



**Bella Coola Trip September 22-25,
2023**
SD73 International Student Program



Twenty students and 4 chaperones left Kamloops at 7:00am on Friday Sept. 22 and drove the 9 hours to Bella Coola. We stopped for groceries in Williams Lake and at a rest area near Tatla Lake. The last part of Highway 20 into the Bella Coola River Valley is a hill that will leave a lasting impression on those who venture down it. The road drops 1500m in elevation in 20 minutes from the Chilcotin Plateau to sea level. Once on the valley floor, we drove the short distance to the Belarko Wildlife Viewing Platform and saw our first distant Grizzly Bear within 10 minutes of arriving. Some time later, another Grizzly was spotted upriver and ended up slowly travelling right past the platform to the joy of the people assembled there. It lingered in the area, eating a few salmon directly in front of us. Very satisfied with that encounter, we drove the last 45 minutes west to Bella Coola and checked into our cabins, ate, and hung out.





We were up and on the road by 8:20 the next morning for our guided petroglyph hike with Noel Pootlass who is a Nuxhalk Hereditary Chief in the area. These petroglyphs are ancient and we enjoyed the beautiful temperate rainforest they are in as well. Chief Noel explained the meaning of the petroglyphs and spoke about many other aspects of Nuxhalk history and culture during our hike.



We went directly from the petroglyphs to a fish-cutting location where the students were able to see and assist with Nuxhalk salmon preparation. The Bella Coola Valley is extremely blessed with an abundance of salmon and this was on full display at this location. We were also served some smoked salmon here.



After fish-cutting, we had 2 hours for lunch and shopping for groceries and/or souvenirs before meeting at the home of Nuxhalk master carver Alvin Mack. Alvin showed us some art he's working on but also spoke to us about some of the history of the Nuxhalk people. He spoke about the effects of residential schools and how this trauma will take time to recover from as a community. He was also able to share some positive recent events happening in the area. Students were then given a demonstration of how to use an elbow adze and took turns working on a block of Red Cedar.

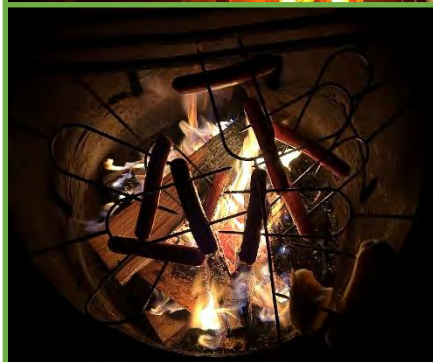


Next, we had a brief stop at the cabins to get ready for our ocean visit. Bella Coola is located at the end of a fjord where the ocean stretches quite a ways into the land. We encountered Bald Eagles, Bonaparte's Gulls, Harbour Seals, and even a few distant Harbour Porpoise there. We also visited Clayton Falls in that area.





After the ocean, we had some time back at the cabins during a rainstorm before returning to the ocean for hot dogs and s'mores over a campfire. Two Red Foxes were seen in the area during our time there.



The next morning we left the cabins at 7:30am and drove back towards the bear viewing platform. After spotting a few bears downstream, we saw one coming in our direction from upstream. This Grizzly put on a show by slowly passing us and then turning around and passing us in the other direction. It fed on several salmon right in front of us. Some people there pay for private float tours that drift through the area where the Grizzly Bears feed. We also spotted two Mountain Goats from the platform in between bears. On the way back to Bella Coola, we stopped at Stupendous Viewpoint and enjoyed the views as the sky cleared. We then had 1.5 hours for lunch.





We met in the basement of a church at 1:30pm for our cedar bark weaving session with master weaver Barb. Barb and her helpers had prepared cedar bark starting several days before in order for us to have our weaving session with her. Students could make bracelets, reindeer, and/or hearts. The Nuxhalk people have used woven cedar bark for centuries for everything from baskets to clothes. We spent two fantastic hours weaving. Some of the finished products below.





After weaving, we were served deer of salmon stew/soup in the church basement. Both were delicious. We then had a short discussion before deciding to try to fit fishing and another campfire into the evening. The fishing hasn't been that good at the spot we usually go because of low water in the Bella Coola River but we decided to try anyway. In the end, one student caught a nice sea-run Cutthroat Trout which we released. The area by the river is a great place to hang out, even if the salmon weren't holding where they usually are. The weather was perfect.



One last campfire to finish off the hot dogs and s'mores.



The next morning we left the cabins at 8:00ish and drove the 9 hours back to Kamloops with several stops for washrooms and food. We enjoyed beautiful fall colours for most of the drive.



Students on this trip were from: Italy – 5, Belgium – 3, Germany – 6, Brazil – 4, France – 1, and Sweden – 1

Mammal List:

Grizzly Bear – 6

Black Bear – 1

Coyote – 1

Harbour Porpoise – 2

Yellow-pine Chipmunk – 5-10

Red Squirrel – abundant

Red Fox – 3

Mountain Goat – 2

Black-tailed Mule Deer – 6

Mule Deer – 2

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

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Favourite Moment:

Matteo – The first campfire because it was a fun moment to sit with friends and see two foxes.

Gabriela – The last campfire because it was nice to talk with friends and the food was really good.

Sofia – the campfires and fishing because I had a nice time with everyone at those places.

Anne – The first campfire because it was with my new friends and we made smores. I also liked that we saw bears so close two times.

Ann-Kathrin – I loved the campfires and seeing bears so near. The scenery was beautiful.

Lilly – The first time we saw a Grizzly Bear and the second campfire because I've never seen a bear before and we ate marshmallows and hung out with friends.

Vito – When we were in the kitchen and all of us started singing an Italian traditional song.

Sam – When we saw the Grizzly Bear fishing. I won't see this any other time in my life.

Erich – Seeing the Grizzly Bear because it was very impressive to see such a majestic animal so near.

Mariano – the hiking to see the petroglyphs because of the lessons they taught us.

Alessandro – At the fish cutting because I love cooking and I loved seeing the people there preparing the salmon.

Oscar – When we observed the Grizzly Bear because it was a connection with wildlife.

Leonardo – Cedar bark weaving because I learned something that I didn't know before and didn't expect to find there.

Jette – I met so many new people and learned something about culture and the nature in Canada.

Lesly – I liked lots of the activities because I saw a lot of new things I had never seen before. I also met a lot of new people.

Anna – Cabin times in the evening with friends and being on our own.

Juni – Watching the bears because we were able to take nice pictures to remember the moment. It was nice to hear the fish bones cracking in the bear's mouth.

Valentina – Seeing the bears because it was the first time I've seen them in nature. I've seen them in zoos but never free.

Linda – The second campfire because it did not rain and because we had time to hang out and cook together.

Annalori – Watching the bears and campfire but also all the moments when we were with the indigenous people and they were explaining a lot about their culture, traditions, and activities.

One thing I learned:

Matteo – to be open minded about other cultures.

Gabriela – how to act when you see dangerous bears and also things about the indigenous culture.

Sofia – A lot about First Nations. How they treat nature and can get everything from nature.

Anne – That culture is very important for the people in Bella Coola and they are very proud that they have traditions like that.

Ann-Kathrin – some indigenous people can get over the past and want to teach non-indigenous people their culture.

Lilly – The traditions from the Nuxalk culture. The tradition where they go into sweat lodges and that they are proud of their culture.

Vito – About residential schools. I didn't know that the Canadian government put the young children in schools to make them change their culture.

Sam – How to cut smoke salmon like the Nuxhalk people.

Erich – I got a new perspective for the beauty of nature.

Mariano – To have a healthy bod we need to have a healthy mind.

Alessandro – How to make a campfire.

Oscar – The lifestyle, culture, and spirituality of one of the First Nations of Canada.

Leonardo – The fact that the First Nations issues with the rest of Canada are still not solved today. There is still much more that we can and should do to solve this.

Jette – How to take care of yourself in the forest because of bears.

Lesly – A lot of things about the First Nations people in Bella Coola such as the troubled history with the rest of Canada and how they have tried to solve the problems.

Anna – The Indigenous story such as residential schools.

Juni – It will take 7 generations to recover from the white people's influence of residential schools.

Valentina – About the residential schools and what happened there.

Linda – How the residential schools traumatized the kids and how they affected the next generations of indigenous people.

Annalori – That culture and traditions are very important. It's important to know the past of our culture and I learned that these people are still learning about their past and applying this to their future.