

My Golden Bear Grizzly Hunt

A Grizzly Bear is one of the few animals that symbolizes the true wilderness. On my trips into the wild they have given me a number of cherished experiences. I have even gone after sheep (1389 AZ) with a Grizzly tag in my pocket but never could get everything to line up. Many bears are taken as an add-on, but to go after just a Grizzly, that is a serious hunt.

I researched outfitters and areas, seasons and methods, prices and success rates, what type and size of bear, there is a lot to think about. While there is a lot that can be said about the Brown bear's size, for some reason many of them strike me as somewhat ugly. In some of the inland areas the bears tend to be not very big. So that also limited my search. But the most deciding factor to me is how I feel when I hunt with a good outfitter. A good outfitter knows that you are spending a great deal of money and will work hard to provide you the opportunity to harvest a memorable trophy. Your success is their top priority, even if it cuts into their profit margin. Their word is their bond.

I chose Golden Bear Outfitters in the area of Telegraph Creek, British Columbia. I sheep hunted with them before when they were in a different location. It took me two years to save the money and set apart the time to go. I had it in my head that this might be my last big trip, so I wanted my wife to go. I introduced her to Greg and Faye and Blake Williams at the Ovis convention in Las Vegas. We worked a black bear hunt in for her so she could take her 300 Win Mag. Our hunt was for the Spring so the hair would be in good condition from the hibernation.

The day of the trip soon arrived, and we boarded a plane at 6:00 am in Phoenix, made the connecting flight to Seattle and then Juneau and then to Highland Ranch, one of their base camps in time for supper that evening. In all my hunts, this was the only time I have been able to make it 'in the bush' in one day. It was great.

We flew to a number of spots and set up spike camps and glassed for bears. We did not walk around too much so we would not give the bears our scent. We did see a good number of bears but they were either too small or were sows. We also saw Stone's sheep, moose, goats and wolves. After a number of days we flew down to Telegraph Creek on the Stikine River and went downstream on their 20' jet boat. The area is 1/12 the size of our home state of Arizona and we were the only two hunters there! Late one afternoon Blake spotted a big boar lounging on a snow bank a mile up the next mountain and we decided to go after him the next morning. When we got up the next morning Janet spotted a good boar with the traditional Golden Bear look about 300 yards above camp. I passed on him because he was not quite heavy enough and we had a larger one to go after that morning.

That was the day I learned that bears, especially boars in the spring are not sheep that stay

put. We climbed until 1:00 only to learn that he had left the country.

All in all it was a great hunt, we really got to know both Greg and Blake, and Janet and I had as close to a vacation as a hunter can have with his wife, but as Greg said: “the bears won round one”. He said he would try to work me in in the fall, or the next spring. By mid-September with no word from Greg I figured it would be next spring but then we got the offer to come up in two weeks on the last hunt of the fall season. With a \$1,000 plus tag about to expire I jumped at the chance.

I went back without Janet as she could not get the time off from work. On the plane into Highland Ranch was Bob Foulkrod and his cameraman Joe and another hunter named Tony. At camp we met Stan who drove from Minnesota to Telegraph Creek. Bob, Stan and Tony all rode off in different directions to different camps already set up. I was the last to get out. My guide, Ian McKinnon went out in Greg’s Super Cub with floats but had to come back because of fog. We left the gear by the lake and went back and had lunch until it cleared enough to try again. This time when the plane came back the back seat was empty. As soon as the plane was tied up Greg said “you won’t believe it”. After 15 days of no breaks I was ready for the worst... “There is a big bear right where we wanted to tie up the plane”. I was surprised at my change in luck. “Is Ian going to be OK?” was all I could think to say. Greg’s response was that Ian said “I think I better load my gun’.

I helped Greg load my gear in the back of the Cub and we took off. I filmed our landing on a beautiful isolated lake and as we taxied towards shore Greg said, “there he is”. He was walking on the shore looking for salmon. I filmed him as we went parallel to the shore, he was round and had a blonde stripe behind his shoulder. He grabbed a salmon and went into the bushes. We unloaded the plane and I loaded my gun. We packed the gear into a small clearing and watched a smaller Grizzly fish in the stream that drained the lake. After camp was set up and we watched the smaller bear fish, I was concerned that the bigger one had left the country so I suggested that we climb up a small hill and glass. We saw the smaller bear again with a fish on the rockslide and filmed it while he ate it along with a raven who ducked in and out from under the bears legs and chest without any reaction from the bear. Finally we spotted the bigger bear a little further up the lake. Ian and I talked about how to work this situation tomorrow as we wanted to pick a good spot away from the bushes.

With all the bears I did not sleep very well. The big bear came into our camp and knocked over our coffee pot and bit a hole in Ian’s axe handle. This was definitely a bear with an attitude. We were up early and skipped breakfast and went over to the other side of the inlet where the bear was when we landed the plane. I set up my shooting stick and we did not have to wait very long as Ian whispered, “there he is”. He was working along the shore

towards us. "Wait for him to come closer, the wind is in our favor". He was already close enough I thought to myself but it made sense to let him get closer. I became aware of this strange pounding in my chest and had to take a deep breath and ignore it. "Make sure he is the right bear," Ian whispered. "He's the one" as I noted the blonde stripe behind his shoulder. "Are you good?" Ian asked. "I am good" I said as I put the illuminated dot of my Trijicon scope on his shoulder and shot.

He lunged forward and turned towards to bushes before I could even chamber another round. I put the next one on his back and fired and then Ian fired. He stopped short of the bushes and went down. We were in no hurry to go over to the bear and built a fire and had breakfast. While we ate Mountain House and had tea the other bear slipped through the woods above our camp. "This place really gives me the 'hibbee jibbees'" I said.

We took pictures and I helped Ian dorsal skin the bear for a full mount. I do my own taxidermy work and the dorsal skinning saves 1/3 of the sewing and hides the stitches better. After 15 days in the spring I had harvested a beautiful bear before sunrise the first day of the fall hunt. All the other hunters filled out with moose and goats and Tony took a great boar on the same lake a week and half later. Bob Foulkrod and Joe filmed a show for Winchester Legends. Great area, great outfitter, good base camp. What a hunt!