

**Bella Coola Sept. 14-17, 2025
SD73 International Student
Program Trip Report**



Thirty students and several chaperones left Kamloops at 7:00am on September 14, 2025 and drove west to Bella Coola on the coast of British Columbia. This trip almost did not happen with the main road to Bella Coola closed up until less than 48 hours before we left due to a wildfire. We had originally planned to go Sept. 12-15 and moved it back two days in order to see if the road would be open. In the end, we made it to Bella Coola and enjoyed wonderful weather for the entire trip. With a washroom and grocery shop in William's Lake, we turned west on Highway 20 and completed the drive to Bella Coola. By 5:00pm were down the hill into the Bella Coola Valley and found a sow and second year cub Grizzly Bear feeding on salmon right beside the road. We then spent roughly an hour at the nearby Atnarko River Grizzly Bear Viewing Platform with no bears being seen. It was another hour west to the town of Bella Coola and we checked into our accommodations by 8:00pm and enjoyed some rest after a long day of travel.



The next day we had breakfast and left our accommodations at 8:30 and headed towards the ocean. Here, we saw many Harbour Seals laying out on the log booms there. We also enjoyed the scenery and adjacent Clayton Falls. After this we drove the short distance to the marina and ferry terminal and walked out on the public dock to enjoy the sights there.





We then had a break for lunch before meeting at 12:45pm for our guided tour of the giant cedar trees at Walker Island. Our local Nuxalk guide Ezra Mecham was fantastic and was able to add local knowledge to our walk, making it much more meaningful. Many of the giant Cedars in this area are more than 500 years old.



The next activity was fishing for salmon. The fishing wasn't that good but we did catch one Chum Salmon. The students enjoyed the sunshine, scenery, and a campfire for a couple of hours there.



Back at our accommodations we had a quick 30 minutes to prepare for our dinner of hot dogs over a campfire by the ocean. We left our accommodations at 6:15pm and drove the short distance to the ocean, took some cool sun set photos, and enjoyed hot dogs and smores over a campfire.





The next morning we met at 8:45am for our 9:00am guided petroglyph hike. Because of the size our group, we broke into two groups for this. One group was led by hereditary chief Noel Pootlass and the other was led by local guide Sheldon Tallio. The petroglyphs are ancient carvings in rock and considered a sacred site of the Nuxalk People. There was also a sweat lodge and other ritual locations nearby. The petroglyphs are a short board walk hike up and back and well worth a guided tour.





Our next activity was fish-cutting. We were able to see how the salmon is prepared, smoked, canned, BBQed, etc... There were samples of Chinook and Coho that disappeared quickly



After a break for lunch, we headed to the Elder's Centre for our next activity: using Devil's Club (plant) and beads to make necklaces and bracelets. This plant was and is used in a variety of ways by the Nuxalk People and several of these ways were explained and demonstrated for us. Barb and her team did an excellent job in leading our group in this activity.



Having only seen the two Grizzly Bears on the way in two days previous, we decided to dedicate that late afternoon and early evening to try to find more wildlife. We drove from our accommodations back to the Grizzly Bear viewing platform area and encountered a large Grizzly on the road just east of the platform. Unfortunately it moved off the road before quality photos could be taken due to a car coming the other way. We then turned around and decided to give the platform a try despite it only being open for 20 more minutes by then. On the way from the parking lot to the platform we could see a large grizzly Bear walking along the river in the direction of the platform. There had not been one seen that entire afternoon and we arrived right at the correct time! It fished and swam right in front of us for around 5-10 minutes before moving off downstream.



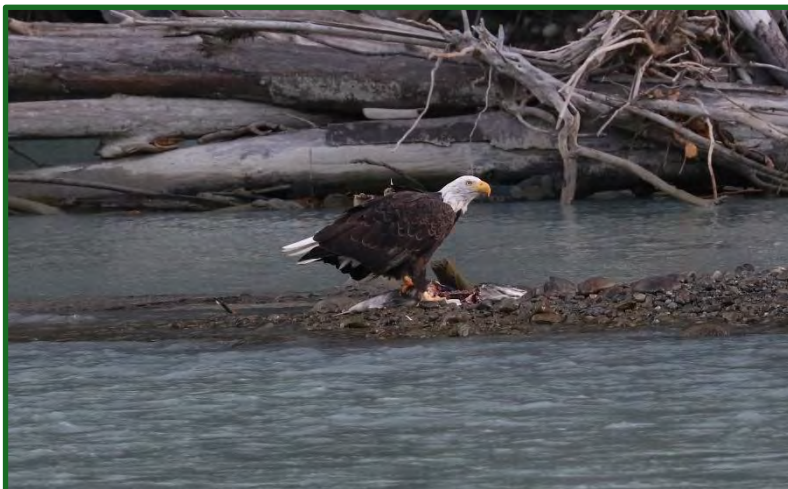


Andrew Andy, a Nuxalk resident of Bella Coola, was instrumental in setting up many aspects of this trip including the cultural components and accommodations, etc... He can be reached at cedarbowconsulting@gmail.com or 250-378-7823

Students on this trip were from: Germany, Brazil, and Belgium.

Trip Mammal List:

**Grizzly Bear – 4 White-tailed Deer – 2 Snowshoe Hare – 1
Black-tailed Mule Deer – 6 Muskrat – 3 Yellow-pine Chipmunk – 2
Mule Deer – 11 Red Squirrel – 2 Harbour Seal – 50**



My Favourite Moment:

1. Finn – When we dipped our head in the cold water because it was beautiful scenery and it cleared my head.
2. Tim – Dipping my head in the cold water because the feeling was good and he said it would clear your mind and get rid of the bad thoughts.
3. Julian – When we saw the bear at the viewing platform because I've never seen a bear before, especially that close and in the wild.
4. Frederik – When we arrived at the bear viewing platform and one showed up after one minute because I've never seen a bear so clearly, so big, and so near and it was my main reason to come on this trip.
5. Taro – When we saw the bear at the viewing platform because I will probably never see a bear that big again.
6. Kian – When we caught the salmon because it was the biggest fish I've ever seen caught.
7. Josefine – The campfire by the ocean because I like the vibe.
8. Jannik – The evening with the fire at the beach because it was really beautiful there.
9. Noah – The tour with the hereditary chief because I got to know the culture. I had no idea what it was before. I also liked when we went to the river because we had a cool moment fishing. I also like bear watching.
10. Lotta – The fire and the nights with my friends in the cabin because we laughed a lot and it was fun to spend time with everyone.
11. Luisa – the campfire by the ocean because you realize that you are in Bella Coola. I also liked the moment when we saw our first bears beside the road soon after arriving in the Bella Coola valley.
12. Ida – Fishing because I've never done that before.
13. Marie – When we saw the bear on the platform because it was fun to see how it was moving and minding its own business. I also liked the campfire because it was nice to talk with friends and see the stars. I also liked making myself a cup of tea and sitting on the deck and enjoying the silence and sound of nature each morning.
14. Sophia – the campfire by the ocean because it was nice to get to talk with the other people and get to know each other. I also really liked when we saw the bear at the bear platform because it is not something you do every day.
15. Anton – the campfire because you could just talk and socialize with people you've never met before.
16. Nathalie – Seeing the bear at the platform and also fishing because it was possible to take really pretty pictures there.
17. Nike – At the campfire because it was a great atmosphere and I really liked the nature there.
18. Marit – The campfire because I liked the atmosphere and the view.
19. Madeleine – The campfire because I got to know new people. It was a great moment to get to know each other. We also took pictures with friends there.
20. Lia – The campfire because we sang songs, ate smores, and looked at the sun set.
21. Leana – the campfire because it was fun sitting with everyone eating , drinking, and talking.
22. Philip – Seeing the bear at the platform because I've never seen a big Grizzly like this before.
23. Jaro – Seeing the bear at the platform because I've never seen a bear that close in the wild.
24. Jamie – Driving in the bus through the nice forest and seeing the bear on the bear viewing platform because it felt so unreal with the bear. I've always loved forests and mountains.
25. Nino – When we sat around the fire because it was fun to talk with others and I like to be outside in the dark.
26. Jonathan – sitting around the campfire and the whole evening because it was fun to talk with the other students and the hot dogs were very tasty.

27. Anna – When we saw the two Grizzly Bears on the first day because this is what I wanted to see and we saw a mother with a cub.
28. Summer – the campfire because it was beautiful.
29. Emily – That we watched Curious George every night to go to sleep.
30. Lara – Being able to meet the hereditary chief because it felt a bit like an honour.

One Thing I Learned:

1. Finn – The Indigenous population there was way bigger than I originally thought.
2. Tim – How the Indigenous chiefs made these challenges like an ice bath at 5am and how it can strengthen your mind and help you find your way in life.
3. Julian – How the Indigenous people prepare the salmon. It is different than my home country Germany.
4. Frederik – How organized the Indigenous people were with the head chief and everything like that.
5. Taro – How the indigenous people got planks of wood out of a giant cedar tree.
6. Kian – About the Devil's Club plant. It can protect you and heal you.
7. Josefina – The difference between Grizzly and Black Bears. Grizzly Bears are taller and more dangerous. Black Bears are smaller and they often have shorter hair.
8. Jannik – How advanced the Indigenous people actually were before colonization.
9. Noah – I learned about the history of the Nuxalk People and how they lived. I also learned how to fish for salmon.
10. Lotta – In nature there isn't wifi everywhere and you put your phone away and enjoy the time and might see things you will never see again.
11. Luisa – My parents were right, you don't need your phone. Enjoy and live in the moment!
12. Ida – On the petroglyph hike with the chief we learned about the Devil's Club plant and how it can be good for you.
13. Marie – How to involve myself better in a bigger group. At first I was a bit scared with so many people in a cabin but everyone was really nice and I got involved pretty easily.
14. Sophia – I learned the difference between a Black and Grizzly Bear and I learned how to fish.
15. Anton – There are really big trees in Canada and that there were tens of thousands of Indigenous people here.
16. Nathalie – I learned about the traditions and culture of the Nuxalk people. I liked the creation story.
17. Nike – I learned how to smoke salmon.
18. Marit – I learned to take care of myself like cooking on my own.
19. Madeleine – I learned about the Indigenous people's history from on the way there until the end. I didn't know much about it before and I really enjoyed the Indigenous guides. During the weaving activity I was able to talk with the three ladies helping us and I am really happy to discover this culture.
20. Lia – I learned about the Nuxalk culture. For example, how they took wood from the trees but didn't kill them.
21. Leana – I learned the history and traditions of the Nuxalk people. For example, I didn't know about long houses before. On the walk I learned how they used cedar trees.
22. Philip – How old cedar trees can get.
23. Jaro – That the Maori people and the Nuxalk had a common background and similar culture.
24. Jamie – A lot about the Indigenous People. For example how the language works and their rituals.
25. Nino – A lot about the culture of the Nuxalk people and the history. For example, how they lived in long houses and how their used to be a lot of them before colonization.
26. Jonathan – That the Maori and the First Nations crossed paths in the past.

27. Anna – How to fish.

28. Summer – How to fish.

29. Emily – How to fish and the differences between Black and Grizzly Bears.

30. Lara – That the Nuxalk Nation used to be a large civilization instead of a small tribe.

