



**MAPLE LEAF SCHOOL – TRU**  
**TOFINO TRIP**  
**APRIL 18-22, 2019**





A group of 12 students, 2 staff, and 2 staff children left Kamloops at 7:00 am and headed south down the Coquihalla Highway towards Vancouver. Our destination was the Tsawwassen ferry terminal where we had a 12:45 reserved sailing to take us to Vancouver Island. We arrived at the terminal a full 1.5 hours early and killed time scoping out birds/ducks from the jetty and some students climbed down to the sea shore and flipped over rocks to find crabs and other sea creatures. Because it was a 4 day weekend, everything was a little busier than normal and this included the amount of people using ferries to get to Vancouver Island. We sailed from Tsawwassen to Duke Point in Nanaimo, which took exactly 2 hours. The ferries are 7 story vessels with 2-3 decks of just vehicles. On the main passenger decks there are restaurants, gift shops, plenty of seating, etc... The top deck is for passengers who wish to be outside and the wind was strong and stiff.



View from the top deck of the ferry



Harbour Seal beside the ferry in Tsawwassen

We arrived at Duke Point a little after 3:00 pm and immediately headed north and then west towards the west side of the island. We stopped at a place called Coombs where there is a tourist general store that sold nearly everything someone would ever need. There are usually goats on the green roof of this tourist trap, but they were not out for the season yet. After Coombs, we kept going west to the other side of Vancouver Island and eventually reached the open Pacific Ocean where we turned north towards our destination. Tofino is a playground of rocky islets, mountains, and ocean. It is very wild, being the end of a road that is already “in the middle of nowhere”. There are scenic beaches and endless bays below towering mountains covered in Douglas Fir, Hemlock, and Cedar. The tourist draw ensures many neat tourist shops and activities including whale watching, kayaking, float plane trips, etc.... It is a true temperate rainforest area with rain being the predominant weather pattern. We were very fortunate to have the rain end just before arriving and have it return as soon as we left! The weather prediction for our 3 nights there was unusually clear with sunshine and we counted out blessings as such. It was 7:00 as we pulled up into the quaint town center with its small docks going out in the ocean.

Our first night was to be at the Cedar Coast Field Station, located on Vargas Island which is a 15-20 minute boat ride northwest of Tofino. On this trip, we met up with students and staff from our school located on the campus of Kwantlen Polytechnic University in Richmond, BC (Maple Leaf – KPU). The Principal of this school had found this gem of a place during his research of the area. Cedar Coast Field Station is off grid with electricity from solar panels and water from the copious amounts of rain the area experiences. The station seeks to further sustainable education by leaving its guests with thoughts of how most humans hurt the planet, while providing an example of how we could live more in sync with nature. Sustainable practices are used in every possible way at Cedar Coast and it was a learning opportunity to see and experience this.



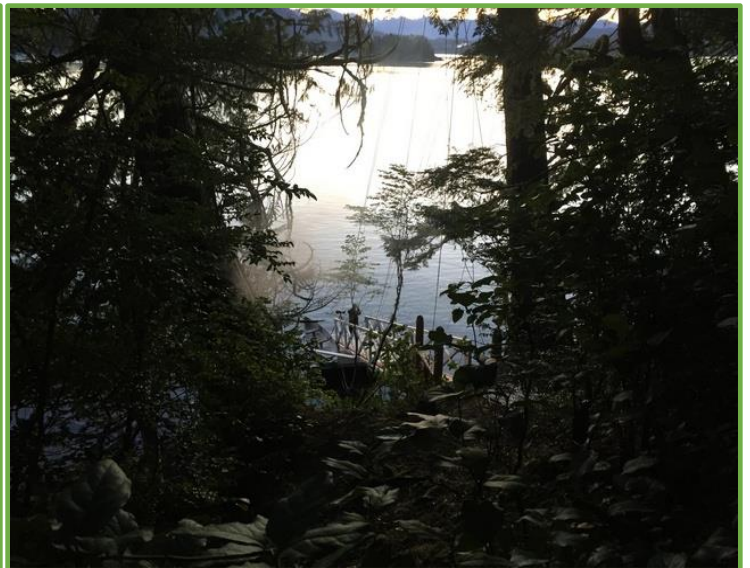
Main Lodge at Cedar Coast Field Station



Inside view of the tent cabins



An outside view of one of the tent cabins



view of the dock area at Cedar Coast Field Station

Soon after arriving at the dock, we walked the short distance to the main lodge and were given our room assignments. We then checked out of lodging for the night and returned to the main



lodge for a delicious supper of curry rice and veggies. By then it was dark and several students went out on the main deck to see the moon coming up over the ocean and to see the stars starting to appear. We knew there were wolves on Vargas Island and had been given a safety briefing upon arrival. While on the deck, we could clearly hear wolves howling from a nearby area and some of the student recorded the howling on their phones. It was a very surreal moment to see the full moon through the barely lit trees and hear the wolves howling in the background! Soon after we headed to our tent houses and drifted off to sleep.



One of the meals



the moon coming up over the ocean at dusk

The next morning two of the staff were up at day break and walked down to the dock area where we arrived by boat. We were hopeful that some of the island's wolves might be able to be seen on the beach viewed from the dock. Immediately we noticed a line of what we thought were a group of ducks out in the bay. These turned out to be nearly 100 Sea Otters sleeping together that had drifted close to shore. They lay on their backs with their large hind feet up in the air. Unfortunately, it was too dark to photograph this raft of otters. As the sun rose, they dispersed to their feeding areas in small groups. We did some birding from the dock area and then picked our way through the forest to the adjacent beach. Vargas Island is a wild place and here was a beach completely unused by humans.



Keltsmaht Beach beside Cedar Coast Field Station



Red-legged Frog near our tent cabin



I scanned the bay from this beach and picked up some good bird species for the trip, including a very cooperative Sooty Fox Sparrow who sang all morning from his perch along the forest edge. Lots of Horned and Red-necked Grebe were feeding along with some Bufflehead, Common Loon, and Surf Scoters. After an hour or so at this beach, we found a much better trail back to the main lodge and met the students for breakfast at 7:30. Breakfast consisted of fresh fruit, yogurt and granola, and cookies and went down well.



Sooty Fox Sparrow



Rufous Hummingbird

In partnership with the Ucluelet aquarium the Cedar Coast Team are monitoring how microplastics are deposited in the marine environment. The hope is to gain information on the ecological impacts of microplastics on the marine ecosystem. It is not yet known how ubiquitous microplastics are in coastal BC. Our group conducted a scientific survey on Keltsmaht Beach, Vargas Island, so we could all learn how and which microplastics are being deposited on our beaches in southern BC. All students involved were able to see the research process. At low tide on Keltsmaht Beach, students were led to the high tide debris line. A 100 meter line was laid out along the high tide line. A random number generator was used to select 10 random numbers along the 100 meter stretch of beach. These were the locations of the 10 transects. At each transect, quadrats (1 meter square) were laid out. From each quadrat along the line, a 2cm "skim" of debris and sand was filtered to highlight any microplastics present on the beach environment. It was surprising for all to see how much plastic was present on this seemingly pristine beach.





On this same beach we were able to meet with one of the knowledge elders from the Ahousaht First Nation who spoke with us about the history of the area as well as the customs and culture of his people. It was a special moment to be able to experience this talk on a remote island of the west coast of Vancouver Island.



We then walked back to the main lodge and had a lunch of chili, bread, and grapes. This was followed by our group leaving on a boat that made 3 trips at 12:30 to travel back to Tofino in preparation for our next activity – whale watching.

We booked a whale watching and bear watching tour with Remote Passages Marine Excursions. This was based on a recommendation from our hostel where we stayed for the second and third nights of our trip. There are quite a few companies that do these activities in Tofino and we clearly had booked with the right one. Remote Passages was very organized and handled our group of 31 people without any issues. The guides on each of the three boats we were on were professional, knowledgeable, and adapted the trip to fit our interests both before arriving and once on the water. The open ocean wasn't as rough as it could have been so only a few people suffered sea sickness. We raced across the ocean in a pack of 3 zodiacs which made the experience entertaining in a good way. We were able to see a close sea otter, 5 Gray Whales, 50 or more Steller Sea Lions, and several Harbour Seals. This was in addition to the numerous sea birds expected on the open seas. The tour lasted all afternoon and we enjoyed gorgeous weather the entire time. The pictures tell the story better than words.







Clockwise from the top left: Sea Otter, Gray Whale, Steller Sea Lions, Gray Whale



Pigeon Guillemot

Harbour Seal





Once back on land, we drove the short distance to our home for the next 3 nights, the Whalers on the Point Hostel. I would highly recommend this place as we paid around \$45 a night per person in large rooms that could sleep 4 people or more. As with most hostels, there was a shared kitchen and washrooms. Students enjoyed a billiards room and a common area where games were played, discussions were had, etc... This type of accommodation was perfect for the needs of our group. We checked in just before 6:00 pm and we all had some free time to get supper somewhere in Tofino, hit the tourist shops, and explore the unique city center there. Sleep came easy after an action-packed day.



Pictures around Tofino

Breakfast was at 7:00 the next morning. Some of us were up earlier and saw 2 Raccoons and a River Otter looking for food at low tide directly in front of the hostel property.



Raccoon



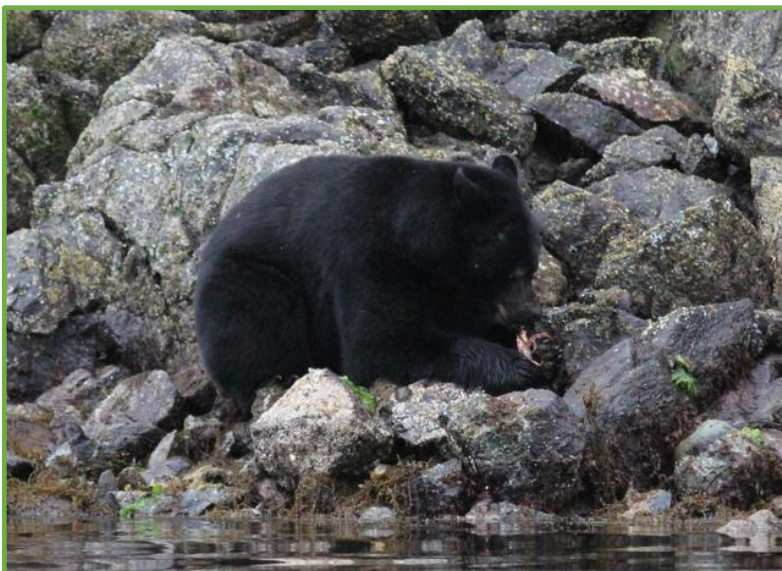
River Otter



We then headed to our 7:30 Bear Watching Tour booked through Remote Passages Marine Excursions. After a short introductory video, we were again divided up onto 3 zodiacs and sped east into the calm inland waters around Meares Island. Before long we pulled around a corner and spotted a Black Bear looking for food among the exposed rocks at low tide. Everyone had great views of this bear and we all watched as it flipped over a rock and caught a large crab right in front of us. A little further there were two more Black Bears foraging along the shoreline. A Bald Eagle landed quite close as well. After enjoying these sightings, we stopped by some Harbour Seals resting on some rocks. We enjoyed calm water for the entirety of this bear watching tour.



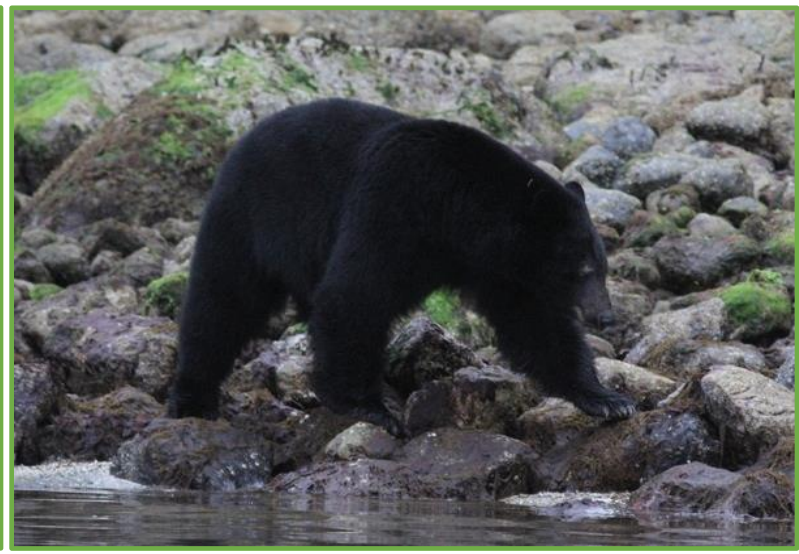
Clockwise from top right: Bald Eagle, Harbour Seals, Pelagic Cormorant







Marbled Murrelet



Black Bear

Back at the dock, we had some free time for lunch before meeting at the vehicles again at 2:00 to go for a walk at Rainforest Trail in Pacific Rim National Park. Rainforest Trail is composed of two loop trails that each are just over 1km. They are reasonably flat and take you through some spectacular old growth forest on a nicely prepared boardwalk. Some sections border areas that are second growth and there are some great old growth forest vs. second growth forest photos to be had. The differences are very clear to see. On the way back to Tofino we stopped briefly at Long Beach to walk around and watch the many surfers braving the cold water. Wet suit or no wet suit, that has got to be cold in mid-April!



Bottom Photo: Left = second growth    Right = Old Growth





Back in Tofino, we had supper and then drove the 10 minutes south to Chesterman Beach for some tidal pooling. There is a large tombolo there and it is possible to walk out to a small island at low tide. We had heard there was good tidal pooling to be found at this location and it certainly didn't disappoint. Spider crabs, Red Nudibranch, and the more common suspects abounded. We had to pull the students away around 8:00 pm because of daylight and an incoming tide. We brought some buckets with us to more closely examine the tidal pool creatures and then let them all go when we left. We also used a Pacific Reef and Shore photo guide to aid in the identification process. Again, sleep came easily after that day.



We had to leave Tofino at 5:30 am the next day to make our reserved ferry time of 10:15. As if planned, we awoke to steady rain and it rained all the way until we reached the back side of the coast mountains. We were very thankful for the weather we experienced during our time in Tofino. Planning a trip there in mid-April is certain risky in terms of weather. The area there is called a Temperate Rainforest for good reasons. We encountered two more Black Bear between the Ucluelet turnoff and Port Alberni, bringing our total up to 5 for the trip. We arrived at the Duke Point ferry terminal at exactly 9:15, right on time. The Ferry ride from Nanaimo back to the mainland was rather uneventful and the rain kept most people inside.









### **Favourite Moment of the Trip:**

Krystal – picking up a star fish from the rock  
 Luke – Sleeping to the sound of waves and under a full moon in nature  
 Nicole – the ferry because I've never been on a boat bigger than a canoe before  
 Ivy – riding on the zodiac on the whale watching tour  
 Davina – the zodiac experience  
 Davida – eating at Big Daddies Fish Fry  
 Becca – touching an anemone in a tidal pool  
 Josh – carrying the girls across the small river  
 Anderson – the sunset by the ocean  
 Stephanie – the hike on Rainforest Trail  
 Ann – Tidal Pooling at Chesterman Beach  
 Jax – Discovering ocean life in the tidal pools

### **One Thing I Learned on the Trip:**

Krystal – sea lions smell disgusting  
 Luke – whales are amazing  
 Nicole – Starfish feel hard even when they're alive  
 Ivy – I should have prepared more for the living conditions  
 Davina – you cannot pish all bird species  
 Davida – there is a kind of bug living in the sand called a sand flea  
 Becca – Red moons are because of pollution (sunset)  
 Josh – warm tea makes you feel better after a bumpy boat ride  
 Anderson – Tofino is in a dangerous position if a tsunami ever happened  
 Stephanie – people need to be educated about the environment  
 Ann – Trees can be 1000 years old and young ones can grow out of dead ones  
 Jax – There is much more marine life than life on land





### Non-bird Wildlife Seen on our Trip:

Black Bear – 5  
 Sea Otter – approximately 100  
 Gray Whale – 5  
 Steller Sea Lion – approximately 60  
 Red Squirrel – 2  
 Raccoon – 2  
 River Otter – 2  
 Harbour Seal – 8  
 Red-legged Frog – 1  
 Harbour Porpoise – 5 (seen from ferry)  
 Yellow-bellied Marmot – 1 seen when returning to Kamloops

### Birds: While this was not a birding trip, there were times for short walks and scanning for birds.

Summary									
	Apr 19	Apr 20	Apr 21	Apr 22					
Number of Species	27	42	10	7	Black-bellied Plover	--	25 (1)	--	--
Number of Individuals	1,025	549	163	14	Whimbrel	--	--	25 (1)	--
Number of Checklists	4	3	3	2	Western Sandpiper	--	16 (1)	--	--
Highest Count for a Species (sample size)					Greater Yellowlegs	2 (1)	2 (1)	--	--
Species Name	Apr 19	Apr 20	Apr 21	Apr 22	Pigeon Guillemot	1 (1)	5 (1)	--	--
Greater White-fronted Goose	--	250 (1)	--	--	Marbled Murrelet	--	--	1 (1)	--
Brant	650 (1)	--	--	--	Mew Gull	1 (2)	60 (1)	--	--
Canada Goose	2 (1)	--	100 (1)	--	Glaucous-winged Gull	30 (2)	10 (2)	--	3 (1)
Mallard	2 (1)	--	--	--	gull sp.	--	30 (1)	--	--
Green-winged Teal	--	18 (1)	--	--	Pacific Loon	18 (2)	--	--	--
Greater Scaup	175 (2)	--	--	--	Common Loon	5 (3)	6 (2)	--	--
Surf Scoter	10 (3)	3 (1)	--	--	Brandt's Cormorant	3 (1)	--	--	1 (1)
White-winged Scoter	--	4 (1)	--	--	Pelagic Cormorant	3 (3)	2 (1)	--	--
Bufflehead	8 (1)	4 (1)	--	--	Double-crested Cormorant	--	2 (1)	--	1 (1)
Common Goldeneye	--	1 (1)	--	--	Great Blue Heron	40 (1)	1 (1)	--	--
Common Merganser	--	2 (1)	--	--	Osprey	--	1 (1)	--	--
Red-breasted Merganser	6 (1)	1 (1)	--	--	Bald Eagle	2 (2)	2 (1)	1 (1)	--
Horned Grebe	5 (1)	20 (1)	--	--	Belted Kingfisher	1 (1)	1 (1)	--	--
Red-necked Grebe	1 (1)	2 (2)	--	--	Hairy Woodpecker	--	1 (1)	--	--
Rock Pigeon	1 (1)	--	--	--	Merlin	--	--	--	1 (1)
Rufous Hummingbird	--	1 (2)	--	--	Steller's Jay	1 (1)	1 (1)	--	--
Black Oystercatcher	2 (1)	2 (1)	--	--	Northwestern Crow	15 (3)	30 (2)	--	--
					Common Raven	--	2 (1)	6 (1)	--
					Chestnut-backed Chickadee	--	2 (1)	7 (2)	--
					Pacific Wren	--	--	2 (1)	--
					Golden-crowned Kinglet	--	4 (1)	--	--
					Varied Thrush	--	2 (1)	--	--
					American Robin	1 (1)	7 (2)	3 (2)	--
					European Starling	--	1 (1)	--	--
					Fox Sparrow	--	1 (1)	--	--
					Dark-eyed Junco	--	2 (1)	--	--
					White-crowned Sparrow	1 (1)	3 (1)	1 (1)	5 (1)
					Song Sparrow	--	1 (1)	--	--
					Lincoln's Sparrow	--	--	--	1 (1)
					Orange-crowned Warbler	4 (1)	4 (1)	10 (2)	2 (1)
					Yellow-rumped Warbler	--	2 (1)	--	--
					House Sparrow	--	2 (1)	--	--



## Resources and Contacts

**Remote Passages Marine Excursions:** Used this company for our whale watching and bear watching tours. Highly recommended and easily able to accommodate large groups. We'll be using them again. Well trained guides. <http://www.remotepassages.com/>

**Whalers on the Point Hostel:** Perfect for our group. Affordable, clean, and perfectly located. Within easy walking distance of all food, shopping, and attractions. Staff were excellent during the booking process and during our stay. Shared showers and washrooms like a campground. <https://tofinohostel.com/>

**Cedar Coast Field Station:** Located on Vargas Island, a 15 minute boat ride from Tofino. A remote location but solar electricity, full washrooms, and water available in the main lodge. A fantastic place to get away and experience real untouched nature. Very well suited for hosting school groups in an outdoor learning environment. Guests stay in tent cabins as photographed above. Great access to an adjacent untouched beach. Full kitchen and large attractive eating area also in the main lodge. <https://www.cedarcoastfieldstation.org/>



Glaucous-winged Gull and Northwestern Crow, the two most common birds on the trip.

