

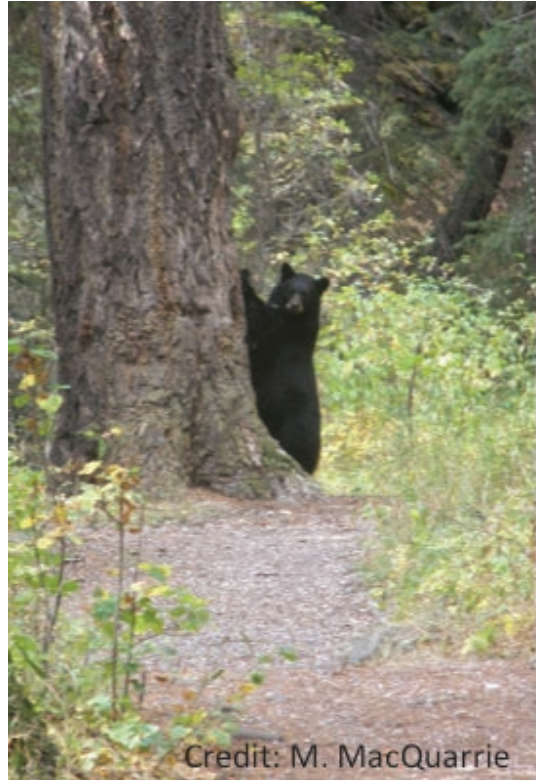
# To Run or Not to Run

## (What to do when you see a bear)

By Elizabeth Anderson  
Crownsnest Pass BearSmart  
May, 2014

Trail running provides amazing opportunities to enjoy moments of solitude, see spectacular scenery, and have memorable wildlife experiences. But how do you ensure a bear encounter during your Sinister 7 training or race experience remains a National Geographic-worthy moment rather than an uncomfortably close call? Follow these tips to reduce your likelihood of an unwanted encounter:

- Buddy up! Run with one or more companions and keep dogs on leash.
- Make lots of noise, especially in areas of dense cover. Yelling will carry much further and sound distinctly foreign compared to bear bells.
- Stay alert to bear signs (i.e., droppings, tracks, digging, over-turned rocks, torn up logs or anthills, fresh carcasses) and sounds (i.e., cracking branches, huffing, grunting). Do not wear headphones and be sure to look and listen for signs of animal activity around you.
- Take extra caution when running during peak bear activity times, in areas of prime bear habitat, and along wildlife movement corridors (e.g., at dusk/dawn/night; areas with lots of berries in the fall; along rivers or streams).
- Carry bear spray in an accessible location on the outside of your pack – it's effective in stopping undesirable bear behaviour in over 90% of cases according to one Alaska study, and can be used on cougar, moose, or elk too! Check out the YouTube video on <http://esrd.alberta.ca/recreation-public-use/alberta-bear-smart/default.aspx> for how to properly use bear spray, or take a training session using inert spray. Practice grabbing your spray and removing the safety clip during every training run.



Credit: M. MacQuarrie

But what if you have taken these precautions and you still run into a bear? First and foremost, remember that the bear probably just wants to get away from you too! Bear encounters are most often non-events where both parties go their separate ways after a few tense moments. Occasionally an encounter may be defensive in nature: bears will defend cubs, food such as an animal carcass, or personal space (i.e., when surprised at close range), while predatory encounters are extremely rare.

# To Run or Not to Run

## (What to do when you see a bear)

In any encounter, cluster together with others in your party to make yourselves look larger and more intimidating. Begin increasing the space between you and the bear by retreating backwards or by detouring well around its location if you must move forward – NEVER RUN! Look around for cubs or a carcass. If the bear sees you, speak to it in a low voice to let it know you are human and prepare to use your bear spray. In most scenarios, this will diffuse the perceived threat felt by the bear, allowing you to return to your vehicle with a great story. However if the bear charges, stand your ground and do not run as it may be a bluff charge. Deploy your spray when the bear is at close range (less than 6m). If the bear does makes contact, play dead by laying on your stomach with your hands clasped over your neck until the attack stops. Defensive attacks are usually short lived, so if it becomes prolonged, fight back as it may have turned predatory. Always fight back with all means at your disposal in a predatory attack.



More information on bear identification, behaviour, and encounters is available by following the link above. As with your physical training, more bear awareness and bear spray practice will make you better prepared in the long run (pun intended)!



Elizabeth Anderson, a biologist who encountered many bear-shaped bushes on her late evening Sinister 7 leg last year, coordinates Crowsnest Conservation Society's BearSmart initiatives. Since 2006, CCS has been using public education, community engagement, and direct attractant management to promote BearSmart practices among citizens, visitors, and businesses in Crowsnest Pass.