

2013 Alaska Cruise Journal # 4



A Classic Setting Our first night out of Seward, we anchored in Coleman Bay (59 51.450 N, 149 37.980 W). With its cloud covered peaks, large ice fields, tumbling waterfalls, and glacier views, Coleman Bay is a spectacular setting (photo).

The men of the crew kayaked after dinner over to an ice field that clearly dwarfed the earlier one that Nick and Brad had scaled a few days earlier. From the top deck Joann photographed their 700' climb. The grandsons came back pleased with their ascent but quite cold.

A Circle of Bubbles The gentle waters behind Granite Island (59 39.630 N, 149 48.398 W) provided a perfect venue for viewing two humpback whales feeding along the shoreline. They were creating bubble nets. Watching this behavior has always been a special treat for us both visually and because the methodology of herding the fish into a smaller area suggests a high level of whale intelligence.

The circle of bubbles which concentrates the prey, usually herring or krill, also provides us with an early warning on where the whales will surface next (photo).

Most often bubble netting is performed by a pod of up to a dozen whales but in the past we have witnessed these actions by solitary whales. These two whales worked both together and individually.

As we drifted, they often swam close to the *Inside Passage* but we felt they were able to avoid any contact because they knew exactly where we were.



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Halibut on Board The boys had been alerted that we would be passing our all time successful fishing spot in Chugach Passage (59 10 159 N, 151 30.909 W). Brad in particular loves to fish and both he and Carl got out on the back swim-step to drop their lines.

It didn't take very long before Brad was able to catch two halibut. Once we anchored for the evening a short distance away, he did a nice job of filleting them and tossing tidbits of the scrap to very attentive seagulls. We estimate that the dressed weight of his catch exceeded 18 pounds (photo).

Weather Effects The area from Cook Inlet west through the Aleutian Islands is known as Southwest Alaska. Storm fronts that cross the entire lower 48 states originate from the waters north of the Aleutians.

With our proximity to this point of origin, the weather can change quite rapidly, so the 4 AM and 4 PM weather reports become our most essential reading since in Alaska boating decisions are based primarily on sea conditions. It is not unusual for a report of 3' seas (normally

the minimum) in the afternoon to have changed to 8' seas by the following morning. Excluding areas subject to tide and current distortions, 6' is the maximum we will comfortably tolerate. Above that and we hole up and wait for another day.

5th of July Celebration Our 4th of July plans were delayed because of ceaseless rain. By the 5th, the sky had cleared and the shore excursion scheduled for the previous night went forward.

Carl started a camp fire and we roasted the traditional holiday s'mores. The boys shot off half of our remaining stash of 25+ year old fireworks purchased by our son Jeff when he was in high school (photo). To our welcome amazement the sun came out for a half-hour around 9 PM. It was the first time we had seen the sun in the previous week and a half.

Battle Wounds Several thousand brown bears roam free in the four million acre Katmai National Park. A visit to the Katmai has become a highlight of the summers we cross the Gulf of Alaska and three of the four guest groups this summer should get an



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opportunity to visit this area.

Pilots drop off visitors from Homer and Kodiak for a few hours but we are almost always the only private boat around overnight.

One mature bear grazing in the meadow had a badly damaged mouth which most likely was the result of being on the losing side of a fight **(photo)**.

In a society where size and strength matters most, dominant bears are the primary source of danger. Humans are not considered a threat since the bears cannot be hunted in a national park.

While walking across a muddy creek bed, we noticed a large bear sleeping on the nearby hillside. It raised its head briefly to check us out, but soon lowered it back down. We climbed to an elevated area and were able to count at least a dozen bears within our line of sight.

With No Fear There was a rain squall in the distance approaching us so we began to head back to our shore boat. By that time we had been roaming the delta meadow for a couple of hours.

As we were preparing to leave, a red fox approached to within 10'. He was multicolored with a white tip on a tail that was nearly as long as his body **(photo)**.

Almost ignoring us, he began sniffing the ground and periodically aggressively digging for clams. He was quite successful in his endeavors and within a short time had retrieved, opened, and consumed a half-dozen **(photo)**.



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Rafts of “Fur Balls” The next morning with reports that heavy winds were expected soon, we decided to beat the weather and cross the always challenging Shelikof Strait to Kodiak Island. We have observed that the population of sea otter “fur balls” has significantly increased over the years. It is not uncommon to find large rafts of them floating together (**photo**) during the rare period when they are not eating, which for sea otters is an almost continuous activity.



We now take a break and return to Mercer Island for a week before returning for another month of exploring Alaskan waters.