

Knight Inlet 2012

Time froze. I could not breathe. They emerged from the shadows into the sunlight, the last raindrops from the recent storm glistening on their coats. They moved as one, silently, cautiously, so closely choreographed that no space could be detected between them. She was alert, there were after all others around and that meant danger. Even so, she proceeded with her mission. Their young lives depended on it

3 days earlier –

It was my first experience on a float plane. One word – “cool”. Somehow I found myself in the co pilot seat, terrified I might accidently touch something that would send the plane spiraling out of control and praying the pilot would be able to complete the flight uneventfully on his own. Alternately skimming the tree tops and the water we flew through the cloud enshrouded mountains toward our destination. The scenery below was spectacular. The anticipation built as time and the miles flew by. Before I knew it, the pilot was executing the smoothest landing I had ever experienced in a plane.



We were greeted by a friendly group of guides ready to outfit us from head to toe in warm, comfortable rain gear including coats that doubled as flotation devices. In less than an hour we were on our way to the estuary on a pontoon boat and shortly thereafter, our first bear sighting.



Three year old siblings Thor and Freya were playing in the sedge grass. Mom had likely sent them on their way in the spring and although they would probably den together this winter they would separate in the spring. We would soon see many more bears on this trip as well as seals, otters, eagles, heron, ducks, and of course lots of salmon known as “pinks”. Throughout our time in Knight Inlet the guides shared a seemingly limitless knowledge on all aspects of the environment– a priceless education for those wanting to learn.



After lunch we made our first trip into the rainforest to the bear stands. The air was unbelievably clear after the rainstorm – I never realized how many shades of green exist. Ferns blanketed the forest floor, evergreens rose hundreds of feet into the air. We traveled slowly along an old logging trail, ever watchful for wildlife. Bears awaited us at the stands but ignored us completely as they focused on fishing. That day we would see two females with cubs, and countless single bears in and along the channel. Surprisingly they did not seem to mind the close proximity of each other, or us. Ever respectful that this was their home we were careful not to intrude.



After a short break with hot cocoa and sweet treats we were off again. Throughout our stay there were so many choices for activities – hikes along the cedar trail, tracking on the bear trails, an inlet cruise to waterfalls, whale watching and more. There was so much to do, and so little time to do it. I chose bears, bears, bears and more bears. I wanted to see, do and learn all that I could about these magnificent creatures and their world. I walked along a stomp trail, sat in a bear bed, and touched a rubbing tree covered in claw marks reaching far above my head.



.... And watched a pair of twins (likely less than six months old and known as “c.o.y.” or “cubs of the year”) learn to fish from their mother. The young mother and her cubs approached the channel tentatively. She led them to the edge of the water, tucking them into a secure niche in the bank and stepped into the water keeping herself between her cubs and the other bears. She proceeded to catch fish and take them to the cubs, allowing them to eat their fill before eating herself. Imitating her every move the cubs finally gained the confidence to venture into the water.



After a few “one that got away” experiences the cubs perfected their technique and each landed “the big one”.



Although the cubs will spend at least another two years with their mother, she successfully completed the day’s mission to teach her cubs to fish. Sadly, my trip was drawing to a close. This was the perfect ending though because I expect to return and hope to see these two fur-balls grow and eventually raise their own cubs.

Knight Inlet, the longest fjord in British Columbia, is located 50 miles (by air) north of Campbell River. Knight Inlet Lodge is nestled about 40 miles from the mouth of the inlet in Glendale Cove and is home to one of the largest concentrations of grizzly bears in British Columbia. Two weeks before my trip, Knight Inlet Lodge was destroyed by fire. Amazingly the lodge team had alternative arrangements for guests in place within twenty four hours and I was able to go ahead with my travel plans. Not only did I want to see the bears, I now wanted to meet the people that could still make that possible after experiencing such a disaster. The trip itself was more than I could have ever hoped for. Sure, I was sorry not to be able to stay at the lodge but I had not planned to spend much time in it anyway. I wanted to experience

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and learn about the rainforest and its inhabitants, specifically the bears. And I did, thanks to an incredible team I will always think of as my Knight Inlet family and the bears of the magical rainforest wilderness in British Columbia.

<http://www.grizzlytours.com/stop-the-grizzly-hunt.php>

<http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/trophyhunt.html>