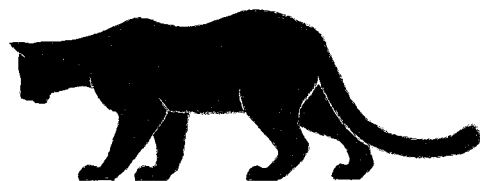
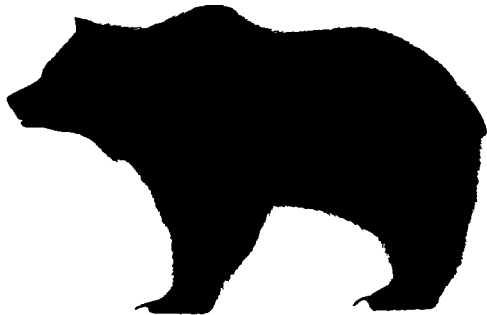
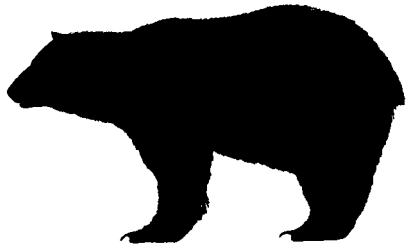


Be Aware!

Bears and cougars are wild, powerful and unpredictable. Despite the number of visitors to British Columbia's protected areas each year, encounters between these animals and humans are low. Actual attacks are extremely rare. When they do occur, it is generally the result of peoples' careless actions.

Keep your visit to British Columbia's protected areas safe by acting responsibly and respecting the wildlife. Your actions affect the safety of future park visitors and the animals that make provincial parks their home.

By using the information in this brochure, you can significantly reduce the risks associated with encountering a bear or cougar in the wild.



Recommended Reading

Bear Behaviour

Bear Attacks: Their Causes and Avoidance
S. Herrero. 1985. Nick Lyons Books, New York, NY; and Hurtig Publishers, Edmonton, AB.

Bear Biology

Grizzly Bear Biology: Concepts and Activities
(Teacher Guide), D. Denning. 1998. Queens Printer, Victoria, BC.

Grizzly Bear Biology: Concepts and Activities
(Student Guide), D. Denning. 1998. Queens Printer, Victoria, BC.



For More Information

BC Parks

<http://wlapwww.gov.bc.ca/bcparks>



BRITISH
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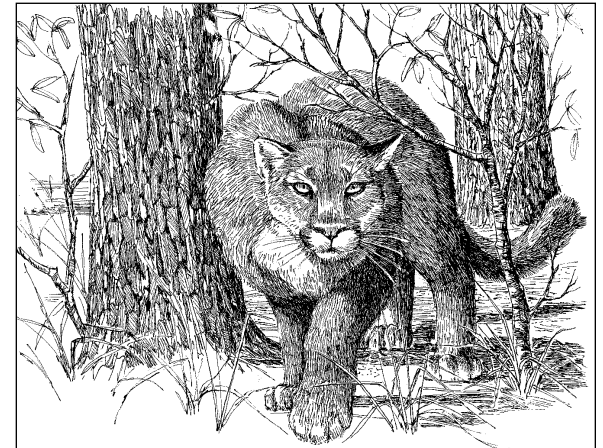
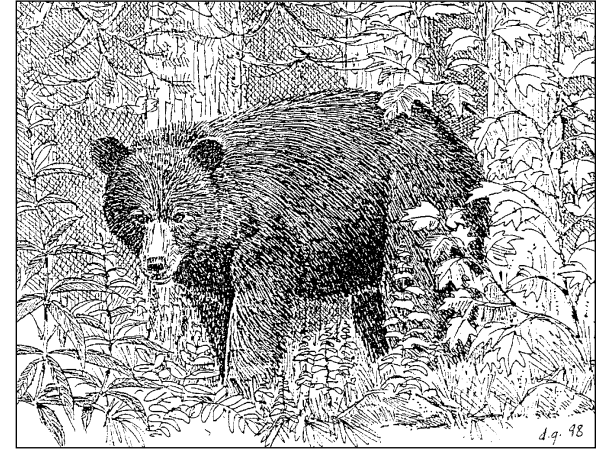
Ministry of Water, Land
and Air Protection



03/2002



Bears and Cougars



Being responsible and prepared is your best defense against a bear or cougar attack. Learn the advice in this brochure and follow it closely. In the unlikely event that you do encounter a bear or cougar, notify park staff immediately.

Know Your Cougar Facts

- ▶ Cougars are mostly found in the southern third of British Columbia.
- ▶ Encounters between cougars and humans are extremely rare.
- ▶ We have little understanding about what triggers a cougar attack.
- ▶ Children under the age of 16 are most vulnerable to an attack.
- ▶ Cougars typically attack from behind and deliver a crushing bite to the spine at the base of the skull.
- ▶ Although cougars are most active at dawn and dusk, they will hunt at any time of the day or night in all seasons.



Learning to Identify Cougars

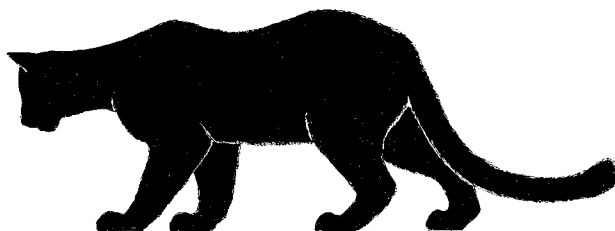


TRACKS

Left front

COUGAR

Felis concolor Kerr



Cougar

Colour: reddish-brown to grey-brown, with lighter underparts.

Height: 80 centimetres at the shoulder.

Length: Up to 2.5 metres, including the tail.

Weight: 45 – 90 kilograms. Females are smaller than males. The biggest cougars are found in the interior and the Kootenays.

Characteristics:

- long tail, up to one-third of total body length
- small head relative to the body
- short, unspotted fur

Diet: main prey is deer, but will eat most animals, including moose, coyotes, black bear cubs, porcupines and house pets.

Habitat: favour rocky and mountainous terrain, but also found in forested and open areas. Travel long distances in search of prey.

Avoiding Cougar Encounters

Many of the safety precautions recommended for bears apply to cougars as well.

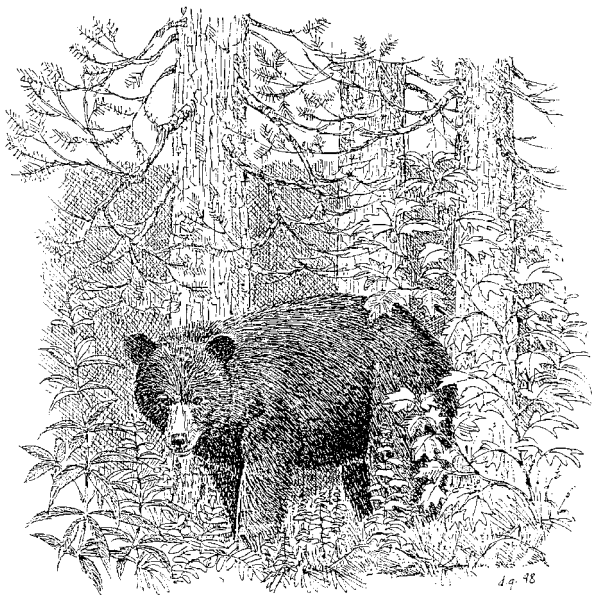
- ▶ **Keep pets leashed**
Cougars have been known to eat house pets. Keep your pets on a leash, or leave them at home.
- ▶ **Always keep children nearby and in sight**
Cougars are attracted to children. Because of their small size and high voices, cougars may confuse them with prey. Never let children wander.
- ▶ **Hike as a group**
Cougars are unlikely to attack a group. Avoid hiking alone.
- ▶ **Reduce the chance of surprising a cougar**
Allow a cougar to pick up your scent by keeping the wind at your back. Use extreme caution in strong wind or around loud water. Make noise to alert cougars to your presence.
- ▶ **Watch for cougar signs**
Stay alert. If you see cougar signs, leave the area. Tracks, droppings, scratched trees and food caches are all cougar signs. Cougars also urinate or defecate on piles of forest debris to mark their territory. These piles, called scrapes, also indicate the presence of cougars.
- ▶ **Never approach cougar kittens**
In the unlikely event you find cougar kittens, leave the area immediately. A female cougar will defend her young.

If You Meet a Cougar

- ▶ Stay calm and keep the cougar in view. Pick up children immediately. Back away slowly, ensuring that the animal has a clear avenue of escape. Make yourself look as large as possible. Never run or turn your back on a cougar.
- ▶ If the cat shows intense interest or follows you, respond aggressively. Maintain eye contact with the cat, show your teeth and make loud noises. Arm yourself with rocks or sticks as weapons. Crouch down as little as possible when picking things up off the ground.
- ▶ If the cougar attacks, fight back. Keep the animal in front of you at all times. Convince the cougar you are a threat, not prey. Use anything you can as a weapon. Focus your attack on the cougar's face and eyes.

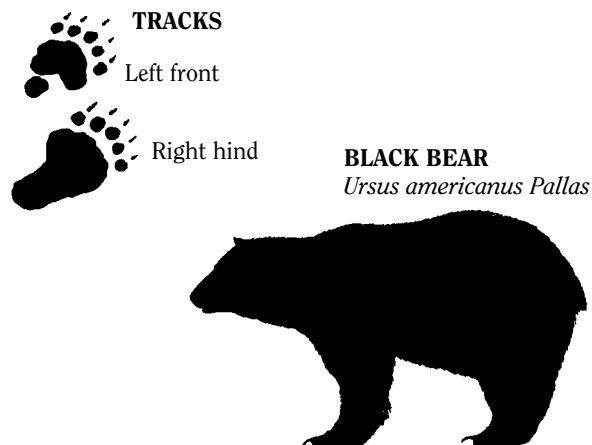
Know Your Bear Facts

- ▶ You are in bear country outside any city in British Columbia. Black bears can be found throughout the province. Grizzly bears may be found everywhere except on Vancouver Island and the Queen Charlotte Islands.
- ▶ All bears are dangerous, especially habituated bears. Habituated bears have developed a taste for human food. They learn to associate people with food, and retain this connection for life. Because of the danger they pose to humans, habituated bears must be destroyed.
- ▶ Bears are strong enough to mangle cars and shred tents in search of food.
- ▶ You can not outrun a bear. Grizzlies are capable of bursts of speed to 55 kilometres per hour. Despite popular belief, bears can run downhill easily.
- ▶ Bears have an acute sense of smell and hearing. They also have good eyesight.
- ▶ Black bears and young grizzlies climb trees. Mature grizzlies are poor climbers, but have a reach of up to four metres.
- ▶ Bears are strong swimmers.
- ▶ Bears generally avoid contact with people, but in rare cases they may approach hikers or campers.
- ▶ Bear deterrents, such as pepper spray, are experimental. Your best bet is to avoid bear encounters altogether.



Learning to Identify Bears

Black bears are sometimes confused with grizzly bears because their physical size and colour can be similar. There are, however, several important features that distinguish these animals. Because black bears and grizzlies behave differently, your reaction to a bear encounter will depend on knowing the species.



Black Bear

Colour: varies. Black or brown to cinnamon or blonde, often with a white patch on the chest or at the throat.

Height: about 90 centimetres at the shoulder.

Length: about 1.5 metres

Weight: 57 – 275 kilograms. Females are smaller than males.

Characteristics:

- straight face profile (flat forehead and muzzle)
- short, curved claws
- no shoulder hump
- agile climber

Diet: omnivorous – eats a variety of foods, including berries, grass, honey, dead fish, insects, carrion and mammals.

Habitat: prefers forested areas with low-growing plants and berry-producing shrubs (e.g. small forest openings, stream/lake edges, open forest). Tends to avoid large, open areas.



Grizzly Bear

Colour: varies. Black (rare) or brown to blonde, often grey or silver-tipped. Light patches may occur around neck, shoulders and rear flanks.

Height: slightly above 1 metre at the shoulder; 1.8 – 2 metres when standing upright.

Length: about 2 metres

Weight: 150 – 450 kilograms. Females are smaller than males.

Characteristics:

- curved face profile (noticeable angle between forehead and muzzle)
- long, curved claws
- prominent shoulder hump
- stout, chunky build

Diet: Omnivorous – eats similar foods to the black bear, and digs for roots and worms.

Habitat: prefers semi-open spaces, although found in the forest and in the open. High country in late summer and early fall; valley bottoms in spring.

Avoiding Bear Encounters

There are many things you can do in camp and on the trail to reduce the risk of encountering a bear.

► Keep a clean camp

Never bury garbage. Bears often dig for food and may consider the garbage site as a food source. Food-conditioned bears put future visitors at risk.

Use fish cleaning stations, seal fish parts in airtight containers or throw fish remains into deep water. Fish odours strongly attract bears.

Cook and eat well away from your tent. Never leave cooking utensils, coolers, grease or dishwater lying around camp.

Keep all food, including commercially packaged snacks, and scented products, such as toothpaste, deodorant and perfume, away from your tent. Avoid getting food odours and scented products on clothes or in sleeping bags.

Women should consider using tampons when menstruating.

► Keep pets leashed

Pets can anger a bear and provoke an attack. If the bear chases an unleashed pet, the animal may be severely injured or bring the bear back to its owner. If possible, keep pets at home.

► Avoid walking at night

Animals are more active at night. Always carry a flashlight to avoid surprising them after dark.

► Always keep children nearby and in sight

► Heed posted warnings

Obey park regulations, stay on designated trails and comply with bear warnings.

► Hike as a group

Solo hiking is not recommended. You reduce the risk of an attack by travelling in numbers. Never let children wander.

► Reduce the chance of surprising a bear

Stay alert. Always watch for bears in the distance. If you see a bear far ahead, make a wide detour or leave the area.

Allow a bear to pick up your scent by keeping the wind at your back. Use extreme caution in strong wind or around loud water. Make noise to alert bears of your presence.

► Stay clear of dead animals

If you see circling crows or smell rotting meat, leave immediately. These may be signs that carrion is nearby. Bears feed on dead animals. Notify park staff of the location as soon as you can.

► Watch for bear signs

Bear signs include: tracks, droppings, recently overturned rocks or logs, rotted wood that has been torn apart, clawed, bitten or rubbed trees, bear trails, hair on tree bark, fresh diggings and crushed vegetation. If you observe any of these signs, leave the area as soon as possible.

► Camp in designated areas

► Store food properly

Always carry 15 metres of rope and plastic bags when travelling in the backcountry.

Store food and garbage in airtight containers in the facilities provided, or suspend it at least four metres above the ground, or store in the trunk of your car.

► In areas without campsites, choose your location carefully

Check for bear signs before setting up camp.

Choose an area removed from animal trails, potential feeding areas, rivers, cascading water and trees used to hang food or garbage.

► Always sleep in a tent

Sleeping under the stars is dangerous in bear country.

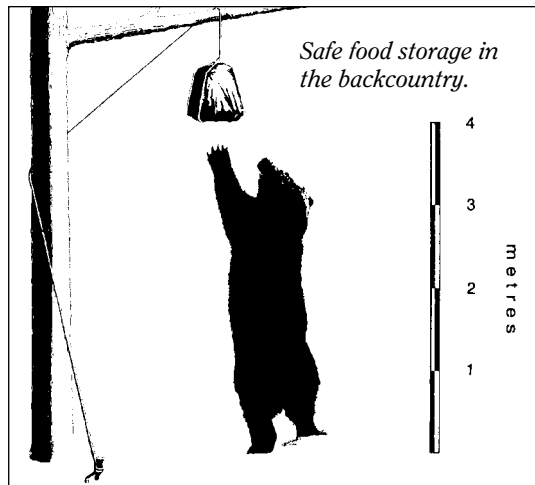
If you are travelling in a group, pitch the tents in a semi-circle or line. If a bear wanders into your camp, it will have a clear escape route.

Before retiring, walk around your tent to leave a human scent.

► Avoid the odours that attract bears

Freeze-dried products are the best for backcountry travel. Cook at least 50 metres away from your sleeping area.

Pack out your garbage in airtight containers. Burning refuse is generally not advised.



If You Meet a Bear

- Stay calm and keep the animal in view, but avoid direct eye contact. The bear may interpret it as a sign of aggression. Back away slowly if you can. Never run from a bear unless you know you can reach safety. Determine whether the animal is a black bear or a grizzly.
- If the bear starts to follow, drop your pack or a piece of equipment in its path as a distraction. Only leave food as a last resort. A food-conditioned bear is a threat to the next human it meets. Continue to back away slowly. If the bear is an adult grizzly, consider climbing a tree. You will need to get at least four metres off the ground quickly.
- If the bear is standing up on its hind legs, it may be trying to pick up your scent and identify you. Talk softly while continuing to back away. Always keep the animal in view.
- If the bear acts aggressively, try to determine its intent. Aggressive behaviour includes jaw snapping, head lowering, ear flattening, woofing sounds and growling. A bear may act defensively if it is startled, or if it is protecting cubs, territory or food. Wave your arms, talk in low tones and back away slowly. These actions will help identify you. Bears sometimes bluff their way out of a confrontation by charging and veering away at the last moment.
- If the charge is not a bluff or the bear is exhibiting predatory behaviour, you will have to change your approach. Signs of predatory behaviour include following, showing interest and unprovoked attacks. How you respond will depend on the species of bear attacking you.

Black bear and young grizzly attacks

Always fight back. Jump up and down, wave your arms and yell. Try to look as large as possible. Never play dead – it makes you easier prey. Remember that black bears and small grizzlies can climb trees, so stay on the ground.

Mature grizzly attacks

Quickly climb a tree to over four metres if you can. If not, assume the cannonball position on the ground. Lie in a fetal position on your side, with your knees against your chest and your head between your knees. Clasp your hands behind your neck. This position will show the bear that you are not aggressive, and will protect your vital organs in case of an attack.

If the grizzly is exhibiting predatory behaviour, do everything you can to escape or fight back.