

NATURALIST NOTES

AROUND ADMIRALTY ISLAND

July 13-21, 2025

Sunday 13 July 2025 We gather on board at Aurora Harbor slip A-13 for our adventure. Most are old Alaska hands, veterans of many West Coast Family trips. Returning from Anchorage are Lori and Richard Rothstein, Tampa Bay Master Naturalists Lindsay and Tom Bell, Apple wizard and former crew mate Thomas “TJ” Johnson, photo leader Betty Sederquist of Lotus, and lens meister Ash Gokli of El Dorado Hills. Crew is owner Ronn Patterson, Captain Hans Bruning of Santa Cruz, chef Melissa Houston from Kansas City, deckhand Jack Spangler from Boston and myself, John Kipping, mate and naturalist from Pollock Pines.

There is a minus tide for our 9 am planned departure, but the harbor is too tight for turning around in shallow conditions, so we delay until 10:33. Hans skillfully brings us out of the tight marina and we head down the Gastineau Channel for the south end of Douglas Island and then



north-west to Stephens Passage. We encounter several Auke Bay day whale-watching vessels focused upon a few scattered humpbacks. We turn at Point Retreat and enter Lynn Canal for Icy Strait. Many sport fishing boats are encountered and only a few more humpbacks. It becomes windy and choppy until about Pt.

Couverden when calm and glassy seas and bright sunshine greet us. Near Spasski Island and the Sisters we follow a cow-calf pair and Tom recognizes the fluke patterns. For food Melissa provides a baked oatmeal bar extravaganza; Lunch was soup and salad, Bell birthday

dinner of salad, halibut and mashed potatoes and dessert of berries and rhubarb cobbler.

Observed were short-billed, glaucous-winged and Bonaparte gulls, common loon, pigeon guillemots, marbled murrelets. We anchored in Spasski Bay at 18:48 – calm with many leaping salmon about us and a neighboring fish tender which is busy all night on-loading catch.

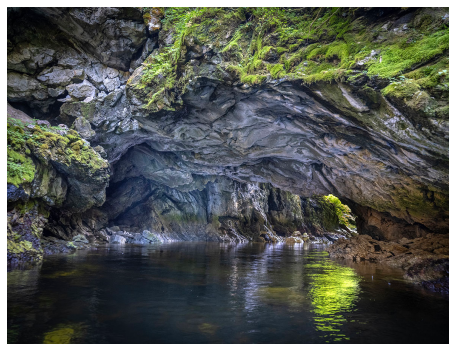
Monday 14 July 2025 The waters are calm this morning with only some distant fog as we head east to Chatham Strait again. We are cruising towards Whitestone Harbor when Hans locates several tall humpback whale blows near another charter boat. He skillfully brings us to a respectful distance to five feeding humpies. Within a half hour the other vessel departs and we enjoy two hours of following the ensemble as it swims back and forth, sometimes approaching us within yards as we have the engines off and hydrophone listening over the side. Two more animals join the effort and we are treated to a spectacular breach by a trailing juvenile!





We turn down the east coast of Chichagof Island and arrive at Pavlof Harbor to anchor near three other boats. We have a view of the waterfall and adjacent beach. A brown bear and her spring cub are grazing upon Lyngby sedge leaves. I take five folks in the skiff to approach the brownies; later a solitary bear is also “sedging” it, and he displaces the mom and cub, both standing at times while checking out the boar. We return to Delphinus II and switch with Hans and the remaining photographers. They too see bears. We hoist the

hook and turn south with sunny, calm conditions and we pull into Basket Bay. Native fishermen have a gill net out and the numerous crab pots are challenges to successful anchoring. Hans skiffs one group and later I another into the stream mouth and its short tall cave of limestone/marble. We pull out then heading towards Hidden Falls where Hans has made a reservation tomorrow at 10:30! On the way five other brown bears are observed working the shoreline. One is black, a “Shira” bear. A raptor is seen and it was probably a Northern Goshawk. We pass into Peril Straits for Hanus Bay, but the ride is bumpy; We anchor up about 10:30 having enjoyed the beauty of an extended sunset.



Tuesday 15 July 2025 We depart Hanus Bay at 0631 under calm and clear conditions, heading out of Peril Straits into Chatham. We anchored at Hidden Falls Hatchery in Kasnyku Bay at 0904. We have 10:30 reservations for visiting the bear area. The inner cove has been sealed off to prevent the entry of chum salmon, so that they are available for commercial catch as well as egg and sperm collection - they can handle 13 million chum eggs per day. We do skiff rides until 1020 and then boat all ashore at the dock for bear viewing. There is a large return of dog or chum salmon and purse seiners are harvesting many. We walk to the creek side and there are five brown bears fishing there: a mom with



a second year cub, two third year siblings and a single older bear. Numerous eagles. We see at least four other bears inside the barrier nets. A gorgeous large male comes and visits. We watch many different feeding styles. There are many bald eagles in the area due numerous dead salmon in the stream bed and lagoon.

We enjoy extra time and after some of the group leaves for Han’s skiff barrier charging ride, we are surprised by a lovely female with 3 small spring cubs! Lots of images





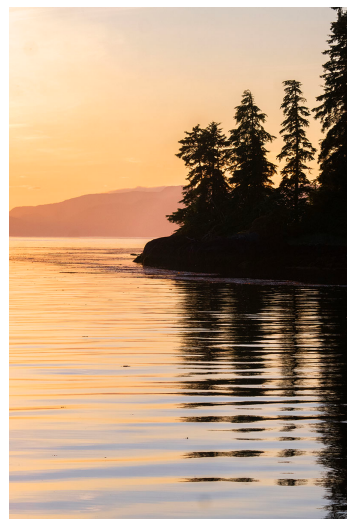
snapped and then we all made a skiff detour to photograph the little family. Four additional bears were seen, and I believe we observed 16 individuals. We pull the hook and Delphinus II streams south a short distance past Ell Cove to Waterfall Bay where Hans gives all a good view of its roaring cascade. We follow the shoreline and pass into Warm Springs Bay. I skiff Betty to the dock for a

bath and then retrieve her. We anchor near entrance to the mini lagoon and Hans, Bells, Ash take kayaks into the salt chuck, we follow in the skiff. After wonderful dinner and best brownies, I take Ronn, TJ, Jack, our chef, Ash, and Hans to the dock for walks and bathing in hot spring water. Later I taxi with many pick-ups. Tom Bell has done salt rinse and then regular washing for this meal. Finish up with these notes at 10:15 after setting up crew beds and turning in for some sleep with the rumbling of the falls filling the wheelhouse.



Wednesday 16 July 2025 Hans takes the Bells and myself to the dock and we proceed to the bath house. What a fine soak we enjoy for an hour, then back aboard to a fabulous breakfast from Melissa and Jack. Hans goes back to dock to pick up long time friend Dr. Fred Sharpe who devotes an hour and a half after his breakfast to enlightening us with humpback information, especially his work with SETI and then gear entanglement progress. Such a fine scientist and remarkable fellow! We head out about 10:40 and I am able to call home. The Strait is a bit lumpy and Ronn drives us

across to Point Gardiner and nearby Yasha Island, which hosts two groups of Steller Sea Lions. We explore Farragut Bay and the northern shoreline of Kuiu Island, but have no whale sightings until we enter Keku Straits. Then we follow three animals for an hour with one making a fine breach in front of us. We later head for the City Float at Kake, passing several sea otters in their kelp beds. We need ice cream and red wine for the lusty. Jack, captain and chef proceed to liquor store where the owner gives directions to grocery store and lends her new truck to them for our use. Bells and Richard trot off to Gunnuk Creek for black bear watching, later we depart for our evening anchor at Honey Cove. As we approach its white beach and limestone bluff, Hans spots a light-colored wolf upon the strand. It fades into the vegetation, but does a quick reappearance for Tom B.





Thursday 17 July 2025 Silvery waters and a calm Frederick Sound greet our morning rise. TJ has again provided our first coffee of the young day, but no wolf songs or sightings. We depart at 6:45A! I drive past Pinta Point towards the reef and see distant blows and bubble net feeding and then even farther south towards Big Creek's large feeding group! Pancakes are being devoured with gusto when I call out the whales. We spend 2.5 hours with two groups totaling about 25 animals. One calf does a couple chin plant

leaps and we see numerous herring at the surface. What a fun morning. Hans uses the hydrophone to good advantage so that we can share the vocalizations. Then we headed towards the Brothers and pass Turnabout Island. There were many common murrelets here too plus a large raft of short-billed gulls. The most exciting avian spotting was a solitary Wandering Tattler which circled the bow three times while serenading us with plaintive calls-a real treat for us. A black bear was seen on shore near Pinta Point. After **8.5 hours** of whales we turn northward towards the Brothers Islands, some 15 miles away. I take the helm and Hans advises me in parking the boat and setting ground tackle. After an amazing dinner, Hans and Jack paddle out to Steller Island. Later the distant fog brings some drizzle.



Friday 18 July 2025 Half of our group eats breakfast and the other accompanies me in our skiff to Steller Island, stopping below the cliff-hanging nesting trees to photograph guillemots. I spot a huge eagle nest at the next islet, in

all we count four nests. Continue to the SW point which hosts 150 sea lions. We use the ebbing current to drift past them three times before rounding our anchorage islet. Numerous black turnstones and surfbirds land and then seem to disappear. Oystercatchers of course are noisier than their numbers should call for. We take a



skiff shore party to examine the cryptogram wonderland with Hans and earlier there had been a kayak cruise. We depart to scan the opening of Seymore Canal, but come up empty for orcas and only a few scattered humpies. We enjoy the shoreline green slate rocks as we approach Holkham Bay and the Harbor Islands. We follow a calf which is trying to grab a few moments of sleep. We decide to enter

Endicott Arm and head for Fords Terror fjord where we join Northern Exposure at the anchorage. Salmon steaks for dinner, brownies. Lunch was salmon quesadillas and salad!



Saturday 19 July 2025 Great sleep but up at 6:30; aft head is acting up again, but would not shut off with toggle switch. Mystery here. Pancake breakfast and we plan two skiff rides into the inner fjord. Black flies on windscreen of wheelhouse. A sailboat is now entering the approach along with a skiff and a brown bear appears a few times across the channel from us. A mink is seen roaming the cobble shore nearby. A small harbor seal and harbor porpoises appear briefly, perhaps quickly satisfying their curious natures. After our two skiff outings to the

giant falls inside Ford's Terror, we return and then detour towards a huge deep blue iceberg which has grounded nearby. We await our turn to closely

examine this turquoise gem that has attracted two skiffs of passengers from another tour vessel.



Later I bring others of our folks to pay homage here. We pull our hook and Jack kayaks to the base of the high falls to satisfy Betty's photographic needs and she is successful! We exit the side fjord and turn southwards to South Dawes Glacier. The icebergs are kind and well spaced, so that our speed is not retarded and Hans brings us with a quarter mile of the face. This glacier has melted rapidly and now the two arms are nearly separated in two.

Standing outside our boat, we experience the cold strong winds generated by cooling air descending the icy valley. We drift for a couple hours, but witness only moderate calvings. We reluctantly bid adieu and head towards the entrance bar of Endicott Arm. Hans, Jack and Ash are left behind with the skiff to gather small icebergs for our vegetable coolers. We set our



course for Sumdum Island and Glacier and we anchor at a favored spot we call the Tea Cup. Soon I spot three brown bears patrolling the shoreline before mom calls them into the tall beach grasses and alder trees.

Saturday 20 July 2025 I tried unsuccessfully to sleep in, but guilt and the fragrance of TJ's fresh Peets coffee win out. I am thrilled to learn that Lori's sharp eyesight still functions, as she reports a light-colored wolf on our shoreline! We take aboard our ground tackle and move across the bar to Woods Spit where we drop it again. After a breakfast of chiliquiles we have a landing party while I return to Delphinus II to board Ronn and the Rothsteins



and Betty for a skiff tour. Numerous harlequin ducks are spotted along with a patient eagle atop a day mark perch. After an hour ashore, I retrieve Hans, Jack and our folks. Another calm sunny morning. The anchor resists being brought aboard, but we have our way and soon are heading up the Stephens Passage, pausing for two circlings of a gull- topped blue iceberg. Midway Island is our next attraction. As we approach the south islet, I had mentioned that two

years prior we had observed a Tufted Puffin. Soon Tom B. announces a fishing Horned Puffin near the seal covered steep shoreline rocks! It is carrying a small fish in its bill and we follow it as it lands and moves into a crevice; perhaps to feed a chick! We observe an eagle nest, hundreds of seals, scoters and surfbirds/black turnstones, but no sea lions.

After heading towards Juneau and our return we are assigned to the same slip- A-13, again in Aurora Haror. We are fortunate to have shore power this time. After dinner the Rothsteins share their Alaskan wildlife show; everyone is blown away, Betty follows with her best 20 of this trip and then Ash also draws many compliments for his images. I stayed up late to assist TJ for his 11:30 pm departure. Jack and I help him with the luggage; some stress as cab is late and no phone contact.



Sunday 21 July 2025 We have breakfast at the dock where all are preparing to depart. I drive the Bells and Rothsteins to the airport and later Betty and Ash to the Driftwood. We are departing tomorrow so all hands on deck to do a quick turn around. The boys, Ronn and Jack, are dropped at laundromat while Melissa and I make a Costco run, return and schlepp supplies to boat and store away same; return to laundromat and also post office. Melissa and I drive to airport to pick up Edith, then a shop at Freddie Meyers. Ray comes aboard late at about 2:15 am! Thanks to everybody on our Admiralty Island voyage. – John Kipping – Naturalist and mate. Photos by Betty S, Ash Gokli, Melissa Houston, John Kipping

