

2014 Alaska Cruise Journal # 5



Orcas Along the Shore

The unoccupied Mary Island lighthouse (55 06.394 N, 131 10.880 W) was the turning point to head in the direction of the British Columbia border. As we passed, we were surprised by a pod of orcas that seemed more at play than hunting for food.

We slowed to idle speed and ultimately stopped for ten minutes to enjoy their active behavior. From all the **photos** taken by the crew, we selected two we felt best showed what we saw that morning.



Ascending the Falls Once over the border and through Canadian Customs, we continued south to Lowe Inlet, one of our favorite overnight choices (53 33.555 N, 129 34.149 W). This anchorage has a significant waterfall that varies in height by over 20 feet depending on the state of the tide. Salmon can only get over the falls at the highest tides. While waiting for the opportunity to ascend Lowe Falls, they congregate at its base. Somehow mother nature tells the salmon when it is high tide and she also gives the bears similar information.

During the top of the tide, which lasts about an hour, a large black bear would periodically appear and take a position at the whitewater base of the falls. Within a few minutes, it would grab a fish and then retreat to the

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woods to consume its catch. Once the tide went out and the height of the falls increased, the bear disappeared (**photo**).

Brim River We scheduled a side trip down the spectacular Gardner Canal that is one of the deepest inlets that snake into the British Columbia mainland.

This major fjord is perhaps the most pristine and scenic in Canada. High peaks with snow and ice fields in the 5,000 foot range are remnants of the glaciers that created this great fjord.

The further in we traveled, the walls of the canal became increasingly sheer with vertical slabs that reach to mostly bare ridges above. The water was often over 1,000 foot deep.

We anchored alone in Owyacumish Bay at the terminus of the Brim River (53 30.459 N, 128 129 34.149.061 W). The *Inside Passage* was dwarfed against the massive peaks (**photo**). The periodic blink of a distant navigation beacon and the remains of a trapper's cabin were the only reminders of civilization. At peace with nature, we explored by



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kayak the glacially silted aqua colored river in the shadows of the granite domes (**photo**).

Khutze Inlet We attempted to ride up the river at the head of Khutze (pronounced Kootz) Inlet in our water jet driven shore boat which draws less than a foot of water when planing (53 05.231 N, 128 26.079 W).

Although we were quite successful reading the river channels, we were stymied after a short while by a set of impenetrable rapids. From there, we drifted back down to the tidal basin enjoying the scenery along the river banks. Unlike many of these expeditions, we did not see any wildlife.

To conclude the evening's activity, we landed on the shore to challenge ourselves for a climb to the base of a sizeable falls. The route up was alongside an exit stream that required numerous crossings over a collection of small and often slippery boulders (**photo**).

Return to Dawsons Landing The sunny

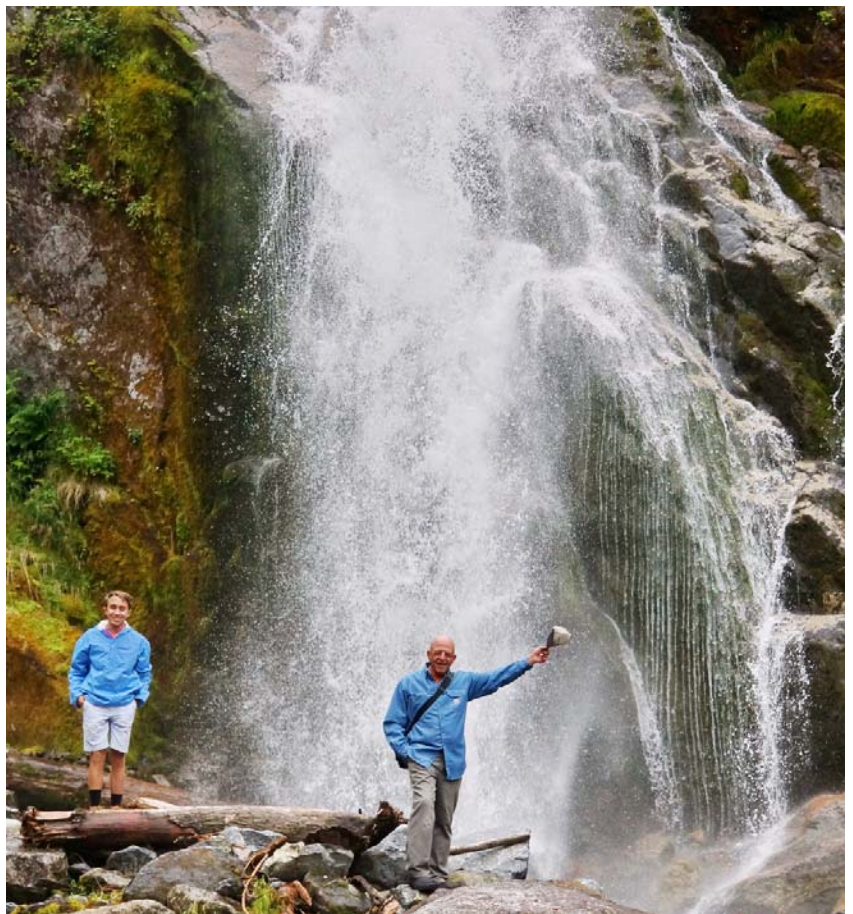
weather we had been enjoying for over a week turned into grey skies and rain.

We motored up Rivers Inlet, a historically productive fishery, to Dawsons Landing (51 34.449 N, 127 35.541 W). It had been twenty-five years since our last visit to this lonely supply outpost containing a one room combined grocery, liquor store, and post office.

The small store had shown signs of disrepair at that time, and we were curious to see if it was still in operation.

The owner explained that she and her husband inherited the operation over twenty-five years ago from her in-laws who had owned the tiny floating village for the prior thirty-five years.

When we asked if there were shore trails on which we could hike, we got the simple explanation that although the entire set of floating buildings was connected to shore, there was nothing but



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dense forest at the head of the shore ramp.

We were also told that the day we visited the family awoke to find a young brown bear wandering the floats and getting into trash that had mistakenly been left outside the night before.

Standing behind an ancient native canoe now used as a planter, our group posed and declared ourselves “the blue shirt group” (photo). Joann wore her Dawsons Landing shirt from our first visit that had been tucked away in a drawer. The proprietress remembered it was her favorite design and no longer available.



Bull Harbor With our plan to cruise south along the west coast of Vancouver Island, an overnight stay in Bull Harbor (50 54.893 N, 127 56.141 W) put us in a favorable position to take on the “outside” waters of the North Pacific Ocean.



Bull Harbor is a weather secure inlet and the site of an abandoned Canadian Coast Guard Station near the northern tip of Hope Island. Only a few small buildings remain and most are uninhabited.

Shortly after we tied up, two young First Nations men approached us to collect the \$20 moorage fee. We learned later that they “guard” the area that is now controlled by the Tlatlasikwala tribal band.

Before reaching the trail to the ocean, we spotted what appeared to be a vehicle parked in the middle of the road (photo).

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It wasn't obvious from afar, but as we approached, we realized that the vehicle had been burned beyond salvage and had simply been abandoned on the spot.

A short walk from the buildings put us across the isthmus to mile wide Roller Bay. Along the shoreline were some interesting ocean smoothed and shaped rock formations that we concluded are quite similar to Henry Moore sculptures (**photo**).

Getting Ready We waited out an expected stretch of bad weather for a night in the nearby town of Port Hardy before motoring around the northern tip of Vancouver Island. There had been predictions of gale force winds but they did not materialize.

The north and west sides of the

island are notorious for their strong winds and severe weather. The wind turbines rising over the morning fog projected a sense that they were engulfed by smoke (**photo**).

On Our Way The Natwitti Bar, just outside of Bull Harbor, is the point of no return for the journey around the north end of Vancouver Island.

The bottom rises from over 200 feet to less than 40 feet in a short distance. Half of the huge flow of water



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“hurricane” mooring buoys the Canadian Department of Fisheries has provided since the water is too shallow for adequate anchoring.

We took our shore boat and landed on one of the outer islands guarding the entrance to the cove. Unlike the shoreline in the bay, the rocks facing the ocean showed an absence of any vegetation for 30 to 40 feet above sea level evidencing the severity of winter storms. We climbed over rocks and beached logs as we explored the shoreline (**photo**).

There are many areas of original “old growth” cedar, spruce, and hemlock trees along the west coast that have been saved from logging. It is hard to appreciate their massive size until you stand by one (**photo**).

Walters Cove The small village of Kyuquot (Ky-oo-Kit) is located in one of the protected areas on Vancouver Island’s West Coast (50 01.596 N, 127 22.532 W). We stopped for a brief

entering the east side of 200 mile long Vancouver Island comes from the north.

Except in extremely calm weather, the bar can only be crossed during the four times per day when slack water occurs. We timed our crossing for the morning slack and headed out to round Cape Scott.

Sea Otter Cove The first place of refuge on the wild outer coast is the extremely shallow but well protected Sea Otter Cove. Access is not available during the lowest tides (50 54.893 N, 127 56.141 W).

We tied to one of the four





afternoon visit in this little port which has only a fuel dock, small store, a single restaurant, and a population of up to one hundred in the summer months. We moored next to seasoned mariners from two vessels who had just arrived to get resupplied. Both couples spend their summers in the area. The tiny store was not open as it would not have fresh product until the next day. The ferry Uchuck III that serves this and other small west coast outposts, would be arriving that evening with its weekly delivery.

We walked along the rainforest trail to have an excellent lunch of halibut fish ‘n’ chips at *Java the Hut*. While waiting for our food, we saw several active humming birds darting back and forth around a large fuchsia bush. We’ve always wondered how photographers can capture their high speed movements. We now know that at least one of the techniques is to aim your camera, shoot lots of photos, and hope you get lucky. On this occasion “Lady Luck” was on our side (photo).

Residents of Tahsis Narrows The route around Nooka Island connects a series of calm channels but takes longer to traverse than outside along the ocean coast. We took the interior route and it gave us time to pass a sizable raft of about 20 sea otters. After virtual extermination, re-introduction of sea otters to British Columbia took place from 1969-1972 using stock provided by Alaska. This raft seemed almost habituated to the many passing vessels, and their natural curiousness provided an excellent opportunity for a group pose (photo).

