

2014 Alaska Cruise Journal # 4



One Day's Adventure

Before heading south for the remainder of this year's cruise, we went north for a side trip to the Anan Creek Bear Observatory on Cleveland Passage ([56 11.131 N, 131 40.685 W](#)).

Always a must see on the years we visit Southeast Alaska, it requires permits from the U.S. Forest Service which become available in mid-February.

We remember the days when there was only a small shed and we would often be alone. Now there is a large enclosed deck and a camouflaged photo blind in which we took a **photo** of our new crew of Bill Faia

and Carol Booth, neighbors from Maui, and grandson Brad Akin from St. Louis.

Currently, there is a limit of 60 visitor permits per day and the season is fully sold out. Most are snatched up by the tour operators from Wrangell who deliver their guests by float plane or jet-boat.

We arrived the afternoon before our scheduled visit so that we could be ashore early in the morning to beat the arrival of the day's crowd.

Extreme Tide That evening, the bright yellow full moon just over the Sitka Spruce tree-line gave us advance notice of what we would find the next day. The



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largest tidal ranges of the month occur on the full moon. Overnight the water level in the bay fell almost 24 feet. During the roughly six hour period, that amounted to an average drop of nearly an inch per minute.

Prior to going ashore, we counted 40 adult and juvenile bald eagles spread along the tide line at low tide, certainly a good sign of what we would find along the creek and at the falls.

A Muddy Landing

The extremely shallow entrance to the creek made getting ashore

quite a challenge. We knew that we had to secure our boat far enough into the stream entrance or it would be stranded when we returned.

The group climbed out and dragged the boat along a soggy and muddy shoreline so it would be in a safe and accessible location when we returned (**photo on previous page**).

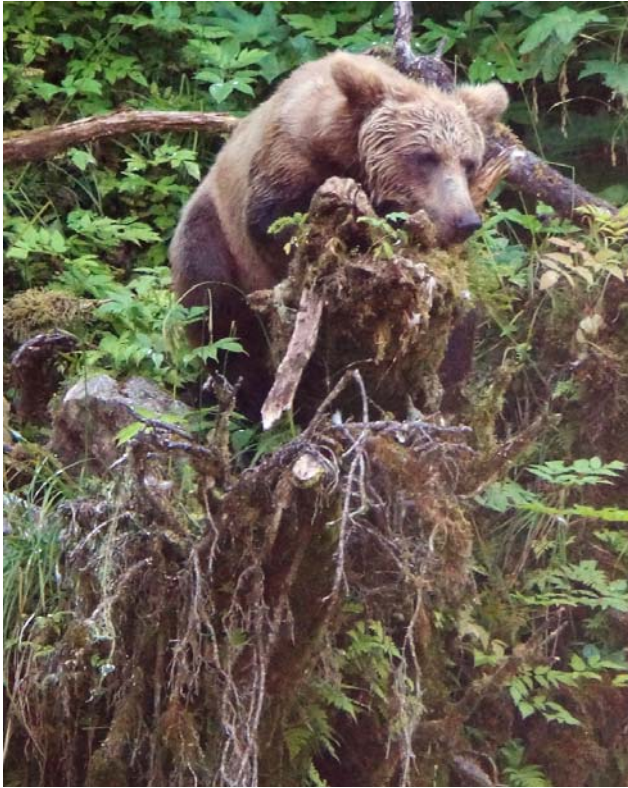
During July and August the waters of Anan Creek abound with salmon, drawing bear, eagles and seals. The sun was at the perfect angle to see below the water's surface to witness thousands of salmon crowding below the waterfall (**photo**).

Bears Galore The half-mile well maintained boardwalk trail winds around a large lagoon in a dense temperate coastal rainforest to reach the observatory shelter with a large surrounding deck above the sizeable waterfall. Immediately after our arrival, a large black bear arrived to grab a salmon out of the creek (**photo**).

One ranger stays at the trailhead and the second one is always at the shelter to answer any questions and instruct visitors on the rules.



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During the salmon run, there are from 40–60 black bears and 15-20 brown bears in the protected area surrounding the stream and falls. We learned that Anan Creek boasts the largest run of pink salmon in Southeast Alaska which is some years approaches 400,000 fish.

Picky Eaters Although still early in the season, the bears had already become very selective as to what portions of the salmon they consumed. During the run, the supply of fish is so plentiful that it is common to see them tear open the stomach first to see if there are any eggs, followed by the brains and finally the skin and leave the rest behind for the birds. These portions of the salmon have the greatest nutritional value.

The black bears know instinctively that the brown bears are dominant and respect their presence by hiding out until they depart. The brown bears that we have seen over the years at Anan have been either mothers with new born or newly emancipated cubs. This year we were treated to both. There was a young solitary brown juvenile that spent most of the day fishing in the same spot.

We thought she was increasing her skill in catching fish as the day went on.

Dinner Time When a mother and her two six month old cubs arrived, the young brown bear ran up the hillside and perched on the trunk of a fallen tree. There she waited patiently until they left (**photo**).

The mother and cub family stayed in the area for a long time. The cubs would watch their mother catch a salmon and then try to share it with her although as first year cubs they are still nursing (**two photos**).

We did briefly see one first year black bear cub and it was less than half the size of the young brownies.



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By nursing immediately after birth while the mother is still hibernating, the newborn cubs get a good head start to becoming a sufficient size to survive when they join their mothers outside the den in spring.

There was an impressive number of eagles and ravens waiting their opportunity to clean up the scraps left by the bears. Immediately after the bear's departure, the eagles and ravens would swoop in to grab the remains. The birds also have their own "pecking" order.

The only thing that would stop them was if the fish remains were under water. One eagle spent a considerable amount of time trying to retrieve a discarded salmon carcass just below the surface (photo). Ultimately it figured out a way to use its sharp talons to pull the fish up onto the rocky shore. It was only our second day with this crew, but one filled with highlights.

