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NZ HUNTER MAGAZINE

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KAIMANAWA TROPHY STAG

Clint White shares the story of his giant Kaimanawa Sika, an 18 year journey

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mark Kirkwood from the West Coast SAR gives us some tips on staying safe in our mountains

PUBLIC LAND WATERFOWL

Callum McKenzie takes us through how he hunts public land gamebirds











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FOR EVERYTHING HUNTING

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A WORD FROM THE EDITOR



By the time you read this the roar will be well underway! We're about to head in on a West Coast Red stag mission, a little early yet but hopefully we can find a big old stag going walkabout checking what hinds are where before he settles down to the serious business of passing on his genes. The East Coast is copping a lot more rain so hopefully the West Coast will stay fine and cloud free – clag being the perennial problem of a "Coast" hunter even when it's not raining!

And for the waterfowlers, we're in the run down to the duck season, only a month to go. I was in the Canterbury region over the two weekends NC F&G ran their trial "Summer Duck" season this year, and was interested to see how it worked out. There are some potential issues with shooting Mallards in February:

1. *Only a small percentage of hunters actually do it, and they wise up or kill many ducks which definitely will have an effect on the traditional opening weekend when all hunters do go out*
2. *The combination of skinnier young ducks and warmer temperatures mean there will be less utilisation of the meat*
3. *They are shooting on harvested crops so they are not helping with crop predation issues (if any) at all.*

On the plus side it does provide an extra shooting opportunity for a few shooters, and if duck populations are extremely high there may be a harvestable surplus that might die off before the traditional May opening. I simply do not believe this to be the case in the North Canterbury region. As any biological reasons for it are dubious, I believe F&G NC must run a survey of their gamebird hunters and see if the majority support the summer season. If not, then don't do it.

The big, bad news for North Island Sika hunters is East Kaweka Helicopters shutting up shop. Anyone who's had the pleasure of flying with our dear mate Chris Crosse from EKH will know what a disaster this is for the Kawekas. He has such a wealth of knowledge on all things Sika and Kaweka. You only needed to look at the huge number of 8 point heads right around the walls of his hanger, all shot by him throughout the Park during his many years as a passionate recreational hunter, until he started EKH which put a stop to his own hunting. Then he devoted his energy to helping his many clients get the best out of their own experiences. When he told you to go here and have a look there, it's because he'd done the hard yards on the ground and really knew his stuff. **He was also invaluable in our Kaweka Liaison Group working with DOC trying to get the best for both conservation and recreation in our beloved Kaweka Forest Park.** His eye in the sky gave us hugely helpful up to date Intel on things like where the Contorta pines were getting away, tracks and huts that needed attention, and he also donated a huge amount of helicopter time for our Save Our Kaweka Kiwi operation run by dedicated volunteers. Not only flying in traps, but when the girls had to do a nest raid in some far flung corner of the kiwi area, Chris and his R44 yellow bumble bee was always there to bring the chick out so it could be got to the crèche a lot quicker than if by "shank's pony".

Chris lost out on his busiest part of the year when the Covid outbreak first hit two years ago which was a huge set back. And now this roar with Omicron rampaging through the country, it was going to make a one man band operation like his near impossible. If he came down with Covid during the peak of the roar when he had hunters in the hills everywhere, it would have been a disaster. Having to self-isolate, and pay another operator if he could find one to service his clients was going to be a logistical nightmare and a huge cost. On top of that there were the new requirements after the DOC helicopter crash in Wanaka to be able to continue to do DOC work including having to install further electronic equipment including video and audio data recorders. Then his DOC concession to operate an air transport operation in the Kawekas, Kaimanawas and Ruahines was up for renewal, requiring a lengthy consultation process – which is a very slow and laborious process as we know all too well. Chris also battled DOC over their unrealistic demands for concession fees which impacted hugely on his clients. The last straw was the ever increasing compliance costs from CAA in order to run an air transport business.

Simply, poor old Chris has had enough, and now another hugely valued and iconic small business has found it impossible to continue. A sad indictment on where we seem to be headed in our overly bureaucratic, PC society where no one has any personal responsibility anymore…

The only bright side is if Chris manages to get his business closed down and helicopters sold in time, he might be able to come Sika hunting this roar and you'll get to see him on an episode again!

Please all take care this roar

Greg

Q&A

Hi Greg

Can you please advise a sensible minimum barrel length for a 308 when fitted with a DPT suppressor.

Objective is to produce a compact, light and handy bush rifle. Scope is a Swarovski 3-9 x 36. Ammunition will likely be handloads. I have a choice of projectiles: 125gn GMX, 150gn SST, 150gn Speer Grand Slam and 150gn Nosler Accubonds. Powder choices are W748 and Varget, primers Federal 210s.

Thanks, Bruce

Hi Bruce

I'd go with a 16" barrel and the 125gn GMXs. We use 130gn TTSXs in our 16" 308 BushPigs, and get about 2900 to 2940fps. Either of those powders should work, but 748 would be best as you might struggle to fit enough Varget/2208 in. We use 2206H and H335,

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

SPOT THE LOGO

The winners for last issue are **Robin Thompson** and **Tom Wright**. The logos were on the AJ Productions advert on page 37 and the Huntech advert on page 74.

Hi Greg

1. **What kind of tripod are you using for your Spotting Scopes?**
2. **Which adapter are you using for the phone-to-spotting scope?**

I recently purchased a nice ATX 65mm Swaro Spotting Scope but I need a good, steady, lightweight tripod for getting up the hills. I guess when it comes to "steady" and "lightweight" the two are probably mutually exclusive but your photography seems to cope with a compromise ok. I also purchased the APO attachment as my daughter does a lot of bird and game photography but I don't want to carry her DSLR with me when hunting. I'm quite happy with the Samsung S10.

Keep up the good work, Mike

Hi Mike

Currently we are using the Leupold Alpine tripod and ball head. This is the best we have found rigidity wise for such a light weight option – only 880gms all up. The Slik 635s were our second choice if you want something with a shorter collapsed length. We make our own spottercam systems from the PhoneSkope optics adapters glued to an Otterbox phone case. That way our phone is still protected if we drop it in the field. We run two Otterbox cases, one for in the hills with the spotter eyepiece adapter glued on, and one without for at home. If you use PhoneSkope's phone adapters, they don't fit if you have a protective case on your phone, so you either have to take it on and off not run a case at all when in the hills – all of which creates more opportunity for dropping and smashing it!

Cheers, Greg



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Alpine Double

WRITTEN BY ~ **LOCKIE MCKENZIE**



There were plenty of 4WDs around for the long weekend, so we soon turned to 'Plan B'

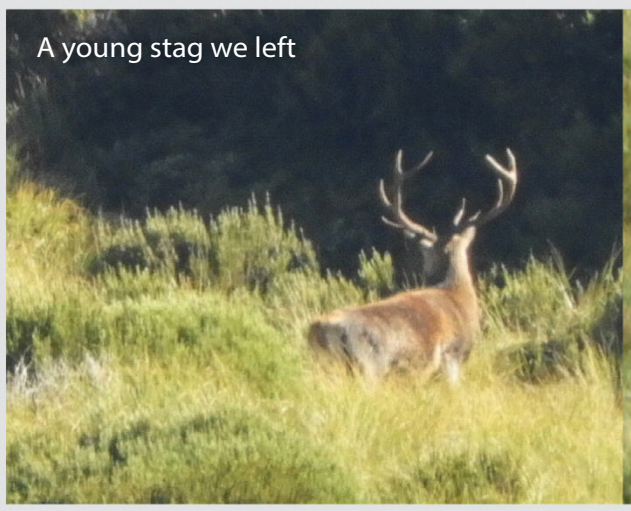
I've always had a passion for exploring remote alpine areas, rich with deerstalking history and, as there was a long weekend on the horizon, mates Tom, Kobi and I were keen to further explore one of my favourite valleys

Once the fence line was finished and Tom had left the building site for the day, the Dunedin lads hooned up the South Island to my place. We hatched a plan over some beers, then got an early start straight into four wheel drive mode, river crossings, boulder moving and general low box muntery.

There were plenty of other 4WDs out in the Alps for the long weekend, so we were soon onto plan "B" (if not further down the alphabet). By late morning we had only just shouldered packs but set sight on a few animals – three hinds grazing the edge of a scree slope. **We split up, ensuring radio contact for the afternoon, each of us bush stalking a terrace and glassing up the faces.** Although together we saw about 20 odd deer there was nothing notable.

Next day set the mood - crisp skies, keas, distant roars and rock falls from the high peaks and glaciers. **We glassed our way up a boulder-strewn stream to a steep, and hopefully, seldom touched, side valley we had pin-pointed on the maps,** to be welcomed by a decent stag with a bachelor mob of 6's and 8's, up high in the tussock. We knew he wasn't fully mature by the photos we managed to take, even from a good kilometre away, but he had a nice shape with potential to be a good head in a couple of years. **It was obvious that he couldn't be the dominant stag for the area, given the time of year.**

Tom was keen for a closer look up the scrubby gut and to get better photos to confirm age but also to see what else was around. Kobi stayed in the river and we took off up out of sight, radios forgotten in our haste. A sudden wind change saw the mob spook, trotting into the next gully. We regrouped for smoko and landscaped a campsite before Tom took off again into the gully following the mob, that also held a few hinds. Meanwhile, Kobi and I made our way further upstream.



A young stag we left





Tom's buck on the hoof



My stag when we first saw him



Looking through the scope to the steep section he fell into



A 13 point brute, shy of the magic 40"



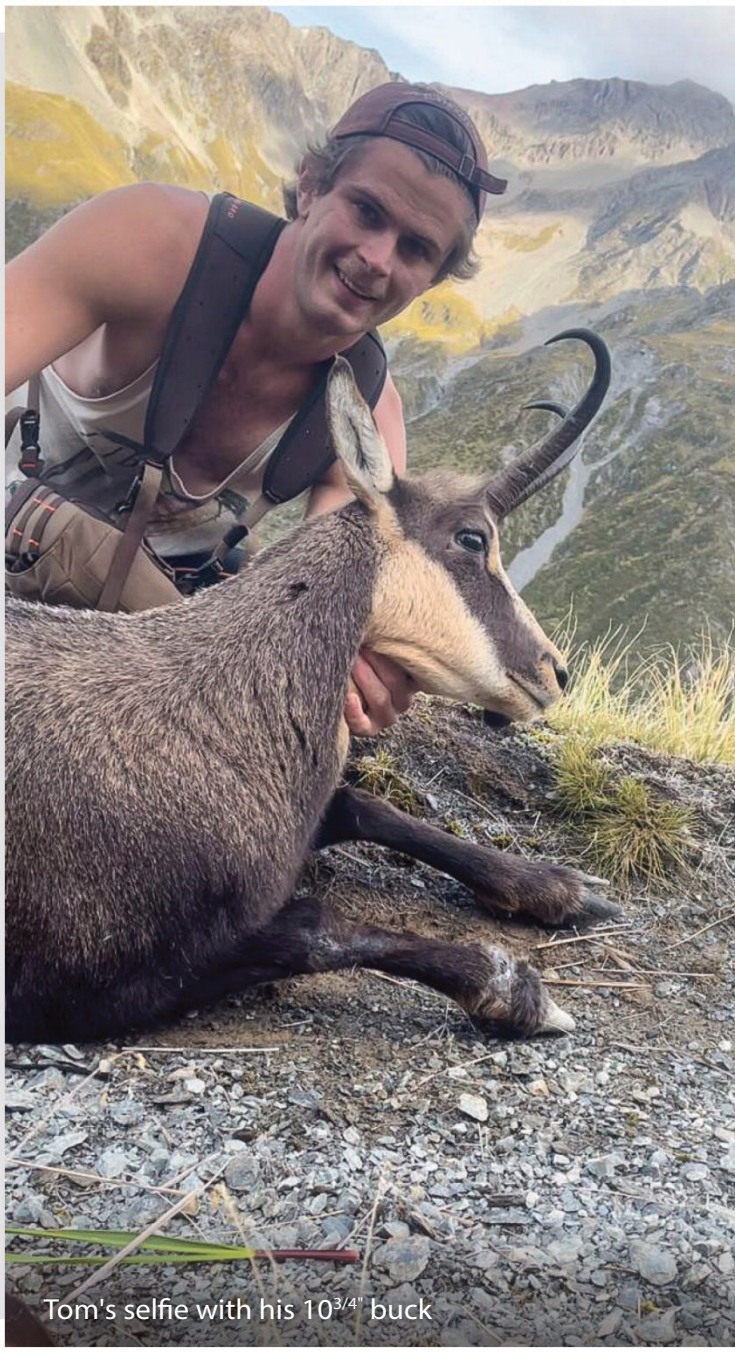
The evening drew on, but we only saw the odd young stag. Then Tom was on the radio, telling us he had spotted a decent chamois buck, 300 yards away, high up on a tussock knob of a craggy ridge. I got the camera on him soon after and instantly confirmed to Tom that he wasn't one to pass up! **I judged him to be over 10" and exactly what I'd been trying to get on the wall for years!**

With Tom already in position 300 yards away from him, and after hearing our thoughts (his best to date had been an 8 ½" buck), his braked 7mm mag rang out and the monstrous buck dropped on the spot as we watched through the binos. Congratulations rang out through the radio and we soon got to work, eyeballing the monkey scrub. Almost immediately after the shot, I spotted a stag holding four hinds, slowly on the move, in about the steepest country a Red stag could possibly inhabit. Even from a distance of two kilometres I knew he was a chunky old boy. With the camera I could see five on one top and clear signs of maturity. Tom informed us that the bluff he shot over was ***"out the gate gnarly"*** so we had to drop, and re-climb the 500 vertical metres to meet up with him before Kobi and I took off for the stag. The stalk involved climbing up a rocky ridge, to attempt get a 400 yard shot over a deep waterfall-strewn chasm, all before dark, or before he wandered the craggy bluffs over to the West Coast. **We finally got there, minus some sweat and scrub bashing, to find him sitting calmly under a rock overhang among his perturbed hinds at 450 yards** - but between two 20 metre dry waterfalls. I hoped like hell he wouldn't smash his antlers in the inevitable fall, **but it was too late in the day to ask him to move.** I dialled up with a solid rest and sent one over… nailing him but a bit far back, and so another shot rang out, putting him down as he tumbled through a pocket of monkey scrub. I held my breath watching the inevitable end-over-end free fall …

but was beyond relieved when he landed heavy on his front, his antlers seemingly untouched, and coming to rest on the boulders beneath the bluff. We were stoked, especially after the events of the last few hours. **Retrieving the stag would be a tomorrow job as the last sunlight left the high craggy peaks.** Nearing dark we met back with Tom, who had the biggest chamois buck any of us had ever seen! He had caped it for the wall, stretching the measuring tape to 10 ¾" (going 27 ¾ ds). With a few Tuis in the creek, smuggled by the North Islanders into Speights country, Tom told us about the buck's old broken leg, as we reflected on quite an afternoon on the hill.

Next morning, the boys went for one last look for Kobi's first big stag up the valley. Just on light and in a strong nor-wester, I climbed up toward the downed stag. **I found him after some teeth-gritting rock climbing and was over the moon with his character, age, mass and shape** - a mature uneven 13-point brute. The fall had broken his front leg and a few ribs so it was incredibly lucky his antlers were untouched. I nabbed some pics, did some butchery and loaded up. The climb down was somewhat questionable with the head being thrown down into scrub more than once. We met back at our packs just as the weather was turning, to hear they had seen a yet another strong 12 pointer! **Unfortunately, the unpredictable howling wind up high had spooked him and, with his hinds, he was last seen heading for the West Coast.** Tom and Kobi were taken aback by the stag's unique shape and we had a quick measure, to find he was still a good couple inches off the magic 40" but slightly making up for it in mass and character.

We began the descent down the boulder strewn stream aiming to shelter from the weather in a nearby bivvy. Unfortunately for us, fellow Alpine battlers had the same idea, so we had a yarn and wished them luck as the weather closed in further, then made the trek back to the truck. As we happily bounced our way back down the valley, we were already planning the next adventure for Kobi's stag, and with solid memories of yet another epic mission in the Alps. **What we have here in New Zealand is just amazing.**


Tom's selfie with his 10 3/4" buck


A happy crew back at the vehicle in between rain showers

KAIMANAWA GIANT

WRITTEN BY ~ CLINT WHITE

The 2020 roar was a non-event due to covid and the frustration of sitting around was high, knowing the stags would be loving the lack of human scent in the bush. The 2021 roar was not shaping well for me either, though I wasn't going to let a ruptured disc in my back stop me from trying. No training meant I entered April in less than prime physical condition and ended up being dubbed 'Muffin Man' by the other boys.

2021 was also different, in that there were four of us – not the usual Josh and I, or me solo. Josh ('Ricky Baker'), Isaac ('Big O') and Liam (Twigs), Ridge (my trusty mutt), and I ('Muffin Man'). The plan was to head into a new area for us - one where Isaac had shot a very promising, but very young stag, on one of our earlier trips.

The time arrived: 11:50pm. I left the farm and reached the Waikato at 7.30am, to meet up with Ricky and Twigs, then on to Taupo to collect 'Big O', to head for the beautiful Kaimanawas. With packs on we walked in and, just after dark, had to scramble down a wee bank to get down to the creek. Ricky, Muffin and Twigs all got down fine, and Ridge needed the quick help of a size 12 on the back end. When Big O's turn came we warned, "If you fall, no one's catching you!" At that same instant, for some reason, he let go. True to our word, like three rats up a drainpipe, we were gone. Big O survived, but I think his bread had become wraps.

Camp set up, kai down, in bed at 10pm - it was a big first day for me. Packed up and ready to go early the next morning, ol' Ricky Baker had us waiting. 'Just a minute' (or an hour) while he did some online shopping on his InReach... that bulk bread lot must have been cheap!

We reached our first proper campsite by 10am and with only a couple of hee-haws heard on the way in, it was



Josh, Isaac, Clint, Ridge and Liam



Our campsite

pretty quiet. We dropped our gear, GPS'd our spot, grabbed the walking sticks and were off again. Team 'online shopping' went one way, and Ridge, and Isaac and I headed for the main river. As we arrived at the bush edge a deer broke from the toi-toi and ran straight across the river. In an instant, I saw a big-bodied Sika spiker with long spikes and Isaac's rifle coming up but with a ***"No, no, no!"*** from me, we watched the spiker disappear into the beech canopy on the other side.

Things were looking up for our new area, although judging by the boot prints, others thought the same. We followed suit, crossed over the river and began climbing on the other side, up and over the ridge, coming into a more North-facing area where, on the map, appeared to hold a bit more food. We tracked along, just over the flat ridge on a game trail, and the bush was pretty good. Ridge was ground-scenting some fresh sign invisible to human eyes and sniffing hanging leaves - showing good interest.

My brain was kicking into action, trying not to repeat past mistakes, time and time again. I slowed up, as the deer could be well gone or right here... somewhere. With no real wind for Ridge to work, or deer for that matter, I stopped and let out a quiet single-call. No reply. A stick broke upfront. The three of us heard it - there was no mistaking the sound. Waiting another 20 seconds or so, I gave two quiet mews and waited. Five minutes passed. A quiet single call tickled our ears and gave us the impression that he was much further away than he really was. We sat tight for about 30 minutes, with me giving just a couple more quiet mews, to no replies or movement.

"Let's move forward slowly,' I whispered to Isaac. ***'He'll still be right here, somewhere. I reckon he's an older boy, as a young fella would be standing in our faces long ago."***

I pointed for Ridge to lead on, and he resumed following where the deer had walked. Up front there was a thick patch of bush, where I quietly followed Ridge, sneaking through with barely a sound. As I broke out, I glanced to my left to see a frozen stag at around 20 metres. My gun instinctively came up to my eye. Ridge was on my right-hand side, six to eight metres in front of me, also frozen and looking 90 degrees at the stag. Instinct kicking in further, I mentally checked things off: Dog location- tick. Stag- a satellite or crappy K-bush 4-pointer?

With my gun lowered again, and thinking that I didn't want to shoot him; I could see the stag's eyes flickering between Ridge and I. All of a sudden, the stag dropped his nose down a little more. Huge tops appeared. Eyes wide, I thought to myself ***"Sh*t! Get some lead in the air, quick!"*** In a fraction of a second, up came the rifle, crosshairs on the neck and boom - stag down. Unsurprisingly, his hind swiftly departed.



Ridge and the big stag, 18 years in the making



Another angle on the big fella



Isaac's young six

What a feeling, and it was only day two, but there was no time for buck fever. Isaac, who was a few metres behind me, saw him drop. *"Woah,"* he exclaimed. *"He was right there - I was looking way past him!"* It turned out that the stag had been no more than 50 metres from us while we were playing patience earlier. **He was just waiting there, ready to bust us, as no doubt he'd done to many hunters over the years.** After a few high fives, 'cha-hoo's', some photos and time for it to all sink in...

It had been 18 years coming...and what a journey. Hunting 40-50 days per year over the last six years (pre-Covid) and here was my trophy stag. For me that trophy had to come off DOC land (or it didn't count); be ideally 180DS (haven't had him scored yet) and have symmetrical antlers. It seemed as though this was him, plus - this boy had the heaviest timber I've ever seen in a Sika.



Ridge and the hind

After head skinning and so on, we carried on hunting. Later on in the afternoon, I heard sticks breaking to our left, just over a mound. Moving closer to a clear patch within the manuka I gave a quiet single call, followed straight after with a mew. Crash, crash! And hello!

In all of about ten seconds, we had a 6-pointer right in our faces. I gave Isaac the OK signal this time, and boom - meat in the freezer. He was rapt with another little Jap-stag.

We trundled back to camp to see if team 'Online Shopping' had managed to buy a deer. Nope. Josh and Liam had to leave the next day to start heading out. Josh, always being a good bugger, carried my head and head skin out for me, allowing Isaac and I to stay on for the rest of the week.

Day three saw Isaac and I move camp further up the main river. From there, we hunted in our own directions. Isaac true-right and me, true-left, which had me climbing a steep spur above the river for an hour. Ridge picked up a wind scent from over the edge and wanted to go down a steep scrubby face - back to where we'd come from. I looked at him and thought, 'You better be sure, boy; cos I'm not keen'. I got the, *"I'm sure, Boss"* look in return. 'OK, lead the way, gingernuts.' Down, down again - a couple hundred metres, and Ridge started applying the handbrake. As I peered down into an even steeper bit, through pongas to where Ridge was looking, I spied the head and neck of a feeding Red stag but with a rubbish head (not what I was after). After a minute, the stag spooked and took off.

Isaac had to leave on day four to attend to a family bereavement, and I was solo once again, the very reason I had a dog. In a supermoon the deer are hard to find and there is no roaring at all. Four stags came in without replying, all of which had gone full circle and cut our scent (game over). Four hinds were seen, but none shot.

On day five I decided to push back, further up river, to the head waters. Still quiet, and no roaring. Two kilometres

up river, we rounded another bend and Ridge's nose grabbed a Red hind (I don't fancy the Reds in Sika country). Being a hind, this one was in trouble. We went back down the river, crossed without being spotted, and started the stalk, not knowing whether she was on the move or feeding there. She was moving, so it took a while. Ridge had lost the windscent, as about 500 metres further up she'd crossed the river twice on a sharp S-bend. **Later he caught it again, and after another 100 metres I spotted her.** She and her fawn had climbed off the river terrace. I thought - 'I want that hind, the fawn will survive, although it won't be long before another hunter gets it.' Even though the fawn was a sitting duck, I watched them disappear over the spur, not able to get a bead on the hind.

A hundred metres further up and following them around a steep rocky face, I spotted them yet again. This time it's the hind and down she went, tumbling into the creek. Gutting her and covering her with ferns, I GPS'd the spot, and on we went.

Climbing up over on the ridge on the true right, I came into a good looking area, similar to where I shot the big boy a few days earlier. Sitting in the pepperwoods, I let out a single call to no reply. Forty minutes ticked by as I ate some snacks then made my way slowly through the grassy manuka in front. As Ridge and I approached a few dark pepperwoods and, looking into the sun, I heard a deer bolt. Unusually I heard antlers twanging off the pepperwood trunks as it ran off – that was a first. A further hundred metres and there were two huge scrapes on the ground and fresh sign everywhere. I'll be paying special attention to the area next year. **Further up the valley, and sidling some reasonable bush, I was getting frustrated that there were not even any hee-haws.** When we bumped into another Red stag, he was out of luck. A bad decision, as it meant two deer to carry: a full load for me and Ridge.


The unlucky Red stag

Butchery done, I headed even further up the valley and as it was getting late, decided to cut back over to my water catchment and make a beeline for the river. With an hour of light left, and 4.5 kilometres back to camp and the hind to pick up on the way, the next stag I spotted feeding on the river was very safe.

I decided that with no roaring and two deer, it was time to pull the pin early and head out next day to visit the taxidermist myself. My dodgy back was tested carrying out two animals! **The day was spent on a slow and steady bush-bash out, but once again, hunting is the best medicine.**



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Kaweka Crusty Demons

WRITTEN BY ~ **GLENN MORRIS**

Beer and bullshit flowed around the table as the Gotman recalled tales from 40 years earlier - cray boats, Ray Tinsley and sleeping rough with dead bulls helped steer the conversation towards the coming Wapiti ballot

With Covid giving the great Southern bulls another year in the Fiordland mountains to grow, and our Aussie brothers not likely to enter, we all agreed to throw our old hats into the ring. We needed to put together a team of six experienced and gnarly mountain men, but a look around the room soon showed we were clean out! Just three old, crusty demons that hunted the Kawakas!

Once we got over that small hurdle names were thrown back and forth before Dave penciled in his farming mate Greg, and I vouched for 'Mark the Hammer'. We needed one more for this team of six and she was right under my nose! Little Red's hand shot up faster than an Electron Rocket clearing the launch pad at the thought of a Fiordland adventure. We had our six Crusty Demons.

Months later an email from FWF gave us the news we were waiting for and it took several minutes to comprehend that we were off to the big dance in the iconic wilderness block of George River. Excited texts were fired off to Crusty Demons throughout the land and a whirl wind of events started to take place as excitement levels grew. Wapiti knowledge became all-consuming, and the logistics operation involved in getting this small army 1400 kilometres to the bottom of the South Island kicked off.

The fear of not being fit enough started a frenzy of training and weight loss programs. I, for one, blew out a knee thinking I was 18 again, setting me back with weeks of physio.

Finally, in March 2021, our convoy rolled onto the Interisland ferry. It was hard to spot any other Wapiti hunters as the days of guys in swanndri and buller gumboots propping up the bar were long gone.

Lake Te Anau sits like a door mat in front of the mighty Fiordland ranges, reminding a hunter of why they are there, and dominating the landscape with continually changing moods. The rural town on its shores is like no other, instantly making a hunter feel welcome, embracing everything that is good about Wapiti, with every shop displaying a mouthwatering bull hanging off the wall.

Gotman had no sooner collected the boys from Invercargill airport on the Friday evening before we hustled into the local rugby club rooms for the FWF briefing. This close to the start line the tension in the air was electric, everybody wanted to be elsewhere and the promised BBQ and beers didn't materialise.

We pushed through the crowd to legendary pilot Hannibal Hayes and his side-kick Snow to get our instructions for the morning and, with nothing more to do, trudged into town to the Moose Bar where the beer tasted flat. One last stop before lights out at the Te Anau Club to check out the huge array of classic heads ensured that we wouldn't sleep well that night.

Next morning, Emma and I drove out




George River and BK44


A wild Bligh Sound, seen from the mouth of McDonald Creek


Our second camp up McDonald Creek

to Te Anau Downs feeling jovial, with hot pies and coffee in hand, only to find to our horror that Southern Lakes Helicopters were early, and the boys were already loading the huge BK helicopter!!

We were frantically throwing gear out of the wagon so I could go and park it up when the start of my adventure took a turn for the worse. My back had a spasm as I bent to put rifles and jackets on the ground, and it took three Nurofen just to climb into the chopper! As if things couldn't get any worse, my GoPro had a hissy, but luckily Emma had hers to record proceedings.

We finally lifted off with Hannibal giving us a guided tour across the famous blocks, pointing out landmarks and fresh muddy wallows on a picture-perfect day while we all chatted like kids on the first day of school!

The big BK dropped into the George catchment and followed the river down to Anchorage Cove where Mr Hayes put her down on a small beach to start unloading the boys' mountain of gear. In a whirlwind of activity this was done, and we said our good byes before the chopper lifted off to take Emma and I to the other side of the block. We flew up Trophy Creek, across Harrison Saddle and down McDonald Creek to land on the damp rocks of Bligh Sound while the tide was out.

Watching Hannibal race off above the mirrored sound towards the Wild Natives memories of my first trip to the big country 15 years before flooded back. Pesky sandflies quickly bought me back to the present.

We stashed some drums of gear safe from flooding and hoisted packs to begin our slog up McDonald Creek. This proved to be the first of many challenges, tackling granite boulders and thick bush at a snail's pace, and with no deer trails to follow it was with welcome relief we found the first campsite late that afternoon.

The next day, in warm conditions, we pushed further up the creek towards Camp two while both noticing the distinct lack of fresh sign - just one lazy moan was heard while we were marooned in a dark swamp. Late that afternoon I scouted up the slip behind camp hoping to entice more roars but nothing ventured.

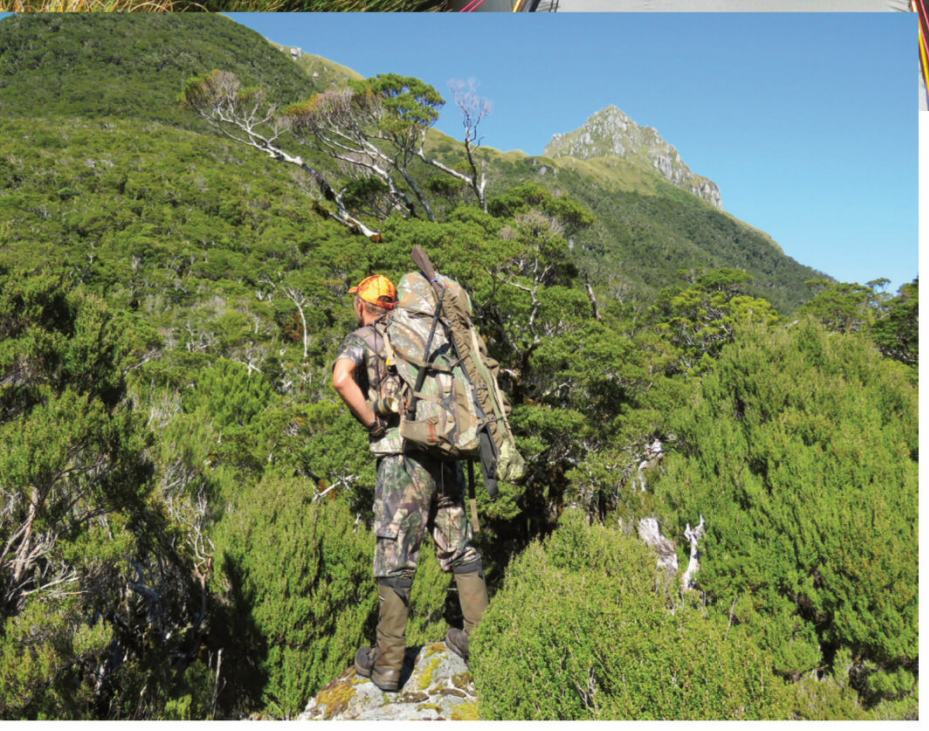
Day three brought high hopes as we planned to climb a known slip to Overhead Cone and get amongst the Wapiti. McDonald Creek had proved to be as quiet as a graveyard, and stories of swatting stags out of the way proved to be fruitless so it was with relief that we started to gain altitude up the slippery moss-covered face. Small shrubs dotted the slip as it went up towards the heavens in a section of benches. Each bench was knocked off and each face got progressively steeper and



Harrison Saddle



The George/Edith tops



more challenging. We climbed for an hour or two before finally getting completely bluffed and out of our comfort zone on a vertical face! No way I thought - again our intel had said we could climb this, so I explored into the bush on the sides only to find massive granite faces where not even a goat could climb. Two dejected Crusty Demons had to admit defeat and carefully retrace our steps to the base of the slip where we camped the night.

New plans were hatched to explore Harrison Saddle and possibly catch up with Hammer and Gotman.

The next day proved to be long and demanding and under foggy conditions we finally broke out onto the tussock swamp of the saddle with an hours daylight to spare. Feeling buggered, we immediately set to work digging out rocks for a tent site when the most glorious thing of the trip happened!! **A Wapiti bull bugled 400 yards away in the mist towards the end of the giant flat.** All the slog and hardship endured over the last few days vanished with that one sound. The bull's airy bugles echoed off the vertical valley walls like a giant organ as we just sat and listened, and in that moment, nothing else in the world mattered.

This sound would become familiar over the next few days, reaching its climax as I stood near Catseye Saddle, not 40 yards from a bull as he thrashed his antlers against a tree high up towards a misty saddle. **His brother bull egged him on higher up, as the two great bulls tried to outdo one another, and as I stalked painfully closer.** The stalk started off with high hopes at 11am and ended at 3pm with a cruel swirling wind creeping past me through the moss-covered trees blowing my chance as he crashed away with the smell of danger hot in his nostrils.

Hammer and Gotman had also hunted Harrison Saddle from the Trophy Burn side, seeing a number of bulls but nothing worth pulling the trigger on. We had missed them by a day, and being old school, they didn't have an inReach!

Meanwhile Dangerous Dave & Greg were busy writing their own part of Fiordland history two days up the George river…

Dave's story

After an action packed second morning, roaring up three separate bulls, we managed to navigate our way around Gorges two and three, which is not something you would chose to attempt in wet weather if you value self-preservation.

The scenery around every corner was mind blowing - deep crystal-clear swimming holes, cascading five metre waterfalls which were tame right now but would be a different beast when the inevitable Fiordland heavens opened up.

We had set out goals to reach the large swamp by the end of day two and after a lot of sweat and a good seven hours hard grind, the bush started to lighten up through the gaps in the beautiful beech trees, and with the late afternoon sun open river flats appeared. This is where we were going to recharge our batteries over night before our assault on the tops the following day.

We went about emptying our packs on the biggest wide-open space we had seen in 48 hours and got the tent erected. The shape of the swamp was like a hockey stick in the bend of the river and if you could imagine we were on the small hook end of it. As it swept around the corner there was another 250 odd metres of open grassy river flats.


Dave and his 40x40 bull


A side view of Dave's bull showing his Wapiti colouration

As tempting as it was, both Greg and I decided not to go around the corner and scent this up on the odd chance we could sit and stake it out in about an hour or so, in time to spot a hungry animal coming out for a leisurely graze on dusk. We only had 35 - 40 metres from the tent to position ourselves in amongst some kawakawa on the bend to give us a commanding view of the length of the clearing.

While blowing up airbeds and discussing which Backcountry was on the menu, we heard that unmistakeable bugle of a Fiordland Wapiti bull in the distance. It was a way off but something we surely could investigate in the morning if he was living in the vicinity. I got my binos out and scanned the very tops of the amphitheatre at the end of George River. How was my six months of fitness and 12kg weight loss going to hold up tomorrow trying to summit those imposing tops? Another piercing bugle quickly focused my attention and this time it seemed to be only 300 metres away and heading in our direction.

I said to Greg *'did you hear that too?'* A very solid nod of the head had us grappling for the gun, the mag and the camera. We composed ourselves slightly before walking briskly, crouched over, to the thicket of kawakawa only a stone's throw from our tent. Greg was in the lead with the camera and tripod, and fumbling to get the lens cap off and turn the camera on. Through a gap in the trees, we could see two magnificent Wapiti cows feeding out in the open. I was taken aback at how tall they stood in comparison to the Reds I had hunted in the North Island.

They were impressive and I was happy just to see them there, happily feeding in their own environment. They may well have not encountered a human for two years as the Covid situation in 2020 had ruled out most stalkers getting into the reaches of the upper George River.

Greg was struggling to focus the camera out to 100 metres because there were branches providing our cover were in his way. I decided to move just five metres closer to the edge of the bush, to get a different angle and possibly a better view of the clearing when, out of nowhere, with the roar of a lion, **my magnificent bull announced himself to the girls on the flat as he slowly appeared through the spread out scrub.**

He was simply a sight to behold with the late low afternoon sun shining directly on him magnifying all his glory. I didn't have to count points - he was huge, his belly was dropped… Check. His antlers were coming straight out of his skull… Check. his neck was massive… Check. Was this my target species and bull of a lifetime … Check. For some reason he walked out into the open and looked straight toward me. I didn't move a millimetre as he was staring directly at me as if to say, *"I dare you... this is my domain, these are my cows and I know you are there."* He couldn't smell me as there was a gentle breeze blowing my way. Had he seen me leaning hard against the side of the tree? If he had, I had about five seconds to do something about it as he turned and started heading back to the cover of the trees.

What ran through my mind was that I didn't want this to be the story about the one that got away. I worked that bolt as fast and as quietly as I could - in my mind he was 200 yards as I did not have time to range him. **He took five more steps, turned and sat down, facing me once again.** What was I to do? Was he just having a breather before a whole night of feeding up on this flat? Would he stay put until last light and I could no longer see him clearly through my scope?



Hammer and Dave with their spoils from the George



George Sound crays, a change from Backcountry meals

My brain was racing, but the one thing I remembered was don't rush the shot; just place those crosshairs and squeeze it off. The best shot was the middle of his raised massive neck and compared with back home in the Kawekas, it was about the same width as the chest of a normal Sika.

I said to myself ***"you have got this"***, eased off the safety, lightly squeezed the trigger, and boom!!, I had forgotten to re-attach my suppressor to the 270 WSM in the excitement, and although it didn't affect the shot at 180 yards (which was the actual distance), it felt as though I had taken a blow to the head from Mike Tyson, and I wasn't expecting the crack either.

He rolled over and took his final breath - I decided to grant him that final time as he had been the King of George River valley for maybe eight, nine, even ten years! The cows ran around and stood looking in our direction as I crossed the creek, and I was within 40 metres of them before their instinct to flee kicked in.

On reaching him, there was the exciting count up of points; one, two, three on each top, trays, a bays, and then huge brows. **An old Wapiti bull measuring 40 x 40 and I couldn't be happier!**

Over the coming days the lads continued their assault, exploring the tops while spotting more bulls tucked away in the hanging basins, before eventually catching up with the boys back down in the George.

Hammer harvested an old character bush bull while the boys rounded off the trip with massive George Sound crayfish, mussels and eels.

As I complete this tale another Crusty Demon meeting has been called to discuss the 2022 bugle…



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IT'S CALLED PERSEVERANCE!

WRITTEN BY
ALEX GALE

Trophy hunting holds no guarantees. After shooting a couple of small Rusa stags in the mid 70's, I then spent 30-odd years hunting for a record book Rusa

For countless hours I sat on cold, freezing faces in mid-winter, dreaming of and waiting for that big Rusa stag to walk out on the sunny face opposite. It never happened. Oh yes, I saw lots of hinds and a few smaller stags, but nothing big. On one trip I saw three small stags, including one about 20 metres away in the bush. I passed them all up.

On yet another mid-winter roar trip I watched seven Rusa for hours on a clearing opposite and failed to spot the stag. My ongoing trophy search was an incredibly frustrating exercise in challenging Urewera country and, to make it worse, it was always in mid-winter. That's the time of the Rusa roar.

My rifle was beginning to wonder why I even took it for a walk when, one day in July 2003, everything changed in a few seconds. As I stalked quietly, just inside the manuka on a clearing up the Whakatane River, I heard an animal move away to my left. I sneaked quickly up the hill and out of the manuka for a better view and there right in front of me, standing alert, was a Rusa stag. But he was just a spiker. While he looked magnificent, he wasn't what I was after. **Then a movement behind him to the right caught my eye.** A majestic-looking Rusa stag had just jumped up from where he'd been lying in the grass, sunning himself, and was looking intently to see what had disturbed him. Seconds later he was on the ground and I had my trophy - I'd hardly had time to catch my breath. He later scored 185 3/8 DS, a constant reminder that when you are trophy hunting, you need to pass up smaller stags if you are to get that big one. Sometimes good things do happen to those who wait.

My quest for a big Fallow buck was a little different. I started hunting Fallow in Beaumont Forest, Otago, in the mid 60's during the early meat-hunting era in New Zealand. **Back then, our main goal was to shoot as many deer as we could, and that of course affected the quality of the heads around.** Deer were shot on sight, with no thought for the longer term future. If you didn't shoot it and sell it, somebody else would. Fortunately, things are now changing as hunters recognise the importance of not shooting young potential trophies, while responsibly culling hinds or does to maintain a healthy balance in the population

Consequently, in those days, there were few good heads to be had. **My good friend, the late Martin Marshall, shot a couple of record book heads in Beaumont Forest.** His best, taken in 1967, scored 219 DS. I shot a few smaller ones but had no luck with anything larger. I even hunted the Mavora Saddle, east of Lake Wakatipu, in Easter 1968, in the hope of shooting a big buck, but again no joy.



This young buck, while chasing the does and roaring, came to within a few metres of me



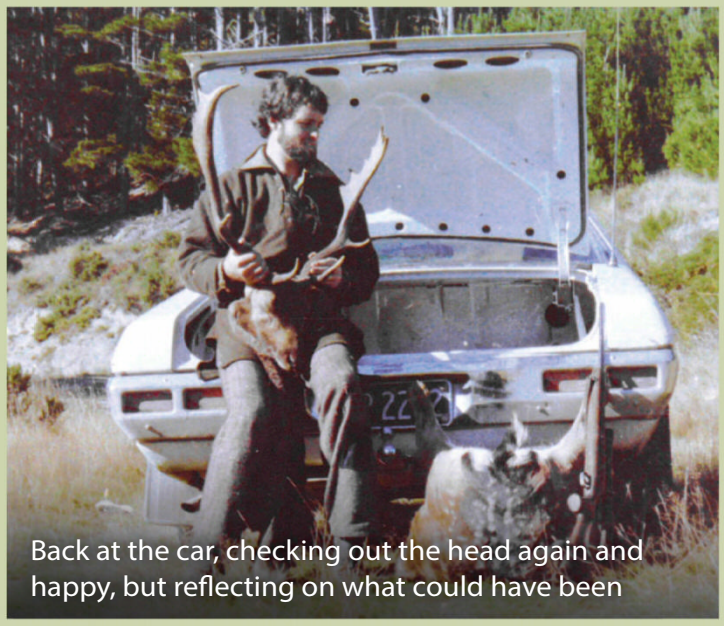
I shot this small Rusa head in the mid 70's, before I started my quest for a real trophy



30 odd years later, a 185$^{3/8}$ trophy



This Fallow buck, shot in 1982, sported long antlers, but was lacking a guard tine and scored only 186 DS



Back at the car, checking out the head again and happy, but reflecting on what could have been

Yes, I was still meat hunting, but the lure of a big head was always there.

Then, one day when I was stalking around the side of a block called E Valley in Beaumont Forest, on the side of the Black Cleugh Creek, my luck changed. Well, sort of! It was an area where thick manuka and scrub merged into more open beech forest. **In those days I bushstalked in gym shoes, which meant that I could be pretty quiet**. It was the roar, so I knew I had a better than average chance of seeing a buck. However, the first hour or so had passed and I'd not even seen a stupid spiker, let alone heard a roar, when I came over a small ridge and a movement caught my eye. It was the moving antlers of a buck. As I saw him, he saw me and immediately tensed. I was quicker that day than he was and he dropped behind a log. As I looked over the top of that log and down at his head, I could see, then count, ten really nice points. At last, I thought to myself, I've shot a big one. Then I pulled up his head and my excitement evaporated - the other side was missing a guard tine, and the palm was uneven. He had the length, the spread, but in the end scored only in the late 170's. To get into the record book a buck needed to score 200 DS or more. As an interesting exercise in what could have been, I later scored the good side, then doubled it - it came to just over 200 DS. Disappointing, but that's hunting.

I also hunted Rankleburn Forest, just along the road from Beaumont, and had some mixed fortunes there. One February day in 1970, I was hunting up a small side gully thick with fallen manuka and other scrub. I wasn't targeting bucks, just deer to help me pay for my university year, when we both spotted each other at the same time. As his head came up to get a better look at this strange creature, namely me, so did my .22/250. He was still in hard velvet and scored 193 DS, just missing the record book. **Unfortunately, he was only a young animal and I wondered just what his head would have looked like a few years down the track, given time to mature.**

Later in winter in the same area I discovered to my chagrin that meat-hunting and trophy-hunting don't really mix. I'd had a great morning, shooting three deer and carrying them out. My finances were looking good, so I headed down another promising ridge in late afternoon, with the aim of making it four for the day, which was always something to celebrate. It was a really scrubby area, with thick tangled clumps of lawyer amidst other scrub, giving deer plenty of feed and cover. A gentle breeze was blowing in my face and, with the bush a little damp underfoot, my gym shoes were nice and quiet. **It was very close hunting, where even the crack of a small twig could alert game**. I spotted a movement - it was an antler, less than 20 metres way. I couldn't get a decent look at the animal as the scrub was so thick. Then I could see parts of both antlers - they looked big, but I couldn't get a shot at the owner. Finally, I spotted a bit of grey, but through the scope I could see only the top part of the hind leg and I wasn't going to shoot him there - I'd lose



The 1982 Martin Marshall trophy for the best Fallow head shot by a NZDA member in the Otago area



One of the best Fallow heads I shot during my meat hunting days in the Blue Mountains of Otago - it scored 193 DS, just missing the record book, but still a good head for those days



My 2019 buck. He was big, but ugly, with split palms and needed to be removed from the gene pool

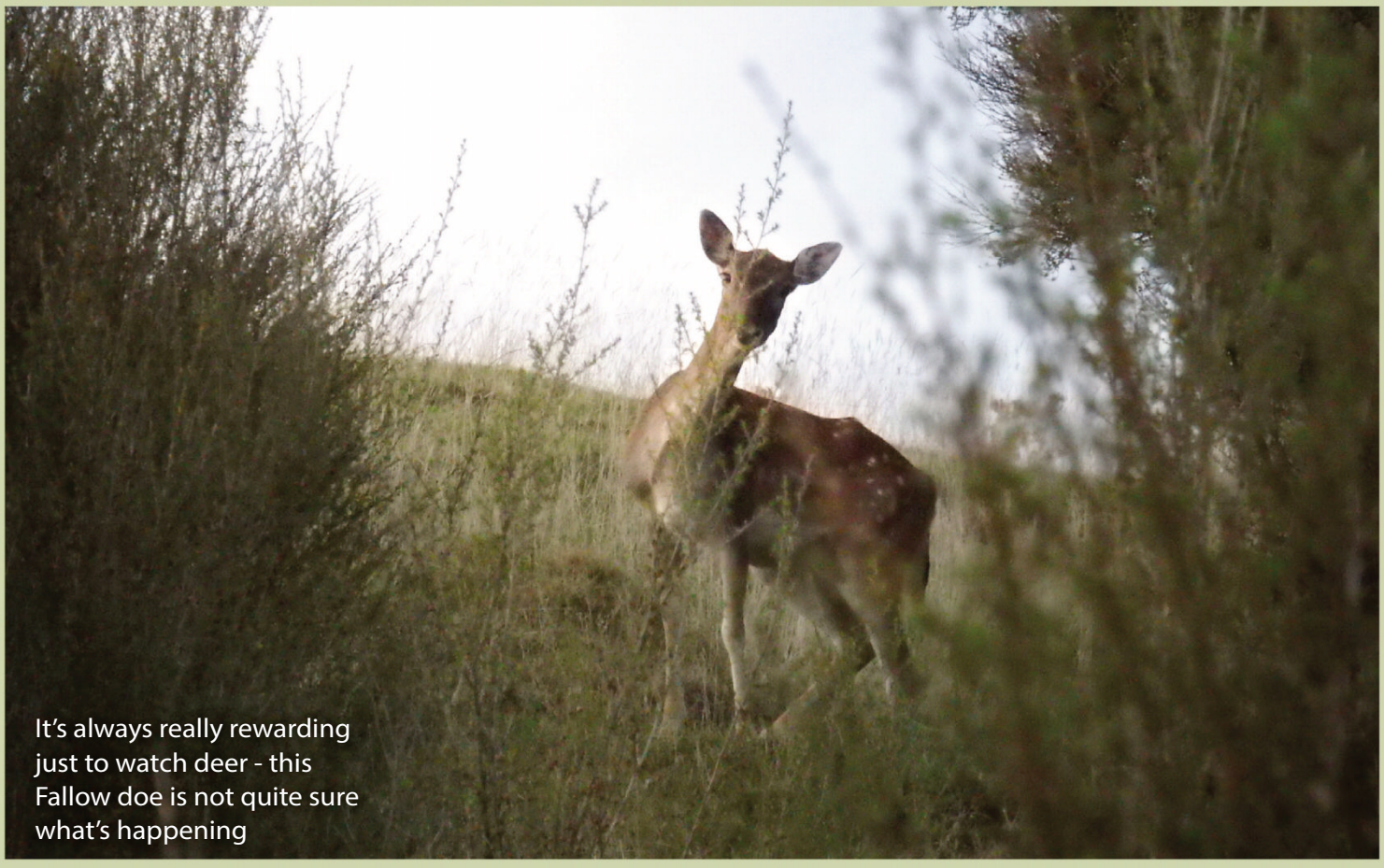
too much money because a bum-shot deer wasn't worth as much, so I held fire. Then, blast it, he turned and walked in behind a big patch of scrub. It was really thick, so I figured if I moved around to the right he'd walk right out in front of me. Yeah, right! What I hadn't counted on was an ally, a small buck standing away up the hill looking down on the unravelling drama. **He spotted me, gave one loud snort and very quickly disappeared as did my big buck.** Was he big? Yes, he was! Was I brassed off? You bet I was. I should have shot him when I had the chance, bum shot or not! Big stags need a bit of luck to get big and he had his share that day, due to my other priorities! I'm still kicking myself. You take your chances when they offer or else ...

In the 80's, when we shifted to Owaka, in South Otago, I again had the chance of trying for a Fallow buck, this time in one of my favourite Beaumont Forest blocks, Long Gully. I'd never spotted a decent buck there, although I'd had great results while meat-hunting the area. **It was 20th April, 1982, right at the start of the roar, and while I wasn't specifically targeting bucks, I was well aware of the time of year**. I'd always had good luck in the first gully on the left, so I pushed up into the bush on the left at the end of the track. This brought back memories of the last time I'd visited the area and had shot three deer in a mob at the top of the gully. That day I saw and shot one then another popped out, so I bowled that one too, then yet another decided to join his mates - it was all over in a few seconds, bar the hard work of gutting and carrying them out. I actually carried all three together using my carry belt method - it certainly wasn't easy, but meant it was a one-way trip back to the car.

This April day the bush was quiet. Sometimes you get a feeling of company or impending action, but today there was little happening. I pushed past where I'd shot the three, wistfully half expecting to see some action, but nothing. Further round there was quite a lot of sign, but no deer. Then, I spotted him: a big buck! He was lying down above me and, in that instant, he was up and away. As he careered through a gap in the scrub I squeezed the trigger as the crosshairs flicked across him. I was certain I'd connected and when I caught another glimpse, I nailed him again. Talk about fast action! In situations like this, where the action is close and fast, you don't have time to count the points or measure the length - it's all go! I knew he had a big head and sure enough he sported big, long antlers, but again one side let me down, and with no guard tine he scored only 185 3/8 DS, well short of the record book. He did win the Martin Marshall trophy for the best Fallow head shot by a NZ Deerstalkers Association Otago Branch member for 1982, and I was quite proud of that. I wondered where his does were, but when I skinned him and saw a lot of bruising on his shoulders I realized he'd been done over by a bigger buck, one who'd taken all his lady friends. **I had a look for that buck the next week, but no joy.**

It was a number of years before I had another decent crack at a Fallow buck. This time it was in the Wairarapa on private property. That's not fair, you might say. Yes, it's definitely not as hard as trying to shoot a big buck in the Blue Mountains, where there is pretty much daily pressure on deer, but big bucks are street-wise, smart and safety savvy, anywhere. In fact, most of the really big Fallow bucks shot today are shot on private property, as are a good number of big Red deer heads. That's one reason why so many big Fallow antlers today look like mini Moose heads - the bucks are allowed to live longer so they can develop bigger heads and they generally feed on better food. There's a lesson in that for us all.

That year I saw nothing of any consequence. The second year, 2019, gave me a little more success and hope: I saw one buck with a big head - he looked promising through the binoculars at about 250 metres distance as he ghosted down the hill with his does through loose manuka scrub. I made a quick decision to have a crack at him. I was using a new rifle, a Thompson Contender G2, in .357 Maximum, a cartridge few in New



It's always really rewarding just to watch deer - this Fallow doe is not quite sure what's happening



The disappointments continue; this good looking buck had only one antler



Another young buck with a promising head

Zealand will have heard of, let alone used. In these days of ultra long-range shooting, it wouldn't even rate, but I can shoot deer with it up to 300 metres, still a long enough shot for most hunters. I heard the whack of the 160gn Cutting Edge bullet and the buck rolled over and slid down the hill.

With a high sense of anticipation, I went to check the antlers. Despair! He was certainly big, but what a terrible head. First appearances had been deceiving. As you can see from the photo, he was no trophy. He scored in the 170's, with wide but uneven and ugly blades, a split in one side and, to top all that, he lacked a guard tine. In fact, the only good justification for shooting him was to remove him from the gene pool!

Later that week I got onto another buck, but he eluded me, and then on the last night before I had to catch the ferry, I spotted yet another buck. He looked really good. He was sitting down with his does on a small flat so I had time to check him out at long distance: long, wide blades, good length and spread, but dusk was against me. With no time to get within shooting range, that was it for the year.

As we know, the roar of 2020 was ruined by Covid. **I had my car all packed and ready to go on the day of the lockdown, and I decided to pull the plug an hour before the Government announcement.** So my trip after Sika and Fallow had to be shelved for a year. And so, with the arrival of 2021, we rolled into another year with hopes high. A week's hunting with son Tim in the Canterbury high country after big Reds didn't produce the big head we were hoping for, but you have to be realistic when hunting for trophies. **There aren't too many big ones shot, and if you do manage to get one, be grateful.** Then, over Easter, I had an accident as I headed up a mountain creek and a rock 'jumped' out at me and whacked me just above the knee. It effectively put me out of action for two weeks and ruined my roar hunting a bit closer to home. So it was with some trepidation that I headed to the North Island again - would my leg hold up, was I fit enough? As it turned out, I was OK, but again my time on Sika didn't produce a good head, so I headed back to the Wairarapa. The roar was in full swing, but my only initial reward was some photos of average-sized bucks.

I targeted the area where I'd spotted my old friend two years previously. It was just after dawn one morning when I heard the resounding croaks of a buck floating down the valley. It sounded promising and definitely got the adrenalin going, but a couple of hours later I was still looking. Then, when I moved out onto an open ridge near the top of the valley and sat glassing the faces, I saw him. It was a fleeting glimpse, but something didn't seem right**. Days later, I saw him again - same stag I was sure, but my initial unease was confirmed as I realized he had only one antler.** The other had broken off just above the coronet. I was certain it was the same animal I'd spotted two years previously. He had one big, long blade and great length, but one antler and the promise of what could have been didn't qualify for a trophy. Was I forever doomed to come



Owner - Allan Foot

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At last, after a long quest and many disappointing hunts, I finally secured a top Fallow buck. With 23 points, it scored 232 3/8 DS



across poor, uneven heads?

Sam, the manager of the property, then suggested he come with me to look at another area, one I hadn't targeted before. **He'd seen a buck with some promise days before, so I figured, 'why not'; I had nothing to lose.** The idea was to work ourselves into a position where we could use our binoculars to see if we could spot the buck. We encountered a few animals on the way, and I managed to get a photo or two. We found a good vantage point and sat, watching, waiting and hoping. I spotted a small group of does, but no buck. Time was quickly passing and dusk beginning to settle when Sam turned around and whispered to me, 'There's a buck behind us'. There he was, not 40 metres away, staring intently in our direction. He looked impressive, so I quickly raised my .22/250 and squeezed the trigger. He spun around and disappeared into the manuka. Minutes later we found him. He looked big, with good palms, length and guard tines, but it was all a bit of an anti-climax. A minute or so before, we'd been sitting there in anticipation, enjoying the evening and the view: the next minute we were looking over a trophy Fallow buck that had literally walked into our laps. **Isn't that the magic of hunting!**

It was one of the easiest Fallow I've shot, but in the context of many frustrating years of hard work looking for a trophy, you can understand why I had a smile on my face. **The buck scored 232 5/8 DS, putting it well up in the record book**. Three better heads were entered in the 2021 NZDA competitions, which just goes to show how good the Fallow heads are today. However, I did win the prize for the best head shot by a senior at the competitions.

Many years ago when I was involved in the Sika Competition, one hunter, while chatting to me, kindly told me I was in the twilight years of my hunting life. I'd just like to remind him that the last shot is not fired until the last shot is fired, and I'm not quite over the hill yet! **Perhaps that Fallow buck somehow knew that in giving up his head for me to display on my wall, it was a just reward for all my times of frustration and disappointment – I'd like to think so!**

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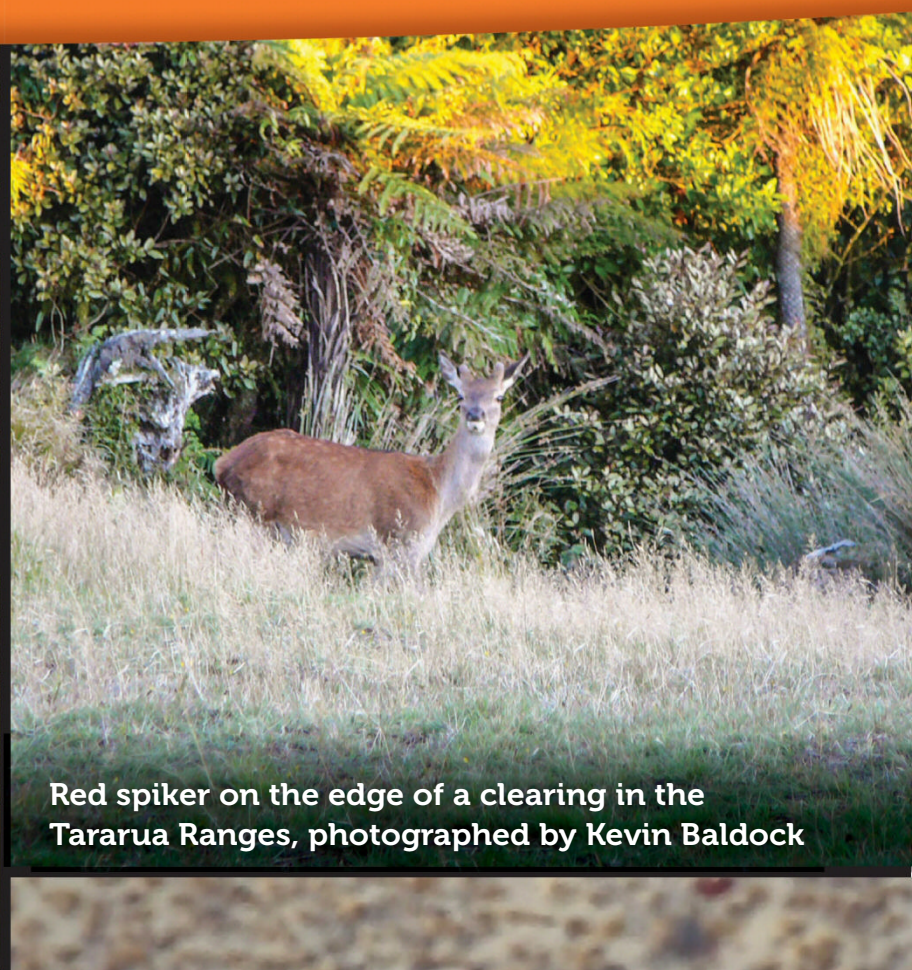
Syd Spence from Te Anau got a superb series of photos of this bull going to town on an Edith River clearing in the 2021 ballot

WINNER



Red spiker on the edge of a clearing in the Tararua Ranges, photographed by Kevin Baldock



Hannah Beynon got her timing perfect to catch this big stag



Blair Chamberlain surpised this young bull tahr on public land in the McKenzie country

Will Porter had no chance of a shot with the gun so he cut his losses and took a photo as a consolation prize

I took this photo of a young stag chasing around his hinds - Lachie Ensor

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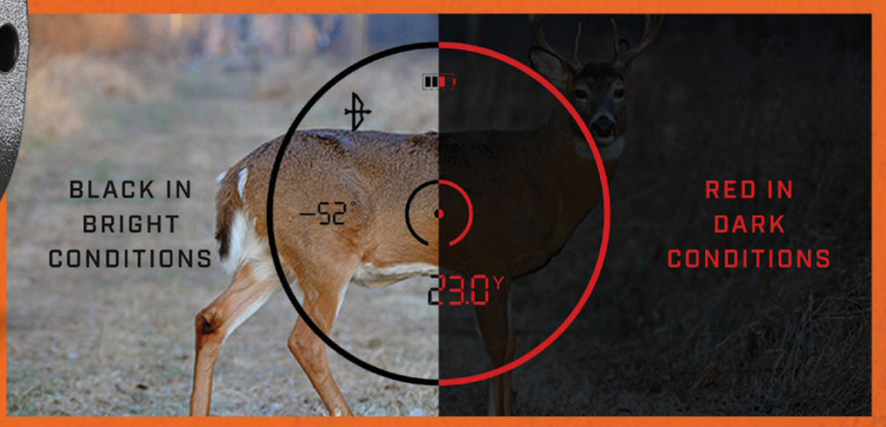



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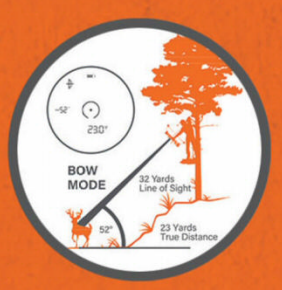

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TAHR TANGLE AT THE TARNS

WRITTEN BY
PAT BARRETT

With a good stretch of fine weather days looming on the Westland horizon our team of five; Bernadette (my daughter), Friar John, Sister Rachel, and Nathan, all headed for Fox Glacier. It was the starting point for a flight in with James Scott the next morning, to camp out on the tops for much of the week ahead

Though I had missed out on the ballot we were still keen to go and see what had transpired over the course of the hunt in another area I had marked out for just this purpose a few years back. A pub meal was a great way to begin the proceedings followed by an early might in preparation for an even earlier start on the morrow.

After arriving at James' heliport, we unloaded and sorted gear for the machine as the distant sound of approaching rotors reached us. His familiar purple chopper swung into view and set down for a quick load-up and got away with the first group, Bernadette, Nathan and I, for the campsite. A brisk sou' easter was flowing out of the main valleys, causing a few heavy bumps as we cut over the flats before sidling up under the brows of the hills ahead to avoid the worst of the gale. It soon reached us again as we crested the ridge and



Author and Bernadette



Nathan, Fr John and Sister Rachel

rattled the machine as James manoeuvred it for touchdown. Peaks, passes, and deep gullies spun around us and then tussock, close at hand, and billowing in the wind. We were down. Out quick-fast as James commanded the dismount and unload, then the machine was up and away to fetch the last two members while we surveyed the scene of rolling hills, lake, and bluff faces.

It is always an exciting experience to be at the roadside one moment and almost the next, to be on a high and lonely mountain shoulder, surveying the splendour of the hills and realising it was pretty cold, windy, and that a tent up might be a good idea! But not before the next drop-off.

"Saw some chamois over there', indicated Nathan, *"as we flew in".*

"That's promising", I replied, as Bernadette looked thoughtful. A powerful roar and whiff of kerosene heralded the arrival of the chopper once more and Fr John and Sister Rachel, the two non-hunters among us, disembarked; the 'observers', we called them.

With the wind now beginning to drop in strength it was a good time to establish camp at the lake and sort the cooking fly and other paraphernalia. Accomplished in fairly short order it left us the rest of the day and afternoon to take an early lunch and head for the hills in an effort to establish what else was about – particularly tahr.

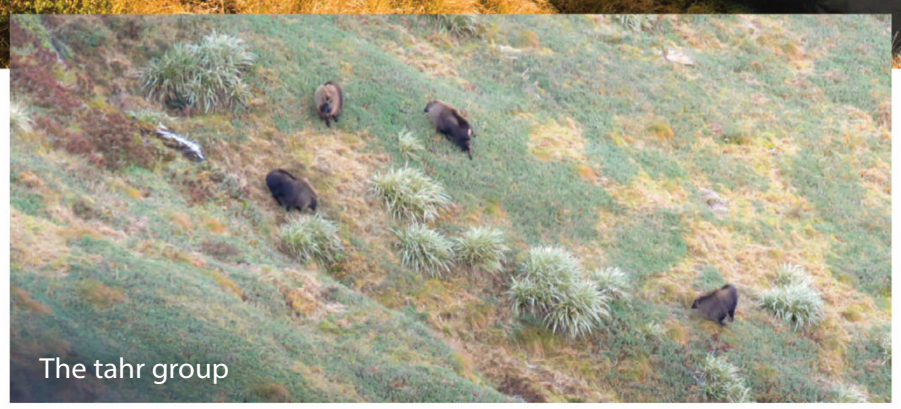
Nathan had headed out an hour before Bernadette and I and it was a surprise to get a call on the radio that he was now in sight of several tahr and that we should get down here quick! The rest of the kit was flung in packs and tents zippered as we made for the gap in the pass above the camp where we had last seen him.

A long sidle then ensued as we headed along the face to the deep gully to the east, above which hung the severely eroded faces of the encircling mountains. It was a dramatic scene, beyond which was the upper valley catchments and distant snowy summits.

The travel proved relatively easy, and we soon gained the spacious meadow beyond the face, where we guessed Nathan was holed up. I hadn't stopped glassing the bluffs the whole way through however, and suddenly I spotted a nanny tahr and soon after a large black bull,

Bernadette looking out over the West Coast and the Tasman Sea

Spectacular views from up high on the West Coast



The tahr group



My bull on the first day

standing proudly above us on an exposed ledge. He looked big.

We took the time to assess him while calling Nathan that we might be onto something already. Moments later I decided that he was definitely a shooter and offered the shot to Bernadette who declined, saying it was a bit far for her.

Nathan arrived and I ranged the bull, which had started to move higher, at 350 metres. Finding a large platform-like rock I set up very comfortably for the shot, resting the rifle on the edge of it and kneeling in the tussock. I then ranged him again at 405 metres. Still doable, I thought. Boom! The shot raced away from my .270, a Barnes TTSX 110gn, hitting the rock face just below the bull. Though obviously rattled, he only moved slightly out of sight before returning to almost the exact same place, near the ridge top. Boom! Shot two soared upwards finding a solid mark on the bull's shoulder and sending the tahr into a spectacular somersault off the crest before catapulting downwards into the deep gulch below. Though he had disappeared out of view, I was very confident he was down for good, and it took just a few backward steps, to gain a view into the gulch and reveal his prostrate form in the streambed just above a waterfall. It looked difficult country, but out to the east there appeared to be a safe, if slightly circuitous route, up into the bluffs and then descending to the creek bed. With plenty of the afternoon ahead of us we carefully headed up the 100 metre ascent, and made use of some easy ledges to gain access to the gully above the waterfall and our tahr. He was a beauty, with a huge shaggy skin (I like these more than the heads!) and eventually went 11 inches on the tape.

Time to photograph the kill, take a good supply of meat and, most of all, that treasured hide. It was a long process on the steep ground, and then to return down slope and get back to camp just on dusk to the surprise of the observers! **What a fantastic first day on the hunt.**

The evening was memorable as dusk stole in over the lake and ridges, and deep shadows morphed into black spires on the

night sky, a small fire flickering among the tents. Even time for Mass – one of the bonuses of having a priest along! The next goal was for Bernadette to find a tahr.

Another two days of superb weather followed, combined with modest frosts in the basin where we were camped, allowing me time to stash the meat and skin away among the rocks where it didn't get any sun, having already frozen it overnight.

During this time, we scoured the ridges above camp and the hillocky terrain around that, searching for more tahr and for chamois. One morning I spied movement on the ridge crest above our camp and elected to make a solo journey up there at dawn the next day, leaving time for an afternoon hunt with Bernadette.

This played out well and by sneaking in downwind from the small pass at the ridgetop I located, to my surprise, a group of four deer, including a one antlered stag.



Nathan up high on the ridge



Bernadette checking out the terrain

They were completely unaware of my presence and so I had the luxury of choosing the best meat animal to take home. This turned out to be a large hind, which also presented the best shot at just under 175 metres. The TTSX took her out with no issues - so much so that the other deer just milled about wondering what had happened. They hung around for another five minutes, wondering what to do, as I considered taking another one, before trotting off into the valley head beyond.

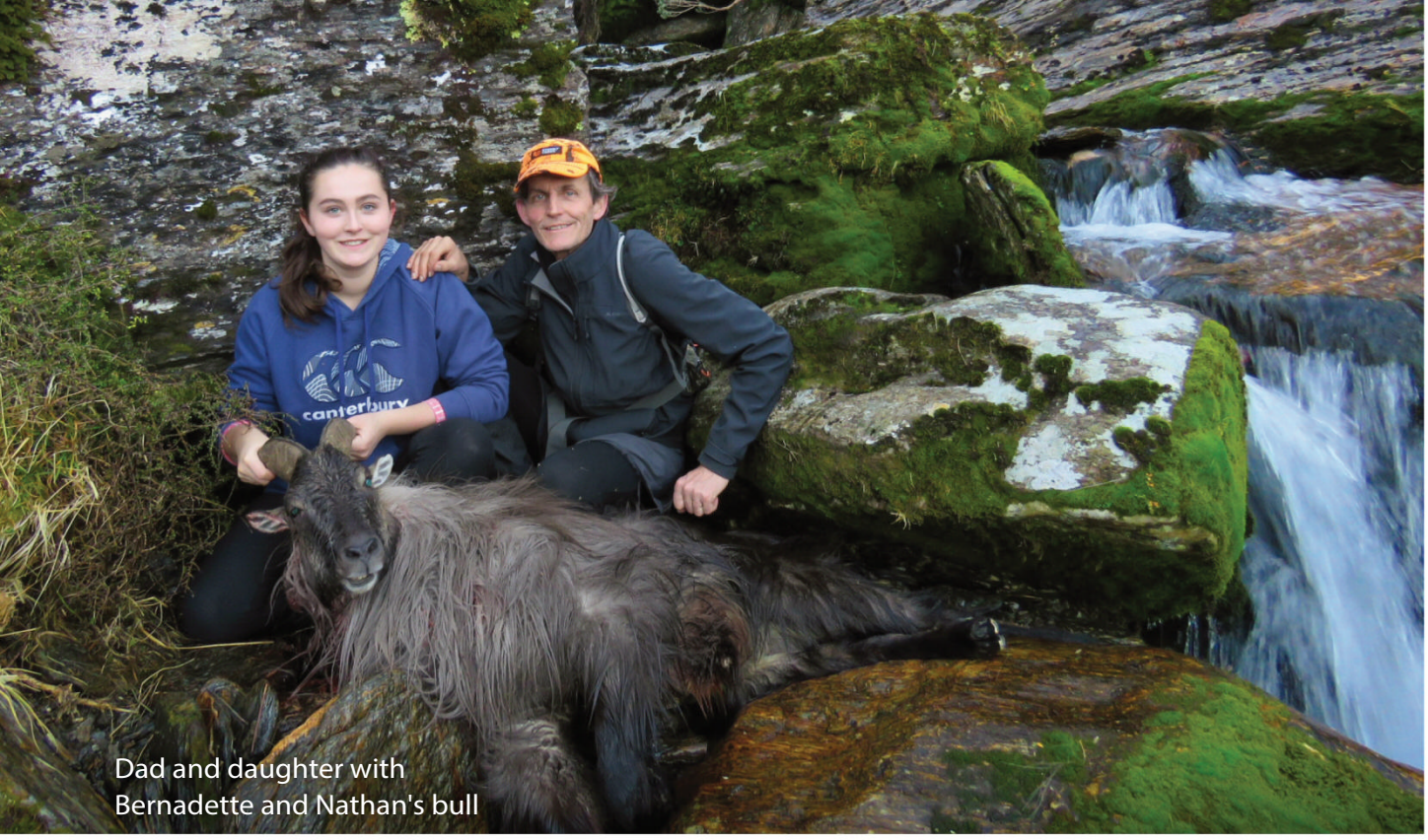
Clean up time for the carcass and a short haul back down to camp through the bluffs to arrive in time for morning tea. Bernadette was not the earliest of risers so by the time we got away everyone else had gone and it was just us two out for a look again. We headed back to the bluffs above the lake, keeping in touch with Nathan who had gone looking for chamois. As the afternoon wore on and the sun began to slip westwards, we spied a nice sunlit knob to rest up and survey the faces above.

Seeing nothing we decided to stay put until dusk. About this time Nathan arrived from his hunt, having missed a long shot at a promising chamois, and quickly announced, ***"Did you guys know there is a big group of tahr just over on the far side of the hill there?"*** A bit chastened we jumped to and located the animals, about ten in two groups - moving away. The chase was on.

They hadn't seen us, so we kept low and traversed carefully over into the steep-sided gully, trying to shorten the distance for Bernadette to secure a good shot. Closer and closer. Most of the group had now moved well off, up the valley side, but two were making their way back toward us. Three hundred metres, 275, 250, 200, 175. Stop. That's it, ***"Bernadette, take the shot!"***

It was a difficult angle and hard to find a good rest, but with some encouragement she set up and got a shot off as the bull came to a halt, broadside on. The shot went wide and he bolted, but in our direction. As he stopped again at 125 metres Bernadette found her mark, but it appeared to be too low, and though hit, he bolted again, into the gully below. Nathan then came to the rescue with his old trusty .303, scoring another hit which just seemed to fire the bull up again and he hurtled through the gully to the far side and into thick scrub. Time to rethink our plan here, I thought.

There was now a very real chance that we might lose him altogether in the thick monkey scrub downstream of us – not a good prospect. So, we headed slowly down the face into the streambed and sought him out. He was holed up again and as he bolted once more, we marked carefully where he was aiming for – an



Dad and daughter with Bernadette and Nathan's bull

overhang under the bank beside the stream. This was our chance. Nathan was well ahead of us however, so this negated the chance of getting a safe shot away at the tahr.

It was just too risky. As I considered our options, I could see Nathan approaching the 'cave' where the tahr was hiding from above and out of sight. Surely, he can see it and he'll take a close range shot at it, I thought. There was no way either of us were risking any shooting now, with Nathan and the bull so close together. What unfolded next I thought really only happened in Boys' Own Annuals.

With his rifle slung over his shoulder, Nathan crept toward the unseen and unsuspecting tahr, then grabbed at it, sending it roaring off with him on its back, over a small waterfall in the stream and completely out of sight. A few tense moments ensued with us both calling to see if Nathan was still in the land of the living. Back came a faint, *"Help..."*

We both raced on over to the edge of the terrace and dropped down into the stream where, after a minute, we found Nathan, bold as brass, standing in the water, knife in hand and a dispatched bull tahr at his feet – below the small waterfall over which they had tumbled. Nathan was a little worse for wear and hobbling, due to having been rammed in the groin by the tahr after they went for a dip together, but the smile said it all!

Whew, we were glad the tahr was the only casualty, and quick action by Nathan having saved the day. There were lots of pictures to take and relief to voice, but we had our booty. It was yet another full skin recovery as well as head and meat –Bernadette wanted the lot. We were late back to camp that night, tired and a bit bedraggled. Fr John and Sister Rachel couldn't believe the story but, we assured them, it was true.

The remainder of our time was spent looking for more tahr in other areas above camp, climbing to the summit of a minor peak for fantastic views of Mt Cook and the Main Divide, along with hunting out the elusive chamois to the south and west of camp. We didn't manage to find any however, but we did capture a magnificent sunset over the Tasman Sea which more than made up for it. And Nathan? Well, he headed back to the tahr gully for another tangle with the tahr and managed to secure his own trophy, but this time without the rodeo and knife stunt. **That was pleasing.**



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WRITTEN BY ~ RICHARD WILLIAMS

MR CONSISTENT

I woke to the sound of my alarm beeping away

Now, I'm not a morning person, but when it's hunting or fishing related, I'm out of bed in a flash. I flicked on the kettle and popped the bread into the toaster. The gear was loaded into the truck, and I began the drive to the DOC car park in the Ruahines where I would meet my mate, Brad.

When getting out of the truck, the wind was a lot stronger than forecast, but at least it was blowing in the right direction for the morning's hunt. With packs shouldered and headlamps on we began the one and a half hour climb up the DOC track.

Now I'm blaming the extra Covid kilos and the fact that I've spent more time fishing than hunting the past year, but at this stage, I was regretting the latté sachet coffee as I was beginning to feel sick.

A few more stops on the way up, stripping off layers of clothes and sucking water from my hydration bladder, we were near the top just in time to see the sky beginning to lighten. **Brad had hunted this area the week prior and bagged a nice eating yearling.** He closed the gap on a stag that ended up giving him the silent treatment.

It was now the 3rd of April, Easter weekend, and I always feel a little bit uneasy hunting public land this time of year. Dressed like a roadworker, I let out my first roar of 2021. **Not surprisingly, our old mate from the week prior let out a reply, followed by another stag further on.**

We decided to drop down the ridge and chase this elusive stag. As the bush lightened up we slowly made our way down the ridge on some well used deer trails. It had been some time since I had taken a DOC deer, so hinds and yearlings were also a target. There was very little sign on this side, and no animals spotted.

As we negotiated our way down into the stream below and up the steep half-used deer trail on the other side, slipping on a tree root and smashing my elbow in the process, we were now on the same ridge as the stag, and had finally gained enough height. We let out a low moan and waited for a response..... nothing. **This stag didn't want to play the game.** After pushing through the ever-noisy crown fern we found some decent well-rubbed trees and well turned up ground. While standing there, contemplating and coming up with our next plan, we heard a roar that sounded reasonably close.

Slowly we made our way further up the ridge and let out a roar. He replied instantly and we could see that he was on another ridge, just across a small stream opposite us. We kept pushing towards him, exchanging roars. He did sound quite fired up but also would not move from his position. Dropping down into a small stream we negotiated the initial steep climb up the other side.

He let out another roar which felt like it rumbled through my body. I'm not going to lie - it was quite a rush hearing it so close in the thick bush, but still, we noted the possibility of it being another hunter.

As we slowly stalked up the ridge, the wind was swirling, and it suddenly went awfully quiet - another stag had slipped away.

Being 11:45am, we stopped for some lunch, salami and cheese crackers with a side of biltong. Discussing further ideas and letting out the odd roar, we decided we had two options: a roar that sounded


A view up the big slip


Slippery boulder walking for the way out


A friendly fantail

more like a hunter and was closer to the DOC track that we had walked in on, or the stag we named Mr Consistent, as he would always reply with a low moan. **The trouble here was that he was some fair distance away.** A quick check on the windy app showed the wind changing to the opposite direction at lunchtime. As it was Easter weekend and there was a greater possibility that the roar was more human-like, we decided to target Mr Consistent, some three or four ridges over.

Yet again, we dropped down the ridge across the small stream and up the other side. This continued several more times, and around an hour or so later, we arrived just opposite the face that he was on.

Luckily for us, the wind did change its direction, and there was another deer roaring further down the valley to keep Mr Consistent roaring.

We could see a big slip on the right hand side of the stag. If we climbed up the slip face, we could hopefully avoid him hearing our movements and ducking into the bush.

Yes, as you could've guessed, it was another descent into a stream, and we were on our way up the steep slip face. Again, the lack of fitness and extra Covid kilos were starting to take their toll on me.

The sun was out in full and the wind was now a light breeze. Plenty of sweat was starting to show as we neared the face of the slip. Entering the bush at the top of the slip, we heard the stag moan again. He was a lot lower than we had first thought, and with the bush looking terribly thick, we soon found ourselves back out on the slip and slowly descending 80 or so metres.

We found an excellent opening that looked like reasonably clear bush. Now, I'm more of a slip type hunter, and Brad is more of your typical bush hunter. He was constantly telling me to slow down and take my time. Mr Consistent was still letting out the odd moan as we sidled our way across and down the ridge.

I thought I was super stealth until I turned around to see where Brad was. He gave me the look of 'slow the **** down'. It had now been another five minutes, and we hadn't heard another moan, so I decided to stay put as I had some reasonable visibility in front of me.

The wind was still in our favour, and we had been super quiet. Well, Brad was. Me - I was trying my best, but weighing 112





We finally caught up with Mr Consistent, I was ecstatic to count 11 points



kilograms without any gear makes this slightly more complex for me. However, I had a feeling that something was not quite right as Mr Consistent was now quiet. I decided to load a round into the chamber and apply the safety, and was keeping my eyes peeled when I saw what looked like a flash of orangey-brown pass through an opening, followed by an antler.

I spun around and looked up at Brad, who was about 10 metres up and behind me. The look on his face told me that he had seen what I had seen. No more than ten seconds later, I could see the stag walking up towards us. It seriously amazes me how, despite his size, he made absolutely no noise making his way through the thick bush. **After clearly identifying my target, I shouldered my rifle and waited for an opportunity.** Suddenly, the stag stopped at around 30 metres. We both locked eyes and almost instantly I squeezed off on his shoulder.

The stag took off downhill. I started to question whether I had knocked my scope when I fell earlier in the day, but Brad explained that the stag jumped as I shot so this gave me a bit more hope. We waited a good five minutes before descending in the direction he travelled; there were fresh marks yet no signs of blood. **30 metres lower, and I could smell that distinctive strong and musty stag odour.**

There he was, down and out, no more than 40 metres from where the shot was made. He had fallen awkwardly and I could see one long antler sticking out. The typical head in the Ruahines and in this area is a small scrubby six or eight point stag. After dragging him out from where he had fallen I was ecstatic to count 11 points.

There is always some emotion after taking an animal, especially a bigger and older stag. The fact we have chased this stag over the past four to five years, and he had always given us the slip, made it a little more rewarding. He certainly wasn't dumb, and we were just lucky, even though I think we executed the plan very well.

After a few photos I set to work on removing the meat, boning it out to try and keep the weight down.

Shouldering the heavy pack we made our way back down to the stream before cutting back up three ridges later, leading us back to the DOC track. As already mentioned, those Covid kilos were not helping me on the way out. After plenty of sweat, slipping and blisters we were back at the truck.

The sun had just begun to set, and we had been on our feet for around 13 hours. Feeling exhausted yet super stoked, I started my drive home, reflecting on another fantastic day on the hill securing an awesome Ruahine bush stag. **Until the next adventure, I'm sure that I will still have those extra Covid kilos and swear and moan just as much as on this trip.**



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SOUNDING OUT THE RUT

WRITTEN BY ~ KEVIN WATSON | ADVANCED ARCHERY

For me, the sound of a Fallow buck croaking his heart out brings a sense of anticipation like no other. The deep grunts lack the volume of a Red roar or the eeriness of a Sika's call, but there's nothing quite like the circus that surrounds a dominant buck in the rut. As a bowhunter, I absolutely love trying to get within bow range (40 yards and under) of a rampant buck

A Lek

Without doubt, the easiest way to sneak in on a Fallow buck is to know where a lek is located. A lek is a staging area for a buck to strut his stuff and announce to all that he's ready to mate. My experience is that these are not overly common, as I have only located two on the many properties I have hunted. One was at South Head and the other at Whanganui.

The Whanganui lek stands out to this day in how impressive it was and how strongly deer were drawn to it. Located on a large

A fantastic photo by Steve Couper

flat in a tight bush block, it was excellent to stalk into and observe bucks.

Over the years it had been etched into a four-metre round patch of churned earth by thousands of hoof prints. The location was a perfect spot to ward off challengers, with enough feed and cover around it for the many does that would come in to be serviced. **Here the does came to the buck, keeping the buck tied to that area.**

The Sound

You can hear a buck croaking from several hundred yards away, and although it alerts you to the obvious, (a buck is near), it can be hard to know just how close he might be. For bush hunting you need to listen for the does. When a doe is ready to mate she will emit a series of meows, a little like a cat. I have found this can be heard from around 100 yards away, dependant upon the wind direction and one's own hearing.

Before hearing a doe, I will move relatively quickly. If you do bump something it is unlikely to matter. **It won't be the buck and you are too far from the action for a spooked animal to upset things.** Even if it's a doe that decides to bark at you, there's so much going on that any alarm calls will be ignored. Once you hear the meowing slow down, right down, look and look. The buck is at the centre of the noise and to get to him you need to safely navigate all the satellite bucks, spikers, does and yearlings that will be in the area.

The Wind

The wind is a dominant factor in how you approach a lek or any staging area. Often wind direction is not consistent in the lek area, and they are situated lower down where the wind can swirl and/or back-eddy. Rather than try to move into range I will wait where the wind is unlikely to reach the lek. Given all the comings and goings it is safer to let the buck present you a shot by coming closer, chasing a doe or another buck for example. This way you have the upper hand as you are not moving, but everything else is.

If you are fortunate to locate a permanent lek by default, you also locate the most dominant buck in the area. My wife Carol shot the dominant buck off the lek in Whanganui, a mature buck scoring into the 180's. For the property this was very good. The next day I was in the same area and to my surprise there was another mature buck already on the lek. He had taken over the spot in less than 24 hours.



Less than 24hours had passed before this buck took over the lek after Carol shot her buck off there the day before



This is the closest a buck came to using the "licking branch" I installed over a mock scrape



Mid-rut saw this young buck preach. This is the spot I got one thousand photos a month during March and April and helped me come to my conclusions on hunting scrapes

Targeting Bucks

Over the last few years I have worked on hunting Fallow from trees. After a slow start it has become reasonably productive for non-trophies. For the bowhunter the close proximity to game by hunting high is invaluable, but targeting bucks is another story. I have looked at ambush spots and then found a way for a buck to stop of its own accord. **If you call for them to stop, they are on high alert and may dodge an arrow launched at them.**

Scrapes seem the logical thing to target as it works extremely well on whitetailed deer, the most hunted deer in the world. While there is some similarity between the species Fallow do not use scrapes in the same way. Whitetail bucks will check out scrapes from their bedding areas up to where they head out to either feed or look for hot does. Mock scrapes work well as a buck and other deer will use these as a community message board (seeing who is in the area). A "licking branch" is used to augment a mock scrape. **A licking branch is simply stick 25mm thick and 1500mm long, hung vertical at belt height, on which deer rub their facial glands.** It seemed a brilliant idea, so I tried it on Fallow. I made a mock scrape and hung a licking branch. A game

18+

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The buck laying between two scrapes. One of the rare times a scrape has helped me shoot a Fallow deer



Thirty-five yards to Carol's right is the dominant buck. While trying to get a shot this young buck trotted in to seven yards



Carol walking up on the buck she shot off the lek

camera recorded over 400 encounters as Fallow deer passed by. Unfortunately, only four were of deer using the licking branch and two of those probably just bumped into it. This experiment was an epic fail. Recently I researched a technical paper concerning how a herd of in Europe used scrapes. If I had read this first I wouldn't have bothered with the licking branch. The report stated the bucks did use the scrapes but predominately as territory markers, as opposed to a message board.

By chance, I had previously done my own "research" which backed up the paper's findings. I placed a game camera over what would become a large scrape/rut pad. Looking to see what deer movements were in an area I was keen to hunt, I put a camera up at the end of 2019. I never got to hunt it as, like much of New Zealand in April 2020, I was stuck at home. The area surrounding the camera could best be described as a doe bedding area which hopefully by April would become a buck magnet. The camera averaged a thousand photos a month during March and April, and I hoped to see a pattern emerge which I could use to my advantage, but there wasn't one. **Even though the camera snapped thousands of photos they were at random times and days.** Bucks could appear an hour after dawn, two hours before dark and anytime in between, and rarely on consecutive days. This made it impossible to know when to hunt in the area. There was only one series of photos that showed a buck mating a doe. The buck doing the deed had visited the spot more often than other bucks but during the rut he would disappear for days at a time. I gave up on the area as one to shoot a buck from with a bow.

It's not to say it won't happen on a scrape, but it won't happen often.

In Practice

I did shoot a 220DS plus buck heading to one but I wasn't hunting a scrape on purpose. I heard the clash of antlers as I made my way through some heavy bush. On the way to the bush edge, I came across a large fresh scrape at the top of a small grass finger. The clash of antlers had me quickly covering the 30 yards to the bush edge. Tucked in behind some pepperwood I watched two solid bucks parallel walking. They clashed a couple more times before they worked out who was the winner. They were 200 yards away and I accepted the fact there was no chance to hunt them. Hunting can take some interesting turns and, in this case, one of the bucks turned and began walking towards me. **Could he be heading to the scrape behind me?** If he was, I needed to move 25 yards to my left. I did this quickly, nocking an arrow as I went. Kneeling down under the low canopy of the thick bush edge scrub I discovered I only had one small window to shoot through. The buck was 100 out, 75, 60, and as the buck got closer my heart rate increased. I could hear the buck walking so came to full draw. Ten more steps and he was going to be in that gap. Antlers soon filled it. A loud "Mmaaa", halted him. My sight pin settled on his chest and moments later the arrow sliced through. The buck ran 40 yards before dying next to the scrape.

If you do come across bucks parallel walking, you have found two mature animals. I have only witnessed it four or five times during the rut. While infrequent, it is something that can work to your advantage.

Sound will be your friend in the rut. It's been my most successful method of finding bucks. **Whether it's a buck croaking, a doe meowing or antlers clashing all will help you locate and hopefully kill a mature buck.**

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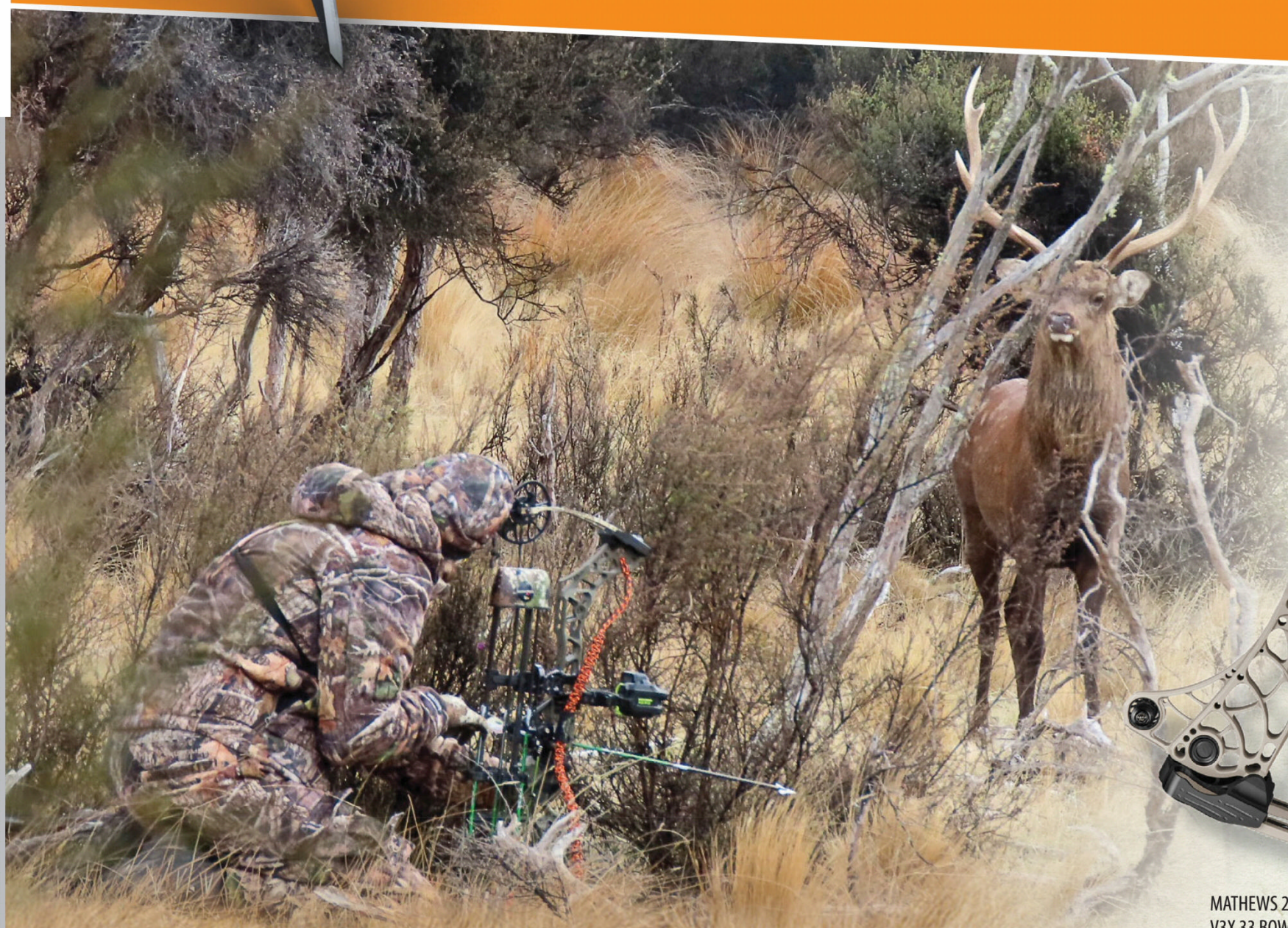



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I had carefully closed the gap from 150 to 25yards of this mature sika stag while he was bedded. Patiently waiting an hour and a half, the stag eventually stood up to check a distant roar and in an instant was standing just seven yards away from me. After a heart pumping three-minute stare down, the stag moved off and out of sight. Unfortunately the stag never gave me an opportunity to draw my bow before it moved away. While a shot hadn't been fired it had truly been a memorable experience.

Carol Watson, *Owner, Advanced Archery NZ*

PC: Mitchell Ewart

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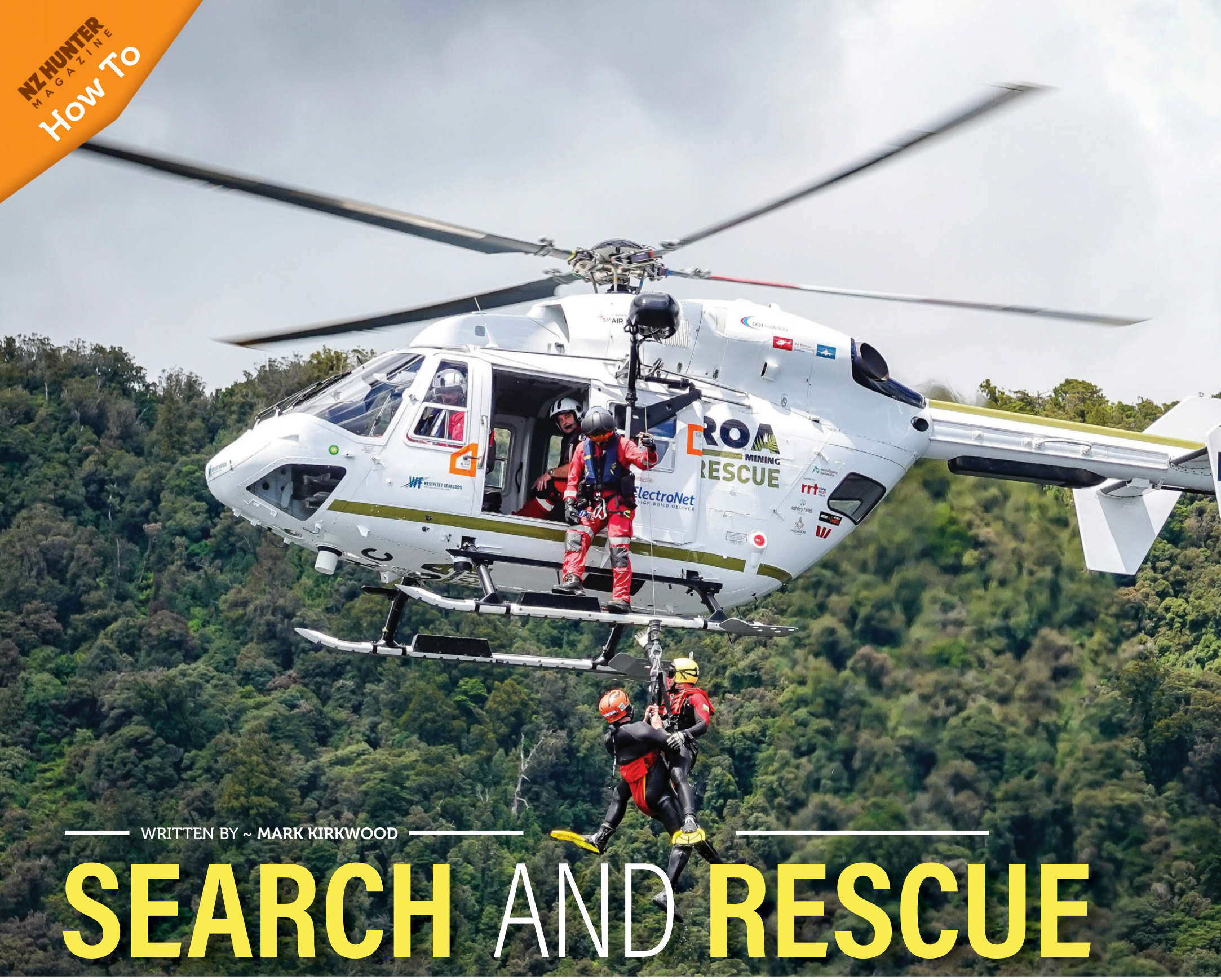

WRITTEN BY ~ **MARK KIRKWOOD**

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Even the best laid plans with the right preparation can go wrong in the great outdoors

For experienced West Coast hunter, Hamish*, doing all the right things couldn't prevent a life-threatening situation following a nasty fall in the Karangarua Valley

I've lived in the South Island all my life and have been hunting since I was a child. I grew up reading about Phillip Holden's exploits and love getting out there - even if I don't see anything. I hunt somewhere new most roar periods and have spent time hunting tahr and chamois in South Westland.

I had some leave coming up and was looking forward to getting away from work. The weather forecast looked good so I packed up the truck, ensured I had a permit and told my partner where I was going and when I would be back - I always text her when I get out. I hit the road, stopping off at Fox Glacier for a last-minute coffee on the way, and parked my truck at the bridge at the Karangarua River. The weather was great so, full of enthusiasm, off I went.

Walking upstream from the bridge I soon started to see deer sign. **I carried on walking and crossed the sometimes dangerous McTaggart Creek without too many problems, and spotted some shootable deer but decided to leave them.** I did some glassing and soon saw my first tahr off in the distance. Making the hut mid-afternoon, I dropped my gear, checked the hut book - it looked like there hadn't been anyone in the area for a while. I filled in the hut book, writing down where I was intending to hunt, detailing the north facing slopes east of the hut.

I had a few hours of daylight left, so grabbed my rifle and headed out, walked upstream for a bit and started glassing for some animals. I soon spotted some and one tahr looked quite good, so I went up a bit of a spur line to get a better look. It was a fantastic place to be, and the wind was in my favour - so I got closer. I was thinking at the time *"wow, these hills sure are steep"*, and was blowing hard even though I'd done some training - but obviously not enough. My position wasn't the best, so I left my pack there and moved around a knob so I could get into an assessing/shootable position. I was feeling quite chuffed with myself - my first day and I was onto a good animal!

That's when things started to go wrong.

My foot slipped on a bit of scree and I fell hard with intense pain shooting through my leg. I sat there for a while taking stock and cursing. I had a couple



A West Coast rescue operation



A pack's worth of hunting gear

of hours of light left so I decided to try and make it back to the hut. **But with only two steps I was a crumpled heap and my pack was still out of reach.** I wouldn't be going anywhere. In all my time hunting, I was now in trouble - and I knew it.

My situation had me worried like you wouldn't believe. Fortunately, I had a Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) attached to my belt and not buried in my now 'out of reach' pack. I set off the PLB wondering if it would work and how long it would take for someone to come get me. I was pressing the button continuously thinking that if this thing doesn't work, "I'm stuffed". **I'd heard somewhere if you set off your PLB it's best to stay in the same spot if possible.** That was easy - I didn't have the option of moving. It was a very off feeling to have my life relying on a $330 PLB that I had never used before. My partner had bought it for me – I'm now super glad that I had it.

I lay there with my leg elevated for what seemed an eternity, wondering if the PLB had worked. I pressed the button a few more times. **After about an hour I thought I heard something, then the sound got louder.** Because it was coming from the north/west I couldn't see it due to the sun, but eventually I saw a white helicopter approaching me. It hovered off to the side of me.

I remember thinking "hallelujah" and feeling an immense sense of relief. I pointed at my leg and the crewperson waved to me that they understood. The helicopter went down to the valley floor then returned, and a crewperson was winched down to do an assessment. She told me it was the rescue chopper from Greymouth and all would be well. I was given a helmet and safety goggles, put into a stretcher and winched with the crew person up and into the helicopter. **My rescuer was very calming and I could tell that they all knew their jobs.**

I eventually got to Te Nikau hospital in Greymouth and called my partner. They told me the Rescue Co-Ordination Centre had rung them as the contact for my PLB and asked lots of questions. My partner was very relieved to hear my voice. I'm just so glad I had a PLB, otherwise I would have been lying there for days until my partner called to report me as overdue. It's not lost on me what the worst outcome could have been.

UNPACKING THE SCENARIO

While Hamish's story is fictitious* it's based on real experiences and information collected from a number of previous search and rescue operations involving hunters and is an all-too-common occurrence for Search and Rescue on the West Coast.

The West Coast region encompasses areas north of Karamea to south of Haast, covering long distances and a variety of terrain. Our workload is busy, especially over the summer months when there are more people hunting, tramping and biking. Over 2021-22 New Year period and in the space of only two weeks, we had 22 Search and Rescue incidents.

So, what happens when you set off your PLB, another device, or you're reported as overdue?

When it comes to distress beacons and satellite emergency notification devices, the differences are really in the functionality, says Rodney Bracefield from the Rescue Co-Ordination Centre NZ (RCCNZ).



A team doing alpine exercises



Specialised crew searching canyons

"406MHz PLB distress beacons are an emergency notification device only. These devices provide a distress signal and a homing signal. While they must be registered, they do not require any subscription or service fee. Satellite Emergency Notification Devices (SEND) offer a commercial subscription-based communication service operating via commercial satellites. These devices offer a range of services that can include two-way messaging, GPS tracking and an SOS alert. However, they do not have a homing capability and if you move then it is necessary for the RCCNZ to be able to communicate with the SAR asset (Heli/Police) to advise of the changing location."

So, in short, if you must activate your PLB/SEND device, please stay where you are if possible.

The best way to keep safe out there is to always have a distress beacon or device. But what would happen if you didn't have one?

In these circumstances, the first Search and Rescue would know of an overdue person would usually be through notification from family or friends when they call Police via 111. Following this, the Police On-Call Search and Rescue (ONC SAR) team is notified. The informant is contacted to get as much detail as possible about the missing person. While not exhaustive, information about the person's gear and equipment, vehicle details, medical conditions, where they normally go, their fitness and hunting techniques all form part of the picture. From there a search urgency assessment is completed.

Some searches/rescues require an emergency response, some are a more measured response depending on the circumstances. Post-assessment, an Initial Incident Action Plan is formed in consultation with LandSAR Team leaders. This identifies initial response tasks to complete, considers various scenarios, behavioural traits, mobility and locations that may attract a lost or injured person.

If the missing person has a SEND device, we will try and get a message to them. If livetrack is enabled, we go straight to their last position. If not, the Search and Rescue Operation continues.

South Westland Alpine Cliff Rescue team leader, Marius Bron, takes us through the next steps.

"On the West Coast the initial taskings are typically to check carparks for vehicles to determine if they are still in the area. We fly the intended routes, aerial search decision points and linear features, check for sign around huts to determine direction of travel, boot prints, how many etc, photograph the hut book entries, and talk to anyone we see along the way."

If the missing person isn't located on the aerial sweep, ground teams would then be deployed searching the linear routes/higher probability areas first – this is usually creeks, ridges, any likely passages of travel. If, following the initial taskings having been completed, the missing person(s) is still not located then we move into extended search planning. This involves sectoring the search area and begin searching each sector.

"We might utilise Swift Water Rescue and/or CanyonSAR teams to search the creeks and rivers. We use the Alpine Cliff Rescue team to do the tops and other high-risk areas. We often search areas several times using different methods, coming in from different directions."

Searching for hunters is more difficult due to the clothing/equipment used – which is designed to blend with the terrain. Some searches require a lot more resources and time, which is mostly attributable to a lack of planning, not entering information into hut books, sub-standard gear, overestimating their ability, no distress beacon and generally thinking they can go "old-school".

Search and Rescue will do their absolute best to find you and don't give up easily. But what can hunters do to prevent getting into trouble in the first place? And, if a search and rescue operation is required, make it easier for us to find you?

WHAT CAN YOU DO

- **Check the terrain and be realistic as to your ability.**
- **Check the weather. Don't push it if the weather forecast is bad.**
- **Carry a distress beacon or SEND device. If using an Inreach, a nightly email to your contact is advised (email gives your location, text does not). Use the livetrack (ensure you have given your contact access before you leave). Always carry a power bank.**
- **Have an item with a RECCO reflector on it. RECCO can be located with a detector and doesn't need a battery/upkeep. This greatly increases your chance of being located. The 19 day Kahurangi search during lockdown was concluded by finding RECCO signal.**
- **Wear a blaze item of clothing.**
- **Carry extra gear/food in case you must spend a night/s out.**
- **Leave good information with a trusted person, detailing all your gear, and ideally including photos.**
- **If you are lost/injured, try to make yourself as visible as possible. Light a safe fire, shine a torch when you hear a helicopter, start blowing your whistle to alert other hunters or to attract a rescue party nearby.**
- **Log an entry into a hut book even if you are only passing through.**

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FIORDLAND FIRST TIMERS

WRITTEN BY ~ **ANDREW ALLEN**

The first week of April had finally rolled around, and we were headed off on our roar trip - destination Fiordland

Owen, Peter, Cam and I had spent hours and hours checking out topo maps and researching potential spots for the trip, most of which at the expense of our University studies. After great debate, we finally settled on one of the spots that I had found.

As none of us had hunted in Fiordland before, we were heading into the unknown. Driving to the start of the track we were greeted by several brief showers of rain, as well as a cold breeze, but the views of the fantastic country we were in were more than enough to offset the weather, as excitement and nerves brewed. **We reached the start of track, parked and locked the Lucky Lux, and started walking.** By this stage it was mid-morning, and the bush was peaceful. Letting out the occasional roar as we walked, I began to become slightly worried at the lack of responses, as well as the absence of any recent deer sign. With it being my spot, I felt slightly responsible for the success of the group. We arrived at the hut in the early afternoon, stopping at the edge of the hut clearing to glass the tops.

I smashed back my rice and tuna lunch while the other boys argued the finer points of cooking two-minute noodles in the bush, with each having their own way of cooking which made them taste 'so much better' than the other argued methods. With sandflies causing havoc, and it being close to 3pm, we started making a plan for the evening and the next couple of days. I was quite keen to head down the main river that night and up a side creek the following day. As the wind was favourable for this plan, and as no one else expressed any great desire to do anything different, we set out. Doing so involved walking several kilometres through either open swamp, or bush bashing our way down the side of it. I had so far managed to keep my boots dry, and so was quite happy to go with the bush option. **The others were not so keen, and so as a democracy, we went their way.** A medium sized stream crossed our route several times, so the absence of water from my socks was short-lived. The first three crossings were accomplished without any trouble, bar the wet feet, but it was the fourth that had some of us in laughing fits. Peter was the last one to cross, losing his balance mid-way and going for an impromptu swim, letting out a piercing shriek as he did so. He was properly soaked, how good! Luckily, he had kept his spare clothes in a dry bag, and so he was able to change into something warm without any trouble. **Carrying on, we started walking through drier, scrubbier country.** As we got to the edge of a thicket of matagouri it opened up, giving a pretty good view





The 7-pointer mid roar



Cameron and his stag



Cameron butchering his stag

of the rest of the river flats. Scanning the opposite bush edge I noticed a red body, followed by another. *"There's a stag!"* I exclaimed, without actually knowing if it was a stag or not. After a quick inspection with the binos, my claim was proven correct; there was a stag and hind. It was just a young stag, a fair bit of pedicle exposed and only a six pointer. None of us were particularly enthusiastic on the stag due to its age, and as it was so early on in the trip we agreed to leave them both in peace. **We were getting into some good country, so decided that it would be best to stay put until dark approached before continuing down the flats.** We chucked on our jackets and relaxed for the next hour, regularly checking the area where we had seen the hind and stag for something bigger, but to no avail.

As 5.30pm rolled around, we shouldered packs and carried on. After crossing more swampy country we reached a small knob on the edge of bush. As Cam and I pushed around it, I heard a roar. I looked at Cam and he confirmed that he had heard it too. Owen and Peter were still giggling away, but after a couple of hushed shut-ups sent in their direction, we heard another. We moved up the knob to try and get a view of origin of the roar, and happened to find a perfect lookout spot for the whole of the river flats. We dropped our packs and set up. **Pretty much as soon as we had done so the whole valley seemed to come alive with the sound of**



The eight pointer who emerged less than 100m from us



Looking up the valley



Owen and his stag

stags roaring! There were at least two on our side of the river flats, in the bush less than 300 metres away, and several more on the opposite side, as well as more down the valley. How cool was this! I was quite keen to stalk in on the stag that had let out the first roar, but as **I started organising myself for the bush stalk, Cameron alerted us to a supposedly 'huge' stag on the other side of the river flats,** jogging upriver towards where some of the other roaring was taking place. After having a look through the binoculars, we decided he was nothing special, and so refocussed on the ones closer to us. We let out several roars, but due to the howling head wind we were unsure if they were actually reaching them. Regardless, it was only a couple of minutes before one of the stags emerged from the bush. He was a seven pointer. Not especially long or old, but got me excited enough to set up, load my rifle and take a very good look at him through the scope. Despite none of the group having shot a proper stag on public land, it was decided that he hadn't reached his potential just yet, and on the first day of the trip there was no point in shooting him just for the sake of it.

The stag carried on roaring though, and all of a sudden, another stag, an eight pointer, appeared less than 100 metres from us. He was heading straight for the seven - they were going to have a scrap! As the eight approached the seven didn't fancy his chances, and took off down the river, leaving his patch to the eight in his absence. We were a bit disappointed as we had been excitedly anticipating watching a fight. The eight was a nice stag, but we put him in the same basket as the seven, thinking that he will be a better trophy in a couple of years. Several more stags emerged, with one in particular showing promise. Owen and Cameron were both keen on him, but he was standing in a patch of scrub and never presented a shot before darkness fell. We decided to camp just inside our current spot in the bush and try for a better look at him next day.

In the morning, we were all woken by a roar handy to camp. As it was still dark, we ate breakfast and packed up the tents before we went to look. We got to the same spot we had been in the previous night and began glassing the flats. Glassing the bush edge on the far

side of the clearing, I noticed a set of antlers in the foreground. Taking them away from eyes I noticed that the antlers belonged to an eight pointer no more than 100 metres way. *"There's a shooter right there!"* I exclaimed. Cameron was quite keen to take it, and no one else objected, so using my pack as a rest, he dropped the stag where it stood. Cameron was stoked - he hadn't nailed a trophy, but the stag's teeth, or lack of, showed that he was an old boy, which was exactly what we had come for. He and Peter set about butchering it while Owen and I carried on downstream to where we had originally planned on spending the previous night.

As we dropped down to the bush edge, Owen motioned for me to stop as four hinds gapped it for the bush. As the first stag we had seen the previous day was the only one holding a hind, we thought that we had just walked into the dominant stag's territory. He was nowhere to be seen, but there was four or five roaring hard in the bush close to where the hinds had disappeared. After roaring back and forth with them for some time, and with the day getting on, they began slowing in their replies until it became quiet. By this stage the wind had changed, ruining our original plan of heading up the side creek. Having seen as much action as we did on the flats in the previous evening, and with Peter and Cam now caught up with us, we decided to set up camp where we were and wait around until the evening to avoid disturbing anything that might be nearby.

It was around 3.30pm when we started hearing the stags again. Owen and I headed to where we had seen the hinds disappear that morning, while Cameron and Peter went across the river flats to where some others were roaring. Although the stags had been going hard when we had left camp, they soon quietened down again and stayed that way for the next couple of hours. Eventually a spiker walked out, and then two hinds, but still no stag. About half an hour before dark Owen and I were starting to get worried by the silence, and we wondered if it had been the best decision to hedge our bets on the evening. **Around this point we heard a gunshot from across the flats.** I reached for my two-way radio to ask the others if they had got something, but Peter beat me to it. The boys had been roaring back and forth with a stag for over half an hour, before finally enticing it out of the bush and Peter getting a bead on it.



Peter with a stag they'd finally enticed out of the bush

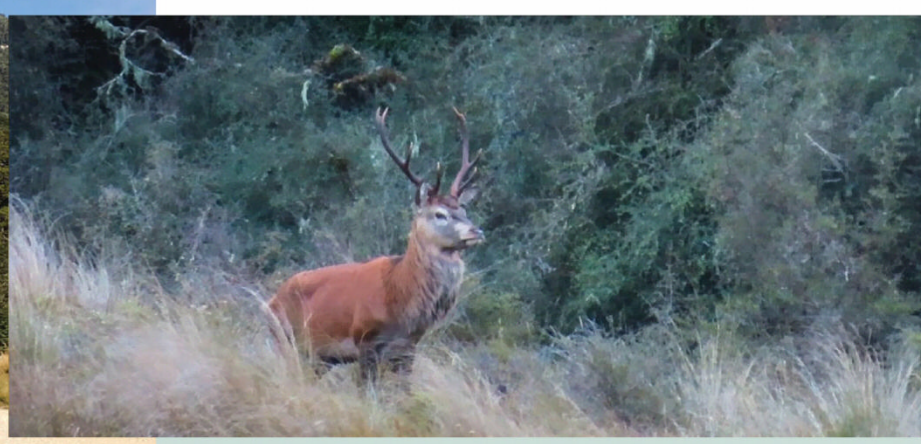


A foggy start to the last day

Feeling like we were getting left behind, Owen and I decided to stalk around the bush edge a bit further to see if something had come out there. **I pushed on in front, trying to get across a patch of open to the scrub when Owen told me to stop.** He had spotted a stag moving across the open. It was a ten pointer, and definitely seemed to be the most trophy-worthy animal we had seen so far. The stag however, was looking straight at us. With no rest for his gun, Owen and I were stuck frozen in the middle of the river flats. After a minute or two, the stag continued on its way, walking out of view behind a matagouri bush. We quickly moved up to the closest patch of cover and got organised, hoping that he was going to reappear. Being worried that Owen and I had spooked him, Owen let out a hind call. Boy did that work! He came running out of the matagouri patch, straight towards us. I fumbled with my phone trying to take a video, but had no time. With Owen all set up with the gun, I let out a hind call to stop him. This was an effective tactic, with the stag even being kind enough to even stand broadside. Owen released the 140gr .270 pill straight into the engine room. The stag made it 20 metres before he collapsed for good. Third stag down! Having turned my radio off when I first saw the stag, I radioed the boys to ask how big their stag was. Twelve points was the answer - Owen and I couldn't believe it! **We joked that they were probably having us on and it was most likely a scrappy ol' spiker.** After the routine photos with Owen's stag, we got into butchering it and made it back to camp just on dark, Cam and Peter not far behind. Owen and I took a good look at Peter's '12 pointer'. It



Peter, Owen and Cameron with their stags



looked as though the head had magically lost 4 points somewhere along the walk back to camp. Owen and I had called it! **Regardless, it was a cool first stag for Peter to take, and an awesome way to earn it.**

The original plan had been to hunt the following morning and then walk most of the way out in the afternoon, but still stay another night. However, with three of the group already having a stag, and Owen having to drive up to Christchurch for his flight the following day, it was decided that we would hunt our way back to the ute that day instead, and get out a day early. The morning broke foggy, but the stags were still roaring, leaving me reasonably confident that I would secure something as well. Owen and I headed out, leaving the other two for a sleep in. We managed to roar out a couple of stags from the bush, but nothing worth shooting. **After the boys caught up, we carried on walking out. We tried to get onto a couple of roars during our walk out, but the stags got the better of us each time**. The highlight of the walk was when I commented on how I was amazed I hadn't seen any fish in the beautiful river we were walking alongside, and as if it had heard me, a decent sized Rainbow swam out from underneath me! We continued on out to the Lucky Lux, getting there by mid-afternoon. We all thought the trip was a huge success, with all three of Cameron, Peter and Owen getting their first notable public land and Fiordland stags. A pact was made that we would have to come back again the following year to see how the ones that we left had developed. **Until next time Fiordland!**

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TAHR BALLOT BLOCKS

THE MAHITAHI

WRITTEN BY
CAM MCKAY | POINTS SOUTH

Looking down-valley from just above scrubline in the headbasin

The upper half of the Mahitahi Valley is equal parts impressive as it is intimidating, where you're surrounded by peaks over 2000m in every direction, with hanging ice and permanent snow on the shady face

The fairly straightforward pass in the head basin bears the name of one of our more notable early explorers Gerhard Mueller, who was responsible for surveying more than a few West Coast towns as well as many of Westlands more rugged valleys.

With Zora Creek just over the pass, the Jacobs to the north and the Otoko to the south. The Mahitahi Block is smack in the middle of some of our finest wilderness, and home to it's fair share of tahr.

With upper and lower landing sites you have the option of hunting the upper tussock country with its steeper sides and camping fairly exposed at about 1100m. Or the steep rocky creeks of the lower site with it's more sheltered but dark and cold campsite at about 700m. The lower camp has the benefit of being sheltered from the wind being in a couple of small openings in a patch of bush, but sees basically no sun. With just enough room for a couple of tents, and somewhat of a fire pit up against the side of a big boulder it's a good idea to start picking up any dry wood you see when you're not too far off camp at the end of the day.

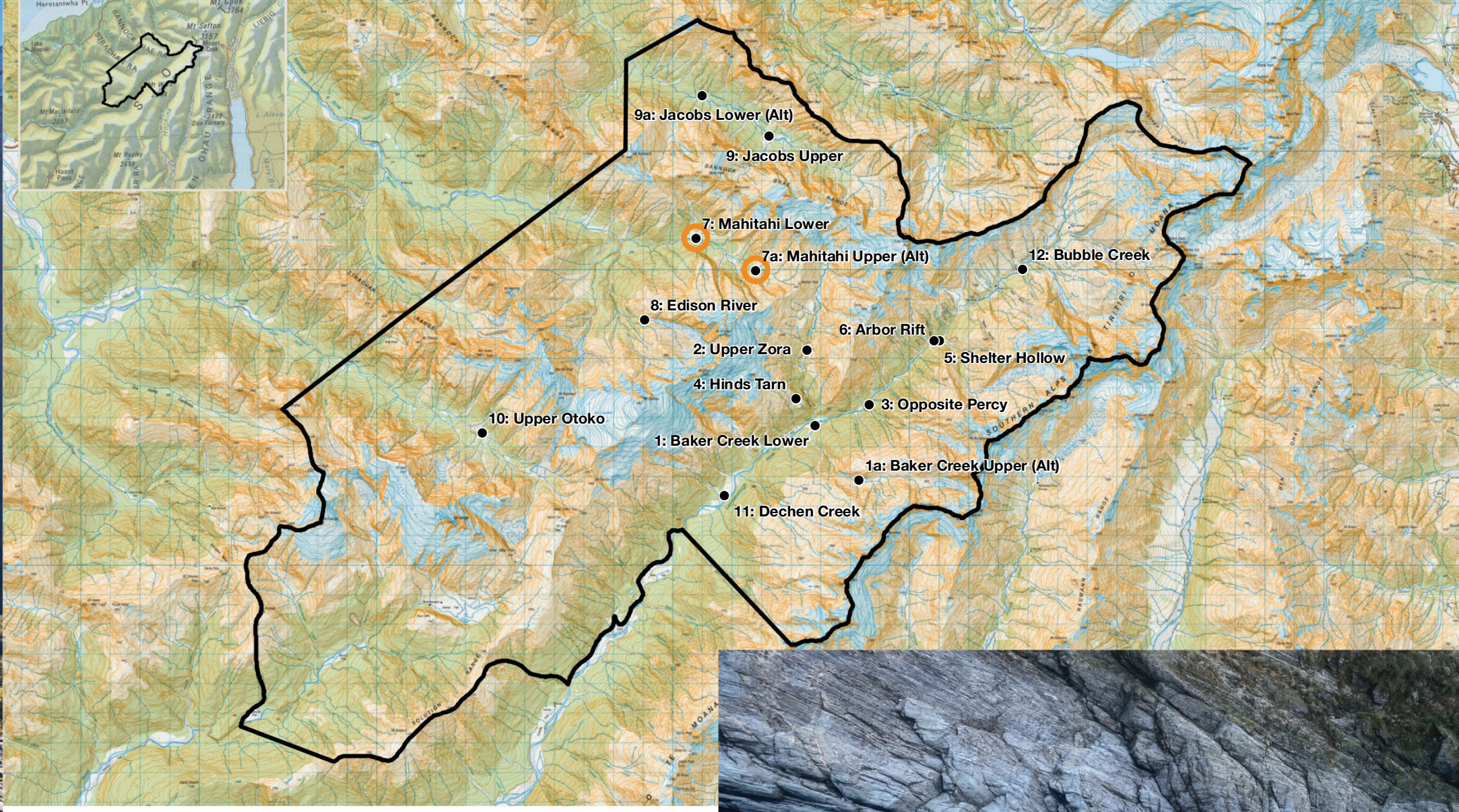
With tahr at all levels both sites are a good option, with plenty of ground to cast your binos



Chris McCarthy glassing from the lower landing site



High in Uraroa Creek look back towards the Edison River



over from camp. As always with Westland tahr hunting, but particularly with the Mahitahi area, it really is a game of waiting for that right bull to make a mistake and step in to the right place where you can actually have a chance of retrieving him.

Travel up and down the valley is pretty time consuming with a good mix of boulders and scrub to climb over, around and through. But really, it's a matter of just waiting it out in the right place for that one bull you've picked out as being the oldest.

Same as it's neighbouring valleys the helicopter pressure has pushed quite a population of tahr to now live in the bush, so be sure to do your bit and add a couple of nannies to the taxi ride home, meaning that next generation of bulls will do well with the extra tucker.

I know of a few nice bulls being taken in the Mahitahi over the years, the last time I was in there we took a nice 8-9 year old bull that was 13 1/2 from memory. And if we all keep doing our bit and let those bulls get some age, then we should see more going forward. **But really it's about experiencing some time in that classic Westland tahr country, just be sure to be sure footed.**



Chris McCarthy retrieving a bull from some steep country

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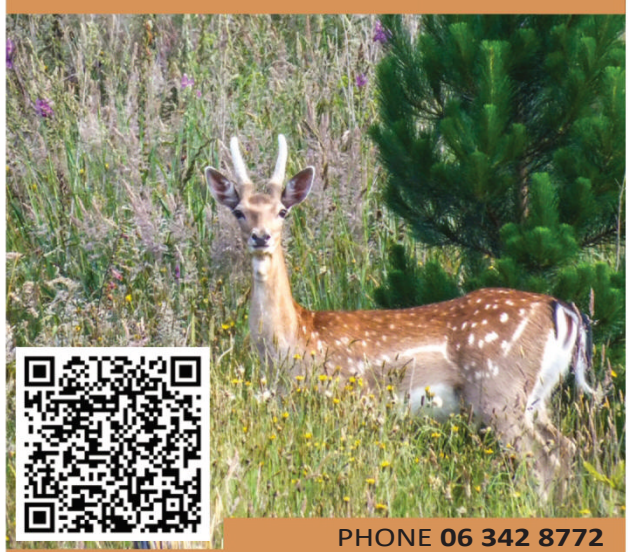

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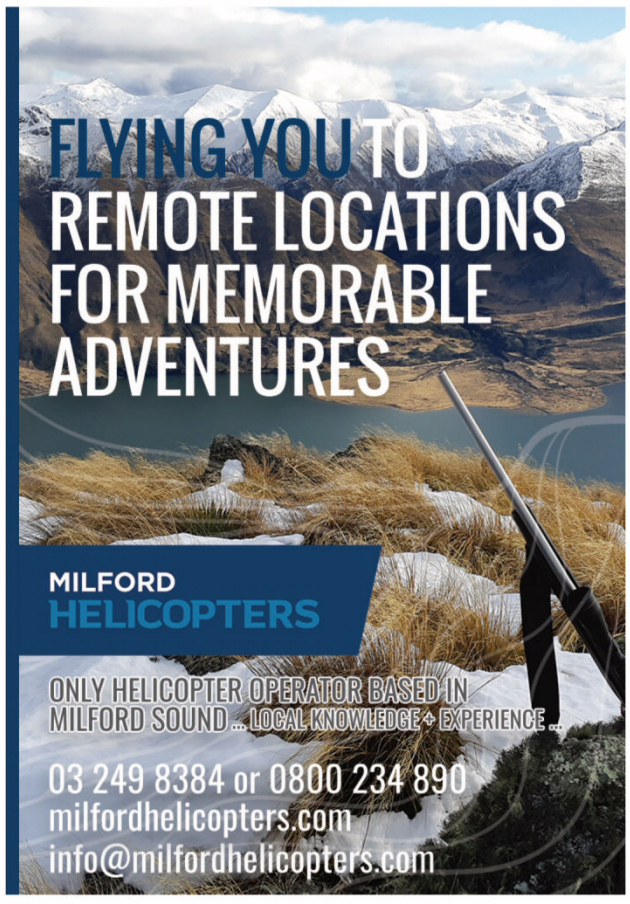

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NEW ZEALAND PLANTS PART 4

MANUKA & KANUKA

Latin - Leptospermum scoparium & Kunzea ericoides

WRITTEN BY
MATT WINTER
@WILDNATURENEWZEALAND



Manuka and Kanuka …. I'd venture to say, the two most confused and misidentified native plants in New Zealand. Historically, for what ever reason, the two seem to have always been lumped under the name 'manuka'

I tend to think this is because, at a distance, manuka and kanuka do appear very similar. However, a close look will reveal quite marked physical differences not to mention the fact that they are not even in the same plant 'genus'. Manuka is also found in parts of Australia (locally known as 'jelly bush') whereas kanuka is an endemic species, not found anywhere else in the world.

The main difference between these two is the height to which they grow – kanuka can attain heights of 20 to 30 metres while manuka reaches 8 to 10 metres at best. Back in the day, when my good mate Aaron and I were young and single, we used to tongue-in-cheek joke to each other about the necessary characteristics and knowledge girls needed to be considered as a potential girl friend. It goes without saying that they had to be attractive (to us at least), have a sense of humour, be kind and generous, intelligent, humble …. you know, all the usual endearing personal traits. But on top of all those distinguishing traits they also needed to be into sports of some kind, not afraid to get their hands dirty, and probably most importantly, have a deep rooted passion and love for the outdoors.

We figured that this last requirement could be identified with the correct answer of three basic, standard questions:

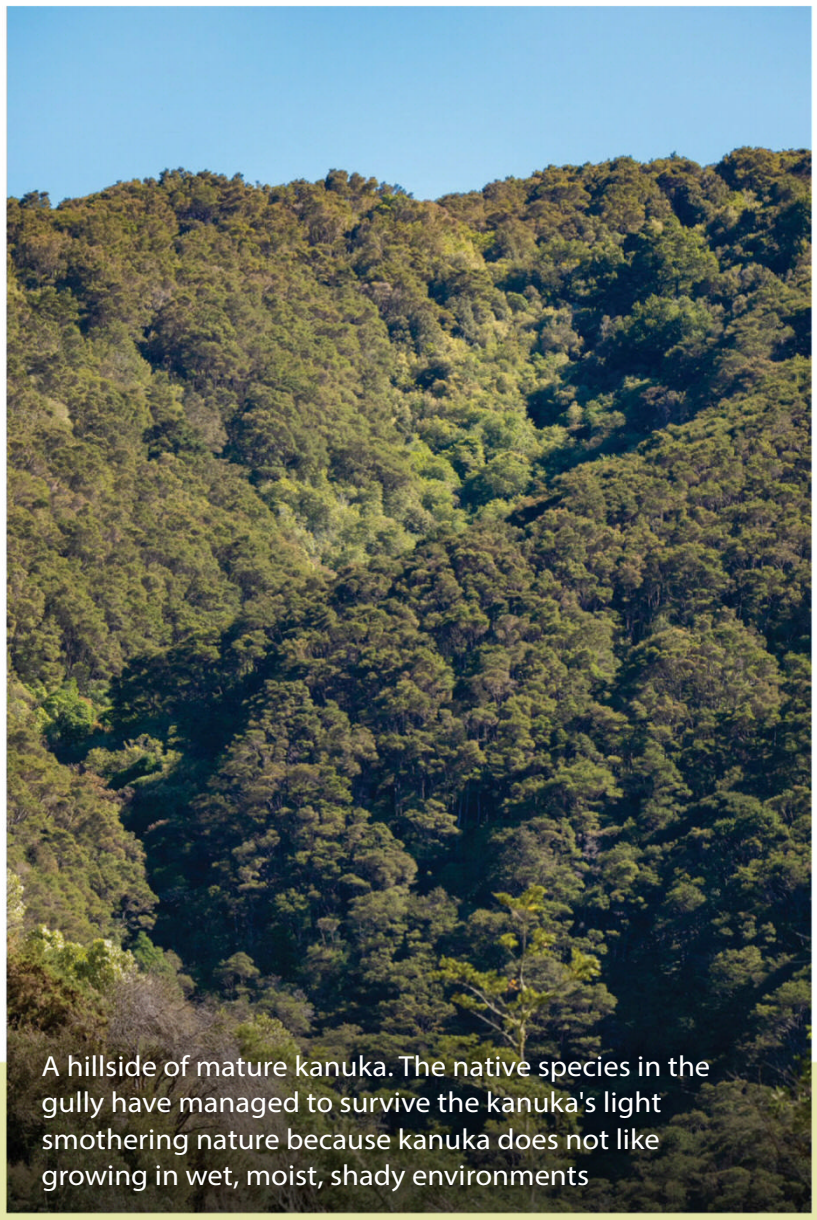
1. Which is the true right and true left of a river ??

2. Where is the adipose fin located on a trout ??

AND

3. Can you explain the differences between kanuka and manuka ??

But back on track, so to speak ….. about six years ago, I stepped into traditional archery hunting with a longbow. Twenty three years of hunting with a



A hillside of mature kanuka. The native species in the gully have managed to survive the kanuka's light smothering nature because kanuka does not like growing in wet, moist, shady environments



About six years ago I stepped into traditional archery hunting with a longbow

compound bow made the transition somewhat easier albeit no less challenging. During those six years I managed to take a few animals including Red deer, rabbits, pigs, tahr and goats. **Only one of the deer was an antlered stag but I wouldn't have succeeded on that one without the help of kanuka.**

It was the last evening hunt of our 2020 roar trip when I set out to stalk a bushy face interspersed with small, tight, narrow feed gullies leading down to a relatively open tussocky face with scattered kanuka and patches of other scrub. I had a definite plan in my mind of gaining a bit of height to enable me to traverse the face around half way up and hopefully, into the wind.

When I turned the corner of the main valley and saw the wind blowing across the face in the complete opposite direction to what I had predicted, my mastermind of a plan went straight out the window. With the wind blowing up my bum, I knew it was fruitless continuing with the original cunning plan. I needed to adapt.

I spent some time weighing up the various options available but, really, there was only one thing to do. I needed to climb up onto the leading ridge well above the face I wanted to stalk then once at the end, drop down and traverse back into the wind.

This new plan of attack would mean much more time 'dead walking' and less time actually stalking the prime face but at the end of the day, better to have 10 minutes of stalking a perfect wind than 10 hours stalking with it blowing up your jacksy eh.

Apart from spooking the odd animal along the ridge, which was expected, the climb was pretty uneventful. Not that it would have been good stalking even if the wind was right as the whole spur was covered in tight, unforgiving and very scratchy, noisy manuka. Travel along the ridge took a lot longer than I hoped so by the time I dropped down onto the face proper I had probably only 45 minutes of light left.

Descending down through the scrub I soon broke out and onto the lower slopes of the hill side. These lower faces consisted of grass and tussock mixed with scattered kanuka trees and small pockets of stunted scrub and thickets of blackberry which all made for ideal bow hunting terrain … open enough to see animals but enough cover to enable stalks into close distances.

Sidling out of the first shallow gully brought a whole heap of new country to my eyes. Even with my naked eye it didn't take much detailed searching to find the bedded stag in a large open area 150 metres below me. Better still, he was facing downhill, directly away from me. Taking a good long look at the country between him and me and taking mental notes of the position of individual kanuka trees I could use for cover, I reckoned I'd be able to get in behind a large kanuka tree just a mere 20 metres from the stag. The only real tricky obstacle was the last 30 metres of approach across completely open ground to that last kanuka. If he happened to turn his head at that point I'd be busted. **If I could negotiate that successfully and get to the last kanuka, I'd be good.**

Well, It all went like clock work … almost. Pin balling from kanuka to kanuka for cover worked like a charm. Heck, I even managed to get across the open ground without him turning his head up hill. So, there I am – arrow nocked and a simple step out from behind the kanuka tree for a simple 20 metres shot. Pffftt …





The eight point 'kanuka' Red stag taken with the longbow

yeh, right.

On peering around from the tree, I was confronted with the stag standing and staring straight at me and looking real nervous what's more. Nothing for it but draw and hope he doesn't run at the movement. You guessed it, he ran. All was not lost however. As Reds often do he stopped for a look back – my final chance. The distance was a tad longer than I would normally take but I trusted my instincts from all the practice at home and released.

In the closing gloom of twilight I still managed to track the bright pink and blue feathers as the arrow sailed across the space between us. It flew true to aim and with the tell tale kick out of the back legs I knew I'd hit the heart. If it wasn't so close to dark I would have waited an hour or so before having a look for clues but as it was, I figured I'd at least have a look on the ground between the place of impact and where I last saw him. A distance of perhaps 40 metres.

I found blood immediately followed by the fletch half of my arrow. Blood was flowing well and easy enough to follow without needing to stop and look for it. Rounding the side of a patch of blackberry, I was elated to find him out cold under a kanuka – quite a fitting final resting place I thought considering how the humble old kanuka had played such a vital role in obtaining the eight pointer.



Manuka on the left, kanuka on the right. Note smaller, harsher more prickly leaves on the manuka

Description, Habitat and Range

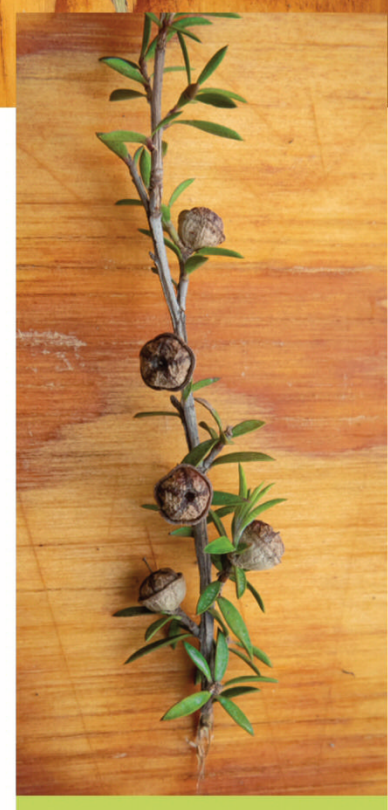
As mentioned earlier, these two species can be very difficult to tell apart. However, with the knowledge of just a handful of quite obvious differences you'll be able to impress your mates no end with identification of each.

I have always focused on two main things to look at when working out which is which. **To my mind the most obvious difference and easiest to identify are the leaves.** Grab a handful and squeeze them in your hand. Manuka leaves have very sharp tips that will feel quite uncomfortable in your grasp … a 'mean' feeling. Kanuka on the other hand has longer, softer leaves with no sharp points and feels quite soothing compared to the harshness of manuka. A 'kind' feeling. The easy way to remember this is -

K (kanuka) = **Kind**

M (mean) = **Mean**

The next thing I look at are the seed capsules or lack thereof. Manuka seed pods are about 5 to 6 mm across, are very woody and hard and to my eye resemble a pie that has been segmented into fifths. The capsules will remain on the tree for a year or more before falling and can be found on the plant at any time of the year. Manuka seed capsules are also very hardy, having no problem surviving a fire and still being able to germinate. **The seeds capsules on a kanuka are contrastingly smaller by half, much softer to the touch and**



Close up of manuka seed capsules. Resembling a sliced pie, they will remain on the plant for over a year



Blight on the stems of a manuka branch



MANUKA BARK



KANUKA BARK

	MANUKA	KANUKA
LEAVES *(see image)*	Dull green, slender and narrow, less than 15 mm ,long. Sharp, prickly leaf tips. Dull green. M = Mean	Bright green, more variable in shape and reach up to 25 mm. No sharp tips and much softer to touch. K = Kind
FLOWERS	White, (sometimes pink), 10 to 25mm across and growing individually. Blooms between October & February.	Smaller, white flowers 4 to 8 mm growing in clusters. Flowers November to January.
SEEDS *(see image)*	Hard, woody seed capsule 5 to 6 mm across. Segmented indents on top resembling a pie cut into five pieces. Capsules will remain on the plant for a year or two and can be found on the tree at any time of the year.	Much softer and only 2-3 millimetres across. Generally fall away after a month or two.
BARK *(see image)*	Much darker in colour sometimes with a red tinge. When rubbed, bark comes off in very thin flakes.	Long, flaky, vertical strips often partly 'detached' (hanging) on mature trees.
SIZE	Generally stops growing at 6 to 8 metres and 7 to 10 cm diameter. Average height 3 metres.	Reaches 10 to 20 metres in height and 15 to 40 cm in diameter. (Not uncommon for some individuals to reach 30 metres). Average height 4 to 8 metres.
LIMBS	Tend to grow in an upright, vertical manner.	Limbs are generally more sprawled out and reach out further.
LIFE SPAN	30 to 50 years	Up to 150 years
WOOD *(see image)*	The wood of manuka will have an obvious red tinge to it	The wood of a kanuka will appear more white in colour

generally fall away at 2 to 3 months.

As a back up identifying tool, I have found the bark on each species also a good indicator. Kanuka bark, especially on older mature trees, will often be 'hanging', detached from the limbs and trunk much like the bark of eucalyptus whereas manuka bark is more 'attached' to the tree though does still flake off if rubbed albeit in much smaller, finer pieces. Manuka bark is also very prone to manuka blight leading to bark that looks sooty and resembles black mould. This is caused by a scale insect that lives in the bark that secretes sugar laden honeydew. Where the honeydew falls on stems and branches, it provides food for the sooty fungus which blackens infested plants.

Manuka is common throughout the North, South and Stewart Islands in lowland to low alpine regions living up to 1800 m above sea level. It is a very durable species able to tolerate a host of varying conditions from dry high altitude back country, rich and fertile lowlands, riverbed gravel environments as well as managing just fine in damp, water logged swampy areas. Its greatest attribute however is the ability to be one of the first colonisers of rough, bare, eroded ground. The establishment of ground covering young manuka provides shelter for a whole host of other native species. **As the natives grow over time, they eventually overtop the manuka causing the latter to ultimately die away due to being shaded.**

Kanuka also has a wide range of tolerances the notable exception being wet and water logged areas. Kanuka is also a great coloniser often growing side by side with manuka. However, kanuka will always win out over time simply because it is faster growing and will attain greater heights with a wider spread eventually ousting the poor old manuka. **With the exception of Taranaki and a southern limit of the Kawarau gorge and Dunedin, kanuka covers pretty much the whole country up to the same 1800 metre level.**

Another reason these two species are such great beginner plants is because neither are palatable to browsing animals giving them the best possible start to life.

On the next page are three images showing three stages of kanuka forest establishment.

MEDICINAL, HUMAN AND



1 Competing kanuka and native species. I'd say roughly on a par with each other at this stage



2 In this image the kanuka has taken a firm and dominant hold over the competing natives



3 In this image the kanuka has taken a firm and dominant hold over the competing natives

Other Qualities

Research tells me that of the two species, manuka has by far and away many more uses than kanuka. In fact I was quite astounded at just how versatile manuka really is.

However, let's start with kanuka. From what I can gather, kanuka has only two historical medicinal uses. One for treatment of diarrhoea and dysentery by boiling the bark and the other when boiled with Coprosma grandifolia (manono) for external use against venereal disease. Kanuka was also used by Maori to make implements, tools and weapons such as fern root beaters, mauls, spades, eel clubs and paddles.

Kanuka also made very good spears due to its very straight grain, strength and 'cosmetic appearance'. And here's one I found really interesting – native parakeets have been observed chewing kanuka (and manuka) leaves and using them during preening. It is believed that the birds are using the leaves to control both external and internal parasites.

Now, manuka on the other hand, well, where do I start.

An infusion made from the leaves of manuka was used for a variety of reasons. For example, as a refreshing tea, to ease stomach complaints, help with constipated babies, to ease bad coughs and when boiled with kowhai and mixed with wood ash, was great for skin disease and dandruff.

The new green berries (capsules) were chewed raw, straight off the tree, for colic at a rate of 6 to 8 berries every 10 minutes until the pain subsided. (Sounds like a modern doctor's instructions).

The same raw berries also helped with dysentery or were boiled then the liquid drank for diarrhoea. Manuka bark apparently was used to help set broken and fractured limbs. Here's another interesting one … sap was drained from the tree trunk and the resulting juice taken internally as a blood and breath purifier.

There are probably dozens more historical

medicinal uses for manuka especially when combined with other plant species but the above gives you an idea on just how useful manuka is.

Manuka had several domestic uses for Maori. The slender tips of the branches made great brooms as well as a reasonably comfortable mattress. The bark was also used to make rough rain 'capes' as well as vessels and receptacles. Yet another really interesting use was for piercing children's ears. A thin pointed manuka 'needle' was bent into a V-shape, with several thicknesses of muka (flax) fibre in it. The sharp ends of the manuka were placed together and pushed through the ear, with the muka fibre. The manuka needle was then removed leaving the muka fibre through the ear lobe. The pierced ear lobes were bathed every day and the fibre moved from side to side and as the ear heals, pulled backwards and forwards. In a few weeks, the ear was ready for a whakakai or ear ornament.

The hardness and strength of manuka made it a popular material for building structures of all types. Walls and ramparts made with soil were often strengthened by adding manuka bark to help bind the walls together. In high-lying districts where totara trees were scarce or absent, manuka bark held more value to Maori as a roofing material.

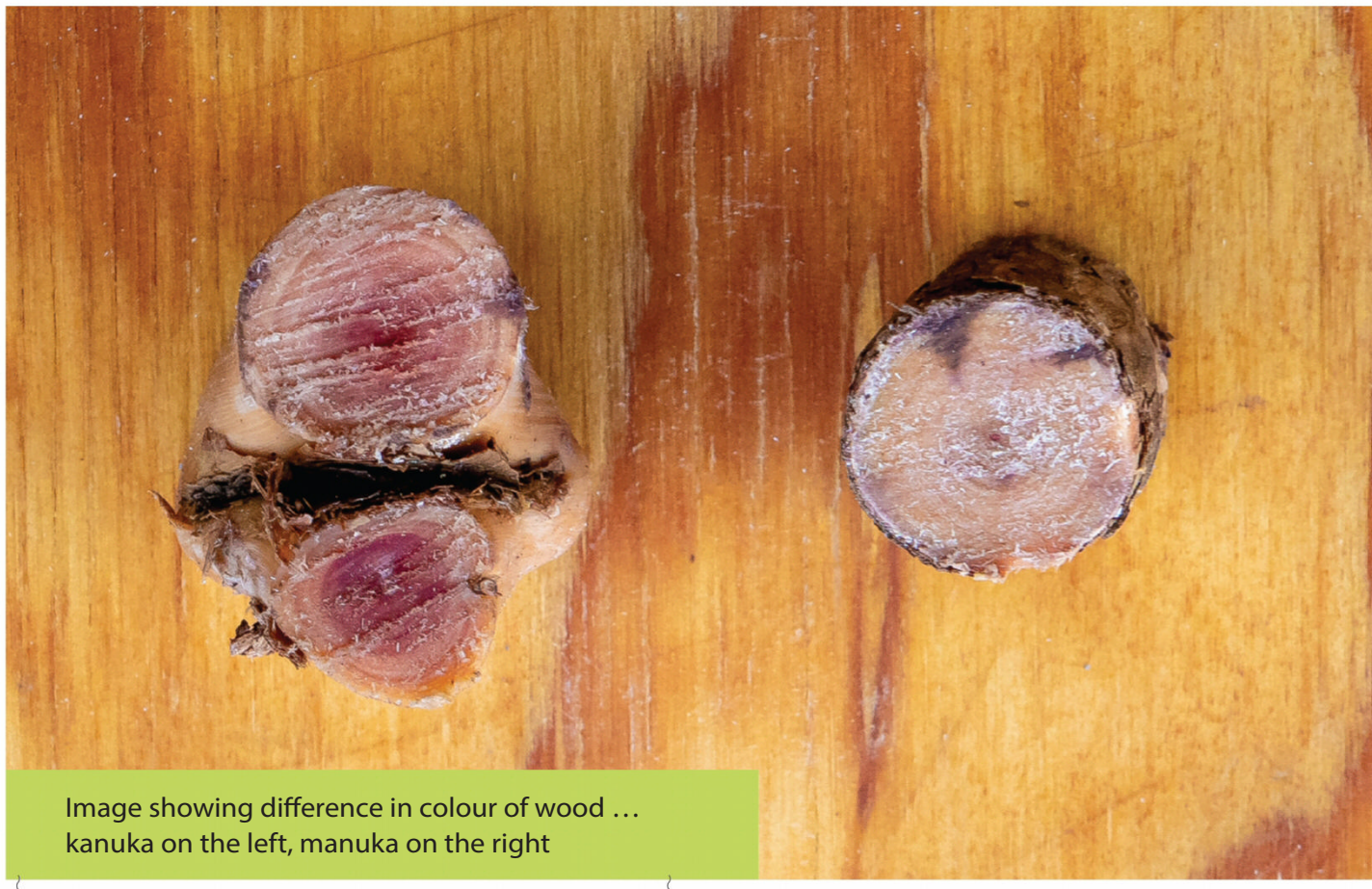


Image showing difference in colour of wood … kanuka on the left, manuka on the right

From a hunting and fishing aspect, manuka materials were utilised prolifically. From the wood used to make spears, flooring of canoes and rafts, eel traps, nooses for bird trapping, fish hooks to handles for scoop nets.

There is a heck of a lot more useful and interesting information regarding kanuka and manuka. I havn't even touched on the more recent discoveries of all the health benefits of manuka and all its derivatives in the form of ointments, supplements, pills, tablets, lip balms, throat sprays and so on. Heck, I even found manuka honey digestive gummies !! **If I was to go on I'd imagine Luke would have to start 'culling' the article down somewhat.**

CHEERS, MATT



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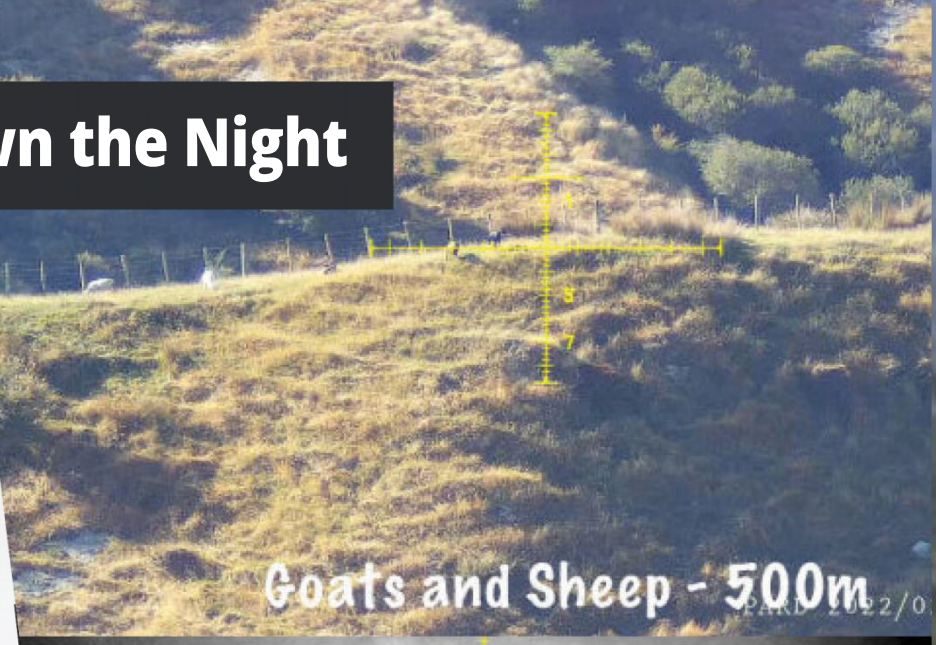



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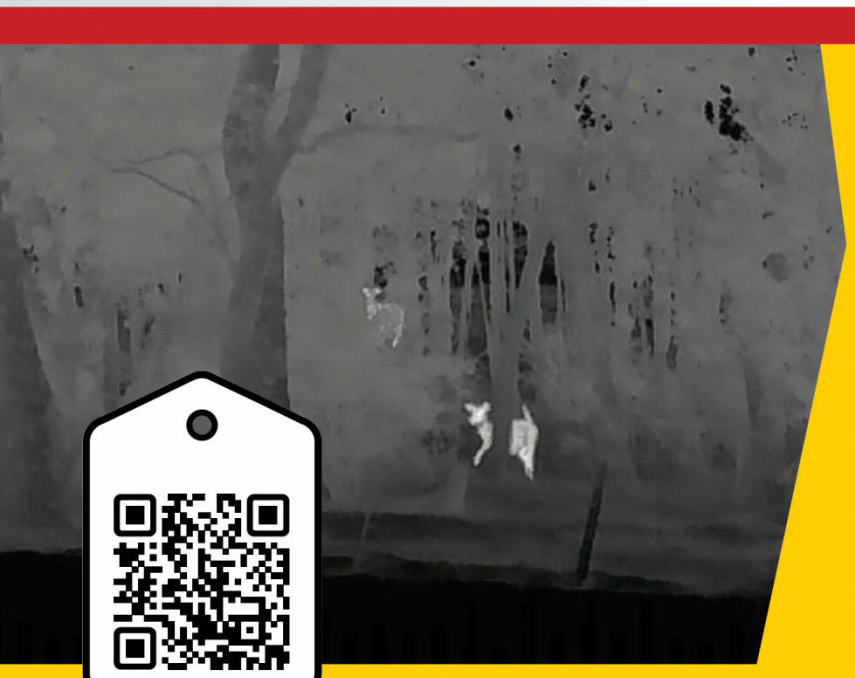

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2 Harrison Black (9) with his first deer.
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3 Max Dollimore (10) years old from Marlborough with his first goat he shot with his Tikka T3 223

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Stoeger
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sako
demand perfection



4 Brady R Nixon's 211DS Sika. He stumbled on it when out hunting meat animals with some mates



5 Ryan August stalked in on a group of three Fallow and managed to bag the lot in Central Hawkes Bay. Tikka T3x in 7mm-08



6 Holly Findlay (17) on her first hunt, out with three generations, our grandad, Dad and brother. Shot with a Tikka T3 270 WSM



7 Parker Collins with his second tahr. Shot at 50m with a Tikka 223. A long walk but a great result

8 Sammy Duff (10) after shooting his first pig in Central Otago. Shot with a Tikka .233 at a distance of 87 yards. What a good way to finish a great weekend away!



WRITTEN BY ~ MICHAEL MCCORMACK
@CHASEANDGATHER

HUNTING IS ACTIVE RECREATION

Many of us are well aware that hunting can be physically demanding at times but how often do we acknowledge and showcase the fitness, physical and wide-ranging wellbeing aspects a hunting lifestyle to others?

As defined by Sport New Zealand "Active Recreation" is non-competitive physical activity for the purpose of wellbeing and enjoyment. It includes activities that occur in built, landscaped and natural environments (including outdoor recreation, fitness/exercise, community recreation, aquatics), are undertaken by individuals and by groups, and occur with and without the involvement of a 'provider' group or organisation (that is, can be undertaken independently).

Without needing to dive into the New Zealand population health statistics, we do know that lifestyle-related health conditions such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular (heart) disease and mental health are not improving, despite the amazing work that many agencies and individuals contribute to these fields. Our ever-changing environments create havoc in making healthy lifestyle choices. Nutrition choices have a significant impact on our risk of developing health conditions but the focus for this article will focus on the impacts of physical activity.

IS PHYSICAL ACTIVITY THE SILVER BULLET?

Being regularly physically active isn't a silver bullet to instant health improvement but it is one of the most powerful tools to which we all have free access. When used with planning and thought it can help prevent, manage or improve a health condition. Often the best time for us to get out and move the body and mind is when we least feel like being physically active.

WHAT IS THE CONTRIBUTING FACTOR HERE?

Stress is an inevitable part of life but the past and current season of Covid has brought with it extra challenges, stress, uncertainties and difficulties for many people, businesses and families. It is when acute stress becomes chronic stress that it is most destructive to our lifestyle, productivity and health. In a number of ways stress leads to lack of quality sleep, poor food and nutrition choices, irritability, productivity decline, relationship degradation and, of course, predisposes us towards developing health conditions such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and negative mental health.

Developing technologies and significant increases in the amounts of screen time, online meetings/webinars, messaging and never-ending notifications can all add to this heightened sense of stress. Stress management is multi-facted because it can come from many directions day to day.

We all have free access to the powerful tool of regular physical activity and exercise to help with stress management!

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY VS EXERCISE

The reason that I use the word physical activity rather than exercise is because it 'allows' us to count all sorts of movement and incidental activity through unstructured forms of movement into our daily activity count.

Accumulating movement throughout the day can be achieved through walking stairs instead of taking lifts, parking further away from work, your place of study or worship, 'walking' some of your meetings or phone calls rather than sitting at a desk or using your lunch break efficiently for a brisk workout.

A couple of activity booster take-home tips from me:



Getting youth in to the sport is a win-win, it motivates you and it motivates them, and you can't beat quality time on the hill

» Schedule it in. Book that recurring time in your calendar for you. Not negotiable.

» Put your phone on flight mode/do not disturb while exercising.

» Choose outdoors over indoors. Away from walls/lights and screens!

» Mix up your intensities, and have some light lower intensity sessions.

» Do some pack training in your hunting boots every week.

» Train with a purpose and specific goal in mind. Without it, you will be a ship without a rudder

Here are 10 reasons why being active outdoors beats indoors for hunters!

1. ***It is accessible.*** No need to drive to the gym or rely on exercise classes. Take a look around, explore your local area and find areas you can exercise. Check out our YouTube page 'Chase and Gather' for our 6 week hunter conditioning programme - all you need is a pack and some boots!

2. ***Helps with Insomnia.*** When you exercise outdoors, you get fresh air which helps to alleviate insomnia. Regular exercise and fresh air will help you to fall asleep quicker and improve the quality of your sleep!

3. ***Sunshine.*** Studies have shown that people's brains have higher levels of serotonin on bright and sunny days. Serotonin is the body's natural mood stabilizer. It helps reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety. Sunlight also increases your vitamin D intake. Vitamin D has proven to be an effective way of enhancing your mood.

4. ***Free of charge.*** Outdoor workouts are often completely free of charge, because exercise parks, sports tracks, stairs and other exercise locations outdoors are usually open to all and free to use. Outdoor exercise is good for your wallet!

5. ***Train in the elements you hunt.*** When you work out in a gym or other indoor facility, you're likely in a climate-controlled environment with air conditioning and more. While there is nothing wrong with working out indoors, exercising outside challenges your body in ways indoor workouts cannot. When you are active outdoors, whether running, walking, pack training, or biking, you put your body in the elements. The environment around you is always changing. Even slight changes, such as inclines, weather conditions, surface type challenge you to adapt and work harder and build resilience.

6. ***Better Mood.*** Why are people you bump in to on a walk, run or pack training session outdoors so much more friendly than those you come across in a gym setting? People feel fresh and empowered outdoors.

7. ***Independent.*** Knowing you have your own training programme in place that can happen regardless of the weather, covid or

other disturbances. You have the toolkit to get out and there get it done.

8. ***Enhanced Self-esteem.*** Research shows that as little as five minutes of outdoor exercise can improve self-esteem (Barton and Pretty, 2010). Any outdoor location will do, but being near greenery or water enhances this effect.

9. ***Move the body, move the mind*** - Getting away from the four walls, home, or office space takes the body and mind to new places. Getting in to nature often helps us get a fresh perspective and clears our head and frees up the mind which can lead to greater productivity and peace of mind.

10. ***Wintering away SAD*** (seasonal affective disorder) - during winter our health and wellbeing can take a big hit in terms of motivation and energy. Being frequently active outdoors during the winter is super helpful for the body in terms of exposure to daylight and keep circulation levels pumped up. Hibernating indoors has the opposite effect!

FROM THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

From the outside looking in, the non-hunting community often view hunting as gruelling, hard work, and a bloody and a dirty pastime. From the outside looking in, the typical member in the non-hunting community see hunters as gatherers of meat. What we don't promote or showcase (or speak of openly) enough of to that community are the wellbeing benefits generated from the hunting lifestyle.

A casual hunting trip can so often be hidden behind remarks of 'freezer filling mission' that we easily forget what else that outing achieves for us. Physical activity, fellowship, socialistion, mental health, time outdoors, learning new skill sets and even intergenerational opportunities are all a result of hunting…before we even mention the aspect of gathering some healthy kai.

As hunters we need to advocate that with our hunting lifestyle, there is more than meets the eye - or that we let on about. We need to speak openly about the mental health or wellbeing aspects provided by a hunting trip.

At social gatherings or through social networks we have the opportunity to share with the non-hunting community the deeper reasons that w,e as hunters, seek the adventure of the quarry and the other benefits we experience when venturing out into these wilderness places.

BANG FOR BUCK

There are not many other Active Recreation pursuits that can collectively achieve the extent of wellbeing benefits in the space of a trip. Let's try and ramp up sharing and showcasing the amount of physical activity/exercise being done out on the hill. Share the distances you travelled, how long you carrying that meat off the hill for your mates to enjoy eating, the elevations you gained and share the epic scenery you came across. Educate the the non-hunters about the wealth of wellbeing tucked in to each adventure.

BIG PICTURE

The Government and non-hunters need to see that hunting isn't just about gathering meat from the hills but that it's impact on the health and wellbeing of a nation is significant and wide-reaching. Hunting is Active Recreation.

The Government's focus is to get more children and young people (especially young women and girls) in to activity. Sport New Zealand has funding to distribute to make this happen through the 'Tu Manawa' fund.

We as hunters in New Zealand have the perfect opportunity to help get our kids and youth out there, active and on the hills! We need to make hunting as a form of physical activity more visible in the community and at Government level - **we need it to show in the statistics that more people are out there, active, through hunting.**



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Robin Saddle Hut

WRITTEN BY ~ **ANDREW BUGLASS | REMOTEHUTS.CO.NZ**

Robin Saddle Hut is a considerable distance from my normal stamping ground and as usual it took some prompting from my hut-bagging friend Mauricio to pry me out of my pleasant backyard west of the Alps to journey into the far reaches of Fiordland

The hut in question lies just outside of the boundary of the DOC takahe Special Permit Area and as such it is open to public access. This doesn't mean that it's straightforward getting there and acquiring a permit to pass through the SPA does allow you to take a more direct line and possibly save a bit of drama.

For those who don't like getting permits, or during the months that the SPA is off limits entirely, Robin Saddle can be approached up the Irene River from George Sound, or from Lake Te Anau along the ridgeline from Lake Ione at the head of the Gorge Burn. **The former has its obvious access issues and the latter requires several days hard travel over challenging terrain**. This is probably why the SPA approaches up the Woodrow or McKenzie Burn tend to be the more favoured ones. Mauricio was prepared to go through the necessary paperwork and this helped me, my partner, and a mutual friend make the decision to join him. There are numerous tracks and huts in the SPA that are used for research and predator control, however DOC are very prescriptive about where you can walk, camp, or stay, and most of these facilities are off limits to the public.

Robin Saddle Hut is a design oddity built by the Fiordland National Park Board volunteers in 1962 when animal control was ramping up in the Murchison Mountains. At that time three departments, the other two being the Forest Service and the Wildlife Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs, shared oversight of the area. Arrangements for hut building were complicated and led British naturalist Gerald Durrell who visited in 1962 to scathingly remark, *"I don't know which imbecile has been responsible for this extraordinary sort of spider's web."*

Back at the beginning hunters and scientists alike would have used Robin Saddle with the Forest Service cullers being the more frequent of the lodgers. In 1963 the FS began building its own huts in the area including Lake Te Au which was our first hut stay on the journey after being dropped at the mouth of the McKenzie Burn in the South Fiord of Lake Te Anau**. The water taxi was scheduled to pick us up seven days later at Junction Burn Hut in the South West Arm**. Our trip took place in February during an unprecedented long fine period when the town of Te Anau of all places, was on water restrictions. If we'd been a bit more trusting of the long-range forecast, we could have saved a bit of weight by leaving our wet weather gear at home. But you just don't do that in Fiordland, do you?

The McKenzie Burn is tracked and has a picturesque lake and tarns on the saddle at its head. Here we had our first views



Lake Te Au Hut



Robin Saddle Hut looking upt to Mt. Irene



Robin Saddle Hut

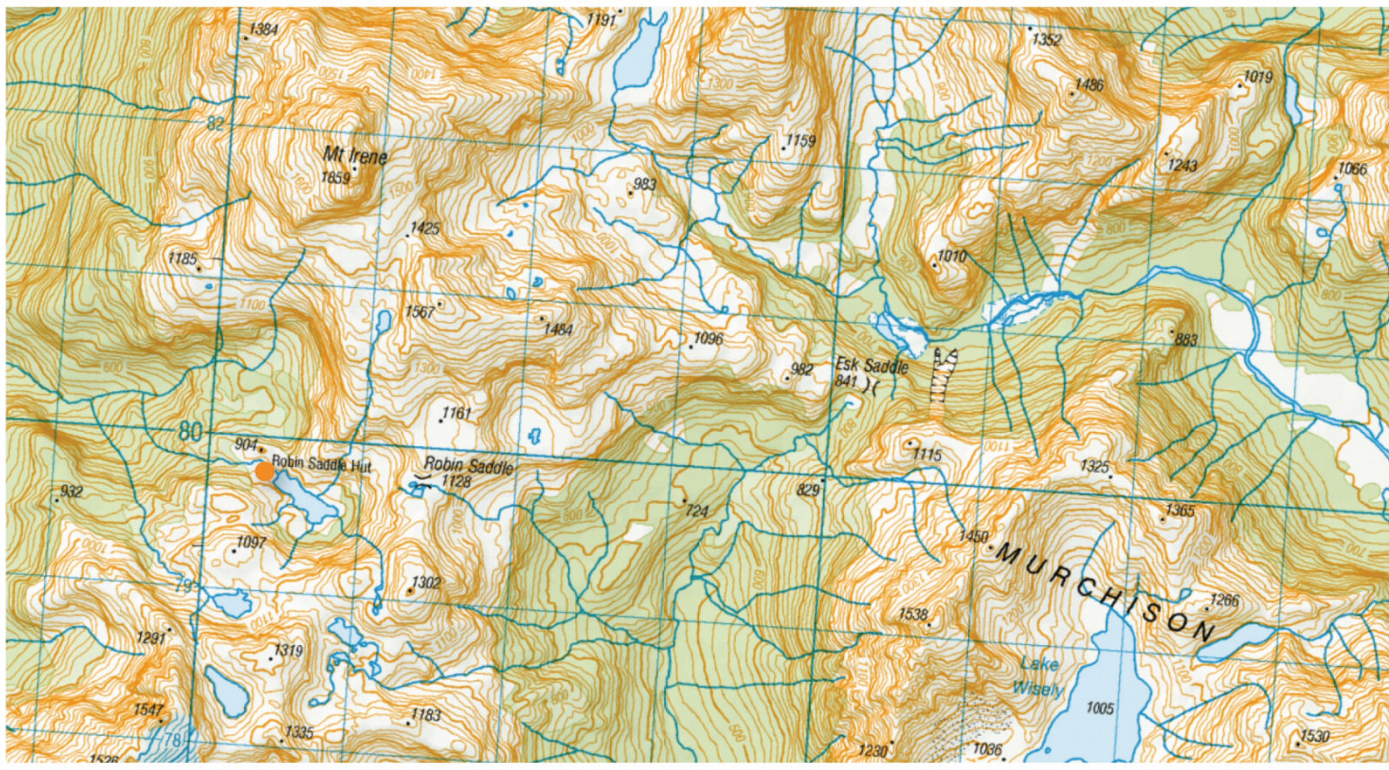


Looking down the Esk Burn to lakes Duncan and Te Au

of the Museum Range before dropping down to Lake Te Au. DOC is obviously putting its resources into research and predator control and the hut itself, a standard S81 four-bunker with open fire, is getting quite run down and would benefit greatly from some basic maintenance.

From Te Au Hut the Esk Saddle track that is follows up past Lake Duncan still has a lot of its original permolat markers to complement the DOC triangles. To reach our end destination we chose a Moir's Guide route involving an old-fashioned Fiordland scrub-bash up the true left of the unnamed side-creek draining Robin Saddle. The weather was unusually warm and a considerable amount of fluid was shed by the time the open tussock benches above the valley were reached. The view from the saddle of the unnamed lake and tiny dot of a hut next to it are breath-taking. It lies below the magnificent vertical ramparts of Mt. Irene's South face with seemingly endless rows of remote mountain tops in all directions.

There is a great sense of achievement when one reaches Robin Saddle Hut which is a little bizarre considering that it isn't much more than a garden shed on stilts. It has corrugated iron walls and sits on an array of metal pipes rather than piles, something I've never seen before. They have obviously done the job of keeping the hut in place over the years despite not appearing that sturdy. The interior is basic but surprisingly cosy with a tongue and groove floor, tar paper and chicken wire lining, and clutter of utensils. **A veritable time capsule from days gone by**. Aside from the original profile cladding being replaced with standard corrugated iron at some point, there have not been any significant modifications to the place. The hutbook is an interesting collection of tales. Epic journeys and days on end sheltering while gales raged and the inhabitants wondering how long the hut was going to stay attached to mother earth.



Robin Saddle was rated in a 2010 assessment as having high historic significance and worthy of retention, but it hasn't been actively managed as such. Fortunately, the ripples of the community-led maintenance movement have reached the shores of the lake and just prior to our visit a party had been in to scope out the repairs required to keep the Hut on its perch for a while longer. It's likely this will be another Back Country Trust funded project. Robin Saddle gets relatively little biodiversity use these days and its visitors tend to be the more hard-core hut baggers. All of the famous names seem to have dropped in at some point.

After savouring our victory and enjoying the unique ambience of our little garden shed, we did a slow amble along the ledges of the Museum Range and down into the Woodrow Valley. The Woodrow is pretty well tracked and passes through a diverse mix of terrains, pleasant pastoral river flats, swamps, gorges, open beech forest, and jungle-like sections of moss-covered rock and rotting windthrow. Lots of fun.

We didn't see much fresh sign of hunting or other human activity until we got closer to the Lake shores. Deer numbers look to be reasonable throughout the area as evidenced by some well-used trails that we were thankful for when passing through some of the picturesque tangles mentioned above.

The boat was on time at Junction Burn Hut but couldn't get up to its usual mooring in the Burn due to the unusually low lake levels. The boat trips in and out are worth doing in their own right. One gets a real sense of the size and remoteness of this amazing area. **All the rest is just icing on the cake.**

REMOTEHUTS.CO.NZ

WYOMING COYOTE

WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

When Kory, our host, asked if I wanted to go coyote hunting my response might have been a little too enthusiastic - I was in. We hadn't even dropped off the Pronghorn buck from the earlier hunt (a story in Issue 79) before turning down a side road to a place he'd regularly shot coyotes

I'd never hunted predators before and the thought was conflicting. Hunting them seemed different, look into a deer's eye and there isn't a huge amount going on – look into a dog's and tell me there isn't more there.

Coyotes will mate for life, call me a softy but I'd hate to break a pair so I quietly hoped for a young one or an old loner. Coyotes will also raise other dogs cubs, unlike lions, cats etc. which will kill foreign young. In North America, coyotes are heavily persecuted and are shot on sight by anyone who happens to be there. There's a $2,000,000 budget for predator control in Wyoming and they are often controlled using planes funded by the federal government. This is a part of Kory's job as the county trapper, which covers all kinds of problem animal management like mountain lion and even bears. This method is cheaper than a chopper but uses the



Kory headed back to the v6 Toyota Tacoma, carrying the Blaser 6mm XC he uses as a client and work gun, and also the loudspeaker in his left hand

same pilot/shooter principal, often with a guy on the ground coordinating as well – and it's no less dangerous than our Wild West venison recovery days. Kory says they've lost too many good men, and a chopper is used when they have the budget but with the vast areas involved, this isn't often possible.



The 'coyote gun' ready for action in the passenger seat, something I discovered was fairly ubiquitous among rural folk

Kory will kill several hundred coyotes a year through shooting, leg hold and snare traps. Poisoning is no longer as common as it was, ranchers used to use 1080 and strychnine in antelope carcasses but this would keep on killing all the way down the food chain to the eagles and vermin, clearly they've moved on from that idea! Unusually for the States, Kory also uses a hunting dog – Coca. Dogs are illegal for deer hunting in Wyoming but he has special dispensation to use her for coyotes. She's a powerful and energetic little Jagdterrier.

The reason for this heavy-handed approach is that coyotes are a rabies vector and regularly kill and worry stock as well as people's pets. The only way to test for rabies in animals is to test brain tissue from the suspected animal, which means if your pet has a fight with a coyote you have to put it down and have its brain shipped to a vet to know if your family is at risk. Rabies vaccines are also incredibly expensive and need to be boosted regularly so this isn't a viable option for most people. Hence the visceral hatred for the wily coyote in rural America, though always coloured by a grudging respect I think.

Anyway, back to the story. Kory rustled around in the back of the pickup and produced what looked like a siren, grabbed the Blaser and set off to the lip of a draw (gully to us). We were poised over a water pond in a rancher's paddock, as far as I could gather Kory has free rein as to where he goes as people want the coyotes gone. **At the lip, he set the siren on a sage brush and we continued lower where we weren't skylined and found a spot clear of cactus**. He set the Blaser on sticks and motioned me behind. I'd just settled when an ungodly noise burst forth and I realised the siren was actually a loudspeaker for playing distressed prey noises, coyotes calls, or anything else, at great volume.



Dropping my pronghorn at the butcher. This hunt was covered in Issue 79


Coca the coyote dog


The loudspeaker for calling


Surely an American relative of speargrass


You've got to be careful where you sit down!


Sam and Coca the ferocious hound


The big, wary, dog coyote we encountered near The Buttes

Locked and loaded Sam and I scanned the horizon with Kory for the evening but nothing materialised. **Close to dark we upped sticks and tried another area of the ranch using the same method, seeing fewer antelope in this area, but one particularly nice buck**. On the way out we took the buck to a drive through butcher, oh how American! There we organised to trade the value of the animal for the same value in pre-made Pronghorn small goods, which would be very useful for our remaining weeks in the van.

The next morning Veronica cooked bacon and pancakes for everyone and we left about 7, hard yakka in the Study household! **We headed south back down Highway 50 past Thunder Basin to a huge 265,000 acre property below a local landmark called The Buttes.** We were attending a callout for a problem coyote who had killed lambs. It's very low intensity farming round here, they work on around one cattle beast to every 30-40 acres!

We started up high, calling to try entice a reply and locate them. A bit like hunting in the roar really, except in very open country. Down here was different terrain to the Pronghorn hunt with shorter grass species and some tougher cuts and draws. These are good Mule deer habitat and they often hole up against the banks in the shade. There were still Pronghorn about, but far fewer, though Kory told me this was a better area genetically.

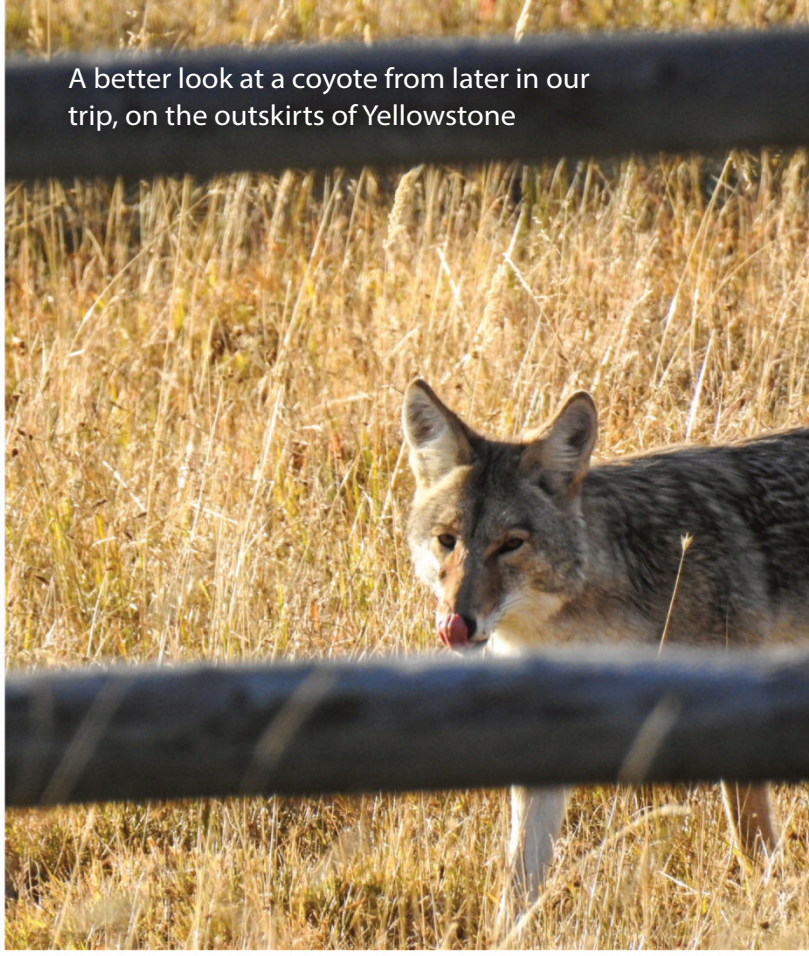
We didn't get any responses to the siren and couldn't glass any 'yotes so carried on around the high ridge. Kory called the landowner for updated info- apparently, they'd been right down by the highway which is unusual behaviour, but again the oil and gas had stirred things up and there was a lot of new work going into this drystock property. **Interestingly some farms owned their mineral rights and some didn't.** Either way you're compensated for the damage/land loss and inconveniences involved, which are significant. A huge roading network, massive stock disruption and eyesores of wells everywhere. In a few years though they'll pull out, cover the pipelines and apart from the wells and the land will go back to the Pronghorn.

Despite the tipoff we still couldn't find the coyote so gave up and went hunting for others. Crossing the highway, Kory headed for the Buttes into the rougher country. Not really rough by NZ standards but it would've been tricky to get a horse and wagon through back in the day! We set up in a spot looking over a rough draw but we'd hardly sat down when Sam and I heard a faint howl behind us. We perked right up, our first evidence of coyote and it couldn't have been too far with the wind against us so we went over to investigate.

We drove over the ridge and down into the next gully. Kory called a few times then eventually I spotted a huge dog who'd come up on to a ridge to investigate. It was our first sighting and I was impressed. So very doglike in intelligence and behaviour, he just sat in the ridge cocking his ear and turning his head side to side as it weighed things up. Kory ranged it at 800yds which was far too far for the 6mm XC in that wind. Abruptly the dog turned tail and went back over the ridge, he



A solid old buck on one of the more arid ranches south of where I hunted mine



A better look at a coyote from later in our trip, on the outskirts of Yellowstone



Our typical setup, the Blaser on sticks and the AR handy. We'd usually be sitting in front of some brush with the caller set up behind



Prairie dog - an awfully cute animal to be carrying the bubonic plague

may have seen the pickup which was hard to hide in that country. We persisted for a good half hour and he reappeared on the close side of the ridge weaving through the sage but we lost him again pretty quickly.

Eventually we gave up and went back to the pickup and as always, I had to do one last scan before I put the binoculars away. Sure enough out to the north was a big dog sitting in the ridge, just observing. I'm pretty sure it was the same one working a big wide cautious loop to cut our wind. He got a good look at the pickup from there and sauntered away again, not in any rush, secure in his knowledge he had outwitted us.

It had got a bit late in the day to see anything else, so we went looking for Prairie dogs. Dare I say it, they're cute animals but they're not loved by ranchers. Poisoned regularly to this day as again they're a disease vector including (almost unbelievably) the bubonic plague. Then there's the damage they cause to the pasture. Their 'towns' are vast warrens of interconnected underground tunnels. With 10-20cm high low-angle cones every 30-40 yards, covering acres sometimes. Coming from New Zealand we're pretty indigenous animal biased, with 260,000 acres at your disposal I would've thought a few left for the prairie dogs isn't too bad but I don't live here and have to deal with it.

Like coyotes, prairie dogs don't require tags and a lot of people hunt them like we shoot rabbits, taking kids out and using the varminting as a stepping stone to big game hunting. Mostly by plinking them as they poke their heads up from the warren, meerkat-like. We wound our way through some poisoned towns like they were abandoned Wild West villages. **Eventually one cautiously poked its head over the rim and Kory directed me to shoot with the little .17**. A clean shot to the head and what looked like the last inhabitant was gone!

We went and investigated the carcass. I didn't touch it after all the talk of The Plague but they're the size of a large well-conditioned rabbit with outsized claws topping each toe which no doubt they use for excavating their towns. They actively mow down vegetation around them so they can see predators coming, commonly coyotes but also eagles and other birds of prey. Kory showed me a video of an enormous eagle attacking and killing a Pronghorn doe! **So no wonder the prairie dogs are wary, they're a ferocious bird.**

Leaving the prairie dog for the eagles, we checked out a bit more area, surveying one of the few fences in the thousand acre 'pasture'. In winter Kory will set snares and leg hold traps along these fences to catch travelling coyotes as well as bobcats - their coats can fetch $1,000 US each. Well worth the effort. Good coyotes can even fetch $70-80. A nice bonus for Kory and a wintertime occupation for many kids.

That was enough for the day so we headed for home. After lunch Sam opted to start getting the van ready for continuing our roadie while Kory and I went back out for our third try that evening. **My last chance, we headed out past the coal mines east of Gillette to the upper reaches of the Bel Fourche River which eventually flows past Devils Tower in South Dakota.** This ranch's landscape was

different, more made up of 'breaks' country - basins carved out from more resistant sediments creating rims of eroding soil and rock around flatter, more verdant valley bottoms. **There were tons of Mule deer in this country, including one quite nice buck that got the pulse up a bit.** To Kiwis, they initially look like a Whitetail but they are bigger, darker-coloured with even squarer antlers - quite a beautiful shape to my eye. They and elk are top of the list for a return journey!

After an evening of straining our eyes we were distracted by elk calling up where Kory's wife Veronica shot her massive bull a few years earlier. There was a storm brewing, the winds were rising and the sky darkening quickly. We had actually stopped howling and were using the caller to wind these bulls up and try entice one out of the pines in the distance. In a lull we heard a weird grunt or growl right in front of us.

I thought to myself 'what the f&%k was that' and with wide eyes dropped the binos in alarm to find a bitch coyote standing there right in front, growling! She was mighty mad. Jumping and barking aggressively. Coca was dancing around after her, Kory never broke eye contact with her and said out the corner of his mouth ***'Don't move a muscle.'*** I had to consciously hang on to the rifle and not pick up the camera, it was a phenomenal photo opportunity.

As the coyote ran to the side, Kory whispered quietly 'get her'. I'd already wound the Leupold down from 20 power, we were expecting one to come in from hundreds of yards away, not ten! I checked Coca was clear and pulled the trigger. Just as I squeezed she ducked her head to growl, as she bared her fangs the swift 6mm pill hit her right in the head. Destroying both the skull and the cape!

In Kory's words to Veronica later, ***'the darndest thing just happened!'.*** Coyotes usually aren't that openly aggressive, I asked Kory if she might have been rabid but he was pretty noncommittal. **Coca was delighted at finally killing one and I was thrilled, we'd properly worked for that animal, a much more challenging hunt than the Pronghorn.** I still can't tell you how I feel about hunting predators, but that was a hell of an experience. As is always the way when you're meant to be photographing events, there wasn't time to set her up nicely for a photo. Darkness was imminent and big, fat, plains raindrops were falling while thunder boomed around the breaks. I'd ruined the skin so I removed the tail quickly for a memento (wearing gloves, Kory takes rabies very seriously) and I was hurried into the pickup so we could get out before the tracks became a problem.

We drove out in satisfied silence while rain poured down and muddied the clay tracks, washing away the scent of dust and confining those broad, broad horizons to the wavering beam of the headlights as I reflected on a fantastic few days, not just hunting but immersing myself in the Wyoming way of life with Samantha. **I'm very grateful to the Study household for welcoming these kiwi strangers with open arms.**



A last-minute photo before the rain got heavy

The inland states get thunderstorms on a scale I don't reckon we really see here in NZ. Real ground shaking thunder


NO. 53: THE CHALLENGE
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THE GAC UPDATE

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

Accurately age Red stags this roar

In the last edition of NZ Hunter Magazine, I wrote a column on the importance of hunters being able to accurately age stags before making a decision to shoot them or not. In that column I discussed the concepts of game animal management and the importance of maturity generally

Since then, the Game Animal Council has released the New Zealand Red Stag Ageing Guide, which puts a bit more flesh on the bones, at least when it comes to ageing Red deer stags.

Developed with input from professional guide Chris McCarthy and NZ Hunter Adventures' Willie Duley, the guide provides hunters with easy-to-understand information on how to assess the age of Red deer stags in the field.

Red deer are the most widespread deer species in New Zealand and are the game animal that Kiwis hunt most often so we thought this would have the biggest bang for buck when it comes to helping recreational hunters in their management decisions.

Being able to identify a few key characteristics means hunters can quickly and accurately determine the maturity of a stag and leave behind younger males that are yet to reach their full potential.

The old adage is, 'you can't shoot great stags, if you shoot good stags', so here are some of the things to look out for in a fully-mature (8+ year-old) Red stag:

- Physical maturity, including a sagging belly, dip in the backbone in front of the hips when relaxed and legs equal to depth of chest with a round back end
- Sunken eyes with a deeper old-looking face
- The head held low
- Fully developed antler top points
- Heavier antlers with broad beam circumference
- Purposeful movements and an animal heavy on its feet

For some stags their maturity is obvious but most of the time you need to build an assessment by looking for the traits above. You definitely cannot just go on the antlers alone as even a young stag can have an impressive head. It is also really important that those animals nearing maturity – the six and seven-year-olds are left to grow older. Obviously, these can be the hardest to pass up but leaving them for those extra few years can really pay off.

Good Red deer management in New Zealand is also about hunters harvesting their fair share of breeding-age hinds. If you want a meat animal, I strongly encourage you to target hinds, even during the Roar, as they make better eating and you are making a valuable contribution to better future hunting and good conservation outcomes.

Because deer are polygynous animals (one male will cover multiple females) it is the number of breeding females in a herd that determines the future population. If you harvest a female today then you are actually removing all her subsequent offspring and their offspring. Over a few generations this can total many dozen animals. In this way a female-heavy harvest can have a positive impact on improving the structure of the herd, and as importantly the quality of the animals by reducing pressure on the habitat.

The New Zealand Red Stag Ageing Guide is available and free to download at **https://nzgameanimalcouncil.org.nz/look-after-your-mates-this-roar/ as well as through the QR Code on this page.**

Finally, whenever we turn our attention to the Roar, one of the biggest things we need to consider is how we can conduct our hunts safely, especially knowing that there are likely to be more hunters around. The Game Animal Council is running a safety campaign called Look After Your Mates This Roar, which focuses on making sure that hunters consider the health and safety of others when making their hunting decisions.

The campaign, which involves a short video made with the help of Willie and Emil (thanks guys!!), is about doing the simple things that will keep you and your mates safe. This includes:

- **Making appropriate preparations** including getting a reliable weather forecast, leaving intentions, carrying a distress beacon or other communication device and making sure everyone has the right gear for the trip

- **Making good decisions** that take into account the fitness and experience of all those in your party

- **Ensuring firearms are used safely,** are carried in an appropriate state of load and any targets are identified beyond all doubt.

You can find out more and view the Look After Your Mates This Roar video at **https://nzgameanimalcouncil.org.nz/look-after-your-mates-this-roar/.**

So, get out there and enjoy your Roar hunting this year. **Do your bit for herd management by taking a good hard look at the age of the stags you are targeting, knock over a hind or two and most importantly, stay safe and look after your mates!**

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

OLD MAN TROPHY

A Space To Celebrate Mature Trophies

Have you shot a bull tahr stacked with age rings, a heavy old stag, or a battler of a buck?

Email us some high resolution images and a caption (under 100 characters) to go into the draw to win the annual **Old Man Trophy** - a grand prize for one of the six winners each year:

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



WINNER

Nathan Holland

"I shot this old stag in the roar down in Fiordland. We were near Lake Marchant in the Large Burn block. My brother (Glenn) and I were dropped off at the head of the block and after a couple of days set off to base camp (a three day hike) to catch up with the other lads.
We dropped down into the bush and after a couple of hours herd our first roaring stag for the trip as we closed the distance to roughly 80 yards we heard a noise to our right (not the roaring stag) and I saw this old boy less then 40yards away. He was busy rubbing a small tree. As the weather was turning we knew this could be the only chance we get so I was on point and had the honour of removing this big old stag from the gene pool.
His tines are well beaten up for whatever reason and he was well past his prime. To date one of the most unusual character heads I've shot so I keep him as a trophy and a memory of the great trip we had"

Elliot Riley

"11 year old bull tahr I shot in the wilderness zone over this years rut. Despite having been tahr hunting half a dozen times I had never managed to shoot a bull. This year I was lucky enough to get a ballot block (the Barlow) in the second period with a few good mates. After several days of hard luck and frustration I managed to get onto this guy late one evening in an old glacial basin below Mt Barlow. He was walking across a near vertical face in typical tahr fashion with another bull. I managed to shoot him right on dusk from 337m with my new Sako. I was stoked! He had broomed of tips and went 12inch (just), with solid 9inch bases and had an epic coat. When we counted the age rings and realized he was over 11 years old I was rapt. Just the kind of bull I wanted to take"





Jake Blakemore

"A 12 year old, $7^{1/2}$ inch nanny that shot up the Rangitata. She was down pretty low in the fern and scrub "

Email your photos to oldmanstag@nzhunter.co.nz to be in to win



The roll is pretty compact for the comfort it provides, and in it's soft carry bag it's easily packable



IRONMAN SWAG BAG

WRITTEN BY ~ **LUKE CARE**

I'm fortunate enough to spend a lot of time travelling around the country

I spend a lot of nights in tents, but when I'm not I'm often in huts, boats, on peoples couches and in the back of the ute!

When Dave from Ironman first handed me the Swag Bag sleeping bag (on the last night of a four day 4wd trip I might add!) I was a little skeptical of how much I would use it. It's large - in its duffel bag it is 900mm long and nearly 300mm in diameter, and weighs in at 4.5 kg. I've spent the entirety of my hunting career shaving as many grams from my sleeping system as I can, so it seemed antithetical to go for this giant of a bag.

But then I stopped and actually thought about it. This bag was never made to be carried anywhere. It's for putting in the ute or the boat or the chopper and taking to basecamps, so why not make it lavishly comfortable? If you don't have to carry it, what's the point in sacrificing volume and materials for weight? Simple, there is none.

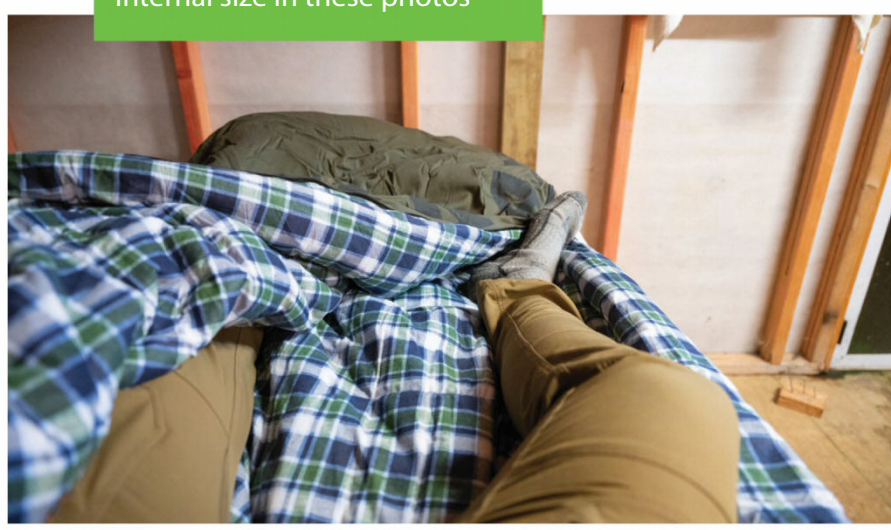
I found myself using it a lot. All those quick overnighters out to huts with the ute, in the rooftop tent, nights on the boat, crashing at friend's houses while I travel around – the Swag Bag is fantastic for that. **It's superbly comfortable in a range of temperatures and the flannel lining has a much better feel than ultralight nylon.** It's rated to -5 (comfort), and I slept like the absolute dead on the last night of our 4wd trip while it dropped to a summer mountain frost outside my rooftop tent, I'm sure I will be able to repeat that over the coming roar and winter trips. **It felt far less like a sleeping bag and far more like cosy conventional flannel sheets with a duvet, the internal space is vast.**

It uses a 300gsm cotton outer and cotton flannel lining with 360gsm hollow fibres in between – using baffles just like a proper sleeping bag too. But it's nearly king-single sized at 100cm wide, and with 235cm of length there is loads of room to spread out and actually gives you more area than a king single. It's not quite big enough for two, I will admit I tried, but if you've got the space to take one along you probably have the space to take two, and then you can zip them together and make a king-sized bed anywhere you go!

It's easy to pack up, no cursing and straining to stuff it in a sack. Just roll it up, tension the roll with the integrated tensioning buckles and bundle it into the carry bag.

I'm a complete convert to the Swag Bag and it's raw comfort. It's certainly on the large side, but it's soft and compresses down so if you're really cramming the canopy/helicopter with gear you can just stuff it wherever it fits. I'll be getting plenty of use out of my one this year! Ironman have an incredible range of camping equipment alongside the 4wd gear, **the Swag Bag sleeping bag is just one example so I'd highly recommend checking the whole range out.**





You can get a feel for the vast internal size in these photos

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SIG SAUER KILO 5K RANGEFINDER

WRITTEN BY ~ GREG DULEY

LENGTH:	4.4in/112mm
HEIGHT:	3.0in/76mm
WIDTH:	1.3in/33mm
WEIGHT:	7.8oz/220gm
MAGNIFICATION:	7x
OBJECTIVE LENS DIAMETER:	25mm
FIELD OF VIEW:	6.78 degrees
EYE RELIEF:	15 mm
LASER DIVERGENCE:	1.3 MRAD
WATERPROOFING:	IPX-4
BATTERY:	CR2 (1)
BATTERY LIFE:	4,000 Ranges
DISPLAY TYPE:	OLED
RETICLE:	Circle & Milling Grid
COLOR:	Ranger Green
RANGE ON DEER:	Up to 2,000 Yards
RANGE ON TREES:	Up to 2,500 Yards
RANGE ON REFLECTIVE OBJECTS:	Up to 5,000 Yards
RRP	$1499.99

Sig Sauer are really raising the bar in terms of rangefinder systems for civilian use

We have reviewed several of their products recently, including the Sauer BDX range system (Ballistic Data Xchange) back in issue 68.

Read that review for a full breakdown on how this ballistic system works, but in brief, the rangefinder talks to an app on your phone that uses an Applied Ballistics engine (currently the best in the ballistics business) to read out your "come-ups" and wind holds in an optics display – either their 3000 BDX binos (reviewed in issue 73) or one of their rangefinders. You enter the rifle and load's ballistic profile into the app, and it takes into account all ballistic parameters including environmentals (temperature, pressure, wind strength and direction), and then sends the data to the rangefinder or binos to read out. You can either dial the correction into your scope, or if you have the BDX scope as well, it will talk to it and illuminate the correct holdover dot for the range plus give you a windage estimate dot as well. **A very comprehensive system!**

This latest series of rangefinders are a step up again in that they have built in environmental sensors (pressure and temp) and the Applied Ballistics Ultralite engine on board. This means once you've set up the ballistic inputs of your rifle and load, it can give you a continually updated reading for changing environmentals firing solution without having to Bluetooth to your phone, Kestral etc.

The ranging capabilities of the new series are also a significant step up due to the new Gen II Lightwave DSP engine providing some extra features. One is the XR (Xtreme Range) that uses a different mode to slow the scan rate to one pulse a second. This allows a stronger pulse which will return ranges far beyond the standard mode. The Kilo 5K is rated to 5000yds on reflective targets, 2500yds on trees and 2000yds on deer. The fog mode is designed to ignore the scatter readings you get off fog and drizzle, and only display the constant target range you are after. **It also has First, Best and Last target modes for all the usual situations where you think you're not getting the reading to your intended target** – ie where there may be a something more reflective beyond your target or ranging though intervening vegetation etc.

The other new feature is the ability to connect to Garmin's BaseMap navigational app on your phone or device to assist in finding downed animals etc. It uses a bearing and distance calculation to drop a pin on your map that you can navigate to, similar to the Sight and Go feature on Garmin GPS'. The potential issue here is it's using the electronic compass off your phone or device to get its bearing, and these are notoriously inaccurate. The top end model Kilo 10K has its own built in compass which will make this feature far more reliable.

HUNTING

I only had time to take the 5K on one early roar trip in the Canterbury high country and despite seeing a few animals, I couldn't find a mature stag. They can be a little hard to find in between them leaving their summer country until they turn up with the hinds. The younger stags can still be mobbed up right up until the roar, but the old boys don't necessarily stay with them after the middle of March.

I had my wildcat 7mm FX pushing the .417 G7 BC Hornady 190gn A-Tip at 3250fps along for the walk, but encountering nothing I wanted to pull the trigger on, I contented myself with giving the 5K a good test on the many varied ranging targets encountered in the hills. I had no problem getting 2500yds plus to the usual things we try and get ranges to – tussock faces, scrub bushes, beech trees etc. And in bright sunlight too. In lower light but still well and truly daylight I was able to get 3500yds to trees etc! It certainly has more range capability than needed for any hunting shots, but the ability to be able to range to a distant animal miles away then to intervening ridges to work out just where you might be able to get a shot from is very useful. The Kilo 5K would really be suited to someone doing one of the extended range competitive steel shoots, where you have targets at unknown ranges distant enough (beyond about 800 yards) that you need to account for pressure and temperature etc. The 5K of course does have the most useful for normal range hunting Angle Modified Range (AMR) mode to allow for uphill and downhill shots, which with a custom turret/ballistic cam graduated for your load in yards is the fastest system into action - **but if you really want to stretch your legs the new Kilo 5K can do so much more!**

FEATURES

- Gen II Lightwave DSP Ranging Engine With Extended Range (XR) Mode

- Onboard Environmental Sensors for Real-time Ballistic Calculations

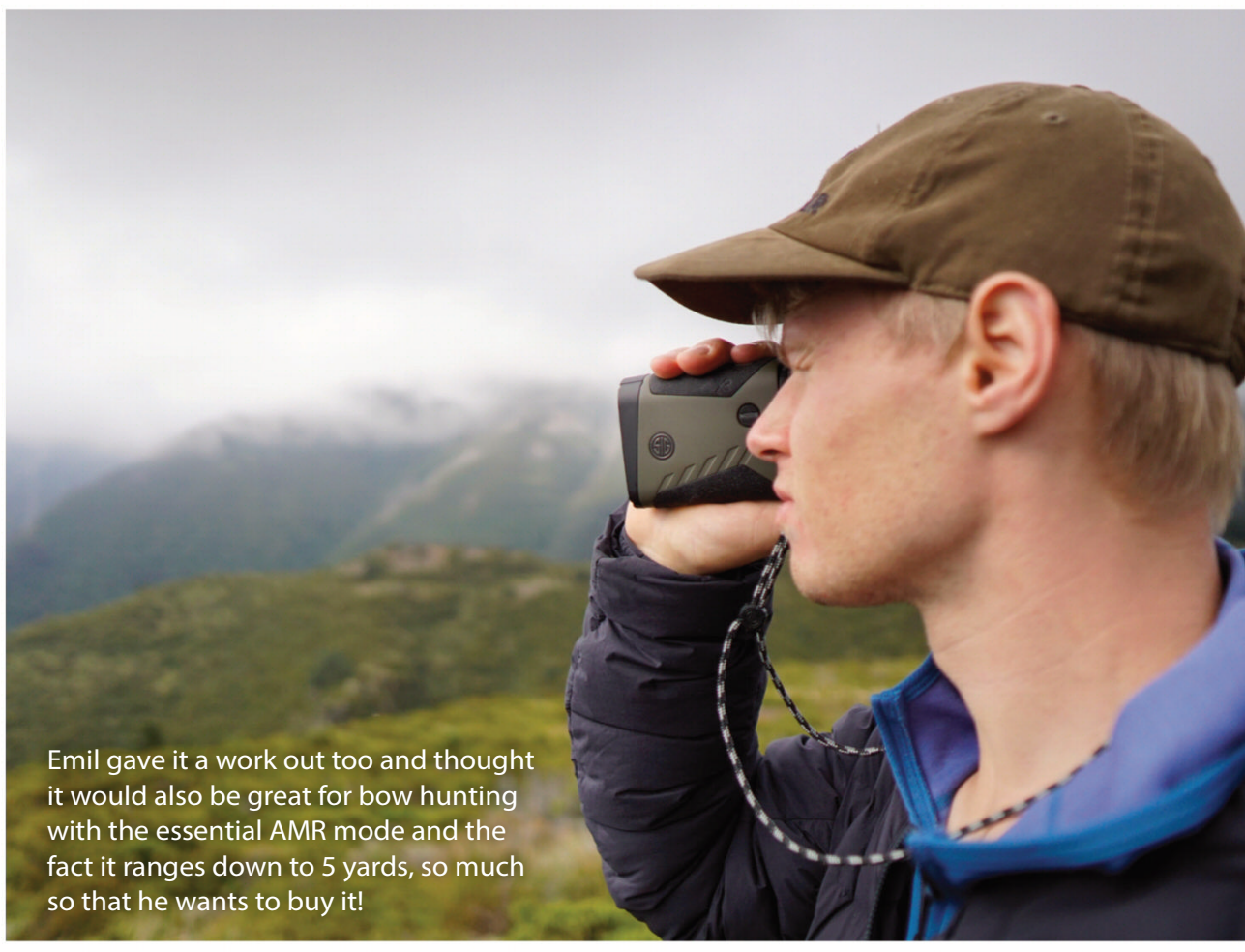
- Drop Remote Waypoints With Basemap App

- Applied Ballistics Ultralite With Complete AB Bullet Database, Up to 25 Custom Bullet Profiles and 8 Onboard Ballistic Groups

- BDX 2.0 Enabled With Low Energy, Long Range Bluetooth



The Kilo 5K is not a large unit


Emil gave it a work out too and thought it would also be great for bow hunting with the essential AMR mode and the fact it ranges down to 5 yards, so much so that he wants to buy it!


Two young stags but no big boys to be seen. I ranged them at a mere 784 yards, which was childs play for the Kilo 5K


A yearling stag



RIDGELINE HYBRID TREK

WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

New from Ridgeline is the Hybrid Trek 45l pack, a substantial overnighter/day trip pack ideal for the roar

It's made from 100% Recycled 300D / 600D Ripstop polyester with TPU coating for water resistance and weighs in at only 1.1kg.

45L is about the perfect size for an overnighter pack, especially in bush country where you aren't carrying a few of the bulky items like a spotter and puffer jacket and can often get away with just a fly, and even do away with a mattress. That being said, I carried a 2 man tent around no trouble, but there might have been a shortage of space for meat, if everything had gone to plan!

The pack is nice and streamlined in shape, with a big lid that drapes down nicely to stop rubbish working its way under. The lid is adjustable on all four connections so you can lift it right up if the pack is jammed full, or even remove it if needed. The volume of the lid was awesome, I like being able to have all my odds and ends in there. About the only drawback was that it had no interior pocket or key hook inside.

The pack uses an aluminium stiffened framesheet as opposed to a structural frame, in this case two bars run the entire length of the back. **This has two major advantages** – it saves hugely on weight and it allows more volume to be kept closer to your back. But it does mean that when you're really packing a heavy load it doesn't transfer weight to the hip belt well as well.

The dedicated rifle scabbard is golden. Even in the bush it can be really handy to just strap your rifle to the pack and go for it to get to your planned hunting country. Ridgeline even had the foresight to sew little tabs under the plastic clips to protect the rifle from being chafed by the hard plastic. It can only be used on the right side, but I can't see why that would really be an issue.



The pack has a lot of room to expand with the fully adjustable lid

There are two solid packing straps on the back, with heavy duty aluminium clips at either end. The top one straps right across the large outside pocket. There are also stitched loops below the pocket for attaching extras, like big sets of antlers! Each side has two clips as well. There is no external drink bottle pocket but I don't rate that as a negative, they often catch scrub and end up filled with rubbish, and it has a sleeve for a hydration bladder anyway. The hip belt has tensioning buckles and handily includes a permanent pouch sewn on either side.

It has all the other features of a premium pack too, like an adjustable chest strap and a rain cover.

Simply put, another well-thought out product from Ridgeline NZ.



Fi using the rifle scabbard while radio-tracking Kiwi in the Kawekas



The rear of the pack, with lid flipped to show blaze orange



The harness system

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WRITTEN BY ~ GREG DULEY

ZAMBERLAN MOUNTAIN TREK GTX RR

Zamberlan is a very old (established 1929) Italian boot brand that is imported into New Zealand by Hunting and Fishing NZ

Luke reviewed one of their models, the Lynx Mid GTX, back in Issue 86. I know he found them a very comfortable all round NZ bush boot. In this issue we are reviewing a much more serious alpine model, the Mountain Trek, designed for mountain hunters and climbers.

UPPER:	Hydrobloc® Perwanger® Leather
LINER:	GORE-TEX Performance Comfort
INSOLE:	Zamberlan® Fiberglass Insole 5mm
MIDSOLE:	Double Density Wedge + Zamberlan® SEMI PCS EVO
SOLE:	Vibram® Mulaz Evo
LAST:	ZTECH
WEIGHT :	920gms (Size EU 42)
PRICE:	$849.99

Zamberlan say about the Mountain Trek:

"Made to more easily transition from climbing to hiking with a hike-friendly midsole. Technical DNA endures allowing for climbing technical routes with or without gear. Designed for high-level mountaineering and glacial routes as well as high-altitude big game hunting."

FEATURES INCLUDE:

» Built on the Zamberlan Vibram Mulaz Evo platform, with integrated Zamberlan semi-PCS (professional crampon system) capability for those times when a crampon is needed

» The Zamberlan Fiberglass 5mm insole grants precise performance and support for edging, toe-in and other technical maneuvers, but is more forgiving for hiking

» A triple-density PU wedge midsole adds both support and cushioning where needed

» The single-piece uppers are comprised of 2.8mm Hydrobloc Perwanger leathers for extreme durability and water resistance over time

» Cordura components are used over the ankles and collar for lightweight protection

» Gore-Tex Performance Comfort membranes provide guaranteed waterproof protection and breathability for maximum range and versatility while hiking

» The Mountain Trek is lasted for a precise fit using Zamberlan's anatomical ZTECH last, allowing for the most sensitivity and precision

» Roller lace hardware is corrosion resistant and allows for easier lacing and less wear on laces

» The Zamberlan RRS (rubber rand system) provides extreme foot protection and prolongs the life of the boot

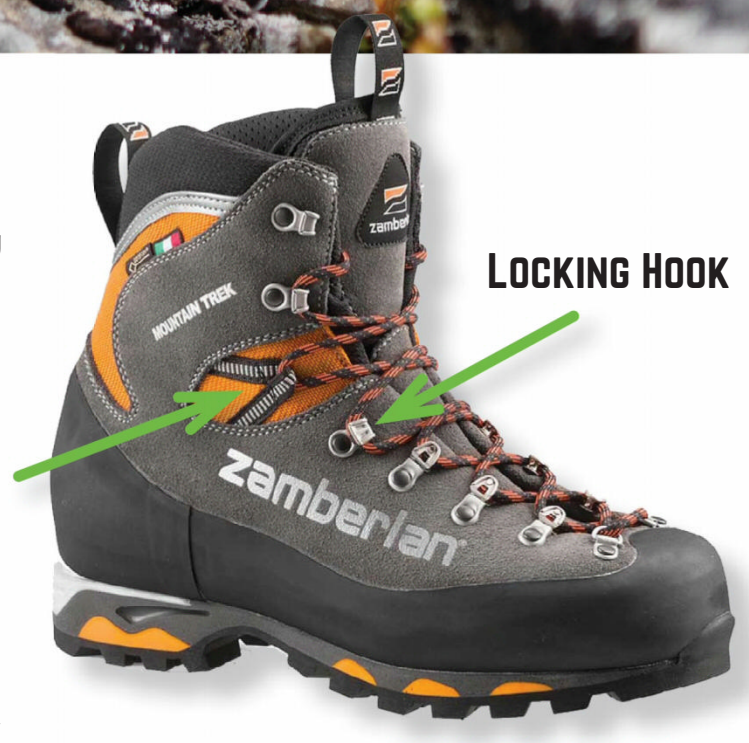
» Resolable



The rubber rand is very high, and at the rear comes right up the heel to the middle of your achilles. The outsole is a fairly stiff compound, typical Vibram, and incorporates a little lip that comes up over the front of the rand for better durability

First impressions are the Mountain Trek is a very striking looking boot. Rigidity wise they have a very stiff 5mm fibreglass shank, with very little flex under the ball of your foot. The lacing system starts very low down on the toe, includes a lock hook at the transition over your arch, and then a running loop before going into the three sets of upper hooks. **The design is so you can run the upper and lower lacing systems at different tightness levels.** The running loop allows more lace movement at this important "hinge" point. This is essential in such a rigid shank boot, otherwise you'll find it quite clunky and uncomfortable walking on undulating terrain. Further to the specifications given, while having a Gore-Tex liner for breathable waterproofing, there is no insulation layer. This is designed as a 3 season boot that won't get too hot in summer and you can get away with for a lot of winter hunting as well. The tongue is adjustable for fit/bulk by virtue of a separate inner that while fixed at the bottom is attached to the outer tongue at the top by Velcro. This way you can account for a high or low arch fit. The full suede leather upper has Cordura reinforcing at the main wear/hinge points. The rubber rand is very high, and at the rear comes right up the heel to the middle of your achilles. The outsole is a fairly stiff compound, typical Vibram, and incorporates a little lip that comes up over the front of the rand for better durability.

The first thing you notice when putting these boots on for the first time is the angle of the upper/heel of the boot is very forward leaning – like a ski boot. Combined with its rigidity, you need to loosen the laces well down to actually get your foot in. The locking hook being below the threaded loop eye takes a bit of getting used to – it is a bit fiddly to get the lace into the locks when it's still held in the loop eye above it. The plus side is that you can get the bottom of the boot very tight over your foot but still allow full flex at the instep without the usual higher locking eyelet causing the laces to cut in when you bend your ankle forward as when walking up a hill. I found this absolutely essential due to the very rigid forward sloping heel. **If you do the upper laces up tight for when you're walking on your boot's toes, especially front pointing with crampons, then your lower calf above your ankle is fixed at a forward leaning angle – ideal for steep snow and ice climbing.** But try and walk on normal terrain for any length of time and you'll find the upper heel section uncomfortable on your Achilles, and also to a lesser extent in front of your ankle. To be able to walk normally and comfortably, I had the lower lace section very tight, but the upper quite loose. This did mean a little more changing of lace tension during the day than with boots with a more usual upper angle.



I would have liked to have had these boots in the middle of winter to climb some ice with crampons, but had to be content with an early roar walk-about in the Canterbury high country. I had a 25kg pack, and covered a fair amount of country over the space of a couple of days. Even with this decent weight on board, I found the boots very stiff, but with the variable lace tension system was able to spend 12 hours a day on my feet. I did find the size somewhat on the small size, and would suggest going a half size bigger than your usual.

Weight wise the Mountain Treks were up there, at 1080gms per boot for my size UK11.5/EU46.5. **This is to be expected of a serious alpine/mountaineering boot with a full fibreglass shank and the amount of rubber and leather in their construction.**

There are much lighter and more flexible boots in the Zamberlan line up, like the Lynx previously tested, and in between those two they have the Guide. This last weighs 100gms less than the Mountain Treks and is a more universal hunting/trekking boot and would be suited to a lot of NZ hunting situations. **But if you're after a really serious alpine boot, do have a look at the Mountain Trek as it might be just the boot you're looking for.**

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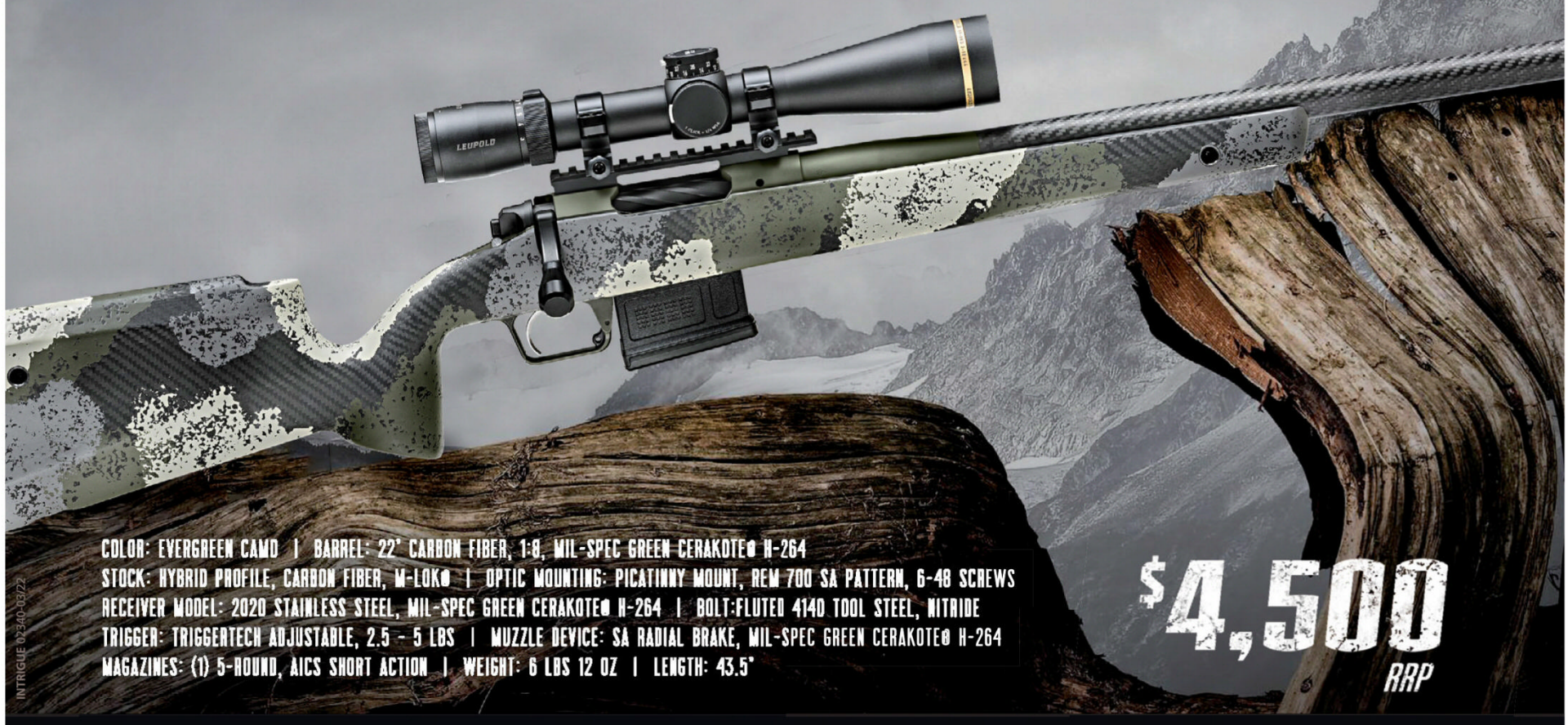

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WRITTEN BY
CALLUM MCKENZIE

As with many of you, I was introduced to the outdoors by my father, just as he was by his father. For us, our year more or less revolves around that three month period in the middle of the year - duck season

As young fellas, my brother and I grew up frequenting rivers and lakes in the deep south, through the heart of Otago and into Canterbury, chasing waterfowl when in season, then fishing trout or salmon during the rest of the year. As well as giving rabbits and hares a bit of a run around and numerous weekends playing rugby, that pretty much sums up our childhood. As we grew older our minds started wandering to the mountains in search of new challenges and animals with hooves and horns.



Our minds still wander and are often followed by our feet but we are still very much grounded around duck season. It's what we love and what we've always known. Don't get me wrong - we're always seeking a bit of mountain therapy but the sight of a mallard dropping into the decoys on some public water is pretty damn hard to beat.

Opening weekend is a busy time of the year for the McKenzie clan. The roar has just finished and we're most likely trying to plan a trip to coincide with chamois and tahr ruts, but opening is the one event that's set in stone. The days, weeks and months leading up to opening are a huge part of the fun, from sorting new gear to putting new ideas into action (that's a whole other story) for the upcoming season, or planning hunts with mates you've been meaning to catch up with for a while. **It all adds to the excitement and anticipation of the upcoming season. There is so much more to duck hunting than pulling the trigger**. In this article I'll talk about our opening weekend, some of the challenges we face and what we do to try overcome them. Hopefully, there will be some information in here that'll help you on the big day!

Our family has hunted opening weekend in the same area for around 30 years now. When my brother and I were old enough to do our own thing, out onto the river we went. We found a good piece of water that was hard against the willows on a big braided river. It's roughly 60 metres long and 20 metres wide at the furthest points. The water looks still but there is a wee bit of flow through it and it's not very deep apart from a deep hole in the top end. We've been hunting the same piece of water for ten years. It has changed drastically and we've had to change with it. **It started out with just the two of us and now we're all in there, all 12-14 of us.** When we decided on blind placement the last thing we wanted to be doing was staring in to the sun all day, so we chose to park up on the north side. Over the years the willows have grown tall but have also grown further out on to the river. Previously, we could see the main stream, but there's no chance of that now. These



Lillian's first opening. Be sure to bring plenty of snacks for the next generation



Opening is all about having a good time, regardless of how many shots have been fired. It's near impossible not to have a laugh when Braedyn is in the blind



Matty and Braedyn blowing out the cobwebs

Birds eye view of our opening spot



This blind has definitely seen a few different pairs of waders

newer willows have worked in our favour, creating a heavy shadow for us to hide in. Now, all we have to do is put a bit of extra scrub on the front of the blind and trim the willows in front of us. Being in the shade makes it a lot easier to hide so many people. There is far less chance of something reflecting off the sun and we don't have to turn the cooker off every time we try to fry some bacon.

Hiding ourselves on the shaded side also allows us to run the majority of our decoys along the opposite side and in the main body of water. This is where the decoys will be in the sun when it's out (opening weekend is always good tanning weather, isn't it?) plus they'll be far more visible from the main stretches of the river.

Most of our birds try to land facing up stream (coming in from our left hand side) so the majority of our decoys are actually a good 10-15 metres above us, with a string down that opposite edge, creating a hole right in front of us that the ducks usually try land in. The south side across from the blind has a lot of flooded willows and I'm a big fan of putting decoys and flicker flockers in those areas, as I believe the ducks look a bit harder to see them in there. The movement on the water coming out of the willows looks very realistic and definitely helps draw the ducks eyes away from the blind. Over the years we've tried all sorts of motorised decoys and there are some crackers out there, but our go-to movement maker is a jerk string with three or four decoys on it set in the bulk of our spread. They are great for movement on calm water, no batteries are needed, wings can't fall off and no stake to try hit in on a rocky riverbed. **The only thing that can go wrong is when your mate gets a bit excited, jerks it a bit much and pulls the anchor away. . .**

When we have checked in on our opening spot during the off season we see few birds.There are bugger-all foot prints in the mud or feathers caught up in the willows - perhaps the odd pair that jump out. But we know it's on a good flight line - traffic birds is what we like to call them. **They can be bloody hard work and they'll make you want to pull you hair out at times.** You can do everything right and the duck won't even look, as the reality is that they already know where they are going. This makes the reward that much sweeter when you do pull ducks out of the stratosphere. The biggest key to this is calling, arguably my favourite part of duck hunting. My brother and I prefer to use a cut-down style call. They are definitely not the easiest call to blow, but they're a big, loud and heavy sounding call, meaning that the sound carries a long way. Dad loves his Hammonds and we have a J.J Lares or two in the blind as well. With so many able callers we do have to be careful that we're not creating one solid wall of sound. **We designate one or two callers to "lead the charge" and our other callers fill in the gaps.** Big and loud calling is often associated with a sense of urgency or desperation but, if you slow your cadences down a bit and drag each note out ever so slightly, you'll sound a lot more relaxed. Vary your cadences, tones and notes and try not to sound too repetitive. Watch how the ducks in your scenario react to your calls, then adjust accordingly. Be sure to keep talking to them all the way in, and don't stop too early. If I'm calling and someone else is shooting, my goal is to put bums on the

Dad's black lab Jack has a huge motor and certainly earns his keep



Geoff watching on as the off-season training pays off

water. At the end of the day it's all about patience and learning to work in with each other. The only way to get better at calling as a group is simply by doing it. Help each other out. Critique don't criticise, or you'll end up getting a head ache from being the only caller or worse, hunting by yourself! Don't be afraid to try new and different things (that goes for decoy spreads too). You'll soon work out what the ducks like and don't like on the day.

When it comes time to pull the trigger, safety is always first. We take turns at taking the first shot and one or two others for back up. The hunters on the ends are generally always ready to go as they'll be the last ones to get an opportunity to get a shot away on a bird that might seem to be bullet proof. Ideally, we would love to bring the gun up, fire one shot and hear a splash but we all know this isn't always the case.

We also make sure everyone is aware of how far across they can shoot. We usually leave a couple of branches high out in the front of the blind to act as a stopper for when someone gets excited and follows a bird too far left or right. If you have to step away from your gun for any reason, unload it and leave the chamber open so everyone can see. **Don't be afraid to speak up and call your friends or family out on minor things - we do it all the time.** It's not having a go or getting upset, it's making sure everyone is on the same page and keeping each other safe. Communication is key.

Without our dogs we would definitely lose a few birds amongst the willows. They really do go hand-in-hand when it comes to waterfowling. Very rarely is there one without the other, and it's hugely satisfying seeing the off-season training come together. We're always stoked when we see them emerge from the scrub with a big fat greenhead. We've had a duck go down in the willows numerous times and thought 'we're not going to get that one back', however, we're usually proven wrong by our furry four-legged mate. If your dog hasn't done a lot of retrieving, don't be afraid to clamber in the willows with them. Let them go about their work and be patient with them. I try to let the dog stay in as long as possible, as I don't want to create a habit of giving up early, and I give them huge praise when they have been working for a while and come out with the duck.

Don't feel pressured to hurry and get back in the blind, as one in the hand is better than losing two in the willows.

We are on public land and there are often other hunters doing their thing close by. Being respectful and courteous to each other goes a long way. When it comes to tagging your spot be sure to have a really good look around to see if anyone is close by, as this will save you all sorts of time and stress if you pick it upon tagging day rather than duck season eve. It's not hard to say g'day when you see another hunter at the carpark, have a yarn and discuss what each other's plans are for the day. You might end up hunting together, potentially doubling the size of your spread and making a new hunting buddy, or strategically placing yourselves to improve both your chances. Be sure to clean up and leave it as or better than you found it. You carried your gear in with you so its not hard to take it out.

Have a safe and enjoyable opening weekend.



Mai Oh Mai

WRITTEN BY ~ **COREY CARSTON**

This article could have very easily started with a raft of swear words, just like it did in the hunt, but I doubt Luke would like to print it so I'm starting like this instead:

In the early hours of the morning we launched the boat in one of those little out-of-the-way places that is only visited by opening weekend hunters and the odd die-hard hard-core waterfowler in the remainder of the season.

The reason that it's not visited as much as it should be is because it never holds a huge number of waterfowl and it can be a fair bit of a mission to hunt at times.

Despite this, it's a neat little spot that's challenging to hunt and I really enjoy going there.

When we left home there was a heavy frost on the ground and no wind, which wasn't ideal, but you have to deal with the cards you're given. In the shelter of the ramp there was no perceivable wind, but once we reached the open water there was, in fact, a pretty brisk south-easterly. A good wind was just what the doctor ordered, but not from this particular direction.

On reaching the maimai we had planned to use we soon realised it was not a goer. The wind was blowing straight towards us and it was unlikely that ducks would decoy to this spot in the conditions.

A lightening sky saw us hurrying back towards the ramp and to a more sheltered spot. If I had been hunting by myself it would have been tempting to park up in the rushes and wade, but my companions and the dog did not like this idea as much as I did, so the call was made to hunt out of the closest unoccupied maimai.

After boating past three that were deemed to be unacceptable I reluctantly dropped the guys off in the most suitable one and placed the decoys out. I'd never had the misfortune to hunt out of this maimai and **it quickly became apparent that this was not going to be an easy or enjoyable thing to do.**

The mānuka covering it was six feet high, there was no grating on the floor, empty shells were littered all around and, for some unknown reason, there were weird side things made of tin. I'm guessing they were to protect the hunter from the wind, but they restricted not only our view, but the swing of our guns. Worst of all there was a big area behind us - no doubt designed to store gear and keep hunters sheltered but it gave no view whatsoever around us.

As soon as the decoys were placed there were ducks flying and we, or should I say I, was into it. As the first mallards of the morning swooped down low to investigate the decoys and with a terribly tired teenager and an older person complaining about the cold, I found it was only the dog and I that were



Stacy picking up the ducks on the pond. Our maimai is situated right behind him. The only evidence of it is the slightly out of place manuka branch. This was a extra piece we used to cover us in.



Everything I hate in a maimai. High scrub as well as lack of cover limited visibility and check out that black hole

ready.

Taking the safety off I raised my Benelli, readying myself for the shot. The ducks were totally oblivious to the activity in the maimai and dropped just behind the furthest decoy. I shouldered the gun and immediately got snagged in the ridiculously high mānuka. Not only did I miss my opportunity at the mallards, but it could have been a disaster safety wise.

As the morning progressed it become apparent to us that any ducks that were shot from this maimai would be the result of good luck rather than good management. Without a doubt it was one of the most frustrating hunts I've ever been on, solely because of the maimai and its design. The other members of the crew, both significantly taller than me, also struggled - so much so, that after the first hour they put their guns down and became spectators.

By this stage I had managed to break some off the highest bits of mānuka and if I stood on my tip toes I could almost shoot properly.

We managed to get a pretty respectable bag in the end, considering the conditions, so there was nothing wrong with the position of the maimai, just the way it had been constructed. With a bit of forethought it could have been really good.

MAIMAI CONSTRUCTION

I believe there are a few things that hunters commonly get wrong when building their maimais and I'm going to outline what works for me.

Obviously, these are my own opinions based on the odd year or two of water fowling around Southland and Otago so if you're happy with your creation then keep doing what you're doing.

Maimai is a Māori word that, loosely translated, means place of concealment. Call them what you will; a hide, a blind, a hut or even a 'sit there' – it's all the same thing - a place to conceal yourself from the birds or animals you are trying to deceive.

SCRUBBING THE MAIMAI

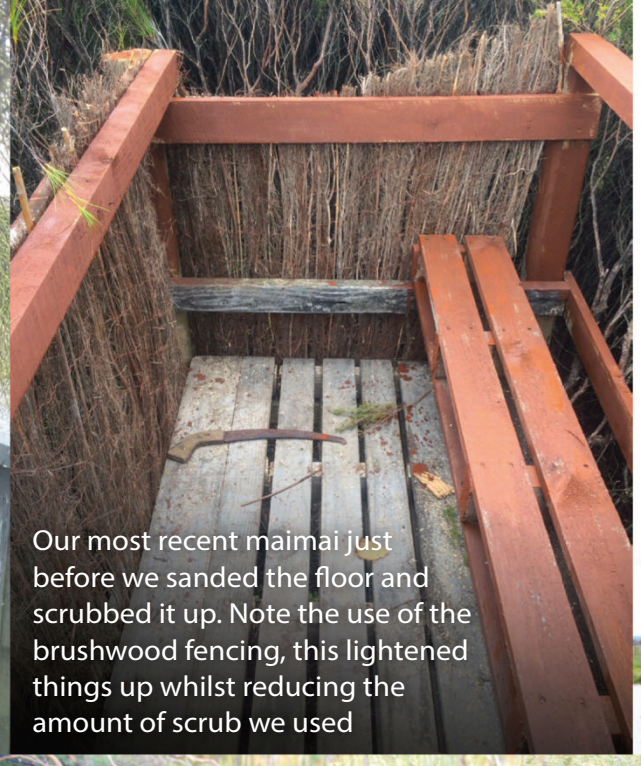
How many hunters have you come across recently that are eight-foot NBA players? I know I haven't seen any. One of the biggest issues I see when I'm hunting is the height of the cover. I realise I'm on the shorter side of things (I prefer the term vertically challenged) but I do and have hunted with some giant people well over 6 feet and they struggle to see, let alone shoot, over top of some of the scrub covering them.

I realise you need to stay hidden but what is the point if you can't see, let alone have a shot at, any passing ducks? I guess the thinking behind high scrub harks back to the grey duck days when it was legal to shoot ducks on the water. Back then, with limited ammo supplies and having to get the most bang for your buck, it made sense to harvest as many ducks as possible with the least amount of shots. **Lots of hunters back then only hunted to feed the family.**

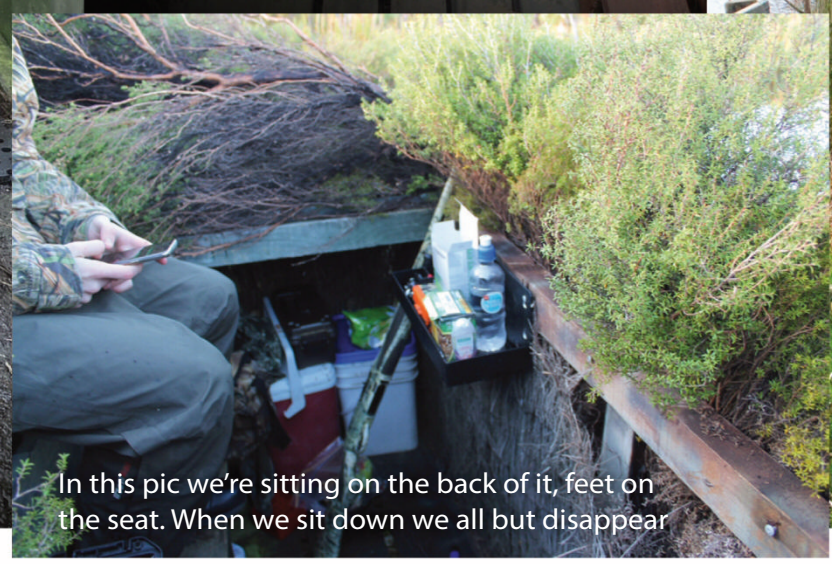
Maimais used by water-shooters were easy to spot as they were normally covered from top to bottom with only a narrow hole front and centre, just big enough for a protruding gun barrel.



With its overhanging broom and painted green the black hole effect is negated on this maimai



Our most recent maimai just before we sanded the floor and scrubbed it up. Note the use of the brushwood fencing, this lightened things up whilst reducing the amount of scrub we used



In this pic we're sitting on the back of it, feet on the seat. When we sit down we all but disappear

A terrible maimai that gets hunted out of on opening weekend. Slippery floor no cover and again, a lack of visibility. How many ducks would spook off this over the course of a week?



NOT ENOUGH COVER

Conversely, one of the things that often drives me spare is having not enough cover on the maimais. Waterfowl have fantastic eye-sight, often compared to an 8x power binoculars. They also see colour exceptionally well, and can see UV light, so a half scrubbed maimai with hunters dressed in fluro polar fleece, smoke billowing out a chimney and a ute or quad parked behind it does not convey 'all is safe below'. Often you can spot large bare patches showing shiny corrugated iron. Once the sun hits, it's like shining a beacon to the ducks and it's not a welcoming one. Over the years I've spoken to many hunters in the above category who are quite happy to tell all and sundry that the ducks were too cagey or the weather conditions weren't favourable, but their lack of camo hasn't helped.

Some maimais are like palaces. Probably the best of them had a flush toilet that over looked the pond. It also had two flat screen TVs, a full bar, sleeping facilities and a brick patio. **There was even a swing and slide for when the kids turned up.** Access to the "shooting platform" was through a huge glass sliding door. Two bright coloured kayaks with orange life jackets were parked in front, not only to put out decoys and pick up ducks but for the patrons to use when things were slow.

These guys didn't really care about shooting a heap of ducks. For them it was an escape from the farm and a drop-in centre for neighbouring farmers. On opening morning they shot for the first hour or so or until they had enough ducks for a feed, then the guns were locked away, the BBQ lit and the tops came off a few stubbies. This awesome work of art obviously had no cover on it and stuck out like dog's balls.

If at all possible, I like to use as much natural cover as I can. This not only blends in well but also limits how much extra scrub and work you have to do.



A picture of the inside of a duck palace from Roy Sloan

BLACK HOLES

Game, whether it has four legs or flys, hates shadows. Why? Because that's where predators hide. It's instinct in birds to avoid such places. The traditional hen-house style of maimai leaves a heap of shadows with the box behind where you shoot.

This can easily be avoided with lighter

coloured paint or a dropper of camo burlap, or even a camo net separating the two areas. This has the additional benefit of non-hunters or camp cooks being able to move around as normal without the worry of spooking ducks. Be warned though - black shade cloth or weed mat accentuates the black hole even more, so go for a lighter option.

Another thing to consider is the angle and height of approaching ducks. You may find low ducks will decoy spectacularly whilst high ducks, that are often described as being spooked, don't. The higher the duck is, the more they will see, and the thing that will stick out the most is a black hole.



Ramps for dogs are great but only if the dog knows how to use them. Here Kiera demonstrates the wrong way to do it

FLOORS

Floors are often an issue. With hunters and their four-legged companions constantly walking in slippery mud and water the floor can end up being as slippery as ice. For safety reasons you need to have a non-slippery floor and it helps to maintain balance while shooting. It's a fact that you will not shoot properly if your feet are not well placed.

This is so easy to solve - a bit of old carpet is great and will protect the dog's feet, and has the benefit of not losing anything dropped between the slats of a gapped floor. Chicken wire stapled on the floor also works well.

SIZE

Size is a big one (pun intended). Why have a huge, big structure that is more obvious and requires more scrub and maintenance if there's only a couple of hunters using it? For me, smaller is best, with just enough room for the number of hunters and dogs using it. Keeping it small means that it will blend in better, making it far less obvious to waterfowl.

The style of maimai I build will not suit a lot of hunters. It's pretty basic, with four sides, a door, a seat and a shelf on which to place extra ammo and that all important can of coke. Despite basic construction, it works. While you're sitting the scrub in front is just high enough to see over but if you're camoed up and stay still, ducks do not see you. It is a huge advantage to always be able to see where the ducks are going, and to be able to react with calling or pull the trigger on them if, heaven help us, they don't commit or flare.

When we are ready to shoot we stand up and the scrub is just over waist height. This gives us a totally unrestricted shooting arc. With the back and sides of the maimai being only slightly higher it means we have 360 degrees arc to shoot, and we can watch ducks wherever they go. Nine times out of ten the ducks will be spotted out front or to the sides. Having



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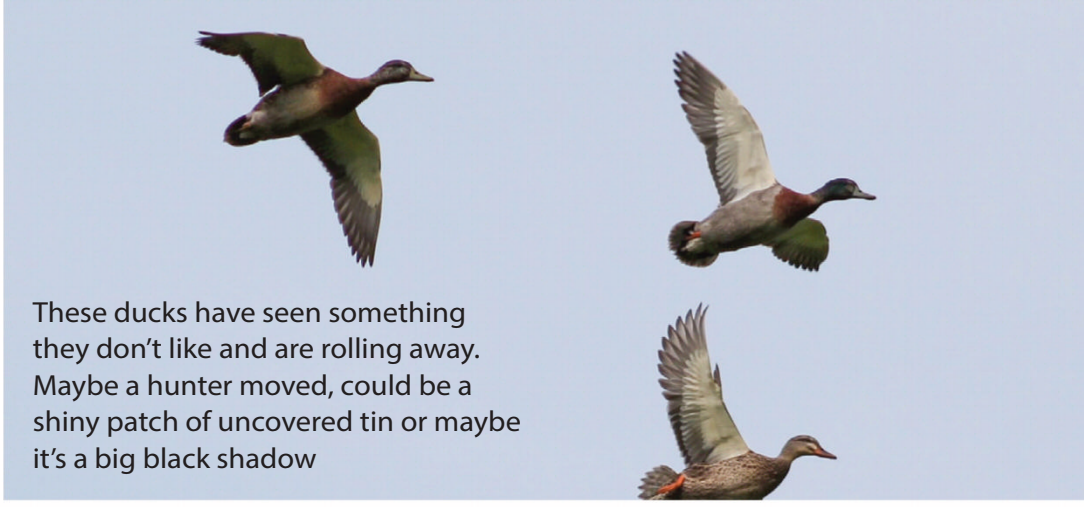

These ducks have seen something they don't like and are rolling away. Maybe a hunter moved, could be a shiny patch of uncovered tin or maybe it's a big black shadow

it slightly higher removes some shadow and if ducks are closer it tends to cone us in, keeping us hidden. Good blind positioning with the predominant wind behind or beside us enables us to all but disappear.

One of my favourite maimais to hunt out of is one of the most basic. Dad and I had started hunting this certain spot and had made a makeshift hide with pieces of cut willow that we had pushed into the ground to give us some cover. After a season of that we got all fancy and put four sheep posts in the ground and nailed a rail front and back. We placed a heap of willow branches in front of us and disappeared. We kill a ton of birds out of this, and it cost $40 to make. The only maintenance we do is to prune the willows back before the start of the season.

Another great one is our big water maimai. This had been abandoned for years and I'd shown it to some of the boys from work who were looking for a spot to hunt. They claimed it for a few years but found what they thought was a better spot and passed it on to me. **It's a pretty impressive structure that stands 12 feet high, with a room out the back to cook in and if you were keen, to sleep in.**

When we first took it over it had one of the worst shooting platforms I'd ever experienced so one off-season we raised the floor and the front. Stepping up out of the box to the shooting platform is annoying but it gives us 360 degrees shooting and viewing. With a mixture of live willows that we trim back before the start of the season and a bit of mānuka, this big structure all but disappears.

I know some hunters may disagree with most, if not all, that I've written but if you're happy then, by all means, keep doing what you're doing.

You may not have enough time for any major alterations this season should you be inspired by my suggestions. So, while out hunting this opening, watch how birds react to your maimai, and while placing decoys or picking up ducks, look back and see if you can spot any of the things I've mentioned. It may bag you a few more ducks.

Good luck for the upcoming season!



This maimai was hidden in the willows. We can park the boat behind it and nothing sees us

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Me and Grandma searching for deer

WRITTEN BY ~ **SPENCER SIMKIN**

MY KAWEKA HUNTING ADVENTURE

Grandma picked me up after swimming at 5.30pm on Friday night

I was all packed up ready to go to Makahu Saddle Hut with Grandma and Grant to try and shoot a Sika stag. I really wanted a nice skin to make a mat for my bedroom floor.

When we got near the Makahu carpark we all had a guess at how many cars would be there. It was the long weekend so we knew that maybe there would be no room in the hut. We were lucky - we were the only ones there.

After putting our gear in the hut, we started up the track to look out across to the spur. **We saw two stags grazing across the gully a bit over 600 yards away but with the windy conditions and darkness fast approaching, they were pretty safe for the night.** It was really good watching them though and I was looking forward to having all the next day trying to spot more.

We got up nice and early and by the time the sun was up we were up the track and bino-ing for deer. Grandma spotted one hind running from one patch of bush to another, but there was no chance of getting that one as it was gone before we could blink.

After a bit more time and a bit more climbing Grant spotted a stag lying down at 525 yards away and he called me over to check it out. I could see that the deer was facing away from us with his head and shoulders partly hidden by bush. Through the scope I could watch the deer lifting up his hind leg and scratching his ear.

We all sneaked down the ridge as quietly as we could to get a better shooting position and to get a bit closer for the shot. We managed to close the gap and the deer was now 411 yards away. I couldn't get any closer. This was it.

I had shot two deer with Grant's .28 Nosler rifle before so I knew that I had a good chance of getting this one. The Nosler has a Proof Research barrel, Manners stock and it fires a 180gn Hornady ELD-M.

The target was pretty small though. Grant told me exactly where I had to aim to make sure of a clean kill and then dialled up the scope. I made sure that I had a steady rest and gently pulled the trigger. Bang!

The deer sprang up and ran into the bush. ***"You got it"*** said Grant. ***"I could tell by the 'thwack'."***

We packed our gear back up and figured out how we were going to get to the deer. It was going to be a steep climb down to the creek and an even steeper one up the other side.

We started by going down a huge shale slide. At the bottom I had to take my boots off and shake out the stones which had got into them!

We left our packs at the bottom by the creek to make it easier to get through the bush. Sometimes we could follow deer tracks, other times we had to push through the vegetation which was



Grant dialling up the scope for Spencer to take the shot



Me and Grant with my Sika spiker

pretty thick in places. **Grant calls me a "squirrel" because I can easily duck under and through the scrub.**

We found where the deer had been lying when I took the shot and I could see that there was blood. I went in front and followed the trail. After about twenty metres I found my spiker wedged between two branches. We dragged it out to get some photos.

Grant skinned the deer for me while I helped hold the legs. It was tricky to do because the deer was lying on a slope and there wasn't anywhere flat to drag it to.

I carried the back steaks out and Grandma took the hind legs. Grant was going to show me how to cut up the meat ready for eating once we got home.

The skin is now waiting to be tanned. We will try and do this ourselves and I am looking forward to learning something else new about hunting.

I cooked the backsteaks on the BBQ for dinner and they were delicious! The rest of the meat was cut up by me and is now vacuum packed in the freezer. Mum got my photos printed and they are now in a frame to remind me of my awesome weekend.

Thanks Grandma and Grant for taking me hunting. When can I go again?

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



Grand Winner
Jack MacDonald (11) with this young Sika deer bush stalked in the Otutu area



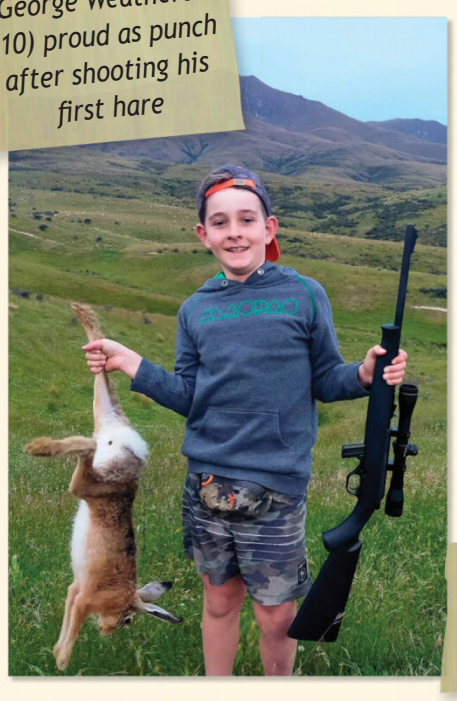
Ashton Ashby with a lazy after school boar weighing 120 pounds



Max Craigie (8) from Glenorchy with his first deer



Jake Woodward - We were out walking on a farm in Central Otago when this massive boar was on its way to the lambs



George Weatherall (10) proud as punch after shooting his first hare



Matthew joyes (14) I stalked in on a goat to 15yrds in Kawhia



FG van der Westhuizen (13) with his first Fallow buck, shot with a 6.5 Creedmoor near Retaruke, a 140m heart shot

Hunting & Fishing NEW ZEALAND

We've had a bumper crop of images from readers supporting Hunting & Fishing so this time around we have two pages, and two winners!

Grand Winner

Chloe Clinch (15) shot her first billy goat at Port Underwood with her Dad's 243, she is adamant the horns are going on her bedroom wall





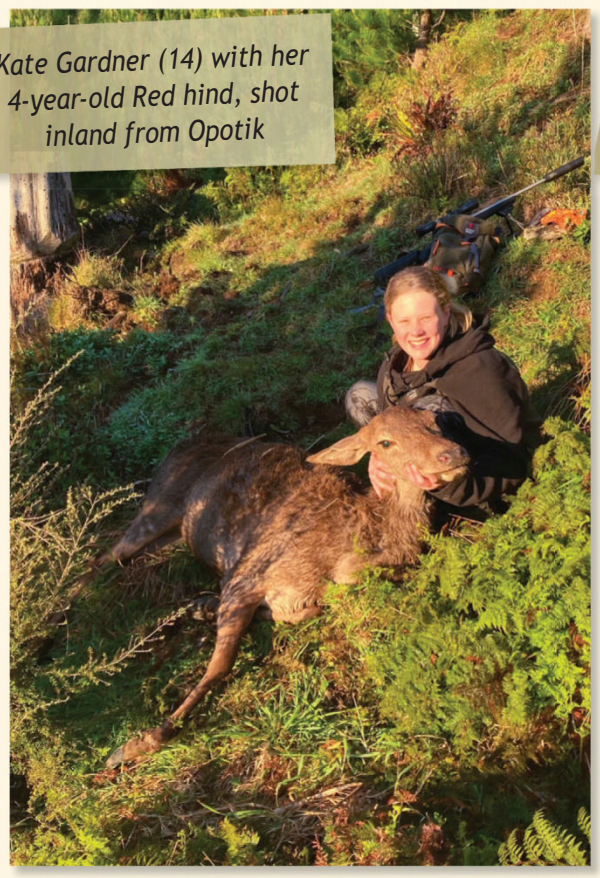
Tara Old's first stag, a nice 11 pointer shot in the King Country using a 6.5PRC



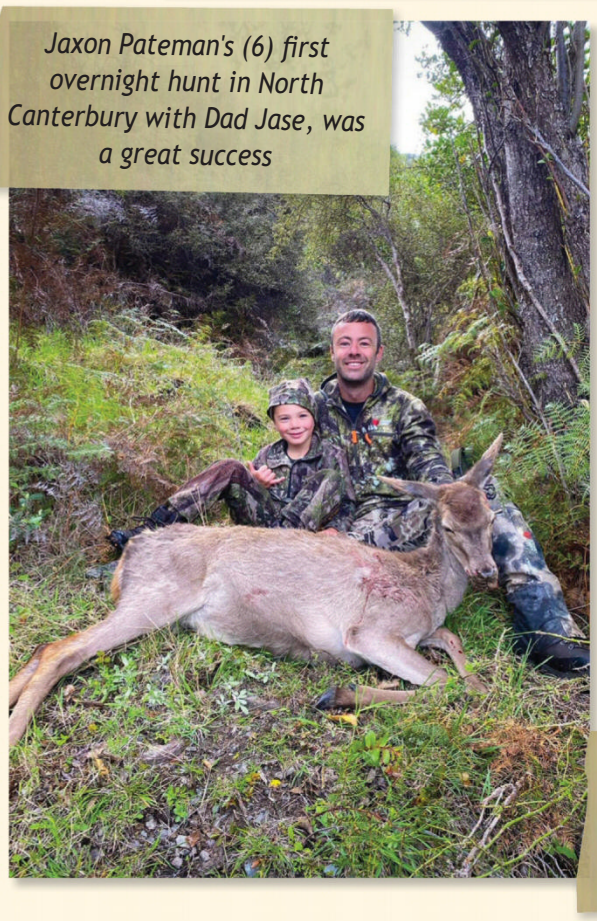
James and Angus Hulse (8 and 6) with James's 123lb boar he wanted to catch for his birthday, caught in Taieri Gorge



Adriana Searle (6), Robbie Holdaway and Cassie Holdaway (6) We took our girls hunting - they loved it. We got two pigs and one deer



Kate Gardner (14) with her 4-year-old Red hind, shot inland from Opotik



Jaxon Pateman's (6) first overnight hunt in North Canterbury with Dad Jase, was a great success



Robert Peeter's grandson Joseph Wycherley (9) with his first deer in Owhango

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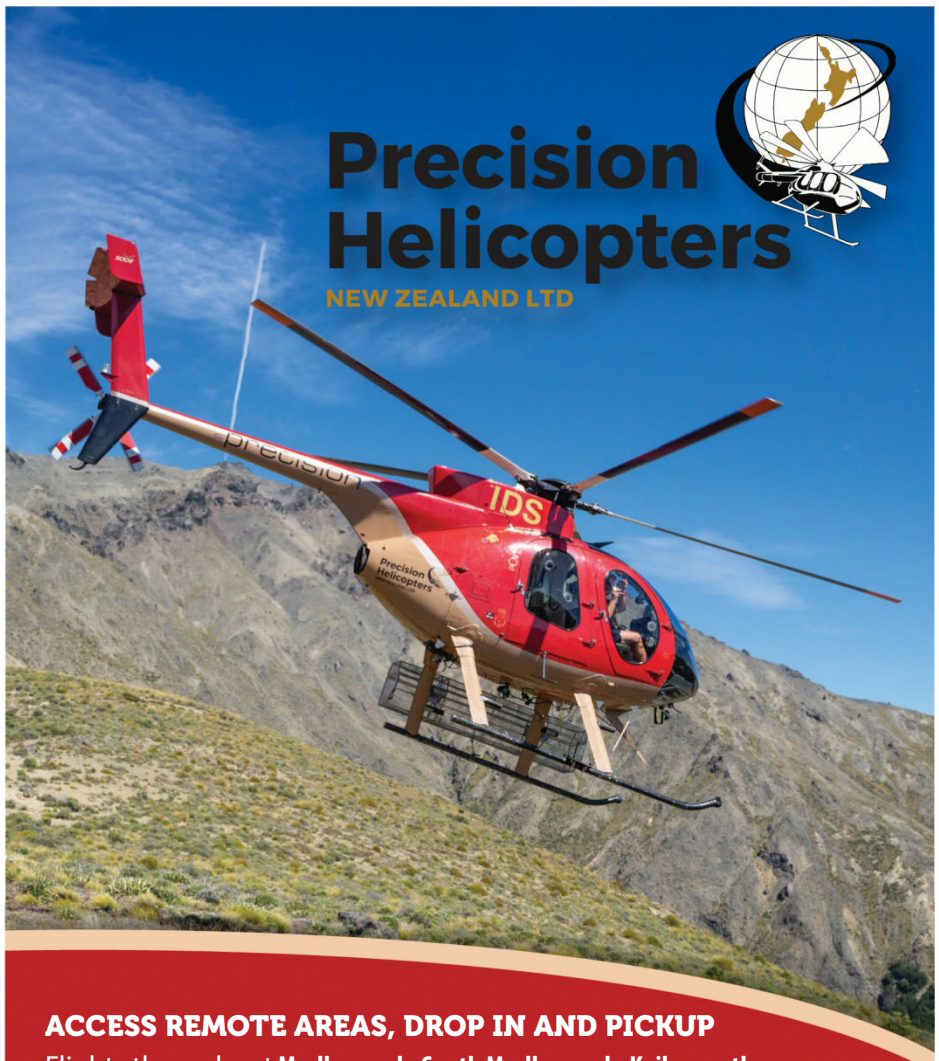

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New Tikka Bipods

Spartan Carbon Fibre Bipod

The Tikka bipod is a custom made combination from the Javelin production. It has the head of the "Javelin Lite" and legs from the "Javelin Pro Hunt" with rubber locks

Carried off the rifle and attached in seconds, this bipod is designed for hunters who need to cover lots of ground but be ready in an instant.

By using high-grade carbon fiber, the bipod is really light weighted at 170g and does not compromise the balance of the rifle, making it perfect for hunters on the move, especially as it can be attached and detached in an instant using the 'Spartan Magnetic Attachment System'.

- Locking cant facility for uneven terrain
- Track targets with the traversing function or use in locked target mode
- Lockable, extendable legs that are easy and quick to operate with a single hand
- Quick and easy to swap to other rifles using the spartan magnetic attachment system
- Secure sling attachment
- Low profile adapter makes carrying a slung rifle comfortable
- Supplied with storage case and a classic rifle adapter kit
- RRP $499



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Sako and Tikka Extended Warranty

For Sako rifles, the extended warranty is 2 years and for Tikka rifles, 1 year. On top of the 2 year standard warranty

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In cases where a purchase has been made prior to receiving the rifle, it is mandatory to provide some proof of receiving the product. Supported file types are pdf and image files.

Customers will receive a Warranty Registration Certificate, after registration. All rifles, currently under the valid standard warranty period (2 years from the purchase date), can be registered for extended warranty

https://www.sako.fi/support/warranty-activation

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Neutrino Pro 700 Down Sleeping Bag (-15C)

The Neutrino Pro 700 is perfect on four season mountain trips and provides maximum warmth with light weight. A tapered mummy fit design reduces bulk and pack size whilst still offering exceptional warmth and protection for its weight

The Pertex® Quantum Pro outer is made from recycled nylon, with a wind and weather resistance coating adding toughness and durability to the fabric. The 800FP European goose down fill is finished with a Rab Nikwax hydrophobic treatment further resisting moisture and improves performance over extended trips in snow or damp weather.

Weight saving baffle construction allows the down to fully loft, eliminates cold spots and maximises warmth. Additional features include baffles around the neck and on the length of the zip to decrease heat loss, an adjustable hood closure system with elasticated drawcord and cordlock, anti-snag zip insert, internal zip guard and a waterproof compression sack. Made in the UK.

RRP $1099.95 - $1159.95

Mythic 600 Down Sleeping Bag (-12C)

A high-performance bag with exceptional warmth with tapered construction for mountain trips in cold, winter conditions where weight and pack size are crucial Filled with 600 grams of 900FP European goose down, the outer cover of 7D Atmos™ nylon ripstop fabric provide wind and water-resistance, making it an ultralight (885g) and super tough sleeping bag.

The mummy shape minimises bulk, boxwall baffle construction allows the down to loft fully, eliminates cold spots and maximises warmth. Additional features include an internal 3D neck baffle and zip baffle to retain heat, internal stash pocket, anti-snag internal zip guard and a lightweight, waterproof, roll top compression sack for protection against the elements and a small pack size while on the move. Made in the UK.

RRP $1499.95

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The Swift 1400

Yet another of the new offerings from Ironman 4×4

Perfectly suited for larger wagons as well as utes fitted with alloy/steel canopies or appropriately rated tradesman racks.

The ultimate in setup and pack-up simplicity while its strong extruded steel roof construction is the suited to mounting up to 50kg dynamic load, it comes with 2 x roof rails as standard equipment! Additionally, the gas assisting roof struts are rated to up to 40kg additional operating roof load; perfect for mounting solar panels. The tent's extruded aluminium perimeter T-slot channel is also perfect for mounting awnings, shower rooms and more.

Here are a few features not to forget about the Swift 1400.
SLEEP CAPACITY - 2 People
DIMENSIONS (mm) - Closed: 2300 (L) x 1400 (W) x 190 (H)
Open: 2300 (L) x 1400 (W) x 1630 (H)
MATTRESS SIZE (mm) - 2200 (L) x 1300 (W) Double
WEIGHT - 88kg + (4kg incl. roof rails)
CASING - Powdercoated Steel Covered Aluminium

MSR FreeLite tents

A 2-person tent weighing about 1kg?!

You betcha.

Over 20% lighter than the previous model, 2022's FreeLite tents bring maximum liveability and durability into the ultralight category. DAC aluminum poles and DuraShield™ waterproof coating provide reliable, 3-season protection. Also available in 1 and 3-person variations



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Element Scope Caps, modular-interchangeable scope caps that can be used in any weather

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Solar Panel Charger

Alternative external power supply for all cellular and non-cellular model trail/security cameras

Distributed by AJ Productions

This Mono-Crystalline Silicon panel features a built-in 8000mAH li-Ion battery and a USB port (5V) for pre-charging the internal battery before field use, then by mounting the panel towards a good supply of sunlight to keep the internal battery charging.

Internal battery pre-charge time via a USB 5V/2ah adapter takes approximately 5 hours. Solar panel also features 3 x External power outlet ports for 6V, 9V and 12V. Panel Waterproof rating: IP54

Ascent Rapid Lace Boots

This lightweight, waterproof boot has been built for maximum stealth and agility by using a moulded fabric upper on a quiet and flexible sole

The ATOP rapid lace system uses a strong stainless steel cord that allows the wearer to quickly lace the boot by turning a tension dial

It provides evenly distributed tension across the foot and ankle for a more comfortable fit - a simple reverse dial flick immediately releases the lacing system. Designed for comfort over long distances, in grass and bush terrains.

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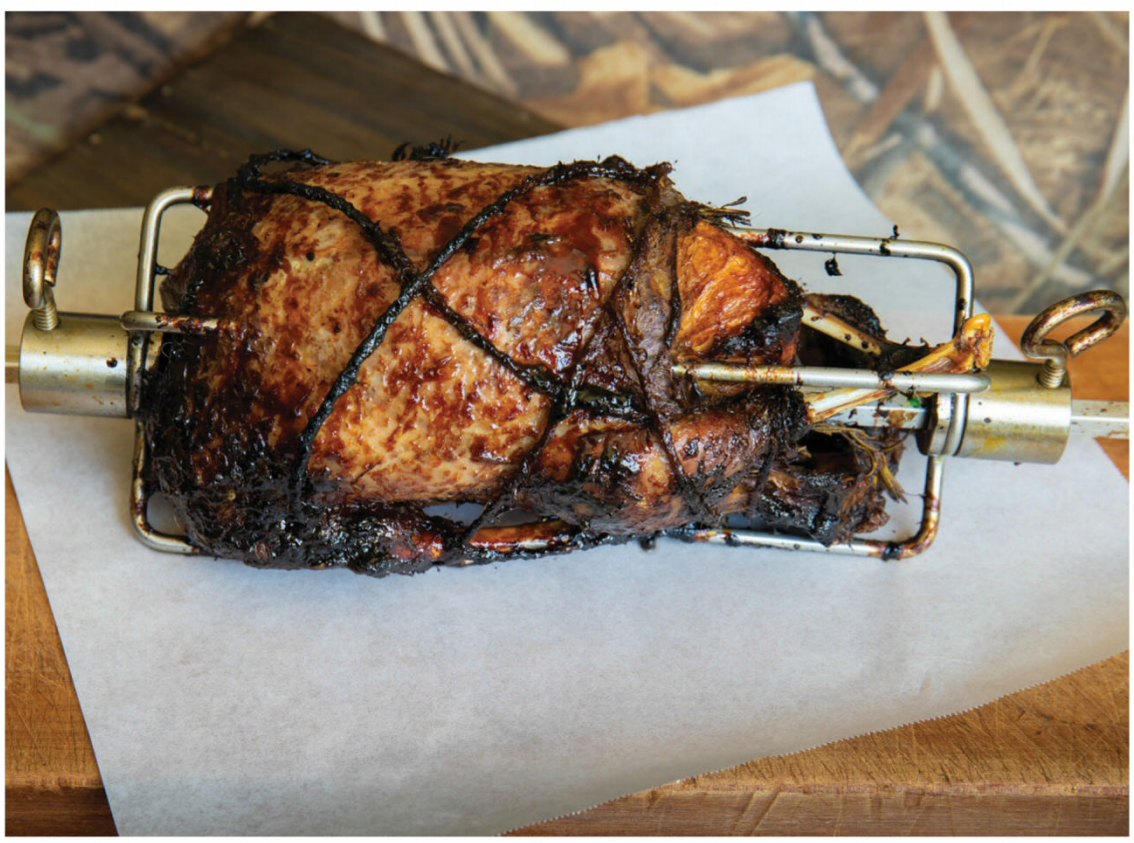
WRITTEN BY ~ **RICHARD HINGSTON**

WHOLE ROTISSERIE DUCK
WITH ORANGE, ROSEMARY, HOISIN AND HONEY

If you're in the middle of duck shooting season, stop, and before you pack up and put the BBQ away for the winter then you may want to try this Rotisserie Duck

The rotisserie is a common attachment and a great method of cooking as the bird will be delicious with a lovely deep caramelised colour of the skin on the outside. The rotisserie produces a very flavourful bird with well-done meat. However, if you don't have a rotating spit then you can still do this recipe under the hood in your BBQ, but you will need to turn the duck at least four to five times during the cooking process.



CAVITY FILLING

- 1 orange cut in half
- 2 spring onions cut into thirds
- 3 garlic cloves, peeled and sliced, or bashed with the side of a knife
- 1 knob of ginger, sliced
- Small bunch of rosemary and/or thyme

SAUCE/GLAZE

- ½ cup hoisin sauce
- 3 Tbsp liquid honey
- 4 Tbsp soy sauce
- 1 Tbsp balsamic vinegar
- Zest of 1 orange
- Juice of 1 orange
- 2 Tbsps chopped fresh rosemary
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed



Method

It doesn't matter which method you use to pluck your ducks but try to keep the skin intact. The quickest and easiest way is to heat a pot of water to 80°C, add a couple of drops of detergent, and dunk the duck into this several times. The feathers will easily be removed when you pull them off. You may have to repeat this several times or work in smaller areas on the duck. Do it outside, otherwise you know who will be on your case with all the mess!



Bird

Rinse and pat dry both inside and outside of the bird.
Place the cavity filling ingredients into the bird.
Place the duck into the fridge, uncovered, 24 hours before you intend to cook it. This allows the skin to dry out and once cooked become nice and crispy. You can cook on the day, but the skin won't be as crispy.

Sauce/glaze

In a saucepan, combine all the ingredients and bring to the boil. Turn off and allow to infuse for 30 minutes before using. Divide mixture in half - one part for glazing or basting the duck while it's cooking and the other as a dipping sauce to serve with the duck.

To prepare the duck for cooking

Preheat the BBQ to a medium heat. For rotisserie you will need an indirect heat of about 170°C. Indirect means that you don't have a burner going directly underneath where your duck is sitting or rotating on the spit.

I find it easier to truss the duck with string first before placing onto the rod for cooking then secure the duck with the prongs from each end, making sure that it is tightly screwed on. This ensures that the duck is now attached to the rotisserie cooking rod and won't fall off while cooking. Remember to use a drip tray underneath.

If you are unsure of how to truss a duck with string then Uncle Google has lots of short easy-to-follow videos.

Set the rotisserie in motion with the lid down and cook for 40 minutes. Lift the lid and baste the duck with the remaining glaze, and continue to do this frequently during the cooking process. Continue to cook until the thickest part of the duck reaches 71°C. The total cooking time will be approx. 1¼ to 1¾ hours.

Carefully remove the duck from the BBQ and allow to rest for approximately 30 to 40 minutes before carving/shredding or breaking the meat into portions.

Serve with thin Chinese pancakes, the remaining sauce/glaze, thin sliced spring onions, sliced cucumber, extra hoisin sauce if you desire, and of course, a nice glass of Pinot Noir.



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