
From: "M. V. Inside Passage" <Boat@BiancoProperties.com>
Sent: Wednesday, August 13, 2003 5:16 PM
Subject: 2003 Inside Passage Journal #7



Brown Bears This scenic region of Southwest Alaska is reported to have the highest density of brown bears on earth, and based on our observation the report appears accurate. There are only around 300 brown or grizzly bears remaining in the Lower 48, but in Alaska there are almost 40,000. The Katmai National Park shelters the largest unhunted population of coastal brown bears (see photo). We had been anxious to return since our last visit two years ago.

Katmai Country The round trip from Cordova was originally scheduled for four weeks, but because of the necessary adjustment in travel plans this summer, we were making the trip in two weeks. One result was a long travel day of eleven and one-half hours to cross both Cook Inlet and Shelikof Strait from Port Chatham to reach Kukak Bay on the Alaska Peninsula. Mt. Douglas and Mt. Hallo were quite impressive in the sunshine.

Several commercial fishing boats, purse seiners, were working a salmon run in Kukak Bay and a tender was positioned in Cannery Passage where we anchored. We kayaked that evening to inspect the abandoned clam and salmon cannery ruins.

Hallo Bay Upon our arrival in Hallo Bay the next morning, our jet boat motor intake kept sucking up gravel when we tried to land at the stream entrance. This caused some temporary concern, but we finally succeeded in getting ashore. The extremely shallow one-half mile by six mile wide tide flats are the biggest challenge of getting onshore at this location. Initially, there were no bears to be seen. The group hiked about a mile to a second creek entrance and spotted three bears at a distance. After little success in getting



near them, we returned to our shore boat. En route, we were surprised to find two red foxes among the drift logs. Carl was able to approach and photograph them from as close

as seven feet. They were either very curious, or unfamiliar and unafraid of humans, or both (see photo).



Killer Whales A pod of at least a dozen orcas surrounded the *Inside Passage* and put on a big display for us for well over one-half hour during our return to Kukak Bay. Orca males (see photo) can reach 32' with a weight of 9-10 tons, and their dorsal fins can rise to 6'. Females grow to 28' and 5-6 tons. Some of the orcas rode the bow wave, others spy-hopped, did tail slapping, or crossed under the boat. We saw numerous breaches. It was an incredible experience, exceeding

anything we had seen before. Just before we settled in Upper Kukak Bay by Aguchik Island for the evening, we got some close up video of three pre-flight bald eagle chicks that were nested on a low rock in the middle of the bay. This seemed a most unusual location for an eagle's nest, but the only trees in this locale were stunted willow and alder trees.

Kukak Bay We were truly getting spoiled with the gorgeous weather conditions that we have enjoyed for the past week. Instead of heading to Geographic Harbor, we decided to kayak in lower Kukak Bay off the mudflats for our third and final day before heading back towards Cordova. Joann and Carl went ashore in the morning, but didn't see much that the rest of the group hadn't seen from their kayaks. Most of us did see three juvenile brown bears wandering along the shoreline (see photo). After lunch, we proceeded to the west end of the bay that had another mud delta to find other brown bears and to anchor overnight. Carl and Bill kayaked up the river for more bear photos (see photo). Bill returned with an exciting tale of his up-close and personal experience with bears on three sides. Later Carl gave us his version of the incident. We laughed at how different their perspectives were in reporting the same event.



Shelikof Strait Leaving Kukak Bay the next morning, Carl spoke on the VHF radio with the skipper of the boat *Waters* that was in the bay during our stay. It is a charter tour boat out

of Homer that was mentioned in an article from a Sun Valley newspaper that first made us aware of this exciting location. He shared a lot of interesting local knowledge with Carl, which will be useful in future visits. We had calm following wind conditions for the long crossing back to Kenai Peninsula. We spent most of the day on the upper deck, enjoying



the coastal views as well as identifying Augustine Island, a smoking volcanic island in the distance. Several Dall porpoise pods rode our bow wave from time to time. In perfect conditions, the men kayaked that evening in Port Chatham while the ladies enjoyed their books.

Thunder Bay The following morning, we returned to our lucky fishing spot in

Chugach Passage. The men caught several small odd shaped and multi-colored bottom fish but only one decent sized halibut. It provided a delicious dinner for six. We stopped to assist some sailors having trouble with no wind and a limited supply of fuel. We gave them some gasoline and promised to "take a message to Mary" (Everly Brother's, circa 1957) to let her know that the captain would be arriving late. Throughout the day, we again sat upstairs to take in the scenic coast along the rugged and beautiful Kenai Peninsula. Our anchorage, Thunder Bay, had many waterfalls and ice fields dotting the towering mountainsides. We paddled around the bay and took photographs in this gorgeous setting.

Returning to Prince William Sound We spent most of the next day traveling in dense fog. It remained calm, so there were no complaints. The crew kept well occupied reading as well as editing and printing our many photographs. There are five digital still cameras onboard plus a digital camcorder for the six persons onboard, so we have more instant and fabulous pictures than we can process. We have had the treat of a photo slide show every evening during our dinner. In late afternoon, we attempted to hike up to the non-tidewater Bainbridge Glacier, but there were far too many drainage ponds and streams in the way. We settled into fog-shrouded Auk Bay for the night and watched the movie *Gosford Park* with subtitles in American English.



Chenega Glacier and Tiger Bight Nassau Fiord, the bay at the face of the Chenega Glacier was nearly clear of any floating icebergs the next morning. We were able to turn

off the engine and quietly float free about one-eighth of a mile from the face of the glacier. As we approached, hundred of seals came into view lying on the congested ice floes. The natural currents coming from the outflow of the glacier would drift us back slowly as we listened to the sounds of cracking ice and watched for calving activity. Most of the ice bergs created were relatively small. We ate our lunch on the fly bridge in the sun while enjoying the spectacle. We later headed into Tiger Bight for a rare occasion where we would be able to have a tidewater glacier in view from our anchorage. Some went kayaking into the fiord of Tiger Glacier (see photo) while some chose to nap in the cozy warmth of the day. The ambient temperature was 65 degrees. It was another special day to savor in this journey of many special days.

Some Final Thoughts on 2003 As in previous summers, Carl became somewhat melancholy the last few days as he knew another wonderful summer cruise was nearing an end. Joann will savor the fond memories of all of our guests who made the trip so much fun. We consider ourselves so fortunate to be able to enjoy experiences that most can only wish for. We thank G-d for having blessed us with the opportunity, and hope our journals have been a way that we can share our good fortune with our friends and family.

