



**Bears!** One came into my office this morning and as I write, is looking over my shoulder. Now that in itself would be unusual, but how he came to be here and help recover my inner strength is the true story.

Eight women and a sixteen year old boy descended on Chris Mckinnon Outfitters this summer and I don't think the camp will ever be the same. I'm sure it was with some trepidation that Chris agreed to let this group of women come to Calling Lake for what turned out to be a fabulous week of bear hunting and I'm sure he didn't quite know what to

expect. Would we argue, be fussy, would the long hours sitting in a tree stand be a problem? In the end, I think he was pleasantly surprised and perhaps a bit in awe of the camaraderie and hunting skills represented by our group.

Our hunt began on May 25th, 2002, when we convened in Minneapolis for the flight to Edmonton in Alberta, Canada. We were a spirited group of women from all over the great state of Texas. Betty Warren and her son Blake were from San Antonio; Deb Cleverdon, Houston; Vicky Dupuy, the only non-Texas, hailed from Echo Louisiana.

Tamara Trail, from San Antonio; Aleidea Escobar, Seagoville; Karen Collier, Spring; Monica Myska, Sugarland; and my myself, from Terrell rounded out the group. I was the least experienced hunter in the group as these women have hunted all of their lives. Some had been bear hunting before and had many stories and rich experiences to share. We were also accompanied by Richard Stafford a freelance photographer who was producing a video for Real Tree about women hunters.

Chris's lodge was an oasis in the

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beautiful wilderness surrounding us. Upon arriving we unpacked and settled into our room finding it to be large, comfortable, and fitted out with bunkbeds and furniture. There was a separate bathroom and vanity area shared by the women. We now had a

base from which to operate, next was to be assigned a guide, and hunt.

We quickly found we would begin our hunt that very day, but started with a huge lunch after which we prepared for the evenings night of hunting. Our group was paired off and left with our guides shortly thereafter. Deb Cleverdon and I hunted all week with our guide, Kelly. We began the first

evening by sighting in our rifles and then going out to the locations where Deb and I would hunt. McKinnon has access to 1.4 million acres, half set up with bait and half for spot and stalk. We positioned Deb first and then drove another 30 minutes to where I would hunt.

After unloading the quad from the back of the pickup truck we rode it for an additional 15 minutes until we reached my stand. After hanging bait, which was a petrified beaver with a horrific odor, was hung, an old 55 gallon drum was filled with cookies to tempt the bear and now it was time to hunt. When I saw the stand I couldn't figure out how I was going to get up into it. It was a 2X2 piece of plywood suspended from the side of a tree with a tiny ladder. I stood looking at it, thinking to myself, "How am I going to get and stay up there?" Here I stood with a backpack, water, my coat and gloves, all kinds of warm gear and a book with me. The most important thing I had besides my rifle was a horn. One of the gals had given it to me in the event a bear started up my ladder and frightened me. I was told that I could scare the bear away with the horn if I was unable to shoot it, but it wasn't an idea that I relished.

I slowly crept up the ladder to the top and it took all I had to turn and sit down on that small piece of wood. I wanted to be tied to the tree but that was refused. It was windy that night and with the tree swaying several feet I was afraid that I would fall out. Kelly handed me my rifle, went down the ladder and called up, "I'll see you in 6 hours."

I looked down at him and said, "You're going to leave me here alone?"

Kelly replied, "Of course, I have to go check on 6 other baits."

I looked down at him blankly and asked, "But I'm going to be here all alone?"

I couldn't tell if he smiled or not but he said, "Yes, I will be back for you at dark". I looked around the stand thinking my lonely thoughts, "At dark! I could not imagine". For the next six hours I sat there and thought about how stupid it was that I let myself get involved in this hunt. With all I had been through in the past seven months, having been mauled by pitbulls in

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## Hunting More Than A Sport - Continued From Page 28

November and four surgeries later (still with an open wound no less), I was now subjecting myself to the distinct possibility of falling off my perch and being eaten alive by a bear! Was I crazy? I loaded my rifle, put on my Magnum Ears (amplified earplugs) and proceeded to listen and watch while remaining perfectly still.

The area I was hunting that first night was heavily wooded. It got dark early because the sun couldn't penetrate the canopy of the forest. As dusk approached the mosquitoes started their open hunting season with me being the prey. I could hear bullfrogs so I knew water was somewhere nearby. The mosquitoes came in droves. As hard as I tried not to move, every now and then one would get through, successful in their hunt.

It was just turning dark, when the sounds of the squirrels disappeared and I heard in their place a heavy rustling in the underbrush. I peered into the woods, all thoughts of mosquitoes forgotten. I knew it had to be a bear. I continued to sit perfectly still. Soon I

was rewarded with a bear visible in my peripheral vision. I couldn't get a good look at him and dared not move my head.

When the bear exited the brush I was able to judge its size by comparison with the 55 gallon drum. As the bear stood up for the bait, I determined by its height that it was a bear big enough to shoot. I was shaking like a leaf and hyperventilating! I had to get my breathing under control or forget the shot. When I started to bring my rifle up, some subtle noise, caused the bear to run off, but not far. Within a couple of minutes, the bear was back; the bait too tempting. While the bear paid attention to the bait I brought my rifle up and took aim, my breathing easy, controlled. I had to wait till I could get a clean precise shot. My guide had said repeatedly that day, "think about where the bullet is going to exit".

After what seemed an eternity, the bear turned giving me a good shoulder and I squeezed off a shot. The bear took off and ran for approximately five seconds. Each lunge the bear made was easily heard as the dense forest impeded its escape. With my amplified plugs I heard its final step as it crashed and was



silent. Once it got totally dark I thought I was surrounded by bear. I could hear them foraging all around me. I was most anxious for Kelly to return. Not only was I being eaten alive by mosquitoes and scared to death, but I was also really cold. Once the sun went down the temperature dropped rapidly and I no longer thought about the tree swaying.

The next morning we went back and found my bear 70 yards from the bait.

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We loaded it up on the quad and took it back to the camp. The bear was a beautiful mahogany sow approximately 5 feet. That first night, three of the group got bear. My hunting partner, Deb, took a five foot black bear and Blake shot a blonde five footer.

Nightly, when we all got back to the lodge, we were tired, excited and famished. Dinner would be served and food never looked so good! We would eat anytime from 1 to 2:30am, visit, and tell our bear stories. It was so pleasant because each night when we went out we were offering encouraging words to those that had not shot a bear. Every night that week I went out and climbed up into the stand and waited. Each day it got easier and easier for me to climb up that tree. We all saw lots of interesting wild life. One night while I was watching, a wolf silently passed under my stand hunting in his own way.

On the last night of our six day trip I had been sitting in my stand for approximately six hours when I heard a sound like King Kong coming through the forest. He stopped just outside of my eyesight and waited. He waited for 30 minutes as did I, not moving, ignoring the ubiquitous mosquitoes who had enjoyed me for the last several nights. I knew this was an older, wiser, more experienced bear due to his cautiousness. This hunt would be a test of wills. My will to prevail and his to guard against humans.

When it was almost dark he came to the bait and walked by the 55 gallon barrel showing me that he was a monster. When he stood up to eat from the bait he could easily take it with his mouth rather than reaching for it. I waited until he turned around and began eating the entrails of the beaver bait to make my move. I slowly brought my rifle to position, aimed and fired. Due to the lack of light I could see nothing in my scope. I did as Kelly had told me; shoot down the barrel. Down he went, "whhhooff". When Kelly returned to pick me up shortly thereafter, he said that they had been trying to get that bear the whole season but that it had alluded all till that fateful encounter. King Kong turned out to be a bear having a 20 and a half inch skull and was the biggest one that had been taken all season at Mckinnon Outfitters.

I cannot say enough about the great



job Chris McKinnon and his guides did. The food was fabulous and plentiful and the lodge was clean and comfortable. The scenery glorious. Our group took eleven nice black bears and came home

with new friendships, great pictures and beautiful memories.

This hunting experience was a real turning point for me. I had been so fearful since my attack in November. I had lost so much of myself. This hunt has had an enormous impact on my life by restoring my self confidence and courage. It was truly a turning point in my recovery. My bear adventure was more than a hunting story. It was about my life. Oh, that Bear in my office? It is 'King Kong' and he was delivered to my office today, looks over where I work and is a daily reminder to me of history past, courage regained and confidence rebuilt.

'King Kong' will be on display in McKinnon Outfitters Booth at INDABA, January 9 through 12, 2003.



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