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Safe Practical Deer Yards



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Foreword

Deer farmers are business people. As such, they understand better than most the devastating impact of injury: not just on themselves, but on their workers, their families, and their own capacity to remain in business.

Unfortunately, deer farming is an industry where there is a significant risk of serious injury, typically to the upper body. Fractures, chest and head injuries, concussions and soft tissue injuries happen from time to time.

Each year ACC spends a significant amount on rehabilitation and compensation for injuries in deer farming.

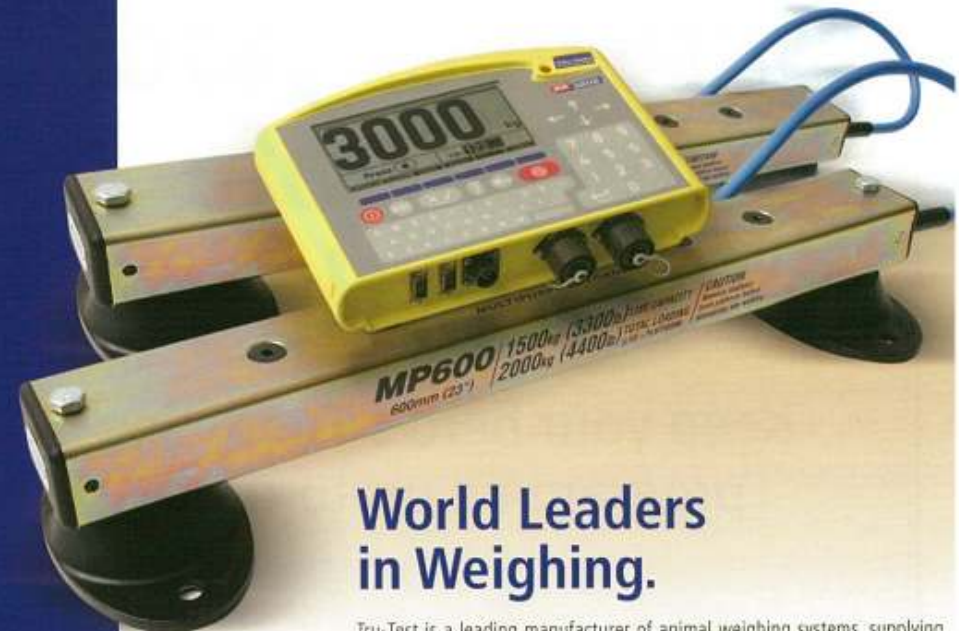
But it's not just a question of dollars. As everybody who has suffered a serious injury knows, there are some things that can't be compensated. Much better to avoid injury in the first place.

Fortunately there are things people handling deer can do to manage risk, if not eliminate it entirely, and AgriQuality is to be congratulated in producing this booklet which provides some good strategies for doing so.

John Wallaart
Programme Manager
ACC Injury Prevention



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Preface

During the early 1980s some enterprising and innovative farmers, looking for a new challenge, pioneered deer farming in New Zealand. This followed a change in the law in the late 1970s which allowed the capture of feral deer from Crown land and some private land, with permission, to specifically approved deer-fenced enclosures. These enclosures had to be inspected and licensed by the NZ Forest Service in conjunction with MAF. This new venture rapidly developed in the first decade into commercial deer farming as we know it today, earning hundreds of millions of dollars in export returns annually for NZ.

Deer farming in this country has come a long way from those early days of live capture, when courageous men in helicopters recovered wild deer from the high country of both the North and South Islands. They virtually set up the foundation stock for deer farming and breeding units as we know it today – selling on to other prospective farmers who gradually, over many years, developed a new industry with a big potential.

Along with that development the need quickly arrived for the improvements to deer fencing and the development of better and safer yards for working with farmed deer. This booklet endeavours to illustrate some of the tried and proven developments that have evolved over recent years to deer yards. The necessity for a safe constraining area to work with deer, especially for the many tasks required for good management and animal health, has brought about extra challenges for today's modern-day deer farmer.

The work bench of the yards, the race, is discussed and illustrated in some detail in this booklet as it is the area where a lot of hands-on work with deer can be carried out efficiently.

To provide a safe working environment is of prime importance for the safety of those working on your property. This is especially so with deer, which are flighty animals and can move extremely quickly, when aroused, frequently without warning. This often results in injury to inexperienced operators, especially in poor facilities.

Well-designed yards, and races, can almost eliminate injury when used to full advantage. They actually speed up throughput and make working with deer an enjoyable experience. No one gets hurt, and it is also much safer for the deer as they flow better through the shed and find yarding less stressful. This becomes a win, win situation for all concerned.

Acknowledgements

The yards on the cover of this booklet were designed and built by Noel Cudby, Kapiti Deer Services, Waikanae.

The other yards and race displayed were built by John & Dale Poulton of Levin. (Their race was based on the Cudby design.) Photos of deer crushes and loading races were taken at the properties of Peter Adlam (Waikanae), Jock Richmond (Te Horo) and Russ Beban (Levin).

I am extremely grateful to all of these gentlemen for their co-operation and contributions to enable this booklet to be published. Last, but not least, thanks must go to AgriQuality staff for layout and for arranging sponsorship and promotion.

On behalf of AgriQuality, I also wish to thank the sponsors of this publication for their endorsement and support.

Leo Cooney
AgriQuality Limited

Legal Requirements

Deer farmed in an enclosure, or fenced area, are farmed animals, just like any other livestock, in a farming enterprise. Farmed deer are subject to the same Acts, Regulations and requirements for animal welfare and human safety as any other livestock enterprise on a farm.

Deer yards are a place of work, and workers and other deer operators must be protected from serious injury.

The Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992 (Section 16) places a strict obligation on the following people:

- The owner, lessee, sub-lessee, occupier, or person in possession of a place of work, and people in the vicinity of the place of work, that they are not harmed by any hazard that is or arises in the place of work.

This places a clear responsibility on people in this position to provide a safe environment for those working with animals in a place of work.



Warning Sign

Safety & Benefits



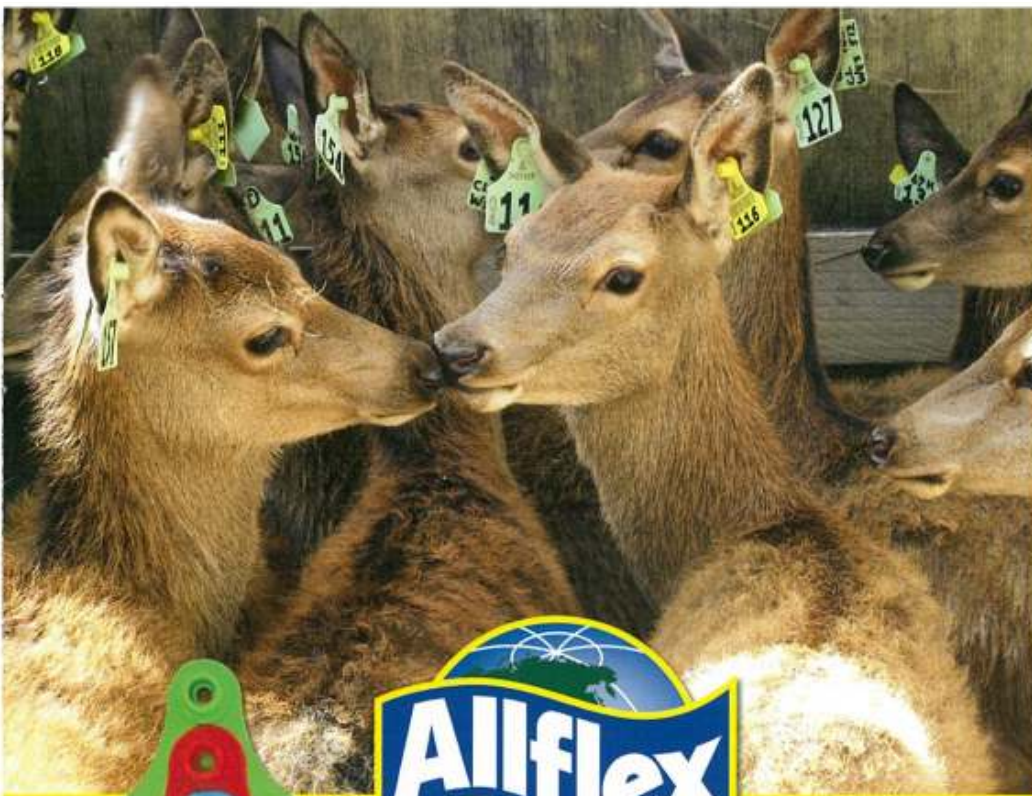
This small booklet contains tried and proven race and yard plans for handling red & hybrid deer. The race is not designed for fallow deer. It needs considerable modification of the race area to be suitable for handling fallow deer. (Race plans for fallow deer can be purchased separately from some AgriQuality Farm Network Offices.)

The race is designed with safety in mind to help avoid injuries when working with deer. The design of the race and construction is suitable for such tasks as:

- Clipping and injecting deer for tuberculin testing
- Vaccinating
- Blood testing
- Pregnancy scanning
- Administering supplements and anthelmintics
- Sedatives for velveting
- Ear-tagging
- Weighing, and many other uses.

The operators stay on the outside of the race in a safer environment, thus reducing significantly the risk of accidents.

Good yards save time, result in less stress for the deer and the operators, and make a potentially dangerous job much safer. They also reduce labour costs, save time and add value to a property, thus becoming a sound investment.



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Conclusion

In conclusion, it is hoped you will have benefited from taking the time to read this booklet and study the plans and pictures published. Working with deer need not be a rodeo and four-ringed circus, where macho men wrestle with deer to achieve the same outcome as can be achieved with more safety and in less time with good facilities. It is pointless getting smacked up and in many cases seriously hurt as part of a day's work. A better result can be arrived at very easily and safely with well designed yards.

Many people are seriously hurt in New Zealand each year working with deer and many accidents are not reported. Most of these accidents would have been avoidable had good facilities been provided. These accidents are not just bad luck, they are preventable.

If the publishing of this booklet goes some small way towards preventing accidents and serious injury or, in the worst scenario, a fatality, then it has all been worthwhile. Working with deer in good facilities can be a pleasant experience for both the operators and the deer. Enjoy your deer farming and look forward to the future without injuries.

Leo Cooney
AgriQuality Limited

For a charge of \$20 (GST & postage inclusive) a DVD is available of the Number 8 Wired TV programme (screened 22 July 2004), demonstrating deer being clipped and tuberculin tested in one of these races. This can be shown on your PC or DVD video.

It also features an interview with Noel Cudby, the designer of the race and yard plans in this booklet, discussing the benefits of good deer yards. Enclosed also with this package is a CD with printable, A4-size plans and diagrams of those featured in this booklet, produced in PDF file format. These can be printed from a PC or Laptop printer.

For further information freephone 0508 00 11 22.

Choosing a Site

This is an extremely important decision. If you get it wrong, you will probably always have difficulty mustering your deer into the yards and the deer shed.

The following suggestions should be considered.

- The yards and shed should be sited on a rise, or elevated ground, with good natural drainage.
- The yards should be sited away from noisy traffic areas. Check with your local Authority the minimum distance that the loading out chute has to be from the roadway or road verge. This may vary between local Authorities. Check also for any building consents/permits that may be required in some local Authority areas (eg. Resource Management Act).
- The yards should be sited so that deer will flow easily into them. (This requires considerable thought and a study of the terrain and environment.)
- Advice should be sought from an experienced stockman with knowledge and experience to help make these decisions.
- The yards should be easily accessible by deer transport trucks/trailers for loading in and out. (They should be sited so that a good all-weather track can be provided for this purpose.)
- Yards should be centrally located on the property if the unit is large. (The reason for this is that deer will not have to be driven long distances to the facility. Better use will also be made of the yards if they are in close proximity and not away up one end of the farm.)
- Availability of electric power. (In making the decision to use a central site on the farm, consideration should also be given to the availability of electric power for lighting and driving electronic equipment, eg. deer clippers used to shave the injection site on the neck for Tb testing.)

(Portable generators can be used as an alternative but must have a high enough output of power for lighting the shed and any other electrically powered equipment.)

Yards & Shed

What is best? Many types of yards and sheds have been built over the years. Some work better than others. A growing percentage of yards are very safe, but many are poorly designed and are just danger traps. This booklet attempts to highlight some of those better yards and the good features that make them safer and easier to work in.

The circular yard plan on the cover of this booklet works extremely well. It takes advantage of the fact that deer (having a longer flight distance than most other farmed animals), will move better in circular yards where they will try and get away from you by disappearing around a corner. They also provide many pens, gates and options for sorting the deer, which work extremely well and are relatively easy to build.

Other shaped yards can work well also (such as the rectangular designs) providing the same principle is used. Square pens should have corners built across so that they are bevelled at 45 degrees. This prevents the deer piling up in the corners. If 100mm x 25mm boards are used with 100mm gaps to do this, they make an ideal escape ladder in each pen or yard corner.

The Lead In Race, to the Shed

This race is approximately 3.8 metres wide and connects the holding paddock to the working yard near the shed.

Some cover, such as shade cloth or shrubby trees on the outside of this race, can be a huge advantage as it makes the lane look more like an escape corridor. Deer will be less likely to dive into the netting if trying to escape. Many deer have broken their necks this way, hitting the netting at speed at an acute angle. Providing some cover on either side helps to avoid this and helps to keep the deer flowing into the yards. This may require double fencing to prevent deer from browsing the foliage. Select evergreens and make sure they are non toxic to livestock.

A strong, well-hinged 2 metre high x 3.7 metre long, diamond mesh, galvanised steel gate with treated plywood rivetted on the inside, makes a safe, quick-closing yard gate. The latch on this gate must be very strong and should be the quick, self-latching type. It must never let go once latched. The top hinge dog should be reversed to prevent the gate from being lifted off the hinges. If frightened, deer stampede back out of the yard (which often happens if they get spooked near the shed), and it can result in a very serious accident if gate failure occurs at this point. This has happened where a mob of deer suddenly hit the gate when someone was trying to latch it or innocently standing behind the gate, thinking they were safe. Several tonnes of venison hitting the gate can be hard to stop. Slow, clumsy latches or chains are dangerous and should not be used on yard gates.

Buy the strong, galvanised, quick self-latching, cattle-yard-type latches, which will withstand the pressure. They are available from most farm supply merchants.

Safety Tips

Well designed yards go a long way towards preventing injuries when working with deer, but they must be used to full advantage. Careless use can still result in unnecessary accidents. Use them intelligently.

- Don't work with deer during the roar or breeding season.
- Wear a strong protective helmet, overalls, steel-capped leather boots, shin pads or leather chaps and protective padded vests when working in pens with deer. (Forestry boots or chainsaw boots can be worn as an alternative to shin pads.) A cricket box should be used to protect from kicks in the genital area. Deer have extremely sharp hooves. They can attack using their front hooves like a rotary hoe and catch a novice very easily, often inflicting lacerations to the face and head of the unsuspecting victim. This is very common in hinds with bad natures. Some will bite as well in the attack, which can result in serious injuries.
- Do not get in pens with bad-tempered stags.
- Use shields if you have to enter pens to manoeuvre quieter stags, and always have a planned escape route. It is a good idea to leave a pen door ajar leading back to another pen in case you are attacked. If you can manoeuvre them from outside of the pen, then that is by far the safest way. It may take longer, but so what!
- Don't work with deer (especially stags) in deer yards on your own in case you get hurt and need assistance. Keep in contact with someone, it may save a life.
- Stags should be sedated or given local anaesthetic (under veterinary supervision) before velvetting or removing soft antlers.
- Fit strong gates with strong hinges and latches. Hinge lugs should be pinned or the top hinge dog reversed to prevent gates being lifted off their hinges.
- Have a well stocked First Aid Kit and book available in the shed for injuries.
- A cellphone, landline phone installed at the shed or an RT back to base can save a life in an emergency.
- For serious injuries, do not move the patient except if it is absolutely necessary. Check ABCs, airway, breathing and circulation. Treat any obvious injuries.
- Let an attacking animal escape and make the area safe for the patient.
- In an emergency dial 111 and ask for Ambulance service.
- Try to accurately describe the type of injury and your location (GPS if known and rapid number).
- Give the number you are ringing from if possible and your name. (Emergency services may need to get back to you for directions to the scene of the accident or to give you advice on First Aid for the patient.)
- Try to keep the patient calm and apply first aid where required until help arrives.

Construction of Yards

Holding yards near the shed can be built from deer netting but will need the posts closer together than paddock fencing as more pressure will come on the fences nearer the shed. Therefore the deer fencing posts should be no more than 2 metres apart around holding yards. Deer netting should be at least 2 metres high to prevent escape. Where the ground is on a slight slope, the netting may need to be higher on the lower side than the standard 2 metres.

It is helpful to fix shade cloth to the outside of the netting so that the deer can't see through it. This helps prevent them from diving at the netting in an attempt to escape. If they can't see out, they will not try to go through the netting. This will prevent deer breaking their necks in a futile attempt to escape.

The internal race and working part of the deer yards should be covered and sheltered from the weather. It is not necessary to have a roof over all of the yard area, but the forcing pen areas and race should be under cover to provide a dry working environment. Extensions of the roof, over other parts of the yards, can be added at a later time. Your shed roof plan should allow for such an extension.

A good roof should have some clear plastic corrugated sheets to allow some artificial light into the working areas of the shed. Deer will run from the dark to the light much better than going from light to dark. Lightened areas look more like a clearing to deer. Make use of this feature to assist movement of the deer within the shed. The old idea of dark sheds to pacify deer is no longer any advantaged with quieter, farmed deer.



Construction of Yards

It should be the objective of every manager to breed from quiet, high-producing stags and hinds. Temperament in deer over the past 20 years has proved to be hereditary, just like it is in cattle. The aim of every breeder should be to consider this along with other attributes when culling and selecting breeding stock. This results in deer that are much easier to handle and won't upset other deer through stress.

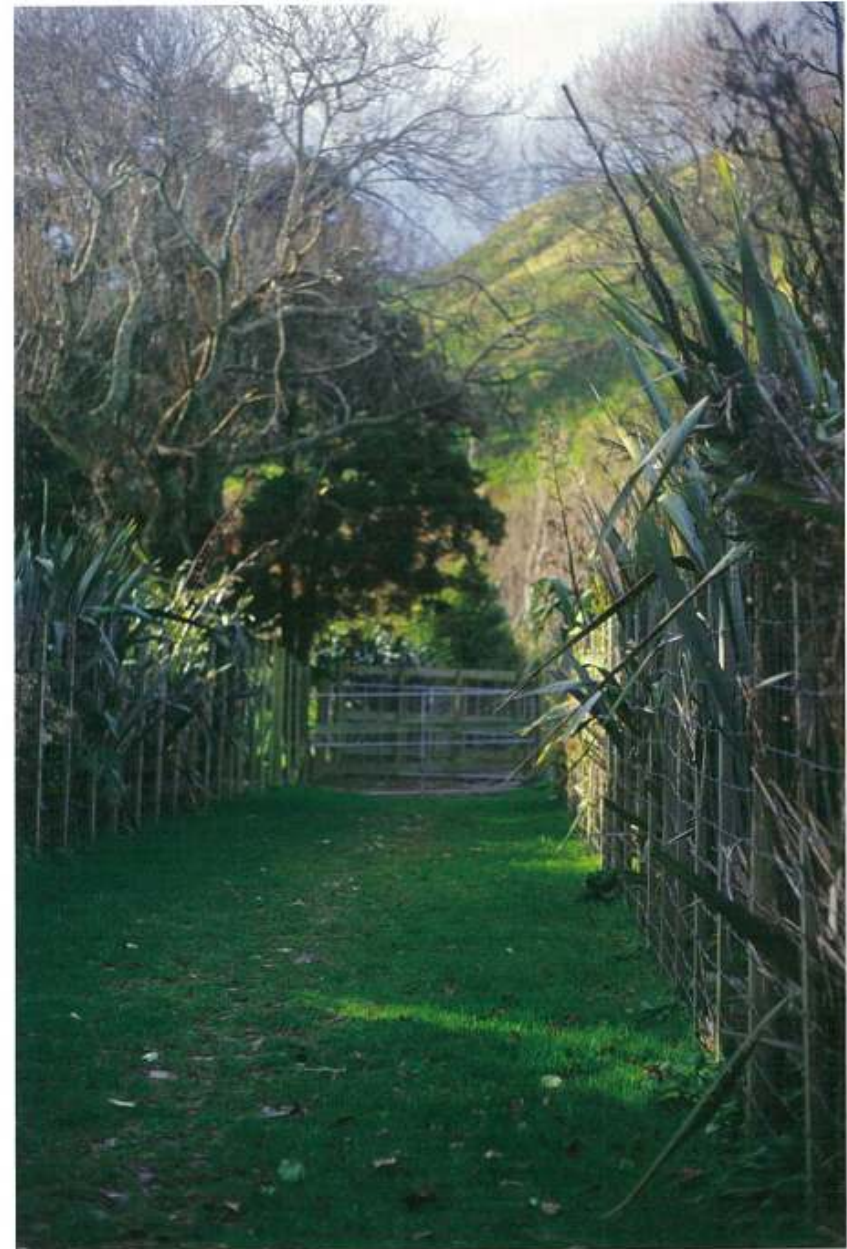
Padded Squeeze Crushes

These crushes are required for immobilising stags for velvet removal and other work requiring restraint. The sides are padded and are hydraulically operated to gently squeeze and immobilise the stag standing in between. They work very effectively but are quite expensive.



Another less expensive model on the market is shown in the picture below, which has no hydraulics and makes clever use of leverage to squeeze and immobilise the deer. One side opens like a big door and as the stag is driven in the door is brought around alongside and then the padded sides can be ratcheted in to squeeze the animal and immobilise it just like the hydraulic action. These squeeze crushes are less expensive to purchase and are proving very efficient.

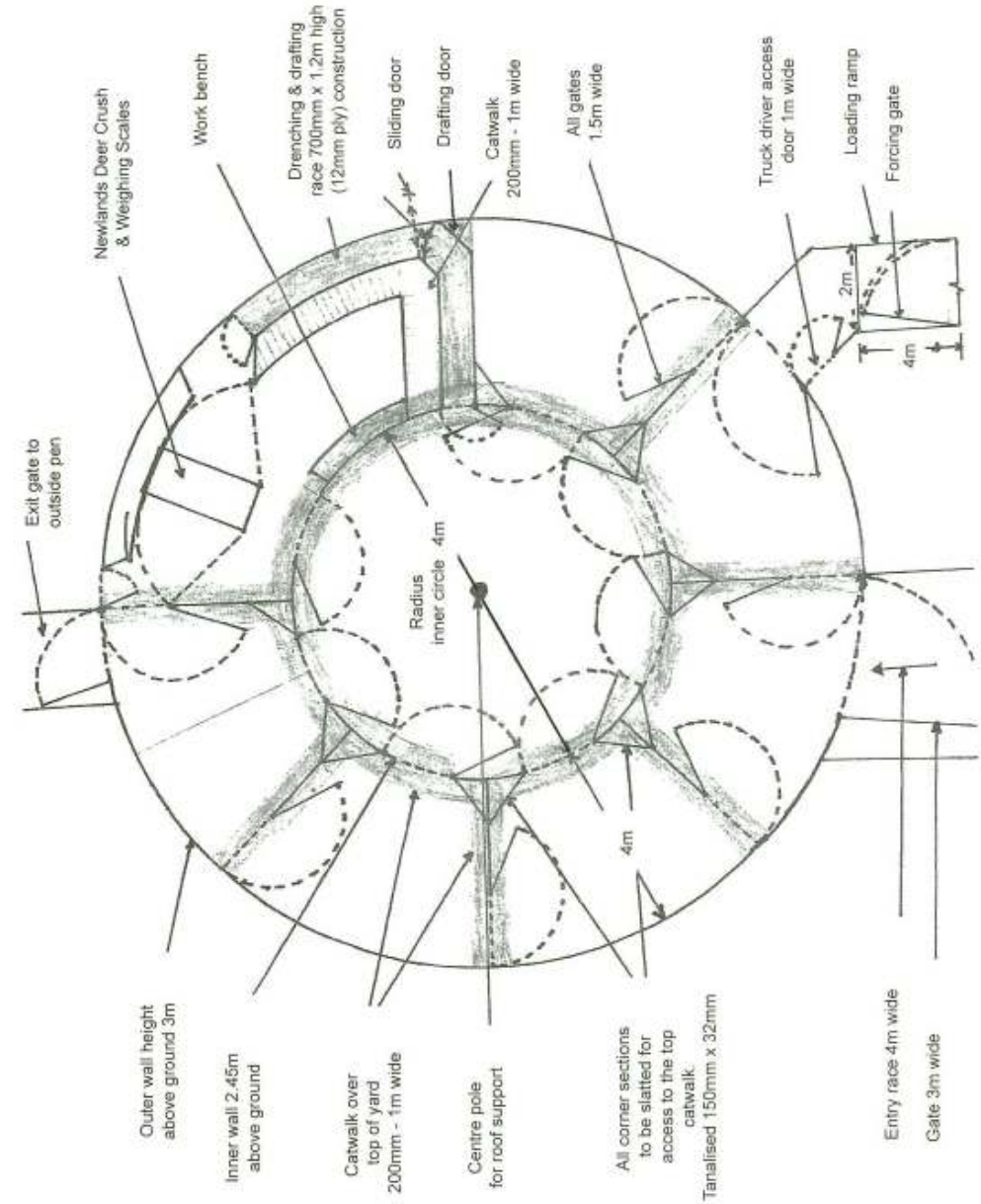
Release is by virtually reversing the procedure.



The Lead In Race, to the Shed

Loading Trophy Stags

For loading trophy stags, it will be necessary to have a race that is at least 2 metres wide to accommodate a full head of antlers. This may require building a second race alongside, purpose-built for loading them. This chute will also need to be height adjustable.



Types of Sheds

You then need to decide on the type of shed you wish to build. As can be seen on the front cover of this booklet, the shed does not need to be huge and a 4m x 5m shed will cover the horseshoe-type race quite adequately. The gable-type roof can be extended further out over the yards if required.

Some very good deer yards have been built in converted hay sheds or barns, in which suitable pens have been built from good working plans and constructed in the existing shed. It is a good idea to concrete the floor area of a shed when all the yard and race posts are put in place. Have a slight gradient for drainage towards the drainage area and cross score the concrete to prevent slipping.

The gates and pens should be at least 2 metres high so that deer cannot jump over and escape. On the inner walls (inside an existing shed) 1.8 metre high strong plywood sheets have been used very successfully over the 100mm x 50mm studs, with a 100mm gap at the bottom. Alternatively, six by one boards (150mm x 25mm) spaced at 100mm horizontally have also been used very successfully. These have the advantage of providing a ladder for you to climb away from an attacking stag.

If starting from scratch it is a good idea to look at a suitable plan and build your shed with the dimensions to cover the main working areas of the shed and some of the holding pens, allowing for further expansion at a later date.

When planning your design, be mindful of the fact that deer tend to run better when races are curved and are not long and straight. As mentioned earlier, it has been found that deer run better around corners, as they think they are getting away from you, so use this to your advantage when constructing races and pens. Corners of yards and pens should be curved or bevelled and not be at sharp right angles.

Various types of materials have been used for constructing deer sheds, but whatever is chosen must be robust and able to withstand severe knocks.

Corrugated iron (provided it has no rough edges) is a suitable outside cladding for deer sheds. The inner walls of a corrugated iron shed are best covered with strong plywood up to 1.8 metres high, or horizontal boards to the same height. This also strengthens the shed to withstand deer.

Other suitable sheds have been built from standard wooden framing lined on the outside with vertical board, or strong tanalised plywood or weatherboard materials. Whatever is used, it should preferably have a smooth surface and be robust and capable of taking sudden knocks.

Internal dividing walls can be built from 100mm x 50 mm timber framing studs and lined with sufficiently strong plywood on either side. Plywood provides a smooth surface for the deer, yet it is robust and helps to prevent injuries to both deer and operators.

Narrow escape doors should be located strategically in forcing pens and corridors. This allows an easy escape for operators from charging animals. These plywood gates need to be at least 400mm wide and on spring, self-closing hinges. These escape doors do not have latches so they will open instantly either way for a person escaping from a charging animal. They should be placed strategically in the forcing pen to allow escape and in pens that have no other means of escape. These safety escapes are most important when using flat material for lining the pens such as plywood. (Don't fence yourself in without provision for an easy escape from a charging stag.)

The Loading Out Chute

Deer transporters come in various types from purpose-built trailers to the larger, specially designed truck crates. All of these different modes of transport have decks which are at different heights for loading. A height-adjustable loading out chute is a necessity. This is to enable the loading floor of the ramp to be adjusted to meet the floor of the transporter. The deer then load much easier and will not get hurt jumping on or off.

Counterweights on the outside of the head of the race are attached by way of ropes and pulleys, similar to the old window sash principle, making adjustments a one-man operation.

(Note the sides are solid and the deer can only see straight ahead when loading.)

This design also loads light cattle very successfully. The support bars may need to be strengthened for heavier cattle.



Latches

Gate latches must be strong, yet easy and quick for an operator to open. They should be designed and fitted in such a way that deer cannot accidentally open them.

Beware of spring-loaded latches that let go when a wall expands outwards under pressure. Many serious injuries have occurred in deer and cattle yards when this has happened. You could be saving a life by fitting safe, dependable latches and making sure the walls of the shed are solid. Walls should not move or flex under load. The construction is inadequate if they do and needs a builder's urgent attention.

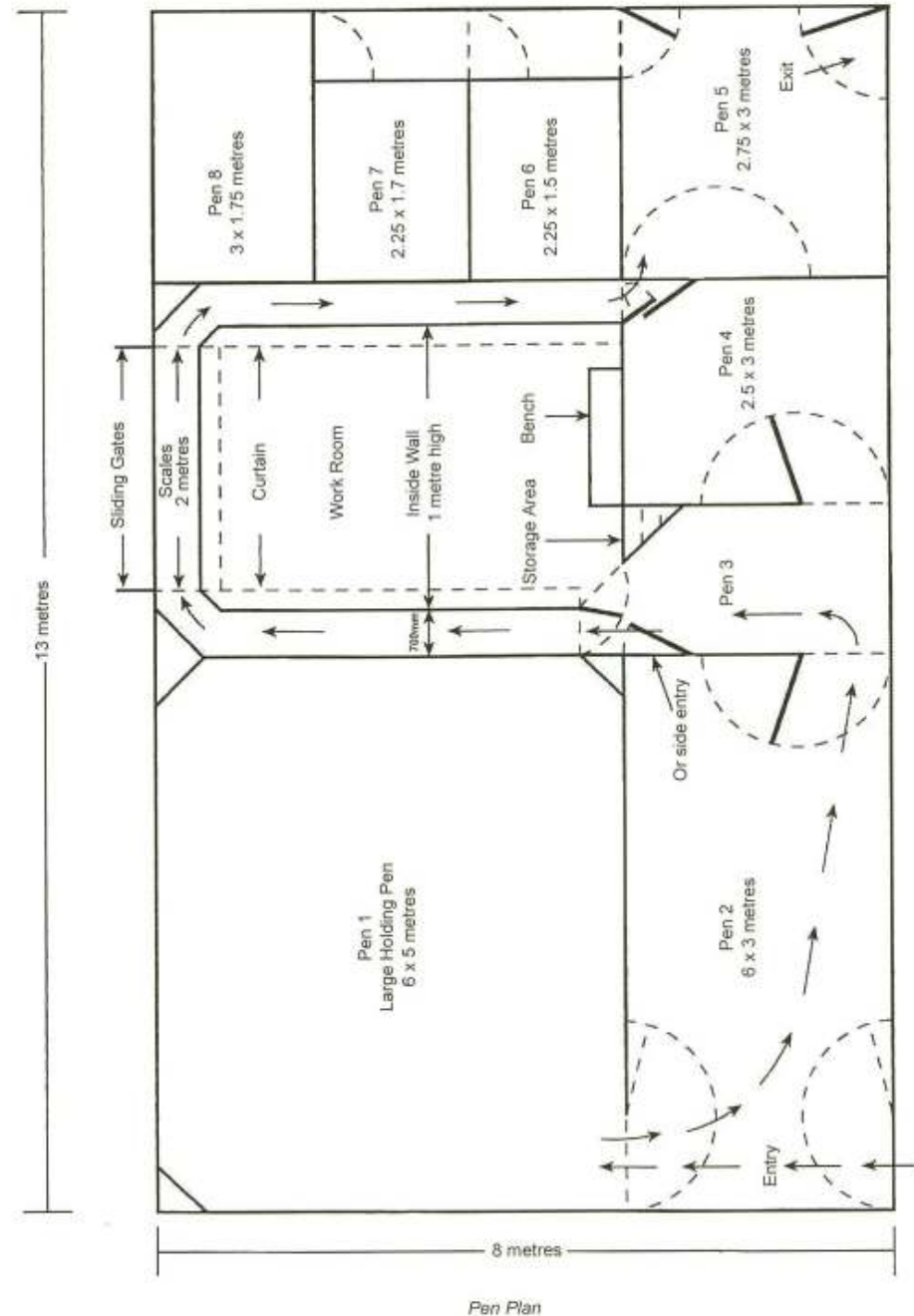
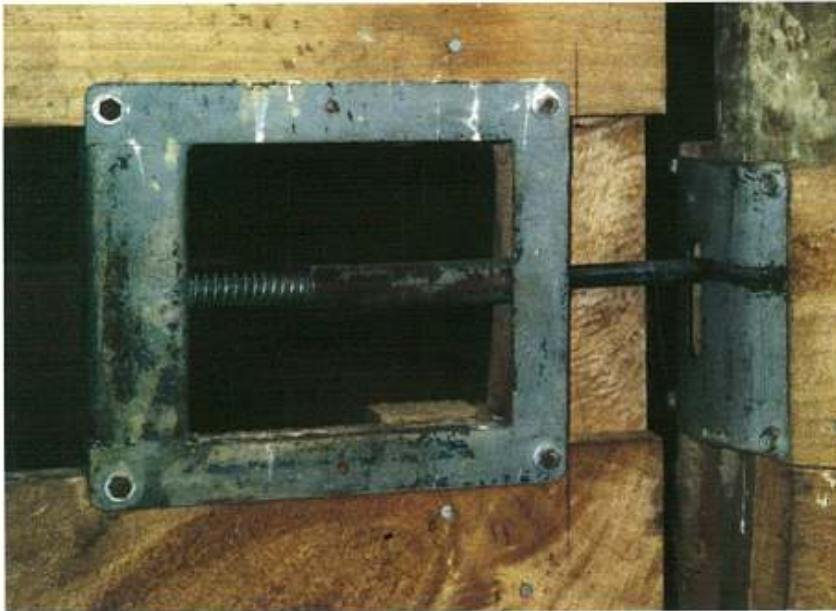
The Cudby recessed, spring-loaded type (patent pending) like the one in the picture below, works extremely well and is designed especially so that deer cannot open them accidentally. A person, however, can open and shut them quickly and safely with ease. They also have the advantage of being quite easy to fit into an existing gate and if fitted properly will not let go under pressure.

When deciding on a latch, consider how it will stand up to impact and mauling by stags trying to escape.

Good latches should be:

- Strong
- Quick and reliable to operate
- Unable to be accidentally opened
- Non hazardous to stock and operators.

Wire or chain latches are too slow and can be downright dangerous.



Gate Construction and Hinges

Gates should be made from strong material that won't sag and can take severe knocks. Some gates are made from four by one timber like the gate below. Note there are no gaps between the boards. This helps to prevent deer climbing the gates and also prevents them from getting their feet stuck through the gates if they do try to climb.

Three millimetre thick (25mm x 25mm) square metal tubing or galvanised 25mm water pipe has been used very successfully to make gate frames.

Strong, four-ply plywood can be pop rivetted on with steel rivets to make a very strong, robust and effective gate. The hinges can be welded easily to the pipe frames. These gates are very durable and work well.

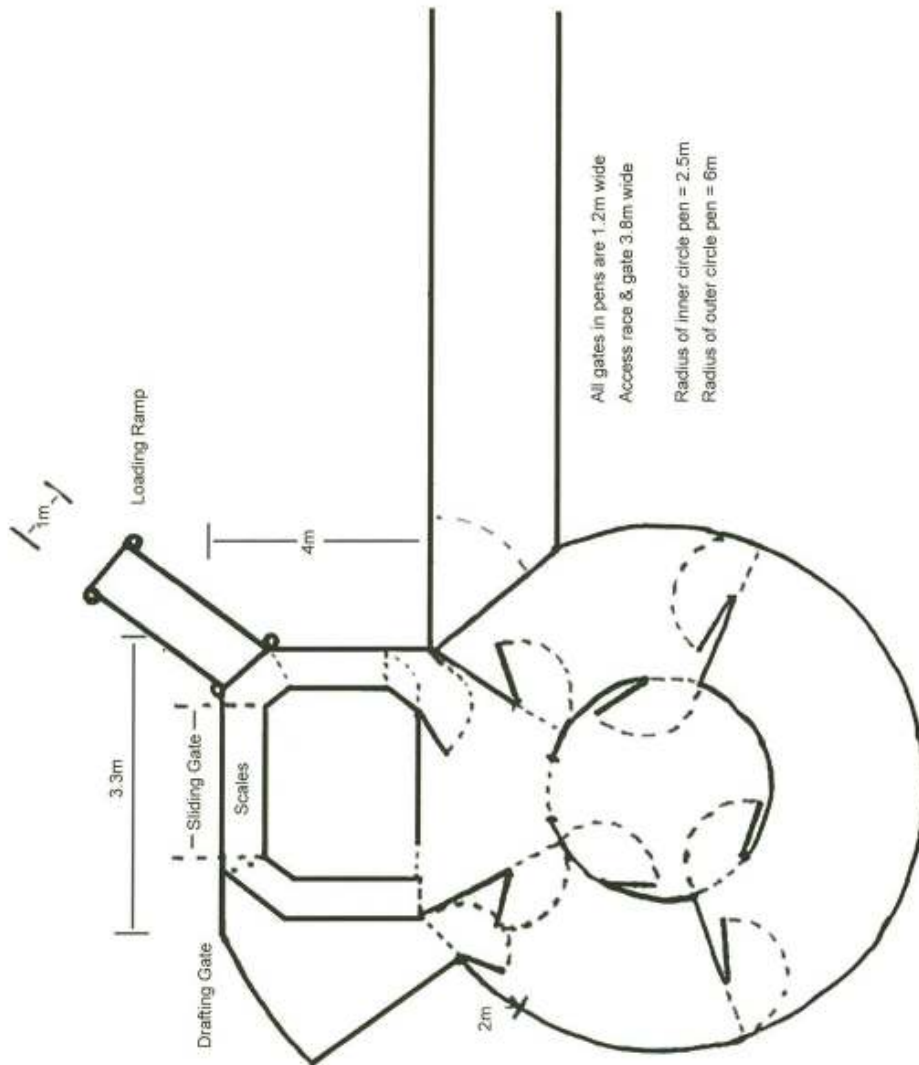
The hinges must be strong and adequate, and not able to be lifted off the lugs by milling deer. If the clearance gap under a door allows a deer to push their head under in an attempt to escape, an insecure gate can be easily lifted off. Many people have been injured over the years when this has in fact happened and the gate has knocked them over as deer race over the gate and crush them in the process.

Top hinge dog should be reversed to prevent gates being lifted off the hinges.

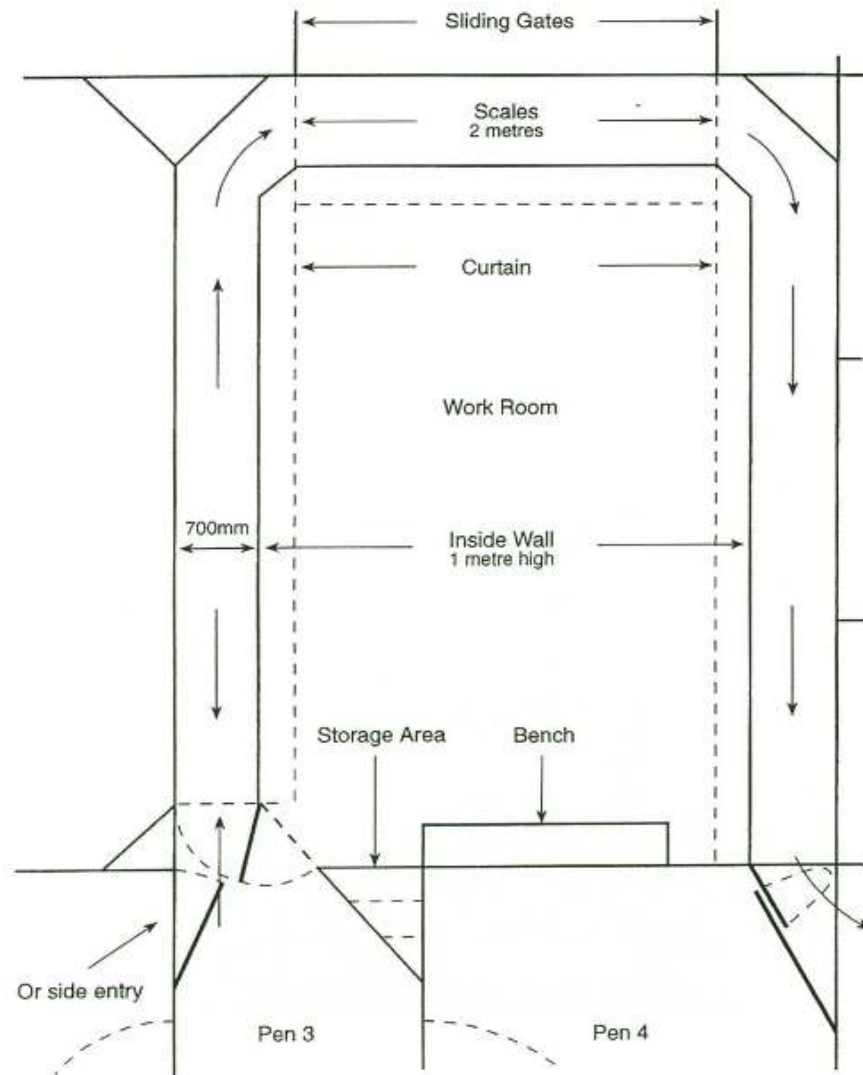
This is very important. Alternatively a four-inch nail can be driven in across the top of the bottom hinge at a right angle to do the same thing. Some hinges will accommodate a retaining pin which does the same job and can accommodate a padlock.

Sliding gates can be used quite successfully, provided they are strong, quick and easy to operate. Plywood well fixed on a pipe frame is ideal.

The pen gates can be made out of the same materials and preferably, for safety reasons, have strong, self-closing latches that will not let go under pressure.



Pen Plan



U-Shaped Race

Pens

The measurements of pen plans shown in this booklet are a good guide for handling most types of work operations with red and hybrid deer.

Walls of pens (as mentioned earlier), should be strongly constructed and either lined with strong plywood to a height of 2 metres, or alternatively they can be lined with 150mm x 20mm macrocarpa flat boards (horizontally) spaced, 100mm apart, up to a height of 2 metres. These 100mm gaps make good ladders to climb up if you need to escape.

Corners of pens should be boarded across as shown below, to help prevent deer jamming into the corners risking pile-ups, and also being awkward to work around in the pen. It is unwise to bring too many deer into a deer shed at any one time and overfill pens. Deer do not like being confined and will start to fight and pile up in a futile attempt to escape or assert a pecking order. You are better to bring small mobs of deer into the shed, and split larger mobs up into groups of about a dozen to 20 in holding pens.

One option is to have outside holding yards to hold larger mobs in, but don't overcrowd these pens either or you will have injuries.

In sheds with high roofs, cat walks can be built on the top of the pen dividing walls so that you can work the deer from up above with a 2 metre long stock stick and a plastic bag taped to the end. These make a rustling noise and are very effective in moving deer.

This is a safe way to work dangerous animals like stags from pen to pen in the shed. Unless you know your stags are really placid (and this will vary at different times of the year), never get in the pen with them. It is always safer to work from another pen or use revolving gates when forcing stags up a race. Stay on the outside wherever possible. If you have to go into a pen with stags, have a shield to protect yourself and have an escape route mapped out first. Never work on your own with stags.

The trick is to work with deer in small mobs and return them to the paddocks as quickly as possible.



Pen Floors

Floors should ideally be concrete in the working areas, with cross-scoring of the surface to help prevent deer slipping and losing their footing. These surfaces can also be hosed out after use and are easy to keep clean. They should be sloped, with a slight gradient for adequate drainage to the outer drain side of the shed, for hosing out.

Clay floors can be used on porous soils where there is good drainage, but they become very dusty and smelly and are hard to keep clean. Shavings or deep sawdust can be used, but these materials must be replaced before they become dust pits or quagmires. This material is good compost, however, for gardens after use.

Wherever possible, avoid muddy yards as these areas can become very dangerous and hard to work in. It is near impossible to escape from a charging animal in a muddy pen.



View of the Inside of the Race



This is what the deer see when they come into the race. The curtain on the right hand side of the race creates the illusion that it is another solid wall, so they don't attempt to jump out.

Neck clipping deer the safe way



The Race

The race is the workbench for the whole complex and needs to be well designed.

Over the years many types of races have been built and tried. Some have worked, some have been useless and some have been downright dangerous.

Many people have been seriously hurt over the years working with deer. All of these accidents could have been avoided with good facilities and less risk taking.

Injuries from working with deer are preventable if the proper facilities are provided and people avoid taking unnecessary risks. A well designed shed and working race, combined with experience, go a long way towards helping to prevent accidents.

The designer of the race and yards in this booklet (Noel Cudby) is very experienced and has worked with deer from the early capture days through to the present sophisticated farming operation it is today. He has been involved with yard design, building, modification and development over the past 25 years. The results are worthy of promoting in the interests of safety for those working with deer and for the welfare of the animals as well.

If you are building yards from scratch or adding a race to existing yards, you can be assured of success if you follow these race measurements as closely as possible.



Designer Noel Cudby



Horseshoe-shaped race, under construction

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