

BACKCOUNTRY ETIQUETTE

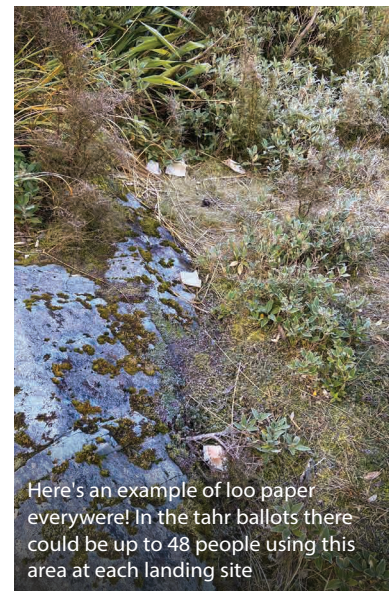
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Always try and keep camp as tidy as possible
Don't leave stuff outside for kea to eat, or to
attract rats and possums to an area



Burnt ash still smouldering two
hours after arriving in camp.
Tahr ballot 2022 - not okay



Here's an example of loo paper
everywhere! In the tahr ballots there
could be up to 48 people using this
area at each landing site



Fires require common sense and
a bit of care and attention. To
find out where you're allowed
fires at given times of the year
check out the DOC website

Times have changed from when I first started hunting. There are way more people out in the hills doing what we all love

I do feel that with the increase and popularity of hunting we are unfortunately seeing a drop off in the standard of behaviour of hunters in general. This could simply just be lack of education or simply hunters not thinking about their actions and how they will affect the next group of hunters or other backcountry users that enter the area.

We need to start being more mindful of others as it only takes one of us to stuff it for everyone else. As always, the lowest common denominator is what the whole outdoor and wider NZ community judges us by.

Let's start with basic ethics. Behaving ethically is "doing the right thing even if no one is watching".

Ethics are defined as moral principles that govern a person's behaviour that goes above what is legal and illegal. It is in the interests of us all to behave ethically, and to encourage others to do the same.

The New Zealand Deerstalkers Association and other hunting clubs and organisations have a code of ethics and

at a very minimum standard these should be followed.

NZDA Code of ethics; A hunter will -

- 1.** approach recreational hunting from the highest possible level of ethics, having due regard to the welfare of the animals hunted, and prevention of cruelty to the same by minimising distress and suffering and to humanely kill animals being hunted.
- 2.** not hunt or carry a firearm on property without the proper approval of the owner, occupier or controlling authority and shall strictly observe any conditions imposed upon them.

- 3.** be a responsible firearms owner and abide by current firearms laws.
- 4.** avoid unnecessary or deliberate damage to the environment, respect property, and other users of the outdoors.
- 5.** advocate sensible conservation practices at all times and promote New Zealand's biodiversity 'in situ'.
- 6.** practice the Field Guidelines when out hunting.
- 7.** be exemplary Members of NZDA by promoting and abiding by its Rules, Field Guidelines and this Code of Ethics.

Their Field Guidelines reiterate

- 1.** to approach the sport of recreational hunting from the highest possible level of ethics, with due regard to the welfare of the animals and the prevention of cruelty to same by minimising distress and suffering and to humanely kill animals being hunted.
- 2.** to encourage the use by hunters, of sporting arms of calibre and/or power adequate to ensure quick clean kills of the

particular game species being hunted.

- 3.** to encourage the fullest possible use of the game killed by hunters and to avoid always, unnecessary wastage of the game resource.
- 4.** to promote safe practices by ensuring oneself and others are suitably trained to minimise risks in the outdoors.
- 5.** to respect the property of others and respect the natural environment.
- 6.** to assist in the gathering of research information from the animal secured for NZDA (and related) research programmes.

So, in no particular order here are some things to be mindful of:

MEAT DISPOSAL

Returning to a hut with the animal or meat and then boning it out and disposing of the remains. These should not be chucked into the bush or tussock anywhere near the hut, or even worse, a mountain stream above or at where the hut's occupants get their fresh

water. I would suggest you

- A – deal with any trimmings on the hill**
- B - bury or take the waste well away from the hut or**
- C - if you are in a truck bring the waste out with you and dispose of it properly.**

Disposing of meat or any food scraps around huts only attracts rodents and flies at a minimum, and stinks the place out at worst. If you're in a ballot block remember there are up to seven parties coming in behind you in the case of the tahr ballots. Don't scatter brains, eyeballs and bits of headskin around the landing site.

FIRES

Lighting fires around huts is definitely a big no no in the Department of Conservation's view. If you do and it gets away on you, you will have to pay for the costs of putting it out and you're going to need very good public liability insurance! Also cutting live native vegetation down is a no go on public conservation land. Gathering firewood for hut fires is okay if

it's standing deadwood or driftwood off the river flats. This is also a reminder that there is always a total fire ban within the Mt Cook National Park. Anywhere else in the backcountry (more than an hour from a roadend) is fine aside from seasonal bans, if in doubt check it out on the DOC website. If you're not in a position to put the embers out properly, due to lack of water or time, don't light the fire. At a hut make sure you leave the wood box with more wood than when you found it, it could save someone's life one day.

OTHER USERS

Silly things like shooting cans in the riverbed - ricochets can go anywhere and you cannot know what other backcountry users are in the area. On some of the major walking tracks there can be a large numbers of tourists, some of them from overseas, who have a different attitude to us around hunting and firearms. Consider strapping your rifle to your pack to make it look less intimidating. If you're at a hut with others, be mindful that they might not want to get up at 5am for a hunt, so keep it down in the morning. Offer to share meat at



If you're serious about tahr hunting a spotting scope is essential for identifying a mature bull

huts - you'll be amazed at how many people will leap at the opportunity of some fresh, free range meat!

ANIMALS

When it comes to tahr, if you are after meat try and target nannies only. Shooting young bulls does not help population reduction in areas where that is needed, as it only takes one bull to service many, many nannies. By shooting the females you remove her and her potential kid for that year, and their future kids and so on, which frees up feed to grow that young bull into something even more special. With a much reduced bull resource in the future, we all need to start thinking "do we really need to shoot that bull" - is it your first tahr, is it a mature and worthwhile trophy?

I also implore all hunters to download the NZTF tahr app and upload their hunting data as it captures more than just tahr killed and tahr observed. The location data is only specific to the management unit, not even the catchment you shot it in, so you're not risking your hard-earned 'Spot X', just contributing to the data we desperately need to show DOC that we can manage populations and their impacts.

And now to an even more controversial one - shooting stags of any age with trophy potential in velvet is totally selfish and the quickest way to ruin any area for future years, as it encourages others to do the same in a race to the bottom, removing the best genetics from an area each year before they've bred. If you're miles in the backcountry and can't take all the meat anyway it's such a waste, so actually help your herd by shooting a

tasty little yearling hind instead.

Last of all - shooting animals with young at foot. From late spring to late summer most mature females will have offspring. If you shoot a female at this time of the year you are more than likely going to orphan a young one so look harder and take the yearling instead. For deer, the yearling hind is often still hanging around with mum anyway, so if you've found one you'll likely find the other.

Leave those young, dumb spikers, who are never in great condition as they are the bottom of the pecking order. If it's an area where there's lots of deer, then you shouldn't have much trouble finding a hind and that will do a lot more for population control, especially in spring before they drop as you'll also be stopping the offspring from being born. And don't forget, that silly spiker is your 300DS 12 pointer in years to come!

4WDs

When you're accessing an area by 4wd, be mindful of what a privilege that is, and one that can be taken away very quickly. Stick to the formed tracks where you can, don't smash up bog holes or create muddy skid pads. Be a good custodian of the public land we're fortunate enough to be able to drive in to. And do be mindful of driving around the huts, 4wd tyres will chop up the grass very quickly and make it a mudpit out front for other users.

DOING YOUR BUSINESS

As tahr hunting has become a lot more popular and the length of the ballot has increased to fit with what

is allowable in the Himalayan Tahr Control Plan we now have even more pressure on the landing sites.

Last year I encountered the worst mess I have ever landed at. The previous party's toilet paper and excrement were spread across a large area and some of it within half a metre of a waterway, and all of it only 15 to 20 meters from the campsite.

With eight parties of six, there could be 48 people needing the facilities at these sites so that amounts to a huge amount of human poo. If you can, make a hole in the ground at the very start of your trip - big enough to last the time you are there. At the very least roll a rock/s, do your business underneath, then roll it back again to cover it completely. There are kea, flies etc that will track your doings right back to camp if you leave it uncovered. Even if it feels like you're in the middle of nowhere take "your doings" well away from campsites and tracks. Think about what it will be like for the next party that arrives there.

HUNTING

In some places we do need to reduce the nanny population but it's still no excuse to take shots at ranges beyond your shooting skills.

It is disgusting to hear of the next party turning up on a block to find multiple wounded tahr staggering around left behind from the previous party's inhumane bomb-ups. Learn how to shoot long-range at home, before taking those skills into the hills. And if you do accidentally wound a tahr, it is your ethical responsibility to make every effort to finish it off.

Unlawful hunting/"poaching" is illegal and unethical, and something that is being taken far more seriously now and so it should. The NZ police are coming down harder on this and if you get caught now you will now most likely lose your firearms license, at the minimum. The New Zealand Police and the South Island high country farmers have collaborated to share the details of those that have a history of this type of activity.

Finally - a spotting scope should be the first thing that goes into your pack if you are serious about tahr hunting as we all want that 15 inch bull, but you'll never get one if you keep shooting them at 12 inches and 4 years old because you don't have the optics to evaluate them properly.

Get out there and enjoy our great country but let's not be selfish and ensure we leave it in a better condition than when we arrived.



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