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Yarns from the Yellowstone By BYRON GROSFIELD

Herding sheep in the mountains takes a special kind of man. In addition to losing sheep that drift away and get lost in the timber, there are always coyotes and bear for the herder to contend with. Of these predators the grizzly is the most dangerous to man.

An old-timer named Alfred Undheim passed away in Big Timber shortly after the first of the year 1984. In the summer of 1933 he had been badly chewed up by a grizzly while herding sheep for Doc Windsor of Livingston. The attack occurred in the Boulder Mountains south of Livingston and Big Timber somewhat close to Yellowstone Park. The bear had been bothering the sheep off and on for several nights and Alfred wasn't surprised to wake up at three o'clock in the morning from the commotion of frightened sheep running helter-skelter from the bedground.

Hurriedly he put on some clothes and shoes, grabbed his flashlight and 30'06 rifle before stepping out of his tent to see what stampeded the sheep. After flashing his light around a bit, he saw a bear among the sheep, so he promptly cut loose with his rifle and downed the bear.

Shortly thereafter another bear either scented or saw Alfred and before the herder could fire again, the bear pounced on him and began biting his thighs and buttocks. For a while Alfred could do nothing but take the chewing, then he gained a favorable enough position on his rifle to where he could pull the trigger. It wasn't possible to aim the rifle but the flash and report spooked the bear, scaring him away.

Just when the camp tender arrived on the scene is not known for sure, but when he got there Alfred was in such condition that he could not walk, let alone ride a horse. The only way to move him back to civilization was to resort to an improvised sling between two pack horses. Two poles were lashed at the sides of the horses and a rough bed fashioned between the poles. This all took considerable time and when Alfred finally reached a Livingston hospital infection had already set in the mangled flesh.

Alfred told me the pain was excruciating and that in order to clean up the rotting flesh. Doc Windsor introduced maggots to the festering wounds. This started the healing process but still Alfred was laid up for six months.

Being an active outdoor man, the confinement and pain got to the injured herdsman to the extent that he nearly gave up his will to live. Luckily Doc Windsor sensed this and promptly gave Alfred such a tongue-lashing that angered Alfred into getting well. What Doc said I do not know, but it did the business.

In his later years Alfred Undheim retired in Big Timber and seemingly carried on as any other normal man, no limp or any other physical deterioration being visible. I never knew him real well but did visit him occasionally, mostly about his experience with the grizzlies.

At the present time there is much propaganda about saving the grizzly bear and his environment. The motive is fine but man and the grizzly bear are not compatible and if you could draw a line as to what constituted the bears' domain, they could not read the signs nor would they pay attention to them if they could decipher them.

This is due to the bear's nature. First of all, the grizzly is so big and powerful he has never needed to back down from any other animal man included. Secondly, he is continually eating or searching for food in order to put on the needed fat to survive the winter. It all boils down to the fact that the grizzly is direct competition with man and his needs. With these facts in mind it can only cause one to wonder who is the more important, man or the grizzly bear? With our increasing population and impact on our wilderness, someday a clear cut decision will not have to be made in regard to this problem. Personally, I would not miss the grizzlies from the mountains and I believe they would be just as happy in zoos.

A full belly in a suitable enclosure would no doubt keep them as content as if they roamed continually in search of food. It might prevent tragedies and economic problems that inevitably occur when man and the grizzly meet head on.