



LOUISE AND VERN PEARSON, pictured with their daughter Danica, own and run a full-time studio, Sika Country Taxidermy, in beautiful Taupo, New Zealand.

SHOULDER MOUNT

T A H R

by Louise and Vern Pearson

Sika Country Taxidermy Taupo, New Zealand

More great reference of Himalayan tahr can be found on pages 122 of this issue. The New Zealand Taxidermist Association offers a great CD with over 100 tahr reference photos taken by Louise Pearson. Order one for your studio through the Web site www.nzta.co.nz.

Himalayan Tahr (*Hemitragus jemlahicus*) in New Zealand: A mature bull tahr's body is dark brown to black in color with the belly urine-stained to a rusty yellow color. But most impressive, and as much a trophy in itself as the horns, is the mane of a mature bull: It is most spectacular in the rut, and best from May to the end of August with magnificent long, straw-colored hair that can be up to 30cm (12 inches) long. The greatest challenge facing a taxidermist is to get the mane to stand up like rays around the sun. Only a live mature bull tahr masters this to perfection.

A mature bull can weigh as much as 150kgs (325 pounds) in some cases. A nanny is much smaller than a bull and weighs up to 50kgs (110 pounds), with her winter coat a grayish dark-brown.

Horn length over 11½ inches (29 cm) would be considered a trophy, but some can grow up to 16 inches long. The age of an animal can be determined by the growth rings on the horns. Some bulls broom their horns like certain sheep species in America, so horn length is not always a sign of the age of an animal.

Himalayan tahrs' preferred habitats are craggy bluff systems above tussock areas in the region of 5000 to 7000 feet in altitude, but they can be found lower down in the steeper alpine bush areas as well. The preferred areas vary with the changing of the seasons.

Because all the game animals we have in New Zealand have been introduced, and it is our government's policy to eradicate them all (they've tried using professional hunters, shooting from helicopters, and poisoning, but the animals still remain!), we have no hunting seasons and are free to hunt our game species year-round.

New Zealand is one of the few places in the world where Himalayan tahr can be legally hunted, and this is why a large number of overseas hunters visit New Zealand.

MOUNTING PROCESS

Living in New Zealand on the other side of the world means we taxidermists often use alternative materials to those used in the US, as shipping and import regulations don't make it cost-effective or viable for us to import some products. The same issue comes into play when we talk about mannequins, and as a consequence we have sculpted all our own New Zealand species, and modify these to fit individual animals.

This particular bull tahr that we are mounting was shot in late May, which is the rut for these animals, and sported an impressive set of 14-inch horns and a beautiful long mane, which is very distinctive for the mature male of this species. In order to make the most of both features, we decided to enhance the turn at the neck, hence bringing out the horns and making the characteristic mane stand out.

The mane is notoriously difficult to re-create as it appears in real life, as the hair stands like rays around the sun, and is most spectacular. When mounted, gravity tends to take over and the mane hangs down. We have found that it is very important to have a very accurate form to enhance this feature. Skin alignment and meticulous grooming are essential to gain this in a finished mount.

1. Measurements of the skull revealed a shorter and narrower face than that of our mannequin, which we were going to use.



2. So we started by marking where we were going to cut out a wedge, also shortening the face behind the lip line as the lip line didn't have to be shortened. The face was then split down the middle, cutting out a wedge, and the muzzle was cut off. This is easiest to do while the face is still attached to the body of the mannequin. The last thing was to saw off the head at the neck joint.

3. In order to put the turn on the mount we wanted, 3 wedges were to be cut out, flipped over, and glued back on with automotive filler. Numbering the wedges made it easy to do without mistakes. We use auto filler (similar to your Bondo) as glue.



NOTE: When deciding how big the wedges had to be, it is important to remember that the effect doubles, e.g., an inch-thick wedge gives you a two-inch effect when flipped.



4 a b. The skull was cut through just above the eye sockets to match the mannequin, and 3 holes were drilled and countersunk in the brain area. This is the strongest part of the skull since the bone in the forehead of a tahr is very honey-combed and not particularly strong. The skull cap was then secured to the man-

nequin, and the areas where flesh was removed during the cleaning process were replaced with paper clay. Particular attention was paid to the horn bases to enable a good fit for the skin.



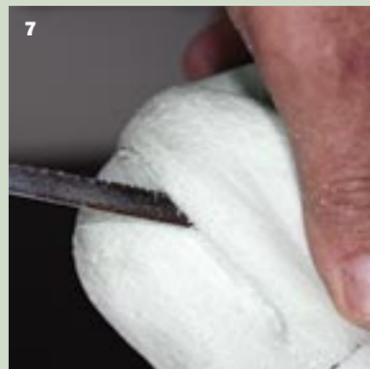
5. It is worth remembering that the angles of the positive set eye sockets in the form were changed by taking a wedge out, and this will need to be corrected.



6. Finally, all wedges were assembled and glued together again. When gluing the muzzle back on, we line up the top of the nose and rasp off the bottom of the cheeks and jaw to obtain a natural shape.

The surface of the mannequin was ruffed using a stout ruffer and coarse sandpaper. Eye sockets, nostril holes, and ear butts were ground out using a Dremel tool. Indentations in the ear butt areas and eye sockets will make it easier to get the clay to grip later on. On our commercial work we complete the nose interior during the finishing process.

7. A lip slot was cut with an old blade from a jigsaw, which had been locked into an Xacto knife handle, making a handy little tool. The lip slot was widened and smoothed with a flat ruffle file, making tucking of the lip skin easier. This slot was only 1½ - 2 mm wide.



8ab. The skin was drummed in dry sawdust to remove moisture and clean the hair. It was then prepped by thinning the lips, eyes, and nostril skin. We use a Piranta knife for this and prolong the usage of the blades by sharpening them on a paper wheel. We sewed up all holes where necessary using clear monofilament in the face area and braid in the body of the skin. We use a simple roll-over stitch for this.



9. Making sure the skin at the edges of the ear had been opened right up, we removed any loose fibers, then blew the ear clean using an air compressor, removing any sawdust left on the skin from tumbling. This also lifted the fibers which gives a better adhesion for the Bondo.

We prefer to do Bondo ears on our mounts as we find them quicker and more cost-effective to do compared to earliners.



10ab. When mixing the Bondo we added chopped up fiberglass matting to the mix, which gave the ears extra strength, making it possible for thinner, yet still strong ears.



11ab. Squash the Bondo to the tip of the ear and poke a little hole in the tip to relieve any trapped air inside. Use the palm of your hand to obtain an even thickness all over, put grooves on the back of the ear according to the reference photos by your side. We can't stress enough how important it is to have good reference. Have it close by while you are working, so you can cross-reference while shaping the ear.



12ab. The very edge of the ear was flattened further with a hammer just as the Bondo catalyzed. We then trimmed off the excess at the ear butts before it cured fully.



13. We use Tohickon IQ series eyes for all our mounts. The backs of the glass eyes were filled almost flush with paper clay (a product we get here in NZ: clay with paper fiber added). Then the glass eyes were set in the eye sockets, making sure to level the pupils.

14. The upper and lower eyelids were built up with paper clay.

Taxidermy is an ongoing learning process. After attending a seminar last year by Ken Walker, a renowned Canadian taxidermist no doubt known to all *BREAKTHROUGH* readers, we now add some clay to re-create what he called the ruminant swell on the top of the eye sockets. It was amazing to see the difference this could do to a mount!

15ab. As a rule of thumb, earbutts are the same size as the widest part of the ears, so two balls of paper clay were rolled to this diameter. These were pressed into the based of the ears to form the earbutts. We tend to shape the muscle details on smaller ear butts once the mount has been sewn down the back line.



16ab. We use a dextrin-based hide paste which we make up ourselves. A layer of paste was put onto the form and skin while avoiding the seam area. This enabled us to have enough glue so we can taxi the skin into the correct position, which is crucial to get the mane to stand.



17. The skin was placed on the form and T-pinned into position. The skin was then sewn up using 20-pound braid with a baseball stitch, 5 millimeters apart. Skin alignment was checked and the excess skin was cut off. The skin was secured to the base board of the form with a pneumatic stapler using 18-millimeter stainless steel staples.



18ab. Clay was added to the nose pad – we always do this to give a nice, fleshy appearance. The nose skin was positioned and lips were tucked. The nostrils were plugged with Glad Wrap (cling wrap) to hold the skin in position while drying.



19ab. A 2-millimeter roll of paper clay was put around the eyes under the inner eye skin and tucked in. Once again, this gave a fleshy looking eyelid. The eyelids were positioned and a pin in the front corner of each eye held everything in place while it dried.



20. Ear butts were positioned and all was checked against reference. The skin was nailed around the horn bases for drying.

The mount was now hung on the wall to dry, and over the next two days we checked it for any movement as the clay and glue hardened, ad-

justing as necessary and re-grooming. We find it important to re-groom the hair on tahr a few times during the drying period. It took around two weeks in our climate for it to dry sufficiently to finish off.

Once dried all nails and pins were removed. Inner ears, nose, mouth, eyes, and any other areas that needed to be airbrushed got a once-over with a soft wire brush to remove excess glue, etc., to prep it for the paint process. We thoroughly cleaned the whole mount with compressed air, removing any sawdust trapped in the hair.



21. When using Apoxie Sculpt to re-create the inner nose interiors, a scooped modeling tool, a soft paintbrush, and wet cotton buds are useful for sculpting and smoothing out the surface.



22abcd. The same materials and tools were used for filling between the eyelids and glass eyes, building up the nictitating membrane, re-shaping the bottom lip, and any gaps around the horn bases. The bottom lip and horn bases were textured according to reference photos.

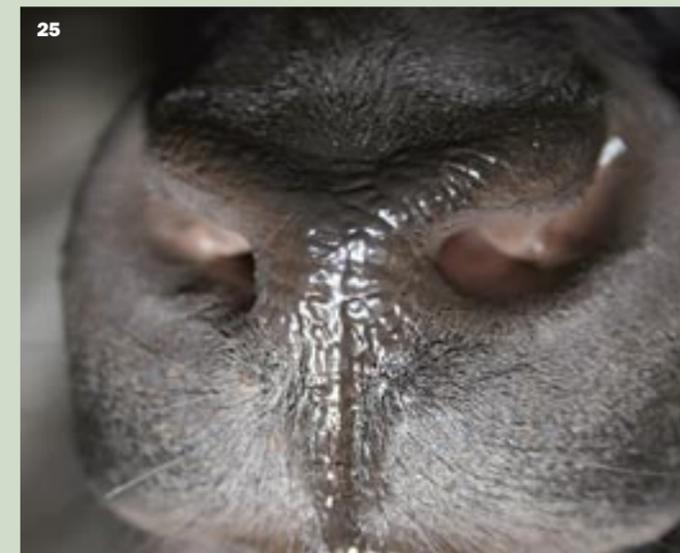
23. The last thing to do before airbrushing was to build up the nodules on the nose pad. We use Van Dyke's Flexible Fin Finish and a small syringe for this, using the pattern on the nose pad as a guide and reference photos to see how pronounced the dots should be. The dots should vary



in size and thickness, depending on their location on the nose pad. Tip: if your nose nodules "bleed" together, do every second one, then once these are dry, do the rest.



24. When the dots were dry, a coat of Flexible Fin finish was applied to the whole nose pad and bottom lip to give it a uniform appearance (so they were not so pronounced).



25. The paint schedule was as follows: Wildlife Colors: Dusty Rose in the inner nostrils holes, Chocolate Milk in the inner ears, around the eyes, and surrounds of the external nostril holes. Raw Umber at the horn bases, inner eyelids, and nose pad.

Warm Black on nictitating membranes. Clean the glass eyes by breathing on them so you can see the moisture settling. Let it penetrate for a few seconds, and rub the paint off with a toothpick, taking care not to rub the paint off the eyelids. Any fine tuning can be done with a needle.



26ab. Clean the glass eyes with a cotton bud soaked in methylated spirits. Rub off any overspray from the hair with a toweling rag and blow off any dust with an air compressor.



27. The last thing to do was to gloss the inner nostrils, nose pad, and the eyeballs using an airbrush to achieve a nice, wet look. We used Cabot's Acrylic Gloss for this: it is milky in color but dries clear.

With the aid of good reference, any competent taxidermist should be able to produce a convincing mount. The New Zealand Taxidermy Association is in the process of producing comprehensive reference CDs and DVDs of all our New Zealand species (the tahr is available now). Contact www.nzta.co.nz.

28. This is the finished mount. ■

