

Bear hides: skinning and field care

Alaska Department of Fish & Game, 2020

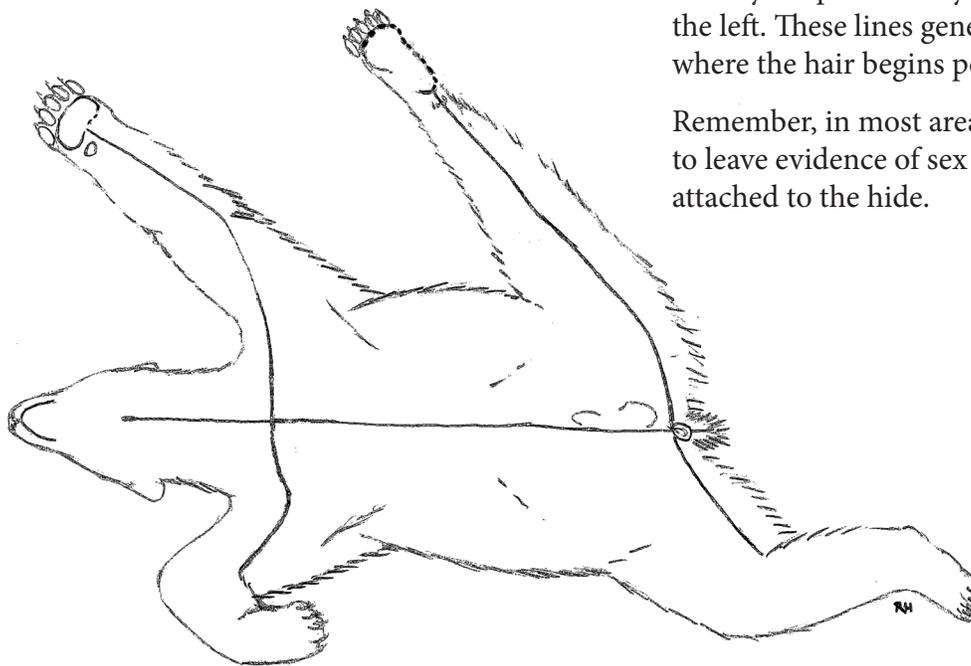


Knowing the proper skinning techniques and field care for bear hides can make a great difference in the final product of your bear skin rug or mount. The following guidelines are the most accepted bear skinning methods and general guidelines to follow to protect the quality of your bear hide.

Field care of bear hides, things to know before skinning:

1. Skin bear immediately to dissipate heat from hide and meat.
2. Leave head and paws in the hide if you're not familiar with proper skinning techniques and get the hide to a taxidermist as soon as possible.
3. Remember, **keep the hide cool, clean and dry**. These are the same rules as for meat care.
4. Use a tarp under the bear, if available, while skinning to keep everything clean.
5. **NEVER STORE A HIDE IN PLASTIC!!** Store hides in game bags or burlap bags. This keeps hides clean, away from flies and allows the hide to breathe.
6. The longer you remain in the field the more completely YOU will have to prepare the hide. Your taxidermist is not a magician; he cannot make a slipped hide grow hair back!

Bear Skinning



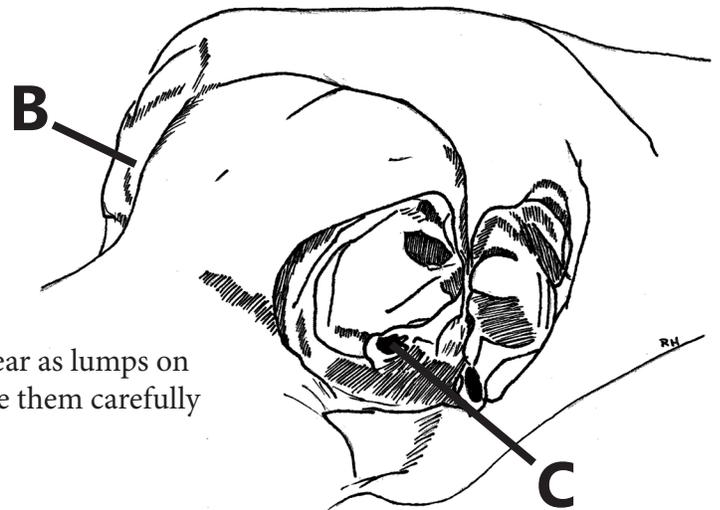
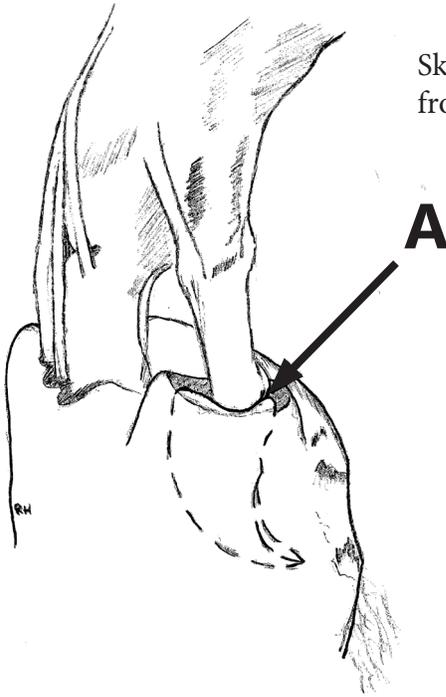
Make your preliminary cuts along the lines indicated at the left. These lines generally correspond to those locations where the hair begins pointing in different directions.

Remember, in most areas of the state, you are required to leave evidence of sex (penis sheath, vaginal orifice) attached to the hide.

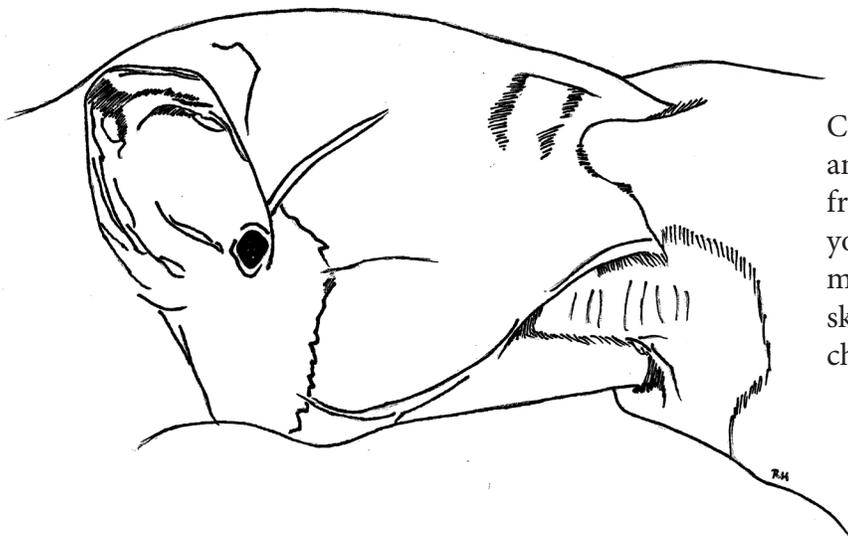


Cut around the pads of the feet to the edge of the hair line, as indicated by the dotted line. In most parts of the state, the claws must remain attached to the hide when it is presented for sealing.

Skin the paws down to the last digits. Then separate the claws from the toe bones at the joint shown in (A) at left.

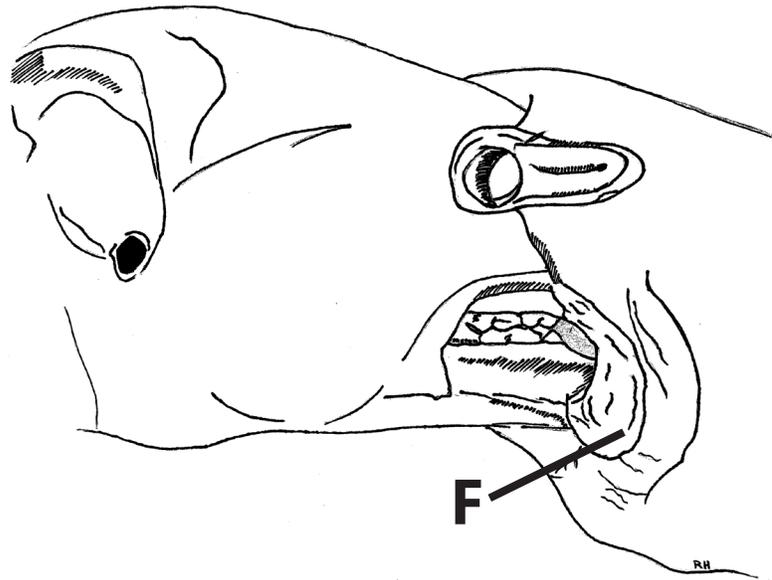


Skin the bear to the back of the head. The ears will appear as lumps on the sides of the skull (B). Grab these lumps and separate them carefully by cutting them off as close to the skull as possible (C).

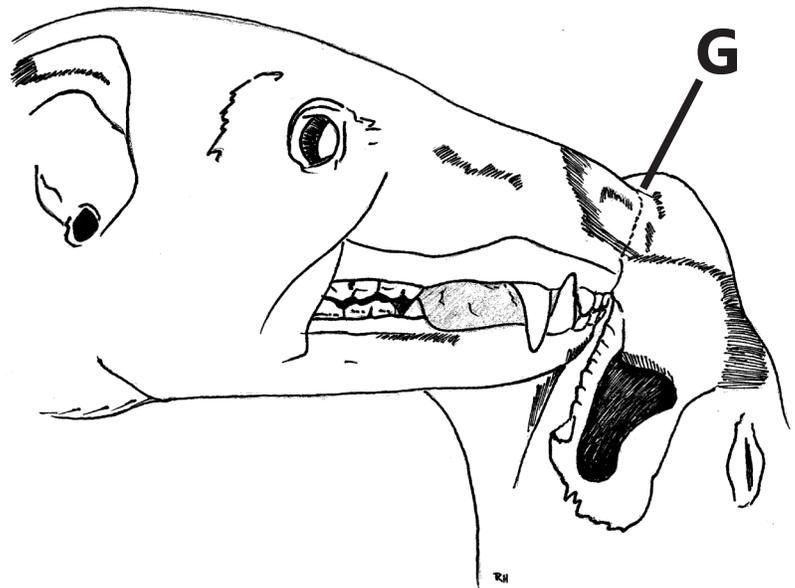


Continue skinning carefully to the eyes and cheeks. Insert a finger to the eye socket from the fur side so you can feel where you're cutting. Carefully cut through the membranes around the eye, as close to the skull as possible at (D). Next, cut through the cheek tissue to expose the teeth (E).

Separate the lip tissue from the gums close to the jaw bones, leaving lots of inner lip tissue on the hide (F).



Separating the skin from the gums, skin down the snout until the nose cartilage is reached. Cut down through the nose cartilage at the dotted line (G), separating the hide from the skull.



Field Care of bear hides during and after skinning:

7. Dependent upon conditions **the ears, lips and eyelids may also need to be turned/split**. The toes should also be skinned out to the last joint and separated between the claw core bone and the elongated toe bones. These areas of the hide should be salted thoroughly as they can slip quickly and are critical for good taxidermy work.

Ears, Eyes, Nose and Lips – These areas of the face are characterized by two skin or membrane layers that must be separated to allow for proper salting of the hide.

The ears must be turned inside out by carefully separating the inner and outer ear membranes to the outer edges, but be careful not to tear them apart at the edges. The cartilage layer will remain attached to the inner ear membrane and should not be removed by the hunter. A 12-14 inch long piece of broom handle with the rounded end intact can be useful to invert the ears by inserting the rounded end into the fur side of the ear, as it is being inverted, creating a pocket. This provides the pressure necessary to separate the inner and outer ear carefully with a sharp knife or with your thumbnail.

The lips must also be split in order to get salt into the hide. When the lips are separated from the skull the inner lip layer is folded over the outer lip with muscular attachment between the layers. You must pull the cut edge of the inner lip toward the natural edge of the lip with your thumbnail and separate the layers with your knife until the entire lip lays flat with no layers overlapping. This process is more difficult to explain on paper than to do.

The eyes are treated the same way as the lips as far as separating the inner and outer eyelids to the edge of the lids. The nose is skinned carefully to the end of the cartilage and the excess cartilage is cut off leaving only a 1-inch long stump of cartilage left on the hide. Remove any fat or flesh from the head skin and salt it thoroughly by rubbing salt into the skin and leaving a layer of salt on the skin to allow it to penetrate completely.

8. If the hide gets wet hang it with the nose up, tail down to allow the water to drain from the hair more easily. You may also want to 'squeegee' the water out of the hair by setting up a fleshing pole and 'beam' the hide.
9. If the weather is warm, the hide should be **fleshed** (see details) and **salted** thoroughly as soon as possible. An average black bear hide can be salted initially with about 10-15 pounds of non-iodized salt, a large brown bear might take 30-40 pounds. Hides can start to slip within one day under the wrong conditions.

Fleshing – Fleshing is the term used for the removal of all fat and flesh from a hide. Flesh will spoil quickly due to bacterial colonization causing a hide to slip (lose its hair) if it is not removed from the hide. Similarly fat will not dry and will prevent salt from penetrating to the hide to preserve it - the fat and flesh must go! Under field conditions the easiest method of fleshing a hide is usually to drape the fresh hide over one knee and carefully shave the fat and flesh from the hide with a sharp knife. Be careful not to cut into the hide. It may take a little practice but once you get the hang of it, it goes pretty quickly. You can also have your taxidermist show you how to use a fleshing knife and beam, which will give you better and faster results. One can usually create a makeshift fleshing beam out of a log if you have the time in camp. The Fur Handling video produced by the ADF&G for trappers shows very well how to flesh hides and is available from the Department, and is available to view on the ADF&G website:
www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=trapping.videos.

Salting – The objective of salting the hide is to set the hair and to draw moisture from the hide providing an environment in the skin that is not conducive to bacterial growth. The hide should be spread out flesh side up after fleshing so that there are no sections folded over. Next, salt the critical areas of the hide first, which are the face and paws. Get a heavy coat of salt into the toes and all around the ears, eyes, nose and lips, then pour a pile of salt onto the center of the hide and spread it evenly over the entire hide all the way out to the edges. If you are still in the field make sure you keep the hide DRY. You may need to put a tarp over the hide to keep it protected from rain, but hang the tarp above the hide to maintain good air circulation. When folding the hide, fold it up skin to skin.

11. If the weather is warm during the day but cool at night, spread the hide out at night and roll it up, skin to skin, in the morning. Then put it back in a game bag. The hair will help insulate the hide and keep it cool during the day.
12. If you intend to freeze the hide do not roll it up to put it in the freezer. Fur is an efficient insulation and it may take several days for the interior portions to cool to freezing. In that period those warm parts may slip. Spread the hide out as much as possible within the freezer, then once the hide has cooled to near freezing proceed to roll it up for final freezing.