



## **Black Bear on the Queen Charlotte Islands**

We left Charlotte, NC at 6am, a full 2 ½ years after we booked the hunt. We took our own advice and being prepared, easily cleared Canadian Customs and Immigration and then boarded our next flight to Sandspit. Sandspit is a small town on an island called Moresey which is one of the two main islands that form a chain of islands known as the Queen Charlotte Islands. These islands are located a good distance north of Vancouver Island. We were expecting to catch a charter plane to another remote island but instead we were met by a driver who took us to a ferry that carried us to the adjacent Graham Island. The weather was overcast, calm and in the mid 50's with a dense fog hanging low over the water. The mention of a British Columbia curse was thought about, but did not dare pass our lips.

After the ferry arrived, we were met by Channing one of the “guides” who proceeded to take us to a tucked away lodge overlooking a small tidal river full of salmon. The plan was to hunt one of the nearby islands the next day. Following this, we were to leave for a distant camp site for a few days bringing a vee-bottomed aluminum boat along with us that would give us access to a lot of other isolated islands. The creeks and rivers were still chock full of salmon which the bears were feeding on so we were going to concentrate on those areas first for big boars. Plan B sounded good.

Well, things change. It turned out Channing was technically not a valid guide due to a paperwork snafu with his guide license. That bit of charming news was reinforced by a hurried breakfast and a return ride back on the ferry. Our new “guide” Chris, met us at the ferry and loaded all of our gear. As we headed toward the thick temperate rain forest via logging roads, Chris revealed that while an avid Blacktail Deer hunter and a professional fisherman, he had never guided anyone professionally and had only shot one bear in his life. Alright then, Plan C it is.

We spent the day slowly and quietly hiking through the thick, lush, moss covered canopy floor that ran along the shallow creeks that teamed with spawning salmon as they meandered through the massive growths of timber. It was easy to be quiet that day as we wondered silently what the heck was to go awry next. We decided that since we could not change our circumstance we would change our



attitude and enjoyed the fruitless stalk. The place was beautiful (see photo #1) and the weather was perfect with the highs in the 50's, clear, sunny, with a light breeze that enveloped us the whole day. But despite a huge amount of bear sign everywhere we never did we see a bear.

Chris decided that we should head back early and get packed for a trip via truck and boat to distant southern collection of the Queen Charlotte Islands where we would spend the next few days hunting. He was extremely confident that we would get good opportunities at very large boars. He explained that as a fisherman he had been near all the major fish creeks and knew where he had seen large bear and where hunting had not occurred in years. So back we went via ferry to Graham Island again acquiring and amassing a huge collection of gear, fuel and food that we would need. A nice dinner and off to bed we went with high hopes for the next day. Plan D was in place and we were good to go.

The next day we left to catch the earliest ferry back to Moresby Island where we met Chris Putterill again. After getting 15 five gallon cans of fuel loaded into the truck we headed off on the 40 minute drive to a beautiful ocean inland inlet that abounded with seals playing in the crystal clear cold waters. The smell of the area reminded me of the rocky shorelines of the Rhode Island when I was a kid looking for blood worms to fish with. The weather was great, clear and crisp. After loading the 22' center console powered by a 200 hp Evinrude with the 15 gas containers, a 600cc ATV, another outboard to power the Zodiac inflatable boat, all the guns, food, bedding, clothing and emergency gear the boat looked like it was going to swamp (see photo #2). Nonetheless, we donned emergency survival suits and headed off for the 30 minute ride through the majestic high mountain scenery that surrounded us on both sides (see photo #3).

We arrived into Sewell expecting to find a vehicle that would run so we could transport our gear to bear camp. Unfortunately, the vehicle was a total disaster to say the least (see photo #4). "Bear Camp" was crammed into the broken down truck and worthless. Ah, British Columbia, another disaster in the making. As we said, Chris was a local boy and a tough one at that. He was not deterred. This was his first professional guided hunt and he was going to make it right. He came up with Plan E. Chris borrowed a battered left over pick up truck from a friend working there for the forest company and we loaded all the gear in that vehicle. Paul followed on the ATV to the trail head that led to the lodge.



Lodge? Chris just happened to know the caretaker of an abandoned lodge in one of the coves. (see photo #5) He was certain this fellow would let us stay there if we didn't make a mess and brought him a case of beer. Uncertain of whether a bed or unsheltered ground awaited us we pressed on. We got lucky and because of the beer we ended up indoors at midnight. Chris had anticipated possibilities we didn't even contemplate and just happened to have a case of beer, this fellow's favorite brand. It is important to note here that we have not mentioned the outfitters name and won't. Again Chris is a local boy and knew what to expect from this group and was prepared. It just goes to show you how sales pitches and fancy booths at shows aren't worth anything compared to real on the ground research. Buyer beware as they say.



The next day we made our way back up the trail to the borrowed truck and drove back to Sewell, an old logging village that was being deactivated along with all the interior roads (see photo #5). We got back into the boat and headed off in our survival suits to Crescent Inlet that was over an hour away. We spent the day there slowly stalking up the densely packed salmon creeks in hopes of seeing a big bear. We saw lots of sign of the huge bruins but no actual animals. The bald eagles were everywhere and were a spectacular sight to see. Up in the dense undergrowth, we found massive bear dens scattered about under the roots of huge trees like a small apartment complex. We climbed into a few of them and took pictures of each other (see photo #6). The weather cleared briefly then took a turn for the worse. It slowly worked its way into a steady medium rain shower which made us decide to take cover under a canopy of a large tree downwind from the estuary and wait till dark to see if bear came out. But all to no avail. All we left with was a lot of wet clothing and an anticipated long wet ride back to the lodge. We moored there since we were not going to be able to use the truck any further as the owner was to be back the next day to continue working. We were lucky to have the survival suits because of the weather.



The next day passed without any bear sightings, but the scat showed signs of visitation to the berry patches. Another strategy was hatched and the patches were scoured and the creeks left to themselves. We saw nine bear throughout the day and only one that met standards, but was passed on Chris's advice. It was over 6 feet and very difficult to turn down with a bow but it was not the monster we were looking for.

Back to the boat and stalking creeks followed the berry patch day. We went back to the estuary and followed a stream toward the mountains. We found a freshly caught salmon with very wide spaced canine teeth marks from a very large bear (see photo #7). We then found a small waterfall with large pool behind

it filled with salmon waiting to try to get up the waterfall. The area was littered with big bear sign, simply walking and looking didn't seem like the thing to do. A stake out was called for as there was a collection of monster bear sign.



The next morning reveal uncommonly good weather and foretold a bad day for a large bear. Paul staked out the most likely path to the salmon creek from the berry patches, hunkering down in a depression a hundred feet or so from the creek's edge. This bear had been catching fish and hauling them up there to dine on them in peace as evidenced by foot prints, and enormous bite marks on the sides of salmon left in his dining room. Chris and I worked the berry patches a few hundred yards up on the ridge. One of us was gonna get Mr. Big. Paul's set up was perfect with all his Whitewater camo and two shooting lanes to the paths through the otherwise unpenetratable undergrowth. Paul settled in for a possible long all day sit but not before moving lunch away 20 feet and put it under a log. One doesn't want Mr. Big trading salmon for peanut butter and hunter sandwiches!

Paul sat there silently for an hour and a half and then heard a load deep long growl coming from down the creek towards the estuary. He told me later "I knew that was a big boar. I waited 10 minutes then 20 minutes but nothing showed up. As I was about to give up on the sound, I heard heavy footsteps in the creek below with rocks being turned over and the sounds of fish scattering in all directions. The urge for me to get up and sneak over to the edge was intense but I resisted since this was his dining room. Just as everything settled back down, I saw movement in front of me and the bear of a life time appeared in front of me. Just as quickly the huge silky black mass laid down facing away from me to dine on his prize fish a mere 18 yards away. I was regretting not bringing my bow as I had the crosshairs of .300 WSM on his spine. The area was just too thick and overgrown to use a bow as the arrow would be easily deflected by all the vegetation but if he was broadside instead of facing away from me in the same spot, I could have arrowed him easily but as it turned out, I never had a good bow shot".

Paul watched him lay there and nibble on the fish for 15 minutes occasionally raising his big blocky head to look around. The wind was perfect and a spine shot was presented but why take chances. Paul was waiting for the perfect standing broadside shot instead.

The retelling of a buddies hunting story is almost as good as being there. That is just part of the whole reason of the 2:1 hunt. Paul goes on excitedly "just then I heard a twig break next to me on my right. I turned my head and found a very nervous medium sized bear standing there in the moss 6 paces away from me looking at the big boar. As if my heart wasn't already beating fast enough, this through it into overdrive. I must admit, I was a little uncomfortable having my rifle pointing in the opposite direction of the bear that was 6 steps away from me but I wasn't taking the chance of the big boar getting away. Now to make matters

worse another medium sized bear appeared in front of me at some 20 feet also looking very nervous and staring at the big boy on the block. As normal, things happened very quickly from that point.

Without warning the big bear got up and whirled around and charged the smaller bear in front of me which dove off the embankment for its life. The big bear stopped in a shallow depression in the forest floor which left me with no shot since I could only see his head. I slid backwards up the moss covered roots of the cedar tree I was underneath to gain altitude and raised my rifle just as his nose turned straight towards me. In an instant he had my wind, turned and began to trot off back the way he came. I found the last and only opening I had to shoot through and fired at a moving, severely angling away creature at less than 20 yards. He bolted as I stood and reloaded hoping to find another shot opportunity but there was none. I stood still and listened for the crash, death bellow or the fish scattering in the stream below as he ran across but I heard nothing. It was dead silence except for the water running. I slowly made my way to where he had been when I fired but there was absolutely no sign of blood or hair. So I pressed on slowly with a not so good a feeling about the shot and also the fact that I was now attempting to track a huge wounded bear in an area that offers minimal visibility and unsure footing due to the wet slippery deadfalls everywhere". Paul of course, being Paul, wouldn't consider waiting for Chris and I to return in response to the audible rifle shot. As it turns out, Paul's worries were to no avail as he spotted a huge black form 20 yards away.

The story continues; " I approached quietly and cautiously but he was done. I waited there till Chris and Steve quickly returned but not before I had taken more photos (see photo # 8), and began to skin the beast. The dense canopy didn't make for the best pictures, but there was only three of us and this bear was not in the lift and carry category!" Paul being Paul, actually just loves to skin stuff and that also makes for a great hunting buddy!



After we all relaxed, we went back and got all the meat from the carcass. It was quite the greasy load. We squared the bear an honest 7'9", with the chest not fully opened. Chris later measured the skull at 21 3/16", a Boone and Crockett skull. The taxidermist in BC later called to say it actually squared 8'2" after he finished splitting the chest. He went on to say that he needed a Brown Bear form to mount it. An absolutely enormous lifetime bear!

We had a great trip with a lot of success because of our guide. Chris did indeed make it right. He was resourceful, hard working and knew where to go. Without Chris (and a case of beer) the trip would have been a disaster. The British Columbia curse is just history now. Sometimes plan E beats the heck out of plan A!