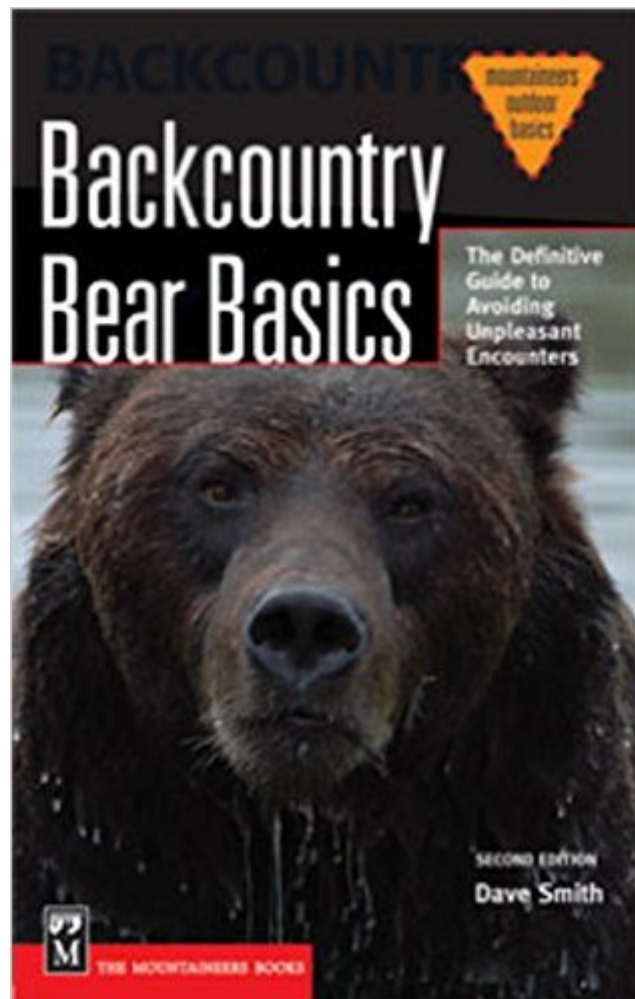


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# Backcountry Bear Basics: The Definitive Guide To Avoiding Unpleasant Encounters (Mountaineers Outdoor Basics)



## Synopsis

Everything you need to know about traveling and camping safely in bear country • Practical strategies for avoiding dangerous situations and how to cope if you do encounter a bear • Debunks commonly held myths about people and bears • Revised edition highlights new research and new issues No more myths. No more rumors. No more horror stories. Backcountry Bear Basics, 2nd Edition provides tested strategies to help you avoid conflict with black bears and grizzlies. Bear expert Dave Smith gives you the basics like how to choose a good campsite and properly store your food so that you don't have to worry whether that pepper spray you brought will work on the bear that wanders into camp. He debunks commonly held myths about people and bears. For instance, menstruating women don't have to stay out of bear country, he says. And no, don't roll up in a ball when faced with a charging bear. So much of conventional wisdom about bears is often just plain bad advice; Smith tells you what you should do instead and why. He also reviews specific outdoor activities from fishing to mountain biking to hiking with young children to trail running assessing the likelihood of bear encounters and suggesting tactics for coping in different settings and situations. This updated second edition incorporates new research (Do bear bells work? Does tent color or shape make a difference in attracting bears?) and adds more charts and sidebars to make material accessible at a glance. Smith provides key information on bear behavior and biology to help you understand, rather than fear, this most misunderstood animal.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

As a wilderness guide I have read other books, brochures, and articles about traveling and camping in bear country, but none focuses in on the most relevant, practical, current information like *Backcountry Bear Basics*. Dave Smith backs up his sometimes unconventional assertions with cogent arguments and scientific references for those who want to know more, and he debunks the myths that have plagued bear literature for decades. I found the book engaging and entertaining as well as informative. I don't know what the reviewers who called it "dry" were expecting -- juicy blood and guts anecdotes a la *Alaskan Bear Tales*? Those are fine for scaring each other around the campfire but the purpose of *Backcountry Bear Basics* is to bring the reader's fears into line with reality and avoid problems for people and bears. My advice to anyone who will be hiking or camping in bear country without a guide: Read this book and carry it with you -- and follow its advice about securing your food!

Careful readers will notice important differences between *Backcountry Bear Basics*, *Bear Attacks: Their Causes and Avoidance*, *Bear Aware*, and *Safe Travel in Bear Country*. When you compare the books topic-by-topic (human sexual activity attracts bears, bears have poor vision, never make eye contact with a bear, bears eat anything and everything, etc.) *Bear Basics* is the most accurate, practical, up-to-date book. Biologist Stephen Herrero's classic *Bear Attacks* was published in 1985; coverage of topics like pepper-spray defense is out-dated. Compared to *Bear Attacks* or *Bear Basics*, *Bear Aware* and *Safe Travel In Bear Country* are cliché-laden lightweights. Neither book includes substantive quotes from bear experts, or reference notes. Consider the cliché that you should beware of sows with cubs. *Bear Aware* states, "female bears fiercely defend their young," and *Safe Travel in Bear Country* states, "nothing prompts a full-blown charge by a bear more quickly than the bawl and commotion of a cub." In *Bear Basics*, biologist Lynn Rogers states, "Unlike grizzly bear mothers, black bear mothers seldom attack people in defense of cubs . . . the ferocity of mother black bears is one of the biggest misconceptions about this species." *Bear Basics* is thought provoking and well documented. Women should read *Bear Basics* just for the lengthy chapter that debunks the myth bears are attracted to menstrual odors. No other book discusses the ethics of wearing bear bells and making lots of noise in grizzly country. No other book about bears comes close to giving you the quality information *Bear Basics* provides about bear behavior. *Bear Aware* says "If you see a bear at close range . . . try to identify the bear as a black bear or grizzly. Both are dangerous, but grizzlies are usually more ill-tempered." *Bear Basics* explains that since "black bears and grizzly bears walked along different evolutionary paths the two species often have a different

response to what biologists call the 'fight' or 'flight' question: How do you respond to a threatening situation? Do you fight, or do you take flight?" Bear Basics provided a sound biological explanation for grizzly and black bear behavior during surprise encounters; it changed my preconception about grizzlies being the ill-tempered grumps of the animal kingdom. What if you're charged by a grizzly? Bear Basics has the best information on using pepper spray or firearms. If you're forced to play dead, Bear Attacks recommends "the fetal position" adding that "Lying flat on the ground, face down, with your hands locked behind your neck is another possibility." Bear Aware and Safe Travel in Bear Country recommend curling up in the fetal position, but don't discuss playing dead by lying flat on the ground-which is the technique Herrero advocates in several recent magazine articles and the 1997 Discovery program "Bear Attacks." Bear Basics is the only book that gives your up-to-date facts on how to play dead: "It's best to lie face down . . ." Bear Basics consistently provides better safety advice than the other books. Bear Attacks said, "Photographers who specialize in grizzlies know that the safest way to approach for a picture is to let the bear sense them when they are still far away before beginning a slow, deliberate, and obvious approach." Herrero added, "I personally do not like to photograph grizzlies-not only because of the danger but also because to get photographs one has to harass the bear." He recommends staying back 1,000 feet--advice many photographers ignore as they slowly approach grizzlies. Bear Basics warns that you should never approach a grizzly because eventually you'll enter its personal space and "force it into a fight or flight mode." Slowly walking toward a grizzly until it has to fight or flee is suicidal, but unless a photographer read Bear Basics, there's no way he'd understand the nature of the risk. On the topic of pepper spray, Bear Aware claims "more than 60 people have escaped encounters uninjured by turning away a charging bear with pepper spray." Not according to facts and figures from a 1995 study on pepper spray by Herrero. You'll find those facts and figures in Bear Basics. You won't find them in Bear Attacks, (1985) where Herrero wrote, "The effectiveness of capsaicin has been tested on caged and free-ranging black bears, on caged grizzly bears, but not on free-ranging grizzlies. Whether capsaicin would repel a bear, such as a mother grizzly, that was highly motivated to attack has not been tested . . . among the commercially available forms of chemical sprays containing capsaicin, 'Phaser' is the most consistent repellent. It also has the most reliable and effective spray system. 'Halt' and 'Dog Shield' are proven repellents but they have less range." Dog Shield? It's been years since anyone hiking in Yellowstone or Banff carried a little can of pepper spray meant for dogs to protect themselves from grizzly bears. This information is way outdated. Bear Basics provides a thorough and up-to-date discussion about pepper-spray defense. Reading Bear Attacks or Safe Travel in Bear Country is about as much fun as reading a master's thesis on hemorrhoids.

Biologist Larry Aumiller's back-cover endorsement for Bear Basics says it's "entertaining and accurate." Bear Basics might not hold the attention of people who read comic books during commercial breaks on Oprah, but it's funny in a subtle way. Bottom line on bear safety books? Don't waste your money on Bear Aware or Safe Travel in Bear Country. You can get the same basic information (and misinformation) free at any National Park website. If you spend much time outdoors in bear country, buy Bear Basics and Bear Attacks. The critiques I've made about Bear Attacks are among its few faults; it's a great book. If you have to settle for one book, Backcountry Bear Basics is the best.

This daring book challenges conventional wisdom about bears, it's well-documented, it provides safety tips you won't find anywhere else, and it's written with style. Reading Bear Basics is like sitting around the campfire and chatting about bears with a witty outdoorsman who has years of first hand experience with bears, and an encyclopedic knowledge of bear literature. You casually mention that bears eat anything and everything; John Muir wrote that to bears, everything is food except granite. "John Muir was wrong," says author Dave Smith. "When it comes to natural foods, bears are rather finicky. Out of 1,000 types of plants in a given area, they might only consume 100-250, and each of those will be eaten during a particular season." To reduce the risk of encountering a bear, Smith suggests contacting land management agencies before you take a hike: "Resource management experts can often predict when and where to expect bear because the bruins are so keyed in on seasonal food sources." X-C skiers generally don't give much thought to bears during the winter, but Smith says, "When I worked as a winterkeeper in Yellowstone, I often saw my first grizzly tracks in March. During the unusually mild winter of 1995-96, winterkeeper Steve Fuller saw grizzly tracks in February. No matter where you're going, you should be aware of bear hibernation patterns. You ask if bears have good vision or poor vision, and Smith replies, "A 1937 report from Europe noted that brown bears in a zoo could see people at 120 yards, and recognize their handler at 60 yards." He then relates an anecdote by a bear researcher in Colorado who was spotted by a black bear from a distance of 800 yards. He closes by noting that Yellowstone Grizzly Foundation research director Steve French has an "excellent rule of thumb regarding the vision of bears: if you can see a bear, you should assume the bear can see you." Backcountry Bear Basics is filled with useful information like this. Now if I see a grizzly 150 yards away, I'll assume the bear can see me and I won't move around unless the bear is preoccupied. Although many books discuss bear vision and other topics that are covered in Bear Basics, Smith consistently gives the most thoughtful, practical information on each subject. In

addition, he debunks a lot of myths about bears. This is the ultimate book on bears and bear safety.

I have lived in Yellowstone NP for 25 years. Dave Smith's book , in my opinion, is the backcountry bear bible. Dave's knowlege and research on the subject is outstanding. I insist that my employees are familiar with this book before heading out for a back country experience. Well researched and informative. A must read for any serious backcountry camper.

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