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TEEN GIVES FIRSTHAND ACCOUNT OF GRIZZLY ENCOUNTER

July 12, 2017 at 4:28 pm | By LILY CULLEN Hungry Horse News

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Hunter Dana is a big proponent of bear spray after he fended off a sow grizzly with two cubs while picking huckleberries at Lion Lake.

Hunter Dana had an experience Tuesday morning that he never wants to relive.

Dana, 17, of Columbia Falls was picking huckleberries near Lion Lake by Hungry Horse when he accidentally angered a grizzly bear sow with two 2-year-old cubs. Although Dana deployed his bear spray seven times, the sow pursued him all the way around the lake, and even caught his pants with one of her claws at one point. Luckily, Dana was uninjured, and serves as an example of how to be levelheaded and prepared during bear encounters.

Dana said he went up to the huck spot Monday night alone, without bear spray, and heard something going up the hill nearby. He saw a brown backside and thought it was an elk, but left sticks on the trail that night to see if the spot was disturbed.

Tuesday morning, the sticks had been moved, and as soon as Dana sat down to pick berries, he heard two snaps that sounded like a branch breaking.

He called his dad on his cell phone, who told him to make noise and try to spot the bear. Dana took the safety clip off his bear spray and kept it in his pocket. He hung up with his dad, walked 15 feet to the next spot, and heard the bear slap the ground behind him.

"She must have been laying right beside me and I never knew it," Dana said Wednesday.

Dana deployed his bear spray and the sow ran and climbed a tree, about 10 feet up. The cubs climbed 3-4 feet up with her.

"The only thing I could think was keep her in the tree," he recalled.

As he was going for his bag, which had his car keys, the sow slid down and approached him again. He got onto the trail and walked backwards for about a mile and a half to the other end of the lake, spraying the bear six more times. She followed him the whole way, bluff charging, sneezing, and drooling from the bear spray.

By the time he got close to his vehicle, Dana had very little spray left in the Counter Assault canister. He waited for the griz to get close enough for the spray to be effective. She belly flopped onto the ground, catching his pant leg with a claw, but Dana escaped, spraying the bear again. The sow followed him all the way to the lake, Dana said. A Sheriff Deputy was waiting — Dana's dad had hung up to call 911.

Dana lost his voice from screaming at the bear, and reported that, unfortunately, people heard him yelling and told him to shut up.

"I just did what I could, when I could," Dana said. "I'd just spray her to get her to stop so I could get 20 yards away. Staying on the phone with my dad for 11 minutes was the biggest thing."

This isn't Dana's first bear encounter, but it's one too many.

Last year during bow season, he and his dad happened upon a different sow and cubs, and avoided a dangerous encounter by using bear spray.

"Last year was enough," Dana said.

U.S. Forest Service spokesperson Janette Turk noted that Dana is a good example of how to handle bear encounters.

"Fortunately, this individual was prepared and his preparation was successful," she said. "We're in bear country. There's always risk in whatever we do and we should prepare to mitigate risk in these encounters."

Dana said that even though he was prepared, and has been outdoors his whole life, the encounter shook him.

"Everybody has too much self-confidence," he said. "You're not better than that one bear."

The Forest Service posted nine "bear warning" signs in the area, but trails near the lake remain open. Folks are encouraged to carry bear spray, travel in groups, and frequently make noise to avoid startling bears.

Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks Region 1 wildlife manager Neil Anderson said the agency will not be removing the sow or cubs.

"We have no intention from my standpoint. It was just a bear protecting her cubs. No one was injured," Anderson said Tuesday.

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That's one brave kid. Your dad taught you well. Hope he's teaching you the blues...this encounter could be a good tune. Glad your ok Hunter

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Proud of u Hunter. Ur family is proud of u too. We r all glad u r safe and home

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