



A Grizzly Discovery

Running for the hills with a bear behind *by Beve Stevenson, Calgary*

My friend, Al, (Anastasia Arechuk, left in the photo above) and I are avid hikers who've known each other for 15 years and have always planned our outings carefully. Our target one fine, clear day a couple of summers ago was Harvey Pass, near Banff, Alta. After several hours of hunger-inducing trail tramping towards the pass, we reached Borgeau Lake. But unimpressed, we pushed on through dense brush to a surprise clearing at the base of a steep slope.

We settled down on individual flat rocks to munch on our lunches, and I daydreamed of working outside instead of the insanity of my job as a nurse in a busy hospital emergency room. Suddenly Al screamed, "BEAR!" Sure enough, there he was, a big, freaking GRIZZLY BEAR, and he was barreling straight for us! I felt an adrenaline surge...and a disturbing sensation in my intestines. A scream of "BEAR! BEAR!" pierced the still air. (Oh, that was me!) I fled up the scree path, feeling sluggish—like I'd just emerged from anaesthetic. Al hadn't followed the trail, so I feared a poorly-timed ankle fracture on the loose stones. With Mr. Bear below us, we pushed on upwards seeking the safety of other hikers. An hour of calf-killing climbing led us to a turquoise lake nestled in a treeless bowl, surrounded by a high ridge. Al grilled me; do bears swim? do they stalk? do they prefer blondes? I'm a middle-aged nurse, not an *ursus horribilis* expert. Unexpectedly, up popped the bear again—on the trail behind us! With Indiana Jones woefully absent, we could only climb faster and hope for the best. Finally, our prayers were answered and we joined other hikers at Harvey Pass. Our wild-eyed, hysterical babbling convinced them to join us for a safety-in-numbers journey down. I'd now calmed down enough to notice my shorts were soaked. I thought I'd wet myself, until a pack-check revealed a leaky water bottle.

Randy Kokesch of Winnipeg shares this pic of a brown bear waving hello. Actually, it was enjoying a good old back scratch. Great shot, Randy!

As we began our descent, a bear was spotted on the ridge. I worried that perhaps the ridge bear wasn't our bear. If so, we were about to become the protein in a bear sandwich. We hurried down, yelling as we went, to deter unwanted mammals.

After our return home, I imagined the outcome had Al been facing a different direction; Mr. Griz could have bitten my buttocks before I knew it! And what if he'd possessed a genuine enthusiasm for the chase? Likely, his routine included daily surveillance of unwitting trekkers, followed by poking his bear friend in the ribs and saying, "Watch this, Bob. Ha ha!" ■

