

## 2014 Alaska Cruise Journal # 1



**From Fresh to Salt** We departed our Mercer Island home on June 19<sup>th</sup> to begin on our 30<sup>th</sup> consecutive annual Alaskan cruise. To enable us to enjoy more wilderness and extend our cruising range, we have in recent years had others either deliver or return the *Inside Passage* to or from her home base.

However, this year we have taken charge of the entire voyage with Captain Carl and First Mate Joann responsible for all aspects of the cruise.

The fresh water portion of the trip is from our home on Lake Washington through Lake

Union and the Seattle Ship Canal to the Ballard Locks where we are lowered to the ever changing salt water tidal elevations.

The time it takes to pass through the locks, which have been in use for 98 years, is unpredictable. Pleasure boats are at the bottom of the vessel priority list, coming after all fishing, government, commercial, and tourist boats. As a result, we have had passages that have taken up to several hours or as short as five minutes if we arrive at a time when no other boats are waiting. On this occasion, it took about a half-hour and we used the smaller of the two locks. In the small locks we tie to floats along the walls that rise and fall with the water levels (photo).

**Visiting a Favorite** We set our course to the modern metropolis of Vancouver, British Columbia. After clearing Canadian Customs, we moored in at the Coal Harbor Marina ( 49 17.494 N, 123 07.437 W ), just across from the thousand acre Stanley Park and alongside the scenic waterfront walkway rimmed by numerous gleaming glass skyscraper condominiums (photo).





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With its cosmopolitan population and cutting-edge architecture, Vancouver has always been a favorite destination and is an excellent transition to the wilderness that lies beyond.

**Size is Relative.** In some of the small Alaskan villages we visit, we have been the largest vessel in town. The same is not true in a world class city like Vancouver where the *Inside Passage* looks small next to the adjacent yachts (photo).

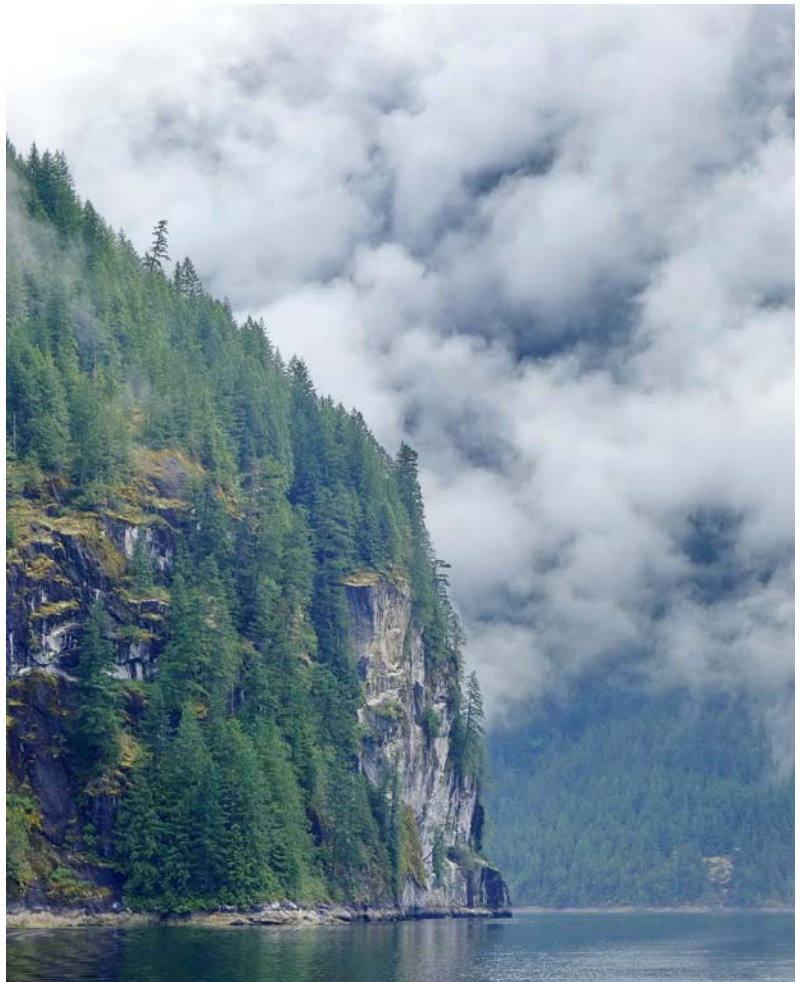
At the bottom of this same photo, Herb and Lucy

Pruzan, our most frequent guests over the years and crew on this first leg, were setting out for an afternoon walk.

**Princess Louisa Inlet** After a couple of wonderful days enjoying Vancouver, it was time to taste the wild natural beauty of British Columbia. Although considerably off the most direct route to Alaska, Princess Louisa Inlet at the end of Jervis Inlet is a magical spot. The inlet is probably one of the most popular destinations for Northwest U.S. and Canadian boaters. It has granite walls that rise to 7,000 feet with water depths that sink to as much as 1,000 feet deep (photo). During the spring runoff, there are up to 60 waterfalls cascading off the mountain peaks.

**Malibu Rapids** The entrance to Princess Louisa Inlet is restricted by a narrow opening called the Malibu Rapids ( 50 09.854 N, 123 51.019 W ). Although short and deep enough for easy entry every six hours and fifteen minutes when the tide changes directions, the currents reach up to nine knots during maximum tidal flows.

In 1792, when Captain George Vancouver led





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the expedition which became the first non-native group to explore the area, his log shows he passed right by Princess Louisa Inlet without discovering the inlet inside.

**Chatterbox Falls** At the head of the inlet the massive Chatterbox Falls sits amidst a stunning temperate rainforest that comprises the marine park that preserves this beautiful setting (**photo on last page**). The falls drop 120 feet and produce a spray that shoots out a similar distance. It is reported that the falls freeze over during severe winters and there is just silence except for the whoosh of the winter winds.

**Passing Up a Climb** It has been twenty years since our last visit. At that time, we made the 1800 foot vertical climb to the abandoned trapper's cabin. A lot has changed in those twenty years including our desire and agility to make the hike again (**photo**).

The marine park has a long dock for visiting boaters as the great water depths make anchoring difficult. Since the dock is restricted to smaller

vessels, the solution for larger vessels is to carefully anchor on the submerged ledge of outflow materials that have accumulated over the centuries at the base of the falls ( 50 12.337 N, 123 46.214 W ). It is in this location that we positioned the *Inside Passage* for the evening and Carl dropped our anchor to give us the best seats in the inlet. It started to rain that evening and as the weather cleared in the morning we could see many waterfalls of various sizes cascading from the high bluffs.

### **Whales and More Whales**

We always try to stay alert for what nature has to show us. Like the weather there are general patterns but little certainty.

As we headed north down Johnstone Strait, we knew that orcas are regularly seen in the area. Thus when Herb announced that he had seen whale spouts, we assumed he had spotted





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an orca.

Surprisingly, he had sighted humpback whales much further south than we had ever seen them before.

### **An Extra Bonus**

Blackney Passage ( 50 33.764 N, 123 41.168 W ) connects Johnstone Strait to Queen Charlotte Strait and is a busy passage used by most of the cruise ships along with much of the other traffic along the most common Inside Passage route to Alaska.

As we were headed through the strong currents in the pass, we had a mega yacht entering from the south and a tug and barge approaching from the north. At the same time we were watching more humpbacks.

All of a sudden a cry went out as Carl spotted an orca approaching our boat, easily recognizable by its large dorsal fin (photo previous page).

During last summer's nine week cruise we did not see an orca once, and this year we see both orcas and humpback whales at the same time and during the first week of the cruise. Mother nature is predictably unpredictable.