

Fur handling tips, beaver - fleshing

One of the things we see people having the most difficulty with and questions about putting up is beaver. I hadn't put up very many beaver for quite a few years, and just started handling enough again a couple years ago that some of the old lessons started coming back!

I'm going to try and give you some basics that I hope will help those of you who are faced with the challenge of putting up beaver for the first time. I've never had the patience to clean skin, so we're going to start out with a rough skinned beaver.

There are two important tools you need; one is a good, smooth beam, I use a plain old six inch wide beam like you can get from any trapper supply house, and the other is a good sharp fleshing knife. By sharp, I mean sharp enough you could skin with it. I had Post make one a few years ago that was about a handle width longer than his stock knife. I needed a knife that would hold a good edge, and didn't have a slippery round plastic handle. We thin down a lot of heavy pickled skins in the tannery with it, and it does a nice job. For pushing flesh off with the dull edge, it's a little too flexible, but does work. I also bought one of his stock size fleshing knives this season, and it would be O K if I didn't have the longer one, so it does spend its share of time on the shelf.

Since we're using a real sharp edge you need to make real sure there is nothing on the beam, and no lumps or clumps of anything in the fur, every one of these is pretty much a guaranteed hole. The beaver in the pictures was drummed in sawdust, that's why you see some dark spots, I got a little close skinning and there was nothing to flesh off, so a little sawdust is stuck to the skin. Drumming in sawdust will help dry the fur, but it can also tend to make little tiny clumps in the under fur wherever there might have been a little bit of grease, pitch etc. in the fur, so you need to be even more careful if you drum your fur.

Now that you have a clean fur, clean and smooth beam, and sharp knife it's time to start fleshing. Start right at the ears with the knife lying almost flat on the skin. Start working a strip down over the shoulders by "slicing" with a sideways stroke as you go down the back. Don't try to take real long slice, just open up a spot down to the skin, then gradually lengthen and widen it. Once you start to get a spot open, you'll find it starts fleshing off easier as you go.

No matter what you are fleshing, it's a lot easier to work into an edge when cutting off meat or fat. You'll notice that by the time you get about to the middle of the back, the skin will start to "pouch" as you're fleshing, don't go any further at this point, you're about to cut a hole.

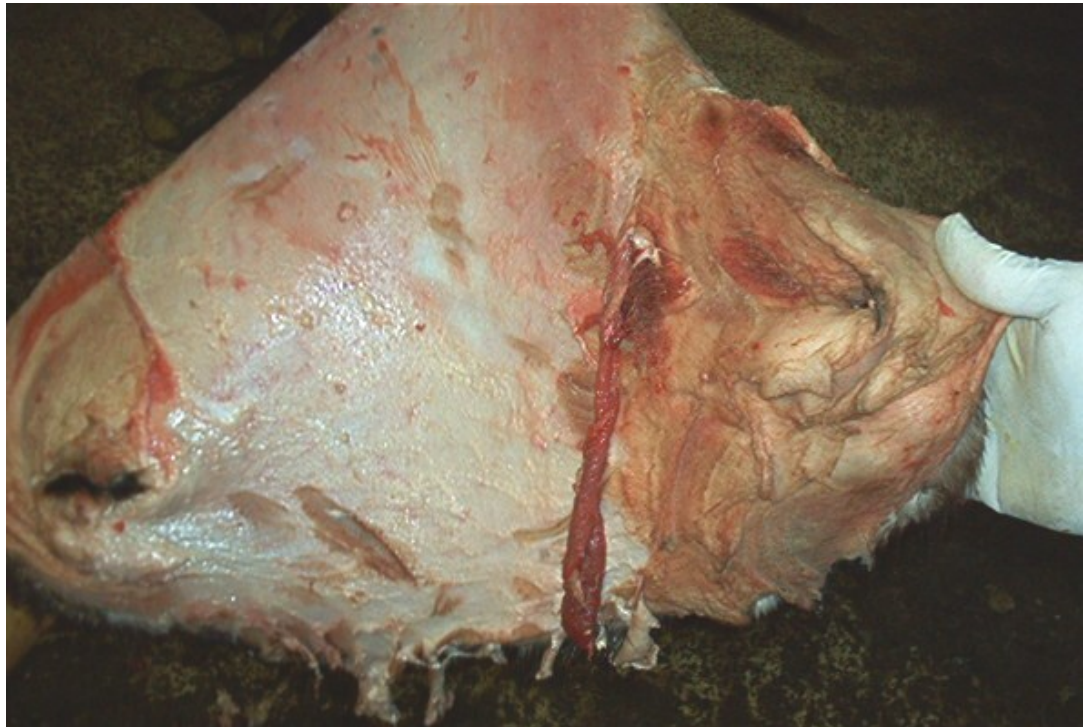


Instead, shift the beaver over to one side or the other a little on the beam, and work into the meat again just like you did down the middle of the back. As you get it fleshed about as far over as the front leg hole you'll notice a little layer of fat under the red meat, and it will start fleshing much easier. When you are far enough to the side that you see this, you don't need to go any farther, you'll push this off with the dull edge later. When you have gone to both sides, about half way down you're ready to move the skin.



I should note now that when you're using the sharp edge of the knife you should be using very little effort. If you're bearing down and pushing, you need to sharpen the knife.

Now pull the beaver up the beam and repeat what you just did down to where the gristle is over the tail base. Don't try to go clear out the end in the middle of the tail, it will pouch and cut easily if you try to go through the middle of the gristle first. Instead, shift the skin over by one leg hole and slice off the gristle on the edge of it, close to the leg hole first, then keep shaving it off working in from that edge, see the picture that shows it shaved from one leg hole about half way to the other.



After you finish shaving off the gristle, now you're ready to do a little pushing with the dull edge. Turn the skin and push the fat and meat off right over the back leg hole. Don't fight the little bit of fat left on the edge of the hole, you're going to trim it later anyway.



Pull the leg hole down over the point of the beam and push off the fat under the leg. You want to get the edge clean from here along the belly up to the jaw, the tail end and jaw and nose will be trimmed like the leg holes, so don't get real detailed on them.

Finish working up the one side and down the other until you're back to the other back leg, this should all be able to be pushed off with the dull edge. If you have to push so hard that you're leaving dark spots on the skin from the point of the beam, you've still got a little meat that needs to be taken off with the sharp edge. The meat and fat you see in the next picture is all basically on the belly and will push off easily, be careful of the teats, especially the ones right under the front legs.



The last picture is the skin fleshed and ready to stretch. Don't worry about tags you see hanging; they'll be trimmed after stretching. This beaver was the worst scarred one of the year so far, had to pick it didn't I!

