

SOARING SPIRITS

Rediscovery International Training Program
July 17-26, 2009

OVERVIEW

For the first time ever, the Rediscovery International Foundation is offering a unique training program at its new Soaring Spirits camp location on the legendary Skeena River. Surrounded by majestic mountains, and with five million wild salmon swimming past its shores, eagles soaring overhead and Kermode "Spirit Bears" grazing in nearby meadows - this is a setting that cannot fail to lift one's spirit.

The 10-day training package has three goals: 1) to teach camp skills necessary to running healthy and safe Rediscovery camps, 2) to teach natural history interpretation techniques in a wide range of settings for Rediscovery camps and the growing ecotourism industry, and 3) to offer immersion education into the cultures of three distinct First Nation cultures – the Wet'suwet'en, Gitksan, Nisga'a and Tsimshian.

Soaring Spirits camp facilities are as inspired as the location. Large canvas wall tents with beautiful Northwest Coast house frontal designs, serve as camp accommodation. A beautiful post-and-beam dining hall, overlooking Frog Mountain, will be the warm and cozy site for wonderful meals featuring wild salmon, berries, mushrooms and endless bounty from the camp's large organic garden.

ITINERARY

Friday/July 17

* Our adventure begins in Smithers, B.C. which is easily accessible by car, bus, train or flights from Vancouver (or points East). Our 11:00 am pick up locations will be Smithers Airport and the lobby of Hudson Bay Lodge in downtown Smithers.

* Participants will be immersed in adventure learning right from the start. Within minutes of arriving we will drive up Hudson Bay Mountain to enjoy a picnic lunch and climb through gorgeous meadows of wildflowers while learning about alpine ecosystems. Marmots and ptarmigan are easily spotted here, while wolves, mountain goats and grizzlies are more elusive.

* We next study glacial melt at twin waterfall sites pouring down from Hudson Bay Mountain. Nearby at Moricetown, we will witness Wet'suwet'en fishing techniques that have been in practice since the retreat of the great Ice Age, and we will visit the informative cultural centre overlooking Morice Falls.

* An hour drive later, we arrive at the Soaring Spirits Camp on the banks of the Skeena River and get assigned to our beautifully designed tents prior to group bonding activities, a welcome feast and opening Council Fire.

(Overnight: Soaring Spirits Camp)

Saturday/July 18

- For early risers, sunrise over the Skeena River is a sight never to be forgotten when the hanging glaciers of the Seven Sisters mountains turn red with the rising sun.
- A “Morning Circle Greeting” will be followed by a hearty breakfast and a few camp chores before formal sessions begin this day.
- Rediscovery Camp Health & Safety Standards will be the focus our morning session as we have a hands-on look at proper camp set up.
- After lunch we will hike to nearby Boulder Creek for bush skill lessons in fire building and emergency shelter construction. Here too we will discuss procedures and consider locations for conducting safe “Solos”.
- There will be time in the late afternoon to fish for salmon or take a dip in a quiet slough of the Skeena River before returning to camp for dinner.
- Following our evening clean up chores, we will enjoy Rediscovery games before gathering around the Council Fire for an evening of songs and local legends.

(Overnight: Soaring Spirits Camp)

Sunday/July 19

- Right after breakfast and camp chores we will have a session on preparation for day hikes and expeditions prior to setting off with a picnic lunch on a hike up the Boulder Creek Trail into the new Seven Sisters Provincial Park Reserve.
- Direction finding using map and compass will be an important component of this hike as will plant identification.
- Our route will take us to a spectacular lookout where we will have an unobstructed view of granite spires and hanging glaciers that soar to nearly 3,000 meters.
- Along the way we will stop to study wildlife signs and tracks - moose, deer, mountain goat, black and grizzly bear, mink, marten, wolverine, weasel, coyote, wolf, rabbit, grouse and other animals that claim this region as their territory.
- Back in camp we will have lessons in Thai therapeutic massage to relieve any sore shoulder, neck, back or leg discomfort from our hike.
- A great dinner will be followed by Rediscovery games and a night of “Feather Sharing” around the Council Fire.

(Overnight: Soaring Spirits Camp)

Monday/July 20

- This is another great day for adventure as we rise early and enjoy a big breakfast before setting off to canoe the legendary Skeena (Ksan – the “River of Mists”).
- We will travel by bus one hour to Kispiox, a charming Gitksan village at the confluence of the Kispiox and Skeena Rivers, to view their proud display of ancient totem poles.
- Next we drive a short ways to Ksan, a re-created Gitksan village that offers a fascinating glimpse into life in days prior to European contact.
- After exploring the many longhouses and the excellent museum, we will have a safety briefing at the riverbank before embarking on our canoe voyage.
- The canoe journey from Ksan to Kitwanga, along the ancestral highway of the Gitksan and Tsimshian, will offer vivid insights into a time when this was the principal mode of travel in these parts.
- A picnic lunch will be enjoyed on a gravel bar along the way, and there will be excellent opportunities for wildlife viewing along shore.
- Lessons in river hydrology and terminology - chutes, haystacks, back eddies, and sweepers – will become familiar terms to all by the end of the voyage.
- The canoe journey will end in Kitwanga where there will be an opportunity to learn the stories told by more ancestral totem poles before returning a short distance to camp.
- Hereditary Gitksan chiefs will honour the group with their presence at a traditional Gitksan dinner feast this night, and share teachings around the Council Fire to close out an amazing day.

(Overnight: Soaring Spirits Camp)

Tuesday/July 21

- Our last day in camp will be a relaxing one before we set off on our 4-day study safari. After breakfast and camp chores we will study edible, medicinal and poisonous plants of the interior forest, and learn acclimatization exercises that allow for a more intimate understanding of forest relationships.
- After lunch back at camp, we will spend the afternoon hours fishing for salmon and learning the time-honoured native methods for smoking and jarring our catch. Hopefully, some of our bounty will find its way to the dinner table.
- There will be time for Rediscovery games in the evening and possibly a relaxing Thai massage before Council Fire.

(Overnight: Soaring Spirits Camp)

Wednesday/July 22

- Today we begin our exciting 5-day study safari to explore the stunning landscape features and living ecosystems of the region, as well as to experience two more indigenous cultures – the Nisga'a and Tsimshian.
- Right after breakfast, we board a bus for the 2-hour drive north to Hyder Alaska to learn about grizzlies and glaciers at two of the best viewing locations in the world. Along the way, we'll have a short stop in Kitwankool to view the world's oldest and most intricately carved totems poles.
- The drive through the Coast Mountain Range from Meziadin Lake to Stewart, B.C. is one of the most scenic drives in the world. At one point Bear Glacier sweeps down from a huge ice field almost to the edge of the highway.
- Just 3 km from Stewart we cross the US border to the virtual ghost town of Hyder, Alaska. After setting up our camp on the edge of the sea, we will visit Fish Creek where an elevated cedar boardwalk allows for safe and intimate viewing of grizzly bears and other animals preying on chum salmon.
- Our camp for the next two nights will be in a meadow beside the Portland Canal estuary surrounded by towering coastal mountains and massive trees.

(Overnight: Hyder, Alaska Estuary Camp)

Thursday/ July 23

- Today we step back in time to see a remnant of the great ice sheet that covered B.C. and most of Canada in the Pleistocene Era.
- While breakfast is being prepared we will have an opportunity to watch for grizzlies feeding on grasses and sedges in the tidal flats. After grubbing up, we set off on the hour-long drive to Salmon Glacier.
- Salmon Glacier is part of the fifth largest ice field in all of Canada, and provides excellent opportunities for studying classic glacial features: lateral moraines, terminal moraines, crevasse, etc.
- Hiking to the very toe of the glacier for a picnic lunch we may encounter barren ground grizzlies grazing peacefully on the rich alpine vegetation. We will also have first hand lessons in glacial retreat resulting from global warming.
- Returning to camp in the late afternoon, we can stop one last time to watch for grizzlies, eagles, wolves, beaver, mergansers and gulls feeding at Fish Creek.
- Everyone helps prepare dinner this evening as we cook up a classic Alaskan stew with bannock, wild berry cobbler for dessert and Labrador tea.

(Overnight: Hyder, Alaska Estuary Camp)

Friday/July 24

- Today we travel to the beautiful Nass Valley, home of the Nisga'a Nation.
- Our route takes us back through Stewart, B.C. and past Meziadin Lake where we can stop for a swim if the water feels and looks inviting.
- At Cranberry Junction we head west to the Pacific following the legendary "Grease Trail" used in ancient times by the Wet'suwet'en and Gitksan peoples to transport the rich oil of the oolichan fish hundreds of kilometers inland from the coast.
- Lunch will be served in Gitwansilk beside a suspension bridge over the Nass River. We will hike through the forest here to view a fish wheel that demonstrates one of the most ingenious native technologies for procuring salmon.
- Continuing on to the Pacific Coast, towering forests, steep mountains and the Nass River estuary dominate the landscape. As we approach the coast we should see bald eagles in abundance and possibly coastal brown bears feeding on tidal grasses.
- The isolated Nisga'a village of Gincolith is our destination for the day. We will set up camp beside the beautiful Gincolith River and have an opportunity to meet the warm and friendly residents in their traditional feast house by the sea.

(Overnight: Gincolith River Camp)

Saturday/July 25

- Right after breakfast we will have time to explore the old growth temperate forest nearby our camp and learn about the nitrogen-15 transfer of nutrients from sea to forest through salmon spawning.
- When the tides are favourable, we head out to sea today with local fishermen to harvest dungeness crab, halibut, ling cod, snapper and salmon from these bountiful northern waters. Eagles, orcas, humpback whales, seals, sea lions and coastal brown bears are frequently sighted here.
- Later in the day we will have an opportunity to visit the village fish hatchery and fish for salmon entering the Gincolith River.
- Preparing our days catch for a seafood feast will offer many lessons in native food cleaning techniques and cooking styles.
- Our final night on the Pacific Coast will be marked by a feast of foods we have gathered and prepared from the surrounding land and sea – a true testimony to the bounty and pristine nature of this great land.

(Overnight: Gincolith River Camp)

Sunday/July 26

- We pack up camp after breakfast and return to our Soaring Spirits base camp on the Skeena River. As we drive back through the beautiful Nass Valley we will witness the massive lava flow that buried three Nisga'a villages here in the last century.
- Nisga'a Lava Beds Memorial Provincial Park is as much a monument to those that lost their lives in this disaster as it is a testimony to Canada's most recent volcanic eruption. We will take time to visit the fascinating interpretive centre and hike trails through the lava beds that bring this cataclysmic event fully to life.
- It's a 2-hour drive from Gincolith to Terrace where we will stop for lunch before visiting Kitselas Canyon, a National Historic Site that tells the story of 5,000 years of continuous occupation by Tsimshian peoples.
- Tsimshian history and culture is powerfully conveyed here through the ancient village sites, petroglyphs on rocks in the river and the haunting sense of a former presence that permeates Kitselas Canyon today.
- A 45-minute drive puts us back at our original Soaring Spirits base camp for a closing feast and ceremony that marks the passage of a most remarkable journey.

(Overnight: Soaring Spirits Camp)

Monday/July 27

- Breakfast and a closing "Medicine Wheel" ceremony will mark the close of camp this morning before we return to Smithers for the journey home.

WHAT TO BRING:

Clothing:

- 1 waterproof rain jacket (with hood) & pants
- 1 wool sweater or fleece
- 1 wool watch cap (toque)
- 1 pair of gloves
- 1 pair comfortable hiking boots
- 1 cotton sweatshirt
- 2 long-sleeve cotton shirts
- 3 cotton t-shirts
- 2 pair long trousers
- 2 pair shorts
- 4-5 pair of socks & underwear
- swim suit

- 1 pair of broken-in hiking boots
- 1 pair of runners
- 1 pair of sandals or water togs

Supplies:

- wash kit: (tooth brush & paste, soap, shampoo, comb, nail clippers, deodorant)
- 1 medium sized back pack
- 1 small day pack
- 1 sleeping bag & pad
- 1 pocket knife
- 1 water bottle
- personal medication & basic first aid kit
- sunglasses & prescription glasses (including extra pair)
- sun hat with visor
- camera with lots of film or digital chip capacity
- binoculars
- flash light (torch)

And a great spirit of fun and adventure!