

The Truth About Antlers

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The Thinking Dog blog is thrilled to share a guest post from Guiding Eyes Hildy.

Dear fellow Thinking Dogs:

I now know where antlers come from. Like you, for years I've been happy to live with the illusion that all dog toys come in boxes from Amazon or Chewy.com. Now I am somewhat embarrassed to admit that I thought purple stuffed bears and fabric cows with long stretchy necks were born that way.



Last month, a fellow canine researcher and I were so deluded about the connection between dog toys and once living beings that we spent a whole afternoon dissecting what my human called “Oscar the octopus,” in an unsuccessful search for his missing two legs. We proved beyond a doubt that Oscar was a hexapus through and through. I began to question what I had been told: only the best animals get reincarnated into dog toys.

The magical moment occurred while walking with Kent, a human friend, in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Snow was still piled high to require athletic leaps so that I didn’t disappear forever inside a snow drift. I was in the middle of an airborne spin when I spied...an antler. Right there, sticking out of the snow.

I know that antlers are the most coveted dog toys. The few times my partner, Deni, offered me an antler freshly peeled out of its plastic wrapping, she made a big deal about how expensive they are and how lucky I was to have one. I made sure to leave it in the hallway where Deni was likely to step on it and truly appreciate how often I gnawed it in gratitude.

Back in the woods, I grabbed my treasure before Kent could object. I was right. It was an antler. I was wrong in thinking I could pluck it off the ground and keep up with our walk. When I pulled, I found that the antler was stuck like glue on a head that was mostly skeleton with some decorative fur patches. “What demented human could have fashioned such a thing?” I wondered. I thought antlers grew on trees like other branch-like appendages.

I looked to Kent for guidance. He soon brushed snow away and shook the skeleton loose from where it had frozen to the forest floor. “You found a dead deer,” he said with pride. “A two-point buck.” Realizing that the antler I found along with its mate were securely attached to the deer’s head, Kent said, “Let’s come back with a saw..”

A few strokes with the saw and both antlers were safely in Kent's pocket for the walk home. I was eager to taste a just-picked antler, but that was not to be. While Kent was sawing, Deni was researching how to make antlers safe for dogs. The antlers first swam in warm soapy stew, then danced in boiling water, then spent the night drying out on the top of the wood stove.

When I was given the choice of which antler I wanted first, I was pleased to find that both antlers retained enough of their wild animal smell for me to remember the moment I found them. I was glad to learn that deer shed their antlers and then hide them in the forest for adventuresome dogs to find. When I return to Florida, I plan to keep watch on the lemon tree. Along with sour fruit, I am convinced that it also grows and drops yellow tennis balls.

Guiding Eyes Hildy