

## Deer Field Dressing, Quartering, Boning

Like the old adage, "The job's never over until the paper-work's done." A big game hunter must live by the slogan: "The hunt's never over until the meat has been properly cared for." That means field dressing the animal and / or quartering the carcass, then cleaning the meat and preparing it for the butcher. For some reason, meat care takes on a sort of mystical quality for the inexperienced. It shouldn't. In reality, field care of big game is an easy process requiring nothing more than few basic tools and some simple skills.

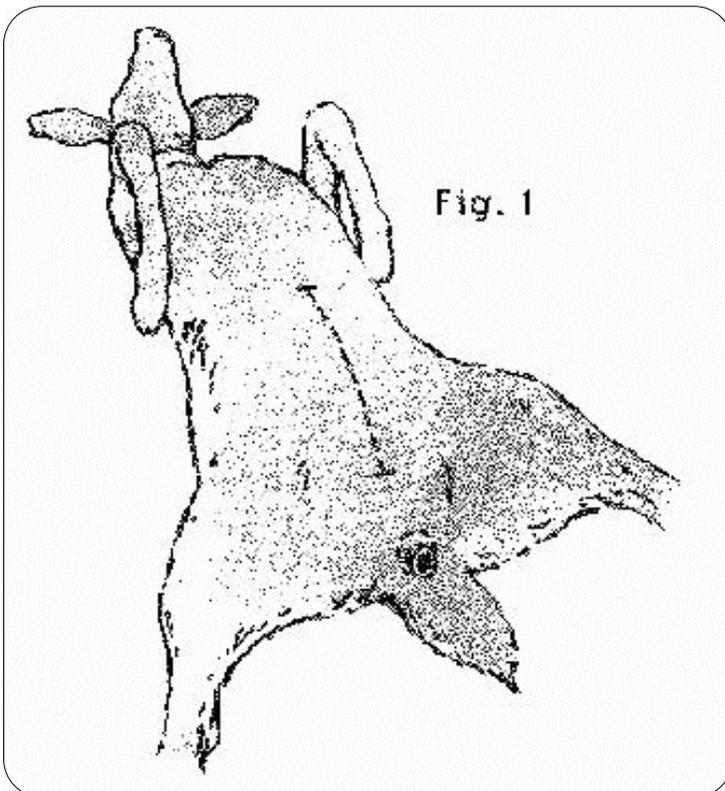
There are two basic ways to care for meat in the field. The first is old-fashioned field dressing, or gutting, a process designed to both remove the entire digestive system, as well as the heart, lungs and windpipe, and facilitate cooling before internal bacteria begins to multiply and taint the meat. This is the common method when the sportsman has easy access to mechanical or four footed transportation -- an ATV, truck or pack animal -- and the carcass can be transported to a clean, civilized area to be skinned, washed and cut up. Here's how to do it.

- Make sure the animal is dead: Approach it from uphill, and watch for movement. Touch the eye with a long stick; if it doesn't blink, the animal has expired.

- Unload your firearm. Safety first!

- Position the animal with its head uphill, and hindquarters downhill. This will facilitate the drainage of blood and body fluids. Prop the carcass on its back, and secure it so it will not roll or slide around.

- Remove your knife and other tools from your pack, and set them within easy reach. Put on your rubber gloves before making any incisions.



- Make an incision that encircles the external margin of the anus, cutting deep enough to free the terminal end of the digestive system from the surrounding tissue. Next, make a small opening in the abdominal wall, taking care not to puncture the underlying internal organs, from the pelvic bone upward to the bottom of the sternum (Fig, 1). Using the index and middle finger of your non-knife hand to lift the abdominal wall away from the internal organs helps.

• Pushing the stomach out of the way, locate the diaphragm (the thin horizontal wall of muscle that divides the digestive tract from the chest cavity). Completely cut the diaphragm from one side of the rib cage to the other.

• With your free hand, reach up past the heart and lungs, locate, and securely grasp, the windpipe. Sever it with your knife blade as high up into the throat as possible (Fig. 2). Take care not to nick yourself with your knife! (Note: using a serrated blade or small saw to cut through the center of the sternum up to the throat will make removing the heart, lungs, and windpipe much easier.)

• (Fig 3) Holding the severed windpipe, begin pulling the heart, lungs, and internal organs free and out of the chest cavity. It may be necessary to cut several adhesions to the body cavity, but the whole works should come free relatively easily.

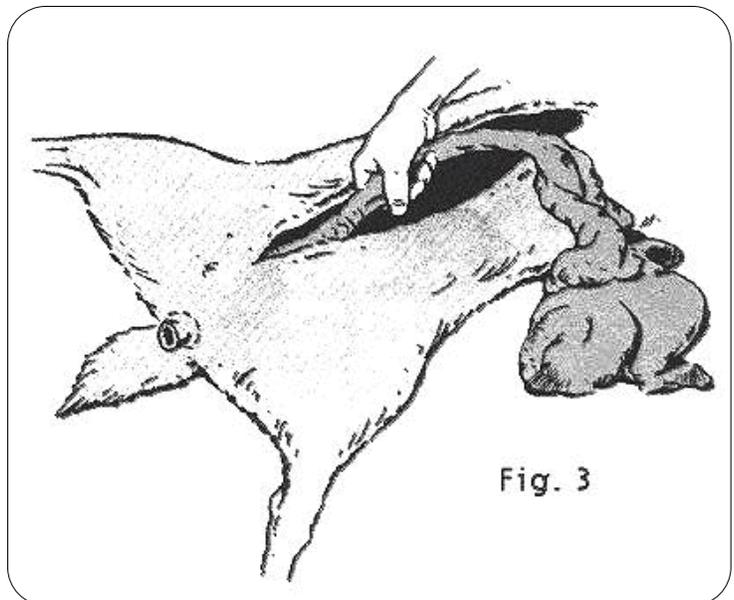
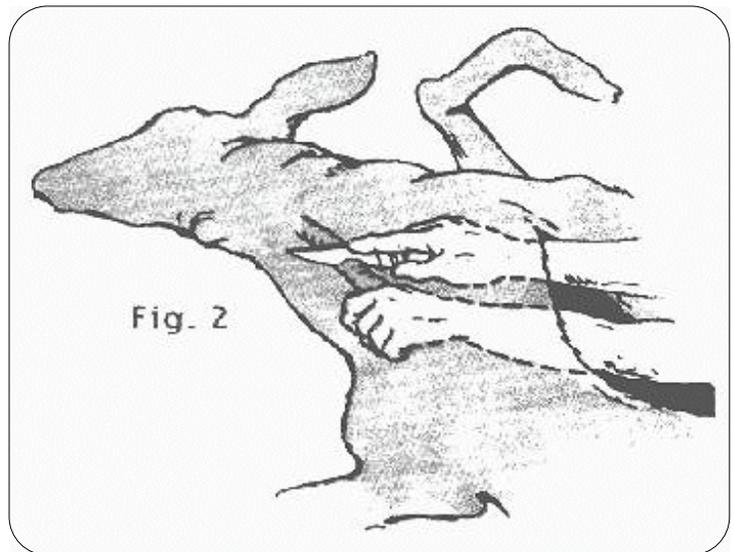
• Reach down into the pelvic opening and grasp the lower end of the intestines, then pull them up and out of the abdominal cavity. If you've cut the anus free, everything, including bladder and rectum, should come free. If not, use the knife to carefully cut through the resisting areas. Take care not to puncture the bladder and get urine on the meat.

• Elevate the carcass, draining all the blood out of the body cavity through the hole where the anus used to be.

• Transport the carcass to civilization, where further cleaning, skinning, and butchering can take place.

#### PACK IT OUT

While rapid skinning will promote cooling, I like to leave the skin on when transporting the carcass whole from the field simply because it keeps the meat perfectly clean and free of debris that would otherwise need to be trimmed away later.



On backcountry hunts, where meat often must be packed out on your own back, eliminating weight and bulk is a real concern. Under these circumstances I no longer field dress the animal.

Instead I quarter and, perhaps, bone it out without ever cutting into the body cavity. It's a much quicker, cleaner way to do business. After making sure the animal is dead and unloading my firearm, here's what I do:

1. Position the animal on one side, making sure it won't roll around.
2. Skin out the up side of the carcass. First make an incision up the backbone, from tail to neck. Begin skinning down the side including the legs.
3. Remove the rear leg. Do this by cutting up from the underside of the hip toward the backbone, then down through the ball (hip) joint. The joint will separate easily using only your knife.
4. Remove the front shoulder. Lift up on the front leg and cut under the scapula as high as you can while pulling the leg away from the rib cage, until the front leg comes free.
5. Remove the back strap. This process is similar to filleting a fish. Insert the knife blade tip into the loin and follow the spinal column from the hip to the neck. Next, cut across the grain of the meat at the hip, finding the point where the ribs disappear under the loin and inserting the blade tip along the ribs. Cut and peel the meat away from the spine and rib cage toward the neck until it all comes free.
6. Bone the neck meat off by simply filleting the meat away.
7. Roll the carcass over, and repeat the process.

#### BONING THE MEAT IS SIMPLE

All you have to do is follow the contours of the major muscle groups with your knife blade around the bone. I try and keep the meat pieces as large as possible when boning. This gives you more options for preparing the final cuts for the freezer. When transporting quartered or boned meat from the field in my backpack, after placing it in cloth meat sacks I prefer to stuff it into heavy - duty plastic bags before loading it into my pack bag. This will keep blood and meat off my pack bag and hunting gear. When I reach my destination, I remove the meat-filled game bags from the plastic bags and hang them so air can freely circulate around them, thus continuing the cooling process.

The above does not take into consideration whether you want to save the cape for mounting. Caping is another process and, while simple, is too lengthy to be discussed here. It also does not consider the fact that some game management jurisdictions may require that evidence of sex remain attached to the carcass. If that's the case, make sure you cut around the genitalia when field dressing; if you skin the animal, make sure you leave the sex organs attached. Also, make sure you remove the hide as quickly as possible. Since the idea is to cool the meat as rapidly as possible, and since the hide will hold heat in like a heavy blanket, it must be removed quickly.

Proper field care of a big game animal yields the sweetest, most succulent meat on earth. With similar effort, you'll never hear your friends and family complain about "gamy old venison" again!

## TOOLS FOR FIELD DRESSING

Several "little things" can make field dressing quicker, easier, and cleaner:

Knife blade shape, length: Either a clip - or drop - point design between 2" and 4" long is ideal for most all North American big game. Longer blades tend to get out of control and contribute to user fatigue.

Knife handles: Non-slip synthetic materials like Kraton, Zytel, and Rynite, as well as natural bone, help you keep a sure grip even after they've been covered with blood.

Whetstone or steel: Your blade edge should require no touching up if you are simply field dressing an animal. When quartering or boning meat, it may. Carrying a small whetstone or sharpening steel makes this easy.

Small saw: A lightweight pack saw is handy for cutting through the sternum during the field dressing process as well as for removing antlers from the skull on backcountry hunts. Browning, Gerber and Michael's of Oregon all make excellent saws of this type.

Gloves: Infection is a real concern when field dressing big game animals. I once deeply cut an index finger skinning an Alaskan brown bear; it got so infected I nearly lost it. To this day, it throbs in moderate weather. To avoid such problems, always wear rubber gloves when field dressing game. I use the inexpensive, heavy-duty forearm-length gloves used for washing dishes.

Tarp: To keep meat as clean as possible, I always carry an old Space Blanket in my pack. It doubles as part of my survival gear, but I also use it to lay meat on during the boning process. This helps keep it clean. A heavy-duty plastic bag works well for this, too.

Game Bags: Never store meat in plastic bags where it cannot cool properly. Heavy mesh cloth game bags are the ticket. The best I've used are from Alaska Game Bags, (Dept. AR), 100 Sheffield Court, Cookeville, TN 38506; (931)525-3626.

Pre-moistened towelettes: Just like those you get with some fast food, these little gems make cleaning hands and arms in the field easy as pie. You can find them in the baby products section of a grocery or drug store.

The above was from: Deer Field Dressing Basics, by Bob Robb

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