

Carl Bianco

From: "Inside Passage via satellite" <CABianco@stratosnet.com>
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Surge Narrows Rapids Continuing our voyage, we started off in sunshine from Nanaimo and traveled up Georgia Strait. We cruised through a group of islands clustered together where the ocean waters merge from both the North and South around Vancouver Island to create some narrow passages with turbulent water and strong tidal rapids. Small boats, in particular, have to time their passage through these narrow channels to coincide with the turn of the tides, but even large cruise ships await the slack tides that occur four times every 25 hours. Carl calculated that we should pass through the Surge Narrows around 5:00 PM, and selected an anchorage in the Octopus Islands just beyond for our overnight stay.

After dinner, the kayaks were lowered from the top deck for the first time this summer. Our guests, the Frains, adapted quickly to the simple technique of paddling a kayak. There was a light mist when we departed, but our hardy crew just donned their rain suits and took off. After floating along the shoreline looking for signs of wildlife, we felt the mist turning rapidly to a hard rain. We paddled back swiftly towards the boat. Everyone was pretty saturated, but we loaded the kayaks on the rack and started to pull them up. Just as the rack was a couple of feet above the water, four of the kayaks slid off. We had them waxed this spring thinking they would glide through the water more efficiently, but it turned out that they had become like slippery eels. Carl quickly came down from the top deck and played nautical cowboy rounding up the wayward kayaks. Since then, we have raised and lowered them very carefully (see photo).



Mamalaliculla At the end of a gloomy gray day traveling through Johnstone Strait, we explored the abandoned Kwakiutl native village with the very tongue-twisting name of Mamalaliculla. It is on Village Island off Knight Inlet and had long ago fallen into ruins. We saw a very old fallen totem that we had photographed standing upright on our first voyage north in 1984. At the time, it was one of the very few original poles still standing at a native site in all of British Columbia, excluding the Queen Charlotte Islands. It fell around 1987, but it now looks like it fell many years earlier given the rapid deterioration of wood in this moist climate. A friendly First Nations watchman on the dock shared

some native stories and myths with us. Apparently, there are now many visitors, especially kayak tours, coming to this site. One of the few remains are the main house posts of a longhouse from the end of the 19th Century (see photo).

On to Fury Bay We encountered a lot of driftwood in both Johnstone Strait and Queen Charlotte Strait which forced us to be vigilant. Many had the potential to inflict substantial damage. This was the day we ventured across the Queen Charlotte Sound. This body of water is one of the three areas with potential seas large enough to delay our voyage to Alaska each year. Our passage was somewhat lumpy, but all did very well. We settled for the evening in Fury Bay, a protected anchorage sheltered from the swells, but with a view of the North Pacific over a white shell beach. We took a walk along the shore after dinner among the remains of several derelict boats and tree sized driftwood.

Bottleneck Inlet Finlayson Channel has water 2000' deep, but the narrow entrance to the adjacent Bottleneck Inlet has a shelf less than 10' deep at low tide. This small inlet is surrounded by 1600' steep vertical hillsides. As we entered, the clouds hung on the mountains and a harbor seal lay on a rock along the shore. It was a magical setting, the type that attracts us to this beautiful country. We were anxious to use our kayaks again. There were five or six seals poking their curious heads above the water to watch us as we paddled nearby. Afterwards, Mary Ann and Joann each continued their reading of Harry Potter's latest adventure.

Lowe Inlet We motored all day in the rain which kept the beautiful mountain-tops along Fraser Reach obscured. We made the obligatory brief stops at Butedale (a large abandoned cannery) and "Boat Wash" falls (which several past guests have sampled) and headed up narrow Grenville Channel to Lowe Inlet. We donned our wet gear and hiked the trail on the left side of Verney falls. Around sunset, the foam formed by the falling tide floated by the boat hull like clumps of cotton candy. The Frains enjoyed the spectacle while relaxing in the hot tub.



Fourth of July The day cleared to bright sunshine shortly before anchoring in Clam Inlet on Baron Island. This island is located just south of Dixon Entrance, the large body of water separating British Columbia from Alaska. We picked our way through a rock-strewn passage into a pleasant cove with a Forest Service buoy that we were happy to use. We put on patriotic John Phillip Sousa music and relaxed on the top deck. Later, after introducing the Frains to a Shabbat dinner, we kayaked amongst the many rocks and small islets. We spotted a mature bald eagle sitting on a tall treetop and it allowed us get very close (see photo). When we saw its large nest nearby, we realized why the eagle had not flown away. The group started a very challenging 750 piece Bev Dolittle puzzle in the salon. By

bedtime only 736 pieces remained to be joined! Sunset is now at 10:22 PM.

Ketchikan Crossing into the United States was very pleasant with gentle sea conditions. We gained an extra hour now that we were on Alaska Daylight Time. En route, we processed some of our photos while threading our way through the commercial gillnet fishermen operating along the border. There

were three enormous cruise ships in Ketchikan which hasn't changed much in the past year. Carl and Joann had a pleasant visit with proprietress of the Scanlon Gallery who is planning to sell or close her business after 31 years. She and her mother, who is 90 years of age, were both born and raised in Ketchikan. The Frains visited briefly with Dennis Franz (of NYPD Blue) at the restaurant at the Cape Fox Lodge. Our group crossed paths with Franz's family later as we wandered through town.

Anan Creek After the commotion of thousands of tourists, we headed to Anan Creek, one of our favorite wilderness locations in Southeast Alaska. Along the way, we passed many commercial vessels (purse seiners) that were actively fishing. This was a good indication that we would likely find spawning salmon at Anan Creek. During July and August the spawning salmon at Anan attract a high concentration of black and brown bears, as well as eagles and harbor seals. About mid-afternoon, we took the jet boat over to the start of the 1/2 mile trail to the bear observatory. We were not disappointed. We stayed for about three hours and watched many bears grabbing fish below the falls. Of particular interest was a three year old female brown bear the Forest Service employees had nicknamed "Pigpen" (see photo). She earned her the name because of her inclination to roll around in the mud, especially around the primitive toilet facilities. This weaned but inept youngster was not very proficient at catching fish, and we worry about her survival prospects if she doesn't build up a large layer of fat before hibernation this fall.



We were the last group to depart the observatory and Carl suggested we invite the two young Forest Service employees to our boat for dinner. Megan and Andy joined us and we had a pleasant and educational visit with them. The following morning, we awoke to sunshine, and since we had an extra day to reach Petersburg, we opted to visit the Bear Observatory once again. This time, the big thrill was seeing a black bear just below the deck rail. Jimmie was quite surprised when he looked down and a bear was about 3' below where he was standing. The bear, named 'Boboli', just ambled off down to the creek to get a fish (see photo).



Zarembo Island Departing in the afternoon, we traveled to St. John's Harbor just south of the start of the Wrangell Narrows. We used this evening to give the Frains one last evening in the "wild" before heading into Petersburg. The weather cooperated beautifully and we were able to dine on the upper deck. The group took a long kayak paddle to shore and hiked a former logging road. We encountered four young Forest Service employees who had been hired to clear the culverts on the island so that the salmon could swim up stream unobstructed. We passed beaver working on their dams. By the time we paddled back to the boat, we had had our share of exercise for the day. A lovely lingering sunset was a welcome sight (see photo) and pleasant end to a beautiful day. We talk to Carl's mother daily, and she has almost resumed a normal schedule. More later...

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