

The Wolves

It was the third day of our hunting trip with Birch Creek Outfitters. Terry Robinson, Josh Collins and myself, were in the Selway with Don Chlarson, our hunting guide, hunting Bull Elk. We walked from our camp down 'The Spur Trail' heading for some meadows and 'The Rock'. We left Terry at the first set of clearings and meadows to watch for elk, deer and bear (our hunt was a combination hunt, allowing us to get any one of these animals). Don, Josh and I continued down the canyon to the next open slide and meadows. Josh stayed here to hunt this area while Don and I continued onto 'The Rock'.

About 200 yards further down the trail, Don and I came up on some bear tracks that seemed to be heading to 'The Rock'. We assumed that this bear was heading to 'The Rock' after the remains of the previous kill (two days prior to us hunting this zone, the other hunters in our group had killed a black bear off 'The Rock'). We moved very slowly down the trail looking for movement and listening very carefully. We crossed several small streams and at one point saw a small brown animal (maybe a beaver or mink).

The bear was a secondary objective. We were hunting bull elk and in doing so had shot out several cow elk calls along the trail. We continued down the trail to 'The Lower Rock' about 200-300' below the main lookout. We looked around this clearing for about 10 min. and then moved into the trees. To get up on 'The Rock' we climbed the hill side toward the back side of 'The Rock'. There is a small meadow back there, then a group of thick trees and bushes to pass through on the way out to the lookout/cliff edge at 'The Rock'. As we stepped out to the edge and began scoping the area for elk, we called out a few more cow calls, hoping to excite a bull into the open. After seeing no real movement, we started to relax and get settled for a few hours of waiting and watching. We set down our packs, drained our bladders and tried to get comfortable (I set a Way Point on my GPS for the 3rd day of hunting at about this time – 10:45am). We both found a nice spot along the cliff edge to view the area.

About 15-20 minutes after settling down, Don shot out another cow call. Nothing was moving... Don took off his boots to relax his feet a bit and to set up his GPS. I went up to a log (about 15ft away, near the bushes) where I had left my pack, to get a sandwich, and return to the cliff edge to continue to look for movement.

This next part happened very quickly, within 5 minutes:

Don was watching the hill side just to the right of 'The Rock' and suddenly sat up and pointed out a wolf. This wolf was about 50 yards away. He was big, real big... I was amazed at how big he was. I always thought of wolves being just slightly larger than a German Sheppard. But this wolf was more like a Great Perinese (probably 3 ½ feet tall at the shoulders). He was black with some brown stripes on his side. He was sneaking into the tree line when we noticed him and then was gone. Don and I were on high alert, watching to see if we could see where he went. A couple of minutes later we heard a wolf 'whooping' and 'yipping'. At first I was not sure what it was, I had never heard wolves in the wild like that. Then we saw the next wolf (slightly smaller, but still bigger than I thought they were). This wolf was much closer,

about 50 feet from us. We were shocked, how did we not see it? It moved in so quiet... But it was way too close for comfort. The wind was blowing up over the cliff from behind us and into the wolves. They knew at that point we were people and not a cow elk. Don was on his feet, with his pistol out. I was up and had my rifle up in ready mode and looking through the scope to find the wolf. Don said we had to get out of there. We heard something big in the bushes behind us, then several sounds in different locations in those same bushes. They were cutting off our escape route! We had nowhere to go but off the cliff (about 100-200 feet straight down). Don turned and aimed high and left of the wolf and in rapid fire, shot out 12-15 rounds from his 9mm. Within the first 2-3 shots, 3 other wolves stood up! We did not even see them. They were all within that same distance of about 40-50 feet. But the gun shots did not scare them. They just headed into the trees, curving toward us as they came. I was scared and decided to let loose a round from my gun, thinking it was much louder; a bigger caliber gun would make them run. I shot about 2 feet behind the last wolf (BOOM). And he did not even flinch... He walked up to a rock and stood his front legs on it, staring at me. An image I can't get out of my head. He was all black with his pink tongue hanging out, just staring at me like I was his target. I jacked in another round and pulled up on him again. The cross hairs of my scope on his head and not much else in the viewing area (I thought, wow, he is way to close). "Don, I can take him out! Can I shoot him?" I said. Don quickly responded "No, don't shoot him", and then the wolf walked into the bushes, following the others.

Don slipped his boots on and told me to grab my stuff and that we had to get out of there, NOW! I was scared to go up by the bushes and get my pack, the wolves were right there, we could hear them. With both of us ready to shoot we ran up and got my pack and jacket. At some point here I remember seeing Don's hands shaking and I knew he was as scared as I was. I remember shoving my gloves and GPS into the pack and then we headed down the right side of 'The Rock'. It was steep and I was thinking "don't slip... they are still coming...". We hurried down the hill to the trail out of there. We had gone about 100 yards down the trail (almost running) before we stopped for a breath. We whispered back and forth about how unbelievable it was to have them that close. About then I heard something moving on the hill above us about 30 yards away. Don did not hear it but we started moving again anyway. About 75 yards further down the trail we heard the 'Yipping' again, just up on the hill about the same distance I had heard it before. They were following us, hunting us! Don made me go first down the trail thinking if they attack, it will be from behind and he wanted to make sure I was safe. When we got to the first stream we saw that there were wolf tracks on top of our foot prints in the mud from earlier that morning. The wolves had followed us in, and now, were chasing us out! We continued to move quickly up the trail. At the next stream we saw prints again, following us in and now they were going the other way as well. They were behind us, beside us on the hill and now we knew they were in front of us as well! PANIC!!! We moved up the trail as if we were moving through a war zone jungle, both of us ready to do battle at any point, safeties off, guns loaded and fingers on the trigger.

Josh had the other 2-way radio, so I radioed ahead to let him know we were being hunted and that there were wolves all around us and between him and us. I told him to be on high alert and be ready when we got there. We were heading back to camp, now! After picking up Josh and heading to get Terry we heard them again, behind us and still too close for comfort. As we approached the meadow where Terry was we did not see him in the tree line where we had left him. Instead he was standing on

a set of large rocks in the middle of the meadow. He explained that he had fallen asleep along the tree line and had been woken up by the sound of wolves. The yipping and howling was close enough to wake him from a dead sleep. With his back against a tree, he had seen a large black wolf run through the trees (about 75 yards away) toward 'The Rock' and heard several others moving around him. He decided it would be better to put some distance between him and the tree line in case they got any closer. We talked for a few minutes and put times together. Things did not match up, the wolves he saw were there at the same time Don and I were shooting on the 'The Rock'. We had two groups of wolves in this same valley with us! We started moving toward camp again. About 200 yards out of that meadow, we heard them howling and yipping no more than 75 yards away. They were still chasing us!!! We made it back to camp in record time. We did not see them again but could hear them howling, yipping, and barking, for the rest of the night. About 4:30am the next morning they all lit up and howled, barked and whooped together for about 30 seconds (which seems like an eternity when this is happening, in the dark, in the back country) and then they were gone.

Some hind-sight thoughts:

The wolves moved in very quickly and very quietly. Unbelievably quiet, the only thing we really heard was a few whoops and yips from the Alpha wolf up on the hill. It was like Morse-Code and he just lined them up in a way that was most effective for a kill. I am sure that they thought they had a cow elk pinned against that cliff and that they were going to eat. By the time we saw them, the Alpha wolf already had them worked up into a feeding frenzy. They were going to kill something and did not care what it was. Even after they could smell us and knew that we were people and not an animal. That is down-right scary to me, being a born and raised Idahoan. I have spent most of my life in the Idaho wilderness, hunting and fishing in the Stanley and Challis areas. This event has opened my eyes to the VERY REAL DANGER that the Northern Grey Wolf presents to the people of Idaho. I no longer feel comfortable going into the wilderness unarmed.

Seeing first-hand how quickly the wolves moved in on a 'cow elk' amazed me. This should be the elk rut and the bulls and cows should all be "talking" right now. We used an elk bugle several times during the week long hunt and did not receive a single response. I believe that the elk have learned that by making any noise they put not only their own lives in danger, but the rest of the animals in the valley in danger from these predators. We did not see any Mule Deer or any Whitetail Deer the entire week. What is happening in our precious wilderness areas? We must gain control of this so called endangered species.

Feel free to contact me to discuss this wolf encounter.

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