

2009 Alaska Cruise Journal # 3



Anton Larson Bay On the last night of our the first leg, we anchored in this most picturesque bay (**photo above**). Located only a short distance from the town of Kodiak, we still felt like we were a million miles from civilization. The bay, protected by a narrow band of rocky islets, is home to tufted puffins, kittiwakes and cormorants. We lowered the kayaks and took advantage of this sunny and serene setting. With several sea otters nearby, it was a peaceful surrounding in which to kayak.

Kodiak Island Kodiak is Alaska's largest island and one of about twenty that form the Kodiak Archipelago. The glacially carved interior is mountainous with green-carpeted valleys, lakes and marshes. Very few trees are found on Kodiak Island, especially on the most western end of the island. After we tied up and took a stroll through town, our most junior crew member was delighted to spy a sign of home, the golden arches of McDonald's. That night we had a brief ceremony on board with a special dessert to celebrate Carl's birthday. He is no longer counting the years, but he celebrates this annual event doing one of the activities he most prefers, enjoying the wilderness. Randy and Christie departed the following morning and we took a rest day in port to restock with perishables, purchase marine and other repair parts for some maintenance chores, and add a few more fishing lures. We had already learned that two of our next scheduled guests were not going to be able to join us, so it would be just the three of us for the next two weeks.



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Old Harbor Old Harbor is to us the most picturesque of the five scattered villages on Kodiak Island. It is nestled on a narrow strip of beach at the foot of a steep, grassy mountain with snow capped peaks in the distance (photos left and previous page).

The Kodiak Island villages range in size from 50 to 200 residents, most of Alutiiq origin. They are windows to the past, but are also models of a modern subsistence lifestyle. The majority of Old Harbor homes were built shortly after the 1964

earthquake and tsunami destroyed most of the town, excluding only the school and the Russian Orthodox Church which both set on higher ground. Forty-five years later, many of these homes are unfortunately not in the best condition and some are greatly in need of repair. We saw a sign outside the school building that announced a Summer Food program for students. The students get at least one good meal each day at school during the school year and the program is continued over the summer months while school is not in session. We also saw a notice advertising for residents to rent homes for teacher use during the school year.

Most of these small native villages are visited by very few private boats and typically word of our visit spreads quickly. We couldn't resist taking a photo of one photogenic young resident who came to visit (photo). The rear of her life preserver was imprinted "Kids Don't Float". Most harbor docks in Alaska have racks containing these life preservers for local use.

Canine Playmate The three of us walked down to the far end of the village to peek in the church and stroll through the cemetery on the hill. As we circled the two streets that



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make up the village, a pretty black labrador enthusiastically joined and followed us back to the boat. Brad found a stick and had a great time tossing it into the water and having it retrieved repeatedly (photo).

Our new friend didn't want to stop, and after many exchanges, the ultimate result was a drenching of Brad's pants and shoes as the dog repeatedly shook itself dry. At 5:30 AM the next morning, we awoke to hear a dog's

rapid paw-steps running around our boat's deck, which we quickly identified as Brad's new best friend coming back in search of his playmate.

The only thriving sign of commerce in town was a fishing lodge. The owner told Carl that he had four boats and we watched when they returned after a day's outing with halibut, a few king salmon and several large red rock cod (locally called Red Snapper). Waiting for the ultimate scraps that would be left, a mature bald eagle settled on a piling right above the work area of the lodge employee who had been cleaning the day's catch (photo).

Moser Bay - Akhiok Circling around Cape Trinity at the most western tip of Kodiak Island, we hoped to stop into another small village that we have never visited. Akhiok is reported to have a population of 58 but it proved very difficult to moor the *Inside Passage* nearby. We instead chose to anchor in nearby Moser Bay to wait out some gusty winds. Native fishing shacks were scattered almost equidistant along the shoreline with set nets stretched from the shoreline for a salmon run that was just beginning. We observed small skiffs periodically checking the nets and collecting the salmon that had been caught in these nets. This type of subsistence fishing can provide the bulk of a



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family's winter food supply.

The winds wrapped around 1,700 foot high Luchek Mountain and proved relentless for our entire 36 hour stay. We would see dark ripples move across the water, and the *Inside Passage* would shake as the wind gauge would jump from 5 MPH to 45 MPH in a matter of a few seconds, and then almost as quickly disappear. The maximum gust we observed was 55 miles per hour. The boat

swung back and forth like a pendulum on its well secured anchor. The local fishermen appeared to act as though these were normal conditions, but they were new to our experience.

Cannery in Chip Cove The next day we lowered our shore boat and went to explore the nearby abandoned Columbia-Ward cannery. The sun continued to shine brightly but the wind was still a major issue. The chance to get on shore again was a welcome change. We carefully walked along the rotting timber decks and peeked into the remains of several buildings (**photo above**). Pages from a 2001 issue of the Anchorage Daily News and some discarded Victoria's Secret catalogs were the most recent evidence of human habitation, but it appeared that the cannery had been closed for many years. The large safe in what appeared to have been the crew lounge interested Brad. Did it contain some kind of treasure?

Larsen Bay Cannery During the long bumpy trip up the Shelikoff Strait side of Kodiak Island, we encountered a pod of thirty plus humpback whales intensely focused on feeding. On several occasions they



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broke the surface immediately in front of the *Inside Passage* requiring us to quickly throttle back so as to avoid a possible collision.

Larsen Bay is the center of commercial fishing activity on the west side of Kodiak Island, and Icicle Seafoods of Seattle operates the cannery/fish processing plant. Fishing nets line the pier (**photo on previous page**). Larsen Bay is the polar opposite of the abandoned cannery we inspected the preceding day. With over two hundred temporary summer workers, the facility is a buzz of activity operating long hours daily. It both cans the lower grades of salmon and flash freezes the higher quality product, both of which ultimately find their way to your local grocer.

We had a chat with the proprietress who operates the nicely maintained general store. An Idaho teacher during the winter months, she and her family have spent the past fifteen summers operating this store which serves the basic needs of both cannery employees and the 100 or so local residents. Recent improvements include Internet access by the hour or minute and soft serve ice cream, which we had to try, if only to verify the quality.

Bears? The weather conditions moderated in our favor so we leisurely crossed Shelikof Strait, the body of water that separates the Alaskan Peninsula from Kodiak Island. From a long distance off, Carl spotted a brown bear at the entrance to Geographic Harbor. We paid little attention to it because we were confident that we would see many more inside this extraordinarily scenic and normally bear-filled area. Wrong! We did not see another bear the entire visit even though we checked the area thoroughly. Our timing was definitely off. We took the shore boat to scan the inlet's shoreline and then headed over to the ranger cabin but found it boarded up. Carl and Brad concluded our visit to this tranquil anchorage with a late evening kayak up the river enjoying the calm and sunny night. Next week...we find bears elsewhere, plus another map.

