

THE SECOND ALASKA TRIP

GLACIER BAY NATIONAL PARK 2012

By Jud Hurd



Dave and LouAnn Hustvedt had so much fun in Glacier Bay National Park in 2011 that they decided to go back in 2012. New member Al Lovas and I joined them for five days of paddling around the Beardslee Islands, an area closer to the park headquarters than they'd been the year before.

We had a few planning and coordinating discussions where I learned that Al is an engineer. Dave and LouAnn are also, so we had three engineers and a retired accountant on this trip. I was in total darkness on a few conversations but they took pity on me and spoke in plain English most of the time.

We met at DIA on June 15 for our flight to Gustavus with a layover in Seattle and a short stop in Juneau. We had a relaxed shuttle drive out to the Bartlett Cove park headquarters that included a stop at a fish processing business while our driver dropped off some plastic containers. We also stopped at the store to get those last minute items and things you can't take on the plane such as stove fuel.

Upon arriving at Bartlett Cove Dave checked us in with the park rangers and filed our paddle plan. This is like filing a flight plan; if we didn't close out our paddle plan within twenty-four hours of our designated return then the rangers would start looking for us. We also checked in for our camp sites and headed down to set up our tents. The campground is a quarter-mile walk from the park headquarters but they provided large, two-wheeled wheel barrows for our gear. As we walked down the path we came across a fresh pile of bear scat. Yes, bears are very much a reality here and the thought of them is always in the back of your mind. The campground is very interesting since it is in the middle of a moss covered rain forest. Everything—ground, trees, shrubs—is covered in moss which makes for a beautiful setting and it is easy to find the camping spots: just look for the paths and tent site clearings in the middle of the moss. Of course rain comes with a rain forest and that is what we had; Bartlett Cove averages 75 inches of precipitation annually. The temperature was cool, probably in the mid-50s and we had on and off drizzle. Nothing heavy, just enough to make you wear your rain gear.

After setting up camp which included tarps over our tents to provide dry coverage, we all went back to the park headquarters for a check-in presentation by the park rangers. This consisted of a video tape which focused

mostly on no-trace camping followed by a talk from the ranger. She covered important points such as where to paddle and, more importantly, where not to paddle, camping above high-high tide water line, pulling your boats above the water line and tying them to a tree, where bears have been sighted and how to avoid them, keeping all food and food smells out of your tent, cooking and eating below the high-water line (so much for cooking under a

dry tarp), storing food in bear containers well away from tents, and what to do about human waste. We then retired to the lodge for a few beers, a nice dinner and to enjoy the beautiful scenery.

It had been a long day and soon we all headed back to camp for a good night's sleep. Tomorrow was going to be a big day. Dave sent out our Spot signal so that loved ones at home would know we were safe and doing well. This became part of our daily routine, and many thanks to Brian Hunter for the loan of his device.

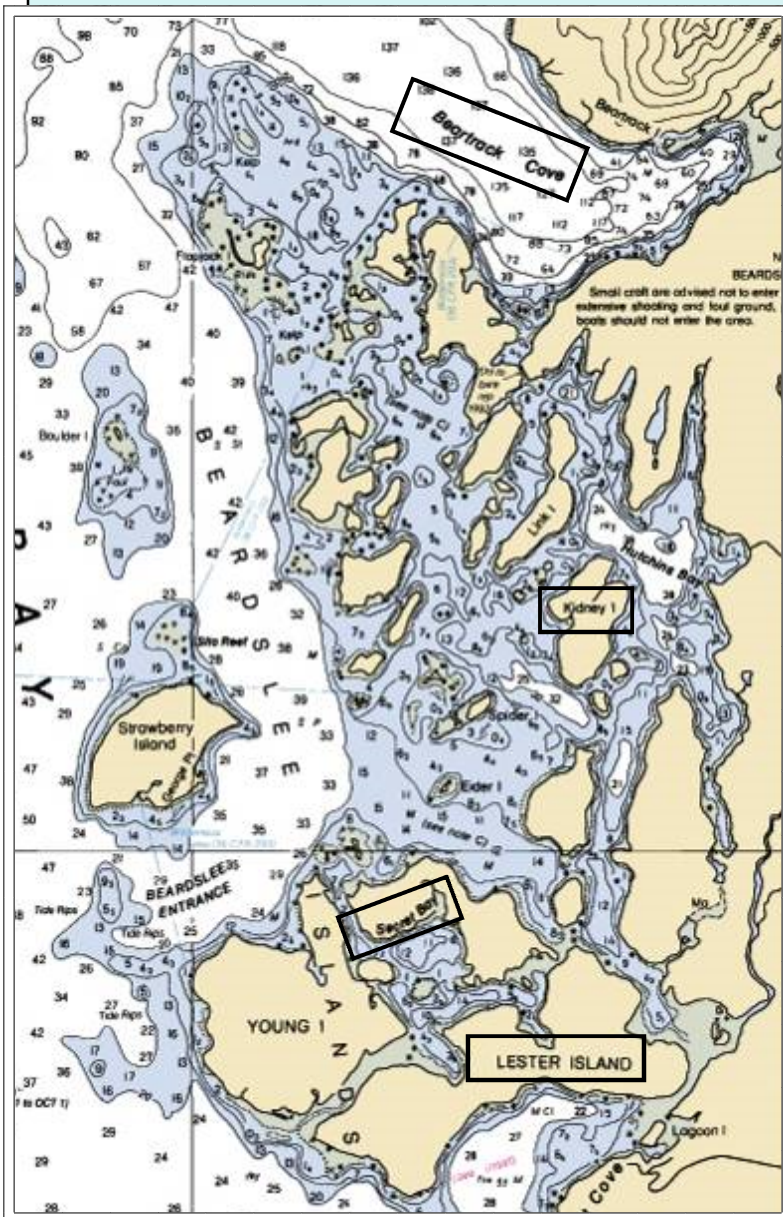
DAY 1: After breakfast we broke camp and hauled our gear back to the park headquarters. The people from Glacier Bay Sea Kayaks arrived with our rental boats and checked us out. They gave us another talk about where to paddle, where to avoid paddling and how to take care of the boats, and gave each of us a laminated map of our paddling area. We took our boats down to shore, did a final arrangement of our gear and packed it into the kayaks. These were nice fiberglass, high-volume boats that held all our gear just fine. The seats weren't great but I brought an inflatable stadium seat which really helped. Finally we were on the water.

The best route out of Bartlett Cove [far south end of the map on this page] is north through a channel between Lester Island and the mainland which can be navigated only at high tide. Since we'd gotten a late start our goal was the eastern shore of Kidney Island. We didn't see any other people after we got through the Lester Island channel and we enjoyed

a leisurely paddle to Kidney Island. We paddled a little and then coasted a little; the paddling in the Beardslee Islands is fairly calm since the islands provide good shelter from wind and waves.

Although it was another overcast day with on and off drizzles, we just paddled our slow pace which allowed us to really soak in our surroundings (no pun intended) and the scenery. In addition, we came across some seals playing on an island. We didn't get too close before they noticed us and went storming into the water. That made them feel safe and they would poke their heads up to look at these strange people invading their world.

We pulled into a good looking shore on Kidney Island to check out a likely camp site. After finding fresh bear sign we decided to move farther up the shore. So, we pulled into another spot and found fresh bear sign again. It seemed we were going to find bear sign wherever we went so we decided to stay at this spot. That meant we now



had to unload the kayaks and haul our gear and the boats up the bank to above the high-high water mark. This was where my large mesh bag came in handy. I was able to put all my gear except food and water in the bag and just make one trip. The heavy boats were another issue, and Al suggested we work together on them one at a time, which was easier. When we finally got everything above the highest tide line LouAnn asked the question, "Is a vacation supposed to be so much work?" Dave had the answer: "This is not a vacation, this is an expedition."

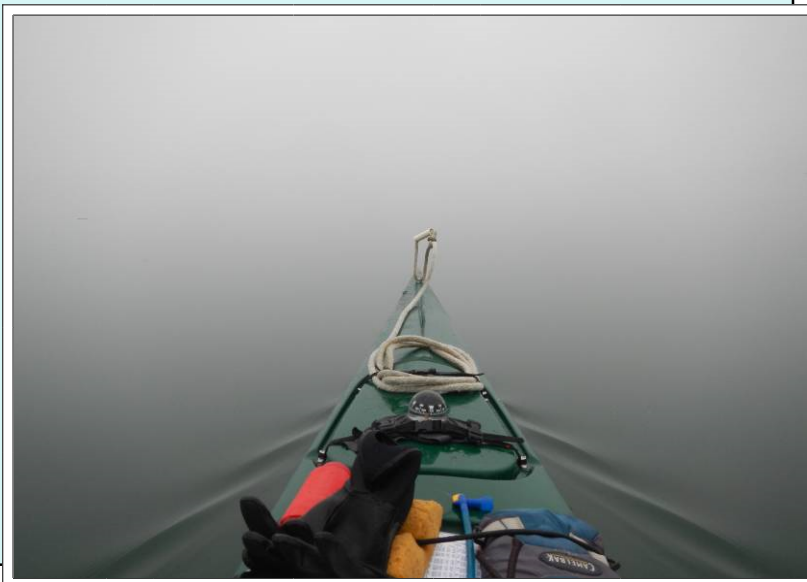
After setting up camp we enjoyed a nice dinner, visited and just relaxed.



From our camp we had a wonderful view to the north and east of the Chilkat Range snow-capped mountains within the wilderness area. It had been a good day but all good things must come to an end so we headed off to bed. I thought it might be difficult to sleep when it was still daylight at 11pm, but I was out as soon as my head hit the pillow.

DAY 2: We now started our daily routine of rising, having breakfast, paddling around in this beautiful park, returning to camp, exploring a bit, having dinner and going to bed. We had agreed to spend two nights at this site so we didn't have to break camp and move. LouAnn wanted to spend the day in camp so Dave, Al and I took off to explore a little. We headed counter-clockwise north around Kidney I island to explore the area and also take a look at the next day's route which would take us around the south end of Link I island. We then headed south toward Spider I island, went around the south end of Kidney I island, past two small islands we named The Muffins, and back to camp. The day's weather was still overcast with the occasional drizzle, but it was another great day spent on the water.

DAY 3: We broke camp and our goal was to paddle north to Beartrack Cove, across the cove and camp on its northern shore. The paddle was a lot of fun and we saw a lot of neat things. First of all it was another overcast day and we had total fog when we launched; you couldn't see an island that



was maybe only 30 yards away. This would have made for difficult navigating if we hadn't been so well prepared. Al had a GPS, I had a GPS on my camera (which I didn't know how to use yet but I was confident Dave and Al could figure it out if needed), Dave had a GPS and a detailed NOAA Chart and he had Brian's GPS with a more detailed map that really helped us verify our location. Again, thank you Brian for the loan.

We came across a couple of seal colonies on shore that went rushing into the water and then just stared at us. In addition to the seal colonies, we roused out several sea otter colonies each containing well over a hundred otters. The sound of their rushing into the water was like an amphibious assault. And, like the seals, once in the water they were more curious than afraid. We watched hundreds of them swimming on their backs; the mothers had babies clinging to their bellies. The otters were fun to watch because they would put their tails and hind feet down to push themselves about half out of the water so that they could get a better look at us. I thought of being surrounded by forty submarines, all of them with their periscopes up and taking aim at us.



Hundreds of curious sea otters



Bull kelp

We paddled inside the outside islands which gave us nice protection but there was shallow water between the islands. At a couple of places we came across bull kelp beds that were so big we couldn't go around. Our only choice was to go through. The kayaks handled the thick sea weed extremely well and nobody was in any danger, but I think we did more poling than paddling. We also hit a shallow that was populated with rocks about the size of pumpkins. We had to pick our way through this rock field carefully and every time I ran aground I thought there goes my damage deposit on the kayak. Fortunately, when we checked in the boats there was no damage and I got my deposit back.

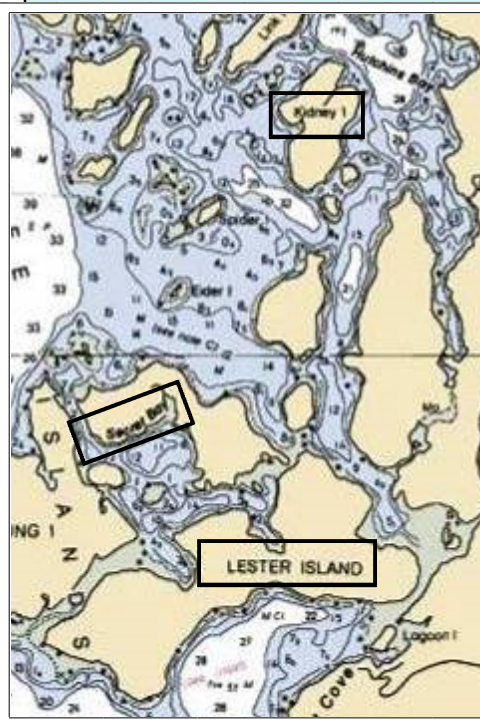
We finally made it to Beartrack Cove and as we crossed the cove a humpback whale came up to give us a nice view. We paddled around for a while but we never saw it surface again. At least we got to see one; what a wonderful sight to see from a kayak. We reached the northern shore, set up camp and got into our end-of-day routine. From our camp we had wonderful views west across the bay to the Fairweather Range snow-capped peaks—another great day on Glacier Bay.

DAY 4: It was time to start making our way home. So, we broke camp and headed south, back across Beartrack Cove. This two mile



View from Beartrack Cove

crossing was our longest, but we had good weather and calm water both ways. On the way home we picked a different route to avoid the kelp and the rocks. We headed southwest across the cove towards Flapjack Island. We then turned south and paddled along the western shore of the outside islands. This gave us more exposure to the bay and the possibility of bigger waves due to more fetch. However, the winds were mild and we didn't have any problems. Once again we scared up some more seals and sea otters. We did hit a couple more kelp beds but we avoided the rocks. We then cut east back toward Kidney Island. Our thinking was to camp on the western shore of Kidney but we never found a really good site. So, we just paddled back around to our first camp site. It was like going home. It was low tide when we landed and nobody was real excited about hauling our gear up the shore to the camp site. Remember, tidal fluctuation can be as high as 25 feet. We had a stroke of genius: we unpacked our food, had lunch and waited for the tide to come in and raise our boats closer to shore. It worked like a gem.



DAY 5: This was our last day and it was time to go home. We awoke to our first sunny day of the trip which made for glorious views and picture taking as we paddled home. In our trip planning sessions we considered camping in Secret Bay the first night, but it is accessible only from a northern entrance along the eastern shore of Young Island. On our paddle back we thought it would be fun to paddle over to the entrance and just check it out. So, we headed south from Kidney Island and then turned west to get to the Secret Bay entrance. Distances on the water are deceptive and we had a time frame for paddling through the channel to get back to Bartlett Cove. Remember, that channel can be navigated only at high tide. Anyway, we under-estimated the time to do what we wanted and we just couldn't get all the way to Secret Bay. We went as far as we could but then had to turn around to make it through the channel on time. This was my first experience dealing with tides and I am grateful that I had knowledgeable paddlers from whom I could learn.

As we approached the back of the cove where the map showed the channel we couldn't see it and it looked like the cove just ended. We began to wonder if we made a wrong turn someplace, but we put our faith in our electronics and kept going. Pretty soon we could see a slight change in the

foliage and shore line. As we approached the back of the cove we saw the channel took a hard right and we just couldn't see it farther up the cove. Lesson learned: trust your map and GPS.

We got back to Bartlett Cove, checked in our boats, hauled our gear down to the campground and set up camp. Then it was time for a cold beer at the lodge which tasted absolutely fantastic. The only thing left was to get cleaned up and fly home the next day.

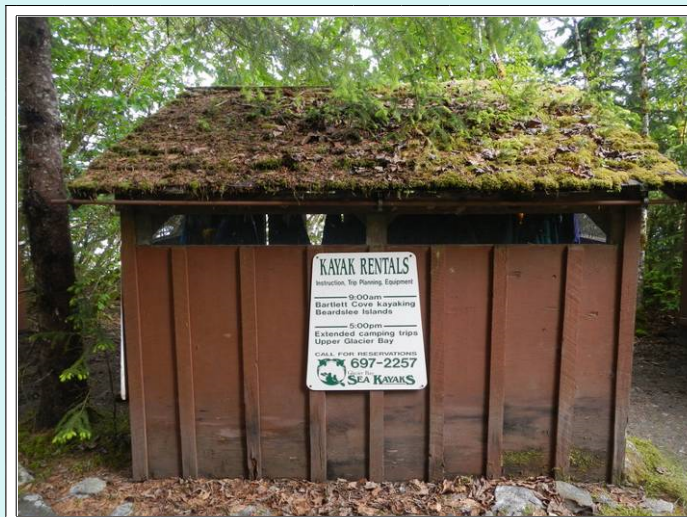
It was a great trip and I hope to go back and do another area of Glacier Bay.



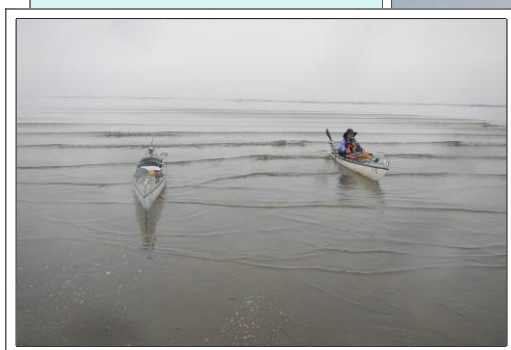
Photos by Jud Hurd and Al Lovas

TRIP SPECIFICS

- **TRIP DATES:** We flew to Gustavus, Alaska, and shuttled to Bartlett Cove on June 15; paddled the Beardslee Islands June 16-20; flew home June 21
- **GEAR INFORMATION:** We rented kayaks from Glacier Bay Kayak Rentals, the only game in town. They provided the kayaks, paddles (I took mine), PFDs (Dave, LouAnn and AI took theirs), spray skirts, paddle floats, pumps, laminated maps and advice on paddling plans.
- We took the usual kayak camping gear with special emphasis on wet weather: a tarp to camp under, good rain gear (Gortex was not recommended but I used it and it worked just fine), and a waterproof hat and waterproof footwear to keep your feet dry and warm; you do not want wet feet all day. The water is in the 40s so a dry suit or wet suit is essential. Temperatures were in the 50s and with the rain it can get quite chilly; it's important to bring good layers of warm clothes and a good sleeping bag.
- Plan for plenty of food including a couple of extra days in case foul weather makes you stay out longer than planned. The park rangers will provide you with bear canisters at no charge to keep your food secure. Upon Dave's advice I bought a Jet Boil that worked great and I didn't have to worry about flying my WhisperLite (does anybody want to buy a slightly used WhisperLite?). We bought fuel canisters at the store in Gustavus. We took fresh water for the whole trip as water access is not guaranteed.
- We had good maps and four GPS units for navigation. We had a Spot to send out daily signals, a radio for getting weather forecasts, and a satellite emergency locator beacon if needed.
- To help in our planning the Glacier Bay National Park and the Glacier Bay Sea Kayaks web sites provided good information. Also, the book *Adventure Kayaking—Trips in Glacier Bay* by Don Skillman was a good resource for advice on paddling plans.



LouAnn, Dave and AI





Dave Hustvedt



The group: LouAnn and Dave Hustvedt, Al Lovas, Jud Hurd