

You are in Grizzly Country



Recommended Reading for Anybody Planning a Visit to Grizzly Country

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Rangers in charge of Montana's Glacier National Park and Flathead National Forest probably receive more inquiries on bears—particularly grizzly bears—than any other subject. National park and forest users not only worry about their safety, but also about the welfare of the grizzly bear, a threatened species.

Their concern is justified. The advent of ultra-light backpacking equipment has allowed visitors to reach into the remotest corners of the grizzly's domain. Increased recreational use in the backcountry has, in turn, increased the number of confrontations between grizzlies and recreationists.

This not only poses a hazard to human safety, but an additional threat to the beleaguered grizzly as the bear involved in a mauling is often killed. The grizzly has a very low reproductive rate and can't withstand increased mortality.

That's why this brochure is so important for anybody planning to visit grizzly country. By following these suggestions for hiking and camping in grizzly country, visitors can decrease the risk of a confrontation and increase the grizzly's chance of surviving modern America.



The Real Grizzly

Most visitors have already heard about the bear/man conflict in northwestern Montana because of the extensive amount of publicity confrontations receive. This press coverage has given the grizzly an undeserved reputation as a vicious man-killer and has given the public an unrealistic opinion of the risk involved when entering grizzly country.

In reality, the likelihood of being mauled is statistically slim, particularly when you consider the number of hikers and campers using grizzly country. The risk is, in fact, smaller than the chance you take driving an automobile to the trailhead. Backcountry visitors tend to accept the hazards of driving today's highways, but sometimes fail to accept the threat posed by the grizzly.

Defensive driving greatly reduces the risk of automobile accidents. Likewise, defensive hiking reduces the risk of seeing a grizzly under unpleasant conditions. In both cases, however, all possible precautions don't eliminate the risk.

In the history of Glacier Park, less than 4 percent of the fatalities occurring in the park were caused by bears. Most deaths resulted from falls, automobile accidents, drownings and hypothermia. Yet, fatal maulings receive much more attention by the media, giving an exaggerated impression of the risk involved.

On the other hand, some writers and film-makers have projected the grizzly as "Gentle Ben."—an equally unrealistic image. The grizzly is definitely dangerous.

Thus, the real grizzly has rarely been introduced to the American people. The truth lies somewhere between the two popular extremes.



Knowing the Facts is the Best Defense

There is no sure-fire method for avoiding a confrontation—other than staying home. The following suggestions are the best general rules available, but don't consider them guarantees that, if followed, will assure safety. Every

encounter differs and requires different response. Overall knowledge of bears and the conflict between bears and recreationists is, without doubt, the best defense.

Fortunately, a wealth of information exists to prepare visitors for their trip to grizzly country. National park and forest visitor centers and ranger stations have publications about bears. In addition, your local library or bookstore can probably provide you with as much reading on bears as you care to digest.

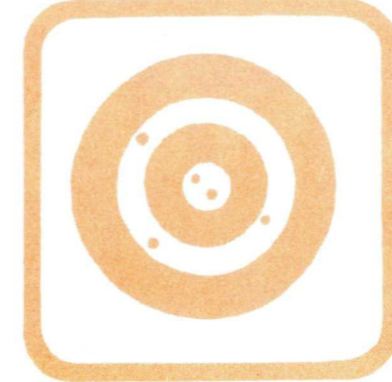


Free Sleeping Invites Disaster

A growing number of visitors prefer to throw their sleeping bag behind a roadside bush rather than pay to stay in a motel or campground. These "free sleepers" either can't afford paid accommodations or prefer to be alone in the wilderness. Unfortunately, they may also be alone with a grizzly bear. Free sleeping has, in fact, contributed to several maulings in the national parks. In addition, such camping practices violate national park regulations. All overnight visitors to Glacier Park must stay at a backcountry campsite, in a vehicle campground or at a commercial establishment (hotel, motel or chalet).

National forests regulations, on the other hand, don't prohibit such camping practices. Visitors to the Flathead National Forest can camp anywhere they choose, usually without a fee.

Visitors staying in designated camping areas in national parks or forests can often receive updated information on bear sightings from rangers. But free sleepers can't. Instead, they could inadvertently camp in an area closed because of bear trouble—thus, greatly increasing the chance of bear trouble.



During the Hunting Season

Although hunting is prohibited in Glacier Park, it's allowed in the adjoining Flathead National Forest. Hunters should follow all rules for using grizzly country, plus taking extra care with bagged game. At times, a hunter doesn't have time to remove downed game before nightfall. During the night, a bear may claim it, so be careful when approaching the animal the next day. Hang downed game as high off the ground as possible, downwind and away from your hunting camp.



Vehicle Camping

Both black bears and grizzly bears have caused some trouble in vehicle campgrounds. This requires additional caution—particularly for tent campers.

- **Store food safely.** At night, store your food out-of-sight in your car, preferably in the trunk. In Glacier Park, regulations prohibit leaving food or a cooler unattended. Some campgrounds have food poles for campers without vehicles. Never leave food in your tent.
- **Keep a clean camp.** Don't leave garbage or cooking utensils around camp. Wash off picnic tables after using them, and clean up messes left by others.

Bear Facts

Much of what people have read or heard about bears is fantasy. For example, all of the following are facts.

- Bears can run downhill.
- Bears have good eyesight.
- Black bears are dangerous.
- Dogs cannot protect you from bears.
- Bears can swim.
- Bears like water.
- Garbage bears are dangerous.
- Bears do eat meat.
- Bears can be found throughout their habitat anywhere, at any elevation, any time of the year.
- Bears are found around residential and commercial developments.
- Some bears can climb trees.

No Guarantee

Glacier Park and Flathead National Forest are two of the few remaining refuges in the continental U.S. for the grizzly bear, the king of the wilderness. Thus, when you visit these areas, you're visiting a king's home, so the best manners are in order. Besides, it makes life more secure for both bears and people.

Visitors come voluntarily, and there are no guarantees for their safety—from grizzly bears or any other hazard. Most visitors don't expect such guarantees, and many feel that total safety would destroy the essence of wilderness. You're taking a small additional risk when entering grizzly country, but since grizzly country is usually the wildest, most beautiful and least crowded terrain left in the United States, this small risk may be worth it.

Grizzly Country Manners

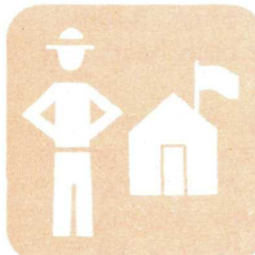
Following these basic rules will make your visit to grizzly country as safe as you can make it.



- **Be informed.** Fear of the grizzly is fear of the unknown. Thus, learning about bears helps relieve this fear by providing the knowledge to help avoid and respond to confrontations.

- **Be alert.** Learn to watch for bears, bear sign and especially hazardous situations where bear trouble is most likely.

- **Be careful with food and garbage.** Bear trouble often results from careless handling of food and garbage, including fish entrails. Never let bears get at your food or garbage. Even if you escape without trouble, you may be setting up a dangerous situation for the next person coming down the trail. Obviously, this means never feed bears.



- **Obey all regulations.** These rules aren't established to make life more difficult for you, but to protect you and the area's natural phenomena, including grizzly bears.



- **Stay away from dead animals.** Bears often feed on carrion (dead, decaying meat), so you're taking a chance by going near it. So make a wide detour around any dead animals you see while hiking in bear country.



- **Never approach a bear.** This goes double for bear cubs, as a protective mother is usually nearby. Don't make the same mistake made by several photographers who have been mauled

trying to get close for a better picture.

- **Avoid smelly cosmetics.** Bears may be attracted to perfumes, hair sprays and other odors.
- **Human sexual behavior may attract bears.**
- **Women should be extra careful.** Bears may be attracted to women during their menstrual period.



- **Guns aren't the answer.** Park regulations prohibit carrying guns into the backcountry. Even in the national forest where guns are allowed, it may not be wise unless the gun-bearer is

very proficient in the use of the right caliber of firearm.



- **Report all bear sightings.** Even if you don't consider the sighting significant, it may be, so report it to a ranger. Taking a few minutes to report a sighting will help rangers manage both

recreationists and grizzlies for the benefit of both.



Day Hiking

Some visitors believe they avoid any chance of a bear encounter by not camping overnight. Although all fatal maulings in Glacier Park have involved overnight

camping, most confrontations result from day hiking. Thus, all hikers should follow these rules.

- **Make noise.** As a general rule, the noisier, the safer. Metallic noises, like bear bells or pebbles in a can, are best. Natural conditions such as wind, thick brush or rushing water can muffle human voices and even metallic noise, so be especially careful in these situations. Before entering thick brush along a roaring mountain stream, for example, make as much noise as possible. Most confrontations result from a hiker surprising a bear at close range, so making noise reduces the risk of an encounter.

- **Watch for bears.** Carefully scan ahead and to the sides throughout your hike.
- **Never hike alone.** There is definitely safety in numbers.

- **Never hike at night.** Besides the darkness limiting your vision, bears are more active at night.

- **Leave your dog home.** Taking dogs on backcountry trails increases your chances of a confrontation. Bears and dogs don't get along, and several incidents have occurred where bears have chased dogs back to their masters. National park regulations prohibit taking dogs into the backcountry and require that dogs be leashed or constrained at all times. National forests do not have these restrictions, but dogs must be leashed in some designated campgrounds.

- **Avoid windy days.** If possible, avoid hiking into a strong wind which muffles the noise you're making and prevents grizzlies from catching your scent.



Backpacking

During backpacking trips, the basic rules for day hiking are equally important. However, backpacking also requires several special precautions.

- **Get a permit.** National park regulations require all backcountry campers to have a backcountry permit. Unfortunately, some hikers ignore this regulation. This not only puts them in violation of park regulations and subject to a fine but increases their chance of bear trouble. When you get your permit, rangers will inform you about any reported bear activity in the area you have selected for your hike. Although national forest regulations don't require backcountry permits, it's still wise to stop at the closest ranger station and discuss your trip before departing.

- **Pack out all garbage.** Don't leave garbage in the backcountry. Don't burn it. Don't bury it. If you carried it in and didn't consume it, pack it out.

- **Avoid smelly foods.** Fresh, perishable foods with strong odors such as meat and fish can attract bears. Freeze-dried foods are best.

- **Carefully check the campsite.** Before setting up camp, check around for bear sign and to see how tidy previous campers have been. If you see fresh bear sign or notice that former campers have left a mess, consider moving on to another campsite. If you see a bear in the area, don't

The Confrontation



Any national park or forest visitor who is forced to deal with a confrontation with a grizzly bear has, in many cases, failed to take proper precautions. At this point, the chance of escaping unharmed has been reduced

substantially. The following suggestions are the best available, but every confrontation differs, as does the solution. This can be compared to waiting until you need open heart surgery to exercise preventative medicine.

Most important, try to avoid a confrontation, and before leaving on your trip, have a group discussion on how to prevent and handle a confrontation. If one member of your group makes a mistake, it may endanger everybody. Plan your response to several types of encounters.

If you follow all the rules and still encounter a

camp there. If possible, pick a campsite, with easily-climbed trees nearby. If there is a popular fishing area nearby, the campsite may also be popular with bears, so consider camping elsewhere. Don't camp near potential bear food sources such as carrion, garbage dumps or berry patches. Also, don't camp on trails or along streams, both of which are common travel corridors for bears.

In Glacier Park, backcountry campers sometimes don't have a choice, as designated campsites are assigned by rangers. However, many of these factors are considered by rangers, and you may have a choice of several designated sites. Campers using the Flathead National Forest have more flexibility in selecting campsites.

- **Set up camp correctly.** Make sure the cooking area is downwind and removed from the sleeping area.

- **Store food and garbage carefully at night.** As night approaches, put all food and garbage in plastic bags, seal them and then suspend them between two trees—at least 10 feet from the ground and four feet from the stems of the trees.

grizzly at close range, here are some general suggestions on what to do next.

- **Keep calm.** Do not panic and run wildly. You may excite the bear into pursuit, and you have no chance of outrunning a grizzly.

- **Look for a tree.** Immediately look for a tree to climb. Do not make a mad dash for it, yet. Simply pick one out. Make sure it is large enough to get you out of reach. Adult grizzlies can not climb trees, but they can sometimes "climb" off the ground by using branches like a ladder. Young grizzlies and all black bears can climb trees.

- **Watch the bear for aggressive behavior.** This includes chomping its jaws, making a "woofing" sound or keeping its head down with ears laid back. Any bear that moves toward you should be considered aggressive.

If the bear does not seem to be displaying aggressive behavior, talk softly in monotones and slowly

- **Sleep uphill from your food cache.** Avoid setting up your sleeping area downhill from your food and garbage, as the downhill breeze common at night in the mountains can carry food odors over you.

- **Be a clean cook.** Don't get food odors on your clothing, sleeping bag or tent. Sleep in different clothing than used for cooking. Cook only the amount of food you can eat.

- **Keep a flashlight, noise-maker or other deterrent handy.** There are many theories on how various devices may deter bears. If you have such a deterrent with you, keep it handy at all times, including in the tent at night.

- **Keep a clean camp.** When you break camp, you should leave no sign of your presence. If previous campers have left trash, pack it out with yours.

- **Abandon a ransacked camp.** If you leave your camp during the day and return to find it torn up by a bear, immediately grab what you need and return to the trailhead to report the bear incident.

If you're camping in an alpine area, place food in a rock pile a safe distance from camp. Never keep food in your tent.

retreat. When you are out of sight, retreat more rapidly. At this point, seriously consider abandoning your trip.

If the bear stands up and puts its nose in the air or swings its head from side to side, it is not displaying aggressive behavior. The bear is merely trying to figure out what you are—so help. Wave your arms and talk in monotones. Do not yell.

- **The Attack.** If the bear comes towards you, get up the tree fast—if you have time. Stay in the tree until you are sure the bear has left the area, and then make your way quickly and noisily back to the trailhead.

Before heading for the tree, drop something like a camera, clothing or pack to distract the bear. However, do not randomly toss your pack to the bear if it is not threatening you. This only allows the bear to get food in your presence and become conditioned—a threat to future hikers.