

Bear hunting with dogs isn't as easy as it seems

Customers' Day: Daniel J. Dubord's first-hand experience at bear hunting with dogs convinced him, he writes, that "bruin holds the upper hand in his element.

"In my many years of hunting, I haven't had the opportunity to hunt much with hounds, with the exception of rabbit and coon hunting, with Joe Doyon many years ago," Dubord writes.

"Recently Steve Cole invited me to a bear hunt. He's from Thorndike and a well-known bear hunting guide now associated with a brand new hunting lodge in Forest City owned by Northeast Outfitters. I knew absolutely nothing about what was to happen and like most hunters, had never seen a bear in the woods.

"The hunt began by selecting hounds for the occasion. The leader of the pack and the strike dog was Boomer, a nine-year-old Walker hound. The hunt took place on property owned by the paper industry where there are hundreds of miles of tote roads and logging paths.

"Boomer quickly got the action started, scenting a bear from the strike cage atop the cab. Steve cut loose Richochet, a Redbone, Duke, another Walker, and Moose, a Plott hound, and soon announced that the bear was off and running. All the dogs had transmitting antennas on their collars and a receiving station was on in the truck to keep them located.

"I quickly grabbed my rifle and headed for the woods figuring it would only be a short time before the bear was either cornered or up a tree.

"Much to my surprise the sound of driving hounds quickly faded from ear contact, at which point we jumped into the truck and began what Steven refers to as hot pursuit. That consisted of putting the truck in four-wheel drive and trying to get in front of the bear and dogs, which by now were running at about 30 miles per hour.

"Unlike in rabbit hunting, I discovered that the cover for this hunt could be a 50 square mile area of land and water and that the bear was likely to utilize all of it.

"When the tone of the dogs changed, it became apparent something had happened and Steve informed that a bear had been treed. In this first instance I learned that a sow bear in a tree with two cubs nearby was off limits. They were left alone, the dogs leashed and we sought another bear trail.

"This second bear chase took us up and down a mountain. We must have driven about 50 miles fol-

Gene Letourneau

Sportsmen say



lowing the chase when the bear crossed a road in front of us, but it was going too fast for me to even get it in the rifle sights.

"I would say now that bear hunting is as exciting as any type of hunting I've experienced and although there are people who suggest that chasing a bear with dogs is unfair, my first-hand experience would indicate that the bear holds the upper hand in his element in spite of the talent of guides such as Cole and the experiences of his hounds."

(Editor's note: The majority of Maine bear hunting guides frown at any chance of anyone killing a sow (female bear) with cubs.)

Dubord, a Waterville attorney, adds that he opened the bird hunting season with Dick Taylor of China and Joe Lucey of Brooks. Hunting over an English pointer, "Doc," they found an abundance of native woodcock and considerably more grouse than for several years.

"We had one stretch where we had three consecutive points and kills before the dog could fetch the first bird," he noted.

Regular contributor Ben Butler writes he's seen more partridges this fall than for several years but deer signs in his favorite spots are limited. He blames "devastation of woodland habitat" for the deer situation.

"With non-residents buying up everything, and posting it, we won't have anything left for hunting as we've known it in a few years," he writes.

Jack Chenard, chairman of the Waterville Country Club publicity committee, made a brief report at the recent meeting of the Board of Directors when his occasion to speak came up.

"I hired five foxes at the start of the season," Chenard said, "and the rest is history."

The club had a nationwide spread of publicity as the result of wild foxes using two sand traps to raise litters.