

BACKCOUNTRY HORSEMEN OF CALIFORNIA

# Black Bear Sense

A COMMON SENSE GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING BEARS



A leaf fell  
in the woods . . .

The deer heard it.  
The eagle saw it.  
And the **bear** smelled it.

You humans have me figured to be just like Yogi, Booboo or your cuddly stuffed Teddy Bear. Please remember; I am a wild animal. Statistically, you are quite safe from us bears. We do add a risk to you visiting the backcountry but you take a much greater risk driving to the trailhead. Even if you should die in the wilderness, you are much more likely to fall off a cliff, drown, suffer heart failure or succumb to hypothermia than you are to be attacked by one of us bears.

My eyesight is not perfect but my sense of smell and hearing are very keen. I can smell you humans coming for quite some distance and I'll usually be gone at the first whiff of human intrusion. There are some of us bears you have invited in for milk and cookies. To some of my fellow bears, the smell of humans in the woods works like a dinner bell. All of us bears remember where our meals come from. We aren't dumb and our stomachs rule. We have a road map sketched in our minds. All the best restaurants (campsites, berry patches, cars, oak groves, etc.) are located on this map and we will visit them again in a couple of days.

We bears are intelligent and opportunistic critters and when we become accustomed to the idea that humans share our space, we readily take advantage of everything that association has to offer — such as helping ourselves to your delicious pork and beans, granola bars, bacon, toothpaste, soap. Some of us have even cultivated a taste for chocolate. We will also eat chap stick and deodorant. With noses like ours, it is impossible to hide the fact that you are keeping all that good stuff in your tent, your car, or your camper! Our noses lead us to the food and our incredible strength gets us past almost any obstacle. We are able to open the side of your trailer as though we had can openers for claws. We will open cans of spaghetti sauce and ravioli. The fact is, when we bears are offered the choice, we will almost always opt for the easiest meal at hand; we have discovered that beef stew with milk and cookies tastes better than grubs!

If we gain access to your food, we become habituated. That means we become dependent on human food sources and are less afraid of humans. Therefore, it is critical that we never gain access to human food. You humans need to mind your manners while you are visiting the forests and parks. Take time to store your food properly at the campground and in the backcountry. It is your moral and legal responsibility. Proper food storage makes the difference between a wild bear and a dead bear because problem bears are often destroyed. The following suggestions may make the difference of having a good time during your visit or going home angry and upset. Please help us both stay alive.

# Black Bear Essentials to Remember

The following are what we bears would like you humans to remember.

**Y**ou Must Be Alert

**P**lease Do Not Surprise Me

**Y**ou Are Being Aggressive If You:

Get between me and my cub  
Are anywhere near a carcass ....

It's my food!

Walk directly towards me  
Circle or crowd me .....

I need an escape route!

Try to take "your" food away from me .....

It's mine!



The following are some helpful hints to remember while visiting the forests and parks.

**A**void a Confrontation

Separate cooking and sleeping areas  
Store food and garbage properly  
Keep a clean camp site

**A**void a Confrontation: Watch for these Signs

Large areas of torn up ground  
Rocks or boulders turned over  
Logs or stumps torn apart  
Fish or dead animals  
Berries  
Claw marks on trees  
Bear scat

**R**emember: Wild Animals Can Be Dangerous

Bears habituated to food are dangerous  
Do not run  
Try to look larger than you are

## Remember ...

Bears have an extraordinary sense of smell. Bears are attracted to and will eat anything with an odor. While not normally aggressive towards humans, bears are possessive of their food and will defend it. They are very quick and powerful. **DO NOT TRY TO RETRIEVE YOUR FOOD FROM A BEAR.** If a bear gets into your food, stay a safe distance away and then be sure to clean up the mess afterwards. Report incidents to a ranger. You can keep bears wild and alive by storing your food properly. Just use some thought and preparation.

## Proper FOOD STORAGE for Backcountry Users:

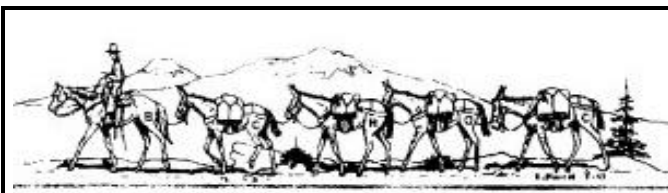
On some trails you may be visited by bears every night. On others, you may not see bears your entire trip; however, that does not mean that bears do not live in that area. In all cases, the best way to store your food properly is in a portable, BEAR-RESISTANT CANISTER OR PANNIER. Safe food storage is as simple as placing the locked canister or pannier on the ground 50 feet from your camp. **THIS METHOD OF FOOD STORAGE IS THE ONLY PROVEN, EFFECTIVE WAY TO STORE YOUR FOOD.** It is required in some areas of the backcountry that you store your food in bear-resistant containers. Please check with the agencies about requirements before starting your trip. Canisters are for sale and rent at sporting goods stores and some ranger stations.

Panniers are available through some saddle shops. Using a bear-resistant container allows for maximum freedom and safety while traveling and when choosing a camp location.

The counter-balance method should be your last resort. This method is hard to do well, requires trees and rope, and bears often thwart it. In fact, bears will probably get your food if you do not get out of your warm bed and make some mighty loud noise and keep a sentinel on watch after the first visit.

## Proper STORAGE at Campgrounds and Trailheads:

Food storage is just as important at campgrounds and trailheads. Having more people and vehicles around doesn't mean there is less danger of losing your food. To a bear, more people means more food. **STORE ALL FOOD IN FOOD STORAGE LOCKERS IF THEY ARE AVAILABLE.** If there are no lockers, then store the food and ice chest in your vehicle (better in the trunk), keep them covered and out of sight. Leaving food in your vehicle at the trailhead while you are in the backcountry is asking for trouble. Bear-resistant containers work when camping at campgrounds, too!



Approved for distribution by

**Backcountry Horsemen of California**

P.O. Box 40007

Bakersfield, CA 93384-0007

[www.bchc.com](http://www.bchc.com)

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