

BONAIR BOX BEAR

Arriving in Alaska the sun was shining and temperature was in the mid 40s'. Clear and mild for at least 2 more days. It was the end of 8 straight days of mild, clear weather. Just before a run of 10 days of rain and gale force winds followed by more gales and rain. We were lucky to have a good tent. Don't believe the salesman that says his clothing is waterproof. If it says tested and approved in Alaska by registered guides, it should do for awhile.

Last year before the banquet, we all looked at the Alaskan Brown Bear Hunt, generously donated by Neil Webster of Bearup Adventures. Checking the outfitter, references, websites and just daydreaming about how the entire adventure could turn out, the time suddenly was "Item # 39" at the auction. I started bidding with my wife on the phone listening. I quit bidding but my wife threatened me not to come home without that bear hunt. What else could I do?

After about 18 hrs. in planes & airports I landed on a "sand airstrip" at the Yahna River tent camp. In the sand I saw wolf & bear tracks. Roddy Shelton, my guide from Bearup Adventures, helped me stow my gear in the tent and we had fresh salmon for dinner. We talked and planned the next days hunting. He is a retired school teacher and hunts ALOT.

The next day took us down the beach to the Yahna River, a salmon stream. We saw seals bobbing in the ocean and some salmon running up the river. Bear tracks were everywhere, but no bears. Shortly after 10:00am, we were repeatedly buzzed by 2 planes, the first of many flights all week. It turns out it was from an outlaw outfitter that didn't have rights in that area but was dropping fisherman for 4hr. fishing trips. Not a good way to start the hunt but after awhile a young bear, maybe 3 yrs. old, showed up looking for a free meal. The fisherman only having fishing poles and whistles were waving their poles and whistling for all they were worth as they ran through the river and waited on the beach for the plane to pick them up. They had enough fishing for the day. The bear must have had enough of their salmon and started up the river. The breeze carried our scent across the river to the bear. We could tell he had our scent. As soon as he caught it he started to cross the river. When it got out of the river at 50 yds., it was great to watch. As he worked his way up the drainage, it was exciting. When it stood up at 20 yds, cocked his head, popped his teeth and rumbled towards us, he had my undivided attention through my scope. The guide stood up, waved, yelled and charged towards it. It did back up about 10 yds. into the brush and gradually worked away from us after a few tense minutes.

The next day I saw a cow moose. Later that week I shot a coyote. The rain had started by then and we found a blue insulated plastic pallet box washed ashore. We rolled it about 100yds. to a knoll and set it up on logs. BONAIR insulated boxes sure make nice waterproof blinds. I highly recommend finding one to spend a rain-filled week. We saw 2 more bears that week. One stopped in the river 150yds. from our box. It dove into the river and caught a salmon within seconds. It didn't take much longer for it to disappear

into the brush to eat it. The other one was smaller and about 125 yds away when it caught our scent. It took off running in the same direction it came from. We could see about ½ mile in that direction. It was still running as it disappeared from sight.

Back at the camp, when the rain started the kitchen area was in 6"- 16" of water, depending on the day. The tent didn't get more than 1"-2". It was on the high ground. We did have comfortable cots. The coyotes were howling nightly from the "airstrip". One night around midnight I woke up and heard splashing near the tent. It was a bear chasing salmon up and down the stream, the same one that had overflowed into our camp and tent. I hoped the salmon kept swimming upstream without taking a detour since it was my side of the tent and I heard bears don't know how to use zippers to get into a tent. We didn't get a lot of sleep that night.

The next week I saw what I think was the same bear that caught and ate a salmon in front of us at the same spot the week before. Because of all the rain and him eating that salmon, I felt he had "grown" enough that week and I decided to take him. He was on the other side of the stream grubbing roots and fishing. I crawled to within 75 yds and tried to get a shot. The brush and washed over trees blocked a clear shot. I crawled to the edge of the stream and waited in a bear path. It was at 40 yds. when the bear turned broadside and 1 shot ended the hunt and the work started. It was getting dark and instead of starting to skin the bear, we rolled it across the stream and onto higher ground for the next day. A gale hit the next day and where I shot the bear was now underwater. We rolled our BONAIR box down for a wind and rain break. We both carried the head and hide back to camp. We thought about using the BONAIR box to float it but our camp was 2 miles upstream.

I flew out to the main camp the next day. The "airstrip" still had standing water on the sand. The pilot left my gear in the water and rain because of weight. After 3 failed attempts to take off we did finally clear the trees. He retrieved my gear on the next supply flight.

The main camp at Icy Bay was like the Hilton after 10 days in a tent. It had running water (hot & cold), a generator, woodstove and a shower. I was talking with some hunters and found out they are also from LVSCI. Also in camp was the owner / designer of Crooked Horn Outfitters, Lennis Janzen. He has a great line of products and his packs are second to none. Several of the guides use his packs and bino system. I ordered a pack and the bino system. I only used it once so far and I like it. His videotographer, Tyler Johnson from HuntSoloVentures was also there to film his hunts. Everyone had great stories to swap after dinner.

I have to thank my wife and family for the opportunity to go on the hunt and putting up with the repeated trips to Boyers' and Cabelas', Fran for the reloading and the trips to the rifle ranges, Neil Webster from Bearup Adventures and my guide Rod for his endless hunting stories. With all the experiences, the people I met, the scenery, the wildlife and the finally the bear, I consider the whole adventure a great success, although, next time I will take chest waders instead of hip boots.