

Bear Encounter Survival Guide



by **JAMES
GARY SHELTON**

BEAR ENCOUNTER SURVIVAL GUIDE

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Publisher contact: Julie (Shelton) McVarnock

shelton@bearattacksurvival.com

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Sample from Preface

The primary purpose of this book is to provide you with a realistic view of bear aggressive behavior and to outline the most practical strategies for reducing the risk of injury or death during a bear encounter. The secondary purpose of this book is to explain the underlying causes of human/bear conflict and why that conflict is increasing.

In order to accomplish these goals I must take you on a journey through unfamiliar territory, to a place where life-and-death reality reigns and theoretical fantasy is left far behind - a place where the looking-glass of cultural belief is discarded, where the basic elements of nature and animal behaviour are rendered down to identifiable parts.

My views were not derived from being just an observer of nature, but mainly as a participant in nature - a participant who has encountered and studied bears under a variety of circumstances for almost 30 years. My knowledge was earned through direct and sometimes dangerous experiences.

The core of this book breaks new ground and a good portion of my material will be controversial, going against the grain of present trends. There will be some people unhappy with what I present here, especially preservationist biologists.

In the first part of our trek we will explore the complexities of bear behaviour and nature in a way never done before. You will learn a significant body of information about bear aggressive behaviour and how to survive it. You will also gain an appreciation for bears and an understanding of what behavioural traits they must employ in order to survive in a dangerous world - dangers both wild and manmade.

The second part of our passage will be a guided tour through bear management and the wilderness of environmental debate that is presently raging across Western North America. While in this landscape we will see the tactics and misinformation used by desperate people who do not have a clue about what really goes on in nature. You will learn the distinct difference between conservationism and preservationism.

I must deal with all issues that influence human/bear conflict and bear conservation or my critics will claim that the main tenants of my thesis are questionable, because I didn't address all factors related to the subject. If you and I reach our destination together, and in agreement, then I will have accomplished what I intended with this book.



Sample from Chapter - Attacks, Encounters and Incidents

After one of these chase, wrestling, bawl, and instant-check episodes, the three bears were walking back to the remains of the last fish. The cubs were ahead of the sow and almost to the fish when the sow stood up on her hind legs and looked at the brush line to her right. I saw a flash of black come out of the brush and head directly for the cubs. The sow was about ten metres from the cubs; she let out a horrific growl and started an angling run trying to head off the large boar.

She made contact with the male about two metres from the cubs and tried to bite him in the flank. He ignored her, and as he passed by her I could see that he was a good foot taller than she was. The cubs didn't even know what was going on when the male grabbed one by the middle of the back and slammed it against the ground. The sow had been knocked flat by her impact with the male but recovered instantly and was just about to jump on his back when he spun around and hit her on top of her head with his right front paw. She had seen the blow coming and tried to dodge sideways. The glancing blow drove her face into the

gravel and the momentum of her run caused her whole body to upend over her head, like a cartwheel. I figured that her neck must have been broken.

The other cub had run down the river bar about 50 metres and stood there bawling. The male put his left front paw on the wounded cub that was lying by the river's edge bawling and trying to move. The boar used his canine teeth to open up the cub's stomach area and grabbed a mouthful of intestines, then reared back, pulling out about a metre of rupturing guts. The cub was squirming and making gurgling sounds.

I was somewhat in a state of shock and couldn't fathom what I was watching. I had already put a shell in the chamber, but I just sat there, dumbfounded, and didn't move.

I could see that the sow had serious damage to her head. I could also see her rib cage going up and down in irregular movements. Her head, neck, and chest were covered with blood.

The large boar fed on the cub for about two minutes. The surviving cub went silent and started walking in a wide semicircle towards its mother. The male had his back to the sow and the other cub that had slowly walked to within about ten metres of its mother. The cub put its head down and whimpered. The boar spun around and was on top of the cub in about four bounds. The cub tried a desperate run towards the creek but stumbled over a small log.

The boar came to a sudden stop when he seized the cub's head with his mouth. He put both front feet on the cub's chest and pulled up, severing the neck spinal column. The head was just hanging by stretched skin.

The sow sat up on her haunches with her front legs dangling in front of her, and tried to look around. Her right eye seemed intact, and she finally seemed to focus on the boar, but she didn't move or make any sound. She sat like that for a minute, then slowly leaned forward and stood up on all fours. Her head was low, with her bloody nose almost touching the ground. I could now see that the boar's claws had made a ragged scalping of the whole back left side of her head, and a flap of skin, including the ear, was hanging down covering her left eye. All of a sudden she took off for the brush where the boar had come out. The big black male casually turned and watched her go, then returned to feeding on the cub.

I'll never forget what happened next. I can close my eyes and picture the scene as if it were yesterday. The boar turned away from the cub and started walking towards the carcass of the other cub. He went into a heads-high posture and walked with a swagger while twisting his front feet inward with each step. He was doing some kind of strut, and it seemed to be some important behaviour in

relation to what he had just accomplished. As he strutted up to the other cub, I could barely see what looked like urine being intermittently shot from his penis at about every other step.

The boar was starting to feed again on the first cub when my bullet pierced his hide just above the point of the shoulder. It went through the shoulder blade on a long angle and slammed into the backbone right at the hump. His back end collapsed straight down, then his front end fell over sideways away from me. He lifted his head slightly and was trying to get up when the second bullet tore through his left lung and lodged under the skin by the spine. The third bullet passed through his heart and right lung, exiting out through his back.

When I left the Talchako two days later I was still uncomfortable with what I had witnessed. Not because of the death and destruction; I had already seen plenty of death at that point in my life. I was left with a slightly hollow feeling in my chest because at that time in my life I was a natural regimist. This event was a capper on a series of experiences I had had in nature that were contrary to my belief system. I had given up on mankind many years before and wanted a nature that was much better than man.

I now know that mankind, even at its ugliest, reflects nature. The territorial warfare of Jane Goodall's chimpanzees, the endless past extinctions, the brute competition at every level, the cannibalism, rape, and murder, it's all there in nature if you dare to look. But amidst all the horror is beauty, serenity, care, and love. That sow grizzly that tried valiantly to save her children will always have a special place in my heart, and I no longer hold a grudge towards those male grizzlies that are acting out an age-old, genetically programmed behavioural requirement.



"Are you tired of confusing and contradictory information about bear aggressive behaviour and how to survive it? Mr. Shelton takes you on a fascinating and definitive journey through bear behaviour and takes time along the way to debunk much of our cultural mythology about bears and nature. If you work or play in the great outdoors, or if you intend to visit a park in the near future, this book is a must."

Angela Hall, Editor,
Coast Mountain News,
Bella Coola, B.C., Canada.

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