

# Look Out For Bears

Shirttail Creek isn't a place that is known for bears. There hadn't been a reported bear sighting in many years prior to the weekend my mom and I camped there. We were camping with my cousins, aunt, uncle, and friends. We had just arrived, but everyone else had already camped there the night before. When we got there, my aunt told us that the camp hosts or people who maintain the campground, warned them that a bear had gotten into someone's food the evening before, so we had to be extra careful about leaving food out. She also added that the bear had pooped on the food just before it left.

I laughed as I felt the warm air surround us.

"It's hot!" my mom commented.

She wasn't wrong. It was almost 100 degrees with almost no wind or breeze.

"It sure is!" I replied to her.

Then my aunt said with her normal enthusiasm, "Well get your swimsuits on and we'll head down to the lake!"

"Great!" my mom and I said almost simultaneously.

As we were getting ready, I thought about the bear. I had spotted a few black bears in Yosemite National Park while backpacking last year, and I remembered how exciting it was to spot a bear. *I would love to see a bear I thought, as long as it's not at my campsite.*

Shirttail Creek is actually a small lake. It is located in the western foothills of the Sierra Nevada. The lake is surrounded by trees as tall as buildings and rocky beaches. There are only a few campsites around the lake, but there are many different spots where you can swim.

All of us were relaxing on the shore next to the lake watching it glisten under the sun like metallic paint. All the adults were comfortably sitting in beach chairs and the kids had to settle on beach towels. Boredom struck some of the kids like lightning, so they decided to jump into kayaks and paddle to the opposite shore to explore. *Fun!* I thought as I sprinted to claim a kayak.

A few moments later, I was in a kayak with the oars in my hands ready to leave when my aunt shouted, "Wait! Can I come with you?"

I barely heard her, but I quickly replied yes, as she hopped in.

"You want to come?" I quickly asked her 8-year-old daughter with some excitement in my voice.

"Nope, I'm good," she said, trying to be as polite as possible.

"Okay, are you sure?" I offered her one more time trying to be nice.

"No thanks, I'm fine," she said with reluctance.

"Well then, see you later!" I said as I pushed our kayak away from the rocky beach.

I paddled hard to catch up with my cousin and friend. I felt the dry breeze blowing in my face and the hot sun beaming down on me. The cool, refreshing water dripped off of my ore onto me.

The lake is small, so it only takes a few minutes to cross it. My aunt and I were almost there and my cousin and friend had just docked on the shore and got out of their kayak to look around.

We were about 35 feet from shore, so I decided to stop paddling for a quick break and watch them for a bit. I saw a bush rustling and moving with the breeze. I squinted into the distance where my cousin and friend were exploring when I noticed something unusual. My aunt and I simultaneously noticed it was a big black bear!

Both of us froze for a few seconds with our mouths dangling open as if they were going to fall off. It took a few seconds. Then it finally hit us. We had spotted a bear! We were both stunned and speechless. My body filled with excitement and smiles formed across our faces.

*Wait* I thought to myself, *an actual bear!*

We were so excited, but the smiles across our faces slowly faded away. The bear was no more than 25 feet away from my friend and cousin, which was way too close! We had to warn my cousin and friend to get in their kayak and paddle away. My aunt and I were worried because both my cousin and friend are only 7 years old and the bear could easily get to them.

My heart was beating with nervousness, and still some leftover excitement. We both started yelling “There's a bear! Get in your kayak and paddle away!”

They looked up, a bit confused.

“Get off the shore!” I shouted at the top of my lungs, pointing to the bear.

They thankfully heard me that time and they quickly scrambled, but it felt like they took forever, to get in their kayak. My cousin and friend paddled away and were soon with us back at a safe distance. We were so relieved that they followed our directions and we only saw a bear and did not see a bear attack.

As soon as all the “good job’s” and “are you okay’s” were exchanged, we stayed in the water for a bit longer to try and spot the bear again, but it had already scampered away. So we paddled back as excited as ever to tell the others.

Everyone else could not believe it and they were so excited for us. They wished they had been there to see it. My aunt, cousin, friend, and I just couldn't stop talking about the bear. My aunt said it was her first time seeing a bear someplace besides the zoo. It turns out, Shirttail Creek is a great place to camp for both people and bears.