

Bears likely to hit bait sites soon

Back in 2005, as many of the bear hunters at Tylor Kelly's Camps in Allagash opted to stay dry, a lone truckload of men — including me — dutifully headed to their stands, hoping for the weather to break.

There was a method to our madness (or, at least, we rationalized our decision that way): The rain was due to stop sometime that evening, and if it did, the bears that had been reluctant to move during the storm might amble right into the baits we were watching.

Unfortunately for us, that storm — the remnants of Hurricane Katrina — had other ideas, and it didn't let up until a couple hours after we'd returned to camp, soggy, cold, miserable ... and bearless.



JOHN HOLYOKE

Out on Route 9, about 50 miles from Bangor, hunters at Eagle Mountain Guide Service haven't had to withstand the elements like my group did more than a decade ago. But owner Matt Whitegiver said earlier this week that the hunting had been a bit slower than he'd hoped.

But he was confident that change was imminent.

"Everybody [I've talked to] is having a slow start," Whitegiver said earlier this week. "What blackberries there are, the bears want, and they're focused on that right now. [Those berries] won't be around long, so I expect we're going to get better and better and better as the blackberries disappear."

That will be good news for hunters, many of whom travel from outside Maine and hire outfitters for six-day hunts. The season for hunting bears over bait started on Aug. 29 and runs through Sept. 24.

According to wildlife biologist Randy Cross of the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, the success rate of hunters should increase during that span.

Cross has been studying bears for more than 30 years, and in my time writing about the outdoors, he's taught me plenty about the behavior patterns of these ghosts of the woods.

"The relative abundance of natural food is what dictates the level of success for hunters who are hunting over bait," Cross said in an email. "[And] bait hunters are the group of hunters that influence the harvest level the most. The rain that we got in the last few weeks has been sufficient to save the blackberry crop in many areas where they occur, and they

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ASHLEY L. CONTI | BDN

Shane Cornman (left) tells a story about how he almost bagged a bear to his fellow hunters while enjoying dinner at Eagle Mountain Guide Service in Township 24 on Tuesday.

Back to bear camp

Camaraderie, teamwork mark experience

BY JOHN HOLYOKE
BDN STAFF

TOWNSHIP 24 — It has been a slow bear season at Eagle Mountain Guide Service so far this year — bears apparently are focusing on abundant blackberries rather than bait for now — but all it took was a squawking two-way radio to spur guides at into action Tuesday evening.

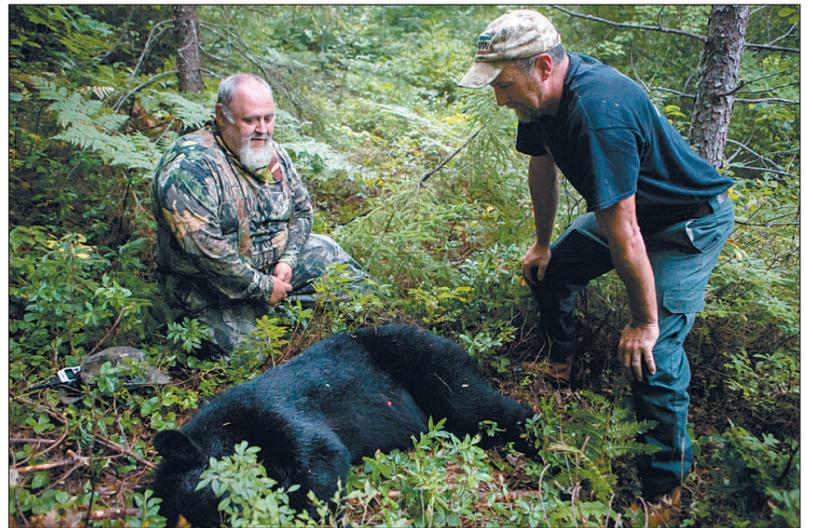
In the great room of his hunting lodge on Route 9 — "The Airline" — 50 miles east of Bangor, owner Matt Whitegiver perked up when he heard the voice of guide J.R. Mabee. "Can you come back again? Over," Mabee said.

"Uh oh. We might have some action," Whitegiver said, grinning.

They did. Five miles away, in the Washington County woods, hunter Matthew Cornman had shot a bear and was trying to hail his guides on the radio. A finicky signal left the guides curious and set them into motion. Ten minutes later, Mabee, who had driven toward higher ground in hopes of gaining a better radio signal with the hunter, checked back in with the magic words.

A bear was down.

Over the ensuing three hours or so, as is the custom in many of the state's sport-



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Matthew Cornman (left) looks over the bear he shot with Eagle Mountain Guide Service's Matt Whitegiver in the woods of Township 24 on Tuesday.

ing lodges that host bear hunters during the season, the excitement was palpable. The bear was brought back to camp and weighed. Cornman, who lives in Kittanning, Pennsylvania, told his story a half-dozen times or more as more hunters returned to camp. Handshakes were offered and accepted.

You might think that this, the success of one of his hunters, is exactly what Whitegiver lives for during the four-week bait season.

But while Whitegiver is always pleased

when one of the hunters fills a tag, there's much more to a visit to a bear camp.

For the longtime guide, actually harvesting a bear is only one piece of what he wants to be a special total experience.

"I want [the bear camp experience] to be like it's a group of friends going out hunting," said 55-year-old Whitegiver, who has been guiding bear hunters for 17 years. He doesn't want to play the role of a seemingly distant head guide. He's often in the middle of conversations with the

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1-Minute Hike: Bluff Head Preserve

Difficulty: Easy to moderate. The preserve features four short trails that are connected and together create a hike that is just over 1 mile long. The trails are marked with blue blazes and travel over a fairly smooth forest floor. Watch out for a few exposed tree roots and rocks. The trail to the top of the bluff features a few steep rocky areas, a section of rock stairs and some wooden steps.



AISLINN SARNACKI

How to get there: From the intersection of Mines Road (Route 15) and Route 176 in Sedgwick, turn onto Rope Ferry Road and drive approximately 0.2 mile to the parking area and trailhead, which will be on your right-hand side.

Watch the video
bangordailynews.com

Information: The Bluff Head trails in Sedgwick officially opened to the public on Aug. 18, with a celebratory hike guided by the Blue Hill Heritage Trust. The short, easy trails, which together total about 1 mile, lead to the rocky top of a bluff, where hikers can sit and enjoy a stunning view of the Bagaduce River.

The trails are located in the 58-



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The Bagaduce River is seen from the height of land in Bluff Head Preserve in Sedgwick recently.

acre Bluff Head Preserve, property purchased by BHHT in 2013 with the help of a grant from the North American Wetlands Conservation Act program.

The grant — a \$1 million matching grant — was awarded to a partnership that included Blue

Hill Heritage Trust, Maine Coast Heritage Trust and the Conservation Trust of Brooksville, Castine and Penobscot in 2012, for a multi-parcel land conservation project on the Bagaduce River watershed. The creation of Bluff Head Preserve is just one of 17 land proj-

ects completed in the years 2013 to 2014 to fulfill grant obligations.

Starting at the gravel parking lot for Bluff Head Preserve, a single trail travels through a hardwood forest filled with ferns and other low-lying woodland plants.

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Pair conquer 20 peaks in one day

BY AISLINN SARNACKI
BDN STAFF

It was no ordinary day hike. Starting on the west side of Mount Desert Island, Darron Collins, president of the College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, teamed up with COA board member Winston Holt on Labor Day, Sept. 4, to trek clear across Acadia National Park. Navigating park trails from west to east, the two men hiked 20 major peaks and crossed Somes Sound by kayak, covering more than 31 miles in less than a day.

"It's an interesting perspective, seeing the island as a complete journey like that," said Holt, 52, of Seal Harbor. "To me it was very much an eye-opening experience."

A part-time resident of the island, Holt recently became a registered Maine guide in recreation and has experience in adventure racing and hiking. But this was the first time he had hiked so many Acadia mountains in one continuous trek.

Collins, on the other hand, had done this sort of thing before. Last June, Collins solo hiked 40 peaks on the island across a 27-hour period to encourage COA alumni to donate money to the

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