

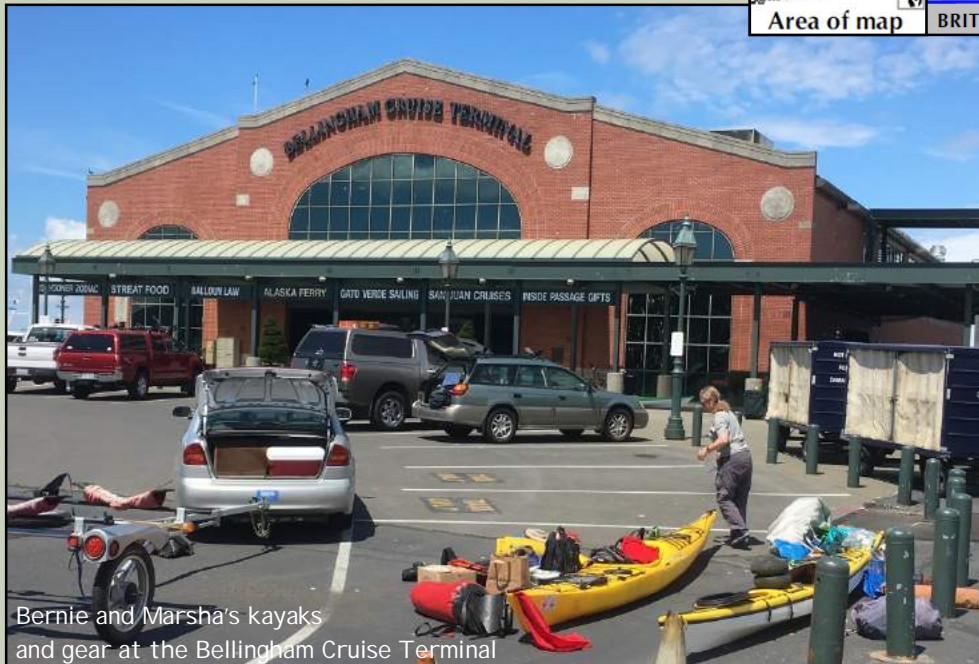
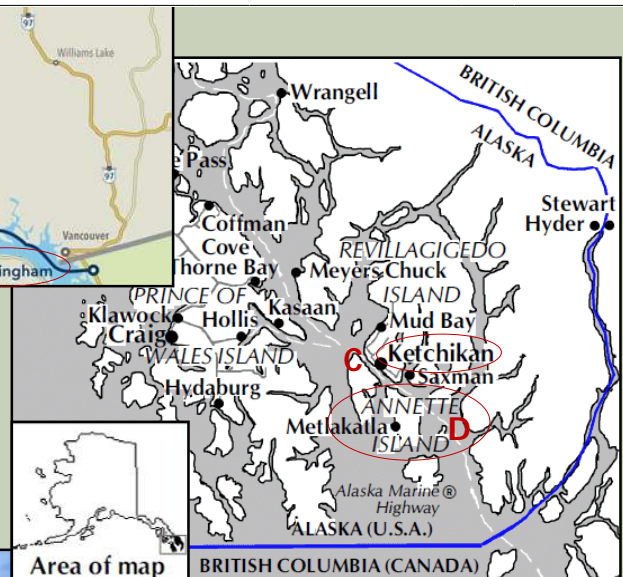
CIRCUMNAVIGATING ANNETTE ISLAND, NEAR KETCHIKAN, ALASKA

JULY 13-29, 2016

By Jud Hurd



This trip started out in 2014 with Dave and Lou Ann Hustvedt and Jud Hurd planning to paddle from Wrangell to Petersburg, Alaska. Sadly, those plans had to be put on hold due to Lou Ann's cancer. Dave and Jud revived this trip for 2016.



Bernie and Marsha's kayaks
and gear at the Bellingham Cruise Terminal

We took another look at the Wrangell/Petersburg route [A] and considered the amount of mud flats shown on the chart. Those flats are exposed during low tide which meant we would be limited to launching and landing at a number of camp spots only during high tide. We decided this would be a problem so we looked for an alternative.

Our plan had been to drive to Bellingham, Washington [B] and take the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) to

our destination island. We would then complete our paddle and return to Bellingham on the ferry and drive home. So, a major planning dictate was where the AMHS ferry docked. We picked Ketchikan [C] where we would launch and then paddle southeast to circumnavigate Annette Island [D].

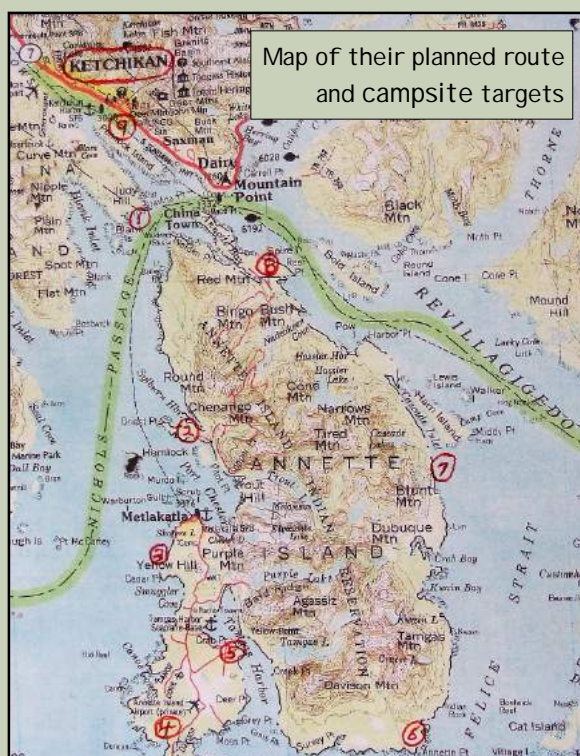
Next we had to decide when to go. This wasn't too hard because it was Alaska after all, which meant we wanted the warmest (and driest) time possible. We settled on July. The ferry departs Bellingham to Ketchikan only on Friday at 6PM arriving in Ketchikan on Sunday at 7AM. It then departs Ketchikan to Bellingham only on Wednesday at 5PM arriving in Bellingham on Friday at 8AM. Given these sailing constraints we decided on a ten-day paddle with the following itinerary:

- Depart Bellingham Friday July 15, 6PM and arrive Ketchikan Sunday July 17, 7AM
- Launch out of Ketchikan Sunday July 17
- Circumnavigate Annette Island
- Return to Ketchikan Monday July 25; this gave us eight nights of camping on Annette Island and nine days of paddling with a layover day if needed due to weather.
- Nights Nine and Ten we would camp on Pennock Island just across from Ketchikan; this would give us Day Ten in Ketchikan to get a shower, wash clothes, sightsee and enjoy a good meal.
- Depart Ketchikan Wednesday July 27, 5PM and arrive Bellingham Friday July 29, 8AM

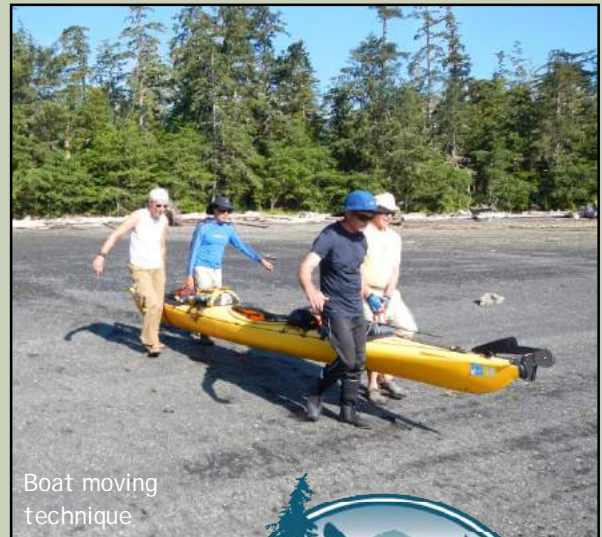
With a trip and dates in hand we sent an invitation to the RMSKC membership and received an unexpected and overwhelming response. This meant we had to decide on a limit for this paddle to keep the group at a manageable size considering the unknown campsite situations we would find. We settled on eight people and after some drops and adds our group was composed of David Hustvedt, Jud Hurd, Dick Dieckman, George Ottenhoff, Joy Farquhar, Marsha Dougherty, Tim Fletcher and Bernie Dahlen.

We spent a number of months gathering the information and working out all the logistics we needed for this trip. Every time we thought we had it all identified, we would think of something else. I cannot stress enough the importance of taking your time to consider all the components of this type of trip and getting the best information you can find. Here is the exhaustive list of what we included in our planning:

- Trip description with specifics on the minimum experience a paddler needed to be accepted
- Mandatory preparation requirements: rescue practice and a dry-run campout
- Details about when and where to meet, equipment
- Requirements, ferry ticket purchase, travel to Bellingham plans, cell phone numbers, etc.
- Permission to camp on Annette Island from the Metlakatla Tribal Council and police; Annette Island is the reservation for the Metlakatla Indian tribe, the only island reservation in the United States.
- Fishing license requirements
- Cost estimate for the total trip
- Mileage and estimated driving time to Bellingham; from Fort Collins it is 1,342 miles, 21.5 hours
- Lodging arrangements in Bellingham for Thursday night
- Parking arrangements in Bellingham
- July average weather patterns for Annette Island - temperatures (53° low and 64° high), water temperature (56°), rain, wind speed and direction



- Websites for information on tides and currents
- NOAA chart covering our target area
- Maps and charts, one for everybody
- GPS for navigation; VHF radio for weather reports; emergency locator beacon for life and death situations
- First aid equipment
- Sleeping and dining options while on the ferry
- Arrangements to stow non-paddle gear in Ketchikan – carts, travel clothes, etc.
- Launch site in Ketchikan after we get off the ferry, and how to get there
- Day-by-day itinerary – paddle route, estimated mileage, target campsites (including coordinates to mark on each GPS), low and high tide times
- Paddle clothes – cold water gear required
- Rain gear and a tarp – required
- Bear information – no bears on Annette Island
- Drinking water – carry and filter
- Meal planning – individual responsibility
- Alcohol provisions, if desired
- Trash – pack-out bag required
- Toilet arrangements, a favorite topic of every trip – relieve yourself below the high water line to be washed away by the tide and burn your toilet paper
- Method to carry loaded kayaks from low water edge to high tide camp [see picture at right]
- Way to communicate our status to people back home
- Local knowledge about our trip, as much as we can find – Southeast Sea Kayaks (a tour business in Ketchikan) was extremely gracious in answering questions and giving us suggestions.



Boat moving technique



With all of this information in hand we were finally ready to start the trip. Oh, one other thing: I can't stress enough the importance of a dry-run camp out which we did on Granby Lake. This allowed people to test their gear and get to know each other on the water. I am happy to report that our dry-run and advance planning was a resounding success. In Alaska, everybody showed up at the right place by the right time, the group stayed together, nobody got lost on the water and nobody got sick. [See the related article in this issue on pages 9-11.]

WEDNESDAY, JULY 13: We begin our drive to Bellingham; Joy is already in Washington visiting friends; Tim, Dave and I caravan together; Dick and George drive together and they are about 1 ½ hours or so ahead of us; we all drive north through Laramie and then west; Bernie and Marsha are behind us and they drive west on I-70; Tim, Dave and I spend the night in Twin Falls, Idaho,

THURSDAY, JULY 14: We all arrive in Bellingham in good shape but driving the last leg on I-405 and I-5 through Seattle is a nightmare of stop and wait and go a little and then repeat.

FRIDAY, JULY 15: We board the ferry and set sail on time; six of us opt to sleep on lounge chairs in the solarium; Tim's wife was planning to come with him so he bought a state room; Kathy didn't make the trip so Bernie buys half of his stateroom. [Photos of the deck arrangements are on the next page.]



Joy and Marsha, cozy on their deck chairs



Some slept on the deck chairs under the solarium's heat lamps; some pitched tents and then had to peg them down with duct tape when the wind came up

SATURDAY, JULY 16: A very pleasant and leisurely day is spent on the ferry where we have the chance to see dolphins, orca and humpback whales. For the most part the ferry ride is very gentle except for one short stretch of water that is more exposed to the sea and we can feel some swells; weather is a mixture of fog, clear, warm and chilly.

SUNDAY, JULY 17: We dock right on time at 7AM but it takes a while to get our kayaks off as we have to wait for a lot of vehicles to be moved; Marsha takes our heavy gear down to the harbormaster while we walk our kayaks down, I would say about a quarter mile walk.

We begin loading our kayaks and organizing our gear when the harbormaster comes out and tells us the US Coast Guard is bringing in a damaged boat and we need to make room for them, which we thought we did. The Coast Guard comes in with a boat alongside and they are trying to get lined up to load it on a trailer; evidently we aren't out of their way enough as some lady is kind of screaming and cussing at us so we keep trying to accommodate. I take our wheels and other gear down to a hostel where we had made arrangements to stow it while we are paddling. Finally we are all together and get launched.

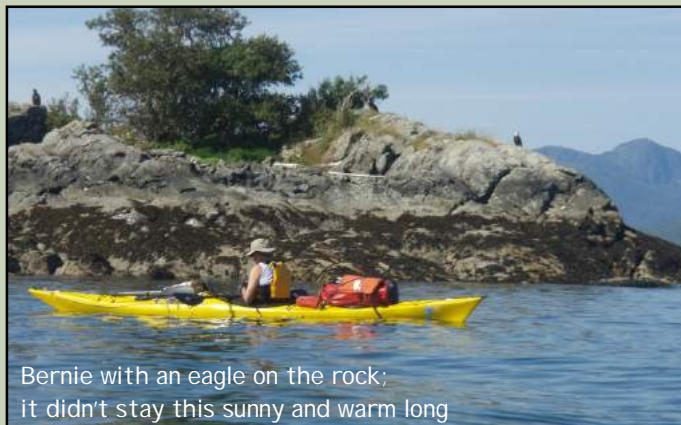


First day's campsite

We have good weather for paddling and make our way across the strait and then head south along Gravina Island; it is a fairly easy paddle with the winds out of the NNW at about 10 mph, which gives us a nice tail wind. After about 7.2 miles we land at Black Sand Beach, our first campsite; there is a family there that had camped the night before but they are getting ready to leave.

We set up camp, bring the boats above high water line and sit back to enjoy ourselves, which we do because we know how to do that. This site is very popular and we have a nice shelter with picnic benches and a port-a-potty; we enjoy it because it is the last one we will see.

MONDAY, JULY 18: After a good night's sleep and breakfast we head out for a crossing of about two miles to Walden Point on Annette Island; it is a beautiful sunny day, mild wind and calm sea, not a problem for this group, in fact it is so nice that we don't wear our dry suits. We paddle about 9.2 miles to Campsite Two in the cove at Driest Point. On the way we see seals, whales less than 100 yards from us, and bald eagles which are becoming very common. There are fish jumping around us everywhere.



Bernie with an eagle on the rock;
it didn't stay this sunny and warm long



Jud talking to the fishermen

We stop and talk to a couple of fishermen on a boat who give us a salmon for dinner and point us toward some good camping beach stretches. (One of the most challenging parts of this trip is locating good camping sites as most of the shoreline is very rocky or has a 2 - 4 foot rock wall; our chart indicates this type of shoreline all around the island with some breaks representing beach stretches suitable for landing and camping, these are our targets each day.) For dinner we have salmon steak with onions, butter, wine, ginger, salt and pepper prepared by George and cooked in aluminum foil over an open fire built by Dick, it is delicious and one salmon feeds all eight of us.



Chef Ottenhoff preparing the salmon
that Dave was given by the fishermen



Part of the fish
that easily fed all eight of the group

Marsha wakes up about 2AM with a feeling that she is floating on air, but she realizes that there is water under and in her tent. Dave wakes up to the sound of water lapping and he gets out to check on the boats when he sees that Marsha is in the water. He gets us all up and we help move Marsha's tent and all her gear to higher ground; she had camped on a tongue of land that some of the others used also, but evidently she is farther out and just low enough for high tide water to reach her. One of the most critical aspects of selecting a campsite every day is making sure there is enough land above high tide to accommodate all our tents and making sure we pull the boats up and tie them off.



Monday night's camp where the salmon was tasty but they misjudged the tide and three of them had to move their tents in the middle of the night.

TUESDAY, JULY 19: Today we paddle about nine miles to Campsite Three at Cedar Point. The weather is overcast with a little more wind and swells up to about two feet; we also have a little misty rain off and on. Once again we see whales and seals; the seals are really funny as all you see are their little round heads poking out of the water as they stare at us wondering what in the world are these strange animals. We see their heads off and on as if they are following us trying to figure us out.



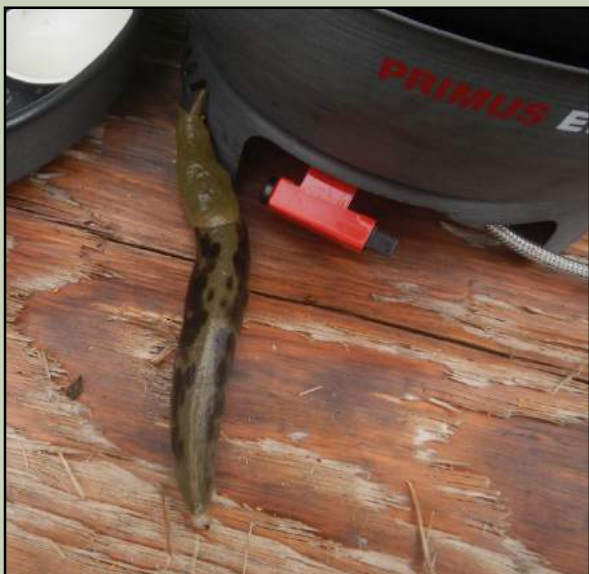
Loading up, Tuesday morning



Metlakatla Municipal Office

We stop in the town of Metlakatla as we need to visit the Tribal Council office to get our visitor permits signed and buy fishing licenses; the Metlakatla Tribe owns the water around Annette Island out to 3,000 feet, so if you want to fish there you have to get a license from them.

We worked with Connie Darling at the council office throughout this whole process and she was very helpful and accommodating; we also find a nice café and have a great lunch. We are able to fill our water jugs at the Council office.



After leaving Metlakatla we make our way to our third campsite which turns out to be at the back of Smuggler Cove. Our first two campsites had fairly nice sandy beaches, but we are now into beaches composed mostly of what I would describe as river rock and larger; that makes landing, unloading and walking around a little more difficult, but RMSKC members are up for any challenge.

At this camp we notice a rather large slug population. I make the mistake of leaving my trash bag out overnight and it has lots of slugs in it the next morning. Let me tell you those are really slimy critters as you pull them out of the bag,

WEDNESDAY, JULY 20: We paddle 7.3 miles past the southwest point of the island and head for Campsite Four around Point Davison; our typical weather pattern now is overcast, off and on rain or mist and some wind with occasional sun. This is the most exciting stretch of the trip as the southwest point is more exposed to the ocean and we get to paddle through three to four-foot ocean swells. (Dave thinks they might even be four to five feet). On top of that the wind is shifting out of the SSW so we have a head wind now.

Everybody does just fine and we don't lose anybody, well not dumping anyway, but there are times the person in front of you disappears from your sight as you are in the bottom of a swell and they are in the bottom of the next swell up in front of you.

It really isn't difficult to paddle as the swells have a rhythm to them and if you stay calm and let your boat do the work you just get to ride up and over them. After we get through this stretch we stop and everybody says it was some of the most paddling fun they have ever had.



David was the only one brave enough to let go of his paddle and take a picture



Campsite, July 20

Dave wrote, "Maybe they were eight to ten feet. These gravity waves were coming in from the open sea. The boats rode very nicely up and down. The short period wind waves were what we had most of the time going down the west side of the island, one to two feet high; the boats just plowed through them with water over the deck."

Our campsite is nice today as we have some grassy areas but we have rain so the tarps go up.

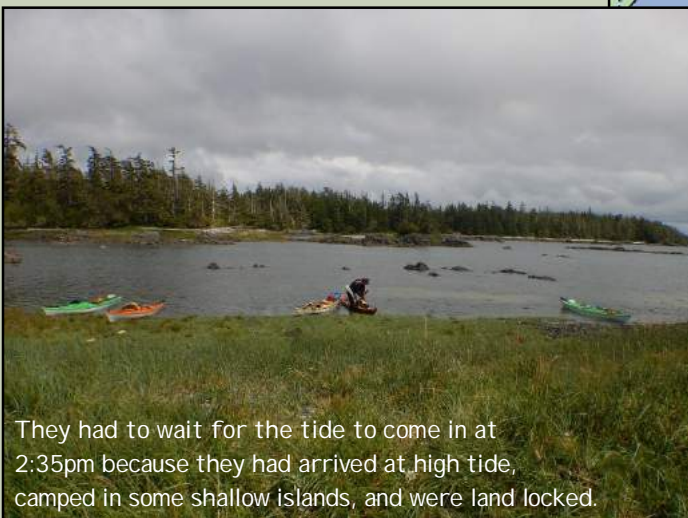


THURSDAY, JULY 21: So, we have now been out for four days and we are all thinking maybe it would be nice to cut our trip short by one day and skip Camp Five at Tent Point. So let's review our situation: we are eight people ages 59, 61, 67, 71, 72, 75 and 81; we have had nice and not so nice weather; Dick got his sleeping bag wet the first day and has been sleeping in his clothes in a bag liner George brought; George has been struggling with a back problem and Dick had a shoulder problem which he thought might have kept him from going.

It's been fun but we are all getting a little tired of camp food and sleeping on the ground, we haven't bathed since we left Ketchikan, and once something gets damp or wet, even from perspiring, it never dries out due to the high humidity so we are all constantly in a soggy state.

No surprise, the group agrees to skip Camp Five so we head directly to Camp Six (which is now five) just across from Indian Rock.

Our campsite that night had exposed a lot of large rocks at low tide and we can't launch until the tide got high enough to cover the rocks.

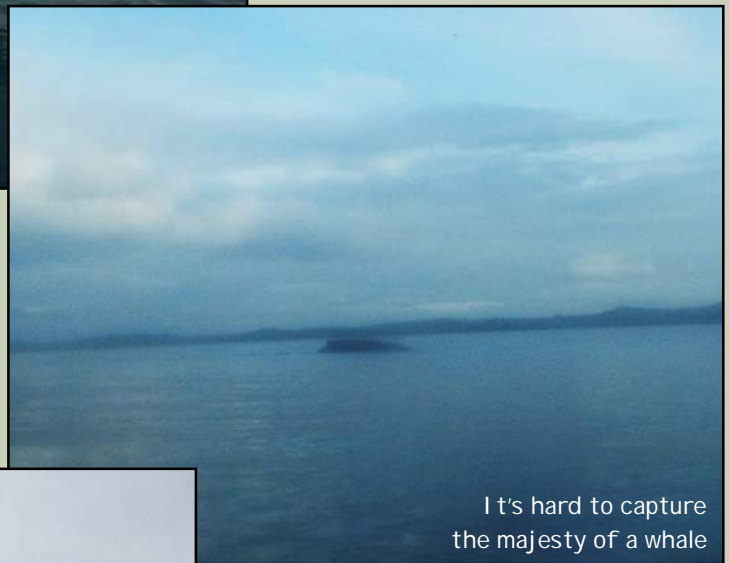


They had to wait for the tide to come in at 2:35pm because they had arrived at high tide, camped in some shallow islands, and were land locked.

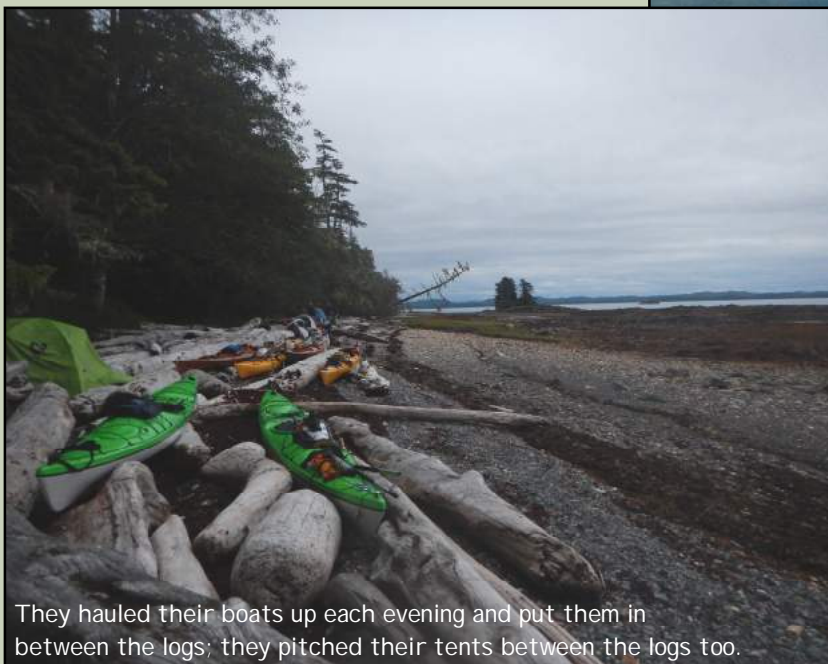


Paddling on Day Five

Marsha wrote, "We heard the blow first, way out in the bay. Then I noticed it came up in sets of two with a little time in between but definitely a pattern. And kept coming closer to look at us. It doesn't look like it in the pictures but it seemed to me to be only 60 to 80 feet away."



It's hard to capture the majesty of a whale



They hauled their boats up each evening and put them in between the logs; they pitched their tents between the logs too.

After dark we are sitting around with some head lamps on and a power boat comes along the shore but a ways offshore. They then stop right across from us and after a while they start to slowly motor towards us.

I am getting a little nervous when they shout out to see if we are all right. We said we are and they rather rudely tell us we shouldn't be showing lights at night; they leave and nothing comes of it. I guess maybe that is some kind of distress signal that I have never heard of.

FRIDAY, JULY 22: Today is a pretty straight forward day and we paddle about 10.9 miles to Campsite Seven (which is now six) to a little cove just a little south of the southern end of Ham Island. This gives us nice protection from the wind. On the way we find our first opportunity to collect water since refilling at Metlakatla. [A photo of the pretty fresh water stream is on the next page.]



A fresh water stream on Day Six, their first opportunity to collect water since refilling at Metlakatla

SATURDAY, JULY 23: We had some rain yesterday and it is a little cool; we wake up to a heavy rain and the weather report says the wind has picked up in the channel. The group discusses our options and decides to stay put for the day; our original itinerary allowed for a weather day and we picked up a day by skipping Campsite Five so we are fine schedule-wise.

We just stay under our tarps and in our tents watching sheets of rain come down. It reminds me of that scene from *Paint Your Wagon* where they are all in camp watching it rain, we just need someone to sing "They Call The Wind Mariah".

Joy seems to be the only one enjoying this as she is out wandering around in it and dancing up and down a little.



Old farts not enjoying the rain.



Joy



This log was cantilevered and bouncy. Both Dick and George fell back at the same time. You had to be there...

Marsha said, "This was our last evening and the best camp, too. It was near high tide and it had stopped raining so everyone had all their stuff spread out."



Clockwise: Bernie, George, Dick, Dave, Joy, Marsha, Tim

Sunday, July 24: About 6PM last night the rain stopped and this morning we wake to a beautiful day. We paddle about 14 miles to Campsite Eight at Reef Point; it takes all fourteen miles to find a stretch of shore suitable for camping and probably the only site along this stretch of the island.

Dave hooks a fish along the way but loses it; George catches a good size salmon which we cook for dinner and have some left over.

Monday, July 25: This is a great paddling day, it is warm and sunny with a mild wind and we are headed home. We paddle eight miles across the channel to the Tongass Narrows on the west side of Revilagigedo Island, which is where Ketchikan is located, and then up the channel back to the harbormaster.



George Ottenhoff's fish



Our route takes us past all of the working ships, coast guard ships, cruise liners, and a lot of small boat activity up and down the channel.

This stretch is also used by the float planes taking cruise people on tours of Misty Fjords; they take off and land right next to us. When they are lined up to land I swear they are coming right at us and will land right on top of us, but they don't.



Last day, heading into Ketchikan ready to go home...

...AND THEN, THE TRIP HEADS SOUTH, OR NOT

After we land Tim checks his phone messages and hears a message from his wife, Kathy. Our July 27th return ferry is *cancelled* due to mechanical issues. (We later found out it seems to happen a lot.)

So now what to do? The Alaska Marine Highway System's option is to transfer our return reservation to the next sailing a week later, August 3. But there is no guarantee the ferry will be ready, although another will be available the following day. This means spending another seven or eight days in Ketchikan at the height of tourist season without a room reservation. Room and board would be very expensive and a number of people have commitments they have to get back to.

Dave's experience in shipping his company's fans turns out to offer the solution, as there is a container shipping company next to the ferry landing. Dave gets the information on sending the boats and gear to Seattle where a truck will haul them to his shop in Boulder. If we cancel our ferry reservation and get a refund, we can apply it to the cost of a plane ticket to Seattle. After considering the cost options we all agree with Dave's plan.

Our next issue is where will we stay for two nights. Our original plan was to camp on Pennock Island but people are ready for a dry, warm room. We find a hostel we can stay in for \$25 a night per person and it's located in the area of the ferry which is convenient.

But what will we do with the boats? The harbor-master solves that for us by allowing us to stow four boats on the docks on racks they had just installed and stow the other four boats behind their office; all of them will be locked with cables.

After arranging for two nights lodging and boat stowing I pick up our wheels and gear we had stowed at another hostel. We finally have everything settled and we head for our hostel. Later, settled in and cleaned up, we meet for a really nice, but expensive, dinner.



Tuesday, July 26: Big day today as we have to take care of getting the kayaks loaded, cancel our ferry reservation for next week and book our flights to Seattle. A really big issue on our list is to hit the laundry and do lots and lots of laundry. Being the very capable and creative RMSKC members that we are we get all of this done in good order.



The biggest challenge is figuring out how to pack the kayaks and gear in the container so that nothing gets damaged during transportation. One of the issues Dave reminded us all about before we left Colorado is that we have to be flexible on these types of trips, and that certainly applies here.

But we get it figured out and get all done in time to do some sightseeing in Ketchikan. People kind of take off in different directions to explore items of interest such as Creek Street (home of the brothels until 1953), shops, museums, totem poles or the funicular tram (a sort of diagonal elevator).



Wednesday, July 27: Pretty straightforward day today. After breakfast we take the local ferry across the channel to Gravina Island where the airport is located; we have an uneventful flight to Seattle and then a shuttle back to Bellingham and a cab ride to the ferry landing where our cars were parked. I for one am really glad to stop traveling for the day! We get a nice dinner and get a room in the Bellingham Lodge which is where we stayed our first night before we left on July 15.

Thursday, July 28: Start driving home or to the next destination.

Thursday, August 11: Our kayaks arrive at Dave's and we can pick them up.

THAT WAS OUR PADDLE TO ALASKA

We all agreed that the trip was challenging, wonderful, exciting at times, educational and we all used muscles we hadn't used in a while.

I know I will remember all the great times I had and the wonderful people I shared them with and I will soon forget the less than great times we endured.

We now have a better idea of all the work involved in planning and executing a trip of this magnitude and we have something to think about if another opportunity arises. Or, perhaps once is enough and now we can just check it off our bucket lists.



Dave's radio



Dave setting up his antenna



Article and planning documents by Jud.

Photos by Bernie, Jud, Joy, Tim, Marsha and Dave.

Many thanks to Marsha for her extra help with sequencing and captions.