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STRATEGIES

**for
Calling Bears**

TROPHY SIZE

How do you measure it?



**Anniversary
Issue**

HOW DO YOU MEASURE A TROPHY?

BY DR. PAUL PLANTE
AND DR. STEVE MERLIN

We tried to quietly but quickly pick our way through the deadfall-strewn steep mountain side that had been logged some 10 to 15 years ago. It was replanted in what looked now to be perfect Christmas trees. We strained our eyes to pick out the correct black shape in between the trees that represented Paul's quarry, a large, very smart and ancient boar. The problem was all the remaining trees stumps from the logging activity were also black from the controlled burn that occurred after the clear cutting. To make matters worse, the wind, which had been consistently in our favor from the beginning of this stalk, started to swirl yet again and from our previous experiences we knew we were in trouble. Suddenly, a black blob was spotted under one of those Christmas trees. It was "Big Al."

Judging black bear on the paw, so to speak, is an incredibly difficult task. What makes it even harder is that often the bear is measured incorrectly once skinned out. Ask any experienced taxidermist who does a lot of black bear work and they will tell you about cringing every time they get business from certain guides. Why, you ask? Well let us suppose you were told your black bear rug measured 6' 5" and you received a 5' 10" rug back. You might insist, for instance, that an error was made and inquire as to where your bear is. Since you gave it to the taxidermist all folded up (salted or frozen), they have no measurements to defend them-

selves with. Messy indeed.

Through a lot of experience over the years, we have seen bears measured and recorded in numerous fashions, most of which led to grossly over-stating the actual size of the critter. Now a big bear is just that, a big bear, and will always measure as one, but a small bear can easily be measured to make it look as if it is a bigger bear. Do yourself a favor and remember this: the only way to measure a bear is to fully skin it out, including the skull, so you are left with only a hide with paws attached. Now stretch the hide over a level surface with the hair up. Then stretch the hide lengthwise from the nose to tail but do not distort it. Then stretch the hide from side to side by gently pulling the two front paws away from each other, again so as to not distort it. You will quickly see that if you pull in either direction too hard, it begins to shorten the other length.

Once you have stretched it to maximize both lengths (nose to tail and front paw to front paw), you then measure from the nose to the tail, *without moving the hide*. Then measure from the front paw all the way to other front paw, *without moving the hide*. The key to this is to never move the hide when measuring it. Now add up the two lengths and divide by two and that is the true measurement of what your bear squares. There is no other way to correctly measure a bear hide, period. A small bear on the ground will make a small mount no

matter how you stretch it and no matter what size your outfitter comes up with. A big bear looks big on the ground and mounted and will also measure well.

Skull size is what actually goes into the "book." In reality, being in the book is not the point of a great hunt anyway. However, measurement of the skull is very straight forward and less subjective. Perhaps that is why this is the measurement of record. Using calipers, simply record the distance from the front of the incisors to the furthest point of the back of the skull (occipital area). Now, using the calipers, measure the width of the skull at its widest point. Add the two measurements together and presto, you have the skull size. Depending on which book you are trying for, you may have to wait a period of time until the skull dries completely before it is measured. But is that really how you measure a trophy?

Two years of expectations and we walked off the twin prop plane onto Vancouver Island. We had organized this seven day, two on one hunt with Dave Fyfe, owner and operator of North Island Guide Outfitters. His reputation for consistently taking mature coastal black bear boars preceded him as did his dedi-

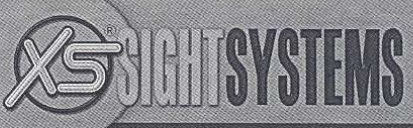
cation to ensuring all aspects of the trip would be first class. Immediately upon retrieving our bags from the airlines, Dave was there. He took us straight to his house to freshen up and get all the required licenses, tags and paperwork filled out. The ride up to bear camp was a little over an hour. Bear camp happened to be a very nice, fully equipped house, filled with facts and information about the coastal black bears from his crew of expert guides.

After viewing multiple bears the first morning, we arrived at another strategic lookout point in which Dave quickly spotted a large boar all by itself on a steep replanted mountain side. To elaborate a little, this boar had picked a home which was going to be very difficult to stalk because of steep terrain. His proximity was totally surrounded by impenetrable overgrowth and mounds of deadfalls, left behind from the loggers to stop the topsoil runoff after the trees are harvested, with swirling winds secondary to the confluence of the mountains. Nonetheless, we drove to the most accessible starting point and began our sneak into his home.


The three of us headed up an overgrown old logging path after firmly implanting into our minds







The steep terrain in this part of British Columbia takes little effort for a black bear to negotiate. Being in good physical condition will give you more opportunities at getting close to a good bear.



TOUGH. FAST. PROVEN.



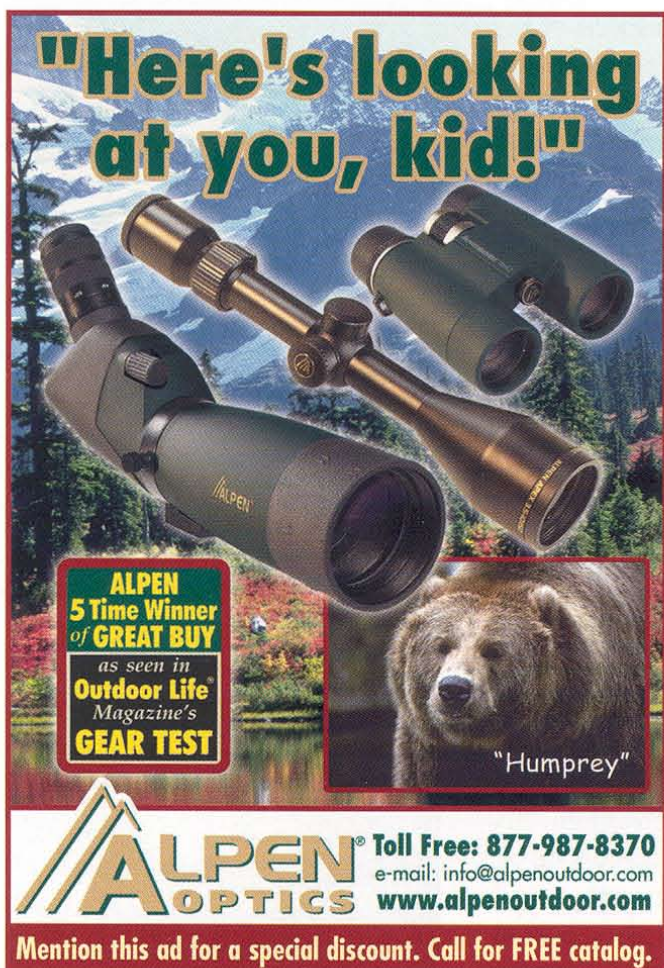
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the bruin's whereabouts in relationship to a vertical black rock bluff. Our hopes were that he would not move far in the hour it would take us to get there and that the wind would not give us away. We made it about halfway up the steepest part, but he picked up our scent because of the constantly swirling wind. As if he had done it a hundred times before, he just turned and walked out of sight and up the mountain before entering into the forest some 500 yards away. He glanced over his massive shoulder in our direction as if to sneer and laugh at our attempt. We left dejected but decided to look for him again in the afternoon. By the looks of the amount of bear scat piles around, we surmised he had been there for a while and was very comfortable staying there. We had been beaten badly and the bear seemed to know it. We named

"Here's looking at you, kid!"



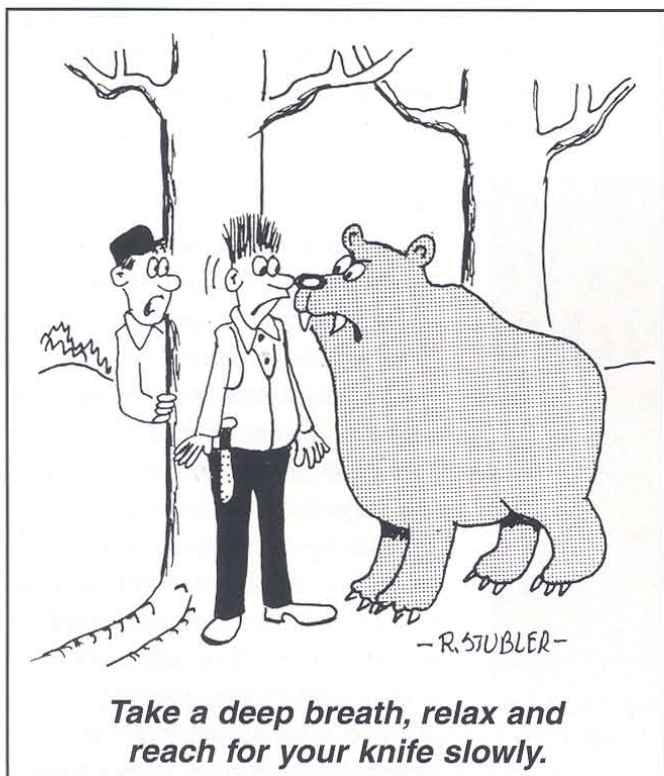
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him Big Al and he named us, I am sure.

That afternoon, we returned back to the lookout point that allowed us to glass for Big Al. Immediately



upon putting his binoculars up, Dave spotted him again back in the same general area as that morning. The decision was made to try it again. We tried to see if any other approach was possible but the terrain dictated the same approach. Back we went to the jumping off point and the climb began again. This time the wind was better but not great. We crossed over our previous point of progress and proceeded to close the distance. Through a picket fence of debris and Christmas trees at 40 yards we saw Big Al slowly heading our way. Then just as before, the wind shifted and blew right toward our quarry. We backed up quickly and climbed higher to gain altitude and avoid the wind. We thought we had him this time because we saw him making his way through the trees heading for an open area directly below us. Steve got in position for the shot but just before the bruin stepped out, he stopped behind some trees where we had stood. He picked up our scent from the trail, turned and bolted down into the thick cover. Gone again, outsmarted by the same bear two times in one day, now it was getting personal. Dejected again, we headed back to the truck and made our way back to camp as the light drew to a close at 9:30 p.m. Dinner and bed were in order.

Three days later we were back on the point that overlooked Big Al's territory. The weather was the same as before. Again, true to form, Dave immediately spotted Big Al, now it was Paul's turn. This time we really sat and analyzed the situation. No bear was going to outsmart us a third time! We were over 1,200 yards away and despite many different questionable possible approaches, we found ourselves back climbing the same trail we had used before. We have to admit, after two failed attempts using this same tactic, we did not feel too confident. This time though, we planned a quick and direct assault, but again, he wined us as it swirled in the bowl-shaped depression in the side of the mountain. Big Al walked out of sight just like the first day, up the mountain he entered the forest at the same place but not without stopping and giving us the same disgusting look. Paul announced that he was going to get Big Al. Dave cautioned Paul about focusing on a single bear for the remaining three days, but the game was on. The ribbing and the jokes flew around us that night as we had struck out three times with the same animal. He had made fools of us. The whole camp echoed with "Three strikes and you are out."

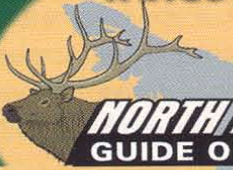
The fifth morning of the hunt found us going directly back up to the same lookout to see if Big Al had come out yet for breakfast. This time, right as we were about to move on, he appeared at the bottom of the semi-open grassy slope. He was lower on the slope. There was no discussion and no planning needed since we knew the only approach was the same as the last three failed attempts.

Off we went to our now too familiar trail leading up to Big Al's home area. We quickly climbed up the path through the timber and out into the slash cut-over. We simultaneously saw that big black blob. Paul quietly made his way to the first stump that gave a clear view. Big Al was very close to the edge of the dense timber, so after quickly putting the crosshairs in the right location, Paul fired and followed it with two more before the bruin made it 15 feet and disappeared into the dense underbrush. Big Al was no longer a challenge, he was a trophy. After a rainy photo session, skinning and quartering, we packed him out and drove back to camp. Big Al turned out to be 6' 5" but was in his last years. He had no fat reserves, gray hair on his muzzle and back and his teeth were worn down to the jaw line.

The bear Steve took was on the second day of the hunt with another guide, Doug. We traveled and glassed all morning and surprisingly saw very few bears. After lunch and a nap we headed back out at 3 p.m. and at 4 p.m., as we traveled down a winding road that overlooked the edge of a large pristine mountain lake, we crossed a bridge and Doug pulled over. With no excitement, he announced that there were two bears down in the ravine a hundred yards back. We thought he was joking because of his lack of excitement and litany of prac-

tical jokes that the guides play on one another. We played along and ran up the road catching up to Doug at the edge, overlooking the deep ravine.

Indeed there was a bear at the bottom slowly walking away. No, there were two bears. As Steve got into a prone shooting position, Paul ranged the bear at 85 yards. It rapidly became apparent that there was a much larger boar following a sow. Doug was busy blowing his wounded rabbit call to halt their progress toward a jungle of bush while Steve was waiting for his order to shoot. After an eternity (misinterpreted as patience), Doug stopped blowing the call and issued the order to take him. The bear immediately bolted and collapsed 10 yards later into the creek after the devastating damage caused by the Barnes Triple Shock bullet. We made our way down the embankment and to the creek to find a massive coastal black bear well over 500 pounds. The photo session had to take place in the creek since there was no way to get him out of there. This was followed by the normal skinning, quartering and packing the beast back up the embankment. The rug was a legitimate 7' 6" when measured correctly back in camp and the skull measured 20 12/16 inches. We will both swear in court that Doug was at least, if not more, excited than we were. You have to love that in your guide.



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A third member of our party, Mr. Craig Field took a huge bruin literally 200 yards from where Steve shot his bear, four hours later. This bruin squared an honest 7' 3" and the skull was right at 20 inches. This was unheard of and Dave told us not to expect this kind of opportunity every time we come back.

From the time Steve spotted his bear until the bullet crashed through the chest was about two minutes. For Craig, it was all of five minutes. Despite our public school education, we realize that Steve and Craig have the bigger mounts to ooh and aah over in their houses. We all realize however, that Big Al is the better trophy! So how you measure your trophy really depends on what you mean. Hunting is about hunting and not meas-

urements. If you do measure (and we all do), do so correctly so you and your taxidermist can remain on speaking terms. Size matters, but how much and to whom? For us, it is the friendship, the adventure and the challenge of the hunt.

We highly recommend Dave Fyfe and North Island Guide Outfitters. Check out their web site at www.huntingvancouverisland.com or give them a call at 250-850-1500. 🐾



Stephen I Merlin, MD
Paul AJ Plante, MD

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Bruin in the Kitchen - Recipes



Keep It Moist; Keep It Tender by Lorelie Scorzafava

Bear meat, if cooked properly, can be every bit as tasty as beef, and those who harvest a bear and bring it to the table can attest to this. Leaner than beef, because the fat is on the outside and can be cut away. It has fewer calories and is lower in cholesterol, but the lean meat can become tough and dry if not cooked properly due to the lack of marbling. To make sure your bear meat does not dry out, it should be cooked with a moist cooking method. Unlike other game meat, bear must be thoroughly cooked because they may carry trichinosis like pork. If you remove the fat before cooking, you can tenderize and moisten bear meat by marinating in an oil and wine or lemon juice mixture before cooking. You can inject added flavor and moistness, baste them often while cooking or cook in a closed environment, such as a Dutch oven, roasting bag or braising liquid. Bear meat is darker and may be stronger than other game meat. It is a coarser, heavier meat that may take more seasonings or sauces, and more cooking time to tenderize.

Braised Bear Roast

- 1/2 cup flour
- Salt and pepper
- 1 tsp. dried thyme
- 3-4 pound bear shoulder roast
(at least 2-inches thick)
- Vegetable oil (for browning)
- 1/2 pound diced salt pork or thick sliced bacon
- 1/2 stick butter
- 2 large onions, sliced
- 1 large apple, peeled, seeded and sliced
- 3 tbsp. brown sugar
- 1 12 oz. bottle of dark beer or beef broth
- 1 small can tomato sauce
- 1/4 cup apple cider
- 1 bay leaf
- 2 cloves of garlic

Slow braising in a Dutch oven tenderizes this shoulder roast or any large roast.

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Mix the flour, thyme, salt and pepper in a large paper bag. Add the roast and shake to coat. In Dutch oven, brown meat on all sides in oil over medium heat. Remove meat and set aside. Add the salt pork to the pan and fry until brown and crisp and fat is rendered. Remove salt pork pieces from pan and reserve. Add butter to the drippings in the pan and cook the onions and apple slices until soft. Add sugar, cook and stir until onions are browned. Add beer, tomato sauce and cider, scraping any bits from the bottom of the pan. Return meats to the pan. Add bay leaf and garlic cloves. Cover and bake until meat is tender, about 2 1/2 hours. Slice and serve with mashed potatoes and pass the pan juices.