

**From:** "Inside Passage" <Boat@BiancoProperties.com>  
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### Lots of Bears

When we ended our journal last week, we were in anchored in Hallo Bay on the Alaska Peninsula awaiting the next morning to go ashore to see more Alaskan Katmai brown bears. We saw a float plane arrive early and we closely observed its approach to guide us to the best location to go ashore. This area is extremely shallow at low

tide, and we were concerned about the best method to use to get on and off the tide flats.. We ultimately made the decision to run the jet boat in as far as possible, and then leave it high and dry until the tide returned to float us free again. It worked, putting us in the midst of a group of five bears.

The beach, when the tide is out, is up to three-quarters of a mile wide and six miles long. We learned that the float plane came from Kodiak to see the bears. We also learned from Roland, the pilot, why we hadn't found any bears on the beaches of Kodiak. At this time of the summer, he said, the Kodiak brown bears were up in the hills eating berries.



We photographed a mother and two lively first year cubs (photos). The cubs played on the beach while their mother caught salmon which she shared with them. A sow

with cubs must be approached carefully, as the maternal instinct for protection of her young is quite

strong. We followed the proximity rule as advised by our park ranger friends in Geographic Harbor, 50 yards for individual bears, but 100 yards for sows with cubs. In this case, the mother bear was not the least concerned with the presence of humans, but did seem to be worried about a three year old assertive female (photo) we called "Blondie."



Roland advised that we should keep our eye on Blondie who would challenge individuals, but avoid large groups. Blondie approached to within about 15 yards of our group, almost as to let us know we should respect her. The number one rule is you never run from bears, as that will guarantee they will chase you. Nevertheless, some of the group carefully stood behind the others. The largest bear on the tide flats was a massive older male we called "Grandpa." Grandpa caught fish with little effort while the much younger Blondie had not mastered the technique of catching salmon in the stream that meandered through

the tide flats (photo). She often settled for Grandpa's leftovers.

### **Bear Spray**

For years, Carl has carried a cayenne pepper bear spray when hiking onshore but he had never used it. Only on occasions such as this, when we were very close to bears, had he even removed the plastic safety catch. On this day, he finally used the bear spray, but not as intended. He used it on himself. Ro had used a pen to give dimension to the massive bear tracks in the sand. While bending down to pick up the pen with all of his camera gear and fanny pack, Carl triggered the cannister. His eyes stopped watering after several hours. He can now attest that bear sprays are quite effective, at least on humans. Despite the mishap, we were able to get action shots of the bears running at full speed after the salmon in the streams. After nearly four hours of bear watching, the tide came in to re-float our jet boat. We returned to the *Inside Passage* and headed across Shelikof Strait in moderate seas.



That evening, we were relieved to find a beautiful quiet anchorage in Shuyak Bay on Shuyak Island. Carl kayaked alone in the evening and discovered a charming banya (Alutiiq traditional log cabin steam bath). Meanwhile, Eddie was pulling in a ten pound salmon. Ro got so excited that he had it half-filletted before there was time to fully identify the species. The return crossing to the Kenai Peninsula went well. We again saw lots of whales feeding among the Barren Islands, and saw Sooty Shearwater birds everywhere.



### **Seldovia**

We revisited friends in Seldovia. We met with Susan Springer, proprietress of the Herring Bay Mercantile gift store whom we had met four years ago. She was about to close her shop and invited us to her residence for a visit and some wine. She brought us up to date on the local populace such as the Black Powder Man who loves to blow up things, and Sadie Synn, the transvestite Mikimic Indian carpenter who built the boardwalk over the swamp in the center of town. Sadie has taken over the job of trash hauling in Seldovia, with the result that one-half of the trash winds up as treasures in his yard. Susan told us that Sadie now has 22 dogs that live on the roof deck of his house. We took this explanation as taking some

dramatic license. When we walked past Sadie's house, we realized that there was absolutely no exaggeration in her description. We ate dinner at the Mad Fish Restaurant which was tiny but served gourmet food. Afterwards, we took a walking tour of the town which appears to be closer to "Northern Exposure" than any other town we've been to in Alaska. Enroute, we ran into Buddy, our other old friend. Buddy is a golden lab (photo) whose life is one of contrasts. He appears to spend most of his life restrained by a short chain. On the other hand, his dog house has both a TV set and a telephone on its roof. Unfortunately, as one might suspect in Seldovia, neither have wires running to them.

### More Fish Stories

The next day was scheduled as a fishing day. We returned to Chugach Passage, site of our previous fishing adventures. This time we focused on salmon. We were under strict instructions from Eddie Hasson not to break his *Inside Passage* halibut record of 98 pounds. Fortunately, the Coho salmon were running and Ro and Ed took advantage of the good conditions. Two of five fish they caught ran ten pounds. Ro did a nice job filleting them with a big assist from Ed. They provided salmon for several meals in the final week.

The next few days we were blessed with calm sunny weather, which made it difficult to envision the 20-30 foot waves that this area gets in the winter months. We once again made an easy passage around Gore Point with following winds. The sun was shining brightly, so we spent time on the upper deck reading and relaxing. One night, we chose to anchor in Thunder Bay, a very scenic anchorage with countless waterfalls, snowfields at tide level, and high mountains surrounding us. We kayaked in afternoon and explored the ice cave in the snowfield near shore.



### Columbia Glacier

Back in Prince William Sound with a day to spare, we headed for the Columbia Glacier. The Columbia Glacier has been retreating rapidly in recent years discharging enormous icebergs. The final six and one-half miles to the glacier are so ice choked as to be impassible. We cruised among the icebergs and anchored for the evening with a view of the glacier in front of the majestic Chugach mountains (photo). We walked among beached ice bergs at low tide during a layover day prior to our final cruise into Cordova where we turned the boat over to Captain Lance, who will return the *Inside Passage* to Mercer Island over the next two weeks.



### In Conclusion

We have some thoughts and statistics upon the conclusion of our 17<sup>th</sup> Alaskan summer. First, we traveled 2,880 miles in 56 days for an average of 51.5 miles per day. This pace of an average five hours of travel per day allowed plenty of time for exploration and relaxation. Second, each year we wonder if we've seen it all, and if this will be the year when it all becomes boring. Our conclusion is that this summer was as enjoyable as any previous summer, and there always seems to be something new to see or do. Finally, it is clear that one of our big pleasures is in the companionship of our guests and our ability to share the natural beauty we see with them.