

2005 Alaska Cruise Journal # 3



Off to an Exciting Start After saying farewell to our initial crew in Petersburg, we welcomed Allen and Chris Prestegard, neighbors from Maui, who joined us for the next two-week segment. Their flight was delayed in Seattle because of another security breach at SeaTac Airport. The first day proved exciting with many sightings along with almost perfect weather conditions. To start things off, we spotted a large iceberg that was grounded in view of the homes in Petersburg. Although probably only a small fragment of its original size, this large iceberg had floated a full twenty-

five miles from the LeConte Glacier without melting (**see photo**). We made a closer inspection than planned due to a temporary malfunction in the starboard engine control.

Humpback Whales Frederick Sound once again proved to be a great area to see humpback whales feeding. One of the whales used a different feeding method than normal. He fed himself by lunging out of the water with his mouth open to capture as many herring as possible at one time. After watching at length, we were ready to proceed on our way. Just as we started to accelerate, we received a big surprise when a couple of whales surfaced immediately in front of the bow of our boat. Fortunately, Carl was able to quickly put the motors in reverse and avoid striking them. It was the closest we have ever come to a collision with a whale, and fortunately it ended well.



More Mammals Shortly thereafter, a large black spot on the



shore at a distance seemed to move, and it proved to be a black bear (**see photo**). The bear was actively rummaging in beached kelp. We edged the bow close to the shore, and both observed and photographed his dining habits. Next, we were off to Yasha Island to find some sea lions. This is a popular haul out spot for the 2000-pound male Stellar sea lions (**see photo**) and their families. It was our impression that there were more sea lions this time than past

years, although it is a confirmed fact that their numbers have actually decreased dramatically in recent years. Scientists have not been able to determine the exact cause. Chris, an avid photographer, captured all of this action with her cameras (**see photo**). Although she only brought six of her many lenses, her camera backpack still weighed forty pounds. Except for the ones she is in, Chris took all of the photos in this issue. Subsequently, we motored on to Warm Springs Bay on Baranof Island.



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There was no room at the dock so we anchored in a nearby cove. It was a long first day of the voyage but definitely one filled with great sights. We had to clarify to our new guests that this was not a typical day.



Spasski Cove Calm seas enabled us to put some miles under the hull. We wanted to make as much progress as we could because the conditions continued to be favorable, and we had the Gulf of Alaska ahead of us. We headed north up Chatham Strait and settled into Spasski Cove just off of Icy Strait for the night. We took advantage of the clear day by taking a hike along the shoreline and through the adjoining woods. Allen and Chris

received a quick orientation on the local trees and plants. We explored the entrance to a small shallow tidal lagoon by jet boat. It was pleasant enough for us to enjoy dinner on the top deck.

Elfin Cove Because our next overnight destination required us to arrive at a certain time, we had some extra time to pass enroute. We watched a large number of humpback whales (probably the maximum ever together at one time) between Pt. Adolphus & South Inian Pass. They had us surrounded, which allowed for many great photo opportunities, in particular tail shots as they dove (see photo). There were a few small groups clustered together that included juveniles learning to feed alongside their mothers. We stopped at Elfin Cove for the first time since 1992. It is another of the unique tiny Alaskan communities with no more than one hundred people, and only a boardwalk system connecting the homes around the inlet (see photo). The tide was too low to enter inner basin, but space was conveniently available at the dock.



Lituya Bay Our trip around Cape Spencer and north to Lituya Bay was uneventful except that all of the mountains from Mt. Crillon (12,750 ft) through Mt. Fairweather (15,300 ft) were out in all of their glory making a spectacular sight. We arrived as scheduled at high slack tide and we observed three boisterous sea lions on a rock at the entrance. Kittiwakes (small sea gulls with black feet) and cormorants (large diving birds) nest along the bluffs on Cenotaph Island, which lies in the middle of the bay. We gave ourselves a layover day in Lituya Bay and awoke to overcast skies. We grabbed our rain gear and headed up the inlet to explore the base of Cascade Glacier. We hiked over the rocky moraine to get a closer look at the waterfalls that descend from this very gray glacier until it started to rain. It was an easy decision to spend the rest of the day onboard processing photos and reading.

Yakutat As we approached Yakutat, we heard a nearby cruise ship over the VHF radio describe the sea conditions as "long lazy swells". After ninety miles of open ocean, Allen commented that the description "was clearly in the eye of the beholder" depending on the size of the vessel from which you were making the observation. As in previous journeys, the *Relief Band*, our

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recommended electronic remedy for motion sickness, saved the day. Everyone made it through without any problems and most caught a few extra winks. It would have been easier if we could have watched the horizon, but the gray skies blended right into the gray seawater. The gleaming glaciated mountains we had seen the previous day on our starboard side were hidden in the clouds. Other than a flock of seagulls that kept circling overhead (and using our boat as a target), we did not see any wildlife. Upon our arrival, we treated ourselves to an evening out at Leonard's Landing, a fishing resort with a modest restaurant near the docks. Carl and Allen both commented that the meals aboard the *Inside Passage* were far superior. We stretched our legs with a nice walk up to the post office to mail picture post cards before making an early retirement.



Hubbard Glacier To our dismay, the overcast skies continued again. Mount St. Elias (18,008 ft.), which we have seen in past trips, was hidden from view as we started our thirty-mile side trip to see the magnificent Hubbard Glacier. The Hubbard is the longest valley glacier in North America with a total length of ninety-two miles (see photo on previous page).. It also is more than six miles wide at the face, which reaches the height of a thirty-story office building. Imagine six miles of skyscrapers. Even a panorama view of the New York City skyline does not compare with this vista. Bundled in our winter clothes, we experienced a 33-degree chill factor enroute as we took photos of random icebergs. As we neared the Hubbard Glacier, the skies opened up to sunny conditions. Over the years, we have often experienced clear skies above the surface of glaciers. We haven't confirmed it scientifically, but our observations have provided us with a theory that glaciers create their own weather. Their extreme cold seems to burn a hole through the overcast sky above. With warm sun and no wind, the temperature reached a balmy 59 degrees in the middle of this enormous icebox.



Calving Icebergs *Calving* is one of the most impressive sights at tidewater glaciers. Calving is the process by which part of the towering ice wall breaks free and falls in the ocean below (see photo). Following a loud sound much like that of a large rifle shot, hundreds of tons of ice crash into the water below followed by a large wave that radiates out across the bay. On our return trip, we passed several harbor seals resting on icebergs. The icebergs serve as places of refuge for seals and their pups where they are normally safe from passing orcas (see photo). Orcas reportedly will try to overturn the bergs, but generally the seals are safe onboard.

Next week, the big crossing...