

Bear Awareness

BEARS:

It is extremely important to remember that Black Bears in and around [Great Smoky Mountains National Park](#) are WILD and their behavior can be unpredictable. It is rare, but attacks on humans have happened, causing serious injury and even death. In fact, over the past couple of years (2008-2010) the bear population has increased by a significant amount causing some of the Park's popular hiking trails to be closed due to heavy bear activity. It is now estimated that the bear population in Western North Carolina could be as many as 10,000 bears. So, treat all bear encounters with extreme caution and follow the guidelines listed below....

Keep in mind that these are suggested actions to take and there are no "guaranteed" actions one can take when encountering wild animals.

BEARS ALONG THE TRAIL...

BY YOURSELF:

Always be aware of your surroundings. It is wise to try and make some noise when traveling alone on remote trails through the Park. Talk or whistle to yourself. Doing this will greatly reduce the chance of even seeing a bear. If you walk up on a bear, do not approach it any more than you already may have. If the bear changes it's behavior like: stops heading the direction it's pointed in, stops feeding, watches you, etc... you are TOO close!

If you find yourself too close to a bear and it starts approaching you, swatting the ground or acting aggressively, the bear is demanding more space. Remain as calm as possible, which can be more than difficult in a situation such as this but **DO NOT run**. Try to slowly back away keeping your eyes on the bear at all times. The key is to increase the distance between the bear and yourself. It has been suggested that if you can increase the distance between yourself and the bear while increasing the elevation in which you are at by moving to higher ground (in relation to the bear), your chances are greater that the bear will leave you be. However, if the bear continues to follow you in non-aggressive manner, try changing your direction. If this doesn't work and the bear remains persistent, try standing your ground. If the bear gets closer, start acting aggressively by shouting or talking loudly to try and intimidate the bear. If you can, like mentioned above, try to move to higher ground to make yourself look as big as possible. If this doesn't work, try finding a large sturdy stick and some medium to large rocks to throw at the bear. **DO NOT** turn your back on the bear and **DO NOT** run. This will promote an attack.

IN A GROUP:

Follow the same guidelines as above but by working together as a group. If separation from the bear and the group doesn't work at first, try coming together as one to make yourselves look as big as possible. This will more than likely discourage the bear and it will leave you alone. If not, try throwing multiple rocks, sticks, etc at the bear. Above all, try to keep everyone as calm as possible and insist on **NO RUNNING**.

BEARS IN THE CAMP...

The best and most effective way to avoid bears in the camp is to not attract them. Follow these key points to decrease your risk of a bear encounter in the camp.

- Keep Cooking and Sleeping Areas separate
- Keep Tents/Sleeping Bags free of any Food and/or Food Odors (Do not store food in them either)
- Do not store food in your sleeping area or other attractants including toothpaste, soap, garbage, etc.
- Keep your camp as clean as possible
- Pack out all food and trash
- Do not try to bury or burn anything
- Regulations require you to use proper storage devices for food, usually air tight containers
- If you do not have the proper food storage devices, use your pack for temporary storage

If you have to use your pack for storage follow these guidelines to successfully reduce the risk of a bear encounter:

Find a tree just outside of camp, using a rock for weight, tie a rope to the rock and toss it over a limb approximately 15 feet high. Tie the other end of the rope to your pack and pull the pack up in the air until it is at least 10 feet off of the ground and at least 4 feet from any nearby branches/limbs and tie it off.

If a bear approaches you in camp, frighten it by shouting, beating pans together or throwing rocks.