

SECTION 5: ADMIRALTY & BARANOF ISLANDS

Saturday, June 30, 2007

**Thomas Bay (on Frederick Sound near Petersburg) to Pybus Bay
(on Admiralty Island) 50.3 miles**

Last night we wrote: “We hope the crabs are happily crawling into our trap and feasting on fish heads. Tomorrow we’ll see.”

After pulling up the anchor we fetched the crab pot, very close to shore but still in forty feet of water. It felt heavy as I pulled the weighted line onboard – and no wonder: inside were ten crabs! Bob does the sorting. You grab them by the middle, avoiding the large waving claws and turn them on their backs. Females (which are usually also the small ones) go back in the water. We kept five big crabs – the legal limit.



It’s raining lightly. A fog lies on the water, a layer only a few feet thick, so trees emerge above it. Thick trees line the shore, but there is a rock ledge and a grassy area. It would be a perfect place for going ashore, but we didn’t inflate the dinghy yesterday – too cold and wet. Sam didn’t seem to care, and used her green mat as we pulled the anchor up.

By 10 a.m. boat time (9 a.m. Alaska time) we are heading up Frederick Sound with just a few tiny wind waves, overcast sky but no rain. Ahead we see snow on sunlit mountains and two boats on the horizon. At 12:15 we pass the end of Cape Fanshaw and head across to Admiralty Island.

At 2 o’clock, after slowing down to look at a passing humpback whale, we reach the entrance to Pybus Bay. We’ve been here before, in 2004. The bay is protected by a series of small forested islands and shoals, which all look alike, especially at high tide. Bob plotted a course through deep water, sort of an upside down “N” configuration, going up along one island to port, around and down the other side, then around another island and up the main channel. Pybus Bay is home to a fancy fishing resort; on our last trip special arrangements had been made for our group to have breakfast there. This trip we just

passed it and its lodge and seaplanes by and headed for the end of the inlet, Cannery Cove, where we anchored by 3 o'clock among lots of crab floats.



We carry a big stainless pot for cooking crab (at home it cooks nearly two dozen ears of Brentwood corn) but this haul required three cooking sessions. Bob cooks them in boiling sea water, 15 minutes, then we chill them in the cooler before cleaning.

By 7 o'clock we are sitting at the table, feasting on sweet, delicious crab that will carry us through several meals. We have to arch our necks to see the tops of the mountains that ring this cove. Snow fills bowls and canyons. It looks like a ski resort but with no ski lifts. A thin waterfall plummets down under the bowls into a creek that drains into our cove. We are hoping that the creek will draw bears at low tide.

Sam is busy catching flies. She does it with the intensity of a herding dog, alert, body tensed, she tracks them in the cockpit, then pounces, catching and swallowing them. Giver her lots of exercise and helps us out.

Tomorrow we will go just a short distance (less than 20 miles) south, to Chapin Bay, and begin our slow circumnavigation of Admiralty Island

Sunday, July 1, 2007 **Chapin Bay, Admiralty Island, Alaska**

How could we be so fortunate? We are absolutely alone in this silent cove. Fish are jumping from the water, so thick we can see them just under the surface. We think they are herring, small, perhaps 6 inches long. Bob is sitting in the cockpit, studying an eagle on a tree near shore. The only sound is the occasional splash of a fish popping out of the water. Even Sam is silent, ears cocked, listening to nature.

We awoke at Pybus Bay to a very low tide, enjoyed crab omelets, raised anchor and by 10 a.m. were clearing Cannery Cove. Half an hour later we passed the diamond-shaped mark at Elliott Island and entered a glassy Frederick Sound. These diamond marks are

interesting; four diamonds fit within the larger diamond-shaped mark. In this case, the two middle diamonds are white and form a horizontal line, as if pointing to a fairway. On top and on bottom are red diamonds.

Passing Spruce Island at 11 o'clock we decided to fish. Sam sat out in the cockpit with me. We enjoyed the quiet, looking at a big light gray sky and big light gray flat water, no flukes, no whales, no chop, no fish...but very peaceful. The weather is predicted to change on Wednesday – about the day we go up Chatham Sound. Sam and I wish it would always be like this (but perhaps with fish biting).

As we approached the inlet to Chapin Bay, our cell phones beeped to life, announcing a voice mail message. “Rabbit Rabbit Rabbit”...Mom, Bob and everyone at Big Bear called us with a 1st of the month good luck greeting!

After talking to Bob Long on the cell phone, we reached the entrance to Chapin Bay at 1:20 p.m. The entrance is narrow, with shoals or rocks on either side, but easily transited with electronic charts. What did we do before satellites and GPS?

We slowly made our way down the narrow passage (shoals and rocks to be avoided) and around a spit of land that opened onto this wide bay. Chapin Bay is round, medium-sized (could easily handle 20 boats swinging at anchor if they could handle deep water) and bounded by steep, forested mountains. At the other end of the narrow entrance the mountains come down to form a “V” and beyond that one can see in the distance dark mountains with snowy slopes. We anchored close to shore in 50 or 60 feet of water.



Today is a momentous day...we finally inflated and launched the dinghy! Sam has been without land for almost three days, and has the green mat routine down. This morning she got up, got her morning cookie, went outside and used the green mat...No problem.

We used the mast and boom hoist to get the dinghy down, then Sam and I rowed around, taking photos, and stalling because I'd just read a chapter in the bear books Steve Dowling recommended and was chicken. Finally we landed. I kept Sam on a leash on one hand and the dinghy's painter in the other as we walked the narrow strip between dense

trees and water (it was high tide). Then we left, rowed around some more and, feeling I'd been too chicken, went back. This time I walked along the shore, still dragging the dinghy behind in case a bear showed up and we suddenly had to vacate. A little paranoid, but better safe than sorry... We are the only ones here in this entire cove. (Only later did we find bears, on the other shore, not this one.)

5:45 p.m. PDT and boat time (4:45 Alaska time): It must be the social hour. Across the cove two bears amble along the beach, probably a sow and her cub. A pair of eagles fly between us, looking for fish. Otherwise it is absolutely still, except for the cries of the eagles. We are the only boat in this lake-like bowl of water. The narrow opening leading to Frederick Sound and sea is hidden behind the point of land Sam and I walked on.

7:10 p.m. PDT (6:10 Alaska Daylight Time): The sun just came out, blazing down on us from high above the tall mountains that protect this cove. It will not set for a long time.

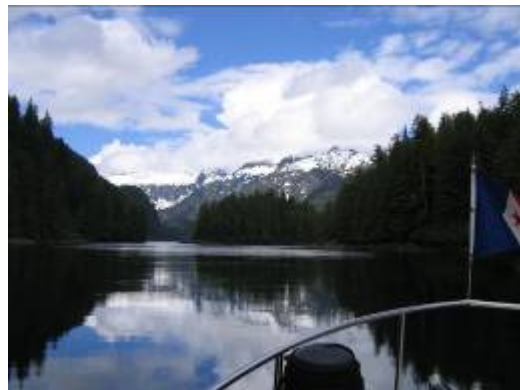
Monday morning: There is a minus tide so lots of beach this morning (and no bears). An eagle sits at the top of a tree near the point, small white head very visible and, through binoculars, his scanning eyes. It's hard to tell where water ends and shore begins, the water is so still. I assume it is where the horizontal layers of water, yellow (ochre) vegetation, brown gravel beach, green grass, white flowers and green trees repeat as reflections.

Monday, July 2, 2007

Red Bluff Bay, Baranof Island, Alaska

(Chapin Bay to Red Bluff Bay: 29.16 miles, about 3.5 hours)

The downside to being alone in these spectacular places is that there is no one to marvel with, no way to call to share our excitement. We are running out of words like "spectacular" and "incredible." Each place bests the one before it, although we just might have peaked here.



We are anchored at the end of a very long inlet, close (about 40 or 50 feet) to a densely wooded shore. A magnificent waterfall plummets down the mountain across the water. Our inlet ends in a shoal that opens onto a large sunny meadow. Beyond the meadow rise snowy mountains. Bob just put “I Left My Heart in San Francisco” on the CD but San Francisco pales compared to Alaska’s beauty. We saw one bear coming in, and expect more in the meadow later. Eagles are scavenging near a log on the shoal.



Sam is laying in the cockpit, enjoying the sun and catching an occasional fly. She’s used her green mat and is in no rush to go ashore, perhaps because I told her she might be considered lunch by a grizzly.

Suddenly an engine noise breaks the mood. Glancing out the window, we see a large aluminum boat with “State Troopers” emblazoned in blue. They were very nice and we think enforcing fish and game regulations. Asked if any of the shrimp pots we’d passed on the way in were ours. “No.” Catch any fish? “Not yet,” I replied, casually mentioning our expensive non-resident fishing license. And then they were gone, leaving us with our music and the sound of the waterfall.

Red Bluff Bay is named for a prominent red cliff that marks the entrance. There is a local magnetic disturbance, possibly related to the iron that probably colored the rock. The entrance is well-charted, and we have a sketch from our guidebook. Nevertheless, it appeared impossible. We are supposed to go between a high wall of rock that marks the southern side of the entrance and two islands. Looking in, even with binoculars, it appears that there is no channel, just beach extending out to a rock with trees on it. The

chart showed a path though, so we crawled forward – and found a deep passage between the rock and shore. We continued down this deep but narrow inlet for about half an hour, enjoying waterfalls along the way.

Weather forecast says a low will kick in on Wednesday, We hope it doesn't. Today's passage was flat and calm, very pleasant. We left Chapin Bay, on Admiralty Island, at 9:30 and arrived at the tricky entrance to Red Bluff Bay at 12:30. We were settled at anchor about 1 o'clock.

One thing about Alaska – things change. I commented on the sunny weather and serenity. Then the rain came. And then two other boats. But now, at 9:20 p.m. (8:20 AKDT) we have glimpses of blue sky, although much wetter decks than before. No bears so far, but an eagle is entertaining us.

One of the other boats came in about 3 o'clock but they are anchored several hundred feet away and are not a disturbance. We continue to marvel at the volume of water cascading down this waterfall. It appears to have at least seven "shelves" so water spray builds up as it hits each flat spot, then falls over the side onto the next flat spot.

Our sun has gone away, replaced by a cold, high fog that dulls the mountain tops.

8 p.m. -- An eagle is perched on a tree just above the boat. We suspect there may be a nest. It's remarkable how visible eagles are, a distinctive white mark standing out among the trees. The trickle of water from a little creek near the boat and the roar of the waterfall the only noises we hear.

A kayaker from the other boat quietly explores the cove, in the rain. The third boat is farther away.

8:45 p.m. We can sit outside between rain showers listening to water in stereo. There are a few little gnats. Sam is getting good at catching them. No bears – tide still too high.