

I'll start this, as usual, with news of my favorite rodents. Winter 2016 porcupine activity was unfortunately sparse. At least two porcupines visited through the first week of February (one brown and one yellow), but no individuals could be identified. The winter was ridiculously mild, so I hoped that alternate food sources were more readily available. Discouraging was the discovery of a full porcupine skeleton on the hillside just a few feet behind the house beneath one of their climbing trees.

Overall, it was a challenging winter/spring for me. In addition to continuing Tlingit language class on Mondays and Wednesdays, I bit the bullet and signed up for dance lessons on Tuesdays. My wonderful instructor from my very first dance lessons (in 8th grade) was teaching a waltz and swing class at the university and I couldn't possibly pass that up. I managed to talk my favorite dance partner into joining me. So I was out of the house Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays at the university, which was thoroughly exhausting, if enriching. I also continued my historical research and finally began to work with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) archaeologist about the Tlingit village that I'd located up the Taku. I put together a powerpoint presentation and gave it first to a joint USFS-Douglas Indian Association (DIA) meeting and then to most of the DIA tribal council, an enormous honor and privilege.

In late February, Chris and I took a short road trip down the coast in the ChevyLUV, breezing through Portland and from there to the coast. Oregon was bleak and wet, but we had dinner when we hit the coast and then rolled into a nice campground Chris had found not far down the road and a short walk from the coast. I was happy enough to escape Oregon the next day, leaving behind the damp and driving slowly into spring. Northern California was just as beautiful as everyone claimed. It took us a bit of backtracking and an unhelpful convenience store clerk to find our way in the dark to a USFS campground in one of the few remaining pockets of old growth redwoods for the second night, but it was worth it. We pitched the tent in the dark and ate snacks from the store for dinner. As I was drifting off to sleep, Chris woke me to ask about a sound he'd heard. An owl repeated its call not far away several more times: who-who-who-whoooooo..... who-who-who-whoooooo..... A barred owl. How cool.

In the morning, the sun shone through the redwoods as we strolled around the campground. After tea, we took off down the highway and made a detour to drive through the famous gutted redwood (still alive!), well worth the time and \$5. Shortly thereafter we left the mountains and descended into vineyards and rolling countryside, stopped at a charming town for an amazing outdoor lunch, then drove down over the Golden Gate Bridge and onto Big Sur, which became a terrifying and stunning drive. We weren't making very good time, so we gave up on a nice dinner and were just happy to roll into a public camp site after dark. The camp attendant suggested where to find the best campsite—rarely unoccupied—and we climbed up the side of the gorge to a terrace overlooking a pocket beach beneath a bridge. It was a spectacular site; we bought firewood and lingered outside around a campfire, then listened to the surf all night from the tent. The next morning we found a young fur seal stranded on the beach and alerted the authorities, but it managed to make its way back to sea through the surf before it was picked up.

The trip got more complicated after that and we had to abandon the ChevyLUV somewhat north of LA to await a new brake system which had failed just outside a convenient city. We rented a car for the rest of the drive, overnighted with Jason and Margaret, and the next day I flew to

Seattle for a work conference. My mother joined me there and we made a shopping expedition downtown for clothing. The best part was drinking the last of our small bottles of wine out of bags in the lobby of the hotel as we waited for a taxi to take us to the airport.

For the second year in a row, we barely had a winter. There was not a single drive to the university that involved snow. I started walking barefoot again some time in February, taking breaks here and there in freezing weather and the occasional snow flurry. I easily could have begun trips to Snettisham in March, but the Ronquil had overwintered again at the shop awaiting service on both engines (not to mention the constraints of my rigorous schedule). I became increasingly antsy with my mechanic as March turned into April and the hooligan season approached, and then passed. I even began to beg, but it wasn't until May that the Ronquil was returned to me with two functional engines (water had penetrated both systems).

Then began a trend which was to haunt me the rest of the season: wind. I was weathered into town on the weekends I was free, admittedly choosing to remain in town on other occasions, mostly dances (which had become an increasing priority over the winter and are scarce in the summer). With every passing week, my anxiety mounted until I finally fled south for one night on a Wednesday late in May and opened the place up. By then I was filled to the brim with stress and anxiety. On top of my exhausting schedule, frustration over the engines, and the waning spring without homestead trips, I was also helping Chris prepare to leave Juneau. As every Juneauite and former Juneauite knows, Juneau is not for everyone, and Chris and I had known for a long time that it wasn't for him. After several exploratory trips, he finally settled on Los Angeles as the next step and was invited to stay with his good friends there until he found a place of his own. I came back from that first trip to Snettisham and spent the afternoon packing boxes for Chris and trying not to think about it. On Friday we stacked everything on a pallet at Alaska Marine Lines and sent it on its way. On Saturday we dropped off Chris's Taurus to be junked (it had irreparable engine damage), and that evening I took him to the airport.

And that's how summer started. Not surprisingly, it was, overall, difficult and not very productive. The next weekend I spent at Snettisham, mostly reading, then helped my parents open up the Taku cabin the weekend after that. I spent a second weekend at Snettisham a few weeks later and then managed six days late in June/early July. While at Snettisham, I felt serenity and a bit of peace and spent a lot of time reading on the porch. But when I returned to town, my spirits would quickly begin to sink, as they disappointingly did upon returning from my six day sojourn on the morning of July 3, timed so I could catch the pre-fireworks contra dance. I neither saw the main fireworks display that night nor drug myself out to the parade the next morning as planned. I was a sorry sight.

But I quickly learned, as anyone will tell you, that socializing and contributing to the community are balms for the soul. I sought out the occasional friend and began looking for new experiences to break me out of my shell, forcing myself to meet new people and try new things. To that end I attended a couple of west coast swing classes taught on Thursday evenings. The first two that I went to, both in July I think, were on such sunny evenings that the venue was switched from a bar to Marine Park (a public area near the waterfront). It was not only a dance style that is uncomfortably spontaneous for me, but there I was learning it outside in front of one group of

tourists after another. But it made me feel better, I did meet new people, and, although I fled home before the post-class “dance party” began, I was proud of myself.

I also had the honor of guiding USFS and DIA personnel to the Tlingit village site on the Taku in June. We flew to the lodge, chatted with Mike Ward, then walked two and a half miles down the road until I broke from the path and led them through what I believe is the shortest route through the brush that surrounds the village site. We ate lunch under the canopy of the spruce trees along the river, then spent three hours surveying all the artifacts I knew of as well as several new ones we stumbled onto. The USFS archaeologists could not verify that the site had once had houses, though some of the artifacts suggested it was used as more than a summer fishing camp. A more thorough survey in the spring would help clarify the matter without all the dense devil’s club and other underbrush, but none is planned. From there we walked down through Bullard’s Landing and, because the pilot didn’t think his beaver could pick us up there, we bushwhacked all the way down to the slough. It was certainly one of the highlights of my anthropological “career.”

So that was a high point in June, but I was feeling generally rather alone in Juneau, so I bought a ticket for Rory to come up in July. We spent a weekend at Snettisham catching up and talking about our mutual spiritual and existential crises. After that I had two more weekends of friends at Snettisham planned, but both were foiled by strong southeasterlies. I did get one adventure in during that time: a trip up the Taku with my mother and my Aunt Vicki. Our main expedition was a canoe ride through the slough up to the first big beaver dam. Our mid-week trip was timed to bring me back for another dance event out of my comfort zone, a camping weekend at “Camp Damp,” Juneau’s small contra dance weekend. I could hardly have had a better time. Wonderful people, excellent band (I learned how much a good band heightens enjoyment), lots of fun workshops, camping, and tons of dancing. I even made a camp friend! More dance camps are definitely in my future.

Unfortunately, three consecutive weekends in town meant that I had been absent from Snettisham for a solid month, most of high summer. I finally made it back the second weekend in August and brought Sally along. Or rather, Sally brought me along. All summer my engine had been running a little funny, slow to speed up and burning a lot of fuel. I was beginning to be concerned about its reliability and I wanted an engine I could rely on, especially as I couldn’t imagine myself ever parting with the Ronquil even though I keep telling myself to look into larger boats. I finally bit the bullet and purchased a brand new 4-stroke Yamaha 70 hp outboard. It is marvelous. I ran it for about four hours in the channel before that trip and couldn’t believe how powerful it was (I felt like I was in a jet plane about to take off, a little out of control), and how quiet it was, soft like a little kitten purring in the background pushing me along. A wonderful machine.

Unfortunately, that trip to Snettisham was the last trip Sally made this summer, so I didn’t even manage to finish breaking it in. The next weekend strong Taku winds kept the Ronquil in town and I was lucky to be able to borrow my parent’s boat to take Ezra to Snettisham for a few days. The next weekend those same Takus persisted and I again borrowed the Kathy M to take Katie and Rob to Snettisham. I am surely grateful for the opportunities to borrow that boat, but it was frustrating to leave the Ronquil behind so often. Katie and Rob and I launched a proper Sweetheart Creek expedition from the homestead, to no avail. It was eye-opening to see how run

timing can change so dramatically between years. I should have gone over there on my trip earlier in August, but I was pretty low energy that weekend and it had been raining aggressively all week, so I thought there was a good chance that fishing would be impossible in flood conditions. Last summer I'd had success both the third weekend in August and the first weekend in September, so I thought we might have luck this year in the fourth weekend in August, right between the two. No such luck. Rob and I fished from the usual point for about half an hour and caught only a handful of pinks. We could see sockeyes trying to jump the barrier falls, so we hiked to the upper pool and found it packed with lively, silver-bright fish. But nowhere was it fishable. Rob headed down the creek to ford it and try fishing from the opposite side where we could see most of the jumping, but a brown bear showed up across the way and the attempt was abandoned. But it was a gorgeous day on the creek with friends.

A few days later, I headed out on another unexpected adventure. Some friends of Ezra's needed a third boat captain to take some rental boats to Angoon for an Animal Planet brown bear shoot, so I wound up piloting a 22' Hewescraft from Auke Bay to Angoon! We encountered the smoothest water I'd seen all summer, and that in Lynn Canal. It was a spectacularly beautiful day. After winding our way through the harrowing straits outside of Angoon, we wandered around town a little and then all climbed into one boat for a short trip to Tenakee where Ezra and I jumped off at his parent's place several miles from town. He showed me around his childhood home and we spent the evening with his parents, then got up early to skiff it to Tenakee town. Ezra stayed on and I flew back to Juneau on Alaska Seaplanes where I met up with my mother and cousin Jeannette with her two kids at the airport, having just flown in from Fairbanks. I had enough time at home for a shower and lunch before we all piled into cars and headed back out to the airport to board a helicopter for the Taku. The six of us (my parents, Jeannette, the two kids, and myself) arrived to a cabin already full of my brother's family. The ten of us squished into the living room for the evening, then spread out again as Mike's family left the next morning for a deadhead from the lodge after a breakfast of wild blueberry pancakes.

My mother, Jeannette, the kids and I walked to the slough on Sunday for a paddle back to the mountain. Earlier in the summer, my mother and I had brought the canoe into the slough and left it there for quicker slough access. It was a brilliant plan and I've used it on every trip since. The kids were antsy by the time we hit the mountain, so we came ashore and climbed up onto the smooth terraced licheny ledges until we had a commanding view of the valley. Gorgeous. The next day we cut and tied trees falling along the riverbank near the cabin to help stabilize the bank (we lost about 15 feet of riverbank this summer) and walked upriver in the rain before the helicopter came and took us back to town.

My next trip was also up the Taku, timed for schedules and tides on the one weekend I could bring Katie and Rob along. Although the weather wasn't ideal, I thought that it was reasonable to take the Ronquil out again and was excited to give Sally another run. Because it hadn't been run in so long, I checked on it after work on Thursday in a rainy gale; everything ran well and, because I was heading out the next day at noon, I thought it surely wouldn't hurt to leave the key in the boat this one time. I mean, it was just overnight, and in a storm that no one in their right mind would venture out in! I didn't leave it in the ignition, mind you, but in an innocuous little plastic tub (one of several) in the glove box where I store some firestarters and other value-less odds and ends. It was just one night. When we arrived the next day, I was slightly alarmed to see

the cover on the battery case was askew. I turned to the glove box for the key and discovered that all the little tubs were gone. Someone had pilfered the boat and taken the key, probably without knowing it. I was numb. Thankfully, there was the Kathy M, ready and able to take up the slack again. We took the Ronquil's battery with us to make it harder for someone to steal my boat, called the police and the harbor master from the fuel dock, and headed down the channel, hoping the Ronquil would be there when we returned. As soon as we arrived and opened up the cabin, we took a walk upriver and wound up unexpectedly strolling all the way to the lodge (my last big barefoot trip of the summer) where I got to show Katie and Rob my childhood home.

It rained the rest of the weekend, but the next day we had an epic canoe adventure in the downpour, winding our way through the meadow and over numberless beaver dams to reach the headwaters behind the lodge. There we encountered our dragons—two gorgeous trumpeter swans—and their tiny cousin, a long, shudder-worthy leech that was exploring Katie's boot. The next day we made a long tramp through the meadow, alive with voles; in some places we could spend minutes watching non-stop action all around our feet. Cailey caught at least two, and let Hank eat both of them, and Hank caught at least one on his own. The two dogs firmed up a bond that had been growing all summer.

After that I made a short trip to the Kenai for work and had the chance to fish the Kenai River for the first time. Although I never got a strike, the young lady we were hosting from NOAA who did catch a coho had no practical way to transport it, and gave it to me. It was a delicious boon to my freezer, otherwise fishless. Without Chris, I did not make a trip to Pavlof Harbor for cohos for the first time in seven years, and I never caught a sockeye at Sweetheart Creek. My last chance (and it was a good one) was for fall cohos at Sheep Creek, but I had no will or energy when I had time to take myself down there during the run. I am sad that I didn't fish—both for the lack of flesh and the lack of that Southeast Alaska salmon connection I am accustomed to enjoying—but the generosity of my boss in unexpectedly sharing his coho and halibut has helped immensely. Surely next summer will be different.

Taku winds began blowing again towards the end of September and I spent the night of the 30th on an introspective solo camping trip around the back side of Douglas Island. The northern lights had been spectacular earlier in the week and I had grand plans to hike back to the car (only 15 minutes away) and drive to the other side of the island to view them after dark. As it happened, I spent the afternoon on the beach watching a humpback whale breach endlessly as it slowly moved its way north through and beyond the brilliant yellow streak of the setting sun reflecting off Stephen's Passage. A brisk little fire kept me warm for the next couple of hours as I contemplated my existence and, after that, I just sat on the beach and watched the stars until Cailey's chilliness convinced me to retreat inside my tent.

After that the sky stayed clear and the winds blew relentlessly for over two weeks when it should have been wet and storming. I managed to sneak down to Snettisham in the Kathy M during a one-day break in the winds and spent a quiet week there mid-October. Each day I checked the forecast and each day the north winds were expected to persist further into the future. On the seventh day, a blizzard came in and I enjoyed a white-out snowy day, my first at Snettisham (it was an early snow for us). I left the next day and, not unexpectedly, was unable to pass Taku Inlet for the seas; somewhat pleased, I sheltered in Taku Harbor for the night and camped on the

boat. There was a foot of snow everywhere. I'd brought along my little propane heater, food and water, my sleeping bag, and a camp stove, so I was prepared for the night. I had a beer and jiffy pop popcorn for dinner while watching a Longmire episode on my laptop, followed by a cozy night of sleep. It was perfection. In the morning, I found that the promised southeastly system had failed to show up (again) and I barely made it across Taku Inlet for the winds. It was October 17.

As for progress at the homestead, there wasn't very much of it. My only major accomplishment was finishing staining the insides of the cabins, so the interior of all four have two coats on them. I also made a few minor improvements such as the installation of curtain hooks and the repair of the lodge outhouse floor which had rotted through. All in all, I made it up the Taku six times, mostly to enjoy the land without contributing very much to the property. All the trails are overgrown and need maintenance. But, I canoed in the sloughs often, tramped around, watched birds, and did some minimal berry picking, all I could bring myself to accomplish.

So it was a strange summer, and not what I expected. I did fulfill one goal which pleased me, though—I hiked. I went up Dan Moller, East Glacier, Thunder Mountain, Mt. Juneau, and Mt. Jumbo (Dan Moller and Thunder I did barefoot). At Snettisham, I hiked to the ridge behind the lodge, rewarded for the hellish climb through deadfalls and devil's club with spectacular views out the Port and to both sides. While for most Juneauites that's not a very impressive list for a summer, it's about five times as many hikes as I normally do these days. My perfect summer day took place on one windy weekend while weathered in town: I hiked Thunder Mountain in the morning (less than three hours round-trip), stopped by a friend's place, read in the nook, practiced swing dancing outside at Diamond Park, went to dinner with my family, and crashed in the evening with Doctor Who. So, there were surprisingly wonderful times as well. I went barefoot often and toughened my feet more than I ever have before.

The weekend after I returned from closing Snettisham, I had the honor of officiating at a very private wedding ceremony on a beach on north Douglas. Katie and Rob's wonderful, simple wedding was attended by myself, Myron and Faith (witnesses), tiny Jet (ring-bearer), and Cailey and Hank on an lovely October day at possibly the only place near downtown Juneau that wasn't raining. It was beautiful and a privilege to take part in.

My red-tailed hawk passed away unexpectedly mid-summer while sitting on a perch in the morning sunshine. Her necropsy was inconclusive, and she appeared to have died peacefully. For me it's the end of an era, as I've cared for and been Monalisa's primary handler (taking her into the public for educational programs) for about ten years. I am left with Bebop, the Steller's jay, happily retired in my garage and I still occasionally get birds to rehabilitate, include a drake mallard currently in hand that landed with some injuries in a soccer field. He is living in Mona's mew and will be released the first of the year when hunting season closes.

Cailey's skills and motivation as a hunter came to the fore this summer. She started the season by taking down a huge, old male mink during my first trip to Snettisham (yes, I kept the pelt and the skull). Later in the summer she killed a marmot during our lunch time walk, which resulted in a very tender marmot stew. During the last trip to Snettisham, a mink was making regular trips around the lodge until he (apparently) fought with Cailey. I was inside a cabin staining when it

happened, returning to find scratches and puncture wounds on Cailey's snout, blood on her cheek and chest, and a musky smell on her fur. I found no carcass, so hope that the mink escaped. And, of course, she had some success in hunting voles up the Taku. She was a big help in my expanding collection of skulls.

With fall not starting until it was basically winter (mid-October), my normal household chores lingered into late December. All in all, I'm enjoying getting to know Debbie's "new world order" as I've taken to calling it and can't wait to see what a chore-free January looks like. Craig moved in on December 17, so I have a roommate again. I've been dancing a lot and attending more concerts and events than usual. Both the Tlingit language class and ballroom dance class I signed up for this fall were canceled for lack of interest, but I've started going back to the Tlingit language learner's group at the library. And, for the first time, I'm really enjoying the Advent season. One of the best moments this fall was the arrival of Lucy at the feeder one evening in late November, an unexpected joy that resulted in "Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!" exclaimed out loud and written in the porcupine log book. I've begun calling him Lucius here and there, as his large size and Oscar-like snout suggest that he is probably male. He's less frenetic than he used to be (now three and a half years old) and I was able to pet him just as thoroughly as I used to pet Squeak when he was eating seed from the doorway. Thank goodness for porcupine friends! And so we start another year, with much promise ahead.