

Unguided Deer and Elk Hunting from Kodiak Raspberry Island Remote Lodge, a Few Tips to Maximize Your Opportunity for Success

Let's face it, you've spent a few nights in a tent, had your share of Mountain House, and don't want to get a fire going in the morning to thaw out your boots anymore. At least not on a hunt to Kodiak, where the wind and rain can last for days and there are far more bears than people. So, you did a little research or were referred to our lodge on Raspberry Island, remote and in the middle of wild country, where you can still hunt freely but while staying with us, don't have to worry about surviving. Sounds great, this is what we do, and we thank you for the opportunity to be of service to you!!

Participating in an unguided hunt, like most of our hunters do, means we provide full lodge support, daily transport to the field, and a pick up every evening. It doesn't mean we offer any guided hunting advice, and as a matter of fact, we legally can't. And while many of our hunters have some, or a lot, of Alaskan hunting experience, some of you may not have hunted in this country before. This is definitely different from hunting Whitetails in Kansas, Elk in Montana, or Moose in Alaska.

I think any hunter would agree that the best part of a hunt is the experience in the wilds and pursuit of the quarry, yet here are some ideas that may help you kill an elk or deer while you're here; certainly the cherry on top of a good hunt, and probably why you're coming.

Pre-Hunt Prep

This is physical country. Every day starts at sea level, and at the end of the day, returns to sea level. Mountains are up to three thousand feet high, and trails are interlaced with Alder, Salmon Berry Bushes, Devil's Club, tall grass, slippery Pushki leaves, swamps, creeks, ravines, and cliffs. One hunter likened it to 'Sheep hunting for Moose in a swamp, only with more Alders.'

Most of this is avoided at about eighteen hundred feet. "Running the Ridges" is, in my opinion, the most effective way to hunt this area. Not only do you get above the aforementioned myriad of nastiness, you a) can see; there isn't a forest of Alders all around you, b) are as high or higher than the game you're pursuing (we'll talk about this later),



c) quiet; you're not crashing through brush and swearing, and d) the hard part is over, you're at the top! (for now).

So, the most important thing you can do before your hunt is tune up that ol' body you're living in. If you can afford a hunt like this, you can likely also afford beer, and, if you're body is at all like mine, it doesn't process beer like it did when I *couldn't* afford beer. Not fun starting UP the mountain with an extra thirty five pounds on deck and breath coming in gasps, wondering how in the hell did I get this out of shape! I've been there and the body recovers fairly quickly if you work it. So exercise, hit the stair master, treadmill, ride your bike, join Tony for some P90X, you know what needs to be done. A tuned up body will not only get you to the ridge faster and in one piece, but a lot of other neat things happen that are unrelated to hunting. Other authors have covered these topics so I'll leave that conversation to them. Your physical condition will greatly affect your non-luck related potential for harvesting an animal or animals in this country.

A few other ideas before the hunt; sight in and reacquaint yourself with your rifle. You should know your rifle, be comfortable with the recoil, and have an understanding of trajectory and ballistics based on your shooting ability (who cares how much your rifle drops at three hundred yards, if you shoot a six inch group at one hundred yards. Be comfortable with what you can do; a six inch group at 100 yards WILL harvest a deer or elk, if you can stalk to 100 yards). Don't just send a round down range and if it is close to the bullseye call it good, try a few different positions you may need to shoot from in the field; prone, seated, and even offhand. If you're not a great shot at, say, an offhand position (I certainly am not) you'll know in the field that pulling the trigger from that position will likely end in either a missed shot or worse, a wounded animal.

If you are investing in new equipment for this hunt, try it out and break it in! Wear your new boots around, load up and adjust that new pack, figure out how to tell which gator goes on each leg/foot. It will save you time on your first few days and make your hunt more comfortable. Most people are only with us for a week; spend that time hunting!

Lastly, know and understand the hunting regulations for your permit/tag and this area!

Packing

Whenever a group joins us on a hunting trip we forward our Equipment List to them with the other final booking paperwork. What to bring (and what not to bring) is so important I'll reiterate hunt-specific items and elaborate on what I think is especially important.

- Rifle: This is such a wonderful category filled with old, trusty calibers to new, fancy wildcats. I'd recommend a .30 caliber or somewhere in that range; the .300 Win Mag, .30-06, .338 Win Mag, and wouldn't go below a .270 Win or necessarily above a .375 H&H. So a lot of range here, but the idea is to bring a rifle you're comfortable with shooting, and having at least one rifle .30 cal or higher in the group as last resort bear protection. Synthetic/stainless or coated (Cerakote, Teflon, etc) is ideal as this

country can often be wet from rain or dew on the grass. In any case don't forget a cleaning kit and to take care of your gun each night.

- Rifle scope: You're looking for a solid scope that is suitable for the calibre you're shooting, ie, if you're hunting with a .338 RUM, make sure the scope can handle the recoil! I also recommend a variable scope, with the lowest magnification 3x or less. I always hunt with my scope turned down to the minimum magnification, which maximizes my field of view if I bump into an animal, targeted or otherwise, at close range. Don't forget a good scope cover!
- Binoculars: Binoculars are one of the most important pieces of equipment you can bring to hunt this area. Every species we target are routinely spotted from within the lodge, through binoculars. When you step off the boat and begin your hunt, you can often see a large portion of the country you'll be hunting that day, often right at first light. The first thing I reach for are my binoculars and give everything I can see a good scan. As I mentioned previously, this country is rough and physically challenging; stop and rest as you move through it! And while you're resting, glass. Move 100 yards and stop and look back the direction you just came from. Look at everything you just glassed. There is no final destination that, once you get there, will have a glowing huge buck ready to be stalked; he is right there, hiding in the country you can see right now! You just have to find him. For deer, you should be spending the same amount of time glassing that you spend walking. For elk, since they're typically in a herd, that ratio is a little less, but still important. Binoculars and how you use them are crucial to your success. So; I'd recommend spending at least \$500 on your pair of binoculars, and I encourage a pair of the high end Zeiss, Leica, and Swarovski brands. I'd recommend 10x42s or even bigger objective lenses (so 10x50s, 10x56). The better the glass the more fun you'll have literally looking *into* the habitat these animals hide in. Good idea to have a bandana or micro cloth along to clean the lenses as needed.



- Spotting Scope: I'd say a spotting scope is not really necessary; it just depends on the goals of your trip. I love bringing a spotting scope when hunting deer because I like to see how many points the buck has and if I should walk all the way over there to hunt him. But, if you're cutting weight, simply don't own a scope, or don't care how big the deer or elk is you'll harvest that day, I'd say a scope is unnecessary or even a hinderance, due to the extra weight and bulk in your pack.

- Range finder. These are really handy little gadgets if you're a poor judge of distance, like I am. They are helpful but largely unnecessary if you're going to make shots under 200 yards and/or are comfortable judging distance. Your call. I have one and use it before every shot, but again, I'm a terrible judge of distance. Make sure the battery is fresh and/or you have a backup.
- Backpack: Two kinds of packs here; external frame and internal frame. External frame packs are typically bigger and a lot easier to pack elk or solo pack deer out in, as they distribute the weight evenly across your back. But, they're typically noisy in this country, and the little prongs that stick up on either side of the top of the frame seem to seek Alder branches to get caught up on. Internal frame packs have come a long way, and are smaller, more compressible, and don't have those prongs. If you're elk hunting I'd recommend the frame pack, if you're deer hunting I'd recommend the internal frame. If you already own both, I'd recommend hunting both elk and deer in the internal frame pack, and making the following day(s) pack trips with the external frame. When choosing a pack, run your fingers down the material, does it sound synthetic? You'll be pushing through Alders and Spruce etc, so noisy, nylon sounds are synthetic and animals pick up on that. Does it rattle and tinkle? Artificial noises are bad. Obviously try it on and make sure it fits okay, is at least moderately adjustable, and pockets/configuration is your choice.
- Clothing: Cotton Kills. It collects moisture (sweat, rain) and holds it against your body, keeping you wet, cold, and uncomfortable. Synthetic in this country is the way to go, from the inside and out. Yes, even your undies should be synthetic. Your clothing system should breath, be quiet (run your fingers down the side, like your pack) and air out easily. So, good synthetic underwear, good synthetic long-johns, and comfortable quality socks act as a solid, flexible base layer. For your outer layer I like good camo fleece or higher end gear like Sitka or Kuiu. I also typically carry extra layers, like a down vest, extra pair of clean, dry socks (dry socks are unexplainably luxurious when you need them), and I also carry a synthetic windbreaker or the like to cut the wind and for extra warmth. Warm hat to cover your ears, light gloves, and a light rain coat (Helly Hansen Impertech or the like) if you go with non-rainproof outer wear and it's raining out or threatening to do so.
- Boots: Another category where a little more investment will pay off exponentially on your hunt. I recommend good, stiff soles, solid ankle support, waterproof, and about mid-calf high.
- Gators: These are awesome and protect your calves; where all the grass and brush and everything else will be wrapping around and snagging and trying to trip you up. Highly recommended.
- Walking Stick(s): A variety of 'optional' ideas here; a walking stick is just as it sounds, picked up along the trail or found on the beach. Or, you can buy the latest telescopic graphite stick, like a ski pole, and mount a V on top to rest your rifle on if you need a little stability while making a standing shot. Your call here, many people love their

sticks, personally I haven't used one. Might be worth trying on your next pre-hunt hike. Be prepared to untangle it from the Alders.

- **Shooting Sticks/Bipod(s):** Shooting sticks are two or three sticks joined at the top that can flex open to make a bipod or tripod to rest your rifle in. Of course they can also double as a walking stick. Bipods also offer stability and mount directly to your rifle. This is also a matter of preference, and I don't use either (though I have a bipod). I've found keeping your hands free and having one less thing to haul up the mountain and get tangled in the brush is easier in the end. BUT, many people I know use them very effectively, especially guides. So, again, your call.
- **Camera:** I think this is an important part of your hunt because you will see things no one will *ever* see; that tiny 5 minute window where the sunrise fills the valley with pinks and golds, a fox approaches and cocks his head while you eat lunch, or just the country itself, how far you can see from the top, and of course a picture or two of your harvest. I have seen every approach, from GoPros to snapping shots with your smart phone; just don't forget a camera. Water resistant to water proof is recommended.
- **GPS:** I recommend bringing a GPS, yes they help mark your trail, meat cache, etc, but also fun to see how far you've walked, what your elevation is, etc. There are a number of great GPS apps out there for your smart phone that don't require an internet connection, and simply use the built in GPS antennae on your phone. Neat tools. I like the iPhone in a waterproof case, like the LifeProof, and use it to take pictures, run Gaia GPS app, and make calls. Just kidding, no cell service out here. But do use it to take pictures and run the GPS app.
- **Pistol and/or bear spray:** I have never carried either of these on a hunt as I already have a far more powerful rifle in my hands or slung over my shoulder. Comparing the point blank energy of my .270 Win to a .454 Casull doesn't even put them together on the same planet. If I'm worried about a bear eating me I'll reach for the rifle every time, and thereby don't take the energy or room to pack the extra hardware up the mountain. I encourage my hunting partner to do the same.
- **Post-Harvest Equipment:** Cut your tag! Good sharp knife, small saw with at least a 6" blade (Wyoming style or folding), and disposable latex gloves to wear while you dress the animal. For deer I just put the quarters and rest of the meat in garbage bags, about 2 bags per pack, or 4 total per deer. They're cheap and light so I usually have 6 or more bags in my pack. For elk, you'll typically have to leave the quarters in the field for a day or days while you pack out portions, so game bags work best. Figure 4 quarters to leave in the field, plus garbage bags to haul out the back straps, tenderloins, neck meat, ribs, and heart/liver (if you like heart/liver) on the day of the harvest. I also like some parachute cord to hang the game bags and antlers/trophy in a tree, as well as a small, lightweight, electric bear fence around the tree/meat cache.
- **Safety Equipment:** Aside from the extra clothing I mention above, I also bring waterproof matches/lighter/fire starter, a space blanket, first aid kit, a good head light

with extra batteries, bandana, a roll or partial roll of surveyors tape, an extra candy bar, and a bag of Frito's (extra food, great fire starter, all in a waterproof pouch!) A VHF radio helps communicate with the lodge/boat if you come out of the field early, late, and/or in a different location, or, in case of emergency, you can call the Coast Guard.

- Uncategorized odds and ends: Water bottle or water bladder, extra bullets (make sure they can't rattle, I usually hunt with my magazine full, one extra round in each front pants pocket, and half a dozen or so rolled in toilet paper or bandana or the like in my pack), license/tags/permit.

The Hunt

This is an unguided hunt; so you'll need to make the hunting decisions on your own. Every morning we'll look at the day's weather forecast and we'll indicate where we can drop you off, and more importantly, where we feel comfortable picking you up that night. Here are few things to help YOU pick out where you'd like to hunt each day:

Know the area we are located in; have a look at a topo map or better yet, Google Earth, and you'll see the area is broken into big valleys and big mountains. We hunt all of the country accessible from Raspberry Strait. I typically don't hunt beyond that because a) it takes too much time out of your hunting day to get there and home that night, and b) bad weather may prevent your pick up at the end of the day if we venture out into the Shelikof. Ultimately, there is rarely a need to hunt beyond Raspberry Strait and the vast amount of country we have access to right here, offering safe and reliable pick up points.

About half of the land we hunt is owned by the Afognak Native Corporation and requires a Land Use Permit to hunt on. I will not drop you off on Afognak Native Corporation Land without a Land Use Permit. You may purchase one here at the lodge or at the [Afognak Native Corporations's Website](#) if you choose.



Purple depicts Afognak Native Corporation Land requiring a Land Use Permit

Plan your hunt on the wind direction and weather forecast! According to a brief Google search I just did, a deer's sense of smell can be up to ten thousand times more sensitive than a human's. Irregardless of that staggering figure, they rely on their noses for safety and to them, we stink. I have seen people stand up and walk around as a deer watched from 50 yards away, I have seen shots missed and the deer just stood there, but if they get one whiff of human scent, they leave the valley. It is safe to say the same is true of Elk. If you're hunting with the wind on your back, turn around. Plan your hunt so you are hunting into the wind. If you hunt a valley or ridge or mountain with the area you would like to hunt down wind of your location, you will most likely not see anything. If you plan your stalk with the wind at your back, that animal will likely not present a shot, assuming you even see it again. Don't hunt with the wind at your back! The day's forecast is updated every morning before breakfast by the National Weather Service. Our area is best represented by the marine forecast for [area PKZ138, the Shelikof Strait](#).

A few more things about wind; look at your topo map and think of this area as a river, with the general wind direction representing gravity. If the forecast is for a North East wind direction, the air over head will be coming from the North East, but down low it will be flowing through the valleys and along the strait. SO, if you're approaching a valley that runs East to West, and the wind direction up high is NE, its likely the wind will be flowing through the valley from the East, channeled by the mountains. Additionally, heat rises; if there is little or no wind, your 'scent' will likely float up the mountain as the air heats up in the morning.

Finally, these animals, deer especially, like to be out of the wind and in the sun. So if we have a light Westerly wind forecast and clear skies, I'd anticipate the deer to be on the South facing sides of the mountain, out of that breeze, and basking in that early morning sunshine. Its also doubtful the elk will be standing on a ridge getting whipped by South East winds blowing at 30 knots; figure they'll move out of that and conserve some calories for winter.

With all of this in mind, pick out a location and have a loose goal for the day. For example, a goal for a hunt I may take would be to hunt into the wind to a high vantage point where I can see country that's protected and out of the wind where the animals will likely be, look the country over, and if I don't see something I like, move to plan B, say down the ridge a bit, have a look there, and then head back down the trail around 3-3:30pm. So a very loose plan that I only HOPE will be changed when I spot an animal I'd like to pursue!

We'll drop you off on the beach as close to first light as possible. Now you can see the country you'll be hunting that day. Get settled and give everything a close look, any tracks on the beach? Pull out your binoculars and glass everything you can see in front of you, did we push up a deer when I dropped you on the beach? Is there one still grazing on the hillside just below the top of the mountain? Look Look Look! If you don't see anything distracting, put into motion your plan; find a route that will get you where you'd like to go while avoiding the darker brown Alder patches. They are your enemy!



My favorite way to travel in this area is through the Sitka Spruce forests, they're typically open, full of game trails, and quiet to walk through (at the tops they're short, squat, and the branches are interlaced; the only thing worse than Alders! Avoid them up high, above about fifteen hundred feet). Or, perhaps a ridge where the Alder seeds haven't accumulated and taken root, or as a final option, trace a route through meadows between Alder patches as you climb. Lastly, along the bottom of nearly every valley in this area is a stream, with a solid bear trail

running along at least one side of it. Pick your route and head up.

This is bear country; keep your eyes open and most likely they'll avoid you. The best advice I can give when hunting in bear country is be there with an armed partner to back you up and help if there is ever a problem. In my thirty plus years living, hunting, and guiding in this exact location I have never been in an aggressive situation with a bear. Keep your eyes open, watch for birds or the like indicating a kill and avoid that, be cautious during the butchering process, and be respectful of their space and the environment they live in. The physical work and paperwork associated with killing a bear in defense of life or property will ruin your hunt and days beyond. Do your best to avoid that situation.

Climb. Glass. Climb. Glass. There is a balance here, the goal isn't to race to the top, nor is it to sit at the beach and glass all day. Take your time, and be comfortable with what you see as you go up. There will likely be deer tracks on the beach when I drop you off (probably does and fawns, but never the less, deer tracks) and deer tracks all over the trails as you hike, so you know they're there. If you can see a lot of mountain, have a seat and thoroughly go over the area in front of you. It is important to point out that you're not looking for just a deer or elk! You're looking for the white patch of fur under that buck's neck, the chocolate ears and neck of an elk; just bits and pieces. Sure you'll get a 'gimme' from time to time, where that animal or herd is obviously right there, but eighty percent of the deer I see are just a bit or a piece of movement, something suspicious that demands a second glance.

Get to the top, glass, glass, glass. You've made it to the top! Look at all that you can see. At this point I will sit down again and spend a good amount of time, twenty minutes to a few hours, given how much country I can see from that vantage point. Cool down, air out, eat lunch or a snack, and enjoy where you are and what you are doing. If you don't see something you want, move along the ridge a little, and look again.

The Stalk

Oh, there's one! Your heart jumps, your senses focus, there's the animal you'd like to pursue. Maybe you're still on the beach and the boat is still in sight, maybe you've been sitting in the same spot at the top of the ridge for an hour, but there it is. Before taking your glasses down to tell your buddy you spotted the big one, carefully pick out landmarks that will help you find it again, rocks, trees, a unique feature on the ridge line. What is the animal doing? How close is it? What is the wind? The stalk will evolve into the shot, so at this point a number of variables come into play. If you've done everything right so far, the animal doesn't know you're there, and hopefully the wind is right (you're down wind of the animal so it can't smell you). If it's running away, watch where it goes. If it's within shooting distance and provides a shot you're comfortable with, shoot it. Otherwise, it's probably a little ways away, grazing or lying down chewing its cud, possibly looking at you. So, now what?



Stalking is simply closing the distance between you and the animal you'd like to harvest, putting you in position to make a shot you're comfortable with, ensuring a clean and responsible kill. It's hard to outline a specific scenario here, but always be mindful of the wind; remember if it smells you it will vacate the area. Sight and sound become more important here, as well. This is why you invested in non-synthetic sounding clothing and gear as you leave the trail and slip between bushes and through grass. Plan your route to your desired shooting location, tracing a path that won't disturb the animal (or other animals in the area), so you can move silently and out of sight. Very carefully mark in your mind where the animal is; oftentimes you'll lose perspective as you get closer or your angle to it changes. Pick out unique trees or landmarks to help identify where it is. The best spot will be a little high ground where you can hopefully lie down for a prone shot, and shoot over any grass, brush, etc between you and the animal. They will almost always be looking down or to the side; rarely up. So, again, altitude is your friend, get up above the animal where you'll find less vegetation, have a greater vantage point, and less likely hood of discovery.

Final Stalk and The Shot

You've planned your hunt, found your animal, made your stalk, and you know it should be right around the corner or over the last little hump, within range. Carefully and quietly slip out of your backpack, and gently ease up the last bit of cover, peeking forward to ensure it's still there. It is. Turn up your scope to the desired magnification. Making a solid, accurate shot is best done by removing as much of your body from the equation as possible. For a prone shot, I like to push my backpack forward and rest my

rifle on that. If it's necessary to make a more elevated shot, a tree branch, stump, or something stable and sturdy to rest your gun on will work. Some folks are trained off hand shooters and are comfortable with this shot; in any case you should know what you're happy with. If you're not comfortable with the shot, re-stalk and re-position to a better spot! No one wants to hit an animal in the rump or guts because they botched the shot. Aside from the obvious hardship on the animal, this will also result in extra time tracking a wounded animal through bear country and add a sour note to an otherwise great hunt.

You are comfortable with your shooting position and distance. I firmly believe in gun safety and don't see a reason to chamber a round until this moment. Carefully and quietly slide a cartridge into the chamber. Be aware of what's behind the animal you're about to shoot, this is especially crucial when hunting Elk. As a herd animal, what will your bullet hit after it passes through the animal you're shooting? If they're moving slowly as a herd, you may need to wait until the one you choose to harvest is separate from the herd. Press the trigger when you're ready. When the rifle jumps, get back on the animal and watch it through the scope; did it go down immediately? Is it up and moving? Watch to see where it goes. If you made a solid shot it either went down immediately, or it's moving downhill and will fall in a moment. Watch to see where it drops. Before taking your eyes away and celebrating, mark where it is, under a specific tree, on a certain edge of a significant patch of brush. Again, it's easy to lose perspective after you head over to claim your animal; be sure you know where it dropped and will be able to locate that spot when you get there! Also be sure you look *behind* you, because you'll be looking back to where you shot from when trying to find your downed game. After you are certain the animal is down, turn your scope back down to it's minimum magnification and reload your magazine (chamber empty). Wait a few minutes, carefully watching the area for movement, before heading over to your harvest.

Butchering Your Game

Once you find your downed animal, carefully approach from behind (if it's still alive be aware that it can kick or gouge you with it's antlers). If it is unfortunately still alive and alert, dispatch it with a shot to the neck. If it's still, gently poke it in the eye with your rifle barrel. If it doesn't blink, it's dead. Congratulations!



Take your pack off and set your rifle nearby, within quick and easy reach. Throughout this next process you and your partner will want to take a break every few minutes to stand up, stretch, and have a look around, ensuring a brown bear hasn't decided to come investigate your technique. Alaska Law dictates you cut your tag here, do it now or you'll forget. Next, take the time here to adjust the animal for pictures, bend the legs underneath, try to roll it up on its belly, tuck the

tongue back in its mouth, wipe any blood from the nostrils or mouth. Blood and gore don't look good in a picture, so take a couple of extra minutes to do the best you can. These are proud and handsome animals, so get some good pictures to show your grandkids someday!

Unload your packs, assemble your saw, and prepare your game bags/garbage bags. This is a good time to have a quick bite or drink some water as your hands are about to get dirty. Pull on some of those disposable latex gloves you brought and take one more look at the beautiful animal you just earned.

There are a number of ways to skin a cat, and cleaning a deer or elk is no different. If I'm not interested in harvesting the cape for a shoulder mount, I like to pop off the lower legs below the knees first, finding the joints by bending the lower leg and circling the hide with my knife at the joint. Circling with the knife again you'll find two joints, one lower and one upper at each knee, and separate the tendons at the lower joint. If you can't see or find the joint, put one finger on the kneecap and move the lower leg, you'll feel the joint. After cutting the tendons and other sinew, sharply snap the leg off by overextending it backwards.

Next, roll the animal on it's back and position the rear downhill. Slit up the belly, starting between the hind quarters. Cut shallow to start, just under the hide, all the way up to the throat. A point to remember when cutting through the hide; do your best to cut away from the animal, ie, poke your knife into the hide with the sharp part of the blade cutting up through the hide, away from the animal. If you do the opposite, cutting into the hide, towards the animal, you'll cut through a bunch of fur, then you'll have hair loose everywhere, which will eventually end up on your clean meat (food).

Carefully make a second shallow cut through the belly muscle, again starting between the hind quarters following your first cut, without nicking the stomach or other guts. The stomach will start to come out of the belly cavity. Move this incision forward until you hit the ribs, and if you have a sturdy enough knife you can straddle the animal and work up one side of the sternum, just off of center. There is a joint where each rib connects to the sternum and you can fairly easily cut through each. If you can't find the joints use your saw right up the middle of the sternum. Don't cut too deep with the saw, just the bone.

Once the ribs are opened up, grab the windpipe and esophagus within the neck and pull back, cutting through them above your grip and free from the remainder of the head of the animal. The windpipe/esophagus are in a way connected to all of the guts, and act as a great handle when pulling the guts free. Pull back on the windpipe/esophagus and gently cut away the membrane that holds the various organs to the chest cavity while your partner holds the ribcage open. Carefully pull the guts back and out, separating the diaphragm and other membrane that bind up the process. Soon you'll have them all out, except the lower intestine. This I just massage the droppings still inside back up the intestine for about six inches, starting back by the pelvis, then cut, and tie off with an overhand knot on the section still remaining attached to the animal. Be careful as the

bladder is still also inside the pelvis, you'll see the wrinkled grey sack. I just leave it for now. From the gut pile you can harvest the heart and liver if you'd like and place in a garbage bag. Take the tenderloins from inside the belly cavity, attached to the spine, and add to the heart/liver bag.

From here, slit the hide inside each knee/leg down to the first long incision you made. Do your best to cut from the inside out, pulling the sharp edge of the knife away from the animal. Remember, cutting into the animal will cut through hair and make a mess. It is a matter of pride bringing home meat (food) that isn't covered in hair, grass, dirt, guts, and shit. Do the best you can to keep it clean.

If your permit or tag requires evidence of sex, you have to leave that attached to a hind quarter. No real pretty way to put this, just do your best to cut around whichever part will identify the animal as a male or female, and leave it connected to the meat of the hind quarter. If it is separated from the hindquarter and tossed in a bag, it won't be acceptable to the troopers.

Work one hind quarter at a time, skinning around the leg; once you get started around the knee, your partner can hold the skinned knee while you pull the hide with one hand and cut with the other. Skin around to the back and reveal all the meat on the hind quarter. Now, carefully and minding the full bladder still within the pelvis, cut strait down through the muscles where the two hind quarters meet, to the pelvic bone. Your partner can still hold the knee area (if you cut through the lower joint the Achilles Tendon should still be attached and makes a great handle) keeping the quarter up and out of the grass. Use the hide also, spread under the hind quarter, to protect it against debris on the ground. Cutting down to the pelvis, slowly and carefully cut along the pelvic bone, making short strokes that end by tapping bone. Just forward you'll find the ball and socket that connect the femur to the pelvis, rotate the hind quarter down and away, and work the ball out of the socket, with help from your knife. Now continue cutting, following the pelvic bone under, until you can pull the hind quarter free.

On an elk the hind quarter is significantly larger; so after separating the ball and socket, close the hind quarters together and work in from the center of the spine from the back. Then work free from here.

Have a new bag ready, a game bag for elk or garbage bag for deer, and place the quarter inside, without setting it in the grass or dirt, until it's protected by the bag. There should be minimal hair and grass on the quarter, if any.

Move forward to the front shoulder on the same side. Skin from the knee down in the same way you did the hind quarter. Depending on where you hit the animal, this is a good time to trim away the bloodshot muscle damaged by the bullet that you can't eat. The front shoulder is held on by membrane that is easy to cut through, with your partner holding the knee and you cutting. Place in a new game bag for elk, or the same garbage bag for deer.

On the same side, feel along the top of the spine and cut down along the edge of the spine as close to the bone as you can. Then feel the side of the backstrap, the long muscle that runs along the spine, and cut under along the rib bones. The backstrap should now be free, put it in a new garbage bag. Skin up the neck and remove as much meat as you can, adding the neck meat to the backstrap bag.

If you'd like barbecued ribs, take your saw and cut the rib cage off close to the spine, where you just removed the backstrap. You'll need to do some trimming etc. with your knife to finish the job. I put the ribs in a separate garbage bag. If you don't care for barbecued ribs, carefully cut the rib meat away from the rib bones, and add them to your back strap bag. You have to salvage all of the rib meat, per Alaska State Hunting regs!

Now you should have one side done. Spread and flatten out the hide you've skinned so far, and roll the animal over, onto the hide. Repeat the butchering process on the other side.

Depending on how you harvested the ribs, you should have two fairly even pack loads; deer should be a hind quarter and front quarter together in a garbage bag, and the backstrap, neck, and rib meat in one bag, and heart, liver, and tenderloin together in a bag. For elk, same scenario but a quarter in each game bag. Each of those will be a trip in itself. You can, of course, adjust who carries what based on what you put into each bag. You are not obligated to harvest the heart or liver, but ARE required to harvest everything else I mention. If you keep the antlers, the regulations also mandate that the meat shall be packed out of the field first and antlers/trophy last; don't bring out antlers and/or cape until the last load of meat is out of the field!

Now your animal is butchered you can pack up and head out. If you harvested an Elk you'll have more on the ground than you can carry in one trip (unless you're hunting with a whole passel of pals). The four quarters are protected in their game bags from dirt, but that won't stop a bear. The best thing to do is get your meat a minimum of one hundred yards away from the carcass. Find a location, preferably a big tree, where you can hang the meat up, with an approach that will offer a good view of what is around the cache (ie bear) the next day. If you don't have a tree in range you'll have to leave it on the ground. Put up your bear fence and activate.

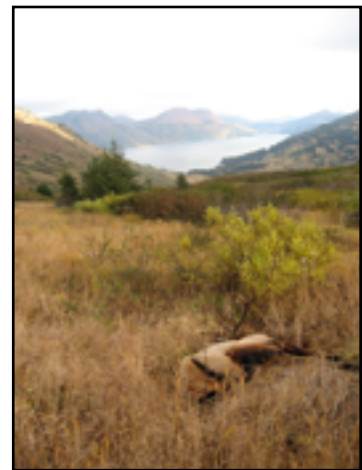
I'll insert here that if you have time during the butchering process you can bone out the quarters to reduce your pack weight. Basically just remove the bone from each quarter while minimizing damage to each individual muscle group. You may not have time to do this on the day of your harvest with elk, so I often do it upon returning to the cache the next day. I rarely do it for deer as I like to hang the quarters from the bone upon returning to the meat house at the end of the day, but will if I harvest a large bodied deer and/or weight is an issue.

Take the time to pick out local land marks that will help you locate your cache the next day. String some surveyors tape or hang a colorful bandana to mark the cache, for both

yourself and other bear-wary hunters, and enter your location in your GPS. Remember how you'll approach the cache the following day; again, you'll want to carefully survey the area around your cache to ensure a bear hasn't claimed it overnight and is lying nearby. When your cache is satisfactory, go back to the kill and get the rest of your gear and meat. Return to the carcass carefully, a bear may have moved in while you were gone.

With deer you'll likely get the whole animal in one trip. I like the weight low in my pack, so first put in the bag with the quarters, then the second bag with lighter meat on top of that, then my extra cloths/whatever else I brought in. Tighten up your pack, make sure you didn't forget anything, check around for bears one more time, and head out! Now the work begins!!

Depending on where you harvested your animal in relationship to the trail you came in on, you may choose to go out a different way. I *always* try to go out the way I came in, unless I'm positive I can follow a good trail all the way out. Even packing uphill a ways is worth it, if you're afraid you'll get tangled up in the Alders if you go straight down. But, if you must choose a new route, you must. Try to pick a route that will avoid the brown patches of Alders, unseen cliffs you may have to go back uphill in Alders to circumnavigate, and gorges/river beds that will make the weight on your back even heavier. Be careful and take your time. Hopefully you can get out before it gets dark. If you can't, get out the head lamp and be even more careful. Try to memorize your route before it gets too dark to see very far.



We'll meet you on the beach. Hot tub is hot, beer is cold, food tastes good, and bed is soft. Do it again the next day.

I'll conclude that your meat will need to be removed from the garbage bags upon returning to the lodge that night; it's imperative to let the meat cool down. This is a no brainer when hunting from the lodge, and the meat house is ready with loops to hang your harvest; cool, dry, and safe from bears.

I hope the information above will help you enjoy an even more successful unguided hunting experience while visiting us on Raspberry Island. We welcome your questions at any time!

Birch and Tiffany Robbins
www.KodiakAlaskaLodge.com