

TWO GRIZZLIES ROARING

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I spend many summer evenings sitting on a platform about 20' above an ex-slough, hoping to see bears. On one red-letter evening – 5 July 2009 – I saw three of them. First a small black bear came out of the brush and trotted past my platform trees and on up the hill and beyond. About an hour later, the two does who were crossing the meadow in a leisurely way suddenly jumped and bolted across the meadow and up into the woods and away. I looked and saw a smallish grizzly bear come out of the woods on my right, near the far end of the meadow, and start walking across. When she (gender assignment arbitrary) was halfway across, she suddenly whirled around and raced back the way she'd come and up into the woods and out of sight. A second bear, a slightly larger grizzly, erupted out of the woods to my left, tearing after the first one. He (I'm guessing it was a he) was clearly chasing the first bear. The second bear – I'm pretty sure that one – gave a cry, sounding like a human cry, quite loud, just once.

Both bears disappeared into the woods up the hill to my right. But they obviously didn't go very far, because the noise was close by: they started roaring, or at least one of them did. The roaring went on for at least ten minutes, softer and then louder, as if they/it were/was circling something – a tree or a deer carcass, maybe? (A raven flew in and was hanging around the area over there too.) Or was one bear up a tree and roaring in distress? Or one bear up a tree and the other bear circling the tree and roaring in irritation? I had (and have) no idea why the volume of the roaring kept rising and falling; I wasn't about to climb down the ladder and wander over toward them to see what I could see.

After about ten minutes the roaring stopped. A little while later, here came the two grizzlies out of the woods again, and into the meadow. One crossed the open space and vanished into the trees on the far side. The other one turned toward me and started up the meadow; soon she (or he) stopped and settled down in the tall grass for a nap, disappearing entirely. This was a bit awkward, because by this time (it was now 8:30 P.M., half an hour or so since I'd first seen them) I was ready to go home, but I wasn't all that eager to climb down the ladder with my back to an invisible reclining grizzly bear. I called home and requested backup; so in the end there were two of us walking away from the meadow, up the trail to home. Just after I'd come down the ladder, a ruffed grouse exploded noisily out of a nearby bush, and the grizzly in the grass sat up and looked around; but he (or she) didn't see us, and settled down into invisibility again.