



AVOIDING CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

DENALI NATIONAL PARK & PRESERVE

Grizzly and black bears in Denali National Park and Preserve can severely maul or kill you. They are unpredictable and will defend themselves, their young, their food, and their territory. When surprised, they may react by attacking. ALL bears are potentially dangerous.

Bear attacks are very rare, and there has never been a fatality caused by a bear in Denali National Park. There have been 20 injuries from bears since the park's inception in 1917. The following simple precautions are the basis for minimizing bear encounters and incidents. By reducing problems we're reducing the need to kill bears or alter their behavior.

This warning is not intended to frighten you away from exploring the beautiful wilderness of Denali, and certainly not to portray the bear in a terrifying way. Bears are vital to this wilderness. It has been their home for thousands of years. You are the visitor.

When you visit bear country you choose to risk encounter. There are few places in the world where the grizzly bear is encountered more readily than in Denali. In this 6 million

acre sanctuary, grizzlies move freely and interact at will with their environment.

When you become part of that environment, you must assume responsibility for your actions to assure your safe return. To the bears, you are unpredictable and may be seen as a threat. It is up to you to conduct yourself in such a way as to minimize the bear's perception of you as threatening. However, there are no guarantees for safety when you enter bear country. Bears are unpredictable, wild animals. If you venture into bear country, you must be prepared to accept them on their own terms.

BEAR COUNTRY: TRAVELING SAFELY

A basic knowledge of bears, their behavior and habitat is the most important element of developing safe bear country habits.

Avoid initial confrontation with the bear. Prevention is the key to getting along with bears. Be cautious. Be alert. Be aware of your surroundings. Travel in pairs or small groups.

Watch for the bears and signs of bears. Stay alert and look ahead. Watch for movement along your route. Be prepared to alter your route if you sight a bear. Tracks are unmistakable (a five-toed foot print, as long as yours, but almost twice as wide with claws extending well beyond the toes). Bear scat is massive, often resembling a cow's or, later in the season, a pile of partially digested berries. Freshly overturned tundra may indicate where a bear has been excavating for ground squirrels, roots, and other delicacies. Bears are frequently sighted near areas of high squirrel populations or on passes used for travel between rivers and streams. Do not be lulled into a false sense of security when you're around the hotel or other populated areas of the park. Bears can be everywhere.

Make noise, particularly where visibility is limited. A bear when lying down can be well hidden, even in knee-high brush. Make a variety of noises - loud talking, ringing a bell, shaking pebbles in a can - to let the bear know where you are and that you are human. Bears will generally move away from such noises. Whistling is not recommended as you may inadvertently imitate another animal, drawing the bear to you. Sound may not travel as far on a windy day or near running water. Staying up-wind from thickets may let the bear smell you and give it a chance to move away. Be aware of wind direction. Bears depend more on their sense of smell than vision.

Bears should never be approached. Even at 100 yards a bear may begin to feel crowded. A sow with cubs is extremely dangerous - stay clear. If you spot a small cub, the protective sow is nearby. If bears approach you, give them the right of way.

Use telephoto lenses and binoculars. Keep your distance at all times. Crowding can stimulate aggressive responses.

Do not feed any animals. Animals fed by people may lose their natural food-finding instincts and their fear of people. Feeding

ground squirrels may cause unnatural population growth, attracting bears.

Leave your dog behind. Pets are not part of this natural ecosystem. They may attract bears, placing you in danger, and are not permitted in the wilderness.

ENCOUNTERING A BEAR

NEVER RUN. You can't outrun a grizzly. The following situations may occur anywhere in bear country. This recommended behavior is generally advised, but is no guarantee of averting mishap. Above all - remain calm and give the bear the opportunity to learn that your intentions are not hostile.

- *An Unaware and Feeding Bear* – The bear may move away on its own. If not, wait for the bear to put its head down and continue feeding, then move quietly away, preferably down wind. If this is impossible, move upwind so the bear is able to smell you first. Alter your route to avoid the bear.

- *An Aware and Distant Bear* – Move slowly away and get out of sight. Often a bear may forget you were so interesting when it can no longer see you. Once you are out of sight move out of the area as quickly as possible.

- *An Aware Approaching Bear* – Remain calm! Speak to the bear in a firm, calm voice; hold up your arms; slowly back away. If you have the time and opportunity, climb a large tree. Grizzlies are not adept at climbing, but may climb trees if the branches are properly spaced. A bear standing on its hind legs may be able to reach 10 feet.

- *An Aware and Close Bear* – Close can be 100 yards. Watch the bear's actions and act accordingly. If the bear stands and waves its nose in the air, it is trying to identify you. Assist it by talking in a low, firm voice and waving your arms. If the bear makes a series of woofs and grunts, it is challenging you for space. If the bear stands sideways, it is showing you how big it is. Both are invitations for you to leave. Retreat slowly backwards.

- *If a Bear Charges You* - **DO NOT RUN** - This may excite the bear and trigger its chase instincts. Grizzlies can run up to 41 mph over short distances, easily outdistancing a human. Stand facing the bear and don't move. Most charges are bluffs. The bear will probably stop, turn and run away. If the bear continues its charge and physical contact is imminent, drop to the ground and play dead. Remain in a curled up position, protecting the back of your neck and groin. Refrain from making any noises. Playing dead may satisfy the bear that you are no threat; keeping your pack on may save your life by protecting your back and spine. Drop your pack only as a very last alternative to allow you to climb a tree. To drop a pack without need encourages the bear to chase backpackers and approach people for food.

CAMPING

SAFELY

Food Storage and cooking. Avoid camping on animal trails, on riverbars, in thick brush, or near food sources, including berry patches and water sources. Cook and store food at least 100 yards away from your camp. Better yet, cook prior to camping (preferably 1 or 2 miles), then move on to camp. Never cook or store food in your tent. Select a cook site with a view to watch for bears. Take only the food you need for cooking out of the bear-resistant food container. When cooking, have your unneeded belongings packed and ready to leave quickly. Be prepared to quickly place food in your bear-resistant food container. Do not leave food behind should a bear suddenly appear nearby. Be ready to pack up everything and leave in 60 seconds. Don't leave anything that will "reward" a bear for intruding. Inquire at the Visitor Access Center about using bear-resistant food containers, which are required in most backcountry units (see "Bear-resistant Food Containers" page 4). If you are in an area that does not require a bear-resistant food container, seal all food in at least two layers of plastic bags. Hang it higher than 10 feet in a tree or bush, at least 100 yards downwind, and visible from your tent. Never carry smelly foods into the backcountry. Wash cans and other containers and carry out everything you carry in. Do not bury litter. Note: in roadside campgrounds store all food in plastic bags or sealed containers. Then place food in your vehicle or bearproof lockers at the campgrounds.

Keep yourself clean. Do not use perfumes or deodorants while hiking. It is better to smell human than enticing. Keep your clothes and equipment free of food odors. Avoid leaning over steaming, cooking food. After eating, wipe your hands on a bandana, then store it with your food. Refrain from wiping grease or other food on the clothes you are wearing and plan to keep in your tent. It is not known whether the odor of menstruation will attract bears. Keep clean. A natural sponge that can be washed out or tampons are preferable to sanitary napkins for reducing odors. Used tampons should be placed in a tightly sealed plastic bag and carried out with other garbage which should be placed in your bear-resistant food container.

You are encouraged to seek more information about this magnificent member of the wilderness from park rangers, naturalist programs, and publications. By no means should you enter bear country with fear born of the unknown, but rather with a keen awareness and appreciation for the great bear based upon knowledge and respect.

