

# **Wildlife Taxidermy by Richard G. Santomauro**

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## **Black Bear and other lifesize animal Field Care if you are away on a hunt**

### **DO'S AND DON'TS**

**DO NOT** place your skin in plastic bags or other airtight containers!

**DO NOT** use rock salt - use a fine grain salt!

**DO NOT** delay in taking care of you trophy - **IT  
COULD SPOIL**

**DO NOT** drip dry your hide in the sun, do so in the shade

**DO** take plenty of photos!

### **First things to do:**

If any of you guys that are going bear hunting and are thinking of getting it mounted please take a small tape measure with you. Who ever will mount your bear would love to have the four (4) measurements so they can order the right size form, they are:

1. From the end of the nose, to the inside corner of the eye.
2. From the end of the nose to the base of the tail.
3. The circumference at the belly.
4. And the last measurement would be the circumference of the neck behind the ears.

Most outfitters and guides will skin out the bear and then it can be frozen. But do not salt and freeze it because it will create problems. Try to remove most of the blood and dirt from the hide, and get it to your taxidermist ASAP, as bacteria will still work on your bear even if frozen, just a little slower. If anybody has any questions feel free to call me before the hunt and I will answer any questions you might have. 732-449-5950

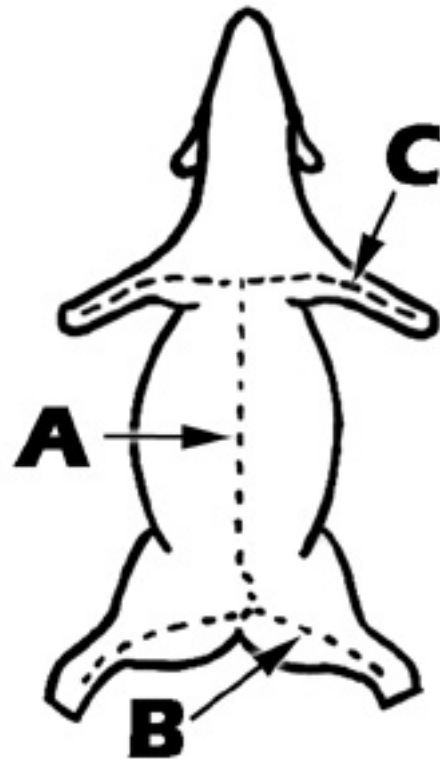
## USE PROPER TOOLS

Congratulations! All your hard work has paid off and you have your bear. Now the crucial work begins; to prepare the animal for a mount of a lifetime. The proper tools are essential for all big game animals. I use several types of knives.



### TOOLS NEEDED:

- 2 - 3" to 5" blade skinning knives
- 1 - 6" to 8" hunting knife
- 1 sharpening steel & 2' parachute cord
- 1- small measuring tape



## HOW TO SKIN A BEAR FOR A RUG/LIFE-SIZE MOUNT

When you are first on the scene of the bear kill take all your photos first.

The following procedures will allow your bear to be made into a rug as well as a life-size. It's very important to familiarize yourself with the bear's body, so look him over thoroughly before starting the skinning process. Areas to check: armpit area, groin area, inside the mount, stick your finger into the ear canal, and look at the bottom of the paws.



### THE INCISION

Starting at the vent, under the tail, cut forward towards the head, staying in the middle of the belly and chest. If it's a

male bear, cut around the genitals leaving them attached to one side. **DO NOT REMOVE** any evidence of sex. This is required by Fish & Game. Do not cut too deep, as it causes excessive bleeding. Do not cut too close, to avoid putting holes in the hide.

## CUTTING THE FRONT LEGS

Starting at the paw, make a cut down the leg until you have reached the point of the elbow. Then aim your cut toward the center of the armpit, when you reach the center of the armpit, aim your cut toward the center of the chest, angling slightly upward. Make sure that each arm cut meets at the



same place in the center of the chest.



## CUTTING THE REAR LEGS

Beginning again at the paws, start at the point of the heel and make your cut down the backside of the legs. Look toward the vent under the tail. Aim your cut 3 finger widths above the anus. This will give you plenty of skin on the side of the bear and rear end of the bear to make a nice

rug. The cuts you make directly affect the shape of the bear rug. Do not cut to the inside of the leg or too far toward the groin area.

## BEGINNING TO SKIN THE BODY

Now that you have performed all of the necessary cuts, you may begin to carefully remove the skin from the carcass. It will be necessary to cut through either the ankle joints or toe joints of each paw to be able to get the skin off the body. Start with the rear paws, then the tail, and work the skin forward toward the head. You will remove the paws from the skin later.



## HOW TO HANDLE THE PAWS

Depending on what you plan to do with your bear hide, you must make a decision regarding the bear pads (bottom of the paws)



Bear Rugs - the pads of the bear paw are not required.

Life Size - require pads to be left on.

If Tanning only - usually leave pads on in case they are needed later.

## TO KEEP THE PADS OR NOT

Once you have decided NOT to keep the pads, you may begin cutting the pad at the hairline continuing around the entire pad. Peel the skin forward until you reach the toe bones. You will sever the tone bones away from the foot. You will



remove the toe bones later with the string trick. The above procedure will leave the entire pad on the bony structure of the foot. There is no need to bring out the pads if you are making a rug out of your bear.

## KEEPING YOUR PADS



To keep your pads, start cutting at the hairline and cut only about 2/3rds of the way around the pad, leaving one side attached to the skin, cut under the, pad and skin away from the bone structure. This procedure now gives you good access to the toe joints for easy removal from the foot. The tone bones will be removed later.

## SKINNING THE HEAD

I always start with the mouth; this helps later in the skinning process. Cut the lips away from the upper and lower gum line and skinning back toward the eyes. Cut through the nose cartilage and pull the nose back toward the eyes. Loosen the skin around the muzzle as far back as you can.



## SKINNING BACK TO THE EYES



When skinning up to the muzzle of the face, you can only go up to the eyes. Always cut as close to the bone as possible.

## STARTING THE BACKSIDE OF THE HEAD

Begin by pulling the skin toward the nose. The first obstacle you will reach is the ear canals. Stick your finger inside of the bear's ear with one hand and squeeze the earbutt with the other hand to feel your finger tip. Be sure to cut below the tip of your finger and this will make your ears long enough for your mount. Always cut close to the skull!



## EYE SOCKETS



Getting to the eyes. Use your finger to feel around the inside of the eye orbit to familiarize yourself with the upper and lower eyelid. When you start cutting, always cut against the bone and into the eye socket. Do not trim off any excess skin around the eye openings. Cut very carefully around the eyes, this is where most mistakes are made.

## TURNING THE EARS



Both ears must be turned inside out. It is helpful to have sharpening steel or some type of slender prop to use for this process. First, remove the ear butt muscle from the cartilage. Next insert the prop into the ear and force the skin downward over the prop while carefully cutting. Proceed slowly turning the skin inside out. Stop 1/8" from the edge of the ear. **DO NOT REMOVE CARTILAGE.**

## COMPLETING THE EAR TURNING



Be sure to get within 1/8" of the tip of the ear and all around the edges.  
A properly turned ear will still have the original shape of the ear.

## SPLITTING THE LIPS

The lips must be opened to allow salt to penetrate into the flesh. Holding the lip skin in one hand, begin cutting with the other hand. Start at the gum line, cutting downward into the thickness of the lips. Use your thumb to hold the skin open as you cut. Do this all the way around the animal's mouth (upper and lower lips).



## SPLITTING THE NOSE



After splitting the lips, the nose cartilage must be split open as well. This means you will need to split the center septum of the nose, right down the middle. Also cut into the surrounding flesh of the nose, so salt will penetrate.

## REMOVE THE TOE BONES

At this point, the toe bones are what is left in the foot. You may remove these by using the string trick. Skin under each pad and split between each toe bone to separate from each other. Take a piece of string or parachute cord and tie a slipknot on one end. Use this to help hold the toe bone as you cut into the socket. Tie the other end to something sturdy. All joints must be removed.



## REMOVING THE TAIL BONE



When you originally skinned the bear, we left the tailbone in the skin. This must be removed.  
Cut on the underside of the tail to remove the bones.

## FLESHING THE HIDE

Once all of the detail work has been done, you must remove all fat and meat from the skin. When in the field, this can be very difficult and time consuming. If you will remove most major areas, it



is okay to leave the rest until you reach your taxidermist. Of course this depends on how long you are in the field or how warm the weather is.

## SALTING THE SKIN



Salting the hide sets the hair. This is very important. The average black bear usually takes about 15-20 lbs. of salt. Pour salt on the flesh side of the skin; spread salt around the face, lips, nose & ears. Rub it in good. Check the edges of the skin to make sure it has not stuck to itself. The salt should be about 3/8" deep on the skin. Fold the skin, flesh to flesh and roll it up.

Shake off the salt 24 hours later.

## STORING THE SKIN

After rolling up our skin, put it in a breathable bag like a burlap or game bag. Hang it up to drip or set it up where it can drain. Be sure to resalt the skin after 24 hours. If you have no more salt-redistribute the wet salt left to areas that need it. Keep in a cool, dry place.



## BLACK BEAR FIELD CARE GUIDE



I have handled thousands of bearskins and have witnessed the tragic loss and mishandling of far too many trophies. With that concern, I have created this step-by-step field care guide. These basic techniques will teach you how to handle bears for a rug or life-size mount. Any other questions can be addressed to

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Good Hunting!

Rich

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