

The Mentasta Lake area is prime grizzly country. The grizzly bear population in this region is high because food, such as salmon is abundant.

The Sockeye (red) salmon make their appearance in the big lake of Mentasta around the last ten days of June. This coincides with the blooming of the cottonwood trees and the operation of fish wheels.

The salmon gather at the mouth of the inlet creek that flows into the lake. This creek is known as "Fish Creek." The salmon spawn all around Mentasta Lake in early July. After the salmon are done spawning, they die off. This occurs in August. The dead salmon float along the shoreline of the lake. This is the time of the grizzly bear. These bruins "fish" along the shoreline of the lake.

In late September, I take my vehicle up to the local school and park it for the winter. I live right on the shoreline of the Mentasta Lake. The steep clay hill leading down to my home is not suitable for winter driving. My driveway is seven-tenths of a mile from the main village road. After my truck is situated for the winter, I walk back and forth. I have done this for many years.

As I hike back and forth from the school, village, and home I keep a shell in the barrel of my Winchester model 70 XTR 30.06 rifle. I walk with the safety off. I keep the safety off because of the many bears in the area. Some day, I will meet a bear or bears walking and in my path.

I have had several encounters with the bears of Mentasta Lake. In late September of 2001, I was half of the way to the village road – walking out when a pair of grizzly cubs approximately 2 years old, ran across the driveway about forty or fifty feet in front of me. As soon as I saw the two cubs, I knew their mother was close. Sure enough, she made her entrance and started for me! I was going to shoot her. I pulled the trigger and NOTHING HAPPENED. My dog, Pal, was only fifteen months old at this time and was, as usual, at my side. He is a mix of husky, Shepard, and wolf. He took off after all 3 grizzly bears and chased them into the brush. I could hear him growling and saw him running. I called him and he reluctantly returned to my side.

Pal and I stood there for over ten minutes. I was very scared. Later, I found that the reason the rifle would not fire was that the safety mechanism was back on click – the safety had been on. I never use that safety when I walk back and forth. I do not remember putting the safety back a click. This was the first time my puppy, Pal saved me from the grizzlies. God job, Pal!

The last five days of October 2004, it had snowed two and one-half feet. On November 2, 2004, Pal and I walked up the little hill and saw a big grizzly tracks in the snow. My home is located on a point with a big cove to the right and small cove to the left. I saw where the big bear had looked around in the corner of the small cove, looking for spawned out salmon. I thought the bear would wander off somewhere else. In the early hours of November 3, 2004, Pal and I walked around in the deep snow and saw where

that big bear had laid down in the snow in three different places around my yard – a very dangerous bear. I saw its tracks head towards the door and turn around.

On November 4, 2004, I saw a big brown grizzly bear coming around the corner of the big cove. I think that is “the bear!” It was raining hard at the time. I tried a long shot at it with my 30.06, but the sight picture was bad. No hits. The bear ran into the brush.

It was 12:20 a.m., August 28, 2005. I was in bed, when all of a sudden; the door was broken down with a loud noise. My dog, Pal, started barking and growling inside the doorway. The intruder, a very large grizzly bear was scared away by Pal’s incessant barking. I quickly got dressed and propped the door up in the shattered doorjamb. The frame was destroyed. I was very frightened because my bed is only fourteen feet from the door.

I told Pal, “STAY” and I went out on the porch with my 12-gauge shotgun and spotlight. I did not see the bear. I yelled in to the darkened woods, “You G.D.S.O.B.!!” I will call Ray Dale in the morning and ask him to build a new frame for my door.

I am staying up all night with my shotgun by me as I am very scared and nervous. Pal is sitting on the couch with me. God job, Pal, you scared the bear away and would not let it inside the house.

That was the second time Pal has saved me from the grizzly bears. The bear turned out to be seven foot tall. That means it is an old bear. The muddy six inch grizzly paw print is still on the door. That bear has to be shot. Don and Molly’s cabin has been wrecked ~~two~~ 3 times by a bear already – I think it is the same bear.

The muddy 6” grizzly paw print on the outside of the door + 1” = a 7’ grizzly bear.

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