

It's a Bear

[This TATC Newsletter Article, appearing in Feb. / March, 2005, was submitted by long time club member Carl Albuquerque. Carl (and his family) have rented and enjoyed the cabin many times over the years. This article was mistakenly published without his name attached to it]

It's morning on Sunday at the TATC Cabin, Halloween, 2004. Barbara, my daughter Erin, myself and some friends are out for the weekend.

Barb's friend Amy is there, along with her 5 ½ year old Chocolate Lab, Willard. I want to take pictures, so Amy and I head out to find nice leaves to take pictures of. No one else wanted to go along. We went down below the spring to find the cemetery. Interestingly enough, I can never find the cemetery immediately. I'm looking around for it, and I was reminded about a story by Faulkner called "The Bear". In this story, this great big bear only reveals itself to some people in the woods. I'm thinking that that is what the cemetery is like. You can't find it in the spring / summer because of the growth, and it's hard to see most of the time with the possible exception of winter. So I'm trudging around in the leaves and I finally find it.

I always love going to the cemetery. One guy was buried in 1930, the other tombstone says 1913, I think. There's a little metal one stuck in the ground besides a sunken grave that I think says the 1950's. I can never remember, and I never write it down. I have a picture, so I didn't take anymore. It's beautiful out, the sky is blue through the trees. Amy notes that this would be a great place to be buried, if you had to be buried.

After a brief stay, I start walking back up the hill, collecting poplar leaves. I have a group of big to small in increments that I want to take a picture of stacked on top of each other when I get back to the cabin. The biggest is around 5 inches wide, and the smallest is approx. 1 inch wide. Yellow tulip poplar leaves. The smell of the forest is great this time of year, its calm out, beautiful temperature and crisp weather. Awesome.

I look up to see Willard coming down from the cabin, around 50 - 75 feet away, at my 10:00. "Oh, it's Willard", I thought.

It wasn't Willard.

The "Chocolate" was actually "Black", and "Willard" was actually a Bear. He was moving down the hill at an angle, passing 11:00. I called to Amy, behind me, "it's a bear!"

Now at this point, I'm thinking, "Wow". He wasn't that big, but I surmised that he was probably larger than a cub, but I'm not sure. Then I'm thinking, "where's the mother?" I scan around, but I don't see any other bears. I take his picture as he passes 11:00, then he stops, right in front of me, around 50 feet away, turns and looks at me.

At this point, my stomach dropped and I thought, "OH, &*+%!, what do I do now?" I contemplated picking up a large stick, but I didn't think to yell or anything.

We looked at each other for a couple of seconds, an eternity, and then he ran away, heading up the mountain to the rocks above.

That's my little piece of trail magic. Like most other things in life, it only happens when you least expect it.

TATC Club Member

[Previous to this encounter, cabin workers or renters had seen only signs of bears in the area around the cabin, but no actual bears. In the 8 years since Carl's encounter three other bears have been seen within 300 yards of the cabin, and another one observed sniffing a club member's car at the parking area along the Blue Ridge Parkway. One lone renter was recently sitting on the front porch taking a break, having just walked back from his car. He heard the

sound of running footsteps in the leaves, downhill and just to the left of the outhouse. There, coming up the trail from the spring, he saw a fawn, being pursued by a bear, the two of them being chased by the fawn's mother. The man stood and reached inside the cabin's front door for his camera, but his movement, or some noise he made, apparently drew the bear's attention and, near the Putman Cabin sign, it soon broke off the chase, ran down into the hollow. The renter couldn't help but realize that if he'd been just a few minutes later returning from his car he would have been on that same trail down near the sign, would have heard an approaching noise, looked up to see a fawn running towards him, followed closely by a hungry bear]