

In early 2009, I was in the kitchen of Andre Morin, our families had gathered and we were enjoying the evening. We were talking about his upcoming bear hunt and he needed a cook with some experience to help him during his 2009 campaign. I had a few years in the kitchen and I told him that I would love to help. I recruited a good friend, Buck, for the first week and we came up with a menu. We arrived at the lodge and began our quest to make some good meals and make sure no one left the main lodge hungry. If they left hungry it was their own fault. We met many great people during the two weeks we were there: Corey, Mike, Gaston, Eric, Doyle, Harry, Dan, Ben, Jim, Jim Jr., Bill, Bill Jr., Jeff, J.J., Chris, and Wayne. You could not ask for a better group of people. No complaining, great people to get along with and it was a great time. If people could have seen the interaction, it was as though we had all known each other for years. There were times that I laughed so hard, my head hurt.

Andre approached this year with great anticipation. The first several nights before the guests arrived, he did not go to bed until 11:30 to midnight because of his planning and strategizing with the other guides in order to make this year a great success. The work that I personally witnessed among all the guides was a sight to see. These guys took it seriously and placed hunters in win/win situations in order to have the largest possibility of success. Four words were spoken throughout the two weeks we were there. "Listen to your guide". Those that did were often rewarded with a bear. One of the best stories I have been sharing with everyone was when Ben got his first bear. This 15 year old had one of the biggest smiles I have ever seen. Please refer to the attached pictures on this website. Ben listened to his guide and bagged a 200-pound boar, 45 minutes into his very first hunt. Keep in mind that this was his very first big game animal. Ben remembers Uncle Buck on the holidays.

So head long into the second week, I had been waiting to see if I would get a chance to hunt. Andre and I had decided that if all of the other hunters had a chance at a bear then I could hunt. That chance came on Friday, September 11, 2009, when Andre asked me if I was ready to hunt. I could not wait. "Absolutely", I said. As the afternoon got closer, it felt like getting ready for a big football game. Andre was going to place me in a stand where Jim had seen a bear the night before. The bear had false charged and winded him while he was in the stand. Jim was a little dismayed by this. Although I do not think the bear knew where he was, it certainly was guarding its little food spot. I had my doubts. This was a smart bear and I hoped that it would come back.

I dressed head to toe in a leaf suit and drove out to the stand with Andre about 2 PM. He placed me in the stand and rang the "dinner bell" for the bear, having baited the barrel while I climbed into the stand. The stand was well placed 12-14 feet up with a clear view of the bait site. There was one blind spot behind a small clump of spruce to my right. I was only about 23-24 yards from the barrel. I sat patiently for about 4 ½ hours. I watched gray jays and blue jays fight it out for the small amount of granola on the ground at the front of the barrel. I was really beginning to have my doubts, but these words rang in my ear, "Listen to your guide". So I resigned myself to sit for the next 35 minutes as quietly as I could and not move an inch.

At about 6:45 PM, I was enjoying the game of blowing the mosquitoes off my facemask when I glanced up and saw a bear's muzzle and head coming in from right to left. The bear emerged and headed straight down a bear tunnel directly behind the barrel. The bright green peat moss and dark bark of the

cedar and spruce on the sides of the tunnel was a stark contrast. This is the picture that plays in my head as I reflect on this hunt. Andre was right I did not hear this bear at all. It emerged without a sound, out of nowhere. The bear turned to his left, my right, and came in beside the spruce trees to my right where I lost sight of the bear. I raised my gun up and waited for the bear to appear near the barrel. I could not hear a thing and was anticipating the bear had just walked off. I then saw the bear's head come out from behind the small clump of spruce trees and glance up. The first thing the bear did was look up directly at where my tree stand was. My heart was pumping and I was trying to control breathing. I asked myself, "was I busted?" "Did this bear have the goods on me?" The bear did not look away for about 10 minutes. It would lower its head sniff and look directly back at me. My arms were burning and I could feel that I was beginning to shake a bit. I could hear my father in my head, "Don't move or it's gonna run!" I could hear one of my academy instructors in my head, "Control your breathing, stay calm and alert". Then I heard these same four words again, "Listen to your guide". I waited a few more seconds. The bear finally stepped back out of sight behind the small clump of spruce. I slowly dropped the barrel of my rifle. I could hear nothing but the beating of my heart and the deep and slow controlled breaths that I was taking. I could not hear the bear. I waited for a sign, anything to know that the bear was still there. It was then that I heard "crunch crunch crunch". I could hear the bear chewing over my beating heart. Finally, a good sign. I waited for the burning to leave my arms. It was then that the bear stuck its head out again. It again looked at me. It looked at the bait barrel and then back at me. I wondered if I was going to be one of the guys that saw and bear but not able to get a shot.

The bear then turned away from me, quartering away toward the barrel. All I could see was the neck and head of the bear. I was waiting for an ethical shot. The bear seemed to be well aware of the stand but did not see me. It reached as far as it could for the next chunk of granola that was just about 2 feet away trying hard not to take a step. I raised my gun and prayed that the bear took the one more step I needed. Seconds later the bear stepped out. I placed my cross hairs on the upper part of the shoulder knowing that I was a good distance above the bear in the air. I took a breath and let it go slowly as I squeezed the trigger of my Remington Model 6 rifle. "Bang!" the woods seemed to go silent. The bear was still there and appeared to have dropped in its tracks. I worked the action of my pump rifle and placed another round in the chamber. The bear rolled and then went about 3 feet. I placed another round in the shoulder, "Bang!" The bear was not moving at all. I waited for my hearing to come back. I trembled as the adrenaline pulse through my body. I loaded my rifle with two more rounds and placed the magazine back in my rifle.

I reached behind me, grabbed my phone, and called Andre. My words were "Bear down, come and get me." I told him I would be in my stand when he arrived. He seemed to arrive in minutes though I was about 4.5 miles from the lodge. He walked in whistling. I called his name. He appeared under my stand. I unloaded my gun and handed it down to him using a string. I climbed down. My legs were shaking as I climbed down. I could hardly walk. We reached my bear. It had laid right there. I had bagged my first bear. Andre was as excited as I was. I was trembling so bad that I had a hard time reaching out to grab his hand for a congratulatory hand shake. This was my first bear. I was very proud. It was then that Andre got a message on his phone. I had shot at about 7 PM. It was now a bit after 7:15 PM. It was Chris. Chris had left a text message for Andre. It appeared that he had gotten a bear as

well. This was going to be a good night. We spent the next couple of hours collecting and tagging bears. John Jr. was tagging Chris's Bear and made sure the store in Linneus stayed open for a few minutes to let us make it there. When we arrived back at camp, the guys were all there. Jim was one of the first to congratulate me. He was as happy as I was. I have many great moments that I am taking from this year's hunt. This is just a few.

I thank Andre, John Lombardi Jr., and John Lombardi Sr. for all their hard work and help during this year. They are truly dedicated to the guests and are doing everything in their power to give them a successful hunt. I have no doubts that 2010 will be great success.

John Sr., turn off the light please.

Ryan

Oakland, Maine

Cook, Katahdin's Shadow Outfitters