

Alaska 8 July

Bill Varie arrived in Sitka and I immediately warned him we would be getting up at 0400 next morning. This was not punishment, but necessity since we had to clear Sturgis narrows at slack water or wait days in Sitka for a better window through that treacherous passage. We made the 40 mile trek on schedule and continued on under a grey misty drizzle for 25 more miles. When we anchored in Appelton Cove Bill broke out the fishing gear and in spite of the rain and cold began to catch fish. Each catch got progressively smaller until he caught a halibut so small it would fit in the palm of his hand with room to spare. At that point he retired his equipment and was satisfied that he had caught more fish than Brian York.

It continued to rain and our next stop was the village of Tennike Springs. We enjoyed the hot springs, Bill took a zillion pictures of this quaint village, and we met up with the Spirit of Balto. After many beers, wine and Ed's homemade pizza we stumbled back to Pixie to rest up for our next long leg to Hoonah. The west wind was blowing 15 to 20 down Icy Straight so we decided to bypass Hoonah and continue on north to Auke Bay. We had some sun breaks but the weather continued to be rain gray drizzle.

I spent the next day riding my bike in the rain and provisioning at the Fred Meyers superstore, where I found many of the minor little culinary pleasures that were simply not available in the small groceries in the little Alaskan villages along our route.

Up early again and out into a rainy windy sea. The plan was to make the 65 mile trip to Tracy Arm to see the Sawyer Glacier, but about halfway the sea kicked up to 4-5 feet on the nose with 20 -25 knots of wind so we turned tail and went north up the Gastineau Channel to Juneau. Happy 4th of July, we arrived just in time to see the stupendous holiday parade in the rain. Bill explored the downtown after the parade and counted 42 jewelry stores. I went to bed at 9:00 PM but Bill stayed up to midnight to watch the fireworks under the rain clouds.

At this point it was only 45 miles to Tracy Arm into a south wind, rain, and bumpy sea. As we progressed we passed at least four dozen gill netters laying out their nets. Some excitement was observed when one of the boats reported a pod of whales heading toward the fishing fleet. We reached Holkham Bay and immediately proceeded up the Tracy Arm. Low clouds and rain along the way hid the beautiful snow capped mountains that I had seen on previous trips. Yet again we were thwarted in our attempt to see the glaciers by a sea of icebergs and bergy bits that threatened to damage Pixie's hull. So we turned back and anchored in the tiny cove at the mouth of the bay.

The weather the next day was cloudy, but no wind so we made our way toward Petersburg over glassy seas and gray skies. A pod of Dahl Porpoise played in our wake as we motored along. They were replaced by some Orcas heading north past us. Then we had the extraordinary luck to encounter several families of Humpback whales. Some actually swam within yards of Pixie as they fed.

In Petersburg we saw the sun for the first time since Bill arrived. I guess Alaska had to show Bill that the sun actually comes out here, occasionally.