

Hunting the Tauranga Taupo

17 to 21 June 2012 – By Roger James

Around 0830 Wayne and Darryl pick me up to do the shop at New World in Freeman's Bay. This has been standard practice for the last 15 years or so. All is proceeding well until it comes to finding the couscous. Three blind men rescued by one very helpful blonde lady; not only did she find it for us she even told us how to cook it. We did ask if she would like to come along and do the cooking. She politely declined.

After stopping at the old church in Cambridge (another tradition) for a brew and some breakfast we arrived at Lakeland Aviation on Clements Mill Rd some 30km east of Taupo. We had a good yarn to Spence the pilot/owner. He gave us a bit of a rundown on the 30 odd Sika deer they had live captured and put tracking devices on a bit over a year ago. One stag they captured at the top of the Kaimanawa's released at the bottom and made its way back to where it was captured over the next 12 months. All the collars they put on the deer dropped off after 12 months and have been located and are now having their data analyzed. It would be quite interesting to find out exactly where these hard to hunt deer hang out over a year.

We threw our gear and ourselves on the scales and were a little under the 430kg allowed. One trip a while ago we were a bit over in the weight department and Spence suggested we leave the wine behind. Immediately Wayne said "if we don't take the wine we aren't going". We found a few other items to leave behind.

1530hrs and we are on the ground at the hut. Lovely spot with the hut set on a clearing 60m from the river. It's a private hunting block so we know there is not much chance of running into other hunters. After unloading the Helo and sorting out kit in the hut we had a brew and one of Mrs McDonald's cookies.



We discussed going for a bit of a hunt but Wayne and Darryl decided to get comfortable in the hut. I threw on my kit and headed up the river to a favourite little clearing a few hundred meters of the river.

Arriving there about 16.15hrs I sat at the bottom of the clearing for half an hour or so then wandered up the top of the clearing. With not much sign around and the light going I headed back to the hut.

To my surprise on arriving at the hut the boys had already started on the wine. Now this is a bit outside tradition as we sort of have a rule that the wine isn't opened till we are all there. The boys have it all worked out: they are only on the first glass so all I have to do is catch up.



Darryl carefully rations out the wine

Dinner is delicious - lamb, vegetables and olives with a little curry; a splendid meal prepared by Wayne's wife Laure. We are lucky hunters as each time we head to the hills the 'little French girl', as Wayne affectionately refers to Laure, spends hours preparing a frozen meal for us to heat up each night to enjoy with a glass or two of wine.

By 1800hrs it is pitch black. A few stories are told - not to be repeated here!! Then it is time for bed for what is a long night.

After a long night we are up at first light for a brew and a great breakfast by Wayne – bacon, eggs, bread and baked beans - and we are ready to hit the hills.

I head west through the bush alongside the river looking out onto the river flat just in case there is a deer out for a morning feed. A km or so downstream the river narrows and runs into a gorge that weaves its way through the hills with steep cliffs on each side. I head south away from the river to avoid the ups and downs where the many water sheds have gouged out canyons to make their way to the river.



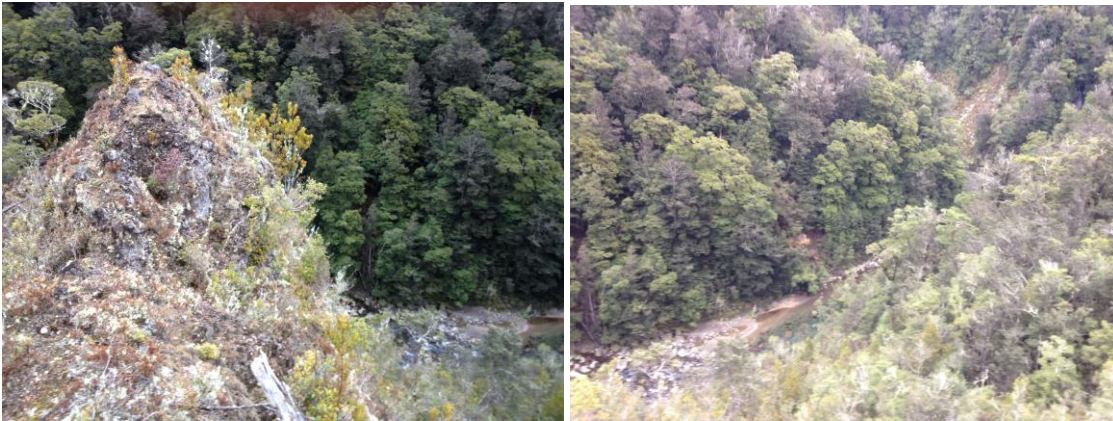
Not much deer sign around here but really nice hunting country. Water over many years has gouged deep ravines into the pumice leaving spectacular water falls and streams through the picturesque bush.

It is still a bit cold in this part of the country. Last night it got to -5c and was +2c when I left the camp.

I came across a tiny water fall trickling 5m over a bluff onto an ice clad branch underneath.



Eventually heading back to the river below the cascade I made my way across and up the ridge on the other side. The ridge turned into a little razor back with a track along the top and a do not fall off drop on each side.



Good balance required.

Just a wee fall to the river!

Getting to the top and heading back east to a nice flat bit of bush as shown on the map which looked like it should be good hunting. Well the buggers that made this map made it with their backsides stuck firmly to the office chair. This bit of flat land is full of ravines 20 to 30 m deep. Wandering out of the bush to where the hut is shown on the map (yes they have that one wrong too - it used to be there 20 years ago) onto the river flat there was a patch of land just full of sign but no deer to be seen. I hunted back up river to the hut for a brew just as it started to rain.

Darryl and Wayne had headed onto the ridge behind (south) the hut and hunted to the west. They had come across the odd patch of sign and at about 1500hrs Darryl got to take a shot at a hind. "It was a big bastard, I reckon it had a bit of red in it." As the shot was across a gully it took a while to get across to it. Buzzer! no deer and no blood. It must have been one of those bullet-proof deer!!!

The boys got back to the hut about 1600 for a brew and a good yarn and then we rationed out the red wine, fairly this time, followed by another fantastic meal by Laure, supplemented with a bit of couscous cooked to perfection with good blonde advice.

During the night I was woken by what sounded like a possum on the hut veranda. Leaping out of bed with a torch to investigate I checked to make sure the lid was tight on the bucket with the fruit in it. We have had possums steal our fruit in the past.

During the night it pissed down. We got up in the morning to find the river up and the weather very bad. After a brew and breakfast we decided on a day in the hut to wait for the weather to clear. So the "horizontal hunters" headed back to the bags. I had a good book called Hunting on Sacred Ground by Dave Ratcliffe with lots of humorous hunting stories in it to help pass the time.

About 1400hrs the weather cleared a bit so Wayne and I decided to go for a short hunt. I went to grab my day pack from the seat on the veranda and was surprised to see the top open. On closer examination I found the cord had been cut and there were cut marks in the top of the pack. Further investigation reveals a rat has smelt the fruit left in the pack and gone after it. The bugger has not only cut the cord and the pack but eaten through my rain coat leaving a hole in the collar and another in the side. From there the prick has had another go via the pouch on the back of the pack eating out the bottom. The little bugger also had a go at Darryl's pack as well leaving a hole in the side.

It was quite funny as the next day Darryl pulled out a rubbish bag to sit on when we stopped for lunch to find a pattern of holes all the way down the side.

Naturally this rat had to die and what better than the flash double-header ferret, trap that was sitting by the river. That night we armed it up baited with an apple and stuck it on the veranda, packs secure in the hut.

Up we get in the morning to more rain and yes you guessed it no bloody rat in the trap. One day!!!!

Anyway Wayne and I did get in a short hunt heading up the ridge behind the hut and following it west. There was a little sign but no sightings.

Wednesday morning we were greeted by strong westerly winds and horizontal rain. After another one of Wayne's great breakfasts and a bit of procrastination Darryl and I headed east up river and into the clearing I had visited on Sunday evening. We sat in cover and watched for a while then headed up into the bush above the clearing heading west but lower down from where Wayne and Darrel had hunted on Monday.



We are just coming up to nice litter feed gully and there is a sharp whistle from the other side!! Darryl brings his rifle up, then moves aside no shot fired. I move a little to my left and there it is - the ass of a Sika deer looking like a couple of big white cotton balls with a little black patch. I bring up my new Browning Light 308 thinking this has to be its first kill only to find the scope is misted up from all the rain and nothing is to be seen. No way was that deer going to wait around while I cleared the scope. That's hunting.

We headed across a few more gullies one of us staying put while the other crossed just in case a deer is hiding in the bottom. We are always careful to make sure we have a specific route and point on the other side to go to when doing this. It's always safety first.

A couple of gullies over and Darryl heads across while I wait for him to reach the tree agreed on the other side. As I head down into the gully there is a loud whistle close by just below me. I can hear the deer heading up around behind me so I race back up to the top of the ridge - really struggle is probably more correct!! The knees won't do that race stuff anymore! Hearing the deer still whistling way further up the next ridge I whistle back. The whistle is returned. This goes on for several minutes until things go quiet and I head across to join Darryl on the other side.

We continue west for a couple of hours then drop down and hunt back across the same country at a lower level. Arriving back at the clearing where we had started from several hours later. We wander back down the river bed to see footprints meaning Wayne must have headed up the river for a hunt.

On arrival back at the hut Wayne is there to greet us with the fire going and a brew on. There is nothing like a good strong cup of tea after a days hunting in the hills.

Wayne had been for a wander up the river to an area past where we had been. Up there he saw lots of sign but no deer. About one he sat down to have his pork sandwich for lunch to realize he had left his pack behind. Wayne still uses an old sugar bag for a day pack attached to some pack straps and worn under his swandri. This works well, so well you don't even know its there. Naturally there was a bit of borax poked over that one when the red wine flowed that night.

The rain came down heavy in the night but by the early morning a couple of stars were visible to the east.

It has been a great few days in the bush in spite of the rain. The hut is warm and dry with bunks for seven, a log burner fire, sink and a tap for cold running water although not working just now. The toilet needs a bit of work on the seat as it is rather rotten and one day some one is really going to end up in the S!!!!

Bang on eight the helo comes in from the east. In a few minutes we are loaded up and flying out through the pass under the cloud into sunshine at the Clements Mill Rd base.



Looking up river from the hut



Down river from the hut



Nice clear river before the rain.