

## Feature



*The author with her first deer and HUNTS instructor, Hamish.*

# A PERSONAL HIGHLIGHT

I RECENTLY ATTENDED A HUNTS COURSE WITH THE KAPITI NZDA BRANCH. AS A NEW FEMALE HUNTER, TURNING 50 THIS YEAR, MY EXPECTATIONS WERE PRETTY LOW.

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I had no idea what it was going to be like, and I have to say my experience of the course exceeded all expectations in so many ways.

We were lucky to have four instructors, Hamish, Iain, Ron and Roger. Two were in training yet every single instructor added so much value from their years of hunting. We all felt very lucky to have so much knowledge and wisdom available. The first night was exciting to receive our HUNTS manual, we also got some other unexpected gifts, a beanie, hunting blazer as well as some great tramping food to try, kindly supplied by Go Native.

The HUNTS course itself, is well thought out and the manual was really great. I think where it comes into its own, is through the wealth of knowledge and experience that the instructors provide that goes far beyond the curriculum.

I honestly couldn't believe the value for money, and I would recommend ALL new hunters/NZDA members to attend.

My personal highlights of the course

were going to the range and practising target shooting, going into the bush to learn map navigation, compass use, using the GPS and much more, we also learnt how to make a shelter and a fire in the rain. The river crossing with a backpack on was great. Particularly the line dancing! Can't remember what it was called technically but it was highly amusing all having to link arms, turn direction in the river without falling in when there is a strong current.

I think what really stood out, was the gratitude I felt for the opportunity and ability to go on a hunt at a private property in Whanganui. This enabled everyone to get good first-hand experience of understanding more about where deer hang out in their natural habitat, how to track them, shoot them, skin them and we could have boned them as well. However, one of the instructors Hamish, thought ahead and offered for those that wanted, to drop carcasses off at a butcher. (I went for that option).

When it was my turn, to go out for a hunt. I was prepared, and thought we would be tramping for hours, but fortunately we had a quad bike, and the instructor had a good idea where the deer would be hanging out.

We had several attempts at stopping to find them without any luck. I have to say, tracking the deer was very insightful, we spotted a doe in the bracken from the top of a ridge and commando crawled carefully down the ridge and lay prone. The doe was about 100 metres away, her head was visible, along with the back however it wasn't a good shot as recommended by the instructors. So, we waited for the doe to move, and it seemed like an eternity. Lying still, the sun was baking my face and my position was quite uncomfortable, but I stayed as still as I could and patiently waited for the doe to move.

Eventually, Hamish made a few deer noises to see if the doe would get curious. It didn't, so he threw a stick and that didn't work either, so he threw another one, and another one closer to the doe. After a delayed response, the doe got up, turned around and shot off into the bracken. I struggled to find her in my view finder, but quickly saw the bushes move and followed the movement. There was a moment when she was out in the open, she turned our way and gave me a perfect shot. I pulled the trigger! BOOM.

Whilst I had done really well with my target shooting on the range, I actually don't know who was more surprised, the doe or me. She toppled backwards immediately. We clambered down the hill, it wasn't an easy descent and I considered how I was going to get back up to the top of the ridge carrying my kill. I raced in front, so I would be first to see the animal. Again, a tinge of sadness as I stroked her fur, and felt her warm body. She was a beautiful animal, so I said a little prayer of gratitude for the food that she would bring to my family, and I'd make her skin into a nice cushion cover.

The instructor showed me how to gut the deer, and then what a bonus, lovely Hamish carried her up the hill. I have to say, I thought women were supposed to carry their animals, and was eternally grateful though as it wasn't an easy climb back to the top. Poor Hamish! Later we learnt how to skin the animal and one of the more experienced hunters Jonny helped me, I found the process quite meditative as you had to be totally present to make sure you didn't get any holes in the skin or damage the meat.

It was such an amazing day; I took the heart and liver home, and the dog enjoyed the scraps. Can't wait to get the meat back from the butcher and my pillow cover! LOL.

All in all, I'd do it all again and totally recommend everyone who is wanting to hunt to do this course. Thanks Hamish, Iain, Roger and Ron. You guys' Rock. **NZHW**