



Home: looking toward Taku Glacier (center) and the Taku River while crossing Taku Inlet

Snettisham 2007 – 8: Productivity July 27-29

Late July and I was back to Snettisham after a weekend in town. I took off Friday evening at 6:00 pm and zipped down to the homestead with Nigel. Typical for July, I saw no whales in Stephen's Passage, nor even in Port Snettisham. Travis had heroically fixed the tilt on my engine, so when I arrived I anchored just off the lodge. Nigel and I relaxed that evening and went to bed early.

Next morning brought pleasant, lightly overcast weather and for some reason I was moved to haul rocks. Travis and Glenn had begun a path of flat rocks through the grassy, marshy beach a few weeks before, creating a stretch about 12 feet long. This area is wet and goopy, so anything to get your feet off the ground improves things immensely. I grabbed the wheelbarrow and set off up and down the beach, collecting several loads of shale and placing them at the start of the path. I was somewhat limited in rock options by my sentimentality and unwillingness to harm critters unnecessarily. Many of the finest

flat rocks provide habitat to myriad crustaceans that I refused to make homeless for my selfish gains. Nevertheless, I didn't have to go far to find as many acceptable rocks as I could carry. My choices tended to be somewhat smaller than those gathered by the boys, but by the time I was worn out I'd tripled the length of the path and reached the lowest and wettest point of the meadow. For this section I made use of the gigantic rocks that the boys had placed in front of the porches last year for the start of a rock patio. Some of these were monstrous and I could carry only a few of them by hand. For this endeavor I used a dolly and carted each rock over the wet and uneven ground to its place in the mud. This turned out to be the most stable and attractive section of the path.

By that time I was pretty tired of brute labor, so I turned my attention to the outhouse, first easily nailing up the plywood siding. Then I finished cutting out the seat cuts in the rafters which I'd started two weeks earlier and nailed pairs of them

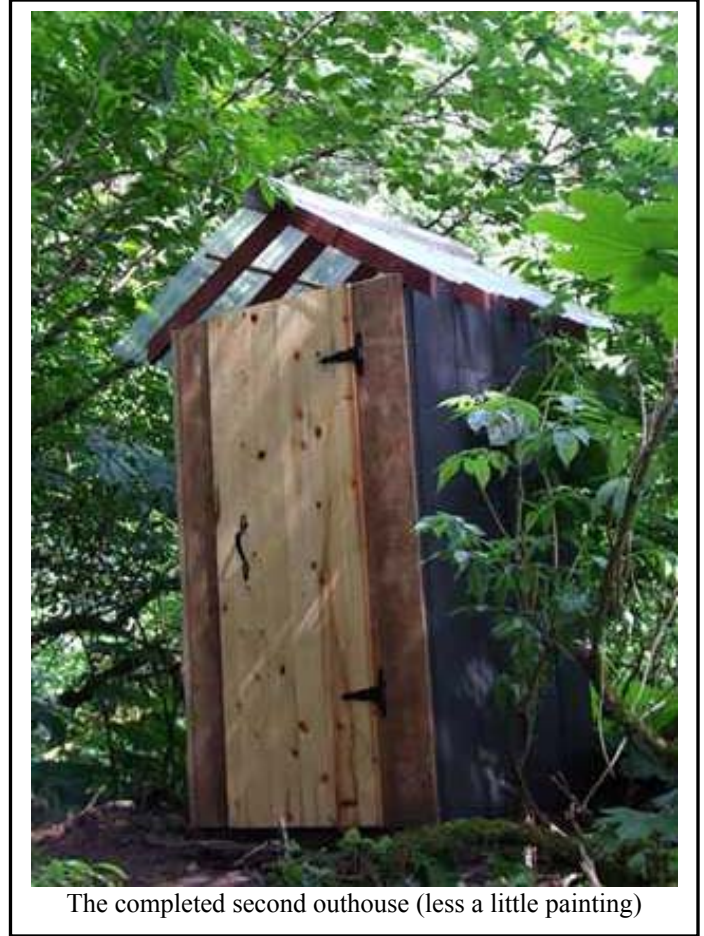


Rock path through the grassy beach

together at the peak. The four pairs went on smoothly enough, toenailed into the top of the outhouse walls. Unfortunately, it turns out that in three of the four pairs of rafters the seat cuts had already been wide enough to accommodate the plywood siding, so they didn't fit as neatly as I would have liked. I hid the unattractive side uphill where few guests will notice (I hope)!

With the rafters up I nailed in a strip of corrugated wood on each side to support the roofing and then started cutting clear plastic tufftex pieces to fit, three sections on each side 40" long. It took several adjustments before they overlapped in the right places. These I screwed in with metal roofing screws, then left to track down a ridge piece. Someone had staged metal roofing supplies on the homestead a long time ago, so I helped myself to a five foot ridge that fit the outhouse pretty well. I drove a nail through each side of each end so a screw would pass through, then secured it to the roof. For the final touch I bolted on the decorative door handle and by early afternoon I had a complete outhouse. Unfortunately, the toilet seat was broken so could not be screwed in, but it sits well enough over the hole for now. All through this process I made many trips back to the standing outhouse for reference.

From this project I went work on the wood pile again—still cutting rounds from clearing the area around the fallen tree this spring. I put the chain back on the chainsaw and carefully cut until I dulled the blade on a rock and took it as a sign to give my aching back a rest. After hauling all the rounds to the lodge by wheelbarrow (several loads) I returned to the rock path, hoping to find satisfaction in its completion. First I took out a hoe and pulaski and evened out the rest of the path, tearing though a hummock and filling in an old rut on the other side. Then I went back to the beach, wandering a little farther afield in search of more flat rocks and getting a little less particular about stranding the arthropods beneath (though I usually put a smaller rock over the top of them after I stole their homes). The sun was bright and hot and I did most of this work topless. By mid-afternoon I had a path all the way up to the porches. This was one of those simple (if back-breaking) projects that makes an enormous difference in the comfort and ease of living there. I also moved aside all the large rocks from two sections of intertidal beach below the path so approaches by boat or kayak would be smoother.



The completed second outhouse (less a little painting)

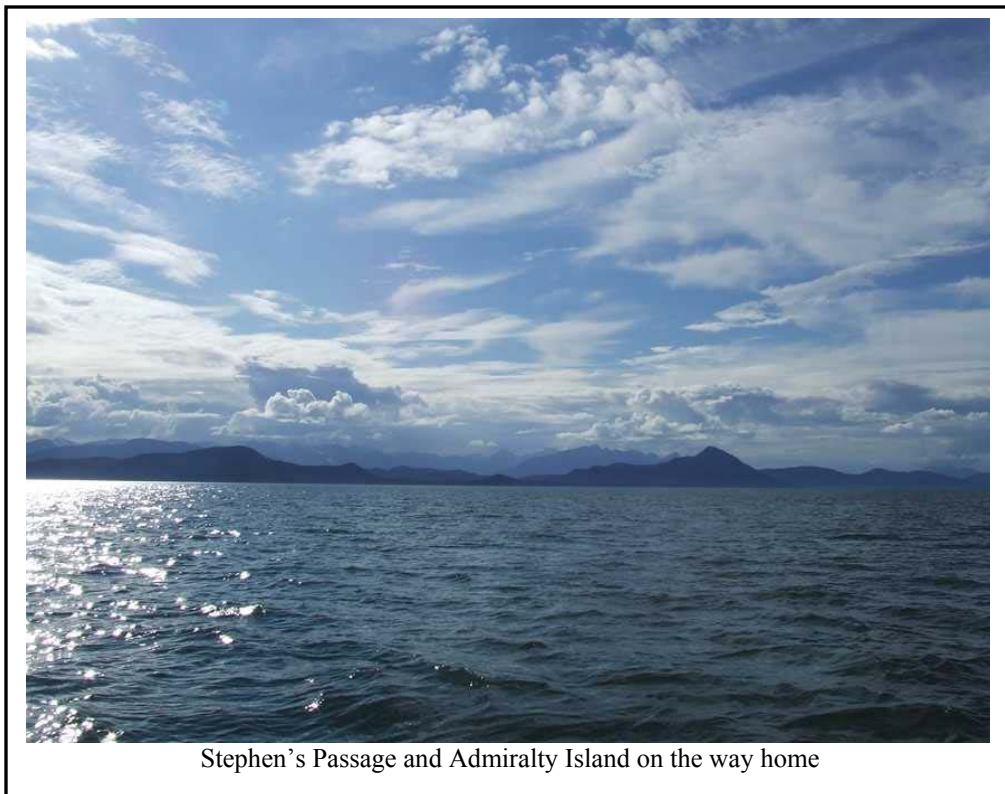
Perhaps inspired to rest by all this sweaty labor, I set about creating a system to hang the hammock that I'd purchased at a garage sale last summer. I wanted to use the tree at the edge of the stairs, but the distances didn't quite work out so I managed to span the porch from post to post. I enjoyed a quick sunny rest swinging in my hammock, amazed at the day's productivity and more than a little pleased with myself. Not yet hungry or exhausted, I decided I may as well start to work on the final cabin porch, as I'd completed most of my goals for the weekend already. That way I could put the porch project to rest and get rid of the awkward pile of lumber staged next to Cottonwood Cabin. Hermit Thrush's porch (my cabin) was the simplest one yet as it didn't require a step and I didn't have to cut any of the 10' boards (beams and decking). I hauled my tool belt, shovel, hoe, pulaski, level, and clippers up on site, selected some rocks for use as a foundation, and set to work. Though I had done little more than get the beam roughly in place, I forced myself to stop for dinner at seven.

I didn't rest long. After a quick supper I began seriously cleaning and reorganizing the storage area in the back of the lodge--which was hopelessly cluttered--in preparation for the arrival of a propane stove the next week. I shoved tarps and plywood out the back door and stacked lumber behind the couch to get it out of the way. I'd begun organizing the tools by the time I finally relented and quit for bed.



Next morning I got right back to work on the porch, finishing placement of the beam before I left the cabin. I carried my breakfast down to the boat where I sat and ate while letting the water drain out of the bilge and onto the sand and silt (this is far superior to bailing the boat by hand!). Then I cut the joists and returned to the porch to place them. I made a rather silly error here that probably cost me an hour of labor and significant frustration. I'd marked the front of the cabin five inches below where I wanted the top of the porch to be as a reference for determining the proper height of the beam (1.5" for the decking plus 3.5" for the joists). This worked fine, except that I got too attached to the line and started using the wrong side of it when I began placing the joists. Instead of putting the bottom of the joists on the line, I placed the top of the joist on the line...and could not figure out why nothing would level! It got worse and worse the more joists I put up until I finally stepped back and realized what I'd done. Thankfully, I'd only fully nailed in two of the joists so the rest came away easily enough. I had to grab my cat's paw for the others.

Once I figured out this error, the rest of the process went fairly quickly and I finished up in the early afternoon in time for lunch. After munching, I hauled the remaining lumber from the porch project back to the lodge, folded up the tarps, and finished cleaning and organizing the back of the lodge. Although the lumber is better protected inside, I was tired of it taking up so much room. One of my next projects may be a better lumber storage area. I also swept out all the cabins and put some fresh sheets and pillow cases on the beds in preparation for guests the following weekend. By about five I'd finished getting everything cleaned and packed up, and took off for Juneau. Desperate to make better progress, I'd intended perhaps staying through Monday to work but instead found myself hugely satisfied with what I'd accomplished in just two days. This weekend finally took me over the progress hump that has haunted me most of the summer.



Stephen's Passage and Admiralty Island on the way home