

Retrieval

Even a young bear can be very heavy. A 150 pound bear is much more difficult to drag or move than a deer of comparable weight. Plan accordingly! If you intend to hunt private property, contact the landowner prior to your hunt and discuss arrangements for accessing a bear with a vehicle. If you are going to hunt public property, check with the attending land manager as to regulations regarding the use of off-road vehicles. A winch and ramp combination will make loading a bear onto a vehicle much easier. A wheeled cart, like used for retrieving deer, can be very helpful for use in moving bears.

Skinning

Extend the center cut used for removing the entrails toward the head to the base of the throat stopping approximately in line with the ears. Then begin at the wrist of each front paw and cut down the inside of each leg first toward the elbow and then angling toward the arm pit until you reach the center incision. Make sure each arm cut meets at the same place in the center of the chest. For the back legs, begin at the base of the heel and make your cut down the back of each leg meeting approximately 3 inches above the vent.

It will be necessary to cut through either the ankle joints or toe joints of each paw to be able to get the skin off of the body. Start with the rear paws, then the tail, and work the skin forward toward the head. Depending on what you intend to do with your bear hide, you must make a decision regarding the bears pads (bottom of paws). Generally, unlike mounted specimens, pads are not required when making bearskin rugs. However, prior consultation and planning with a taxidermist is recommended.

Continue working the hide toward the head until it is stripped up to the neck region. It is recommended that at this point you sever the head from the rest of the body allowing it to remain with the hide. The head and hide must remain attached to each other until the bear is checked at an official bear checking station. Furthermore, since skinning the head properly can be tedious and time consuming, it is best performed in the comforts of a well-lighted area. Special attention is needed when skinning the ears and nose. Be sure to consult a taxidermist for guidance.

Many taxidermists prefer to skin bears they are going to work since proper skinning is imperative for achieving a quality finished product. Check with the taxidermist you intend to use and find out the protocol he or she prefers.

Hide Care

After complete skinning, the hide should be taken to taxidermist or placed in a refrigerated cooler. Be sure to remove as much fat and flesh from the hide as possible and salt it heavily. Salting the hide sets the hair. The average bear takes between 15-20 pounds of salt. Pour salt on the flesh side of the hide and spread it especially around the face, lips, nose and ears. The salt should be about 3/8" deep on the skin. Fold the skin, flesh to flesh, roll it up and place it in a breathable bag like burlap or muslin. Never store or transport a bear hide in plastic as this makes the hair slip.

Meat Care

Bears have a tremendous amount of fat and a thick hide that provide great insulation. As a result, it is imperative that the hide be removed as soon as possible to prevent meat spoilage. If you anticipate any delay in getting your bear to a cooler, you should consider quartering it to allow the heavier portions to cool more quickly. Packing bags of ice in the body cavity or around the quarters is advisable in weather above freezing. Take every precaution to keep your bear meat free from dirt, debris, hair and blood.