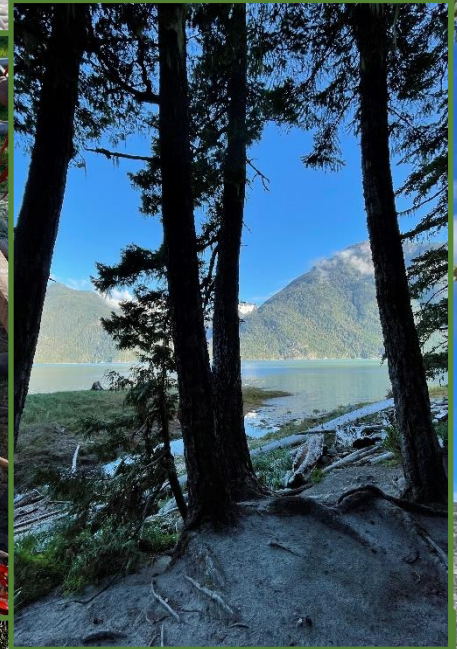




Bella Coola Trip SD73
International Student Program
Sept. 16-19, 2022

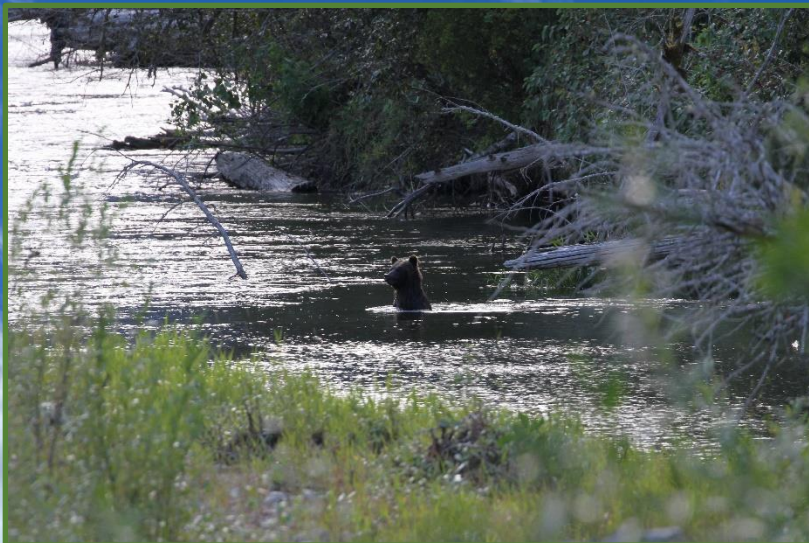


17 students from 6 countries and 3 chaperones left Kamloops at 7:00 am on Sept. 16, 2022. We travelled west and then north at Cache Creek to Williams Lake. Here, we stopped at a large grocery store and bought food for supper that night and breakfast the next morning. Then we turned west again and headed towards Bella Coola. The total distance from Kamloops to Bella Coola according to google maps is 736.5 kms and this took us nearly 9 hours of driving time. The road from Williams Lake to Bella Coola is known as Highway 20. It is paved up until just past Anahim Lake where it turns to compact gravel. Just after Anahim Lake, the road descends "the hill" down into the Atnarko River Valley. This is not a road for the faint of heart as the elevation drops from 1530 m to sea level in 30 minutes. The grade is advertised as steep as 14% but who is really measuring? This section of the road was built by Bella Coola residents using a couple of bulldozers in the 1950s and is affectionally known as "Freedom Road". The photo on the right below shows the bottom of the valley from near the top of the hill.



Highway 20 between Williams Lake and Bella Coola above left. Smiling students at a rest area above right.

After descending the hill, we arrived at the Belarko Grizzly Bear Viewing Platform just before 5pm. Because we had such a large bus, we parked on the road and the driver and I walked into the parking area to assess if the bus could fit. Upon returning to the bus, one of the chaperones was trying to close the bus door as a large Grizzly had crossed the street right in front of the parked bus! After getting on the platform, there was a large Grizzly that stayed frustratingly just around a corner and out of view for a while. We waited around and eventually a female Grizzly Bear and a single young cub showed up just after 6:00. The female stayed around and ended up walking right by the platform on the near shore giving great views to all who were gathered. Camera clicked and cell phones recorded videos as she searched for dead or dying salmon and ate the skin off each one. A salmon's skin is very high in protein and probably stays in better condition after a salmon dies? Most of the bears we observed on this trip seemed to focus on the skin. It was a magical encounter, after which we headed the last 55 minutes west to the town of Bella Coola on the territory of the Nuxalk First Nation. We checked into our accommodations (Bella Coola Motel Cabins) and fell asleep after a long day of travel.



Our Accommodation

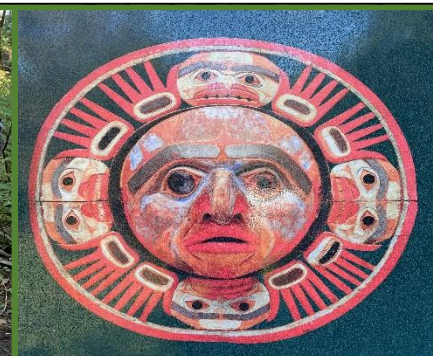


The next morning we met at 8 am and travelled the short distance to the ocean. Bella Coola, though far inland on a map, is at the end of some very long saltwater fjords. You can take a BC Ferry from Bella Coola to Port Hardy on Vancouver Island which takes around 10 hours. At the ocean, we watched a large amount of harbour Seals in the water and hauled out on log booms. We also walked around a grassy beach area and took in the scenery. Unfortunately, we were on the side of the valley that didn't receive sun in the morning. A short walk also brought us to Clayton Falls there. Clayton Falls and early morning hikers below.





We then headed back into Bella Coola and stopped by the welcome sign for a quick group photo. We then met up with Andrew Andy, who arranges most of the activities when we are there. Our first activity was the short hike to see the ancient petroglyphs. This activity included a Nuxalk guide who was very helpful in helping us understand the area, the petroglyphs, and other cultural and historical elements of where we were. The hike in is gorgeous and the small river there is almost green. The water is drinkable.



Our Nuxalk guide was a singer and he shared several songs with us along various spots of the trail. Hereditary Chief Noel Pootlas also joined our hike and was able to contribute stories, personal reflections, and other information. This was the beginning of the many learning opportunities the students received on this trip to further their understanding of the role and place of Canada's First Nation people historically but also currently. There were many of these opportunities on the trip, most of which organically arose.



After the petroglyphs, we returned to Bella Coola for lunch and then headed out to Andrews brother's house to watch, learn about, and participate in Salmon cutting and smoking. The students enjoyed seeing different ways that salmon is prepared and also enjoyed eating some of the finished product.



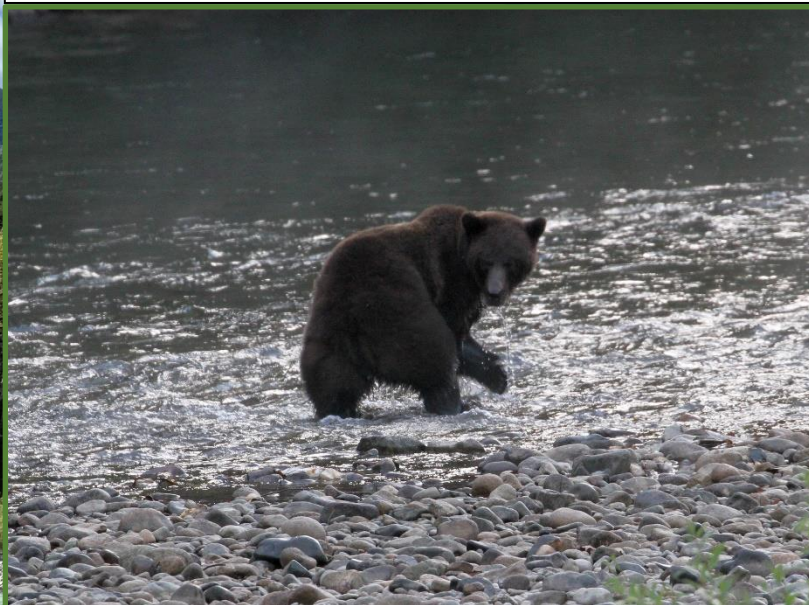


The next activity was fishing in the Bella Coola River. We walked through a forest area on the way that contained very large and very old Cedar trees. Unfortunately the water level was quite low so the salmon were not holding where they normally do and therefore the fishing was not as good as it could have been at the spot we usually go to. One student did reel one in and several others were lost. We then returned to Bella Coola and purchased supplies for a hot dog roast over a fire near the cabins.





The next morning we met at the bus at 6:00 am and drove the 55 minutes to the Grizzly Bear viewing platform again. We had heard that there were usually some bears around in the morning. After 30 minutes or so 2 Grizzlies appeared upriver and spent 15-20 minutes catching and eating live salmon. These feeding bears delayed the float tours to see bears as they were feeding directly across from the boat launch. Both of these were very healthy Grizzly bears as can be seen below.



On the way back from the bear platform we stopped at a new roadside turn off in Tweedsmuir Provincial Park called Stupendous Viewpoint. It sure was stupendous and we were able to see two Mountain Goats high up on the mountainside. Digi scoped photo of the goats below. We also thought it was a nice place for a group photo. We then drove back and visited with a Nuxalk master Carver. He was working on a totem pole that will be used in a new building and he explained the meaning of the carvings to us. He then had students take turns using a traditional adze on a block of wood.



Our next activity was cedar barking weaving. We were led by a master weaver and her sister. Some students made flowers and others made bracelets. The flowers were either attached to stems or pens. It's amazing to see what can be woven using cedar bark.



We posed for a picture with our two weaver teachers below. After this we had some down time before our traditional feast in the church basement. It certainly was a feast with barbequed salmon, Bannock, and other goodies. Several of the students helped to dish out the food. What a treat to have such great food and hospitality during our stay! We had another campfire that evening.



Loading up in the morning for our 6 am departure. The road up the hill.



Favourite Moment of the Trip

Marten – making hot dogs on the fire.

Marta – when we went to the ocean see the seals. The landscape was very beautiful.

Candela – when we went to see the seals and when we went to see the petroglyphs.

Guillaume – The first fire because we were all talking together and having fun.

Achille – The first campfire on Saturday night. It was a great atmosphere.

Thibault – The first fire because we cooked our food on the fire. Also when we went to the ocean because we saw a lot of animals and good views.

Victoria – When we got to do Salmon cutting. I like to learn how they smoke the salmon and they were such a nice family.

Lina – the last fire when we heard stories about the residential school in Kamloops, how they found the bones of over 200 children, and how the Catholic Church is not releasing records.

Chisato – Learning how to make smoked salmon and cedar bark weaving.

Anna – When the Nuxalk people gave us the tour of the petroglyphs and how he talked about his own experience and generational trauma.

Selma – Experiencing the songs of the Nuxalk. Sheldon's singing was very strong and passionate.

Kian – Cedar Bark weaving was a very cool experience. I didn't expect it to be that strong.

Ryder – When we drank water from the river in the forest.

Carla – the campfires because it was fun to sit there and all talk together.

Louis – Fishing, because I never did this before. Also, the Indigenous people talking about who they are. It made me think about who am I? This was beneficial to me.

Tarja – The first campfire when we made hot dogs and smores. And seeing the Grizzly Bears.

Jo – the campfire on Saturday because it was fun talking to each other.

One Thing I Learned on the Trip

Marten – about Residential Schools and what happened there.

Marta – Indigenous culture and history. For example, wood carving.

Candela – The culture of the indigenous people. Stories, myths, and legends

Guillaume – About residential schools. The history of the relationship between the First Nations and European Canadians.

Achille – A lot about the First Nations people. Their way of life, their closeness to nature, their history.

Thibault – The First Nations culture and relationship with white people.

Vicky – I got to understand the term “generational trauma” and why many First Nations people still have pain from all the things that were done to them.

Lina – About how the Nuxalk families identify with one animal. The entire family identifies with the same animal.

Chisato – The culture of Bella Coola and the meaning of totem poles.

Anna – How the Nuxalk dry and smoke salmon. Also how to weave with cedar bark.

Selma – Cedar weaving, how salmon is prepared, and an interesting story about some Nuxalk in Germany in the late 1800s.

Kian – That some Nuxalk people travelled to Germany in the late 1800s.

Ryder – All cultures should be respected.

Carla – It was fun to learn about the Nuxalk people and their traditions. How to cut fish and weave with cedar bark.

Louis – It was really difficult for us to take the first step in joining this trip. But if we overcome this fear, we can learn a lot of things.

Tarja – The story between Indigenous people and other Canadians is still ongoing and there isn't 100% peace yet.

Jo – I like the stories that we heard from the First Nations people. For example: about Raven bringing the sun to earth.