

## 2005 Alaska Cruise Journal # 5

**Back to Cordova** We met our friends, Stuart and Debby Timoner from Chicago, in Juneau via Alaska Airlines. After a brief stop in Yakutat, we continued north to return to Cordova, Alaska. The skies were clear part of the time, which enabled us to see much of the route we have traveled since our departure from Mercer Island on June 10<sup>th</sup>. We had prearranged to pick up a van upon our arrival at the airport. After dropping off luggage on the boat, we had a delicious lunch break at Baja Taco. Not your typical restaurant, Baja Taco's kitchen is located in an old red school bus adjacent to a raised



dining platform. They offer free Wi-Fi access to all visitors. Guess where the owners spend their winters?

**Copper River Delta** It was a beautiful sunny day for a drive across the vast Copper River Delta. There is only one road out of Cordova, which is a fifty-miles long and mostly gravel. The route has grassy meadows and ponds fronting snow capped peaks, including the Sheridan Glacier (**see photo**). We stopped to see a trumpeter swan nesting with her brood in the flats. This area is a vital migration spot for many waterfowl and birds. The road, which follows a former rail bed, dead-ends at the "Million Dollar Bridge" and the nearby Childs and Miles glaciers.

originally built in 1910 to be a rail connection between the Kennicott Copper Mine in the interior, and the seaport at Cordova. One of the spans of this bridge collapsed in the 1964 earthquake, and since the road ends once across the river, we could not fathom any reason to have it repaired. Could it be one of many "pork barrel" projects for which Alaska's politicians are well known? We watched large icebergs streaming under the bridge in the cold gray water. Stuart commented that if this was the water in which the famous Copper River salmon spawn, he wasn't sure he would pay a premium for this fish in the future. Although there wasn't much calving activity at the

**Childs Glacier** It was quite a surprise to discover that this historic bridge had been rebuilt since our last visit. It was



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Childs Glacier, it was none-the-less fascinating to view the glacier up close while standing on land (see photo on previous page).



**A Sea Otter Breakfast** We were fortunate to get some photos the next morning of a sea otter eating its breakfast just off our dock in the harbor (see photo on previous page). Note the shell on his lap. A sea otter eats over twenty pounds of fresh food per day, which is among the highest known food requirement for an animal of its size. Departing Cordova, we cruised across Prince William Sound to anchor for the night in Marsha Bay on Knight Island. Dall porpoises chose to ride our bow wave as we crossed the open water. These 400-pound pinnipeds seem to effortlessly keep pace with the boat with only a few flips of their powerful tails. Scientists who have studied the Dall suspect that

this porpoise is the swiftest of all small cetaceans, including the orca. Often they stay with us for only a couple of minutes, but this group of four traveled for some distance before they tired of us (see photo).

**Visiting Seward** The following day we traveled in fairly calm waters. We saw Steller sea lions at Needle Rock in Montague Strait, and also a single humpback whale feeding right next to our boat. Once again out in the Gulf of Alaska, we bounced our way into the town of Seward at the head of Resurrection Bay. There were no slips open at the transient dock, so we tied up next to an old beat-up workboat. Climbing over the *Bearing Explorer* to get to the dock presented an interesting challenge (see photo). The vessel fully met the definition of a “rust bucket”, and we just hoped it wouldn’t sink overnight while we were tied to it. The *Ultimate*, a 60’ sailing vessel from Holland via New Zealand and Japan eventually tied up on our other side. The owners spent five years building the vessel prior to 1999 when they set out on their world journey. By this fall, they plan to be in either Vancouver or Seattle for the winter where they hope to work and earn some money before continuing their journey around the world.





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Under sunny skies, we walked the mile into the town center and visited the Alaska SeaLife Center where we watched a very animated tufted puffin bathing (**see photo**). This photo was a much closer view than we will ever be able to take in the wild, as these birds are notoriously wary of humans. We were able to get cell phone coverage for the first time in days and used the opportunity to check in with our families. Debby and Stuart went to the local Safeway that contained a Starbucks for breakfast, and were able to purchase some fresh bagels to supplement our supply.



the rugged cliffs along this stretch. We anchored in Windy Bay near the end of the Kenai Peninsula. Ignoring signs of “Criminal Trespass”, we took a long hike on an old logging road. Our sounds surprised a black bear on the road ahead. The bear ran off into the woods before we could get our cameras out, and we never saw it again.

**Lingcod** We only had to travel a short distance into Chugach Passage to what has always been our most productive fishing spot. Carl and Stuart both were lucky to catch enough lingcod for several dinners. Stuart’s was the largest of the three at thirteen pounds (**see photo**). While fishing, a humpback whale came very close to our boat perhaps to check out the rare visitors.

**Barren Islands** Crossing Kennedy Entrance towards the Barren Islands, we experienced the roughest water we have seen in the last few summers. There is a vast amount of tidal water that pours into and out of Cook Inlet four times a day creating some large tidal rips. With thirty-foot tides at Anchorage at the upper end of Cook Inlet, there is an enormous amount of water that pours into this body of water. Tide against wind caused steep ten-foot waves on our starboard side. As Stuart stood outside the galley observing the turbulent seas, he suddenly found himself lifted and deposited on the floor of the galley. Nothing was hurt but his pride (and perhaps his back side). Joann & Debby came through the experience in good shape.

**Kenai Peninsula** After refueling at a fairly new facility in Seward, we headed out into the Kenai Fjords National Monument area. We stopped for the evening in Crater Bay where we kayaked for the first time with the Timoners. This scenic spot was appropriately named as the bay was shaped like a crater with very steep walls on all sides. Once again our weather changed, so we traveled in rain and fog beyond Gore Point. It was a shame not to be able to see



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**Fin Whales** We cut between West and East Amatuli Islands to take a break from the seas. These are two of the Barren Islands that lie in the middle of the entrance to Cook Inlet. Barren is an apt



name as the islands are covered with very green vegetation, but are treeless. We witnessed thousands of airborne puffins and a major sea lion rookery in this area. Completing our crossing to Shuyak Island, the easternmost of the Kodiak Island chain, Carl (the only one awake for the entire trip) calculated he saw probably more than fifty separate fin whales. We have only seen fin whales in this part of Alaska. They differ from humpback whales in that they are larger (70' instead of 45') and have a more metallic coloration. Near the end of the day, a group of about fifteen crossed immediately in front of,

underneath, and behind the *Inside Passage*. Carl had been standing on the bow preparing to photograph when he found himself surrounded by these massive creatures (**see photos**). The mantra of the moment was “unbelievable” which was the term Stuart used repeatedly to describe the spectacle. Joann captured the enormity of the event on video and it will likely be one of the key highlights of this year’s DVD.

Next week...off to Katmai.

