

## 2011 Alaska Cruise Journal # 3



scraped from the mountainsides over the millennium. Each of us had our chance to play outdoor clothing models in this frozen environment (**photo**).

**Cordova** Located on the eastern shores of Prince William Sound, Cordova is in many ways our home away from home (60 32.723 N, 145 45.941 W). Accessible only by boat or plane, it is a world apart from the tourist bustle of many of the coastal towns in Alaska.

Although only a fishing community of around 1200 year round residents, it is served daily by jet service on Alaska Airlines. For this reason, we have often used it as a layover location to change crews or on occasion leave the *Inside Passage* while we take a break back in Seattle. The harbor staff tends to remember us as our vessel is one of only a few larger pleasure boats to visit Cordova. As we approached the entrance and requested moorage, the harbormaster responded “Hello Carl, welcome back”.

**Eight Miles of Floating Ice** Near the end of our two week leg with the Loys, we visited the Columbia Glacier, the largest and most active in Prince William Sound. The past winter in Alaska was mild resulting in less snow on the mountain peaks but much more ice calving from the glaciers.

We could not come closer than approximately eight miles from the face of the Columbia (**photo**). Having marked our position on our electronic charts during our last visit in 2009, we found we were almost a full mile short of our previous visit (60 58.818 N, 147 05.207 W).

**Beached Bergs** The most accessible and largest collection of beached icebergs was stranded on the moraine bar near Heather Island. After anchoring for the night in Jade Harbor, aptly named for its glacial green water, we explored the edge of the eight mile ice jam.

Walking amongst the large ice formations, we could see the uniqueness of each of the natural ice sculptures. Some were as clear as crystal glass while others were black with the remains of rock



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At the head of the harbor is the Ilanka Museum and community center of the Eyak native community. Mary, the director, explained the story behind the orca skeleton hanging from the ceiling (**photo**).

The whale had beached itself on the Copper River Delta and the attempt to rescue it was unsuccessful. Inside its stomach was the remains of two harbor seals that had been recently tagged by research scientists. With much effort, town

volunteers preserved the skeleton and reconstructed it for display with some expert guidance. It is one of only five known complete orca skeletons.

**Off On Our Own** Unfortunately, our guests scheduled for our second leg had a family health emergency and had to cancel on short notice. This has happened several times over the years both within our own family as well as our guests. When this occurs we miss the companionship but appreciate the more leisurely pace.

**Fishing Fleet** The salmon fishing fleet out of Cordova consists primarily of two major categories of vessels. The smaller gill net flat-bottomed jet boats are perfectly suited for the shallow Copper River Delta.

The few days we remained in town these fishermen and women were out taking advantage of an “opening” on the “flats” of the Delta. In contrast, the crews of the larger 50 foot purse seiners were repairing their nets and preparing for their season which was to begin shortly (**photo**).

As we headed across to the western side of Prince





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William Sound, we saw virtually zero vessels for the first 50 miles. It appeared that we had scenic Prince William Sound all to ourselves until we encountered the mass of gill netters along the shore near the entrance to the Port Nellie Juan fjord. During the periods when fishing it allowed, the ocean is alive with small boats and their nets (**photo**).



The salmon try to swim through the nets and their gills get caught. There are different size nets for each specific species of salmon. Most boats seemed to favor setting their nets as close to shore as possible because salmon, like most humans, prefer to take the shortest route to their destination.

**Deep Water Bay** The magnificent granite half-domes that surround this picturesque bay have been described by some as the miniature Yosemite of Alaska (60 29.929 N, 148 23.673 W). We took advantage of a beautiful sunny day to kayak to shore and hike a steep hillside of glaciated granite. It was partially covered with mosses, lichens, minute wildflowers, and other plants trying to gain a foothold on this slab of rock that had been buried beneath a glacier for thousands of years. From the top we had a panoramic view of the outwash valley of the Contact Glacier (**photo**).



### **Ewan Bay and Lagoon**

Our next anchorage was Ewan Bay where there is a reversing tidal waterfall which alternatively pours in and out of the lagoon with the change of tides (60 24.079 N, 148 09.649 W).

We kayaked to the rough trail that crosses the point on the western side of the narrows to inspect the lagoon on an incoming 15' tide. The *Inside Passage* was visible in the background as we watched the rising tide pour into the restricted lagoon (**photo on next page**).



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**4<sup>th</sup> of July** In the small villages and towns of Alaska, Independence Day is always fascinating. It may be because this holiday occurs during the best Alaskan weather of the year in our 49<sup>th</sup> state. Whatever the reason may be, we always try to be “in town” for the Alaskan version of a 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration. We realized we would be passing Crab Bay, the site of the rebuilt native village of Chenega ([60 03.967 N, 148 00.649 W](#)).

The '64 earthquake and tsunami destroyed the historic village in Chenega Bay when the sea level fell 120 feet shortly before a 70 foot wave swept away a large portion of the community. Twenty-three of the seventy-five residents perished and the survivors were “temporarily” disbursed to other communities in Prince William Sound. It took almost twenty years before the town was relocated to its much higher current site and the natives were finally able to return.

We walked the short distance to the center of town which consists of a small Russian Orthodox church and a community building. We missed the holiday parade of five vehicles but arrived in time for the barbeque and other festivities. We were greeted warmly by Pete, a village elder, who welcomed us to their small village of 54 residents of which 27 attend the school.



When asked, Pete told us that he was in the Navy at the time of the earthquake and initially heard from his girlfriend that his parents had perished. Fortunately, a few hours later he received official notice that they had survived. Among the community events of the 4<sup>th</sup> for the children were potato sack races, egg tossing contests, and a tug of war (**photo**). Echoing the warmth of the Alaskan culture we experienced in Elfin Cove, Pete gave us a jar of his homemade kippered salmon and thanked us for visiting Chenega.