

Aug. 22/67

GRIZZLY NOTES

While we were instrumenting grizzly number 188 on August 22, Les Abby of the Park Service dropped by and watched our operation. He said that he had seen grizzlies early in the Spring when they were plowing the roads kill elk, kill a moose, also take a buffalo. In the case of the elk, he said that they had come down into the plowed part of the road and the grizzlies started advancing. The grizzly then made a rush and the elk scattered, one of the elk going off into the deep snow where it floundered and the grizzly immediately pounced on it. Apparently he bit the elk in the region of the neck and head and killed it. On another occasion he saw a moose out on the island at Big Game Overlook in the Yellowstone River, it had apparently been somewhat bothered by grizzlies and had taken refuge on the island. While Les was watching, he said a grizzly with cubs or yearlings swam out into the river above the moose then down onto the island and pounced on the moose and killed it. He said that it wasn't a real old moose and appeared to be in good condition. On still another occasion, he saw a sow or mother grizzly in early Spring with yearlings stalk a bullalo that was lying down and then pounced on it. The buffalo got up and tried to gore the grizzly. The grizzly managed to bite into his neck and hit him a number of times with her paws and he suddenly seemed to drop as though she had broken the backbone and hit the spinal cord. When I have time, I will try to meet with Les and interview him in more detail and record his observations of these three cases of predation on large mammals by grizzlies. I would also like to get the approximate dates and year that these occurred.

GRIZZLIES

Elk Kill - 1965

On July 13 we killed an elk just west of the third bridge up Hayden Valley. No grizzlies came into this "kill" during the first two nights. We spent the night near the carcass on the 13th, 14th and 15th. Upon arriving on the night of the 15th at approximately 9:00 p.m. we found that one or more grizzlies had just located the carcass. We placed the panel wagon in the timber about 125 yards from the carcass, set up the camera tripods and sound gun and then went to bed. Two of us slept in the car and one outside. Within an hour, at least two grizzlies returned to the carcass and from this time on there was continued feeding and intermittent fighting and growling as the bears consumed the carcass and as more animals moved in to feed.

The air was quite still but what air motion existed was from the carcass toward us. Occasionally the grizzlies seemed to scent us and left the carcass for short periods of time. At daylight they were apparently spooked in this way and all disappeared. Thus the only bear in sight at sunrise was not a grizzly but a large dark black bear. This bear moved in and started feeding on the carcass when the grizzlies left. The black bear after feeding a short time was scared away by the returning grizzlies. There were ten of them in all. These included a sow with three cubs, grizzly #112, grizzly #51, and others that were unidentified. The roars and growling followed by scampering bears during the night indicated that a rather dominant animal was present, probably one or more large boars. No large boars were observed at daylight.

When we attempted to get set for taking pictures the grizzlies again took off. Two yearlings returned and fed for a while. The rest did not come back. We were able to take a few stills and a few feet of movies of the young animals. When they left the black bear again came in to feed and we took a number of pictures of him as well.

The interesting thing about this incident is that this is the first time we have ever found a black bear feeding on a carcass intermittently with the grizzlies. Apparently the black bear remained in the timber and was unmolested by the grizzlies. Just before we left we moved in close to the black bear and had a difficult time scaring him off. In fact he moved into the woods only 100 feet or so. Even though he was 10 or more miles from the nearest highway it was evident that this black bear was accustomed to people and apparently had spent a lot of time either begging along highways or in campgrounds. A black bear similar to this one in size and color was observed in upper Trout Creek last summer. It seems quite likely that this is the same bear. He probably weighs over 350 pounds.

At least ten grizzlies, including three cubs, fed on the elk carcass during the course of the night. Feeding started about 9:30 p.m. and the entire carcass with the exception of skin and a few bones was consumed, by 4:30 a.m. Over the years we have observed grizzlies feeding on numerous elk carcasses but in no cases have they completely consumed a large bull elk in such a short period of time.

Oct. 17, 1963

Nobears seen on buffalo carcass but signs indicated a sow and cubs had found it. There were 17 defecations, some large and some small around carcass. Bears may have been stimulated to defecate by sight and smell of meat. These defecations, often with undigested bulbs and berries are usually found around carcasses. Sow and cubs had pulled off hair but had not been able to eat much. There was vegetation and some bulbs in most droppings. A few of the cub ones were somewhat watery. Later checking indicated this family was sow # 150 and her 3 cubs. They apparently were the first to reach the carcass and arrived 54 to 60 hours after animal was dropped at 12:00 noon on Oct. 14. They came from a distance of approximately 1 3/4 miles. (Buffalo carcass in upper Hayden V.)

#40
Oct. 6 Marion came into buffalo carcass about 1 mile west of the Hilltop Station. There was a sow and three yearlings on the carcass and these bears kept Marion at a distance. This carcass is within Marion's home range yet these other bears kept her off the carcass and were aggressive as compared to her timid actions in approaching the food. These animals do not seem to defend a home range but an aggressive animal may defend a good foraging spot or at least a carcass. This too seems to vary with conditions and individuals.



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Oct. 1, 1968

Roberts seen on buffalo carcass but slight indication
had found it. There were 14 defecations, some large and some small around
carcass. Bears may have been stimulated to defecate by sight and smell
of meat. These defecations, often with undigested bulbs and berries are
usually found around carcasses. Sow and cubs had pulled off hair but
had not been able to eat much. There was vegetation and some bulbs in
most droppings. A few of the cub ones were somewhat watery. After
checking indicated this family was sow & 150 and her 3 cubs. They
apparently were the first to reach the carcass and arrived 54 to 60 hours
after animal was dropped at 12:00 noon on Oct. 14. They came from a
distance of approximately 15/4 miles. (Buffalo carcass in upper Hayden V.)

Oct. 6 Norton came into buffalo carcass about 1 mile west of the Hilltop
Station. There was a sow and three yearlings on the carcass and these
bears kept Norton at a distance. This carcass is within Norton's home
range yet these other bears kept her off the carcass and were aggressive
as compared to her timid reaction approaching the food. These animals
do not seem to defend a home range but an aggressive animal may defend a
food foraging spot or at least a carcass. This too seems to vary with
conditions and individuals.

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GRIZZLIES ON ELK

#40

July 9, 1961

John, Maurice and I took a cow elk in the upper part of Hayden valley beyond third bridge where road makes a sharp bend in trees. Shot elk just at sunset. Took pictures of elk herd in valley near pond of water.

July 11 visited kill in evening with ES and still no bears present and no coyotes, ravens or magpies.

~~July~~

July 12 John visited kill early in morning and it was still untouched

July 12 Charlie and I drove out to kill arriving about 7:45 pm. There was nothing on kill and no sign that it had been touched. We parked in trees about 500 ft away and watched until dark. Cow and bull elk came by to our right. Cows barked when they detected us. Took a few pictures. No bears came in as long as we could see or hear. Slept in panel wagon.

July 13. Awoke at 4:00 am and wiped moisture off windows to look at kill. The light was still poor and a heavy mist hung over the valley. There was no sign of a grizzly. We dressed and started to move along edge of woods and saw a small grizzly coming toward kill at 4:45. This bear came up to the elk approaching warily. He came in from the SW and swung around to come in from the NW. The light was still very poor and the bear stayed at kill only a minute and then left. She (later identified as # 40) took off to the NW and then coursed over the fields like a bird dog. She ran with nose to ground and occasionally stopped to sniff and look about. She circled over to the north and again approached the elk ~~from the~~ after roaming over to the east. This time she came in from the NE and started right away to tear away at the elk. The bear appeared to have partially circled the kill to see if any other bears had approached it or were nearby. This may have been the bear's first appearance or she may have been in during the night hours. From my position I could not tell whether the carcass had been eaten but it appeared to have been slightly shifted from the evening position. It was immediately apparent that the bear was tagged. It bore two yellow tags but no markers. The bear started eating on the rear end and tugged away at the flesh and tendons with her jaws but using the front claws to move the hide or to push with when pulling backwards with her head. Several times she partially rolled or pushed the elk and occasionally grabbed a leg and pulled to shift the position of the carcass. I could clearly hear her paws strike the legs and her jaws snap shut on bone.

While the bear was eating I took pictures using HS Ekt. A cow elk moved up behind the bear but in the distance and stood sniffing the air. Mist still hung in the low ground. I took two pictures and then the elk left. Slowly elk moved out from the far timber to the NW. Without showing alarm but for no apparent reason the bear left the kill going off to the NW. and out of sight over the immediate hill. I then noticed another grizzly coming in from the SW but too far off for the first one to see. There was little or no air movement but apparently the first bear winded the newcomer. This one was a much larger dirty brown bear. It was not black but close to it. It had no ear tags. While this bear was approaching I saw another one coming in from the east. This was a rangy black colored bear. He reached the kill first and started immediately to tear up the carcass and ate as though quite hungry. This bear had Al. (silver colored) tags in both ears but no markers. Shortly after the arrival of the second bear the still larger brown one poked his head up over the hill just behind the feeding bear. As the big bear came in the black one ran

July 13, 1961 cont.

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off a short distance but immediately returned and was not molested by the larger bear. I photographed both bears on the elk with a herd of elk in the background. The big bear fed only for 5-10 minutes and then turned abruptly and started moving off to the NW. He seemed ~~xx~~ warier than the other bears and perhaps got a faint wiff of our scent. Though not alarmed he definitely had detected some sort of danger. This large bear was not marked and perhaps had had less contact with man than the others.

While the bears fed and particularly the black one alone Charlie and I moved through the lodgepole timber until we were directly opposite them and as close as we could get without walking toward them in the open. At this point we were 75-100 yds from the car and with few climbable trees nearby. Charlie carried the single shot shotgun and I had the 357 sidearm. After the black grizzly had been feeding for sometime he left the elk and started directly toward us. He appeared to be starting out on a reconnaissance trek which they seem to periodically make at a kill: especially soon after arriving at one. I took a couple of pictures as the grizzly approached and told Charlie to start through the woods toward the panel wagon. The grizzly was about 200 yds away and though walking was covering the ground rapidly. I picked up the camera and tripod and started after Charlie. The grizzly apparently did not detect me until I started to run. A few minutes after this he took off in the opposite direction but as I had not looked back I did not know just where he went or where he was. I decided to wait awhile near the car and see what would happen next. In about ten minutes the bear that had first come to the elk (#40) reappeared and moved in directly to the kill. He had apparently been hanging around nearby but out of sight and saw the black bear leave.

Pictures
#40

I moved up close on this bear and took quite a few pictures, some with a whole band of elk in the background. On several occasions I moved into the open 3 or 4 yds beyond the trees and took pictures. This bear as well as the black one looked right toward me with out apparently seeing me or giving any indication that they detected my presence. After a while this bear like the black one left the kill and started toward me. I took several pictures after he left the elk and then decided to move. I had already told Charlie to start moving through the woods toward the car. The bear approached to within 200 ft. and I would have liked to let him come closer for a picture but with Charlie present was afraid to risk it. This time I decide to try yelling before running. When I waved my arms and gave a yell the bear stopped, looked at me a second and then took off on a run to the West. Just before disappearing over a rise he slowed down and almost stopped. After a few minutes I followed through the timber and reached a point where I could see the rest of the big valley to the south and west. The grizzly had disappeared.

Prior to the arrival of the first grizzly I had not seen coyotes, ravens or magpies in the neighborhood of the elk. Soon after his arrival a coyote moved in and was followed by ravens wheeling in close and finally a magpie came. The coyote went into the kill when the first grizzly left but then moved off apparently seeing or sighting the other approaching grizzlies before I did. These three scavengers seem to wait until the bears open up the carcass before they come in and try to feed. The coyotes probably would have started on the elk had they been real hungry.

None of the bears made any attempt to bury the elk as they regularly and characteristically did in the fall. None lay down or slept on the carcass and at least two bears tolerated one another though both appeared hungry. All the bears were in such constant motion eating that I had difficulty getting shots at 1/50 sec. stopped down to get background.

July 13, 1961 cont.

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After the bears had gone I examined the carcass. Not a great deal had been eaten. The rear end had been partly eaten and the intestines pulled out. One section of these had been dragged off 30 feet by the largest bear. The head had been chewed on and eaten and the eyes devoured.

John and Derek returned to this kill in the evening and found it nearly consumed and dragged down into the sagebrush. The small bear #40 was the only one there. They spent the night and still no more bears appeared in the morning. Probably the three grizzlies that I saw and perhaps more ate this whole elk in the course of the day -- from daylight to sunset. In fall the grizzlies did not consume any such quantities of meat in such a short time.

It seems logical to assume that the reason for the burying of the elk in fall and not at this time of year is that in the fall the bears are fat, not ravenous and are getting ready to hibernate. They tend to hide, protect and defend the food rather than consume it. At this time of year they are relatively lean and hungry. Their instinct seems to be to eat, not hoard. From observations made so far they seem more inclined to share food as they do at the dumps. It will be interesting to see if these distinct types of behavior for summer and fall hold true or are at least somewhat characteristic of the seasons.