

The Central Victorian Guide for New Members and Hunters

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Why this eBook was written.

Central Vic has quite a large turnover of members. Thinking about why, part of the issue may be that some people join wanting to hunt deer, but never get started. This eBook is to help you get started.

Learning to hunt on your own isn't easy. In Australian Deer Magazine (Jan/Feb 2016), Ken Slee wrote:

“One of the major obstacles to becoming a successful sambar hunter is learning to like the bush and becoming comfortable in it. A heavily forested mountain slope or a cold, fast-flowing river can look very daunting from the road, sufficient to make an inexperienced hunter hold back and really not come to grips with the job at hand.”

And incidentally, when you're standing next to your vehicle looking up that mountain slope for the first time, it's worth remembering that because more light reaches the forest floor and there's more water run-off by a track, the bush is usually thicker there. Once you're in, it's not so daunting.

If you get past this obstacle, sambar hunting is still very challenging.

Many experienced hunters say that at the beginning or at some point you will want to give up and you will have these moments unless you get a lucky start. Stick with it. Time in the bush is the only answer and you have to work it out for yourself which is what makes it so rewarding. (Matt Beattie, Secretary ADA Central Vic)

And remember,

Satisfaction lies in the effort and not in the attainment, full effort is full victory.
(Mahatma Ghandi)

Get into it and stick with it. Stick with deer hunting and stick with the Central Victorian branch of the Australian Deer Association.

This eBook is written for new members and beginners by someone who remembers what it's like to be new and the questions I had. I hope these pages help get you started, make it a bit less daunting, and stick with it. But if you already have experience hunting sambar, I hope you still find something to enjoy in this and at maybe even get a couple of tips.

About the Central Victoria Branch.

Central Vic, has about 180 ordinary (adult) members, plus another 100-ish family and junior members. There may be a dozen different reasons for joining but deer is the common denominator.

The Branch was formed in 1994, 25 years ago, splitting from its “mother branch”, Melbourne. Back in 1994 a number of Bendigo based members wanted to create a branch closer to home. Advertising in the local paper for people interested in deer hunting, the branch was formed.

Central Victoria is a friendly branch, small enough to make it easier to get to know each other and large enough to have facilities and camps for members. But joining anything new, you'll need to “break the ice”. At meetings, introduce yourself; tell them you are new.

Members are quite spread geographically. While many live in Greater Bendigo, Ballarat, Moira or Mitchell Shires, others are in Melbourne and spread all over the State. Clearly, it's not always easy to get to Wednesday night branch meetings for everyone. But the branch hunts are weekends away in prime deer hunting country. Branch camps are a fantastic way to meet and get to know other members and to learn about deer and deer hunting. I learn something new at every camp.

The thing about deer hunters is they tend to be independent; it's not a team sport. To be a sambar hunter, you might walk a couple of km up a spur and along a ridge on your own. You have to enjoy that to enjoy deer hunting. In camp, if you expect someone will take you by the hand up a hill and point to a stag, you'll be disappointed. However, when others see you putting in an effort and having a go, then they WILL help. I think it's like there's an unwritten law that they'll only help those who are prepared to help themselves.

Professor Jordan Petersen (12 Rules for Life) describes some “rules” men impose on each other, including: do your work; pull your weight; stay awake and pay attention; don't whine or be touchy; stand up for your friends; don't suck up and don't snitch; don't be a slave to stupid rules; etc. Without wanting to ignore or discount any of the women and girls among our membership (who are very welcome and encouraged), these “rules” (IMHO) especially apply to deer hunters.

Using myself as an example, prior to my first branch camp, I had done a bit of homework where I thought I wanted to hunt. It wasn't the best place and I was given a couple of better suggestions in camp. Same again at the next camp. In my third camp, without really asking, an experienced hunter took me out with him. It was a long walk over some fairly difficult terrain. The next day (same camp) another experienced hunter took me out with him, hunting independently in the same area. In my experience, you will get help if others see you are trying, so they know if they do help you, their help isn't going to be wasted.



Remember, if someone is taking you with them, they may be sacrificing their own chances of a successful hunt in order to help you. Two people will make 3 or 4 times the noise of one.

There are people who are happy to help you get started in deer hunting and share a good time around the camp fire. But if you are a novice, be prepared to “jump in the deep end”. Once you’ve “jumped in”, I find members are very happy to help. But in my experience, they don’t like “hand holding”, it’s “against the rules”.

Meetings.

Meetings are on the second Wednesday of the month in February, April, June, August and October, plus a Christmas party in November. Come along for a social evening at your club. Meetings include:

- an (optional) **\$8 BBQ**, hunting news, library, raffles, drinks etc
- “Door prize” free entry at each meeting attended, prize drawn at the Christmas party
- Q&A around the room: Where have you been? What have you hunted?
- Deer carcass breakdown/butchering demonstration (venison could be shared)
- Guest speakers and trade demonstrations
- Swap/Buy/Sell night
- Other things of interest, such as first aid for hunters.
- Raffles of items donated by sponsors or other gear bought by the branch
- And there is a library with lots of deer and hunting related titles you can borrow



CV’s greatest member resource is its members. Get involved and get to know members. You’ll make friends and they will be there to help you. The branch also has a “Lead Sled” for free use by members (deposit required), great for sighting in rifles with heavy recoil. At camps there is usually an equipment trailer and in future a portable cool room.

Ethics

As club members, you are required to adopt the ADA ethical standards. The Game Management Authority also encourages sound ethics and the Bureau of Animal Welfare (Vic) has a code of practice. You can protect the future of hunting by hunting ethically and insisting others do too. The GMA says:

Respect your quarry

- Don’t waste. If you are going to take an animal, it is your responsibility to make full use of it. If you can’t do this, should you really be taking the shot?
- Being a trophy hunter does not excuse you from also recovering and using the meat.
- Marksmanship should be of the highest standard each individual can achieve and any limitations respected.
- Firearms must be properly maintained, and the calibres and projectiles used suitable for the task expected of them. Firearm safety must be practised at all times.

Respect your chosen recreation—become a hunter in all ways

- Enhance your hunting experience by learning to appreciate the bush — ALL of it, there is more than deer to see and enjoy.
- The responsibility for promotion of ethical hunting practices rests with all hunters.
- Respect the rights of other users of the environment.
- The real test of hunting ethics comes in deciding when you won't rather than when you will, shoot.

Safety!

Remember, firearms safety begins with YOU

And Don't wear brown in the bush. Deer are brown. Wear something orange. Deer are colour blind, hunters are not.



The Basic Rules:

- Treat all guns as if they are always loaded.
- Never let the muzzle point at anything you're not willing to destroy.
- Keep your finger off the trigger until your sights are on the target.
- Be 100% sure of your target and what is beyond it.

- **A reminder.** Keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction at all times. I once had something catch on the trigger and the rifle discharge unexpectedly. When I'm hunting, until I actually see an animal, I like to have a loaded magazine and empty chamber. At one time I used to like having a round chambered but the bolt handle up. I stopped that practice when I fell and the bolt handle closed when I hit the ground. Some people have a round chambered but the rifle uncocked but in most rifles the firing pin is resting against the primer and a sudden bump may be enough to fire it. This is not a safe practice unless you have one of the few rifles that are designed so that the firing pin is retracted.
- Don't load a round until you're likely you'll be taking a shot. Use the safety but don't trust it.
- When you are climbing over large logs or crossing streams or fences, unload and be careful.
- **Accidents & Injuries.** NZ statistics show the vast majority of accidental shootings are between people in the same party and happen at distances of 25m or less, but more people accidentally shoot themselves than are shot by others (unload when crossing obstacles!). NZ statistics also show the majority of firearm related injuries are caused by the "baby boomer" generation. But injuries from shooting is not the major risk. Most injuries while hunting big game (NZ) come from falls, sprains and strains and carrying too heavy a load.

Equipment

In order to hunt with the branch on branch camps, you **must** have:

- An item of Blaze Orange clothing. A hat is the minimum.
- A handheld UHF radio. (usually someone can loan you one if you don't have one). If you are buying one, get a 5W unit. Lower power units are a false economy. You'll be frustrated with a 2W unit being able to hear talk, but not being able to be heard yourself. And should you need help, you'll want others to be able to hear you!

This is all you need to start hunting. You don't need a firearm to hunt (chances are you won't use it in your first outings, or you can use a camera or just enjoy the experience) but other equipment you may need or want are, from the ground up

...

Day Packs

Day packs don't need to be large. Peter Burke recommends a small one so you can't pack unnecessary gear. You should carry what will save your life in an emergency and then only what you will need for the hunt. The pack itself is best made of a quiet fabric, so it doesn't make a loud or unnatural noise in the bush as you move through it.

Here's a sample list. Some would say it's too much, others carry more:

- Water bottle (or camelback)
- Snacks/Lunch.

- Avoid salty foods that will make you want to drink more. Trail mix, fruit sandwiches or bagels are popular. I like a meal replacement bar, an apple and a UHT milk “breakfast” drink (you’re carrying water anyway, just carry a bit less water if you are worried about weight).
- Head lamp and/or torch. One with red L.E.D.’s is suggested if you want to walk into a location before dawn. Red is less visible to deer.
- Spare batteries
- Toilet paper - handy to mark where you took a shot from as well
- Wind indicator (powder puff one) or cigarette lighter (flame indicates wind, and good for emergencies)
- Electrical tape (to tape over the muzzle to keep debris out).
- Secateurs (to cut blackberries etc - sometimes needed to get to a downed animal or make a shortcut back to cross a creek or get back to camp)
- “Kill Kit”
 - Length of cord (to help hold the animal from sliding downhill etc)
 - Knife and sharpener (butcher type knives are easier to sharpen)
 - Quarter master meat bag and 3 calico meat bags (Moroka.30) and a large plastic garbage bag (can double as a poncho if you are caught out in bad weather)
 - Plastic/Latex gloves
 - Folding pruning saw or similar (to cut the skull to recover antlers)
- Emergency Kit:
 - Personal Locator Beacon (PLB)
 - Water and hydro-light satchel in a zip lock bag to keep dry
 - Firelighters. Either cut pieces of bicycle inner tube or cottonwool and Vaseline work if wet. Have an extra (spare) cigarette lighter.
 - 6-inch glow stick in a pvc pipe - a great back up light source that lasts for 8 hours. The pipe stops it from being cracked until you need it.
 - Small first-aid kit and snake bite kit in the warmer months and a
 - lightweight (foil) emergency blanket.
- 3-4 rounds of spare ammo (also useful as an emergency signal)
- Depending on the season and weather outlook:
 - Extra clothing layer, spare (dry) thermal underwear
 - Light weight rain coat.

Camping with Central Victoria Branch

Each club is different. Here’s how Central Victoria do things.

Central Victoria branch organise camps and provide some gear to make camps more comfortable and members use that as “base camp” for their own hunting. Central Vic does not organise or arrange any hunting, just the camp. Your hunting is your responsibility and at your own risk. Because there are firearms in camp, there is a safety policy that must be adhered to.

Parkinson’s Law says, “work expands to fill the available space”. A corollary is, “camping gear expands to fill the available space”. We have some members who bring in a tandem trailer full of comforts into camp. I have to admit, sometimes my 4-door ute has barely enough room for 2 people. Which is funny when I think about my recent NZ hunt where everything I needed for 4 days was on my back.

The Branch Trailer

The branch will usually (not always) have the trailer with camp ovens, gas BBQ, hotplate over the campfire, hot water (stainless steel keg heated by the fire) hot shower and a few cooking utensils. The trailer also has a large tarp, folding tables, L.E.D. lights powered off batteries (solar panels and generator backup), UHF base radio, maps of the area, first aid kit and other gear.



Depending on what you want to cook and eat, all you need is your own plate, knife and fork. Something to boil your own water in for coffee or tea is useful, but you could get by asking others if you can have some of their boiling water. Personally, I bring an espresso maker, a frying pan, a billy and a small gas burner. But I often never use the frying pan and billy.

What should you bring?

Restating, it's a branch safety policy requirement (and for insurance) that you wear an item of blaze orange (a hat is the minimum) and carry a UHF radio. (see "Equipment").

Something to sleep in. If you only had a sleeping bag and mat, or want to travel light, you could sleep by the branch trailer under tarps. To be more comfortable, bring a stretcher too and your own tarp and a swag if you prefer. If the weather outlook isn't so good, maybe bring a tent. And don't forget to bring a towel (South Park reference!) Some people have a basic set up, others more elaborate and some sleep in the back of their ute. It's up to you.



Lights Bring a headlamp and an extra torch. You should have a headlamp or torch in your hunting gear. I like extra lights for camp and save my hunting headlamp for hunting. That way I can't forget to put it back in the hunting pack or run its batteries down. The branch trailer has batter powered LED lights, but bring your own torch for around camp.

Chair. Something to sit on by the fire - don't forget a camp chair. If it's cold or wet, maybe also a piece of foam mat to put over the chair for insulation or if the chair gets wet.



Salt. The branch trailer has some bags of salt in it for preserving skins for mounting. But it's a good idea to have some salt yourself in your car or ute if you have ambitions of mounting a trophy.

Maps, compass, GPS. Some areas are easy to navigate and are close to roads. Some people go deeper into the bush. Regardless, it's always good to know where you are. A compass and a printed map are a good backup to GPS. See more under "Equipment".

Clothes. I like to have travel clothes, camp clothes and hunting clothes (keep smoke and camp smells out of your hunting clothes, and look semi-respectable going home) and spare boots (mine always get wet). See more about clothes under "Equipment".

Firewood. If you are arriving Friday, if you can, bring a couple of pieces of firewood for the campfire. Usually the guys arriving early haven't been able to cut firewood locally, so bring some for the camp.

Garbage Bags. You brought it in, take your rubbish home.

Spade or Shovel. If you are not camping anywhere with toilet facilities, bring something to dig a hole for your toilet.

Food and water. Bring drinking water unless you are happy drinking river water (generally not recommended). Some members enjoy a beer, wine or whisky by the campfire after they finish hunting for the day, but in moderation. I've noticed a big difference in the amount of alcohol consumed in a deer camp compared to a duck or fish camp. Deer hunting is a lot more physical. You're not going to hunt well if you are feeling a bit under the weather from imbibing the night before.

Depending on your choice of food and relying on the branch equipment, you may not need much of your own cooking gear. While I actually carry more, I really only need a knife fork spoon, plate, bowl, mug, a billy and something to wash them with. And hand cleanser. The branch has folding tables, but I still like to bring my own.

	My typical food	Others' typical food
Friday Evening	Supermarket (rotisserie) chicken with pre-packed salad	BBQ meat with canned vegies, heated on the camp fire or BBQ hotplate.
Breakfasts	Instant Porridge satchels (x2) Coffee	Eggs and bacon on the BBQ hotplate
Lunch & snack (hunting)	Fruit Aldi Meal replacement bar 250ml breakfast drink	Fruit and trail mix or nuts Muesli bar Sandwich or bagel etc
Evening (cooking after dark – keep it simple)	Can of chunky beef soup, add a can of beans, garlic and chilli. Cheese and crackers Another favourite of mine is pasta (shelf stable ravioli or similar) with a can of sauce and parmesan cheese). Remember the branch trailer has camp ovens. I've used them to cook pizza, bake jacket potatoes and you could roast meat (venison) too.	Same as Friday, or packet pasta or other? Something savoury around the fire (often someone has venison salami or jerky)

Some things I like about branch camps

Branch camps aren't just for novice hunters. They are great for all members. The locations are picked as good spots to hunt and camp.

Well known deer hunter and author, Peter Burke had some tips for new hunters:

"the best thing a new hunter can get out of ... [ADA] ... is they have a willingness to show you things, an example is ... branch hunting! What a wonderful opportunity for someone who's just taken up deer hunting, to come and mix with other deer hunters and to find someone - there'll be someone there [to help you] - deer hunters are like that these days. It's not like it used to be when they didn't help you. These days they'll help you. And they show you. That's a BIG thing".

Some of the benefits of camps (not just for new hunters) are:

- Set Dates I don't know about others, but in between family birthdays, my wife's birthday and our wedding anniversary (both in prime hunting months), work commitments and other things (deer season also seems to be the season for nieces' engagement parties), my calendar can get pretty full. Weeks can drift into months and I haven't gone hunting! But branch camps are on my calendar. They are a weekend I can block out and say, "that weekend, I'm hunting!"
- Meet new Friends. Since getting active in the ADA, I've met a lot of people I like and would like hang out with. I'm looking forward to sitting around a campfire with them. In business, I used to avoid any mention of hunting (not anymore!). But from time to time when I come across someone else who hunts, we have an instant connection. I think we each feel that we've found someone we can relate with, someone with whom we don't need to worry about political correctness and we can relax with. A

club is where you'll meet like-minded people and camps are where you'll get to know them and make friends.

- **Learn and Share.** The future of deer hunting depends on there being ethical and responsible deer hunters. These days, as Peter Burke said, club members will help you and show you.
- **Assistance.** When you shoot a deer kilometres away from a road, you'll appreciate being in a camp with people to help recover your trophy and meat. (But remember, if you ask for help with a carry-out, it's an unwritten rule that you share the venison)
- **Safety.** If you're part of the camp, you'll tell others where you intend to hunt. This is partly to keep others out of your hunting area, but also for safety. If you don't come back at your expected time, the others in camp know where to start looking for you, or at least move closer for radio contact to see if you need help with a carry out, a bogged car, or something worse.
- **Facilities.** It's not the "Wonnangatta Hilton", but Central Victoria Branch provides a bit of comfort in camp so members can travel with a bit less gear themselves. At the time of writing, our portable cool room/trailer is under repair and out of service, but should be back soon. When it's in camp, it helps keep meat from spoiling.