



Night of the Grizzlies

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Jack Olsen's true account, traces the causes of the tragic night in August 1967 when two separate and unrelated campers, a distance apart, were savagely mangled and killed by enraged bears.

Night of the Grizzlies Details

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From Reader Review Night of the Grizzlies for online ebook

Book Concierge says

Over the course of U.S. history, the grizzly bear's environment has been steadily encroached upon by man, the grizzly's only enemy. Once roaming over the Great Plains and mountains of the western United States, they have retreated to the few remaining wilderness areas that afford them sufficient food. Still, they remain solitary and typically avoid humans. In this nonfiction work, Olsen explores the events that culminated in one night of terror in August 1967 when two young women were savagely attacked by grizzly bears.

I love reading 'true crime' and this work has all the hallmarks of the best of that genre. Olsen gives us an explanation and history of the various parties involved – park rangers, temporary concessionaire employees, casual hikers, physicians, birders, families, older couples, exuberant teenagers, and long-term residents. He also recounts the unusual number of bear sightings in Glacier National Park during the summer of 1967, and even more unusual number of "encounters" between bears and humans.

It's important to remember that this was set in an era before cell phones or other forms of instant communication we are so used to today. I applaud the courage of the rangers and hikers who went to the aid of those attacked. I don't know if I would have ventured out into the night to investigate the screams. Olsen doesn't shy from exposing bureaucratic inefficiency, nor the fault of "tourists" who fail to understand the real dangers of a wild environment.

The pace is unrelenting and the tension builds to an unendurable pitch. I reluctantly stopped reading because it was after midnight and I couldn't keep my eyes open much longer. I should have stopped an hour earlier, or just kept going until I finished. Even though I live in a decidedly suburban area, in a secure home and without any evidence of any type of bear within 500 miles, every slight noise fueled my imagination, and I had a fretful night and little sleep.

Jason says

I run in to grizzly bears from time to time while hiking in Glacier National Park, 30 minutes from my home. Though they normally just turn tail and run away from me, I thought this would be a good book to help me better understand these lumbering creatures that share the trail with me.

I'd just read McMilion's book "Mark of the Grizzly" and found it to be loaded with the science of the grizzly bear, its habitat, what to do and not do if you encounter a grizzly in certain situations (e.g. while feeding on carrion, with young, when it is cornered, etc.). This advice was indispensable. Being an animal behaviorist by trade McMilion clearly knows his stuff and wrote from a very objective standpoint.

While I found this book to be engaging and sometimes educational I also felt that the stories were written for a completely different audience; those who want to be entertained. We've all seen those movie clips of salivating grizzlies, thirsting after human flesh, where no tent within 100 miles will go unscathed. That's how this book felt in some regards. And while this creates good entertainment, it's simply not based in reality. I, along with thousands of other tent campers in Glacier National Park (and other grizzly-infested territory) safely cohabit with grizzly bears every year with no harm greater than a crick in our neck from an

uncomfortable thermarest ground pad.

So if you're looking for adventure and thrills, grab this book. If you're looking to truly understand the grizzly bear, grab McMilion's *Mark of the Grizzly*.

Rebecca McNutt says

Night of the Grizzlies is a terrifying yet compelling story of the man who tried to uncover why exactly bears decided to attack campers without warning. It's chilling, but a great read.

Anthony Whitt says

Can't put it down kind of read if you like to hike and like Glacier National Park. Read it in one day.

Valerie says

I have always liked Jack Olsen's books, and have read many of them. This is one of them I somehow missed. (Sadly, Mr. Olsen died of a heart attack in 2002 at age 77). This particular book is centered around Glacier National Park and two fatal grizzly bear attacks which took place in August of 1967. There have been more since then. One of the biggest reasons why these attacks started happening is twofold: one - the National Park Service was dumping garbage into gullies and other areas, not far from where some of the camping sites are located, and two - the park has become so popular with tourists that millions of people visit the park every year. The grizzly bear, *Ursus arctos horribilis* (the 'grizzly' part of its name is from the silver-gray tipped fur in certain light), is an extreme predator, and its only known natural antagonist is the human being. Grizzly bears have a wide range of area that they inhabit, and therefore do not take well to being confined to small areas, which is exactly what has happened at Glacier National Park and other areas. At one time, the grizzly bear inhabited a very large part of western North America, including the area which is now southern California. (I believe the last one in that area was killed by a human in 1924). Glacier National Park had been in existence for decades and there had never been a bear attack (that anyone knew of, although there were disappearances of people which were never explained) until 1967, when the disposal of garbage became a huge problem, and huge numbers of people visited the park. There were also wildfires going on, and the park service personnel were stretched thin. People would actually gather at a cabin or other site to watch the bears feast on the garbage, and they did this on a daily basis. No one should ever forget that these are wild animals; they are not 'cute' teddy bears, and they are resistant to domestication. They are one of the apex predators of the animal kingdom, and everyone needs to remember that. On the night of August 23, 1967, two female campers, separated by quite a distance, were killed by grizzly bears. The NPS's response? They told the rangers to go to the area and kill every grizzly bear they saw. Personally, I think that is not only a non-solution, but it shows a distinct lack of respect for the planet and its creatures. The rangers did kill three or four adult bears (one of them had human hair in its stomach); two cubs were left to fend for themselves, although one of them had his jaw shot off, and the next year, a ranger had to destroy him. One of the bears was a mother with two cubs and as everyone knows, getting between or even around a mother bear and/or her cubs is equivalent to a death wish. Since that terrible night in 1967, many grizzly bears have been relocated to areas like parts of Canada and Alaska. The bear is considered to be 'threatened' per the Endangered Species Act, and I fear that if current political attitudes continue, they may well become extinct.

This book is a very sobering view of what may happen when human beings don't use the brains they were born with, and don't educate themselves and others about all life on our planet.

C-shaw says

As I've mentioned before, I am perversely interested in stories of grizzly bear attacks. This is a true account of two deaths in Glacier National Park, Montana in 1968, written by the popular mystery/thriller writer Jack Olsen. It is a readable and intriguing report.

Eric_W says

Obviously Olsen is quite taken with Glacier National Park and the first section of the book is devoted to a close examination of the flora and fauna of that region before he delves into the habits of *Ursa Horribilis*, otherwise known as the Grizzly Bear. They are huge creatures, standing erect sometimes close to eight feet tall and despite their size can run faster than you'll ever hope to. Their habitat has been under pressure for decades: "...the destruction of the forests in which he could hide, the plowing of the plains on which he grazed, the stringing of thousands of miles of barbed wire, and the pervading, unpleasant stink of man, who only smells good to himself and his fellow man, and not always then. The grizzly of the plains, as was his custom, backed into the final square miles of American wilderness, avoiding a fight. He is holed up there today, his numbers reduced to less than 1,000, perhaps as few as 500, his range restricted more or less to a few states: Montana, Wyoming...."

Grizzlies had been living in Glacier National Park for decades and their relationship with humans had been a comfortable one, each leaving the other alone. In 1967, however, an emaciated bear was seen foraging in garbage cans around Kelly's Campground. The permanent residents noticed his strange behavior and warned the rangers that this bear was not acting normally, standing his ground when yelled at instead of running away.

The Park Service was torn, clearly it had a rogue grizzly on its hands, yet the ethic was to leave the wildlife as intact as possible. The visitors didn't take numerous warnings seriously and the end result, a combination of negligence and procrastination coupled with some rule violations and insouciance resulted in two deaths and a mauling.

Several years ago, my wife and I went horseback riding in Glacier National Park. We had been told there had never been an attack on a person while on horseback. Just the following week, a group of riders ran into a large grizzly on the same trail we had been riding. When one of the children fell off his horse and attracted the interest of the bear, one of the guides reflexively charged the bear on "Tonk" a huge horse (part Percheron and 18 hands high -- I owned a large Arab that was 16 hands and he was big) that must have terrified the bear for he took off. The horse and wrangler made it on Letterman (<http://www.spokesman.com/stories/2011...>) The Letterman show can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tHAIY...>

Olsen writes well and I must say the scenes describing the human/grizzly interactions are the stuff of nightmares.

Kathleen says

Acquired by Mom in the Many Glacier Lodge gift shop a few days before our hike out to Granite Park chalet; read by all 4 of us before the trip ended.

Interesting perspective as to how much has changed as far as relations-to-wildlife in just 45 years or so in the national park.

Molly says

Overall, a very good story, and very sad because it's true. Despite the terribly written preface, the story was written well and built suspense, despite some archaic writing that sounded more like the '50s than '69 (e.g., chauvinistic descriptions of women and embarrassments like, "For a year Gildart and his wife had lived on the Rocky Boy Indian Reservation in northern Montana, where they eked out a living and learned the Indian ways...."). Right. "learned the Indian ways" in a year. And it's "Rocky Boy's." But anyway, back to the point. I also wish the chronicler had included follow-ups regarding the victims' families and the other members of the camping parties. I'm grateful that his final predictions about the demise of the grizzly in the U.S. have proved false. A terrible part of the National Park Service's history, handled pretty well by the author.

Ben Vogel says

My old friend Joe gave this to me to read, and by chance I started it when we were traveling out West. That was a crazy choice, because the story told in this book is real, it is riveting, and it will scare the hell out of you, especially if you are anywhere near bear country. I should find a copy and read it again (2011) as I originally read this in approx 1991.

Shelter Somerset says

Up until the early 1970s, Americans viewed their immense wilderness much the same way they had zoos: national parks were places to go animal watching. Montana's Glacier National Park in 1967 was no different. In fact, Glacier rangers understood perhaps more than anyone that park goers dropped huge sums of money each summer for a chance to see a real-life grizzly up close and personal. Despite the official ban on bear baiting, like good entrepreneurs park officials overlooked, if not encouraged, employees to lure bears with garbage. Visitors became spellbound by the nightly displays of huge grizzlies rummaging through half-eaten donuts, bacon grease, chicken bones. Such an unnatural, disrespectful attitude toward wildlife was bound to reach a catastrophic apex.

Written 45 years ago, Jack Olsen's "Night of the Grizzlies" details the separate, fatal mauling of two young girls on the same sticky summer night back in 1967. Originally written as a journalist piece, Olsen realized the story required far more attention. A fascinating, straightforward 200-page book unfolded that has captivated readers for nearly 50 years. The book builds from scenic descriptions of Glacier National Park to

the individuals and animals living, visiting and working in the park that are central to the story. Each individual has a backstory and reason for being at the park. Each provides more clarity into what might have gone wrong that led to the two women's deaths. The two grizzlies themselves become central characters. One is an old, gangly, deformed boar with signs of brain damage and despite the number of complaints about its harassing of campers and fishermen, park officials largely allow the bear to roam freely to scavenge from unkempt campsites and fish guts left along the lakes. The other is a sow concerned with rearing her young. She knows the easiest way to feed her two offspring—the bear baiting areas around the popular lodges. There's little information about the backdrop of the times other than quick mentions of the central characters' backgrounds. A park ranger is a Vietnam veteran, many of the kids who work summer internships at park souvenir shops participated in a few protest marches before discovering the park's grandeur. The novel focuses on the activities inside the park as if the rest of the world is a mere frame. This gives the reader a sense of timelessness and perhaps explains partly why Olsen's book has endured for nearly five decades.

There's no hardcore or sentimental environmentalism in this book. Written in 1968, pre-PC era, some readers might cringe from the constant reference of one figure as "the Indian." The book today is as important as when first published. The two catastrophic events that took place on the same night symbolize more than a rare occurrence: Americans required a long and hard look at how we viewed our expansive wilderness. Beyond park mismanagement, a culture of disrespect and ignorance permeated. It's almost embarrassing reading the attitude many people had toward nature. America's immense wilderness had become a circus sideshow. Fortunately, in large part due to books like Olsen's "Night of the Grizzlies," that attitude has changed, although improvement is needed, especially from the wildlife management angle which now views wildlife as so venerable they've gone from mistreating wildlife to worshipping it. I highly recommend this book for anyone interested in bears, wildlife management, Glacier National Park, or if you like a grizzly tale that smolders until you can barely stand it.

Lea says

I know this is supposed to be one of the best books out there on grizzly attacks, but I just didn't enjoy reading it.

Although the subject matter -- two grizzly attacks in Glacier National Park on the same night in 1967 -- is engrossing, the writer's style did not appeal to me at all.

I believe this was originally published in 1969, so perhaps the writing is a bit old-fashioned for my tastes. The author spends a good two-thirds of the book describing scenery, flowers and animals, that might set the scene perfectly for some readers, but I would much rather have learned more about grizzly behavior or wildlife management in general.

I also found many of the quotes and descriptions to be more than a little sexist -- for example, the lodge manager complains about "hysterical women" when he's woken up when one of the campers hears screams coming from the woods outside.

I really can't put my finger on more than that -- another reviewer commented on how "archaic" the writing is, and I think that sums it up perfectly.

I would recommend only for die-hard fans of nature writing who have already exhausted all other

possibilities.

Diane says

The 'night of the grizzlies' was August 13, 1967. The place was Glacier National Park, Montana USA. It is definitely a true horror story, expertly told by Jack Olsen. The cries for help are indelibly engraved in my brain. I'll never forget their last words.

The park, covering 1600 square miles (2574 km), had recorded no grizzly-caused human fatalities since it was established in 1910. The tragic deaths caused the Park to re-think how the tourists, and Park employees, could better co-exist with the original inhabitants ... the grizzlies. John Waller, Glacier's bear biologist, said "It was a watershed moment for bear management, not just in Glacier but the whole National Park Service. It fundamentally changed how we view our relationship with bears."

I highly recommend this book, especially if you are fascinated by grizzlies.

5 Stars = It made a **significant** impact on my heart, and/or mind. It moved me. I won't forget it.

Paul says

This is a gripping book relating the deaths of two young women in two different areas of Glacier Park on the same day in 1967. The first part of the book has lovely but overly long descriptions of Glacier, but once the author gets into the bear maulings and killings, it is horribly fascinating. These two attacks were the first ever in the United States, and they disproved the leading theory then that grizzlies were afraid of people and would run away from them. Ever since then, wisdom has dictated that no one should go anywhere near a grizzly in Glacier.

Jackson says

An incredible telling of the night at Glacier Park in August 1967 when two campers were killed by two separate bears, miles apart. It helps that I know these areas pretty intimately, so the story hits closer to home for me. I'm almost equally horrified by the mismanagement of trash by the NPS 50 years ago -- things we take for granted now (pack in, pack out; not setting up camp in areas known to be heavily traveled by bears; ignoring, for a whole summer, repeated bear attacks on camps) seemed to be alien concepts back in this time. Olsen's book is fast-paced, thorough, and gripping, and though the story is incredibly sad, it also makes me feel a great longing to return to GNP.
