



The massive Pacific tectonic plate inexorably grinds and subducts beneath the overriding North American tectonic plate, raising the upper raft of rock, creating steep-sided mountains inhospitable to man. But on Kodiak Island, the steep mountains hold an apex predator, one that dwarfs and intimidates mere men, the giant Kodiak brown bear. This is a story of a 16-year-old youth who met one of those bears, a great, huge beast that unleashed its massive power to try the mettle of the lad.

The story starts in the Adirondack Mountains of northern New York when 15-year-old Daniel Wescott sat at his computer on a cold winter day in 2017. Daniel's dad, George Wescott, an Alaska master guide and owner of Alaska Hunting Services, had brought Daniel up hunting from a young age and instilling fair chase and sportsman's ethics in him. Daniel needed no urging—he applied for the lottery drawings for Kodiak bear, sheep, caribou, and emperor goose on his own. Then he waited with fingers crossed. Finally the Alaska Department of Fish and Game announced the results—Daniel had drawn a tag for a Kodiak bear in one of his father's areas on Kiluda Bay. By then Daniel was 16.

Although he lives in the Adirondack Mountains, Daniel is not exactly a cheechako. At 6 months of age, he spent

several weeks in a base camp tent on the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge with his mom, Jessica. And Jess taught him to swim when he was 2½ years old at the U.S. Coast Guard pool on Kodiak. Since then he has been on dozens of hunting and fishing trips with his dad and mom in Alaska and has harvested caribou, a Dall's ram, and many salmon and halibut. Besides, knowledgeable Alaskans know that Adirondackers adapt to Alaska easily because of the similarities of weather, culture, and attitude.

Daniel prepared well for his trip to Kodiak Island. He hand-loaded a pile of .300 Weatherby Magnum cartridges with 180-grain Swift Scirocco bullets and 81 grains of short-cut IMR 7828 powder. He made sure his Remington 700 customized by Nathan Chesney of Hillbilly Rifles was sighted in. He had all of his hunting clothes and camping gear ready as a matter of routine. On April 25, 2018, he and his father George checked their rifles with their airline and boarded the flight to Alaska and then on to Kodiak. Once there, they hooked up with close friend and seasoned Adirondack guide, Jamie Frasier, and hunter, Tom Williams. Jamie came along out of friendship to be the cook, packer, and all-around camp guy. Tom had drawn a tag also and was there in hopes of shooting a bear.

After attending to logistical issues, on April 27, bush pilot Taj Shoemaker flew George and Daniel in his Cessna 185 to one of George's

licensed areas on Kiluda Bay. Taj then returned to Kodiak and picked up Jamie and Tom for the flight. George and Daniel had the camp well set up by the time Jamie and Tom arrived. Since you can't fly and hunt on the same day by Alaska law, everyone settled into camp with a good freeze-dried supper, some storytelling, and big bears on their minds.

Hunting on Kodiak Island, the Aleutians, the Peninsula, and the archipelago of islands on the west coast of North America have one thing in common: cold rain showers blow in off the North Pacific a great deal of the time. Like they say, "if you experience a little bit of sunshine, wait five minutes and it will be raining."

The next day, George, Tom, Daniel, and Jamie walked up a streambed and then climbed up to a vantage spot that George calls the "Yellow Hill" where they spent the day glassing. They saw some bears on the mountains, but none were considered huntable. The trek from camp to Yellow Hill was about one mile direct distance by map and one and a half actual miles by foot. Temperatures ranged between 40 and 50 degrees Fahrenheit, and rain showers were intermittent. This was Kodiak Island in springtime.

On the second day, April 29, George devoted his guiding time to Tom. They saw some bears, but again none were huntable. The steep slopes, treacherous footing, and abundant Devil's Club were taking a toll on Tom. Devil's Club is a bush that is covered with sharp thorns that no one wants to touch. Meanwhile Daniel and Jamie

walked down to the ocean to look for sign. They saw nothing, but 16-year-old Daniel enjoyed goofing off—after all, he was still part kid.

On the third day, Tom needed some rest, so George and Daniel went down to the beach and then climbed a different mountain to do some glassing. The nice day turned to rain. George and Daniel saw some bears and some Sitka blacktail deer in the mountains, but none were worth the extra work.

Day four was May 1—May Day! Tom was still resting an ankle, so George and Daniel trekked up the streambed to Yellow Hill, George's favorite glassing spot. While they were walking on the streambed, they spotted three or four bears half a mile to a mile away, but none held promise. Once on Yellow Hill, George spotted a big bear about two miles away. The bear had enough potential that George thought they should take a closer look, so they half-jogged and fast-walked another mile up the streambed. When they stopped, they could see the area where the big bear had been, but no bear. Daniel ranged the area as being 800 to 1,000 yards away. They climbed the left side of the hillslope from the streambed to get a better view and glassed the right side of the mountain above the streambed for another four hours under intermittent showers. Finally the bear showed itself. It was a dandy.

George could see a route that was accessible, although steep and through heavy stands of brush, where they would have to climb

A BOY, A BEAR, AND A BULLET

BY BRIAN B. TURNER, AS RECOUNTED BY DANIEL WESCOTT AND GEORGE WESCOTT

JACK STEELE PARKER GENERATION NEXT

ALASKA BROWN BEAR — 28-9/16

DANIEL B. WESCOTT

about 800 yards in order to keep the wind from blowing their scent to the bear. The end spot would give Daniel a roughly 200-yard shot. But being a teacher as well as a guide for his son, George asked Daniel to figure out a route and a destination for shooting. To George's complete satisfaction, Daniel chose the same route and spot that his dad had scoped out.

So they began the steep climb, taking care not to grab the sharp spines of Devil's Club as a handhold. After going about 600 yards, George cautioned Daniel to be as quiet as he could. It is almost impossible to be truly quiet in thick alders and salmonberry bushes, but they did their best. The hillside alternated between short steep slopes 5

to 10 feet high and small benches or terraces 5 to 10 feet across. As they proceeded, Daniel thought he heard some dead branches cracking near them, but couldn't tell if his dad had made the noise or if something else had!

Ironically George had asked Daniel how fast he could chamber a round, and Daniel showed him that he was blindingly fast. Normally guides in Alaska require their hunters to walk with an empty chamber, but under the circumstances George was willing to let Daniel carry a round in the chamber. Daniel declined. After proceeding a little further, branches from the tangled brush caught George's binocular holder, and the binocs fell to the ground. George bent over to pick them

up, and when he stopped, Daniel could hear something big very near

them breaking dead branches in the thick brush. Daniel had lazily rested his rifle on an alder branch when his dad stopped, and it just happened that it was pointing in the general direction of the snapping twigs. He thought he saw something brown in the brush about 14 yards behind him to the left. Then came the unmistakable sound of deep "huffs" (haaah haaah haaah) that only a very agitated, angry bear makes. Daniel's eyes were drawn to the terrifying bear sounds and immediately saw the bear's head searching for him. Almost instantly the bear spotted Daniel, stepped forward to a bench on the hillside, hesitated for a split second, and at 12 yards lunged in one massively powerful movement at the youth. Somehow in the milliseconds that had elapsed between hearing the crackling twigs, hearing the huffs and seeing the bear's head, a round was racked into the Remington's chamber, and

the crosshairs of the scope were on the bear's face.

Daniel also tried to warn his father, but in George's words, all he heard was something like a single vowel yelp that sounded like "YXWBLF." George spun around when he heard the huffs, but Daniel was between him and the bear. George shouted "Shoot!" but the simultaneous thunder of the .300 magnum shredded the word into a hundred syllables that were lost in the air.

The Scirocco entered the bear's skull just under the left eye and smashed its way through the brain and lower part of the back of the skull, killing the bear almost instantly. The bear collapsed from its powerful lunge and buried its snout in the soft duff of the hillside. The bullet stopped just under the skin on the rear of the neck. Daniel quickly put a follow-up shot in the bear's neck as a safety measure.



16-year-old Daniel Wescott and his father, Master Guide, George Wescott with Daniel's kodiak bear, May 1, 2018.

George said that when the bear hesitated for a split second on the topographic bench, the body language of the bear an instant before it lunged was the most powerful display of angry bear muscle he had ever seen—an image he will never forget. It was pure energy—like a massive coiled spring that intended to devastate human intruders.

As father and son quietly tried to calm down from their brush with pure death, sounds of snapping and cracking twigs came from 20 yards in the brush, and it circled them. Another bear was there. They steeled themselves for another charge, but it never came. The second bear went away. Perhaps it was a sow that was going to be bred by the big boar at their feet. When all seemed calm again, they cleared some brush away to take photos, but it was getting late, perhaps 7 or 8 p.m. You do lose track of time when death has been but 12 yards away. So they spread-eagled the bear, covered it with tarps for the night and strung orange tape around the site.

Both Daniel and George are strong, but they could not roll the bear over; after all, it weighed more than 1,000 pounds! They got back to camp at dark with quite a story to tell Tom and Jamie.

The next day, Daniel, George, and Jamie returned to the site of the kill to skin the bear. Jamie recovered the first bullet from the neck and then carefully fleshed the hide from the skull, noting that a lot of the lower left part of the skull had been fragmented by the bullet. Since the day was young, the group carefully fleshed the hide to remove fat and tissue that cause rot and excess weight. Later, the hide alone was weighed at 101 pounds and the skull at 30 pounds. Before leaving the site of the bear kill, they found the bear's bed—a large hole in the ground about 10 yards farther into the brush. Daniel and Jamie took turns carrying the bear hide back to camp.

The group looked for a bear for Tom in the remaining four or five days, but time ran out. Taj Shoemaker flew in and got Tom and Jamie, but the

weather closed in, and he could not return for Daniel and George until the following day.

The bear's hide squared at 10 feet 4 inches. The green measurement of the skull was 28-11/16 inches. Even with normal shrinkage, the skull would likely make the Boone and Crockett record book. But the measurements do little to tell the story of the life-and-death drama that played out on a remote mountainside in Alaska in 2018. Perhaps the memories will fade with age, but the written word will tell generations yet to be born of the fortitude of a 16-year-old who faced one of the biggest bears in the world and won.

George summed it up: "In my 30 years of guiding for brown bears in Alaska—and my hunters have taken some

big ones up close—I have never had one stalk and charge me or my hunter until now. They usually run away. And of all the people that this would happen to, it had to be my son. I will never forget the look of that bear when he sprang forward towards Daniel." ■



Daniel B. Wescott received his plaque and knife at the Jack Steele Parker Generation Next Banquet, shown here with Chairman Richard T. Hale (left) and Vice President Eldon L. "Buck" Buckner (right).

JACK STEELE PARKER GENERATION NEXT YOUTH DISPLAY **FEDERAL**



Within the 30th Big Game Awards Trophy Display was the Generation Next Youth Display. All the trophies on display in this section were accepted into Boone and Crockett Club's 30th Big Game Awards Program and were taken by young hunters who were 16 years or younger at the time of the hunt.

JACK STEELE PARKER GENERATION NEXT YOUTH FIELD PHOTOS



ABOVE:
COUGAR — 14-11/16
ZACHARY J. RENNER

RIGHT:
BLACK BEAR — 20
**SCHUYLER P.
HARKNESS**

BELOW:
TYPICAL MULE
DEER — 180-2/8
ABIGAIL L. MCCOLLOM



TOP:
TYPICAL MULE DEER — 184-7/8
JAKE T. DAVIDSON

ABOVE:
CANADA MOOSE — 205-7/8
GEORGINA R. EIDMANN

LEFT:
BIGHORN SHEEP — 185-7/8
MASON J. MILES

