

2009 Alaska Cruise Journal # 4



Hallo Bay Motoring 35 miles northeast from Geographic Harbor to Hallo Bay, we remained in Katmai National Park. A small portion of this massive national park was originally created in 1918 under President Woodrow Wilson at the recommendation of the National Geographic Society following the major eruption of the Mt. Novarupta Volcano in 1912. In the next sixty years, additional acreage was added to this vast section of the Alaskan Peninsula that now contains 14 active volcanoes and the largest population of coastal brown bears in the world.



Although only our third visit here over the last twenty-five years, it is very special for two reasons. First, there is the spectacular vista of the Barrier Range and its numerous glaciers that provide the backdrop for this special location (**photo above**). Second, it is one of the best places to observe the large number of brown bears that graze on high protein sedges and other herbaceous plants in the meadow as well as digging clams on the beach and the tide flats before the beginning of the summer salmon runs.

Tide Flats Hallo Bay at low tide has a tidal flat that is three-quarters of a mile wide.

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This makes the timing of arrivals and departures in the 12' average tide difficult. Care must be taken so that when we are ready to depart, we are not stranded with either our shore boat well offshore or stranded high and dry on the sand.

On our first visit onshore, we chose to access by kayak reasoning that we could drag our kayaks across the beach or float them out on one of the streams as the tide went out (**photo on previous page**). This went reasonably well except that a dense fog came in while we were onshore and we couldn't see the *Inside Passage* from the water's edge. Since we could hear the sounds of the generator on a nearby charter boat, we elected to paddle upwind towards the sound knowing that we could always reverse our course and return to the beach. It worked and the *Inside Passage* gradually appeared out of the fog.

Red Fox Encounter On our second trip ashore, we spent considerable time watching one bear relentlessly focus on digging clams in the muddy tide flats. With the enormous Hallo



Glacier as a backdrop (**photo above**), he totally ignored both our presence and that of a red fox that searched for a tasty morsel among scraps that the bear might have overlooked. As we approached for a closer look, the fox surprisingly came towards us. When the fox was about 20' away, it suddenly veered right and headed up the stream bank into an area of tall beach grass sprinkled with native wildflowers (**photo at left**).

The fox was shortly searching for a small snack of its own. We watched as he first froze and then, like a cat, abruptly leaped up into the air and pounced down grabbing a small fuzzy gray creature that it swallowed fur and all.

Brown Bear Country Carl was anxious to return to get some more photographs and take advantage of the ideal sunny, calm conditions. After a brief visit

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by kayak, he returned this time without seeing any bears. Launching the kayak into low surf he took some salt water into the cockpit. His camera continued to work for the duration of our Hallo Bay encounters, but quit shortly before our return to Kodiak. Fortunately, he will be able to repair, or most likely replace, the camera body during our several day trip break when we are back in Seattle.

In the Meadow On our next visit we stopped to photograph a couple of bears that were grazing. They were also being observed by four eco-tourists and a guide/naturalist out of Homer. Although difficult to visit by individual travelers, charter boat guide services and bush pilots produce daytime traffic into Hallo Bay which is 110 air miles from Homer and 60+ from Kodiak.

The charter group was set up nearby across the stream from us as we approached (photo above). After one of the large bears passed close between them and where we were standing, there was some concern by two of us that we might be too close.

Carl was correct in his assessment in that the bear totally disregarded us and continued to feed only stopping to scratch his backside against a large driftwood log. After the bears departed, we went over to the group



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and learned a few new tips on how best to ward off any close encounters. The guide offered that he carried marine flares that produce a dense smoke instead of bear spray finding them just as effective. He feels that they are more environmentally friendly since the pepper spray is quite uncomfortable and potentially damaging to the bear's health. In eleven years of full time summer guiding, he said he has only had to use flares a couple of times.

One Last Great Encounter After walking back along the river to our shore boat on the beach (**photo on previous page**), we began the process of untying the shore lines and preparing to embark. Joann spotted a dark brown bear high on the riverbank above us. We soon realized that we were not the focus

of his interest as we saw he was eying another lighter brown bear walking along the sand bar across the river from our boat. We each had different thoughts of what we wanted to do next.

Brad, standing in the shore boat, grabbed the bear spray while Joann scrambled over to grab the back pack with our emergency gear and then held on to the line to the shore boat. Meanwhile Carl started the video camera to record the entire upcoming encounter. We watched the second bear start to swim across the river to our side while the first bear came down from the high bank for a possible confrontation. There was no telling what type of interaction it would be. The first bear started to walk along the shore towards us to meet the arrival of the second bear but realizing that we would be right in his path, he quickly backtracked. Once swimming, the river current grabbed the second bear and swept him towards us, but he also quickly reversed his course and returned to opposite shore. Moving further upstream he finally swam across the stream to meet the darker brown bear.

After a few minutes, we concluded that they were sub-adult siblings as they proceeded to wrestle and play-fight for ten minutes as they had moved up stream and out of camera range. Once the play-fight began, Brad dropped the bear spray and picked up his camera to capture at a distance the friendly sparring between the two siblings (**photo above**).

Fourth of July We anchored that night in



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nearby Kukak Bay for a holiday celebration. The plan was to meet Brad's request for his "very favorite holiday" and have a campfire on a beach, roast hotdogs and shoot off bottle rockets. Brad and Joann made some classic American potato salad and packed up all of the essentials for a beach outing. Carl selected a nearby beach of polished stones on which to build a fire. It was a perfect ending to the first day that actually felt like summer (**photo on previous page**). After dinner and dessert, Brad went exploring and climbed most of the boulders in the surrounding area. Shortly before midnight we launched some final rockets off the bow of the *Inside Passage*. The sky was not completely dark but there was no reason to wait any longer as it was not going to get much darker.

Contrary to most expectations, Alaska can sometimes have good weather. On this two week leg of our voyage and although windy at times, we had no rain and the final three days the temperature was in the high 70's. We ended the 2nd Leg by celebrating Brad's fifteenth birthday.

Our final view in this Journal is of a morning sunrise illuminating the peak of 7600' Mt. Denison which towers over Hallo Bay (**photo below**).



KODIAK ISLAND, rugged, and windswept, is Alaska's largest island, one of about 20 islands that form the Kodiak Archipelago. Spruce forests cover the northern part of the island and most of neighboring Afognak Island. The interior is mountainous with glacially-carved valleys, lakes and marshes.

Two-thirds of Kodiak and adjacent islands are set aside as a national wildlife refuge to protect the habitat of the giant Kodiak brown bear and other wildlife. Nearly 3,000 of these huge carnivores roam this lush wilderness eating.

Kodiak Island's history has been shaped by two natural disasters. The 1912 eruption of Novarupta volcano on the mainland devastated the area's fish and wildlife population for several years. The 1964 Good Friday tidal

wave d

as well as other Alaskan communities. In 1784, Grigor Ivanovich Shelikof, a Russian fur trader established the first Russian settlement at Three Saints Bay - later moved to the present site of the town of Kodiak.



From Hallo Bay

Kodiak

To Geographic Hbr

Larsen Bay

Old Harbor

Moser Bay

In 1784 a Russian force decided to end the Native resistance to trade in sea otter pelts by engaging the local Aleut and Koniag warriors in a one-sided battle near the village of Old Harbor. An estimated

500 villagers were killed including some who threw themselves off the 10-story-high cliffs of the sanctuary known as 'Refuge Rock'.

