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PHOTOS COURTESY OF AUTHOR



# MEAT HUNTING HERE AND THERE

Each continent handles its wild game meat differently. We've got it pretty good here in North America.

Words matter. When a nonresident guest draws a deer permit to hunt on my Kansas farm, they don't exactly get the expected "buck" or "antlered whitetail" tag. The permit comes with two tags (better look at them closely) and apply the correct one when the time comes.

One is a tag for any whitetail. Maybe not so obviously, it can be applied to a doe, but that's your buck tag. Also included is an antlerless whitetail tag. Sadly, once in a while, mistakes are made, and "button bucks" are taken—that's your doe tag. Most of our hunters come hoping for good antlers. Happily, most of them are successful. However, it is not true that Boone and Crockett whitetails lurk behind every bush in Kansas—certainly not in my area. In our southeast corner, we have few giants, but we have lots of nice bucks, depending on your definition.

I want to keep it that way, so we strongly encourage guests to use their doe tags. Kansas is a strict one-buck state. Without applying that one precious buck tag, we can't manage our buck herd by removing mature spikes or seriously lop-sided bucks. With my buck tag, I try to find a buck that appears to have no potential, one that a guest is unlikely to take. That's the best I can do.

I know we have a high buck-to-doe ratio, and I don't think we have a major overpopulation, so we don't hammer our does. Instead, we work hard at a balanced harvest—at least one doe for every buck taken. By doing that, I figure our buck-to-doe ratio can't get worse. The challenge is that our hunters come from all over the country, with at least one Canadian every year. Hauling meat home is easier for those who drive but awkward for folks who fly.

John Sonne and Boddington starting their chores at Boddington's Kansas farm.



This is the kind of buck Boddington likes to put his Kansas tag on. This old buck grew spikes all his life, was known in the neighborhood. Boddington considers this his very best Kansas buck. It's not a record-book contender, but it's mighty tasty.

RIGHT: John Stucker and Boddington with a tasty "meat moose" down just at dark on a cold Alberta night. Lots of work lies ahead... and lots of breaks to warm up by the fire.



Larry and Erin Tremaine at work with their vacuum packer at Boddington's barn. They bring all the gear needed to process deer, harvest as many does as possible, and haul every scrap of meat home.

Either way, some hunters prefer not to use their antlerless tag or don't want to carry or ship venison. We try to offer solutions. Deer season is a big event in rural Kansas. Field dressing is done under the eve of my barn, and we bone them out on the spot. Local processors will cut, wrap, and freeze almost overnight. We keep freezer boxes on hand. Packing frozen meat, sealing the box carefully, and getting it home safe is generally not a problem. Alternatively, a local church is set up with freezers and has a list of families who want the venison—and they are grateful for it.

There's a seeming oddity in Kansas game law. Depending on the area, once you have the nonresident white-tail permit (available only by drawing), you can purchase additional antlerless white-tail permits for \$50—up to four in our zone. During the January antlerless-only firearm season, those permits are over the counter. Unless you draw the nonresident white-tail permit (with two tags), no doe permits are available to nonresidents while any buck

season is open. Kansas is an important whitetail destination. So, it's not surprising that in the last decade, we've only had a couple of hunters who came specifically to hunt antlerless deer for meat.

Hunters of my generation grew up in times and places with few deer; it was a mortal sin to harvest does. I fully understand that some of my hunters dislike taking females, even though the venison is better. Honestly, I prefer not to, but some hunters help.

For instance, Larry and Erin Tremaine from Washington have been with us several times. They come with a trailer set up as a portable abattoir, including a vacuum packer and freezer. After taking his buck, Larry makes multiple trips to Walmart for additional licenses. They'll work long into the night under my barn light, cutting and wrapping, taking every scrap home. Larry is interesting. Aside from the fact that he wants all the meat, his thing is taking game with as many different cartridges as possible. He's a rifle nut's dream. At last

count, he's taken big-game with 150-some cartridges, and he helps keep my buck/doe harvest straight.

I usually buy a couple of extra resident antlerless permits to keep the numbers even. In most years, I haven't needed to use them. As a backup plan, we leave propane heaters in key blinds when rifle season ends so young hunters in the neighborhood can use them when the cold January antlerless season rolls around.

The license isn't the only fine print one needs to read. Our Kansas deer situation is simple. Smartphone registration works well, and we are not in an area with chronic wasting disease. Our tags stay with the meat, not the head or antlers. Check-in and transport requirements vary widely from state to state and from species to species. It is essential to study the regulations. Within the U.S., they are rarely onerous—however, the farther one travels, the more complex hunting becomes.

### HUNTING FAR FROM HOME

When I fly to distant hunts, I bring as much meat home as I can without undue excess baggage charges. I freeze it hard, pack it and insulate it well. I've rarely had issues and never had meat spoil getting home within the continental United States, even with inevitable flight delays.

Shipping meat is expensive and carries risks, mainly spoilage. When I fly to distant hunts within the U.S., including Alaska, I donate a lot of excellent meat. We all know how good it is. Sometimes I've had to cast around a bit, but I've rarely had difficulty finding someone who wanted game meat. If you do give away meat, follow the regs. This usually means a mutual exchange of information between donor and receiver—addresses, phone numbers, license/permit numbers. All state and provincial game regulations I've seen cover local requirements for transferring game meat.



I've never had a problem with frozen fish when returning from Canada and Mexico. Game meat is a bit different. I've rarely had issues with clean, frozen game meat, but it depends on the inspector you get.

I'm sorry to say this, but outside of North America, time, distance, and regulations make it almost impossible to bring home meat. I'm often asked what happens to meat taken on overseas hunts. It depends largely on where you are. One of the lynchpin tenets of our North American Model of Wildlife Conservation is that markets for game are eliminated. In North America, it's specifically illegal to sell wild game. When you see bison, duck, quail, or venison on a menu, those animals lived on a farm or ranch. Elsewhere, things are done differently. That doesn't suggest that wild

meat goes to waste, but the hunter may not have the opportunity to enjoy it.

In Europe, most game harvested goes to market. Many restaurants have wild game on the menu. There, the word "wild" has meaning. The roebuck or chamois you take in Austria may be served in the country inn down the road. On the large red deer estates in Scotland, sale of harvested meat is an important byproduct and business; during hunting season, refrigerated trucks do the rounds for scheduled pickups.

Meat utilization in Namibia and South Africa are much the same. Both countries are largely private land. Wild game belongs to the landowner. Some meat will be used in camp and shared among locals, but the majority goes to market. I've taken buffaloes in South Africa's Limpopo Valley for the last

couple of years. When the animals were dressed and skinned, a local butchery sent a truck.

It's different in wild Africa. There, some meat will be utilized in camp and shared among the staff. Typically, Africans air dry meat. We call it jerky, biltong to them. If villages are nearby, they share the bounty. When an elephant is taken, an entire village may congregate. It's a fascinating operation that takes perhaps 12 hours. When complete, barely a wet spot remains. Where I hunt in coastal Mozambique— with an annual quota of 100 buffaloes—outfitter Mark Haldane schedules meat drops to surrounding villages. Some 30 tons of boned meat are delivered each season to protein-starved people. In Third World countries, nothing goes to waste.

In North America, whitetail is hard to beat, although some prefer elk or moose. For me, wild sheep meat is amazing. However, and despite rumors, my

absolute favorite is pronghorn. Just skin and cool it quickly and keep sagebrush-laden hair from touching the meat. In Africa, all antelopes are absent any gamey flavor—even waterbuck, which Robert Ruark described as inedible. (Again, skin and cool quickly, and keep the oily hair away from the meat.) The smaller antelopes are tender and sweet, but my personal worldwide favorite is eland, largest of all antelopes, bigger than buffalo. The meat is uniquely marbled. If it is cared for and cooked properly, it's as good as the finest beef. If it were possible to bring game meat home from Africa, eland would be my choice. If an eland is on your game list, take one early in the safari. You'll feast like a king for the rest of the hunt. ■



**South African professional hunter Fred Burchell with eland steaks on the grill, yum. It's virtually impossible to bring meat home from overseas, so enjoy it while you're there.**

**BOTTOM LEFT: Tiffany Abraham, John Stucker, and Boddington with lots of happy people at a scheduled "meat drop" in coastal Mozambique. This area has lots of buffalo; the outfitter delivers about 30 tons of meat annually to local villages. BELOW: An elephant bull can weigh seven tons. It's a massive recovery job; an entire village will congregate and no edible meat will be wasted.**

