

First Time is a Charm (Bear Hunting)

By Paul Moore

Sportsmen's Digest

January 2005

Bob Owens of east Tennessee had a myriad of thoughts racing through his head on the drive toward Ontario, Canada.

Although he had taken numerous game with both bow and gun, this was his first trip north to bowhunt for a Canadian black bear and he wasn't really sure what to expect. Unbeknownst to him, there were plenty of surprises ahead.

Bowhunting is Bob's passion. He was pumped with excitement at the thought of being one-on-one with a black bear deep in the remote Canadian bush.

Bill Drane, owner of Bear Lake Wilderness Camp, met Bob and the other hunters and anglers at Lang Lake Boat Dock near Espanola, Ontario.

Along with one of his guides in another boat,



Drane shuttled his clients and their gear down the very scenic Whitefish River toward Bear Lake.

Bear Lake Wilderness Camp is located on an island in Bear Lake. Bear Lake is 1700 acre lake and is the last lake on a chain of ten lakes. There are also twenty-five or remote lakes which are accessible by portage and offer some outstanding backcountry fishing opportunities. The camp is in a very pristine area that adjoins Killarney Wilderness Park.

A guide assigned the boats and motors. Most boats were Lunds with Honda 4-stroke motors

These boats provide comfort and security on the water while at the same time offering a quieter operation and hunting friendly use. Drane and his guides escorted the hunters away from the base camp and began showing bait sites and baiting methods.

This was mid August and just the first week of the season, but Drane had many sites showing activity. The camp maintains numerous bait sites and begins baiting well in advance of the hunter's arrival to ensure active baits.

Bob's first two nights on bait offered up a rude introduction to the bush.

The weather turned extremely hot and humid and mosquitoes were out in force. By the third night, Owens had adapted and used some tricks to keep the bugs at bay.

Another surprise for Owens came in the way of topography. He was expecting the landscape to be more open and offer a field of view similar to his east Tennessee woods. What he found was thick impenetrable woods and ground cover which prevented sight beyond 20 yards. He felt somewhat closed in which intensified the anxiety of seeing a bear because it would be right at his stand before he could see it.

The weather was again uncooperative on the third day with a dramatic increase of wind. Bob had heard animals moving nearby for the third night in a row, but had yet to see a bear.

First Time is a Charm

He was now halfway through his hunt and considered talking with Drane about changing locations. When Bob reported in that evening without seeing a bear, Drane, himself, suggested a move the next day.

The fourth evening found Bob in a new location. This stand called Jethro's Overlook, was high on a ridge overlooking Bear Lake. Although it was also densely forested, this bait site opened up to the side of the bait.

This was a little more comforting to Owens because he was only a mere 10 feet off the ground.

The evening progressed uneventful except for a few chipmunks visiting the bait barrel.

Owens figured he only had around thirty minutes left of shooting light. He stood to inspect the video camera which he had previously mounted just above his shoulder.

Movement 30 yards directly behind the stand caught his attention. A bear was making its way silently toward Bob's position. Owens judged the bear to be smaller than he wanted to take.

Nonetheless, the bear was on a path which would it immediately under the stand which caused the hair on Bob's neck to bristle slightly at the thought.

Owens lost sight of the bear as it passed behind the tree in which he was perched. He looked over both shoulders, but couldn't locate the bear.

This immediately increased the adrenaline rush.

The jet black form emerged from the thick tangle below and made its way to the bait. Bob had not retrieved his bow from its holder for he still thought the bear too small.

Instead, he switched on the camera to begin recording. The camera made a slight noise on start-up which instantly caught the bear's attention. Just as quickly, it returned its efforts to the bait barrel. Owens now realized that he had misjudged the bear's size.

The bear stood even with the top of the bait barrel and its head appeared larger than a bear taken the night before by another hunter. With one swipe the bear cleared the large heavy rocks



First Time is a Charm

from top the bait barrel. Bob knew now this was a “Shooter” and he was unprepared for the shot..

Nervously, he removed his bow from the holder and with shaking hands clanged the release against the bow which made another noise, The bear’s head popped up and in an instant staring directly at the hunter. Slowly, the bear calmed and resumed feeding.

Bob steadied his nerves and took careful aim behind the right shoulder. A gentle squeeze on the release sent the arrow to its mark for a perfectly-placed pass through. The bear wheeled around and bolted headlong into the brush, but fell not twenty yards away. Bob had taken his first archery bear.

The boar weighed about 230 pounds, so getting it out of the bush was no

easy task. After field dressing the bear, Drane and Owens tied the bear to a heavy pole and made their way awkwardly toward the bottom of the ridge.

Bob’s patience and hard work were well worth it and he was excited to get his trophy back to camp. There he was greeted by accolades and congratulations from the hunters and other folks gathered around the skinning table.

Owens found his trip to Canada quite rewarding. Not only did he come home with a bear on his first trip ever, he also found time to catch some mighty Smallmouth, Lake Trout, and Pike. This was definitely a trip worth repeating.

Bill Drane and Bear Lake Wilderness Camp

operate from “Ice-Out” in spring until the end of October.

There are around ten large lakes which are reachable by boat from base camp. Another twenty five or so remote lakes are accessible by portage. Boats are already on each lake.

Drane provides very comfortable lodging in private lakefront cabins. Maps, guides, and fishing advice are available for the asking.

The Drane family hails from Kentucky and operates the camp with a very down-home atmosphere. They strive to make sure that every hunter, angler, and vacationer has an enjoyable stay.

Anyone interested in discussing the hunting or fishing opportunities at Bear Lake should contact

Drane by phone or email. He also sets up a booth at many area sport shows each year and is happy to discuss the camp’s offerings in person.

Drane, a retired US Army Officer, runs several discounts and specials throughout the season. One discount is referred to as the “In Harm’s Way Discount. This special gives all Military, Law Enforcement, and Firefighters a 10% discount on their trip.

His website provides much more information and can be found at www.blwc.com.

Bear Lake Wilderness Camp



May – October (Canada)

Lodge (705) 866-7100

November – April (Kentucky)

Home (502) 228-7625

Cell # (502) 648-2758

Website – www.blwc.com

Email – blwc@aol.com