

Kayaking with a brown bear

Snettisham 2008 – 8: Girls Weekend August 8-10

I'd promised several of my girlfriends a trip to the homestead last winter but for one reason or other every weekend from June through August was booked for Sarah or I except this one. Dru and I fished Sweetheart Creek at the end of the same week but we arranged the schedule so I'd be back in town by Friday to pick up the girls. Although the potential participants ranged from half a dozen girls to a full fledged party including the whole group (boys too), in the end we wound up with a modest posse of four: Sarah, Amanda, Shawna and myself. Transportation once again was the critical player in limiting invites. Thankfully my parents offered to take us down on the *Alaskan* which almost entirely eliminated my stress over boats and fuel. I'd intended to borrow the *Kathy M* (22' Hewescraft) since my boat is a bit small for four plus Nigel plus gear, but the last time I took it to Snettisham we burnt 80 gallons of gas and still ran out before we got back to town. Instead we were able to travel down on the *Alaskan* while towing the *Kathy M*, returning on the smaller boat.



Sarah, Amanda, Shawna and Debbie at the lodge

Friday after work we all assembled at my place and the last minute mad packing began. We headed down to the boat at 4:35 with our bags of food and gear and hauled it all down to the *Alaskan*. Amazingly, we managed to slip out of the harbor at 5:00, our scheduled departure, most of us with beers in hand. I drove down as far as Taku Harbor or so, then my dad took over. Shawna and

Amanda hung out on the bow for a bit, then everyone gathered in the salon to eat dinner. We had pre-made sandwiches and broke out the chips, grapes and sangria.

Hitting the homestead at about 8:30 we anchored the *Alaskan*, then pulled the *Kathy M* in to get us to shore. We loaded all people, dogs, groceries and gear on board and headed in just as the *Blue Heron* arrived with its passengers (more on that in a moment).

Thankfully it was high tide so we were able to offload everything as close as possible to the lodge. My parents returned to the *Alaskan* for the night while we hauled everything inside. Then I took the girls on a tour of the place and took one of the cots down to

Murrelet Cabin for the boys.

We were all a bit hungry by then so we returned to the lodge to break out snacks.

Meanwhile the boys had finished unloading and reconnoitering. Rob (the carpenter who built the lodge building) was fishing the salmon derby with Bruce, Drake and Selmon near South Island, right across Stephen's Passage from the homestead, so they spent the night at my place. The only unfortunate thing was that they were relegated to a single cabin so the girls had plenty of room. They came in to make supper while we were snacking and the two groups made a pretty amusing contrast. The girls and I sat at the front of the lodge clustered around an oil lamp drinking red wine and eating camembert and crackers while the boys sat around the wood stove in the back drinking Rainier and eating

beer boiled cheddar brats. Both groups were pretty tired and soon retired. Sarah and Shawna shared Cottonwood Cabin (cabin 1), Amanda stayed in Mink Cabin (cabin 2), the boys stayed in Murrelet Cabin (cabin 3) and I stayed in my own cabin, Hermit Thrush.



Amanda and Shawna hauling plywood

The boys were long gone by the time we got up the next morning and didn't return. We lit a fire and made phenomenal pancakes—blueberry for Sarah and Amanda and banana

for Shawna and I. My dad dropped Rosie and my mother off in deep water down the beach and they walked the treacherous rocks back to the homestead mid-morning. After a quick visit we headed back out so I could take possession of the *Kathy M* and my parents could go fishing. I also wanted to drop off Travis's large air compressor so they could transport it back on the *Alaskan*, but the *Kathy M* was slated to pick us up several hundred yards down the beach. (The air compressor was too large for my generator to run). Instead I drug out the double kayak, placed the compressor in the front, and kayaked down to the pick up area while my mother and Rosie slid over the slippery boulders. When my dad came to pick us up we manhandled the compressor onto the bow, then transferred it to the master state room on the stern of the *Alaskan*. Then I left to anchor the *Kathy M* in front of the homestead and they pulled anchor.

I spent the rest of the morning relaxing and reading with the others in the lodge. Of course, I eventually got a bit antsy and announced that I was going to work a little. It turned out that Shawna and Amanda were antsy too, so we all geared up in our xtratuffs (new pairs for the two of them) and headed out to the cabins to procure scap pieces of plywood. I was intending to insulate the ceiling and wanted to put boards up there to span the joists and provide a floor and storage potential in the attic. Behind each of the cabins leans a mishmash of leftover lumber from their construction including pieces of plywood from cutting the floor boards to fit the cabin dimensions. I'd brought over a piece from my cabin that morning and we made trips to each of the others, bringing back about a dozen or so pieces of various sizes. We brushed off the pine needles and dirt that caked them where they rested on the ground and then they handed each piece up to me in the attic.

We lunched on bread, cheese, crackers and fruit, after which Shawna and Amanda decided to go for a kayak and headed out across the river in *Keet*, the same double I'd used that morning. I took a can of expanding foam insulation and got busy filling in all the potential mouse entrances at the corners and beam of the lodge. I'd been foolish enough to think that I'd mouse proofed it the last time, but there was plenty of mouse dirt. Travis and his uncle had come down earlier in the week (I had to be at work) and had caught two mice in an ingenious trap consisting of a



Insulation before the vapor barrier



Smoking stogies on the porch

Gatorade bottle with a piece of cheese and a hole in it tied to the ceiling with a string and leaning precariously on the edge of the oven (the bottle swings away when the mouse enters). Travis had chased a third mouse to the front right corner where it disappeared. I went around to all the corners and along the beam and sprayed a bunch of insulating foam wherever there was a chance they could come in. I

ended in the corner where the mouse had gone and discovered a corner of the mosquito screen chewed through and the thick hardware cloth over it bent back. For this corner I added some more hardware cloth that fit a bit better and then filled the heck out of the whole corner with the foamy insulation.

Once that was accomplished I moved all the boards in the attic to the front half of the lodge (pulling a muscle in my side in the process). Then I took one of the packages of insulation outside and cut it open, amazed at its powers of expansion! It went from about 18" high to four feet high and consisted of 16 pieces of fiberglass insulation, each 8' long. These I carried inside two at a time, hauling them up the step ladder and placing them between the ceiling joists. They held in there relatively well as long as I made sure that both edges had contact with the joist. I placed them all from the ladder in the middle of the lodge--one on either side--



Hummingbird at the feeder

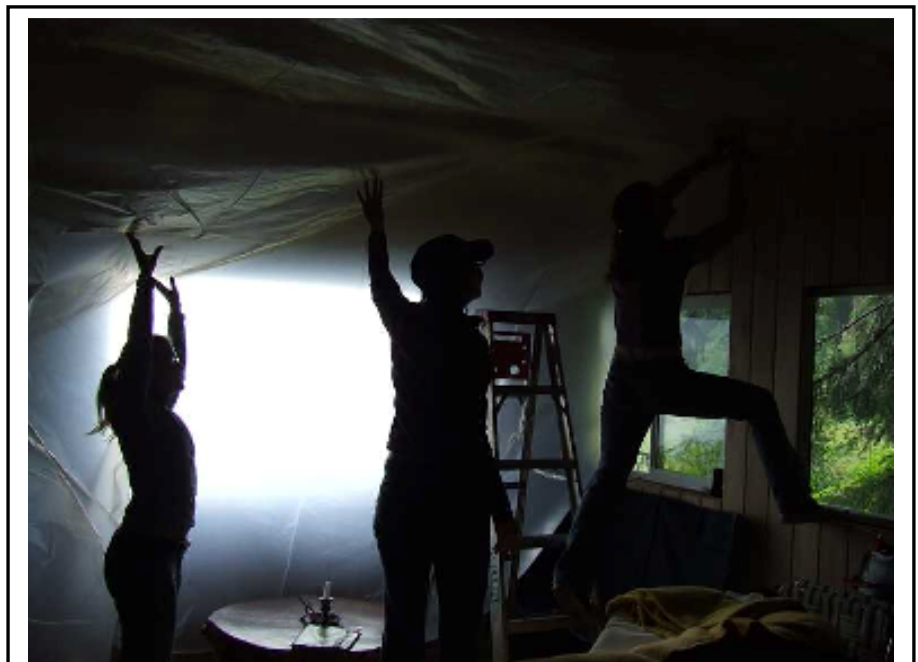


Brown bear

securing the inside end so they didn't fall out, then moving the ladder to the walls so I could secure the other end. There was a bit of back and forth as one end or the other fell down, but mostly it went fairly well. When I finished the insulation on the back half of the lodge I opened the big roll of visqueen and started stapling that up. It was

hard work...the piece of visqueen I'd bought was larger than the whole ceiling and the process was a bit unwieldy. I started in one corner, stapling it to the ceiling joists as far around me as I could from my perch on the step ladder, then moving a few feet to repeat the process. I was hot and exhausted by the time I was done, but the ceiling looked good.

After Shawna and Amanda came back we made pasta, garlic bread and zucchini for dinner, then threw together a boxed berry cobbler and put it in the oven for dessert before retiring to the porch for a stogie. A brave hummingbird came to drink at the newly filled feeder right above us. We each smoked a small honey flavored cigar, chiming in to give first-timer Shawna advice. The cobbler wasn't ready, so Amanda, Shawna and I went for an evening kayak. It turned out to be a great idea. Some ways out we came across a brown bear walking along the rocks on the beach and watched her from the kayaks for a little while.



Putting up the vapor barrier

When we returned Sarah had taken the cobbler out and we had dessert, then played a few rounds of Scattergories before turning in.

The next morning I managed to get up before everyone else and start to work on the front half of the lodge. When I finished the insulation I hiked up the mountain to the water system and turned on the valve, filling the two five gallon jugs at the bottom before hiking back up to turn it off. When the girls arrived they helped me put up the vapor barrier before breakfast. It was late in the morning so we had quesadillas, then relaxed a little before cleaning and packing up. I brought the boat to shore and we took off about 2:30. Unfortunately, the cooling water wasn't streaming out the outboard so we futzed around for 20 minutes or so poking wire into the hole until it started working.

Out in Stephen's Passage the water was flat calm. We snacked on cheese and crackers on the way back and took the scenic route around the back side of Grand Island. We stopped for a pair of whales, but they were cruising too fast and we only saw them well once. Sarah drove from Snettisham up to Grand Island, then Shawna took over into the channel. We passed my parents on the *Alaskan* returning from their fishing trip (with a big coho) and made it back to the harbor around 5:00.



Shawna, Sarah and Amanda filling the small water jugs