

THE BLACK BEAR

SPECIES: Ursus Americanus

Bears are far more likely to enhance your wilderness experience than spoil it. Knowing how to interpret their behavior and act responsibly is part of the thrill of sharing the forest with these amazing creatures.

TIPS FOR HIKING SAFELY

- Bears are not typically aggressive, and they normally would not consider you a food source. Black bears are more likely to leave if they see you.
- Avoid surprising a bear, as that can create a dangerous situation. Make your presence known by talking or singing. "Bear bells" are somewhat effective.
- Stay alert. Don't hike with earbuds in. Keep an eye on the trail ahead and keep children near.
- Be especially alert and make lots of noise so as not to surprise a bear when traveling through dense brush, into the wind, near rushing water or near food sources such as berry patches.
- Hike in groups & on established trails when possible. Hike during daylight. In remote areas carry bear pepper spray & know how to use it. Spray is far more effective than a weapon.
- Watch for signs of recent bear activity, e.g. droppings, tracks, over-turned rocks, broken up logs, fresh claw marks on trees, plant diggings, and fur on tree trunks.
- Traveling on fast-moving mountain bikes can lead to surprise encounters. Stay alert!
- Keep dogs on leash and under control. Dogs can be helpful in detecting bears, but they may also aggravate a bear and get injured.



IF YOU MEET A BEAR ON THE TRAIL...

DON'T...



- Don't panic. Keep your wits about you. Your brain is your best defense.
- Don't try to hide from the bear. Don't turn your back on it either.
- Don't make any sudden movements.



DO...



- If you see a bear in the distance, go back or detour around the bear, giving it a wide berth.
- If the bear notices you, STOP. Stand confidently and face the bear. Allow it to see you. If the bear stands up it is not threatening, only trying to see/smell better. It will most likely leave without incident.

- Talk in a calm, soothing tone to let it know you are a human and not threatening.
- Walk slowly backward, wave your arms, extend your backpack over your head to increase your size. To a bear size means power.
- If a bear feels threatened, it may attempt to intimidate you by "popping" its jaws or swatting the ground while huffing or snorting. It may even charge – run toward you and then suddenly stop and turn away. Although scary, it is a most likely a bluff and won't harm you. For your own safety, stand your ground until the bear turns away; then retreat.
- Throwing rocks and sticks or banging hiking sticks together may discourage a charging bear.
- If bear spray is handy, this may be a good time to use it. Determine which way the wind is blowing so you don't get a face full, and aim just above its head from 25' to 30' away. Bear spray is an extremely effective deterrent when employed properly, but it **must** be certified "bear pepper spray." Use only as a last resort!
- While extremely rare & more likely in remote areas, there is the occasional predatory bear that won't even bother with warnings. Unlike a curious bear, it will stalk you. Keep your eyes on it, stand your ground and intimidate it. If attacked, fight with everything you've got.
- Bears are powerful, strong, wild animals; they should always be treated with caution and respect.



Suggested reading: "**SAFE TRAVEL IN BEAR COUNTRY**" by Gary Brown and "**BACK COUNTRY BEAR BASICS**" by Dave Smith

B.E.A.R.'s Mission: To promote safe, harmonious coexistence between humans and bears

CAMPING IN BEAR COUNTRY

~ **1st rule: DON'T FEED THE BEARS!** Improper food storage is the root cause of most conflicts. Since anything with an odor smells like potential food to a bear, do not keep any odorous items in your tent. This includes: scented toiletries/personal care products, gum, snacks, bottles/cans (full or empty) & coolers, as well as clothes you wore while cooking. Spraying your tent with bear spray will not repel bears—it may even attract them.

~ Store all food and odorous attractants (including garbage and cooking clothes) in sealed bags (double-bagged is best) or special bear-proof containers. Bring extra zip lock bags for leftovers and for packing out garbage.

~ Carry a 100' cord to hang food and scented items out of reach. Secure by hanging 10' off the ground and 5' from a tree trunk. You can store them in a locked vehicle, but be aware that bears may get into cars.

~ Restrict cooking, eating, cleaning activities, and food storage to **100 yards** downwind from tent.

~ Keep a clean camp. Wash dishes and utensils immediately. Never leave food, scraps or garbage sitting out; do not burn them in fire rings.

~ If a bear enters your camp, either leave or stand up to the bear and yell at it to leave, throw things at it (*use bear pepper spray only as a last resort*).

~ Hunters must keep carcasses that are left on ground 1/2 mi. from campsite, 200 yds. from a trail. If hanging in tree, keep it 300' from camp. Consider using portable electric fencing.

"People who choose to live in bear country have a responsibility to adapt and adjust to the bears, and to create solutions, not problems." – Tom Beck



HOW CLOSE IS TOO CLOSE TO A BEAR?

Bears are timid and naturally avoid humans. However, dozens of minor injuries have occurred when people petted or approached black bears to feed or photograph them.



Bears defend their own "personal space." That may be ten feet or fifty feet. Once you have entered a bear's space, you have forced it to act – to either run away or to defend it. Don't ignore its warnings.

Berry season and early fall when bears are frantically searching for food to fatten up for winter are when hikers are most likely to encounter bears. Bears are more aggressive when protecting cubs or a carcass.

Unprovoked attacks on humans by black bears are very rare and occur more often in remote areas where bears are less likely to encounter humans. Only 62 people have been killed by black bears in the past 100 years. You are 180 times more likely to be killed by a bee!

For more information or publications contact:

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B.E.A.R. is a Task Force of the Western NC Alliance



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Hiking & Camping in Bear Country



~ Bear Education 201 ~



Photo by Peggy Marra

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