Denali

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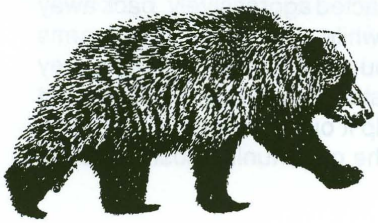


Bear Encounters

Traveling in Bear Country

When you venture into bear country, you must be willing to accept these wild creatures on their own terms. You have chosen to risk the possibility of encountering wild grizzly bears and black bears. Although there are no guarantees of safety, by being perceptive and non-threatening, you can minimize the chances of being involved in a dangerous confrontation with a bear. For your own protection and to keep Denali's bear population healthy and wild, please carefully read and abide by the following guidelines.

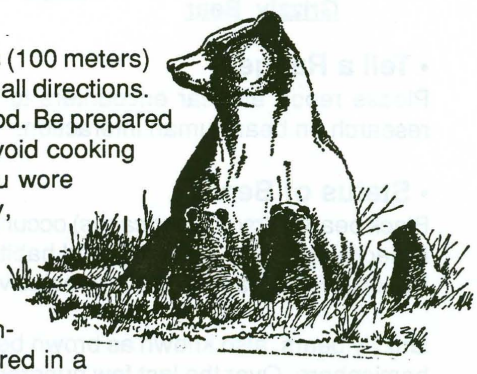
• Stay Alert - Avoid bears

Bears can be anywhere, even near populated areas or around buildings. Look for footprints and large droppings. Stay alert and watch for movement across the landscape. Try to hike in open areas, either along wide river channels, or in the alpine tundra. This open habitat affords you the opportunity to spot a bear before it sees you. Be aware of wind direction because bears rely heavily on their sense of smell. Stay upwind of thickets so the bear has a chance to smell and hear you. Never approach carcasses; a defensive bear is likely to be in the area. Be especially alert for bears in berry patches. If possible, detour around areas with high concentrations of berries. When you observe a bear, look for others; females often have cubs with them. Female grizzlies aggressively defend their cubs; therefore, never get between a female and her cubs. Be prepared to alter your route if you sight a bear. Never approach a bear or attempt to pressure it to move out of your way. Always give bears the right of way.

• Make Noise

When visibility is limited, such as in forested or brushy areas, bears may be difficult to see. A bear may also be less likely to sense a human presence. Make a variety of noises (loud talking and bell ringing work well) to alert bears of your presence. When given the opportunity, a bear will often move out of the way. Whistling is not recommended because a bear may perceive the sound as a prey animal. Sound does not travel well on windy days or near running water. Compensate for these conditions by altering your route and increasing the amount of noise you make.

• Camping and Food Handling



In the back-country, cook and store food at least 100 yards (100 meters) downwind from your tent, in an area with good visibility in all directions. Keep an eye out for approaching bears while preparing food. Be prepared to put all food away quickly when a bear is observed. Avoid cooking greasy or odorous foods. Do not sleep in the clothes you wore while cooking. When spending the night in the back-country, always store your food and garbage in a bear resistant food container.

In the roadside campgrounds, <u>all</u> food, beverages, containers, pet food, coolers, and cooking utensils must be stored in a closed, hard-sided vehicle, or in campground food-storage lockers when not in use. Trash must be stored in the same manner as food or deposited in a bear-resistant garbage can. Scrape unwanted food from pots and plates into a bear-resistant garbage can. **Never** leave food, containers, or garbage unattended. Bears are often destroyed when they become persistent in seeking out human food.

• If You Encounter A Bear

Do not run. Bears can run faster than 30 mph (50 km/h), even faster than Olympic sprinters. Running is likely to elicit a predatory chase response from an otherwise non-aggressive bear. If the bear is unaware of you, detour away from it. Give the bear plenty of room, allowing it to continue its own activities undisturbed. If the bear is aware of you but has not acted aggressively, back away slowly while keeping an eye on the bear, talk in a calm, firm voice while slowly waving your arms above your head. These actions will help the bear confirm that you are a human and not a prey animal. Grizzly bears do not normally prey on humans. A bear that stands up on its hind legs is not acting aggressively, but is curious and is trying to identify you. Help it out by following the above guidelines. Scientific evidence clearly indicates that when given the opportunity most bears will avoid humans.

• If A Bear Approaches or Charges You

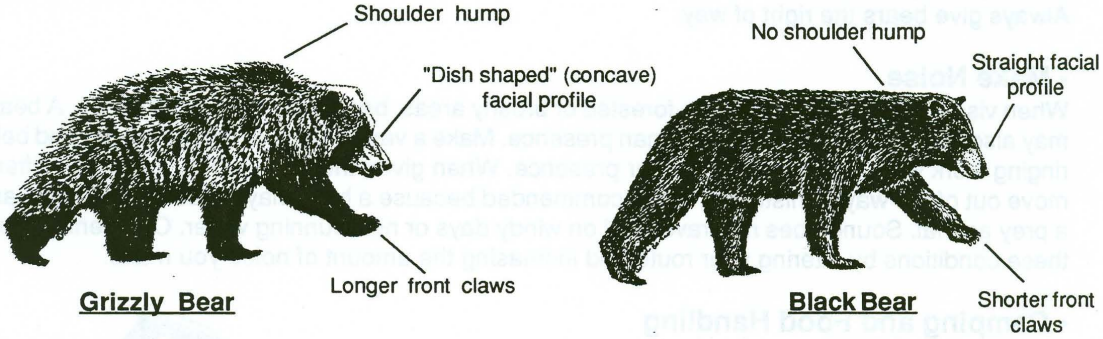
Do not run; do not drop your pack. A pack can help protect your body in case of an attack. Dropping a pack may encourage the bear to approach humans for food in the future. Most charges are bluffs, sometimes coming to within 10 feet (3 meters) of a person before stopping or veering off. Stand still until the bear stops and has moved away, then slowly back off. Due to the small size of the trees in the sub-arctic, climbing a tree may not provide protection.

• If A Grizzly Bear Attacks

The grizzly's ferocious reputation arises largely from the fact that a female grizzly will aggressively defend her young. Most attacks are defensive; therefore, if a grizzly bear does actually make contact with you, drop to the ground and play dead. However, do not play dead before contact is imminent, as it may elicit a curious approach from the bear. Leave your pack on and put your arms around the back of your head and neck for protection. The majority of charges are from female grizzlies protecting their young. By playing dead you will neutralize the threat that you represent to the bear's cubs. However, if the attack is prolonged fight back vigorously because the bear may be preying on you.

• If A Black Bear Attacks

If you are being approached or followed by a black bear, aggressively chase the bear away, even if it is a female with young. Black bears have been known to stalk and prey on humans in a few isolated incidents. Black bear attacks are rarely defensive. Females will generally send their cubs up a tree in order to protect them rather then aggressively defend them. If attacked by a black bear fight back vigorously.



• Tell a Ranger

Please report all bear encounters to a ranger. This information is used for management and research on bear-human interaction.

• Status of Bears

Black bears (*Ursus americanus*) occur in many places in North America. Although their population is declining due to poaching and habitat destruction they are currently not threatened. In Denali National Park black bears are reclusive forest residents and are rarely seen.

Grizzly bears, also known as brown bears *(Ursus arctos)*, once ranged over most of the northern hemisphere. Over the last few hundred years the grizzly's population has been reduced to a few, widely scattered, and isolated populations. Only two hundred years ago over 100,000 grizzlies roamed the landscape between the west coast of the United States and the Mississippi River. Currently, in the 48 contiguous states the grizzly is a species threatened with extinction; fewer than 600 remain. Alaska and Northern Canada are the grizzly bear's last stronghold. There are few places in the world where grizzly bears are encountered more readily than Denali National Park.