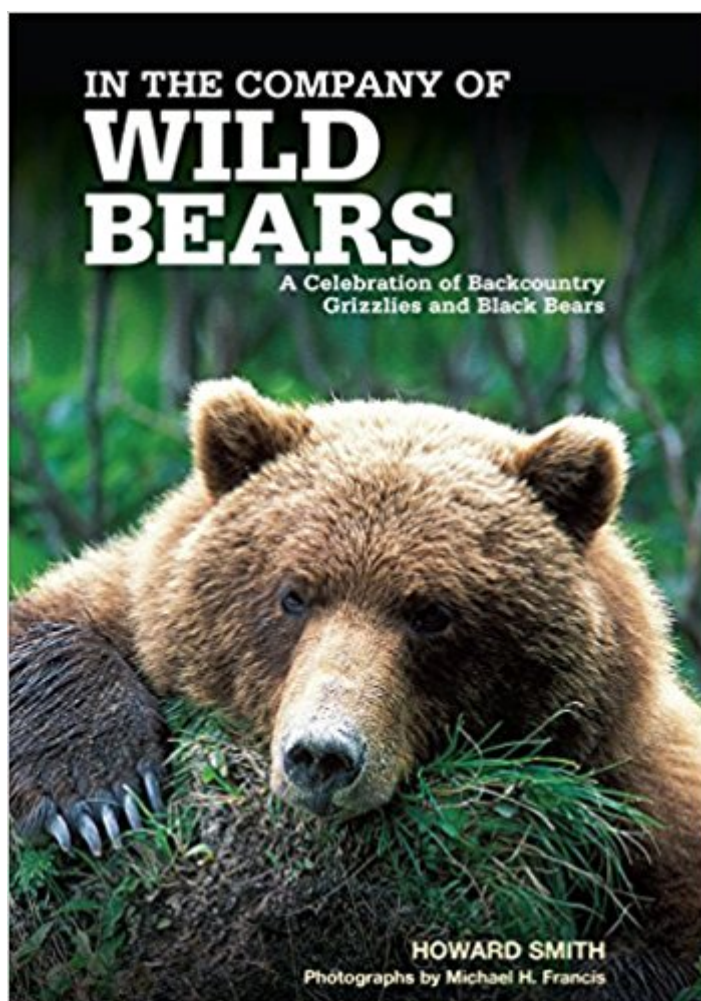


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# In The Company Of Wild Bears: A Celebration Of Backcountry Grizzlies And Black Bears



## Synopsis

Most people conjure up fanciful images of mammoth-sized grizzlies with gaping mouths full of razor sharp teeth when they think of bears, but wilderness aficionado Howard Smith and internationally acclaimed photographer Michael H. Francis show another side of these massive bruins. *IN THE COMPANY OF WILD BEARS* melds fascinating real-life human-bear encounters with never before seen world-class photographs to create a unique experience most readers have only dreamed about. Instead of scaring people out of the forest, *IN THE COMPANY OF WILD BEARS* invites them in to take a closer look at the lives of these incredible beasts. Join Smith as he takes a Beaver floatplane to the majestic mountains of Alaska to mingle with Alaskan brown bears, treks the Teton Wilderness to get an up-close and personal glimpse of grizzlies, and almost gets bowled over by a mother black bear and cub who crash, bam, and boom through the brambles of the Appalachian Trail--literally missing him by inches. Smith's deeply descriptive writing makes you feel like you're right there on the trail experiencing everything firsthand as he does. Also included are numerous informational sidebars on bear protection, hibernation, understanding bear language, sharing living spaces with bears, and more. And with the continued threat of grizzlies being an endangered species, a new light is cast on the important value of bears in the wilderness. Each chance encounter will leave your mind racing, your heart pounding, and your feet itching to get out into the woods on your own.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Smith (Yellowstone Memories) delivers a loving tribute to the Ursidae family that will delight animal enthusiasts and could even make a convert of famed (and faux) bear-hater Stephen Colbert. Smith combines accounts of his true-life encounters with bears across North America, from Alaska's Talkeetna Mountains to the Grand Teton and Shenandoah National Parks, with no-nonsense sidebars that dispense useful information for people interested in seeing bears firsthand. Supported on almost every page by Francis's gorgeous photos, the book more than meets Smith's goal of providing an account that is "representative of what it means to walk in bear country." One of the most entertaining adventures involves an exploration of Wyoming's Pilgrim Creek near Grand Teton National Park, which also features Smith's surprisingly rugged West Highland terrier. Smith's explorations also serve to counter what he calls "sensational" stories about bear maulings so he can encourage people to safely explore the backcountry. The book is best at showing that bears are "a metaphor for simply enjoying the sparkling wonder of wildness." (Sept.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Bears are a powerful icon in the collective consciousness of Americans, conjuring up images of love-worn stuffed animals, cartoon characters, the solemn spokesbear who reminds us that only we can prevent forest fires, as well as images gleaned from movies, television, and books. Smith's obsession is a bit beyond most people's interest in wildlife. He admits that the adrenaline rush that comes with sighting a bear is almost addicting, referring to the sensation as a "ramping up" of the senses. He has had extensive experience hiking on backcountry wildlife trails, although his accounts of his travels in Alaska, Canada, and various other wilderness outposts lack a precise time frame. Smith shares a wealth of information about bears, including such tips as "Play dead if touched by a grizzly. Fight back if touched by a black bear." Although most readers will never have to put such nuggets of wisdom to the test, Smith's fascination with and respect for this great animal make for an instructive and fun book, lavishly illustrated by wildlife photographer Francis. Pamela Crossland Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

I received this well-written book as a Christmas gift and have enjoyed the variety of wildlife adventures shared by the author, Howard Smith, and the remarkable photos presented by Michael H. Francis. The author has done his homework through relating relevant accounts and observations provided by acknowledged bear experts. Moreover, he has been able to share a great deal of practice advice surrounding possible bear encounters through sidebars interwoven with his actual

first-hand personal experiences from hiking and backpacking in various wilderness areas around the country. Smith's potential and real run-ins with bears are documented in 10 chapters where he records his thoughts and feelings, often through each of our five senses. Often, in a rather dramatic fashion, he is clearly able to capture his emotions and record his reflections prior to, during, and following probable meetings with bears. I found the book to be an introspective analysis and reflection of the wide array of reactions experienced by respectful and fearful wildlife enthusiasts.

Although this writer is a good writer and has had some wonderful wilderness adventures to write about, his experience with bears is limited. This shows in his narratives of his adventures where his sentiments are confusing. On the one hand, the excellent sidebars about bears are well researched and informative. On the other the author gets carried away by saying stuff like "What if we had run into them earlier when bushwhacking up the hill? That would have been a fatal confrontation - and I don't mean bear fatalities-because she has three feisty cubs to defend. There would have been total carnage." This part of one of his stories was interspersed with pages of practical advice on how not to get in trouble with a bear. There is no way the author could know what would have happened in his imagined instance. I find that there are roughly three kinds of bear books . . . those that dwell on maulings and attacks, those that are educational and include observations made in the field without prejudice, and those that say "don't do as I do, but I had a great time with bears . . . you, on the other hand, will get killed" This book falls in the later category. The author wants you to understand how exciting and wonderful it is to have bears in our wild lands and how much fun he has walking and rafting where bears are, but he wants the reader to be scared as well. I still gave this book four stars, however, because the information he imparts is up to date and his stories, if you don't expect them to be without conjecture and feelings, are entertaining and engaging.

Author's accounts show his lack of understanding of the rules of bears. For example, his group got within 50 yards of bears? His use of words like: "Why are we purposefully seeking the razor's risky edge by confronting enormous carnivores on their howe turf?", "snouts laden with razor-sharp tools of destruction.", and "Better conditions for an ugly ambush are difficult to imagine." seem to give bears a very negative connotation. I found myself asking, "Are you kidding me?" over and over. Made it through about 1/3 of the book before I stopped reading it.

In the Company of Wild Bears: A Celebration of Backcountry Grizzlies and Black Bears pairs photographer Michael H. Francis' black and white photos of bears in the field with a blend of writer

Howard Smith's bear encounters paired with sidebars of bear facts and safety tips. What makes this different from the usual bear guide - many laden with color photos and made for coffee table display - already on the market is an attention to understanding the bear's habitat and psyche: chapters focus on first-person encounters which provide such insights and understanding, and are designed to reduce reader fears about bear activities and presence. Diane C. Donovan California Bookwatch

WOW--what an interesting read! While most bear books focus on the negative aspects of these unpredictable creatures, Howard Smith goes above and beyond and takes the reader on unforgettable adventures through Bear Country. While he stresses that one should always use caution when around wild bears, he allows us to open our eyes and see these beautiful animals for what they really are in their natural habitat. Highly recommended for all nature lovers and bear enthusiasts! Well done, Howard!

Although I like the photos for this book, I thought that the author did not know his subject matter well. It appeared that he had not really spent much time in the company of wild bears. Rather, he stayed in cabins and ran around on day hikes trying to run into bears, not something I think is wise to encourage. He had very few actual encounters with wild bears and so his musings were part conjecture, part exaggerated fantasy, part yearning, and part re-hashing other's experiences. He failed to understand or obey the rules about why dogs are not allowed in bear and wolf country. They suspect a dog brought parvo into Yellowstone and thus was responsible for a high mortality rate a few years ago. Better would be to go buy Enos Mills, The Grizzly Bear or Grizzly Country by Andy Russel.

This is a delightful book for those with an interest in bears and bear encounters. Smith relates stories with bear run-ins that the average person can relate to. You don't have to be some superhuman mountaineer to experience the same kind of encounters that Smith has. In fact this book is quite valuable because it confirms that a gentle approach to bear encounters is often the most rewarding. Fabulous job.

In a world of bear books that accent death and destruction, In the Company of Wild Bears offers a refreshing alternative view. I often hike and backpack in wilderness areas and appreciate Smith's bear experiences as will others who walk in 'bear country.' This is an excellent book to read and a great gift for those fascinated about bears.

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