

THE PURSUIT OF CALIFORNIA BLACK BEARS WITH DOGS



CALIFORNIA - PUBLIC LAND - GUIDED

BY BRUCE BROWN

One of my neighbors growing up was Denny Cogburn. Denny was a hunter to the bone and he had a couple of treeing hound dogs. I listened attentively to the stories he would tell about his dogs trailing the scent of big and small game animals and then treeing them. He really got my attention as he spoke about treeing bears. As a little kid, I thought he was part crazy chasing bears with dogs, but it also sounded like a rush.

Other than hunting pheasants, I never hunted using dogs that trail the scent of another animal. I work around a lot of police K9's and I am fascinated on how well they trail the odor of a fleeing subject.

Wade Derby, owner of Cross-hair Consulting asked me if I wanted to do an evaluation hunt for him using archery equipment. He told me it would be a bear hunt using dogs. This was totally different from any other type of bowhunt I have been on. I decided I would give it a try, it would be a new experience for me and I was looking forward to it.

I only had a few days to hunt and I could not make it up to Yreka to hunt his normal area so I made arrangements with the guide to hunt north of Redding, California. The guide was a bowhunter and he was



looking forward to an archer coming to hunt as he usually only has rifle hunters booked.

It was early November, the weather was still nice and the fall colors had come to the mountains. I met the guide and two young men that were going to help with the hunt.

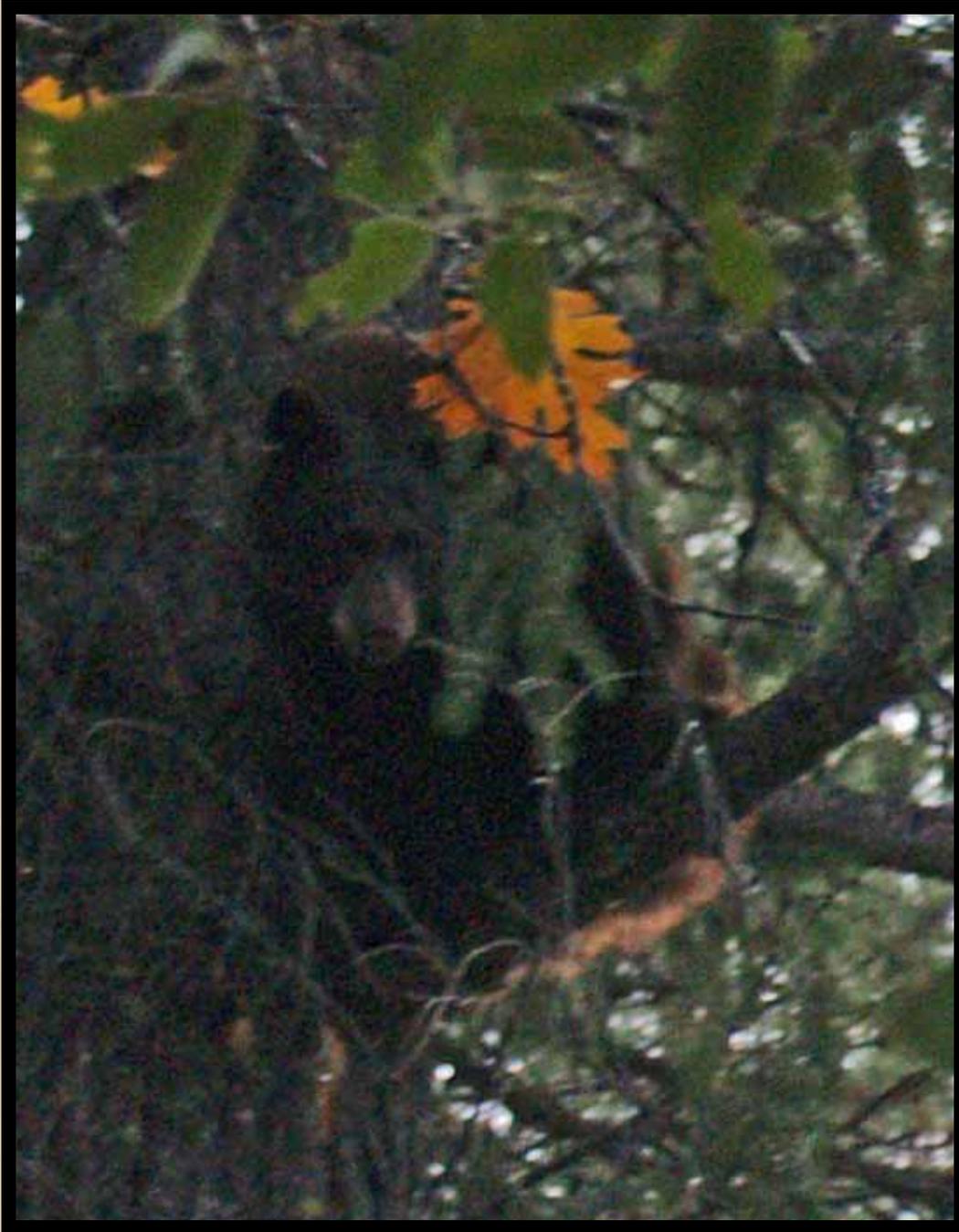
When I got out of my truck and started to put my quiver on my bow the two young men looked at the guide and said, "What's he going to do with that?"

They were referring to my bow. Neither of these two guys had ever seen a bear shot with a bow and they did not think it would do the job. When the guide told me this I just laughed and wondered if they ever watched any hunting shows on TV.

The guide explained that he puts his dogs on the hood of his truck and drives slowly down the dirt roads until the dogs alert to the scent of a bear.

After the dogs alert on the scent he gets out and starts to look for bear tracks. If the tracks appear to be from a mature bear he will let the dogs go and let them do their trailing.

It seemed like we were only driving for a few minutes when the dogs started prancing on the hood of



his truck and barking. Sure enough we got out and examined the ground and found some fresh tracks. The first couple of tracks that we found were small and the guide told me that he could get me on a better bear.

We drove around for about an hour more when the dogs once again alerted to the presence of a bear. The guide told me that the tracks

we found were from a decent bear, but he again said there were bigger bears in the area. He let me decide whether I wanted to go after this one. With only a little time to hunt I elected to go after this bear. The guide turned his four dogs loose and

off they went sprinting and barking up and down the hillside. I could not believe how fast the dogs took off.

Within a few minutes we could not see or hear the dogs. Never done any kind of hunting like this I asked him, what was next. He said we wait until we hear the sound of the dog having a bear treed.

The guide had radio collars around the dogs' necks so he could track their movement. We drove around until he pinpointed the dogs' location. Two of the dogs were found in an area. After getting

the dogs back in their boxes we drove around until he picked up the locations of the other two dogs.

I could hear the dogs barking from

down at the bottom of a deep canyon. There was only one way down, and it was going to be a workout. The guide told me that we would have to move fast to get to the dogs. We started our descent down into the canyon.

The sides of the hill were full of moss and broken slate. To say the least I spent a lot of time sliding on my rear. When we reached the bottom we could hear the dogs were up on the side of the hill. The descent down was a lot faster than up. It was the same kind of terrain so it took us a little longer to get to the dogs.

As we got close to the dogs the guide explained what could happen. He said it is common when the treed bear sees a hunter he will jump from the tree and take off running or go after one of the dogs or even us.

I finally could see the dogs circling the base of a big pine tree. The dogs were going to town barking and looking up into the tree. I looked up and saw that they had a good bear treed about 50 feet up. The guide asked me if I wanted to shoot the bear and I chose to. The dogs were tied up so I could prepare for the shot. I took a couple of pictures of the

bear up in the tree and then started to prepare for the shot.

It was an uphill shot that I had practiced time again at the archery range. I knew that I could make the shot with ease.

I pulled

back my bow and zeroed in just behind the left front shoulder. I let the arrow fly and it hit the mark completely passing through the bear. The bear bent over and fell from the tree. When the bear landed on the ground beneath the tree, I put one more insurance arrow into the bear to make certain it was not going anywhere.

Those two young men that were there to help kept saying, "Oh my God, did you see that." I set back and chuckled at their astonishment with just how lethal a well placed arrow is. They told me that the day before one of their friends shot a bear five times with a rifle and the bear got away. They could not believe that one arrow from my bow killed this bear.

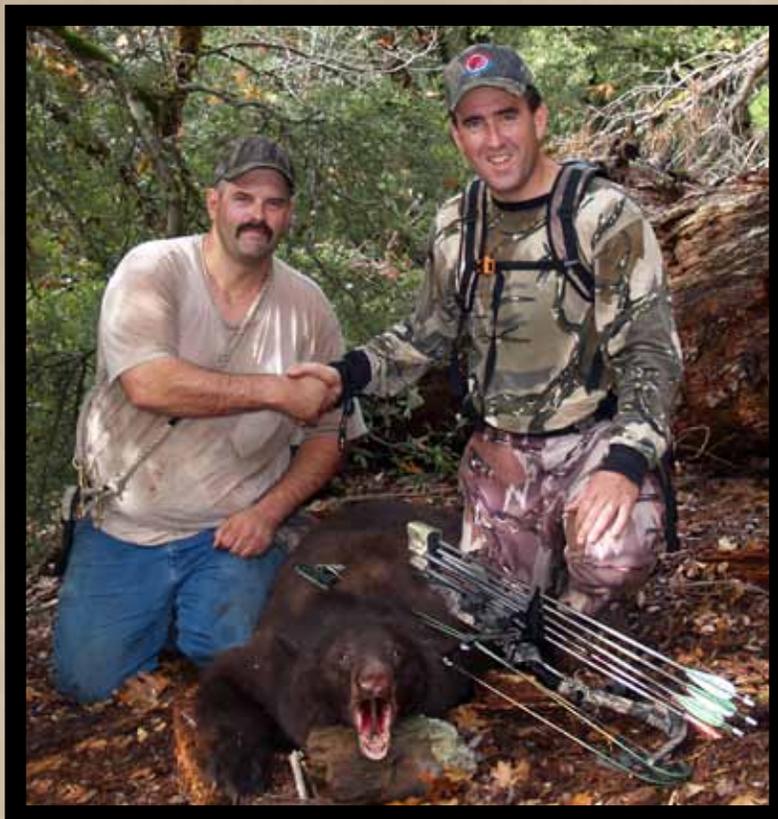




After taking some photos with the bear the guide let the dogs have their reward. They sure deserved their time as if it was not for them we would not have found the bear.

For the first time I ever hunted with dogs I was very impressed with this outfitter. He not only was extremely knowledgeable about his trade, he took the time to explain how the dogs work, what will happen, and most importantly he gave me the choice whether I wanted to take the bear that his dogs treed. That meant a lot to me.

I would absolutely recommend this hunt to anyone who has an interest in pursuing black bears with dogs. This hunt is reasonably priced and the guide has an impeccable reputation for being one of Northern California's leading bear guides. If you are interested in booking this hunt go to www.crosshairconsulting.com and to hunt number 16.





Bruce's equipment: Bow: Mathews Switch Back, Strings: Winner's Choice Custom Bowstrings, Arrows: Gold Tip Pro Hunters, Binoculars: Steiner Predators, Range Finder: Bushnell Elite, Camo: Predator, Pack: Jim Horn Western, Boots: Danner Proghorns.

www.crosshairconsulting.com/hunt16.htm