

AFTER THE KILL

By Dr. Vince Crichton

“Hey doc, I shot a bad moose (or elk)”! During my 40 years with Manitoba’s Wildlife Branch, I did not tabulate how often hunters, both licensed and rights based, called or submitted samples for testing. In every case, the animal was not “bad”. The fault rested with the hunter for improper handling after the kill. In other words, it was not cooled properly and went sour.

One such scenario occurred when hunters shot a moose early one morning in Manitoba’s Interlake, hauled it to their truck, took almost a full day to get home, and then left the moose, which had been gutted but not skinned, folded up in the back of their truck until the next morning. Yup, it was bad, real bad – due to the hunters’ negligence and lack of expertise.

You can lose meat even in cool weather. I once shot a moose at 4 pm on November 7, and dressed the animal. I did not have a snow machine, and with darkness approaching, placed snow inside the body cavity to help the cooling process; I turned it over with legs spread eagled to prevent ravens from feasting on the inside. It was retrieved early the next day, hung at home, and skinned. The temperature was about -5C with 10” of snow. About 20 lbs. of meat was lost in the hump area where the body heat could not escape.

There are some simple rules that hunters “must follow” during the fall hunt to prevent this from occurring. All jurisdictions have legislation in various forms which makes it illegal to waste meat which applies to “all” hunters. Wastage means that meat on the rib cage and neck must also be used.

The first step in dressing is hide removal shortly after the animal has been killed. My preference is to skin the animal prior to extracting the internal organs. The hide can be used as a table to keep the quarters off the ground and relatively clean. Plastic is useful to have available for the placement of quarters. I also insist that cuts be made such that hair does not get cut and onto the quarters.

After skinning, an incision is made at the front of the brisket (the animal is held belly up by ropes attached to trees) to the groin area, being careful not to puncture the stomach or intestines. To facilitate removing the internal organs, a sturdy twine is tightly tied around the windpipe and oesophagus, with one person gently pulling toward the animal’s rear while their partner carefully cuts the attachment points for the heart, lungs, diaphragm, and kidneys. The saw is then used to cut the pelvic girdle and remove the rectum, again being careful not to puncture the bladder. The entrails are then pulled away from the carcass.

For quartering, I prefer a meat saw or chain saw. I have a small chain saw used only for this task with vegetable oil for chain lubrication – this makes dressing easier, faster and is not messy if the flesh is cut first where the bone cuts are to be made. The front half is separated from the back half between the second and third ribs. For small moose, the animal is quartered, and larger animals are cut into 6 pieces (shoulder removed from front quarters) to facilitate handling.

The next process for meat care is critical. I use T-shirt tubing cut into 5’ lengths and sewn across the bottom. These shrouds



Nylon bags and shrouds covering cleaned quarters of moose

are pulled over each quarter prior to leaving the kill site, and help to keep the quarters clean. Once in camp, the quarters are hung from a meat pole, the shrouds removed and the quarters carefully cleaned (remove hair, leaves, grass, dirt and flesh around the wound – butchers often charge for cleaning quarters). The shrouds are then replaced and tied at the top.

All 4 or 6 pieces are then covered with a nylon mesh sack, with holes no bigger than 1/8”. The nylon is 5’ wide, cut into 12’ lengths and folded so the sack is 6’ long. Each side is sewn and velcro is sewn along the top – this fly proof sac is placed around all meat hanging on the meat pole, and the velcro sealed to prevent flies from entering (see photo). The task is complete and the animal can be hung in the bush for a week with no ill effects while the ageing process begins.

The T shirt tubing can be purchased for about \$5.50 per metre. Used bags can be washed and stored for subsequent years. The nylon bags are more expensive, but when washed, they will last for years. Cheese cloth is not recommended as flies can gain access to the quarters.

While some hunters throw water on the quarters for cleaning, this is not recommended. If the quarters are to be washed to remove stomach content or dirt, use a damp cloth. Water used in excess will accumulate in tissue pockets and is an ideal medium for bacteria, resulting in bad meat.

Wild game contains high levels of eicosapentaenoic acid (epa). This protective fatty acid improves blood flow and equates to a natural antifreeze, ensuring the fluids and organs of well nourished animals do not stiffen even in the most frigid weather. Research suggests that epa in the human diet can protect against heart attack, atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) and certain forms of arthritis.

The last task before leaving the kill site is a ritual I learned from my father. The person who killed the animal removes the bell (flap of skin underneath the throat) and places it in a notch in a tree out of respect for the animal. As ethical hunters, we have a legal and moral obligation to ensure meat is properly cared for, out of respect for the animal. Remember that success is not measured by what is put in the freezer, but rather the total outdoor experience with friends.