

by Harry Dodge, Master Guide-Outfitter and author of *Kodiak Island and its Bears: A History of Bear/Human Interaction on Alaska's Kodiak Archipelago*

Coastal brown bears most likely forded the Shelikof Strait to Kodiak Island approximately 11,000 to 14,000 years ago, before rising sea levels isolated them from mainland populations. The earliest humans to the Kodiak Archipelago arrived perhaps more than 7,500 years ago and have co-existed with bears ever since. Archeological evidence suggests that men have hunted the Kodiak bear from the earliest times of co-habitation. Early man venerated the bear and relied upon it for subsistence purposes. The incursion of Russian colonialism on Kodiak disrupted long-held traditions governing interactions between men and bears. Matters of subsistence and respect were overshadowed by considerations of commerce, and bear and man often came into direct conflict over limited resources.

The Kodiak bear received little worldwide attention until taxonomist C.H. Merriam classified it in 1896 as *Ursus middendorffi*, declaring it the world's largest bear. A few big game hunters ventured to Kodiak in the early 1900s, seeking the island's fabled bear. The hunters hired Native guides and typically hunted along the coast from baidarkas (kayaks).

Not until after World War I, when advances in transportation reduced travel time to such remote locales as Alaska, did sportsmen begin venturing to Kodiak with any degree of consistency. The Boone and Crockett Club, established in 1887, did much to popularize the sport of big game hunting while formulating an ethical code of hunting and promoting legislation to protect wildlife from over-exploitation. Passage of the Alaska Game Act of 1925 led to the licensing of hunting guides, and by the 1930s there were competing guiding services on Kodiak.

Franklin D. Roosevelt established the Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge in 1941. Comprising roughly two-thirds of Kodiak Island, KNWR was created for the protection of the Kodiak brown bear. The refuge mission includes a hunting program, which is managed by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. From October 25 through November 30 and April 1 through May 15, hunters from around the world visit Kodiak to partake in this trophy hunt. License and tag fees from this activity account for a substantial portion of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game general fund, which supports research and conservation efforts across the state. Studies indicate that the Kodiak bear population is at an historic high. Indeed, hunters and guides have long been the Kodiak bear's greatest advocate, going to bat against ranchers, fishermen, politicians, and even state biologists who aimed to significantly reduce Kodiak bear country and bear populations.

Today Kodiak maintains a well-managed hunting system and in recent decades an evolving bear viewing industry. Visitors can fly to a remote wilderness lodge to enjoy bear viewing, hiking, kayaking and/or sport fishing on multi-day trips. Several local air taxi services offer 4 to 6 hour trips to Fraser Falls (Kodiak) or the Katmai coast. Except for at the Fraser Falls fish weir, Kodiak bears are not habituated to human presence and maintain their natural fear of humans. A trip into Kodiak bear country is therefore a unique look into the bear's world and respect for the bears' needs should be central to visitors' interests. Reservations in advance will insure your dates of travel.

Biologist/Master Guide/author Harry Dodge has lived on Kodiak for 32 years. From May to September he and his wife, Brigid, take eco-tourists to hike and see bears based out of their lodge in Kodiak's Uyak Bay. Low impact, land-based bear viewing trips are their specialty and Harry is recognized locally as a leader in this field, representing the bear viewing interest for Kodiak Island to the ADF&G subcommittee for bears. For more information, consult our Kodiak Island Travel Directory for Kodiak Treks' land-based bear viewing trips.

Harry's book *Kodiak Island and Its Bears: A History of Bear/Human Interaction on Alaska's Kodiak Archipelago* is available through the Kodiak Treks web site (www.kodiaktreks.com).

KODIAK ISLAND and Its Bears

Bear Viewing on Kodiak Island With the Publisher of Travel Guide

Vacation Country Travel Guide publisher Scott Graber took advantage of a half-day bear viewing tour option offered by Andrew Airways, an operator conveniently located at Kodiak State Airport in Kodiak.

The floatplane flight from their new office at Trident Bay to a quiet bay on the Island provided continuous bird's eye views of Kodiak's world famous scenery. After touching down at the shore, the pilot and three passengers walked a short distance to the mouth of a salmon stream, where a group of about 15 brown bears were busily feeding and interacting with each other.

With over 20 years experience on Kodiak Island and the Alaska Peninsula, owner and pilot Dean Andrews has the knowledge and expertise to comfortably transport you to all the places you've always wanted to see, with packages designed to fit every itinerary and budget. Andrew Airways may be contacted by phone at (907) 487-2566, by email at info@andrewairway.com, in writing at PO Box 1037 in Kodiak Alaska 99615 or view their website at www.andrewairways.com.



Kodiak Bearviewing with Andrew Air
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