



New Series

Generation Next: Essay

Recognizing that the future of our Hunter-Conservation legacy is dependent on passing this tradition down to our young hunters, the Boone and Crockett Club and Fair Chase Magazine have invited youth hunters (hunters 16 years and under when they harvested their trophies) who have made our record book to submit articles about their hunting experience. Starting in this issue of Fair Chase we will feature these hunting essays. At the end of each awards entry period (3 years) the Fair Chase staff will select an outstanding author to receive the Fair Chase Youth Literary award for the top article in that awards period. It is our pleasure to present our first contributor Joshua C. Hamat who took a marvelous black bear hunting with his father on Prince of Wales Island in Alaska.

In conjunction with these essays, we will also highlight outstanding groups that are contributing to this youth legacy. These persons or groups have taken the extra effort to ensure the hunter-conservationist tradition is passed down to the next generation. The first to be recognized is Ted Nugent's Kamp for Kids. For nearly a quarter century, Nugent's camp has introduced, promoted, and brought recognition of our North American wildlife model to thousands of our younger generation. This is the future heritage of our conservation and hunting legacy.

Submitted by: Joshua C. Hamat
Age: 15
Trophy Type: Black Bear
Location: Prince of Wales Island,
Alaska - 2010

When the trip to Alaska was first mentioned, I thought to myself, *there is no way this will ever happen. Missing a week of school to go bear hunting? No way! My parents would never let me go.* However, my parents realized this would be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience the outdoors and convinced my school of the benefits of experiential learning. I promised to get all of my assignments completed in advance of the trip, and the next thing I knew I was getting outfitted for my great Alaskan adventure.

My father and I were going with very close friends, another father and son from Houston. We arrived in Ketchikan, where we boarded the Tamarik, a 65-foot yacht that would be our home for the next week. The Tamarik, owned and operated by Tam and Erik Johnson, provides fishing charters in Alaska during the summer and black bear hunts in the spring and fall seasons. When we first got onto the boat I imagined how great this trip would be—seven days exploring the southern part of Prince of Wales Island for trophy black bear. In addition to hunting, we would be fishing too. Accompanying us on our journey was deckhand Jake Barfield, a highly experienced guide who had worked with Tam and Erik for several years. After we all got acquainted, we were off to Prince of Wales Island.

After a long and sometimes rough journey, we anchored in a quiet cove. We were all tired, and after a hearty dinner I went to sleep with thoughts of bears on my

mind. When we awoke the next morning, Tam had already prepared a huge, hot breakfast for us. We filled our stomachs, then it was off to find bears.

Spring bear hunting on the Tamarik involves cruising up and down the coastlines while glassing for bears that have just emerged from hibernation and are looking for food on the rocky beaches. Once a bear was spotted, we would hop into a rubber skiff to get closer to see if it was a shooter or not. Two or so hours into our first day we spotted our first bear! Creed and I flipped a coin to see who would go on the first stalk. I won the coin toss, so I put my waders and boots on. My heart was racing so fast when my father and I jumped into the skiff with Erik. When we got to within a hundred feet of the coast, Erik was able to tell that the bear was a small sow, so we passed on her. We stayed on the skiff most of the day looking for more bears. We saw one more from a distance, too far to see if it was a shooter. We also saw deer, sea lions, some really cool birds and lots of bald eagles. Just being outside in the vast Alaskan wilderness was an incredible experience!

The next day was a beautiful sunny, southeast Alaskan day. Soon after breakfast we spotted another bear and Creed and his father went off with Erik to stalk it, while my father and I stayed on the boat to fish. After a few hours, Creed came back without firing a shot because his bear turned out to be a small sow. After Creed came back on the boat we spotted a pod of killer whales. We got on the skiff to get a closer look. As we were approaching the whales, one breached 10 yards in front of us! It was the most amazing sight one could imagine—a killer whale in mid-air right in front of us! Although no bears were taken that day, we had seen some pretty amazing things and were looking forward to what would lay ahead.

The next day the weather turned bad and we decided to do a little fishing. We dropped some lures and started jigging for rockfish and halibut. That day we caught about 10 yelloweyes, as well as black bass and other rockfish. Creed caught a 103-pound halibut. We also set out some shrimp pods and were happy to find them a little later full of shrimp. It was hard work bringing them up from 400 feet down, but it was worth it. Those were the best shrimp I had ever tasted.

The next morning was another beautiful day, sunny and warm. In order to increase our chances of spotting a trophy bear, our groups split up. My father and I went with Jake on the skiff, while Creed and his father went with Tam and Erik on the big boat. My dad and I cruised with Jake up and down the inlets. Jake yelled to us, "Guys, I see a big one, get ready!" My heart started to race and I

started to get my hopes up about getting a huge bear. I could tell by the look on my dad's face that he was just as nervous as I was. We rode toward the shore slowly and we finally got onto the beach downwind of the bear. It was time to make the stalk. When we got to within 90 yards of it Jake whispered to us, "It's a big sow." My heart dropped because I knew I wanted to shoot a boar. Jake said that because it was an older sow, and it would still be a great trophy. I was thinking about whether to take this sow and had my crosshairs on it. After what seemed like hours, I pulled up. I knew this was not the bear I wanted to shoot. It was the hardest decision I had ever made, but it turned out to be the best decision I ever made, too. That day on the skiff we saw six different bears, but none worth shooting. It was getting late in the day, so we decided to go back to the boat.

When we got back we saw a huge bear spread out on the stern! Creed had shot a big black boar. We celebrated that night and watched the video Erik had taken of Creed's stalk. That night was very hard for me because time was running out for me to get my bear.

The next day was our last day of hunting. I knew this was my last chance but the weather turned bad again, it was very rainy and cold. At about 11 a.m. we spotted a huge black bear on a beach about a mile away. I put on my waders and boots and got on the skiff with my dad, Erik, and Jake. As we were making our way over to the bear, it went up the beach and into the forest, out of sight. My heart dropped as low as it could possibly go. Usually, when a bear gets spooked it does not come back. However, time was running out, so we decided to go sit on a small island a few hundred yards away from where we saw the bear and wait to see if it would come back out. My emotions were going crazy. To everyone's surprise, after about an hour the bear came back!

We were determined to get this bear so we got back in the skiff and rode about 200 yards downwind from the bear on the beach. We started the stalk. After about 20 minutes of slowly crawling and walking towards the bear, we found the bear eating crab on the beach, oblivious to our presence. It was a huge, mature boar! The one I had been

waiting for. I had my .338 set up on a fallen log, crosshairs on the bear waiting for him to turn broadside so I could take it. After what seemed like forever, he finally turned. I took a deep breath, exhaled, and squeezed the trigger. I hit him, but he did not drop. The bear started running towards us. I stood up, reloaded, and squeezed the trigger again. He dropped right then and there. Erik yelled, "Great shot!"

It was only then that I realized that I had just shot a trophy black bear. What a sense of accomplishment and relief. As I



Joshua C. Hamat with the black bear he harvested on Alaska's Prince of Wales Island in 2010. The bear's final score is 20-3/16 points. Hamat also snapped this shot of these killer whales from the boat.



walked towards the bear, I had the best feeling in the world, knowing I had taken a world-class Alaskan black bear. The pressure was off. Now we could just celebrate, and head back to Ketchikan the next day!

Going bear hunting in Alaska was one of the best experiences of my life. It has left me with many amazing memories and an appreciation for all the beautiful things that Alaska has to offer. Every time I look at my bear mount I am brought back to the cold and rocky beach where I was able to take him. I am so glad I was able to experience this hunt with my dad and close friends in a part of the country where few people go. One day, I would love to go back and take another one, but for now I am more than happy with my Boone and Crockett trophy black bear. ■