



Bears and People

S. Michel

SAFE TRAVEL IN BEAR COUNTRY

Canada's mountain national parks are home to both grizzly and black bears. You can run into a bear anywhere here, be it on a busy trail close to town or in the remote backcountry. Bears generally prefer to avoid people, however, encounters between bears and people do occur.



M. Charles

Knowing how to avoid an encounter with a bear is the best way to safely enjoy the parks. In the event you do come across a bear, it is important to be familiar with bear behaviour. How we respond during an encounter with a bear depends on the type of interaction.

AVOIDING an encounter is the best approach.

Bears are extremely sensitive to the stress of human activity. You can help protect bears by avoiding encounters with them.

Make noise!

Let bears know you are there. Call out, clap hands, sing or talk loudly – especially near streams, dense vegetation and berry patches, on windy days, and in areas of low visibility. Bear bells are not effective.

Watch for fresh bear signs.

Tracks, droppings, diggings, torn-up logs and turned-over rocks are all signs that a bear has been in the area. Leave the area if the signs are fresh.

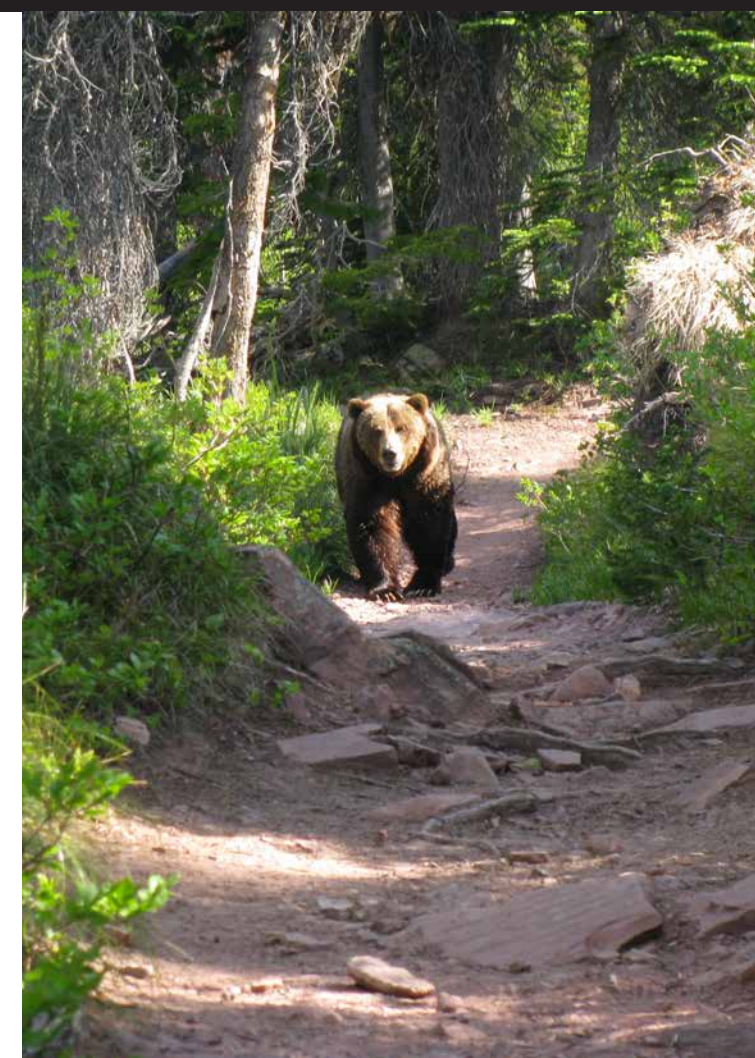
Keep your dog on a leash at all times or leave it at home. Dogs can provoke defensive behaviour in bears.

Larger sized groups are less likely to have a serious bear encounter. We recommend hiking in a tight group of four or more. Never let children wander.

Use officially marked paths and trails and travel during daylight hours.

If you come across a large dead animal, leave the area immediately and report it to Parks Canada.

Dispose of fish offal in fast moving streams or the deep part of a lake, never along stream sides or lake shores.



IF YOU SEE A BEAR

Stop and remain calm. Be ready to use bear spray. Do not run away.

OBSERVE:

Is the bear UNAWARE of your presence?

If so, move away quietly without getting its attention.

Is the bear AWARE of your presence?

Bears may bluff their way out of an encounter by charging and then turning away at the last second. Bears may also react defensively by woofing, growling, snapping their jaws and laying their ears back.

Stay calm. Calm behaviour can reassure the bear. Screams or sudden movements may trigger an attack.

Speak to the bear. Talk calmly and firmly. This lets the bear know you are human and not a prey animal. If a bear rears on its hind legs and waves its nose about, it is trying to identify you.

Back away slowly. Never run! Running may trigger a pursuit.

Make yourself appear BIG. Pick up small children and stay in a group.

Do not drop your pack; it may provide protection.

If you must proceed, make a wide detour around the bear or wait at a safe distance for it to move on.

IF THE BEAR APPROACHES

Stop and remain calm. Get ready to use your bear spray. Do not run away. Assess the bear's behaviour and determine why it is approaching.

Is it DEFENSIVE?

The bear is feeding, protecting its young and/or surprised by your presence. It sees you as a threat. The bear will appear stressed or agitated and may vocalize.

Try to appear non-threatening.

Speak in a calm voice.

When the bear stops advancing, start slowly moving away.

If it keeps coming closer, stand your ground, keep talking, and use your bear spray.

If the bear makes contact, fall on the ground and play dead. Lie still and wait for the bear to leave.

Is it NON-DEFENSIVE?

A bear may be curious, after your food, or testing its dominance. In the rarest case, it might be predatory – seeing you as potential prey. All of these non-defensive behaviours can appear similar – and should not be confused with defensive behaviours.

The bear will be intent on you with head and ears up.

Speak in a firm voice.

Move out of the bear's path.

If it follows you, stop and stand your ground.

Shout and act aggressively.

Try to intimidate the bear.

If it approaches closely, use bear spray.

HANDLING AN ATTACK

Most encounters with bears end without injury. If a bear actually makes contact, you may increase your chances of survival by following these guidelines. In general, there are two kinds of attack:

DEFENSIVE ATTACK

This is the most common type of attack.

Use your bear spray.
If the bear makes contact with you, PLAY DEAD!

PLAY DEAD! Lie on your stomach with legs apart and position your arms so that your hands are crossed behind your neck. This position makes you less vulnerable to being flipped over and protects your face, the back of your head and neck. Remain still until you are sure the bear has left the area.

Defensive attacks are generally less than two minutes in duration.

If the attack continues, it may mean the attack has shifted from defensive to predatory – **FIGHT BACK!**

PREDATORY ATTACK

The bear is stalking (hunting) you along a trail and then attacks. Or, the bear attacks you at night. This type of attack is very RARE.

Try to escape into a building, car or up a tree. If you cannot escape, do not play dead. Use your bear spray and FIGHT BACK!

FIGHT BACK! Intimidate that bear: shout, hit it with a branch or rock, do whatever it takes to let the bear know you are not easy prey. This kind of attack is very rare but it is serious because it usually means the bear is looking for food and preying on you.



Remember . . .

It is very difficult to predict the best strategy to use in the event of a bear attack. That is why it is so important to put effort into avoiding an encounter in the first place.

BEAR SPRAY

Carry bear spray with you at all times on the trail, ensure it is accessible and know how to use it.



S. Gignac

Bear spray can be effective with some bears when used properly. Be aware that wind, spray distance, rain, freezing temperatures and product shelf life may influence its effectiveness. Familiarize yourself with the proper use of bear spray (including the manufacturer's specific instructions) and keep it readily accessible. However, the best way to live safely with bears is to avoid contact with them.

CYCLISTS AND TRAIL RUNNERS

Your chosen activity is a dangerous one in bear country. Your speed and quietness put you at increased risk for sudden bear encounters.

- Slow down through shrubby areas and when approaching blind corners.
- Make noise, travel in groups, be alert and always watch ahead.
- Do not wear earbuds while travelling on park trails.

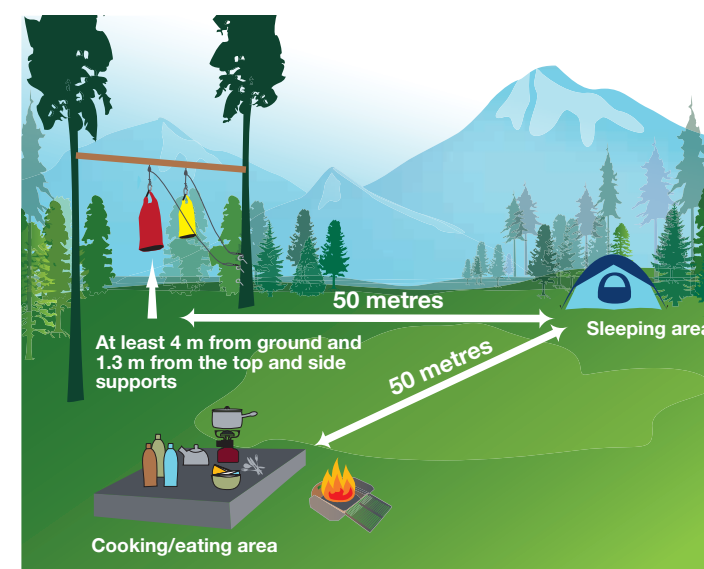


M. Fitzpatrick

BACKCOUNTRY CAMPING

To stay safe and protect wilderness, travel with two goals in mind: limiting your impact by avoiding encounters and managing your food, odours and garbage.

- Camp in designated areas where provided.
- If random camping, set up cooking, eating, and food storage areas at least 50 metres downwind from your tent. Ensure good visibility so animals cannot approach unseen. Avoid camping, cooking or eating near running water, thick brush, animal trails or berry patches.
- Keep yourself and campsite odour-free. Keep sleeping bags, tents, and sleeping clothes free of food, food odours or beverages.
- Leave smelly cosmetics at home. Store toiletries and personal items with food.
- Store your food, pet food, livestock feed and garbage away from your tent. Use storage facilities in designated backcountry campgrounds. In random camping areas, hang it between 2 trees at least 4 metres above the ground and 1.3 metres from top and side supports or use bear resistant canisters.



- Wash and store all dishes and food utensils immediately after use. Strain food particles from dishwasher and store with garbage. Dump dishwasher in designated areas or at least 50 metres from your sleeping area.
- Pack out garbage – do not burn or bury it and do not dispose of it in pit privies.

BEAR SIGHTINGS

Report bear sightings and encounters to Parks Canada staff.

Banff, Kootenay and Yoho:
Park Dispatch 403-762-1470

Jasper, Mount Revelstoke and Glacier:
Park Dispatch 780-852-6155

Waterton Lakes:
Park Office 403-859-2224

For general information visit:
pc.gc.ca
or a Parks Canada Visitor Centre



D. Reilly

A BEAR'S SURVIVAL GUIDE

Making a living in the mountain parks . . . 365 days a year.

Bears need whole ecosystems to survive. The mountain national parks are an important part of the remaining grizzly and black bear habitat in North America. Yet, the mountains can be a challenging place for bears. At a minimum, bears need access to good quality habitat, a safe place to raise their young, and freedom to move through large home ranges with as few obstacles and human disturbance as possible.

What's a bear got to do to make a living here throughout the year? Read on!



K. Johnson

Spring



Bears emerge lean from hibernation, onto a landscape scarce with food.

There is snow at high elevations, so bears congregate in valley bottoms to find early green-up. Grizzly bears head to sunny, exposed avalanche slopes to dig for roots and bulbs. If they are lucky, bears may find carcasses of winter-killed animals which are a critical energy boost, especially for a female nursing cubs.

Males seek out available mates . . . often travelling great distances.

The grizzly male's urge to reproduce is strong but females do not reach breeding age until around 5 years old and it may be another 5-6 years before they are ready to breed again. To secure food and available mates, a male's home range may be as large as greater Vancouver. Black bears also have low reproductive rates when habitat quality is poor.

Summer

As snow retreats, plants flourish and bears range widely to find these green pockets.

Avalanche slopes remain critical to grizzly bears, offering a rich variety of plant food and forest edge that provides cover. Black bears, a forest species, remain largely in the valley bottoms where they find food and security from grizzly bears.

Bears are devoted mothers.

Here in the Rockies, grizzly bear cubs may remain with their mothers for up to 5 years, learning the ropes for survival in the mountains. Female grizzlies aggressively defend their cubs from dominant male bears and other threats. Black bear cubs are ushered up trees for protection from adult black bear males and grizzly bears.



B. Spencebury



J. Coker

Fall

Bears are driven to consume up to 35 000 calories per day.

Bears dig, push, rub and peel their way through an area looking for food. This behaviour leaves behind interesting clues – large diggings (for ground squirrels and roots), turned over rocks and logs (insects), berry bushes that have been stripped clean (up to 250 000 berries/day in peak season). The focus is feeding on berries found in forest openings, including trails, road edges and even in campgrounds.

Winter

Bears give birth in mid-winter . . . if they are fat enough.

Both black and grizzly adult females have a physical adaptation called "delayed implantation" – the fertilized egg does not implant in the uterus unless the female has enough fat reserves to grow and nurse cubs. Born into a secure den environment, the tiny, blind cubs (usually one to three) suckle on their sleeping mother's rich milk.

Remember that it is possible to see bears out and about in winter. Bears are not true hibernators; they have been known to stay active during periods of extended warm weather, or if food is easily accessible.



A. Atmwal

SURVIVAL OF THE SPECIES

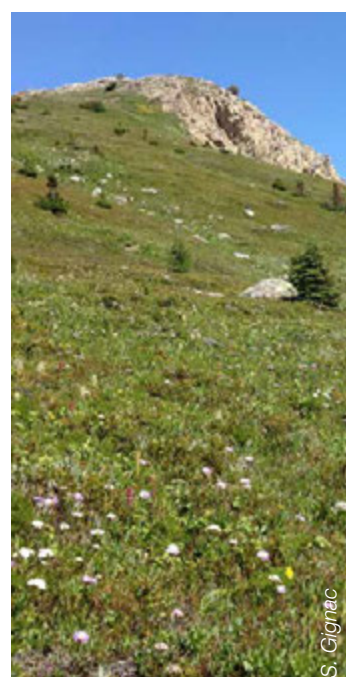
Grizzly bears have the lowest reproductive rate of any mammal in North America. To maintain a population, births must balance deaths. Although bears can live to be 25 years or older in the wild, many die human-caused deaths well before this, cutting short their legacy of future offspring.



A. Atmwal

A challenging landscape

What does a bear see?



S. Gignac

Refuge

a secure home.



S. Gignac

50% Rock & Ice

and the precious green space that is left.



J. Allen

Seasonal Foods

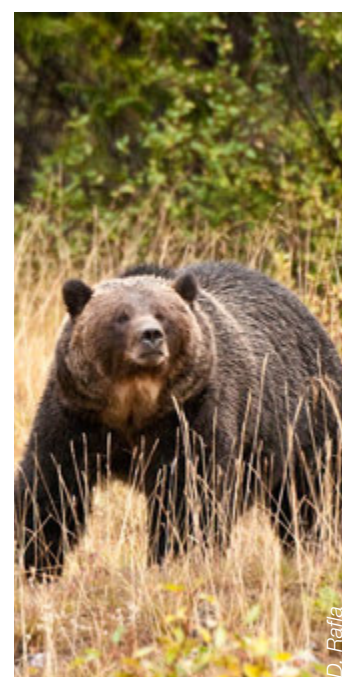
in scattered patches.



D. Garrov

Potential Den Sites

for the upcoming winter.



D. Parlat

Other Bears

cubs to protect; a mate a mountain range away; rivals.



P. Zizka

People

trails, roads, railways, towns to manoeuvre around.

The landscape obstacle course

Even in protected areas, bears face a kind of obstacle course where it is becoming harder to avoid people. Think of what it would be like to be a bear travelling through the mountain national parks in midsummer – trying to bypass towns, campgrounds, highways, railways, and busy trails – and still find enough food to survive.

To successfully raise cubs and sustain a healthy population, bears need access to as much quality habitat as possible over a short period of time, with few human surprises.

Before you hit the trail, think about the time of year, what the bears are probably doing and how you can give them the room they need to do it.

Conservation is not just about bears; it is about protecting the whole ecosystem. Parks Canada has a responsibility to protect wildlife and their habitats. As a national park visitor, you can help protect bears and reduce the likelihood of an unpleasant bear encounter by learning more about bear behaviour.

Bottom line?

Give bears the space they need to make a living.



A. Atmwal

For more information:

pc.gc.ca/mtn-bears

Visit a Parks Canada Visitor Centre

HOW YOU CAN HELP PROTECT BEARS

The best thing you can do for bears is to limit their exposure to you.

- Consider not stopping when you see a roadside bear.
- Put all garbage in wildlife-proof garbage bins.
- Keep your picnic or camping site attractant-free. Move the food, cooler, dirty dishes, recyclables, BBQ, lotions and pet food into your vehicle, trailer or storage locker (tents are not bear-proof).
- Use official trails only and leave the wild trails to wildlife.
- Respect closures and seasonal trail restrictions – they are in place for your safety and to give bears a chance to use critical habitat undisturbed.
- Pay attention to bear warnings – follow recommendations. Be careful when travelling through these areas, or choose a different route.



Dispose of garbage properly



Don't leave food items



Observe from the safety of your car

If you see a bear by the road . . . slow down – consider not stopping

Bears need to forage undisturbed in order to gain enough fat to survive the winter. Your decision to drive by gives bears the space they need to make a living in this challenging landscape.

At all times . . .

- Observe and photograph bears from the safety of your car.
- Remain a respectful distance from the bear.
- Never feed a bear.

If you stop . . .

- Be aware of the traffic around you.
- Pull over where it is safe to do so.
- Use your hazard lights to alert other drivers.
- Watch for a few moments, take a quick photo, and then move on!
- If a traffic jam develops, move on. It is unsafe for people and bears.



A. Atmwal



A. Favre

What happens to a bear when it encounters people?

- It can alter its path of travel** or abandon an area, displacing it from important habitat.
- It can react aggressively:** this usually only happens when the bear is surprised at close range and feels threatened. Serious human-bear encounters may result in the bear's destruction and loss from the ecosystem.
- It becomes habituated:** with frequent, repeated exposure to people, a bear loses its natural wary behaviour. It is more likely to enter a campground or townsite where food or garbage may be improperly stored.