

2009 Alaska Cruise Journal # 7



Back in Cordova We returned to Cordova where we had begun this summer's cruise in early June. Dick and Nick Migliore, our son and 14-year-old grandson from San Antonio, Texas, joined us for our final two week trip to Sitka. With the approach of August, known in the Alaska maritime community as "Fog-gust" (**photo above**), we took a few days off in Cordova to wait for calm conditions to begin our crossing of the Gulf of Alaska. We took advantage of the few days in Cordova to take in the local attractions which included being entertained by the resident harbor sea otter. Nick was able to stand on the end of dock and get close-up photos (**photo at right**). Intensely focused on the delicacies of crabs and clams from the harbor bottom, the sea otter was oblivious to all the human activity around him. These fascinating creatures, which may weigh up to 80 pounds, can live out their entire lives without coming on land. Other than primates, sea otters are the only mammals that readily employ tools, in their case stones, which they use to crack open the hard shells.

Copper River Delta We rented a car and drove out the McCarthy Road, a fifty-mile mostly rutted gravel road which was formerly the rail bed of the Copper River & Northwestern Railroad. It was originally constructed to deliver rich copper ore from the Kennicott Copper Mine until its closure in 1938.

The paved portion of this road ends at the Cordova airport at the 12 mile marker and then continues through the Copper River Delta, which is a maze of lakes, bogs, ponds and



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glacial waters pouring down from the various ice fields. This bumpy road ends at the Million Dollar Bridge, named for the cost to complete it in 1910, near both the Childs and the Miles Glaciers

Childs Glacier The three-mile-long face of the Childs Glacier is only separated by the quarter mile wide Copper River. Enormous snowfalls in the Chugach Mountains feed the twelve-mile-long glacier only to be kept in check by the undercutting current of the river. We sat and ate our lunch

watching the glacier calve directly in front of us (**photo above**). It is a unique experience to approach a major calving glacier by land. That night we drove out Power Creek Road to the fully automated Cordova hydroelectric power plant on the chance that we might see some bears but only discovered bright red sockeye salmon preparing to spawn in the creek. Finally departing Cordova, we passed right through the thousands of sea gulls always present feeding off the offal discharged from the salmon processing facilities that lie outside the harbor (**photo at right**).

Bear Trap and English Bays Our next to final stop in Prince William Sound was Bear Trap Bay, a lovely inlet almost totally enclosed by 3,000 foot high mountains with numerous waterfalls. At the head of the bay there was a small river full of jumping salmon going through the acclimation process before starting up the river to spawn. As we paddled our kayaks further up stream, there were many large gray carcasses lying on the bottom of salmon that had already finished the spawning ritual and died.

The next evening we anchored in English Bay, our departure point for our crossing, and used the shore boat to get a closer look at the thousands of nesting shorebirds on Porpoise Rocks. We waited for the sea conditions to



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calm before we started our longest day at sea. Our biggest challenge when we cruise this far north is the eighteen hour day across open ocean water before we can take relief in Icy Bay 180 miles to the southeast.

Off We Go Carl made an early start leaving our anchorage at 2:30 am, earlier than scheduled but he was having difficulty sleeping anyway. We did not want to arrive at our destination in Icy Bay after dark because of both the shallow entrance and the possibility of floating ice at the entrance. We successfully arrived well before dark and settled into a secure anchorage. The next day we did a shore excursion to the large Pt. Riou Spit that extends half way across the entrance to Icy Bay. The collection of driftwood trees accumulated on



this stretch of glacial moraine is enormous. The power of the ocean is evidenced by how far across the spit these full size tree trunks are thrown by the surge of winter storms (**photo at top of page**). We did not see any mammals but came across recent tracks of bear, moose, and wolf. A flock of artic terns on the shore and

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a common snipe on the top of a tree all vigorously squawked at us as we passed them. We suspected we were either invading their comfort zone or they were just protecting their nests.

We later explored another section of the surrounding area of our anchorage where we walked amongst smaller icebergs that the receding tide had left on shore (**photo on preceding page**). The salmon berries were ripe, plentiful, and we felt like our ancient hunter-gatherer forefathers. Our visit to Icy Bay ended with a glowing sunset of radiant colors possibly caused by a forest fire somewhere in the interior (**photo below**).

