

North Shore

STORY BY BRAD MARTIN

PHOTOS BY BRAD & DEBI MARTIN, AND ROGER LEWIS



Brad Martin, Lisa Godin, Debi Martin and Terry Smith with Tank.

16 June - New Brunswick bound. We finally finished packing about midnight last night and with the anticipation of the hunt, sleep was hard to come by. With the 5:30 wake up, we were out the door, ready to begin this adventure. The ride to the airport, check-in and security check were smooth as silk, for me. Debi on the other hand was too pretty to pass up for the TSA agent. She was delayed momentarily for the sweet, little (neither of which she was) agent to fondle every crack and crevice she had. It was hard not to laugh, because our last trip to New Brunswick found me in the same position and she has told anyone that would listen about my TSA buddy.

The flight out of Jackson was great, completely uneventful. It wasn't until we touched down in Houston, that it dawned on me that we may have a problem. We were still sitting on the plane waiting to unload and our next plane to Toronto was taking off in 30 minutes. I figured we still had time to make it, but we held very little hope that the luggage would. I was correct in my assumption that the checked luggage, including bow cases, would not make the quick turnaround to the next plane. What I didn't know was how much our luggage liked the Houston airport. So much so, it decided to stay a while. Lessons learned, from now on I will allow a minimum of 90 minutes per layover to allow for luggage transition.

The Toronto airport is usually a nightmare, but we slid through security and customs in a matter of minutes and began the waiting game for the next flight. We finally arrived in Moncton, New Brunswick around 11:45 and met a crowd of people at the baggage claim carousel. We were the last ones standing when the conveyor stopped. That sinking feeling in my gut had been realized. We were headed to bear camp for a bowhunt with absolutely no archery equipment. We filed the necessary claims for delayed baggage and jumped in the truck for the three hour drive to Jacquet River.

We would be hunting with North Shore Guide Service, Terry Smith and Lisa Godin. Terry and I take turns wearing the guide hat. We have taken them bowfishing and alligator hunting and they have been the guides for our bear and moose hunts. Our relationship is way beyond guide/

hunter, now we are great friends.

Terry said, "watch for moose." The baggage claim guy said, "watch for moose." The security guard said, "watch for moose." I'm thinking we should keep an eye out for them big rascals. And apparently they all knew what they were talking about. We saw three on the trip to camp. One pretty good bull.

By the time we were finally able to lay down, we were completely exhausted. We had planned to check all of the stands and bait sites the next day. Thankfully the guides let us sleep late and didn't start the process until after noon and we had a little breakfast at lunchtime.

17 June - The stands looked good and the bait sites were being destroyed. Hopes for big boars were at an all-time high. Trail cameras revealed that the big boys were hitting the bait. And in the daylight too. We were pumped. Now came the question of what equipment we were going to use to poke a hole in the big Bruins.

The baggage claim website did not give us the warm and fuzzy feeling. "Baggage being traced, please allow more time" was not what we wanted to see. So maybe calling in and talking to a human would give us some answers. So I called the 1-800 number, pressed "1" for English and waited... and waited... and waited. Forty-five minutes later I finally did get to speak to a human, but not one that spoke English. I distinctly remember pushing "1" for English. His Middle-eastern version of English and my Southern version did not mesh well. "Huh" and "I don't understand what you are saying" was used extensively throughout the

conversation. But I did finally manage to get "luggage is being tracked" and "please allow 24-48 hours" out of the very frustrating conversation.

Our outfitter was able to locate us one bow that we could borrow from a local. Our hunting partner, Darren Bridgers, would be shooting that one. Also, one of the guides was a traditional archer and offered his Black Widow for me to use. I'm not new to traditional bows, I shoot one often bowfishing. But there is a huge difference in hitting a watermelon at 10 feet and hitting a grapefruit at 20 yards. For the most part, I was pretty good and felt like I could consistently kill a bear at 15-20 yards. But then there were those crazy shots that would come out of nowhere and fly over or under the target or worse yet, hit him in the butt or ear. I spent most of the day trying to get rid of those flyers.

The call about the lost luggage in the evening was a mirror image of the one from the morning. I know I pressed "1" and they have no idea where our luggage is or when we will see it again. I have had delayed luggage in the past. I'm actually beginning to think it is standard operating procedures for international flights. But the part that concerned me was the airlines not knowing where the bags were. In all the other instances the bags have been delayed, the airline was able to tell me exactly where they were and when they would be arriving. I was really beginning to believe I wouldn't see my bow again.

18 June - Still no luggage and drizzling rain. Slept in and tried to get comfortable with the borrowed

equipment. I gave up on the Black Widow due to inconsistency with the nut holding the bow. The bow shot great, I just couldn't get me straightened out. Too many unexplained flyers. I didn't want to have one with Tank or Chevy below me. Another guide showed up with bows from the Outfitter for both Debi and I. Within a few minutes we had the Mathews bows dialed in out to 30 yards and were ready to go. Mine was easy, it was just a little too short for my draw length. Debi's on the other hand was 2" too short and left handed. She tried shooting it left handed and that didn't work well, so she shot it right handed. Within just a few minutes she was punching the 12-ring and was ready to kill.

PM. 60-65 degrees, drizzling to moderate rain. I was on the Site 1 stand by 4:00. A sow and 2 cubs were in and out until 5:30. About 7:45, momma and the munchkins returned. She was being followed by a couple of want-to-be boyfriends. All were decent bears, but not what I was willing to put a tag on on the first day. All total, I believe I saw 10 bears. The way they were moving through the dark timber and in and out of the bait, it was hard to keep track of individual bears.

The borrowed bow proved deadly for Darren. He ran a sharp stick through the lungs of a 265 pound boar on the first evening. That was a long trip for a 3 hour hunt. But the old guys will tell you, don't pass on the first day what you would kill on the last. Darren heeded their wisdom and has a trophy for the mantle and meat in the freezer.

19 June - It sure does get daylight

Darren Bridgers with his 265 pound bear killed on the first hunt with borrowed equipment.



awful early up here. 3:45 wake up to leave for the stand at 4:15. Legal shooting time began at 5:02, with at least 15 minutes of good shooting light before that. After processing Darren's bear and eating supper, it was nearly 1:00 am when we laid down. That doesn't leave a fellow much time to sleep.

A momma and three little bitty munchkins came in at 6:00 am and the parade of sows with cubs and small to medium sized boars continued until 9:30. In total, 9 bears moseyed through Site 1 this morning.

The luggage saga continues. The Outfitter spoke with the airport we flew into and they showed the suitcase there and my bowcase with both of our bows in it arriving at 1:00 pm. But they weren't sure when they would be delivered. So about 10:00am, the Outfitter jumped in the truck to make the 3 hour run to the airport to get our bows in time for the evening hunt. Now that is what you call service!!! Guess what, bow case was delayed again and would be on

the next flight at 6:00. They agreed to deliver it tonight, regardless of the time. So here goes another hunt with borrowed equipment.

I decided the wind, although howling, was good for the Ralph Road stand. This is the spot two years previous where a miscommunication with the guide had him picking me up 10 minutes early. And what a critical 10 minutes that would prove to be. A bruiser of a bear, probably 500 lbs, with a big chevron on his chest, thus the name Chevy, was walking in to the bait when the guide pulled up to get me. At that point, he was 24 yards and cautiously working in. Just 2 steps shy of clearing the spruce tree for a clean shot. I was heartbroken and the guide was sick and very apologetic.

With the high wind, activity wasn't as high as it had been. It was 7:45 before the first bear arrived. He was smallish, approximately 175 pounds and he was followed by a slightly smaller bear with large patches of significantly thinned hair, or rubs as they are called in bear

camp. Between the two runs, I was watching bears until 9:15. Now is time for Chevy to show up. But he never did. Just after legal shooting time, a huge sow with two cubs bellied up to the feed bin and hung around until the guide arrived and spooked them off.

Upon arriving back at the camp, word was that my bow case was on the ground in Moncton and would be delivered in the morning. After a short conversation with Terry (a very big man), they decided it would be best if they delivered the case tonight. I really think he told them that if I didn't get my bow tonight, someone from the airport was coming back to the camp as bear bait. And I did get my bow case with everything intact. It was 1:30 am, but Debi and I finally had our bows. Darren's still hadn't been located. With the late night, we decided to sleep late in the morning and check everything on the bows to make sure nothing was bumped in the extended journey to Jacquet River. Surprisingly, everything was spot on. We were finally ready to hunt bears, with our own equipment. Let's get this party started.

20 June - I spent the evening back in Site 1. There were a ton of bears there, and some brutes showing up just after dark. We were hoping one would slip in early. All was fairly quiet until 8:00 with only a couple of recently booted out cubs hitting the bait. But at 8:00 the circus rolled into town and someone left the gate open to the bear cage. By the end of legal light, I had seen 14 different bears ranging from 5 pounds to 300 pounds. Those little bear nuggets are a blast to watch. Every time momma



Momma bear below checking on the bear nugget that had climbed a tree nearby.

grunts, they scurry up the tree like a cat squirrel. The biggest boar had me putting tension on the string, but I decided I had 3 days left and wasn't ready to end it just yet. Overall it was a very entertaining evening.

21 June - I was headed to Black Point, a bait site I had not seen before, but was trusting the guide that a big boy was in the area. The 150 pounders started showing up before the truck quit crunching gravel and hung around until 7:00 am. Then all was quiet until 8:30. The sun was warm and with only 3.5 hours sleep, the eyelids were getting heavy. Their weight may have gotten the best of me for a moment or two. Slight movement in the shadows across the creek caught my attention, but I figured it was one of the dinks that had been to see me earlier. But when the sow cleared the cover, it was instant recognition that this was a different bear. Then movement behind her really got my attention. I didn't have the "gasp for air" reaction that I had when I first saw Chevy two years ago, so my initial instinct was to turn on the video camera show the guides what I had seen. I knew he was big. Much bigger than the sow, but it wasn't until later that I realized that I was significantly misjudging this bear's size and made a big mistake by not grabbing the bow. She was feeding and didn't have a clue I was in her dining room. He had given me several shot opportunities, but had not gotten close to the 55-gallon barrel yet for a size comparison. So, at this point, I still didn't realize what I was looking at. When he approached the barrel, his size became much more apparent. He dwarfed the drum. But

as he moved by, he had passed my shooting lanes and was moving more downwind to try and get my scent.

I had flipped the switch to kill mode, but also wanted to get the shot on video. As he circled in the thicket, he passed several shooting holes and turned around in a wide open hole at 8 yards. Easily a dead bear, but I wanted the video and the sow was sprawled out on the ground, working on the molasses soaked grain. I figured he would mosey back to the bait for an easy shot.

Instead, he got a good whiff of me and hit the eject button. He was out of there like a bullet and she just looked at him like he had lost his mind. She never got off the ground. Dad told me years ago, and I have preached the same thing into Debi's head. "Kill him on the first opportunity you have confidence in", because it may be your last. I didn't heed my own advice. But I still had his girlfriend... and she was just as content as she could be. And for the next two hours she would wander off and stroll back into the bait. With each return, my hopes would skyrocket that big boy would be tailing her. And each time, there was no sign of him. I was beginning to think he didn't stop running until he crossed the Canadian border headed to the States. On her fourth trip leaving the bait, she headed in the opposite direction. I figured if he was hiding in the shadows across the creek, he wouldn't let her just walk off. He would tag along. And he did just that, but just out of my shooting lane. Had I been set up a foot lower, I could have made the shot. But as it was, my shooting lanes just weren't clear.

I gave them about 15 minutes and figured the couple was gone for good, so I texted the guide to slip in and get me out. No sooner had I hit send, they cleared the thicket headed my way. I didn't know how close the guide was, so I fumbled for the phone to tell him to stop. Deja vu to two years ago with Chevy. I was rushing to get the phone put away and the bow off the hanger and was apparently moving a little too quickly. She picked me off and led him back the way they had come.

I had mixed emotions about the whole situation. It was definitely a bumbled opportunity at a great bear. But, I still haven't given a true "boy scout" effort at killing Chevy. And he was the bear I had left Mississippi to kill. This evening Debi will be at Black Point and will hopefully kill the brute from this morning and I'm headed back to Ralph Road to try my luck with Chevy.

Instead of the much needed nap at lunch, Terry said the fish were biting, and I'm easily persuaded into switching gears and ripping lips. Within a couple of hours, we each had a limit of striped bass within the 19 to 26 inch slot. My mouth is watering for supper already.

PM - Ralph Road was a bust. Big Bertha and her two oversized cubs have taken up residence at the bait site and were very persistent at chasing off any other bear that gets near the bait. And to make matters worse, the SD card in the camera was corrupted, so there were no pictures to verify that Chevy had been back. With the rut in high gear, I believe he is out looking for love, in none of my places.

22 June - Decisions, decisions. I'm a whitetail hunter at heart and

with whitetails, you live and die by the wind. I wanted to go back to the Black Point site and try the one I passed yesterday. But the wind was dead wrong for the stand. With many reservations, I decided to trust the guide, ignore the wind and hunt the stand.

The guide dropped me off at 5:10 am, just a few minutes after legal light. Once I was setup, it dawned on me that I intended to bring the polesaw with me to trim a few limbs that would open up several shot opportunities. But there was nothing I could do about that now. The second issue I had was the Thermacell would not light. This was serious. It would initially ignite the gas, but not light the heating element. I fiddled with the Thermacell for several minutes but was never successful at getting it to work properly. Luckily I had a full face mosquito net. Without that, I would have asked the guide to bring me a replacement. Those bloodsuckers are not bearable without protection in the north woods.

With all the time me and the other hunters in camp had spent in the stand, all of the bears came from the thick swamp directly in front of the stand. I wasn't exactly ignoring what was happening behind me, but I wasn't really focused on it either. About 15 minutes after drop off, I had this eerie feeling I wasn't alone. I glanced over my left shoulder to see a big black shadow disappear behind a tree. I slowly turned to catch it over my other shoulder and immediately knew he was a shooter bear. Problem was, with no bear activity behind me, I hadn't cleared any shooting lanes back there and it was a jungle of trees

and limbs. No possible way for a shot.

The bear was in no hurry and just paced back and forth directly behind me. So to keep up with where the bear was, I had to slowly flip back and forth between shoulders. For those that have never hunted bear, they make no noise when slipping around. And I mean none. Zero. Silence.

Unbelievable to watch an animal that size walk silently. You will swear he must be levitating. Anyway, this cat and mouse game continued for approximately 30 minutes with him gaining a little ground to the right with each cycle. I presume he was scent checking the bait for a hot sow, but he may have just been making sure the spot was safe before coming in. Then all of a sudden he headed down the lane that we walked in on and went completely out of sight. Well another shooter had walked out of my life.

I was typing a text to give the guide the play-by-play, when I noticed him headed back in my direction. And again he circled around behind me at 15 yards. He traveled around to my

left and out into the swamp where the bears are supposed to come from. He missed my only shooting lane by a few yards. Within minutes he emerged from the swamp tracking towards the bait. I positioned for a shot, but he skirted the area and managed to stay just out of the open lanes. He circled back into the swamp and disappeared.

Now I'm on high alert, studying the swamp for any signs of movement or the slightest hint of a noise. Five minutes of absolutely nothing. Then the very slightest rustle of pine needles pulled my attention behind me to the left. It was him walking in at 15 yards and approaching one of my shooting holes. How in the heck did he get there? In one slow fluid motion I slipped my bow off the hook and attached the release to the string. I hit full draw just as he entered my shooting window, but he stopped 2 inches shy of where I really wanted him. I stretched as far right as I could to clear a small limb and tucked the pin tight to his shoulder and slightly high due to the steep angle of the 8 yard shot. I don't remember firing the



Brad and Debi Martin with Brad's 290 pound bear.

shot, but it hit the small tuft of hair I was focusing on. With a loud twack, the illuminated nock lit up that exact spot. The bear stumbled then bulldozed through the thicket into the swamp. Within seconds all was quite again.

I let the guide know that I had shot and of the point of impact and angle of the entry. Since I had not heard the signature “death moan” that bears are known for, we agreed to the customary 30 minute wait. We, along with my wife and another guide, met at the drop off point and further discussed the shot and his reaction afterwards. I was also informed by my wife that she had expressed interest in hunting that stand and that I was in trouble because I talked her out of it.

We went to the impact spot and immediately picked up blood and could see the nock glowing 50 yards along the trail. The blood trail started out heavy and was downright gory within 25 yards. My confidence soared as I knew he wouldn't be far. He was piled up in the swamp 100 yards out. The combination of the

Black Eagle arrow and Grim Reaper broadhead had done their jobs. After a quick photo session that the local mosquitoes didn't want us to finish, we skidded the big rascal back to the truck in an ice fishing sled.

The scale at the camp said he weighed 290 pounds. He wasn't the biggest bear in the woods, but certainly a trophy for this Mississippi bowhunter. Now time to catch some more of them striped bass and settle into camera duty for my beautiful bride and partner in crime on these crazy adventures.

PM – We were back in Site 1, as each time I had hunted the stand, I had seen multiple bears over 200 pounds. And with time getting short, Debi may be interested in dropping the string on one of those very respectable bears. The hunt did not disappoint. We saw 15 different bears, but only one of which was approaching the 200 pound mark. He fed for an hour and Debi considered taking him home, but I could tell she wasn't really excited to kill him, so we let the sun set with him in the

bait. We were thoroughly entertained by the three little bear nuggets that couldn't have been more than 5 pounds apiece. They would climb up the trees, out on the limbs, on the barrels and even in the barrels. Getting to watch them was worth the price of admission.

23 June – After much discussion with the Terry and the guides, we decided to give Site 1 another shot this morning. We arrived just at legal shooting light and could hear a bear climbing a tree. Most likely one of the little fellows that never get far from the site. We settled into the stand as the guide freshened up the goodies that the bears were focused on. Before Debi could even get her release buckled, the little fellow shimmied down the tree in into the bait. He typically doesn't hang around long, but chooses to grab anything he can take with him and run for cover. He would do this many times throughout the morning. There was a never-ending parade of bears this morning and about 6:30 a nice bear slipped across our shooting lane in front of us and circled around to the right. I knew it was a good bear, but bears being so hard to judge, I wanted him beside the barrel for reference before giving Debi the thumbs up. As it was approaching the barrel, another bear appeared crossing the same trail. With this one, there was no need to wait on a size comparison. This bear was huge. He looked like a black Volkswagen slipping through the timber. The first bear, which I now believe is a hot sow, eased into the opening beside the barrel and Debi asked “Which one do I shoot?” I responded, “Not



Guides Kevin and Roger helping Brad drag his bear out of the swamp in an ice fishing sled.

that one. Be patient". The oversized bear also circled around to the right, so I figured we would follow his girlfriend right into the bait. But he was smarter than that. He didn't get big by being stupid. He stayed in the dark timber and only give us faint glimpses over the next 5 minutes, before completely disappearing. The large sow continued to feed for another 10 minutes and every time she would position for a perfect shot, Debi would look up at me with the "are you kidding me" look on her face. She really wanted to kill this bear. With each look, I would urge her to "give him a few more minutes". After the sow had been gone for a few minutes, another bear appeared on the outskirts of what we could see in the same direction the last two bears had come from. She said he was a good bear, but all I could see was patched of black. As he cleared the brush, I knew instantly which bear we were looking at. With his size and completely black face, he was easy to identify, it was Tank! I recognized him, I didn't think she had. As he approached the barrel, she turned and asked if she should shoot. I halfway thought she was being sarcastic, but replied "KILL HIM!" When he got near the barrel, he laid down facing us and would reach into the barrel and pull food to him. With the first reach into the barrel, he gave a quartering to shot and Debi began to draw. I instantly told her "Bad angle". She completed the draw and appeared to be settling in for a shot. At this point I was in panic mode and said a little louder than I wanted "Bad angle Baby". She held at full draw for over a minute waiting on him to get into

a better position. She eventually had to let down. We continued to watch the bear feed in the same position for eight grueling minutes with the camera running the entire time. Tank eventually repositioned slightly for a better angle. With the first swipe into the barrel, Debi came to full draw. When he reached in again and exposed his lungs, she sent a Razortrick right behind his shoulder. He jumped up, did a 360 biting at the wound and sprinted off the way he had come. We could hear him crashing over anything in his path for approximately 40 yards and then he stopped. We heard him cough 4 or 5 times, then total silence.

Debi asked "Did I hit him good?" I said, "Yes Baby, you hit him good. You just shot Tank." She hesitated for just a moment, looked back up at me and said "What did you say?" I said "That was Tank! You killed Tank!" She lost it. She had no idea that was one of the "Hit List" bears.

Cell service was very poor in the area, so we slipped out of the stand and headed for the road to the high spot to hopefully get a text out to the guide. We met up with him and

showed him the video. He said "dead bear, let's go get him". We slipped in and picked up the bloodtrail right at the barrel and found the lit nock approximately 5 yards down the trail. From there, I spotted a big pile of black and said "There he is". He was dead where we heard him coughing. His size was unbelievable to me. He was a giant. We took lots of pics at the site then skidded him out in the sled. Luckily it was downhill all the way. We had another photo session at the camp and everyone there was in awe at the size of Tank. He was appropriately named. He tipped the scale at 401 pounds. That is a giant for a spring bear. The guides estimate a 30% loss of weight during hibernation. That would put him over 500 pounds in the fall. An absolute giant no matter how you look at him. Congratulations to my beautiful bride.

I want to say a truly heartfelt thank you to our great friends and bear guides extraordinaire, Terry and Lisa. Also Roger, Randell, and Kevin, who shared the early mornings and carted us all over the countryside. They made pretty good bear draggers as well. Thank you all.

