

Wild Tasting, Gamey — Suarnituluni

UNA TUNTUQ SUARNITUU'UQ. – THIS DEER HAS A WILD TASTE.



Photo: Men returning from a deer hunting trip on Afognak Island, ca. 1962. Chadwick Collection.

Wild meats can have a gamey taste. There are people who claim to like this flavor, but most prefer to avoid eating gamey steaks and roasts. To prevent filling their larders with wild-tasting deer, elk, goat, or bear, Alutiiqs take two essential steps: they harvest the right animals at the right time of year, and they process their kills carefully.

Sitka deer are a good example of these principles. When bucks enter the rut in November, their meat becomes gamey. The reproductive hormones that drive them to seek does alter the flavor of their meat. Knowledgeable hunters will avoid taking these animals, even though they are often less shy and easier to find than females. A hunter looking for good food will hunt earlier in the season or resist the temptation to harvest a buck with large antlers in the late fall.

Good meat care also will improve the flavor of an animal. Hunters who bleed their kills have better-tasting meat that preserves well. Alutiiq Elders recall their fathers hanging meat for many days, even weeks, to tenderize it. This process cannot remove a gamey taste, but it does make meats like Sitka deer, which are naturally low in fat, less stringy and easier to chew.