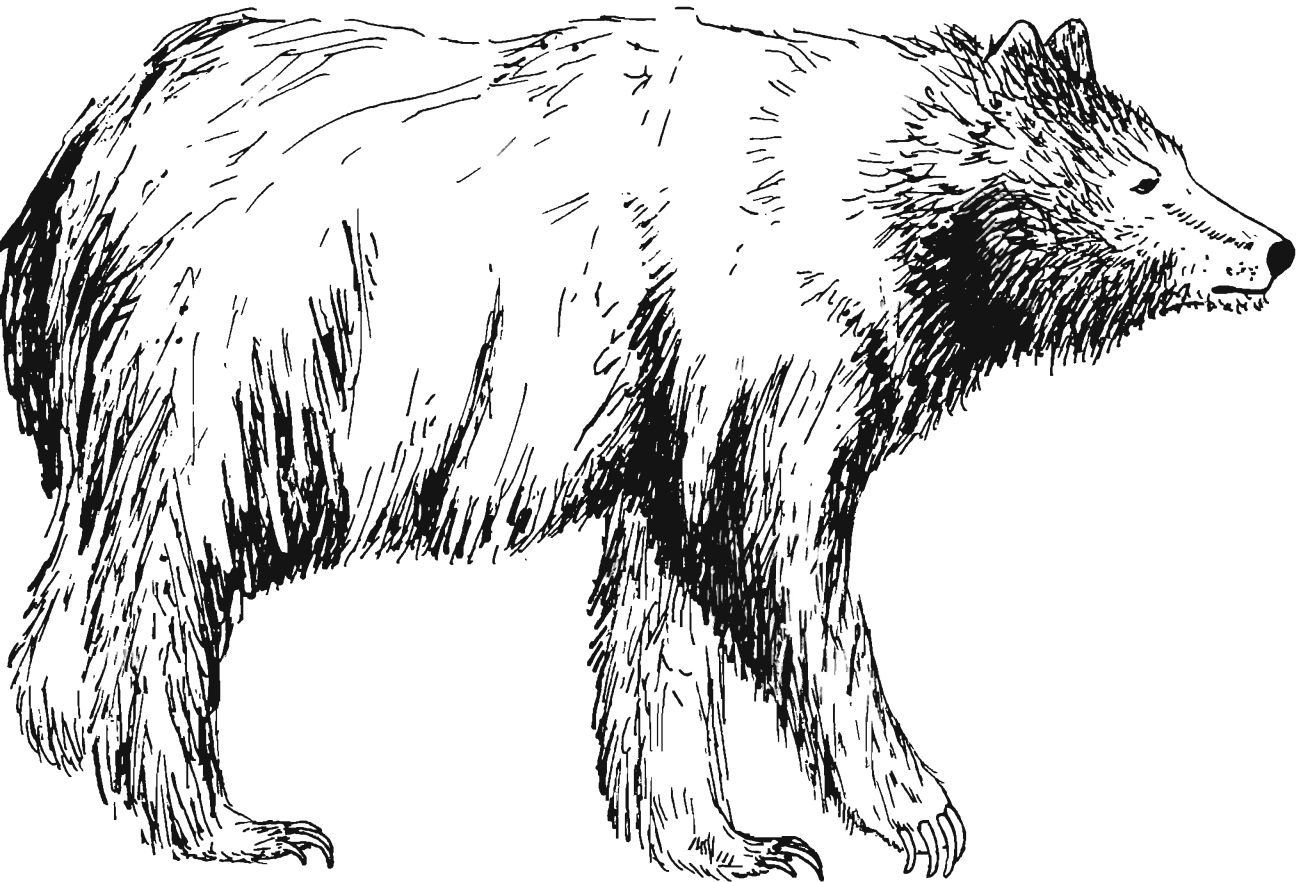


# ***The Grizzly Bear***



## The Grizzly Bear

### THE HORRIBLE BEAR

The grizzly bear's scientific name is Ursus horribilis -- "horrible bear." A full-grown adult male may be nine feet tall when he stands up and weigh as much as 1,000 pounds. With an easy swipe of his powerful paw, he can kill a man or a caribou. His jaws are strong enough to bite a slab of wood out of a tree.

But his strength is hardly ever put to horrible use. He does not look for fights with other bears, large animals or people. From time to time, a wolf attacks a bear, and they will fight. Sometimes a bear kills a small animal for food. And a mother bear is always ready to fight to defend her offspring from any animal that comes near.

### THE LONE BEAR

Adult bears, in fact, stay away from other animals, even their own kind. If two bears should meet in a berry patch or a salmon stream, they will probably ignore each other. But this does not often happen since adult bears live alone, each in an area that may be twenty miles long and just as wide.

There is an advantage in having a large area to oneself when an animal must eat an enormous amount of food every day to

survive. Bears live almost entirely on berries when they are in season. Imagine how many berries an animal that huge must eat each day. If each bear has a piece of land generally to itself, there is no need to share the food supply with other bears.

Many animals live in groups for protection. A group of animals can fight off an enemy better than a single animal can. But a grizzly is so strong that it can defend itself easily. It is also a speedy runner -- it could outrun a horse in a short race. It has so little fear of predators that it does not even try to move around quietly.

One animal that the bear has learned to fear is man, for all the bear's strength cannot stop a bullet. Grizzlies usually wander in search of food both day and night, but in areas where bears have been shot they do not come out until dark.

#### THE HUNGRY BEAR

The grizzly's diet changes when the available food changes. A scientist studying grizzlies in Alaska found that in the spring they ate mainly roots, in June and July grasses, and in August and September berries. In any season, a bear welcomes a tasty piece of meat: a squirrel, hare, or a baby caribou or sheep. An especially large kill, such as an adult caribou, may be too much for the bear to eat all at once. It buries the leftovers in the ground or covers them with leaves and earth, and goes a short distance away to rest. The bear keeps an eye on the meat until it is hungry again.



A bear's powerful claws, sometimes six inches long, are used in getting food. Like man, bears can stand on two legs, and they use their front claws to pick fruit from tree branches. They also use them to dig for roots in the ground and to overturn rocks that hide ants and crickets. With its keen sense of smell, a bear can track down a squirrel that is in a tunnel almost two feet underground. When the bear starts digging, it may get so carried away that it ends up with a hole big enough to bury a piano -- and maybe is lucky enough to catch the squirrel.

The bear's keen sense of smell can lead it into mischief. A bear is tempted to follow the smell of food even if it comes from inside a house, unless it has learned that this

means danger. A scientist reports the case of the chocolate bar bear. One spring while the scientist was away from home, a bear broke into the house. The bear ate what it wanted from the kitchen, pushed the stove around a bit, broke some windows and spilled some brown paint. Then the bear went down into the basement where it feasted on boxes and boxes of chocolate bars before leaving through a window. The bear did not forget the chocolate bars. The next fall back came the bear, but this time crashing right through a wall. Again the bear ate its fill. The scientist was annoyed at replacing walls and windows; he was prepared the next season, and left no food in the house. The angry bear this time smashed its way through room after room before it went away hungry. At least this time the bear did not come back.

#### THE WINTER BEAR

Grizzlies live mainly in Alaska, Canada and the Rocky Mountains, all places that have very cold winters. When snow covers the ground and the temperature falls below the freezing point, grass, berries and baby animals become scarce. There is not enough food left to feed the bears. Yet grizzlies may live to be twenty-five years old. That is, they survive twenty-three foodless winters.

The solution to the food problem is a long winter sleep -- hibernation. When the weather turns chilly, the grizzly follows its urge to find a warm, dry resting place. A handy cave makes a good den, but often the bear must dig a den

from solid earth. The bear's claws, so important in digging for food and in fighting, are now used to make a sleeping place. (They are worn down by so much use. But during the winter sleep, the claws have a chance to grow out again.)

Once the bear has dug the sleeping hole, it drags in bushes for bedding, and then closes the entrance with tree limbs, rubbish, anything the bear can find, to protect itself from snow and storms. Always, though, the bear leaves a small opening for fresh air. And then the bear lies down and drifts off for a six-months' sleep. But the whole time it remains alert enough to notice any disturbance near its den. It may even step outside to see what is going on, which has scared many a passer-by out of his wits.

The bear's body is prepared for this long sleep. In the late summer the bear's thin warm-weather hair begins to grow long, into a thick winter fur coat. A bear ready to hibernate is very fat. A thick layer of fat lets the sleeping bear survive without food and also protects it from the cold.

During this time of little activity, a big event occurs in the life of some bears. What could possibly happen to a drowsy animal tucked away in a den the size of a closet, safe from the killing cold, safe from the threat of predators, safe from the need to roam in search of food?

While hibernating, some female bears wake to give birth to

a blind, deaf, one-pound heap of gray fuzzy Ursus horribilis. Immediately, the mother licks her cub's nose until it sucks in a first breath of air and makes a piercing cry. She licks the cub clean with her tongue and pulls it close to her warm belly fur. Once it is dry, she helps it find her nipple and the infant bear nurses. Now it is time for the cub's twin to be born, and the mother treats her second infant just as she did the first. Twins are most common, but sometimes a mother has three or four cubs, sometimes only one.

The coming of mild weather awakens the hibernating bear. A mother with new cubs will stay in her den about a month longer than male bears and childless females. This gives the incredibly small infants a chance to grow stronger before leaving the safety of the den. (If the bears were not so small, the mother probably could not nourish them without eating or drinking herself.)

The emerging bear digs its way out, usually into still-present snow. Even though the bear's stomach has shrunk to the size of a pea, it feels empty, and the hungry bear digs in the snow for the bodies of animals killed by the cold or by snow slides. Greedily, the bear eats its frozen finds and washes them down with melting snow. This



is the most dangerous time of year for bears, and many die of hunger and disease.

A bear's heavy coat is still needed to keep it warm, but in late spring and summer, the bear sheds its thick fur, rubbing it off against trees or the ground. With the coming of fall, the fur and fat cycle starts again.

#### THE YOUNG BEAR

The cubs spend their first two and one-half years with their mother, the warm months roaming the hills and valleys, the cold months once more in the den.

The young bears follow their mother everywhere. She watches over them all the time, keeping them out of trouble with a ready spank but also quick to protect them from animals that might harm them. That includes other bears. Male bears are very harmful to young cubs -- if given a chance, they kill the cubs and eat them. A strange female with cubs is also dangerous because she will fight any animal, even a young bear, who comes near her own cubs.

The scientist who lived in bear country tells of a tragedy caused by a chance meeting of two females with cubs. One mother, whom he named Old Rosy, saw a cub that belonged to the other mother, Nokomis. Old Rosy mistook this cub for her own and went galloping toward it. The frightened cub ran to its mother Nokomis with Old Rosy not far behind.



(Following Old Rosy were her own two cubs, but she was not aware of this.) Now Old Rosy and Nokomis stood face to face. Both followed a mother bear's urge to protect her cubs, and the battle was under way, paws swinging and jaws snapping. Old Rosy appeared to be winning when she left Nokomis to again gallop toward the cub. The cub disappeared over the hill top just ahead of Old Rosy. The next day the cub was found dead.

The scientist thinks that when Old Rosy caught up with Nokomis' cub, she realized it was not her own by the smell of the cub! Again she followed a mother's urge to protect her cubs from any bear who comes near -- even if it is only a harmless cub.

During the two years it spends with its mother, a cub is learning by watching her what bears must do to survive. When the mother sniffs the ground and then digs, her cubs sniff and dig. At first they do not know why they are sniffing and digging, but eventually they learn that this behavior may result in a squirrel dinner. If the mother stands and pulls down a branch full of fruit and bites it, the cubs pull down a twig and at least have a look at it. If the mother suspects danger is near and stands half on her hind legs to sniff the air and look around, the cubs also stand on their hind legs. When they are through nursing, they will know where to go for food, and they slowly learn how to take care of themselves for the time when they no longer have their mother's protection.

A female grizzly usually mates every three years. So during their third summer, the two-and-one-half-year-old cubs may find an adult male grizzly keeping their mother company. She does not chase this male away from her offspring, for he is not interested in harming her cubs but in mating with her. The pair may stay together for a month or so, with the cubs tagging along. Then the male and female part, probably forever. The following winter new cubs are born to the mother, tiny, helpless and entirely dependent on her.

The two-and-one-half-year-olds are no longer dependent on their mother. They do not need her food or protection, and they are old enough to mate although they will continue to grow until they are eight or ten years old. One final motherly gesture helps the cubs begin life on their own. She attacks them, claws them, and bites them. Blood is drawn. And the cubs finally escape into the adult world of the grizzly bear.

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