



The *Ronquil* at anchor, Snettisham homestead

Snettisham 2008 – 10: Bear Proof Box II August 30-September 1

Work brought Chris back to town for the week so we had the unexpected opportunity for one more summer adventure. We took off Saturday morning around 10:30 on a flat calm ocean—so flat that I indulged a little and took us around the back side of Grand Island (I call it the “scenic route” because the cliffs are so pretty back there). In truth, I was also looking for orcas, (it was nearly September) but in the end we didn’t find anything particularly interesting—except a log! I was going along as usual and suddenly out of nowhere this 10” log shows up 10 feet in front of me, barely breaking the surface. I did a crazy dramatic turn to the left and immediately stopped to check the propeller. I’m not sure if the impact I felt was the log hitting the side of the boat or just my imagination, but it apparently didn’t hit the engine. Phew! It started raining heavily about that time (which didn’t help the visibility) and we made good use of the squeegee that Ashleigh and Nick gave me after their trip to Snettisham two weeks before.



Lumber from the murrelet camp

We arrived at a highish tide, unloaded, anchored the boat and lit a fire. We were both hungry but before we did anything I replaced the plumber’s putty around the sink drain which was damaged when the bear tore the system apart last fall and was leaking. That went fairly well and we could hear the water draining into the olive barrel outside when we turned the water on (I’d already hiked to the creek to turn get it running). We lunched on quesadillas before collapsing on the



Chris retrieving gas from the boat

couch for a nap. When I woke up I headed outside to work under a surprisingly clear sky, set on finishing the bear proof box and doing other miscellaneous tasks. Since Chris was still napping I did all the quiet tasks I could, measuring and marking and getting everything ready to cut. First I measured and marked two pieces of pine siding to fit into the last two corners of the walls inside. Then I pulled out the rough cut cedar 1X6s from beneath the lodge and marked those for cutting so I could wrap

them around the pressure treated 4X4s that support the front porch to match the rest of the rough cut cedar. Finally I measured the walls of the bear proof box and went down to the load of lumber sitting on the beach to grab a piece of plywood.

Matt had made good on his promise to deliver lumber and we'd found a neatly bundled stack sitting on the beach tied to a log. I untied the lines, pulled some nails, untwisted the rebar that held the lines taut, and barely managed to manhandle one piece of plywood off the stack (but not before I'd laid down on the dry plywood in the glorious fall sunshine for a few minutes). Chris came out when I was done marking everything and helped me grab a second piece of plywood and cut all the pieces (first gallantly kayaking out to the boat to retrieve a jerry jug of gas for the generator). I'd borrowed Carp's skill saw for the weekend with a guide attached that allowed us to rip in a straight line--this made ripping the rough cut cedar and the two pieces of siding much easier, especially with the two of us. Chris and I got into a routine, he holding the boards and me cutting, and we soon had all the pieces done.

By that time we were ready to break so we had a beer and played some Connect 4 before a dinner of pasta and salad to the *Royal Tenenbaums* soundtrack. That evening we had a rigorous conversation about institutional racism while finishing the wine and listening to



The bear proof box under construction

Disintegration. When I headed up to the outhouse somewhere in the middle I noticed that the sky was still clear so when I returned we walked down to the water in the dark and watched the stars for a bit. It was a fantastic display—the best night sky I’ve seen in Alaska since my childhood, if not ever. The Milky Way was incredibly distinct and stars were dense in all directions. It’s getting pretty dark here now and there was no moon. We saw shooting stars on and off.

The next morning I made banana pancakes for breakfast, but they didn’t turn out nearly as well as the ones others had made recently, plus I was out of maple syrup. Afterwards I headed outside to work under another sunny sky in a stiff breeze. First I repositioned the water filters on the back wall outside so they didn’t interfere with the bear proof box, then I screwed in the plywood piece for one side of the box (the other side still needed to be cut to allow the water line and the propane lines to run through). I also screwed the plywood roof on the



box, then started to bury the gray water drainage pipe nearby. Last summer I’d just finished digging the trench and laying the pipe when I had to hastily leave one weekend, and I’d never gotten around to finishing the burial. It had been weighing on me, plus I figured the more dirt was on top the less smelly it would be for any potential bear activity now that the pipe was in use.

The burying was a long and laborious task, especially since the dirt had lain there solidifying for a year, but I was glad to get it done. Then I cut the necessary holes in the other side piece of plywood (it took a few tries to get it right) and Chris helped me put up the long piece on the back of the box. Then he screwed the hinges on the two side pieces so each became a door. It worked flawlessly! I also tentatively nailed in the rough cut cedar 1X6s on one of the porch posts and discovered that I’d cut them a bit narrow so they don’t quite overlap. It still looks pretty good, though.



Porch posts with and without cedar wrapping



Kayaking in the river

It was still beautiful and the wind had died down so we stopped working and took a couple of kayaks out. We paddled a ways along the shore, then drifted down the middle of the river being entertained by (and entertaining) harbor seals. They came up all around us, some bolder than others, watching us from all directions. We both came back relaxed and a tiny

bit pink from the autumn sun on the water. Dinner that night was Sweetheart sockeye, stuffing, and zucchini to *The Life Aquatic* and *Anchorman* soundtracks and afterwards we played a game of Cranium--I won, but only because I had a better partner than he did. We also saw two bats flying back and forth outside!

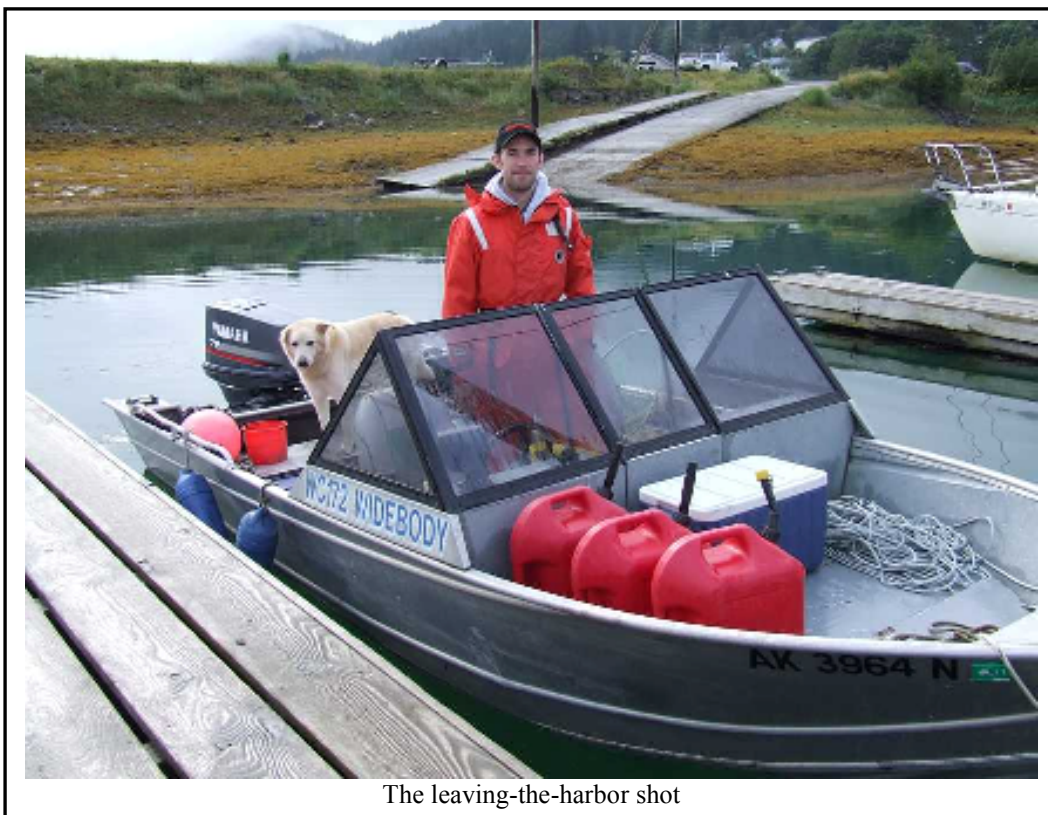
The next morning we slept in a bit and had a quesadilla brunch, then I managed to get a few last minute things done before we had to leave. First I used tin snips to cut a 12' piece of roofing into four 36" pieces for the roof of the bear proof box (my mother and I had deliberately used convenient dimensions in order to create the least amount of work). I then went about screwing the roofing on, first pounding holes with a nail to get the screws through. Then I felt like I needed to do



Bear proof box with roof and hinged door

something with the pile of lumber on the beach, which I'd been avoiding all weekend. It had started raining in the night, so I was decked out in my rain pants, rain coat and xtratuffs. The pile of lumber was big and dense and I quickly decided there was no way I was carrying it all either to the porch (where the previous loads were staged) or to the main lumber storage area inside the bushes—which was actually quite close, but on the other side of an impenetrable vegetated barrier. Instead I began a stack of lumber just above high tide line on the beach. I threw aside the half dozen pieces or so of plywood on top, revealing a dense stack of 2X4s and 2X6s beneath. I put a few on the ground for support and to elevate the rest off the ground, then laboriously moved all the others, some of which must have been 16' long. Everything had been soaking twice daily on the high tides for two weeks and was wet and slimy. It was raining. I was unhappy and my mood quickly plummeted into angry frustration. By the time I'd moved all the 2Xs I was ready to quit. I put several pieces of plywood on top, covered it with a tarp, and left two piles of plywood on the beach tied to shore.

I came back inside to a reward of diet tangerine lime soda and Oreo cakesters (wow) and we relaxed a little before the final cleanup. What a joy it was to wash dishes in a fully functional sink! We swept and packed up, then Chris covered the windows with newspapers to keep the birds from hitting and I hiked up the mountain to shut the water system off. I brought the boat in around the high tide (it was about an 18 footer I think) and discovered that the pile of plywood was now floating. I pulled it in as far as I could, nearly reaching the stack of lumber I'd made earlier. Then we loaded up and took off, beers in hand, at about 2:30. The ride back was rainy but not too rough. A small swell was running from the south and picked up into 2-3' seas between Taku Harbor and Grand Island, but nothing to slow us down much. We had to avoid a few late gillnetters around Limestone Inlet. We made it back in less than two hours, with plenty of time to relax and eat pizza before I had to drop Chris off at the airport.



The leaving-the-harbor shot