

The demand for hunting on private land is growing throughout New Zealand and so too are the businesses that cater to this demand. On the other-hand we are aware that some Kiwi hunters do not agree with paying for the right to hunt of any kind and many more have opinions in between these two. We feel, as New Zealand's oldest and most established hunting magazine, it is our job to bring you the hunting options so you can make up your own mind. Feel free to send your opinion to info@nzoutdoor.co.nz.

MANAGEMENT HUNTING

Poronui is to Sika deer, what Dry Creek is to tahr, and Dingle Burn is to Red deer. All are iconic private properties that are forever linked to these top big game species. Of the trio, Poronui was the last ranch I finally got to visit, and yes I was excited to see with my own eyes what I had regularly heard other hunters talk about.



Arrogant Sika stag

Poronui Ranch is a historical hunting property that rightly deserves its place as one of New Zealand's best stalking locations. It was the site of the first release of Sika deer into New Zealand in the early 1900s, and because of this liberation this deer species today is numerous throughout the surrounding Kaimanawa, and nearby Kaweka Mountains. This 16,000-acre North Island property is still the premier place to hunt a trophy free-range Sika stag, and if evidence is required just read Neil Philpott's articles, and drool over what his clients shoot, or have a look in the Stables complex where there are two mounted local heads on the wall. The Ranch is just 30 minutes drive from the tourist town of Taupo, and smack dab in the middle of great hunting and fishing opportunities.

Owned by the North American Westervelt chain of Sporting Lodges, the Poronui owners have placed their faith going forward in the hands of great Kiwi staff. I immediately met three key people. Steve Smith is General Manager; Eve Reilly is Lodge Manager; and Mark McGlashan, jack of all trades in respect to farming and guiding. All are enthusiastic, affable, great ambassadors for the property, and very professional.

The ranch is long in shape, covered in eucalyptus and native bush with striking buildings appearing roughly at each quarter waypoint. Near the impressive gates is Poronui Lodge: the main guest accommodation and hospitality centre, while further along is The Stables, an impressive guest leisure centre complete with dining room and sunken wine cellar. At the halfway point is rustic Red Hut which features on the logo; at the three quarter point is Blake House, the impressive, stately home of a previous owner, and at the far end of the property is the Safari Camp where most Kiwi and Australian hunters stay in relevantly pampered comfort. The Taharua Stream runs down the length of the property and the famed Mohaka River skirts the boundary near the Safari Camp.

Poronui features often in this magazine as Steve Smith has opened the Poronui door to Kiwi hunters and tried to get the message out there as much as possible. He wants to work in with New Zealand hunters rather than appear a closed-door international destination only. Readers of the magazine also want to know how the collared Poronui Sika stag release programme is going. In a word; great, with information showing that Poronui is the land

based equivalent of a well populated Marine Reserve, providing in the rut trophy stags for surrounding public land hunters. Poronui grows them, feeds them, lends many stags out in the roar, and then gets the survivors back to fatten up again.

Unlike top rated Ngamatea, which has both free-range Red deer and Sika, Poronui has only Sika, so there is no hybridisation occurring, making Poronui Sika genetically pure, and a huge national and international hunting attraction.

The only Red deer that do live here are behind wire in a massive 3,000-acre game estate, which caters mainly for international hunters seeking Red deer stag, Fallow buck, Sika stag, and Rusa stag. Poronui Game Estate is one of the few game parks in New Zealand where wild deer are attacking the wire fences to get in because there is less competition in the estate than outside it, and more food. Poronui has a great free-range population of deer and consequently management has to occur in order to maintain a healthy population. Driving down the main road early one morning we were nearly skittled several times by retreating free-range deer filtering back to the forest from their feeding grounds.

ON PORONUUI

Written By
Greg Morton



Cheeky Rusa spiker.



Mark McGlashan and management Sika Stag.

Management or meat hunts on Poronui are guided; either 2 or 4-day safaris, and hunters stay at the Safari Camp, which is extremely well equipped. Hunters can target management stags, or just concentrate on surplus meat animals.

Prices are: (November-April)

Management or Meat Hunts:
2 or 4 days, Safari Camp, Guide, Food, Drink, NZD \$900 (2 day) or \$1,700 (4 day) pp.
Trophy Fees: Management Stag (Red or Sika): NZ\$1,500; Meat Animal: NZ\$200

At this price a hunter on a two-day all inclusive trip shooting a good management stag would pay \$2,400 and \$1,300 if he shot no stags and two meat deer for the freezer.

The purpose of my Profile article on Poronui was to describe management hunting so I hunted both for a management stag and a meat animal and wily hunter Mark McGlashan was my guide. To up the stakes Mark and Steve wanted me to try and shoot one particular Sika stag that carried a distinctive 6 point head. No pressure: find one animal in miles of scrub and bush. Sika deer can hide under a handkerchief. One positive card on

my side was that I was visiting during the roar, and the target animal was an old dominant male who would be busy doing his thing, and making a lot of noise in the process.

The particular stag we were hunting was a management problem, because his dominance meant his antler genes were being carried on in offspring, he was successfully chasing away from the hinds better antlered stags, and his big head was catching the eye of clients and guides, then disappointing them with his 6 points when they stalked in closer. On our very first night out stalking we saw him in the gloom eyeballing us at about 500 metres. While the hinds with him fled for cover he just arrogantly stared us down, then stiff legged strutted after his girls. One nil to him, but game on, as we now knew where he was hanging out. The following morning we checked out the gully where he had run into but no deer were around. Mark then showed me around the game estate where I observed numerous trophy Red stag, Sika stag, and Fallow buck, and one cheeky Rusa spiker. The rut for all species was in full cry so roars, squeals, grunts, and snorts echoed through the hills.

Later in the day we snuck back to the big boy's gully but listening to him donkey bray was our lot. He was making a lot of noise in the thick bush at the gully head so obviously had some girls with him. Other stags and spikers appeared periodically around the edges, but all were respectful to the unseen, dominant stag, and gave him a wide berth. The next day we went hunting amongst the eucalyptus trees, seeing numerous deer, and some good stags. It was here that I took several photos of a stag whose antlers were just promising enough to earn him a management reprieve. I had seen him sneaking along behind a hind, and gave a squeal to catch his attention. I was amazed at the reaction.

He spun around and began a stiff legged prance at my position. He went past at just ten metres, eyes bulging, neck puffed up, and hackles raised. My last photo was of him staring hard at me to see what sort of rival I was. A puff of wind broke the deadlock, and he evaporated back into the scrub. That evening we checked out another spot and just on dark an opportunity to score a hind presented itself. Walking back to the truck a head jerked up from a scrubby gut and stared at us.

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The next day was my last day, and after another failure in the morning it was coming down to the wire. Our boy was still holed up in the same patch of bush, but was not leaving it for anyone. Mark had tried several tactics so far and I was impressed by the way unsuccessful plans were quickly ditched and a new one tried. Sometimes guides can doggedly adhere to a failing plan for too long and go home empty handed.

Our last afternoon/evening hunt involved sneaking into position about 250 metres from the bush the stag was located in and just waiting for him to appear. Time ticked by and two big 8 pointers appeared, but no dominant stag. Even the 8 pointers were too nervous to enter the bush. With twenty minutes of light left Mark changed the plan one last time. He would go into the bush and see if his proximity pushed the stag into the clear. It was a long shot but worth a try. Squeals and groans had been regularly occurring all afternoon but after he entered the bush it went quiet. Finding a rest I waited for something to break the deadlock. Deer on the edge of the bush began fleeing into thicker cover, then on a narrow ridge I spied a long, wide antlered stag running in a pig-like manner with head down along the ridge spine.

I quickly counted the points, and realised it was the ghost I had been hunting for a week. He knew his patch, because rather than leave the bush he was skirting Mark's position and intended cutting under him and back into the scrub.

It was a fat hind, just begging to get a free ride on my back.

I was off-balance and standing awkwardly so getting off a shot was no easy task. With her neck finally located in the scope I squeezed off a shot. The shot and a periphery blur happened simultaneously and I turned round to find Mark grinning, and shaking his head. "Too slow," was his dry comment. Apparently as I fired she ducked down and exited right, so no venison for me. She showed her displeasure all the way back to the truck by squealing abuse at our intrusion into her world. I was quickly learning that Sika deer hunting can be a hard day at the office.



Mounted local Sika head

To do this he would have to turn broadside once and as soon as that happened, with a wing and a prayer I squeezed the trigger. It looked like a miss, as rather than collapse he changed direction and ran fast up a steep open face. Desperately working the bolt for a last shot, I was relieved to glance up and see him suddenly rear over backwards and tumble dead down the hill. By the time I reached his position Mark was standing there waiting for me. He had seen it all and was impressed when the rifle shot cut down the legend in full stride.

It was a massive stag, with an incredible winter skin which later on became the best trophy of all. Trevor Chappell did a magnificent job of tanning it and it looks great hanging on the wall. Trevor has a tanning business, well known in the Taupo area, for curing skins and cleaning trophy head skulls. If interested he can be contacted at Great Lake Tannery: Taupo: Phone 07 377 0163.

The antlers were a mix of fantastic and disappointing. They were 31 inches long, 26 inches wide, had brow tines 12 inches long but broken bey tines, and no inner tops. He was obviously a fighter. The Douglas score was still about 170, because of the length and width, and long brow tines. This was about as big a management stag as you could get.

The antlers stayed with Mark, Eve, and Steve, as this boy was well known on the property and his headgear is part of the continuing history of Poronui. I felt a bit guilty having ended the reign of this local identity. Poronui is a spectacular place and has to be one of New Zealand's best all round outdoors destinations. To reinforce what I had experienced Forbes Life Magazine, the home page of the world's business leaders online, recently named Poronui the ninth best fishing lodge in the world.



Tanned trophy Sika stag skin.

Author and management Sika stag.



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