



Deer...and Deer Hunting of the Capay Valley



OK, I admit it, I am the “annoying” one in a family of hunters who has never intentionally killed anything bigger than a fly. I grew up a cattleman’s daughter on not just beef, but venison of all kinds--moose and elk was a specialty of my maternal grandfather’s, Big Game Hunter Charlie Polk, who displayed the heads on his saloon walls in The Alamo in Colusa. But though I was a great shot--Deadeye Betsy, Dad called me--I would not shoot anything livelier than a spent tin can or “the barbs off a barbed wire fence at fifty paces.” I even became a vegetarian in my last year of high school, much to my mother’s chagrin: “Elizabeth Anne, your father is a cattleman and hunter, are you TRYING

to insult him?” Well, No, but I felt like a hypocrite: I wouldn’t kill an animal, so how could I eat them? Amazingly, my father became my biggest supporter in my culinary adventures--willing to try anything I put in front of him and even built me raised vegetable beds in the back yard. Thing is, he and I both knew whatever my own aversion was to killing, I respected the fact that while I knew he loved “the hunt,” he never killed for anything other than “necessity.” He fed us and he killed predators who threatened his livelihood--and that of others; as a young man, he rode into the Berryessa Hills as a paid-bounty hunter with men like Shorty Clark to kill the marauding bears and mountain lions killing livestock. But he also was a naturalist and loved all animals...well, with the possible exception of coyotes...And my mother rescued every fallen animal that stumbled her way--including several abandoned fawns like the one in the photo with her above. Is this Misty, who came to us in the mist, or Sunny, who came on a sunny day? (That is Tommy behind her with her rescued magpie Sam on his head.) We learned that when the harvesters cut the wheat and oats near our home, they were “lucky” when they stopped in time to pick up or scare off the nesting fawn, left in tall grass for safety while the doe went to feed. Often these men carried the fawn to my mother or they just wandered into the yard on their own--crying for a mother! And, of course, for a “mother” they had come to the right place.

Well, years passed and I eventually added meat back into my diet--mostly out of sheer necessity--but to this day, if I had to kill to eat I would go back to beans-n-rice and tofu and mushrooms, all perfectly great sources of all 8 essential amino acids! But I grew up with hunters in my life and know it is a big part of growing up in the Capay Valley, so I am researching and chronically it in this issue. Many of the priceless pictures and stories I am collecting will go into the website at greatercapayvalley.org. Like me, many recall waking up at 4AM during September deer season to the smell of frying onions, bacon and venison liver and to the sound of hunters gathering in companionship and excitement. As a child, I would toddle out to join in--but was “cured” the first time I saw the big, brown, soulful eyes of a newly slain deer up close. Even so, the taste of my dad’s “secret recipe” for venison jerky keeps me from enjoying beef jerky to this day.

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Black-tailed Deer and Tule Elk

Our indigenous deer and elk are Black-tail Deer and Tule Elk. Obviously, the deer are named that for their distinct tail color and the elk is named for one of his favorite snacks--which also indicates where he will often be found, along creeks and small rivers and marsh land.

The Tule Elk, a subspecies of elk found only in California, were once prolific--even in the Capay Valley--but had been hunted down to only one breeding pair in the state by the late 1800s by early pioneers. Rescued from complete extinction by the California Fish And Game Commission, they were reintroduced and protected until they now have about 22 herds with over 3,800 elk statewide. Ironically, two of their predators, the grizzly bear and wolf, have gone extinct in California, so mountain lions and hunting are the only thing that keeps their numbers in check. And while Tule Elk prefer forests and tule-rich waterways, they do eat grass and can compete with livestock and are hard on fences, so have come into conflict with ranchers as their numbers have grown. Permits to hunt are few and hard to come by--though tens of thousands of hunters apply for them. Happily, their numbers are well protected and you may have a lucky sighting at the upper end of the Capay Valley where they frequent the pines and creeks near Highway 20 in Colusa County. Up there, some landowners have allowed them to flourish in their "game preserves," where the elk are less likely to bother the cattle ranchers nearby.

Our Tule Elk is an impressive sight, though he is the smallest of his cousins at an average of 500 pounds, 4.5' tall and 7' long. The Rocky Mountain Elk averages 700 pounds, and the Roosevelt Elk weighs in at 900 pounds, 5' tall and 10' long! In California, those two big boys may be seen at the northern end of the state, only.

The Black-tail Deer are common in northern California and through western Oregon and Washington and on into the Alaskan panhandle. Some consider it a separate species, but most say a subspecies of the Mule Deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*). They thrive on the edges of forests, as they are mostly grass grazers, but need the forests--like our oak forests in the Capay Hills--for shelter. They are also very fond of lichens that grow on our trees and rocks--my dad used to say, "They like lickin' lichen" when he was teaching us where to look for them in our hills. And, happily, they love browsing on western poison oak! Unlike we unlucky humans, they suffer no allergic reaction to its toxins.

Mating and rutting takes place in November and early December. The Bucks drop their antlers between January and March and regrow them between April and August. The gestation period for Does is 6-7 months and they typically have twin Fawns. The Does typically nest their fawns in tall grasses while they go feed--which is how they are often killed in harvester accidents in our area. And even if the fawns escape the blades, they often get separated from their mothers who come back to an empty stubble "nest" and have to go hunt for their young. It is said that while the doe is a good mother, the fawn mortality rate is 45-70%! A doe is very protective of her young, and human and dog attacks by a sharp-hoofed doe is not unheard of if they get too close to her fawn--to which I can personally attest, having come upon a nesting fawn and then the "ferocious attack-deer" more than once while hiking with my dog!



Photos, clockwise from top left: Black-tail doe; bugling-rutting Tule Elk bull; the Tule Elk herd up Capay Valley at the Colusa border at Highways 16 and 20--a rare and exciting sighting!

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Hunting, a Long History in the Capay Valley...

...when I began to ask for stories and pictures from pioneer-descendant locals, I was overwhelmed with the response. I have shared a few of both here, but much more will appear at the website at greatercapayvalley.org

As kids, we went on "cattle drives" with our dad, Tom Monroe, and lay in army-surplus sleeping bags with our horse-blanket-on-saddle "pillows," under the stars by campfire, listening to him tell his own hunting stories.

Photo top left, 1919, is courtesy of Charlie Schaupp, who shares: "John Schaupp in a Model-T Ford with a bunch of antlers from a successful hunt...My dad once told me the story of how in about 1924 John Schaupp

and Charlie Schaupp (My Great Grandfather and Grandfather) went up to Goat Mountain above Stonyford to go hunting. But after they arrived on the mountain one of the main bearings on their Model-T Ford engine went out. Back then they used lead babbet for the bearings. They had to fix it to come home to Hungry Hollow so they dropped the engine pan with the engine oil, took off the bearing cap and wrapped the crankshaft with some bacon rind "hog leather" they had with them. Then they put the cap back on, put the pan back on, put the oil back in, and drove the 80 miles home--just try to do that in today's cars? Also,

notice that those bucks are in their velvet--deer season was most of the summer back then and there were no deer tags, so this must have been June or July."



Deer Hunting 1919
John Schaupp, John Heitman and an unnamed man in Capay Hills near Capay Valley



Photos: at left is Yolo County Sheriff Jim Monroe, early 1900s; below is his son Tom on a black bear bounty-hunt in 1950s--that is the slain bear behind a huge rack of antlers at left foreground; below left are the pack mules for the hunt that would often take weeks in the wilderness; below right, Tom with his two eldest tots, Tommy and Cathy, in 1953, after a successful deer hunt...Tommy would continue the "family tradition," as would brother Bobby at right in the 1970s, in the Capay Hills.



Deer communicate with the aid of scent and pheromones from several glands located on the lower legs. The metatarsal (outside of lower leg) produces an alarm scent, the tarsal (inside of hock) serves for mutual recognition and the interdigital (between the toes) leave a scent trail when deer travel. Deer have excellent sight and smell. Their large ears can move independently of each other and pick up any unusual sounds that may signal danger.

wikipedia.com



Deer + Bear Hunting





Deer Camps - Poison Oak - Manzanita: Ernie Lehman's Capay Valley Childhood!

When I asked for stories of deer hunting and memories of a youth spent in the Capay Valley, I got a delightful response from **Ernie Lehman**--who grew up in Capay in the 1950s, living above his parents' saloon, *Ike and Kay's*. Today it is the *Road Trip Bar and Grill* and originally it had been *Louie's Tavern*, but it has always a place to gather for Capay locals--many of them avid hunters. Ernie went to Capay School with us and many of us always saw him as a sort of Huck Finn--did he even wear shoes? He was fun and full of mischief, but didn't like school nor do well there--but everyone liked him! So his stories have been a real delight for me. Here is one of his memories of deer camp...: *"I started going to deer camp around 1958 with uncle Joe and everyone else. Deer camp was a slice of heaven as far as I was concerned. It was located just down a little bit to the left of Signal Pole (I think that's what it was called if I remember correctly), if you are looking at it from Madison. To get there you drove up Highway 16 and there was a gravel road to the left about 1/2 mile down from the Tabers and Shayne Whitfield homes. You took that gravel road up into the mountains where it turned to dirt all the way to the end, past landmarks like the horse trough, Blue Rock and the Adobe Hut, past the road to the Clark's deer camp and another road to the Mason's (I believe) deer camp, and then you were in Bracket's deer camp. The deer camp was at the end of a canyon that the road came through. As you drove in you were paralleling two mountains until they met and there was a dead-end, where the deer camp began. The whole space was about 100 yards long and about 25 yards wide. There were 2 creeks that came down both the right and the left edges of the deer camp and joined together just below it. It was a cozy space, actually, because it was an open area surrounded by Mountains and trees and the two small creeks. It had a well--with the crappiest tasting water you ever wanted to taste--a generator, an outhouse and a large cabin nestled to the right-hand side of the space. There were many mini camps all over the place where the different couples slept, almost like little open-air bedrooms. The kids--or at least the boys--slept mostly under the cabin or wherever. No one slept in the cabin, but in there were wood stoves, a gas refrigerator and a very large table where people ate. There are actually some beds in there, but I don't think anyone actually slept in there...except for an occasional guest, maybe.*

The outside had a dirt patio area under some trees with chairs and a couple of old time Coca-Cola refrigerators where ice was put along with beer and sodas that weren't there long before the cabin was built. It was a great space and all the people would sit around and tell stories, and all the grown-ups seemed to have a great time--well, I didn't really pay much attention to the grown-ups, but they always seemed to have a good time. I was far more interested in the 2 really great rock slides a very short distance from the camp, and another great steep slide that was fun to climb. The 2 little creeks were outrageously fun to explore. There was always something to do and places to go. I was never ever bored at deer camp, and was exhausted when I went to sleep at night and very excited to wake up. In the spring there would be water in the creeks, and other than just being beautiful, they were fun--with salamanders crawling around and little waterfalls all over the place! Man, it was kids' heaven--or at least this kid's heaven! [These creeks would be branches of Salt Creek]

When I first started going to deer camp there was no cabin or well, although there was a portable generator. The Bracket camp was all away over to the left hand side of the open space under some trees. Canvas was strung out under the trees where there was a shady area. All the cooking and stuff occurred under the canvas area. Jimmie Johnson (uncle Jimmy was one of the coolest grown-ups I knew, although I didn't really know him except for him hanging out a lot at my parents' place, Ike and Kay's in Capay) had a hunting camp all the way to the right where the cabin was eventually put. I believe uncle Jimmy owned the property and sold it to several people who were a part of the Bracket Camp.

Deer camp started to change very radically immediately after the property had changed hands! One of the first actions was to widen the open area by cutting down whole bunch of bushes, shrubs, poison oak, small trees etc., that was in the area. This took a couple weekends when all of the shrubs, trees and poison oak etc., were piled in the middle of the open area. It was a huge pile. The open area had expanded tremendously. The weekend that the big pile was lit there was a wonderfully large bonfire! Gary Anderson and I had a great time where we spent most of the day and night running in and out of the smoke, crawling around next to the bonfire, we were generally in the smoke all day long. Even though I was only 10 or 11 years old I was familiar with poison oak, I'd caught poison oak many times in some of the strangest areas of

the body. You know, as a boy, your are playing around deer camp and get some poison oak on your hands and go to the bathroom in the outhouse: a young boy could be shocked at the results. You do learn the value of washing your hands before you go to the outhouse. But! I never got poison oak like I would this time!



I fell asleep that night completely exhausted and excited for tomorrow to come, but had a restless night's sleep, where I was tossing and turning and it felt like my skin was caked with hot itchy mud and my head felt like a dirty hot air balloon. I woke up to the sound of Gary screaming at the top of his lungs, "Mom I can't see!!" and there was a

scurry of motion and sound. I wanted to go see what was happening but I was more into my own dilemma: why did I feel like a slimy blackhead! I was in my sleeping bag and it seemed awfully dark, so I thought my head was in my sleeping bag, too, but it wasn't, and I could barely see. Meanwhile there was still all this noise with lots of excited urgent talking going on and I wanted to go see what was happening! I finally got myself together enough and on my feet but it was very strange as I could barely see and it seems like my whole body was burning! By the time I made it over toward where the noise was coming from I could barely see Gary's dad putting him in their pickup with his mom and driving away very rapidly! I was standing there feeling like an itchy, puss-filled blackhead; I could barely see, thinking, What is all this excitement about? until a grown-up spotted me standing there. I heard the words, "Oh my God!" Then all of that excited urgent talking noise and motion was surrounding me and I was loaded up into a pickup and delivered home. By the time I was delivered to Ike and Kay's (home) I couldn't see it all, I could only hear the "Oh my Gods!" "What the Hell happened?" remarks. Mom thoroughly washed me and completely covered me with some cream that seemed to make me feel better. The rest of that Sunday just went by where I slept a lot and was just kind of out of it.

The next day Monday Mom loaded me up in the car and took me to a doctor that practiced in Winters. Apparently he knew a whole lot about poison oak. He gave me some sort of a shot that was composed of poison oak! (Anyway that's what I thought I heard him tell my mom) and gave her some new cream and we went off to home! When we got back to Capay, Mom stopped at the post office which was right next to the Capay school around recess time and some of the students

gathered around the car and looked at me lying in the back seat while Mom told them what was happening.

What happened was there was a fair amount of poison oak in that bonfire and the smoke was filled with poison oak vapor. Gary and I spent a whole lot of time in and around the smoke because that's where the action was. The result was Gary and I caught poison oak so bad that our eyes swelled shut and you could barely see the hair on our heads, as we had very short hair. I missed about two weeks of school, which was okay by me, but I was not allowed to go back to the camp for about two months--which was not okay by me. I didn't see Gary for about two months because he was recuperating at his home in Sacramento. When I was given the "okay" to go back to deer camp I was truly surprised at the amount of work that was done. Uncle Peg had sunk a well and the cabin was well under way. There were a couple of horse pens built, a larger generator, and a new outhouse. You wouldn't believe the amount of excitement I felt as a 10-year-old being allowed to be back at deer camp with all of this great stuff occurring. And you know I rarely ever caught poison oak again! Apparently I got poison oak so bad that I became partially immune to it, which was cool by me! I spent a lot of time at deer camp for the next five years or so. When I got a little older my attention went toward Esparto, football, basketball, girls and other things."

Ernie (...who today is a "successful business man" enjoying his memories!)

NOTE: The area Ernie describes is above Salt Creek and not only covered with poison oak, but also Manzanita. It is too bad they did not know that Manzanita can be used as an antidote for poison oak! The Native People knew of its properties--and the fact that a poison and its antidote often grow together--and my father once used it in desperation when my brother Tommy had a similar experience. Brewing a tea of the berries and leaves to drink and the red bark to soak in, it did what



Above: Manzanita seen growing along Salt Creek on south side of the Capay Valley.

Western Medicine couldn't. I am not prescribing, here!!! I don't know the exact "recipe," but we were desperate and Dad had grown up hearing from the Native People who lived in the Capay Valley that it would work, so we tried it--the doctors were amazed! They had shot Tommy full of cortisone, had Mom cover him in Calamine lotion, and sent him home, shaking their heads--as they did with Ernie, apparently.

Ah, Mother Nature's medicine cabinet--a homeopathist's pharmacopeia!