovery for the next day.

RESPECT YOUR SLEEP

Quality sleep will help your performance on the hill AND support your recovery afterwards.

The importance of sleep is often not respected enough. Not only can our energy levels suffer but our decision-making and our concentration too.

Strategies for improving sleep quality to aid recovery times can include:

- **sleeping surface/soft mat and pillow/level slope/keep dry**
- **right 'cabin' sleeping temperature/clothing layering/quality sleeping bag and liner**
- **noise reduction/earplugs/beanie over the ears**
- **have an afternoon nap if you need to**
- **getting enough hours of sleep (aim for 8+ hours)**
- **alcohol/caffeine (stimulant) considerations at bedtime**
- **brush your teeth - this routine cue prepares the body for sleep.**

HYDRATION/DEHYDRATION

Hunting is demanding. We are often constantly moving, carrying a backpack or rifle and of course losing fluid through sweating, expiration and toileting etc. If your body is dehydrated, your blood flow circulation to muscles and organs becomes limited, meaning your muscles miss out on getting the right volume of recovery nutrients they need. The muscles can also cramp up.

Strategies to reduce the risk of dehydration and improve recovery:

- **Drinking little and often is the most effective way to hydrate.**
- **Wear breathable clothing layers for commuting/high exertion activity.**
- **Plan to have your campsite within a short walking distance of water if possible.**
- **Make a habit of having a quick drink when you come across a water source (water filtration bottles help).**
- **Include some amino acid and electrolyte powders in your day pack.**
- **Hydrate at the very start of the day (aim for at least 300ml) and again at the very end of the day.**



NUTRITION CARBOHYDRATES:

Carbohydrates are sugars and starches that fuel our bodies. Each gram of carbohydrate contains around 4 calories (or 17Kj) worth of energy. Our body stores carbohydrates as glycogen in both our muscles and liver to use throughout the day during activity.

'Hitting the wall' is often experienced if the body has depleted its glycogen stores. Replenishing carbohydrate levels throughout the day is essential for the active hunter. Things like porridge, multi-grain bread, mixed muesli, nut butters, beans, wholemeal crackers, pasta or wraps, rice (brown is best, but takes way longer to cook) or vegetables are all great 'slow release' carbohydrate choices. Having these slow release carbohydrates on board will also help with your recovery and muscle glycogen repletion overnight and ensure that you have some fuel in the tank for another early start. For convenience and more of a 'pick up' towards the end of the day, energy-dense muesli bars, protein bars, fruit, fruit sticks or scroggin etc are ideal choices.

PROTEIN:

Protein is a source of energy but its main role in the body is growth and repair. Our body uses protein to build and repair tissues, bones, muscles, cartilage, skin, and our blood. Try to include protein in each of your meals throughout the day. If your style of hunting is 'active' then aim for an intake of at least 5 grams of protein per hour of hunting. If your hunting style is less active then you won't need quite the same amount of energy intake. If you take medication while hunting you should also consider meal timing and have a good supply of barley sugars, lollies or sugar energy gels in your first aid kit to spike glucose levels if you need a hit in a hurry.

Protein is found in both animal and plant foods:

Animal sources: meat, fish, chicken, eggs, milk, cheese and yoghurt.

Plant sources: soy protein (such as soy beans, tofu and soy milk) grains (quinoa, oats, barley, etc) nuts and pulses (dried beans, peas and lentils).

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Hamstrings, lower back and groin stretch



Short calf (soleus) stretch (front calf being stretched here - bent knee, heel down)



Hip flexor/oblique/lats

OILS/FATS:

The extra energy comes through from fats or oils in snacks such as salami, jerky, snack bars, scroggin, nuts and seeds.

MEAL PLANNING

To map out the day I try to have around 15 grams of protein at breakfast (which is often mid-morning) the same amount at lunch and then again at dinner. That way I have 45-60 grams of my protein ticked off for the day. The rest I can make up with snacks/powders. For an 'active' full day of hunting, I would have around 120 grams of protein.

I am not a calorie counter but my intake split would be roughly around 50% carbohydrates, 20% protein and 30% fats and somewhere around 3,500 calories for a very 'active' day. An easier way to visualise that is for every meal you have, half the plate would be carbohydrates, a quarter of the plate would be protein and a quarter of the plate would be fats/oils.

AT THE END OF THE DAY

If it has been a punishing day, often we will just pack the gear away, get a brew on and start prepping some dinner. If you have a bit of remaining energy, a gentle stretch will be super-helpful for how your body will feel the next day. Key muscle groups to stretch would be the hip flexors, calf muscles, lower and middle back and the hips/glutes. I also take a tennis ball on my hunting trips to use for rolling on my legs to break up any tender muscles. Five minutes spent 'loosening up' before you hit the sack is five minutes very well spent! The end of the day can be a good time to have another electrolyte solution or a protein powder to maximise the 'recovery window' while sleeping.

The same stretching routine can be done again the next morning if you are up for it. Just take it a bit more gradually as the muscles might have some residual tension.

THE DAYS AFTER THE HUNT

Movement is king. 'Active recovery'

is low-intensity exercise completed after a physically demanding event.

As strange as it may seem, the best way to recover from a taxing hunting trip is to exercise at a lower intensity rather than remaining still. Active recovery could include a low-key walk, bike ride, pool session, or something that moves you without taxing any specific muscle group. The focus should be on recovery rather than performance. Active recovery might also include massage or stretching to improve the range of motion of joints. Self-myofascial release (SMR) using foam rollers and other tools, is also an ideal way to massage inflamed and overtaxed muscles.

I have a 'how to' video on the Chase and Gather YouTube channel using the foam roller on the legs, lower back and hips. Good sleep, frequent hydration and regular movement and mobility exercises will support a quick recovery. **The strategies mentioned in the article become even more important as we age but you tend to learn a few of your own shortcuts along the way as you go!**

Michael McCormack (B.PhEd)



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Pic two for above stretch, shows second stage of side to side rotation



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My Tararua Hunting Trip

WRITTEN BY ~ JOSH WIGGINS

It was the day after New Year when I received a phone call from my mate Wilson who was keen to go on a hunting trip

He mentioned going up to a farm out of Whanganui where we used to hunt regularly when we were younger but the weather wasn't looking flash for that.

After a few ideas floating around in my head, I finally hatched a plan and gave him a call back. The plan was to walk into a spot in the Tararua Ranges for an overnighter where I had seen a few deer in the past. It would be my first hunting trip I had organised on my own. I could finally put my firearms licence to work and I was confident that I could bring something home to fill a small gap in the freezer. I checked the weather and it mentioned a bit of

rain overnight but it didn't actually come until after the trip so that was a relief. I packed my pack, got the 300WSM all sorted and then I was ready to head in the next day.

I had a few errands to run before we set off on our mission but after that I picked up my mate and we headed off. We got to the car park and loaded up ready to walk in and find a camp for the night close to where I had seen these deer on a previous trip.

At about 2.30pm we found a nice flat spot just off the main track to pitch the MSR tent that would be our accommodation for the night. After setting up camp we had a bit of a late lunch and a quick rest but there was still plenty of daylight, so we headed down the hill towards the river.

On the way down I came across a perfect vantage point where we could sit tight and watch the two slips where I had seen deer before. We sat down for about ten minutes and my mate spotted a hind and soon after that, a yearling. I wasn't able to take a shot as the sun was beaming right down on us and glaring up the scope, making



The slips from our lookout point

it difficult to see. **We continued to sit there and watch the deer feed their way across the slip before disappearing into the bush out of sight.** It was only 5.30pm at this point

at about 260 yards and dialled in the scope on the 300WSM. I managed to find a good rest eventually on the sloping ground and fired a shot. As the hind dropped, another one higher up ran

and I had faith that we would see something else walk out onto the slip.

After a good 2½ hours of watching the slip and having some rather close encounters with goats that walked in on us, we had seen nothing more and the light was fading behind the hill. **Just as we both got up for a stretch and were about to head off back to camp, Wilson spotted something red on the slip** so I put the binoculars up and sure enough, it was nice hind that had obviously been out of sight when we were sitting down.

I ranged the animal

across the slip – it was good to see the deer numbers in the area. **I was relieved that everything Dad had taught me over the years had finally paid off.** He always said to wait for as long as you can and just take your time. We headed down the hill across the river and up to the hind, where it had rolled down into a side creek. It was well dead, shot right through the front shoulder. I was thrilled to have gotten my first deer on the first hunt that I had planned on my own.

After some quick photos, I started gutting the animal and we heard about five gun shots further up the valley. We had no clue about what could be happening but we had to move quickly or we would be heading back to camp wearing head torches. When we got back to camp, I hung the deer up in a tree to be broken down in the morning and we had some dinner, then set off to bed after a good evening's hunt.

We woke to a bit of cloud the next day and my first job was to butcher the deer. I started off skinning it while it was hanging by the neck (it's a lot easier to do that way) and then took the back steaks, inside steaks, three of the legs and the neck. Having watched Dad do this often over the years, I'd soon picked it up but it's all about the practice and getting in there and just doing your best. The people who hunt in my family don't like



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to waste any meat, so I wanted to take home as much as I could fit in my pack.

After butchering up the animal we had a quick breakfast and packed up camp, then set off out of the valley. We arrived back at the car park with our heavy packs full of meat and headed home. I called Dad on the way and told him to put the fridge on down in the garage and straight away he knew I had gotten something.

When I got home I put the meat in the fridge to chill for a week or so before Dad got around to processing it. He seemed very proud that I had bagged something by myself. It was an easy trip but it's all about getting out there and learning new areas. All in all, it was a great first independent hunt with my mate and I encourage all young people who are keen on hunting to just get out and have a go. You may not have luck on your side

Camp for the night



or know an area too well and you may struggle to bag your first animal on your own but keep trying! **Most importantly though, stay safe and be prepared for any type of weather that could occur. Happy hunting.**



My first public land deer on my own trip



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STORIES FROM OUR KIDS

*By
Kieran
Young*

I have been fortunate enough to take my three youngsters hunting on friends' farms that back on to the Kawekas, Ureweras, Ruahines and in bush blocks on farms

These are such great places to begin teaching kids to hunt and fish and share the skills required to put meat on the table. I believe hunting and fishing has taught my children patience in life and respect for the outdoors.

Mistakes were made before we got meat on the ground. Weather conditions were a major factor, ranging from being caught out in fog, in heavy rain, and in near-snow conditions to getting the wind in the wrong direction and blowing our cover.

However things changed when I missed a good stag. Three very disappointed kids gave me an earful all the way home, even saying that they could do better. **This initiated a gear upgrade, which included a new suppressed Tikka 7mm-08 with a Leupold VX 3 dial-up scope, a bipod, a range finder and good set of binoculars.** Setting up a rifle that the kids were happy to shoot and not be scared of was a biggie. We were set.

Because I work on a farm it wasn't hard to set up our own range gongs out to 400 yards. It didn't take the kids long to master the new setup and they all hit the gong time and time again.

Since all three kids seemed keen to get out and hunt, it was a good chance for a family outing together, a chance to get them away from their devices and get their hands dirty out in the fresh air. When our trip was axed due to Covid 19, the wait was on. Once level three kicked in with hunting on private land allowed, we planned some new trips.

Our first outing together, with the intention of giving one of the kids the chance to pull the trigger, was on a friend's farm at Tutira in the Hawkes Bay. After a bit of a walk to get into hunting country, we spotted a few Fallow deer. The range finder showed 400 yards and with the wind in our favour, we were able to close the gap to 220 yards. So who was to go first? Cain, the eldest at 14, set up the rifle on the bipod. The scope was dialled up and then we sat and waited for a good broadside shot. A nice yearling moved out of the scrub in a side-on position. Cain, waiting patiently, closed the bolt and I waited to see the result. **One shot and down it went and we had a very happy young hunter who was totally hooked.**

Because this happened so early in our hunt we decided to push on, hoping to find a deer for our daughter Jade (12). An hour or so later, we managed to glass a Red spiker. Ranging the animal at 300 yards and with no way of closing the gap, we made the decision to try from where we were. Finding a good rest, getting set up and dialling in the range, Jade was ready and waiting for a good broadside shot. It didn't take long, but the wind was picking up. Jade closed the bolt, found the animal in the

scope and pulled the trigger. It was a hit but a bit far back, as I hadn't allowed enough for the wind. Jade reloaded and the spiker went down at the second shot.

It wasn't until three weeks later that Liam (9) got his chance. We had planned a weekend away at a friend's farm which backed on to the Ureweras that had a hut where we planned to stay. On the first day we were up early and headed off with a big day planned. An hour or two passed before we found a likely spot to glass from. We were in luck, seeing a Red hind and a yearling, ranged at 500 yards away. The wind was average and moving all round but we moved slowly to close the gap to 330 yards. The hind kept looking up and I was sure she knew something was up so I decided to get Liam to take a shot from there.

Getting the rifle set up on a fallen tree was our first option. **However Liam, the smallest of our team, wasn't happy as he couldn't keep the rifle still so we crawled forward a few metres.** Lying down, we re-ranged the deer at 320 yards and Liam was now comfortable and happy to take the shot. Once he found the hind in the scope, I closed the bolt. We waited for what seemed like an eternity for the best broadside shot, but in reality it would have been only minutes. Liam squeezed the trigger and down she went. He was quick to try and take a shot at the yearling as well but alas it was a near miss so we walked on to find the kill. Once we found the hind, Liam was a

very happy boy. He'd shot his first deer on his 9th birthday – and the obsession had started.

I am a very proud dad with all three of our children getting their first deer within three weeks. It was a richly rewarding experience watching them take an animal each, but it took preparation and patience as we had to set up to take these animals at greater distances than I would have liked. With a hunting party of four, it's hard to get close so the key has been to give them heaps of practice beforehand and then find a good rest, get them set up for the shot that gives them the best chance, and not rush them.

Cain, Jade and Liam now all have the bug and they are totally hooked. Going to hunting and fishing stores, reading magazines and staying up late to watch NZ Hunter all fuel their

obsession. It didn't take long for the nagging to start – when and where are we going next – and they all took a second animal over the next month. Cain shot a Red spiker from 300 yards. Jade shot a 100lb pig at 100 yards and her second deer was a 10 point Red stag. The highlight for me however was Liam's next turn. **He took an 8 point Sika stag from 230 yards with one shot.** He was a very happy boy. It's not a biggie, but in his eyes it's a trophy to go on his wall. I'm still not sure who was the most excited – him or me.

It's hard to believe all three kids have this healthy addiction, although I feel my role has changed dramatically to taxi driver, tour guide, packhorse and butcher. All these tasks are made enjoyable by seeing the enjoyment they get from not only the hunting, but also the outdoors.

We have started saving our pennies to fund our next family adventure – a trip by helicopter to one of the huts in the Kawekas. Liam has started his own wish list, at the top of which is a Himalayan tahr hunt. Hopefully one day he will get the opportunity if the current tahr management issue can be solved.

What a great investment it has been spending a little extra and getting quality gear. Thanks to Jeremy Hanaray at Rivers to Ranges in Hastings for setting up our rifle for long range shooting. **And a special thanks to those who let us on to their land.** Granddad says he's proud of his grandchildren and the way they have learnt to respect and enjoy the outdoors. And as one proud dad, I hope they will be an inspiration to other budding young hunters.



Cain and his first deer, and the first for the three kids



Jade with her first deer, shot on the same day as Cain's



Liam with his first, taken three weeks later than the other two.

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Braidyn Christison

Early one morning I woke up to excitement and joy because I was going have a crack at my first deer

We loaded up the D-Max and headed for Pop's place to grab his gear and enough food to feed an army.

. Leica the dog was excited as well, maybe even a bit more than me. Soon enough we got loaded up and headed off to meet Pete and Hughsey in Otane. We got to Pete's house where we sussed out our plan and headed for the Wairarapa.

It was a nice clear afternoon as we loaded up the bikes and headed for the hut. We soon got there and unloaded the mountain of gear on the bike into the cramped hut. **I kicked Hughsey out into his tent as there were only four bunks, but he whinged so much, I gave the poor little fella my mattress.**

The old fellas had a few beers and I sat in my chair having a coke and waiting for that magic hour so we could head off to spot some deer and listen for roars.

We were watching ten pigs and a couple of deer but the deer were very quiet and there were no roars so we walked back to the hut where Pete and Pop were having a rum. I sat in my little chair next to the fire and listened to the old men's stories. **Eventually I got tired and dozed off and I soon fell asleep with no dinner to fill me up.**

The next day I woke up to another exciting day and had my usual milo. As the day went on I tried to entertain myself by going up the track and looking at some faces and throwing boulders down the hill, because since the weather was calm, Dad, Pop and Hughsey were putting a new roof on the hut. I did that for about an hour and then I helped Hughsey on the chimney. When Pop and Dad were doing the tin on the roof, it was really fun putting in some screws with Hughsey.

After that we got off the roof. It was about 2.30pm so we got ready to go for an afternoon hunt. It started to drizzle a bit and by the time we had got

to the scrub, it was peeing down with rain so we made our way back to the four wheeler in the rain with soaked hiking boots and soaked legs. Dripping with water, we soon got into the hut and started to lay out our wet stuff next to the fire and put some dry clothing on. That night was full of stories and a yummy dinner with a coke. Then it was bedtime so I jumped into my sleeping bag and crashed to sleep.

The next day we woke up to a clear day except for a few clouds. I started to throw boulders down the hill and with a huge effort I tried to carry them back and forth up the hill to where I'd thrown them from. Soon it started to get into the afternoon so I went back down the track to the hut, where we sussed out our plan of attack for the evening hunt.

We jumped on the motorbike and made our way to the pines. We soon got there and parked the bike next to the fence leading into the pines. The trees we were going into were very scrubby and there was sign all over the place. **Just as we walked in there I knew that we were onto something so we quickly made**



our way around the track and came to a halt. We sat there and gave a couple of roars but nothing answered back.

Soon enough though we heard a roar in the distance and it sounded like an old Red stag. Dad and Pop gave a roar back

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and the stag followed after us with roars but it must have cut our wind, so it was suddenly silent again. We headed further up the track and that's when we were in the deer's territory so we quietly made our way up a teensy bit more.

We stopped next to a swamp and gave a moan. A stag answered back with a low moan – we were definitely in stag territory now. We crept down the ridge to find a vantage point, hoping to get the stag to pop his head out but before we could go over the ridge, we bumped into him. It was just on dark and it was hard to see how big he was. Laying across a rotten log, I looked through the scope of my great pop's 7mm Ruger but I kept losing sight of him. Then I got the crosshairs on him and man, he was a cracker of a stag.

He was looking straight at us from 20 metres so we hid behind a log, crouching down. The stag was still looking right at us and Dad kept on saying **"Shoot it!"**

I was trying to aim behind the shoulder because that's where I was taught to shoot deer and other big game animals. I finally shot it just above that, almost breaking its back. It took off around the face so we let Leica track it. She soon found it dead in the scrub about 100 metres away. We skied down the face to

where the stag lay and I couldn't believe my eyes – I had just shot an 11 point stag for my first deer.

After a few yahoos and handshakes we took some pictures. **We cut the back steaks and legs off the deer and loaded Dad and Pop up with meat.** I carried the head out in the torch light – man those Led Lenser head torches are awesome. By the time we got back to the bike it was 10pm and we loaded it with the mountain of meat we'd cut off the horse-sized stag.

We rode back to the hut where Pete and Hughsey were having a beer and they were rapt about my stag after we showed them the footage of me shooting it. That night was full of beer and rum and coke for the oldies and ginger beer for me as well as some cool stories.

The next morning we woke up to hail, thunder and lightning, so we decided to head out and go home. That turned out to be really hard because the river was too high for the bike so we sussed out another plan and got the bikes loaded up, chucked our wet weather gear on and gapped it for the utes. The

Braidyn and Pop with their stag



ride out was really cool as we crossed the flooded rivers in the rain and thunder. We soon got to the utes and I took off my Stoney Creek jacket. It was the best jacket ever – I was as dry as a bone. **We loaded up the utes and headed for home.**



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Conservation Week 2020

WRITTEN BY ~ JASON VAN BEERS

The Start of Something Bigger for Hunters and Conservation?

During Conservation Week 2020, the New Zealand Game Animal Council, with the help of some passionate volunteers, launched an initiative named 'Hunters for Conservation'

The aim of this was to shine a spotlight on the amazing hunter-led conservation projects being achieved around the country and to show that hunters really do care about the conservation of our public land.

When you lace up your boots, shoulder your pack, grasp your rifle and head for the hills to go hunting – what is your reason? What is your 'why'? Is it the chance to put ethically gathered meat on the table for your family and friends? A trophy set of antlers or horns? A recharge from the stresses of everyday life, by spending time with your mates? Or to experience everything our amazing backcountry has to offer? All perfectly good reasons to hunt, and definitely my reasons.

THE QUESTION IS, HOW CAN CONSERVATION BECOME PART OF OUR 'WHY' AS HUNTERS, AND SHOULD IT?

Conservation may not be at the top of your list when you head out hunting and that's absolutely fine. But in my opinion, when a recreational hunter harvests

a game animal on public land, s/he is contributing one small piece to a giant jigsaw puzzle. All recreational hunters collectively do this across New Zealand's public land and it's multiplied with every game animal they harvest. **So, directly or indirectly, as a recreational hunter you are a game animal manager and therefore a conservationist.** By contributing to the management of the game animal population, recreational hunters are taking pressure off native ecosystems, which is a positive for conservation. In a situation where a professional contract hunter is tasked to reduce a population of game animals in an area where they are causing the native ecosystem to fail, that hunter is deemed to be undertaking conservation. **He is seen as a conservationist because he is managing that animal population.**

The recreational hunter normally does this on a much smaller scale, yet his activity is essentially the same and it has a positive effect on native ecosystems where s/he hunts.

SMART MANAGEMENT OF THE GAME ANIMAL RESOURCE IS THE KEY.

Unfortunately a game animal can become a pest through no fault of its own but due to poor management of the resource, and no educated hunter wants an overpopulation of game animals. With an overpopulation, herd structure, quality of life, meat and trophy potential deteriorates drastically. I have seen it first-hand and it's not at all desirable. A knee-jerk reaction often happens where the so-called 'pest' is sought to be eradicated by the authorities. In my opinion, the eradication (or attempt) of any of NZ's game animal species from mainland public land is an ideological, unrealistic and a near-impossible task. It's now the 21st century and our ecosystems have evolved.

Eradication of game animals is the worst-case scenario for recreational hunting and conservation. The resources and time spent on this ideal is and will continue to have a negative effect on the Kiwi way of life and our environment. I believe this thinking will continue to drive a wedge between

conservationists and hunters, when the two groups actually have many values that are aligned. It's about coming together for that last 10% to get the balance. Resources and time are far better spent on more practical conservation projects, including focusing on critical pests ie mustelids, rats, noxious weeds etc that do real damage in any numbers and hold little to no recreational or commercial value.

A POWERFUL WAY THAT HUNTERS CAN HELP WITH CONSERVATION OF PUBLIC LAND IS TO GET INVOLVED WITH THEIR LOCAL REGIONAL CONSERVATION BOARD.

Conservation boards give advice to DOC on the conservation matters of each region and they are the community's voice. Conservation boards can play a big part in shaping DOC's plans and these statutory plans identify and establish objectives for the regions. The board meets up to six times a year and at each meeting, a public forum session is held, where members of the public can talk to the board regarding conservation issues that affect them ie the management of game animals. But hunters cannot simply demand it – we have to 'walk the talk' with conservation projects in the ecosystems we want to see remain healthy and balanced.

The Department of Conservation was formed by the joining of the Forest Service and the Wildlife Service, and we need to remember that these original services no longer exist. DOC does not exist to serve our personal wishes for public land. **DOC is a department of the government of the day and the staff are responsible for managing conservation** and fostering recreation on our public land. It might be a hard pill to swallow for some, but hunters need to start thinking about how they can better help DOC, not the other way round. This is a tough one but a change of mentality here will greatly benefit hunters and conservation in the long run. We are so lucky in NZ to be able to hunt recreationally on public land and we must respect the value of this or we could lose it. Just look at Australia with its detailed permitting and even exclusion from some of its public land.

IF YOU ARE TRULY PASSIONATE ABOUT THE PUBLIC LAND YOU HUNT, ENHANCE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR LOCAL DOC OFFICE BY CONTRIBUTING TO CONSERVATION PROJECTS.

Hunters will then become recognised



Image - FWF

as a resource, we'll have more influence and will be a big part of the solution. There are several examples of hunter-led volunteer groups across NZ working directly with DOC to achieve a balance between game animals and native ecosystems. In my opinion the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation (FWF) is currently the best example of this. **Their positive, balanced relationship with the local DOC office has and continues to work wonders in the Wapiti area for conservation as a whole.**

If hunters can front-foot more conservation projects alongside game animal management, especially in significant areas where there are herds of special interest like the FWF, the stronger the relationship between hunters and DOC will become nationwide. There's nothing stopping this apart from the current attitudes of both sides. At the same time I hope that the members of DOC management can fully open their eyes to the win-win that working with hunters can provide everywhere. It is also my hope that DOC can implement a programme where WARO can be used as a game animal management tool. And a national game animal kill return app or similar would be so beneficial. **DOC wants volunteers and actually needs them.** There are no native money trees that DOC is hiding; it has budgets to work by. Hunters must be active in contributing to game animal management, and not reactive when DOC staff are just doing the work they have been set to do. Throughout Conservation Week 2020, the Department of Conservation acknowledged hunter-led conservation projects across the country. This is a great step in the right direction for hunters and



DOC being on the same page.

Educating the next generation that hunting and conservation can go hand-in-hand is also a critical issue. By doing this, we can hopefully get more balanced conservation in the future, while still having the amazing opportunity to hunt game animals on public land alongside flourishing native ecosystems. **In this day and age when people are becoming more separated from hunting, this now falls on us.**

So it might be time for the hunters of New Zealand to start thinking more about the big picture, and reprioritizing our 'why' for the future of hunting and conservation together as a whole.

Please support the New Zealand Game Animal Council (GAC) and its new initiative Hunters for Conservation. Their work around this issue is opening doors with conservation groups and making sure hunters are at the table when decisions are made. **And please check out the Hunters for Conservation Instagram account and Facebook group to share your conservation work as a hunter.**



TOP CRAWFORD HUT

WRITTEN BY ~ ANDREW BUGLASS | REMOTEHUTS.CO.NZ

I did an article on Crawford Junction Hut earlier this year and thought it worthwhile to do one on its little relative in the head of the valley, Top Crawford Hut

The Crawford is the main tributary of the Kokatahi River in central Westland and forms part of a DOC maintained circuit starting in the Styx valley and finishing at the Toaroha road end.

There are two alpine saddles on this loop, Lathrop and Zit, both of which require reasonable levels of experience and fitness to cross. I did a Level Two wander to Top Crawford from the Styx end in August and was the first person there in five months. You can't blame COVID entirely for this as the Styx valley was officially closed this year by DOC due to track damage caused by successive floods. **Despite this this it's still OK to get up the Styx at low or normal flows by following the riverbed where it's washed out and executing couple of fords around Tyndall Creek.**

Browning Biv at 1050m on the Styx side of the Browning Range is cosy and well-provisioned and the obvious stopover on day one of the journey. At 1572m Lathrop Saddle is a U-shaped corridor strewn with huge shattered boulders and has some picturesque tarns that appear when the snow melts in summer. During the colder months the slopes are icy on the

Crawford side near the top and ice axes are needed for the initial sidle across the faces.

Top Crawford basin is a magic spot and a great place to hang out and explore for a couple of days. The hut is located on a large tussock flat ringed by mountain ribbonwood and alpine forest. It looks pretty new, but is actually a creative relocation of an old Forest Service 4-bunker that used to be sited midway down the valley. The original had an open fire which was removed by DOC around 2004. The hut was shifted up to the basin in 2011 and was pretty much rebuilt **in the process, strengthened, insulated, and had double glazed windows, a woodburner, porch and deck added.**

Currently, visitors would stand a very good chance of having the place to themselves. The area is

The upgraded Top Crawford Hut

Browning Biv

Top Crawford, 1958.
Peter Logan pictured



The route from the Styx to the Top Crawford is part of a DOC maintained loop

not frequently hunted and has low numbers of deer and chamois scattered about. The Browning Range tops are easily accessible and bush hunting gets easier down towards Crawford Junction.

For those not wanting to do the alpine stuff it is possible to get up the Kokatahi valley and connect with the DOC circuit at Crawford Junction. A fit party should allow a full day for this, plus another 4-5 hours from the Junction up to the top basin. Permolat volunteers have kept the lower and mid Kokatahi routes open at a rudimentary level. Some sections in the mid valley are rough and actively eroding and upstream of the Twins three-wire it's river travel with large boulders and the odd bush detour. Reasonable levels of competence are needed for tackling this route. **A Permolat team did some track repairs between Pinnacle and Alice creeks in May and I did some more marking on my way down in August.**

Things should be good there until the next extreme weather event which, judging by their ever-increasing frequency, may not be long. The Crawford River is currently running in two channels at the Junction, making it a relatively easy ford at normal flows, however none of the big side creeks are bridged and crossings shouldn't be attempted when rivers are running high. DOC workers were in the Crawford and upper Kokatahi in March redoing the tracks, so if you want to continue up the Kokatahi and go out via Zit Saddle and the Toaroha, it's all good to go. Allow 1.5-2 days to get to Top Crawford from



A closer view of the Crawford headwaters



Looking East from Lawthrop Saddle

the Styx or Kokatahi road ends, or 2.5 to 3 days from the Toaroha end. It's 4km between the Styx and Toaroha car parks with the Kokatahi road end in the middle. This makes the various loops relatively

hassle-free with regard to transport.

More comprehensive route information can be found on http://remotehuts.co.nz/huts/top_crawford_hut



Sako S20

HYBRID RIFLE

WRITTEN BY ~ GREG DULEY

It's been a while since we saw a completely new rifle including action and stock from the Finnish firearms manufacturer Sako, but the new S20 certainly is that!

While not targeted at the pure hunting market, this new modular rifle system certainly is a hybrid capable of a wide range of competitive and fun range shooting, while still suitable for less strenuous forms of hunting.

Starting with the action, the S20 is a new version that reminds me of a cross between the TRG and A7. It is a three lug action with a spring loaded plunger ejector, composite bolt shroud and alloy bolt handle. **The steel receiver doesn't have the usual tapered Sako scope mounting dovetails, but has integral picatinny front and rear bases machined into it** – a very sensible idea allowing you many different yet rock solid scope mounting options. The trigger is a more adjustable version of the very

good standard Sako/Tikka option, with a smooth blade adjustable for pull length. **It is available in either single or two stage variants.** The safety is the usual Sako two stage that locks the bolt with a separate button just forward of it to allow the bolt to be opened with safety engaged. The bolt stop is in the usual place on the left hand side of the rear receiver bridge.

The stock is a totally new system reminiscent of the Accuracy International chassis system. It has an internal alloy

chassis that includes a V block for the receiver to bolt into, eliminating any bedding issues. The "stock" is a three piece composite shell that clamps around the internal alloy chassis. **The butt stock is split vertically with left and right sides, while the forend is one piece and slides on from the front.** This is where the modular system starts, with either a thumbhole stock style called the Hunter, or a vertical grip style called the Precision.

INTERCHANGEABLE
BOLT HANDLE
INTERFACE



STAINLESS STEEL
BOLT WITH THREE
LOCKING LUGS

ROBUST FULL
ALUMINIUM
BEDDING



RECEIVER WITH
INTEGRATED
PICATINNY RAIL



Fiona lining up on a Sika with the Sako S20 Hunter



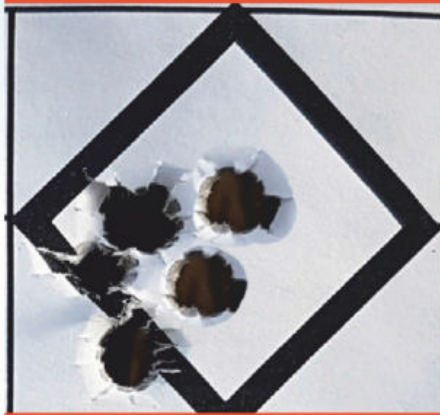
S20 Hunter - 165gn SGC handload - .4 inches



S20 Hunter - GameHead Pro 165gn - .6 inches



S20 Hunter - TRG 175gn - .5 inches



S20 Precision - GameHead Pro 165gn - .7 inches



S20 Precision - SGC 165gn handload - 1 inch



S20 Precision - TRG 175gn - .6 inches

	POWDER/ GRAINS	MUZZLE VELOCITY	AVERAGE 5 SHOT GROUP	COMMENTS
20" PRECISION GAMEHEAD PRO 165GN	-	2600	.7 inches	
20" PRECISION TRG 175GN	-	2525	.6 inches	Most accurate load in this rifle
20" PRECISION SGC 165GN	CFE223/50	2884	1 inch	
24" HUNTER GAMEHEAD PRO 165GN	-	2653	.6 inches	
24" HUNTER TRG 175GN	-	2567	.5 inches	Accurate range load
24" HUNTER SGC 165GN	CFE223/50	2950	.5 inches	Superb hunting load

Both have a push button adjustable comb, and butt pad adjustable for length and height via spacers. The precision has M-Lok fittings under the forend and butt stock ahead of the toe. **The Hunter has usual sling swivel studs while both have side mounted QD swivel attachment points front and rear.**

The magazine is a detachable composite double stack with centre feed, allowing a maximum cartridge length of 3 inches in the medium and 3.6 inches in the long and magnum chamberings. This allows you to seat the projectiles out closer to the lands than usual in Tikka/Sakos with their characteristically long throats. The grip sections on both stocks are removable, and the Hunter comes with a soft option for better handling in the field.

The barrels are the extremely reliable and consistent cold hammer forged chromoly Sakos, fluted and muzzle threaded 5/8"x24tpi. They have a sub MOA 5 shot accuracy guarantee.

The S20 is available with a 24 inch barrel in 243 Win, 6.5mm Creedmoor, 6.5 PRC, 270 Win, 308, 30-06, 7mm Rem Mag and 300 Win Mag. There is also a 20 inch 308 version.



We received 24 inch Hunter and 20 inch Precision S20s from Beretta NZ, both in 308 as that was all they had available at the time. The Hunter came with a Steiner Ranger 2.5-10x50, and the Precision with a Steiner T5Xi in 5-25x56 – both in solid Steiner alloy rings. **The Ranger is a second focal plane illuminated reticle hunting style scope, while the T5Xi is very much a first focal plane tactical style scope.** Both have MIL adjustments, where 1 click = .1 MIL = 1cm@100m or .36"@100yds. Due to the 10 power maximum magnification in the Ranger I used larger 2" orange aiming dots for the range work with this scope. We fitted a DPT suppressor with 4 baffles to the rifles. Beretta NZ also supplied Sako ammunition in the GameHead Pro and



Sako TRG and GameHead Pro factory ammo, 165gn Sierra GameChanger projectiles, Sako brass and CFE223 powder, and 165gn SGC handload



The 720 yd gong getting whacked by the S20 Precision



Hunter

Precision

the TRG Precision lines. The Pro is loaded with a 165gn Sierra GameChanger and the TRG a 175gn Lapua Scenar-L. The GameChanger is a fairly new offering from Sierra that is basically a tipped GameKing with optimized Ogive to work in most rifle throats even if you can't get them anywhere near the lands. The Scenar is a time proven match bullet. Both have almost identical BCs of around .480G1. **We also worked up a handload with the 165gn GameChangers using**

CFE223, to get the most we could out of the 308 cartridge. The TRG line shot superbly in both rifles, and the GameHead Pro wasn't far behind it. The handload with the same 165gn GameChanger projectile proved to be an exceptional hunting load in the 24" Hunter, **producing extremely good velocity for a 308 and superb accuracy too.** With the range work done we were away out the back of Ngamatea Station to our gong range to give the rifles a good work out. The gusty SW weather wasn't exactly conducive to shooting something like a 308 at long range, but we started on the 560yd gong with the Tactical and the 175gn TRG ammo. It took a couple of shots to work out the windage and then

we were all ringing it successfully as long as I got my wind calls close. **Next to the 730 yards, and we were on the steel with the second shot.** The wind was more quartering behind here so the calls were a little easier. Then to the 1016 yard gong with a full broadside gusty SW. It took 3 shots to decide about 3 MILs was the average correction needed, and I called it more or less from there. Everyone rang the 1016 yard with Fi having the perfect record – she fired one shot at each gong and hit every time! Then gave up while she was ahead... **Lastly I pulled out the Hunter using the handloads and this quickly showed what a bit of velocity achieves** – with 2 MILs dialed in I whacked the 1016 yard with ease. The extra over 400fps of velocity compared with the 20" Precision with the TRG load cut the wind drift by a third, and meant

CALIBERS:	6.5 PRC, 6.5 CM, .243 Win, .30-06 Sprg, 7mm Rem Mag, 300 Win Mag, .308 Winchester, .270 Win
WEIGHT: .	7.2 – 8.6 lbs
RIFLE OVERALL LENGTH:	43" or 47"
TRIGGER:	Two-stage, Adjustable from 2 lbs. to 4 lbs.
SAFETY:	Two-Position Safety with Separate Bolt-Release Button
RIFLE BARREL LENGTH:	20" or 24"
RIFLE BARREL TWIST:	1:11"
BARREL THREAD:	5/8x24tpi
RIFLE STOCK:	Polymer Thumbhole over Aluminum Chassis, Polymer over Aluminum Chassis
SCOPE MOUNT:	Integrated Picatinny Rail
MAGAZINES:	5 Round Magazine Included
RRP	Hunter - \$2,999 Precision - \$3,499



Fiona lining up on the 1016 yard gong

my slight wind misreads still just hit the gong whereas with the previous load and rifle they just missed.

The following morning we headed off for a hunt, making the most of the almost nonexistent snow levels to target some of the higher country often covered this time of year.

Eventually we found a couple of hinds and Fi set up on a rocky outcrop to make the 405 yard shot. The 165gn GameChanger load did the job and a nice Sika hind for the pot was the result.

The S20 platform is a unique offering from Sako. Its features offer advantages over other models such as the integral picatinny scope bases, the alloy chassis bedding system and the fully adjustable and customisable stock. The extra magazine capacity and length is a bonus too. These rifles are purpose designed for "sporting shooting", which means general fun and competitive field shoots, with crossover into hunting situations where the lightest weight is not critical. At a minimum weight

of 7.2 pounds before scope and mounts, these rifles are very pleasant and stable to shoot, but would not be my choice for lugging round the mountains. And being blued chromoly steel you will need to look after the metal work and especially the bore on an extended hunting trip. They are chambered in a wide range of cartridges, including Hornady's new and intriguing 6.5 PRC – which is slightly more capacity than the 6.5/284 and about the same as the 6.5 SAUM wildcat. This gives it about 100fps over the 6.5 Creedmoor but is still about 100fps behind the 264 Win mag.

Overall it is pleasing to see a firm with Sako's enviable reputation thinking outside the square and coming out with new products and designs. **I'm really looking forward to when they turn their brains trust to a new lightweight mountain rifle – now that will be something with wide appeal in New Zealand!**



Fiona's well conditioned two year old hind

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sako s20

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The future-proof Sako S20 is the first true hybrid rifle – the one that both hunters and precision shooters can embrace. Thanks to the modular structure of the rifle, the Sako S20 is always up to the task where ever your path may lead you.

Learn more: sako.fi/s20

BAKEWELL BURNER *DELUXE BASECAMPER*

WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

I hardly need to explain the benefits of a well-built outdoor fire

They're a luxurious evolution on an open fire as the legs bring the heat up closer to you, the flue keeps the smoke out of your eyes and they give you a quick easy cooktop, not to mention all the accessories you can add. If you bring a hot-tent to the mix then by crikey you're on to a winner!

But, there are fires and there are fires, people have been cutting up LPG bottles for decades.

The Bakewell Burner takes that crude methodology to a new level. Wayne Bakewell uses and is passionate about his product, having built nigh on a thousand he has

deliberately gone for a robust product, which brings us to the latest evolution, the Deluxe Base Camper.

We reviewed the original Bakewell Burner back in Issue 59 (2017), and not a lot has changed from that winning recipe. Large departures are the greater use of stainless steel, ditching the perforations on the cooktop and a slightly larger firebox. Chasing that robust element, wanting a product that people can pass on to grandchildren, is what led Wayne to stainless steel. There was also some feedback from some consumers about food safety concerns in regard to cooking on aluminium so he listened to the people and gravitated toward that. The main box is made of stainless now as well as the accessories, this has increased the weight but it is undoubtedly more robust. With all our extras the total package came to 21kg.

The Burner is full of features created by someone who knows how to make camping life easier. The clever construction allows you to store the flue, leg and accessories inside, leaving you with a compact 430x275x275mm





Here you can see all of the components nested inside, with the side-shelf sitting on top. I pack the spare firelighting material in to stop the rattle while travelling



Water box

The whole arrangement is well thought out, making for a very funtional cooking station

box – including the hinges and leg attachments.

Functionally it's an excellent fire, you can have it roaring hot enough to fry a pan full of steak or stoke it down and get good ember base so you can go for a hunt, come back and it's still good to go.

A good extra included in our package was the spark arrestor. **It makes it much safer around nylon tents and dry environments,** I deliberately burnt some sparky macrocarpa through it and even at full noise it was still catching probably 50% of the sparks that actually make it to the top of the chimney. The ones remaining are so small and light they are drawn out with the air through the holes. You could try adding gauze on the inside if you were seriously concerned with it but it would reduce draw and soot up over time.

Another excellent extra is the five litre water box, superbly useful for a cuppa, washing up or as a pot for boiling spuds etc. I like

how this is side mounted as opposed to the flue mounted options around, being on the side it enlarges the cooktop area.

The customization with accessories is endless, you can even add a side oven! To really max things out you can run two side tables as well as two water heaters (or ovens) for maximum surface area and 10l of water on the go. The side table is a worthwhile addition, beside adding surface area it allows you to adjust cook temp by only having a portion of the pot or pan on the heat, and provides area to hang your utensils from.

These fires really are a luxury item to take in the 4wd, campervan or fly in to the hills with. **They make camp life a lot cleaner and easier, they're infinitely more functional than an open fire, and combining them with a canvas tent or fly makes for serious home-comforts.**



www.bakewellburners.co.nz



You can put out some serious heat when it's cranking! The door is open a fraction in this image

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POINT6 SOCKS

WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

For the tail end of winter I've been wearing Hiking Extra Heavy, Hiking Light and Tactical Medium socks from Point6 – thus far I'm loving them!

Merino is a wonderful fibre, but on its own it's not super durable. A good merino blend brings that all-important durability and can enhance the fit, wicking and drying time.

Point6 have capitalised on our world renowned merino and combined that with some clever yarn and construction techniques in their USA factory. They use a method known as compact spinning as opposed to more conventional ring spinning, this reduces loose fibres to aid durability and reduce pilling. They're completely open about the ratios, the Ex. Heavy's were 83%, the Medium's 70% and the Light's 69%, the balance being Nylon and a little Spandex.

The physical construction of the sock is a step up from the ol' wool bag shaped like a foot! It includes nylon reinforcing around the heels and toes and venting panels across the instep as well as above the toe and inside the ankle joint. They have excellent cross stretch, they're a snug fit when you first try them but this is a good thing as loose-fitting parts

will bunch and wear on your skin, eventually forming blisters.

Overall I was highly impressed with the socks. The heavy pair are luxuriantly thick and certainly warm, perfect for winter conditions. The mediums are what I would pick as an all-rounder. Thick enough for protection and durability but thin enough to breathe and dry really well. The light pair were certainly comfortable, bringing the same excellent fit and technology, but definitely at the lighter end of the scale. They certainly have their place with day hunts or lightweight summer missions.

To get the most out of modern boots you need good socks and I like the extra cushioning that comes with a thicker sock like the Tactical Medium or Hiking Heavy on big trips with heavy loads.

These Point6 socks, made in the USA, are certainly worth a try.



The Tactical Medium in the big tussock country

www.point6.co.nz

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Photo Gallery

The winning photo receives a Hunting & Fishing voucher to the value of \$100. Send all your photos to editor@nzhunter.co.nz

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

Grand Winner

Lachlan Hamilton, Josh and Zac Coles and Hadley MacPherson with a good Pureora boar



Hunter Mackey getting into his pig hunting

Josh Telford shot this nice hind off the 42 Traverse with a Tikka 7mm Rem Mag



Thomas Brown with his first chamois



Daniel Durbin with his biggest stag to date



Ange Bellew with a ripper white Fallow buck





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Something's Missing



The eve of duck season was upon us and it felt really weird. Like seriously really, really weird

Normally it's a time of high excitement mixed with some nervyness and often if things aren't quite running to schedule, a fair bit of panic. There were only small degrees of these feelings this season, with everyone acting pretty calm and chilled.

All the other members of the hut were feeling the same way. Conversations were limited and everyone was extremely reserved, especially the younger members of the crew who tend to make a fair bit of noise and are normally told at least once that the older folks would like some quiet time. **Things were so quiet and reserved that most of us drifted off to bed well before we normally would,** some to dream of paddles-down Mallards in the morning and some to ponder what was making things feel so strange and wonder what was missing.

Firstly as we all know, due to Covid-19, opening day was far from a normal day as

it was three weeks later than usual. Also due to Covid-19, my brother and hunting partner Stacy wasn't with us. He was still in Australia, as was my little bro Brodie who had decided he would come over and hunt with the old man this year and now couldn't be here. My cousin Warren and his son James weren't there either. They had decided to stay close to home and hunt a pond they had always talked about doing not far from Warren's house. They would turn up the next night for the Sunday shoot. My uncle Phillip was going to hunt a pond at his place on Saturday and his neighbour's pond too this year. After a few disappointing years hunting various locations on the lake, he thought

he could do just as well, if not better at home without the major effort involved with coming to shoot on the lake.

There had been other opening weekends when some of the crew hadn't made it down to the duck hut. James missed a few years when he was too busy establishing what was to become a very well-known business. Warren missed one when he was working in Australia. Phillip had stayed at home to hunt his old farm pond but often turned up on the Saturday afternoon. Stacy and Brodie had also missed a few while living in Australia and with work commitments. Even my cousin Chris, who is a stalwart of the hut, missed one when he hunted in Dipped In – oops I mean Dipton.

Although I missed all of those I've mentioned, there was another person I was missing even more. My dad Kevin wasn't there and things did not feel right. This would have been his 51st consecutive year of hunting the lake. His chair to the left of where I sit when I have my tea was empty.



Kevin on a nice big-water hunt

The previous Saturday I was just walking out the door to head off to work when the landline rang. **Apart from the missus's sister and those lovely telemarketers, no one ever rings that number these days.** As it was 5.45am, I thought I'd better answer it. Turns out it was Mum – she wanted to let me know that Kevin was having a heart attack and the helicopter was on its way to pick him up and take him to Dunedin Hospital.

The next few minutes were a blur as we rushed out the door, hoping to catch up with Dad before his flight. When we saw him, he was lying in the ambulance with a million wires and sensors attached to him. The first words he said to me were **"That's my opening day fecked!"** He went on to explain to the paramedics that he didn't want to miss out on his 51st opening day, all the while hoping they were going to tell him he was fine.

He later told the medics and the helicopter pilot the same thing, as well as the nurses in the hospital, any doctors he saw and the numerous people who rang

him in subsequent days to see how he was progressing. Lucky for him, his quick thinking in recognising he was having a heart attack as well as the rapid response of the ambulance staff stopped him from doing too much damage to his heart. He did require some stents and some recovery time on the side line. Mum had to constantly remind him he was 73 and not 18 like he would have us believe.

Fast forward a few weeks after opening weekend and Kevin, Jake and I were waiting in our blind for the sun to creep over the horizon. This day had been a while coming as I had decided I wouldn't ask Kevin to come out for a hunt until I thought he was in the right head space to do so. I knew my timing was right when he started mentioning that he wasn't too far off rejoining the fold and was talking about all things 'duck' again.

I had casually texted him to see if he was busy the next day and if not, would he like to go on a close-by, easy, no dramas and little-effort hunt? **This description was more to persuade Mum to let him go than anything else.** It didn't take long for a reply to come through and it said 'What time and where'. Despite



Kevin been shown how it's done by his considerable taller grandson

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Picking up a few birds. I managed to sneak these photos as Kevin can be a bit camera shy

knowing there wasn't a likelihood of shooting a ton of ducks due to the hunting pressure in the area and the fine calm conditions, I'd decided we would hunt near to home. **This was for two reasons: if anything went wrong we were only 30 minutes from the hospital and my cousin Andrew had started his own boat building business called Huntercraft Boats and Kevin had been one of the first to purchase one.** Despite a couple of test trips before lockdown, this hunt would give Kevin his first real opportunity to have a play in his new boat.

Jake and I met Kevin early the next morning at the boat ramp. Not surprisingly, he was waiting on us to arrive and had been there well before the agreed meeting time. Despite that, he still wasn't ready and while I suited up

and got the boat loaded and organised and Jake held onto a struggling labrador who was quite determined to sneak away and do some possuming, Kevin was still mucking around doing I don't know what. Eventually he was sorted and the new boat was in the water and we were away. Despite all the weight in the boat and not having an overly large motor on the back, it got up and planed really easily due to its good design. Subsequently we arrived at our blind well before I thought we were going to.

While the other two ferried gear into the blind, Kiera sneaked off and with a squeal, the first possum of the day was dealt to. While this was all going on, I took the boat out and set the morning's decoy spread. With few ducks in the area, I decided that a small spread of high quality decoys would look the most

realistic and it didn't take me long to get the 12 we had taken with us all set out. As I tied up the boat, Kiera arrived back with a wagging tail and a mouth full of possum.

By the time Kiera and I got back to the blind (minus the possum) the sky was just starting to lighten in the east. My shotgun had been helpfully loaded, my spare ammo placed on my side of the blind and all I had to do was take off my head light, put my calls around my neck and carefully place my earplugs in.

With clear skies and no real wind, the morning started off pretty slowly. The odd hen could be heard calling in the gloom and a few calls from the blind saw a quick flash as a pair swooped into the decoys before a shot could be fired. I checked beside me to make sure everyone was ready and when I got two whispered replies, I fired a single shot into the air to lift the pair. We tend to do this 'warning shot' a lot as we've learnt that ducks, despite our hollering and arm waving, tend to either sit tight or slowly swim away. Eventually they'll get out of range or just as frustratingly, they'll jump just when you think they won't and catch you off guard. The shot in the air gets them up straight away, thus avoiding all of this.

The result was two shocked and very dead Mallards and a quick retrieve for a happy labrador who was still coughing up possum fur.

Three weeks later than he was supposed to be, Kevin was on the board for the season with a nice fat drake and Jake bagged the equally fat hen. It was a good while before I got myself on the board as it was a pretty slow morning and it seemed like the resident ducks wanted a lie-in. My chance came when a single was

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Kevin a few years back

lured closer with our incessant calling. Unfortunately the drake had played the game before and he circled, tantalizingly close to us. He was in range but the lake is a huge bit of water that's pretty hard on dogs so we left him, hoping to get him in a bit closer.

Just when we thought we had him fooled, a barrage of shots in the distance spooked him and as he flew past making his escape, I pulled off one of the shots of the season and rolled him onto the shore. I hadn't intended to shoot at all, preferring to give Kevin more opportunities to make up for his lost time, but there was no way he could have safely shot this drake so I rather reluctantly had to.

My rushed shot came back to haunt me though as the silicon insert on one of my fancy ear plugs came off and somehow got imbedded in my ear. It was a long way in and some none-too-gentle operating later by my partner with a very large pair of tweezers saved me from what would have been an embarrassing trip to the hospital.

The birds we did get near us decoyed rather well though and enough was happening for us to stick around. Normally when things are pretty quiet Kevin tends to get restless feet and either decides to go for a walk or a play in the boat, which I encourage as it often moves ducks around. Or he'll start talking about all the stuff that needs doing at home and perhaps we should head away. This morning though, there was no such talk.

Around 10am Jake said he was going to cook some bacon. Another thing I really encouraged as I was starving, but minutes later, instead of the sizzle of a hot pan all I heard was the sounds of a young bloke snoring. As Kevin and I chuckled to ourselves, a pair hovered over the decoys.

Kevin raised his gun and cleanly dropped the closest bird, then swung onto the furthest one and sent it crashing into the water. When I quizzed him about why he didn't take the further bird first instead of letting it get more distance, he just grunted *"They're both dead so what's the problem?"*

A sleepy voice from behind us then asked if we'd got anything! That happened to be the last ducks of the day, bringing our bag to ten Mallards for the morning.

On the boat ride back, Kevin let me take a few photos of him, not knowing they were going to end up in this magazine. If he'd known that, there was no way I'd have been allowed to.

Duck hunting to us is more than just a passion, it's a lifestyle we've lived for more years than I care to count. Big bags of ducks has been one of the main drivers of why I do what I do but with everything that has happened this season, I've had to re-evaluate. This season more than any other has shown me there's much more to hunting ducks than just killing them. It could be hanging out in a layout blind with Thomas, discussing the ins and outs of the hunting industry or hunkered down with David in a grass paddock deliberating Fish and Game issues and watching hawks mistake the decoys for real ducks and dive bomb them. It could also be putting out a ridiculously large spread of fully flocked, full-bodied decoys with Lyndon, which took us hours and then about the same amount of time to pack them all up again in the dark, all the while complaining about how silly it was – only to do the exact same thing the next night. **But mostly I've learnt that in the past I'd really overlooked the value of hanging out with family as a part of the whole hunting experience. I'll never take it for granted again.**



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THE GAC UPDATE

Collaboration vital for game animal management and conservation

I don't want to go into detail about the ins and outs of the recent debate over the 2020-21 Tahr Control Operational Plan as I'm sure most readers will be familiar with it, but despite a pretty challenging process overall the Game Animal Council did make some gains for hunters in the end.

Discussions with DOC about the remaining control work will see the reallocation of hours outside the national parks move away from a number of accessible tahr hunting areas to more inaccessible and remote locations. We also gained a commitment that control work was not to take place close to road ends, huts and helicopter landing sites frequently used by hunters. Instead operations were targeted at areas of known high tahr density and that are largely inaccessible to hunters.

None of this diminished the disappointment at the loss of tahr hunting in the national parks but hopefully we did preserve some decent hunting opportunities in accessible locations across other parts of the feral range.

From my point of view what this last stage of the tahr process illustrates is the benefit of open collaboration between DOC and the GAC. If we are to successfully and sustainably manage game animal species then all sides must be willing to openly discuss the issues and come up with shared solutions. When government seeks to just impose its will on hunters the result is division and needless antagonism. There is a better way and the GAC is determined to continually work towards that.

HUNTERS FOR CONSERVATION

Conservation Week went largely under the radar this year coming as it did hard on the heels of the reappearance of COVID-19 in the Auckland community. Nevertheless, it was great to see the hunting sector celebrate the great work that hunters do in preserving our native species and our backcountry heritage under the 'Hunters for Conservation' theme.

Most Kiwi hunters know that our sector organisations and volunteers do a lot of great conservation work but never really get the credit they deserve. This is partly our own fault. As hunters we are pretty reluctant to claim credit for anything and much prefer to chip away quietly in the background just getting the job done.

While these are admirable traits, the reality of the world we live in is that to be truly effective as advocates for hunting and also as conservationists we need to get better at telling our stories. This year we really made an effort to promote the conservation projects hunters are involved in. Whether that be members of the Central North Island Sika Foundation who spent over 1200 hours working on the Kaimanawa Whio Recovery Programme, the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation's extensive predator trapping programme or NZDA's involvement in the Backcountry Trust, we really want to get the message out there that hunters are conservationists too.

It has also been pleasing to see the inclusion of valued introduced species into Te Mana o Te Taiao - Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020.

The GAC put a lot of effort into development of the Strategy as we see deer, tahr, chamois and wild pigs as an important part of our backcountry heritage, as a significant food source and as a significant recreational and commercial resource for New Zealand. These species do come with some challenges, so having them recognised as a 'valued introduced species' in this overarching strategy document is an important step towards sustainable management.

NEW GAME ANIMAL COUNCILLORS

Grant Dodson has been appointed new Chair of the Game Animal Council. Joining Grant as new Game Animal Councillors are Erin Garrick, Don Patterson, John Cook and Bruce Warburton.

- **Grant** is heavily involved in the forestry sector and has an extensive background in land management and recreational hunting in New Zealand and Australia.
- **Erin** is a current Southland Fish and Game Officer with a background in wildlife management and over 20 years of hunting experience.
- **Don** is Governing Director of Manuka Point Station in the Canterbury high country, professional hunting guide and game estate manager.
- **John** is President of the Central North Island Sika Foundation and a dairy farmer in the Waikato.
- **Bruce** is science team leader of the Wildlife, Ecology and Management team at Manaaki Whenua - Landcare Research.

The new councillors join Stephen Hall, Sharon Salmons, Rachael Dean and Steve McFall on Council. **Carol Watson, Richard Burdon, Roger Duxfield and Don Hammond's** terms have ended.

I cannot thank our departing councillors enough. They have put in a huge amount of unpaid time and effort into advancing the interests of hunting and game animal management in New Zealand. It is particularly important to acknowledge Don Hammond's contribution. As the GAC's inaugural Chair with very little in the way of resources Don has built the Council up into a well-established statutory organisation that is a responsible advocate for our sector.

More information on all the current GAC Councillors is available at <https://nzgameanimalcouncil.org.nz/who-we-are/>.

The NZ Game Animal Council is a statutory organisation responsible for the sustainable management of game animals and hunting for recreation, commerce and conservation.



Grant Dodson



Bruce Warburton



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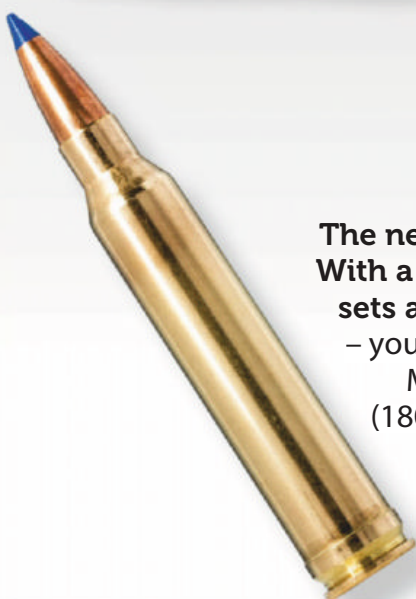
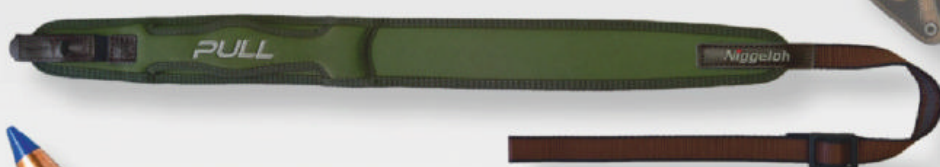
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FRENCHMAN PHIL'S POT AU FEU

WRITTEN BY ~ RICHARD HINGSTON

Pot au Feu translates to 'pot on the fire'. This is a classic French dish using the simplest ingredients: meat (beef) and root vegetables taken straight from the soil

It is one of the most celebrated dishes in France, where it honours the tables of both the rich and poor. King Henry IV of France even declared "I want no peasant in my kingdom to be so poor that he cannot have a poule au pot on Sundays." Poule au pot is basically the same as pot au feu.

In medieval France, most peasant households had a single hearth, in which a small fire would be kept burning for most of the day. Suspended from a hook or nestled in the corner was a large earthenware pot. In the morning,

the ingredients would be thrown into this, covered with water and left to cook slowly for several hours. At lunch, then the main meal of the day, the meat and most of the vegetables would be consumed, while the thick broth that remained

would be left to bubble away over the fire until the evening, and then served for dinner.

Nowadays we have slow cookers, which I use to produce this dish, but still only one pot is needed. Making this meal is easy and it's also easy on the dishes as there's not much to clean up. You could also use a pressure cooker to speed up the process if you wish. You could even cook the vegetables separately to get them perfectly done and then add them in at the end of cooking.

Within France, the ingredients for pot au feu may differ from region to region, and also with the seasons. Here I have swapped the beef out for venison and suggest pairing the dish with a French burgundy or a pinot noir.

VENISON POT AU FEU

Serves approx 4

- 4 pieces of beef marrow bone cut into approx 5cm lengths
- Splash of white vinegar
- 1.5 kg of trimmed, diced venison, either shoulder or back leg or combo
- 4 meaty venison neck bones
- 2-3L vegetable or chicken stock (the amount will depend on the size of your cooking vessel)
- 1 bouquet garni (2 bay leaves, 1 thyme sprig, 4 parsley stalks, 8 black peppercorns, 6 cloves, 12 juniper berries)

These can be tied up in either a muslin cloth or a clean Chux cloth and attached to the handle of the pot (if possible) as it will then be easier to pull out at the end of cooking. Juniper berries are not in your classic bouquet garni but they do complement venison very well.

- 6 cloves garlic, cut in half
- 2 medium brown onions, peeled and cut in half or 4 shallots
- 2 leeks trimmed and cut into rings, or use baby leeks
- 2 celery stalks, angle sliced
- 6 medium potatoes, peeled and cut in half
- 8 small turnips, peeled
- 4 carrots roughly chopped or 8 baby carrots, peeled
- Half a small head of cabbage cut into about 6 pieces (optional)
- Parsley to garnish

Optional accompaniments: cornichons, flaky salt, Dijon mustard, horseradish cream (this is equal quantities of crème fraîche and horseradish mixed together with chopped parsley)



METHOD

Fill a large bowl with cold water, add the vinegar and immerse the marrow bones in it. Leave to soak overnight in the fridge. The following day, rinse the bones and discard the vinegar water.

Place the diced venison, venison neck bones and the marrow bones in a large saucepan. Cover with water and bring to the boil. Skim the surface to remove impurities and then transfer the meat and the bones to a slow cooker or casserole dish. Discard the cooking water in the saucepan.

Add the stock to the meat and bones in the slow cooker. Add the bouquet garni, garlic, onions, leeks, celery, potatoes, turnips and carrots.

Place the lid on top and cook on low for a minimum of 5 hours (this will depend on the cut of venison used). Remove the lid occasionally and skim the impurities from the surface.

Once the meat and vegetables are tender, add the cabbage for the last ten minutes of cooking, if using. Taste and season with salt and freshly ground black pepper.

To serve, divide the meat and vegetables amongst the serving bowls, add one marrow bone and one venison neck bone to each bowl and ladle on the broth. Scatter over the parsley and serve immediately with the accompaniments. It is traditional to spread the bone marrow on toast and eat it separately.

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