



**Ketchikan, Alaska** Carl's jet boat airport shuttle service made three trips across The Tongass Narrows to ferry over our outgoing crew for each of their flights and then greet our next crew. On the final trip Ron Akin, and our grandsons, Brad Akin age 12 from St. Louis, and Nick Migliore age 11 from San Antonio arrived. The Ketchikan airport is on Douglas Island across the channel from Ketchikan, and recently gained national notoriety as one of Senator Ted Stevens' pork barrel projects that was tacked onto a recent defense bill. Do you remember hearing about the proposed two billion dollar "bridge to nowhere"? Currently there is a fully functional and efficient ferry operating every fifteen minutes which brings passengers to and from the airport, but politics and pork are a potent combination. As is customary for first time crew, Carl gave the emergency safety drill and instructions to our new group. Brad demonstrated that one size fits all for survival suits (**see photo**). Many of our previous crew will likely chuckle as they remember their own awkward first fitting into these bulky red "gumby" suits.

**Lumberjack Show and Departure** We headed into town the following morning where we made an important stop at Tongass Trading to get the boys outfitted with knee high rubber boots (known locally as "Alaskan sneakers") and to get Ron a fishing license. Our primary destination in Ketchikan was the Great Alaskan Lumberjack Show. Ironically, most of the "Jacks & Jills" participating in the show were from New England. They put on an excellent show. As we departed Ketchikan, we spotted two eagles sitting on the breakwater of the marina. Acclimated to humans, they allowed the *Inside Passage* to closely approach. Each of our crew has their own digital cameras and we got numerous great eagle pictures (**see photo**). Near Moth Bay, our first evening's anchorage, Brad caught a red rock cod, the first fish of the trip. After dinner, the group went kayaking. It was Nick's first experience in a kayak, but after a few minutes he took right off.

**Misty Fjords National Monument** Behm Canal was our destination for the next few days. Touring Misty Fjords is a major highlight out of Ketchikan, and is very popular with the passengers from the cruise ships. They take either seaplane or boat tours. This preserve encompasses 2.2 million acres of wilderness where the fjords are extremely deep and



they are surrounded by 3,000 foot sheer gray cliffs with numerous waterfalls that tumble from snow-filled bowls. We decided that we were up for a hike to Punch Bowl Lake. The boy's new boots got a workout. It was a difficult and muddy climb of only three quarters of a mile with an elevation gain of 600 feet to a U. S. Forest Service camping shelter. Midway up, we stopped for a group photo near a noisy waterfall (see photo). The shelter was nicely equipped for overnight stays,



and there was a canoe at water's edge that was used by all of the boys to paddle out into the lake. Best of all, the youngsters never complained and kept up the entire way.



**Active Boys** Nick made a satellite call to his mom Laura to let her know that he was doing all right. This is the first time he has been away from home for more than three days (see photo). The boys have explored every nook and cranny of the vessel, and have taken out and played almost every game that was tucked away in the salon cabinet. BiancoOpoly is their favorite. Concocted by the Bianco Properties staff, the *Inside Passage* replaces one of the utilities on this board game. At other times without warning, the boys started chasing each other around the boat in some unexplained game of tag. Even the extra grocery storage compartment above the

pilothouse has become a great hiding place. Looking in there at any time, one may find potatoes, paper towels, or a smiling face. Ron has been a great asset supervising the fishing activities as well as showers and also refereeing wrestling matches. As their mothers requested, the boys have been writing in their journals every evening (see photo). To her delight, Joann has had lots of help in food preparation. Both boys have been involved in galley





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duties, and Brad has been given the nickname “Emeril”. Our friendly galley staff served dinner consisting of the captain’s favorite *Inside Passage* meal # 1 (Caesar salad and fresh salmon) on the upper deck (see photo).

**Walker Cove** Before leaving the Punch Bowl area, we explored Rudyerd Bay at the back of the inlet. We noticed some seaplanes with tourists from Ketchikan landing and discovered they had spotted a brown bear sow with three small cubs feeding on grass along the shore. Still within Misty Fjords, we traveled on to Walker Cove and saw one brown bear digging for clams on the northern shore and two more

browns on the southern shore making a total of seven for the day. A beautiful partial sunny day with no wind provided us a great kayaking opportunity below steep cliffs and snow-capped mountains. Early the next morning the captain spotted a solitary trumpeter swan along the shoreline. Shortly thereafter, we had to leave because weather reports indicated a storm was coming in and we needed to get through a portion of Clarence Strait, a 90 mile long potentially nasty body of water, before the weather changed. For that day, we traveled 106 miles which was greater than the three previous days combined. From our moorage in Vixen Inlet that night, we were in position for an easy run to Anan Creek, our next destination.

**Anan Creek Bear Observatory** Since advance permits are now required, we had to select our days to visit this active bear viewing area last March. The dates are not changeable once the permits are purchased. Arriving at mid-day when all of the tourists were around was somewhat distracting, but there were as many bears and bald eagles as we have ever seen at this location. Anan Creek is like a zoo in reverse. The humans stay within a fenced area and the animals roam free. Although the fence is only 42” high, each group knows where it belongs, and the bears wander next to and even under the observation platform. Twenty would be a reasonable guess of how many different bears we observed the first afternoon. On this particular day only black bears were seen. A highlight was a black bear sow and three first year cubs that repeatedly climbed a nearby tree (see photo).



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Unfortunately, these cuddly infants have only a 50% likelihood of living to adult age. They are very much at risk from both nature's elements as well as adult male bears. If an adult male can destroy the cubs, the sow will go into estrous and be ready to mate again. On our way back to the boat, we heard



a rustling in the bushes. It was a large black bear wanting to cross the path to get back to the fish swollen stream. We paused, and the bear scampered across our path and down the hill.

**Cub in Peril** Heavy rain commenced during the night and continued intermittently into our second day at Anan Creek. Even the majestic bald eagle looked a little soggy after the evening's rain (**see photo**). We guessed that the two boys would opt to stay onboard instead of returning to watch bears in the rain, but Brad and Nick proved us wrong by donning their raingear. We all went ashore after each boy braided a loaf of Challah bread under grandma's supervision. We watched bears for 1 ½ hours before any tourists came. As we approached the time we had set for our departure, a black sow whom the Forest Service rangers had named Virginia, and her first year cub came near. Virginia went out into the stream near the head of the falls to search for fish. After a short while, the cub decided to try and follow its mother across the

stream, but got washed away. The small furry cub managed to climb onto a small boulder in the center of the torrent (**see photo taken by Nick**), and cried loudly for the mother. When Virginia heard the cries, she scampered back to the nearby shore, but the current was too strong for her to swim out to her cub. Soon after, the young cub fell into the water again and was swept over the falls repeatedly submerging under the current. Fortunately, the cub bobbed to the surface downstream and ultimately made it to shore. For a few minutes the mother and cub could not find each other in the large boulders that border the stream, but they were finally reunited and wandered off into the woods together as if nothing had happened. Joann captured the entire drama on the camcorder, which will be a highlight of our 2006 video diary. Next journal...the final days of this year's cruise

