

Two buddies and I hunted Labor Day week 2008 with Andre and we stayed at East Branch Lodge with Paul and Kathy Dorward.

I'm not one of those people who fills out surveys with all 'excellent' ratings just to make people happy. I don't describe things as 'great' very often, but this was a great trip from every angle. I've hunted deer and hogs for years, but I've never hunted bear before. Andre set me up on well-established bait sites with good cover, wind and approach management and instructions, so that – even doing something for the first time and way out in thick boondocks - I felt comfortable and had several successful hunts.

I took a bear on the fourth day of my hunt, but saw bears on all but one of them. I passed a small boar on the first day and have some advice if you go on this hunt and have not hunted thick cover at close ranges. The woods we hunted are some of the thickest I've ever seen. The range from stand/blind to bait was always less than 50 yards for me. When your mind is accustomed to seeing for hundreds of yards, and a little bear pops out at 25, he looks like a city bus! If you wait until the bear is at the bait bucket, then you can size the bear. As I said, we were given excellent instructions and benefited from them.

I passed some sows with cubs, but had a blast watching them. I was busted by one (likely sow) bear when I shifted position and she noticed the change in the sight picture back to my stand. I didn't change position much, and only while she looked down or away, but she still busted me. Anyone who tells you that hunting bear on bait is not sporting is wrong. These animals have senses that make whitetails look blind and with no sense of smell.

The hunts were great, but as with any hunting trip, only part of the picture. We met up with another group of hunters from Pennsylvania that turned out to be some of the nicest guys ever. This, together with the fine hospitality, fine food, campfires and accommodations at East Branch made this one of the most exceptional hunting trips I've ever taken.

Another suggestion: add the small charge for a fishing license when you buy your hunting license. After Jim, one of the PA hunters, and I had our bears, we had a really nice time wading the river that passes right by East Branch and throwing some spoons. We caught a couple of small trout and had a great time doing it.

I couldn't recommend this operation more highly.

Manny
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