

Chapter 3

Buckskin Smorgasbord: The Variability Between and Within Hides

Now we have arrived at the challenge and the beauty that is traditionally tanned buckskin. It is this: while they all share a lot of important characteristics, no two hides are exactly alike. Some of the differences can be quite subtle while some are enormous. Factors such as species, habitat, age, gender, tanning methods, area of the hide on the animal's body, and more, all contribute to and affect the nature of the finished buckskin. To make it a little easier to get a handle on, I'll divide the variables into two categories- the variability between hides and the variability within a hide itself.

Variability between Hides

A lot of the differences between hides are due to differences between the animals themselves, but because tanning methods also impact the character of the finished hides, I will split this category further into inherent differences - those factors which are intrinsic to the hide itself, and tanning differences- those which are caused by the techniques, (or occasionally, lack there-of) employed in the tanning of the hide.

Inherent Differences



Figure 1: Oregon black tail deer hides.

Type of animal: While technically *buck* skin refers specifically to the skin of a male deer, in common usage it is generally used to refer to the tanned skin of either a buck or a doe, and often used to describe the skins of other related ungulates (cloven hooved animals) as well. Thus, while *buck skin* is the skin of a buck, *buckskin* could be describing the skin of a female antelope or goat or any other gender/species combination. It is more a descriptor of the process and resulting material than the origins of the hide.

Deer hides are the most common skin used for buckskin and thus I consider them the standard. They can range from thin to thick