

**BROWN BEAR ENCOUNTERS AND HAZING ACTIVITIES,
Fall, 1991
Emperor Goose Project, Strogonof Point Camp
Alaska Peninsula**

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During the fall, 1991, field season on the Alaska Peninsula, a large Brown Bear was driven out of the Strogonof Point camp 19 times. Described below is a short history of local bear observations, chronology of events from this season, and some recommendations for future camps.

In May, 1991, at least 6 individual bears were observed on or near Strogonof Point. This included 1 family group of a sow with 2 grown cubs (2-3 year-old), observed fighting/wrestling with each other. This sort of 'wrestling' is at times precursory to a sow driving her grown cubs off.

In the first week of September, 1991, the hunter/guide cabin located on the Point was attacked by a lone Brown Bear. The cabin was occupied at the time (about 0200 hrs., according to Jeff Graham, owner and occupant). The bear broke out all 5 Plexiglas windows and raked some of the interior of the cabin with its forelegs, but did not gain access. The bear apparently obtained food at this time.

Mr. Graham later reported having yelled at the bear, and fired several rounds of birdshot at the retreating bear on the beach. He said the birdshot hit the bear 2-4 times.

Biological Technicians Dave Boyd and Dave Wolfe were dropped on the Point, by boat, with supplies for 2 months, about 1 mile further out the Point from the cabin on 11 September. A 10x12' cook/sleep Weatherport and 6x6' Bombshelter food tent were set up about 100 feet apart. The food was stored in open cardboard boxes in the smaller tent.

During the first week, we noted fresh bear tracks over our ATV tracks nearly every day. Camp was located at the narrowest part of the Point, with the inland beach about 125 feet away, and the seaside beach about 150-200 yards away. The radio antennae for the Single-Side-Band was the only part of camp visible from either beach.

ENCOUNTER #1 9/16/91 1000h Bear comes over dune from inland beach and surprises Wolfe at 100 feet. Yelling turns bear away briefly as Wolfe retreats to Weatherport for shotgun. Boyd joins Wolfe beside tent as bear stands on hind legs and looks at us; possibly trying to catch scents also. Boyd fires Crackershell into dune in front of bear; bear drops to all fours, turns back to beach (below dune) and leaves, but not at a bolt run.

The bear is distinctively dark about the head and underside, almost silvertipped, and blondish brown along the back and rump. The bear was probably 10 feet tall -maybe more- when standing,

and easily distinguished from other bears seen just off the point later in the season by coloration and markings. The tracks were the largest of any in the area, measuring over 8 inches wide on the fore feet and fully encompassing a size 10 Bunny Boot (6x13 inches) in the hind feet. Later inspection of the approaching tracks on the beach indicated the bear either caught sight of the antenna pole or caught a scent, stood a couple times, and then approached to investigate. Wind direction was not particularly favorable for the bear that day, but was not specifically noted at the time.

The food tent was getting blown apart by high winds, so on 19 or 20 September we moved the smaller tent into the windshadow beside the main tent.

ENCOUNTER #2 9/21/91 0200h Wolfe awakened by quiet noises outside tent. The light thump of a plastic bucket causes me to grab a shotgun as I head for the door to investigate. Boyd is also awake now. I open the door a crack and peek out just as the head of a bear emerges from alongside the tent, less than 6 feet away. I immediately begin yelling loudly as I pull the door shut and chamber a round. It occurs to me that the gun is fully loaded with slugs, only. After very brief hesitation, I open the door again and fire a live round over the bear at 10-15 feet. The bear bolts to about 100 feet and stops. Boyd, now beside me just outside the door, fires another live round over the bear at 100 feet. The bear moves off, at a slower pace.

After dressing, we begin an investigation, cleanup, and all-night vigil.

The bear had apparently entered through one side of the tent, collapsed it, and exited through the other side. Food consumed included jam, cookies, crackers, salsa chips, etc.

We burned all opened and spilled foodstuff while waiting for the bear to return.

ENCOUNTER #3 0230h Bear returns on opposite side of camp (East, having departed to the West at 0200h) while we were both in Weatherport, with a candle burning, talking. We shine a 6 volt flashlight at the bear, yell, and fire a crackershell at the bear at 50 feet. He rapidly retreats to 200-300 feet, and we fire a second crackershell at the bear. Bear retreats out of sight over dune. Both shells were very effective, well aimed, with good reaction.

ENCOUNTER #4 0330h Bear tops dune at 200-300 yards (distance is very hard to determine in the dark). We shine the flashlight in his eyes and yell, and the bear drops back below the edge of the dune.

ENCOUNTER #5 0656 Bear returns to West side of camp and is driven off with light and yelling.

ENCOUNTER #6 0704 Bear returns, now on East side of camp (camp is half-circled by a dune and, beyond that -out of our view- a low trough which provides quick and easy access to opposite sides

of camp). A crackershell and the light drive it off. Dawn is just beginning to cut the night.

We inform the other camps and the Alaska Peninsula National Wildlife Refuge Office in King Salmon of our problem at the 0830h radio check. The refuge office discusses DLP justification with us. Apparently since we are in an unprotected tent, a DLP killing is easier to justify than if we were in a cabin as Cinder River was during their bear trouble.

We move the food stash away from the Weatherport, to about 65 feet straight out from the door, and cover it with tarps and boards.

ENCOUNTER #7 9/22/91 0040h We keep vigil in the dark, to preserve night vision, and talk. Periodically scanning our 300 yard horizon with the light.

Bear gets to within 10 feet of Weatherport, apparently approaching from our blind side, the inland beach side, prior to detection. The first crackershell is fired at him at 10 feet, the next two were duds (duds explode in the barrel, spewing forth quite a flame from the barrel and temporarily ruining one's night vision), and the fourth crackershell drove the bear off. We also yelled and shined the light in his eyes.

ENCOUNTER #8 0130h Bear returns and is driven off the food stash, with some difficulty, with 3 crackershells, yelling, and the light. The bear is tolerating these methods now and leaves almost casually. Bear got eggs and cookies, etc.

ENCOUNTER #9 0630 Bear makes it to the food stash again. It is very dark, with visibility further restricted by what appears to be a slight haze in the air. At 60 feet, we see a shadow move, the light picks up the yellow eyes, and we fire. Three crackershells directly at the bear, at 60 feet, don't seem to make him leave. We didn't see when the bear left. Crackershells seem to have lost their effectiveness.

King Salmon refuge advises us that we have full authority to DLP the bear whenever it approaches in a threatening manner. This authority comes from the state and well up in the Service's Regional Office we are told. Targets from all angles are discussed in detail. Though the bear has shown absolutely no signs of aggression towards us, the people, so far, there is considerable anxiety that his interest in the food is overcoming our facilities to haze. We feel we have no room for error if he turns on us.

The bear beds down downwind and within sight of camp for the day of 9/22. When we climb the bump directly behind the tent, or stand on the ATV, the bear raises its head and watches. Boyd sees bear between beds about 300 yards from camp in mid afternoon.

ENCOUNTER #10 2000h Daylight approach. The bear peers at us over a knoll from 300 yards. We stand on the ATV, waving our

arms and guns (trying to look bigger), and yell. The bear leaves.

ENCOUNTER #11 2200h Bear within 200-300 feet, silhouetted atop a dune. Wolfe fires a Skyblazer hand-held aerial Meteor flare directly at the bear while Boyd keeps the light on its eyes. The first two flares were duds which didn't fire (expiration date: May, 1992). The third, from my personal survival kit, with a November, 1992 expiration date, fired. Despite strong crosswinds, the flare flew straight out, with sparks flying, and ignited within 15 feet of the bear. The bear bolted. The flare followed the bear into the gully and started a small grass fire.

ENCOUNTER #12 2305h Bear approaches food to within 50 yards. Light and yelling cause him to bolt and run.

We stayed on watch the rest of that night and had no further activity.

By 26 September we were only staying up through midnight, and then sleeping with the Coleman lantern on so that we would wake up more often for horizon checks. We had also gathered beachdrift and built a low wood and metal A-frame. This fortress was closed in with metal roofing and then covered with sticks, lumber, former tent poles, rope and an old barrel. All the food was then stored inside the fortress.

ENCOUNTER #13 9/27/91 0200h Bear bending metal wakes us as we hoped it would. We yelled him off. He may have gotten a packet of powdered milk. At 0203h we fired a crackershell at the bear and got little response. At 0210h we attempted to fire our last Skyblazer Flare. Though it didn't ignite, it at least fired, and the noise drove the bear off.

ENCOUNTER #14 1045h Daylight approach. We again are awakened by bear-on-metal noise. Three crackershells and yelling drive the bear off 100 feet. Wolfe fires 1 round of 7 1/2 birdshot at bears' rump, sending it another 50-100 feet at a run followed by walking and backward glances.

We are down to 6 crackershells, birdshot, and 12 slugs. We decide to abandon camp and will begin taking it down at 1700h if the hoped for electric fence and hazing materials don't arrive today (9/27). We would move to the cabin (even though the bear had broken out the windows again) and set up the radio.

By early afternoon, a helicopter arrives with the fence, Olin flares and gun, rubber slugs, crackershells, and 2 food-storage metal barrels. By nightfall all food and the ATV are stored inside the fence installed around the Weatherport.

ENCOUNTER #15 10/1/91 1900h Wolfe is surprised by the 'raider-bear' (as opposed to another bear seen earlier in the day) while scoping geese 2-3 miles from camp. Bear is 200-300 feet away when first rounding knoll protecting Wolfe from the wind. Bear is downwind, but I'm in a wind pocket, so it doesn't sense me. I holler at it, making my presence known despite the departing

geese. The bear tries to catch my scent. I stand up and wave my arms, yell, and chamber a crackershell. Bear sees me, stops, then turns toward me and takes a couple steps. I fire the crackershell in front of him, and he veers off and lumbers a few paces before slowing to a walk. I return to camp.

ENCOUNTER #16 2020h Bear within 200 feet of camp while we are eating dinner. We fire a crackershell (dud) at him and he turns away.

ENCOUNTER #17 2315h Bear returns and alerts us from sleeping/reading by bending up more metal on the now-unused "decoy" fortress. With yelling and the light he runs off to 150 feet. We send the streaming fire of an Olin flare at him and he runs off.

ENCOUNTER #18 10/2/91 0440h Bear back at the decoy fortress and wakes us with more claws-on-metal noise. He may have bolted from the initial light beam, but in the dark we didn't see it, and so fired a crackershell just after the light caught his eyes. He apparently left.

ENCOUNTER #19 0620h Bear at the decoy again. Begins to run from sound of rubber slug being chambered and with light on him at 30 feet. We fire an Olin flare over his head but are unable to get the rubber slug off before he is out of range.

King Salmon refuge reminds us of authority to kill the bear if we feel cornered or if he penetrates the fence.

The bear last approached camp within 36 hours of the morning of 6 October. He had been to Jeff's cabin on 5 October, and tracks were found leading directly for our camp, but we never saw him after 2 October.

Bear hunting season started 7 October. Jeff Graham had said in September that there was one large bore in the area that he had been hunting for 7 years. When we described the size of the bear we had been dealing with, Graham said "that's the one I'm looking for". His client flew in on 5 October and apparently was successful by the 9th. No bear tracks were observed beyond the base of the Point through 29 October, when we left.

Throughout these encounters, we communicated our intended actions with each other and discussed what to do next time. We arranged DLP battle plans and laid out clearly what position and action we were each to take should we have to shoot the bear. In preparation for shooting the bear, we reviewed in detail over the radio with King Salmon where to aim when shooting a bear. There were several reasons we resisted killing this bear:

1. Personal safety. Shooting a large healthy brown bear in the dark at 50-100 feet with a 12 gauge shotgun is extremely dangerous. Neither of us had experience shooting large game.
2. The bear, surprisingly, never showed aggressive reactions to us or the hazing actions. We were very lucky on this point.
3. There had been rumors that some locals did not favor the idea of having USFWS personnel in the area before or during bear

season. Killing any bear, most particularly the largest bear in the area, would have likely been a major public relations debacle for the project and the Service.