

Summer in the Southern Great Bear  
Exploratory Photo Adventure 2023

*The Super Voyage!*



**B**ack for 2023 – my second ever 10-day Great Bear Rainforest SUPER VOYAGE! By extending past *Summer in the Southern Exploratory Photo Adventures* by an extra day we have even MORE time in the Great Bear. This means we can visit more photographic locations and have more route options. As always, our “targeted” subjects on this photo tour will include Grizzly Bears, Black Bears, Humpback Whales, Sea Otters, possibly coastal Gray Wolves and Spirit Bears, landscapes and seascapes, and more. And, we’ll do all this while traveling into the depths of the Great Bear Rainforest aboard a classic and spacious 70-foot wooden schooner, the *Passing Cloud*.

***The Region – And Our Expedition At A Glance.*** The portion of the British Columbia mainland coast that stretches from Rivers Inlet in the south to the Skeena River in the north is often referred to as “The Great Bear Rainforest”. At over 64,000 square kilometers (25,000 sq. mi.) it is the largest tract of temperate coastal rainforest left on planet Earth. Here the coastal mountains meet the Pacific Ocean – the area is cut by hundreds of steep-sided inlets/fjords and there are countless islands. The more inland portions of the Great Bear Rainforest (AKA the “*Inner Great Bear*”) are characterized by thick forests cut by steep-sided inlets – here forest literally meets salt water! Another characteristic feature is the presence of wide, fertile



***Sunset Snack – Humpback Style!*** In the last two decades Humpback Whale numbers on BC’s coast have noticeably increased, including in the Great Bear Rainforest. I captured this humpback while it engaged in a little low-energy trap-feeding at sunset.

estuaries where inland rivers and streams drain into the inlets and fjords. These estuaries are wildlife viewing and wildlife photography hotspots!

The portions of the Great Bear Rainforest more directly facing the Pacific Ocean (AKA the “Outer Great Bear”) are more wind- and “sea-swept” and include many islands and islets with more stunted tree growth and are generally more open than the forest of the Inner Great Bear. Many portions of the shoreline even have long, sandy beaches!

Both faces of the Great Bear – the Inner and Outer – are true wilderness and stunningly beautiful! They are rarely visited by humans. And both faces share many fascinating wildlife species, including Grizzly Bears, Black (and Spirit) Bears, coastal Gray Wolves, Wolverines, American Martens, Bald Eagles, Humpback Whales, Killer Whales, and Harbour Seals. The Outer Great Bear adds even more species to this strong list – here Steller Sea Lions, Sea Otters, additional whale species (such as Fin Whales), and many species of waterfowl and seabirds are more commonly seen, adding even more faunal diversity to our adventure!

The southern portion of the Inner Great Bear has generally the same assemblage of wildlife species as the more northern regions. However both of our possible routes provide us with opportunities (if weather conditions and the sea state permits) to explore portions of the Outer Great Bear as well. This gives us a greater chance of seeing and photographing coastal Gray Wolves, Sea Otters, Steller Sea Lions and Fin Whales than on a typical northern (and Inner) Great Bear trip. But please note that on this trip our chances of encountering a Spirit Bear are lower than in the northern Great Bear trips I run in the late summer and early autumn.

***This is a Tour of Exploration!*** The *Summer in the Southern Great Bear Super Voyage 2023* is a true tour of photographic exploration. We’ll explore the inlets, bays and old-growth forest of the spectacular mid-coast of British Columbia. We’ll walk trails and beaches, explore creeks, and search for the unique mix of subject matter that only the Great Bear Rainforest can provide! The photographic opportunities on this tour are always absolutely amazing.

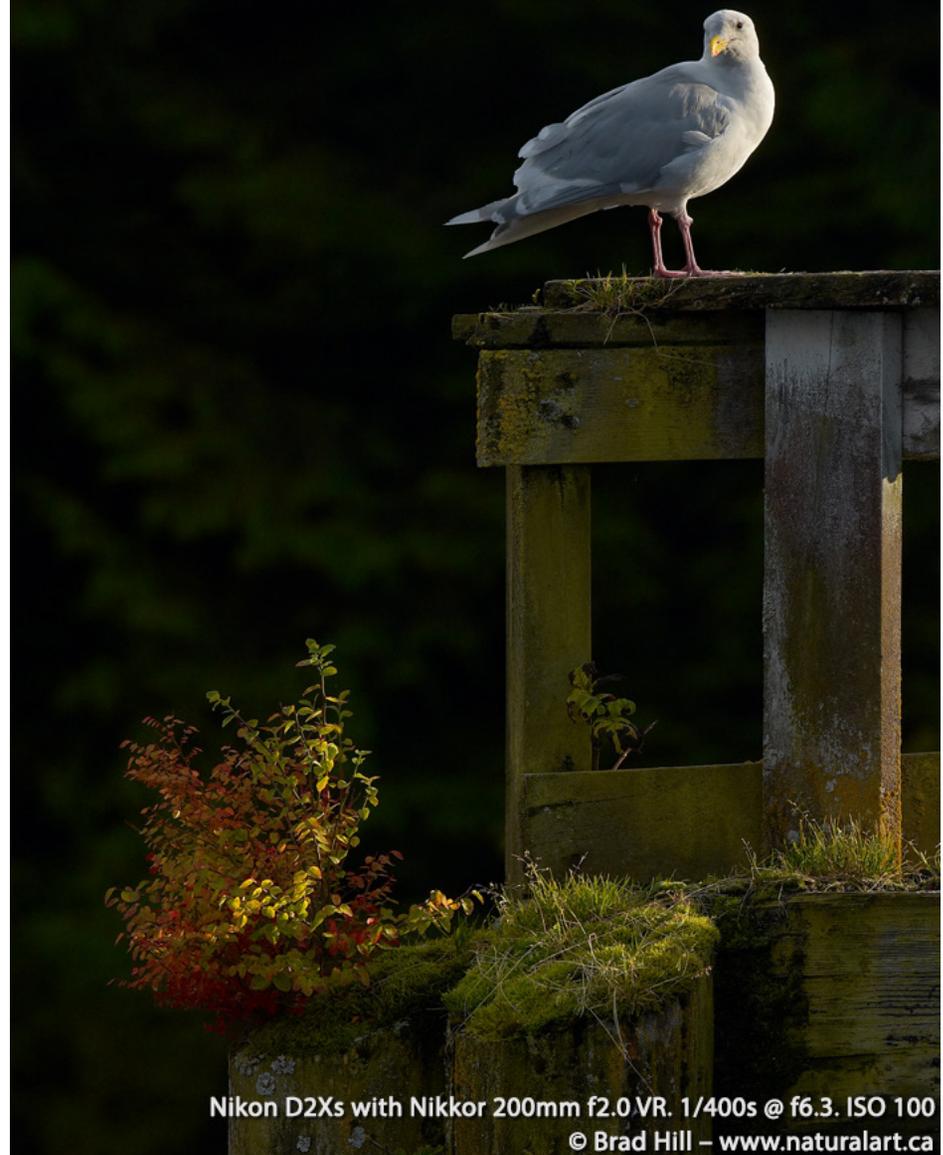


This is a multi-faceted trip, focusing not only on the bears, but on *all* the inhabitants of the Great Bear Rainforest – and the entire ecosystem in which they thrive. While the bears are an integral part of this trip, we will be approaching this trip *with an attitude of finding and capturing any form of natural beauty and natural art we can find*. This may include many species of terrestrial and marine wildlife and birds, intertidal scenes, landscapes, seascapes, and more! ***Please be aware that if your sole goal is to photograph bears (to the exclusion of other subject matter you will be presented with), this may not be the trip for you.***

***An Exciting New Twist for 2023!*** In 2023 we're tweaking both of our possible routes to overlap some of our highly successful 2019 "Summer in the Southern Great Bear" photo tour where we had excellent encounters and photo ops with both Black Bears and coastal Gray Wolves. Of course I can not guarantee we'll see coastal Gray Wolves on this trip, but we're doing all we can to maximize our chances of finding and photographing them!

***About the Photography "Style" On This Photo Tour.*** On this trip – as on our other photo tours – this is a "*photography in true wilderness*" experience. This means we will spend the bulk of our time in isolated and remote wilderness and away from other humans (and other photographers). We'll have to "track down" our subject matter without the help of other outfitters, spotters or real-time online apps listing recent sightings (i.e., there is no "network of sightings" for us to plug into!). Additionally we'll have no "set-up" situations where we can set up in a specific location ahead of time and with the knowledge that a certain species will predictably appear and pose for us! The advantage of our "*photography in true wilderness*" approach is that it produces a far more unique and personalized experience and it can often lead to more original and compelling photos. A possible downside is that it means we don't know the specifics of the shooting conditions ahead of time and thus may put more onus on the photographer to make snap technical and creative decisions in a field setting. This means it may challenge – and encourage you to expand – your photographic skills more than other photo tours do!

***Seeking Natural Art!*** While finding and working with several species of "charismatic megafauna" is a big part of our experience, we'll be approaching this trip with an attitude of *finding and capturing any form of natural beauty and natural art we can find*.



Nikon D2Xs with Nikkor 200mm f2.0 VR. 1/400s @ f6.3. ISO 100  
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**Ghost on the Ridge!** Coastal Gray Wolves are common in the Great Bear Rainforest, but their secretive nature makes them a challenge to see, and an even bigger challenge to photograph.



Nikon D5 with Nikkor 180-400mm f4E @ 560mm. 1/800s @ f7.1; ISO 1800

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**Our Wildlife Subject Matter:** While this is a *photography-in-true-wilderness* trip, we are definitely headed into a target-rich environment! Here's a quick run down of both our "most likely" wildlife subjects and our "less likely but possible" wildlife subjects:

**A. Most Likely Subjects** (50% or greater probability of encounter):

- Black Bears
- Steller Sea Lions
- Herring Gulls
- Harlequin Ducks
- River Otters
- Asst'd songbirds
- Grizzly Bears
- Humpback Whales
- Dall's Porpoises
- Common Loons
- American Mink
- Asst'd seabirds
- Harbour Seals
- Bald Eagles
- Surf Scoters
- Sea Otters
- Great Blue Herons
- Asst'd shorebirds

**B. Less Likely But Possible Subjects** (<50% probability of encounter):

- Killer Whales
- Minke Whales
- Elephant Seals
- Pacific White-sided Dolphins
- Coastal Gray Wolves
- Fin Whales
- Wolverine
- Spirit Bears
- Pacific Marten
- Marbled Murrelets

**2023 Trip Start and End Points:** The photo tour starts and ends in Port Hardy, BC.

**2023 Date:** August 24 - September 3, 2023 including arrival and departure days. August 25 - September 3, 2023 aboard the *Passing Cloud*.

**2023 Price:** \$9,950 CAD plus 5% GST.

### ***What's Included?***

- All meals and accommodation in Port Hardy beginning on the evening of Day 1 (see Itinerary)
- All food and accommodation while aboard the *Passing Cloud*
- A highly-experienced crew, wildlife guides, chef and a professional photography guide
- All First Nation, Conservation, and Stewardship fees
- Use of onboard gear and resources, including rubber boots!
- Use of Zodiac® and all associated safety gear (life jackets, etc.)

### ***What's Not Included?***

- Transportation between your home and Port Hardy, BC at the beginning and end of the trip
- Personal belongings and equipment you bring on this tour
- Meals and accommodation in Port Hardy prior to Day 1 of the photo tour
- Any extra personal expenses incurred because of weather, logistical delays, or missed flights
- Any gratuities for the crew of the *Passing Cloud*



*I'm Currently Pretty Tied Up!* This male Sea Otter has wrapped itself in kelp to help anchor it in place while it rests. Sea Otters have recently re-colonized the region after a nearly century-long absence. © Brad Hill – [www.naturalart.ca](http://www.naturalart.ca)

Nikon D5 with 800m f5.6 VR. 1/1250s @ f11. ISO 1250



*The Original Big Gulp!* Humpback Whales feeding along the shoreline in the Great Bear Rainforest.  
Nikon D4 with AF-S 80-400mm VR @ 180mm. 1/1250s @ f6.3. ISO 1600

### **What To Expect?**

- Cool and rapidly “changeable” weather (daytime highs of about 18-22°C or 65-72°F) with the possibility of moderate to heavy rain
- *Mostly* calm seas, but with some bouts of rolling or choppy water
- Hearty, healthy and delicious food
- Always warm, always dry floating basecamp!
- A truly unique and once-in-a-lifetime experience!

**Photo Tour Leader:** Brad Hill

**Accommodation:** While in Port Hardy we'll be staying at the Quarter-deck Resort & Marina. Unless otherwise requested, you will have single

occupancy accommodation (i.e., a room for yourself) in Port Hardy.

This trip is being offered in association with *Outer Shores Expeditions*. While in the Great Bear Rainforest we will be staying on their classic 70-foot wooden schooner – the *Passing Cloud*. Please be aware that you will be sharing a berth with one other person while on the *Passing Cloud*.

### **Sample Itinerary**

The itinerary of the *Summer in the Southern Great Bear Super Voyage 2023* is designed for flexibility. This allows us to react to the ever-changing distribution and abundance of wildlife and fluctuating weather conditions. Here's *one example* of how our time together may look!

*The Tree of Life.* Bald Eagles are always great subjects, but finding them perched in settings like this is like a photographer's dream come true!



Nikon D4s with Nikkor 400mm f2.8 VR. 1/640s @ f7.1. ISO 1800  
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Note that we have several route options available to us and the actual route we'll follow will be determined by weather conditions, any recent information on wildlife distribution and abundance, and a desire to minimize travel time (and maximize time in the field). At least two of our route options (see map on page 3) provide us with opportunities to explore both faces of the Great Bear – *the Inner* and the *Outer Great Bear*. Please keep in mind this is only *a sample itinerary* and how we actually spend our days may differ from this proposed route and schedule.

***Day 1 – August 24, 2023***

Arrive in Port Hardy, BC. Make your way to the Quarterdeck Resort and Marina. You may check-in any time from 4 PM on. If you arrive early in the day feel free to go for a walk or check out town. Our first official activity will be meeting in the hotel restaurant for dinner at 6:30 PM.

***Day 2 – August 25, 2023***

Early breakfast, followed by a float plane flight to meet the *Passing Cloud* in the Great Bear Rainforest near Bella Bella, BC. After meeting the crew and guides of the *Passing Cloud*, allocating cabins, and a brief orientation we'll begin our journey into the Great Bear Rainforest. Our voyage will immediately take us north into glacier-carved fjords of the "*Inner Great Bear*" where photographic opportunities can abound! The narrow channels we'll travel through are home to Humpback and Killer Whales, Sea Otters, Elephant Seals and countless seabirds. End of day will see us anchoring in a small coastal estuary where salmon may already be arriving. We'll be able to watch for wildlife from the deck of the *Passing Cloud*.

***Day 3 – August 26, 2023***

We'll begin the day heading north with the goal of getting to Mussel Inlet, one of the Great Bear's premiere Grizzly Bear viewing locations. Here we'll be surrounded by snow-capped mountains, steep granite walls, and stunning cascading waterfalls. Those who enjoy spectacular wilderness scenery will be stunned by Mussel Inlet!

**Day 4 – August 27, 2023**

Today we'll continue heading north, now along the east side of Princess Royal Channel and towards Khutze Inlet, another of the Great Bear's many gems. We'll venture into the estuary by Zodiac® with the hopes of finding some of the local inhabitants of this rich ecosystem, which includes Grizzly Bears, Black Bears, coastal Gray Wolves, and Bald Eagles. Khutze Inlet almost always offers the quintessential Great Bear experience!

**Day 5 – August 28, 2023**

Today we'll continue heading north and over the northern tip of Princess Royal Island with the expectation we'll be encountering an increasing number of Humpback Whales and possibly even some lightning-fast Dall's Porpoises. By afternoon we'll be exploring kelp forests and visiting Steller Sea Lion haul-out rocks. With luck we may even encounter some Transient Killer Whales in search of their preferred prey – marine mammals!

**Day 6 – August 29, 2023**

Today we continue south on the western side of Princess Royal Island and venture in a region of the "Outer Great Bear" that's becoming increasingly known as "Whale Haven". Here the sightings of both Humpback and Fin Whales are increasing. Fin Whales are the second largest mammals on Earth and are often longer than the *Passing Cloud!* Evening should see us anchoring in a secluded cove.

**Day 7 – August 30, 2023**

Today we'll continue our cruise south and be on the lookout for large groups of Humpback Whales that are known to engage in unique and spectacular bouts of *bubble net* feeding. Later in the day we'll cross Caamano Sound and shortly thereafter stretch our legs on the stunning white-sanded beaches of Campania Island. Swimming anyone? ;-)



*Shake it Up!* Adult male Grizzly pausing in his pursuit of prey for a quick shake.

Nikon D4 with 400mm f2.8 VR. 1/400s @ f6.3. ISO 560.

© Brad Hill – [www.naturalart.ca](http://www.naturalart.ca)

*Day 8 – August 31, 2023*

Our goal today will be to explore the western inlets of Princess Royal Island and have another taste of the “*Inner Great Bear*”. We’ll head deep into an inlet in the hopes of finding the rare white Spirit Bear. And, we plan to doing a little trekking along creeks and streams which may already be filling with migrating Pacific Salmon.

*Day 9 – September 1, 2023*

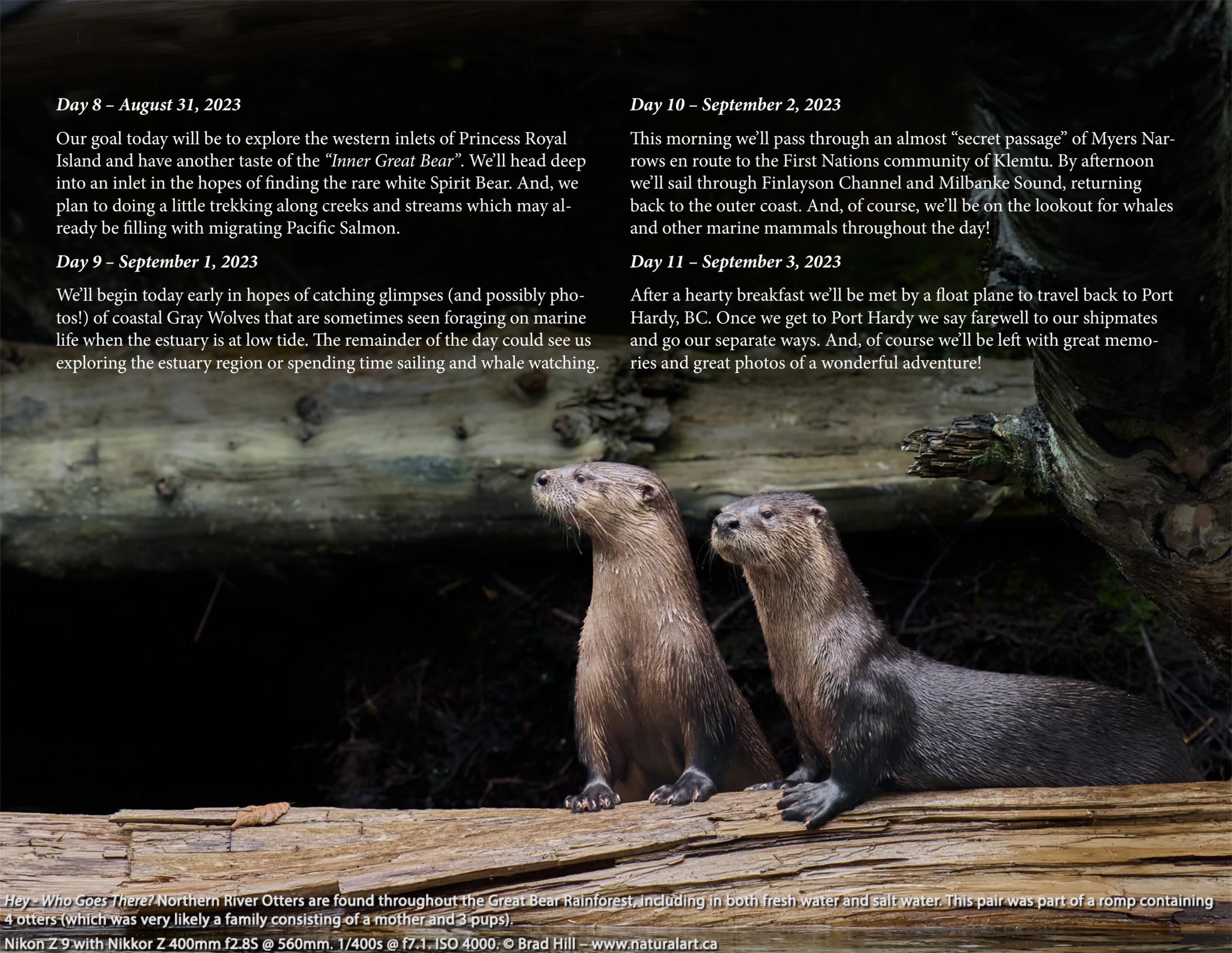
We’ll begin today early in hopes of catching glimpses (and possibly photos!) of coastal Gray Wolves that are sometimes seen foraging on marine life when the estuary is at low tide. The remainder of the day could see us exploring the estuary region or spending time sailing and whale watching.

*Day 10 – September 2, 2023*

This morning we’ll pass through an almost “secret passage” of Myers Narrows en route to the First Nations community of Klemtu. By afternoon we’ll sail through Finlayson Channel and Milbanke Sound, returning back to the outer coast. And, of course, we’ll be on the lookout for whales and other marine mammals throughout the day!

*Day 11 – September 3, 2023*

After a hearty breakfast we’ll be met by a float plane to travel back to Port Hardy, BC. Once we get to Port Hardy we say farewell to our shipmates and go our separate ways. And, of course we’ll be left with great memories and great photos of a wonderful adventure!



*Hey - Who Goes There?* Northern River Otters are found throughout the Great Bear Rainforest, including in both fresh water and salt water. This pair was part of a romp containing 4 otters (which was very likely a family consisting of a mother and 3 pups).



## Our Ethical Stance – *Wildlife FIRST!*

Wildlife conservation is the primary reason for my involvement in wildlife photography. As such, *I place the welfare and value of our subjects above the value of any photograph of them.* This philosophy is embodied in my *Wildlife FIRST* rules of conduct that guide our actions during all my photo tours. These four simple ethical rules state that:

1. **Ethical wildlife photographers should engage in *passive* wildlife photography only.** This means striving to capture images of wildlife behaving as naturally as possible and without the photographer taking any actions to guide the subject(s) toward desirable settings and/or backdrops or elicit specific “poses”.
2. **Ethical wildlife photographers should do nothing *intentional* to alter or influence the behaviour of their subjects for the purpose of photography.** This includes not intentionally influencing their distribution in space or their behaviour. This translates into not engaging in any form of luring or baiting (or any other form of food supplementation).

Additionally, it extends to not using any sound to alter the behaviour of the subject for the purpose of photography, including using predator and/or prey calls, song or vocalization playbacks, vocal clicking, or making any other sound to cause the subject to alter its ongoing behaviour and look at the photographer.

3. While conforming to and working within any legal guidelines determining minimum allowable approach distances, **ethical wildlife photographers should allow the wildlife subject – regardless of the species – to determine the subject-to-photographer distance it is comfortable with.** This principle serves to reduce stress on the subject and also allows the capture of photographs of the subject behaving in a more natural, and often more interesting, fashion.
4. **Ethical wildlife photographers always consider both their *individual and the overall collective effects* photographic activities can have on the subject(s).** This includes being aware of *your total time spent with the wildlife subject(s)* and, whenever possible, *the total time spent with the subject by all photographers utilizing the subject.* In practice this means the photographer may have to withdraw from the subject and cease photographic efforts of it, especially if there is any indication that his or her presence is impacting on the subject's behavioural routine (including activities such as feeding, resting and/or sleeping, caring for its offspring, etc.). This consideration is always important and may become even MORE important if multiple photographers or groups of photographers are simultaneously or sequentially sharing the same subject(s).

All photographers participating in my photo tours are expected to conform to these ethical rules.

All images in this trip brochure and the Natural Art Images website ([www.naturalart.ca](http://www.naturalart.ca)) were captured following these *Wildlife FIRST* rules of photographer conduct.

For more information about this amazing trip contact Brad Hill at:

[seminars@naturalart.ca](mailto:seminars@naturalart.ca)

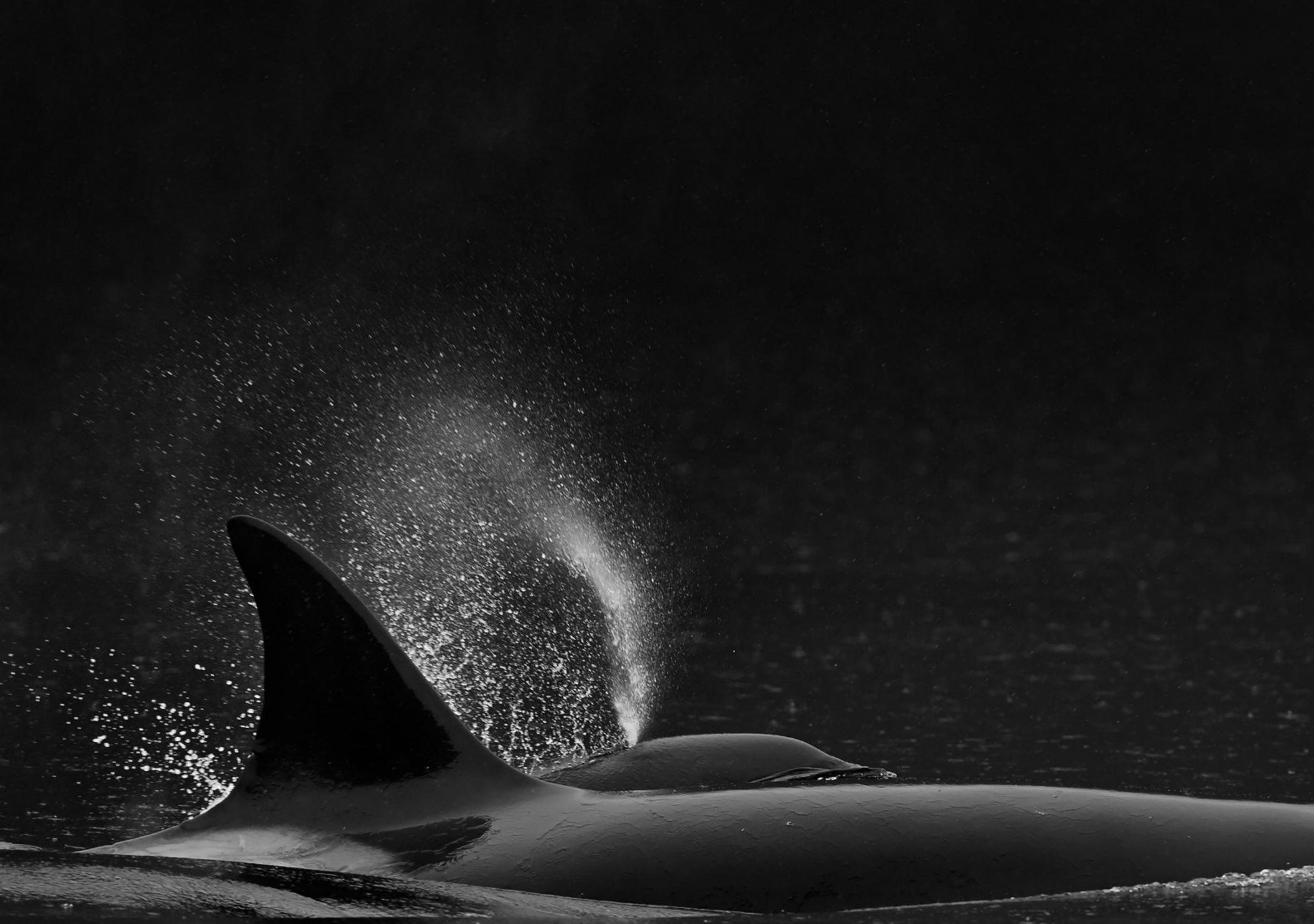
*Black-on-Black – Emerging from Shadows.*





*Beauty in the Beast.* Humpback Whale numbers have been on the rise in recent years in the channels and inlets of the Great Bear Rainforest. The whales are commonly seen during our photo tours – but capturing a breach shot is a special and rare treat!

Nikon D5 with Sigma Sport 150-600mm @ 550mm. 1/1250s @ f7.1. ISO 4000. © Brad Hill – [www.naturalart.ca](http://www.naturalart.ca)



*The Blow!* This female Killer Whale and her calf are part of a small pod of 5 transient Killer Whales hunting for their primary prey – marine mammals. Transient Killer Whales can be seen in both the inside and outside coastal waters of the Great Bear Rainforest.

Nikon D4 with 400mm f2.8 VR. 1/1000s @ f5.6. ISO 2000. © Brad Hill – [www.naturalart.ca](http://www.naturalart.ca)

Incomparable Khutze Inlet! Spectacular moody light, stunning backdrops, and dramatic subjects – what more could you ask for?



*The "Inner" Great Bear.* Our photo tour begins in the glacier-carved channels, inlets, bays, and estuaries of the central BC coast. Here towering mountains fall steeply to the Pacific Ocean, with forest often meeting the water line! Humpbacks, Killer Whales, Harbour Seals and the occasional Steller Sea Lion are found in these waters. Brown and Black Bears, coastal Gray Wolves, and many other species reside in the thick forests.



*The Untamed Beauty of Khutze Inlet. Solitary Humpback Whale dives deep in Khutze Inlet*



*Unnamed Falls!* Go off the beaten path in the Great Bear and you can find stunning scenes that few have ever witnessed.



The "Outer" Great Bear – Where Rock Meets Sand! Many of the western-most islands and shorelines on the BC coast offer a beautiful mix of beach, forest, and rock! In this region we find greater numbers of Sea Otters, Steller Sea Lions, and Coastal Gray Wolves



