



'YOU WILL NEVER KILL ANOTHER BEAR LIKE THAT IN YOUR LIFE'

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Never in my wildest dreams did I envision myself hunting with hounds. I was aware hound hunting existed, and I never had any personal ethical objections; it just never crossed my mind that it was for me.

A Northern Michigan bear hunt was something I had wanted to do for a long time. After moving to Indiana for a number of years and losing all my bear preference points, I finally had enough points in 2023 to draw something.

Then I met the hound hunters.

The hound hunters get it. "It" being conservation and the role stakeholder groups like MUCC or the Michigan Hunting Dog Federation, Michigan Bear Hunters Association or the UP Bear Houndsmen have in protecting our outdoor heritage.

Hound hunting is under perpetual threat from folks who are, frankly, ignorant of the sport. Sometimes willfully so. But like shooting guns or running hounds, once you try it, you just look over at the person and see a huge grin.

I know of a handful of folks, myself included, who participated for the first time recently, and it changed their entire perception of the sport. One former Democratic legislator from the Detroit area described his first time to me as

"life-changing." He also harvested his first bear this fall.

Spoiler alert. I ended up harvesting my first bear this year.

My first opportunity to run bears during the training period was going to an MUCC Conservation Policy Board meeting in Alpena. I had already drawn my tag, and this was meant to be training for me as much as for the dogs.

Rex and Rhonda Lansing invited me to their place. We were joined that morning by Elijah Keller and started looking for tracks. After some time, the dogs were loose, and we met up with Mike Thorman, who was driving around with two Natural Resource Commissioners.

This is an excellent time to mention we had also met up with a different group, all friends, and all helping each other get this bear in a tree.

The bear finally did tree — in the nastiest, thickest hell-hole of a swamp I have ever been in.

I was hooked.

Fast forward a couple of months and I was headed north, fixing to cross the bridge and spend a week at a hunting camp named Camp Woolrich near Powers.

Camp Woolrich is a family friend's deer camp, and we were fortunate enough to use it throughout my hunt. The

Camp Woolrich was base camp for the author during his Upper Peninsula bear hunt.





regulars in camp have their own personalized mug, there are dozens of trophies from over the years, and a sign that says "living the dream" carved onto the UP hung on the wall.

My dad and two family friends I had known most of my life, Dan and Mel, joined me for camp. They were not tagging along on my hunt but wanted to come for the camaraderie nonetheless.

Each night, as I returned home, we would make some delicious meal, drink a few beers, play euchre and I would regale them with the stories of the day.

When Septmeber 16 rolled around, I met Joe Hudson at the only gas station in town. Joe is the president of the UP Bear Houndsmen Association and agreed to take me out for my first bear.

We set off.

We met with a couple of other groups and chatted for a minute. I met a few of the other guys — Jameson, MistyTom, Ron — and more whose names I have since forgotten. Get the dogs out to do their business, formulate a game plan, load up, drive a bit and before I know it, the dogs are loose.

Looking back, after Joe explained it all to me, I understand I was obscenely lucky that day.

The bear was treed in less than an hour. Again, I was very lucky — the next day, we would spend four hours chasing what turned out to be a small sow through beaver ponds, catching and cutting in dogs several times.

When we got back to my treed bear, a few hundred yards off the road, I was able to line up and make the shot.

The bear fell and hit the ground. I turned to Joe and he shook my hand and said, "You will never kill another bear like that in your entire life."

Jameson lifted the front leg, and everyone lost their minds. It had the most prominent white blaze (a white patch of fur on the chest) any of them had ever seen.

"That bear was a rug until you lifted that leg up," I remember saying. I knew the bear was special, though the size did not really dawn on me until I got to the processor, which had two other bears hanging, both of which could have fit inside of mine.

Part of the reason I hunt is to spend time with friends and family. The camaraderie means a great deal to me. Growing up, it was often the only time I would see some uncles, cousins, and my Nono (grandpa) who lived out of state.

Nothing in hunting, and I mean nothing, comes close to the team sport that is hound hunting.

I gutted my bear, with ample guidance from Joe and Jameson, and we started to drag it out. This is probably a good time to mention it is not a small bear; it dressed out at 332lbs.

Using a daisy chain of dog leads, a jet sled and a half dozen men, we started dragging. About halfway out, another group that was out hunting just appeared out of the bush, marching towards us through the swamp, and they all grabbed hold.

By the time we got the bear back to the truck, there were something like seven trucks total, with a couple more en route, and friendly faces everywhere.

Everyone was congratulating me, but more importantly, congratulating Joe and Jameson. Those two and their dogs did all the hard work.

We took photos, loaded the bear up and I headed to the check station and processor.

I finally met up with my dad and his friends, who helped me get it to the processor, weighed the bear and stopped by the taxidermist. Then I headed back to camp to get into some clean clothes and eat some dinner.

I joined Joe and his crew again the next day. I wanted to try and get the next hunter his bear. I really felt motivated by this new sport I discovered. The crew took the third day off, and I headed south, back to my family and work.

I connected with new folks, doing something I never thought I'd do, and had the time of my life. I intend on getting more involved with hound hunting in the future and want to get my daughter out with me ASAP.

This hunt was a dream come true for me. But beyond that, I met new, interesting folks, dispelled some ignorance I had toward the hound hunting sport, and found a new outdoor activity to get involved in.

Thanks, Joe.

Left; Hound hunters are a dying breed. Rarely do these men and women kill a bear – they do it because they love watching dogs do what they were bred to do. Right: The author's massive bear on the tailgate of a truck. Below: the core group that helped the author get his large black bear.

