

An Alaskan bear hunt

By JED DUNNING
Special Contributor

I have never been able to spend much time hunting out of state, as my deer processing and taxidermy business requires me to be at work during the fall hunting season.

Although I have managed a few fall hunts, such as a pronghorn antelope hunt in Wyoming, I have become more interested in winter, spring and summer hunting activities. I have enjoyed trapping and calling predators, spring turkey hunting and feral hog hunting.

Last winter, I was invited by a taxidermist friend to go on a black bear hunt on the Alaskan peninsula, along with four other hunters. The hunt was to take place in the early spring of 2009.

My method of hunting was to sit on a platform strapped to a birch tree 20 yards from a baited area. Bear bait is very similar to what would be used to bait feral hogs. Typical baits would be breads, pastry, dog food, fish scraps, grain, honey, molasses, bacon grease or a combination of whatever would be tasty and good-smelling to a bear.

No bears visited our baits, however, and even using four-wheelers traveling over the countryside, we saw no bears. We did encounter moose, grouse, red squirrels, bald eagles, ducks, trumpeter swans and

ptarmigan. Evidently, we had scheduled the hunt a little early in the season, as the bears still were hibernating or had not come down from the hills.

For the past nine years, my family and I have been able to spend much of the summer in Alaska and have fished for trophy king salmon in the Kenai River. We also have caught rainbow trout, Dolly Varden, grayling, steelhead and lake trout.

On our return trip to Alaska this summer, I was able to go on another black bear hunt. Knowing I planned to return to the state, I had stored my archery equipment in Alaska.

On this hunt, bear signs were abundant. I selected a site to place my hunting stand near good bear signs. I sat in my elevated tree blind from late afternoon all night to the next morning.

A mature bear appeared early in the morning within about 35 yards of my blind, and I decided to take him. My arrow found its mark, and I followed up with another arrow. I did not want to follow a wounded bear into the thick brush. I was finally rewarded with an opportunity to harvest a mature male black bear.

The bear's coat was rubbed clear of much of its winter hair, but I made a clean kill and was glad to discover the bear was very old. To indicate his advanced age, I later learned his skull was heavily boned and fused at the joints. The bear's teeth

were quite worn, and a few were missing.

The bear was skinned and quartered where he fell. I was hunting alone, so by the time I had packed the bear and my hunting equipment out of the woods, I was ready for a break.

The bear provided tasty steaks similar to lean venison. The backstraps were sliced, breaded and deep-fried. We pressure-cooked the shoulder and added barbecue sauce to make a dish similar to chopped beef. It made great sandwiches.

The other meat was prepared for chili and stir-fry dishes. Many people say they would not eat bear meat, however we found it to be very good.

The bear skull was bleached, which made it a good trophy. The hide will be tanned and used for a mount or crafts of some kind. The bones from the paw have been cleaned and will be used for crafts or jewelry.

We enjoy our yearly trips to Alaska and even after nine trips to this beautiful, fascinating state, we look forward to returning next summer.

I have come to realize that the world is not as big as we have been led to believe, and the limits to it are the ones we create or accept.

I wish "happy hunting" to all during the upcoming deer season, and remember safety first.

Semi-automatic rifles: Not what they used to be

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normally would favor a larger bullet. I then tried some 150-grain reloads, which resulted in sub 1-inch groups. The load used Barnes TTSX bullets and IMR4895 powder. This load was a pleasure to shoot. In fact, I shot over 20 rounds that session, which I never do with other .30-06s.

Some semi-automatic sporting rifles do not function well with light loads since they may not work the action. I did try some reloads that were equivalent to the reduced loads sold by some companies. It was a 125-grain bullet at around 2,700 feet per second. They worked the action normally and had no effect. The accuracy was not that good but sufficient for hunting.

Browning has several different models in the BAR lineup to choose from, including some Magnum cartridges, but I highly recommend the models with the synthetic stock because this does assist in recoil reduction. The BAR would make an excellent hog rifle. So if you are looking for a rifle that has reduced recoil, fast follow-up shots and is accurate, then look at the Browning. After all, in my book the name Browning means quality.

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