



CURING HINTS FOR



COW HIDES, GAME SKINS AND TROPHIES

One can understand now, that when my late father-in-law illustrated his experience he had with clients and then his own experiences, is how important it is to treat, cure and preserve your skins properly.

I would like to submit to you a guide for curing your game skins and trophies.

Many hunters are disappointed when they receive a skin which has hairslip, and can not understand why their skin, which looked perfectly good when they delivered it for tanning, has hairslip, caused by bacteria which thrive on blood and dirt. Heat accelerates the damaging bacterial process.

So, how can we reduce the risk of bacterial damage?

1. Skin animal as soon as possible after shooting.
2. Remove excess fat and meat.
3. Wash off all the blood and dirt, particularly in between the hair.
4. If possible, soak the skin / hide for a minimum of 3 hours in a saturated salt solution (about 20kg salt per 100 litres of water), together with a Bactericide (normal household disinfectant will also help eg: Dettol or Savlon) of about 50ml per 100 litres of water.
5. Before placing the skin / hide on a clean surface, apply sufficient salt on the area where your skin / hide will be placed on to. When you remove the skin / hide from the solution, open and flatten the skin / hide on the salted surface with the flesh side facing up and hair side facing down on the salted surface. Cover the skin / hide with salt. Be liberal when applying the salt.

If the facility in point 4 above is not available then wash off blood and dirt with Bactericide in the washing water and then salt immediately on the flesh side while the skin is wet.

It is important as a guideline, to use the equal quantity of salt to the weight of the skin. The skin must then lie in salt for at least 3 days, after which the skin should be, dried out as soon as possible. There is nothing wrong with drying the skin in the sun after salting. The sooner the skin is dehydrated, the better. If one does not have time to do this, the skin must be rolled for transport in the salt and dried at destination.

DO NOT!!!

- drag the animal or leave it in the sun after it has been shot.
- salt a skin /hide that has already started to dehydrate. Rather soak in a strong salt solution before salting.
- leave blood, fat or flesh on the skin / hide. (salt does not penetrate fat)
- store the skin / hide in a plastic bag, except for transportation only!!! keeping it as cool as possible.

As I said at the start, the above is a guide. It has worked for me and my clients over many years. If one follows the guidelines above, you would not be disappointed.

Editorial by the late P.C. Van der Merwe

I will dedicated the editorial on mainly trophy tanning and taxidermy and for what I consider the most important point in the hunting industry – and that is the field preparation and curing of hides and skins.

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For the overseas readers who do not know me, I was born in Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) and started my tanning career in Zimbabwe. I immigrated to South Africa in 1983 and have since been involved in the tanning industry although now, semi-retired, I spend most of my time in my children's tannery – probably one of the largest exotic tanneries in this field.

I was the chairman of the taxidermy association of Southern Africa for a few years and also elected president of the S.I.T.C. (Society for Leather Technologists and Chemists, South Africa section), where I also served for two years.

Game skin – and trophy tanning in Zimbabwe in my years of apprenticeship, was not really anything to write home about. It was very small – in fact to me, it did not really mean very much. I had an Italian boss whom I respected very much and the first year of my tanning career was seeing my boss tasting chemicals to determine the pH and quality, although as much as it may sound strange. Our company was involved in a large production of game skin products making rugs, game skin poufs, handbags, key rings etc. This was a very large industry those years.

The little trophy tanning that came in to be done, was more or less adding to the skin bulk production and if it came out good and well, it was difficult really to understand when the client or the hunter brought in an impala skin, and the skin had hairslip. It was difficult to understand why the client was so upset. We would offer him another good quality skin, surely he must be happy with this, surely he should be grateful that we actually gave him another skin, but no! He was not. Oh, what a pain this client was. It was only a few years later when I started hunting myself, not in a big way, that suddenly I realised the importance and sentimentality of that impala skin. I was now on both sides: hunting and tanning. The guy that was a pain, I now fully understood, in fact, I was now on his side.

After my apprenticeship I started my own tanning company with the view to give personal service to the hunter by understanding what this hunt meant, by understanding what a trophy and a skin meant. Well, needless to say, I started my business with this in mind and to say the least, my business increased by more than threefold every year.

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I hope one can now understand why I related to the above real happenings and real story so often in our business: tanning and taxidermy. People get involved for a quick buck. This does not mean to say that we are not in business to make money, by quick buck I mean the real die-hard interest, is not always there. Therefore, my advice to the hunter is when you arrive at the first stop for example the professional hunter or the outfitter, view the professionalism, the way your trophies are treated, the way they are cured or preserved which taxidermist is going to be used. Are they professional? Find out who they are. Ask for their brochures. After all, it is your right to know who is going to work on your trophies.



Hunting, tanning and taxidermy is no longer inexpensive and you require the best, but for the best service and prices. Now apart from professionalism, honesty and integrity, if the trophy is not well or properly preserved or properly prepared in the field, then there is no point in looking for a good tanner or taxidermist. ■



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