

A BEAR HUNT LIKE THIS COULD EITHER GIVE YOU A HEART ATTACK - OR PREVENT ONE FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE.

Cardiac



Grizzly

HAD ALL THAT WORK been for nothing? My guide, Bryan Martin, and I had just spent the last 5h hours fighting our way through alders thicker than dog's hair, crossing a swamp, and then climbing up a steep mountain, all so we could get the wind in our favor to stalk a big grizzly bear. We had got within 60 yards of the bear and things were looking good - until the bear, which had been gorging himself on blueberries that whole time, decided he was thirsty and dropped 300 yards down the hillside to the valley floor to get a drink. Then he bedded down. In an unstalkable position. Now what were we supposed to do?

Six days earlier I had gotten a call from Bryan, who owns Canadian Mountain Outfitters. Because of the terrorist attack in New York, a couple of clients had canceled their hunts, leaving Bryan with some openings. He had his guide and wrangler hired for the season and wanted to keep them working. He made me a good offer. Was I interested in coming up and hunting a grizzly bear?

Get serious. Immediately I was on the phone. Working in construction, I had to call my contractors to see what would happen if I suddenly disappeared for a couple of weeks. I finally got the okay from everyone, and two days later I was driving to Smithers, British Columbia. With such short notice, the airlines wanted an arm and a leg for plane tickets. So I got to enjoy 1,220 miles of beautiful fall colors along the highways between my home in Montana and northern British Columbia.

I arrived in Smithers late on October 5th, and by 9 a.m. the next morning I was aboard a turbo Otter with two other hunters, taking off on a 200-mile, 2-hour flight to Bryan's base camp. From there the pilot flew me to another lake where I met up with Bryan at about 2:30.

From there Bryan, our wrangler Aliya, and I departed about 4:30 for a 5-hour horseback ride to grizzly camp. Bryan's area also has good moose and mountain caribou, but my focus was on bears. I had taken a grizzly 25 years earlier (see "The Three-Month Bowhunt" in the August 1978 issue of **Bowhunter**) hunting with my good friend, the late Paul Schafer. I like hunting bears and was hoping to take a bigger one this year.

The ride was an experience. By 8 p.m. the woods were pitch black, and riding a horse while carrying a recurve bow through the alders and under low-hanging pine branches was not fun. I just cradled my bow in my left arm and lowered my head. Amazingly, all my body parts were still intact when we reached camp about 9:30. It was a welcome sight.

By Scott Koelzer

THE NEXT MORNING we got out of camp at 9:30 a.m. and rode for if hours to a good spotting point. We were surrounded by an old burn that had turned into a giant blueberry patch. The berries attracted bears from miles around, and Bryan had seen two good bears here 3 days earlier.

After only 10 minutes of glassing, Bryan said, "I see a bear."

He was a long ways away, on the next ridge over, but we decided he was worth a closer look. With a strong updraft blowing, we had to go up our side of the drainage to prevent the bear's smelling us. Unfortunately, our side was an alder jungle, and the going was pretty slow for an old man (that would be me, not Bryan).

We had cut the distance in half when we set up the spotting scope again to check the bear out. While Bryan was doing this, I spotted another bear a couple hundred yards uphill from the first bear. It was lighter colored, a very pretty bear, but it was definitely smaller.

Bryan got the first bear in the spotting scope and said, "It's definitely a shooter." The bear's sagging belly barely cleared the ground. He had obviously packed away a lot of blueberries. As Bryan said, "They are on a biological clock and are trying to put on as much fat as they can for the winter."

We proceeded up our ridge until we were past the bear. From there we dropped clear to the valley bottom, where we crossed a swamp created by a series of beaver dams, and then climbed back up to get above the bear. After 5F hours of fighting brush, swamps, and vertical mountainsides, we found ourselves within 60 yards of the bear. And that's when the bear decided he needed a drink and a nap.

"Do you think you could sneak within bow range of that bedded bear?" Bryan said, studying the snoozing bruin through his binoculars.

"I doubt it. The brush is just too thick in there. I'll never get close without him hearing me."

With the wind steady in our faces, we watched the bear sleep for a while. But by now it was late afternoon, we were 3 hours from camp, and I do not walk well in the dark because

of an injury I suffered in a fall from a treestand (see "Falling!" *Whitetail Bowhunter*, 1997). I told Bryan we had better head back to camp soon and try for the bear the next day.

JUST THEN THE BEAR decided to get up and head back up to his spot on the berry patch. Because of the curvature of the hill, we immediately lost sight of the bear, but we knew he was coming toward us. So we got about 50 yards apart on a little finger ridge where we thought the bear would come up.

Suddenly he appeared, 75 yards below us, coming straight up the hill. At 50 yards he started angling towards Bryan, and going another 10 yards he crossed over the ridge Bryan was on and out of my sight. I rapidly moved towards Bryan as he hand-sig-naled that the bear was 25 yards below him.

I had to cross a little deadfall right then and was really watching my step to be quiet. My plan was to top Bryan's ridge at a small flat spot about 5 yards below Bryan.

Finally across the deadfall, I crept towards the flat spot and suddenly the bear came over the ridge - right on the flat spot! Apparently I had made some noise getting over the deadfall, and the bear was coming to see who was invading his blueberry patch. I came to an abrupt stop in the most awkward position for a right-handed shooter - with my right foot forward. In this position I would be lucky to draw 15 inches.

The grizzly stopped on top of the ridge, facing me straight on and staring at me, 14 yards away.

I was only 4 to 5 yards from Bryan, with my Schafer Silvertip takedown raised, arrow on the string. The bear and I then had a 30-second stare-down. I thought all hell was going to break loose, but the bear just stood there. After 30 seconds he slowly turned his head to the right and looked up at Bryan for 5 seconds and then turned back to me for another 10 seconds. He then looked back at Bryan and started walking toward him. It wasn't a charge, but the bear was clearly going to see who was sleeping in his bed.

I waited until the bear had turned broadside and extended his front leg forward. As a snap shooter, I then made the fastest snap shot of my life. With my awkward position I had to rotate my shoulder to increase my draw. When the arrow hit the bear I could hear it cutting ribs. The bear turned back towards me and then went straight down the hill. I knew the hit was good. I glanced at Bryan to see him grinning.

"That bear is dead," I said. "I hit him right through the heart."

The bear stumbled about 100 yards down the mountain

and went down. I give Bryan a lot of credit. The bear was 4 to 5 yards from him - and was coming closer! Bryan was carrying a rifle, but instead of shooting the bear he let me do my thing. In those close quarters that took some courage, and I thank him for that.

WE DIDN'T HAVE TIME to skin the bear before dark that night, so we headed back to camp, knowing the hide would keep well in the cold October night air. Then we returned

first thing the next morning to skin and pack the bear back to camp.

We had just started skinning when Bryan looked across the valley and spotted a big bear on the hillside we had climbed the day before. Five minutes later I spotted another bear, a true monster, near the other bear. A few minutes later the two came together and started wrestling and playing. One would be on top, and then the other would be on top. One bear would try to run away and the other would run after and tackle it, and vice versa. This went on for a half-hour. I would love to have been over on that hillside to hear the ruckus those two were making. Being able to watch those two big bears play like that was one of the highlights of my 30 years of bowhunting. My bear measured 7 feet 4 inches from nose to tail, a big mountain grizzly, and we were sure the bigger of the bears across the valley was considerably larger.

If you want a rush of a lifetime, you need to get to British Columbia and hunt a grizzly.

After an experience like this you

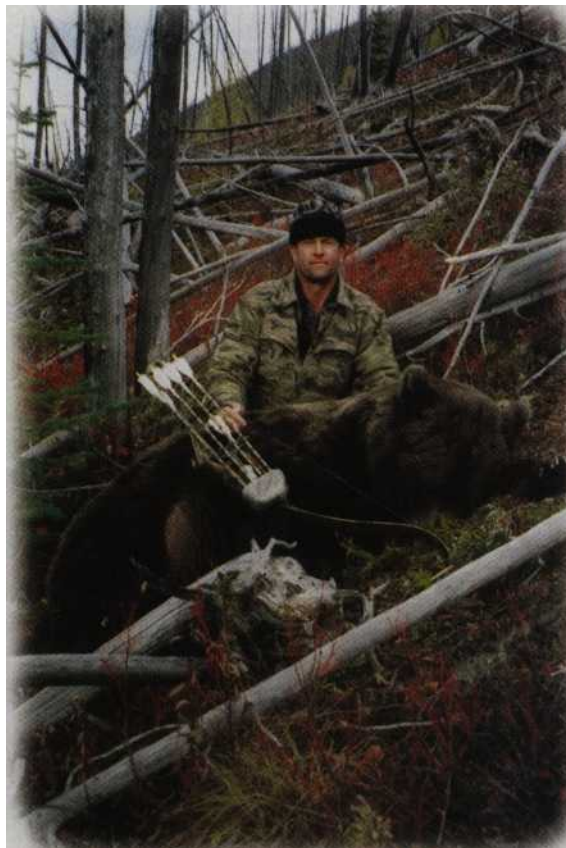
will never need by-pass surgery - your arteries will be totally cleared for the rest of your life. V

*Since the mid-1970's, Montana resident Scott Koelzer has written a number of stories about his northern adventures, particularly about moose and bears, for **Bowhunter**.*

AUTHOR'S NOTES

My bear has an official Pope and Young measurement of 24 inches. For grizzlies and other northern game, I highly recommend Bryan and his area. He also has good hunting for goats, moose, mountain caribou, and Stone sheep. Contact: Bryan Martin, Canadian Mountain Outfitters, Ltd., P.O. Box 31011, Dept. BH, Kelowna, BC, Canada, V1Z 3N9 (250) 317-5525 www.CanadianMtnOutfitters.com.

For this and other similar North American bowhunting adventures, you also can contact: Mark Buehrer, Bowhunting Safari Consultants, (419) 943-3743; bohuntrm@bright.net.



HEART STOPPER Guide Bryan Martin put me on this gorgeous *griz...right* on top. I took the bear with my recurve at just 15 yards.