

I was the person who took the orca video and this will be my only post on this thread on the subject. You are allowed, by following certain rules and guidelines, to approach whales to view them. Whale watching tour boats do it up and down the BC coast daily. They depart from shore and move to where the whales are. These rules and regulations apply to all watercraft, including non-powered boats, but are primarily intended to restrict motor powered vessels due to engine noise etc. I assume from some of the comments that people are not actually aware of what the whale watching rules and regulations are. We did not approach the orca head on. We paddled to the south of them, keeping them to our port side. We did not paddle closer than 100m. We were drifting as the orca then moved closer to us. We do not get to choose where they swim. The regulations state that if you find yourself within 100m you are to put your motor into neutral, or turn off your engine, and wait until the whales depart. We were in kayaks. No motors. We did wait where we were until the whales moved away from us towards Denman Island.

The video and photos we took were amazing and we wanted to share them with others! It is important to understand that the video was taken on MAX zoom, and what that means. The photos were taken with a large telephoto lens. Doing so makes the orca appear much much closer than they actually were. Anyone can take their smart phone and zoom in on a butterfly from 6 feet away and make it appear like it is mere inches away. A telephoto lens can have the same effect from 40 feet away, making that same butterfly appear inches away. The photos of the breaching orca are amazing as it looks like he is right over my head! He is nowhere close to being over my head. There was a massive splash that primarily went in my direction. I did not get wet nor feel any spray. The telephoto lens removes most of the depth perception, not giving you reference to judge distance.

We were watching the orca in a different direction to where the breach took place. They sounded and we weren't sure where they were, assuming in the same area. They had ended up moving off to my starboard side. I had no intention of getting that close to a breaching whale. Would I choose to be that close to a breaching whale again? No.

To those that have commented that they were on shore: I am so glad you were in the right place at the right time to be able to see the orca! How far from shore were we? Some seem to think we were right along the shoreline and that couldn't be further from the truth. It is extremely difficult to look from shore, across the ocean, and accurately judge distances far off in the distance. Gartley Beach is extremely shallow and a really low tide is probably ¼ mile or more out from shore. Early Saturday evening the tide was approximately 13', meaning that the water depth ¼ mile from shore was 13'. We were significantly further out than that. I don't know the depth for an adult orca to vertically breach but I'm confident that it requires much more than 13' of water. Often people can see a couple of boats running parallel out to Tree Island from Comox. They “appear” to be nearly side by side but they could easily be 200 meters or more apart. We were hundreds and hundreds of meters off shore and it would be nearly impossible to judge our distances from shore. Using binoculars or a spotting scope simply further eliminates depth of field, as I mentioned prior.

If you are still reading this, thank you for your time. I am grateful that I was able to experience this once in a lifetime experience with my daughters. Orca are amazingly graceful and beautiful animals and we are so fortunate to have them in our waters around Vancouver Island.