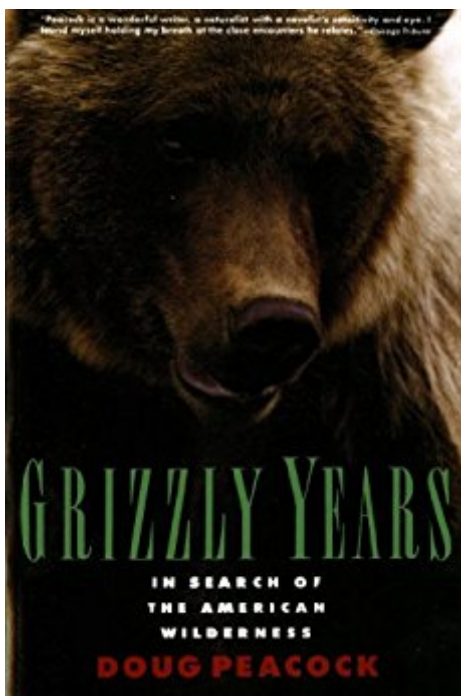


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# Grizzly Years: In Search Of The American Wilderness



## Synopsis

For nearly twenty years, alone and unarmed, author Doug Peacock traversed the rugged mountains of Montana and Wyoming tracking the magnificent grizzly. His thrilling narrative takes us into the bear's habitat, where we observe directly this majestic animal's behavior, from hunting strategies, mating patterns, and denning habits to social hierarchy and methods of communication. As Peacock tracks the bears, his story turns into a thrilling narrative about the breaking down of suspicion between man and beast in the wild.

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## Customer Reviews

An interesting tale with some fiction thrown in, I find it hard to follow someone who is telling a story while fabricating it as well - names have been changed to "protect" sites - and people, anyone with a history of the NPS and Glacier would know the sites and people - who is the author fooling but perhaps showing some arrogance that he is more privileged than the common American - every American has the same opportunity if they follow the laws and regulations of National Parks, Mr. Peacock shows he is better by admitting his antics don't always comply - a ticket for harassing

animals, among other violations would be appropriate - I can honestly say after a career of 35 years in National Parks (both Yellowstone and Glacier) there are those who share the magic of the area and those who exploit it -

Doug Peacock grew up in rural northern Michigan. As a boy, he spent a lot of time alone outdoors, exploring the woods, swamps, and streams. Later, he fell in love with the West, especially the Rockies. He enjoyed fishing and rock climbing. His plan was to become a geologist, so he could wander around in the great outdoors and get paid for it. But one day he realized that his dream career would likely involve working for oil and mining companies, "whose rape of wild country repelled me." Sadly, he abandoned the plan, and volunteered for an exciting job with the U.S. government. Peacock loved the central highlands of Vietnam. It was a gorgeous region, inhabited by good people. Then, the war spread there. He was employed as a medic in the Green Berets, an elite combat unit. His job was to provide first aid to injured soldiers and villagers, and the fighting kept him very busy. He witnessed far too much senseless death, destruction, and suffering, far too many dead children. By and by, he came down with a devastating case of war rage, which he has been struggling with for most of his life. Back in American society, it was no longer possible to blend into the crowd, and feel at home. He couldn't talk to his family. He spent a lot of time in the woods, trying to pickle his demons with cheap wine. Finally, he bought a jeep, and headed west, to pursue two powerful medicines: solitude and wildness. For American soldiers, Vietnam was not as safe and secure as strolling through a shopping mall. There were tigers, vipers, snipers, booby traps, and Vietcong. The odds for survival were boosted by good luck, common sense, being with experienced warriors, remaining as silent and invisible as possible, and maintaining a state of heightened awareness. Survivors slept lightly, easily awakened by snapping twigs and other irregular sounds. Survivors developed an acute sense of smell, because an odd whiff could warn of danger. Survivors frequently stopped, looked, and listened. Similar skills were useful when moving through grizzly bear country, where Peacock spent many post-war years. Near the beginning of his wilderness quest, he hiked around a corner and discovered that a large brown grizzly was approaching, and it was not at all happy to see him. The bear's head was swinging back and forth, jaws gnashing, ears flattened, hair standing up on his hump - the ritual that precedes charging, mauling, and a bloody hot lunch. Peacock slowly pulled out his large caliber handgun, had second thoughts, and lowered it. His shooting days were over. He was ready to die. Something happened, the energy changed. "The grizzly slowly turned away from me with grace and dignity and swung into the

timber at the end of the meadow. It was a life-changing experience. He became a grizzly tracker. He acquired a movie camera and began filming them. He did winter lecture tours, wrote about bears, and told his story in *Grizzly Years*. Importantly, the book reminds us of a forgotten reality, living in wild country amidst man-eating predators – the normal everyday reality for our wild ancestors, whose genes we inherited. Outside my window each morning, the blue jays stop by for a pumpkin seed breakfast. Before they glide down from branch to porch, they look in every direction for winged predators and pussy cats. They don't live in a constant state of fear and paranoia, they simply live with prudent caution, look before leaping, and never do stupid things. In grizzly country, Peacock stayed away from animal trails, and slept in concealed locations. He tried to remain invisible and silent. He tried to approach bears from downwind, so his scent would not alert them. He spent years studying bear behavior, and the quirks of individual animals. He was charged many times, but never mauled. He learned how to behave properly during close encounters. Never run, climb trees, make loud noises, move suddenly, or look weak and fearful. Instead, act dignified, and display peaceful intentions without appearing docile. Calmly talk to the bear, while keeping your head turned to the side. Peacock's tales are precious, because they encourage readers to imagine wilderness as their true home, and to contemplate the normal everyday tactics used by our wild ancestors to avoid being eaten. Grizzly country was one place where humans were not the dominant critter. The bears could kill you and eat you whenever they wished. This ongoing possibility freed Peacock from wasting hour after hour in self-indulgence – thinking, analyzing, daydreaming. It demanded that he always pay acute attention to the here and now. Americans expect wilderness to be as safe as a mall. We don't want to be killed and eaten when visiting a national park, yet parks foolishly build trails and campgrounds in high-risk locations. If a hiker is mauled, bears are killed. Now, if a cat kills a blue jay, we don't kill the cat. In automobile country, the streets are lined with busy enterprises selling chunks of dead animals. So, why are government bureaucrats so uptight about what God-fearing American bears choose to have for dinner in the privacy of their own homes? Why do delicious primates from Chicago expect to be safe in grizzly country? I've never seen a "Save the Grizzlies" bumper sticker. To maintain a pleasant Disneyland experience, and avoid lawsuits, the Park Service kills aggressive bears, and bears that beg for snacks. Backcountry outfitters kill them. Ranchers kill them. Violators get light punishment from judges in redneck country. Bear numbers are in decline, and this infuriates Peacock. In Vietnam, he had a ringside seat at a contest between a full-blown industrial civilization and a society that practiced muscle-powered subsistence farming. He

witnessed the indiscriminant massacre of countless innocent villagers and children. Back in the U.S., he saw that the same monster was obliterating western ecosystems, from mines in the Rockies, to developers in Tucson. He had escaped from the Vietnam War, but there was no escape from the American war on America, where "greedy scumsuckers" were raping and desecrating "the last refuge of sanity on the planet." Peacock wasn't the only Vietnam vet with war rage who found sanctuary in the mountains. Other vets were equally pissed at the scumsuckers. They had lost many friends while defending the freedom and democracy of God's most cherished nation. And so, in those mountains, angry American vets defended the sacred American ecosystem against the atrocities of the "syphilization" they had been trained to serve. When loggers built bridges that had not been authorized by the angry vets, the bridges were mysteriously demolished. So were helicopters used for oil exploration. Peacock did not become a corporate geologist, and spend the rest of his life shopping with the herd. It was a great gift to live so many years outside the walls. He was able to observe the insane monster that lurks behind the cartoonish facade of the American Dream, and he was able to explain the horrors that so many folks inside the walls were unable to see, feel, or imagine. In wild country, Peacock was careful to never be seen, or reveal his plans. "If I got into serious trouble, I didn't want to be rescued. My considerable carcass could feed the bears."

In *Grizzly Years*, Vietnam veteran Doug Peacock tells how his road to recovery led through the wilderness of the Rocky Mountains. He fell into a job as a freelance photographer and videographer who would disappear into Yellowstone and Glacier national parks for long periods to photograph grizzly bears. The book tells of notable encounters, including a series of accounts that lead up to his own Moby Dick. His grizzly stories are interspersed with stories of his tour of duty in Vietnam, in the hill country of the Montagnards. For him, nature is real and human society is not especially the part of human society that goes about killing one another. He recognizes that grizzlies too can kill other creatures, and even humans. However, he sees grizzly violence as natural in a way that human violence can never be. While Peacock's own story is unique, and movingly told, it falls into the wider class of stories about how wild places can heal damaged people. Perhaps we need a self-help section in our bookstores for those damaged by civilization or "syphilization," as many of these writers call it. This well-written and moving story would deserve a featured place in that section.

Peacock's been studying the bears, probably longer than anyone else alive. You can't read a better treatise on the grizzlies.

This book summarizes much of Doug Peacock's experience studying grizzly bears in Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks. It is pretty interesting reading, although I think the writing itself is not quite as good as some of Peacock's later work. The writing style is very candid, with numerous anecdotes that parallel or elucidate what topic is addressed at any given time. Particularly, there are many parallels between Peacock's experiences with the grizzlies and his experiences in Vietnam. The main theme of the book is the importance of wilderness, without which humans would not have risen to their current dominance and grizzlies could not exist. The wilderness, like the grizzlies, is threatened, and with this fact comes a degree of uncertainty about our own future. It's a good read, sometimes informative and sometimes entertaining.

This book is definitely worth the time and thought. Anyone who is interested in these large, top of the food chain predators won't be disappointed. Peacock takes you to Yellowstone and Glacier with descriptive adroitness that gives a feeling of being right there as his adventures evolve. He also gives you a consideration from the bear's point of view and articulates an honest existential reason for a different approach to "management" of these majestic animals without the anthropomorphic reasoning of someone who has never shared a moment of terror with one of these powerful creatures. Peacock knows his subject better than anyone I've ever read. I've walked many of the places he describes in a way that makes me want to go back and see what I missed compared to his perceptive eyes and sense of adventure.

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