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THE MINISTER OF CONSERVATION

NZ Hunter chats with Kiri Allan on all things hunting

WAPITI DREAMS

Emil shares the epic story behind his big old bull

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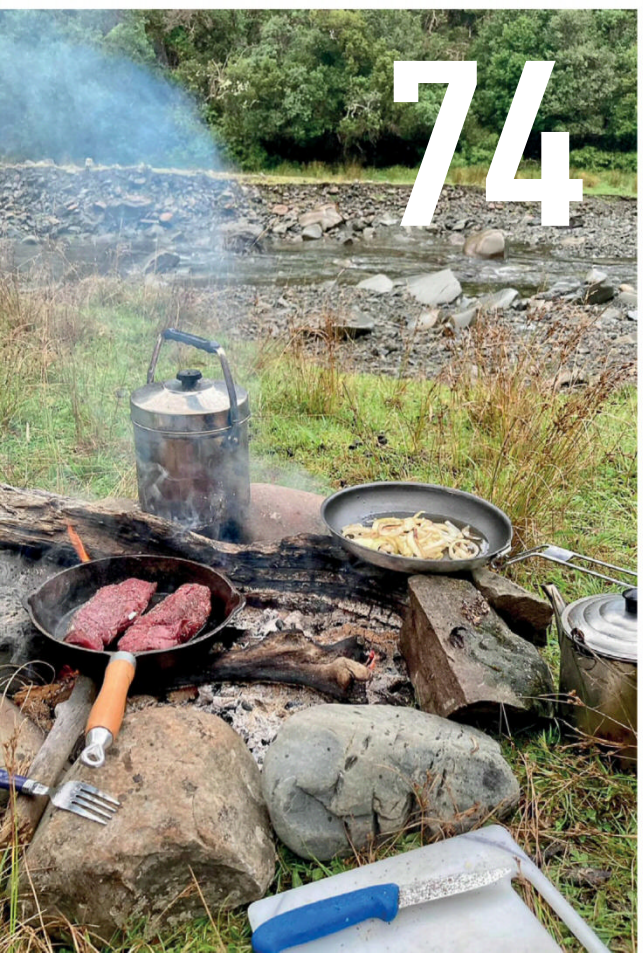

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FOR EVERYTHING HUNTING

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Emil Hansen's Dream Wapiti

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A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

This spring has been totally dictated to by Covid, and as I write this the Auckland outbreak is now well and truly marching its way down the country. Those in the South Island have not been affected too much yet, but we can all see it's only a matter of time. Auckland hunters have been locked at home for months now, and frustration is spreading throughout the community. It's going to be a very interesting Christmas indeed!

At the end of October lobby group Forest & Bird did another of their media beat ups, claiming that game animal numbers are at "crisis level" and our forests, our "largest living carbon sinks are on a death watch". This is yet another case of carefully chosen language, inuendo, data misuse and manipulation to try and tell a tale. They misused DOC's FPI plot data in which they count all ungulates poos including sheep - but F&B neglected to tell you that didn't they! The quality of the data is made clear when we look at one of these so-called crisis points which is in fenced sheep farmland on Kaitorete Spit between Lake Ellesmere and the sea on the Canterbury Plains! I'll give you one guess as to which species has caused dangerous amounts of poo in that plot – and it ain't deer! There have been periods in our history where animal numbers were much greater than they are today and when I last looked the forest was still there.

The intent of this F&B campaign is to totally mislead the public into thinking deer are exploding everywhere (which they most definitely are not) and that our forests are about to collapse around us at any moment. One picture of a deer in the Wellington water catchment, which is basically closed for hunting, and suddenly they are in plague proportions. There are certainly places where we need more control of numbers on and around a lot of farm land but on large chunks of the backcountry deer numbers are still only slowly recovering from the extensive Waro of a couple of years ago and there is still Waro going on in some areas at the moment. Yes, there are some areas of that backcountry that do need some hind management, and we are already working with the GAC and the Department of Conservation on programs to address these areas right now.

But do you see F&B contribute in any way to these management programs? Not on your life! They just sit outside the processes, claim catastrophic consequences using cooked up data, and threaten court cases against the Department when it suits them – just as they did in the tahr debate. I have had the misfortune to sit round the Tahr Liaison Group meetings with them, and they do not contribute constructively at all, sticking to outdated ideology like expecting DOC to eradicate tahr out of National Parks which is unachievable and pointless as long as you control nannies to low levels. Targeting all the bulls is totally counterproductive, as we've discussed many times recently.

So, are they really about conservation? No this is nothing more than a money go round. It is about making noise and creating conflict in order to try and hoodwink the uninformed public into believing F&B are the savior of the planet and so give them more money to make more noise to get more money. They actually don't want solutions to any of these issues because solutions mean no conflict which means no money. Remember F&B's staff are all paid and need to generate money to keep their jobs. They are not volunteers like the vast majority of the hunting sector who are trying to contribute constructively to managing game animals. I wonder how many would carry on if they were volunteers like the rest of us?! Hunters and hunting organisations contribute far more to real, on the ground conservation than F&B ever has…

The one shining light currently is the Minister of Conservation Hon Kiritapu Allan. As many of you may be aware the Minister took the opportunity to attend this year's Parliamentary hunting trip organised by the Game Animal Council where she and other MPs were able to experience hunting first hand. We also had the privilege of sitting down with her recently to discuss issues around hunting, conservation and what she wants to achieve during her term as Minister (See the interview page 12). There has been a massive change in direction from the previous Minster which has meant the Department of Conservation is now far more able to constructively and collaboratively engage with the hunting sector on hunting and game animal management issues to formulate sensible solutions for the future – for the benefit of all New Zealanders.

As we said above there are some areas with too many deer, and the GAC is working on some solutions for these at the moment. If and when deer management/control comes to your favourite area, please support this hunter lead management, even though it means a few less hinds. If we want a say over how deer are controlled, then we have to accept a low to moderate population of quality animals that don't cause unacceptable damage to our environment. Destroyed habitats and skinny deer with poor trophy potential are no use to anyone.

And lastly, Johnny Bissell is taking a break from writing for a while, but I'm sure we'll see him back refreshed and renewed at some stage in the future!

Make the most of the summer hunting opportunities and we'll see you all in the New Year when the new season of the TV Show kicks off in February!

Greg

SPOT THE LOGO

The winners for last issue are **Raymond McKenzie** and **Pat Fuller**. The logos were on the Tikka advert on page 11 and the DPT suppressor on page 52.

Q&A

Hi Greg

I have a Swarovski Z8 3.5-28, and it is one hell of a scope and I love it.

I see that you guys have reviewed this scope in your magazine and I am just wondering if I should get the ballistic turret or just stay with the BRX-1 reticle that it has which is good but I like the precision of dial-up. I am probably only shooting out to 400 yards.

Also, I want a bipod and I am just going to get one from hunting and fishing. It is mainly so I can get above the grass line when I shoot. **Would you recommend a 9 inch or 6-inch bipod?**

Cheers, Jackson

Hi Jackson

I would always go for a dial up turret over a reticle any day, as you will sooner or later get caught out by being on the wrong magnification if using the reticle. . The Z8 is an awesome scope but it is a 2nd focal plane scope so the reticle subtends different amounts depending on what magnification you have it on. And when you're talking anywhere from 3.5 to 28 times, that's one hell of a range in magnification, and therefore potential for a large potential elevation error if you shoot on the wrong magnification! The BTF turret option for the Z8 has the numbered rings from 200 to 500, or you can order a custom PBR in yards or metres to suit your load. This is our preferred system.

Bipod wise, I'd go with the longer bipod, as the short BR type bipods will frustrate you in a lot of cases. T**he 9-13" Harris' 1A2-L without the swivel would be my choice if not going with the lighter carbon fibre Javelin or Backlanz models we use now**.

Cheers, Greg

Hi Greg

I've read so many of your Swaro reviews, so I purchased the Z5 3.5-18x44BT scope with Optilok rings for tahr hunting on my model 85 Sako 25-06 and went out to range to sight in at 100m and set the ballistic turret up.

Sighting in I have run out of elevation and windage. I worked out that there is only 38 clicks of elevation adjustment total with a BT turret. A 350m shot needs 36 clicks from a 100m zero so where I'm at isn't going to work.

I'm sure you know about getting scope alignment right. From my readings on the internet looks like I need a 20 MOA rail to get the required elevation so I can set up the BT.

I hope you can help.

Cheers, Jim

Hi Jim

Unless you have a crooked barrel in your Sako (most unlikely) which means you're used up all your possible elevation getting it sighted in, you must have the zero stop in the wrong place.

The Swaro Ballistic Turret gives you 53 clicks of up. Once you have your 100 or 200 yd zero (I personally would go with 200 yds as that will give you a little more range with your 53 clicks), lift off the base turret with the click graduations and triangular zero mark, and turn the bottom of the 2 toothed gears clockwise until it stops. Then put the base turret back on with the triangular zero pointing straight backwards on the little dot zero mark and you'll have your full 53 clicks/13.25 MOA of up left. Remember – anti clockwise for up! **Try that and let me know how you get on. I'm sure this will solve your problem!**.

Cheers, Greg

Visit www.nzhunter.co.nz for this issue's "Spot the Logo" Competition.
You are looking for this icon
Two prizes of $100 H&F vouchers to be won

"Ever since my first trip down south chasing bugling bulls in the rugged and remote country of Fiordland, securing a Wapiti trophy had become the goal at the very top of my hunting bucket list. Not just any animal, but a bull with character, good antlers and most importantly, age; a minimum of eight to ten years old. A mighty creature that would've had the chance to pass on his genetics and be past his prime. That was the dream."

WAPITI DREAMS

WRITTEN BY ~ EMIL HANSEN

I'd been lucky enough to spend over 30 days in Fiordland during the bugle, ten days as part of an actual party and the rest as a tag-along filming for our TV Show. Even though most of this time was theoretically spent 'working', there is no place on earth I'd rather have been. Hearing those big creamy-coated bulls voice their spine-tingling bugles and watching them round up their harems of cows in such steep and unforgiving mountains is an amazing and incredibly humbling experience. It's almost spiritual in some ways.

The year 2018 began with some luck and saw Greg and I draw a ballot, the first period of a core block that tends to produce quality bulls. But as per usual, Fiordland did what Fiordland does and our hopes and dreams of ten good days in God's country were shattered with a horrific weather forecast.

As beautiful and scenic as Fiordland is on a fine day, it can become very wet, windy, and challenging in an instant - something that needs to be respected. A few extra days were had sipping tea in the video editing room or 'dungeon' as we like to call it, but

A magical spot to wake up to for day two

that Wapiti dream was proving irresistible, and since we had drawn such a great block, we headed South and went for it anyway. What followed were numerous days stuck in our cosy three-man tent, sheltering from gale force winds and rain in our expertly excavated rock crevasse. We'd sneak out any time we got a break in the weather and were rewarded for our resolve with the spotting of a very large 15-point bull, one of the biggest Wapiti Greg and Willie had ever laid eyes on. Sadly, he was only five and a half years of age, so we decided to leave him, to hopefully mature and continue passing on his great genetics in this area. The herd still needed this bull more than I did so it was a no brainer decision, but it's always a little hard walking away from the greatest animal you've ever seen. **This bull had the potential to break some serious records if he could survive a few more years and reach full maturity.**

2020 was a year to remember for a lot of reasons – both good and bad. With the police supervised ballot being 'rigged' as the odd person likes to claim, Greg and I managed to get the same block but this time it was for the second period. We were stoked, our prayers and good karma from leaving the big bull must have paid off… but then Covid-19 hit, and all ballots for the bugle were effectively cancelled as the country went into a nationwide lockdown. Our Wapiti dreams were shattered once again.

After suffering through lockdown levels 4 and 3, we were eager for level 2 to commence, which would allow us to go hunting again on public land. The closer we got to that date, the more excited we became, and a close eye was now kept on the weather forecast. **Jackpot, it looked like a good weather window was approaching!**

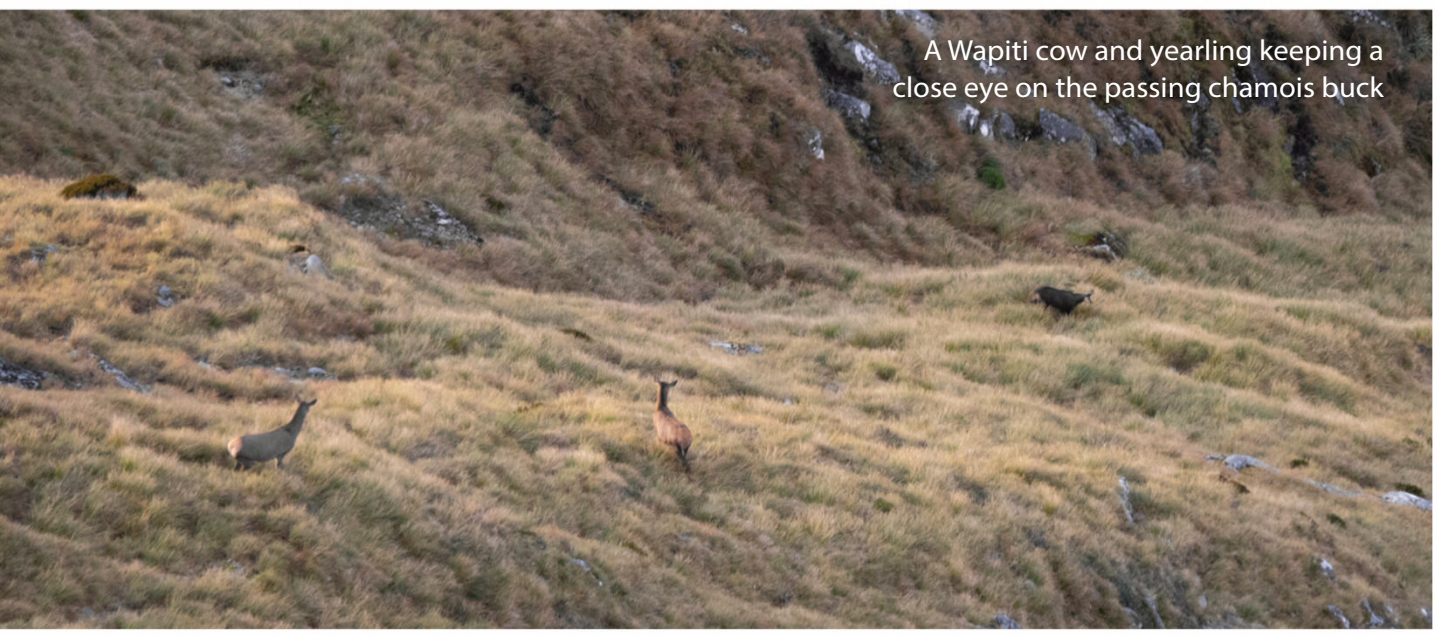
With the truck fully loaded with gear, Willie and I picked Greg up from the airport and headed south. The forecast showed seven days of stunning weather followed by a massive storm. Things couldn't get any better… and then on the drive, Roy Sloan from the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation (FWF) rang. He'd managed to pull together a great initiative called the 'Fiordland Wapiti Venison Mince Project'. The Foundation removes approximately 1400 deer annually from the Wapiti area to manage their vegetation impact, but since the recent venison price crash, it hadn't been viable for them to recover and export the deer. The Foundation had worked alongside the Game Animal Council and approached the Department of Conservation to partly fund 600 deer to be recovered by local Te Anau operators, minced in Invercargill, and then distributed to foodbanks around the country free of charge to families in need. **He wanted us to help document this great post-Covid news story by filming some of the recovery, processing, and distribution.** It was a great project to be involved in and seeing the Wapiti country from the back seat of a helicopter during the deer recovery part was certainly a neat perspective, but it also meant we'd now lost a few days of our fine weather window to look for the big bull…

One of the unique things about hunting in Fiordland is that most of it is a wilderness area. That means you've got to walk and carry everything you need for a trip on your back. The travel is challenging and all off-track aside from a few of the main-valley routes that the FWF volunteers use eight times a year to service their 500+ predator traps.

Our main goal for the trip was to try find the 15 pointer we'd left two years prior. By now he should be mature and hopefully have grown to his full trophy potential. But we didn't actually know if he was still alive. There were all sorts of rumours floating around, that he'd been shot and also that he had been seen in the same area. It all added to the adventure ahead.

When we finally got to the tops it was a joy to put the pack down and get the binoculars out to take in the scenery. For me personally, it's important to go into a trip like this with the right goal in mind. And that's simple, to enjoy a memorable trip in stunning country with no expectation of bringing a set of antlers home. If securing some antlers was my only goal, chances are that I'd more often than not be left disappointed, or even worse, shoot the wrong animal, like a five year old bull with heaps of potential. **Being able to enjoy just the scenery and animals is crucial and the key to always having an incredible experience.**

The clear night skies of Fiordland are truly something spectacular



A Wapiti cow and yearling keeping a close eye on the passing chamois buck

This trip was slightly different in a couple of ways-it was well after the bugle and now entering winter. This meant it was a lot colder and the shaded side of the tops were largely frozen which made for some interesting travel. These exposed and slippery faces took a lot of concentration to traverse, and we'd decided against bringing crampons, a decision we quickly regretted. **It wasn't all bad though.** We had a theory that because everything was cold and frozen, the deer would be out in the open seeking the warm and sunny faces. But theories are just theories, and for the first day of hunting, the only animals of note we laid eyes on were a few Wapiti cows and a lone chamois buck that Willie spotted underneath our campsite. The chamois encounter was an unexpected bonus given their rarity in this country, but not what we'd journeyed all this way for.

The other challenge about winter hunting is the short daylight hours and before we knew it the stars were out, signalling an end to the day. It was our first night camping out in a long time and we were blessed with an unbelievably clear night sky. Because of Fiordland's isolation, there's no light pollution and the Milky Way is pure and vibrant. The stars almost seem magnified, and you really appreciate these things when stumbling around in the dark doing astro photography.

The next morning saw us even more bemused. We didn't locate anything up high but soon were scrambling for the spotter to evaluate a couple animals right down low on the cold frozen flats, one of which was a strong, mature looking bull sporting 14 points. As tempting as he was, he wasn't quite within the trophy bracket we were after and shooting a bull would put a quick end to our trip. It takes days lugging a Wapiti out with kilos of meat, antlers and usually a head skin on top too. It was only the second day of the trip, and we still had a whole lot of country to cover to satisfy our quest for the 15 pointer.

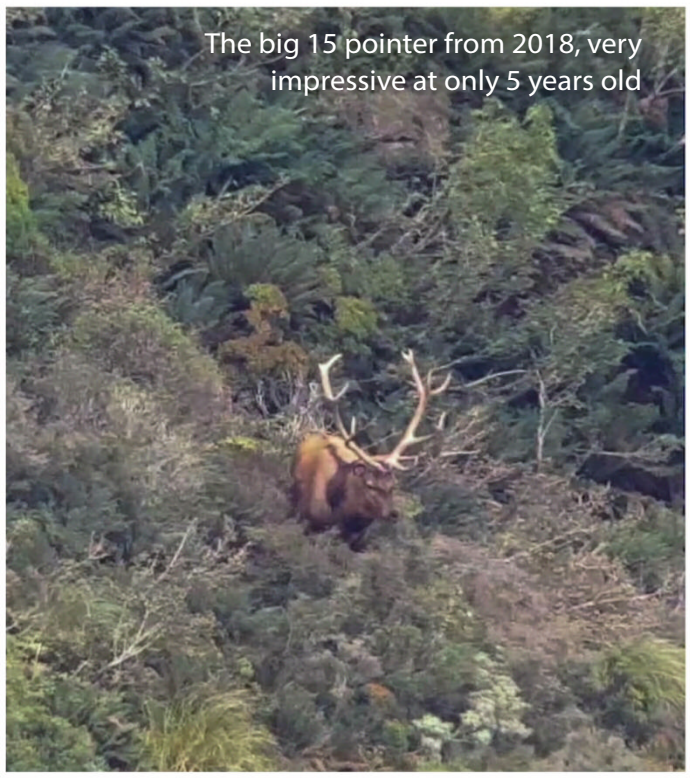
We spent the remainder of the morning glassing over every nook and cranny, and I even managed to spot a couple of younger bulls myself. It can be quite hard juggling camera work and glassing time. Although my main priority is always documenting the trip on film, the hunter in me still wants to be part of the fun and that's usually satisfied when I'm doing timelapses as then I can sneak in some time behind the binoculars.

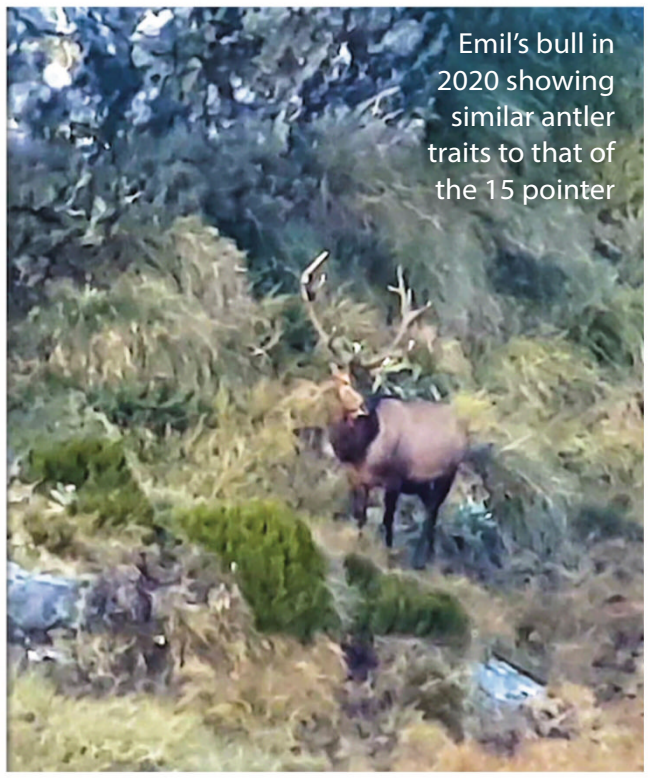
Carrying on with the trip, we now had a steep down-climb plus a big up-hill slog to undertake for the rest of the day. According to Greg, the route was a "piece of piss". In real terms it meant it was doable but very steep, sometimes almost vertical. Places where you need both hands to cling onto any bit of vegetation you can find and a lot of concentration, which isn't always easy with a 30+ kilogram pack on your back and a camera bag bouncing in front, obscuring your foot placements.

Once we got to the other side of the up and down, we were entering the 15 pointer's territory and we only had an hour of light left to glass. We pushed on to a high vantage point and soon spotted a mob of three good-looking bulls. On closer evaluation, the best was a promising 12 pointer with good tines. A bull that gets you quite excited when you first see him but after carefully assessing him and comparing antler length to skull length, you realise he's only 40 inches long and still needs a couple more years. That wasn't all the action. A big bull who was feeding just out of sight walked in to view on last light. He was an even bigger 12 pointer with heavy antlers and an old filled out body to match, but he was too far away and we didn't have enough light to pursue him further.

Retiring to the tent to plan our next move, we got an updated forecast on the InReach which said we were to expect snow the next morning and it looked like our awesome weather window was rapidly getting smaller. **Our spirits were still positive though as we'd finally found an animal which ticked a lot of boxes, and we were eager to get a closer look at him.**

As forecasted, we woke to sleet and rain so recuperated in the tent till the weather broke mid-morning, having had a couple of big days on the feet. Greg had scouted a new "piece of piss" route for us to undertake, one which involved another steep and slippery down-climb, followed by a sharp push back uphill. This had us clinging even tighter onto any vegetation we could find, forever double-checking our foot holds. While negotiating this steep country, it's not uncommon to encounter Wapiti trails leading through parts of it and you can only admire their ability to exist in this unforgiving terrain. Willie and I have spent a lot of time with Greg over the years undertaking his "piece of piss" routes but for some reason it always surprises us how difficult they often turn out to be, especially after a morning of rain. I guess that's the eternal optimist in him. When we finally made it to the other side we were greeted by thick, engulfing cloud, a complete white-out. This was pretty gutting as it was potentially our last evening hunt and was supposed to give us a different view into the 15 pointer's area-a last roll of the dice so to speak. Our plan had been to hunt along the ridge and glass the


The big 15 pointer from 2018, very impressive at only 5 years old


Emil's bull in 2020 showing similar antler traits to that of the 15 pointer

The body size of Emil's bull dwarfed the mature 12 pointer he was feeding with

Emil's bull slowly reappearing out of his rock cave after the tense helicopter incident

country on both sides, while also getting closer to the boat pick-up since the weather bomb wasn't too far off now. Despite the lack of visibility, we just couldn't walk past all of his territory without giving it a proper look, so opted to make camp and crossed our fingers for a final clear morning.

The weather gods must have been listening because we woke to a beautiful morning, clear and still. Sometimes when one good thing happens, it starts off a domino effect, and that's largely how the morning unfolded. Willie quickly picked up the mob of mature bulls from a day earlier, and within the mob there was now a new bull. This bull had even bigger antlers and a few more points than the rest-was he the big 15 we were searching for? A closer look through the spotter told us that unfortunately he wasn't. He had similar genetics and shape but was missing both of his bey tines. Nonetheless, he was mature and extremely impressive. While I filmed Greg and Willie looking through the spotting scope, their excitement and reaction to the bull made me very eager to check him out for myself. This was especially so after they said he looked mature and was a potential shooter if I wanted to take him. I really admire Greg and Willie's restraint of only wanting to take one good Wapiti trophy, and then holding out for that monster 'unicorn' that might one day tempt them to get behind the rifle again. The herd simply can't produce enough mature bulls if every hunter shoots a bull each time they get a ballot. When I finally got the chance to look through the spotter at him, my heart started racing. The bull was standing next to the big 12 pointer from the previous day and he dwarfed it, both in body size and antlers. This was a stunning animal that ticked all the boxes of my dream trophy.

We had a considerable walk on our hands to get within shooting range of him and the wind wasn't ideal. We were hoping the thermal winds would be strong enough to keep our sent away from him and the other bulls. While traversing the main ridge, we kept a regular eye on his location, and I vividly remember how impressive he looked in the sun with the shadow of his antlers silhouetted on a rock behind. When we got to the end of the ridge it was decision time. Do we carry on and out the tops route so we can get a boat pickup before the pending storm hits, or do we just go all-in for the bull and deal with the consequences of that decision later? It wasn't really a hard decision, but it meant that we were potentially looking at riding out a few rough days in the tent. The stalk was on!

To stay out of sight of the bull, we now had to drop down and traverse the dark side of the ridge. This entailed an interesting sidle through steep rocks with verglas ice, and of course all above a big drop-off. Everything was frozen and it felt like being in a freezer. Once we reached the saddle, we popped up with our binos and were relieved to see the bull was still in the same location. **He was now 800 yards away so we identified an ideal looking grassy knoll beneath us that would place us within a comfortable 350 yard shot.** To approach him, we were now going to be in direct sight but luckily there was a slippery gut in the shadow of a rockface that could partly conceal us. Everything was so quiet. All I could hear was my heavy breathing and bouncing heart rate. Once we got closer, Willie accidently triggered a loose rock that took off downhill. At the time it felt like the whole valley would hear it, but the bull didn't seem to react, so maybe they are just used to them. We now had to cross over an open flat to reach the knoll and were down on all fours, praying the bull wouldn't sense us.

We got there undetected and now had to set up the rifle. Everything was going to plan. **But just when we thought the tense part was over we heard a helicopter in the distance and it was heading straight towards us.** In such remote country, what were the chances of this? My heart was pounding as I expected this cagey old bull to make a run for it at any second. In disbelief, he stayed still and tilted his head back to look straight up at the helicopter. Maybe he'd learnt over the years that a good bull like himself was safe from the FWF operators.

Emil's Wapiti dream – a big mature 10 year old bull oozing character, 44 inches long and sporting 13 points

Everyone was overwhelmed at the bull's enormous size and weight

Once the helicopter passed, he headed straight for a rock cave and backed right up into it, with just his head and antlers poking out. We carried on setting up and tried to re-settle the nerves. I quickly passed the camera to Willie, got dialled in behind the rifle while Greg got setup on the spotter. **Now only 330 yards from him, we had a good chance to evaluate him properly and it was easy to see he was old.** A big filled out body, low head and neck, his back was sagging, and his pedicles were nowhere to be seen. He was a shooter for sure.

Part of his body was still concealed inside the rock cave but after a few lengthy minutes, he walked out a little further. Unfortunately, a fair chunk of his front shoulder was now covered by a boulder, so we waited some more. There was no need to take a risky shot when we were undetected. **Suddenly he walked out a step further, making his shoulder visible above the boulder.** Greg gave the all-clear on the spotter cam and Willie was rolling on the big camera. I held my breath and squeezed the trigger. Boom. It felt like a good shot, and I instantly heard the impact. The bull lurched 30 yards and then toppled over with his antlers sticking up and out of the tussock, we'd got him! Man, what an impressive sight that was!

That's when reality started to kick in. I had a lot of mixed feelings. I was undoubtedly super stoked about taking such a great Wapiti, but I was also a little sad. That was the end of the quest, the search for a big mature bull. To watch a majestic animal draw his last breathe was a little emotional too. At the same time, it was good to know that he was fully mature and was nearing the end of his prime, so he'd had a good chance to pass on his genetics. Knowing that we had let so many other good bulls go over the years made it feel right to take him. **He felt earnt.**

When we reached him, I couldn't believe how big he was, especially his body. It was mind-blowing. I've seen a lot of big stags in Poland, but they were nothing compared to him. And he was even older than we'd thought-his coronets were right down on his skull. We were all a bit overwhelmed by his sheer size and what that meant going forward for our pack weights. The real mission was about to start!

We skinned the bull and then took as much meat as we could carry. Our packs were loaded to the brim. I had the head skin, jaw and head, while Willie and Greg took the meat and my camera gear. My pack must've been well over 50 kilograms, one of the heaviest packs I've ever carried in the mountains. Now we had about 15 hours of walking to do…. Greg went ahead to scout a route while Willie and I finished packing and took care of the filming. The idea was to take a more direct route straight down into the main valley although it looked very steep on the map. Greg called on the radio and said it was "steep and maybe a goer". Willie and I agreed that if it wasn't a "piece of piss", it most

Soaking up the occasion before beginning the gruelling trek back out to civilisation

A last glass before the mentally testing bush travel began

definitely was not a goer... so we opted for the safer but much longer option.

We carried on along the high ridge in dwindling daylight and hoped to get along and out to a sheltered saddle for the night. After a couple hours of walking with headlamps, it completely clagged in. We tried to carry on with our GPS's, but a little tricky traverse that should've only taken five to ten minutes, saw us spend 45 minutes going virtually nowhere, so we gave up for the day and luckily enough stumbled upon a good camping spot.

We woke to rain and knew that with a big day ahead of us, it wasn't looking good for our chances to get back out and across the lake. To make matters worse, the first few hours along the tops were again in clag but we pushed on through some steep sections and made it to the bush edge. **The real struggle started once we were in the bush..** Trying to get through thick swampy bush with heavy antlers strapped to your pack isn't easy and it certainly tested my mind. The antlers kept catching branches and I was constantly getting stuck. This suffering is a big part of earning the trophy for me. Whenever things got tough, it only took a glance to the side to see the big antlers on my back to regain some positive energy. After nine hours of walking, we decided to call it quits for the day. It was dark, my knees were aching, and I had a bit of trench foot kicking in which made each step feel like walking on burning glass!

We got up early, packed in the dark and carried on for the remaining three hours in heavy rain and wind. We had no idea if our boat pickup was going to be waiting for us or if we'd be spending a few days waiting for the storm to pass. But the boat was there at the lake edge, so we jumped straight on, dumped the heavy packs, and soaked up the final journey out from the towering mountains back to the truck.

Taking the last few steps of a truly epic journey

My Wapiti dream preserved forever – a stunning job done by Tyron Southward Taxidermy

For me, this was a memento for all the trips in there and all the animals we'd let go. He was my one bull of a lifetime. The Wapiti experience isn't about getting an animal every time you go in there. It's about the journey, the animals you see, the struggles and the camaraderie. **Getting a bull isn't a one man show, it's a team effort. That's the Wapiti dream.**

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NZ HUNTER SITS DOWN WITH THE

MINISTER OF CONSERVATION

HON. KIRITAPU ALLAN

Greg and Garry were offered the opportunity to sit down with the Minister in her home and have a free and frank discussion about some of the issues important to hunters, game animals and conservation. We asked her a bunch of questions and these are her answers

Q *You were brought up in a small community where hunting, fishing and mahinga kai are an important part of everyday life. Can you tell us a bit about your background and how those experiences have shaped your views on the place of hunting in our communities?*

Okay, so, right here we are situated on State Highway 35. This is a highway that is laden with hunters, farmers, people that depend on the environment for our survival. Economic survival, recreation purposes, you name it. And so I think when you live in, when you're raised in, rural NZ you see the world around you differently. There's a couple of things: I think that one, the environment is something that we see not just as something to kick about but as something that's necessary to our sustenance. It's necessary to our community values. Just round here for example on a Thursday/Friday night, we'll all try and go up the bush, hunting and all of that meat is shared out amongst the entire community here. I've had people drop off just this weekend whitebait, koura, crayfish, mussels and it's a part of life. Especially venison. It's such a big part of the way we see ourselves, and each other. **It's a great way to spend time but also it fills people with a sense of pride, that we can be a little bit self-resilient.**

So I think the way that forms my views when it comes to the way that we manage our environment, it's very much through a lens of 'use'. Like, who uses the environment, how does the environment sustain us, how do we monitor the way that we engage with the environment. And it's got to be quite community led as well, like here along this highway I'm pointing to, these are the people that know those tracks intimately. Know what's where and can note the changes over periods of time. So it's not a really academic application of views and theories, it's a really intimate knowledge that's been accrued over time. **Mud under the fingernails and that type of approach.**

I think that's one of the things I bring to a conservation portfolio, it's a real practical application of who does what – do we have the necessary regulatory tools, or are there processes in place to ensure that we can manage this beautiful asset that we all are responsible for. And cracking through when it doesn't quite make sense, as well. I'd love to be able to do quite substantive law reform in this area. Probably a bit more than we could bite off for this term of government, but there needs to be a lot of

thinking - our management planning, is it fit for purpose in the environment that we are living in. Our world is changing so swiftly, **Covid has taught us that everything can upend in seconds.** Is our regulatory framework fit for purpose, can it adapt as quickly as we need to adapt, can it prioritise values and ensure that those things can be adapted over time to make sure that we can all use the environment, look after the various species and make sure we can hand that stuff off to the next generations. But there has to be an element of practicality to it, and I think that's my biggest asset that I bring to this portfolio, just seeing things through quite a regional-based lens, and a very practical lens, but wanting that legacy of our taiao to be endured for all of us, forever.

The Minister and her first Sika

Q *Before becoming Minister of Conservation, was conservation a portfolio that you were interested in and if so why; and what are some of the key things you want to achieve during your time in this portfolio?*

The only additional thing I'll say here is that I wanted to be Minister of Conservation for two reasons. One, for its reach into rural and regional communities. It's one of the only portfolios that really does have a practical reach into regions. The things that really drive me are job creation and that kind of thing, I'm a big believer in trying to sustain our regions, so I saw a really natural marriage between being able to reach into regions, create future focussed jobs that are around those sustainable and environmental values that we want and that create great career trajectories for locals. That could be our hunters, whatever, it didn't matter. It's for locals.

The second reason was it's one third of NZ's landmass. It's a critically important portfolio to any of us that use the environment and it comes with so many different challenges because it's so big. We've got this saying in te reo Maori that's 'All wars are fought over two reasons: women and land'. That's basically the state of play, for resource. It's an area that's fraught with people with vested interests, and we all want to be using the land in particular ways. One of the things I saw before beginning was that in order to bring out the best value for all New Zealanders was to make sure that there was a high degree of trust in the relationships for those of us that are intimately connected with public conservation land, and committed to its legacy. **And so what I wanted my role to be was to bring those relationships together to find the sweet spots. It felt like it had been quite fragmented for some time.**

Q *Hunters consider involvement in hunting and other forms of outdoor recreation as a great way to get people involved in conservation and believe the two things are complementary. However, there are other lobby groups who want to lock people out of the public estate. Access is crucial to enable hunters to make a greater contribution to managing game animals - local government, tenure review and decreasing landowner access have created isolated populations of deer that can't be hunted, i.e the well-publicised Wellington water catchment issues and tahr in areas where helicopter access is not permitted. Would you support removing barriers to hunter access?*

Yeah for me the key question there is that there's effective management planning in place. So that Wellington case is a great example. The first question I asked there was 'how do we get the deer'! I sat there for 15 minutes listening to a list of challenges why it wasn't going to be easy to go manage that herd. Again, it comes back to the planning process that are in place. I don't know that they're adequate. There's variances between regional and district, between the local level of planning and also central government.

Access is one thing. If we can make that work in a way where all of the relevant health and safety procedures are in place, then yeah, fantastic. So my key question therefore would be - who has that overarching picture of game management? Who holds the pen on that issue? I think there's some real opportunities, for example the Game Animal Council, I think there's a real natural marriage there. I'm responsible for the Department of Conservation, so the things that we can assist with is mapping and making sure that we're implementing and giving good guidance around regulatory issues etc. but I can't see anything that would prohibit us from really being able to lean into another statutory entity that has relationships and the wherewithal to go out and manage that herd, in a way that makes sense for achieving our biodiversity aspirations. We're maintaining a level of deer and there needs to be a shared consensus as to what level makes sense, but give the job to the people that can do it and do it well. Whether that's just a matter of access, or there needs to be a range of other issues that need to be tackled as well, together. But either way, we're clearly not quite there yet, having deer traipse through Upper Hutt would say we probably aren't hitting that sweet spot just yet!

Hunting's critics often accuse our sector of being anti-conservation. It's an accusation that is both counterproductive, and as most hunters are passionate about conservation, insulting. We as hunters are trying to work constructively in this space on indigenous species conservation and also manage any negative effects of game animals, while opposition lobby groups sit on the outside petulantly throwing stones at us and the Department while making no positive contribution. What role do you see the hunting sector playing in conservation into the future and how do we, as a society, break down some of the entrenched divisions promoted by some of the extremists on either side? We see it as essential that we get a wider representation, including hunters, on the likes of conservation boards and the New Zealand Conservation Authority. What are your thoughts?

Q

I think that there is a much larger role that hunters and people from the hunting fraternity or community can play at all levels of governance including the conservation boards and the NZCA. I think that to do that in a way that's useful there needs to be a good feed-in, preparing who comes from what environment and whether that's through GAC or whomever, but so that there is actually a feed-in point, that would be really helpful for me.

And look, the extremists on either side of the spectrum, they're frustrating, but what they do is highlight the tensions that those of us in the middle need to navigate, so the issue though is there is no point in constant conflict. Public Conservation Land (PCL) is one third of New Zealand's landmass. You've got this group, hunters, who predominate the use of and are very active on PCL. You've also got Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) who are doing their best to really preserve and do things that they feel is best for the environment, protecting various different indigenous species and all the other things they do. If we can't find a way of working together we are going to be in this constant conflict and it means we won't ever be able to finish things that make practical sense. We've got a lot of hands that have to hold the baby, which is conservation.

I personally know many, many, many, many hunters who love conservation work. I was with a big group of them just the other day. They take their guns and they take their traps and they are so proud of the work they do. One of them is leading a big whio restoration project here, taking all and sundry with him out to check their traps, that's a big part of the lifestyle. That may not be true for everybody, some people might like just to get out there and crack on and shoot stuff, whatever, each to their own. I think that if you've got leadership within the hunting sector really exemplifying why conservation is critical for all of us, and you've got people on the other side of the bridge that might be seen as ardent conservationists but really trying to understand where hunters are coming from**. That's really a critical component I think, because there's just far too much tension in this area. I speak about it frequently.**

One of the things that we tried to do from governance perspective is set up these quarterlies of 'conservation stakeholders'. Conservation needs stakeholders. So it's not just XYZ, it's not just the NGOs, it's not just hunters, it's actually all of us knocking our heads together and going 'alright, what are the critical issues for all of us to be able to manage this asset, this gift, this taonga. Whatever you want to call it. So that we can collectively use it and protect our biodiversity values'. For example, we've got the ANZBS - the Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy. That stretches our biodiversity goals out to 2050. I reckon if you showed that to a group of hunters, they'd say 'oh we're doing that and we're doing that' and so that's the piece of work that everybody needs a bit of visibility on, with people out there charging, cracking on, and that's coming from the hunting community. **And it might be that some of the work our conservationists are doing is critical work hunters could be doing as well. But so there's a big piece of work we need to do there in terms of healing some of the relationships.**

We have had a lot of feedback from readers regarding the recent accusations from Forest and Bird that deer and other game animals have expanded their range by more than 30% and are contributing in some significant way to climate change.

Forest and Bird selected datasets that are not comparable by using 2007 and 2014 tier 1 data. They set their own arbitrary 'crisis levels' not supported by DOC science to suit their own propaganda. The Faecal Pellet Indices (FPIs) across all datasets they've used, including the latest tier 1, include sheep, which F&B never acknowledged. A classic example is the FPI (poo count) plot on Kaitorete Spit between Lake Ellesmere and the sea which F&B show as a 'crisis density level plot', DOC's own Species Distribution Maps show no deer, goats or pigs in this farmland area, let alone at any so-called crisis level. DOC acknowledge they have issues distinguishing between various species in their plots but F&B show this on their map as a 'crisis' deer/goat/pig hotspot.

Q *They also are comparing results from different monitoring systems, using 2007 data pre Tier One verses the latest Tier One data as by their own admission in the small print the 2014 Tier One data didn't show an increase in ungulate ranges.*

We don't know what the carbon footprint of the helicopter or any means used to control deer might be, and we'd need to make sure it's not greater than any carbon footprint of the deer themselves.

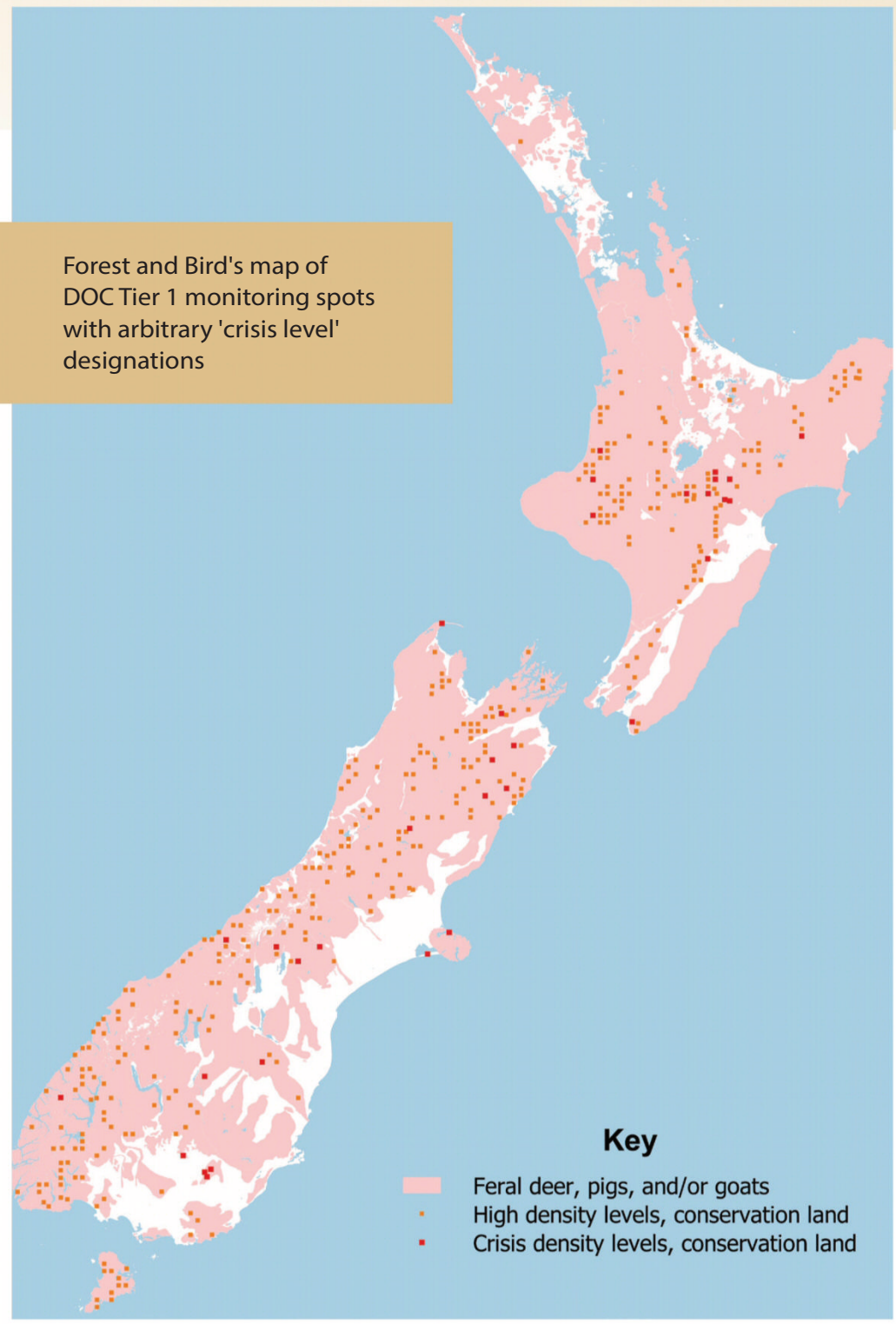
This propaganda by F&B is hugely damaging to our goal of trying to work collaboratively as we all know this was a totally misleading use of DOC data. At the time of this interview we have seen nothing yet from the Department to correct this misinformation - if hunters misused DOC data like this the Department would climb into us in a flash.

Hopefully DOC is planning to undertake the work to actually quantify the carbon footprint of game animals on the public conservation estate. Do you see this as an important issue that needs resolving so that the public has the right information to make informed opinions?

Well there's a couple of things that strike me in that question. First, yes, we have to make sure that information is not been manipulated by anyone for any purpose.

Secondly it comes back to this issue though, the question has to be 'what's the purpose of releasing information like this?' are there processes in place [for Forest and Bird] to have a good yarn with the Game Animal Council, saying 'hey team we're not managing animals here, here and here - who's got responsibility and resource to do this.'

I have always encouraged people who are mounting campaigns that if you've tried everything and you can't get over the line and you need to just go and throw a grenade that's okay. There's always going to be a time and place for that. But I also know when you grow up in a region and your all dependent on each other for your community survival, the first thing is that you've got to have a yarn and break bread first. So I guess is just probably another example for me of an area where look – has there been a conversation with the Department of Conservation? With the Game Animal Council? With Forest and Bird? Around 'are these the right areas, is this what's really going on'. Or was this just a shotgun to try and get a bit of momentum. I don't know whether that's the case, but this is the constant tone and constant type of campaign that we'll see. Because I'm so passionate about everybody having a real strong stakeholder connection to our environment, this is something I plead with all stakeholders, guys we're trying to work towards each of us feeling like we've got a connection and a role here. If I'm trying to cut you out or exclude you or vice versa, this is gonna create this animosity and **we're not going to be able to actually sit and have a beer or a feed and actually be able to work out what do we each do well for the future of this conservation estate.**



Forest and Bird's map of DOC Tier 1 monitoring spots with arbitrary 'crisis level' designations

Q *Predator Free 2050 is a flagship conservation project for New Zealand and is supported by many hunters through their predator trapping efforts. There is some concern that its role is to be expanded to include game animals such as deer. Can you provide assurance to hunters that Predator Free will remain focused on mustelids, rats, cats etc and our game animals will be managed differently?*

No is the answer there. Predator Free will always be focussed on predators. With game animals that's a different kind of conversation and one I actively want to be having with the Game Animal Council about who does what, and how we do it better.

Because I think we can all probably say that in certain areas they're overpopulated and we're not managing them well and we don't want to get to a point we're just shooting them from the sky.

Q *Do you have any advice for the hunting sector on how it could better engage and work together with Iwi on hunting and conservation going forward?*

Again, so much about what happens on the conservation estate really is about relationships. Right up here on Raukumara Range we've got a great example. I think it's a fair statement to say DOC haven't done a good job of managing the Raukumara. In the forest we can see it has been really overpopulated by various different herds and species, there's big dark dead spots within that bush. So, as you'll be aware we've undertaken to transition the management over to two different Iwi. It's gonna take time just to build up the capacity so that they can crack on and do things but there's really good relationships on the ground between hunters and Iwi. So I know that there is a group of people ready to go as soon as they've got the management systems in place.

I think there's so much skill and acumen there and it is a two-way relationship and learning that can occur between the hunting sector and Iwi. I see it working so well up the coast. Just yesterday I was over at Matawai, hunters from all over, farmers from all over out on the marae and there about Tuatara. But this is a situation where everybody had collectively bought into this project and everyone was learning and sharing from each other, finding projects to really work on practically together is always the best way instead of jumping around the table to have a discussion about governance or whatever, it's practical projects kind of space. But we're really going to need to lean into our hunting community to look after places, there is a lot of wisdom that hunters bring to the table, skills that hunters bring to the table. **Find a project and crack into it, together.**

Q *Modern game animal management in New Zealand, where game animals are proactively managed both for their benefits and to mitigate any impacts is something the GAC and others in the re pushing quite hard. The process of managing game animals into the future will yield large quantities of high quality meat that can be used to feed those in need. Do you see management, particularly hunter-led management, as important to achieving high quality game animal herds that provide benefit to hunters and the wider public, and would you support the sector in helping to achieve that?*

Two parts to that question. So one, we know that there can be really incredible hunter-led solutions to some social issues and we saw that as an example during Covid with the Wapiti Mince project in Fiordland.

Secondly, when it comes to modern game animal management I really think it's going to be critical that we lean into hunter-led

The efforts of the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation have given us a great model of hunter-led game animal management

The Minister and Greg hunting for her Sika at Ngamatea

management, but that has to be done through an entity. I keep saying it has to be something like the Game Animal Council. It's got the mandate, it's got the statutory levers to be able to do that. So I think that's the natural evolution and maturation of the relationship between things like the Department of Conservation.

This is also about the Department's mantra of working with others. It's working out what we do well - huts and tracks and maps and planning and things - and where can we work with others to do better. I think this is a classic example of where we can all get wins. **So yes, I would support that.**

Q *Kiwi hunters see the Game Animal Council as absolutely essential for the future of hunting and modern game animal management in New Zealand. It is also your statutory advisor on these matters. Currently the GAC's proposed funding strategies (the proposed levy on trophy exports and voluntary contribution on firearms and ammunition) are seriously compromised. This is due to Covid prohibiting international tourist hunters and the fear in the US created by the change in administration causing massive stockpiling of firearms and ammunition, leaving little to be exported to NZ. In the near future the GAC has almost nothing to levy. While we need to push ahead with these strategies for when the climate does improve, are you able to assist the GAC in finding the resources to enable them to do this work in the meantime?*

Absolutely. So we've seen an uptake in funding this funding cycle to the GAC for a couple of bespoke issues, some through Jobs For Nature and some through baseline increase. I think that something that can be an ongoing conversation, particularly as there are impacts through Covid. The levies, that's a GAC led initiative we're happy to support and you're right international tourism is really impacted at the moment. Ammo, you'll be far more across the nature and extent of that than I am.

Funding is one of the challenges that I've had a yarn with the Department about, what are the other options on the table. The report by Martin Jenkins quantified what would be required to run the GAC, that already showed that GAC was underfunded at the time. But that's always a challenge, it's like squeezing blood out of a rock when it comes to getting baseline increases. We had some success this year.

I think that where we can start looking at doing things a little bit different is if we were to really look at GAC leading on some of these other types of management. Like some herd management and really making it their core business.

So it's just really about a different way of looking at the opportunities, how to work best together and whether it's through enhancing capabilities, some baseline funding increases and some beg/borrow/steal! **The basic thing is yeah, happy to look laterally and I really do want to see the GAC take on a more of a hands-on role in terms of actual management of deer and other game animal species.**

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The comfort of my warm sleeping bag made it difficult to rise, but nature was calling. The temperature had dropped and there was a layer of frost coating the top of the bag. I crawled out under my bivvy tarp and stepped into the cold night.

Still rubbing my eyes, I was struck in awe of the magical mountain scene before me. To my feet lay an ocean of clouds with the full moon shining above, and mountain peaks emerging through the gleaming white like hundreds of little islands. To the west lay the peaks of desolate Fiordland and to the far north, I could see a few white glaciated peaks of the Southern Alps, glowing in the moonlight. It was the first time in 36 hours that I could see the world surrounding me, further than 20 metres away, as I had been caught in bad weather.

Two days earlier I had parked up my home on wheels at the end of a backroad, (at the time a Toyota Corolla with a mattress in the back), thrown a pack on with some gear and a little grub, and headed out for an adventure. The initial plan was to explore an area of the Eyre Mountains that I had surveyed only briefly on maps. The spirit of exploration made the outlook of the hunt even more exciting. I was hoping to find a pre-rut stag or a chamois buck.

MOUNTAIN SOLITAIRE

WRITTEN BY
ALEX PIROUZ-SCHLÜTTER

After a few kilometres through a wide and open riverbed and some river crossings, I reached the bottom of the mountain range. I wanted to reach a saddle that I had made out on the map as a good camp spot. But before I could get to my destination I got swallowed in thick clouds and relentless rain set in. As the daylight also started to fade, I set my bivouac tarp up for a semi-dry shelter. Waking up in the morning the weather hadn't improved and so I used my GPS to shift camp to my initial destination.

After a few more hours back in my warm sleeping bag, I started my first hunting day with a hot coffee and full of excitement, awaiting the first warming rays of sunshine. It is always a special experience to witness the sunrise from on top of a mountain, which brings with it a great sense of jubilation. I left my camp behind and headed out with a light pack. Throughout the day I worked my way along a rugged ridge, which divided the two main valleys that ran in opposite directions. I glassed the magnificent terrain of open tops, basins, slips and creeks in beautiful late summer weather. I was a little disappointed that all I spotted were two hinds and a fawn, grazing in a slip, deep down in the valley. Despite this, I was able to get better oriented in my hunting area, which had me excited for the next day.

The next morning, I decided to pack up my camp, which allowed me to hunt with greater freedom, sleeping wherever I would be at the end of the day. The feeling of having one's life needs at hand, and of traveling light, brings with it intense energy and exhilaration.

A simple bivvy shelter high up in a saddle

The rugged terrain of the Eyre Mountains is a test of your physical condition

A marvellous sunrise witnessed from camp

As the last of the clouds lift finally I get to see my hunting territory so I let the binos do the walking

Again glassing the country around me showed nothing but the three Reds that I had already observed the day before. I surveyed the country in my view and on the map and decided to drop into the head of the main valley via a side valley, to get my eyes on some new country.

At first, I was able to drop down fast but when I entered the valley bottom moving forward became more strenuous than expected. **I was a traveling man from the northern hemisphere, so I wasn't familiar yet with New Zealand's vegetation**. From atop, the valley had looked open but I was fooled by waist-high tussock grass and Spaniard grass. It took me almost two hours to cover the three kilometres to the main stream. The further kilometers up the stream were also burdensome and no game came into sight.

As I glassed up the steep mountainsides in the evening, I finished the last of my little food rations. As the weather was fine, I made my bed under the beautiful starry sky. The total tranquility and gazing into the universe made the thoughts wander. The mind becomes more clear after a few days away from the distractions of society.

I've spent numerous seasons as a hunting guide in the mountains of northern Canada, but it was a new experience to venture completely on my own into the mountains hunting. I love the intimate moments shared with good companions through a backcountry hunt but there is a special kind of experience and feelings that come with such a solo pursuit. While when hunting with a companion, decision making is always a team effort and leads to a certain level of analysis, when you are by yourself it is rather instantaneous and intuitive. When you become comfortable on your own you find an ancestral feeling, you fully emerge into the hunt and act rather instinctively. As a hunter you truly become a part of nature. I didn't feel lonely but rather a great sense of freedom, fully present and able to intensely connect with my environment.

Since no game came into sight in the morning either, and I was out of food, I decided to make my way out to my car. **According to my maps, it would be a 15 kilometre walkout following the stream into the open river bed that led to the road.** Again, I had misjudged the terrain and vegetation a little. The stream cut a deep gorge into the young mountains. Through boulder fields, rockslides and thick bush the going was extremely slow and exhausting. By mid-afternoon, I had only made it half way. Looking down the stream the vegetation grew thicker, so I decided to change my route and go up a ridge and straight over the mountain. It would take a climb to an elevation of 800 metres but at least it was open country.

The legs were getting pretty tired and the stomach was growling. I had to take a few breaks on the steep slope. I dropped my pack off and while giving my legs a rest, glassed around. I didn't have much hope anymore to take an animal, which didn't bother me much. I felt greatly fulfilled by the experience of the last few days even without hunting success. I always saw hunting as an active approach to nature, rather than just a focus on the act of killing.

To get a little better angle into the canyon, I moved along the hill just a few metres, when I noticed a movement to my right and raised my binos. Just a few hundred metres away in a bluff stood a chamois, watching me. Of course my gun was out of reach, with my pack about 10 metres behind me. For a few moments we were eye to eye, then the flighty animal was gone around the bluff.

At the sight of prey, the hunting instinct kicked in and set free new energy. With a spring in my step, I now climbed up the steep slope, hoping to cut off the chamois on the other side of the ridge. From a top there was no sight of him. The backside was almost vertical and rugged so it was easy for the chamois to slip through unseen. I sat down and started picking apart both sides of the rough sided gorge below me. **I now made out a group of chamois that were calmly browsing down the hill across from me and so quickly went out of sight.** To get closer, I made my way down a knife-edge spine. It was tricky, but in the stalk, I was fully present - just focusing the next hold and not the possibility of a fall. Higher up on the face straight across, I noticed a movement and made out a chamois on the run. At that distance, I couldn't judge the animal through my binos, but at this time of the year, the chances for a single chamois to be a buck was high. With my pack propped up, I quickly found a solid shooting position. The chamois stopped, and I put the crosshair slightly over

the top of the back to adjust my 308 for a 350 metre shot. The projectile hit low on the shoulder. I missed a rushed second shot, re chambered, took a deep breath and held a little higher. The animal dropped in his tracks.

It took some more down and back up climbing to get to my prey. I couldn't have been more satisfied when stepping to a mature trophy buck. I may have been somewhat lucky but I felt proud to be taking a hard earned keepsake from my adventure in these mountains.

After a few pictures, the chamois was quickly butchered and all the meat was loaded into my pack. I was aware that by law I wasn't required to retrieve any meat, however it was a matter of my integrity and of the hunter's guilt for killing an animal. **I was raised hunting in Germany with my grandfather as a mentor. Respect for the animal is the highest virtue for a traditional hunter in Germany.** With all the meat and my gear, the load weighed easy around 80 pounds. Every mountain hunter knows the love and hate for such a load on the shoulders.

At first, I tried to make the short distance down the gorge to reach the main valley. A tempting but rather foolish thing to do in this terrain. The bottom was extremely rugged. I fought through brush and lowered myself off small cliffs. Only a hundred metres short of the main stream, I found myself stymied by a waterfall.

Climbing back up the rugged stream was extremely strenuous with a heavy pack and through debilitating vegetation, but I was still determined to pack out all the meat. It was the first time on my trip that I really missed having a hunting partner - not particularly to divide the load but rather as the camaraderie in such hard times was always very special.

Further upstream I reached a section where I could cut back up the slope to get on the ridge that I had initially come from. The sunlight had faded. My legs were exhausted by now and after every couple of metres of altitude earned I rested, kneeling into the steep slope.

At last, a few hours into the darkness I reached the top of the ridge. I chose the closest two flat square metres to roll out my sleeping bag. I had now been walking and climbing, up and down through this rugged terrain for almost 14 hours straight. On a rock, I cooked slices of tenderloin and heart with some steak spice. To taste success and fill the void in my stomach at the end of such a mountain pursuit makes the experience wholesome.

Opening my eyes in the morning I was again greeted by a spectacular view. To reach my car it was a last ten kilometre push over a high ridge, but did that lukewarm Speights waiting there taste ever so good.

As it is tradition in Germany I gave the chamois buck his last bite

Beyond happy and proud being rewarded with this great chamois buck

Returning to phone service, I received the news that the Covid pandemic had reached a new severity and international travel was put on halt, which in the end left me stranded in New Zealand for six months beyond my planned stay.

I enjoyed the great freedom of hunting in New Zealand, through this one and numerous other hunting adventures. I got to explore magnificent parts of the country, had unforgettable experiences and fell greatly in love for the land and its game. Some of the adventures I took on by myself and others shared with keen Kiwi hunters that I met on my travels. Great new friends were made in the hills. **At this point I want to warmly thank the local hunters for the incredible welcome I experienced, the hosting, their conservation efforts, advice and shared experiences.**

A small flat space on a steep ridge halfway into a hard packout for the nomadic hunter

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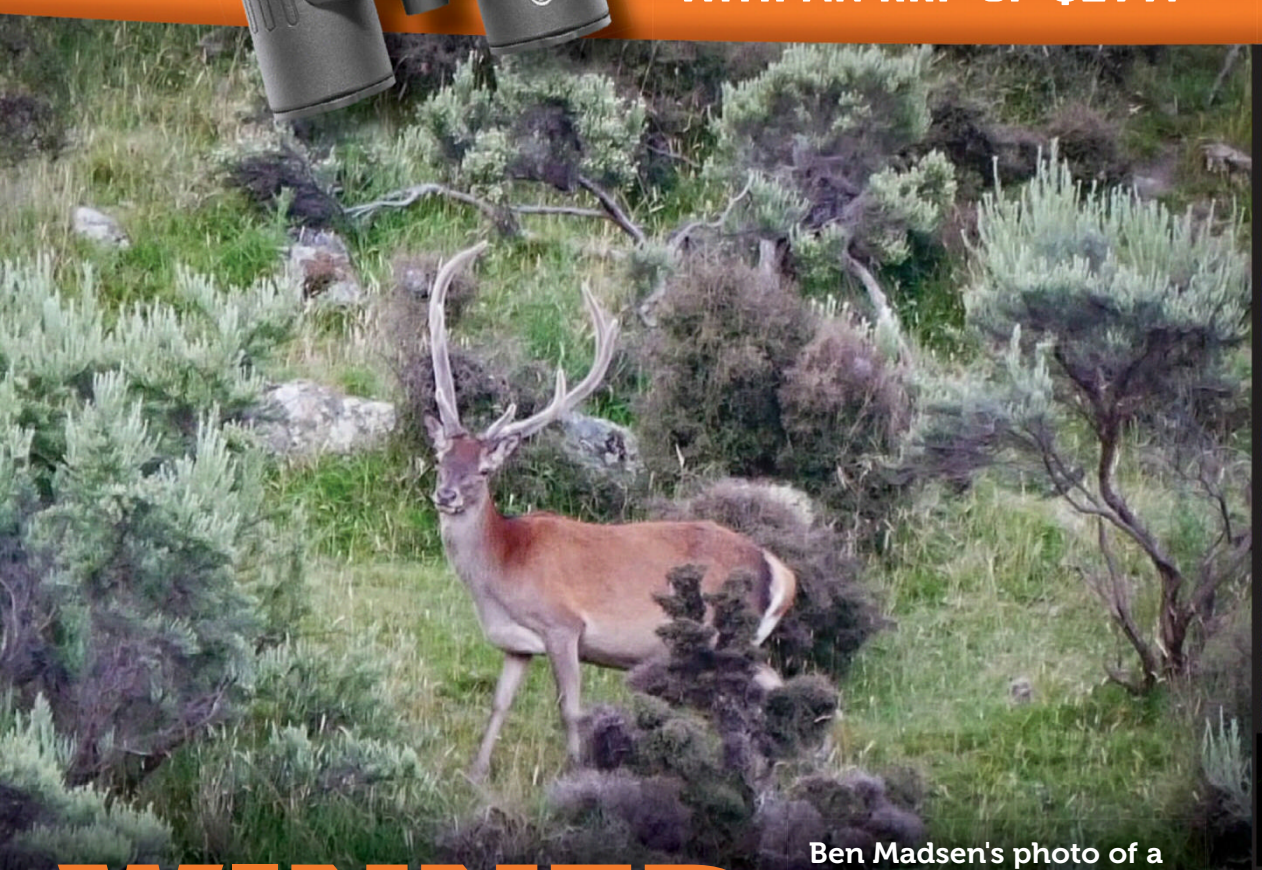

WINNER

Ben Madsen's photo of a velvet stag photographed and left to finish growing

An alpine Red hind on the West Coast by Derek Johnson

Laura Benjamin - A decent Fallow buck rounding up his hinds during the rut

An awesome up-close photo of a stag in the bush by Matt Bennett

A mob of Fallow out grazing in the sun- taken by Charlie Probyn

A photo Alex Miller got of a young bull tahr checking out a nanny

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THE BORROWED GUN

WRITTEN BY ~ **PETER RYAN**

Our son is twelve years old. Today, after much pleading, Jamie is with me at a hut on the South Island, a long way from anywhere

Here at the head of the valley the snow looms high overhead, waterfalls cascade off the mountainside and fingers of dark beech forest reach down to the valley floor.

Our days settle into an easy rhythm, splitting wood, out scouting for wild Red stags then back for dinner. The old fireplace invites a blaze and we oblige – a good fire brings out the boy in every man. Then it's time to blow the last candle out.

Half an hour later the fire is flickering but sleep is elusive. It's easy to watch the flames and get lost in memories.

The doctor was doing his best to talk about the weather, anything he could think of except the reason for our walk. There was no getting around the fact that if things were fine we wouldn't be taking Jamie, just twenty minutes old, to intensive care. He wasn't looking good.

In the lift I wondered about my wife in the operating room and about our boy, so new to the world. It occurred to me that he may only have an hour and that it might be best to steel myself for that. And then it occurred to me that those thoughts have never been any damn good to anyone.

No, if all our little man will have is an hour, then I will love him and take his hand for that hour, let the chips fall as they may. If I've ever done a brave thing that was it.

But he grew up strong and sure.

It's the eyes you see first. Not that muddy cape, not the nostrils flared for battle. It's not even antlers. It's the eyes, wide and fixed on you and nothing but you.

It happened quickly. Moving through tight cover a rutting young Red stag charged into view just a few yards away, his face framed by wet leaves. His fierce gaze was right on us, there was no chance or reason to raise the '06. Slowly reaching back I take Jamie's hand in mine and give it a squeeze. Don't move. Remember this. Then the stag spins abruptly and is lost to the mist, his rank scent hanging in the air.

On that happy note our day is done and we trudge down the valley to the hut, muddy but lit up. Along the way it occurs to me that in his boy's mind things will be like this forever. I know better but in the meantime we go on little adventures.

I'll never be able to give him a million dollars - but I can give him this.

The lives we live today come with a lot of baggage. Just renewing insurance and recovering lost passwords can soak up the hours. None of this is hard work but when you pause and watch the ducks circle and gang up and call to each other it's hard to bear. They feel the change of season, the restlessness in the air, in themselves. Yes, there is work to be done, a hundred small cares and duties. Yet I see them winging across the broken autumn sky, the wanderers of wild places, and wish that I could follow.

Today we're off to a field to set up against a fence line. That means a blind big enough to hold a man, a boy and Tom the Labrador. Eventually we're all set but there's nothing moving. That's OK, it's a chance to talk – about the tree house we're

Tom and Jamie enjoying the hut

'And then he swallows it all down, puts his hand out and shakes mine. Damn boy. I've met grown men who can't do that.'

building, hockey, girls. I give Tom a rub behind one ear, then all three of us settle into an easy silence. What else could I spend my time on that's better than this? Just sitting with a dog and a boy isn't doing nothing. We're busy being friends.

Without warning they are high above us. Jamie and I freeze and Tom stops panting, closes his jaw and goes to full alert. Four mallards cup and sail in, two leave. I clear the 870 Wingmaster, my dad's old gun, and praise the pup up, but right now he couldn't give a damn. He wants those ducks.

That was the pattern of the day, steady ones and twos right through, including a decent haul of parries. ***"Ten more minutes Dad. Just ten more."*** I get more fun out of watching him and the pup than from the birds.

Maybe that's wrong. Or maybe it isn't.

We climb slowly, looking for venison, sidling from one spur to the next. We move below the ridgeline as the valley stretches out before us and just like that a fat young Fallow materializes out of the mist. There are too many here in this valley, some must go. I check in with Jamie, putting him behind me. The crosshairs veer wildly before the '06 settles. The shot is a lucky one, the spiker flops without a step.

I clear the rifle and turn to Jamie. I can see now that it has cost him - he wanted so much to do something himself. He wanted to impress me, to tell his friends, to take something home. Instead all he could do was stand by and watch. And then he swallows it all down, puts his hand out and shakes mine. Damn boy. I've met grown men who can't do that.

The next few days are spent exploring. Is there anything better than a swathe of new country and no deadlines to meet? We spend hours walking the valley, the crossings too high for his boy gaiters, so I swing him over the fast clear streams on one arm, a small laugh of joy bubbling out each time. We forage tart blackberries low down, slowly approaching the high ridgelines to glass below.

After two hours of sketchy four-wheel driving we hit the boundary. Beyond lies The Molesworth, biggest station in New Zealand at around 160,000 hectares. I ask if he would ever want to go there one day. He glances at the vast high plains and endless mountains rolling to the horizon, then looks me in the eye and says 'can we go now?'

And it is then that I remember another boy who was just like him. I wonder where he went, and by what crooked alchemy the best of him is somehow standing beside me forty years later.

The mountains loom, fans of scree spilling down their flanks. Cliff faces show layer after layer of battleship grey, iron-blue and black rock sliced as though the hand of a god passed over them yesterday. We sit in the sun below a ridge and ponder the next move. Suddenly there's a boar trotting quietly through the thicket below. Just in case I put Jamie right behind me and work the bolt. To everyone's surprise the boar emerges through a window in the scrub, still at a fast trot. The Swarovski tracks past that thick neck, along the line of the jaw and without any real thought the '06 rolls back. There is no flinch, no burst of speed. He doesn't even break stride and is lost in the next dark thorny tangle, but it felt right.

Visibility is just a few feet and some of it is on hands and knees. Dragging him out he just keeps coming. The Barnes hit squarely on the point of the left shoulder, opened through the heart and exited on the opposite side. He was walking dead, carried forward under his own momentum, yet showed no flicker at all.

Coming down the hill, squinting in the bright morning light, Jamie asks if he can have the tusks.

You know it's cold when the dog doesn't want to get up.

Ducks are already trading in the distance as we settle. The river is running fast so retrieves will need to be on the ball. Twenty minutes later a single sails in from nowhere, ripping air as it spills back and forth. It folds to a single lucky shot. Tom makes the retrieve nicely and peace settles over us again.

Jamie sees them first - two mallards. One drops to the shot like a stone but the other planes down further out. I steady Tom and send him, knowing what will happen. He makes a beeline for the still bird but to my surprise charges past. He seems to sense that the far one is more urgent. Maybe he's more talented as a dog than I am as a trainer.

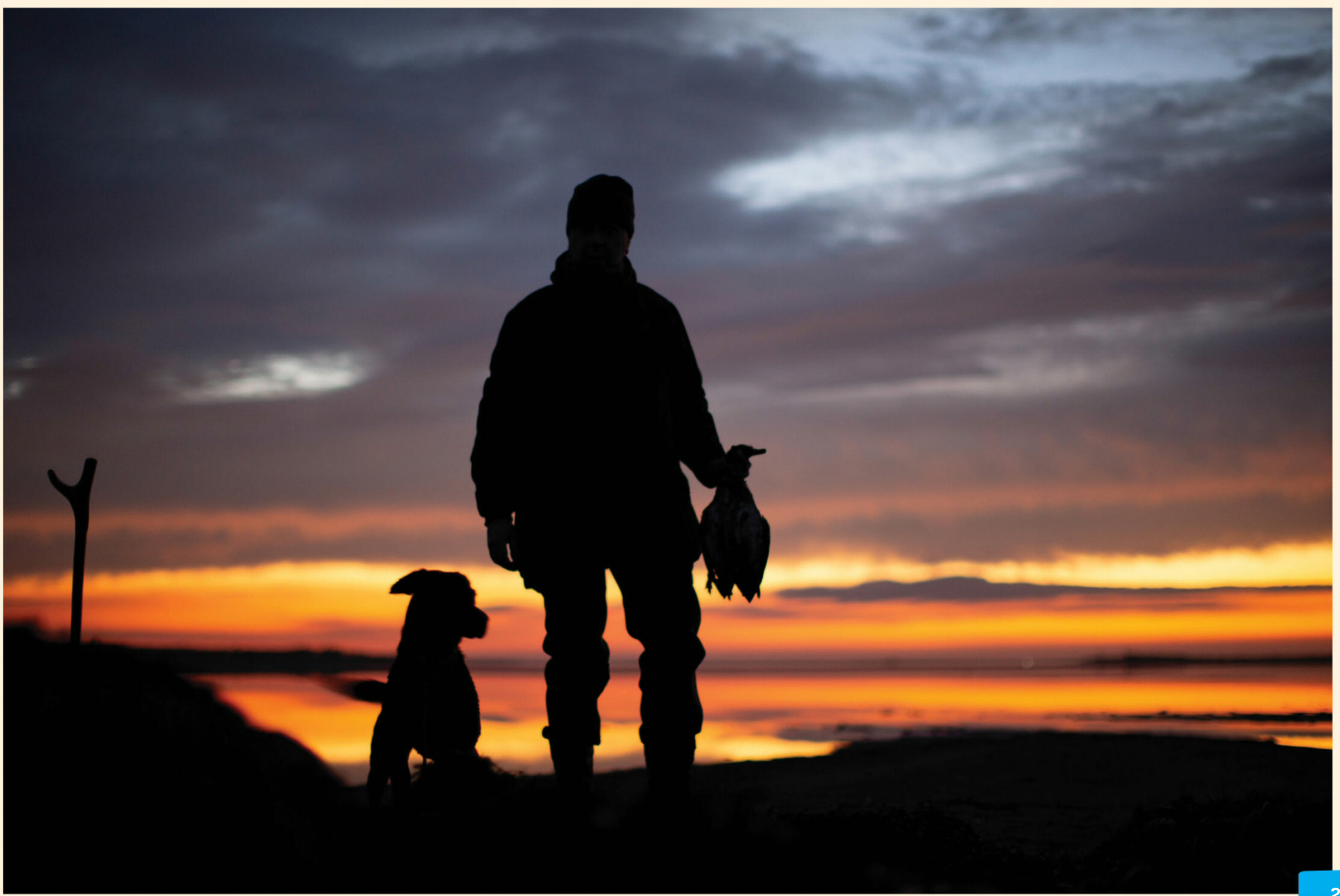
Hours later an icy wind has sprung up and the light begins to fade. We pick up the shells and break camp for the last time this year. Without being asked Jamie threads the ducks onto my carrier and heads off with a load slung on his back – and just like that my little boy is a little man.

There are more ducks overhead, high against the red-gold cloud, riding the southerly. Tom hears the whisper and watches them with me. In just a few seconds the birds are taken by the wind and gone from sight. Off to parts unknown, they're a gentle reminder of the sad, sweet thing about moments – that they disappear.

In the heart of the Southern Alps lies a deep valley hung with beech. By our camp a stream rushes clear as air over clean stone. That water has tumbled its way down from the high peaks, soft and cold and sweet. If you stand still for a moment there is no sound but the little river whispering to itself.

We glass and finally make out a chamois, then another and another. There is no point coming at them from below, all those eyes and ears would nail us miles out.

By afternoon we're up on the spur that forms the right hand edge of the great bowl of the mountain. Even the spotting scope draws a blank until at last the figure of a female standing against grey rock swims into view. A wise old girl on overwatch, so we circle down. At the bottom of the scree a female is picking around in



Then I look at the thick hooked horns of the buck and think about all that for a while.

In the distance an avalanche sweeps down one of the valleys, a gentle cloud billowing upward as the rush settles. I'm glad we're not going that high. The bulls are feeding into the wind, halfway up the flank of the mountain. The only stalk is up through a creek bed, then through forest and finally a long sidle across a mile of rock and thorn. Nothing dangerous but five hours, minimum. In that time the tahr could be anywhere.

Halfway through the traverse we spot nannies. If they bust they could go for a long way and sweep the bulls up with them, but after half an hour of fancy footwork we're clear.

The bulls are gone, of course. We sit on a spur to plan the next move and it is then that the bulls step out below. There are three but one has length and lots of rings. We close the gap and at the shot he rears up like a mustang, but is down in seconds. Seven hours after we started the bull comes down the mountain. It's a fine old Kiwi tradition to wear the cape as you go, and a pleasant one at that. Tahr don't smell like goats - their scent is of stone and dry herbs and wilderness.

' It's a fine old Kiwi tradition to wear the cape as you go, and a pleasant one at that. Tahr don't smell like goats - their scent is of stone and dry herbs and wilderness.'

the open. I spot a hint of white in the low scrub and realize it's the buck watching from cover.

I put Jamie behind me then go into the dreamlike bubble that a shot like this needs. There is a splash of stones an inch or two over the buck's shoulder. The buck moves across the face of the scree and then turns downhill, quartering. Drop the crosshairs, shooting quickly now. The buck fades into a small stand of bush.

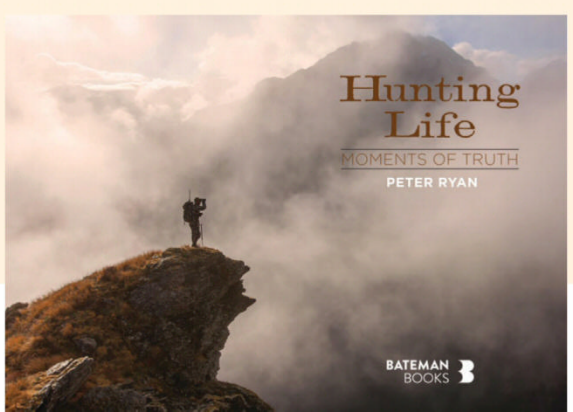
It's a hellish place to get down to, until we hit deep scree and ride the slide in great bounds, much to Jamie's delight. I look with wonder at that thick black coat, so soft to the touch, the chastening blankness of those eyes. Jamie is excited, but I put my hand on the animal's face and we have a little talk. I tell him this buck had a life. He was strong today but getting older, time for another buck to come and hold this place. Night is coming so after a few pictures we begin the trudge out. In the deep scree a burst of grunt gains nothing but a handful of yards. Do five steps, then another five. It seems to me that climbing is about five times harder than it used to be.

Much later over a fire I realize that in a few years Jamie will be able to walk me into the ground. That's a hard thing to grasp. It seems like yesterday that I was teaching him how to use a spoon.

Halfway down we pause to rest. I watch the boy, the high snows looming over him. Already he knows how to make camp, to work all day, to find what does not want to be found. Somehow - even in a modern world - these things will give him a compass to steer by, will let him be who he can be.

I've seen how he looks at my rifle and know that I'm a caretaker of sorts now. A few weeks ago I found one of my old maps with a cross drawn on a high valley. I've never been there and don't know anybody who has. Next to it, in his child's lettering, is a date set far in the future. It took a moment to grasp the meaning of that little promise to himself. That date is twenty one years to the day since he and I took that long walk in the hospital.

If the fates are kind I'd like to be there too, even if as an old man I'll need some help getting up those mountains. Perhaps things will have gone full circle by then, and this time around he can take my hand.



Based in Canterbury, Pete Ryan has hunted across the globe. His writing and images have appeared in the world's finest journals for many years. This is an excerpt from his third book, Hunting – Moments of Truth, now available in all good bookstores across NZ.

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THE DEATH OF THE VOLUNTEER

WRITTEN BY ~ ROY SLOAN

I have been involved in this hunter-led animal management game for a long time now, and I think I know and understand the game as well as the next guy

I've worked alongside some amazing people - they have come and they have gone, a few have stayed. Some have burnt out, some just had enough. I can't say I have worked alongside an abundance of amazing people as I think the sane choose easier paths, but some really stand out. Hunting in New Zealand is successful due to a small amount of over-achieving, amazing people.

I have seen some give their lives for us. I have seen some give their relationships for us or put their family second for us. I know most have forgotten about their personal health because of us. But there are not enough of them to save it for us.

If some of these amazing people took on another challenge in life instead of championing hunting there would be a bronze statue of them in the town centre, but instead, most of you couldn't name these folk who have starved so you could feast.

You are hunters, and able to hunt, because of these people, yet most likely you would not have seen or felt any disruptions in your hunting life due to the unselfish work from these amazing people. These people work in silence.

You think your hunting world will last forever? It won't. The day of these amazing people is coming to an end. The day of the amazing volunteer is going to be left to 'back then'.

A group of volunteers donating huge amounts of hours for the betterment of the Wapiti herd and by extension, hutning in New Zealand

Will you step into those shoes knowing what it takes to get the job done? Amazing people are drawing a line in the sand and saying 'I have given enough'.

This is your lucky day as I know some of these amazing people, so I have asked them for some advice.

They tell me that we need everybody in New Zealand to give a little back to their hunting. They said we don't need to ask for much, that their sweat and hard work has almost got hunting to the top of the hill, but to take the next step it's going to need a little from all.

The time of volunteers is all but gone, and we need to employ full time people to carry on with this hunting game. They said 'Why should this burden fall on so few when there are so many and such a lot to do?'

Personally, I see and have seen our future as hunters in New Zealand so clearly and so simply that I get frustrated at how we complicate the obvious. There're not many things that I think I am good at but maths I can do. We say there are around 200,000 hunters in the country who hunt a variety of game, with around 100,000 of them hunting game animals. Imagine if we all paid $20 per year to hunt. 100,000 x 20 - that's $2 million. **Hell, that would solve a lot of problems.**

We can't expect to continue keeping up with changes in the hunting world without spending any money and YOU cannot expect to keep getting a free ride and expect these amazing volunteers to keep paying your bills.

We are living in a hunting world that has to fight policy, law, and 1080 and now with the recent addition of a huge environmental monster that is receiving billions of dollars of funding. We have the green sector chucking millions of dollars into marketing and media, selling the story that introduced animals in New Zealand are a bad thing. You just need to look on social media to see their latest campaign. We also have organisations such as Forest and Bird getting friends in Parliament, and we all saw the results of having one of them as Conservation Minister just for one term.

Currently, hunters are fighting millions of dollars with just our spare time. This cannot go on. To fight these things we need to invest money into our hunting. We need hunters to pull their heads out of the sand and invest in their hunting.

Great things have happened because of these selfless people. We have the Game Animal Council, and in my mind, this is the best achievement for hunters in my lifetime. I don't think the average hunter has any idea how important the GAC is to our future. The only downfall that I see with the Council is their lack of money to operate, and this must be addressed before it's too late.

As hunters we will take every benefit the GAC gives us, but do we appreciate them? Do we know how important they are? Do we even know what role they play in hunting, do we fund them in any way? No! If they had more money they would be more successful, as right now they are "fighting fires", just tending to the urgent stuff. The GAC is the most important organisation in New Zealand - they must survive!

The other great thing that has happened in my lifetime is the Wapiti program. Why is the program so successful? Early in the Wapiti battle I realised that to make this program and herd successful it would need something a little special and require us hunters to do something that we have never done in my lifetime – **pay for managing the area and pay for managing the herd - OUTRAGEOUS!!** Well, it was at the time. So, we went to the hunters who hunted the area, and I travelled the length of New Zealand talking to people, telling them the bottom line is either we pay or we walk away and lose it. Bloody simple.

Hunters did the right thing. Here we are, almost ticking over 20 years of Wapiti management, and what is the shining light in New Zealand hunting? It's the Wapiti herd. Why is the Wapiti program so successful? Money. We understood early on that New Zealand Wapiti hunters needed to invest in their future to have a future for the herd.

The Wapiti Foundation added a little professionalism to hunting. To drive our hunting forward, or to be frankly honest, for our hunting to survive into the future, we must take a page out of the Wapiti book.

New Zealand needs paid people to guide our hunting policies into the future, working on it all day long and not just in the hours at either end of the day. Currently, we have only two paid people in the country working for hunters. One of those people solely works for you via the GAC and the other works for the NZDA. I know both people are so swamped with work that they are not making a dent in what they are trying to achieve.

I am not talking about the death of boots-on-the-ground volunteers, that will always be a critical component

There are places in the country where we need to seize the initative and explore helicopter control of breeding animals, that takes money

So, what would I do with your $20? I would buy you some professional and talented people. Those people would take a collaborative approach to ensuring that your money was spent in the right places. They would ensure the Game Animal Council is funded and supported, and that we have a collaborative approach to smarter lobbying. **They would tell the public the true story about the importance of game animals and why we hunt rather than having to worry about the likes of Forest and Bird writing it for us.** They would ensure that we have a succession plan to educate others to lead us forward. They would invest in science to support hunting.

I have used the arbitrary figure of $20 as an example to underline how simple I think it would be to solve our hunting problems. How do we get that $20? Who would control where it was spent? How many people currently contribute to hunting politics or lobbying? At an educated guess I would say around 10,000 as lots of people are members of multiple groups. So, 90,000 people give nothing back to hunting in this country, which really is very demoralising.

So, we need to get our act together and take a collaborative approach, joining forces before it's too late. Hunters are good at supporting a "fight" - the tahr cull is a great example. How do we keep progressing hunting when there's no current skirmishes to energise people? How do we put ourselves in a situation to avoid these skirmishes? Because, like it or not, they only happen because there are not enough amazing people and not enough support from hunting to buy some more.

It is 1am in the morning, I'm still writing, and I have brain fade. I get side-tracked so I answer some emails hoping that will inspire me. We're trying to get a Wapiti venison project across the line – Roy, we need some term of trade, got some Wapiti management agreements to sort. Roy, what do you want changed, we have a new conservation project to get approved? Roy, is this ok to be sent to Iwi, got to get some stuff together to kick deer recovery along. Roy, when can the processing plant start taking animals and how many, what area should they come from, we have vegetation monitoring project to sort. Roy, when will this kick off? Roy, what's the Whitewater block like? Roy, will you speak at our annual dinner? Roy, is the first period wetter than the second? ROY!!!

This is just another average night in my 20-year Wapiti life. I work 50 hours a week for my company, and I give, at the very least, 20 hours a week for the Wapiti and hunters. To be good at this you need a supportive family as it's them who suffer the most.

If I had my time again would I do what I have done for hunting? The simple the answer is NO, I would not. It's a huge sacrifice. More and more volunteers are choosing not to give their valuable time.

It's time we made it easier for those who want to follow the hunting advocacy path, so we have got to pay folk to do it for us. These people must work for a collective group of New Zealand hunting organisations as the only way forward is doing this together. **We need to all take some ownership and invest in our future.**

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WHAT ARE THE ODDS

WRITTEN BY ~ DANIEL FAKE

"What's the TAB paying for a stag on the ground?". I lost count of the number of times I said that over 14 days spent in the bush during the 2021 roar

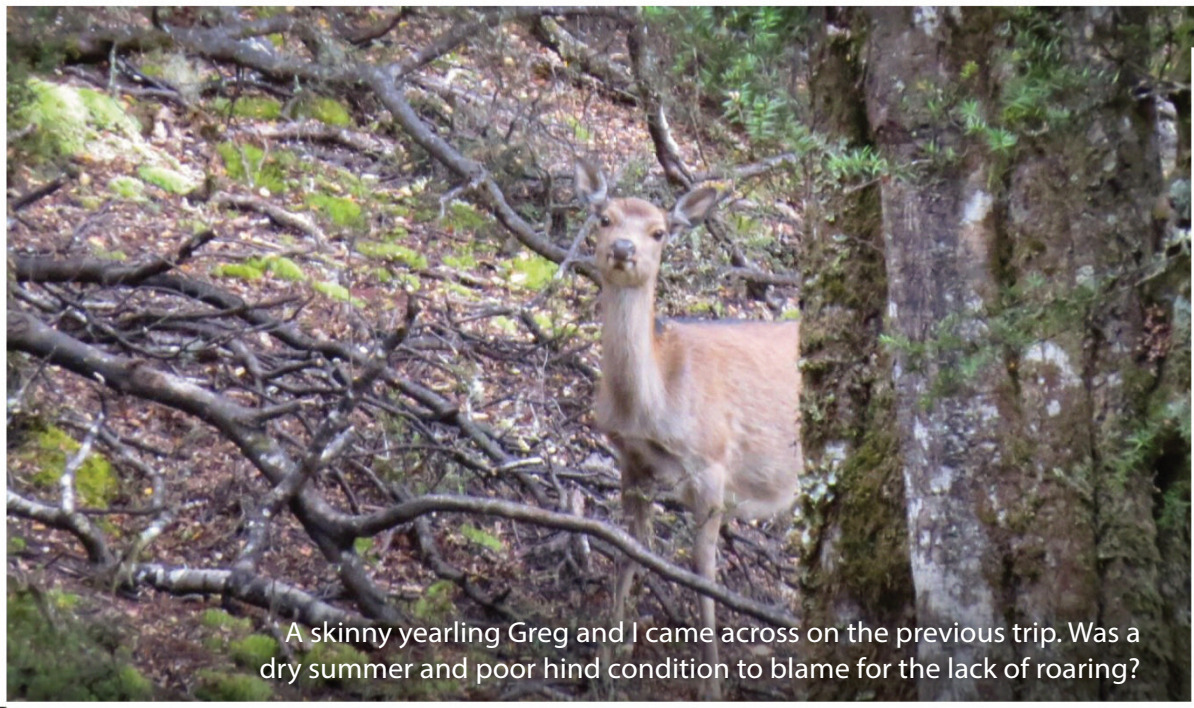
A very dry summer and a warm and windy April meant very little vocal action from stags in the areas I'd been in. I'd done a stint in the Ureweras with mate Adam, and then two trips into the Kawekas with mate Greg, and while we'd seen lots of animals, and had a couple of hard luck tales, a mature stag was yet to have a bullet sent its way.

So, when mate Henry asked if I was keen on a big fly-in, walk-out mission over Anzac weekend after a Sika, it was on like Donkey Kong. Surely the odds were good that they'd be roaring by then?

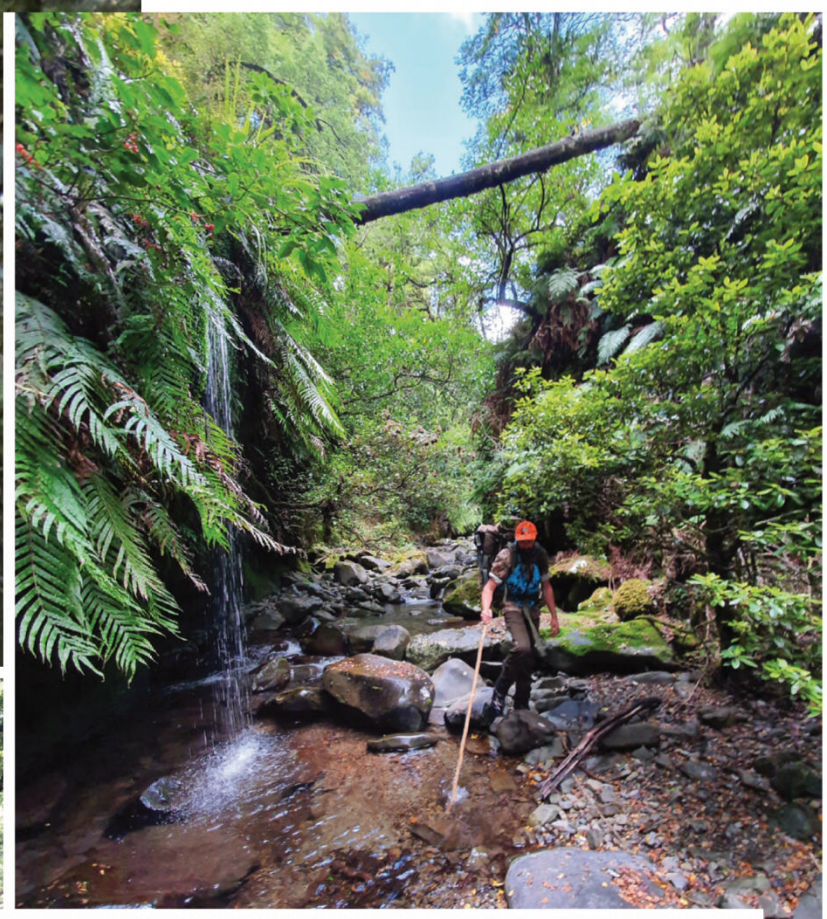
After a quick flight to the hut, Chris Crosse took off in the 500 and left Henry, Sophie the dog and I up in the Kaweka high country. The plan was to spend a night at the hut and then drop down one of the leading ridges into the river valley and walk out over two days, hunting as we went. With an hour of light left and a still evening we quickly ditched the big packs in the hut and set off to roar and listen down one of the spurs at the bush edge. After hearing a couple of far away hee-haws, spirits were high as we made our way back to the hut.

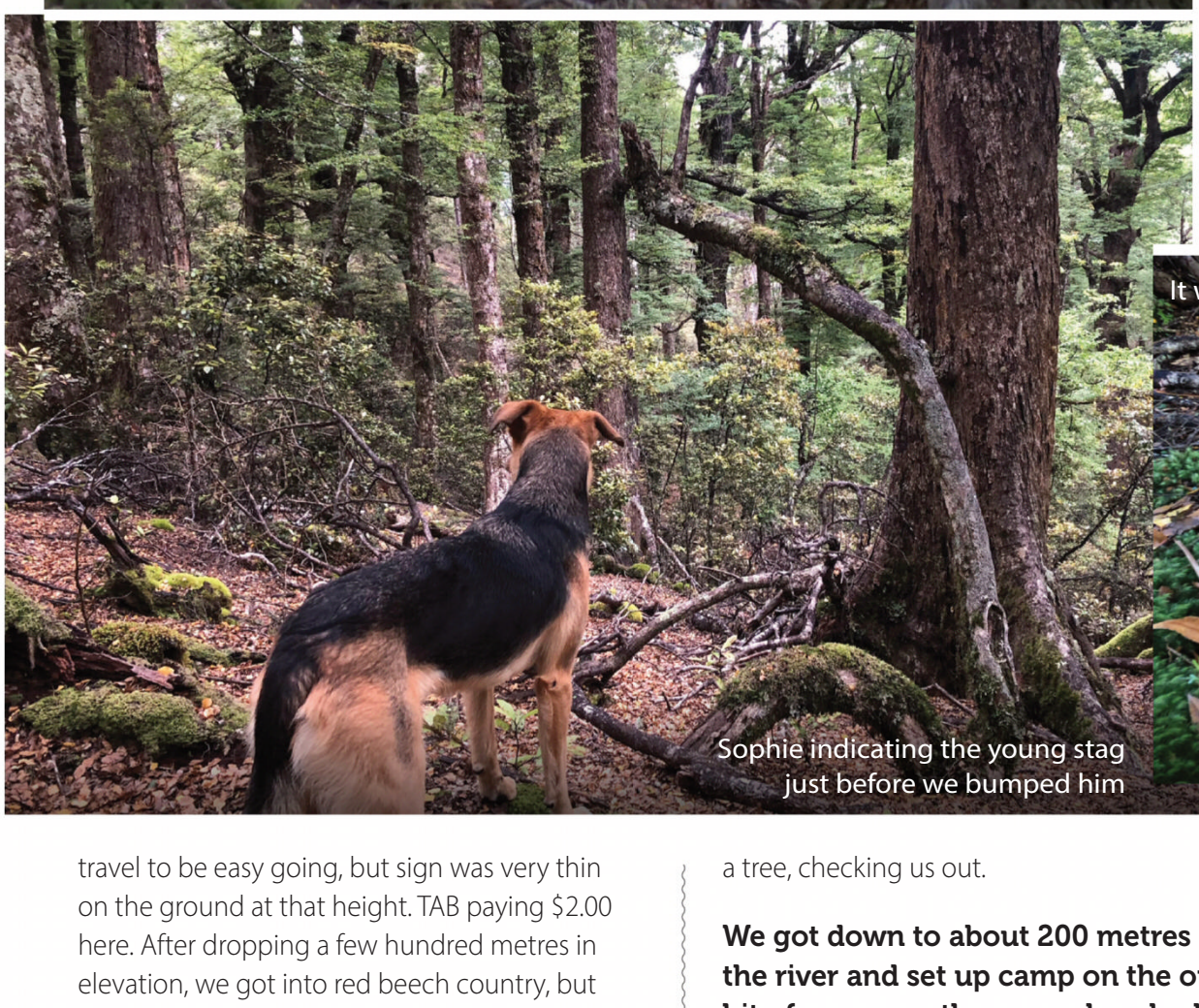
The forecast was for rain that night which we hoped would quieten the beech leaves underfoot and kick some stags into action, but the rain never really came. After a quick cup of Jeds no.5 we set off down the ridge and into the mountain beech. We had no idea how thick the bush would be and were pleasantly surprised to find the

Looking out at the country we were to cover over the next few days

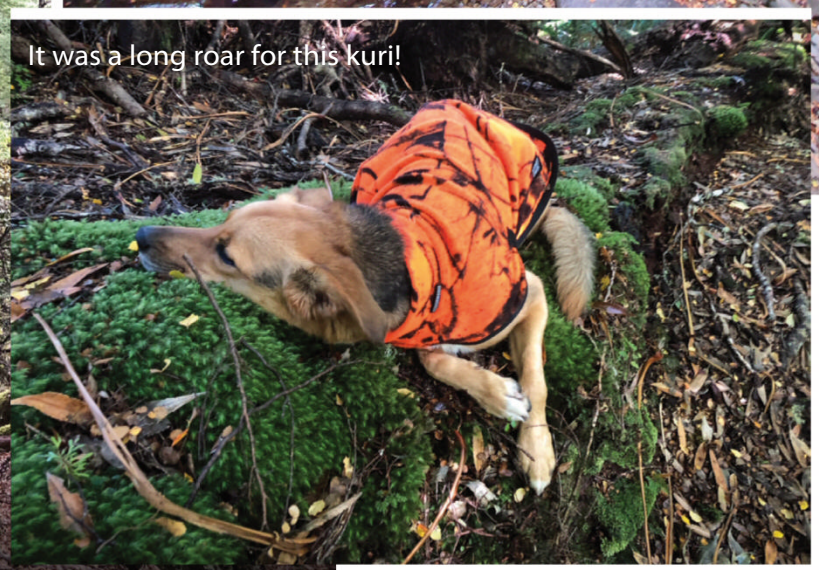


A skinny yearling Greg and I came across on the previous trip. Was a dry summer and poor hind condition to blame for the lack of roaring?





Sophie indicating the young stag just before we bumped him



It was a long roar for this kuri!

travel to be easy going, but sign was very thin on the ground at that height. TAB paying $2.00 here. After dropping a few hundred metres in elevation, we got into red beech country, but sign was still pretty patchy. Nevertheless, we had some saddles we wanted to investigate, so we hit two on the AJ caller and waited. And moved, hit two, and waited. From our position on the ridge and with the still conditions, we should have been able to hear hee-haws and single calls from all round the valley, **but it seemed like this trip would be like the previous three and the odds were getting worse… $2.50**

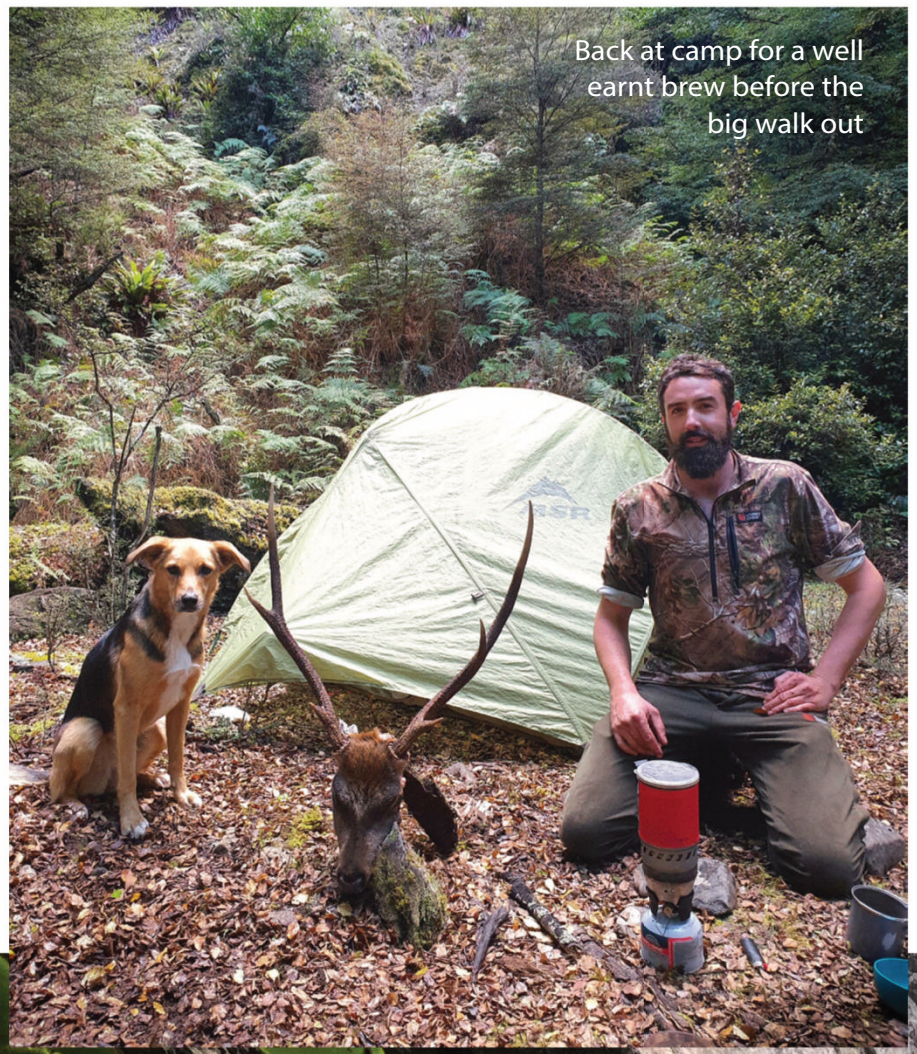
As we dropped further towards the river the sign was more prevalent and the dog got keener. Around midday her nose went to ground and we could tell there was something in the vicinity. TAB paying $1.30 for an animal nearby. We quietly ditched packs off the side of a saddle and crept round and let rip a hee-haw. I was fumbling to reach my pocket for the windicator bottle when I heard the crown fern crack right beside me and Henry whispered ***"Dan!!"*** – the young four-point stag must have been bedded not five metres away from me and promptly ran round to the other side of the gut. **A few hasty mews from me and the AJ caller stopped him in his tracks at 30 metres.** We got come cool video of him half obscured by a tree, checking us out.

We got down to about 200 metres off the river and set up camp on the only bit of camp worthy ground we had come across – funny how those flat spots on the topo maps look much bigger than they are in reality! By this time the westerly had cranked up to the stage where we were getting back eddies, so hopes weren't high as we sidled off eastwards towards another spur and gut. TAB back to $2.00. The spur was thick with head-high scrub but offered reasonable views of the gut, so if we could just call a stag in from the other side we might get a shot at him. But, with the wind swirling, I think we both had written the evening off until I saw Henry's head snap round. **He mimed that he'd heard something down in the gut, but the shrug of the shoulders also suggested it could have been the wind.** It's amazing how quick and quietly those things can move, as in what seemed like only 30 seconds another stick snapping down spur from us revealed a surprised looking spiker staring at me! He lingered long enough for the shot but he was safe from us. Back to camp it was for a feed and an early night.

Waking up to gusty winds again in the morning we got a bit more shut-eye than we should have before giving ourselves a verbal kick up the arse and packing up camp. We planned to drop into the river valley, have a hunt up a spur, knock a few kilometres off the walk out, and set up camp somewhere in the creek. Well, the first bit took most of an hour, as we kept getting bluffed out getting down into the creek. **From there the travel wasn't too bad and we made our way downstream and dropped packs with the intention of climbing a spur and sidling round and dropping back down into a side creek.** Like the day before, the stags were quiet and it seemed we just weren't in the right country, as we only came across one spiker who promptly left the scene. Later that afternoon we had one hee-haw from across the gully, but when we got over to the spot all was quiet again. We then proceeded to get bluffed out of the side creek, and then once we got down into it, we found a nice waterfall that meant we had to climb out of the gorge and sidle around. We got back to the packs an hour or so before dark and proceeded to knock off some of the walk out over the next couple of hours. As we dropped lower and lower in the valley the sign got thicker and the dog got keener – perhaps this is where we should have been all along? The odds were getting better again, $1.75. The steep sided gorge opened up and we had nice river terraces and the odd slip. We bumped a hind and spiker in the river which

the dog plainly told us were there – must learn to trust that dog! An hour after dark we found a nice camp spot and lit the first fire of the trip. The pants and boots had taken a soaking with the river travel, so it was good to dry out and stare at a campfire for a couple of hours.

The next day we were up in the dark and set off downstream at first light to climb up a spur on the true left. We walked a good 300 metres down the gorge without finding a route up and decided to back track and try our luck on the true right bank as a quick map check revealed some good country lower down with less climbing. **We set foot upstream and found a suitable spur as a route up and were soon onto good sign.** We wondered if the area would have been scented from our campfire smoke but given the amount of sign pressed button no.2 on the AJ and gave it 20 minutes anyway, but nothing replied or came in. We sidled a bit and climbed further and got that familiar swirling wind which was awesome *facepalm* – our only hope was that we'd get one coming down the ridge. **The dog was winding and ground scenting the whole way up, so we knew they were somewhere,** and when we came across a semi open spot on the spur, we hit no 2 and waited. I think we both would have picked about $12 odds but after two minutes or so we heard sticks snapping and crown fern swishing. **Both our heads snapped uphill and saw what we'd been picturing so many times – long white sticks swaying their way through the undergrowth en route for a scrap!** There was no question in my mind that this was a shooter, but when I glanced down to chamber a round and looked back the stag was gone – impossible! He couldn't have winded us; did he see me standing there and bolt? There was a big stump to the right of where he'd been, maybe he was hiding behind that? It felt like minutes but was probably only 20 or 30 seconds before I heard movement again and he popped out beside the stump, maybe eight metres away. A quick shot to the base of the neck had him falling downhill on his face, and the silent fist pumps, handshakes, man hugs and dog pats began while we made sure the stag had died. After a couple of minutes, we went over for a look and were pumped to see a mature Sika on the deck, my best to date. What were the odds of that?



Back at camp for a well earnt brew before the big walk out

Afterwards it was a short downhill back to camp for a brew and a pack up, and then began the long but uneventful trek out to the ute.

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WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

Part 5

WHAT CAMERA SHOULD I BUY

LENSES

The wide world of camera lenses really needed its own article to do it justice

The great thing about lenses, is the ability to choose a specific lens to perfectly suit the images you are trying to achieve. The worst thing about lenses, is you have to choose a specific lens to perfectly suit the images you are trying to achieve. Sound like a conundrum? It is!

Some lenses are more versatile than others, but no one lens can do it all. Before we get in to that let's start at the bare bones, what is a lens and how did they come about?

HISTORY

In researching lenses I found some more interesting historical information. The word itself is Latin, unsurprisingly. 'Lens' experiments began with an Arabian scientist named Abu Ali Hasan around 1,000AD. He noted that when looking through a glass sphere the image changed if you change the shape of the sphere. Over the next 500 years we discovered that the image was clearer if you applied an aperture (if you focus the light from the lens through a hole), but it was centuries again before it was discovered why. The aperture helps reduce chromatic aberration. The first lens in the sense we know it as didn't appear until 1840. After the invention of the Daguerrotype, Charles Chevalier invented the first camera and with it the first lens – an 'achromatic landscape lens', one with two elements that reduced chromatic aberration and two apertures, f 14 and f15. What this lens did that others didn't was project an image successfully on to a large, flat film/sensor. The curvature of single-element lenses before had created distorted images when recorded on a flat surface.

By the 1930s cameras were in everyone's hands; hobbyists, families and artists – not just scientists and professionals - and lenses proliferated. There were even plastic and acrylic lenses. Then after WWII Japan turned itself into a technological powerhouse during the US occupation, with plenty of investment in cameras and lenses and by the 1950's were seriously challenging the long-established Germans. We still see their influence to this day. With the rise of computers we then saw an even greater rise in the quality and array of lenses available as the complex calculations and modelling needed was more achievable.

CONSTRUCTION

A lens is an instrument for focussing light. A magnifying glass is a lens, spectacles are lenses. A camera lens is a barrel that actually houses multiple lenses, referred to individually as 'elements'. The size of a lens, and the quantity, composition and amount of glass within, depend on the sensor size of the camera it's attached to and the function it is trying to achieve. Within a lens are different types of glass like 'crown glass' and 'flint glass' made of different materials and with different properties.

Anti-reflection coating sounds like a bit of a marketing gimmick but it was actually a monumental step in lens constructions. Prior to this advent the reports I read

Macro photography is extreme close-up photos, usually striking because they are of objects or features too small to discern with the naked eye. Normally you need a specialty lens with very short focussing distances for an ICL, but here Jamie Fairbarn has a great example of using the long focal length of a superzoom bridge camera to create to same effect

This is one of my favourite images ever, captured by Martin Brenstrum. Partly because of the scene, subject and composition, but also because I recognise the difficulty of obtaining such a high quality photo in gloomy conditions and the quality of the kit required

quoted 'four to eight percent (or more) reflective light loss at every glass-air interface', this meant that adding elements to control aberrations or compress the focal length (i.e so that a 500mm lens wasn't actually 500mm long, becoming a telephoto lens) dimmed the light making it to the sensor drastically. One lens, the Astro Pan-Tachar, lost over of 41 percent of light transmission to reflections from the eight air-to-glass surfaces within the lens

In the late 1800's it was noted that paradoxically, old and slightly tarnished lenses produced brighter images. It was discovered that the thin film of oxidation was suppressing surface reflections. It wasn't until 1939 that Zeiss utilised an antireflective coating on their lenses, the first commercial example of what is now an industry standard. This coating could cut reflection by two thirds.

Due to the increase in light transmission, f/2.3 lenses could replace f/1.6 lenses, giving the same brightness with a smaller aperture and therefore superior optical quality. Some lenses now have 20 or more elements, this would be completely impossible without the advances in antireflection coating. We have also seen the benefits of this technology transferred to binoculars, scopes and spotting scopes. Not all coatings are strictly for reflection either, some now help with ease of cleaning, durability, isolating and/or decreasing certain wavelengths so most lenses have dozens of different coatings.

Aside from these optical elements, lenses also typically have to house precision engineered autofocus motors and nearly as often, image stabilisation functions. They really are a bit more than an expensive magnifying glass.

Each of the various lens types; telephoto, zoom, macro, wide-angle etc use different constructions or arrangements of glass to achieve different outcomes. Some lenses with similar properties also balance things like glass and surface quality, gasses and housing properties to achieve more cost-effective outcomes. As with most things, some brands focus on quality and some on cost. A Nikkor or Sony G master lens with the exact same formula to say a Tamron is likely to be a superior lens, but come with a superior price tag.

APERTURE

Of the three main functions in the exposure triangle; ISO, Shutter Speed and Aperture, only one is entirely governed by the lens. This is the aperture. Cameras with fixed lenses, i.e phones, compacts and bridge cameras, have to balance affordability, weight and bulk when determining what aperture their lens can have. As a fixed lens you can't adjust it after you've purchased it by buying a different lens. With interchangeable lenses you can use a lens for your specific aperture needs, for hunters that usually means a wider aperture for low light e.g f2.8.

The presence of an aperture is critical to an image's quality. Aperture limits a number of aberrations (I hardly know what I'm talking about here, but research tells me it's the 'transverse' aberrations: coma, astigmatism, field curvature, distortion and lateral chromatic) by

A lens aberration brought out by challenging conditions. I can't tell you what kind of aberration it is, but you can clearly see the five blades of the aperture diaphragm reflected in the sky, ruining the shot

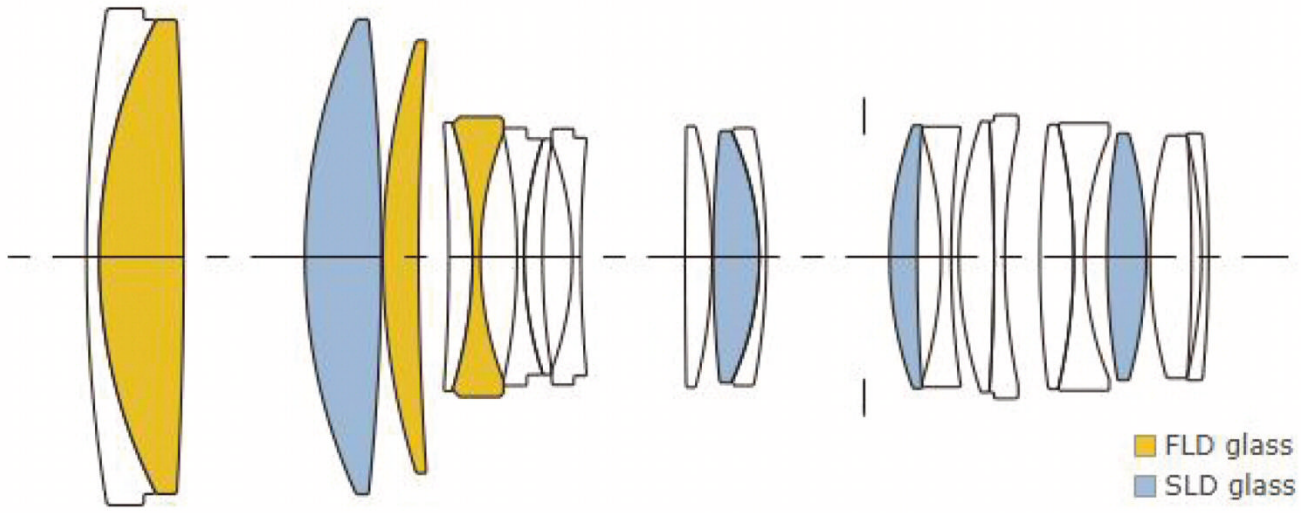
blocking peripheral light. To a point anyway, too small of an aperture (big number, i.e f/22) and it introduces diffraction effects. To this day most lenses work best in their middle apertures, either end of the available stops is always working the lens to the limits of its design. For a crude analogy think how an engine performs best away from either extreme, very low revs or very high revs.

Early camera lenses didn't have adjustable aperture. It wasn't until the 1880's that people realised aperture had an effect on depth of field and the various creative techniques that followed. This led to more emphasis on aperture and the iris aperture (like we still see in modern lenses) was introduced widely.

As for the notation system – f/1.8, 6.5, 8 etc. It is a geometrical sequence. The small numbers/wide aperture – big numbers/narrow aperture part is very counterintuitive but it used to be even worse. Prior to 1949 there were actually three separate systems which would've added an absolutely bewildering layer of complexity.

LENS ABERRATION

Decentration, distortion, coma, vignetting, spherical aberration, pincushion distortion, blur and lateral chromatic aberration are just some of the 'problems' or aberrations that can occur



A lens diagram to illustrate just how complex a zoom lens is. Showing why they are so expensive and heavy. In this case, a Sigma 50-1100mm f1.8 DC HSM Art lens for Canon by advertiser CRK

These flares are light reflecting off the elements within the Tamron 28-25mm f/2.8 I was using. A lens hood would have probably helped here but they add bulk and I never use them

with lenses. Look through a cheap magnifying glass and you see a few of the shortcomings just with your naked eye. In the modern digital era huge amounts of time and money have been spent on physical and digital corrections for these. Cameras themselves and post-processing software like Photoshop and Lightroom are loaded with thousands of lens profiles that can then digitally address the known issues with said lens.

These various aberrations can manifest in a lot of ways - lines appear blurry or bent, colours to appear different, or edges of things have strange colours or are less in focus than the centre. It isn't really necessary to understand every kind of lens deficiency, I'm learning this all the time, but knowing a little helps you to figure out why an image may not have turned out well and help you avoid it next time. Some of them occur from lens construction, a cheaper lens might not be as well put together (or stay well put together after use by rough hunters!) and some of them are optical aberrations where either budget or simply physics have limited the correction available.

I'm also going to include a phenomenon known as Bokeh in here. Bokeh is the shape of the out-of-focus elements in an image. Like the nice luminous balls of light behind a person in a portrait shot – probably candles or light bulbs, but all you see are the spheres as it's out of focus. Some lenses (due to their construction) produce nicer bokeh than others, generally because of the amount of blades in the diaphragm of the aperture. More blades will create a smoother shape, it's nothing more than an aesthetic consideration. Small sensor cameras like phones don't produce any bokeh, they have short focal lengths which create very little depth-of-field, meaning there isn't enough of the image out of focus to create bokeh. In a nutshell, they don't 'zoom' enough and don't have wide enough apertures. This was an aspect that set quality photographs apart from phone photos for many years until the advent of 'portrait' modes, where photos are digitally altered within the phone to produce a similar effect. Read issue 83 for my less than enthusiastic opinion of such modes though.

TYPES OF LENSES

The main division of lenses is between prime and zoom lenses. Prime lenses have a fixed focal length, i.e 35mm or 50mm. Zoom lenses can adjust between a set amount of focal length, i.e 28-75mm.

PRIME

Prime lenses are specialists with better optics. They're typically faster (a term meaning wider aperture, e.g f/2.8 or better) sharper, have less aberrations and are both smaller and lighter. They can be cheaper but a quality prime is still typically more expensive than a budget zoom. The lack of zoom gives you less flexibility when composing a scene, so if you're using primes people tend to have multiple. This speciality is what leads to types of lenses like macro (very close focussing) wide-angle (self-explanatory, sometimes called fish-eye for very wide-angle) and telephoto (often mistakenly referred to as a zoom lens). A lens becomes a telephoto lens when it uses elements to create an effective focal length, i.e it is a 600mm lens, but the elements aren't actually 600mm apart.

Primes can be very useful for hunters though. I have often owned a fast wide-angle prime lens, primarily for astro, but they're also really cool for creating a different perspective on things like the interior of a tent for example. Also in some landscape scenes the large field of view creates great leading lines into your scene. On my full-frames I have used the likes of a Samyang 14mm f/2.8. It is a cheap and rough lens with no AF and lots of aberrations, but it's relatively light and most of its aberrations aren't so noticeable in astro. Crop sensors have even lighter and cheaper options, typically with better optical performance.

ZOOM

Zoom lenses give the photographer greater flexibility, but often with optical and weight drawbacks. The widest zoom ranges, say 18-400mm for example, typically have reduced aperture abilities. Low end zoom lenses are a bit of a trap, sometimes things are too good to be true. To be light, fast and have a high zoom ratio the lens probably uses cheaper glass and introduces more aberrations.

Zoom lenses are a huge challenge to build and the first iterations didn't appear until the 30's, then called 'Travelling' or 'Vario' lenses. The first one for still cameras didn't arrive until 1959 and it was a giant with a 95mm front lens. Zoom lenses require incredible design and engineering and really took off with the rise of computer power for calculating

and modelling. Still, creating a wide aperture makes it hard to get a good range of focal lengths and keep on top of aberrations. If you could wave a magic wand you'd have an f1.8 12-500m full-frame lens that weight 250 grams, but unfortunately that would be well beyond our current technology.

Despite all of this I recommend a zoom lens to most hunters, not because prime lens don't work well, it's the constant swapping of lenses in challenging conditions that cost you shots as well as allow dust and moisture to get on the sensor. Something like the Tamron 28-400mm f3.5/6.3 for crop sensors is a pretty amazing lens, especially if you then paired that with a nice compact wider angle, prime or zoom, to cover all your bases. For full frames it's pretty hard to go past the fast wide to portrait zooms, like the 24-70mm f2.8 I use.

LENS ATTACHMENTS

Between the camera and the lens you can attach an array of property-altering mechanisms. A common one is a telecoverter, an additional lens that will multiply the focal length of the main lens, typically between 1 and 2x, but this will also decrease the effective aperture. You can also add attachments that aid in the focussing distances, to make a lens more useful for macrophotography. You can also use adaptors for non-native lenses, i.e a Canon lens on a Sony body. We touched on this last issue, but companies like Metabones make a range of adaptors. Often with adaptors you lose some functionality though, commonly you lose the ability to autofocus and sometimes image stabilisation. When choosing a camera it is worth considering the range of lenses available to you, using adaptors is usually less than ideal.

FOCUS

This leads to brief recap on focus. Having good AF and MF capability in your setup is important. Good AF tracking (this comes mostly from your body not the lens) allows your video to track a subject, like when an animal or a person is moving. For stills it also allows you to take multiple photos of a moving target reliably. Manual focus is a feature on most ICL lenses, but isn't present on some bridges and compacts. MF is crucial for photographing or filming subjects in busy scenes, like an animal photo in the bush.

WHAT TO BUY

The big question. The money question. What lens to buy? Obviously this only applies to Interchangeable Lens Camera (ILC) because these are the only cameras you can select lenses for later, for fixed-lens cameras you need to pay especially attention to the lens because it's stuck there.

Here's Steve Couper with his epic 500mm f/4 Canon lens, using a 2x teleconverter to bring it to 1000mm. This is mounted to a Canon 5D MKIII

Martin Brenstrum in the field with his 800mm lens

Lenses are expensive, buying multiple is stretching most people's budget. Not only that, if you're carrying more than one lens you can almost bank on Murphy's Law that you'll have the wrong one on the camera body when a particular photo opportunity arises. This means you either miss out on the photo, or hurriedly take the lens off, try keep the dust/leaves/rain/sweat off the sensor and back of the lens and probably still miss out on the photo.

That all sounds very unpleasant, so to avoid that I'd recommend buying a zoom lens. A high quality zoom lens is neither cheap nor light, but if you're using an ILC you've swallowed that pill long ago. A zoom lens with a wide angle bottom end to portrait top end with a nice wide-aperture, like the 24-70 f/2.8 I have on my Nikon Z6ii. Currently I use a p1000 for wildlife photography, but I would like better image quality so one day I would like to purchase high focal length telephoto lens too. Nikon don't have as many options as others here, but something like the Sigma 150-600mm f/5-6.3 would get you some pretty neat images though a prime would probably be lighter and cheaper.

Recently I caught up with a legend of the hunting photographer scene in NZ, Martin Brenstrum. Martin uses a Canon 5d MkIV and an array of the truly top-end telephoto lenses. These are enormously bulky, heavy and expensive but achieve superb imagery. Just like the intro photo pictured here that was the inspiration for the art piece we commissioned Madison Coulter to undertake. Using these kinds of lenses means you are seriously committing to achieving high-quality wildlife photos, like the images attached of Martins, or the cover photo from last issue by Steve Couper. Given the weight and the bulk you're effectively giving up the option of carrying a rifle.

ROUNDUP

The last notes I have on lenses are to remind you that with larger sensors, comes bigger glass. Using crop sensor cameras seriously reduces the weight and bulk of your lenses and makes quality wildlife photography achievable for most people. Getting a focal length similar to a P1000 on a full frame sensor would mean a lens probably a couple metres long if was even possible, but even then using the best quality telephoto lenses for a full-frame camera is expensive. Therefore, like the last issue, I'd recommend most of you look at a high quality crop sensor camera unless you're really looking to commit.

The very last point is that you generally get what you pay for. The more expensive lenses are better constructed, more waterproof, have greater optical performance and less aberrations. The 28-70mm Nikkor I have currently is the most expensive lens I've ever owned, but the images I get are the best I've ever captured. What lens to buy is a very complex spectrum where you have to weigh up budget vs intended use, weight, bulk and quality and that is very specific to a hunter and what they want from their photos. Hopefully now that you understand lenses a little better you can make a more informed decision.

18+

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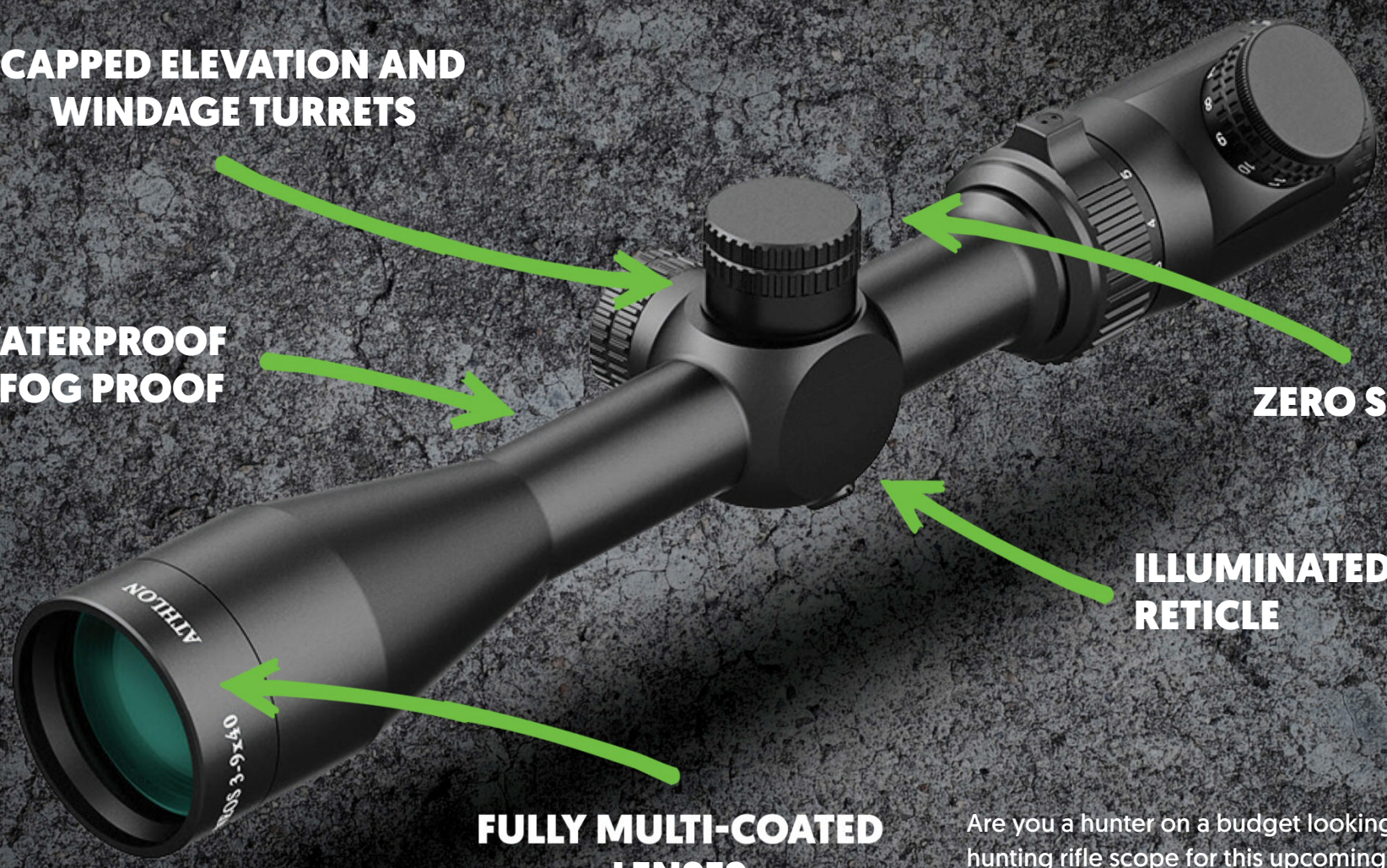

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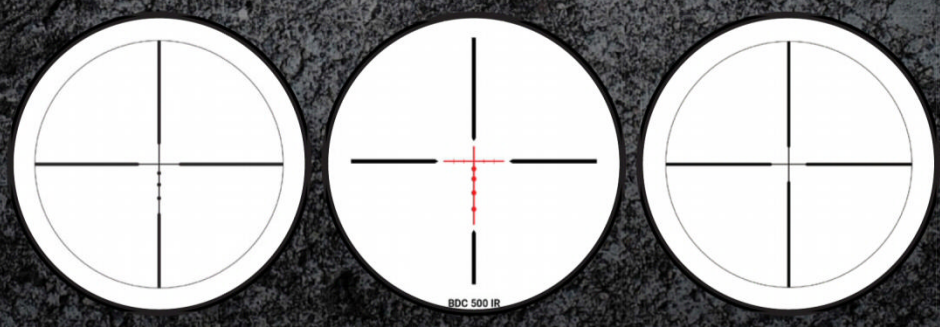

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BORN IN THE USA

WRITTEN BY ~ CODY WELLER

As a young fella, I'd look at American bowhunters and their style of hunting and think, 'that's not bowhunting, all they do is sit in a tree!

How can it be hunting? You just sit there until something walks past, right?' Little did I know that there is a whole lot more to it.

Some 15 years on, I have three treestands and all the bits to go with it. I would go as far as saying that I thoroughly enjoy it. There are more qualified people on this subject than me, but I'm going to dive into some of the details that I've discovered and adapted for the New Zealand environment.

It started with a trip to Stewart Island in 2006. I'd never shot a Whitetail before and apparently sitting in a tree was a good way to get one - how boring. Well, I was wrong! The first Whitetail that walked through right under my tree was so close I could have spat on it. The thrill of the ambush approach consumed me after that and having deer just going about their day less than 15 metres from me was amazing. You never know what is going to happen and the suspense is unreal. Could that movement over there be a deer? Is it a monster buck coming? Or is it just a kiwi? **The list of scenarios that play out in your head are endless.** I ended up with three Whitetail that trip and very quickly learnt that it wasn't just a case of coping with the boredom while you sit in a tree waiting for something to walk past.

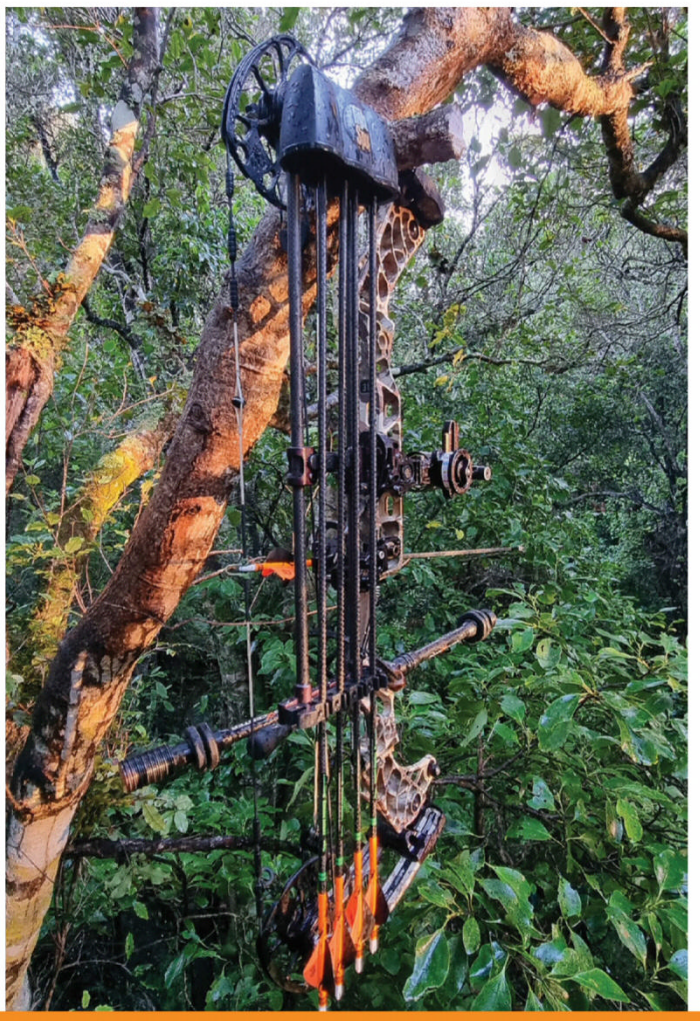
I had no treestand back then - just scrambled into a tree and uncomfortably made it happen. Fighting off numb body parts and dealing with awkward shooting positions was all part of the hunt, plus the limitations of where to setup due to lack of equipment. **If I was going to keep hunting from a tree, I would need some specialist gear**. So as time ticked by, I built up my treestand-hunting inventory. Now, I can setup and wait in comfort and make shots with ease.

I have found that being positioned in a tree makes for a very controlled shot. Yes, they still smell, see and hear you. However, you are above their eye line and you seem to have more time than when at ground level. **At ground level it often feels as if you are always racing against time before something goes wrong - winded, spotted etc.** From a tree, everything is set and ready to go, arrow nocked and the bow hanging a short reach away. For the most part, I position myself so it's just a case of quietly and smoothly picking up the bow then making the shot. I guess because it's all pre-planned, things fall into place a little easier.

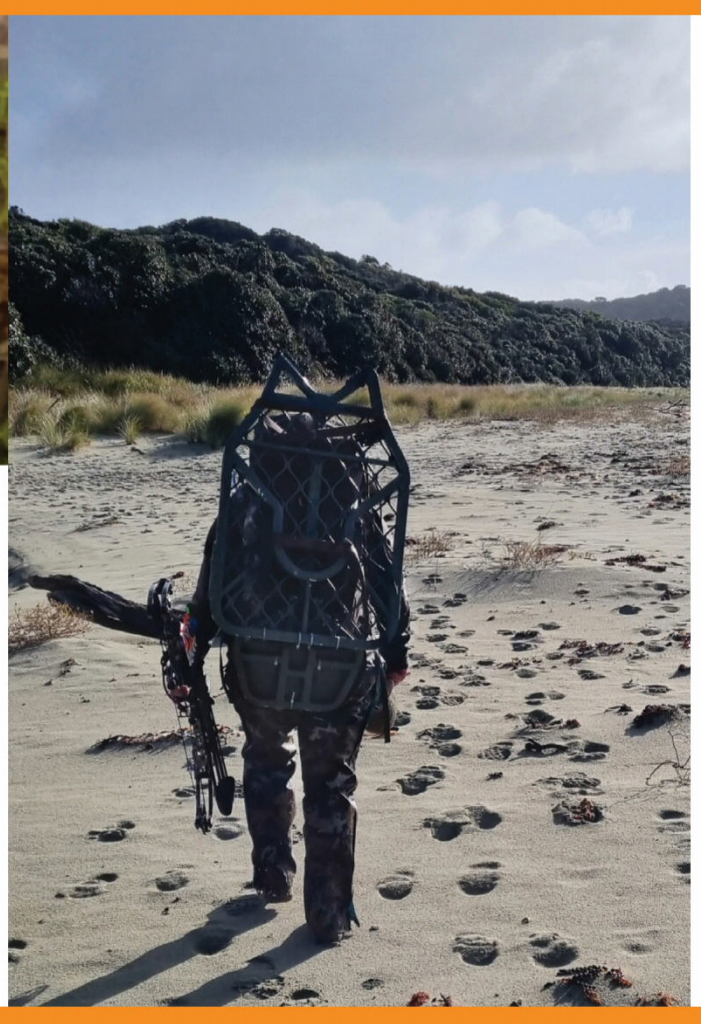
They get so close that when the plan comes together - in the bush especially - the shot will be very close. 15 metres or less isn't uncommon. **Being close on the ground is always good but no matter how experienced you are, you have to do something that shouldn't be done and that is move.** You must draw your bow undetected, and this is always tricky. Somehow in the heat of the moment, you have to find the

Tree hunting isn't limited to any one species - Nathan O'Hearn at full draw on a boar

Getting to full draw is made easier by the fact that you're above the targets eye-line



Bow ready to go, within arms reach



Samantha Weller shifting locations on Stewart Island

This is the Whitetail that started my tree hunting experience

right time to do this.

Being as close but sitting in a tree makes the pulling-the-bow-back part much easier. Above the eye line, there's a little more ease to this part of the process. While you can't be bold as brass, you can get away with a lot more.

There's no denying that boredom is one thing that can be a struggle and I find I have to get into the right mindset and trust in the method. **Once you're set up, it's easy for the brain to switch the thinking to 'maybe I should just go for a stalk? Or maybe something's not right with this location'.** Too many times I've been seduced down from the tree because of the 'what could be over there' thought. Only to get back to the stand just before dark and spook deer that I would have shot if I had just stayed put.

There is no time for the deer to react to the sound of the arrow coming at this short distance. This means the arrow always makes it to its intended mark and, as a plus, there's

My first tree hunting experience. Though uncomfortable it was successful

My current treestand setup with all the safety attachments and climbing pegs

Despite a tree-stand's size, they do pack down quite well

always far more forgiveness if the shot wasn't just right.

Having all this treestand hunting gear, I figured I should use it for more than the occasional trip to Stewart Island. So, I started putting in the time on Reds and found this style of hunting worked on them as well. **The Reds I targeted lived in thick cover and knew how to stay out of harms way, even though humans surround them daily.** But after some work and planning, I started getting results and this type of hunting opened up an area that was otherwise terrible for stalking. It's a unique feeling watching a Red deer strolling along whilst you're perched in a tree, but it works. By spending the time, I also had pigs cruising by, and I can assure you, you can also make good shots on them from a tree.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. The hunting where, when and why is still to come because, contrary to popular belief, it's not just a matter of sitting in a tree until something walks past. There is a lot more at play than that. **A lot of pre-planning goes into finding out why and how you're going to get animals to stroll by.** Luck may play its part, but I know educating yourself as to why that happened will make a massive difference if you are to have multiple successes. In my next few columns, I intend to discuss when and where to setup for bedding-to-feed travel or vice versa, as well as stage hunting, hunting a transition line or hunting a contour line, and hunting pinch-points.

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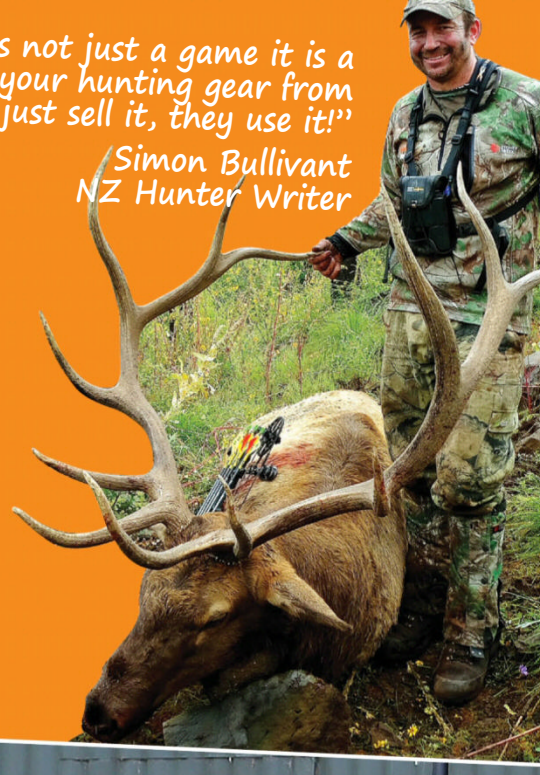

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HUNT LIGHTER PART TWO

GET READY

WRITTEN BY ~ GREIG CAIGOU

You can see the more compact profile of a small pack. This helps the hunter stay very nimble. Low bulk and less overall weight makes for great trips on the tops over summer. This is all you need carry for 2-5 days.

Last issue we concentrated on packs and shelters in finding a strategy to trim down . . .

Remembering that reducing the weight and 'bulk' of what you carry actually means you can also move to a smaller pack and so further reduce the total carried..

This time, I'll look a bit more closely at the types of shelters mentioned last issue.

You'll recall that a double-wall tent is typically the tent body and a rain fly and is what most hunters are familiar with. Overall, you will be drier, with space to store gear out of the weather. However, that comfort and space comes at the expense of an increase in both bulk and weight.

One of my suggested options was to use your existing double-wall tent in a single-wall configuration - leaving the inner behind - reducing overall weight. Most hunters can trim at least a kilogram off their load this way.

You could purchase a single-wall tent for the type of trips we're talking about in this series or try using just a fly (or tarp), which has been the standby for several generations now.

This is the most cost-effective option in my opinion.

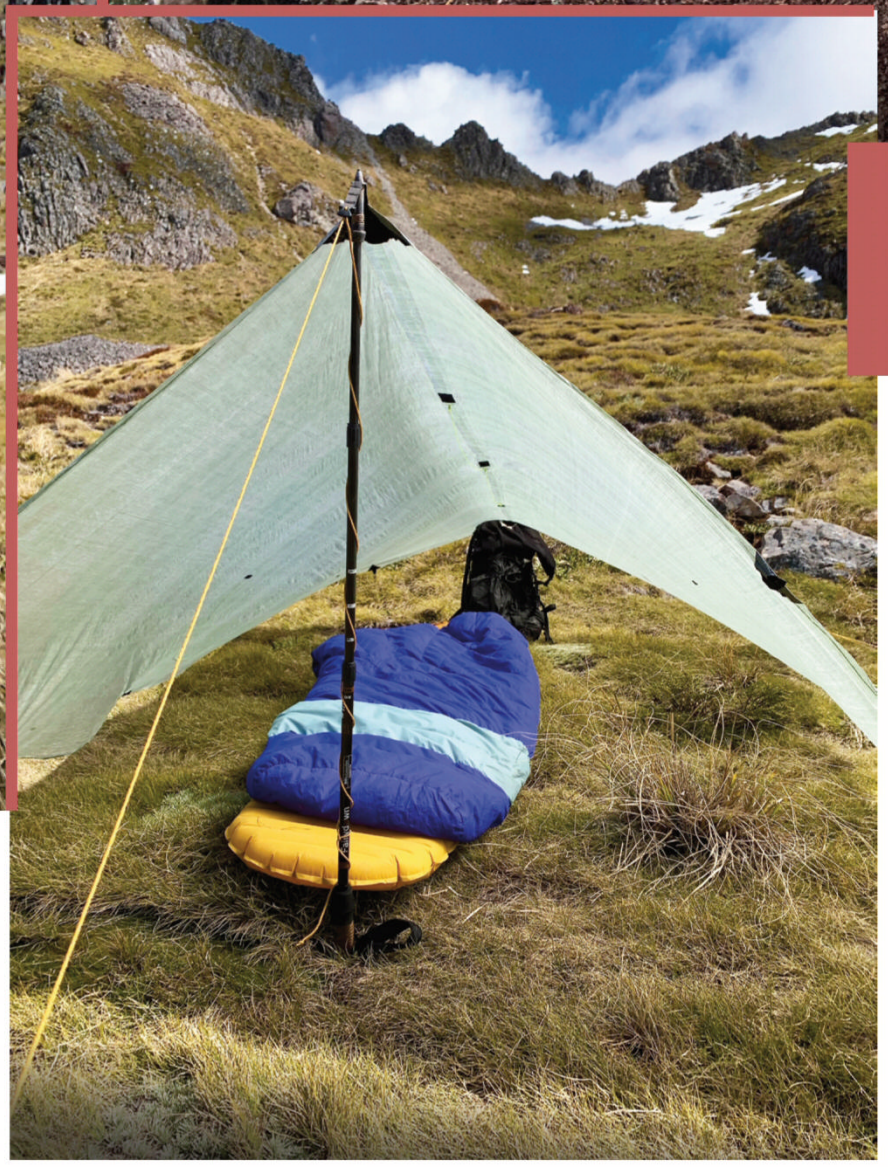
There are a wide range of single-wall tent purchasing options now available and a lot of hunters have contacted me for advice. Some have spent the money and gone to pioneer manufacturers such as ZPacks and Henry Shires at Tarptent. These were light, strong and simple shelters and once Dyneema composite fabrics entered the outdoor gear scene such shelters went 'next level', with specialist artisan manufacturers producing great shelters. **Others have gotten into making their own gear (MYOG).** There are also some good single-wall tents available that come in at great prices and can certainly handle New Zealand conditions.

PROS AND CONS OF SINGLE WALL TENTS

Single-wall tents are easier and quicker to set up, which is great when trying to get your shelter up in a storm.

The price paid for ease of set up and lighter weight can be more condensation inside the tent and usually not as much protected gear storage. Many like to take a double-wall tent to achieve waterproofness and breathability. The rainfly is 100% waterproof but not breathable, while

As mentioned later in the story I put this pitch together just on dark in the last steep section of bush. On the left side you can just make out the 'riser' I have on my tarp, allowing me to lift the headroom in such circumstances. Fly-camping allows for a lot of fun in creating workable solutions and multiple configurations



SOME TIPS TO TRY WHEN YOU GIVE FLY-CAMPING A GO

When I set out to be an ultralight hunter I chose to go with a fly (a tarp is the more universal term). A kind friend made my tarp (a MYOG project) in Dyneema composite fabric as he was teaching himself to work these super duper new fabrics.

Having multiple tie out points on your tarp has real advantages, and I had five tie-outs along each side built into mine. With ridgeline tie outs and adjustable tensioners you will meet most needs. We even put 'risers' onto the main flanks to allow for more headroom when pitching in the bush, where you can hoist up to an overhanging branch. If you buy an off-the-shelf tarp then have a local canvas maker sew in some extras.

The result is a very versatile two-person shelter weighting in at 236 grams, including pegs! And its bulk is little more than a black rubbish bag!

Most hunters in New Zealand grew up pitching their fly in an A-frame shape, as taught at Outdoor Education camps - with good reason. That was all I knew for many years. Nowadays my other go-to pitch on alpine hunts is in the shape of a diamond pyramid. Many who see this pitch would think it's a tent as I'm fully enclosed, and kiwis wouldn't usually associate this with fly camping.

This is a truly quick set up, with minimum faff. One key advantage is that I can get all the staking sorted with the tarp flat on the ground, held down from being tossed

the inner tent is 100% breathable, but not waterproof. Combine the two and you get the benefits of both. But this comfort and space comes at the expense of an increase in weight compared to a single-walled design of the same capability, and that is what we're trying to trim down.

Many of you will be hunting with a mate and can share the load and distribute the bulk by splitting up the tent components. This is a great idea, but if you can trim your gear needs down to the kit of a solo hunter then you improve your outdoor skills, reduce dependence on one common camp and increase your options . . . even when hunting with mates. For example, you could each take a side trip through different catchments and meet up again the following day - a super-spreader approach in that you fan out and gain maximum knowledge of the lay of the land and where the animals are (assuming you're keeping it real, and not going spying with a drone!!)

There is a sizeable movement towards 'tarptents', which are a compromise between a tent and a tarp. Their big advantage over conventional tents is that they are much lighter for the volume that is enclosed.

Such single-wall tents and tarps are colder, as they do not have that cushion of air between a tent body and the outer fly. If you want to trim down and give lighter weight hunting a nudge, then look to having a go at fly-camping.

This is my go-to pitch when facing wet weather. It is a fully-enclosed using the tarp in a long-sided pyramid configuration. Shown here is how I would set this up quickly, in 2-3 mins. And I've simple wrapped the corner together.

In this view of the long-sided pyramid I've unwrapped the corners I folded together and pegged that out as a kind of wing. Here I've tucked the wing underneath and anchored back to a shared peg. You can bring this wing out to its own separate peg, creating a diamond shaped pyramid. Both versions are more bomb proof if the weather is coming in hard

around by wind squalls.

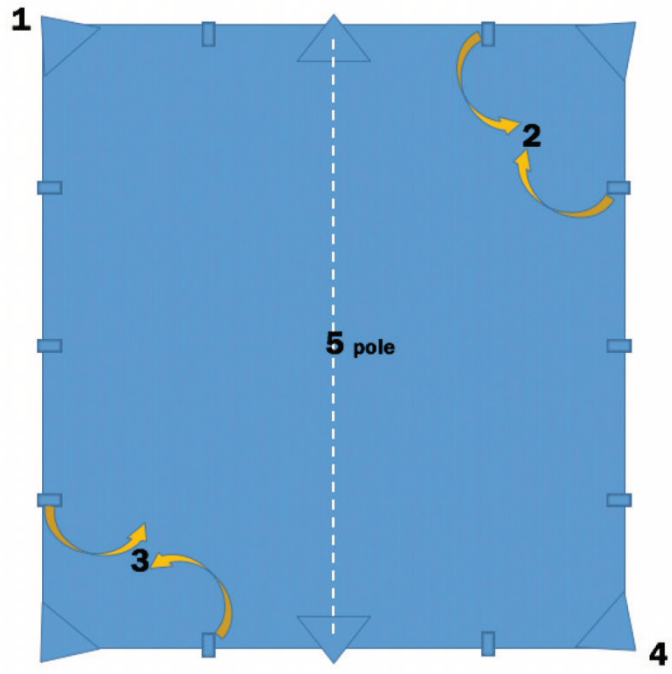
As you get field practice you'll discover some refinements. For example, on this pitch I've learnt to angle my walking pole to one side to give more sleeping room, and I know I can add some internal tie downs to the pole if the weather gets real gnarly. This is a four - five peg setup that then allows me to get gear inside and tidy up afterwards, as shown in the pictures. The other key advantage is that there is more protection from rain and any spindrift.

You'll need an adjustable walking pole, but many hunters have now seen the light and taken to using these anyway.

You can learn this pitch at home, and get real slick for using this in a variety of terrain and under varying conditions. In fact, this is one of the things I really enjoy about a good tarp set up . . . **the satisfaction of creating your own solution for the situation you find yourself in.** With a tent there's only one configuration for all scenarios, which requires a certain size of flat footprint area, and no real option to customise. A tarp allows for multiple variations on several themes. A quick example will highlight how useful that can be.

I was recently on an overnight chamois hunt that had me approaching up a steep spur nearing the bushline with less than an hour of daylight left. Perfect timing . . . only the expected clearance hadn't eventuated and squally weather was still thrashing the tops. **I could have pushed into a basin and set up, but I figured that was a prime spot for a morning hunt, so I opted for a camp right in the top 50 metres of steep bush . . .** not usually a place to find a tent campsite! Having options that are not completely dictated by your shelter allows for plenty of versatility in your hunts.

The boyhood delights of making shelters has extended well into my adult years and crafting a workable campsite from a tarp with multiple tie outs is all part of the fun and sense of adventure. **All you need is a 'flatish' area for the length of your body and you engineer a shelter**



around that. (For added comfort and with a slightly compromised sense of 'Leave No Trace' camping I did relocate some old branches against a couple of trees, carving out some ground to backfill against for a perfect night's sleep.)

The only mishap of that trip turned out to be the shambles I made of the three easy deer I bumped on the bush edge next morning . . . never too old to make the occasional stuff-up!

Fly-camping on the tops requires ingenuity at times, depending on where your day ends up, but having a variety of configurations in your repertoire means you can make something work. Tarp camping in awful weather is fully possible as well. Check out YouTube for ideas, which is where I learnt the long-sided pyramid pitch from 'Papa Hiker'.

SOME EXTRA POINTS TO CONSIDER ABOUT SLEEPING IN A TARP SHELTER:

If you need a bivvy bag to keep your sleeping bag dry while inside then, in my opinion, your shelter or pitching is substandard because it's not providing meeting the requirement of a lightweight system . . . low-weight camping that keeps you dry and free from spindrift. I don't carry a bivvy bag because my tarp performs this role.

You'll want to find the right balance between a warm interior and controlling condensation with single wall tents and flys/tarp. Condensation comes about on the inside as the warmer breath of the sleeping hunter comes in contact with the cold walls.

No part of your sleeping bag or body should touch the shelter - whether single or double wall - **so pile gear along one side to stop you from rolling**

Here I have used my walking pole with the tip pressed into the ground and tied back from the handle. Get familiar with how to tie this out so the pole doesn't rotate down your line

I clip the corners at 2 and 3 together before pegging out as one unit

sideways into the sidewall and forming condensation on it. With a tarp you can steepen your pitch so any condensation tends to run to the ground rather than drip on you. (You could take a small sponge to wipe up this interior moisture in the morning before you accidently wipe it on your down sleeping bag!)

From my experience with both tents and tarps I've found that the key to condensation control is through-draft. The A-frame pitch means you do not generally suffer from condensation because the airflow is so good and both ends can be kept open in almost all weathers.

With an A-frame style pitch I will have one end lower though, into the wind. This is also because, as a solo hunter, I'm only carrying one walking pole. If you are two hunters with poles, then you have more flexibility to easily adjust the height at either end, especially if the wind direction changes in the night.

Should you get a full-blown windstorm billowing out your structure and causing it to try and get airborne like an umbrella, then you have to take action. Options include holding onto the sides and have a sleepless night or getting up to add more tie downs.

I recall one really bad wind coming up during a night while on the Nelson tops. Thankfully the night was clear but the storm-force wind was horrendous and would've probably flattened any shelter! With things flapping around wildly I just grabbed everything down, rolled it around me and hunkered down low in the snowgrass . . . the tarp becoming a bivvy bag!

I tie out with a loop for a ease of taking down my shelter in the morning. I insert a small stick or grass into the loop so it doesn't pull out by itself. This is slick - don't tie knots!

The last resort in these situations is to just cram things into your pack and head for the relative shelter and safety of the bush.

It's quick to de-camp a tarp shelter. Top tip is to use your pack as the cram bag, pushing the tarp down the outside of your pack liner. This is especially useful if the tarp is wet, and you'll fill up all the little cavities created when stowing your other gear, which means less overall bulk and wasted space that comes from trying to jigsaw together a lot of different little solid lumps of equipment.

If you don't own a tarp, give one a try this summer. Setting yourself up with a fly camping option under 300 grams is a decent saving in weight and volume, allowing you to stay with a smaller capacity pack, saving more weight and still leaving room for packing out wild protein. **Summer hunts on the tops are looking good!**

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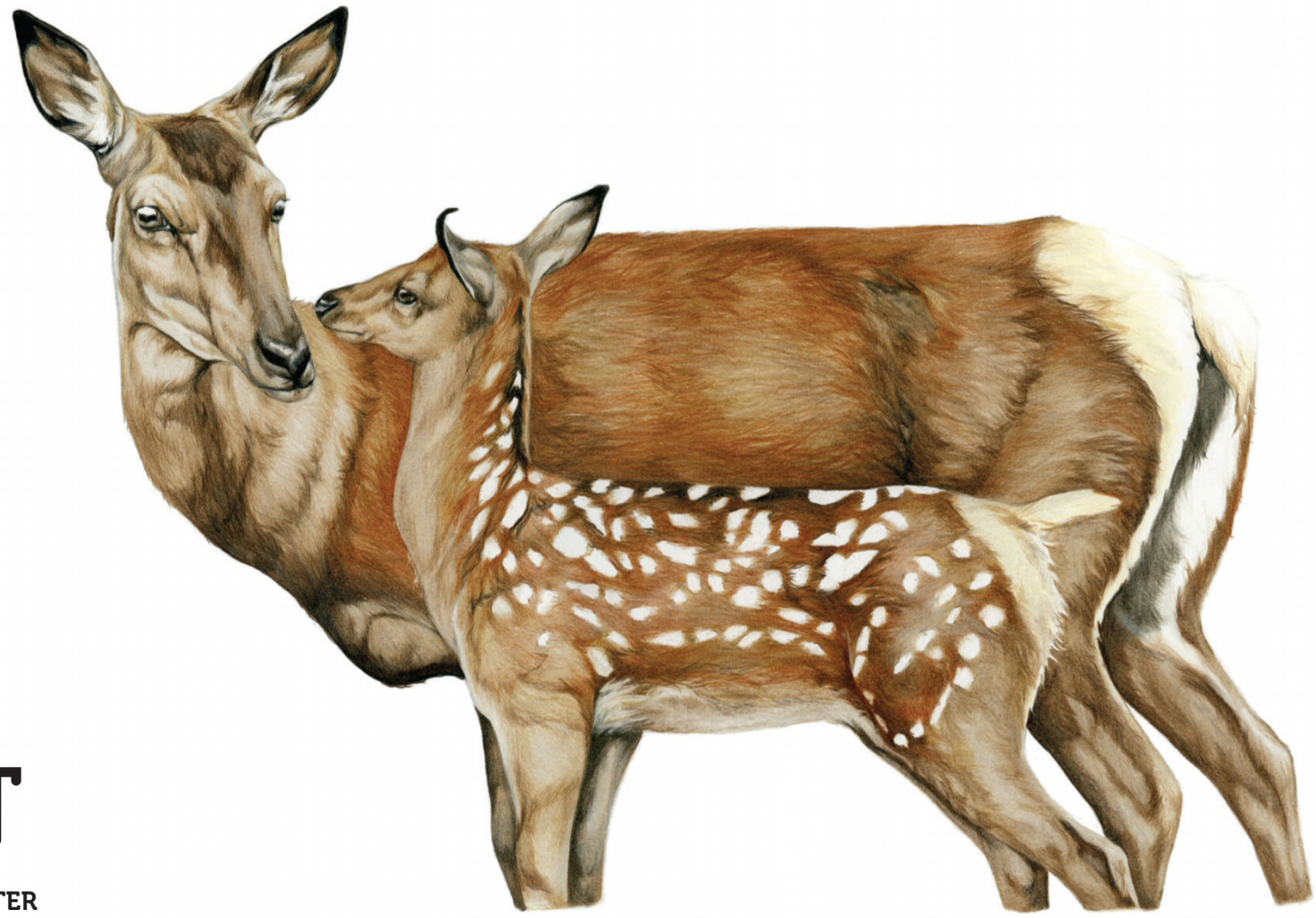

WRITTEN BY ~ **MADISON COULTER**

Growing up in an outfitting family in northern BC, Canada, was a childhood I am thankful to have had

My three sisters and I experienced everything from wild roundups to trail-ins, hunts, and some amazing flights, seated behind Dad (Dale Drinkall) in one of his bush planes. How could I not be fascinated by wildlife, when I got to see it up close from such a young age?

I don't know if Dad knows how much of an influence he was on me. His back story is that he was a teenage cowboy - out on his own - who wanted to become an outfitter. **He found a way into it, and with my mum Sandra by his side, grew Folding Mountain into one of the largest operations in British Columbia.** Later, he realised that getting his commercial pilot's license would be hugely beneficial for his outfitting business, so he taught himself to fly. This feat was just one of his many accomplishments - if he wanted to do something he knuckled down, did the hard work and just went for it.

I've wanted to be an artist for as long as I can remember. When I told my parents this was my career choice, they didn't insist that I looked for other options. They just told me to practice. And that's what I did. Ever since I was a kid, I practiced.

I was 14 years old when a hunter gave me my first commission. He paid me $200 to draw his stone sheep. At the time I couldn't believe it (that's a lot of money for a teenager) and my foray into earning an income from my art began. I was hooked! Dad was a tough critic, especially in relation to any artwork involving rams. He was an expert on exactly how those tricky-to-draw horns are meant to curl, after guiding hunts for these mountain sheep for years. I spent ages redoing and obsessing over getting ram horns just right back then - and I still do! Dad and I would look at wildlife art together and he would point out my errors. It was hard to take on board as a kid, as there were always improvements to be made but it definitely upped my drawing game.

My background and up-bringing are absolutely fundamental to why I love drawing wildlife and working with hunters and outdoorsmen. **A hunter knows exactly what an animal is supposed to look like.** They know this because they have watched and admired these animals out in the wild. If I can get a hunter's approval of one of my pieces, it's the best compliment I can ever receive. The pressure is always there to recreate these beautiful animals in an artwork but that's what helps me to continually strive to be better.

I started donating my drawings to wildlife foundations when I was 16. The first time I saw one of my pieces framed professionally, I burst into tears. It was a special moment where I caught a brief glimpse into my possible future as an artist and it was incredibly powerful. I'll never forget that feeling.

I will try to donate an original artwork to help out a charity foundation annually. Last year I donated to the Fairlight Foundation here in New Zealand, which is dedicated to advancing women in the New Zealand rural industry. **The piece depicted a hind and a fawn, inspired by my incredible mother, who not only raised four daughters in the wilderness, but taught us what we needed to take on the journey of motherhood ourselves.**

I came to New Zealand when I was 18 to work for a hunting outfit here. When I met Sam, my now husband, we continued to work both the Northern and Southern Hemisphere hunting seasons together. We'd travel to Canada to work for my parents and then back to Southland in

Our family ranch where I grew up

New Zealand to work at Leithen Valley. Sam is also a pilot, so we have had some incredible adventures. We both got our mountain goats on whirlwind hunts at the end of the season and have guided a few hunts together too. **One particular goat hunt sticks in our minds.** It was late in the season, so it was getting extremely cold. We got a great big mountain goat, nearing the end of the hunt. As we headed home we walked over the ridge right above our campsite and stumbled across a huge stone sheep, bedded up all by himself. He must have been watching our entire hunt from his spot visible right out of our tent door. Hidden in plain sight!

We desperately tried to encourage our hunter to buy a sheep tag as this stone sheep would've made such a beautiful trophy. He procrastinated for too long and we ran out of time. On the upside, that majestic animal got to live on in his scenic ledge!

My family members each took turns getting an elk tag each year. We always looked for a nice trophy but mostly we were after meat for the winter. So, at a very young age, we all started out with an elk hunt. It was a big milestone moment when we took our turns heading off hunting with Dad. He would knock on the bedroom door in the early morning's still-dark hours, and we would have to swiftly dress. **He drank his coffee and then was out the door, with one of us girls racing along behind him, still tying up our laces!**

We were fortunate to live in an area with plentiful elk and they were never too far away. Elk season was in September and was filled with warm days, crisp nights and mornings made more beautiful by the incredible autumn colours in the leaves. We woke to the sound of elk bugling every day for the whole month.

Our family also had a few scares, living as remotely as we did, miles from anywhere in Toad River. The threat of cougars, wolves and bears meant we needed to know each other's whereabouts every day on the ranch. All of us girls were always outside and were on our horses constantly from the first moment we could hang on to them successfully. I trailed along behind my two big sisters, and we practiced our 'bear drill' out in the fields. **We tied up our horses and timed how quickly our eldest sister Keera could throw us all on, smack our horses on the arses so they ran home, and then jump on her own horse.** Poor Keera seemed to be a bear magnet and got charged more times than anyone would like in a lifetime! Dad had to shoot a black bear who charged her one day when we were all out hiking at our favourite spot.

Over the long, cold winters, we were lured outside by our squirrel trapline. We would sell their hides to Dad. He had his own trapline for wolves - trying to keep on top of the predator numbers. We set up sticks with tiny snares and check them regularly. **One day Keera and Savannah were out on the trapline and came across a cougar.** He was watching them intently and all they could do was puff themselves up in their bulky snow gear and back out slowly, returning to safety at high speed on the snowmobile.

Ours was a childhood filled with animal encounters, with grizzly bears literally trying to bust through our back doors; wolves stealing away with our dogs; and a black bear pulling Mum's linen off

Dad, Dale Drinkall, and I on an elk hunt at Terminus Mountain

Sandra (mum), Dale (dad) and sisters Keera, Savannah, Fallon and myself

the clothesline and making a bed in it. I could go on and on about wild animal escapades and hunting stories! I only hope to give my two kids some of the same experiences one day - just maybe fewer involving bears! **As a mother now, I don't know how I would handle those.**

I'm just starting to work with hunters again after having my children. As I'm not able to head away working the hunting seasons anymore, it's so exciting to recreate that hunt with the hunters through my artwork. I get such a feeling of accomplishment bringing that animal back to life on paper, so it can be remembered on someone's wall forever. Think of it as taxidermy, but a little more space savvy. It's slightly easier to convince your significant other to make some room on the wall for an animal artwork, rather than its stuffed version taking up half the room.

I'm truly thankful to my upbringing for instilling in me the passion I have for my wildlife drawings. The stories and experiences I had as a child have intrinsically shaped who I am as an artist.

I look back at my younger self - still in kindergarten - telling everyone I wanted to be an artist. I sat in my bedroom for hours drawing and I took the results in little portfolios up to the booths of artists who sold their paintings for thousands of dollars at hunting conventions. That little girl had a burning desire to become an artist and now in my late twenties, I feel like I've stepped into that reality. It's been the hardest journey with lots of failed attempts. But to be here now, writing for this magazine, I know I'm getting there. **My dream career is just beginning, and I can't wait to send this magazine home to my family, so they can see how much our past has shaped my future.**

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The low, stunted bush at lower left of the Whitetail doe and fawn is probably C. distantia, mentioned later in the article

NEW ZEALAND PLANTS PART 3

COPROSMA

Latin - Family: rubiaceae

WRITTEN BY
MATT WINTER
@WILDNATURENEWZEALAND

All plants, worldwide, are classified in a hierarchical structure. Each level within that structure is given a name. For example, in descending order, kingdom ('plantae') division, class, order, family (in this case 'rubiaceae'), genus ('Coprosma') and finally, species

The Coprosma genus consists of around 90 species which are found throughout the Pacific and Australasia. 58 of those 90 species are endemic to New Zealand making the genus one of the largest in New Zealand. Most are what you would call 'shrubs' but 8 species grow into small trees.

Way back in the dark ages, 1985 to be more precise, I got accepted as a trainee with the Agricultural Pest Destruction Council (APDC). For the younger readers out there, in 1967 the long standing regional Rabbit Boards (administered by a national body called the Rabbit Destruction Council) were disbanded and replaced by the APDC. Later, in 1989, the role was taken over yet again, this time by the newly formed Regional Councils.

But I waffle .... 10 cadets were taken on every year with a view to training them up into managerial roles within the council. Each trainee was posted to a different province for their two year 'apprenticeship' (I went to Hawkes Bay) and expected to work with the local field staff learning the day to day job of being a rabbiter while also toiling away on fairly intense theory, assignments, exams, projects and research papers. **Being young and only a year out of college, studying was one of the last things on my mind –** I absolutely loved the field work but, if I'm honest, didn't really apply myself to the theory with quite the same enthusiasm. However, one aspect of the study I did really enjoy, and learned a lot from, was the plant collection we were required to compile.

My first stint was 10 weeks staying with one of the field managers based in the heart of back country Hawkes Bay about half way between Napier and Taihape, just shy of Ngamatea station. My 'mentor', Vern, possessed a wealth of knowledge about the natural environment but more specifically plants. **I had the ideal tutor to learn from.**

While out in the field during our day to day activities, I would constantly ask Vern the name and details of various plants and trees we came across. I'd write down a few notes, take a sample then, later, press and dry the specimen to add to my growing collection.

On quite a few occasions I received an answer of, ***"Oh, that's another Coprosma"*** when asking the identity of a plant. It was soon explained to me that there were literally dozens of different Coprosmas and that their physical appearance varied greatly from one to the next. Individual Coprosma species are also notoriously difficult to identify however Vern did point out the two really obvious, identifiable features that all Coprosmas have in common. Leaves come from

Coprosma robusta showing the obvious paired leaves and stipule at the base of the leaf stems (arrowed). All Coprosmas will possess these features.

1/800 @ f/7.1, ISO 400

the stem in opposite pairs with a small appendage, called a 'stipule', joining them at the base of each leaf stem. These stipules have a prominent gland at their tip when young but eventually shrivel, dry up and are eventually shed. **See the image above and all will become obvious ....**

As trainees we were tested on our knowledge of the plants we collected. To this day I am still able to rattle off the common, Maori and Latin names of a couple of dozen species of plants and grasses.

The word Coprosma originates from the Greek word kopros which means 'dung' and osme meaning 'odour'. A few of the Coprosma species give off a very bad odour, much like the smell of dung when the leaves are crushed.

A few years later in my working life, I was back in Marlborough, this time employed by the New Zealand Forest Service. Our work included building and maintaining tracks, repairing huts, erosion control planting, noxious plant control, some animal control and what ever else was needed to keep the Forest Parks up to scratch. One particular day I was showing off my plant knowledge to a work mate. I spied a Coprosma (didn't know which species at the time) and plucked a small branch to show him the identifying features. Next minute I smelled a terrible odour in the air. It was that bad I accused old Grant of letting a fart go. He denied it of course and we soon realised the smell was emanating from the leaves. I subsequently learned that the species was C. foetidissima, commonly referred to as stinkwood.

Now, here's a wee prank you can play on your unsuspecting mate. As you're walking through the bush, casually grab a couple of leaves off a kawakawa (pepper tree) and crush the leaves in your hand. **Give them to your mate and ask him what they smell like.** He'll let you know that they smell just like pepper. A bit later on, point out a lemonwood (tarata) and this time get him to crush a few leaves. He'll say something like, *"Wow, that smells exactly like lemon".* So, when you eventually come across a stinkwood tree (C. foetidissma) tell your unsuspecting friend to go through the same process. He'll be trusting by this stage and he'll be loving this game, wondering what wonderful odour this next plant will give off. The look and expression on his face will be priceless not to mention absolutely hilarious. It cracks me up every time I try it.

C. rigida

C. linariifolia (mikimiki or yellow wood)

C. robusta (karamu)

C. repens (taupata or mirror plant)

Four different species of Coprosma showing the huge variation in leaf form and structure.

Description, Habitat and Range

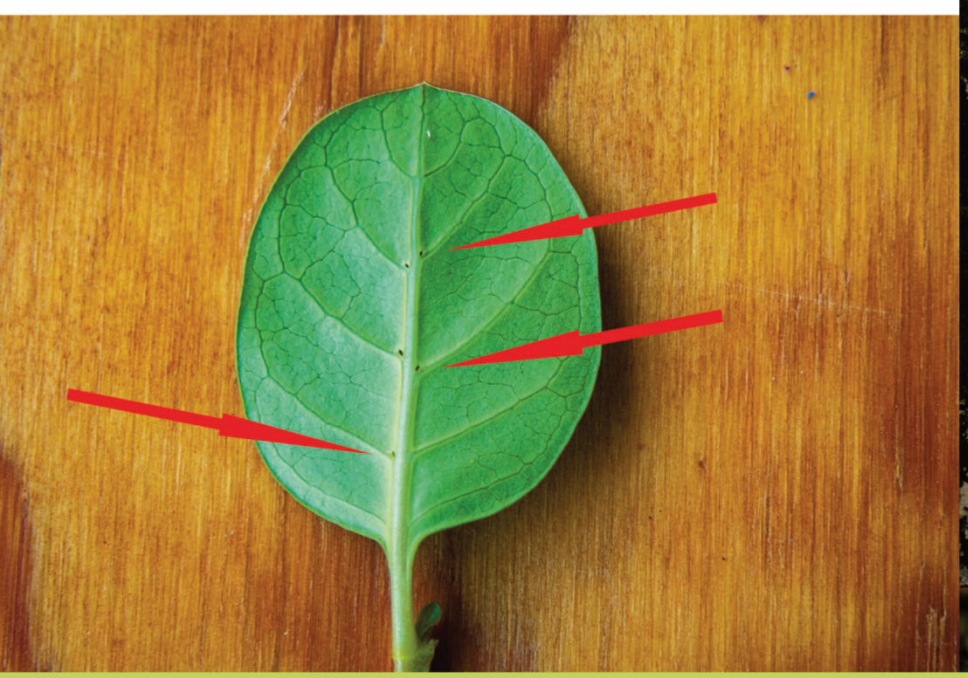
I'm not going to even attempt to give descriptions for all 58 odd Coprosma species. That would be a fairly pointless task given that even the boffins admit to a lot of difficulty and frustration when trying to compile detailed catologues of the genus. However, with the two main identifying features mentioned earlier, you should at least be able to recognise a Coprosma when you see it.

In saying that, one other sign you could look for is on the under side of the leaves. A very close look here will reveal very small pits or tiny holes, called 'domatia', located at the point where the small leaf veins join the main midrib that runs down the middle of the leaf.

There is a very interesting story behind

A 'two-for' – Coprosma tenuicaulis bottom left and Coprosma grandifolia upper right
1/200 @ f/6.3, ISO 800

Close up of stinkwood leaves and branches – C. foetidissima



Under side of a C. repens (taupata) leaf showing the 'domatia' holes at the junction of where the leaf veins meet the main midrib.

Image showing similarities between Broadleaf (griselinia littoralis), on the left, and Coprosma robusta (karamu) on the right.

these little holes. Like many plants, Coprosmas often have to battle fungus which can cover the leaves preventing precious sunlight from reaching the photosynthesising parts of the plant, drastically retarding its growth**. Thankfully for the plant, there are several types of diminutive mites in New Zealand that love nothing more than chowing down on fungus.** Through evolution, the Coprosmas have learned to produce these tiny little 'hollows' to provide the mites with some protection which encourages them to call that particular leaf home. Nature at its best I reckon.

Thinking back on the last 40 odd years of my back country travels, I can think of two species that seem to be the most common or abundant - C. repens and C. robusta. (See image above). When I was researching the broadleaf article in issue 84, I needed a few specific images to illustrate a couple of points I was making. C. robusta (karamu) is very similar to broadleaf in overall appearance so I got 'fooled' many times thinking I had found the perfect broadleaf subject. Its not until you get up close and look for the paired leaves and stipules that you realise what you've found. I'd venture to say, too, that almost everyone has noticed the clusters of bright orange taupata berries that are produced in late summer.

Overall, as a species, Coprosmas range from small trees to very low, ground covering matted plants. The largest growing species is C. arborea (mamangi) reaching up to 12 metres high, common in open, lowland forest from near the far north to about the middle of the North Island. C. grandifolia comes in second for size at about 7 to 8 metres and will grow in forests up to the lower montane level (around 1600 metres) throughout the North Island and northern parts of the South Island.

Just like broadleaf and lancewood, Coprosmas are 'dioecious' in that the male and female flowers are produced on different plants, generally in clusters, and therefore rely on wind and birds to pollinate. Fruit (berries) are always round in shape, very succulent and juicy with a vast colour range from translucent white to black and literally any colour in between. Some plants may even bear more than one coloured fruit. Another consistency of the genus is that each berry will have two seeds per berry.

Medicinal, Human and Other Qualities

It turns out that, historically, the Coprosmas have many uses, as food, as medicine and for more practical applications such as fibre and dyes. Once again, there are just too many species to detail individually but the following should give a fair idea of the vastly useful Coprosmas.

The berries of many of the species were popular as a sweet food for both Maori and Europeans. The inner bark of a handful of species were used regularly to help with cuts, bruises, itches, aches and pains. In these situations the bark

A shy, secretive and rare fernbird atop a Coprosma propinqua. This species likes swamp margins and damp, scrubby forest edges, just like the fernbird
1/1000 @ f/7.1, ISO 320

was usually crushed or 'bruised' and then applied to the affected area. Other situations entailed boiling or soaking in cold water before application. More potent and effective concoctions could sometimes be obtained by mixing with other plants. One example is boiling the inner bark with kanuka tips for 15 minutes then applying externally for venereal disease.

Boiled Coprosma leaves of many species had a whole host of medicinal uses from wound bathing cuts, sores, bruises and gun shot wounds to kidney troubles and broken limbs. Karamu leaves made a great substitute for china tea as well as giving flavour to food when used to line the hangi.

The bark of many species of Coprosmas can yield good quality dyes that are completely washable and which don't fade over time. Different species will offer different colours from their bark and within each plant, the colour will be richer near the base of the tree than higher up. **As well, a variety of colours can be produced according to the process used to extract the dye 'liquor', as well as by the type of substance** (usually an oxide of some sort) that is combined with the dye to fasten it to the fibre or fabric.

Being a lover of coffee, there is one last thing I just have to say about Coprosmas. As mentioned, Coprosmas are part of the 'rubiaceae' family. Guess what other tree is also in that family ?? Yup, coffee. Even the earliest botanists recognised the similarities. William Colenso went as far as naming the C. robusta species, Coprosma coffaeoides, which never stuck of course. **During the two World Wars. Coprosma robusta was used as a coffee substitute.** Apparently its a simple case of collecting the two seeds in each berry (which also happen to be coffee bean shaped), remove their flesh, dry them, roast them, grind them and finally brew them. Voila !!!

Discalimer – I have tried my best to be as accurate as possible with identifying and naming the Coprosmas in this article. I believe I have them correct but there may be some discrepancies due to the notorious difficulties with identifying species within this genus.

Cheers, Matt

An example of one of the low profile, dense ground covering species of Coprosma. More than likely C. distantia, probably the same as the opening image

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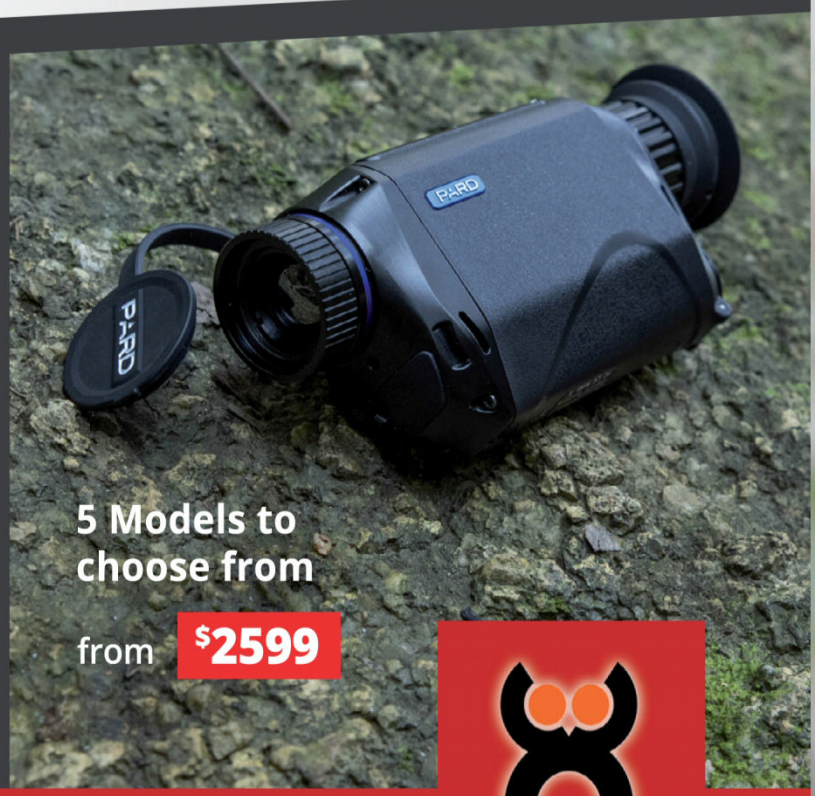

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Simon Bridges and his sons Emelyn and Harry with a hind Dad shot using a Tikka T3x 270. Both boys also scored their first deer on the same trip

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Blake Clearwater with a yearling Fallow for the freezer. Shot with a Sako 85 243

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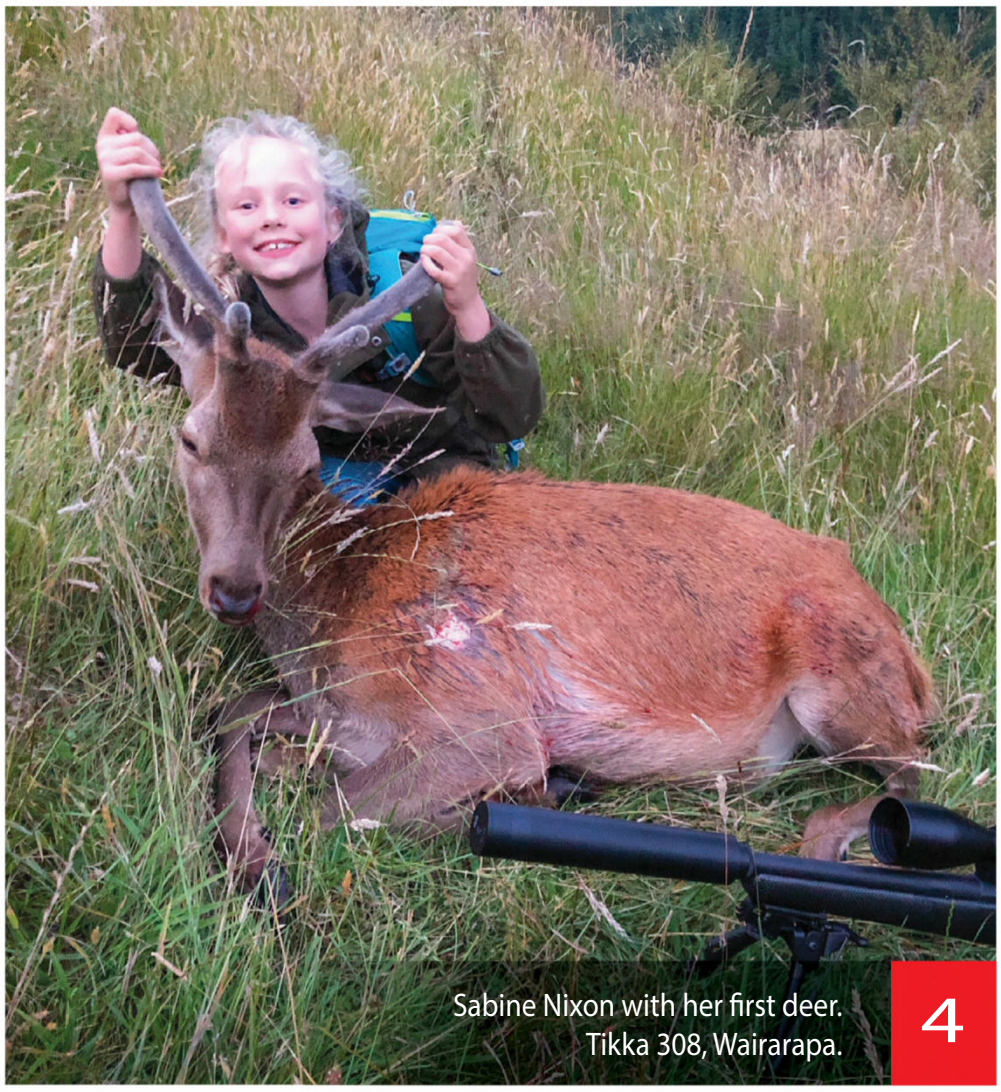
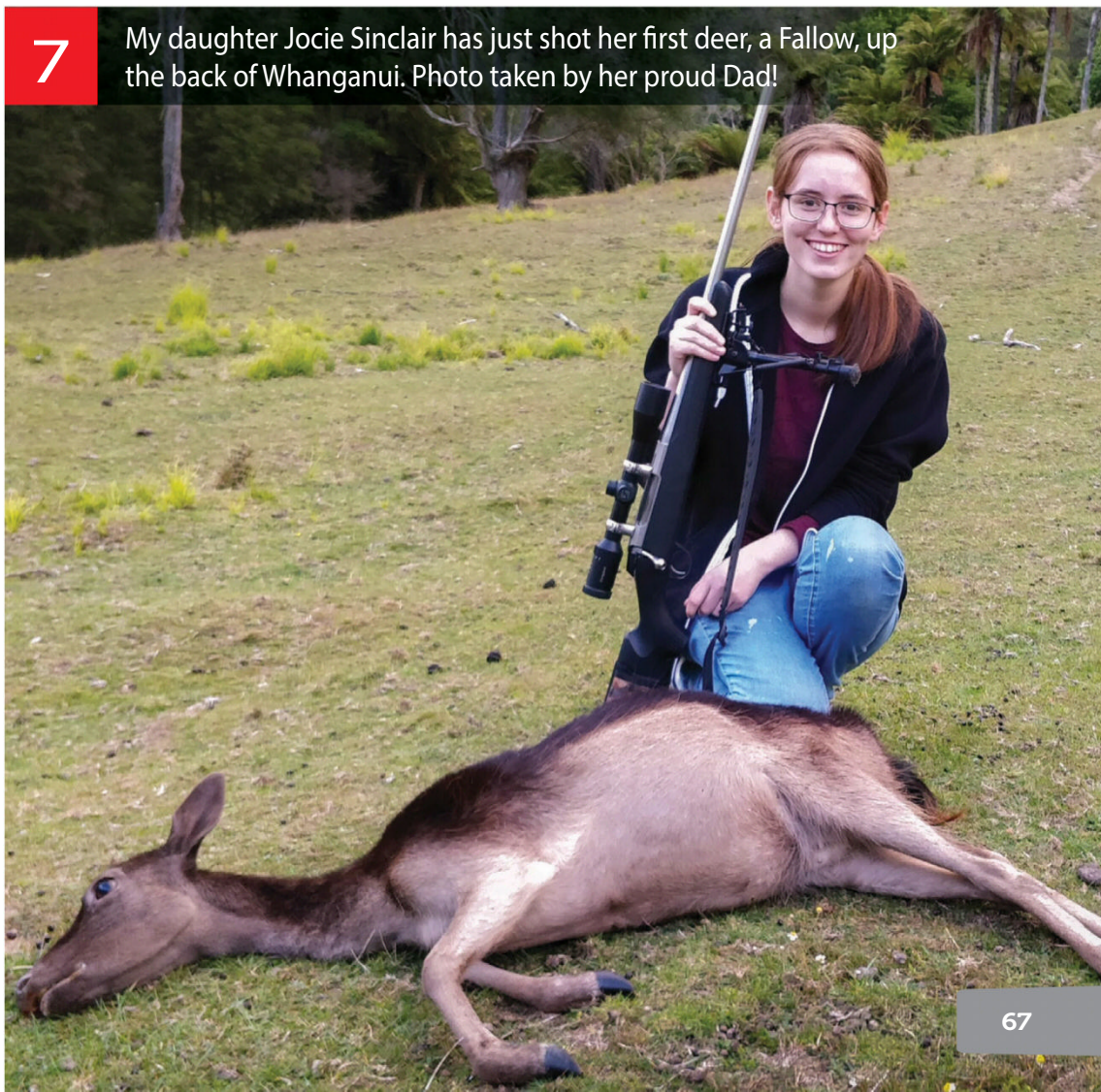


4 Sabine Nixon with her first deer. Tikka 308, Wairarapa.

6 Liam Young (10) with his first roaring Red stag taken with Dad's T3x 308, taken at 30 metres

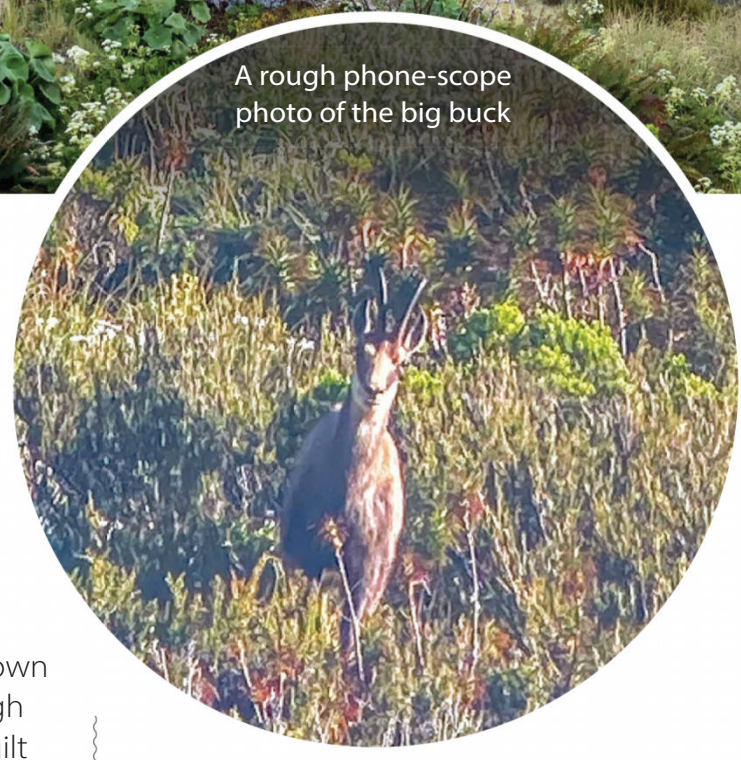
5 Dwaine Faletanoai with his first deer shot at 285 yds with a Tikka T3 7mm-08. Kids from left Joshua, Mia, Mason and Olivia first ever hunt for the Aucklanders in Northern Southland



7 My daughter Jocie Sinclair has just shot her first deer, a Fallow, up the back of Whanganui. Photo taken by her proud Dad!

SUMMER CHAMOIS HUNTING

WRITTEN BY ~ CAM MCKAY | POINTS SOUTH



A rough phone-scope photo of the big buck

With good planning and the lightweight gear available these days you can really cover a lot of ground, even on just an overnighter

But, even with all that fancy gear and an honest attempt at good planning, you can find yourself having bitten off more than you can chew and in the midst of what feels like a death march.

There's a valley I'd had my eyes on for quite a while, and after the usual pouring over a topo map, Google Earth, and even consulting my trusty Moirs Guidebook, it appeared that a solid overnight trip should have it covered.

So, on a Friday evening, I did the usual last-minute ring around to see who was keen for what for the weekend. We took off at a leisurely hour on Saturday, leaving the truck just before lunch as a team of three, being Joseph, Luke and I.

Now Joseph is built like a hillstick, naturally fit and has his gear weight down to fine art. Whereas Luke and I, although having quality lightweight gear, are built more like a pair of seals and so tend to rely more on stubbornness to get us up the hills.

Trying to follow the line in the guidebook to a tee, we soon found ourselves traversing through thick shitty bush with tight, eroded, washed-out gutters every 100 metres. **No wonder the book said *"seldom used"*.** Trying to keep the pace up so as to be out of the bush before dark, we lost a lot of sweat. But we popped out into the valley floor with just enough light to find the nearest flat spot to camp for the night, something like ten or eleven hours after we'd left the truck.

Waking up in prime country, albeit a bit tired, we started glassing over a morning coffee, picking up a few animals here and there. Then we spotted what looked to be a really nice buck, well above camp, but quite obviously making his way down to check out these intruders in his valley.

With the buck now only 300 yards away we sent Luke off up the hill with his bow to put a stalk on him, while Joe and I sat back filming and generally mocking Luke's decision of a direct uphill approach. The direct approach, to our surprise, worked out really well, with Luke getting all the way in to 30 yards. When about to draw the buck winded him and spooked off uphill. By this time Joe and I had had more than enough time watching to know that he was a seriously nice animal with super heavy bases. **So, as soon as he paused to look back down hill, we were ready, taking him with maybe only a 200 yard shot.**

After the usual milling around reliving what had just happened and grabbing a few photos, it was back to camp to pack up and get moving, knowing we needed to find a better route out and ideally hunt on the way and still hit the truck before nightfall.

Camp reached about 11 hours after leaving the ute

After little debate, we decided to just grind our way up a side creek to hopefully pop out on the ridge some 700 metres above and glass our way along before dropping back down near the road. A few hours later and after a considerable monkey scrub swim, we finally hit the tussock and crested the ridge.

Moving along the ridge and stopping to glass we were picking up a few animals here and there, when we spotted a lone buck pretty swiftly heading uphill, again to check us out. **Luke hurriedly screwed a few arrows back together after having dismantled everything to go in his pack for the monkey scrub swim.** Taking a guess that the buck would pop up to the left of the wee knoll we were on, Luke shuffled 20 metres that way and set up. Of course, only for the buck to do the opposite and come up just to our right. So, with Joe and I staying dead still and filming the buck from only 20 metres, Luke now had to shoot 40 metres from behind and to the left of us. Watching the arrow strike we knew that buck was dead on his feet, losing his legs and rolling down the hill some five seconds later. Luke had managed to take his first buck with the bow, though I'd say that the buck stalked him rather than him stalking the buck.

Packs were lifted again, and we were again wandering down the ridge to drop back into the bush, hoping to find a nice line down through the 600 metres or so of height we had to lose to get back to the track. This went relatively smoothly for a change, with us hitting the track just on dark and walking the final hour back to the truck.

It was one hell of an overnight trip, having essentially walked 24 out of 36 hours - **I'm pretty sure we will be allowing for a couple of nights next time!**

Luke Manson and his epic 9 1/4" bow-shot buck

Cam's awesome 10 1/8" - 28½DS buck

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North Island Red Deer

WRITTEN BY
KAEDIN VAN DER POEL

It was the first week of April when Dad picked me up early from school for our annual father and son roar trip

I was so excited as we missed out on last year's mission because of stupid covid. There was good cold and clear weather forecast for the next three days and the truck was filled with lollies and chocolates. After what felt like the longest drive ever, we finally arrived at our secret hunting spot.

We had only been there for five minutes when we heard the first roar. The hairs on the back of my neck stood up straight away and my heart started racing. We quickly dumped our gear and crept up over the spur to try get a glimpse of our first stag. I heard some sticks break so Dad let out a moan to try and get it to come in. Straight away we saw the sneaky young six-pointer tip-toeing through the trees looking for us.

It was so cool to see him all worked up and crazy, smashing his antlers on a small tree while scraping up the ground in anger.

We didn't want to shoot him because he was only a young stag and Dad and I had been dreaming about a huge stag we had seen there a couple years before.

By now there were stags roaring everywhere but it was starting to get dark so we decided to head back to camp and cook up some of Dad's famous noodles

and mash potato for dinner.

I couldn't sleep much because of all the stags roaring and Dad's snoring so when the alarm went off, I was all ready to go.

First, we tried to sneak into a noisy stag up the valley but the wind changed and he ran away.

The biggest stag I have ever seen

Then we watched some hinds feeding in a clearing, hoping a stag would come out but he wouldn't show himself. **So we headed deep into the bush and spooked a ten-pointer and another young stag.** Feeling exhausted we walked back to camp a little gutted.

I was starting to think we should have just shot the six-pointer we had seen the day before but Dad kept saying to be patient and not to be worried because we still had one more full day to go.

That night I slept like a baby because my legs and body were so sore.

The next morning the phone alarm sounded for the final time. **Dad had porridge and a Milo ready for me and we talked about our final plan for the day.**

We decided to go after the noisy stag up the ridge from camp because Dad reckoned he had moved and sounded really angry.

We had to sneak really quietly through some tight bush without him knowing we were there. We were lucky because another stag had turned up to fight him so we didn't have to roar to give away our position, but it also made it harder because now there were extra eyes looking for us.

My heart was racing the fastest it ever had, I could even hear myself breathing. **We could see tips of antlers and smell him but couldn't get a proper look at him.** Then, all of a sudden, the second stag smelt us, barked really loud, and took off at full speed with hinds running everywhere.

I thought we had stuffed it up but Dad let out a big roar, stood up tall, walked forward five steps then BOOM.

I quickly asked if he got it and he told me he had missed. He then told me to follow the game trail to check for blood. He was smirking and I didn't believe him. Just ten steps away I saw the biggest stag I have ever seen laying dead. We were so, so

A young stag we spooked in the bush

happy. We hugged and laughed and my hands were shaking with excitement, it was the stag we had both been dreaming about. He was a really old stag with perfectly even twelve points. I couldn't believe it. We took heaps of photos and cut all the meat off it. Dad took the back legs, front legs and sausage meat in his pack and I took the backsteaks. We had to have turns at carrying the head because it was really heavy. We finally made it back to the truck after lunch where we packed up and started the big drive home. The whole way home we never even turned the radio on because we were both so excited we couldn't stop talking about what just happened.

It was the best trip ever and I can't wait to go on the next hunt with my Dad.

WRITTEN BY ~ MICHAEL MCCORMACK
@CHASEANDGATHER

Part 3
NUTRITION IN THE WILD
PROTEIN

In the previous two issues we have discussed fat and carbohydrate, and in this article will cover the third and final macronutrient - protein

WHAT IS PROTEIN?

Protein is found throughout the body: in muscle, bone, skin, hair, and virtually every other body part or tissue. It makes up the enzymes that power many chemical reactions and the haemoglobin that carries oxygen in your blood.

WHAT ARE THE KEY ROLES OF PROTEINS IN THE BODY?

- Aids growth and maintenance of tissues
- Transmits hormonal information and nutrients between your cells, tissues and organs
- Acts as a buffering system, helping your body maintain proper pH (acidity) values
- Helps maintain the fluid balance between your blood and the surrounding tissues
- Forms antibodies to protect your body from foreign invaders, such as disease-causing bacteria and viruses
- Is a valuable energy source but only in situations of fasting, exhaustive exercise or inadequate calorie intake.

HOW ESSENTIAL IS PROTEIN?

Our bodies need 20 different 'amino acids' (often referred to as the building blocks of proteins) to grow and function properly. Though all are important for your health, nine of these amino acids are classified as 'essential.'

Essential amino acids cannot be produced by our bodies, so must be obtained from the food we eat.

Complete proteins are those that contain all nine essential amino acids.

Complete protein sources include:

- **Meat**
- **Seafood**
- **Poultry**
- **Eggs**
- **Dairy Products**

Soy, quinoa and buckwheat are plant-based foods that contain all nine essential amino acids, making them a complete protein source as well. Many plant-based sources of protein are considered incomplete, as they lack one or more of the 'essential' amino acids.

For this reason, we should all aim to have a 'balanced diet'- by combining a variety of food sources to compliment one another and eat well rounded meals that contain a wide range of nutrients.

If you are following a strictly plant-based diet, you can still ensure proper intake of all essential amino acids by eating a variety of plant proteins each day.

IN THE FIELD Q & A WITH REGISTERED DIETITIAN, JULIA SEKULA

1. For an active hunter who spends long days on the hill - is there a recommended amount of protein per day that they should aim to consume?

To support general fitness it is recommended to eat 0.8-1.0g/kilogram body weight per day of protein. For those doing a more moderate amount of intense training, 1.0-1.5g/kilogram body weight per day is recommended.

For example:

- Inactive 80kg person would aim for at least 70 grams of protein per day
- Moderately active 80kg person would aim for at least 80 grams of protein per day
- Intensively active 80kg person would aim for an intake of at least 120 grams of protein per day

How this looks, in reality, needs to be more practical than grams per kilo, as we eat food, not grams. So when thinking of your protein needs, consider what you need to eat (what your fuel is) before, during, and after your time out hunting.

When we think of protein, we automatically think of meats, eggs, and dairy; these are only part of the protein story as we have plant-based proteins that are really helpful to help ensure that an active individual is getting enough food when out hunting.

Plant-based protein foods such as lentils and beans (scary words but there are now heaps of easy-to-eat options available) contain both protein and carbohydrate and can help ensure we are getting enough energy into our bodies during periods of activity.

Make sure each meal you have in the lead-up to a big day hunting have regular amounts of protein, including at breakfast. We often undereat protein in the morning so by mid-afternoon there is a 'slump' in how we feel, then we may overeat at night. Take note of how you feel, and what you eat and when, and start to work out what works for you.

Think about your meals and as an initial food aim, try to make ¼ of your meal protein (animal and/or plant-based), ¼ of the meal carbohydrate, and ½ vegetables/salad.

On a day when you are out hunting, consider having plant-based protein foods as part of the suppies you take with you, to ensure you have good sources of protein, carbohydrate, and fibre to help you feel full for longer and have the energy to be out there doing what you enjoy.

We often think we need to eat more protein these days, but the evidence tells us that it is the carbohydrate portion of your meal that needs to increase, not the protein.

2. Protein powder is a super lightweight and compact source of protein and amino acids. Would you recommend these as a complete meal replacement for an active hunter?

I strongly encourage people to eat food rather than have meal replacement powders, tablets or other products. Protein powders that are meal replacements can appear convenient products to have, but given that these are drinks, one often doesn't feel full. The feeling that results from sitting down and taking the time to eat is still important even when out hunting. By doing this with real food, we ensure we are getting a good range of the nutrients our bodies need to perform at their optimum, especially when we are active.

We can often end up eating more protein than we actually need if we have protein powder; remember, protein still has calories in it and as mentioned, we may not actually recognise when we are (or aren't) full. As mentioned earlier, we often don't eat enough protein earlier in the day perhaps because there isn't enough time.

Protein powders made into a smoothie with fresh fruit could be an option but, a cheaper, more nutritious option is a smoothie made up of milk (or a milk alternative), a banana, a handful of frozen berries, some yoghurt and if you have it, a few spoons of LSA (linseed, sunflower, almond).

3. If the daily intake of protein is too low, how does this affect the body?

We need protein for many reasons, particularly to build and repair muscle. New Zealanders typically eat more protein than is actually needed so it is the timing of protein consumption that can be a concern and affect the body.

It is important to have a variety of protein foods (plant and animal-based) across the day to help ensure we have sufficient energy to do what we want to do. Having jam on toast before going out hunting will most likely mean you are hungry not long into the hunt, compared with having eggs on toast or cereal with milk and yoghurt.

I encourage you to start thinking of what your energy needs might be over the hunting day, set yourself some goals after each hunt, and see if you feel any different the next time you are out. Mix it around in terms of amounts and types of foods eaten (including ones high in protein) and see how you go. Most importantly, enjoy the hunt and hopefully, you'll bring back some high-quality protein to share with your whānau at another time.

Julia.

Nutrition Facts

Venison

Serving Size: 500 g (500g)

Venison nutritional information

Amount Per Serving	
Calories 750	Calories from Fat 105
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 12g	**18%**
Saturated Fat 7g	**35%**
Polyunsaturated Fat 0.8g	
Monounsaturated Fat 2.7g	
Cholesterol 395mg	**132%**
Sodium 285mg	**12%**
Potassium 1990mg	**57%**
Total Carbohydrates 0g	**0%**
Dietary Fiber 0g	**0%**
Sugars 0g	
Protein 150g	
Vitamin A	0%
Vitamin C	0%
Calcium	2.3%
Iron	115%

* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2000 calorie diet.

'BRANCHED CHAIN AMINO ACIDS' (BCAA)

The branched-chain amino acids (BCAAs) are a group of three essential amino acids: leucine, isoleucine and valine. Some studies involving BCAA supplements have been shown to build muscle, decrease muscle fatigue and alleviate muscle soreness.

However, because most people get plenty of BCAAs through their diet, supplementing with BCAAs is unlikely to provide additional benefits for the sedentary to moderately active populations. For highly exhaustive phases of repetitive exertion, the supplementation of BCAA's has been reported to improve performance and recovery.

PROTEIN POINTERS

- **'Bulk up' a meal by adding lentils, chickpeas or kidney beans to dishes like spaghetti bolognaise, casseroles, stews and soups to reduce the amount of meat you need.** This could even be dehydrated foods that you carry in, and rehydrate at camp.
- **Red meat is an excellent source of iron and zinc,** but it is recommended you eat less than 500 grams of cooked red meat (750 grams when raw) per day.
- **Iron is an essential mineral because it is needed to make haemoglobin** - a part of our blood cells. It also helps fight infection and supports growth through all stages of life - young and old.
- **Protein intake as we age is very important to help maintain muscle mass and improve both strength and balance**

PROTEIN IN A NUTSHELL

Protein plays many roles in your body. It helps repair and build your body's tissues, allows metabolic reactions to take place and coordinates bodily functions. Collectively, these functions make protein one of the most important nutrients for your health.

Aim for variety, balance and a contribution of nutrients from all sources of protein to achieve the optimal intake for yourself. Try not to rely on protein powders or supplements to keep you going but plan your meals to include wholefoods that are full of nutrients, provide sufficient energy for the demands of hunting and help you perform and recover as best you can. **Remember to space out the intake of your protein throughout the day so your body is fully equipped to deliver output when you really need it.**

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Mudflats Hut

WRITTEN BY ~ ANDREW BUGLASS | REMOTEHUTS.CO.NZ

Mutflats Hut is located in Central Westland about two thirds of the way up the Arahura Valley in the Waitaiki Historical Reserve

This is upstream of where the river does a big dog-leg to the south around the Newton Range.

I'm not sure how or why the hut got its name. Sure, it's on a river flat, but it's a relatively well-drained one covered in tall snow tussock and nary a mud puddle in sight. **The Arahura is the fabled pounamu river of local Māori and was used by them as a route over to Canterbury via Nōti Raureka or Browning Pass.** A benched trail was established by Europeans over the pass in the nineteenth century to connect Canterbury with gold-rich Westland, however the bench stayed high on the true left of the valley opposite Mudflats. Obviously, the place didn't have much appeal for the early settlers.

After the gold rush ended there was a big drop in traffic through the valley but things picked up again in the 1930's with the advent of something called tramping. Canterbury mountaineers were busy building huts on the other side of the divide including one in the head of the Wilberforce River and humans with backpacks began traipsing over the alps on what became the popular Three Pass circuit, comprising Harman, Whitehorn and Browning passes. These folk would mostly exit via the Styx Valley over a low saddle of the same name an hour or so upriver from where Mudflats would eventually make its appearance.

The first Mudflats Hut was built close to the river, probably by Internal Affairs for their deer cullers, but I'm not sure when

Cullers at Mudflats (old Hut) Brian Brown, Dave Richardson, John Scott and Tom Leonard about 1962-3

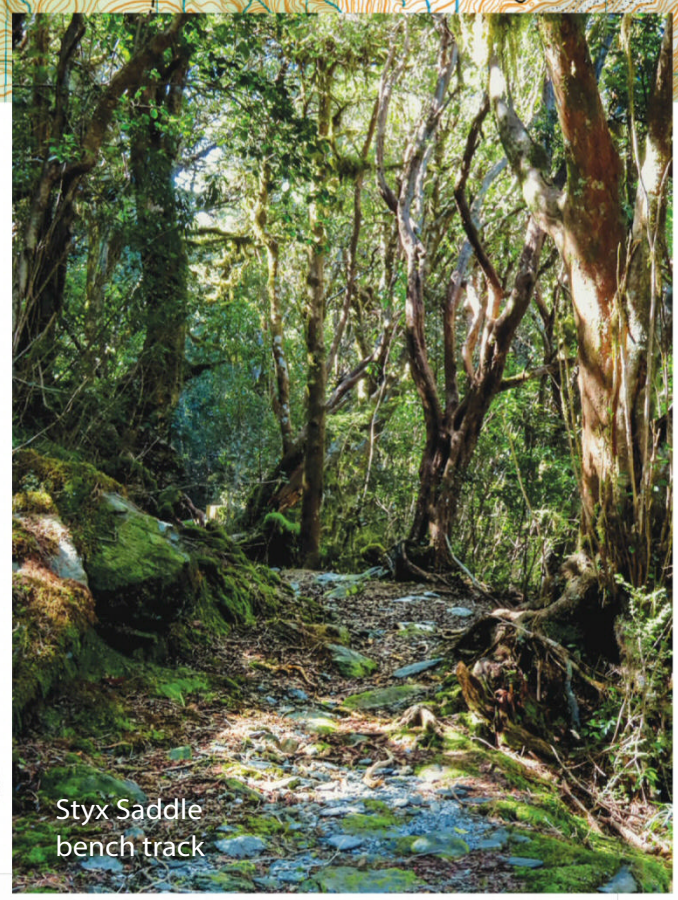
Arahura upstream from Mudflats

exactly. Access across the river from the bench track was by means of a crude flying fox arrangement. The old hut was still standing when I did my first tramp there in 1972 but it wasn't that appealing as lodgings, having been used by possumers as a drying shed. A swingbridge now spanned the river and we chose to stay in a much newer six-bunker that the New Zealand Forest Service had built on the terrace above the flat.

A slightly modified version of this is what you now stay in. The original open fire has been replaced with a wood burner and a porch and deck added, but the rest is pretty much as it was, even the sandflies. Mudflats Hut and its access track are DOC maintained. The Permolat group and its volunteers maintain three high level-bivouacs in the area, Campbell Biv, Lower Olderog Biv (covered a few articles back) and Newton Range Biv. A few years back we reopened the old NZFs track behind Mudflats that provides access onto the Campbell Range.

Mudflats has never been much of a magnet for hunters, although deer are found throughout the Arahura in much the same densities as anywhere on the Coast. Chamois can be encountered along the Campbell Range in ones and twos and the tops are easy travel with some big tarns and plenty of good camping spots. It's around six hours walk to Mudflats from the Arahura road, a lot of it level walking along the old bench. Travel times used to be the roughly the same from the Styx roadend via Styx Saddle however successive extreme weather events have trashed the tracks over there leaving DOC scratching their heads for long-term solutions. You can still get up that way but it takes a bit longer and several fords of the river are required.

Mudflats has historically had fairly low visitation rates that gives you a bit of old-time ambience with well-maintained access.


Styx Saddle bench track

TEXAN RAMS

WRITTEN BY ~ TYRON SOUTHWARD

Being a taxidermist for a living certainly has some perks if you like hunting

I've been running my own taxidermy business for over 20 years now and you get to meet some real "good buggers" along the way. One of those good buggers is Wade Renfro. Wade runs a hunting outfitter business out of Bethel, Alaska, and we get along really well.

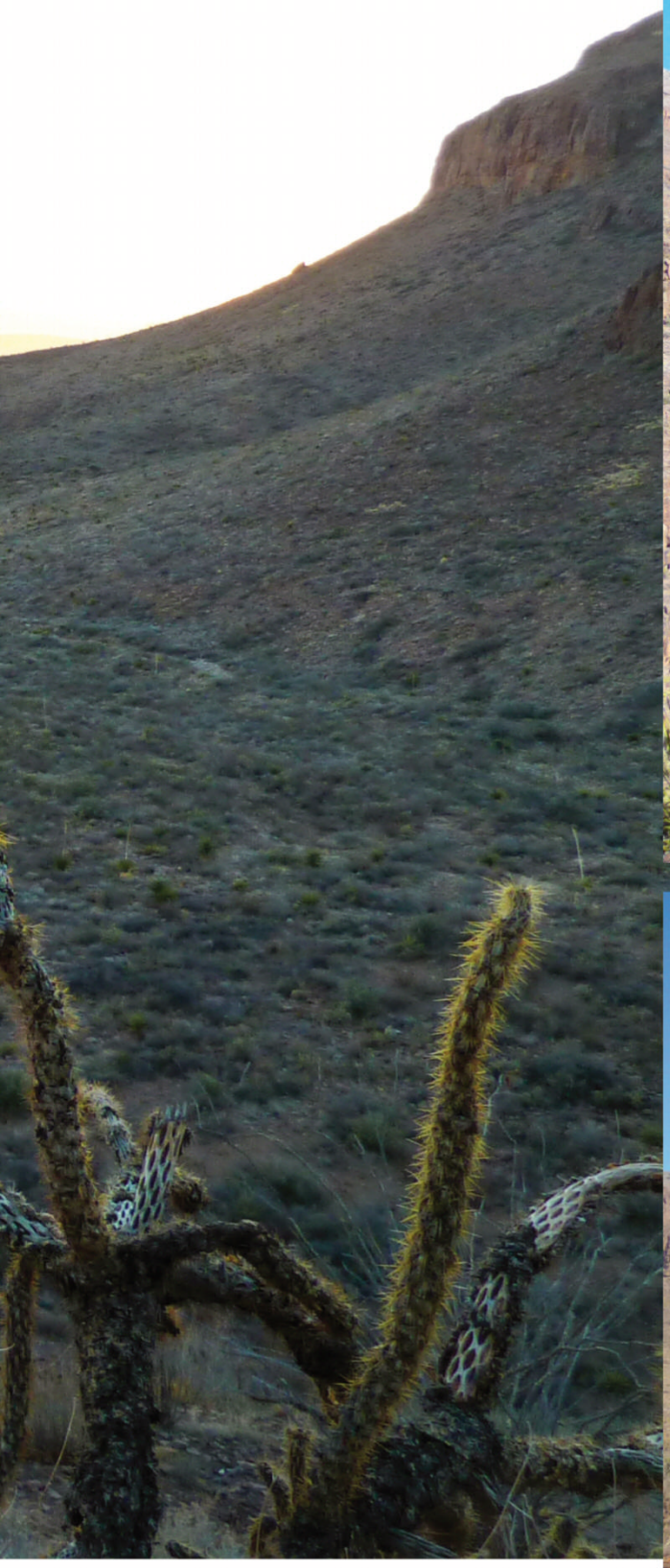
He came out to New Zealand some years ago, hunting Red stags in the North Island and then tahr and Fallow with me in the south. He had a great time and got several good trophies. We have kept in touch ever since.

Wade invited my wife Lisa and I on a hunt for aoudad in Texas, courtesy of a buddy of his who guides for them down there. Dates were booked and we landed in El Paso, west Texas, where Wade met us. We loaded up our luggage and drove four hours south alongside the border of Mexico to a huge ranch where we would be staying for the next four nights. Here we met Zack, Wade's top guide, who had a cold beer waiting for us. Then we hit the sack to get some much-needed zzz's to be ready for the next day.

After a quick breakfast, with some seriously strong coffee, we all loaded into the truck and headed away to check out the place. Several hours were spent glassing hillsides and benches trying to find animals. These aoudads are really hard to see, being the same colour as the terrain. **We saw quite a few mobs but nothing very big amongst them.** Great to get a look at the surroundings here; desert country – big high red-coloured mountains, with lots of various cactus and other strange plants, and really interesting.

The second day was more of the same, driving up into gullies and glassing from the truck, or climbing onto ridges and glassing benches. **But still no monster rams – we were finding plenty of aoudad but nothing good enough to shoot.** Zack was getting a little stressed about it, having talked this place up to me before Lisa and I arrived. We were also seeing quite a few mule deer and javelinas (small Mexican pigs) scattered here and there, so it was always interesting, never knowing quite what we'd see next.

That evening Wade, Zack and I drove around to another gully for a look while Lisa stayed at the house to read a book. One thing I must point out about our location is that we were only a mile from the Mexican border, so there were real risks of having Mexicans running the border into the United States. There is a lot of drug trafficking happening in the



Typical Western Texas dry hill country

Lisa searching for a swimming pool!

area. So, when us lads headed out that night, Zack left Lisa with his 270 calibre rifle with full magazine and gave her instructions on how to use it. He was deadly serious!

The gully we drove to was a big one, right at the back of the property. We parked up and got walking, heading up the dry grassy riverbed for a couple of miles to where the gully hooked to the left and began gaining some altitude, with really good grassy benches and broken bluffs in between. This was great looking country, just the place for big rams to hang out in, I thought.

We got a little elevation up on a rocky knoll and got comfy behind the binos, making sure not to sit on any cactus spines (learnt that fast!). Pretty quickly we were picking up animals on small benches feeding here and there, with some rams amongst

Tarantula spider, one of the many different critters to look out for while walking around

One of the many varied cacti

A good representative auodad ram

Javalina boar, they're not a big pig but very tenacious

A group of aoudad, perfectly coloured for their terrain

them. As the sun disappeared below the horizon, more and more animals popped up, and soon enough we had three good rams located with close to a hundred aoudad now grazing throughout the gully. It was impossible to move without getting busted, so we waited until it was fully dark and then sneaked out of there, with plans for the morning already brewing!

Not long after heading back towards the truck, we started to see several vehicle headlights snaking around in all directions – not too far from our truck! Zack turned to me and with a very serious face says *"We need to get back to the ranch house right now".*

It was a very quick hike back to the truck, with not a word spoken, and an even faster ride back to the ranch house in the truck! We came tearing into the yard and everything was dark, no lights on outside the house or inside it. **Three hunters blew into that house with fully loaded weapons ready to go!!** Thankfully Lisa was okay, hiding out in the kitchen but very shaken up by events, having had various trucks and bikes blasting through the yard, all around the house, and with people looking in through the windows – luckily not trying to enter. It certainly gave us all a fright and put things into perspective as to just where it is we were staying. Group decision was that Lisa now travelled with us at all times!

Next morning, we were up well before light. Hiking in the semi light up to the same knoll from the night before, we soon picked up the rams in amongst a big herd of ewes, young rams and juveniles. As we hoped, they were now a lot lower and feeding across an open grassy face. **Wasting no time, we sneaked down into the bottom of the gully and set up for a shot.** With no more cover between us and them, I got in behind Zack's 300mag rifle. They were still 380-400 yards off but this was as close as we could get – further away than I would have liked but I had little option. I waited for a clear shot at the biggest ram and touched a shot off. Hit him too low, breaking the bone just above the elbow and low through brisket. He only moved 20 – 30 yards further along the face before stopping again, and now knowing where to hold, I put him down for good. High fives all round!

We quickly picked our way over to him. What a stud – real interesting critter. Big wide horns that curl out then in behind his head, finishing in sharp pointed tips. The beast himself was a lot bigger boned than I thought he would be. I would guess the aoudad ram to average 50 – 60lbs heavier than a big bull tahr and of similar build type. They are quite short haired (around two inches) but the really fascinating feature on them is their long hair (ten inches), down the throat and across the chest, and ending at the knees - a unique looking animal. This hair is called 'chaps' by the locals.

Time for a big photo session, then quick skinning job and back to the ranch house for a brew.

Next day ended with us getting a nice trophy javelina boar . So, a great ending to a very interesting trip.

Thanks to Wade – I will return the favour!

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THE GAC UPDATE

WRITTEN BY ~ **TIM GALE** | GENERAL MANAGER
GAME ANIMAL COUNCIL

Tim teaching firearm safety

Modern approach required for game animal management in NZ

In October the Government released its long-awaited Emissions Reduction Plan designed to prescribe the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions across a number of sectors of the economy over the next 15 years

The Plan is subject to public consultation and as such is open to intense lobbying by interest groups on all sides of the debate.

Highly-funded and powerful conservation lobbyists Forest & Bird reacted by demanding the Government undertake a major control programme on wild game animal numbers in order to reduce browsing and increase the carbon capture of our native forests. They released a series of maps using extrapolated Department of Conservation data to illustrate the spread of deer, pigs and goats and despite some pretty obvious flaws with the maps and pretty dubious methodology they gained significant media and public attention, which has again raised the place of game animals in New Zealand.

Needless to say, game animals in New Zealand present a complex issue and one where simplistic, politically-motivated rhetoric does little to assist improve management outcomes.

For its part, the Game Animal Council, along with most other hunting organisations, has long-acknowledged that there are issues with increasing game animal numbers (particularly deer), in certain places. Our often-stated position is that New Zealand's valued introduced species (deer, tahr, chamois and wild pigs) require a modern management approach that recognises both their environmental impacts and their value to our communities.

Game animals are an important part of the everyday lives of many New Zealanders and provide significant recreational, commercial and food gathering opportunities for a lot of communities. It is also true that game animals present an environmental challenge if poorly managed, which is why we are pushing for a much more consistent and enduring management strategy that gets away from the boom-or-bust, divisive and ultimately unsuccessful style of animal control New Zealand has practised in the past.

When it comes to our seven species of wild deer, a successful long-term nationwide management programme, like that undertaken by the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation, will take into account the variable nature of animal impacts in different environments and applies sophisticated management techniques to maintain a high-quality, low-density herd. This creates a win-win situation where the quality of hunting is improved as lower quality animals are removed from the herd, while reducing the overall population and protecting native species.

It's also important on a national level that we incorporate game animal management into a broader strategy that includes the role of other browsing animals such as feral goats and possums, **because in many places around New Zealand it's those animals that are often responsible for over-browsing.**

Unfortunately, and unhelpfully, there exists a common narrative among opponents of the hunting sector that hunters are both responsible for increased animal numbers and are opposed to any kind of game animal management. This couldn't be further from the truth.

Firstly, hunters already make a massive contribution to game animal management. In 2014 it was estimated that recreational and **free-range meat hunters harvest around 135,000 deer, 132,000 other game animals and 230,000 pest goats each year,** while Wild Animal Recovery Operators (WARO) have harvest on average 18,000 deer per year. No centrally administered control methods can even come close to achieving those numbers.

Secondly, the Game Animal Council and other hunting organisations have long been involved in trying to get better game animal management programmes up and running. A number of herds around the country have been identified by the hunting sector as requiring management. Unfortunately, many of those projects have failed to get off the ground.

It is also the case that a reduction in hunting access in many places has made it a lot harder for recreational hunters to help manage game animal herds in recent years. The well-publicised case of deer incursions in the Hutt Valley is a classic case in point, with hunting in surrounding areas being severely limited to just a few weekends a year.

The Game Animal Council will continue to work closely with the Department of Conservation and engage with the hunting sector to develop a strategy that seeks to better manage deer around New Zealand and we are very keen to see this work progress.

I firmly believe that modern and balanced game animal management programmes that recognise the community value of game animals along with their environmental impacts can have positive outcomes for both hunting and the protection of native species in New Zealand. **I also believe this to be a far more reasonable and enduring solution than the kind of divisive blanket culling that groups like Forest & Bird are advocating for.**

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

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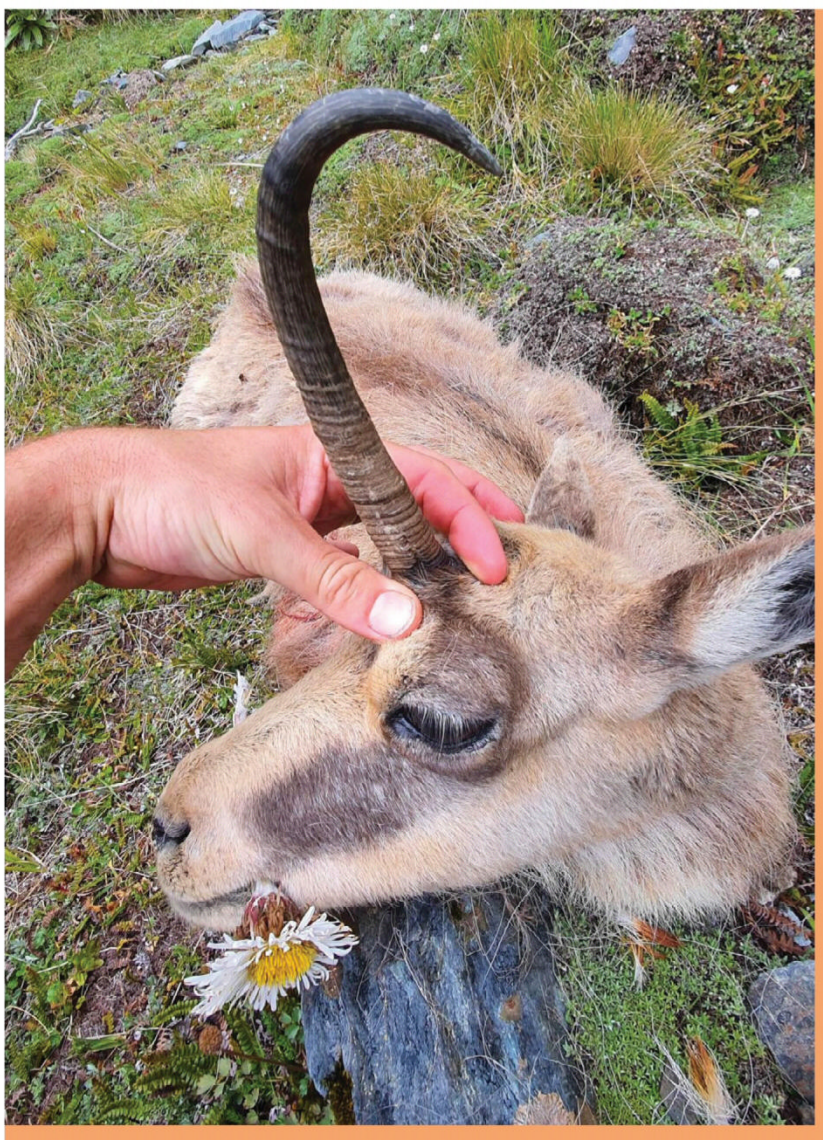

Elliot Riley

"A 16 year old one-horned doe I shot early January in the Nelson Lakes area. It was the first trip for my new Sako 7mm-08 and I had six days solo hunting looking for a summer buck. Didn't manage to find the buck I was looking for but I got on to this old girl in a steep gut just below camp one evening. She measured just over 9.5 inches and was a good animal to take out of the herd as she was well past her prime. Will be back next year to find that summer buck"

Bradley Bartrum

"A $10^{1/2}$ year old bull shot out of the Edison River this rut. The bull stepped out of the scrub at 90yd and my great grandfather's 1881 Martini Enfield .303 put him on the ground. An old bull with an old rifle"

James Motley

"Shot this old boy deep in the Tararuas a few years ago. We had heard him for years prior, identified by his chainsaw-like roar. We finally caught up with him as he was bedded down and roaring, we could smell him as we stalked in and saw him sitting down. A bittersweet moment as we finally caught up with him, he was many years past his best at 5 points but impressive length for the area. He still is one of my more favorite heads. "

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WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

UoVISION
UM595 CLOUD 3G

Trail cameras are both extremely fun and extremely powerful as hunting tools

I still have a childlike joy of catching images of animals, that's magnified a hundred-fold when it's a trophy.

And if checking the SD card is like opening presents on Christmas, then cellular cameras that send the photo to your phone is like having Christmas presents sent to you all year! So when Allan from AJ Productions, probably New Zealand's leading authority on trail cameras, asked if I wanted to review one I jumped at the chance!

CELLULAR

Since we've never done a review on a cellular camera we'll talk a little about that technology first. These cameras will, instead of just recording an image to an SD card, send it directly to an app on your phone as well.

This has some powerful applications. You can use it to make real-time informed decisions in any number of hunting situations. **They're fantastic for placing on animal carcasses to know when pigs turn up**, for placing on the approaches to crop paddocks to let you know when nocturnal deer are raiding, on isolated clearings or other features to know what time of day you should be in place to ambush a deer, and perhaps most exciting of all, to know what calibre of stag is using a rut pad or wallow at any given time. **I also use mine as a security camera around home if we're heading away on a trip for a few weeks.**

It's amazing for high-stakes areas like a pad that's difficult to approach. You don't have to scent it out to check the card and find when animals have been using it. And it's real-time, you can use the information from it (or lack of, i.e the stag isn't using this pad today so I'll try one of the others) to guide your plans for that day once you've checked the phone in the morning.

I primarily had the UoVision set to single image capture. Burst mode would be great if you had a location with very few non-target animals, but I'd get a bit tired of 3 sets of possum or cat burst photos a day. I also didn't experiment with video a great deal as I can't display those in the magazine and they don't send to your phone, only a notification saying a video was recorded to the card along with the battery/signal/SD card data. Data usage is pretty economical. 112 photos had only cost me 3 dollars!

The one downside of it is that, like any technology, you can depend on it too much. Living just inside the Waikato level 3 restrictions I haven't been able to travel for weeks, which has the nice upside of me doing more pig hunting than I have for the last few years so the UoVision got a lot of work in that regard. I learnt the hard way that if you place the camera in poor reception it may not send some photos, and with no file numbers sent with the data you won't know if you've missed images. We set up a 'dump' with a pile of culled goats. It worked really well and after a few days we had a large mob of younger pigs turn up. After another few days a seagull tripped the sensor and I noticed the pile was noticeably smaller but I didn't have an image. Dad went and collected the camera and on checking the card we'd missed a boar that had come to the dump. Learning the limitations of this system is important. Andrew Hamilton, a good friend and very experienced pig hunter who uses these cameras a lot also gave me a few tips that I'll reiterate here;

- **If you place an attractant in the open, be it a dump for pigs or a salt lick for deer, be prepared for hawks and seagulls tripping the sensor. Better to have it under the**

The inside of the UoVision. 12x AAs, a viewing screen and a lockable case

The UoVision Cloud 3g set on a pig dump with an external battery, in this case a 12v quad bike battery

tree canopy somewhere. Cats will be a problem everywhere, use it as a chance to trap them.

- **Be patient when using dumps for pigs. Often sows and younger pigs will move in long before the boars feel comfortable enough to use it.**
- **1 bar of reception is no good, 2 is iffy, 3 is more reliable and about the least you'd want to use.**

Talking about reception brings us to the main limitation in New Zealand. This obviously restricts the use of this type of camera hugely and dictates placement more than is ideal. When placing pig dumps for example, you often want them down at the bottom of a gully so that when the dogs use that fresh scent to find the pig it has to run uphill to escape. For deer, most of the wallows or features of interest are in wet areas, which clearly aren't often on the high exposed ridges where you get the best reception. **The good news is AJ Productions sell booster antennas to make those iffy placements possible and I've ordered one for myself,** it advertises up to 3 bars of increased reception which will open up a huge range of options for the areas we hunt.

One question I had to go back to Allan about was what signal the Cloud 3g can utilise, and his answer was so typically comprehensive I've copied it verbatim here:

'Most cellular towers around New Zealand will support both the 3G signal and 4G signal and some still support the older 2G (GSM). The UOVision 3G "Cloud" camera can work on both 2G and 3G whereas our Glory 4G LTE model can work on 2G, 3G, 4G and 4G LTE so with overall network coverage the Glory 4G LTE camera will connect with more towers. BUT within each 3G or 4G frequency is a series of signal Bands. All my comments below with the letter (B) stands for Band.

Of all the New Zealand network frequency signals it is the 3G (B8) 900MHz that has the furthest signal coverage in rural and marine areas, up to 120 kms offshore and the 3G "Cloud" supports this frequency. Spark NZ's main 3G frequency is (B5) 850MHz which is not supported by the UOVision 3G "Cloud" camera so that is why we only recommend Vodafone or 2-Degrees for this model camera.

However, the Spark 3G (B5)850MHz frequency is supported on the Glory LTE camera. [Next model up]. If you want more technical details regarding the different signal Bands supported by these UOVision cameras then contact us directly.

You can research cellular towers around New Zealand and it will show which band each tower supports. The 3G "Cloud" supports 4 different New Zealand frequency signal (Bands) and the Glory 4G LTE supports 9 different New Zealand frequency signal (Bands)

It's interesting to note that cellular cameras are such a powerful tool for hunting that they've actually been banned outright in the American state of Arizona. Nevada banned the use of all trail cameras for parts of the year while Montana has banned cellular cameras during hunting season.

The UoVision

As for the UoVision UM595-3G Cloud itself, I found it a fantastic unit. It was easy to set up with a good, clear instruction manual and it takes great video and images.

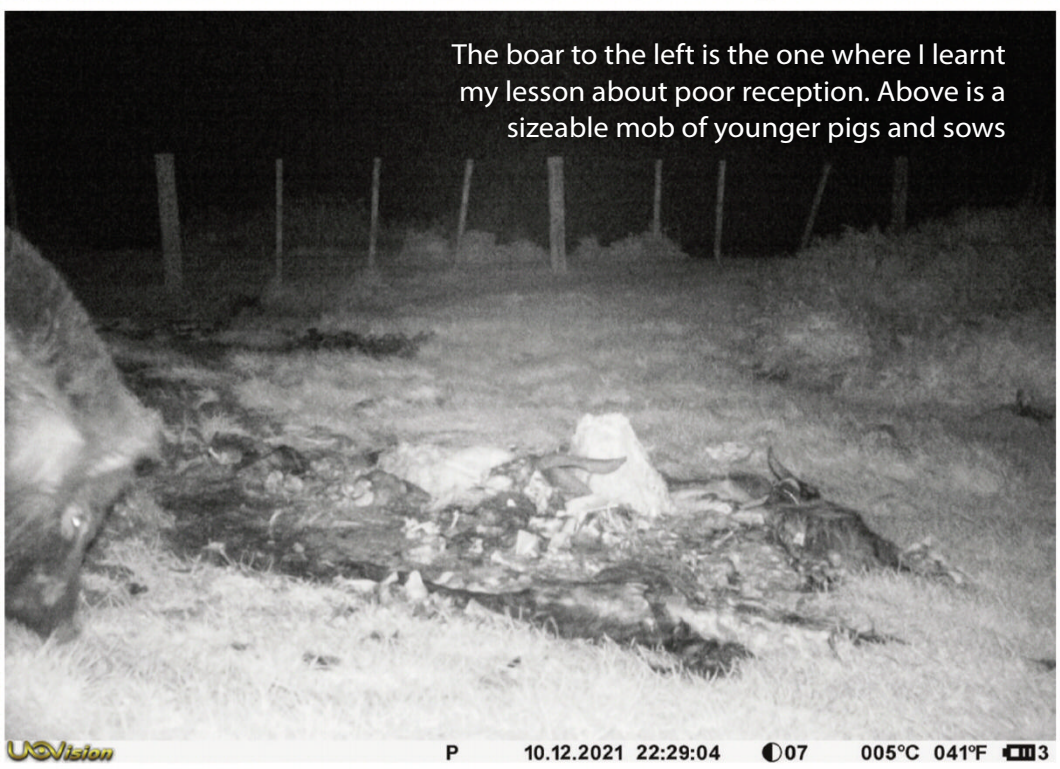
The 12MP (true MP, not interpolated like some brands) have plenty of resolution and also good dynamic range. This is important in a trail cam as it gives you more visibility in harsh light. The video aspect on 720p seemed a little stretched horizontally, so just bear that in mind if you see a super wide Sika pop up on the camera!

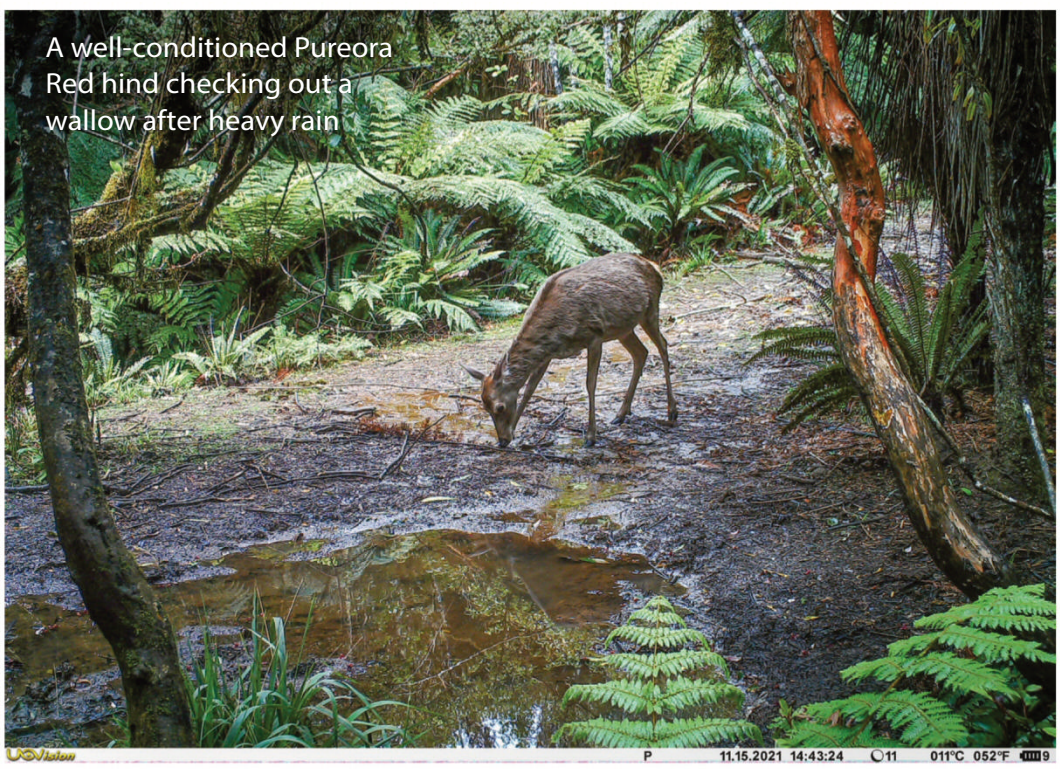
In terms of file size, the images are quite small at between 900 and 1900kb on the 5mp setting and around 10mb on the full quality 12mp, 720p videos at 5 seconds were 14mb.

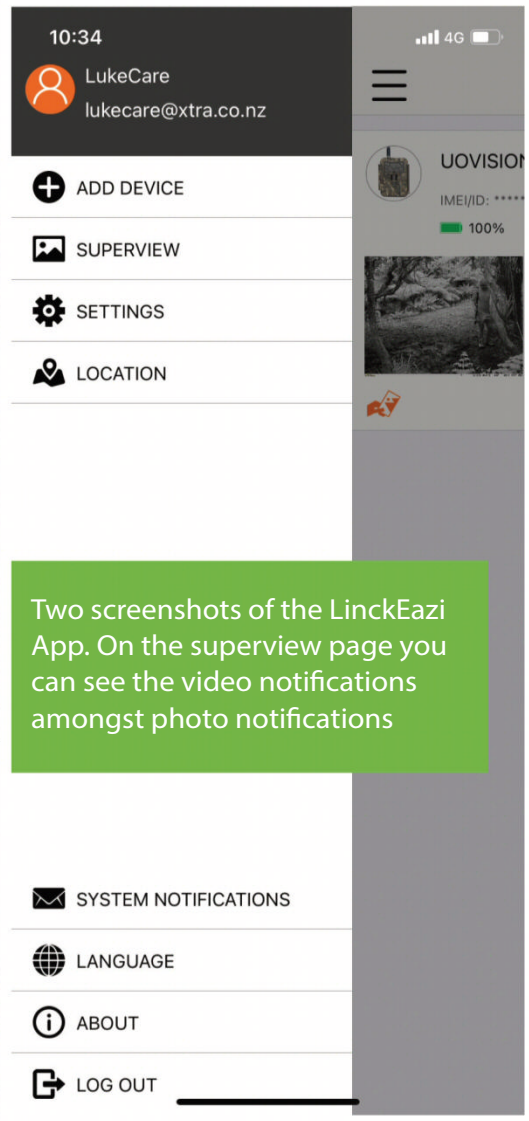
The ability to use these cameras with an external battery is a godsend. Despite the UoVision's economy I find having to use 12x AA batteries every time wasteful, and not to mention expensive because you have to use decent ones. Rechargeable batteries don't work well in trail cameras due to the lower voltage. Also, cellular cameras use more battery power than a regular trail cam too because they have to stay on for up to a minute after the shot while the image sends. Using a rechargeable external battery gives you heaps of run time for very little cost. The external port is only 6v but Allan sells a cable that includes a voltage converter.

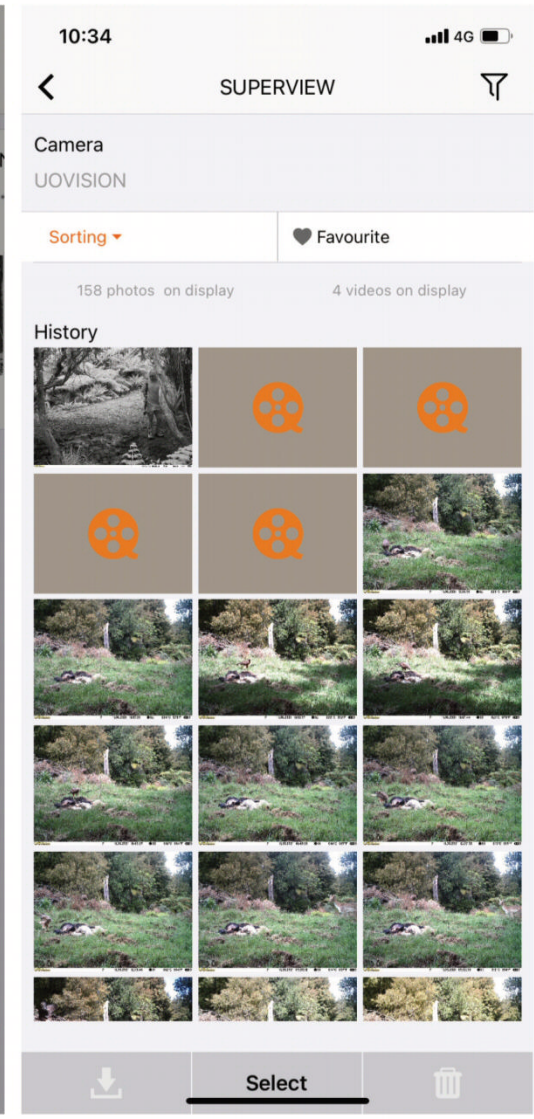
It pays to remember that the trigger system on these high end cameras uses PIR (Passive Infrared - basically heat sensor) not motion. Unless it was the height of summer I'd be using low sensitivity to try reduce triggers from birds, rats etc.

Everything is customizable with this unit. Image type, quality, video duration,









Two screenshots of the LinckEazi App. On the superview page you can see the video notifications amongst photo notifications

trigger delay and sensitivity - you can even set start/stop times and use timelapses.

THE APP

UoVision use the 'LinckEazi' app to get the images from your camera to your phone. The app is a little clunky and slow, but entirely functional and for the amount of time you spend on it, perfectly adequate. Setup is pretty easy and well covered in the instruction booklet. A big plus is there are no hidden costs like subscription fees.

You can only assign the camera to one login, but you can share login details. So for example if Dad wanted to see my images he'd have to log in on his app, and that would kick the other user, me, out. This isn't a major, but you have to check the app occasionally to see if you've been logged out else you won't get the notifications appear when the camera has been triggered.

The app allows you to receive battery, reception, temperature and storage data which is really handy for remote placements. You don't have to guess how much battery or storage is left and turn up to find it's been dead or full for a month.

A great improvement would be to be able to adjust the settings via a return text, say to reduce sensitivity or switch from photo to video to save space, but unfortunately it doesn't have that function yet.

This is a great value-for-money cellular trail camera, packed with features and from a very established brand that is going to see some heavy use from me coming in to next roar. **What you also purchase is access to Allan's decades of experience and knowledge, to scratch the surface of that refer back to his trail camera article in Issue 75.**

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ILLUMINATION	No glow black LED
TRIGGER SPEED	0.9s
PRICE	$669

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WRITTEN BY ~ **LUKE CARE**

ZAMBERLAN
LYNX MID GTX

Zamberlan is another of those giant European footwear companies, yet they're relatively unknown here

Made in Italy and founded by Giuseppe Zamberlan the company has been producing mountain boots since 1929 in the factory at Torrebelvicino at the foot of Italy's beautiful Dolomites and is currently headed by Maria Zamberlan, granddaughter of Giuseppe.

Giuseppe collaborated early with Vitale Bramani, fellow mountaineer and the founder of **Vibram – the now industry standard rubber sole maker,** thus they were one of the first adopters of the system and reaped the rewards with sales now expanded to 45 countries around the world. Recently Hunting and Fishing acquired the brand so I'm sure they'll soon become more widely known in NZ!

The Lynx Mid GTX had all the right ingredients for an all-round New Zealand boot when I first picked it up and read the manual. A stiff last, waterproofing, quality components and most noticeably, light weight.

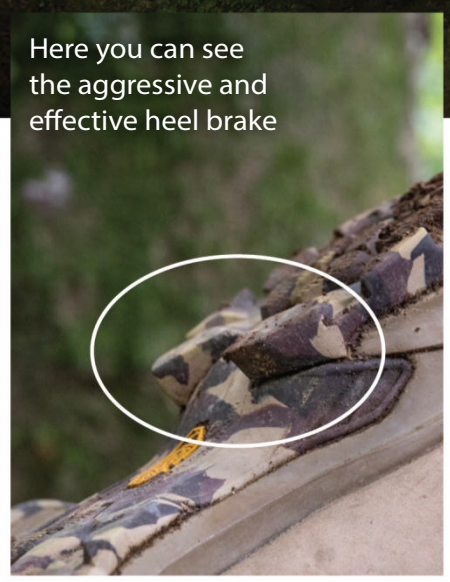
The weight is one of the great attractions to this boot. At 980 grams per boot for 46 ½ EU there are lighter boots around, but they often use different materials for the upper which I'd argue probably wouldn't last as long. These are proper leather mountain boots with Goretex lining that strike a great balance between weight, support and longevity. Part of the weight loss is achieved by not having insulation, but that just makes sock choice more important and the breathability gains make them incredibly comfortable. Another weight loss is due to the absence of a rand. This is great for weight loss, but may allow a bit quicker wear if you spend a lot of time walking in scree. A lot

The Zamberlans had put in the hard yards here on a mammoth day trip across the Pureoras

of people wear boots that are too heavy duty though, if 90% of your hunting is out of the scree and rocks of the alpine then having insuated boots with a rand is wasting energy for most of your hunting.

These have a medium/high profile. This was my first time wearing a relatively tall boot. **The Zamberlan Flex System is specially designed to make sure these taller boots do not inhibit that forward rotation as you walk, and I certainly never noticed any restriction.** You do have to be mindful how you lace and be sure to really crank on the ankle laces to make sure it's tight there and not further up on your lower leg for proper ankle support. These boot don't have a tongue hook but I really have never ever had an issue with tongues slipping down. The eyelets come a long way down the boot and in to the toe box so there's plenty of adjustment available, and the laces themselves are generous in length.

The camouflage dye on the leather upper is very suble, while the pattern on the vibram sole is very distinctive



Here you can see the aggressive and effective heel brake

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UPPER:	Hydrobloc nubuk
LINING:	GORE-TEX performance comfort
OUTSOLE:	Zamberlan vibram 3D camo
SIZE RANGE:	UK7-UK14
WEIGHT:	980gm (per boot, UK 11 1/2)
LAST:	Wide
RRP	$629.99

The boot sole is camouflage which makes them quite distinctive. The tread pattern seemed more than adequate and the heel brake was incredible. **I've never worn boots that maintained grip downhill so well, though you can see the brake is very pronounced with pointed blocks rather than a wall as shown in the photo above.**

The upper has a subtle camouflage pattern dyed in to the tan leather, with Goretex lining membrane. I had misgivings about the pale leather after bathing it in blood from all the deer at the Ngamatea Parliamentary hunt but it washed itself out over the next few days hunting in the wet. The Microtex collar didn't rub at all and allowed great breathability.

Even for a wide fit I thought the boots were wider than usual, but I do hover between regular and wide fit. I don't think it's quite enough to go down half a size but be mindful of it and make sure you test fit, ideally on a day where you've done a bit of walking around beforehand. The wide fit (last) is great for general comfort but a regular last might be better if you were using it for big multi-day trips with constant pack load, especially with a lot of sidling involved.

They are a great New Zealand mountain boot, but don't misinterpret that as an alpine boot. The flexibility and lack of rand and insulation mean they're not a winter tahr boot, Zamberlan have more specific options for that and keep an eye out for a review on those next year.

These are a stable, lightweight, highly breathable boot that combines for extraordinary comfort. It's amazing the energy you save wearing lighter boots and I haven't hesitated to recommend these boots to plenty of friends. **There's no doubt these boots have made getting around the hills easier, with lighter boots you tire less but there was no sacrifice in support.**

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Getting The Best *out of your* Layout Blind

PART ONE

WRITTEN BY ~ **COREY CARSTON**

Layout blinds well grassed up. They are a different colour to the paddock. This was because we had to use roadside grass to cover them with.

There was supposed to be three of us hunting that day but an early morning text told me that the other member of the crew wouldn't be joining us

A faulty alarm clock and a bunch of cows that were going to be shifted in the wee early hours of the morning were to blame.

The grass we were to use to cover the layout blinds had already been picked but was unfortunately an hour north of us in a wool sack in the back of David's truck. This meant we would have to pick some before we could start hunting. This didn't not thrill Jake one little bit.

Funnily enough, I had my first real job after leaving school on this particular farm. Back then, I thought a life of dealing with live animals was the life for me but back then wages were terrible, and the hours weren't flash either, so I decided instead to work indoors with dead animals.

Anyway, here we were, waiting for the first ducks of the morning, which conveniently arrived just as the sky was lightening. We were hunting a large bit of surface water where I had seen a good number of ducks a few days prior to the hunt. It looked to me as if a drain had blocked and had flooded up the lowest lying areas of the paddocks. A prime spot for a layout blind sneak attack.

If we hadn't had crap ammo (actually we shot like muppets) we should have been packed up within a couple of hours but with some pretty wayward shooting it took us until nearly 10:30 before the last duck was dropped and we could call the hunt over. Despite the useless display of shooting we achieved our goals by filling bag limits of some of the biggest, fattest mallards of the season.

This hunt was only possible due to the portability and low profile of the layout blinds we were using. We could have set up a camo cover and hidden behind it, or maybe a panel blind. The problem with that option was that there was absolutely no surrounding cover whatsoever and they would have stuck out like the proverbial. To make them blend in we would have had to place them along the fence line, which wasn't the optimal spot.

Another option would have been to do what we used to do pre-layout blind days - wear camo that was as close to the natural cover as possible, don face paint or masks and lie on our backs as still as we could. This would have been a good option had we been evening hunting, but because the ducks were only doing a limited amount of feeding on the puddle this wasn't really an option. As the water had been around for a week or two they had eaten most of the available food and were mostly using it for a loafing area and feeding on nearby muddy paddocks. The use of layout blinds put us right where we and the ducks wanted to be.

LAYOUT BLINDS

There is lots of conjecture on who actually made the first commercial layout blind. Some hunters had apparently got sick of digging holes in paddocks and thought there had to be

a better way and the layout was born. Many of the initial versions were big and heavy and not really that portable. They were designed for American hunters who drove all their gear into a field. We do the same thing here but at times also end up carrying them a fair way to hunt more out-of-the-way places.

My association with hunting from layouts started way back in 2008. At that time there were only a few hunters over here fortunate enough to own one. I was lucky enough to meet a like-minded hunter from California named Mike. He was coming to Australia for work and put a few feelers out via the duck hunter's refugee forum to see if there was anyone over here that could take him for a few days duck hunting, so of course I put my hand up.

Anyone that has had the pleasure to hunt with an American will know that they normally are very appreciative hunters and often extremely generous. Mike was a great guest and kindly brought a GHG ground force blind over with him and when he departed, the blind stayed in my garage.

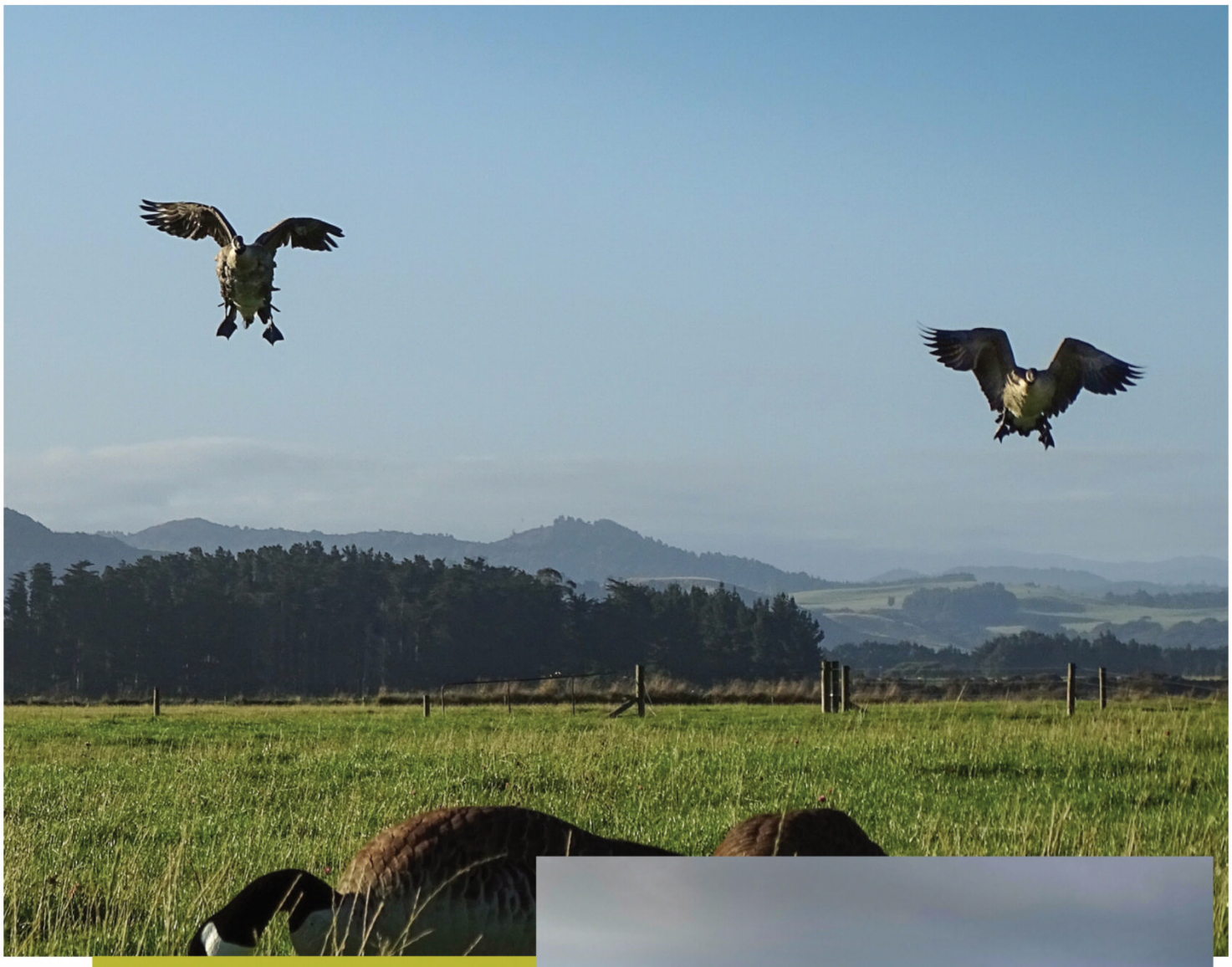
Only days after he was back stateside I got the chance to hunt out of it and after only a few minutes of use my waterfowl hunting was to change forever.

By the end of the first season I was not just a convert, I was totally hooked on using one. Places that I had often driven past and wondered how to hunt were now viable options. I even used them in places I didn't necessarily need to, just because it was so much fun.

There was no more getting tangled in nets or covering one's self in grass or straw. Hunting on frozen ground or on cold, lumpy stones immediately became much more tolerable.

The only real downside was hunting in the rain. Those keen hunters that have experienced the shared joy of being in a layout blind with the rain running down your back and pooling under your backside will know what I mean.

One major hiccup at the start was that I was the only person who had a layout blind. Until I got a second one, I spent a hell of a lot more time hunting by myself than I previously had. The best thing we found to do, especially when hunting ducks, was to have turnabout in the blind whilst the other hunted elsewhere, watched on or ran the dogs.



Jake and Kiera with the morning's bag

HOW TO MAKE USING THEM MORE EFFECTIVE?

One of the biggest mistakes I see hunters make is not grassing or stubbling them properly. For them to work at their most efficient they need to blend into the environment you are hunting. Bare patches will be obvious to waterfowl. Some hunters maybe scoffing at this and will say 'we kill birds and don't even cover our blinds at all'. Often these hunters are having to take longer shots and don't have the ducks commit to landing. With early season geese, and ducks arriving late in evening you may get away with it, but a couple of hunts in, when birds have wised up to things, you just won't.

Picking grass is one of the most tedious jobs ever, especially when there are multiple blinds to grass. I've used hedgecutters, weedeaters, grass shears and a few farming mates have cut us a heap behind the mower on the tractor. All work, but if using any of these methods, cut it as low to the ground as possible and avoid cutting it twice, as often it will turn to pulp.

Pulling it by hand is a horrible job but it's still one of the best ways to do it. Break the grass as low as possible and avoid pulling the roots out. Not only will this be hard to thread through the stubble straps but will not impress any farmers whose land you are hunting on. This method will result in the longest grass which in turn best covers the blinds.

The most effective vegetation to use is what is in the immediate vicinity. This will ensure it blends in as close as possible. That nice looking long grass you spot in another paddock or on the road side may look great until you start setting up and find it's a different colour. I've done this many times and the result can often be a yellow-green blob in the middle of a deep green paddock.

I'd been in and out of the blind all morning on this particular hunt and every time I did I'd knock off some grass. Ideally I'd be replacing the displaced grass

Ammo, calls, food, jacket, gun and hearing protection. There's plenty of room for all this and more. There's a drink bottle and the ever present can of Coke hidden under the head rest

Try to avoid picking grass close to the blinds too, as this will expose bare patches of dirt and will make the blind more obvious.

Grain stubble that has been cut for a few days will lose lots of its colour as the sun will bleach it. The sunny side will be dull but the ground side will still be a lot yellower. Try to put the sunny side up, straw facing towards the outside of the blind. If you don't, the blind often looks like a big yellow blob that looks totally out of place and could potentially scare waterfowl.

Grass will wilt in the heat. As it dries out it turns dark green and will start to look out of place. We often have spare grass on hand and touch the blinds up when required. **Every time you get out you knock grass off - especially around the foot area and doors.** Again we use that spare grass to touch this up when we can.

You can actually over grass or stubble a blind. Once I was out with my mate Tom and his cousin Joseph. Tom and I were using our well-used blinds that we were very familiar with. Joseph was using a blind from the same brand, but a different model that unfortunately he wasn't as familiar with. **Long story short, we told Joseph to get in his blind and as it was getting on to duck o'clock** and we both stuffed the stubble straps with as much straw as we could while poor old Joseph was stuck in his blind.

Not long after the ducks started to fly and we were into it. Just after we had shot our tenth duck a voice yelled out ***"are you going to let me shoot some?"*** In our rush we'd put so much stubble on we had jammed the doors shut and poor old Joseph couldn't sit up to shoot! Sorry about that Joseph.

That brings me to another point - once you're ready to hunt, make sure you can still open both doors. If there's any binding try to remove some grass and practise sitting up your blind.

MUDDING

Layout blinds are made from various thicknesses of polyester. Thicker ones will be more durable but will be heavier. The blind will be shiny out of the box and have a heap of waterfowl-scaring UV shine. Many hunters use them straight away and it's not until after months of use and weathering that they lose their shine.

There are some easy ways to get rid of this shine. The cheapest way is to mix up a slurry of water and mud and rub it into the outer side of the fabric. Leave the blind out in the sun to dry then brush off the excess dried mud, which will dull things off and get rid of any shine. The downside to mudding is that it will eventually wash off in the rain and you will have to repeat the process.

I go to my local hardware store and purchase some Rustoleum camo spray paint in dull green and carefully mist it over the blind. A can costs around $15 to $18 and you can treat a number of blinds with one can.

Two labs and 3 well covered blinds. They looked just like a hump of straw.

The inside door flaps are also very shiny and is some cases are almost white, so they get the misting treatment as well.

While we're on the subject of doors I have a policy - if you get out of your blind to retrieve a bird, have feed, relieve yourself or whatever, the blind doors have to be closed. Too often we've been caught out with guys going for a wander and birds show up only to be scared away by the black interior of a blind.

Grain hunt with the boy and dog. The blinds let us hunt right on spot X. So you can see it was still light and we had a 3 man evening limit on the deck.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A LAYOUT BLIND

1. Room

You need to have enough room, especially if you're on the plus side of things.

2. Weight

They need to be light and easy to carry, fold up easily and pack down small for transportation.

3. Stubble straps

Lots of the cheaper blinds seem to skimp on the number of stubble straps. If there aren't enough then, no matter how hard you try, you will never get enough vegetation on the blind to make it blend in properly.

4. Size of straps

Some blinds I've seen have tiny gaps between them which makes grassing all but impossible. On the other side, straps that are too large mean the grass won't stay in and during the hunt will fall out.

5. Comfort

A must if you're going to spend a lot of time in them.

6. Low profile

A lower blind will cast a much smaller shadow along the sides. Blinds that have more tapered sides also throw a much smaller shadow.

7. Strength

Some of the cheaper or less well-made blinds will not stand up to hunters getting in and out or leaning on the doors. Once the doors become buckled it's time for a new blind.

8. Ease of setup

There are some terrific blinds out there that are as comfortable as a lounge suite but unfortunately some take a degree in engineering to erect, and take a lot more time to sort. Nothing is more frustrating than watching someone who has a blind like this trying to get it sorted in time before the ducks or geese fly.

I've seen and hunted out of a number of blinds now and the one that ticks most of the boxes for me is the GHG ground force. It has enough room, easily transportable, a good low profile and best of all takes mere seconds to set up. I like the ground forces so much I'm currently using my fourth one.

I haven't covered near as much as I'd hoped for so guess I'll definitely have to do second article now. Stay tuned.

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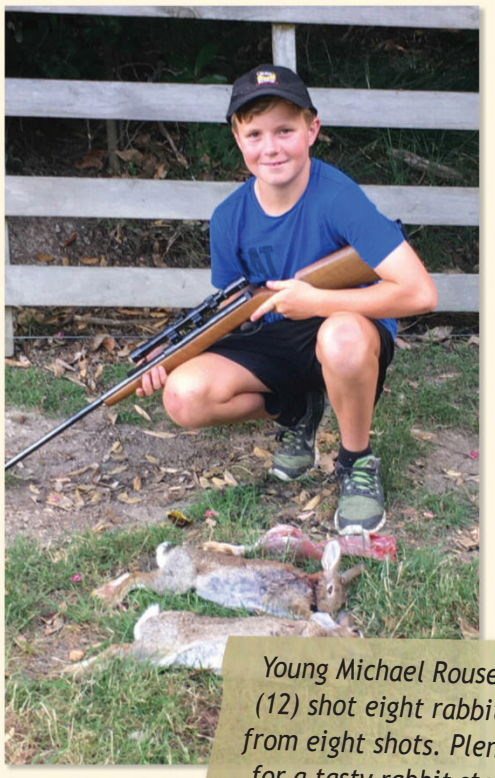
Note: *Photos must be of a suitable size for printing - a minimum file size of 1MB is preferred.*

Grand Winner

Joe Spence and Dad Mac with Joe's first Red stag, shot in Southland

Marcella Pitt and Jeramiah Te Kira with Marcella's first stag, shot on her birthday with a Howa 308

Harvey Fairbairn (2) is obsessed when his Mother Aliesha shoots a duck



Young Michael Rousell (12) shot eight rabbits from eight shots. Plenty for a tasty rabbit stew

Tom Hepburn (12) shot a Red spiker using Dad's Browning x-bolt 7mm-08 at 150m in the Wairarapa

Hugh Maclean's Taiga is very pleased with the cock pheasant she retrieved during the 2021 season

Tristan Smith's first stag shot at his home at Tukemokihi Station

NOMAD 1300 RTT

Distributed by Ironman 4x4

ironman4x4.co.nz

Nomad 1300

The first of the new offerings from Ironman 4x4

The first thing to note of the Nomad 1300 is its compact 'in-transit' profile. With a footprint of just 1600 x 1300mm and a net weight of just 68kg the Nomad 1300 is perfectly coupled, in both size and weight, with dual cab ute canopies and many dual cab ute cabins as well as all size of 4x4 wagon and SUV

The ABS lid is formed with a tapered shape to assist with Aero dynamics and reduced drag. When installed the tent will open to the right hand side of the vehicle.

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Apple & Berry Crumble

- Creamy mashed potato with smoky flavoured freeze dried chicken, cheese and vegetables.
- 3.5 Health Stars
- Gluten Free
- Sizes – Small 90g $9.49 RRP and Regular 175g $13.99 RRP

Instant Pasta

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- 3.5 Health Stars
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SPEC SHEET

	MODEL	SENSOR	FOCAL	MAG	FOV	RANGE	MEMORY	BATTERY	WEIGHT
LYNX	LH25	384×288, 12µm, NETD < 35mK	25mm, F1.0	2.45 - 19.6, x8	10.5° × 7.9°	1200m	8GB (220,000 Images)	Up to 7.5h	300g
	LH19		19mm, F1.0	1.86 - 14.88, x8	13.8° × 10.4°	900m			310g
	LH15*			1.47 - 11.76, x8	17.5° × 13.1°	700m			
	LE15*	256 ×192, 12µm, NETD < 35mK	15mm, F1.0	1.42 - 11.36, x8	11.6° × 8.7°	600m		Up to 8h	
	LE10*		10mm, F1.0	1.0- 8.0, x8	18.0° × 13.6°	450m			
	LC06*	160 ×120, 17µm	6.2mm, F1.1	1.0- 8.0, x8	24.7° × 18.7°	220m		Up to 10h	
OWL	OQ35	640 ×512, 17µm, NETD < 35mK	35mm, F1.0	1.4 - 11.2, x8	17.7° × 14.2°	2000m	16GB (460,000 Images)	Up to 5.5h	500g
	OH35	384 ×288, 17µm, NETD < 35mK		2.3 - 18.4, x8	10.66° × 8°	1200m		Up to 7h	
	OH25*		25mm, F1.0	1.7 - 13.6, x8	14.88° × 11.19°	900m			460g
GRYPHON	GQ35*L*	640 ×512, 12µm, NETD < 35mK	35mm, F1.0	2.0 - 16, x8	10.97° × 8.82°	2000m	16GB (460,000 Images)	Up to 4.5h	510g
	GH35*L*	384 ×288, 12µm, NETD < 35mK		3.35 - 26.8, x8	7.5° × 9.7°	1800m		Up to 6h	
	GH25*L*		25mm, F1.0	2.39 - 19.12, x8	10.53° × 7.9°	1200m			
	GQ35	640 ×512, 12µm, NETD < 35mK	35mm, F1.0	2.0 - 8.0, x8	10.97° × 8.82°	2000m		Up to 4.5h	
	GH35	384 ×288, 12µm, NETD < 35mK		3.35 - 26.8, x8	7.5° × 9.7°	1800m		Up to 6h	
	GH25		25mm, F1.0	2.39 - 19.12, x8	10.53° × 7.9°	1200m			
PANTHER	PQ50*L*	640 ×512, 12 µm, NETD < 35mK	50 mm, F1.0	2.6 - 20.8, x8	8.78° x 7.03°	2600	32GB (900,000 Images)	Up to 4h	630g
	PQ35*L*		35 mm, F1.0	1.77 - 14.16, x8	12.52° x 10.03°	1700m			560g
	PH50*L*	384 ×288, 12 µm, NETD < 35mK	50 mm, F1.0	4.22 - 33.76, x8	5.28° x 3.96°	2500m			630g
	PH35*L*		35 mm, F1.0	2.96 - 23.68, x8	7.53° x 5.65°	1700m			560g
THUNDER	TQ50	640 ×512, 12 µm, NETD < 35mK	50mm, F1.0	2.6 - 20.8, x8	8.7° × 7.0°	2600m	16GB (460,000 Images)	Up to 4h	390g
	TH35	384 ×288, 17 µm, NETD < 35mK	35mm, F1.0	2.08 - 16.64, x8	10.0° × 8.0°	1200m			
	TH25		25mm, F1.0	1.5 - 12.0, x8	14.9° × 11.2°	900m			
	TE25	256 ×192, 12µm, NETD < 35mK	25mm, F1.0	3.25 - 26, x8	7.0° × 5.2°	1200m			
	TE19C		19mm, F1.0	2.47 - 19.76, x8	9.2° × 6.9°	900m			
BINOCULARS	TS36-100*L*	640 ×512, 17µm , NETD < 40mK	100mm, F1.4	×4	6.2° × 4.9	3000m	32GB (900,000 Images)	Up to 7h	1.5kg
	TS36-75*L*		75mm, F1.2		8.3° × 6.6°	2200m			
	TS36-50L		50mm, F1.0		12.4° × 9.9°	1500m			
	TS36-100		100mm, F1.4		6.2° × 4.9	3000m			<1kg
	TS36-75		75mm, F1.2		8.3° × 6.6°	2200m			
	TS36-50		50mm, F1.0		12.4° × 9.9°	1500m			
	TS16-50		50mm, F1.0		12.42° × 9.95°	1500m			
	TS16-35		35 mm, F1.0		17.7° × 14.2°	1000m			

* No manual focus

** Models ending in ***L*** = Laser Range Finder

RABBIT KOFTA

WRITTEN BY ~ **RICHARD HINGSTON**

At this time of the year, we are all gearing up for the busy season of Christmas, or preparing for our Christmas holidays, or deciding where to go for New Year – it's just a busy time

With this in mind and remembering that it's BBQ season then why not try this easy-as recipe.

Kofta sits in the family of meat ball dishes, which is similar to a kebab and originates from the Middle East, Asia, and India subcontinents. In their simplest form, koftas consist of balls of ground meat, usually beef, chicken, lamb, or pork (but in our case its rabbit) and mixed with spices and onion. The mixture is formed or shaped onto a stick and then cooked over an open fire or BBQ and served with pita, salads, dips and sauces.

The beauty of this dish is that it's easy to get the kids involved mixing it through their wee paws and shaping it onto the sticks which then leads to them wanting to eat what they have made and trying different things. Getting them interested in cooking early on can only be a good thing. It's a great opportunity to spend some time with the wee ones at this busy time, as they will have memories that will last forever.

The meat will benefit from being marinated overnight and then minced the following day, and you will find that it helps with developing the flavours. If using wooden skewers then remember to firstly soak them in cold water so they don't burn as much, and if using metal then remember they will hold the heat once cooked.

Kofta

2 rabbits cleaned, gutted, trimmed, and meat removed from the bone roughly chopped into cubes/strips
5 tsp salt
8 to 9 grinds of the pepper mill
2 Tbsp whole grain mustard
2 tsp ground cumin
4 tsp ground coriander
1 tsp ground turmeric
1 med brown onion, finely chopped
4 garlic cloves, crushed
2 Tbsp olive oil
1 lemon zest and juice
4 Tbsp chopped fresh herbs (coriander, flat leaf parsley and or chive)
½ cup fresh breadcrumbs

Method

- **In a large bowl mix all the ingredients except the fresh herbs and breadcrumbs.** Cover and chill in the fridge overnight.
- **Using a fine plate on the mincer,** mince all the marinated meat and then add the chopped herbs and breadcrumbs.
- **Using your hands mix the meat together until well bound.**
- **Divide the mixture into approximately 50 gram balls for 2 skewers,** or 90– 100 gram portions for 1 skewer (depending on the size of your skewer)
- **Thread the balls onto a skewer** and slightly squeeze to shape into a sausage form on the skewer.
- **Preheat the BBQ or a fire to a medium heat.**
- **Cook the koftas for about 8 minutes turning them often.** The cooking time will vary depending on how big you have made them.
- **Once cooked, rest for 2 minutes, then serve**

Try serving it with some of the suggestions below

- In a pita bread, with a crunchy slaw, hummus, or tzatziki
- Sliced tomato and cucumber
- On a couscous or rice salad
- Leafy greens and sliced raw red onion
- Garnish with cherry tomatoes and fresh picked Italian parsley or coriander

And of course, after that hard hot work on the BBQ then I would suggest it all be washed down with an IPA, APA, or a Pilsner of your choice.

Tzatziki

- **1 brown onion peeled and finely chopped**
- **2 clove s garlic peeled and crushed**
- **150gm butter unsalted**
- **1 celeriac head peeled and rough chopped**
- **450ml chicken stock**
- **50ml cream**

Method

Sprinkle the salt onto the cucumber and allow to sit for three minutes, then squeeze the excess moisture out, and place cucumber into a mixing bowl.
Add the lemon zest and juice, yoghurt and the chopped mint to the cucumber and mix well.
Season to taste.
Add a good dollop to the top of the rabbit kofta.

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