

2013 Alaska Cruise Journal # 2



A Remote Destination

Each new crew takes a few days to acclimate to the pattern of a voyage and by the time we were underway from Yakutat, the crew had settled into a comfortable rhythm.

Stretching from Yakutat Bay to Icy Bay is one continuous ice field that encompasses the Malaspina Glacier. It covers most of the coastal region creating a vast almost featureless white plain of ice gently sloping toward the coast.

The sixty-five mile trip along the coast to Icy Bay

takes around seven hours. Under clear weather, we enjoyed relatively calm seas and a spectacular view of the impressive St. Elias Range which sits on the Alaska-Canada border. Icy Bay qualifies as one of the most remote destinations we will reach this summer. Anchored in the bay was a solitary sailboat manned by a Canadian couple who were waiting for a weather opening to go directly across the Gulf of Alaska to Seward instead of following the coast to Prince William Sound as we intended to do.

In the Shadow of the Mountain Icy Bay is a glacially carved fjord that is 5 miles wide at the mouth and extends inland more than 22 miles (*60 11.582 N, 136 20.710 W*). Actively calving Guyot, Yahtse and Tyndall Glaciers are at the north end of the bay. On this visit we weren't able to make any progress to approach the glaciers as the bay was too densely packed with icebergs.

To get some much needed exercise, Carl and David went kayaking in the evening in the shadow of 18,008' Mt. St. Elias (**photo**). Later that night through the portholes in our stateroom we noticed that the sky had turned into glorious shades of red at sunset. We grabbed our cameras and came up to the main deck to find Ron also taking photos (**photo**).

The Longest Day With assistance from David, Carl raised the anchor at 4:00 AM to begin the "big run" across the Gulf of Alaska to Prince William Sound.



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This passage is the most challenging of all of our cruising through the summer because of the extended distance of 185 miles with no layover anchorages available along the way.

We have always felt that even though we have a 18 hour day of continuous cruising, it is worth the effort for what waits us across the Gulf.

At one point during the passage, we were about 25 miles from the coastline and over the entire trip we

passed only one fishing boat near the tip of Kayak Island ([59 44.908 N, 144 38.358 W](#)).

Except for a breaching humpback whale and a few porpoises, it was only grey skies and grey seawater. We pulled into the anchorage behind Hinchinbrook Island around 9:30 PM with the sun shining brightly ([60 29.240 N, 146 32.930 W](#)). Once the anchor was secured, we enjoyed our long-delayed dinner and visited until midnight when the exhaustion of the day's travel finally caught up with us.

Columbia the Gem of the Ocean We departed the following morning to reach a glacier that has always proven to be a highlight of our visits to this region.

Our destination was the massive Columbia Glacier, the largest glacier in Prince William Sound. With its iceberg-choked bay, it covers 440 square miles and has retreated many miles since it began its drastic retreat in 1982.



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Icebergs ‘R’ Us On past visits our progress has been stopped by the large bergs calved by the glacier. They stacked up on the terminal glacial moraine which is located at what was the outer limit of the glacier for many millennia.

At that location over many years, material ranging from boulders to fine glacial dust were deposited gradually raising the ocean floor from 800’ to almost sea level. This time we passed through larger icebergs with ample separation. We do not know whether this decrease in ice flows is a result of global

warming or just the unpredictable nature of glacial activity.

Towering Above After anchoring in scenic Jade Cove (60 58.312 N, 146 58.687 W), named for the color of its glacial water, we lowered our jet boat to cruise among the grounded bergs. Floating icebergs can be dangerous as they periodically roll over as the bottom portions under water melt much faster. As we had done once several years ago, we anchored to a grounded berg and cautiously climbed aboard taking care to avoid areas with overhangs that had the potential to break free. The view from the berg was spectacular (**photo on previous page**) as we could look directly towards the face of the glacier many miles in the distance.

We knew we wanted to return the next morning to kayak amongst these enormous but continually varied superstructures of ice. We estimated that the tallest of the bergs were 30’ to 40’ above the level of the bay (**photo above and on previous page**).

Crowded Rookery Enroute to our next anchorage, we visited one of the largest concentration of Stellar sea lions we have seen. Densely packed on a gravel beach, the movement of any one would cause a response from at least ten others (**photo**).

