

Destina

Trophy Brown Bear

While skiffing along a large lake on the Alaska Peninsula on a drizzly October afternoon, my friend Bo Bennett and I spotted a huge brown bear swimming across. Before we could get close, the bear clamored out of the icy water, shook himself off like a big dog, and waddled into the thick brush. We beached the skiff, and while Bo secured it, I grabbed my bow and a .338 for backup and raced into the bushes. The plan was to locate the bear then wait for Bo before stalking him.

By Bob Robb
B&C Professional Member

But fate has a way of changing things, sometimes for the better, although not always. I had not gone a hundred yards when I spotted the monster rolling in waist-high grass to dry off. The wind was right and, being quite naive at the time, I moved to within 30 yards, knelt down, and nocked an arrow. I figured, what the heck, the bear is right here, and when he gets up I'll run a broadhead through his chest, just like that.

When he got up, instead of turning broadside, the bear looked right at me. How he saw me I'll never know, but he knew something was not right. He started swinging his head from side to side and popping his teeth, and when he

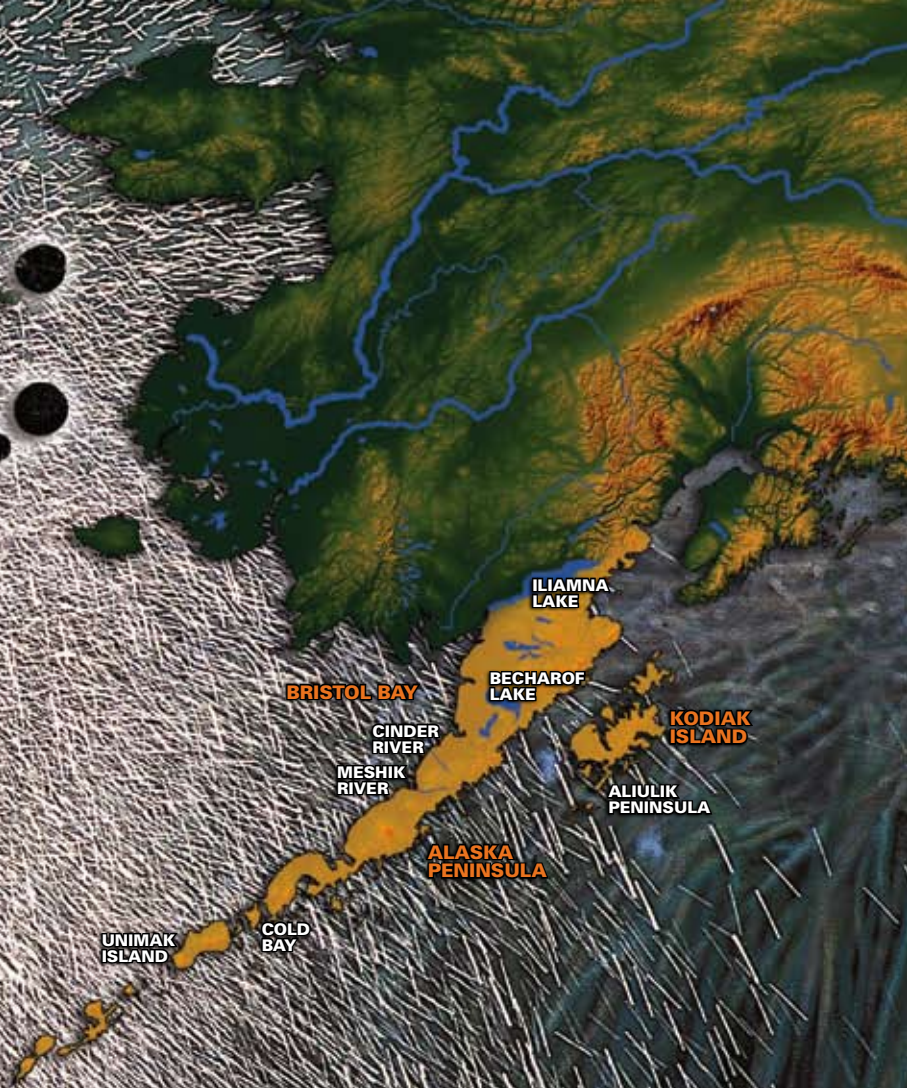
looked away for an instant, I let go of the bowstring and grabbed the rifle. Good thing, because in a flash he was coming hard. I threw the gun up and fired like a shotgun, the recoil taking me over backwards. I rolled into a tight ball and prepared to take a swatting.

Nothing.



This is the big bear described at the beginning of the story. I measured it at 13 inches between the inside edges of the ears. Yikes!

tion:



I soon heard Bo yelling at me, and when he arrived he asked what had happened. I tried to explain it all, but I was so shook up I could barely talk. When I pointed to where the bear had been, Bo walked over and said something like, "Holy buckets!" There lay the bear in a deep, grass-filled depression. My bullet had miraculously shot through the base of the big beast's throat and shattered his spine at the Atlas joint, killing him instantly. We had to skin him where he fell, he was so big. Later at the lodge we weighed the skinned hide, with paws and skull still intact: 157 pounds. The hide squared nine feet, seven inches, and the skull measured 27-3/8 inches.

There's Nothing Like It

I lived, hunted, and guided in Alaska for 15 years, traveling the length and width of this magnificent state many times. Of all the incredible hunting it offers, nothing gets my blood pumping like hunting the massive and magnificent brown bear. From

the southeast Alaska panhandle north to the Copper River Basin, then on to western Alaska, the Alaska Peninsula, and out to Kodiak and Afognak islands, brown bear hunting is an experience like no other.

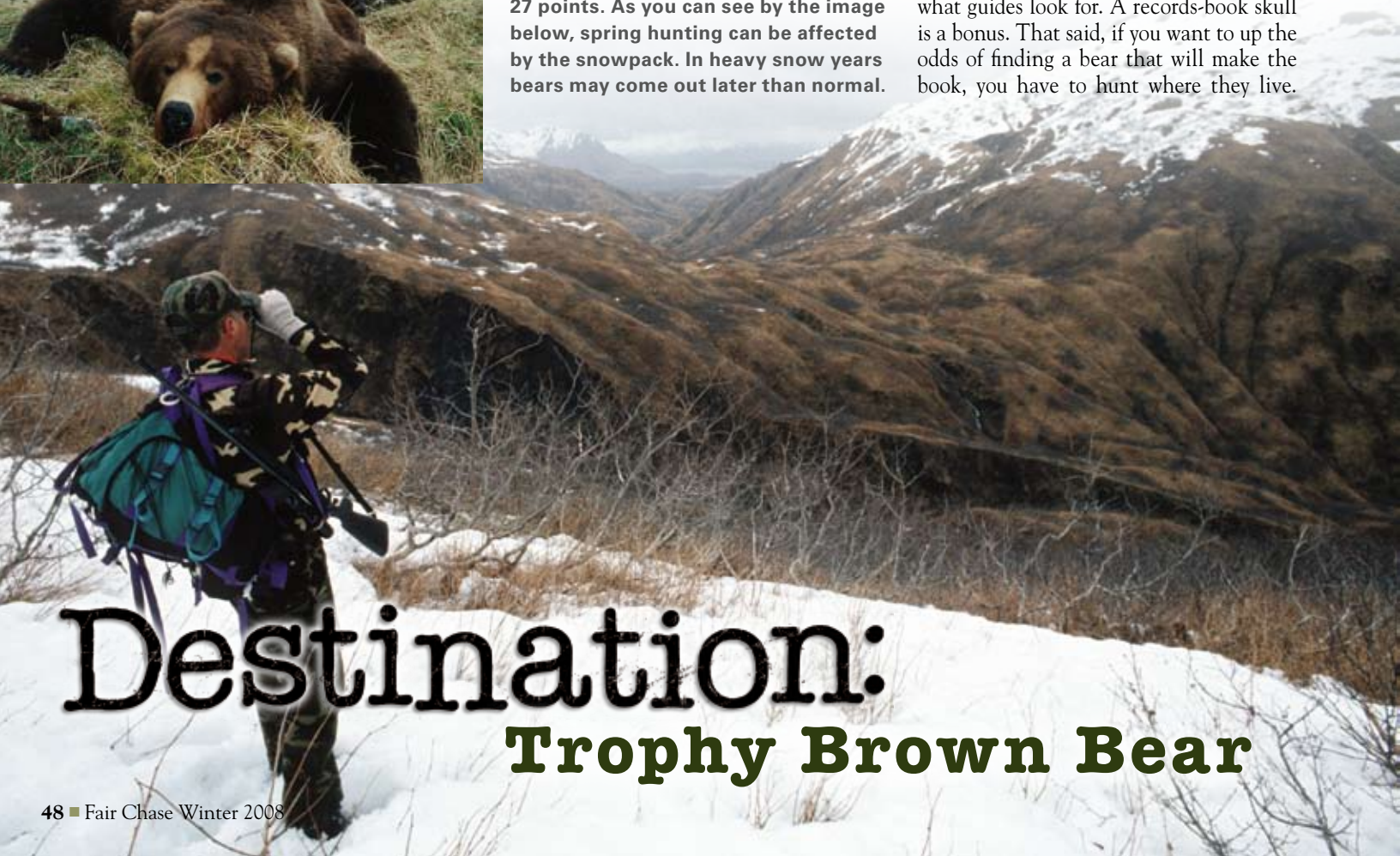
Alaska brown bears (*Ursus arctos middendorffi*) occur throughout Alaska except on the islands south of Frederick Sound in southeastern Alaska, the islands west of Unimak in the Aleutian Chain, and the islands of the Bering Sea. They also occur in Canada, Asia, and Europe. Bear weights vary depending on the time of year, with bears weighing the least in spring or early summer and gaining weight rapidly while gorging on salmon during late summer and fall. At this time most mature males weigh between 500 and 900 pounds, though extremely large boars can weigh as much as 1,500 pounds; sows weigh half to three-quarters as much. An extremely large brown bear may have a skull 18 inches long and 12 inches wide. Brown bears have been known to live 34 years in the wild, though this is rare. Usually, old males may reach 22 years. (The oldest of the 12 bears I have personally killed came from Baranof Island in southeast Alaska and was aged by the

Mark A. Wayne harvested this records-book Alaska brown bear near the Cinder River located near the top of the Alaska Peninsula. The bear scores 27 points. As you can see by the image below, spring hunting can be affected by the snowpack. In heavy snow years bears may come out later than normal.

Alaska Department of Fish and Game at 20 years old.) Brown bears have an especially good sense of smell and under the right conditions may be able to detect odors more than a mile away. Their hearing and eyesight—often poo-pooed by inexperienced hunters—are probably equivalent to that of humans. When bears stand upright, it is not to get ready to charge but to test the wind and to see better.

What is a Trophy Brown Bear?

For record-keeping purposes, both the B&C and P&Y Clubs measure a bear's skull. After the 60-day drying period, both the skull's width and length are measured, with those two measurements added together to give you the final score. When hunting bears, however, it is next to impossible for even the most experienced and very best Alaskan brown bear guides to tell you that an individual bear will "make the book." It may be a big-bodied bear with a huge head, but variations in muscle mass, hair thickness, and so on make it impossible for the guide to tell you exactly how big the skull is. It is nothing like looking at antlers or horns! For that reason, both the size of the bear and the quality of its hide are important criteria when deciding whether or not to shoot a given bear. An old bear with a large body and a hide that is thick and lush and not rubbed on is what guides look for. A records-book skull is a bonus. That said, if you want to up the odds of finding a bear that will make the book, you have to hunt where they live.



Destination: Trophy Brown Bear

TRUE EFFORT

“True effort requires gear that hunts as hard as you do. Only the best gets to wear the label

“Boone and Crockett™”. A name that has stood for conservation and fair chase for over 120 years.”



Crooked Horn Outfitters is celebrating 20 years of building
American Made Products!

We make the gear that will create more opportunities for success;
Stalk closer, Shoot more accurately, Pack your game and your gear...
Hunting Essentials... That's What We Do!

Visit our new Video Website to learn more about these products and
Gear Up For Your Next Adventure!



www.crookedhorn.com

Free DVD Offer; Tagging the West, One Species at a Time, visit us on the web or call us Toll-Free (877) PACK-USA

BOONE & CROCKETT is a registered trademark of the Boone and Crockett Club



Kodiak Island is a top destination for trophy Alaska brown bears. The bear pictured at top was taken by David A. Ratliff near Sturgeon River located on the north shore of Kodiak Island (28-5/16 inches). The other bear was taken on Kodiak Island's Aliulik Peninsula. The brown bear, scoring 28-4/16 inches, was taken by Keith C. Halstead.

That means locating areas where, historically, the numbers of record book bears is more than in other areas.

Locating the Best Trophy Areas

When it comes to locating potential trophy hunting hot spots for all North American big game, I have always found the Boone and Crockett Club's *Records of North American Big Game* to be an invaluable source of research material. Sure, there are other sources of information, but this book is like the cornerstone of a well-built house. It's where I turn first.

The best way to utilize the Boone and Crockett Club's database is to use the club's Trophy Search section on the Club's website, www.Boone-Crockett.org. This is a subscription-only section, but believe me when I tell you the value for the minimal fee is priceless when it comes to quickly and efficiently searching the records. Here's what you do. Go to the Trophy Search area of the website and search Alaska brown bear. And while you can mine data from way-back-when, I like to concentrate on the data from the most recent 10 years. That gives me a perspective of where the very best hunting potential is today, not 20 or 40 years ago.

Much of the hunting in Southeast Alaska occurs along the coast, with hunters and guides using small skiffs to access good glassing stations in spring, or salmon streams in fall.

Brown Bears 1999-2008

Trolling the Trophy Search section for the period 1999-2008, I found that there have been 192 brown bears entered that meet or exceed the period entry minimum score of 26, and just 106 bears that meet the all-time minimum score of 28. Delving further into the data, you find that the bears located in southeast Alaska are not as large as those living further north. In the past 10 years, for example, only four record-book bears have come from the southeast part of the state—and just two of those make the all-time book. Conversely, the highest number of record-class bears come from two general areas—Kodiak Island and the Alaska Peninsula. As you scroll through the names, those of you familiar with Alaska hunting will see many recognizable names—Becharof Lake, Iliamna Lake, the Cinder River, and more. But as you begin adding up the score, you'll see that a couple of locations stand out. One of those is the Meshik River, an area that has produced nine bears scoring 26 or better since 1999, six of which exceed 28. If you know Alaska bear hunting you can then immediately connect that name with Port Heiden, a fishing village located on the northern edge of Bristol Bay near the head of the Alaska Peninsula and the mouth of the Meshik. Port Heiden has three entries of 26 or better, two of which exceed 28. That gives this tight area a total of 12 book bears since 1999.

Destination: Trophy Brown Bear

Travel further down the peninsula and you come to small, windswept town of Cold Bay. Cold Bay has produced 10 bears that exceed 26 since 1999, six of which exceed 28. A short ways further to the southwest and you come to Unimak Island, where few bear permits are issued but which has produced five bears scoring 26 since 1999, four of which go over 28. From Port Heiden to the tip of Unimak Island, this narrow stretch of Alaska is less than 300 miles long, yet produces more book bears per square mile than any other spot in the state.

The only other area to match the Alaska Peninsula is the Aliulik Peninsula. Again, if you know Alaska geography you know that this stretch of land is located at the southern end of Kodiak Island. The Trophy Search section 1999-2008 lists eight bears scoring 26 or better from the Aliulik Peninsula—seven of which score better than 28. The southern end of Kodiak has long been known for its giant bears. If you travel north and west of the Aliulik, you'll run into other areas that have produced large numbers of record-class bears since 1999. These include Sturgeon River (five scoring over 26, four of them going over 28); Halibut Bay (two and one); and Karluk Lake (five and three). Along the way you'll find other areas that have produced a book bear or two, including Red lake, Olga Bay, Deadman Bay, and Zacher Bay.

Arranging a Hunt

Before moving on, it should be noted that, as is the case in all big-game hunting, record book brown bears are where you find them. In addition to the areas listed previously during the 1999-2008 period, book bears also came from the Copper River Basin, scattered areas of western Alaska, Prince William Sound, and southeast Alaska. All these areas offer outstanding hunting experiences that can be quite different from each other due to variations in terrain and latitude.

OK, now that you know where the biggest bears are, how do you arrange a hunt? According to state law, nonresidents of Alaska must either hunt with first or second-degree of kindred relatives or hire a registered guide or outfitter licensed by the state. It is a matter of deciding where you want to hunt, then contacting outfitters who conduct hunts in these areas. You can find them through both the Alaska State Department of Commerce, Professional Licensing Division, P.O. Box 110806, Juneau, AK 99811; (907) 465-2534, or through members of the Alaska Professional Hunters

Association, 907-822-3755; www.alaskaprohunter.org; e-mail office@alaskaprohunter.org. You also must decide whether to hunt spring or fall. Each hunt has pluses and minuses. In spring, hides are as thick and lush as they can be, but hunting can often be affected by weather variables, most notably, the snowpack. Bears leave their dens and immediately begin searching for food. As spring progresses, boars start looking for receptive sows to breed, a task that can have them covering huge expanses of terrain. In fall, the bears are focused on putting on the pounds, and that usually means they are

concentrated on salmon streams. Believe me when I tell you that creeping up a heavily brushed-over salmon stream in the fall that is dense with brown bears of all ages and sizes is an experience you will never forget! No matter what you choose to do, hunting the magnificent Alaska brown bear is a true adventure. These are animals as fast as a racehorse and as strong as Superman, with senses rivaling any scared-of-their-own-shadow deer you have ever hunted. A mature brown bear 10 years of age or more is a trophy to be proud of, regardless of how big its skull may be. ■



NEVER LOSE FOCUS with the locking diopter. An audible and tactile click tells you it's secure.

POWERFUL OPTICS IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND.

The 23-ounce Mojave™ Series from Leupold® sets the standard for peak performance and ergonomic design in a lightweight, easy-to-use package. With 8x42mm and 10x42mm models, Mojave provides the power, resolution, and clarity you've come to expect from Leupold. To learn more, see your Leupold dealer or visit www.leupold.com.



LEUPOLD®
AMERICA'S OPTICS AUTHORITY®

1-800-LEUPOLD » www.leupold.com

© 2008 Leupold & Stevens, Inc.