

## Alaska Brown Bear Hunt

# Getting “(Not) So Lucky”

The bear raised his great head, slowly scanning up and down the hill. A nearby sow was sleeping peacefully, and they were both

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unaware of  
our presence.

My guide whispered to me, “Can you shoot that rifle offhand?”

There were choke alders between the bear and us; I would have to stand up and face the bear at 90 yards. He was angling uphill to our left, so I would have to shoot

in on the boar as I rose, thinking to myself, “This is what you came to Alaska for!”

I was hunting with the Mike Litzen Guide Service out of Soldotna. Litzen hunts Unit 9 on the Alaska Peninsula, which he leases from the Native Corporation for the spring hunts in even-numbered years. I had flown into Sand Point to meet Litzen, our guides, and three other hunters. We would be using the FN Patricia Ann as our base camp, cruising the numerous bays and inlets in Litzen’s area, glassing as we went. This is the only way to go! We had warm bunks, hot meals, dry clothes, and were completely mobile, anchoring up at night and moving by day.

from winter to spring. The bears would need the green grass to aid in digestion and clean out their systems after the long winter hibernation. As we motored around the bays, everyone glassed, and if the guide assigned to you spotted a bear, it was your call whether you wanted to put a stalk on the animal.

Dennis, from Alabama, harvested an 8-footer on the first day and opted to fly out so there were three hunters left and four guides and the captain. On the fourth day, we stalked one bear we had spotted; however, after an hour-long vertical climb, we decided he was too small. You know you are in trouble when the guides pull on glacier hiking boots and Kevlar chaps, and there



H. James LeBoeuf, Jr., Boone and Crockett Lifetime Associate, with his “Not So Lucky” Alaska brown bear, which scores 28-3/16 points. LeBoeuf was hunting near Balboa Bay in Alaska.

between his head and left shoulder, hoping the 225-grain Trophy Bonded Bear Claw would go down and into his boiler room. The Ultra Light Arms .338 Magnum is a tack driver, and I had complete confidence that it would do the job. I slowly stood up, sighting

We had seen a lot of bears in spite of the usual peninsula fog and rain. They were mostly sows with cubs and some lone sows, but the boars just weren’t showing due to the weather. We needed some sun to warm things up and transform the hillsides

I was in hip boots! The two other hunters connected on the fifth and seventh days. Where is my bear?

On the eighth day, the boat had to return to Sand Point to pick up two new hunters and drop off the hunters who had

tagged out. Litzen decided to put us ashore so we could hike up a hill overlooking a rapidly greening meadow. Don, my guide, and I nestled in and spotted two bears after about an hour. They were up high, ambling along and one appeared to be a decent boar. After further scrutiny, my guide decided this was my bear. The pair disappeared over a ridge and never came out, so we figured they were sleeping. I looked at Don, and looked back where we had to go. It was at least a mile across the valley floor, through five drainages and then halfway up the mountain.

I said "Are you nuts?"

He said, "Do you want a big bear?"

When these guys tell you to be in shape, you'd better listen.

It was soggy, spongy, and slippery, and the alders grabbed you. It took us a while, but we made the spot where we would have to climb straight up. Don just climbed, while I cursed the whole way up, but we took our time, climbing and resting as we went. I thought I was on a bear hunt, not a sheep hunt! It took three hours to get to a spot on a ridge, looking through my scope at one of the largest carnivores on earth.

I pulled the trigger on the .338, and at the shot, the bear hunched up and tried to bite where the bullet had hit him, right

between the left shoulder and head. He whipped around, trying to go uphill away from us and quickly turned around to follow the sow, who wanted none of this and was steamrolling downhill. I could not get a second shot through the alders, but Don had a clear shot at the wounded animal, so he took it. At his shot the bear flipped over and stopped, and I was able to sneak another shot through the alders and finish him.

Don and I high-fived then slowly went down to see the bear. He was bigger than we thought. His head was mammoth. My first shot had gone right down through his chest, leaving a large exit wound and would have been a mortal shot. But up here they don't take chances on tracking wounded bears in the thick stuff, so it is legal for the guide to backup the hunter.

It was 3:45 p.m., and now the fun began. My bear came to rest, headed downhill and was caught in the alders, thank God, because otherwise, he would have rolled downhill. At 10 pm we had the packs loaded — Don with the hide, which weighed about 150 pounds, and me with the skull and some of Don's pack, since he was carrying all bear. We loaded up facing downhill, and we could not stop to rest unless we had a fallen tree to rest the packs

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on, half sitting half standing. Had we fallen we couldn't have gotten up!

We made the beach with an hour to spare before darkness set in. In May, it is light until around midnight. We had called the boat on the way down and told them we had a big boy. Joel, the lead guide, thought we might have shot "Lucky," a large bear that had eluded them for two seasons. Joel picked us up in a seine skiff and just happened to have two ice-cold beers in his pocket; we were in heaven!

After measuring the hide, which squared 10 feet, we determined that it was not "Lucky." Instead, I called my bear "Not So Lucky," and it stuck. After the 60-day drying period, he scored 28-3/16, a B&C bear, and he is the trophy-of-a-lifetime. ■

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