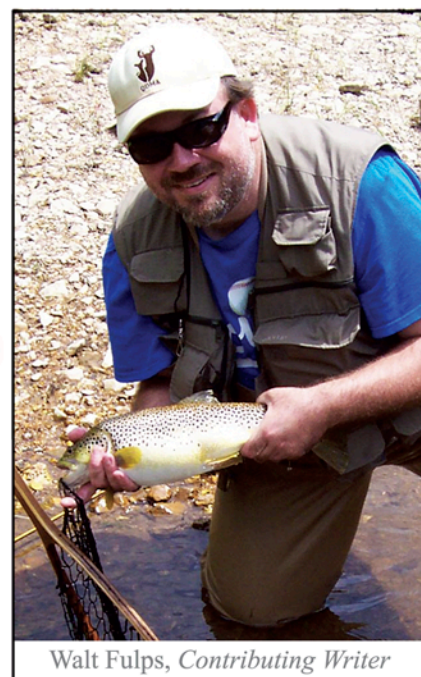




Warning: We have done our best to cleanup the photos included here. However, they may not be suitable for the squeamish. We feel it is important that our readers have a clear understanding of proper field care of a trophy deer.

Preparing Your Trophy Deer for the Taxidermist



Walt Fulps, Contributing Writer

How to Prepare Your Trophy Deer for the Taxidermist

As a taxidermist, I must admit there are a few aspects of the business that I do not enjoy. Customers can get really nasty if you're running late on work. Sometimes they can't afford to pay the bill to pick up their completed mounts, leaving you to wonder how you can spend a turkey mount at the grocery store. And, occasionally, customers will remember their trophy as bigger than he was in real life, which often leads to being accused of shrinking their fish, somehow. All fun experiences. There is one issue, however, that makes every taxidermist pull his hair out, and that's when a customer damages the animal before it gets here. When you shoot your trophy deer this fall, it's up to you to get a good-looking specimen to the taxidermist. That's the only way you'll get back the best-looking mount the taxidermist can produce.

Step 1: Place Your Shot.

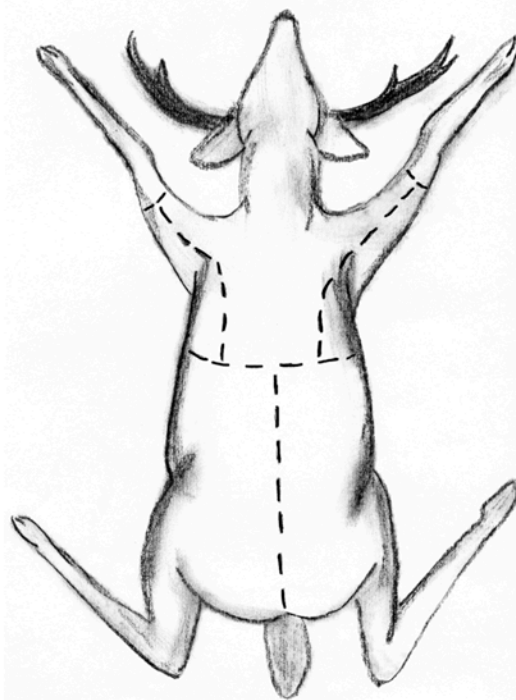
Put that bullet behind the front shoulder of the deer — not in the head area. Any holes in front of the shoulder must be cutout and sewn-up to be repaired. Large repairs may cost you some

size on your mount, or even worse, your taxidermist might not be the best at repair work, and you'll have an obvious pucker in the damaged area.

Step 2: Do No Harm.

When field dressing, stop cutting when you feel the sternum, and do not split the rib cage. It may be messy, reaching up into the cavity to cut away all the nasty bits, but you'll thank me later. Many deer rub their brisket areas fairly bald due to ticks, so cutting through that thin-haired area will require more repair work to the area — and thin hair means it may be noticeable on your mount. After field dressing, do not drag your deer back to the truck and never drag him with a rope around its neck. Deer hair is hollow and fragile, and broken hairs will produce a ratty looking trophy. Drive your truck to the deer, if possible. Otherwise, use a cart or a drag bag. If none of those options are available, then at least try dragging him with the shoulders up off the ground. If your trophy is going to be on display, you have to treat him like a delicate flower!

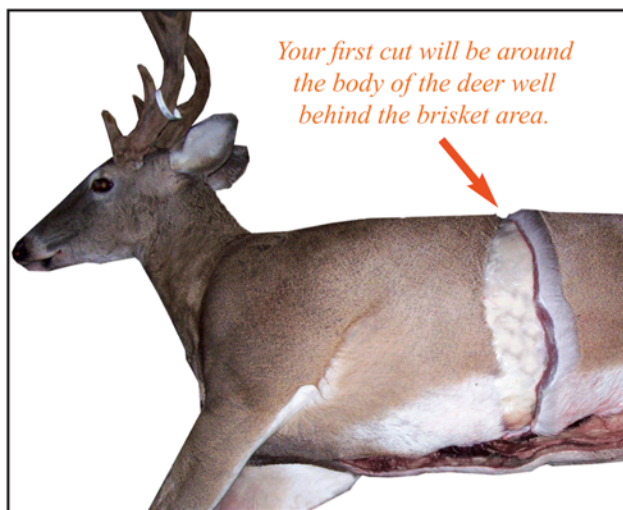
Diagram A



Step 3: Cape the Deer.

The easiest way to do this is take your deer to your meat processor or taxidermist and ask them to cape it for you. Processors will charge a small fee for this, but many taxidermists will do it free — trust me — it's worth the effort to make sure the taxidermist has good quality specimen to work with. But, if you must cape it yourself, it's really not that difficult.

If possible, hang the deer up by his hind legs. Capping on the ground is fine, but you'll have to flip him back and forth during the process and work a bit harder. **Your first cut** will be around the body of the deer, well behind the brisket area. If you cut about halfway between



the front and back legs, your taxidermist will love you. In addition, that much hide will allow plenty of room for some interesting mount options that show a lot of body.

Your next two cuts will be around each foreleg at the knee, and then you'll connect the leg cuts to the body cut (see **Diagram A**). When you look at the deer's legs, you'll notice they're brown on the front and white behind. Your leg cuts should run along the line between white and brown fur on the "outside" of each leg. Stay away from those armpits! Follow that line and cut directly to the body incision.

Start pulling the skin forward toward the head, and as the connective tissue flares away from the body, cut it with your knife (see **Diagram B**). Pull and cut, repeat. As you cut, roll the skin forward like taking off a sock. Six inches behind the head, cut through the meat of the neck until you hit spine, cut/hack through the spine with a handsaw or recip-

rocating saw, and finish the cut with your knife. Leaving six inches of neck on your trophy will give your taxidermist something to measure, so he can give you a mount that's roughly the same size as the animal you shot.

Step 4: Go Straight to the Taxidermist.

Some will freeze or ice their deer until it's convenient to bring it in. Not a good idea. From the moment the deer hits the ground, he's decomposing. If you put him in the freezer, he's decomposing until he's frozen. When the taxidermist thaws him, he also continues decomposing while thawing. The biggest risk is hair slippage. Rot will cause the hair to literally slide right off. The next biggest risk is freezer burn. If you freeze your deer without proper packaging, the delicate parts can dry out, making your cape worthless. Bring your deer in fresh, even if you don't have the down-payment. Most taxidermists will be willing to work with you on a payment plan if not find another one.

Proper field care for that trophy you worked so hard to bag, will afford the taxidermist an opportunity to give you back the trophy that you remember shooting. The trophy that will decorate your wall, will offer you the opportunity to tell your story of that special day for many years to come.

Photo on right is of a "bad" capping job. When done incorrectly there will be cuts in the chest/brisket. You will be forcing the taxidermist to sew in the neck and chest area. There may not be enough cape for a full-shoulder mount.

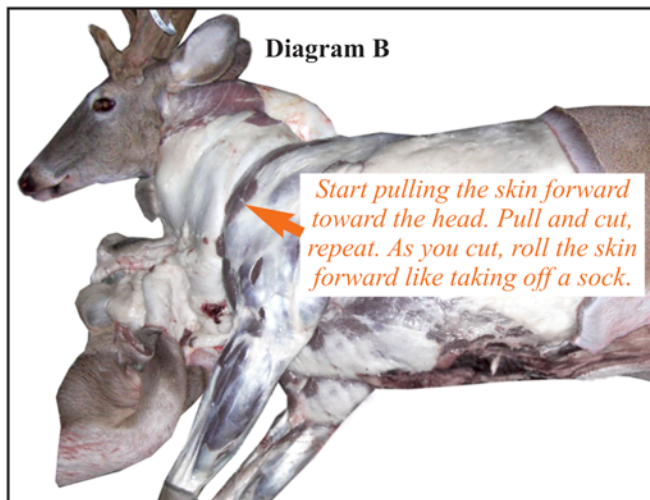
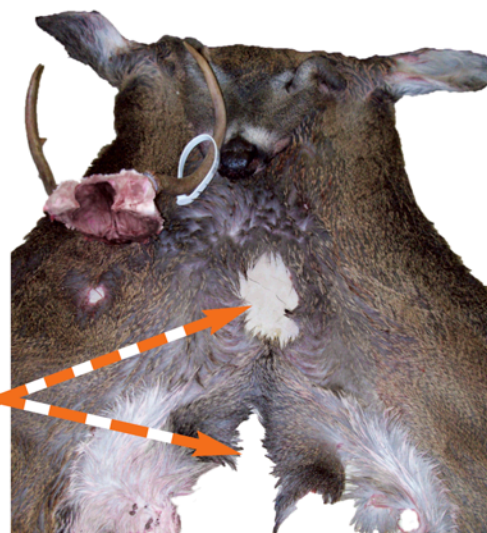


Photo above is of a "good" capping job. When done correctly there will be no cuts in the chest/brisket. You should have more than enough cape for a full-shoulder mount.



Your Trophy and Your Memory Will Last a Lifetime,

Walt Fulps is the owner of Ozark Taxidermy, Trout Hunter Guide Service and Trout Hunter Fly Fishing School, all based in Rolla, MO. You can reach him at www.OzarkTaxidermy.com and www.MissouriTroutHunter.com.