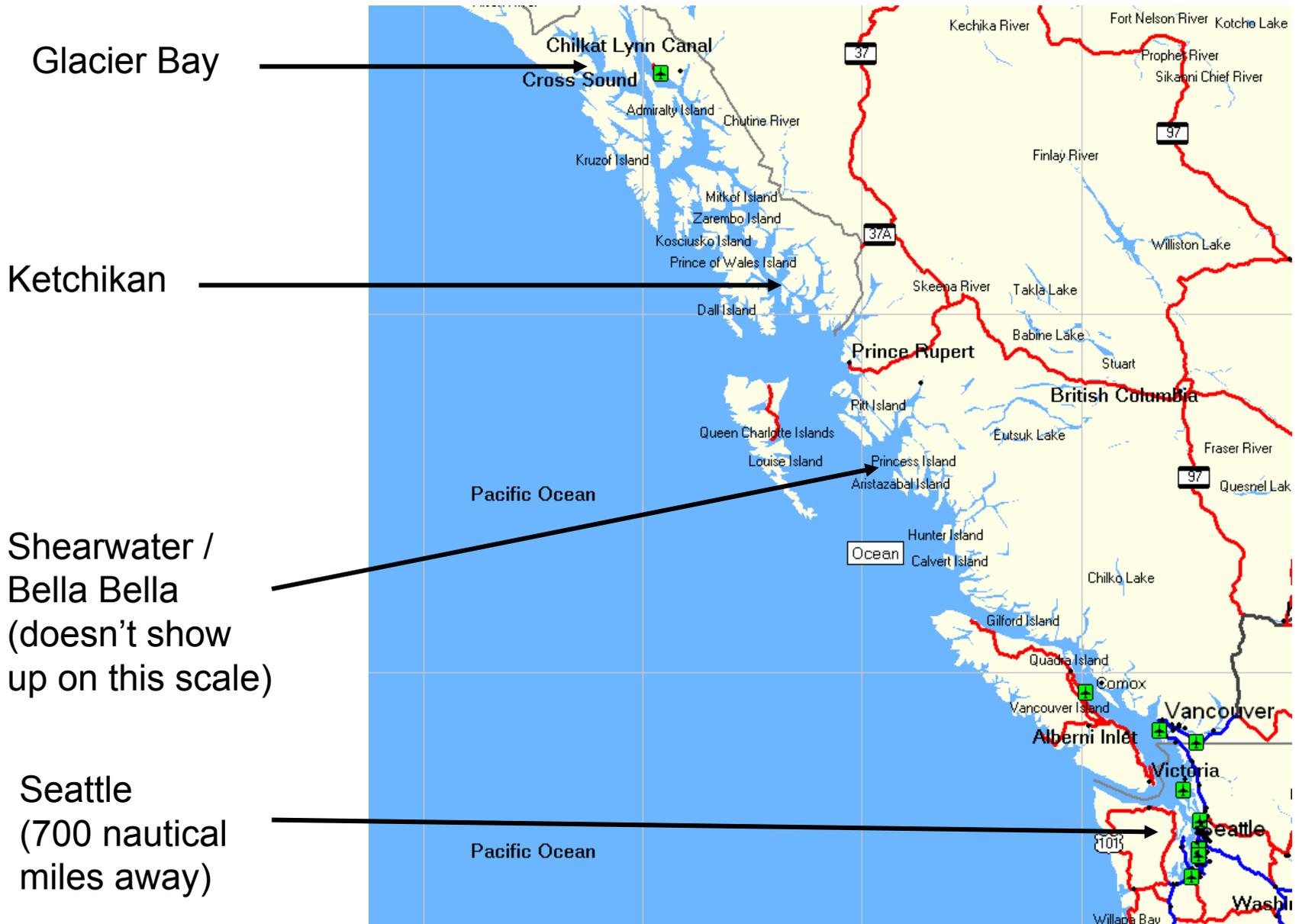


Where's SARANA now? Ketchikan Alaska!



Leaving Shearwater

- We left Shearwater (Bella Bella) and headed Northwest, transiting the Seaforth Channel which empties into the Pacific at its western end, (this opening is called Milbank Sound). With the wind picking up from the NW, the Pacific swells started piling up into the Channel and made for a pretty bumpy ride. Sadly, I admit, it was too bumpy for the cat.
- Nevertheless, we proceeded down the channel and turned into a narrow shortcut called Reid Passage which is protected from the crashing waves and anchored in welcoming, serene Oliver Cove.
- The next day the weather calmed down and we continued North to Rescue Bay, where we had 3 or 4 Dall's Porpoise swim with our boat while we tacked up the channel. The anchorage in Rescue Bay was very calm and we got some much needed rest.

Jackson Narrows

- We left Rescue Bay very early in hopes of making a longer passage to get us to Alaska a little quicker.
- Jackson Narrows is one of the first of many narrow passages along the route.
- Here you can see the sun start to rise and the trail left behind in the water. (Notice the clear skies? A rare day!)



Finlayson Channel

- We used the tides to our advantage to gain some extra speed and picked some of the more narrower routes for that extra current push—like riding a bike downhill.
- Along the way, we saw many waterfalls cascading hundreds of feet down cliffs and over rocks.
- We also managed to get ahead of several powerboats (on a different route to the same place) who travel twice as fast as us.
- This picture is the lower 30 feet or so of a 300+ foot cascade from the mountain top.



Graham Reach

- Since we had such a good run with the current, we kept going. There are certain magical spots where the tides reach equilibrium between the flows, and the current switches direction. With some careful planning (and luck), you can time your passage so that at the turn of the tide, you cross the spot where it switches. This way, the current that would normally run against you turns around and pushes you again.
- We got lucky not only with the tides and currents, but with the weather as well – not a cloud in the sky, and temp's in the 80's (but it wasn't to last).
- Yet another waterfall 



Hartley Bay

- The winds had started to pick up some as we entered Wright Sound. Wright Sound is where 7 major channels intersect. The currents are unpredictable and the wind was blowing. It took us quite a while to round the point and leave Wright Sound due to the very confused waves and strong winds (coming directly at us of course). Oh, and a tug pulling a massive lumber barge, and a cruise ship were thrown in to complicate things.
- We were beat by the time we got to Hartley Bay, a small First Nation Reservation (“First Nation” is Canadian term for Native American). It had been a long 15 hour day.
- The river otters promptly came out to our dock to say hello.



Grenville Channel

- We decided to take the route that most of the cruise ships use to get to Alaska. Up until this time, we mostly were in smaller, and less traveled areas. It was rare for us to see more than half a dozen boats in a day.
- But in this channel, the narrowest the cruise ships use, everything suddenly seemed to get crowded.
- And naturally the visibility was very poor with all the rain.



Prince Rupert

- Within Grenville Channel we stopped in a couple of Inlets, rode out yet another nasty storm at anchor and set our sites on the last major town in Canada's West Coast, Prince Rupert.
- We managed to time the current switch well again and found ourselves in town almost 3 hours ahead of schedule!
- But don't try going to the fuel dock to get fuel when the Coast Guard boat is in. They took the entire dock for 10 hours and loaded 120,000 liters (~30,000 gallons) of fuel.

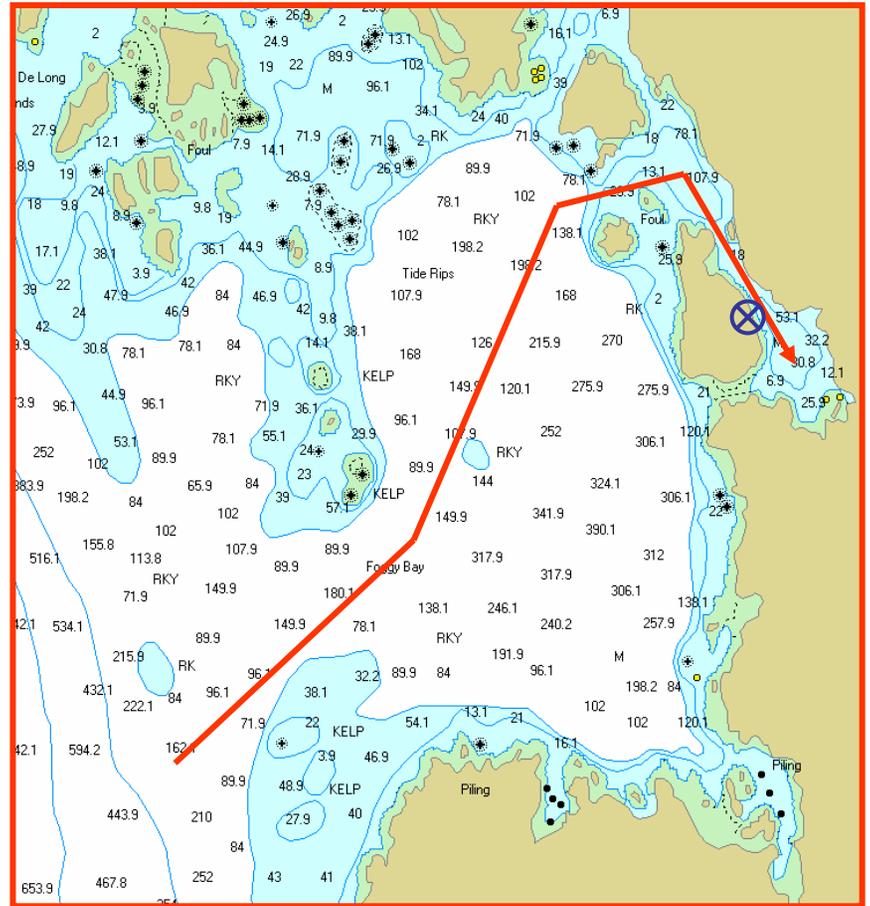


Crossing the Line

- We spent a few days in Prince Rupert waiting for a good weather window for crossing Dixon Entrance to Alaska. Dixon Entrance is famous for big waves, heavy wind and/or thick fog and is totally open to the N. Pacific. Getting the timing right can make all the difference.
- A pair of sailboats from California, whom we had met earlier, were getting ready to make the same crossing. So we compared notes and decided the weather window was now.
- Once again we timed the tides with our departure (4:45 am) and got a great current push out of Prince Rupert and towards Dixon Entrance.
- As the day progressed the boats from California were slowly slipping out of sight (they were larger boats than us) as we sailed northward.
- They called us on the radio to say that things were pretty bumpy and they were going to anchor at a small Inlet on Dundas Island, instead of crossing Dixon Entrance. We noticed that they had been pretty close to the shore, which can make the swells bumpier and the wind stronger. At any rate, we were surprised by their decision because the current was flowing favorably and the wind was behind us. Both rare conditions, that we didn't want to pass up. So we continued sailing as we watched them tack into Dundas Island.
- As we started to cross Dixon, we noticed there was a high pressure area pushing lots of rain and wind to the south of us. We sailed hard to stay ahead of it, as we watched the black rain clouds drench Dundas Island for hours with our bow pointed to sunny skies in Alaska. Well, it was just good luck for us, but the wind did pick up and so did the swell.
- The crossing wasn't comfortable, but it sure was quick. We averaged about 7 knots with just one sail up. Normally we only do about 5.5 Knots with the engine full throttle, or 6.0 knots under all sails. The fast crossing was worth the bumpy weather. We got into the anchorage at 2pm. That's 9 hours to cover 55nm for an average of 6.1 knots, including about 90 minutes of motoring slowly in and out of anchorages. Oh, and Jezebel seemed to handle it fine this time!

Foggy Bay and Bears

- Our first anchorage in Alaska was Foggy Bay. It's a good spot because it is a little more than halfway between Prince Rupert and Ketchikan.
- It's a very cool anchorage that is a bay within a bay. You can see from the chart that the red line (our approximate course) goes through a narrow passage into a smaller bay where we anchored.
- There's a small gap where you can look out onto Dixon Entrance and watch the waves crash onto the reefs. See the green section to the left of the red arrow? That's the gap.
- The best part of this anchorage was the Momma Bear and Cub we saw rooting around along the shore looking for snacks. The bear cub was so small and obviously didn't know what he was supposed to be doing, but giving it a good try. This was our first bear sighting and to see them at our first anchorage in Alaska really was exciting.
- They were unfortunately too far away to photograph.... The blue X shows where we spotted them.



Tongass Narrows

- I thought Grenville Channel was the narrowest passage for the cruise ships, until I saw Tongass Narrows right outside of Ketchikan. Their boats are so big they require almost the entire channel. Luckily our boat can go into much shallower water than they can. As we approached Ketchikan, the cruise ships started a mass exit.
- They notify everyone on the radio that they are departing so everyone can stay out of their way. We heard the captain of one of the ships talking to their office about some “elderly lady that missed the boarding time”. They had already retracted the gangplank and the office was trying to get the captain to ok her to climb the boarding ladder saying, “She’s elderly but she’s sure she can climb it.” The captain came back and said, “Sorry, you’ll have to fly her.” When they’re ready to leave dock, nothing stops them.
- We happened to be approaching the narrowest part of the channel when one of the ships notified everyone it was leaving. Since we can go into shallower water, we ducked around the outside of a channel marker and watched the moving city power by. Fortunately their captains are used to moving around small boats in tight spaces and are quick to call on the radio if they have any questions about a boat’s “intent”. That’s a big difference from the Puget Sound where you’re lucky if they see you, much less answer your radio hail. Just the same, we knew if we were outside of the marked channel there was no question of us being in the way.
- They passed so close (close for us) that we could clearly see all the people on deck and in the windows looking out at us. It was a bizarre sight for us (we’re already planning our next route to get away from these floating malls).



Ketchikan

- The scene here is dominated by cruise ships, sometimes as many as 5 at a time. In a place with only 12,000 or so residents, the influx of tourists is ridiculous. Most of the businesses setup to cater to them, are run by non-residents. For example many of the jewelry shops are run by New Yorkers and most of the seasonal help comes from out of town. During the winter it is easy to imagine Ketchikan looking like a ghost town.
- We had our replacement autopilot sent to us here (it broke down about 600 nm ago just north of the San Juan Islands) and we had our mail forwarded too. Everything arrived intact so we should be ready to go again with our 3rd crew member, the autopilot. Good customer service goes a long way! They sent a replacement, no questions to “General Delivery Ketchikan”



Ketchikan Moorage

- We weren't alone here with the fishing boats. I hope these guys never have a problem docking here in these tight docks.



More Wildlife Along the Way



Bald Eagle looking at tourists



Two Bald Eagles waiting for fishing scraps



Momma and baby black bear



Ketchikan Jelly Fish

Wildlife Notes

- Since entering Northern British Columbia, we've seen dozens of eagles. In Prince Rupert we saw as many as 9 just hanging out waiting for low tide so they could get the halibut scraps the fishermen discarded. The locals tell us if we go to the city dump, we could see 50 or so at a time fighting over garbage. They're like the seagulls of higher latitudes.
- No whale sightings yet, despite all our wishes.
- We heard what we thought was a wolf one night, but it was far away and could have been just a drunken lumberjack.
- We've been toyed with by Dall's Porpoise several times. These porpoise are dolphin sized but their coloring makes them look like miniature orcas (which are actually large dolphins, not whales).
- In Ketchikan, the raven population is like the crow population of Seattle. The big black birds are everywhere and they're constantly getting into trouble.
- The clear cuts in B.C. were extensive and from the attitude of the small towns we visited, they aren't ready to stop anytime soon. It's too bad because they have one of the most extensive intact ecosystems on the West Coast. They are quite proud of their "Tree Farming" heritage, but what's left behind definitely isn't wilderness anymore. Very little of this area is protected and most of it is cut to feed the U.S. market. Despite how much Canadians complain about the cheap price of lumber in the US, the timber companies are obviously making money. They have very expensive logging camps complete with several helicopters, float planes, road construction equipment and countless barges.
- At any rate, we're still hopeful for some whales, and more bear!!

Sayonara from SARANA

