

# Idaho Grizzly Bear Encounters



*Photo by Chris Servheen,  
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## **1806 Encounters**

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## 1806 Encounters

### **June 14, 1806**

On **June 14**, Lewis wrote:

Collins killed two bear this morning and was sent with two others in quest of the meat; with which they returned in the evening; the mail bear was large and fat the female was of moderate size and reather meagre. we had the fat bear fleaced in order to reserve the oil for the mountains. both these bear were of the speceis common to the upper part of the missouri. they may be called white black grzly brown or red bear for they are found of all those colours. perhaps it would not be unappropriate to designate them the variagated bear.

In the evening, Labiche returned late and informed them that he had killed a female bear and two large cubs; these bears were also grizzly bears.

### **May 15, 1806**

On **May 15**, Lewis wrote about the bears that Labiche had killed:

These bear gave me a stronger evidence of the various coloured bear of this country being one speceis only, than any I have heretofore had. The female was black with a considerable proportion of white hairs intermixed and a white spot on the breast, one of the young bear was jut black and the other of a light redish brown or bey colour. the poil of these bear were infinitely longer finer and thicker than the black bear their tallons also longer and more blunt as if woarn by diging roots. the white and redish brown or bey coloured bear I saw together on the Missouri; the bey and grizly have been seen and killed together here for these were the colours of those which Collins killed yesterday. in short it is not common to find two bear here of this speceis precisely of the same colour, and if we were to attempt to distinguish them by their collours and to denominate each colour a distinct speceis we should find at least twenty. some bear nearly white have also been seen by our hunters at this place. the most striking differences between this speceis of bear and the common block bear are that the former are larger, have longer tallons and tusks, prey more on other animals, do not lie so long nor so closely in winter quarters, and will not climb a tree tho' eversoheardly pressed. the variagated bear I beleive to be the same

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here with those on the Missouri but these are not as ferocious as those perhaps from the circumstance of their being compelled from the scarcity of game in this quarter to live more on roots and of course not so much in the habit of seizing and devouring living animals. the bears here are far from being as passive as the common black bear they have attacked and fought our hunters already but not so fiercely as those of the Missouri. there are also some of the common black bear in this neighbourhood.

#### **May 16, 1806**

On **May 16**, Drouillard had wounded three bears which he said were as white as sheep but had obtained neither of them. These must have been grizzly bears also.

#### **May 17, 1806**

On **May 17**, Lewis wrote:

Sergt. Pryor and Collins returned, Sergt. Pryor brought the skin and flesh of a black bear which he had killed; Collins had also killed a very large variegated bear but his horse having absconded last evening was unable to bring it. they had secured this meat perfectly from the wolves or birds and as it was at a considerable distance we did not think proper to send for it today. neither of these bears were in good order. as the bears are rather ferocious and we are obliged to depend on them principally for our subsistence we thought it most advisable to direct at least two hunters to go together, and they accordingly prepared themselves out for this purpose.

#### **May 25, 1806**

On **May 25**, Clark wrote this same description of the bears as Lewis had written about on **May 15**. Apparently, he was copying Lewis's journal ten days later.

#### **May 31, 1806**

On **May 31**, Lewis wrote another description of the bears:

Goodrich and Willard visited the Indian Village this morning and returned in the evening Willard brought with him the dressed skin of a bear which he had purchased for me. this skin was of a uniform pale redish brown colour, the Indians inform us that it was not the Hoh-host or white bear, that it was the Yâck-kâh this distinction of the Indians induced us to make further enquiry relative to their opinions of the different species of bear in this country. We

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produced the Several Skins of the bear which our hunters had killed at this place and one very nearly white which Capt Lewis had purchased. the White, the deep and pale red grizzle, the dark brown grizzle, and all those that had the extremities of the hair of a White or frosty Colour without regard to the Colour of the ground of the poil, they disignated Hoh-host and assured us that they were the Same with the White bear, that they associated together, were very viscious, never climb the trees, and had much longer nails than the others. The black skins, those which were black with a number of entire white hairs intermixed, the black with a White breast, the uniform bey, brown and light redish brown, they disignated the Yâck-kâh—; Said that they Climb the trees had Short nails and were not viscious, that they could prosue them and kill them in Safty, they also affirmed that they were much Smaller than the white bear. I am disposed to adopt the indians distinction with respect to these bear and consider them two distinct Species. the White and the Grizzly of this neighbourhood are the Same as those found on the upper part of the Missouri where the other Species are not, and that the uniform redish brown black &c. of this neighbourhood are a Species distinct from both Species of our black bear and from the black bear of the Pacific Coast which I believe to be the Same with those of the Atlantic Coast, and that the Common black bear do not exist here. I have previously observed that the claws of Some of the bear which we had killed here had much Shorter tallons than the varigated or White bear usially have but Supposed that they had worn them out by scratching our roots, and these were those which the indians call Yâhkâh. on enquiry I found also that a Cub of a uniform redish brown Colour pup to a female black bear intermixed with entire white hairs, had climbed a tree. I think this a distinct Species from the common black bear because we never find the latter of any other Colour than a uniform black, and also that the poil of this bear is much finer thicker and longer with a greater proportion of fur mixed with the hair, in other respects they are much the same —.

The Lewis and Clark expedition camped at Kamiah, Idaho, (Camp Chopunnish) from May 14 to June 10, 1806. They killed at least 7 grizzly bears, wounded several, and saw many more.

Only the Grizzly Bear and the common Black bear were found in this area.

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They did not record any more Grizzly bears killed after May 17. They did, however, record seeing more of this species. On June 15, one of the hunters reported seeing a white bear about 15 miles East of Weippe, near the Crane Meadows. This was the last white or Grizzly bear they recorded seeing in Idaho.

Lewis wrote that the Indians esteem the killing of one of these tremendous animals, (the grizzly bear) equally great with that of an enemy in the field of action. They said their people sometime kill the variegated bear when they can get them in the open plain, where they can pursue them on horseback and shoot them with their arrows. They kill the black bear more frequently because they are less ferocious.

Information taken from the *Journals of Lewis & Clark Expedition*, Gary E. Moulton, Editor, University of Nebraska Press.