

ALASKIAN DEFEVER MINI-RENDEZVOUS

by Kathy on s/v Conrail

On July 30 DF 71 M/V Far Out (Gil and Judy Middleton) and DF 43 M/V Lady MJ (Dick & Mary Jo Bradford) docked @ Auke Bay, Juneau, Alaska, hosted Sandra & Howard Rambo (DF 44 Fourth Day) and Ted & Kathy Kay (DF 44 Conrail) to cruise with them for 2 weeks on the Inland Waterway of Southeast Alaska. Having been cruising buddies for the long haul to Trinidad from the states, it was the chance of a life time for the Kay's and Rambo's to see the stomping ground of their northern friends. Spending a day in Juneau, we did the tourist "thing". We visited the hatchery, and while the women shopped the men hit the infamous Red Dog Saloon. On a typical Alaskan drizzly day, the two ships left Juneau and headed to Funter Bay on the NW corner of Admiralty Island. Before the days of refrigeration, Funter Bay had a fishing cannery and is now the summer lodge of friends who greeted us with a banquet of freshly smoked salmon, dungeness crabs, and king salmon. We had time for a quick hike through the cannery ruins and then through the forest to the Aleut Indian burial grounds. What a special place to spend with new and old friends.

Leaving early the next morning we traveled south on Stephan Passage to another old cannery site, Taku Harbor. Humpback whales, Dall dolphins and a grouping of sea lions were sighted in route. On shore we explored the old cannery and picked berries. A small gill net fishing boat was tied next to us on the floating docks. The fishermen, having torn their nets, spent the rest of the night mending. The next day we trolled for salmon and landed a silver as icebergs from the Taku Glacier floated by.

Rafting, Far Out and Lady MJ @ Pack Creek, rangers escorted us from our dinghies to view the bears. Everything was perfect. The salmon were running, the sea gulls circled, the eagles waited at the streams edge and in nearby trees. Two deer grazed in the tall grass as one by one the bears appeared. A float plane brought in other hikers and photographers that joined us. What a treat! We observed 13 grizzly bears. Two sows had two cubs and one had three cubs. Having eaten their fill on previous days, the bears ate only the fattiest parts of the salmon to survive the long winter hibernation, leaving the remains for the gulls and eagles. Not to be out done, we feasted ourselves on freshly caught salmon that night. Moving on to Holkham Bay off Coke Pt., we fished for halibut. Such fun! What could be better than this?

The next day was bright and sunny and the water unusually still. We traveled up Tracy Arms stopping to view several waterfalls in this fjord that was cut 10,000 years ago by glaciers. Large cruising ships dwarfed us as they passed in these high walled canyons. We encountered larger and larger icebergs as we neared the glacier. Our hosts having previously experienced this dangerous journey, were experts at dodging floating chunks of ice. DeFevers are not meant to be icebreakers but they can easily sustain a few bumps at slow speed. Rounding the last bend, the north face of Sawyer Glacier came into view. The glacier blue color is distinct to this ancient ice. At first the glacier face seemed rather small because the surroundings are on a grand scale. A much larger open decked sight seeing boat nearer the glacier was but a dot until approached. The danger of the ice was ignored as we slowly positioned closer to the face. We could hear the moaning and groaning of the ice as it shifted. The sun's rays made the blue ice glisten and melt as we hopefully waited to view the glacier calving. Floating nearer to larger pieces of ice floats the dark spots moved and we realized that

harbor seals were everywhere sunning themselves. Not until we floated within several feet did the seals bother to abandon their sunny perch. In contrast to the glistening blue ice is the water which is a milky green, a product of melted ice and silt. The experience is magnified by contrast; the dark canyon walls, the glistening blue glacier, the milky green water, the bright blue sky, and the white icebergs dotted with seals. The air is fresh and clean and the warm sun feels so good. Out on the bow of the boat, we are forced to bundle against the cold air blowing off the glacier. The only sounds are the moaning and cracking of the ice, a seal "arfing" or an eagle's rapturous screech. Although we only saw small glacier calving, we got an even rarer treat. A very large "boom" coincided with the water boiling at the base of the glacier. Then from somewhere underneath the water a huge blue iceberg shot to the surface. The iceberg, easily over 200ft. long, dwarfed and rocked the sightseeing boat. The wave sent the large pieces of ice zooming through the water rearranging the seals. This kind of glacier calving is called a "shooter". But now we had an additional problem. The swirling water had hurried the bergs down stream and our egress was blocked. Using boat hooks we pushed the ice aside to keep from making contact. Since only 10% of the berg is above water, we were concerned that the unseen ice would damage the protruding stabilizers. The faster moving tour boat finally left, clearing a path for our exit. What a day to remember. What could top this?

Anchoring again in the picturesque cove outside the entrance to Tracy Arms we are not alone. Several sailboats and mid sized luxury charter boats anchor with us, positioning to ascend to Sawyer Glacier @ sunrise. In the A.M. God has once again blessed us with magnificent weather. The water surface is so still gull feathers ski easily across the cove. Tall spruce, hemlock and cedar surround the anchorage. Daybreak is early in this land of the midnight sun. Slumber felt good and the "crack of dawn" was never realized for sighting deer or bear on the shore. We had to be content to view an occasional floatplane dropping off quest @ the remote forester's cabins that are for rent. Across the passage snow capped mountains are the backdrop for yet another photo op.

The next afternoon was spent in Portage Bay where we set out crab traps, explored and kayaked. While waiting for dinner to walk into our traps, we investigate the logging camp. Taking our dinghy to the float dock, we were able to closely observe a large tug driven barge landing and picking up trucks and equipment for the Forestry Dept. A young man on the dock told us that logging has ceased in Alaska so the camp is abandoned. We also learned there were lots of deer and several salmon runs and ladders within a mile but to be aware of the bears. Needless to say, we did not venture into the bear's domain. A slight smirk appeared on the young man's face when we bragged about our 16 lb halibut catch, as he told us that his buddy landed a 277 lb halibut recently. Back at home base the hauled crab traps contain only large starfish. Yuk! To the rescue, a commercial crabber came into the bay. Putting pride aside, we bought the Dungeness crabs. So much for sustenance, gluttony ruled the day.

After we cleared all the kelp that had accumulated underneath the two DeFevers, we set out for Petersburg via Frederick Sound. At this time of year, Frederick Sound is home to an estimated 1,500 humpback whales that have come to feed on herring and other small fish. Hoping to view the bubble feeding of these giants, we eased up to several pods of sounding whales. The slow roll from the surface brings that beautiful tail up out of the water. Our cameras were clicking away. We did learn that eating all those herrings can give you really bad breath.

As we passed yet another glacier we realized that our great Alaskan adventure was drawing to an end. Many fishing boats and work boats were sited as we neared Petersburg for this city processes more fish than anywhere else in Alaska. A very picturesque village, Petersburg is bustling with activity. Gulls are everywhere, circling, floating and diving. Boats are coming in and out and float planes leave often through the circling gulls adding more chaos to the boil. There are 4 large fish processing plants here that return the excess materials to the harbor which keeps the gulls, sardines, halibut and occasional seal fed. Our marina is in full view of the fishery's docks so we have great entertainment. Small gill net boats, long liners, seiners and crabbers come along side to off load at Iceberg Fisheries. The fishing boats keep their catch in an icy slush. Fish and slush are sucked up by huge vacuums to the dock above (20+ft. tides here) from the boat's holding tanks. Large tenders wait their turn to off load 225,000 lbs of salmon in their holds. These larger tenders wait offshore during an "Opening" to collect fish from the smaller boats. The next day we toured the plant and even got to see how caviar is made and why it is so expensive. During a tour of Petersburg we learn that the village was founded by Peter a Norwegian that located his fishing business here in Petersburg because he could tow the glacier ice into port and use it for free refrigeration.

Sadly saying goodbye to our Caribbean buddies, we flew home content with memories of a dream come true.