

BEAR OR SCARE By Dale Olson

At home, many nights my wife has awakened me up with what feels like a Linemen's jab to the ribs. "What's that? I heard something." I was sound asleep, how could I hear anything? So, I crawl out of bed and make the usual stroll around the house, return and announce that everything is alright and it must have been "an earthquake in Yellowstone Park." Of course I might just as well stop at the bathroom and check the weather outside before returning to bed, only to find her soundly sleeping, even, do I dare say, making some strange noises herself.

Now when we go camping, just the opposite occurs. Maybe it's the fresh air or just plain being tired, but my wife is sound asleep when her head hits the pillow. I try to get to sleep, and almost make it when something rustles outside the tent. Was it just a light breeze and a leaf fell and slid down the side of the tent? Was it a mouse scurrying to his home with a morsel of food that I dropped? Or was it something BIG!

I unzip the tent flap. Nothing jumps on me. That's always a good sign. The horses are tied to the highline, standing quietly, sleeping, head lowered. All is good. O.K. now to get some sleep. Yep, just about there when a horse stomps his foot. I'm now wide awake listening for some more stomping that would indicate my attention is needed. Nothing. All is quiet. I'm awake, might just as well get up and answer nature's call. Back to bed. This scenario is repeated several more times during the night. Finally from pure exhaustion, I drift off to sleep for the remainder of the night.

Morning comes with the sun shining brightly through the door flap. My wife awakes from a good night's sleep, sits up and jabs me saying cheerfully "Good morning honey, what a beautiful day, wake up, are you going to sleep all day?" and jabs me with that Linemen's elbow again. With my senses still impaired from the lack of sleep, a slow mournful groan is emanated through my clenched teeth.

That reminds me of another time when I was camping with my son, brother-in-law and nephews. We were engaged in a serious game of Pinochle, when at a quiet moment, TWAAANG! went the guy line on the back of the tent and it shook like an earthquake had just hit. For just a moment we all looked at each other, then in unison we reached for the bear spray and any handgun that was handy (I think I was the only one armed). We thought we heard footsteps leaving the area. Cautiously, we peered out the door flap then looked around the tent. Searching the area with our flashlights we spotted a small deer walking towards the trees. Whew, now to calm those kids down and resume the card game.



On another occasion we were camped near the same location. My tent was off a short distance from the others. With the fire dead out, we all turned in for the night. Sometime in the middle of the night I heard some noise that sounded like something pawing the ground. Was it a BEAR? I reluctantly rolled over, fearing what would be out there. Gently lifting the tent door flap, with flashlight in one hand and bear spray in the other, I peered out into the darkness. Two sets of eyes were staring back at me. What my eyes beheld was not what I expected. Slowly, two deer turned and walked away. Whew, needless to say, sleep was slow to return that night. The next morning, I looked around the campfire and discovered what had drawn them in. We had been sitting eating salted peanuts. They dug everyone of the shells from the fire pit, craving the salt.

That reminds me of a time when I was working in Yellowstone National Park on a road reconstruction job. The park officials wouldn't allow us workers to stay in the park, so we rented cabins at Pahaska Tepee outside the park near the East Entrance. It was in the fall. I decided to set my cooler out on the deck. Now, this was way back before we ever heard about bear proof containers. I had this Styrofoam cooler (young people probably don't know what this is) full of food. I think it was late in the evening and I was probably laying on my bed reading when I heard



a scuffling noise outside by the steps to the cabin. My thought was it was probably a dog trying to get my food. So, I decided I would kick a dog in the rear end. I got up, went to the door and swung it open. OH OH! Imagine my surprise when I was looking almost eyeball to eyeball with not a dog, but a GREAT BIG GRIZZLY BEAR!! He was standing on the ground three steps down, with his head almost the same height as I was. You might think it was rude of me, but I turned around and closed the door rather quickly, almost in his face. I don't know who was more surprised, him or me, but he left the area immediately. After several minutes of hearing nothing but the loud thumping of my heart I decided it was safe to venture out and retrieve my cooler. With the adrenalin flowing to almost a vein splitting level, I slowly opened the door, scanning the darkness, and seeing no sign of him, I grabbed the cooler and dragged it inside. Fully expecting it to be empty, I was surprised to find one big chunk of Styrofoam bitten completely off and only a loaf of bread gone. My pound of fresh hamburger was completely untouched. Lucky me. Then the thought hit me, I had seen many pictures in the old *Outdoor Life* and other sporting magazines from years ago where a grizzly bear rips off the cabin door to get food! Whoa, this screen door and thin storm door aren't much of a deterrent to a hungry bear! I suppose it was perhaps a half hour later when he returned. I had already propped a chair against the door. Yeah, like that would stop him. Sure wished I had my gun. He sniffed around a little and thankfully left. Sleep was very hard to find that night. The next day I heard that there was a bear trying to break in the roof of the kitchen in the lodge just below us. The day after that the Fish and Game captured a bear in their trap at this lodge. I can't say if it was the same one or not, but we never had any bear problems the remainder of the time we were there.

As with anyone who has camped near the Yellowstone Eco System, there are many bear stories to be told. Some are Bear stories some are Scare stories. None the less, they make for great campfire scares. Happy camping!