

Leaving Petersburg

- This is a short leg and on the way out of the harbor (doing 9 knots through the tidal rapids), we spotted our first ICEBERG – more on this later.
- The trip to Read Island was uneventful, but the anchorage wasn't. Here in Alaska good anchorages can be hard to find. Read Island has a couple of small coves that are shallow enough to anchor in and the bottom isn't 100% rock. We went into the small cove as the weather was getting rough and the island blocked all the waves and swell. The cove was very small (barely enough room for us) and the bottom of the seabed was rocky. For the uninitiated, anchors and rocks don't mix well. Not to mention when the chain drags around on them it makes a lot of noise inside the boat where we sleep. To top it off, the wind started to howl from a new direction that blew right into the cove. We rolled around on the anchor and drug the chain around on the rocks all night. Fortunately the anchor stuck in well and didn't move, but we were up often checking our position.
- After a sleepless night, the last thing we wanted to do was to stay in that cove again. So, despite the strong wind and rain we set off for the next stop 36nm away, Entrance Island, where there is a small public floating dock.
- The wind was really howling out in Frederick Sound. The good thing about it was the wind was behind us so we sailed along averaging 6.5 knots with 4 foot seas to surf down. Yes, of course it was raining. And you can imagine if we are seeing icebergs, it's not a warm tropical sort of rain.
- None the less we flew down Frederick Sound between all the islands until we got to Entrance island where we kept our fingers crossed there was space at the tiny float. Since it was July 3rd, we thought everyone would be in port and no one would be out here. In fact the only sign of life on the water was a couple of Megayachts, a ferry and 2 fishing boats.
- We certainly didn't think that perhaps they were all hiding at the dock waiting for better weather; but then, as we rounded the corner, we learned differently. There were so many boats, we couldn't even see the dock. We thought we would have to just push on to the next anchorage (~2 hours away).
- On closer look, however, we noticed two sailboats we knew well. They were the two boats from California that we crossed paths with several times from way back in Desolation Sound, Shearwater, and crossing Dixon Entrance. They spotted us immediately and we rafted to them (3 boats deep on a tiny float).
- They were surprised to see us again and even more surprised we were out sailing around. When we told them it was a choice between riding it out at Read Island or in the open water they laughed because they had a miserable time at the same anchorage a day before us.

Getting to Juneau

Glacier Bay

Juneau

Taku Harbor

Tracy Arm

Tracy Arm Anchorage

Entrance Island

Read Island

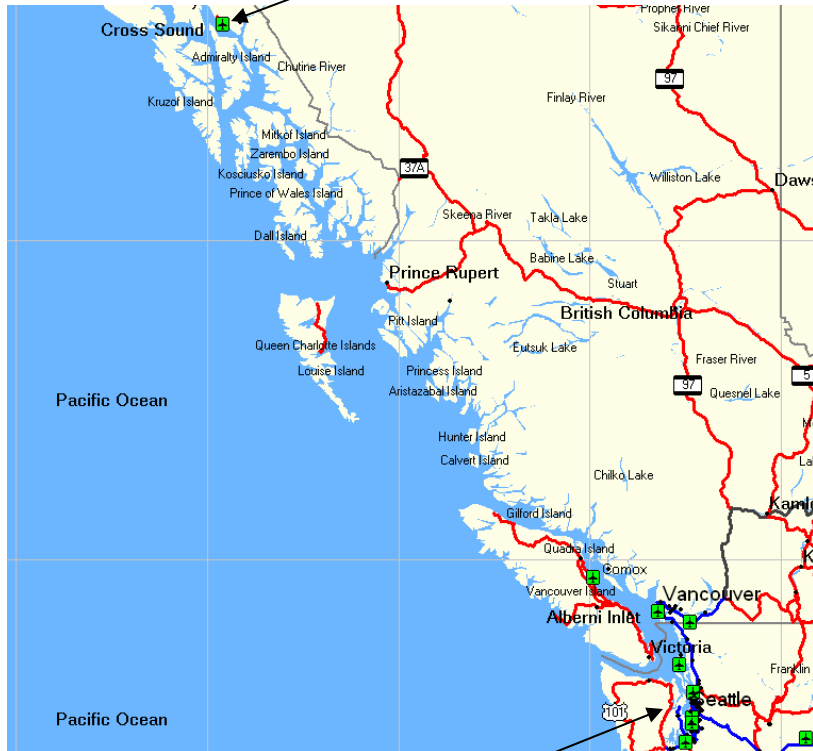
Petersburg



Coasts

- Off the subject for a moment, I was looking at the maps for the East Coast the other day and thought my East Coast family might find this comparison interesting. Compare the highway density of Alaska and Canada to the East Coast of the US (Notice how there isn't a road linking Juneau to the main highways? Yet, it's the state capitol).

Juneau



Seattle



Entrance Island

Okay, back to the story -

- So after meeting up with the California gang again, we talked about our next stops. They were heading to Tracy Arm and we were thinking of skipping it and continuing further north.
- We told them after seeing the iceberg and reading all the warnings about navigating the ice brash, we decided we weren't thrilled with the idea. We also didn't want to go into those areas alone.
- They briefed us on the current conditions at Tracy Arm and it sounded like things were nice there.
- After more debate about it, we reluctantly plotted an alternate course into Tracy Arm, but kept our original plans.
- Since all three of us were rafted together, when they took off, we left with them. We said we might poke into the entrance to see what it looked like but we planned to bypass it.
- After leaving Entrance Island, we headed north up Stephens Passage where we saw lots of whales!



Not Nessy, a whale! It's hard to take photos of a moving whale from a moving boat...sorry! If you look closely you can see the water from his spout in the air. They're much more impressive in person anyway; even a clear photo doesn't do this animal justice. Go see them for yourself!

Whales



I know, terrible photos. The digital camera battery kept dying on me and the boat was rolling in the waves. And if you're wondering about the dark ring, that's because I'm shooting this through a pair of binoculars. Normally I can squeeze out a good shot despite the conditions, but too many things were going wrong all at once.

Would have been a beautiful shot of a diving whale tail...if only...

California Boats

Juniata



Valhalla



- Juniata is a Pacific Seacraft Crealock 37 (similar to our boat, which is a Pacific Seacraft Mariah 31) and Valhalla is a Catalina 34. The crew on Valhalla has done the Alaska tour four times including this one and Juniata's crew retired from the rat race to start their full time voyage of the seas beyond.
- As the southerly winds picked up all three of us sailed wing on wing down the channel. It was a great day with no rain and light breezes. You can even see some of Valhalla's crew lounging on the foredeck.

Tracy Arm

- We followed the two boats to the entrance of Tracy Arm and slowly decided it made sense for us to give it a try, especially with two other boats there with us.
- As we crossed the bar into Tracy Arm we started to see lots of bergs, but there was no turning back due to the 4 knot current pushing us through the narrow entrance.
- Our guide book and sailing directions warned us that the small cove in Tracy Arm (the only cove to anchor in) often has icebergs drifting through it. Encouraging.
- The berg in this photo drifted all around the blue boat to the left, and then grounded on a bar in the cove. (No one was aboard the blue boat to fend off the berg at the time. They relied on pure luck). The top photo is the anchorage.
- Keep in mind, only 10% of the berg is above the surface.
- We rowed the dinghy over to check it out (from a distance). As we were photographing it, it groaned, cracked and calved sending out a bunch of ice chunks.
- As the tide came in slowly, the berg lifted off the bar and began roaming the anchorage again. All of us had our emergency bailout plans ready as it slowly lurked around the cove all night.
- At this point we still hadn't decided if we were going to tour Tracy Arm (45 nm round trip) requiring that we anchor in the same cove the following night. We figured that if all went well, even with the lurking berg, we'd do the tour, if not, we'd bail.
- The bluish berg roamed around all evening but didn't cause any trouble. That made our decision easy, we'd do the tour.



Above: Berg just after anchoring.

Below: 3 Hours later it was roaming closer.

Brown Bear

- While sharing our anchorage with the iceberg, we saw a juvenile brown bear. This little guy looked young and thin. Many of the bears don't survive their first year away from their mother, and we wondered how he was getting along.
- He seemed pretty content sitting munching on grass and roaming around the shores, but he looked pretty small.
- Ok, so I'm not a very good wildlife photographer, but these were also taken from a moving boat, with a camera whose battery was dying. At least I'm getting better at dealing with adverse conditions.... But I can tell you that I missed some beautiful shots of this guy because the camera kept shutting off (Sherrell thinks he looks like a cute little teddy bear).



Glaciers & Ice Bergs

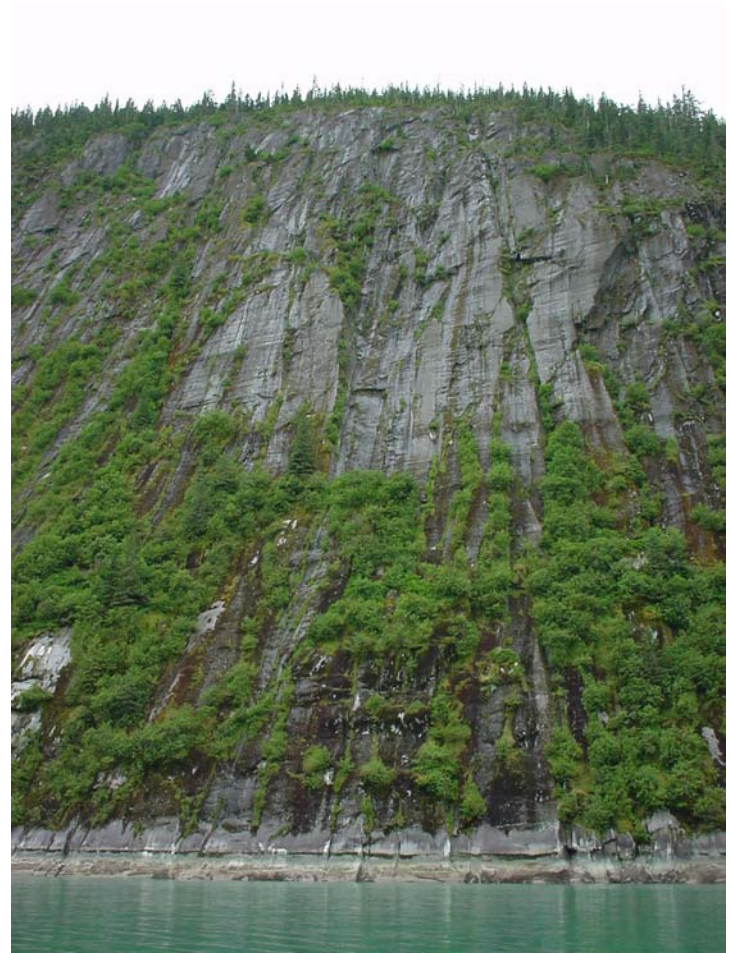


Now I should probably say a few explanatory words about this environment. Ice and boats don't mix well. A small piece of ice can bend or break the propeller leaving the boat disabled. A large piece of ice can scratch up the boat like a rock. They can roll over suddenly or split in half and send out large waves. And if you're at anchor, they can slide along your anchor chain and pull your bow into the water. Because you can only see 10% of the berg, you never know where the other 90% is lurking – hitting one of these is like hitting a rock. That said, these babies are the primal geological powerhouses that shaped this coast line and it is spectacular to see what the receding glaciers leave behind..

Tracy Arm

- Tracy Arm is one of several fjords in Alaska. The fjord was only recently surveyed in April 2000. Previous to this, mariners were forced to use a very small scale chart, which had only a crude charting of the fjord itself (the shore was depicted as a dotted line to indicate it was not fully surveyed).
- It is roughly 22nm to the end where there is a fork to a Northern and Southern glacier. The Southern glacier is much more active and spews out lots of ice. We were hoping to get to the Northern glacier if the ice didn't get too thick.
- Once you get to the end you have to go all the way back, because there are no places to anchor. The walls of the fjord are 2000 to 5000+ feet tall and the water is over 200 feet deep just 100 feet from the shore.
- We were hoping just to go up and see some of the fjord, waterfalls, icebergs and maybe some wildlife. If we got to the glacier that'd be great, but we didn't want to put our home in any sort of danger.
- The following images speak for themselves; I won't clutter them with comments.

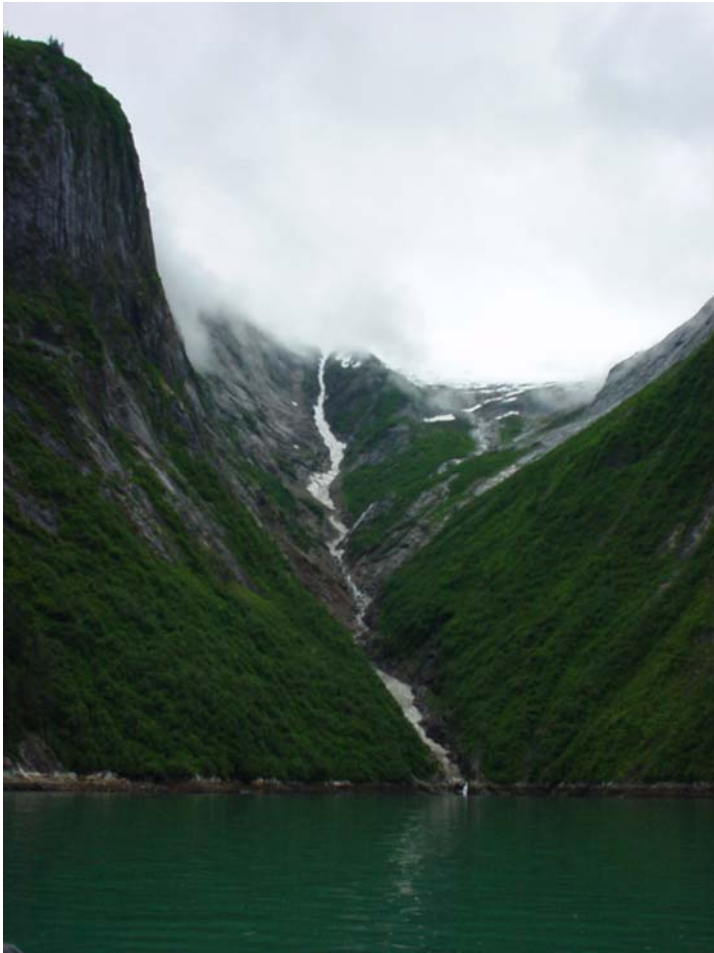
Tracy Arm



Tracy Arm



Tracy Arm



Tracy Arm

- Did you notice the sailboat in one of the photos? That might help you understand the scale of these walls. They are literally 1000's of feet straight up.
- In fact the fjord walls are so steep, our navigation system (GPS) didn't work because the satellite coverage was blocked by the granite cliffs.
- Unfortunately a place this amazing also draws tour boats. There were many large boats (small cruise ships) and medium sized boats that plowed past us (even one full-sized cruise ship passed us). These larger boats chew up the ice and spew out hundreds of smaller chunks that cause problems for us little guys.
- We went about 18nm up the fjord before the icebergs and "bergy bits" started to get thicker. Dodging them became a constant activity. The two California boats ahead of us were swerving to avoid them. Over the radio one of them indicated they were turning around. The other one wanted to keep going.
- The other boat soon called back to say they had decided to turn around also, as the ice chunks were getting thicker, and impossible to completely maneuver around. Considering there was still 4 nm to go and another 4nm back through the stuff, we threw in the towel too. There was still a ton of cool things to look at on the way back.

More Tracy Arm



Tracy Arm Last Thoughts

- Despite all the motion, icebergs, cold weather, and very cold water (44 deg.) Jezebel didn't seem to be the least bit perturbed.
- I know some of you can't believe we didn't get to the glacier. For many boaters, getting to see glaciers from the boat is the end-all-be-all to the Alaska trip. In fact Tracy Arm was the turn around point for the California boats. I guess we just didn't feel it was really worth the risk. We were going to bypass Tracy Arm all together, but having two other boats with us gave us the courage to give it a shot. We knew that if anything did happen, help would be near. But going into the glacier field invites another, bigger set of risks.
- Yeah, yeah, lots of people do it. We know several that have, but it just wasn't for us. Maybe in a steel boat, maybe in someone else's boat, no problem in a twin engine boat with maneuverability and horse power. Maybe if our boat wasn't our home....
- Sherrell figured we didn't really need to see the glacier. The trip up Tracy Arm was more than we could have ever hoped.



Taku Harbor

- The next stop north for us was Taku Harbor. The harbor consists of an old abandoned cannery set in a scenic little bay alive with bears and river otters. The state of Alaska keeps a public dock here for visitors, but nature has been left alone to reclaim everything else.
- From here, Juneau is a short 20nm away.



Sarana at Taku



Sun setting on Taku Harbor

Taku Cannery Ruins



Approach to Juneau



Sunny day motoring into a headwind



Blurry Mountain Goats on Mt. Juneau

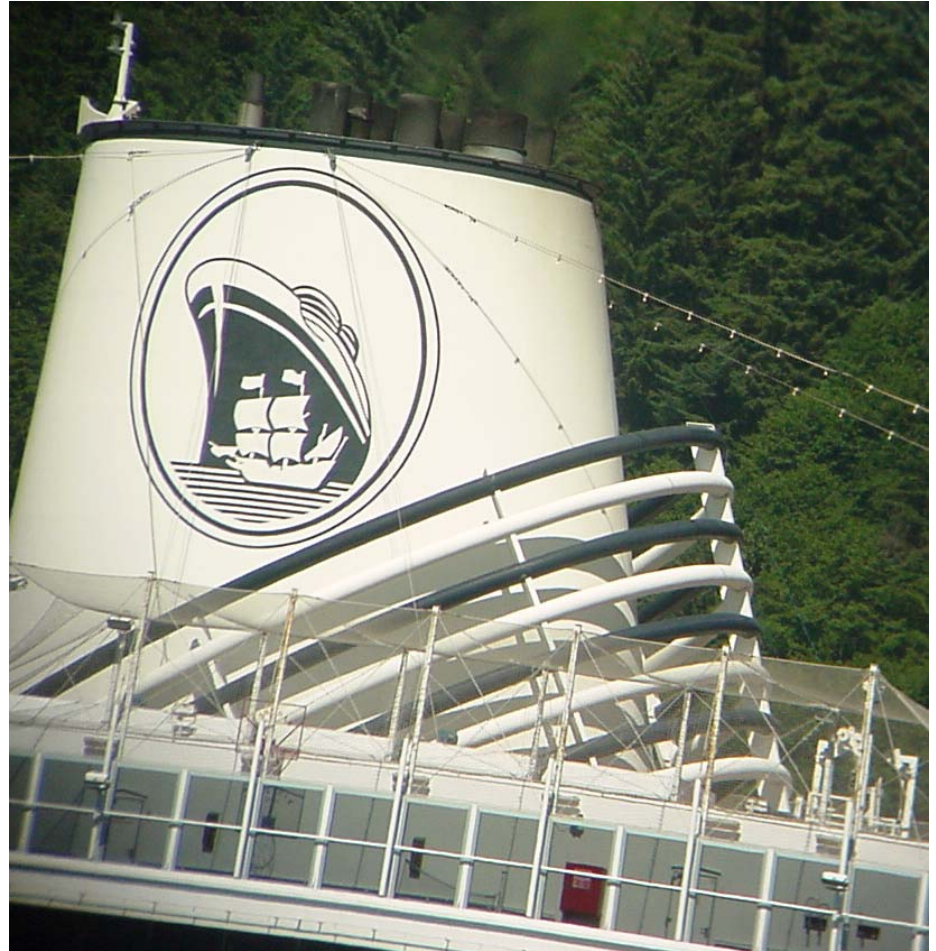
Juneau!



- We made it! 58 days, 38 stops, and over 10 degrees of latitude. Probably the slowest passage on record, but we've really seen a lot of cool stuff.
- Now that we are in Juneau we've stopped to do some much needed work on the boat. Your typical stuff, prop up the engine on blocks, replace a broken mount, fiberglass the cracked support, get 2 modified engine brackets made. Oh, and remove 2 bolts that sheared off in the block.
- The funny part of the story is the Marina wouldn't let us hookup to shore power because they don't manage the power on the dock. They actually told me the best option is to rent a generator! Since no one rents the slip we're in, I decided to go to the local power company and talked them into signing me on as a customer so we can use some power tools. Would you guess the marina is government run? Normally you just pay a daily fee to the marina to use power....
- I'm now a proud new customer of Alaska Energy Lighting and Power.
- Hopefully we can get the repairs done quickly (and get the parts from Seattle) so we can still continue our plans for going down Baranof Island. If not, we'll have to just reverse our route and retrace some steps.
- Anyway, Juneau is quite cosmopolitan. There's a surprising amount of vegetarian food and there's a natural foods store here too. We also spotted some democrats, if you can believe that.

Juneau

- Sadly, Juneau has the cruise ship plague. They get about 4 a day, but the town is almost big enough to absorb them. But it still surprises me how many cameras some people can carry.
- I think I'm becoming obsessed with complaining about them, but just look at one company's logo. It shows them running over a sailboat!!!!
- We went to a JUMP (Juneau Underground Movie Productions) Film Festival where locals had made several short films (87 minutes worth). One was titled "RAWHIDE" and described as "Have you ever REALLY watched the tourists?" And to the tune of rawhide and the lyrics "keeping those doggies moving" the film showed fast motion images of thousands and thousands of cruise ship tourists flooding the streets, shopping, filming, photographing and buying everything in sight. The entire room was cheering and laughing. Sherrell laughed so hard her eyes were watering.



Mendenhall Glacier

- There's a popular glacier near Juneau which offers some good hiking trails. While the fiberglass repair was curing, we took some time to follow the hordes to the glacier. Odd though, we only ran into about 15 people on the trails. Not many seemed to make it past the visitor's center.



This glacier is 12 miles long and fed from the 5th largest ice field in North America. It takes the ice 80 years to flow from the top down to the water. However, it is receding faster each decade and in the 1930's it covered the spots from where these pictures were taken.

Next?

- After we finish with the repairs, we plan to head northwest to Auke Bay then start heading south as it's roughly shown in the chart.
- There's more hot springs and a couple of native villages to visit before returning to Petersburg and the crowded Wrangle Narrows.
- We had hoped to visit Sitka, of which we hear repeatedly that it is the prettiest town in Southeast Alaska. But with these unplanned repairs, we just don't have the 5 additional days we'd need to make this side trip, and actually see something of the town.



Sitka