

Leon's Alaskan Brown Bear Hunt

This hunt was conducted on Kodiak Island, Alaska.

The hunt was originally scheduled for 12 days with Brian Petersen, Master Guide. Unfortunately, Brian and I miscommunicated and I arrived a day after the other hunters had flown out to the base camp. I had to make a special charter flight and hope I would get there within a few days late. When I arrived, the other hunters had all departed for the best areas to set up spike camps up in the mountains. The snow was very heavy in the spring of 2010, and the bears had just started to come out of hibernation. So, the spike camps offered the best opportunity to find a big bear.

I had been applying for this tag for 9 seasons, which was longer than any of the other hunters, so Brian had promised me the best opportunity. However, all the spike camps were gone, so I was required to hunt out of the main lodge with Brian himself. It sounded nice to hunt out of the main lodge, but there were two major catches:

1. The hunting areas were only accessed by taking a skiff across and around the island. The ocean here has VERY high tidal movements. For a desert dweller like myself, the huge waves and the little skiff had me clinging to my life vest! Of course, it rained every day, so the rain and the saltwater spray did not help my Handgun at all.....

2. Every day we started at sea level and then we had to climb a few thousand feet up the mountains and canyons, in order to get to where the bears were coming out of hibernation. The spike campers only made this climb once - at the beginning of their hunts! The climb could have been relatively easy, except we had to work our way through the heavy brush and then flounder through the deep bog and the snow.

Since I had planned this hunt for so many years, and since this specie was not critical for any of my SCI slams or Diamond inner circles, I told Brian I was holding out for a 9 ½ foot bear. Brian was very honest and said that was a very difficult order to fill. I assured him that I would hunt as hard as possible to increase our odds of success.

I began to question my sanity after the first four days and we had not sighted a bear yet! This time of year (May), the days are getting very long in Alaska - 18 hours of daylight. Since we had such a difficult task to actually harvest a 9

½ foot bear, we stayed out all day every day. Of course, my high quality rain gear, that I have used numerous times in the Yukon, started to leak after the 2nd day. Kodiak is famous for the fact that it rains all year, except for a week in the summer. It lived up to its' reputation!

On day five we finally started to see bears! In fact, during the next 5 days, we spotted 16 bears. Three of them were 9 footers. Two of them were within easy shooting range. I held out for the magical 9 ½ footer. Brian was starting to get discouraged - most hunters eventually lower their standards and shoot a decent bear. We started talking about having me begin applying again and, hopefully, come back with him to try for the size of bear I wanted.

On day nine of the hunt, one of the other guides had taken a bear with his client and the client had flown out of camp. So, he offered to come with us and be "another set of eyes". By 9:00 p.m. I was completely soaked and ready to head for the lodge. I told Brian that we needed to take the skiff into the next bay and take a quick look, since we had only seen two small Bears all day long. As we were coming out of our bay, the other guide just caught a glimpse of what he thought was a big bear on the other side of the bay - two miles away.

We sped over there and jumped out of the skiff. I left so fast that I forgot to take my backpack, which has my extra shells in it. I only had the 5 shots that I carry in a wrist loader, which helps reload the single shot handgun faster. We climbed to the top of the bank and there was a HUGE bear at 207 meters! The grass was so high that I could not get a sitting or lying shot. The bank was so steep and slippery that I could not get my shooting sticks to set up. So, we ran down the bank and around the point of the bay. We were wearing hip waders, but a tidal pond we had to cross was chest deep and the ice cold water filled my waders and soaked me thoroughly. We were now at about a 100 meters and I was shivering from the cold dunking. The Bear was walking angled away from us and toward the heavy brush. I layed down to get a steady rest. The guide thought I was ready to shoot, so he whistled to get the bear to stop. Unfortunately, there was a clump of heavy grass 3 meters in front of me and I could not shoot. So, with the bear watching, I had to move over about a meter and set up again. The bear decided he did not like company and started running for the brush. I shot him through the chest and broke his offside shoulder - he slowed down. I shot him through the chest again and he fell over! Since he was still rolling around, I put a round right into the center of his chest as he lay facing me. He jumped up and started coming toward us then! I shot him head-on into the chest again. He fell over and again his chest was facing me as he rolled around. I had one shot left, so I put it in the same spot -

dead center of chest. Again he jumped up and came at me on a run. I was out of bullets! When the Bear was within 15 meters and still coming, I yelled to Brian that I was headed for the ocean. My thought was to drown myself with the hip waders on, rather than be eaten by the Bear. Just as I made it to the ocean, Brian yelled back that the bear was down, and he looked like he had finally expired!

This handgun is the same one that I use for all African dangerous game - everything, including the elephant, has dropped with one round. This bear took five rounds to the chest and was still coming!

He is the new #1 in the SCI record book for the handgun category. By the way, his hide squared ten foot, 2 inches (10' 2")!! He is the biggest scoring bear Brian Peterson has taken in 26 years of outfitting on Kodiak Island..... Brian called the SCI convention department the day I left Kodiak, in order to secure a spot in the aisle in front of his booth to show off the bear. He is flying to Phoenix, AZ and personally transporting the Bear to the SCI show in Reno, 2011.