

The Fall Scramble

Author : blueseas

Date : September 30, 2018

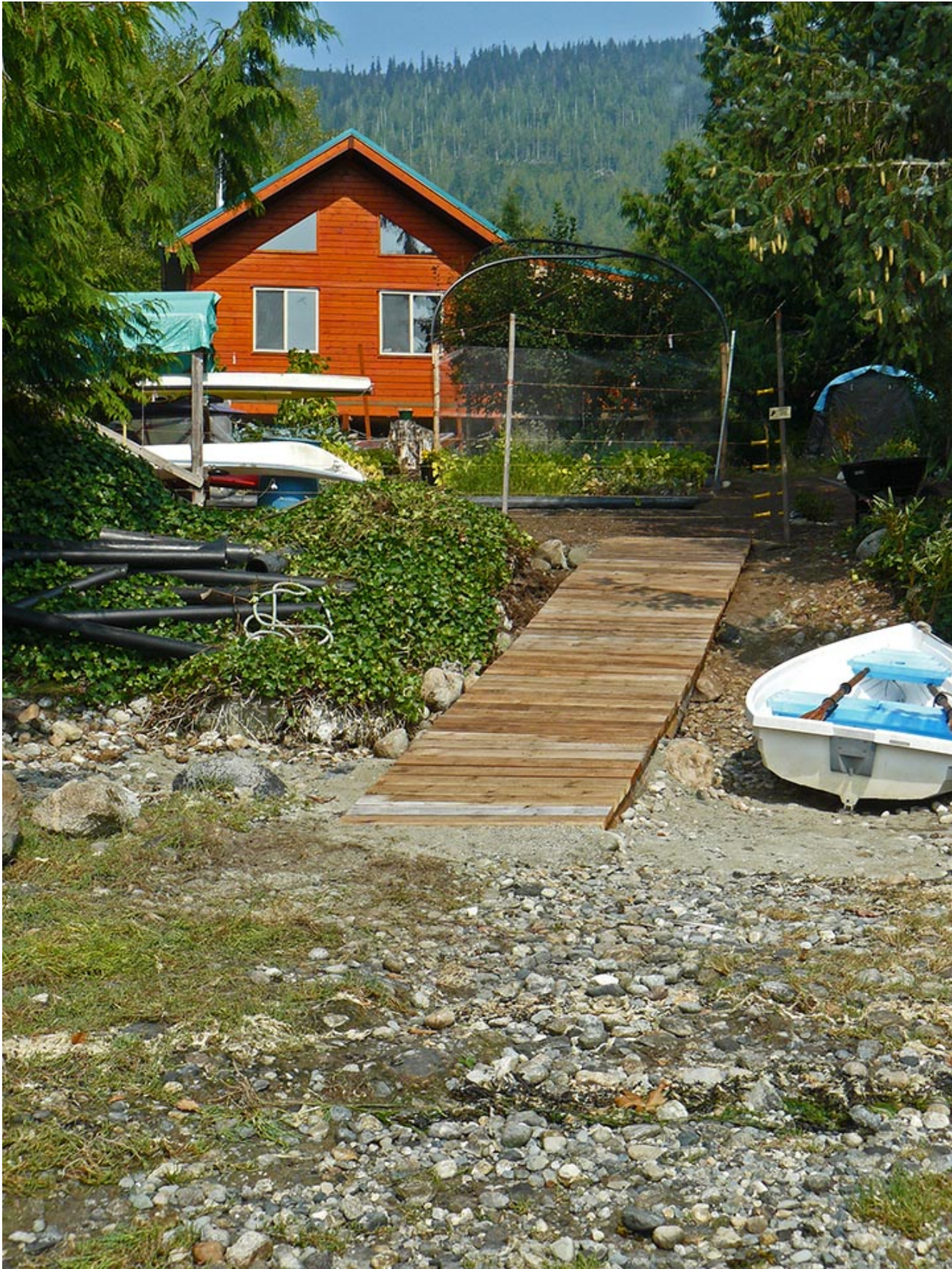


Image: *A new ramp leading up to our yard from the intertidal zone.*

Mabon is past and Samhain is on its way, and as usual, we find ourselves engaged in the fall scramble as we try to get through our list of tasks that must be completed before the fall rains set in.

The Ramp Project



Another view of our new ramp.

When we first came here, we spent a bunch of energy moving rocks and dirt around to build a nice access ramp to the property from the intertidal mudflat where we land our skiff. However, what humans make, nature is quite willing to unmake, and over the past four years, high tides and waves have gradually eroded our ramp away, leaving us with an ankle-breaking rocky clamber. Of course, we were always too busy to fix it ...

This fall, two convenient yellow cedar logs appeared, and with chainsaw, shovel, pick, and come-along, we fitted them into the bank. A little work for a neighbor yielded some cedar planking from a deck he was tearing apart, and there you have it ... a new ramp. And it didn't cost us anything except our time and labor!

Firewood



Stacks of firewood under the cabin.

Usually, we have most of our firewood cut and drying by summer, but this year, things were a bit behind. I ended up taking a contract during the summer, which really slowed our projects down. It seems that living out here is pretty much a full-time job all in itself! So we ended up scrambling for our firewood. Happily, last night we toasted to a plentiful supply of cut and stacked wood, and a warm and happy winter by the stove.

The Chimney (Again)

Every year, I hope I won't have to get on the roof and repair the chimney again, and every year, I'm up there once more.

Seems we ended up with some pretty shoddy metal for our chimney flashing. Last year, it started to rust, and I went up there and coated it liberally with rust inhibitor. In the middle of the winter, it started leaking again.

This year ... the rust had penetrated the flashing completely, after only four winters! So, major repair work on the flashing. We will have to replace it soon, but I'm hoping to get another year out of it first. I finished up the job with a good coat of paint over everything (black for the flashing and teal for the roof in the regions where the corroding flashing had left ugly rust stains) ... let's hope that it doesn't start leaking again this winter.

The Annual Refueling Trip

Fuel has been a bit of an issue this year for the *Awen*. It all started a couple of trips back. We were just coming into Kelsey Bay, having crossed the Strait, and Ken throttled the *Awen* back as we were coming alongside the breakwater. Without any warning whatsoever, the engine died ... and wouldn't restart (thanks to the fact that it is a new, and overly electronic engine, with way too many "safety" features). The currents and wind were strong in the harbor that day, and with little hope of reaching the floats with what forward momentum we had, Ken angled the *Awen* so that we drifted up against the southern breakwater (if you know Kelsey Bay, you will recognize this as being the rusty hulk of an old sunken ship). There we stuck, within sight of the harbor office. After a bit of hollering, we were eventually pulled off the breakwater by the RCMP (that was something of an adventure in and of itself), and towed to the floats. The culprit behind this adventure? Apparently our fuel had become contaminated with "algae" (not actually algae at all, but some type of microorganism), and had become gelatinous. This clogged the fuel filter, and the engine went into shut-down mode.

So ... we ended up running the *Awen* off of a couple of yellow jerry cans of fresh diesel fuel while Ken "polished" (i.e., filtered and refiltered) the remaining fuel until all of the particulate material was gone. This took a while ... and in the process, we discovered that the gunk had jammed our fuel gauges, and we had somewhat less fuel than we had originally realized. So, it was time for a refueling trip.

Our annual refueling trip is also a chance for us to get caught up on a variety of little tasks in Campbell River, things that are hard to look after when we are in a rush. So we spent a week tied up at the Discovery Harbor docks, buying stuff, getting caught up with appointments, and so on ...

The Fall Harvest

Just before we left for our week in Campbell River, I worked diligently to harvest as much of the garden as I could. With a month of hot, dry weather, everything was winding down, and I could see that the garden was quickly going into fall mode. Thankfully, I got most of our beans in off the vines, shelled, and dried.

The day we left for Campbell River, the first of the fall rains began. After a week away, we came back to a garden that had reached its end, pounded down by the winds and the rain. In those first couple of days back, I worked industriously to salvage the remains, gathering beans before they rotted and collecting masses of tomatoes that were now lying in the mud ... a sad ending to what had been such a lush and productive garden earlier this year.

My harvest of green tomatoes were laid out in cardboard boxes and stored in the dark – a trick I learned from my mother – which allows them to ripen. So in spite of the fickleness of the weather, we've still had lots of tomatoes to eat and many to dry.

The wet weather has given us another fall harvest – mushrooms! Puff balls, sliced and fried with

garlic and butter. The excess harvest dries well, and makes great additions to pasta!

And so the garden season comes to an end ... yesterday I was hilling up the root crops for overwinter storage, and planting bulbs for the spring.

Bears in the Apple Orchard

At the moment, our property coincides with the range of a pair of three-year-old grizzlies. We first saw them when they were cubs, still following their mother. Each year since, they've progressively gotten larger. This year, they are quite impressive!

We've had a couple of scary encounters with these two. A few months back, the darker of the two (also the more aggressive one), was on the logging road above our property. We were out for a walk, and surprised it. Standing up on its hind legs and peering myopically at us, it finally decided to exit left, and we continued on up the road. On our way back home, some time later, the bear was back on the road. This time, it wasn't so ready to leave, and walked grumpily in front of us for awhile before taking to the bush. Even after it had left the road, we could still hear it following along beside us, crashing through the salmon berries. Finally, it decided to make a charge.

Even knowing that the charge was likely to be a feint, the adrenaline surged through my veins and my heart hammered in my chest. "Don't run", the logical part of my brain was saying. "If you run, the bear will think that you are prey, and chase you. Back up slowly!" But my legs were thinking "Run!!!" We held our ground, and as the bear reached the road edge, Ken blasted our air horn. Momentarily frightened, the bear hesitated, then backed off, but continued to track alongside us until we were almost home. Fortunately, the bears seem to have a great deal of respect for our electric fence!

A few days later, the second, lighter colored grizzly was busy breaking down salmon berry bushes just outside our fence, standing on our path in clear view. Ken and I hollered at it (from the safety of the cabin) and threw a few stones, but did little to distract it from its feeding. Finally, Ken slammed the back door of the cabin. The bear jerked like it had been shot, then tore up the trail. It hasn't been back by the cabin since. I guess we have the most dangerous cabin door in the country!

So ... apple trees ... we pick apples from some of the old trees that have survived after the homesteads in the inlet were abandoned. So, unfortunately, do the bears. We took the Kipper down to the end of the inlet where there are several good apple trees. However, dark bear popped out of the woods right at the base of the trees – I guess he was having dessert to go with his salmon. Having experienced this bear before, we wisely chose to leave the trees to him, for now.

Some Creatures that we Love to Have Around

- a little juvenile male Anna's hummingbird. Every time we don't see him for a day or two, we think maybe he's gone south for the winter, and then he shows up at the feeder again. Maybe he will overwinter here???
- toads in the garden ... and I was going to blame the Steller's Jays for uprooting some of my potatoes, but it turns out that there was a toad "rootling" through them ... just pushed aside the ones that were making her bed too bumpy.
- bats (not in our belfry). We've been treated to lots of bat antics as they fly around the house at dusk, often feeding on insects that are sitting on the cabin siding.
- owls in the night. We are often serenaded by Great Horned owls during the fall and winter. Not sure why we don't hear them the rest of the year.

A Few Photos ...

It's raining today, but Ken was out with his camera a couple days ago, taking pictures of the last of the fall flowers. Here is a little gallery of his shots ...

Dark velvet-red Gladiolus.

First Pink of the year.

Prairie Rocket or Rough Wallflower.

Chicory.

Hairy Cat's Ear.

Purple Coneflower or Echinacea.

Calendula.

Spanish Lavender.

Lupin.

Sweet Pea.

Mint.

Oregano.

Red Clover.

Red Gladiolus with an interesting pollinator.

Ceanthus.

Purple Gladiolus.