



Bella Coola Sept. 15-18, 2023 Trip Report
SD73 International Student Program



Seventeen students and three chaperones left Kamloops at 7:00am on Friday Sept. 15, 2023 and headed northwest towards Bella Coola. After a grocery stop in William's Lake, a washroom stop at a rest area near Tatla Lake, and driving past a wildfire, we drove down "the hill" into the Bella Coola River Valley. We arrived at the Grizzly Bear viewing platform along the Atnarko River at 4:30pm and saw some Grizzly Bears soon after arriving. We ended up staying on the wildlife viewing platform until 6:40 and drove the last 45 minutes into the town of Bella Coola and checked into our cabins. We saw 7 Grizzlies from the platform and 1 more along the road near Hagensborg. The students settled into their cabins and prepared dinner before meeting for a short campfire near the cabins. Soon after this we were asleep in preparation for a full day to follow.



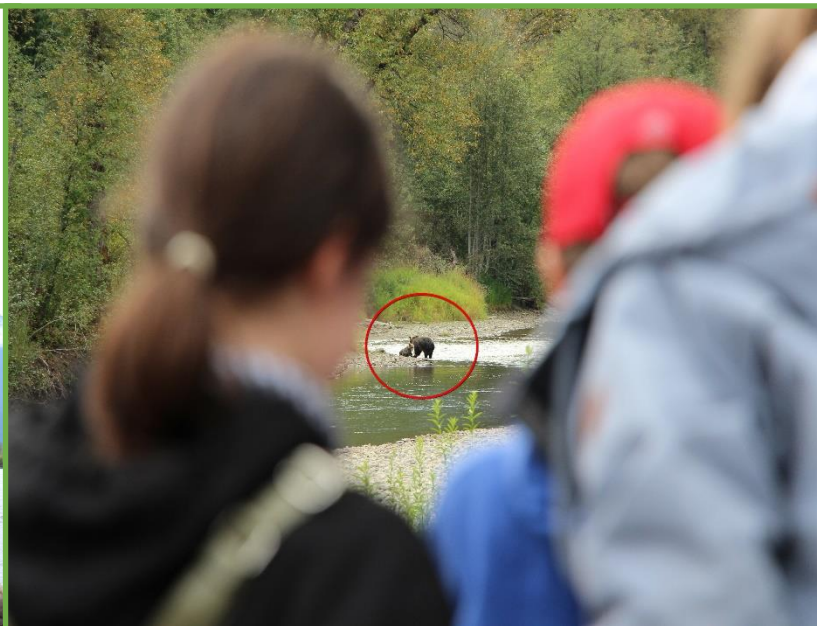
The next day we took advantage of the weather by driving the short distance to the ocean. We explored Clayton Falls and an area where you can walk out to a nice viewpoint. We spotted some Dall's Porpoise feeding out in the fjord as well as some Bald Eagles and Harbour Seals in the area. After this we headed for our first cultural piece of the trip – fish cutting. At the fish-cutting location we observed and tried our hands at preparing Salmon strips to be smoked. Samples were provided which didn't last long :)





Our Cabins

After fish-cutting, we had some time for lunch before meeting at the cabins at 2:00pm to try fishing near the airport. Hopes were not high for good fishing due to the water level being so low and this turned out to be the case. After trying to catch some type of salmon for 30 minutes and having a couple of bears in the area, we decided it would be better to leave. The students voted to go back to the Grizzly Bear viewing platform so we went there and stayed for just over an hour, seeing 5 more Grizzlies.



We then drove back to our cabins, had supper, and met again for a short drive back to the ocean where we roasted hotdogs over a small fire. A Red Fox was seen at this location. Sleep came easy after this full day.



We met at 9:30 the next morning to have a day full of Nuxhalk cultural tours. This started with a short guided hike up to some ancient petroglyphs. This site contains rock carvings that are very old. Cedar boardwalks and stairs lead to the place. We were guided by Hereditary Chief Noel Pootlass who spoke about the petroglyphs and provided interpretation. There is also a very clear flowing river in the area so we stopped there for a while as well.

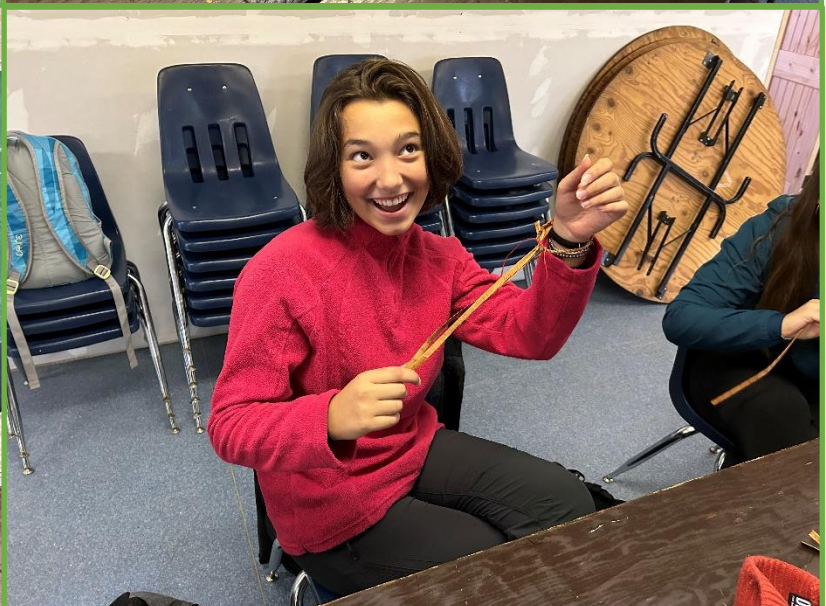


Our next cultural piece was a visit at the carving shop of Alvin Mack, a Nuxhalk Master Carver. Alvin spoke about historical and present First Nation issues including the residential school program and provided context of the relationship between the First Nations people and the Canadian government. Being a master carver, he showed us some pieces he is working on and let the students try their hand at an elbow adze and a block of cedar. Each student took turns trying it out.



After lunch, we met Barb, a Master Weaver. Together with some helpers, she had prepared cedar bark for weaving like the Nuxhalk people have done for generations. The students wove cedar bark for just over 2 hours, making many different items.







After cedar bark weaving, we were treated to a fantastic supper of Coho Salmon and various salads. The Coho Salmon had been cooked in the smokehouse we had visited the previous day.



We left the cabins at 6:30 the next morning with a planned stop at the bear viewing platform on the way back to Kamloops. Just over an hour there produced another 3 Grizzly Bears. We also saw one in a field beside the road on the way to the platform. The ride back to Kamloops went smoothly. One student found a Pacific Tree Frog at the rest area near Tatla Lake and we enjoyed beautiful fall colours over the Chilcotin Plateau and all the way back. We arrived back in Kamloops around 5:45pm.



Andrew Andy, a Nuxhalk resident of Bella Coola, was instrumental in setting up many aspects of this trip including the cultural components and accommodations, etc... He can be reached at cedarbowconsulting@gmail.com or 250-378-7823

Students on this trip were from the following countries:

Japan – 5	Belgium – 4	Germany – 4	Italy – 2
	France – 1	Spain – 1	

Trip Mammal List:

Grizzly Bear – 9	Coyote – 3
Black Bear – 1	White-tailed Deer – 2
Dall's Porpoise – 5	Black-tailed Mule Deer – 3
Harbour Seal – 10	Red Squirrel – 5
Red Fox – 2	Yellow-pine Chipmunk – 3

Favourite Moment From the Trip

Maud – Walking into the cold water because it was something I would not be able to do where I live because it was so cold, water from a glacier, and the natural habitat of bears.

Eleonore – At the bear viewing platform because it was nice to see bears eating and catching fish with their cubs. It was really nice to see a bear in the wild.

Zazie – When we saw the bear and her two cubs because it was the cutest moment and I felt very lucky to see that.

Lotta – The campfire by the ocean because it was really cool to be near the ocean and talk with and learn about the other people on the trip.

Aitana – When we went to the fish-cutting and smoking location. I found this interesting and I liked when they gave us salmon to eat.

Odile – At the ocean because it was very rejuvenating. For me, the landscape was beautiful and the air was very fresh.

Thibault – When we went to the ocean and saw the waterfall, eagles, and the porpoises.

Benedetta – When we saw the porpoises because it was rare and they had never been seen on any previous trip.

Caterina – When we had the campfire by the ocean because we were all together. I have never had a fire that way before.

Luisa – When the man showed us the carving because he showed us what he does and how long it takes. We could also try it ourselves.

Tim – When we saw the petroglyphs because it was a very beautiful forest and it was interesting to see the art there from the past.

Koyomi – When we found a family of bears because that was pretty special and cute.

Hinako – Eating hot dogs at the ocean because I love hot dogs.

Yuta – Seeing the bears because the bears were very cute and it was my first time.

Rinka – Making reindeer and bracelets out of cedar bark because I have never made this before and I think it was very special.

Kenya – Seeing the many bears. The mothers and cubs. I've only seen pictures before but never seen real ones.

Sasha – When we were seeing the bears and I saw the mom of the two cubs jumping into the water to catch a fish.

One Thing I Learned On the Trip

Maud – Salmon will come back to the exact place where they were born.

Eleonore – How to weave ropes and reindeer out of cedar bark.

Zazie – The history of the First Nations living at Bella Coola.

Lotta – I learned lots about the culture of the people who live in Bella Coola.

Aitana – The damage that cultural genocide can make and the importance of the preservation of the First Nation's traditions and culture.

Odile – How we can cut and prepare salmon.

Thibault – How to prepare smoked salmon.

Benedetta – How to explore nature and still stay safe.

Caterina – Many aspects of the First Nation's history such as residential schools, wood carving, salmon, etc...

Luisa – A lot about indigenous people. How they live in communities and really care about each other.

Tim – A lot about bears. The differences between Black and Grizzly bears. It was nice to see Grizzly Bears because they are not in Europe. I also learned a lot about the Nuxalk Nation.

Koyomi – It takes a lot of time to finish the art work of carving.

Hinako – To stay calm when I see a bear.

Yuta – Nature is very important for us because it refreshes my feeling.

Rinka – A lot about the Nuxalk people. How to cut salmon, make totem poles, and art design.

Kenya – First Nation's culture. I didn't know anything about this before.

Sasha – The way that First Nations people smoke the salmon and how they eat it.