

Field Dressing Moose

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Most available field dressing instructions or manuals are too vague for a first-time hunter. These detailed, basic instructions will guide you through the process

of dressing and quartering your moose. These same instructions can be used for any game animal. A few comments at the end of the process description generalize the procedure with notes for smaller animals. Minimum tools are two sharp axes, and two sharp knives. A saw might be used should you have one, but is not necessary for field dressing.

First of all, think safety. Approach any downed animal with caution. There are several stories of excited hunters being too close when an animal thought to be dead struggles to get up, injuring the hunter. Make your approach from the rear of the animal, ensuring it is dead. That done, TAG YOUR ANIMAL. In the excitement of the hunt, many forget this simple step. Legally, you must tag you animal immediately. Save yourself trouble and do this first.

Your first priority is to cool down the carcass as quickly as possible. Have your hunting pack available at all times during the hunt so that tools are readily at hand. Move the animal so that you have adequate working room, preferably in a slightly inclined orientation, head at the lower end.

Clear the working area for safety and convenience. Remember that a moose is large, running up to 1200 pounds or more for a bull. Take your time, do not become exhausted or overworked. Expect the process to take up to one hour for a novice. Experienced field dressers will still require at least a half hour to complete work. There is no need to rush.

The time taken at this point in the hunt ensures your meat will be clean, and enjoyable. You will find the help of your hunting partners of real benefit.

Avoid using water in the process, which may contain soil or bacteria which could lead to spoiling you meat. A carcass cavity wiped of blood this way will seal the meat with a thin film of body fluids that dry quickly. Using water dilutes this fluid, and introduces unnecessary microbes and creates an environment for bacterial growth.

A Brief Step-By-Step Summary Of The Process:

- Clear Your Working Area
- Bleed The Animal
- Preparatory Skin Cuts, Throat to Anus
- Break the Breastbone
- Sever the Wind Pipe and Gullet from the Head
- Open the Abdomen to the Anus
- Split the Pelvic Bone
- Cut the Diaphragm from the Cavity Wall
- Free the Anus and Bladder
- Roll Out The Abdominal Organs with Anus Attached
- Remove the Neck and Chest Cavity Organs
- Clean the Body Cavity
- Prepare the Carcass for Cooling or Quartering

The Details of Field Dressing

Clear Your Working Area

Clean the immediate area around the animal so that you have room to move, and to roll out the entrails. Plan ahead, choosing the lowest ground around the animal for the entrails. Move the carcass if necessary. Also clear an area leading away from the carcass, in the direction you wish to move the animal away from the entrails for transportation or quartering. Place the animal on its back, spreading the rear legs using ropes or having your partners hold them apart. If you have several people, or additional rope, do the same with the front legs. Bleed The Animal

A heart-lung shot usually provides adequate bleeding. However, to ensure bleeding, insert a sharp knife into the shallow cavity at the base of the throat and slice across the main blood vessels with a wide and deep, crosswise cut. This opens the jugular veins that run from the heart to the head. Since the animal is dead, blood flow is by gravity. Allow the blood to flow away from the animal, clearing the ground when necessary. Preparatory Skin Cuts, Throat to Anus

Starting at the breastbone, just below the rib cage, use a sharp knife cutting the skin in a straight line to the neck and base of the jaw. Complete the process by cutting through the muscles to the bone of the ribcage and higher, exposing the windpipe and gullet. Cut the skin from the base of the ribs downward over the middle of the belly, in a straight line, to the anus, taking care to cut around the genitals slightly. The genitals must be left on one hind quarter in Ontario,

for sex identification. Once these cuts are done, prepare to eviscerate the animal.

Break the Breastbone

With the breastbone exposed, use two axes to cut through the breastbone. Use your sharpest axe as the cutting tool, the second as a hammer, driving the cutter from the base of the ribcage, up the middle of the breastbone, through the top ribs. As the cut enlarges, pull the front legs apart opening the chest cavity. Sever the Wind Pipe and Gullet from the Head

With the chest cavity open, sever the windpipe and gullet as close to the head as possible, pulling it clear of the carcass, cutting where necessary. When free of the neck, lay in the chest cavity. Open the Abdomen to the Anus

With the chest spread open, and the neck area clean, move to opening the abdomen. From the base of the ribcage, carefully cut through the abdominal muscles, exposing the stomach and intestines, without puncturing them. Have your partners spread the abdomen to open the area for easy work. As you approach the pelvic area, take precautions to avoid cutting the bladder. Cut through the muscles to the pelvic bone, exposing it for the next procedure.

Split the Pelvic Bone

Starting at the top of the pelvis (closest to the abdomen), using the two axe method described

above, split the pelvic bone, taking care to stay clear of the genitals. Avoid cutting the urinary tract, which could release urine, tainting the meat. Cut the Diaphragm from the Cavity Wall

This procedure is one that requires patience and care. You must start at on side of the chest cavity near the base of the ribs cutting the diaphragm at the chest cavity wall. As you move deeper into the cavity, you may need help from a few hands to pull the organs to one side so that you have rooms to see and cut. Cut as far back along the cavity wall as is possible. Switch to the other side of the chest cavity, repeating the actions. Most likely, some of the diaphragm will remain attached. Leave the remainder for later. Free the Anus and Bladder

The most important procedure is the separation of the anus from the carcass and the pelvic area. Extreme care must be taken not to cut the intestines and the urinary tract, which could taint the meat. At the opened pelvic bone, use a sharp knife to make cuts to free the large intestine and rectum from the pelvic area. Extra hands are helpful to pull the organs to one side or the other to clear the working area. Proceed until working in this area until the rectum meets the muscle tissue near the anus. At the base of the tail, use a sharp knife to cut a circle the skin about one or two inches from the anus. Once completed, use the knife to cut through the muscle tissue to the inside of the pelvic bone, towards the top of the pelvic bone, to

free the anus and rectum. At times, you may have to work both from the anus area and from the opening of the split pelvis to free the organs. Once free, pull and hold the anus, rectum and lower intestine free of the cavity

Roll Out The Abdominal Organs with Anus Attached

With the Anus and Rectum free and held clear, slightly roll the carcass to the lower ground, and allow the intestines and the stomach to fall to the prepared ground. Remove the Neck and Chest Cavity Organs

Grasp the windpipe from the chest cavity, and pull the heart and lungs out toward the entrails on the ground. Cut the remaining tissue holding the diaphragm to the back of the chest wall freeing the organs from the carcass. Allow any blood to flow from the cavity. Roll the carcass to drain as much blood as possible. Clean the Body Cavity

Now that the body cavity is clear of organs, use absorbent material to wipe it clean. This can be cloth rags you have prepared in your hunting pack, or clean grass, moss, or leaves at the site. Avoid using water in the process, which may contain soil or bacteria which could lead to spoiling you meat. A carcass cavity wiped of blood this way will seal the meat with a thin film of body fluids that dry quickly. Using water dilutes this fluid, and introduces unnecessary microbes and creates an environment for bacterial

growth. Prepare the Carcass for Cooling, Quartering, or Transport

Repeating the introductory note at the beginning, cooling the carcass is a first priority. Depending on the time available to you, and the weather conditions you may decide to move directly to transporting your animal whole, quartering, it for transport, or leaving it to cool some hours. Quartering and transport is covered later. Here, the focus is preparation for cooling, should you decide to leave the carcass for some hours. The assumption is that the temperature is below 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Should the temperature be higher, seriously consider transporting your meat to your camp or butchering facility for hanging and cooling immediately.

Depending on the size of the animal, cooling can present you with several problems. A large animal cools more slowly than a small animal, because the mass involved and the surface area of the animal. A rabbit cools in minutes, a moose, in hours.

Efficient cooling is a matter of air circulation, a transfer of heat from the surfaces of the carcass to the air, and away. Leaving the animal in a heap risks meat spoilage, in violation of most provincial and state game regulation. Attempt to provide as much air flow around and through the carcass as is humanly possible. The most effective strategy is hanging a quartered carcass, thereby increasing surface area and air circulation to a maximum.

The next best approach is hanging the entire animal. This may not be possible, depending on the help, materials and tools available at the field dressing site. Failing these first two methods, the next alternative is to provide free air circulation between the ground and the carcass, laying on its back, the body cavity open but protected from possible rain or snow.

Provide air circulation by placing the carcass (with a moose, rolling the carcass) on logs or some similar supporting material. Ensure free air circulation by providing several supports along the backbone area, so that the animal is indeed off the ground. Ensure it will not roll by tying off the legs to surrounding trees or other anchors. If direct sun, rain or snow is a high probability protect the moose by placing a framework of spruce, balsam or pine boughs above the carcass, leaving at least six inches of free space for air travel.

At lower temperatures, if the next hours are not expected to be warmer and when snow is on the ground, it may not be necessary to lift the animal. Only after you have made provisions for cooling can you take some time to rest and celebrate in what can be called recreational celebration.

Additional Notes and Generalizations

A small field saw, such as the Browning Folding Saw might be used for splitting the pelvic bone and the breastbone. For animals that are smaller than the moose, for example deer and bear, the breastbone

and the pelvic bone might be able to be split with the knife alone. Any sharp quality hunting knife with a five to seven inch blade is adequate for moose, as well as smaller game.

Effective hunting axes are those with a sharp two and one-half pound head, with handles 24 to 26 inches in length.

Four 15 foot lengths of 3/8 inch ropes allow stabilizing and tying off the legs while field dressing or carrying quarters.

Good Hunting!

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