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WHITETALES

PROTECTING THE FUTURE OF DEER AND DEER HUNTING THROUGH HABITAT, EDUCATION, ADVOCACY AND LEGISLATION

FALL 2026



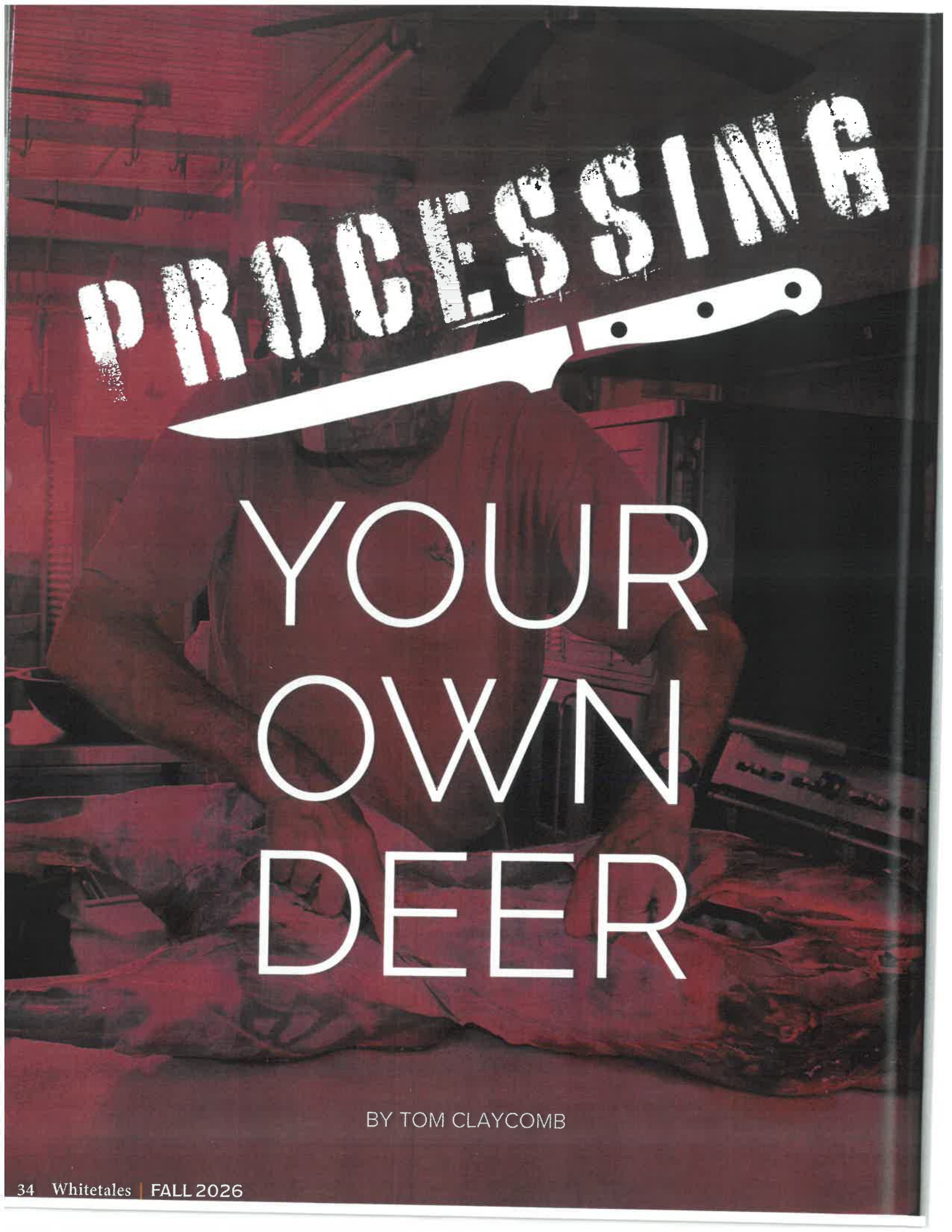
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A photograph of a person wearing a red t-shirt, working in a meat processing facility. They are positioned behind a large, dark-colored animal carcass, which appears to be a deer. The person's hands are visible, working on the carcass. The background shows industrial equipment, including metal frames and hanging lights, typical of a processing plant. The overall color palette is dominated by reds and dark tones.

PROCESSING

YOUR OWN DEER

BY TOM CLAYCOMB

This article is going to teach you how to process your deer (applies to all your big game animals). Cave men just whacked up their game and threw them in a pot or roasted them over a fire and got by. It's just that the methods I'm going to teach you will enhance your eating pleasure. It's not a right or wrong thing.

Let me further explain. Imagine you kill a cow and make it all into ground beef. For the next 12-months your family will be eating hamburger or spaghetti every other night for one year straight! That'd get boring. I worked for three of the four big beef packers for 45 years. I took what I learned there and put into my outdoor world.

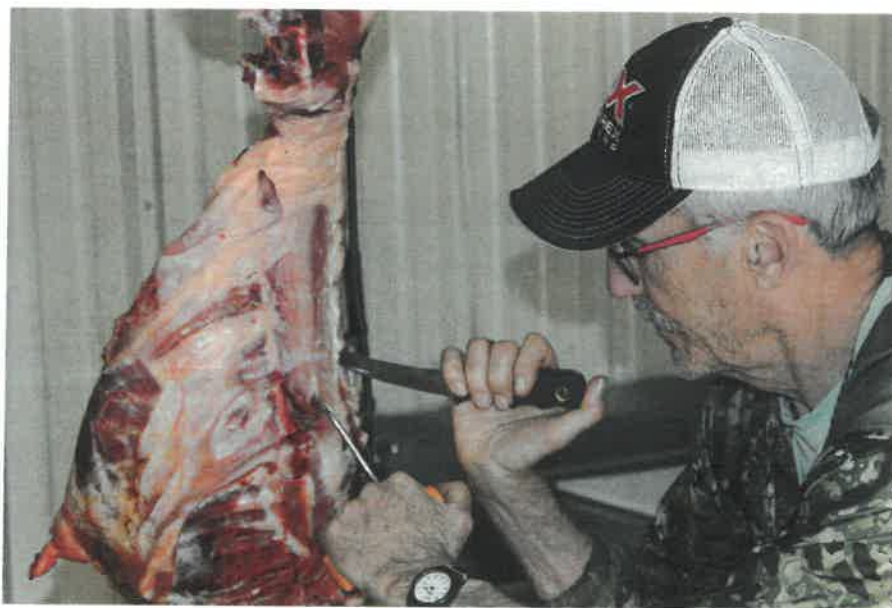
Well, let's get started. I usually hang my carcass hind legs up, but you can do head up. For boning use a boning knife shaped like the Knives of Alaska Professional Boning Knife. Yes, you can use a sharpened butter knife but if you use a good boning knife you will retrieve more meat and do a better job. Start by removing the fore shoulders. Grab the front shank and have someone hold the carcass steady. Start slicing between the shoulder and the body. I like to leave the brisket on the shoulder, so I have more meat on it.

It will surprise you how easily it comes off. Cut through the bubbly fat/membrane. Up near the backbone you will hit the cartilage on the bottom of the paddle bone so start cutting closer to the carcass, but you don't want to cut into the backstrap. The shoulder is now removed. Cut off the fore shanks at the spool joint and lay both aside. It is that simple.

Now remove the backstrap, which is the ribeye and strip on a steer. On a steer the 6th rib to the 12th rib is the ribeye and from the 13th rib to the 5th sacral vertebrae is the strip, but since we want more backstrap we'll start by making a cut between the 3rd and 4th rib and cut back to the 5th sacral vertebrae. Don't worry about the big names. Make a cut along both sides of the backbone down to where you hit a bone right before the hind quarter (the 5th sacral vertebrae).

Scoop the backstrap out starting at the bottom of the cut you made along the backbone. From the bottom of the thoracic bone cut out along the rib bones to remove the backstrap. From the 3rd rib to the 13th rib, the bones will be round but past the 13th rib they will be flat.

There will be a cap covering the backstrap. If the deer is fat, it may be easier for you to peel it back to expose the backstrap. I slice my backstrap into a meal portion that my family will eat at one meal and wrap and freeze. I don't slice it into steaks, they get freezer burned. Wait to slice it when you thaw it out and are ready to cook it.



You can see how I'm cutting down the backbone in preparation to remove the backstrap.

Now let's remove the two flank steaks. On most cuts there are two of everything, a right and a left-handed piece. The flanks steaks at the first part of the belly where you cut the pattern up the stomach to gut your deer, you will cut right between the two. They are the two long teardrop muscles on each side of the belly line cut.

Make a mark up at the bottom of the round where it attaches to the round and then cut both out. Pull the thin tissue/membrane off the top and then separate it from the tough bottom yellow rubbery membrane on bottom.

Now let's move to the knuckle that is the teardrop-shaped muscle that attaches to the kneecap (patella bone) but first let's pull the tri-tip off the bottom half of the knuckle. Look halfway down the knuckle. You'll see a muscle that somewhat comes to a point covering the bottom half of the knuckle. Make a 3/8-inch cut along the seam to separate it from the knuckle. Pull and

separate it as you cut. On the outside edge it will flare out as you progress down. The bottom half flares out and ties into the top butt (sirloin). Remove the tri-tip.

Now you can remove the knuckle. On the outside you will see a seam. Make a 1/4-inch deep cut with your knife tip pointing slightly outwards and you will expose the seam between the knuckle and the bottom round. Let's say you start with the left side. The above-mentioned seam will be on the left side. Open it up. The cut on the right side is a blind cut. Up at the patella bone make a cut and hit the femur bone on the right side of the bone and cut down to the bottom of the femur.

It helps to have a meat hook to pull the patella down. Make a mark on the femur bone below the patella and you should be able to pull the knuckle off and expose a pearly white femur.

The bone you hit when making your cut down the backbone while removing the backstrap, the meat on the other side and extending down to the base of the tail joint, is the sirloin. It is tougher than the backstrap, but tasty if properly prepared.

Cut around the femur bone, making short cuts, so the round falls off and cut it loose. Now, we want to separate the inside round from the bottom round. The inside round is the chunk of round on the right of the left side we boned. Explore slowly and you will discover a seam between the bottom and inside round.

On the back of the bottom round, you will see a cigar-shaped muscle. Depending on how big your deer is, it is probably about 2-inches wide. Cut in the seam separating the eye of the round from the bottom round.

Remove the hind shanks from the femur bone and lay it with the foreshanks. Make Osso Buco out of your shanks. Scoop the tenderloin out of the inside of the back end of the body cavity. Osso buco, by the way, is a classic Italian dish made of beef, veal shanks, or venison braised with vegetables, white wine, and broth.

You can use the 1st rib to the 8th to make short ribs, but many times the fat may give

them an off odor. Try some to see. I remove all the chuck meat, the meat from where you started removing the backstrap at the 3rd rib and forward to the atlas bone and use it for sausage/trim as well as any other loose trim.

I could write a whole article on recipes, but since I am short on space, let me cover some of the unique cuts as well as some of my favorites.

Here's how I cook the flank steaks and tri-tips. Marinate for 4-hours. I use a vinaigrette dressing. Sprinkle on coarse McCormick seasoning. Chop up onion and green peppers and lay on the flanks. Roll up and pin it shut with toothpicks (on the tri-tip marinate, sprinkle on the same seasoning). Smoke and then slice paper thin. They're not big but make super hors d'oeuvres.

BACKSTRAP AND CHICKEN FRIED STEAK (TOP ROUND)

I assume everyone knows how to chicken-fry their back strap and top round, but to elevate it to another level serve it with milk gravy. Another twist is to sauté onions and make onion gravy and garlic toast. Fry up some French fries and drizzle the milk gravy on the steak, French fries, and garlic toast. A meal fit for kings. I can get the best beef in the country and yet this is my favorite meat. My family loves fried backstrap.

Here's how to make the best gravy in the world. After you have fried deer backstrap in a black skillet, leave in the grease and meat cracklings. Throw in a bit of flour and stir in with the grease and meat cracklings. Brown for a few minutes and then pour in some milk. Stir and heat until it thickens. You now have some famous Southern milk gravy.



I cut my backstraps long enough for a family meal and then wrap and freeze.

KABOBS

Another way to use your backstrap and top round is to cut it into 1x1x1/2-inch chunks. Marinate the steak, mushrooms, squash, slices of green peppers and onions in a bowl for 2-4 hours. Soak wood skewers in water. Thread ingredients on the skewers, sprinkle with seasoning and cook on your

Camp Chef pellet smoker. As they're smoking, douse with leftover marinade. But don't douse the last 5 minutes since the marinade has been contaminated with raw meat. Kabobs made of tenderloins are to die for.

SMOKING FOREQUARTERS

Now for my all-time favorite big game recipe, which after trying it once it will be yours too. The 3rd most tender muscle on the carcass is in the shoulder, IF...you cook it slowly. Sprinkle the shoulder with your favorite seasoning salt. Smoke on low heat for 4-hours. You can lay bacon strips on it. Then, put it in a black turkey roasting pan and put in about 2-3 cups of water. Put it in the oven all night at 200 degrees. If you wake up in the middle of the night check on it. If it runs out of water, it's ruined. If low, add two cups.



Sometimes to make it juicier I'll lay bacon strips on my deer shoulders and smoke them. These are to die for.

When you wake up, if it falls off the bone with a fork, it's done. If not, turn the heat up to 300. After cooking all night, it should finish in 30-45 minutes. But, to make sure this is clear, if it doesn't fall off the bone with a fork it is not done.

When done, pull all the meat off the bone. There will not be enough meat left on the bone for an ant to eat and all the collagen and gristle will have disappeared. Chop into 1/2 inch chunks. Sprinkle with Tony Chachere's seasoning salt to taste. Toast buns slightly in a Lodge black skillet on both sides with a little butter. Throw on a handful of chopped meat and douse with your favorite BBQ sauce and a little tabasco sauce. I never eat tabasco except with BBQ. I cannot tell you how good these are.

I know you are shaking your head in disbelief but just trust me and try it once and from now on you'll shoot deer just for their forequarters. For years I boned out the forequarter for sausage. After boning it out and removing the tendons and ligaments, you're lucky to have a handful of meat. Then

about 40 yrs. ago a guy I worked with told me how he smoked his forequarters. It's the best meat in the world and will rival any beef brisket sandwich you've ever eaten. It is super easy, but it will take 13 hours to prepare.

SWISS STEAK



Swiss steak makes for a good winter comfort food.

Last summer, I told my wife Katy that we had one chunk of round steak left in the freezer from a deer I shot on my cousin's ranch and that I was going to make Swiss steak. She said she'd never eaten Swiss steak. It suddenly hit me; I'd never cooked Swiss steak before. In fact, the last time I ate it was when mom cooked it for me as a kid! I didn't have a clue how to cook it, so I looked it up on the internet, read a handful of recipes and then jumbled the highlights out of all of them into what sounded like a good recipe. It turned out to be unbelievably easy to cook and yet it was a tasty meal.

This is a good way to cook your drier round steaks. Slice your meat in 1/2-inch steaks. Dust with flour and slightly brown then throw into a Dutch oven. Add the following ingredients.

- Chop 2-3 carrots, 1/2 onion, 2 celery sticks and a green pepper and throw in the Dutch oven.
- Add 1-2 thyme sprigs and 2 tbsp of chopped garlic
- 2 cups of beef broth
- 1 cup of cooking wine
- 1 large can of tomato paste or better yet diced tomatoes.
- Salt/pepper
- 1 or 2 cups of water

Preheat on the stove top, put on the lid and slide into the oven preheated to 325. When the steak falls apart with a fork it is done. Dip out the desired portion and lay on a mound of mashed potatoes. I'm not a big tomato-base type of guy but this stuff was awesome and didn't last very long.

Happy processing and bon appetit! 