

2011 Alaska Cruise Journal # 4



Kenai Fjords Leaving the west side of Prince William Sound, we entered the Kenai Fjords, as spectacular a setting as any we have found in our 80,000 miles of cruising the Northwest Coast of the U.S. and Canada.

With the Harding and other large ice fields as a backdrop, it is what most visualize when they think of Alaska's vast wilderness.

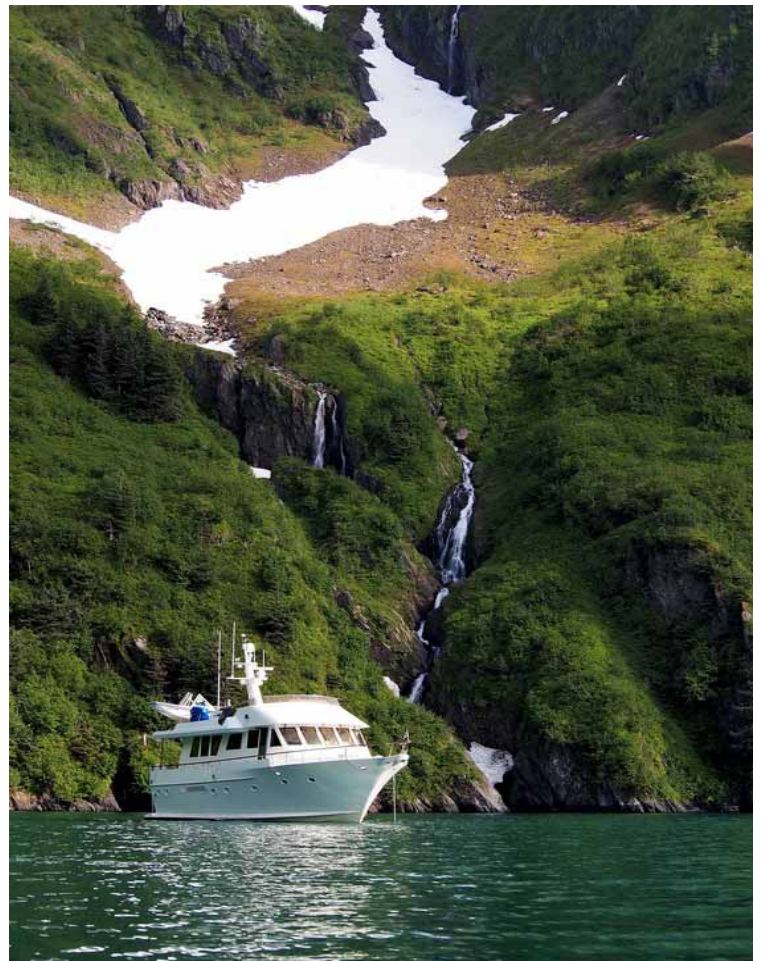
The subduction of the Pacific Ocean has resulted in the uplift of the Chugach Mountains – one of the highest coastal ranges in the

world. These mountains form an arc facing southeast and have just the right orientation to intercept prodigious amounts of moisture in the form of snow. This snow compacts into solid ice which flows down the valleys as glaciers.

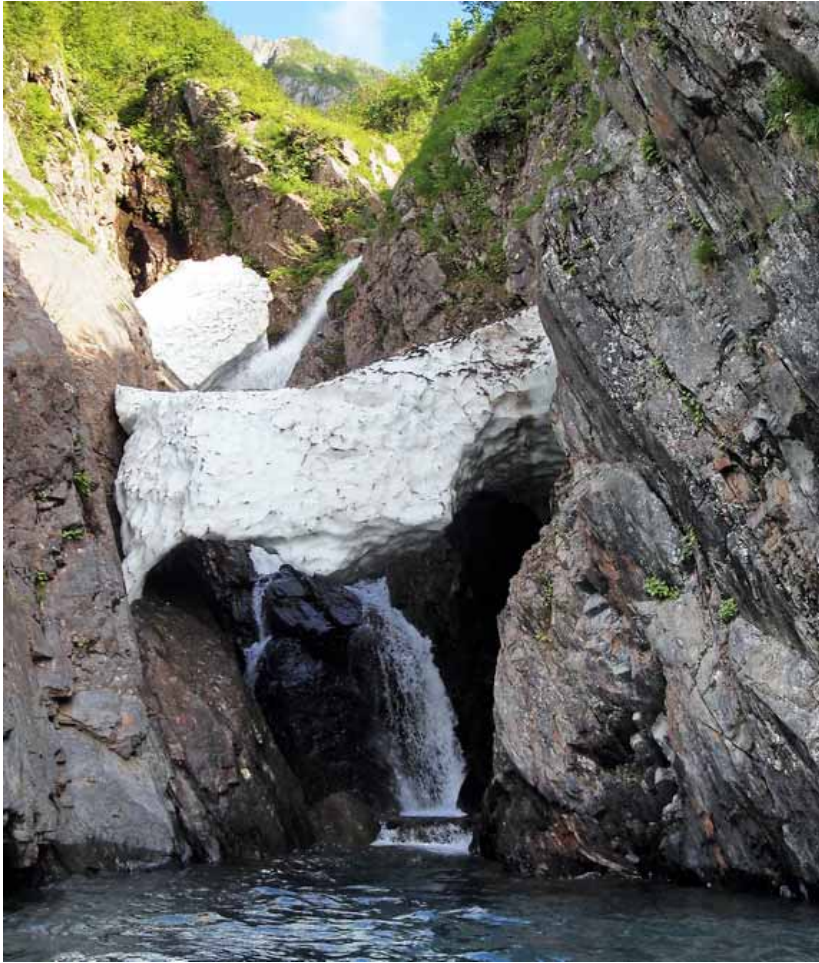
After a brief overnight stop in Seward where we rode our bicycles into town on a warm sunny day, we set our course to Coleman Bay (59 51.493 N, 149 37.937 W). Our anchorage faced the Pederson Glacier (**photo**). The other three sides of the bay were steep mountains rising two thousand feet to snow capped peaks from which numerous waterfalls descended at various points around us.

Carl kayaked over to the one behind the *Inside Passage* (**photo**). A several ton slab of ice had formed across a fissure in the rock through which the waterfall flowed. Although we were well into July, it appeared that this ice formation at almost sea level would last for several more weeks (**photo on next page**).

Wildlife Sighting We spent an extra day passing through the many islands and inlets that make up the stormy coast of the 670,000 acre Kenai Park preserve. This majestic coastal parkland is incised with sheer dark slate cliffs rising from the sea which are accented with



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patches of dense undergrowth and tufted with deep-green Sitka spruce.

Gore Point Beachcombing has always been a fun element of our walks along Alaska's outer coast shorelines. The enormous beaches that rim Gore Point have been favorites when we visit this remote location. We studied the west side first as a possible candidate for a shore expedition. The swells were a bit too large and it was raining and blowing hard so we opted out. We then realized we could round Gore point and approach from the opposite side which was better protected from the easterly wind.

The Ranger Once around the point, we donned our raingear and kayaked ashore to walk the beach and inspect the rusting hulk of the shipwreck *Ranger* (photo). The derelict vessel was clearly beyond salvaging except for some aluminum that covered the original wooden hull.

Winter sea conditions had split the *Ranger* apart and filled it with rocks. There have been similar boats on beaches in the past

but what confused us were the numerous nearby fully stuffed bags of beach litter. We have been appalled by the amount of plastic and other debris scattered above the high tide line on similar beaches.

Often we have wished we had trash bags to pick up what we have found while beachcombing but have been overwhelmed by the sheer amount of the accumulated debris.

Gulf of Alaska Keepers

A man and his dog appeared out of the surrounding woods and solved our mystery. Ted



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Raynor explained that during the summer months he had personally gathered the marine debris from many of the nearby beaches and had been doing so for the past six years.

He and a friend, a retired lawyer, decided something should be done to correct the eyesore to this pristine wilderness and organized the Gulf of Alaska Keepers. It was Ted's passion to restore the region's beaches. We quickly realized that we would not be adding to our collection of glass balls at this well scrubbed location.

Yellow Plastic Bags Over the years the debris reclamation project has grown in size. They have organized volunteers for major clean-up efforts and have secured funding from the oil companies to bring in a large barge to haul it away at the end of the season. Note the name and logo of BP on the bright yellow trash bags next to Ted (**photo**).



We walked through the open spruce woods to the east shoreline on a trail filled with devil's club and other lower-story plants. On that more exposed bay, a wall of drift trees was stacked almost 50 feet high and proved too dangerous to climb under wet conditions.



Returning to the west beach, we wandered out into a meadow filled with blue lupine and other native flowers like the beautiful appearing but foul smelling chocolate lily (**photo**).

Humpback Whale
Ted pointed out a dead humpback whale lying along the rocky section of the beach not too far away. We paddled over to take a closer look. The seagulls had discovered the whale and were trying to pick

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away at the carcass, but the hide was still too tough for the gulls to make any progress. If and when one of the black bears in the vicinity discovers the remains, it will easily tear the remains apart.

The whale's final resting spot was at the base of a steep mountain slope that makes for relatively difficult access except by water (59 36.150 N, 151 25.140 W). However, as the odor becomes more pungent and with bear's keen sense of smell, we suspect that at least one will find it soon. Ted had told us that the whale had just washed up a couple of days earlier, and he suspected it may have been drifting for at least a month. The typical dark black hide had transformed into a pale brown tone (**photo**).



After a week's break in Seattle, we will return for another month in Alaska. More in about two weeks...