



Stacks of lumber

## Snettisham 2008 – 12: Buttoning Up September 19-21

September. This is where I usually wax rhapsodic about the most spectacular month of the year. The arrival of September is inevitably met with a tinge of sorrow for the waning summer, but it also brings some of the finest sunny days, orcas, humpback group-ups, golden mountaintops, and so on. It shouldn't have surprised me after the summer we had that none of those (except the mountaintops (when they were visible)) really came through. Spring and early summer saw plenty of sunny weekends, but temperatures were unusually cool. It started raining around the 4<sup>th</sup> of July and didn't stop much after that. Last I heard it was the 4<sup>th</sup> rainiest and 2<sup>nd</sup> coldest summer on record.

So it shouldn't have surprised me that we didn't get the September I was hoping for.

Thankfully, my mother and I did manage to catch a more or less rain-free weekend to close up the homestead. It was the second to last weekend in September and it seemed wise not to trust the last weekend for weather. October is pretty much out of the question in my boat, and anyway, I was heading off on vacation. My mother was good enough to come along to help out. She and my dad had to head up to the Taku cabin on the Thursday before to meet a landing craft that delivered their new 4-wheeler and they didn't come back until Friday afternoon, so we didn't head out until Saturday morning. Again, because I was taking my mother along, I left the *Ronquil* behind and we took the *Kathy M*.

Heading out of the harbor a little after nine, we cruised over to the Trucano



Mom putting up metal roofing on the bear proof box

fuel dock and fueled the boat. It was a beautiful day, but the seas were a little hairy from Grand Island south. I've been lucky with the seas this summer--they hadn't been this uncomfortable since the very first trip. I have to admit that it would have been a bit less comfortable in my boat.

Two and a half hours later we arrived at the homestead on a low tide. We beached the boat and carried Nigel and our gear to shore, anchoring the *Kathy M* in the mud. Then we went about turning on the water system and the propane and lighting the pilots. We were both hungry and worn out from the rough boat ride, so we had quesadillas for lunch and then found ourselves unable to maintain consciousness. Still recovering from the exhaustion of summer I fell sound asleep and didn't stir for an hour.

Eventually we roused ourselves to begin work, first finishing the metal roofing on the walls of the bear proof box. I'd run out of my leftover roofing before finishing the third wall, but my mother had found some pieces at the Taku cabin and brought them back for me. I measured and marked and she cut the pieces to fit the trapezoid shaped door by the water filters. She also cut notches in the metal for the edges of the long side of the wall to accommodate the hasps and we screwed all the sheets on. It looks great!

Then I had another project in mind that I needed help to finish. I'd never screwed on the metal flashing that covers the front and back fascia boards on two of the cabins. This is ladder work, and it's good to have someone to hold the ladder and hand up tools (or drag my broken body to the couch if I fall). The back wall of Mink Cabin went up pretty well, though it was difficult to slide the flashing under the roof (the metal roofing was pressed tight against the wooden ceiling panels). Unfortunately it went downhill from there. On the front of the building the land sloped down, so the ladder needed to be extended considerably. The metal roofing was screwed in close to the edge so I had to unscrew it

to slide the flashing under. This required unscrewing the crown of the roof as one of the roofing screws was underneath it. In order to actually access the roof screw, I had to unscrew the crown for several feet in from the edge, as far as I could reach, so I could bend it up. Then I spent some time pounding and prying up and down one side of the roof (moving the ladder every time), frustrated



Finished bear proof box and water filters behind the lodge

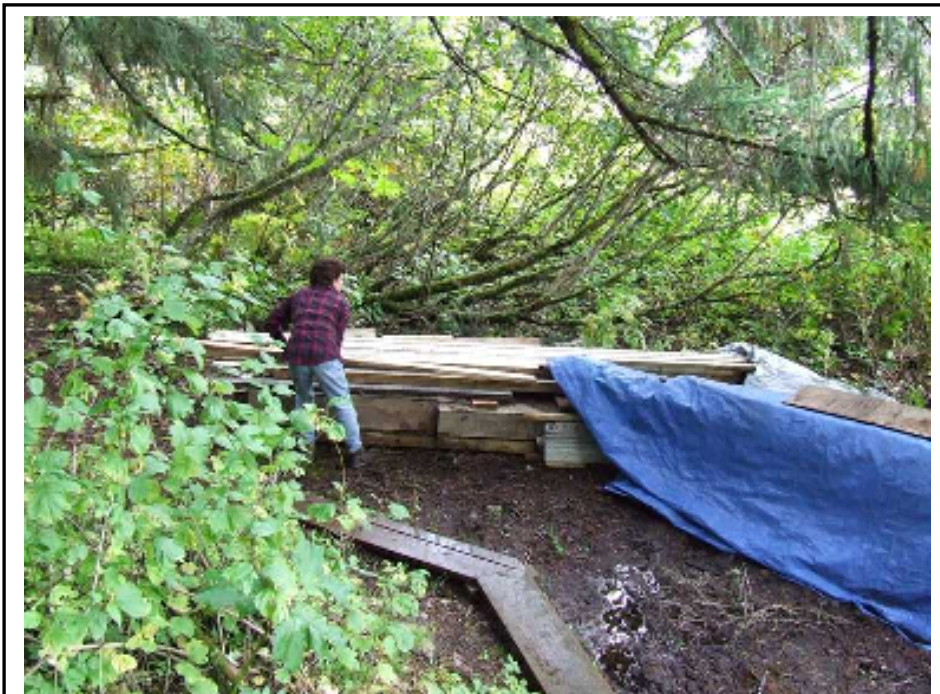
and irritated to no end with this stupid project. I'd already given up on putting the other side's flashing on, as the corner of the roof butts up against a tree and the flashing would need to be trimmed to fit.

Eventually that piece slid in with much whacking and I screwed it in, screwed the roof back on (which required pounding holes with a nail through the flashing that was now underneath the roof), and screwing in the crown. It was all very troublesome and annoying for such a tiny task. Then we headed up to my cabin where the project went very badly. We started at the front wall and struggled and struggled and struggled to get the flashing in place, having to unscrew the roof and the crown again. We must have moved the ladder at least 20 times back and forth, up and down each side, screwing and unscrewing, banging the flashing in, screwing and unscrewing more, shifting the flashing when it wound up in the wrong spot, and so on. At one particularly low point I flung the stupid piece of flashing on the ground along with a slough of curse words. It took forever and I felt bad for my mother. My blood sugar plummeted but I was not about to stop until that damn flashing was up. I finally figured out a trick, bending up the edge of the whole roof so the flashing could all slide in at once (I'm a slow learner), but by then it was getting dark. We moved to the back wall where the project went much better. By the time we were finished it was nearly too dark to find the screws in the roof and I had to feel for the holes when I screwed the roof back in.

I was cranky and beat. We made pasta and green beans for dinner, drank a bottle of wine, and headed to bed.

The next morning I was once again greeted by a pleasant surprise—my mother was up and had a fire going by the time I arrived at the lodge. I started the day by rummaging through all the dried and canned goods in the mouse proof tin and on the little shelving

unit, filling up two totes of food to bring back to town. There was an embarrassingly large quantity of boxes of cheesy pasta and top ramen—emergency rations that I'd apparently bought repeatedly. Many of them had "best used by" dates of around 2005 (when I had burly volunteer construction crews to feed) so I figured I'd best bring them back to town to eat over the winter and buy some fresher boxes next spring. I also wandered around the



Mom moving lumber to the new pile

lodge pulling out the items I wanted to overwinter in town—the cordless drill, my rifle, Cranium and Mastermind, etc.

Then my mother and I had Russian tea and banana pancakes for breakfast before heading outside to work. The first thing we did was move all the lumber that was staged on the front porches to a new stack over near the traditional lumber storage pile where I'd started to stack the lumber from the beach. It was good to get the decks clear again and get some of the lumber stowed better—I hadn't realized we'd been given such a nice, solid load of 2X4s that day when Matt came by. I also handed down most of the random pieces of lumber that had been thrown up on the stack of siding on the front porch to my mother to stow away, cleaning that area up quite a bit. I took down the hummingbird feeder and we repositioned the tarp over the siding and secured it for winter.

Behind the lodge we trudged up to the second outhouse and together covered it with a tarp, wrapping line around it several times to keep it



Outhouse wrapped up for the winter

secure. Finally we were ready to deal with the water system. Closing down this year became a lot more complicated with running water and a gray water system! On our way up to the olive barrel in the creek I stopped to photograph an enormous, picturesque hemlock tree with patches of yellow devil's club behind and my mother happened to look up and notice that one of the other huge trees nearby had mossy branches overhung by licorice ferns. The staggered boughs, all fuzzy and sprouting vivid green ferns against the white sky was amazing.

Up at the creek we laboriously hauled the olive barrel off onto the right bank of the creek before we realized that that position left the hose laying across the creek all winter where it could be damaged, so we quickly hauled it to the other side and stowed it away, intact, among the devil's club. We opened the valve all the way and trudged back down to the lodge to drain the system. I turned on the tap inside and let it drain through the gray water system, unscrewing the filters when the pressure was low and taking them inside for the winter. We hit a stumbling block with the sink at that point, as we needed to



Forest scene

unscrew the cap for the hot water inlet to release the water trapped inside. The way I have the sink stuck into the makeshift counter I built makes it pretty difficult to access the cap without lifting the sink out. However, the hose that connects the filters to the sink is too short now to lift the sink out easily. I left my poor mother to struggle with that while I went outside to start draining the gray water system.

That also turned out to be more trouble than expected. I never

put a plug in the bottom of the barrel so there's no way for water to get out except through the drain system and the top. I futzed around a little while my mother struggled inside. Eventually she got the cap off (I'm not entirely sure how) and came out to help, crawling in the bear proof box behind the olive barrel and pushing it out while I pulled. We managed to dump most of the water out and left it laying on its side for the winter. We also took down the smoke stack outside and boarded up its hole and the picture window with plywood.

Finally we were finished with the major chores. I'd already gone around to all the cabins to grab the linens, lock them up, and say goodbye for the winter. Now I hauled all the gear I was taking back to town onto the front porch and started tidying up inside. I'd been pretty melancholy all day, very sad to close up for the winter and a little disappointed in my productivity. When I look back I realize that I did work awfully hard once I got going, but there was a bit of down time as well and at least one significant thing I wish I'd finished. Plus, I spent a lot of weekends down there but only one extended stay (five days) and I've vowed to remedy that next summer. I am pleased, however, at the number of people I managed to bring down. More than anything, I just wanted to be there longer.



Branches with licorice ferns (photos don't do it justice)

But that will have to wait until April. I took a few loads of gear down to the water, then kayaked out to fetch the boat, overshooting it and paddling around the river for a few delicious minutes. At about 2:30 we loaded up and headed out for a pleasant uneventful ride to town.

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A few days later (Wednesday) a real September day arrived, genuinely clear and calm and lovely. The next day was also beautiful, so Chris (who'd arrived back in town Sunday night) and I took the *Ronquil* out for one final fall tour. My boss let me off work an hour early in honor of the sun, so we managed to leave the harbor about 4:00 with beers in hand. The water was slightly choppy in the channel, but calmed down in Stephen's Passage. We cruised half way to Arden, then shut down to enjoy the sun (low over Admiralty) and to listen. Nothing was going on, so a few minutes later we moved on, catching the tail end of a breach as we approached the point (I saw the flash of a tail and the splash). The whale took one breath then disappeared. We waited around for a while, then moved on, heading half way down the back side of Grand Island before turning around. The sky was hazing over, it was chilly, and a chop was developing. Nearing Arden again we stopped for another disappearing whale, then saw a real whale close to shore take a long series of breaths. So we headed over and made one more stop, shutting down in the calm near shore. Seven minutes later the whale came up behind us, moving closer and closer to the boat over a series of about eight breaths, coming about 50 feet away when it finally fluked. It was as close as I came this year to the Stephen's Passage group-up (the first year I've missed it since 1999), but that's the way it goes. Hopefully they're out there somewhere munching away in fall fashion.

The next Sunday my parents helped me fix the front roller wheel on the trailer (which was catawampus) and shore up the front (3<sup>rd</sup>) wheel of the trailer in their garage. Then I parked the truck and trailer at the launch ramp, walked to the *Ronquil* in her slip, and drove it over in the driving rain. It took a try or two to trailer it, but no one else was around to mind. Back at home I scrubbed the algae and barnacles off the bottom, took all my gear off, and covered her up for the winter.



Licorice ferns