

BEAR FACTS

So You're Thinking About Traveling in Grizzly Habitat

The grizzly bear was once the uncontested monarch of North America. Now only small populations remain outside of Alaska and parts of Canada. Even in the wilderness of the North, bears have an increasingly difficult time avoiding the pressures of civilization. You are visiting an animal sanctuary, the home of the grizzly bear. Your help is needed to minimize the problems which occur between bears and people. This is necessary for the bears' protection and your own safety.

Most of the bears in Mount McKinley National Park are grizzlies (Ursus arctos), although black bears (Ursus americanus) are sighted on rare occasions. Grizzly bears may be seen almost anywhere, from spruce forests to the most windswept mountain passes.

Bears that feed by the park road are not tame, but are there because the road passes through some of the best grizzly habitat in interior Alaska. Any contacts you have with bears should be handled with caution and common sense. If you are photographing bears from the road, stay in or near your vehicle and use a long telephoto lens. Never approach a bear for pictures. Photographers are often the victims of their own misplaced trust and the unpredictable nature of a grizzly bear.

Do not feed any park animals. It is dangerous for both the animal and you. Rabies is not uncommon in the wildlife of Alaska and may occur in any mammal species. Wild animals are healthier eating their natural foods and remaining independent of man. Park regulations prohibit the feeding of any park animal.

When hiking:

1. Make noise while in or near heavy brush. The noise will alert a bear to your presence, and prevent an unexpected encounter at close quarters. Talk loudly, sing, whistle, clap your hands, rattle rocks in a can, or attach a bell to your pack. But do not make noise if you see a bear that is not coming your way, it might attract the bear to you.
2. Avoid dense brush whenever possible.
3. Carry a pair of binoculars to check the brown hump ahead. Stop and search ahead occasionally. Change your course of travel to avoid the hump if it is a bear.
4. Do not camp on or next to an animal trail or what you think might be a common route of travel. Do not camp in thick brush. It is better to pitch your tent in the open where your camp can be seen and avoided by bears. It is much safer to sleep in a tent than out in the open.
5. If weather permits, cook outside and several feet away from camp to avoid trapping food odors in your tent. Do not drain cooking or wash water near a camp. Store all your food and cleaned cooking utensils in a tightly sealed plastic bag or stuff sack at least 200 feet away from your tent. If possible store your food in a tree, between trees, or on a rock outcropping out of a bear's reach. Keep your camp clean of food spills. Wash your face and hands before going to sleep.
6. Avoid taking smelly foods such as canned fish, bacon, etc., with you. Do not fry fish in the backcountry.
7. Carry out all of your trash. Wash out any cans and store trash with your food away from camp at night. Fires are not allowed in the backcountry.

8. Do not use any perfume while on a hiking trip. It is better to smell human than to smell enticing.
9. It is not known whether the odor of menstruation or intercourse will attract bears, but it is advisable to keep your body clean. Tampons are preferable to sanitary napkins in reducing odors. Used tampons should be placed in a tightly sealed plastic bag and carried out with other garbage.
10. If you come upon a fresh animal carcass, leave the area immediately. Bears are extremely possessive of their meat caches and may stay near them.
11. Be extremely cautious if you encounter a sow with cubs. Mother bears are very protective of their young and feel threatened by anyone that approaches too closely. A cub often has no fear of people and may even approach you. Its mother will not appreciate the closeness, and her concern and aggression will be directed towards you.
12. Leave your dog behind. Pets may attract bears. They are not permitted in the backcountry.
13. Firearms are not allowed in Mount McKinley National Park. The use of a firearm against a charging bear may change a bluff charge into an actual charge. A misplaced shot may turn a curious bear into an enraged bear.

If you see a bear but it does not see you, put as much distance between you and the bear as possible. Bears have poor eyesight, but they have a very good sense of smell. When a bear first spots a person it will often stand on its hind legs to get a better view and to sniff the wind. Most bears will then turn and run away.

If a bear approaches you, even at a full charge, do not run. Running will excite the bear, and a bear can run much faster than you can. At this point you may want to yell and wave your arms to let the bear know what

you are. If there are trees around, climb up as high as you can. Bears can reach up 8 to 10 feet. Adult grizzlies usually cannot climb trees although they can use branches as ladders. If a bear is approaching you from a long way off, try to get out of the bear's sight. Often a bear will forget that you were so interesting once it can no longer see you.

Young bears are especially curious. They may come right up to a person, but cause no harm. Do not run or excite the bear. Do not leave your pack or any item for a bear that is approaching you unless you feel there is no alternative. Once a bear receives a few of these gifts, it will become conditioned to expect one from every person. Your actions in this respect will affect others that come into bear territory after you.

Most charges occur when a person and a bear are both surprised at close quarters. Most charges are bluffs. DO NOT RUN! Stand facing the bear and do not move. The bear will probably stop its charge, turn and run away. If the bear continues its charge and physical contact is imminent, drop to the ground face-down and play dead. Remain in the natal position, protecting the back of your neck and groin. People are not always seriously injured in bear maulings. If you play dead, the bear may be satisfied that you pose no threat.

Remember that most hikers do not see grizzlies in the backcountry, and those that do often see them from a great distance. Bears usually go to great lengths to avoid people.

If a bear has lost its instinctive fear of people and is frequenting human areas, the National Park Service will try to relocate the bear. Relocations are not always successful. It costs a great deal of time and money to

tranquilize and fly a bear to a remote corner of the park. It is a trauma for the bear which does not end once it has been released. If the bear stays and adapts to its new surroundings, it must find food in a spot which is almost certain to be the territory of other bears. Many relocated bears do not adapt to their new surroundings. They walk back home, posing a management problem. If the bear continues to be a problem should it be relocated again, destroyed or

We have a responsibility to the bears. We are guests to their home and should make our presence felt as little as possible. We must try to minimize our contacts with grizzlies for our own safety and to ensure that they can continue to roam wild in Mount McKinley National Park.

Thank you for your help.

The staff of Mount McKinley National Park.