

2010 Alaska Cruise Journal # 2

Into the Wild Leaving Vancouver, we cruised along Vancouver Island to Port McNeil (50 35 51.8 N, 127 05 36.2 W), at the northeast end of the island. It was our last port stop with elements of civilization such as groceries or internet access until we reach Ketchikan, Alaska.

We anchored in Fury Bay (51 29 25.3 N, 127 45 48.3 W) after crossing the Queen Charlotte Sound. Fury Bay's unique white shell beach is both picturesque and fun to explore. In the adjoining woods, we saw some massive old growth western red cedars that are rarely found today. Anchored behind the Ivory Island lighthouse (52 43 05 N, 132 06 69.9 W), Carl and Bill



kayaked out into the ocean swells to view the wave strewn coast where the vegetation growth line is much higher on the rocks because of severe winter storms. They encountered the first bear of the season, a large black male, grazing on beach grass (photo).



We continued north passing the small native village of Klemtu (52 35 58.8 N, 128 31 37.7 W). Enroute to Hecate Strait, we traveled through Meyers Passage (52 36 35 N, 128 36 86.3 W) on the south end of Princess Royal Island. Meyers Passage has a minimum depth of five foot at extreme low tide and strong currents during tide changes, so it was important that we time our arrival and pass through at high tide.

Just as we reached the narrow entrance, Bill spotted two brown (grizzly) bears grazing on the beach. With the excitement of trying to photograph and video the first

2010 Alaska Cruise Journal # 2



two browns of the summer, we arrived a little late for our passage but there was still plenty of water under the hull as we went through.

Evening shore visits after anchoring often included rock-skipping contests and an occasional kayak race. In Turtish Harbor (52 44 13.3 N, 129 16 70.9 W) the night before we crossed the 70 mile wide Hecate Strait, the guys went kayaking together. Nick had bought a small soccer ball in Vancouver and with it the group created their own version of the World Cup. Montana & Missouri faced Washington & Texas for the championship. With a sloping field and rocks almost the size

of the soccer ball, it was a physically challenging event. The boys exhaustion occurred at the time of a 2 – 2 score and all were happy to settle for a tie.

Haida Gwaii The Haida Gwaii archipelago, made up of hundreds of islands and islets, sits at the western edge of the continent. To the east, between the islands and the mainland, lies Hecate Strait, a shallow marine valley subject strong north/south storms that stir up its shallow waters. Generally considered by Canadians to be their most dangerous waters, Hecate Strait can be calm one day and a maelstrom the next. To the west of Haida Gwaii, the lip of the continental shelf extends less than three miles before plunging some fifteen miles to the ocean floor. The four thousand Haida native band members make up two thirds of today's



2010 Alaska Cruise Journal # 2

population of Haida Gwaii and most live in three small towns.

Gwaii Haanas The southern half of the archipelago is The Gwaii Haanas National Marine Conservation Area Reserve created in January 2010 with joint shared responsibility between the Haida people and the government of Canada. This large area is accessible only by boat or chartered plane.

European trade and settlement began in the late 1700s. The devastating impact of smallpox and other diseases introduced by Europeans traders reduced the Haida population from approximately 6,000 to less than 500 and led to the abandonment of most of the 126 native villages. There are 39 endemic plants and animals that lend the archipelago its nickname “Galapagos of the North”. Six of ten land mammals on Haida Gwaii are distinct subspecies that are not found anywhere else because of its remoteness and since not all of this area was covered with ice during the last glacial period.

Tanu The first of the former native village sites that we visited, it is also the name of a type of sea grass found nearby. At one time there were 25 to 40 longhouses in the village. Abandoned in 1885, little remains



2010 Alaska Cruise Journal # 2



standing in this village (52 45 79.2 N, 131 36 83.5 W). The house depressions and fallen, moss-grown house posts give a vivid sense of the layout of the village. Haida Watchmen staff five village sites during the summer months to provide tours, logistical support and protection of the cultural heritage. Our visits to the Tanu and Ninstints villages complemented and supplemented the knowledge we had gained from our visit to the B. C. Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver. Most visitors to these sites are professionally led kayak groups like the eight women with their two guides who were visiting Tanu as we arrive (**photo on first page**).

Hotspring Island As we traveled south, we stopped for a soak in the springs. This island (52 34 53.8 N, 131 26 470 W) is one of the most unusual sites in Gwaii Haanas. Here, the small hot spring system that gives the island its name, warms thin soils and keeps the forest at bay. The springs seep from at least 26 small vents, at temperatures ranging from 77 to 170 degrees. There were multiple pools to choose from so Bill and Carl could select from hot, warm, or pleasant (**photo on second page**). Haida watchman Eileen invited us to explore a well marked trail that crosses the island and passes through a coastal western hemlock climax forest. White clam shells are placed along the edge of the trail to guide the way. A small deer walked right past the boys and seemed very much at home.

Ninstints ...This former village (52 05 90.3 N, 131 13 01.3 W), a UNESCO World Heritage Site, represents the best of the remains of a traditional

Northwest Coast First Nations village site, complete with standing poles and the remains of massive cedar longhouses. This location is most difficult to reach by private boat as it is on the outer coast with only partially protected anchorages. We eventually inched our way into a tricky location and had to kayak ashore as the swells were too great for us to safely lower our shore boat.

The temperate rain forest path to the village site was carpeted with moss and led us through tight passages between massive granite boulders (**photo at right**). We met Watchman Jordan who conducted the tours. He has been leading tours and clearing the area of excessive vegetation since 1981. Many of the totem poles were probably erected around the time of the signing of the U. S. Declaration of Independence. We later confirmed from the ship's log of the *Inside Passage* that Jordan also conducted our tour on our last visit in 1999 to this very special place (**photos on pages 2, 3 and 4**).

