



Field Notes “Brown Bears of Katmai” By John Pennoyer

Many people have told me that the only way I could carry a tune is to put it in a backpack and take a hike! But here I was in the rain hiking down the trail and singing out-loud some of my favorite tunes such as jingle bells, she'll be coming around the Mountain, 99 bottles of beer on the wall, etc. As you can see my repertoire of music is very limited, but I was instructed to make loud noises when hiking down the trails. It was during the chorus of 99 bottles of beer on the wall, that I noticed this big brown blob walking down the trail towards me about 50 yards away. I did as instructed and moved off the trail and this Male Alaskan Brown bear continued walking towards me, his slow deliberate steps causing his huge head to sway from side to side. This Brown Bear passed within 15 to 20 feet from me and for an instant we made eye contact and I thought that my rapidly beating heart was going to fly out of my chest. The bear paid no attention to me at all; I went back on the trail and continued on to the falls. My emotions were so mixed that I cannot describe it, but I can tell you that one of the emotions was not fear. This was my 4th day and I had seen numerous Brown Bears and they are only interested in the salmon and not this guy from Minnesota. Growing up in Montana near Glacier National Park, I have seen many Grizzlies, but from the safety of a vehicle or they were seen from quite a distance away. But seeing a 1000 lbs. Alaskan Brown Bear this close, was a thrill that will be with me forever.

The year was 1988 and that was my first trip to Katmai National Park, I consider this park to be one of the best places to photograph Alaskan Brown Bears. The biggest problem is that so does everyone else and that is why it is one of the busiest places to view or photograph this magnificent animal. It had been 18 years since I was there and in 2006 I decided to make a trip back to Katmai. I had gone in July during the peak of the salmon run and this next trip I decided to go back in September with the salmon run being completed the bears would be feasting on the dying and decaying fish. I also had hoped that it would not be as busy, but it was busier than I thought with many people running workshops at this time. It seems like many of the places where I venture alone you still are competing with the numerous workshops that go on world wide. Many things have changed at Katmai since my very first visit, but one thing that hasn't changed is the joy and thrill to see and photograph this very large carnivore. So for this month's newsletter articles Ron Winch and I decided to write separate articles on the Alaskan Brown Bear from our own perspectives.

Brooks Lodge was one of the very first wilderness lodges in Alaska; it was a fly-in fishing lodge which is what it still is. Brooks River is known for not only its salmon run but also gigantic rainbow trout. When Katmai became a National Park in 1980, Brooks Lodge was still being run by the original founder, now his son runs the lodge. However fishing is still as popular as ever, but the gigantic brown bears began showing up in the middle 70's to feast on the salmon. Brooks Lodge now caters to not only folks who want to fly fish, but also to many of us that want to see and photograph the Alaskan Brown Bear. I have heard from reliable sources that there could be anywhere from 100 to 150 Alaskan Brown bears along the one mile stretch of the Brooks River. However just don't expect to see them all at one time. July and August are the busiest times to view the bears, this is during the peak of the salmon run and thousands of people from around the world come at this time, many on just daily flights from the many lodges in the area. September is not quite as busy but still many more than I thought would be there. Here are some cost factors for going to Katmai National Park in the Brooks Falls area.

Want to stay at Brooks Lodge? **\$650.00 per night** (may include flight from King Salmon and of course all meals)
Anyone is welcomed to eat at Brooks Lodge: (2006 costs)
Breakfast: **\$12.00 (continental \$8:00)**
Lunch: **\$16:00 (soup/salad bar \$12.00)**
Dinner: **\$22.00 (soup/salad bar \$18.00)**

Camping: (this is primitive camping run by NPS not Brooks Lodge)

\$8:00 per night (showers available at Brooks Lodge for \$7.00 for 5 minutes)

Food: I brought my own freeze dried food, but did eat two meals at the lodge.

Those are some of the basic expenses at Brooks Lodge, but let's get back to the bears!

My clock said that it was 6:30AM and time to get out of the sack. I quickly got up and woofed down a Nutri-grain bar, grabbed my photo pack and tripod and started down the trail to the river. It was 7:00 AM when I walked by the lodge and noticed that many of the workshop participants were eating breakfast. As I crossed the bridge to get to the other side of the river, the sky was beginning to turn to a brilliant red. With my 500mm lens fixed on the tripod I noticed a bear standing on his hind legs in the river searching for fish on the bottom. The river was a brilliant red from the sunrise and made some great silhouettes. As the sun began to peak above the horizon I noticed a large bear on the edge of the river, but too far for any photos. Slowly he walked towards me constantly looking in the river for fish. As he approached within shooting distance the sun was

giving his fur some beautiful rim lighting, I quickly stopped down 2/3 stop and focused on this bear, as he stepped into the river I fired off a couple of shots and within seconds he was gone. I was pretty much alone on this side of the river, because all of the other photographers had gotten stuck in a “bear jam” and was not able to cross the river.

I could tell that it was going to be another great day to photograph “The Brown Bears of Katmai!”

Everyone have a great summer and if I don’t see you in the field, I will see you next September.



Good Shooting

Coastal Katmai – Alaska By Ron Winch

Standing knee deep in a cold coastal Alaskan river I can feel the migrating salmon brush against my hip boots. Tension is high. With my eye pressed against the viewfinder I watch the large “V” shaped wake spread across the surface of the river. It’s getting closer by the second and then, like a volcano erupting, it explodes from the eater. A hundred feet in front of me stands an eight hundred pound coastal brown bear chest deep in the shimmering pool. Water streams down from his head and neck in silver rivulets, punctuated only by dark beady eyes. He stares directly at me but seems to offer no threat, only curiosity. His nose and muzzle are red with the blood of salmon. He shakes like a dog and water droplets fly in all directions. Now his bloody muzzle is brilliant red as he turns slightly to the side and picks up the sunlight.

At six frames per second, I’m soon loading another roll of film into the Nikon and waiting for more action as the bear returns upstream to try again in his quest for salmon.

For the second year in a row, several of us have been living on a sixty-five foot boat for ten days at a stretch and photographing coastal brown bears off the coast of Katmai National Park. The adventure begins with several days on Kodiak Island driving the Backroads (and they are all Backroads) searching out photo opportunities with bison, elk, fox, landscapes and rivers. Only a few roads exist on Kodiak as most of the island is a National Wildlife Refuge for the Kodiak Brown Bear. The island is also home to a large fishing fleet and the largest U.S. Coast Guard base in the world, with responsibilities for safety and rescue in the North Pacific and the unforgiving Bering Sea.

At 9 a.m. the last of our luggage is safely strapped down in the cargo hold of a Beaver floatplane and we’re off on a forty-five minute flight across Shelikof Strait to Geographic Harbor, the coastal waters of Katmai National Park. Brook Falls, where the bears stand on the falls waiting for salmon to jump into their mouths, is over fifty air miles inland from the coast.

The sixty-five foot long Coastal Explorer will be our home for the next ten days. Accommodations are quite comfortable and there is plenty of fresh seafood. Captain Chuck has been plying these waters for ten years and knows many of the bears by name.

Our best count has been twenty-one bears in sight at one time. Salmon are migrating in from the sea, running up the streams to lay eggs and die, or be eaten by bears. This morning we are working the bears on a small river and standing at the edge of the water. All lenses are pointed at a midsize bear working her way downstream toward us. A quick rush yields a twenty inch fish which is torn apart and quickly devoured. She continues downstream toward us. At 100 feet the word is given, “Pick up your gear and move back as a group,” thus keeping the appearance of a “mass of humanity” rather than individuals. Tripods and camera bags were hoisted and moved back a safe

distance – all but one camera backpack. Patti didn't seem to be with the program this morning as she moved her tripod, but failed to pick up her camera bag. Too late! The bear spots the bag, comes over to inspect, rolls it over once and begins dragging it toward the river. Luckily no food was in the bag, but enough is enough. In unison the six of us throw our arms into the air and yell. That did it. The bear dropped the bag in a puddle of rotting fish and water, looked up bewildered then returned to fishing.

In May, shortly after the bears come out of hibernation and the salmon are still out to sea, we find bears feeding on sedges, grasses and digging for clams at low tide. Tripods steadied in the bottom of a twenty-six foot skiff, we zero in on a light colored bear wandering the shoreline at low tide.

Coming into shallow water, Chuck goes over the side and carefully walks the skiff along, following the bear. A keen nose soon senses a clam – and the digging begins. Slightly curved claws on large front feet dig methodically down and down, sometimes until the bear is resting on its chest before reaching and extracting the clam. One foot firmly holds the clam on the sand, one claw of the other foot extended and delicately picks open the clam. Picture if you will, a six hundred pound bear holding down a four inch clam and opening the shell with a claw the size of your little finger.

Election Time

Club officers will be elected at the May 16, 2007 meeting. The slate of officers for 2007-2008 is:

President: John Pennoyer
 Vice President: Rod Blesener
 Treasurer: Jim Duncan
 Secretary: Linda Nygren
 Editor: Don Nadreau

Floor nominations may be made at the April or May meeting providing previous agreement of the nominee has been obtained.

April Salon Results

Judge: Mike Prokosch

Score of 8

Aronson, Jim	Turks Cap Lilly Closeup
Bergman, Lyle	Savanna Storm
Bergman, Lyle	Bored (W)
Blesener, Rod	Oak in Fog
Cassuto, Nadav	Osprey #1 (W)
Cassuto, Nadav	Osprey #2 (W)
Cyr, Mariann	Iceberg with Penguin (W)
Ellenbecker, Dave	Yellow Jewel Weed
Fleury, Cynthia	Mountain Color
Lillestrand, Dottie	One Milkweed Seed
Lillestrand, Dottie	Rough Blazing Star
McDonough, Jean	Cheetah on Ant Hill (W)
	Great Blue Heron & Branch (W)
Morgan, Jeff	Cascade Ice
Nygren, Linda	Brown Bear Silhouette (W)
Pennoyer, John	Male Wood Duck (W)
Pennoyer, John	Pheasant Tracks
Samuelson, Tom	White Pelican
Scholljegerdes, Flo	Ducks 1 (W)
Vichich, Dave	Red Fox Kits
Wilbrecht, Jon	Yellow Headed Black Bird (W)
Wilson, Tom	Tree Swallow (W)

Score of 9

Cyr, Mariann	Adelie with Egg (W)
Gladitsch, Marilyn	Purple Hepatica #26
Graves, Rick	Fan Fall
Nelson, Vern	Male House Finch
Polley, Lil	Buffalo Itch (W)
Polley, Lil	Pronghorn (W)
Samuelson, Tom	A Superior Morning
Schulz, Alan	Gull & Clouds
Zosel, David	Honeybee (W)

Score of 10

Gladitsch, Marilyn	May Bloodroots
Nadreau, Don	Death Valley
Spicer, Michael	Leaf

The BATTLE is scheduled!

An international battle is on the horizon—and we need your help to win!

The History

About two months ago Selsdon Camera Club in the U.K. asked if we would like to accept an international challenge. One of the club members, Ian, had been to our web site and had seen our images and thought we would give them a good challenge. I looked at their web site:

<http://www.selsdoncameraclub.co.uk>

and thought they were OK but nothing special. Since Ian was really keen, I accepted the challenge to do battle. I was then informed that there was another UK camera club in the fray--Hoylake Photographic Society:

<http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/hoylakephoto/>

To keep things even, I invited the Minnesota Nature Club to also join in a four-way battle with the 2 U.K. clubs and Minneapolis Photographic Society.

It was about this time that I started to notice some warning signs. One was that “battles” were so important to the Selsdon Camera Club that they even have a board (officer) position for External Competitions! Next we exchanged club locations on Google Earth and Selsdon is really an area of South Croydon, a suburb of Greater London. Hoylake is just on the other side of the Mersey River across from Liverpool--think Beatles! These are *not* small-town clubs! Then Ian directed me to some sample images from a previous overseas battle. Gulp! We need well-armed troops and everyone’s best images to win!

Rules of Engagement

To do battle, here are the guidelines:

1. Each club will submit 15 images. There will be 60 images total and they will be projected in random order.
2. Each club member may submit only one image.
3. The images will all be judged in one evening by a totally independent judge.
4. There will be one judge in the U.S. and one judge in the U.K.
5. A sound recording of the judges’ comments will be provided with the program to all clubs.
6. One club will be named the winner and has bragging rights for a year.

Preparing for Battle

Where I really need your help is with the images to use in the battle. These are digitally projected images. There are no restrictions except we should have less than 50% nature images (no more than 7 total). Your image can be the best image you have ever captured, and it does not matter what it has won

before. Closer to the time you will each need to send me 4 or 5 of your best images and we’ll put them all together to select the very best.

On Wednesday, July 18, at 7:00 p.m. we will meet **at a place to be determined** to project these images and vote on which images we will submit as a club. This will be an evening of fun choosing and selecting which 15 images we will use to represent our club. This will enable us to get our images to Europe by the deadline of July 31.

The Battlefield

The international judging in the U.S. will take place on Monday, August 6, at IFP, in the normal MPS meeting room. Everyone is welcome and encouraged to attend. Additional details will be provided later. At that time we will get to hear the U.S. judge evaluate and score 60 images. This will give us the opportunity to see some great European images, so it should be fun and educational.

The U.K. clubs are sponsoring a meeting in September when a judge from the Royal Photographic Society will score the same set of 60 images. That judging will be recorded and sent to both U.S. clubs to listen to at a club meeting sometime in autumn.

Scouting the Territory

If you would like to see the location of the U.K. clubs you will need to download and run “Google Earth” (see more about Google Earth below) which is a free program:

<http://earth.google.com/>

Here are the locators for Selsdon Camera Club and Hoylake Photographic Society in Google Earth:

www.elmstudio.com/docs/scc.kmz

www.elmstudio.com/docs/hps.kmz

Call to Arms

Can we beat the Brits—and MPS? We are relying on you! Please give us your support and join in the fun. Our club’s honor is at stake! Come be part of this historic challenge!

Thank you!

Jeff

a.k.a. “Battle Commander”

The View from Here
By Lawrence C. Duke
"Photography Spoken Here"



My juice camera's got juice ... What's yours got?

After the Brian Peterson presentation, which I enjoyed because I had shot stories with two of the writers, a new member walked up to me and asked, "where do you go shooting? "

It use to be a long time ago, "... In a Galaxy far, far, away. Obi-Wan lead us out of the Dark Side ..." oh, sorry, I got lost in space.

We have in the past had someone who thought to lead the Club out into what was then called the, "Field ". Hey folks, it was a "Field Trip "that's what it was!

Nature photography for some reason has come to be known as an individual form of photography. Is there some kind of magic that nature photographers do (so that their score will be higher) and are afraid of sharing with others, who are not worthy? There is no magic going on under the dark clothe (from the old days). Maybe a good fishing hole is something to guard but sooner or later someone else will show up to cast in a line.

Sorry, but the good old Phoenix Camera Club have me on their mailing list, and each month they are on a " Field Trip ". They will have so many members on a trip that it takes two members to keep track of everyone. This season they been to; Phoenix Zoo, Desert Museum, Bosque, Monument Valley, White Sands, "and they keep on going ".

On one trip I made with the PCC group to the Desert Museum, the critters are behind wire thank you, a member standing near by was trying hard to get the attention of a Javelina, a wild pig with a bad temper, so being from Iowa, I called the Javelina in by squeaking like a rabbit. The sound of the shutters, mine too, brought other members over and everyone got shots. And, I was the hog caller for the day.

I joined the Club a ways back and we had outings for; Spring wild flowers, Birding, Zoo shooting, Mpls., St. Paul, we've got two of them, Fall color at different State Parks, and we even had Picnics. Let's think about it again, Club members can be fun, and if ... "you open up your mind "... you may learn something new about a plant or animal or how to call a Javelina in. Photography is my kind of fun.

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Editor: Don Nadreau, 763-377-4589,
dnadreau@usfamily.net
124 Ardmore Dr.
Golden Valley, MN 55422

President: Mariann Cyr 651-636-3738
mcyr@mmm.com
Vice Pres.: Larry Duke
lduke1601@earthlink.net
Treasurer: Jim Duncan 651-459-3558
jduncan001@comcast.net
Secretary - Rod Blesener 952.465.3420
rblesener@fishbowlsolutions.com

Meetings are held on the third Wednesday of the month, September through May

6:15 PM - Set-up and Social Time
6:45 PM - Announcements and Business
7:00 PM - Program
8:00 PM - Nature Salon (Competition and Judge's Comments).

Meetings are held at:

Visitor Center, Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge,
3815 East 80th Street
Bloomington, MN

May 16, 2007 Meeting

May Program: John Pennoyer – Working in the field with a camera.

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