



Kayne Robinson

It is the dream of many a hunter to pursue the infamous brown bear of Alaska. For this hunter, that dream finally came true this past May.

Actually, this was not my first Alaska hunting trip. Several years ago, my friend and fellow NRA Board member Wayne Ross took me black bear and moose hunting at his place near Talkeetna. I recall Wayne and I standing near a large bush on the muskeg one evening. "If you come out here at daybreak, there will be a moose walking across that clearing," he told me.

Wayne proved trustworthy. The next morning, I was at that clearing and, sure enough, spotted a fine moose. One shot later, I bagged the moose and was rewarded with one of the hardest working days of my life! If you ever feel the need to test your fitness level, spend the day hauling a moose out of the Alaska muck.

As enjoyable as that trip was, my desire to hunt the Alaska brown bear went unfulfilled until this year. The wait proved worthwhile, as the hunt was one my most enjoyable ever.

Mike Baker, producer of ESPN's "Under Wild Skies" television program, met me in Anchorage and we headed out for King Salmon, Alaska. This small town of about 450 residents sits on the Alaska Peninsula and hums with hunting traffic. A broad assortment of airplanes—old and new, from small Super Cubs to Jets—streams into the town's airport. Mike and I packed our considerable gear into a Cherokee-6 and headed for Jensen Field, an abandoned, but still serviceable, airstrip built many years ago by an oil exploration company.

We were met by the owner of Blue Mountain Lodge, Tracy Vrem, a veteran hunting guide and outfitter. Literally everything that man brings into this remote area comes by air, including the trucks and building materials for the few hunting camps like Vrem's Blue Mountain Lodge. We were treated to a glorious home-cooked meal prepared by Tracy's mother, Eunice. Certainly, the knowledge that we were to spend the next several days eating out of cans at our spike camp made Eunice's fare all the better. We packed our gear into Tracy's Super Cub and flew to our spike camp, located about 30 miles southeast where the arm of Becharof Lake almost touches the Pacific Ocean.

They don't call it "spike camp" because it's fancy. Ours consisted of two small dome tents with cots to keep us dry and out of the wind. We were dead-smack in the middle of monster bear country! In fact, two people had apparently been attacked and eaten by a bear a few months prior at nearby Kafia Bay. Bear hunting in this area is serious business. Sure enough, on our very first hunting day, a huge bear walked right through our camp. Fortunately, no damage was done and the ESPN crew got some terrific footage as the bear ambled off.

The hunting in this desolate region is hard. Real hard. We spent hours working with field glasses to spot a proper bear and then decide whether we could intercept the animal. A long trek ensued over raging streams, through dense alder bushes, up steep climbs and in snow. These great obstacles to man, of course, present no obstacle at all to the brown bear. We were on his turf, on his home court, and he had the advantage. Most of these attempts were futile, and I was left tired and cold from light rain and my own hard sweat.

But even in futility, I was rewarded with the wonders of this wild land. A large wolverine squared off only 50 feet from me. He looked me over pretty well and then slowly and eerily sidled away. Every day, curious caribou walked within close range.

After several days of searching the valleys and mountainsides in the wind and rain, our assistant guide, Josh Morales, gave the alarm. A bear was headed our way, on a course we could likely intercept. Tracy, Mike and I grabbed our essentials and headed out, while Josh stayed on a high point to signal us as we closed in on the bear. We managed to get within a few yards of the animal, but just out of our sight the bear veered off down a small ravine. Moments later, we spotted him again—at a distance of what later proved to be 122 yds. Three quick shots later from my trusty Ruger .375 and my dream was finally realized—the great Alaska brown bear!



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