

MIKE FOSS

**DIARY OF A BEAR GUIDE***Will Snaggle Tooth show?*

SUZUKI  
**KINGQUAD 750 AXI 4x4**

**Wisconsin guide Mike Foss chooses the Suzuki King Quad 750 AXI 4x4 Camo ATV when guiding clients for black bear and whitetail deer in rugged Bayfield County.**

*Beginning in May, Foss baits several times a week for bear clients spread over 20 square miles of tough backcountry near Washburn, and twice daily as the September season approaches. He needs a machine as tough as the country. For endless chores from scouting to tree stand placement, to hunter transport and retrieval of tagged game, Foss depends on the King Quad 750.*

*"I'll take my Suzuki," Foss said. "I also manage wildlife food plots including spraying herbicides, tillage, seeding, and fertilizing, and I transport ice fishing clients far out on Lake Superior. I need a reliable machine because Wisconsin hunters rely on me. I need the best."*

*Mike Foss works hard for his clients 12 months a year. Hard enough that his black bear clients enjoy a success rate of 88 percent and his deer hunters know from history that a buck for the record book is always a distinct possibility.*

*His Suzuki works as hard as he does.*

**SUZUKI**  
Way of Life!

As the first hunters entered our Washburn-based camp to hunt Wisconsin black bear from some of our 30 stands placed over active bait stations in Bayfield County, I could see the excitement in their eyes. I could also feel a high level of anxiety that only a hunter who has waited years for that precious Wisconsin bear tag knows.

Many questions were answered, bait stations were assigned and the hunt was on. Most of the 15 hunters were already very familiar with our quest to tag "Snaggle Tooth," the massive black bear that I had seen just once over the years, but had more recently photographed over bait station #01 with a motion trail camera. Although we have cautiously estimated his weight at over 500 pounds, I believe the big boar nicknamed due to the large tooth jutting from his jaw will in reality tip the scales at over 600 pounds. I am comparing his mass to many bears tagged over the years in this camp at over 300 and 400 pounds, and by comparing photos of other bears taken over the same bait pile, and in front of the same trees in which we photographed the monster of Bayfield County.

Also high on our hit list was Holyfield, caught on motion camera too while gorging at one of our bait stations and so named after the boxer due to a large piece of one ear torn out. Holyfield will weigh over 400 pounds. Other bears in our target territory near Lake Superior will match him in size. For our reader's comparison, an average Wisconsin black bear will weigh 125 to 150 pounds.

Black bears wander and we were ready for Snaggle Tooth at stands where we knew he had visited before. Hunting

from portable tree stands to minimize the effect of undesirable wind direction, Eric McGuire from Wonder Lake, Illinois drew Snaggle Tooth bait station #01. Don Solberg from Dousman, Wisconsin would hunt over Snaggle Tooth bait station #02. A logging crew began operations on neighboring land three days before the season was to start, one of the unfortunate realities in the world of guiding that led to our decision to abandon Snaggle tooth bait station #03.

With all the hunters on stand by 2:00 p.m., it was time for more work at bear camp. Bait buckets were refilled for the next day's hunt, the camp kitchen was cleaned, and the menu prepared for breakfast. With chores done it was time to relax and wait for the first successful hunter to return to camp. The hunt itself concludes months of daily baiting and hard work making sure the baits are active and the bears in a habit of returning for meal they learn to expect. This week though, the hunters with bow and arrow or firearms would be waiting.

In my hammock sound asleep at one point, I could hear a fast-approaching truck coming down the driveway. Without opening my tired eyes, I thought, it's still too early for a hunter to be back at camp. I could hear the shuffling of rubber boots coming my way. I slowly opened my eyes to find Eric McGuire standing before me, his voice shaky and heart still pounding as if he had just taken the shot.

"I think I just shot Holyfield," he said. As his story poured out, and I looked at Eric's face, I thought, "This is what it's all about." The days, weeks and months of hard work were coming together over a few days in Wisconsin early fall. Eric had made a well-placed shot with his arrow but was not comfortable going after what he knew was a very big bear without help. In fact, our hunters are instructed to come back for the guides after a shot for assistance with recovery.

Back in the field and pointing to the spot where the big bear had stood just 45 minutes before, we found first blood. Slowly, quietly we followed a good blood trail through the thickest cover imaginable. Kneeling down, Eric



*Sean Puccinelli held off for an hour waiting for a certain vital shot before taking this 466-pound black bear with his Marlin 45-70 at 75 yards while hunting over a Mike Foss bait station. (Dick Ellis)*

looked ahead. "Mike..." he asked in a strained whisper, "what is that?"

The bear had traveled only 50 yards but it seemed like a mile. I walked up to his bear and confirmed that it was indeed Holyfield, a Wisconsin Pope & Young black bear that would take the scales back at camp to 411 pounds with a green scored skull of 19-8/16.

Eric secured the tag to a once-in-a-lifetime bear. Overwhelmed with excitement, he began a combination dance and shadow box worthy of Holyfield. With some help from camp, and a lot of sweat and muscle power, we were back at camp just in time to watch another hunter pull in.

Eric had driven north with his cousin, Sean Puccinelli, who had also drawn a Wisconsin black bear tag after eight years of applying. Sean jumped out of his truck and stumbled over to us with excitement. "I just shot a really big bear," he said, pointing at Holyfield. "And it's bigger than that one."

Big indeed. Sean had used a Marlin 45-70 to make a perfect shot on a tremendous bear. It took five men one exhausting hour to drag the 466-pound boar that would green score 20-8/16th just 60 yards from the deep ravine adjacent to the bait station.

Finally in the sack at midnight, I reflected on another opening day in northern Wisconsin. 14 hunters had already tagged seven bears. 13 bears would soon be tagged. In addition to the two massive boars, a sow would weigh in at more than 300 pounds. Not bad. As I drifted off to sleep, my mind drifted back to Snaggle Tooth. The patriarch was a no-show when it really mattered. There is a reason he's an old, great bear.

Will a lucky hunter get him or will I have another chance at this cunning big old boar next year? That...is a bear tale yet to be written. *W*



*Eric McGuire with the 411-pound Holyfield harvested with bow and arrow. The bear traveled only 50 yards from the shot. (Mike Foss)*

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