

# Impressions of the Inside Passage

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*Copyright 2004, by Russ & Donna Sherwin, cruising on the Motor Vessel Four Seasons*

## Northbound

It was June. We had been on the water for a little more than 5 weeks and were seriously into Southeast Alaska. It was early afternoon as we rounded the point into our chosen anchorage for the night. Eagles soared above, waterfalls cascaded down the towering granite canyon walls, and snow-capped peaks were visible only a few miles away.

“Oh, no!” said Donna. “Not more soaring eagles, cascading waterfalls, towering granite cliffs and snow-capped peaks! We had those yesterday!”

‘Fraid so. Not to mention vast glaciers, majestic fjords, prowling bears and breaching whales. That’s what it’s like in Alaska and British Columbia. It’s breathtakingly beautiful, everywhere, all the time. It’s timeless and ageless, yet new and different every day. There’s no dull anchorage or boring passage. You get so you can’t wait to get to the next place and sit, wine glass in hand, and feast your eyes on it all. As I write this in late summer 2004, we have traveled over 3000 miles, converting 1400 gallons of diesel fuel into pictures, new friends and memories of the Inside Passage.

We left Sidney, British Columbia, on Vancouver Island, on April 24, 2004 and headed up to Nanaimo, across the Strait of Georgia to Pender Harbor and up Princess Louisa Inlet to Chatterbox Falls. Here we saw the first of those vertical granite cliffs that not only tower more than 5000 feet above you, but extend over 1000 feet straight down below the water as well, and the first waterfalls. There is a dock at Chatterbox Falls, and there was only one other boat tied up to it. As we went further, up into Desolation Sound, a very popular cruising place for boats from the Seattle and Vancouver area, we discovered the wisdom of getting an early start. Everywhere we went, we were the only boat, or nearly so. In mid-summer, you can walk across boat decks in some of these anchorages, we hear.

Of course we complicated our lives immeasurably by adopting a 4-year old spayed German Shepherd female in January, who turned out to be more like 2 and not spayed. We discovered this on her maiden voyage over to Friday Harbor, after an emergency run to the vet with what we thought was probably an infection of some sort. We named her Gracie, and we have no idea of her previous life, other than it must have involved snow and pickup trucks, because she loves them both. She probably also had a cat. When we started the trip north Gracie was not “boat trained” and we had to plan for frequent dockside stops. Now, after nearly 4 months on the water, she is, and life is better, for us at least.

We hold Larry and Alba Stevens responsible for our being here. We met them in Mazatlan last year and during the several months that we cruised Mexico with them, they convinced us that we would be missing something if we didn’t come up here for at least one summer. Larry told me at one point, “this is wimpy boating”, meaning the Northwest compared to Mexico. He was right about coming up; he was wrong about it being wimpy boating. It’s not. It’s true that there’s very little open ocean exposure, no long passages, and no overnight passages, and there are good anchorages every 20 or 30 miles, unlike Mexico. But it requires

a great deal of planning, studying and worrying, and heads-up piloting and navigation to do the Inside Passage.

Mexico is a known quantity to us. Our fears of the isolation, lack of anchorages or safe harbors, banditos, language barriers, weather, and so on have been dealt with and we're comfortable with them. Up here we had a whole new set to worry about: being caught in a whirlpool, eaten by bears, crushed by whales, hit by icebergs, swamped by calving glaciers, tangled in fishing nets, hitting a rock, running out of wine – the list was long. For the record, none of these awful things happened. We're used to having surf, swell and high winds in Mexican anchorages, with anchor-dragging common. Maybe we're just lucky, but the anchorages up here, for us at least, have been extremely quiet. Quiet to the point of almost being eerie. We have had no wind of any significance in any of them the entire four months. Most of the inside passage is isolated from the ocean, so there are no swells and no surf breaking on the beaches either.

We used the guidebooks extensively, particularly the ones by Don and Raeanne Douglass. There are two uses for guidebooks: Plan #1 is the way we used it, which is to look up each place we wanted to visit, pick the one Don recommended the highest, and go there. Plan #2 is to look up each place Don recommends and avoid it. That's the plan our friends on *Sea Lark* followed, according to Earl. Mostly, using plan #1 worked fine, except for the time we couldn't find Tenakee Springs. We knew it was along here somewhere in Tenakee Inlet, but the charts were confusing, and Don's waypoint seemed to lead to a deserted cove. We kept poking around, thinking there must be a marina here somewhere, but it was not to be seen. Finally, we went another three miles up the inlet and there it was. Don's waypoint was 3 miles east.

The tidal range up here is extreme, and it gets worse the further north you go. Tides of 25 feet are common, up to 30 during springs, with reversing currents in some narrow passages of up to 15 knots! You must time your transit through these places to the minute. More than fifteen minutes one side or the other of slack water can mean dangerous rips, whirlpools, high currents and overfalls. The more we read about these, the more we worried. When Dodd Narrows, south of Nanaimo, turned out to be a non-event – that is, we timed it correctly and had no problem – we were encouraged. The next one was Malibu Rapids, entering Princess Louisa Inlet. Again, no problem because we timed it to the minute. There were more rapids to traverse; Hole-in-the-Wall, followed by Upper and Lower Rapids in Desolation Sound, both of which we timed exquisitely and had no problems other than massive stomach butterflies. There are some places where, if you time one rapids correctly, you will by definition miss the next one. It's impossible to hit both correctly, so you have to hole up somewhere in between and wait for the next tide cycle. We discovered, to our surprise, that the Ports and Passes Tide book was off by up to ½ hour in its predictions of certain narrows, notably Dodd, and our electronic tide tables were right on.

We expected logs in the water, of course; everyone told us to watch out for logs. We didn't see very many until we got out of Desolation Sound into Johnstone Strait. Suddenly, they were everywhere. Most of the logging takes place north of Desolation Sound. The Desolation Sound group, with its intricate, narrow passages, acts as a log filter, apparently. Huge logs accumulate along tide lines, where the incoming and outgoing tide meets. In some cases they form a barrier that is difficult to get through. In whirlpools and eddies the logs race around like battering rams. Some are 3 feet in diameter and 40 or 50 feet long. Some, called

“deadheads”, float vertically just below the surface and are sometimes impossible to see. We steered carefully through all this flotsam, but occasionally had a bump as we hit something we couldn’t see.

We stopped at Port Neville where a woman and her daughter live and operate a post office for the area. A mail plane lands once a week, which is common for these types of communities all through BC and Alaska. We visited Port McNeil, a fairly large town near the top end of Vancouver Island, restocked on groceries, then went northeast across the Strait of Georgia into Retreat Passage in the Broughton Islands. Like many areas up here, you could spend years just exploring the Broughtons. Kwatsi Bay up Tribune Channel was an interesting stop where we saw our first black bear foraging on the beach. Kwatsi Bay has a “Resort” that is being built one stick at a time by a man and woman and two kids who live in a cabin there. We stopped briefly at Sullivan Bay, a village of floating homes used mostly in the summer by people who live elsewhere in the winter. Some are quite large and modern, though the flotation consists of large logs tied together as a raft. All of the logs are rotting, the houses have a slight tilt, and one has to wonder how long these houses will be around. It purports to be an artist community with shops and crafts and stuff, but we were early in the season, and there were only caretakers around.

Cape Caution at the entrance to Queen Charlotte Sound was our first open ocean passage since leaving Sidney and there were moderate seas and not much wind. We were going to stop at Fury Cove, but pressed on up Fitzhugh Sound to Greene Island Inlet instead. The watermaker (also referred to as “the troublemaker”) came to a sudden noisy and tragic end here when the high pressure pump seized up and sheared off its mounting bolts. The watermaker has two pumps: an expensive one and a really expensive one. Guess which one this was? We depend on the watermaker because we anchor out a lot, and even when we dock, there frequently isn’t a good source of water. So we immediately switched from water pig mode to conservation mode, but found we were quite low when we got to Shearwater. They have a filtration system for dock and town water, but it wasn’t working, and the water was muskeg (meaning it flows through the swamp) and quite brown. We agonized over this, finally filled the tank with it and added a dollop of bleach. It tasted fine, just a little cloudy. We ordered \$1900 worth of parts for the watermaker, to be shipped to Ketchikan.

We got a berth for one night in Prince Rupert on the outside dock at the Yacht Club, but got kicked out the next morning when the owner came back. We did catch two nice crabs right under the dock in 110 feet of water before we left. We anchored just across the channel in Pillsbury Cove the next night, then followed a local boat northwest through twisty and shallow Venn Passage on the morning slack tide, and crossed Dixon Entrance to Foggy Bay. Dixon Entrance is the second open water passage on the way up. Again, though 30 knot winds had been predicted, we had 15-20 knots and seas of about 6 feet on the beam. With paravane stabilizers, this is no problem, and it’s only about 20 miles across. In Foggy Bay we met some delightful people on an 80-foot Northern Marine named *Meander*. They had passed us in Dixon Entrance, but kindly saved room for us in the anchorage, then invited us and the folks from their buddy boat *Alyeska* to dine with them that night.

Ketchikan was our first stop in Alaska and our customs clearance port from BC, and we hit the first day of a week long hot spell in late May. We took a berth in Thomas Basin, ate hamburgers at the Ketchikan Yacht Club, and did touristy things for 5 days. The natives were all in T-shirts, the kids were playing in the water under Ketchikan Bridge, and the

temperature was approaching 80 degrees F. Many cruise ships were in, and we visited briefly with friends, Buzz and Linda Elliott, who happened to be on one. The package from Village Marine Tech arrived at Mailboxes, Etc. with the new pump, and I spent a day installing it. Everything went well and we had a watermaker again.

Wrangell and Petersburg went by in a rainy, windy blur. We stopped overnight in each of them, then moved on, finding nothing very compelling about either of the towns. We anchored in Tracy Arm Cove the last of May along with *Eagles Nest*, *Meander* and *Alyeska*. This was our first exposure to icebergs. There were several bus-sized ones floating by in front of the anchorage. The next day we went 25 miles up Tracy Arm to North and South Sawyer Glacier, threading our way through increasing quantities of ice, with some helpful advice from a small tour boat that passed us on the way. It was stunning. The sky was clear blue, the water was as still as glass, and we sat there in front of South Sawyer Glacier with all the machinery off for at least 20 minutes without moving more than 50 feet. House-sized 'bergs drifted along with us, and when one as big as *Four Seasons* suddenly rolled over and broke into pieces, chunks the size of refrigerators charging up from underneath, we clearly understood the reason to stay a respectable distance away from them.

We had talked with people in the Ketchikan Yacht Club, and they advised not going up to Haines and Skagway. Big long windy ditch, they said. Not worth going up there. This was one of several pieces of bad advice we got, and fortunately we ignored it. (We sometimes ignored good advice as well.) We stayed one night in Juneau, then proceeded on up Lynn Canal to the town of Haines, which we fell in love with. We visited the Hammer Museum, which consists of 4000 hammers (really); the Cannery Museum which is a restored salmon canning line, in full operating condition except for salmon; the Raptor Center and the Historical Museum. It turned out that Jim, the owner and restorer of the cannery line, has had a long time love of Nordhavn 46's like ours, but had never been on one, so we invited him to visit. He and his wife and daughter came down bearing a gift of about 10 lbs of frozen halibut – Jim is also a commercial halibut fisherman with one of the last “grandfathered” licenses to fish commercially in Glacier Bay.

From Haines, it's only 12 miles further up Taiya Inlet to Skagway. We went beyond Skagway about 2 miles, to the mud flats at the mouth of the Taiya River, which is truly the end of the road. At 59° 29.5' North latitude, it's as far north as you can get on the inside passage. This is the site of the town of Dyea, no longer in existence, where the gold miners provisioned in 1897-1898 for their long, arduous trek up over Chilcoot Pass into the Yukon. We toasted our success. From here, it was all south, as far (we thought then) as Zihuatanejo, Mexico. Interestingly, this is almost the same north latitude as Seward and Anchorage, 400 miles west.

This was early June, and the daylight at this latitude lasts for about 20 hours. There is a device called a grid that is common in Alaska. It's a tidal dry dock. You float over a grid of heavy timbers at high tide, tie the boat to pillars, wait for the tide to go out, and your boat is high and dry until the next tide. You then have 4-6 hours that you can work on the bottom. The morning after we arrived in Skagway, we were tied to the fuel dock near the grid, and I awoke at 3 am to the sound of an air compressor running. When I looked out, I saw a boat on the grid, and the owner was sanding the bottom in broad daylight at 3 am! Alaska is on daylight savings time. You gotta wonder why! They could lease some to us in the lower 48 and still have plenty.

## Southbound

We refueled in Skagway, replenishing the 700 gallons used from Sidney, BC. We returned via Rescue Harbor, Tee Harbor and finally to Auke Bay, north of Juneau, to pick up our company, Margo and Ivan, from California. Auke Bay is a marina that operates first-come-first-served. You find an open space on the dock and just pull in, then tell the office. It's easy, and there is a 3-night limit after which you must leave for 48 hours. If you leave and come back, you won't find the same spot. You may have to orbit for a few minutes, but there's enough in-and-out traffic that you can always find a place. They do have 208-volt 50-Amp power available, but only on specific sections of the dock. If you're out on the end, you'd need 200 feet of cord to reach it. Fishing was good. Right off the back of the boat I caught 10" cod and one Dolly Varden saltwater trout that we had for dinner 2 hours later on, after the company arrived. We left the next morning for Glacier Bay, anchoring that night at Pleasant Island, just south of Gustavus, the town and airport nearest Park headquarters.

Before we left Sidney, and again at the Ketchikan Yacht Club, people told us that if we saw Sawyer Glacier (Tracy Arm), which we did, that we could skip Glacier Bay. Glacier Bay was too bureaucratic and too many rules, they said. True, but more bad advice. You need to see both. You need a permit to visit Glacier Bay after June 1, and we had secured one for three days. The bureaucracy of the Park is off-putting at first, especially when they show you the video and hand you a copy of what Donna calls the "no-no" book. This tells you all the places you're not allowed to go and things you are not allowed to do. But we got over it, and the overwhelming beauty of Glacier Bay soon makes you forget the bureaucracy. It's a huge park, and 3-4 days is about the minimum amount of time to see it. Interestingly, only a little over 100 years ago, when John Muir first visited Glacier Bay, nearly 2/3 of the entire 60-mile bay was covered by glacier ice. Now that has all receded, leaving a wide open bay with many small individual glaciers in the various inlets.

It was cold, overcast, and rainy in Glacier Bay, so we couldn't see the tops of the Fairweather mountain range or Mount Fairweather itself, standing as a sentinel between the Park and the Gulf of Alaska only 40 miles away. We did see glaciers up close and personal, though we were forbidden by the no-no book to go to several we would like to have seen. Muir Inlet which includes Muir, McBride and Riggs Glaciers are closed to motorized boats, Johns Hopkins inlet is closed to everything the last 3 miles up to the glacier because of newly-born seal pups on the ice floes, so you can only peek around the corner at it. But we were able to anchor right in front of Reid Glacier overnight, and the next morning, after the tide change, we were surrounded by ice chunks. No huge ones; just ones about the size of refrigerators and smaller. Up at the end of Tarr Inlet, we saw Marjorie and Grand Pacific glaciers up close, as well as Lamplugh Glacier in the entrance to Johns Hopkins Inlet. Lamplugh had a large cave at water level that was spewing gray-colored glacier water out at a high rate. The water around all of the glaciers is gray with what is called "glacial silt", a fine, flour like residue from the grinding of the glacier across the rocks. We dropped the hook in Blue Mouse Cove for lunch, and then anchored in North Sandy Cove our last night, and were treated to at least 7 bears and some cubs on the beach, and one coyote. Ivan and I went out to set the crab pot and stopped to say hello to *Jamboree*, a sailboat in the anchorage. They offered us some fresh halibut from a 100-pound monster they had caught that day in Blue Mouse Cove, but since we already had Jim's (from Haines) halibut thawing out for dinner, we declined. When we

relayed this to Donna, we were immediately sent back, hat in hand, to get the fresh halibut and Jim's went back into the freezer for another day.

Shortly after we finished our halibut dinner, a double kayak drifted up to the swim platform with two exhausted guys from Israel, Shay and Amir, asking for water and help. Amir was nearly passed out from, we determined later, lack of water, lack of food and exhaustion. They had become lost and had paddled about 35 miles with only a couple of candy bars to eat, and they had run out of water. We laid Amir out on the floor of the salon, which at that point had no carpeting because of a nearly fatal red wine incident during dinner, two in fact, that resulted in the carpeting hanging over the rail in the back cockpit, drying out after being hosed off. These were interesting, funny guys, once they became human again. We called the Park Headquarters on the radio and they sent a boat out with an EMT to check them out and get them back to the hotel. We saw them the next day at the hotel and they bought us lunch.

The whale show we saw coming back into Bartlett Cove, staged just for us no doubt, was extraordinary. What we thought at first was a small whale jumping out of the water was actually a very large gray whale splashing its very long flipper back and forth with great energy. We watched it for at least 30 minutes as we approached very slowly, and went past.

We took two days to return to Auke Bay via Hoonah. Hoonah has a very nice marina and a great marina manager who takes real good care of boaters, but as for the town – don't bother. Of course, this opinion was formed in part by the fact that it was pouring rain during the time we were there. But still... it ain't much!

Before Margo and Ivan caught their plane home, we visited Mendenhall Glacier, right above Juneau. You can (and we did) walk to it from the last bus stop. This is one of the more spectacular glaciers you can visit, and it's nearly right in town. Of course, Juneau is a major cruise ship destination, and there were five of them in port that day, so the area was full of tour busses and tourists from the cruise ships. There were endless helicopters circling over the ice field, usually 5 to 8 in view at any given time doing "flightseeing" tours. We couldn't even get into the museum there were so many people, so we spent about 2 hours hiking an obscure trail pointed out to us by the Ranger out to the waterfall and the base of the glacier. Then, after all the tourists left, we looked through the museum, saw the movie and went into the gift shop.

Another set of company, Byrl and Fran Williams, arrived the day after Margo and Ivan left. Because they only had three days, we had planned on taking them from Juneau to Tracy Arm and back, but we were so impressed with Glacier Bay we decided they HAD to see it. So at the last minute, Donna finagled another permit for three more days, and they got their flights changed to arrive at Gustavus instead of Juneau. One of the more obscure park rules is that the same captain can't bring a boat back into the park during any given season. Since I had been captain on the previous trip, Donna became captain for this trip. You gotta love bureaucrats! We picked them up at Bartlett Cove and did pretty much the same tour all over again, stopping at the same places, seeing the same bears (no coyote) and whales, but this time in bright sunshine and hot weather. We anchored again in front of Reid Glacier, and again, were surrounded by ice in the morning after the tide change. I went out in the dinghy and brought back an ice chest sized chunk. We hacked off some for the cooler and gave the rest to Gracie. She loved it. She flung it around the cockpit and chewed on it for an hour until we finally put what was left into the ice chest to keep the beer cold.

In front of Marjorie and Grand Pacific Glaciers, we did a do-si-do with the Sun Princess cruise liner, talking with them on the radio to arrange where they could go and where we could go so we could all see the glaciers without running into each other. They were extremely pleasant and accommodating to us, as we were to them. We were able to see one major calving from Marjorie that generated a wave that rocked our boat (but not the Sun Princess). As we left, they radioed us about six brown bears they had seen on the beach to the north, but we couldn't find them. Grizzly bears and brown bears are the same bear; grizzly is the term applied to brown bears when they are inland, and brown when they are near the coast.

We fished for and didn't catch halibut or salmon. We did catch 4 large crabs in Bartlett Cove, however. After a fast three days, we dropped Fran and Byrl back at Park Headquarters where they took a small plane from Gustavus over to Juneau and caught their flight back home. We anchored once again in Bartlett Cove, had dinner that night in the hotel, and upon returning to the boat, I dropped a fishing line off the back and instantly hooked a 34" 20-lb King Salmon!

From Glacier Bay we went down the west side of Chichagof Island, through Peril Strait to Sitka, stopping at Tenakee Springs (after we finally found it), Corner Bay and Piper Island. The main engine alternator quit charging along about here, so we had to run the genset a little more than usual to keep the batteries charged. We managed to get assigned a berth in Sitka for 5 days, not an easy task – some folks had to anchor out for a day or two and wait, others would get kicked out of a berth they had been assigned to because the owner came back. I spent the first day in Sitka, all day, putting in a new alternator, running to the hardware store, and finding and installing all new belts. To my surprise, the "spare" belts I have been carrying around for four years were obviously for someone else's boat – not ours. I had to get Napa Auto Parts equivalents, not quite the same size, which required modifying some of the bracketry and belt shields on the front of the engine to make them fit. However, if you're going to have a problem like this, Sitka is a good place to have it.

We managed to catch the last of a series of concerts in the summer music festival (three Beethoven pieces, two of which were excellent), saw the Tlinget dancers (so-so) and the Russian dancers (pretty good), visited with several boat friends who were there at the same time, went to all the museums and the totem park and just had a grand time.

It was now the first of July; we headed back out Peril Strait, and down the west coast of Baranoff Island, which has to be the most beautiful place in the world. Every anchorage was just breathtaking. In Red Bluff Anchorage, we looked up to see our friends Earl and Ginny on M/V *Sea Lark* pulling in unexpectedly, headed up to Sitka from Ketchikan. We had a nice visit and a pig-out of smoked salmon, cheese and wine. It was along about here that I started making sounds about how I could get used to the idea of staying another year up here. Donna rolled her eyes, having set her heart on going back to Mexico this fall.

We bypassed Petersburg and Wrangell by going around Cape Decision, up through Sumner Strait and Clarence Strait, stopping at Port Malmsbury, Labouchere Bay, Kindergarten Bay and the tiny settlement of Meyers Chuck. From there we spent a week touring Behm Canal from the north clockwise to the south, stopping about every 20 miles in one after another breathtakingly beautiful anchorage. In Punchbowl Inlet we watched a brown bear (grizzly) prowl along the beach, eat grass and take naps in the meadow for over 2 hours. There were

people camped nearby, but they were gone exploring. When they came back, their dogs chased her off, but she didn't go far, reappearing from time to time where we could see her but they couldn't. We also caught a load of crabs here, and fished for halibut but didn't get any. We could use the phrase "fished for halibut but didn't get any" many, many places. "Fished for salmon but didn't catch any" was also hugely popular.

But that's not to say we haven't caught any fish. We have. But we have learned the 4 phases of fishing according to Donna: There's 1) fishing, 2) hooking, 3) keeping, and 4) eating. Things can go wrong in any one of the first 3 phases that can deny you fish for dinner. Our friend Chris on *Compromise* claims that she catches fish with brownies. We caught one large king salmon with 2 rolls of paper towels. Having overheard the guys on the fishing boat next to us in Ketchikan talking about not having any paper towels, I tossed two rolls on their deck. The captain thanked me, then hollered down belowdecks, "Hey, do we still have that king on ice down in the hold?". They did, and minutes later it plopped on the dock beside us, with the guys all waving goodbye as they left the harbor. A few days later, we hooked a Coho while Donna was trolling and I was in a state of sartorial disarray in the forward head.

We finally made our way into Ketchikan, restocked on groceries and fuel, had one more round of hamburgers Friday night at the Ketchikan Yacht Club, and continued south. By now we had pretty much decided, in fact were actually telling people, that we were intending to stay another year. This means giving up Mexico this fall in favor of another cold winter in Sidney. What are we, nuts?

Darlene and Floyd Minor are caretakers of the Misty Fjords Lodge in Mink Bay. This is about 40 miles southeast of Ketchikan, up Boca de Quadra Inlet. Darlene is a radio ham, KLØYC, and runs the early morning Great Northern Boaters Net on 75 meters. We stopped for an overnight visit that stretched to two nights because of incredible hospitality on their part. It was overcast and intermittently drizzling rain. We asked Darlene if there was any place near that we might catch a halibut, having had no success to date. She told us about her favorite "halibut hole" just 50 yards off the dock, and after rigging a line with bait for us, she stood on the dock and directed us as we dinghied out to the exact spot. At her thumbs up sign, we dropped the hook and INSTANTLY caught a 27-pound halibut! Darlene, halfway back up to the house, ran back down to gaff it for us and help us fillet it. We had fresh (really fresh) halibut that night. That's one of the reasons we stayed another night, but this triumph was not to be repeated. We tried three more times in the same hole, but there were no more halibut stupid enough to fall for the same trick.

We had missed Ocean Falls on the way up, so we bypassed Shearwater and Bella Bella on the way back to visit there. What a delightful place! It's a small town of maybe 30-40 hardy permanent residents that swells to 60 or so during the summer. They call themselves "The Rain People", not without reason. Ocean Falls used to be a booming paper mill and sawmill town with more than 6000 residents, but this was 30 years ago and all of that has gone to ruin. Now they have a dam and power plant that furnishes electricity to Bella Bella and Shearwater, and a salmon farm. There is a ferry to Bella Coola that runs twice a week to bring supplies and provide transportation, but with the recent privatization of the ferry system, who knows how long that will last. Surprisingly, there are four restaurants in town, if you include the bar that only opens on Friday nights and serves hamburgers. Our favorite was Eva's Holy Grill, in the back of what is still a Catholic church, though there are no services anymore.



From Ocean Falls, we stopped at Codville Lagoon, Safety Cove where we caught a Coho and a pink salmon, and Allison Harbor, then across to Port Hardy. On the way across Queen Charlotte Strait, we caught five more 3-4 pound pink salmon in about an hour, which we took into Hardy Buoys Fish Processing for smoking. That resulted in 7 pounds of smoked salmon of three types: regular, candy glaze and peppercorn crusted.

In Port Hardy, the northernmost town on Vancouver Island, early August, it feels like the trip is over. It isn't; we still have at least 400 miles to go, down the West side of Vancouver Island to get back to Sidney/Victoria for the winter, but having touched Vancouver Island once more, we feel like we've turned a page.

### Finale

It's different trip down the west side of Vancouver Island. You leave the relative security of the Inside Passage with its protected waters and absence of swell and encounter 400 miles of open coastline with several major capes which can generate interesting weather phenomena. Cape Scott is the first, on the northwest corner of Vancouver Island. This is known for its unpredictable winds and currents, and is to be highly respected. Watching the weather forecasts carefully, we left Port Hardy August 7, stopped overnight at Bull Harbor, crossed the Nawitti Bar the next morning, around Cape Scott in absolutely flat water with no wind, and into our destination, Winter Harbor in Quatsino Sound. Interestingly, though Quatsino Sound is nearly 100 miles around the north tip of Vancouver Island by water from Port Hardy, it's easternmost channel is only about 8 miles by land.

There are five major sounds, Quatsino, Kyuquot, Nootka, Clayoquot and Barkley, along with a number of bays and inlets. We explored Quatsino sound for a day, then went into Klaskish Inlet in Brooks Bay for the night where we found a group of four huge mooring floats for our use. These things are made of four stacks of four truck tires, a total of 16 tires for each float with a welded metal plate and pipe loop on top. Klaskish was the narrowest of all the inlets we have traversed so far. If we had had the paravane poles extended, we would almost have touched the overhanging trees on both sides! Once inside, it's secluded and calm.

We rounded Brooks Peninsula, a famous, or infamous, point of land that is considered to be the dividing point between the rougher northern weather, and the milder southern weather of the west coast. It was fairly lumpy going around Brooks, and we were glad to get safely anchored in Bunsby Cove, a cute little rock bound anchorage in Checleset Bay where we saw hundreds of otters playing just outside. Next just down the road in Kyuquot Sound is Walters Cove, a pleasant village with a tortuous, winding entrance through numerous rocks, some of which are marked with buoys, some not. We tied to their dock along with another sailboat, free of charge, but with no power or water. There was a restaurant, but they declined to serve us because they were fully committed to the people on the supply boat *Uchuck II* which came in that evening with several dozen tourists and kayaks. One interesting thing about the *Uchuck II*, aside from the fact that it's a beautiful old boat, was that it had a lift for the kayakers. They lower the lift into the water, the kayaker paddles over it, and they winch kayak, person, gear and all onto the boat.

Next stop, Esperanza Inlet after rounding Tatchu Point in dense fog, where we had one of those heart-stopping moments as a boat emerged from the murk about 100 feet away headed straight for us at full speed! Because of the fog, we anchored in Queen Cove, but after dropping the hook and having lunch, we decided to go on up to the town of Zeballos. It was

still quite foggy, but the fog bank ended just about 3 miles on up the inlet and it was a clear run the rest of the way. Zeballos didn't amount to much, but we did walk around town, gave Gracie a good walk, and had a good breakfast the next morning at one of the lodges.

Tahsis, the next day, August 14, was a delightful town. Westview Marina is a fine, full service marina with a good restaurant, nearby shops and a bakery! We loaded up the freezer with cinnamon rolls, turnovers and Danish, this being the first place in many weeks that we could get them. Two large German Shepherds owned the docks, and Gracie's repeated attempts to take command were received with polite disdain.

Bligh Cove, a tiny secluded anchorage at the edge of Nootka Sound, was most memorable for its murky, copper colored water. The next day we pressed on, rounding Estevan Point on the Hesquiat Peninsula in nearly flat seas and overcast sky to Hot Springs Cove, where we got one of five mooring balls, another of these 16-tire affairs. We walked the boardwalk from the dock to the hot springs, a magnificent piece of work with carefully mitered and fitted planks that is almost a mile and a half long. Boaters and other visitors over the years have engraved many of the planks with their names. The Royal Victoria Yacht Club, for example, had a series of 20 or 30 planks in a row with member's boat names professionally engraved by machine. The hot springs is a deep cut in the rock where a tiny stream of hot, sulfurous water cascades out over a pool big enough for about 10 people.

This is about the half way point. We went around Flores Island and explored several anchorages in Clayoquot sound. While there, we heard on the radio a sailboat reporting an encounter with "Luna", a renegade Orca that has apparently been abandoned by its pod, and likes to attack boats. Luna was battering the rudder of this 32 foot boat, and had disabled it. They were not far from a marina, but couldn't proceed there on their own. The whale kept it up for several hours, and all attempts to drive it away failed. After that encounter, we heard of another one where Luna took an interest in a rowboat and kept pushing it out away from the docks, foiling the attempts of the persons aboard to get back to land. Luna is a significant hazard and should be dealt with in the same manner as a marauding bear would be, but the First Nations people have decided this is the spirit of their dead chief and refuse to cooperate.

We stopped briefly at Ahousat at the south tip of Flores Island, but found it not very compelling, so after lunch we left and anchored in Island Cove for the night. It was foggy, rainy, predictions of high winds – altogether miserable, but the wind at least didn't materialize. We were beginning to have serious bouts of fog and wind nearly every day. Upon finding what seemed like the best compromise in wind, fog and high seas, we left Clayoquot Sound without stopping at Tofino, the major destination there. Still we had fairly heavy 6-8-foot seas all the way around Amphitrite Point into Ucluelet, but no fog.

We found Ucluelet, 30 miles south in Barkley Sound, to be much more to our liking. So much so that we stayed almost a week, going out a couple of times to fish or to anchor out. We spent one night at the Port Alberni Yacht Club docks in the Broken Group of islands inside the sound. One morning, we had decided to get up early and go out 28 miles to a known halibut hole, and the main engine refused to start. This was the second minor mechanical problem we had on the trip, the first being the failure of the main alternator near Sitka. This turned out to be the starter solenoid, easily replaced with a new one from the Napa Auto Parts store up the road, but by the time I got it installed, the moment had passed and we didn't feel like fishing anymore.

Ucluelet is a delightful town with many shops and restaurants and a great marina. It's first come, first served, and the docking is alongside, "parallel parking" as it were, like in Auke Bay. Only 15 amp power is available, and water is one spigot at the middle of the long dock, so you have to have 100 feet of hose to get it. If you get dock space, then leave and come back, you will most likely be put somewhere else. There's no such thing as a "permanent" berth. Fishing was great, for other people. They were bringing in 30# king salmon by the wheelbarrow load the whole time we were there, but our attempts yielded one pitiful king, exactly legal length, and two small bass. We bought a 10-pound frozen tuna for \$25 CDN from a fisherman who came in from 70 miles out with a load of frozen Albacore. I had to let it thaw out, then fillet it and refreeze it.

Part of the reason we stayed so long in Ucluelet was the weather, rainy, windy and foggy most of the time, making it unappealing to attempt the 100-mile run to Victoria. The other reason was, we were getting tired of traveling. We had been on the go for 4 months, pretty much non-stop, and we were ready to get back to the barn. On September 2, we decided the weather was as good as it was likely to get, and, along with our new-found friend Bill Crawford on *Richmond Star*, we left Ucluelet in 8-10-foot seas, anchoring that night in Port Renfrew. This is just inside the Strait of San Juan de Fuca, normally a windy, rough passage, but by the next morning the seas had laid down and we had a good run all the way to Cadboro Bay, north of Victoria.

We had to kill a few days before we could get into our berth in Port Sidney, so we visited Fulford Harbor, then Coles Bay on the west side of the Saanich Peninsula, getting into Port Sidney on September 5. Now we can boast that we "circumnavigated Vancouver Island", a goal of many boaters from this area. We just did it by way of Skagway, Alaska! Over the winter we will spend time "at home" in San Diego, and cruising in the Gulf Islands, the San Juan Islands, Sidney, Victoria, Puget Sound, Seattle, Anacortes, Poulsbo, etc. We also have quite a bit of work to get done on the boat in preparation for next summer in Alaska. I don't think we will lack for things to do, though we certainly will complain bitterly of the cold, rain and absence of sun. By spring we will have forgotten all that and we will be ready to head north once again, to the land of eagles, glaciers, icebergs, bears, fjords and waterfalls.

Then, next fall, we will, for sure, head south seeking warmer climes once again. We said that last year, but this time we mean it, Really, Really!

End