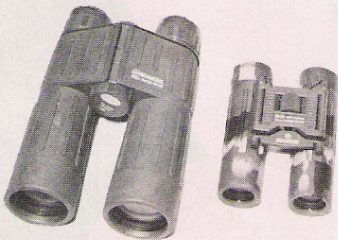


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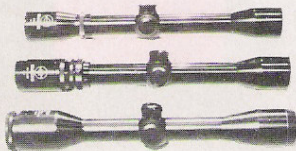
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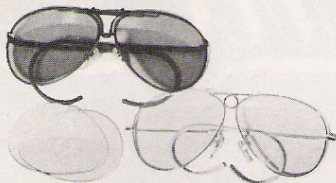
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GUN NOTES



By Elmer Keith, Executive Editor

EDITOR'S NOTE:

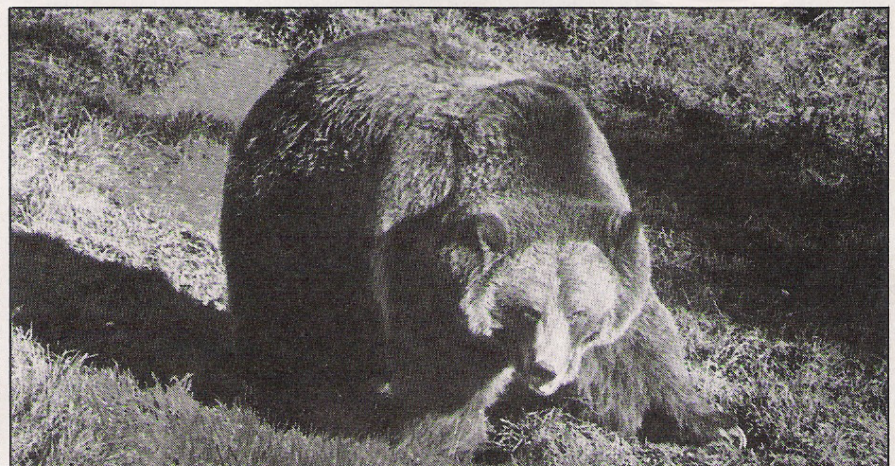
The following has been taken from Elmer Keith's book, Guns & Ammo For Hunting Big Game, published in 1965, and now out of print, by Petersen Publishing Company. This chapter, entitled, "Grizzlies And Black Bear," deals with Keith's many years of experience in hunting these animals, along with his observations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



GUN NOTES



By Elmer Keith, Executive Editor

EDITOR'S NOTE:

In this issue, Elmer Keith continues his excellent treatise on grizzlies and black bears, gathered during a lifetime of hunting. His colorful reminiscences of these game animals were taken from his book, *Guns & Ammo For Hunting Big Game*, published in 1965, and now out of print, by Petersen Publishing Company.

If any dead game animals were caught by the snowslides of the winter, so much the better, as the grizzlies will find them when they start working the slides. Then you have a good bait that they will return to until it is cleaned up. If you can find a bear kill that is not eaten, it is a sure bet for the big bear.

Regardless of how good a rifle shot you may be, never chance a long-range shot at a big bear if it is possible to get closer and into more effective range. Out at long range a rifle has plenty of penetration but little shock effect left, so get close enough to give your bullet its maximum knock-down shock effect on bruin and you will have far fewer cripples. If you do wound a big bear and he goes into a small patch of timber, or alders, it's best to try and find some vantage point from which you can watch the surrounding terrain and try and kill him when he comes out, and if he doesn't come out, give him plenty of time to stiffen up before you go in after him. A wounded grizzly is one of the most dangerous, for once he decides to square accounts, nothing but death will stop him. Leslie Simson, the old African hunter, once told my partner, Arthur Kinman, he considered a grizzly or brownie in the alders or timber just as dangerous as any beast he had ever been up against in his



lifetime of collecting all over the North, as well as in Africa. Simson has probably killed more African game than any other American, so should know whereof he speaks.

Today our grizzlies have been forced back into the mountains over all their southern range, owing to the inroads of civilization, and for this reason remain denuded longer and have less growing time each summer; hence they are today over the southern part of their range smaller animals on the average than they were 75 to 100 years ago. The mountain grizzly, inhabiting only the roughest and highest, as well as longest winter sections of our Rocky Mountains, never did attain the huge size of grizzlies that formerly ranged well out on the plains and had an abundance of game as well as berries and roots to live on. The grizzlies of the Bitterroot Mountains here used to have the name of being the smallest and meanest of all grizzlies. As a rule a mountain grizzly is much more apt to fight than are the huge coastal grizzlies and brownies of Alaska. He is

continued on page 16



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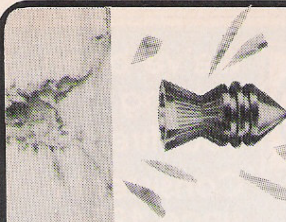
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continued from page 15

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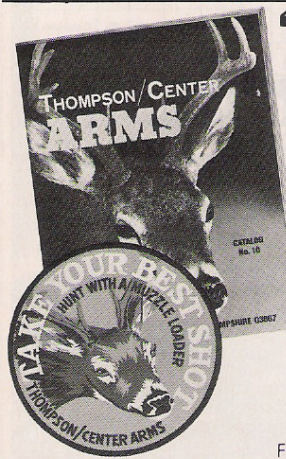
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grand game, second to none on this continent, and to my notion is an even finer trophy than a good ram—certainly harder to obtain and offering much more sport and thrills in taking. The real big ones are always bear of very old age, 20 to 40 or more years old. Many have lived to be 50 years of age, and when you consider that at least 10 to 15 years are required for a bear to attain his full stature, and he then fills out and gains weight for many more years, it's no wonder that really big grizzlies are old.

Two old grizzlies used to range the headwaters of the South Fork of the Flathead and I heard of them often for 20 years. One was called Gordon Bill and the other White River Jim, as they frequented those two streams. Many hunters of my acquaintance who wanted a grizzly turned back when they saw the tracks of those old boys and decided they had lost no bear at all. I heard that someone had killed Gordon Bill but I never have heard of them getting old Jim. Both were very big grizzlies. I have seen their tracks several times, and a friend and I once trailed old Jim along the divide for three days on one light lunch, but never did catch up with him in a light snow. We slept out under a tree each night and hoped to have a meal off that great bear if we caught up with him, but the last I saw of his tracks, they were pointed for the head of Sun River and still going. They were enormous tracks for a mountain grizzly.

The spring is by far the best time to get a grizzly and you should be out at daylight and where you can cover all the slides possible, then watch them until about ten o'clock in the morning, after which you might as well take a snooze, until about three in the afternoon. The bear will work out of the deep snow in the timber and feed from early morning until about nine or ten o'clock, then they will usually go back in the timber or brush and bed up until towards evening. If you are in good grizzly country you will find them in this way, but in the fall, bear hunting in the mountains is very uncertain, more a matter of chance than in the spring. In remote sections of Canada and Alaska, where they have not been hunted to any extent, the old males will often come out and feed just before it gets dark.

Sows with cubs will be the most active and will be seen more often than the big males, because they have a family to support and must be on the go a great deal more than the solitary old males. Today you will be very fortunate in killing a grizzly along the Rocky Mountain chain that will weigh from 800 to 1,000 pounds, but formerly grizzlies were killed that weighed 1,600 pounds or more and some are said to have reached 1,800 pounds in the old days when buffalo and all game were plentiful. The record bear I killed at Snug Harbor was lean and we estimated him at 1,200

continued on page 18

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GUNNOTES

continued from page 16

pounds, and I for one am certain in my own mind we did not overestimate him, as it required all four of us to roll him over, using his legs as levers. He would have easily carried 400 pounds of fat or more when hog fat, in late fall. Grizzlies have been killed in late fall that had a layer of back fat from six to eight inches thick. Even caribou often have a layer of fat four inches thick on the back. Anyone can readily see how much heavier a fat animal will be than a lean one.

In the spring as the snow melts back, the bear usually work along the lower edge of the snow line. They are still heavily furred and like to bed in the snow during the heat of the day, and for this reason will usually be found following the snow line back and up. Watching slides and meadows from some vantage point is the easiest way to hunt them. The hardest way of all is to pick up a fresh track and trail up the bear. In the timber, where he will usually be found, the big bear has every advantage in both hearing and smell. He is even harder to still-hunt than either deer or elk, and they are both hard enough. One will simply have to watch the slightest wind at all times and also where he is putting his feet, for the cracking of a small dead limb is usually enough to warn the bear and send him on his way. If you do run onto him in the timber it will be at close range, and after your first shot, if it is not an instant kill, anything can happen. Jim Simpson, an old Wyoming guide, once told me of trailing up a good grizzly on a light fall of snow. Jim had only a .250 Savage Model '99 rifle for the job and he finally found the old bear asleep in a windfall and approached very close, then carefully shot him between the eyes. He got away with it all right, but if that tiny slug had missed the brain, the chances are more than even that the bear would have killed Jim.

I noticed that all experienced guides of the North hold the bear in wholesome respect and always take every precaution before shooting. Certainly there can be no greater thrill in big-game hunting on this continent than trailing a big grizzly through dense alders, or timber, where you never know when you may walk right onto him and have to kill him before he can reach you. Such timber hunting is also most apt to produce a charge by a wounded bear. If hit at long range, or even moderate range, the bear has an even chance of getting away, but if surprised at close quarters and wounded, he will usually charge on sight. When he does so it is an awesome sight and you may well know he must be killed to stop him. I saw one sow grizzly charge out at the hunter from some brush twice and each time he knocked her down, but the third time she came in earnest and we could plainly see the bottom flats of her hind feet as she reached right out past her ears with them at each jump.

He had first knocked her down and she went back in the brush, after which her two yearlings came out walking on their hind feet. He killed each with a single chest shot, using Western open point 180-grain .30-06. Then the old sow came out again and was again knocked down, after which she went back into the brush, growled and whined for a time, then with a bawl of rage came for us. That hunter is dead now, but I'll bet he remembered that grizzly charge to his dying day. This last cartridge in his rifle put her down for keeps. Those 180-grain open point bullets expand well but did not have enough penetration to break the shoulders down on the first shot, and later shots into the chest seemed to have no more effect than if we had thrown rocks. However on skinning out and opening that small grizzly, the heart and lungs were found to be demolished, and how she lived so long is another one for the book.

One day George Bates and I were working the rim of a high basin on a branch of Fish Creek in British Columbia for caribou and that old grizzly. Coming out on a rim we looked down into a huge amphitheater. Heavy fog rolled into the basin and covered it entirely below us. Occasionally a wind would suck up the basin and blow the fog away so we could see patches of the terrain below. Finally, in a rift in the fog, I saw a huge old grizzly waddle along down one side of the gulch and then go into it, searching and digging for roots or small rodents. As the wind was directly behind us I jumped up and ran back over the ridge and Bates followed me, asking what all the hurry was about. I told him of seeing the big grizzly about the center of the basin and that we would have to make a long two-mile circle and come down from the other side, in order to have any chance of keeping the wind in our favor. Bates remonstrated, saying I had probably seen only a porcupine and insisted on going directly down that long shale slide to the bear. I told him we would never get him if we did, but he was sure I had mistaken a porcupine for a grizzly, and as this was his first big game hunt in the fall of 1927 I finally became disgusted and told him all right, "It will save me a hell of a big skinning and packing job anyway." So down that slide we went, as carefully as possible. The fog had closed until we could not see ten yards and when we reached the edge of the gulch, where I had last seen the great bear, I sat down to listen. Bates stayed on his feet and started walking along the rim of the narrow gulch to see what he could see. Soon we heard a snort and then rocks rolling, as that bear tore up the other side, completely hidden by fog. Startled, Bates asked, "What was that?" and I answered, "A porcupine, I guess."

Later on that same trip we had crossed Fish Creek and were working out way back toward a low divide over the Rockies to the north of Mount Ida. We had camped for the night, in a wide, beautiful valley. Next morning as I was just ready to start pack-

continued on page 20

GUNNOTES

continued from page 18

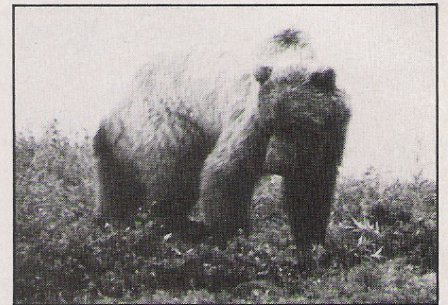
ing up the cook outfit and was polishing off one last Dutch oven biscuit, wrapped around a choice fat slice of mountain sheep loin, I happened to glance across the valley. A lifetime in the hills has trained my eyes until they are always searching for game, regardless of what I am doing, and that one glance revealed four grizzlies working down a rock slide between thin ribbons of fir shin-tangle. Harry Snyder was standing nearby, so I said, "Harry, put your glasses on those four animals and see if they are not porcupines." Harry was an old experienced big-game hunter and knew his stuff. I had told him about losing the other grizzly. One look through his glasses and he pronounced them grizzly, a sow and two yearlings and a three- or four-year-old. Instantly he yelled at Jim Ross, the head guide, and the camp was in turmoil as the three Callean boys, Cree Indians, named Sam, Pete and Joe, all ran for the horses. We soon saddled and forgot about moving camp that day.

Jim Ross detailed Pete to back up and guide the Skipper, our nickname for Carrol Paul, and I was to guide Bates again, while Jim guided Harry Snyder. We rode across the valley well downwind from the feeding grizzlies and tied our horses. Then, splitting into three groups of two each, we

started spreading out and working back into the wind, toward the last position we had seen the feeding bear. Pete and the Skipper climbed highest, while Bates and I took the center of the line and Jim and Harry the lower end. The shin-tangle tapered out to only a foot high above us some 400 yards on the mountain, but where we were cutting across those narrow snowslides and patches of shin-tangle the fir trees were from breast-high to six feet or more. We had gone about a quarter mile when I came through another strip of shin-tangle and stopped to look over the next slide, before showing myself. Bates followed close on my heels. Just as I had covered the whole slide, both above and below me, seeing nothing of either Pete and the Skipper above or of Jim and Harry below, the old sow walked out of the brush about 100 to 125 yards above me. She promptly turned her rump to us and started digging. She was a jet-black grizzly of about 500 to 600 pounds weight at most, a rather small sow. I whispered for Bates to take her and to sit down so he could hold steady in the hard wind. Told him to bust her right over the base of the tail and be sure and center her rump, as she was up the steep slope above us and I well knew the other three were somewhere in that strip of shin-tangle she had just vacated. Bates would not sit down but insisted on kneeling, and in that position I could clearly see the wind move his rifle muzzle. He was using a Webley &

Scott .300 Magnum and Western 180-grain open point ammo, when I had advised 220-grain for the job.

At the shot, the bear dropped and rolled end over end down toward us for 30 to 50 yards, then she regained her feet and reared up on her hind legs. I could see instantly that Bates had muffed the shot and hit the right hip, breaking it, and the slug had emerged on the belly, letting out a hatful of intestine. I had never seen a madder bear. She bawled for all she was worth, all the while she looked all around for us, but we were well hidden in the shin-tangle. I told Bates to bust her again, between the forelegs. At the same time the two cubs or yearlings, I think they were, ran out into the slide, followed by the four-year-old. Instantly Harry Snyder put a 172-grain W.T.C. Company handload of mine through the four-year-old's lungs, close in



behind the shoulder. The bear snapped at the bullet entrance and went back into the brush. Bates shot again and again the sow went down and rolled close to us, then regained her feet and again stood up on that one good hind leg while she bawled, then reached down and bit off six-foot sections of her intestines and flung them aside with a shake of her shaggy head. I now heard the Skipper shoot twice where the four-year-old had run through the brush and the two yearlings came down the slope on an angle toward us. I told Bates to bust the sow again and sit down and place it right, then rolling the safety over on my Hoffman .300 Magnum I held well ahead of the lead yearling and fired into the slide rock in an effort to turn them back out into the open where Harry could get in a shot. My shot threw up a cloud of white rock dust, but those two yearlings ran right through it and into the strip of shin-tangle, within 20 yards of us. At the same time Bates shot again—and again the sow went down and rolled. She was not getting very close and was terrible in her rage, but did not seem to be able to locate us as she evidently heard the Skipper's shots above us and back on the other side of the shin-tangle. Again she bit off a long section of her intestines and flung it aside. I knew she was bawling as her mouth was wide open and now flecked with blood from Bates's last lung shots, but neither Bates nor I could hear her make a sound, though both Pete and Skipper above us and Jim and Harry below could hear her plainly and the boys in camp three miles away as well. Some freak of the wind prevented our hearing her bawling.

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