Story Idea: Crabbing at North Beach

Summary: At North Beach on the north end of Graham Island you can catch crabs on the beach without any special equipment in early summer. This is a popular day trip for visitors and a great way to get a taste of local seafood.

Facts:
- The crabs most commonly found are Dungeness crab (Cancer magister) which are usually considered the best species for eating due to their large size and abundance. They can reach 23 cm across, weight up to 2 kg, and live up to 10 years.
- Red rock crabs (Cancer productus) are another good eating species also found on the islands.
- The waters of the Hecate Strait and Dixon Entrance are ideal breeding grounds for crabs and are fished commercially by boats based in Masset (as well as vessels from other parts of the coast).
- On a low tide crabs can be caught just under the surface of the water on the shallow, sandy shoreline of North Beach and throughout the islands. The easiest method to collect them is with a strong dipnet.
- A recreational salt-water fishing license is required to collect crabs and can be obtained online: [http://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fm-gp/rec/licence-permis/index-eng.htm](http://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fm-gp/rec/licence-permis/index-eng.htm). Local Visitor Centres and stores selling fishing equipment can help.
- It is illegal to keep undersized crabs. Dungeness crab must measure at least 165 mm across the widest point of the shell (also called the carapace). Red Rock crab must measure at least 115 mm.
- It is also illegal to keep female crabs. You can identify females by the wider shell on their abdomen (the flap of shell that points toward the crab's eyes when you hold it upside down). If in doubt, ask for advice or consult the fishing regulations.
- If a crab is undersized or female, return it gently to the water. Never use sharp implements such as spears or rakes to collect crabs.
- Crabs must molt (shed their hard outer shell) in order to grow larger. Most crabbers find that the meat is not as high quality in soft-shelled (recently molted) crabs, so if you find a crab with a soft shell, you may want to return it to the water.
- You may see signs on the islands warning of red tide (PSP), a toxin that affects shellfish. Fortunately, this is not a concern with crabs.

Suggested Itinerary:
Go crabbing. Be sure to get a fishing license first, and get advice on how to catch and hold crabs safely. Even if you don't have access to a kitchen you can easily boil your crabs over a camp fire.

More Information:
For information on fishing regulations check the Department of Fisheries and Oceans webpage [http://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fm-gp/rec/index-eng.htm](http://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fm-gp/rec/index-eng.htm) or the Tidal Waters Sports Fishing Guide.

The local Department of Fisheries and Oceans office (in Queen Charlotte) can be contacted at (250) 559-4413.