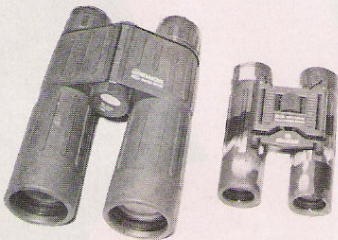


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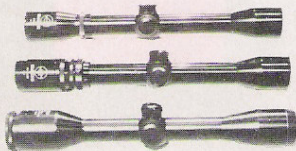
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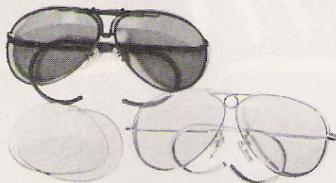
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# GUN NOTES



*By Elmer Keith, Executive Editor*

**EDITOR'S NOTE:**

*The following has been taken from Elmer Keith's book, Guns & Ammo For Hunting Big Game, published in 1965, and now out of print, by Petersen Publishing Company. This chapter, entitled, "Grizzlies And Black Bear," deals with Keith's many years of experience in hunting these animals, along with his observations of their habits and characteristics.*

■ North America may truly be called the home of the bear, as this continent supports more bear than any in the world. Formerly, the grizzly ranged in great numbers from Mexico to Alaska along the Rockies and Pacific coastal ranges, but now is probably gone except from British Columbia north along the coast, and only scattered grizzlies occur the length of the Rocky Mountain chain. No great number of grizzlies exist anywhere south of Yellowstone Park.

The park still contains a nice comple-

ment of grizzlies, and Montana, Idaho and Wyoming, where they join the park, have a few, including the overflow from the park. Northward, however, we have grizzlies in increasing numbers, beginning at about the head of the Blackfoot River, the head of the Dearborn and the South Fork of the Flathead. From the section where these three rivers head on north, grizzlies occur in ever-increasing numbers. The divide between the South Fork of the Flathead and the Sun River is still fairly good grizzly country. To the west the Swan River and the Mission range contain grizzlies. Here on the head of the North Fork of the Salmon we still have an occasional grizzly. The Bitterroots today have only a few of the grizzlies left that formerly ranged these mountains when Theodore Roosevelt hunted along this divide in the eighties. We still have an odd grizzly in the Middle Fork country of the Salmon River and I saw four one evening, in a high alpine park this side of the Middle Fork. A

*continued on page 14*





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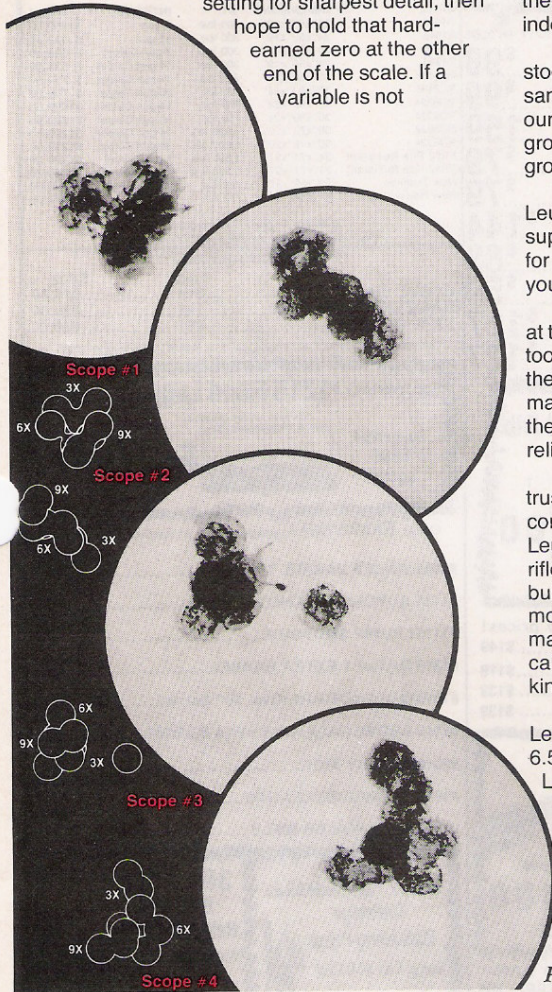
We drew four Vari-X II 3x9s from stock, then mounted them in turn on the same target rifle. With each scope and our own handloads, we fired 3-shot groups at 9X, at 6X and at 3X, each group on a fresh target.

To show how consistent these Leupold variables are, we superimposed the three groups for each scope into the composites you see here.

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## GUNNOTES

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stray grizzly shows up occasionally on down the main Salmon from Horse Creek to Sheep Creek. North of the main Salmon River in Idaho, we have the Selway and Lochsa branches of the Clearwater River and these all contain some grizzlies; probably more are still around the head of the streams on the divide between the Selway and the Lochsa than elsewhere on the Bitterroot range today.

A very small desert specimen is said to still exist in the Craters of the Moon, south of Arco, Idaho. I have flown over the Craters a couple of times and crossed through their upper edge many times, but never have been out in them on foot, so I don't know whether any of this small subspecies of grizzly still exists or not. My friends, the late Julius Maelzer and Fred Carl of Salmon, have told me of seeing skins brought out of the Craters by sheepmen, and they were small, big-headed grizzlies probably dwarfed by centuries of existence in that desert section of lava flows. Maelzer has hunted them there and seen plenty of tracks, leaving no doubt they were grizzly, but failed to get a shot at any of them.

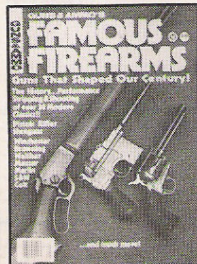
A very few may still exist in Colorado, New Mexico and in the Mogolons in Arizona, but they are now very scarce and should have permanent protection in those states. Glacier Park in northern Montana has a nice bunch of grizzlies left and they extend ever northward along the Continental Divide into the edge of the Arctic. Some grizzlies also inhabit the flat lowlands to the east of the Divide in the north and even out on the Barren Grounds of the Arctic.

When my old ancestor, Captain William Clark of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, came up the Missouri River in 1804, they had considerable trouble with grizzlies, especially about where Fort Benton and Great Falls, Montana, now stand. Civilization has pushed the grizzly back and made him strictly a mountain animal in the United States, but farther north he still inhabits the lowlands east of the divide. I saw many fresh grizzly tracks on the Siccanni, Prophet, and Musqua Rivers, a couple of days' pack east of the mountains and along where the Alcan Highway now runs north from Fort St. John, British Columbia. What that highway has done to the species in that section I do not know, but it cannot help their existence in any section.

The great brown bears of Alaska are also grizzlies, differing in size due to the great abundance of seafood they have available, and are larger than the mountain grizzly for this reason. Formerly the California grizzly also attained great size, as he too fed on salmon a good part of each summer, but the California grizzly is now probably extinct. If any section of that once great grizzly range is still wild enough, especially in the parks, then some bear should be removed from Alaska and again planted back in California.

continued on 16

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## GUNNOTES

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Black bear do well living near civilization, but not so the grizzly. He is an animal with considerable ranging qualities, and likes the remote sections as far from civilization as he can get. While the Yellowstone and Glacier Park grizzlies have been fed so long they have become used to seeing people, the wild grizzly is a different animal entirely in this respect. Formerly there were a good many grizzlies along the park on the West Gallatin, and the fall of 1917 I trailed 17 different grizzlies on that watershed and all went into the park, where I could not follow. They were digging out and eating the winter cache of piñon nuts of the pine squirrels and their huge droppings were a solid mass of pine nut shells. They were out quite late that year, well into November, and traveled ever higher into the park. I trailed every fresh track I could locate in the snow, but never got to see any of them.

Today, in the United States, the grizzly inhabits only the high rugged mountain ranges and, with the exception of the parks, as far from civilization as he can get. The more remote places without any pack trails are today his main range.

Grizzlies vary in coloration from a very light creamy yellow to jet black without a single white hair. No section of the continent seems to have any corner on a certain color phase. The grizzlies of the Bitterroots here in Idaho and Montana seem to run more uniform in color than those farther north, being usually a very dark undercover of brown to almost black on feet and legs, with more or less silver tipping over neck and shoulders and extending back to the hips and at times to root of tail. In the Brazeau district in Canada, many jet-black specimens occur, and this same color occurs north of Jasper Park on Fish Creek. We have seen one old sow there that was jet black but had two yearlings that were almost yellow and a silver-tipped four-year-old with her when killed. On Admiralty, Chichagof and Baranof Islands in Southeast Alaska about all color variations occur, with a great many jet-black specimens. Up the Unuck River out of Ketchikan are found many of the jet-black grizzlies. The former world's record for grizzly before I killed that old sorehead at Snug Harbor was a jet-black bear named Old Groaner, killed by Bruce Johnstone of Ketchikan. The bear had been much shot up and one eye and zygomatic arch competely shot away, and bullets were imbedded in his frame in various places. Farther north, I saw bear that were almost silvery in color all over, like a silver badger. You will see all color variations in different localities. Often you will see these extremes of color variation from jet black to silver or blond in one section of the country.

The grizzly never inhabited the eastern part of this continent, being content with the Rocky Mountain and Coast Ranges

and the northern barrel ground for some distance east of the Rockies. Skull conformations differ greatly between the mountain and coastal bears, the largest skulls and bear being on the Alaskan Peninsula and on Kodiak Island. The peninsula bears (*Ursus gyas*) have long narrow skulls, while the Kodiak species (*Ursus middendorffi*) have much higher, wider, broader and more massive skulls. Some folks think the largest bears are all on Kodiak but I for one believe that bear just as large live on the Alaskan Peninsula. In weight a very big mountain grizzly would probably seldom go over 1,000 to 1,200 pounds today, but the huge coastal grizzlies of the peninsula and Kodiak Island may run to 1,600 or even 1,800 pounds in rare instances when hog fat, before holing up in the fall. The C.E. Sykes expedition obtained one enormous bear on the peninsula, but with most of the real big ones there are almost never facilities at hand for weighing them. When it comes to the size of bears, several very experienced hunters who have hunted the Arctic claim that it is very rare that they find a polar bear that is as large as the big Kodiak and Alaskan Peninsula bears—

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and they are shaped very differently.

Pelts of mountain grizzlies will average best late in the fall just before they hole up, usually in November in this country and earlier farther north whenever winter sets in. In the spring when they first come out, pelts will be even longer, glossier and heavier as a rule, but some will be found that have badly matted during hibernation; also some have had water and ice freeze on the guard hair and pulled it out, or have rubbed some in the den. Later, when they come out, they will rub as soon as the sun gets warm. Further, they like to rub on some old pitch-covered bear tree.

In any mountain grizzly country, you will see many trees where the bears have reared up and bitten out chunks of bark and wood as high as they could reach. Whether they do this as a sort of signpost of their domain, to tell other bears of their presence, or just for the hell of it, I have never been able to tell, but they bite trees as high as they can all over their range. The grizzly cannot climb trees, except as a little cub, on account of its long, straight or slightly curved claws. The longest claws will always be found on spring-killed specimens that have just come out, as the claws continue to grow throughout their lives. In the fall the claws are often worn off fairly short from much digging, but by spring will be grown out beautifully. The longest claws I have heard of were on a brownie killed in the spring and went six inches for the longest on each front foot. The hind claws are very short, not used for either digging or fighting.

continued next month