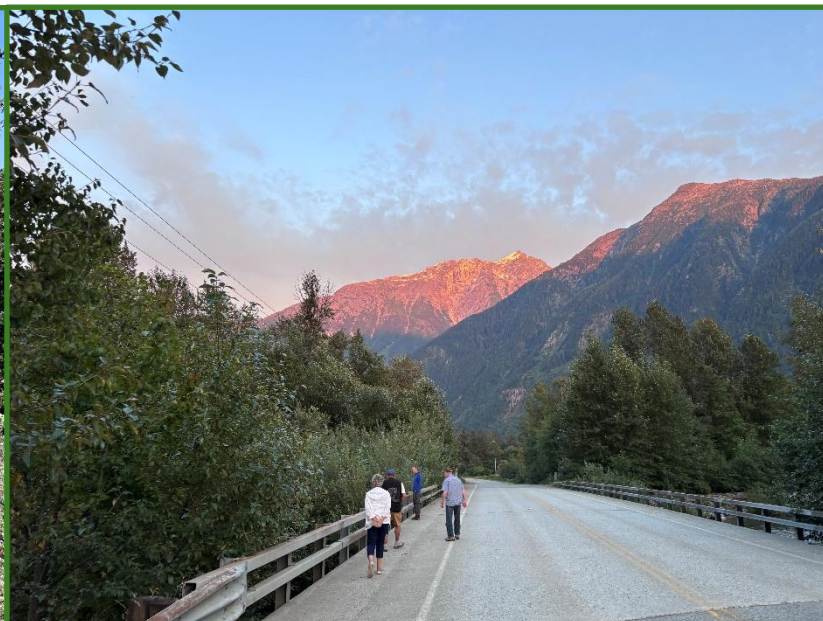




Bella Coola Trip Report
August 21-24, 2026



On August 21, 2026 we left Kamloops around 7:00 AM and drove to Williams Lake. We stopped there for some groceries and a washroom break before turning east on Highway 20 and driving across the Chilcotin Plateau. We stopped at Bull Canyon Provincial Park to admire the beauty of the Chilcotin River, stopped at Polywog Rest Area to stretch our legs, and also stopped in Anahim Lake for fuel. We had one close view of a Black Bear crawling under a fence on the plateau. After this, we drove down “The Hill” into the Bella Coola Valley. The Hill drops from 1524m to near sea level in 15 minutes and is a real brake-tester of a road. By the time we were at the bottom of the hill it was 4:30PM and we spent some time looking for Grizzly Bears on the remaining hour to the town of Bella Coola. Upon arrival, we checked into our cabins and then drove around a bit more, checking for Grizzly Bears at some known locations. We also watched Chum Salmon spawning in huge numbers from one bridge.



Clockwise from top left: Checking out the Chilcotin River, checking from Grizzly Bears on a bridge near Bella Coola, spawning Chum Salmon seen from the bridge, the cabins where we stayed right on the Bella Coola River.



The next morning, some of us did some bird watching right in front of the cabins where we saw a good selection of local birds including two Arctic Terns flying down the Bella Coola River. We then left as a group at 8:45AM and headed for our guided petroglyphs tour with Noel Pootlass, Hereditary Chief of the Nuxalk Nation in Bella Coola. Noel's family has lived in the Bella Coola Valley for thousands of years and his interpretation of the land and its animals and plants on this walk was exceptional. At the petroglyphs he explained what the symbols were and their meanings. He also did some drumming there for us. These ancient petroglyphs are a special sacred place that are very old and it was a treat to be able to see them.



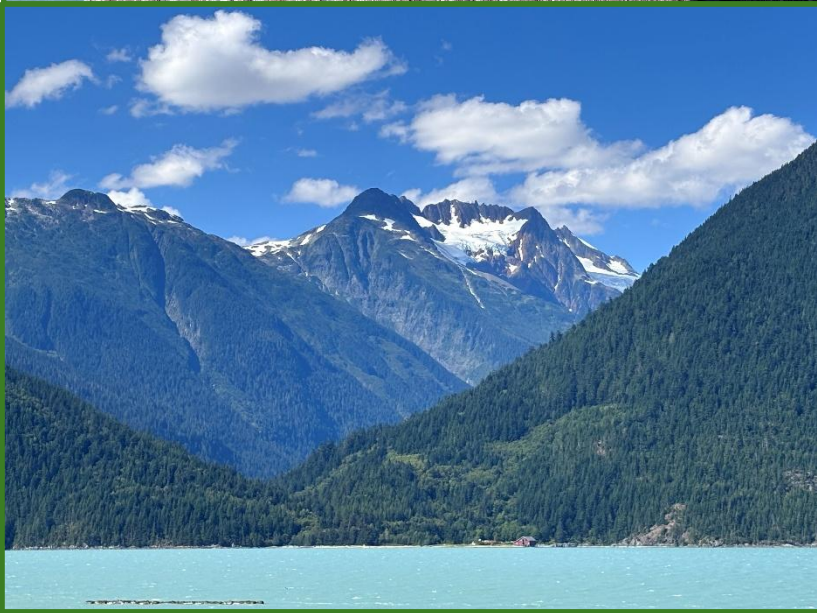
After the petroglyphs tour, we met with master weaver Barb to try our hand at cedar bark weaving. Weaving cedar goes back thousands of years in Nuxhalk tradition and we were thrilled that Barb was available to show us how it is done. Cedar was once used for everything from clothes to baskets. Each person weaved a head band that we were allowed to keep and barb also threw in some other gifts of cedar for us. Many thanks to Barb and her team for this activity!



We then had a late lunch and met at 2:00PM to visit with a carver who was working on a pole. The pole was in the painting stage and we learned all about colours in Nuxhalk artwork and carving in general. It was incredible to see a pole in construction and meet the carvers who were working on it. The pole was in its final stages and will be put up soon.

Photos cannot be shown until the pole is raised in the coming weeks as per protocol. This page will be refreshed after the pole is raised.

Next, we drove the very short distance to the ocean where saltwater reaches all the way up a flooded glacial valley. The scenery here is spectacular and we enjoyed excellent views of the surrounding glaciers, Clayton Falls, a river full of salmon, and some Harbour Seals. We were thankful for the beautiful day that allowed us to view all the surrounding mountains.

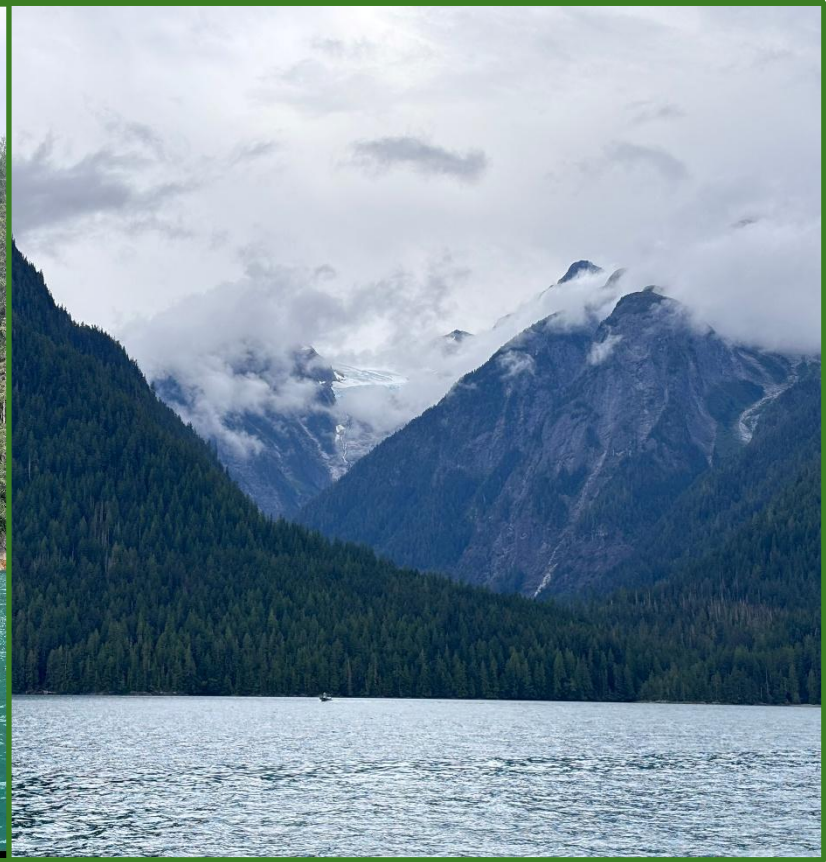
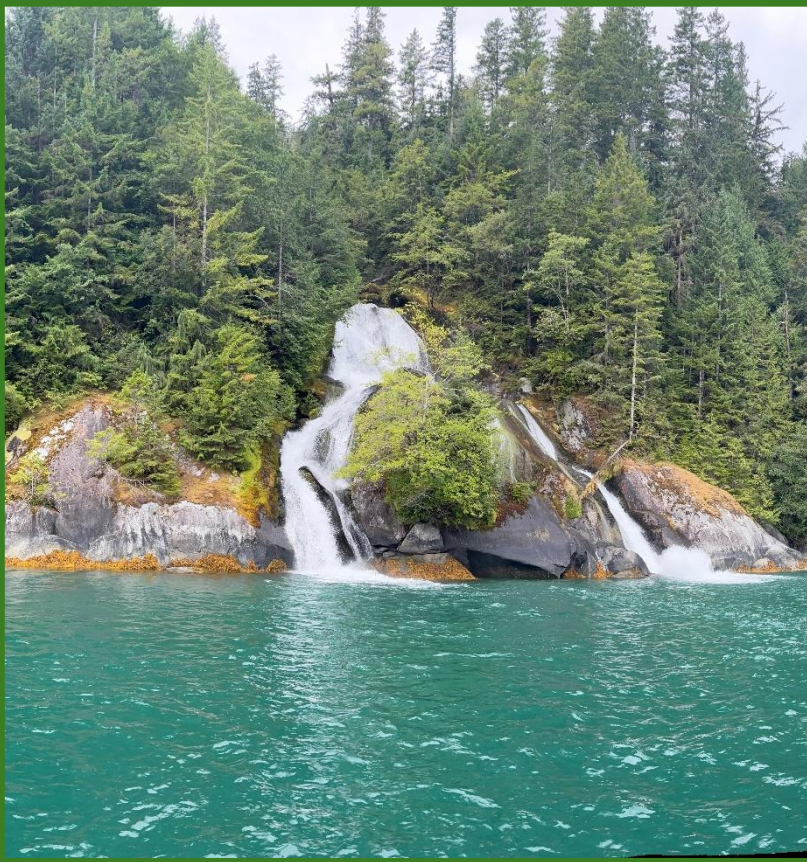
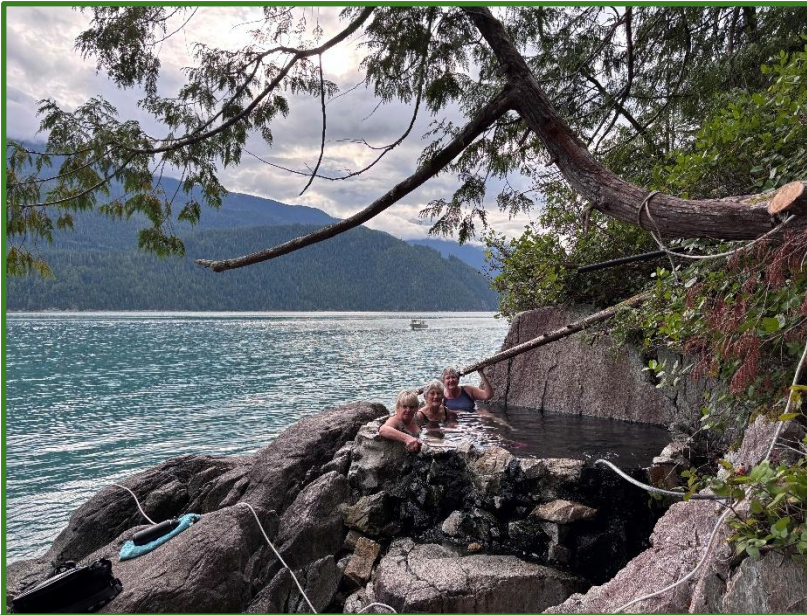


We then had some free time to visit gift shops, buy more food, or relax by the cabins for a couple of hours. We met later in the day and did another short bear drive trying to find a Grizzly Bear before heading to the seaside for a hot dog dinner over a campfire. It was just beginning to get dark when we arrived at 8:00PM and we enjoyed a bit of a sunset as we cooked and ate our dinner. Several friends were able to join us at this campfire as well and we learned even more about the area through their stories. We stayed until around 9:30 and then fell fast asleep after a packed day.



We had an early departure the next day to meet our hot spring tour boat at the marina at 7:00AM. It is nearly 1 hour to get to the hot spring each way and enjoyed gorgeous views the entire way and back. The hot spring is completely natural and is split into two pools right on the side of the ocean. We spent just over an hour there and then were pleased to see a Hump-backed Whale and a Black Bear from the boat on the return trip to the marina. We were back on the docks at around 11:30AM from this tour.







After this we had a short break for lunch and then met master weaver Barb again for her to show us some of her cedar weaving projects. We were in awe of what she can make out of cedar bark. She answered questions and we took a few photos.





On the way to walk through some giant cedar trees, we stopped to admire Barb's work in making clothes for one of the poles along the river there. At the giant cedar tree area, we marveled at huge cedars that are hundreds of years old. On several of the trees, you can see the scars where the indigenous people were able to get huge planks out of trees without killing them.



On the last night there, we decided to dedicate to finding a Grizzly Bear. There were some bears around but we had not run into any at that point. We tried all of the places at the far west end of the valley but kept hearing the same thing. **Due to a very large salmon run, bears were not having to walk the rivers to find food and therefore making themselves visible.** They could simply stay in one place and grab a fish whenever they wanted right in front of them. Even the paid float tours for bear photography were not seeing bears all of the time. Very unusual. Despite dedicating an entire evening to finding one, we came up empty again. After not seeing one that night, we wondered if we would run into one the next morning. We ended up leaving the valley without seeing one – **a first in 12 trips there for me.** On our last morning, we checked out of our cabins and arrived at the Snootli Creek Hatchery just after 9:00AM for our scheduled tour. The director there, Haakon Hammer, led us on a very detailed tour of the facilities and explained what is done there. He was very knowledgeable about his work and we enjoyed our time there with him.





After this, we stopped for photos at the aptly named Stupendous Viewpoint and Big Rock before climbing the hill back up to the Chilcotin Plateau. We stopped several times for fuel and food on the way home and arrived back in Kamloops around 8:30PM. Four days full of adventurous experiences!

Mammal List From The Trip:

1. Black Bear – 2
2. White-tailed Deer – 1
3. Mule Deer – common
4. Hump-backed Whale – 2
5. River Otter – 1
6. Harbour Seal – common
7. Red Squirrel – common
8. Yellow-pine Chipmunk – 1
9. California Bighorn Sheep – 8 close to Kamloops on the return trip

