

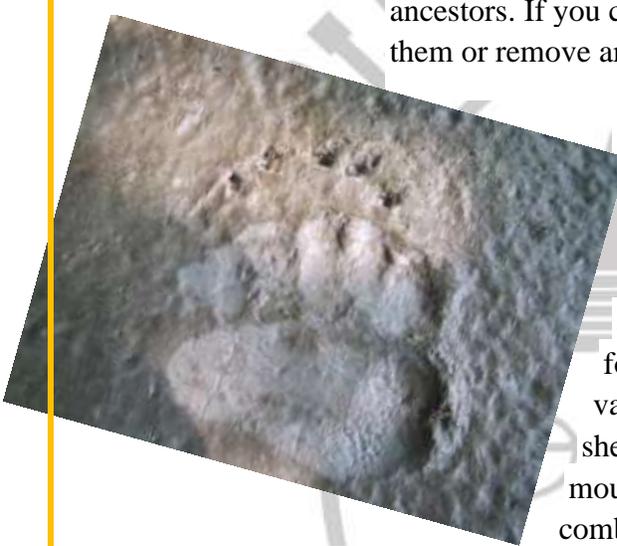
*Solstice Recreation Group's  
Bella Coola Valley River Rafting*

**Client Information and Orientation Package**



### **Cultural Heritage – Bella Coola Valley**

The surrounding areas have been used by the Nuxalk and Carrier First Nations for thousands of years. Routes known as “grease trails” enabled the interior peoples to trade furs and obsidian for marine products such as eulachon grease. The Nuxalk people of the Bella Coola valley depended on the abundance of salmon in the rivers for their livelihood. Today, descendants of these earliest inhabitants catch and process fish from the same rivers in much the same way as did their ancestors. If you come across any First Nations heritage sites, do not disturb them or remove artifacts.



### **Conservation**

The climate and topography influence the type and distribution of vegetation, with four zones being easily identifiable. Commencing at the coast and extending inland along the Talchako and Dean Rivers is a coastal hemlock forest that thrives in this moist area. Farther up the Bella Coola valley the climate is drier since much precipitation has been shed by the time Pacific air masses have passed through the mountains. At lower levels and on the plateau, forest cover is a combination of Douglas-fir and trembling aspen or lodgepole pine interspersed with natural meadows. High on the mountainsides is dense Englemann spruce and sub-alpine fir growth that gives way above 1,650 meters to treeless alpine tundra.

### **Wildlife**

The alpine and grass meadows north of Highway 20 are the habitat of grizzly bears, black bears, mountain goats, caribou and wolves and the summer range of moose and mule deer. In the summer and into the late fall grizzly bears utilize the Atnarko valley in pursuit of salmon. Cougar and many other smaller mammals also inhabit the Valley. There is also a great variety of bird life, including the magnificent trumpeter swans that winter at Lonesome Lake.

The Bella Coola Valley is also known for its coastal cutthroat trout, mountain whitefish, resident and sea-run Dolly Varden, and runs of chinook, Coho, sockeye, chum, and pink salmon.

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## Client Safety Guidelines

### Guidelines

#### General Safety Guidelines:

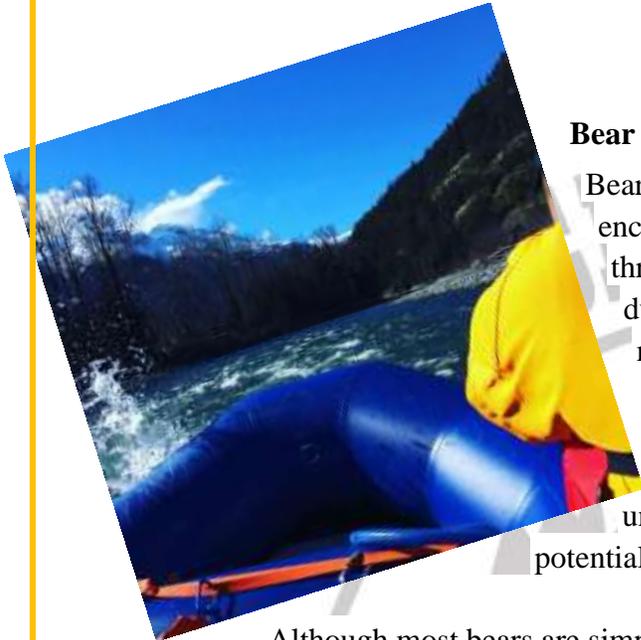
1. Garbage and food odors will attract bears. Once bears become accustomed to human food they can be dangerous and usually have to be destroyed.
2. Dispose of garbage in bear-proof containers.
3. Store food securely in your vehicle.
4. Keep pets leashed at all times.
5. Keep children in sight.
6. Obey all closures and warnings.
7. If a bear approaches you, stay calm. Do not run. Back away slowly.
8. Never approach or feed bears.

#### Fishing

9. Never fish alone.
10. Bleed and clean your catch immediately – not at your campsite – and throw remains into fast flowing water.
11. Store fish and bait in a sealed container in your vehicle, not in tents or in the open. Bears can open coolers.
12. Handle roe cleanly. Wash your hands afterwards, do not wipe on clothing.
13. If approached by a bear, reel in and leave the area. Cutline if playing a fish.
14. Do not build fires or cook on the river's edge.
15. Grizzly bears range throughout the Valley, but many of them congregate on the Atnarko and Dean rivers during the fall salmon migration. Fishing and hiking may be dangerous. Make plenty of noise and watch both riverbanks.

#### Bear Aware

16. You are in bear territory on the Atnarko and Bella Coola Rivers, so expect to see either a Black Bear or Grizzly bear during your River Adventure.
17. No food is allowed on our rafts during the River Raft – you can bring a water bottle for the Raft but it will need to be able to be clipped on our raft. We recommend the Nalgene style water bottles.
18. In the event of our Raft approaching a bear on the Bella Coola River, please remain in the raft and remain calm. No load or distracting behavior will be allowed. This may interfere with the natural feeding of the bear. This usually is during the last few weeks in August, Sept. and Oct. annually when the bears are feeding on the salmon in preparation for hibernation.
19. No camera flashes are allowed to be activated while taking pictures of the wildlife on the Bella Coola River. This flash once again disrupts the animals and may cause them to withdraw from their natural activity.



### **Bear Safety**

Bears may be encountered throughout area during the summer months. Bears are not tame, gentle or cuddly; they are unpredictable and potentially dangerous.



Although most bears are simply travelling through and make every effort to avoid humans, a bag of garbage or some unattended food on a picnic table may be irresistible to their keen sense of smell.

### **A Fed Bear is a Dead Bear**

Don't be a contributor to food-conditioning.

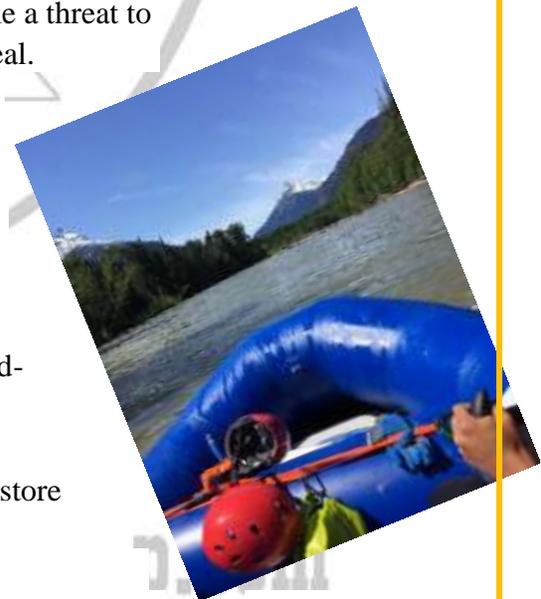
Bears that scavenge food begin to associate food with humans, and become "food-conditioned." Food-conditioned bears lose their natural fear of humans and become a threat to area visitors as they roam through the valley in search of an easy meal.

There is little or no chance of correcting a food-conditioned bear and the BC Conservation Service is forced to destroy them when they become aggressive towards humans.

### **Avoiding Dangerous Encounters with Bears**

There are some simple precautions you must take to prevent the food-conditioning of bears and avoid dangerous bear encounters.

- Never feed or approach Bears or other wildlife.
- Reduce or eliminate odors that attract bears. If you are camping, store food in air-tight containers in your RV or car trunk.
- Bear caches must be used if they are available if you are tenting.
- Pack out all your garbage. Store garbage with your food, out of reach of bears. Do not bury garbage or throw it into pit toilets. Only paper and wood may be burned: plastics, tinfoil, and food items do not burn completely and the remains will attract bears (besides creating an unsightly mess). Storing garbage in bear-proof containers is recommended.



- Cook and eat well away from your tent.
- Clean up immediately and thoroughly. Never leave cooking utensils, coolers, grease or dish water lying around. Dispose of dish water by straining it and then throwing it into a gray water pit or pit toilet. Solids should be packed out with the garbage.
- The odors of cosmetics, toothpaste and insect repellent can attract bears. These should be stored out of reach with your food and garbage, never in your tent. Leave strongly perfumed items at home.
- Obey all closures and warnings.

### **While staying in Bear Country**

- Always keep children nearby and in sight.
- Always sleep in a tent or in your RV– not “under the stars”.
- Obey all posted regulations, stay on designated trails and comply with posted warnings.
- Hike portages and trails as a group. Solo hiking is not advised – you reduce the risk of an attack by traveling together as a group. Do not let children wander. Always carry Bear Spray while on trails.
- Keep pets leashed. If possible, keep pets at home. Free-running pets can anger a bear and provoke an attack.



### **Reduce the chance of surprising a bear.**

- Always check ahead for bears in the distance. If one is spotted, make a wide detour and leave the area immediately.
- Make warning noises and loud sounds, bear bells and whistles are great.
- Watch for bear sign: tracks, droppings, overturned rocks, rotten trees torn apart, clawed, bitten or rubbed trees, bear trails, fresh diggings or trampled vegetation.

### **Stay clear of dead wildlife.**

- Take note of signs that may indicate dead wildlife – such as circling crows or ravens, or the smell of rotting meat.
- Carcasses attract bears. Leave the area immediately!
- Report the location of dead wildlife to the BC Conservation Office or BC Parks Staff.

If you have an encounter with a bear, please leave the area immediately and report it to the BC Conservation Office or BC Parks as soon as possible.

Bear pepper sprays have been effective in deterring some bear attacks. However, do not use them as a substitute for safe practices in bear country. Avoidance is still your best bet.

### **Bear Facts**

- Bears are as fast as racehorses, on the flats, uphill or downhill
- Bears are strong swimmers.
- Bears have good eyesight, good hearing, and an acute sense of smell.
- All black bears and young grizzlies are agile tree climbers; mature grizzlies are poor climbers, but they have a reach up to 4 meters.
- If a bear is standing up it is usually trying to identify you. Talk softly so it knows what you are. Move away, keeping it in view. Do not make direct eye contact.

### **How to Identify a Bear**

Identifying bears is important if you are ever approached by one.

#### **Black Bear (*Ursus americanus* Pallas)**

Black Bear



Color: Varies. Black, brown, cinnamon or blond, often with a white patch on the chest or at the throat.

Height: Approximately 90 cm at the shoulder.

Weight: 57 kg to more than 270 kg. Females are usually smaller than males.

Characteristics: Straight face profile; short, curved claws; barely noticeable shoulder hump

Habitat: Prefers forested areas with low-growing plants and berry-producing shrubs (e.g. small forest openings, stream or lake edges, open forest).



### **Grizzly Bear (*Ursus arctos horribilis* Ord)**

Grizzly Bear



**Color:** Varies. Black (rare), brown or blond. Fur often white-tipped or “grizzled.” Light-colored patches may occur around neck, shoulders and on rear flanks.

**Height:** Slightly above one meter at shoulder; 1.8 to 2.0 meters when erect.

**Weight:** 200 kg to more than 450 kg. Females are usually smaller than males.

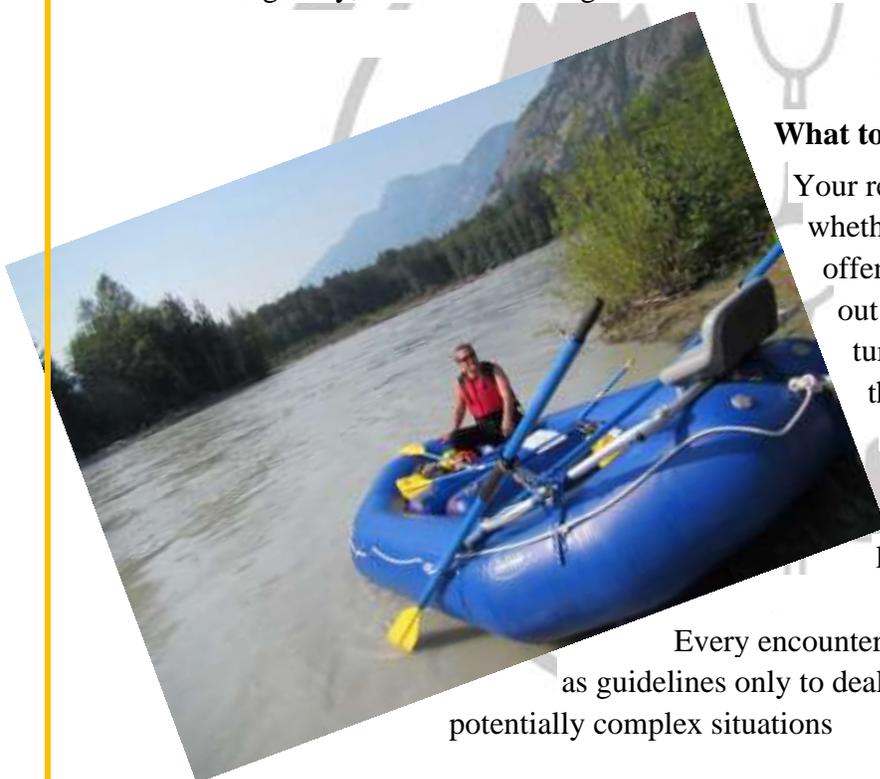
**Characteristics:** Dished or concave face long; curved claws; prominent shoulder hump

**Habitat:** Semi-open spaces preferred. High country in late summer and early fall; valley bottoms late fall and spring.

**What to do if you see a Bear**

**If It Does Not Approach**

- If spotted in the distance, do not approach the bear. Make a wide detour or leave the area immediately. Report your sighting to the RCMP, BC Parks or the BC Conservation Office at the first opportunity.
- If you are at close range, do not approach the bear. Remain calm, keep it in view. Avoid direct eye contact. Move away without running.
- **If the Bear Approaches**
- If the bear is standing up, it is usually trying to identify you. Talk softly so it knows what you are. If it is snapping its jaws, lowering its head, flattening its ears, growling or making “woofing” signs, it is displaying aggression.
- Do not run unless you are very close to a secure place. Move away, keeping it in view. Avoid direct eye contact. Dropping your pack or an object may distract it to give you more time. If it is a grizzly, consider climbing a tree.



### What to do if a Bear Attacks

Your response depends on the species and whether the bear is being defensive or offensive. Bears sometimes bluff their way out of a confrontation by charging then turning away at the last moment. Generally, the response is to do nothing to threaten or further arouse the bear. While fighting back usually increases the intensity of an attack, it may cause the bear to leave.

Every encounter is unique and the following are offered as guidelines only to deal with an unpredictable animal and potentially complex situations

#### Grizzly Attacks from Surprise (defensive)

- Do nothing to threaten or further arouse the bear.
- Play dead. Assume the “**cannonball position**” *with hands clasped behind neck and face buried in knees.*
- Do not move until the bear leaves the area. Such attacks seldom last beyond a few minutes.

#### Black Bear Attacks from Surprise (defensive)

- Playing dead is not appropriate. Try to retreat from the attack.

### **Grizzly or Black Bear Attacks Offensively (including stalking you or when you are sleeping)**

- **Do not play dead. Try to escape to a secure place (car or building) or climb a tree unless it is a black bear. If you have no other option, try to intimidate the bear with deterrents or weapons such as tree branches or rocks.**

### **Grizzly or Black Bear Attacking for Your Food**

- Abandon the food. Leave the area.
- Do not deal with a problem bear unless it is an emergency.

**Garbage disposal:** We pack out everything that we pack in. All garbage is to be disposed within Bear Proof garbage cans located within the valley.

**Necessary Personal Items:** You will be provided with a Personal Items list well in advance of your arrival. Ensuring you are dressed for the weather on your given day will assist in ensuring you do not overheat or become too cold during your river raft adventure.

### **Emergency Equipment:**

Solstice Recreation Group is equipped with emergency communication equipment (sat phone / cell phone) if the situation arises on the river that requires either medical or emergency evacuation procedures.

We also carry an Advanced First Aid kit during our River Rafting Adventure

### **Contingency Plans:**

In the event of unforeseen weather or conditions in which we need to vacate either the river or the scheduled days activities you will be advised by our guides of the procedure. The best way to ensure we do not have to vacate the River or days schedule activity is to ensure you are properly dressed for the days weather. All clients will wear wet suits due to the Bella Coola River temperature – year round as it is glacier feed. We may need to abandon the day's activities along the river due to a number of circumstances such as lightning and have a number of pull out locations that we will exit the river.

### **Emergency Procedures:**

1. First Aid / Injuries – All Bella Coola River Rafting Adventure staff are Advanced First Aid certified and we carry an Advanced Medical Kit with us during our rafting adventure. Please report all injuries, no matter the size. Small cuts and blisters can grow to become problematic in only a few hours, so we treat all injuries regardless of the size.

2. Emergency Evacuation Procedures - In the event that a member of the rafting adventure becomes ill or injured due to medical or trauma reasons we will engage our Emergency Evacuation Procedures. As we are in a wilderness environment, we may have to call for Emergency assistance if required. Follow the direction of your guide. They will dispatch the resources necessary to evacuate an ill or injured client. We ask that all members of the expedition remain calm and follow SRG staff direction in the event of an emergency.



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## ***Your Solstice Recreation Group River Rafting Adventure Guides:***

Ian Cox:



Dr. Cox is a current serving member of the Canadian Forces whom is currently stationed at CFB Esquimalt. Dr. Cox is an avid white-water kayaker, rafting guide, rock climber and mountaineer.

Jerome Bourget:



Jerome is a current Canadian Forces serving member. At present Mr. Bourget works as a Search and Rescue Technician based out of CFB Comox. Jerome is well versed in both marine and land-based activities. Jerome holds an unrestricted River Raft Guides License presently.

Ray Hawkes:



Ray has dual land based and marine based qualifications and guiding experience. Ray has years of Adventure Guiding and Instruction within BC and the Central Coast of BC. Ray is a certified instructor in mountain / rock climbing as well as a Paddle Canada Instructor. Ray is an Advanced First Aid Instructor who enjoys mountaineering / rock climbing, scuba diving, rafting, and canoeing with his two sons.

Corey Boux:



Corey brings both marine and land-based certifications and experience. Corey works as both a Heli-ski guide and a white-water rafting guide based out of Squamish / Whistler BC. Corey brings years of guiding to the team and is another asset to our team.