

BLACK BEAR USUALLY DOCILE BUT SOMETIMES DANGEROUS

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About the time a person thinks they know all there is to know about a subject or way of life something comes along to change their outlook. It happens to me all the time and the most recent occurrence was dramatic enough to compel me to want to share it with others. It changed long-held beliefs on possible dangers to humans posed by bears.

A TV documentary on the Discovery Channel and a book titled: *Bear Attacks: The Deadly Truth* were the vehicles that wrought my change. I have spent much of my working years in the woods in close association with our native black bear. I always held a healthy respect for all bear I encountered, something I learned from being around horses or bulls. I observed their body language and tempered my actions accordingly. As a consequence, I truly believed I had nothing to fear from contact with bear. After viewing and reading the above-mentioned articles, I have to change my opinion.

Most of us have long known the dangers from grizzlies and their propensity for seemingly unprovoked attacks.

I, like most others, have long held that black bear are shy and docile animals and pose minimal or no danger to humans. The above pieces present convincing proof that is not always true. In fact, under certain circumstances, black bear can be more deadly than the grizzly.

The TV presentation may not be readily available, but the book is and it's a much more comprehensive work that should be read by anyone likely to come in contact with bear. The author has spent several years working in the field studying and researching bear habits and attacks on humans.

He has spent the last 10 years making his living primarily by teaching bear encounter survival courses to government personnel and industry employees who work in the field. A comparison is made of grizzlies and black bear; how to avoid contact with both and prevent attack, and how to react in the event of an actual attack. He lists five aggressive bear behavior patterns and how recognize them.

Several accounts of attacks are described and personally researched by the author. They are graphically portrayed in chilling detail not soon forgotten by the reader. It should not be construed as a condemnation of all bear, but rather a means of informing people how to coexist safely with them.

Most locals and visitors are well acquainted with visits by our ample bear population. After reading of the experiences other have had under similar circumstances we have been truly lucky. Possible reasons for this are discussed, conditions which can change abruptly or are unpredictable.

We personally have had annual visits from one or more bear and I have been more than tolerant and sympathetic with their plight. I will continue to do so in spite of my newly founded fears. I also will have a much more heightened awareness of possible dire consequences. I firmly believe others should as well.

In closing, I urge everyone who spends time where they may encounter bear to read *Bear Attacks: The Deadly Truth*. A copy is available at the Old Forge Library and there are copies for sale at the Old Forge Hardware bookstore. They would be excellent gifts and one should be in every camp where guests are regularly hosted. Read it – you may well be glad you did!