

TEMPTING

# Wallowa River redsides

WITH FLIES



**DENNIS DAUBLE**  
THE NATURAL WORLD

“Sorry to leave you, but I’ve got happy feet,” I say to a fellow writer after we polished off a three-course breakfast in the Wallowa Lake Lodge dining room. What I didn’t share was early departure from the summer conference would allow me to toss a fly on the way home. After spending two nights in a pup tent staked

next to a gurgling mountain stream, wild rainbow trout called.

One hour of driving north on Highway 82 provides a close-up glimpse of the Wallowa River and roadside access to several miles of water. I ease my truck over to a gravel shoulder where a slow meander beckons and hike through waist-high orchard grass only to find a sign, “Private Property. Subject to Arrest.”

Motoring on down the road, I look for another

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Dennis Dauble/Contributed Photo

The stretch of the Wallowa River visible from Highway 82 is popular with anglers and recreational rafters alike.

# On the track of the bear

Hunting bruins in the Pine Creek unit



**GARY LEWIS**  
ON THE TRAIL

There was a time when bighorn sheep were numerous as deer in these canyons. And more recently, there was a time when deer were too many to count. In our corner of the Pine Creek Unit, we saw a lone mountain goat, a small herd of elk, a precious few mule deer and bears, maybe too many bears.

On this hunt with Pine Valley Outfitters and guide Lucas Simpson, of Halfway, it took three days before we found the bears, all together in one canyon feeding on the hawthorn berries.

We had four hours maybe, for this last effort. Out in the August sun now, the temperature hovered in the mid-80s.

Up onto the hog back we climbed, saving our strength, going slow, one foot in front of another. Hundreds of yards up the rising plateau we stopped. Sweating, we folded our mountain-burned legs in

the shade of a grove of trees. Here there was a spring and some cooling in the shade.

Shadows lengthened, yet the sun was still full on the rock faces of the mountain.

This is how it happens, I reminded myself. Sit in one good place. Let the animals move. Let them show themselves.

There comes a moment in days like this when the animals have to move. A time for water. And there is no giving up. Hunt till dark. Stay at it. Believe in the process.

A bear. It was on a level as high as the goat had been the day before, and it strolled a narrow ledge like it was a sidewalk. Black. Almost silver-black against the granite cliffs, its coat seemed to glint in the afternoon light. It turned and showed a white patch on its chest. When it reached the shoulder of the ridge, it angled into a stand of hawthorn and fed through it and out into the open again. It was on a course straight for us, but when it went out of sight, it veered into a side canyon.



Samuel Pyke/Contributed Photo

Back down to the creek after an “easy” morning hunt. So far the trophies included a shed mule deer antler and one cow elk whistler. The hunt was drawing to a close with no bears sighted.

We had found where the bears were. They were in the hawthorn patches and it did not matter that apples, plums and seven other kinds of berries were on the bushes. The bears wanted hawthorn berries. And here were hawthorns. And fresh

piles of scat on every trail.

In the last 15 minutes of light, a dark chocolate brown shape materialized on the brush line and then the bear stood up on its back legs. Not the black one I had seen earlier, a different bear. Watching its

back trail, it seemed to be looking for our guide Lucas Simpson in the canyon below. How many other bears were in there?

In the scope, I could see the white hair on the bear’s chest. Under my thumb, the safety clicked through into “fire” and the cross-hair found the white patch. Finger on the trigger, three pounds of squeeze, the punch of the rifle on my shoulder.

Down in the creek bottom at sunrise, we found the bear where it had cooled to 40 degrees, and

## MORE INFORMATION

The fall black bear hunting season opened Aug. 1 in Oregon, and continues through the end of 2021. The deadline to buy a tag is Oct. 1.

skinned it for a rug and for the burger and steaks it would provide.

At this time of year in the Blues, in the Wallowas and the Elkhorns, a hunter should prospect for bears in the high meadows and old burns. Patches of hawthorn berries are a favorite food source, but not the only one. Where huckleberries and blackberries grow wild, a hunter can find a bear by watching trails that lead from bedding areas to feeding areas.

When the weather is unseasonably hot, expect to see bear earlier in the day and again later in the evening. But a person should commit to hunting the whole of the day; bears feed any time they feel like it.

Berries are a food source that can be counted on year after year. Some seasons are not as productive as others, but when the berries are ripe, the bear know it.

Gary Lewis is the author of *Bob Nosler Born Ballistic and Fishing Central Oregon and other titles*. Gary’s podcast is called *Ballistic Chronicles*. To contact Gary, visit [www.garylewisoutdoors.com](http://www.garylewisoutdoors.com)



Samuel Pyke/Contributed Photo

One last effort during a bear hunt.



Gary Lewis/Contributed Photo

Pine Valley Lodge in Halfway, about 53 miles east of Baker City.