

B&C IS NOT YOUR DADDY!

THE ETHICS OF FAIR CHASE



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When you consider the phrase fair chase literally, it is nonsense. There is nothing fair about chasing animals with the advantage of our human reasoning and knowledge, not to mention our weapons. So, when we say fair chase, we imply and intend that the situation is fair and square, that no cheating is involved and that honesty and character is brought to bear. Ultimately, honor and respect underlie the fair chase hunt. That is to say, we are willing to face adversity and uncertainty in our pursuits because the taking of a life deserves such investment, toil and tribulation. We are being fair by not taking advantage of the animal and by making sure the situation is not controlled or contrived. In the end, the animal can get away; so be it. In fact, hunting fair chase means that killing the animal is actually not the most important part. Additionally, antler inches, horn length and all the “mine’s bigger” stuff is actually secondary to an honest pursuit.

B&C defines fair chase as “The ethical, sportsmanlike and lawful pursuit and taking of any free-ranging wild game animal in a manner that does not give the hunter an improper or unfair advantage over the game animals.”

This deceptively simple definition leaves the door wide open to interpretation through myriad possibilities and “what-if” scenarios. The fact is that any more precise definition or any less definition would be far worse and we

would be left with allegations and arguments.

Consider the notion that fair chase is actually an ideal and not a set of rules or limits. In this perspective, it is rooted in honor and respect, effort and knowledge and the best of intentions toward the species we pursue and the places we hunt. It is not a law, nor a rule. It is much more personal than that. I call it a credo, and it is a guiding force for me whenever I go afield. It is not a blunt instrument anyone should use to beat you about the head and neck if they think you are not hunting the right way.

While there are some practices that clearly cut against the ideal of fair chase (frankendeer, extreme long-range shooting, canned or put-and-take shooting, etc.), the distinction in almost all of the other legal hunt scenarios is much more about intent than it is about circumstance. And, while there are hunters that will never see some of the regional practices of legal hunting as fair chase (baiting, use of dogs, etc.), we are all free to leave generations of custom and history play out without our participation. Most of the time, they didn’t ask for your or my opinion anyway.

On a higher plane, fair chase is rooted in the principles of wildlife conservation. The unpredictable nature of hunting, where there is ample opportunity for escape, means that most of the time, that is exactly what happens and therefore, there are still wild game animals to pursue. Additionally, legal limits are

generally set according to the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, which intends to promote sustainable populations and wild spaces. At the same time, there is a much more fundamental benefit, which is a love and appreciation of the wild animals and the wild places they call home. Personally, I have never met the person that has chased wild game that has not been affected in a profound way. Paying witness to all that nature is and considering what it all means and how it is connected is deeply humbling and exceedingly compelling. I submit that it is impossible to engage in fair chase without being transformed or affirmed, in a positive way, in the very marrow of your bones. This is where the hunter-conservationist is born. The apparent conflict between being a taker of life and a steward of wildlife is undone, and the wild animals and wild places are the beneficiaries. The scale is balanced when you are influenced by this premise, and fair chase exists.

In the end, B&C is not your daddy. You are the only

one that can determine if you hunt fair chase or not. B&C should seem more like your hunting buddy. We should be thought of as helping and supporting you, not judging you. We are here to share your stories and to talk about hunting—past, present and future. The term servant leader is a better definition of our role in the hunting community and our service is borne out of our commitment to fair chase hunting and the hunter-conservationist way of life. We intend to lead by example not by edict or rule.

And while we are best known by the records book we keep, we are just hunters. In the end, we are so blessed to participate in the hunt it would be a damn shame to trivialize the wonder of it all by getting hung up on the details. ■

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Pedrotti, Jr.' with a stylized flourish at the end.

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