

Chatham Strait & Lake Eva

Aug 4, 2013 - National Geographic Sea Lion



Hiking in the Tongass National Forest

Our first day started out in true Alaskan style... a brown bear before breakfast and humpback whales after! The humpbacks presented us with a rarely seen tandem dive with flukes up simultaneously. We continued to cruise up Chatham Strait to our afternoon destination, Lake Eva on Hanus Bay. On our way, Mike Greenfelder, gave a photo presentation followed by a hands-on workshop to practice photo techniques.

After lunch it was time for our first hike in the Tongass National Forest! The day had been a bit misty, so we geared up with our raingear and rubber boots, but once inside the forest, the overhead canopy of Sitka spruce and Western hemlock trees shielded us

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from the liquid sunshine. Lake Eva Trail is an excellent walk that winds around an estuary, gradually climbing above a salmon stream and waterfall. Above the falls is a holding pond full of pink salmon, waiting to travel upstream to spawn.

A variety of options were offered for our time ashore; some chose an exercise hike, others a moderate-paced medium hike and there was also a kayaking option. The first round of kayakers was able to paddle up to the waterfall, but the tide was dropping fast and it was tricky to find a way back without getting grounded on the rocks. However, good things come to those who wait... the last hiking group out saw a mother brown bear and cub fishing for salmon on the waterfall!

Marca Kidwell-Babcock·Naturalist, grew up in Bellingham, Washington and graduated from Western Washington University with a master's degree in environmental education. Her program of study focused on effectively teaching environmental literacy, so that young students can learn what is necessary to engage constructively in environmental problem-solving.

Inian Islands, Port Althorp

Aug 5, 2013 - National Geographic Sea Lion



Sea life below Alaska. (Photo by Colin McNulty)

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We awoke this morning to a thick layer of fog covering the mountains and surrounding sea. Layers of clouds drifted through the trees surrounding our ship in an anchorage called the Hobbit Hole at the Inian Islands.

After a warm breakfast, we bundled up and boarded the inflatables for our morning excursion exploring the rugged shores of these remote islands. Strong currents from the open Pacific rushed through the channels as we cruised along the shoreline looking for wildlife. We soon spotted sea otters lounging in the kelp near shore. Their furry faces and cute attributes belie their quick and sharp personalities. Harbor seals were also spotted before they made a quick exit into the safety of the cold waters. They reappeared after a few minutes to study these strange black boats filled with wiggling orange creatures.

Sea lions plied the waters all around, and we soon found the large rock they called home. This bachelor pad was littered with sea lions lounging on the rocks between foraging excursions. Many others played in the ripping currents as they procured fish from the bottom. Gulls hoping to share in the feast soon surrounded each sea lion that surfaced with a fish. Otters rolled in the kelp as they feasted on the bounty provided by kelp forest below.

A female humpback and her calf were spotted on the second round and put on a performance as they enjoyed the strong currents in their search for food. They surfaced near our boats, which enabled us to capture the special moment.

The afternoon found us in the small scenic bay of Port Althorp. A large meadow decorated with bald eagles and a meandering stream filled with pink salmon was the perfect setting for our afternoon hikes. Mike led a fascinating photo walk and even boarded an abandoned barge; a relic from days past. There were many signs of bear activity, which added to the excitement of the afternoon.

Back on board we were treated to a wonderful feast of Alaskan king crab during cocktail hour. Everyone sat elbow to elbow as we devoured the magnificent crab. It was a true Alaskan experience.

With the last rays of the sun lingering in the sky, orca whales performed near our ship. The sounds of their breathing serenaded us as we headed to our cabins to relish a wonderful day and plan for more adventures tomorrow. What a fitting end to another spectacular day in Southeast Alaska.

Colin McNulty Undersea Specialist grew up scuba diving with his family, and fell in love with the ocean at an early age. He has been fortunate to dive in many exotic corners of the world, and to work on a number of undersea research projects studying whale sharks and several deep water fish species. After graduating from the University of Vermont, he began working in various capacities aboard expedition ships. During his travels he photographed and shared his adventures as a way of making remote areas

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and cultures more accessible. It was in Santa Barbara, California that he learned how to photograph underwater, and combined two of his great passions, photography and the sea. Exploring and documenting the vast richness, diversity, and beauty of the underwater world continues to be a lifelong endeavor.

Glacier Bay National Park

Aug 6, 2013 - National Geographic Sea Lion



Johns Hopkins Glacier. (Photo by Scott Babcock)

Our day in Glacier Bay began with glorious blue skies and sunshine. Because we picked up Chelsea, our Glacier Bay ranger, and William, our Huna cultural interpreter, at 9 p.m. last night, we were able to enter the park at midnight and cruise all the way to Johns Hopkins Inlet at the upper end of the bay by the time we got up in the morning.

What an incredible view greeted us as we came on deck! The Johns Hopkins Glacier rose 250 feet out of ice-bedecked water and 10,000-foot snowy peaks ringed the glacier. We watched as several small pieces of ice fell, creating a sound like thunder that the Tlingits called “sumdum.” The small sumdums preceded much larger slabs of ice that also created a wall of spray and shock waves in the water that actually rocked our ship. The process of ice falling from the front of a glacier is given the curious name “calving,” supposedly because the glacier drops ice like a cow drops a calf.

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We continued down the bay looking for wildlife and at Gloomy Knob spotted an eagle on a tree with a nest containing a fledgling just above waterline. Goats were also seen keeping cool in the high mountain snowfields. After lunch Chief Engineer Hector, Head Chef Ryan and Chief Mate Billy revealed some of the secrets of keeping the *National Geographic Sea Lion* running smoothly and effectively. Also, William gave us a very special individualized account of his Tlingit heritage and Chelsea provided bird identification lessons.

We also found the wildlife. Several killer whales swimming close to the ship was one of the highlights. We worried about sea otters nearby, but the killer whales apparently had other prey on their minds. At South Marble Island we had a really close look at sea lions, sea otters, and a multitude of birds, including tufted and horned puffins.

Our amazing Glacier Bay experience ended with a hike through an old growth forest that has grown where glacial ice was flowing just 250 years ago. The last attraction was the historic Glacier Bay Lodge with a knockout view of a brilliant sunset and alpenglow on the Fairweather Range.

Scott Babcock·Naturalist is currently professor and chair of the Geology Department at Western Washington University in Bellingham, Washington. He is also an affiliate faculty member of Huxley College of Environmental Studies and Seattle Pacific University. Scott received his undergraduate degree from Dartmouth College where he developed a life-long interest in mountaineering and outdoor sports among the White Mountains of Hanover, New Hampshire.

Pavlof Harbor and Kootznahoo Inlet

Aug 7, 2013 - National Geographic Sea Lion

National Geographic Sea Lion cruised southward from Glacier Bay and entered Freshwater Bay and Pavlof Harbor (Chichagof Island) early this morning. We quietly dropped our undersea specialist, Colin, and his dive buddies Israel and Billy into the water to get some video footage of the rich realm beneath the surface. Guests out on the deck before breakfast were able to watch a brown (grizzly) bear wandering the shore next to a salmon stream.

After breakfast we also wandered on shore, toward the base of a falls where the salmon endeavor upstream on their homeward journey. We were fortunate to find bears fishing in the shallow water. From a safe distance we were presented with an incredible photo opportunity and a superb wildlife experience. Salmon and bears are major players in a cycle that connects the ocean and forest ecosystems.

The tides were right this afternoon for a quick tour of Kootznahoo Inlet near the native town of Angoon on Admiralty Island. Known as the “Fortress of the Bears,” Admiralty Island has a high density of brown bears. The currents run strong here between tides,

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so we had a short window on either side of slack high tide today to explore part of the scenic inlet. Quite a few bald eagles were spotted, along with a couple nests containing young birds. Sunshine added a lot of warmth to the day and kept our spirits high.

During cocktail hour we were entertained with the guest talent show – singing, dancing, magic tricks, poetry, and more. Festivities continued with more dancing in the dining room after dinner.



Brown Bear with pink salmon, photo by Lee Moll

Lee Moll·Naturalist grew up as a "Nature Girl" in the rural outskirts of New York City, where she developed and expressed her keen sense of biophilia. She expanded her passion for the outdoors when she ventured to the western side of the country and she currently owns a home in Boise, Idaho.

Le Conte Ice Tours & Petersburg Aug 8, 2013 - National Geographic Sea Lion

Today our early morning stretch class incorporated several yoga poses from the natural world that we've been exploring: bear, eagle, starfish, and boat!

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Then we took our exploration to view large icebergs at the mouth of LeConte Bay. Guests remarked that the blue color was the most beautiful and serene that one has ever seen! Unbelievable!

During the afternoon we docked at the busy Norwegian-influenced Peteburg, one of Southeast Alaska's hidden gems. Peter Buschmann arrived in 1897 and found a fine harbor, abundant fish, and a ready supply of ice from nearby LeConte Glacier. Petersburg today has a large fishing fleet and canneries and the boat harbor is bustling with vessels, barges, ferries, and seaplanes. This afternoon we had several options to pursue. Several hardy hikers climbed the steep and beautiful Petersburg Mountain on Kupreanof Island, a true rain forest. Others walked the docks to view the fishing boats and weathered boathouses, and some wandered into town to visit the quaint streets of this unique town of our 49th State.

After our fresh Dungeness crab feast, dessert was served in the lounge while we viewed the video preview, and then we all went out to view humpback whales feeding in Frederick Sound.

Nancy Sheehan Wellness Specialist, has been a practicing massage therapist for over 20 years. Her interest in massage therapy began while training for her first triathlon. That experience prompted her to begin studying at the International School of Massage Therapy in San Francisco. Later she founded Cranbury Therapeutic Massage, a thriving massage practice dedicated to the belief that regular massage therapy can be a powerfully relaxing and centering experience that contributes to lasting improvements in health, balance and awareness.

Endicott Arm & Ford's Terror

Aug 9, 2013 - National Geographic Sea Lion

Our grand finale for this incredible voyage was Endicott Arm, one of the most spectacular places on the planet. After a morning of foggy conditions cruising in the waterfall-clad cliffs of Ford's Terror, we repositioned for the afternoon in front of Dawes Glacier. The skies cleared, and we waited. Not long, as the glacier was incredibly active today.

Dawes Glacier is surrounded by breathtaking scenery. Monstrous peaks loomed overhead and seals and porpoise swam amongst us, as ice snap, crackled, and popped alongside of us. Waterfalls surrounded us, plunging past a thick forest. But of course, it was the glacier that was our focus.

Dawes Glacier is one of the numerous glaciers that spill down from the Stikine Ice Field that runs along the U.S/Canada border. With a flow rate of around twelve feet a day, it is a fairly fast moving glacier. Calving events are dynamic, unpredictable, and incredible. We started the afternoon with some good chunks falling in front of us. Two hundred foot towers of ice plummeted down to the sea, creating gigantic waves and loud roars.

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Then, the first shooter appeared. A shooter is a piece of ice that breaks off below the water, and rockets up to the surface and above. After the first, everyone was in place to watch as shooter after shooter appeared. One piece, with a side filled with dirt from scraping the bedrock material, was more than 100 feet in length, and that was only the ten percent above water! Another, rose slowly to the surface, and was the most gorgeous blue color imaginable. Piece after piece rose up, soon filling the water in front of us. With more than one hundred years of experience amongst the staff working with glaciers, no one had ever seen an event like this.

Mike Greenfelder·Naturalist/Certified Photo Instructor, learned early on that the best way to escape Ohio was to become a marine biologist. During college at Wittenberg University he attended a semester at Duke University's Marine Lab — that time only confirmed his love for all things oceanic and maritime. After graduation, Mike promptly moved to Catalina Island in California where he taught marine biology to school kids. Since 1999, Mike has been working and traveling chasing his three loves: marine critters, photography, and birds.