

MY EXPERIENCE WITH A HUGE SILVER-TIP GRIZZLY BEAR

By Ambrose Shurtz

Over a period of time there was a very large silver-tipped grizzly bear that roamed the mountains of Southern Utah, particularly in Garfield County, but his trail covered, also, the mountains which lie between the East Fork and the West Fork of the Sevier River and onto Fish Lake Mountain. He did not confine his range to the mountain tops. Frequently his tracks were seen down on the lower elevations. I once saw his tracks on what we called the Parney Top. This was where Major Powell set up his observation post. From this mountain which was twelve thousand feet high he could, with high powered glasses, scan the country from Nevada on the west to New Mexico on the east.

Mr. Grizzly was the cowman's worst enemy because wherever he happened to lie, he never lacked for something to fill his belly. He not only killed a critter when he needed food, but he seemed to kill them just for the fun of it. Examination of dead cattle showed that he would slap a cow on the head and break her neck. One such cow had every bone on the one side of her head broken.

In 1904 the Powell National Forest was created. This took in all of the mountain from the Boulder Top on the east to the rim of the mountain on the west, a distance of approximately sixty miles. On May 4, 1904, I was appointed ranger. With me were other men. One of these men was Joseph J. Porter. Our districts joined.

In my district, high up under the crest of the mountain at the head of Twitchell Creek, on a branch of North Creek, there was a small reservoir known as Round Wallow Bottom. Before I moved down onto Twitchell Creek, I visited this reservoir and saw that it was leaking badly at the one edge. Immediately below was a very steep mountain side, and I knew that if this dam should give way that the little flat on Twitchell Creek where I often camped would be buried under hundreds of tons of mud, rock, willows, and trees. Regardless of this I moved down and set up my tent, hanging the guy ropes on the pegs I had used before. Had I been camped there in 1907 when the reservoir broke, I would have been buried under tons of mud, rocks, willows, and trees.

Ranger Porter and I had agreed to meet on this small flat on July 2, 1906. About noon he rode up to camp. As I went about getting some dinner I told Porter of the leak in the reservoir, and I suggested that we pull up the tent and move out onto higher ground. Well, we didn't. Instead we grabbed a hook and line and set out to catch a mess of fish. We returned to camp about dark. When the fish were cleaned and our night

chores were done, we made ready to roll in. Ranger Porter, now in his underwear, stood out in front of the tent. He called to me and said, "Brose, I just wish old Club-foot would come along."

"Well, if he were to come, what would you do?" I asked.

"Brose, I'd just leap upon his back and take a ride."

"Now listen, Joe, the sight of Old Bruno would scare you until your knees would crack and your whole physical being would just about collapse. I'd have to bathe your head in cold water to keep you from having heart failure."

"You know that I'm not a coward," he continued. "Why, I'd leap on his back, clinch my fingers into the hair on his back, and away we'd go."

Our saddles with guns down were laid one on top the other at the foot of the bed. The beds were behind the center post. Porter was in the front bed. We left a small wash pan of water just inside the tent door. Hanging on the front post were my two quarters of mutton. We rolled in and were soon in slumberland--but not for long. I was awakened by the tent's lapping down into my face. I nudged Joe and told him what had happened. But he just gave me an off-handed answer, saying, "Brose, let me alone and let's get a little sleep."

When our visitor, Mr. Bear, had come from behind the tent, he had pulled the two guy ropes off the peg. That was why the tent sagged onto my face. As yet I had not heard any real audible sounds, but I was nervous and couldn't feel easy.

After our night visitor had eaten our fish, he came and stood with his head right inside the tent door. I looked up and saw him lapping the water from the pan. I nudged Porter and said, "Joe, there's a bear!" He raised up and saw the old grizzly's face about four feet from him. I didn't have to tell that "brave" man to cover up. He quickly covered his head with quilts so tightly that he nearly suffocated. The old bear paid no attention to either of us. He kept looking up at that mutton.

I said, "Joe, he's going to take my meat."

In a smothered, trembling voice he answered, "Let him have it."

Well, the good-natured old fellow didn't take the meat. As he stood there he opened his mouth, which looked mighty big to us, and with that long red tongue of his just licked his face off.

When the old fellow decided to leave us, he quietly walked down the trail about forty yards and there stopped on the bank of the creek. He seemed in no hurry. Both of us men were so excited that we simply couldn't get our guns out of the scabbards. We yanked and pulled at them, and when we finally did get them out, each of us stood in the tent door and took a shot at him. We missed him, but hit "Aunt Vesta's Ranch House."

Next morning I reminded Joe that he had wished Old Bruno would come along. I said, "Joe, do you remember what you wished for last night? When your wish came true as suddenly as yours did last night, what ailed you? You told me that you were no coward. Our good-natured old cowkiller came along, and all you needed to do was to hop upon his back and take a ride."

Looking at me very seriously, Mr. Porter pleaded, "Brose, please don't tell the men down town about how my courage failed me. I really thought I was no coward, but I tell you I was so damned scared that I wondered when I would get my breath back, and my hair is still standing straight up!"

The long night of fright was ended for Joe and Brose.

The final and last day of life for Clubfoot, the monster grizzly bear, came to an end on March 16, 1915. Ten long years of freedom for this cowkiller had gone down the stream of time since that night he visited the Ranger Porter and me. During all this time he had ranged at will and wherever he went he left a few dead cattle. On one of his tours across the country, he killed sixty cattle. Charley Rowan who lived in Coyote told me that he killed thirty-six head for him in one little valley. Now, whether these thirty-six were a part of the sixty or not, I do not know. He said that he found one cow with her head buried under the mud out in the center of a shallow lake and that it looked like that bear just chased her out into the lake and then held her head under the water until she was dead. I never heard of his bothering a sheep herd.

Obviously, there seems to come an end to most things whether they be good or bad. This was especially so when on March 16, 1917, the tables were turned on the old cowkiller. He had gone down off the high mountain ranges to hibernate for the winter. He had located himself out seven or eight miles west of Coyote in a rough section of country that was covered mostly with pinion pine and scrub cedar. At a later date the men who killed the bear found a large hole dug under a tree. They thought the bear had dug this hole in which to hibernate for the winter. He had lined it with cedar bark. They also theorized that he had come out of hiding only a few days before he was killed.

His first act after leaving his den was to eat all the flesh off a cow's back from her withers to the loin. That was the first indication the men found that Mr. Bear was out. The cow was killed by the men. They then went back to town for a bear trap.

The next day about ten o'clock as they rode along Pole Road, they spied the old fellow on a ridge. At first they thought it was a burnt tree stump. In a few minutes, however, he was off. As I have stated, the country was very rough. There are three little creeks coming from the west. These small canyons or gutters were about a half mile deep and were steep to climb. The grizzly headed south across North Fork of Forest Creek and the men followed him. As he climbed toward the top of the side hill, Chess Riddle made the first direct hit, hitting him right behind the ears on the back of his head. This knocked him down and he rolled and tumbled down the hillside about two hundred feet.

"That's it," they said, "We got him." But the old fellow was only stunned and in a little time he got up and took off up the hill heading south across Forest Creek.

The men chased him as fast as they could and continued firing at him as best they could. One bullet hit him in the flank and it ranged upward into his vital parts. This really started his downfall. He began to show signs of weakening, but he still had plenty of go. They followed him another four or five miles over a rolling, ridgy country. By this time he had become sick and had lain down under a cedar tree. The men, three of them, Chess and Clell Riddle and Rube Jolley, rode right up to him. They did not see him. All of a sudden the bear charged after them. He ran right into Mr. Jolley's horse, giving out a terrible, mad growl. As they chased him, he rushed them several times. By now they were just about out of cartridges so they sent Clell to town for more ammunition and to get more help. Meantime, poor old Clubfoot lay down again under a bushy cedar tree. He didn't have life enough to get up, so they got up closer to him. As he seemed to be dying, they overcame their fear. They had only two cartridges for a 30-30 gun, and they fired both of these at his head between his eyes. Neither bullet broke through his skull. Now, all fear gone, they pelted the old fellow in the head with big rocks. They made a signal fire so the men coming from town could locate them.

Young Riddle led fifteen other men out to the place where the old grizzly had lain and died. These men helped to skin him. They estimated his weight to be from 1,200 to 1,800 pounds. His hide, when off, had thirteen bullet holes in it, but there was not one hole in his head. They also discovered that half of one front foot was gone. It was the track made by this stub foot that had earned him the nickname "Clubfoot." Each man

stripped off a piece of fat. There was a layer of fat from 4 to 5 inches thick over his back and down onto his sides. In trying to estimate his weight they compared his body with that of a Durham bull that weighed 1,000 pounds.

The hide was strung over a saddled horse and carried into town that night. Next morning Josiey Fiddie went back and got a hundred pounds of fat which he rendered out to grease harnesses and saddles.

The seventeenth of March was the annual celebration of the founding of the Haller Society. The women of the town always had a Seventeenth of March Festival. The men decided to join the party. They put the bear hide on the old, black, baldy horse that Sube Jo'ley had ridden during the hunt. In order to get the hide onto the horse's back, they had to put a twister on his nose before they could subdue him. When the hide was on the horse, they paraded up and down the street, stealing the show from the ladies. This was not surprising because the legs of the hide drag the ground on both sides. The hide when tanned covered a good sized floor.

Because these men said they could not penetrate the skull with a 30=30 caliber gun, I was rather skeptical. They also said that his teeth were worn down almost to the jaws, and that the bear must have been anywhere from sixty years of age up. There were two Indians who said the bear was known to be in the country when they were little boys, and they were at least forty years old. Because of these stories I decided to write to the U. S. Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Sports, Fisheries and Wildlife to ascertain if these stories were true. I am giving the letter that I received from Richard H. Manville concerning the story of Clubfoot.

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
Fish and Wildlife Service
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife
Washington 25, D.C.

April 19, 1963

Mr. Ambrose Shurtz
175 North 7 East
Springville, Utah

Dear Mr. Shurtz:

Your recent letter to the Smithsonian Institution concerning the Utah bear specimen has been referred to this office. We are pleased to learn of your interest in this specimen and happy to hear something further of the circumstances of its capture.

The specimen in our collection is merely the skull. It was received on March 16, 1916, and catalogued as No. 223034. Our notes indicate that it was an old adult male, collected by J.M. Riddle on the Sevier National Forest, Utah. It is indeed a very large specimen and certainly came from a grizzly (or silver-tip) bear. The greatest length of the skull is 15 and one quarter inches. There is no evidence on this skull of bullet wounds. Certainly this is a fully adult bear, but judging from the amount of wear on the cheek teeth we do not feel that it is nearly as old as the 60 to 100 years which you suggest. We have no precise way of aging such specimens as this, but we would feel that an age of about 20 years might be reasonable. The cheek teeth are not greatly worn, certainly not to the jaw. The incisors and canines in the front of the mouth have been worn considerably more. Several of them are shattered near the tip and this appears to be an injury suffered from a severe blow, or possibly damage to the teeth after the skull was cleaned up. Bears frequently have accessory and abnormal teeth, usually representing rudimentary premolars. This specimen had two such small nubbins in the lower jaw and four in the upper, one of which was worn down to the jaw line, as though from fighting a trap.

The above is about the only information which we can deduce from the specimen and we hope that it will be helpful to you. We will be most interested in seeing a copy of the article you propose when it is published.

Yours sincerely,

Richard H. Manville
Director, Bird and Mammal
Laboratories
Branch of Wildlife Research