

## A Little Black Bear

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People always ask us if we have problems with bears. The last two summers, our answer was “no”. This summer, we have a little black bear ...

When I say little black bear, this is somewhat relative. It's most likely a rather underweight three-year-old, but it still outweighs me, and I wouldn't want to have a wrestling match with it.

The local logging camp, about half a mile from our place, has been active again this year (it hadn't been in operation the last two years). I don't mind the loggers, but this group had a bit of a problem with their garbage and our resident “little black bear”. Unfortunately, this turned a rather timid black bear into an irritating camp follower.

My father was a park ranger up in the Rockies before I was born, back when the national parks had really serious bear problems, particularly with grizzlies. I still remember the stories my Dad used to tell about relocating the same grizzly time after time, and finally having to shoot the bear because it was causing trouble. Almost all of those bears were attracted and habituated to garbage that was readily available in the parks at that time. My father, who was a good marksman, generally ended up being the warden who had to shoot the problem bears, something he hated doing. His commentary on the situation was that “there's no such thing as a bad bear, only bad people”, referring largely to the fact that the parks needed to “clean up their act”. In time, they did, and the bear problems decreased dramatically.

In addition to becoming habituated to humans, our little black bear was having a hard spring. The salmonberries were late and few, forcing the bear out onto the beach, feeding on crabs and sand fleas. It also caused the bear to challenge our electric fence. The first time this happened, I was working in the back yard, heard a crashing in the brush, and, with hoe to hand, watched as the black bear shot through our yard twenty feet away, and back through the fence. This, unfortunately, would not be the first time.

Another time, when we were clearing our trail up to the main logging road, I had quite an encounter with the little black bear. We'd run out of gas in the bush saw, and Ken headed back down the trail a quarter mile or so to bring our jerry can of gas up and do a refill. I was still working on the trail with a scythe, and kept at it. I heard a disturbance in the bush, stopped working, and banged on a couple trees, just to make sure the bear knew I was there. Sure enough, a few minutes later, it popped out on the trail about twenty feet ahead of me. I'm thinking there's not much I can do – I'm alone and the bear's got me beat – it can both outrun and outclimb me. So I just stand there,

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wielding my scythe, and thinking – well bear, there's 18" of sharp steel between you and me – I hope you decide to leave. Maybe it read my thoughts, but in any case, it turned tail and huffed up the trail, to my great relief.

And so it went all summer. We'd head up the trail ... and there was the bear. We'd walk along the beach ... and there was the bear. It almost felt like the beast was tracking us. We shot bear bangers at it, honked air horns, threw rocks, cursed ... pretty much everything except shoot the thing. At one point, I thought some negative mental imagery might be a good thing. We are admittedly carnivores, and getting a little low on our canned meat supply, so I started visually the little black bear as a pile of sausages, ground bear wrapped in its own intestines. Not sure that I'd really do this ... but it helped *me* feel better every time I tripped over the \$#@\*! thing.

The fellows over at the logging camp got tired of little black bear into everything, and chased after it with a gun. It got away, but it seems to have developed an aversion for having things pointed at it. Now we can point at it with a walking stick, and it will run into the bush. I'm glad little black bear is developing better manners. Maybe we will still be able to coexist!