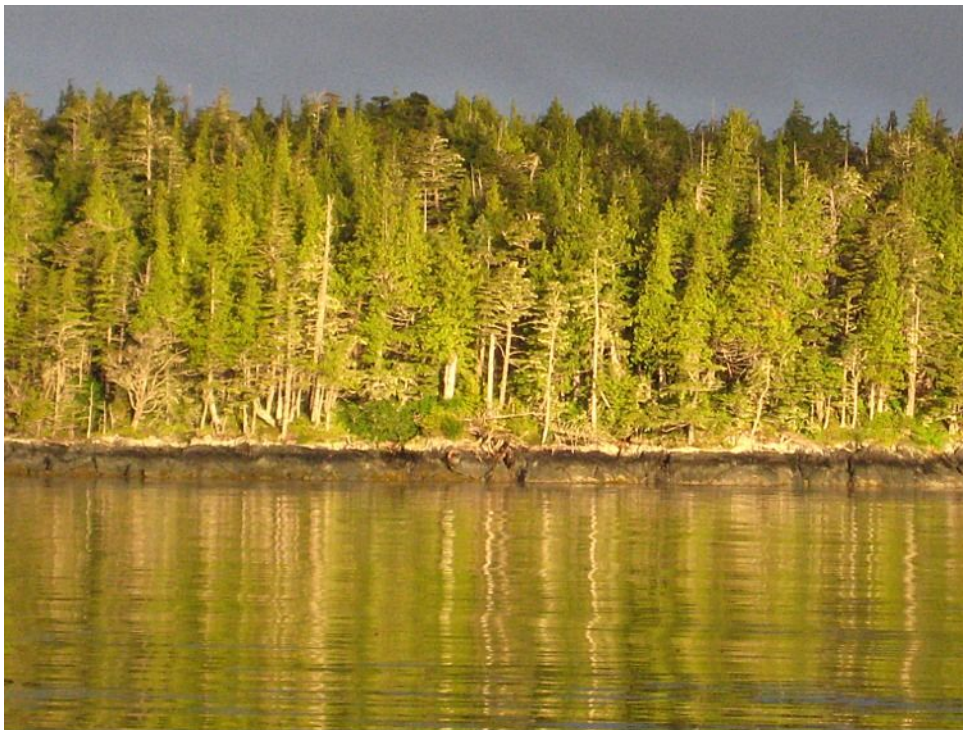


Seagate and Wild Blue Alaska Cruise – Thursday-Friday, July 10-11, 2008



It's 4:50AM Thursday, per Alex's timepiece but the Seagate has started her engines and is hauling her anchor. These guys are starting out an hour early today! Rubbing sleep from his eyes he verifies the time and realizes his alarm was set to SE Alaska time. It is 4:50 in Alaska but 5:50 here in British Columbia.

(← The sun blasts through the early morning clouds as the boats circumnavigate Henry Island.)



(Morning sun drenches the last island as we leave mainland for the Queen Charlotte Islands.)

The Wild Blue is quickly made sea ready and the boats exit Welcome Harbour for Queen Charlotte City, a 76-mile run. Snaking their way around Henry Island the boats enter rugged Hecate Strait at 7AM with 68 miles and 8 hours run-time remaining. Hecate Strait is open ocean 50 miles across, with Alaska's Dixon Entrance on the north, and open Pacific on the south. The Strait is not part of the Inside Passage and usually features big seas with high winds. Today we are lucky as seas are less than a meter (3 feet) and winds are less than 15 knots.

It's a boring run. We don't see another boat for 7 hours. The seas and wind cooperate, as do the dolphins that accompany us for a good while. We make Queen Charlotte City by 3PM and tie-up to the public wharf. QC City is the main town on the Islands and has a population of 900. There are several good restaurants, one OK grocery store, and a general store. Besides the local



fishing fleet, the City is home to the administration of Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site, our destinations for the next week or so.

(← Dolphins, or Dalls Porpoises accompany the boats to the Islands.)



So Thursday night in port, we dine at a popular local eatery, the Sea Raven. It's a great meal and we run into our companion boat crew as well.

(← Seagate crew enjoys the Sea Raven in Queen Charlotte City.)

We're all relaxed tonight but need to study up for the Gwaii Haanas orientation course tomorrow at 9AM. It's 10-minute car ride from the dock to the Center where the course is held. Each person that wants to enter the Park is required to attend the orientation and upon completion, receives an authorization number. Only a limited number of persons are allowed into the Park each day. Lets get some sleep!

On Friday we shuttle via Norman's borrowed vehicle to the Gwaii Haanas Heritage Center, a beautiful new complex built on the waterfront.

(← Just one of the fine indoor-outdoor designed buildings of the Gwaii Haanas Heritage Center, Queen Charlotte City.)





(← The buildings make great use of sunlight.)

We settle in the classroom, about thirteen in all. After a 20-minute video overview, we have a 40-minute lecture about the Park. We learn a bunch and then each person receives his visitor guide with authorization number for entry. Afterward we visit the museum and other heritage exhibits, then the Seagate crew takes a driving tour into the northern Queen Charlottes.

Haida Heritage Centre at Kaay Llnagaay Mission Statement

Through the Haida Heritage Centre at Kaay Llnagaay we celebrate the living culture of the Haida. Through our language, art and stories we share our relationship with the land and sea—that which shapes, nourishes and sustains us. Qay'lnagaay protects and fosters Haida culture by reaffirming our traditions and beliefs, encouraging artistic expression, and serving as a keeper of all that we are. The Haida Heritage Centre is a place for the Haida voice to be heard. This is our gift to the world.



(The Gwaii Haanas Crest features the sea otter with sea urchin; Eagle and Raven clan crests.)

(These Haida longboats are BIG and LONG. You can barely see that Seagater down at the end. →)

As expected we were not allowed to take photos of the exhibits in the museum, you'll just have to take our word... they're grrrrreattttt! Thinking ahead, Dick purchased a recipe book of the Haida dishes using the food items found along





the shoreline. Kelpburgers anybody?

(← The Queen Charlettes are inhabited by Black Bears. The Black Bear is not nearly as aggressive as the Brown Bear. Here Norman got in pretty close, and then zoomed in even further to get this great shot. In future bear photos, Norman promises to hand the bear a brush to get the leaves off. Thankyou.)



(← Norman claims to have taken this awesome eagle shot, however, he's brought along quite a bit of computer gear, so it may be doctored. Even so, it is still an awesome eagle photograph!)

The orientation course taught us that GH Park and Haida Heritage Site is a place of contrasts: wild, open seas and calm, secluded bays; fierce winter storms and perfect summer days. The islands were



home to about 20,000 native inhabitants. The remains of about 10 villages are found inside the Park. Each village was composed a particular Haida "clan". These clans have names like Eagles, Ravens and Seals. Only 500 natives remained of the 20,000 peak population after the Europeans arrived in the 1800's, those deaths primarily due to small pox. (For a detailed history of how the Europeans shaped world history read "Guns, Germs and Steel" by Jared Diamond.)

(← Haida Seal clan crest.)

The instructor also told us that when out there, we need to depend upon ourselves: there is no one near to help us. There is no phone or cell phone service, and VHF radio cannot be received from many of the remote anchorages. There are five Haida Gwaii Watchman sites

inside the Park that serve as a point of contact for visitor information, or if needed, in emergency situations. We do plan to visit these sites to learn more.



Tomorrow, Saturday, we head south to Thurston Harbour, a secure anchorage about 50 cruising miles away. We won't actually enter the Park until Sunday or Monday, as it's over 60 cruising miles away.

(← Sleemans bucket of ale. Here 2 Cream and 2 Original Dark ales have just been delivered. Note: Justin's 6th grade teacher, Ms. Meeker, is not supposed to see this photo, so please ignore it. Justin thanks you.)

Queen Charlotte City has mostly friendly, helpful people. However, Alex was able to locate an unfriendly fisherman when the Wild Blue was moved to the loading dock to top off water tanks. Although the Wild Blue was idling, next in line for access, the fisherman thought he could just motor up and cut in front. After a bit of shouting on the part of the fisherman (something about the Gringos) which didn't even enter Alex's deaf ear, the Wild Blue was quickly watered and moved to her assigned berth. It was just then that Seagate decided to fire up their watermaker!



Friday night both boat crews dined at Howlers Restaurant, just at the head of the public dock. The seafood selections were great and we rate this one high. A couple of us indulged in a newer BC tradition: a bucket of Sleemans ale. The Sleemans ale and bottle quantity of your choice is delivered in a bucket full of ice. This ale is pricey and tasty. It was a fine evening. See you tomorrow.

(← Justin's mom and Wild Blue crew, Janice, seems to be thinking "Why stop now?". She knows what happens in Canada -- stays in Canada.)