

[Page 35 - Clarence Barrett and the Bears](#)ISSUE : [Issue 74](#)

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Clarence Barrett and the Bears "It's what?" "Bearshit." "Go on. It looks like the whole insides of some animal." Gerard MacMullen and I were making our way up the Indian Rising by the narrow ridge between the north and south canyons of the Clyburn River. Seconds before, as we were beating our way through the bushes, I had told him to watch his step as I stepped over a large mound of bear doo-doo. "You're not serious," he said. "Would one bear do that?" I don't think he had taken me quite seriously when I offered some weeks before to take him on a hunt for bears. It was his first trip into a wilderness area and he seemed quite excited at the fact of just being there, let alone at the prospect of getting a glimpse of some wildlife. We had kept up a steady chatter as we hiked, but now the conversation seemed to die down a bit as the magnitude of the bear droppings took hold of him. We pushed on up the ridge. I hadn't known him before this trip, and my first impression of him was of a shy, polite, if not slightly timid guy who perhaps would not enjoy beating his way through several miles of bush just for the exercise. But he was lean and fit, and it was a pleasure to have the company of someone who could keep up a comfortable pace without having to make frequent stops, except for important things like looking at the scenery, or botanizing, or taking pictures. Further up the ridge we came to a small grassy clearing among the trees. Three depressions in the grass were evidence of some animals having spent the night there. There was one hardwood free standing among the shorter conifers here, and strewn around the clearing were short branches that had undoubtedly come from this single hardwood, because the leaves were still on them. "How do you suppose they got there?" wondered Gerard. "Bears will do that," I offered. "Just out of sheer boredom they'll get up a tree and shred it to pieces for something to do. You know what I mean? Just like a bunch of punks in Sydney with nothin' to do and nowhere to go. So what turns them on? Kicking over mailboxes or ripping apart the flowerbeds in a public park. I guess you've heard of rogue bears." "Oh." He looked up the trunk again. He had been leaning against it with his hand as support. He lowered his arm from the tree. Long, narrow grooves ran up and down the trunk where the bears' claws had stripped the bark and gouged the wood. "So much for climbing trees if we see one." I reminded him that there were no trees where we were going anyway, just open barrens. Things grew more silent as we went on. After a while, Gerard said, "What do you do if you meet a bear?" "Anything he wants," I replied. "Keep your voice down from here on." We got to the top of the ridge just where the barrens roll down over the crest for a hundred feet or so. It was cooler up here so we paused to put on jackets. "All set?" I asked, as we shouldered our packs. "Yeah, all set." "Camera ready?" "Yup, let's go." "All right. There's two bears right over there." Whether he had planned to hang around or not I don't know, but before he had a chance to act rationally, I headed towards the bears, signalling for Gerard to follow. Keeping crouched to the ground we circled downwind of them to a good vantage point and watched them graze. They were on a knoll near the edge of the canyon, which formed a dramatic backdrop behind them. After a while I whispered



to Gerard, "I'd like to get a picture with you and the bears in it. How about moving a little bit closer, say to that rock over there?"

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