

**2010 Alaska Cruise Journal # 3**



**Remote, Wild, and Uncharted**

The *Inside Passage* thrives on challenges, and the west coast of Haida Gwaii (formerly the Charlottes) is an area that even seasoned boaters approach with caution.

Cruising north along the 170 mile west coast of Haida Gwaii is unique since a very large portion of the area is either poorly charted or not charted at all. To complicate the matter further, many of the charted areas are off the GPS readings by as much as

100 yards in both directions.

This surf-smashed coast, wide open to the North Pacific winds, is probably the highest-energy coast in Canada. The vegetation line on the outer coast is often 50' to 100' above the high tide line (**photo above**). There are no permanent residents and only seasonal occupancy in a few floating sports-fishing lodges. Their customers are typically flown in and out by helicopter. With that as background, we rounded the southern tip of the island chain and headed north against the prevailing winds.

One evening we watched the Russell Crowe movie *Master and Commander* and the next day chief bosons' mate Bill organized a work detail for our able bodied seamen to vacuum carpets and wash windows. The carpets were definitely improved upon completion, but we were not so sure about the results on the windows (**photo**).





## 2010 Alaska Cruise Journal # 3



**Gowgaia Bay** Near the entry to Gowgaia Bay, one of the few sizable inlets on the west coast of Moresby Island, we found what had been described in our guide as the remains of a Chinese local trading vessel that

had drifted across the Pacific and wound up on a rocky ledge. Located just inside the entrance but tucked out of the swells was the site of the former Haida village of Tcuga.



**Soccer Again** On our beach visit, Joann collected a few of the rarer turban and large moon snail shells before being put into service video recording the next round of our world cup soccer competition. Once again it ended in a tie, but this time not because of the physical exhaustion of the younger players.

After the first period, Carl suggested that the teammates switch roles and the older players give up their cherished goalie positions and become the forwards. That lasted all of two minutes before Carl pulled up lame with a charlie-horse in his right hamstring. That hasn't happened since he gave up basketball almost 20 years ago, and it was a lesson on the limitations of age.



## 2010 Alaska Cruise Journal # 3



**Tasu Sound** Although still within Gwaii Haanas National Park on Moresby Island's west coast, Tasu Sound is the exception to an area basically unsurveyed, uncharted, and pristine. With abundant natural resources and a large deep water entrance available to ocean going ships, the area was subject to considerable resource extraction prior to the formation of the park.

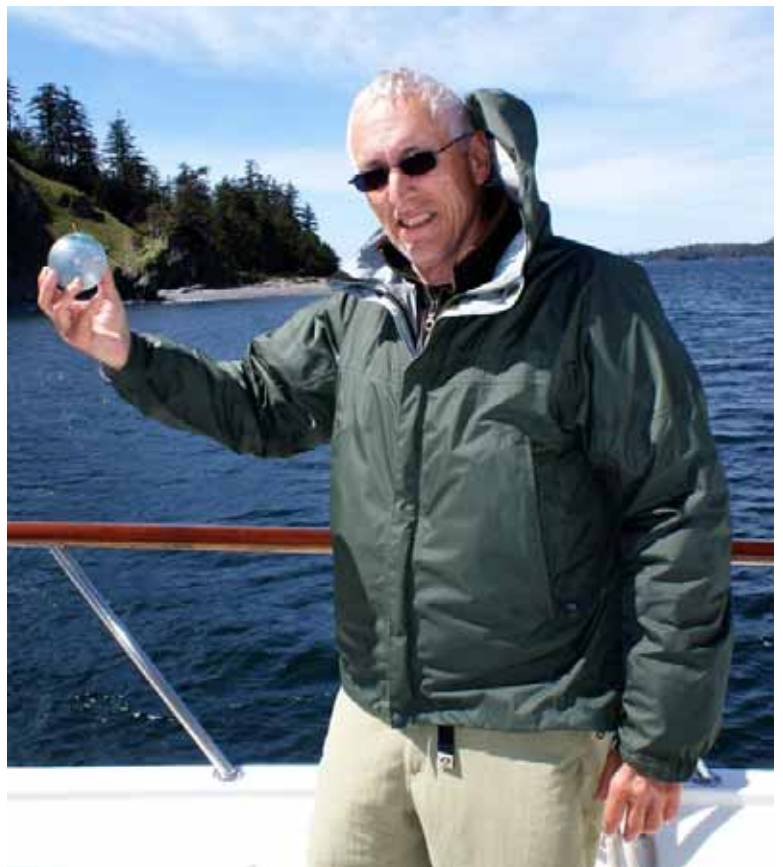
We passed Hunger Harbor, a former mining town site where 400 people once lived and worked. It was a working iron and copper mine until the last evidences of the town were removed in 1985. Twenty-five

years later, the contrast between the natural beauty and a mountainside of mine tailings remains striking (photo on previous page).

Around 9:30 pm, rather than just going to bed, Nick suggested we all go kayaking. With a beautiful sunset and calm water around us near Botany Bay, we brought down the kayaks to paddle before dark (photo on previous page). Brad stayed on board to fish while the rest of the crew went out and were entertained by a mother seal and her pup.

**Off the Charts** Just a short distance north, Kootenay Inlet has two arms that penetrate deep into the 3,000 foot mountain range. The giant conifers here of cedar, spruce and hemlock are among the best examples of temperate rainforest found in North America. Using a guidebook with sketches drawn by its authors, we chose to access the east arm through a very narrow passage into a larger basin.

The authors mentioned a former gold mine as being located up a stream about a mile inside the inlet. We probably found the right stream but the forest was impenetrable, so after a short time panning for gold, the boys of all ages gave





**2010 Alaska Cruise Journal # 3**



up and instead had a rock skipping contest.

After having heard a Parks Canada representative at Ninstints mention finding a bottle there with a message inside from a child in Oregon, Brad decided that he wanted to try it himself. He carefully composed his message and using a bottle found on a beach, he sealed it with a cork and candle wax in preparation for its launch (photo on previous page).

**Hippa Island** The waters remained calm and we enjoyed another day of partially sunny weather. Hippa Island was originally named by Captain George Dixon in July, 1787, as just a part of the whole chain he named after his vessel and his Queen Charlotte. Hippa Island protrudes out into the Pacific Ocean and catches large amounts of flotsam from around the world.

Remembering our success beachcombing on our last visit 17 years earlier, we were curious as to what changes we would find. The primary change was the large number of small empty plastic water bottles. We anchored temporarily in the Hippa Passage Cove in the lee of the island protected from the prevailing winds. There were numerous steep hillsides and pinnacle rocks and Brad and Nick were crawling up them within minutes of our arrival (photo above).

Bill made the find of the trip, a much sought after Japanese glass float, which he quickly donated to the *Inside Passage's* collection (photo on previous page). We crawled over many large boulders and logs until we reached an area that was impassable and headed back to our shore-boat (photo at right).

**Canada Day** That evening around dusk, a small skiff with an off-duty fishing guide from a nearby floating fishing lodge came





## 2010 Alaska Cruise Journal # 3

by. He invited us to join his co-workers for a Canada Day bonfire and celebration onshore at the head of Nesto Inlet. After a short consultation, we all quickly agreed to accept the offer. There were about a dozen young Canadians, and for most of them, this was their first break from the lodge in weeks. We had an interesting experience visiting with them, sitting around the fire, and learning about their lives working in this isolated area (**photo below**).

The large fishing lodge is on a barge and, with the assistance of two tugboats, is brought down the Inside Passage to Vancouver at the end of the season. As the evening progressed, one young couple went out in a boat and came back with a large piece of bull kelp. Bull kelp when cut open reveals a long hollow tube. When we inquired as to its purpose, we were told that the kelp was to be fashioned into a “kelp bong”. With that announcement, we thanked them for their hospitality and returned to our *Inside Passage*.

