

AK Style Grizzly or Brown Bear- Take your Choice

By: Brandt H. Williams
hook-n-hunt



Forward: After our black bear boat hunt in Prince William Sound during the spring of 2003, one of my best friends, Mike and I had a burning desire to return to AK to hunt brown (grizzly) bears. For roughly the next three months following our spring trip I researched different outfitters, finally getting a very positive lead on Tony of RMO from Russ. Russ and I had started corresponding while he was on tour in Iraq through the Accurate Reloading website, where I had originally posted a thread on brown bear hunting and via e-mail. Russ had already booked a spring 05 brown bear hunt with RMO and felt Tony would do a creditable job. I called and spoke with Tony personally to get a feel for what his operation was about. Tony was candid and up front about his political and religious beliefs, but assured me these would not be put upon us in any manner during the hunt. In September of 03 we formally booked with Tony for the fall of 05, almost two years in advance. For the next twenty three months I communicated on a semi-regular basis with Tony, developing a customized gear list, staying in touch with him on the hunts he conducted and even meeting with him for dinner in January of 05 when Mike, another good friend, Morgan and I drove to the new WVA Cabelas store. It seemed like it took forever for August 30th to arrive, but it finally did and what follows is a snapshot of our trip.

August 30, 2005: After dragging Mike to the airport on August 28th to plead with Delta Airlines to reroute us around Atlanta to avoid hurricane Katrina (which to Delta's credit they did at no expense to us) the morning of August 30th dawned even before my alarm clock went off as I was filled with anticipation and excitement about our trip that had been building up inside of me for nearly two years. Our flight didn't leave until 12:30 PM so I moseyed into the office for a few hours to help pass the time and put a finishing touch on my work as we were scheduled to be gone over two weeks. Mike picked me up on time at 10:00 AM which was somewhat surprising as Mike usually runs a little late. I read into the on time arrival that he was anxious and excited about the trip also. Mike is a very quiet and reserved kind of guy who can be a tough read, but his on time arrival was a dead give away of his desire to get this hunt off to a flying start. We arrived at the airport and sailed right through check in including having the rifles checked. The Greensboro Airport has been a very good place to fly out of for going hunting as they do what they are supposed to do and don't hassle hunters or at least that has been our experience to date. We sat at the gate for about ninety minutes before we boarded and took off (on time) on our trip. 12:30 PM, the trip officially began. Our flight to Cincinnati and subsequent connection to Anchorage with an intermediate stop in Salt Lake City all went as planned with arrival in Anchorage a few minutes ahead of schedule at 9:30 PM (ADST). We phone Crissy at Alaskan Splendor Limousines with whom we had made arrangements to pick us up and shuttle us to Alaska's Harvest Bed and Breakfast Inn in Palmer where Tony had recommended we bunk for the night. The B&B was where the vast majority of his hunters and his guides including himself have been basing out of for their hunts. The B&B is run by Collette and her husband, who have a fabulous place and are very accommodating in that they are very flexible with hunters coming

and going as well as allowing hunters to leave gear in their shed that is not needed to fly out into the bush with. I can't tell you how valuable this is and certainly would recommend anyone needing a place to bunk before flying out of Palmer or Willow calling Collette and staying at the B&B. Crissy's husband Desmon picked us up as well as Joe, another hunter from Arkansas and one of Tony's assistant guides, Jerry from Oklahoma. After another hours drive and a long day of traveling we finally arrived at the B&B around 11:30 PM Alaska Daylight Savings Time (ADST). By midnight I was fast asleep.

August 31, 2005: We were awakened at 7:00 AM as there appeared to be a window of opportunity to fly us in that morning instead of the afternoon as originally scheduled. If we missed this window it could be a couple of days before our next opportunity would present itself. Alaska weather is VERY unpredictable and can cause levels of anxiety I wished not to experience getting into and out of the bush. Flying conditions MUST be right at both ends as most pilots fly visual so they have to be able to see where they are landing both going and coming. Our morning departure was so hurried we barely had time for our last hot shower for who knew how long. I didn't even have time to grab a cup of coffee or a muffin before we piled into Tony's rental van and departed for Willow Airport another 45 minutes up the road. We had six people needing to get into the bush to base camp today and this would require two flights of three people each with gear. Tony already had one assistant guide and two guides in training up at the base camp. Joe, Mike and I would go first with Tony, Jerry and the fourth hunter Dr. Bob from Phoenix, Arizona flying in after us. We were scheduled to fly out at 8:30 AM. We arrived at Willow Airport and met with Barry Stanley owner and operator of Denali Flying Service. Barry is a very personable and likable individual who is very conscientious about his work. We quickly and efficiently loaded our gear and ourselves and set off for the 40 minute one way flight into our base camp. Our flight was considerably smoother and more enjoyable than I imagined as I am not a lover of those small planes where you get bounced all over the place. The flight in was without a hitch. We flew, I am guessing, at around 1500 feet and I was able to see much of the area between Willow and base camp from above and it was quite impressive. We touched down and emptied the plane so Barry could return and get the remaining three guys in just as quickly as possible. At the base camp we met assistant Guide Dan from Minnesota, and guides in training Jesse, an attorney from just outside Syracuse, NY and John who worked as an IT person from the Minneapolis area. The three were in the process of erecting base camp when we arrived. With base camp erected (sort of) we sat down and engaged in conversation about the upcoming hunt while waiting for the remaining members of the group to fly in. Dan then returned to his task at hand which was "constructing" a pit toilet about 50 yards up the runway from base camp. This as it would turn out was used frequently by most members of the hunting group and I was personally very thankful that Dan had this completed before he left out for spike camp. About two hours later Barry once again touched down at the base camp with Tony, Jerry and Dr. Bob. Another quick unloading job and Barry was off and gone again. It would be eight days before we would see Barry again. After about an hour or so of mingling and kicking around camp, Tony had everybody who was going to base out of a spike camp pack. Dr. Bob would be put out with Dan and John at one spike camp and Joe was to put out with Jerry and Jesse at the other spike camp. Tony, Mike and I were going to stay and hunt out of base camp. I had talked with Tony before we left and this was my understanding of how it was initially at least was going to go down. I had little interest in hunting out of a spike camp as I felt we could accomplish what we came to do while hunting out of base camp based on my understanding of what Tony had painted

a picture of for me. Mike and I walked the mile down to the raft with Jerry and Tony which was docked next to Joe's airboat. Joe was an interesting and very personable individual who had moved out to the area where our base camp was located over 20 years ago. He and his wife Debbie had built a cabin and outbuilding high on top of the bluff overlooking the runway and Skwentna River. Tony and Jerry had gotten to know Joe over the last few years and Joe proved to be a valuable resource for gasoline and drinking water. The Iditarod trail ran very close to the back of his property, which tells you just how far out he was. I had the opportunity of meeting with Joe and speaking briefly with him on 3 or 4 occasions over the eight days and can certainly tell you Joe is a very self sufficient individual and a pretty darn nice guy. Due to low water level in the river's slues Tony was unable to get the raft as close to base camp as he had hoped. This didn't pose any problems during our hunt other than the extra distance gear had to be carried back and forth from to the raft. Tony and Jerry set out to explore downriver to find two suitable locations for the spike camps based on what they had seen the previous year. Mike and I returned to base camp. Hours passed before Tony and Jerry returned. Daylight was beginning to wane and Tony wanted those going to spike camps to get it together so all could be put out with adequate daylight left to set up the spike camps. With everybody but Mike and I now headed to the raft, Mike and I just kicked back at base camp. Alaska hunting regulations forbid hunting on the day you fly in so we had to be content with waiting until the next day to get our hunting officially underway. Finally, early that evening Tony and Jesse returned from putting everyone out at the spike camps. Tony had decided to hold Jesse in base camp with him as he would have been 2 on 1 without Jesse. This decision proved to be the correct choice in my opinion as the spike camp where Joe and Jerry set up was very tight and Jesse was more valuable to Tony in camp than out in a spike camp. I never felt that the two spike camps were situated where Tony had originally planned. Changes in the river over past year appeared to preclude Tony from putting the two spike camps where he had been anticipating setting them up. None the less, Joe and Jerry and Dr. Bob, Dan and John were out. We feasted for the first time late that evening on what would be our staple for dinner over the next 8 days, Mountain Home Freeze Dried Food. While actually very tasty considering, the meals all had high percentages of sodium so I was cautious in how many of these I would eat over the next 8 days. The shift in my diet the first few days took some getting use to. Our meal plan over the duration of the hunt consisted of Mountain Home Freeze Dried Food, Ramen noodle soup (beef and chicken), oatmeal, and an assortment of candy bars, summer sausage, cheese, coffee, tea and tang. The four of us retired about midnight ADST after a very long day with the anticipation of seeing bears the next day as our hunt officially got underway.

September 1, 2005: For me morning came at 7:00 AM. I had not slept as long as I had hoped, knowing we wouldn't be hunting in the mornings I had hoped to sleep to at least 8-8:30 AM so I could catch up on my sleep I missed from the night before. My sleep that night had been better than I thought it would be with the exception that I got cold as the temperature apparently had dropped into the low 30's and we maybe weren't as prepared for this as we should have been. We had watched the weather religiously for the past month and all indications were that the lows would be in the upper 40's, not the low 30's. Again Alaska weather is unpredictable. Wide awake, unable to go back to sleep and somewhat chilled I emerged from the tent at 7:00 AM to a light frost and clear skies with the sun just starting to peak over the horizon behind camp through the trees. I was the first one up and was standing outside of the tent admiring the beauty of the morning with out my glasses or a gun when I saw our first bear of the hunt. A good size "shooter" was meandering across the runway about 300 yards down from camp. It never broke

its gate, but did turn to see who and what I was as it continued across the runway. There was no opportunity to grab a rifle and take a shot as the bear made it across the runway in less than 30 seconds. I was caught by total surprise at the sight of this bear and wondered if this was a good indication of things to come. After the bear had disappeared into the brush at the edge of the runway, I took the opportunity to advise the guys in the tent that I had just seen our first bear. This was the signal for them to get up and start the day. Jesse promptly announced after emerging from the tent that Mike's snoring had him on the brink of committing some heinous felony. Jesse proceeded to erect another tent and move Tony's and his gear into it before he even ate breakfast as sleeping in the tent with Mike another night was not an option. After a quick breakfast Tony and Jesse took the raft to go and move Dr. Bob, Dan and John as apparently where they were left last night was not where Tony had wanted to leave them, but needed to for the night. They were gone most of the day as the raft would only accommodate two people with limited gear at one time. Mike and I occupied ourselves with piddling around camp and glassing down the runway in hopes another bear would stroll across it, giving us an easy opportunity for a shot. Hunting bear we were told would be only in the evenings from about 7:00 PM until dark at around 9:30 PM or so as this is when the bears moved. Tony had told us hunting any other time would be an extremely low percentage opportunity and he preferred the evenings only. Tony and Jesse returned in time to take us out that evening, setting out of camp around 6:00 PM or there about. We headed back towards where the raft was docked and about a 1/2 mile from where it was turned back downstream following the shoreline for a couple of miles. We pulled up on the river bed of the Skwentna and set up to glass the shoreline giving us at least a mile maybe two of shoreline to look for bears after having to traverse numerous slews and tributaries, some nearly waste deep and some with rapidly moving water. I didn't go anywhere with out my walking stick and that was a good thing as with out it I would have surely made a splash or two in the rapidly moving water we encountered on a regular basis. Throughout the week we saw an abundance of bear sign, including bear scat that consisted mostly of unprocessed berries and porcupine quills. This gave credence to what we thought was the fact that we were hunting grizzly bears not brown bears. Sure enough at about 8:00 PM we spotted a very large sow with 3 very large cubs working the shoreline looking for fish. We moved in on the bears to shooting range without them ever seeing or winding us. We watched in amazement at these beautiful creatures. The cubs were huge certainly second year cubs that would not be going back into the den with mama this year. Mama was likely the largest bear we saw during the hunt. She had a magnificent dark brown coat and we judged her to be an eight footer, a very large sow. Tony indicated that in order for us to take a sow bear it had to be solitary, a bear by herself with no cubs in sight. We watched as the bears worked the shoreline for a couple of hundred yards and finally disappeared into the brush at a bend in the shoreline. While we were naturally disappointed in not being able to harvest the sow, what a wonderful sight and great way to open up the first day of hunting. As we returned to camp having not seen any other bears that evening we were encouraged and looked forward to day two of the hunt. Back at camp our conversation centered on the days activity and Tony's philosophical/political viewpoints as we dined on more of that delectable freeze dried food. We gazed to the night sky as it was absolutely beautiful, filled with stars, it was an incredible sight I had not ever seen before in the lower 48. I continued gaze at the sky as we talked and wondered aloud how many possible civilizations of intelligent life could there be in the stars we saw. It was a question no one could answer except to say we weren't the only ones. Finally, we all retired to our tents around midnight filled with anticipation of what day two would hold in store.

September 2, 2005: Well, I awoke about 6:30 AM and decided to hurry my fanny up and go down on the edge of the runway about 100 yards and see if I could catch anything crossing. The night before had been noticeably colder than the previous night and while we wore more clothing to bed we were just as cold. There was a very heavy frost on the ground and on the tents and tarps as well. We guessed it had dipped to the mid twenties that night, it sure felt like it. I sat quietly in my chair at the edge of the runway for a couple of hours without ever seeing anything that resembled a bear. So much for the morning hunt. After another filling breakfast, the four of us set out in pursuit of scouting for bear, this time upstream of the river, beyond where the raft and airboat were parked. We hiked what I guess were two miles upstream to a spot where some decent bear had been spotted the year before. Once again the river had changed and getting to the spot Tony wanted was more difficult than anticipated and required some jungle maneuvers through the alders to work our way around a slew that was too deep to cross. We finally got close to where Tony was looking to go and pulled up at the edge of the Skwentna to glass the surrounding areas for possible bear movement. I was pretty tired already at that point and would have been satisfied to have spent the rest of the day there. Tony ventured a little farther down to look for sign and after returning with less than favorable report, we retreated and headed back to base camp. We took a different route and altogether avoided those nasty alders. By the time we got back and downed lunch it was close to the time we needed to head out for the evening hunt. I told Mike to go ahead as I was too beat to venture out on another 2 to 3 mile excursion. I said I would relax in a camp chair on the runway looking for bears. I had put up flagging tape at 200 yards after the morning hunt from where the chair was so as to give me a sense of distance should a bear decide to cross the runway should I have the opportunity to hunt the runway again. Mike, Jesse and Tony set off to go back where we had hunted the night before. However, this time they cut through the woods between our base camp and a little tributary off of the Skwentna. This turned out to be a real time saver, cutting about 30-45 minutes off the walk each way. By the end of the week we had the trail marked and beat down enough to where it really wasn't a problem. I moseyed on down to my chair on the strip and sat there until shortly after hearing 4 or 5 shots at 9:30 PM. I had seen a huge red fox at about 8:30 PM that was beautiful and ripe for the taking. He never knew I was around and had sat down at the edge of the runway with his back to me about 50 down and on the other side. Unfortunately, I thought fox was not in season and let it pass only to find out later I could have toasted him. I felt very confident that after hearing multiple shots Mike had scored on his bear and was most anxious to have him return to camp to hear about it. It had been a beautiful night for hunting, but as dark approached the wind shifted and left me wondering what kind of weather tomorrow would bring. The three of them return by flashlight around 10:00 PM. It was dark, but I could tell by Mike's gate as he approached camp that he had in fact been successful. Not only had Mike and Tony put on a ½ mile stealth stalk on his bear that was feeding on fish, Jesse had been filming the stalk on video. Certainly while not Oscar worthy, the video however was a true adventure that was captured on tape. It gave me as well as it will give many other people the opportunity to see the stalk and subsequent follow up after the bear had been downed. At the sound of the first shot Jesse lost control of the camera and what was captured on tape over the next minute were gunshots and plenty of sky and gravel. He finally got control of the camera after all the excitement was over. The three of them had pulled up a little farther out from where we had been the night before in order to cover an area behind them that they felt held promise as fish were running in the water

behind them. They had at least 1 to 2 miles of timberline to glass and when they spotted the bear it was at their estimation about ½ mile away. The three of them made the stealth stalk in a very short order running through slews that I had enough trouble walking through. Jesse had stepped into a patch of quick sand and gone down during the stalk, but fortunately was able to keep the video camera dry. I told Mike after seeing the tape it was a good thing I wasn't along as I would have been way behind them. Mike and Jesse recanted the sequence of events as we watched the video. Throughout dinner and after we talked about the Mike's hunt that evening trying to recall all the details that encompassed what Mike had set out to accomplish and how the hunt had gone down. We retired shortly after 11:30 PM to the anticipation of seeing his bear the next morning and concern with a possible turn for the worse in weather with the wind having shifted now 180 degrees.

September 3, 2005: Rain, Rain, Rain. Our concerns from the night before about the weather had turned out to be well founded. The morning broke overcast with an extremely low ceiling dampness and an intermittent light rain. As it turned out it rained intermittently for the next four days, making hunting less than enjoyable. We made our way out to where the bear had been shot to retrieve its hide and skull. Mike showed me where they had started, the route they had used to put the stalk on and where the bear had been spotted and shot. The last shot Mike took the night before put a bullet in the bear's head as the bear while down was still moving and making a noise. Tony and Jesse, with some help from Mike, skinned the bear out except for the skull in about two hours. It drizzled a considerable portion of that time, making for less than ideal conditions. We returned to camp with the hide and skull aboard Jesse's pack frame. Tony set out to retrieve Dr. Bob, Dan and John as he had a phone message from Dan that Dr. Bob had taken a small bear the first night. While Tony went to bring them back, Jesse and I set up a make shift covered area with a tarp and some poles cut from small trees that had been bulldozed over earlier in the spring when Joe had expanded the runway. It certainly was my opinion as well as those of the other hunters as I found out later that the tarp should have been erected before it rained not after it started. This was in my view nothing more than a lack of planning and organization that precluded us from having proper drying conditions to hang wet clothing out of the rain while staying warm and dry. None the less it served the purpose of keeping the rain off of us for the next few days. Hours later Dan and Dr. Bob returned. Tony had gone back on a second trip to get John and the gear. Finally Tony and John with the remaining gear in hand returned. Dan and Jesse had set up another tent in the meantime. At 7:30 PM Dan and I set out in the rain in search of bear. I was completely convinced that we should concentrate our efforts on the immediate area where the carcass of Mike's bear lay. On the way out I stepped in a spot of quicksand while crossing one of the slews. Fortunately, I was only about 10' from shore when this occurred and the water was only slightly over knee deep. I did however go down, taking on some water inside of my waders. This certainly did not enhance my hunting experience that evening. Dan wanted to pull up short of where we believed the carcass to be and glass the timberline along the slew as we had done the preceding two nights. I agreed to that and the two of us hunted until about 9:00 PM with no sign of bear. By that time we were both cold and I was wet. We weren't sure we had a bearing on exactly where the carcass was, but having not seen anything we opted to call it night and hoped the rain would take a breather the next day. While Dan and I were out hunting they fleshed the skull of Mike's bear as well as Bob's. The bear hides had been rolled up for the night with the salting of the hides to be done the next day. That evening I retired early, around 10:30

PM and left the guys all huddled under the tarp talking. It was a fairly uneventful evening back in camp and I wanted out of the rain.

September 4, 2005: Morning arrived to the pitter patter of rain falling everywhere. The entire day was pretty much confined to moving between the tent and the tarp as it rained lightly but steady for a good portion of the day. The rain did stop long enough for them to salt the hides and put them up under the tarp. My first rain suit (Top) had gotten wet when I stepped in the quicksand the day before and went down over my waist high Cabela's Stockingfoot Dry Plus Waders. The waders had kept water out the entire time except then; water went over my waist band. Up until that point the Cabela's Rain Suede Packable Raingear (top) had done its job, but once the underside (lining and pockets) got wet I couldn't get it dry as we had not sun and no real means of drying it except to hang it a line under the tarp. I had to go to my back up rain suit which was the Cabela's Space Rain Ultra Pack Rainwear (top). It took little space in my pack and was a life saver. I will tell the only way to go is with waist high (or chest high if you prefer those) stockingfoot waders with a lugged sole boot similar to my Vasque. The set up may be a little harder to get on, but it is significantly easier on the feet and has a much more stable feel than conventional hip or chest waders. Dan and I took off for hunting that evening about 6:00 PM as I felt with overcast conditions the bear would likely move earlier. Tony did not agree with that idea, but since he wasn't going we went out anyway. We went back to the area where we had initially set up the night before confirming that we were pretty close to where we wanted to be and certainly with viewing and striking distance of the carcass. By 7:00 PM a small bear had showed up about twenty yards from where we believed the carcass to be. This bear was small and it was questionable whether or not I would shoot it. Dan and I had made our first move in, closing in on where we had decided to set up and take our shot from. At this time we were still over 200 yards away and not close enough for me to shoot given the adverse weather conditions. As we were watching the bear, it all of a sudden got up and bolted off running away from the carcass. We knew it hadn't seen or heard us and we didn't think it had winded us, so the only logical conclusion left was the presence of another bear. We spotted two black bears some distance down the shoreline shortly after the little bear had made his exit. Dan inquired as to my wanting to take one of those and I indicated not tonight but maybe towards the end of the hunt if we hadn't connected on a grizzly bear by day eight. At 8:30 PM another much larger bear made his presence known at the timberline and bank's edge overlooking the carcass. He stood broad side for 15 seconds or so and then decided to lay down under a low hanging limb next to where he had just stood. He was laying such that he would have been looking directly at us had he lifted his head. However, he seemed quite intent on concentrating his vision at the carcass below. As it grew darker Dan and I finally made our way up to where we wanted to be. By the time we had settled in it was close to 9:30 PM and the bear had not gotten up since about 8:30 PM. We felt he was content to lay there under the drooping tree limb until darkness. At 9:40 PM Dan told me to take a shot as light had almost completely waned. I took what was an ill advised and poor judgment shot on a bear that I could only barely see its head and front paws hanging over the edge of the bank. As luck would have it I completely missed, shooting what I now believe was under the bear's head. I knew instantly I had completely missed as if I had hit the bear, I felt certain the bear would have tumbled over the edge and into the slew. The bear made a fast exit and Dan and I approached the bank's edge after navigating yet another fast moving knee deep slew. We visually confirmed that this was the carcass sight and that the carcass had been started to be buried as a bear's cache. Wounded, dead or not I had no intentions of rushing the bank as I

understood from Dan that was what he wanted us to do. I told him the last thing I wanted to do was confront a wounded bear at dark. I said to him we need to back out of here and return tomorrow. He will still be here if dead or gone if not. We retreated walking backwards to the slew and made our way back to camp to tell of our encounter. Everyone was very supportive that they felt the bear was lying up on top of the bank and we would find him the next morning. I certainly appreciated their support, but knew what the real deal was. Still raining and somewhat dejected at the events of the day I retired.

September 5, 2005: It was Labor Day and yes it was still raining. Once again I awoke to the pitter patter of rain drops falling on the top of the tent. The routine today was pretty much the same as the previous day with the exception that after all of us had smattered the area with our scent where the bear had been the night before for hours looking for a blood trail that didn't exist. Tony finally conceded that I had in fact missed the bear. Upon returning to camp Tony promptly took off to get Jerry and Joe. Dan insisted that I shoot my CZ American Safari in 416 Rigby to see if it was properly sighted in. Dan was very impressed with the gun and the way it looked. I told him to carry for a while if he really wanted to be impressed. I was reluctant to do so as I thought it was unnecessary and put him off till later in the day. The balance of the day passed slowly. Tony returned later that day with Joe and then Jerry. They had been unsuccessful and Joe was ready to clock out and call it a hunt. Tony spoke with Denali Flying Service in hopes of getting Joe and Dr. Bob out soon. Unfortunately the weather was not going to cooperate for a few days so they were stuck here until it broke. I was feeling better and had a strong sense that if the bear came back which I thought it would we could get a shot on it tonight. About 4 PM I finally agreed to shoot the rifle a few times to prove I was right. Well I was wrong, my 416 Rigby shooting 350 Barnes TSX's was shooting 12" low at 100 yards. I couldn't believe it. I made the adjustments to the Leupold 3.5-10x 40 Vari X III rifle scope and after about three more shots had the problem corrected, thanks in large part to Dan's persistence. I asked Dan if he was still so impressed with the rifle that he would like to carry for me and he politely declined, noting that it was fairly heavy. Dan and I set out about 5:00 PM, it was still lightly raining, but we weren't going to kill a bear sitting in camp. We decided to start closer tonight which somewhat prompted the earlier departure. We needed to get set up closer to where we wanted to shoot from and allow things to calm back down before the scheduled arrival of our guest, Mr. Bear. Tonight we started about 250-300 yards out, with a final destination of about 150 yards from where we thought the bear would show. Everything went according to schedule and the plan with one small exception. The bear showed up walking the timberline along the bank's edge as we suspected he would do, walking into the wind. We saw him and had plenty of time to move up as he moved into the brush about 100 yards from the carcass. Sometime later Dan asked if I heard a noise. Having less than great hearing I told Dan I had not heard anything. Dan said it definitely sounded like two bears having a difference of opinion. Finally, the bear we saw earlier emerged directly under the drooping limb where he had been shot at the night before and stared at the carcass for maybe a minute. He then backed out of sight probably 5-10 feet off of the timberline at the bank's edge. We moved into our final position and waited. We didn't see the bear again. At 9:15 PM I told Dan that the bear wasn't likely to show himself again until dark and I had absolutely no intentions of a repeat performance of the night before. My feeling was our best bet was to back out and come back tomorrow, setting up early in the final spot we wanted to be so as to eliminate a similar performance like tonight's. I was convinced he would be back as there was no reason he wouldn't come back. Dan was very reluctant to leave, but I again reiterated, I am not

shooting unless it is a very high percentage shot. He conceded to my wishes and we backed out returning to camp. I felt good the entire way back as I really felt we had patterned the bear and now would take it the next night. And yes it was still raining. Upon returning to camp I proceeded to tell the guys what had transpired and how enthusiastic I was about the prospects for tomorrow evening. It was at that point that Tony jumped in and essentially curtailed any relationship I had been building with him. He jumped all over Dan and myself for not shooting at that bear and questioned whether he was going to need to take me out to shoot the bear as he wasn't about to sit around in camp for ten days while we were out trying to stalk that bear. He was quite honestly way out of line in my opinion. I told him I wasn't taking a shot unless I felt it was a high percentage shot as I had no interest in wounding a bear and not being able to find him. I further told him that the choice of whether to shoot or not after being given the okay was mine, not his and I was just as anxious to kill a bear and leave as the next guy, but only if the shot was a high percentage shot. He backed up a little, but the damage was done. He didn't talk to me directly or look me in the eye for the next two days. He told Dan he wanted him to take me out in the morning to hunt as he was now sure the bear was coming to the cache every five hours or so. This had no appeal to me whatsoever so rather than make an issue of it I retired to the tent and left the remainder of the guys under the tarp engaged in conversation.

September 6, 2005: Rain drops keep falling on my head; this was getting old, especially when Dan and Jesse roused me at 6:30 AM. I really didn't want to hunt as the rain was heavier than it had been the previous two days. I acquiesced and agreed to go, if for no other reason than to get Tony off of Dan's back. So at 7:00 AM Dan, Jesse and I set out in the rain on what I was sure would be a complete waste of time. 4 hours later my suspicions were validated as all we had seen that morning was rain so we called it a hunt and headed back to camp. We stopped briefly at a slew where Dan and Jesse in very short order caught a dogface salmon. They were going to take it back to camp to eat for lunch. We returned to camp and proceeded to shed our wet clothing seeking shelter from the steady rain that had been with us all morning. Tony still wasn't talking to me, which made for an uncomfortable feeling. John had gotten a fire going as the rained lightened slightly. Dan spent the next few hours trying to dry off as all his clothes were pretty wet while trying to get around to cooking the salmon. The afternoon passed surprisingly quick and I hurried Dan up to get ready as I really wanted to get back out for the evening hunt. Dan, Jesse and I headed out a little later than I wanted to which was around 6 PM. We managed to get set up in our final place and settled in by 7 PM. The wind tonight was still okay, but not as favorable as the night before and it seemed to be changing direction on us. About 8 PM it stopped raining, finally, the clouds started to break up to where you could even see blue sky. The wind was now fairly consistent and light from the direction opposite which it had been the night before. While this was not ideal, it was blowing out slightly from the timberline to us which would preclude we felt being sniffed out by a bear coming from either direction. 8:30 PM and Jesse said, bear, bear, shoot that bear. I asked where and he pointed him out. I said that was a black bear, he said no it wasn't, shoot before he gets into the slew. I quickly positioned the rifle steadying it on the log we were using for cover. I put the cross the hairs on his chest under his chin as he was quartering to us, not the ideal angle and squeezed the trigger. He jumped up and snatched at where I had hit him with his jaws. I hadn't broken him down by hitting him in the front shoulder, but he was dead on his feet the instant I shot. Dan and I both fired four times. I know I hit him at least one more time and Dan I know hit him at least once also. He jumped up on the top of the bank 15' from where I had initially shot him and collapsed. He had expired.

Jesse hauled freight across the slew and was the first one to reach the bear. He picked up a few stones and threw them at the bear, hitting him and when no additional movement occurred pronounced the bear dead. Dan was totally consumed in excitement as was I as we both made our way across the slew. I was the last to arrive at the bear. It looked big. The first shot from 160 yards had gone in just over his front shoulder taking out his heart and lungs before exiting out the other side behind the other shoulder. It was a really good shot from an award angle. After a several minutes of high fives and congratulations from each for total team effort, we took some pictures as dark was beginning to set in before starting back for camp. Here is where it gets real interesting. We hadn't gotten 150 yards down the timberline walking the gravel river bed when low and behold here came another bear very intently making its way to the carcass. It saw us and paid little attention to us. I expressed a serious concern about needing to run that bear off. Both Dan and Jesse were totally reluctant to fire a warning shot at it and Jesse's failed attempt to scare it off by throwing a rock at it left me concerned as to the safety of my bear. We noticed a fresh wound on the backside of the left rear leg of the bear and quickly concluded that my bear and this bear were the two that had gotten into it the night before with what Dan had heard. We stood there in amazement as the bear proceeded directly to the carcass grabbing it and dragging it around the general area. We decided to make haste and leave as we were no match for an aggressive meat loving bear that evening. We talked all the way back about the events that just occurred, especially the presence of the second bear and its aggressive attitude towards the carcass. We felt we had just seen something that was highly unusual and I wondered how safe my bear would be out there that night given the presence of that other bear. Tomorrow would tell. We returned to camp to questions about hearing eight shots and what had happened. Tony actually did shake my hand and say congratulations to me and I was glad for that. The rest of my evening was consumed in talk of the events of the past few hours. I retired earlier than the others as the conversation moved from the events of the evening hunt back to those of Tony and his views on life and politics.

September 7, 2005: The morning broke clear and crisp just at it had the first two days in camp. Barry was pretty backed up on his flights and it was going to be tough getting everyone out of camp today. Barry was going to fly in and snatch Joe, Dr. Bob and Tony. If he could get back that day he was going to get Jesse, Mike and I. If not we would have to wait until the 8th to get out. Jerry, Dan, Jesse, John, Mike and I headed out to get my bear mid morning. Prior to getting to my bear Barry came in and picked up Tony, Dr. Bob and Joe. They flew over us on their way back as we approached the kill site. When we were about 200 yards from the place where it had gone down the night before I could clearly see my bear was not where we had left it. In fact I couldn't see my bear. My worst fears were racing through my head as we approached. We found my bear had been dragged down into the slew and had had its back end eaten (nuts and penis) in addition to having a chunk taken out of its back right leg. Hopefully, the damage will not prevent me from having the hide turned into a rug as the bear is a perfect size for our family room. I was obviously less than thrilled that we had not exercised the opportunity to run the other bear off the night before, but that was the luck of the draw. What that other bear did to mine seems from all accounts to be highly unusual behavior and the exception not the norm. After a morning photo shoot, Jerry and Dan proceeded to skin the bear out while Jesse operated the camcorder getting some footage for what Tony hoped would be educational purposes. Mike and I stood around and kept an eye out for any bears that might be in the neighborhood. With the bear skinned out except the fleshing of the skull we made it back to camp in about 2 ½ hours start to finish. Dan

and Jerry didn't really finish skinning the bear out to the same degree as Mike's bear had been done. They said the tannery could finish it. They did however, get the fleshing done and salted the hide leaving it out to cure in the sun. As I subsequently found out at the tannery, the additional work that Jerry and Dan said the tannery could do cost me an extra \$150.00 above and beyond what Mike had to pay. I guess they thought we would run out of time. We stayed close to camp the rest of the day in the unlikely event Barry would make it back. As it turned out Barry wouldn't make it back until mid morning on the 8th. Late that afternoon Jesse went down to the river and caught a couple of sockeye salmon for an appetizer at dinner. Filleted and cooking over the fire in a frying pan a bottle of Jose Ceurvo gold tequila miraculously appeared at fireside. It was a treat to be enjoyed with the salmon that put the finishing touches on the end of the hunt. We had all stayed true to Tony's preference of not having alcohol in camp, but when he left, I felt properly handled alcohol would not be bucking the system as the hunting was over and Tony was not in camp. The fresh salmon and tequila were enjoyed by most as we wound down on our last night in camp. After dinner and a few hours at the fire we all retired knowing tomorrow was our last day in camp.

September 8, 2005: We awoke for the last time in what we had called home for nearly 10 days. While I was looking forward to a hot shower and real food, it was at the same time somewhat with sadness that I realized our hunt was coming to its conclusion and we would be venturing back to civilization. We had not heard a word from the outside world on the news, sports, weather, etc. for well over a week. It felt like we had been in a time warp. I did realize that after the second day in camp the only way I could remember which day of the week it was, was to look at my pill container to see what the last empty day was. Camp was broken down with the exception of the tent we had used. That tent was staying up at Joe's place so it was left up in the event not everyone got out that day. Gear was separated into what was going to Joe's and what was going to sheep camp. Barry made it in around 9:30 AM and took Jesse, Mike, myself and our bears and gear out. Jerry, Dan and John were left behind with the assurance Barry would be back sometime that day to get them. The return flight was just as smooth as the outward flight. After touching down we waited nearly an hour for Tony to show up to take us back to the B&B. Once there I made arrangements for Desmon to come get us to take us back to Anchorage so we could get our hides to the tannery and squared up with Collette. This all happened in a relatively short period of time and Tony was busy going in other directions getting prepared to go out for the sheep hunt in a day or two, thus we did not have the opportunity of bringing closure to our hunt and saying goodbye. Regardless of the differences of opinion, philosophical differences and such, I wished I had the opportunity to bring proper closure to the hunt with Tony as our outfitter, for both Mike and I had gotten what we came for, albeit somewhat smaller than what we had hoped for. Mike's bear squared at 7'-4" while my shortened bear squared at 6'-11" , lets call it 7'-0" for good measure as I am sure mine was a seven footer before the other bear feasted on it. We returned to Anchorage where we went directly to the Alpha Fur Dressers Tannery and then had the limo drop us at the Ramada Inn where I had made reservations from Palmer. After a hot shower and clean clothes we hit the town for real food and some shopping. We returned around 9:30 PM and made a call to Delta Airlines to change our reservations, rebooking for an early morning Saturday departure. This accomplished what Mike wanted by getting us back to Greensboro on Saturday night and providing a day of readjustment before we both went to work on Monday.

September 9, 2005: More shopping, including a visit to Wild West Guns of Anchorage, AK and more real food was the order of the day as we waited for Saturday morning to arrive.

September 10, 2005: Up at 5:45 AM it was the last day of our Alaska trip. We took the hotel shuttle to the airport and with somewhat of a wait in line finally got our tickets, bags checked and inspected and made our way through security. Mike got the pink slip and was the lucky one to go through the random search. It only took a few minutes and was not a problem. I told him I had been through that drill on a few occasions and it was his turn. We boarded the plane on time and as we were being pushed away from the gate I turned to Mike and said “you know this isn’t the end of the hunt.” Mike looked at me with an inquisitive look on his face not saying anything. I then said “it’s just another chapter in the book.”

The End



Brandt with his Bear



Mike with his Bear



A view of snow capped Glaciers across the Skwentna River



Another pic of Brandt’s Bear