

## 2005 Alaska Cruise Journal # 4

**On to Icy Bay** Leaving Yakutat, it was about a sixty-mile trip out into the Gulf of Alaska to our next anchorage in Icy Bay. We experienced short steep waves at the bow of the boat as we exited the mouth of Yakutat Bay. As we made our way up the coast, the massive 45-mile wide Malaspina Glacier and surrounding mountains were not visible because of the low-lying cloud cover. Icy Bay is a twenty-mile deep opening that has often been filled with floating ice. On this visit, there were some icebergs, but not nearly as many as we have seen in the past. There is no habitation here other than a logging camp.



popcorn to watch a movie, the sun broke through the clouds. We retired later that evening in full daylight. The sun had been setting well after 11:00 PM and rising around 4:00 AM. Given the long twilight periods that occur as we approach 60° north latitude, it never really gets totally dark even when the sky is overcast. After reviewing the latest weather forecast, we concluded that we could and should take the next day off. We relaxed the entire following day of intermittent dripping skies without going ashore. We completed the preparations of the previous journal, read extensively, and Chris showed Carl the basics of using Photoshop (see photo).

**The Big Crossing** We designated a departure time of 4:30 AM for the last and longest crossing we needed to reach Prince William Sound. It is a normally a 180 mile segment that takes about 18 hours, and we have usually arrived fully exhausted regardless of the sea conditions. This year was special. We had an extremely mild ocean for our sixth trip across the Gulf of Alaska. With following seas pushing us along, the burgee flag on the bow hung limp indicating no wind. We made very good

**Loading Logs** A freighter with four large cranes, the *Oriente Noble*, was loading logs directly from the water into the holds of the vessel (see photo). The logs are likely headed direct from Icy Bay to Asia. We went ashore to take a nice long hike on the Point Riou Spit. Although animal tracks are common on this wide sand beach, we had never seen so many bear, moose and smaller mammal tracks. In particular, there was a series of fresh tracks left by a brown bear sow and at least two cubs. We saw no animals but got some much needed exercise.

**Not Much Darkness** Just as we settled in with our



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time. For part of the way, we took advantage of the favorable seas and sunny skies to enjoy the view from the flybridge. On this day we saw only one whale in the distance and one lone albatross that flew across our bow.

**Kayak Island** For the first time, we had the pleasant opportunity to pass close to the large 494 foot high Pinnacle Rock that sits just offshore from the western tip of Kayak Island (see photo). We also saw the



adjacent automated lighthouse and out buildings at Cape St. Elias at the west end of this historic island that sticks out into the Gulf of Alaska (see photo on previous page). Lighthouse keepers last operated it in 1974. In July 1741, Vitus Bering and his crew, in the Russian flagship St. Peter, were the first Europeans to sight Alaska, and it happened at this location. The ship's naturalist, Georg Steller was dropped ashore, and one of his findings was the Steller's blue jay that now bears his name (as does the Steller's sea lion). The discovery of this species of blue jay reportedly helped provide proof that Bering's expedition had reached a new continent.

**Wingham Island** Given the extremely calm ocean we were experiencing, we elected to turn east along the backside of Kayak Island to explore an area of the Gulf of Alaska that sea conditions have never previously allowed.

This reduced the "big crossing" by fifty miles and five hours making the day an actual delight. There aren't many good guide resources for this area, but the draft we have of the yet to be published Douglas guide indicated that a multitude of birds could be found on "bird rock". There were countless common murres (see photo) blacklegged kittiwakes, herring gulls, and pelagic cormorants nesting in every possible crevice and cave.



Tufted puffins, short-tailed shearwater and other diving birds were floating in large numbers just offshore. The sounds of the birds drowned out the clicks from our cameras. For the evening, we anchored in calm water in Controller Bay just inside the northern tip of Wingham Island.

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**Black Oystercatcher** After dinner, we hiked on shore for a short while and observed a black oystercatcher that was intent on leading us away from her eggs hidden in the rocks on the beach (see photo). The eggs are mottled and of similar color to the beach stones, and are laid without a nest directly on the rocky shore. As a result, it is necessary for the bird to distract any potential predators. She does this by approaching the visitor and fluffing her wings, yet always intent on staying a safe distance from the predator. In our case, she approached to within about fifteen feet.



**Katalla** A short distance from Wingham Island, our maps prominently show the abandoned town of Katalla. We had read about this ghost town, and couldn't resist trying to find whatever remains from the early part of the last century. Located near the mouth of the Katalla River, the town was once the supply point for nearby and supposedly rich oil deposits and coalfields. The first oil well was drilled in 1901. In the early years, increased mining activity in Katalla created the need for improved transportation. By 1907 when the population reached several thousand people, there were three railroad lines transporting natural resources from the interior. The town went through many changes until 1943 when the post office was finally closed.

**Good Local Advice** As we prepared to anchor offshore to begin our search for Katalla; a gill-netter fishing nearby approached us to confirm our awareness of a hidden nearby reef. His net was set for a sockeye salmon run. Sockeye salmon are known locally as "reds". We took the opportunity to verify directions to Katalla. It involved taking our jet boat upstream after crossing over the bar at the mouth of the Katalla River. After a pleasant hike down a wilderness trail, we found the one hundred year old town site. Along with scattered pieces of rusty equipment, we found 15-20 cabins in various stages of repair (see photo). Most appeared to be used as summer or weekend homes, accessible only by the nearby grass airstrip, or via jet boat from Cordova. Although there was no one around, most of the cabins showed signs of fairly recent habitation.



**Prince William Sound** Departing Katalla on totally flat seas, we crossed by the edge of the delta of the Copper River. These were our final hours on the Gulf of Alaska before returning to inside waters. Hinchinbrook Entrance is the primary entrance to Prince William Sound, and it is used by all of the oil super tankers enroute to the terminus of the Alaska pipeline at

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Valdez. We celebrated the 4th of July holiday dinner on the upper deck to the muted strains of patriotic march music from our I-Pod driven stereo system. Given the bright sunlight at bedtime, we elected to skip the fireworks display that Carl had planned, much to his disappointment.

**Sea Otters** At our anchorage in Port Etches, we had an opportunity to kayak in a beautiful setting, and to see the first sea otters of the voyage ([see photo on previous page](#)). A salmon run is just beginning in the area, and many animals and birds were attempting to prevent the salmon from making the trip upstream to spawn. As we kayaked, numerous feeding sea lions surfaced with salmon in their mouths. They would occasionally



interrupt their foraging to closely inspect our kayaks ([see photo](#)). We concluded the day with a gourmet dinner on the flybridge followed by a movie in the salon.

**Beartrap Bay** Carl chose a beautiful setting for our last night out before heading into Cordova. There were some spectacular waterfalls originating from 3,000-foot high mountains. We quickly brought down the kayaks to explore the small river flowing into the end of the inlet. Countless salmon were jumping out of the water around us. This was an excellent sign that we would possibly see eagles and even a bear. The watercourse continued to get shallow, and with every stroke of our paddles hundreds of fish would scatter away. Fortunately, it was high tide and we were able to kayak well up into the spawning areas. Seeing a sub adult brown bear trying his best to catch a fish rewarded us, even though the bear was a good distance away. This was a great conclusion to the 2<sup>nd</sup> leg of our journey that covered 890 miles for a total trip to date of 1795 miles.

Leaving our boat in Cordova, we now fly back to Seattle for a scheduled one-week break in our voyage. During the intermission, we will make a trip to Florida to check on Carl's mother. Our next journal should arrive in about two weeks.