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 whit, 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 why is it then that so many hunters have small or medium-sized 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.

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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.
ALASKA BROWN BEAR

<table>
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<th>Average</th>
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BLACK BEAR

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POLAR BEAR

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average Final Score</td>
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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
WWW.BOONEANDCROCKETTCLUB.COM OR CALL 406-542-1888

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**BEAR**

(CHECK ONE):  
- black bear 20 21  
- grizzly bear 23 24  
- Alaska brown bear 26 28  
- polar bear 27 27

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<th>MEASUREMENTS</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Greatest Width</td>
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**FINAL SCORE**

**Exact Locality Where Killed:**  
**County:**  
**State/Prov:**

**Hunter (Legal Name):**  
**Date Killed:**

**Trophy Owner (Legal Name):**  
**Telephone #:**

**Trophy Owner’s Address:**  
**Guide’s Name:**

**Trophy Owner’s Email:**

**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/PROVINC**

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.

When hunting is viewed as a fair and ethical endeavor in support of science-based game management programs the voting majority (non-hunters) accept hunting. Join your fellow hunter-conservationists who believe that ethical sportsmanlike behavior is the only way to ensure a positive public image of hunters and hunting. Become a part of 120-year-old commitment to preserving our hunting heritage.

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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- A 20% discount on Club books.
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- Wallet I.D. card and a Hunt Fair Chase window decal.

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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.