

## Alaska's River Wild Adventures 2024 Newsletter

"I'm a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work the more of it I have" - Thomas Jefferson

The 2024 season started a little later than normal as we are in year 2 of 5 of the nonresident Dall sheep closure within our hunt area. Nonetheless, with the Alaska Department of Fish and Games liberalization of both grizzly and black bear hunting seasons, ARWA got rolling mid-August. The past 2 years a more than the normal number of bears have been observed and ARWA is taking this opportunity and running with it.

As the season began, I knew it was going to be quite an experiment being able to bait for bears in the fall time and having Grizzly bear season open in August. However, I looked forward to the unknowns as well as the adventure! Well, it didn't take long and on day one, before we even had a chance to set a bait station, Aaron was able to harvest one of the oldest black bears I've ever seen with the ol "Texas heart shot." This was a super cool bear, with a superb hide, a salt and pepper head and squared out at 6'1"! Aaron and crew found a young grizzly early in the hunt and the decision was made to pass with hopes of bigger and better. Throughout the week several black bears were turned up and on the last day a nice grizzly was glassed up but was a long way out, Aaron and guide, Jared, went for the "Hail Mary", but the weather and daylight ran out on them.



*Aaron's salt & pepper bear*

September 1 and the moose opener was upon us. ARWA welcomed Chris, Kaitlyn, Lance, Dan and Jeff. Chris was teamed up with guides Jeff and Jared, and on day 1, much like Aaron, wasted zero time and the chance at a big grizzly. With a small shot window, Chris put the 300 PRC where it needed to be and after a short but nerve-racking tracking job, the big bruin was in hand. This bear was older than dirt and from the story I was told, deaf and blind. But more than likely, just so old and big that nothing ever messed with him. The near toothless old boar measured just over 8 and half! As for moose, all the crew could dig up were sub legal and weren't able to talk a big bull onto their side of the proverbial fence.



*Chris's older than dirt bear*



*Jeff's black bear*

Meanwhile, Jeff kept the bear ball rolling with multiple bears to chase after and on day 4 he connected with a beautiful 6'3" black bear. At 53 yards and a well-placed 250 grain bullet from his 9.3x74R Ruger number 1, the bear was in the bag or should I say, in the wheeler.

Kaitlyn and hunting companion Lance were 100% committed to finding a big bull for Kaitlyn and after a bit of coercion I was able to talk Lance into buying a bear tag. After a short conversation with Kaitlyn, it was evident that she had moose fever. With that amount of energy and enthusiasm I knew teaming them up with guide, Skout was the right recipe. The moose hunting started out slow and continued slow throughout the week with just a few cows and 3 sublegal bulls in the area. Skout cow called day in and day out with hopes of drawing a legal bull into the area and day in and day out the same love-struck 40-inch bull would come in. The trio needed something to break the spell and a single black bear up on the mountain side munching on blueberries was just the ticket. The 3 made their way up and Lance broke the ice with a well-placed shot on a 6' black bear.



*Lance's black bear*



*Kaitlyn's 500-yard bull*

The black bear sacrifice worked...to a degree. It was day 9 and the last full day of the hunt. As the pm hours started to build, a big bull appeared. The crew went for broke, closed to within 500 yards and hit a roadblock. If they moved closer, they would lose sight of the bull. They were running out of time and daylight, so it was now or never. As Kaitlyn settled in for a long shot a torrential downpour came out of nowhere and the entire valley was enveloped in fog. Night fell with no bull. The next morning and well before daylight they returned to where they last saw the bull with high hopes, but the big one was nowhere to be found.

Dan and guide Eric located a “hammer of a bull” halfway through the hunt. The big bull was hold up in a small bowl with plenty of food, water and cows to keep him occupied. The duo made multiple attempts to coerce him out with cow calls, raking, and bull grunts. Every attempt resulted in calling up smaller satellite bulls. On the last day of the hunt the guys went all in. They planned to get downwind, come in from the top of the bowl, and still hunt right through the big bull’s domain. The plan worked but Dan darn near gave Eric a heart attack as he missed his first shot when the bull stood up in front of them at 200 yards. Dan’s second shot found its mark. The cat and mouse game yielded a huge 67” bull with 2x3 fronts, a drop tine and multiple swords protruding off his paddles. A true hammer!



*Dan's 67" hammer bull*



For the final hunt of the season, ARWA welcomed Brian, Gary, TJ and a father/son team that wish to remain anonymous. The father and son were teamed with Eric and got off to a tremendous start. The morning of day 3 the trio glassed up an old bull making his way towards a low saddle that spilled over into the next drainage. Eric knew that if he crossed over, they would most likely never see him again, so the chase was on. At just under 300 yards, they set up for the shot and with a couple cow calls, managed to turn the bull. The father took the frontal shot and spun the bull around. Three follow up shots ensued to anchor the bull in his tracks. The old bull with 3x3 fronts and a drop tine, measured just under 61”.



On the morning of day 5 the son was able to arrow a nice bull. The bull was waiting for them on the back side of the lookout hill as soon as they got there. As the bull was being vetted, he laid down just a few hundred yards from them. A bedded bull is much more conducive to stalking within bow range. At 51 yards the bull stood up and the son was able to send an arrow right into the boiler room of the bull moose. Turns out the bull only had one eye. No doubt that it was an old injury as the eye was healed shut. Did the loss of an eye aid in the harvest of the bull, well I'm sure it didn't hurt! The One-Eyed Willy bull with 3x4 fronts measured 55”.



*Son's 55" bull*

The hunt didn't end there. On the final evening the team watched a grizzly bear sneak into the carcass of One-Eyed Willy. As the last of the light was fading the father was able to use Eric's 45-70 with its halo sight to harvest a beautiful 7' grizzly. Meanwhile, I was guiding TJ. I've known TJ since the 7<sup>th</sup> grade and the adventures that we've shared are endless. We usually talk each other into doing something stupid, but luckily, this hunt did not fall into the "that was dumb" category. Day one found us surrounded by moose. At one point we were looking at 5 different bulls. Three of which were legal. The biggest was over 3 miles away and moving fast. I knew the chances of cutting him off were zero. The other 2 just didn't trip our triggers. That night I hoped we wouldn't come to regret that decision. The next 3 days the weather as well as the moose movement were less than desirable. As we sipped our coffee in the dim lantern light of the fifth morning, I heard a faint bull grunt way off in the distance. I stepped out, gave a few cow calls and we headed for the glassing knob. We weren't on the hill 30 seconds and heard a bull grunt from behind camp. TJ spun and glassed him up immediately. We bailed off to get a closer look and to try and intercept him before the sights and smells of camp spooked him. We met the bull at camp with him on one side and us on the other. The bull soon lost interest in my cow calling as well as the decoy and started to walk away. I gave TJ the green light and he bolted through camp to get a clear shot. As the bull crested the next ridge, TJ was able to slip a round from his 300 win behind the last rib as he was going out of sight. I kept the high ground to try and keep tabs on the bull as TJ gave chase. As the bull topped the next ridge he paused just as TJ was getting to where the bull was at the first shot. TJ braced himself on a tree and fired, putting the bull down for good. Just under an hour had passed from the first pour of coffee until the 59" 2x2 bull was down.



*TJ's 59" bull*



Brian teamed up with Skout and along for the ride was Skout's dad, Gary, with a bear tag in his pocket. From the sounds of it, these three were in stitches the entire hunt. The team put in the time behind the glass and were coming up with everything but a big bull. They even glassed up some rams.

A week into the hunt had only produced a couple of low 50's bulls but nothing that quite fit the bill of what Brian was looking for. One side of the valley held bears and the other held moose, so Jared joined up with the trio to help divide and conquer. Day 9 produced multiple black bears for Gary to choose from. After sizing them all up, the stalk was on. Gary and Jared blasted up the hill and with a well-placed shot, Gary was able to punch his tag on a 6'2" black bear.



*Rams on the mountain*



*Gary's black bear*

At the finish line, the 2024 season produced 2 Grizzly bears, 4 Black bears, 4 moose and many an adventure. As I sit here in my office and reflect, I think of the team at ARWA and am astonished by their talents and dedication to the hunt and how fortunate I am to have such a great crew alongside me. Lastly, I would like to thank this year's clientele, without whom, the ARWA crew and I wouldn't get to experience the wilds of Alaska, and spending time outdoors with good people is what I love about being a professional hunter.