

# SPORTS AFIELD

AMERICA'S ORIGINAL OUTDOOR MAGAZINE

## Hunting North of the Border

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Saskatchewan Deer  
Alberta Wolf

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## Canada's Most Wanted

*A black bear hunt on Vancouver Island takes an unexpected turn.*

**S**ometimes the thrill of the chase lies not in chasing but in being chased. As the blue and red lights flashed and I kept my hands where the Mountie could see them, I held that thought in my mind.

The other thought I held was that you never know exactly where the real adventure will come from when you go on a hunt. Hunting black bears on Vancouver Island in British Columbia, Canada, is certainly adventurous in its own right, but it becomes more so when you find yourself under the suspicious glare of law enforcement.

Last September I hunted bears with Darren Deluca of Vancouver Island Guide Outfitters (250/724-1533). The island is so densely populated with big bears that getting one is a virtual certainty, and late on the first day I shot a good boar that was fishing for salmon at the edge of a wide bend of the Kennedy River.

Matters turned truly interesting, though, after the bear went down. That's when, in the gathering dusk, Darren and I noticed the headlights.

There was a bluff back from the river's bend and a break in the firs that hid the river, and that's where the headlights were. Without realizing it, while stalking the bear we had worked our way to an area where we were clearly visible from the main highway. Several sets of headlights were stopped, pointing our way. It

was still light enough to see the vehicles themselves, although it was difficult to make out the occupants. For some reason it seemed as if these must be people we knew—why else would they be watching us?—so we waved to them and went on dragging the bear out of the river.

It was well past dark by the time we made our way upriver to a place where we could hike back to get the truck and then load the bear into it. When we finally got out onto the highway and drove past the spot where the vehicles had parked, only one remained, its lights off. As we approached, it flashed its lights and we stopped. It was a Mountie.

"Did you just shoot a bear?" the law-enforcement officer in the car asked.

Darren said we had, and the Mountie told us to pull off the highway and turn off the engine.

After we were stopped and the engine was off, the officer exited the police vehicle and walked up to us. No Dudley Do-right hat for this Mountie—she wore body armor and a holstered semi-auto. She also had tortoiseshell glasses and a Clairol-enhanced bouffant, and her head came barely above the edge of the pickup window. But when she asked for our assorted permits, licenses, and my passport, and told us to step out of the truck, I knew she wasn't kidding.

That is how I came to be standing in the flashing lights, keeping my hands in plain sight, while a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police who looked more like a librarian or a school nurse ran me for warrants. When neither Darren nor I turned up on any fugitive lists, the Mountie handed us back our papers, then told us why she'd been waiting for us.

Coming around a curve at twilight, she'd found six or seven vehicles stopped



*Despite having shot this fine black bear legally, the author was later stopped by a Canadian Mountie on suspicion of poaching.*

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on the shoulder, facing the river. When she pulled over to investigate, a cargo of Germans boiled out of one of the cars and rushed to her.

The Germans were tourists, enjoying themselves on holiday, when they spotted a bear down on the river. It had seemed to them the perfect image of rustic Canada, the bear standing peacefully, ankle-deep in the pure water of the river. (The fact the bear was actively engaged in shredding helpless salmon with its teeth had not shaded their interpretation of the idyllic scene before them.) And just then—*Gott in Himmel!*—there was a horrific fireball and the bear ran, and another fireball and the bear fell. As more vehicles stopped, two men sloshed through the river to the bear, made some kind of *gesture* at them, and dragged the bear away.

The Germans were beside themselves, howling at the Mountie, demanding to know *was ist los* in Canada that men were allowed to murder tiny bears? It hardly mattered that the bear was far from tiny, or that Germans had “murdered” all of their own bears by about 1700; they insisted the officer of the *polizei* must take action against such an outrage.

As I listened to the story, I couldn't help thinking about a line of dialogue from a book called *John Macnab* by John Buchan. In the 1920s, the British soldier, barrister, diplomat, Minister of Parliament, Governor-General of Canada, and avid hunter and angler John Buchan was, as well, the great adventure-thriller writer of the day (the classic Alfred Hitchcock movie, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, was based on his novel). His 1925 *John Macnab* is about three world-weary English gentlemen who conspire to add savor to their predictable existences by poaching red stag and Atlantic salmon on several estates in the Scottish Highlands, the gentlemen concealing their identities under the shared nom de chasse, “John Macnab.” It's their way of acting on the advice given early on in the book to one of the protagonists by his physician: If you are looking for a foolproof way to liven up your life, simply “. . . steal a

horse in some part of the world where a horse-thief is usually hanged.”

Of course, no one in this day and age wants to be taken for a poacher; at the same time, it is reassuring to know that the law takes the possibility of poaching seriously enough to investigate a report of it.

Cleared of any charges, we were about to part company from Madam Mountie when we asked her if she had been waiting a long time for us.

“Oh, yes,” she said.

“It's a good thing you came out when you did,” she added. “If you had been fifteen minutes later, we were going to call out a special squad with night-vision gear and tracking dogs and go in after you.” She wasn't smiling when she said it.

It was all I could do to keep from grinning, though, as I thought of the K-9 and the tactical squad scouring the woods for me. It seemed to me that you really haven't lived until something like that happens to you on a hunt—assuming you live to tell about it. 

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