

# Up **CLOSE** and personal



Dwight Blackwood dropped this big bruin right at the bait bucket with a neck shot

Photo by Geoff Fallett

## By Gord Follett

Whether your quarry barely reaches the one-pound mark in weight or pushes the scales past the 1,200-pound level, there's an element of excitement in each and every hunt.

For many, the pursuit of small game is more exhilarating because there's more action over a longer period of time, while those who favour the larger animals will tell you that firing one shot for an entire season carries enough anticipation to last from one steadying of the crosshairs to the next.

Dwight Blackwood and I have hunted virtually every game animal in this province, from grouse to moose, with each adventure bringing its own rewards and anticipation.

In each case, the oft-used phrase, "adrenaline rush," comes into play, but there have been very few such rushes that can compare to a recent bear hunt we experienced in Black River, Management Area 28, near Clarendville.

Dean Crocker of Beaulieu's Trophy Woodland Caribou and Black Bear Hunts was our guide, and if our hopes of getting a bruin weren't high before we got there, his promise to put us within shooting range of an animal certainly heightened our expectations.

He has personally harvested about 50 black bears in his career, including a 600-plus-pound spring bruin with a 21-inch skull a few years back, which qualified him for the all-time Boone and Crockett record book; thus, the reason for our confidence.

"Whether you hit him or not is another thing," he said with his wide, amicable smile, "but you will see bears. Definitely. The rest is up to you."

With that comment constantly in the back of our minds, Dwight and I took Dean up on his offer to tag along on his baiting duties Sunday, a non-hunting day until after the end of October in Newfoundland and Labrador. After a 10-minute walk along a pole line, we branched off slightly to check the first bait.

"Hit again," he whispered, pointing to the 45-gallon drum which had been ripped from its cable mooring and dragged inside the woods. "And that's a big, powerful animal to tear the cable through the thick barrel."

"We aren't necessarily after big, trophy animals, Dean," I said. "We just want a bear; a couple of 200-pounders will do. Maybe next year we'll go after something larger."

Dean, whose operation also boasts some of the top woodland caribou heads in the world, and his father Dave had been baiting several sites in the weeks leading up to our arrival, and of the seven we checked Sunday morning, every single one had to be rebaited with bakery scraps of donuts and cookies.

"Seven out of seven," Dwight commented. "I believe you now, Dean; if we have patience to stay in the stand long enough, we're definitely gonna see bears."

Our goal on this trip, as usual, was to get enough film and material for a television show and magazine feature article, so we decided to take our video camera to a stand Sunday evening and hope for some pre-hunt footage of a bear at the bait. And boy, did we ever get footage - from less than 30 metres! We replayed it over and over that night on the camera monitor.

After just 40 minutes in the stand, a bruin of about 250 pounds cautiously made its way into the small clearing, eventually poking its head into the barrel, which had already been cleaned out since it was baited hours earlier.

The animal wasn't happy with the empty plate. He/she (it's difficult to tell) showed its displeasure by pushing the barrel around, clawing a nearby tree and lunging at a smaller animal; a squirrel, we believe.

The animal then walked directly under the stand, scraping its side against the ladder as he went. Now that's close!

A short time later, another bear sauntered in for a feed, but he, too, found the restaurant to be temporarily out of service.

We were hours, perhaps minutes,

behind bears that hit the various baits on Monday, so we decided to stick around for at least four hours in two of the more promising stands Tuesday morning, with Dean manning the camera in my stand and friend/cameraman John Dyke following Dwight to his perch a couple of kilometres away.

For those who may not be familiar with bear hunting from a stand, the one thing you have to be is quiet. Very quiet. You cannot talk, clear your throat or move around. In most cases, the slightest noise will send the bear scurrying; that's if you get to see him at all. The same goes for any scent you may be carrying. Deodorant, cologne, etc. are no-no's. We actually put our hunting clothes in garbage bags filled with spruce and fir boughs three or four days before the hunt.

As Dean pointed out, a bear could spend a long time in nearby woods checking for potential danger, and if he spots movement or picks up unfamiliar scent, chances are the animal will be long gone before you ever knew it was there.

Book Now For  
**SPRING  
BLACK BEAR  
HUNTS**

- #2 Black Bear for Newfoundland
- Professionally Guided 1 on 1 Baited Bear Baits
- Owned and Operated with Over 25 Years Experience
- Trophy Black Bear Hunting at its BEST
- New Area next to Terra Nova National Park  
(never hunted by Outfitter before)

Beaulieu's  
**CARIBOU  
& BLACK BEAR  
Trophy Hunts**

For Information Contact: **DEAN CROCKER**  
709-579-2563 or 709-685-2463  
deancrocker@nf.sympatico.ca

www.biggamehuntingnewfoundland.ca



Photo by John Dyle

Gord and Dwight prepare to bring Dwight's bruin back to camp

With a few ounces of molasses or vanilla in and around the barrel to complement the menu of baked goods, we settled into our respective stands and waited. And waited.

I almost fell into a trance watching dozens of squirrels fight for scraps and chase one another around the barrel for about two hours, until Dean tapped on my left shoulder and pointed to a narrow trail leading away from the bait.

A bear which we estimated to be 300 pounds glanced back in our general direction as he slowly walked out the trail. I had an opportunity for a quick shot, but we wanted as much footage of bears as possible, so I held off in hopes it would circle through the woods and head back very shortly.

That particular animal didn't return while we were there, but 40 minutes later, two smaller bears - one slightly more than 200 pounds and the second in the 150-

pound range - walked directly underneath us and towards the barrel.

My heart rate doubled as we watched the larger of the two sniff the barrel. Never had I been this close to a live, wild black bear, an animal that can snap a caribou's neck with one swipe of its paw.

From 30 yards away I raised my rifle ever-so-slowly, still watching the partly-hidden animal lick molasses from the top of the barrel. When he poked his head and neck to lick the side of the barrel facing me, I gently thumbed off the safety and put the crosshairs on his neck.

I turned my head slightly to let Dean know I was ready to shoot, then took a couple of deep breaths, steadied myself once more and fired.

The animal fell back and rolled over, its entire body trembling like a paint-shaking machine.

"He's finished," I said to myself as, much to our surprise, the smaller bear took

advantage of the opportunity to check out the barrel. While looking at that animal, the one I hit got back on all fours and busted through the thick alders and bushes faster than I ever thought a bear could move.

The second one followed shortly after, so we waited for 30 minutes before beginning our search. Little did we know what was happening at the other stand less than two minutes after I fired my shot.

"Dwight and John will be here soon because we agreed to meet on the trail at noon," I said to Dean, "so we'll wait for them to help us search; better to have two guns than one while tracking a bear."

We met as planned, with Dwight asking, "You got one, did you?"

"Yeah," I said, "how did you know?"

"We heard the shot from our stand," he said, obviously busting to tell me his news: "I got one, too. A dandy!"

"Are you serious? Did you find him?"

"No searching necessary; he dropped right at the barrel."

And drop the bruin certainly did. We watched the incredible video back at camp that evening, after searching for several hours without success for the animal I hit.

Dwight's bruin, which weighed close to 300 pounds, approached from the right as the boys waited for it to stop at the barrel. Before doing so, however, the bear walked under the stand and at one point appeared to be looking up at the motionless duo.

Satisfied there was no danger, the animal approached the barrel, hauled off the plastic lid and reached inside.

Boom!

With a shot to the base of the skull/neck area, the animal was dead before it hit the ground a split second later. Actually, we've shot moose that have dropped "like a tonne of bricks," but none as quickly as this big bruin.

Remnants of a hurricane kept us camp-bound on Wednesday, so by Thursday morning we were well rested and eager to get me a bear that I could actually touch, preferably without the animal breathing.

Dwight grabbed the camera as we

## More meat than plants

Black bears in Newfoundland eat more meat, particularly moose and caribou, and less plant material than bruins in other parts of North America.

Newfoundland lacks many types of nutritious plants found elsewhere, and the bears compensate by eating more meat.

They mate in the summer, and in late January or early February, one-to-three tiny cubs are born to the dormant female. Black bears are not true hibernators, since their body temperature remains high and they can be fairly easily aroused. In late March or April, the cubs, each weighing about three kilograms, emerge from the den with their mother.



headed to a smaller, one-man stand inside a pole line. I was more comfortable standing on the ladder, so Dwight sat atop the stand to film.

I was three steps off the ground, starting straight across at the bait barrel 30 minutes later, when I felt Dwight tap the ladder above me. I looked up to see him pointing down at the trees and alders to my right.

At first I couldn't believe my eyes as the furry black object slowly made its way towards me.

"What the ..."

Even as I turned around on the stand and raised my 30-06, the animal, which was no more than 16-18 feet away (yeah, that's feet, not metres) kept coming.

"Oh my ..."

After blurting out a few more unprintables, I pushed off the safety and, still standing on the ladder a few feet from the ground, tried to find the animal's head and neck through the leaves and branches. As soon as I did, Boom!

The animal dropped with a shot to the neck, but kept crawling on its side until I



Photo by Justin Crocker

Although much smaller than Dwight's bear, Gord was "relieved" to have taken this one. With them is guide Dean Crocker, right

## Good Value Insurance


At the Co-operators, we've built our reputation by providing sound insurance and financial advice, quality client service and a full range of superior products for over 55 years.

That's why we are the largest wholly Canadian-owned, multi-line insurance company today, with 700 service offices across Canada. Our staff is fully trained to provide the insurance advice you want and the personalized protection you need.



**Home Auto Life RSPs Farm Business Group**

**KNOW WHERE YOU ARE GOING**



**FUGAWI Canada Maps™** are the first seamless digital collection of government topographical maps for all of Canada.

**Benefits include:**

- Electronic storage on your PC
- No need for multiple maps
- Print paper copies from your PC
- GPS option availability
- Complete 1:50,000 and 1:250,000 scale coverage

Suitable for all outdoor enthusiasts, including anglers, hunters and hikers.

**FUGAWI™**  
KNOW WHERE YOU ARE GOING

Available at leading outdoor retailers, or call 416-970-9300  
www.fugawi.com : sales@fugawi.com

**ONLY \$99.95**  
100% PROTECT

placed another to the head, directly behind its ear.

Trembling slightly and still finding it difficult to believe what had just transpired, I leaned back against the ladder and shook my head.

My buddy was now laughing so hard he could barely hold the camera steady.

Although only about half as large as the animal Dwight harvested earlier - and one I would not have fired at had it been at the bait 50 metres away - I considered this more of a self-defence move.

"No matter what size," I said to Dwight after catching my breath, "I'm not fussy about a black bear sniffin' my boots."

"Are you ever going to get down and haul it out to the trail," he asked 20 minutes later.

"Yeah," I answered, "in another hour's time."

Eventually, we did get down and drag the bear - very quickly - to the old railway bed where Dean was on his way in the truck.

While waiting, I made a point of dis-

cussing the other, larger bears in the immediate vicinity, and when Dwight turned his attention to the dead bear laying near his feet, I picked up a fist-size rock and tossed in among the alders just a couple of feet behind him.

Even the professionals on Dancing With the Stars wouldn't have kept up with him when he jumped, twisted around and kicked up hundreds of tiny rocks as he ran, until he glanced back and saw me falling to my knees in a fit of laughter.

Oh, to have had a second camera right then and there. Top prize on Funniest Home Videos would most certainly have been ours. For now, though, we're quite satisfied with our award of an absolutely thrilling hunt; one we'll be doing a great deal more of in the years to come... just as long as our hearts can handle it.

*(For more information, visit [www.biggamehuntingnewfoundland.ca](http://www.biggamehuntingnewfoundland.ca) or email: [deancrocker@nf.sympatico.ca](mailto:deancrocker@nf.sympatico.ca))*



**LARGEST SELECTION of Hunting Supplies in Newfoundland and Labrador**



**Coastal MARINE & RECREATION**  
1256 Topsail Road  
Mount Pearl, NL.  
**709-747-0159**

**CABOT Recreation & Automotive**  
500C Memorial Drive, Glenville  
Tel: **709-466-4541**

**Coastal MARINE & RECREATION**  
18-25 Goff Ave., Ind. Park  
Carbonear, NL.  
**709-596-8326**

**- Firearms - Ammunition**  
**- GPS - AND MUCH MORE...**