

Seagate and Wild Blue Alaska Cruise – Friday & Saturday, June 27-28, 2008

Alex steps out of the pilothouse door, then up to the bow, and quietly starts the windless grinding up the anchor chain. The sky is dimly lighted so no external lights are needed, but the inside lights will “run on red” for awhile so as not to disturb his low-light vision. The weather forecast has improved: from very dismal, to pretty dismal: 20-25 knot winds, 4 foot seas inside waters, 5 to 7 foot seas outside waters. Is this a dramamine day? It’s Friday, 3:30AM on Wild Blue and no other crew have awakened yet. Could they not want this day to start?

Alex clearly can see Seagate’s single, white anchor light in the distance. Just as their anchor is secured in place, the lights change: red on port and green on starboard. Seagate is ready to go and soon, so is Wild Blue. The boats power out of Elbow Bay into the already roly-rocky seas with little wind. It’s only 4AM, with 70 miles and 8-hours of mostly open ocean to go before Ketchikan. Oh boy!



(The best photo Denny can get with his fastest camera as both boats rock and roll. The rest of us were not up to photography in these conditions. We hope this doesn’t make you sea sick!)

After awhile, the crews become acclimated to the pitch, rock and roll as the wind begins to build. Some maybe are re-thinking their mornings big breakfast, and hoping they chewed their food good. Others try to sleep the hours away, dreaming their way to Ketchikan.

The boats are making good headway through Egg Passage in the Barrier Islands off southern Prince of Wales Island. The wipers are on high as the wind driven spray works like a pressure washer against the pilothouse windows. Then as we approach Point Marsh, the seas build and steepen. As forecast, these are the 5 to 7 foot seas. Green water pushes across the deck of Wild

Blue, as a tight wave sequence lifts the stern and jams the nose into the second wall of water. Crash noises fill the cabin and the few remaining unsecured objects are easily identified by simply looking on the floor. “Only one wine glass lost so far”, exclaims Pat with a false sense of cheeriness. We quickly learn to slow the boat when the big sets approach, then power up the second wave. Although we have stabilizers which dampen the side-to-side roll, nothing can reduce the dramatic fore and aft pitch. Everyone has a least one hand gripping a rail, and all hope they have an “iron stomach” throughout today's ride.

On Wild Blue, we learn that one unnamed couple has become religious. They have chosen to worship below the main deck, in a small, tight space. We know they are praying for calm seas, but the object of their worship is odd: a white porcelain bowl. The worship helps them cope. We can't get them to stop, and we can't get into the heads either.

Surprisingly, we come across patches of ocean with moderate seas. Everyone gets a giddy feeling as if we made it. Then pretty soon the nasty, steep walls of green water are back, just like they never left. Frustrating.

“Wild Blue this is Seagate calling,” booms Dick's voice over the VHF radio, also in that falsetto cheeriness of a voice. “We may do better by speeding up a bit.” And just as he says this the seas ever so slightly, reduce. We're back up to full revolutions and liking it. It's really getting giddy now!

Finally we round Cape Chacon, the southern tip of the Island and the northern edge of Dixon Entrance. In this part of the ocean, the chart reads “Tide Rips”. The waves can read charts, because the water comes from more than one direction at the same time. We can hear the worshippers below as they rekindle their moany mantra. Fortunately, the rips cease after 500 yards and we're back giddy all over again, and this time we've entered southern Clarence Strait. As we turn north towards Ketchikan, moving further up the Strait, the waves change direction, broaden and build. They slowly move to the beam and eventually are aft of the beam. The boats are just big surfboards now, and the rudders are way too small to keep us straight, but this

is way-better than before. A good sign: one worshipper comes up from below deck.

(← *The ships are in Ketchikan upon our arrival.*)



We haven't seen another boat for seven hours and our first sighting, a small sports fisher, occurs just before Nichols Passage, about 10 miles from Ketchikan. The seas moderated as soon as



we entered the Passage and are flat as we turn into west Tongrass Narrows. Seagate with it's superior speed, has pushed ahead to secure dock space in Ketchikan. It's all good now.

(← The only salmon we've seen is in the market, and it's farm raised.)



(← US Coast Guard, Ketchikan. Glad we didn't need these guys and nice to know they're there.)

Ketchikan was full of people as five cruise ships were in port. It was raining pretty good and the storm dumped 4 inches on the city. Those Seagaters won't let a little rain stop them from doing the town.



(← The Seagate crew does Ketchikan. If we didn't know these people, you could mistake this for an album cover. We weren't sure if Dick was also auditioning for the Blue Man Group.)

While the Seagate crew frolicked in the rain, the Wild Blue people planned yet another halibut dining experience. We'd exhausted all known recipes amongst us, so we Googled halibut to find a new one. It yielded a method using lots of vermouth, and since we couldn't drink enough martinis to use it up, halibut in vermouth with garlic was the entrée.

We're taking a 7-day break from our cruising. We resume on Monday July 7. We'll reenter Canada, clear customs and head to the Queen Charlotte Islands. So depending on weather and

wi-fi connections, you should begin to hear our story again on about July 10th. Have a nice, fireworks-filled July 4th.



(← Vermouth and garlic halibut with herbs by Chef Vince.)



(← Fresh tossed green salad with lemon and olive oil dressing by Sous chef Pat.)



(← Fresh vacuum bagged and frozen Halibut headed home. No worries, we're having hamburgers for July 4th.)