

## Exploring Coastal Northwest America, The Inside Passage from Glacier Bay, Alaska to Seattle, Washington.



The Coastal Mountain Ranges of North America and the off shore islands of the Alexander Archipelago form a protected series of bays and channels extending along the Southeast coast of Alaska and the northwest coast of British Columbia. This area of water has been named the Inside Passage and is part of the Alaskan Maritime Highway.

The geology of the area was shaped both by the glaciers of the last ice Age and the tectonic and volcanic activity associated with the movement of the Pacific and North American plates.

The carryover from the last Ice Age has left the largest inland ice fields in North America and over one thousand glaciers.

The proximity of the Coastal Mountain Ranges to the ocean have resulted in temperate rainforest where Red Alder are the pioneers followed by Sitka Spruce and in the mature forest Western Hemlock.

### Alexander Archipelago



The Alexander Archipelago is a three-hundred-mile-long archipelago, or group of islands, off the southeastern coast of Alaska. It contains about 1,100 islands, which are the tops of the submerged coastal mountains that rise steeply from the Pacific Ocean. Deep channels and fjords separate the islands and cut them off from the mainland. The northern part of the Inside Passage is sheltered by the islands as it winds its way among them. The islands have irregular, steep coasts and dense evergreen and temperate rain forests.



## Sitka, Alaska

Sunday, September 7, 2008

The City and Borough of Sitka is a unified city-borough located on the west side of Baranof Island in the Alexander Archipelago of the Pacific Ocean (part of the Alaska Panhandle), in the U.S. state of Alaska. With an estimated population of 8,986 in 2005,[1] Sitka is Alaska's fourth-largest city by population and the largest city in the United States by area.

The name Sitka (derived from Sheet'ká, a

contraction of the Tlingit name Shee At'iká) means "People on the Outside of Shee," Sheet'-ká X'áat'l (often expressed simply as Shee) being the Tlingit name for Baranof Island. The town is sometimes referred to as "Sitka-by-the-Sea."

There are approximately 126 inches of combined rain and snow fall annually. The average daily humidity hovers around eighty percent. With monthly temperatures ranging from 61degrees in summer to 34 degrees in winter a sense of humor is a valuable survival tool.

What do you do with a boatload of tourists when the boat isn't ready for them to board? Well first you feed them. That is always the first fall back position. After a meal you have a bunch of sleepy people but no where for them to take a nap. The next best thing is to take them on a "City Tour".



The bus is not conducive to napping so the Tour Guide needs to be witty. Not necessarily pretty, just funny. Ours was a thirty plus year resident of Sitka. That indicates not only patience but of necessity a sense of humor.

The Tlingit people were the first people to inhabit the area. Their Totems and Long Houses where they hold Potlatches survive and are reminders of the Tlingit culture.



## Chatham Strait

Sailing north from Sitka on our way to Glacier Bay we pass through Chatham Strait. This area is a favorite spot for humpback whales. We are fortunate to find them practicing “bubble-net feeding”. Bubble-net feeding is a group activity that requires the whales to release bubbles as they swim around a group of fish. The bubbles act like a net and cause the fish to form a tight group. The humpbacks can then come up under the school and capture the fish in their mouths. The whales push the excess water out of their mouths using their baleens as a filter to trap and retain the fish.



This pleases everyone but the fish. When the sea gulls start to gather in a tight group you know that the whales are about to surface and make their catch. It reminds one of Sunday Church Dinners.



As we cruise north toward Glacier Bay we explore exotic sounding places like Pavlof Harbor, Fox Creek and the Inian Islands. Along the shores Stellar Sea lions announce their awareness of our presence. Perhaps it is the memory of being hunted for their fur that makes them so wary of humans.



Along the shore the forest seems to grow out of the face of the rock face that forms the substance of the



land. While inland the profusion of life is manifest by the fallen trees providing a foothold for plants. While there is the appearance of abundance, nothing is left unused. Even flowers from which the pedals have fallen are still visited by the pollinating insects of the area. The scene below brings to mind the lines from Beatle’s song “When I’m Sixty Four (64)”  
(See next page)





From here we move on to Gustavus Alaska where we pick up the Park Ranger that will be the Pilot and Guide for our stay in Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve.



### **Glacier Bay, Alaska**

The Glacier Bay area was originally inhabited by the Tlingit (pronounced Klink-it) people. The glaciers of the Little Ice Age forced the Tlingit to move to Hoonah, across Icy Strait from Glacier Bay. The area that today is the bay of Glacier Bay was completely filled by glaciers until the late 1700's. In 1799 the Russian Alexander Baronov established Sitka as a "White" settlement and the capital of Russian America. In 1867, William Henry Seward the American

secretary of State purchased Alaska from the Russians for **\$7,200,000.00**. In **1777** Lt. Charles E.S. Wood climbed northeast of Mt. Fairweather and therefore was probably the first white man in Glacier Bay. However, he made no mention of “discovering” the bay. **1879**: John Muir recorded his "discovery" of Glacier Bay. He entered the bay in a dugout canoe guided by Tlingit Indians from Fort Wrangell. **1925**: It was the inspiration of one man - Dr. William S. Cooper an ecologist studying how plant life returns to land freshly revealed from beneath retreated glaciers - that lead President Coolidge to establish Glacier Bay National Monument on February 25th. In **1939** President Franklin Roosevelt, by proclamation doubled the size of Glacier Bay National Monument. **1992**: Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve, together with Wrangell/St. Elias National Park (Alaska), Kluane National Park Reserve (Canada) and Tatshenshini-Alsek Provincial Park (Canada), became part of a 24-million-acre World Heritage Site.



In the **1953** U.S. Canadian Pacific Steamship Company first brought modern cruise ships into the area and in the **1960**'s cruise ships began entering Glacier Bay regularly.

Glacier Bay is accessible only by air or boat; there are no roads into the park. More than 400,000 people visit the 3.2 million-acre park each year. Most come on large cruise ships. Yellowstone National Park, in contrast, is two-thirds the size and gets 2.9 million visitors a year. We start our morning at the foot of Johns Hopkins glacier. The glacier is 12 miles long and about 199 feet tall. It is still advancing and calving actively.

The park includes some 12 tidewater glaciers that calve into the bay. The show can be spectacular. As water undermines some ice fronts great blocks of ice up to 200 feet high break loose and crash into the water. Johns Hopkins Glacier calves such volumes of ice that it is seldom possible to approach its ice cliffs closer than about 2 miles. The glaciers seen here today are remnants of a general ice advance -- the Little Ice Age -- that began about 4,000 years ago. This advance did not approach the extent of continental glaciations during Pleistocene time. The Little Ice age reached its maximum extent here about 1750, when general melting began. Today's advance or retreat of a glacier snout reflects many factors: snowfall rate, topography, and climate trends. Glacial retreat continues today on the bay's east and southwest sides, but on its west side several glaciers are advancing.

(<http://www.nps.gov/archive/glba/InDepth/learn/about/nature/geology/glaciers.htm>)

## The Journey South

After we leave the ranger and guide at Gustavus we start the journey south to Seattle. Low clouds and rain showers are our constant companion.

Juneau the capital city of Alaska and recent hang-out of Sarah Palin is our first stop. In the late 1800s when gold prospecting began in the Gastineau Channel region, the area was a fishing ground for local Tlingit Native Americans. A mining engineer from Sitka, George Pilz, offered a reward to any local native chief who could show him the site of gold-bearing ore. After Chief Kowee of the Auk Tlingit arrived in Sitka with ore samples from the Gastineau Channel, Pilz outfitted Joseph Juneau and Richard Harris for a trip to investigate the lode.

The prospectors reached the area in 1880, and although they found gold samples, they did not follow the gold to its source. After their return to Sitka, Pilz sent them out again. On the second trip Harris and Juneau climbed Snow Slide Gulch at the head of Gold Creek and observed the mother lode of Quartz Gulch, and Silver Bow Basin. They staked a 160-acre town site on the beach. By the next year more than 100 prospectors had arrived in the settlement, which was later named in honor of Joseph Juneau.

(<http://www.city-data.com/us-cities/The-West/Juneau-History.html>)

The down town area reflects the same “folksy” traits that the governor has.



The primary destination is Mendenhall Glacier. Mendenhall Glacier is about 12 miles long and located in Mendenhall Valley. The valley is about 12 miles from downtown Juneau and is in the southeast area of the state.

Mendenhall Glacier and Lake was originally known as Sitaantaagu ("the Glacier Behind the Town") or Aak'wtaaksit ("the Glacier Behind the Little Lake") by the Tlingits. The glacier was named Auke (Auk) Glacier by naturalist John Muir for the Tlingit Auk Kwaan (or Aak'w Kwaan) band in 1879. In 1892 the area was renamed in honor of Thomas Corwin Mendenhall, superintendent of the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey (1889–1894). It extends from the Juneau Icefield, its source, to Mendenhall Lake and ultimately the Mendenhall River.  
([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mendenhall\\_Glacier](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mendenhall_Glacier))



Mendenhall Lake and Glacier



The Visitors Center overlooking the bay and glacier provides a scenic overview.

With the memories of Mendenhall Glacier and Bay still fresh we set sail for the next spot along the way south.

### LeCounte Bay

Lying at the terminus of LeConte Glacier, LeConte Bay is an 810-foot-deep , six-mile-long bay. In 1887 it was named for Joseph LeConte, then professor of geology at the University of California. According to John Muir, the local Tlingit name for the bay is Hutli (the mythical thunderbird). On Adventure Cruises when the tourist have been fed all they can hold and are still restless They are sent on Zodiac cruises. LeConpte Bay has a variety of wildlife and icebergs. Today it was mostly ice bergs.



Our ingenious guide captured a small bit of ice to take back to the ship. What do you do with a piece of ice berg? You set up a ship pool to predict when it will be completely melted. Then you sit around and watch it melt. This piece weighed about 25# and took about 36 hours to melt at room temperature.



The larger pieces of ice like these we left to take care of themselves. They wouldn't fit in the boat!



The steep walls of the fjords are subject to rock slides and avalanches. These events deforest an area that is gradually reforested. The first trees to come back are the Alders followed by Sitka Spruce. The reforested avalanche area below is estimated to be about thirty years old. The lighter green color trees are Alders. The Sitka Spruce has not yet begun to reappear.



## Misty Fjords National Monument and Wilderness

Misty Fjords National Monument was created December 1, 1978, and covers 2,294,343 acres of Tongass National Forest in the Panhandle of Southeast Alaska. All but 151,832 acres is designated wilderness. This area is called "The Yosemite of the North" for its similar geology.



The first clear day we have is in Misty Fjords which were named for the misty rain that often veils the area. Rainfall averages  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch per day, but today it's all sunshine and no misty fjords. But we do have cascading waterfalls and breath-taking vistas. These are better than the misty fjords that are advertised.



These fjords are a frequent stop for float planes that provide sightseeing flights over the area. One of the planes made a brief visit while we were cruising the bay.



One of the advantages of small “Adventure Cruise” ships is their ability to enter bays, straits, and channels that larger cruise ships can’t manage. This was the case at Misty Fjords.



With our departure from the not so misty, Misty Fjords we leave Alaska and set sail for Canadian waters.

### **Prince Rupert**

Prince Rupert, named after Prince Rupert of the Rhine, was founded by Charles Melville Hays, the general manager of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway (GTP) and was incorporated on March 10, 1910. Prince Rupert is situated on Kaien Island (approximately 480 mi north of Vancouver), just north of the mouth of Skeena River, and linked by a short bridge to the mainland. The city is located along the island's northwestern shore, fronting on Prince Rupert Harbor

Prince Rupert lies at the heart of the traditional territory of the Tsimshian First Nation. This territory is bordered by the traditional lands of the Gitksan, Nisga'a, Haida and Heiltsuk people, many of whom today make their home in Prince Rupert as well as in their traditional communities along the coast. For countless generations these communities presented the familiar line of post and beam cedar houses along the forest's edge in sheltered bays, with magnificent canoes drawn up on the beach and tall crest poles telling the story of each house and family—and though there are similarities between the nations, each spoke a distinct language and led a unique way of life. The monumental art of the

Northwest Coast Cultures, today famous around the world, reflected the beliefs of the First People in the interconnectedness of all things, and the strength of family networks.



The photo above was “borrowed” from a store window.

The annual rain fall is about 100 inches and the city has been named “The City of Rainbows”. However, we found our Rainbow at Fox Creek.



Every tour company seems to feel an obligation to see that their tour groups have a “Cultural Experience”. In North Western Canada that means a performance by members of the “First Nations” people. There is of course an admission fee. We did our civic duty and supported the concept of “cultural diversity” before going off to explore the port city of Prince Rupert.

The Cultural event was held in the local ‘Long House’ where the local First Nation’s people have their ceremonies (between “cultural events”). There is a lot of drum beating and chanting in the local dialect. This is followed by an interpretation by the moderator. All in all, I would rate its educational value just above that of a root canal.



The profusion of flowers is always a new delight to discover in each and every port. They delight the eye and lift the spirit.



Next on the itinerary is Alert Bay and Johnstone Strait. Of course we can expect a Cultural event in Alert Bay and we hope to see Orcas in Johnstone strait.

### **Alert Bay, British Columbia**



The village of Alert Bay faces south-west along a wide beach on Cormorant Island at the northern end of Johnston Strait. Alert Bay was named by Captain G.H Richards of the Royal Navy in 1860 after HMS *Alert*, a screw corvette serving on the Pacific station at the time. The Kwakwaka'wakw name is Ya'Lis meaning "spreading-leg beach".

At that time the regions occupied by the Kwakwaka'wakw - the northern end of Vancouver Island, the mainland opposite, and the islands between - were rich in sea life and heavily forested. At some time between 1865 and 1870 a Mr. Spencer and a Mr. Huson leased land on Cormorant Island from the government and built a small saltery there. To ensure a larger pool of labour, they persuaded the 'Namgis band from the Vancouver Island shore opposite to resettle in Alert Bay. They also built a mission house, and the Reverend Alfred James Hall from the Church Missionary Society of Fort Rupert took up residence in 1878. This society built a church in 1881 and in 1887 a sawmill. A school was opened in 1899 and by the beginning of the century Alert Bay had become the primary trading center on the coast between Campbell River and Prince Rupert. Today it continues to be the center of art and culture of the Kwakwaka'wakw people.

Northwest Coast societies did not pass their culture through writing since they did not have written words. Rather, their culture and heritage was shared with future generations through the use of imagery and oral tradition. Deeply embedded in native art is historical meaning and context which tells a story of a time and place in native history.

The key elements of First Nations art are line, color, and form. The lines used are bold and strong and not jagged. Through the use of smooth and curving lines, clear boundaries and shapes are created. In addition, form line changes constantly, in both thickness and direction. Bold contrasting colors are used in Native art which allows the areas of color to be obvious and clear. Traditionally, the colors used in northwest coast art are black and red with black being the primary color of the form line. A distinct element in First Nations art is form. The basic components in the art are: ovoid, inner ovoid, U-form, split U-form, and the S-form. The combinations of these forms, along with the animal's anatomical features, are used to form various animals such as killer whales, sea lions, and eagles.



The Kwakwaka'wakw believe that their people once made a deal with the thunderbird for its help during a food crisis and in return, the tribe agreed to honor the thunderbird for all time by making its image prominent in their Northwest Native American art. This is why West Coast totem poles often have thunderbirds with outstretched wings at the top. The English word totem is a transformation of the Anishinaabe (Ojibwa) word (*odoodem*) for clan (kinship group).

Alert Bay boasts the world's tallest totem pole, at 173 feet (two parts), carved by six Kwakwaka'wakw artists. Unlike most totem poles that are specific to a particular family, the fourteen figures depicted on this pole are acquired through marriage and represent some of the tribes of the Kwakwaka'wakw nation.

In spite of their artistic appeal, I found the Mother Nature's weaving to be more appealing to the eye than the Native Art. It was a misty morning in Alert Bay and everything was glistening with droplets of water. The droplets on the spider web below glistened like jewels strung on a fragile thread. The web spinner was nowhere in sight. An artist is not necessarily devoid of common sense. (See below)





### **Johnstone Strait**

Johnstone Strait is a 68 mile long channel along the north east coast of Vancouver Island in British Columbia, Canada. At the southern of the strait it meets Discovery Passage which connects to the Georgia Strait. The Strait was named for James Johnstone master of the armed tender Chatham. His survey party established that Vancouver Island was an island.

The strait is between 1.5 miles and 3 miles wide. It is a major navigation channel on the west coast of North America as it is the preferred channel for vessels from the Georgia Strait leaving to the north of Vancouver Island through the Queen Charlotte Strait bound for Prince Rupert, Haida Gwaii,

Alaska, and the North Pacific Ocean and for south bound vessels from those areas bound for the Port of Vancouver.

The Strait is home to approximately 150 Orcas during the summer months. Orcas are cetaceans, one of nearly 80 different species of whales and dolphins. They are the largest member of the dolphin family.

The name Orca was given to these animals by the ancient Romans. The name may have been derived from a Greek word meaning whale. Orcas live in matrilineal groups consisting of a mother and her offspring. Families that associate with each other form the community. Female orcas live long lives (averaging 50 years and can be 80 or more) that give daughters ample time in which to nourish their own offspring, who in turn learn habits and traditions which are passed on to succeeding generations. In this way, orca societies achieve stability and long term duration. Orca society is based in long standing cultural and acoustic traditions that have common elements but which vary among populations. One striking common element is the virtual absence of overt aggression within and between families. Orca society is peaceful, and cooperative.

There are at least three to five types of Orcas that are distinct enough to be considered different races, subspecies, or possibly even species. Orcas are also classified as Resident, Transient or Offshore depending on diet, social habits and primary sites of hunting. The Orcas that we observed were from both the Resident and Transient populations.



The dorsal fin, the saddle patch just behind the dorsal fin and the white eye patch just above the eye are distinctive for each individual. This enables researchers to conduct long term studies of both individuals and families of Orcas.

Since Orcas are not aggressive toward humans kayaking among the Orcas is popular with both novice and veteran whale watchers. While the Orcas seem oblivious to the kayakers, you never know



The Orcas keep sticking their heads up to look around. That has got to mean something.



Our time with the Orcas was all too brief. From the stern of the ship, we could see the Orcas continuing to hunt as we cruised southward toward U.S. water.

### **Friday Harbor, Washington**

In 1845 the Hudson's Bay Company laid claim to San Juan Island. The harbor got its name from Joseph Poalima Friday, a native Hawaiian man who worked at the Hudson's Bay Company's Cowlitz farm from 1841 to 1859-60. He moved north to San Juan Island and raised sheep around the harbor.

The story of the Pig War and how the San Juan Islands became U.S. territory is an interesting historical caveat, but not for this space.

Back in the USA we clear customs at the port of Friday Harbor. Friday Harbor is a town in San Juan County, Washington.. Located on San Juan Island, it is the major commercial center of the San

Juan Islands archipelago and is the county seat of San Juan County. The population was 2,082 at the 2007 Census Bureau estimate

While we waited for the ship to clear immigration and customs we watched the unfolding of a local drama. A man had fallen from his dockside boat and injured his head. The ship's medical assistant went to his aid and after many minutes the local Emergency Assistance Team showed up.



(Team center: Injured man right: at arrow)

What we learned from this incident was “Don’t get injured in Friday Harbor”.

On a lighter note the local school children have adopted a harbor seal that is blind in one eye. They have named her Popeye. She hangs out at the little fish stand by the water’s edge and waits for tidbits from the fish stand. She only leaves the harbor during the local salmon run and returns when the run is over.



The harbor sports a recently dedicated arch carved by one of local Native carvers. A local artist has made Popeye the center piece of his painting of the arch.



Friday Harbor has a store that sells everything Lavender. They even have lavender flavored ice cream. We came home with a bottle of lavender pepper. So far, it remains on the shelf unopened.

The reason for making port at Friday Harbor was to make our official re-entry into the U.S. So after a very brief time ashore we set sail for Seattle, Washington and home.

We lift our glass once more to the adventures we have enjoyed on our journey along the inside passage. Tomorrow we take wing for home.



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