

Juneau

- In the last monologue I mentioned some engine trouble we were working to correct.
- We replaced a broken engine mount, fiber glassed the support, took the transmission out three or four times, hauled the boat out of the water, pulled the prop and the shaft.
- We wore ourselves out and wasted two weeks.
- It turned out that one of the engine problems we've had is actually in the transmission, but it took a long trial of elimination to find it.
- It also seems that there is really nothing that can be done to fix it, except replace the transmission. Short of that we spoke with a Yanmar representative who gave us some great tips on making the transmission last longer.
- The engine runs smoother with his suggestions so we are going to stretch the life out of it until we reach Seattle.
- After 14 days of laboring on the boat, we were ready to get moving. Unfortunately that lost time meant we couldn't explore Icy Strait and Cross Sound, visit Sitka, or round Cape Decision.
- We ended up taking the quicker route back to Ketchikan and Canada, although still managing to go a different way than our route North.



Auke Bay

- Auke Bay is only 11 miles up the channel from Juneau, but that stretch of the channel is too shallow for our boat. So we had to do a 33 mile loop around Douglas Island to get there. The marina facilities were much nicer than Juneau and the town was quieter.
- As we approached Auke Bay we could see the Mendenhall Glacier in the mountains above the town and the marina.



Funter Bay

- Since we used up most of our time working on the boat, we were in a hurry to get exploring and to head down Chatham Strait to the more remote areas.
- Funter Bay is just a small little public dock that is a good stopping point for us. There's nothing very interesting there, but on the way through Saginaw Channel a Humpback Whale surfaced about 20 feet from our boat! Sherrell almost had a heart attack. It was about 5 feet longer than our boat and surfaced right next to us.
- I was ready with the camera the second time he surfaced, and with our new camera battery I'm pretty much unstoppable.



Point Retreat Lighthouse

This is our furthest northern point. After seeing the whale, we rounded the lighthouse and began our trip back home. (The sailboat below is headed back towards Auke Bay/Juneau – check out the glacier in the distance)



Tenakee Hot Springs

- Tenakee Hot Springs is a cool little town with a public bath house. They post hours on the door for when men can use it and what times the women can use it. It was really nice to sit and soak in that volcanic hot sulfur water. The water seeps into your muscles and really relaxes them.
- The town is full of friendly characters. We met one guy, who couldn't live with himself as a fisherman because of all the by-catch and now he finds old growth spruce logs from abandoned fish traps and cuts them up and sells them to musical instrument makers as sound boards. So some of the guitar tops out there today are probably made from his salvaged wood. We're still wondering what to do with the two boards he proudly gave us.
- If you're wondering about "by-catch", it's the undesirable animal that unfortunately gets caught in the net, or hooked on the long-line (i.e. less marketable fish, and even sometimes porpoise or dolphins). By law fishermen are supposed to keep everything they haul in, but they catch a lot of different types of fish and only have limited space for the ones that bring in the money. So usually they toss the dead by-catch back in and hope they don't get caught. At any rate, he couldn't live with himself anymore doing that kind of work. I'm sure you can imagine we were quite sympathetic, being vegetarians and all.
- Anyway, Tenakee is a small one-lane dirt road town of about 100 people. There's ferry service here (foot passenger only) and a helipad. The ferry comes in briefly as there's not much foot traffic here and once in a while you'll hear it blast its horn and a stray backpacker or two will come bolting down the dirt path trying to get back to the boat before they're left behind and forced into manual labor by the locals. Well, at least that's what the Harbor Master threatened to do to them if they didn't make their boat.

Tenakee Springs



A Measure of Summer

- In Alaska, the length of the summer is estimated by the blooms on an indigenous plant called Fireweed.
- In late Spring the plant grows a stock of buds at it's top. The blooms start opening from the bottom, and slowly work upwards throughout the summer.
- At summer's end the plant will be in full bloom. Somehow the plant knows when summer is closing and blooms in synchronization.
- So it looks like we are about halfway through the summer. We'll need that extra bit of summer to make our trip back South under the best weather conditions.

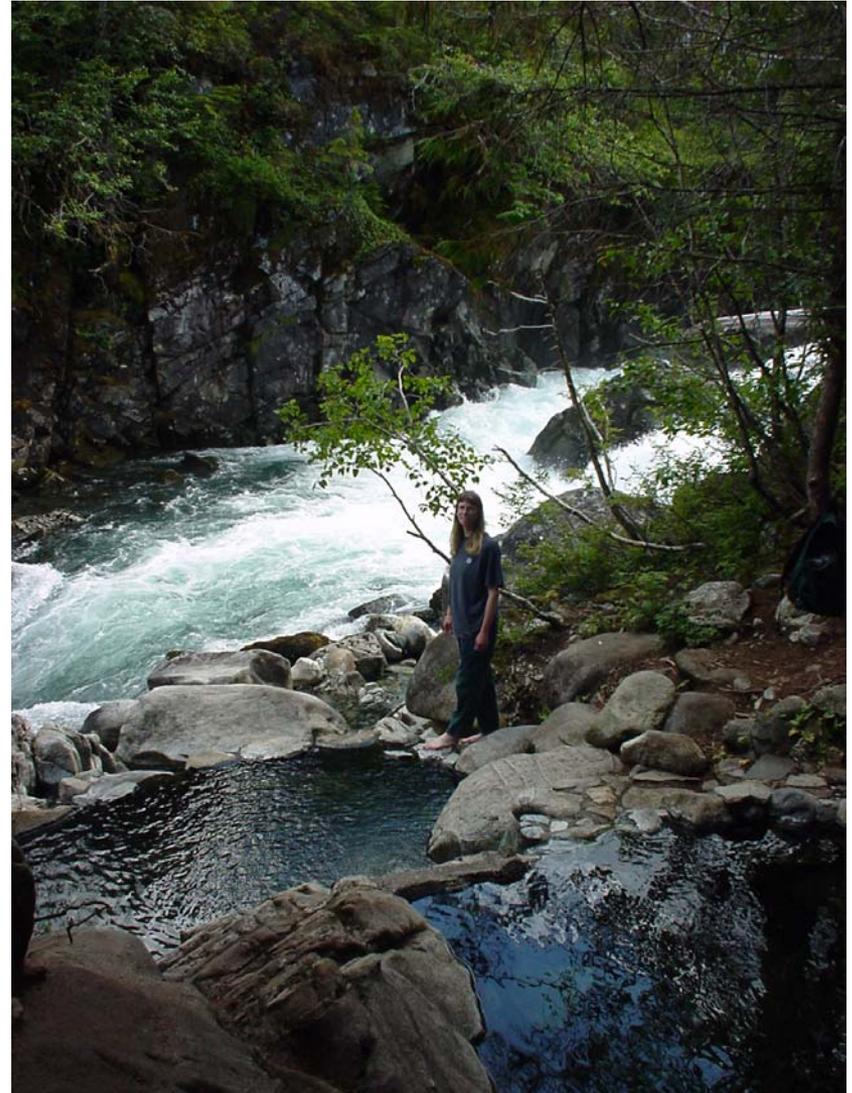


Eva Island – Escaping the Brick Walls

- We left Tenakee southbound for Baranof Hot Springs. This is a longer leg, about 40nm or about 10 hours of motoring assuming poor current or wind conditions.
- The day started out nice, but about 18 miles into the trip, someone turned on the wind and wave machine. The current was flowing south quite strong down Chatham Strait and the wind had whipped up to 25 - 30 knots from the opposite direction. This creates a condition I dubbed the “brick walls”.
- When current flows against the wind, it creates steep waves. When a really strong current flows against strong winds, it makes brick walls. They completely stop our boat’s forward motion.
- We tried everything to make headway in those seas. Our motor is useless in these conditions because it doesn’t have enough power to overcome the force of the wind and the waves. So we spent two hours tacking back and forth under a double reefed main and a double reefed jib.
- The waves were surprisingly large and breaking all over the strait as we pounded into them. The motion was so violent that even the best secured items were tossed to the floor of the boat and it looked like a house after a tornado. And of course the poor cat got sick.
- Our forward motion despite our best efforts was only about 1.0 to 1.5 knots towards our destination. We estimated we would take about 10 more hours at that rate. Since the wind picked up and was gusting to about 35 knots, we decided to search for some shelter somewhere.
- To avoid turning around and sailing back 20 miles, we decided to scour the shores of Peril Strait for an anchorage. After about two hours of exploring, we found a snug spot in a half moon shaped cove near tiny Eva Island. The sea was flat, the wind was calm there, and we were able to get the anchor to set in the seabed. The only problem is Peril Strait is the main route to Sitka and the big ships go through there leaving behind large wakes. Fortunately for us, only one large ship went by.
- The biggest surprise came after we finally got the anchor set and started to relax - a large Minke whale who swam around Eva Island “pooooofing” (the sound they make when they breath) and searching for fish. Watching this big guy swim around us really cheered us up after a long hard day of sailing.
- After calming our nerves, we set to work cleaning up the disaster area inside the boat and trying to calm poor Jezebel down.

Baranof Hot Springs

- The next day we employed a new strategy of fighting the current and the wind to avoid the brick walls. It was a little slow, but much faster than hitting the walls. And since the wind was a lot calmer (15 knots or so), we managed to get to the hot springs in good time.
- The hot springs are three natural pools of decreasing temperature that pour down the hill into a raging river. The “grotto” was surrounded by trees and the water eased our tired muscles.
- The locals also built a new set of bathhouses by the docks. The small building on stilts had three private rooms with an open view of the bay. Inside the room they had piped hot spring water into a huge metal watering trough (like for cattle).
- They were very clean and we were able to lock the door and enjoy a long hot bath.
- The surreal town consists of about 20 people and the houses are built into the cliffs on stilts with boardwalks leading around.



Baranof Hot Springs

- The raging river, which pours down from a large lake, empties into the bay near the dock. We've never had a more spectacular view from a dock before.
- And it's all free!



Red Bluff Bay

- From Baranof Springs we headed south to a place called Red Bluff Bay. A deep fjord where mountain goats, salmon, seals, eagles and lots of bears reside.
- Along the way, we saw a pod of Minke or Humpbacks (hard to tell the difference from the surface) and Orcas feeding in the cold currents that flow directly in from the Gulf of Alaska.
- It's easy to see how the place got its name from this photo.



Red Bluff Bay

- Red Bluff turned out to be our favorite anchorages so far. We rowed around the bay and were quickly surrounded by 5 curious harbor seals who kept pace with us and swam under us while turning in circles.
- Many of the hazards are not well marked or even charted. I usually stand on the bow looking for rocks while Sherrell pilots the boat in search of an anchorage. As we approached a shallow nook, perfect for anchoring, I saw a large rock in front of the boat appear suddenly out of the depths. My screaming and waving to Sherrell from the bow sent us swerving around the bay.
- We turned only to find another uncharted rock directly in front of us! Too late to avoid it, I signaled to REVERSE! But suddenly the rock moved away and I realized they were large schools of pink salmon (also known as “humpies”)!
- It was quite a sight to see them leaping into the air and swimming all around our boat.
- All these fish brought out the eagles, bears and seals all looking for snacks.



A “buddy” keeping perfect pace behind our rowing dinghy.

Red Bluff Bay

A few Pinks swimming by the boat



Seals soaking in the afternoon sun
(on a partially submerged stump)



The “Eagle Eye” for fish



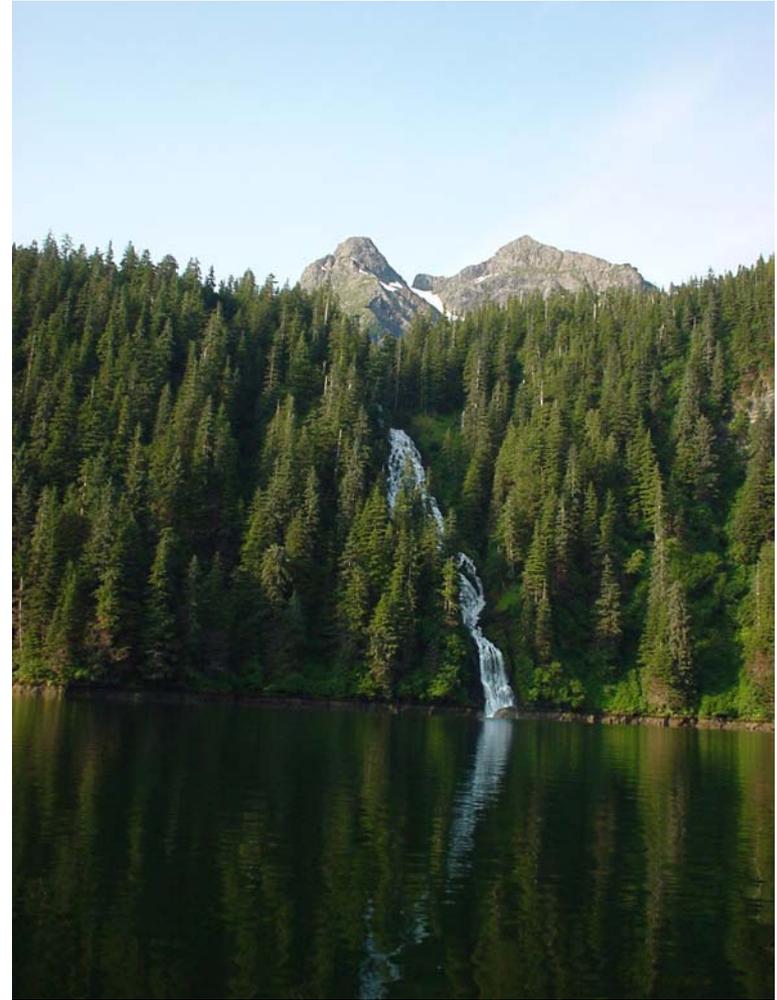
All those dark spots are fish

Red Bluff Bay

- Deep inside Red Bluff is a large meadow called “Bear Meadow” and a river that the salmon run up.
- We watched bear after bear pounce through the water trying to catch fish. The younger ones were a lot more energetic and much less successful than the older bears who would pounce once and then carry the fish to the shore.
- We kept our distance from them because they were easily scared from their feeding site by the presence of people. We were likewise easily scared away from them.
- Thus we were unable to get close enough to photograph them, but here’s a cool shot of Bear Meadow with the waterfalls high up on the cliffs.



Red Bluff Bay



Clockwise: Eagle prints in the sand (that's my shoeprint as a reference), Falls inside Red Bluff Bay, Seal "Buddy" saying hello.

Red Bluff Bay

- We stayed an extra day in Red Bluff just to watch all the animal action.
- Unfortunately some large charter tour boats arrived with a few people. They trampled around on the beach, scaring off the bears (which they probably didn't know were there). Another group drove their dinghy right up to the basking seals and scared them off (not just once, but twice). All the eagles disappeared too.
- We sadly left it behind to give the animals some peace and quiet.
- Deep in the back of this fjord, out of view, there are a pile of seals, a crowd of bears, and several thousand fish all going about their business.



Sailing at Long Last

- Since departing Juneau, we had contrary winds the entire way. Sailing would have been very slow and we only did it out of necessity when we hit the “brick wall” waves while trying to get to Baranof Springs.
- Finally, a high pressure system brought some favorable winds and clear skies. We were able to sail at 6-7 knots most of the way.
- It was such a relief to finally get to do some sailing after 7 days of nothing but motoring. Here we are before Sherrell hoisted the mainsail with Baranof Island in the background.



Baranof Island

- We had originally hoped to keep heading south down Chatham Strait, to explore even more remote anchorages abundant with wildlife, but this required rounding Cape Decision at the south end, notorious for it's dangerous and steep waves in anything but perfect conditions (open to the Gulf of Alaska).
- Since we lacked the time we might need to wait for perfect weather conditions, we realized we would have to traverse the more common waterways and head East up Frederick Sound.
- We couldn't keep our eyes from looking behind us at the beautiful mountains of Baranof Island – you can see why there are no roads connecting the different small towns.



Kake

- Kake is a native town not far from Baranof Island, on another island called Kupreanof. Kake is Tlinglet for “town that never sleeps.” It’s a bit of a misnomer by today’s standards.
- The people there were very friendly and always waved and said hello. An older gentleman named Leonard Nanook invited us into his house where he told us stories and showed us photos of the large wooden fishing trawlers his father skillfully designed and built by hand.
- We previously thought of Kake as just a convenient fuel and water stop. But in addition to the friendly people, the little town had more to offer in the way of wildlife.
- We heard one of the charter tour boats (the smaller 120 foot kind), calling Kake on the VHF asking if ‘the black bears were down at the stream yet’.
- Naturally when we got in, we headed headed for the streams.



Kake Bears

- The black bears were feasting on the salmon and we could see them from the bridge.
- They repeated the same behavior as the Red Bluff bears, charging and leaping in the water chasing down the fish.
- Our presence on the bridge made them nervous as they fished. They kept peaking up at us to see what we were doing. The one in the photo to the left got scared and bolted. We felt sorry for the bears who were just trying to fatten up for the winter. They were stuck trying to feed here with no unobtrusive way for all the people to gawk at them.



Bear Crossing



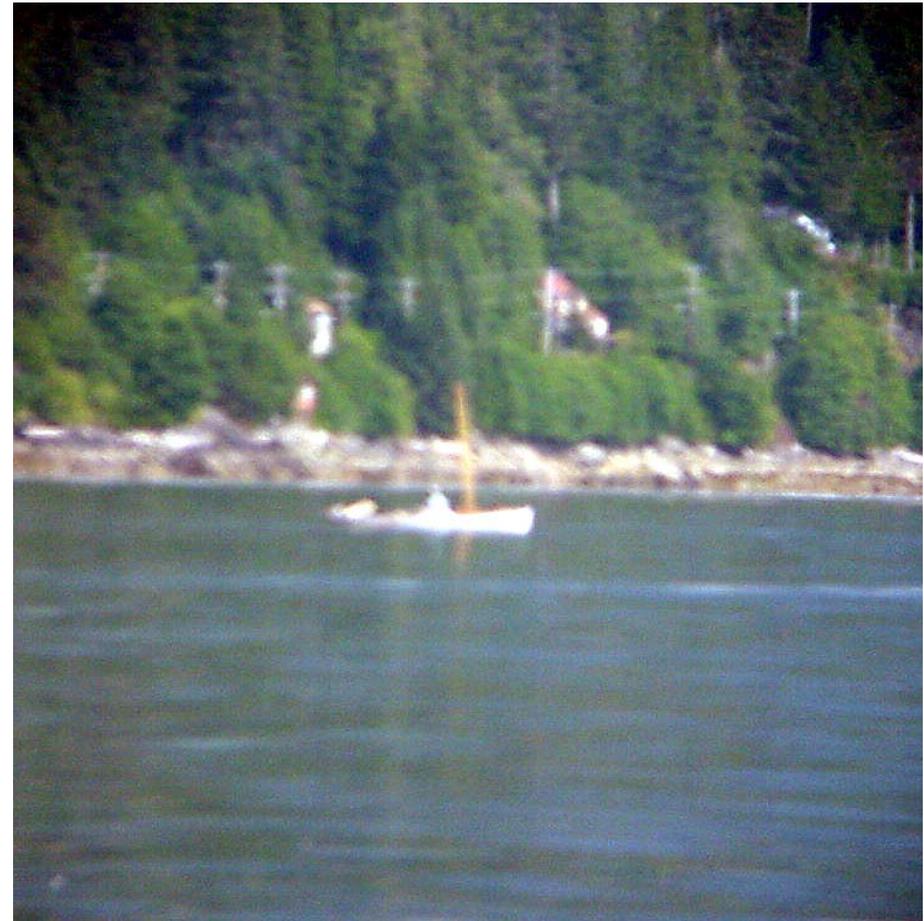
This bear decided to join his pals on the other side of the bridge. He was only about 40 feet from us, but he was very obviously more scared of us than we were of him.

Southbound

- After Kake, we stayed at Portage Bay - a large shallow bay with a lot of current flowing through it's tiny, s-curve entrance. We had to wait for slack tide to get in and out of the bay.
- From there we went back to Petersburg. This was the first place we went to twice since leaving Seattle. We almost decided to keep going, but the fog and rain was pretty bad so we stopped for the night.
- Because Petersburg has an amazing amount of current flowing through the marina (which we frighteningly learned on our stop North), we vowed to only enter and exit during slack. This requires a lot of patience. In fact, when we headed back down through Wrangle Narrows, we left the dock at slack, but had to find a spot to anchor to wait for the end of the flood current to start the trip south.
- We managed to transit Wrangle Narrows without any ships or barges trying to shove us out of the channel and we made great time getting to St. John's Bay.
- The bay was packed full of boats because this is the only place to anchor for many miles. In addition to the fleet of fishing boats, there was a large power yacht with a helicopter on the stern.
- From St. John's Bay, we motored south through "Snow Passage" where the current has a mind of its own. Despite common sense it runs the opposite direction of all the water around it and since it is narrow it runs very fast. Our timing was perfect and we got through there without encountering severe turbulence.
- We anchored in Meyer's Chuck for the night because the dock was full again. We kept the momentum going and set off for Ketchikan the next day.
- We hit Ketchikan, did some rapid fire engine work, and provisioning and set out again the next day for Foggy Bay and then to Canada.

Row Row Row Your Dog

- This guy and his dog set out from Seattle and rowed and sailed their way to Petersburg, Alaska in an 14 foot boat. It seems that rowing the Inside Passage is not too uncommon. We've read many stories about it, from natives in dugouts to whities (pronounced "why-tees") in modern kayaks.
- I happened to spot him with my binoculars just outside of Ketchikan headed back south.
- His company wanted to sponsor him and buy him a motor for his trip, but he opted for new sails.
- I don't know if he regrets the choice or not, but according to a newspaper article he sails about 25% of the time, and rows the rest. He mentioned something about excruciatingly knotted muscles....



Last Alaskan Sunset

- We finally got to do some sailing again on the way to Foggy Bay. It was nice to get the boat healed over and quietly plow through the water again.
- Foggy Bay is the last Alaskan anchorage on this trip. When we first arrived, heading North, we toasted Alaska with the last of the rum that our friends Josh and Michelle gave us. So in good fashion, we toasted again with some Alaskan Amber beer and watched the sun sink.



“Quarter Mile Wall of Death”

- This is how one fisherman described his gill net to a dismayed sailor on VHF trying to find a way through the fishing fleet.
- We were disheartened to find out later that they often trap & kill seals, porpoises, skates, and lots of other animals in addition to salmon. “Trolling” has a lot less impact on marine wildlife, and is often referred to as “clean caught” when being sold. The next time you purchase salmon from the store, ask how it was harvested, and support an environmentally sound method.
- This photograph is of one of the many fishing boats we had to dodge in a small stretch. They often choke the entire waterway with nets.
- In the photo, taken at Dixon Entrance, the buoy is the end of the net, and the other end is attached to the fishing boat. Go between the two accidentally and you’re going to disable your boat and have an irate fisherman on your hands.



Crossing the Line Again

- Our passage South has been smooth and since leaving Kake, we've been moving as fast as possible, everyday for 14 days. We're a little behind schedule and we have some places in Northern Canada we promised ourselves we would go see.
- Anyway, both the US and Canada forecasters predicted NW winds allowing for a nice downwind crossing, but we had to settle for light SW which is what really happened. We managed to get in about 3 hours of sailing out of the 12 hour passage.
- If time allows (i.e. weather), we'll head south along the outer edge (dubbed the "Outside Inside Passage") all the way down to Bella Bella & Shearwater. If things go quickly we might take one more side trip and then continue south again to Cape Caution, which we want to cross in early September.
- This outer passage is very remote and promises even bigger adventures and more wildlife.
- Anyway enough jibber jabber, there're places to go.



A "Red Tide" is a natural occurring algae bloom in summer, which is highly toxic when ingested by humans – this causes the clam and oyster harvesting to close. It's rarely thick enough to be visible like this.