

# IS FAIR REALLY FAIR AND WHY DID YOU HAVE TO CHASE?

## THE ETHICS OF FAIR CHASE



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**When man first hunted, “fair” was probably not on his list of priorities. Likewise, I am pretty sure “chase” was to be avoided at all costs, and was generally the fate of a hunter that was not all that good at hunting. All kidding aside, hunting done for subsistence is and always was noble, respectful, and proper; it is not subject to emotional reinvention or mischaracterization. Hunting is clearly man versus beast, for the purpose of survival; it does not need to be further justified as “fair chase.” Hunting was not and is not wasteful and further, is broadly accepted by all.**

At the nexus it is still hunting, entailing another key challenge which is man or woman versus self. This is where the notion of fair chase comes to the forefront. When we depart from hunting out of necessity, we need to make sure we are on solid ground and that we can properly justify our actions, not so much to folks outside our community, but to ourselves and the generations we represent. We have to strive for an honest test. We cannot short-change or artificially modify the situation to our benefit. Admittedly, “fair” exists on a continuum and there is no “one-size-fits-all” answer here, so lets not get too far down in the weeds.

It all starts with the first step into a naturally wild place and it is all about the hunter’s intention from that point forward. We should aspire to the highest degree of “wildness” possible in every

hunting circumstance. Our intention should be to leave an animal and its opportunity to evade us as pure as possible. We should embrace and endure the challenge of the weather, topography, patience, stealth, and just plain old bad luck as a tribute to the game we pursue. This is what begins to shape the modern definition of “fair” in the credo “fair chase.”

The “chase” part is the knowledge and skill we must acquire and bring to bear. It would substantially lessen the dignity and honesty of the hunt if we didn’t do the groundwork. I learned as much as possible about the habits, habitats, and circumstances of each animal I pursued. I spent the time on the range to make sure my ability as a marksman was in proper order before I chanced a shot at a game animal. I learned to read a map, track an animal, tell the time by the sun, and how to gut ‘em, skin ‘em, and butcher ‘em. Then I learned how to write checks to support wildlife conservation and I participated in clubs and groups that support the hunting community.

Funny thing is, all the effort was never a burden. The work to prepare and educate myself was done with a sense of fascination and awe, never tedium. It was a commitment I made to myself and to the hunt. As it turned out, and I am certain you can relate, being well prepared for the chase creates a remarkable sense of peace and satisfaction. It is a critically important element in the

justification for the fair chase hunt. Of course, since it is hunting, often all you really get is the satisfaction of a job well done; and while it is not easy to eat a really good hunting story, it is what brings us back time after time, and in that way it sustains us.

As we have outgrown our reliance upon hunting as our primary source of protein, we recast the rules of the hunt and re-justified the equation. As fair chase hunters, we go afield with a sense of reverence regarding the wild animals and wild places we encounter. The fair chase ethos encompasses a moral imperative. We owe a debt to the generations before and after us that requires us to act with honor and dignity. The animals fed and clothed our ancestors and to make waste of them is unacceptable. In this day and age we go far beyond this and we are compelled to organize ourselves into representative groups, which serve to support wild game and wild places. We spend countless millions on wildlife conservation; we support youth hunter education; we tend to our ranches and step lightly on the vast public lands made available to us. And, we hunt fair chase!

I am reminded of a simple but stirring version of the guiding principles of fair chase. My good, good friend, and fellow philosopher Steve Mealey often recites the Hunter’s Creed that his father taught him, and it goes like this:

May I grow to know intimately the secrets of the forest and field.

May I learn to be a true sportsman, keen of eye, sound of heart and soul.

May I strive to understand and profit from the criticism of my fellows and my own introspection.

May I aspire to a true knowledge of the rights of the wild ones and my fellow man.

May I ever be humble as I tread the pathways of those who have gone before.

May I set my mind and will, intolerant of devious ways, and truly on the course of right, and in the plain sight of my god.

All I have to add is: Amen, Brother Steve. ■

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'DPedrotti'.