



View from the lodge at dusk

## **Snettisham 2008 – 11: Small Things September 5-7**

So I'd finally hit a wall. I'd spent a total of four weekends in Juneau since the start of adventuring on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, gone north for two work trips, and weathered an insanely busy and stressful work life all summer. The cumulative exhaustion of all this had finally sucked all enthusiasm and energy from me. I was too tired even to be cranky, was short and distant with my friends, and all I wanted to do was stare into space and sleep. I couldn't imagine eeking out any productivity (and thought it wise just to rest) but when the weekend weather looked decent I managed to pull myself together enough to fuel the boat and head to Snettisham. With only four weekends left in September—each subject to heavy weather—I had to take advantage of the fair seas. If only I could muster the energy to get there I'd be able to relax.

I'm actually quite pleased with how long it took for this inevitable exhaustion to overtake me! Last summer it was early August, this time early September—not a bad improvement since I was even busier this summer. I left work a little early Friday afternoon, anxious not to be caught out when the sun set. I left the harbor at about 4:30 and headed out under partly cloudy skies on calm water. It was such a pleasant ride that Nigel even stepped onto a tote and sniffed over the side of the boat while at



Nigel Boat Dog

full speed. I was all bundled up in my mustang suit and on the lookout for wildlife. We stopped for two whales in Stephen's Passage north of the Seal Rocks and saw two more whales later—early signs of a group-up perhaps? By the time I hit Port Snettisham I was glad I'd come.

I arrived not long after six and went about the usual business of dropping off Nigel and the gear, grabbing a kayak, and anchoring the boat. Nigel's such a pro by this time of year that he doesn't worry at all when I take off without him.

Now that I have "systems" in place, settling in is a bit more arduous! I had to hike to the creek to turn the water on, unscrew the door to the bear proof box to turn the propane on, then light the pilots for the propane range. The light was

already fading so I lit a little fire, made some jiffy pop, opened the wine, and curled up in the lodge with my book and my laptop. (Oh, yeah, I brought my laptop along for the first time, since one of my goals for the weekend was to get caught up on trip reports.) It seemed a little odd to be writing about adventures in the middle of one, but it worked out really well and I nearly finished two reports over the weekend before my battery died. I headed to my cabin early and didn't rise for 12 hours.

Late that morning I had sufficient energy to work a little, so I went back to the bear proof box (which, by the way, isn't bear proof of course, but maybe it'll do the trick). I'd bought hasps the week before to latch the two side doors of the structure in the hopes that I wouldn't have to leave them screwed shut to secure them. The hasps worked pretty well except that

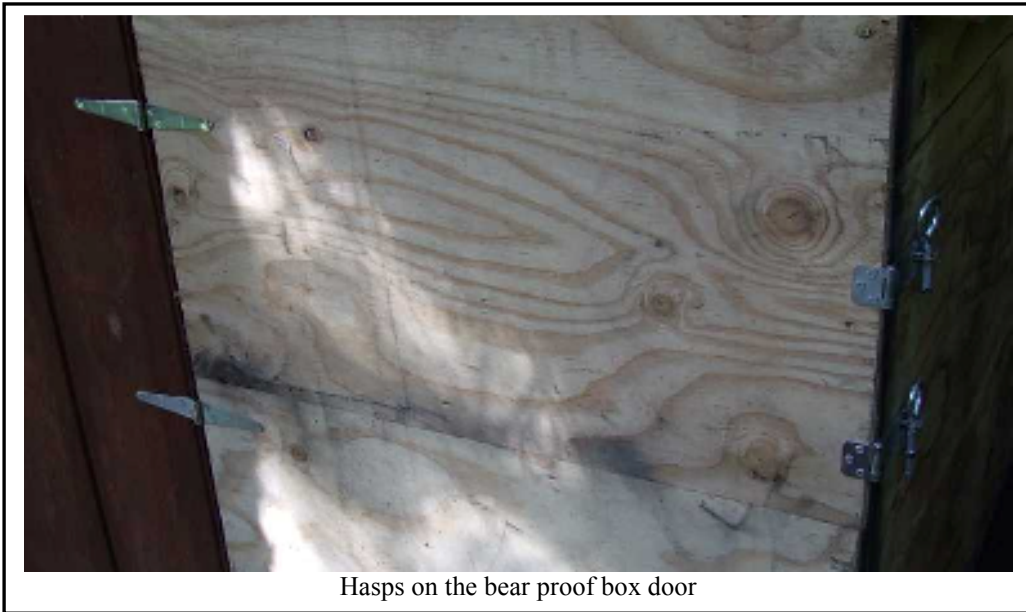


Scenic whale tale shot



Seal Rocks at high tide

my sloppy construction methods meant that some of the hasps were too small to span the distance between the two pieces of plywood. Nevertheless, I think the method will work and I removed most of the screws.



Hasps on the bear proof box door

While I was working I heard the cries of a young eagle and it slowly dawned on me that it was coming from right above me. I looked up to see a juvenile eagle slowly flapping his way overhead to land on one of the highest trees on the property. From there he surveyed his world and chatted a little back

and forth with his parents, glancing occasionally down at me. I had no doubt that this was the homestead eaglet. I'd found a new eagle's nest in a tree overhanging the first point downriver from the lodge in May. Although very visible from the water and from the beach below, the nest is unfortunately behind a tree when viewed from the lodge. One of the adults' favorite perching trees, though, is in plain sight and the weekend before I was pretty sure I'd seen some serious flapping activity from among the trees and heard the baby crying. I watched him for a while, snapped a few pictures, then finished up with the hasps.

Unfortunately, I still had to deal with the plywood pile on the beach from the Fish & Game camp. It was a lovely day, so I thought I'd dry it out a little in the sun before I moved it inland. Every piece was wet and slimy, so I spread them out all over the grassy beach, watched all the while by the baby eagle above. It was so lovely and sunny out that I went for a short walk upriver, stopping on the way back to check out the eagle again. I stood there on the beach, staring up at the eaglet and willing it to fly again so I could capture it mid-air,



The eaglet



The eaglet in flight

realizing all the while how ridiculous it was to be excited about watching an eagle fly (how many times have I seen that!?). But this was the homestead's eagle, and I'd watched his parents carrying flounders and sticks to the nest and hunting all summer. As I watched, camera ready, he flapped a few times, then leapt off his branch and flew upriver, across the creek and to another tree. I snapped my photos, then headed back inside for a

late brunch and a nap.

My contentment with relaxing only lasted so long and I finished my only book, so eventually I ventured outside again to change the propane tank for the range (which had finally expired) and finish nailing in the porches. I'd built porches on all four cabins last summer but had only tacked the decking in; earlier in the summer I'd nailed in one and a half of them, so decided to finish up. I finished the second cabin first, then moved to

Murrelet Cabin on the point and nailed in that one. Last summer when I'd built that porch, I'd struggled with constructing the step up, lacking any convenient way to connect the step to the porch itself since that corner rested on a rock



The porch and step of Murrelet Cabin

rather than a post. It's had to explain, but I'd wound up leaving the porch without a step all winter. I finally decided to remedy that, returning to the lodge for a square, tape measure, level, and small scraps of pressure treated lumber. Half an hour later or so I had a reasonable, if not completely attractive, step that seems sturdy enough for now. I walked out onto the rocky point and rested a little before heading up to my cabin and

nailing that in until I ran out of nails.

I don't remember much about the rest of the afternoon, except that I think I turned over all the plywood so the opposite sides would dry a little. It was a beautiful evening with a bit of alpenglow and I spent most of it on the couch. I think I only stayed 11 hours in bed that night.



One end of the bear proof box with metal roofing and propane tanks inside

The next morning I

went back to work on the bear proof box. I had two 12' sheets of metal roofing left, nearly enough to wrap the whole outside of the box. I grabbed the tin snips and started cutting, doing a tolerable but not great job of covering one end. Then I tacked on the pieces along the long wall but didn't secure them because I didn't have it in me to cut the metal or drill holes to fit the hasps which I'd already screwed into the plywood below. I didn't have enough matching metal to do the end of the box near the filters, but at least the other sides are more or less protected from the weather.

Then I returned to the plywood on the beach. I made a space for

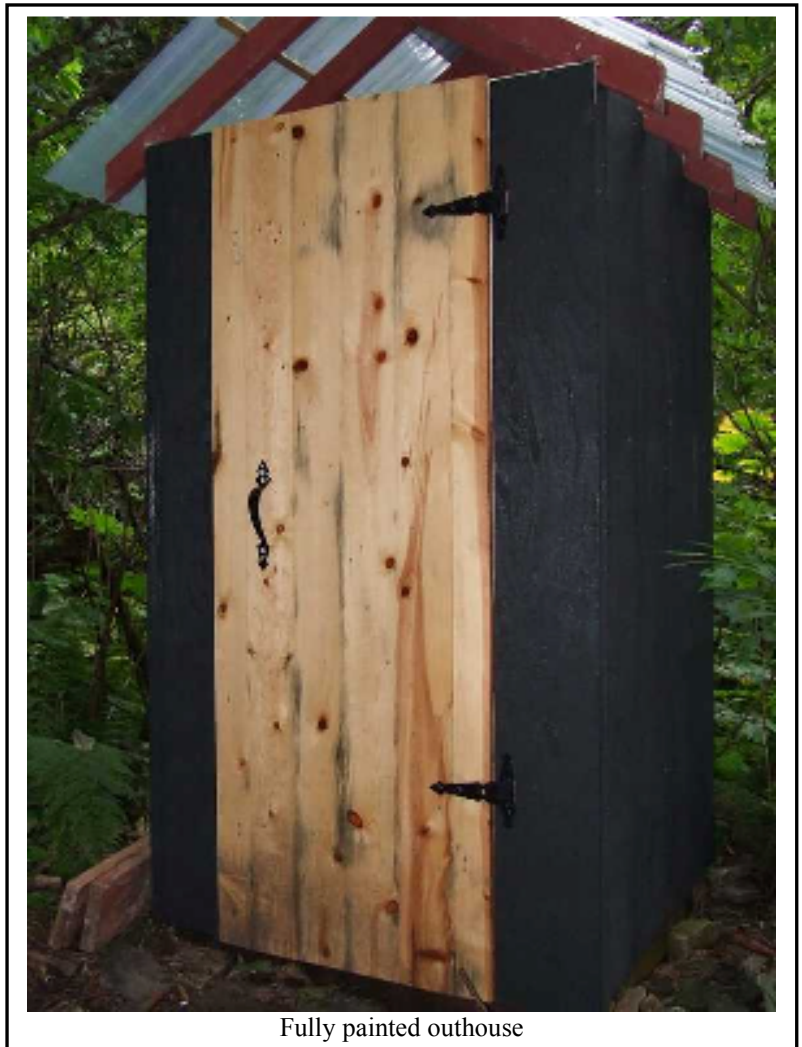


Snowshoes on the wall

it near the rest of the lumber stored near the lodge and cut a narrow path through the currents and salmonberries to the beach, laying down a few narrow pieces of plywood over the rough ground to stand on. I carried in all the small pieces of plywood, but it wasn't long before I was beat and entirely gave up on the notion of moving the full size pieces. 4'X8' sheets of plywood are awkward anyway, but these were still heavy with water and there were a lot of them. I was hopelessly exhausted. So I stacked the plywood on the rest of the lumber stored on the beach, covered it all with a tarp, and called it good.

Then I was looking for small projects to do and remembered that I hadn't repainted the floor of the second outhouse from when it got rained on wet last summer, nor had I painted the two panels of siding on either side of the door. I gathered up all my painting supplies and headed up there, discovering that the beige paint I had for the inside of the wall was hopelessly hard and separated. So I cleaned off the floor and painted that, using the tiny roller I bought myself last summer because it was so adorable (and practical). Then I painted the outside panels as it started to sprinkle. I leaned a piece of plywood against it when I left in the hopes that it would at least protect the bottom from splattering. If it doesn't dry, then so be it. I also raked the area around the back and side of the lodge, and brought the pile of kindling inside, which tidied up the area quite a bit.

I did one last little project before washing dishes and packing up. Last winter my dad gave me a pair of old used snow shoes for decoration (after all, what's an Alaskan lodge without snowshoes on the wall!). I mounted them next to the wood stove inside and they look great. I can't recall that I did anything else, other than relax a bit more, close everything down, and head out in the early afternoon. The seas built a bit as I headed north, getting up to three feet or so near Grand Island, but it was tolerable. The rain started coming down with a vengeance, though, as soon as I left, and it was very wet and chilly all the way back. The extremely hot bath at the end was amazing.



Fully painted outhouse