

**The Victoria & Vancouver Island
Travel and Tourism Guide
TRAVEL MAGAZINE**

Over the next few months, we are going to feature articles that highlight the eastern shore of Vancouver Island and the northern half of the Island.

The Bear Facts

by Ron Kirstein, Edited by Lisa Cole and Linda Kirstein

We arise at the crack of dawn. We feel each other's excitement as we get ready for our next adventure. We'd packed the night before because we have to drive from Port Hardy to Telegraph Cove to catch our boat. We scarf down our breakfast 'en route'. We had purchased a to-go breakfast they evening before.

Howard Pattison, the owner of Rip Tide Grizzly Tours, asked us to be there by 7:30 am. He indicated it would be about a 45 minute drive, plus 5 minutes for each bear we saw along the road into Telegraph Cove. Years ago, as my wife and I were driving into Telegraph Cove, I was telling her that I'd lived on Vancouver Island for 12 years and had never seen a b____! I never got the word out. A large black bear was standing on the side of the road. Before I got over the shock, we spotted another one about a quarter of a mile down the road. So, today, my expectations are high. Jim's right about one thing. The trip takes us about 45 minutes. But yep, you guessed it; there are no bears on the side of the road.

I've been on the water many, many times all around Vancouver Island and have been close enough to kiss Dahl's porpoises, but I've never seen Pacific white-sided dolphins. We've been close enough to kiss Dahl's porpoises. We've witnessed a gathering of all three resident pods of Orcas (Killer Whales) while they performed every whale behavior imaginable. We've seen hundreds of massive Sea Lions. We've watched a large sea lion leap from a 15 foot cliff and bounce into the water below. We've even seen wolves on the shores of the Broken Group Islands. But I've never seen a grizzly bear and I have never seen Pacific White-sided Dolphin. Today, I hope to see both.



Linda on the Telegraph Cove Boardwalk
Photo by Ron Kirstein



A Black Bear at Roadside-another trip
Photo by Rebecca Kirstein

We drive into Telegraph Cove just before 7:00 am. Telegraph Cove is a piece of living history on the East Coast of Vancouver Island. It's a historic community perched on a boardwalk on one side of the cove. Coming here is like walking into the last century. The buildings have been restored and are well kept. There are eco-tourism businesses here, accommodations, a general store, and other businesses.

We sign in with Howard and he puts us on the Kermode ride to Knights Inlet on the mainland side of Johnstone Strait. He tells us that they're sending out two boats today. They couldn't go yesterday because of high winds. We know. We were in that wind, on our way to a wedding north of Port Hardy, our boat surfing in the curl of the waves.

Today, our driver is Lindsay, Howard's son, and Lenka, our naturalist. Both are extremely knowledgeable about the area and about Grizzly bears. They give us our lessons on the trip out. The trip is approximately 50 miles one-way and our destination is a marsh at the mouth of a river, just across the inlet from Knight Inlet Resort. It's near the mouth of the Glendale River in the traditional lands of the Da'Naxda'xw First Nations.

Our guides tell us that the mission of the area is not to acclimatize the bears to humans. We are asked not to take food into the marsh, not to make any loud noises, and not to move fast.



The Pub on the Boardwalk
Photo by Ron Kirstein



Lenka Tresnakova our naturalist giving us a bear education
Photo by Ron Kirstein

Our boat holds 12 passengers, providing an intimate environment where we meet people from all over the world. The passengers consist of six Dutch people, two English folks, and four of us from Victoria. The other visitors are astounded to hear that we had never seen grizzlies.

It seems to take only minutes to cross Johnstone Strait, pass a few islands, and then we're in the magnificent Knight Inlet. Knight Inlet is a massive fjord with high mountains on either side, some snow-capped. There are large cascading waterfalls everywhere and the views are absolutely awesome. We see lots of eagles and some seals. There is an Oolichan run here. These fish are part of a food chain that involves eagles, whales, seals, sea lions, and of course the people of our First Nations who treasure the oil they get from them. A glacier feeds the Inlet at one end, causing the water to turn turquoise as the glacier melts. The color change is in progress as we proceed.

As the snow melts in the spring, the Grizzlies emerge from their hibernation dens. Hungry, they make their way down to the marsh to feed on the spring sedge grass found in the river lowlands. At low tide, the bears also feed along the shoreline, eating seaweed. They turn over rocks to uncover crabs, mussels, and whatever else they can find.



A Waterfall pouring down to Knight Inlet
Photo by Ron Kirstein



A Grizzly Bear eating Sedge grass in the Marsh
Photo by Ron Kirstein

We stop briefly to switch to another fuel tank. The weather is great, however there are rogue rain clouds drifting about. As we sit, a full rainbow appears across the Inlet.

As soon as we arrive near the marsh, we switch to flat-bottom skiffs so that we can get closer to shore. The spring tides are among the lowest of the year, making the skiffs necessary. As we approach, we see the bears on shore. We are amazed that they pay no attention to us at all.

At one point, a noise comes from our boat. A bear turns slowly and walks toward the bushes. Other than that, they seem oblivious to our presence. We watch numerous bears going about their business until lunch break. It is awesome.

Lunch is provided by our tour. It consists of “concoct your own sandwich” plus veggies, treats, and drinks. It is very good. Then back to the bears. We poke our way up the river and then move back along the shoreline. We see six bears in all, some young, some old: a mom, a raggedy one named “Scruffy,” and a pair of young ones. The young tend to be a blondish colour in the spring.

Our companion boat has just returned to the water taxis and we are just about to leave, when one of the two young bears pick up a scent and start to stand upright! Before reaching a full standing position, both small bears run for their lives down the beach. They are pursued by a much larger bear who is, as our guides explain, not intending to hurt the two cubs, but to let them know that they were in his territory. This was a display of dominance to set boundaries for the fall fishing season. The bigger and stronger bears apparently get the best fishing spots. It is hard to fathom just how fast those bears could run, certainly much faster than a human!

On the return trip we watch for eagles, more bears, whales, porpoises, dolphins, and more great scenery. We see one black bear and stop to observe a mother Grizzly and her cub on a small island. Then we stop at Lagoon Cove Marina about half-way back. There is a very small community in what seems like the middle of nowhere. I think its primary function is a gas and supply stop. We have a chance to get off and check out the property here. Our trip has been very relaxing and we’ve never felt rushed once.



A rainbow across Knight Inlet
Photo by Ron Kirstein



A flat bottom skiff used to get close to shore
Photo Courtesy of Ron Kirstein



Two young grizzlys along the shore
Photo Courtesy of Ron Kirstein

Then we are off again for our final run. Approaching Telegraph Cove is like turning the corner on history. You know you are approaching something with historical significance just as soon as you round the corner and see the boardwalk. It is a special place indeed.

This was one awesome trip with memories for a lifetime. But, you guessed it; I still haven't seen any White-Sided Dolphins

To learn more visit [Rip Tide Grizzly Tours](#)



Open Bay Views Towards Heriot Bay
Photo by Ron Kirstein



A mom and cub grizzly on a small island
Photo by Ron Kirstein



Scruff one of the larger grizzly
Photo by Ron Kirstein



The House at the Lagoon Cove Marina
a stop on the way home
Photo by Ron Kirstein



Knight Inlet Lodge near the Marsh
Photo by Ron Kirstein



The Motherships (Water Taxi)
Photo by Ron Kirstein



The Rainbow - Is this the pot of Gold
Photo by Ron Kirstein



A Grizzly Reflection
Photo by Ron Kirstein



Nimpkish River flowing into the Ocean
Just before the turn to Telegraph Cove
Photo by Ron Kirstein



A Lone Grizzly
Photo by Linda Kirstein



A Lone Grizzly eating sedge grass
Photo by Linda Kirstein



Photo by Linda Kirstein



Two Young Grizzly Bears
Photo by Linda Kirstein

Photo by Linda Kirstein



Grizzly Watchers
Photo by Linda Kirstein

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