Story Idea: Old Growth Forest

Summary: Haida Gwaii is known for its spectacular old growth temperate rainforest. Despite the logging that has affected the forest over the past century, there are still stands of impressive old growth.

Facts:
- Old growth forests are ancient stands that contain a wider variety of tree species and ages than a second-growth forest. Although old-growth is commonly thought of as forest that has never been logged it can also be defined as any forest over 130 years old regardless of whether it has been previously logged or disturbed.
- The huge, straight-trunked trees often seen in photos are not the only old growth; this type of forest is typical of river valleys and flatlands, but the smaller trees found in boggy areas, on mountainsides, and at high elevations is also old growth.
- The main tree species on the islands are Sitka spruce, Western hemlock, and Western red cedar. Yellow cedar and pine are also found, and red alder is a very common deciduous tree. There is no Douglas fir, a tree commonly associated with old growth stands in other coastal areas.
- Logging of old growth forests has resulted in several well-publicized logging protests over the years. The best known is the blockade at Lyell Island in 1985 which led to the protection of southern Moresby Island and eventually to the creation of Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site.
- Old growth forests typically have a dense understory, due to gaps in the canopy created by older trees dying or being blown over (this allows light to get through to the understory). However, on Haida Gwaii you will notice that the forest is very open without many bushes or young trees. This is due to browsing by deer, an introduced species that is having major impacts on local forests. Deer were introduced from the mainland in 1878 and again in 1911-1913. [http://www.rgisbc.com/Deer.html](http://www.rgisbc.com/Deer.html)
- Old growth provides essential habitat for many of the rare bird species found on the islands such as goshawks, marbled murrelets, and tiny saw-whet owls. [http://www.lidc.sfu.ca/haida-ebm/ecological_integrity/habitat/terrestrial](http://www.lidc.sfu.ca/haida-ebm/ecological_integrity/habitat/terrestrial)

Suggested Itinerary:
Take a short hike into an old growth stand. On Graham Island, try the Golden Spruce trail in Port Clements or the Yakoun Lake trail near Queen Charlotte. You need to drive on a gravel road to access these trails (the Golden Spruce trail is closer to the highway). There are several nice trails in the Tlell area that can be accessed directly from the highway but are not as clearly marked. On Moresby Island, take a walk on the Dover Trail just outside of Sandspit.

More Information:
For information on the history of logging try the Port Clements museum (250)557-4576.
Contact the Ministry of Forests and Range (Haida Gwaii Forest District) in Queen Charlotte for current information on logging of old growth stands (250)559-6200.

For an analysis comparing old growth distribution between the years 1800 and 2000, see http://www.spruceroots.org/Booklets/Booklet.html.