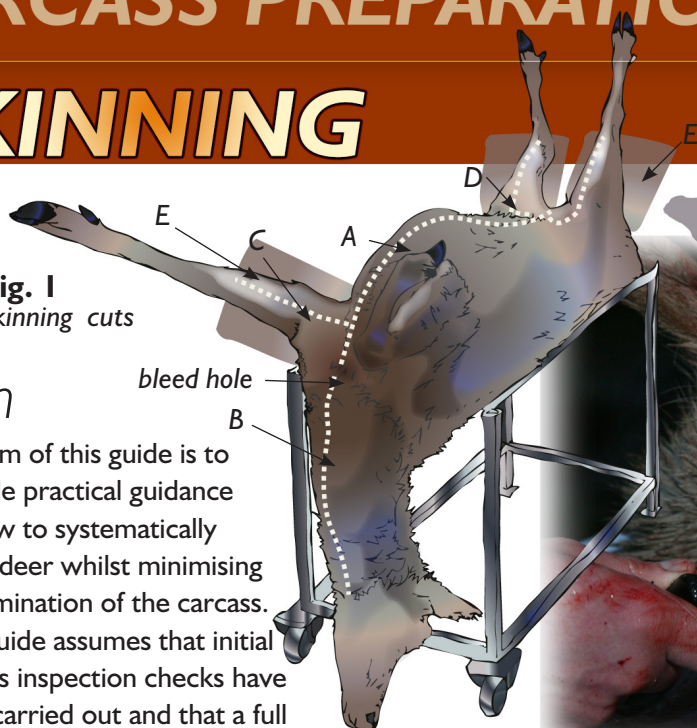




## SKINNING

**Fig. 1**  
skinning cuts



### Aim

The aim of this guide is to provide practical guidance on how to systematically skin a deer whilst minimising contamination of the carcass. This guide assumes that initial carcass inspection checks have been carried out and that a full inspection will have been undertaken by the end of the skinning process.\*

### General

There are many ways of skinning a carcass. The carcass may be skinned on a bench or hanging up. There are also various cuts that can be used. Choosing a technique will depend on the size of the carcass and personal choice but the key element is about creating flaps of skin to pull.

For those who take pride in preparing a well-skinned carcass, the end product should have no hairs on it, no bloody fingerprints, no knife marks, a striped bacon-like appearance on the back and flat joints.

### Preparation

The starting point for this guide assumes that the carcass has been gralloched\*\* and larded\*\*\*. In practice it is easier to skin an animal before rigor mortis has set in.

- 3 Begin by washing down the work area, equipment, hands and forearms.
- 3 Skin the carcass as soon as possible.
- 3 When skinning the carcass, it may be useful to leave the chest and pelvis closed. The pluck, however, should be removed and inspected beforehand. The head and legs may also be left on to assist handling the carcass during skinning.
- 3 Either hang the carcass by each hind leg on two fixed or anchored hooks, or lie the deer on its back on a larder bench (see Fig. 1).
- 3 Work systematically from one side of the animal to the other. It is helpful to have someone hold legs or to tie legs to the bench.



**Fig. 2** (above) cutting from the bleed hole along the sternum, with blade facing away from the carcass;  
**Fig. 3** (below) cut down the inside of leg to just below the hock joint and pull away hide

Equipment:  
Hot potable water  
Round bladed knife  
Protective clothing



**Fig. 4** (below) where tendons and muscle attach to skin, use a knife to free the hide



## Cuts

Figure 1 (overleaf) details the key cuts to be made. The position of these cuts can vary between practitioners and will depend on whether the carcass is hanging or on a bench. The following suggested technique is based on the carcass being skinned on a bench. If skinning with carcass hanging up then make cuts accordingly to allow downward tension on flaps of skin.

The key is to minimise the amount of cuts and ensure that there are flaps of skin for gripping to assist with skinning.

- 2 Keep your hand clean at all times by periodically washing in water. Having a wet hand also helps your hand or fist slide between the skin and the carcass easier.
- 3 Use one hand to hold the skin and to apply tension to peel away the skin while the other hand can be used to break through the connective tissue between the skin and the carcass.
- 2 It is good practice to use the knife to ensure that the skin is being separated from the carcass and not taking a layer of tissue with it.
- 3 To prevent hairs being cut and contamination from hair into skin, make cuts to the skin from inside or underneath the skin outwards (see Fig. 2 overleaf).
- 3 **Cut A:** Cut through skin only over the sternum from bleed hole in neck up to breast bone. Make cut over length of pelvis. Remove penis or udder.
- 3 **Cut B:** cut from bleed hole to under the jaw (this may have been partly done during the gralloching process\*\*). Care should be taken around the neck area to limit the amount of blood spilling onto carcass.
- 3 **Cut C:** Make a cut through skin in a line down front leg knee to chest to join up with Cut A creating a flap (see E in Fig. 1). This rectangular flap can be pulled to create tension.
 

Use hand or fist to push skin from carcass around the front leg.

Pushing an arm between the leg and skin can be used to free skin around leg.

There is an option to cut through skin in a line around the knee. Alternatively cut off leg at flat joint once skinned leaving front leg attached to skin. This provides a weight that pulls the skin away from carcass.
- 3 Use your fist to push the skin away from carcass over the flank. Note a knife may need to be used to help start the separation of the soft tissue

(below) using the hand and the hide's own mass to separate from carcass



around the flank from the belly.

Push the skin away from carcass working as far back towards the backbone as you can.

- 3 **Cut D:** From cut A make an incision down the leg to groin/pelvis area.

Use flaps of skin (see E in Fig. 1) to help skin the back leg as with the front leg.

Use fist to push skin back towards the backbone.

Repeat whole procedure on other side of the carcass.

Hang carcass up. The only area of skin attached should now be the very centre of the animal's back. If there is any skin left on back, work skin towards the tail rather than pulling down as the skin may break. Cut through the tail at anus, leaving attached to the skin.

Pull skin downwards only when over the neck, using a steady pressure. Use one hand to hang onto the carcass, and the other to pull the skin down enough to expose the atlas joint.

## After skinning

- 3 Cut the head off at the atlas joint and make a final inspection of the lymph nodes.\*\*\*
- 3 Check the carcass for warbles and remove.\*\*\*\*
- 3 If carcass has been skinned with the chest and pelvis closed, consider splitting them at this stage. Remove the anus and rectum when the pelvis is split.\*\*\* The benefits of this should be balanced with cutting into the meat and exposing surfaces when there may be no need.
- 3 Leave the carcass hanging in the larder initially to enable the carcass to cool slowly and steadily in the first six hours after skinning. This will ensure the full and rapid onset of rigor and will prevent cold shortening of the soft muscles in the carcass. Thereafter carcasses should be stored at 7°C or below.

\* See BPG Carcass Inspection \*\*\* See BPG Gralloching \*\*\* See BPG Lardering \*\*\*\* See BPG Deer Health