

Paul's Testimony -2007

I'd like to share with you, the prospective client of a Black Bear Lodge bear hunt, my experiences and advice as you consider where you'd like to book your black bear hunt. First and foremost, you are in for the challenge and experience of a lifetime when you choose to go on a black bear hunt, regardless of the outfitter you choose. If you don't decide to hunt with Black Bear Lodge, please by all means, hunt black bears with another reputable outfitter. It is a thrill that you will not easily forget, and a challenge to truly test your abilities as a hunter, outdoorsperson, and as a conservationist.

### **Why Black Bear Lodge?**

I choose to hunt at Black Bear Lodge because of its location, price, successful track record, and the integrity and knowledge of the Lodge's owners, Jim and Jillian Slavich. They are both truly great people. Jim and Jillian will not only make sure that every detail is looked after, they will also ensure that you have the hunting experience and success that you rightfully deserve. I have known Jim and Jillian for many years, and had already visited Black Bear on a successful walleye fishing trip.

### **My Past Hunting Experience**

I'm primarily a deer hunter, and have taken one with a rifle, black powder, and bow. I've been hunting for 7 years, and like to bird hunt when not in a tree stand. I would consider myself an average marksman, an above average outdoorsman, and in good physical condition. Previous to my trip, I had never hunted black bear, though I had often dreamt of the opportunity.

Although there are many similarities in hunting deer and bear, the differences are what makes or breaks your adventure. Not understanding the differences and subtleties will cost you dearly.

### **Preparation**

I decided to book my hunt at Black Bear in the spring of 2007 and began my preparations right away. If you look at the length that I write in all of these different sections, you will notice that this one is by far the longest...that is by no accident. The time and energy devoted to preparation of your hunt will DIRECTLY equate to your level of success, or lack thereof. I can not say enough about how important it is to prepare early and often. Start by reading a few books on the subject.

I have two I recommend from the four I read: "***Do-it-yourself Black Bear Baiting & Hunting***" by Dr. Ken Nordberg and "***Successful Black Bear Hunting: Strategies for Bagging Your Trophy Bruin***" by Bill Vaznis. These books are motivational, instructional and get right down to the bare facts of what you are likely to encounter. Both are available on Amazon, but Dr. Ken's book can be hard to find. After you read these books (four months in advance of your hunt), you can fill in the blanks of the questions you still have by asking Jim EVERYTHING you want to know about.

Jim loves questions, because they help him help you. Jim is responsive to emails, and loves to talk hunting any time of the year. At the end of this article, I've included some questions you should be asking, and their likely answers in parenthesis.

### **Three Months Before Your Hunt:**

Get your bow tuned and choose the broad heads you're going to be shooting. For rifle hunters, get the proper scope on top and buy the ammo you will be using. Do not start practicing until you have the exact weapon combination you will be using. Sighting in without the EXACT equipment you will be hunting with is useless. Actually it is less than useless, it detracts from later practice when using your final hunting set up. Bow shops and gunsmiths are notoriously slow at service work, so get your weapon tuned well in advance. If you start having issues with your terminal tackle, it's best to have them 3 months out instead of 3 weeks out.

Build a packing list and distribute it to Jim and other experienced bear hunters. This will help identify things you have forgotten, and things you will not need to bring. I like to create a simple spreadsheet with three columns: Item, Category and Action. For example:

#### **Item Category Action**

Mosquito head net Clothing Buy at Cabela's

Skinning knife Equipment Clean and sharpen

### **Two Months Before Your Hunt**

Start an exercise regimen. It doesn't have to be as hard as if you are running a Triathlon, but being in good shape makes everything a little easier. Climbing trees, climbing in and out of boats, hauling your gear, and hopefully dragging a large black bear out of the woods can really take a toll on your body. Don't run out of steam on your trip because you failed to prepare your body.

### **One Month Before Your Hunt**

#### **The Hunt**

You are going to see bear. And it's as exhilarating as anything you've experienced. Stay calm, they're going to take many trips in to raid the bait. Not just one. If they are grabbing and running, they're scared a bigger bear is going to come in. If they're lying down and eating in front of the bait, they're convinced they're the dominant bear.

Jim will point out "landmarks" to help you decide if a bear is a shooter. Pay great attention to these. Bears seem about twice as big as they really are. Have a plan of what you want to shoot, tell Jim, and he will set up the proper "measuring stick" so you don't have "cub shooter's remorse". It thought my bear was 350 lbs. plus. He turned out to be about 200 lbs.

Although there may be opportunities for long distance shots, most of the sites are set up with bow hunters in mind, so the distances between stands and bait will be 30 yards or less. If you want a different set up, ask Jim about it, and he'll probably be able to accommodate your preference. Hunting close to bait is better for many reasons but the most important is that seeing a large bear tends to make a hunter tense and a less accurate shot. **A well-placed heart shot is crucial.** There is no/VERY little blood trailing done in these woods. They are too thick to go more than 10-20 yards, and NO ONE likes tracking a wounded bear into thick, dark woods. (Even Jim) Leave the machismo at home: hunt close.

You're likely to hunt the late morning (10-ish) and afternoon. If you can, stay out from 10 AM until dark. Tough to do, but it will greatly increase your odds.

Plan on seeing bear within 30 minutes of getting settled. The familiar sound of the ATV is their dinner bell and they're likely to come around when the coast is clear. Be ready to see a bear at ANY time. They come in completely silent. They are not as quiet as a deer, they are MUCH more quiet than a deer. Those big soft paws absorb sound and cradle twigs without snapping them. Eyes peeled at all time.

As I said earlier, the bear is going to come in multiple times. First he's going to scout the bait; he'll lie down and watch it from a short distance and he will circle to ensure it's safe. Once he's convinced it's safe and he starts eating donuts, he's going to be a LOT less wary of potential hunters. When you're not seeing a bear, assume he's watching you...because he probably is.

Because the bear is going to come in multiple times, don't take your first shot, take your best shot. I pulled on my bear 3 times before letting an arrow fly. Either the angle was wrong, or the wind was pushing me around in the tree too much. I'm glad I waited...I put the arrow behind his ribs on a quartering away shot, punctured a lung, split the heart and then after the arrow came out his chest it drove through his windpipe and carotid artery. He was one dead bear.

After your shot, watch and LISTEN. You are waiting to hear 3 moans. Those are his death moans and it means, "Game, Set, Match". Without hearing those moans, wait for backup, and take nothing for granted.

### **Examples of Questions you May Have:**

"How many stands will I have to choose from?" (There is a minimum of two active baited stands per hunter.....although typically there are more available.)

"How far is the longest shot I should be prepared to make?" (Bow: 20 yards. Rifle: Limited only by your ability.)

"How successful have your past bear hunters been?" (100% Shot opportunity rate, and of the last 13 hunters we have harvested 11 bears.)

"What is the average bear size your hunters see?" (250 - 350 pounds.)

“Will there be other hunters in camp?” (Could be anywhere from 0 to 10 others.)

“Are butchering fees included?” (Yes)

“Are taxidermy fees included?” (No, but he can refer you to several good ones.)

“Are stands provided?” (No. Please bring your own stand. We will help you set it up on the first day.)

“Should I bring my ATV?” (Yes.)

“What’s enough firepower for bear?” (For rifle, anything in the .30 caliber range will work. For black powder; minimum 100 grains for powder and 175 for bullet weight. Bow: 125 grains, fixed blade broad heads (MUST be fixed by law) with at least 60 pounds of pull.)