

KNOTTED TWINE

X AN EPISTLE FOR FIELD AND STREAM.

Life is full of ironies.

We, as a species, have tamed the wild; we have nothing to fear from its creatures. What we have not tamed, we comprehend enough to avoid when deemed necessary. We rest assured the wild beast will not invade our sleep or attack us in our workaday world. All would seem in order. There 'tis again: Multiply and Subdue the Earth; both Prophecy and Admonition fulfilled. Ah Yes!, if it was not for the perpetual fright of one's fellow man, against whom one must take every precaution; dead-bolting one's doorway, as it were... a suit of armor has become a useless anachronism.

Lest I become 'carried away' in my denunciations and seeming paranoia, I ought return to elaborate my intimation of Irony. What will follow promises to be lengthy; that is, I will pursue the theme until I have naturally arrived at its terminus.

As part of our travels, we catalogued, as one of our considerations, the anticipation of encounters with the 'Alaska' Brown Bear, or his relatives, the Grizzlies and the Kodiaks, or ***Ursus Arctos***, as the general Latinization; the Grizzly appellation inspiring its own '***Ursus Horribilis***', keeping Latin scholars awake; and rounding out the foreign nomenclature applied to this awesome brute, the Kodiak earns his own consequentiality, or lack thereof, as ***Ursus Middendorffi***. Having been apprised of the bear's presence in the areas we had hoped to be cruising, we felt obliged to envision the ultimate encounter (much in the same way we would envision the ultimate wave, or a nuclear winter) anticipating a Surprise! encounter as the worst possible case. Never having encountered a wild beast much beyond a fox, a groundhog, possum, or rat in real life (mice are a bit wee), and perhaps nothing quite so large, even in my dreams, the size of a brown bear, who when mature, and standing, conservatively stated, measures eight feet, weighing well over one half ton, I possessed no foreknowledge of what was in store for us in such a meeting. I had vaguely remembered Leo Tolstoy's story of the Bear Hunt, a rather gruesome standoff between a wounded bear and the Hunter. A take-home lesson from all the information gleaned suggested a studious avoidance of the beast.

Beyond scant information then, and a willingness to call the

An Epistle

Brown Bear anything that any other nominalist will, I can offer very little authority to support my limited knowledge. Most people who have opinions regarding close contact with Grizzlies in the wild are hardly to be considered expert in the best conversational tone one should adopt in his encounters with these Kings of the North. However, absorbing opinions from self-acclaimed experts and other sources it would seem advisable one should tender a very unobtrusive etiquette if he or she would presume to invade His territory, where it becomes evident one is apt to be at a very great disadvantage in the bear's theater of operation.

A short 'run-down' of the 'opinions' is in order, and what one might deduce therefrom, and what best strategy to employ in sharing the wild with them. Resorting to short maxims: Do nothing to attract the Bear, which means, primarily, do not allow the odor of foodstuffs to permeate the atmosphere; Do everything to alert the Bear to your presence; Yes, a rather seeming contradiction. In an attempt to dispel the quandary, it must be stated that the Bear is reputed to possess very poor eyesight, while simultaneously possessing an acute sense of smell. The clarity in his eyesight is confined to close range, a distance upon which opinion varies, but not to such a large degree that in the end, you would most certainly see the Bear long before he would perceive you in your royal aspect. Some have ventured, 'the Bear cannot see clearly beyond fifty feet', which would be uncomfortably close for permitting him to view your winsome smile, and allowing him an opportunity to study your good intentions. It has been further adduced these creatures have excellent hearing which 'bears' on the previous quandary. It has been advised one should therefore appeal to that sense, putting the creature wise to one's presence early on, through the use of tinkling bells or some other symphonically 'bearable' noisemaking device, preferably accompanying one's bodily motions through the unsuspecting wilds. Very few suggestions were forthcoming how one might achieve this same early-warning whilst he took his nighttime repose; surely Bears sleep as well. Fortunately we, the first mate and I, would not be concerned with this last, lest a Bear stood between us and our floating home, or 'Gud help us', we should survive a shipwreck in the wilds.

It is thought, while Bears are generally considered omnivorous, and since man is not part of his daily diet, the beast would not attempt to dine upon ***homo sapiens***, unless from some perversity. Since his vision is poor, unfamiliar sounds, presuming of course,

KNOTTED TWINE

his skull has catalogued all the customary noises to be found in his habitat, may alert him to unsuspected dangers, particularly if the sounds are to be associated with the effluvium of Man. However, the Bear is reputed also to possess a canny intellect and may discern more than danger in the presence of Man. While a warranted caution may proceed from the beast, often enough Man means food, the two omnivores rather compatible therein, their diets being somewhat akin.

There are many convolutions to these permutations of Bear maxims, Bear logic, and Bear precautions. I'll attempt to brief in the remainder.

One is apt to encounter Bear where he will be at a great disadvantage in the terrain. A Bear is eminently more suited to his environment than you are (despite your cleverness). He is basically indestructible and is unimaginably powerful. One would most likely meet him in the forest near a river or stream where the terrain is rife with rock-strewn declivity and rise through which he clammers indelicately and with purpose, and through what must be construed as impediment to *homo sapiens*, and where Man would consequently be decidedly handicapped and compromised in a tangle of underbrush, bramble, root and rock.

It has been opined further, outrunning a Bear intent upon catching you is impossible. He also runs uphill faster than downhill, but is in no way restricted in his downhill progress resorting to somersaulting, perhaps inadvertently, as the situation may arise, wherein he would most likely keep apace with your feebler attempts to elude him. Perhaps one could gain some escape through burrowing whilst playing dead, or, as some have suggested, ascending some tree, out of reach. Tricky, but rather speculative, when one would be given a mere fraction of time to calculate the best course of action.

To further augment the terror and utter need to avoid these immense beasts, one never knows when he may stumble upon the She-Bear in her capacity as mother. Lore reveals, like all mothers with offspring, she is not to be trifled; she does not engage in any polite conversations in order to determine the extent of any danger to her cubs; she assumes the worst and acts accordingly. Beware! Bearwe! Exeunt.

Before departing the fiction, fact, myth and realities of Bear lore, without protracting you into boredom, it should be mentioned that, generally speaking, Bears will avoid thee, unless, of course, ye encounter the She-Bear with her young, or, unless the Bear has a genuine appetite for human flesh. As this narrative

An Epistle

progresses, it will become apparent some of these Bear creatures are accustomed to Man's presence, and are fearless as well.

As indicated already, the amount of time available to discern a bear's proximity and the set of his mind is likely to be numbered in seconds. If he cannot see you, but is aware of your presence, he might be standing upon his hind legs scanning about attempting to observe you in your glorious aspect. Now you will have an opportunity to observe him in his deliberations; you have but to wonder whether he notices you clearly in your full regalia or whether you appear as something indistinct of which he might care to examine more closely. It is said if he returns to all fours with his head pointing in your direction, it is time to activate the adrenaline and evacuate. Most likely he will point in another direction, retreating from this clever unknowable intruding two-legged appurtenance.

Lest it seem I make light of our precarious position with respect to this Giant Omnivore, I shall return to some of the deliberations engendered in order to account for and meet the challenge of the chance encounter.

You are allowed some choice, the least appealing of which is to stay home in your own protected environment; another is not to venture wherein you would expect to invade His privacy; and yet another is to proceed with caution and intelligence, taking into account all you might know or suspect as the worst. In addition you could potentiate your feeble being through the use of some adequate compensator, which might do more to inflate you beyond your sensibilities than be an effective competitor with the Brown Bear. We now begin to think of 'killing' as an effective means, since one's life in proximity to His could be ended as much through inadvertencies as through intent. Even if he was bowled over by your winsomeness, offering to shake your hand, his awkward manner and dubious social grace might leave you in disarray - no offense intended.

So, it has come to pass, you have decided to arm yourself with a "Shootin' Ir'n" which presumably you would carry 'at-the-ready' to use when his decision and intent was clearly recognized, when his cogitations had ceased, having lowered himself to all fours aiming his bulk in your direction. Given the limits of his vision, he might be within fifty feet of you. NOW! you must attempt to do your compensating or 'forever hold your peace (piece)'. Heh!, with what manner of armament, pray tell?!

One cannot drag a howitzer, a fifty caliber machine gun or a

KNOTTED TWINE

bazooka, or RPG about with him, even in the best of conditions. In lieu of having access to a military arsenal, what is available? As a bear must be 'stopped-in-his-tracks', one needs to be accurate in his thrust. Tarzan with dirk is fine for Tarzan and his peculiar mythology; perhaps only Ernest Hemingway or his brother were equal to the task, wielding some blunderbuss, they possessing some special instinct and would-be macho in subduing Wildness with the Firearm.

In my deliberations I quickly ruled out anything less gifted in firepower than a 30.06 or the 12-gauge shotgun, even considering these marginal, unless very much on target at close (too close) range. Whereas a 30.06 shell is reputed to go clean through a deer, not stopping him unless the projectile strike him in a vital place, one needs a full charge of powder to penetrate sufficiently the sinew and muscle of the Bear. Not owning a gun of any kind and not being any kind of a gun expert any more than I am a Bear expert, having only fired at some nebulous stationary targets while hanging on to the recoiling impact of an M-1, a B.A.R., a 50 caliber machine gun, a 45 caliber burp (grease) gun or the 45 automatic while attached to the military wherein I saw no action (Thank Gud), I felt inadequate to the task.

Much conversation (the old 'moo') ensued with gun owners and sellers wherein one heard much of muzzle velocity, grains of powder, type of projectile, all designed to do particular things to the LIFE that was to be impregnated and ended thereby. Some recommended the 44 Magnum hand gun as the ultimate hand gun, which would require an expert to aim and fire within any degree of the necessary accuracy.

One is more apt to be able to control some weapon he can brace against his shoulder, despite all the theatrics we have witnessed in the two-gun Westerns. Probably for the amateur, bracing a long-barreled weapon against his shoulder, planted in two hands, sighting down its barrel to achieve quick direction and aim would be more serviceable than a heavy short-barreled, hard to aim and hard to control, or steady, hand gun. Obviously, with practice one tends to overcome some of these difficulties.

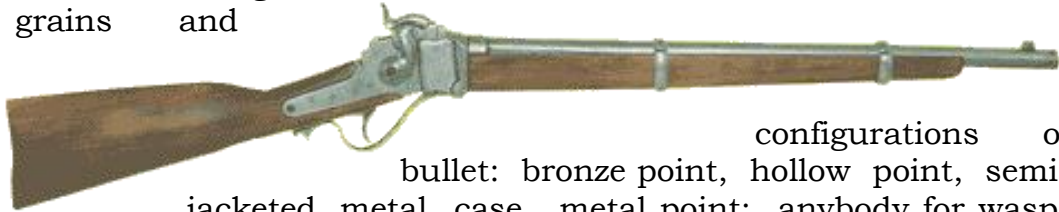
To penetrate the skull or sinew and muscle of the Bear, it was nearly decided a sheathed or jacketed projectile would be best, or one delivered with such power as to accomplish the same purpose. A ten gauge shotgun would be a better choice than a twelve; however these weapons



An Epistle

are not commonly available, whereas the twelve is. For the twelve one may obtain a three-inch high velocity slug or three inch double ought, if the weapon be appropriately chambered.

Shall we discuss rifles: Enfields, Mausers, 45-70 Governments, Winchester Magnums, Manlichers, Bearlickers and their caliber, grains and



configurations of bullet: bronze point, hollow point, semi-jacketed, metal case, metal point; anybody for wasp-

waisted sonics? Already this is a gruesome undertaking and ought sour one permanently on the whole messy business. However, being keen on the admonition 'nothing ventured, nothing gained' we were not to be deterred in our travels. That they might coincide with the wily beast gave rise to some serious considerations with regard to our survival in a chance meeting. We, or I, subsequently borrowed an automatic twelve-gauge chambered for 2 3/4 inch shells, having purchased some superslugs and double-oughts to fill the chamber. HAH!, thus it was we became armed, minimally, and if the truth be known or bravely confronted, with a peashooter. We wanted to give the bear a fair chance, observing that ancient paradox: 'Where wildlife cannot live, humans cannot survive'.

In some remote corner of the world, away from human earshot, Charline's excepted, I set about to fire this borrowed cannon, finding it accurate in that I was able to direct a projectile to strike a stationary target at close range (within one-hundred feet) within a reasonable margin; that is, if a Bear stood still at seventy-five feet, my aim coupled with the weapon's straightness and delivery in relation to sighting down its barrel, additionally stabilized in the rifling of the slug, it could be truly stated He would be struck somewhere about the skull. Thus being assured of some accuracy, all I needed was a 'drugstore' bear at his afternoon leisure arranged in a convenient posture, to use for a practice target.

Perhaps we have arrived at the place in this narrative where I might introduce the discussion of the Ironies to which I had referred earlier in this lengthy melodrama.

KNOTTED TWINE

Whereas, in passing through British Columbia, one would not be permitted to transport a hand gun, a rifle or shotgun was considered an honorable guest. When asked the routine question, by the Customs Agent, if we carried any firearms, at the mention of the shotgun, the customs agent merely inquired after the number of rounds of ammunition, two hundred being the nominal limit. The only advantage the hand gun possesses over its cousins rests in its concealability; surely a shotgun loaded with double-ought is a rather formidable foe whether concealed or not; and should one choose to conceal such a weapon, he need not pack a violin case.

Ah hah, finally we get under way, now making the Tale of The Bear our most preeminent business at hand.

Until we had arrived at Glacier Bay National Park we had seen a total of two Black Bear, *Ursus Americanus*; one foraging along the shore; another navigating through some stumpage on a logged-off hillside. Also we had spied the tracks of the Black Bear upon a logging road in the vicinity of the second sighting. During our entire sojourn we had not seen what we would deduce were signs of the Brown Bear. We even took the trouble to visit an area that purportedly proved to be a home for a pair of resident Browns, again not sighting them. We needed therefore not to carry a weapon, and did not upon our persons, but only once, at the end of our journey, this happening at the request of some other boaters in an area where many signs of Black Bear appeared, not unexpectedly, in and about a fruited orchard wherein we had been harvesting fruit with another couple.

To continue. While we eventually made our way to Glacier Bay National Park, we had been specifically instructed that firearms were not to be carried about within the Park. Since we had not carried the weapon upon any occasion previous to that time, we did not feel deprived in our right to BEAR arms. We entered a pristine Glacier Bay, having chosen North Sandy Cove as our first anchorage, this cove being tucked away in the middle of the Park on the east side behind some protecting islands. We whiled away a few days there waiting out the 'inclemencies' of mother nature. During one of the lulls in the seemingly incessant march of frontal systems we decided to row ashore to take the measure of one of the islands, photographing on occasion, accompanied by our two Shelties.

During our sauntering about, all of which took place on the sandy, pebbly beach, the underbrush consisting of a formidable

An Epistle

dense soggy wetness, the first mate had remarked she noticed a recess in a rock outcropping which might have answered as a bear's habitat, it revealing the appearance, on the outside, of some disturbance. We had thought nothing more of this observation, having grown accustomed to seeing the signs, particularly the conspicuous piles of blue-black seeded excrement we assumed were deposited by **Ursus Americanus**, whom we had assumed was foraging for the berries abounding hither, thither and yon. A pleasant walk it was - we two, with canines, alone in this 'pristine' wilderness.

We had returned to our dinghy, left high and dry upon the beach. I deposited my clammy raincoat and camera bag in the little tender before we proceeded down the beach in the opposite direction attempting to discover how far the gravelly beach presumed upon the world, which it did but very little, whereupon we decided to return to the mother ship.

Forthwith I repeat some portion of a letter I had written describing what took place as we approached our faithful tender 'Attadink'. With an admixture of political overtones to lend the dialogue a ruddier complexion, I wrote:

"I had a brief discussion with a Black Bear; not exactly a teddy bear; but I'll call him Teddy (Teddy from Chappaquiddick, the island remaining otherwise nameless). Anyway 'Teddy' suddenly



appeared from nowhere, or as we returned to our dinghy, pulled high up on the gravelly beach, after our two-hour sojourn, before the torrential rains had set in, there was Teddy chewing the gunnall

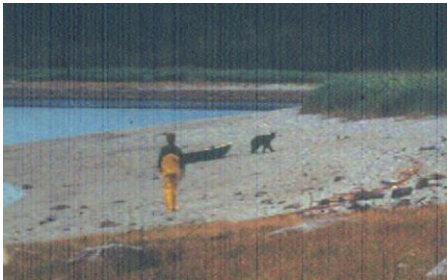
(gunwale) of 'Attadink'. Not content, he proceeded to mouth her little painter at which time I began hailing Teddy; "HOI!, HOI!" I said. Either he didn't hear me or he chose to be addressed differently.



Anyway he further concerned his palate with my raincoat lying inside the dinghy, and was beginning boldly to paw inside the tender, when I chose to ricochet some rocks against the side of the dinghy. Teddy was not to be dissuaded from his appetites. I began to fear for other stuffs in Attadink, my camera

KNOTTED TWINE

chief amongst them, this prompting more urgency to my "HOI! HOI!", as well as stepped-up rock throwing, becoming more aggressive, and approaching closer. Ah! Now! Teddy stands up a bit, seeming to be prepared to listen to what I have to say. I dared to go closer with my incomprehensible chatter, Teddy moving away a little, just far enough for me to get hold of an oar, a seven and one half foot arm of ash, and brandish it in the air berating him with all manner of Hoopla. But he stood there, nonplused, immune to my conversational tone. WELL! what do you do with a knothead like that? It so happened I grabbed the camera taking a couple of quick pictures of Teddy about thirty feet away. He seemed to want to enter into a discussion of his own, so I decided I had better get the dinghy into the water before he waxed eloquent. Thus I grabbed Attadink by her polypropylene painter, starting to pull her across the



Teddy appeared to dislike



Whats For Dinner?

his rear-end full of hot peppers, because he put his rear legs so far forward of his front legs that his escape velocity almost exceeded his forward progress - he romped at full gallop into the bushes. I surmised, mostly with hindsight, he had never had a conversation with a 'tupperware' dinghy, and was a bit amazed, shocked, and filled with consternation as Attadink '**ROARED**' across the gravel beach.

gravel towards the water when, LO!, my impertinence; or some strange thought occurred to him; or he remembered suddenly he had left something behind on the stove; or he had to go to the can hurriedly and privately; (or he had a vision of Merry Jo), or worse yet (worse for him), he acted as though someone had shot



That's Not Very Nicel

An Epistle

End of discussion with Teddy. (Actually Teddy returned from Chappaquidick to remain an officer in the public trust) We saw him later foraging upon beach grass as though Merry Jo had never existed. Then, despite all the stories to the contrary, we saw him swim to another island (in 40° [F] water) and return the next day to the scene of the crime (discussion). No more conversations. A Grand Jury was convened; I was not invited, so I'll never know what Teddy was thinking".

The First Mate could embellish this story from another point of view, having an entirely different perspective, and without humor.

As it turned out, the jocularly of the occasion must be measured against a future event of which we learned a week later, the day before we departed this glorious wilderness.

It is our considered opinion **Let Me Outta Here!** that these creatures (Teddy's relatives) are normally intimidated and shy of Man, except where food is a learned and proven adjunct to the latter; however we will be making some assumptions regarding this particular Bear called 'Teddy'.

Teddy appeared hardly shy and rather bold. We carried no food aboard the dinghy. Doubtlessly, if we had carried food aboard, the Bear would have made for it straightaway. In hindsight one must wonder at my lack of caution, as well as the Bear's presumptuousness and seeming lack of fear (it was only the different and peculiarly noisome racket of the plastic tender dragging across the gravel that alarmed him - nothing else).

We are assuming that, if this Bear had smelled food, being essentially fearless of Man, and who may even have been encouraged by men, at some juncture, through deliberate (humane) feeding or through human leavings, to approach Man and Man-things, he would not have been deterred by a lone individual camped ashore in his tent along with his foodstuffs. We further surmise, this particular animal is the very one who most likely entered, by what ever means, a ready opening or one slashed by himself with his reputedly sharp and powerful claws, to gain entrance to the source of what excited his olfactory sense.



KNOTTED TWINE

In so doing he was confronted with a person who may have been reclining cocooned in his sleeping bag, who, in attempting to discourage the Bear, or ward him off, met instead, a two to three hundred pound hungry, driven, slashing creature, that, by intent, or inadvertently, killed the person, whereupon, as omnivore without scruple, found the homo sapiens he had killed as appetizing as anything he had ever ingested.

We were informed that it was upon one of these very islands, (Chappaquiddick ?) at North Sandy Cove, the incident had occurred, all signs pointing to a Bear, whereupon the Park officials cast about in search thereof, killing one animal in the vicinity in whose stomach was discovered partly digested human parts.

It would be unfair to convict Teddy in absentia on hearsay evidence, circumstantial proximity and whatever other presumptions to guilt, but it is mine and Charline's particular view and prejudice that it was none other than Teddy who was rightfully accused of the crime. (*It may occur to the reader that the author may joke too much concerning Merry Jo, whereas in actuality he views the happenings in the state of Massachusettes, where he was born, as prejudiced toward royalty.*)

Certainly, if I had been carrying a twelve gauge, I would not have shot the Bear; it is possible I might have fired it to create a resounding noise if I had deemed it necessary. The Irony is all too apparent however; the only time I really needed the equalizer, I was prevented from carrying it with my person, despite all those earlier calculations and precautions taken, in ascribing to the principle of my own continuance.

A rather sobering event. I would imagine my views have not been substantially altered or improved through our experience, or by other's experiences; my guess being, I would not repeat my challenge to the Bear (not abandon my gear), and would be more inclined to wonder how many bears have made the association between Man and victuals, and how delicately or indelicately they tread the line of propriety, and if they do, wherein lies their threshold of self-containment. It also may be assumed that Islands, per se, afford no protection against these foraging omnivores. I would therefore advocate even more caution, all other considerations being the same. I would be tempted to carry a cannon for protection when taking hikes, even on beaches. I would not advocate shooting Bear any more than I would normally advocate the taking of any life, which I most certainly do not advocate. After all, it is I who am the intruder; it is best I demonstrate all the social graces of the guest, not presuming

An Epistle

myself conqueror and Lord of the mere beasts. It would be in my own interest to observe a modicum of propriety.

