



View of Sandy Beach and Mt. Jumbo while kicking down the channel

Snettisham 2008 – 5: Siding June 27-29

I headed down to the boat after work on Friday feeling on top of the world. The *Ronquil* was already fueled up and ready to go and my load was light—only a tote full of food and tools, my backback, the camera, and my satellite phone. It was mild, cool, and the clouds were low in the channel--I entertained visions of rain falling on a flat calm ocean all the way down. My chilled beer was ready, I had my dog, my mustang suit, and I couldn't have been happier, facing only a weekend of solitary work. It's always a dangerous mood to be in and I pondered that as I loaded the boat, lowered the engine into the water, and....found myself completely unable to get it to turn over. It clicked hopelessly and I was suddenly at a loss, my ebullient mood plummeting. The tilt worked well, so I figured the battery was okay, but I'm no mechanic. I fiddled with connections and things for a while to no avail, regretting that I'd left my new cell phone at home. I finally humbled myself and walked down to another boat and asked someone to come take a look, just to get an idea of what I might be up against. As I walked back to the boat to wait for him it occurred to me that I'd had a similar problem two years ago. At that time the engine had periodically failed to turn over (I couldn't remember if it had clicked or not), then would mysteriously start. Travis had fixed the problem by simply tightening the connections on the battery. I figured I'd give that a try, so I popped the top off the battery case and found the connections not even finger tight. I grabbed pliers, managed to tighten them without electrocuting myself, and the engine started up like magic just as my helper arrived. Brilliant.

So, somewhat subdued but still feeling rather full of myself, I pulled out of the harbor into a light chop in the channel. By the time I reached the end the chop had built up into unpleasant seas in Taku Inlet and my visions for a smooth run began to disintegrate into dismal resignation of a long and arduous ride. It was slow going to Arden, but amazingly the seas laid down after that and by the time I hit Grand Island I was at full speed and remained so all the way to Snettisham. The chop kicked up again as I turned around Pt. Styleman and entered Port Snettisham. Somehow the wind this year has managed to blow straight at me no matter what direction I turn! Whales at Arden, south of Grand, and Seal Rocks.

As I came around River Point and in sight of the homestead I found a boat anchored up and decided to approach. This year for the first time there have been half a dozen or so buoys across the river mouth near the drop off and we've seen a boat trolling in there; I thought that, in addition to being friendly, I might learn something about the buoys. As I pulled up I saw them glance nervously out the window and at one another (which I found slightly amusing) and then come out on deck. I told them who I was and asked about the buoys. They'd set one for Dungeness crab but didn't know about the rest. They were just down for the night.



Before (the corner where I started)

So I left them and pulled into the homestead, dropping my gear and quickly grabbing a kayak to anchor out. Nigel has learned the routine again and didn't panic when I pulled away without him. I anchored just out front, paddled back, and took a look around the chaotic lodge building to figure out where to begin. My plan for the weekend was maddening now that I finally had my lumber after the previous weekend's delivery. I decided to start in the back corner on the wall toward the cabins, first moving the furniture from against the studs. I grabbed a board and quickly discovered that it was too long for the height of the wall! My walls are 97.5" tall (just over eight feet) and I'd foolishly assumed that my "eight foot" boards would fit with room to spare....of course,

eight feet is only a rough estimate of length and really only means that the board is at least eight feet long. As I began to measure other boards I discovered that the majority of them were 98" and more. Disheartened, I found a shorter one, squared it up, and nailed it in. The nails didn't go in easy. They're small finish nails and you'd think they'd be easy to drive, but they're soft and bend when encountering the least resistance. I managed to secure that board and then add another, struggling to fit its groove around the tongue of

the first piece. By the time the second board was secure it was after nine and I called it a night, starting the first few pages of a book I've been looking forward to since December.

Nigel and I slept in the next day and didn't get to work until about nine. A bear had torn down the hummingbird feeder but I shoved it back together in the morning, filled it, and put it a little higher on the porch.

The next few boards were exceedingly difficult to fit into place, but I soon fell into a pattern. I'd find a board that fit (there was room to place the longer pieces between the ceiling joists where they could stick up toward the rafters), climb onto the step ladder, whack the top corner into place with a rubber mallet, step down, grab the cordless drill, drill a hole, and drive one nail in to hold it in place. Then I'd work the board until the tongue and grooves snugged around each other. Occasionally this worked smoothly; more often the boards weren't perfectly straight and it took a great deal of pounding, pushing, bracing, and sometimes whacking on wedges placed between the studs and the edge of the board to get them to fit. Then two nails in the bottom, more whacking in the middle of the board, and then a nail in the center of the board to the cross pieces between the studs. Then I'd measure boards until I found the next piece (trying to get pieces that looked nice side by side), climb up the step ladder, put another nail in the previous board, then start the process all over again. When it worked well it took about five minutes per board. The nails were so frustrating that I'd resorted to drilling holes with my cordless drill to prevent them from bending all the time. I learned tricks like prying out the bottom corner of the previous board where I'd nailed it tight against the wall if it wasn't lining up with the next one. I also learned that the reddish boards (against expectations) were easier to nail through than the pale boards. It was hard work and hot and I let the fire die shortly after it got going in the morning and never restarted it.

All along the way there were setbacks and frustrations, naturally. The first wall I worked on has a copper tube that runs propane to one of my lights so I had to remove its brackets (wrenching the nails from the wall) and eventually the



Up to the first window

light itself as I moved along, securing them again as I moved past. I broke a couple of drill bits and drained one of my drill batteries. Boards didn't fit. Then I hit the first window—amazingly it was perfectly spaced so that a board was flush with the edge of it and I didn't have to cut the window outline. Then I started cutting pieces to fit above and below the window. I set up a work station out on the front lower porches over a couple of sawhorses and set to work cutting shorter pieces out of the boards that were split on one end or otherwise blemished. While I cut lumber I plugged the cordless drill charger in to get the dead battery going.

Installing the small pieces around the window was easier, but ultimately took more time since I had two rows to cover for the same distance. The header and framing around the window were also not flush with the studs on either side, so by the time I reached the other side of the four foot window the first full board wouldn't fit into the small ones on the top at all. I had to go back and pry out the whole top row so they would fit. Then I marked the first full board where it overlapped the window pane and cut it out with the jig saw. Two boards later I hit the second window and started the process all over again. In the meantime my second drill battery died and I'd broken my last small bit. On a whim I walked over to Mink Cabin where I still keep some tools and was amazed and grateful to find a full set of drill bits. For some reason, though, those drill bits weren't working at all! I broke one before I realized that the drill was on the reverse setting...no wonder they weren't drilling well! By that time I'd mostly stopped drilling holes anyway. The last thing I did before relenting for the night was to cut the corner piece on the first wall and the first piece in the second wall where it fits around the door. It was nine and I was spent. It poured relentlessly all night on the metal roof.

The next morning I got up at 6:30 and was to work by 6:45. I immediately discovered that I needed to trim the corner piece by the door and set to work—the hemlock spits a lot of sawdust when ripping so I wound up putting on eye protection for those cuts. I also



Cutting outside



The first wall

cut the short pieces for above the door. Once I reached the other side, the full length pieces were just not cooperating and I had a sneaking suspicion that it might have been because I didn't have any cross pieces between the studs on which to nail the center of the boards (I'd gotten excited about vapor barriering the first wall after the insulation and forgot about them). I eventually tore out the three panels I'd installed over that section already and cut some cross pieces, tearing through the vapor barrier and the insulation to install them, badly. Very badly. But they'll function. I made it to the window and quit, wanting only to clean up the chaotic mess around me. With one wall complete I was able to rearrange things into some order. I also put vapor barrier along half of the third wall and filled the water jugs from my potable water system (which worked well).

I wound up leaving my tidy lodge at 12:20, with exhaustion that would last all week. The trip home was similar to the trip south, with winds from the north that kicked up in Snettisham and again crossing Taku Inlet. As I approached Sheep Creek in the channel I ran out of gas in my larger tank and had to switch to the small tank. I was able to start the engine several times, but it kept dying and eventually ceased starting altogether. I was unable to convince it otherwise and was afraid I'd flooded it. There was nothing to do but kicker.

So I spent half an hour puttering down the channel over a section that would normally take five minutes. At least the weather was pleasant and the kicker needs to run more anyway. Getting into the slip was a trick because it was low tide and there was very little room to maneuver between the dock and the exposed mud; the wind was blowing and my kicker doesn't turn very well in one direction because it runs into the fuel filter. I did a lot of backing up and eventually sailed into the center of the slip and jumped off the bow. Travis came down the next day after work and determined that I must have water in the engine. He unscrewed the fuel filter and found it full of rusty water and not much gas; we pumped through the filter several times and kept coming up with mostly water. The spark plugs appeared wet with water. I couldn't figure out how the small tank had filled with water (it had been recently drained and filled with fresh gas), but we did have a jerry jug of gas on board and put that in the main tank. Travis managed to get the engine started on that amid much fuss and billows of smoke. It had to have the choke fully engaged for quite a while just to idle. Eventually the smoke diminished and the boat would idle without extra gas so we took it out in the channel and ran it for a while until we were confident the water was burnt off. We grabbed the small tank to take back home and discovered that it was leaking out the bottom—mystery solved. But my boat was working again!

