

Processing Your Deer

Deer processing is no longer “business as usual” in Wisconsin

By Scott Craven and Dennis Buege



The conclusion of a successful hunt will be a bit different for Wisconsin hunters this year. Due to concerns about Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD), some commercial processors, especially in southern Wisconsin, will not handle deer in 2002. Thus, many hunters will have to process their own deer — some for the first time. These guidelines will help both experienced and novice butchers obtain quality venison while minimizing exposure to the parts of a deer carcass that could contain CWD prions.

Even a novice can complete the process in a few hours. You'll end up with boneless, lean, high quality venison, and the confidence that you've processed it with as much care and caution as possible.

Good hunting, and enjoy your venison!

Some General Considerations:

- ◆ We recommend careful boning of the entire carcass.
- ◆ Wear latex/rubber gloves, both for field dressing and butchering.
- ◆ Put away the saw for now. You won't need it until you dismember the carcass for disposal.
- ◆ When you're finished, carefully clean and sanitize the knives and other tools you've used. Use a solution of 50% bleach and 50% water.
- ◆ Consider using a disposable cutting surface such as clean plywood or paneling. You may want to keep some towels handy during butchering.
- ◆ If the bullet shattered bone, especially the skull or spine, trim liberally around the damaged area.
- ◆ Watch for any special announcements regarding carcass disposal.
- ◆ Don't use garbage bags for meat storage. If you have more than one deer, label each freezer package so you can identify which deer it came from, in case you later decide to discard meat from that deer.

Notes on Chronic Wasting Disease

As of October 2002 the following statements were supported by the scientific and wildlife management communities:

- ◆ In Wisconsin, CWD had been found only in the so-called CWD management areas in the southwest part of the state and on a game farm in Portage County.
- ◆ CWD has never been linked to disease in humans.
- ◆ In animals with CWD, the disease agent (prion) has not been found in lean, skeletal muscle — what we eat.
- ◆ Many deer will be tested throughout Wisconsin; you may want to store your venison until test results are in for your area.

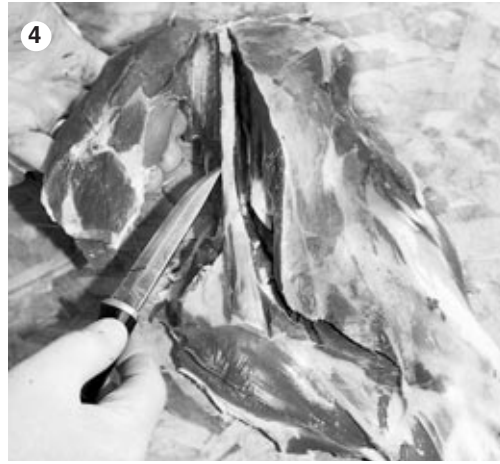
Processing Advice

- ◆ Hang the deer and skin it as you always have. In these photos the deer is hanging head-up. However, hanging the deer head-down may prevent fluids in the head from draining down into the carcass.
- ◆ DO NOT remove the lower legs with a saw cut. Skin to below the shank, and then simply cut the hide away from the leg.
- ◆ For more information on skinning, see Extension publication G1598, “So You Got A Deer,” available for download at <http://www1.uwex.edu/ces/pubs/pdf/G1598.PDF>
NOTE: This publication contains a lot of useful advice, but the butchering instructions involve saw use.
- ◆ A warm carcass is easier to skin, but a cold carcass is much easier to cut up. When possible, hang and skin the deer as soon as you can. Weather and storage area permitting, let the skinned carcass hang and cool off before butchering.
- ◆ Once you have a hanging, skinned carcass you can begin working on 3 basic parts of the carcass — the shoulder, the backstrap (loin), and the hindquarter or round. These 6 pieces (3 per side) contain at least 80% of the useable meat, and all the choice cuts. You can remove all 6 pieces without cutting through any bones. You may find it easier to cut them up on a bench or table. Or you can remove the meat from the shoulders and rounds on the hanging carcass.
- ◆ Your goal is clean meat, trimmed free of fat and connective tissue before wrapping and freezing. Discard all bloodshot/damaged meat.
- ◆ Don't forget the inside tenderloins! Remove them from the interior of the body cavity either before or after other processing.



1

THE SHOULDER
Start with the **shoulder**, which is attached by cartilage and tissue that can be cut with a knife. Pull the shoulder away from the carcass to expose the “armpit” (Fig 1).



4

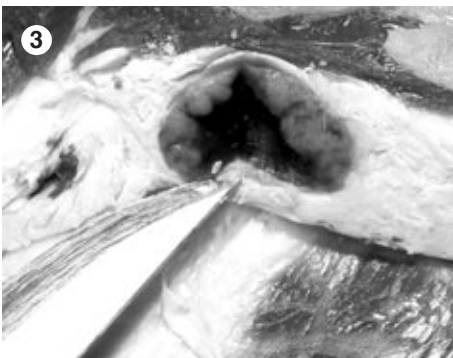
Place the shoulder on your cutting board, outer surface up. Locate the vertical portion of the shoulder blade bone with your knife

(Fig 4). Muscle bundles on either side of the shoulder blade can be filleted away from the bone. Remaining lean muscle and the shank can be boned out from the long bone of the shoulder (“arm”). Use this meat for stew meat, burger, sausage trim or jerky.



2

Cut into the armpit so you can pull the shoulder away from the carcass. Then a curved cut above the shoulder blade and through the tough cartilage and surrounding tissue will remove the shoulder (Fig 2).



3

Watch for lymph nodes embedded in the fat around the shoulder. Try to avoid them when cutting; if you accidentally cut into one (Fig 3), clean your knife before you continue cutting.



5

BACKSTRAP. Cut the backstrap (loin) away from each side of the spine by making a cut down along the spine through the fat and tough connective tissue on the back (Fig 5).



6

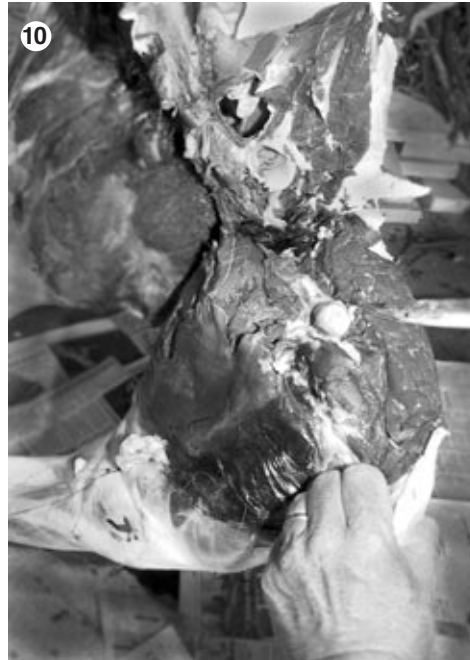
You can better expose the strap by peeling away the tough layer of tissue that covers it (Fig 6).



By working along the sides of the spine and then the tops of the ribs with fingers and short knife strokes, you can pull the strap away from the carcass (Fig 7).



Work up into the chuck (shoulder) and down into the rump as far as you can before hitting bone. Then cut the strap away at each end and with a long cut along the rib cage the length of the strap. You are left with a long strip of lean meat to trim and slice into roasts, chops, or thin sandwich steaks (Fig 8). Prepare butterfly chops by cutting a double thickness slice, and then cutting most of the way through that slice. Fold it open to form a butterfly chop (Fig 9).



THE ROUND is easily removed by locating the ball-and-socket hip joint that connects the leg to the pelvis (Fig 10). Cut the surrounding tissue to expose the ball of the leg bone, then sever the joint with several knife strokes

to the connective tissue around the joint. You can lift the entire hind quarter away after a few knife strokes along the pelvis. If you keep your knife close to the pelvic bone, little usable meat will remain on the carcass.



Place the round outer surface up on your work table and locate the white seam in the surface tissue (Fig 11).



Cut through this thin layer to begin to expose the large muscles of the round that you need to separate. The big football-

shaped muscle (Fig 12) is the sirloin tip. Bone this away from the leg bone, sever it at both ends and set it aside.

