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2/1/09 Part 1 of the Alaskan Sea Kayak Expedition – August 2008 (Part 2 in next months newsletter)

A 12 day (200 mile+) unsupported exploration of the Fjords of Prince William Sound. The weather is generally settled and by late August most of the Tundra flies have gone. Although the water near the glaciers is cold, dry suits are not necessary. Normal Spring or Autumn paddling gear is all that is required. Camping is just above the high tide mark on the shingle beaches. The wild life and view are stunning. Constant rain can be expected and the use of cooking shelter is highly recommended. There are only black bears in the west of the sound with the more dangerous grizzlies residing to the west. The book “[Kayaking and Camping in Prince William Sound](#)” A Kayaker's [Paradise](#) by Paul Twardock is an excellent source of information and proved invaluable while planning the trip.



Sat 16th Aug – We flew into Chicago and then onto Anchorage. The pre-booked hire car (a Dodge) was waiting for us at the airport. Alison had booked a couple of rooms in the Best Western Golden Lion Hotel as it would be 9.00pm before we landed.



After dumping bags in our rooms we decided to go across the road for a bite to eat. We needed to get in the car to go through the drive through as this was the only place still open.

Sun 17th – We headed off early to get provisions for our trip, deciding to shop in [Fred Meyers](#) rather than Sayers. (For future reference both these shops are open from 6.00am on a Sunday and Sayers is 24 / 7 – Well Alaska is America!). We then

drove the short distance to [REI](#), North Americas prestigious outdoors chain to try and get methylated spirit and bug nets. After checking out of our hotel we drove the 80 miles to Whittier via the railway tunnel under the mountain and glacier. This tunnel allows cars into Whittier for the first half of ever hour and outwards for the second half.



Whittier is an old US Naval base and is now a little run down. We waited nearly 4 hrs (it only takes 10 minutes to walk around the town) before meeting up with Tom Pogson from <http://www.alaskakayakschool.com/> based in Homer. We had hired UK style boats and equipment from him although there were two kayak rental companies based in Whittier these only supplied wide beamed USA style boats and rather basic gear.

We quickly packed the boats, leaving the car in the Harbour (Car parking provided by [Honey Charters Ltd](#) – Who also rent Kayaks). This record sub two hour pack was



because we were anxious to get going before nightfall and paddled off into the sound at 8.00pm. As we quickly sped down the sound within the first hour we came across seals, sea otters, Bald headed eagles and a black bear. We just knew it was going to be a great trip. We passed Emerald Cove and Trinity point as these already had groups camping. As darkness descended we headed into Shotgun Cove to camp next to an old wreck. There were a few tent platforms

already made in the shingle at the top of the beach. Disaster struck when my petrol stove failed with the washer on the pump unit failing to seal. Several attempt to disassemble and fix it failed. Unfortunately we had brought two stoves requiring different fuels (1 petrol and 1 methylated Spirits). In future I would recommend that extended trips like this use the same fuel to cook on as that night was spent contemplating a return to Whittier to sort out the stove / purchase another as there would clearly not be enough Meths to last the four of us 12 days.



past Pigot Bay, Pirate Cove, Hummer and Beatles Bay and onto Hobo bay to idyllic campsite on Hobo Point. We fetched fresh water from a Salmon Stream at the back of the bay and watched the otters play among the rocks made good use of our bug nets). Later, zip lube managed to fix the faulty seal on the MSR stove and things were looking rosy.

Mon 18th – We had decided to risk the trip with the broken stove and thought we would be able to cook on open fires. We left the bay and paddled over to Entry Cove where we caught a glimpse of our first tide water glacier in Blackstone bay. We made the most of excellent conditions



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Tues 19th – We paddled around the point into Harrison Lagoon and investigated the log cabin found there. 15 or more sea otters were encountered on the way towards Point Doran and we came across our first ice berg (cube). As the weather was excellent (blue skies) we decided to paddle over to Coxe glacier for lunch and photos. The area was so impressive we decided to camp at this spot. We spent the afternoon watching and listening to the

glaciers carving into the fjord (3 joined at this point). We were a little concerned that as large parts of the glaciers fell away into the water the surge waves may wash up the beach to our tents. Later that evening we were joined by [Paul Twardock](#) and one of his university students, Elliot. They were surveying the campsites used by paddlers in the sound as part of a 15 year study into this fragile ecosystem.



Wed 20th – We spent several hours paddling around all three tide water glaciers (Coxe, Barry and Cascade) and watching them carve into the fjord. We then had to make our way through the “brasher ice” (broken ice field) using the lead kayak as an ice breaker! We passed seals hauled out onto the ice to sun bathe and near the entrance to the fjord stopped for elevenses on a shingle bar. This section of the Barry Arm was probably the most stunning part of the trip, greatly aided by the clear blue skies and warming sun.

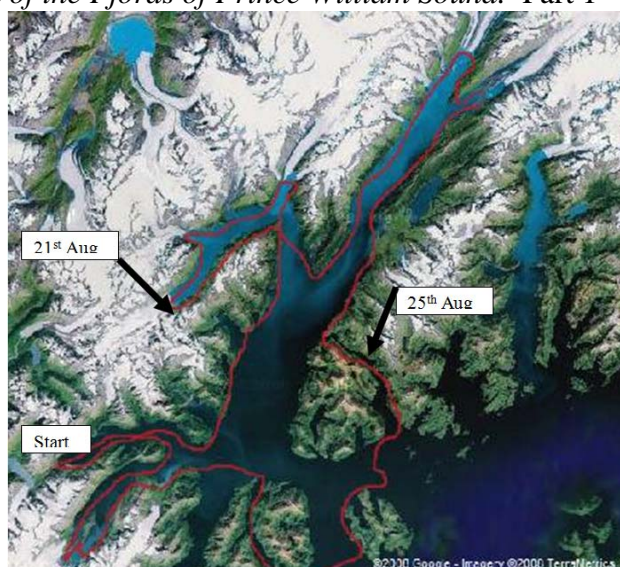


We headed west into Harriman Fjord, taking a look at Serpentine glacier on the way but were surprised to find that it was covered in rock and scree which gave it a black covering. After lunch on a small island at the mouth of Serpentine Cove we paddled on to Surprise Glacier where we met 3 local kayakers who were out for an 8 day paddle

into Harriman Fjord. We saw more carving and took numerous photos of the glacier and hanging waterfall(s). After a short stop for water we paddled into the evening and to camp on a small beach next to Harriman Glacier.

20/05/09 Part 2 of the Alaskan Sea Kayak Expedition – August 2008 A 12 day (200 mile+) unsupported exploration of the Fjords of Prince William Sound. Part 1 of this report can be found in [January's Newsletter](#).

Thursday 21st – We awoke to a light drizzle and paddled across the front of Harriman glacier taking photographs of the moraine deposits dumped at its snout. After playing in the ice cold, silt laden melt-water stream pouring from this massive glacier (several high crosses and breaking-in) we paddled along the southern side of the Fjord and around Doran point taking one last look at all 8 tidewater glaciers. It seemed like



we happened across sea otters in every bay that day. We crossed the Barry Arm to Kelly's cove and rounded Pakenham point hoping to find a suitable campsite. It had already been a very long day. Unfortunately the gravel spits all seemed to offer less than one tent-sized footprint (We were nearing springs and wash from passing liners rolled up the shallow shingle beaches to the vegetation line). The group decided to continue north into College Fjord (Yale and Harvard glaciers were at its head). After about an hours paddling we found a small lagoon with perfect views south into Port Wells and Prince William Sound. Kirk decided to take his first wash here as the water was considerably warmer than by the tidewater glaciers in Harriman fjord – he lasted about 20 seconds in the water!

Friday 22nd – We paddled north along the shore of College Fjord seeing many otters, a Stika deer, Bald-headed Eagles and a black bear along the way. As the water became colder we entered “Berg territory” again, with at first small pieces of ice and later, several large, beached segments of ice carved from the glacier. We camped on a moraine spit 200m from the foot of Wellesley Glacier. Later that evening an enormous luxury cruise liner passed our campsite to take 1,000's to see Harvard and Yale glaciers. The commentary and dinner dance music filled the quiet of the fjord



but left with the ship, less than an hour later.

Saturday 23rd – We set off against a very strong thermal and meltwater current (2-3 knots) and after about 2 hours of paddling we landed for a cup of coffee on a beach by Smith glacier. We then headed across into the Yale Arm of the Fjord and then turned south, looking for fresh water and a suitable campsite. We eventually set-up camp in a small bay

with two hours still to go until high water. The tides were getting higher each day as

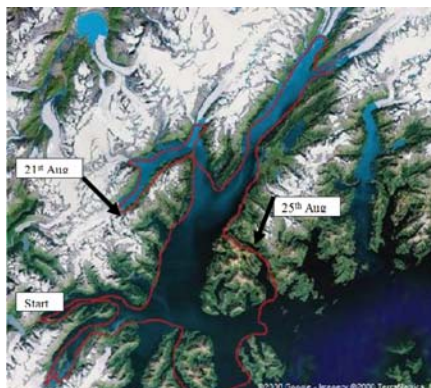
yet another cruise liner came passed. We hurriedly moved all our stoves and food from under the tarp just as its wash nearly swept the camp away.

Sunday 24th – As we slid away quietly from our cove we passed many sea otters and saw several bald eagles perched high in a tree. We happened across Avery Lagoon and its magnificent waterfall behind. In the afternoon we changed our original plan and headed down Esther Passage, a deep cleft between the granite of Esther Island and the mainland. Our intended campsite was Waterfall Cove, a scenic cove surrounded by streams and waterfalls. Upon paddling into the bay we encountered hundreds of Salmon which were leaping clean out the water to catch the evening flies. Some were literally jumping over our kayaks. Our campsite had signs of fresh bear activity, `steaming` droppings according to Ian who



hurriedly made his way back to his boat and the safety of the water. We headed further round the bay to discover lots of dead salmon, apparently swiped out of the air by bears who would have grown fat on the “fast food” provided aplenty. At the back of the cove we paddled over to the stream to collect fresh water and were surprised by two bears feeding on the salmon, one had a 3 foot salmon in its mouth. They sauntered off upstream and eventually moved out of sight. Despite the late hour we made the unanimous decision to move a few miles further along the coast to camp in the next small bay.

The area has so much to offer the sea kayaker that we plan to return in late August 2010 to try and paddle from [Whittier to Valdez](#).



22/05/09 Part 3 of the Alaskan Sea Kayak Expedition – August 2008 A 12 day (200 mile+) unsupported exploration of the Fjords of Prince William Sound. Part 1 and 2 of this report can be found in the [January and May Newsletters](#).

Monday 25th – We paddled from the southern end of Esther Sound, across to Fool Island and then onto Perry Island. This was out into Prince

William Sound and had wind against tide on the crossing producing a confused sea with 21 to 2 feet of chop. We also required a compass as the mist made it very difficult to spot our intended landfall. There were many fishing boats trawling off the Southern end of Esther Island, the strong currents here probably provide ideal conditions for the running salmon. During the crossing the giant high speed Whittier to Valdez ferry passed close by. We made camp on Tipping Point on Perry Island. A beach fire and swims in the sea helped to freshen up several of the team (the water was still relatively cold). Later that night we learned from Valdez radio of a small earthquake (4.3 on the Richter Scale) that had hit Alaska earlier that day.

Tuesday 26th – We left Perry Island to paddle across the sound to Culross Island. As we rounded the point into Culross Passage we bumped into Paul Twardock again (“[Kayaking and Camping in Prince William Sound](#)” [A Kayaker's Paradise](#) “). He, Elliot and two more helpers were surveying campsite around the South of the Island as part of a university study into tourism and environmental damage. We chatted for a while and careful questioning led to answers to a few of the questions that had developed over the past 8 days.



1/ What was killing all the trees near the waters edge, was it the wake from the luxury liners? No, it was the 1964 earthquake where the Northern Edge of the Sound dropped by 10 feet and salt water was slowly killing the trees.

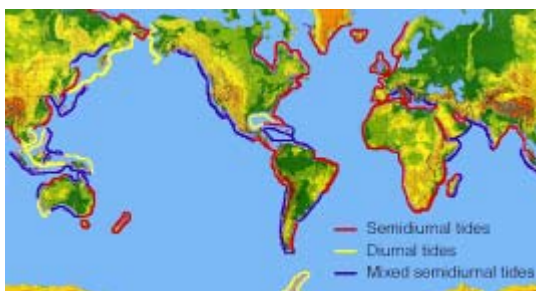
2/ What are the orange tapes placed on numerous trees around the sound? These mark River Otter Burrows (River Otters swim on their fronts and are smaller

and sleeker than the Sea Otters who tend to swim on their backs.



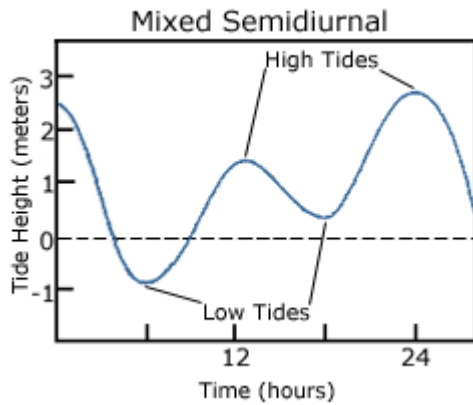
A while later as we rounded a small headland Alison spotted a black bear in a small clearing. We watched him from our kayaks for several minutes (less than 25 metres away) he headed for the undergrowth. We heeded Paul Twardock's advice and stayed at the campsite / beach at the end of Culross Sound (near a point called Peter). It

proved the right decision as we had magnificent views out into Port Wells.



Wednesday 27th – We paddle from Culross Passage across the mouth of Cochrane Bay to Surprise Cove. As we rounded the point into Blackstone Bay we could see our intended destination for the night, Williard Island. We were treated with some of the best views of the trip

with six glaciers surrounding the head of the bay. As we paddled closer to the island we encountered floating ice again. Our campsite was on a moraine (stone and gravel spit) which would have marked the end of the glacier several hundred years before. As I was pitching my tent a Bald Headed Eagle flew over the camp. We retired, as usual, soon after dark around 8:00pm.



At 11.53 I awoke to a lapping noise against one of the kayaks. Upon scrambling out of the tent I found the tarpaulin cooking area submerged by the tide with my stove and pots just beginning to float. Fortunately this was the “top of the tide” but we would need to find out why the second tide of the day is 2 to 3 feet higher than the first throughout the sound. This is not something that happens in Europe and we were certainly not aware of it before our trip, crucial really as all our campsites were just above the high tide line!

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tide>

http://oceanservice.noaa.gov/education/kits/tides/tides07_cycles.html



Thursday 28th – The group left Williard Island and paddled to the top of the fjord to Beloit glacier; this steep glacier had produce much floating ice and had several seals which chased and played around us. We rounded the point and paddled into a cauldron shaped bay of Blackstone Glacier. This was truly impressive with hanging ice, waterfalls and active carving off the front of the glacier. We posed for numerous photographs and ventured as close as we dared (the guide has warnings of several deaths with kayakers killed by 1000s of tonnes of carving ice). We later paddled up the other side of the fjord to Decision Point, filling our water bottles on the way by a small waterfall. We came across several seals and eagles on the way. We knew that we were returning to habitation as our campsite in Squirrel Cove had a small cabin and tent platforms built by the ranger service to protect the forest bog. Although feeling a little like

the tribe of Ewok`s from Star Wars they proved comfortable and practical.

Friday 29th – Our final day should have been a breeze. Unfortunately the wind increased and combined with at katabatic wind (Cold air sliding down from the glaciers) proved a testing challenge as we paddled headfirst into it to make our way back to Whittier. We passed a group of tourists having a taster paddle as part of their

luxury cruise; they looked less than happy in the conditions. A few hours later they were picked up by the honey charters boat and rescued from their ordeal.

Tom Pogson was waiting for us as we paddled into the small beach by the ferry terminal in Whittier. After 12 days of living out of our kayaks we very swiftly packed up, put the boats on top of Tom`s pickup and headed over to the local restaurant for a chat and meal. After saying our goodbyes we drove back into Anchorage and all booked into a room to sort ourselves out. We followed local advice and headed to the Moose`s Tooth to savour a typical Alaskan evening, the food was however, extremely good. After a few hours sleep we returned to the airport for our early morning flight home.

We are already starting to think of returning in 2010 to paddle across the sound from Whittier to Valdez in the East. A fantastic experience and trip. *Keith S, Alison B, Ian B and Kirk W.*

[The Full Trip Report.....](#)

[Photographs.....](#)

[2010 Expedition to Prince William Sound.....](#)

Advice for future trips:

- 1/ Food available from Fred Mayers from 6:30am / Seyers Mall 24hrs.
- 2/ Car hire makes getting around easy and is relatively cheap for a group.
- 3/ UK styled sea kayak hire from Tom Pogson (alaskakayakschool.com)
- 4/ Need bug head nets in worst areas. (Although late August is the best time to go rather than July.
- 5/ Large lightweight tarp is very useful to cook under and for shelter from the rain.
- 6/ All stoves should be of the same fuel in case one has a mechanical problem. Such a long expedition means that you take only enough fuel for yourselves.
- 7/ Tents should be capable of pitching on rounded pebbles on beach immediately above the tide line. Do not expect to use peg in the conventional way but they can be buried sideways with the guy clove-hitched onto the middle.
- 8/ Paul Twardock`s book "[Kayaking and Camping in Prince William Sound](#)" A [Kayaker's Paradise](#) is an excellent refererence. National Geographic publish a topographical, waterproof map of the west of the sound (Sheet 761)
- 9/ Keep bear safe. All food needs to be sealed x 3 (2 zip-locked bags + 1 dry bag) and stored overnight away from the sleeping area (50m). Tooth paste and wash kits kept with foods – not in tents. Hand flares are probably better than pepper spray as defence against marauding bears.
- 10/ Neoprene boots with over trousers are ideal for keeping your feet dry and launching boats on the gravel beaches. (Wellington Boots would do a similar job but may not be as comfortable)
- 11/ \$12 toll on tunnel to Whittier / Honey Charters for fishing boat drop-off or to pay for parking by the small beach under passenger ferry ramp.