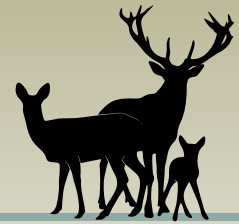


John Barber

and the Early Days of the Elk Industry

By Ray Favero, Ph.D. (IL)



I really did not ever think that I would get to this ‘status’, but I am writing this as the "Old Guy". I have been involved in NAEBA since its first convention in Kansas City, Missouri. I can remember that convention like it was just last week. There were many memorable people at that event. Many of them have exited the elk industry through a variety of means. But at that first convention, a few people made huge, memorable impressions on me, as I was a person investigating and learning about the elk industry. People

continually hear me talk about the old days, but that is what us old people do. It was different back then, but the elk industry is still alive, still surviving and will continue to be a viable form of alternative livestock. The elk industry is rather complex in that we continually have to achieve a balance between viability of markets, government, animal rights issues, environmentalists and land values. We have survived a lot. Please remember two things, REMEMBER THE PAST and REMEMBER THE PAST. Enough of the soap box.

One of the first people that I met in the elk industry was at the first NAEBA convention in Kansas City, Missouri. His name was John Barber. I was introduced to John during the convention, but as with any great relationship, we got to know each other at the hospitality suite and bar. Prior to that convention, I had read, heard and viewed video and film of the deer farming industry in New Zealand. Then, as now, John was a wealth of information. John was one of the original founders of NAEBA. John has stated, and the story is

somewhere in NAEBA history, that 36 elk farmers came together and contributed money to form an association. This was a year before that first convention and they had met in Denver. The purpose of forming NAEBA was to present a unified voice and plan to safeguard the private ownership of North American elk. One of the early functions was to provide purity testing of elk and to begin to establish a registry for elk. It was through the efforts of these people that we are able to raise elk today. A list of founding and original members is on the current NAEBA website. I have to say, it was a colorful mixture of people. Everything from farmers/ranchers that rarely left the farm to doctors and

“John & his family still have the farm and still raise red deer & elk in New Zealand.”

lawyers. It was quite a group.

Anyway, John Barber brought with him the knowledge of the deer industry in New Zealand. This proved very valuable in



designing pens, handling systems and entire farms. John also had firsthand knowledge of the world velvet market. That market is amazing, ranging from the use of velvet antler throughout the world to its methods of purchase and distribution. Additionally, for many years, one man controlled almost all of the world antler market. At that first convention, I was a poor (some things never change) graduate student and the only thing that I was able to purchase on the benefit auction was a box of velvet antler capsules that John had brought from New Zealand. John (as well as his son Tony) and I have maintained a friendship over all of the years since. John has always had a very practical knowledge of the elk and red deer industry. The design and techniques that John used in New Zealand have been incorporated into several systems in North America. Many years ago, Roger Prock toured and studied the New Zealand elk and red deer industry, and at the end of the trip, he returned to John Barber's farm and commissioned John to design and construct a handling system



in Colorado on John's next trip to the USA. John also built other handling systems in North America and Canada as well as in Minnesota and elsewhere.

I recently talked to John, just to document some of the information on his involvement in the deer and elk industry. In New Zealand, the red deer and elk (wapiti) industries are deeply intertwined. Crossbreeding of the two species has occurred for many years. The meat industry is very important in New Zealand and the hybrids of the two species

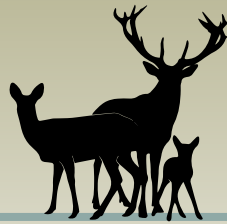
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provide a special component of the New Zealand meat industry. John Barber and his sons have raised both species and many hybrids.

John Barber was involved in the early export of North American elk to the farmed deer industry in New Zealand. John was involved in the purchase and shipment of several airplane

shipments of elk to New Zealand. The airfreight company was Flying Tigers, I think it was later bought by Federal Express. From about 1980 to 1986, John had purchased elk in Canada for export to New Zealand. Over those years, 131 head of elk were transported from various parts of Canada to Toronto to be crated and flown to New Zealand. Those 131 elk became the main base for the North American elk industry in New Zealand and the elk that contributed heavily to the hybrid elk industry in New Zealand. The bloodlines of those elk are bloodlines that are still being used and recognized by breeders in the USA as well. John talks of an incident in the loading area of the Toronto airport where an elk crashed through a barrier and was loose inside the building. Attempts were being made and a plan was being developed to recapture the animal. At some point during this, the animal came running down a small avenue

between vehicles and equipment. John launched himself between two vehicles and tackled the elk. There was really not much way for anyone else to help but one of the other New Zealanders threw a capture net over John and the elk. Several people carried the elk (probably not a real happy elk) and John, both in the same net, to the crate and then finished the



loading process. John said that a representative of Ag Canada had a camera out and videotaped the entire event.

The New Zealanders were fortunate in having John Barber as a buying representative for them. John has the most unique eye for elk. I have been amazed by how John has been able to identify exceptional elk. John had also owned and maintained

Mike Bringans at Orr Lake Elk. The same was true for the elk bull Manitoba Weapon. Manitoba Weapon was born on the John Eisner farm in Manitoba. That bull was later owned by John Barber and also sold to Dr. Bringans at Orr Lake Elk. John Barber owned elk and boarded elk on several farms across North America. I

had worked with some of John's bulls on Marvin White's farm on the western slope of Colorado. Several females that were owned by John had proven to be among the industry's greatest dams. In New Zealand, John and his son Tony, sold a female that was pregnant with a male offspring that became Cassius. John's son Tony had spent several years in the USA and later Canada.

In the USA, Tony had an elk farm in southern

Wisconsin, Rose Lake Elk and co-owned animals with Ryan Clark. Ryan had owned Korean Gold, one of the most famous elk in the industry. Tony has moved back to New Zealand and is operating John's farm of 200 plus red deer with some elk breeding influences.

It was not that many years ago when John Barber and a good friend of his, Lester Morris



L to R: John Barber, Tony Pearce, Nev Cunningham

attended a NAEBA event and toured some elk farms in the USA. As I stated, John and his family still have the farm and still raise red deer and elk in New Zealand. Just a few years ago, John (and cohort, Diane) had traveled to Alaska and spent a week with Kim Kafka and myself fishing with Roger and Linda Prock on the Yetna River for king salmon. It was a very memorable experience. John has slowed some with age, and elk, deer, and rugby have supplied him with a lifetime of aches and pains. John still gets out to the farm but spends quite a bit of time monitoring his part ownership in a racehorse. Anyone that has met John will remember that crafty mischievous look that he gives out the corner of his eye (Tony has the exact same look and grin). Thank you, John Barber for helping mold the North American elk industry as well as befriending me.



elk in Canada and the USA. John Barber at one time was the owner of the great elk bull named Columbus. Columbus was directly out of the Toronto Zoo. At that time, Columbus set a couple of record velvet weights, that being 11# at two years of age and 34# at five years of age. This shows how much progress we have made in the last 30 years. Columbus was later sold to Dr.