

# B E A R S



The author taking a measured look at an Alaskan hillside.



WTA Client Chris Burnside with a 9 foot plus bear.

## ... IN THE LAND OF THE MIDNIGHT SUN

*Nowhere on earth is producing as many giant brown bears as the Alaska Peninsula; it is a true adventure.*

BY TIM HERALD

**K**odiak has a long standing reputation as THE place for big coastal brown bears, but in all honesty, the lower Alaskan Peninsula likely produces more really big bears (honestly squaring over 9.5') than anywhere on Earth. Kodiak seems to have genes that produce larger skulls, but the body size of the bears of the lower peninsula are massive. Good operators down there produce a few honest 10-foot-plus bears every season.

A few years ago on the last evening of a hunt near Perryville, I missed a big bear, later to find out my gun was shooting 18" high due to loose scope bases. It was a huge disappointment after a hard nine days of hunting, but I

guess that is part of what we do.

This past spring, I was able to go back with one of my favorite Alaskan outfitters along with 3 clients and friends from Worldwide Trophy Adventures. If someone asks me my number one choice for a big coastal brown bear, this is always my number one choice (though the outfitter does not want to be named). It proved to be a great choice once again.

I was filming my hunt for the new TV series Cabela's Instinct, and had veteran cameraman Danny Dodge with me. I knew this could be a very physical hunt if the bears were not on the beaches, so I had trained for months, doing core and cardio workouts regularly, to prepare. By the end of the trip, I was





Hoyt President Randy Walk with a great brown bear



Tom Neiderer with his humongous 11' bear

thankful for my time in the gym.

We flew out from Anchorage to base camp, and in the evening, we made it out to our spike camp in a huge valley. We could see the ocean to the east and volcanoes to the west. My buddy Tom Neiderer was going to hunt out of the same camp, but he was delayed due to a bird hitting one of the commercial planes he was on when traveling to Anchorage.

The first day, we hiked up the valley and saw a few bears, but nothing looked too big. We glassed from a point nearer to the ocean that evening, and just a bit before dark, we saw a bear with potential headed off a high ridge, and we hustled about a mile to try to cut him off. We got one glimpse of him at about 100 yards, but it was dusky and he was moving, so we really couldn't tell how big he was.

Tom got in that evening, and that was a relief. This was a relatively short, 8-day hunt, and I wanted him to have as much time as possible to get his bear.

The next day, my guide (also the outfitter), Danny and I went in a different direction to glass another valley, but we only saw 1 bear and a small group of caribou. In the evening, we went farther up the big valley to the west, but again, only spotted small to medium bears.

We could see that the valley ended in almost a box canyon configuration, so we decided to concentrate on the far end the next day. We would leave earlier, go farther, plan on staying until dark (which is only from around midnight until 4:30 AM that time of year), and trek back in the dark if needed.

We made our way about 3.5 miles up the valley, and we found a place to eat dinner and glass about 8:00 PM. The bear movement really picked up from 9:00 PM until dark with that last hour really being prime time.

I was glassing one way and my guide walked around a bluff to glass the other direction, and I spotted a sow with 3 cubs as high on the mountain as they could be, right under the sheer cliff line under the ridge. After a while, my guide came back and told me he found a bear with potential moving across a far hill, and he thought we needed to go

check it out.

It didn't look too far, but it was at least another mile to where we could see well, and it took well over an hour as we had to cross a swift river numerous times and fight through a couple of dense and tangled alder thickets.

Finally, we were 400 yards away, but the bear had bedded on a small rocky shelf with its back to us. We moved on a bit closer to somewhere around 250 yards, and we just had to wait and hope the bear would get up again before dark. It was after 11:00PM, so we didn't have a lot of time.

They usually prefer shots to be within 100 yards on these big bears, so I really was not expecting any kind of opportunity. As light began to fade, the bear stood up, took a couple steps toward us, looked over the ledge, and turned back. I looked at my guide; he looked at me and then asked me, "What did you think?"

I said, "It looked blocky to me, but I am no judge." The bear reappeared about 10 yards down the hill where it stopped quartering away, and the guide said, "You can take him now." In disbelief, I looked at him as he repeated himself.

I went into auto mode, got on my shooting sticks, put the crosshairs of my Nikon Monarch 5 scope on the bear's ribs, and squeezed the trigger of my Winchester .416 Rem. The bear exploded down the hill, but after only a few bounds, it stopped and rolled up, obviously hit hard. Then, it started down again, and I threw out a Hail Mary shot, and it disappeared over a side ridge, but its far side foreleg definitely appeared broken.

At this point, light was a serious issue, so my guide said he was going to hustle up the hill to where we last saw the bear, and he wanted me to go downriver and around a bend a few hundred yards where I could glass the whole mountainside.

He found blood, but it was thick and got dark just minutes after he made his way up the hill, and I couldn't be sure because of the sketchy light, it was just before midnight, but I thought I saw a patch of fur move just around the hill a bit from where we last saw the bear.



The Author's bear where it died, photo taken by guide.

It was now after midnight, and we knew we had a very long hike back to camp in the dark, including 15-20 river crossings. We would have stayed the night up the valley, but we hadn't planned for it and had nothing to sleep on or in and no way to build a fire.

So we embarked on what would be a nerve-racking 3-hour-plus walk back to camp mainly through a boulder strewn river system that we crossed time and time again in the dark. Danny had been having knee problems for about a month from a tahr hunt in New Zealand, and by the time we got back to camp after 3:30 AM, he was in pretty rough

shape.

My guide, also being the outfitter, had to move some clients around in his supercub the next day, so he brought in a fresh young guide named Travis to go back up with me to recover the bear.

After lunch, Travis and I made the long walk back up the valley, set up a tent to stay the night in, and got back to the spot where I thought I had seen the bear last. The bear was not there, and though we found a good amount of blood, we could not locate the bear. I was just sick as we made our way back to the tent before dark.

I was supposed to meet the





The author and his 2 guides with bear skin.

outfitter in late morning for a flight back to base camp, so when we got up the next morning, we ate a sparse breakfast and I packed up while Travis glassed. He kept saying that he saw something up the hill that looked like part of a bear, but it never moved, so we sort of ignored it.

Just as we were going to head out, Travis told me that he really wanted to go up and look at what he thought was possibly a bear, but I needed to go on down and meet the outfitter and plane. He would be down a couple hours after me, but he just had to satiate his curiosity.

I really dreaded walking out again and crossing that river over and over alone, but we had to do what we had to do. I made it back in about 2.5 hours of hard walking, and I counted 17 river crossings. A couple of times if I hadn't been able to hold myself against the current with my BogPod shooting sticks, I know I would have taken a cold, rough ride down the river.

An hour or so after I was back to camp, the outfitter flew in with a big grin on his face. He said he flew over the area where we had been looking, and Travis radioed him that he had found my bear, and he was skinning it out. He said it was a beautifully furred and very nice bear, but it wasn't a monster bruin.

At that point, I was so relieved to have the bear recovered that I was not too worried about it not being a 9.5-footer.

Late that evening, Travis showed up in camp carrying my bear hide, and though he is as tough a guide as I have ever been in the field with, he was obviously beat. We got some

### GEARING UP FOR BIG BROWNIES

Brown bears can reach 1,500 pounds, so I believe in big guns for these big bruins. For this hunt, I chose a Winchester Model 70 Safari in .416 Rem. The gun is very accurate out to 250 yards with Cutting Edge Bullets' Safari Raptors that are devastating when they hit animals. I have shot a couple of brown bears with it, numerous African buffalo, etc., and it is my bullet of choice on big dangerous game. In the alder tangles and rough Alaskan bush, I really like the Winchester's 3-position safety.

My rifle is topped with a Nikon Monarch 5 scope in 2x10 magnification and a BDC reticle. I wanted to have good magnification so I could shoot at distance, and I am supremely confident in the BDC reticle and Spot On Ballistic program after years of proven results.

food in him and laid out the bear hide for a few photos. I obviously didn't get any trophy pictures, but again, I was so relieved to have the bear recovered that was inconsequential.

Travis told us that he had seen 2 monster bears up the valley on his walk out, so though Tom was seeing plenty of bears, they decided to go back up there the next day.

I flew on to base camp and found out that all the other hunters had killed really nice bears, and I caught an early flight home two days later. Just as I was about to take off in Anchorage, I got word that Tom had killed a really, really big bear. When all was said and done, he had taken an absolute world-class trophy with a green score skull of 30.5" and a hide that squared right at 11 feet (yes 11)!

I was elated for Tom. He is a great guy and had worked hard on the hunt, and for him to take such a special animal was a great ending to a great trip. Things like this are one reason I enjoy hunt consulting and booking trips for folks through WTA.

Yes Kodiak has big bears, but for my money, I would choose the Alaskan Peninsula every time!

If you would like to book this hunt or any other around the globe, you can contact Tim Herald of Worldwide Trophy Adventures at [tim@](mailto:tim@)



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