

The Bruin of Limehill

By Roger Kingsley

It's the last day of bear season in November of 1996. On a snowy afternoon, Martin Alles of Wyalusing, better known as Marty, and a group of friends are hunting the Limehill area of Wyalusing Township. The group has just completed their second drive of the afternoon finding no bears or sign whatsoever. Frustrated with their efforts, they're driving down the road in route to another location when Marty suddenly hits the brakes and leans toward the windshield. Something has stirred the snow crossing the roadway. Stopping the truck, the group piles out for a closer look. Just as they suspected, the stirred up snow was made by a bear casually shuffling along and entering a wooded parcel that the group had hunted earlier that day. These men know a thing or two about sizing up a bear by its track, and judging by the dimensions of these paws, the bruin that made them was definitely an official member of the 'Monsters Club'.

With an attitude adjustment, the group hastily makes plans to surround the area. About that time an absentee hunter named Harry Camp arrived in his vehicle and joins in on the excitement of the newly discovered bear sign. Harry worked for Tuscarora Township and had been busy plowing snowbound roads while the rest of the gang hunted. As the group worked out their strategy, Harry was chosen to take up the track, while the rest of the men would cover the best ambush points around the perimeter.

When everyone was in position, Harry started out. But instead of following the tracks, Harry headed for a section of the woods that had a reputation for being a good "bear run". With a moderate snow falling, Harry's strategy would save time, and surely he would find the track there. But by the time he'd reached the upper end of a familiar stand of pines, Harry had a gut feeling he'd missed the snow-covered tracks. Quickly doubling back, Harry hadn't gone far when he was startled by the tremendous crashing sounds of the bear breaking from the nearby cover. Harry desperately tried to get a shot at the fleeing bear, but the beast was in overdrive spooked from the smell of human scent. After gaining a substantial distance the bear came to a stop, but even with his rifle braced against a tree, Harry's one and only 250 yard shot missed.

By that time, Marty Alles was on a side hill in open woods next to a strip of pines. Hearing the gunshot, he ran in the direction where he thought the bear would go. As he approached an open strip between two stands of pines, he caught a glimpse of the bear but couldn't shoot. As he closed in, the bear made a beeline running hard across the open strip with Marty opening fire with his Model 94 Winchester. His first shot was a solid hit slowing the bear, and three more 150 gr. silvertips brought him down for good. After 40 years of hunting, Marty had his first black bear, and a record book animal to boot.

Later, at the Monroeton Rod and Gun Club, which served as a bear check station, Marty's bear was given an official weight of 600 pounds. After the 60 day drying period, the skull measured 21 inches even (21-00). That score squeezed it into the Boone and Crockett (B&C) all-time black bear list in the Records of North American Big Game, and currently ranks No. 14 in Bradford County. The bear was later found to be just shy of eleven years old. It's interesting to note that this heavyweight bruin had once been examined in Susquehanna County by Pennsylvania Game Commission Personnel, 28 miles from where Marty tagged it.

While studying the Pennsylvania Game Commission's Big Game Records Black Bear Firearm category, I learned that out of 1033 bears that qualify for the state's 19-00 point minimum, Marty's bear currently ranks 263. His bear is one of 60 plus bears taken in Bradford County exceeding the 19 point minimum that has been entered in the state record book since 1969—the year the Commission started measuring and recording the trophy status of bears. Fifty of those bears meet or exceed the 20-00 Awards minimum (honorable mention) for B&C. Sixteen meet B&C's all-time minimum (21-00) which qualifies them to be listed in the Records of North American Big Game. Needless to say, these figures speak highly of Bradford County's trophy class bear hunting.