

MIKE FOSS

DIARY OF A BEAR GUIDE

Snaggle Tooth lives!



What will be the next chapter in the Snaggle Tooth saga? Will there be a sequel next year? Will the final chapter be cast this hunting season? Actively working baits is one thing, but actively working baits during hunting season—during legal shooting hours—can be a completely different story.

Wondering about Snaggle Tooth, the enormous Bayfield County black bear? Me too.

Flipping through the calendar earlier this year, April 14 (the start of baiting season) couldn't come soon enough. I knew no one shot the big bruin last season.

I thought and dreamed about him this past winter ... thinking and hoping he selected the perfect den and consumed enough food to pull him through another long cold winter ... and said a small prayer as I dumped the apple pie filling mixture at "his" bait station. With patches of snow still lingering in the cool shadows, I cut fresh logs. And with new batteries, the Cuddeback trail camera was hung with care ready to shoot anything that crossed its path.

One week later, with the excitement and anticipation of a young child on Christmas morning, I slowly approached the bait site. And to my surprise it wasn't hit. With my head hung low I re-scented the area with anise oil and bacon scent gel, and then walked away.

Upon my return 5 days later, I was horrified to see the bait still

wasn't touched. I was baffled. I knew from the local reports that most bears were out of hibernation. With the lack of a springtime food source, numerous bears should've been scurrying the countryside to fill their bellies. I thought they would've found or visited this bait station by now.

Finally, the site was picked clean sometime during week No. 3. Cuddeback photos revealed some coyotes, a wolf and a few good-sized bears worthy for the wall ... but no Snaggle Tooth.

It wasn't until the end of May that I started to doubt Snaggle Tooth's return. Could he really be dead? Did he succumb to the wrath of winter? Was he simply too old? What if ...?

My frustration was diverted on June 22 when a rare Wisconsin trophy was captured on camera: A beautiful blonde/cinnamon colored bear was suddenly my new quest. And I made a few new friends along the way, too. Each time I checked my trail camera and pulled off the cover to retrieve the memory card, I noticed black ants inside; I guess they decided it was a good place to call home.

SO LONG, SNAGGLE TOOTH

By July 25, I had enough of the ants and came to the full conclusion the great Snaggle Tooth, the King of the Forest—who has outwitted many hunters—was no longer alive. I decided to pull the plug. I removed the trail camera but grabbed the

before, in that very spot, sat Snaggle Tooth.

If it wasn't for me forgetting the right screwdriver for those bear-proof boxes at both those bait stations, I would've pulled the camera from the tree and decided the big bear was dead.

As I sit staring at his picture on my computer, I wonder why it took so

"The very first picture forced my heart to skip a few beats: At 6:12 a.m., less than 4 hours before, in that very spot, sat Snaggle Tooth."

wrong screwdriver to remove the metal bear-proof box that the camera was placed in, so I had to leave the box on the tree until the next day. That night I removed all the ants from the camera, cleaned it up and plans were to place it on a newly established bait station that was getting pounded by multiple bears.


The day arrived, and with my Suzuki King Quad ATV fueled and bait buckets loaded on the truck, I was ready to go. Nathaniel Doucette, my niece's husband, would be accompanying me on this baiting trip. First stop: Place the trail camera on the new bait station.

Once there I realized I again grabbed the wrong screwdriver to mount the metal bear-proof box to the tree. On the way back to the truck I said to Nathaniel, "Everything happens for a reason, and there is a reason why I forgot the same screwdriver twice for both of those bait stations." There was something in store for us.

Like a light bulb going off in my head, I told Nathaniel, "The box is still on the tree, and we're going back to the Snaggle Tooth bait to put the camera back—just for a few more days." So we did.

The very next day, with the bait totally cleaned up, I unlocked the box, took the card out (still fighting some ants) and installed it in my camera to view the pictures. The very first picture forced my heart to skip a few beats: At 6:12 a.m., less than 4 hours

long for him to show up.

Everything happens for a reason. Snaggle Tooth has now returned several times to the bait station to be captured on film. The hunt is on. I got you. 

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