

Humpbacks, Orcas, Sea Lions & More!

Exploratory Photo Adventure 2018



Beauty in the Beast. Humpback breaching along rocky shoreline.

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



The *Humpbacks, Orcas, Sea Lions & More: Marine Mammals of the Central Pacific Coast* Exploratory Photo Adventure 2018 combines professional photography instruction with 8 full days of wildlife photography chock-full of spectacular subjects in an absolutely stunning environment. You will be provided with the opportunity, the conceptual and creative tools, and the techniques needed to photograph some of the most dramatic marine mammals the Pacific Ocean can provide, including Humpback Whales, Orcas (Killer Whales),

Stellar Sea Lions, Sea Otters and Harbor Seals. On previous trips we have also encountered and photographed Pacific White-sided Dolphins, both Dall's and Harbour Porpoises, Gray Whales, Minke Whales, Northern Fur Seals, plus many species of seabirds. And, of course, we'll have absolutely fantastic scenery as a backdrop. You'll do all this while traveling through and around the northern tip of Vancouver and the Johnstone Strait, BC region aboard a comfortable and spacious 71-foot sailboat, the *Ocean Light II*.

The Johnstone Strait Region of Northern Vancouver Island. The northern tip of Vancouver Island is incredibly rich in wildlife. During the summer months it is home to a wide variety of marine mammals as the Pacific Ocean delivers nutrients to the numerous channels and inlets of the region. Orcas, dolphins, porpoises and sea lions assemble to feed on the Pacific salmon that are returning to their natal rivers. Humpback Whales and coastal seabirds feed on the nutrients stirred up by the strong tidal currents.

This trip is an Exploratory Photo Adventure, and after spending time in the Johnstone Strait region we'll swing north and east and explore the region from the northern tip of Vancouver Island all the way over to the isolated First Nations village of Bella Bella. Expect fantastic scenery with great marine mammal subjects during the entire adventure!

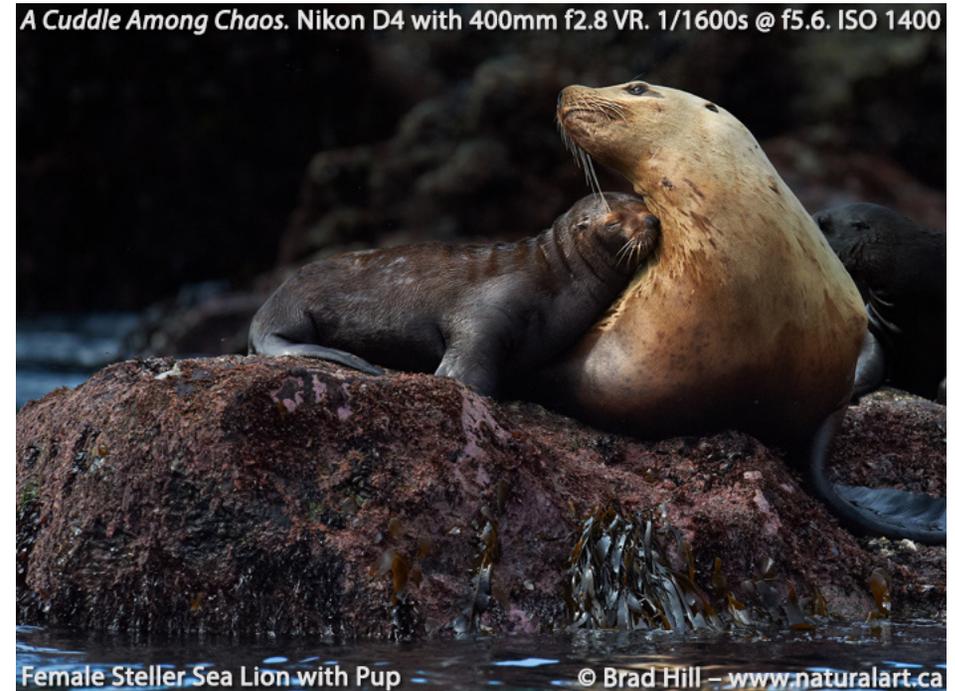
See the final page of this document for a regional map of the area this photo tour will explore.

2018 Dates: August 16-26, 2018.

2018 Price: \$5499 CAD plus 5% GST based on SINGLE occupancy accommodation during the portion of the trip in Port McNeill, BC. Deduct \$100 CAD for double occupancy (shared) accommodation..

What's Included?

- All meals and accommodation in Port McNeill beginning on the evening of Day 1 (see Itinerary)
- A full day of professional-level wildlife photography instruction, with special emphasis given to the unique wildlife and other subject matter we will encounter on this trip.
- All food and accommodation while aboard the *Ocean Light II*
- A highly-experienced skipper and aquatic-mammals guide and a professional photography guide
- A great cook and crew
- Use of Zodiac® and kayaks and all associated safety gear (life jackets, etc.)



- Jaw-dropping scenery, fascinating Marine Mammals, and wonderful photo ops!

What's NOT Included?

- Your transportation and accommodation expenses associated with getting to the tour's start point (Port McNeill, BC) or back to your home from the tour's end point (Bella Bella, BC).
- Gratuities for skipper and crew of the *Ocean Light II* (not mandatory but always appreciated!)
- Personal belongings and equipment

What To Expect?

- Photographic instruction designed to take *your* wildlife photography skills to the next level (along with a lot of tips on photographing the species you'll encounter on this trip).

- Temperatures ranging from cool (daytime highs of about 15C) to very warm (daytime highs of about 25°C); rain showers are likely but usually short-lived (and sunny skies are NOT uncommon at this time of year)
- Calm to moderately rolling seas – those susceptible to seasickness should bring appropriate medications/remedies
- Moderately long hours of daylight
- Unsurpassed aquatic mammal photography opportunities (and excellent landscape photography opportunities as well)
- Hearty, healthy and delicious food
- Always warm, always dry floating basecamp!

Accommodation: We will be staying on the beautiful *Ocean Light II* sailboat, a 71-foot ketch. With fourteen Atlantic crossings under her belt, the *Ocean Light II* has the pedigree and comfort to make any sailing experience with her one to remember.

Please be aware that it is likely be asked to share a berth on the *Ocean Light II*. This will be dependent on the make-up of the group (e.g., the number of couples attending, gender mix of the participants, etc.).

The Headline Acts...

While it is impossible to absolutely guarantee finding any naturally-occurring non-captive species of wildlife during an 8-day trip, based on past experience it is almost inconceivable that we will not have success in finding four species of Marine Mammals: Humpback Whales, Orcas (Killer Whales), Steller Sea Lions, and Harbor Seals. Of these we will consider Humpbacks, Orcas and Sea Lions of equal rank in determining how we allocate our efforts. Because our ability to find and focus on any one of these species can be impacted by such things as prey abundance and/or weather conditions (which can change quickly and unpredictably) we will choose our target species each day based on highest probability of yielding quality photo ops. So, one day it may be Humpbacks and another day it may be Sea Lions. And, of course, there is a strong supporting

cast of characters (notably Sea Otters and Pacific White-sided Dolphins) that we will “pursue” as opportunities present themselves.

Humpback Whales: Once hunted almost to extinction, Humpback Whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) are now strongly rebounding in population numbers. In recent years their numbers along the BC coast has sky-rocketed. Humpbacks grow up to 14m (46 feet) in length and weigh up to 40 tonnes (88,160 lb or 44 tons). Despite their large size, humpbacks are filter-feeders that prey on tiny, minnow-sized fish and krill. The confluence of several tidal currents plus nutrient upwelling (caused by the currents and changes in ocean bottom depth) means that the waters surrounding the northern tip of Vancouver Island are rich in Humpback food – and hence are rich in Humpbacks!

From a photographic perspective, Humpbacks are absolutely extraordinary subjects. They are active and often amazingly acrobatic – they will leap completely clear of the water (a behaviour known as “breaching”).





The exact function of breaching is poorly understood – some argue it is done by Humpbacks to rid themselves of external parasites. Others believe it serves a communicative function (either to other Humpbacks or as a warning to boats). But regardless of its function – breaching can make for spectacular photos!

Humpbacks commonly feed on the surface using dramatic lunges. And, they will – either alone or in a group – feed using a fascinating behaviour known as bubble-netting. When doing this one or more whales swim under a school of herring or other small fish and swim in a circle while exhaling bubbles out of their blowholes. As the bubbles rise they form a net which trap the fish. The whales then swim upward through the fish with their mouth agape, trapping them in their massive, pleated lower jaw and throat. Finally the whales strain the water through their fine baleen plates, which allows water to pass through but traps the fish.

Power & Beauty. Nikon D3s with 600mm f4 VR. 1/1250s @ f5.6. ISO 2500



While Orcas are primarily black and white in colour, light reflecting off their skin can produce a striking array of colour and patterns.

To learn more about Humpback Whales, check out:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humpback_Whale

The Orcas of Johnstone Strait. The waters of Johnstone Strait are considered the best place in the world to observe and photograph the Orca (*Orcinus orca*). In the early years Orcas were thought to be merciless killers and were hunted. Since the 1970's scientific research and intensive study has shown the Orca to be a highly intelligent animal capable of complex vocal communication and advanced social behaviours.

Within Johnstone Strait and the waters surrounding northern Vancouver Island there are two distinct populations of Orcas – residents and transients. The resident Orcas primarily eat fish and, at times, squid. They are very vocal and tend to visit the same areas consistently (hence the name “resident”). Transient killer whales range over much greater distances and primarily eat Marine Mammals such as Harbor Seals and Steller Sea Lions. Compared to residents, transients are more “stealthy” and vocalize less.

With their large dorsal fins, striking black and white coloration, and their propensity to travel in groups (pods), Orcas make great photographic subjects. Behaviours we may observe (and photograph) include hunting, breaching, spy-hopping (where an Orca will raise its head out of the water and remain motionless while it surveys the scene) and more. The mountainous topography of the surrounding islands and mainland BC that's unique to this region provides us with stunning natural backdrops to work with. There's simply no better place to photograph Orcas!

For more information about Orcas, visit:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orca>

Steller Sea Lions. While endangered and declining in the most northern part of its range, the highly social Steller Sea Lion (*Eumetopias jubatus*) is experiencing a strong rebound in population numbers in the waters of British Columbia, and especially in the waters surrounding northern Vancouver Island. Steller Sea Lions are the largest of the “eared” seals

(seals with visible outer ear flaps). Males can be up to 3.5 meters (11 feet) in length and weigh up to 1,120 kg (2,500 lb).

Steller Sea Lions are most commonly found aggregated on small, isolated and exposed islands and rocks known as haul-outs. Breeding colonies (also known as rookeries) are located in similar isolated (and generally hard-to-access) locations.

I consider Steller Sea Lions one of the most under-rated (and historically ignored) photographic subjects available in North America. In fact, they have quickly become one of my favourite subjects. There are a number of reasons for this. First, because they are normally found in “tight” social groups, there are continuous – and often highly dramatic – social interactions between them. These include territorial disputes for limited space on intertidal rocks, a huge range of diverse interactions between females and their pups, and more. Sea Lions have a polygamous (harem-based)

breeding system where dominant males control valuable “turf” (normally the tops of rocks) where large numbers of females will visit to breed with the males. Not surprisingly, male Sea Lions will compete very aggressively to gain control of the “best” rocks, including fighting for them.

Second, the rocks where sea lions aggregate are often exposed and awash in breaking surf. This can lead to striking, dramatic scenes of sea lions enduring conditions which seem almost unimaginable as a “home” to humans!

Learn more about the Steller Sea Lion here:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steller_Sea_Lion

Please note that because of the isolated and exposed nature of the haul-out rocks and rookeries inhabited by Sea Lions, our access to them is limited to relatively calm conditions. Thus on any single trip we may not be able to visit all potential sites to photograph Sea Lions.

The Welcoming Committee. Nikon D800 with 400mm f2.8 VR. 1/1000s @ f8. ISO 400

© Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca



Curious sub-adult Steller Sea Lions checking out the photographers!

Family Time. Female Sea Otter cruising with soon-to-be-weaned kit looking on admiringly.



Nikon D4s with 400mm f2.8 VR with TC-20EIII Teleconverter (800mm). 1/1000s @ f9. ISO 4000

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The Supporting Cast...

The supporting cast of characters we can reasonably expect to encounter on this trip is strong and deep! In past years some of them have come close to stealing the show! Here's a little more about some of the other species of Marine Mammals we are likely to encounter on this trip.

Sea Otters. By early in the 20th century Sea Otters (*Enhydra lutris*) had been completely extirpated through over-hunting on the entire BC coast. In 1969 and 1970 a small number of Sea Otters were reintroduced to a

few locations on the west coast of Vancouver Island. The reintroduction was successful and the otters have now spread over the northern tip of Vancouver Island. Sea Otters are unique in being the only fully aquatic mammal which has no fatty layer of blubber to insulate itself. Instead, they rely upon an amazingly dense and luxuriant coat to provide warmth from the cold waters they inhabit. In fact, with up to 150,000 strands of hair per sq. cm (almost 1,000,000 strands per sq. inch), they possess the densest fur of any animal. This dense fur – and man's desire for it – is what led to the demise of the Sea Otter. The Sea Otter's unique method of

insulating itself has lead to at least one more hazard to its health – if the otter’s fur becomes fouled by oil (such as after an oil spill from a tanker) it quickly loses its insulating properties and the otter dies of hypothermia.

It’s challenging to think of a wildlife subject with a higher “cute factor” than a Sea Otter, especially when you encounter a female with a kit. Sea Otters feed almost exclusively on shellfish, and it is not uncommon to encounter them floating on their backs with a sea urchin or two resting on a makeshift table formed by their chest and belly.

We will opportunistically photograph Sea Otters as we encounter them. They do tend to be quite wary, so successful photography of them often requires the use of super-telephoto lenses (such as 500mm or 600mm lenses).

Learn more about Sea Otters here:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sea_Otter

Pacific White-sided Dolphins. Nicknamed the “Lag”, Pacific White-sided Dolphins (*Lagenorhynchus obliquidens*) are known for their extreme



exuberance and energy. They’re one of the liveliest dolphins found in the Pacific and they commonly leap clear of the water, perform flips and somersaults, and will also often approach and ride the bow waves of ships. White-sides are commonly found in groups of 30 or so, but on occasion they will form super-pods consisting of up to 1,000 or more individuals. Within the Johnstone Strait region we have seen super-pods of more than 200 Lags on many occasions.

Besides the obvious photographic appeal presented by their leaping and frolicking, Pacific White-sided Dolphins’ interactions with other species can present unforgettable photographic opportunities. When they encounter schools of salmon they will quite literally pursue them right out of the water! And, we have observed strong interactions (probably more accurately described as “mobbing”) between pods of dolphins and sea lions, humpbacks, and even Orcas.

For more info about the Pacific White-sided Dolphin, go here:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pacific_white-sided_dolphin

Diving for Dinner! Nikon D4 with 400mm f2.8 VR. 1/1600s @ f5. ISO 450

© Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca



Gray Whales have characteristically mottled skin. The white blotches are scars from parasites picked up in warmer waters that are shed in cooler, northern waters

Itinerary

NOTE: The itinerary of this tour is designed for flexibility. This allows us to react to the ever-changing distribution and abundance of wildlife and fluctuating weather conditions.

Day 1 – August 16, 2018.

Participants must arrive in Port McNeill, BC. Overnight in Port McNeill at the Black Bear Resort.

Day 2 – August 17, 2018.

Day of photography instruction in Port McNeill. Overnight in Port McNeill at the Black Bear Resort.

Day 3 – August 18, 2018.

Our journey will depart from Port McNeill. Once on board the *Ocean Light II*, we'll head towards Johnstone Strait and the Robson Bight Ecological Reserve. This area is regarded as one of the best places in the

world to observe Orcas and many species of Marine Mammals in their natural habitat.

Days 4 to 10 – August 19-25, 2018.

We'll spend our days seeking and photographing Marine Mammals in both the Johnstone Strait region, north and west to the northern tip of Vancouver Island, and then north and east towards Bella Bella. Our exact route and daily itinerary will be determined by weather, the distribution and abundance of our target species, and the wishes of our group.

During the evenings we will anchor among the numerous islands and bays of the Broughton Archipelago. Here we may see a Black Bear foraging through the rich intertidal or Great Blue Herons fishing atop the abundant kelp beds. These islands provide us the opportunity to paddle one of the *Ocean Light II* kayaks and explore our calm protected anchorage.

We will spend more time ashore on this exploratory trip than on “standard” marine mammals trip, and this may include beachcombing and/or hiking on beautiful Calvert Island.

Day 11, August 26, 2018.

Our journey will end in Bella Bella and you will depart with memories and photographs of a spectacular area abundant with the wonders of nature.

Our Ethical Stance – *Wildlife FIRST!*

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

1. We work only with free-ranging wildlife subjects in natural (non-captive and non-confining) environments.
2. We engage in *PASSIVE* wildlife photography only. This means we strive to capture images of our subjects behaving as naturally as possible and without the use of “set-ups”, contrivances, or actions that could guide our subjects toward desirable settings/backdrops or elicit specific “poses”.
3. We do nothing intentional to alter or influence the behaviour of our subject(s) for the purposes of photography. This means we do not engage in any form of luring or baiting (or any other form of food supplementation). Additionally, we will not use any form of sound to alter the behaviour of the subject for the purpose of photography (including using predator and/or prey calls, vocal clicking, or making any other sound to encourage the subject to look at us).
4. We always allow the wildlife subject – regardless of the species – to determine the distance it is comfortable with between itself and us. This principle not only serves to reduce the stress on the subject, but it also allows photographers to capture the subject behaving in a more natural, and often more interesting, fashion.

Those participating in our photo tours are expected to conform to these rules of photographer conduct.



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

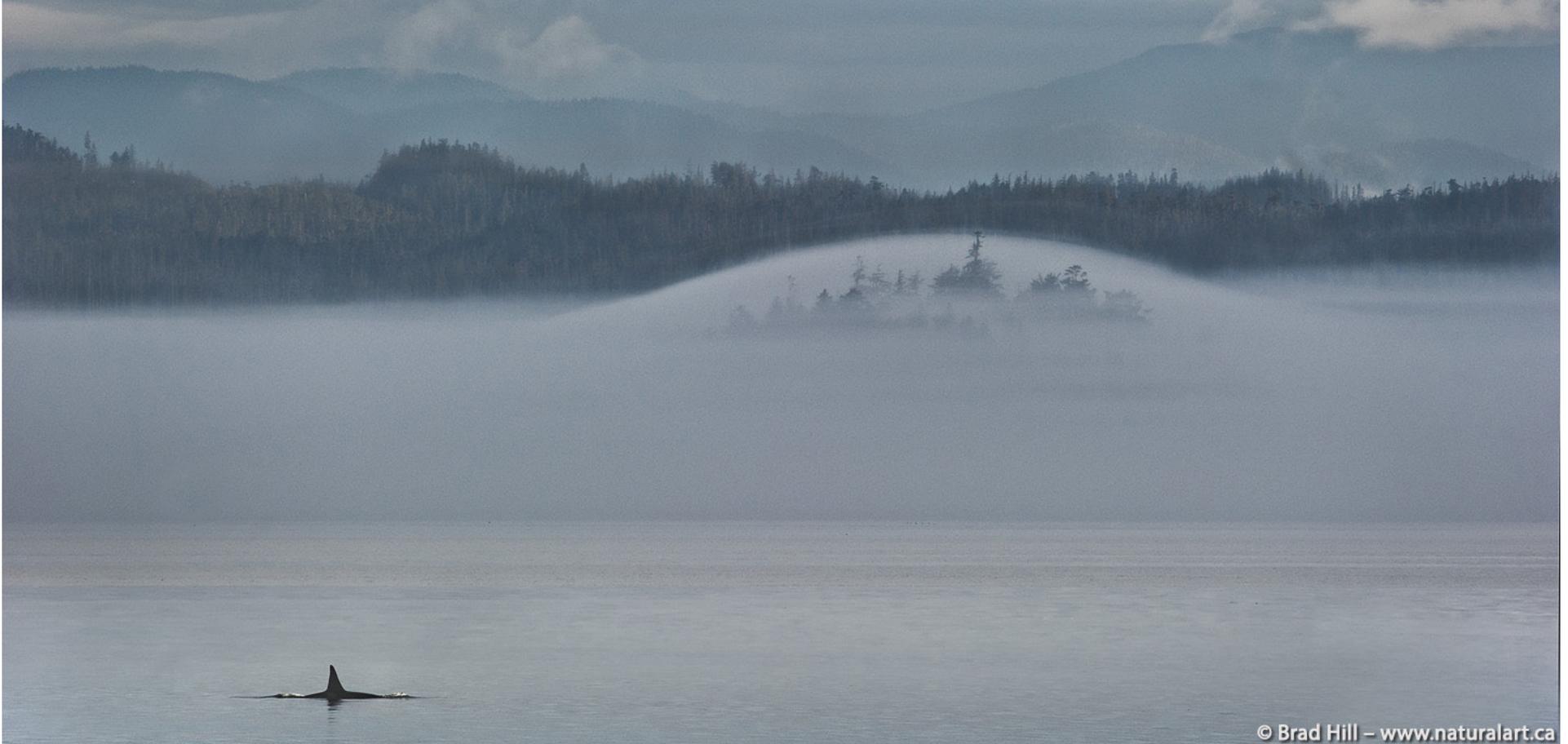
Fitness Requirements of Participants

This photo tour is not excessively physically demanding. There will be some hiking and/or beach-combing during the trip. So on this trip we will be shooting images from the deck of the *Ocean Light II*, from a 19' Zodiac®, and from shore locations. To fully enjoy and participate in the shooting sessions in the Zodiac® there are a few physical tasks you should be able to perform. These include:

- **Being able to easily move between the sailboat and the Zodiac®.** This involves climbing up or down a 5' vertical ladder.
- **Being able to easily move from the Zodiac® and a beach and/or rocky shoreline.** This involves being able to climb over an obstacle (the side of the Zodiac®!) approximately 1 meter high to or from a surface that may be unstable or slippery. This requires some balance and mobility.
- **Hiking/beach-combing with your camera gear.** You should be able to

Solitude. Nikon D3s with 600mm f4 VR. 1/1250s @ f5.6. ISO 720

Solitary Orca in Blackfish Sound



© Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca

hike or beach-comb while carrying your camera gear while walking up to 3 kilometers (or two miles) on uneven or even slippery surfaces.

- **Shooting your camera from within a Zodiac®.** This involves multiple tasks, including shooting your camera while sitting on the pontoon of the Zodiac® or, at times, while sitting on the floor of the Zodiac®. In some cases you may find that the most convenient way to shoot will be while kneeling (on your knees) on the bottom of the Zodiac®. Note that tripods can **not** be used within the Zodiac® and while it is theoretically possible to use a monopod in the Zodiac®, few

photographers find it practical.

On some occasions it WILL be possible to stand in the Zodiac® when shooting, but you will be shooting while sitting or kneeling far more frequently. A degree of flexibility and/or suppleness can make your time in the Zodiac® far more productive and enjoyable!

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

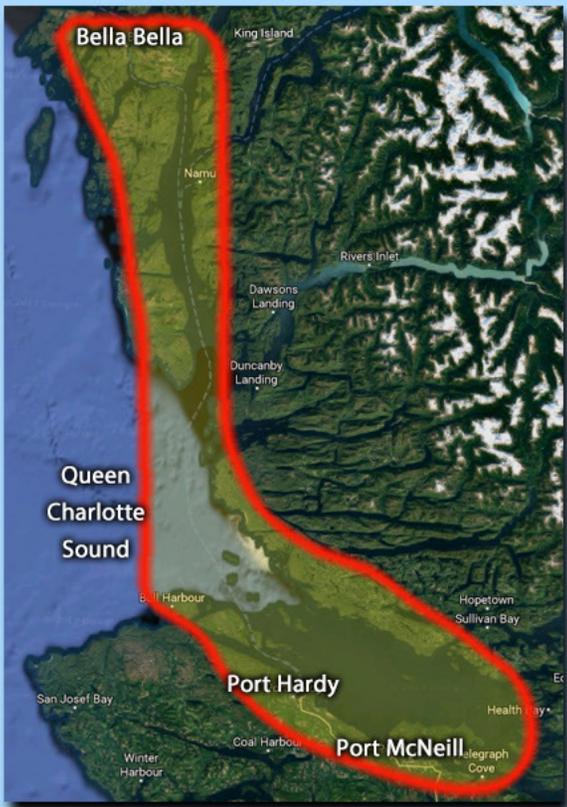
seminars@naturalart.ca





Region of Humpbacks, Orcas, Sea Lions & More

Exploratory Photo Adventure



Approximate region of exploration shown in yellow.
Actual trip route can vary depending on wildlife
distribution and abundance, weather and other factors