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SAMBAR BY BOW

Cody Weller shares the story of his bow hunted Sambar stag

WHAT CAMERA SHOULD I BUY?

Luke Care covers bridge cameras and superzooms in the third installment of this series



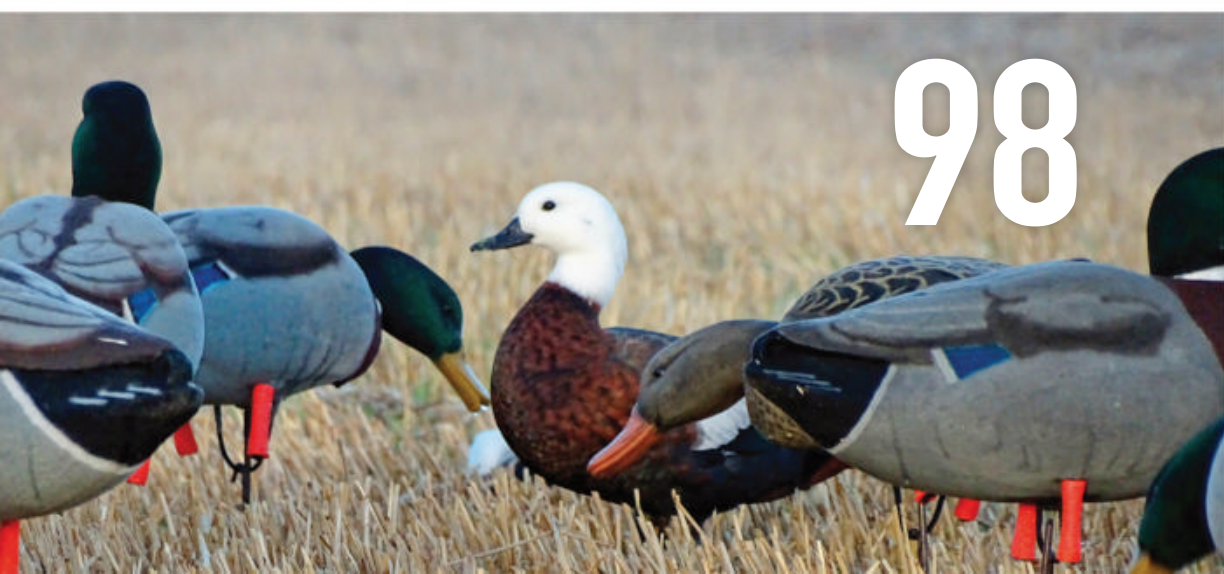
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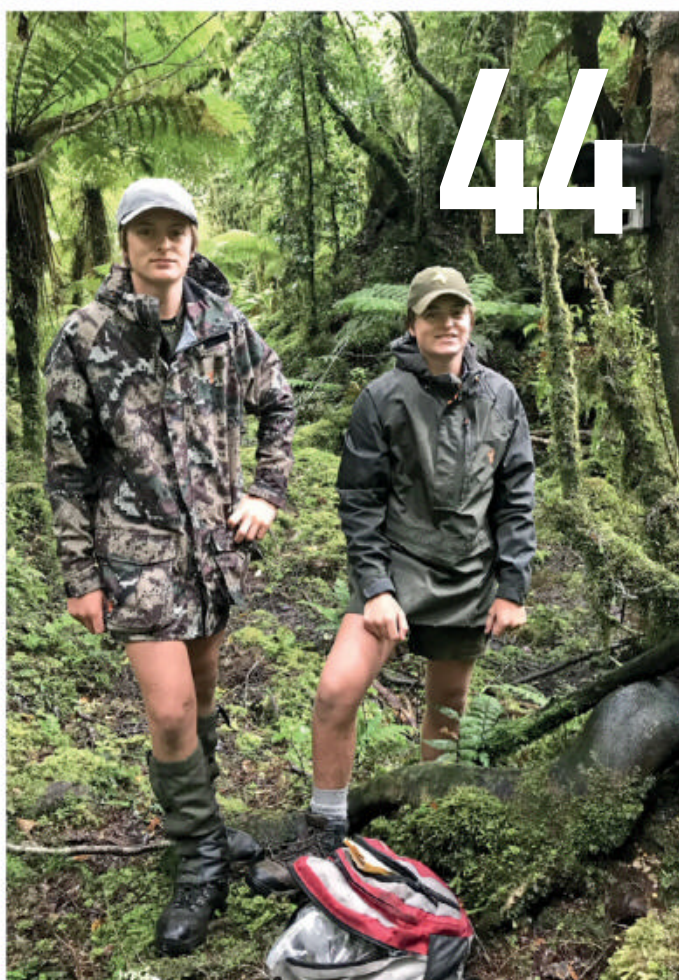
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Brooke Thompson glassing across the Copland Valley

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A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

It's that deepest darkest time of the year when only the keenest seem to venture far into the mountains. We've had a fair amount of snow unlike this time last year, and the avalanche risk is up to **Considerable** or **High** in anything above 1200m in most of the Southern Alps. So be careful if venturing into any terrain with those classic avalanche characteristics, and remember, it's not just what you are standing on, it's what's above you that can kill you. Don't forget to check both the weather and avalanche forecasts if heading into the alpine over the next few months.

We are very pleased to see the Minister of Conservation Hon Kiri Allen has recovered from her illness and is back on deck again. Minister Allen has been a breath of fresh air and we hope to see a lot more common-sense dealings between the Department of Conservation and all public land user groups than we endured during the last government. Minister Allen, we sincerely hope your issues are in the past and you are able to achieve what you started out to earlier this year and we are really looking forward to working with you in the future. **We also want to acknowledge the work of Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall as acting Minister of Conservation in Minister Allen's absence**

Some good bulls have come out of the West Coast tahr ballot blocks this year, but the future of our tahr herds are somewhat uncertain. Without belabouring what we said last issue, we really need to micro manage the culling from here on in to target those last few areas where the population is too high, and leave it at that for now until the vegetation and population studies that are underway are completed.

This year's culling that started in July will hopefully be less intrusive due to the agreement we've reached with the Department of Conservation. The operators are to avoid huts and landing sites and anywhere they encounter hunters, so again, please make sure you get video footage if you encounter any who don't.

We have continued to work with Ospri in Hawkes Bay and Taupo to design a possum control operation that will stop TB getting into the Forest Parks. Ospri's contractors are struggling to be able to achieve

the result during the winter months this year that will have the least effect on deer and all users of the Park, so we have put a new proposal to Ospri involving an intensive ground control buffer area to hold the line until the optimum aerial 1080 operation months from our perspective.

These are July and August next year, when we will get the best biodiversity outcome from the operation - the possums and rats are more susceptible as there's minimal other food available, and you are taking out the predators before the native birds breeding season when the adults, their eggs and chicks are most susceptible to predation. The deer's metabolism is slowest during winter and they are less likely to pick up baits, also there are the least hunters and other Park users in the hills - and we have our highest chance of rainfall to wash out the toxin relatively quickly afterwards to have minimal effect on valued species. Again, this is a work in progress - so watch this space!

Another issue of interest to gamebird hunters and freshwater fisherman is the current review of Fish&Game NZ that is underway. The review panel set-up by the previous MoC Eugenie Sage delivered some very wide ranging and far reaching recommendations to the new Minister Kiri Allen. Many of these were not well thought nor fleshed out properly for the management of a user pays/user says organisation like Fish and Game NZ, especially considering it is totally funded by hunters and fisherman and gets no money from the Government/taxpayer. While we support the review in principle as our legislation has not been reviewed since Fish and Game was set up in the eighties and there are several things we wanted to change, but we must not rush this through despite the up and coming Fish and Game elections. There has been a huge amount of feedback given to the review implementation committee lead by our current NZF&G Council chairman. We need to ensure we keep all that is good about Fish and Game NZ while fixing a few of the things that have been holding us back. **If you would like to be involved, make sure you put your name forward soon for the Fish and Game elections in your area!**

Until next issue

Greg

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THE
LOGO**

The winners for last issue are **Earl Smith** and **Courtney Menzies**. The logos were on the Ridgeline advert on page 54 and the Spika advert on page 85.

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THE GREAT *Southern Alps*

WRITTEN BY ~ LAURENCE AITKEN

"Next thing, the young bull came barrelling over the ridge with our bull chasing him.

He slowed and stopped, quartering downhill slightly, and giving me enough of an opportunity to squeeze the trigger"

After a very successful roar and opening weekend of duck shooting season, my morale was high, counting down to our annual tahr rut trip

But ten days out from departure into the great Southern Alps, my usual hunting companion reluctantly told me that he had to sit this one out. Quickly I phoned an old school buddy that I hadn't seen in 18 years, to see if he wanted to try and bag his first tahr.



Kyle, who is a very keen and seasoned pig hunter, jumped at the chance to get a run on the board, especially since his fourteen year old son had already beat him to it on a hunt with his grandfather.

After a brief reunion and a small debate on essential items to pack, (a value pack of jet-planes is not an essential, Kyle) we were all set to jump in the truck and catch our chopper ride the next morning.

We arrived at the hut after a quick, smooth flight and the usual quality banter with the pilot, amped up and ready for the six days. Knowing the following day had been forecast as absolute shite, we waived unpacking and shot straight out the door to scout one of the main river systems and determine the altitude of any animals in the area. Stopping to glass every so often, Kyle soon located his first ever tahr, and a bull at that, standing right up on the skyline outlined by the blue stuff.

Moving closer and with the gorge getting progressively narrower, we realised we would have to cross it to carry on. Kicking ourselves for leaving the trusty Crocs in the hut, we headed back to base, as it would have been a rookie mistake to get our boots wet on the first day.

There were other stream systems on offer, and we located a few more animals, the majority of them young bulls hanging around a group of nannies. That was it for the day and the

evening was spent enjoying a few beers and more of a catch up.

As the alarm sounded the next morning, we were in no rush to get out of bed, as the nor'west wind of the previous evening had brought the first lot of raindrops.

We spent the best part of the day hut-bound, reading every magazine twice and glassing the odd face visible between showers. **Thinking those jet planes would have come in handy at that stage, I was glad that we agreed that choccy biscuits were classed as an essential item.**

By late afternoon, the weather had broken enough to get out for a quick squiz. Not even a hundred metres from the hut I spotted a shaggy black object making its way across the riverbed in front of us. Determining that it was a young bull, we took advantage of a good opportunity to get some great camera shots before he cottoned onto us.

After that brief encounter, once again we saw many of the same animals as on the previous evening, so back at the hut we devised a plan to make the most out of the next two days of good weather.

This included packing for a night away from the hut, finding a more suitable river crossing, and heading up the valley we checked out the first day.

A ripper frost overnight, and the glacier-fed water made for a very quick dash across the river at first light. Being able to



The juvenile eyeing up his river crossing options



put on dry socks and boots was a luxury, thanks to bringing the Crocs this time round.

Stopping frequently to glass, we spotted a good number of animals starting to feed back above the snowline, but nothing that was easily accessible. Wanting to gain some elevation, we edged across one of the larger side creeks and onto a good vantage point for a quick munch on a muesli bar and to punish the binos a bit more. We thought we could push through a small band of monkey scrub to the next scree still maintaining height, and follow it back down to the river.

Looks are deceiving as we quickly found that the eighty-metre scrub belt was far denser than we had expected. The pig hunter was in his element, and all we were missing were the bailing dogs. The impenetrable chest high mess of turpentine and leatherwood exhausted us and slowed our progress but we eventually dropped back into the

riverbed and carried on up stream.

Whilst discussing our options, I noticed a lone bull feeding on a small slip further up the valley. Once we put the spotting scope on him and made an evaluation, we agreed that he would make a prime candidate for Kyles' first tahr.

Making our way up a shallow scree shoot to keep out of sight, we dropped our packs and crept to within three hundred and fifty yards, but our bull had fed into a small patch of scrub and sat down.

A well-trained eye could just make out his head and neck, and after fifteen minutes describing half the mountainside to Kyle, we concluded that he was indeed looking at the animal. Now we just had to get him

standing up but no amount of whistling had the desired effect, and not wanting to be there all day, we made the call to have a crack at him whilst he was bedded.

Kyle let rip with his 270 and the bull quickly rose and started making his way across the scrubby face in front of us, stopping briefly presenting a broad side shot, which once again was wayward.

This time Mr Bull decided that going up would be much better for his health, but at a leisurely pace, as he was unsure of our location.

I did the dash back to our packs and grabbed my rifle. As I returned the bull had gained some elevation, but was still within comfortable range for the 300 Win Mag.

Kyle got behind the rifle and after I gave him the low down on aiming, he took full advantage of the next opportunity. Moments after a well executed kill shot, the bull galloped ten metres or so before his legs came out from underneath him.

We returned to our packs and started the climb up to Kyles' first tahr, and me being my cheeky self, I reminded him of how much easier the retrieval could have been if he'd connected with the first shot.

After a few mandatory snapshots, we began the task of butchering the beast, but soon realised that he was in quite bad shape due to a badly deformed jaw, which, no doubt, was why he was feeding so low down where the tucker was a bit easier for the taking.

Just as we finished, I happened to look up and notice a juvenile bull making a beeline for us, which made for another even closer encounter, allowing me to hone my photography skills.

After lunch of tuna and noodles at the river, we carried on upstream and found the ideal campsite, erecting the tent and dropping excess gear before heading further up for an evening cast about.

There were few animals about but only one mature bull that was quickly gaining altitude, and with limited daylight left, we could only watch as he headed to sort out a young bull trying to get in with a group of nannies. As the sun disappeared behind the snow-capped peaks, the temperature instantly dropped, so on the way back to camp, we collected some driftwood and lit a small fire on the scree, cooked up a feed, and retired for the evening. Wearing thermals and a beany to bed had paid off, as by morning, a thick layer of ice had formed on the top of Kyle's alpine pot.

With a quick coffee and a bit of brekkie we returned to the lookout of the previous night to see if we had missed any wily bulls. Cresting the range into the adjacent valley we saw what appeared to be the same nannies followed by a mature bull. I got up to shake off the pins and needles and right below us was a juvenile bull attempting to cross the river. His frolicking and curiosity entertained us for a while as we pondered our next move. There was a large tributary that we had passed on the way in, so we shot back to camp, packed up and headed there to suss it out.

After being mocked twice by a cheeky little tahr whistling at us, we got to the unnamed creek of interest. Dropping the bulk of our gear at the junction, we

Kyle's first ever bull, 8 years old and 12"



Not even 100 yards from the hut this bull ambled across the river flats



climbed high into the tops, but were left disappointed only seeing a few nannies.

The comfort of our warm hut was calling us so we returned some well-deserved brown fizzies, accompanied by a feed of streaky bacon and rice.

Our last day dawned, with scattered rain, and gusty sou'west winds, much as the forecast had predicted. Not wanting to waste an opportunity in the mountains we donned wet weather gear and made a plan to trek to the head of the valley.

In between sleet showers, we jumped from one sheltered spot to another, scoping out what country we could see. The animals, just like us, were tucked up in any nook and cranny they could find. We found a mob of juvenile bulls and nannies not far off the valley floor, after watching them for some time we couldn't see a mature bull in the mix. As we boulder-hopped our way up stream, the weather started to lift, and by early afternoon we had a reasonable view into some promising looking country. **We were forced to cross using some**

fancy footwork to keep our course, and Kyle spotted a group of nannies just above the snowline.

At first, we could only see two very young bulls pestering them. I thought to myself... **"There has to be a mature bull nearby."** Scanning through the binos amidst the snow, I found him sitting, gazing up the valley. Once we had the spotting scope on him, we confirmed it was indeed a bull, with average horn length but solid looking bases, and requiring a better look. He was in a good spot to stalk, but we had to be careful not to alert any of the nannies feeding below him.

Climbing up through the mountain daisies and turpentine bushes, we came across a dead mature bull, showing no signs of how he came to his demise. He was sporting a fantastic set of tips, far too good to let go to waste, so I made a small rock cairn to locate him on our descent.

A further 150 metres up the side of the scree, and doing our best to keep a



Laurie's 11 year old bull, measuring 12^{3/4} inches



The dead bull we stumbled across

low profile, we dropped the packs and climbed the last stretch to get a better look at the bull, who by now had stood up to chase one of the younger bulls. Showing good base height and large body mass, I knew he was the beast I had been aiming for this season.

I crawled the last few metres to get a clear line of fire and got comfortable behind the rifle, waiting for him to present a clean shot, as he stood obscured by a turpentine bush. For a split second he was completely visible, then in a flash,

he took off after the young bull again, disappearing over a ridge, out of sight.

Moments passed and I could only hope they would come back, as moving now would only spook the nannies.

Next thing, the young bull came barrelling over the ridge with our bull chasing him.

He slowed and stopped, quartering downhill slightly, giving me enough of an opportunity to squeeze the trigger. Sacking him on the spot sending him on

a downhill descent towards us saving a bit more legwork. Gathering our packs and climbing up to his location, I was second-guessing my initial assessment of him. He seemed much smaller as he lay with his head and mane tucked under. But looks were definitely deceiving as we dragged him up onto a large flat rock and realised his true size as well as age. The rock served as a great butcher's block, and the stunning backdrop was a bonus.

Once we skinned him and had our packs full of meat, we rode the scree back down to the rock cairn marker with my new rug in tow. Our two-hour journey back to the hut was with a sense of accomplishment and we were ready to polish off our last few supplies. We'd made it back just on night fall, so we had well and truly made the most of our time.

Now that Kyle has been well and truly bitten by the tahr bug, it's safe to say he'll be hounding me to come on more trips, and a welcome companion he will be.



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A LONG TIME COMING

WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

I hadn't felt the pressure on a shot like this since I was gripping Dad's old Miroku 308 and a Pureora stag crested the hill in front of a much younger me

Willie, Greg and Emil are friends, if I missed the shot the episode would be a waste and I'd be letting them down. If I missed I'd be letting myself down on my dream of a mature Rakaia bloodline stag. If I missed ... I'd at least have a good excuse.

I was literally sitting in a tree. My feet were dangling in thin-air as I sat astride a bend in the trunk. One arm was wrapped around the most vertical bole of the tree to reach the forend with my fingertips, while the other braced against a branch and gripped the rifle. We'd searched around the monkey scrub looking for a better place but the old stag had chosen his fortress well. **Surrounded by his harem and challengers it was nearly unassailable.**

We made the perch as secure as we could, did some dry-fires, and all that remained was for me to do my bit. It was a struggle to still my nerves but once I looked through the scope and settled the crosshairs on the stag's shoulder the tension eased a bit. I had my focus back, I couldn't see the camera, all I had to do was make sure I killed him cleanly. **Regardless of anything else, that is our responsibility.**

Three days ago we were bouncing our way up a Canterbury riverbed. As always, it felt superb to be heading into the hills. The focus was on adventuring with mates and simply getting out in the mountains – **and didn't they look grand on a chill May morning with a dusting of snow livening their flanks.** I'd been lucky enough to be reasonably active during Level 3, but there were always restrictions looming over you – like being home every night! The best bit was we didn't really have a fixed plan, we were going walkabout.

Only a few hours later we reached the end of 4wd country and parked the ute in the shadow of the main divide, hallowed big stag country. Bustling around the ute, doing the last minute packing, we discovered we'd forgot Gunnar's dog food but other than that we were surprisingly organized. Before long Greg was swinging those long legs upriver and Emil and I settled in to the pace behind.

Within the hour I was questioning my fitness (not an uncommon occurrence when hunting with Greg, Willie or Emil). In Willie's absence I'd been bequeathed a set of shiny new Swarovski NL Pure's, but no one had told me they were 12x magnification. I'd been glassing as we went and wondering why my hands were shaking more than usual, I'd accepted my fitness levels and moved on to blaming the coffee we'd had on the way in when Greg asked how I liked the 12x – aha!

Now that I knew why my vision rattled like a '92 Hilux down a gravel road I could put some time into actually finding animals and soon spotted some hinds down low. Normally this early in the trip I wouldn't really be thinking about getting venison on the deck, but Gunnar was going to need something to eat and it was either venison or part of our Backcountry's. We plotted

an attack on them that wouldn't spook the rest of the valley and filed the information away for later in the evening.

Not much further up the valley we bumped another group of hinds and they trotted up on to a prime sunny scree face so we settled down to see if they'd shake any stags loose. They didn't but it was a great place, there were clearly animals about and we could see a lot of the valley so we decided to make camp early. **Glassing back behind us into the shady side of the valley I soon spied a dark animal which Greg confirmed was a chamois with the spotter,** and he soon multiplied into a small mob of four or five chamois clothed in the midnight black of their winter coat, looking like a priest's cossack with their cream faces the trim.

A cold, still night settled. We'd sighted no stags but it had been an enjoyable day, snug in the tent with two litres of hot chocolate in the tent I was content. Greg obviously shared my buoyant mood as he was already talking about saving rations and heading for the West Coast!

Camping in the valley floor in winter isn't too dissimilar from throwing yourself in a chest freezer for the night, and waking up in the shade means it takes a while to warm up, so we glassed from camp while we waited for a bit of the ice to melt off the tent. Looking back downstream Greg spotted a young stag making his way to some hinds. **He was a heavy timbered young fella, with gleaming dark antlers and plenty of promise.** We just needed his father!

The other hinds that had been down low, in reach for Gunnar's dinner, were gone, and the ones from the scree were up much higher now. The chamois had departed to points unknown so we packed up and headed for a side valley with a mind to look at the West Coast. It didn't take us long to find we had





Greg checking out our potential pass to the West Coast

been thwarted by snow, we didn't have crampons and it would've been hard on Gunnar even if we did.

The side-valley diversion only cost us a few hours and we spent the rest of the day following the main valley trying to find a lookout we could climb to glass the warm face western face. We passed up a few options and the last possible place turned out to be the best, it would have panoramic views of the whole valley, but getting there was another matter. The obvious route was a near vertical rock slide, a deadly alley of loose rock, it would be direct but cost a bit of sweat!

It was as bad as it looked. Two steps up, one back. If you were lucky. Steep rock climbing with packs on and passing Gunnar's none-too-light frame up. I lost a fingernail to a falling rock and halfway up Greg spooked a possum in a head high coprosma, it made the mistake of running my way and after a somewhat brutal death-by-rock, we had Gunnar's main course.

We made camp pretty late, the rocky shelf needed a little renovating but looking around we knew we had picked the right spot. We could see almost all of the good country from the tent's door, this was the box seat.

After another nice long winter night all we had to do was roll out of bed and

start glassing while the billy boiled. We spotted several animals doing the same as us, waiting for the sun to arrive. A couple stags and a handful of hinds, just the right amount for the country really but still no mature stag.

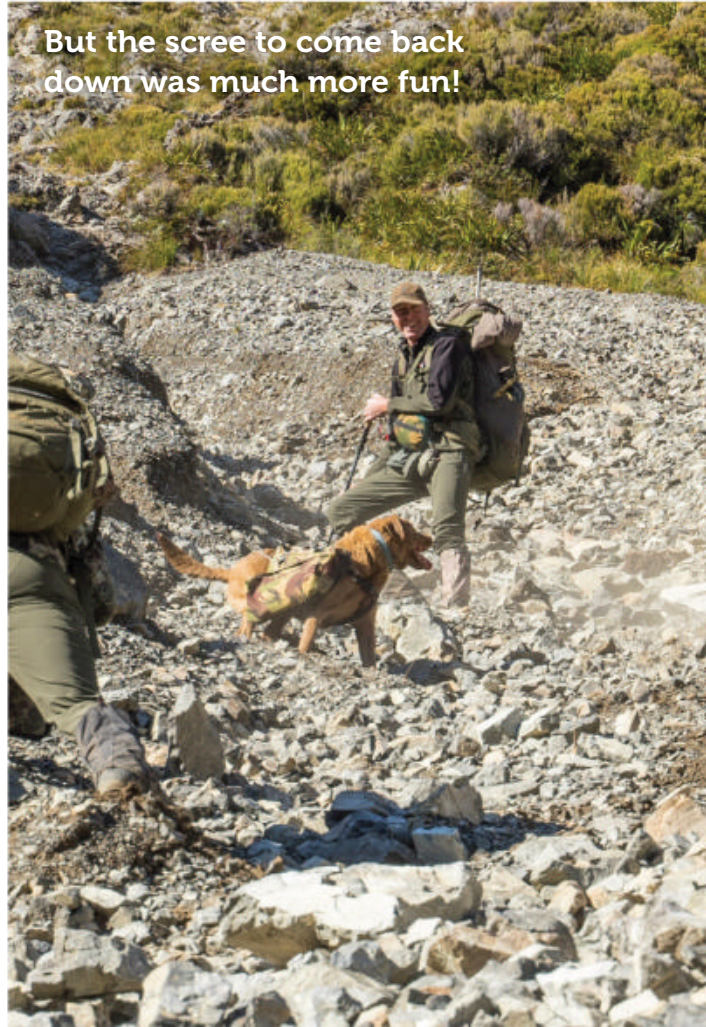
It was interesting to note that all through the trip we were expecting to find bachelor mobs of stags, but it wasn't the case, they were all still with the hinds. **Is that what happens with less pressure because Covid kept hunters out over the roar?** Do they rut longer? Do the hinds cycle longer? Who knows, but it was different and I enjoyed it, it still felt like a roar experience to see stags with hinds.

Greg had wandered around the face a little to look into the dark, quite cold looking headwaters and surprisingly soon came running back, beckoning for the spotter. I ran it up to him and he got set up while explaining to me he'd seen what was unmistakably a big stag.

We all switched focus to finding that stag and after 20 minutes or so I picked him up quite a bit further around the face, Greg's first words weren't all that TV friendly – **'sh*t if those are antlers I'm looking at he is f*#king huge .. they were antlers, they just moved!'** and antlers they were. Or at least one antler. He was a long way away and it took us some time to realise that something



The gutter up to our lookout was a bit on the steep side



But the scree to come back down was much more fun!



The spectacular young 12 pointer we bumped into. He was still hanging around the old stag's hinds even in late May



was amiss with his left antler, but from that distance we couldn't really judge what. **Just to add interest was his harem of six or so hinds and the appearance of a ripper young stag also drew a round of appreciative murmurs from behind the spotter.**

We had an easier time getting down a shingle scree, taking about eight minutes to descend the same elevation that had cost us an hour of grinding the evening before.

We paced across the flats, casting nervous glances up to the stag's stronghold while we were exposed. Making our way up the valley we were covered by its deep sides and perhaps got a little blasé. As we came out of a small gorgy section I looked up to the right and my eyes nearly fell out of their sockets – there was a dirty great stag looking at us from 180 yards away!

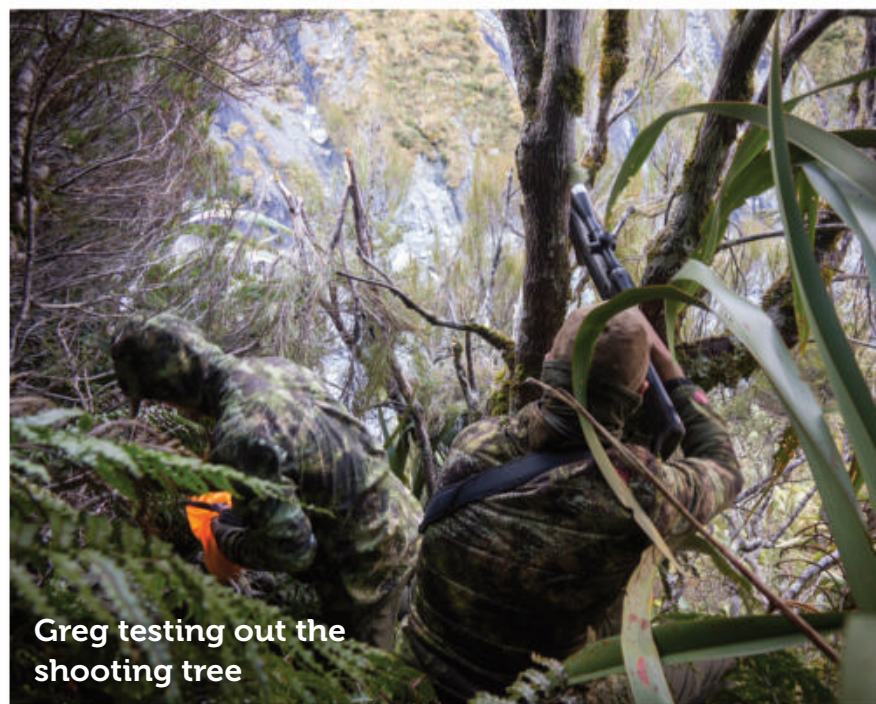
We all hit the deck and did our best to become one with the boulders.

He was clearly spooked, but we had a good look at him as he strutted up the face. It was the young hanger-on, but what a beaut. Despite four on each top he was missing beys like so many of his parentage, so he totalled up to be a beautiful young 12. I actually liked that he was missing his bez, in this herd it's an emphatic nod to his heritage. He was just a bit young, he would certainly grow out into a real ripper. As it was he was only in the high 30's length-wise.

Despite the delight in the encounter, it



Emil is never far away from a river crossing, he'll catch you falling eventually!



Greg testing out the shooting tree

did concern us that we'd blown the stalk, or would soon. If that stag was down here, where was the big boy? Had he spooked already? **Was this stag on his way to alert the mob?**

The tall mountains all around hastened the sense that nightfall was just around the corner and lent urgency to our deliberating. Finally we got enough elevation on the opposite side of the creek to see the stag dozing on an outcrop, surrounded by alert but not spooked hinds.

The hinds behaviour sealed it, we definitely couldn't attack him directly. There were just too many animals in his entourage to do it safely, with the way the land lay it was going to be a cross-valley shot. That left us scratching our heads a bit, as we were perched on the steep edges of a debris levee completely swathed in dracophyllum.

We sweated and beat our way up the face as quietly as we could, he was under

500 yards away on a still winter evening and we were in full sight so we needed to be careful. Greg found an old leaning tree with a gap through the canopy. Try as I might I couldn't improve on it. Emil braced himself just forward of me to film, while Greg lay back, cocooned in fern, to set the tripod up on the near-vertical face and all of a sudden we've reached the start of the story again.

After the shot the immediate sensation was wave of relief, a huge breath out, it was clearly as clean a kill as you could ever hope for.

After that was a surge of exhilaration – we'd done it! We'd taken an old warrior of a main divide stag, who would've eluded dozens of hunters and helicopters, and pulled it off in pretty challenging conditions. Greg and Emil's ear-to-ear grins and high fives showed they shared the excitement as much as I did.

That wasn't quite all the pressure off though, we had to hoof it up there before



The hefty old warrior on his throne

it got proper dark so Emil could still film. As usual Greg leapt ahead like a mountain goat, with Emil hardly a step behind him.

Perched on a blade of rock, within hidden a cozy, grassy hollow, the old boy lay in his throne. The views from his eyre were magnificent. He sat on the spine of the main divide, with towering peaks protecting his flanks, and the best of Canterbury's high country laid out before him. Passes snaked their way back to the West Coast within a kilometer and I can easily picture him trailing those summer tracks in search of rich feed to fuel that monumental frame.

Again, true to his bloodline his body was brutishly large.

The rich russet coat of the rut was greying as he thickened his coat for winter. The timber of his lone 40" antler was dark and thick all the way to the tops, with only the tines burnished white. **If he'd had two antlers they would have tallied a shade over 300ds, pretty impressive for a 10 pointer.**

We happily broke into Emil's lolly stash while we butchered him then began the long haul out with heavy, heavy packs. Rational me loves time in the mountains like a drug, but I think my subconscious spirit animal must be a cantankerous old station horse - my internal compass knows the second you turn my nose for home and then there's no stopping me. You can put as much weight on my back and I'll skip the whole way with a smile on my

face. I like to think it's the thought of all that prime venison in my pack, but in reality it's probably just me looking forward to ditching the pack and having a proper shower!

Thanks Willie and Greg for taking me to a place so special to you two and thanks Emil for the kind selection of scenes that were broadcast to millions of viewers. You're all good buggers to spend time on the hill with, and that's where you really know a bloke. **That stag had been a long time coming, I'm glad we could all share in the taking of him.**



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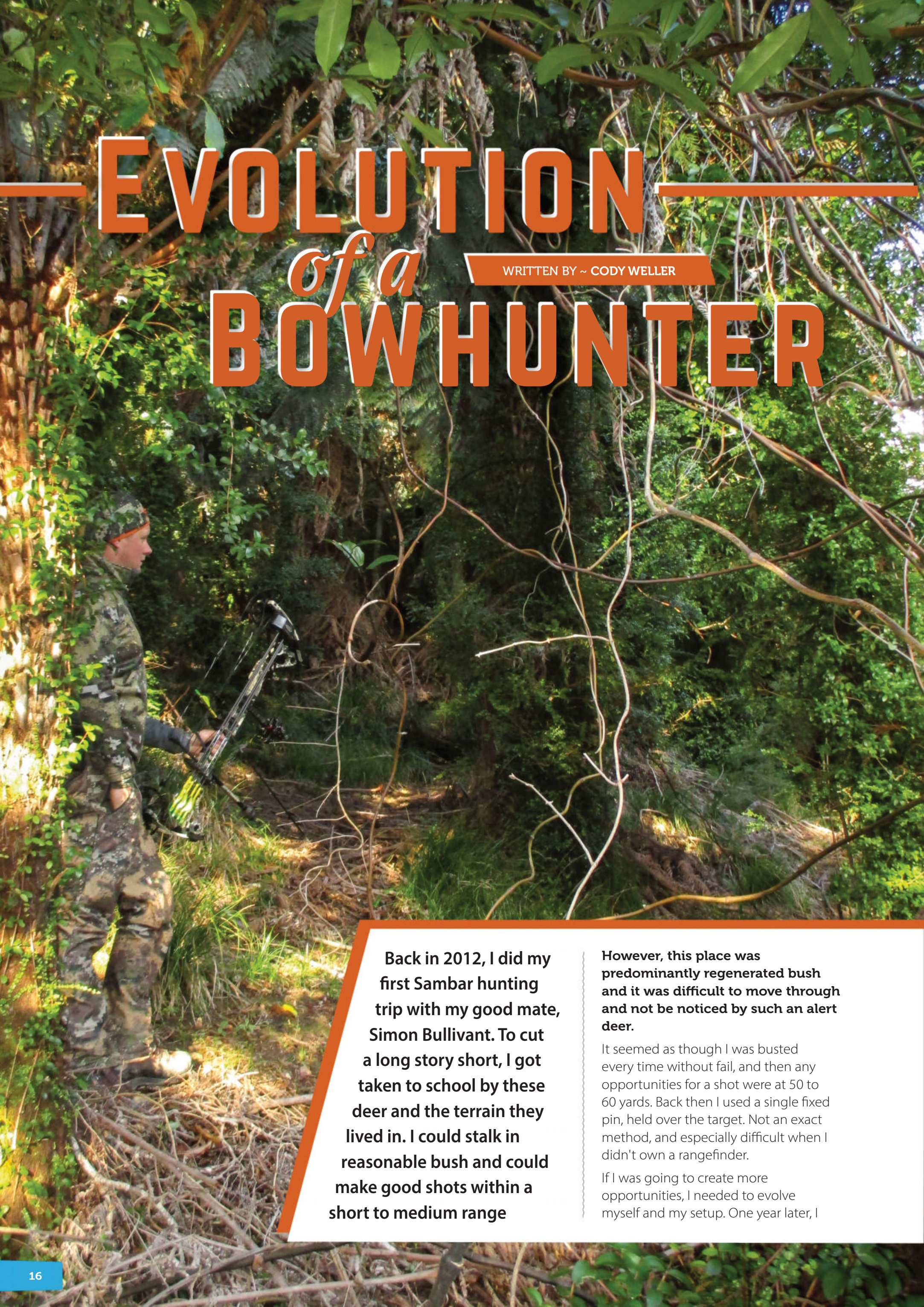
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—EVOLUTION— *of a* BOWHUNTER

WRITTEN BY ~ CODY WELLER

Back in 2012, I did my first Sambar hunting trip with my good mate, Simon Bullivant. To cut a long story short, I got taken to school by these deer and the terrain they lived in. I could stalk in reasonable bush and could make good shots within a short to medium range

However, this place was predominantly regenerated bush and it was difficult to move through and not be noticed by such an alert deer.

It seemed as though I was busted every time without fail, and then any opportunities for a shot were at 50 to 60 yards. Back then I used a single fixed pin, held over the target. Not an exact method, and especially difficult when I didn't own a rangefinder.

If I was going to create more opportunities, I needed to evolve myself and my setup. One year later, I

had worked on developing patience within the stalk, thinking about how I moved and waiting longer. Good pre-planning resulted in decreasing distance travelled and increasing time spent watching. A day bag gave way to a bum-bag.

I minimised the gear I carried to decrease the human profile and fit through thicker cover, and ensured there was nothing that would make a metallic sound.

Sambar ears are massive, like large dessert plates and they are able to detect anything foreign, especially within bow range. I had to make these adjustments if I was to create more opportunities. Next time around would be different.

2013

I had upgraded my bow to gain more power and speed, and I had a single pin adjustable sight that I used in tandem with a rangefinder, enabling me to make more educated shots out to 60 yards. On this trip, I shot a yearling hind at 50 yards. This was a nice little confidence booster, because opportunities were starting to flow. I got a stag at 25 yards, front on, on the same trip. It was an extremely difficult shot and I was glad for the extra power of the new bow. He was carrying his head low, and the arrow had to drive a long way down his neck before reaching the chest.

I was thrilled my evolution as a bowhunter and some simple adjustments to my gear had paid off.

A family group of Sambar
By Scott Sisam



Trail camera photos from the area we hunted
By Scott Sisam



The first stag, from 2013, once I had upgraded a bit of gear



The yearling hind displaying those incredible plate-sized ears

FAST FORWARD TO 2019

It was time to have a crack at a big stag. I

intended to leave the hinds and younger stags and solely focus on big, mature stags. My ground game had improved significantly, bringing me to the next level of stalking patience and skill set and my bow shooting structure had developed considerably. I now had confidence out to 70-80 yards, if conditions allowed. My bow setup had micro-yardage adjustability, plus front and rear stabilizers to help with long distance accuracy along with a quiver that also worked as a stabilizer. It was tuned for a micro-diameter arrow shaft. These arrows help with penetration and wind drag... power and speed to burn. Oh, how things had changed in that short space of time! It was time to try to put all this technology and skill to work.

But a mature Sambar stag doesn't just appear. All this tech doesn't mean a lot unless, as the hunter, I played my part and created an opportunity. **Days and days of high intensity stalking ticked by, combined with spot and stalk efforts.**

Nothing of real note was found to start with, but as the days ticked by eventually we found an area where big stags were lurking. Each day Simon and I would walk back in the dark, buzzing about the encounter we'd just had. It was as if the perfect storm was building. Of course, the days left on the trip were dwindling with each walk back but the feeling was that



There's no doubt Sambar stags carry a lot of weight

something would happen before we had to leave.

Then it did happen. Simon and I had positioned ourselves to watch over the paddock in the gloom that was day break. As dark turned to light a brown object that appeared to be a Sambar stag turned out to be exactly that. I had limited time before the big stag realised it was time to move back into the bush only 30 yards away so I made a move, cutting distance quickly. While he went about grabbing the last mouthfuls of grass I closed right into 40 yards. He was just over a rise, and the lay of the land naturally covered his head while it was down grazing.

Here I was with a big Sambar stag in the paddock feeding at 40 yards broadside on - this was going to be it.

No, it wasn't. The morning breeze that flowed across the cold, open paddock was too strong to make a perfect shot. Such a massive animal, renowned for its durability, needed a precise shot. The thought of the shot being compromised due to

the left - right wind overruled my urge to shoot. I just couldn't do it. It doesn't take much wind to affect an arrow at 20 yards, let alone 40, so I let him walk. As he strolled by, staring down at me not 20 yards away, I could do nothing other than stay crouched and enjoy the absolute bulk and power possessed by these deer. I could hear the short grass tear under his toes and see his nostrils flare as he strained to figure out what this strange object was. The encounter was incredible. Then, just like that he was gone, jumping back into the heavy cover.

If this was going to be the tone for the day I was all about it. Catching up with Simon, we made a plan to head in and do battle with the stags back in the heavy cover. The breeze that had hindered my opportunity had now disappeared and we had a couple of long shots out in the paddock, just to reinforce our confidence, before cruising into the deer's domain.

We fast tracked to a gully that was catching the first sun, as we had had good stag action on most of the days we had previously spent in this area. Drawing

closer, we eased up the pace and switched into stealth mode. After only ten minutes, movement on an opposite face caught our attention. I popped my head over the ridge to see who was over there. The heart jumped a little to see a good stag milling around with hinds - this could be a goer. Quietly positioning ourselves I checked the rangefinder, and read 90 something yards. **"Bro, it's a long way,"** I said to Simon and there was no way of stalking closer

Sambar have very thick skin. A good broadhead/arrow combo is a requirement



94 yards, couldn't have been happier with the result





The big stag once we'd managed to drag him out of heavy cover

from this position. A little more ranging and sussing out and I found I could get to 92 yards on my sight tape before my fletching would make contact with the sight housing.

Although more ranging determined it was 94 yards I started to think that I could do this, as my footing was level and body position was perfect. Simon backed me up with *"if you're confident, then have a go."*

The conditions were dead still and there were no outside influences. Some 15 minutes had passed and I was ready to make the shot. We waited until there was no possible chance of the arrow being deflected by the tree under which he was feeding. Then he offered up an ever-so-slightly quartering away body angle. A big, grey scar was positioned high in the lung that gave me an excellent aiming point and also made up the two yards I was missing due to fletch contact. I ran through the plan... aim for the big, grey scar and the arrow will punch through the heart. Pin set for 92 yards, it's time.

Steel your mind and let the shot break, I

told myself. Back to full draw, level the bow, work through the shot and just stick with it. **Don't rush, just work through it. PINCK.** The shot broke and the arrow raced its way across the gully. Then, like magic, the arrow arrived fair in the middle of his heart. He bolted away in an instant, but I have seen the fletches absolutely bury themselves. Flopping to the ground with a type of joy that can't be explained and now totally becoming immersed in the moment, I think the word unreal was used more than once. I had known if I just stuck with the shot, the arrow would land perfectly.

It seemed crazy that I had let one walk much closer than that but I just knew it wasn't going to be a clean shot with the outside influence of

the wind. **Tucked away down in the bush with better light and footing, 94 yards turned out to be a much better option. Unreal.**

Both Simon and I crossed down through the steep gut that divided us from where the stag stood. It confirmed that closing in wasn't an option due to the steep and noisy nature of the ground that lay between us. **Quickly, we found the stag's last position and with it a very good blood trail.** The blood trail led us 50 metres around the hill to a massive bodied Sambar stag that had expired on the trot.

A photo session and full body breakdown followed. As we went about boning out the meat, I was pleasantly surprised to find the arrow had still had enough power to shatter the offside leg bone on what is some of the thickest bone structure to be found in an animal.

The next day we retrieved the meat with bigger packs and between us pulled out some 80 kilograms of meat. They are definitely a well muscled animal with power and strength, requiring



Owner - Allan Foot

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WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

Part 3

WHAT CAMERA SHOULD I BUY

BRIDGE CAMERAS, SUPERZOOMS AND SPOTTING SCOPES

Now that we've covered the pocket sized stuff, we're going to step up to a class of camera referred to as 'Bridge Cameras'

These are in between the compact cameras (point and shoots) we covered last issue and full-size DSLR's/Mirrorless cameras we'll cover next issue.

Bridge cameras have been around since film days, and have always provided the same niche – a 'bridge' between camera classes. They provide an introduction to DSLR's, with similar weight and size, manual controls and electronic viewfinders (EVF) but almost never have interchangeable lenses - that is a key distinction from DSLR's. The high zoom cameras a lot of hunters will be familiar with, the Nikon P1000 and Canon Sx70, are part of this class of camera but generally referred to as 'superzoom' cameras.

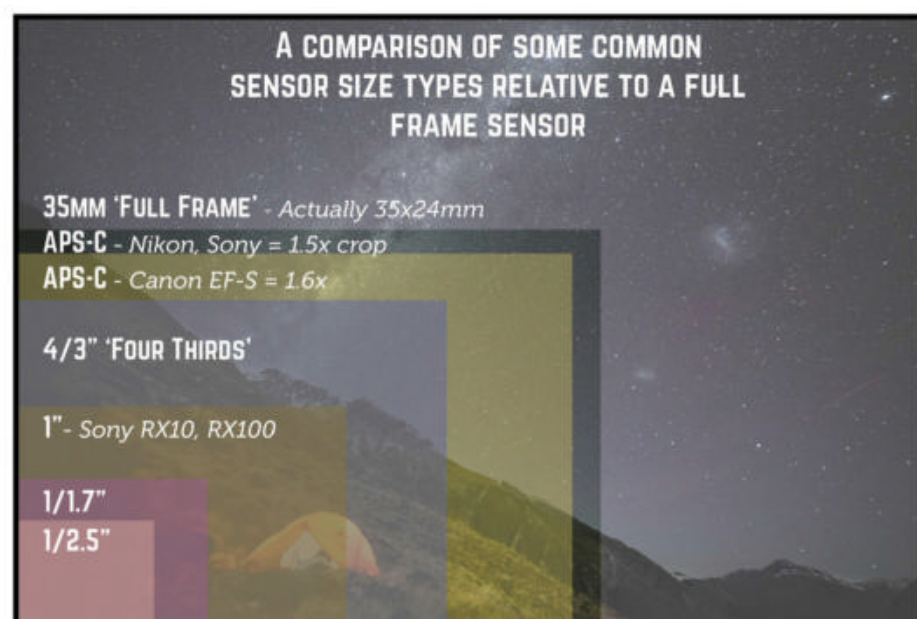
Something I've neglected to hammer home in previous articles is the importance of sensor size. In this case bigger is always better. See the below graphic for a better illustration, but to give you an idea the 1/2.3" sensor you see in a lot of compact cameras (and superzooms) has a surface area 38x smaller than a full-frame 35mm sensor! The problem with a larger sensor is that as you go up in sensor size you need correspondingly large lenses to focus the light back to that big sensor. Which is why you see the

sports photographers running round with giant two foot long lenses that cost tens of thousands of dollars.

Bridge Cameras

There are a couple of quality contenders in this class, two that would seriously tempt people away from DSLR's I think. If you're ready to delve into photography and move past the compact camera then the Sony RX10 is very hard to beat for a hunter, it is widely regarded as the most versatile mid-sized camera. In a 1065gm body it offers a fixed 24-600mm lens on a large 1" 20.1 MP sensor. The 1" sensor is the best option for anything smaller than a DSLR, the smaller sensors really lose quality quite dramatically. **This is also an excellent zoom range for**

a general duties camera, 24mm is good and wide while 600mm provides enough zoom for excellent live-animal photos. The great f2.4-4 aperture combined with the large sensor gives you great low light performance, which is crucial for a hunter as we're usually doing our best work at either end of the day. This is the camera I generally recommend to people that are looking to take their photos up a notch, or at least take the step away from phones or compact cameras but don't want to commit to DSLR's. - to be honest, this will be better than a DSLR for a lot of people just due to its ease of use and versatility. The great low light performance combined with substantial and high quality zoom images mean it's an excellent hunter's camera. I took one of my favourite photos on an RX10, see the young Red we let walk on page 13. The latest iteration, the Mk 4, is generally priced around \$2,800 though so it is a



decent commitment.

If that price point is a bit steep, then the Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ2500 comes a pretty close second, especially for about half the price. It has a sensor with similar specs, but the lens is only 24-480mm, has slightly less aperture at f2.8-4.5 and weighs in about 200 grams heavier. There are plenty of other things you'll want to compare for your specific needs but it seems a good second place option.

Willie: While you'll find 'professional videographers' tend to turn up their noses at any camera that doesn't have interchangeable lenses as it limits their 'creative freedom', today's modern bridge cameras like the Sony RX10 IV are really bridging the gap (excuse the pun) towards professional video cameras with every new model and upgrade released. For the amateur film maker or hunter who simply wants to record his trips and edit a quick video to share with friends or on YouTube, the likes of the RX10 is probably your best all-in-one option. As Luke mentioned, 24mm at the bottom end is wide enough to film your landscape shots, your piece to cameras (PTC's), hero shots with animals etc., while 600mm at the top end is fantastic for zooming in to film animals in the distance and your kill shots. Recalling our chat last issue about film resolutions and frame rates, this camera boasts UHD/4K resolution in 30 frames per second (fps) which offers good image quality for all round filming and the ability to crop in if necessary, without losing too much quality, while it can also record Full HD 1080/120fps which is ideal for slow-motion animal footage and kill shots. Features like the 1 inch sensor, reasonably fast F2.4-4 lens, good autofocus, image stabilisation, touch screen, picture profile options like S-Log3, dust and moisture resistance, and 1095gram all up weight, mean this camera topped with a small RODE microphone will be a photo/video setup very hard to look past for the majority of hunters. As a side note, a number of the kills shots and animal clips on the TV show have been filmed on the RX10 iii, so we speak from experience when we say it's a bridge camera worth looking at!

Superzooms

The reason I have separated Superzooms is because comparing them to the likes of an RX10 isn't apples with apples, due to the different sensor sizes. The Bridge cameras have more of a focus on image



One of Emil's favourite photos that exemplifies the strengths of the RX10. Live animal photography in the bush demands a lot of a camera. The RX10 performs very well.

Willie comparing the Spottercam to the P1000, you can see one of the limitations of the P1000 in that it places a lot of strain on the tripod ball head with that big lens hanging out the front, while the spotter is mounted in the middle. Using a balance rail or offset tripod plate will help this.



quality, so use the 1" sensor. Superzooms, as the name suggests, are biased toward zoom. To keep cost, weight and bulk reasonable they have to use a smaller sensor. As I mentioned in the introduction, as your sensor size goes up, you need correspondingly larger lenses to focus the light back to the bigger sensor. The four contenders in the superzoom category, the Nikon P1000, Nikon P950, Canon SX70 and the Panasonic FZ80 all use the smaller 1/2.3" sensor. The 1" sensor has over four times the surface area of these little sensors, which means better image quality, less noise and better low-light performance.

The P1000 trumps all other superzooms, both Emil and I own one. The 3,000mm lens is completely unmatched anywhere in the camera world but it does come at a cost –

weight. While it has the biggest zoom of any superzoom, beating the nearest competitor by 50%, it weighs nearly 1.5kg and it is big. However, this is the only camera that can truly come anywhere close to replacing a spotting scope (we'll touch on that later) so you are potentially saving the weight of a spotting scope and only costing the bank around \$1,600. But if you're serious about good photos the weight won't worry you too much, I carry a P1000, a full-frame Z6 DSLR and on tahr trips, a spotter as well!

Next up on my list, the P950 (replacement for the P900). It has the exact same specs as the P1000. Same sensor, raw photos, EVF resolution etc, but packaged in a slightly smaller body and considerably smaller lens. As far as I can tell that whole extra 400 grams in the P1000 is all lens. The P590 is a much more



P1000

Here is the first comparison between spotter and P1000. A well-lit scene at approximately 500 yards. You'll notice the P1000 has slightly more magnification and more importantly, a richer, sharper image. This advantage doesn't transfer to video unfortunately



SPOTTER

manageable package and still gives you a whopping 2000mm lens whilst saving about \$400 and 400 grams on the p1000.

The Canon SX70 has the next biggest zoom, with a 1365mm lens attached, but is only capable of f/3.4-6.5. It also has the highest resolution sensor at 21MP, though it's still the same size as the others. It is considerably lighter than the previous options at 600g and more compact as well. This camera does provide raw photos too, so with the weight and cost savings (usually around \$900 rrp) I can see why people lean toward this over the P950 on paper, but having worked with the photos from both, I would recommend people toward the P950 – the extra zoom and aperture is worth the weight and cost.

The final option worth considering

is the Panasonic FZ82. It has a 1200mm lens, and 18MP sensor and weighs in at 600 grams – all for around \$500. It also shoots in RAW and keeps an aperture of f2.8-5.0 but lacks a few technical features like an eye sensor for automatically switching over to the EVF when you look through it.

Willie: As Luke touched on, the video recording quality of the superzoom cameras like the Nikon P1000 are a slight step back from the RX10 IV and other bridge cameras. They are still capable of producing 4K footage but with the smaller sensor, slower lens, and less recording options, priority has definitely been placed on maximising zoom over being the best all-in-one video camera. It really comes down to what your intended use is. If you're planning on editing

clips together of your trips and place importance on video quality, go for the RX10, but if you're simply wanting to film animals to evaluate them better or share with your mates, the P1000 or P950 is probably the best bet.

Spotter/Superzoom shootout

This old chestnut - can you use your superzoom camera instead of a spotting scope? Before the P1000 came on the scene the answer was an emphatic no. Not if you're serious about evaluating tricky species like tahr and chamois. Yes, it was a more affordable and lightweight option, but if you were really serious about it a quality spotting scope easily trumps a P950. But the introduction of the P1000 has made things less clear-cut so let's weigh up a Nikon P1000, the best of the superzooms, vs a Swarovski ATS 65m spotting scope (combined with a Samsung S10), an ideal choice for a mountain hunter.

SPEED

The first point goes to the P1000, its speed into action is far superior to the spotter for a first glimpse or indication of an animal. These cameras have incredible image stabilization, you can just freehand or rest it on your leg and take a quick photo at max zoom. This way you can be glassing as you walk and not have to take off your pack to get tripod and spotter out just to confirm if that distant speck is actually a tahr. You will however need a tripod for really low light conditions or to get the perfect, steady image, and this can be quite cumbersome with the fully extended front-heavy lens, which requires a very rigid tripod and ball head/plate setup.

The P1000 is also quicker to set up on the tripod. With the P1000 you just have to slide the plate in and tighten it. With the spotter you have the extra step of attaching the phonescope adapter. It's not a huge delay once you get good at it, but when you're taking it on and off 50 times a day, it can get tedious. The P1000 isn't at as much of an advantage as it sounds though, it takes some time to zoom in on your target and as mentioned above, all that heavy glass out the front makes it more cumbersome on the tripod so a time trial wouldn't show a whole lot of difference between the two.

AFFORDABILITY

A P1000 is more affordable than any spotter worth comparing it to. The side effect of this is that hopefully more hunters will buy at least a P1000. These

are people who wouldn't have even contemplated buying a spotter because of the cost. This hopefully means more people are evaluating animals properly and our game herds will be all the better for it.

RELIABILITY

A spotter easily comes out on top here. They are built much more robustly, and they're more water resistant simply because they don't need to allow ports for charging, batteries, headphones etc. Also there is the simple fact that your spotter can't run out of batteries!

OPTICS

The optics of a P1000 and a quality 65mm spotter are relatively comparable to the naked eye during daytime and most people probably won't notice a major difference until low light situations (e.g morning and evening hunts) where the spotter comes out far superior. This is largely a result of lens size and quality, hence the price difference. A 20-60x 65mm Swarovski spotter utilizes Swarovision technology, which matched with a human eye provides more resolution and light transmission than the small sensor and smaller, lower quality optics on the P1000. Swarovski lenses are at the forefront of optical technology and have to be given the price point they compete at. The spotting scope benefits from the Swarovision system which includes fluorite HD glass, aspherical field flattening lens technology and lens coatings like Swarotop and Swarodur. In saying this, the photo image quality from a spotter (once taken via smart phone) is slightly inferior and lacks a little detail compared to that taken on a P1000 (shown in our photo comparison). But when you remove the phoneskope and use just your eye to evaluate animals, the spotter definitely comes out on top. A spotter paired with a sharp human eye is the best method for evaluation on the hoof and discerning the millimeter scale features like tahr age rings and this is why they are so popular with trophy hunters. The gap only widens as you use a bigger spotting scope with better light-gathering like the big Swaro 95mm.

A further benefit of the spotting scope and smartphone setup is it provides you with a better screen to watch and an easier to use interface, along with a range of great playback features – the ability to zoom in, slow down kill shots to check for the point of impact etc.

Willie: From a filming perspective, I'm a believer a spotting scope with a smartphone setup will better a superzoom camera on video quality

VIDEO

P1000

Here are two frames from video taken on the P1000 and Spotter. It's hard to show the difference with screenshots in the magazine as opposed to looking at the video, but the spotter/phone combo has the advantage here as it can film in 4k 60f while the P1000 is restricted to 4k 25f and the phone has a higher bitrate. The P1000 also tends to have more motion blur when it gets darker

SPOTTER

(mostly for the reasons Luke outlined above). Our recent one-off side by side comparison suggested the spotter cam setup had an edge video wise over the P1000 but I think a lot of variables can play a major part here – lighting conditions, distance to the animal, quality of spotter cam setup, and smartphone video specs are some obvious ones. The 4K/30fps resolution would be the pick of the P1000 video recording settings as it unfortunately doesn't offer a high frame rate option like the 1080p/120fps of the RX10. A bonus of the spotter cam or phoneskope setups is that smartphones are continually improving and being upgraded almost every year. The latest Samsung S21 records an incredible 8K/24fps, and a very useful 4K/60fps, which is what we film most of our animal footage in for the TV show as it allows us to slow the speed/playback of the footage by over half before losing quality.

It always amazes me just how good the spotter cam footage can look if captured in the right conditions once played back on the TV show amongst all our professional cameras!

There you go - spotter or P1000?

It's not as clear cut as it once was; for affordable image quality and speed of use – the P1000. For the best video quality and evaluation – the spotting scope.

If you are serious about hunting mature trophy animals and managing our herds to the best of your ability, a high quality spotting scope comes out on top. But either way, if you're alpine hunting and/or shooting at long ranges I highly recommend you invest in one of them. I can't preach to anyone that you have to spend several thousand dollars to enjoy our sport, I just ask that if you can't justify the cost of either make sure you get up close and personal so you can be sure of what you're shooting at.



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Kyle Brown - 'I found a bachelor group of tahr and was able to sneak in pretty close to a few of them. This guy must have spotted me'

WINNER



Alex Miller got this awesome shot of a mob of stags

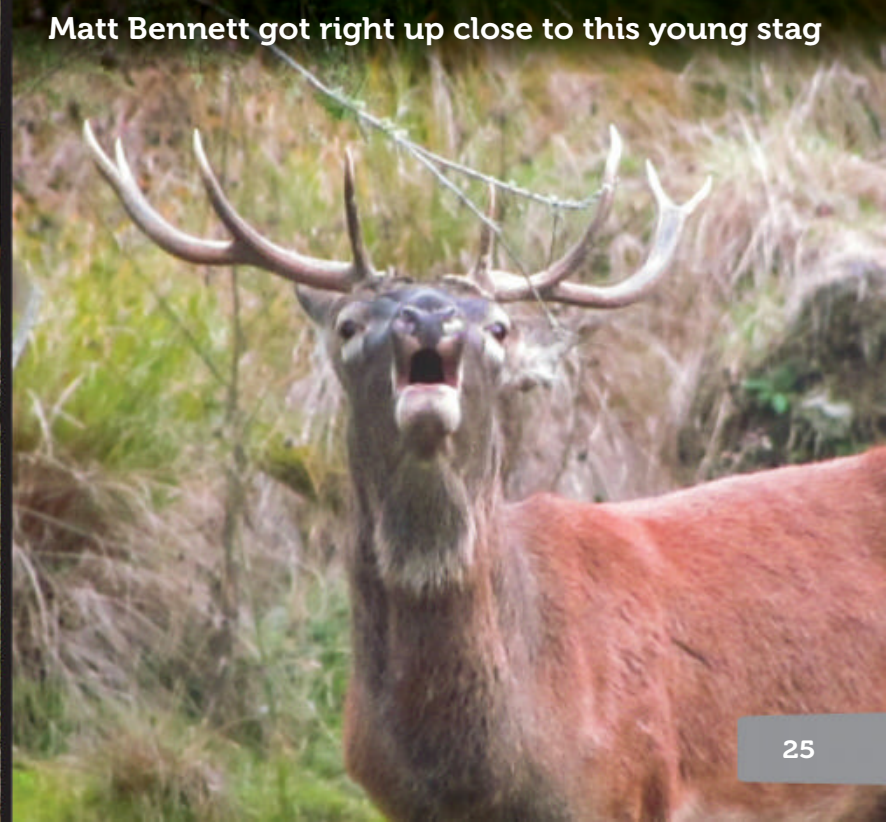


Steve Nickson caught these two on his trail camera



John Lumsden surprised this Sika stag

Shona Godfrey stalked in on this spiker in the Tararuas on a recent overnighter



Matt Bennett got right up close to this young stag

Antlers Among THE SNOWGRASS

WRITTEN BY ~ LOGAN TAYLOR

Covid 19 and lockdown had put paid to our plans to hunt stag in our beloved mountains, but my partner and I had used the opportunity to fit in some heavy backpack training and maintain a reasonable level of fitness

Level 2 arrived and we were able to hunt DOC land once more, so seizing the opportunity of a two day gap in our commitments, we set off on an overnight trip into the mountains.

We left early in the morning hoping to get to the bushline by first light. It was a smooth walk in and a dream to be back amongst the beech trees once more. A few more hours of effort and we were up amongst it, binos out and glassing. A very fresh northwest wind came up, which was in our favour. We spotted four hinds and yearlings across the valley feeding out of the wind, 100 metres

from the bushline. I have found that May is the best time to see and hunt stags when they are never far away from the hinds. **Towards winter they break away and are harder to locate.** Having spotted the hinds, we thoroughly inspected the area to see if a stag was nearby. There he was, 200 meters away up the face.

He looked as though he had some age and wide lengthy antler, but we couldn't count coat hangers from our position, a kilometre, if not more, away. We sidled around the hill to get a better look at him. **Then suddenly, the hinds disappeared back into the beech trees, with him in tow.** It was very disappointing to have had him our sights for such a short time, but there was still the whole headbasin and the folds on our

ridgeline to glass. Almost immediately, on our side of the headbasin, I spotted dark, long antlers amongst the snow grass. I knew it was a good stag but at 1500 metres away it was hard to determine how good he might be. We needed a game plan to get closer.

He was sitting under a steep, bluffy part of the hill and was going to be out of sight until we were right on top of him.

The wind was in our favour and it was now late morning. He was 500 metres from the bushline and settling for the afternoon. Everything was going our way – a rare occurrence when hunting big stags. Leaving our camping gear to travel with only the essentials we started up the main razorback ridge. Enjoying the thrill of closing the gap, we took our time and saw a few young stags on the way.

They were down another face so we weren't concerned about spooking them. With fingers crossed that he might still be bedded down we carried on and found ourselves at a steep, rocky part of the hill that might give us a view point, if not a shooting spot. Very slowly I poked my head around the rock for a brief few seconds and saw him, still lying down at 179 metres. I was blown away by the sheer size of him, let alone his antlers. He was bigger than we had first thought. I moved my head slowly back behind the rock and said to my partner, heart pounding with excitement, *"S**t, he's got like 20 points!"*

I managed to get a photo of him from there, but it was too steep to take a shot. We had to get closer to a little flat spot that I thought would be a good, solid shooting point, so crawled back



Our view of the big boy from 179m

and down a wee chute, out of sight. Excitement, adrenaline, and all the good emotions were flowing. Reaching the shooting point I managed to slide through the snow grass to range him now at 139 metres. There was a hind and yearling close by, and all three animals were looking downhill. **I was just getting set up when he looked directly up at me.** For a moment I thought he would up and bolt but I had the crosshairs on him, so took the shot and nailed him clean. I had managed to control the adrenaline until that point, but the thrill was overwhelming. We were both buzzing as we made

our way down to him.

Up close, we were in awe of such a beautiful 15-point stag in his prime. We sat with him, in his basin, enjoying the moment for a while, knowing these moments don't come often. **Retrieving our discarded bags, we returned to the bushline, set up camp and reflected on the day's adventure.**



An awesome stag to get with my partner Josi beside me



A beautiful 15 point stag in his prime



Packing down off the tops

How to Kill a Wapiti

WRITTEN BY ~ ROY SLOAN

A few years back I was sitting beside the one and only Jack McKenzie. He was then in his early eighties and the most experienced Wapiti battler of the day.

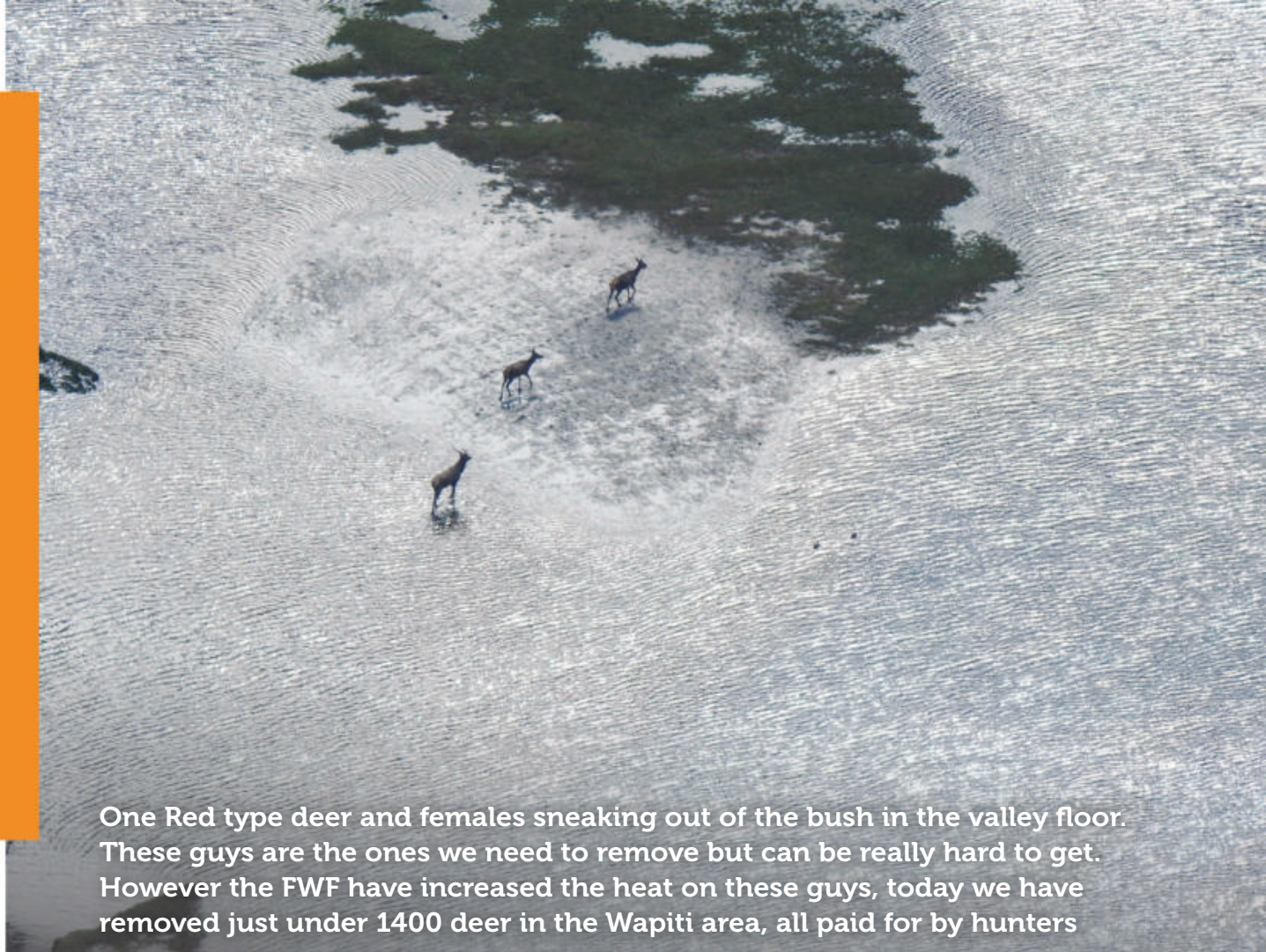
I had just been told in no uncertain terms by the Minister of Conservation to please take the pressure off the Government until we sort this Wapiti business out, this was around 2002.

Jack had said, *"sometimes there are casualties in war"*. The younger me liked this man. I had learnt a lot from Jack - he was old school, and although he thought my approach to managing the Wapiti area was WAY left field he also understood that the old ways were no longer working and people had become predictable.

Not long after, Jack sent me a hand-written letter saying that it was time he stepped aside. He said that he was willing to support our new approach in trying to achieve management of the Wapiti. But his key message and one that has stuck with me is best described in his own words. *"I will give you some advice. Every hunter who hunts the Wapiti is obligated to do their utmost to ensure this herd has a future. In the past we have let ourselves down and allowed our differing opinions to get in the way of our goal which should be managing the Wapiti herd."* Those were very wise words from Jack and I suspect that folk involved with the Wapiti program prior to Jack would give the same advice. I have an old minute book from the 1940s or 50s and it's obvious that most of the reoccurring issues are created by people about people, not managing the Wapiti and the Wapiti area. Managing the deer is relatively simple, but so much effort and unmeasurable energy goes into the social side. Personalities, egos and misinformation are the quickest ways to kill a Wapiti.

We need to find solutions to our problems without airing our dirty laundry in public. Social media is a great tool, but used in the wrong manner creates havoc, as it did this year for the Wapiti Foundation. I must say I have never been so embarrassed to say I was a hunter. One upset hunter, through no fault of the FWF, placed his side of the story online. It created such a negative feeding frenzy that we had to place it in the hands of the police.

Come on team - we are better than that. This man had a moment of interaction with the FWF and judged them on that basis. Even the All Blacks lose a game now and again. I often wonder what sort of credentials you need to have to stick



One Red type deer and females sneaking out of the bush in the valley floor. These guys are the ones we need to remove but can be really hard to get. However the FWF have increased the heat on these guys, today we have removed just under 1400 deer in the Wapiti area, all paid for by hunters

your head up above the ridge and run a program such as the Wapiti program. I would like to think we are visionaries but maybe we are lunatics.

The FWF do a hell of a job and have achieved unprecedented outcomes not accomplished by any other hunting group. We may not agree on everything the Wapiti Foundation do, but undoubtedly hunters enjoy the fruits of the Foundation's labour. In a nutshell, this success has become the main problem for the FWF. There are more opportunities in the Wapiti area, trophies are getting bigger, and the area has been sold as the last big adventure in New Zealand. Greed is leading to frustration. Let's hope the Wapiti area doesn't end up another "garden of Eden" where someone eats the apple.

The Wapiti team has a significantly large workload. Much of the work is hands-on and the simple things, or boring but important tasks can get put to the bottom of the "to do list". One of those tasks is a review of our ballot system and our ballot rules. There are two key areas that have always created problems and lead to allegations of wrongdoing, the balloting system and the cancellation lists. We have now begun to review these processes.

THE BALLOT:

We are reviewing the ballot process, including the online ballot system itself. It is purely an IT review, as lottery ballots like the Wapiti system are purpose built and hard to perfect. Complications arise as a result of the number of variables required, (party numbers, block choices and so on) and the complicated

underlying coding necessary to handle these choices. Our predecessors have not made this easy for us. It would be simple if it was like Lotto, with one person per application, and each application can only ballot for the entire 75 options- you get what you get.

THE CANCELLATION LISTS:

The purpose of the list has been to manage the ballots/hunters that withdraw and to give hunters more opportunities, rather than let blocks sit empty. There are many issues with the cancellation list, and in fact, more time and energy are spent on allocating the list than is spent on the rest of the ballot. Again, like the ballot, allocating these cancellations is difficult. There are 101 variations, such as the application must match the block cancelled, have the same number of hunters and be for the same period. More often than not, when the hunter is contacted they have made alternative plans so the FWF starts the process again and again. It ends up a thankless, tedious, time wasting process and would test a saint's patience. The closer we get to the beginning of the ballot periods the more difficult it becomes to find people to fill the spots.

We are discussing the abolition of the cancellation list to streamline the ballot process. Regardless of whether we have a list or not there will always be blocks cancelled and the FWF need to find a solution to manage it. Without a list we increase in the number of times the ballot is drawn and redrawn, in effect becoming a cancellation list in all but name.



Normally we don't see the big guys while doing recovery however for some reason this year we have seen more large bulls in the open than ever before. This big guy shot this year was not one of them though

It could work like this;

1. An initial electronic (IE) ballot draw. Hunters have 30 days to decline or accept.

2. Cancelled blocks go back into IE ballot draw and get redrawn. Hunters have five days to decline or accept.

3. Repeat step #2 every two weeks until all blocks have been accepted or until 15 days prior to the first period.

4. 15 days out: If there are any blocks handed back after being initially accepted, we then offer them (by email) to the people who have paid and entered the initial ballot. On a strictly first in first served basis.

5. 10 days out: Any blocks handed back within 10 days of the first period will be allocated by the Wapiti committee at their own discretion.

Currently we end up with several blocks empty each year. We anticipate that the 5 point plan would give a better structured and more automated system and would do much better at avoiding empty blocks.

However, this will be a decision for the committee. The 2022 Wapiti ballot has been delayed due this ballot review and will be made available to the public on the 1st of October 2021.

The ballot is only one aspect of work done by the FWF, so what else has the team been up to?

DEER MANAGEMENT:

Without a doubt, the most important thing that the FWF do is to manage deer numbers. There is good evidence that Wapiti trophies are improving. I have not seen all the returns from this year's ballot, but I see a bull shot this year was just a tad under 50 inches and you may

have seen the photos I used in my last article.

So why is the herd improving so quickly? I think it's simple – food, food, food. Additionally, we are managing the animals for quality as best we can so I'm sure it's a combination of factors. I have been doing this for 20 years and I am still amazed when I see and recognise young average deer in overpopulated areas that then develop into an above average deer when the competition is removed.

Deer recovery was stopped because of Covid 19. Socially, and I think morally, the right thing for us to do is recover and process the animals that we are shooting. But on the other hand, the FWF are responsible for deer control in Fiordland and managing the effects they have on the ecosystem, so culling is the only tool left in the tool box. Personally, I find culling a real emotional roller coaster. Prior to the flights I have sleepless nights about the wasteful killing. I hate it, but if we want to manage deer in New Zealand, we need to put our big boy or girl pants on and get on with it. As hunters we will always be judged by our action and not our words.

I often wonder if the people who say that, "all introduced animals must be removed from New Zealand" would still say it if it was them who had to get the blood on their hands. It is not a glamorous activity.

Rather than dwell on the negative aspect of the recovery industry we decided to look at the opportunities. Numbers of deer shot via recovery is governed by the amount of deer the processing plant can take. However, managing deer numbers is a fickle game - one day we could fly for four hours and see 20 deer and take them all to the chiller, and next time out we could see 50 deer and not be able to shoot them all. Culling presents more

Recovery, Lugal Burn tops at the end of May. It almost looks fun when the weather is like this



opportunities to manage deer numbers, not affected by recovery restrictions or the process plant.

For the 20/21 season we set the largest target we have ever set of 1400 deer. Currently we have reached 1390 shot and cost of the program has been funded by recreational hunters. This is something Wapiti hunters should be proud of. The herd will really benefit from this cull – food, food, food is the best way to save a Wapiti.

PREDATOR CONTROL PROGRAM:

The team has been flat out tidying up the trap lines for the end of the season. These predator lines are working well. All our trapping areas are important but in particular, the Nitz has a very special ecosystem and the native wildlife in the area seem to be doing well. We are starting to hear kiwi where we haven't heard them before, plus all sorts of other birds. Currently we are working on a proposal to increase the trapping/predator control in the Nitz. The team is really excited about this as it is a unique and remarkable place.

The Covid 19 effect hasn't only damaged the deer market but, as we know, also created carnage in the tourism industry. This has had irreversible effects for

Te Anau and the FWF as 90% of foundation sponsorship comes from this industry. The FWF had to cover the costs to keep the predator control program going. That is not ideal but, just as with the animal control program, contingencies were in place. As with most projects, it's times like these that test planning and systems and so far, they are holding up very well.

HUTS:

Finally, we have the almost 100-year-old Hankinson hut restored back to near its original state. The team already have their sights on the second hut, the Caswell Sound Hut, which is also an historical hut. DOC and the FWF have completed an assessment on this hut, prior to planning and action.

The above projects are but a fragment of the work undertaken by the FWF. You can only imagine the number of meetings we



Our predator control line are designed to protect these guys, however we are finding that all birds in these areas are getting some benefits out of the program

need to attend to make it all happen.

I want you to focus on the positive, and to hopefully make people understand that negativity is like a plague – it has amazed me how one person's uninformed opinion created so much work for the team.

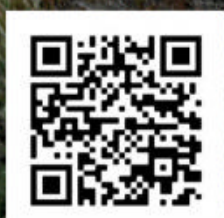
If we want to manage our hunting in New Zealand, we need to have credibility. If you want to kill a Wapiti, Tahr, Sika or any of our other game animal species the quickest way to do this is put your own self-interest first and drag negativity into the mix.

Our goal as hunters should be our environment and our game Get the mix right and we will all reap the rewards.



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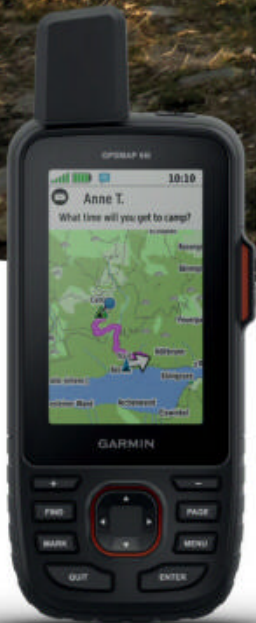
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WRITTEN BY ~ HANNAH RAE

Hunting Feels Good

Of course hunting is good for us - but why?

We all know the feeling of needing to “get some fresh air” or put on our pack and “blow off some steam”. It was highlighted for us last year when lockdown left the hunting population of NZ trapped like ill-tempered rats stuck in our respective cages. The fact that the Red stag roar and the Wapiti ballots were about to kick off served to truly exacerbate the issue.

Every one of us says *“hunting is good for me”*. We know it intuitively, we know we feel good being out in the hills - stretching the legs, breaking a sweat, seeing animals amongst fantastic scenery, and soaking up some vitamin D. But what is it exactly that makes it so good for us?

I went another round with a case of cabin fever earlier this year, suffering a broken foot in February. This, plus the lingering ligament damage, kept me out of action for so long it put my own sanity, and the sanity of those around me, in jeopardy. **Thus, with a lot more time on my hands I began to explore how hunting supports our mental wellbeing, and why it feels so tragic when the option of getting out in the hills is stripped away from us.**

Exercise, and the feel-good endorphins produced as a result, is the most obvious

factor. **But as I scratched beyond the surface I discovered there’s a lot more to it than that.** I came to realise that what I missed the most was the type of “realignment” that comes from being out in wild places. The way society is constructed and the way we live today, we are very much removed from the natural rhythm of life, with light, food, heat, and entertainment all available at our fingertips. I needed, and had come to rely on, hunting adventures to remind me not to take these things for granted.

Digging into the science produced some more answers as to why spending time in the great outdoors is good for us, our mental wellbeing in particular. I also spoke with Tui Keenan of ‘Hunting with Tui’, and Willie Duley of ‘NZ Hunter Adventures’, to glean insight from their hunting experiences.

The use of the natural world as a healing tool is growing in popularity throughout the globe. In Scandinavia the concept of forest schools has been embedded for several decades. The Japanese have re-invigorated the idea of forest bathing, with parts of the Western world subsequently jumping on that bandwagon, and ecotherapy centres have been established in the rolling green hills of Scotland. Time in the outdoors has become part of some prescribed therapy for PTSD, and Nature Deficit Disorder has been identified as one of the latest maladies of the increasingly indoor-bound human race.

We’ve all seen the headlines touting the benefits of sunshine and fresh air. And we know that even just bringing a nature scene to mind - a stream trickling through a beech forest, tussock-laden open ridgetops, or crashing waves and salty ocean air - our breathing deepens, shoulders relax, and we can feel a little more at ease. The science behind the relationship between our wellbeing and spending time outdoors offers a heavy hitting list of benefits: it lowers blood pressure and resting heart rate, reduces muscle tension and the production of stress hormones, it improves memory, calms our nervous system, enhances our



Tui Mārama-Keenan

NATURE & NGAHERE AS THERAPY

It turns out the importance of the outdoors and the ngahere had come into Tui's awareness

immune system, and lifts our mood. If someone put all of that in a single pill there's no arguing that every one of us would be scrambling for it.

Even relatively small 'doses' have a great effect. Research shows that people who spend 120 minutes per week in nature, spaced out or all at once, are "substantially more likely to report good health and psychological well-being than those who don't." It also demonstrated that two hours was a pretty strict boundary, anything less than that showed minimal benefit. This indicates to me that perhaps it should no longer be considered a leisure activity or luxury, and instead be promoted as essential to our humanity. No wonder it felt like the sky was falling when simply getting to the mailbox was tricky during my first weeks on crutches!

in recent months too. For her, the pre-game to just going on a day hunt can be stressful - making sure work priorities are taken care of, getting home life (husband and five daughters!) organised, gear packed, and the rush of an early morning. When we have opportunities like this to get some fresh air and clear the mind, we don't want to be spending half the time worrying about things that concern our home or work life. Tui shared an idea for fast-tracking the process of switching our brain off, a ritual she has adopted courtesy of Sam the trap man. **She suggests that taking a moment to wash our hands in the first water source we come to, and even splashing the water over our face, serves as a trigger to reset.** It can also be an acknowledgement, a practise in gratitude, as we enter nature.

I tried this myself on a recent overnight

trip - there was a thigh-deep river crossing first up. While I was too chicken to inflict brain freeze with an icy water face splash, I did dip my fingers in the river and hope that the glacial-fed current was enough to wash away everything weighing on my mind.

Since her introduction to hunting several years ago, Tui has come to realise she relies on the ngahere as a form of therapy. ***"It's teaching me that I can be present, and I can be calm in my busy environment. Now I know that it is possible."*** She makes an interesting point from her own experience that I'm sure can be applied almost universally. We make an effort to get ourselves physically fit for hunting by doing some form of regular training, yet we do nothing regularly to improve our minds. ***"There's something wrong with that equation,"*** she said.

In the modern world we are encouraged to look for the fastest solution, the tick-box criteria to meet, or process to complete in order to "fix" ourselves. But the outdoors works on a totally different level to clinical mental support, and it can be an important and free tool to help with whatever is going on in our lives. From Tui's experience it seems we don't really need to 'do' anything, just 'be' out there, become immersed in the experience, and let nature do the rest.

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PERSPECTIVE & RESILIENCE

I had a feeling Willie would have an interesting take on the relationship hunters have with the outdoors, especially given his extensive experience and the fact that his job is intertwined with it. He didn't disappoint.

Willie's theory on life is that we all need something to live for, a passion to work for during the week. But is hunting still as good for you when it is your job? He admits that on a filming trip he's unable to completely switch off. Whether it's managing a group and route, planning video shots, thinking about storyline, there will always be something on his mind. He's learned to deeply relish those times when the cameras are off and to intentionally enjoy the moment. That said, he's still certain the benefits far outweigh the cost.

There are two themes that arose from my conversation with Willie about how hunting supports our mental wellbeing, the first being perspective. He highlights how it removes us from our day-to-day routine and its associated stress, by forcing us to focus on what actually matters at any given moment - whether that's looking for an animal, climbing that next hill, or

finding shelter before the rain sets in. As Willie said, *"The weather doesn't care about all those emails you're supposed to send."* It gives us the opportunity to give our minds a break from all the little things we fret about at home, and remind ourselves what factors are actually critical to our fulfilment and survival. He has also come to enjoy and appreciate the downtime, especially during summer. *"You can actually talk about stuff with your mates - family, relationships, life, dreams. You might not solve anything but it's always good to get it off your chest."*

The second theme is resilience.

Often in hunting we put ourselves through a certain element of suffering - tackling a big climb with our heavy pack, navigating challenging terrain, and enduring atrocious weather conditions - colloquially known as type-2 fun. Willie recognises that in order to keep pushing onwards, to continue putting one foot in front of the other, we are pushing mental barriers all the time. This builds resilience. It's the same resilience that we can then use when we encounter challenges in our normal lives, things like stressful work projects, relationship struggles, the chaos of a pandemic, financial instability and illness.

As my injury heals and I'm on track to being 100% operational again, I've been trying to get out into wild-ish places for my recommended weekly dose of nature. It started with a brew by the lake and long drives up river flats to glass; now it's short, mildly adventurous outings, and soon I'll be back in the real backcountry again. It's great to be armed with the knowledge and awareness of all the benefits that come from spending time outside - being present, absorbing nature's inherent healing, gaining perspective, and building resilience. The challenge is how can we maximise these benefits, and more importantly, bring them back with us into our everyday lives? I'm still figuring out what that looks like for me. **But I'd also like to see you take on this challenge for yourself; as well as meat, stinky gear, or a trophy head, what are you going to bring home from your next hunting trip?**





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WRITTEN BY ANDREW MARTIN | ROARSOME HUNTING

WINTER CHAMOIS

With the lockdown events and unable to hunt the roar last year behind us, we were very excited to be heading south on another West Coast hunt

It's always an exciting adventure but this time there was a special level of anticipation. Accompanying me to hunt the elusive chamois was Tim, my right-hand man, and Matt, my brother, who was on his first trip.

We had been into this wider area almost a dozen times previously and had been lucky enough to have taken both tahr and chamois on most of them. **This time we had decided on a spot on a terrace just above a river, focusing our attention on chamois.** On previous trips we had gone in on foot, but now that we knew chamois were always about, dropping in amongst them

would put us in close. Well, so we hoped. The West Coast weather that morning wasn't as we had hoped for, with howling winds that delayed our fly-in for a day; disappointing, but out of our control. We found accommodation and chilled out for the day, knowing an improvement was forecast and set to stay that way for at least a few days.

The next morning, we were at the hanger

bright and early and were the first group to be dropped in. An excellent flight over some of the country we were to be hunting that week had us all pretty excited. **Upon landing and watching the chopper disappear we wasted no time in setting up our basecamp and making plans for that day's hunting.** The lads and I headed upriver for a while then Tim and Matt branched off up a side creek where Tim had shot his first chamois a few years previous. I carried on up around another bend in the main river and took a leading ridge to gain some height. After a couple of hours, I reached a great vantage point and opted to park up and relax in the warm sun for the next few hours, using my binos to glass the stunning tussock valley. **It's hard to beat being high in the alpine mountains, sitting and glassing in such a beautiful country.** I always enjoy those



Matt's first buck, and a goodie at 9^{3/4}"



Matt's buck on the hoof

special moments.

Getting back to business I soon spied a lone chamois, seemingly a young buck, only 300 metres across from me. Encouraged by a positive start I then saw a larger group in the head of another basin - six animals and expanding to at least 11 animals as the afternoon wore on. **There was just one decent buck amongst them that offered any promise.** However, the day was getting on so I made my way back and met up with the other boys at the river. They were two happy hunters - my brother with a beautiful chamois skin and a nice set of horns around the 9 3/4 mark in length and they filled me in on the hunt as we made our way back to camp. They had made their way upriver and sat on a ledge glassing further upstream and it hadn't taken them long to spot the chamois. They got some fantastic photos and

decided it would be a great shooter for Matt to take as his first chamois. A nice shot at about 225 metres had him dead on the spot.

The news certainly had us in great spirits on the first hunt of the trip and we enjoyed a good hot dinner and a few beers in the warmth of the MIA tent, anticipating some excellent hunting the next day. But we woke to unexpected rain so spent the morning lazing about in front of the fire playing cards and relaxing. It cleared a little in the afternoon so we ventured out for a scout about, fog preventing any glassing.

Up early with clear weather and bellies full of food we had decided on a whole day of solo hunting to try to cover some ground and glass potential animals for the upcoming days. I opted to head back to my spot

of the first afternoon. I soon spotted chamois a long way off, but, as Tim and I had already discussed, a couple of nights fly camping in the general area would be worth our efforts. **As I headed back towards camp mid-afternoon, taking my time and glassing high, the lack of tahr numbers was very noticeable.** In previous years we had seen good numbers, and where I should have been watching magnificent bulls cruising the skyline, I was yet to spot even a single tahr. Back in camp, the other lads had similar stories of seeing a few animals at distance, but not the groups and not the potential bucks that I had seen. They did see one nice bull tahr but he gave them the slip.

Next morning, we were on the hoof and prepared for two nights away fly camping, heading upriver and excited with the potential of the day. Walking upriver for



Matt and Tim
having smoko



A cracking view to
wake up to



My chamois, just
under the 10" mark

four hours and with the occasional crossing we reached the side creek and the stunning vista of a huge open valley appeared before us. **We set up camp and carried on up the valley to get into glassing.** In no time a chamois was spotted around a bend in the creek feeding amongst some flax. He looked like a younger buck sporting a set of horns of about eight inches. At one stage he was only about 100 metres from us before he disappeared into the scrub.

Carrying on up we climbed onto a vantage point and immediately picked up on a large mob of chamois, near to where I had seen them earlier in the week. There were also a few smaller groups of two or three animals so it was very exciting. Some appeared to be around that nine to ten-inch mark but they were a good distance away and retrieval could have been tricky. **While discussing our positioning options we spotted a lone buck staring straight at us at 200 metres.** He was on the other side of the creek and the consensus was that he would be very close to the magic ten. In a flash, he dropped down into the creek and out of sight, but we had the feeling he was coming in.

Sure enough, he reappeared on our side of the creek, staring at us once more. It was clear he was rutting and very interested to see what we were. Over a ten-minute period he came closer and closer until he was only 20 metres from us. With Tim on the camera and me on the rifle, we muttered in a whisper **"yup, we thought he was a shooter."** I sent a pill his way and down he went, crashing into the creek below us. High fives all round and a recap of what just happened. It certainly was an awesome sight to have had him coming on into us and getting so close. The shot had unsettled the other groups but they didn't disappear, just became more alert and gained more height and cover.

As we made our way down we could see that he had fallen into a deep pool so I had to lose a bit of gear and wade in. It was a magic moment to grab the animal by the horns for the first time and realise he was a good respectable buck. Dragging him out of the water as darkness fell and setting up for a photo, we were all very happy. A quick run over with the tape confirmed him at a fraction under 10 inch but with great solid bases and an awesome coat. Tim and I quickly head skinned him out as I had a mate after a cape. Meat loaded, we made our way down to camp under the headlight. A quick easy meal on the jet boil and into the scratcher. It was a cold old night on the hill with a crystal clear evening and frosty conditions.

We were all keen to get back up there next morning and see what animals were still about. Chamois were there but higher up and with a sense of being more alert. As the morning dragged on the animals disappeared and bedded down. We spotted a doe below us and in a very handy position on the way back to camp and as Tim wanted a skin and some



meat he wasted no time in putting her on the ground. A nice animal, in prime condition, that gave Tim a great skin and us both loaded daypacks. It was apparent that the area was now a little spooked so the call was made to pack up and head back to our main camp down river.

With full packs and a great sense of achievement, we made our way down, reliving the excitement of past couple of days. Camp was a very welcome sight, as we were all exhausted and happy to be back into the MIA tent. Sitting in front of the fire and after a hot meal, playing cards with a port in hand, we really couldn't have been much happier. We had one more day before we were due to fly out and it started with

Happy hunters at the end of the trip



a sleep-in and the leisurely cleaning of skulls and sorting. With that done and the weather still nice there was time for one last afternoon hunt up the nearby creeks. A couple more chamois were spotted at a distance and we even spooked a big bull tahr in some tight scrub. It was the first bull I'd seen on the whole trip. The musty smell gave him away first - we all stopped in our tracks knowing what that was - and then like a train he was mid-air down a steep bank in front of us. No shots were fired but an impressive sight for sure.

Returning into camp just before dark we enjoyed some chamois steak and the last of our food rations talking long into the night. A fantastic trip with many, many highlights, and a great introduction to alpine hunting the elusive chamois for Matt. A chopper arrived fairly early the next morning and we were back to civilization. heading straight to Greymouth for KFC. **Bring on the next great adventure lads, wherever that may be.**





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THE HERRICK CONNECTION AND THE MYSTERY OF MOOSE LAKE

WRITTEN BY ~ ALEX GALE

This sounds like the title of an exciting, drama filled-novel, doesn't it?

Instead, it's the compelling story of two identical twins, two Fiordland moose heads and a trip back to historical roots.

As with many trips, this one began with a phone call, but a most unexpected one, I must admit. It was a call from my old dentist in Taupo, Chris Casswell, and she wasn't calling to ask about the present state of my teeth. In the past, in my old meat-hunting days in Fiordland, I'd neglected them with the carelessness of youth and paid the price in more ways than one. I always felt a bit guilty when I visited her, over my teeth and the impending state of my bank account.

The call was good news - not some miracle cure for failing teeth, but the invitation to take her two grandchildren, Eddie and Jono, identical 16 year old twins, into Herrick Creek, in Wet Jacket Arm,

south-west Fiordland, for five days in late January. The connection between them and Herrick Creek? Well, Herrick Creek was named after Eddie Herrick, who shot one of his two trophy bull moose there in 1934. Considering only three bull moose in total were shot in NZ, this was no mean feat. He shot the other up the Seaforth River in 1929. The young men are Eddie Herrick's great-great-grandsons and they wanted to go to the places where their famous forbear had inscribed his name into the annals of New Zealand hunting history. I'd already been to Herrick Creek with my son Tim, in our first visit to Dusky in 2011, when we began our search for the remaining Fiordland moose. I always say it's the 'holy ground' of hunting in New Zealand. It's a very special place.

'Was I interested?' Chris wanted to know.

Was I interested? You bet I was! I never need a second invitation to go into Fiordland and besides, it might provide an opportunity to check my trail cameras for any current sign of moose. Moose still in Fiordland? 'You are in la la land,' I can hear you thinking! Virtually anyone who believes there are still moose in Fiordland is put in the Bigfoot class, believed to be tainted by temporary insanity. However, as I always say before I give talks on the subject, 'There are lots of experts discussing whether there are still moose in Fiordland and they all have one thing in common - they've never been there!' There's nothing that can beat uninformed ignorance, and New Zealanders seem to have a great penchant for putting down people who don't fit into their prescribed boxes.

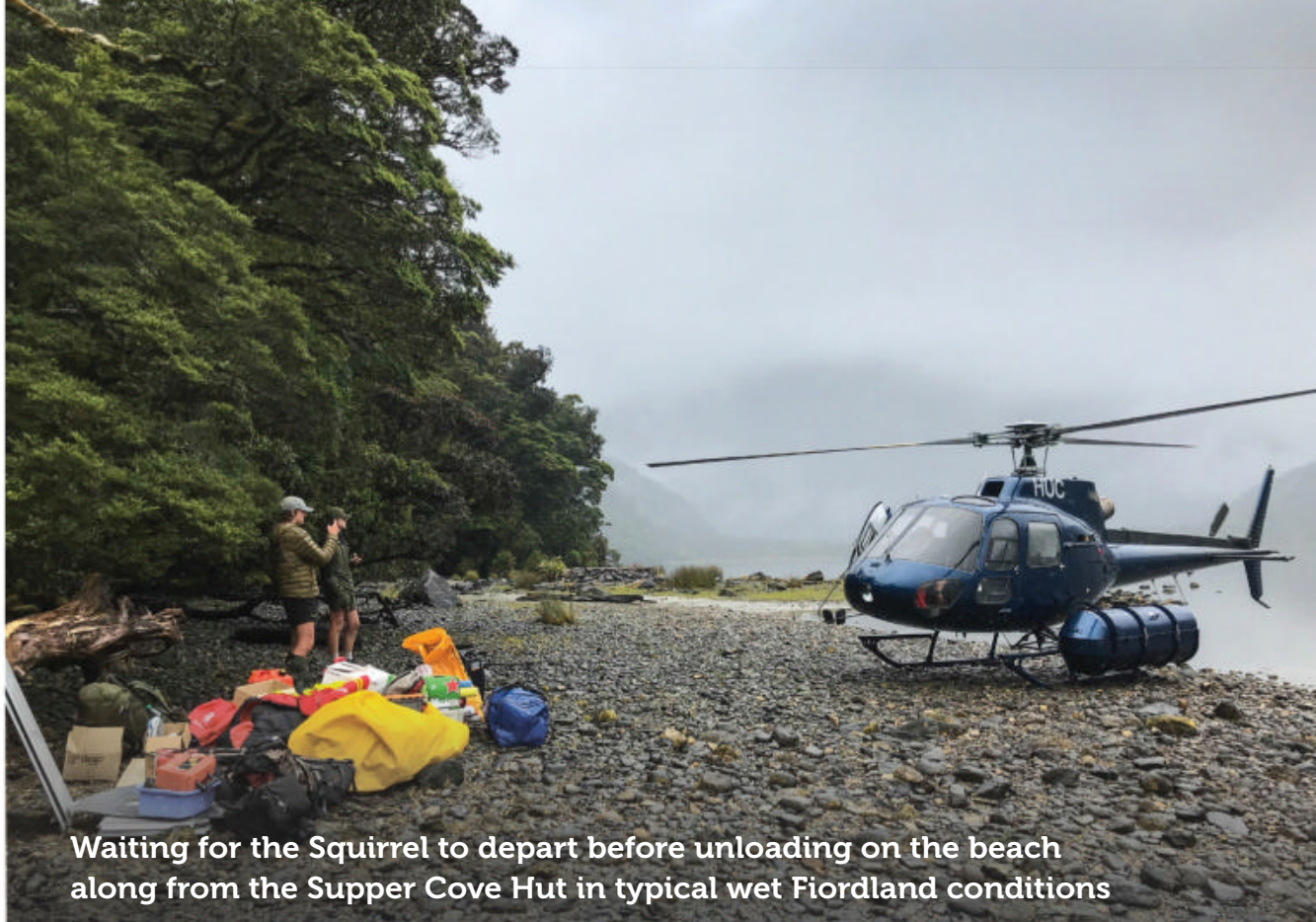
Whether it's the helicopter pilot who saw a cow moose in March 2000, and had previously seen great numbers of moose in Canada, or Ken Tustin, who



Dark and overcast conditions, heralding another front, were the backdrop when we offloaded at Herrick Creek



Eddie & Jono Harris and grandfather Pete eyeing up the moose head shot by great great grandfather Eddie Herrick



Waiting for the Squirrel to depart before unloading on the beach along from the Supper Cove Hut in typical wet Fiordland conditions



Eddie Herrick's second moose head, displayed in the the Invercargill NZDA rooms. Shot in Herrick Creek, Wet Jacket Arm, Fiordland in 1934



Looking to the far shore with the Seaforth Valley behind to where the original moose were released on April 6th, 1910 . Supper Cove Hut on the left. Photo - E Harris

is a trained wildlife biologist and knows a thing or two about game animals, or even someone like me who has shot a few deer over the years, our insights, observations and knowledge are written off by those who consider their ignorance superior. It's kind of sad.

They forget the story of Geoffrey Orbell, who was a New Zealand doctor and keen hunter and best known for the rediscovery of the takahe. He was ridiculed by so-called experts for suggesting takahe may still survive, but in 1948 in a remote valley of the Murchison Mountains near Lake Te Anau, he discovered a set of unfamiliar footprints and heard a strange bird call. After following the footprints with three companions, he rediscovered three of the species. A lake in the valley was named Lake Orbell in his honour. Once again,

the 'experts' were wrong. Orbell was also one of the founders of the New Zealand Deerstalkers' Association and was the first president, holding the position from 1938 to 1952. Amazingly enough, Eddie and Jono also have connections to the Orbell family!

Anyway, I was excited and so were the guys. The challenge was to fit the adventure into five days, around the great unknown - the ever-challenging Fiordland weather - and the different places we wanted to go to. **No easy task. Tim and I had taken our inflatable from Supper Cove to Herrick Creek on our first trip and it had taken us well over two hours each way.** It wasn't what you'd call a pleasant trip in a small boat, especially on the way back.

Eddie, Jono, Chris and her husband Pete met me in Invercargill on 21st January

at the NZDA Clubrooms just outside of town. I'd discovered that the club featured on their wall a 13 point bull moose shot by Eddie Herrick in 1934 up Herrick Creek, so it was an inspiring place to start. **Thanks to Ray Phillips for assisting us there.**

It was heavy rain next morning when I picked up Eddie and Jono before heading off to meet Dale Green from Fiordland Helicopters at his base at Orawia just before 10am. Not a good sign, but the weather miraculously cleared, and when Nathan, Dale's offsider, flew us in, it was all looking great. Until, that is, we hit the top of Lake Monowai with low, thick rain cloud, making us detour over the top of Lake Hauroko, then up the Hay River and finally scrambling down some semi clagged in, twisted, bush-covered valleys, before sneaking out over Shark Cove and



Eddie & Jono wondering if we've got a moose picture on one of my cameras

then to the beach along from Supper Cove Hut in Dusky Sound. Nathan wasn't worried, and I always take the pilot's attitude as a good sign. The guys were loving it. We'd decided to go to Supper Cove first because of the weather, and the hut, and because I'd managed to score a 'hitch-hike' around to Herrick later with

one of the charter boats.

Yes, it was raining and the sandflies were as thick as ever as we pumped up the inflatable boat and carted all the gear to the hut, but we were grateful we were the only occupants. So nice to have a hut all to yourself.

I noticed that someone had removed a humorous sign on the hut door which had said, 'Don't feed the moose'. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Removed by the fun police! Guess who!

First task after a lunch of pancakes, fruit salad and yes, cream, was to check my cameras. No obvious moose sign and even worse was the demise of a few cameras. While they are all IP65 rated, which means they are all supposed to be water resistant, Fiordland rain is persistent, heavy and not great for electronics. The

big question was, 'what did the cameras say?' We'd check them later. Moose or no moose?

Friday night was fishing for tea up Shark Cove, named so by Captain Cook, and we quickly caught enough blue cod for a good meal, including one huge

granddaddy I put back. Lesson one for the guys was how to fillet fish, which they quickly learnt.

Saturday saw us re-setting some of the cameras and heading up the Seaforth River, almost to where Eddie shot his bull. Unfortunately the river was in flood and there was no way we could cross. As we walked along the remains of the old road cut in 1903 by 50 gold miners under a government scheme, we could only reflect that Eddie too had marvelled at the same sight. The miners were paid the equivalent of \$1.25 a day. The road was supposed to reach Manapouri, but the miners quit not far beyond Loch Maree, a bit further up the valley. From the distance of time we commiserated with them about how challenging it must have been to have built that road and to have dug the still visible drainage trench alongside, through thick native bush. We reflected too on the challenges Eddie Herrick must have experienced camping out there. One record states that **'Herrick and his guide, Jim Muir, spent a month under miserable conditions searching for moose in the Seaforth Valley.'**

A few excerpts from Ray Tinsley's book, **Call of the Moose**, give an insight into just what those miserable conditions were really like:

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Looking down the Henry Burn and towards and beyond Supper Cove. Big country, but where are the moose?

"It poured all night but eased in the morning. Instead of heading back to base and more food, they carried on hunting for the bull moose they believed to be near at hand. This was to lead them into a far worse position by the next morning.

The camp was not well situated but as the river seemed to be dropping, they once again headed upstream to the gorge and zig-tagged down the flats, running into the prints of the animal they had heard the day before. Once more, at almost the same time of day, the rain clouds thundered in and they were enveloped in sheets of heavy rain.

Both of them were now thoroughly wet and again out of tucker. The river was rising, this time more urgently and with a head start, as it hadn't dropped completely from the day before. They spent a sleepless and anxious night huddled in their tent. Before daylight they found their campsite was completely surrounded by water and the prospect of not only being marooned, but drowned was very real.

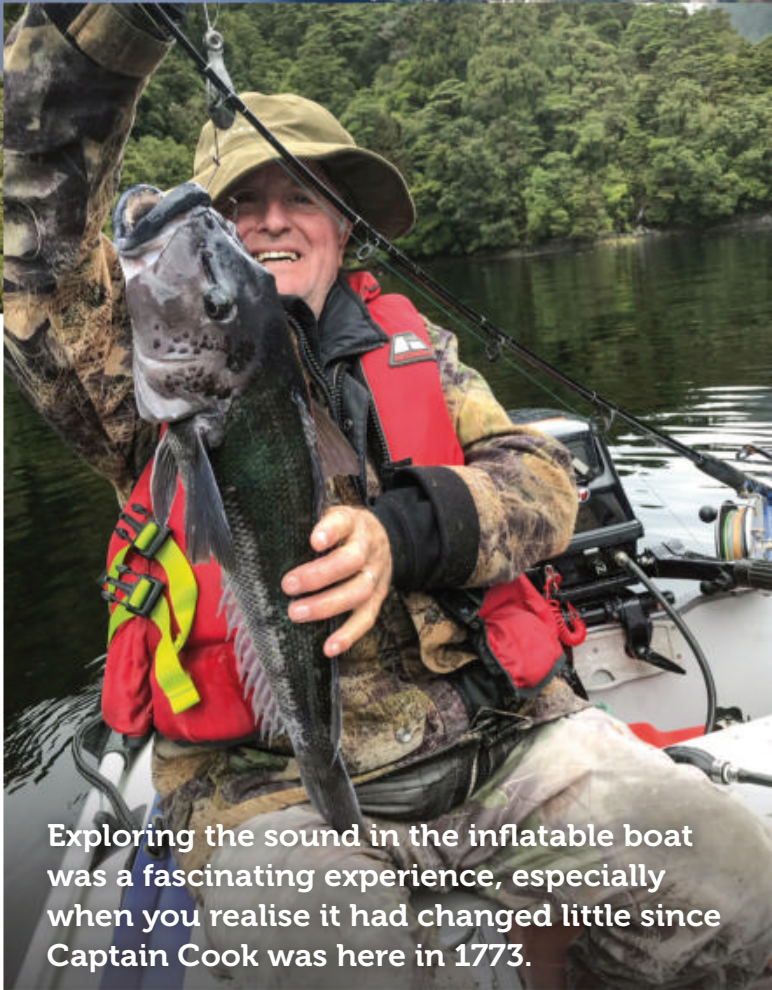
Frantically pulling down their fly and jamming the rest of the gear into their packs, they plunged into the icy water and for half an hour waded toward the high ground south of them, where they spent a miserable time waiting for daylight. The rain still descending in torrents and with the wild bush tossing and heaving about them they had no choice but to climb back on the return journey.'

Jono, Eddie and I talked a lot about how tough these old guys must have been. For the record, the next day great-great-grandfather Eddie Herrick shot his first bull moose.

Sunday we woke to torrential rain as only Dusky can lay on, and were we grateful for the hut! It was still raining during our fish-for-tea session, during the night, and the next morning when the charter boat came to pick us up at 10am. That's Fiordland, and if you don't like rain, stay away!

A trip to Herrick Creek in Wet Jacket Arm, on 'Breaksea Girl', an amazing sixty-foot steel ketch from Wild Fiordland charters was a key to the next part of our adventure. It all came about because I met an old acquaintance on my last trip to Dusky. Dave Barraclough was the skipper on the 'Fiordland Jewel' and had originally arranged with his boss, Rob Swale to pick us up, but the weather played havoc with those arrangements and Brian Humphrey, the skipper of 'Breaksea Girl', offered to help. We were so grateful.

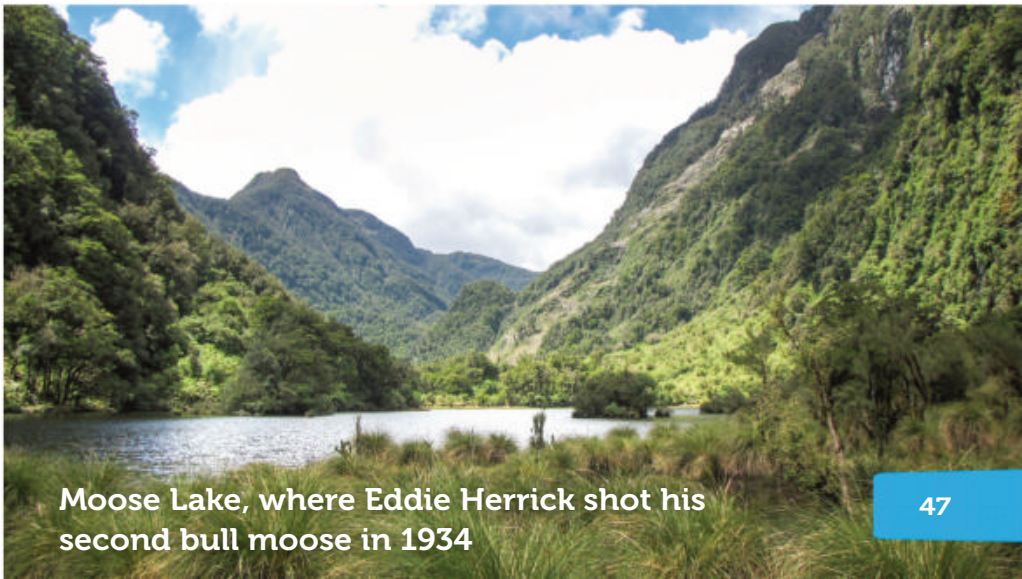
It's amazing the way the charter guys treat the place. You'd never know they'd been there. Hunters sometimes don't show the same respect, but I think that's changing. Remains of old hunters' camps are not a welcome sight. By the way, if you ever want to spend an exciting week exploring the south-west Fiordland area,



Exploring the sound in the inflatable boat was a fascinating experience, especially when you realise it had changed little since Captain Cook was here in 1773.

take a trip on one of these charter boats. You'll have an amazing time.

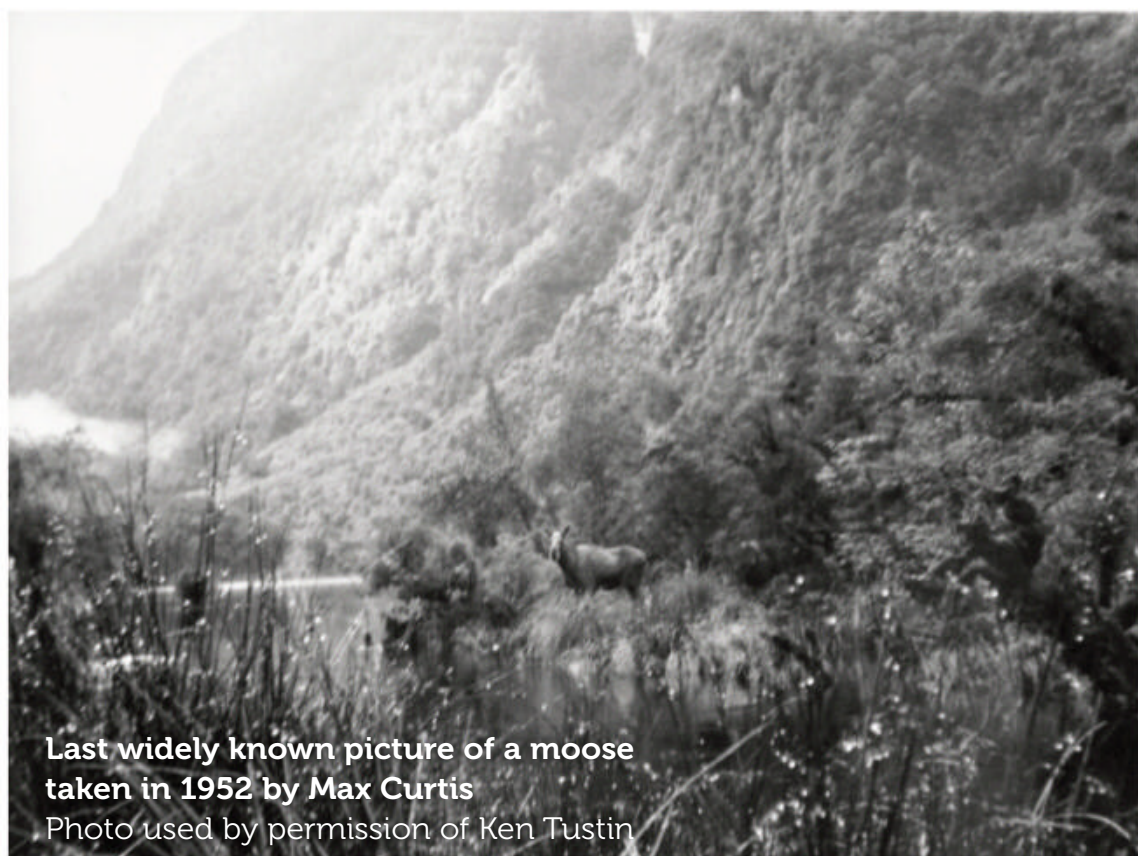
The trip from Dusky Sound to Herrick Creek in Wet Jacket Arm took over four hours. A real treat was crayfish for lunch. It was a great time to chat with chef Kim, and guide Scotty, who has a similar love for Fiordland history to mine, plus skipper Brian. The time passed quickly. The scenery, as in all of Fiordland, was spectacular. As we passed the vast reaches of Resolution Island, I couldn't help but reflect on the \$1.022 million dollars DoC spent on a deer eradication programme that lasted from 2009 to



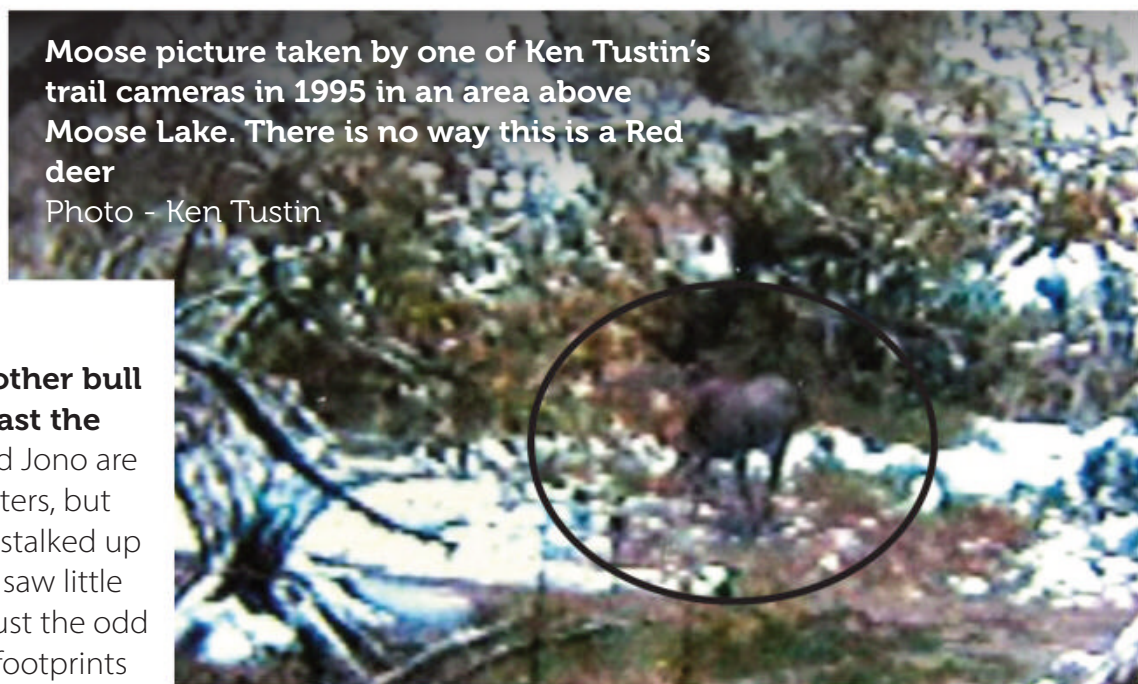
Moose Lake, where Eddie Herrick shot his second bull moose in 1934



Erin Garrick from the NZ Game Animal Council found this fresh moose sign in Fanny Bay in December 2020. They're still there somewhere! Photo - Erin Garrick



Last widely known picture of a moose taken in 1952 by Max Curtis
Photo used by permission of Ken Tustin



Moose picture taken by one of Ken Tustin's trail cameras in 1995 in an area above Moose Lake. There is no way this is a Red deer
Photo - Ken Tustin

2014, that had as its purpose, *'To achieve eradication of deer and to maintain a high level of control and monitoring for other pest species, including stoats and pest plants'*. They shot only 136 deer in 2012 and 2013. (Reference: Letter from Minister of Conservation, Hon Nick Smith.) Given that the deer and stoats originally swam out to the island, I wonder what all this achieved apart from wasting taxpayers' money?

In dark, overcast conditions, we pitched camp at Herrick Creek, aware of impending rain and a big storm due to hit late Tuesday, then headed up to the top of Wet Jacket Arm for a look-see. The water towards the head was a dirty coffee brown, coloured by the tannins in rotting vegetation brought down by the water in the rivers. **I'd never seen it before this trip, but it was an indication of the huge volume of water that had drenched Fiordland in previous days.**

Not far from our camp were the remains of Ken Tustin's camp, where he spent weeks and months trying to get a good picture of a moose. While Herrick Creek is one of the drier valleys in this part of the woods, it's still very damp, in an area with some of the highest rainfall in the world. I take my hat off to Ken for all the tribulations he went through to try and get a picture. His research, books and DVD's have made an incredibly valued contribution to hunting in NZ.

Due to the forecast, I made the call to fly out mid afternoon on the Tuesday, so it was all go first thing. We headed first for Moose Lake. **Named as such on the topographic maps, it was at one time called Lake Herrick, after Eddie**

Herrick, who shot another bull moose just past the lake. Eddie and Jono are both keen hunters, but although we'd stalked up to the lake, we saw little sign of deer - just the odd dropping and footprints to tell us that there were still a few deer about.

For Jono and Eddie it had been a special time. As they stood looking up Moose Lake, one of the most beautiful parts of Fiordland, there must have been lots going through their minds. They said to me a number of times, *'This must have looked exactly the same when Eddie was here'*. Yes, it did, except now there was little moose sign left, just some remains of old high browsing that even they could see was definitely not from Red deer.

Hard to believe that we were standing in sight of where the last widely known picture of a moose was taken in 1952, and not far from the moose picture from Ken Tustin's trail camera in 1995. **In some past moment, a moose must have stood right where we were now standing. It was quite a feeling.**

And that was the trip. Later that day, as we flew up Herrick Creek and looked back down the Henry Burn to Supper Cove and south-west over the vast reaches of the area, I couldn't help but wonder, were there any moose still here, and if so, where in the heck were they?

And my cameras? No sign of moose on them, just pictures of a few deer and the

odd hunter. The guys could see lots of old moose sign, pre-dating the installation of my cameras in 2017, and how different it was to normal Red deer sign. **They were quite excited about it all, but unfortunately, I couldn't deliver an actual live moose!** I had been quite hopeful of capturing a photo because in early December, Erin Garrick, from the NZ Game Animal Council, reported some fresh moose sign in Fanny Bay in Dusky Sound. I've been there a number of times, but saw no evidence even of old sign, so it was a reminder that moose can pop up in all sorts of places. Just where they come from and where they go, no-one seems to know!

This wasn't just an ordinary trip. It was an investment in the future for two special people. Five short days, but for Eddie and Jono, their first trip to Fiordland was a trip connecting them with one of their illustrious forbears, Eddie Herrick, a man who along with his famous guide, Jim Muir, will always be revered by those of us who respect our hunting history. **Who knows, maybe one of them may follow in his footsteps and go on to be a leading light in the future of hunting in NZ?**



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Sam and I pinched the rifle before we'd quite finished the build so that we could take it on a West Coast ballot trip

MY NZ HUNTER RIFLE BUILD

WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

This issue wraps up the 'My NZ Hunter Rifle Build' series

We've progressed from calibre selection to components, through testing, assembly and tuning and now we're finishing on exploring some different loads and the final weigh-in.

Samantha and I drew a tahr ballot block in between these issues, so we actually pinched the rifle and took it for a walk before we'd finished everything off. We didn't find anything mature enough, though I thought Sam displayed outstanding restraint in passing up an opportunity at a 12½ - 12¾" bull that was around 7 years old, her first bull. Despite not firing a shot we gained an appreciation for how spectacular the rifle was to carry around. With the suppressor and bipod stowed, there's only 7lb 2oz (about 3.2kg for the younger generation) to carry in your hand, and only 40" of length to maneuver through the scrub (1030mm my fellow children).

COSMETIC WORK

Once we returned it was time to make a call – cerakote the barrel the Strata green, or bead blast the action back to bare stainless? We picked the latter, for no better reason than it looked better with the stainless rings and should wear better than a painted barrel.

Ian again was instrumental in the bead blasting, but it turned out to be a pretty simple process – or at least they made it look that way! Greg disassembled the rifle, Ian screwed an old barrel offcut into the action and used an old bolt minus the handle to keep the blasting out of the interior. A little dab of putty on the safety indicator and we were good to go. The actual blasting took all of about 5 minutes and we ended up with a bare action again, though more matte than a factory action which complemented the bead lasted barrel very nicely. There was some concern about removing the bolt given we'd blasted grit into the action, but with some gentle tapping enough fell out to slide the bolt back. All that



The action prepped for blasting with a dummy barrel and action in place for protection



Ian carefully removing the Strata green in the blast cabinet



A very thorough blast with compressed air to remove the grit



The rifle reassembled following bead blasting



Greg beginning work on trialling different projectiles

	POWDER/GRAINS	AVG. VELOCITY @65,000PSI	SEATING DEPTH	GROUP SIZE
180GN BERGER HYBRID	Re33/90.5gns	3025	5 thou jump	Under .5"
175GN HORNADY ELD-X	Re33/89gns	3025	5 thou jump	.5"
166GN HORNADY A-TIP	Re33/91.5-92.5gns	3115	10 thou jump to 10 thou jam	1.5"
162GN HORNADY ELD-X	Re33/91gns	3150	5 thou jump	.6"
165GN SIERRA GAME CHANGER	Re33/90gns	3110	20 thou jump	.6"



Examples of the loads in the foreground, some finished loads with the 180 Bergers in the back

remained to do was give it a thorough clean to make sure all the grit came off and reassemble everything.

PROJECTILE INVESTIGATION

The next day Greg made a start on the different projectiles we thought worthy of investigation for if someone wanted to do a similar build, I'll let him cover that:

This time round we tried a few other combinations in the 20 inch 28 Nosler. While the 180gn Berger Hybrid doing a little over 3000fps was going to be hard to beat, for interests sake we thought we'd try another prime contender – the Hornady 175gn ELD-X, and some 160gn options for those who'd rather have velocity over Ballistic Coefficient. We stuck to Reloader 33 powder as it had proved itself in this combination of cartridge and barrel length. And also in these times of component shortages, it was a powder we had! The 195 Berger and 190 A-tip are good options in a longer barreled 28 Nosler, but we don't have enough barrel length to drive them fast enough to be of use in this barrel length.

After stripping the rifle to bead blast the green off the receiver, we reassembled it and shot it with the existing 180gn Hybrid 5 thou jump load to make sure nothing had changed. No danger here, the Berger's performance was still stellar! Next up we ran a short ladder test with the 175s, and they also shot

half an inch despite starting a little high and needing to drop a half a grain for each shot to get down to 65,000psi.

Then it was the new 166gn Alloy Tip Hornadys, but this rifle did not like them with the limited time we had to test them, trying them at a Just Touch, 10 thou jump and 10 thou jam. More work was required with these to find out what seating depth they prefer.

The 162gn ELD-Xs looked like they will shoot at around 3150fps, again despite starting a little too high and then having to progressively decrease the powder charges. Sierra's comparatively new tipped Game King – the Game Changer – also looked promising while down a little in velocity from the 162 due to a longer bearing surface.

So the 175/180 grainers at just over 3000fps, or the 160 grain options at 3100 to 3150fps – the age old BC verses velocity compromise. While there is not a huge difference between them, I would choose the 175/180s personally, due to their better performance in the unpredictable mountain winds, and better terminal performance.

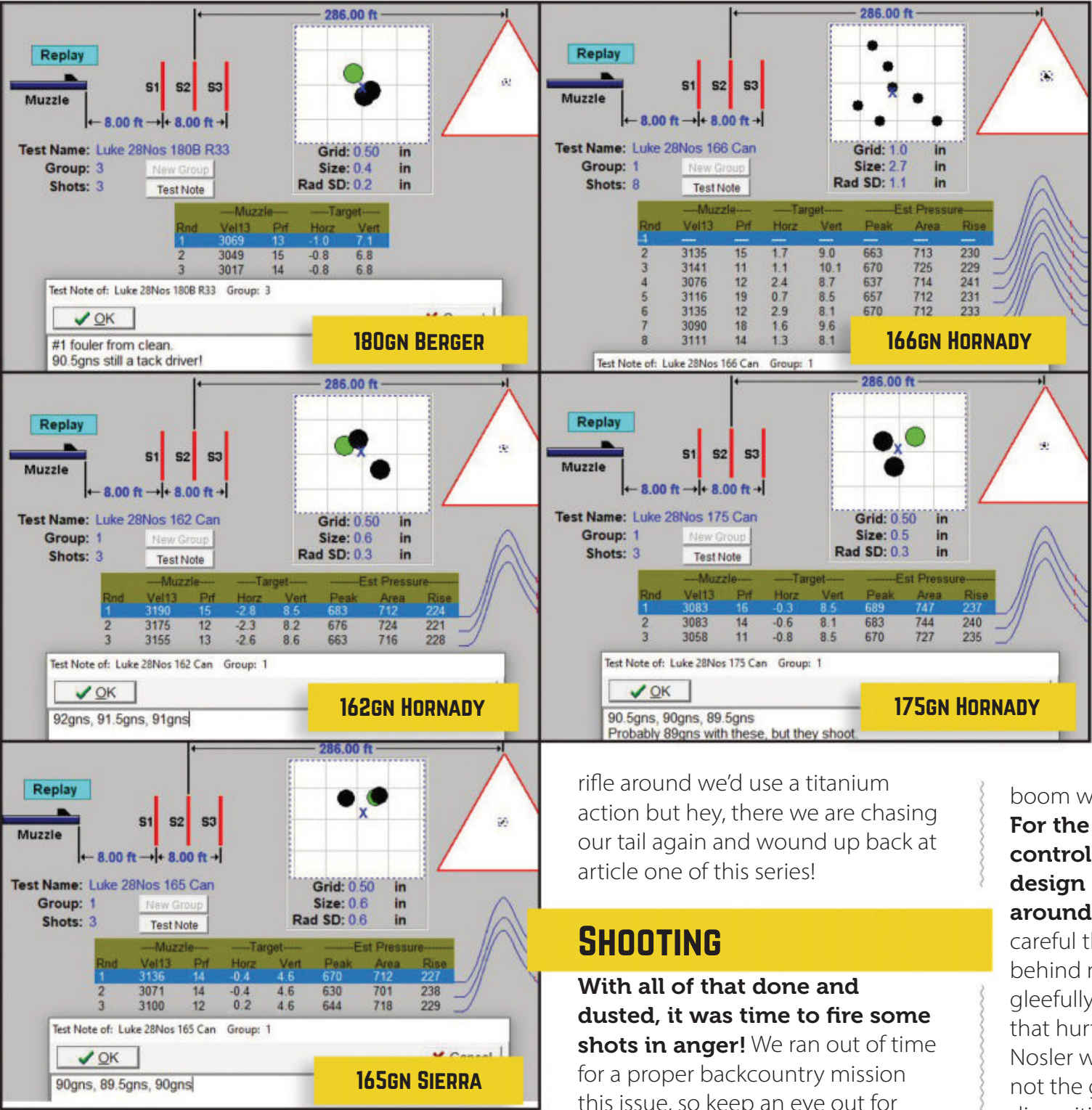


L-R 180 Berger, 166 A-Tip, 175 ELD-X, 162 ELD-X and 165 GameChanger

WEIGH-IN

With all the modification and testing work complete (with the exception of fitting the Leupold CDS now that we're settled on the 180gn Berger load) we were due for a final weigh in. With the suppressor we just inched over 8lb by 0.8oz, or 3.65kg. With Greg's little radial brake we got it down to 7lb 3.3oz, or 3.27kg – a seriously light magnum!

I'd love to see it under 7lb, just because. We'd need to lose a further 95 grams and that would take a bit of doing. You might be able to shave off a bit of weight by going for some lighter rings and you might be able to get a bit out of the bolt handle too. Maybe downgrading the scope to a VX-5 to shave nearly 50



was the 1,000 yard gong, which was a trickier shot being at more of an angle to the wind than the rest of the range. I didn't hold enough on the first shot and struck the post (sorry Trent). For the next shot I used one more bar to the right on that excellent TMOA reticle and drilled it – job done, she shoots and shoots well for a 7.2lb (plus can), 20" magnum!

Next Lucas got behind the rifle and tried his luck at the 800 yard gong, his longest shot to date, and drilled it first time round. We hadn't done the ballistic calcs for the muzzle brake yet, at some point we will get a second CDS turret made up for it, but I had to have a shot just to see what the boom was like. Crikey, it goes off alright!

For the shooter it's amazingly well controlled, the excellent brake design diverts the muzzle blast around you. The bystanders have to be careful though - after the shot I looked behind me to Lucas's wide eyes as he gleefully exclaimed 'F*#k that's something, that hurt me! I felt it in my chest!'. The 28 Nosler with a muzzle brake is probably not the gun for someone with a twitchy disposition, but it will be a backcountry weapon. I did manage to get out and shoot some crop-raiders while I was down south and meant to be pig hunting, dropping two Reds at 680 yards for the landowner and our family, but that's really not what this rifle is built for. It needs a good mission for the matter to really be settled, so keep an eye out next issue.

In the meantime, thank you to the brands involved in this build. You all brought excellent products to the table that combined to create a super-light, super-short magnum that shoots under .5 MOA: Beretta New Zealand, Hardy Rifle, NZ Asia for Leupold and Spartan, DPT machinists. Ian, for your time and the use of your incredible workshop and of course Greg, not only for designing the cracker CF stock that we used, but for sharing a glimpse of his encyclopedic knowledge of reloading and gun building.

rifle around we'd use a titanium action but hey, there we are chasing our tail again and wound up back at article one of this series!

SHOOTING

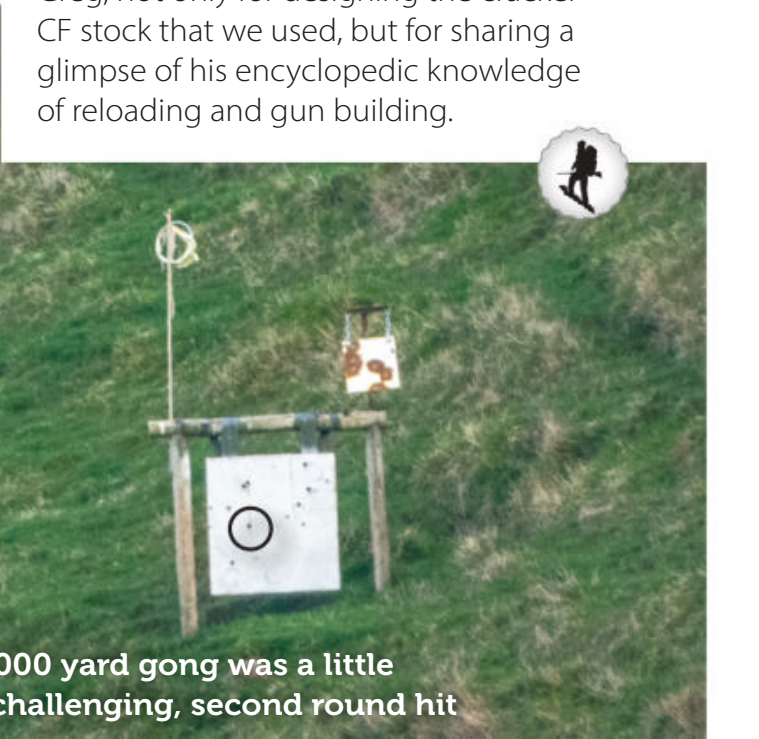
With all of that done and dusted, it was time to fire some shots in anger! We ran out of time for a proper backcountry mission this issue, so keep an eye out for that in Issue 85, but we started at the range on a day with some challenging wind.

We skipped the pre-lims and started at 500 yards. No need to hold for windage there unless it was blowing a gale so we scored a first shot centre-plate strike for the 28 Nosler. **I am very happy with how it shoots with the can on, I'd have no qualms with Sam or teenagers shooting it as there's very little recoil.** Despite the suppressor there is still quite a 'crack' due to the high velocity of the 28 Nosler.

From there we moved on to 800 yards and let it have a couple of inches of wind for another centre of plate shot. Finally

grams, or even a VX-3 - that would get you 160 grams but cost a fair bit in optical performance compared to its bigger brothers.

We could get about half way there on this rifle by trading our Hardy barrel up to carbon wrapped model, there is less advantage in going carbon with our short little barrel, but it would get us closer to the 7lb mark whilst keeping the stellar optics of the VX-6. **For the meantime though I don't want to mess with a good thing,** it's shooting too well right now to want to change anything, but once this barrel wears out I know what we're doing! To get the absolute lightest



With all of the gun work complete it was good to get the rifle to the range. Now it's time to get it in the hills

The 1,000 yard gong was a little more challenging, second round hit

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WINNER



1

Lana and Maisy Breingan with their first Red stag shot in the roar by Dad with the Sako 75 7mm Rem Mag in the Pureroas



2

Michelle O'Connor with a few Wairarapa turkeys. Using a Beretta Urika AI 391

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3

William Scotland with his first deer, taken with Dad's Sako 85 Carbonlight in 6.5mm Creedmoor

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Parker Collins with his second pig on his first overnight hunting trip. Shot at 120 meters with a Tikka 223

4



Oscar Smith (11) with his first deer, a spiker taken on public land at the Torlesse Range with a Tikka T3 270 on his first overnight Father/Son trip

5



6

Miller Inness (8) shot his first deer in the National Park area using his Dad's Tikka T3X in 25-06 at a range of 307 metres



7

Cain Young's first stag in the roar ended up being best one for the trip, shot after long walk

TROPHY TUSKS

AND A CLOSE SHAVE!

WRITTEN BY ~ JONATHAN FULTON

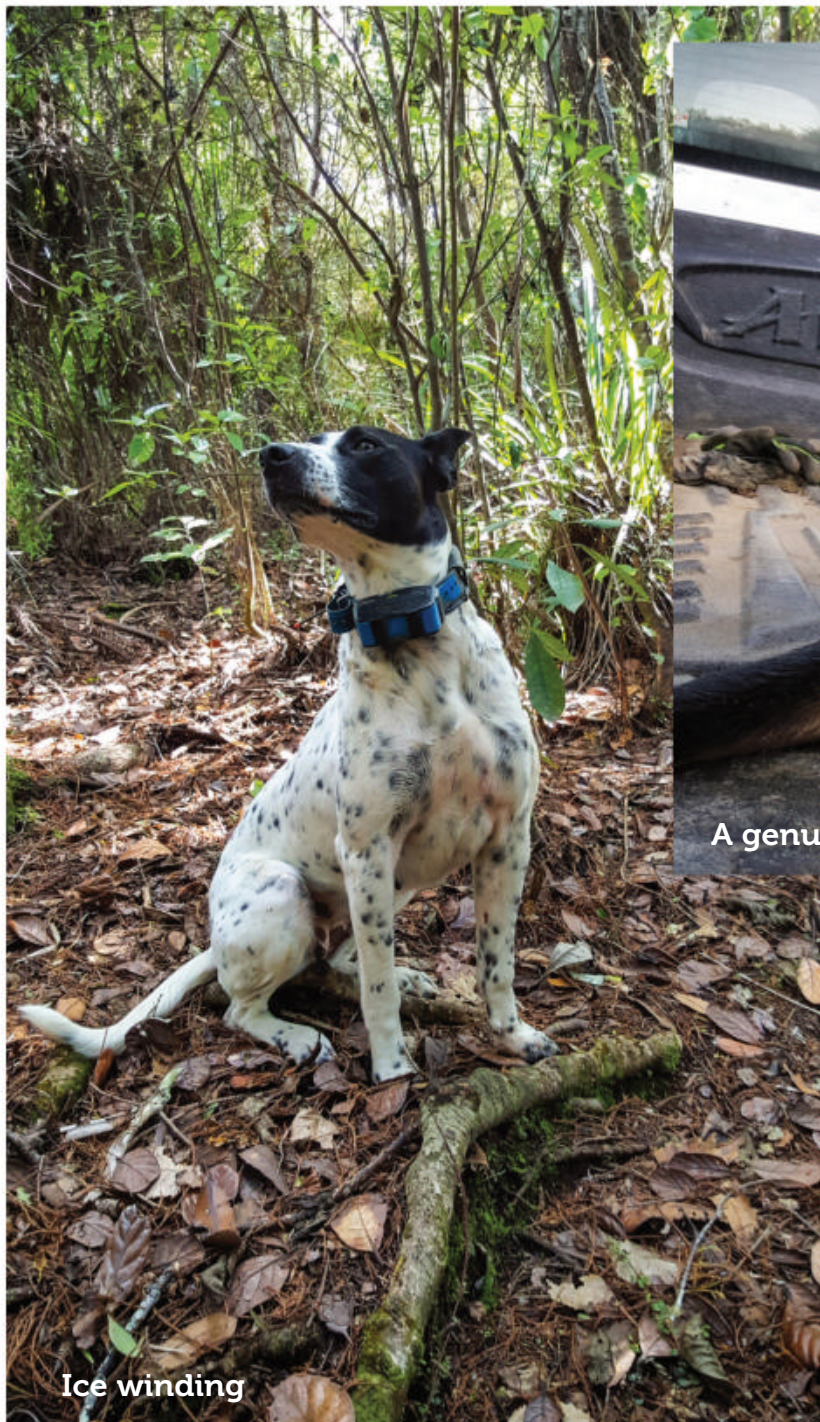
The end of March was fast approaching and the first good autumn rains had quenched the parched Northland countryside where I live

Following the wet spell, verdant green paddocks emerged from dusty brown, and cooler temperatures set my mind drifting to another much anticipated roar trip.

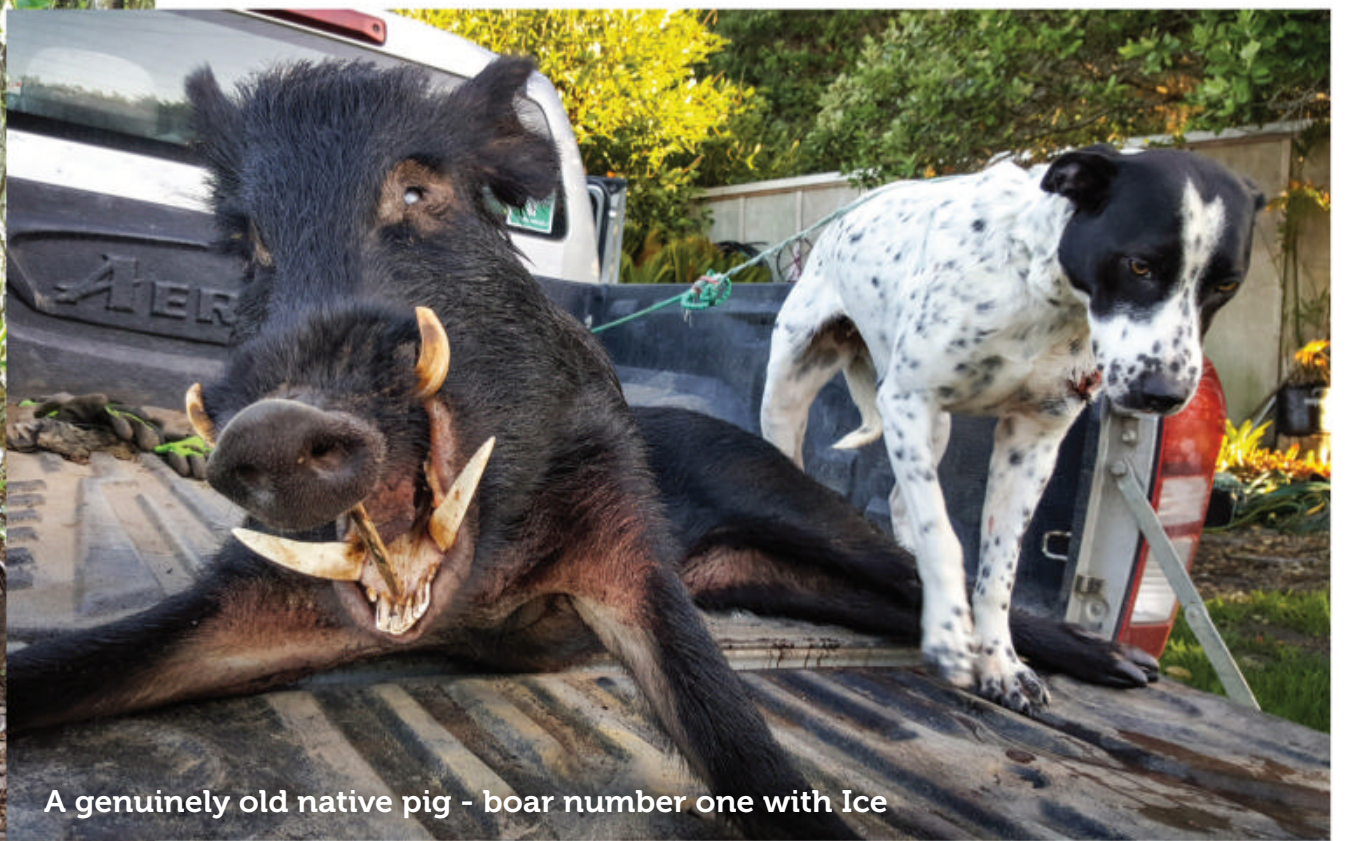
In the weeks leading up to our departure date, a busy work schedule was only made tolerable by the long, drawn-out evenings providing opportunities to chase wild pigs with the dogs and get in some extra fitness training for hill climbing and meat carrying at the same time.

Sneaking in on a good boar, with two good bailing dogs singing their music is – for this hunter – every bit the adrenaline rush that close encounters with roaring Red stags can be. The main difference however, is that geographically speaking, one form of hunting requires a short drive from home and the other around 11 hours! Living only a hop-skip-and-jump from Cape Reinga has its cons, but with wild pigs and endless snapper and kingfish to hunt it definitely has its pros too!

As it turns out, my 2020 roar trip – for obvious reasons – never happened, but luckily the week leading up to its cancellation was a vintage one for pig hunting! Tuesday evening 17th March was the first of three exciting evening pig hunts.



Ice winding



A genuinely old native pig - boar number one with Ice

HUNT ONE

A short text received at midday from a friend on whose property I regularly hunt, confirmed a pesky pig was in residence close by. It was leaving tell-tale signs such as smallish prints under the fence, and rootings around the damper paddock edges and close to the creek. By 6.30pm I was parked at the end of the dusty gravel road, clipping on a hunting belt with knife and GPS, dog tracker, and a bum-bag loaded with essentials – spare bullets, cellphone, bailing twine and an absolute must for ‘quick’ evening hunts – head torch with spare batteries. Gun slung over the shoulder, and it was time to quietly open the dog box and let out two young but experienced bitches, Jazz and Ice.

It was another glorious Northland evening, with more than a hint of autumn in the air, and the sun clinging stubbornly to the last throes of summer – a singlet and shorts was perfect hunting attire, with a fleece top around the waist for backup.

After recent rain the shadows were refreshingly cool and damp, and from the minute I stepped away from the truck my two dogs put their noses to the ground and seemed intent on investigating every scent they encountered. A consistent gentle breeze

from the north necessitated a hill climb first, then a gradual descent through dense native forest to the distant paddocks and truck to complete the loop before dark (I hoped!)

To the west, hundreds of acres of “true” native eventually gave way to fingers of manuka scrubland, and pockets of radiata pine. Like so many Northland blocks, the pigs residing in them transitioned easily through the three distinct habitats, but at the end

of a drought summer it was the native valleys that hunters targeted – for the cooler temperatures, and the food source offered for pigs – in particular nikau berries and the starchy, nutrition filled ‘hearts’ of semi mature palms.

Nearing the top of the ridge, sweating freely, it was a relief to check the GPS, and see that the dogs were slowly tracking out on what could only be pig scent, starting where an animal had crossed our track minutes or hours before us. Jazz leading, the map showed them going through a patch of native toitoi, then over a small creek in a tangled gully, and climbing the main creek in the bottom of the valley. **All the time I watched the screen closely to see when ‘tracking’ became ‘chasing’.**

Pigs that grow up educated to the threat of hunting dogs need minimal coaxing to get them running – it could be a twig breaking, a vagrant breeze, or more likely on such a balmy evening, the puffing of an unfit dog! 600 metres across the valley, two things happened simultaneously to herald that tonight luck was on our side – the GPS, unit buzzed in my hand to indicate both dogs were ‘treed’, and a flurry of barks drifted from a distant gully, indicating quarry found! More distant barking, and no movement on the GPS., meant that the priority now became speed to prevent possible dog/pig

damage, and secondly to beat oncoming darkness! Head down, gun slung across shoulders, and into a wall of supplejack and parataniwha-choked side creeks!

Once off the main ridge, all sounds of battle were lost, and the focus was solely on making wise navigating decisions, with only the occasional GPS. check to make sure everything was as it should be. Fifteen minutes of solid ploughing later, I slowed my pace as the steep face gave way to a slightly more open kauri terrace, and steady bailing was once more music to the ears. More groveling, then three metres away the back legs of Ice, my white dog became visible, as she fronted the pig in sharp, tangled kiekie.

Sensing, or more likely smelling I was close, she disappeared into the dense clump and did what I had been trying to discourage her from doing of late – she grabbed a hold of the quarry, and the settled bail suddenly became a high stakes wrestling match, complete with yelps, growls and angry roars! Jazz had loyally followed her mate into battle, so with no time to think and through loyalty to my two dogs I was forced to follow suit!

Luckily kiekie offers some protection, and from on top of the melee I reached down and miraculously found the tail – with a solid wrap and two dogs still hanging on it was a simple matter to use the knife to end the battle. Climbing down off the springy canopy of vines and stems, reaching under and dragging it free, I was able to finally clap eyes on the quarry – a smallish, old battle-scarred boar with trophy grinders and tusks disproportionate to the size of his head and body. **With minimal dog damage (Ice had one small tusk wound on her front shoulder), and a trophy boar on the deck, it was pats and praise and happy days all round!**

With light stubbornly holding the darkness back, I gutted the lean carcass, shouldered the load and began a weary carry-out, two obedient dogs at heel.

HUNT TWO

Exactly two nights later, I was back for more pre-roar fitness! Ice's shoulder was a mite sore, so instead Jazz's companion was her 11-month-old half-brother, Tiger. The reason for another visit was more fresh pig sign, and again the dogs didn't disappoint. Following another slow, tracking find, a bail broke out in the head of a storm-choked, tight native creek. With barely enough light to see, I closed in to

find Tiger boldly bailing a skinny sow, and this is where a ho-hum pig hunt suddenly becomes interesting! With two dogs bailing, my clumsy attempt to sneak in and grab the pig's tail prompted a speedy 180-degree turn, and quick as a flash the grumpy old girl grabbed my finger and bit down hard. Wrenching it free but not before feeling the fingertip 'pop', my appetite for catching sows diminished further, and an embarrassing lack of hand-eye coordination was yet

again exposed in the sporting field!

Contemplating the negative turn in fortunes during the weary trudge back to the truck in complete darkness, one positive was that it wasn't my trigger finger! As it turned out, it wasn't really to matter in the end...



Nikau hearts, high on a boar's menu!

HUNT THREE

More good autumn rain, and four nights later I received an email from a landowner suffering pig damage very close to their house. Although in a different area to the previous two hunts, this block shared many similarities, - steep, gorgy, native, at the end of a dusty gravel road, and an easy drive from my home. It was early evening when I quietly parked the truck on the driveway above a creek ford where pigs had last been seen. Jazz and Tiger were raring to go, Ice and I were both nursing

stitches but equally enthusiastic! Dogs collared-up, we snuck down to the creek to look for fresh signs in the silt. Small prints matching the described size littered the creek bed, and muddy runs formed tunnels disappearing into the undergrowth. **After only a quick look the dogs returned, and head down, we dug in to climb the steep face of pine and native which was logically where our quarry would be found.**

Forty minutes later, nearing the top ridge, hardly a print had been seen and Jazz, the main catcher was still at heel, seemingly uninterested in anything to do with hunting. The other dogs were nowhere to be seen, so we began to angle across the face and make for two well-used boar wallows in a depression on the ridge.

My frustration grew when checking the GPS. I found the two young dogs to be already 400 metres over the top and down the other side, moving steadily up the valley directly away from our position, obviously chasing pigs that hadn't yet been stopped. Waiting and listening was all we could do, whilst slowly but steadily the sun sank towards the horizon.

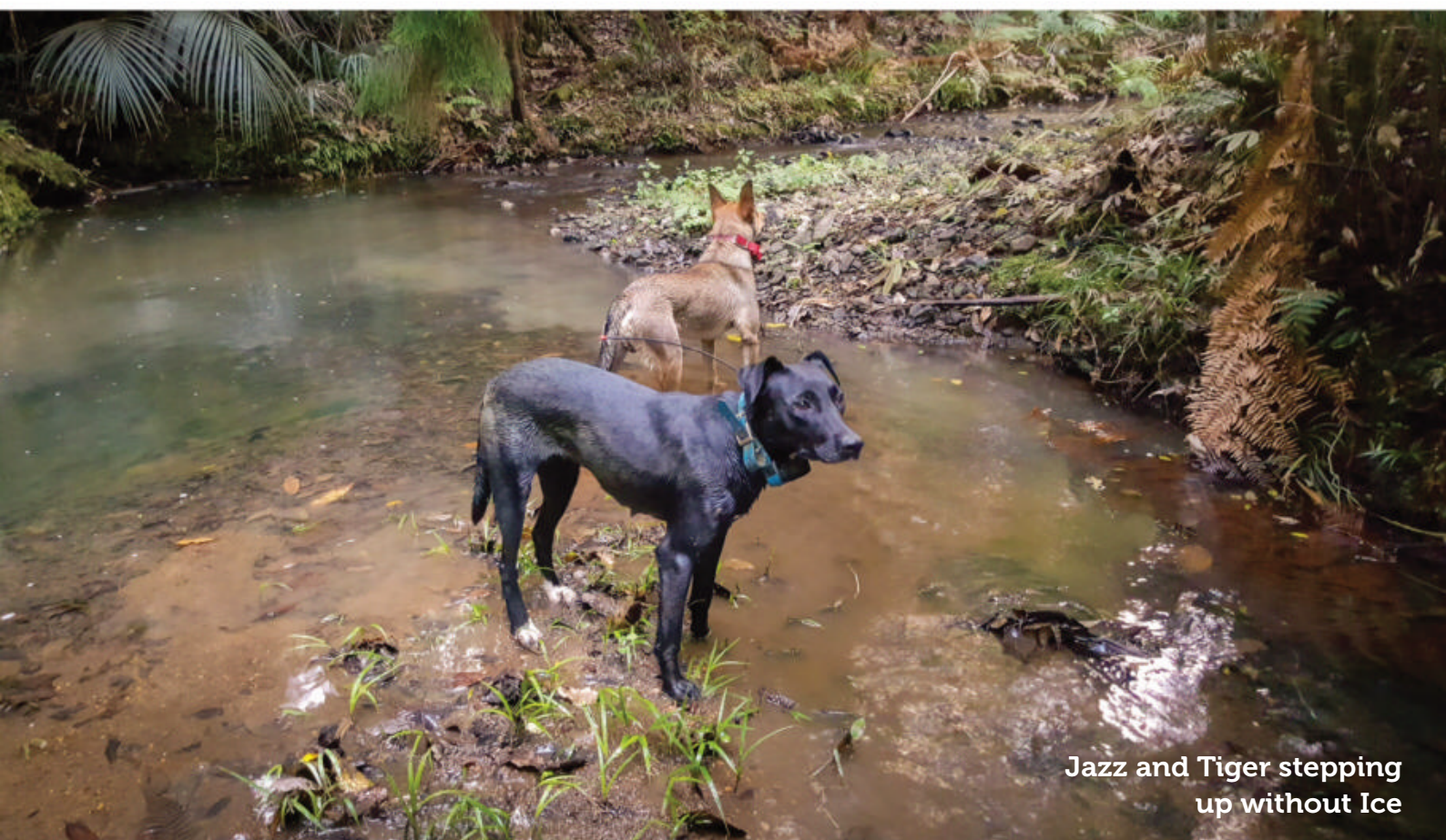
Twenty minutes later the situation hadn't improved, so we sidled slowly closer to the two young dogs, who were still performing twists, loops and figure 8s on the Garmin screen, albeit 700 metres below us!

Pig hunting with dogs is no different from any other form of hunting in that, so often, success lies just over the next hill, and you must keep putting one foot in front of the other. Just crossing the next stream, or walking out to the end of the ridge can be the difference between success and failure, and this hunt was about to prove that point.

As we descended the steep face, Jazz put

her nose to the ground and slowly tracked away. I didn't notice she had gone until I checked the tracking unit, and my first thought was that she was about to chase the same pig/s the other two had put up an hour before. But this was dispelled when her trademark speed registered on the screen and, moments later a beautiful, clear bail echoed out of the mature native forest. Game on!

Hunters luck can be a wonderful thing, and it just so happened that Jazz's two companions were only 350 metres across the gully from her when she began bailing. Intent on deciphering their own trails and backtracking



Jazz and Tiger stepping up without Ice



Boar number three - Jazz and her pig

their way back up the steep face to where I stood, Jazz's familiar bark was enough to galvanize the troops on a direct line to her and, four or five minutes later, there were three dogs singing their music from the depths of the forest below. How quickly fortunes can change! **Fifteen minutes earlier I had been mulling over a wasted opportunity, and mentally preparing for the long walk back to the truck.** Now that familiar excitement gripped as I made sure everything was locked down and tucked away before plunging over the side and beginning an awfully steep descent, all the while the clear barking of the dogs resonating in my ears. Clinging to coprosma limbs, trying to avoid the thickest stands of supplejack vine, an occasional GPS. check confirmed the gap was closing, and minutes later a volley

of barks only metres ahead meant that I had arrived. As usual all the action was taking place in the middle of an impenetrable tropical tangle of vines and swamp grass, and the first movement my eyes caught was the mud splattered coat of the white dog, Ice, as she disappeared into a gloomy labyrinth of kiekie. **Hesitant to unsling the gun from my back and therefore lose the ability to have both hands free, waiting, watching, it was Ice who broke the stalemate** - she must have smelt my presence and went in for a hold, and another nice, settled bail suddenly became a dangerous game of bullrush. Wading in to the yelping, growling mass, trapped by vines and mud, trying to avoid the sharp end and focus on the long, bushy tail, the struggle was only over when I had a full wrap in my fist and was able to lean forward with the knife and find the pigs heart. Lying in the mud at my feet was a large ginger and black

boar, with a fighting shield and a beautifully even set of tusks – the second good set in a week! Checking the dogs over thoroughly, Ice had fared the worst and had several rips, which luckily did not appear to be life-threatening. Tiger had bailed from a safe distance and now came to me, tail wagging, as clean as a whistle. He would not approach the boar's still body – even in death he kept a safe distance. With darkness coming quickly, I gutted the berry-fat carcass and tied it for the carry out. In hunting terms, for a 'weekend warrior' such as myself it had been a heck of a week, and all the struggles and misses that are par for the course when hunting pigs with dogs were momentarily forgotten. **The sore finger was still there though, covered in boar's blood and stinking mud – definitely not doctors' orders!**



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PART 1 New Zealand BROADLEAF

Latin - *Griselinia Littoralis*

Maori - Kapuka or papauma

WRITTEN BY
MATT WINTER

@WILDNATURENEWZEALAND



The broadleaf is widely regarded as one of the most preferred food plants of introduced ungulates

Following a lot of digging and research for this plant series of articles, I discovered several studies and pieces of literature that back up and confirms what, as hunters, we already knew from our observations in the field ... game animals 'love' broadleaf

'Back in the day', (don't you love that term could mean last week or could refer to 40 years ago but in this case around the early '90s), my mate, Steve, and I used hunt a very steep, bluffy and fairly inaccessible tract of back country. Geologically it is rather unique in that the main rock type is limestone, unlike the rest of the province (and in indeed the whole of New Zealand) which is greywacke.

Effectively, in terms of vegetation types, it favours the growth of podocarp hardwood species unlike surrounding areas which are generally dominated by beech forests. One of the species that absolutely thrives in these sorts of free draining, limestone soils is the broadleaf. Preferring lots of sunlight for optimal growth, we found the north facing hill

sides held the biggest concentration of broadleaf varieties.

The average gradient of this place far exceeds the average in most other places. Bluffs, steep, loose, rocky slopes, difficult footing and angled sidles were pretty much the order of the day on every trip to the location. Limestone is a notoriously loose, fragmented and unstable rock so, combined with the steep nature of the terrain, it appears that whole faces are constantly on the move in a gravity fuelled direction downwards.

As you could well imagine, young saplings or shrubs have a hard time getting a vital hold in the 'mobile' nature of the soil (read rock), let alone becoming established. Successful plants subsequently receive a never-ending bombardment of gravel, stones and rocks rolling down from above. Over time the

tree grows and forms with a distinct lean tending to the down hill side instead of the usual skyward direction towards the sunlight. It is not unusual for the trunks of many trees to be growing, literally, horizontally and perpendicular to the hill side.

I am reminded of one of the first hunting trips that Steve and I made into the valley. At that stage we were still familiarising ourselves with the lay of the land so were essentially just following our noses. We were stalking a face that was typical ... sunny, bushy, rocky, loose but, with a good amount of sign, it screamed animals.

Popping our noses around a wee, shallow spur, we both pulled up short when an out-of-sync noise hit our ears. It sounded natural, it was regular, it sounded like it was at ground level, it sounded to both of us like a feeding animal and ... it sounded close!! Visibility was a good 40 metres in all directions but despite two sets of eyes



This image gives scale to how tall a mature broadleaf can grow
1/200 @ f/8, ISO 400



A sunny, north facing, free draining face ideal conditions for broadleaf (lower left third of image).
1/320 @ f/7.1, ISO 400

searching, we couldn't spot anything. Besides, our ears were telling us that the noise was a heck of a lot closer than our visible range.

Eventually we realised the noise was coming from plant material falling and landing on the ground just a handful of metres up hill from us.

Finding the source of the falling debris, we could make out a young white and black billy goat buried in the upper branches of a broadleaf tree. Now when I say the 'upper' branches of the tree, I mean he was literally amongst the top of a tree that was growing 'out' from the hill side. **So, had the tree been growing in a more conventional vertical manner, the goat would have been a good six or seven metres off the ground.** As it was, with the trunk growing more or less horizontally and the acute angle of the hill, he was still four or so metres above the ground and a couple of metres above our eye level, which explained why we had initially failed to see any animals. Our relatively quiet approach, the dense nature of the branches limiting the billy's visibility and the concentrated way in which he was feeding, ensured a very close encounter, albeit unplanned.

I still smile every time I think about that trip. Its hard case when you think about it ... **you just don't tend to look up, do you, above your head, in the top most branches of trees when stalking for game animals?**



A mid size mature broadleaf showing the trunks 'flaky' bark
1/100 @ f/10, ISO 3200

BROADLEAF DESCRIPTION, HABITAT AND RANGE

Bearing in mind the relationship between plants (food) and game animals, I'd venture to say that the broadleaf is the species most recognised by New Zealand hunters.

As the broadleaf is widespread and abundant in most areas of the country, and is also near the top of the list of preferred foods of game animals, it is a really good indicator of animal numbers in any given area. When looking for sign of browse, the broadleaf seems to be the 'go to' indicator species for most hunters.

Broadleaf (*Griselinia littoralis*) also goes by the two Māori names of kapuka or papauma. Described as a hardy evergreen, it is not unusual for a fully mature tree to reach 10 metres in height and sometimes up to 15 metres. The main trunk is quite short relative to the trees' overall height and has dark, rough, gnarly

and, what I would call, 'flaky' bark which will fall off at the brush of a hand.

The leaves are two-faced, for want of a better term. The top sides are a glossy, yellow-green colour with a leathery feel to them while the under side is paler with a definite matte look and feel. Depending upon age, size, soil conditions, and environment, the leaves range in size from six to fourteen centimetres and vary in shape from circular to oval.

Broadleaf trees are classified as 'dioecious' which means that each individual flower is either male or female, but also that only one sex is found on any one plant. So, for a broadleaf to reproduce it needs either close neighbour trees of the opposite sex to enable wind borne pollination or good numbers of insects and birds for long distance pollination. A mature broadleaf will produce small, greenish flowers on the smaller outer branches from late spring to mid summer. Dark



Shining broadleaf (Griselinia lucida) 'epiphyting' on a bluff. The Pinnacles, Coromandel Peninsula
1/160 @ F/7.1, ISO 250



Close up of newly formed berries on Griselinia lucida. Littoralis berries are very similar
1/125 @ f/800, ISO 100



Close up of the two broadleaf varieties. Left, littoralis and right, lucida (shining broadleaf).

Note the longer, larger and shinier leaves of lucida. (Sprouting berries also visible). Another tell tale distinguishing feature are the asymmetrical leaves on lucida compared to the more uniform leaves of littoralis.

purple or black berries, six to seven millimetres long, start appearing from mid summer on and will ripen from autumn through to winter. I couldn't find any documentation on whether ungulates eat the broadleaf berries but do know that Maori sometimes ate them, although generally only in times of food shortages. Not surprising as they have been described as having a very bitter taste.

The range of broadleaf extends over most of New Zealand, growing from sea level up to around 1000 metres and is especially prevalent in coastal areas. Incidentally, the second part of the botanical name, littoralis comes from the Latin word littus, meaning shore or shore-loving or growing on the shore. They tend to grow to higher altitudes, on average, in the North Island than the South Island, I would imagine due to the colder temperatures at the lower latitudes.

Broadleaves can be found in a variety of habitats within its altitude ranges and being a very tough, hardy plant, will tolerate harsh sea breezes and relatively severe wind exposure. Even temperature extremes don't hinder this plant over much as it is able to survive in conditions from -10 °C to 35°C. However, its preferred growing environment is one of free draining, light loamy type soil with high nutrient levels, in full sunlight

or semi shade and with high rainfall. Broadleaves also have the ability to grow as an epiphyte with their roots running down the host tree and into the ground to obtain nutrients. In some cases, the broadleaf will place its roots where leafy, organic debris deposits have collected high in the host tree. The relationship between the broadleaf and its host is merely one of support and is never parasitic.

Shining broadleaf is the second of the two New Zealand Griselinia species but not as widely spread as the littoralis variety. It is also found more often in the North Island and is much more likely to be existing in an epiphyte situation than littoralis.

MEDICINAL, HUMAN AND OTHER QUALITIES

It seems that the broadleaf does not have many medicinal uses. There are records of Maori using the inner bark as a fight against scrofula which is a tuberculosis infection of the skin on the neck as well as a treatment for venereal disease.

The timber is regarded as very durable and ideal for making waka huia (treasure containers).

I discovered an interesting study on the relative flammability of forty-two native tree and shrub species. Broadleaf, *Griselinia littoralis*, ranked lowest in flammability. i.e. very unlikely to burn. **It was said that only the flaky bark may ignite and create embers that may cause spot fires but only in extreme fire conditions.**

The humble broadleaf has recently become popular as a hedge species in town areas, especially in suburban gardens. The fast-growing characteristics of broadleaf makes it ideal for that purpose and when trimmed properly, will create a very dense wall of vegetation ideal for partitioning off sections of properties or perhaps hiding from nosy neighbours. Local provincial councils also take advantage of rapid growth rates by using it quite prolifically in their parks, reserves and riverside restoration projects.

When you're out in the field on your next hunting trip, keep your eyes peeled for areas of broadleaves. Take time out to stop and have a good look at any browse and feed clues that the tree might be offering. **Often it will help you narrow down where to concentrate your efforts instead of blindly covering ground with a 'hope' mentality.**

Cheers, Matt

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Part 1

NUTRITION

IN THE WILD

FATS

WRITTEN BY ~ MICHAEL MCCORMACK
@CHASEANDGATHER

In this series we will dive into the big wide world of nutrition covering all of the key elements, including how to apply some of this theory into everyday life, and for when we are on the hill

Registered Dietitian, Julia Sekula will be busting a few myths for us and setting a few facts straight through our Q & A panel.

In the next three issues we will cover the three macronutrients (fat, carbohydrates and protein) and uncover a little more about the roles they play within the body, the benefits they provide and how much we should be consuming for optimal health.

FAT

You may wonder, isn't fat bad for you? The truth is that your body actually needs certain types of fat to operate efficiently. For example, it helps you to absorb vitamins A, D, E and K, and some minerals. Fat is also

required to build our cell membranes - the vital exterior of each cell, and the sheaths surrounding nerves (protecting them).

It is a major source of energy and it is essential for physiological responses such as blood clotting, and muscle movement. Particular types of fat have shown to improve chronic inflammation. With regards to our health, some fats are certainly better than others.

For the notebook: 'Calories' will be mentioned throughout the nutrition series. A 'calorie' is a unit of measurement. It is defined as 'the amount of heat (energy) needed to raise the temperature of 1 gram of water by 1 degree Celsius.



KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

THE 'GOOD'

Some fats are necessary for a healthy body, and are often referred to as the 'good fats'. They are technically known as 'unsaturated' fats and tend to be liquid at room temperature (that is, around 20°C).

Unsaturated fats can be classified as:

> **MONO - UNSATURATED** - found in high concentrations in foods such as olives, avocados, nuts (eg. almonds and hazelnuts) and seeds such as pumpkin and sesame.

> **POLY - UNSATURATED** - found in high concentrations in sunflower, soybean, flaxseed oils, walnuts, and oily fish.

One for the notebook: Scroggin, trail mixes and nut or seed - based snack bars are an ideal way to keep up your unsaturated fat intake. They also deliver a good energy to bulk ratio. They are nutrient dense as well as often being high in fibre to keep the bowels working. Have a go at making your own snack bars or mixes to take on the hill.

THE 'BAD'

The types of fats that are often referred to as 'bad fats' are classified as 'saturated' fats and 'trans' fats.

Both fats tend to be in a solid state at room temperature, so are typically easy to distinguish from unsaturated fats.

> **SATURATED FATS** include fatty meats and dairy products, such as butter, cheese, whole milk, cream, and ice cream.

> **ARTIFICIAL TRANS FATS** are formed through industrial processes that add hydrogen to vegetable oil, causing the oil to become solid at room temperature. This partially hydrogenated oil is less likely to spoil, so foods made with it have a longer shelf life. Very small amounts of trans fats occur naturally in some meat and dairy products, including beef, lamb and butterfat but nothing substantial enough to be concerned about.

Q & A WITH REGISTERED DIETITIAN, JULIA SEKULA

How much fat should an adult be having each day?

Approximately 30% of your daily energy intake should be made up of fat. Fat is a concentrated source of energy; for every 1 gram (g) of fat there are 9 calories (kcal) or 37 kilojoules (kJ) of energy; compared to protein and carbohydrates which contain 4 kcal (17kJ) of energy per gram. This is a guideline, and individual requirements may differ slightly. Remember, we eat food rather than nutrients so think of the types of food you eat, how you prepare and cook them and the amount you eat each day rather than the percentage fat content, when choosing better options for your health.

The Eating and Activity Guidelines for New Zealand Adults – 2020 state that you should "choose and/or prepare foods and drinks with unsaturated fats (canola, olive, rice bran or vegetable oil, or margarine) instead of saturated fats (butter, cream, lard, dripping, coconut oil)".

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Is butter a healthier option than margarine?

Overall, although using small amounts of saturated fats like butter every so often isn't a problem for most people, there are healthier fats to choose for heart health. Instead of focusing too much on specific foods (like butter) or nutrients (such as saturated fat), it is important to consider the bigger picture and what you eat overall.

The Heart Foundation recommends that you use vegetable oils, mashed avocado, nut or seed butter, hummus or margarine instead

of butter or ghee. Alternatively, use no spread at all.

FOR THE NOTEBOOK:

» While many of us like to cook our back steaks in a pool of butter, we can all be mindful to use alternative oils for cooking or preparing kai (and use a smaller amount) - whether on the hill or around the home.

» Check out the Nutrition Information Panel on the foods you are eating to keep an eye out for how much 'saturated fat' is in that food, and where possible, opt for the option with the lowest amount.

» Remember, 1 teaspoon of fat is equivalent to 45 calories so the calories can stack up pretty quick!

» Remove excess fat from the meat before cooking, or with leftovers - drain the fat off first before storing in the fridge. Alternatively, scrape off the fat once it solidifies.

Our recommendations in a nutshell, short and sharp:

Love It: Unsaturated fats
(Polyunsaturated & Monounsaturated)

Limit It: Saturated fats

Lose It: Artificial Trans Fat and Hydrogenated Oils

In the next issue we will discuss Carbohydrates.



Can eating certain types of fat help to reduce the risk of heart attack, high blood pressure and cholesterol?

Eating more unsaturated than saturated fats is better for overall health.

Replacing saturated fat with polyunsaturated fat decreases the risk of heart disease by decreasing your LDL-cholesterol and your total/HDL cholesterol ratio. Trans fat does increase your risk of heart disease. These types of fats are found most often in foods containing partially hydrogenated vegetable oils, like deep-fried foods and baked foods such as biscuits, cakes and pastries.

Does eating fat make us fat?

Eating or drinking more than our bodies need regardless of the source can contribute to weight gain over time. Fat is energy dense so you don't need to eat as much to get the same amount of energy as you would if you ate other foods, and it makes you feel full quicker. Remember that the food or meal you are eating will be made up of different nutrients, and it is the combination of these nutrients that will make you feel more or less full (satiated) and in turn, impact the amount of food you eat.

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WRITTEN BY ~ SHAUN MONK | POINTS SOUTH

WHO BROKE THE PIG HUNTER?

Well the statistics say that it was actually the pig hunters who broke themselves!

Hunting behind a team of pig dogs is hard yakka and could well be described as a big, fun, semi-organised ball's up. For those of you that have been lucky enough to give it a go, you'll be well aware that there are plenty of opportunities for things to go very wrong. And go wrong they do, I can assure you.

In just the month following the Covid lockdown level 2 there were two serious hunting related injuries. One of which was a slip of the knife resulting in the hunter managing to stab themselves.

My own pig hunting misadventures have taken me into some of the worst situations and nastiest gullies on the planet and for some reason I manage to forget all the bad stuff and return for more punishment the very next weekend. **Occasionally I've even ended up in the human vet clinic for a bit of a patch up and haven't be able to return to the hills for weeks or even months.** Experiences like that are actually more common than you'd think amongst pig hunters and I reckon it's because we tend to take big risks during that adrenalin filled heat of the moment, barrelling on in to the thick of the action to help out our dogs.

The New Zealand Mountain Safety Council collated and analysed the available data from several sources including ACC injuries, SAR, fatalities and participation to produce a document called "A Hunter's Tale" which highlights the key risks to the safety of

hunters. The results indicated that pig hunting injuries happened most frequently during the pursuit or final moments of the hunt, in close proximity to wild pigs or hunting dogs or in challenging terrain.

Bites are the biggest risk with 59% being inflicted by pigs and 41% by dogs. Compared with all hunters a pig hunter is 2.5 times more likely to be inflicted with a knife wound. Post hunt infection from bites and cuts has been a common reason for pig hunters to seek medical attention. **Strains, breaks and open wound injuries to the limbs were also more common in pig hunters than other hunters and this is due to the very rough terrain that us pig hunters seem to force ourselves into.**

The desire to carry out heavy loads also makes pig hunters more likely to experience back problems than other hunters. There have been five recorded accidental fatalities during pig hunting trips in New Zealand, three were caused by drowning, one from falling over a bluff and one accidental self-shooting.

Over 25 years of very regular pig hunting I've been afflicted by several injuries and have seen some nasty damage to my mates and we've certainly made good use of ACC. I've suffered a few pig bites to my hands, some requiring medical attention, taken a tusk gash to the leg which luckily didn't go too deep, and have slipped with the knife into my thumb. I've also been stuck 15cm deep by a manuka stake which jabbed up through my calf muscle and into my hamstring tendon, requiring surgery to remove the bits left behind and keeping me off the hill for a couple of months.

A busy lifestyle is catching up with me and my knees are in a really bad way. I've had several surgeries to try and keep one of them functioning, rugby was the original cause but carrying heavy wild pigs over rough country certainly hasn't helped. One of the worst injuries I've seen happen to a mate was when his hand slipped down the knife during the stick, partially severing his fingers. Another mate with a broken leg had to get a chopper ride out, and a bloke I took on his first hunt took a boar

tusk slash to the forearm as he went in for the stick and it's left him with a pretty decent scar. Most of us have seen the gory pictures on the internet of the tusk rips up the legs and I've heard about a solo hunter who somehow slipped the knife right through while throat sticking a pig and slashed his own inner thigh, an injury that very nearly could have taken his life, bleeding out right there on the hill.

Anyway a few horror stories aren't going to keep a good keen pig hunter away from the bush and life would be bloody boring if you let the nay-sayers slow you down, so the best thing I can write about are some of the things I've learned that may help to reduce the risks of injury while out pig hunting with dogs:

BE AN ATHLETE

You enjoy your hunting so much more when you are fitter and arguably you could actually do a much better job of it with more enthusiasm to cover ground and put the dogs where they need to be to catch a pig.

You will also get to the dogs on the pig faster and when you are right in the thick of the action you'll be able to make good decisions without the hindrance of exhaustion. Good decisions could make all the difference in preventing injury and helping your dogs. If you're still recovering from a night on the razzle, you're not really being fair on the dogs, the pigs or yourself either. Nutritional food and plenty of water will also help to keep you in beast mode. I do realize that not all pig hunters are world class athletes, but everyone has it in them to be the best that they can be within their lifestyle situation. This could be as simple as walking the dogs on their daily exercise route, instead of driving beside them.

WEAR PPE

Personal Protective Equipment, most of us in outdoor or trade jobs know exactly what this means and it's no different for pig hunting. If you're operating through gorse, blackberry, lawyer, briar or matagouri, you'll thank yourself for trading in the fleecy pyjamas and wearing heavy duty canvas chaps or pants and strong jackets. Thick gloves are a great addition to your belt bag as well and you'll get along a lot quicker if you're not pussy footing through the prickles. If you do happen to get injured an item of bright clothing will help in your rescue, as will a personal locator beacon and a hunt plan left with a family member or friend. If you wear rubber gum boots like red bands into rough and slippery terrain you will have a higher risk of a sprain or strain than if you are wearing lace up boots with ankle support. Don't forget your headlamp, I find you fall over more when you can't see!

SET YOUR LIMITS! TRAIN YOURSELF AND YOUR DOGS

Biting off more than you can chew is something that many of us pig hunters could think more about. With the modern GPS tracking gear we will often let our dogs get out a bit further than we probably should and this really puts the pressure on when they "tree quarry" miles from where they started. It's about using a bit of self-controlling judgment to know when to pull the dogs back if they are moving into rough country where the terrain is dangerous for humans, or when the humans are just getting far too tired to thrash around the scrub any longer. To do this you can train your dogs to respond to a return signal. I've used

This bloke copped a solid slash on his forearm, on his first ever pig hunt



a shepherd's whistle for many years to pull my dogs back and in recent times I've managed to use the tone or beep signal on the tracking gear to get the dogs to return to me. The best days out pig hunting are the days that you exit the block with all your dogs at the time you want to leave. Catching a pig is a bonus and there is less risk of a verbal injury from the other half when you make it home on time!

GET IN THERE!

Once the dogs have actually caught or bailed up a pig it's time to quickly make a plan for a safe approach. Sometimes the shortest way is not the safest way and local knowledge combined with GPS maps will help you to pick a safe route that avoids waterfalls, bluffs, deep river crossings and thick prickly vegetation. Once you are close, if it's a larger pig that's giving the dogs a good work out then you'd be very wise to take caution on the final approach. Keep quiet and keep downwind if possible so as not to alert the pig that you are there. Try not to get yourself downhill of the pig or on its potential escape path as you may well get flattened. If the pig is being bailed remember that a pig's first form of defence is attack, I've been charged many times as soon as the pig has spotted me and boy can they move quick. It's best to keep above them and use a bank or a tree as a physical barrier when sneaking in to take a shot.

SECURE THE PIG

Most injuries to pig hunters happen in the situation where the pig is being held by the dogs and the hunter is



Share the load, your knees and back will thank you in the future

attempting to dispatch the pig. I find the best way to calm the whole scene down is to secure the pig first and foremost and to do this you need both of your hands free. Approach from behind and pick the pig up by both back legs then roll it onto its back. This will immobilise the pig, making it less able to turn on the hunters or fight with the dogs. The hunter can then pin the pig with their knee on the animals belly and by holding a front hoof upright. Now and only now is it time to pull out the knife with your free hand. Pulling out the knife before the pig is secure is a common mistake and can lead to accidental knife wounds to the hunter or the dogs. Occasionally if the situation is too risky and the pig cannot be flipped, a hunter may need to side stick a standing pig, but the safest way to do this is to have one hunter securing the pigs back legs and the other executing the stick. Grabbing by the tail is not a useful way of immobilising a pig because with all four hooves gaining traction it will simply drag you around. Get those back legs off the ground.

AVOID THE TOOTHY END

The toothy end includes both the pig and the dogs as bites are a regular injury to pig hunters. The tusks of a boar might be showy enough to demand caution but also be wary of sows and small pigs as they can all inflict a very nasty bite as well. Just stay clear of their mouths at all times. Excited dogs make no distinction between a pigs head and your hand so make sure they are clear before getting the knife up towards the toothy end. Too many dogs is a common issue and when the pig has run out of ears and cheeks for them to grip the other dogs or pups may be snapping on and off. Limiting dog numbers will certainly help. Also well trained dogs will actually come off the pig once it is secured on its back and stand-off while the hunter dispatches the pig.

GET A GRIP AND KEEP THE SHARP EDGE AWAY

The stick itself can result in a very nasty cut if not done properly. A sharp knife with a well-honed point is required to slide in without too much brute strength required. Conditions are often damp so a non-slip handle is a must. If you are forcing the knife or your grip is not tight enough then your hand may slip off the handle onto the blade, which can cause very deep cuts and even tendon damage. If the knife goes further than you expected where is it going to end up? Avoid the “serial killer stick”, where the knife is raised well above the target before being driven downwards. This is stupidly dangerous and you should instead hold the point on the target then put even pressure on to slide the blade in.

RIFLE CHECK, CHECK, CHECK

Pig hunting rifles can get loaded and unloaded many times on a hunt. Some hunters may prepare to shoot a runner pig that might break over a crossing after the dogs have grabbed one from a nearby mob. They then will unload to carry on down to the dogs, often through thick vegetation. If the pig is being bailed the hunter will load up in the final few meters of the approach. Often the bailed pig will end up being a held by the dogs just before the hunter has a chance to take a clear shot, so the rifle will have to be unloaded again and placed on the ground pointing in a safe direction before moving in to grab the pig. The situation is fast paced and exciting and there are many opportunities for a hunter to forget to unload and make the rifle safe. The only solution is to get into the habit of check, check, check. Even if you’re sure it’s safe, always open the breach and take another look before making your next move. Moving off a pig run, check again. After the pig has been killed, check again. During the carrying out, check again.

SHARE OR LIGHTEN THE LOAD

We pig hunters pride ourselves on getting the whole carcass back off the hill, one way or another! It sets us apart from the deerstalkers not only in our brute strength, good looks and power but also in our statistically higher risk of injury from slipping over or straining our backs. I could say don’t be stupid and butcher the pig on the hill and carry the meat out in a pack, but most aren’t going to listen to that advice, including myself! If you are hunting in a team then take short turns on the carry and swap over regularly. If it really is unachievable you could always hang the pig and walk out to take the dogs home, then return with scales if you need to know the total weight, a camera if you need the glory and then pack the meat out once it has cooled and set. Hey I enjoy a decent pig carcass travelling on the back of my ute too, some days I just wonder why the hell I did it!

SCRUB-UP

Post hunt infections of scratches and cuts are a common reason for pig hunters to seek medical treatment. You can alleviate this by cleaning up your hands and arms as soon as possible after the kill, washing in free flowing creeks or rivers and even carrying anti-septic gel in your belt bag. Cleaning up again after the carry will also help and you could consider leaving some soap in your vehicle. It’ll make your steak and cheese pie taste a lot better on the journey home anyway.

Hopefully these 10 tips give you pig hunters a bit of useful knowledge to help keep you safe and get you home in one piece. Now get back out there with the dogs, hook into those hogs and try not to break yourself!



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AGE THE BUCK

This is the 34th and final issue in our series of guess the age of the buck.

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



> Roy

Right, these buggers are hard.

Breeding and food plays a big part in Fallow deer. I hunt two wild herds, the Greenstone/Caples and the Blue Mountains so will pitch my experiences towards those. I also have Fallow in my paddocks. Fallow are really hard to judge by their pedicles, they tend to sit low on their skulls and their hair can be quite thick.

Body wise these guys are just like a Red or Wapiti, as they age they go from leggy teenagers then start filling out. First they fill out in the chest and then bulk up in the hind quarters, but the difference between Red and Wapiti is they mature a little younger. During the rut these bucks can lose a lot of weight and get very tucked up in the flanks making ageing them even more difficult.

Antlers are also very misleading in these two herds, I am talking about people think that tear drops (cleft palms) in the antlers is a genetic problem but it can also mean the animal is young and age can fix this problem. On the other hand three year old bucks can have nice palms. Judging a Fallow on the hoof can be really difficult. Front on you cannot see the antlers clearly and palms can be misjudged and from behind you have the same issue. I have hunted Fallow a lot and I have seen more immature bucks shot from this species than most of the others. I think one of the major reasons is limited opportunity and people lack

experience with them.

These little dama dama or drama drama as I call them are hard to judge but just like any other species the best way to do it is ensure he's a trophy and the rest will take care of itself - and remember does are better eating than bucks. I think this buck is around 6 years. My farm bucks can look like this as young as 4 or 5 years Good luck, Roy

> Tyron

Missing in action

> Cam

Firstly, it's a privilege to jump in on the last of what's been a really great series.

I've never found Fallow the easiest animal to get a good grasp of age on the hoof, the visual clues from the body change quite dramatically through the seasons.

Based on the body condition and neck size you can see the photos range pre and post and during the rut, also that in one image he is back with a bachelor group that all appear very young. He looks like he has come through the rut with quite a bit less body condition, but is still in not bad shape, suggesting he will still carry himself into the next season well.

His coronets are low to the skull suggesting reasonable age, and he has a nice big square frame to his antlers, again suggesting reasonable age.

He is a nice buck which I would guess

at perhaps 5-6 years, which is mature for Fallow given they have a slightly shorter lifespan than say a Red deer. I would think that if left for another year he would only get older and uglier (more character is awesome with Fallow bucks though), and not that it matters but probably wouldn't improve on score, especially as the Douglas system heavily favours symmetry. So, I would say that he is currently in his prime.

Is it time to take this buck from the herd? Well, it depends on your objectives, if he would be your biggest and oldest buck then by all means. But to the left of him is what's called a sorrel, or a 3 year old with its first head, and not a very good one at that so stuffing him in the freezer could perhaps be a better option for the herd overall.

Just remember with how sneaky and secretive Fallow bucks are, it's often only during the rut that you'll even get to lay eyes on those true master bucks.

> Greg

I'm far from an expert on Fallow, but luckily Roy and Cam are. This is a great specimen of a buck and a lovely better-than-representative trophy. He is very flat across the top of the skull and his antlers come off low and almost on the side of his head. He has a very square, well grown out antler configuration. I would have said "in his prime" and probably 6 or 7 years old, so we'll go with 6 years.



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of our readers guesses and the
Stoney Creek prize for issue 83 is:

SAM THORPE
Who came closest with a
guess of 5.5 years old

AGE THE
BUCK

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A \$1000 voucher supplied by Tyron Southward Taxidermy for any of their services



Ryan Crump

"One of my 2021 roar stags. He looked real old with coronets way down onto his skull, he was definitely past his prime. A pretty typical head for that area - bloody heavy to pack out!"



WINNER

Mark Wright

"Evening NZ Hunter team,
Here is the Wilberg Warrior. One of my favorite tahr I've shot, he was 15 1/2 years old, I can't help but imagine how many hunters he has avoided. Let alone helicopters he has hid in the scrub from, and other bulls he has battled with. Now he is a permanent resident on our lounge floor"



Mark Crossen

"This fella looks like he's been around a number of years, keeping his head low from the heli hunters. Shot back in June on the coast."

LOOKING AFTER OUR GAME ANIMALS

HEALTHY ANIMALS REQUIRE A HEALTHY HABITAT

The health of the game animal habitat is the foundation of the hunting resource. A healthy habitat with quality feed produces quality animals. Too many animals have a negative impact on the habitat and the health of the herd.



HUNTERS AS CARETAKERS

By making the right choices as to what we harvest, hunters can manage our game animal herds, improve the hunting experience and help our native species thrive. In this way we can be caretakers of the game animal habitat.

IT'S QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

A male-focused harvest leads to a herd with a high proportion of breeding females.

A more female-focused harvest provides better herd balance with lower animal densities and a healthier habitat. This means higher quality animals and better hunting. This is a 'win-win' for hunting and conservation.



MEASURING OUR SUCCESS

Success is hunter-led game animal management that balances the desire to target trophy males with the need to harvest more females.

The benefits of good management are outstanding rut hunting, quality meat and young males being given the opportunity to mature. It also means a healthy forest and better outcomes for our native species.





#FIREARMSAFE SCHOOL FIREARM SAFETY COURSE

WRITTEN BY ~ NIK SEATH

John McGlashan College in Dunedin became the first establishment in New Zealand to run the new SCHOOL FIREARM SAFETY COURSE from #firearmsafe (Firearm Safety Training Ltd)

With a strong history of promoting firearm sports, John McGlashan College is incredibly proud of its shotgun club boasting an impressive 47 trap shooters. They also encourage hunting amongst their students with an annual hunting competition. As such, they wanted to proactively support their shooters by strengthening their skills with additional firearm safety training.

#firearmsafe is a NZ based health and safety training company. We specialise in providing indoor firearm safety training courses. We use over 45 deactivated firearms to deliver a variety of services focusing on the education and training of both recreational and commercial firearms users.

Our training is based around the core principle that nearly every New Zealand firearm-related incident could have been avoided with better training and drills. While range days and live firing are crucial, we believe they should come second to professional instruction and practical based classroom learning. The current training systems in place throughout the country focus on making people a better shot, and to shoot

further. #firearmsafe offers is the highest level of training and education before people go out and squeeze the trigger.

John McGlashan College asked #firearmsafe to create and deliver a firearms safety course to be held on site for its students. The briefing for the course focused on three main areas:

- 1. Include both theory and practical elements that encompass firearm safety.**
- 2. Allow new users to have a good introduction and a solid understanding of different firearms and ammunition.**
- 3. Assist those who are applying for their firearms licence with a days' equivalent of pre-study and education.**

#firearmsafe developed a targeted training package combining both modern teaching practices and traditional hands-on learning. On Saturday 22nd May #firearmsafe delivered the first course of this type in New Zealand. Preparation involved three #firearmsafe staff dividing the sports hall into two zones – **one for theory and the other for practical learning.**

#firearmsafe has a one-of-a-kind \$5m indemnity insurance policy that allows the team to take deactivated firearms into schools for the purpose of training. With a multi-layered approach to safety, #firearmsafe take personal welfare extremely seriously, and each firearm is made completely inert and non-operational.

Instructors laid all of the firearms and snap caps on the floor for inspection by the John McGlashan College member of staff. Once all the safety formalities had been completed the session started with the course introductions.

Les is Dunedin's gunsmith and carries out work for two of the three gun shops in the city. His passion is to shoot

1000m target competitions and he has captained the New Zealand rifle team at a previous world championship. He started the course talking about ammunition, the components, how to identify different calibres and their potential lethal range.

It came as a great surprise to the students when they found out that the lethal range of a .22lr rimfire bullet was 1.5 kilometres. Les demonstrated this with an overlay of a map and the golf course next door to John McGlashan College. He described the potential range and unintentional targets (houses!) of an individual using a 22 for rabbit pest control in the area.

As a part of his lesson, Les handed out empty boxes of ammunition and encouraged each student to explain what they were holding in their hands and which rifle it would suit. This reinforced the importance of having an in-depth understanding of ammunition, as well as of your firearm.

Chris is an ex-Police Firearms Instructor who is currently working as the Senior Firearms Instructor to the NZ Mountain Safety Council (MSC). The MSC delivers the Firearms Safety Programme nationally for new licence applicants under contract with the New Zealand Police. With regional instructors located throughout the country, the MSC works hard to ensure that every new licence holder has received safe handling education before being able to purchase a firearm.

Chris started the next session with the Seven Firearms Safety Rules. Even though revision for some, it's always good to go over the core principles with regards to firearm safety.

This was followed by a practical exercise demonstrating how a scope reduces the safe field of view when shooting. Using a simple piece of foam tube, Chris asked the students to focus on a picture of a Fallow deer at the end of the gym 30 metres away. **We were not surprised to hear that most would have taken the shot, as they could clearly see and correctly identify the target animal (Rule 4).**

However, when he asked them to lower the foam scope, it was obvious that they hadn't seen the images of cattle, people and houses that Chris had placed around the target. Although the students had correctly identified the target, it was an unsafe shot to carry out (Rule 5) due to the restricted field of view! A very powerful learning tool highlighting the dangers of using optical aides, employed by a seasoned Firearms Instructor.

After a short break the students arrived

"Nik (with the help of Zane) delves into the context and circumstances surrounding a near-fatal shooting, which is showing to have a powerful and self-reflective impact on new firearms owners. As a PhD researcher in safety and a certified human factors professional of 15+ years, I fully support the approach Nik is taking."

DR KARL E. BRIDGES
BSC (HONS.) MSC PHD (PSYCH)
CNZHF C.ERGHE FCIEHF



"Learning how to safely use firearms is an absolutely critical skill for new and inexperienced hunters. The Game Animal Council fully supports the work that #firearmsafe does to help the next generation of New Zealand hunters be as safe and successful as they possibly can be."

TIM GALE
GENERAL MANAGER AT
THE NEW ZEALAND GAME
ANIMAL COUNCIL

back in the class to see Zane joining the session via Zoom. Zane is a hunter who in 2018 was mis-identified as a deer and shot in the chest! Zane's presentation brought home the importance of getting firearms safety correct, and the consequences of getting it wrong (Rule 4).

This was my time to speak to the students. I am the creator of #firearmsafe and bring nearly 20 years military experience to the table. I was recruited by Mountain Safety Council in 2019 and am Dunedin's Firearms Safety Training Instructor. **During this session I asked Zane a number of questions about the day he was shot, and Zane shared his experience with the captivated students.** The young men

were hanging on his every word, and you could literally hear a pin drop!

Once Zane said goodbye to the course, the group held an open forum and discussed the human factors, learning points and the lasting impact of that terrible day.

After lunch, the course tackled **"Parts of a Firearm"**. This was the first time that many of the students had seen and handled so many different types of firearms. The range of firearm actions were explained, along with the varied styles of safety catches and magazine types.

Chris brought two firearms out that had blocked barrels when fired. He showed how the barrels had exploded causing



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injury to the users. This again stressed the importance of knowing your firearm and using the correct ammunition.

The bulk of the afternoon session was programmed for practical firearm handling drills.

The gymnasium was sectioned off into 5 different skills stations.

1. Rimfire semi-automatic
2. Bolt action centrefire
3. Pump action shotgun
4. Semi-automatic shotgun
5. Other action types i.e. break barrel and lever action

Hula-hoops had been placed on the floor representing the safe direction to point the muzzle when carrying out their safe handling drills (Rule 2).

#firearmsafe has a custom muzzle mounted laser, a device that helps any individual who may be having difficulty mastering safe muzzle control. The laser demonstrates the amount of muzzle travel that can occur when not fully aware of your barrel direction. Students were asked to keep the red dot of the laser inside the hoop as they learn to handle the firearm safely. Usually, the laser is removed after a few cycles of drills and the learning goal being fully achieved (Rule 2).

Our instructors are mindful that as reflective learners making errors helps cement future good practice.

Any attendee that was unable to master a particular drill was given individual support and encouragement to help them achieve the required standard. There was always a spare instructor walking the gym, ready to provide one-to-one training if required.

Throughout the afternoon the students of John McGlashan College learnt the different firearm states of readiness at each of the skills stations (Rule 1-5). The load state procedures taught by #firearmsafe, MSC and the NZ Police Service are internationally recognised as best practice and are used internationally by civilian, law enforcement agencies and military establishments.

At the last skills station Les asked students individually to run through an ammunition identification task with him. Reflecting on his lesson at the beginning of the course, Les wanted the students to identify five different boxes of ammunition. This represented going into a gun store or locker and finding the correct box of ammunition for a particular firearm.

Upon successful completion of that exercise, he asked them to also identify five individual brass cases. This

represented finding loose ammunition and going through the correct identification processes to ensure it would be safe and suitable to use (or not!)

Overall, the afternoon session was intended to be more relaxed and fun as it gave our instructors the chance to get to know the students on a more personal level. Speaking on behalf of all the staff at #firearmsafe, it was a real privilege to work with such outstanding and enthusiastic young men.

Blending new technology such as Zoom, with traditional hands-on learning has created a course that many would regard to the best that is currently available in the country.

The session provided at John McGlashan College is completely mobile and can be transported by road to any location. As a result of this highly successful course, we are looking forward to making it available to other schools and institutions throughout New Zealand.

If you would like to have our team visit your establishment to promote firearm safety, please contact me (Nik) via the website, or at info@firearmsafetytraining.kiwi

WWW.FIREARMSAFETYTRAINING.KIWI

The outdoor community has been amazing and #firearmsafe has been offered a huge amount of support. The team would like to specifically acknowledge and say thank you to the following contributors:

- **The NZ Mountain Safety Council** for its support and providing leaflets on the Seven Firearms Safety Rules and hunter safety when "Heading Out!"
- **Stoney Creek** for providing #firearmsafe team uniforms.
- **Gun City, Hunting and Fishing and Elios Gun Shop** in Dunedin have all supplied firearms for training.
- **NZ Hunter** for giving each student a copy of their magazine detailing hunting adventures in New Zealand.

(People attending this course will still have to participate in an MSC Firearm Safety Course if they wish to apply for their firearms licence. This session should be considered to be additional training, as #firearmsafe does not have permission to issue the NZ Police theory test whilst on the SCHOOL FIREARM SAFETY COURSE.)





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LOWER OLDEROG BIV

WRITTEN BY ~ ANDREW BUGLASS | REMOTEHUTS.CO.NZ

Olderog Range from
the ultramafic zone

Lower Olderog Biv is located in the Arahura catchment in Westland, one of the key pounamu rivers for Maori prior to the arrival of Europeans

The biv is at 865m and sits on a tussock bench that overlooks the headwaters of Jade Creek, which is a tributary of Olderog Creek.

Jade Creek is famed for its pounamu and was the site of some intensive activity in the 1970's. A number of huts were erected in the creek and helicopters regularly flew in and out with stone cutters that were set to work on some of the bigger boulders that were found there. **Two of the old huts are still standing and visible way down below as you approach the biv.** One is pretty derelict but the other built by the Dalziel family

and surrounded by dense sub-alpine scrub and toetoe, is remarkably dry and sound. **A veritable time capsule complete with an old transistor radio and 1976 calendar on the wall.** Guardianship of the Arahura was returned to local Iwi in the early 2000's and the site is now part of the Waitaiki Historical Reserve overseen by Mawhera Corp. Lower Olderog Biv predates most of

this activity and has its own story. A dry rock located just above the biv clearing still had the remains of some old camp stretchers when I first started poking around there, and was probably used by cullers before the biv was built. **Lower Olderog is one of three remaining first batch, B49 bivs built by the NZFS in 1957.** It was retrofitted with sleeping platforms in 1974, and that it remained in good condition for the following 30 years with no maintenance is a tribute to the simple wrap-around iron cladding design. **The Biv was designated for removal by DOC in 2004 primarily because it was seldom visited, which is hardly surprising given that the access track hadn't been maintained since the 1970's.** Also, the multiple restructures



that DOC had undergone through the 1990's had effectively purged any field workers who had prior knowledge of routes to these more remote places.

And so, like many huts, Lower Olderog simply vanished off the radar for a while. When I heard about the biv's proposed demise I submitted a maintain-by-community proposal and started recutting the old ridge track up from Olderog Creek. In 2014 Joke de Rijke and myself carried out some repairs on the framing, floor and sub-floor, and repainted the Biv. Geoff Spearpoint came up and helped out with the finishing touches.

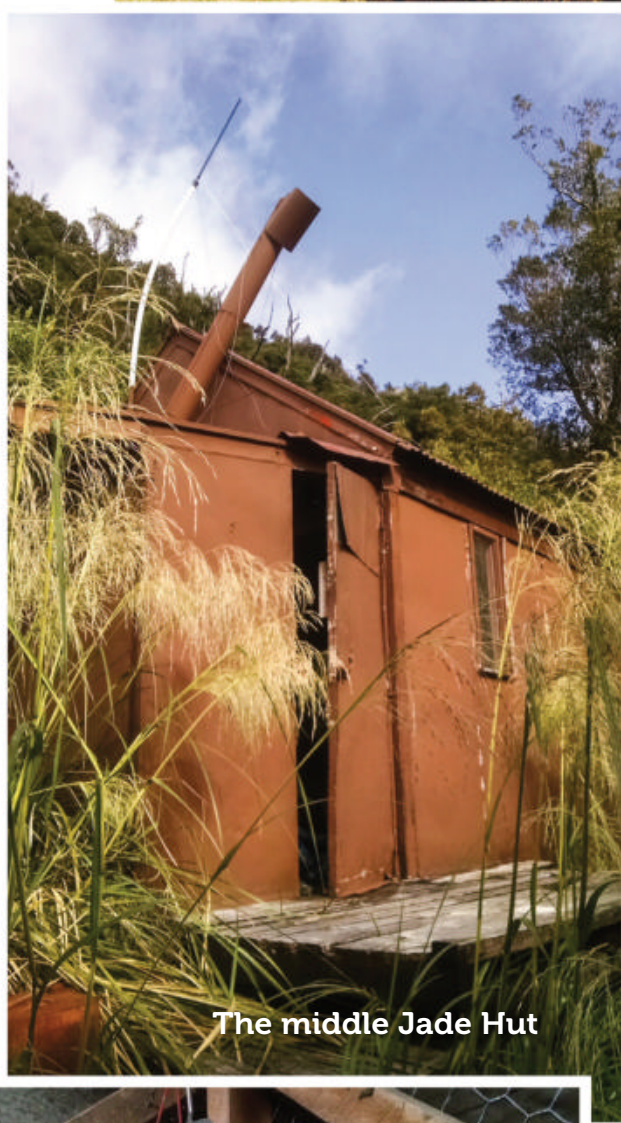
Lower Olderog Biv can be accessed from the Arahura roadend in a day. There is a bit of rough river travel required up the true right of the Arahura from the Lower Arahura swingbridge to Olderog Creek, and an active slip in the Olderog that currently forces a ford of the creek just below the Jade confluence. The tracked sections are in good nick however and the biv gets an amazing 5-10 visits a year currently. **There is an ultramafic rock band above the Biv that resembles something of a desert-scape with its weird and twisted outcrops and scattered stunted scrub.** Its openness allows relatively easy access onto the McArthur Crag and the tops are good open travel from here. A longer and more challenging high-level traverse to Lower Olderog is possible via a

volunteer-maintained tops track up onto Mt. Kerr from the Big Wainihinihi Valley. This adds an interesting overnight circuit for the more experienced. The McArthur Range can be traversed all the way along to Top Olderog Biv, another remote gem, and from here to a number of other remote destinations.

In terms of animals, there are scattered deer and chamois throughout the area. **The most well-used trails seem to be in the thicker sub-alpine forest in the head of Jade Creek, which can be accessed by sidling around the scrub faces from the biv.**



Lower Olderog Biv



The middle Jade Hut



Lower Olderog from another angle



1976 calendar in the bottom Jade Hut



Dalziel Hut no. 2



Ultramafic rock above Lower Olderog Biv

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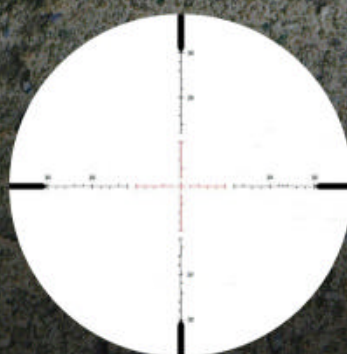


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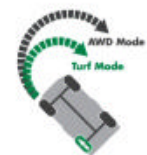
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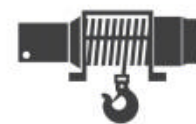
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POLARIS RANGER

1000 EPS PREMIUM

WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

I was very excited to take the Ranger 1000 Premium for review

Polaris NZ were very accommodating in the conversation leading up to the review, they gave us free rein to really test their machine over seven days of pig hunting from Omarama to Ranfurly so I'm happy to say that it was thoroughly tested!

Side By Side (SxS) vehicles provide the best balance of off-road performance and carrying capacity for backcountry driving. 4wd vehicles like utes can't compete, the only thing that possibly comes close is the old Suzuki Jimny (Or the Samurai, Escudo etc). **SxS's are infinitely more comfortable than a quad for passengers, not to mention the driver, and they keep the occupants out of the weather.** The carrying capacity is far more than a quad, you can take a dog box, several dogs and still have room for multiple carcasses and kilos of equipment. The only way to do the same with a quad is tow a trailer, which reduces its capability and bounces and bangs around behind you. Anyway, you can always tow an even bigger trailer (1.1 ton!) with a SxS too if you want to really pack the kitchen sink.

The SxS's low centre of gravity keeps you more stable on slopes and the slightly narrower wheel track than a ute gives you more room on narrow tracks – and

doesn't cut them up as much. With a SxS, you get offroad performance straight out of the box, getting a 4x4 to anywhere near the same level of capability requires far more investment – and there's always the niggling thought when you're hammering your ute offroad, you've got to drive it home at the end of the trip! The only areas a 4wd/ute is superior in is dust ingress and river crossings. Dust in summer can be brutal in a SxS, but that's easy to get around, just make sure you're leading the convoy! They are at a bit of a disadvantage for big river crossings though.

The recommended wading depth is only the level of the floorboards, but just like a ute you can add diff breathers and snorkels. Their lighter weight places them more at risk of overturning, the low clearance means getting hung up on a rock is more likely and worst of all – you



Here you can see the centre four air ducts, the heater controls and the switches for drive mode and windscreen wiper. You also see how the accelerator can be hit by the middle passenger

have to keep your foot on the accelerator so you'll get wet feet in a deep crossing!

One of the Ranger's main strengths was evident the second you hit rough terrain - ride comfort. The suspension is light years better than a



The Polaris was superbly stable on hills. The mud was mostly from towing the SxS on the slushy roads post-snow, the guards did a better job of keeping the body clean that this image would suggest



The underseat storage was sufficient for some tools and extra clothing

vehicle, its light body and offroad-specific suspension mean you glide along tracks. Not only is it much more comfortable, but you cover ground much faster. **I didn't really pick up on it until I watched a ute try and keep up with us.** The premium model also gets upgraded seat padding which contributed greatly to general comfort, and the placement of the side grab handles were good for tucking your shoulder against and keeping you securely inside the vehicle.

The only slight downside to the soft ride was the ride height when laden. With nothing on the back the clearance was okay, but with a dog box and a load of dogs, let alone with a few carcasses on the back, all of a sudden you had to be mindful of large rocks. Polaris had to pick somewhere on the spring stiffness spectrum to start with, and it happens to be a little soft for heavy duty hunting applications (though perfect for comfort). A simple spring upgrade would remedy the issue, as would a bonnet rack to better distribute weight. **This ride height does provide incredible stability though, combined with the wide wheel track (158cm) means the stability is simply outrageous.** Even better than a quad and significantly better than any 4wd. It is perhaps a fraction narrow in the cab for three large men to sit in the front comfortably, just in terms of elbow room for the driver, but that's nitpicking.

The next key strength was one I didn't hold out much hope for – the heater. I thought it would be a gimmicky box on the dash that trickled hot air out. But no, it's a fully ducted system with eight outlets starting at your feet and running right up to the windscreen for de-frosting with force and temperature control dials just like a car. I also thought it was a waste of time given we only had webbing

doors (which I preferred to solid half-doors), but the windscreen deflected the oncoming wind and the rear screen and roof kept it trapped admirably, the team absolutely loved the heater in the frozen polar blast we endured during our trip. After experiencing it everyone rated it as a major selling point and I can't speak highly enough of it.

Besides these two salient points the Ranger 1000 Premium had a host of other great features. The 61hp engine provided plenty of power for big, committing, mud hills but had a smooth and quiet engine note. Just ticking along you could barely hear the vehicle from any distance and fuel economy was pretty good for a powerful and heavily loaded vehicle, we usually got just shy of two big days out of the 43l tank. This model didn't have the Active Descent Control module that locks in engine-braking for downhills with a switch, but I really had no issues with the engine braking as it was. With a bit of left foot braking so you could keep revs up with your right foot the engine braking was always well under control, only at the very lowest speeds did the belts disengage. The approach angle was excellent, as was departure with the towbar removed. Ramp-over and centre height is adequate, always a hurdle for SxS's and that low centre of gravity, but even in deep ruts touching its belly the Ranger just kept on climbing.

The electric power steering was superbly effective, it took no effort to turn the wheels, even at a standstill. The disk brakes all round were also nice to see, they're much more effective and reliable than drum brakes, especially when there's mud and water involved. The driving posture was good, but at 6'1" I had the seat as far back as it would go. The pedal arrangement is very right foot



The tub lifted out for access to the battery area

oriented, which is strange given left foot braking is crucial in a CVT transmission. A broader brake pedal would be a nice upgrade so that you can transfer feet easily. **If you're carrying passengers often, especially children, you'll want to install a small guard between the middle passenger foot area and the driver's area,** as the passenger can easily slip a foot off the raised floor in the centre and stab the accelerator - this did happen to us once, to no worse effect than a little lurch, but something to be mindful of. The only genuine oversight I found in the cab layout is the lack of a grab handle for the middle passenger, even a removable one would be helpful.

There was a variety of storage on the dash and great maximisation of the underseat space with removable tubs. Underneath



The tilt at full extension



The superb tip-out window with gas struts

the passenger tub was a void for any extras you might like to add to the vehicle such as the spare battery upgrade, or in my mind, an on-board air compressor for adjusting tyre pressure, blowing dust etc. **The flip up seats and removable tubs meant it was easy to access the battery, and also easy to clean the underbody.** With the comprehensive underbody panels it means a lot of mud can be trapped above them, easy access to clean them means it actually gets done and you stay ahead of any rust issues. The tip up tray also helped here, and provided easy access to the engine.

The swing-out front window is an awesome feature, coupled with the excellent lights (60w halogens for high beam) it was dangerously good for spotlighting bunnies in the paddocks. The wiper is centrally mounted so it actually gets enough window for everyone in the vehicle to see out. We had a full glass rear window on our model (one of the upgrades) that could be removed with two twist handles. The glass was a real luxury touch, but you do have to wonder if the polycarbonate option (which Polaris do) might be better for hunters or

farmers given it's the backstop for the tray. I can just imagine me biffing a log of firewood through the back window, or throwing a pig on and the jaw smashing the glass. It's a high impact area on a working vehicle.

Speaking of the tray, the size was ample at 94x138cm and the tilt is a fantastic feature. It is hinged at the back though so you'd have to be pretty strong to lift it if you had the maximum 450kg in the bed. The tailgate was a bit finicky with the centre lift handle like a ute and the sides were pretty lightweight, they'd tilt in if you had a tie down over the dog box and pinched the tailgate when it came up to close. Not a huge problem, but latches either side might be a bit more robust and secure.

Fortunately we never had to seriously try the winch, we couldn't get it stuck! But I had to have a play and it was smooth and powerful, even with the vehicle loaded. You would need a bit of power though as that smooth protected underbody would create a lot of suction in mud. A nice feature was the



We certainly tested the payload rating, but it never once felt lacking in power



With some big hills to climb on the way home I thought it prudent to distribute the load a bit

auto-stop, which halted the winch once the hook was at the bulbar, making it much safer to work solo.

The three drive modes – turf mode, diff-locked 2wd and full 4wd are a good selection. You might scoff at turf mode for a hunter (in this mode the rear diff is open, meaning the wheels can turn at different speeds) but it was actually really nice not chopping up the grass around huts and making a mess – a little respect goes a long way with landowners. The 2wd diff lock mode was sufficient for 90% of the driving on the relatively dry South Island stations, I only engaged 4wd for technical driving or low traction like mud or snow. Doing your general running in 2wd places less strain on the drivetrain and less wear on the whole front assembly, and better fuel economy, so it's a great thing for long-term value for money.

One oversight is the lack of a factory spare tyre, we found this out two hours into the trip! Those alpine rocks are bloody hard on tyres, and not many SxS tyres have good enough sidewall protection. A spare is an absolute must. As an aftermarket upgrade there's a million options for mounting it, bulbar, roof, rear window, attached to a dog crate – the possibilities are endless, just make sure you have one! To check out the full list of accessories (like the cargo max system you could attach one too), jump on the Polaris website.

On this trip I had my father Terry and another good friend Craig Simpson, they both use SxS's in the course of their farm work but had never used a Polaris. They were both highly impressed by the thoughtfulness of the design, the comfort and the power – it's a whole lot of fun to drive!

I was in my element driving the Polaris Ranger 1000 EPS Premium around the South Island high country, I wouldn't hesitate to recommend it to anyone in the market for a new SxS (especially at that price point!). **I really didn't want to give it back but I must say thank you to Geoff Gray, the Polaris agent in Temuka, for allowing us the use of his demo vehicle for such a long time so we could test it so thoroughly.**

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HORSEPOWER	61HP
FRONT SUSPENSION	Dual A-Arm 25.4 cm Travel
REAR SUSPENSION	Dual A-Arm, IRS 25.4 cm Travel
FRONT TIRES	26 x 9-12; PXT 2.0
REAR TIRES	26 x 11-12; PXT 2.0
WHEELS	Aluminum Black Xcelerator 2.0
DUMP BOX CAPACITY	454 kg
BED BOX DIMENSIONS (LxWxH)	93.3 x 137.8 x 31.75 cm
TOWING CAPACITY	1,134 kg
FUEL CAPACITY	43 L
GROUND CLEARANCE	31.8 cm
VEHICLE SIZE (LxWxH)	305 x 158 x 193 cm
PAYLOAD CAPACITY	939 kg
WHEELBASE	206 cm
LIGHTING	Halogen Headlamps, 55W Low Beam, 60W High Beam, Dual LED Taillamps
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TIKKA T3X LITE

VEIL WIDELAND

WRITTEN BY ~ GREG DULEY

The Tikka T3 (now T3x) is understandably the most popular hunting rifle in New Zealand

It's sound, well thought out design that suits our style of hunting, teamed with the Finn's meticulous manufacturing and capped off with its affordable price point has ensured its success.

There have been numerous variants of the T3 over the years, but some have been more aimed at the European market and not really suited to the average NZ conditions. This year there are a range of new models some with new stocks and others with new barrels. The latter is what we are reviewing here. The standard **T3s have always had a fairly light barrel contour** – not as skinny as the Kimbers/ Remington Model 7s, Ruger Ultra lites etc, but a fairly good compromise of rigidity verses weight for our hunting situations. There has always been the Varmint and Super Varmint models with a much heavier contour barrel for maximum accuracy and the least fussy harmonics. If anyone has used one of these, you'll know how easy they are to get to shoot.

Tikka have taken a little of the thinking around the Varmint and put it into a new variation of the standard T3, while still trying to keep the light and portable

ethos of the most popular T3 Lite Stainless. They have called this new variant the Veil, and it's available as either the Alpine or the Wideland variant depending on the camo pattern — the former a little lighter in overall colouration to suit above the bushline scenery.

As alluded to earlier, the Veil has a slightly heavier contour barrel that Tikka call "optimised", measuring .725" at the muzzle instead of the T3 Lite's .625". In the 7mm Rem Magnum we received for testfire, the barrel length was still the metric 24.5 inches. The barrel is fluted as with the Super Lights, but new for Tikka the bolt is fluted – which Tikka say is to

offset some of the additional weight from the heavier barrel contour. **The bolt also has the large plastic bolt knob we've seen before on the Aspire and Strata.**

CALIBRE	7mm Rem Mag
WEIGHT	3.2kg/7.02lb
TOTAL LENGTH	1132/44.5"
BARREL LENGTH	617mm/24.5"
TWIST RATE	1:9.5"
MAG. CAPACITY	3+1
TRIGGER	Single Stage
MATERIAL	Cerakote Midnight Bronze
STOCK MATERIAL	Synthetic
STOCK FINISH	Veil Wideland Camo
MUZZLE THREAD	5/8-24
PICATINNY RAIL	No
CHEEK PIECE	No
OPEN SIGHTS	No
FLUTED BOLT	Yes
FLUTED BARREL	Yes
CHANGEABLE GRIP	Yes
FOLDING STOCK	No
RRP	\$2399



All the metal work is Cerakoted except for the bolt body – bronze in the case of the Wideland and light grey for the Alpine.

The muzzle is threaded imperial 5/8"x24tpi, which is a change from the 15x1mm metric thread of the Aspire and the Strata. It does come with Tikka's fairly standard radial type muzzle brake for the price, but it is "one bore size fits all" and it's a closer fit (and so is more efficient) on the larger bore size of the 300 Win Mag – which is logically where you need more recoil reduction anyway.

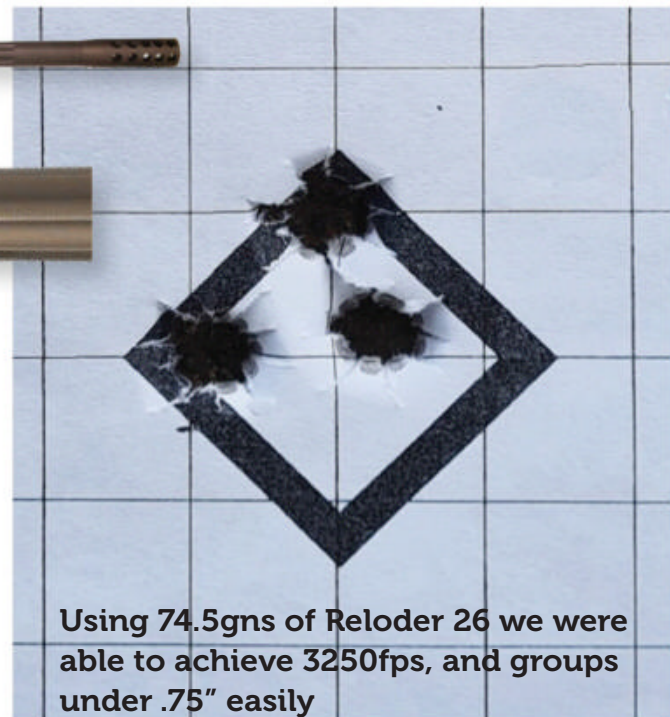
The stock is a digital camouflage pattern that as we said earlier is a little darker in the Wideland.

After the usual Tikka trigger job to get it down to about 1.5 pounds, I fitted

a Steiner Ranger 2.5-10x50 in Optilok mounts. Due to the short tube putting the 50mm objective closer to the receiver and the slightly fatter contour of the Veil's barrel, I had to go to the Optiloks with the separate bases to get enough height to get the scope to clear. **This scope has no target style turret, so I worked up a load with the 150gn Berger Classic Hunter and drove them as fast and flat as possible to minimise bullet drop and maximize point blank range.**

Using 74.5gns of Reloder 26 we were able to achieve 3250fps, and groups under .75" easily. Zeroed at 250 yards it was only 1.4" high at 100 yards, 3" low at 300 yards, and 10" low at 400 yards. So our maximum point blank range (PBR) was about 350 yards on deer sized game, and hold top of the shoulder at 400yds.

The Veil's barrel seemed not at all fussy about velocity, and shot in the same place



Using 74.5gns of Reloder 26 we were able to achieve 3250fps, and groups under .75" easily

throughout the ladder and accuracy testing – which is what you'd expect from the heavier contour.

I was heading to the South Island to catch up with the builders on our Barn house build, and film some waterfowl hunting during the closing week of the season. I took the Veil with me hoping I'd get a day to head for the hills and get it out hunting. Unfortunately there were too many hiccups with the builders, electricians, drainlayers etc and **I couldn't get away, so Emil took the rifle for a walk instead.**

I carefully explained to him the fact I'd set the rifle up with a substantial PBR, and he shouldn't have to dial unless the shot was over 400

yards. He headed up Arthur's Pass way and leaving his vehicle climbed and covered a fair bit of country for the day.



A pair of young stags Emil saw on his hunt with the Veil



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Emil high above the Canterbury plains



The lucky pig

After seeing a few distant animals in unsuitable positions to stalk, late in the afternoon he finally got on to a pig at 380yds. Instead of holding top of the shoulder as instructed (didn't I Emil??), he took the scope cap off and tried to dial for it. Unfortunately, even though a

European himself, he's got used to our American style "anti-clockwise for up" dial direction. He didn't look at the "Up" direction on the Steiner, and proceeded to dial the required number of clicks in the wrong direction and consequently shot under it! Last seen the pig was

hightailing it to a quieter part of the world...

The Veil is yet another interesting addition to the T3x lineup that will definitely appeal to some hunters – especially in the magnum calibres. It carries about a 200gm weight penalty but makes up for that with more forgiving harmonics.

The extreme mountain hunter will probably still choose the T3x Lite, but there is definitely still a market for a slightly heavier version especially when all the extra weight is in the barrel where you get the most benefit from it.



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SPIKA

— WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE —

TERRA PUFFER, XONE PANT & GUIDE TOP

We're seeing more and more from the Australian brand Spika, you might recall their Drover pack system we reviewed back in issue 81

It's refreshing to see they clearly have input from hunters in their design, and they have a huge range of products.

Recently we got sent the Terra puffer, Xone pants and Guide long sleeve shirt - all in their Biarri camo, which is well suited to our environments whilst retaining some aesthetic appeal for day-to-day use. The gear just arrived in time for a West Coast tahr ballot, what better place to test some gear! It's also had some pretty heavy use since, like a frozen winter pig hunting tour through Central Otago, not a pursuit that's kind to clothing.

TERRA PUFFER

It seems to me the general standard of puffer jackets has really lifted in recent years. The Terra is no exception, and we certainly put it to the test. Our ballot block was a frigid valley, camp never saw the sun once and we spent about 6 hours total in the sun for a week in the mountains. The Terra brought all the features we've come to expect; stitched baffles, an adjustable hood, hand pockets, quality zips and cuff adjustments. The exterior is a polyester that provides a good blend of durability and weight.

The light nylon liner provides excellent breathability. This is a crucial part as good vapour transfer gives you that toasty dry and warm feeling. If it doesn't breathe the sweat coats the liner and it's like wearing a rubbish bag, some jackets I've seen do it to such a degree that ice can form once the jacket is taken off! The Terra is certainly not one of them.

The 750 loft duck down is certified as responsibly sourced, treated with DWR and blended in a 90/10 fill ratio. That means 90% of the down is actually down, not bulked out with feathers. **90/10 is the highest possible ratio, and anything above 80/20 is regarded as high quality.**

My size large weighed in at 740gm, which is pretty good for a heavy-duty winter puffer jacket. It rolled up in its hood nice and tight, and also came with a nice lightweight stuff sack which I promptly lost after about a month. It had a good fit which didn't restrict any movement. Good fit is extra important in a puffer as they don't stretch much and if it's

pulled too tight at any point then it will compress and won't insulate as well in those places. The singular problem I had with the jacket was the shallow hood. It is good for ensuring the jacket stays dry under the peak of your raincoat if it's raining/snowing, but I missed the extra bit of protection around my face when wearing just the puffer in the wind. It was a conscious design choice from Spika with good reasoning, just not to my preference.

The Terra has been my go-to puffer this year, and will continue to be for quite some time I think. The down was excellent and the fabric choice was great, I never felt clammy in it, always toasty, warm and dry.

RRP - \$379.99

XONE PANTS

For a long time I refused to wear trousers hunting. The only offerings we had were baggy fleece pants which I just sweated in, or straight-legged pants made of low stretch materials that sapped your energy trying to lift your leg and ripped the crotch out on the second trip! Recently however, we've seen the emergence of proper tailored pants with high stretch materials, like Spika's Xone pants - now these are a pleasure to wear.

The fit is excellent, there is a lot of intricate tailoring around the waistband, crotch



A quiet morning hunt turned into a big workout for the Guide top when Mac found this good pig

and knees to optimise the fit for your hip and knee movement as you climb hills, the degree of stretch helps with comfort here too. **The fabric selection was great, warm and robust enough for all of our peak season hunting, especially with the reinforcing seams in the knees and double layered fabric inside the cuff.** The material is perhaps a little heavy for the height of summer, but you can't have everything and the big ventilation zips were effective at dumping heat. They seemed to dry well, I never had them completely soaked, but everyday dampness from getting around wet scrub and snow would dry out overnight if you left them in the bottom of your sleeping bag.

The pants have a single zip rear pocket, two conventional hip pockets and two zip thigh pockets. The slim integral belt was good, and it was exposed for about four inches on either hip so you could attach a small pouch to it if you were inclined to but it also has belt loops if you want to wear a heavier duty belt. The cuffs had bungees for tightening them against your boot, and an excellent addition was a shoelace clip like you see on gaiters, so you could keep the cuff attached to your boot and actually do away with gaiters in the scrub if you wanted. **My size XL's weighed in at 510g, pretty respectable with the plethora of pockets, integral belt and cuff attachments.**

RRP - \$159.99

GUIDE LS ZIP TOP

The Guide top was a great all-purpose baselayer. It's light enough to wear underneath three other layers on a winter trip, but the high collar and chest pocket means it's versatile enough to use on its own in warmer weather. It's nice and light too, my size L weighed 280 grams. **The fabric breathed well, but is robust enough to wear in the scrub and you won't wreck it.** It has thumb loops and reinforced cuffs. I'm a big fan of the reinforced cuffs, it's a pet hate that over time the cuffs on a lot of light baselayers balloon



The long hours spent sitting in the snow watching bull tahr are when you need good insulation layers



Putting the Spika combo to work in freezing conditions back in May

out, especially when you push them up your arm for messy work like dressing an animal. I like that Spika have gone to the extra effort, and production cost, of introducing features like this.

RRP - \$89.99

The thoughtful design and great material selection were typical across all of the Spika products I trialled, I was pleasantly surprised at how well an Australian brand performed in our different terrain and wouldn't hesitate to test more of their gear.



SPIKA.CO.NZ





I THINK THERE MIGHT BE THE ODD DUCK HERE

WRITTEN BY ~ COREY CARSTON

By far the hardest part to writing an article is the start. I mean, how do you actually start to write the story that is in your head?

There is always the weather, and maybe a spiel about hunting companions, a description of my location or the quarry. Even though it's been done to death (and I've been guilty once or twice of doing it myself) I could always fall back on 'the sun was slowly rising in east' or conversely 'the sun was slowly setting behind the hills/ wetlands/ paddock in the west'

Possibly I could start with a lab and a mouth full of mallard or even, the leaves were turning brown and there was a distinct change in the weather (done that one before too).

But this story had a definite starting point. It began with a text from our mate, Lyndon. It read *'hey man, went for a scout today, saw not many but there looks like the odd duck or two at xxxxxs place. Worth checking out.'* I replied with a *'Cool. I'll get David to swing past and check it out'*, which he duly did.

I'd just finished work on a sunny Southland Friday afternoon when my phone beeped. It was a text from David reading '1000s'. Not being satisfied with

such a tempting but incomplete text I quickly phoned him. **He was on a farm lane watching the field and there were, according to him, literally thousands of mallards and parries flying and feeding there.** I'm normally rather sceptical when I hear claims like that as, like many other hunters, I've turned up at a location where someone has said there are thousands or even hundreds of ducks or geese, only to be disappointed with small numbers. However, in this case I knew David would probably be under-estimating the numbers instead of over-estimating. While I was talking to him, he gave me a running update on events with statements such as *'oh, there comes*

another wave of mallards' and *'the field is almost black with ducks.'*

The large numbers David was describing were not unexpected as I had hunted this farm for a considerable number of years with great success, but it was surprising. You would expect to see such abundance in the evening, but David was watching in early afternoon.

He suggested that we could hunt it Sunday afternoon – I couldn't wait so we settled on early Saturday evening.

Saturday afternoon seemed a long time coming so early in the morning Jake and I went for a quick hunt close to home. It was hard having to sit back and watch him in action as he dropped seven mallards – one of the Souths most heavily hunted ducks. But I knew that David and I (Jake wasn't coming with us as he had chosen to hang out with his lady friend) were going to have our chance that evening.

When I saw David it was clear that he was very, very excited about the afternoon's hunt. As we drove to the spot, he filled me in on details we hadn't had the chance to discuss the previous evening. It seemed that the paddock had been harvested three weeks previously but as there were other harvested paddocks nearby, the ducks had only



The amount of ducks on that tiny pond was staggering



recently discovered this particular one.

As Lyndon made the initial discovery it was obvious that he would be coming and with Jake bailing on us, there was room for one more hunter. After careful deliberation, we asked David's cousin Trent to join us, to offer him the experience of his first time hunting out of a layout blind and also his first grain hunt.

Such was the anticipation that we all met up at the farm considerably earlier than

the planned arrival time.

Driving across the paddock I could see a huge mass of birds in the furthest corner. With the angle of the sun on them all I could see was white and I almost mistook them for a large mob of gulls. As we got closer, I realised that the white was the heads of hundreds and hundreds of parry hens. In fact, I was looking at the most parries I had ever seen in one spot. In amongst them were a lot of pigeons and a ton of mallards.

I rather unsuccessfully tried to get a few photos before they all became airborne. The rest of the crew couldn't fathom why I would drive 50 metres and stop, then drive another 50 metres and stop again, but once they saw the camera hanging out the window they understood.

As we got closer the field came to life as countless ducks jumped skyward. The parries flew in circuits before departing, while the bulk of the mallards headed for the nearby hills. About 500 however, flew a paltry few

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We had some awesome decoying ducks and I even remembered to sneak the camera out

hundred metres and flopped down into a small poplar-choked pond on the neighbours' dairy farm. I had hunted this farm for years and hadn't even realised there was a pond there.

David then announced that, while he was scouting the previous evening, he had bumped into the owner of the pond and had gained permission for us to hunt there as well.

As we set up the decoy spread, ducks were constantly seen flying past.

The parries would circle twice and land in nearby pasture while the mallards would have a good look then head back to where they came from. While this was going on, we were serenaded by the mallards on the pond and it was obvious that there were rather a lot more mallards on it than the 500 we had watched

going in. Our set up took considerably longer than normal as we were constantly distracted watching so many birds around us.

Eventually we were done and almost ready to roll. The only

thing left was to move the utes and bump the ducks off the pond. I lucked out and was sent out to do this task.

I'm often (ok always) guilty of only taking photos of dead things or trout about to be released so I thought I'd bust the camera out and snap a few photos on the way over.

As I got closer to the pond and despite only part of it being visible, I could see an amazing number of mallards. The closer I got, the more I could see. At this point I was absolutely staggered by the numbers. The banks were moving with ducks and I couldn't see more than an inch of vacant water.

Eventually my big white truck spooked some off the bank and they started to fly out of the pond. The next minute was one of the most exciting ever, as there

was wave after wave of ducks taking to the air. There were ducks crashing, not only into the poplars but into each other. **The mallards still on the ground couldn't get airborne without risking a collision and either flopped back into the pond or scurried around under the feet of the stray cows that were grazing nearby.**

From the truck I watched a good two thousand (yes, there were that truly that many) come out, then hopped out to see if there were any more. I was so close to the pond that a high bank was obstructing my view. As soon as my feet hit the ground there was another huge lift, then another. Jumping the fence, I peered over the bank and was absolutely astounded to see the pond was still covered in ducks.

When they saw my shiny face, the pond erupted and both camera and I were covered in spray as they all tried to get off the pond at the same time. **There were so many trying to escape that they crashed into each other and into the trees, and a few hundred had to flop back down on the pond to avoid injuring themselves.** As I continued to film there were still more ducks sitting on the water waiting their turn to leave.

Once the pond was all but empty, with only a 100 or so left, I jumped back over the fence and saw the biggest mob



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With parry limits on the ground this hen was safe from us



One of the bigger piles I've ever seen. This was Saturday arvo and Sunday mornings limits combined

of flying ducks I'd ever seen. Over the years I've seen some massive mobs, but nothing came anywhere close to what I was now witnessing. If I was put on the spot, I'd have to say there would have been at least 5000 ducks crammed into that tiny little pond.

Before I could start hunting, the ute needed to be moved out of the way. I thought it may have been a good idea to place it in another paddock and use it as a scarecrow to prevent any ducks feeding there. Unfortunately, it was some distance from the hunting spot and trouble with a complicated gate and chain set-up resulted in it taking longer to move than expected.

There were 500 plus mallards happily feeding away in the scarecrow paddock as Trent and I drove in. We both got to within 20 metres of them before they reluctantly flew away.

Walking back to the decoy spread we watched a small mob of parries decoying. **Two barrels appeared through the opening layout blind doors, and four parries fell to the ground.** My walk now turned into a run, as I could no longer hold back from joining in on the action. On reaching the lads we were informed that they already had ten parries down, meaning they only needed two more to reach their limits. Just seconds later, as Trent and I made it into the blinds,

and before we had the chance to load our guns and put in ear plugs, David and Lyndon were done.

Five minutes later so were Trent and I. Twenty four parries in less than ten minutes was pretty sweet but what was to come was even better. For the next 30 minutes the mallards put on a show for us. We had mob after mob dropping into the decoys whilst hundreds more waited in the near vicinity. **With so many ducks, and abundant grain in the paddocks, we didn't want to shoot a few and potentially educate hundreds.** More than one hunt was on offer here so I spent a lot of time poncing around in the decoys, waving my hands around trying to scare away the big mobs.

Every time I thought I had cleared the air a mob of 50 to 200 would appear and I'd have to repeat the dance. Eventually, I had to admit defeat even though it was the start of the hunt. It didn't take long and with so many ducks about there was a big risk of us accidentally going over our limits. A cease fire was called when we thought we were close and the count revealed only two more were needed. Trent duly got the job of sorting the last ones.

With the hunt over, or so we thought, it

was time for a photo. **While the boys started packing up their gear, I arranged the ducks for what I thought would make a great photo.** We placed the mallards into rows of ten and quickly discovered that the chief counter who shall remain nameless (it was Lyndon) hadn't been as accurate as he thought, and we were still four short.

A quick race back to the blind then ensued and guns were hastily reloaded. After 15 mins of watching ducks flare off we realised that the strategically-placed belly-up pile of ducks needed to be covered with handfuls of straw.

No sooner done than a good-sized mob of ten decoyed perfectly and we were finished. We were all pretty chuffed with what we had witnessed. When both David and Trent said it was their biggest ever hunt and their first limits it made the experience even better.

With so many ducks still flying and using the paddock it was a no brainer to leave the decoys out and return in the morning. **We also bailed early from work a few days later and returned again the following weekends but those are tales for another time.**



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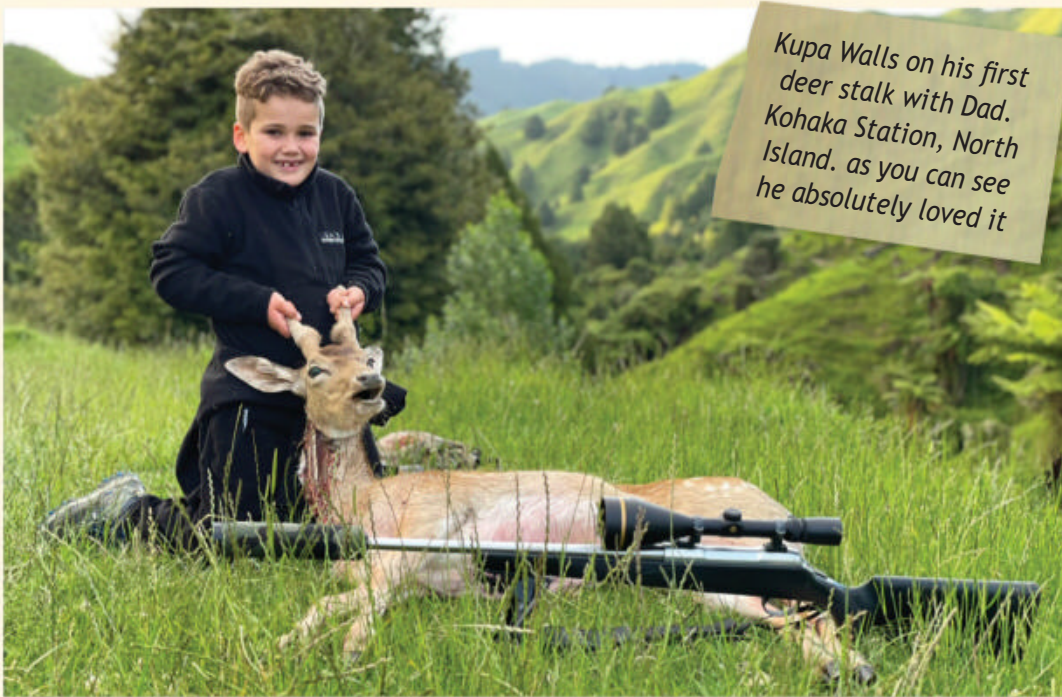
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Grand Winner

Suzy Toresen (11) shot this Red in the Wairarapa - her first deer



Steve Haines with a one-antlered Fallow buck from Raetihi

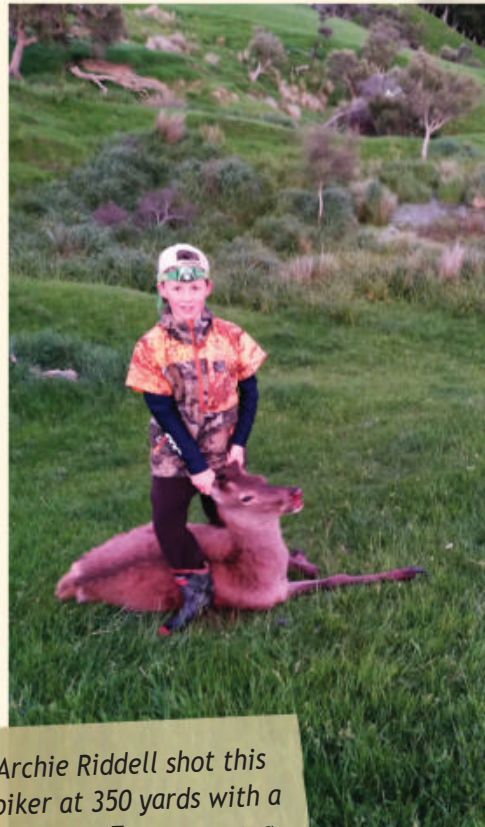


Kupa Walls on his first deer stalk with Dad. Kohaka Station, North Island. as you can see he absolutely loved it



Keeley Redwood (9) and Rocco Redwood (7) out helping their dad with some deer control during the roar

Riley Matterson's second goat and a cracker billy to boot!



Archie Riddell shot this spiker at 350 yards with a Tikka T3x 7mm rem mag

Taylor McGregor and his first Christmas boar





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THE GAC UPDATE

WRITTEN BY ~ TIM GALE | GENERAL MANAGER
GAME ANIMAL COUNCIL



Back in June Game Animal Councillors and staff attended the NZ Deerstalkers Association Conference in Queenstown

Gwyn, Craig and the NZDA team ran a fantastic event, and it was a great opportunity for hunters from all around the country to catch up and spin a few yarns about our latest hunting adventures and the future of hunting in New Zealand

The Conference was themed 'Hunting is Conservation', which gave us a great chance to discuss all the work that hunting organisations do to preserve our native species, look after our backcountry heritage and provide opportunities for young people to get involved in outdoor recreation and conservation. It also provided a platform to consider the path ahead for big game animal hunting in New Zealand.

When we look at New Zealand hunting in an international context, how we perceive and manage our game animal species is fairly unique when considered against many other places overseas. The reality, whether we like it or not, is that some New Zealanders will always consider deer, chamois, tahr and wild pigs solely as pests that need to be controlled. The GAC considers this to be overly-ideological, simplistic and ignorant to all the benefits that these animals bring to our communities.

A far more enlightened point-of-view can be found in Te Mana o te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy released last year that classifies game animals as 'valued introduced species'. The report identifies that 'reaching a balance to ensure that valued introduced species continue to provide the benefits they are valued for, while also ensuring that indigenous biodiversity thrives, is a key challenge for Aotearoa New Zealand'.

Tackling that challenge is at the very heart of what the Game Animal Council is about. We firmly believe that New Zealand can achieve a successful balance that provides for a thriving hunting sector and a free-range wild food resource while also protecting our native species.

This is the philosophy behind our recently launched Looking After Our Game Animals Programme, which explains how hunters can help improve both our future hunting experience and the health of our native ecosystems by making good game animal management decisions.

The programme is broken up into four parts – Healthy Animals Require a Healthy Habitat, Hunters as Caretakers, It's Quality over Quantity, and Measuring our Success. These explain how hunters can use good game animal management practices to help improve the quality of our future hunting experiences while looking after our native habitats. This relates to how male and female game animals have a different role in the herd and a different impact on the environment and how, by targeting more breeding age females, hunters can achieve better quality herds in a healthier habitat.

It also goes-without-saying that hunting organisations deserve far greater recognition for the native species conservation work they currently do.

The Sika Foundation is constantly expanding its who recovery work and predator trapping along rivers such as the Kaipo and Oamaru in the Central North Island. Lugging heavy wooden traps up and down steep country is bloody hard work so it was awesome to hear that a recent volunteer day attracted 33 keen participants.

Most NZ Hunter readers will also be familiar with what the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation do with regards to predator trapping. The Foundation is also a major supporter of the Kea Conservation Trust and every year remove upwards of 1000 red and hybrid deer from the wapiti area to reduce numbers and increase the quality and purity of the wapiti herd. Last year this culminated in a special project with support from DOC, GAC and others to get wild mince to struggling kiwi families in need.

NZDA has long been an extremely strong supporter of conservation work. Members have made huge contributions to hut preservation work through the Backcountry Trust and NZDA branches support many other local and national conservation initiatives, including predator trapping projects for who recovery.

The NZ Tahr Foundation recently partnered with the Kea Conservation Trust and developed and distributed a pamphlet for tahr ballot hunters to record their kea sightings.

These projects are just a snapshot of what is happening for there are thousands of unaffiliated hunters that contribute to conservation and predator trapping through their involvement with various other conservation and community organisations that go under the radar.

So, while extremists in the conservation debate may feel the need to demean hunters and create needless division, it is good to know that the hunting sector is out there just getting on with doing the mahi.

Hunting in New Zealand's wild places is what we love to do and we shouldn't be bashful about that. It's what gets tens of thousands of us out in the mountains and the forests and is a special part of New Zealand's social fabric. **It is also an important avenue to threatened species conservation and the GAC is determined to make sure this is better recognised.**

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



Grant Dodson, Lou Sanson and Craig Benbow at the NZDA Conference

Sika Hunters

Are you using the app?

The Sika Foundation has launched a handy app which hunters can use to submit invaluable data on the deer they harvest in the Central North Island - what? where? when?

The goal is to get the app used by many, as it is a real game-changer for the Sika Foundation's data collection programme.

The harvest data from the app will be used for herd-management purposes. One of the Sika Foundation's objectives is to actively monitor and manage the Central North Island Sika herd - to ensure it provides sustainable benefits.

Careful, targeted hunting activity can achieve a higher level of protection for the forests on which Sika depend, enhancing the herd and the overall hunting experience. But that needs good data. It's another opportunity for you to be a Sika manager, not just a Sika consumer.

The App is available for free from both the Apple App Store and Google Play. Download and start using it now!

APPLE: NZ Sika

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Sako turns 100!

The historic arms company is celebrating its centennial anniversary

Sako was first started in 1919, when the Civil Guards needed a workshop to repair the spoils of war. The workshop was made economically independent on 1 April 1921, and that is the day which Sako considers its day of birth.

In 1927 the company moved from Helsinki to Riihimäki, the same industrial lot from which Sako still operates today! In 1996 Sako introduced the 75 product range. The success of this gun (the first one Sako had ever designed in total) turned the course of the company. This success also helped Sako take the next step: the major Italian company, Beretta, took an interest in Sako and obtained its shares.

In the ownership of Beretta, Sako has seen 21 years of growth. One of the sales successes has been the Tikka T3, the millionth piece was sold by Sako in 2020.

Sako is celebrating this milestone with a worldwide competition, [see page 43](#).

Beretta New Zealand is giving away 10 special edition SAKO 100 Anniversary caps for 10 lucky winners to be drawn at random. Simply answer the question below & email your answer to: info@berettanewzealand.com

"What is the day which Sako considers its day of birth?"
Entries close August 31st 2021.



WIN

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Rab & Lowe Alpine

Initiative to expand use of recycled materials

British outdoor brands Rab and Lowe Alpine (owned by Equip Outdoor Technologies Ltd.) are proud to announce their new Spring/Summer 22 collections.

As part of their efforts to make their brands ever more sustainable, there is a significant increase of recycled materials throughout the range. As well as the apparel collection, recycled fabrics and materials can now be found in Rab sleeping bags, the new Rab packs and the new Lowe Alpine packs. The use of recycled materials not only reduces pressure on natural resources but they have a smaller carbon footprint than the use of virgin materials, thus contributing to the brands' aim to be Net Zero by 2030. In SS21, Rab has launched its own down collect and recycle scheme, together with the down recycling experts at Minardi Piume. This is a pilot in the UK and will be expanded to other territories if successful.

In partnership with brands like Pertex® and GORE-TEX®, the design team is developing fabrics containing varying levels of recycled content that still perform to the highest level. By 2030, at least 50% of their fabrics will contain 100% renewable or recycled content.

outfittersstore.nz | rabequipment.eu

Hunters Element Zenith Hood

If you're venturing on mid-winter alpine excursions or warm spring/summer missions the all-purpose, all-season, Zenith Hood is an essential hunting mid-layer top.

An integrated slimline hood has a skull cap design, providing complete insulation without any uncomfortable bulk when paired with a barrier layer. In particularly cold conditions, you can lose up to 50% of your body heat through your head. Being able to retain body heat and transfer moisture is key to staying safe in the mountains. The Zenith is light, warm, tough and breathes well when the heat comes on. It utilizes a 280gm RPET recycled polyester hard-faced, high wicking fleece for the main body, and a 205gm GRIDstretch, high wicking, high breathability fleece for the underarms. The body-mapped design optimises warmth, wicking & breathability.

RRP\$119.99

Sentry Bush Coat

The Sentry Bushcoat is a durable, water and wind resistant anorak that will breathe well when things get hot and keep you protected when the crap weather comes through.

The three-layer laminated hard-faced fleece fabric is made from recycled polyester which uses 73 recycled plastic bottles per jacket. Your ultimate barrier layer and primary defence against the elements, the water-resistant and breathable membrane keeps light rain out, allows for moisture transfer and keeps your body heat in. It comes with all the essentials like a zippered chest pocket, a big kangaroo pocket, a fixed hood with TunnelTECH adjustment, and an extra-long tail so you can sit on the back of the coat and keep your arse dry.

RRP\$179.99

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Hunting Life - Moments of Truth

A New Book By Peter Ryan

NZ Hunter was fortunate enough to be sent an advance copy of Pete's book, and Willie even wrote the introduction.

Ever since, I've been looking forward to the day we can share Pete's work with the rest of the world. He is a national treasure, I'm proud to have him representing New Zealand on the literary world stage and his writing constantly challenges me to improve.

Just start with the first chapter, I beg you, you won't be able to stop after that. Pete writes with a rare clarity and an arresting and insightful style, he will cut to the heart of a matter with a handful of elegant words and bring the reader along the truly important parts of a journey.

The book is composed of contemplative short stories so no chapter is the same. There's something for everyone with a seamless blend of anecdotes, education and history with a sprinkling of political commentary and one chapter of merciless satire. It spans continents and pursuits with Red stags, chamois, sable and buffalo, waterfowl and upland game. Truly there's something for everyone, even the pig hunters can relate to the dog man in Pete. You can't write with this kind of emotion without knowing your sport and passions inside out, bravo on a masterpiece of kiwi literature Pete.

Luke Care - editor of NZ Hunter Magazine

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Magazine Publishers Association 'Magazine Matters' survey



SAVOURY SCONES WITH VENISON COBBLER

— WRITTEN BY ~ RICHARD HINGSTON —

At this time of the year, when we are technically still in winter and just breaking into spring, I like to think we can still enjoy some comfort food

Comfort food to me is like a classic dish that will warm you up on a winter's night, such as a satisfying pie, hearty stew, and calorific puddings that force decisions about whether to have cream or ice cream, and deciding to have both!

All washed down with a substantial red wine while sitting in front of the fire watching a rerun of NZ Hunter Adventurers 'cos the rugby is all over.

This dish is really a combination of two delicious foods - a casserole and a scone, turned into what we call a cobbler. A venison cobbler in this case. The difference between a pie and a cobbler is that a pie has a form of pastry top and bottom, whereas a cobbler just has a top. The top could be a pastry, either sweet or savoury, but in this case, we are going to make it with a savoury scone. **However, if you can't be bothered to make the scone, then by all means use some savoury or flaky pastry instead and make a pie.**



VENISON COBBLER

1 kg of trimmed and diced venison
¼ cup flour
vegetable oil for cooking
100g diced bacon, or 4 to 6 rashers
1 large brown onion, diced
2 carrots, peeled and diced
½ leek, washed and sliced
4 cloves garlic, sliced
1 tsp juniper berries, crushed
2 sprigs thyme
3 bay leaf
3 Tbsp tomato puree
500ml dark beer
500ml red wine
1 ltr beef stock
1 cup wild blackberries, (blackcurrants will also work well)



Method

Dust the venison in the flour and shake off the excess.

Heat the oil in a fry pan and sauté the venison until brown on the outside then remove to a dish. You may want to do this in batches so as not to overcrowd the pan, ensuring that all the meat can touch the base of the pan to colour up.

Add a splash of oil to the same pan and sauté the bacon, onion, carrot, leek, garlic, juniper, thyme and bay leaf, and cook until just coloured.

Add the tomato puree and stir. Remove the vegetables and set aside with the venison.

Add the dark beer to the cooking pan and deglaze the pan (scrape all the caramelised pieces off the bottom of the pan).

Add the red wine and beef stock and simmer until reduced by one third.

Add the venison and vegetables back to the reduced stock mixture and stir. Some of this liquid will be absorbed by the scone mixture when cooking.

Place into a casserole dish and cook for approximately 1 ½ to 2 hours at 160°C until the meat is tender, and the sauce becomes rich (if it becomes a little dry then add a little more stock). You may wish to use a slow cooker or pressure cooker for the meat mixture but be aware that you will have to transfer to the oven when the scone mixture is added.

Finally, and so they retain their shape, stir in the blackberries and adjust the seasoning. The blackberries or blackcurrants bring a lovely tartness to the dish and match well with your chosen red wine!!

Transfer to a casserole dish if necessary, and place the scones evenly over the top.



SAVOURY SCONE

500g flour
40g baking powder
100g butter
100g grated parmesan
4 Tbsp chopped herbs (parsley, rosemary, thyme, chives etc)
320ml milk

Method

Rub all the dry ingredients together with the butter to resemble a crumb.

Add the milk and mix to form a dough. Do not overwork the dough or the scone will be tough.

Roll out the scone dough on a lightly floured work surface, shaping into a rectangle approximately 33cm x 28cm and about 2cm thick

Spread whole grain mustard across the scone dough, add more grated cheese (a mature cheddar is ideal), and a nice relish and roll up like a swiss roll.

Cut the roll into 2cm slices, and place on top of the venison mix to cover the entire top. Egg wash and bake at 220° C for approximately 12 to 15 minutes.

Enjoy with some roasted parsnips and maybe a glass or two of a Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah or Shiraz - something with a little bit of a fruity character to match the berry flavour in the cobbler.



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