



Cliff Gray, Owner/Outfitter – Lic. # 2975
PO Box 5977
Eagle, CO 81631

Phone: (970) 343-4460
Email: cliff@FTGuides.com
FlatTopsWildernessGuides.com

Game Packing Expectations

Contact us once you harvest an animal so we can coordinate how to get in and pack the animal out. We try our best to get in as soon as possible (particularly in September), but we work in a wilderness environment with uncertainty and unexpected challenges. You need to take care of game and get the meat cooling down as soon as you can. On non-full service hunts (drop camps, spot packing, game only packing), we haul the meat. Do not expect us to quarter and skin your game. You need to have the quarters ready to go before we arrive.

Large game like elk need to be field dressed as soon as possible. In September this is even more important, but don't be fooled that a bull elk won't go bad in the middle of November.

There are several how-to guides on field dressing big game on the internet. On elk you need to remove all the digestive tract and cut through the diaphragm to remove all the organs. Alternatively you can do the gutless method. Either way, you need to get the meat cooling quickly. Unlike a deer or smaller game, you should never leave an elk overnight without splitting its pelvis in addition to removing the guts. Elk are large enough that the heat in the rear quarters will rot meat even in frigid temperatures if you don't split the pelvis (cutting to the ball joints).

DO NOT FORGET TO LEAVE EVIDENCE OF SEX ON A QUARTER AND TAG YOUR ANIMAL AFTER THE HARVEST. We will not pack untagged animals and will report any game violation. In Colorado, the carcass part of the tag should be attached to the meat not the antlers/head.

Quartering

There are two common ways to quarter elk, the gutless method and the classic method. Don't perform the classic method unless you have experience with it. The gutless method is a more efficient method and has an easier learning curve.

Classic method: After field dressing the animal (gutting and pulling out trachea), lay it on its back and use an axe to split it down the spinal column. Next, split the shoulder from the rear quarter above the tenderloins (2nd rib up) on both sides. If day time temperatures are above 60 degrees, you should skin the quarters before hanging. It is even optimal to bone out the quarters in high temps. If the temperatures are cooler (2nd rifle season and later) leave the hair on and hang the quarters.

Gutless method: Remove all four quarters from the spine/ribs without gutting the animal. Rear quarters come off near the pelvis, front quarters behind the scapula. Then remove the backstraps, tenderloins, rib meat and neck meat. Be careful when removing tenderloins. It helps to save them for last and cut a small belly cut to relieve gut pressure against the tenderloins. There are several YouTube videos that cover this method in detail. Bone out the quarters if temps are above 60 degrees. If the temperatures are cooler, leaving the bone in is fine.

When you put your meat in game bags to hang, it is a huge favor to the packers if you “even up” the bags. For elk: 4 bags total, 2 bags each containing a backstrap, tenderloin and a shoulder, 2 bags each containing a hindquarter. For deer/bears: 2 bags, each containing 1 shoulder, 1 hindquarter, 1 backstrap and 1 tenderloin.

Capeing

Do some research on capeing game before your hunt. The key point when capeing bulls and bucks is to leave excess hide in the brisket, armpit and wither area of the animal. No taxidermist is going to chastise you for leaving too much cape on.

When capeing deer and elk, remove all of the neck meat. Do not leave a chunk of meat attached to the base of the skull. Any meat left attached drastically increases the chances of your cape slipping (going bad). The head should be removed at the top of the spinal column. This typically means you need to “split” the cape on the dorsal line (the back) of the animal, vs “tubing” the cape off the animal. Don’t worry about doing this, as most taxidermists will split tubed capes anyways.

Location

Mules and horses are not orangutans nor are they mountain goats. For us to get game on a mule or horse for pack out, the quartered animal must be near a decent trail (within 100 yards). A lot of the time this means the quarters need to be hauled by the hunters to or near an accessible area.

Video walkthrough of us packing an elk on pack stock:

<https://youtu.be/BAzm6asg0d0>

