

2007 Alaska Cruise Journal # 7



Jammn Salmn Tom and Donna Anderson arrived in Cordova to join us on the final leg of our 2007 voyage. They split their time between Minneapolis and Useppa Island near Ft. Meyers, Florida. Tom and Carl were graduate school roommates at Northwestern University and they had reconnected a couple of years ago after a separation of forty plus years. One piece of the Andersons luggage was lost in transit which required a delay until noon the following day. What could have been an inconvenience turned into a pleasurable experience. Our Cordova connection Lauren (**photo**) was meeting her friend Steve, who was bringing in some large sockeye salmon (a/k/a “reds”) that morning. Steve, onboard his commercial gill net vessel *Jammn Salmn*, had saved ten of the best from his catch during the current opening for their combined personal use. Together they would clean the fish and then Lauren would lightly smoke and can the product that the two of them would then split. We spent the better part of an hour watching the fish preparation process while getting a full explanation of the intricacies of commercial fishing.

Mother and Child

The delay also enabled us to have a rare experience observing the interactions of a family of sea otters in very close proximity in the harbor. In addition, we captured some extraordinary action video plus many still photos. Until the cub is six to eight weeks old, it will not have learned to swim on its back (**photo**). Most sea otters are born in May or June after only four months of gestation and are covered in a woolly, light brown to yellowish fur. The curious youngster swam to within a few feet of Carl, until the mother noticed, swam over and



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grabbed the baby by the back of its neck and dragged it to a safer distance (photo). We watched a full cycle of their most common activities. First, the mother dove and brought fish and clams to the surface which she quickly ate and then dove again. During this period, the baby remained on the surface mewling piteously for its mother like a young sea gull. Next, the mother groomed herself, which

for sea otters is an ongoing process. Their fur, with 800,000 hairs per square inch (not an exaggeration), needs to be kept extremely clean so the hair follicles can trap air which is needed for insulation in the cold water. After her personal grooming, she placed the cub on her stomach and proceeded to thoroughly groom her cub while it nursed. In the photo (at right), the cub is chewing on its mother's foot while the exposed teat sits unused. Finally, the two rested with mother on her back and baby asleep on her belly. What a great morning it had been!



Where's Waldo!

Once underway, we traveled to English Bay just inside Cape Hinchinbrook, where we could position ourselves for our return trip across the Gulf of Alaska. Shortly before anchoring, we visited the Porpoise Rocks, a rookery with at least a thousand common murre (photo), cormorants, sea gulls, and kittiwakes. After a delicious dinner of lightly smoked king salmon, we went to bed as we planned an early start on the next day's crossing.



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The Longest Day This was our first crossing of the Gulf of Alaska going southeast and fortunately, the seas were favorable at only five feet. All went well until we crossed through a debris filled tide line off Cape St. Elias on Kayak Island. We are not sure what we hit, but the engines revved up and the boat experienced intense vibrations. Carl thought we had something dragging on our propellers. We were in about the most remote and inconvenient location to possibly have engine trouble. *Inside Passage* was about 140 miles from Cordova and a similar distance from Yakutat, the nearest towns where mechanics might be located or where parts could be shipped. Fortunately, the engines appeared to settle down and

we continued on but the port (left) throttle required more advancing to maintain speed. We experienced overcast skies the entire day and missed seeing the beauty of this mountainous coastline. Just as we arrived in the inner harbor of Icy Bay, the clouds parted and the majestic Mt. St. Elias came into view to welcome us back (see Carl's "penultimate" photo in Journal #2).

Mystery Solved Clear sky and bright sun roused us the following morning. We brainstormed ideas on how best to diagnose and possibly correct our problem with the port controls and also check the bottom for anything we might be dragging. The plan emerged to use our waterproof underwater TV camera attached to a gaff hook to check our stabilizer fins, props, and rudders. Tom manned the camera from the shore boat (**photo above**) while Joann and Donna positioned the shore boat and Carl described what he saw on the TV screen. Both the port propeller and rudder were clean but the port stabilizer had a stick caught between it and the hull. Carl removed the stick with some effort using a long pole. The port engine shift and throttle control are still out of kilter and we are using the



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handheld remote controls instead. An e-mail was sent out to the manufacturer for advice, but we have not yet received any response.

Icebergs & Wild Flowers Work completed, we were ready for some fun. In the shore boat with its water jet engine, we ventured deep into the inlet to share Icy Bay with the Andersons on a wonderful sunny day. There were innumerable icebergs and three sizable glaciers to see and photograph. To capture the excitement of the ride on the camcorder, we sped between the floating bergs at full speed until we failed to make a full turn and came to quick stop against a small iceberg, fortunately without mishap. Not far from the Guyot Glacier, we photographed the lupine wildflowers in full bloom as we walked the shoreline (**photo on previous page**). Large quantities of ice kept us from getting near the face of the glacier. The folks that we met in Cordova on the *Far Out* (see Journal #3) came into Icy Bay late in the afternoon. We invited them and their guests over after dinner to hear about their adventures in Prince William Sound during the past month while we had ventured out to Kodiak. We also shared with them our problem with the controls and unfounded fears that perhaps we too had a net on our props. The next day, we did an excursion to the Pt. Riou Spit for a long walk along the beach. We watched the roaring surf along the western coast and crossed back over the spit to the shore boat through lupines, yellow paintbrush, and dwarf fireweed, all blooming at their summer peak.



A Dutch Accent Our next to last long segment in the Gulf was a seven hour ride to Yakutat. The coast was blanketed with clouds the entire way but the seas were relatively calm. As we were entering Yakutat Bay, the cruise ship the *Radiance of the Seas* overtook us and approached to cross our path (**photo above**). It quickly was evident that if one of us didn't change course, we would come within a few feet of each other. After the ship made arrangements to pick up the required harbor pilot who would guide the passenger ship to the Hubbard Glacier at the head of the inlet, we also got hailed. A voice with a Dutch accent announced over the VHF radio, "...the small white boat on our port, what are your intentions?" Carl replied that we would be more than happy to allow him to pass in front of us. During the entire summer, this was the first time that we had been referred to as a small boat. Most everything in life is relative!