

## 2009 Alaska Cruise Journal # 5



### Third Leg Begins

After our brief visit home, we returned to Kodiak to begin the final four weeks of our summer adventure. Our guests for the next two weeks are Avery and Kathleen Loy of Vancouver, WA who are our neighbors on Maui. The sunny weather that existed throughout our entire second leg was still continuing upon our return. Our luggage consisted of some fresh provisions from

Costco and we supplemented what we lacked from the nearby local market.

**The Pandora** Carl noticed that the couple on the catamaran moored nearby was attaching a band of carpet padding to the side of their vessel, and wandered over to ‘chat them up’ and find out what was going on. David and Irene, a young couple from France, are sailing on an around-the-world voyage with their two Russian blue cats. They had recently arrived in Alaska from Hawaii and needed to haul their sail boat for major transmission repairs. The carpet padding was installed to protect their hull on haul-out since the travel lift was only 18” wider than their boat. Our two groups visited, swapped stories, and inspected each other’s vessel. Their experiences were fascinating and we were intrigued by their sense of adventure.

### **Alaska Peninsula Revisited**

Shelikof Strait was reasonably agreeable for a crossing, so we bounced our way across to the Alaska Peninsula for another chance to observe the magnificent coastal brown bears. Seeing them in their natural habitat has become addictive. At anchorage the first night, Avery spotted a brown bear grazing at the end of our inlet. After watching him forage while we





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enjoyed our dinner on the back deck, we couldn't resist kayaking over for a better look. As we approached from a safe distance, the bruin began to swim across the channel to the opposite shoreline. The bear totally ignored us during the entire passage including when it paused to shake the water out of its fur (**photo on**



**previous page**). Departing the bay in the morning, we passed a small island with an eagle's nest on top. There were two unfledged eaglets trying their best to avoid detection in the high grass that capped the rocky islet (**photo on previous page**).

**Back to Hallo Bay** Before beginning the trek back to Cordova, we had to revisit this very special destination which also gave the Loy's the opportunity to share this unique environment. Having developed a sure-fire method of coming ashore on this challenging shore landing, we again secured our jet boat in the opening of the glacial river. Words can't describe the sensation of climbing up the riverbank and taking the first scan of the vast Hallo Bay delta. Covered by many glaciers, the nearby mountains rose above the scrub alder trees. The massive inland collection of drift logs edged the flat grass lands that were laced with numerous streams and tide flats. Sprinkle in maybe as many as nine brown bears in view at one time (**such as the four small objects in photo above**) and there is nothing that quite compares to this wildlife wonder.

**Bear Behavior** Most of the bears were voraciously dining on sedge grasses but there were others digging in the tide flats for razor clams. We saw a few interesting bear encounters but for the most part there



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were only minor interactions among them. Once adults, bears tend to be very solitary animals with little tolerance for the presence of other bears. It is only in locations with a great abundance of food that they at least partially suspend their anti-social behavior. Protected from man in this National Park, they are at the top of the food chain, with no fears except for other bears. During our entire visit, we felt totally ignored in each observation although we also felt that they had to at least be aware of our presence.

When we returned to our shore boat from our first

visit, Joann and Avery climbed down the bank notwithstanding a dark brown bear sleeping on the sand bar across the river. Carl and Kathleen called out to them to look up as a large bruin rose up on a drift log above them (**photo on previous page**). The black-faced bruin was focused on the bear resting across the river and slowly skirted around us. We were experiencing a scenario very similar to one that had happened to us two weeks earlier. Carl and Avery, with cameras in hand, captured at close range this immense specimen towering above us before it wandered off down the beach (**photo above**).

**The Main Event** After a break for dinner aboard the *Inside Passage*, we returned for a final visit to Hallo Bay's extraordinary bear sanctuary. We wanted one last opportunity in this special setting and we weren't disappointed. With bears around us in all four directions, we watched them busily eating or





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napping, their primary activities, and walked further inland than we had earlier in the day. We soon found ourselves at close range watching two bears of nearly identical color and size battle for position.

As sub-adult bears they were practicing the fighting techniques which they will need to be strong enough to compete with other males during the mating season or as mothers to defend their cubs and also to have the preferred stream location when the salmon runs begin (**photo on previous page**). For nearly ten minutes the two bears standing 7'-8' high put on a show for us, but it was without the ferocity and accompanying roars that would have existed if the battle had been for actual dominance. It resembled watching two human wrestlers with their different holds and maneuvers.

**Tide's Up** Absorbed in the wrestling match, we lost track of the rising tide that had come back in to fill the main tide flat that lay between us and the river shoreline. The one we crossed earlier as solid mud covered with bear tracks (**photo at left**) was now nearly three feet deep with very cold water. The minor dilemma was that our boots only came up to our knees. With no good alternatives, both couples cautiously crossed the stream holding hands to stabilize one another in case one sunk too

deeply into the mud. We were laughing hard when we sat on a log to empty out the water in our boots (**photo below**) but were fortunate that it was a pleasant and warm evening. We crossed over the wildflower meadow to return to our shore boat a bit wet but excited with all that we had seen.

**Rainy Days** The following morning as a predicted weather front was arriving; we crossed Shelikoff Strait for the final time this season. After three weeks, the more normal Alaska wind and rain was arriving. Crossing back across the entrance to Cook Inlet, we paused for lunch and a break in the Barren Islands, aptly named, but nevertheless beautiful. Emerald green grass but no trees cover the rocky outcroppings of these remote islands and they are occupied by thousands if not hundreds of thousands of a variety of seabirds.

Continuing on to the Kenai Peninsula, the seas were not as calm as we would prefer. Both fin and humpback whales, as well as Dall porpoises, were sighted within close range but with the rolling sea we were not able to get any decent photos. This area is especially rich with these large marine mammals which tell us that the often turbulent seas are loaded with food sources for these leviathans which feed continuously throughout the short Alaskan summer.

