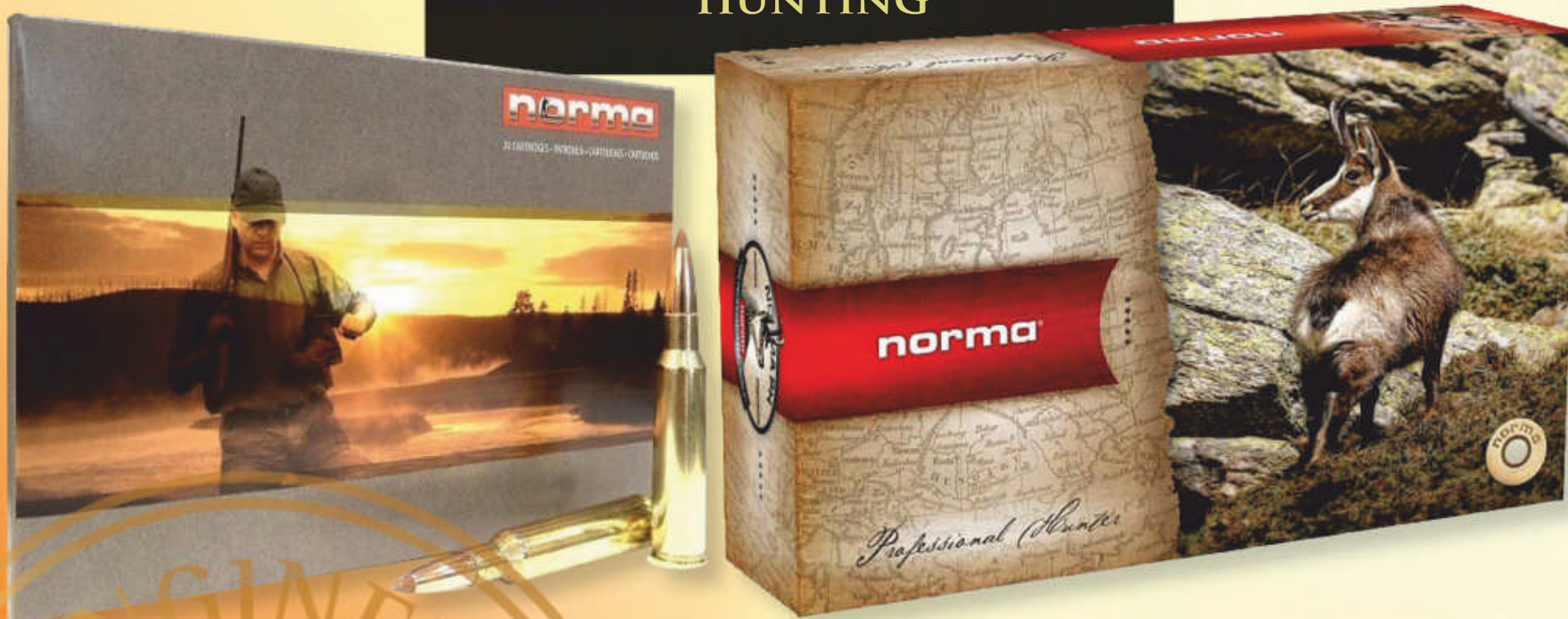


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M A G A Z I N E

FEBRUARY / MARCH 2021



46 INCH MAIN DIVIDE RED

Harry Graham-Samson
recounts his hunt with
Blair Hampton that led to a
legendary 321DS stag

THE ROAR

Tips from the team,
a new approach for
game management, and
capping out your trophy



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A Urewera stag by Jordan Kappely

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A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

Starting off with the good news, we have been flat out filming and editing the last few episodes of the new season of the TV Show due to go to air on February the 17th. Despite the Covid restrictions limiting our roar hunts to private land, since then we have managed to complete some amazing expeditions and seen some amazing country and animals. I promise you your Wednesday nights will be busy watching TVNZs Duke channel for some time!

The process for compiling the tahr control operational plan for 1 July 2021 to 30th June 2022 is still ongoing. The next TPILG meeting is scheduled for the 16th March and we should have more information on the shape of the control plan following that meeting. There is no more culling inside the tahr management units to be done until that plan is finalised. There is work ongoing on tahr culling outside the feral range which everyone supports. One of the key issues is that both between the management units and within each unit it is not a one size fits all. However, this is how the current plan is structured. We need to have a greater degree of precision in how we manage tahr in each management unit.

We have just come back from a big trip through Westland National Park. A couple of valleys had a few tahr but few nannies and either very little or old browse damage, and with the amount of culling done in there this year will need nothing for some time. Then just one catchment south still has far too many tahr even after the culling, the bulls had stunted horn growth and the bush has been completely opened up. Everything palatable has been eaten as far as the tahr can reach, and there are extreme examples of browse on snow tussock clearings down in the bush – to the extent the tussocks have been killed. This area needs a significant increase in culling, and may well need something like ground cullers using the latest technology to make a difference. Helicopters flying round creaming the odd easy animal off the tops and head basins is not doing the job here. DOC using their current aerial transect/plot regime have no idea how many tahr are in these densely bushed areas, so a blanket number of tahr per km² does not deal with issues such as this.



Examining old tahr bark stripping on ribbonwood

It's been rather sad to see the number of stags shot in velvet showing up everywhere on social media at the moment - and very, very few hinds or yearlings. Please, please read what Cam and Roy and now Johnny have had to say yet again in this issue. Hunters in New Zealand must grow up fast and start to accept the very basics of game animal management. If we do not, we can't complain if DOC and uncontrolled WARO steps in and "controls" our prized herds for us. And they will. Deer numbers are increasing beyond what is sustainable in a lot of areas. **Continuing to shoot the stags and leave the hinds is just accelerating this problem. Do we really want to see another tahr debacle?**

We need to show we are doing our bit by targeting yearlings and hinds, and leaving anything other than old cull stags at this time of year. Save the trophy hunting until the roar and through the winter, when the stags are real trophies and the best animals have at least had a chance to compete for the right to breed and pass on their genes. Again, please read Cam's articles, and don't think this doesn't apply to me – it applies to all of us!

With the roar not far away now, whether planning an expedition into somewhere new, or hunting old familiar ground - set your goals on what you are after and stick to them, evaluate your animals properly, and then you and anyone else in the area will be safe!

Greg

SPOT THE LOGO

The winners for last issue are **Callum Wood** and **Greer Fletcher**. The logos were on page 53 in the Lyman advert and on page 91 in the Laundromat advert.



Emil Krysa Hansen

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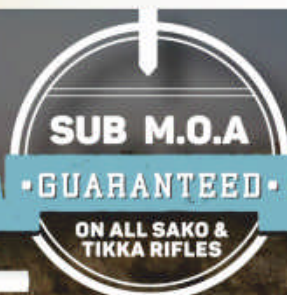
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MAIN DIVIDE BEAUTY

— WRITTEN BY ~ HARRY GRAHAM-SAMSON —





Me and Blair with our trophy of a lifetime

It was that time of year again - summer was coming to an end and temperatures were slowly dropping, meaning only one thing, the stags start roaring!

My good mate Blair and I did a couple of pre-roar scouting missions and on this particular trip we bounced our way up the riverbed on a Friday after work and walked in the dark to our campsite.

The next morning we were up bright and early, full of anticipation of finding a big stag. We were glassing away and I spotted a deer way up high on a steep scrubby face. I could see he had antlers but

in the low light it was hard to tell how big they were, so Blair got his spotter set up and had a quick look.

Pretty quickly he said that he might be bigger than we think, so I had a look and said *"far out that's a ripper!"*. Straight away we began planning how to close the gap on him for a shot, but unfortunately the way the wind was and where the stag was living made it impossible. We planned to keep watching him until he bedded down and then have another go, but the wind never changed and the stag hadn't moved off that horrible steep scrubby face. **The drive out knowing that there was a stag of a lifetime still up**

there got us talking about when we could next go in. He was an enormous, mature stag. The biggest wild stag I had ever seen.

It wasn't until two weeks later that we got a good weather window and could head back to where our big stag was living, hoping that he hadn't been shot by another hunter.

Blair got to my place Thursday morning and we loaded up my truck and headed for the mountains! The weather was looking pretty good, except for the second day of our trip when they were predicting snow down to 1000m. It was forecast to clear up for the rest of the trip, which **Blair and I thought would be perfect conditions to get the stags roaring.** Once we parked the truck we put our crocs on and crossed the river which was a bit deeper than we anticipated. On the other side we put on our boots and trudged up the valley for about two and a half hours. As we were walking we could see four hunters walking towards us so the first thing we did was put our

The stag when we
saw him on the
first scouting trip



binoculars up and see if they had any antlers strapped to their packs. Sure enough they did!

Once we caught up to them and had a yarn we saw that the antlers attached to their pack were from a young stag, and obviously not the one we were after. We carried on up to where the valley splits and turned into the valley where we had seen good numbers of hinds on previous trips. **A helicopter came over the ridge and picked up another lot of hunters, so we had the valley to ourselves.**

Glassing our way in revealed a few hinds but no stags. It was starting to get late in the day so we set up camp and kept glassing until dark.

The next day we were pretty much tent bound as the weather came in and we had poor visibility and couldn't see a thing.

Once it cleared up in the afternoon there was a good dusting of snow on the tops and the temperatures weren't tropical. Blair and I thought that this would be the perfect cold snap to get the stags roaring and the hinds cycling.

We hatched a plan for the following day to find the stag we were after. The alarm went off and we got up full of anticipation. Blair went upstream and I headed downstream, both with our two-way radios. A couple of hours later I got a message from Blair so I packed up my stuff and raced to join him. Blair said **"have a look through the spotter and tell me what you think"**. In the centre of the spotter was a great big stag! The same one from three weeks ago. We needed to make a plan on closing the gap, so we discussed how we were going to do that without him seeing us or catching our scent or even bumping other deer that we couldn't see. **Once we came up with a plan we started closing in on him.** The wind was in our

favour and we had plenty of cover. We stopped briefly to evaluate our situation and made sure the stag hadn't moved. I turned to Blair and said **"so who's going to shoot this stag?"** We were both very keen to shoot it so we decided to settle it with paper-scissors-rock. I ended up winning so I was behind the rifle, feeling a bit of pressure as so far we had everything going in our favour but I couldn't bear to stuff up an opportunity for a stag like this.

We found a reasonably clear spot to shoot from but the stag was bedded up behind a bush so that gave us a bit of time to set up the rifle and get the spotter ready. All of

a sudden he stood up and started feeding to the right, then slowly came out into the open, nibbling away at the pods of the flax bushes. I said to Blair **"are you watching? I'm about to take the shot"**, squeezed off the shot and heard a hit. The stag just stood there then slowly walked off, so I quickly reloaded and when I saw him again, I fired another round. It sounded like another hit but we weren't too sure as he popped over the ridge and out of sight.

I was a bit puzzled about the situation as I had felt confident with the first shot so we packed up our gear and raced over to where he had been standing. We found blood so we started following the trail but there was still no sign of the stag and we were really confused about the situation. **We split up and Blair stayed up high with a radio in case he could see him while I kept on following the blood trail.** I started to follow it down into a thick



scrubby gully when Blair called me on the radio to tell me that he could see him so I dropped everything and set up my rifle. All of a sudden I saw him on the other side of the gully below me so I got behind the rifle - the stag was facing away from me standing up the slope. I squeezed off a round in between his shoulder blades and he dropped instantly!

After a couple of yah hoo's Blair came down to me and shook my hand congratulating me. As we made our way over there we were discussing how close he was from getting away from us. We split to start searching for him when Blair called me over **"come have a look at this..."** I popped down to him and saw three big tines sticking out of the bush and could not believe what I had just shot! He was a big 12 pointer. Blair said **"surely that's a shoulder mount for the wall"** and immediately I said back **"too damn right it is!"**

We shuffled him around for getting

photos (which was quite a task as he was a big bodied animal). **Once we got him in position Blair measured the short side.** As we ran the tape up the antler it was getting close to the antler tip and that magical 40 inches mark had already been and gone! We hit 40 on the tape with antler to spare!! We couldn't believe it - he really was a monster and ended up being 44 inches on that side. We measured what we thought was the long side and that went 46 inches long. I said to Blair *"that's crazy! I didn't even know stag antlers went that long"*. He was a true mature stag that had dodged other hunters and helicopters, and we were absolutely stoked with his length. We later discovered he's one of the best stags to come from this region in a very long time.

We got plenty of photos and started the process of making my pack heavier and making our way back to camp, getting back just on dark. Over dinner we discussed where to go to find Blair a stag and decide to pack up camp in the morning and shift into another catchment to see what we could find.

Up early the next day we headed around into the next valley to find Blair his stag. **We set up camp again and had a good lunch while we waited for the wind to change.** There were a few hinds around which was a good start, and we hoped that there would be a stag hanging around them. Blair headed off up-valley while I stayed back and watched those hinds for the afternoon as well as looking over new country for a stag. We didn't see any stags that evening, just a few chamois. We got back to camp in the dark and once again over a Back Country we discussed about where to go and explore tomorrow as it was our last full day hunting.

Up early again, we packed up to head into yet another catchment, and as the sun hit the face up high and worked its way down the deer started to pop out. We saw a good number of hinds and a nice young stag with great potential but he wasn't the big one we were after. **As we shifted around into the catchment we started seeing a few more deer and there were young stags around but we were only after a mature stag.**

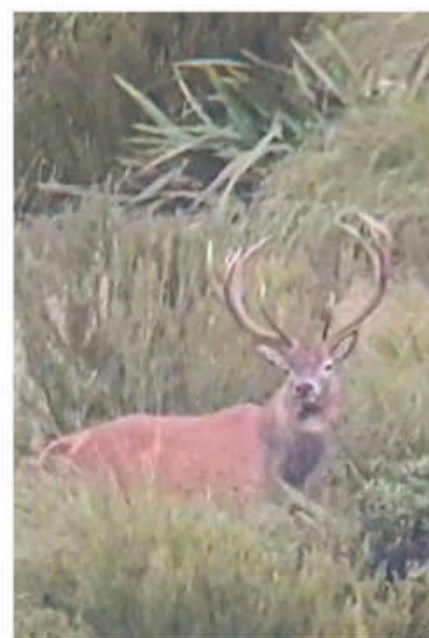
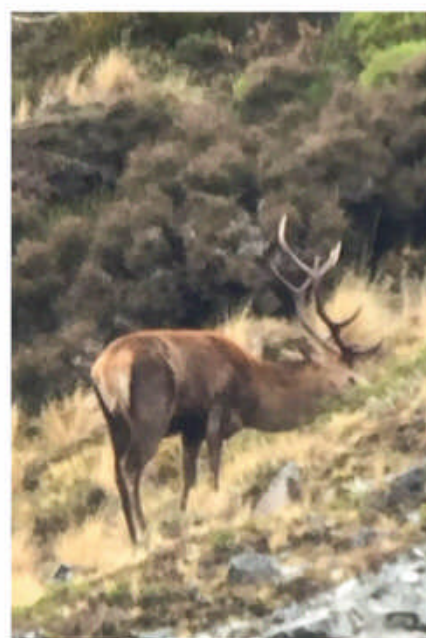
Blair and I watched them for a while



My shooting position for the big stag



The young stags we left



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SPREAD			39 1/2
SPAN			30
BEAM	5 5/8	6	11 2/8
CORONET	9 2/8	9 3/8	18 5/8
BROW	11 1/2	12 5/8	23
BEZ	9 1/2	4 5/8	9 5/8
TREZ	10	11 1/2	20
TOPS ROYAL	12 1/2	12 1/2	25 1/2
INNER ROYAL	12 3/4	9 3/8	18 1/2
BACK TIME	19 5/8	21 3/8	39 1/2
TOTAL SCORE			321 1/2

SKULL LENGTH OVER CURVE:
SHOULDER HEIGHT OF STAG:
MEASURED BY: Blair 3-5-09
ASSISTANT:

hoping a bigger stag would appear and push those younger stags away from the hinds, but that didn't happen so we packed up our gear and kept on exploring this new catchment. As we were glassing our way up the valley we found a good spot for lunch and parked up for a few hours waiting for the wind to change. The wind started to blow down the valley so Blair headed off up valley again while I stayed back and

watched the faces in front of me, just like the night before. **We were radioing backwards and forwards once again and about half an hour later I saw another two hinds join the lone hind I had seen earlier.** Then a stag popped out so I assessed him and radioed Blair asking if he had seen anything. He hadn't so I told him that I had seen a stag but he wasn't mature and needed to be left as he had great potential.

That's all we saw for the evening so it was a long walk back to camp in the dark - we were a little stumped that we hadn't seen another mature stag or heard any roars! We had covered a lot of country. We got back to camp and had the usual discussion of plans for the morning as we were walking out. **The weather was meant to pack in and we had a few river crossings to make.** Heading downstream the following day we kept glassing some nice faces hoping that a big stag for Blair was out, but unfortunately we didn't see anything so we carried on down the



A better angle to show the huge tops on the stag



riverbed to the truck. Once loaded up we headed straight to the closest pie shop for some good food and then to the taxidermist to drop my head in to get mounted. We had an awesome six days in the mountains and came out with a big mature Red stag. **Now its Blair's turn and I can't wait to be there for that moment.**





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WEST COAST *WAR OF ATTRITION*

WRITTEN BY ~ JOSH MORGAN

It started, as usual, with the random phone call. 'Hey mate, how's it? Good-yup cool-yea, yea I'm good.' just how most of my yarns start off with my brother in law, Regan

Regan and my sister Stacey had recently purchased a lodge in the West Coast of the South Island and after venturing there for a visit on holiday in 2019 I was adamant that I had to move away from the usual South Kaweka missions and get into this epic backcountry paradise in 2020.

Quick plans were made and a rough date range was set with Regan doing some quick scouting missions to check animal numbers before the trip.

As we got closer, my mate Josh mentioned he was keen to join us, as he had missed the last Kaweka trip because of a shoulder injury.

Fast forward to the morning of February 18th and we were frantically repacking and checking over all our gear before starting our journey into the wild-lands that is the West Coast. It was a bloody weird feeling leaving the Waikato in full drought and the 30°C+ temps only to arrive in Hokitika to

temperatures of around 18°C and rain. Soon Regan had us both bundled into the car heading to our destination. Once we reached the lodge, we repacked again to trim the fat so to

speak, as we were headed in by foot for eight days. **As usual, when I weighed my pack it wasn't great, which is the price I pay for taking my DSLR and tripod setup plus batteries added to all the usual hunting gears.** You get the picture, but also damn worth it in my opinion.

After a decent sleep my sister dropped us off at the road-end to start our journey. It was evident real quick that the previous two storms had really taken their toll on the initial roading section with whole sections washed away. Pushing on we made our way deeper into the valley, trudging through some s*** bog sections early on, only to



Bashing our way up the river



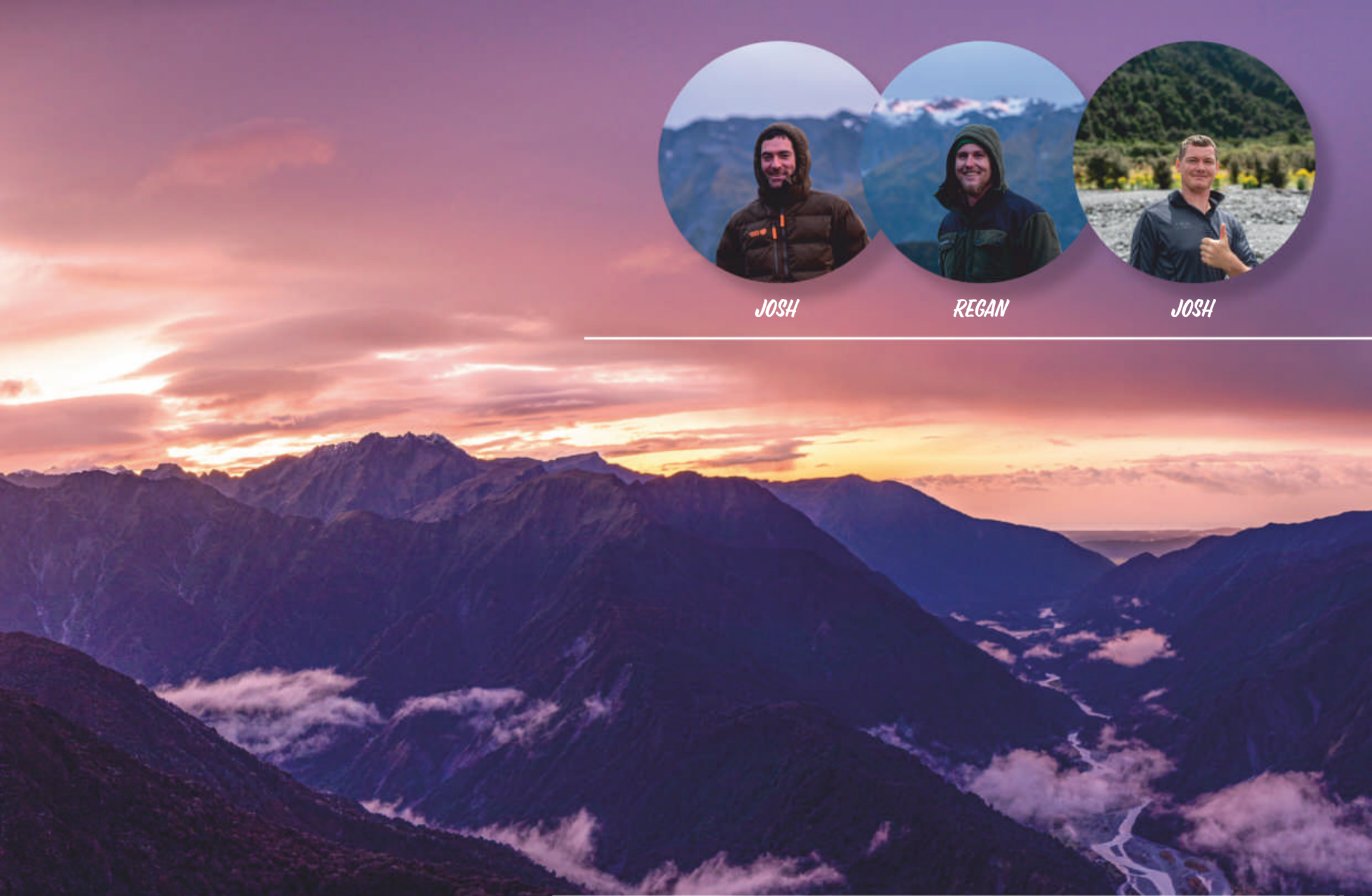
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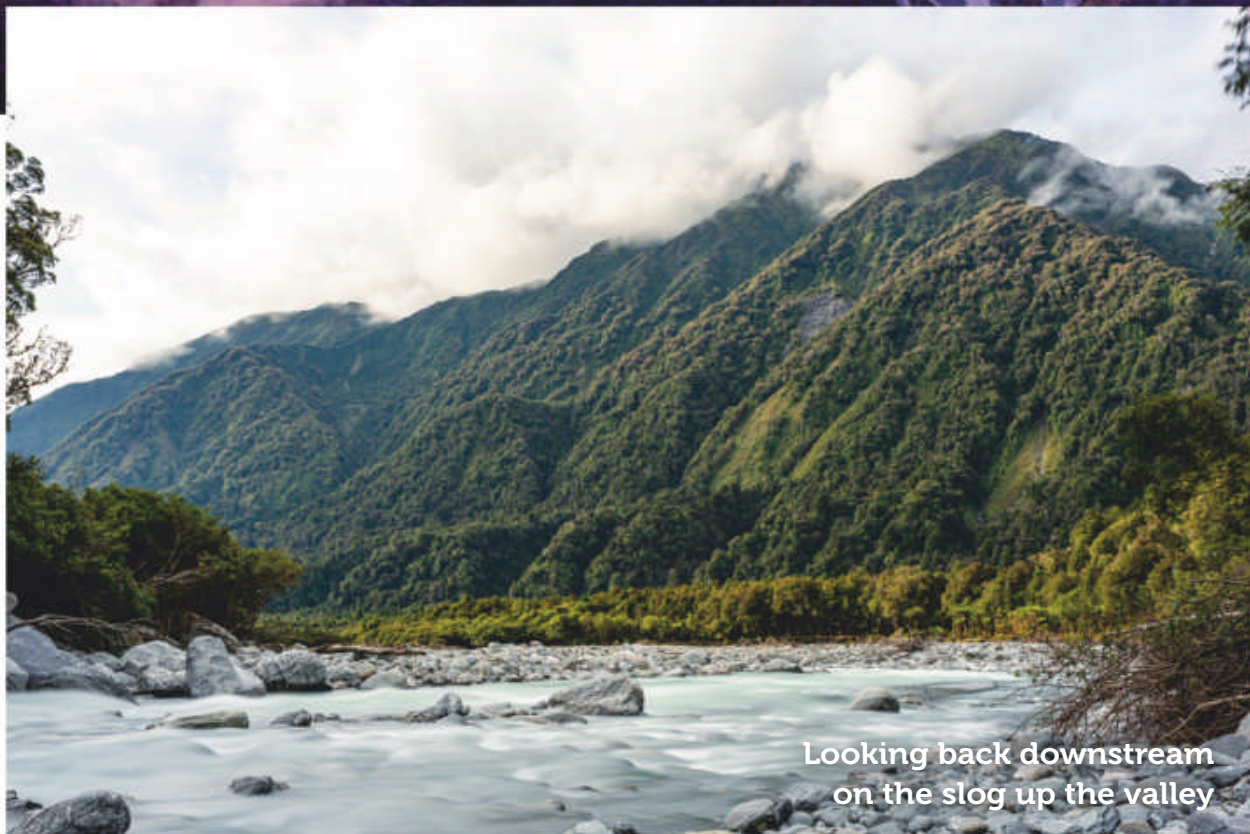
A view of the main river valley (right) and the wilderness area from near our campsite

be met with a lot more washout debris and blown out waterfall sections. The track had taken some big hits in places which made traversing certain sections rather hairy for us. **There was essentially just rock face and shingle with nothing to hold onto or stop you falling into the river, and the forces of Mother Nature really had to be seen to be believed.**

It became clear that deer numbers were in great shape, the sign and mashed up silt areas we came across at every open grassy section were an impressive sight and really got our hopes up.

Hours, rest breaks and swing bridge crossings slowly ticked by until our first serious moment. Regan managed to roll his ankle during a rock hop, which slowed proceedings from there on in. He was damn determined to make the hut, so found a make-shift walking stick and pushed through the pain. Josh also unfortunately picked up an inflamed shoulder muscle injury from his pack which gave him hell later on.

Daylight was fading when we got stuck on a particularly annoying flat section that was overgrown and sent us in circles. However, it ended up being exciting for the boys as they spooked a bunch of hinds and spikers



Looking back downstream on the slog up the valley



A hut day in the rain





A better view of the main valley with the ocean in the distance

feeding on the fresh grass, but no one got the chance to drop anything. We moved onto the cable cart which definitely could've used some more tension on the main line, but it was an entertaining and easy way across the river to the hut. We finally crashed through the hut door some ten hours after starting our trek. All broken souls were washed away when we lit the jet boils, got some dinner on the go and settled in for an attempt at some sleep.

After the mammoth first day things were sluggish

around the hut and we stirred later than the usual hunting time of dawn. This day was more admin really, unpack gear, coffee, tea, food and then the all-important scout of our new area, which was pretty awesome I must say.

None of us spotted anything that day but I wasn't fazed as we had plenty of time up our sleeves. I found a sheltered spot under trees overlooking the main river, set the camera up and let rip on a time-lapse for a few hours while I hunted up river. Still nothing showed but plenty of sign was seen so it was promising country.

Before starting we saw a heavy front had been forecast to drop that afternoon and getting heavier the next day, so I called it quits after the time-lapse and hightailed it back to the hut on dark. **The boys flew back over the cable cart to try their luck at the Reds on the flats again but lady luck was not on our side that day and again nothing was dropped.**

That night and into the next day we were treated to a barrage of rain which sent the main river into a frenzy, quite the sight for us North Islanders. It also meant that we were hut bound so cards, a rest and a few drinks that Josh brought in were about as strenuous as it got for that day.

Saturday dawned with fine weather and this was our day to leave the hut and finally venture into the treasured high country in search of tahr and chamois, which was my ultimate goal. **Excitement levels were high and the packs were loaded for a two day mission so we set off up river.**

We were just about to start our ascent when Josh slumped down on to a rock and said his shoulder was giving him heaps of grief, but he's a tough bugger so he wanted to push upwards and see how it went. Sunny skies soon gave way to high clouds, then persistent drizzle which turned into full blown rain, making for sketchy sections with undergrowth washed out by previous storms. Eventually, after six hours we broke from the tree line and right into the full force of the weather. At that point Josh's shoulder really packed in. Tired and soaked he pulled pin and



Looking north across the main valley



Some pretty big country



The hut on our return

ventured back to the safety and warmth of the hut. I'd lost sight of Regan in the cloudy conditions, so I pushed onwards up the poled route over the boulders and through monkey scrub only to find him already set up in a perfect clearing under a rocky outcrop and out of the wind.

I set up my tent and dug some rain trenches, as by this stage it was pelting down and the temperature was plummeting. It was a great feeling to put dry clothes on and hop in the sleeping bag to rest out of the elements. We both drifted off to sleep and hours must have passed. Suddenly Regan woke me up saying **"get outta ya tent, you gotta see this, oh and bring your bloody camera."** I hurriedly grabbed my gear and headed out and was greeted by the best sunset I've seen in all my years, and all the while the storm was fading off out to sea. It made for some epic photos and panoramas.

During the night it completely cleared off and I snapped some basic astro photos from my tent door as I wasn't keen to get out of my dry tent and use an icicle

covered tripod, we were well into the negative temperatures. In hindsight I probably should have done a few panorama shots. As I drifted off to sleep, my mind drifted towards Josh and hoping he made it back to the hut okay.

Up early with a quick feed, we were greeted to super crisp morning and clear conditions with no wind - perfect I thought. We had ventured no more than one kilometre when I spotted a chamois on the horizon, so quietly we climbed through and around the scrub but never saw it again. We moved further eastward towards the rocky area where Regan spotted a group of chamois playing in the morning sun and dropping altitude rather quickly towards us. We stalked towards them, but again they vanished into a rock garden, nowhere to be seen. After a few minutes of glassing, I spotted what I thought to be a brilliant looking tahr about 700 yards away, so I pointed it out and we moved slowly towards a good lookout that would give me a roughly 300 yard shot. I set up the rifle and ditched my pack, then frantically

started looking for the animal but again, unluckily, it seemed to vanish (quite the pattern emerging here). After ten minutes I spotted another one higher up sunning itself, and a quick range and a ballistic check gave me a range of 377 yards. I dialled in +4.6 MOA on the trusty Leupold for elevation and there was no wind at all, so no correction was needed. I settled to wait for the right moment.

That perfect broadside never eventuated, so I took the next best option which was a quartering away shot that would take at least one shoulder and the central boiler-house area, as I call it. **I got my breathing settled in, then slowly squeezed off a 7mm mag round out of the Tikka that disrupted all silence but was rewarded with the nice heavy thump sound** that you know is a good thing. I saw him at 20x zoom crumple hard and fall to his right out of sight. Elated, I jumped up only to find Regan laughing that my pack had tumbled 50 metres down the cliff with all my camera gear in it and unknowingly smashed a hole in my camelback lid. I was more concerned with my expensive

camera gear which luckily survived.

Next up was the inevitable retrieval but my luck must've been really running dry as by the time I'd reached the area of the shot I couldn't see a thing, apart from small bloody area and heavy hoof marks. We both crashed out on a small outcrop for a much-needed lunch stop and thought about the worst but not saying it, all the while taking in the grandness of what was surrounding us. We live in a hell of a beautiful country, don't we?

After 30 minutes or so we carried on our search and Regan finally found him crumpled in a heap at the bottom of a bluff between two vertical sections of rock. We guessed it at roughly 30 metres deep and there was no way his rope was long enough to reach it.

'Never mind mate, we'll have to keep going' said

Regan, so despite my disappointment at the waste we moved on back towards our camp area via a large alpine rock lake and some absolutely huge rock fall sections.

Halfway back to camp, while sliding down a tussock face Regan stopped in his tracks, trying to prop himself up on shrubs, frantically searching through his scope. Much to my surprise a nice chamois popped out from behind a rock. It was a hell of a shot considering the angle and position we were in, but the .308 rang out and he managed a solid shot freehand. Down went the buck. We were over the moon - our luck had finally changed and we had an animal on deck that hadn't vanished.

The standard photo session proceeded during the bone-out and after the usual congratulations of our alpine double we headed off to camp for pack down and the mission down to the hut to see Josh and relax.

My knee I'd injured earlier gave me all sorts of grief on the way down, I loaded up on Nurofen and ended up using my rifle for a walking stick and prop while sliding on my arse downhill for the majority of the walk. The pain temporarily subsided as we finally made the side-river close to the hut and rested our aches in the freezing water.

A sign of our luck changing was that deer were spotted quite regularly between the river

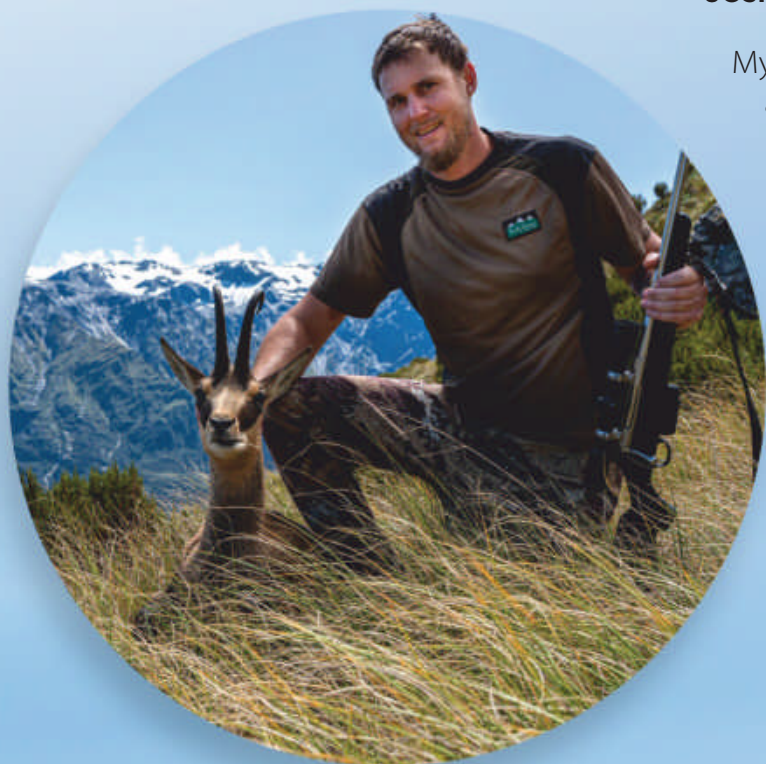
and hut but they were left to grow as we didn't need the added weight at this point. Arriving at the hut we crashed out, fairly well exhausted from our mission. After food and solid amounts of Nurofen I drifted off for a quick recovery sleep, content with how things had gone so far. **A plan was hatched to hike to the road end over two days to ease any issues we may encounter with our current injuries and to give us a chance to drop a Red on the walk out.**

Unfortunately no deer eventuated even though both Josh and Regan tried multiple times around our campsite. The remainder of the walk out was pretty quiet apart from a few major hurdles with the track in places. We bumped into two other hunters on the last half and filled them in on where we had been and what we had seen. They were locals so had it fairly sussed with some decent looking ice gear so they were going a bit more hardcore than us.

Dumping our packs into the ute at the road end was absolute bliss and my sister had some cold ciders and beers, so as you could imagine, we got fully on board with those while telling her and the kids all the yarns and misfortunes we had had during the trip.

The chamois went 9.64", and for Regan's first ever he was rapt. We never did get any deer in the end but it was definitely a bucket list trip for multiple reasons and doing it with great mates is even better.

It's a place I think I'll be regularly coming back to from now on when I get the chance.



Regan and his great chamois buck

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MY NZ HUNTER RIFLE BUILD

WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

LEUPOLD

3-18X44MM / VX6 / TMOA

TIKKA OPTILOK
SS 30MM RINGS

HARDY ENGINEERING
26" TIKKA CONTOUR 1:8 TWIST BLANK

TIKKA
T3X ACTION
STRATA BASE RIFLE

DPT
MODULAR MAGNUM SS

SPARTAN JAVELIN
PRO HUNT TAC

NZ HUNTER
CARBON FIBRE STOCK





A test fit of the components to see what the final product will look like

With calibre and rifle decided, it's now time to go through the components of a custom build

But first, a little more about the base rifle. I've been fortunate enough to be using a Tikka Strata for over a year now, beginning with the tasty wee hind Greg and I shot in the Kawekas for the original Testfire in January 2020. Since then I've used one in 300 Win Mag on several hunts including my biggest stag to date (a story yet to come!)

When we spoke to Niccolo from Beretta New Zealand about a base rifle for this build he volunteered a 7mm-08 Strata that had been damaged in transit. It almost seemed a shame to be using nothing but the action and leaving that improved stock and fluted barrel behind!

To convert this rifle from the 7mm-08 to 28 Nosler we'll be adding a magnum magazine and long bolt stop, and opening up the bolt face.

A summary of the rest of the components in the build are as follows;

SCOPE – LEUPOLD VX6 3-18X44MM TMOA RETICLE

BARREL – HARDY TIKKA CONTOUR BLANK, 1:8 "TWIST- CUT TO 20" AND FLUTED

STOCK – NZ HUNTER CARBON FIBRE

BIPOD – SPARTAN JAVELIN PRO HUNT TAC

SUPPRESSOR – DPT CUSTOM MAGNUM SS

RINGS – TIKKA STAINLESS STEEL OPTILOK

SCOPE:

The scope is an area where you can save a significant amount of weight. A lot of premium long range scopes are designed for the European and military markets. In Europe the focus can be heavily on low-light performance at the expense of weight as they are often hunting areas with relatively easy access and cagey animals that only come out right on dusk i.e stand hunting (big generalisation I know, especially when you consider Swarovski, but it's the largest part of the domestic market for the other brands). **The military market also sacrifices weight but in their case it's in the quest for the extremes of durability and reliability** - we've all seen the video of people bashing in nails with a Nightforce! The North American mountain hunting market has driven the demand for scopes that suit our Kiwi style of hunting where we need the best of all of those fields. Performance *and* reduced weight, and that's why we've gone with one of the leaders in that market, Leupold.

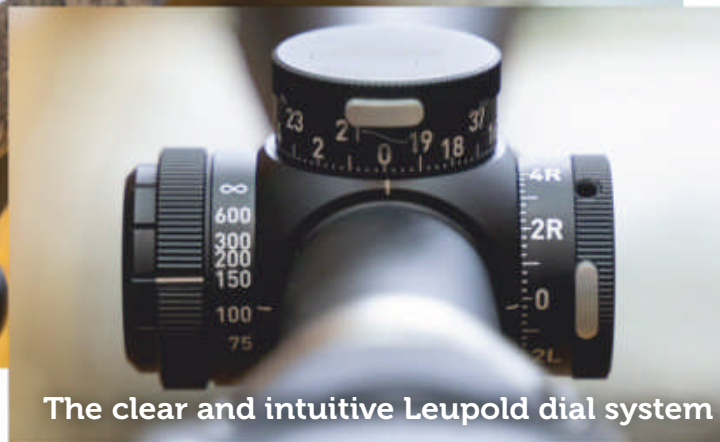
We've opted for a VX6 3-18x44 weighing 539g/19oz with the TMOA reticle from the kiwi distributors NZ Asia based in Nelson. The VX5 is a slightly cheaper option, but given this rifle is built to be the ultimate generalist we're happy to pay a little more for the extra magnification range. **The 3x through to 18x will cover all situations from close quarters roar action through to long range tops shooting.** This is a 30mm tube scope, offering increased strength but most importantly more adjustment for windage and elevation. Tube diameter does not increase light transmission, everything else being equal you need a larger objective lens diameter for that.

A huge advantage to the Leupold line is Custom Dial System (CDS). Having CDS makes allowing for bullet drop at different ranges criminally easy, it's as simple as ranging the distance and winding the dial to the range.

Once you have finished your load development you send the load and scope data away to Leupold and they will laser etch a custom dial cap to match. The first cap is a free service with the purchase of the scope. When it is returned you simply remove one screw and replace the standard MOA scale dial cap with the CDS. **They are an easy-to-use design, with strong positive clicks and no dial covers.** Just press the button to release the zero lock and turn. If you run different loads for different hunting situations, you can have more than one CDS made up and swap between them.



A closer look at the VX6 mounted in Optiloks



The clear and intuitive Leupold dial system

The reason I selected the upgrade to the TMOA reticle is the windage marks. Not only do they make wind calls more repeatable for you, but it is clear and easy to explain for a guest shooting the rifle. Newbies in particular may not understand animal anatomy and or terminology well, i.e. telling them to aim at the crease. Also they often struggle with the concept of aiming off to the side of an animal, without an understanding of ballistics and the effect of wind it appears you're shooting into thin air. Telling them to use a windage mark is quicker, more intuitive and much less ambiguous. Money well spent in Greg's words.

BARREL:

We've discussed barrels to a degree last issue. Shortening your barrel will reduce weight, increase portability, and if you go for an aftermarket barrel, potentially improve accuracy. The hammer-forged Tikka barrels are very good, so if you're sticking with the same calibre you can start with just shortening it, or perhaps fluting it at the same time to achieve some extra weight reduction. The only thing with Tikka barrels is they are not that nice to rechamber to a different calibre, as their steel is very stringy and doesn't always machine nicely. This can be a bonus though! You can explore aftermarket options like the button rifled Hardy we've gone for, or other match-grade cut rifled barrels. Then there's always the option of a carbon wrapped barrel like the ones Hardy produce to save serious amounts of weight.

Just to explain a bit of terminology, there are three main ways of creating the rifling on a barrel, all with various advantages and disadvantages. In a hunting scenario a quality example of any of these methods will more than suffice.

HAMMER FORGED – This is the most common and cost-effective way of making a barrel for large

volume manufacturers. In this case a short fat blank is created (for standard length sporter barrels this is usually about 12 inches long), and a mandrel with the negative of the rifling pattern is placed inside. Then the hammer forging machine strikes the blank in a rotational manner and compresses the metal down on to the mandrel, forming the rifling and squeezing the barrel out to full length in the process. If needed, hammer forging can form the chamber and throat as well as a fully profiled outer surface. The spiral tracks of the hammers can often be seen on the outer surface of hammer-forged barrels. Some manufacturers turn the barrels to remove this surface, while others leave it in place.

These are expensive machines that are only justifiable for high-volume applications like the major rifle manufacturers hence we see few of them in aftermarket options, but in the hands of an attentive machinist they do create a quality product with tolerances as tight as 0.01mm/0.000394". They are wear resistant and finished to high tolerances, but some argue that the stresses of the forging can be released over time (such as during the contouring process) to create accuracy issues in the barrel. Most manufacturers have stress relieving heat treatment processes to minimise this. Few competitive shooters use a hammer forged barrel, instead preferring a quality button or cut-rifled barrel that has been finished by hand lapping (the process of smoothing out any tooling marks left in the bore from the drilling or reaming processes).

BUTTON RIFLED – In this process the blank is made with a smooth, undersize bore in the centre. A 'carbide button' - a super-hard button of tungsten carbide with the rifling negative on it is then pushed or pulled through the bore while being turned at the desired

rifling twist to create a finished barrel. The drawback of this method is that it also creates stress in the barrel's steel that must be relieved before any further machining is done on the barrel.

Button rifled barrels take more finishing than a hammer forged barrel as the button leaves more of the drilling and reaming tooling marks that need to be lapped out, but the actual process is very fast and both time and machine efficient - only one pass needs to be made to form the rifling. Our Hardy barrel is created using the button rifling method.

CUT RIFLED – Cut rifling is the original process, and there are various improved versions of it in use today. A cutting tool is pushed

or pulled through a drilled and reamed to bore diameter barrel. The tool cuts the metal out to form the grooves, it does not beat or iron the grooves into the steel as with the other two methods. Cut rifling is favoured by a number of gunsmiths and competitive shooters, Greg included, as there is little to no additional stress imposed on the barrel while forming the rifling and the rifling twist is more consistent throughout the length of the barrel.

It is a time-consuming and therefore more expensive way of making the standard quality barrels used by the major firearms factories though, so you must purchase them from specialist match quality barrel makers like Bartlein, Kreiger, Brux etc. Cut rifled barrels have to be lapped to remove the tooling marks whether standard or match quality, whereas some manufacturers do not lap standard quality hammer forged or button rifled barrels as they are reasonably smooth straight off the mandrel or button. All match quality barrels are lapped though, no matter which process was used to form them. Also some metal alloys cannot be cut so the choice of materials is more limited.

There is also another, far less common method known as Cation rifling. Basically it is precision applied acids wiped down the barrel at the twist rate and groove spacing required, then a neutralizer is flushed down at the precise time calculated to get the desired groove depth. Theoretically this can get very fine tolerances with little stress placed on the barrel, but it is quite new, expensive technology. Its major advantage is it can etch alloys previously unheard of as they couldn't be utilised by the above methods. Perhaps there will be breakthroughs in even lighter alloys for mountain hunters?

STOCK:

One of the largest gains to be made in lightening your rifle is by going to a carbon fibre stock, which is also more rigid, helping to improve accuracy. There are a huge array of carbon fibre stocks around, especially if you're going to use a Rem 700 base. For our Tikka we've decided to use one of our own NZ Hunter CF stocks. Greg has personally designed these stocks (manufactured here in NZ, so kiwi-made from start to finish) to be as minimalist as possible - slim forend for gripping one handed when using it as a walking stick up a hill but still perfect for bipod use, a more vertical pistol grip for correct trigger hand placement, and including as high a cheek piece as possible so you can just remove the bolt without having to have the added weight of an adjustable version. Long ago I learnt one of the most important things for accuracy was a good cheek weld, and most factory stocks simply don't provide this as the combs are too low - left over from the days of open sights.

The Strata stock we will be ditching weighs in at 30oz, and the NZ Hunter CF weighs 22oz, so we will be saving half a pound/225 grams in this simple customization. If you're building from a regular T3x you'll also be gaining that



The superb Spartan Javelin bipod system. This is the Pro Hunt Tac, heavier than the Lite, but with the excellent springloaded adjustable legs and leg lock the Lite sacrifices

crucial cheek weld and more rigidity to your stock for improved accuracy.

BIPOD:

If you're serious about ditching weight on a mountain rifle then detachable carbon fibre bipods are the way to go. The best in this regard is the Spartan Javelin Lite, weighing in at only 133g for a standard. They also do a model with notched, rapidly height adjustable legs called the ProHunt Tac which is model NZ Asia supplied. This model weighs 215gms.

The best way to fit these bipods does require some modification to your stock - you need to drill a hole to fit the magnetized receptacle to the forend, but

after that it's as simple as slipping the bipod in when you're ready to shoot. This system obviously saves a lot of weight, but also a significant amount of bulk on your rifle as you don't have to carry your rifle with bipod attached. The Spartan's easily fit in a belt pouch or top pocket of your pack etc so they're accessible and quick to get into operation.

I've used these bipods a lot as Greg is using them religiously on his serious mountain rifle builds, and I can definitely vouch for their ease of use, rigidity and build quality.

SUPPRESSOR (CAN):

Not only are suppressors nicer on you (and your companions) ears, they also



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A closer look at the internal baffles of a modular DPT suppressor. The all important stainless steel baffle is far right.

reduce recoil to a reasonable extent. They can also have quite a positive effect on accuracy, as adding weight to the end of your barrel dampens the barrel's vibrations and most often produces helpful harmonics. Most rifles shoot better with a properly fitted can than without. In our build we're hoping to be able to use the rifle with a brake instead of a can on occasion, but we'll have to wait and see if this light short barrel with considerable barrel whip due to the copious 28 Nosler capacity will shoot accurately enough without a can.

With shorter barrels and large capacity cases like our 28 Nosler build there is a significant amount of gas and partially burnt powder granules blasting out of the barrel at high exit pressures. This calls for a well-constructed suppressor with replaceable baffles and ideally a stainless first baffle to bear the brunt of the impact. In all honesty though, just like wearing out the barrel, a rifle like this is going to see so few shots (once we have the load worked up) that suppressor life doesn't really concern me. We've found DPT modular suppressors to be the best balance of reliability, replaceability, weight

and noise reduction so we'll be using one of the custom magnum cans they make for us on this build.

RINGS:

Rings are a no brainer when you have the option of the superb Optilok rings on Sakos and Tikkas.

These quality stainless steel rings have self-aligning inserts that reduce any torqueing or bending of the scope tube and eliminate the need for lapping. Weighing 4.9ozs for the standard height 30mm ring mounts, they are not the lightest, but arguably the best as they clamp around the Tikka integral rail. If you do want to investigate lighter options Talleys at about 2.5ozs are one option, but they are relying on the screws to hold them in alignment as they don't clamp the rail, and just sit on the flat top of the receiver. There used to be Tikka alloy rings too if you can still find a set somewhere. They do clamp the rail like the Optiloks, but they only had two screws per cap instead of four, but I don't think Greg has ever had an issue with them so long as you use the recoil pin to stop them sliding.

There are other options if you want to mount a picatinny style base on the receiver, and DPT even make a one-piece full-length base/ring combo that clamps the integral receiver rail. This is very robust with no possible alignment issues so theoretically would be the most accurate, but is a little heavier. Really long-range rigs may require one piece angled bases to provide maximum elevation from your scope's adjustments, and DPT's one piece mount is also available in a 20MOA cant.

TRIGGER:

The Sako/Tikka factory trigger is so good there is no point replacing it on a hunting rifle. It can easily be adjusted down to about 1.5 pounds, and this is plenty light enough for our purposes, and what Greg sets all our triggers at. Factory triggers are set quite heavy for product liability reasons – especially in the USA – as much as 7 pounds on some models! It is impossible to shoot accurately with a trigger this heavy. Once you have got used to a 1.5 to 2 pound trigger, you will never go back to something heavier!

So those are our picks and why we picked them. Next issue we'll be getting in to the exciting nitty gritty of the barrel length verses velocity testing!



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Grant Hill - "A young Red stag in Central Otago. This was a couple of weeks after the roar and I caught him out in the open feeding."

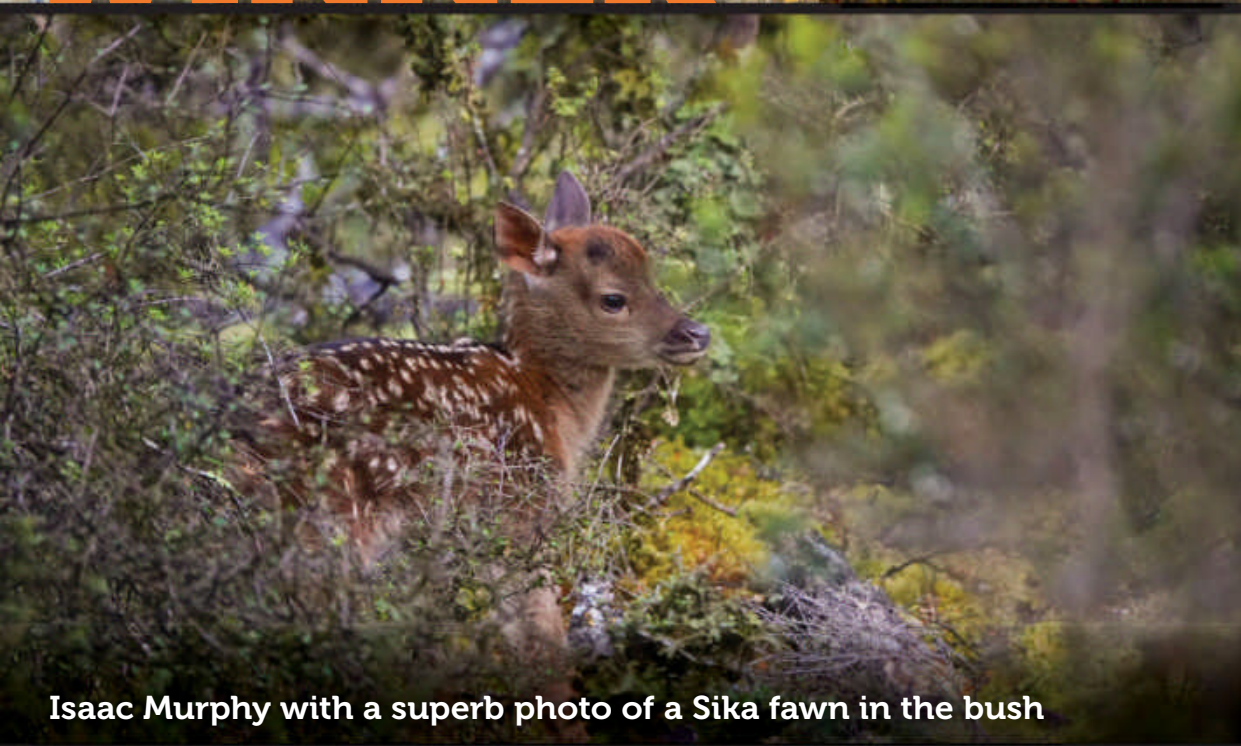
WINNER



Brent Dillon's game camera behind his house 'Been in a few battles this boy and he's evaded me twice now too!'



A big eight point Red photographed by Matt Bennet



Isaac Murphy with a superb photo of a Sika fawn in the bush



Jonathan Macdonald photographed these Rusa grazing in dry grassland, South East Queensland, Australia



Les Bell saw these chamois in a riverbed in South Westland

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ROAR TIPS

FROM THE NZ HUNTER TEAM

1. Mature stags that are holding hinds will not always come into a roar until you get right into their territory. When right in close, turn your head away when you roar to make yourself sound further away or even just break the odd stick and stay quiet and watch and wait.

2. Cover the ground at a steady pace roaring regularly into catchments. Let your voice do the walking. Always be aware that a stag could come in to you silently while doing this so keep your eyes peeled.

3. Gain a bit of height to help hearing and so your roars carry further. Keep away from rivers and streams and any noise that will stop you hearing roaring stags.

4. Big stags can turn up on river flats at first and last light so check these out on your way to and from a hunt. Keep your scent off them though.

5. Where possible, target stags that are roaring rather than stalking wallows etc.

6. If two stags are roaring really well, sometimes it is better not to make any noise and just stalk in.

7. When roaring in a stag, make sure you are concealed and with a good view of your shooting area with reasonably clear shooting lanes, especially downwind of you. That is often the direction a stag will sneak in from. Have your rifle up ready (pointed safely with bolt up) and

keep movement to a minimum.

8. Watch out for hinds!!

9. Stags can show up anywhere, especially subordinate stags.

10. The first stag you see is not always the dominant stag, they are often surrounded by ringers.

11. If it is a young stag with a head that will be a ripper in a couple of years, let it go. If you need the meat shoot a yearling or a hind.

12. It is safer to stay together when roaring up a stag with a mate. One can roar and the other can take the shot. If the stag is cagey and won't come in, then the two hunters can work together. One stays back and roars and the other sneaks in. The roaring hunter must stay put and not even load his rifle if he has one (which he shouldn't) under any circumstances!

13. Always presume it is a person until definitely identified as a deer. Watch out for life like recordings that can fool both stags and hunters. Identify your target!!

14. Hunt the mid level spurs that flatten off.

15. If after a trophy stag, research what heads have come out of various areas. History has a habit of repeating itself!

16. In tight bush on a stag roaring well, only move when he roars. It will help cover any sound you make.

17. If hunting open country, keep your scent out of the good areas and watch from a distance.

18. Roar lots early in the roar – when stags perhaps have yet to find a hind. They are more likely to come in if they haven't already got one.

19. During the middle/peak of the roar when stags are likely to have hinds, they will be far less likely to come in, especially if a hind is cycling. Use their replies to pin point their location then stalk in on them.

20. Start with a basic stag moan to see if you get a reply. When you do, begin to work the stag up by intensifying your roars. When in close to a stag and he just won't come to you, try using a hind call. This call can often be far more effective than an actual roar!

21. If a stag replies once or twice then shuts up, stay where you are. More than likely he is quietly sneaking in on you. (We have seen this happen lots).

22. If you know a stag is coming in get ready!! They often come in much faster than you are expecting.

23. When roaring in a stag in the bush look for tops of antlers rather than body. Very often it's the antlers you'll see first.

24. If sneaking in on a stag that won't come to you, watch out for the lesser, outrider satellite stags/spikers.

25. If inexperienced at roaring go out to a deer farm and listen. Try to imitate the sounds.

26. Don't be too ashamed to use an electronic caller, especially on Sika!

27. Where there are hinds there will sooner or later be a stag, but you might have to wait a while for one to begin cycling!

28. Don't use the weather as an excuse. When they are ready to roar they will roar regardless of the weather!

29. The big boys roar earlier than most expect.

30. If a stag is roaring without you having to keep him going, then don't roar!

31. Never put him off until tomorrow, if he is going well and the wind is suitable, get him now. You never know what will happen with the weather, other hunters etc if you decide to leave him till later.

32. Just because he has stopped roaring doesn't mean he's buggered off. Often a loud "Woof" will get them going again.

33. Don't be afraid to spend time up high in the dark pin pointing roaring stags for the morrow.

34. If you see a good one and muck him up, odds are he will be back in the same place the following year.

35. Look for fresh stag sign, as the stag may not be far away. Be alert around wallows or tree rubs.

36. Aim to be in the stag's area at first light or last 2 hours of light.

37. When you get a response, reply back with a similar sounding roar.

38. Use wind to your advantage and close in on stag as quick as possible while he's roaring.

39. Get into within 100-150m from stag and roar again.

40. Shake trees and roar and finish with a grunt ... make it sound like you are in his domain and ready to fight.

41. Don't move and be patient, only moan if you have too otherwise you may give away your position.

42. When you are in your hunting area roar every few minutes as you move along as often a stag will be where you least expect it. Roaring regularly will minimise the chance of walking past a stag or inadvertently walking into one.

43. Regular roaring may alert another hunter that a human mimicking a stag is in the same area.

44. If you hear sound or see movement, shape or colour assume it is another hunter until proven otherwise beyond all doubt. Think about this often during the hunt and remind yourself. When you see an animal assess its gender, age and antlers. If you've taken the time to do that then you've established it isn't a human.

45. Roar from places where you get good coverage over a large area. If there is no wind roar from spurs and ridge tops working your way along, roaring regularly on both sides. If there is wind up top this will make it difficult for your roar to be heard by a stag and to hear an answer from the ridge top. If it is blowing try and climb down out of the wind on the leeward side of the ridge and sidle roaring as you go. If you do hear a stag then you need to nut out how to approach him into wind.

46. Carrying out a set of antlers or an animal on your back can be perceived as risky as another hunter may think it is a deer walking through the bush. Wearing a high visibility garment is sensible and if you are carrying an animal or head put the garment over the animal. Carry antlers, tips facing downward. It is safer, more comfortable and makes negotiating thicker bush a lot easier.

47. If you are able find out if other hunters are in the same area then do so. Ask at the DOC office or check with land managers. Are there other cars parked nearby and if there is consider going somewhere else.

48. A deep, loud, long and angry roar does not necessarily equate to a bigger stag with the bigger head. Check out the puny roars also.

49. Control buck fever. Know how to recognise it in yourself and have a strategy to counter it. Mine is: "STOP"
S top
T ake time to control your emotion
O bserve for as long as it takes to positively ID the target beyond all doubt.
P lace the shot with care

50. And lastly Druncle's tip - take a silly brother in-law or a young nephew with you to carry out your stag!



KAWEKA SCRUB COUNTRY

WRITTEN BY ~ LIAM SCHLIERIKE

There was not a breath of wind, the sky was full of stars and the moon was illuminating the valley

We pulled to the side of the road where we'd begin our adventure. With packs ready and head torches charged we set off into the wet scrub.

We slogged for 55 minutes up to a lookout we had discovered four months prior. We had watched a

number of animals that were living in the area. We didn't watch any big velveties, just a good number of

hinds. The boys would be moving in soon as it was coming close to that time of year. I was eager to get on the board - it'd nearly been one month of hard antler and none of the velveties I had watched in the prior months wanted to be found. Right on cue the first deer emerged from the scrub just as it was light enough to see through the bins.

We watched the young spiker feed through the pockets of open until the sun lit up his beautiful spotted summer coat. We watched 6 deer across multiple faces for the morning, the sun was getting higher in the sky and we were happy with the photos we'd taken and laughs we shared. The deer had returned to the bush, so I

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glasses the faces one more time before I turned my attention to the morning coffee. I was relaxing with a coffee in hand looking out across the valley when my mate Brayden said **"the spiker is back out"**. I put my coffee down calmly and picked up my binos. The tempo changed when I laid eyes on him **"that's not the spiker!"** I replied to Brayden. There he was - the first stag I'd seen in this area standing proud on the clearing, I could see that his antlers had length. I got my camera ready to try and identify whether he was worth pursuing. At the time he looked like he was a mature stag sporting 7 points.

So, the plan was made that we'd make our way as quickly as possible to the closest shooting position as we were over 1000 yards away when we first saw him. After a good 30 minutes of running through the kanuka, we finally closed the gap to 600 yards - still a long distance to shoot even in good conditions. The sun was hot and high, the deer were nowhere to be seen. I glassed constantly for over two hours when finally he appeared. I could only just make out his dorsal stripe and orange coat through the kanuka but it was definitely him as I could also see flicks of antler as his head moved while feeding on the undergrowth. Just as quickly as he'd appeared he disappeared, taking one step into the thick trees. We persevered for as long as we could, and the hours passed slowly. With the sun now beating down on us we finally decided to pull the pin and return another day for him. There was definitely no sadness in my mind that we hadn't got him. If I've learned one thing from Sika hunting it's that you have to be okay to go home with nothing.

The intention was to return in a weeks time but the determination to get my first hard antler stag for 2019 was unbearable. I rung Brayden the next day and told him what time we were leaving. He was in, and my partner Rhiannon wanted to get in on the action as well.

We arrived an hour before light the next day to face an entirely different set of conditions. It was too foggy to see five metres in front of you. We sat in the car talking rubbish while half falling back asleep. The sun was slowly rising showing us that the fog was doing the same thing. Picking up our gear we headed to the

lookout that we had waypoints the day before. We glassed for an hour but not a single deer presented itself. It started to drizzle and then to rain. I knew if we persevered, he'd appear at any moment as Sika stags seem to venture out more in the rain.

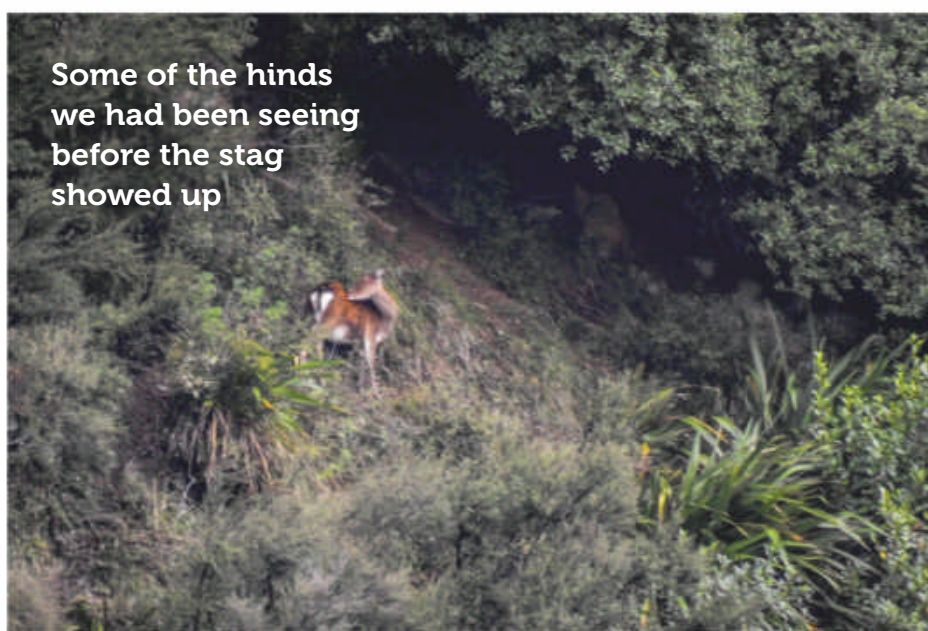
Another two hours went by before finally I caught a glimpse of a deer in the small pocket between the kanuka. Ready the camera and rifle as quickly as I could, I zoomed in on the deer with my camera to see whether it was him. I was in luck!

The stag never stopped once, making his way up the face through the thick scrub and I only catching glimpses of him. It was starting to become frustrating - getting setup, back to binos setup, back to binos. This stag was smart enough to know to stay away from the open. The rain started coming down hard, making it difficult to see and even harder to persevere. **We were drenched, and another hour of steady rain and wind went slowly by. Still no sightings since he had stepped into cover.**

Rhiannon, Brayden and Peppa (the dog)



A still from the video we took of the stag



Some of the hinds we had been seeing before the stag showed up

had decided it was nap time, leaving me to try stay awake. The rain reduced to a drizzle and the wind was a steady breeze, and my hopes had risen as we still had time. I glassed the faces over and over - the same pieces of dirt, same trees and the same game trails. Then, there he was broadside, standing in the middle of the clearing feeding as if he'd been there the entire time.



Liam with the trophy where the dog found it



Rhiannon displaying the hard-won antlers

I laid down behind the rifle while waking the others up, I wanted to get the crosshairs on him fast, as we'd been playing cat and mouse for close to ten hours now. But, yet again, he never stopped feeding from tree to tree. Thirty minutes behind the rifle can make anyone start to feel uncomfortable, let alone the hours building up for one deer. The stag made his way out of the trees cover yet again, but this time stopping for a moment, just long enough for me to touch a shot away. I watched the bullet impact, he was hit hard and fell down into the kanuka below. **The relief was amazing-finally we had shot him. I celebrated with Rhiannon and Brayden briefly before the real work began.**

The plan was made for Rhiannon to stay behind with a fluoro pack cover (for us to navigate with) and Brayden and I would retrieve the stag. With only a knife and steel we set off through the gully that separated us from the stag. It took an hour of bush bashing through monkey scrub and snow damaged kanuka to put us close to where we last saw the stag before he tumbled into the trees. It wasn't long following the blood trail before the dog took a hard left into the trees and we followed her for ten metres. **The relief was amazing after all this time as there he was laying on a bed of fern.**

The antlers were long and sporting five points. I was ecstatic. I picked his head up off the ground, the brows were impressive. I was stoked - what a character stag, and a great stag to shoot just prior to the roar. He was in incredible



Rhiannon and Braydon after the gut-buster back up the hill

condition, two inches of fat on the rump and at least an inch everywhere else. I made the decision to get him out whole as there was too much prime meat to waste. Down hills are supposed to be easy, however rolling this stag down was not going to happen. Every time I tried to move he got stuck on trees, sticks or vines - just enough to make you run out of energy twice as fast. We made it back down to the creek that we had crossed on the way up. **I took as many mouthfuls of water as I could before returning to the hard slog that would now be all up hill.** After a few hard hours of taking turns carrying we were thrilled to see Rhiannon holding out two Up and

Go's she had got from the ute.

We sat and relaxed for a moment, catching our breath and taking it all in. It's not always about the antlers or how big a stag he was - it's about the fun and hard work it took to get it. Spending time with mates in the hills makes getting the stag a trophy within itself. Looking around I could see Brayden and Rhiannon were smiling but also exhausted, and so was I. We finished the day taking turns carrying the stag the rest of the way up the valley. What a relief to see the ute only a few metres away through the scrub. **"my shout, chocolate milkshakes!"**, a small price to pay for great company and incredible help.



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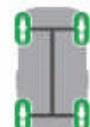
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WRITTEN BY ~ ROY SLOAN AND CAM SPEEDY

PT 2: GENETICS

A NEW APPROACH FOR GAME MANAGEMENT

The current Deer Policy Statement within which the Department of Conservation works on public conservation land was put in place in 2001 by the then Minister of Conservation, Sandra Lee

The opening statement of the Policy reads: *"Deer are a serious conservation pest".* Very few of us believe that statement, although we all recognise game animals do have an ecological consequence in natural habitats and that they must be carefully managed. .

It is very clear 20 years on that the current Deer Policy has been an abject failure. Reliance on fickle international commodity markets and exchange rates to drive a commercial Wild Animal Recovery Operator (WARO) based deer management model that directly competes with other hunting sectors is fundamentally flawed. A lack of investment in research and monitoring hasn't helped.

As the Department of Conservation follows a new Deer Plan development process, the opportunity arises to address game animal impacts through a new approach. There are huge win-win outcomes available for both conservation and hunting if we can get it right. Examples such as the Fiordland Wapiti

Area highlight such outcomes, but it requires open hearts and open minds across the social and political spectrum to bring to fruition.

In this three part series, we look at some key issues that might underpin a new collaborative approach to game animal management on public conservation land in New Zealand.

An approach that sees high quality, sustainable natural habitats supporting healthy organic meat animals to nourish Kiwis from all walks of life, and quality trophies that re-establish New Zealand as a hunters paradise. Such outcomes highlight the huge value our game animal resource could make to our provincial economies and to New Zealand society as a whole.

CAM SPEEDY

PART 2: GENETICS

How often do you hear it: *"...the stags on the block are no good - what we need is new blood..."*? Genetic background or 'blood' is the factor that many hunters seem to focus on as most important when it comes to big trophies hence their interest in 'new blood' when things are not as they could be.

It should be noted right from the start that releasing deer into the wild in New Zealand is illegal and risks far more to hunting than any of the (minor) perceived benefits of doing so. Hunters must understand that the long term sustainability of hunting in this country depends on a complex balance of factors across ecological, biological, social, political, economic and legal spectrums. What is discussed below is part of that balance – **it's called game management and there is an urgent need to educate New Zealanders about it.**

While it is true that big antlers are genetically based, the genetic make-up



A stag from some of NZ's oldest bloodlines



A mature animal with rubbish antlers, are genetics to blame? Or is it feed?

of a male game animal is simply the Plan. Sure, before you can build any quality structure, you need a quality plan. However, no matter how good the plan might be, if the building materials are not available, even the best builder in the world cannot deliver it. As we said last time: Only feeding will bring out the breeding. But it goes much deeper than that.

Over time, animals adapt and change with the environment in which they live. Various components of a game animal's environment, at a population level, will select for certain successful genetic traits and over time, these will predominate to make a particular herd genetically different from another. Hence, we have many breeds, races, bloodlines, sub-species - call them what you like - that can all represent a single 'species'. We see this in our farming systems where breeders exploit particular traits to breed farm stock that are best suited to peak production efficiency under given farm (environmental) conditions. **They match their animals to the country they are farming.**

So it is in game animals. Each local breed, race or sub-species - over many generations - adapts to their specific

environment as a result of the various selective forces peculiar to that environment. In hot, dry environments animals often become smaller to cope with poorer food supplies, heat and drought. In cold, wet environments, larger size and heavier body weights allow greater summer weight gains and help preserve body heat in extreme cold climates and/or under poor winter feed conditions. **Animals do, over time, become finely tuned and adapted to their specific environment.**

In many cultures where deer have had culturally significant value for any length of time (thousands of years in Europe); and where specific value has been placed on antler size; different strains of deer - particularly Red deer - have been developed with large antlers, but in a way that works with nature, not against it. By allowing the best males to survive to compete and contest mating rights, the fittest, strongest traits that are best suited to a particular environment are passed on to future generations. Why do you think they don't shoot 12 or 14 pointers in Scotland? **Would a cattle farmer kill his best bulls each year if he was looking to breed a good bloodline?** In fact, the combination of selective removal of the very best males for trophy rooms, habitat decline, nutrient deficiency, and chronic over-harvest of young males, explains why New Zealand has suffered declines in trophy quality far more than genetics per se ever will. These are all herd management issues, not bloodline issues.

So, can we fix these situations? Yes we can - but it has nothing to do with new



A seven year old Red x Sika hybrid stag, culled from the Kaimanawa main range as part of a TB deer survey in 2018. Is this a genetic issue or a habitat/feed issue?

blood. Instead of trying to introduce human valued and selected genetic traits directly into game animal populations, we should be returning more to maintaining the natural selective processes within our herds.

This will go against traditional thinking that holds the secret to big trophies is to throw a few monsters out there to breed. This thinking seldom considers whether the new studs are suited to the particular environment in which they are being placed. **If there are already wild herds which have been established in the area for any length of time (20+ generations for most of New Zealand), chances are the expensive monsters which are supposed to be the start of a**

whole new bloodline will get their arse severely whipped by the local boys the first time they attempt to breed and will limp off to lick their wounds, passing on very few if any monster genes at all. And how many would you need? Depending on the size of the herd - based on a conservative 20:1 mating ratio - you could need dozens of new studs to make any sort of difference, even for a relatively small herd.

In any case, I'd put my money on a mature wild stag every time over some soft, flash-Harry velvet industry monster. The reason is simple. The local boy will have the home team advantage of being a product of his environment. He will be finely tuned to life in his patch based on the fact that he and his ancestors have been there for 20 + generations. The monsters from the velvet-farming situation may grow big antlers, but they are the product of highly targeted velvet industry breeding – usually supported by a wide range of nutritional supplements. They are adapted to the easy life provided for them by the farmer. And their genetic traits are selected by the breeder, not the environment. **In fact, they would most likely struggle to even survive a full year in a bush situation, let alone breed!**

So how do we get better genetics in a wild game herd? The answer is to allow more wild males with desirable genetic traits to reach maturity. Having plenty of mature males generally ensures mating

rights are conveyed on the basis of individual strength and fitness rather than just to the few young males - good, bad or ugly - who are lucky enough to escape the helicopters, spot-lighters and weekend hunters.

That is another reason why the Wild Animal Recovery Operation (WARO) industry, in its current form, works against the long-term value of the national game animal resource to New Zealand. They target large stags while in velvet to maximise the economic return from a commercially marginal industry. This increases the proportion of females in our herds, reduces the number of mature males, and promotes poor gene flow through lack of competition. Harvesting large velvet stags for the barbeque or pre-rut hunting by recreational hunters for trophies, has a similar effect. **At least trophy hunting during the roar will still allow some competition and the chance of higher quality males passing on stronger genes.**

Unless there are sufficient numbers of mature males actively competing for mating rights, natural selection processes will be severely restricted and the genetic traits of the herd will continue to be dictated by luck - not by the fact that successful breeders are successful because they are best adapted and finely tuned to their specific environment. That, behind habitat health (nutrition), is a key reason why so many New Zealand game animal herds have declined in trophy quality over the past few decades.

Having a greater proportion of mature males in any game herd will also increase the quality of the rut hunting enormously. More males would be competing for fewer but fat, highly receptive females.

Again, these are herd management/ herd structure issues - not genetic issues. Any future game management regime that seeks to enhance both our game herds and the habitat they occupy must consider these issues.

While genetics does play a role in producing big trophies, other factors such as habitat quality (nutrition) and herd structure are far more important. If genetics is considered a problem in a given herd, the best way to improve bloodlines is through improved management - not introducing new blood. Releasing a few monsters aimed at instantly improving feral bloodlines will never be a quick fix for bad management. They are illegal, likely to be expensive and ineffective in all but the most controlled situations and will continue to drive a wedge between hunters and the various government agencies that must try to navigate the complexities of game animal management in New Zealand.

Key Message: Releasing genetics is not a fix for bad management.

Next time, we will drill more into the herd structure issue and look at how age plays an important role in our game herds - for both males and females.

Cam, as per normal you are a hard act to follow, so I will add a couple of real-life situations that I have been involved with.

It's not going to solve the problem, but rather remind people that we need to dig a little deeper, be a little more careful and try to understand the situation of a herd and what makes it tick.

Cam, as per normal you are a hard act to follow, so I will add a couple of real-life situations that I have been involved with. It's not going to solve the problem, but rather remind people that we need to dig a little deeper, be a little more careful and try to understand the situation of a herd and what makes it tick.

THE WAPITI FOUNDATION:

When it comes to genetic management there are not a lot of people in New Zealand who spend more time brooding over this ugly beast than us Wapiti nutters! In fact,

the biggest threat in my time with Wapiti management has been brought about by genetics, or a dogmatic approach to genetics. As old Albert Einstein said, **"the more I learn, the more I realise how much I do not know"**. That is so true about my life with deer.

Some of the information that our forefathers have told us and taught us is simply not all true. I thought the biggest deer battle of my Wapiti life was going to be the signing of the Wapiti agreement with the government - how wrong I was. It was only a baby compared to the internal scrap with Wapiti hunters over genetics. This subject is not an article, it's

ROY SLOAN

a book!

Half of Wapiti hunters were hell bent on shooting everything that did not look like a pure Wapiti and the other half wanted to err on the side of caution. My position in it all was to stop it ending in tears for Wapiti hunters and losing everything. There was also a group wanting to petition the government so they could release new genetics into the Wapiti area. The group wanting nothing but pure looking wapiti in Fiordland brought an international animal biologist to New Zealand as he, in theory, agreed with them.

However, the international biologist gave them a thumbs down and his report said that the current herd was, in his opinion, the best type of animal suited for the Wapiti area of Fiordland as they have hybridised and adapted to the environment.

It did not end there - it took the current Wapiti group to nip it all in the bud. Releasing deer back into Fiordland was nothing but a pipe dream. So, our only option was to manage the herd with the assumption that they are the best animals for the area and maximise their potential. So, we implemented our current program employing science to try and solve some of the big questions. **We started to run the Wapiti management programs on what we knew, or maybe more accurately, by not using guesswork on things we didn't know.** Focusing on looking after the environment and reducing the impact that the herd had on Fiordland by reducing females and allowing the males to show their full potential before removed or keeping them. It didn't matter if they were pure looking Wapiti or Red-looking hybrids. The only exception to the rule was Red deer had to go.

The key focus was age, low numbers and food - all tangible measures. We tried to solve the Wapiti vs Red type fight by a project called the Yearling Project lead by Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research. This was based around genotype and phenotype, or in layman's terms, what a Wapiti type animal looks like vs a Red type animal. Basically, who should stay and who should go. **Those of us doing deer recovery wanted to make the best-informed decisions on what to keep and what to shoot.**

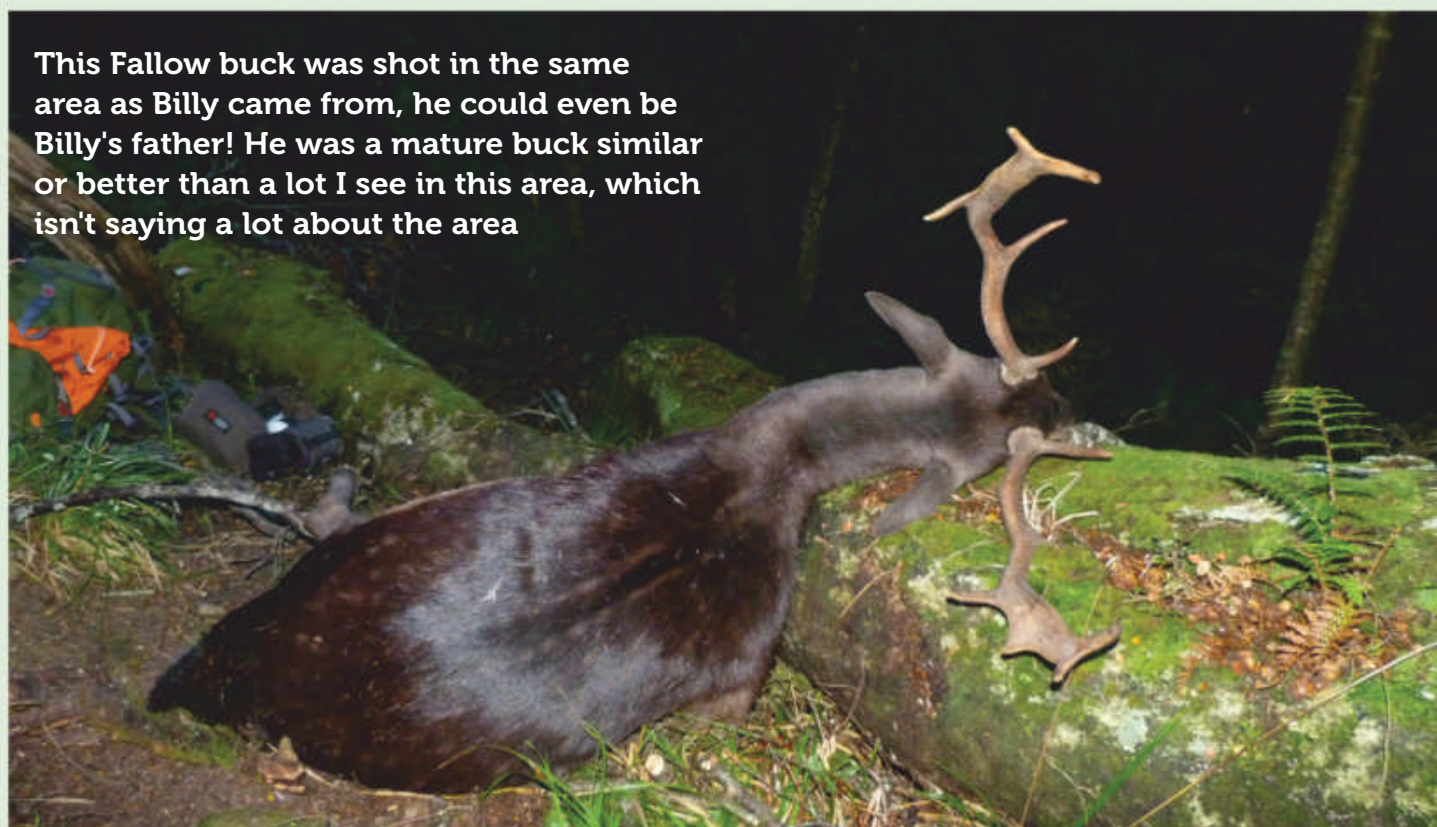
So, to date, after shooting 300 yearling animals over five years, the only indicator as to how much Wapiti blood they have over a non-Wapiti is the weight of the animal. They found no evidence of physical markings being a reliable indicator of percentage of Wapiti DNA. This is of little help as judging the weight of an animal from a helicopter is a hard thing to do.

But this is not a waste of time or money because the yearling project basically confirms that the current Wapiti management program is doing the right thing, and shooting everything that doesn't look like a pure Wapiti is not the right way forward.

Still, we do not know who grows the largest antler - Wapiti type or Red type Wapiti, as both can show their genetics in different ways. Wapiti type may show it in its coat, black face, neck, and tail but may not grow large antlers. Red type may have Red deer face and colouring and can also grow large Wapiti type antlers, and all of this can be chunked into the big mixing bowl of



This Fallow buck was shot in the same area as Billy came from, he could even be Billy's father! He was a mature buck similar or better than a lot I see in this area, which isn't saying a lot about the area



life and you can end up with a variation of them both. Yet all could have similar percentage of Wapiti blood!

How do we know that this program is working? Since implementation, the big factor is the improvement of the male side of the herd. Simple. More large bulls are coming out of the Wapiti area than years before. Food is hugely important to trophy development and it starts with the mother - she must be in prime condition so the fawn is born in prime condition and she's able to feed it to reach its full potential. Around the world there is science to support this.

Have you ever wondered why back in the days New Zealand was once the dream place to shoot a huge Red deer or Wapiti? Why the old boys followed the leading edge of the herds as they spread across the country? Put simply, it was not all about genetics but also about food; animals were moving into areas where no other animals had been and because of that the food quality was key to growing these big heads. The recipe has not changed.

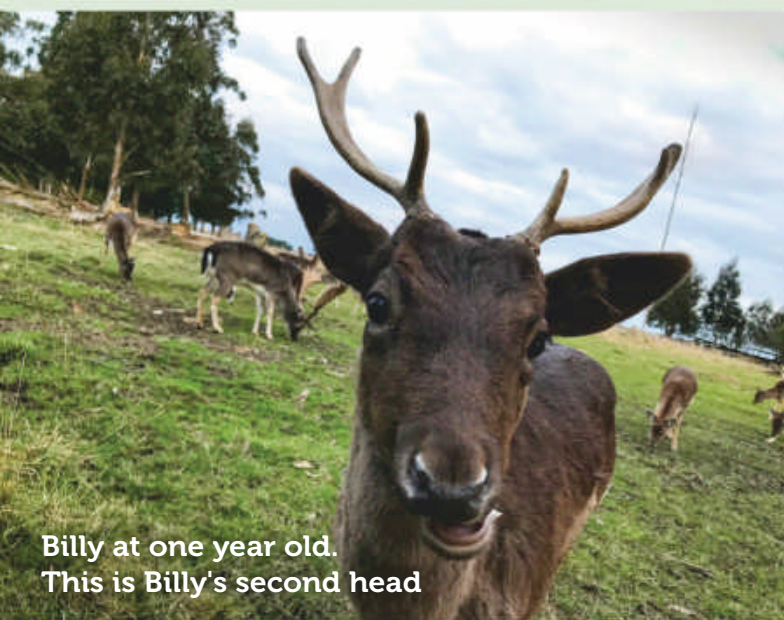
Around New Zealand the big question

will still be asked - why doesn't this herd grow decent heads? Are the genetics depleted? People should really be asking these questions as well - are the males shot too young? Or is there not enough tucker?

BILLY:

Just to complicate matters more I'll bring the most famous Fallow buck in all Southland to the story, Billy the Blue Mountain buck. The Blues once produced some of the best traditional Fallow heads in New Zealand, but over time the decline in these animals has been sad and noticeable. Yes, there is the odd nice animal, but overall, they are hard to find. The chat around town is all centred on genetics - but is that the case?

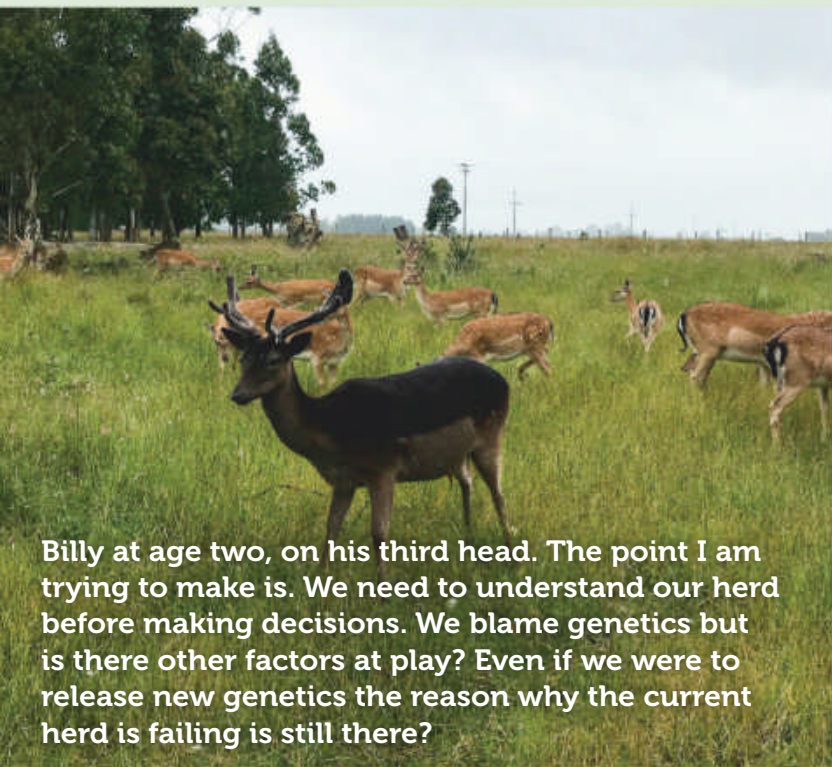
Billy was a two-day old Fallow fawn that I found in the Blue Mountains in December 2018. On arriving home Billy quickly took ownership of our house, the cat and the dogs until he finally got evicted to the deer paddock as my wife caught him finishing off the last of several hundred spring flower bulbs, which for some funny reason never grew after that. It also didn't



Billy at one year old.
This is Billy's second head



One of my well-bred spikers
the same age as Billy



Billy at age two, on his third head. The point I am trying to make is. We need to understand our herd before making decisions. We blame genetics but is there other factors at play? Even if we were to release new genetics the reason why the current herd is failing is still there?



This is my breeding buck
age five. At one year of
age he only had spikes

help that he was helping himself to the grapes off the dinner table, the lettuces in the garden and the hen's food. What finally ended his domestic life was he thought our deck was his rutting pad and started rubbing his small antlers on the veranda poles. **One of us had to go.**

In the paddock Billy wasn't happy as he didn't realise that he was actually a deer and not a human. I am not sure what upset him the most - not being allowed in the house or stopping his rides in the car with the dogs. But Billy finally accepted his new herd while still enjoying his milk and four eggs per day, then finally moving on to a couple kilos of sheep nuts.

Billy grew into a fine boy, and grew his first set of antlers/spikes at six months old. My well-bred Fallow deer at home grow their first sets of spikes at 12 months. Billy already had his second set at 12 months, and a fancy set of six points they were. He was very proud of them and the other spikers got to feel them whenever they got to close. Now at two years of age Billy has popped up another fine set of antlers but the big question is, will this continue?

The area Billy is from is the very area that I touched on in the last article. Large numbers of Fallow, very little tucker and miserable antlers.

Perhaps we will see if his genetics can still create antlers like the originals, given all the opportunities of feed and age.



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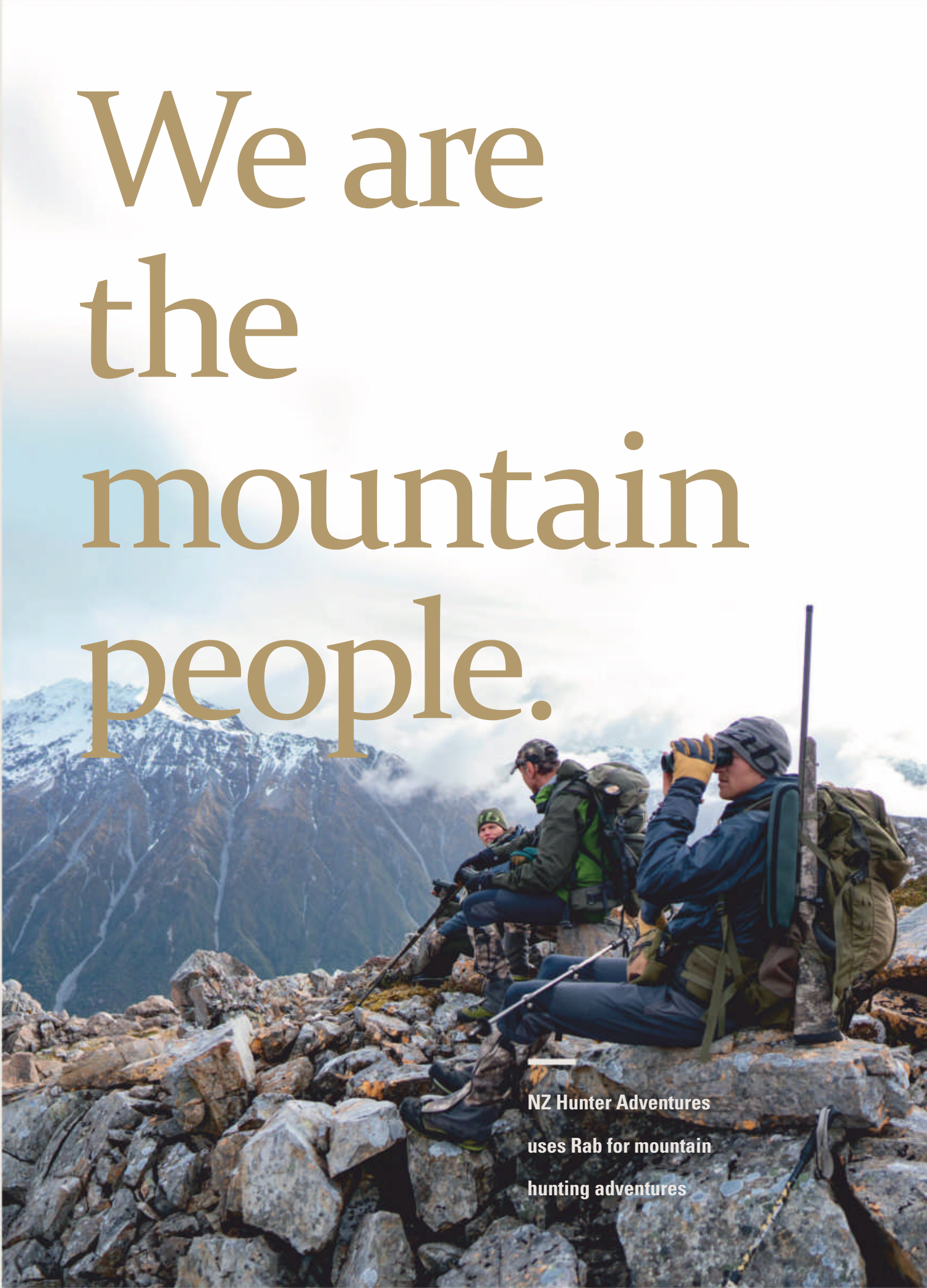


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HIGHCOUNTRY

WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

By Horse

With Waitangi weekend approaching Sam had a couple days off that we could tack on to that and make a lightning trip to the South Island

After our hunt in the area for the TV Show I had really wanted to bring her back and take up Gary's offer of using his horses

We had a brutal marathon drive down then parked up by Hanmer and slept in the car for a couple hours until it was a reasonable time to show up on Gary's doorstep at Pukatea Horse Trails. He kindly had some bacon and eggs on so we wolfed that down and set to sorting some horses.

Sam got Valhanna, a smaller gelding who I'd actually ridden around the shores of Lake Guyon for a brief time on our last trip with Gary. **I had Nesea, a mare who was our packhorse for the very same trip!** I struggled to find a saddle that fit, eventually the only one I could use was Gary's own which he kindly

parted with.

We loaded up the packsaddles with all our gear and started off down the road. It was a crisp February day but the high country kept the sweltering heat at bay. **Eventually we turned down into the Edwards and worked the horses up the 4wd track to Peters pass.** The horses worked out that Nesea was the lead but she was fairly reluctant to be heading away from her paddock that first day! I was exhausted from the 16 hour overnight drive down, and the constant attention required to keep Nesea going forward and in the right direction tested my fortitude somewhat.

We spent the whole day meandering

down the beautiful Edwards valley 4wd track. A lush, warm riverbed linking the high, dry Molesworth territory with the comparatively luxuriant Waiau to the west. It was a hard day with the horses testing us and simply getting saddle-fit, so when we finally tied up at Scotties Hut we were quick to turn the horses loose and had a long anticipated afternoon nap. **Afterward I went for a wander back up the valley and spied some family groups of chamois but no handy deer for some venison.** There were well-used 4wd tracks around the perimeter of the flats from spotlights though.

Getting back to the hut on dark we chatted with a pair of mountain bikers who had arrived in our absence, and it was an eye opener. There were some conservationist/hunter barriers to break down and it was quite concerning really to see how much effort it took to have a normal conversation. **Eventually we found common ground, discovered we have a mutual acquaintance** (I can guarantee that not one person I've met in the NZ backcountry doesn't have a mutual connection somewhere, 6 degrees of separation comes down to two in our awesome backyard). Finally, realization dawned that perhaps these scary hunters (one of which being my 5 foot wife, don't get me wrong, she can be scary, but

Leaving the more desolate looking Molesworth country via Peters Pass

she doesn't generally look it!) may not actually be all that bad, and that there can be balances reached between conservation values and hunting. It was constructive conversation but it was an eye opener, there was so much bias and misperception to break down to actually get to meaningful dialogue.

The next morning we stretched aching knees and sore butts before rounding up the terrible two for the push over to Jervois Hut. It was much less of a marathon than the previous day; we were a little fitter to it, wise to Valhanna and Nesees antics and they had realised they weren't going home any time soon so were a little less reluctant to keep up a decent pace.

Looking across the valley from the end of the 4wd track I could see an old cattle trail leading up off the flats onto the Jervois Terrace, which would save us a big detour right up to Pool Hut and back down the track. After crossing the Waiau (which was sizeable, even in February, you wouldn't be crossing it with much rain) the horses gamely tackled the waist high broom but when it started turning to matagouri we soon realised we'd hit the end of the road. I could see the cattle trail, but there was 100m of scrub in the way. I cast around for 20 minutes looking for a track but in the years cattle haven't been run it's overgrown and will need re-cutting. **No matter, we now had an excuse to explore to Pool Hut, passing the historic McArthur Hut and the nearby swing bridge.** Quite an edifice, it allows mountain bikers (and hunters) access no matter the condition of the river.

We stopped at Pool for lunch but kept moving quickly, I had hopes of salvaging an evening hunt. Wending our way back down the terrace toward Jervois was quite pleasant. The horses were behaving and the ancient, knarled old matagouri combined with the heat and tinder-dry grass made it feel very African – not that I've ever been fortunate enough to visit! The crowding trees



Leg-stretch stop on the Waiau side of Charles Saddle



The Jones where it meets the Waiau. The old cattle track came down the spur on the TR of Jones



Scotties Hut



Valhanna



Snacks



Poole Hut



Sam keeping dry feet across the Waiau



Sam loving life with her buddy Val. Looking back upstream on our way down Jones



Jervois Hut

meant all the horses could do was stick to the old bulldozed track, so this latter stage of the ride was very low input. The last couple kilometres as we turned up Jones Stream dragged on a little but that was our lack of riding fitness telling.

Finally we came off the lush flats and wound the horses through a small patch of beech and saw a peep of orange appear in the distance. Jervois Hut is a 1970's four-bunker that is placed on a strange little wet clearing, especially given the verdant flats just downstream, but I then recalled that this hut well and truly preceded the purchase of St James and would have been placed over the then boundary on public land.

We opened the crude 'gate' to the loosely named horse paddock and noticed the door was ajar. I assumed someone had forgotten to fasten it properly but then I noticed a thin tendril of smoke laboriously climbing into the hot afternoon air. **I whistled a tune to myself and spoke loudly to Sam so that we didn't give any potential inhabitants a fright.**

But fright we gave! A terrified

face poked out the door then quickly retreated. We called out hello but heard nothing back. Passing a glance full of questions between us Sam and I went to tie the horses up so as to give the lady some time to collect her wits. As we turned around she was stumbling out the door hurriedly thrusting her belongings into a small pack and scattering the rubbish and other odds and ends as she did. She finally gave up, quickly hunched over the pack on the ground and wrenched the zips closed. **Sam called out to her in a friendly voice that she needn't leave on our accord, the hut had four bunks,** but all the response we got from the strange woman was that she whipped her head around, cast a wide-eyed furtive look over her shoulder at us then leapt to her feet and ran back down the track.

Sam and I were quite bewildered, I'm hardly a scary bloke and you'd be very hard-pressed to call Sam threatening but this woman was plainly terrified. I was mighty curious. Carefully I eased the door to the hut open with my boot, half expecting to see a recent body on the floor, a victim of the madwoman! At least it would explain her behavior! But all was normal, perhaps she was a vegan,



**Tweddle Dee and Tweddle Dum,
AKA Nesee and Valhanna**

who knows.

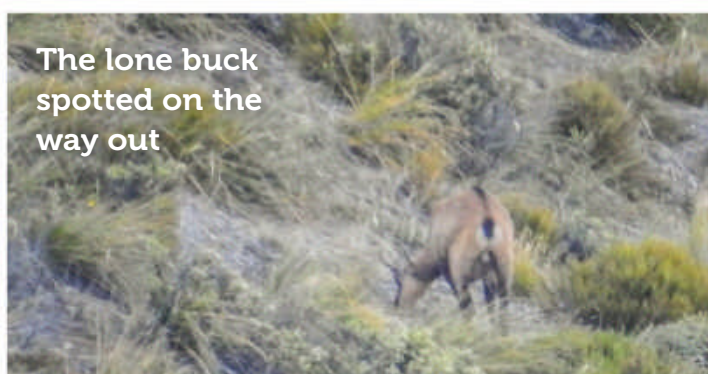
We put out her rubbish fire that was just filling the hut with acrid smoke then set about sorting the horses. There is a rough paddock with some wire across the downstream end and some tangled electric tape cutting off one corner, the remaining sides are bounded simply by beech forest. It would be enough for some relaxed horses, but given we were using loaned animals that were quite familiar with the area we thought it best to string a high-line to be safe.

By now we'd run out of time for my quick evening hunt plans, so I found a vantage point and glassed from the valley floor. It was promising stuff, I saw a really heartening number of chamois. All females and juveniles, it appeared Jones Stream was a bit of a nursery area. Also there were eight hinds and their quickly growing fawns scattered around the tops. Several kilometres up in the headwaters I could see the Opera Range rising up and that lush snowgrass looked like prime February stag feeding country. Soon darkness drove me home but it's always time well spent observing animals.

The next day was meant to be a reasonable morning hunt. I had hoped to get up to the tops behind the hut and try find some yearlings to take a venison home. I no longer had any illusions about stags or bucks within walking distance, it was apparent this was hind and doe country. The five foot long sack bunks,



A hind that was low enough to warrant a quick run up to on the last morning at Jervois



The lone buck spotted on the way out

the resident mice and thoughts of a madwoman stalking us in the night on top of two days of unfamiliar exercise had taken its toll though. I rolled out of bed before sunrise, made a coffee and decided that a climb to the tops followed by the ride out was really a asking a bit much. I meandered down the flats in quite a leisurely fashion, sighting all the animals from the night before and even some more. **I had a hope of catching some yearlings down by the main river, but it was in vain, I think there is a little too much spotlight activity down there, even for silly yearlings.**

Rousing Sam on my return we packed the saddlebags and mounted the terrible two in preparation for the ride out. It had taken us a long time to get in, so we thought we'd better make tracks and even get past Scotties if we were going to reach the ferry on the following day. The ride out was pretty uneventful until past Scotties. I spied a buck up high and we stopped to evaluate him, but he wasn't of the calibre I was looking for so we re-mounted and continued. Val and Nesee had doubled the pep in their step once they realise their precious little equine noses were pointed toward home! On the smooth terraces they were practically trotting at the thought of their paddock.

We'd planned to make for an old set of yards we recalled from the trip in, but it was certainly further back than we recalled! Nearly back at the foot of Peters Pass. And just before arriving, after a day of aching knees and bottoms, and violent summer tempest sprung up.

In the space of half an hour the sky darkened, the temperature halved and a cruel wind hurled freezing rain right at our faces. Of course this all occurred just as we had to find a camp. We got the gear off the horses, turned them loose after checking the fences and huddled under the fly, hoping it would pass before nightfall so we could find a suitable camp. It

did after some time so we cast around trying to find something that we could actually string a fly from. Eventually it had to be some twisted old matagouri, and its attendant litter of sharp thorns meant we couldn't use the mattresses. After picking out the worst we lay the horse blankets down and covered them with our raincoats and it was actually a pretty snug spot with the deep summer grass insulating us.

I glassed the faces around that evening but there was a bit much traffic in the area to see anything I think, and the inclement weather didn't help. It was a cold night, a good reminder that even summer in the Alps has to be taken seriously. I made Sam a hot water bottle before bed and I can see why she was cold, we awoke to a decent frost!

The next day the horses were positively racing for the home paddock, it was a marked contrast from trying to get them to head the other way only a couple days prior! We were back at Gary's in no time so after a debrief we hit the road north via the beautiful Acheron road. That lonely country has always captured my imagination for some reason, it really is a must-visit if you've never been through there.

Despite not bringing home the trophy or even some meat it was a satisfying trip having explored some new country, especially with the novelty of the horses for company.



ATHLON

OPTICS

NEOS

**CAPPED ELEVATION AND
WINDAGE TURRETS**

**WATERPROOF
& FOG PROOF**

ZERO STOP

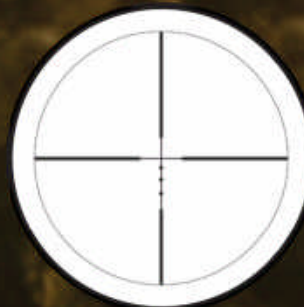
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RELOADING: TOOLING

WRITTEN BY ~ JARED HEARSEY



BLACKWATCH RELOADING 101

Experienced reloader Jared Hearsey, who will be familiar to you from recent articles, has generously gifted us his reloading manual to reproduce in a series of articles. If you want to skip straight to the meat of it you can order the manual at: www.blackwatchreloadingco.nz

Now we've lost all fear of the imperial system and realise what we're looking at is just an incremental scale, we can move on to some of the tooling you'll need to become competent with and confident using.

CALLIPERS

First, and used above all other tools on your reloading station, is the digital dial or Vernier calliper. These callipers give a direct reading of desired linear distance, measured with high accuracy and precision, to 0.001 (one thou).

Callipers can measure internal dimensions (using the uppermost jaws in the picture), external dimensions (using the pictured lower jaws), and in many cases, depth, by the use of a probe that's attached to the movable head and slides along the centre of the body. This probe is slender and can get into deep grooves that may prove difficult for other measuring tools.

There are three varieties of calliper, but the digital version has largely taken over in today's machining and engineering world due to its ease of use, and that's the type I'll refer to exclusively through this manual.

The first step is to zero the calliper. Close the jaws and press the 'zero' push button. As the calliper slides open, it'll display the gap in the calliper jaws to a 0.001 reading.

We utilise this tool during every part of the reloading process.



DIGITAL CALLIPERS

THE SINGLE STAGE PRESS

This press is so called because while it's used at various stages of the reloading process, but only performs one function at a time.

The single stage press is most commonly made of stiff cast iron incorporating a lever arm and cam linkage that provides a mechanical advantage to the user.

With various presses on the market, you need to consider when purchasing what your intended use will be and how robust a model you'll require for the calibres you expect to be reloading. My advice is, the bigger the better. The RCBS Rock Chucker Supreme II is very hard to beat for a do-it-all, handle-everything option.

It's important when mounting the press that it's well secured to a solid bench.

DIES

It's easy to get lost in the world of dies, so in this manual, I'll only cover full-length sizing and seating die sets.



DIGITAL CALLIPERS CALIBRATED

SIZING DIE

This tool is fitted to your single stage press.

The threads of all the major die manufacturers are a universal size, so they can be swapped and changed between various press models.

The full-length sizing die does exactly as its name suggests.

After a cartridge is fired, the brass case expands and stretches. When a used case is pressed into the body of the die, it resizes that case back to a factory specification, thus making the case ready to reload again.

The full-length sizing die also has a decapping or depriming pin fitted to it; when you press the case into the die, this pin knocks the spent primer from the case's primer pocket. On the upward stroke of the press lever arm, as the case is coming out of the die, there's an expander ball fitted to the decapping pin that resizes the case neck to the calibre specific size, thus providing the optimal neck tension for the newly resized case.

In summary, it has three functions. With every stroke of the press, the full-length sizing die will:

- 1. Size the outside of the case**
- 2. Deprime the case**
- 3. Expand the neck of the case to accept a new projectile.**

When setting up your die, you fit the appropriate shell holder to your press.

Set the deprime pin so it extends 0.150" to 0.200" from the base of the die (you can measure this with your callipers).

Take the press lever arm to the bottom of its stroke.



USING THE CALLIPER DEPTH PROBE TO MEASURE
DECAPPING PIN DEPTH ADJUSTMENT



A CLOSER VIEW OF THE PROBE



KINETIC
BULLET
PULLER
WITH
LOADED
ROUND



HAND PRIMER



KINETIC BULLET PULLER



PRIMERS
SHOULD
BE SEATED
FLUSH WITH
THE HEAD
OF THE CASE

Screw the die into the press until it contacts the shell holder, then use the locking ring on the die to secure that position.

The die is now set to full-length size a used case.

The only other requirement prior to running the cases through the die is to lube them. There are several ways to lube your cases, but I prefer a spray type. The best I've found is a mixture of 1 part liquid lanolin to 10 parts isopropyl alcohol. It's cost-effective and works brilliantly.

Spray the solution on the unsized cases. Wait a couple of minutes for the isopropyl to evaporate and you're in business. For a commercial option, Hornady One Shot Case Lube aerosol is excellent.

With lubing cases, the less-is-more approach is best. Pay particular attention to getting enough in and around the case neck, but don't drown it. Otherwise, with the pressure from the sizing process, you'll start seeing dents in the case shoulder. Not enough lube and you'll get a stuck case in the die.

SEATING DIE

The seating die is fitted to your press and is the tool used to press the bullet into the case (seat the bullet) after the case has been primed and the powder charge has been added.

Reloading manuals will state standard seating depth for specific calibres and bullets – this will be referred to as overall length (OAL).

This is a good place to start when

beginning reloading. As you become more accomplished, you'll learn how and why handloaders commonly adjust the published seating depth for a specific rifle.

KINETIC BULLET PULLER

This is used to remove the bullet and powder from an unfired cartridge.

You'll need one if you make a mistake seating the bullet or, for whatever other reason, you need to 'pull' (disassemble) a bullet.

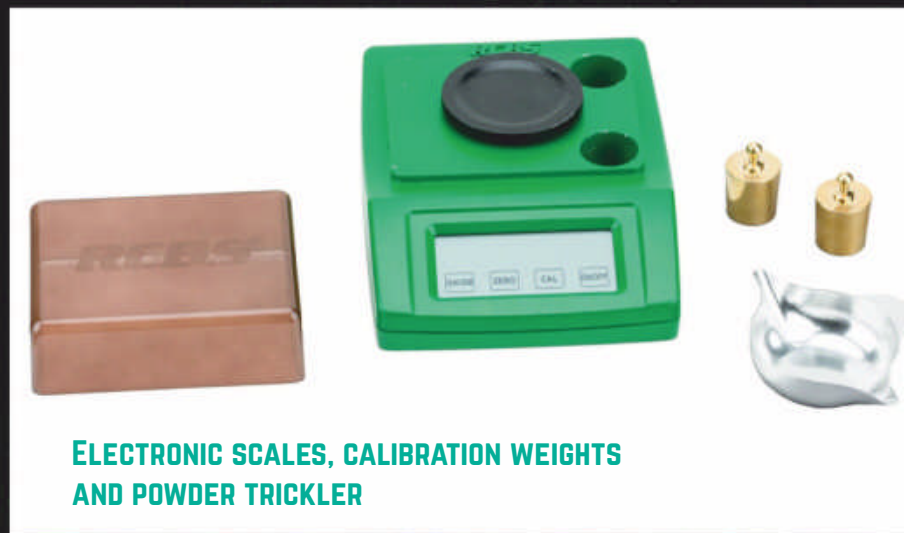
It's basically a hammer with a hollowed-out head and a shell-holder chuck. The chuck grabs the rim of the case head, then you lightly hammer on a firm surface until the bullet and powder come out of the shell. These can be reused along with the case.

HAND PRIMER

A hand primer is the fastest, easiest way to prime cases. It provides an element of feel to give you a physical indication the primer has been seated correctly as opposed to using a mechanical press. You'll also feel the tightness of the primer pocket.

If it's loose and the primer seats with little to no pressure, it indicates the primer pocket has expanded and the case should be binned.

Primers should be seated flush with the head of the case.



ELECTRONIC SCALES, CALIBRATION WEIGHTS
AND POWDER TRICKLER

I recommend spending a bit more with this tool and getting the RCBS Universal Hand Priming tool. It's extremely robust in construction, and you don't need any additional collets or shell holders – it works with both large and small rifle primers.

ELECTRONIC SCALE

Accuracy in weighing out your powder charge is critical for both safety and load development performance. We'll use electronic scales in this tutorial, due to their ease of use and excellent performance.

When choosing a scale, I recommend getting the best quality you can afford. It's without doubt one of the primary tools on your reloading bench.

When using a highly accurate scale, ensure there's no breeze in the room, no floor vibration, and be sure to have the scale unit plumb and level.

All scales require calibration; this process only takes a matter of seconds with modern scales. Carry out this as per the manufacturer's instructions.

POWDER TRICKLER

This tool is placed next to your scales and, as its name suggests, you use it to trickle in the last of a given powder charge - generally about the last couple of grains. It'll allow you to trickle as slow as one kernel of powder at a time.

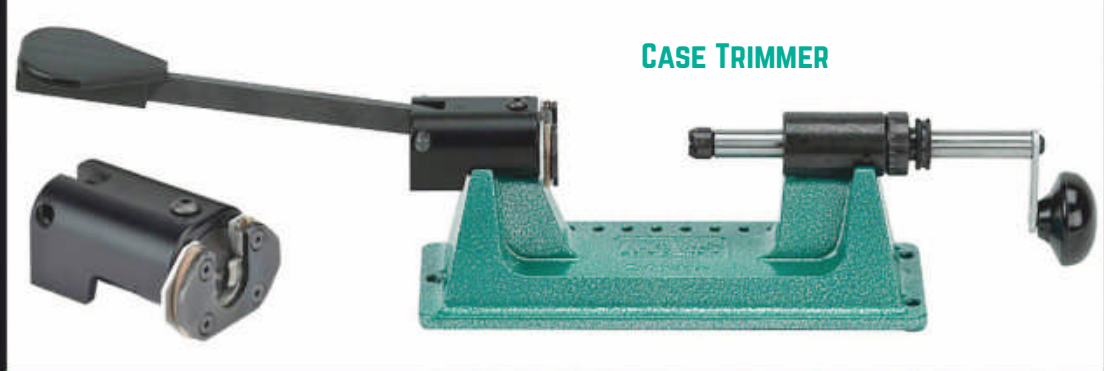
PRIMER POCKET BRUSH

This is a simple tool used to clear any carbon contamination from the fired primer that may be present in the primer pocket.

CASE TRIMMER

Every time a cartridge is fired, the spent case will grow; the overall length of that case stretches. The amount will depend on several factors - brass quality, calibre design, how hot the fired load was, etc.

In your reloading manual, it'll state



CASE TRIMMER

the industry standard length the case should be - its SAAMI spec. This OAL measurement has a tolerance of + or - .015. When the case grows beyond this length, it must be trimmed.

There are a variety of case trimmers on the market. Most are a lathe type where the case is secured by a chuck then spun onto a cutting blade. The trimmed case then requires inside/outside deburring before loading.

VIBRATORY CASE TUMBLER

Cleaning your cases is advantageous to the reloader as it makes any defect on the case easier to see. It helps limit corrosion of the case, and it

eliminates any case-feeding issues you may encounter due to contamination of the case.

The vibratory tumbler uses a corn cob or walnut media to polish the brass cases.

TIPS:

1. To help keep your media clean so it'll last longer, add some used, cut-up drier sheets.
2. To help with the polish and achieve added corrosion protection, add half a capful of Nu Finish car polish to the media.
3. Always check that the primer pocket flash holes are clear of media after tumbling.

BLACKWATCH RELOADING WORKSHOP

With the unprecedented surge of female involvement and interest in the shooting and hunting community we reached out to get an idea of what ladies want to learn the skills of reloading and what has been holding them back

Overwhelmingly the response was "I would love too, but I just don't know where to start". Our goal is to smash down that barrier.

We want to present the required information, skills and techniques for getting in to reloading in an easily understood and informative way. To that end we have written a start-up manual, the manual that we are working through chapter by chapter in this magazine. But this issue, we'll depart momentarily as I take two ladies from different backgrounds, experience and interests through a workshop based at the BlackWatch Reloading lab, and we will follow their personal journeys as they learn and develop their skills.

With the fantastic support of RCBS and with the co-operation and support of Sportways New Zealand they've each been kitted out with top of the line RCBS reloading gear. Now having been shown

how to use it competently they've proved that with utilisation of the right resources learning the dark art of reloading is more accessible now than ever!

KATIE THOMAS

AGE: 25

LOCATION: North Canterbury

'I have been hunting most of my life, for as long as I can remember, thanks to my late grandfather - also a keen hunter and fisherman. It all started with shooting bunnies and targets then progressed to waterfowl and just grew and grew, since then I have never looked back.

Hunting, firearms and bows are my passion.

It is also something I thoroughly enjoy, having it as a hobby and my job! I work for a company called Stager Sports in West Melton, Christchurch.



KATIE



KELLI

My role is in the firearms section of the company. The company is the distributor for Blaser firearms in New Zealand which is a popular high-quality European brand. The company also imports various other high-quality European brands. Europeans often have strange calibers which are hard to cater for or find factory ammo here in New Zealand, so knowledge of calibers and reloading is a key element with these firearms. Being female in a heavily male dominated industry can be a tough gig sometimes. Half the battle is convincing people on your knowledge, or they are wanting to speak to "the bloke who does the firearms" - sorry mate but you're stuck with me! There is now a huge increase in women hunting and shooting, large brands are now catering for females also! So why not start reloading myself too? I am excited to start the reloading journey with the Reloading Manual 101: The Blueprint and any other females that have thought about reloading too.'

KELLI HEARSEY

AGE: 33

LOCATION: Auckland

'I was born and bred in West Auckland, surrounded by acres of green native bush. Not the kind of bush that is the home to wild pigs, deer and feral goats, but instead art galleries, cafes and hippies who eat \$30 smashed avocado on toast.

So how did an Auckland girl get into shooting? Well how do all good stories start? I met a man... A man from rural North Canterbury that is...

Our first date consisted of your standard dinner at a nice restaurant. We later went back to his house where I thought we would partake in a few wines but instead he took me down to his basement (alarm bells started ringing) and there he proudly presented me with a beat up old school desk he called a reloading bench and a huge metal safe full of firearms I had only ever seen in movies.

My initial thoughts were "This is it, this is how I die" and without hesitation I ran outta there at a speed Usain Bolt would be proud of. I admit I may have overreacted, I had just watched the movie Taken so in my mind anything was possible.

But this was the defining moment when I was introduced to the world of firearms and reloading. Fast forward 10 years and I ended up marrying that man, Jared and I are parents to two beautiful young girls and the proud owners of Black Watch Reloading Ltd.

I remember my first time holding a gun, naturally I started off with a .22. I can laugh about it now but at the time I was scared to fire it because up until then I had a preconception from watching videos of woman firing guns and the recoil had either sent them flying backwards or given them black eyes. Quite entertaining at the time, but unnerving when faced with that situation yourself. After my first initial nervous squeeze of the trigger, the adrenaline took over and before I knew it I had hit my target and had successfully fired my first shot. From that day I wanted more and after upgrading to a .308 I was officially addicted.

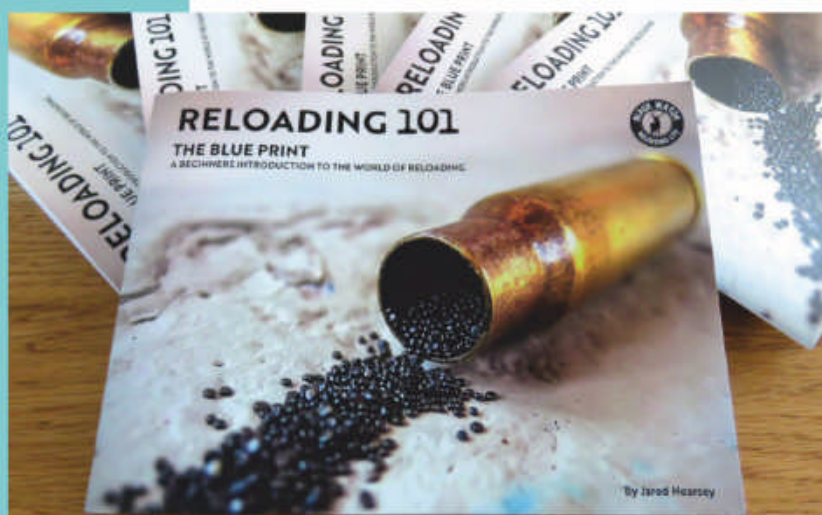
Not long after, we made the decision to throw ourselves into a lifelong dream of owning our own business and that's when Black Watch Reloading was created. Starting a business was no easy feat to start with, but for myself having little to no knowledge in the products we were selling and a new born

baby made the experience even harder. At the time reloading seemed like a foreign language to me, talking about MOA and OAL felt like learning the English language all over again. But it made me think... how do you learn to reload? It's not something you learn at a night course or university, if it's not passed down to you by a family member then where do I start?

Jared was self-taught but as an engineer I felt he already had a head start. Sure there's manuals but some being 300+ pages the thought of reading them was daunting. I prefer a more practical hands on approach to learning I wanted an idiots guide to reloading but without the offensive and humiliating title, something simple that everyday people like me would be able to pick up and learn from, or people who already had a basic knowledge could read and be confident that the steps they were taking were the right ones. This is where Jared came in and over the last 6 months he's compiled all his knowledge, experience, trials and error into this Reloading 101 Manual.'

THE PROCESS

We needed something to be the backbone for the training, an easy to understand reference for anyone starting out. Something to answer the questions a newcomer wants to ask, but doesn't know who to approach or doesn't want to deal with a smart ass answer in some online forum by a self-proclaimed know-it-all-legend. We tend to learn better by doing or seeing so the manual has pictures at every step. There is endless information available via books and the internet to guide you when you are reloading ammo, which is great! The problem we identified is that there is really nothing if you have absolutely zero knowledge or background and this is a massive stumbling block for people showing an interest. Taking this into consideration I wrote Reloading 101, the blueprint not only specifically for the complete newbie, but also that guy or girl who may only get behind the reloading press a couple of times per year and may require a quick refresher. This is the process we guided the girls through.



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Measuring case base to ogive (CBTO)



Katie priming her cases



Kelli doing her ladder test

THE TECHNIQUE

No reloading techniques are set in stone. If you talk to 10 different experienced reloaders, no doubt you will hear 10 different ways to get to the same final result! I have developed my technique from 20 years of trial and error and I have been lucky enough to have received tuition and guidance from some of Berger's and Sierra Bullets top ballistics engineers. This is the process Katie and Kelli learnt and we'll skim through it below.

WHERE TO BEGIN

We will start with a fired case from the girls chosen rifles. Both girls are running Blaser R8's in 308 and both are suppressed 18" barrels. The first step is to work out a few critical measurements to set you up for success further into the

process. Firstly, measure the headspace of the fired case. This gives us a reference point for the resizing process. The girls use the Hornady headspace gauge and bushing set. This measurement is the 'fully chamber expanded, fired formed case'. When resizing, ideally we will be bumping the case shoulder .002. To measure this we use the Hornady Headspace bushing kit.

Next, we need to find the lands of the rifle with the chosen bullet to be reloaded. Kelli has opted for a dedicated target bullet. The Speer Target Match 168gr. Katie has gone with the potent animal killer, the Speer Gold Dot 150gr bonded projectile.

We relieve the neck tension of a dummy case with a junior hacksaw and place the projectile in the case. Load the modified case and projectile close the bolt slowly

and smoothly. An alternate method is to use the Hornady OAL gauge. Now take your callipers and measure the OAL (overall length) and CBTO (case base to ogive). For this we use the Hornady comparator gauge.

This gives you the critical measurement of where the projectile meets the rifle lands, so you can determine bullet jump. For Kelli with the target load we will start seating tests with a .005 jam (stuck in to the lands). Katie will start seating the Gold Dots .040 off the lands due to mag length restrictions. I prefer to keep the projectile off the lands for a hunting round as the last thing anyone wants in the field is a stuck or pulled bullet!

Both girls seated additional test rounds in a 3 round set at .040 increments. This brings us onto powder selection, I have found Alliant RL17 to work exceptionally well with the heavier 308 projectiles and ADI2206H is brilliant with the 150's. Consulting the Alliant and ADI online reloading manual's determines a start charge and this is what the seating test rounds will be loaded at.

Now the girls have a plan in place it's time to tackle the brass prep. The importance of this aspect of reloading can often be overlooked and it is sometimes assumed just running brass through a resizing die that has been butted up to the shell holder is good enough. Yes, said case may work fine when reloaded, but with a bit more care you set yourself up to achieve far better results later in the reload process. Paying attention to headspace, consistent neck tension, neck thickness, case OAL and primer pocket condition are all aspects of brass prep that have an advantageous effect on a loaded round. **When handling brass be constantly vigilant of any defects, these could be from pressure or corrosion.** If in doubt throw it out, always keep in mind that safety is non-

negotiable. Using quality brass such as Norma or Lapua, even Starline has proven very consistent, can potentially reduce the amount of brass handling required as they are manufactured to such exact tolerances. Processes such as neck turning are generally not required for the majority of shooters.

So with the brass successfully decapped and resized, trimmed, chamfered and de-burred, the girls moved onto giving their brass cases a birthday and use the RCBS Vibratory Tumbler with corn cob media and some polishing compound. **After a couple hours in the tumbler the brass looks like jewellery!**

Time to prime! Taking their RCBS universal hand priming tool, they quickly and safely seat the Federal Gold Medal Match 210 primers. With the cases now ready to load, the girls stack their reloading blocks and calibrate the RCBS Rangemaster 2000 digital scales. These scales can be run on mains power or battery which is a real bonus for field work. The girls start by throwing all the seating test loads at the start charge weight then moving in to the ladder test, increasing the loads by .4gr. We start seating projectiles at the predetermined seating depths using the RCBS Rockchucker Supreme press.

RANGE TESTING

In excellent conditions the girls set up their rigs at 100yds. What we were looking for was grouping. Not necessarily hitting the bullseye.

After the seating tests Katie's load shot best at .030" and Kelli's at .085". We take their ladder test loads to these seating depths using the portable RCBS Partner press and continue into the search for additional accuracy and velocity.

After a long day at the range, with a lot to take in, I was amazed by not just the girl's enthusiasm, but their natural ability behind the trigger! Kelli's best round was at 51.6gr of RL17 and measured .520" which for a relatively new shooter was fantastic.

Katie's Blaser loved the Gold Dots and she put together several groups around the 1/2MOA mark with her best being at the impressive velocity of 2730fps and measuring .502"



With the loads dialed the girls loaded up their remaining projectiles, all the while becoming more familiar with the tooling and moving forward with an obvious sense of achievement and pride in their new found understanding. I can see these girls have caught the bug and I can't wait to see them both develop their skills!

From a personal perspective, this entire process was no doubt in some way about me being a proud father of two girls and looking to find a way to provide them with the confidence, tools, guidance and opportunity too, if they choose, be introduced into the world of ballistics and grow to share the same love for reloading that their Dad has.



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1 Jackson Didsbury shot this stag in the Wairarapa with his Tikka T3x 308



Ben Jolly (11) tipped over his first deer at 80m using his Dad's Tikka 7mm-08 near Upokongaro

2



3

Dylan Hill-McLean (14) shot this buck at 300 yards with a Tikka 7mm-08 in the Blue Mountains just before dusk

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Frances Oldfield with her first deer taken with her Tikka T3x on a work trip for Hamills Taupo!

4



7

Angus Robertson with his first public land deer, taken with Tikka T3 Lite 7mm-08 during a three day tops trip in the Buller region



Melissa Jager with her first pig she shot in Central Otago. Shot using a Tikka T3 308 with DPT suppressor

5



Sammie Joyce with her first deer taken with her Dad's Tikka 308 shooting a reduced load. Very happy pup Storm and a very happy Dad behind the camera

6



8

Ollie Robertson (10) with a West Coast billy goat taken with his Dad's Tikka T3Lite 7mm-08

FEBRUARY CHAMOIS

WRITTEN BY ~ CODY WELLER

Bowhunting New Zealand chamois bucks with a bow and arrow in the high country seems like an impossible task

If there's one thing that's for sure, it's that chamois have incredible eyesight that they use to their advantage. Then add perfectly good hearing and sense of smell to the mix, you'd wonder why you would bother hunting them at all with such a close-range system. However, there are a few holes in their game that a bowhunter can take advantage of.

February brings high temperatures. In my neck of the woods chamois and especially bucks avoid the sun and actively seek out the shade for the duration of the day. **I have watched a buck feed around a pinnacle as the day gradually ticked by, not once ever leaving the shadows.**

This also goes for bedding. Any well-shaded ledge or random tree that provides cooling and shade might be perfect buck bedding. So how does this translate into good bow hunting opportunities?

Well for a start, you can forget about scanning a big, bright sunny

basin with no shade offering. Those areas seldom have bucks. It's just too hot and doesn't seem to hold bucks at this time. Look for those southeast facing bluffs and guts that provide all day shade. There's a specific habitat bucks prefer and always gravitate to, and once you know them finding bucks becomes easier. **In Feb they are dressed in a fairly bright apricot colour which can really stand out and be very quickly picked up, even over a good distance.** The only thing that can throw you at a moment's glance seems to be Speargrass flowers.

Once you've found a cunning old buck, the reasons for stalking right up on him

Typical summer chamois terrain. Plenty of shaded guts, ledges and pinnacles providing all day shade



Summer time buck hunting, travelling light and looking through various catchments for an opportunity

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A big chamois buck caught in his summer feeding zone

in the open start to become clear. How? Instead of sitting on the top edge of a bluff with a commanding view as they do most of the year, he is now forced under the bluff and tucked away. Creeping into him has just become a lot easier as they're often blinded by their surroundings. Just the same as the pinnacle, he's always creating a blind spot by staying behind the cover. **It's pretty simple - instead of standing on top of vantage points, they're using them for shade.**

The feeding habits often create the best opportunity by far. February growth around little trickling seeps and guts is like candy to bucks. Little green folds among bluffs all make for excellent feed opportunities, staying nice and cool while filling his stomach with fresh new growth. This is where that super close

opportunity may arise. Just like any other pre-rut animal, they want to be in top condition for the rut. **A buck with its head down feeding in a tight little gut with minimal danger surveying is absolutely the perfect scenario to sneak right in.** They appear very occupied by feeding and really let their guard down at this point. They are obviously still sensitive to movement and scent as per any other time, but these thing are much easier to manage by only having to pop up for a short time to make a shot.

I almost always try and approach them from above. They just don't seem to look uphill as often as other game. If the above manoeuvre is not a good option, try from the side. This also makes for a less challenging, steep downhill



Sam's chamois buck shot with his head down feeding in a small bluff system



Believe it or not, this buck is one of my biggest bucks. Although his horns look short, the mass and the depth of the hook make the douglas score far bigger than anticipated

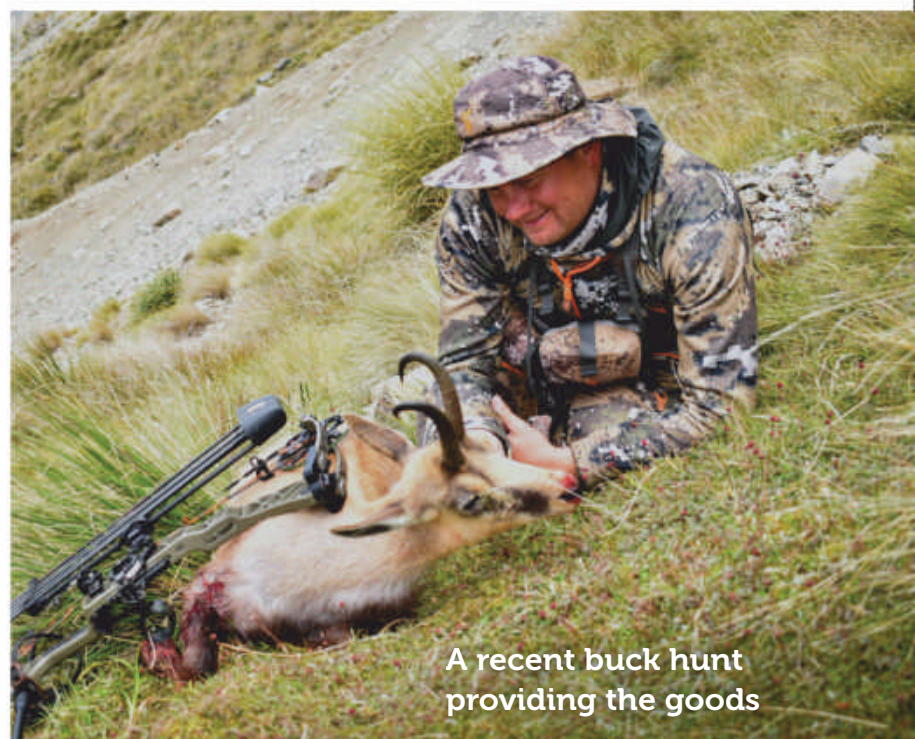
angle where it can be difficult to get good arrow placement and stability out of your shot. You also have more time than you think to make the shot. **The head is often tucked right down amongst the feed and close to trickling water so time is on your side, no need to rush.**

It seems almost always a buck is solo at this time. So this, once again, makes for less eyes looking around for danger. If you see a good apricot coloured animal from a distance and it's by itself, it's definitely worth investigation for a closer look.

Making good judgment on horn

size can be difficult. There's a lot of different configurations within what seems like a pretty basic horn... height, hook, flare and base all play their part so try do some research on them before heading out. There's a good resource on the NZ Hunter website for this.

All these things are in the bow hunters favour: less country to search through, bedded or feeding down in little sight-obscured nooks, very busy feeding and far less looking, easier to see and in a landscape that's better to operate in when you have to move amongst steep terrain.



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WRITTEN BY ~ PAT BARRETT

THE SLEEP-IN STAG

With the school holidays coming it looked like a good time to take my daughter and some friends on a tramp and roar hunt on the West Coast

It's always at the top of the picks when it comes to a trip away, and the weather is favourable.

We had a three day time slot to fill and so chose one of the valleys with huts not too far in so we could base ourselves for a couple of nights. That would let us do a bit of an explore-around to sample the best of the west as well as, hopefully, get in a hunt.

There was much excitement on the drive over Arthur's Pass with a few quick stops for photos and refreshments, along with stories of trips past, before we headed into the valley to park up and set off.

From the get-go things were not looking that good as at the carpark there was another group of Dads and kids heading the same way as us. *"Oh well"* I said, *"just have to try and beat them to the hut!"* However, I wasn't sure that was going to work as they looked a fit bunch! We would give it a go anyway as we were off first on the way in. The hut was several hours away so, who knows, perhaps we might keep them at bay.

The trip in was typical mixed West Coast

travel – farmland gave way to riverbed then to bush and river terraces with a few rough sections thrown in to keep us focussed. I love West Coast travel and with the pulse of the big, blue river almost under our boots on the way in, it's always exciting and has the very real feeling of total immersion in the wilderness.

Particularly so, as we entered deeper into the valley and high forested hills soaring above, morphing into tussock and rock peaks where cloud hung in grey blankets around the tops.

My mate James had his two boys with him, and I had my youngest daughter with me, all in their early to mid-teens. A keen bunch relishing the idea of a hut, hunt, and harvest of a good stag – we hoped. By late afternoon we were at the final river crossing and had not seen the



The walk in

other party of four for quite some while, so it was looking hopeful that we would claim the hut first. I was less impressed by the continual trafficking of heli-hunters overhead into the valley and could only pray they were headed further up the catchment far away from anywhere we might like to hunt.

Once over the river, and with the hut not far off, we set off to claim our bunks and in our haste disturbed a Red that had been browsing on a sunny clearing just back in the bush where the track ran. Blow! Though we spent a while looking it was long gone. **Still it was a good sign for our hunting.**

Finally the hut, and best of all we were there first, with no sign of any activity around about for some while. This was great news. We set up at the hut and



Swingbridge on way to hut



Cook-up at the hut

then before dark, decided to have a look around at a couple of spots I had noted from a previous trip here, staying there until night fell.

Firstly, I checked in with the other group who followed us in, as they had decided to camp out nearby, to see where they were headed for the evening. After we had sorted who was doing what and where, I set off with my mate's two sons while he and my daughter stayed back at the hut to ready dinner.

A beautiful clear evening was opening up over the valley with not a trace of the earlier cloud cover and the promise of a light frost as we headed up a side creek looking for any stag sign or recent activity. I also gave out a few test roars and grunts on my cut-off lemonade bottle to see if there were any passing stags. However, despite a good look around and a few

long waits in promising spots there was no activity and we headed on back to the hut for dinner and an early night.

After dinner we had a quick conversation about who was doing what for the morrow. I expected that my daughter would be up and keen-as to go.

"Do I have to get up at 5am?" she asked.

"Yes, of course, we have to be out there early, but it's not too far away though," I answered.

"Well count me out then. I want a sleep-in," was her surprising rejoinder.

This was a bit out of character, as she is normally into any adventure and this was to be 'her stag' as she and I had only recently got a big stag (14 points) which I had shot, so the next one was to be hers.



The sleep-in stag



Bernadette heading back

moan or roar when we could find cover.

Dawn light on the tops brought with it the first few roars of the day – but they all sounded distant and hard to pin-point. There was lots of deer sign on the riverbed from the previous night, but nothing was moving out there. Time to head off into the bush.

Thick lianas and dense foliage made for a tough and noisy battle as we fought our way in away from the river. A few small streams gave us some respite until we eventually pushed through into some clearings where we paused, hoping to pick up some sign or sound. It wasn't long in coming as a faint roar drifted in on the breeze. We looked at each other in cautious expectation but decided to stay quiet for the moment. A few moments later another closer roar echoed in through the forest and was almost instantly replied to from the first faint roar. This was looking good, two stags were roaring at each other and neither of them knew we were there. Keeping low and quiet we moved on in the direction of the closer stag.

More sign was evident

now. Rubbed trees, droppings, stag prints in the mud, and a much more open environment with the wind in our faces. Again, the distant stag roared. We stopped, waiting for a reply.

A loud roar reverberated through the trees and with it the pungent scent of stag! He was close, much closer than we had anticipated. Ducking low behind some saplings and loading up we considered what to do. I barely had time to chamber a round in the 6.5 Creedmoor when some crashing and thumping, out of view in the forest ahead, indicated that our stag was coming to us, like it or not!

James crouched low behind me and to my right as I lifted the rifle. **Suddenly there he was just 15 metres away behind a fallen tree.** Though we were

rock still and had camo masks on the stag paused – he knew something was up. Finding his chest through the scope I squeezed off a 140gn ELD-M round which knocked him for six. He reared in the air and crashed over backwards stone-cold-dead.

"Whew," we exhaled in unison, "That was close."

"Awesome shot mate," said James as we moved in to inspect my stag.

He was a beauty. Nice chocolate brown in colour, with medium body weight and a good even, shapely six-pointer. Not a trophy, but a nice animal and a great hunt. Marking the spot and way in, we headed on out to alert the kids back at the hut and bring them up to see the stag and help carry out the spoils.

On arrival at the hut we found all three still in bed, but awake.

Bernadette was the first to ask how we got on.

"I shot a stag" I replied.

"You what?" she gasped.

"I shot a stag, your stag" I repeated.

"You shot a stag?" she intoned again, not really believing me at all.

"Yes! While you were in bed I shot a stag. Want to come and see it?"

She didn't need to be asked twice and we were quick out the door, after breakfast, and along through the bush to reach 'our' stag. I took a while to photograph him and process the meat and head, and finally stumble out through the thick forest cover to the riverbed and back to the hut. We had another whole day in front of us to relax at the riverside and catch up with the other group to see how they had got on. They reported some success and some disappointment having seen and shot at a spiker across the river, but which had scarpered by the time they went to retrieve it. **They had also heard other stags roaring but had had no more success there.**

Evening crept in slowly that day as we cooked up some backsteaks and bacon, relishing the hunt, the hut, and the times together and the debacle of the 'sleep-in-stag'.

As we shouldered packs and headed out with heavy loads next morning a determined Bernadette stated, **"Dad, the next stag is mine!"**





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BUCKET LIST STAG

WRITTEN BY
WYNNE MCKAY

2019 was to be my year

I was turning 62, and I knew statistically there probably aren't too many women hunting at my age, so if I wanted to get a stag on the wall to show my grandchildren, I had to get cracking!

I had been out on many trips with my partner Steve May over the years, but usually only took photos. I always enjoyed the exercise, loved the beauty of the mountains and hills, the bush, and the birdlife, but I really wanted to get a stag myself as a memoir of our hunting adventures.

I have a busy and often stressful job as a Clinical Team Coordinator at Christchurch Hospital. Days filled with endless pager traffic, clinical emergencies, deteriorating patients, and other crises! So it is nice to get away from it all, and go hunting with Steve. No pagers, phones, Ipads pinging; in fact no

Nearly back at camp
after an enormous day

one can contact me at all.

Steve was on a mission to help me tick this off my bucket list. We were to head off to the Nelson Tops in February, where he was hopeful we might find a good stag out grazing on the tussock faces.

With great excitement I packed everything bar the kitchen sink (a woman has to be prepared for anything), and off we went by helicopter (the pilot quipped to Steve “was he taking a cook?”!)

I was enjoying the amazing views, until about 15 minutes into the flight, when all the lurching and buffeting by the nor’west wind started to take its toll. I **felt like one of those patients I would be asking a doctor to review at the hospital!**

I was squashed between the pilot and Steve, and as the nausea overwhelmed me, I wondered what I might use if I had to throw up. Steve gave me a panicky look as he could see by my pale sweaty face that this was not going to pan out well.

But, as luck would have it, we started dropping down to where we were to make camp for a few days. The pilot landed, opened the door and climbed out, and I spilled out right behind him with only vague recollections of him preaching to us about staying in the helicopter until he told us to move. One look at me and I’m sure he was very pleased I was out of his helicopter! I could see him give Steve a quick look and a silent message of “OMG - do you really need a cook?”! Not the best start to the expedition.

With firm feet on the ground and some fresh air I soon recovered. It was a beautiful February day, and the mountains and vast wilderness looked absolutely spectacular. We set up camp and then went for a walk to see what was about. **Settled on a ridge and watching the flats below us, I was excited and encouraged to see a couple of hinds appear just on dusk, followed by a young stag.** We headed back to camp to have some tea and get sorted for a big hunt the next day. I filled my hot water bottle (in my defence it is very cold in the mountains at night) and snuggled into my sleeping bag.

At first light we were off into the fog on a mission. Steve had a plan, and I was just trudging along behind. A couple of hours later we were going down a steep tussocky slope when I lost my footing, slipped on the wet tussock, and went speeding down the slope on my bum! I could see an anguished look on Steve’s



Steve on our first evening hunt

face as I whizzed pass him, and I’m sure I could see his fingers twitching on the emergency locator beacon. I have had bilateral hip replacements in the past, and as I was flying down the hill, I did pray that everything ‘held’ together. **I eventually came to a stop about 50 metres down the slope with nothing hurt but my pride.**

We continued until we found a good place to glass the basin and the surrounding area. We had been looking for about an hour when Steve noticed three stags and a couple of hinds grazing across the valley. They were a long way off and were heading back towards the scrub. I was really excited, but it was difficult to see how big the antlers on the stags were due to the distance.

Steve thought we should wait until the evening as the stags would probably come out again. But I was impatient, and worried that they might not reappear. **I convinced Steve that we could shimmy down the slope we were on and move through the mountain pine until we closed the gap to a shootable distance.** Steve was sceptical and thought they would be back in the bush by then. But off we went, down on our backsides for about 500 metres through the scrub until we got to just over 400 metres from the stags.



Steve leading the way to collect the stag

Although we had a better view, they were still a long way off for an amateur like me to shoot. I had instructions coming thick and fast from Steve. He put his day pack on the scrub for me to rest my gun, but there was a bit of a breeze and the bushes were moving. One stag looked a little bigger than the other two, so Steve told me to focus on him. They were grazing on a small clearing of grass and were right on the edge of the scrub, so there was no time to contemplate. The bigger stag was standing side on, and Steve instructed me to aim for his spine above his chest, to account for the distance and drop of the bullet (no fancy gear here!). My breathing



A beautiful 13 pointer, shot by a grandmother!

was fast from scrambling down the slope, and the wind was moving the bushes and my rifle from left to right. **If I ever shot this animal, it would be a minor miracle!!**

I slowed my breathing and concentrated on looking through the scope. As the breeze eased and the rifle drifted slightly back to the right again, I aimed at his spine and squeezed the trigger. **To my**

absolute amazement the stag dropped like a ton of bricks! I just couldn't believe it (and neither could Steve). We kept watching, just in case, but he didn't move.

This was followed by much screaming, yelling, hugging, and many profanities from Steve. I really could not believe I had managed such a long shot and I think Steve was just quietly relieved (maybe not so quietly!) All his tutorials and practise over the years had finally paid off.

We certainly realised it was a long shot as it took over three hours to get down the slope we were on and up the other side across the gully before we got to the stag. To our surprise the stag was a beautiful 13 pointer.

Who would have thought he would be shot at 400 metres by a grandmother?

We took dozens of photos, mainly because I thought at my age the chance of repeating this exercise would be very slim. Steve cut up the meat, and we set off on the long slog back to camp. I have to confess this was when I really did feel my age and lack of strength. The heat of the day didn't help as we struggled back up the slopes. It was exhausting. We

stopped for a break, and some food, and then I excitedly remembered I had some Vitamin C energy tablets in my bag which we golloped down and then waited in anticipation of having some great surge of renewed energy. **Sadly, that turned out to be false advertising.** We picked our tired bodies up and continued the long haul back to camp, arriving about 8.00 pm, absolutely exhausted and hardly able to take another step. I flopped into bed so tired, but exhilarated and contented that I had ticked this off my bucket list. I would be happy to go back to being photographer on trips again.

That stag on my wall will remind me of all the wonderful hunting trips we have been on, the incredible wilderness areas and our beautiful native bush and birdlife. All the laughs, adventures, and good times with a lot of great stories to tell my grandchildren. I am extremely grateful to my wonderful partner Steve, who wants me to share these experiences with him.

So, ladies of my vintage, put down your knitting, or leave the girls in the office for a couple days, and tag along with your partner, son or daughter when they head off for a hunt. You will be amazed, and you may even enjoy yourself!



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WRITTEN BY ~ CAM MCKAY | POINTS SOUTH

TROPHY CAPING 101

Hopefully one day you might be lucky enough to take an animal worthy of sending to the taxidermist, so it is a good idea to learn how to skin for a shoulder mount and care for a cape prior to shooting that once-in-a-lifetime animal

David Jacobs is our local taxidermist and mentioned to me that just the other day he had three different people come in on the same day that had all cut their capes too short, and the disappointment they had to deal with.

Knowing what to do would have saved the disappointment of learning the cape was too short, especially after carrying out the head and half the neck and no doubt a good amount of meat. Taxidermists these days are just about magicians, but a short cape is a short cape and they simply need to have enough skin to work with. Hence the motivation for this article.

Special thanks to David for his input and for the numerous images he has provided. He is a fourth generation taxidermist based in Arrowtown so certainly knows his stuff and we are all lucky that he is passing on this knowledge.

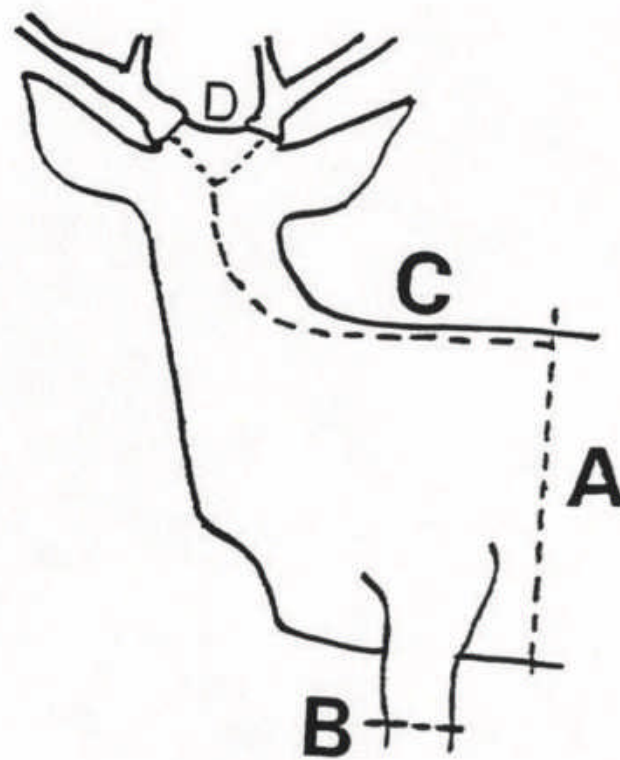
Taxidermists keep a good stock of replacement capes for exactly these circumstances, but it does add unnecessary expense to the mounting costs. If you try to get a replacement cape

for yourself or a mate, it may not be a suitable fit for the antler pedicles or, if taken later in the season, it might not match your original animal.

Now they say there's more than one way to skin a cat, but whichever way you look at it the initial cuts need to provide enough skin to work with. Taxidermists are not concerned about excess flesh or fat on the hide, and even the odd hole is acceptable.

The above illustration shows where these cuts need to be, and the minimum length down the body needed by the taxidermist.

1. Always cut the skin with the blade facing upwards. The aim here is to just be cutting the skin and not the hair itself.



2. Make all these cuts as smooth and as straight as possible. Follow the natural black hair line down the centre of the back of the neck on most animal species. The exception is winter chamois and tahr, where you want to be a half an inch to one side of where the hair naturally parts, so the stitching will not show on the finished mount. And always cut away from yourself!

3. If you're unsure about length, then just take more than you think you need! A good guide here is just to always take the skin back as far as the



The atlas joint, where you remove the head from the neck

A cape cut too short, and also with a lot of heavy neck left attached

A guide for how long a cape can be left unfrozen in various temperatures

pizzle and go just past the point where you would usually take the hock off an animal. This is of course for a shoulder mount.

4. If you are unsure about how to deal with the legs you can sock them. This is more time consuming but you're not cutting the skin so you can't really stuff it up.

Once the cuts are right, start knifing the skin off from the cut made down the centre line of the back. The less schnitzel left on the skin the better so take your time and make sure you're taking off just the skin and not all those tiny muscle layers between the skin and body, which, interestingly, are used for the animal to shiver/shake. The key to doing a tidy job is to get between the skin and the very thin membrane attached to it right from the start, as this sets you up well for punching the skin off.

Once you get to a certain point you can start to "punch" the skin off the animal, but watch out for sharp broken bone around the bullet holes, especially the exit hole. Simply hold the skin out from the body and start driving your fist between the skin and body. On a stag you can usually punch the flanks and down in around the belly, but with chamois being quite thin skinned you can actually punch quite a bit of the skin off. **Tahr can be a pain and you will generally have to knife the whole skin off.** The brisket area is particularly tough as this is the thickest part and insulates the body where he lies on the snow.

There are a few ways to make the cuts to get the skin off around the front legs. Personally, I make a cut all the way up the back of the front leg to just slightly past the elbow. If you check it out first you can often place your cut

on the back of the front leg to follow along a colour change in the hair. From this cut you can sleeve skin until the leg is free. Then once you've punched/skinned down low enough from the cut down the back to join up with your leg skinning, simply pass the hoof through the hole you've created and carry on skinning your way around the brisket and neck. **Just be sure to keep your cuts nice and straight.**

It's really helpful to have your mate helping out with holding up legs and moving the animal around, especially with stags. For larger animals it is easiest to skin one side first then flop the skin back over to protect the meat and stop debris such as leaves, dirt or stones getting on both the hide and meat. Then roll him over and do the other side.

DAYTIME TEMPERATURE	TIME TO FREEZER
40°C	1 Hour
30°C	4 Hours
20°C	8 Hours
10°C	24 Hours
5°C	72 Hours

When you're at the point of thinking you can start to take the head off, it's time to slow down! This is often the point where people slip and end up going through the cape. **You are aiming to take the head off at the atlas joint, the point where the spine meets the skull.** It can be a little hard for people to find at first, but follow the skull down with your finger and find where it dips down in to the joint. It often helps to tilt the antlers/horns forward and chin down, holding that pressure as you poke around working that joint apart enough to twist the head off. Be wary hacking at the joint with your knife though, as it's super hard bone that



A good day, two trophies to cape!
Luke Potts



With chamois you want to avoid the classic Y shape you use for other species (see D pg 62) as you need to cut around the glands, visible in this image

down/skin up) to allow it to cool down, as this helps prevent hair slip.

Removing the tongue is a good idea (especially before photos) as gut fluid can get trapped under it and cause localised hair slip.

Fold the cape skin to skin then roll/fold it up and pack it out. David's

tip here is to not wrap the cape around the head and trap the heat in. Instead, use cable ties or some string to attach the cape to the inside of one beam of the antler. This provides extra padding for packing out over your shoulder, as well as no blood down the back of your neck. You can swap the antler from right to left shoulder as the terrain dictates. This ensures that the antlers are less likely to get caught up on vegetation and you are less likely to be mistaken as a deer, while leaving the other hand free for your rifle, hill-stick or ice axe.

the temperature the faster the bacteria will grow and cause hairslip which is the irreversible loss of hair. As a guide David put together the recommended time frames for the time between when the hide is removed from the carcass and delivered to the taxidermist or a freezer on the page prior.

Most taxidermists prefer that you bring in the head unskinned so they can record information and take measurements particular to your trophy and ensure that the intricate process of head skinning is done correctly.

Note that chamois have glands on the top of their skull at the base of their horns. It is very important not to cut through or between these, but instead cut smoothly to one side of the glands then back to the base of both horns. **By doing this it's much easier to hide the stitching given the glands are a pretty important part of a chamois mount, particularly with a buck taken in the rut.**

The choice of knife is personal preference, and everyone will say that what they use is the ideal. I know different hunting guides that use drop points, boning, skinning, old school Mercator pocket knives and of course replaceable scalpel blade knives. The choice is yours, but one thing I will mention is that the replaceable scalpel knives in the wrong hands have probably punched more holes in capes than all the others combined.

It's one thing to read about this process but the best thing you can do is a practice run on your next meat animal.

When you have shot the trophy of a lifetime and are burning daylight is not the time to start learning!



will dull your knife quicker than anything else!

Needless to say, through this whole process you want to keep the skin as clean as possible and not covered in dirt or plant material.

Once you've got the cape off you need to spread the whole thing out on the ground for 10 minutes or more (hair

When you return to the truck or hut don't leave it sweating away in a plastic bag. Mutton cloth or a game bag is ideal to keep off flies, wasps, keas or vermin. The goal is to get it straight into the chiller until it can be head skinned and turned, then frozen.

It is important to get it to the taxidermist as soon as practical, as temperature effects the bacterial growth. The warmer

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Making It Work

WRITTEN BY ~ JOHNNY BISSELL

A forest without a succession plan is a forest in a state of collapse. Or is this a gully where it is natural for no understorey to be present? What do you think? There is a lot to understanding our whenua and we need to be realistic about how much we do and don't know

A few issues back I did a series on hunting and conservation. The response from hunters to what I wrote was both humbling and encouraging

It would appear that many hunters in New Zealand are thinking about the environment that means so much to them, and also about the future of New Zealand hunting alongside conservation work and where that fits in to the bigger picture.

I operate my own business working in conservation specialising in threatened species protection and targeting hard to remove predators. Many of the lessons that set me apart in what I do, I learned though hunting. That is what I am. A predator hunter! I even moved somewhat into the modern age recently in my business and started an Instagram page. The name? nzpredatorhunter. What else?

HUNTERS IN CONSERVATION

I work around the country and the thing that I see constantly is the fact that when it comes to conservation work and doing the hard yards, that hunters are very well represented in this field. Very! In this PC gone mad world, where people are not allowed to learn by doing like they used to, the lessons learned when hunting transfer very naturally into the field delivery side of conservation. Skills such as off track navigation, river crossings, resilience, reading the weather, physical fitness and knowing what you are capable of, and so

on. **I love spending time with hunters working in conservation because they get it!** They get what it means to treat each animal in a population as an individual, and that the little things and decisions along the way make the big difference. And when it comes to things like search and rescue, once again, hunters are there using the skills learned in their own time for the benefit of the community. Last year I sat in a row of proud parents as our children went one by one up on to the stage and received awards for achieving various goals and milestones. And I had a moment, people. I looked along the row of parents and I realised that every child in my row came from a family of hunters. Now, that isn't a blanket statement about successful children, but it sure came home to me that the lessons learned with their parents when out on the hill and the way they were being raised was certainly contributing towards the end product of growing good people. Being taught respect and consequences and the like.

HUNTERS IN THE COMMUNITY

The bottom line is that hunting is often quietly in the background contributing to the health of our society and well-being of the people within it. Post 2020 (and we aren't out of the woods yet), that whole wellbeing thing seems to be getting considered more and more. Suddenly, it isn't what you own and where you go overseas. **It is who you are as a person and what you do in work and play and as part of your community.** There is no doubt that hunters and hunting are contributing to society and the GDP, so why are hunters not getting the ear of those in power as they ought? Simple really, and it comes back to what I said in a previous article. It comes down to money and power and votes among other things. The fact is that New Zealand society, as with the rest of the world, is changing rapidly. Society is becoming increasingly urbanised and with the advent of social media everyone is suddenly an expert and has a voice. **Suddenly hunting and many other rural or wilderness-based activities are being judged by people who have never been outside the city limits and who own a phone.** Just look at what happened to the Inuit subsistence way of life around seal harvesting when people in cities on the other side of the world started looking at cute seal pup pictures on billboards. Animals are being given human names and personalities by some and now, more than ever, hunters and hunting are in the

spotlight and being forced to defend what has been up until now to them a very natural thing. For so many hunters it is actually very much like going to the supermarket. Until now. **Now, they are increasingly feeling the need to defend what they do.** And it is not just hunting on its own either. Farming and many other types of land use are starting to feel the heat too. I don't for a moment think that we shouldn't be environmentally sustainable in what we do, but we need to be rational, scientific and logical and look at the whole picture and not just convenient parts of it.

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Are skinny runty deer really what we want?

Community conservation groups are adopting large tracts of bush and are being funded to restore it. I love that, but things ungulate are not flying under the local environmental radar like they used to. In places where there is any imbalance in flora or fauna it is getting looked at. **Often favoured hunting grounds that were considered by the hunting community to be nothing of any environmental consequence are being revealed to be quite the opposite.** Ungulate impacts, if significant, are being considered. Please go back and read last issue's article by Roy Sloan and Cam Speedy. Cam has for many years been something of a lone voice in the wilderness when it comes to deer management. He is not anti-deer as some would say, he is pro healthy environment and healthy all species within it. Cam also did a presentation recently for the Sika Foundation where he described in detail the gain to be made for hunters by a balanced and lower population of healthy deer. It makes absolute sense. Go watch it on You Tube and then turn it off and think. Hard! - sikafoundation.co.nz

HUNTING IN THE FUTURE

Hunting and the future of hunting both locally and globally has some huge challenges ahead of it and

none more so than in New Zealand.

The reason is that animals hunted in New Zealand are not native. That is fact. They didn't originate here and as such their impacts can be harmful if not managed. We need to be realistic about that. There is a legal precedent to treat deer as pests and the view of some New Zealanders is that that is the correct position. There is also a large percentage of the population of this country, both hunting and non-hunting, who see the value to families and society as a whole from game animals and hunting. So where does that leave us?

I am sure that this country, and the people on both sides of this argument, can have their cake and eat it too. But, as with any good decision-making process, there will have to be compromises on both sides. As I often say about arbitration, if both sides are a bit pissed off then the right decision has probably been made. Same thing here really. The New Zealand story currently has two sides lined up opposing each other (in some cases) and neither fully understanding the language the other is speaking. It doesn't have to be like that. In the middle are a very small number of people who understand and speak both languages and who could

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I heard about Red hinds the size of dogs in the old days and in some parts of New Zealand where there is minimal open country hunting I am seeing it now. I never thought I would. I should have removed the jaw off this mature hind for ageing

interpret and broker deals to ensure that our environment first and our game animals second are protected. As Cam and Roy stated, you cannot successfully have the second without the first. If that last sentence caught in the back of your throat then you need to sit down and have a good hard think about yourself and your motives. If you want healthy deer then you need a healthy environment. Pure and simple. And don't forget that the anti-deer people would be having the same chat with themselves about conceding to a population of game animals being left alone and present at all. What did I say about both sides being a bit pissed off for the greater and longer term good? So, what do hunters need to do? Right then. Let's roll our sleeves up.....

1. The fact is that there are hunters who are currently acting in ways that feed right into people's negative perceptions of hunters and hunting. Front and centre to this are the rants, abuse and straight out threats on-line, in and around hunting forums and social media sites. I get that people are often frustrated by what the authorities do around hunting management, but come on people. There is a lot of hate out there and social media has presented an opportunity for people to abuse others without any risk to themselves. Hunting related sites have more than their share. The simple fact is that in every walk of life you will get these people and you won't stop them. How you chose to respond to that, or to people you disagree with however, is your choice. It might sound a little 'Covid response' but please be kind. If you can't say it nicely then perhaps don't say it at all. It won't change the world if you don't react negatively, but it will incrementally if you do. People are watching folks and we need to be

squeaky clean.

2. Hunters across the country need to stop considering themselves as islands and start to get to grips with, and interested in, the wider environmental issues facing us, and not just by ranting and criticising.

We need to start to better support a wide ranging fully funded national hunting organisation that supports and speaks for hunters. The GAC. We also have other organisations that are doing great work too, but we need a wide-ranging umbrella organisation that speaks for all and not just those who want to belong to a club. What I am talking about is an organisation that works hand in hand with government, Forest and Bird and others, and is involved actively in science and management decisions, and be prepared to fund it. Even if you don't agree with the whole policy it needs to be a united voice. Folks - if you want to keep hunting you need to wrap your head around dipping into your pocket or supporting a tax and maybe having it more managed and regulated. But don't worry, we don't have to be America either. Just better funded to result in being better coordinated.

3. Hunters need to get used to the idea of a lower population of healthy animals and front foot this issue or the decisions will be made for us.

A quality hunting experience needs to mean more than a deer behind every tree. I know we already get that, but we need to dig deeper and think and appreciate more of our environment and ecosystem. Hunters also need to be OK with working in with commercial hunters and be OK with the thought of professional ungulate control being carried out in some hunting areas, if it is needed to maintain agreed densities. The fact is

that hunters visit more remote areas less frequently, and when they do, they often want a stag. The hind population also needs to be managed to agreed densities. Recreational hunting is the best, first, and logical option for this, in my opinion, but hunters need to be realistic about whether that will actually be enough in many places and adjust if needed. This is where commercial hunting can have a real part to play. Properly managed and regulated commercial hunting that works to an agreed quota, area by area, and to an agreed sex ratio could be the best thing that could happen for both recreational hunting and the environment and conservation. We need to protect our commercial hunters but also better regulate them, and what they take and target. I am sure they also want to be assured of a sustainable and secure harvest without the free-for-all, first in first served, current regime. The science behind carrying capacity and management area by area could potentially be a joint funded approach between hunters and government.

4. Hunters need to think and research the issues around conservation and not just believe what they hear from unsubstantiated sources.

Conservation and all species management is a complex subject. Hunters need to be realistic about the fact that, as with every type of work, it can take many years to fully understand the complexities. To run down conservation professionals often only serves to demonstrate lack of tolerance. Sure, they don't always get it right, but there are also often very complex reasons for doing what they do. Farming is also a good example. To a city dweller it just looks like someone shifting stock between paddocks and selling a few, but anyone in the industry knows that farming is complex, and that good farmers are some of this country's top business people with skills in many areas. Some of the sweeping statements currently being circulated about farming by non-farmers have demonstrated the same thing.

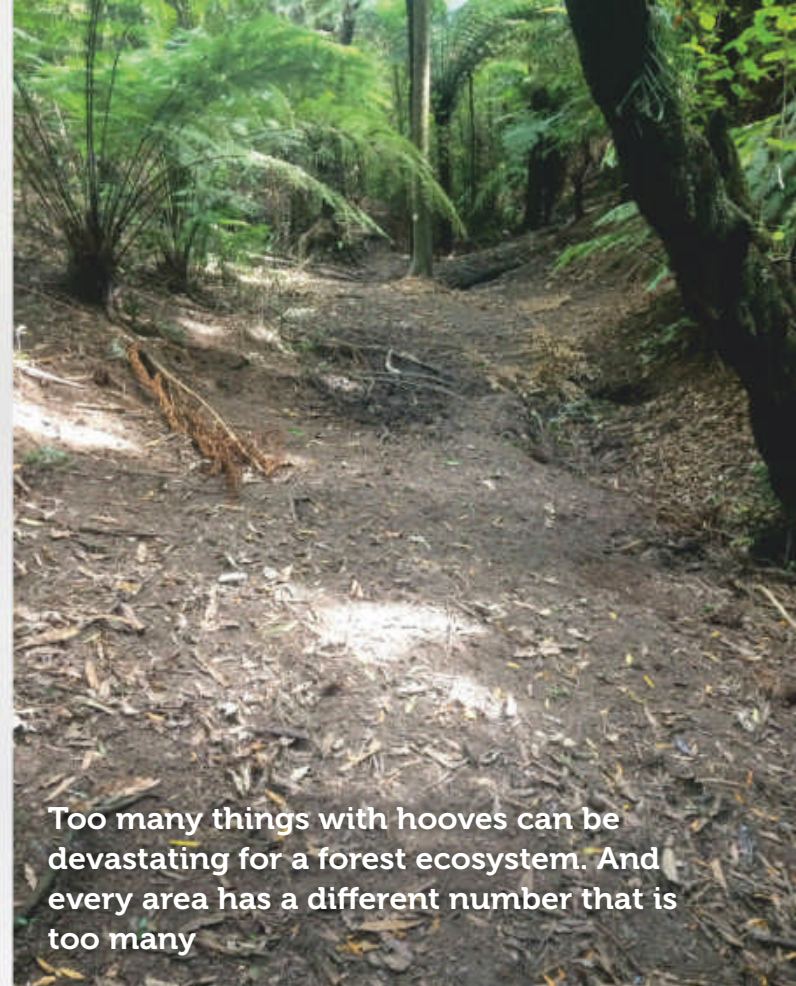
5. We need to stop playing to the tune of justifying hunting because we are controlling pests.

If that is all hunting is about then be ready to have it taken away when the tools become available. I am even seeing some on-line conservation based and influential hunters repeating this message. Yes - anything is a pest if it is out of balance with its environment, but let's be honest folks, there are places in New Zealand where game animals are out of balance. The longer that goes on for, the longer it takes for the environment to restore itself

once balance is returned, and the lower the re start population of ungulates needs to be in order for balance to return. But here is my greatest concern. New Zealand has been calling and legislating deer as pests for nearly a century now, and it has failed dismally. I don't care whether you love or hate deer, no one will be happy with the current regime and result. To continue to class, call and consider deer as pests is to doom ourselves to continue to keep repeating the same mistakes moving forward. I want desperately to see this culture changed for the sake of the mountains and ngahere I hold so dear. When ungulate densities are linked directly to the price per kilo and budgets funded by taxpayer dollars it is an entirely unsustainable up and down model. Area by area recommended densities should be arrived at by practical rational science with a big dose of realism and societal benefit thrown in, and then held there through a collaborative approach. As Cam states though, the environment must always come first and we will all be winners. I agree. There is a difference between being conservationists and unrealistic preservationists. We shouldn't let the pursuit of the perfect and pristine pre-human panacea dream be the demise of a long term sustainable and good-for-all option. Every time we try for the panacea dream (or deer as a pest to be all removed) and fail and let things get out of balance, we wind the clock back to near zero in some places and start the whole long process of restoration again. That is the current situation with our game animals. So, let's consider them game animals that are here to stay, but keep a close eye on each local environment and act accordingly, manage where and what we take and for the long term and in harmony with the environment.

I will leave it there, but I also want to make one last suggestion. Get out there and get involved with conservation projects. You will learn as you go, and as hunters you will add real value with your skill set, observations and approach to pest control and predator hunting. Keep an open mind, be kind to all and enjoy rubbing shoulders with people you never thought you would be in the same room with. We are all people after all, and we all have the same basic needs and varied viewpoints. Embrace that. Remember you will be judged in these situations as a person, but your actions will reflect on hunters as a whole. People in these projects are not there to judge. They are there to restore and connect. Many of the hunters in conservation projects I am involved with are revered by non-hunters for what they add and do and everyone gets on well. **You might surprise yourself with what you learn.** If you want to stay specifically with a hunter led project, then take a look at the current hunter led conservation initiatives and see if that is something you might like to get involved with. The groundbreakers here are the Wapiti Foundation, the Sika Foundation, Eastern Kaweka and Ruahine groups. The Tararua Wild Foundation is another such example near to me, and there are a number of others. If you can't support through work, think about donating. Hunters for Conservation is another great initiative. So, get out there people and enjoy. Everyone has something to offer. Don't stand in the shadows whining. Its not our way. **Let's lead from the front.**

CHEERS, JOHNNY



Too many things with hooves can be devastating for a forest ecosystem. And every area has a different number that is too many



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AGE THE Bull

This is the 31st in our series of guess the age of the bull.

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



> Tyron

This bull is in terrible physical condition, most likely in late winter - his hips are nearly sticking out through his skin and he'll need to be lucky for spring to kick in early to save him.

He's very old - it's always hard to see the tiny age rings for the last couple of years on truly old bulls but it's easy to see he's stacking them up close to his hair line.

He has very little horn height above his forehead for an old bull, and is very narrow horned. He looks to only be around the 8.5" - 9" wide mark to me when considering ear tip to ear tip he'll be averaging somewhere between 9.5" - 10.5".

He looks like he may have his right horn slightly broomed although hard to tell for sure. His bases are very small also, as visually he has no mass at all when considering the lack of height on the horns to begin with (bull's with no height often look like they have bigger bases proportionally). When taking into account his lack of height of horn, lack of width of horn, and small bases this bull's not going to measure well. My guess is he's 10+ years in age. He has under 8" bases, 11-11.5" in horn length.

Douglas score 38-40 at best. Great old character bull but won't score well.

> Marcus

This is definitely an older bull, difficult to see all his growth rings in the photos, but he looks to be at least 11 years old though could be up to 13 years old. He is not in good condition,

his hips are very obvious. Though having survived winter he might make another year. His horns are not huge considering his age, his right horn tip is well broomed and he has also rubbed the ridges or keel off the front of his horns. By doing this a bull can often reduce their overall horn length by an inch or so. Rubbing off their ridges also greatly reduces the bull's base measurements, as is the case with this bull, his horns lack mass.

My guess is this bull's right horn is in the 12" vicinity could be just over or just under, his left horn looks a bit better probably around 12 1/2. His bases look to be less than 8" so I will say 7 3/4". So if we say his right horn is 12" he is likely score 39 1/2 Douglas Score or thereabouts.

This bull will never be a top tahr trophy given what he has rubbed off or broken from his horns, however this bull has a heap of character and is the ideal animal for a hunter to take for their first tahr trophy. It is far better that people take an older bull like this than kill a young bull with good tips full of potential. Now that we have a significantly smaller tahr resource we are all going to have to be more selective with what animals we choose to take.

> Joseph

First glance he is certainly no obvious 'trophy'. A closer look reveals his age.

He is thin through the body and looking pretty worn out, with his head turned toward us we can easily see the washboard effect of stacked annuli. This bull is certainly in the 10+ age

bracket, and judging by his condition he is nearing the end of his life. An older bull will be very difficult to age exactly on the hoof, as once they get into the 10-12+ age bracket those annuli can be so close its hard to see.

His horns show obvious signs of wear, missing ridges and worn tips. It's also worth noting the thin bases on this bull. Fairly common traits of West Coast bulls of this age class.

He would sit around the 12" mark, maybe 12.5 if we are being generous, small bases would be not much over 8", if at all. So horn wise he is no monster, but a bull like this will certainly not get any bigger. He is fully grown and likely at the end of his life cycle.

Would you shoot him? It really depends on what you're looking for. A bull like this is a 'trophy' in my books, he is old and worn with plenty of character and has lived his life. He will never get any bigger as a 'trophy', and these types of bulls are the perfect animal to take for hunters looking for a good mature bull. It is much better we shoot these animals, than the 5-year-old 12 incher with loads of potential.

> Greg

As the guys have said, this bull has had a rough time of it nutrition wise, and has no mass in his bases. He also had a lack of feed in his first year as his lamb tips are stunted as well. All in all, he is definitely an old bull that will make a great character trophy for someone's first bull, but he won't score well. I would be guessing around the 11.5 inch mark with under 8 inch bases so around 38 DS.



THE WINNER OF OUR READERS GUESSES AND THE STONEY CREEK PRIZE FOR ISSUE 80 IS:

M. Baker

Who guessed 10 years plus and a
Douglas Score of 40

EVALUATE THE STAG

For Red stags we have a mix
of our existing Wapiti and
tahr judges – taxidermist and
hunter **Tyron Southward**,
trophy stag deer farmer and
hunter **Jere Dearden**, and
Cam Speedy who needs no re-
introduction.

What we have asked them to
do is give us an age estimate,
and a trophy evaluation. As with
the Wapiti and tahr, readers can

email in an age and general
trophy evaluation, and the
closest to the judge's estimates
will win the prize. Please do email
in any good pics or ideally series
of pics you have of any Wapiti
bulls, bull tahr or Red stags, and
if chosen for the age the bull/
stag candidate you also will win
a prize.

So let's see how we go on aging
and trophy evaluating Red stags!

AS WITH THE OTHERS...

Readers can email in an age and Douglas Score
guess, and the closest to the judge's estimates will
win the prize. Please do send in any good series of
pics you have of any bull tahr, and if chosen for the
Age the tahr candidate you also will win a prize.

Email in your answers and
any photos for future competitions to;
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FOR THE NEXT ISSUE...

First up we have photos from expert
West Coast hunter and great mate Derek
Johnson, who some of
you will remember
from some of our
tahr and Wapiti
TV Show

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



BRUISED BACK *AND BATTERED KNEES*

WRITTEN BY ~ RYAN GILLARD

This trip started a little different than our usual roar trip as the “Dream Team” couldn’t all get together due to some work and family commitments

Oh yeah and Lance pulled out just hours prior to leaving due to getting the week long runs with giardia from drinking out of a river a week beforehand!

CRAPSVILLE

Al and I, like clockwork, were biting at the bit to get out and amongst the roaring Red stags so we hatched a new plan a little different to usual and decided to pack into an area for a couple of days that none of us knew much about. We did our research and read up a little which got the blood pumping. Our other spot X was on hand for whenever we wanted, so it was nice to know incase this spot turned to custard!

It felt like the middle of summer, sweat was pouring out of us. The bush was so dry and there wasn’t

a sign of water anywhere. The water that we took with us was gone before the first hour due to the gradient we were travelling. It seemed like such hard work trying to battle the never ending hill! Our packs were so heavy we had bruised backs and battered knees and it was only day one!

We plotted our way up on our GPS numerous times but couldn’t quite work out when we were actually going to make the waypoint which we had set months ago on the computer.

We travelled for hours and then realised we had gone down a

gradual spur leading us away from our waypoint. This was heart breaking - no water, no deer sign - it was custard!

We named it “Crapsville”.

The decision was made to turn around while we had some light and head straight out to the car to regroup then head into our Spot X. We knew that had lots of water and is a place that holds such an amazing place in our hearts.

On the walk out we had numerous stags roaring almost back at the carpark - bloody typical! A good feed and drink we were back in it - mind you we were so dehydrated we nearly cracked in to the window washer water in the car!

We put that trip down to a good learning curve, and as we have always said from past experience it is best to stop and weigh up the options instead of bush bashing into the unknown and getting lost. We were so lucky to have Lance’s misfortune to laugh about, this kept us amused for hours.





Trying to find that big boy

SPOT X

Al and I packed the car with all the essentials and then drove up to the Spot X in the Motu Area. His son Ryan (my godson) who we call "Little Ry" (might I add he is not so little anymore) was to meet us there that evening. This place had so many memories where Al had taken me numerous times as a kid, had filled our freezers for years and even produced some nice first stags for some of his boys. Al knew this place like the back of his hand and had stories galore - in his early 60's he could still march up those hills like a bloody teenager!

We were into the stags instantly, they were roaring from all directions. **It was now a matter of deciding which one we were to go after and which ones we should film for our videos.** We got on top of one in the bush who was constantly staying ahead of us but boy did he smell like a polecat! We finally caught up to him but couldn't get a clean shot away. It didn't matter

though, we were finally into the hunting we had been dreaming about. A few more deer were seen and we set up a camp spot and got ready for the morning chorus.

5.30am - I woke and unzipped my tent to find Al with his compression tights on and just a jumper with that look in his eye! ***"Get up! im going, there's a stag 100 metres from camp!"***

Well it took me a minute or so to get that image out of my mind - then I was up. He was right, straight out from our tents were a couple of stags pacing up and down on a clearing roaring at each other. Little Ry had his new camera ready and we marched up and took our place on a nice little knob. Little Ry had been instructed by his photography teacher to get some good shots which might go towards his final marks. With that said Al lined up a nice eight pointer and delivered an echo across the hill side that every hunter dreams about.



A 10 pointer we saw and left

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A Bradley



The lookout where we spied the big stag from

Just like that meat was sorted, so close to camp and all downhill - our last spot in "Crapsville" was quickly forgotten about! **We cut the deer up, hung it, then sat down and had breakfast - bliss.**

Our hunting over the next few days was so exiting, there were plenty of deer and since having already bagged a nice meat animal and some amazing photos for Little Ry we had one thing in mind now, and that was to get a big boy.

The weather had its ups and downs but hey that's hunting. We were seeing some nice stags but windy conditions made it difficult to get on top of them. Just as we were

unzipping our bags for lunch we noticed a nice big 10 pointer walk up a ridge and roar - it looked like a nice one for the wall but as we were chatting and evaluating him another roar came from directly below us. We quickly zoomed in on the camera and there was a nice 12 pointer who sat down in a little sunny spot on a tiny clearing and went to sleep.

Well that was all I needed to get excited! As Little Ry was hunting with a bow this year and the shot was only available at 270 metres I looked at Al who was offering me his nice Remington with the latest Leica scope. Some precision ranging with the Leica rangefinders and a few clicks on the dial and I had the stag in the



Another of Little Ry's photos

crosshairs. It only felt right to roar this stag so he could wake from his nap and present himself for a clean shot. **I still remember the sight vividly as he arched his head back and gave an almighty roar!**

Once again that sound we all love rang out through the valley. The precision of the optics were on point and with a clean shot he was ours. I had only shot one 12 pointer before this but that feeling is the same with any stag we shoot, it's all about the experience and feeling we get to share with our buddies in the hills.



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Finally, the big boy!

That evening while walking out laden with meat and antlers we came across another eight pointer with quite a few hinds walking up a ridge. Little **Ry really wanted to shoot a stag with his bow and this seemed like a great opportunity.** He ran up that hill so fast his legs must have been like jelly when he finally got there. I was

watching from below and noticed him draw back his bow, I looked to the side and just in front of him was the stag feeding. All of a sudden we heard a little groan from Little Ry then by the time I looked back the stag was bolting, he'd seen Ry draw. He was so gutted but that fact that he got so close to such an animal really

put a smile on his face. It was a great accomplishment for a young fella to give bow hunting a try and now he is determined more than ever to get that big boy with an arrow.

Days in the hills with mates and to be able to share these kind of memories is priceless - bring on the next roar!



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FROM ZIMBABWE TO NAMIBIA

— WRITTEN BY ~ ASHLEY TROBRIDGE —

'Robert Mugabe, Zimbabwe's strongman ex-president, dies aged 95'. Headlines like this were flooding through media channels in early September 2019 as Willie and I were finishing our travels in Zimbabwe

Mugabe lived his last days in Singapore with the best health care and luxuries. All while his 'people' were still suffering thanks to his own destructive actions. I'd wondered how this day would go down in history and what it would mean for Zimbabwe as a country.

The optimistic side of me really hoped it would bring some positive change, but unfortunately it did not. Emmerson Mnangagwa, who has taken the presidential reigns since November 2017, has indeed continued Mugabe's terrible regime of corruption and poverty.

From one fascinating African country scarred by controversial history to another - Namibia. However, Namibia's scars were far less severe and you immediately noticed the difference when arriving in the clean friendly airport of Windhoek.

Goods and services were reasonably priced and the Namibian dollar was still in use. Namibia's population is relatively small for its considerable land mass, supporting just 2.5 million

people - a consequence of its vast dry and unproductive plains and limited water supply. **Our friendly Uber driver filled us in on some Namibian history while cruising the pot-hole free highways into the capital.** He explained that many opportunities exist in the country but emphasised it is still not free from corruption and other problems. A strong German influence was evident as road signs and place names were in German and many people were speaking the language. Namibia was colonised by Germans in 1884 and was known as German South West Africa. Following the First World War, it fell under South African Rule until 1966 and it eventually obtained independence as Namibia in 1990. It has managed to

keep a reasonably stable economy and peaceful culture which was somewhat refreshing after being consumed by the chaos and sadness of Zimbabwe.

Willie and I had envisioned touring safari style in a Land Rover Defender with a rooftop tent through Namibia's top sights but soon settled for a Toyota Hilux. **Although the Defender would have looked better on Instagram, the Hilux was going to be much more forgiving over the long hours of driving on rocky and corrugated roads.** Turning onto the highway with a load of food and fuel, aircon and Bob Seger turned up high, we were excited for the journey ahead. We planned a loop heading off south down to the striking orange sand dunes of Sossusvlei, then turning west across to the Walvis Bay coastline, trucking back inland to the large rock formations of Spitzkoppe and finally circling up north to the vast flat salt pan of Etosha National Park, before returning back to Windhoek to fly out in 12 days time.

Like much of Africa, Namibia is not exempt from wildlife and human population conflict. The San (or bushmen) people of Namibia have been hunter gatherers and meat eaters for centuries. Game numbers



dropped drastically during the 70's and 80's due to a huge rise in poaching. In 1990, Namibia became the first country in Africa to incorporate environmental protection into its constitution whereby the government passed a law enabling communities to set up conservancies, giving them the right to manage and benefit from their own natural resources. **National parks and conservancies now cover over 45% of the land and many consider Namibia as the wildlife jewel in Africa's crown.**

There are only 5,500 black rhinos left in the world and over half of them exist in Namibia. It also boasts the largest population of wild cheetah worldwide which has been aided by the growing number of plains game for prey. Trophy hunting has definitely played its part by making animals more valuable to local communities and in turn, those communities are more actively engaged in wildlife protection. From our own experiences of seeing thriving game and communities in the flesh, it's hard to argue that the benefits of hunting are not real. It was great to see the CEO of Air Namibia paying special tribute to ethical hunting and the positive contribution it makes, welcoming all hunting clients for the season in their in-flight magazine.

Something I do not expect from Air NZ anytime soon...

While undertaking our whirlwind tour of some of Namibia's favourite tourist attractions, we did some research into different hunting operators and ended up connecting with a lovely Namibian family via a German social media page (jagdtotal on Instagram). Oase Guest Farm is located in the Otjozondjupa region, south east of Etosha National Park. A super friendly and hospitable chap, Hans Werner Erpf (nicknamed Buns), runs the hunting operation along with his wife Yvonne. Buns's parents, Hansi and Gaby Erpf, also own and operate a hunting outfit 'Otjenga' on the adjacent property. We had little idea about what to expect over the next four days, having only exchanged a few causal messages with Buns on WhatsApp, but it soon felt like we were visiting some old family

friends.

We arrived mid-afternoon, greeted by a couple of inquisitive ostriches and Buns's two young kids running out to the gate. The guest house was surrounded with bright flowers, a rare sight in this dry country. The glistening swimming pool looked extremely tempting as the intense heat was just starting to cool for the day. Yvonne treated us to a delicious afternoon tea and we were then quickly whisked off to the shooting range. Buns wanted to see if we knew how to handle a rifle, and I thought for ethical reasons this was great. Thankfully, my shot was spot on while Willie's was slightly off centre...

Confident we were up to the task, Buns took us on our first African hunt. For his 'bakkie', he had removed the cab off a Land Rover Defender and mounted a bench seat on the back tray, making game viewing from the vehicle bliss. We drove through a small part of the 6,000ha property before stopping the vehicle and starting a walk and stalk, just the style of hunt we were hoping to do. Willie was on the rifle and the goal was an old oryx bull. We saw an abundance of wildlife all in good condition, the most beautiful benefit of well managed hunting operations. Walking amongst these animals, giraffe, kudu, warthog and oryx to name a few, is truly captivating and allows you to be 100% present. **I gently placed each foot in front of one another in the dry, orange dirt.** I could feel a slight breeze on my face as I scanned my immediate surroundings for animals – better than yoga on the mindfulness scale I reckon. The constant threat of danger in Africa, like stepping on a highly venomous black mamba snake makes the experience all the more enlivening.

Two oryx were now in our sights so we made a stalk to close the distance. As we



Male Impala

Our fully equipped Toyota Hilux



Watching the sunrise on dune 45



Spitzkoppe



My eland cow



Our host Bunsu glassing

were nearing 50 yards out from them, the camera I was using went flat and I quickly realised that I had left the spare batteries back in the truck... breaking the bad news to Willie, he laughed somewhat painfully and opted not to take the shot on offer, preferring to wait to capture the moment on film so he could use it as part of a television episode. The animals eventually spooked and Bunsu seemed amused at the situation, telling us that we had just pulled off a textbook stalk and it doesn't always go that well. The next few days were going to be interesting!

Day two - We rose at the crack of dawn, had a quick coffee and jumped in the truck pondering about the wind direction, where to go and what to target. I was on the rifle today and I had a slight feeling of butterflies in my stomach. With the abundance of bush cover and potential to spook other animals, you had to be quick and able to shoot accurately freehand. We walked a fair distance over the next four to five hours but the time absolutely flew by. We got awfully close to a mature oryx bull in the thick brush but he spooked just as I was about to line up on him. We

weren't too dismayed at the situation as there was a bouquet of magnificent animals to keep us entertained - kudu, cheeky warthog, lanky giraffe and some noble eland. We arrived back empty handed but nonetheless fizzing from the experience.

Lunch was always a lavish spread involving much wild game. We tried oryx, zebra, eland, warthog and kudu. All were exceptional eating and far better than any farm beef we ate on our travels. My personal favourite was oryx schnitzel. We quizzed Bunsu on his favourite game meat and were surprised to hear it was zebra. Hunting zebra is reasonably common, some would say there's nothing more iconic to Africa than a zebra and its black and white stripes - hard to argue with that. A refreshing swim and a mid-day siesta was a great way to escape the worst heat of the day.

Around 3pm we met for a cup of tea and were off again in the bakkie heading to our destination for the evening hunt. Footing it into the bush, I was still on the rifle and it seemed like we spent hours pushing through prickly brushes, trying to be quiet and forever keeping note of the changing wind direction as we followed some faint oryx prints along a game trail.

The sun was close to setting, glowing an amazing orange hue that you only get in Africa. However, this meant we were running out of time. Bunsu spied some white face markings ahead, I lined up the rifle on the shooting sticks sighting an oryx bull through a wall of thick brush. Willie had him on camera and I was just about to squeeze the trigger when the bull turned and moved off, damn!

It seemed like déjà vu of our morning hunt, again narrowly missing out at the final stage. A tough pill to swallow given the effort we were all making. I wasn't quite fast enough and didn't want to take a shot unless I was fully confident it was going to be clean and ethical. No animal is far better than a wounded animal in my books.

We took a different way back towards the truck in the half-light as Bunsu had one last throw of the dice in mind, an open area where we had spotted some eland cows earlier in the evening. Creeping out from the bush edge, we quickly picked up a couple of animals and Bunsu asked if I'd like to take out a cow as he needed the meat. I jumped at the opportunity, found the animal in the fading light and placed the crosshairs on its front shoulder. Gently squeezing the trigger, the muzzle flashed at the bang and the cow dropped to the ground. **Racing over, we were**





My mature oryx bull



Willie, Hans and his old character warthog boar

astounded at the sheer size of the animal. Bunsu estimated its weight to be near 600kg. Eland are the largest antelope in the world and we were lucky that we could bring the vehicle right to the animal and winch her onto the back tray as there was no way we were moving her by hand. Heading straight for the butchery shed, eight cheering locals had heard the good news and were ready to greet us with excitement and high fives. Our kill meant fresh delicious meat for them and their families as Bunsu shares everything he harvests with his community. I've never seen an animal utilised so well - everything was taken. The people were telling me how they love to eat the brain, intestines and all of the organs. Even the skin was carefully managed as Bunsu sent all the skins to a local tannery business.

Day three - Bunsu had dedicated the morning to spend with a German client he had staying but we were lucky enough to be dropped off early to hunt with Bunsu's father Hans for the day. Hans was a fantastic guy, a true gentleman and experienced hunter with a wicked sense of humour to boot. Willie was back on the rifle this morning and I was allocated to camerawoman. I enjoy

being behind a camera just as much as a rifle if not more. It's somewhat to do with the satisfaction of capturing something beautiful in a photo or video and being able to relive that moment forever. Our plan was to find Willie an old male warthog, an animal he found particularly fascinating. Hours of hot and dusty footsteps later and we came across an old boar. I lined up the camera while Willie picked his shot with the rifle. Let's just say the shot was on the money but I may have benefited from the use of a tripod... We walked up to a magnificent specimen, a 15 year old boar with bugged teeth and not much life left in him, the perfect trophy. His poor condition meant Willie probably only did this old boy a favour. Over lunch at Hans and Gaby's place, we excitedly recounted the highs and lows of the morning's stalk. Bunsu joined us for the evening hunt and the rifle was back in my hands with the goal of getting an old oryx bull before we departed the following day. Hunting overseas really makes you feel an extra edge of pressure as you don't know when or if you will ever be back. However, the overarching goal is to always just soak up the experience, learn and come away enriched - that is the real trophy.

We headed for a high vantage point to glass from which seemed a similar tactic to what we often use back in New Zealand. Conditions were perfect, a slight breeze was in our face and the sun was glowing red as it slowly lay to rest for the night. It was the sort of African stalk you dream about. Cresting the high rocky outcrop, we immediately spied a solid looking oryx below feeding its way through a clearing. I felt a tingle of excitement run through me when Bunsu confirmed it was a mature bull. Leaving Hans up top on spotting and radio duties, we rapidly dropped height down towards the bull under the cover of some sparse brush. **My nerves were building as we closed within 50 yards of where we had last seen him.** Suddenly there he was, staring straight at us. I raised my rifle and tried to settle on his shoulder. Just as I was beginning to squeeze the trigger, he turned his head away and trotted off, and was swallowed by a mass of bushes. We were absolutely gutted.

Something caught our eye to the right. The gods must have been smiling on us as they'd offered us a second chance. Picking its way through the clearings and bushes was another mature oryx bull. I followed him on the shooting sticks which seemed like an age before he finally paused offering me a shot. I took no chances and drove a shot in just behind his shoulders. He ran on impact and we took off behind him, not wanting him to make the bush edge in the darkening light conditions. **We caught him staggering his last steps but I quickly dispatched him with one final shot to the neck.** It sent him crashing down and his blood trickled through the orange sand. I had my bull and we were ecstatic, man did I feel alive! If you would like to watch this exciting



Willie's oryx bull



The 'bakkie'

stalk on film you can tune into the 'Overseas Excursion' episode of NZ Hunter Adventures on TVNZ On Demand (Season 6, Episode 9). I was fortunate enough to finally get my trophy oryx bull but it didn't come easy! A memory I will treasure forever and an experience I'm so glad I got to share with Willie.

Day four – Our last day with these amazing people at a truly magical place they get to call home, a bittersweet feeling had dawned on us. Despite our intentions to casually pack and head off midmorning, Bunsu insisted we go for one last morning hunt – no complaints from us! I was fully satisfied with the hardships of securing my eland cow and oryx bull so insisted

Willie had one last crack. We came across a nice clearing and could see a mixture of animals moving through including a nice oryx bull. As we closed the gap, a stunning kudu bull ghosted in and had our eyes popping out of our heads. Lining up on our intended target, Willie pulled off another great shot and the oryx bull crashed down into the piping hot orange sand. We were ecstatic and relishing our final moments hunting the dark continent.

It seems no matter where you travel in the world, hunters tend to be extremely passionate about their sport and love for the animals. You find yourself sharing many similar views on life too. Bunsu's family were no exception and we hope we can return the favour.

Hooning the trusty Hilux back to Windhoek to catch our afternoon flight out to the USA, I began to feel a little homesick as I didn't know when I would next be returning to my homeland. At the same time I felt satisfied and fulfilled, as we'd had an amazing trip and it was nice to see Willie now felt some of that African blood flowing through in his veins. He still talks about this trip as some of the best and most enriching travel he has ever done.

Africa – despite all the sadness and lost potential, it's still one of the great places in the world and certainly holds a dear place in my heart. We will definitely be back one day. **Besides, I have a date with a mighty kudu bull.**



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LAKE MORGAN HUT

WRITTEN BY ~ ANDREW BUGLASS | REMOTEHUTS.CO.NZ

Lake Morgan Hut is located on a section of rolling open tops on the western side of the Southern Alps, east of Lake Brunner (Moana)

The hut is not far from the lake of the same name and sits just above where the outlet creek drops down a precipitous slot into the Morgan River. The Morgan is a tributary of the Crooked River which feeds into Lake Brunner.

The surrounding tops are mostly gentle and easy going with the odd rocky outcrop. There are expansive views north and south along the ranges and out to the coast. Lake Morgan Hut gets around 20 visits a year currently, a mix of trampers and hunters, and is also popular with groups and honeymooning couples from the Gloriavale Christian Community which is located to the north at the foot of the range.

Lake Morgan Hut is maintained by DOC Greymouth currently and is a standard NZFS S70, 6-bunk design built in the 1970's. The cupboards at the door end were removed at some point to create more space and small roof-fed water barrel was installed in 2008. The hut is above the scrubline and quite exposed but well secured with tie-downs. Its toilet was destroyed by wind some time back and not replaced due to the hut's low use however visitor numbers are now increasing and plans are afoot along with some Back Country Trust input to get a replacement flown in

and installed. The hut is well-provisioned with billies and cutlery.

Lake Morgan Hut can be accessed from a number of directions. All routes involve tops traverses and as such, require reasonable levels of fitness and experience. There is no permanent snow on the Lake Morgan tops and winter falls have usually melted off by early summer. Nevertheless, parties need to be equipped for extreme weather changes

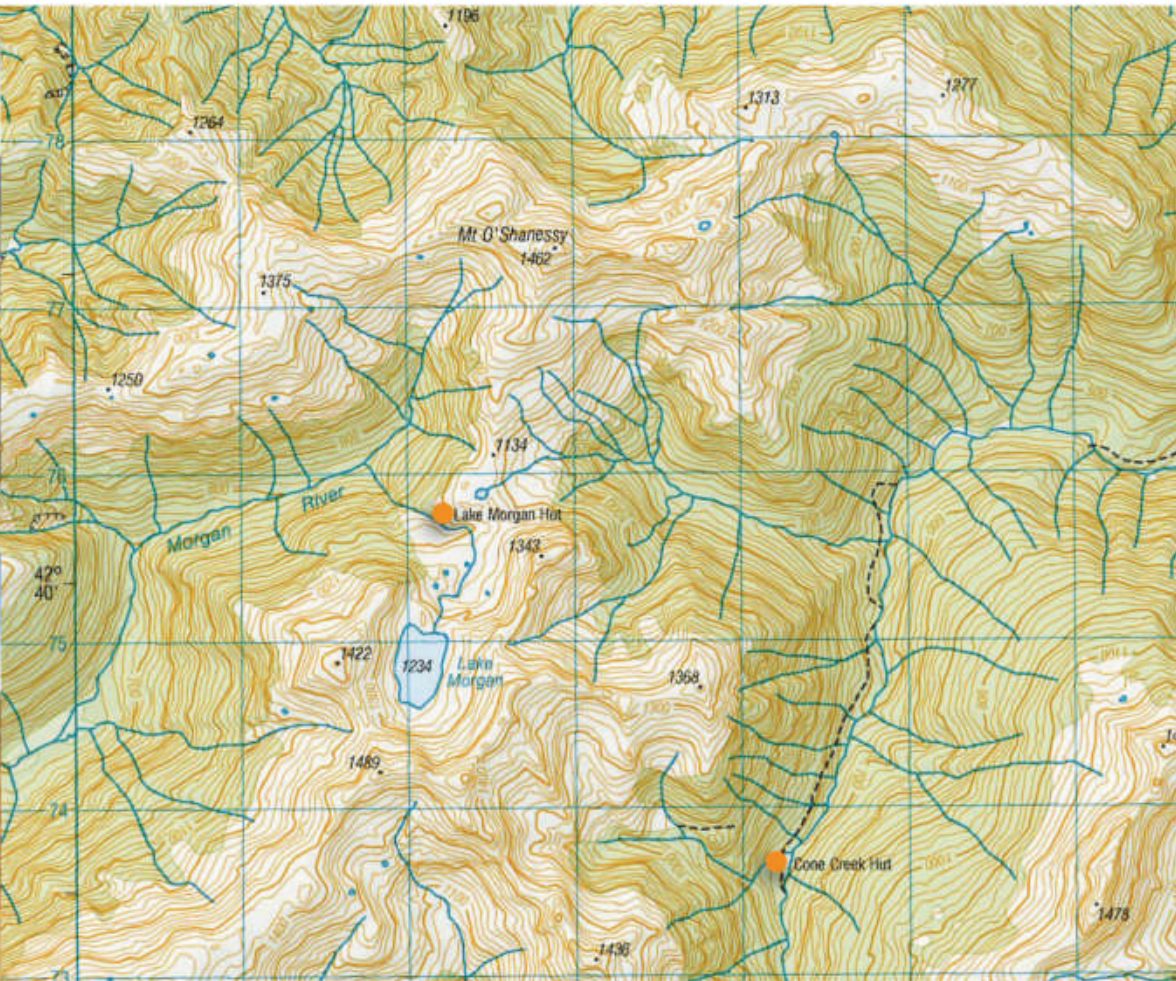
even during the warmer months. The most direct and frequently used route to Lake Morgan is via the Brian O'Lyn track from the Haupiri valley which takes your average fit party 5-6 hours and involves a traverse of the 1400m Mt. O'Shanessy. **Permission is required to cross Gloriavale land to get to the Haupiri roadend and the track start at O'Shanessy Creek.** The track is fine to follow but needs a haircut at the top end. DOC doesn't have the resources to consistently maintain it, and Permotat have proposed that a volunteer crew gets dropped at the top when the new toilet goes in to Lake Morgan.

A longer, medium difficulty loop taking in the Crooked Valley and exiting via Brian O'Lyn has been regularly used over the years. Another circuit from Cone Creek in the Haupiri has been getting more traffic since Permotat reopened the track up to Cone Creek Hut in 2015. Like Lake





Cone Creek Hut



Morgan, Cone Creek is highly underrated as a destination, and a beautiful location in its own right. **The hut, a well-maintained six bunker with an open fire, is located in montane forest next to the creek.**

The Lake Morgan tops are liberally sprinkled with tarns and good camping spots and the lake itself is a photogenic gem a half hour's walk from the hut. Hunters can expect to

encounter single or small groups of highly mobile chamois in the vicinity. Up until not long ago, deer were quite plentiful on the tops as well and had started muddying up many of the smaller tarns. **Recent helicopter hunting**

activity has made a noticeable dent in numbers and the remaining animals are a bit more wary, however there's a bit of something for everyone up here whether you are out hunting or not



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IS IT SAFE TO EAT? PART IX THE BEST OF THE REST

WRITTEN BY ~ COREY CARSTON

In this edition we are going to cover multiple risks that hunters could come across in deer

Some will have little or no effect on food safety where others may have the opposite. Most of them are probably classed as conditions. I'd like to include them in the series just so hunters know that they are safe to consume. This is a quick coverage of the main risks, to inform and help keep you safe.

PLEURISY

Pleurisy is inflammation of the pleura - the membrane that lines the thoracic cavity (rib cage) and the outside of the lungs. The pleura binds, lubricates and protects the moving parts in the cavity.

When the pleura becomes infected it become thicker and hyperaemic (red) and it loses its ability to keep the surfaces lubricated. This generates friction which in turn causes damage to the affected part.

When pleurisy is acute, a live animal can become distressed, dull and often remains stationary. There can also be bouts of shivering. Breathing is much faster as there is less ability to fully expand the lungs. It is a very painful disease as the infected membranes of the pleura rub together and cause damage to nerves.

At post mortem the animal maybe in in poor condition, especially when the

disease is acute.

Pleurisy has several causes. Lung worms can start an infection as can pneumonia which we will cover later in this article. The animal may be affected by micro-organisms or injury, such as broken ribs or a puncture wound inflicted between stags fighting.

SO WHAT ARE WE LOOKING FOR?

The lungs will be thickened, and in an acute case, they maybe inflamed.

In a chronic case there will be some and often lots of fibrous tissue. This will look like scar tissue it is. The lungs, or part of the lungs, maybe stuck to the inside of the ribs.

The flesh of the animal will be safe to eat but care should be taken around the lungs as often there will be a number of micro-organisms that could be harmful.

PNEUMONIA

Pneumonia is inflammation of the lungs. Normal lung tissue is spongy and pink. They have millions of tiny air sacs called alveoli and form a very thin membrane that contacts inhaled air. The outer surface is covered with capillaries (small blood vessels), and the thinness of the two membranes allows the diffusion of oxygen into the blood.

Because the alveoli are so delicate and thin, they can be very easily damaged by dust, micro-organisms, harmful substances and temperature.

Air is full of potentially harmful organisms which are inhaled regularly. A healthy animal is able to withstand the risk but if there is damage to the lungs these organisms can start an infection. Damage to the lung tissue can cause dilation of the blood vessels and the area becoming red. The leakage of blood plasma into the alveolar sacs will fill them with inflammatory excretions. This can overflow into other alveoli and eventually fill an entire area.

In a live animal, a mild case may show signs of shivering, will be coughing and may have some difficulty breathing. In a severe case, the animal would have a very bad cough, be feverish and physically weak. There may be nasal discharge with dilated nostrils and their neck will be outstretched.

When you are gutting an animal with chronic pneumonia you will find the lungs will be red or purple. Because the animal is usually standing the exudate falls and fills the bottom portion of the lungs and will then slowly fill from the bottom of the lungs upwards. You will find what is known as a line

of demarcation. This is the line that separates the affected tissue and the unaffected. There may also be signs of pleurisy.

A deer affected by chronic pneumonia will be fine to eat but it would be safer to discard the heart.

PERICARDITIS & EPICARDITIS

Pericarditis is the inflammation of the pericardium, the membrane that surrounds the heart.

Epicarditis is the inflammation of the epicardium, which is another part of the pericardium.

The pericardium protects the heart and contains cells that secrete fluids that lubricate the heart. Pericarditis is usually caused by infections spreading from the lungs and is often accompanied by pneumonia.

Both the pericardium and epicardium can be affected. When infected they become hyperaemic, swollen and stop lubricating the heart. Without the lubrication friction can cause damage to the membranes. As the disease progresses inflammatory exudate clots between the membranes forming a pale green tissue. Eventually the pericardium and heart will be fused together with white fibrous scar tissue. This will impair the heart's function and will lead to a slowing of the blood circulation.

If you were to find an animal with either condition, do not consume the heart as it may contain micro-organisms that won't be safe to eat. This rest of the carcass will be fine.

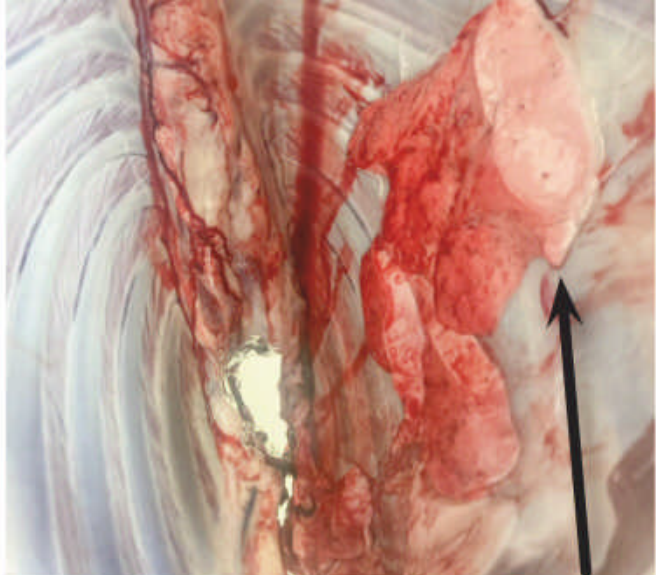
PERITONITIS

Peritonitis in the inflammation of the peritoneum - the membrane that lines the internal wall and the organs and parts of the abdominal cavity. Like the pericardium, its role is to lubricate the organs and muscles, thus reducing friction.

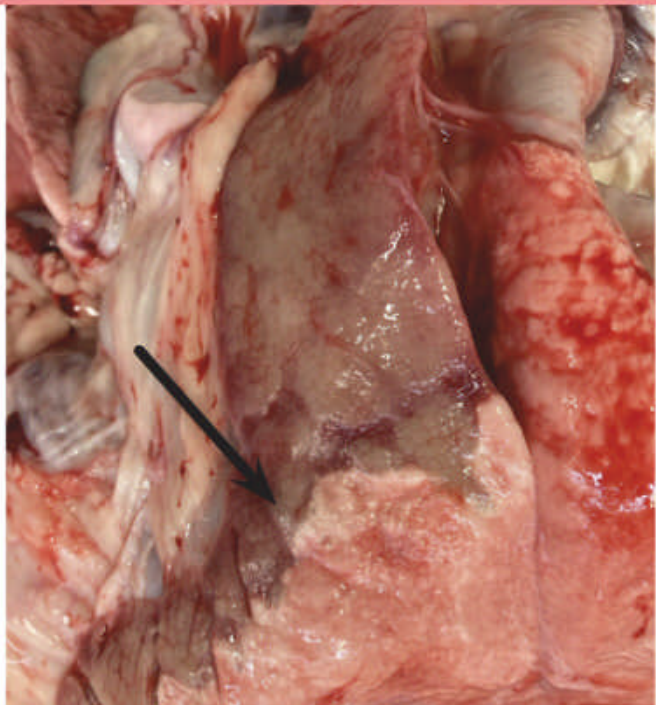
The gastrointestinal tract is loaded with huge numbers of bacteria that are usually harmless. When the wall of the gastrointestinal tract is penetrated bacteria can pass into the abdominal cavity and infect the peritoneum. A wound can cause this process as can migrating parasites. In the case of cows, ingestion of sharp objects such as wire can penetrate the walls of the stomach causing the infection.

A live animal will become very restless as peritonitis is extremely painful, as

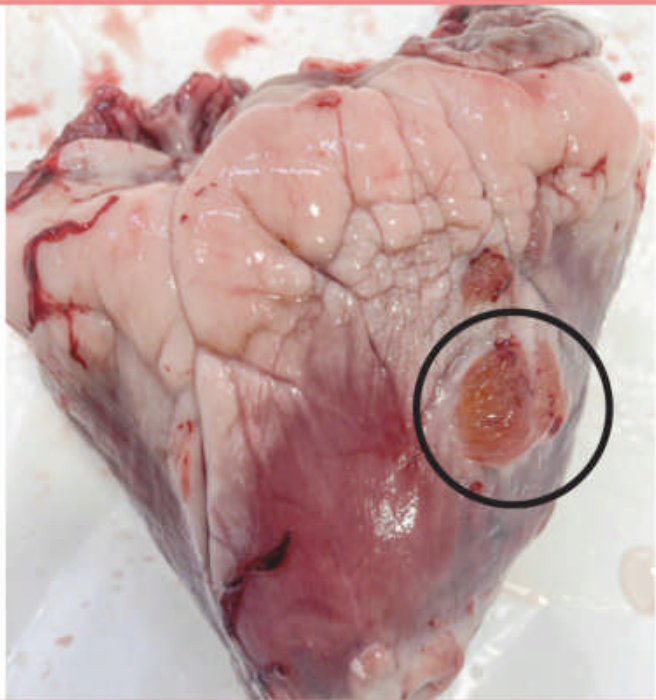
any of our readers that have undergone stomach surgery could attest to. The animal appear in distress and will have an associated fever. They will often be seen looking at the sides of their abdomen. In its acute stage it can cause death due to associated toxemia (toxins in the blood), septicaemia (bacteria in the blood), and pyaemia (pus in the blood).



Chronic pluerisy. You can see the fibrous tissue and part of the lung that has adhered to it



Lungs affected by pneumonia. Note how it filled the bottom of lobes and you can see the line of demarcation. This is chronic.



Heart with a small amount of pericarditis note the fibrous tissue. In a severe case there would be substantially more or the pericardium would be stuck to the heart

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TOTAL LENGTH:	165 mm
MAX BARREL DIAMETER:	N/A

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



OVERALL PERFORMANCE:	35 DB(C)
SILENCER WEIGHT:	440 g
DIAMETER:	60 mm
OVER BARREL LENGTH:	80 mm
ADDED LENGTH:	150 mm
TOTAL LENGTH:	230 mm
MAX BARREL DIAMETER:	Ø23.7 mm



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



OVERALL PERFORMANCE:	38 DB(C)
SILENCER WEIGHT:	596 g
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The peritoneum will be thickened and red. There may be a lot of inflammatory, watery, and blood-stained exudate present.

In its chronic stage white fibrous tissue will be present and parts of the gastrointestinal tract may be stuck to the peritoneum.

As far as food safety is concerned, the animal should be safe to eat.

However, you should discard the abdomen and cut the 'flaps' off. You can put a small cut in the lining of the peritoneum and peel the layer off thus removing the peritonitis, but the safer way would be to trim and chuck. Organs in associated areas such as the kidneys and liver should be discarded as well.

ABSCESSES AND PUS

An abscess is a collection of pus within a fibrous capsule. Pus is a collection of dead cells, cell debris, white blood cells, bacteria and tissue fluid.

When damage occurs to tissues normal defence systems can be overwhelmed, and bacteria gain entry and multiply. The body attempts to repair the damaged tissue and destroy the bacteria. As the battle between the bacteria and the white blood cells progresses the defences try to seal off the area. They do this by encasing the area with a fibrous capsule. This is the start of an abscess and will look like a cyst.

Pus colour varies depending upon the type of bacteria present. It can be pale white or various shades of green, and can have a pretty unpleasant smell. Again this can vary with the differing types of bacteria and how much or how little pus is present.

In a live animal there may be some swelling on the surface of the body. In very severe cases there could be fever that may lead to death.

Wounds and or any injury that can penetrate under the skin are a prime cause, perhaps through fighting or a non-lethal bullet wound. Accidental injuries, such as breaking a leg, could also be a cause. Pig hunters will be very familiar with abscesses as boars are often criss-crossed with tusk wounds they receive when fighting. Dog bites are a prime candidate for the start of an abscess. Rams often get abscess between their eyes from fighting and I assume tahr would be the same.

Airborne infections can also occur, affecting the lungs. Abscess can



A photo of my mate Dave and a healthy deer, because we don't need to see photos of abscesses and pus

occur throughout the carcass and organs, especially the liver, kidneys, lymph nodes, spleen, gastrointestinal tract, and the lungs, so pay particular attention to these areas.

Abscesses can vary in size from pin pricks to substantial, often close to tennis ball size.

When the condition becomes systemic, serious conditions may develop when bacteria leaves the capsule and invades the blood stream. This interferes with the animal's thermostat, effectively turning the temperature up and resulting in a fever. Septicaemia can occur if the bacteria are able to survive and reach the blood stream. As a result, toxins can rupture small blood vessels causing fever, toxemia, and death.

The bacteria can also use the blood for transport and set up in another organ, resulting in more abscesses.

Luckily, most bacteria involved in pus are not zoonotic (can affect humans) but under some conditions, and with specific bacterial species, infection in humans can occur. It is mostly due to poor hygiene, i.e. not washing properly or through uncovered cuts and scratches. Infection may also happen through ingestion of meat contaminated by pus. Normal cooking will destroy the bacteria, and the risk is in handling infected raw meat, or handling meat that is to be eaten raw. By keeping meat separated and with good hand washing and cleaning procedures this risk can be eliminated.

My advice would be to trim around any carcass abscesses as carefully as possible, or remove the affected area completely. If you were to see any pus, trim it, and avoid any cross contamination from your knife or hands. Again, I just would remove the area in total, even if it was at the expense of some meat. With the abundance of deer around at the moment we don't have to risk eating any suspect meat. Don't ever wash pus with water or try to scrap it off with your knife as all you will do is spread it around. Any organs with abscesses should not be eaten.

These are the most common diseases - most hunters should now be able to understand if it doesn't look, feel or smell right and leave it behind.





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Grand Winner

Charlie Probyn with his first Fallow buck shot at 125 meters with his Pop's Mauser .243



Dallas Templeton 'My first bush stalked Red deer, shot at 10metres in the Waitutu forest. Stoked!'



Luka (10) with his first duck from one of Grandads ponds



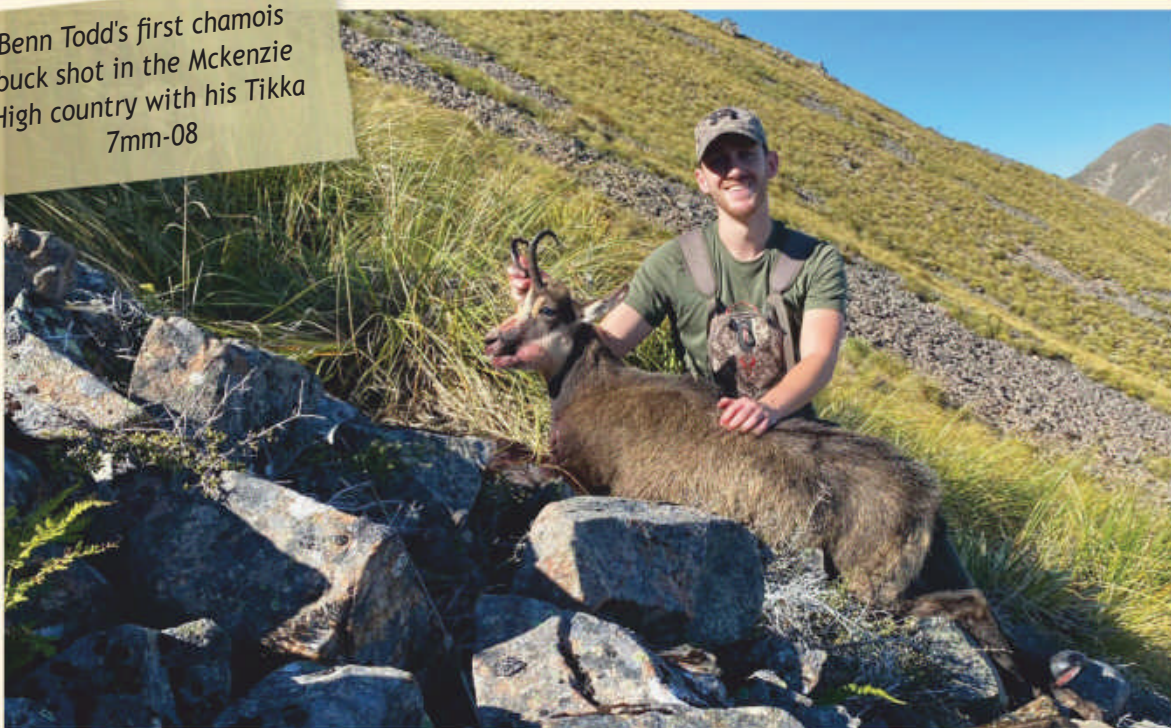
Abel Mitchell (2) helping Dad skin and butcher his deer



Sammy Duff (8) with his first goat at Skippers, Queenstown



Benn Todd's first chamois buck shot in the Mckenzie High country with his Tikka 7mm-08



Lilly Pilcher on another successful hunting trip with her dad



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BERGARA'S PREMIER MOUNTAIN 2.0

WRITTEN BY ~ GREG DULEY

IN 6.5 CREEDMOOR

The US company Bergara has been making a name for itself with both rifles and barrels in recent years

Based in Georgia USA where they have an assembly and distribution plant, their manufacturing facility is in Spain. We have reviewed several of their rifles previously, including their first bolt action - the B-14 - in issue 63. The B-14 has remained as their standard line, while the Premier is as it suggests is their premium line.

THE PREMIER

So how does the Premier differ from the B-14? They are both based on a Remington 700 footprint and receiver shape. They both have a cone breech and bolt stop on the left side of the receiver, and a sliding plate extractor in the front of the right hand locking lug. This provides a lower ejection angle and the empty cases are less likely to hit the scope than if you have to position the extractor just above the lug as a lot other 2 lug actions have to do. The B-14 had a sandwiched and captivated recoil lug, a major advantage if interchanging or replacing barrels. The Premier no longer has this, no doubt due to the extra machining and costs required

to manufacture this. It has the standard Remington 700 type sandwiched lug.

Now for what puts the Premier above the B-14 line in quality and cost. Firstly, each individual Premier is assembled in their Georgia plant by a single gunsmith, who has responsibility for how it shoots when accuracy tested before it ships out. **It is not the usual assembly line operation as with most manufacturing facilities,** where many hands touch each rifle with no one individual having responsibility for the final product.

Unlike the B-14's chromoly steel barreled action, the Premier's is cerakoted 416 stainless. The Premier's bolt has a floating bolt head which allows the locking lugs

to seat evenly without sending unwanted vibrations back down the action. **This is not necessary if everything is dead true, but a good idea in any mass produced action.** Behind the actual locking lugs there are another set of non-rotating dummy lugs whose job it is to block the lug raceways in the receiver in the event of a case failure. They to stop the gas coming back down the action – a very worthwhile safety feature that may well just save your eyes if the unforeseen happens. The bolt is also fluted, and the bolt knob is integral stainless steel. The scope mounting holes are threaded with the larger and stronger 8-40 instead of the standard 6-48. The trigger is an aftermarket Trigger Tech roller trigger, one of today's leading triggers. These are easily externally adjustable down to 1.5 pounds. **Instead of the B-14s polymer stock, the Premier line has glass or carbon fibre models of different shapes and configurations depending on the model.** The floorplate is cerakoted steel, which should keep the traditionalists happy. All Premiers come with a sub-MOA accuracy guarantee.



THE PREMIER ACTION

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MOUNTAIN 2.0

The Bergara agents NZ Asia sent us the logical model in the Premier line for New Zealand hunters – the Mountain 2.0 – in 6.5 Creedmoor for review. As the name suggests this model is designed as a lightweight mountain hunting rifle. It is the only one in the line to have a carbon fibre stock. It has a 22 inch light contour barrel I'd call about a #2 that measures .560 inches at the muzzle. The barreled action is finished in a matte grey cerakote with the floorplate matte black. The stock is pillar bedded, and clocks under 5 thou which is very good for a factory model. It is finished with the carbon weave showing through an attractive mottled grey paint job. The only criticism is the comb could have been at least another ¼" higher without getting in the way of the bolt. The cheek weld is pretty poor, especially with the only mount set-up the NZ Asia boys had on hand being unnecessarily high to mount the Leupold VX6, which they also supplied. The throat was also typical of most US factory rifles that have the chambers cut without a tight tolerance pilot on the reamer - not perfectly centered. Whether off line enough to affect the accuracy we'd just have to wait and see.

With the 3-18x44 VX6 mounted in Talley rings on a one piece base, it was on to the range to see if this rifle would shoot. Initially it was pretty average until I noticed a copper buildup on one land just inside the muzzle. A quick KG2 to get rid of that and smooth the area some more and presto, the Mountain 2.0 easily beat its MOA guarantee with factory ammo and averaged half inch with my favourite handload with the Berger 135gn Classic Hunter doing over 2800fps.



BOLT IN THE BATTERY POSITION WITH FRONT FIXED LUGS VERTICAL, SHOWING ROTATING DUMMY LUGS IN HORIZONTAL POSITION TO BLOCK THE LUG RACEWAYS IN THE RECIEVER IN THE ADVENT OF ESCAPING GAS.

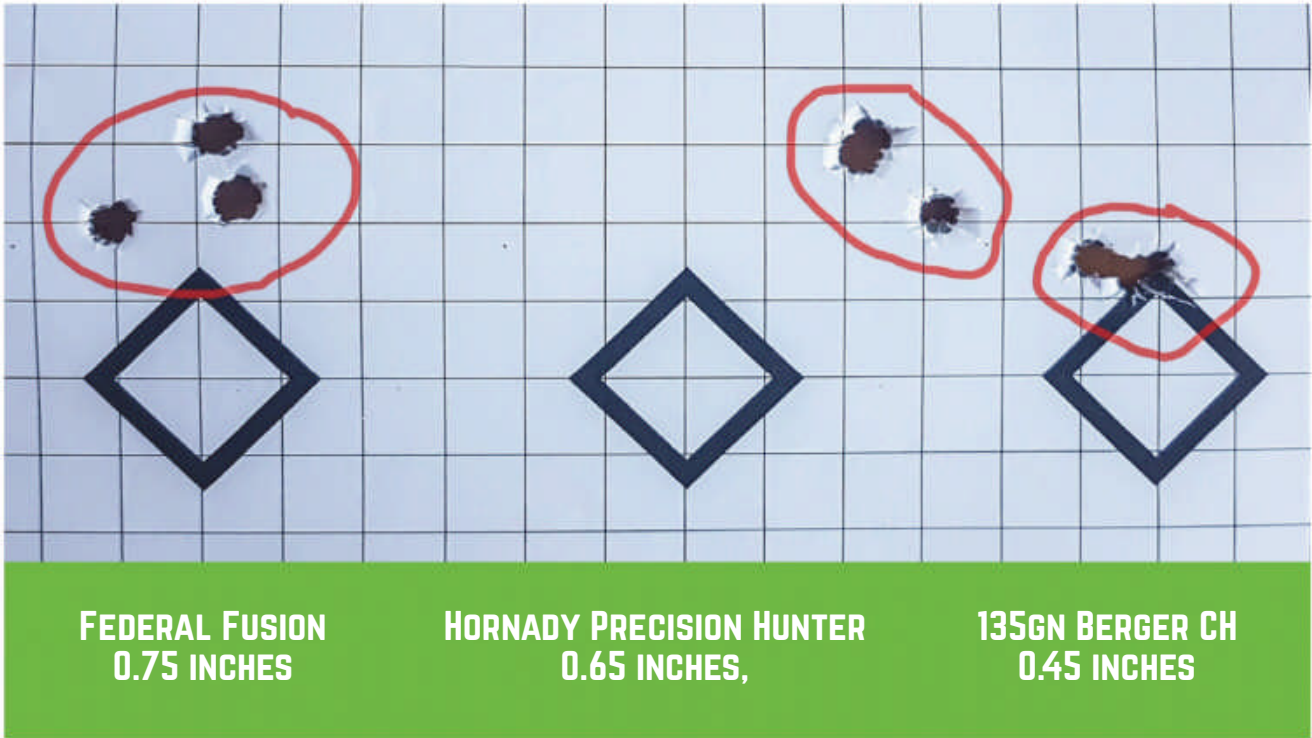


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Hornady Precision Hunter 143gn ELD-X	-	2580fps	.65 inches	This load always shoots but is slow
Berger 135gn Classic Hunter	Superformance /45.5gns	2825fps	.5 inches	Superb hunting load



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HORNADY PRECISION HUNTER 0.65 INCHES,

135GN BERGER CH 0.45 INCHES

BARREL LENGTH	22"
WEIGHT	6.25 lbs
OVERALL LENGTH	41.5"
TWIST RATE	1:8"
MAGAZINE CAPACITY	4 rounds
RRP	\$4699

HUNTING

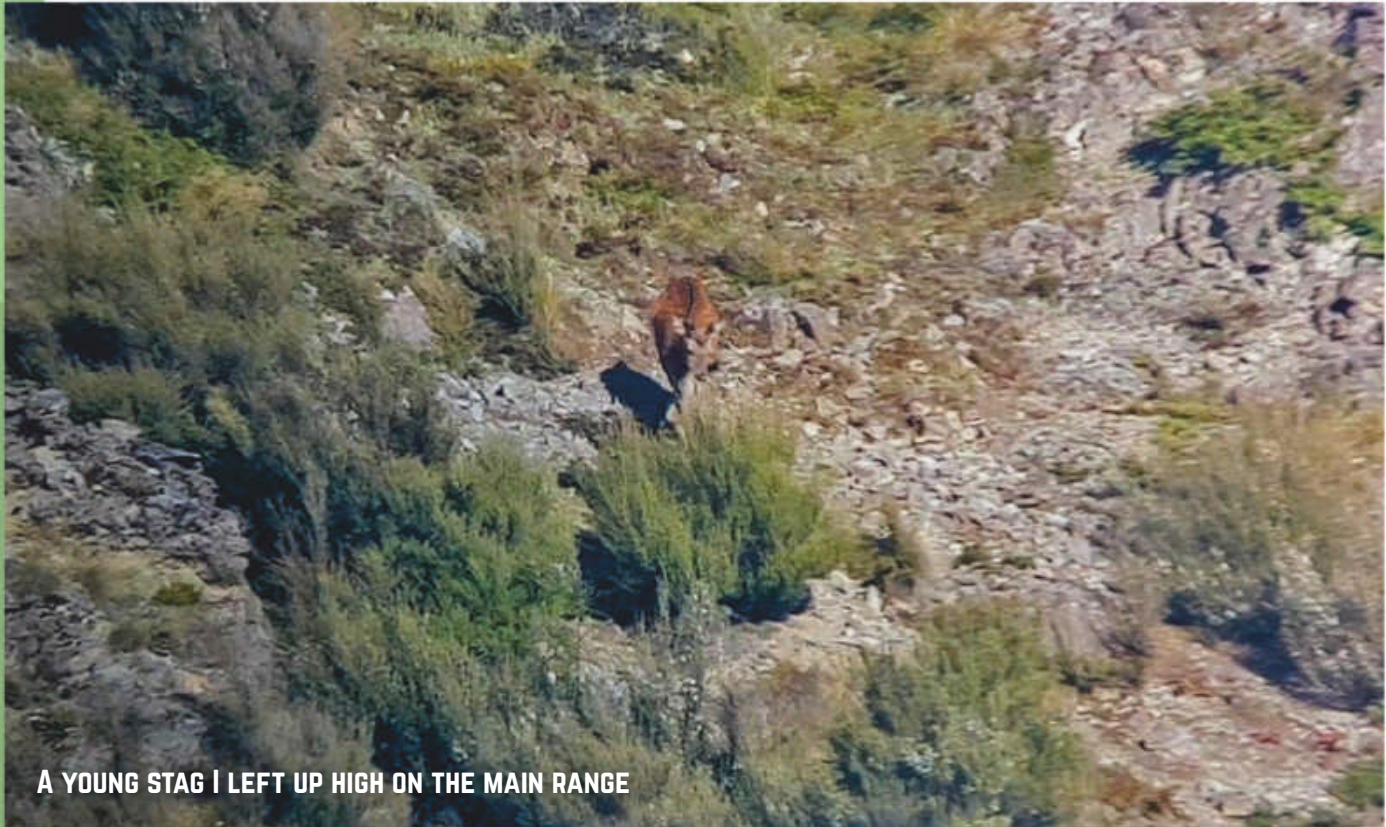
Then it was up into the hills to do a stoat trap line in our Kaweka Kiwi recovery project, and see if I could find a yearling or young hind without a fawn to take for meat. The early morning proved frustrating with a couple of yearlings spotted but then the cloud came in before I could get into position for a shot, and then when it lifted an hour later, all I could find was a young stag. After finishing the stoat line, I climbed up into the contorta area further south for the evening and managed to find a scruffy young hind in average condition not quite in her summer coat yet – there ain’t much to eat in the wall to wall contorta! A comfortable 450 yard shot in perfect conditions and the 6.5 Creedmoor did the job with ease.

6.5 CREEDMOOR

This cartridge has been getting rave reviews as a long range demon. It is ideal for high volume range shooting at long range because it can push respectable BC bullets at around the 2600 to 2800fps mark all day long without fouling or chewing up your barrel or the recoil getting too excessive. What it is not is a serious long range mountain hunting cartridge. There are just too many highly variable environmental conditions to deal with in the mountains, and it doesn’t have the margin for error of some of the larger, more ballistically superior cartridges that can push much higher BC bullets significantly faster. It has less capacity than the 260 Remington, and so should not be given magical status it doesn’t live up to just because it is the new kid on the block and some advertising blurb says it can shoot one mile! It is about a 500 yard hunting cartridge in good conditions in my opinion. Fill your boots banging away to far as the eye can see on inanimate targets at the range if you want to, **but be a lot more circumspect if you are going to use it for hunting.**



A SCRUFFY YOUNG HIND FROM THE KAWEKA CONTORTA COUNTRY



A YOUNG STAG I LEFT UP HIGH ON THE MAIN RANGE

With some other major US firearms manufacturers in disarray, its good to see one that is still operating and continuing to innovate. While well on the right track with the Mountain 2.0, especially as they are chambering it in some superb long range thumpers for NZ conditions like the 28 Nosler, there are still a few improvements that could be made – one is a stock with a better cheek weld. Another would be trimming

a bit more weight by going to an alloy or even dare I say it plastic floorplate and magazine assembly. They could also flute the barrel, although with such a light contour barrel there wouldn’t be a lot of gain. A factory muzzle thread for a brake or suppressor would also be a wise addition, as they have on most of their other Premier models. **I’m sure we’ll see some of these at some stage from Bergara in the future!**





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The 80l half-full on a day trip away from basecamp in the Gammack Range

SPIKA DROVER

PACK SYSTEM

WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

Spika is an Australian brand that has only been here a few years

They have an enormous range of products and have been primarily promoting apparel and gun safes. New to the market is the Drover range of packs.

THE LOAD SHELF

This range is centred around a strong, aluminium framed, 1.85kg 'hauler frame'. You can then attach either an 80 or 40l pack to it. You can also use the frame independently of the packs for straight load hauling as well with the 'load shelf' - simply a sheet of tough nylon for strapping heavy items back against the frame. A great application for retrieving meat, collecting firewood or packing equipment to a basecamp.

The harness that stays with the hauler frame is a well-designed system. It's adequately padded, fully adjustable and I found it very comfortable. The biggest test for it was a fast-paced mission up and down a West Coast valley for a two night tahr mission, if anything will bring out a flaw in a pack it's boulder-hopping with 20kgs on board but it survived. Some of the buckles slipped a little over time but that's pretty normal.

The harness comes with two well-placed

removable hip pouches which are good for stuff you want to keep handy. Also the adjustment even extends to the lumbar support pad, if you open the Velcro you'll notice four foam pads. If you feel it protrudes too far, simply remove as many as you need until you're comfortable. I liked it best with all the pads in though, it meant there was excellent airflow on your back.

THE 80L

With the 80l pack attached I could fit all the gear I needed for a four day East Coast tahr trip. It would be perfect for most people but it was a bit of a squeeze with my extra camera gear. The top pocket is curiously small and lacks an under-pocket for things like a first-aid kit. This is somewhat offset by having the hip pouches. The pack includes a front access zip to the main compartment, as well as a front zip pocket. This pocket does not enlarge, so if the interior of the pack is already stuffed full it won't hold much.

Of course it includes a hydration bladder pocket and associated exit point.

All up the 80l and frame is a respectable 3.1kg, and I've already spoken for the comfort. The pack has a good array of straps and tie-down points for attaching antlers, as well as dedicated ice-axe loops. It also includes a rifle holder strap.

My camera gear tips the scales northward a little, so I can be a little nervous throwing the pack around with 26-28kgs of gear in it but the straps all held up for several trips. The tough 500 denier nylon was excellent and the design is quite sharp aesthetically. It moved well in the bush, didn't sit overly high and snag and was narrow enough to squeeze through anything my shoulders would. The bottom was reinforced, so scraping over rocks left it unscathed.

THE 40L

The 40l is virtually a miniaturised 80. It shares the same harness and all the same design features, just on a smaller scale. Front access zip, front pocket, ice axe loops, tie down points, rain cover etc. It has the same size hood pocket so it's a little more proportionate, but still a bit on the small side. Sharing the harness means you can save cost by buying a combo, and also save bulk for trips where you need both a main back



80L and bino harness ready for a few days on the coast



The snug, secure fit for the rangefinder in the side pocket of the bino harness



The drover binocular harness

and a daypack.

Capacity-wise it's perfect for day trips, overnights or lightweight multi-days. Combined with the load shelf it's the perfect meat hunting pack. You can go in light and come out heavy in complete comfort, it'll be my go-to pack for local missions. Simply as a load hauler the frame performed exceptionally well. I shot an enormous Red hind in an old crop paddock where I couldn't get the vehicle to on a local farm. With all the meat in game bags in the load shelf and my gear in the 40L pack the system worked flawlessly. The weight is hard against your back and superbly comfortable, and on top of that there's no blood spillage into your pack. The strap system is a little cumbersome at the base though, there's an intricate system of three buckles per strap so I bypassed two of them.

BINOCULAR HARNESS

Also part of the Drover range is the binocular harness. There are two schools of thought with binocular harnesses. The absolute minimalist,

where it is a vessel for you binoculars and nothing else, maybe a small web pouch for some earplugs, which is what I prefer for big expedition trips. The other school of thought is to make the most of that nice comfy harness and add some pockets for extra gear. Rangefinder, knives etc. In some instances I've seen this school of thought taken too far, some people virtually walk around with a baby pack on their front!

The Drover just edges into the latter category. I think it's actually the perfect balance. In the right pocket I squeezed in my rangefinder. In the front I squeezed in the Iphone 8+ with lifeproof, and in the left pocket I had room for a knife, museli bar and a couple rounds of ammo.

The design keeps the harness close to your chest, which is very important. With a pack on your centre of gravity doesn't take much tipping backward when you're edging around bluffs. I liked everything being zipped, you couldn't fill the pockets with scrub or catch on anything. The interior was roomy for my Trinovids but still fit the Zeiss victory RF binos as well, though it was perhaps wider than necessary. If you have tall giants like the

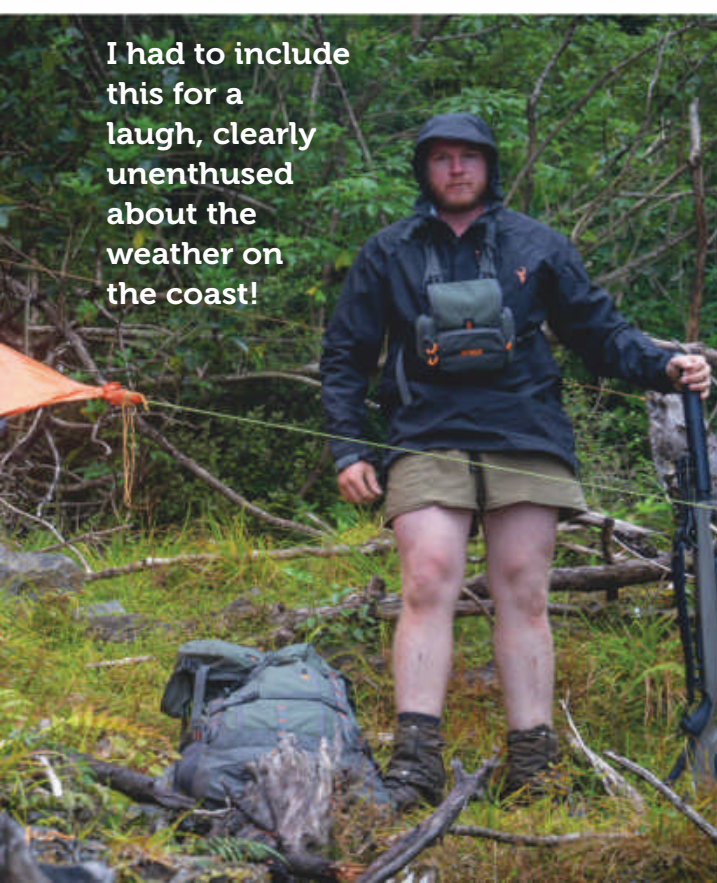
Geovids it might pay to check for fit.

The harness was comfy, with good broad straps which were an extra perk for me as I could attach my PD clip for the camera. There's a safety strap that comes off and attaches to the binoculars so you couldn't drop them even if you wanted, good insurance for those expensive binoculars. The lip is a good, positive magnetic close which keeps things quiet and quick. This is my go-to morning/evening trip hunt harness as I can put everything I need in it. It dispenses with the need for shifts with pockets (which is nice in summer) and even wearing a knife belt.

Overall I was impressed with the Spika lineup. It's clearly had a lot of design input by a hunter, and with the inclusion of ice axe loops etc it's clearly not just aimed at the Aussie market.

80L W FRAME - \$549.95
40L W FRAME - \$489.95
BINO HARNESS - \$129.95

WWW.DROVER.SPIKA.CO.NZ



I had to include this for a laugh, clearly unenthusiased about the weather on the coast!



The hauler frame and load shelf without a pack attached



The 40L with a large set of hindquarters in the load shelf



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DROVER



EZE SHARP BLADE SHARPENER

— WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE —

NZ HUNTER
MAGAZINE
Testfire

WWW.KENTMASTER.NZ

Kentmaster are a meat industry tool manufacturing company who have a branch here in NZ to supply meatworks and butchers

As well as their own tools they also distribute items like the Australian made Eze Sharp we reviewed.

The principle is the same as most sharpening mechanisms, it is simply a jig to make sure you build an even cutting edge (the bevel) on your blade. The Eze Sharp includes a flip-over component as well though which is a huge boon, as well as degree marks on the two separate angle adjustors. **The T bar setup allows for a large range of movement so you can sharpen all shapes of blades**, you can even purchase cylindrical stones to sharpen serrated blades like breadknives. All in all the design is well thought out to keep your stone at a constant angle to the blade all through the sharpening process and includes clear instructions that gave a great result.

Now I thought I was a reasonably dab hand with a conventional whetstone, but the Eze Sharp soon pulled my ego back in to line! If you aren't sharpening properly you will create rounded cutting faces, this means while you might be lucky enough to create a sharp edge for a while, it will likely be uneven and also dull quicker. **This was illustrated quite clearly when I set my most heavily used knife against the stone and found the cutting face was so rounded you could see the silver mark the dead-level stone had left.**

Initially I wasn't getting great results with the jig, I would go through the process and still have a pretty dull knife. Yet the superb Giesel knives Kentmaster had supplied clearly had razor edges. That rounded cutting face was the problem,

I'd heavily underestimated how much grinding I would need to do to rectify my poor sharpening. **On hard steel it took up to 200 strokes on the coarse side before I'd brought it back to a flat plane!** On milder steel like the Victrinox I could feel a burr on the underside by 50 strokes. Once I'd figured that out the knives were in much better shape, and infinitely easier to sharpen thereafter.

The stone supplied was a common combination stone, but I felt a finer stone again would be beneficial for hard steel knives like my Gerber. **The angle markings are crucial as you can experiment with different blade angles but know precisely which ones worked for you.** Though the angle dial for controlling the flip-over needs to be bigger so you can more easily see what degree you are on. I always finished with a steel though and this polished things up nicely, and having good straight bevels meant the knives were much easier to touch up with the steel later on too.

Compared to using a whetstone the Eze Sharp makes sharpening knives much easier, creates a better finished product and makes them easier to touch up, I'm considering purchasing this unit for myself.

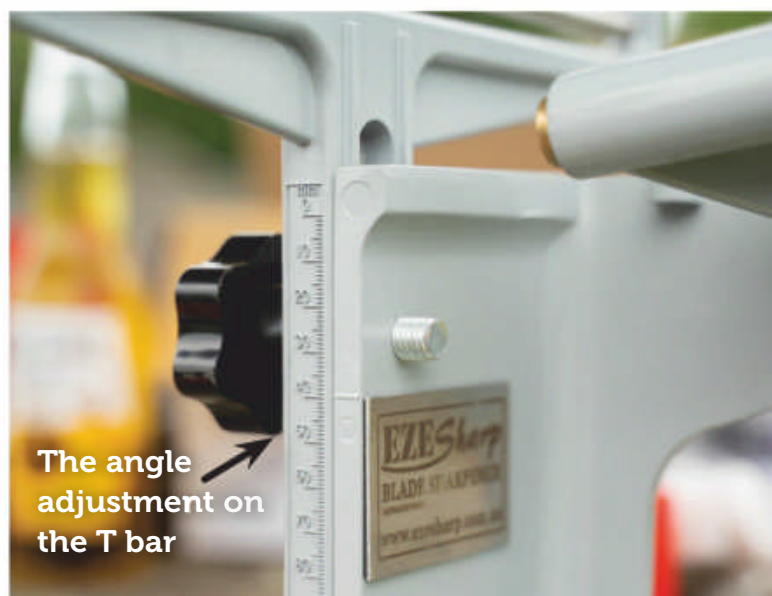
There's always plenty of discussion around this and it depends on the hardness of the steel, but we've included a breakdown on some angles.



The angle adjustment on the flip-over



If you look closely on the bevel you can see how the edge is rounded



The angle adjustment on the T bar

UP TO 10° – only for tools that cut soft, consistent materials. This creates a very fragile cutting edge extremely susceptible to roll, chip and general wear. For the likes of straights razors and scalpels, not your butchering knife.

10 TO 15° – Some chefs will run an angle this fine, but not many. This is still pretty fine and fragile, you certainly wouldn't want to have any contact with bone.

15 TO 30° – Anywhere in this range is acceptable for a hunting knife. If it's a blade for more heavy duty, err toward the 30. I've found 20-25 to be a pretty good all-rounder, whilst I brought our kitchen knives down to 15-20.

30°+ – A machete? Or something that requires very serious edge holding ability. Thicker edges are more durable but less sharp in the first instance.

Where There's Coke *There's Hope*

WRITTEN BY ~ COREY CARSTON

As the morning light slowly filtered across the farm pond it became painfully obvious that, despite our farmer mate saying he thought there had been a good mob of mallards in residence, in fact there wasn't

We had seen very few ducks around and shot even less. The clarity of the water and the lack of feathers and duck crap along the edges told the tale of no ducks for a number of weeks.

Even with only a few ducks bagged it was a good morning to be out and about. I had my son, Jake, with me and my oldest mate in the world, Paul, there too. Paul and I met at primary school and we were the weird hunting kids. Over the school holidays, other kids would be happily parked up on the couch watching TV while we were out scouting ducks, building mai mai's and even loading shotgun ammo. Whichever father arrived home first had the pleasure of taking us out for a hunt that night. Usually this

involved a quick trip up the road to the Invercargill estuary where we manged to knock over the odd mallard and a pretty decent number of pukekos and swans.

Fast forward a number of years and we were still out hunting together while most people were still curled up in bed or watching TV. With no ducks flying Paul was getting restless, and the farm we were on had more to offer that just the pond we were hunting. I could see by his pacing in the maimai it wasn't going to be long before we were sneaking up to a barn for some pigeons, so reaching into my pack, I pulled out

three cans of my secret duck hunting weapon. I handed one to each of the guys and told them to brace themselves as we were about to kill some ducks. **Paul rolled his eyes while Jake opened his can of liquid luck.** Immediately, ducks could be spotted in the distance, quickly heading our way. Soon they were feet down over the decoys and Paul's wirehaired pointer Darkie had some work to do. A somewhat disbelieving Paul remarked on the properties of Coke and I uttered these now infamous words **"mate, where there's Coke there's hope".**

I've been planning this article ever since I had my first one published but I've always put it off. One reason for not doing it earlier was to avoid any ridicule as some hunters will not believe in the power of Coke. But if I'm truly honest, I wasn't keen to share the secret to my success. If everybody was to do this, then there would be a lot less ducks around for me to shoot.

My brother Stacy and I quite accidentally discovered the duck attracting properties of food and drink years back when we were teenagers. When we were hunting there was nothing else in the world but





Once a sceptic Hayden is now a firm believer in the power of the red can. It took us four cans to bag our limits.



hunting. We never took much food as it got in our way and ate (pun intended) into good hunting time. Before eating we would scan the sky at least twice in both directions before having a handful of chips or a bite of peanut slab. **Despite the precautions, ducks and often geese would always make a surprise arrival.** Of course, with our mouths full we couldn't call as the Haydels we used back then would always clog. As the birds got closer we would be flat out chewing and trying to swallow, and often in desperation we would have to spit it out while vainly looking for a water bottle to wash out our mouths. By the time this performance was finished, the ducks had passed us and were off to the next hunter, or we would attempt to blow our calls with the result of clogging them. After the first year we got smarter and decided that only one of us could eat at a time. Unfortunately for us this simply didn't work and while one was enjoying some much-needed sustenance the other would have to patiently wait, **something neither of us was good at, and worse still the ducks just didn't respond.** As soon as the bag of party mix was devoured and

we were again both chewing, then lo and behold! Ducks would arrive.

The discovery of the magic of Coke didn't happen immediately, and I now shudder when I realise how many more ducks I might have shot had I realised its astonishing duck pulling abilities earlier. Since I was always lugging bags of decoys around and had little room in a big blind bag that was crammed full of ammo and spare calls, I never had any space to take water. After a big day's hunting and often hours spent blowing on a duck call, I got awfully thirsty and often would arrive home with some cracking headaches. I started taking water but it weighed far too much, and again I had no room in my blind bag, so it was soon discarded. One day, as a treat, my partner brought us home a six pack of budget cola. The next

morning, as I was leaving for a hunt, I saw an unopened can sitting on the bench so I took it with me. Around mid-morning, when the duck flight had started to peter out, I got a bit thirsty and I remembered the can sitting in my bag. **No sooner had I cracked the tab and before even taken a sip, the unmistakable call of a very close mallard hen made me forget all about my thirst.** With a full can in my hand, I frantically looked for somewhere to place it down without it spilling. By the time I'd sorted myself out the hen was just a speck in the sky and I'd missed my chance at her, and that was my last opportunity to bag anymore ducks that morning. Despite that, I'd still had a pretty productive morning and what's more, I'd quenched my thirst and on arriving home realised I didn't have a





A coke, a muffin a dog and a boat. How could it not work

patiently waited on the last few to round out my limit. An hour later and I was still waiting on the last three birds. **Over that entire hour I had not even seen a duck in the distance let alone get one in range of me.** By now boredom had well and truly set in so, more for something to do than I needed it, I popped the tab on the can. I managed a quick sip before five ducks were seen honing in on the decoy spread. This time I simply dropped the can, shouldered my gun, and peeled out the last three for my limit. Luckily, I didn't lose too much cola and for the next few minutes I sat back congratulating myself on a job well done and enjoying what was left of my drink.

On the way home I was thinking about the hunt, and how lucky it was that as soon as I'd opened the can the ducks appeared as if by

magic. When I thought back further I remembered the hunt before and how the hen had appeared at the same sort of moment. Suddenly a light went off in my cluttered mind! **Maybe, somehow, the simple act of opening a can of cola would result in ducks appearing.** At this stage it was more wishful thinking

than anything, but just to check, I took another can of budget cola for the next morning's hunt. As had happened with the previous two hunts, during a lull in the morning, I confidently pulled out the can and opened it up. Half joking but still hopeful, I was saddened when nothing happened, and as I wasn't really thirsty I placed the opened can on the ground. No sooner had I done this when the sky was alive with ducks. **It looked as though a farmer had bumped them off one of his paddocks as he went around the cows.** For the next few minutes my duck call and shotgun got a fair work out and too soon the sky was empty of ducks and all I had to do was send my lab Ripley out to retrieve the fallen birds. As I watched her, I had to concede that this time, though not instantly, cola did attract ducks. The big question now was how best to use this information and should I share it with anyone else?

A couple of days later I was again out chasing the wily mallard (I hunt an awful lot). This time my mate Moof was with me and we were hunting some really big water. The day before, when I rang him to see if he wanted to go, I debated about spilling the cola secret. In the end, as we had a pretty big morning ahead of us, and as I still wasn't 100% sure that I wasn't losing my marbles, I casually suggested to him that maybe he should head to

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Even deer are lured in by the power of the cola



Moof and Ed, one of the original discoverers of the duck attracting wonder that is coke



My mate Tom (center) still doesn't believe in Coke. He does however believe in the power of coffee especially when there's a dog around

the dairy to pick up some cola in case we got thirsty. I didn't mention its duck killing abilities to him as I thought a live demonstration would be better.

The next morning the hunt was going well. The ducks had decoyed and by 10am we were a way off limiting out but still very satisfied with how the hunt had run. It was about then I got my now ritualistic cola out of my bag. Moof had one look at it and said *"Don't drink that rubbish - it tastes like crap - have this"*.

From his bag he pulled out two shiny red Coke cans. As I held it in my hands I wasn't quite sure what to think. I still wasn't sure if the cola was a great big coincidence or not, and if it indeed worked, why was I holding a Coke instead of it? Moof casually opened up his can and had a swig and all hell broke loose. We were swamped by ducks - they were

everywhere. **As we were calling to a mob in the distance, we looked up to see ducks hovering above the decoys, and when we fired more ducks arrived.** It was incredible! As anyone who has done a good deal of calling knows, it can be hard work, and between ducks Moof had been casually sipping away on his drink. As he drained the last dregs from the can the flight stopped. When the dog had retrieved the last downed duck, I opened up my can to see what happened, and believe it or not the sky was again full of ducks. So much so that by the time I'd finished it we had limited out. Turns out that Coke is light years better than the budget cola and it tastes way better.

While we packed up the decoys, I explained to Moof that what we had just witnessed wasn't a random event but was a direct result of Coke. Understandably, Moof was pretty sceptical of my theory so we decided on the spot that we would have to test it, and what better way to do this than on another hunt. If you can't already see what I'm going to say next I'll spell it out for you! The very next morning the pair of us were again out - this time armed with two Cokes each. Again, every time the top was pulled on a can, ducks appeared out of nowhere. All this happened a few years ago now and since then there is at least one can always present in my blind bag.

Others are now converts to the magic of Coke. My mate Hayden rang me in a panic early one morning before we were due for a hunt. The can he had set aside had disappeared and he assumed that it had been borrowed to be mixed with rum. Fearing we were going to have a bad hunt without it, he sent me a SOS out of desperation to see if I had a spare can handy.

I've since learnt that others have found their own secret duck attractants. Some hunters carry flasks of coffee or tea. Others swear by the power of ale. The go-to of Greg and Willie on the show is bacon. Also, I have heard of plenty of

other jokers who find that answering the call of nature works well.

Now that I've let the cat out of the bag, there are some simple rules for the use of Coke that I will share with you in the interests of good sportsmanship.

- 1. Original Coke is the best. The Zero and no sugar ones do work but they're not as effective.**
- 2. The only way to go is cans. Lids or caps are no good as you can screw them back on.**
- 3. It works best when you don't have a clear space to put it down. Rule of thumb is that if you have to dither and worry about where to place it, the more potent it is.**
- 4. It works better if there's a risk of spillage either by dropping it or knocking it. The best place is as close as possible to the dog. If you have to glance down to see if it will get knocked over, you know its working. The bigger the risk, the better it works.**
- 5. Thinking about it can sometimes work, but immediately afterwards, you have to open it.**
- 6. Don't open when ducks are flying but wait until it's gone quiet.**
- 7. Cup holders simply don't work, so avoid at all costs.**
- 8. If hunting out of a layout blind it has to be outside of the blind in full view of the birds. To avoid spooking I keep spare grass or straw handy to cover it up.**

On your next hunt make sure you have a can handy for those quiet times, as where there is Coke or tea or bacon, there's hope.



THE GAC UPDATE

WRITTEN BY ~ TIM GALE | GENERAL MANAGER
GAME ANIMAL COUNCIL

Hunters role as caretakers of game animals and their habitat

Circulating around online hunting groups over the past couple of months has been an excellent video made by the Sika Foundation covering a recent presentation from ecologist Cam Speedy.



palatable species.

The good news is that as hunters we have the ability to prevent this and instead create a major hunting and conservation 'win-win'. What it takes is an investment of our hunting effort to actively target yearling and breeding females while at the same time being judicious about what males we take.

Failure to do this and to instead focus on a male dominated harvest that preserves too many breeding females will have major consequences for the habitat and quality of the herd and will lead to fewer big trophy males in the future.

So, fundamentally we must ask ourselves, what are the type of game animal herds we want? An over-abundance of skinny females existing in bony, over-browsed country or a stable population that includes a good number of both females and mature males in a healthy habitat. Regardless of what DOC and government do when it comes to management; as hunters, we are the caretakers of our game animals and the habitat they live in, so the choice is ours.

To view the video featuring Cam you can look up Sika Foundation Game Management on YouTube or find it under the Hunter Education page on the GAC website.

GAME MANAGEMENT

For those that haven't seen it, Cam explains in some detail how hunters can have a positive impact on improving the quality of our game animal herds by harvesting the right animals to look after the health of the habitat.

Cam challenges hunters, and not just Sika hunters, to be caretakers of the habitat rather than simply being consumers of the resource.

Of course, this isn't a new concept. We all know that a healthy ecosystem is critical to having healthy game animals and that it is the habitat that is the foundation of the hunting experience. A healthy ecosystem and good food produce quality animals. Too many animals will have a negative impact on the habitat and that will in turn have a significant effect on the quality of the animals, both in their trophy potential and as meat animals.

The fact is, hunters are uniquely placed to make a significant difference to both habitat health and the quality of game animal herds. The key is understanding the simple premise that when it comes to herd management, male and female animals are definitely not equal.

Whether we are talking deer, tahr or chamois, the basic way they breed is broadly similar, they are all polygynous animals, meaning that one male can cover a whole lot of females. This means that it is the number of females that determines the breeding population.

In the presentation Cam does a great job at explaining how male and female animals use the habitat very differently, based on their different roles in the herd.

Females often exist in large groups, have relatively small territorial range, and therefore inflict most of the localised habitat impact. Males more often exist alone or in much smaller groups and roam a lot further spreading their impact over a larger area.

If a herd becomes dominated by a high number of females the population is likely to quickly increase to near or above the carrying capacity of the habitat. That will result in skinny animals, a lack of quality, mature trophies and degraded bush where browsing destroys all but the most mature plants and non-

BRIEFING TO THE INCOMING MINISTER OF CONSERVATION

Just before Christmas the GAC publicly released our Briefing to the Incoming Minister of Conservation. As a statutory organisation this is an important resource for new minister Kiritapu Allan to understand who we are, what we do and some of the key issues of concern for the hunting and game animal sectors.

As the Briefing's summary explains, the GAC is focussed on making a positive contribution to the way game animals are managed for both hunting and conservation. We are convinced that hunting and conservation interests are far more closely aligned than is sometimes the perception. The GAC is committed to working with DOC and other government agencies as well as hunting sector organisations and key conservation stakeholders to achieve our shared objectives.

Information on what the Game Animal Council is up to, including our full Briefing to the Incoming Minister, is available on our website and our Facebook page.

Happy hunting.

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



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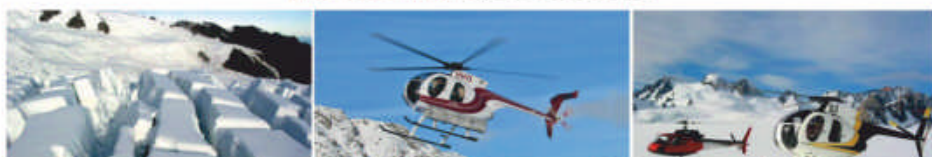
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Pureora Hunting Competition

Returns for 2021

The competition will start on 12 March, and is open to all hunters with current permits for Pureora.

Hunting is a popular use of public conservation land, and the competition is a great way to tie that into a family-friendly event, with a free BBQ and games for the kids, promote responsible hunting, and provide valuable information on the native wildlife populations in the area.

Sponsors have again generously agreed to offer some fantastic prizes over a range of categories. The heads and jaws collected in the competition provide DOC with valuable information about local deer populations and forest ecosystems. Information indicates deer populations in the hunting area are healthy and strong – good news for those keen to compete.

All heads must be entered by midday 18 April at Pureora Workshop. Prizegiving to follow. Terms and conditions for the competition are available on the DOC website. doc.govt.nz/news/events/regional-events/pureora-forest-park-hunting-competition/

Kina Campbell

Senior Community Ranger | Hauraki-Waikato-Taranaki Region

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Becki Moss



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Turqua is distinguished from the other bolt action rifles with its 3-stage safety and 2-stage adjustable trigger.

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WRITTEN BY ~ RICHARD HINGSTON

VENISON RUMP WITH BAKED BEETS

The rump is a forgotten joint of meat with regards to the premium cuts that can be carved from the animal and should not be overlooked

The rump is a boneless piece of meat from the hindquarter. It is made up of fine muscle groups which have little to moderate work to do for the animal.

The result is a mix of textures and levels of tenderness full of flavour and very tender once cooked. Rump is often cut into steaks but can also be cooked as a whole piece and then sliced. This versatile piece of meat can be cooked in a pan or on the BBQ.

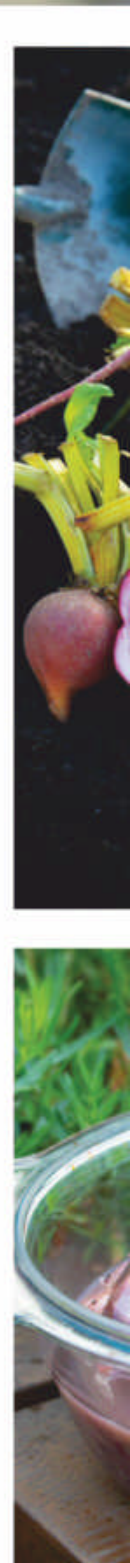
With this recipe, we are going to use a cooked marinade which will bring a deeper, more balanced flavour to the meat. This marinade can also be turned into a final sauce if you wish.

Marinades can flavour the outside of the meat or they can be used to tenderise meat. In our case they flavour the meat and combined with grilling, will bring a wonderful flavour to the dish.

Beetroot is one of those iconic Kiwi things to plant in the vege garden and can be used to flavour venison, as I remember my Dad doing as a kid. Not

that I liked beetroot as a kid, however I do now, and not that I liked red wine then either - **how things change!**

Baked beets are a great match to the venison as they bring a nice “earthiness” flavour. There are many beet varieties out there, red being the most common, but you could use a yellow beet or a Chioggia (or candy canes as they are known due to their red and white strips). These are great eaten raw which will bring a bit of texture to the dish if you are making it into a salad. Beets will also carry many flavours when paired with a cherry or a raspberry, or even balsamic vinegar or a feta cheese. **All these match well with venison as does a red wine of course, as mentioned earlier.**





COOKED MARINADE

1 brown onion peeled and diced
1 celery stalk, diced
1 carrot, peeled and diced
2 fresh bay leaves
10 peppercorns
10 juniper berries
Approx 6 fresh sprigs thyme
250ml cheap red wine (merlot or Cab sav)

Method

Crush the juniper berries and the peppercorns. Pick or rough chop the thyme. Place all the ingredients into a stainless steel sauce pan and bring to the boil, then turn down to a simmer and cook for 5min, then leave to cool.

VENISON RUMP

This recipe is good for approximately two medium sized venison rumps

Method

Once the rump has been trimmed, with the flat side up (there is a thin white sinew line running along the length) cut the rump in half along the sinew seam. Then trim the sinew away and you will have some beautiful even meat fillet pieces. Place these fillets into a stainless or glass container, pour over the marinade and cover. This can be kept in the fridge for up to approximately 3 to 4 days. Overnight would be the minimum for imparting flavour.

BAKED BEETS

4 medium sized red beets
1 bay leaf
4 cloves crushed garlic
Olive oil

Method

Wash the beets. Place in a baking dish with the other ingredients. Cover with tin foil and bake at 170 deg C cook for approx 1 hour or until beets are tender. Leave to cool a little before peeling and slicing .

SAUCE

1 Tbsp flour
1 Tbsp butter
1 tsp tomato puree
1 tsp brown sugar
250ml chicken stock
250ml water

To Finish

Remove the venison from the marinade and pat dry, oil the venison and season, sear the meat in a hot fry pan then place into a preheated oven or BBQ at 180 deg C. Cook for approx 6 min, remove and keep in a warm place to rest.

Place the pan back onto the heat and tip in the marinade. Brown the marinated vegetables to add a little colour to the marinade then add the tomato and brown sugar. Add 250ml chicken stock and 250ml water.

Simmer to reduce by half, mix the flour and butter together to form a paste then whisk this into the sauce to thicken

Season the sliced beetroot and warm through, arrange on a plate, carve the venison and arrange on top with the sauce to the side.



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