

# SPORTING CLASSICS

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# Travel

By John Ross



From carcasses of mesquite trees long dried by some forgotten burn, guide Terry Brandon and I quickly threw up a ground blind along a seismic road that gently rose to meet the crest of a ridge. The fire had happened on this chunk of Texas' Krooked River Ranch so many years ago that the brush had greened again and grown to twice the height of a hunter. We built the blind well down from the ridge-top; had we put it higher up, deer crossing the road below us would have seen it and our silhouettes.

About three p.m. or so we climbed into the blind. Terry reclined on a chaise lounge, and I sat ahead of him on a folding stool with a built-in rest for my rifle. When I sit in a blind or on stand, I do a quick mental inventory. The stump by the forked tree is about seventy-five yards away. That yellow boulder is closer to 125. Where the road to the river crosses is nearly 225, and beyond that I will not shoot.

Once these landmarks are firm in my mind, I begin to review my intentions for the meat and hide and rack of the deer I plan to harvest. As shadows lengthen with approaching evening, my mind wanders toward venison menus I'd like to try. There was one – fillets, marinated overnight, and then baked with Granny Smith apples and black currants and a sauce of cream and Cognac – that kept running through my head. I'd even chosen the wine, a powerful and aromatic Musigny. Ah, how hunger fires the imagination.

I had yet to shoot a deer, and I didn't that evening, though a perfectly fine eight-pointer sauntered right up to the blind from behind. There was no way to take that deer without making moves that could do nothing but startle it into crashing bounds of escape. Terry and I rolled our eyeballs and



watched, and eventually this youngster satisfied his curiosity and ambled off.

Early the next morning a long-tined nine-pointer stepped out onto another seismic road high on the plateau above the river. By noon it was hanging in Krooked River's walk-in cooler, and I was confronted with the realities of getting the venison home without it

***Here are a few neat tips to help you get your fish, fowl or that once-in-a-lifetime big game trophy safely home.***

spoiling. This was complicated because I was flying to California for New Years before returning home to Virginia.

No problem. Roy Wilson, honcho of Krooked River (Haskell, Texas; 915-773-2457), stripped the tenderloin, quartered the deer, bagged it in plastic, and quick-froze the meat. He held it in

*Ross with his Texas whitetail. Next step: getting the venison all the way back to his Virginia home without it spoiling.*

a locker until I called to tell him I was home. He wrapped the frozen quarters in newspapers (a great insulator), packed it in a meat box, and sent it via second day to Upperville. The same day the box arrived, I thawed, butchered, wrapped and refroze the cuts. You can freeze, thaw and refreeze the game if you do not allow the meat to grow even the least bit warm when it's thawed.

Had I been headed home right after the hunt, I would not have had the meat frozen in the first place. Instead, I'd have followed a little trick used by Andy Dyess (Pearl River Outfitters, Madison Mississippi; 601-856-0933). He'll freeze the quarter that's to be used for burger or sausage, and slip other cuts into ziploc bags, wrap the bags in freezer paper, and then pack them around the frozen quarter in a foam-insulated cooler.

When Andy hunts elk or caribou, on

the flight in he packs his gear in a 150-quart Igloo cooler. Coming home, the cooler contains not only the meat – again arranged tightly around a frozen hind quarter – but also the cape. The rack can be split, wrapped in cloth and plastic, and taped to the top of the cooler which is sealed with duct tape. He labels the cooler with his name, address, phone and appropriate hunting license information as required by the state/province or country. The airlines will charge you extra (about \$100) to handle the cooler with your other bags.

In some airline hub cities like Montreal, where hunters frequently overnight after sojourns for caribou in Quebec's Ungava Bay region, you'll find firms like Himbeault Gibier (450-377-1128). M. Himbeault's staff picks up your game at your hotel and returns it, butchered, vacuum packed, chilled and boxed well before your departing flight the next morning. The fee for this service is about \$60 Canadian. It's a bargain.

Getting a trophy rack home safely is another matter. The easy route, and one favored by many hunters and outfitters such as legendary Wayne Bosowicz of Foggy Mountain Guide Service (Dover-Foxcroft Maine; 207-564-3404), is to leave the cape and horns with a taxidermist who works with the outfitter. If at all possible try to see at least one example of the taxidermist's work. Also, you need to make sure he has all of his capes tanned before mounting. The taxidermist will build a wooden crate for your mount and ship it to you. It's his responsibility to ensure that the mount arrives in the same condition as it left his shop.

If you're leery of leaving your trophy with a taxidermist, here's one way to bring the cape and antlers back. Dave Egdorf (Last Stand Lodge, Hardin, Montana; 406-665-3489) likes to screw the bases of big mulie racks to a two- or three-foot square of one-half-inch plywood, tape empty twelve-gauge shotshell hulls over the points, and pack the rack in crumpled newspaper or other medium so it will not move around inside a heavy duty cardboard shipping box. Hunters take this box along as additional baggage, and normally the



## OCTOBER AFTERNOON

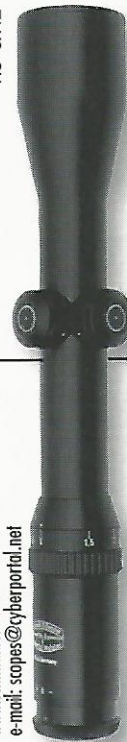
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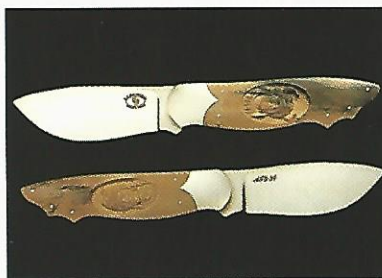
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rack arrives in perfect condition. The  
cape can be shipped in a cooler, and your  
neighborhood taxidermist can reunite  
horns and hide just the way you want it.

As an extra measure of protection, buy  
a few feet of the foam insulation used  
to protect water pipes from freezing.  
Slip a piece of the insulation over each  
tine and secure it with electrician's  
tape. Adding but a few ounces to your  
out-bound luggage, the insulation is  
worth its weight in gold when it comes  
to getting your rack home unscathed.

In comparison to shipping big  
game, birds are a piece of cake.  
Most outfitters skin quail, pheasants,  
grouse, ducks and geese. Birds for  
mounting are frozen whole. When  
bringing gamebirds into the U.S.  
from other countries, it is often  
necessary to leave a wing attached.  
Check and follow federal laws (for  
big game too).

The best way to pack quail and similar  
upland birds, says Hugh Walters of  
Deerfield Plantation (St. George, South  
Carolina; 843-563-7927), is to clean and  
freeze them in water as you would bass  
fillets. They'll last twice as long as birds  
that are wrapped and frozen. For a large  
bird such as a Canada goose or wild  
turkey, Hugh skins the bird, bundles it  
into a large plastic bag, chills it to  
almost but not quite freezing, and then  
seals it in a cooler. If a customer wants  
a bird mounted, Hugh will have it done  
by a local taxidermist, and will deliver  
it at the winter sport show that's closest  
to where the hunter lives.

**Late Fall Hotspot: Head for  
Montana's Bighorn River.** Crowds  
are gone, but the trout aren't. Neither  
are pheasants on the islands or ducks  
in the sloughs. Huns, sharp-tails and  
chukars abound in brushy upland  
draws. A 20 gauge and a five-weight  
are all you need. Accommodations  
are readily available and mostly  
empty. Among the best are George  
Kelly's comfortable and laid-back  
Kingfisher Lodge in Ft. Smith  
(406-666-2326) and Nick Forrester's  
posh Bighorn River Resort in Ft.  
Smith (406-666-9199). Best time:  
mid-November into December and  
don't worry about the weather.