

2009 Alaska Cruise Journal # 1

Skipping the Inside Passage

We began our 25th consecutive annual summer cruise in Cordova, Alaska, skipping the voyage from Seattle to Southeast Alaska through the Inside Passage which has traditionally been our route.

Instead, professional captain Stan and 1st mate/mechanic Andy piloted our 68' *MV Inside Passage* the 1400 miles to Cordova, allowing us to spend nearly nine weeks exploring South Central and Southwest Alaska. Joining us on our first two-

week segment are Randy and Christie Hasson formerly of Seattle, but currently from Starkville, Mississippi and Brad Akin (our 14 year old grandson) from St. Louis, Missouri.



Cordova This small remote town, accessible only by air or boat, depends primarily on fishing and is the home of the prized Copper River salmon, now known the world over. The *Inside Passage* had arrived in Cordova shortly after one of the fishing season sessions had closed. In a few short hours, almost 300 of the 20+’ gill netting boats had returned to port. Rather than fight the arriving traffic for moorage, the captain

chose to anchor out for the evening before completing the delivery of our *Inside Passage* the next day.



The evening of our arrival we caught up with local resident, Lauren Padawer whom we first met two years ago. Lauren is still actively involved in both her community and her “not quite a full-time business yet”, the Alaska Glacial Mud Company in which she takes fine glacial silt from the Copper River and processes it into a cosmetic face mask sold over the Internet. To welcome us back, Lauren brought her homemade

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goodies including bread with millet and flax, some triple berry jam, and two jars of freshly canned smoked salmon. Shortly before our departure the following morning, we saw her decked out in full rain gear cleaning the bottom of a purse seiner on which she will be crewing shortly when the salmon season re-opens (**photo preceding page**).

Tatitlek Passing the small native village of Tatitlek, the blue dome of the Russian Orthodox Church caught our attention in its setting against the majestic background of Copper Mountain (**photo preceding page**). Tatitlek sits among spruce and hemlock trees along the northeast shore of Tatitlek Narrows, 25 miles southwest of Valdez. With 83 residents including a student population of 17, it is the largest native village in Prince William Sound. Like most of these small villages, there are no stores, restaurants, or marine service facilities. Two churches, the school, a community building, and an infirmary complement the homes of the residents.

Climbing the ladder to the city pier at low tide is the only method of arrival for those coming by boat (**photo**). Most residents work as deckhands on fishing boats but the lady who came to greet us at the top of the dock and served as our volunteer tour guide told us that her native husband works in the oil fields up north in Prudhoe Bay – two weeks on then two weeks off. She told us about her part-time job of picking up the cruise ship harbor pilot that has to be flown into their small airport and driven over to the ferry dock once a day. A harbor pilot with specific local knowledge takes over all cruise ships and other large vessels entering Alaska ports. When we inquired as to the pronunciation and meaning of the name of this small community, she said that Tatitlek means “windy place” in the native language and then quietly leaned over to whisper that an easy way to remember the pronunciation is to think of it as “two tits and a lick”.



The Columbia Glacier The most visited site in Prince William Sound is the massive Columbia Glacier, the largest of the area's many tidewater glaciers. For a still unknown reason, it has been retreating for nearly 30 years at a rapid pace and the result is a dense field of icebergs that float for many miles between the face of the glacier and the shallow gravel bar moraine created at the former terminus of the glacier. We anchored for the evening in Jade Cove, which is named for the color the salt water becomes when it is mixed with glacial runoff.

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The guys went off to explore the ice bergs and the shoreline (**photo preceding page**) and Randy and Brad tried panning for gold in a region that historically had numerous gold mines. After dinner, the entire group ventured among the grounded icebergs. Because icebergs periodically roll over as they melt, they are not safe to walk on if they are not grounded. Being

careful not to step too close to the edges, we enjoyed the beauty of this setting (**photo**). Randy and Christie expressed surprise at the consistency of the ice that made up these enormous icebergs and said it was just like “crushed party ice”.

Valdez In the lower 48, or “the outside” as seen by Alaskans, this town is best known as the southern terminus of the trans-Alaska pipeline. On our visit, Valdez was lush green with patches of snow in the surrounding 5,000 foot high mountain peaks (**photo**). Just a few months earlier the community was buried under winter snow. Valdez annual snowfall averages 29 feet, but the temperature rarely falls below zero. In the span of 30 years, Valdez’s citizens endured two of the nation’s worst disasters, both coincidentally on Good Friday. The first, the 9.2 magnitude earthquake of 1964 killed over 30 people and forced the city to totally rebuild from scratch in a new location. The second was the massive oil spill from the Exxon Valdez in 1989 when 11 million gallons of crude oil poured into the pristine waters of Prince William Sound.

