

RIDGELINE



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Time and Effort
Pays Big Time!

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Man it's been a long winter!

Sitting around all winter has got to be one of the hardest things that we hunters do. It sure seems like time stands still while I wait so impatiently for spring to arrive. This last winter was especially hard for me because not only was I waiting for my usual big game hunts to come around, this year I would be adding an archery hunt for spring bear to the mix as well. I was excited about the prospect of getting so close to a bear with my bow. I have seen plenty of bears before, and even taken a few with the rifle, but never before have I attempted to get as close as an archery shot would require.

After months of waiting and researching baiting methods, May finally arrived and it was time to get set up. My buddy Aaron and I acquired a metal barrel with a closable lid and a BUNCH of old bread and dog food. After a few crazy looks from a couple of local dive restaurant owners, a helpful fellow even allowed us the not so fun task of dipping out 30 gallons of used fryer grease from his dumpster. We also cooked up some really stinky stuff to get the bears initially interested in our bait. When I say cooked, I mean I took a bunch of the nastiest stuff I could find from the house and let it "cook" in a bucket outside in the sun for a few weeks. It was nasty to say the least. My excitement was cooking right along with the stink bait as the last few days wore on until we could get up and set our bait-site. While I was getting antsy for the season to get going, I couldn't help but notice all the not so excited looks my wife was starting to throw around about all this filth I was bringing home. Not a moment too soon, it was finally time to haul all these groceries to the hills.

May 3rd was the first day that both Aaron and I had time to get set up. We had a general idea of where we wanted to go but with the snowline you just never know where you're going to be able to get this time of year. Finally getting to where we needed to be we packed our barrel with a few loads of tasty goods and hung the bucket of "cooked" grossness in a nearby tree. I also set up a trail cam on the bait before leaving so we would be able to tell what kind of bears were be coming in, if any at all. Leaving that bait-site I was excited, nervous, and a little skeptical that this would actually work.



A week later we came back to check the camera and re-bait and, what do ya know, it actually worked! There was at least one bear coming in and it looked to be a good one. He was still just coming in after dark, but it was definitely a start. Trying not to disturb to much we filled the barrel up with bait, got the camera set back up, and got out of there. It would be a long week at work thinking about that bear and waiting to get back up there to hunt him.




Saturday finally came around and I was headed to the hills, this time with bow in hand. Aaron was unable to make it up that weekend due to family obligations so there would be no coin toss to decide who got the first shot at this bear, I was up to bat. I got up there at about 1:00 in the afternoon and checked the camera, finding good news. The big black bear was still coming in as well as a smaller cinnamon colored bear.



Trail camera shots of the bear. The trail camera took this photo just seconds before Chad arrowed him. (Right)

I scurried up the tree into the stand and got set up for the hours of sitting ahead. Three hours later a bear showed up, but not one that we had seen before. It was a big chocolate boar that was a shooter for sure. The only problem was he didn't stick around long enough for a shot. I don't know if he winded me or what but he was off like a bullet after only a few seconds. I was bummed but still had a lot of daylight left, so it was back to hunting. I was hopeful he would come back. At 7:30 the little cinnamon showed up and I had a great time watching him gorge himself on the day old bread and grease. I was 14 yards away from him, the closest I had ever been to a bear and it was awesome. Not big enough to shoot I just turned on the video camera and enjoyed the show. After getting his fill he disappeared into the brush and I was alone again.





At about 8:15 I was having a great time watching the blue-jays and chipmunks fight over the bread on the ground that the little cinnamon had spilled. I heard some brush breaking down the hill from my stand and after glassing down in that direction for a minute or two, I found the big chocolate bear making his way in. He was definitely on full alert, sniffing the air with every step. It took him quite awhile but he was finally right behind me on his way into the bait. What happened next will be burned into my mind forever. As he was coming past me towards the bait he passed by on the uphill side of my stand. He stopped only 5 yards away from me and stared a hole right through me. A couple hours earlier 14 yards was as close as I had been to a bear but not anymore. This bear and I were looking at each other from so close I could hear him breathing. It was so intense! Finally after our staring match he was satisfied I was just an ugly part of the tree and committed to the bait.

As he walked in directly away from me I pulled my bow to full draw, waited for the quartering away shot, placed my top pin in the crease and let the arrow fly. He was gone in a fraction of a second. But the damage was done. I sat in awe of what had just happened. It took me at least 15 minutes to gather myself enough to climb down from the tree.





Finally back to earth I walked over to the bait and planned my next move. The sun was going down fast and I was almost forced to leave him alone over night. I marked the first spots of blood and headed home for the long night ahead. I spent the last few minutes of daylight looking for my arrow but was never able to find it.

Talk about a sleepless night. Any archer who has been in this situation knows exactly what I mean. I must have gone over that shot in my mind a thousand times. I was certain that it was a good hit but you just never can be sure. It's funny how your mind can create doubt even in the most certain situations. I think I hit every emotion that night as I replayed our encounter over and over.





The next morning the blood trail was short and wide and it wasn't long before I had my hands on my first archery bear. Man what a feeling! I'm telling you this never gets old for me. All the time and energy had paid off and I was proud to take this bear home to share with my family and friends. I haven't scored him, but he by far exceeded my expectations. One thing for sure, I will be "cooking" up bait again next spring. You can count on it!

Chad Lowe, Nampa Idaho



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