

Have you ever sat up in a tree top and watch a grizzly bear eat your supper? Well, that was the unhappy experience of two of my packers in Yellowstone National Park.

But first let me tell the story!

We were surveying the Revised East Boundary of the Park in the summer of 1932 for the Government. The boundary line was along the crest of the Absoraka Range far from the roads. Thus we were usually camped in remote areas of the Park seldom seen by tourists. The wild animals we saw were more in their natural state. The bears, for instance were not the gentle beggars seen along the roads. They were wild and used to fending for themselves.

Supplies for our camps were brought in by pack train. This summer we never saw a road or truck from June until September. The pack-string consisted of sixteen mules and three saddle horses. The packing was done by two Government packers of years experience, Justin (Blackie) Postle and Bert Wackert.

At times it took them three or four days to make the round trip for supplies. To reach the roads they must travel over long precipitous mountain trails. When on such trips they would carry their beds and camp where ever night over took them. No tents were carried, they just rolled their beds out and slept under the stars. It was a rugged life.

For stopping over night they tried to select a place where an open park afforded some grazing for the stock. On this trip they were going from camp at timber-line on the head of Lamar River to Soda Butte Cabin where the stage left supplies for us with Ranger Scotty Bauman. Stopping for the night along the way they picketed the saddle horses and turned the mules loose to graze. Starting a camp fire they were frying some bacon for supper. Shortly after the odor of the cooking bacon floated out into the surrounding timber an old grizzly bear was seen walking around sticking up his nose sniffing the fragrant air.

The packers did not like what they saw. It was not yet sunset and they knew that a bear grows more bold as darkness increases. Soon he was coming closer smacking his jaws to show his displeasure. There was no mistaking his desires.

To play safe with their food supplies in preparation to abandon camp they packed the food in two panniers and hoisted them high in a tree with a rope. As he became more and more threatening they threw fire brands at him which frightened him only temporarily. They soon ran out of suitable burning sticks to throw. As it got darker he became more defiant and they finally had to take to the tree.

The bear then came in and licked out the frying pan, and cleaned up all scraps of food he could find. He pawed their bedrolls around and messed things up generally as they looked down helplessly from their perch in the tree. They felt

reasonably safe in the tree because a grizzly cannot climb trees like the black and brown bear. They cannot circle the tree with their front paws because of the shape of their fore legs.

I might point out also that neither the packers or any of the survey party carried guns while in the Park. Mr. Roger Toole, the Park Superintendent offered to issue gun permits to me for use in emergencies but I did not take advantage of the offer.

After the bear rumaged around the camp ground a while he ambled off. The boys came down and rekindled the fire to get warm. This was in late August and the nights get cool and frosty at that altitude. Their stay around the camp fire however was short. Seeing them around the camp again old bruin became curious. He kept edging up to see if he was loosing out on something good to eat, until the boys again sought the safety of the tree top.

After another time or two of this up-and-down procedure they decided to call on Old Mose for help. Mose was an onery old gray mule. He was ungainly looking, with a long head and roman nose, with a continuous desire to kick at most anything within reach. So they took a nosebag and some oats and went out and caught Mose and tied him to a tree with his kicking end near the camp. They hoped in this way to cash in on one of his less favorable characteristics.

At previous camps during the summer Mose and other mules had taken great delight in chasing black bears and trying to strike them with their front feet. They hoped Mose would play the same game with the grizzly, but no such luck. One look at the menacing grizzly with his deep throated growl, and Mose was all for leaving. Maybe it was partly the moral support of the other mules he craved. At any rate he strained at the rope with all his might.

But to run away and fight another day was out of the question, he discovered. When those men tied a mule to a tree they planned on him staying tied. They ran the 3/4 inch halter rope through the ring on the jaw strap of the halter, over around the mules neck and down to the ring and tied it. to get loose he had to break the rope or take the tree along.

At each threatening charge of the bear Mose did his level best to break loose. The bear did not understand why the mule did not run away so he would roar all the louder. He would back off and then rush up raising on his hind legs and roar as though he was going to eat the mule alive. The packers from their grand stand 'seats' felt sorry for the unhappy mule. He was ringing wet with sweat. Viewed in retrospect the situation seems somewhat comical but it was not funny then.

They think that what saved the mules life was the large cow bell they had hung on his neck. The closer bruin got the louder the bell rang. This bell ringing was something new to the bear. Perhaps he thought it was some sort of reply to his roars. At least it so baffled him he was afraid to close in for the kill. As this went on they saw they might as well turn the poor mule loose. So during one of the lulls when the bear was at retreat they eased down and cut the rope with an axe, the knot being too tight to untie.

So they spent the whole night playing 'hide -n - seek' with the bear. To make it easier to scramble up the tree they fell another tree so it leaned against the one they were climbing and used it for a sort of stairs. As daylight came the bear gave it up as a bad job and ambled off. It was a miserable night and one they will never forget. They said they found Mose about 3 miles down the trail that morning.