

2017 Alaska Cruise Journal # 3

Arrival in Prince Willam Sound After once again successfully traveling 180 miles along the coast of the Gulf of Alaska in one 18-hour passage, we anchored in Port Etches, our first stop in Prince William Sound (60 20.280 N, 146 32.764 W). Enclosed by high mountains and glaciers, this is one of the world's largest intact coastal ecosystems. It continues to be a major draw that we have been returning to biannually. The small fishing community of Cordova, with twice daily jet airline service, has been a great location to exchange crews and resupply a few fresh items.



Orca Channel Taking note of the high tide the morning prior to the arrival of our next guests, we took our jet shore boat into the shallow waters of Orca Inlet (60 32.212 N, 134 50.083 W). We had been told that there were large rafts of sea otters in this channel used by the local commercial fishing boats to access the Copper River, source of the well known but pricey Copper River salmon.

Large Rafts of Sea Otters These remarkable marine mammals are difficult to photograph because they typically dive under the water before you can approach close enough to photograph.



Curious George? We encountered a couple of large rafts after traveling only a short distance from town (**photo**). We were able to anchor in the channel with the engine off and sit quietly observing their behavior.

Before long, there were small groups of curious otters popping up to spy on us (**photo**). At a distance, sea otters do not appear very large but the average weight of an adult male is around 60 pounds.

The whiskered faces of the older otters assume the appearance of a grizzled old grandfather and they

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have sometimes been referred to a “the old man of the sea”. Because of the desirability of their fur, densest of any mammal, otters were nearly exterminated by the 1920s.

Their population was further decimated during the 1987 Exxon Valdez oil spill. Today the otter population seems to be thriving and Alaska is home to

90% of the world’s population of sea otters.

Spawning Salmon With our new crew Ron Leibsohn and Diane Kuenster of Seattle, we traveled to Bear Trap Bay, a scenic inlet. The weather remained very favorable and we took advantage of it to kayak amongst a multitude of jumping salmon on their way upstream.



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As we kayaked by, we saw many bald eagles flying off out of the old-growth forest ahead of our path. This validated that we were in a active salmon spawning creek. These large raptors, with wingspans of 6 ½ to 8 feet, commonly scavenge for dead or dying fish. At high tide, we paddled as far up the stream as possible. From there, we could watch the salmon actually spawning in the shallow water, and listened to the screeching seagulls that had gathered to feast on salmon carcasses (**photo on previous page**). Later that evening from the *Inside Passage*, we watched as a brown bear worked the shoreline catching and eating salmon along the way.

Journey Westward The following day, we crossed to the western half of Prince William Sound to visit the Chenega Glacier (60 16.457 N, 148 23.047 W). This is but one of 25 glaciers that descend from the enormous Sargent Icefield that blankets 825 square miles of the Kenai Mountains. For some reason that we don't yet understand, large groups of harbor seals gather on the ice flows by this particular glacier (**photo on previous page**). Orcas have been known to cause these smaller ice bergs to overturn so they can get at the seals.



Rocky Climb Our final destination before departing Prince William Sound was South Twin Bay on Erlington Island (59 56.810 N, 148 11.81710 W). The uniqueness of this location is that there is a small rocky saddle that separates this usually quiet bay from the Gulf of Alaska. Although only a short climb, each step released a stream of rocks, which made the ascent a challenge. At the crest of this isthmus, we managed to grab a group photo before continuing our journey west along the Kenai Peninsula.