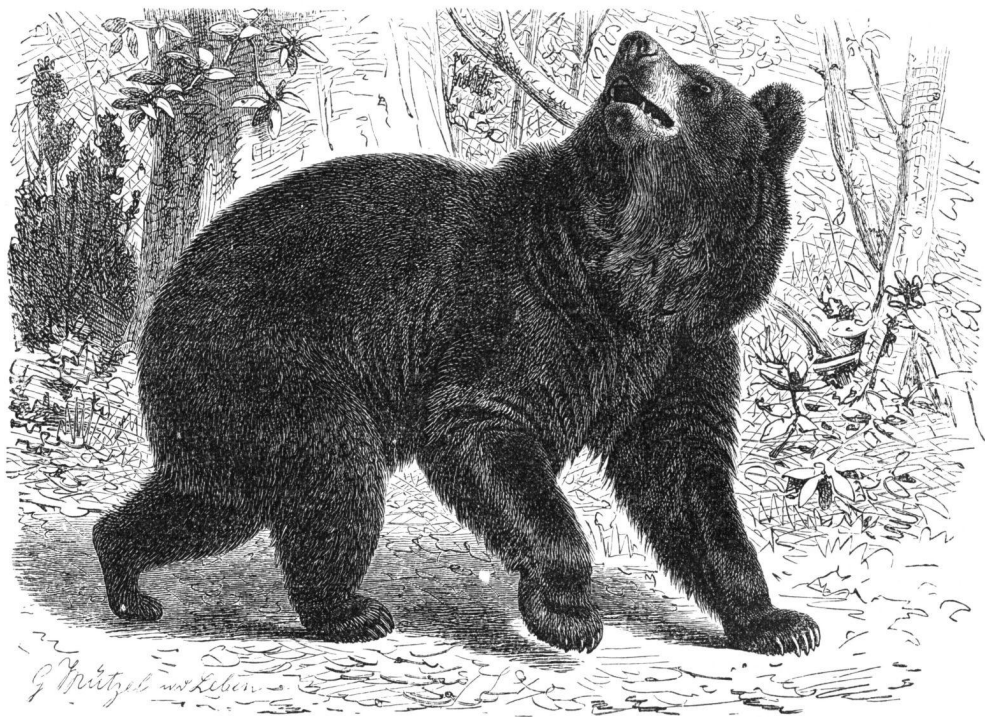


THERE IS A BEAR

Mike Finley



There is a bear.

First thing, you must appraise the situation. Might the bear be a friendly bear? Is it wearing a vest and a fez? Does the circus happen to be in town?

Is the bear sitting up and begging for a treat? Better hope you have a treat.

Did you notice are there cubs nearby? Did you bring enough treats for everyone?

If it is not an obviously friendly bear, you should consider turning and running. Do this even though bears are famously fast. If this bear is unusually slow to follow, running should buy you a good two, three minutes, plenty of time to get your affairs in order.

Some people say to run downhill from a bear. Not surprisingly, it turns out that bears are just as good at running downhill as you are likely to be.

Instead of running, step carefully. Try backing away deferentially. Maybe the bear is just feeling territorial and you can get away by with a show of respect, bowing and nodding as you edge away from it.

Quite possibly the bear is miles from its home and doesn't really care that you are there. It is just looking for the right path to take. Do not whip out a map to show it.

Pepper spray – you are welcome to try it. But understand that pepper can act as an attractant or a repellant. The bear gets to choose.

Do you have Cracker Jack or other food on you? If so, get it off you. Bears love popcorn and caramel and peanuts. Distribute it as widely as you can.

Distract the bear with easy pickings, and perhaps buy another two minutes.

Understand that once treated to Cracker Jack, a bear will want more. How much Cracker Jack did you bring?

Note: Most bears, seeing food distributed on the ground, will understand that the dispersed food is now “in the bank.” They can return and enjoy it any time they like. Whereas you are on the move, and trying to get away from them. You need to be put “in the bank.” Bears are not idiots.

Is there a tree nearby? Go ahead, climb it. If a tree is not tall you can stay clear of the bear for about five minutes. Eventually, however, the bear will simply bend the tree over until you are low-hanging fruit.

If it is a tall tree, you should climb at least 30 feet off the ground, ideally till the trunk is too small to support the bear. But if it can only get close, it will still have the option of whipping the trunk from side to side until you let go.

This is work, but most bears will put in the effort.

If the bear gets to you in the tree, even high up, the bear will hurl you down, break your legs and crack your

skull, then follow down after you. This only takes seconds.

If you are successful with the tree, hope that you did not throw your food away as suggested earlier. You may be up in the tree for several days, until you faint or fall, or the bear gets bored waiting and leaves. This does not happen often. Most bears find the situation of you being up in a tree weeping entertaining, even if they are very hungry.

Your final option is to fight the bear. If you fight a bear, keep your backpack on.

Wear it in front of you, across your beating heart. Fill it with rocks, if rocks are available. Lie face down. You want the bear to get at your heart last of all. Like the

king in a game of chess, you must at all costs protect the heart!

Fighting the bear will be the challenge of a lifetime – literally – and in the end you will be broken and gashed open in several places, But the bear, who up until this moment has shown disdain for your abilities, will respect you now.

You will respect yourself as well – you engaged a huge carnivore in physical battle. You will have the satisfaction of knowing you tried everything, if you are still able to feel satisfaction.

Do not play dead until you almost are. Admittedly, it is harder to be persuasive then.

Once you have been mauled, and the bear has finished doing things to you, stay where you are. Wait until the bear departs to begin the long ,, crawl ... home.

