

Foxes are prone to hair slip — good field care is a must!

Firstly, I recommend gloves.

To begin, make a single cut in one action, along the spine, from the base of the neck to the base of the tail. Cut with your blade facing up to avoid cutting hairs. Make another cut, under the tail, just long enough to enable you to cut the tail bone off at the base to make skinning easier. Pull the skin away from the spine and down the rear legs as far as you can go.

If freezing your fox for the taxidermist to finish skinning cut the legs & head from body (keeping them 'unskun'), and freeze flat as possible in a plastic bag and tie the end off.

Some foxes can be skun to the ankle, some just to the hock before the skin is too hard to invert. To free the lower legs and feet a relief cut is made, on the inside of the leg from the hock down to the ankle where you will angle under the foot to the large pad, peel the skin away.

You need to skin out the toes to the last bone before the claw bed. Sometimes continuing your cut, around one side of the pad and to the base of the toes helps. Once both hind feet are free continue forward and do the same on the front legs. (skin down as far as the skin will go, then, make a relief cut if needed, etc.)

Continue on and free the chest area. 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, (watch the armpits).

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 at 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.

After freeing the ears from the skull work towards the eyes. 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 and this is a delicate area to repair.

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 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. 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 close to the teeth. When you approach the soft nose cartilage, cut the nose here, straight down. This ensures plenty of nostril skin. Now free the upper lip, again, cutting close to the teeth.

The tail bone should be split the entire length on the under side. Continue the little cut made earlier to cut the tail bone free. Sometimes it is easier to pull the bone out first before cutting the tail open.

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.

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. Be very careful with fox ears, heat from your hands is sometimes enough to contribute to hair slip

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.

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 lay open, just as you would butterfly a prawn. Take extreme care to avoid cutting through the narrow lip walls.

Surplus fat and meat should now be scraped from the skin for best results. 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 skinning is finished before salting.

Just remember that if you decide to salt a skin, it can't be frozen until its finished draining fully and excess 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 and rock salt 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 hair slip will result on the dried areas. The skin should be spread on the ground, 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 hand 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 cardboard box for postage, transport or for freezing in an airtight bag.

Basic field care tips.

Do not wash the fox. Moisture and heat creates a haven for the already present bacteria.

Blot up excess blood with a towel or paper towel. Don't rub.

Don't cart your fox around for hours before skinning. Skin it as soon as possible. Skins can be opened up to cool some.

Foxes are prone to hair slip. Immediate cooling and skinning and/or freezing is a must.

Always work with your blade facing up and skin down the back to the tail-- not up!

You can leave the head, feet and tail in to be skun out by the taxidermist.

Don't make unnecessary skinning cuts.

If you are skinning the whole head remember to split the lips and turn the ears. Otherwise freeze as it is WITHOUT salting. Salt will draw out all moisture making turning of the ears after salting almost impossible.

You can use any fine grained salt. No pool or rock salt. Iodised or non iodised? It won't make a whole lot of difference. (20kg bags @ \$15 at food suppliers such as PDF foods)

Rub the salt in well with the palm of your hand. Get it into every crease, you can't use too much.

Change the salt every 24 hours until the skin no longer drains.

Skins should NOT be transported inside plastic bags. They will sweat and rot.

Skins being frozen should be folded like a towel, not rolled up. If the skin was salted prior, it must have finished draining and knock any remaining salt off.

Salted skins need not be frozen, they can be kept in a hessian bag in a cool dark place away from rodents/dogs.

Fully skun & salted skins can be posted after draining has finished. (wrapped in butchers paper & placed into a paper lined cardboard box)

Call your taxidermist if you are going to arrive late or have posted an item.