

HUNTING THE BIG GAME OF WESTERN ALASKA

III.—KILLING MY LARGE KADIAK BEAR

By JAMES H. KIDDER

PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

AS I had been fortunate in shooting bears upon the island of Kadiak and the Alaska Peninsula, nothing remained but for me to obtain a specimen from one of the outlying islands of the Kadiak group, to render my trip in every way a success.

Therefore, now determined to take my two natives and hunt from a bidarka the deep bays of the island of Afognak, while Blake, not yet having obtained a bear from Kadiak, went back to hunt there. He had been extremely good to his men, and in settling with them on his return from the Alaska Peninsula, had good naturedly paid the excessive demands they made. The result was that his kindness was mistaken for weakness, and just as he was about to leave his hunters struck for an increase of pay.

He sent them to the right-about, and fortunately succeeded in filling their places.

A sportsman going into a new country owes it to those who follow to resist firmly exorbitant demands, and at the same time to be firm and just in all his dealings.

In my former articles I have described bear hunting in the spring, when we stalked our game upon the snowy hillsides, and again on the Alaska Peninsula, where we hunted across the open on foot, and also in the bidarka. I will now attempt to describe still another form of hunting.

Toward the end of June the red salmon begin to run. These only go up the streams that have their sources in lakes. After the red salmon come the humpbacks, and after the humpbacks the dog salmon. Both of the latter kinds in great numbers force their way



A Cave in Which Our Natives Lived and in Which We Did Our Cooking.



Brown Bear (Alaska Peninsula).

Marsh Female Grizzly (Wyoming).
Kakak Bear (Sheslay Island).

Brown Bear (Alaska Peninsula).

A Group of Bear Heads in the Author's Collection.

up all the streams, and are the favorite food of the bears, which come down from the mountains in deep, well-defined trails to catch these fish in the shallow streams. When the salmon have begun to run, the only practical way of hunting these bears is by watching some likely spot on the bank of a stream.

Early in July Blake and I parted, intending to meet again two weeks later. My friend sailed off in a small schooner, while I left with my two Aleuts in the bidarka. In Fedor's place I had engaged a native by the

name of Lofka. We three paddled with a will, as we were anxious to reach a deep bay on the north side of the island of Afognak as soon as possible.

This was all familiar country to me, for I had spent over a month in this region the year before, and, as we camped for the night after finally reaching our hunting grounds, I could hardly realize that twelve months had gone by since I left this beautiful spot. For the island of Afognak, with its giant cliffs and deep bays, is to my mind the most picturesque spot I have ever seen.

The next morning the wind was unfavorable, but in the afternoon it changed round and we were able to visit one of the salmon streams. The red salmon had come, but it would be another week or more before the humpbacks would begin their run. It was a bleak day, with the rain driving in our faces. We forced our way up the banks of a stream for some miles, following well-defined bear trails through the tall grass. Some large tracks were seen, but we sighted no game. We returned to camp after ten o'clock that night, wet to the skin and chilled through.

was rather ticklish work, as the sea was rough. Early that afternoon we turned into the narrow straits which lie between the islands of Afognak and Shuyak. Shuyak is uninhabited, but some natives have hunting barabaras there. Formerly this island contained a great number of silver gray foxes. A few years ago some white trappers visited it and put out poison. The result was the extermination of all the foxes upon the island, for not only the foxes which ate the poison died, but the others which ate the poisoned carcasses. The hunters ob-



Our Three Largest Bear Skins.

The following day was a repetition of this, only under worse weather conditions, if that were possible.

I now decided to push on to a large bay on the northeast side of the island. This is locally known as Seal Bay, and is supposed to be without question the best hunting grounds on Afognak.

Unfortunately, a heavy wind detained us in Paramonoff Bay for some days. The morning after the storm broke we made a four-o'clock start. There was a strong favoring breeze, and we made a sail of one of the blankets. The bidarka fairly flew, but it

tained but one skin, as the foxes died in their holes or in the woods, and were not found until their pelts were spoiled. This is a fair example of the need for Alaskan game laws and their rigid enforcement.

At the present time Shuyak is rich in bear and in land otter, and I can imagine no better place for a national game preserve. It has lakes and salmon streams, and would be an ideal place to stock.

The straits between Shuyak and Afognak are extremely dangerous, for the great tides from Cook's Inlet draw through this narrow passage. My nerve was tested a bit as the

bidarka swept by the shore, for had it once got well started we should have been drawn into the rapids, and then into a long line of angry breakers beyond. At one point it seemed as if we were heading right into these dangerous waters, and then abruptly turning at a sharp angle we glided around a point into a shallow bay. Circling this shore, we successfully passed around the line of breakers and soon met the long ground swell of the Pacific, while Seal Bay stretched for many miles inland on the other side.

As the wind was favorable we stopped only for a cup of tea and then pushed on to the very head of the bay. Here, at the mouth of a salmon stream, we came upon many fresh bear tracks, and we passed the night watching. As we had seen nothing by four o'clock in the morning we cautiously withdrew and, going some distance down the shore, camped in an old hunting barabara. It had been rather a long stretch, when one considers that we had breakfasted a little over twenty-four hours before and had paddled some thirty miles. It is poor sport this watching a salmon stream by night; but it is the only kind of hunting that one can do at this time of the year.

I slept until seven o'clock that evening, when the men called me; and after a cup of tea we started for the salmon stream, which we followed up beyond where we had watched the night previous. We were very careful to wade, so as not to give our scent to any bears which might approach the stream from below. There were many tracks and deep, well-used trails leading in all directions, while every few yards we came upon places where the tall grass was trampled down, showing where bears had been fishing. These bear trails are quite a feature of the Alaskan country, and some of them are two feet wide and over a foot deep, showing that they have been in constant use for many years.

That night we heard a bear pass within ten yards of us, but could not see it. We returned to camp next morning at five o'clock, and I wrote up my journal, for it is extremely confusing this night work, and one completely loses track of the days unless careful.

My men came to me after their mid-day sleep with very cheerful countenances, and assured me that there was no doubt but that I should surely soon meet with success, for the palm of Nikolai's hand had been itching

and he had dreamed of blood and a big dog fighting, while Lofka's eyelid trembled. My hunters told me in all seriousness that these signs never failed.

Next day we made a start about ten o'clock, but after a couple of hours paddling, when we had met a fair tide to help us on, I lit my pipe and allowed my men to do all the work, while I lay back among my rugs half-dreaming in the charm of my surroundings. Myriads of gulls flew overhead uttering their shrill cries, while now and then the black oyster-catchers with their long red bills would circle swiftly around the bidarka, filling the air with their sharp whistles, and seemingly much annoyed at our intrusion. Many different kinds of ducks rose before us, and the ever-present eagles watched us from the lofty rocks.

Nikolai now pointed out one of his favorite hunting grounds for seals, and asked if he might not try for one, so we turned into a big bay, and he soon had the glasses in use. He at once sighted several lying on some rocks, and we had just started in their direction when Nikolai suddenly stopped paddling, again seized the glasses, and looked excitedly across the straits to the Shuyak shore. Following the direction of his gaze I saw upon the beach a black speck which my native at once pronounced to be a bear. He was nosing around among some seaweed and turning over the rocks in search of food. Each one of us now put all his strength into every stroke in order to reach the other side before the bear could wander off. We cautiously landed behind some big rocks, and quickly removing our boots my hunter and I were soon on shore and noiselessly peering through the brush to the place where we had last seen the bear; but he had disappeared.

The wind was favorable, and we knew that he had not been alarmed. It took us some time to hit off his trail, for he had wandered in all directions before leaving this place; but after it was once found his footprints in the thick moss made tracking easy, and we moved rapidly on. We had not expected a long stalk, and our feet were badly punished by the devil clubs, which were here most abundant. We could see by the tracks that the bear had not been alarmed, and knew that we should soon come up with him. After a mile or so the spoor led in the direction of a low marsh where the coast line makes a big bend inward; so apparently

we had crossed a long point into a bay beyond.

I at once felt sure that the bear was near, having probably come to this beach to feed, and as Nikolai looked at me and smiled, I knew he too felt that we were on a warm trail.

We had just begun to descend toward the shore, when I thought I heard a slight noise ahead. Keeping my eyes fixed in that direction I whispered to Nikolai, who was standing a few feet in front of me, intently peering to the right. Suddenly I caught just a glimpse of a tawny brownish bit of color through the brush, a short distance ahead. Quickly raising my rifle, I had just a chance for a snap shot, and the next instant a large bear made a dash through some thick underbrush. It was but an indistinct glimpse which I had had, and before I could throw another cartridge into the barrel of my rifle, the bear was out of sight. Keeping my eyes moving at about the rate of speed I judged he was going, I fired again through the trees, and at once a deep and angry growl told me that my bullet had gone home.

Then we raced ahead, my hunter going to the left while I entered the thick brush into which the bear had disappeared. I had gone but a short distance when I heard Nikolai shoot three times in rapid succession, and as quickly as I could force my way I hurried in his direction. It seemed that as we separated, Nikolai had at once caught sight of the bear slowly making away. He immediately fired, but missed; at the report of his rifle the bear turned and came toward him, but was too badly wounded by my first two shots to be dangerous. At close range Nikolai fired two more shots, and it was at this moment that I joined him. The bear was down, but trying hard to get upon his feet and evidently in an angry mood, so I ran up close and gave him another shot, which again knocked him over.

Now for the first time I had a good view of the bear, which proved to be a large one. As my men declared that this was one of the biggest they ever had seen, I think we may safely place it as a fair example of the Kadiak species. Unfortunately I had no scales with me, and could not, therefore, take its weight; but the three of us were unable to budge either end from the ground, and after removing the pelt from the carcass appeared to be as large as a fair-sized ox. We had much difficulty in skinning him, for he

fell on his face, and it took some half an hour even to turn him over; we were only able to do this by using his legs as levers. It required over two hours to remove the pelt. Then we had "chi" (tea), and shot the bear all over again many times.

It seemed that at the time when I had first caught sight of this bear, Nikolai had just located the one which we had originally seen and were following; and it was a great piece of luck my taking this snap shot, for the other bear was much smaller.

We took the skin and skull with us, while I made arrangements with my natives to return some months later and collect all the bones, for I at once decided to present the entire skeleton to the National Museum.

It was six o'clock when we again made a start. I had a deep sense of satisfaction as I lay lazily back in the bidarka, with the large skin at my feet, only occasionally taking the paddle; for it had been a hard trip, and I felt unlike exerting myself. We camped that night in a hunting barabara which belonged to Nikolai, and was most picturesquely situated on a small island.

My natives were extremely fond of bear meat, and they sat long into the night gorging themselves. Each one would dig into the kettle with his fork, and bringing out a big chunk would crowd as much as possible into his mouth, and holding it there with his teeth would cut off with his hunting knife a liberal portion, which he would swallow after a munch or two.

I had tried to eat Kadiak bear before, but it has rather a bitter taste, and this one was too tough to be appetizing. The meat of the bears which we had killed on the Alaska Peninsula was excellent, and without this strong gamey flavor.

The next morning we made an early start, for to save this large skin I had decided to push on with all haste to the little settlement of Afognak, where I had arranged to meet my friend some days later. It was a beautiful morning, and once more we had a favoring breeze.

Some forty miles across Shellicoff Straits was the Alaskan shore. The rugged, snow-clad mountains seemed to be softened when seen through the hazy blue atmosphere. One white-capped peak boldly pierced a line of clouds and stood forth against the pale blue of the sky beyond; while the great Douglas Glacier, ever-present, wound its way down—down to the very sea. It was all grandly

beautiful, and seemed in keeping with the day.

We paddled steadily, stopping only once for tea, and at six o'clock that evening were back at the little fishing hamlet of Malina Place. Here I was asked to drink tea with a man who, my hunters told me, had killed many bears on these islands, I showed him the skull of my big one, which he declared was as large as he had ever seen; my natives told me that all the Aleuts, who on our arrival had crowded around the bidarka, said the same.

This man also told me that at times there were no bears on Shuyak, and that again they were there in great numbers, showing that they freely swim across the straits from Afognak, which are, at the narrowest point, some three miles wide.

While I was having tea in one of the barabaras I heard much shooting* outside, which announced the return of a sea-otter party that had been hunting for two months at Cape Douglas. It was a beautiful sight, this fleet of twenty-odd bidarkas, the paddles all rising and falling in perfect time and changing sides without a break. There is nothing more graceful than one of these canoes when handled by expert Aleuts. These natives had already come forty miles that day, and were now going to stop only long enough for tea, and then push on to the little settlement of Afognak Place, some twenty-five miles away, where most of them lived. In one of the canoes I saw a small chap of thirteen years. He was the chief's son, and already an expert in hunting and handling the bidarka. So is the Aleut hunter trained.

As it had been a warm day I feared that the large skin might spoil, therefore I concluded to continue to Afognak Place without camping for the night, and so we paddled on and on. As darkness came the mountains

*The natives welcome the return of the sea-otter hunters by a brisk discharge of all their guns.

seemed to rise grander and more majestic from the water on either side of us. At midnight we again stopped for tea, and while we sat by the fire the host of bidarkas of the sea-otter party silently glided by like shadows. We joined them, for my men had much to tell of their four months with the white hunter, and many questions were asked on both sides.

Some miles from Afognak the bidarkas drew up side by side in a long even line, our bidarka joining in. "Drasti" and "Chemi" came to me from all sides, for I had from time to time met most of the native hunters of these islands, and they seemed to regard me as quite one of them.

When all the straggling bidarkas had caught up and taken their places in the line the chief gave the word "Kedar" (Come on), and we all paddled forward, and just as the sun was rising above the hills we reached our journey's end.

Two days later my friend joined me. He also had been successful and had killed a good-sized male bear in Little Uganuk Bay on Kadiak Island.

Our bear hunting was now over, and we had been fortunate in accomplishing the three most important objects of our trip.

MEASUREMENTS OF MALE BEAR.

	Inches.
1. Place.—Shot on island of Shuyak (Kadiak Islands)	
2. Length in straight line from nose to end of vertebrae.....	36
3. Height in straight line at shoulders between stakes, and not including hair.....	31½
4. Girth of body just back of shoulders.....	61½
5. Height of body just back of shoulders from ground.....	28¾
6. Girth of neck just back of ears.....	28
7. Girth of head just front of ears.....	27¾
8. Length of head from end of nose to front base of ears.....	19¾
9. Length of front paw from back of sole to end of middle claw.....	14½
10. Length of back paw from back of sole to end of middle claw.....	16
11. Width of front paw across sole of foot.....	8½
12. Width of back paw across sole of foot.....	7½

In all measurements tape was stretched.

*Russian and Aleut for "How do you do?"

