

Late one night I was walking home after covering a Mammoth Lakes Town Council meeting. It was deep into summer and the temperatures were warm and friendly. As I passed by a familiar dumpster I heard a noise. Not thinking much of it, I glanced in the general direction and to my surprise (and, I must admit, delight), I saw a large bear rummaging for food. I'm not very lucky when it comes to bear sightings, so I felt like I should make the most of the experience.

The dumpster had a staircase running alongside it that led into the building that utilized the dumpster. The bear was at the top, perching on the edge of the big garbage can. I figured he was far enough away from where I was, at the bottom of the staircase on the curb of a semi-busy street, that I could inch in for a closer look. It was then that visions of snapping an awesome bear photo to show off to my friends and potentially run in the newspaper where I was employed popped in my head. So I pulled my camera out of its casing and began to move in.

I thought the bear was busy enough with his food that he wouldn't even notice my approach ... wrong. I'm not sure if he could hear, or if I had an unfavorable breeze blowing my scent in his direction, but as I reached the lowest stair his head snapped up and he looked straight at me. Telling myself to remain calm, that he wouldn't be interested in little old me when there was a feast just under his nose, I raised my camera and prepared to take the photo from where I was just to be safe. However, as the camera neared by face, the bear began to charge down the stairs!

I was caught so offguard that I followed my first instinct and turned and ran ... right into the street! Luckily for me there were no cars careening by and I made it safely to the curb on the other side. However, when I turned around I could see that the bear had begun to follow and had just stepped off the original curb. Luckily, a car came into view and its bright lights scared the creature and he ran off in the opposite direction (away from me).

Lesson learned, bears in Mammoth enjoy similar celebrity to famous actors, athletes, etc. and dislike being plagued by paprazzi just as much!

- Lara Kirkner