2006 Big Bear Recognition

Bill Colby — 508#

My bear hunt experience began with receiving a letter from the DNR stating, "You will be receiving a bear tag for the 2006 bear hunting season".

My original plan, upon receipt of the permit, was that I would travel every weekend to northern Wisconsin to work a bait site at least 4 weeks prior to opening day. Then reality began to set in and I realized with the cost of gas and mileage on my vehicle that I would pursue hunting with dogs. At this point I did not know anyone in area A that hunted with dogs. I have been an avid reader of Wisconsin Outdoor News for many years. I began to look closely at the guide service ads in the paper and make inquiries. After speaking with five different guides, I settled on Mark Heeg. Coincidently, Mark happens to be from Colby, Wisconsin. Mark sounded extremely experienced with dogs and has tried every type of dog for bear hunting and settled on plots. Mark explained that he hunts in the Clam Lake area.

Three months prior to my hunt just talking with Mark about the possibilities of hunting with dogs was already exciting me. September 12th after work I loaded up the car and made the 358 mile trek to Marks cabin, arriving that night around 11:00 pm. I pulled into Mark's driveway and could not help but notice the amount of dog kennels scattered throughout the yard. I knew it would be hard to sleep that night. After walking into the one room cabin, with 8 bunk beds built against the wall, I knew all the comforts of home were gone. We talked for awhile about the next days hunt. The alarm was set for 4:00am. When the alarm went off it was not your standard buzzzzzzzzzzzzz, but it was the sound of a dog treeing a raccoon. (What a great way to start an exciting day ahead). We got dressed and our breakfast was whatever was around (usually a local gas stations treats). There were a total of four people in Mark's group, plus myself. After breakfast we headed out to the yard and filled buckets with bait. This got the dogs very excited because they knew they would be heading out to the woods. We then loaded the trucks and prepared to go check about 16 bait sites. We split up into three vehicles. I road with Mark. Upon arrival at the first bait, we grabbed the flashlights and bait bucket and found the first one had a hit. The tracks, according to Mark, belong to a 300 lb. plus bear. It was very early in the morning and Mark was not sure if we should leave the bait. The fear was another bear may come in and the dogs may chase the wrong bear. We took the chance and left to check the other 2 bait sites. These 2 baits were hit by very small bears. We called the group on the radio and told them we were heading back to the first bait. We got there about 5:50 am and waited for the hunt to open at 6:08 am. Mark grabbed his first dog and brought him towards the trail of the bait and let him go. Within a minute the dog was hot on the trail so Mark ran back and began grabbing two dogs at a time and releasing them on the trail. Once the dogs were out it didn't take long to get together as a group and be on the bears trail. For the next two hours we were listening to the dogs chasing the bear. At about 8:00 am, we could hear the dogs betting close to the road. Mark instructed me to "grab you gun we're going in". The bear and dogs were in an alder swamp; it's a good thing we were having a dry season. As we walked in, the dog's howls were getting louder and louder until we were right in with them. We could hear them right next to us but could not see them, it was so thick. Mark decided to circle around and at that point we began to see the dogs and then the bear. Unfortunately there was not an opportunity for a good shot and off the bear and the dogs wert. The dogs chased the bear until dusk. We tried various times to get in and get a shot at the bear but we were unsuccessful and the bear would not tree. The first day hunt took its toll on the dogs. One had three broken ribs, one was bitten in the hip and the rest had holes in their ribs from the bear's teeth. Most of the night as spent caring for the dogs. We tried to hunt the next two days, but due to the dog's injuries we no longer had enough dogs to hunt.

We decided I would go home and come back up the night of October 5th. I arrived on October 5th, again round 11:00 pm., just in time to go to bed and wake up at 4:00 am. Again we filled the bait buckets and loaded up the dogs and went out to check the baits. Since it was later in the year, not all the baits were being hit. One of the other people in the group found a half way decent track. We put the dogs on it and by 9:00 am we had the bear treed about 1/4 mile off the road. Again I grabbed my gun and we started going in towards the bear. It was sitting in the V of a large tree and it was hard to judge the size. The bear never attempted to exit the tree while we were there. Since it was so close to the road and an easy drag back, I was tempted to fill my tag with this bear. We estimated the bear to be 225 lbs. with a beautiful fur coat. I told the group I am a gambler and I will pass on this with hopes to see a larger one tomorrow.

Continued on following page...