

Seagate and Wild Blue Alaska Cruise – Saturday, May 3, 2008

The Alaska crews arose at “oh-dark-hundred-hours” (4:00AM) this morning to guide the boats through treacherous Seymour Narrows. The Narrows is famous, having claimed 120 lives and over 100 boats – of course that was before the government blew the top off Ripple Rock in 1958. Google “Ripple Rock” to see the video. We departed Campbell River at 5:00AM in the dark, hoping to avoid contact with a wayward floating log. We arrived at the Narrows at first light with the GPS displaying 12 knots of speed: that’s 9 knots through the water and 3 knots of current push. The tide tables indicated about a 6+ knot current in the Narrows. Just as we entered the swirls Wild Blue took a deep heel to port and the knot meter shot up to 18+. Whoosh! Seagate following closely was able to steer around the deep whirlpool that tried to swallow the Wild Blue, but also careened a bit on its way through. When things get spectacular, near 90-year-old Walter Benedetti makes a low whistle sound. As expected, he added this exclamation point to our Seymour Narrows experience.

The boats continued up Discovery Passage and turned west into Johnstone Strait. At that point we had a 2+ knot current pushing into westerly winds and building seas. This is the classic “current against waves” condition that every NW cruising guidebook says to avoid.



← Up ahead we noticed a large fishing trawler wobbling down the Strait on its way through the big seas.

Then the our seas turned steep and close together, say 4-6 feet at times. Our boats were taking waves over the bow, then green water over the bow. Now these are heavy boats, Seagate is 65,000 pounds and Wild Blue is 85,000 pounds, but both were bounced around like corks, rattling the crew and contents! When Walter started that low whistle sound, it was time to take a different approach.

(Earlier in the day Seagate cuts nicely through the waves. Then the big ones came! →)



The Seagate and Wild Blue crews are always in contact on VHF radio and discussed the options. Bill Stump on Seagate, drawing on his vast sailing experience (Bill was the principal race official for the US Olympic Sailing Trails that determined the team to represent the United States at this summer's Beijing Olympics), suggested something called "tacking". Dick and Alex, now diehard power boaters, reluctantly agreed. By taking the waves at an angle, i.e. tacking, the boats rode the seas much easier. Dick suggested lunch and a nap at Port Harvey and after a relatively easy 7-mile "tack" the boats anchored in calm waters.



(← Seagate enters Port Harvey on East Cracroft Island. Vancouver Island snow-covered mountains in background)

After naps, the boats re-entered Johnstone Strait. Flat seas and calm winds once again returned. All enjoyed an easy cruise into Alert Bay on Coromant Island, an 84-mile day.

(At the Dock in Alert Bay →)





(← Alert Bay dock home with airstrip. Note plane on left side of dock)

Alert Bay is a famous native peoples (Indian) community. It has one of the largest collections of NW Indian masks and artifacts. These items were taken from the Indians at their culture gift giving ceremonies called “potlatches”. Potlatches were outlawed in the late 1800’s and the Canadian government confiscated the Indian property at potlatches. This continued until the mid-1900’s when they were again allowed. In the 1980’s the government finally returned the remaining Indian’s property to the Museum at Alert Bay. So the Alaska cruisers had planned on visiting the museum, scheduling the Alert Bay stop on a weekend, typical museum open days...but, the museum is only open Monday-Friday.

This was just not acceptable to Dick Squire. Somehow he was able to contact the museum and “convince” the curator to open the museum on Sunday morning at 9AM , *just for us!* But that’s tomorrow, and after our “special museum tour”, we’ll push on across Queen Charlotte Strait, past the NW end of Vancouver Island, and across Queen Charlotte Sound into Northern British Columbia.



(← Alert Bay cuisine: Willie Bird BBQ duck breast with servings for both boats. There are 6 duck breasts ready for the grill later in the cruise!)