

NI'NOXSOLA

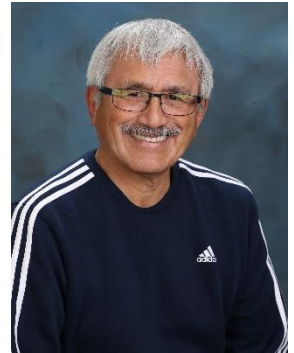
Elders in Residence Program
Indigenous Education Comox Valley Schools



Bryce Mercredi

Animal Encounters

Bears



Leonard Demelt and I had a base camp on Basler Lake, which was about mid-way between Yellowknife and Great Bear Lake. A Twin Otter, which is a type of small airplane, dumped us and about 500 lbs of gear. Our gear consisted of plywood, lumber to set up our tent, propane fridge, Coleman stove, gas for the stove, airtight stove and stovepipe, food for 6 weeks a toboggan and our personal gear.

We were dropped off in the middle of the lake about 2 miles from where we wanted to set up camp as the pilot was afraid that the ice would be too thin if we got closer. It was later that we realized that the ice was more than 5 feet thick...It took us the better part of the day to load our gear on the toboggan, lash it down and haul the cargo to our campsite.

We then started to build our camp. We levelled a spot where we could lay down a floor and set up the walls and frame for the tent. The 12x14 foot tent was then placed over the frame and secured by nailing strips along the bottom of the tent. The wood stove was set up, the cots laid out for sleeping on and the rest of our gear was sorted and put away. This was to be our home for the next 2 months. We also had a radio which kept us in daily contact with the office in Yellowknife.

The ice on the lake was still very thick and as a result we used to walk on the ice to reach the area that we were going to traverse. This saved us a lot of walking time by providing a shortcut across the bay. We were waiting for the ice to break up so that we could use a boat and outboard motor, which would be sent up by twin otter. We could see dark pools of water forming on the ice towards evening. The next morning there would be a white expanse of ice, the water had seeped through the ice overnight. We had 24 hours of daylight at this time of year. Finally, a strong south wind came up. This was what we were waiting for.

The noise was incredible, sounded like glass breaking. The ice was breaking up and within 12 hours the lake was clear of ice.

Our job for the summer was to prospect for uranium and one of the tools of the trade was scintillometer which would detect excess amounts of radiation.

We would go out on fly camps for a week to check out areas that was too far to reach from our camp. We portaged from one lake to the next, the longest was about a half mile, the shortest about 200 yards.

We were preparing to head out for a week to check out this one area, when it started to rain. We were told to not go out as the instruments were very sensitive and would not work if they got wet.

We were resting up when we heard something rattling around our dump. We would burn all of our garbage and food waste so as not to attract bears. I got my rifle, and we went out to investigate and sure enough there was a bear in our dump. I shot the gun in the air, to scare the animal away. He ran off into the bush and we went to see what he was looking for. The bear ran in the bush for about 200 feet then turned down towards the lake. I fired again to make sure that he kept running. He turned towards our camp, then turned again and headed straight towards us. I saw Len leaving but had no time as the bear was about 40 feet away and coming right for me. I had no time to think but reacted. It is amazing how fast a big animal like a bear can run. He was about 30 feet from me when I fired at the running bear and as luck would have it, I hit him. He was going so fast that he rolled over 3 time behind some big rocks, and I couldn't see if he was dead or just wounded.

Carefully, I walked around the boulders and saw that he was dead. Shock finally set in, and I had to sit down as my legs gave out. Len finally showed up and I asked him, 'where did he go?'. He said "I ran back to camp to get the axe in case the bear was on top of me"

That was a very lucky shot. He was about 250 lbs and in very good shape and I felt sorry that I had to shoot him.

One piece of equipment that we had, to use in emergencies, was a pencil flare. It was carried in the breast pocket of the shirt. When used the flare capsule that was screwed in the tip of the gun and the spring-loaded trigger was pulled back and released. The flare could rise about 150 feet in the air. It also made a big bang.

It was a bright sunny, calm day and was doing my traverse when I came upon a clearing in the bush. As I was walking through, a bear suddenly came out of the bush about 30 feet from me. He was unaware that I was there as there was no wind. I plucked the pencil flare gun, which was loaded, and fired the flare right in front of him. The bang and bright flight scared him, and he immediately turned around and ran away. I then had to go and extinguish the fire that had started. That was the end of my day and headed back to camp.

Another day as I was heading back to camp, I came upon this small lake which had a muddy shore due to low water levels, I saw a set of bear tracks. The tracks belonged to a mother bear and cub. I stopped and watched her. She looked back and was checking up on me. They have poor eyesight but have a keen sense of smell and hearing. She was about 50 yards away and was just ambling along with her cub and I spoke to her telling her that I was taking another route home and not a threat to her or her cub. After watching her for a few minutes I changed my route back to camp.

