

Logbook 2013 - With Best Explorer - Along North America

How did you spend the winter at King's Cove, Best Explorer?



Figure 1: 2013 Best Explorer's track

As the winter months pass slowly, planning for the next voyage is progressing: the destination next year will be in the area around Vancouver, Canada.

There will be for sure a place to fix the severe damage caused by the ice on the right side of the boat, but her navigability at present is not compromised.

I must travel through a series of flights to reach it: firstly, I need to fly to Anchorage, then to Canoe Cove, and finally, with a small plane, to King Cove. I will do it alone. Returning to Italy last year took us five days!

Upon my arrival on Sunday, April 28, I noticed the problems caused by the strong wind, which blows here frequently. The sail's hood is broken to shreds. Even the windvane is bent, but that is probably the work of a bald eagle who must have chosen it as its perch. Almost everything on board is working, which is a positive thing.

I'm making sure everything is in order because Bernard, Paolo, and Sabine will be arriving the following day.

There is ice on land and the sea temperature is close to zero: here at 55° north, it is almost as cold as in Norway at 70°.

From King Cove to Sand Point

On Thursday, we are ready to leave with a clear sky and strong winds from the north. There are humpback whales in the sea. They have also begun their annual migration southwards. We move through rocks and islands to stay as close to the shore as possible, and we have to fight against the wind occasionally.

The mountains and volcanoes of the Alaska Peninsula accompany us with their rough and rugged profile. We experienced violent gusts of wind coming down from the valleys, just like we did at King Cove.

On the evening of Friday, while there is still light, we enter Sand Point, which we hoped was our port of arrival last year. The fishing port has more ancient piers than that of King Cove, but in good condition. We'll pause for one day to get settled in. For the moment, we are making direct acquaintance with the first bald eagles.



Figure 2: The windvane bent by a bald eagle



Figure 3: The outline of the Alaskan peninsula volcanos from Sand Point

Towards Kodiak



Figure 4 Best Explorer moored at Sand Point among fishing boats

Sand Point has better boat maintenance facilities than Tromsø! They have mobile shelters that cover the boats and which are heated: in Tromsø none of this is available. Had we had them available in previous years, we would have been able to avoid problems caused by cold and humidity that will arise in the coming years.



Figure 5: We can watch a bald eagle ip close

The first indication of Russian occupation in the 18th and 19th centuries, prior to the United States acquiring Alaska, is a damaged Orthodox church.

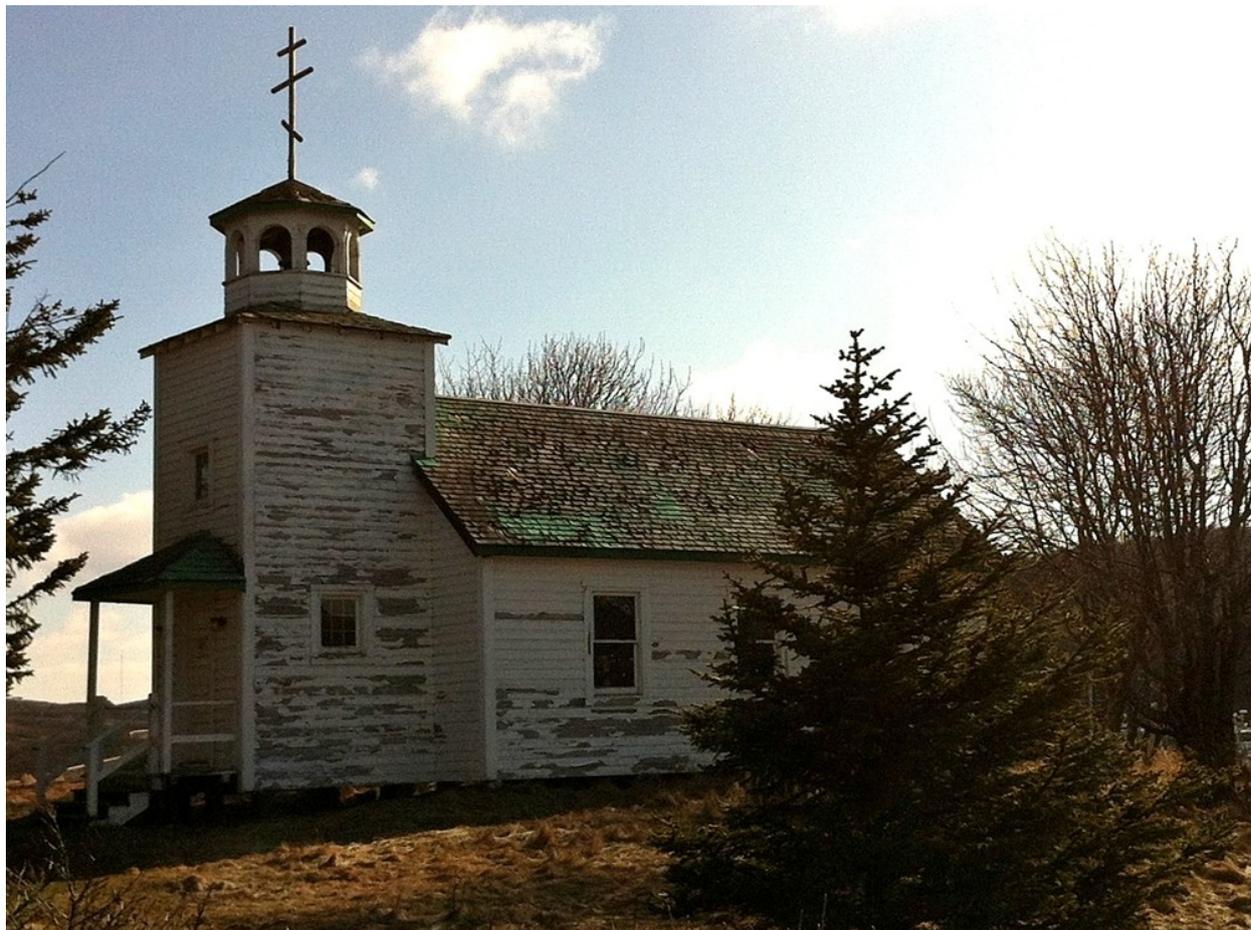


Figure 6: A semi-abandoned church

We set out again on Sunday, May 5th with calm and sunny weather, heading towards Kodiak. The mountains of the peninsula can be seen on the horizon far to the north..

I am inspired by sailing in the same waters as Vitus Bering in 1741, a journey that has been engrossing me for a long time. Nothing to do with the hurdles of that navigation: the sea has only long undulations with a light breeze from the SW, but it is always very cold, a few tenths of a degree above 1°C.

Life is absent, despite the perfect conditions for sightings.

Here, the naturalist Steller observed a strange animal that remains among the most elusive in zoology, but whose reality is indisputable given his stature as a scientist. He called it the 'sea monkey'. Although we sharpen our eyes until we're exhausted, we won't have the chance to see it again, which occurred to Basil Smeeton on the Tzu Hang in 1965.

When we view the western reaches of Kodiak Island, we can also see the puffs of several whales near the coast, but we are too far away to identify them.

The Shelikof Strait, which runs over a hundred miles between the island and the peninsula of Alaska, is enticing and surrounded by bays and inlets. But besides needing to supply us with diesel oil, which we bought last year in Nome, I read that those places are dangerous because of the violent currents that flow through them.

Upon leaving Kodiak, we'll gain a practical understanding of what that means.

We arrived at the port with the pleasant surprise of meeting Mark from *Jonathan*, who

had made the passage last year and is about to leave again, but not before having dinner with us.



Figure 7: Another orthodox church in excellent condition

We take a few days off to visit this fascinating town. Here the signs of the original Russian occupation are everywhere, from the Orthodox churches to the cemetery, to the residence of Governor Baranov. Fortunately, they are still standing after the devastating earthquake of magnitude 9.2 in 1964, which raised the seabed in places by up to 9 meters.



Figure 8: The orthodox cemetery

From Kodiak, Friday 10 May

Unexpected surprises and challenges are part of the game when traveling in unfamiliar waters! The most common logistical problems are those related to stops. Formalities, supplies and anchorages must be approached with great adaptability.

The diesel station in Kodiak is hidden behind a deep dock that delimits one of the access channels to the port area. During one of our explorations on the ground, we finally found it! Filling the tanks was an opportunity for Paul to experience a formidable shower of diesel driven out as a geyser from one of our tanks that was unexpectedly pressurized. Fortunately, the special detergent we have with us has been very effective in cleaning his new raincoat! He took it with admirable philosophy!

We then went through the inlets of the nearby island of Afognak, Kitoi Bay, with the hope of observing fauna and flora of Alaska. At King Cove and Sand Point, the nature was more arctic.



Figure 9: Anchored in Kity Bay

There the ocean welcomed us with one of its surprises. The sea bottom is deep near the coast in this area and Prince William Sound, just like Norway. I should have expected it, both coasts are landscapes that have suffered erosion from glaciers. However, we found a solution in a narrow bend, with an anchor brought to the ground and a couple of lines tied to the trees at the stern.

The day after the weather is beautiful with a light breeze from the shore and we sail towards the Kenai peninsula through the fifteen miles of the Marmot Strait, not recommended in

bad weather, who knows why. The current is favorable and we make 10 knots up to half the strait, where we meet a very steep opposite sea and our speed is reduced to six knots. In consequence, the speed on the water becomes three/ four knots only. The boat's motion becomes extremely unpleasant.

When we reach the exit of the strait, suddenly the sea calms down. We witnessed the danger of sailing with the current in favor but against the waves! And overall, the sea was almost calm! It becomes apparent why this passage and the longer Shelikof Strait are not recommended for high-wind conditions. This is a lesson that we in the Mediterranean do not easily learn. It's not the first time I've heard it, but it's the first time I've had the opportunity to have the demonstration 'in vivo', and with luck, I will never forget it.

In the evening we are in the Kenai and find a decent anchorage in Qikutulig Bay (Picnic Harbor), welcomed with the exciting sight of a family of sea otters, until a few decades ago on the edge of extinction, surrounded by fir forest.



Figure 10: Our first sea otters are watching us with curiosity

The coast of the Kenai peninsula seems less jagged than similar "glacial" coasts, but shares the great residual depths of the excavation of the glacier fronts and in some places also the submerged moraines that block them at the entrance.

The slopes of steep valleys covered with dark fir trees and snowy peaks at the bottom of the "inlets" accompany us as we slide into total calm of wind under a grey and rainy sky, partly foggy, that only occasionally opens in the distance on the glaciers. The search for a decent shallow anchorage is almost a haunting task: there are very few!

We find one in front of a very noisy waterfall after passing a school of sea otters that are

lulled by the waves of the ocean.

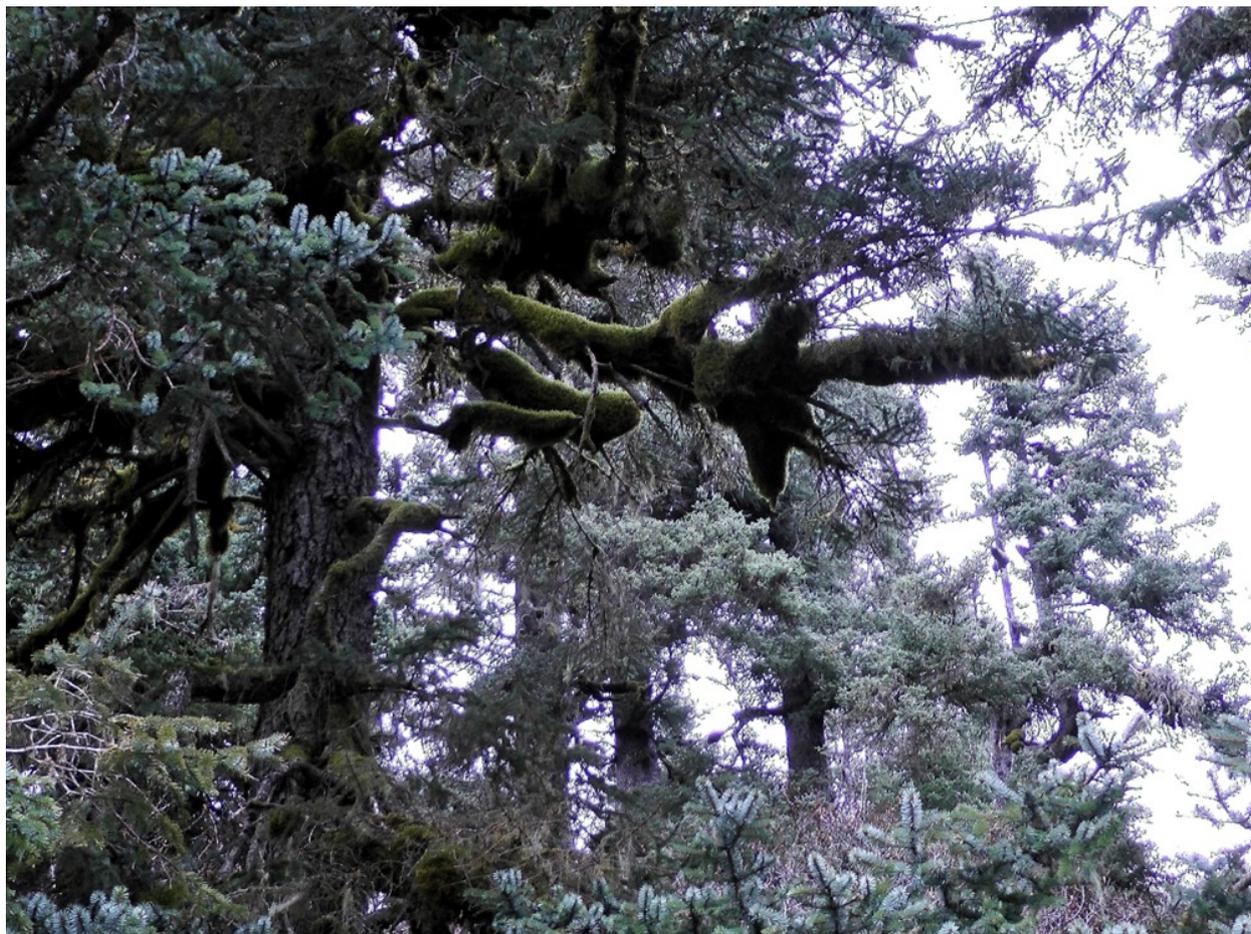


Figure 11: Trees covered with moss by the aptly named Picnic Harbor - Quartz Bay

The next day is even more interesting. A narrow passage, the Mc Arthur Pass, allows us to shorten our route by twenty miles, by cutting off a chain of islands that extends south. It is always at least a little exciting to get between rocks menacing a few meters from the sides of the boat, but there is no danger here and now, except for the three knots of opposite current.

The long peninsula to the west of Resurrection Bay, where Seward stands, the Aialik Peninsula, is very rugged on her western side where a completely enclosed bay, Paradise Cove, attracts us like a magnet, at least partly because of the name which all sounds like a program. It is a really picturesque view with its vertical rock walls bordered by fir trees a few meters above sea level. It is a pity that the bottom is almost uniformly close to seventy meters in depth. In a single area, it rises to twenty-five, and I am not confident that it is not dotted with dangerous rocks.

I go very slowly up to a few meters from the walls looking to find a zone where they are smooth enough to allow us to flank them, but everywhere under the surface of the water protruding rocks can be seen that discourage the maneuver. Finally, I decide to take advantage of a slight dent on the shore corresponding to a ravine on the ridge of the coast.

Carrying two moorings to the shore, one at the bow and one at the stern we stand precariously sideways, far enough from shore to have enough water under the keel. We are a little surprised by the total lack of life: neither birds nor otters nor sounds. To cheer us some porpoises come to visit us for a few moments. We still see them for a short period evolving far in the bay, then they disappear leaving us completely alone.



Figure 12: Kenai Peninsula-Picnic Harbor-Quartz Bay



Figure 13: Sailing out from -Quartz Bay the mountains of the North Arm of Nuka Bay greets us at the stern



Figure 14: Precariously moored at Paradise Cove



Figure 1: Paradise Cove porpoises

in Seward, from Tuesday 14 May to Monday 1 July

Seward, located at the bottom of Resurrection Bay, serves as the Anchorage harbor. The city itself is not easily accessible from the sea because of its shallow surroundings.



Figure 2: Best Explorer moored at Seward before maintenance

We did not expect to find a railway station there, but we soon discovered that it is also a tourist and freight terminal.

Bernard, Paolo and Sabine are soon leaving me to deal alone with the repair of the ice damage and maintenance of the hull in the yard where the travel lift lays Best Explorer. The shipyard is located next to a kilometers-long pile of coal in the alluvial plain that ends the bay. During my stay here for a month and half, the coal will be stored in a few days on a cargo docked at a long pier that is far away from the tourist and fishing marina.

Here I make my first acquaintance with an Alaska of pleasant and helpful people. From the carpenter who lives on a trawler in the yard sitting ashore next to Best Explorer to several sailors who tell me their stories, give me smoked salmon (excellent) and lend me their car to travel the five hundred kilometers round trip to Homer, in Cook Bay, to overhaul the lifeboats.

Among the tourists who come here there are many typical American faces: I meet the twin of Nick Nolte, that of Dustin Hoffman, that of Michelle Pfeiffer and so on.

One evening the carpenter calls me and invites me to eat wild salmon (they were just starting to arrive). I gladly accept and after a while I find myself sitting in the middle of the forest under a light snowfall at his friend home from the Aleutians to enjoy the fish prepared on the barbecue fashion of the islands: great dinner. Even more so because they whisper to me

confidentially that it has been caught by poaching it on the stream next to the house!



Figure 3: The tourist train arriving at the station

Always the same carpenter, who is missing many teeth, sells me a rifle (he says it's legal) for protection against bears, you never know. On another occasion, as I climbed into his pickup, I felt a hard object under the blanket on the seat: it was a big handgun. "What does the police have to say?" "In case they stop me, I let them know right away that I have one. That's it". In fact there are photos of bears crossing the road nearby.

The weather stays nice, even warm. We reach almost thirty degrees Celsius. The surrounding mountains are still covered with snow and the show is fantastic, especially at sunset.

The deep dent on the side of Best Explorer has been repaired, a bit in the same way it's done with cars bodywork. My initial experience with steel has removed most of my fears. The material is very easy to repair once stripped, cleaned and brought to light.

The longest operation is precisely this one: disassemble the furniture, remove the insulating layer and then put everything back. Once the insulation has been removed and the debris have been cleaned up, one has to cut off the damaged parts inside, easy, then the damaged plate is pulled with long threaded bars welded to the outside at the right points. The bars pass through perforated beams out of which suitable nuts are placed that are pulled by putting the bars in tension while suitably heating the wall from the inside. A long operation, but quite simple, then one has to weld back inside new ribs, very easy for a carpenter. A little more delicate is cleaning the surfaces, painting with the various layers of epoxy, antioxidant and the placement of new insulating foam.

Once the boat is put back in the water, I dedicate myself to cleaning and painting the deck, and at the end, the boat looks new! I've started to understand how to operate.



Figure 4: The side of the boat ready to be repaired

The materials here differ from those in Europe. Already in Norway we had faced supply difficulties unknown in Italy, here it is even more complicated. It's a sample of what we can expect in the future when we will reach the tropics and the far east, but we don't know yet...

The evening, waiting for the next friends, I watch the sea otters that come to visit me in port.



Figure 5: A sea otter having breakfast next to the boat

Prince William Sound, from Tuesday 2 to Saturday 6 july

Mariele, Nicoletta, Elena, and Barbara have arrived.

Our final destination is Juneau, the capital city of Alaska. The first stop, however, takes us nearby to Prince William Sound, a small inland sea full of islands and fjords (inlets), often represented with images of whales and killer whales in abundance, which we also hope to meet.

The weather that had been magnificent until yesterday is overcast and it's raining, I'm sorry for the ladies even if the atmosphere is more northern. I'm not sure they appreciate it to the right degree...

We anchor for the first night in a small cove, Humpy Cove, on the western side of the Resurrection Peninsula, just to leave them time to settle. There is a breath of wind and in the mist and under an insistent drizzle (blessed hood!) we then go to anchor in a completely sheltered Fox Farm Bay with the surprise of the unwelcome meeting with a half-submerged rock not marked on maps.

Seals and sea otters surround us from all sides, while bears cannot be seen in the dense forests that cover the sides of the bay.



Figure 6: In front of the Chenega Glacier, in the Nassau Fiord in the Prince William Sound, Icy Bay

In the days that follow, we roam through the crevices that sometimes hide glaciers that descend into the sea. The ladies enjoy a bit of arctic scenery. We also end mooring at Whittier, one of the saddest inhabited places I have ever seen, thanks to the cloak of clouds that close from above any hope of breathing.



Figure 7: Whittier's old-style pontoon

Here we meet once again Plum, a Solaris boat that we had also met in Seward, after Nuuk in Greenland, and on which I had had a pleasant dinner in the company of the Skipper and his guests, and it is an occasion for some chatter around the municipal bin that serves to burn the garbage.

There is a single dwelling building, a concrete barracks right under the steep mountain side below the glacier: good thing that it is retreating...

The only reason why Whittier is here is for military reasons during World War II. A hidden port connected by a rail and road tunnel to Anchorage about 120 kilometers away.

Sailing from there we wander a little longer in the Sound. Not full of life, I'm afraid. Now awaits us the crossing of the Gulf of Alaska, almost four hundred miles to the Cross Sound, the opening between the coastal chain of islands and the Inside Passage, a long almost completely protected channel that extends to Vancouver and Seattle, almost a thousand miles further south-southeast. We stop one more night in Esther Bay before exiting again into the ocean: a somewhat critical passage that we will face tomorrow always in rainy weather, unfortunately

Gulf of Alaska, from Saturday 6 to Tuesday 9 July

The exit from Prince William Sound at Hinchinbrook Entrance is a bit tricky. The central parts of the Sound and its narrow exit are quite deep, from two to three hundred meters, but the ocean floor outside becomes immediately shallower, around fifty meters for a distance of about fifty miles.

Commercial traffic passes through the entrance, and with the overcast weather and rain today, and the radar that hasn't worked for a long time, you have to be very careful.

Our stomachs feel the impact of the swell and twenty-knot headwind, except for Elena who appears impenetrable. Past Middleton Island along with the deep sea the wind subsides and the sea improves. It's unfortunate that the sky is always low and covered, which means we can't see the top of Mount St. Elias, more than six thousand meters high and close to the sea, first seen and baptized by Bering.



Figure 8: The jetty of Elfin Cove with Best Explorer moored behind the floating house

On the grey waves, several albatrosses glide. As soon as I see them, I grab the camera, but every time they notice it and leave!

It's a grey two-day journey with no history, but at the end of the night between 8 and 9 July we enter Cross Sound, which I was afraid I wouldn't be able to see in the mist. We would feel it immediately because the state of the sea changes quickly.

Under the low clouds, however, the visibility is quite good and you can see the dark cliffs of the islets surmounted by fir trees, whose tops are lost in the clouds just above the rocks: it's an unusual and curious effect.

Our destination is Elfin Cove, which has an enticing name! The creek's mouth between the rocks provides a glimpse of some boats at the bottom, but the impression is of a tiny space.



Figure 9: We will have to climb up to the red building up there

We approach slowly: it is not an impression. Though the area is small, there is a floating pier that is parallel to the shore. I take advantage of our small draft and slip between it and the algae-covered rocks. Taking into account the tide, the vegetation on the rocks is a clue that here does not enter much sea: we will be fine. I did not dare to enter the inner basin: the entrance channel seems very narrow.

There is a very steep moving passage leading to the village of which you can see a couple of houses from the pier. As soon as we're settled, we'll climb it.



Figure 10: Climbing will be easier at high tide

Elfin Cove Wednesday 10 July and Thursday 11 July

If I wanted to imagine a corner of paradise in Alaska, Elfin Cove would be the best option.

Once we have overcome the obstacle of the steep and slippery climb up to the footbridge leading from the piers to the coast, we are surrounded by tall fir trees fringed with lichens. At the end of the path, you can see a low wooden house, and others you imagine that follow it. Our route leads us to a bin that holds the embers, which is the dustbin from the village that is surrounded by large butterflies.

Just a moment, butterflies? Not at all! they are hummingbirds. We couldn't be more surprised. It will be the heat that will favor the flowering of wild herbs, as they are here for nectar. Later we learn that they travel so far to the north in spring and then return to the south in the middle of summer. It seems that these are the final late arrivers.



Figure 11: Elfin Cove: the wooden path leading to the inner harbour

The path becomes a narrow road of wooden planks descending between some houses beyond the top of the small peninsula, which hides the inner basin in which I did not dare to enter.

We pass the post office and a restaurant/bar and overlook the port. A grid covered with brown algae is topped by a structure of wooden poles. The tide is low, so I guess it's a place where you can clean the bottom without the need for lifting tools. The signs of algae suggest that the tide here can reach and exceed five meters of depth.

The path moves on to the ridge that encircles the basin. Other houses are spread out

and the wooden stairs climb through the thick fir trees, completely hiding the houses they lead to. There is silence everywhere. Almost unnatural. We too whisper afraid, so that our voices do not disturb the atmosphere of the place.



Figure 12: Best Explorer next to the fishing boat that sold us salmon

It wouldn't surprise us if we saw a bear among the logs, but we're glad it hasn't happened yet. With a full of almost unspoiled nature we return to the boat. A small fishing vessel is being loaded with salmon by a small boat that is moored on the other side of the jetty. They agree to sell us one coho, which confirms the experience already made in Seward: the taste of wild salmon from Alaska does not fear any comparison with those from the Atlantic!

The morning at six, we booked a visit to Glacier Bay via satellite phone. The entrances are contingent, but there are five places per day for short excursions. They are almost taken aback when they hear us at that time and joyfully confirm that we are the first of the day. Great! Our goal is set for the day after tomorrow. Tomorrow we will go out looking for whales. They say it's the right season to see them.



Figure 13: The "coho" ready to enter the oven

Elfin Cove 10 July

There is fog. Thick.

Absolute calm.

We slowly come out determined to watch the whales. It remains to be seen whether they will agree. I feel painfully the lack of radar even though, after all these years of use, I have full confidence in GPS and AIS. We stop just outside the narrow passages leading to the inner part of the Cross Sound. If the whales want to enter the Sound, they must pass through here. After turning off the engine, we wait in silence.

We have little time for impatience as a faint noise of torn paper reaches us from the sea, then it repeats louder and then even stronger.

We have no doubt that it is the breath of at least one whale.



Figure 14: A humpback puffing in front of the rocks of the Inian Islands

And then its black back comes out from the fog like a ghost. It's a humpback whale. There is movement around. At first we do not understand it, but then when they are at our height we see them: some sea lions are writhing around the nose of the whale, much more agile. They're eating, maybe. There must be fish around, running away in terror from all those hungry jaws.

I start the engine to keep track of the group that is moving slowly enough. The emotion is powerful. Some of the ladies had never seen anything like it, not even us, to be honest. This dance with sea lions. The fog makes everything mysterious and a little creepy.

We are approaching the dangerous rocks of the islands that block the entrance of the Sound, and I realize that there is also a current that pushes us against it. If we fail to change course immediately, things could become complicated.

We must say goodbye to the group of beasts that seems to be accelerating and preparing themselves for the passage.

We are well wet and cold, but nobody has thought to go below the deck to warm up. Approaching the pier, the fog lifts slightly and I take advantage of it to try to enter the inner basin. The entrance is very narrow, but the channel is short. We soon find a mooring at one of the piers. Tomorrow, Glacier Bay awaits us!

A video of the experience can be found here (Humpback in Alaska):

<https://youtu.be/2uTfHkTVp4U?si=OGKzEgaU7P-hxvNn>

Glacier Bay and Auke Bay, 10 July

That's not the way to start your day! At six o'clock in the morning we call the rangers of Glacier Bay to confirm our reservation and a cold, dry voice tells us that we are the first, all right, but only on the waiting list!

Needless to insist that two days ago we were confirmed otherwise.

The fiercest proposals give way to the resigned realization that the democratic and correct Americans are corrupt as much as others around the world. Even in Canada, we will receive additional evidence that Anglo-Saxons are equally as mafia-like as our fellow citizens, with the added problem of arrogance.

But the day is beautiful and the whales, just beyond the barrier of the entrance of the Inian Islands, do not hesitate to show themselves.

As you move further, the entrance to Glacier Bay is immense and you can witness the glaciers whitening.

We do not have time to regret being left out because there is a huge cruise ship that ruins the otherwise magical atmosphere with its mere presence. On top, we are visited by many sea otters that the more you watch them the more funny they look with their capers to get rid of the crumbs of sea urchins and shells that dirty their stomachs after being broken with stones before eating.

While we are distracted watching them, we hear distant rumbling noises. It's the humpback whales that jump out of the water and splash back repeatedly. Some of them have arrived and linger right at the entrance to the bay, while inside it you can't see any.

Photos and videos are never enough. We wouldn't have been so lucky if we'd entered and still couldn't get to the glaciers that are too far away.

Here is a video of the experience:

<https://youtu.be/xHMu23OOLh4>

Having learned not to put too much trust in our neighbor, even if American, in the afternoon we continue along Cross Sound that greets us with the sight of a family of killer whales, although a little too far away.

At the bottom of the Sound, the Inside Passage begins.

This is actually a valley that is underwater and runs parallel to the coast, just like the rear chain of mountains that tectonic movements have aligned in geological ages, and from which other glaciers descend.

Leaving an S shaped track, we sail between the islands facing the port of Auke Bay. It is protected, if there was ever a need, by a heavy, wide, floating concrete pier that offers us a safe and comfortable mooring. We have met many of them around the world and we wonder why they are not being used by us in Italy. There is nothing more practical and comfortable.

Juneau, the small capital of Alaska, is nearby and we will visit it with its scenic surroundings in the next few days, before Elena and Barbara return to Italy.

Auke Bay (Juneau) from Thursday 11 to Saturday 13 July

In the hinterland of Auke Bay there is a valley that reaches the foot of a glacier hosting a spectacular waterfall. We are going to visit it (it is a well-known tourist destination) with the hope of seeing the climb of salmon and bears fishing there, but maybe it's too soon.

The trip was not wasted though, because the panorama is worth a visit. While we walk, we also see one of the big North American porcupines climbing on a tree!

Juneau, located slightly south of our harbour, is located on a thin piece of land near the foot of a steep mountain that is parallel to the sea. The adjacent pier for cruise ships is at the end of a narrow channel, protected by a long and narrow island. The channel ends in a large area that dries at low tide.

Sailboats with tall masts like ours are unable to access the nearby comfortable tourist marinas. Behind the dock of the ships, there are several souvenir shops, one of which exhibits a big black teddy bear.

Mariele's attention is drawn by one of our friends: "Look at the bear"

"Of course I saw it! It's right here!"

"No, not this, that" and points to a young black bear, alive, who has come down from the mountain and walks a few meters away! They promptly escort him away by presenting him up the mountain amid the curiosity of passers-by.

A cable car ride to the top of the mountain will take you to a beautiful view of a forest of fir trees that is typical of the area. We should feel sorry for a bald eagle that is kept in a cage.



Figure 15: The Indian pictograms and totem poles where I met with the alien witness!

The city has several places where Indian memories can be found, such as wooden sculptures and totem poles. While I was admiring them, a guy stopped me and seriously told me how he saw an alien spaceship. He does it in particular to me! To think that I am mad at the aliens who never showed up on our long journey!

I get rid of him with difficulty and a little caution: it doesn't seem like a normal person.

The last visit before Elena and Barbara leave is at a salmon nursery.

The fish have access to a ladder, a sort of stepped channel that the salmon can climb easily. It takes some of the water from the nearby river to bring them to the tanks where the workers fertilize their eggs. For a year, the fry are kept in tanks to protect them from predators before being released back into the sea. According to them, the yield is hundred times superior to that of nature.

The nearby mouth of the stream that supplies water is crowded with salmon coming up and the banks around it are covered by bald eagles who, like the pigeons in Venice, are waiting to eat some of them.



Figure 16: Salmon crowd to enter the fish ladder

Auke Bay - Sitka and back from Sunday 14 to Friday 19 July

Barbara and Elena left and we have a week before Salvatore's arrival.

I am eager to see Sitka, which was the final seat of the Russian governor of Alaska before it was sold to the United States.

We set off on a nice, warm and sunny day. You see salmon jumping out of the water everywhere and porpoises and whales take advantage. Also, the fishing boats that we observe lay out the purse seines, which then close from below and take on board loads of prey.

Here we understand the usefulness of artificial fish nurseries that avoid or reduce the negative effects of such a heavy fishing practice.

After a quiet night our trail winds through tortuous and wooded channels that intertwine between the many islands. Our engine is silent so that when we meet deer along the banks, we do not scare them, while bald eagles look at us indifferently from the tops of the fir trees.



Figure 17: The cone of the dormant Edgecumbe volcano from Sitka

To reach the port of Sitka we briefly go out into the ocean. The dormant volcano Edgecumbe's snow-capped summit stands behind us.

In Sitka, there are few traces of the Russian past: a beautiful little cathedral full of icons, and a fort reduced to a belvedere.

The city is full of flowers and the nearby Sitka National Historical Park enchants us with her small museum, in which we have the chance to touch and admire the wonderfully soft and thick fur of a sea otter. Precisely because of these qualities, the otters were hunted and almost

brought to extinction in the 18th century. However, they have recovered beautifully since the last war and are now protected.



Figure 18: The bright interior of the Orthodox cathedral in Sitka

Among the majestic fir trees of the park, there are numerous totems. While we observe the last one before we leave, we greet with a 'hello' a crow standing on top of a tree. To our extreme surprise and delight the crow responds with a very clear "hello!", but unfortunately it is not going to repeat itself.

The return to Auke Bay is complicated by important tidal calculations, because we will pass through channels affected by currents. We make another delightful stop at Elfin Cove and then stop again in an inlet just before Juneau where a family of killer whales allows us to observe them closely.

Departure from Juneau to Petersburg from Monday 22 and Tuesday
23 July

Mariele and Nicoletta departed on Sunday, just after they had had a chance to welcome Salvatore's arrival. We are preparing for the unknown Inside Passage, which leads to Campbell River on Vancouver Island, Canada.

We anticipate no problems with rough seas since the coastal islands will protect almost all of the route. But we will face another problem. Since we're only two people, it's not wise to sail at night because of the dangerous and ubiquitous floating logs. We must find a place to stop at every day. I was unsuccessful in finding maps that showed marinas. I discovered an album of them, but we had a hard time deciphering it. All maps are similar and almost indistinguishable. Indications are more focused on fishing than navigation and they exhibit a straight inlet after another, unlike the usual ones. Tidal calculations are complex, but essential for some legs. We will see if we can obtain more information on the spot.

We also have to solve another problem. Entering and leaving a country is only allowed through a 'Port of Entry'. In Alaska, there are no other ports of entry south of Juneau. Before we reach Canada, we need to stop at a port at least once.

Customs is unable to provide me with answers; they will ask Fairbanks.

The answer comes the next day: go quietly. And what about the exit documents? "What documents? No need!" Alaska is blessed, but the rest of the United States will not be as friendly and simple!

Fuel was produced, gas cylinders were acquired (unable to fill the Norwegian ones, which we must replace), and they were topped up. We sail.

Mountains and forests, forests and mountains, no animals.

At the Tracy Arms, we anchor because a convenient bight provides us with a shallow area to anchor and shelter from the currents.

We will have time to stop in Fredericksound the next day.

Whales everywhere!

We stopped the engine and drifted slowly near the coast. They came to visit us. Look at this:

<https://youtu.be/UnMtwjVW5e8>

In the afternoon, reluctantly, we leave them and move to Petersburg, a lovely village founded by Norwegian immigrants who retain some (very little) of their spirit.

It is situated at the mouth of a narrow and long channel that is swept by strong tidal currents. In front of the mouth are some icebergs coming from a nearby glacier, and on a big red buoy, some large sea lions are resting completely indifferent to our passage.

Upon arrival at low tide, we find the high piers of poles and logs covered with mussels and algae to be unappealing.

I begin to feel anxious. Entering here with a strong cross current and trying to approach a forest of poles does not seem like an easy thing.

But behind the next pier, there appears a modern marina with new floating piers. I take a deep breath of relief.

The price of parking is ridiculous, the shopkeepers are friendly, and even the large crow on the parapet doesn't fly away when we pass by half a meter away.

From Petersburg to Canada (Prince Rupert) from Wednesday 24 to Friday 26 July

Petersburg is located at the northern end of a narrow canal about twenty miles long, which must be traversed in favor of current: Wrangell Narrows.

The departure time will be conditioned by the tide, which will leave us some time to walk through the town comfortably.

We set sail just before three o'clock in the afternoon and glided between the buoys and local traffic. We exited into the next maze of passages, among which there are an abundance of choices. This choice is dictated above all by the desire to hurry up and search for an anchorage with reasonable depths.

Out of the Narrows we find a sheltered mooring on another island equipped with some fishing piers, which we flank in the middle of the night (Tolstoi Bay). Just enough time for a short rest and at five-thirty in the next morning we set off south again.

We take a short detour through the Tongass Narrows to see Ketchikan, but we're trying to avoid the many seaplanes that arrive and take off from the wide straight channel. It is two o'clock in the afternoon and we have time to look for a mooring elsewhere, so we skip the local marina: the place has a rather industrial atmosphere and we do not feel attracted by it.

We sneak into a small sheltered bay between islands and rocks just before the Dixon Entrance, one of the few doors that open between the Inside Passage and the ocean. Foggy Bay, as it is called, requires careful navigation to enter, but with the aid of our Forward Looking Sonar that displays the shallows, we can still progress slowly.



Figure 20: Foggy Bay e perfect name

The next day, the wind is always calm as in previous days. We slip between some small islands that allow us a shortcut to Prince Rupert.

At about 2:30 in the afternoon, at the exposed customs pier, we received our first unpleasant impression of Canada. The officers are correct, but they are also very meticulous and suspicious. This is very different from the reception in Alaska, but we will have more confirmatory experience later. At first, they did not want us to stay for the winter. It would narrow our options, forcing us to look for it in Seattle, but then we overcome the obstacle. Some questions remain about the polar bear gun that we will address later.

We moor at the yacht club which is not too sheltered, but the weather is calm. The atmosphere on land is more European and we also find a ship chandler for some small spare parts



Figure 21: Near the jetty of the Prince Rupert Yacht Club



Figure 22: Another view of Prince Rupert

Inside Passage from Sunday 28 July to Thursday 1 August

When we set sail from Prince Rupert, we found ourselves in a thick fog. Once again, I feel the pain of missing the radar. There will still be a couple of similar occasions, a short one when we enter the Queen Charlotte Sound, and another at the Golden Gate in San Francisco, then there will be no more. Fortunately, it lifts up in a couple of hours.

We begin a rather uniform and monotonous navigation through a number of almost straight channels with few places to stop. We encounter little traffic, with the AIS that informs us in advance of ships and tugs even behind the headlands.

The shores are steep and wooded, all similar. In the sea, there is only a flock of dolphins. All the drifting logs I feared were not visible.

The open and scattered passage of islets near Bella Coola village, as well as later in the Queen Charlotte Sound, becomes increasingly interesting.



Figure 23: Anchored behind Robinson Island, Queen Charlotte Sound

We arrive between the islands of the Broughton Group at the entrance of the canals that connect Vancouver Island and the continent after making two short stops in sheltered waters between islets.

There are three other boats anchored there. Obviously, we have chosen wisely.

We took a day to explore the surroundings with the dinghy and tried to fish. It was wasted effort. It is full of seabirds and seagulls, and they fish with satisfaction.

The dinghy lands us among the fir trees covering the islets, but the undergrowth is

completely barren of vegetation and very little fascinating, at least to our eyes.



Figure 24: View of the Broughton Islands group

The tide changes rapidly and causes strong currents to flow between channels and passages. I pray that the dinghy's motor doesn't stop here (it never did) and that my prayer is heard. Tomorrow we will start going north-east. I intend to show Salvatore the end of the Knight Inlet and its spectacular walls of gray and smooth granite, where I had already sailed a decade ago.

We liked these places so much that the desire to see them again was one of the main reasons why we decided to plan a transit for the Northwest Passage.

Inside Passage from Friday 2 to Sunday 4 August Glendale Cove and Minstrel Island

We depart from our quiet anchorage and proceed to enter the turbulent inlets towards the interior. It's a child's play! The only variable, in the absence of thunderstorms, is the current, which can be sensitive at certain points but does not pose any problems.

By observing the wooded flanks we begin to notice how strange they are. In certain places, the trees are identical. There are no old trees, unlike Alaska. At a turning point the mystery becomes clear: an entire side of the inlet is devoid of trees and forestry machines are scattered here and there. The forests here have been cultivated! And for hundreds of years. The wild nature is fictitious! That's why there's a lack of terrestrial animals.



Figure 25: The planned destruction of a fir tree forest

Fortunately, there are areas owned by the First Nations (Indians) where traditions and greater respect for nature prevail.

The robbery finance that is present everywhere in North America has yet to find a way to touch the water of the inlets. So for a while, we can go up the current next to a family of killer whales that travel just a little faster than us, touching the rocky shore covered with algae.

I can't reach the end of Knight Inlet as I would like because the last two sections are being swept by a strong catabatic wind. The approaching evening suggests instead of looking for an anchorage, which is not easy here.

A slight bend at the entrance of a side branch, Glendale Cove, has an acceptable bottom where we can drop anchor. Here it would seem that there is finally a nature reserve

where the forest is much more diverse, even if there are no boundaries marked or signs with special restrictions.

On the other side of the Cove, we see a resort where seaplanes land to bring guests, probably fairly wealthy.

During a boat trip on the small river that descends from the valley in complete solitude, we are given the opportunity to see deer and bears to satiate our eyes.



Figure 26: A family of grizzly bears in Glendale Cove

We can't linger because the day of Salvatore's departure is approaching and we are still far from Campbell River, where there is an airport.

The next day we follow the course of the previous day, deviating only at the end to stop at a small port unused for many years that I had already visited about ten years before, Minstrel Cove. There are no services there and the piers are even shakier than before. But there are two other boats that have preferred the quiet atmosphere of this bay with its deep depths to the equipped port a few miles away.

The meeting with the crews of the other two boats proved to be beneficial. I gather valuable information on possible winter stopovers.

Then we get back on course and end up anchoring together with many other boats in another sheltered loop, Forward Harbour, which is thirty meters deep. Probably the deepest anchorage I have ever been in (Douglas Bay in Forward Harbour). Previously, we came across a small tugboat that was training a vast collection of floating logs that were held together by a chain of logs joined to each other by wedges.



Figure 27: Moored at Minstrel Cove

Inside Passage from Monday 5 to Tuesday 6 August- Nodales Channel - Campbell River

It rarely happens, but it does.

A bad night causes me to feel so bad that I can't leave right away.

I don't eat lunch and Salvatore accepts the task of taking the boat to the next anchorage.

In the afternoon, I feel better and can work at least as a navigator. Along our route , which runs through a series of channels inside the labyrinth of islands separating Vancouver Island from the mainland, there are a couple of thresholds where the current is very strong and that require us to pass, prudently, during slack.

The first threshold, just after we weighed the anchor, is short and wide enough to allow us not to follow this rule even with the current (in these conditions it could be very difficult to correct course in time to avoid rocks if a turn is forced by a whirlpool)

It's a beautiful day and the weather is calm. It seems that the banks in this area are respected by loggers. Towards evening, with my health and strength rapidly returning, we stop in the middle of a channel leading to the main passage next to the island of Vancouver. A stop in a romantic corner that, given the very "normal" nature of our partnership, It makes us regret being here only among us men (Hemming Bay in the Nodales Channel)



Figure 28: The beautiful Hemming Bay

The next day, now fully fit, we can face the passage of the Seymour Narrows with a

short stop to wait for the right moment. This was an extremely dangerous passage because of the cross and unpredictable currents caused by a large double rock, the Ripple Rock three meters deep up from a bottom of about eighty, located right in the center of the passage which, moreover, is S-shaped. The current even today can reach 15 knots.

The passage resulted in the sinking of over a hundred ships. In 1958, the rock was blown up with just under 1,500 tons of explosives, and now the bottom has dropped to about 14 meters. We however easily pass during slack and we then moor to one of the marinas of Campbell River.

Salvatore leaves me a little sad after his second adventure with Best Explorer. We will meet again in two years to cross together a half of the Pacific Ocean.

Desolation Sound from Wednesday 7 to Sunday 18 August. Talbot Cove - Squirrel Cove - Bute inlet - Drew Harbor

A couple of new friends have arrived, and they are nice.

They unexpectedly pose me with a small problem: they will only be staying for one week.

The distances between anchorages around the world are usually quite significant. Even here, planning a short cruise at the last moment that returns to the starting point without retracing the route is not easy. I will try.



Figure

30: My first and only salmon!

T

he farthest point I'm going to reach to show them some nice scenery is a bay in Bute Inlet. It is not exceptional in itself, but offers good shelter. In that Inlet, years ago, we observed black bears just by the sea, and I hope to meet them again.

Meanwhile we anchor in a small lagoon between islets where I am lucky enough to catch a salmon, an exceptional feat for me and rightly appreciated by my guests

Figure 44 My first and only salmon!

The journey to the farthest destination will be disappointing though. The bight above mentioned became private and an alternative further on is unusable. It is filled with a large amount of logs ready for transportation collected in the only section where the seabed is

manageable.

My poor friends have been forced to undergo a lengthy motor navigation to retrace our track and search for another anchorage due to circumstances.

Even the bears are missing and the journey promises to be very boring.

There is an underwater log that is being dragged by a sneaky current to make the journey exciting.

A lateral inlet, home to very violent tidal currents, spewed out into the Bute Inlet branches, and a submerged log was hidden below them. One hit and the sudden stop of the engine makes my heart jump in my throat. I rush to inspect the couplings between the engine and the propeller shaft, and it appears that everything is in order.



Figure 31: Spectacular sunset at Drew Harbour

Back on deck I use the boat hook to free the boat from the sneaky and deadly log. Crossing my fingers, I restart the engine and carefully engage the gears. No vibration. This time, we were able to avoid it, especially because of the propeller's quality. I am always congratulating my Jprop for its robustness!

Upon landing the boat, I will learn that the only damage sustained was one of the rope cutter blades being bent 90° in a way that didn't impede the propeller. Only two years later, more serious damage to the bolts of the couplings will show itself.

We still rest at some interesting anchorages, with waterfalls and the ubiquitous fir trees before returning to Campbell River. The friends still seem satisfied with their vacation. I take them to the airport and we greet each other warmly

Desolation Sound from Monday 19 to Sunday 25 August

Nicoletta and Andreas have come in.

Once the supplies are finished, we return to the western entrance of the labyrinth of islands linking Vancouver Island to the mainland. The area is filled with various views and anchorages, where one can hope to observe the families of killer whales that often frequent these areas.

We return to the Seymour Narrows, always during slack, this time in the opposite direction. We find the current later on, rather strong and contrary going up the Blackney Passage, quite wide. I enjoy testing the performance and behavior of the boat in these conditions, with the whirlpools that push us from one side to the other, right here where there are no dangers or risks.

I try to find, without success, the anchorages that I explored years ago, but many corners of these tortuous channels resemble each other and my memory betrays me (I do not have with me the logbook from then).

At the end, we anchor in a particularly protected and pleasant spot, although it is infested with kelp (Port Neville).

I'm returning to Glendale Cove, where I'm confident I can exhibit more animals to my friends. We proceed straight towards the Knight Inlet, which flows right next to the present anchorage. Already during the approach the killer whales gratify us with their company and once anchored again in the same point as last time, after a night of rest, we return to the mouth of the stream at the end of the Cove.

The salmon are heading up the river this time, but we must wait for the tide to rise to pull the dinghy further upstream.

During the wait, we are approached by two floats full of tourists perched on benches and led by guides who come from the nearby resort.

The guides are extremely annoyed to see us there and ask that we remain behind their boats. We assume that their tourists paid a lot of money for an exclusive experience, but we are ruining it.

While I don't think they have any right, we need to adapt to avoid fighting and wasting our day.

We did well: it's not long before a mother grizzly bear arrives with two cubs that, completely ignoring us, start grazing and playing next to us. Meanwhile, bald eagles feed on the shore of salmon carcasses, and at the edge of the forest, we even see a grey wolf pass silently.

<https://youtu.be/MkQ-4VMQ-yU>

We have had enough of the unwanted company and we returned to the boat. All in all, we are very satisfied.

I will have unpleasant repercussions later: I will discover that the owners of the resort have denounced me, completely without foundation, as a squatter, but I do not suspect it yet. I here anticipate the conclusion: no consequence for me or for the boat, of course.

I repeat my previous trip to the deep anchorage of Douglas Harbour, but this time, I can select a less challenging seabed due to the presence of fewer boats.

Desolation Sound and Strait of Georgia to Canoe Cove from Monday 26 to Friday 30 August

We must overcome the tough challenge of traversing the Cordero Channel.



Figure 32: "Dent Rapids" in the Cornero Channel

To pass "upstream" of Vancouver Island, this is the alternative route to the Johnstone Strait. It is more narrow and dangerous, but also more scenic. The Spaniards made the discovery in 1792, but it was later judged too unsafe for ships by George Vancouver, who had sailed with Cook. It presents four rapids that are spaced so that their passage becomes complicated in a single stretch due to the different times of slacks.



Figure 33: Lund Harbour, the mooring was in the extreme right corner Photo Ken Walker kgw@lunar.ca CC-BY-SA-2.5

By accepting to sail for some stretches against the current and calculating carefully and patiently the times, direction and forces of the currents, we manage to spend them all at one time, going then to anchor in the Von Donop Inlet, a kind of isolated internal lake, surrounded by a dense forest where the generator suddenly stops. We are surprised to discover that the sea is a soup of jellyfish so thick and dense that they were sucked from the sea water intake, placed more than one meter below the waterline, filling it completely.

The next leg is going to take advantage of one of the rare windy moments during this season to moor in Lund, where I will perform one of the most spectacular mooring maneuvers of my career. I put Best Explorer, almost 17 meters and 27 tons, with a single maneuver between another boat and an angle of the pier, despite the current and with less than ten centimeters of free space each side.

From there, in the meantime carrying out the towing in port of a father and son in trouble, after a couple of stops and finally some sailing again, we anchor in the bay overlooking Nanaimo after crossing the Georgia Strait.

Several narrow passages with current lead us finally to Canoe Cove, our destination, a small marina hidden behind the umpteenth narrow passage with rocks everywhere where we hope to be able to leave the boat for the winter.

Canoe Cove from Saturday 31 August to Sunday 15 September

Figure 48 The strange narrow entrance channel between the boat shelters at Canoe Cove

Upon entering Canoe Cove's marina yesterday, we found ourselves entering a narrow channel between two rows of blue houses floating, which were locked by doors preventing us from seeing what was inside.

Distracted by a seal watching us pass with a puzzled expression, I almost missed an open one: they are boathouses! We suspect that here the precipitation is very abundant, which drives people to find such a complex solution.

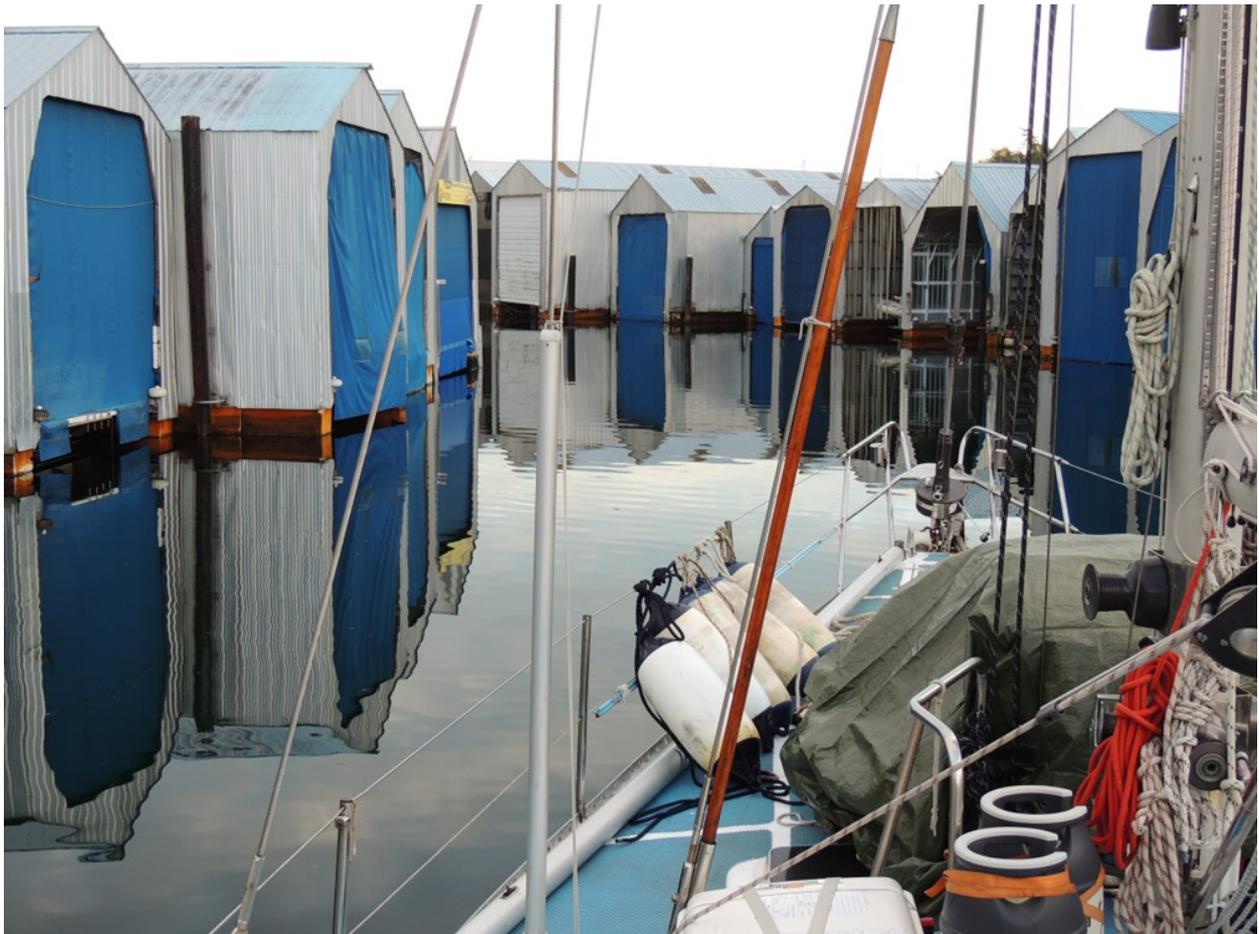


Figure 34: The unusual narrow passage among boat huts to reach the travel lift

We moor in a tier right at the end, next to the bridge for the travel lift.

Nicoletta and Andreas are preparing to leave, while I will remain in patient and hopeful waiting for the new travel lift to arrive on site. A few months ago the old one fell into the water destroyed by an incorrect maneuver: this has not been said to me beforehand and is a little worrying, But we're here now and we can only wait..

I use the time to prepare the boat for winter and look for a solution for the permission to keep the gun as the temporary one expires soon.

I received a customs visit following the complaint of the owners of Glendale Cove resort. It is clear that they wish to have exclusive rights to tourism there. It takes a while to clear up the whole thing, including a thorough review of the logbook which I fortunately keep very diligently and in detail, but meanwhile you can bet that my sympathy for Canada increases considerably.

It reached its climax the day before departure when, having exhausted all alternatives, I handed over the rifle to the same customs officers who, after duly cashing it free of charge, told me: "But it was enough that you applied for a permit to carry arms, which would be granted immediately, So you would have kept it!" And you're telling me now, son of a bitch?

Opposite our mooring there is a gentleman who regularly lies on a garden chair in front of his shed. One day he gets up and comes to visit. Our adventures fascinate him.

He clings to me. I am truly delighted to find out that he is a former convict (for armed robbery!). As he likes me, he gives me gifts: a steak, lunch, beer, and the use of his car.

In return, he asks for a shirt and the Best Explorer flag, which of course I will not deny him, especially after hearing his story. If I needed it, he assured me of the support of the mafia boss from Toronto, who made friends in prison. I appreciate it, but I am declining.

The travel lift finally arrives and Best Explorer will be the first boat to be pulled dry this year: I do not know if I'm pleased with the honor, which will even end up in the local newspaper, but in the end everything is fine. I board the plane to return to Italy and greet the boat that I will see again in spring with new adventures.



Figure 35: Best Explorer a terra a Canoe Cove

Figura 49