

BLACK BEAR

BY JIM SHOCKEY

Though some may disagree, black bears are one of the most sought after of all the big game species. Who hasn't desired a black bear rug? Next to whitetail deer, there is an argument to be made that black bears are the second most popular big game animal to hunt.

Popular to hunt they may be, but easy to field judge, they are not, and yet, in spite of the high degree of difficulty, everyone who hunts black bears wants a big one. A "meat bear" won't do. To wit, in all the many years I've outfitted for black bears, not one of my client-hunters has told me that his dream was to shoot a small bear for the freezer. It hasn't happened and it never will. The fascination we hunters have with big bears is ancient and primal; a combination of "fear" and "facing fear," another black bear dichotomy. It's akin to climbing up onto the roof of a building and looking over the edge, the higher the building (the bigger the bear), and the deeper the fascination.

Taking all this into consideration, why is it then that so many hunters have small or medium-sized black bear skin rugs on their wall? And more to the point of this article, why do they have small bear skulls in their dens? Why indeed. Ask them and virtually every one of them will say something to the effect of, "he (or she) looked huge to me." It is a standard and a fair evaluation of black bear hunting. Without doubt, the toughest part of taking a big black bear is knowing what "big" looks like. What follows in this article will hopefully help you correctly make what will be your toughest judging call of all.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

When my hunters ask me, and they all do, how to judge black bears, they invariably throw in

what they know about judging black bears, the one or two tips they've read in some bear article, things like "look for small ears" and "big bears have small-looking heads." My pat response is that they are way ahead of themselves, looking at the size of a bear's ears or head isn't necessarily wrong, it just isn't the right thing to be doing first. The first thing they should be looking at when they see the bear they want to judge is the location of that bear.

LOCATION

Big bears live, eat, and hang out in the best living, eating, and hanging out areas. Find the best looking bear habitat in whatever hunting area you are in and odds are, the bear you see there will be big, especially during prime evening hours. Small bears usually live in marginal habitat for their own safety, as well they should, since big black bears eat small bears. Often I hear hunters tell me that they spied an especially large bear right up near the edge of the timber, near the big trees. And they may well have, but odds are, the reason that bear is up there near all those good escape trees, is that the bear itself is small and the very tops of those nearby trees are the best insurance against ending up as a bear breakfast.

Of course, location is a relative thing. In my guiding area on Vancouver Island, a "good location" is a grassy meadow along a creek in the bottom country or a reclaimed road seeded to clover in the high country. In other areas, a good location may be a bait pile or oat field. Because of the huge diversity of black bear habitat across North America, good location is relative and impossible to qualify. Know your hunting area and you'll know what to look for, but remember, if there's a bear feeding on a prime

spot at prime time, odds are it's a bear worth judging.

ATTITUDE

Big bears are the toughest, meanest sons-of-a-guns in the valley and they act it. Watch a human bully walk down the street, he walks with a swagger and an attitude. A big bear walks the same way. He doesn't fit and start at every sound like a small bear will. A big bear doesn't have to; he believes he's got nothing to fear. Once you've spotted your bear on the prime feeding spot during prime time, it's time to get serious about how that bear is behaving.

It is important to note that long before you judge the size of the bear, you must judge the sex of that bear. A big, old sow will have all, or more correctly, almost all of the physical characteristics of a big, old boar. She'll have the nasty looking face that's seen one too many years in the ring, the potbelly and the sway back. The one thing (besides the obvious) that she won't have, except in exceptional cases, is the "I'm the biggest and baddest son of a gun in the valley" behavior that determines sex more effectively than if that bear was wearing a bikini.

Watch to see if the bear stands on his hind legs and rubs his back on a tree, that's a boar. If it walks along and straddles small trees, wiping its scent on that tree, it's a boar. If it stands up and breaks saplings over its shoulder, it's a boar. If it encounters another bear and gives chase, it's a boar and if it is following a smaller bear, it's a boar.

Believe it or not, if the bear has attitude, meaning if it displays any of the above behavior and is feeding on the best food source during the best part of the day, I will have already made up my mind for my client to take the bear. No looking at ears, head, belly or tail, if we're

close enough, and the bear is about to disappear. I'll call the shot and live with the consequences. That's how important "location" and "attitude" are.

The simple fact of the matter is, no matter how much longer I look at that bear, I'm still not likely going to be any surer about the size of the bear's skull than I was when I first determined it was a boar! It isn't like judging any of the horned or antlered game—there's nothing to look at, and it's like judging the size of a whitetail buck's antlers when those antlers are inside a burlap sack. It can't be done, or at least not accurately.

SCALE

There is one last general appearance tip to judging black bears that makes the top three in importance, and that is scale. A big bear looks big... but so does a closer, smaller bear. Here's a quantitative example of this. If the bear is 150 yards away but the hunter thinks the bear is 200 yards away, the hunter will overestimate the bear's relative size by somewhere near 25 percent. In other words, the hunter is in for a serious case of ground shrink when he walks up to his bear. Get as close to the bear as you can. The closer the bear, the less chance there is of misjudging the distance to the bear, and thereby misjudging the bear's relative size.

SPECIFIC TIPS FOR JUDGING BLACK BEARS

When I'm guiding, if the bear my client and I are judging fails any one of the above general conditions, then I will normally let the bear walk. It's tough and I've been wrong before, but at least there isn't a dead small bear lying on the ground. Call it a personal aversion to profuse apologies. If it does pass all the above criteria, and there is time to get fancy on the judging, I'll use every second I have to confirm what I already know. Normally I'll tell my hunter to be ready to shoot because at that particular instant I believe it's a big bear worth tagging, but the longer I can look at the bear the higher the odds that I'll be right.

1) Body Shape: Do you wear the same size pants as you did when you were in high school? Be honest, does your spouse poke you in the belly once in a while and tell you to cut back on the Twinkies? Bigger bears are older bears, and like most of us, they don't have the svelte bodies they once did. They tend to look "heavy" and out of shape. Remember, they monopolize the best feed and habitat, and therefore exert less energy to live.

2) Head Shape: A big bear (boar) will have a deeper, wider and longer snout than a smaller bear or a female. His ears will appear to be wide apart and small. If he is aware of you and looking your way, his ears won't stand up on top of his head like a dog's ears, they'll seem to be aimed out to the side of his head. A big bear will have well developed "bulging like Arnold," biting muscles on the top of his head.

3) Legs: A big bear will have massively developed front shoulders. His shoulders will look big and burly. A sow's wrist will pinch in directly above the foot. Not so with a boar. The lower forearm, wrist and the foot on a big boar are all the same width. A big bear often appears to have shorter legs because the body is so much thicker, but keep in mind that the best-scoring bears for the records book are often the lankier looking, longer-bodied bears.

There are bears that have meatier heads; bears that look great and are great trophies, but that don't score well. There are others that have short skulls, block-headed beasts that look impressive, but that don't score well at all and there are lanky, skinny bears with donkey faces that score like the devil, but that a hunter seriously looking for a records book bear wouldn't walk across the street for. Black bear morphology is just too darn diversified to make a science out of judging. Trust me, I've been on both ends of the surprises when it comes to the actual score of the black bear I just told my hunter to take.

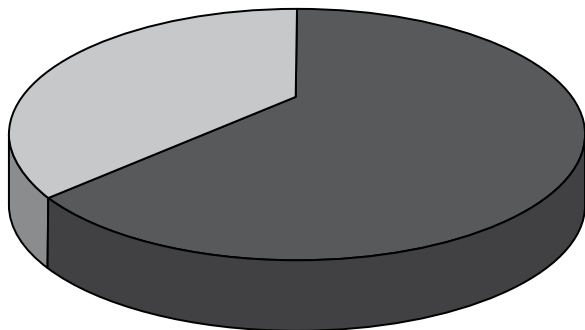
The best way to hunt for a records book boar is to simply shoot the bear that looks good to you and that hopefully you'll appreciate. If it's got a nice hide, be happy with your animal. If it has long claws and weighs a ton, good for you and congratulations. If it isn't as big as you'd like, don't fret, you're not alone and the rug on your wall will still look great. If it happens to be one of those rare few bears that has grown a skull that qualifies for the records book, thank your guide and your lucky stars and don't expect to repeat the feat in the near future. It won't be that bigger bears aren't around—they are—you just won't be able to tell them apart from the other bears in the area!

LET BOONE AND CROCKETT SORT THEM OUT

We've got a saying around my camp, "Let Boone and Crockett sort them out," and we live by it. There isn't a guide or hunter in the world who can accurately call the skull measurement of a black bear. It's impossible. There are simply too many variables that affect the final dried measurement. Sorry if it bursts any bubbles or offends other guides or hunters, but after outfitting for hundreds of black bears and seeing thousands upon thousands of them, I stand by what I said.

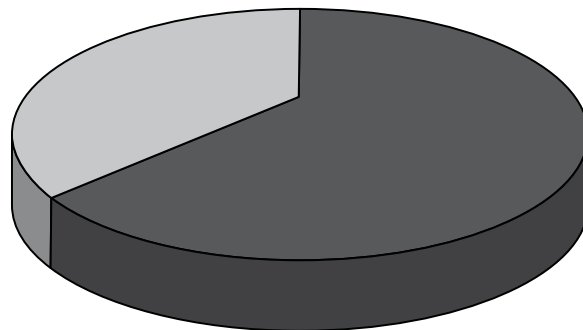
■ Greatest Length □ Greatest Width

ALASKA BROWN BEAR



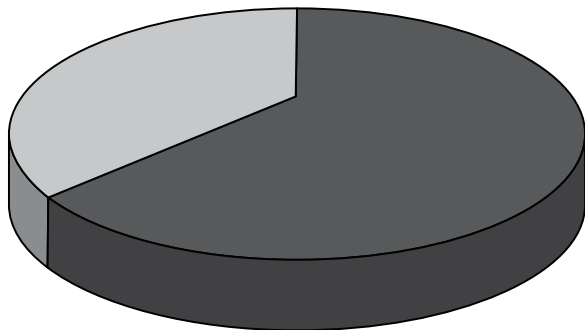
Average	Alaska brown bear	% Of Score
16.95	Greatest Length	62%
10.43	Greatest Width	38%
Average Final Score		27.84

BLACK BEAR



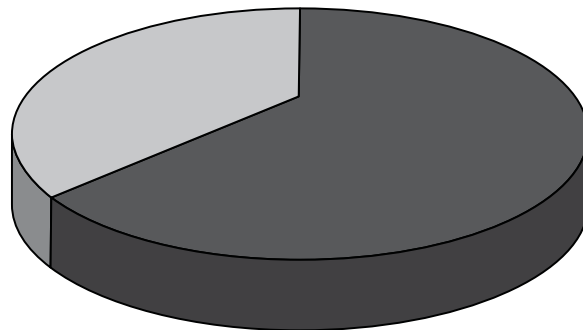
Average	black bear	% Of Score
12.57	Greatest Length	61%
7.44	Greatest Width	39%
Average Final Score		20.60

GRIZZLY BEAR



Average	grizzly bear	% Of Score
15.08	Greatest Length	63%
8.93	Greatest Width	37%
Average Final Score		24.42

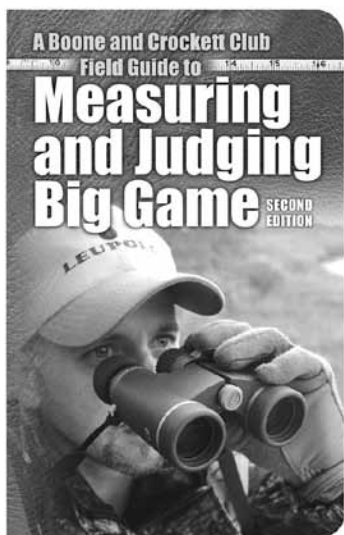
POLAR BEAR



Average	polar bear	% Of Score
16.77	Greatest Length	62%
10.09	Greatest Width	38%
Average Final Score		27.28

RESOURCES AVAILABLE FROM THE BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB

Boone and Crockett Club Field Guide to Measuring and Judging Big Game, 2nd Edition



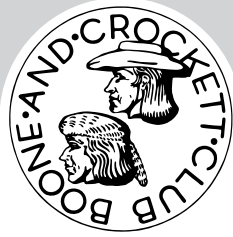
The definitive manual for anyone with a desire to learn the Boone and Crockett Club's world-famous big game measuring system is now available in this updated, convenient field guide that easily fits into backpacks.

Inside you will find detailed instructions on how to score each of the native North American big game categories recognized by the Club, including numerous illustrations to clearly demonstrate techniques for proper measurement. Also included in this field guide are techniques for evaluating and field judging the most popular species of North American big game.

Other important sections of the field guide include:

- A chapter on general measuring techniques for native North American big game
- Scoring instructions and scorecharts for all 38 categories of North American big game recognized by the Club
- Boundary descriptions for species such as elk, blacktail deer, grizzly and Alaska brown bear, whitetail, and caribou
- Table of the quarter locations for easy reference when measuring all big game categories with horns
- A chapter on understanding the dynamics of hunting and spotting optics.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO ORDER VISIT
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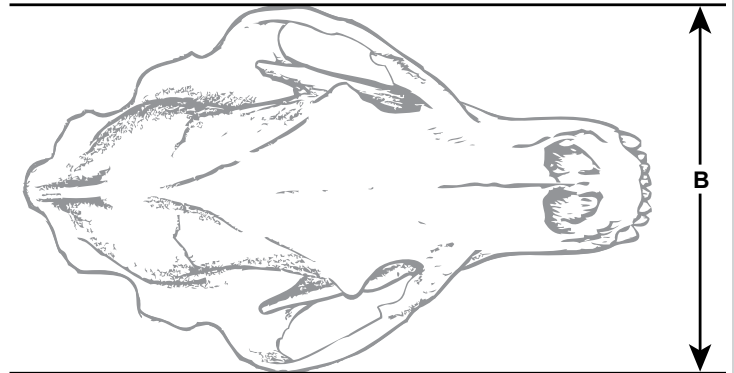
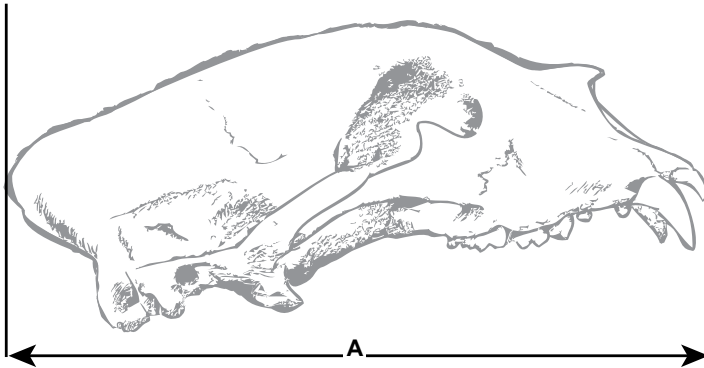


BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB®

OFFICIAL SCORING SYSTEM FOR NORTH AMERICAN BIG GAME TROPHIES

BEAR

(CHECK ONE):	MINIMUM SCORES	
	AWARDS	ALL-TIME
<input type="checkbox"/> black bear	20	21
<input type="checkbox"/> grizzly bear	23	24
<input type="checkbox"/> Alaska brown bear	26	28
<input type="checkbox"/> polar bear	27	27



SEE OTHER SIDE FOR SCORING INSTRUCTIONS	MEASUREMENTS
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A. Greatest Length Without Lower Jaw	
B. Greatest Width	
FINAL SCORE	

Exact Locality Where Killed:*	County:	State/Prov:
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Hunter (Legal Name):	Date Killed:
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Trophy Owner (Legal Name):	Telephone #:
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Trophy Owner's Address:

Trophy Owner's Email:	Guide's Name:
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Remarks (Mention Any Abnormalities or Unique Qualities):

*Geographic location (lake, mountain, river, etc.) required for trophies taken in Canada and Alaska.

I, _____, certify that I have measured this trophy on _____

PRINT NAME MM/DD/YYYY

at _____

STREET ADDRESS CITY STATE/PROVINCE

and that these measurements and data are, to the best of my knowledge and belief, made in accordance with the instructions given.

Witness: _____ Signature: _____

B&C OFFICIAL MEASURER

Boone and Crockett Club® Official Measurer I.D. Number

Mail To: Boone and Crockett Club ■ 250 Station Drive, Missoula, MT 59801 ■ (406) 542-1888 ■ www.booneandcrockettclub.com

No part of this scoring system may be altered in any way. No part of this score chart may be altered or copied without express written permission from the Boone and Crockett Club. A score chart is not authenticated until signed and dated by a certified Boone and Crockett Club Official Measurer. No scores are official Boone and Crockett scores until verified and the trophy is accepted by the Boone and Crockett Club. All trophy entries into the Boone and Crockett Club's Awards Programs are subject to verification.

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The single-most critical element facing the future of hunting and our wildlife is the continued public acceptance of recreational hunting.

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MISSION STATEMENT

It is the policy of the Boone and Crockett Club to promote the guardianship and provident management of big game and associated wildlife in North America and maintain the highest standards of fair chase and sportsmanship in all aspects of big game hunting, in order that this resource of all the people may survive and prosper in its natural habitats. Consistent with this objective, the Club supports the use and enjoyment of our wildlife heritage to the fullest extent by this and future generations.

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BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB® INSTRUCTIONS FOR MEASURING BEAR

Measurements are taken with calipers or by using parallel perpendiculars, to the nearest one-sixteenth of an inch, without reduction of fractions. Official measurements cannot be taken until the skull has air dried at a habitable room temperature for at least 60 days after the animal was killed. The 60-day drying period for a skull that has been frozen or boiled begins the day it is removed from the freezer, boiling pot, or submersion in any liquid. All adhering flesh, membrane and cartilage must be completely removed before official measurements are taken.

- A. Greatest Length** is measured between perpendiculars parallel to the long axis of the skull, without the lower jaw and excluding malformations.
- B. Greatest Width** is measured between perpendiculars at right angles to the long axis.