



North American Hunting Expedition 2009

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International Airport
Billings
11th September
Morning

Last night I said my farewells to my hunting friends.

Today I leave early in the morning, at 5.00.

My plane leaves at 10.00, so I want to be at the airport by 9.00. At dawn Babsie asks me if I'd like to sit in the driving seat of the Polaris for one last time. I climb up onto the trailer, which is where the Polaris has spent the night. Babsie says he will always remember me as the Hungarian lad who constantly wanted to drive the Polaris. He appoints me its official driver, and says I can take it out whenever I pass this way again.

Patti drives the Ford through a landscape straight out of a Hollywood movie. As with every parting, this one was hard. Something good has come to an end, and that is very sad. Montana has been everything that I could have possibly wanted. And some that I hadn't even expected.

Because, when going through my itinerary receipts, I can see that the cost of the varmint hunt has not been added to the package. Babsie gave it to me as a bonus. He has not charged me extra for using his guns, and a lot of his ammunition, either. He's the type of man that does this job because he loves it. It's impossible to fall out with him because he never stops smiling.

This goodbye has been made a little easier because it is not final. It is just a temporary, half-goodbye. I will see Babsie's Coca-Cola house again! He also organizes hunts of white-tailed deer, and I'd certainly like to bag myself a big bull, as an example of this American species. I can't do it this trip as the season only opens some weeks after my last hunt has finished. The American hunting season takes a short break between the end of October and early November.

For many species the hunting season ends in October, but the November hunts don't begin until a couple of weeks later.

I will return to the New World at least one more time, I hope, and, of course, I will be bringing my gun.

Sticking to my original plan, I am at the airport before 9.00.

Today is the 11th September.

Since 9/11 it's never been a popular day to fly on, especially on internal US flights. And it is particularly risky if carrying a gun and ammunition. Many people warned me about travelling on this day, and I wasn't too happy about it myself. I've heard that TSA officers have very little sense of humor on this day. Before I left I checked all my permits several times over to make sure I'd done everything according to the book, and ensured that all my documents were in order. I've



checked and re-checked my Blaser to make sure it's not loaded. In the end, going through airport security this time proved to be one of the smoothest check-ins I've ever had, and, since leaving Hungary, I've done quite a few, I can tell you.

The surprise was waiting for me after the check-in.

They don't use the 24hr. clock on American electronic tickets. For example, no ticket is issued saying 13.00. Instead, in the column for departure time, is written 100P, the P indicating PM, for the afternoon. I'm afraid that yesterday I was a bit careless and negligent; when I looked at the first two numerals I assumed it meant 10.00 in the morning. Well, I was wrong; I shall be flying at 1.00 this afternoon. I have got here three hours before I need to. I could have slept in, and started my day with a big healthy breakfast. Patti wouldn't have had to get up so early, and I wouldn't have three hours of boredom stretching ahead of me in the departure lounge. I console myself with the thought that it's better to be here at 10.00am for 1.00pm, than at 1.00pm for 10.00am. Also, it gives me time to write up my diary, so I won't have to deal with it in Anchorage.

But it would still have been better to sleep in those extra three hours.

Room 1164
Expedition Headquarters
Anchorage Hilton
Anchorage
Alaska
11th September
Evening

At the time of my last entry, I had once more placed my gun at the mercy of Fate and Alaskan Airlines, and was about to board the plane for Seattle. In Seattle I changed planes, and now 4hrs later, I am back in my headquarters. Together with my gun and all my luggage. I set my Fortis chronograph two hours back. Unfortunately I couldn't get room 2162, my old, familiar room.

There is a Chinese government delegation being put up in the hotel, along with all its staff and paraphernalia!

They have booked the whole of the 21st floor and no-one is allowed up there. Even the Chinese Prime Minister is here! Earphoned Chinese and American security men stare at me with piercing eyes, especially at my gun. I don't touch it more than I have to, and call a porter over to take it up to my room. (Now they can shoot him, instead of me.)

While I'm having my dinner, the waiter - we've become quite good pals during my two stays here - tells me that the hotel is full of people from the CIA, the FBI, and several other secret service organizations whose names are also made up of three letters. There is complete chaos down in the lounge, the hotel staff are aimlessly standing about among the Chinese, and the police are out in force in the street. As for me, I'm not going to forego my time in the jacuzzi just because of some prime minister, so I quickly pack my bag, ready for tomorrow - I'm only staying one night - put on my trunks, and head for the pool. But the hotel is designed in such a way that, if you want to get from the Anchorage Tower, where room 1164 is situated, to the West Tower - where the pool is - you have to cross the lounge, past the hordes of journalists in their smart suits, the government officials and their secretaries, the security guards, the secret agents, the advisors, and the all the other hangers on; it would make a perfect photo - opportunity for an alert paparazzo. (It will be even better when I come back, with the water dripping from my trunks...)

In my room I find cold beer, my reserve ammunition, and my laundered clothes... or, rather, not my laundered clothes; they seem to have been irretrievably lost. There's no doubt; the hotel staff have definitely mislaid them. I speak with the supervisor, Moe Hanltaz, who is a kind of manager - but the clothes still don't show up. He is stunned; it is really shocking; such a thing has never happened before. He promises to court martial the culprits, and publicly execute them. This doesn't make me very happy; it has to be sorted out, as I don't want to spend the rest of my trip in the same pair of underpants.

11th September
Night

(My final entry, because I'm feeling tired)

Two T-shirts have turned up, but the socks and underpants haven't. My solution is that, the next time I'm back here - on the 21st September - I'll take a taxi to the Sportsman's Warehouse, replace the lost items, and the hotel will foot the bill. We agree on it. Tomorrow they will make arrangements with the shop to have the items put aside for me. It's a fair deal.



In front of the gate for PenAir
International Airport
Anchorage
12th September
Morning

This morning I get a message from Robi: news from Csákvár. The rutting season hasn't started yet, and the weather at the foot of Mt. Vértes is warm and dry. So far, no bull has yet fallen, not even in the neighboring hunting grounds. I hope that soon the forest will be ringing with the deep bellows of the bulls!

Autumn in Hungary!

According to Széchenyi, there is no more beautiful place to go hunting in than the forests of Hungary! So, even though I'm enjoying every moment of every day of my trip, if I had a superfast jet I'd happily whizz home, just for a couple of days, to go hunting in Csákvár. It wouldn't even matter if it wasn't the rutting season; I'd just sit by the Wolf Pit - that's my favourite hide - and wait for the young boar. They would be bound to come just when I thought nothing would appear that day. And then I would drink a glass (or more) of the incomparable local schnapps, eat a large piece of venison sausage, and finally have a good night's sleep in the hunting hut.

It would be a really nice thing to do.

This morning I successfully checked out of the Hilton. It might not sound like a big deal, but if you'd seen what I had to go through this morning, you would congratulate me on my achievement. The whole of the Chinese Delegation also chose today to leave. According to my informers, the Prime Minister has already gone, but all the staff are leaving now. I've never experienced such chaos and anarchy as in the hotel that morning. For a while the security guards tried to keep the delegates apart from the Hilton's other residents, but they weren't very successful. All hotel residents, including me, have the right to go anywhere they like in the hotel. The hotel guests knew this, and, despite all the requests, warnings, and mild threats, they persisted in swarming all over the lounge. Hunters mingled with policemen, bodyguards with visiting grandmothers, and misbehaving children with ministers. It was in the middle of all this utter chaos that I was trying to organize that the clothes I was leaving behind would be laundered ready for my return - and to ensure that the hotel staff wouldn't lose what's left of them - and to put my excess luggage safely into storage. The hotel staff and management appeared to be on the verge of a nervous breakdown, sweating profusely while trying to placate everybody; the street was partially blocked off, policemen were busy on their radios, and the Chinese delegates were yelling orders at each other.

I reach the airport, praying that the bag containing my binoculars has somehow been placed in this taxi, and is not on its way with the luggage belonging to the Chinese Minister of Economics. The delegation has arrived at the airport with - I'm not joking - truckloads of bags. They seem to be travelling with everything but the kitchen sink.

Bearhunting Spike Camp
12th September
Evening

We have arrived in the town of Aniak, after a 30min. flight. From here we must catch another flight to the base camp. Or, to be precise, we are supposed to catch one; but the outfitter, Bob Adams, has left a message for us in the departure lounge. It says that his time of arrival is uncertain, as he is unable at present to take off from the base camp because of fog. He asks us to wait for him in Aniak (what other choice do we have?).

To be frank, Aniak is not exactly the center of the universe. I've been to several of these northern towns, but never to one as boring as this. There is absolutely nothing here whatsoever. We can't even work out where the people live. There's an airport of one building, and a solitary supermarket. But where are the people's houses? In fact, where are the people? These are unanswerable questions - all the more so, as we can't find anyone to ask!

Over the days ahead I plan to hunt a Grizzly bear, an Alaskan Giant Moose, a Black bear and another caribou.

In his excellent diary, recording his 1935 expedition, Zsigmond Széchenyi mentions the controversy over the number of bear species to be found in Alaska. Well, the bear issue has remained unresolved; there is still a lot of misleading information circulating in hunting literature. However, if we analyse this information, it soon becomes evident that the matter is not that complicated: there are exactly three species of bear living in Alaska.

The Polar Bear - this requires no further details. It's just a nice, big teddy bear that happens to be white, and is protected in Alaska. The next one is the Black Bear, or Baribal, which has a very rare sub-species, called the Glacier Bear. There's very little opportunity to shoot one of these Glacier Bears, but later in my trip I hope to have the chance.

And now comes the great bogeyman of Alaskan hunting taxonomy. The simplest way to categorize brown bears is this: in Alaska there is only one species of Brown Bear! Its latin name is *Ursus arctos*. So, if you shoot something in Alaska that looks like a bear, and is a brown color,

you can be pretty sure that it belongs to this species. (The situation becomes more complex when we learn that there are brown variations of the black bear, but this is a completely different species; and, on top of all that, a very large black bear can sometimes reach the same size as a small grizzly. So, telling the difference between them all, especially just before taking a shot, requires a lot of experience. The brown-colored black bear is very rare here, and doesn't have the characteristic hump found on the back of the brown bear, so the risk of mistakenly identifying this species is reduced.)

In Alaska the brown bear has two sub-species: one is the Alaskan Brown Bear (*Ursus arctos middendorffi*), better known among hunters as the Kodiak. Another point of confusion for us Magyars is that the Hungarian name for this sub-species includes the name of the whole species and also uses the term "brown bear". The other sub-species, the famous Grizzly (*Ursus arctos horribilis*) has, in English, the full name of Common Grizzly Bear. For the sake of thoroughness, I must also add that there is another, newer sub-species, also called Grizzly, the Barren Ground Grizzly Bear (*Ursus arctos richardsoni*), which is only found in Canada.

The grizzly is smaller than the Alaskan Brown Bear, and costs less to shoot. Another thing that causes confusion is that vain European hunters seem to be embarrassed to admit to their hunting pals back home that they've "only" bagged a grizzly, rather than the giant Alaskan Brown Bear. So, when recounting their hunting tales, they will just say: "I shot a brown bear in Alaska". As I've just explained, this is technically true, as the grizzly is also a member of the species. But in Alaska, whenever the term brown bear is heard in hunting circles, we can be certain that it refers to the big Alaskan Brown Bear.

To safely differentiate between the two sub-species while actually out hunting, is impossible.

Their habitats overlap, and in some places they even interbreed. In general, it may be said that the Alaskan Brown Bear tends to live in coastal areas and on Alaskan islands, including, of course, the notorious Kodiak Island, which has given its name to that particular sub-species. One of the contributory factors to its huge size is that, living around coastal river mouths, it can find abundant supplies of fish, which are rich in protein and help it to reach its large stature. I have read recently that the big monsters living on Kodiak Island show some genetic differences to those on the mainland. The dimensions of their skulls, their teeth, and the shape of their claws, are all different, making it necessary to constantly update the record books with new sub-species. Inland, within the continent itself, there are only grizzlies, whose smaller body size is due to their predominantly vegetarian diet. As there is no precise dividing line between the coastal and inland areas, the type of bear you shoot is determined by the Unit in which you shoot it. All Alaska is divided into these hunting areas, known as Units. The relevance of these is that

hunting certain species may be permitted in one, but banned in another, and the dates of the hunting seasons may vary from Unit to Unit. Their boundaries are determined scientifically, and there are no obvious signs of the borders on the ground itself. To a non-professional, like myself, their sizes and locations appear random, though, of course, they are not. A foreign hunter in Alaska does not need to worry about Units; it's enough that the guide, the professional, knows where you are, how far you can go, and what you can shoot. But, as I've just said, it is essential to remember that categorizing and identifying the bagged bear depends on the number of the Unit you are in. So, if a hunter wants to shoot a grizzly, or an Alaskan brown bear, he must decide in advance which Unit the hunt will take place in.

Bears shot in Units 1 -10 and 14 -18 are considered to be Alaskan brown bears, while those in any of the other Units are classified as grizzlies. This is the only rule that a bear hunter in Alaska needs to remember when determining which sub-species is living in that particular area. Now we can see why that author, who wrote that he had shot a grizzly on Kodiak Island, was writing complete nonsense: to find a grizzly there, you'd have to take it over

I'm going to be hunting in Unit 18, and perhaps 19 as well, so, in theory, I have an equal chance of bagging either a grizzly, or an Alaskan brown bear. I know from my own experience that you shouldn't place too much importance on which sub-species you are going to hunt. If I see a desirable Alaskan brown bear in Unit 18 I shan't care if it runs over the boundary into Unit 19, where it will be called a grizzly, and I shoot it there.

On Wikipedia I've seen a very strange story about a grizzly.

In 2006 a bear was shot, and DNA tests then revealed that it was, in fact, half grizzly and half polar bear. According to the article, the two species are capable of interbreeding, but, so far, it is only known to have occurred in a zoo. What is even stranger is that breeding is preceded by each species' mating ritual, so an accidental fertilization seems unlikely. The article refers to a National Geographic link, which I consider to be a credible source. On the National Geographic site unbelievers can see the strange creature, which was shot by a hunter from Idaho, for themselves.

It is of interest that the current record for an Alaskan brown bear shows it to be a dwarf when compared to the short-faced bear (*Arctodus simus*), which used to live here. This animal had several sub-species in North America, and seems to have died out relatively recently, about 10,000 years ago, at the end of the last ice age. When on four legs, its height to its shoulders was a not-insignificant 5ft 3ins. and it weighed almost 1 ton. When standing upright it could tower over 11ft.! It got its name because its skull was so much shorter than those of today's bears. And unlike

modern-day bears, which are more or less omniverous, the short-faced bear was exclusively a meat-eater requiring up to 35lbs of meat a day. It must have been a truly terrifying predator, but nevertheless, our ancestors hunted it successfully.

Today's hunters will be intrigued to hear that several specimens have been discovered frozen in the ice, so maybe it will be possible at some point to recover some of its DNA intact. The ability to clone animals has advanced to such a level that Professor Steven Schuster, of Pennsylvania University, has claimed that in the future we will certainly be able to recreate extinct species. This could mean that even Jurassic Park might become a reality one day, though I can't really envisage lots of T. Rexes running around the woods. Under ideal circumstances DNA can remain stable for up to 1 million years, so in fact there is only a realistic chance of resurrecting species that have recently died out. And we might not have to wait thousands of years for this to happen, as Spanish scientists have already managed to clone an extinct species of rock goat, though the kid only survived for 7 mins.

So it isn't too far-fetched to imagine that, in a few decades, the short-faced bear will be on the hunting list in Alaska!

It looks as if, over the next four days, I will be hunting grizzlies in Unit 19, so I will now describe this sub-species in greater detail. The length of its body ranges from 6 - 8ft. and its weight from 500 - 750lbs. Bearing this latter figure in mind, I'm always sceptical when I hear of bears weighing 660lbs. being shot in Transylvania. I do not think that these figures are credible, and suspect that they are the product of the excessive enthusiasm generated by a successful hunt.

Basically, a grizzly will try to eat anything that's made of meat. It will attack a Giant moose, happily eats fish, and doesn't mind carrion, either. Despite all this, it generally finds it difficult to maintain its daily nutritional requirements, which is why it has developed its omniverous tendencies. From the moment that it wakes from its winter dreams, it starts to eat plants to supplement its meat diet. Its favorites are various grasses and sedge, bulbils and roots, and nuts and berries. In other words, it will eat just about anything that comes within its radar.

The grizzly is one of North America's most prestigious and respectable trophies. According to Theodore Roosevelt, the grizzly is definitely the "top trophy" in America. For a hunter it is unthinkable to return home from North America, especially Alaska, without a grizzly, and, this is the hunt that I, personally, am looking forward to the most. It is the type of hunt that places the hunter in real danger. There are countless stories of hunters' lives being in peril during grizzly hunts, and some of them must be true. Here they think that, even though it is smaller than the Alaskan brown bear, it has a stronger build, making it more dangerous. That hunting grizzlies is no picnic, is confirmed by Dave Kelleyhouse, former Director of the Division of Wildlife Conservation, ADF&G. On its official website this experienced hunting expert writes as

follows: *"On big bears keep shooting until the bear is down and stays down. Big bears are nothing to mess around with trying for that "one shot kill" so popular in sporting magazines."*

As with all dangerous big game, there is an endless dispute over which caliber is best when hunting Alaskan bears.

Some European hunters base their decisions on Old World methods when deciding on the caliber to use for Alaskan brown bears. They usually arrive carrying .375 H&H Magnum rifles; some try the shoulder-punching .416 Magnum type, used for elephant hunting, but few go lower than a .338 Winchester Magnum. The majority of local professionals with whom I spoke, both before and after I got here, and who spend a large part of their lives chasing bears, almost unanimously agree that a .30-06 is fine for shooting grizzlies safely. It is important to use modern, non-disintegrating bullets, and that the bullet mass is a minimum 200 grains (13gm). You just have to study the anatomy of the bear and be able to shoot. Despite its size and danger, a bear is not a strongly built animal, so, in practice, a .30-06 caliber generally works perfectly well. However, the Alaskan brown bear is a different matter; with this, a more high-powered bullet is a necessity. The world record SCI grizzly was shot in April 2001 in the GMU 19/B area of Alaska. Its giant skull boasts a length of 17.87ins, and a width of 10.31ins.

But it is quite possible that this record-breaking trophy will soon be banished to second place. The week before I left for America I was told by Cabela's Outdoor Adventures that on 13th May this year (2009) one of their clients, Rodney Debias, bagged a royal monster, considered to be a potential new world record, and, what's more, did it near the area where I shall be hunting. The prestige of this trophy is further enhanced by the fact that the brave hunter bagged this Alaskan emperor with only a bow and arrow. Because the grizzly is perhaps the highest ranking American trophy, all measurements, and their confirmation, are subject to greater scrutiny than usual. I eagerly await the final verdict.

The North American Moose is the largest deer on earth, and, as a species, has the largest antlers as well. The height of bulls, to their withers, can reach an impressive 7ft.6ins, and they can weigh 1390lbs, sometimes even more. It is a real giant - the European Moose is nowhere near it. Just as a point of interest, I'd like to mention that, according to the SCI record book, American and Asian moose have 70 chromosomes, whereas the European has only 68. Another characteristic of the species is that on its jaw it has a "bell" of flesh, which hangs down as far as 35.5ins. This unique growth gets larger as the animal ages. It has a hump on its back, and long legs with wide hooves, enabling it to move with ease over the marshy ground. Its antlers are very bulky and grow quickly; apparently they can grow up to 2.75ins. a week.

The North American Moose can be subdivided into four sub-species.

The biggest is the Alaska-Yukon Moose (*Alces alces gigas*) which, in Hungary, is often called the Alaskan Giant Moose. It easily exceeds the average weight of the species; specimens of about 1785lbs. are not considered unusual. It is the only sub-species indigenous to Alaska, so is the only one available to hunt. In Canada there are three more sub-species, as well as this one: the Western Canada Moose (*Alces alces andersoni*), found over the greatest area, the Eastern Canada Moose (*Alces alces americana*), and the Shiras Moose (*Alces alces shirasi*). The habitat of these three latter sub-species stretches down to the north-eastern territory of the US, and in the case of the Shiras, extends even to the mid- and north-western territories. To obtain a set of trophies of all four sub-species is one of the most sought after achievements of the hunting world. Whoever attempts to do this must take great care as all their habitats overlap each other, so you must ensure you know exactly which sub-species is living in a particular area. Information found in hunting literature suggests that stalking this moose is not as difficult as stalking other American deer, so you shouldn't have to go through a very gruelling hunt.

This is just one of several reasons explaining the appeal of this animal to European hunters in America. European hunters are very keen on convenience. I have no intention of comparing the hunting cultures of the two continents in detail, but, for me, there are two things that stand out. Firstly, American hunters tend to be hardier, fitter, and more able to endure harsh conditions. They are used to the tough weather, rough terrain, mountains, cold, and long, almost endless, stalks.

In Alaska you do not moan.

Secondly, they are generally good shots, and know all about their guns and ammunition. In this they must be greatly helped by the friendly gun laws, and there are many people here who must have been born almost with a gun in their hand, like their pioneer ancestors.

When Americans are assessing a pair of these shovel-like antlers, it is the width that is most important, though the SCI - fortunately - takes other measurements into consideration, and ranks antlers according to the number of points they have. The world record for an Alaskan-Yukon Moose trophy is a width of 6ft.2ins; the creature was bagged near Cordova, Alaska, in September 1999. However, the largest width belongs to a set of antlers that only rank 10th on the SCI list; the tape measure was stretched to no less than 6ft.8.5ins! That lucky hunter shot the animal near Wildman Lake in September 2003. Without a doubt this is going to be a very important trophy for me, as a Hungarian hunter; and I would be perfectly happy with a width of 6ft.

The moose, despite its enormous size, is well known for its weak physique. So, for this hunt, it won't be necessary to use a small cannon. But, as in Széchenyi's case - and this has happened

with other people, as well - it is often difficult to tell if the moose has been hit. The reason for this remains a secret of the species. Dave Kelleyhouse, whom I have already quoted, says this about it: "Except for big bears, there is no need to keep shooting at an animal after it has been well hit once in the lungs. An oldtimer once told me that "it doesn't matter whether a moose is shot well once or a dozen times, the beast will not die for a minute and 55 seconds." He was right. It seems to take almost two minutes for a lung shot moose to bleed out into the chest cavity and fall down. More shots just make more holes, a big mess, and wasted meat."

I'd like to add that, with a lung shot, I think it is not bleeding, but suffocation that causes death. I shoot every animal as long as it keeps moving. I do this because you can never be sure that the first bullet has hit the right place and done its job. And because, for me, the most fundamental law of hunting is that you cause the animal the least pain possible.

It might well be that two extra shots are not necessary, but it is better to have taken too many than too few. And if those extra two shots will shorten the animal's suffering by even 10secs. then I'm not going to economise on the ammunition. Of course, the damage to the meat will be greater, but you can't use the excuse of having more meat to justify letting the animal suffer.

Personal experience has taught me that - just like the FBI - I should always try and take at least two well-aimed shots, and remain on target after the second.

A strange thing once happened to me in my favorite hunting place in Hungary, near Csákvár, at the foot of Mt.Vértes. I was sitting in a hide overlooking a field of sunflowers, waiting for dawn and some luck, with that excellent local professional hunter, Robi. I was holding Robi's .30-06 caliber Mauser, which he always loaded with Sako Hammerhead 11.7gm shells. Suddenly, to our right, very, very stealthily, a young boar came out of the sunflowers into the clearing. It was so close that at first I didn't even notice it; I was looking beyond it. After being alerted by Robi, I fired, more from above than side on. The impact energy from such a close shot knocked the boar onto its back at once; I was watching all the time, through the riflescope, mistakenly thinking that I had delivered a fatal shot. Even though I had the chance to use up the entire magazine, I didn't.

And that was a big mistake.

The boar suddenly jumped up, turned around, and, showing us its right flank, ran back along its original track towards the sunflowers. After I had recovered from a temporary fit of amazement, I fired at it again, but just a little too late for a good shot, though I did manage to hit its right front leg. Again, this was an obvious hit: the huge force of the Sako seemed almost to blow off the front half of the boar. After a few faltering steps we heard the the young animal stop, sunflower stalks breaking, and then silence. Robi and I agreed that we'd bagged the boar, that we'd be taking it home, and so we just let the time pass by. When the hunt was over we climbed down,

found the spot where the first shot took place and then Robi began following the trail. Well, for the next two or three hours, with a care that would put any hound to shame, Robi followed the trail, noting every drop and smear of blood. I, being color-blind, wouldn't have been able to see anything anyway, so I just stood about uselessly in the clearing. In all this trailing all I was asked to do was mark the final visible signs of the trail. There and then, Robi did everything he possibly could, but that boar could not be found. Neither then, nor later during harvest, when Robi asked the farm workers if they had come across a boar carcass. I felt terrible about it, and really couldn't understand what had actually happened. I hate it when a wounded game animal escapes, but, due to my regular shooting practice, it doesn't happen very often. We've talked it over several times since then, and finally managed to come up with a theory; because you always need an explanation.

Even if it does sound unlikely.

We decided that the first bullet must have hit the backbone and, despite the elevated angle, did not enter the body. It must have ricocheted off the spine, or perhaps a rib, just causing superficial injury. And the shot that struck the right leg - regardless of its spectacular appearance - simply grazed it, and the boar probably recovered in a few days. It's not absolutely certain that this is what happened, but we just couldn't come up with anything better.

Since then I have almost always taken a second shot, even if the first seemed a definite hit. The only time I make an exception is if the game collapses immediately after the first shot. But even then I don't stop watching it through the riflescope until all movement has stopped. The black bear can reach a size similar to its fellow species on the American continent, but it is the only one that can boast of being a pure American breed. I might say that it is a real, blue-blooded, pedigree American. Even its name shows how proud it is of its origin: the American Black Bear. For those who doubt its ancestry, here is the latin name: *Ursus americanus*. It is the most widespread species of bear on the planet; it would be difficult to find areas in Alaska and Canada where they are not found in great numbers. The only exception might be the most northerly polar regions. Its general habitat extends as far south as Central America, so no American hunter need travel very far to get a black bear skin for his trophy room. Its height to its shoulder hardly ever exceeds 3ft. and its weight is around 175 - 300lbs. As with brown bears, we see the same phenomenon occurring, that the average weight of those living on the coast is much greater than those that live inland, the reason being that the coastal bears have easier access high-protein food. This enables some black bears on the eastern coast to reach a huge 600lbs.

Unsurprisingly, the color of the black bear is usually black, but there are known to be many other variations. What is interesting about bears is that their color tends to adapt itself to the surroundings. It's worth mentioning this because, according to a belief widely held in Europe, prey animals cannot distinguish colors. But, if they can't, why does an infallible evolution always favor those bears whose color is suited to their habitat. Is it possible that prey animals can, in some way, spot the difference between certain colors? If so, it would mean that Americans do not wear camouflage clothing purely for reasons of fashion, as Hungarians suppose. Hungarians believe that prey animals are color-blind and so wearing that kind of clothing won't help them to blend into their surroundings.

In the many color variations found in black bears, two are considered real curiosities. One is the previously mentioned Glacier Bear, which is categorized as a sub-species under the name *emmonsii* by Dall (yes, the same guy who gave his name to the sheep). Its blue tinted fur is an exceptionally rare phenomenon. But even this blue variation appears commonplace when compared to the white black bear, which is a true absurdity. A white black bear is not a common occurrence.

This sub-species, the Kermode Bear, *kermodei* in latin, should not be confused with albinos bears. It is white, but it is not albino. They are only found on certain islands off the north-west coast of British Columbia, in Canada, and, quite rightly, enjoy the full protection of the law.

Black bears are very adaptable, and are the most commonly found type of bear on the continent. Altogether there are 16 sub-species; but fortunately the SCI exercises commendable self-restraint, and puts them all on the same record list. Their hunting - as in my case - is frequently combined with hunts for other game. The world record was shot on the Alaskan island of Kuiu, in May 1996. The measurements of the skull of this record-breaker are 13.87ins. long and 9.06ins. wide. I'd like to point out that the lucky hunter did not enlist the help of any local professionals, but did it all on his own. That is worth knowing because, according to the record book, royal trophies - with very few exceptions - are only ever found with the help of professional guides. I, as a Hungarian hunter, do not have to waste any time worrying about it, because, according to Alaskan law, all foreigners and hunters from other US states can only go hunting if accompanied by a local professional.

I also want to say that, although I keep mentioning the record books, I don't personally feel that record trophies are of much more important than average ones. Everyone must decide his reasons for hunting for himself. For me the main reasons are adventure and new experiences; that's why I am making this trip. It might be quite possible to find better trophies, cheaper and faster, if those are your priorities, and you have the means. Anybody can get a record-breaking

trophy; everything has its price, and every problem has a solution. Nevertheless, these solutions are a often long way from my definition of a hunt. Pursuing records - in the case of trophies, at least - is not for me. Even so, it is still important to be aware of such records, as this is the only way of assessing the animals we have bagged.

The only serious problem about today's delay in Aniak - because I am now quite used to waiting - is that if we don't get out of Aniak today, we won't be able to hunt tomorrow, because of the "no hunting on the day you fly " law, something I've already mentioned a few times. We're beginning to think that we'll be spending the night at the airport, there being no hotel here. Out of sheer boredom we walk the half mile between the airport and the supermarket several times over. We always buy the minimum amount of food and drink, just to give ourselves an excuse to make another visit 10mins. later. I have got friendly with a couple of Mexican guys, also on their way to Bob's to hunt bear. Both are cool, and they have tequila!

It is genuine Mexican tequila...

One glass is quite enough for me.

Especially in the middle of the day.

I've now been to the shop several times; I've probably walked further than I have on any mountain hunt; and then, finally, Bob arrives. They are going to have to take us in two journeys, as there are so many hunters waiting to get to the base camp. The Mexicans and I choose the second flight. So at least we'll have time to eat all that useless food we've bought.

We arrive at the bear hunters' base camp in 30mins.

On the way, we admire the landscape and watch out for game. And, fortunately, there is game in bundance. During the flight we see, altogether, 7 black bears, 2 grizzlies, and a herd of caribou; though we aren't actually allowed to hunt in the area we are flying over. But Bob throws some cold water over our enthusiasm: we aren't allowed to hunt any caribou at all, despite our previous arrangements and bookings. But it's not the outfitters fault.

Caribou is the basic source of winter food and nourishment for the indigenous population. They are allowed to hunt the species without limit, irrespective of its sex and age. This year there are fewer caribou about in some Alaskan units, which has triggered complaints from the locals, who are seeing their winter sustenance put at risk. The Alaskan Government has taken action, and three weeks ago - to general surprise - they cancelled all commercial hunts. (It's reassuring to see this, because it proves that it is not only in Hungary that inconsiderate and unintelligible decisions are made.) Bob says that non-Alaskan hunters bag around 30 - 40 bulls a year in Unit 18-B. The indigenous population of the region - which spreads over several units - probably bags several thousand during the same period. The claim that the animals shot by foreigners spoils the

hunting for the locals has not been proven. It is also not a good advertisement for Alaska. Many people will be going home disappointed, without their caribou trophy, after spending a lot of money for their trip. These hunters represent a huge income for the state, much more than those few damn caribou are actually worth. And the decision is also a big blow to the outfitters. They have to return the money they were paid for the hunts, even though they will already have incurred various expenses. I'm lucky: I have three bull trophies ready and waiting for the flight back home, so one more, or one less, makes no difference to me. But I wouldn't be so relaxed about it if my main reason for being here was to shoot caribou. The license cost \$420, so at least I'll get that back when we reach the base camp.

After the most nerve-racking landing so far - I might well be a bit of a coward, but I was convinced we weren't going to make it - we arrive safely at Bob's headquarters.

I've never, ever experienced a warmer, friendlier welcome. My first impressions could not have been better: four golden retrievers, wildly overexcited, rush up to greet the new arrivals from the plane. They are not hunting dogs; they belong to the camp's staff, but, unlike their owners, their only job in life is to enjoy themselves. They all have two things in common: they are always under our feet, and are the firm favorites of the whole camp.

The bags are taken from our hands, placed on hondas, and driven over to the barracks. Everybody we pass is smiling broadly, and laughter can be heard throughout the camp. The guides are all very young, and there are quite a few who make me feel a bit ancient. They introduce themselves, one after the other, and then invite me into the main cabin, where I am immediately given a bowl of spaghetti.

There is a lot of money and energy invested in this little settlement.

It contains six or seven buildings, all of which had to be built out here, out in the wilderness, without the help of road transport. They are solid, wooden structures, but I have no time to explore them right now. To demonstrate the level of Bob's professionalism, gun testing here is not so much an option, but virtually a requirement for all the guests. At the testing-ground hunters are provided with spotting scopes, gun stands, and two logs of differing heights, for a comfortable seat and a table. The target is on a pole in the ground 300ft. away. I am about to set up the automatic target when it is taken from me by a young boy, who runs off with it to the target pole. I change my gun stand to a rest made up of my sleeping bag and some clothes. Shooting from a gun rest that is badly prepared can damage your confidence and waste ammunition.

I cannot over-emphasize the importance of a shooting test before hunting.

A gun's settings can easily change. A different altitude, or a change of weather, is enough to spoil its accuracy. On a trip like this it is impossible to avoid bumping the sight against things. This

could lead to a deviation of more than an inch over 300ft. and, at home, I probably wouldn't notice it if I wasn't at a rifle range; but when out hunting that 1in. per 300ft. can become 3.5ins. over 1000ft. and if we include the deviation in trajectory caused by the by the weather we can easily reach a shift of 6ins. And then we are surprised that we have missed a game animal worth several thousand dollars. I turn the sight a few clicks and my future guide follows the results through his spotting scope, making comments.

After the test we all get changed, sort our things out in the barracks, and go and hang around the runway. We are going to fly on to another camp, the spike camp, today. If I had to stay here tonight, at the comfortable base camp, and travelled on to the spike tomorrow, then that would count as a flying day, and I wouldn't be allowed to hunt. So this way I gain an extra day. Bob asks me which game is my priority, and I vote for the grizzly. They choose my destination accordingly. Apparently, there is a huge bear wandering around that area, and Bob thinks it is about time it was bagged. We throw everything we need to take into a small plane - I wouldn't swear to it, but I think Greg Jensen has the same type, though his was yellow, and this is red - and take off.

It's my third flight today.

We had only been airborne for about 5mins. when the pilot warns me through the earphones to get ready for landing.

We're coming in to land!

But where in the hell are we going to come down?

We have turned and are heading towards a mountain ridge; it can't be wider than 60ft... there are sheer drops on either side of us, and if the plane slips over we will tumble down to the bottom of the valley... I grip on to the nearest part of the plane and clench my teeth... when we have finally stopped I promise myself that, while I remain in Alaska, I will never again keep my eyes open during a landing if there's a bush pilot in the cockpit. I'm sweating, my heart is thumping, and I can barely manage to wriggle myself out of this flying coffin.

We have not even started to unload our equipment when yet another lunatic lands beside us; he is bringing my guide and the rest of our stuff. The two planes then take off - I'm happy to see the back of them - and my guide begins setting up the spike camp.

We each have our own tent. Mine is a four-person Cabela's Expedition Tent, which, when the tent poles are assembled, make a good, sturdy structure. A camp bed is placed inside, and I put my inflatable Therm-a-Rest mattress and sleeping bag on it. Every single piece of equipment is of top quality, and the confident movements of the guide show that he knows exactly what he's doing. To judge from the last few hours, I would say that this must be the most professional team

that I have hunted with so far. Their attitude, expertise and level of organization surpass that of all my previous guides. Frank Cole wrote me to say that Bob Adams' company is probably Cabela's finest partner, which is why they have been assigned to me.

We discuss the agenda for the next few days.

For me, the grizzly hunt is going to be the big treat of the whole trip. So I ask my guide John not to shoot at the bear. If my first shot does not kill it immediately, I will repeat it, but it is my bear, and I don't want someone else to shoot it for me. We agree that, as long as the bear remains completely visible and our lives are not in danger, he won't touch his gun. But, if the bear appears to be wounded and heads for the bushes, our two-member team will open fire with all guns. That is because going into the undergrowth after a wounded grizzly is a very risky thing to do. The discussion continues in perfect harmony; I think that we are going to get on very well together.

In the late twilight we go out to have a look around through our binoculars. About 600ft. away from the camp we sit down on the top of a hill, and from there we survey the neighborhood. The ground is fairly barren, but we can make use of the topography while we are stalking. Nothing is moving and it is very cold, so after about 30mins. we decide to call it a day and go to bed.

The wind is blowing through the spike camp.

But it is no match for our tents.

**Bearhunting Spike Camp
13th September**

I slept so well on my hard camp bed that John could hardly wake me up. He had to come right into my tent to do it. But the 6.00am wake-up call, usually so convenient for a hunter, was pointless today. There's fog everywhere, and we can't see further than 300ft. So we aren't going anywhere, and instead will spend the time in John's tent enjoying a generous breakfast. His quarters form the kitchen and dining room as well, with his bed serving as a bench. I eat from a disposable paper plate, which has been designated as mine. At each meal I try to eat from the side which is least dirty. Today's breakfast continues where yesterday's dinner left off. So far, I've drunk cocoa and water, in that order, both from the same glass. It is surprisingly practical as the water helps to wash off the dried cocoa on the glass, and I wasn't bothered by the fact the water had a slight taste of cocoa to it.

This are normal occurrences in the life of any camp.

John makes excellent scrambled eggs with fried bacon, and after that I eat a whole packet of biscuits; so at least I won't have to worry about storing them.



We look to see if the fog has lifted. We walk about 100ft. behind the camp to see what's happening. But there's not much to see if you don't like fog. We soon return; at least it's warm in the sleeping bag, and we can see nearly as much from inside the tent as we can from outside. We spend most of the morning dozing and thinking (I choose to doze rather than think: it's less exhausting).

I wake up around 11.00, and when I look out there's no trace of fog. I call John, we slowly pack our rucksacks, and then set out to do some bear spotting. I was told yesterday that the secret of bear hunting is patience. 90% of hunting is nothing but waiting. You have to strike a balance between trekking and using the binoculars, the latter having the larger role. A lot of walking around leaves too much scent on the ground, and every bear will run a mile. John says a grizzly can pick up human scent even after 2-3 days, and will take flight at once. There will be no chance of bagging that bear that year. Whereas a moose will quickly forget the scent and possibly return to the area, a bear never will.

They are too clever for that.



We walk for about a mile, stopping occasionally, until we reach the top of a neighboring hill. Huge vistas roll out before us, valleys running off in every direction. Now begins the endless searching through the binoculars. For the first hour the Swarov never leaves my eyes, but then I decide to lie back comfortably on the 1ft. deep bed of moss and watch the landscape with my bare eyes.

The beautiful, untamed, untouched, ancient Alaskan wilderness.

There are no roads here. No cities, no forestry, and nothing to be seen made by human hand, or any artificial influence. The land has looked like this for thousands of years. The colors are bright and varied. I've noticed a copse, made up of a few tiny trees, in front of some gray rocks, which is so yellow that it seems to be ablaze in the sunlight. I can also see flame-red bushes and ivy-green moss. There's no transition between the colors; all the different types of plants are sharply delineated. The small valleys are broken by hills and mountains, and crystal streams criss-cross the landscape. And there, on the banks of one of the brooks, between two lonely, towering pines... a huge body is moving!

GRIZZLY!

I alert John, who's on the other side of the hill; he looks in the same direction through his spotting scope, and then rolls towards me. I point out the two trees and he tells me to get my gun ready. While I'm fishing about for it he gets his out, while still managing to keep watch with the spotting scope. The bear goes behind an elevation... we lose sight of it.

There are two possibilities, says my guide. The first is that it will carry straight on in the same direction. If that happens we won't ever see it again. The second is that it will climb up the hill to start nibbling on the blueberries - a treat for any grizzly. And then we'll get it.

We stare fixedly at the place it disappeared, and the blueberry bushes on the hill. We wait for over 30mins. but it doesn't come back. Unfortunately, it has run off. I measure the distance with my laser: it was 250ft. away when I spotted it. There's no point in chasing it: a grizzly can move very fast.

We relax, the excitement is over, and we each return to watching our allotted area.

That is how the day passed.

We keep watching for another bear for nearly eight hours. Almost always in the same place. No-one can accuse me of impatience. We don't need to move as we have a good view of everything. When we get home, we sit on the look-out, beneath the camp, and kill two more hours there. It is past 9.00pm when we finally get back to camp.

We've seen nothing apart from caribou. They know they don't have to worry about us. I could have shot as many as I wanted.



Bearhunting Spike Camp
14th September
Morning

Several times last night, I had to fix a technical failure.

My bed is comfortable, but not very skillfully designed. It has collapsed under me twice. The first time I was able to put it back together, but after the second, I had to call John in. And then, a little later, I manage to put a hole through my tent. I have some camouflage duct tape - this is the super-strong American type, not the poorer version available in Hungary - and so I put a patch over it. We wake to clear skies; there is no need to delay the hunt.

There is oatmeal for breakfast: a hot, sweet, somewhat unalluring mash, but it is delicious and nourishing.

We stay on the well-chosen hill where we are camping, but go a little higher up, and from the rocks can watch the undergrowth and clearings below. I hold out for two hours. We are sitting in our third hiding place, when I succumb to an unexpected bout of sleeping sickness. I fall asleep sitting up. I soon wake up, but feel very tired. People I've been lucky enough to hunt with will back me up when I state that I'm not one of those hunters who typically says " Tell Me If You See Something And I'll Come And Shoot It", and who spends most of the hunt either in bed, or just in the tent. But, even so, I have to ask John to take over my watching, and I retreat to my tent. I sleep until noon; lunch is just being prepared. I haven't missed anything; there's been nothing moving in the entire neighborhood.

I hope my hunting luck has not turned.

My notebook's battery is on its deathbed. I shall have to start writing by hand.

I am sure that batteries, and charging them, become the major preoccupation of any trip or expedition after about the third day. Altitude sickness, sore feet, upset stomachs and diarrhea, aching joints and stiff muscles, all soon become just routine for the group, and, after a few days, nobody bothers to mention them. But not batteries!

This is a simply inexhaustible topic of conversation. Who has the latest alkaline / metal / lithium / digital / hybrid / cadmium / duracell-ionic battery, and how long will it last? Do you think I've brought enough? Is that charger compatible with this? How many hours / minutes / seconds is its expected life, and how can it be prolonged? During every breakfast, break, and dinner, this is the recurring question. While climbing up neck-breaking walls of rock some people will happily chat about the energy saving abilities of their camera. Somebody might have lost his wallet, or maybe can't find his passport, but the important thing is he's still got his batteries. Nothing is more

important. When planning a journey, battery use, the chances of recharging it, and the possibilities of finding a source of electricity, are of prime concern. Members of the group soon form cliques, depending on their type of battery. Those who need the same sort for their wonderful electronics will forge unbreakable bonds until the trip ends.

Experienced mountaineers suddenly turn into battery experts.

They learn how to squeeze out the last drop of energy from their rechargeable batteries, each in their own particular way. Every responsible member of the expedition will have his own method of keeping his battery going. One swears that by warming it up he hopes to gain some extra energy, while another does the exact opposite, and cools it down. There are some who try to revive a dead battery by rubbing it; another colleague explains his theory that all gadgets use energy, even when switched off, so he always removes his batteries, even from his head-flashlight when he's not using it. (These generally end up getting lost, thus solving his energy supply problem once and for all) Recharging experts are a breed apart.

They are the true elite. In their rucksack they will have an adaptor that can function using any electrical system in the world. Their heads are packed with information about electrical standards in far-off countries with unpronounceable names. And they don't get phased if they end up in some place that has no standards at all. They'll just stick two wires into any source of electricity - it's terrifying just watching - will coil and twist wires, and then, provoking a sigh of relief, the red light will appear on the charger.

But whoever really wants to be king of the hill need to do no more than bring along a solar-powered charger. He will instantly become Mr. Popularity, with everyone trying to get into his good books. I can guarantee that all the girls will form a line outside his tent, clasping various batteries. For some reason that is unknown to me, the use of solar chargers has not really been taken up by Hungarian hikers and mountaineers. This is possibly because they appear to work by magic, which baffles ordinary people, and are quite probably the work of the Devil. And there's also a chance that if all of us had solar chargers we'd have nothing more to say to each other. It would eliminate the ties that bind us together, almost the whole purpose of the trip; there'd no longer be a need for creative problem solving, and our lives would sink into a state of terminal boredom.



14th September
Afternoon

It has been decided that, depending on the weather, we will leave this campsite today. We will fly back to the base camp and, if possible, go on to the second spike camp. If we can stick to this plan, we will be able to hunt tomorrow. If not, the day's sport will have to be written off.

John doesn't think it's worth spending too much time in one place. He says it is very possible that the grizzly wandering about close to our camp is bigger than one we might find at our next spike camp. But a bagged, grizzly, even if it is just average size, is a much better result than some unfound, unshot royal specimen. I agree with this philosophy entirely.

2nd Bearhunting Spike Camp
14th September
Evening

We had planned to leave the camp at 6.00am, but, early in the afternoon, we received an unexpected radio message. It said they'd be there to collect us within 20mins, so we should start to pack up the camp at once. We were prepared for this, so all our clothes and equipment are already neatly packed and waiting. I've just started taking my bags out of the tent when we get another radio message: they'll be here in 10mins. Because of the hurry, I force myself to give John a hand to take down the tents. We finish quickly. When the first message came through, we were lying on our camp beds, but 15mins. later, here we are, ready, and waiting, for the planes.

The first lands without any mishap, but the second - flown by Bob Adams himself - makes a very strange, hair-raising maneuver: it lands in the valley, and then continues taxiing up the side of the hill. I film it with my camera, and hope I've got it all accurately. We throw in the bags, and, after a short run, we are airborne.

Alaskan hunting laws forbid any searching by air for game before a hunt, including circling over the area. So it is not possible for a pilot to spot a bear and then radio the guide to lead his client there. However, there's nothing to stop us keeping our eyes peeled as we travel from one camp to another. This is what we are doing now, though in vain, unfortunately, as we cannot see a single living creature. We fly over an abandoned camp, and Bob tells us that the cabins there haven't been used in decades. We've only been flying for 10 - 15mins. but the wind is throwing the little dragon-fly about so violently that I'm starting to feel sick. To my great relief I see that we

are coming in to land, but once again, where...? It's another very narrow ridge, but I'm beginning to get used to the fact that there is nowhere that these guys can't land a plane.

Well, this is our new camp. Before leaving, Bob tells us that there are grizzlies, black bears and giant moose in the vicinity, so there is a fair chance of bagging all three species. He also assures me that, should I be unsuccessful, he still has a couple of other campsites up his sleeve; he won't let me leave without a grizzly.

I hope he's right.

Second Bearhunting Spike Camp 15th September

John is concerned about the smells from the camp drifting about. They might warn off the grizzly. It seems that Alaskan bears are more cowardly than Canadian ones. There, we were always afraid that one would ambush us, but here we are worried that it will run away.

In the morning we divide up the ridge where we landed into two parts; our tents are pitched on one side, and I can watch the valley from mine, while John keeps watch on the other side of the ridge.

It's cold, the wind is blowing, and the air is damp.

Alaskan weather.

I spot a moose far off in the distance. I run over to John immediately, to borrow the spotting scope, but by the time I get back, it has gone. There's no point in starting to hunt based on such a vague sighting. Instead, we keep on watching. After 30mins. John runs up: there is a black bear on the next ridge! My rucksack is packed and ready, I throw it over my shoulder, and we set off.

The terrain is not easy here, either. My feet sink into the carpet of moss, which is 8ins. deep in parts. At first I thought it was a pleasant surface to walk on, but I soon discover the drawbacks.

The wet moss sucks in my boots, like a swamp, and sometimes I have to really tear myself from the grasp of this over-friendly plant. There's not as much as 10ft. of flat ground: it is all uphill or downhill. That sums up the whole trek. The ridge where we landed, and the ridge where we saw the bear, form a horseshoe. The baribal is on the opposite arm of the horseshoe and we should be able to catch up with it in the curve. We haven't got an easy job, that's for sure. The difficulties come from the terrain's rough surface and its inclines and the fact that we have to move quickly. The bear disappears from view, descending behind the ridge on the other arm. We speed up - this sort of pace is called mountain running in Hungary. We have a short break to take off a few

clothes. We are very hot from running, but we soon start off again. We get to where the bear should be.

But it is nowhere to be seen.

Some difficult hours are coming.

We systematically check out all the hills where the bear might be. With no success. We are battling against mountains, wind and occasional rain. We have no food with us; we left so quickly there was no time to pack any. We finally give up the search. We stop because there simply aren't any hills left to climb up. The black bear has disappeared somewhere in the depths of the undergrowth.

That's the end. It's over.

We head back to camp, looking forward to some food and a bit of a rest. Just out of habit, we take a look at the hill on our ridge... there is another bear there! It is also a black bear and is much larger than the one that got away. Back to camp! It is another merciless march, carrying our rucksacks, during which we keep a constant watch on the bear and on a few other promising sites, using our binoculars. If we do see a grizzly, we'll stop our black bear hunt and go after the bigger one. But we don't have to make the decision. We could put up a sign saying " Grizzly Free Zone" anywhere around here.

During our march, sweating profusely, John explains the difference between a travelling bear and a feeding bear. A travelling bear is on its way from one place to another. Nobody knows where it is going, or why. Shooting it is almost impossible, unless it is heading towards the hunter. The first bear was one of these. We tried; we chased it and we failed.

A feeding bear is just that: one that is eating. It is rather like me: it won't stop eating unless there is a reason. It will stay in the same place, happily munching on something, for hours. The second bear that we saw is a feeding bear, which makes this hunt look promising. Finally, after many steep hills, and a lot of struggles, we are back in camp, but we don't stop for a second. We run past the tents, going along the ridge. The bear is quite far from the camp. The only part of the ridge that is flat is the place where the planes land. As we go on, we come to a craggy section, full of steep elevations and drops. Having no other options, we steadily keep climbing these small peaks and crags. We must be within 2000ft. of the bear, and turn down to pick up its trail. We choose a good lookout place and sit down to discuss our chances. The black fur is clearly visible on the hillside. We should approach it from above, but the wind direction is not good from there.

But that is our only option, so we have to do it, and hope for the best. We creep towards it, using bushes and any cover to hide behind. But we can't get very close as the terrain becomes completely open. Another council of war. The final decision is: we shall go down the other side of

the hill, move along under cover of the ridge, and overtake the bear that way. Then we will climb over the ridge and look for a good shooting position.

And that is what we do.

John is constantly throwing blades of grass into the air to check the wind direction. It is not very favorable, but it never seems to be up here. It will be even worse when we get there. Anyway, we'll give it a try - that's why we are here. Meanwhile, the bear is on the move, probably because the blueberries have run out - so we have to make several changes to our route. After our final maneuver John peers forward... there it is, right in front of us, no farther than 150ft.! We change places, I get out my gun... I take another look... and there it goes, running away; it got wind of us. I stare after it through the reticle, but I can only guess at its whereabouts as the undergrowth is so dense...

I can't see anything.

Shoot, says John.

I'm not going to.

It's moving so fast, I can barely make it out; the angle is so bad, and the bushes so thick, that I won't let fly with the SST. We sit down to see if it turns up somewhere else, but we are not that lucky.

I'm disappointed.

Should I have fired? I have no idea. I didn't fully grasp the situation. If I had managed to hit it, it would have been pure luck. But if I had shot it, I would now have a bear. And how pleased I would be! But if I'd missed, or, even worse, just wounded it, I'd have lost my chance to have another try as wounding counts as bagging. And the bear might have died in terrible agony, perhaps not for several days! No-one should ever do that to a bear, or any other animal. As I write these lines - my netbook hasn't been working for a long time - I feel good that I didn't shoot. It was the right decision, and John's sounds of disapproval were all in vain. If I hadn't been using a fast expanding, plastic-tipped bullet, but, say, a .93 Swift A-Frame, perhaps I would have. Back to camp, once more... A cruel hike in bitter wind and damp, sweaty clothes, feeling cold, hungry and exhausted. We don't speak much, which is never a good sign. The harmony of our team seems to be evaporating. The hunt is not shaping up well.

We haven't even seen a grizzly or a moose.

15th September
Night

After a two hour nap we had hot soup for dinner, with a generous portion of sausage. I sliced up two sausages, each the length of my lower arm, into it. My mood has improved considerably, as have my hopes. I manage to sort out the misunderstanding about the bear with John. It arose because he didn't trust my knowledge of English, and couldn't understand what I was saying.

When I turned and said the bear was running, he couldn't see the creature, and thought it was just walking. That's why he was so keen on me firing. When he stood beside me and saw that the baribal was really running fast, into the bushes, he admitted he wouldn't have fired either. I'm just glad that we see it the same way. The harmonious relationship between a hunter and his guide, which sets the mood of the hunt, is very important, at least, it is to me, anyway. Mutual trust is the bedrock of success. If it is missing, then we'd better just stay in our tents. At 6.00pm, after an exhausting day, I climb into my sleeping bag. I need to relax for a while. I intend to laze around for the evening. As a mountaineering friend of mine has said: the clever mountaineer spends as much time in his sleeping bag, and as little outside, as possible. I am settling down on my wobbly, unstable bed when John's shadow appears on the side of my tent.

- Gábor, come out quickly and quietly!

I don't know what he has seen, but I hurriedly get dressed and grab the three most important things - my gun, my ear-defenders and my binoculars - and go out in the open air. John is sitting by the tent's entrance, looking towards the floor of the valley with his high-powered binoculars.

The valley is broken by two hills, one pointed, the other flat-topped. There, on the flat one, a brown dot is moving: grizzly!

It's not much more than a mile, and the way there is not difficult. We can get there before dark. One of the features of this valley, and also its curse, is the constant, gusting wind. It is pointless relying on a favorable wind direction; by the time we've gone a couple of hundred feet, it will change and carry our scent to the bear; at least, that's what John says. We must wait. Down in the valley is a moose carcass. We must wait for the bear to find it. Then he will be so preoccupied, and his sense of smell will be so overwhelmed by the odor of the moose, that we will stand a much better chance. To get a better view we climb up to the highest place on the ridge, which I call the Gallery. We follow events below from there. The bear's raised nose shows he has detected the moose. We don't wait any longer, and begin our approach under cover of the pointed hill. I don't bother with my rucksack as we're not going far. After a couple of steps John reminds me: bring your gun!

In all the excitement of watching the bear I had left it behind on the ridge.

We get to within 2500ft. of the bear. It's standing in long grass; it is easy to see from above, but could be invisible when we are on the same level. John is not happy about it, and tries to memorise the bear's exact position. We go on carefully... but the bear turns around, and then disappears forever into the bushes.

The wind!- signals John.

Like others before us, we also could not escape the Curse of the Valley.

I'm just settling into my tent once again, when John, outside, asks - as if en passant - what about a black bear?

What a question! Let's go!

On the other side of our ridge, where the valley splits, there is a baribal grazing! It's picking blueberries. It is 1428ft. away, not that close. We must get closer. Once more we must take advantage of the terrain, watching through binoculars whenever we can, and using them to measure the distance. At 900ft. we start to feel optimistic. Now we are on the same level as the bear; we have a perfect view of it. We have time to study it.

And guess what? It's the same bear we saw earlier, says John.

I was a bit sceptical myself; but it's unusual to come across two such large bears living so close to each other. Because this is definitely a big bear. John estimates it must be nearly 6ft. Just like a small grizzly. This would be a beautiful bag! There are a lot of bushes between us and the baribal, and this time, miraculously, the wind is good. We get closer to ensure the shot will be on target. John puts down the rucksack; my gun rest is perfect. It is 654ft away, standing in the middle of my crosshairs. I wait a moment for it to move slightly, as, just in my field of vision, I can dimly see some grass beyond my gunsight. And then it steps forward, and is now a clear target.

One shot, one kill.

The sound of the SST as it hits is quite audible. The baribal collapses, and - just like in a hunting video - starts rolling down the steep hillside. I'm still watching it, but I don't fire again. Sliding down the hill, and from this range, the bear makes a very awkward target; but the sound of the impact and the collapse of the bear are evidence enough of a hit.

I give a huge sigh of relief.

I've got my first bear!



John congratulates me, and I get up. He remains on the spot and directs me to the bear. I'm busily searching for it, but I can't find it. I start to get worried. Could it just have been a surface wound? And is it happily running around somewhere at this very moment? But the noise the bullet's impact made doesn't suggest this. So where is it? I call John over. It is slowly getting darker. We search for blood: nothing. We scour the area, but can't find a drop. My worry is turning to desperation... but then... John unhitches his gun from his rucksack... stares at something in the undergrowth... beckons me over, and points at something beneath a bush...

There lies my black beast!

It has slid a long way.

John has traced its long slide through the grass. The heavy body just pushed aside all the bushes in its path. I'm lucky, as it could have been lost forever. I prod it with my gun, but there's no sign of life. We do not dare to try and move it; with every touch it slips a couple of feet further down the

hill. We take our photographs right there, in the bushes. It is indeed a large specimen! John has never seen one so big. My first bear! We don't have a lot of time. It's getting very dusky. My guide starts to skin it on the spot, as the meat will be left here. We find the bullet; it mushroomed as expected, and the lead core has remained intact. It was a perfect shoulder shot; the bullet passed almost straight through its body, stopping on the other side. It expanded immediately, expending its full force, making a first-class impact. The ammunition and bullet are specifically designed for shots over 600ft. In the case of a closer shot from just a few feet - as with my Canadian caribou - it probably isn't the bullet's fault if the lead core disintegrates. I must continue to study SST bullets.

The skinning is finished under the bluish glare of our head-flashlights, though, for John, the toughest part is still ahead. He has to carry the sack containing the bear skin up an almost vertical slope. He produces ski poles to help with the climb, but a steep slope is still a steep slope. We arrive back at camp panting heavily.

Eventually, even the longest day must come to an end. And on 15th September 2009 it finally did. It has been such an eventful day! Going from disappointment to joy, from fatigue to even greater fatigue, and from failure to success! Diana, the goddess of the hunt, has finally given me my due. She allowed me that second chance today. She sent back the bear that I failed to shoot this afternoon. I seized the opportunity, and have increased my expedition's trophy list with yet another species.

It is past midnight by the time we crawl back into our tents.

Second Bearhunting Spike Camp 16th September

I've stayed in bed until 9.30am today, if I can dignify my decrepit camp bed with that name. It is getting colder and colder; the brief Alaskan summer is coming to an end.

After getting up, out come the binoculars. From the camp, nothing can be seen moving in the valleys, at least, nothing that I am interested in. We have seen a lot of caribou from our current campsite, as we did from the previous one; the main reason for this is that their hunting season is over, and somebody has probably told them. Now they feel safe.

Yesterday I shot my baribal; today we have seen three more.

But not one moose or grizzly.



To be precise, we have seen a grizzly, all day yesterday, and again today.

It is our pet grizzly, and I'm thinking of calling him Balambér, as in the Hungarian children's story. It is about 2mi. from us, as the crow flies, but, if we were to try and walk there, we would have to walk around 12 -15mi. over some of the toughest mountain terrain, including two river crossings, hacking our way through primeval forest. John says that it would be a three day journey there and back, and if Balambér decided to move on, a couple of hours after we'd set off, we'd only find out the next day because of the unevenness of the ground. Which means that Balambér is safe, and knows it. He's standing quite brazenly in open ground, not bothering to try to hide.

Today we've decided to keep it simple. We go along the ridge for about a mile, stopping now and then to use the spotting scope. We check the area thoroughly, but, apart from Balambér, there is not a grizzly in sight. Let alone a moose. I don't think we are going to shoot a moose here. We are going to have to try somewhere else.

Our late breakfast is followed by an afternoon lunch. We leave our tents again at 5.00pm. Once more, there is a bear at the moose's carcass. It isn't the one we saw yesterday; it looks a bit bigger. My rucksack is packed and ready - I'm always prepared - so we start the descent into the valley without delay. We probably haven't even got 150ft. when the grizzly heads for the shelter of the bushes. John swears softly. Has the Curse of the Valley returned? John thinks it has; the bear had probably noticed the smell from the camp earlier, but after we'd opened the flaps of both our tents, and stepped outside simultaneously, the smell must have been too much, too strong for the grizzly. Whether that's what really happened, or is just an excuse that John has made up, I can't say. We rush back up to the Gallery to try and follow the bear's trail, but we can't see it anymore.

Balambér is perfectly safe and happy, thank you very much. Through the spotting scope we think we can see him nibbling blueberries, just like his smaller cousin that I shot yesterday.

This hunt is becoming difficult.

I'm making some calculations, and so is John.

We both think that there is still enough time, but it is starting to run out. There might just be enough left for a grizzly and a moose.

I can't complain about conditions in the camp. Here I am, in the middle of the wilderness, in one of the most beautiful places in the world. Our home is a pair of lonely tents. We have virtually no contact with the outside world as John doesn't have a satellite phone. His walkie-talkie has only a limited range. If he happens to hear a passing plane he takes it out to chat with the pilot up above us. We are living here like the early Alaskan pioneers.

Though our guns are better, even if they are not much use to us at present.



Second Bearhunting Spike Camp
17th September

We start the day in a rather subdued mood.

Including today, I have four hunting days left. It might well be enough if we can find some shootable game waiting for us in a convenient place. But we haven't seen anything.

The weather is fine, but cold. I am finding it increasingly difficult to leave my warm sleeping bag. Today John is going to move his lookout place a couple of hundred feet, and keep searching for moose. I will remain where I am, watching for grizzly. Apart from Balambér I haven't seen another living creature.

Around 10.00am John comes back with the news that he has seen a moose. It has disappeared into a bank of fog, about a mile away. If what he says is only half-true, it's antlers must be at least double the size of the current world record. This is typical. Széchenyi, and other hunters, have also written about about these strange, mythical, royal-sized animals, which always manage to turn up when the hunter is somewhere completely different. And by the time he gets there, these "phantoms" will always have vanished! If a hunt is a failure - and this one certainly is - the guides often try to maintain morale with similar tales.

All this probably suggests that I am getting impatient.

Well, that's true.

Hunting is hunting. There's never a guarantee of success. But in my hunting package the black bear, which I shot yesterday, and which I am still as happy with now as I was when I shot it, is only a minor part. The three main game species I want are: moose, grizzly and caribou. I also have a permit for a wolverine, but I'm not even thinking about that right now; so far, I've only ever seen a wolverine in a picture book. The caribou season has been suddenly curtailed by the authorities. They cannot be touched. We just have to take a deep breath and accept it.

There are four game animals left.

And one is already outside my tent.

Before I left Hungary, I was given a leaflet containing some valuable advice for globe-trotting hunters. One of the suggestions is that, if, during a hunt, you become discontented with something, or you have a problem, you should tell your guide. There's no point in bringing it up at the end of the hunt, when it's too late to do anything about it. Now that John is here I take this advised and express my dissatisfaction.

I always hate it when I read an account of some hunt, written by a knowledgeable organizer, who never understands his clients impatience. In order to put an end to the usual disfunctional

communication between client and organizer, I can reveal that the client is not being impatient because he's an idiot and knows nothing about hunting. He is being impatient because - unlike the organizer - he has paid a lot of money to be allowed to hunt in a particular territory, and he won't get a penny back, even if the hunt is a total failure. He wants to get some return for his money.

Like a chance to shoot something.

It's one thing that success can never be guaranteed. But the flip side is that, so far, I have only been offered one black bear to shoot, during one of the most expensive hunting packages on sale in America. If there are not enough bears available in an area, then they should not take so many hunters there. And they shouldn't take everyone's money.

It's that simple!

There are no moose or grizzly available here.

It's a matter of fact.

We do the same circuit every day. Balambér is too far away to get to. The bears in the valley can all smell us because of the Curse of the Valley. John's argument that we have seen a lot of bears just doesn't wash! I don't want to watch bears, I want to hunt them. If I feel like watching bears I can buy a \$10 ticket to Anchorage Zoo - although I might even get in for free, as I have adopted Nicolai - and look at them from morning till night. The methods used so far have not produced results. To constantly hope for new outcomes from the same old actions is possibly a definition of madness.

If we were staying here for weeks, and had a lot of luck, we might manage to get one of the coveted animals on my list. But this is only a ten-day hunt, and it wasn't me who chose these ten days, but Bob Adams, the famous outfitter and organizer. It is he who has received enough money from me to buy himself a really cool car. So, excluding today, I have three days hunting left to find two more game animals, one of which - the moose - I haven't even seen yet, and the other only from a distance of 1-1.5mi.

This is, slightly edited, more or less what I say to John, hoping that the result will be that every uncomprehending organizer will now finally understand what makes his client impatient. What I really don't get is, why are we hanging around a place where there is obviously no prospect of finding anything? Bob should have quickly moved us to another area yesterday. He might do it today, but with time being so tight, a single day really matters. I can tell that the desperation of the situation has made John quite tense, so I try to stay calm. However, I do ask that, during his next radio conversation with Bob, he will pass on my remarks as clearly as he can, and, at the

same time, ask that Bob, should his busy schedule permit it, pays us, and our modest little camp, a visit.

There are still three days left!

I'm not going to complain about John.

He is perhaps the most motivated guide I've had since I've been in America. He keeps the binoculars glued to his eyes for 10hrs. a day, and I mean that literally. None of this is his fault, but he doesn't have a magic wand. He doesn't speak the bears' language, so he can't call them to us. (They probably wouldn't be able to hear him anyway, as they're so far away) The current situation is probably more upsetting for him than it is for me. He's a professional - he can see what's going on.

At noon it starts to rain.

It is hard to tell which is colder: the wind or the rain. But, combined, they are just too much. The rain is so heavy that it even makes using the binoculars difficult. We should be able to see for several miles, but the curtain of rain makes it impossible.

Our camp, with its bedraggled tents, is starting to look quite miserable. And as if this blessing from heaven isn't enough, I make my own contribution. One of my water bottles seems to have sprung a leak, so my tent is now wet both inside and out. I bail it out with my mug. So at least I'm able to wash out the dried cocoa in it. The hole in my tent is getting larger; I haven't had time to repair it. I don't need to worry about my electrical equipment as it's all safe in the waterproof Peli case. In the tent I hang my ear-defenders up with a piece of string; at least they'll be dry there.

The area beneath my bed has managed to stay dry, so I put my gun there. If the camp bed collapses again, I'll land on top of it. Which will mean I have to test it again. Right now my only concern is to stop my sleeping bag from getting wet.

Montana! The endless prairie! Sunshine! Blue sky!

Babsie Bishop's good humor!



17th September
Evening

At 2.00 this afternoon Bob Adams paid us a visit.

What happened then was so remarkable, unbelievable, and bizarre that it took me a minute to work out what was going on.

Quite literally, he went for me.

He was shouting and swearing, and touched, almost pushed, me several times - yelling that the failure was all down to me(!). Because I'm always asleep in my tent!

That is such an absurd, outrageous lie - completely untrue!

One of our hunts lasted for 18hrs. and none have been under 12hrs.! Only the day before yesterday we didn't get back until after midnight. His style of argument relies on aggression, shouting, and not letting the other person get a word in. Everything he had said is simply not true, but then John starts to behave a bit strangely too. Now that his boss is here, his opinion about the lack of bears has suddenly changed. Now he is just echoing Bob's words, even though he had previously agreed with me that all the bears were elsewhere. It is all about the fact that I twice spent 10-15mins. in my tent making a video, because outside it was so windy that my voice wouldn't have been heard. That is the basis of their argument, why it is impossible to hunt with me!

It is a shocking and incredible insult!

As I've already said, in order to keep watch efficiently, we divided the camp in two. My half was on the side with the tents and the other was over the ridge. They then twist the facts even more, saying that the reason I hadn't shot that alleged moose was because I hadn't felt like accompanying John up to the Gallery, preferring to stay down by the tents! I just didn't know what to say; not that I was given the chance, anyway.

There seems to be some tension between Bob and John, too.

But I can see that John is not resolute enough to stick to his opinion that we should move to another camp. Bob's opinion, and he's yelling it at us - if there was a bear anywhere near, it will be far away by now - is that we have to stay here, and that I will be able to shoot a bear here.

John asks me to decide whether I want to stay or go on.

Me, who is here for the first time! Exactly who is the guide here??? Who is supposed to know the area??? Is this a guided hunt, or not???

This is a sly move on John's part, because, if the hunt is a failure, they can then put the blame on me, saying that was the place I had picked. The behaviour of these two men is underhand and quite despicable!

To clarify the matter to my readers, here is a list of my main points:

- Whoever needs to shout won't be in the right. Nothing can justify such coarse and rude behavior!
- It is extremely unprofessional to behave like this towards a client who has paid a small fortune for just ten days.
- Based on his recent hysterical and aggressive outburst, my personal opinion is that Bob Adams is not a very intelligent man. Anyone who argues like this can't be very bright.
- Every problem can be solved if you examine it calmly. It's a pity Bob didn't try to do that.
- What he says is not true. But, even if it was, it wouldn't matter, as finding the game is not the client's job. That's what your guide is for. The client's task is to obey the guide and shoot accurately.
- Neither Bob nor John know where the moose and bear are to be found. I firmly believe that this is the root of the problem.

Soon after Bob's stormy departure I make a final decision.

I decide, of my own accord, to bring my moose and bear hunt to an early conclusion.



I give John my decision, and he radios it to Bob. He quickly returns to the camp - he'd left before I had decided what I would do - and we start to pack. 30mins. later all three of us are on the plane, flying back to the base camp.

There are many reasons for my decision.

This has been a dreadful hunt. There was never the slightest chance of success. I can see how embarrassed Bob and John are, but they try to hide it with bluster and yelling. I do not doubt that Bob is one of Alaska's best outfitters. Many people have said so, so it must be true. The facilities at the base camp and the standard of organization also suggest it. But Bob just could not handle the situation, he got very wound up, and consequently became unpredictable and aggressive.

This is not the right job for a nervous man. Given the general mood and atmosphere, I really don't feel like going on with the hunt.

For me the bagging and the trophy are no more than 50% of the hunt. The size and weight of a game species unfamiliar to me are almost incidental. I've always asked my guides not to let me shoot anything way below the average. But, if I get that, then I'm happy. And if it happens to be above the average, then I'm especially happy.

The other 50% is the experience itself.

The personal relationships I build up with my hunting companions.

For me, the laughs we have together, the non-stop teasing, the endless chats about guns, calibers and ammunition, listening to other people's stories, looking at their photos, appraising each other's clothes and binoculars, and getting to know their histories, are what are important.

Drinking whisky together behind the guide's back, telling dirty jokes... Looking back over my journey so far, these are what first spring to mind. Now I am going to be very honest: I don't have the faintest idea how big a Dall sheep's horns are. Greg Jennen assured me it was a good one, and I believed him. It is not a point that greatly interests me. But I still start to laugh when I think of the two archers, and all the silly things we got up to during those few days. That is what it's all about! That is what I remember now, and hope I will for decades to come!

In the current atmosphere that second 50% has gone completely.

This is no place for me.

With a little bit of magic I might have been able to get my grizzly, say, the day after tomorrow. But I'm not particularly bothered. What would it remind me of when I look at it back home? All the quarrels and stress that Bob has brought into my life? Is that what I'm here for: to fight with people like this? Should I start yelling, as well? What would I gain by it? It wouldn't improve the atmosphere. I'm not here to get a grizzly at any cost, but to enjoy some good hunting in Alaska. But, if this is what it costs, I don't want it. With a bit of luck the greater part of my life still lies



ahead of me. I can always come back to Alaska to get my moose and grizzly. And I hope I will make many more good friends, and spend the hunt in a happy atmosphere. But one thing is for sure: I won't be using the Adams Guiding Service. Once was quite enough. Perhaps too much. I've made the right decision.

Room 2069
Expedition Headquarters
Anchorage Hilton
Anchorage
18th September

If I say that the atmosphere in the base camp this morning was icy, in every respect of the word, then I describe the situation precisely. In the barracks heating is supposed to be provided by a wood-burning stove. Maybe the weather is too cold, but the stove isn't working well; perhaps I just don't know how to operate it, but I seem to have to feed it every 2hrs. But I always sleep at night, not worrying about the wood, and, consequently, by dawn it is pretty cold.

I think that Bob might be feeling that he's gone a bit too far. He is trying to get pally with me, offering me beer, but this is one of those few occasions where I'm not in a friendly mood. I deliberately avoid breakfast, which shows how serious the situation is. I don't even leave my cabin; I tell them to call me when it's time to leave. The plane to Anchorage will take off from Aniak at 12.00am, so I have to be there by then. Just after 10.00am, I leave this place, with its unhappy memories, in complete silence, with no farewells; no-one comes to say goodbye, which doesn't bother me at all.

At Aniak I am surprised to find that Pen-Air is not going to charge me extra for changing my ticket to an earlier date. There are empty seats on the plane, so why shouldn't I get on it? So says their representative at the desk, and I'm not going to object.

I've had to fly a lot during my American trip. I have flown on just about every type of plane. Some small; some even smaller; some large, and some enormous. Not counting my helicopter trips in Alaska, the journey from Aniak to Anchorage is my 29th flight, and there's still a long time before my trip ends.

I've developed a technique for overcoming the boredom of flying: immediately after take-off I fall asleep. I can't remember where, but somewhere I bought a box of earplugs. They are very useful as I occasionally have to sleep in places that are not particularly quiet at night. I use them on planes as well, as I don't like the noise of the engines and the ventilation system. After take-off I

just put them in, lean back, and fall asleep at once. I seem to spend at least half my time flying, fast asleep.

I've flown a lot before, as well, and, if I've learnt anything, it is that planes are always late.

I don't see why they have timetables, as no plane ever keeps to them. Some are just 5mins. late, some 15, but every flight has some delay. It would be a good idea to add 10mins. to the flying time of every plane in the world, and then, maybe, they'd all arrive on time. This is why all the passengers on this flight are stunned to hear that the 1hr.30mins. journey will, in fact, only be 1hr.10mins. Some whoop in appreciation, but I join in with those who clap. Not long after 1.00pm I'm in a taxi on my way to the Hilton.

All my arrivals at this hotel have been fairly memorable.

My stubble is almost ten days old, and I've been wearing my clothes for exactly the same time. There is a thick layer of dirt on the sleeves of my jacket, the one that was lost, then found, in Montana, and dried bear blood on my camouflage trousers, all of which emphasises the fact that I have not just come from a smart dinner party. It would be hard to look inconspicuous among all the well-dressed guests. My favorite receptionist, the incredibly nice Yolanda, who understands and copes with all my complicated hotel arrangements, is at the desk and smiles at me as I approach. They had reserved Room 2162 for me, but thought I'd be arriving at a later date, and can't move the current occupants out. She suggests Room 2069, saying it has a good view of the mountains near Anchorage. I get all my stuff out of storage and go up to my room. It takes a long time to sort out all my clothes and send them off to the laundry. Meanwhile, I get an email from the hotel supervisor telling me that the clothes that had previously been lost, are now found.

However, on my last visit here I left some other clothes in the laundry and they now seem to have been lost. I'm a bit nervous about telling him this, fearing the Hilton management might start a mass purge of its employees. I'm here for a couple of days, so they'll either have time to find my clothes, or I'll go shopping at their expense.

We agree to that.

I let Cabela's know about my bad experiences, and they are completely surprised. Did Bob really behave like that? Yes, indeed he did. Nobody can understand it, and everyone is very sorry; particularly me.

I spend most of the afternoon in the jacuzzi and steam room. Interestingly, I seem to be the only person attracted to these facilities; I've never seen anybody else in them. I pop over to the nearby shopping mall, and then the Army/Navy Store, but, unusually, I don't buy anything.

From my window I have a good view of 4th Ave. Around midnight there are sounds of lively parties going on in the two bars, but I don't feel like going down.



Room 2069
Expedition Headquarters
Anchorage Hilton
19th September

I'm just lazing around.

There are several souvenir shops nearby, which I go into. In one I start chatting to the shop assistant, who asks, in a friendly way, what I'm doing here. I tell her about my trip, and my recent unpleasant experiences. She becomes very indignant. She, as a native Alaskan, is very upset to hear that a stranger from half way round the world has been treated like that in her country. She won't let it rest, and starts making several calls. Finally, she advises me to make a complaint to the Alaska Professional Hunter's Association (APHA) as well to the Alaska Travel Industry Association and the INC.

She's absolutely right, and I decide to go back to my room and write the letters.

I'm not expecting to get a refund. That's not why I'm pursuing this. I only want Bob, and people who behave like him, to know that they can't just do as they like. This diary might become a book one day, so I must avoid strong language; but there is a good Hungarian expression for it: the world does not spin in his ass! We shouldn't just bow our heads and put up with certain types of hunt organizers ruining our fun! We mustn't forget that we are the customers; the organizers - although they sometimes act like it - are not doing us any favors! These two letters won't change what happened to me, but they might help hunters coming after me: that might sound a bit hypocritical, but it's true. Whether they will produce any results, I can't say, but that is not the point. I'm making a protest against intolerable behavior, which I hope will encourage better service for future hunters.

After venting my anger, I go off to the barber's, as my hair is getting as long as a rocker's. I tell the barber not to be afraid to use his clippers, and I end up looking a bit like a marine, which means I now have to tighten the buckle on my cap to stop it falling off.

I have a quick phone call about my lost clothes, which have still not been found.

In the evening I go and have some beers in the bar. My new favorite is Miller Lite.

I didn't use to like these light American beers, but I've rather taken to them since I've been here.



Room 2069
Expedition Headquarters
Anchorage Hilton
20th September

I think I can safely say that I'm having no luck with the hotel laundry. Yesterday, unwisely, I gave my battered Under Armour jacket to them. I should tell you that this item of clothing is made of the most up-to-date fabric available today. Seriously, I doubt if any astronaut, five years ago, was wearing such advanced clothing. It requires special handling so I include a detailed note with it, giving instructions.

But the laundress, or whoever, did not manage to stick to them.

It has been washed in water that was too hot, and the fabric has melted and become very thin. In certain parts the glue has gone and the seams are coming apart. I feel very sad about it as we've been through a lot of battles together. I tell Steve Tass, the head-head Hilton guy, and a great friend of mine, all about it. When he sees the unfortunate jacket, he is speechless. He seizes it as evidence. He gazes silently at the damage. He doesn't know what else he can say, as he's already said it all during my previous laundry disasters. I do not envy the laundry staff. They are facing a tough investigation.

I receive a letter from my two archer friends, Ricardo Longoria and Jake Ensign. Their hunt is going well, and they are bagging one animal after the other. They are great guys and excellent hunters.

I keep going over last week's events.

I come to the conclusion that it is hard to see how I can be blamed for the hunt's failure. I have tried to examine those last days fairly and impartially, and that is my opinion. If a hunter follows every instruction given by his guide - and I did - then he can't be blamed if things go wrong. I was given only one opportunity for a shot, and I took it. All through life you come across people who refuse to take responsibility for their actions. Who always point the finger of blame at others. This is what is happening here. Handling any dispute capably should be a key attribute of a good outfitter. Bob Adams has a long way to go in that field.

In the afternoon I visit the Anchorage Museum. It's no big deal; it's not quite finished and only has a few, slightly tired exhibitions. I buy a new pair of shoes, sit in the jacuzzi for a while, and then, with my binoculars, watch Anchorage from the window of my room.



Room 2069
Expedition Headquarters
Anchorage Hilton
21st September

" You're pissing up the wrong tree."

When I think of Bob Adams and all that's happened today, I am reminded of the quote from the Oscar-nominated film Donny Brasco, starring Al Pacino. This line, memorably dubbed into Hungarian by Tamás Végvári, has become a familiar saying. Bob made a blunder if he thought that this Hungarian wouldn't stand up to him just because he was in a foreign land. Even here, this Hungarian guy has made some influential friends.

To start with, there's Eddie Grasser, the president of the Alaska Chapter of Safari Club International. My dear readers might remember that I met him a few days after I had arrived in Alaska. Yesterday I wrote and told Eddie what had happened.

I got his reply today.

In it he emphatically advises me to make a complaint to Kevin Anderson, the head of the Ethical Committee of Safari Club International, as well as to the Big Game Commercial Services Board for the State of Alaska, which operates under the aegis of the Alaskan Department of Fish and Game, and is in charge of guide training and outfitter supervising. And so, I did!

Never forget, there's always somebody above everybody.

In a letter to Cabela's I suggest the creation of an Ethical Code, to be signed by every outfitter working for them, in order to achieve a higher standard of service. Frank thinks it's a good idea, worthy of thorough consideration.

Above Anchorage the sky has become depressingly overcast. It is drizzling and the clouds are bumping into the hotel towers. I don't feel like doing much wandering around, I prefer to rest before my next hunt.

At noon I go back to the Army/Navy Store and, at the hotel's expense, I buy myself a Carhartt jacket to replace the Under Armour one which died a hero's death at the hands of the hotel laundry. I'm starting to get used to the fact that for the rest of my journey I will always have to check in three pieces of luggage. But, on the positive side, I'll have enough space for some more shopping... Finally the hotel staff have tracked down almost all my missing clothes, and I've replaced the ones that are still lost. During all of my four stays here I have received invaluable help from them in arranging my affairs. It has been a real Expedition Headquarters. There is not one person working here who has not done what I asked of them. I am totally satisfied with the



Anchorage Hilton, but tomorrow, sadly, I must leave it. Hopefully not forever, but on my current journey I won't be coming back. I go to the shopping mall on 5th Avenue and buy two huge boxes of chocolates, all chosen by me in the shop, for the hotel staff.

I sink into the jacuzzi for the last time...