

# Mildred The Bear Remarkable As The Years Go

Grandfather Mountain-Wildlife experts shook their heads in disbelief here this week at events that led to Mildred the Bear, Grandfather Mountain's 18-year-old mascot, adopting a pair of 10-week old bear cubs in a year when she had no cubs of a comparable size herself.

In the past years Mildred has willingly adopted cubs that were not her own, but always when she was nursing her own cubs of identical size. The current adoption in a season when she did not have cubs of a similar age appears to be a history-making first

for bears, who are normally hostile to cubs that are not their own.

The two tiny cubs, named Walter and Elizabeth to honor Sir Walter Raleigh and Queen Elizabeth I in North Carolina's 400th Anniversary year, were born to a mother bear in Ohio. They were purchased by Grandfather Mountain when its own group of four adult female bears failed to produce young this year.

Last year Mildred raised a family of three cubs, one of which she adopted, and these

yearling cubs were recently separated from her. The fact that Mildred had not completely weaned the yearling cubs probably contributed to her being able to and willing to nurse the two 10-week-old offspring of the Ohio bear.

Several wildlife authorities familiar with Mildred's gentle disposition were consulted prior to the attempt to introduce her to the new cubs, and everyone urged extreme caution for the safety of the cubs.

The first step was to give Mildred the opportunity to inspect the cubs through the heavy strands of a chain link fence. When she reacted in a friendly manner, the cubs were given to her.

Mildred's first move was to

pick up one of the cubs in her mouth and gently carry it to the den in Grandfather Mountain's Cub Habitat. She then returned for the other cub. Later she took them out of the den, where she began raking the cubs against her breast in an invitation for them to feed.

Although the cubs appeared to be hungry, they did not respond to Mildred's invitation to breast-feed. At that point, Grandfather Mountain staff member Winston Church decided to lift the cubs where their faces were directly against Mildred's bosom, but that failed to work. The cubs obviously had been bottle fed so long that they had forgotten how to nurse.

Church was the employee who had traveled to the Atlanta Zoo 16 years ago to bring Mildred the Bear to her new home at Grandfather Mountain. Although his position as Gift Shop Manager places him in contact with the animals on few occasions, he is recognized for having a special gentle knack for handling them. What Church did next was simply unbelievable.

Church held a cub in one hand and squeezed one of the

nipples of Mildred's breast between fingers of his other hand until droplets of milk appeared. He then rubbed the cub's nose against the milky breast and it immediately began to nurse. He then repeated the procedure with the second cub, and Mildred has fed Walter and Elizabeth without incident ever since.

"I knew she wouldn't mind since she wanted them to nurse anyway," recalled Church, "so I just tried it and it worked. We used to do this with baby calves, and I heard John Cooper talk about doing it with sheep, but I never heard tell of it being done with a bear."

"No, I never heard of anyone being able to milk and unsexed bear," confirmed Dr. Lynn Rogers of the US Forest Service in a telephone interview from Ely, Minn. Rogers, the nation's leading authority on the behavior of the Black Bear, con-

tinued, "This is very interesting to me because she was willing to adopt cubs when she did not have cubs of her own that were a comparable size, and it is interesting that she was lactating enough to take on a pair of young, fast-growing cubs."

"Mildred come within a hair of not being a bear, didn't she," mused 73-year-old Mountain man John Cooper. "There's a whole lot of human about her. She's different from anything I've ever seen in all my years."

No one has checked with Ripley, Guinness, or "That's Incredible," but for now Grandfather Mountain is holding to the belief that Walter and Elizabeth have again been a part of history, and that Winston Church is probably the only person on this earth still in good health who has milked a fully grown, live, unrestrained, unsexed Black Bear.



MILDRED THE BEAR - Mildred the Bear, the 18-year-old mascot of Grandfather Mountain, patiently accommodates her two adopted cubs, Walter and Elizabeth, as they nurse at her breast. Mildred surprised everyone by adopting the cubs

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