

2018 Alaska Cruise Journal # 2



Orcas at Last Under pleasant and calm sea conditions, we crossed Queen Charlotte Sound, a major exposure to the Pacific. Shortly after entering Fitz Hugh Sound (51 44.121 N, 127 58.588 W), we finally saw a pod of orcas (commonly known as Killer Whales).

These were the first orcas we had seen in two years after seeing none during the 8 ½ weeks last summer

spent much further north. Reports of their numbers diminishing had us concerned but watching this B.C. pod was a refreshing sight. There were females with juveniles protected in the center of the pod (**photo**). A large dorsal finned male was also present.

Poison Cove At the eastern end of Sheep Passage is an impressive and very picturesque alpine area called Mussel Inlet. We approached by way of a 6 ½ mile fjord that begins where Mathieson and Sheep channels converge. We first anchored alone in this offshoot inlet. It affords more protection than Mussel Bay even though the winds were not an issue. Poison Cove (52 54.222 N, 128 01.727 W) was named by Captain George Vancouver when several of his crew became ill and one died after eating mussels contaminated with red tide (paralytic shellfish poisoning- PSP).

We could see the flow of water coming down off the mountains and entering the bay, but the gradation of the inflow rose too quickly to investigate in our kayaks. This is where our drone adds so much to our enjoyment of the wilderness.

Flying the drone up the non navigable channel and videoing the path below, we recorded an impressive cascade that would previously never have been visible to us (**photo**).





Beautiful Sounds Like many, we love the haunting call of the common loon. With the sunny conditions and the water calm, we spotted a pair of common loons feeding nearby. Because they typically avoid human proximity, these water birds have been difficult to photograph in the past but they accommodated us by swimming close (**photo**).

Relocation Decision After dinner, we moved over to be closer to the entrance to the valley the feeds Mussel Inlet (52 54.926 N, 128 02.362 W). We lowered our shore boat to explore the Mussel River that feeds this inlet.

The tall granite peaks were only partially snow covered indicating that this was a light winter for snowfall. Just a short distance from the river's opening, Loretta called out that she saw a bear on the beach (**photo**).

We quickly reversed direction and grabbed our cameras to record a young solitary grizzly bear grazing the shore grasses and digging for clams.

Although bears have good hearing and a keen sense of smell, their eyesight is not their strongest sense. Although he looked in our direction several times and was close by, he either chose not to acknowledge us or possibly was not aware of our presence



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Red Tide The following evening, we anchored in Goat Harbor off Ursula Channel (53 21.743 N, 128 51.226 W). We were taken by the presence of dark orange streaks filling this inlet.

It certainly was not red as the common name describes, but was fascinating to see especially after recently reading about how Vancouver's explorers suffered in Poison Cove several centuries ago (photo).

Kumealon Inlet

Located on the northeast corner of Grenville Channel, this scenic inlet

boasts an intricate channel of small tree-covered islands and islets protecting an entrance into Kumealon Lagoon and the waterfall at its head (53 52.630 N, 129 59.187 W).

Our timing was fortunate because the low tide conditions made it extra inviting to explore by kayak. We saw many tidal species like various sea stars, lion's mane and moon jellyfish, red feather duster tubeworms, and an enormous quantity of bull kelp along the shorelines.

Sea stars have recently been decimated along the West Coast of North America by an unidentified disease and are just recently starting to recover. The real highlight was seeing the lovely low waterfall created at the back end of the inlet that was pouring out vast amounts of white foam (photo).

