

Processing Your Deer At Home



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Processing Your Deer At Home

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Venison can be delicious meat. A great deal of your family's acceptance and enjoyment of venison will depend on how it is cut up and cooked.

This publication illustrates and describes a good method of cutting up a deer. It serves as a guide, and there are tips on using, cooking and storing venison in the back.

The deer processing method described here is basically one of boning. If you do not especially like your venison now, try this boning method and you might be pleasantly surprised to find how boning enhances the eating qualities of venison, especially the round in the hind quarters.

Boning a deer is neither impossible nor particularly difficult. It just looks that way. Once learned, it is an easy and convenient way to take care of venison. It may, however, take some extra courage and a sense of adventure to try it the first time.

Boning can be done in the field, garage, kitchen, basement or butcher shop. All the equipment needed is a counter or table top, a meat saw or fine-toothed carpenter saw, a sharp narrow-bladed knife and a place to put the meat and scraps. Because most people have tables, the cutting illustrations are shown on a flat surface. However, the best position for boning a deer is when it is hanging from a gambrel by both hind legs. If placed on a flat surface, the animal can be quartered, halved or left whole. The basic principles of boning will apply in any case. Elk, antelope, bear or other large game can be cut up in the same way.

Boning has several advantages over the conventional methods of cutting up deer. It separates the choice pieces of venison from tough connective tissue, tendons, off-grained meat and excessive fat. Dirt, hair and bloodshot muscle are also removed easily. The bone dust and marrow from the meat saw is avoided, and packages for freezing are boneless, compact, smooth and easy to wrap tightly. Venison from the boned animal takes up less space in the cold storage locker or freezer.

For the uninitiated, the first step in boning out a deer is to study figure 1. Locate the major parts to be boned out. After you have them fairly well in mind, pick up the knife and begin. It is not necessary to follow the exact order of the steps as shown, but it is a good way to proceed.

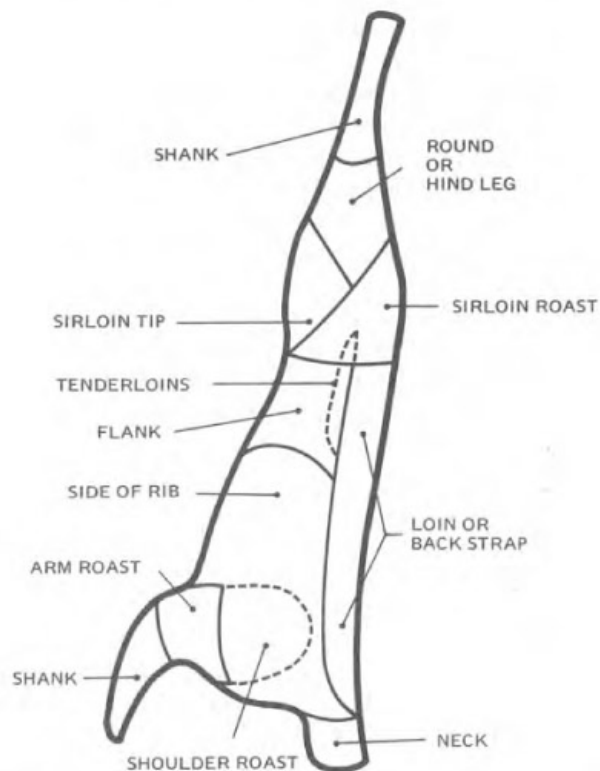


Fig. 1. Venison boning chart, location of main cuts.



Fig. 2. The first cut is to remove a front shoulder. Lift the front leg up from the chest and cut the meat attaching it to the side of the ribs.



Fig. 3. Then work the knife back and forth to cut the connective tissue between the leg and the rib cage. The last cut to be made will be at the top of the shoulder blade where it is attached to the withers.

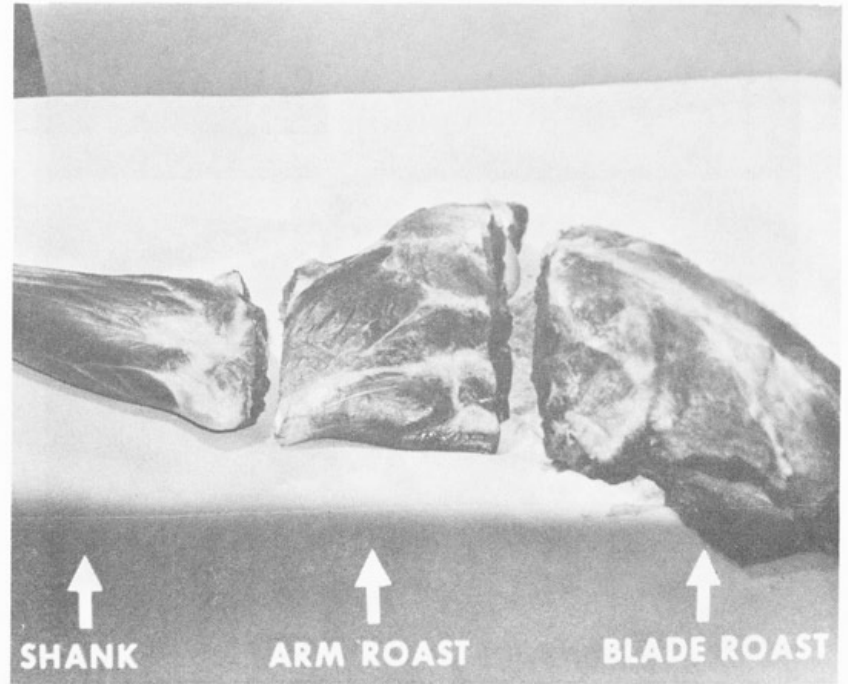


Fig. 4. Cut the front leg into three parts — shoulder or blade roast, arm roast and shank. (figures 5 through 7.)

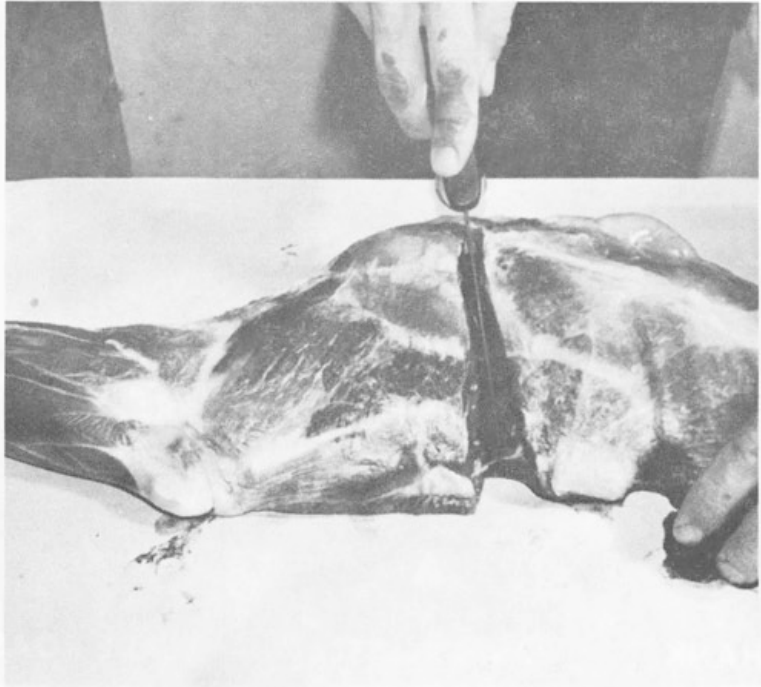


Fig. 5. Remove the shoulder roast from the leg by severing at the joint. Locate the joint by moving the shoulder blade up and down and then cut through it. The shoulder blade roast is now removed from the leg. Notice that the cut has been made through the joint. Trim the roast to make a neat-looking piece of meat for roasting. The bone is not removed. The trimmings are good for hamburger and other uses. For those who prefer steak, the muscles on each side of the bony ridge on the shoulder blade can be removed. Steaks should be cut 1/4 to 3/8 inch thick for frying.

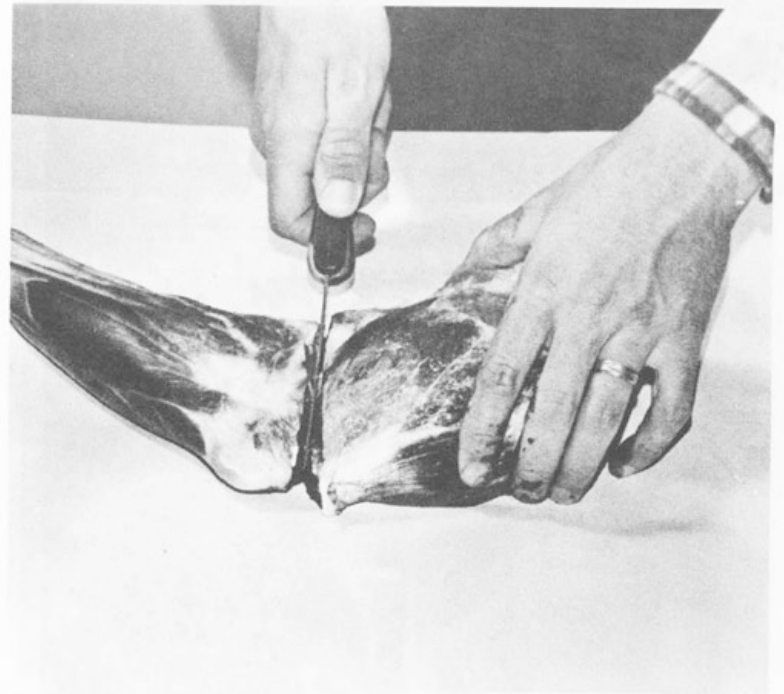


Fig. 6. To separate the arm roast from the shank, prepare to saw the leg bone by cutting the meat down to the bone.

Fig. 7. This is a close view of the neck joint with the knife at the juncture of the neck and body. The knife is held at an angle to the neck and the vertical spine of the neck is cut through with the knife. Cut it at the first joint just in front of the hind leg and follow the cut all the way to the backbone. Cut 2. Use the vertical spine of the backbone as a guide and cut forward along these until you reach the base of the neck. Cut 3. Make the side-cut all the way over the point where the ribs come down to join the backbone.

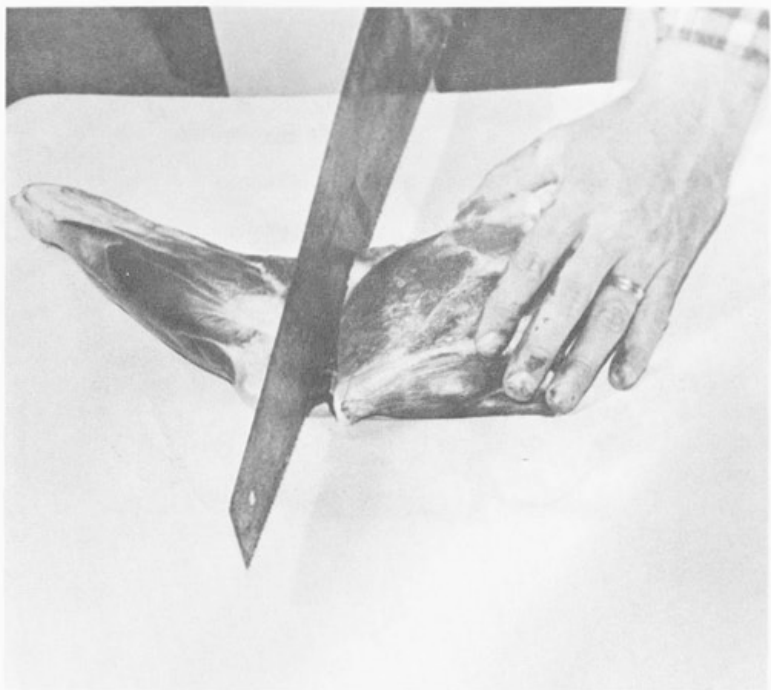


Fig. 7. Saw the bone through. This is one of the few places where sawing is done close to meat. Trim the arm roast and it is ready for cooking or storing. Trim out the meat from the heavy tendons and tissue of the shank. This meat is good for grinding.

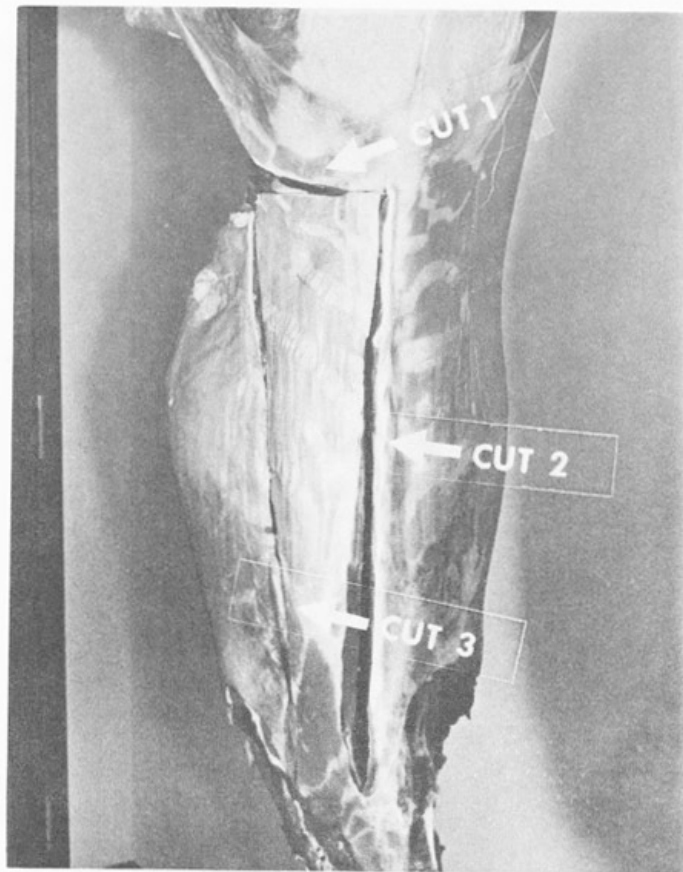


Fig. 8. This is a back view of the whole deer with the outline of the preliminary cuts that are made to remove the loin or backstrap along one side of the backbone. The loin lies in the groove between the ribs and the vertical spines of the backbone. Three basic cuts are made. Cut 1: Cut the flank loose just in front of the hind leg and extend the cut all the way to the backbone. Cut 2: Use the vertical spine of the backbone as a guide and cut forward along these until you reach the base of the neck. Cut 3: Make the side-of-rib cut directly over the point where the ribs curve down to join the backbone.

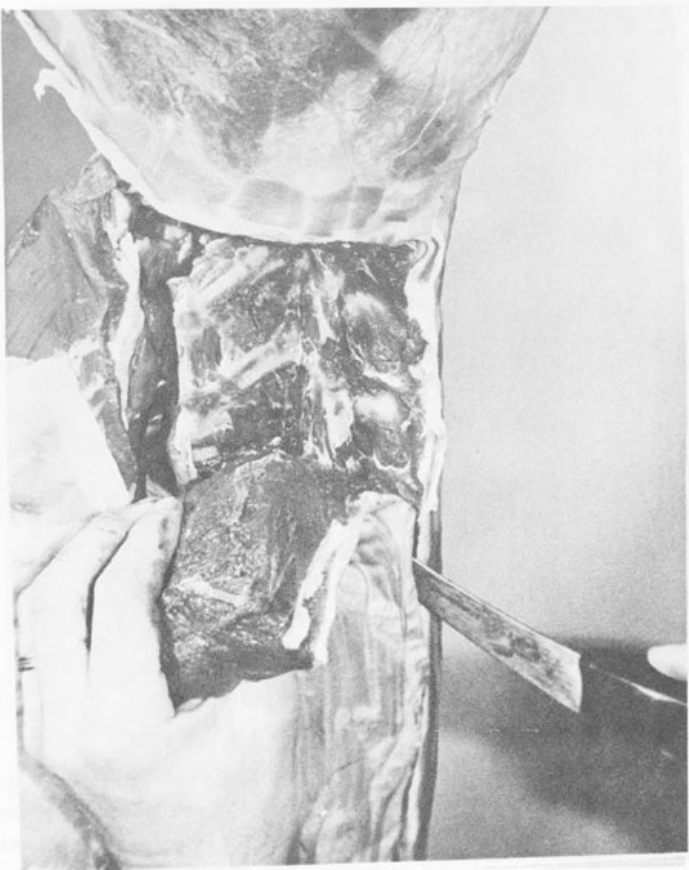


Fig. 9. This photograph illustrates cut 2, the use of the vertical spines of the backbone as a guide in cutting forward to the base of the neck. Cut down to the backbone until the junction with the ribs is reached.



Fig. 10. Remove the loin by cutting it loose from the ribs. Lift the loin and start cutting and peeling it from the groove, continuing forward until loin meat ends or the base of the neck is reached.

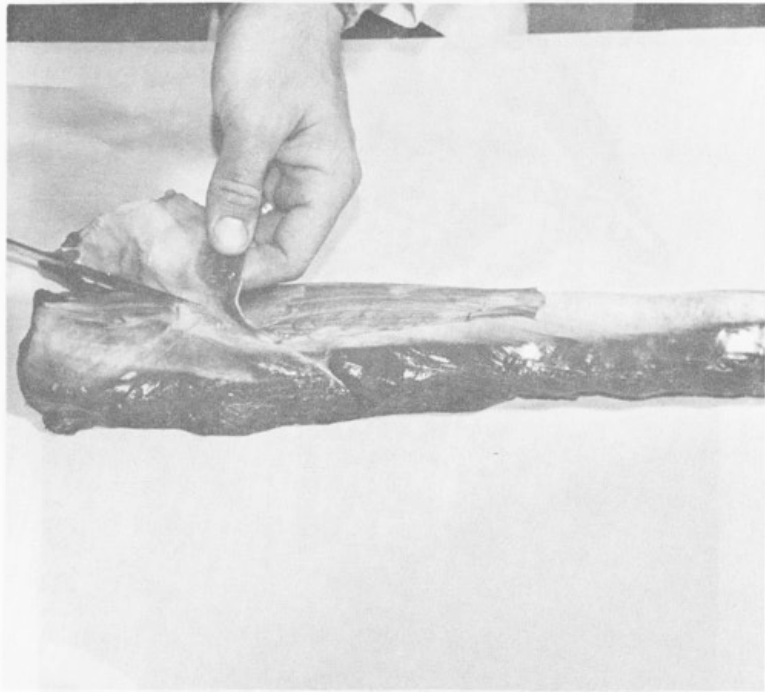


Fig. 11. One of the two loins from a deer. It is ready to be trimmed. Lay the loin on the table and prepare to pull off fat, odd-grained meat and tough tissue by starting at one end. Cut enough of the connecting strands to allow a good hand hold. Pull and rip the layer of fat and connective tissue from the loin. The loin meat will still be encased in thin connective tissue. Remove the loosely attached meat near the neck end of the loin. This meat is good for stews, ground meat or other uses, but it detracts from the tenderness of good steaks.



Fig. 12. Cut the trimmed loin into family-sized chunks or pieces and freeze whole. By freezing the chunks whole, moisture and flavors are preserved and packaging is easier. Wait until you are ready to cook them before cutting the steaks. Cut them $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 inch thick. The boneless loins are not large but they have no connective tissue, fat or off-grained meat.



Fig. 13. Remove the flank by cutting it free from the backbone and the adjoining ribs.

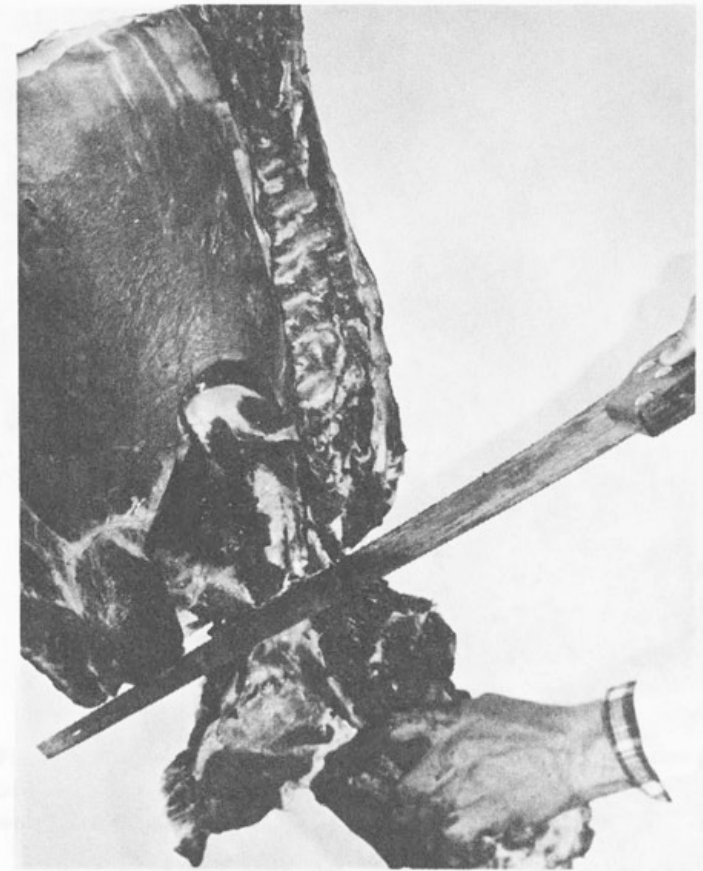


Fig. 14. Remove the neck by sawing the backbone off just in front of the point of the shoulder. The neck meat makes excellent mincemeat, stew or grinding meat. It can also be roasted whole.



Fig. 15. Remove the side of rib from the backbone. Use the saw and cut the ribs loose at the point where they curve enroute to connecting with the backbone. Cut all the way to the base of the neck.



Fig. 16. A side of rib that has been removed from the deer is shown here. You can either cut it up at this point or turn the deer over and start boning out the remaining side.



Fig. 17. A layer of meat covers the ribs. It is usually left as shown, but the layer of meat can be removed and used for jerky, grinding meat, stew meat or tiny steaks. Enough meat will be left between the ribs for barbecuing.

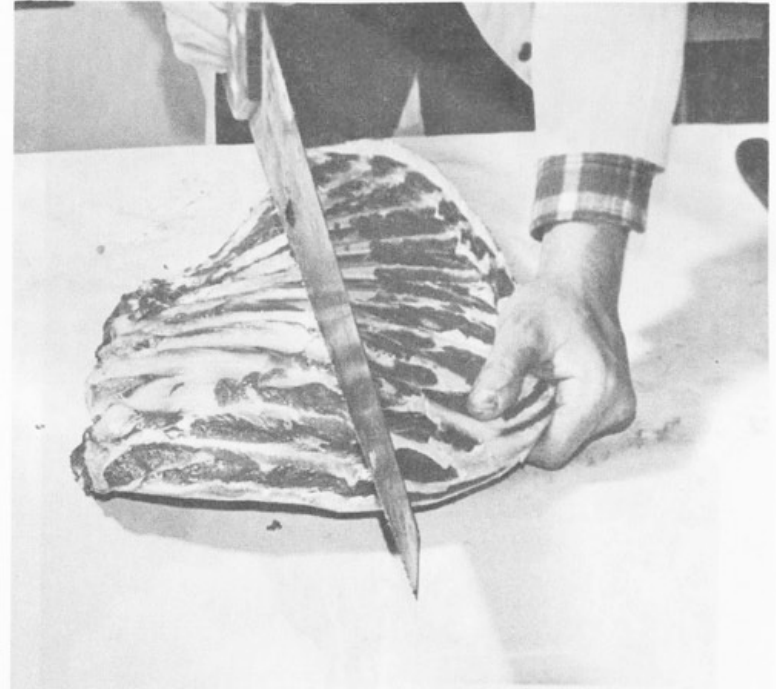


Fig. 18. Here a side of rib is being cut into plates. Plates of ribs can be barbecued whole or separated into two or three ribs per piece. Ribs can be cut into short pieces and used in stew if you prefer.

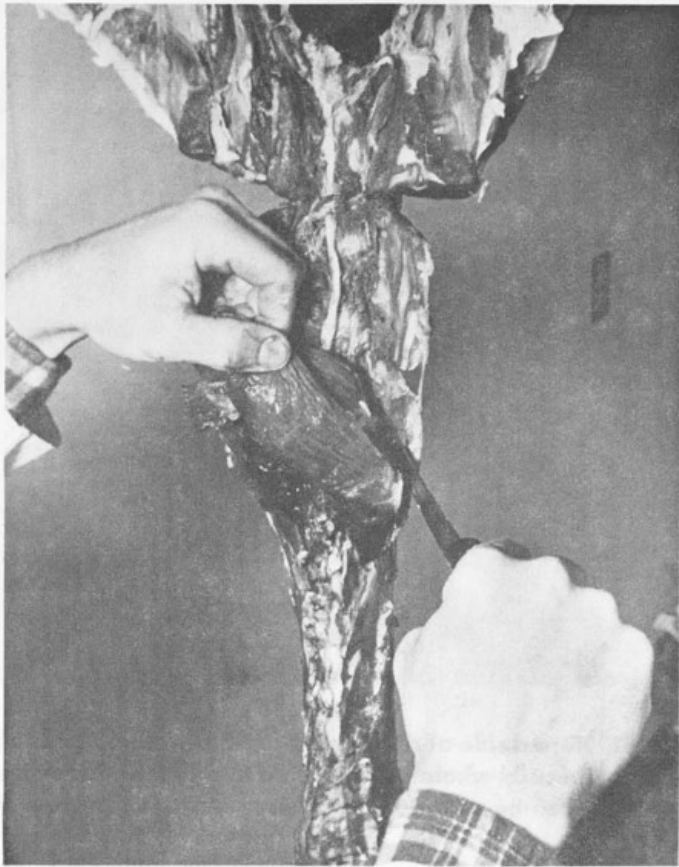


Fig. 19. Remove the tenderloin by lifting and cutting it free from the backbone. The two tenderloins are located on each side of the back-bone and just forward of the pelvic area.



Fig. 20. Each tenderloin is only about 1½ inches in diameter and a foot long. These are the most tender pieces of meat in the deer, and they are excellent for steak. To make the steaks larger in diameter, butterfly them. A butterfly steak consists of two steaks lying side by side and connected by the same tissue on one edge. These steaks are made by cutting the first steak almost completely off and cutting the next one completely off. Then they are folded edge to edge at the point of connection and laid flat in the frying pan.



Fig. 21. Saw the backbone off just in front of the hind legs. It can be cut into sections and used to make soup stocks. The meat scraps can be picked off and used in mincemeat, head cheese, ground meat or for other uses.



Fig. 22. The two hind legs are ready to be separated by sawing through the middle of the backbone.



Fig. 23. Use the spinal cord in the backbone as a guide in making the cut with the meat saw. Each hind leg is cut into a sirloin roast, a sirloin tip, the round and the shank.



Fig. 24. To cut up the hind leg, remove the sirloin roast first. To do this, locate the ball and socket joint which connects the pelvic bones of the sirloin roast with the large leg bone. Feel for the joint as you raise and lower the sirloin roast. Once located, cut as shown in figure 25.



Fig. 25. Cut down to the ball-and-socket joint and work the knife through it as shown above. Make the cut as vertical as possible, but leave enough meat on the sirloin roast for a meal. Separating with a knife instead of sawing avoids spreading bone marrow and dust.

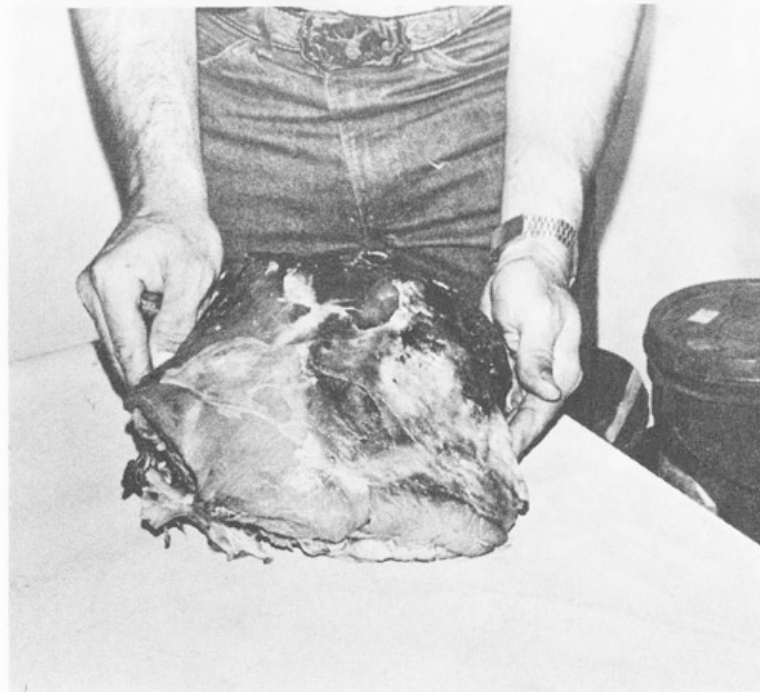


Fig. 26. The sirloin roast is shown from the top side. Remove the fat and sharp projections of pelvic bone before cooking or freezing. If you prefer other cuts to roasts, the meat can be removed and cut into small steaks or used for grinding meat or stew meat.

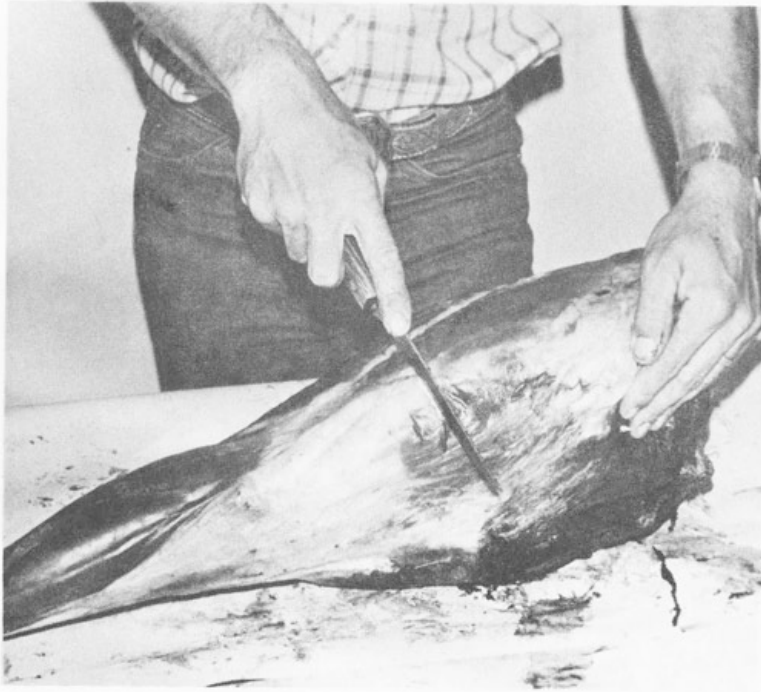


Fig. 27. Next cut the sirloin tip from the remainder of the hind leg. First, set the leg in a vertical position. Make a cut above the knee cap. Cut directly down to the large leg bone which is shown in figure 28.



Fig. 28. Lay the hind leg flat on the table and remove the sirloin tip by using the leg bone to guide the knife while cutting off the large chunk of meat. Notice the large white bone (arrow). Start at the knee cap and keep the knife in a vertical plane against this bone. Cut the meat away from the bone with short strokes.

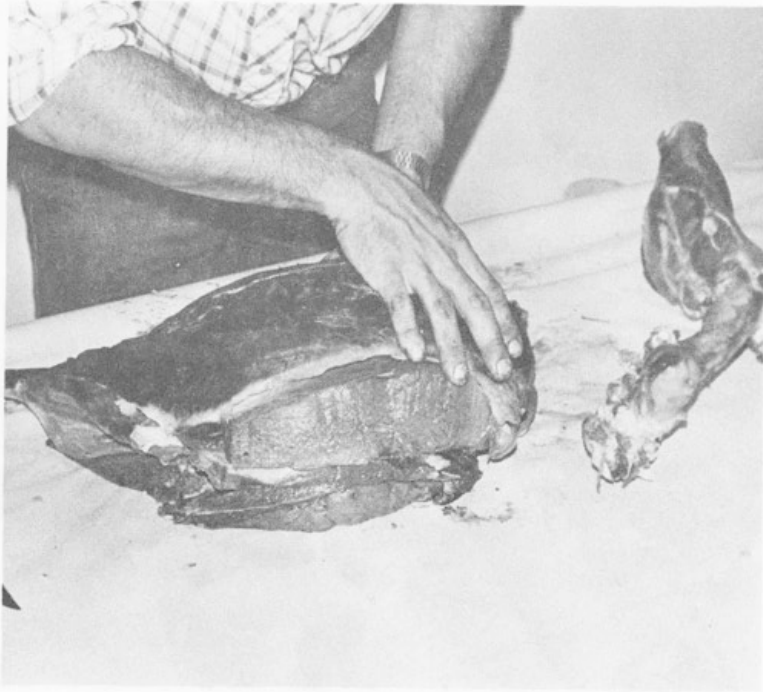


Fig. 35. In this photograph, the leg bone has been separated from the large chunk of round. The meat from the leg bone can be trimmed off and used for grinding. The next step is to separate the round into its individual muscles, each of which is enclosed in its individual envelope of connective tissue.

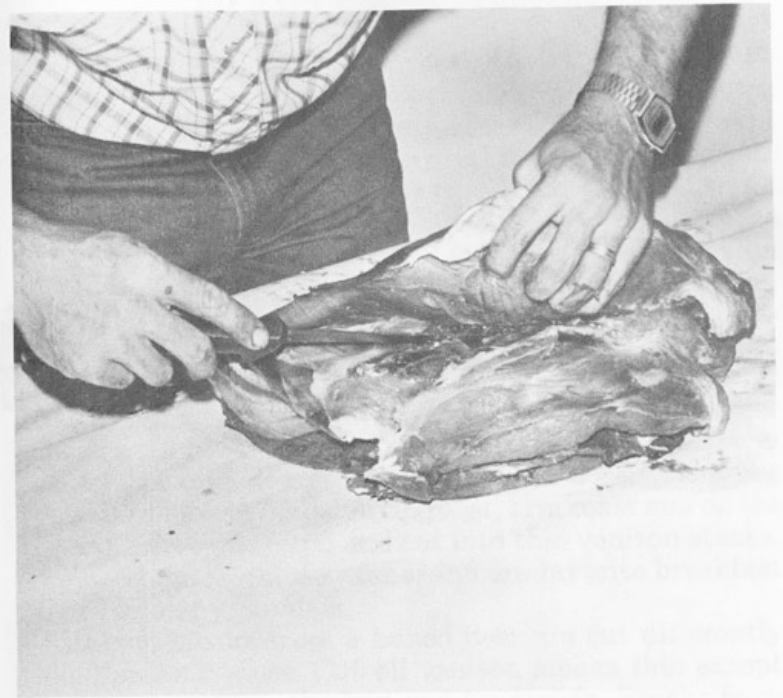


Fig. 36. Divide or separate the large leg muscles in the round by cutting the connective tissue holding them together. Avoid cutting into the meat as much as you can. The meat close to the long tendon does not make good steak meat, it is too tough. Remove it and trim out the meat for grinding or other uses.



Fig. 37. Chunks of trimmed round that have been separated from the hind leg are shown above. These chunks can be made into steaks or roasts. For the smaller family, the larger pieces of round may be halved lengthwise. Leave the pieces whole until just before cooking. The round makes excellent steak meat when it is cut thin.

TIPS ON USING VENISON

When you encounter bloodshot meat, most of it can be saved by soaking it in cold salt water. Put about a gallon of water in a 3 or 4 gallon bucket or dishpan, add 3 or 4 handfulls of salt and put the bloodshot meat into the solution. Let it soak for an hour or two, then wash and scrub the blood off the pieces. Use the meat according to the cut. If the blood impregnates the muscles of the meat, trim that part out and throw it in the scrap box.

The boning process described and illustrated favors getting lots of steak meat from the carcass. A venison steak is not like a beefsteak. A venison steak is smaller, without bone or much fat, and can be cut from most of the larger muscles. In other words, the loin, tenderloin and round are not the only sources of steaks from a deer. Muscles from the shoulder blade, rump roast, arm roast and on the rib cage can be isolated and cut into thin venison steaks. They are small, but delicious, and are favorite breakfast meat for many families.

Venison steaks from a boned deer are cut differently than domestic meat. Cut all venison steaks thin except those coming from the loin and tenderloin. Steaks from tenderloin and loin can be cut either thick or thin, depending on your preferences. A thin venison steak is about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick and a thick one is about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch. The diameter of small steaks can be enlarged by butterflying them.

The chunks of round from the hind leg make excellent steaks when cut thin. Have the chunk partially thawed by dinner, then cut it into $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{3}{8}$ inch steaks just before frying. Fry in a hot skillet or frying pan. The frying time is about 90 seconds on a side for a steak cut $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick. Fry steaks just enough to brown the outside but leave the center slightly pink. The steaks should be juicy and tender. If steak is dry and tough, it was cooked too long.

Steaks from the loin are usually cut $\frac{3}{4}$ inch thick. However, they can be as thin as $\frac{1}{4}$ inch and as thick as $\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Fry or broil to suit taste.

If roasting venison is a challenge for you, try this recipe. Lay out a piece of aluminum foil large enough to double wrap the roast. Sprinkle one-half package of dehydrated vegetable soup mix in the aluminum foil. Place the thaw-

ed roast on top of the vegetable soup mix and pour the rest of the soup mix on top of the roast. Wrap the aluminum foil tightly around the roast and place it in an oven preheated to 325°-350° F. Cook the average 2 or 3 pound venison roast for 1½ to 2½ hours, depending on how well done you prefer the venison. The meat will be juicy and moist with this method of roasting.

Use your favorite shortening in frying steaks, but bacon and beef fat are favorites. If you have never tried beef fat as shortening for frying steaks, you may be in for a pleasant surprise.

Freezing chunks of venison whole helps to preserve moisture and flavor in the meat. Also, it saves time in cutting and wrapping and gives the cook a choice of ways to prepare the meat for the table.

Keep all air out of packages and double wrap them with suitable paper or seal tightly in special plastics or freezer bags. The best way to freeze meat is to have it quick-frozen at extremely cold temperatures, then stored at 0 °F or below. Whatever method of wrapping you use, be sure to label and date the packages for later identification.

Ground venison can be mixed with other meats to make excellent meatballs, sausage, weiners and bologna. Most parts of the deer will make excellent jerky. Dicing venison into small pieces and canning it is still an old favorite. Good stew meat can be made from trimmings and by cutting the ribs into short pieces.

Ground venison can be mixed with beef fat to increase the moisture content. About 10-15% fat is recommended. Some butchers may give you beef fat at no charge.