

Three Grizzlies, One Human Dead in Glacier Park

Phil Knight

1993

On October 3 a lone hiker was killed by grizzly bears near Granite Park Chalet in Glacier National Park, Montana. John Petranyi of Madison, WI was found dead by another hiker on a trail between the Chalet and the Loop. It appears Petranyi encountered a sow with two cubs and was attacked and injured, then later attacked again and killed. Part of his remains were eaten by the bears. Rangers believe the sow killed him in defense of her cubs, then took the opportunity to feed. This was the first human killed by grizzlies in the park since 1987.

Because the bears had eaten human flesh, Park Service officials pronounced a death sentence on them. But it took the NPS a week to find the bears which were supposedly responsible. Rangers who had visited the kill site and been charged by bears believed they knew which bears to look for. Come On! Bears can be pretty hard to tell apart, especially when your only view of them was during panicked moments as you were being charged! Helicopter pilot Jim Kruger spotted the allegedly responsible bears on October 11 near Granite Park. Rangers then closed in and shot them. Kruger is the infamous tourist pilot—who allegedly buzzes bears with his helicopter for the pleasure of clients as the bears gather to feed in the fall.

Several individuals and animal advocacy groups called and wrote the Park Service, asking them not to kill the grizzlies. But they did so anyways. This case brings up several important questions which you can bet are not going to be dealt with in the mainstream media.

First and foremost is our relationship with bears and our place in the food chain. Are we not potential prey? Will we exterminate every animal which is a potential threat to us? We'd better kill all large predators. Then all birds large enough to inflict injury. Let's not stop there. What about pets? Many of them are dangerous when threatened. When we are through there, let's flatten out the earth so we cannot fall off anything. Where will it end? When we all live in padded room, eating through tubes? We cannot eliminate all risks. By god, we *need* a few maneating grizzlies out there, if not a whole shitload! John Petranyi might not agree, but we cannot ask him. Ask Sarah Muller of Bozeman who was attacked by a sow grizzly defending her cubs in Yellowstone Park this fall. Her first words upon rescue were to ask that the bears be spared. And they were. Thank you Sarah!

Grizzlies cannot be blamed for sometimes preying on a soft, vulnerable creature such as a human. But should we target individuals who actually eat humans? It seems that any other bear out there is just as likely to kill someone in defense of her cubs, and then decide to dine on the remains. This is one of the risks associated with travel in grizzly country, a risk that some people feel is needed, even welcome. As Doug Peacock says, if there is not something out there big enough and mean enough to eat you, it is not true wilderness!

Can we afford to kill a breeding age sow with cubs (the second such family removed from the Glacier-area ecosystem this fall, see related article) from an imperilled population which has an extremely low reproductive rate? This was not considered in the revenge-like actions of the Park Service. I speculate that these bears were killed to

prevent the Park Service from having to deal with potential legal and public backlash, rather than through any great desire to prevent risks.

Think about how a bear attack might affect you and the bears. Consider the risks, both to you and the bears, associated with travelling in grizzly country before you go. Consider carrying a note on your person which absolves the bears of any wrongdoing in the event of your death. And defend those who might eat you!

The Ted K Archive

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