

## Spring Big Game Hunting?

What big game species has a spring season? Black Bear! They have just exited their dens and are hungry. The first green succulent grass appears on the avalanche slides on the sides of the mountains and along the coast sedge flats were newly sprouted short grass and greens are abundant. Prince William Sound (PWS), Alaska is said to have the highest concentration of black bears in Alaska. Sleeping in a wet cold den is ideal for producing plush fur coats on lean spring PWS black bears.

Through a hunting and fishing friend of mine from Twin Falls, ID and a request to see my Kleine, German for Small, Munsterlander gun dogs I meet Ron and Ede Neilson, long time residence of Cordova, Alaska located on the east side of PWS. Over the course of our exchanges involving gun dogs and hunting Ron invited me up for a spring bear hunt. I landed in Anchorage on May 19, drove to Whittier and caught the ferry to Cordova. Their winter had been very mild and spring had arrived exceptionally early. As a result the alders growing on the avalanche slides had leafed out making a spot and stalk tactic very difficult.

The evening I arrived Ron introduced me to a mountain valley where his nephew had harvest a bear 10 days earlier. Ron had to work, so the next morning I hiked, along with a pack and rifle, the 3 miles in and began glassing the mountains on one side of the valley. Seeing nothing I crossed the glacial stream. That was an experience in its own right. Take your shoes and socks off, roll up your pant legs as far as possible, and wade the 30 yards across walking on the pebbled river bottom in knee deep ---straight off the glacier---water. It literally took my breath away and my feet and ankles ached by the time I was 10 feet in. The worst was knowing I had to do it again to leave the valley. But by crossing I was able to glass the mountains on the other side of the valley and climb high enough to glass the valley floor. All where area where new grass shoots were abundant and bears could be feeding. The valley was unproductive for me that day.



Beautiful but VERY cold!

## Cordova Black Bear

Realizing the almost impossible chance of success using spot and stalk technique Ron suggested a switch in strategy. Ron maintains several bait stations he and his son Hyrum use to harvest spring black bears using re-curve bows Ron built himself. The next morning I followed Ron's hand drawn map to one of those sites. It rained all day and the mosquitoes were horrendous. A head net was a must and every inch of my body was covered with rain gear and my hands with gloves. Nothing came in that day but it was very evident bears had been frequenting the site.



Hunting area was at the base of those mountains

We restocked the site that night. When I arrived the second day it was obvious bears had been there during the night. It was a beautiful sunny morning. Noon arrived with no sign of a bear so I ate my lunch and settled back into the ground blind located up a little rise about 50 yards from the bait area. I unsuccessfully fought drowsiness from the warm sun and lunch and fell asleep for about an hour. That night as we viewed the trail cam pictures we saw a very nice bear come in at 12:30 for about a half hour. Ron turned to me and said, "Wasn't somebody at this site then?" I was nailed ...I thought it best so I fessed up!

The next morning, feeling a little pressure I was in the blind and set ...early! At 7:55 am, suddenly I detected a slight movement on the edge of the small opening. A very nice black bear moved into the open. It did not take me long to decide. At 8 am I called Ron to let him know I had harvested a very nice bear with no evidence of rub marks.

He said, "sit tight, Hyrum and I will be out and help you skin and pack out the meat." As soon as they arrived and had a look there expressions were..."This is a VERY nice bear." True to their judgment the hide measured 6'7" and the skull 16 15/16 inches, a very respectable black bear and a beautiful hide.

Cordova Black Bear



Jim nice black bear



## Cordova Black Bear

Ron cooked up a fresh bear roast that night and it was very tasty! During the meal the discussion involved planning the next day's hunt for his daughter and her family who had just arrived from Idaho. Ron commented to Hyrum, "If we're not getting bears into the bait stations we may have to try the Julson Technique," and threw me a smirk. I just smiled and said, "I had it coming, that nap was definitely my screw up."

Ron and Ede took me in as one of the family, that along with harvesting a great black bear and walking on a glacier just down the road made it one SWEET spring time big game hunting adventure!



Glacier near where I hunted

Ron is retiring in November and moving to the lower 48. I am pretty confident I will have a chance to host him for sharptails, prairie chickens and pheasant hunting in South Dakota in the not too distant future!

The sentence below is what Ron wrote me later that summer when I inquired how the season ended up. He retired last November and moved to Twin Falls, ID. So most all of his family who had not harvested a black bear were there in May so see if they could before Dad, Grandpa, Father-in-law and Friend moved away from that area for good. Everyone did and some really nice bears. I was fortunate to be one of them.

*"What an awesome year for field testing "Neilson" knives. Seven bears harvested by friends and family, including these two which were taken using "Ron Neilson" made, takedown recurve bows, and all skinned with "Neilson" knives."*