

HUNTING THE DOBSON

Written by Per Jacobsen



The author and his dog, Andy, peeking behind him, with an 8 point Stag.

Someone, somewhere, somehow went through an awful lot of commotion in creating the settings the Dobson River lies amongst. Exceedingly rare does one get the privilege of encountering such magnificent beauty! It was the River I have had many a dream about, pursuing my recreational hobby in. The River where many of New Zealand's legendary hunters have hunted, and died in their pursuit of doing what they loved.

*On the way in to the Dobson,
along Lake Ohau.*

*“I hope you know
what you are
getting yourselves
into, cause that’s
a serious drive all
the way up there...”*

The station manager’s charming wife couldn’t agree more in my belief that Dobson was indeed “The Precious”. She however went slightly silent when I mentioned driving up to Waterfall hut and staying there for 10 days, then after a bit of consideration replied; “I hope you know what you are getting yourselves into, cause that’s a serious drive all the way up there. Last year, a four wheel drive got stuck up near Waterfall hut and it set the owner back considerably! In those sorts of mountains you would be around 35km’s away from anything resembling a slight civilisation. Come to think of it, a gate with a couple of cow skulls would rarely be classified as civilisation.” It did not discourage Pete nor me. We were psyched up for a bit of South Island adventure. Pete had flown down to the Island where the greater part of the keen Kiwi mountain hunters hangs around on every mountaintop, showing off their flash, smashed up guns. Inside the truck was Andy, my 7 month old dog.

Dobson River lies between two massive Mountain Ranges. The western side, named the Neumann Range, and the Eastern range, Ben Ohau. The River spans roughly 40 km in length, from the Station and to the top bivvy, Reardon. Mountains such as Mt. Sealy 2627 MASL, Mt. Darby 2531, and Mt. Spence 2458 are a few giants casting their shadows over Dobson River, which flows softly or rapidly - highly dependent on weather situations, into Lake Ohau. A couple of glaciers can be found in the valley. The Selwyn glacier, and the Hourglass glacier – a massive overhanging glacier that I would not be caught dead walking under, even if it was to save my life!

*Amazing views towards
Mt. Sefton and the main divide.*

Roughly five hours of exhilarating use of the four wheel drive and we were able to park the truck a mere 20 metres below the hut! Well, the boys who built the hut back in the day must have done one helluva job on it because the hut hasn’t seen neither a hammer nor sealants since the day it was born, and is miraculously still standing! I’ve seen worse huts than this, but the condition of it had me wondering whether to start laughing or just move on and locate a campsite to call our own. Pete reckoned the hut would do just fine, despite the fact that none in the hut book had been able to locate the dunny. The Waterfall houses 4 bunks, a table decorative called “the kitchen”, a pantry filled up with the appetizing odour of millions of mice shit and an open fireplace.

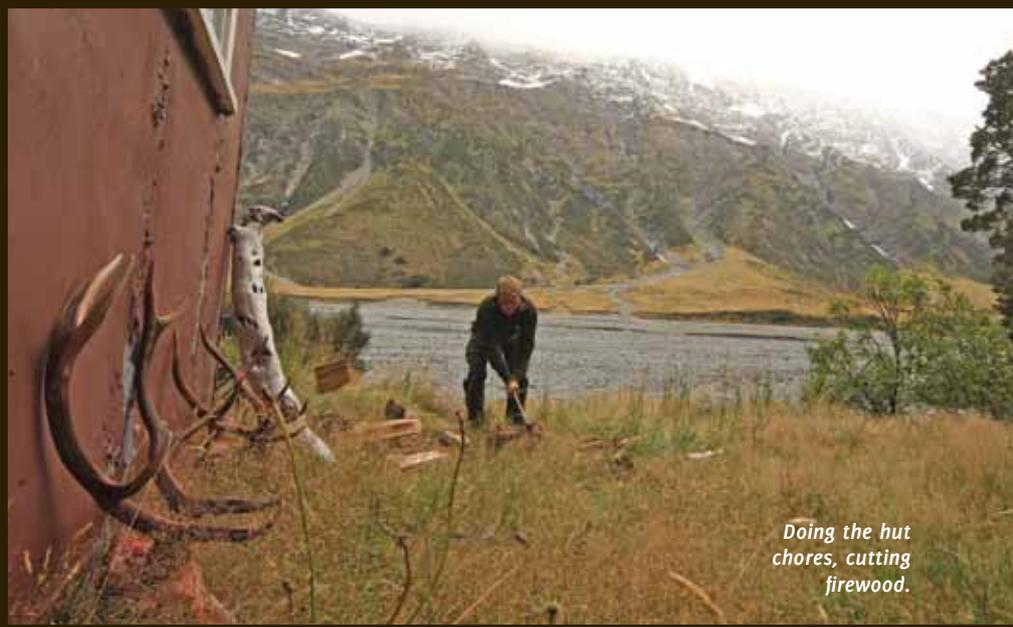
As we were sitting out the front contemplating over the area of huntable land, Pete spotted a couple of stags and a hind opposite the hut some 1400 yards away. I stayed behind in the belief I would guide Pete with Egyptian moves, and other bodily signs. A solid hour went flying by and the fading light saw Pete less than 100 yards away from the deer, on the other side of the ridge. I signalled my best that he was getting tremendously close. The problem with good keen Kiwi hunters lies in their old wrinkled moleskin sack – in other words, good gear's old gear and lets keep it that way. Rather than spending wee fortunes these days, one will pursue the noble art of maintaining great grandpa's old semi worn out pair of binoculars. Pete has never, could not, and will never be able to perceive what Egyptian hieroglyph I was trying to look like on 1300 yards through his old pair of semi worn out binoculars! However Pete hadn't come to where he is today by just cruising, and the stalk he subsequently performed blew me away.

Some 2 hours later Pete entered through the hut door with 2 full-size back steaks hanging around his belt, one at each hip, kind of like John Wayne style, should one dare to imagine. A pair of dry boots hanging around his neck, and only wearing something I firstly imagined being his jewel bags. Andy let out a rather vague grunt, most likely due to the concern towards what looked like a psychopath standing between the hut door and us. I must admit the sight was one of those that made me rethink for a second about my current path in life. But as always, Pete had an explanation to his unusual appearance. The stalk had gone as planned. But when he found himself standing where I was pointing he had lost the "scent". He decided on crawling 50 yards further up the ridge. The strange thing to then happen was that the deer travelled the same way – just on the other side of the ridge. Pete stalked over the ridge and found himself in a good vantage point. A brief moment went by when the stags started to mock around and the hind leapt down the bush directly in front of Pete. He dropped her on the spot and the others were nowhere to be seen after that. Now, because Pete reckoned that the back steaks were going to be on the menu anytime soon, he believed to cool them down effectively he would hang them down from his belt – quite sensible when it comes to mind – cooling the meat down. Then my Kiwi mate bumped into the river. Pete, being the one and only Pete in this world, stored his boots around his neck, rolled his trousers up into a neat do-it-yourself-wedgy and leapt into the river. What's more, he believed it was hardly worth the effort changing into dry clothes seeing as how the hut was less than 500 yards away, thus the look-alike psychopath-entry to the hut.

The chance for the remaining stags in the nearby vicinity was great enough for Pete and I to plant our bums flat on the riverbed, straight below the hut, all of the next day, waiting for them to make a move. From that plan we had two outcomes. Firstly, we never laid eyes on them ever again, the only thing that caught our vigilant eyes were Tahr, a mob to be hunted



Pete during an exhilarating hunt after the seven deer he saw on the opposite side.



Doing the hut chores, cutting firewood.

the following morning. Secondly, I became so restless that I decided to get stuck into the firewood. I had located a dead tree overhanging the very bottom of the riverbed and decided that it would do us. Whilst the saw was a good three third of the way through, I yelled out to Pete asking if he had Andy the dog. He replied with a sturdy, "Yep." What I did not know was that when I yelled out just before the log fell, Andy leapt to his feet and bolted towards the only place he wasn't supposed to run to – under the log! Call it a stroke of luck; the log landed a mere metre away from the little puppy with a hefty racket to follow! The last Pete saw of him, he was heading south at a rapid pace. About three hours later he came sneaking back from behind the hut. He wagged his tail in a very unsure manner when Pete welcomed him back. Within seconds Pete yells out, "Gosh it smells bad around here, did you step on a turd or something Per?" My soles were clean, but when I went to bid G'day to Andy the dog blew his breath right into my face, and then I suddenly realised that the back of the hut had become our long drop and Andy had helped himself to a snack and was in no need for tea that night! When I awoke next morning the dog had sneaked up in my sleeping bag, curled up like

a ball and was lying 5 inches away from my face. The smell was – revolting! After a hearty Kiwi breakfast we were on our way up along the riverbed, towards the confluence of the Dobson, when halfway along a firm hand lands on my shoulder and with convincing power forces me to kneel down. "Get ya dog tied up now, I have just seen a heap of deer on the other side of the river Per!" About 1.5 km away a mob of about seven deer were mucking around making the roar existing to each other. It wasn't quite part of the plan, but then again they were right there and quite honestly, I've never been one to pass on a dish of fried pork belly with parsley sauce, nor the challenge of hunting a mob of deer in the Dobson! The deer proved fairly agile which troubled our stalk and knackered my knees completely from crawling through the riverbed, until we had to cross the river. I leapt into it with Andy hanging along my side in a combined "I believe I can fly/swim position", and Pete half a hundred yards behind me. We eventually came to a halt some 390 yards away as a wee valley separated us. A shot was lined up from there and after an hour the stag finally came out into the open bush and a Winchester silver ballistic tip 140 grain raced through the valley. The disappointment sneaked up on me like a boot in the guts



Pete glassing for game.

when I realized the shot was a huge miss. Pete had been lying at the ready with his trusty Sako and sent the stag cartwheeling down the valley side out onto the riverbed.

That was definitely a hit as the blood was pouring out the side of the stag, but we dared not lose him to the river as neither me nor Pete felt like a white water swim to catch a dead deer! On roughly 250 yards Pete stood up, reloaded the gun and sent two projectiles through the barrel, piercing the imminent air, and direct into the running stag. It fell where it got hit and the stag was secured. I was at this stage convinced the “dude with the do-it-yourself wedgy” must definitely be holding back on his past, probably involving the Special Forces as a long-range sniper! Nine points were on the top of the head, but Pete couldn’t give a hoot about timberworks. To him we were up there, hunting hard, and reaping the reward – a heap of meat!

Determined to reach Reardon bivvy, we pushed on. The hut book at the Reardon explained how three huntsmen travelled in the same style as us and 30 yards away from the bivvy they found a 13 inch Bull Tahr going about his bully business. The hairy mountain goat didn’t quite make it – obviously. The finer art of bullet hole assessment arose when all three brave huntsmen had let rip each their respective calibre, and now had to decide on which bullet was the most deadliest of them all...

We didn’t travel far from the bivvy before Pete’s old semi worn out pair of bino’s settled further up the valley on a brown looking spot on the mountain with white tines poking about. A magnificent stag! With less than no time to spare, Pete exclaimed one of his short commands, “Get it!” I leapt to my feet, got into the river and a throughout soaked Danish Racing Sardine jumped out on the other side.



The trusty Terrano crosses the Dobson, considerably easier than normal.

*“A magnificent stag!
With less than no time
to spare, Pete exclaimed
one of his short
commands,
“Get it!”*

A brief invitation into the mind of a huntsman follows:

“1.5km away is the stag, I have to run, fast. The sun must already have set by now, I’m in a great rush. Heck, the hinds up there are starting to notice something’s up. I have to slow down. Too slow, I’m not going to make it. Hang on. Get down on all fours and yell out a roar as you stalk in. Yeah, it’s working, the hinds seem to forget about me! Darkness is all around me soon.

I have to line up a shot now, if I want a chance at him. Phew, I feel the adrenalin throughout my body. He is on 420 yards, my rest is perfect, the gun sits welded onto my shoulder, I feel every muscle tensed up, controlled breath which drifts up around my Nightforce optics, and blurs my sight a fraction. The stag lets out a roar, now!!! Wham! I’m silent, hanging on to my breath, there he is, running to the left, he’s gone!”

I ran back to Pete, sitting with only one comment left to spare, “Buggar!” He too had seen the stag bolt off to the left, only to stop some 100 yards further away and start grazing. The 2-hour walk back towards Waterfall hut got used productively to kick stones around in the riverbed – at least them I was able to hit!

Next morning ten blue toes leapt out of the bunk and into the river. My gun needed sighting in. But as things happen, the gun was shooting precisely as accurate as the last time I sighted it in, which meant the finger could

only be pointed one way – towards the Danish Racing Sardine!

We had gained enough knowledge about the upper part of the Dobson to move our paraphernalia up to Reardon. When we found ourselves up there around midday, we went for a look around. Two bulls displayed their position for us and we were about to set off when Pete's old semi worn out pair of binos again got stuck halfway up the mountain. "I see your stag Per, he's standing in the other valley!" Quickly we found the whole situation to be a bit peculiar though. It stood still, no hinds nearby, not even the white tines were moving. The skin even had a bit of dew on it, and it was almost leaning up against the mountain – had I hit it after all?

We decided on sticking to the plan of hunting the two bulls and see where the stag would be when we got to the top. The bulls pulled one on us, and were never to be seen again, but the feeling of joy flushed throughout my veins, as we laid eyes on the stag. It was indeed dead! I could hardly wait to get to it the next day, alarm clock got set to 4am, and the billy had "a round up the spout" ready to boil. Huey didn't fancy my plans and as faith would have it, it bucketed down the entire night and the next day. The river raised a good 2½ feet, and mist had slowly settled in the valley. A hard hut day was had, in fact we took turns reading the bowhunters magazine – the only magazine on the shelf!

The torrential rain eased off during the evening and at night trillions of stars came out, with promises of a fine morning.

Pete and I duly got into our boots, mine being wet, his being dry, and into the river we went. The climb up a mountainside eventually had us standing on an old avalanche with only a crust on top being about three feet thick! We found our way across and started climbing towards the stag from two days back. Andy got the scent of the deer and sure enough there he was, dead as a bunny in Easter time. A real beauty he was, with 8 even tines. The shot was, if anything, a fraction to the rear part of the stag, but everything to keep the machinery going was ripped to pieces, which got Pete and I wondering even more how on God's green earth it was able to stand and graze immediately after the shot, then travel across into the adjacent valley! Shortly after the head-off-the-body experience 11 bulls gave up their position for us. I was stuck in the belief that Andy would not cope with the long stalk. Besides,

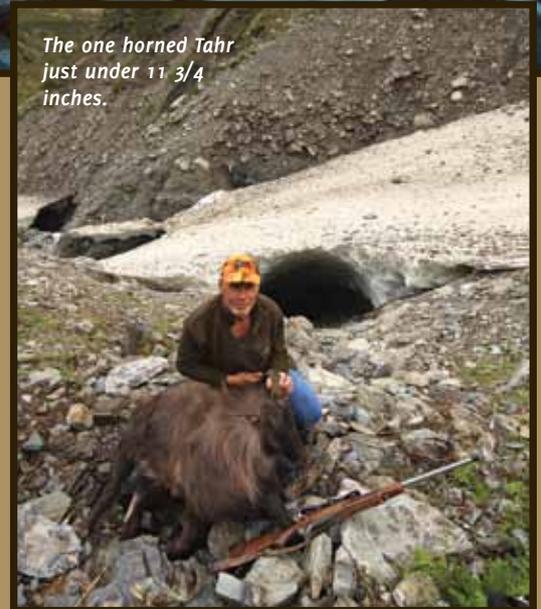
The River proved too high to cross at the end of the day.



The one horned Tahr just under 11 ¾ inches.

I did not intend on hunting with a stag's head on my back, and there was no chance in hell I was going to leave it behind, as I had just got it! I dropped back down the mountain towards Waterfall hut, whilst Pete got into what he does best – climb n' hunt!

Sometime before midnight, Pete came back to the view of a lit up hut, a sight he glanced at great distance. Many hunters who have walked the walk in the middle of the cold nights knows how much it does to your spirit, knowing that the hut is lit up, and the aroma of a fire spreads throughout the valley. He had shot two good bulls on the tops, one being a one horned Tahr. He failed to get to them before the sun bugged off to the other side of the world, another mission, another day.



On the final day we had decided on climbing on to a vantage point to hunt a certain group of bulls. Again we laid eyes on them, and I attempted a stalk which no doubt must have amused Pete a fair bit as I was again seen running around on all fours trying my very best – or worst, to look like a Tahr. It worked until I got up to 350 yards away. They then climbed up the hillside where this particular bull displayed a broadside. My gun found it, I pulled the trigger and sent the bull flying down behind. Next thing I saw, the remaining bulls all leapt out on a ledge and bolted off on a damn near vertical face! Suddenly my bull came staggering behind and out onto the face, Buggar! I had not seen it move and now it was in a place I simply could not get to. I've tried shooting at many things in my life but shooting a bull walking out on 350 yards was definitely in my outer periphery. Nevertheless the magnifi-

cent giant received two bullets that sent him a few drops further down, where he came to a sudden halt, dead. They are truly kings of the Southern Alps.

Pete, me and the now beyond tired dog Andy, met up in the dark and walked home by the light from the moon, reminiscing over another fantastic trip which had been better than any of us had dared to dream of, and the final morning proved to be the cracker of them all. We stopped at the farm and yarned to the farm lady with a promise to be back and heartfelt thanks for letting us into the area. When we arrived exhausted in Christchurch, Andy ran over to my fiancée and planted a doggy kiss right in her face. Pete burst into laughter then said, "The dog ate my shit up there, I was gonna tell ya, but Andy beat me to it!" 🐕

FACTS ON HUNTING IN THE DOBSON RIVER

Permits: Glen Lyon Station, Department of Conservation.

Coordinates on Google earth: 43°53'00.77" S 169°58'06.26" E.

Distances (approximate):

- | | |
|--|-------|
| • From the Station at Glen Lyon to Station hut: | 28 km |
| • From the Station at Glen Lyon to Kennedy memorial hut: | 33 km |
| • From the Station at Glen Lyon to Waterfall hut: | 38 km |
| • From the Station at Glen Lyon to Reardon hut: | 42 km |

Huts:

- Le Crens hut. Private 4 bunks, fireplace, stream water.
- Grough hut. 6 bunks, no fire, water in Main River.
- Station hut. Private 6 bunks, open fire, tank water.
- Kennedy Memorial hut. 6 bunks, fireplace, tank water.
- Waterfall hut. 4 bunks, fireplace, stream water.
- Reardon hut. 2 bunks, no fire, tank water.

Side Streams:

- Stewart Stream
- Camp Stream
- Stoney Stream (no hunting in or South of Stoney)
- Sutherland Stream (no hunting South of this)

Species: Himalayan Tahr, and Deer in most of the valley. Chamois tend to be a rare view in the area.

Level of fitness: If you plan on venturing high, the days are long and hard, and fitness is essential as well as decent climbing skills. In wintertime the snow slows you down a fair bit, whereas in summertime little snow is in the area. The riverbed itself offers easy access to the side streams. Above the Reardon hut, the River gets very gorgy, with big boulders. The River rises rapidly during heavy rainfalls so be aware!

