

Continuing On In dense morning fog, we departed Icy Bay following the coast to our next stopover in Yakutat on our route across the Gulf. In calm seas, our radar showed a path clear ahead with no boats or



logs in sight. As we turned into Yakutat Bay, the coast became visible again. By nightfall, we had a beautiful sunset in the small town of Yakutat (**photo above**).

Primarily a base for both salt and fresh water fishing charters and home to about 300 full-time residents including a small Tlingit native population, it is not on any cruise ship itinerary. It exists as the only inhabited community on the Gulf of Alaska between Cordova and Sitka. Like Cordova, its World War II airport has been upgraded to modern standards. The only other methods of access are private boats or the ferry which visits monthly during the summer. Cruise ships do come nearby as they travel up the bay to view the active Hubbard Glacier situated at the end of the 35-mile long inlet. The only business the town receives from their visits are the salaries of the harbor pilots who accompany the cruise ships up the bay.

The Cutter Long Island Over our vessel's radio, we heard the U. S. Coast Guard cutter *Long Island* request moorage space from the local harbormaster. The 110-foot long cutter (**photo below**) with two



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opportunity to board and inspect theirs.

Nick was fascinated by the 25-millimeter cannon mounted on the bow and Carl was intrigued by the extensive inventory of electronic gear. The boys had their picture taken with the captain who presented them with *Long Island* baseball caps for their collections (**photo above**). The ship had been part of a recent search and rescue mission for a woman who disappeared off of a cruise ship somewhere between Juneau and Glacier Bay.

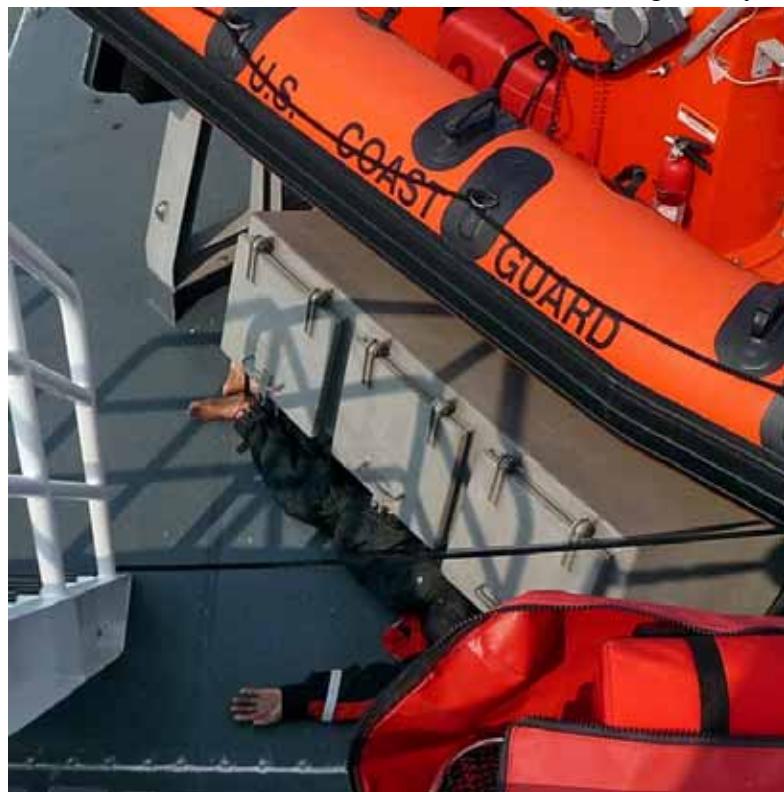
Joann thought she spotted what first appeared to be the remains of a body sticking out from under their shore boat, but it was the dummy gear used for rescue training exercises (**photo at right**). The ship's next assignment was cannon target practice for the crew. The captain explained that "to minimize impact on marine life" the firing would take place 60-miles offshore and their targets would be plastic barrels and wood boxes.

Hubbard Glacier The main attraction in

officers and 17 crewmen was enroute back to its home port of Valdez, Alaska.

A short time later Carl put on his extrovert personality and struck up a conversation with the ship's commanding officer who had walked over to take a look at the *Inside Passage*, the only other non-resident boat in the small harbor.

Before long, Carl had wrangled an invitation for us to tour the *Long Island*. We have had the USCG board our vessels for routine inspections several times over the years, but this was the first time that we would have the





this area is six-mile long Hubbard Glacier, the most consistently active we ever see. As usual, Carl had to carefully thread our way through the many floating icebergs as we made our way down Disenchantment Bay enroute to the face of the glacier.

There were three cruise ships ranging in size from 200' to 900' exiting the glacier area as we approached the face and we soon had it all to ourselves. We

positioned ourselves at the active southern end of the glacier where the Russell Fjord empties large volumes of water into the bay causing the face of the glacier to be more vulnerable to calving. Studying his previous notes on our electronic charts, Carl observed that the Hubbard had advanced almost one-half mile from the markings that he had made on the chart in 2000.

Carl and Joann used this setting to have Dick take a photo of them in their new fleece jackets purchased at the Copper River Fleece factory store in Cordova (**photo above**). The owner had requested a photo to add to the slide show display featured on the flat screen TVs located throughout the store. After an hour viewing

numerous small calvings in the frigid breeze pouring off the glacier, we watched a large section break free from near the top of the 300-foot high face, crash into, and explode out of the grey glacially silted water (**photo at right**).

Zip Lines & Whales Hoonah was a small isolated native town of 800 before the arrival





of the cruise ships. Five years ago, the century-old abandoned cannery was restored, upgraded to a mini-mall/museum, and made into an exclusive stop by one of the cruise lines. Dick and Nick joined some of the 2000+ passengers off the *Serenade of the Seas* to take a 90 second ride down the 1,330 feet high zip-line at first through the clouds and then into clear skies to the landing below.

A definite thrill for them but a bigger one came for all four of us, plus many of the cruise ship passengers, when we were ready to depart the Hoonah harbor. A lone humpback whale was bubble-net feeding just off the village docks (**photo above**). Circling below their prey, humpbacks release a circular pattern of bubbles which concentrate the fish or krill, and then rise with their mouths open engulfing huge quantities of food. The pleats on their lower jaws expand during this process to accommodate their catch and then contract to expel the water.

Later that day as we headed down Chatham Strait to our final destination of Sitka, we encountered a group of approximately a dozen humpbacks also bubble-netting, but this time as a large cooperative group (**photo below**). Only one of the many whales creates the bubble-net, but all participate in the harvest. Whether



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observed individually or as group effort, it is exciting to watch the natural processes of animal behavior.

As we complete our 25th consecutive summer cruise to Alaska, we find ourselves reflecting on the wonders of nature that we have been so privileged to enjoy on so many occasions, and the fabulous ending to another Alaska adventure enjoyed with both family and friends.

