

Caping Deer & goats.

A taxidermist can only work with what he or she gets and by doing the following you are insuring a good mount. If the mount turns out second rate because of hair slip due to inadequate or lazy field care it is usually the taxidermist who is blamed and their reputation by word of mouth is improvised. As such, don't be surprised if a taxidermist examines and refuses to work on capes not properly cared for.

Don't expect to have an unskinned or treated deer cape lying in the camp, for 2 or more days and then have it mounted.

You have 4 choices to ponder:

1. Skinning up to the head and delivering the animal to your taxidermist to finish caping. Done ASAP!
2. Skinning up to the head and freezing the head skin. Delivery to a taxidermist at your leisure. Only good for those with freezers big enough to accommodate a big set of antlers.
3. Taking the whole skin off the animal and freezing the cape, without turning ears & splitting lips. Freeze ASAP. (Taxidermist to finish turning ears & splitting lips). Delivery to taxidermist at your leisure.
4. Skinning the animal completely, turning the ears, splitting lips & nostrils, rough fleshing, salting & drying. Delivery to taxidermist at your leisure.

Decide before hand which method suits you. You should not skin an animal and salt it before the ears and lip work has been done. You risk hair loss on these areas. Freeze it instead.

To begin, the skin surrounding the girth of the abdomen area is cut through, encircling the animal.

I recommend to clients that they skin to as far back as the last third of the animals back, (mid to last rib), insuring plenty of hide. This is extremely important in floor and wall pedestal mounts. Better to have too much than not enough. A cut is then made from about the middle of the skull on an angle to meet with the base of horn/antler. This step is repeated from the same starting point to the other horn/antler, resulting in a V shape cut. Note: It is best if these initial cuts are made with the edge of the blade facing up, away from the hairs. In this way there is less chance of actually slicing through any of the hairs. A long opening incision is then made from the bottom of that V, down the centre of the topside of the neck along the spine, and on past the shoulders and down to the girth cut.

Now you have a choice - Cut the front legs off at the knee and pull the leg skin over the stump or cut down the back of the leg to the armpit before angling in, (about 15 degree), to meet the girth cut. Personal choice here but be careful, this is where most mistakes are made and the cape is cut too short.

After all opening cuts are made, skin forward, up and over the shoulders and the neck. As the skin is pulled forward the white connective tissue is all that should be sliced through to remove the hide from the meat of the carcass. This assures there will be no knife nicks in the skin and less meat to remove from the hide during rough fleshing. Skin up over the base of the ears by pulling the skin forward until the creamy-yellowish ear cartilage is seen. Always make sure the muscles of the ear bases, the ear butts, are cut through at their point of attachment right on the skull. You will cut a lot of meat off with them but this can be removed during rough fleshing. Never let the ears be cut further up the ear canal as this will result in a repair fee.



Ear cut off at skull. (Note the small hole).

After freeing the ears from the skull, the skin must be carefully cut or peeled from around the antlers or horns if present. Be extra careful, hair can be cut, skin torn and it will be visible in the finished mount and, also, you can slip easily and cut yourself. Continue forward down the skull, being careful not to cut through the skin, especially around the eyes. This is an extremely hard

area to repair without being visible. To preserve the eyelids intact, the free hand acts as a guide from the outside of the skin so that you feel that you are not cutting into the lids. Reverse the skin and from the outside put a forefinger under the rear edge of the eyelid and lift up then from the flesh side and cut through this thin skin-tissue close to the bone, (it does not matter if you slice the eyeball), surrounding the eye until the forward corner of the eye is reached. Then cut 'on' the bone and continue to do so until the tear duct is free. Be very careful removing the glands in front of the eye in deer.

Skin down the face until nearing the rear corners of the mouth. Again, from the outside, insert a finger in the corner of the mouth and pull up, giving tension to the cheek muscles. Cut through the cheek muscles about 1" - 2" back from the corner of the mouth then free the skin of the lower lip from the jaw by cutting the gums, close to the teeth. From the bridge of the nose, when you approach the soft nose cartilage, cut the nose here, straight down, through the cartilage. This ensures plenty of nostril skin. Cartilage will be cut away later. Now free the upper lip, again, cutting the gum, close to the teeth.

The ears must now be turned inside out creating a pocket. Use the thumbs, an antler tine or the back of a desert spoon to assist in this step. They must be worked to the tips and sides but great care must be taken not to break through the edges. You will need to trim away some of the excess meat from the ear butts now.

Insert a spoon or your thumbs into the skin of the ear between the backside of the ear skin and the white cartilage and gently 'push' forward whilst holding the ear tight with your opposite hand. You will feel the two surfaces separating. Continue until the entire ear can be turned inside out, right to the edges.

The actual ear cartilage remains attached to the ear for now. All remaining red meat is removed from the ear cartilages, leaving the full bowl (rounded base of ear cartilage) of the ears intact. Proper salting will preserve these parts and proper turning of the ears is paramount to preserving them.



Ear before turning.



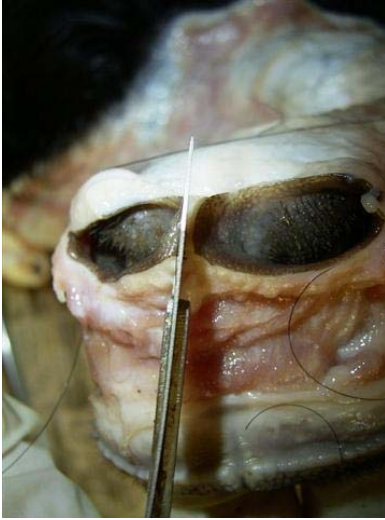
Ears turned fully & meat removed.

The lips are opened or split by holding the outer surfaces, the hair-side and the textured gum-side, between the thumb and forefinger while cutting on the flesh side with a knife so they will flay open, just as you would butterfly a prawn. Take extreme care to avoid cutting through the narrow lip walls. You are opening the lip line so the salt can preserve it.



Splitting the lip.

The nostrils are 'split' by cutting down the centre of the septum, (cartilage line separating the 2 nostrils), until the two nostrils separate from each other. Allowing salt to penetrate this area.



Surplus fat and meat should be scraped from the skin for best results. Do NOT slice through the hair roots, (look like dark spots). Sambar deer can have very thick hide at the neck and should be fleshed well.

It is advisable to get the skin off and salted with the least possible delay if in extremely hot country and it is very wise to arrange to have some salt carried with you so as the trophy is skinned salt may be applied to the surface and continued frequently until the skin is completely removed. By the time the skin is off, the salt has started its valuable work and the safety of this trophy is assured. Salt also helps you get a grip on slippery, bloody skin. You don't have to wait until all the caping is finished before salting. Just remember that if you decide to turn the ears and split the lips and then salt a skin, it **can't be frozen** until its finished draining fully and all salt has been knocked off.

Common table salt is the best thing to apply and there is no danger of using too much. Pool salt, generally, is too large a grain for salting skins properly. While skinning, or after skinning, the flesh side should not be allowed to become dry before salting, as it will not take in the salt and hairslip will result on the dried areas.

The skin should be spread on the ground, in the shade, flesh side up, preferably on a tarp, canvas or towel with the edges opened and stretched and then liberally sprinkled with salt. Pay particular attention to the facial areas. The salt supply should always be kept dry. The drier it is the better it draws liquids from the skin. The salt should be well rubbed into every part of the skin with the flat of the palm and the skin folded flesh sides together and placed in a shady place on a slanting platform allowing the initial fluids to drain away.

After eight to twelve hours, the skin can be unfolded, all the old salt scraped off, and a new dry layer of salt rubbed into all areas of the skin again. Be sure no wrinkles form in the skin that will not allow the salt to reach them. Salt must be in contact with all areas of the flesh-side of the skin. This can be followed up with an additional salting or two, until the skin is no longer weeping and still pliable enough so they can be folded and packed into a Hessian bag or pillow case for storage or transport or put into a cardboard box for postage. After knocking the salt off they can also be frozen in an airtight bag.

For antlered animals: Cut the skullcap from the head using a hacksaw or similar. Use the eye socket as a point to aim for when cutting the cap. Make the first cut from top of skull down to the centre of the eye socket and the second cut from the back of the skull to the centre of the eye socket. Unless you are getting the antlers or horns to your taxidermist the day the trophy was taken, simmer the skullcap for $\frac{1}{2}$ hour being careful not to immerse the actual antlers in the water or burn them if simmering over a campfire. Remove all meat still clinging.

Antlers in velvet: Must be frozen a.s.a.p or delivered to your taxidermist a.s.a.p. Do not touch the velvet with your hands. Velvet does slip just as hair/epidermis does, only faster and easier, and needs to be treated as quickly as possible. You can spray/inject with formaldehyde but this product is extremely dangerous - best left for the experts.

Horned animals:

Simmer skull cap and up to 2 inches of horn for 30 minutes then tap the simmered skullcap where it meets the horn lightly with a stick or simply twist and pull from cores. (Inserting a knife under the horn can help). Clean all membranes from within the horn and on the bony 'cores' and rinse with a little Pine-o-clean, Metho or Dettol. Replace horns on the cores to dry, as they will shrink if left off after heating.

