

Seagate and Wild Blue Alaska Cruise – Thursday, July 31, 2008

After yesterday's peaceful cruise and restful night, we have a bit of a challenge today. First we transit narrow Chatham Channel, just a mile outside Cutter Cove. Then 68 miles later we pass through Seymour Narrows where the peak tidal current today is 14 knots! No worries as we've planned our transit around 4PM when the current will be less than 8 knots going with us.



(Above: Small tug with log tow slowly moves towards Chatham Channel entrance. Those boats behind it will have a tough time passing once inside the narrow Channel.)



It's a lazy, quiet morning and our departure from Cutter Cove is relatively late, at 9:45AM, which is slack tide at nearby Chatham Channel. David is out kayaking in the Cove, the tenders haven't been craned aboard as we have plenty of time.

(← After passing the log tow we approach Chatham Channel northern entrance.)

But just after 9AM we notice a tug with log tow slowly moving down towards Chatham Channel. Log tows travel super slow, from 1 to 2 knots. This one will block the narrow Channel for maybe an hour with all the boat traffic stacked up behind. Suddenly we're in a big hurry to get going. The kayaks, tenders and anchors are stowed in record time and we immediately depart, attempting to get ahead of the tug.



(← The current line in Chatham Channel. We had a 1-knot push until we crossed the line. Now the boat faces 1 knot of current against us.)



(← Lady Anne flies down Johnstone Strait. This crew likes to leave late, cruise fast, and arrive early.)

The tug is so slow we easily beat her to the Channel. There are many other boats that are cruising north and we pass them at close quarters. 30 minutes later we enter the wide Johnstone Strait and turn left for Campbell River.



(← Only our second citing of Orcas for the entire 2000+ mile cruise.)

The Strait is busy today with ships, tugs, barges, floating cranes, sailboats, and powerboats of all sizes moving east and west. At half-past noon Seagate and

Wild Blue are approaching Helmcken Island, which is in the center of the Strait. Current Passage is on the north side while Race Passage is to the south of the Island. There are lots of boats clustered at the west end of Current Passage and the radio is jammed with traffic. Then we see action in the middle of the boat cluster: moving Orca dorsal fins. We count 8 different Orcas with 3 to 4 foot fins. They're feeding on salmon or seals as the current flows through the Passage. Some boats are getting too close and one of the whale-watch boats warns them to back off. We slowed but didn't add to the confusion and continued on toward Campbell River.



(← Wild Blue and Lady Anne are tied up in Coast Marina at Campbell River but Seagate is worried about being next to a Canadian Coast Guard boat, due to Dick's Mexico arrest record. He eventually docked and the Coasties ignored him.)

West-east running Johnstone Strait ends at the eastern corner of Vancouver Island. There it turns north-south becoming Discovery Passage. At this turning point when the current is flowing fast, large whirlpools form and massive debris lines are created. The boats need to run a slalom course to avoid the kelp, wood pieces, kelp islands, logs and full grown trees moving in big circles. The circulating debris keeps all crew alert and assisting the driver so collisions can be minimized.



(← The ferry terminal is just in front of the Coast Marina. The ferries create uncomfortable wakes for the moored boats.)

By 4PM we're transiting Seymour Narrows with 8 knots of current pushing us so that the GPS Speed Over Ground approaches 17 knots. Boy we're ready to take on Lady Anne now! Even with all this water rushing through, we easily make the passage and arrive at the Coast Marina, Campbell River just after 5PM, 2 hours behind Lady Anne.

All the crews join forces for an enjoyable salmon dinner at the Coast Marina Hotel restaurant. Even Herb off Lady Anne, who's been a bit ill the last few days, joins us making it dinner for 10. We relive our Alaska cruising memories, realizing it all ends on Sunday.

Tomorrow it's 70 miles to Nanaimo and even more civilization. This coming Monday is British Columbia Provincial Day celebrating the 150th year since the province was established. And because the weather is now warm and sunny, the marinas and anchorages will be filled to capacity. No worries as we have reservations.