

BATTLING

with a

KILLER BEAR

Mountaineer Braves
Claws, Teeth and
Huge Paws of
Vicious Prowler

By WILLIAM HORNE

IN all the wilderness of Dismal Swamp there is probably no animal more cunning and wily than the large black bear. Nor, it should be said, more ferocious when wounded or mating or encountered with cubs, or when caught red-handed in the act of ravaging a livestock pen or native's poultry yard.

Generally, this big, lumbering fellow feeds on roots and choice herbs and on the eggs of wild fowl and birds, but not many of them will pass up an opportunity to kill a cow or a fat porker that has strayed from a small herd of some isolated family of the region.

However, once they have tasted flesh and blood, they will go to almost any extreme to get it, and have been known to employ such uncanny tactics in making a kill that men have marveled at their cunning. Harassed natives have been forced to disregard closed season on the animals wherever the law was imposed.

This species of the black bear often grows to weigh 600 pounds, and has been known on several occasions to attack a lone hunter or a trapper in the dense thickets of the swamp. More than one hapless native has been known to lose the battle.

Often the din made by one of these larger killers as it attacks a cow can be heard for two miles through the silent swamp, and he does, indeed, employ weird methods in going about it.

His usual routine is to stalk a herd patiently for several days until he learns the habits, watering holes, grazing territory and where they spend the night.

Displays Cunning

THEN, satisfied with what he has learned and probably mapped out in his cunning brain, he waits at a water place for the herd to approach, or at night near the cattle's corral.

In his mind's eye he has already picked out the fattest of the lot. When this individual approaches he springs from his place of concealment with the stealth of a cat and launches his tremendous bulk straight atop his quarry's back.

If the victim can withstand the sudden attack and is not immediately dragged to the ground, the bear sinks its long teeth deeply into the ridge of the neck and clamps down with all its enormous strength. In this manner the vertebra is soon reached, and the hapless bovine collapses, paralyzed.

Often, however, the victim does withstand the terrific onslaught, and in this case the attacker drops lightly to the ground and delivers terrific, whacking blows to the region of the heart.

These blows can be heard for an unbelievable distance through the swamp, and a native, hearing the hollow, whacking sounds, knows immediately that some savage killer is taking its grim toll of life.

With the exception of dragging the

kill to its lair, the bear uses the same tactics with hogs in the swamp.

Stalking a big porker for a while, he suddenly attacks with savage blows, and when the victim is beaten into submission, a smart slap on the side of the head with one great paw starts the hog walking toward the killer's den.

On that journey it is driven wherever the bear wills by alternate blows to either side of the head, and once at the mouth of the lair it is quickly dispatched, dragged inside and devoured at leisure.

Cunning and powerful indeed are these lumbering killers of Southern swamps, and more than one native will vouch for their savagery.

Bear Captures Hog

HENRY FRYE, who makes his home on a small, isolated farm near the Drummonds Lake section of Dismal Swamp, probably knows more about these wily killers than any native of the region, for during the last several years he has been molested a score of times, and his last experience came near costing him his life.

"At one time," Frye declares, "I was losing my hogs and cattle so fast I thought I'd just quit trying to raise them. There was one old bear in particular that seemed to take a special delight in raiding my hog pen, and my boy had gone with me many times on his trail with our hounds, but we'd never caught him.

"One Sunday morning I was up on a ridge above the house when I heard a hog squeal down in the hollow. I looked down across a little clearing we'd made for corn, and I saw this big fellow trotting along as calm as you please right beside my biggest porker.

"Now and then the hog would try and dodge around, but that bear would reach out in a matter-of-fact way, box its ears and start it going farther into the swamp. The hog would let out a squeal every time, but, it'd always keep going like the bear wanted it to.

"I didn't have my rifle right handy, but I grabbed up a big stick and started running down the hill through the clearing, and yellin'.

"I got almost there before the bear stopped and looked around at me, then turned and left the hog and went galloping off out of sight.



The bear reared up and towered over Henry Frye. Its mouth was wide open and its teeth gleaming in the light

"I saved my hog, all right, but I don't think that bear was really scared of me.

"It was that same night, right after supper, that I heard a cow bawling somewhere down in the swamp. It sounded like it was a mile away, but I knew it was one of my cows that hadn't come in for the night, and I knew right off what the trouble was.

"I grabbed up my rifle, yelled to my boy and we made our way as fast as we could toward the sound that kept comin' through the swamp. Pretty soon we could hear it plainer—a loud, slapping sound and then a bellow.

"We hurried on, but we couldn't get there in time to save her. When we finally located her she was lying on the ground dead, and we could hear the killer crashing through the bushes gettin' away."

Battle With a Bear

BUT Henry Frye's biggest adventure took place a few nights later. There had come a mysterious sound from his hog pen, situated about fifty yards back of his house. Having no idea he would have any need of a firearm, he carried with him only his lantern. When he rounded the corn crib and strode up to the low fence that surrounded the hog pen, he came face to face with the biggest and most savage of all the bear family he had dealt with during his thirty-odd years in the great swamp.

"I'll never forget that sight," he vows, "as long as I live. When I reached the fence and held my lantern up to look over into the pen, that bear raised up on its hind legs and towered over me. Its mouth was wide open and its teeth gleaming in the light.

"I couldn't move. I just stood there gaping like a man turned into stone. The bear growled like he was mad because I'd bothered him, and before I knew it one of his big paws flashed out, caught the lantern and sent it twenty feet away, where it crashed against a tree and flickered out.

"For a second I stood there in the dark; then I screamed out and turned

to run. But I didn't run far. I heard the bear snorting and growling behind me, and I knew he'd jumped the low fence and was right at my heels.

"I yelled again for my boy. Then something smashed against the side of my head and sent me stumbling. I staggered to my knees and tried to get up, but something hit me again, and I went down with my head roaring and spinning.

"I could feel the hot, sticky blood running down my face and neck. I knew it was where the bear's claws had raked me as he slapped me. Then I felt big, hairy arms go around my neck, and I went down on my back right in a pile of wood I had cut in stove-wood length and left there to season.

"I covered my face with both arms as the hairy arms closed about my shoulders, and I heard the low, snarling growls against my ear and felt the hot, panting breath in my face."

Meets New Foe

"SOMETHING closed down with crushing force on my left shoulder. I thought it was all up with me then. The pain took my breath, but I screamed and kicked out with all my remaining strength, and I thought I heard my boy answer me.

"Through the blood in my eyes I seemed to see him coming across the yard with a lamp bobbing up and down. The bear must have seen that lamp, too, for suddenly he turned me loose, scrambled to his hind feet and stood there glaring over me at the approaching light.

"Right then is when I felt the handle of the axe under me. I knew if my boy ran up on that beast he would be torn to pieces. With this in mind, I grasped the axe, got to my feet and swung it straight at that enormous, wagging head.

"The heel of the axe caught the head on the side and made a sound like hitting a rotten log. I guess the first blow must have killed him. I was scared, more scared than I've ever been in my life, and I hit that big head twice more with all my strength before the bear crumpled to the ground. The skull was crushed when he examined it. My face was ripped open, my scalp split and my left shoulder laid open to the bone.

"But I guess, after all, I'm lucky to be alive."