

From: "Carl A. Bianco" <CABianco@BiancoProperties.com>
Sent: Sunday, July 11, 2004 4:17 PM
Subject: 2004 Inside Passage Journal #3

4th of July The annual holiday parade proved once again to be a fascinating glimpse at small town USA celebrating our independence. The participants included a wide cross-section of the community, from little league champs and class reunion groups to professional entertainers from a cruise ship. A highlight was Tlingit Nation dancers whose leader mixed modernity and tradition by talking on her cell phone as she led her drum beating clan (**see photos**). After a dry 4th (weather not abstinence), the rains returned to soggy Ketchikan. It claims to be the Rain Capital of Alaska with an average of almost 160 inches of rainfall per year. Even before we were up, the Bernsteins departed Monday morning for their early flight back to Seattle. Lynn and Jorge Covarubias, from San Diego, joined us that afternoon for the next leg of the trip. Lynn is Carl's first cousin.



An Unplanned Delay Preparing to depart Ketchikan, we encountered a problem with the crane when trying to lift the jet shore boat onto the *Inside Passage*. We had to disassemble the hydraulic crane and spend the entire morning working as a team to repair it (**see photo**). After the crane was patched back together, we collectively held our breaths



as we loaded the jet boat to the top deck. We were successful, but a major overhaul will be required upon our return.

Bad News Bears Our destination for the evening was Anan Creek. We had prepped our guests on the great bear sightings we had experienced in 13 previous visits, and they were excited. It is one of the few places we can almost guaranty to see bears. After dinner about 6:30 PM, we went ashore

planning a quiet visit to view the bears without the daily tour groups around. We were met by Brad, a U. S. Forest Service Ranger, who informed us that there were now strict

hours from 8 AM to 6 PM when visitors were allowed to the Bear Observatory. A greater disappointment was that permits were also now required with a maximum of 60 total visitors per day at a fee of \$10 per person. Of major concern was that he wasn't sure if there were any open slots for the following day.

Up Anan Creek Without a Paddle

We showed up exactly at 8 AM and Ranger Brad called the USFS station in Wrangell to see if there were any permits available. We were extremely disappointed to learn that there weren't any because a cruise ship was visiting Wrangell that day, and the majority of the permits had been taken by tour operators. This was only the 3rd day that the permit system was in place, and no amount of pleading would affect the established bureaucracy. Brad was mildly sympathetic but absolutely firm. An appeal to his supervisor was unsuccessful. Even though there were currently only two others at the observatory, he could not allow us in even for a short while. Rules were rules. We



got some video of the many eagles and seals around the opening of the creek, but Lynn and Jorge were not able to see a single bear.

Red Bay & Wrangell Narrows

We motored to Red Bay, at the north end of the heavily-logged Prince of Wales Island, where Jorge and Lynn kayaked for the first time. We



greeted the morning enveloped in a pea soup fog. Carl had to pick our way through the labyrinth of rocks guarding the exit from Red Bay using both GPS and radar systems. A swimming deer appeared almost magically out of the fog in front of the boat and swam to a nearby rocky islet. We fought a strong outgoing tide in the Wrangell Narrows and were only progressing around 6 knots instead of the usual 10. There were many small fishing boats in the Narrows, and it appeared that salmon fishing was good. We spotted a dozen eagles or more in a single tree near a fishing lodge. Near the town of Petersburg, we recognized the original *Inside Passage* approaching, and waved to the current owner as we passed. It was amazing that this was the second year in a row that we've encountered our

first Alaska cruising vessel in this same locale.

Scenery Cove in Thomas Bay The fog burned off as we passed Petersburg and approached Le Conte Bay at low tide. The blocking terminal moraine was visible with several large bergs stranded against it. The blue ice seemed more intense than ever in the bright sunlight (**see photo**). The surrounding ice covered mountain peaks and enormous waterfalls were spectacular sights. The amount of ice in the large bay was minimal, and we got close enough to get a good view of the glacier (**see photo**). Leaving Le Conte behind, we made our way through a group of gill netters enroute to Thomas Bay. Passing by the Baird Glacier, we anchored in beautiful nearby Scenery Cove. With steep cliffs rising several thousand feet from sea level to snow capped peaks, this narrow inlet merits its name. Fortunately, it was pleasant enough to enjoy dinner on the top deck before kayaking to end a wonderful day.



Sandborn Canal in Port Houghton Most of the morning was spent navigating again only by GPS and radar through dense fog in Frederick Sound. As we rounded Cape Fanshaw, the glassy calm of the water was broken as two humpback whales surfaced in front of the boat. We made our first visit to Sandborn Canal which is essentially uncharted. Our reference book suggested it was deep and clear to the head, so we proceeded carefully to a successful anchorage. There were numerous crab pots set in this inlet as well as black headed Bonaparte Gulls diving for small fish. We explored the shore and adjoining rainforest at low tide in the afternoon. With salmon jumping periodically out of the water nearby, we kayaked several miles up the river after dinner. The return paddle was much more difficult as we fought a head wind. Although tired upon return, we all agreed it was worth the trip.



Sail Island Just after an early departure, we saw a couple of humpbacks breaching repeatedly in the distance near the shoreline. By the time we reached their immediate area, the display was over and the whales were back to feeding. Our next destination was Sail Island in Stephens Passage, a popular refuge for Stellar Sea Lions that we have visited often. Although we have read many reports that their numbers have drastically diminished for unknown reasons, the population at this location remains stable.

Cantankerous as usual and using their teeth as weapons (**see photo**), the dominant males fought for their favorite positions on the

reef. Our next stop is Skagway to pick up additional crew.