

## Seagate and Wild Blue Alaska Cruise – Thursday-Saturday, May 15-17, 2008

Ketchikan, at last! Once again, Thursday started early with the 4:00AM weather report. “Dixon Entrance East: 15 to 25 knots during the morning hours, then 5 to 15 knots later today. Seas 1 to 2 meters.” Dick and Alex discussed this forecast over thick coffee. We decided it was the green light we needed and so at 5:00AM off we went, across Prince Rupert Harbor, through skinny Venn Passage and out into Chatham Sound. The seas were manageable and we had the wind behind us.

It was a solemn passage, just a tug with tow and a 200+ foot US Coast Guard vessel on “Military Operations” coming south. In fact the US cutter *Heally* looked to be crossing close, so Alex called them on VHF 13, the bridge to bridge communications channel. “US Coast Guard ship *Heally*, this is the motor vessel *Wild Blue* calling, 1.5 miles off your starboard bow, channel 13.” The response was immediate, and a young, female officer responded. “*Wild Blue*, Cutter *Heally*, go ahead”. “Cutter *Heally*, *Wild Blue*, looks like we’ll be close, request a port to port passing.” Port to port means each vessel leaves the other on its port, or left, side. A pause, then “*Wild Blue*, Cutter *Heally*, we’re OK with port to port”. “*Heally*, *Wild Blue*, port-to-port, thank you, *Wild Blue* clear”. We actually didn’t get closer than 1/3 mile, but it was a good exercise. For about 7 hours, there was no boat traffic until we approached Ketchikan.

We motored up the east side of Dundas Island, still in protected waters as we approached the southern edge of Dixon Entrance East. The Entrance is open to the North Pacific Ocean and does regularly get nasty waves, winds and currents. Brundige Inlet on Dundas Island is a “bullet proof” anchorage and was our back up if the Entrance was too messy. Dixon Entrance, Queen Charlotte Sound and Hecate Strait are the three open ocean crossings we transit. We cross each twice during our entire Alaska Cruise.

As we nosed above Dundas, the Entrance seemed just slightly roly. No big swells, no big wind and the current was a bit in our favor. Dick Squire labeled the crossing “piece of cake”. We hope it’s that way when we recross in July.



(← *Scary Ham Island Passage is full of twists and turns.*)

Our last hurdles before Ketchikan were Danger Passage, then Ham Island Passage. Danger Passage was misnamed, but Ham Island Passage was tight and twisty. These shortcuts, which we find in various cruising guide books, can save a bit of time and fuel. Ham Island Passage definitely did a nerve fraying.



(← *Seagate “enjoys” Ham Island Passage*)

Once clear of Ham Island, we re-entered Revillagigedo Channel, one of the main through fares into Ketchikan Harbor. As we neared, the boat traffic intensified: barges, boats, water taxis, tugs and then.....it looked like a hotel moving towards us! Turns out it was a hotel, the *Golden Princess*, one of three cruise ships leaving Ketchikan.



(← *Golden Princess departs Ketchikan with escorts.*)

Both Seagate and Wild Blue are hugging the north side of Tongrass Narrows, to give room to the hotel, and to keep our distance from those two little escort boats in the photo. So who gives a hoot about those little escort boats.... wait I see a gun!



(← *US Coast Guard escorts Golden Princess.*)

The Coasties placed their escort boat between us and the ship as it approached. Thankfully, the crewman didn't point the gun at us, but then he didn't take his hand off the trigger either. Alex thinks if these guys weren't tasked to escorting, they would have immediately come over and arrested Dick.



*(← Even after the ship has passed the escort stays between us and the ship!)*

We pulled into one of the many marinas available to visiting boaters called Casey Moran right near downtown. On prior visits to Ketchikan it has been via cruise ship. From those visits, one gets a lasting memory of a busy little town jammed-packed full of tourists. Well that is the case when the ships are in, but when they're gone, Ketchikan is a ghost town. Just a very few businesses stay open and the walkways are empty and business hours are quite variable. When a ship arrived



Friday at 5AM, all the stores were open, and the town was shoulder-to-shoulder tourists. When the ship left at noon, almost all the businesses closed.

*(Boats docked at Casey Moran Marina →)*

So it's time to take a break from our Alaska Cruise and head home for a couple weeks. We'll start again from Ketchikan on June 1<sup>st</sup> heading for Misty Fiords National Park. We had a great cruise with Ray and Cheryl on Seagate and John and Elaine, and John and Gayle on Wild Blue. Although we fished



many hours, there was no fish this past week. Summer is almost here, the water will warm a bit, and maybe the fish will bite. Next Alaska Blog will be after June 1<sup>st</sup>.



*(Dogs do tourist head count)*



*(Ketchikan's famous boardwalk without any tourists. →)*

*(The three Johns are happy to be in Ketchikan. John Curry, John [Alex] Benson, and John Pratt. →)*

