

VIII *FORD'S TERROR* and *THE FOURTH*.

If it had not been for another's specific mention of Holkham Bay as a 'don't miss' (including Sundum Glacier and Endicott Arm) we might have passed on by, although, upon studying the annotated charts in the [not-to-be-used-for-navigation](#) 'picture chart books', it would be hard to imagine not considering this area as a place to visit. The photo reproduction of Ford's Terror was something to behold (for a workaday suburbanite), an image surrounded in a mistiness, evoking a sense of mystery; likened to a face beneath a veil; in this case, revealing none of the 'terror', but more, an invitation to some enchanting wonderland. It would be fair to say this one image of itself, might have sufficed to persuade us to travel to Alaska.



As prelude to Holkham Bay, the day we chose to travel northward in Stephens Passage from Hobart Bay could not have been clearer. The day could be described as a bright blue day, with a clear blue sky reflected in the sea, emerging as a deeper darker blue, a hint of haze on the snow-capped mountains of Baranoff Island appearing on the distant horizon to the southwest. Something we tended to overlook, having grown so accustomed to their presence, I'm remembering now, the snow-capped ridges and mountains we had seen throughout our entire northward journey following the 'inside passage', a journey which began in early May at Whidbey Island, Washington. These ridges and mountains formed an unending panorama and spectacle of 'breath-taking' scenery as no other stage-setting could hope to duplicate.

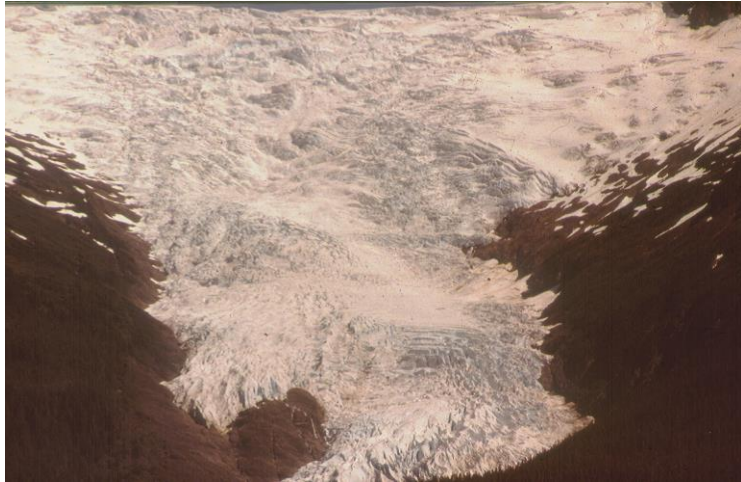
It was, then, a day of pristine beauty, of which we alone were the possessory freeholders, in our minds eye, excepting of course the humpbacked whales lolligagging, 'tail lobbing' and generally playing about. As we neared our objective for the day, Endicott Arm, planning to anchor in Sanford Cove, the only purported anchorage in the entire Arm, excluding a place within Ford's Terror, we spied towards the northwest, in the distance, what we assumed to be a pair of fishing boats - all white. Then we conjectured these craft to be too large to fit the description of such vessels, reassigning to them a different purpose such as Cruise Ships, or as Hospital Ships all arrayed in a

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stark whiteness. They seemed not to be moving perceptibly. It was time to study these shapes through the 'glass' where, indeed they appeared to be heeled at some precarious angle. Hah!, then it was these outer perceptions guided us to a clearer and less prejudiced view of the facts - HOI!, they were Ice Bergs. And sure enough, there for further confirmation, stated upon the chart for us but to observe - CAUTION: Icebergs float out of Endicott and Tracy Arms creating significant hazards to navigation.

As we approached our destination, following the mainland somewhat, our view of the Arm was mostly obscured except for some of the higher ridges on the north side, particularly the bright white outline of Mt. Sumdum whose grandeur we glimpsed from time to time until arriving near Point Astley where, as we cleared the Point,

Sumdum appeared in all her bright glory. One must understand the aphasia one feels as he emits a series of 'Ahs!, Ohs! and Wows!, Can you imagine?!, Isn't that something?!, Have you ever seen anything like it?!'. Yes!, there it was, a set piece arranged



for our visual feasting; Mt. Sumdum with her glacier of bluish-white, nested and cradled, flowing down her side, upon this still bright blue midday; all, a scene of placid splendor. Perhaps the foregoing description seems overdone when considering the many magnificent glaciers one finds in the variety of breathtaking settings in the watery, icy north country. Mother Nature is perhaps always a little indescribable, our language becoming feebly depleted when attempting to elucidate the impact upon one's soul created by these immense visual stimuli. And, yes, each of these glacial settings, big or small, became an experience for one's inner being, perhaps in awe or in reverence. I say these things guardedly being aware of the affect that familiarity has upon us. But to reiterate in this context, we two, for the most part were alone, in sole command of our little ship, our time, our whereabouts, each a critical element to this enterprise. Yes!, we were attentive to the disposition of Mother Nature, fortunate in her provisioning of fair days and clear vistas. We had liked to

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imagine we were attuned to her moods and obedient to her whims. Thus 'twas mostly our own sounds we endured. Surely we were reminded often enough of our fellow creature's existence, the roar of his motorized birds being the most obtrusive reminder, but seldom enough heard to cause any real disturbance, but often enough to season the enchantments with some unneeded awareness.



Many others had come here before us to stand in awe; many came to pillage the riches they could find; others to hunt the wild goat. Where enjoyment of the beautiful and the exploitation and ravishing merge I do not know; they seem not compatible - ever.

Mount Sundum was only the beginning; as she became integrated into our visual reality as part of a scene we must negotiate in order to continue our adventure, another scene came into view, and yet another; and perhaps just as startling and awe-inspiring,

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our first ice berg, close enough to feel its coolness radiating. We circled this sculptured immensity in Atavist, aquiver with those Ohs and Ahs and Wows. Such a variety of shapes in one single piece of ice, very blue, absolutely still, excepting the gentle perturbations of Atavist slowly under way. The berg was of a translucently pale blue and white all about its edges with a slight glow radiating from within illuminated by the bright sun, the range of coloration extending from a near whiteness through iridescently pale to bright blues, mixed with opaque lavender hues. And the shapes: a three-hundred and sixty degree visual feast of a monumental scale of a faultless work of art. One whole side in particular displayed a cavity, a few feet above the water, a cavity resembling a whale's open jaw coupled with the bold overhanging shape above creating a distinct impression of a sperm whale's head. This cavity extended the full length of one side of the berg, perhaps fifty feet in width, and with the corresponding overhanging shape coupled with the irregularities of uneven melting along with the changes in hue of the coloration of ice, creating the additional impression of a fleet of sperm whales lined up in some 'marching' formation, yet comprised all of unique individuals.

Surely I ramble on; a picture is worth a thousand words, yet I persist herewith to persuade what might be persuaded by your own eyes and imaginings.

We proceeded to the more mundane chore of anchoring at Sanford Cove. Once firmly 'hooked' to the 'mate's' satisfaction we beheld the beholdables, enjoying the leisurely stillness and sunshine.

We began to observe a procession of icebergs of all sizes, mostly of a smaller variety, moving about with the tidal currents. Occasionally one would float close by Atavist, we becoming aware of its presence through a characteristic sound of light tinkling and crackling. It has been stated that approximately only one tenth of a berg's mass appears above the water, thus it has been advised one ought give these larger bergs a wide berth, for, even though so great a mass projects downward as



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though ballasted, many bergs' shapes do not conform to their hypothetically stable metacenter; a piece of its mass cracking and breaking loose above the water may upset the whole focus of gravity as to cant and topple the mass, quite disturbing the surrounding waters, sometimes precariously to the mariner.

Needless to mention further, it was a lovely place, and 'twas so we were amply provided with all the amenities, the chiefest amongst them, our own good health and cheer; but also remarkably obliging weather which remained with us on the following day, the Fourth of July, the scheduled date for our junket to Ford's Terror, thirteen miles distant.

In consulting the Coast Pilots, an older one (ninth edition) and a newer one (eleventh edition) we could not find any information regarding the timing of our passage through Ford's Terror. In consulting one of those books containing a two-page article extolling the virtues of the place, we, once again, found that particular piece of information lacking. And in consulting the picture-book Marine Atlas no mention was made of the timing. In each case it was advised that high water slack was the preferred time to transit the passage. We did not wish to wait several hours for a tide change. In one of the not-to-be-used-for-navigation Marine Atlases the statement appeared: '...entrance bay is sometimes clogged with ice from Dawes Glacier; narrows is but a shallow creek at low tides but may be entered by small craft at high slack. Flood starts about two hours after low tide at Wood Spit...' This last turned out to be a useless piece of information for calculating the high water slack; not only was it useless, it turned out to be incorrect. One might as well have said, "Ebb starts about two hours after high tide at Wood Spit" which also would have been useless and incorrect.

Fortunately for us we had negotiated enough narrow passages to have guessed we could arrive a little early hoping to catch the end of a flooding current, 'riding with it'. Guess Again?

And indeed - What of this place - Ford's Terror?

I can recall many places we have been that might have earned such a name readily and appropriately, if this naming be a measure of all the others, yet whose names bear no relationship to the amount of consternation they might engender given half a chance. Soon it would come to pass however, that we would exhaust our store of ghastly-aghasts, and our language would lose its impact and general utility, as it does in the market place, if we were to apply every terror evoking morpheme to all the anfractuositities one would encounter in his nautical adventures.

I'm not certain I will be able to pass on to you the correct

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origin of the naming of Ford's Terror; but in my reluctance to research it further, I'll perpetuate the myth or facsimile thereof, hoping it obliges the truth, which I found in our [not-to-be-used-for-navigation](#) Marine Atlas wherein a crew member of a ship christened Patterson is purported to have rowed into the fjord-like area through this narrow passage during a 'slack water' period for the purpose of hunting ducks. When it came time to leave, this individual, presumably a man named Ford, was confronted with 'extremely turbulent water with rapids, rooster tails and whirlpools which took floating icebergs and ground them together'. It is said he was trapped in the fjord for some six 'terrifying' hours.

Truly, from the description provided, it does not appear one should attempt passage under such conditions. The Coast Pilot's statement of Ford's Terror: '...its entrance dangerous except at high water slack...tidal currents rush through the narrowest part of the inlet with great velocity. The controlling depth through the narrows is 2 fathom'.

We thus chose the predicted time for High Tide at Wood Spit as our reference, not being sure when high water slack at the inlet would occur. We estimated between one and two hours. Our choice of high tide consisted of one early in the morning or one early in the evening. We anticipated a slight boost with the flooding tide down Endicott Arm. We left Sanford Cove at dawn, one hour before high tide at Wood Spit, arriving at Ford's Terror two hours and eleven minutes later hoping to be able to study the situation and be able to ride the end of the flooding current with plenty of time to spare. In theory we had remaining a safety margin close to fifty minutes. But to our surprise the current had already begun to ebb; thus we needed to proceed without hesitation lest we be confronted with waiting for the next high water slack some thirteen hours later. We were fortunate indeed as we estimated the current against us to be close to five or five and one half knots; we opened the throttle to produce a hull speed of seven and one half knots (one and one quarter knots in excess of designed hull speed), (and I know this sounds awfully like Jacques Cousteau, but nevertheless true, we barely made it through).

We found ourselves surrounded on all sides by precipitous rock formations down the faces of which cascaded many waterfalls. These small mountains rose some three-thousand feet, in one case an apparent jagged basaltic fresco, nearly perpendicularly, devoid of any vegetation, showing an undulating smoothing horizontal glacial scouring some five-hundred feet from its summit. Still larger

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formations revealed the shape of a bowl characteristic of glaciation, and still higher elevations bore snow and ice fields glistening as polished silver in the bright sun.



And once this glorious place inside
We were by ourselves beside;
And herein, not knoweth which sights to abide;
All, but eagerly invited our spirits therein to reside.

We were located in a chasm or fjord at the base of which, in the northeast arm, lay a shallow place and a meadow of marsh grasses, in the center of which grew a small coniferous grove, beneath which grew heavily laden stalks of salmon berries. We anchored on a shelf

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that formed part of this shallow place, which, in turn, above the high tide line, merged into the meadow.

On our way into the fjord we saw three other boats anchored and rafted together; we also observed where some prawn traps had been set. Before we anchored we also consigned our traps to the deep. The other occupants of Ford's Terror did not show resentment at our appearance; anyway, perhaps not as much as I revealed to the first mate upon finding someone there. In all fairness, they deserved that 'possessory right' I had referred to earlier, having ventured there several times from Juneau to celebrate holidays in a secluded and peaceful setting. They were in fact very helpful in assuring us of the holding ground that formed this shelf to which we all were now anchored. We had 'dropped the hook' some one-hundred yards away which assured adequate privacy for all; as it developed only one other vessel entered the area, to join the others, during our two-day stay.

It should be mentioned, Charline, the 'first mate', conducted the 'lion's share' of the socializing for the good ship Atavist, in making contact with other mariners, always being successful in her own special way.

Ah so, 'twas the Fourth, a time for flying the ensigns, and pennants, and a time for conviviality - and such a day - such a day. A grand time was had by all walking about the decks of 'Gadget', the beautifully restored 1929 forty-five foot Blanchard power yacht, imbibing copious quantities of festive juices peculiar to such occasions. Ah yes; then a potluck feast, the centerpiece: bowls upon bowls of fresh Ford's Terror shrimp. During the festivities the clamor associated with Independence Day was executed in the guise of a trap shoot from the bow of Gadget. Two big cherry-bombs reserved for the momentous climax, the 'grand finale', landed in the water before they could explode - fizzle-izzle-izzle-iz. Alas!, then, wee firecrackers, trap shooting and a noisy gin and tonic hullabaloo were all the racket these souls could muster, buried in this remote part of Amerikee, where it must be claimed not a soul in the whole wide world was disturbed thereby, lest one account our two Shelties, left to their own devices on Atavist.

While engaged in this exchange of convivialities, we gained some critical local knowledge regarding the timing of passage through Ford's Terror. High water slack occurred forty-five minutes after high tide at Wood Spit. We thus gained the explanation of the adverse current we experienced upon entering. By that measure we were twenty six minutes late. If we had timed ourselves for the two hours listed in the not-to-be-used-for-navigation Marine Atlas we would

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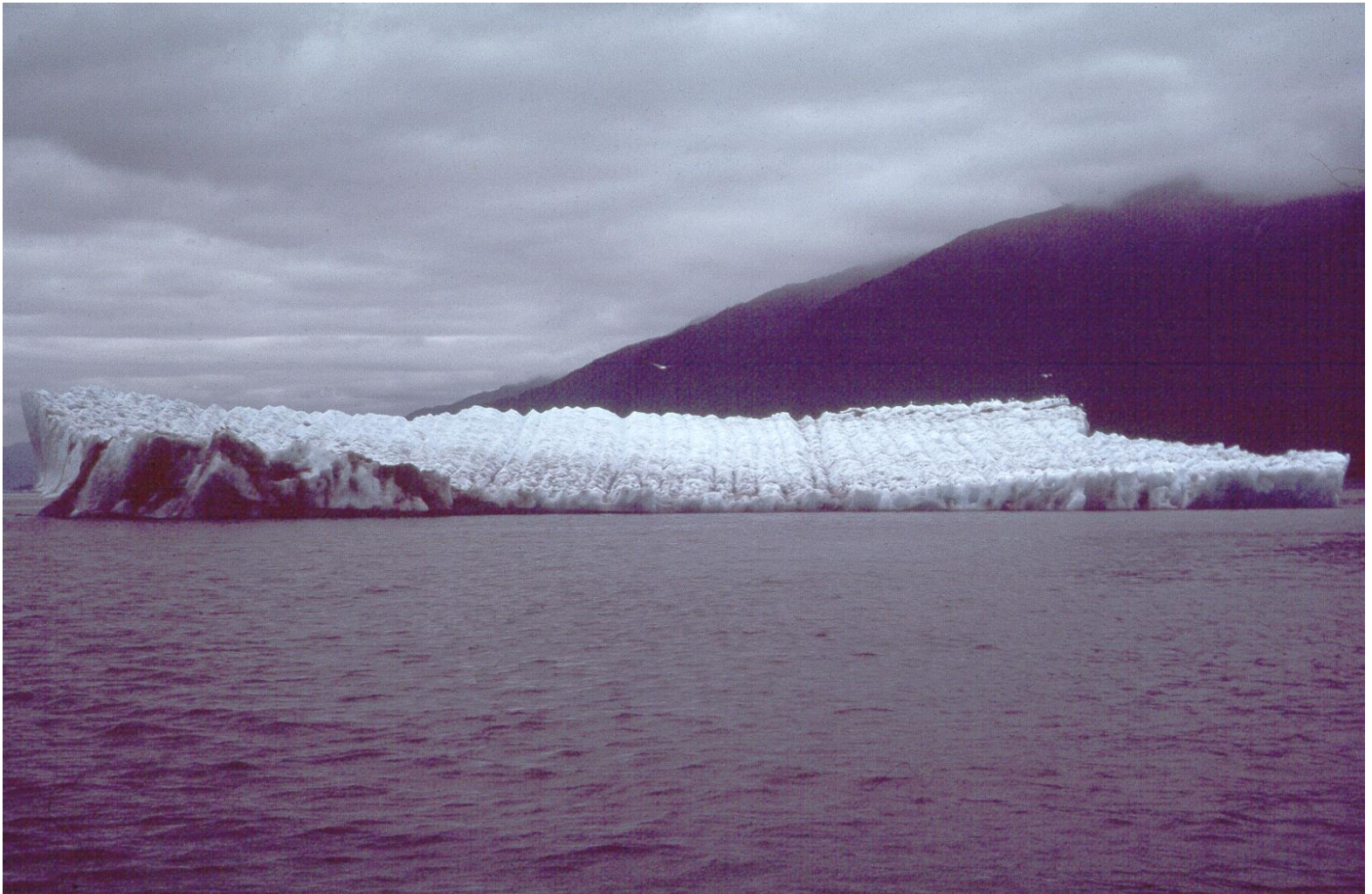
have been one hour and fifteen minutes late, consequently would never have been able to negotiate the velocity of the rapids being created by the thirteen and one half foot tidal change; indeed, we had been fortunate in our cautions.

Have I exclaimed enough concerning the splendors of this place? What the eye beholds, being unaccustomed to such sights, naturally leaves one variously agog and tongue-tied; I suppose this is the condition that awe and reverence produces within us. Indeed we are humbled by the raw beauty, the immensity. Some will authoritatively ascribe all this 'handiwork' to a God or some such omnipotent 'personage'. I am affronted by these proclaimers, perhaps as I am by the 'patriots' who cannot perceive the meaning or recall some advocacy for dissent, even on the Fourth. The patriots righteously berate "Love it or Leave it", as does the Grand Inquisitor to the second coming of Christ. God is a convulsion of ignorance; some will argue God is a recognition and a humility in the face of something Greater than oneself. Perhaps this is so, but surely not something with two legs. I cannot so ascribe from my 'ignorance'. This proposition is obviously not a matter for common knowledge; it is all too great a conundrum and secret. I say this 'agogness' and 'tongue-tiedness' speaks for itself - the awe and reverence do represent some of the divinity in us, neither as cause nor effect, but as a unity, perhaps totally submerged in the reality of our earthen home, yet transcending its material aspects, investing it with a special quality of ourselves as 'living' entities, that only living entities are able to impart to this lonely and indifferent cosmos.

We departed this magical place timing our exit through the Terror's narrows to be forty-five minutes after the high tide at Wood Spit, arriving at slack water for a most leisurely passage. It was a gloomy day wherein the world became foggy-misty, cold and enclosed, more eerie and threatening than enchanting. The snow-capped ridges were now obscured from view, the bergs more desolate and more dramatic, their blues ultimately cool, but exquisite in their stark beauty of light against dark. The water was of a cold gray-green. We circumnavigated one huge piece of ice, obviously an immense, still intact, piece of glacier with its sloping corrugated and ridged back, perhaps one-hundred and a hundred feet square by twenty-five feet tall. Most of its blueness, perhaps a hundred feet or so, was submerged, in the impenetrable darkness below; above was seen the dirty craggy greywhite typical of the exposed glacier, covered with grindings and finings of mother earth blown about by the cold winds that scurry and rage up and down the backs of these slumbering slithery glacial serpents; and at its very highest point were

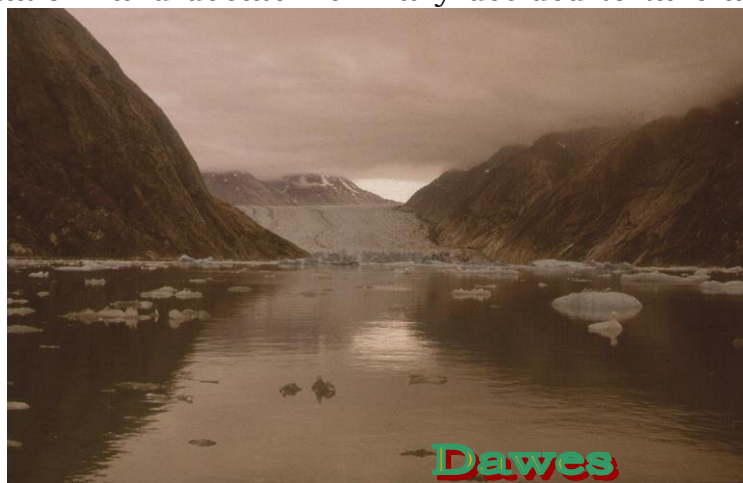
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perched gulls and eagles.



After much hesitation and debate we finally decided to take a peek at Dawes Glacier, from which this huge berg had calved.

The closer we approached the more ice we encountered and the more frightening became the aspect for us two alone. We could see the glacier plainly



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enough, but held back in our approach fearful lest we engage too many of the ice floes. A most dreary day; yet the gray-green water



contrasted to the rust-red of the exposed rock forming the fjord, contained its own austere beauty, with the ice in turn forming bright spots of light, dotting the whole scene, with the occasional larger bergs rich in brilliant opaque blues.

Still we were anxious to leave with nearly four hours to travel down Endicott to our planned anchorage at Sanford Cove, once again. We thus departed the vicinity of Dawes leaving it to the harbor seals who lie upon the ice projecting some strange form of contentment.

The day remained foggy. We had thought if the weather proved amenable we would explore the highly recommended Tracey Arm, appendaged to the North. The next dawn however, presented us with the same overcast and bleak conditions, perhaps making it hazardous to travel at all. Visibility was clear to the entrance of Endicott Arm. We felt it ill-advised to travel into Tracey Arm, and, as charm would have it, we learned later that Tracey was clogged with ice beyond the bend.

As it developed, travelling northward towards Taku Harbor in overcast and drizzle required seven hours dedicated to helmsmaning in adversity - towards some imaginary predetermined goal. After

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Endicott Arm, Taku proved poor hostel to our spirits, though the Danforth found familiar comforts in Neptune's cradle. The following day was almost completely 'socked in', visibility being very poor in fog, as we groped our way from headland to headland, finally reaching Grand Island, then Cove Point, lastly navigating through an immense gill net fishing fleet at the entrance to Taku Inlet. The visibility improved enough to allow us to see the entrance to Gastineau Channel where we made way to Douglas, across from Juneau, another destination achieved.

Ford's Terror is a special place, as is Endicott Arm. There are many such special places along the way. Those most special to me were the one's the least frequented by our fellow look-a-likes. By now, you are beginning to suspect the author is truly an unfriendly sort. The author might put his case succinctly as having experienced too much of something, and not enough of something else, what might be adduced as overindulgence in an unbalanced, cloying diet. Would one tire of places like Ford's Terror? Indeed, would one tire of the modern metropolis? Answering a question with a question appears as an avoidance. There isn't any way I might explain my abhorrence of the city. The two conditions are overwhelming in their austerity; the tactile reality of the city leaves one cold; the tactile reality to be found in the raw immensity of the mountain certainly proves most inhospitable, however inoffensively touchable. What if one should attempt to remain in its vicinity without a lifeline to the outside; for in much of the formidable rocky wilderness one could survive for only brief periods? Ah!, but does that warrant the embrace of the metropolis? 'Tis understood there does exist some in between ground; but the in between ground always results in a compromise of a kind that does not satisfy. Within the bowl beyond Ford's terror, most likely one would soon become depressed as a persistent overcast hovered day after day. If one were imprisoned there, then doubtlessly the aspect would alter; and perhaps one would long for the comfy cozy suburban fireside. What one most appreciates is something that is grander than oneself. One is confronted by the mystery of the place, and the mystery of life, of his own life, his own palpable presence surrounded by the austere. One senses something vital to his comprehension of existence lies close at hand; he senses affinities with elemental forces and spirits. The essence has survived untouched by man because nothing is there for him to exploit. Therefore something remains of a condition one wants to be able to apprehend, something essential to his body of knowledge, not a specific knowledge, not describable in scientific terms, yet a tangible three dimensionality; not tangible in the sense one may

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reach out to touch, but a corporeal presence one's expansive spirit may freely embrace. The wilderness has not proclaimed itself to be anything; it promises nothing; it does not seek one's allegiance, one's genuflections. If I were to anticipate the one or the other, the asphalt jungle, or this near-inhospitable indifference as my sepulcher, the latter would find me abandoned without human companionship; amongst the former, it is assumed, one would find himself amidst a swelter of hominidity. While in this austerity one might cry as He did upon Calvary, how should one wail amongst those who resembled him, not caring enough? The too many, the utter glut, the saturation has dulled one's affinity for his own kind.

The roar of the cataract; such originality; a praiser of things I do not comprehend. That it could be you, Man.

Aye, we must leave it there.

