

From: "Carl A. Bianco" <CABianco@BiancoProperties.com>
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Subject: 2004 Inside Passage Journal #2

Ellerslie Bay Continuing from our last journal, we motored back from Goose Island toward the protected waters of the Inside Passage. For only the second time, we ventured into a magnificent wilderness area that was uncharted before 1996. Ellerslie Bay, just off Spiller Channel, proved to be a well-protected anchorage, and convenient departure point to explore the adjoining lagoon and tidewater waterfall. To gain access to this lagoon, we had to run the jet boat up a narrow rapids at about a six foot tide. Ellerslie Lake is a ten mile long fresh water lake that dumps dramatically into the saltwater lagoon over Ellerslie Falls. This enormous waterfall is credited in one of the guidebooks with being "about one of most spectacular on the entire B. C. coast" and that includes some really stiff competition. With considerable effort, we were able to rock climb up one side to appreciate the upper falls as well (see photo).



Horsefly Cove off Green Inlet After a rather late start under overcast skies and rain, we traveled most of the day up Graham Reach. Jerry led us in a session of our almost daily stretching exercises to keep us in shape. We motored into picturesque Horsefly Cove late in the afternoon, and it was still raining steadily. Three hearty (read *crazy*) souls kayaked

in the rain after dinner to explore the area. While out, they visited briefly with the occupants of a small sailboat that shared the cove with us. Its crew consisted of three adults and three teenagers. When the kids inquired how many were on our boat, Carl sheepishly answered only four. The kayakers' reward for getting soaked to the skin was a nice dip in the hot tub on the back deck and some hot chocolate. Such is the difficult life on the *Inside Passage*.

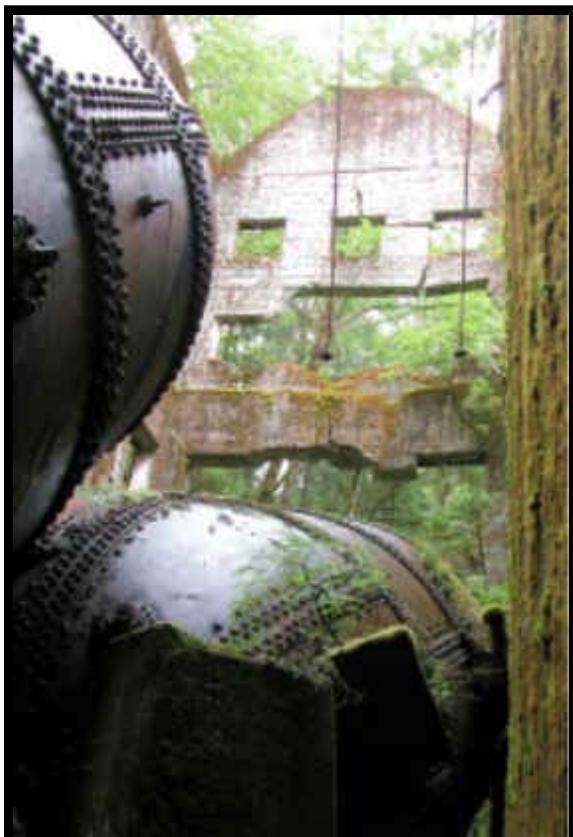
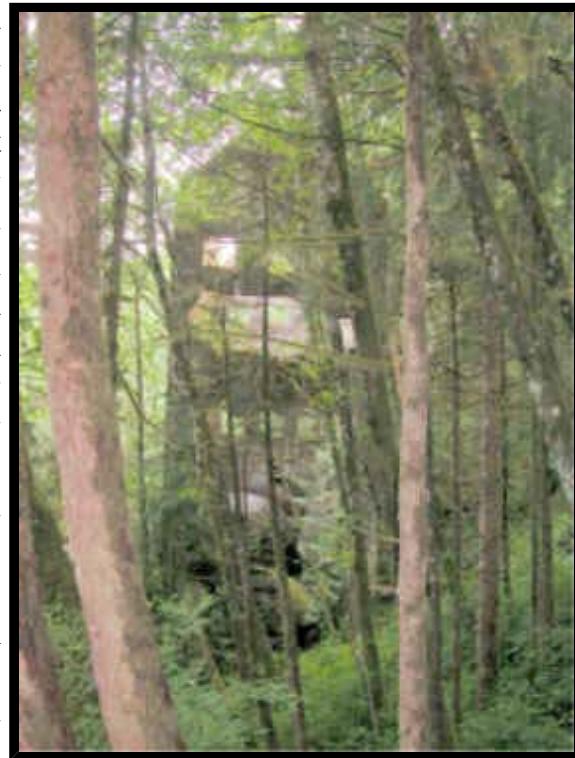


Swanson Bay We decided to explore an area that we pass each year but have never visited. Exposed to the wake from cruise ships and fishing vessels in Graham Reach, Swanson Bay is not a good overnight anchorage. To passing vessels, there appears to be little more than a brick smokestack back in the

woods, and some rotting pilings on shore (see photo). We were surprised to discover that there are the remains of several large concrete buildings including one that is six stories tall (see photo). According to our reference book, this was the site of the first wood pulp mill on the B. C. coast. It was erected in 1909 and operated for only fifteen years. At one time, the population reached 500. In addition, there is a large waterfall behind this sizable facility that provided the hydroelectric power. The only treasure found was an old pocket knife, but the whole area was a photographic windfall. With all the recent rainfall, it was a very soggy and difficult hike through the under story bushes and trees. As previous crew are aware, off-trail hiking through a British Columbia rainforest is no easy task. We were obviously the first visitors this year, and it may have been even longer since anyone explored this site (see photo).

Baker Inlet Once again we proceeded in rain with a few dry spells to break the monotony. Between the gray of the sky and water and the green hillsides, it was fascinating to pass through an area of converging currents that contained a very visible collection of “red tide”. Red tide is a naturally occurring toxin that is absorbed by shellfish, and can be fatal to humans if consumed. Baker Inlet off Grenville Channel, a beautiful area just south of Prince Rupert, was our overnight moorage. It was chosen so we could leave early the following day for a visit to the Khutzeymateen Grizzly Bear Sanctuary. We cautiously entered the narrow entrance to Baker Inlet just after high tide with lots of debris flowing against us. The bad weather finally broke, and we enjoyed a long kayak exploration after dinner in absolute calm conditions with high snow capped mountain peaks surrounding us.

Khutzeymateen Grizzly Bear Sanctuary At the entrance to Portland Inlet just north of Prince Rupert, there were about 150 Canadian commercial gillnet fishing boats setting their nets for a sockeye salmon run. It took the entire crew to help Carl pick his way around each of the one-quarter mile long nets which, until you are almost on top of them, are identifiable only by a red float



at one end. Khutzeymateen Inlet was designated as a Provincial Park ten years ago and is known for its protected concentration of brown bears.

Sarah was the first to spot bears along the shore shortly after we entered the thirteen mile long inlet. As we approached the shore, we were thrilled to see that it was a sow with three small cubs ([see photo](#)). We were able to position the *Inside Passage* within thirty feet of the shore, and took both digital video and still photos until the family ambled into the woods. Not long after, another bear was spotted on the opposite shoreline. This is the time of year when the bears are feeding on the coastal sedge meadows. Grass has a much lower nutrient value than salmon, so the bears need to eat continuously during early summer to rebuild the fat stores consumed during their six month winter hibernation.

More Bears As the next morning's fog was lifting, Carl heard funny grunting sounds in the distance, and counted over 50 seals lying on the mud flats close to our anchorage at the head of the inlet. One lonely bear sauntered across the flats seeking some breakfast. It wasn't long before we took the jet boat and headed up the river that flows into the inlet. A large brown bear was stationed on a pinnacle at the edge of the river munching on the tall grass. We quickly stopped and secured ourselves along the river's edge to photograph this bear, who was having a bad hair day. Its coat was sparse with about half of the skin void of fur. The dermatologist onboard diagnosed the condition as mange, but also considered *alopecia areata* or even poor hygiene.



After traveling upstream until we reached a major log jam, we turned back. We chased a Common Merganser all the way down the river as she led us away from her brood. She flew just in front of the jet boat at our speed of approximately, 25 mph and she stayed in position for over a mile. We felt like we were part of the movie *Winged Migration*. We later watched and photographed additional bears ([see photo](#)) for a total of ten in less than 24 hours. In both situations, wind and tide conditions permitted good photography from the jet shore boat in one

instance, and from the deck of the *Inside Passage* in the other. After departing the inlet, we traveled to the edge of the border between the U.S. and Canada to position ourselves for the next day's passage into Ketchikan. As a fitting conclusion to the first segment of our 2004 summer's voyage, a humpback whale surfaced about 25' from the boat as we motored up the channel fronting downtown Ketchikan. The 4th of July parade starts shortly. Enjoy your 4th.