

taxidermy

TROPHY PREPARATION FOR A CONVENTIONAL MOUNT

Being a professional taxidermist, I see many trophy headskins that are damaged due to being incorrectly removed from the body. In more recent years the taxidermy industry has evolved to improve the quality & presentation of your trophies, the manikins today are far more appealing to the eye & there are many different positions for your trophy to mounted on - i.e. the shoulder mounts today have more shoulder & brisket exposed than the manikins of yesteryear, with the pedestal mount or a pedestal wall mount requiring even more. For these particular mounts, the taxidermist has to have more cape/ headskin than a normal mount. It's always better to have more than required as you can always cut off what is not needed. Another major point to consider is that if you've shot a trophy just on dark & haven't the time to cape it out straight away, don't leave it lying on the ground overnight, as bacteria will start where its touching the ground & the heat can't escape. Even if it's snowing. If you have to, then cut the animal in half to hang it up till morning to allow the air to circulate & cool the hide & meat until the following morning to remove the cape.

HERE'S WHAT TO DO

1. Lay the animal on its belly & splay the legs out each side with the head & neck in a straight line. Insert your knife approximately half way along the back in the middle of the dorsal stripe which runs along the top of the back, between the shoulder blades & up the back of the neck. When you follow this line, cut the skin from the inside up towards the hairline. This way you're cutting only the skin & not the hair. Proceed along the dorsal stripe to the back of the head.

2. Now with the animal lying on its side, make your cut from the top of the back where you started the previous cut. Cutting from inside out, proceed to the belly. Turn the animal over & repeat on opposite side.

3. Now cut around both front legs at the knee. With the animal upside down, make the cut starting from the knee along the leg. Do not cut across the brisket to the opposite leg. Follow the hairline (seam) where the thinner armpit hair & longer leg hair meet. Stay away from the brisket, cutting towards the previous

cut that was made from top of the back to the belly.

4. Start to peel the skin away from the body by punching & knifing as you go. Try not to leave any meat on the skin, so the salt will penetrate better. Take your time to remove the skin without cutting holes in the skin. You've spent a long time securing your trophy, years perhaps? Therefore,

no hurry right?!

Proceed up the neck to the back of the head.

5. Now cut through the last vertebrae (ball joint.) Let the skin cool in the shade for 15 to 20 minutes then wrap it around the antlers & head to carry back to camp or home.

DOING THE WHOLE JOB

If you're camping out & have to skin the cape off the skull & salt it, this is what to do.

1. Make a "Y" cut from between the ears to behind each antler to hide any subsequent stitches.

2. Start by skinning the head towards the nose & leave plenty of meat on the skin from this point on to

avoid cutting into the facial features. (this is the exact opposite of the shoulder & neck skin being meat free.) For this delicate work a smaller sharp knife is more suitable.

3. Following the bone of the head now, leaving the meat attached to the skin, proceed to the ear butts & cut through at the base of the skull & free the skin around the antlers/coronet. If you have a big steel for your knives at camp, insert it under the skin to help pry the skin away from around the antlers.

4. Be careful not to cut through the eye sockets & scent glands which are quite deep. Remember to follow the bone with the meat remaining on the skin. This is a real problem area for many people, requiring the taxidermists to rectify with heaps of stitches.

5. Cut inside the lips on both top & bottom jaw following the gum line beside the teeth prior to peeling the cape over the muzzle. Leave all the meat from the lips on the cape & cut the cartilage of the nose off the skull to free the nostrils & front of the lip.

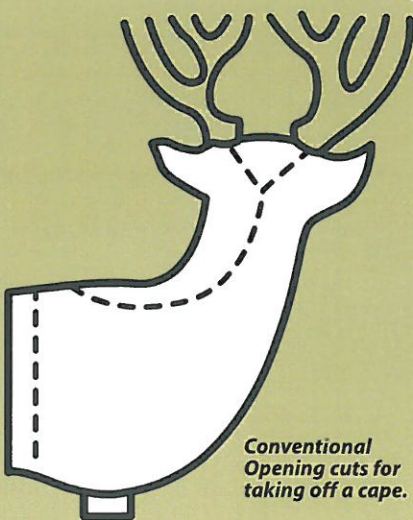
6. If you're in the bush for a few more days then you'll have to turn the ears inside out. I use a dessertspoon with the mouthpiece in the palm of my hand inserting the handle & cutting with the knife to carefully separate the skin from between the cartilage of each ear just wide enough to be able to salt.

7. Now rub plenty of salt into the flesh side of the cape, fold flesh to flesh & roll the skin from the nose to the shoulder/brisket. Place it in a shady, cool area so that the moisture will drain away.

8. Next day, scrape away the wet salt, resalt & repeat from previous day.



This is a conventional mounted White Tailed Deer.



Conventional Opening cuts for taking off a cape.

PLEASE NOTE

It's always better to skin the animal while it's warm. Rub salt into every part of the flesh side of the cape & put extra salt around the ear butts, eyes, lips & nostrils. Any area missed will attract flies & could result in hairslip.

A WORD OF WARNING

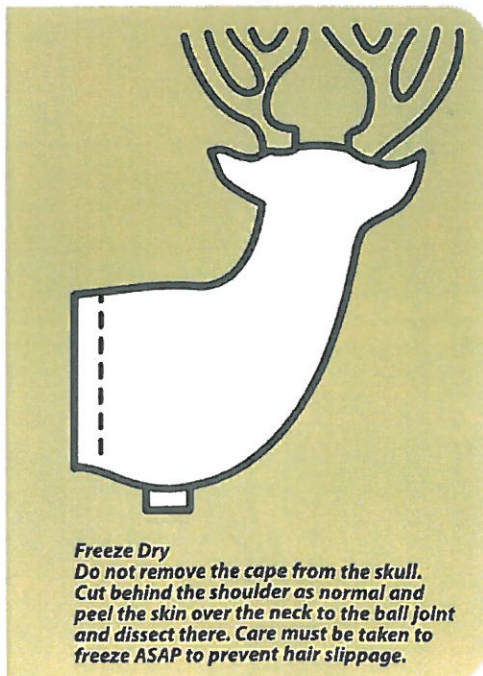
Never store a cape in a plastic bag as it can't breathe. The warmth & humidity inside the bag is a great incubator for bacteria, which would seriously damage your cape. Only use a plastic bag to transport it home to your freezer or chosen taxidermist, after it has been cooled & salted. Good preparation of your trophy in the field is vital for the final appearance upon receiving your trophy. A good taxidermist is an artist that's proud of his/her work. Given the right material these guys can create fine work that is appealing to the eye. But don't expect them to be able to transform a sow's ear into a silk purse. Always phone your chosen taxidermist prior to sending your trophy to be mounted.

TROPHY PREPARATION FOR FREEZEDRYING

Most hunters prefer to have their trophies mounted without any stitching for the deer, chamois & bull thar heads. The skinning off of the cape is the same process as a wild boar. However the deer heads are a bit more difficult due to the antlers being in the way. Most of the bigger deer have to have the antlers removed in order to fit them into the freeze dryer. (Removable Antlers) Many taxidermists do this to save on crating /shipping costs for their clients. Sawn off at the coronet, where the antler & hairline meet, steel pins are used to lock the antlers in the desired position.

HERE'S WHAT TO DO

1. Cut right around the whole animal behind the brisket & shoulders, again making sure you're cutting the hide & not the hair.
2. Cut both front legs off at the knee & discard.



3. Start to peel the skin over the shoulders, neck, & front legs by punching & knifing as you go. Take your time so as not to have any meat left on the skin; without cutting holes.

4. Proceed with peeling the skin over the head - like a sock inside out - until you reach the last vertebrate, (ball joint) where the head is cut off. Allow to cool, then return to camp or home & freeze asap.

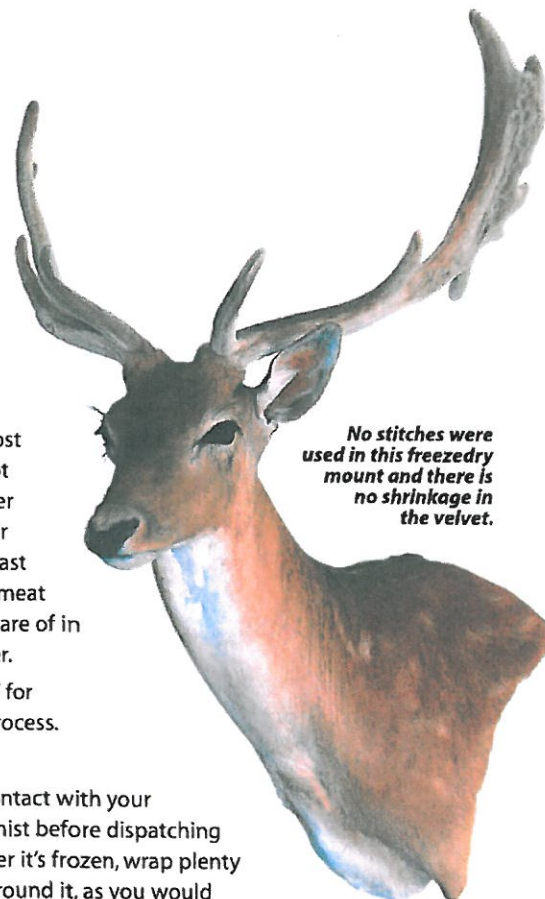
5. If you're still out there for a few more days, then protect

your cape from flies, sunlight & heat. Find a nice shady creek to hang it in, as the water will act as a refrigerant. Most trophies are shot during the cooler times of the year & the cape will last as long as your meat would if taken care of in a proper manner.

6. DO NOT SALT for freeze-drying process.

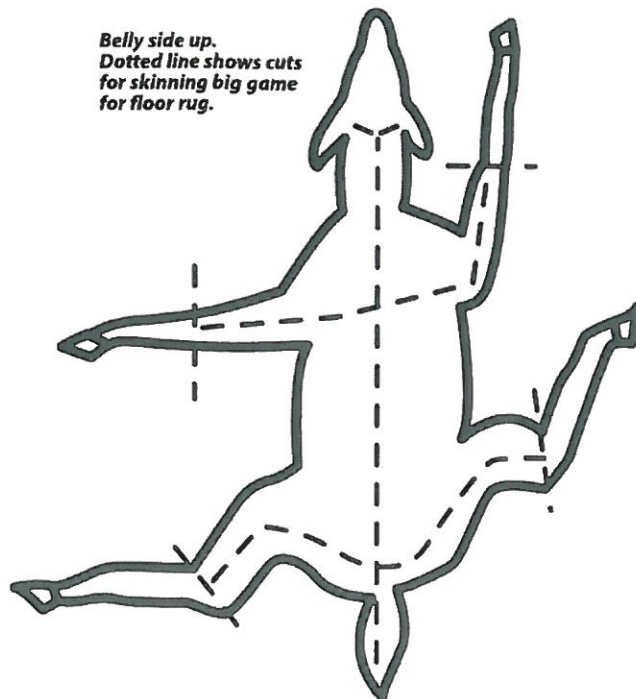
PLEASE NOTE

Always make contact with your chosen taxidermist before dispatching your trophy. After it's frozen, wrap plenty of newspaper around it, as you would icecream. Place into a strong & sturdy cardboard box. The head should stay frozen for several days when wrapped properly. Make certain that full names, addresses and phone nos. are clearly marked for both the 'TO' and 'FROM' parties. NZ Courier Post are the only ones that will deliver to rural addresses which many taxidermists are on, myself included.



No stitches were used in this freezedry mount and there is no shrinkage in the velvet.

Belly side up. Dotted line shows cuts for skinning big game for floor rug.



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