

# Bradford County's Biggest Black Bear Ever

By Roger Kingsley

By the time bear season had rolled around in November of 1991, 89,452 hunters had purchased a tag to hunt the animal in Pennsylvania. And when shooting hours had ended after that three day season, 40 of the 67 Counties in the state would report a combined total of 1687 bear kills. By doing the math, we learn that one out of every 53 of those bear license holders was fortunate enough to kill a bear. According to the Pennsylvania Big Game Records, 36 of those 1687 bears were entered in the book that exceeded the nineteen inch minimum Boone & Crockett skull measurement. And the biggest one of all was killed right here in Bradford County's Monroe Township by a 16 year old named Chad Reed from Lititz, PA.

The night before the season opener in an old farmhouse atop Cahill Mountain, Chad and his bear hunting companions were discussing their options on where to hunt the following day. During the conversation, Chad's brother spotted an article and a picture of the current PA State Record Black Bear in a magazine he was reading. When Chad saw the picture, he jokingly remarked that he was going to kill one bigger. The discussion of where to hunt ended with the group choosing the Hatch Hill area of State Game Lands #36 on Kellogg Mountain.

At the break of dawn the following morning, the bear hunters had split up with each one electing to sit for a spell in hopes that a bear would amble by. Around 10:00, Chad's father approached to tell Chad that he was moving to another location nearby. Chad continued to occupy his chosen spot until 11:30 when he decided to move to a rocky ledge that offered a good overlook of the surrounding area. Digging a sandwich and a soda out of his pack, Chad was enjoying his lunch when he spotted a bear moving through the mountain laurel about 50 yards away. Quickly dropping down on one knee and propped against a sapling, Chad fired a shot from his Ruger Model 77. The 150 grain 308 slug instantly dropped the bear, but he was back on his feet charging headlong around a boulder and coming straight toward Chad, who fired twice more before stopping the bruin.

Overwhelmed with excitement, Chad began hollering to get his father's attention and started off to find him. A short distance away he happened upon two hunters who heard the shouts and offered to assist getting the bear out. After locating his Dad, they returned to the spot where the awesome animal lay. The first order of business amidst the handshakes was to wager how much the beast weighed. Between the four men, 480 pounds seemed to be the best estimate.

As it turned out, it would take until 9:00 o'clock that evening to learn how low their estimate really was. Chad was adamant about getting the bear to the check station without field dressing to know the actual live weight, but that decision didn't help matters when it came to moving the animal. During the course of the afternoon, nearly a dozen people along with a 4x4 ATV took turns straining, pushing and pulling the heavyweight beast 2.5 miles before it finally lay in the bed of a truck.

Word of a massive bear taken on Kellogg Mountain that day had spread like wildfire. By the time Chad's hunting party arrived at the Monroeton Rod and Gun Club check station well after dark, the road was lined with vehicles even at that hour with people hoping to get a look at the trophy and witness the weigh in. With a length of 8 feet 2 inches long, the bear weighed a whopping 604 pounds.

By the time Chad arrived back home, he had decided on a full body mount of the bear and had chosen Smith Taxidermy in Denver, PA to do the work. But there was a problem...a BIG problem. Manufacturers of black bear forms didn't even make a size large enough to fit this bear hide, but Smith had an idea. He contacted a Taxidermist in Alaska who had a form specifically for mounting brown bears that would surely fit Chad's bear. It worked!

Like all North American Big Game Animals, the black bear's trophy status is determined by the Boone & Crockett Club's measuring system. While it is the simplest of all animals to measure, it differs from other big game species in that the measurements are taken to the nearest sixteenth of an inch instead of the nearest eighth of an inch. As with all trophies, black bear skulls must also have a 60-day drying period before measuring. The final score is determined by adding the width taken at the widest point of the cheeks, to the length of the skull with the lower jaw removed.

A skull that totals 19 inches would mean it scored 19-00/16 Boone & Crockett (B&C) points. In Pennsylvania, a score of 19-00 B&C points would be considered a trophy class bruin if it was taken with a gun. And because of the degree of difficulty, that skull measurement only has to measure 17-00 to enter the record book if the bear was taken by an archer.

Carl Graybill, Information and Education Director of the Pennsylvania Game Commission, and a certified B&C measurer had received a tip of the possible record bear that Chad Reed had taken, so he made a special trip to Chad's home to take a preliminary measurement (green score) of the skull. Graybill was certain it would be a new state record, so he offered to take the skull back to Harrisburg, to undergo a cleaning process using Demisted Beetles (flesh-eating bugs) in preparation for official measuring.

After the 60-day drying period, Graybill officially measured the skull at 22-11/16 B&C points, making it the largest bear ever taken in Pennsylvania at that time. A cementum analysis of a tooth indicated the bear was 11 1/2 years old. While some bears in that area of Monroe Township had been tagged by biologists for research purposes, this one had escaped such an encounter.

What a trophy for a 16 year old on his second year of bear hunting. But the luck didn't start or stop there. Chad also used his 1991 hunting license to tag a fall turkey, a whitetail buck and a spring gobbler. Since that memorable day back in 1991, Chad hasn't missed a bear season nor has he killed another bear. He's had chances though, but opted to let them go. Simply put, with the publicity that he received for killing a state record, taking a bear of average size could never be as meaningful.

For seven years Chad Reed's bear was number one in the state. Then in 1998, a Bucks County resident named Joseph Mindick killed a 17 year old, 548 pound boar in Luzerne County that scored 22-13/16 making it a new Pennsylvania State Record. Five years later, Mindick's bear went to number two when a Carbon county bear was entered. Right now, a Monroe County, PA bruin not only holds the state record, but is also a Boone & Crockett hunter-taken world's record at 23-09/16. And even though Chad Reed's bear is now ranked number ten in the state, it still remains Bradford County's biggest ever.