



Dwight Blackwood, left, and Gord Follett with Gord's 200-pound black bear

Photo by Dean Crocker

'Yeah, I'm gonna take him'

By Gord Follett

Ever-so-cautiously, the bear poked its head through the alders and bushes, scenting and listening for any sign of danger. Twice he slowly backed into the woods, but the aroma of donuts, bacon fat and vanilla extract in and around the bait barrel finally coaxed him out into the open.

Sitting 15 feet above ground in a portable chair-type tree stand, Dwight was the first to spot the 180-200-pound animal about 5:15 p.m. I was sitting low in my chair, three feet below and a couple of feet to his right, in a stationary wooden stand, the sides of which were covered in

with branches.

Manning the video camera, Dwight motioned that he'd seen the bruin, then continued filming while I tried to peer through the branches, fearing that if I tried to grab the rails and stand at this point, the slightest noise would surely cause the bear to bolt back into the forest.

Dwight and I had discussed our filming plans earlier; if I decided to shoot the animal, I'd whisper in the microphone I was wearing and Dwight would pick me up in his headset. That way, he'd have time to pan the camera from me and focus on the bear for the actual shot. If I decided not to shoot, I'd say nothing and we would still have plenty of terrific close-up footage of a wild black bear.

After catching glimpses of the bruin for several minutes from my chair, I waited just a little longer until he became pre-occupied with the bait. Not until then did I get to my feet.

"No, I don't think I'm gonna take him," I said to myself, my hands still not reaching for the 30-06 rifle at my side.

For several more minutes we watched and studied the animal, first as it scratched its back on a tree, then as it scooped goodies from the barrel. On at least three occasions, the bear appeared to be staring straight at us for up to 10 seconds at a time. We remained as motionless as humanely possible...

My mind flashed back to the previous evening, Sunday, when our guide, outfitter

Dean Crocker of Beaulieu's Trophy Black Bear and Caribou Hunts, was alone in the stand hoping to snap a few photos of a bear at his bait.

Dwight and I had been sitting, also without firearms, for three hours in another stand some two kilometres away, and left our perch around 7 o'clock to drive out the railbed west of Clarendville to pick up our host. Knowing Dean would hear our truck tires travel over the loose rocks, we parked and waited quietly for him to appear.

After 10 minutes, there was no sign of him, so I gave a bird-type whistle and got an immediate similar reply.

"Why isn't Dean coming out?" I whispered to Dwight.

"Not sure," was the response.

I climbed the small, sandy bank and slowly made my way along the narrow trail until I could see that the cover had been removed from the bait barrel, which Dean had replenished just a short time earlier before climbing into the stand.

It didn't take a genius to figure out that Dean had indeed seen the bear, and that if

While he couldn't actually see him at that point, the bear was likely in the bushes... less than 40 metres to my right

the animal wasn't still in the immediate area, he wasn't too far away.

Out the short trail I sneaked - backwards - as fast as I could go, learning from Dean 10 minutes later that while he couldn't actually see him at that point, the bear was likely in the bushes and small trees less than 40 metres to my right.

I whistled from the railbed again, and I heard Dean clap his hands.

"What's going on now?" I asked.

"Maybe the bear came back," Dwight suggested.

He did. Apparently, between my whistling and Dean's hand clapping, the bruin couldn't enjoy his supper and became

agitated. Eventually, though, he went back into the woods. How far back, Dean had no idea... until he climbed down from the stand. That's when we heard and then saw Dean rush out the trail to the Tundra pickup as fast as his legs could carry him.

Initially, Dwight and I thought he was just trying to scare us. His mad dash, however, was not an attempt to test the strength of our bowels.

"He was just off the trail when I came out," Dean said. "I didn't see him in the bushes, but when I walked by this certain point, he growled; the little shagger."

A short time earlier, he continued, the bruin climbed a tree some 40 metres across from Dean and let him know that he wasn't a happy camper.

"He beat it up that tree in no time; no time at all. Then he started pawing at the branches and clicking his teeth at me. He may not have been a huge bear, but he certainly was a pissed-off animal."

Back at Dean's newly-constructed Deep Country Lodge that night, we looked at a few still pictures he had snapped.

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There was no doubt in my mind, nor Dwight's, that this was the same animal we were now looking at, some 24 hours later.

Because I had taken a small, 150-pound animal with Dean the year before here in Black River, Area 28 - and because Dwight harvested one almost twice that size on the same trip - I still hadn't convinced myself to take this one.

We continued to watch and film the animal for another couple of minutes until I slowly reached for and raised my rifle. Although there was no need to use a scope at such a close range - perhaps 30 metres - I was forced to because the design of the scope and the way it was mounted prevented me from looking cleanly down the iron sights.

I flipped the scope caps open, sized up the animal and whispered, "Yeah, shag it, Dwight, I'm gonna take him."

Our filming plan was working perfectly, with Dwight focusing from my rifle to the animal as it reached over the barrel and offered me a high, front-on chest shot.

The crack of the gun sent the animal

on its back with a thump. Unlike last year, when I knocked one over, only to see it get back up and run off, there was no doubt in our minds that this fella was going nowhere.

Dwight turned the camera directly back to me and asked something about how I was feeling right now. I was about to answer, when out of the corner of my eye I saw the bear get back on all fours and sprint towards the woods.

Although we discovered soon after that my shot hit its intended mark and that the animal wouldn't be going too far, I wasn't taking a chance on having to track it in the woods just before dark, so I quickly raised the gun, aimed and fired just as he entered the woods, lodging the 180-



Bait barrels are stocked with baked goods and/or meat

Photo by Carol Fralich

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Photo by Gerrit Follett

Dean and Dwight relax on the deck of Dean's new lodge

grain bullet in his lower back, or "in the ass," Dwight said. We found him less than 40 metres inside.

"To have hit him when he was taking off like that was quite a shot, Mr. Follett," he added, "and you had very little time to line him up and fire... congratulations."

We called Dean to report the news of our success, and he thought the timing was perfect for a celebratory Jiggs dinner feast that his father Dave was preparing, complete with all the fixins.

Once my bear had been cleaned and taken back to camp, it was my turn to man the camera in hopes of catching Dwight nailing another big one. Despite having only another 2-1/2 days before leaving for a scheduled moose hunt further west, we remained optimistic he'd get his chance.

We would spend some time during the late mornings and early afternoons riding our Arctic Cat quads and stopping often to glass mountainsides and open country for bears on blueberry patches - a very common place to find them in September - but whatever happened with the blueberry crop this year, we weren't fortunate enough to spot one. According to reports from several people who regularly head off with their

plastic tubs, blueberries weren't as abundant or as large in 2007 as in most previous years.

Dwight did get an opportunity to take a small bear from our second stand on Day 3, but he decided to pass.

It was just before 9 o'clock in the morning when the skies suddenly became dark and mist soon turned into rain.

"Better put the camera away," he said, "or we'll ruin it."

Less than five minutes after unhooking wires and wrapping the camera, an animal weighing between 180 and 200 pounds walked right underneath our perch and proceeded directly to the bait. Dwight sized him/her up for just a minute or so before announcing, "naw, not this one."

Seconds later, whether it picked up our scent or something - perhaps a larger bear - spooked it, the animal dashed into the trees. We waited two more hours for a larger animal to appear, but it was not to be.

"Are you sorry that you didn't take that bear yesterday?" I asked him as we packed our belongings back at the lodge on Thursday.

"No," he said with a grin. "I don't

wanna take something that's 100 pounds less than what I harvested last year."

"I hear ya," I responded. "I've had my fun with smaller bears. I'm increasing my weight standards from now on; raising the ante, so to speak. Next one has to be close to 300 pounds, or I won't even raise the gun."

Then I thought, "hey, not necessarily; spotting and stalking a 200-pound bear in open country and shooting from a couple of hundred metres would be quite a challenge, eh?"

"And that it would," my buddy replied.

"Alright then," I said, "open country will have one size standard - 200 pounds minimum - and the bait stand will have another - 300 minimum."

"And we'll raise them to 300 and 400 after that, then 400 and 500 the following year," Dwight chuckled.

"Now, b'y, let's not go to hell with it."

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