

2013 Alaska Cruise Journal # 1



This Makes Number 29 At the end of each summer, we wonder if we have made our last trip, but by December we have begun planning the following summer's cruise to explore the wonders of Alaska again. It is our chance to photograph and experience surroundings and wildlife that most do not have the opportunity to enjoy. With these journals, we try to share our experiences with others.

The summer's journey of the *Inside Passage* began before we did. Captain Lance and his crew

delivered her from our home on Mercer Island to Sitka to enable us to maximize our time further north into Prince William Sound and Kodiak Island. We have scheduled a total of eight weeks at sea and will have four different guest crews each for two weeks.

Departing Southeast Alaska We flew to Sitka where we replenished some fresh supplies at a nearby market and filled our 2,200 gallon fuel tanks before departing into the Gulf of Alaska. We watched a golden sunset around 10 PM in Eliason Harbor before retiring for our first night onboard (**photo above**). Our first crew was unable to depart with us and they would meet us in Yakutat after a few days on our own.

Lituya Bay Located on the outer coast of Glacier Bay National Park, Lituya Bay (*57 37.111 N, 137 37.132 W*) is one of the gems of Southeast Alaska. Its glacial melt turquoise water fills this seven mile long and two mile wide inlet with only Cenotaph Island in the center. There are three distinct glaciers at the head of this scenic bay and its two long spits nearly enclose its opening.

With its challenging narrow and rocky entrance that can only be accessed twice each day for a short period at the high tide, we are the rare visitors other than occasional commercial fishermen.

During our visit, we rode our jet shore boat along the island to see the kittiwakes nesting on each small outcropping along the cliff's shear edge (**photo**).



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On the Outside to Yakutat After leaving Lituya Bay, we continued along the mainland coast as it curves westward along the base of magnificent Fairweather and Wrangell-St. Elias mountain ranges.

When the weather forecasts are delivered twice a day on our VHF radio, they refer to the North Pacific Ocean as the “outside waters” because most all of the reports are for the protected waters of the areas containing the thousands of islands in Southeast Alaska.

In clear weather, we enjoyed the view of a continuous line of sizable glaciers and enormous snow-capped mountains including Mount Fairweather at 15,800’ that make up the border between the U.S. and Canada.

Yakutat is an isolated small fishing community along the eastern coast of the Gulf of Alaska and the only town we will stop in while traveling 500 miles to reach Prince William Sound. Our crew, Ron Leibsohn from Seattle and his son David from San Francisco flew into Yakutat to meet us.



“Catching” a King Salmon Within an hour of boarding the *Inside Passage*, David Leibsohn did some exploring and returned with a beautiful white king salmon which he shortly supplemented with several pounds of fresh caught halibut (**photo**). What was most impressive was that he accomplished this without a fishing rod. Two different fishermen on the dock were kind enough to offer him some of their catch as a gift. The cold waters of the Alaska fishing grounds are not only bountiful for residents, but can be plentiful to visitors also. As Ron joked: “Not only was it clean and iced, but it came in a box. What a country!”



Zigging and Zagging Our trip up Disenchantment Bay to the Turner and Hubbard glaciers (60 60.000 N, 139 30.600 W) began as expected. The ocean in front of us appeared to be filled with ice, but as we got closer, we found openings between the ice bergs through which our vessel would fit. The bright sunny skies would set an all time 70 degree record high for the day in Yakutat. With our speed reduced and a considerable amount of maneuvering, we reached the face of the Hubbard Glacier. Six miles wide, the Hubbard was more active and protruded further into the bay than on most previous visits (**photo**). Joann captured some quality videos as massive sections of ice from the face of the glacier plunged into the bay.

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Trapped in a Sea of Ice

On our return trip, we passed the Celebrity cruise line's *Millenium* which was unable to make it closer than ten miles from the face of the glacier because of the heavy ice conditions (photo).

Large vessels have many advantages over smaller ones, but in this instance we were able to enjoy an experience that several thousand guests on the *Millenium* were denied.

During our return from the glacier, we were pleased that we had encountered less sea ice than we had experienced during our approach, but did notice that there were several areas of fog ahead.



Before we realized what had happened, we found ourselves in the midst of one of the fog banks with our boat surrounded by ice chunks ranging from one hundred pounds to several tons (photo).

We quickly learned that on this sunny day, the cold from these concentrations of bergy pieces were causing ground fog to form above them. Gradually, we worked our way out of the icy mess and for the balance of our return to Yakutat, carefully avoided the areas of fog.