

2005 Alaska Cruise Journal # 6

Alaskan Peninsula We faced one more large body of water to reach the Alaskan Peninsula, our ultimate destination. The Shelikof Strait separates Kodiak and adjoining islands from the mainland of Alaska and is known for its unpredictable seas. Katmai National Park and Preserve on the peninsula, is reported to shelter the highest concentration of coastal brown bears in the world. These Katmai bears are the same species but yet different from grizzly bears found in the interior. The browns are generally larger because of diets that include an abundance of fish. The weather forecast was for favorable two-foot waves, but instead they were steep five-foot waves directly on our bow. With the prospect of five hours of these conditions in front of us, we diverted and temporarily anchored by a gravel spit on Ban Island. The group hiked and relaxed on shore (see photo) until the tide eased and the waves subsided. We then headed across Shelikof Strait for a more comfortable passage. We anchored far back in the inner inlet of Kaflia Bay, for a late dinner and well deserved rest.



small lake but did not see any bears around, just footprints. We had planned to carry our kayaks across this landmass to view bears feeding nearby in the stream, but since the salmon had not yet arrived, we abandoned the plan.

Geographic Harbor We decided to try a new location, and headed back out into Shelikof Strait to Geographic Harbor, which is a beautiful anchorage to the southwest. Its name is derived from The National Geographic Society sponsored scientific expedition to this area after the massive 1912

Kaflia Bay We slept in until we heard the arrival of a DeHaviland Otter float plane bringing in what appeared to be a group of fishermen. They were approached by a brown bear as they were organizing their small skiffs, but the bear kept its distance and soon disappeared into the underbrush. A short time later, there were two other large bears working the shoreline at low tide. We took the kayaks ashore and hiked across an isthmus to a

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eruption of nearby Mount Katmai. Volcanic ash is clearly apparent on all of the surrounding hillsides and throughout the entire region. We have read that it was almost totally dark for three days after the mountain blew up sending six cubic miles of ash into the air. The exploration cruise ship *Clipper Odyssey* was at anchor upon our arrival.

With its shore boats already back onboard, they were about to depart. The rain had been quite steady so we waited until the next morning to explore.



into the mud flats for various types of clams. We had great viewing from just offshore in our kayaks, and were able to watch the entire process (see photo on previous page). It was especially fascinating to see a bear put all of its weight with a pumping action onto its right paw (like a one-armed push up) to crash open the shells after they were exposed. These monsters, during these moments of stretching, look almost like 'Teddy Bears' (see photo).

The Battle of the Bears We happened to be at just at the right location when two bears we were observing had a disagreement. One bear charged over to the other and after facing off for a few seconds, they were upright, and very loudly howling at each other (see successive photos). Fortunately, the video camera was rolling and caught the action. The roar from their clash was startling. It was over very quickly and the charging bear backed off and retreated. They calmly returned to their search for clams and did not interact again.



Rain, Rain Go Away

It rained pretty steadily for two full days, but bears were often visible on the low tides. Because of these super wet conditions, it was

the humans who stayed away. The *Spirit of Oceanus* arrived on Sunday, and we saw its shore launches nearby as their passengers searched for bears in the nonstop rain. Our grandson Coby wrote to ask if it is cold in Alaska. The answer is that in the summer months, with our close proximity to the water, it is

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usually between 55° and 60°, except on sunny days when it may reach 70°. The wind chill factor is another matter. When the wind is blowing across the water, the effective temperature can be that of the upper 40s.



Forced Relaxation Carl, with Stuart's assistance, changed the oil in the main engines, and they then rewarded themselves with a good soak in the hot tub. Joann and Debby got busy baking cookies and kugel. With a cozy fire burning in the fireplace, movies, reading and needlepoint completed the activities of the day. We call this "forced relaxation". After three nights in the same location, which is not at all common for us, the wind and rain finally diminished. After lunch, we once again went kayaking, which resulted in Stuart unexpectedly going for a swim. Our

warm engine room saved the day. As Carl drifted along the shore, he was false charged by a young male sub-adult bear (called "hooligans") who only went into the water about two steps.

Kukak Bay Moving on to Kukak Bay, we were fortunate to observe some bears strolling along the shoreline near the entrance. They were meandering along the beach, and we wondered how they would pass around some rocky outcroppings projecting into the water. Without hesitation, the bears simply waded into the water and swam around them (see photo). There were many bears on the flats at the head of the bay, but windy, wet conditions prevented much exploration. Crossing back across Shelikof Strait was better than anticipated, and we anchored in Nachalni Bay off Kuprenof Strait. We took a welcome walk along the extensive beach area to stretch our sea legs.



Rafts of Sea Otters Almost hunted to extinction two hundred years ago by the Russians and later Americans, the sea otter populations continue to recover. Passing through Kuprenof Strait, we discovered a large raft of sea otters. There were at least forty and maybe more, and many had babies. With their continuous diving and surfacing, it was impossible to count them all. This surpasses the number we have ever seen in one location. Upon our arrival in Kodiak, and with the end of the 3rd leg of our voyage, Stuart received a certificate for completing his C. I. T. (Captain in Training) course. More next week...