



**Bella Coola Trip Sept. 20-23 SD73
International Student Program**



Twenty students plus chaperones left Kamloops at 7:00am Sept. 20, 2024. Our chartered bus turned west to Cache Creek, north to William's Lake, and then west again all the way to Bella Coola. We arrived at the Belarko Grizzly Bear Viewing Platform at 4:45pm after crossing the Chilcotin Plateau and descended the hill into the Bella Coola Valley. On the drive, we recorded 3 Black Bears, 1 Muskrat, 1 Yellow-pine Chipmunk, 1 Red Fox, 2 White-tailed Deer, and 2 Mule Deer. We saw loads of salmon but no Grizzly Bears at the wildlife platform during our 1 hour there. We then drove the last 45 minutes to Bella Coola and checked into our accommodations at the Cumbrian Inn and the Bella Coola Cabins. We then went to sleep early in preparation for the next day's activities.



A hungry student at a rest area



Part of "The Hill" down into the Bella Coola Valley



A Black Bear beside the road



Red Fox

The next morning we met at 8:30am and drove a short ways to our first activity, the petroglyph hike. Hereditary Chief Noel Pootlass guided our hike to see the ancient petroglyphs.



After the petroglyphs, we visited a place where fish cutting and preparation happens. Some smoked salmon was also served. One of the dogs at this location had puppies to hold as well.



Due to better weather than predicted, we snuck in a quick trip to the ocean before lunch. At the ocean, we saw Clayton Falls and some Harbour Seals. We did not have much time there before driving back to town for lunch.



After lunch we had a visit with master carver Alvin Mack. He spoke to us about Residential School trauma and showed us some of his carvings. Students were also able to use an elbow adze to try their hand at removing wood.





We then drove a short ways to Snootli Creek Regional Park where there are some giant old growth Cedar Trees.



Next, we drove to an area to check out where we planned to fish the next day. We planned to go back to the Grizzly Bear platform for dusk, but the bus ended up getting stuck which took some time to resolve. It was getting dark by the time we got out, so we went back to our accommodations for the night. The next morning, we left at 8:30 and headed back to the ocean. We saw some seals that were out of the water, but it was raining so hard that we ended up back in town and opted for a longer lunch break than planned. At 12:00pm we had our Nuxalk traditional cedar weaving activity with master weaver Barb. The students enjoyed making bracelets, head bands, and other items out of woven cedar bark. This is always such a fun activity for the students.





Due to the extreme rain in the area the previous day and night, the river where we were going to fish had risen steadily and was close to overflowing its banks. We made the decision that this would not be a safe activity so we switched to having a campfire by the ocean and roasting hot dogs and making smores. The rain stopped for this and the rising clouds revealed many waterfalls coming off the mountains around us.





We then drove the one hour to the Grizzly Bear viewing platform and saw a large male Grizzly catch a couple of salmon and eat them right in front of us. The Grizzlies were not moving around much due to a record salmon return in the area and were therefore more difficult to see on this trip. We were happy to finally see one on our last night.





The next day we left Bella Coola at 7:00am and went back up the hill to the Chilcotin Plateau and on to Kamloops. We were treated to gorgeous fall colours for the majority of the drive.

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: Switzerland, Germany, Taiwan, Italy, Mexico, and Spain.

Trip Mammal List:

**Grizzly Bear – 1 Black Bear – 3 White-tailed Deer – 2 Mule Deer – 2
Black-tailed Mule Deer – 9 Muskrat – 1 Yellow-pine Chipmunk – 2
Red Squirrel – 2 Red Fox – 1 Coyote – 1 Harbour Seal – 36**

Favourite Moment

- Diego – When we saw the petroglyphs because I really like the history of the people who were first in the land.
- Hector – When we saw the Grizzly Bear because I have never seen one before. I also liked the campfire by the ocean because it was like the movies for me.
- Alejandro – When we went to the forest and saw the petroglyphs because I've never seen something like that before.
- Markel – When we saw the Grizzly Bear in the river because it was very beautiful and I've never seen and Grizzly Bear before.
- Anna – Going to see the petroglyphs because it is impressive to think that they are so old.
- Marlene Goepfert – When we saw the Grizzly Bear because it was a very rare moment for me.
- Nelly – The first time we went to the ocean because of the beautiful landscapes and waterfalls.
- Marlene Grahmann – When we saw the Grizzly Bear because it was my biggest wish to see one when I went to Canada.
- Matteo M – Cedar bark weaving because I liked to learn how they can make whatever they want with tree bark.
- Sebastian – Playing pool with the guys because it was a good way to get to know each other.
- Ilaria – Making the cedar bark bracelet because we learned about the indigenous culture in this activity.
- Eugenia – When we were playing pool because I met new people while having a good time there.
- Aurora – When we went to the restaurant in Bella Coola because the atmosphere reminded me of my home in Italy.
- Cassandra – When we saw how they prepare salmon and we ate salmon together.
- Emma – At the carving place because we learned that they used masks and totem poles to tell stories to their children.
- Filippo – When we saw the Grizzly Bear because I've never seen a bear before.
- Judit – When we went to the woods to see the large cedar trees because it looked like a fairy tale.
- Matteo A – Seeing the Grizzly Bear because it was different than what I was expecting. I thought they were very aggressive.
- Michele – Seeing the Grizzly Bear because I've never seen a bear before. It was my first time and I was a little bit scared of it but it did not really notice us much.
- Federico – The story of the carver because I saw his passion in his work and how to give the new generation his culture.

One Thing I Learned

Diego – Grizzly Bear have a hump on their shoulders and Black Bears don't.

Hector – A lot about the Indigenous People in Bella Coola because I did not anything about this before.

Alejandro – The creation story of the Nuxalk People: The story they told us about the Raven when he asked if he could borrow the shiny ball which turned out to be the sun.

Markel – The history of the Indigenous People of Bella Coola.

Anna – About Residential Schools and how bad that situation was for their culture.

Marlene Goepfert – More about the traditional indigenous way of life and how they respect nature.

Nelly – More about the indigenous people and their traditions but also the problems they still have to deal with.

Marlene Grahmann – That the one indigenous man would not carve wood again until his friend was out of the hospital to not put bad energy into the totem pole.

Matteo M – Grizzly Bears can be really cute but they can also be very dangerous, so we have to pay attention when we see them.

Sebastian – If there is a lot of salmon the bears only move at nighttime.

Ilaria – We should appreciate and respect nature more.

Eugenia – That you can make candied salmon.

Aurora – The great sense of culture and community in Bella Coola because they have a strong culture that we don't have anymore.

Cassandra – Also to see the positive aspects of things even if the weather is bad.

Emma – How to watch Grizzly Bears. Stay quiet and stay in a group.

Filippo – How the people in Bella Coola prepare salmon.

Judit – The history about Residential Schools: what happened in those schools and the terrible costs.

Matteo A – The process of using salmon and exchanging it for other things.

Michele – Recovering a culture is difficult once it is lost and also how to share a culture.

Federico – Even if you get very unlucky there are always ways to get in a better situation.