

Safety in Bear Country, Bear Facts, and Bear Encounter Stories

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CONTENTS

- [Introduction](#)
- [The Grizzly and Brown Bear](#)
- [General Bear Country Safety Tips](#)
- [The Great American Black Bear](#)
 - [Neat Black Bear Facts](#)
 - [Biological Facts](#)
 - [Black Bear - Human Interactions](#)
- [How and Where to Store Scented Objects](#)
- [Black Bear or Grizzly?](#)
- [Black Bear Stories and Misc. Advice](#)
- [Grizzly Bear Stories and Misc. Advice](#)
- [Other Resources on Bears](#)

INTRODUCTION

This is a compilation of information and stories from all parts of North America on the North American black bear. The black bear is a wild animal and some regional bears are noted to act in an unusual manner. Bear country, while a wonderful place to be, can also be dangerous. This page is not meant to be a substitute for good judgment, or used as an instructional tool for any bear country activities. Always consult with local experts on the behavior of bears in the area you are entering.



THE GRIZZLY OR BROWN BEAR (URSUS ARCTOS)

"His is a dignity and power matched by no other in the ...wilderness." -- Andy Russell, Outdoorsman.

Grizzly means grayish and implies horror. Both meanings are appropriate. The fur of the grizzly changes in color from off-white to black depending on location and time of year. In the Rockies, the bear is usually dark brown with a gray frosting on the back, where they are often called "silvertips". Both Grizzly bears and brown bears are of one species: *Ursus Arctos*, the circumpolar brown bears. The Grizzly sub-species, or race, (*U. a. horribilis*) is usually found on the mainland, and the *U. a. middendorffi*, called the Kodiak bear, inhabits Kodiak and nearby islands of the Gulf of Alaska. We will refer to them both, as they do in Alaska, as 'brownies'.

In the United States, Brownies can only be found in parts of Alaska, Wyoming, Idaho and Montana. Although, they are on the California flag, they are no longer found in that state. South of Canada, they are considered a threatened species.

Most of the killings attributed to bears have been linked to grizzly bears. According to the North American Bear Center (<http://bear.org>), around 80 people this century across North America have been killed by grizzlies. Note that although they are known to attack people, it is not a large number of attacks. From 1900 through 1985, an average of less than 1 in 2.2 million visitors to North American national parks sustained injuries from grizzly bear attacks (see: <http://www.nwf.org>).

GENERAL BEAR COUNTRY SAFETY TIPS

Bear Country, Ben Kruser, The Leader, October 1992

Article #R64.

There's an old saying: "when a pine needle drops in the forest, a turkey sees it, a deer hears it, and a bear smells it."Canada is bear country. Wherever we live, we go camping and hiking in what is probably bear territory.

While the chances of meeting bears are relatively low, largely because of bears' disinterest in most people, we must know how to avoid, recognize, and deal with bear encounters. CJ'93 participants will camp right in the heart of bear country, but all of us have need of this information. It comes from an Environment Canada Park Service brochure, titled YOU are in Bear Country.

Bears are strong and agile wild animals that will defend themselves,their young, and their territory if they feel threatened. All bears are potentially dangerous; they are unpredictable and able to inflict serious injury. NEVER feed or approach a bear.

Tips for Safe Camping

Put away food and garbage, strong attractions to bears. Keep your campsite clean and never leave around food, garbage, coolers, cooking equipment or utensils. Lock food in the trunk of your vehicle or hang it at least 4 m off the ground between two trees. Several campgrounds have bear poles or steel food caches.

Do not cook or eat in or near your tent or tent trailer. The lingering odors of food invite bears. Clean utensils and put garbage in containers immediately after eating. Do not get food odorous on your clothing or sleeping bag. Sleep in different clothing than what you wear for cooking. Use a flashlight at night. Many animals feed at night, and a flashlight may warn them away.

Tips for Safe Hiking

Bears feel threatened if surprised. Hike in a group and make loud noises. Whistle, talk, sing, or carry a noise maker (e.g. bells).Most bears will leave if they are aware of your presence. Stay in the open as much as possible. Keep children close at hand on trails.

Be especially alert when traveling into the wind. A bear may not get your scent and be warned of your presence. In dense bush and near rushing water, the animal likely won't hear your noise-maker.

Stay away from dead animals and berry patches, important food sources for

bears. You'll often see crows and ravens circling over dead animals. Report dead animals to park wardens.

Watch for bear signs, tracks, fresh diggings, and droppings.

NEVER approach a bear, especially a bear cub. A protective mother is usually nearby and may attack if she thinks her cub is in danger.

Leave your dog at home. A dog often infuriates a bear and may come running back to you with the bear in pursuit!

Backcountry Camping Safely

Camp in designated campgrounds. In random camping areas, pick a spot away from animal and walking trails and the sounds of rushing water. Camp near large sparsely-branched trees you can climb if necessary. If you spot fresh bear sign, choose another area.

Avoid fresh perishable foods with strong odorous (e.g. meat and fish) that attract bears. Freeze dried foods are best. Keep tent pads clean and free of food and garbage.

Cache food away from your tent. Use bear-resistant food storage facilities where provided or suspend food between two trees (at least 4 m up and 1 m away from trunk) if possible. Store food and garbage in airtight containers.

Pack out all garbage. Don't bury it; bears can easily locate it and dig it up. Burning scraps of food is not recommended; if you do it, make sure you burn them to ash.

Avoid smelly cosmetics, perfumes, hair sprays, and soaps.

Menstruating women should be extra careful. Bears may be attracted to them.

Bear Confrontations

Make a wide detour or leave the area if you see a bear at a distance. If you cannot detour or retreat, wait until the bear moves from your path. Always leave the animal an escape route.

Do not run. Most bears can run as fast as a racehorse. A scream or sudden movement can trigger an attack.

Don't throw anything at a bear; it may provoke an attack.

Watch the bear for aggressive behavior--snapping its jaws together, making a "whoofing" sound, or keeping its head down with ears laid back. Consider any bear that moves toward you aggressive. If the bear does not seem to be displaying aggressive behavior, talk softly in monotones and slowly back up. If a bear rears on its hind legs and waves its nose in the air, it is trying to identify you. Keep still and speak in low tones.

Keep calm. Assess the situation. There is no guaranteed life-saving method to cope with an aggressive bear, but calm behavior has proven the most successful. Sometimes bears will bluff their way out of a threatening situation by charging and veering away at the last second. Back away quietly; never run!

If a climbable tree is nearby and the bear shows aggressive behavior, speak softly and back slowly toward the tree. At the same time, slowly remove your pack and set it down to distract the bear.

Climb a tree as high as you can. Adult grizzlies don't usually climb trees, but large ones can easily reach well over 4 m. Stay in the tree until you are sure the bear has left the area, then make your way quickly back to the trailhead. Black bears are agile climbers, so a tree may not offer an escape from them.

Bears are an important part of the park ecosystem and worthy of continued protection. With your cooperation, bears and people can co-exist.



THE GREAT NORTH AMERICAN BLACK BEAR (URSUS AMERICANUS)

[US FWS Drawing by Robert Savannah, used with permission]

Perhaps no other animal has so excited the human imagination as the bear. References to bears are found in ancient and modern literature, folk songs, legends, mythology, children stories, and cartoons. The American black bear

lives throughout North America. In the East the black bear is found in swamps and forests. In the West the black bear calls the mountains its home.

The black bear is approximately 5 to 6 feet from head to tail, and two to three feet high at the withers. The black bear varies in weight. Males from 125 to 550 pounds, and females from 90 to 300 pounds. It has small eyes, rounded ears, a long snout, a large body, and a short tail. The shaggy hair varies in color from white through chocolate brown, cinnamon brown, and blonde to black, but most black bears are indeed black or a darker shade of brown.

Except for breeding and raising young, black bears are generally shy, retiring, solitary animals. They try to avoid humans and are considered non-aggressive except when injured, protecting their young, or protecting themselves. The black bear is inclined to escape from human presence. Bears are most active in the cool of the evening or early morning. During the heat of the day, they will seek shade in dense underbrush.

Black Bears have increased in population in a number of areas in the USA. The number of attacks by these, usually passive, bears has increased proportionally. Especially as we humans encroach on their habitat. Recorded killings by black bears this century total only 35 across North America. Most of these killings were unprovoked acts of predation. How likely is a black bear to be a killer? The 650,000 black bears of North America kill fewer than one person per 3 years, on the average, despite hundreds of thousands of encounters. To put this in perspective, for each death from a black bear across North America, there are approximately 17 deaths from spiders, 25 deaths from snakes, 67 deaths from dogs, 150 deaths from tornadoes, 180 deaths from bees and wasps, 374 deaths from lightning, and 90,000 homicides in the United States alone (data from the National Center for Health Statistics, 1980-1983). Source: <http://bear.org>

NEAT BLACK BEAR FACTS

The following three sections: *Neat Black Bear Facts*, *Biological Facts*, and *Black Bear - Human Interactions* were contributed primarily by Scott Montague. Here is a brief introduction by Scott:

I work up north at Missinaibi Provincial Park (Ontario, Canada) during the summers. Missinaibi is located 88 kilometers north of Chapleau in the midst of the Chapleau Crown Game Preserve, the largest game preserve in the world. As you can imagine, black bears flourish in the preserve, and tend to frighten the campers a bit. Here are some Black bear facts taken from a variety of Ontario Ministry of Natural

Resources resources (including myself)

By: [Scott Montague](#)

You are more likely to get struck by lightning or killed by a bee sting than being attacked by a bear.

Bears can be found in almost all areas within the temperate zones of the earth. (In case you forget your geography... the temperate zone is the region between the Tropics and the Circles... That is between Tropic of Cancer and the Arctic Circle, and between the Tropic of Capricorn and the Antarctic Circle).

Everyone knows that bears like honey... so much in fact that bears can attack a bee hive and eat everything-- including the bees! One report shows that a bear had nearly 2 liters (quarts) of bees in it's stomach!

When bears become nuisances (usually due to unknowledgeable campers) we have to catch them in our live trap and bring them down 77 kilometers of poor logging road. Their destination is another area of the game preserve that has been selected by biologists to be "bear friendly" and hospitable. However, bears don't always like to be moved, and so it's not unusual for them to wonder back 50 km or so. One bear has actually wondered back 160km to his home range!

Biologists estimate the current polar bear population to be 20,000. Some of these can apparently be seen in the north end of our park, near Moosonee. There may be up to 500,000 black bears left, say biologists. A lot of which can be seen in the game preserve!

Each bear has a different temperament sort of like humans. Some bears will attack, others will not. Some bears are scared of humans, others have a natural curiosity. (But still don't try to get too friendly with a bear that seems nice, just like people it can have a nasty streak :-)).

Black bears come in different shapes and sizes... and colors! While they were named for their color, they can also be brown, cinnamon, and black with white patches on their chest. (Maybe they're trying to give up smoking? :-)). *(Editor's note: Bears in the Western U.S. tend to be of the brown color variety, while those in the East tend to be black in color).*

BIOLOGICAL FACTS

Black bears (*Ursus americanus*) originated in Asia. They migrated to North

America over time.

The average female (sow) is 5 years old before she has cubs. The average male (boar) is 4 years old before he breeds.

The black bear population does not have the ability to increase rapidly.

There is a bond between the boar and the sow during mating season.

Black Bear mothers have strong bonds with their cubs. (See Black Bear-Human interactions).

Most cubs weigh .2 kilograms at birth (.5 pounds). They usually open their eyes when they are 40 days old. At this time, they typically weigh 1.8 kilograms or 4 pounds.

Cubs stay with their mother for a full year after birth (in Jan. or Feb.), plus for their first full winter.

Mothers teach their young their food searching and selecting habits.

Black bears are extremely territorial. (See Black bear-Human interactions).

The black bear is the smallest bear in North America. The average adult weighs 300-400 pounds, has 42 teeth, and can climb trees.

The largest known black bear weighed 802.5 pounds. The oldest known black bear was 30 years old. (1985)

Black bears are carnivores, however they act like omnivores, with only one quarter of their diet being meat. They mostly eat plants and other vegetable matter.

Many boars will wander over an area of 38 square kilometers to find food. Sows wander less, as they usually have their young with them.

The current black bear population, world-wide, is approximated at up to 500,000. (1992)

Black bears have been recorded running at speeds up to 50 km/h (30 mph).

Black bears do not hibernate during the winter. They do remain dormant however.

Black bears have poor eyesight, good hearing, and a great sense of smell.

BLACK BEAR - HUMAN INTERACTIONS

One thing I like to stress to the campers in our park... remember, the north is the bears home, we are just visiting. If the bear wanders through a campsite searching for the blueberries on the other side, that's perfectly OK. However, you do not want the bear to stop and try to eat YOUR food. Even worse, you don't want to have to worry about the bear attacking you! Here are a compendium of tips to help you share the north with the black bear. They are not necessarily applicable to other types of bears.

DO NOT leave your food, waste, or other scented objects within reach of a bear. Bears can smell anything from far distances, and will taste it...even if it is something inedible! (E.g. I have seen bears try gasoline, candles, and the grease remaining in a fire pit.) Even if you think they can't smell the food (e.g. unopened pop) think again... I heard of a bear who put his claw through a pop can and drink it. The only smell black bears aren't interested in is that of humans. *Don't forget that gum in your pocket!*

How and Where to Store Food, Waste, and Scented Objects

Editor's note: Most black bear and human encounters involve food. Please bear in mind that food to a bear equals food as we know it, plus "garbage", wrappers, soap, lip balm, sunscreen, toothpaste, anything with a fragrance (remember, they are more practiced at using their sense of smell than we are).

CAMPER CAMPING -- Store food and scented objects inside the camper.

!!! CAVEAT !!! Do not store (*food*) inside a soft-side camper as black bears can (and do) rip the sides open. Store it in the car. Put waste in the designated garbage bin in the campground. Use the campers privy, or an outhouse provided by the park. Empty the campers privy only at designated trailer dumping stations.

TENT-OUT-OF-TRUNK -- Store food and scented objects inside your car. Put waste in the designated garbage bins in the campground. Use the outhouses provided by the park. Do not store a "port-a-pottie" in your tent.

BACKPACKING / CANOEING / TRUE CAMPING

Store all food and scented objects (*ed.: in a bag*) at least 3 meters (9 feet) up, between two trees, at least 1 meter (3 feet) from each tree trunk (remember, black bears can climb)!

Editors note: A suggested way of hanging a bear bag: Find a branch WAY up a strong tree. It should not be so strong that a bear could climb out on it, nor so weak that it is likely to break off. It should also be positioned such that food hanging from the branch will be a good distance away from:

- *the ground (at least 9 feet)*
- *the trunk of the tree (as far as possible, preferably 3 feet)*
- *other branches*

Tie a rock to one end of a nylon line and toss it over the branch. (Hold onto the other end so it doesn't get hung up.) You end up with the line "draped" over the branch with both ends on the ground.

Divide your food into two equal-weight piles. Put each pile into a sack. (a stuff sack will do but don't use one that you use for your clothes, the smell will transfer to the clothes) If you have LOTS of food - (are on a) long trip or (with) many people - you will obviously need more bags...in multiples of two. One person traveling lightly can counterbalance a single bag with a small bag or rocks.

Tie a bag onto one end of the rope. Hoist it as high as possible - though not-quite-this-high may be high enough if you managed to get the line over a REALLY high branch. While holding the other end of the line down - maybe under your boot, or with the help of a partner - tie the other bag to the line as high as possible.

Now toss the lower bag up. If you get this just right the upper bag will drop down to the same height as the lower and both will be positioned correctly. Reality often intervenes and you'll have to fiddle around a bit to get this just right.

Oh yeah, how do you get the food down in the morning? Leave excess line loosely looped outside one of the bags. You can snag it with a long stick and pull it down. Sometimes a long branch can be used to snag one of the bags. (contributed by:

[Dan Mitchell](#) / De Anza College / Cupertino, CA USA)

Burn all combustible wastes. Bury the ashes at least 20 meters (60 feet) from the campsite. Place remaining wastes in a garbage bag and store with the food and scented objects. All non-combustible garbage must be "packed-out". Use outhouses provided by the park, or, if unavailable, dig a trench six inches deep at least 10 meters from the campsite, and fill it in before you leave.

Never, EVER, feed a bear!

(Editor's note: Feeding bears can be dangerous. Bears will tear at an item (you) to get at food they think is there. Feeding any wildlife not only endangers their health with unusual substances, but also teaches them that "where humans are there is food".)

Do NOT come between a mother and her cubs.

The mother will become scared for her cubs, and will attack if she fears they are in danger.

A Nuisance

Due to their territorial nature, black bears can prove to be nuisances when they leave their mother, searching for a home.

What to do if you run across a Bear

Even if you have no food out whatsoever, you may still encounter a black bear wandering during its daily travels. Upon spotting a human, the naturally curious black bear will either a) run away, or b) stop and observe the human.

If you want to completely avoid black bears, talk continuously or make loud, unnatural noise (i.e. Bear Bells). This will scare off most black bears.

If a black bear DOES come uncomfortably close, or if it starts approaching you, back away SLOWLY, always watching the bear. Speak in a LOUD, DEEP voice (It doesn't matter what you say. I use "GO AWAY BEAR" as it also serves to inform others around me of my situation).

What to do if you have a Black Bear in Camp

If you can stand being scared a bit, and you have taken good precautions to hang anything that smells out of their reach (and keep a clean tent and site)

just let them be. They'll probably wander off in a bit. If not, you can try to scare them off by making a loud, deep noise, or bang a shoe against a pot. That'll probably scare them off. If the bear tries to rip through your tent (it does have sharp claws), back towards the door and leave (or go through a wall if you must), talking to it LOUD and DEEP (try "THERE IS A BEAR IN MY TENT. I AM NOW LEAVING" or whatever else comes to mind). You should be trying to inform any public around of your situation. DO NOT turn your back to the bear. Try to make yourself as TALL as possible. If it attacks (**VERY UNLIKELY**) be the aggressor. Fight back vigorously.

But remember: you are in black bear country. The black bear is completely entitled to wander wherever it wants to, and if that includes your site then so be it. The black bear did NOT come to your site to try to attack you, it is just naturally curious. It smelt something different, maybe your food, and just wanted to find out what it was. The black bear does NOT want to fight.

Don't Run

DO NOT RUN AWAY FROM A BLACK BEAR. THEY CAN RUN FASTER THAN YOU.

Do Not Play Dead With a Black Bear

(Editor's note: Black bears eat carrion (dead things)). It is curious, and will rip you open just to see "what's inside"!

What To Do If a Bear Attacks

Sometimes black bears will still approach, or even attack (VERY, VERY UNLIKELY). The next step is one I have trouble convincing campers of...**FIGHT BACK!** Get angry with a black bear. Throw your arms up in the air, yell and scream in a deep voice, throw something at it. Throw a pot at it, or a big rock. You want to show the bear that you are in control. This sounds futile, but it works. The black bear will get scared and run away.

Keep in mind though, you don't want to kill the black bear... just scare it.

Respect the Black Bear

Remember, you are in it's home. It may look cute and cuddly, but don't try to pet it. Let the black bear be and it will let you be.

More Info

If you have any questions or concerns, speak to the park staff where you are

staying, or call your local Ministry of Natural Resources Office.

If you have any more black bear questions, call Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources Chapleau District at +1-705-864-1710, (ed.: or call your local [U.S. National Park Service](#) office).

I hope this helps you a bit.

Scott.

I invite any comment/corrections on my post. This does not necessarily reflect the official stance of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources.
[Scott Montague](#) | Assistant Cub Leader; 4th Kingston Cubs | Missinaibi Provincial Park, Canadian Ask me about Ontario's Parks! | Les renseignements dans ce message sont également disponible en français.

BLACK BEAR OR GRIZZLY?

Black bears, grizzly bears and brown bears can all be brown in color. So how do you tell the difference between the grizzly and brown bears (aka "browns" or "brownies") and the black bears?

The shape of a grizzly is far from that of a black bear. Brown bears and grizzly bears are the same species and there are things about their bodies that set them apart from the black bears. Take the time to study the front shoulders (and hump between them) of a grizzly compared to a black in a zoo, book, etc.

Brownies have a mass of muscle between the shoulder blades that is used for digging. This produces the characteristic hump. You will also notice that the shape of the head of a grizzly is much flatter (snout shorter) than a black bear. The ears on a brownie are shorter and more rounded than those of a black bear.

Black bears frequently climb trees, brown bears and grizzlies normally do not.

Bear tracks show five toes and may exhibit claw marks. In a walking pace the hind foot just overreaches the front. The big toe is on the outside of the bear's foot. Unlike a black bear, a brownie has longer claws, less fur between the toe pads and the pads appear together. A line drawn that separates the toe marks from the pad of a black bear will be curved. It will be straight on a brownie.

The best indication of what type of bear you are sighting is the location you are in. In the lower 48 states, Brown bears and grizzlies are mostly limited to the Yellowstone and western Wyoming area. Brownies can also be found in Alaska, and Western Canada. Black bears monopolize the rest of the North American forests and many of the swamps.

BLACK BEAR STORIES AND MISC. ADVICE

The #1 rule for camping in the North East (black bears); is put **all** food, snacks, etc., in a bear bag and hang it **high!** NO absolutely NO food or gum, or anything else eatable in a tent!!!

Bear bags should be at least 10 feet off the ground and between two trees. Bears climb trees and the larger ones have a long reach. The garbage dumps are now closed, and bears still like to pick over easy to get food. They will rip open tents and sleeping bags. When they open the latter, the occupant often gets hurt. No trees? Best have a truck or car to lock up the food. Off on a canoe trip with no trees? Have some bear rattles handy. They are empty soda cans with a few pebbles in them. The bears don't like the noise. Beating on pots and pans works as well.

The #2 rule is leave those cute little bear cubs alone! If a cub is encountered, get the hell away from it pronto! Mama bears will always be very close, (within 100 yards) and they are *very* defensive of the cubs! ANY threat (or perceived threat) to a cub will be attacked without any preliminaries. The best bet is to make noise (sing?) during bear country hikes to give the bears a chance to avoid you.

A friend of mine used to live near a dump. He kept a basket of old baseballs on the porch. Each night he and the kids would chuck a few baseballs at the bears in the yard. The next day the kids would find the balls and put them back into the basket. Bears don't like pain. The first hit sends them away. The second hit makes them mad! The third hit sends them away again, etc.. If you're good, you can keep a bear running away and charging you all in the same five yards!

My son does not like to be awakened by shaking him. He naturally lashes out with his hand. On a scouting trip we were in Lean-tos, and a bear came in to "check for food". When the bear sniffed my son, it must have nudged him, and he wrapped it a good one in the nose. The bear whined, snorted and got the heck out of the lean-to. The kids that were awake were very "impressed". Actually they did very well - no wet sleeping bags. My son had to be shown

the tracks in the morning before he would believe anyone that he had "punched out a bear".

I have had to replace an iron cover to a garbage pit that weighed over a ton, that a large black bear had "tossed" 6 feet with one swipe of its paw! Several of the guests at the hotel that used the pit were watching when the bear did it!

YIS

Ken

[Kenneth B. Hawks](mailto:hawksk@rl.af.mil) Griffiss AFB, NY :hawksk@rl.af.mil

Disclaimer: There is no one else here who thinks like I do; therefore....

We had one of our scouts written up in Boy's Life about a year ago for a rescue from a black bear attack in our council's camp in the Chricahua National forest. The camp is no longer used by BSA but the public still uses the area (It is National Forest Land) and the bears are still a problem. One ranger gives a description something like what follows:

We are having a lot of Vans smashed in this area. The bears have gotten particularly good at getting into Ford Vans. First they look to see if there is an ice chest like box inside (Yogi likes Picnic baskets, these bears like ice chests - this is an editors observation). Then they go to the front of the van, put a paw on the corner of windshield and POP goes the windshield. Starting in the front of your van they go for the ice chest, usually exiting via the back door which they force open.

From what I understand, the one tow truck operator in Wilcox who is willing to drive all they way to get vehicles damaged by bears charges a fairly high price.

I can believe this story because when we went to Summer camp there in 1991 (the year before the bear attack) we could hear the bears trying to get at the garbage in the cage. The cage was a steel caged trailer where we put our trash. Every night it was moved out of camp and down the road to discourage the bears from wandering around camp after they could not get into the cage.

The black bear story I like the best is my wife's (not even my own from Philmont). We were with the troop at Victorio for Summer Camp 1991. I wear hearing aids which I take out a night (kids always had trouble keeping me up at all hours when camping). During the night my wife, who loves to watch the bears on TV but is terrified of meeting one for real in the wild, heard some noises outside the tent. Grunting noises. Quickly she tried to get me up. Of course she had no luck. I was out. The next morning she told me

about the bear outside the tent, I told her it was not very likely.

She then asked the Scoutmaster about the bear that passed through camp last night. Didn't hear or see it (he was sleeping in a bakers tent). No-one was going to believe her bear story. then she heard the noise again just off into the woods. There, did you hear that she explained. (Not me, it was beyond what my old hearing aids at that time were capable of.)

The scoutmaster laughed. A reaction my wife did not like to well. Then he explained. That's a couple of young bulls fighting! Cattle graze in this area as well. The noise my wife heard the night before was most likely one or more of the local cattle. The scoutmaster did notice them going through camp!

[Chris Haggerty](#),

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My closest incident occurred some 12-15 years ago in Algonquin, as a matter of fact. My wife and I were in a small tent trailer, and our two sons sleeping in a separate tent. In our first days on site we heeded the warnings to lock food in the car. That night we left our metal cooler out. My wife awakened me because of noises and the flashlight revealed a bear battering and carrying the cooler some 30 feet from where it had been. (fortunately it wasn't interested in childlike morsels) The next morning revealed holes in the metal where teeth and claw the cooler, and successfully ripped off the lock. I initially thought the bear had good taste when a review of the contents revealed it had eaten the meat and eggs and had left my wife's yogurt and cottage cheese, but after that it apparently made a dessert of the garbage can. Incidentally, for those who haven't seen it, Algonquin is magnificent. North of Toronto, it's SW quadrant is open to family camping with highly instructive self-guided nature tours. The rest is portage country. Parks Canada is super!

The precautions of hanging food (and anything smelly, like soap), not keeping anything aromatic in your tent, etc. are all sound, and one would do well to follow them in bear country. In general, though, black bears are shy, retiring creatures and you should consider yourself lucky to see one in the back country.

[Jay Thal](#); ASM, T666; Banneker District, NCAC;

By the way, just to share a story about how an old dog can learn new tricks. Last year I joined the Ottawa Y Canoe Camping Club. While on an outing I watched as another camper tied a rock in their old sock, tied the old sock to the rope and then threw the sock and rock up in the air to catch a branch on the tree. For years I had been tying my rope directly to a rock or a branch on the ground then throwing it up

in the air. I have long since outgrown the tricks of my youth when I used to shimmy up trees to secure the ropes from the branches. Anyhow, I would agree that under all circumstances all food must be suspended in the trees, at least ten feet off the ground, and about six feet away from the nearest tree. Hope the sock trick helps. Oh yes, also buying a carabiner helps if you loop it onto the high rope, and slip you hoisting rope through it before you tighten the upper rope. You can get fancier and purchase one of the excellent pulleys they make that attach to carabiners.

YIS

[Gerald de Montigny](mailto:gdemontg@ccs.carlton.ca); gdemontg@ccs.carlton.ca.

Sun Jun 18 21:28:35 1995

Just this weekend, I was hiking in the Adirondacks, and our food was attacked, probably by a bear. Yup, I thought, I should have read those posts on SCOUTS-L more carefully. :) Probably something about Murphy's law in this, somewhere.

We had hung up our food and garbage in a plastic garbage bag. It was pretty high off the ground, so we don't think he grabbed the bag itself. More likely is that he grabbed the rope and just pulled hard enough to make the bag come down. We were in our tent at the time. The first noise we heard was a thump, as if something had fallen, but we didn't think it was the food bag. But then there were noises as if something was eating food, not very natural. We decided that it would probably be best to leave our campsite for a while. (It was dark outside, by the way.)

That was scary. Fortunately, we lost our food just before the last day of the hike, and had enough food left to have some sort of brunch.

Now we'll have to be careful with not only the height we throw the food, but also with what happens to the ropes connecting the bag.

Patrick Lam

Someone asks, "When do the bears quit hibernating? Does snow cover the usual food sources, making them more dangerous?"

Bears in the California don't hibernate...it's not cold enough. They do den up, and spend a lot of their time sleeping, but are not completely inactive. In Winter I use the same food storage techniques as I do the rest of the year. They are not at all "dangerous", unless you hassle them or *appear* to be hassling a cub. Use proper food storage. 1st choice, a Bear Saver (food canister), 2nd choice, ****proper**** counter balancing (don't use the same stuff sacks that you keep your sleeping bags or clothes in! you'll transfer smells...). Keep a very clean camp. And...have a great time!

Native Species for Habitat

I remember watching a squirrel destroy someone's carefully hung food cache. They had wrapped it in a plastic trash bag then hung it from bear cables in the Banff back country. The squirrel scampered overhead, dropped onto the bag with claws out, and ripped open the bag as it slide down the side. Quite a feast for the little fellow. I imagine raccoons have probably figured this one out too.

The bears in Yosemite have a technique where they will climb up and jump at the bag, either breaking the branch or rope, or ripping open the bag before they and the contents spill to the ground. The rangers call them kamikaze bears.

I use an old stuff sack for hanging food. Fortunately, my food bags have never been tested by Mr/Ms Bear.

Alan R. Houser **** Scoutmaster, Berkeley Troop 24 **** troop24@emf.net
His [WWW Page](#) is here.

Our council camp is located in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania near the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. Since the Area was created, the population of Black Bears has increased. National Geographic (TV), about a year ago, featured a story on "The Bears of Hemlock Farms." That's just down the road from us.

Last year, the camp had a garbage disposal problem due to a vendor who stopped making pick ups toward the end of the season. We always keep all garbage in an old commercial refrigerator container located outside the dining hall. That became full, and after camp closed, extra garbage was stored in the laundry room of the shower house to keep the bears away from it. The room was made of concrete block with a steel door. A bear bent the bottom corner of the steel door out about 6 inches from the frame in order to get out bags of garbage. Don't fool with these guys folks, they're strong!

[Jim Miller Sr.](#)

GRIZZLY BEAR STORIES

Couldn't resist passing on another bear story. :-) Years ago at the age of 14 our family was camping at Yellowstone. We had taken the precaution of hanging our food and smellable items on the advice of a ranger. Turned out to be well worth the effort. As we sat around a glowing be of embers thinking of going to sleep a gigantic (from a 14 year old's eyes) bear waltzed down the trail past our site to the next one over. The folks camping there had kris-cross lashed a metal Coleman cooler to a heavy picnic table. Old bear just gave it a few wacks with each paw and it shot out of the ropes like a bullet. Now this bear was experienced and didn't waste time working on the lock. He just hurled against the nearest tree and repeated the process until it spilled out a treasure of goodies.

Satisfied the bear moved off. We sighed in relief thinking this was the last we were to see of old bear. Next morning I hiked up to the shower house. On the way up the trail I first found a towel, then a little farther up some clothes, and finally near the building a kit bag. Funny thing the wooden door that was normally open was shut tight. At 14 you don't always make brilliant deductions with these sorts of clues. I proceeded up to the door, unlatched it and opened it to a great roar.

Standing fully upright at the other end of the room was old bear in an ugly mood. I slammed the door back shut and left a second string of clues for the next would be user of the showers. Luckily the bear was more interested in the soap and food in the backpack that the last user had left in his haste. (I don't think the door would have stopped him for long, if he'd decided to go through it.) The ranger later told us this bear had to be darted and moved to a different area of the park.

Speaking only for myself in the Scouting Spirit, [Michael F. Bowman](#) ; Prof.

Beaver, Nat. Capital Area Council, BSA mfbowman@CAPACCESS.ORG

Date: Wed Jun 28 08:26:30 1995

From:Lawrence P. Murtaugh

Subject: Re: Safety in Bear Country and Bear Stories

I was in Glacier Park about 4 years ago. Glacier is home to a significant number of Grizzly Bears. The week before we were there a couple from Ohio was attacked by a Griz. At one point the bear had the husband's head in his mouth! The woman wacked the bear on the head with a camera as I recall. Husband and wife recovered.

I'll bet that guy can still smell the bear's breath!

OTHER RESOURCES ON BEARS

- *Bear Attacks, Their Causes and Avoidance*, by Stephen Herrero, Winchester Press.
It covers Black and Brown bears based on 30+ years of research.
 - *Safety in Grizzly and Black Bear Country*; NWT Renewable Resources.
 - [Alaska Wildlife Service](#)
 - *The Great American Bear*, By Jeff Fair, Northword Press,1994
 - *Wild Animals of North America*; National Geographic Society;1995
 - If you have any questions or concerns, speak to the park staff where you are staying, or call your local [U.S. National Parks Service Office](#).
 - [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) tracts and reports on a number of wildlife species, including the American black bear.
 - <http://bear.org>
 - <http://forensicfiles.bc.sympatico.ca/0044.html>
 - <http://www.nwf.org/nwf/natlwild/polar.html>
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Edited by: [Bill Nelson](#), Assistant District Commissioner, Salt River District, Grand Canyon Council, Boy Scouts of America. Please let me know of any additions or corrections.

[Return to the Top of this Page]

