

If Huge Bear Rushes Toward You He May Just Be Heading Home

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Canadian National Railways

Grizzlies and Kodiaks Are Polite but Dislike to Be Disturbed While Fishing, Finley Finds After Years in West

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PORTLAND, Ore.—When Kodiak and grizzly bears go fishing they dislike intensely to be disturbed.

They are as intent upon their work as a sales manager in conference with his staff, and intruders are no more welcome than a silk socks peddler.

But are they dangerous? No more than the busy executive. If one is polite, and willing to recognize pre-occupation, they are not. If one is persistent, and pushes boldly past the secretary—or the warning growl—he may in either case expect serious consequences.

The fact is that bears are not the formidable creatures which hunters and some writers have pictured. Not, at least, according to Mr. William L. Finley, who has spent more than 30 years in the West studying and photographing wild animals.

Mr. Finley returned recently to his home at Jennings Lodge, Ore., from a summer in Alaska, spent to a considerable extent in studying at close range the habits of bears. During his spare time he approached as closely as he could, for photographic purposes, the activities of whales and glaciers.

Not much is known about bear nature, Mr. Finley believes, and much of current beliefs concerning it is misleading. Most information along this line has come from hunters, and they, of all people, are probably least qualified to interpret aright the motives behind the small amount of bear life which they see.

The hunter, Mr. Finley points out, goes out to make a kill. When he finds a bear he does not wait to study that animal's actions, but shoots him at the first opportunity. The wounded grizzly may then rush toward the hunter, who returns feeling a hero, with a hide and a story of having been "charged" by a dangerous brute.

But the naturalist who wishes only to study and photograph bears learns vastly different things concerning these huge denizens of the back woods. A bear, Mr. Finley has found, is generally disinclined to "charge" a human being. He is, in fact, extremely desirous of avoiding human scent, and even the largest Kodiak bear—and he is the world's largest carnivore—will make off into the woods if the wind carries to him the message of a man's presence.

King of the Forest

If he sees a man whom he does not smell, however, the average big bear will stand his ground. He is king of the forest, and accustomed to all other creatures yielding at his approach. If he is busy—fishing, for instance—he may be observed quite openly. But if his right of way is openly challenged, or one attempts to "shoo" him away, he will yield with the utmost reluctance, if at all.

But by nature he is not vicious. There are, however, many bears who have had sad experiences with humans, who have been hunted and possibly shot, or have escaped with difficulty after being cornered; and these may bear a grudge against mankind. Being large and powerful animals, it is not beyond reason that they may now and then maul the injudicious hunter or camper who fails to recognize their dignity and give them a wide berth.

But the vicious "charge" of the bear, made famous by many a hunter and novelist, is, according to Mr. Finley, largely fictitious. His own observations have brought to light several explanations of why a bear may run toward a man without any intention of injuring him.

"When a hunter shoots at a bear," he told this correspondent, "whether or not he is hit, the bear does not generally know from what direction he has been attacked. His natural inclination is to run for home, and it may just as easily happen that 'home' lies behind the hunter as in any other direction. In such a case the bear rushes toward the man. Both are badly frightened.

"Charge" Goes Fast

"When I was in Alaska six years ago my wife and I were out with a camera to study bears. We came upon a ridge down which a bear had recently traveled in search of food. We unwittingly intercepted his path, and when he saw us he rushed toward us. It was not a pleasant moment, for we were unarmed, and it certainly appeared that we were being 'charged.' But the bear rushed right past us and on up the trail he had used in coming down the ridge." Simple curiosity may also cause a bear to run toward one.

Working patiently in "blinds" such as are used in photographing birds, Mr. Finley, this past summer, secured motion pictures of upward of a score of Kodiak and grizzly bears fishing. He was able to observe and photograph them as close as 20 feet, and disproved at least one theory of their fishing methods.

"It is generally believed," he said, "that bears stand beside a stream and reach quickly down with a paw, like a cat, to swish a fish out upon the bank. Their actual methods are quite different. Again and again

I saw them plunge with a great splash into some deep pool, where salmon were swarming, and drive the fish out into the shallows. Then they would scramble into the shallows

low themselves and quickly plant a paw upon a fish. Invariably they would then retire with their catch to a secluded nook in the brush for their banquet.

"It was interesting to observe the differences in method between the young bears and the veterans. The youngsters would frequently try to catch two or three fish which they had driven out into the shallows, while the old bears, taught by long experience, invariably kept their eyes upon a single fish, and as invariably caught him."

But while bears are not the vicious creatures they are sometimes pictured, Mr. Finley would not encourage familiarity with them. Especially is this true in national parks, where bears have become accustomed to the proximity of men, and are not so inclined to flee from them. If treated with decent respect, however, he believes they are not to be feared. No animal of their size and strength should be approached flippantly, he feels.

Speaking of size, Mr. Finley was particularly fortunate this summer in observing a group of whales. Not only did these "blow" and "sound" in their accustomed manner, but two of them, in playful mood, leapt and played about the surface for some time, more than once clearing the water completely.

Wishing to photograph icebergs in the act of separation from their parent glaciers, Mr. Finley witnessed a scene of mass production, when the entire face fell off a glacier. The giant waves resulting would have swamped his craft had not a number of rocks and small islands intervened to break their force. But when a berg the size of an office building suddenly popped up beside him and turned on its side, freshly separated from submarine glacial ice, he and his party felt they had found thrills enough, and lost no time in sailing away.