

The First Glacier

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Rather than recall, blow by blow, the more mundane aspect, although many an hour is passed in the ordinary, and may even be said to comprise the larger part, let us intercept this adventure to describe our very first encounter with the Rivers of Ice.

You must understand, while we leaned upon each other, drawing strength therefrom, our hearts linked in companionship and tender regard, we two, were nonetheless, alone, in a remoteness. We could have disappeared without a trace, as some have done, giving rise to those untoward speculations and inexplicables associated with the likes of "Devil's Country", and the Bay of Death (as it is known throughout Southeast Alaska), to be found in 'The Strangest Story Ever Told'.* We had casually transformed the substantiality of our surroundings into progress across the face of our nautical charts. These charts revealed little of the splendor, and of the invigorations contained in the pristine ocean atmosphere, or of the clear blue sky reflected in the mirror-like waters before and surrounding us. Nor could we estimate the spectacle of the snow-capped ridges streaming with their filleted, crevassed glaciations. As we navigated in this manner, between the o'ermapped surface, all cast in a two-toned hue, revealing the water as some near-pastel blue and the terra firma as some tanned grayness, having occasion to observe and study the actualities, we found them wholly dissimilar. If it had not been for the Navigational Aids placed there by Man, and had these not been reliable, and reliably attended to, we investing such trust in them; and had they been differently located than purportedly indicated upon the chart and in the very same place within, or upon the water, we surely would not have occasion to return to say "All the more marvelous, Captain Vancouver, Lieutenant Whidbey, and Lieutenant Puget".

As we pointed the index fingers of our homologous prehensile extensions, so attuned to delicate, demonstrative gestures of this kind, our wills having thus brought these integers to bear, we made way towards what our minds had already eclipsed, partly in anticipation, and partly to probe yet further into some newer, remoter place.

* By Harry D. Kolp. Lind Printing, Ketchikan, AK. 4th Edition, 1978

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Ah!, but now the waters altered their cast, alerting us, as though to challenge or to forbid us to enter the proximity of that aforementioned Bay of Death (Thomas Bay).

That I do not deceive you, I must mention we traveled innocently, having only the scantest information, containing some allusion to the mystery associated with one arm of the body of water we were approaching.

So that you not anticipate some spine-tingling event, suffice it to say we were nonetheless assured the water was colder for its greener tint. We had witnessed this shade once before as we passed by the effluence of another river fed by melting glaciers (the Stikine). And now we had entered the Bay of Death wherein some mixing of ocean and glacial waters occurred during the flooding tide.

To lessen, even more, the suspense, we were not the first intrepid mariners to enter into these splendorous environs, for our fingers once again aimed whereof another had made his mark upon our chart as 'A MUST!', affixing thereto, the symbol of an anchor.



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It was ours to be alone amidst all this wonder and remoteness, apprehensive of the new, mindful of the water's aspect, yet awed. And though pursuing our 'duty' to the 'MUST', we were unprepared for the appearance and spectacle of this River of Ice as we turned, gazing to Port. There, unveiled before our eyes, and for our eyes alone, lay the supine glacier resting above the water's edge, its corpus stretching long and sinuously out of sight between ridges of mountain upon which it slept, a rather emaciated looking creature, morained, its vertebrae emphasizing the shape and flow of its wondrous body.

Partaking of the sight, of the 'vision', and partaking of our response, the two potentiating each other into a joyous ebullience, Ah!, Ah!, Ah!; we mutes having developed that peculiar aphasia before Mother Nature's performance - Bravo!, Bravo!.

For an unguarded moment one carelessly expanded, "Oh, if only all mankind could behold!; Surely he would be uplifted!". Aye!, that t'were only possible - another time perhaps.

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Surely he that so anointed our chart with his inglorious 'X' and Anchor, expressed in all humility the wretched limitations of human language. Am I able to more than grunt? Well, to you TOK A TEE, I extend a grateful nod.

Ah!, but to persist in the tale. A glorious day; the solar ball, resplendent, beckoning.

Having anchored some two miles distant from the glacier in the safety of Scenery Cove that would assure us of some protection from certain exposures to wind, not knowing what would happen if the untoward should spring upon us, we trusted, not wishing to become paralyzed with apprehension, so futile in any case; and we debated how we ought gain proximity to the Sleeping Frozen River (Baird Glacier).

The mechanics were modestly accomplished, not without trepidation, for a breeze was blowing which would aid our transport thereto, but would hinder our return in our meagre auxiliary craft, so-called dinghy, but gamely christened, 'ATTADINK'.

While an oar-propelled traverse would constitute a less cacophonous event, the distance to be traveled in choppy water, under oar power, was an uninviting prospect. We shipped our,



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more-or-less, faithful British SEAGULL, to 'roar' towards our destination, all the while hugging the rock-cliff shore where the water seemed less choppy.

The greenish hue of the water had become transformed into a gray dish-watery coloration as the rivers of silted ice-water merged into the waters of the bay. Beneath us the depths could have reached to the Philippine Trench, or we might have been able to wade for what we could perceive of the bottom in this silty murk. And no sooner than we had speculated upon the waters depth when our 'roaring' bird began delivering a labored pulsation divulging the bottom's approach. Whereupon, shipping oars, we, like some lumbering water bird, splashed the miring Attadink, until disembarkation became our only option. We had touched upon a long shallow shelf of silt, over which, we needed to drag the dinghy for some distance, to the higher ground of the extensive gravel bar that lived at the foot of the Sleeping Giant.

Alas, now we could partake of the view; however, the broad



countenance of the Glacier stood some distance off, perhaps yet another half mile. The intensity of the wind had increased over the

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land as the air approached the cold emanations of the Glacier, cradled in its self-made valley. There we stood, listening to the eerie sounds of the wind and the rushing rivulets of glacial melt intermingling in some strange musical counterpoint; still one could proclaim it silent, not being rasped by a cacophony of MAN sounds. Even above this harmonious din, arose a loud ponderous report, as the deceptively still Ice River shifted and snuggled into its scoured bed.

Ah!. But the Ah! became overtone with apprehension; the wind proved cold; the environs were bare and stark, although sunny. Our deliberations favored a stroll, that evolved into something more like a shove from the wind at our backs, pushing us in the direction of the craggy white mass, showing hints of blue at its base, and a dark brown cascading down upon its whiteness from the moraine bestriding its spine, all appearing as some Great White Scelidosaurus.

We were somewhat defeated in our purpose, both by the swift intraversable, turbid rivulets and the coldness of the wind, coupled with our mounting apprehension. Had we willed it so, we might have returned to our little ship, using it to gain the other side to these rivulets, but indeed, our venturesomeness seemed to have become burdened with caution. Our meagerness became confirmed upon spying the large tracks of doglike paws in the sand, having deduced the likes of a wolf. After all, it was not a place one would choose to walk or run his dog, and not a natural habitat of dogs, they being more amenable to the comforts and opportunities associated with Man; and wolves being aloof, independent and accustomed, and happier still, in their wilderness. Even though one could not ask for a more enchanting vista, this place was completely inhospitable for man and beast. God only knows the why of the wandering track on this forsaken barren. We allowed our imaginations to overwhelm our better sense, conjuring images of wild beasts with reputations for indiscriminate palates.

Our natural cautiousness in this solitary place deemed we reconnoiter to the Mother Ship lest this cold wind whip these already choppy waters into an impassable fury, leaving us stranded, prey to the wild; and to the, even Wilder, issuances of our conjurations. CAST OFF!

Such beauteous surroundings, and indeed they would pass as beauteous, despite what I might declare concerning their apparent inhospitableness, for beauty is often austere, unfamiliar, and distant; yes, 'tis the saving grace for these surroundings to

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be a barren hostel to the living. That one be lured by this more friendly circumstance might give rise to exclusive condominiums, that would, in the end, imprison such loveliness in the malevolence of possession. As it is, should one desire to feast upon her statuesque aura as some daily diet, he would be obliged to endure her handmaidens, the cold austere elements who tend her train year round, often obscuring her sweet mystery from view, perhaps in a rage that he should gaze so long and boldly upon her nakedness. 'Twere Diana or Athena, he that cast the covetous gaze, might suffer yet another fate.

Thus it was, we tarried not, and others were not there to be found. Aye, we may return, and be welcomed all the same; for 'shall not loveliness not always be loved', and would not our fancies promote a return, and have we not displayed a deferential attitude?

We cast a glow upon John Muir clambering o'er these mammoth Icy Hedges, as we are always mindful of Captain Vancouver in these climes. There were those who did not survive, long before we became self-conscious and literate; and others whom we have known personally, perished at the base of Mt. St. Elias, having had the effrontery to assault her mantle when she was indisposed. This odd fascination that holds man before the specter of his own existence. Thus it is, we in our venturing encounter the unaccountable, our wills supreme in our fantasies, becoming upbraided by the sullen aspect of reality.

No, we did not challenge the Mountain of Ice, nor did we seek to dispel the mysteries of Devil's Country. Our footprints attest to the limits of our venturesomeness, having crossed those of another creature who quite understands the truth of realities, although he cannot speak of them, thereby enlightening us friable ones.

Still, in all, will we ever forget, fortified in emulsions, preserving in stillness, some part? And do we acknowledge some failing in not having touched upon the solid reality? What would beckon us on beyond our curiosity? If one fail his curious nature, halting before some apprehension, has he still not fulfilled some part of himself?

Always before us, in our foreconsciousness, is the Great Remonstrancer, expostulating, "Ye live but once" as though to chide one in his every caution. And now, he admonishes again, "Nothing ventured, nothing gained", and Oh, further beration, "He who hesitates is lost", and from he that takes our pulse, the Great Throbber, "Look before ye leap", adding the mighty

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enforcement, "When in doubt, Don't"; and still one last refrain from the chorus, "Fall down, you may; get up, you must".

You, who think adventure is a straightforward "GO FOR IT" enterprise, must be assured it is a flesh and blood affair that provides the substance of the suspense and the excitement. To have gained the summit, however steep or however shallow, is not the undertaking of the 'inanimate'. One becomes acquainted with himself, or herself; there is little he is able to confront or deny, for he emerges as what he is, puzzled at his make-up, more or less resolved, with some new nerve or fiber he had not before.

So onward to adventure.