

# Kim Delozier recalls bear encounters in the park

**By Carson Brewer, The Knoxville News-Sentinel staff writer,  
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Kim Delozier says that if he had to choose between a black bear and a European wild boar for an opponent in a no-holds-barred man-beast battle, he'll "take the pig every time."

If I had to choose which to fight -- the pig, the bear or Delozier, I'd take the pig first, the bear second and Kim last.

I mean I don't want to battle Kim over blueberries, acorns, ramps, mushrooms or any other goodie of the forest. He is 6 feet and 1 inch tall and nearly that wide. And he weights 260 pounds without his shoes on. I much prefer to stay on his friendly side.

He's the senior wildlife technician of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and the park beasts never had a better buddy.

I asked him recently to tell me some stories about close encounters he's had with the bears and hogs. So he first told about the 260-pound bear that was robbing hikers of their food in the Mt. Le Conte area.

Typical attack: Bear sees hiker wearing day pack and carrying camera. The odor of peanut butter sandwiches engulfs bear. His nose follows it to pack. "Easy pickings," bear says to himself.

Then he charges, his teeth pop together. Dirt flies from his racing feet as he goes for the hiker. The hiker, scared half to death, thinks he must appease the bear. He flings the pack and his lunch to the ground and runs.

What's called the "false charge" has worked again. The bear wasn't all that angry or hungry. That furious run was to frighten the hiker into giving up his lunch.

After getting reports of the bear's evil deeds, Kim played the role of the hiker. He took off his ranger uniform and wore what a hiker might wear. The bear saw him toiling up one of the Le Conte trails and prepared to welcome him with the "false charge."

Teeth popping, feet flying, he went for Kim as fast as he could move his 260 pounds. He expected Kim to throw away his pack and run any second.

But the foolish man stood as still and steady as Stonewall Jackson. Doubt and fear assailed the bear. He put on his brakes and slid to a stop at Kim's feet.

"I just did what you're supposed to do," Kim said, "but it's hard to do."

One of the next actions Kim might have taken then was to "dart" the bear with a concoction that would have put him to sleep for several minutes. But Kim doesn't recall whether he darted that bear or did something else to dissuade him from hanging around Le Conte.

An incident involving a bear cub started in the Chimneys Picnic Area. A poacher had killed the cub's mother and the orphan had climbed to the top of a tall silverbell tree and wouldn't come down. Kim, armed with a "grab pole" (a slender pole about 12 feet long, with a rope loop at one end) started up the tree.

Kim got pretty far up the silverbell trunk, at that point only about six inches in diameter. The angry, frightened cub was just above Kim and on the opposite side of the trunk.

Suddenly, the cub slid down the trunk. Kim and the cub met, almost nose to nose. Kim dropped the grab pole and held onto the tree trunk with his right hand.

With his left hand, he reached around the trunk and grabbed the cub by the scuff of the neck.

He called his helpers below to stretch their net to catch the cub. Then he dropped the little fellow from high in the silverbell to the net below. Kim said the cub "spread himself out like a parachute" during his long fall to the net.

They put him in a cage and he was quiet and subdued for a short time. But he soon got his spunk back and was making false charges inside his cage.

By the time Kim reached ground, the cub was in the control of others and was resting. But once it was rested, it took out after some of the men, pretty much like the big Le Conte bear did.

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