

2012 Alaska Cruise Journal # 1



Off Again We began our 28th consecutive Alaskan Cruise aboard our vessel *Inside Passage* departing this year from Sitka, Alaska (**photo**). Each year we try different routes to keep our summer cruising fresh and interesting.

Captain Lance and his crew delivered our boat to Sitka, (57 02.928 N, 135 20.410 W) where on June 13th we began our six week journey. This was Lance's 20th delivery for us since 1992 and he has logged almost 18,000 miles and spent almost five months doing the deliveries.

This year's itinerary is re-exploring the Inside Passage both in Southeast Alaska and then going south along the coast of British Columbia, Canada to arrive home in Seattle. We will certainly find a few new places and revisit some of past years. Our crewmates for the initial two weeks are repeat crew, cousins Alan and Helene Spetner (**photo**). Also onboard are our 17 year old grandsons Brad Akin and Nick Migliore who are on their 5th voyage with us. During our first few days in Alaska, we experienced constant rain with colder than average temperatures. We weren't dissuaded as it is early in the season and there is some adjusting that our bodies must go through.

Alaskan Panhandle The landscape in this area stretches 400 miles along the narrow southern strip of this 49th State. There are a multitude of densely forested islands. Backing them are snow-capped coastal mountains chiseled with fjords created by ancient glaciers from the Ice Age. Bald eagles, humpback whales, sea otters and other wildlife are common in the vast wilderness in which we love to insert ourselves.

Originally the capital of Russia's Alaskan colonies, Sitka is one of the most scenic and historic cities in the state of Alaska, and is now best known as a sports fishing destination and cruise ship port. It was the capital of Russia's Alaskan colonies in 1808 well before becoming part of the United States. We were greatly outnumbered on our flight to Sitka by many men anxious to sports fish.



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Crabber's Arrive This particular crew enjoys fishing and our first stop was to satisfy that desire. Many small fish of various types were caught then released in Hoonah Sound on Chichagof Island. With bad weather in the larger channels, we headed into Fick Cove for the evening (53 37.711 N, 135 40.545 W). Initially, it appeared to be like so many of the quiet and peaceful anchorages that we share only with eagles, seals, and an occasional bear.

During a break in the rain, we went ashore to walk the beach and the surrounding woods. Along the shoreline, we came across a collection of crab pots stacked high (in photo with Alan & Helene).

Later that evening, five different boats each loaded with crab pots, entered the bay and set their pots around us, including one that retrieved all of the pots from the beach. It became apparent that the commercial crab fishery had just opened that evening and that Fick Cove has a large crab population. Each vessel owner was out to get his share of the available catch. As darkness approached, the identification floats marking the crab pot locations mimicked a string of pearls.

Angoon Located on Admiralty Island on the eastside of Chatham Strait (57 30.160 N, 134 35.168 W), this traditional Tlingit native village is the only permanent settlement on the island and home to a reported 570 residents. We anchored offshore and landed by shore boat on the beach in front of many older homes facing Chatham Strait.

Kevin, a native child, met us and accompanied us on our walk through town. When questioned about the meaning of a house sign printed in the native language, Kevin explained that the only words he knew in Tlingit were his name and the expression "thank you very much". Enroute, we passed memorial totems of bygone Angoon village elders (photo above).

We arrived at the small community store in this subsistence village around 3 p.m. and to our surprise it was quite crowded. Inside, we visited with the local policeman. When we inquired if the store was always this busy, he explained that the store closed at 4 p.m. on Saturdays and would be closed on Sunday. Some shopping patterns extend across many cultures.



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Tenakee Springs There are no cars in this remote Chichagof Island community of about 100 residents; only one main pathway along the shoreline that we shared with passing ATVs and bicycles (57 46.691 N, 135 12.493 W).

Tenakee's most unique feature is a sulfurous hot spring that has been enclosed to form the community bathhouse for the roughly 100 residents. The facility has separate hours for men and women, but we have been told that after 10 PM, anything goes. At one time, there were many outhouses

extending out over the tide line where the ocean effectively provided a daily cleansing, but today only one such facility remains (**photo on previous page**).

Emergency Drill Favorable weather finally found us and we took advantage of a sunny calm day to stop to fish again this time in Icy Straits. We saw whales feeding in the vicinity, but the fish were not cooperating with our anglers. Later that day in Swanson Harbor, we completed our shipboard emergency drill. The discussion, which takes place with each crew, covers the location of fire extinguishers, how to contact the Coast Guard in the case of an emergency, how to activate the emergency locator beacon (EPIRB) to summon help via satellite, and finally how to don the survival suits commonly known as "Gumby" suits.

On this occasion, our grandsons had offered to take the drill one step further and actually enter the saltwater to more fully test the survival suits (**photo above**). Made of a thick neoprene, the Gumbys keep the wearer both warm and dry. Difficult to put on and even more awkward to wear, paddling on your back is the easiest way to move around once you are in the water (**photo below**).

