

Alaska 2016

Part Three Inland Passage

Taking the Alaskan Ferry South





Alaska 2016 Travel Journal Part Three "Inland Passage"

84 Date: 9/5/2016

Time: 6:45 pm

Mileage: 41444

Location: Skagway, Alaska

Island Hopping

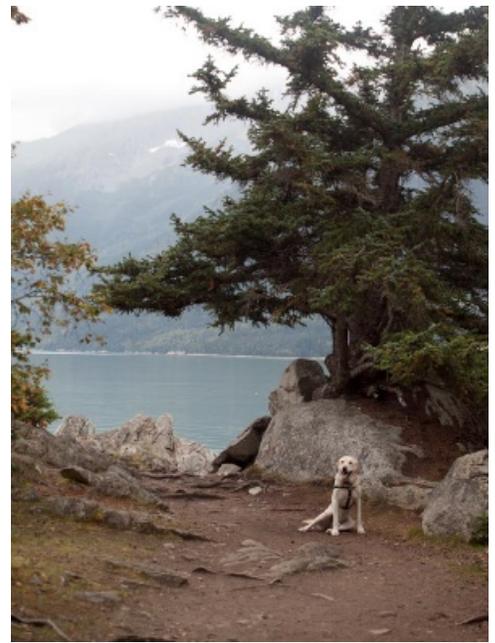
We broke camp in Dyea this morning and came over to Skagway to shop and do the laundry. Next we parked at the ferry terminal and had the motorhome and car measured for the ferry ride to Sitka, AK. I had taken the back plate off the Tracker and the tow bars off the motorhome. They measured only the length of the motorhome, not the width and gave us back \$25. Jill had said the motorhome was 28 feet with the hitch, but without the hitch it measured 27 feet.



We walked around town, bought a Skagway hat pin, and had lunch. There were three cruise ships in the harbor this morning, so there were people everywhere. John Muir was up here doing the stampeed and said Skagway looked like ants swarming out of an ant hill. I suppose we got that flavor from the cruise ship passengers today.

The steam powered locomotive ran today and I got a few shots as it went by. We took a walk on an easy trail from the boat harbor out to Yakutania Point. On the way back, we spotted the ferry boat heading into port.





We moved both vehicles into Lane 7 as instructed. By then the ferry was already docked. Soon, cars, trucks trailers and motorhomes began coming out. The ramps were steep in placed and several had troubles dragging their undersides. It was quite the show, watching the dock crew add steel ramp sections to help get the trailers and motorhomes off loaded. Some thing no one mentioned, is that the propane had to be turned off. We hope the freezer and frig don't spoil any food. We left Skagway about 15 minnutes late. Our motorhome had no scrapping issues loading.



While we are moving, we are not allowed on the car deck. So the only time we can go to the motorhome and feed the pets is when we are in port. Our first stop was Haines, only an hour from Skagway. We fed the pets and took Sampson ashore to pee and poop. We left Haines about a half hour late. They loaded a double trailer semi next to the motorhome. There were also several Diesel Pusher motorhomes that came aboard too.



We are now headed to Juneau and should arrive around 12:45 am. Fortunately, we will not leave port until 7:15 am, so we should get up in time to feed the pets and take Sampson to shore to do his business.

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The next stop is at Sitka and we will take the vehicles off there and stay a few days. The run from Skagway to Sitka is 23 hours and 30 minutes, so we also purchased a cabin to sleep in, as they won't let us sleep in the motorhome on the lower car deck. Sampson and Cinnamon will be in the motorhome. We thought we would have a few 15 minute periods that I can take Sampson out to use the Poop Deck, but that is only if the ports are 8 or more hours apart. We will arrive at Sitka tomorrow at 4:30 pm.

85 Date: 9/6/2016

Time: 6:45 pm

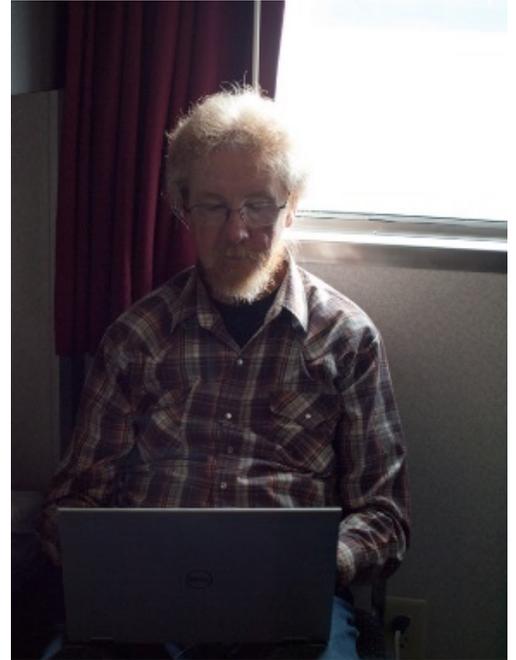
Mileage: 41454

Location: Sitka, Alaska

Back to Solid Ground

Early this morning (about 12:30 am) we made port at Juneau. Jill was still awake, so she went down to say good night to the pets and put Sampson in his crate. I had set my alarm for 6 am, so when I got up, Jill was still asleep. I dressed in the dark in unfamiliar surroundings. Then I went down to the car deck and fed Sampson and Cinnamon. I took Sampson a shore to let him do his business. Like Haines, the ferry terminal at Juneau is out of town. It was overcast, but not raining.

Jill was up by the time I got back, so we headed to the dining room for breakfast. It was too early and they were not open yet. So we headed back to the lower forward observation room and sat at a table and posted yesterday's journal. After that the dining room was open and we had breakfast. It was raining hard through breakfast and we were heading toward Sitka. At one point the islands began to disappear in the fog or low clouds.



We returned to the room so I could take a shower. It sure is nice to be able to let the water run continuously during the shower. In the motorhome we are very conservative

with shower water. Not only could we run out of water, but we could fill the grey water tank. After the shower, the clouds began to lift and the sun began to peek through the clouds, but that didn't last. We continued to have sporadic rain and sun all day. The ferry went through narrower and narrower natural canals as it wove its way through the islands to Sitka.



At noon, they allowed a pet rest on the car deck. Sampson walked around on the car deck, but didn't do his business. So he had to wait until 4:30 when we drove off the Ferry at Sitka. As we docked at Sitka, the sun came out for our departure.



We got a camp site at a Sportsman RV Park next to the ferry terminal. We only bought one night so we could look at our options. The Forest Service campground up the road is in a dense forest with little light and no hook ups and they lock the entrance gate, locking you in (or out) at 8:00 pm. There is RV park in town next to one of several small boat harbors which is a parking lot with power smack-dab in the middle of all the "action." We also followed signs up the hill to another questionable RV parking lot next to the golf course. Where we are at currently, we are the only campers and since there won't be another ferry for a week, it looks like we will be alone here. We are set for the



week with views of the bay. We will call the owners to see if we can get a deal to stay the rest of the week.

Sitka is mostly along the shore and is an eclectic mix of ram shackled trailers, older houses and beautiful homes, all mixed together. There seems to be a number of things we can find to do here, which is good considering we can't leave until the next ferry comes back in a week.



86 Date: 9/7/2016

Time: 8:45 pm

Mileage: 41454

Location: Sitka, Alaska

Exploring Sitka

Rain, lots and lots of rain, last night and this morning. We just layed in bed listening to it. We had a leisurely breakfast and the rain slowed to a mist. So into town we went.

On the way, we saw that a cruise ship is in port. This is good in this town, if a cruise ship is in town, things (like Russian



Dancing) go on, if not everyone here takes a day off. Anyway, got some info, from the chamber (which was open because of the cruise ship). Went shopping for food, and came had lunch back at RV.



After lunch, we went into town for the Tlinkgit Dancing at 2:30. Afterwards, guess what? We had some sunshine, so Les got his large format camera and photographed the Russian Orthodox Church in the middle of town.



We went on to Sitka National Historic Park. They have a hiking trail that leads to the site of the Russian Fort that used to be here. Along the way they have a number of totem poles. Sitka was the Russian Capital of Alaska and it is where the paperwork for selling Alaska to the US was signed. Something happened in the relationship between the Tlinkgits and the Russians in 1804 and they fought a battle here.

The clouds moved in again so we returned to the motorhome for dinner. The sun came back out for the sunset, so I headed down the road to take some photos of a cabin on an island just off shore at sunset. Jill found another place to take pictures at Old Sitka State Park near the motorhome.



87 Date: 9/8/2016

Time: 7:30 pm

Mileage: 41454

Location: Sitka, Alaska

Title: *Sitka After the Rain*

Rain, rain, go away! We have very fast Wi-Fi here and with the rain coming down all morning, we watched Back episodes of "Greys Anatomy". About 11:30, we headed out to see the Russian Dance program. They did 6 traditional dances from different regions in Russia.

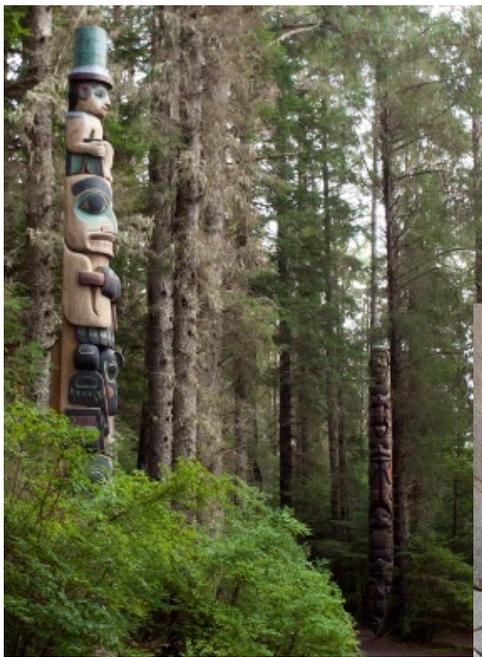


From there we headed toward the car, but Jill side tracked us into a museum about the Alaska Native People. They had the displays divided into the different groups by regions in Alaska. While it all was very interesting, I got most interested in a beautiful Northwest Trade Gun tucked into one display that they did not interpret. As

it turned out, I began to read up on these guns while is lived in Illinois and started to build one from a kit. I did not finish it and it has been sitting in a box in the darkroom at home. I think it may be my winter project this year.

Leaving the museum, we walked past the car and down to the science center where they were harvesting salmon eggs outside. Inside they had several salt water aquariums with local native fish and invertebrates. The tide pool animals were in touch tanks. In a nearby building we looked at gift items and shared a cup of very good clam chowder. Outside again, we continued along the walkway until I found a way down to the rocky beach and took a bunch of digital photos.





We walked on to the NPS totem pole park we were at yesterday. We followed the trail through the park to the fort. We had assumed the fort was built by the Russians, but that was wrong. After the Tlingits kicked them out in 1802, the Tlingit medicine man realized that the Russians would be back, so they built the fort to protect their village. The Russians were back in 1804 and thing didn't go so well for the Tlingits.



The trail continued on out the back side of the park and the signing indicated that we could get to the Sitka Raptor Center. What the sign failed to say is that you would need to cross and deep ditch and then across a very busy road. It is surprising how much traffic there is when there is only 13 miles of roads here.

We found another trail that appeared to return to the park, but it ended in the ware yard area behind the place we watched the Russian Dancer. We finally got to the car and headed back to the center of town. We went to a spa to



get an appointment for massages. The sign said "Open", but the door was locked without explanation or posting of hours. Down the street, we walked into a coffee shop to get something to drink and a dessert, only to be told they were "Partially" closed. We finally got drinks and dessert in the back room of a book store down the street. Strange hours in this town. We went back to the motorhome where I fell asleep and Jill watch more episodes of "Greys Anatomy".

Time: 5:00 pm

Mileage: 41454

Location: Sitka, Alaska

Heavy Rain, Heavy Seas

Heavy rain this morning, but we had to get up early this morning to take a wildlife watching boat tour around the islands off Baranof Island (that is the island Sitka is on). We boarded the boat at the cruise ship terminal along with visitors from the cruise ship. It docked as we waited for the tour.



We started out going north past the Siginaka Islands and watched a large raft of male sea otters. From there we passed through the gap between Beehive Island and Crosswise Islands where we watched a Steller's sea lion rip apart and salmon, we think. Then we went back down through the Siginaka Islands where we were told



about the flora of the north coast of North America. We traveled further south through the Sitka Harbor where we saw another sea otter (sound asleep) and a couple more sea lions. Off Cobb Island we found several humpback whales feeding. This was quite entertaining as they were smashing the water with their bodies or tails.

We were dropped at the harbor in town and rode

the bus back to the cruise terminal. Returning to the motor home totally drenched, we both changed clothes, ate lunch and sat watching more "Greys Anatomy". We made a run to town to buy groceries and fishing tackle. On the boat tour this morning, we learned that the grocery store we went to actually got an award for having the best view from their parking lot in America! The place is right on the shoreline overlooking the bay.



Time: 5:00 pm

Mileage: 41454

Location: Sitka, Alaska

Feathers, Fur, Ferns, Falls & Sunshine!

We woke to a dark morning, or so I thought. Jill opened the curtain and said "Sunshine!" We stuffed down a quick breakfast and headed out to get the two morning photos I had scouted. Jill shot the digitals while I shot the large format.

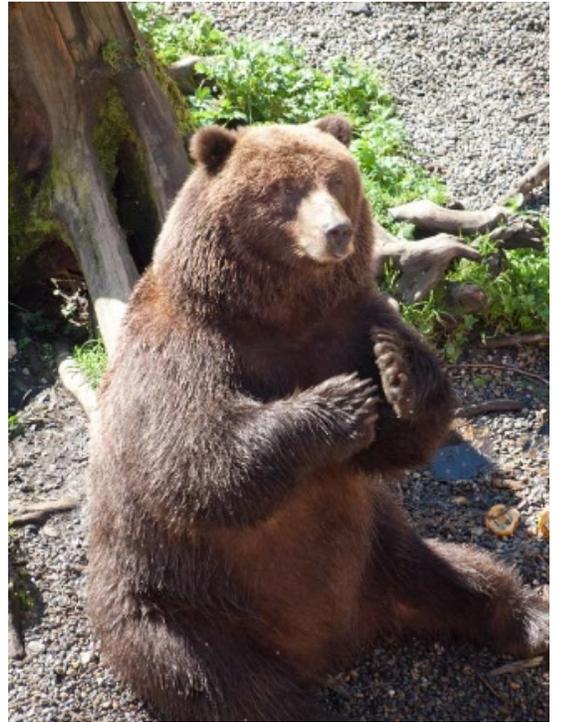


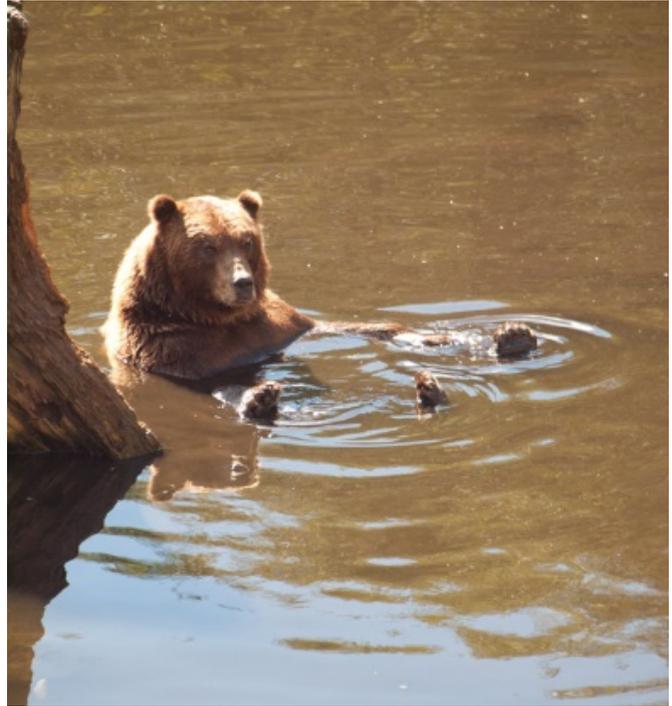
After that we went to the Alaska Raptor Center. We expected to just wander around



the place reading interpretive signs. Instead, after paying our entrance fee, the young lady behind the desk, took us on a great tour. The main building has two large rooms for the rehabbing birds to fly in. They call it the flight center. Other raptor rehab centers around the country, send some of their raptors here to use the flight center. The bigger flight room had 18 Bald Eagles in the larger room and a single Great Horned Owl. The center has a number of raptors that can not go back into the wild, some are sent to other zoos and rehab centers to help with educational programs. Outside they had several averaries with other raptors and one with a couple of rehabbing Common Ravens. There were two open averaries for eagles that can't fly, 4 Bald and one golden. They feed the eagles salmon, but since these averies are adjacent to Indian River, it is not uncommon for wild eagles come in to steal salmon.



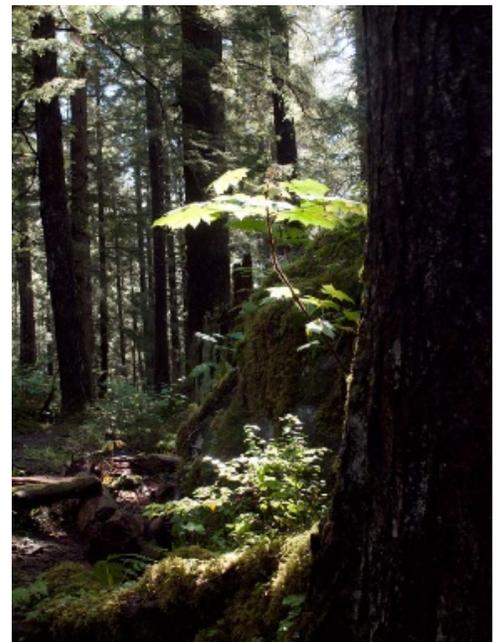




We next headed to the Fortress of the Bear, stopping for lunch at Whale Park. At Fortress of the Bear, they have three enclosures with bears, two for Brown Bears and one for Black Bears. The Brown Bear enclosure are huge tanks previously for water clarification for a pulp plant that was nearby. This facility was founded because in the State of Alaska, if a mother bear is killed, the Game Warden will kill the cubs. They also have a law against releasing the rescued cubs into the wild. Many of these bears have been sent to zoos and other facilities around the country. The gal working there was throwing apples and fish to the bears. Two of the brown bears have learned sign language of sorts to ask for more food.



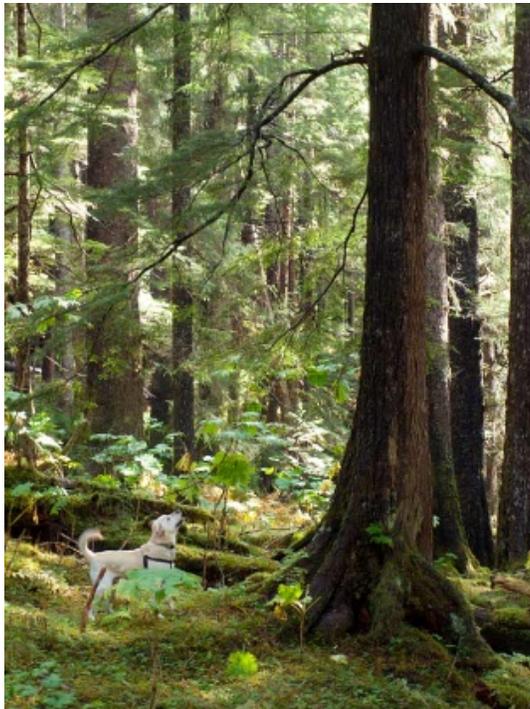
With the sun shining brightly, we headed to the east end of Sitka to walk a trail to Bear Creek Waterfall. It was only 0.7 miles from the parking lot, and what seemed like 1,000 foot climb. I was exhausted by the time I got to the bench looking at the waterfall. The light filtering



through the boreal forest was beautiful.



After dinner at the motorhome, we went to Starrigavin Creek to recon for fishing tomorrow. We were there at sunset and Jill got some great shots.



Time: 5:00 pm

Mileage: 41454

Location: Sitka, Alaska

Scales and Charcoal

Today was our day to do our own things. For me, I bought a one-day non-resident fishing license and printed it. I went up to Starrigavin Creek, just up the road from the RV Park. I followed the road up the creek to the first bridge. I spent the morning and into to the early afternoon fishing for Dolly Virden. I got a good strike from

a Dolly Virden, I think, fought it for maybe 15 seconds before the line broke. Later, I snagged a Sockeye Salmon and then a Coho Salmon. Both got away. This was fortunate since I can't keep them anyway. So the day was a bust for fishing.



Jill on the other hand went up to the shoreline nearby and did a pastel of a small island off shore. At least she was successful.



Since I didn't bring home dinner, we went out to eat. Unfortunately, we only found a few places open for dinner. The only ones with a view were McDonald's and a pizza place. We had pizza two nights ago, so we had Buffalo Wings and salad. From the pizza place we could see the mountains to the south including a glacier we did know was there, because of the cloud cover. As it turns out that all of Baranof Island, the ocean to the west with the small islands within are all part the city and borough of

Sitka. So what is this mean? Sitka is the largest city in the US, geographically speaking. As for population it not even a close hundredth.

91 Date: 9/12/2016

Time: 5:00 pm

Mileage: 41454

Location: Sitka, Alaska

Laundry Day

It's been most of the week in Sitka and we have seen and done about everything we can. We leave tomorrow, so today we will do the laundry. After starting the laundry, we walked across the street to Mc Donald's for lunch with a view of the harbor.



When we left the laundromat, it began to mist. By the time we got back to the motorhome, it was raining. We put the clean clothes away and headed to town again. We went through the visitor center at Sitka National Historic Park. Then we toured the Bishops house. This was the building that the Russian Orthodox bishop lived in and taught school in. We were going to tour the Russian Orthodox Church, but it was late and raining, so we returned to the motorhome.

92 Date: 9/13/2016

Time: 5:00 pm

Mileage: 41454

Location: Sitka, Alaska

Good Bye New Archangel

Its cloudy this morning, as expected. We heard rain on the roof before we got up. This is the day we leave Sitka on the ferry. When the Russians owned Alaska Sitka was known as New Archangel.

We went to the ferry terminal to see about our boarding passes, only to find it locked and a sign on the door saying the ferry was delayed by a few hours. So we called the phone number on the sign and talked with the guy inside, who came out to talk with us. The ferry was having mechanical issues and was travelling at only about 11 knot, instead of the usual 17 knot. He was busy calling everyone that was going to board or pick up stuff from the ferry.



Since that gave us additional time in Sitka, we decided to go tour the Russian Orthodox Church. So off to town we went, passing the cruise terminal we noticed there was not ship in port. When we got to the Church, it was closed. No cruise ship, no tours. We drove down the street and found a developed trail. So we parked and walked the trail up to the top of a small hill. It turned out to be Castle Hill, the place that the first American flag was raised in Alaska after the purchase from the Russians. On top of the hill today is a small park with flag poles and a couple of old canons. The hill has been used for various other things over the years.

We found a place to eat lunch, then we did some grocery shopping, including ice for the refrigerator to keep it cool on the ferry. After putting everything we bought away in the motorhome, we went for a walk to Old Sitka State Park at the end of the road and walked the trail there. We checked back at the ferry terminal and the ferry was now 5 hours behind schedule.



We ate dinner in the motorhome and saw the ferry come into port about 5 pm. After dinner, we did our final cleaning and unhooked the motorhome and drove over to the ferry terminal and parked in Lane 4 as instructed. By 6:15 pm we had boarded both



vehicles and met at the Purser's desk and got our cabin keys. After settling in, we went up the top front observation deck to watch the ferry leave port at 7:30. Since, we are now 5 hours late on the schedule and only able to travel at 12 knot, we won't get to our first port, Petersburg, until 9 am tomorrow. There will be a car deck call at 1:15 am and we will go down and give Sampson a walk on the car deck and then put him in his crate for the night. The

mechanical issue seems to be a balance problem with the starboard shaft. At speeds over 12 knots there is a bad vibration. At our stop in Wrangle after Petersburg, they are going to send a diver down to take a look. I am thinking it could be a fishing net tangled in the prop. We will get off the ferry at the third stop, Ketchikan about 3 pm tomorrow.

Time: 5:00 pm

Mileage: 41454

Location: Ketchikan?, Alaska

Slow boat to Ketchikan?

I got up at 1 am to take Sampson for a walk around the car deck. Of course he would not do his business. So I put him to bed in his crate and petted the cat.

This morning we got up about 7:30 and ate breakfast in the on board restaurant. We pulled into port at Petersburg about 9:30. We fed the pets and took Sampson for a walk off the ship. He finally did his business. He needs grass or dirt; the steel car deck feels like being inside the house. The stop here was only 45 minutes long, so we got back on the boat and headed for the next port, Wrangell, AK.



As we left Petersburg, we went through another narrow channel between islands. The ferry has to share the narrow lane with other vessels. We past another ferry, the Matanuska. That will be the ferry that will take us from Ketchikan to Prince Rupert, the last leg of our Inland Passage. Along the way we saw numerous houses, docks and boats along the way.



Wrangell about 1:15 pm. I thought we'd be in Ketchikan by 3 pm but no, the boat is too slow. Here at Wrangell they sent a diver under the boat to try and see if they could find the problem. In the meantime, we got off the boat and took some off to do his business and we ate lunch. After wandering a little in town, we got back on the boat at 3 pm. As we settled in on the lower front observation deck, the captain came on the loud speaker and told us they were sending the divers back in the water to take a look at something else and we would be delayed another 45 minutes. Current ETA Ketchikan – 11:45pm, about 14 hours behind schedule.



Time: 7:00 pm

Mileage: 41467

Location: Ketchikan, Alaska

Got Totems?

We got off the ferry at Ketchikan after 11:30 pm last night and traveled north of the ferry terminal to Clover Point Resort. Knowing we would be arriving late, Jill yesterday afternoon called Clover Point Resort and made a reservation. They assigned us to site 123, but when we got here, Jill looked all over the small resort (RV parking lot), but could not find the site. About the time we decided to just take the easiest empty site, 116, we found 123 had a truck parked in it. This morning I went to the office to pay for last night and tonight and told them what happened. They checked their reservations and said it was fine for us to be in site 116.



After breakfast, we continued to the north end of N. Tongass Road to Settlers Cove State Recreation Area and found Lunch Creek Trail. So we walked the loop portion of the trail, pass the Creek falls, UP through the Boreal Forest, through the muskeg bog and back down through the Boreal Forest to the shore and back. Unlike other Boreal Forest trails we have walked, this one has had a great deal of trail construction. There were only a

few slightly wet spots, lots of board walks, and lots and lots of steps. Even better, we found that most of the otherwise slick wood surfaces had asphalt shingle material tacked on to provide a non-skid surface. The trail had a number of large old growth trees and stumps along the way. These were mostly Red or Yellow Cedar.

We next headed to town to look for a spot to park the motorhome tomorrow while we take a boat tour. We talked to one of the ticket agents at the ferry terminal and he said just come in and check in. They will assign us to Lane 2 and the motorhome can stay there all day as they won't be



using the lanes until they load our ferry in the evening.



With that settled, we continued to roll through downtown Ketchikan. All four cruise docks had cruise ships in today and the town had more people than you could shake a wet stick at. Oh yes, it is now beginning to rain. We had the boat tour scheduled for today, but since a storm was coming in, they cancelled and we rescheduled for tomorrow. Part of the reason for going through downtown was to find where we would catch the tour boat and also where we would park. All parking down town is signed 2-hour parking and the boat tour is 4 hours long.

So as we continued to look for longer timed parking, we found ourselves headed south out of town. So we decided to go on down to the next community on the coast, Saxman. We must have blinked,

because after several miles, Jill finally checked the GPS and found we had missed Saxman and were now about 4 miles from the end of the road at Beaver Falls. So we thought OK let's see the falls. Surprise, Surprise, the falls are now a pipeline feeding the hydroelectric power plant for the island.

Returning toward Ketchikan, we spotted Saxman. It is a native community with new copies of old totem poles and a Clan House. So we wandered around in the rain looking at the totem poles.



Returning to Ketchikan, we found the Totem Heritage Center. They have a large number of original totem poles inside, protected from the destructive weather. As it turns out, back at the turn of the 20th century, people, including the territorial governor realized that the totem poles were slowly decaying and not being replaced. The native carvers were no longer teaching their craft. In the 1930's, the CCC got involved in collecting original totem poles from abandoned village sites and started a program with the native population of relearning to carve totems, by copying the originals. Unfortunately, the originals were often destroyed after the copies were created. This facility has become a repository for the originals and a teaching



center for various native art forms. While touring the center, we talked with some of the people there and found they were celebrating their 40th anniversary today at 5 pm. They invited us to come back to meet some of the artists that work at the center and teach classes.

We were feeling tired, but Jill wanted a Ketchikan pin. So we went back downtown to the Visitor Information Center. They didn't have any pins, but they were able to tell us

how to use the free bus system so we can park tomorrow away from the downtown area.

We walked over to the multiagency Southeast Alaska Discovery Center to see if they had a pin. We got our NPS passport book stamped, but the cooperative association that would have had pins, closed down operations in the center some time ago. So we found a souvenir shop that had pins and we bought 2 pins, as they were on sale.

We went to the mall where we will park tomorrow and had an early dinner and sat there waiting for 5 pm to roll around. Then we returned to the Totem Heritage Center to meet the artists. Jill talked with one artist that teaches harvesting Red Cedar Cambium, used in basket making that is taught by her mother. Then she talked with one of the other basket makers and also a weaver. The weaver was actually working on an intricate piece while they talked. We left and returned to the motorhome as the rain got heavier.



95 Date: 9/16/2016

Time: 7:00 pm

Mileage: 41467

Location: Alaska Marine Highway Ferry
- Matuska

More Totem Poles and Misty Fjords

The ferry will load this evening, so we have today to do more tourist stuff. After breakfast, we headed to town with both vehicles. On the way, we stopped at Totem Bight. The word "bight" refers to a

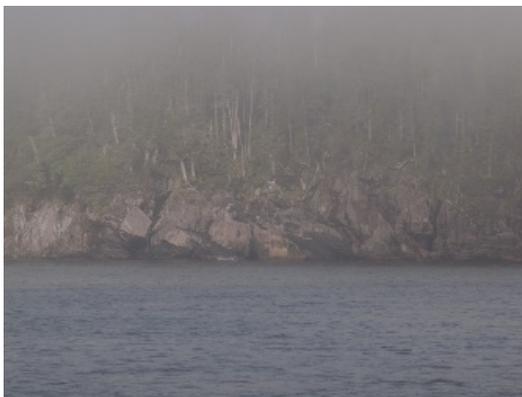




shoreline with a shallow cove, like and animal took a bight out of the shoreline. It is the site of the CCC project to revitalize the economy through totem pole carving. They built a clan house and placed many newly carved totem pole copies of original totem poles.

As we were getting ready to

leave, we asked if they had a pin for Totem Bight. They didn't have any, but the gift shop next door may have some. So we walked past the tour bus tourist to the gift shop. We found pins and other interesting things to buy. Then we found out about a second clan house and more totems behind the gift shop. Their clan house was even nicer than the one at Totem Bight.



We continued to town and checked in at the ferry terminal and parked the motorhome in Lane 2. Then we had lunch at the docks near berth 1. We got on the Misty Fjords tour boat and headed out to Misty Fjords National Monument.

The weather was cloudy all morning and as we headed toward the fjords, the fog

settled in. But then it lifted again. Then the boat sucked a stick into one of its jets and we had to stop so a crewman opened up the pump and pulled out a 10" stick. We were soon back up and running about 30 knots. We turned north into Behm Canal. The scenery so far was not all that interesting, mostly steep round topped mountains.

We did a slow pass by New Eddystone Rock out in the middle of the canal. It is a volcanic plug and is quit scenic.



We turned up Rudyerd Bay. At this point, the scenery changed dramatically. The mountains got very tall and solid vertical cliffs with lots of waterfalls. It is amazing how such large tree are able to cling to the shear rocky cliffs.

Returning to town, we had dinner across from the ferry terminal and then waited to board the ferry. Jill drove the Tracker on as the first vehicle to board, then waited for me to bring the motorhome. And she waited and she waited, finally I drove on and one of the last vehicles. We left port after 10 pm, headed for Prince Rupert, BC.

