

## Alaska Trip – Day 1 - Tuesday August 13 – To Anchorage :

Today Marcia and Jim Elving and Marie and Kal Tinka start a three week vacation in Alaska and the Yukon Territory of Canada. Marcia and Marie are sisters and the four of us enjoy traveling together. This will be the 14<sup>th</sup> international trip we've taken together over the last nine years. As we two couples live in distant cities these travels are about the only occasions each year we get to spend a lot of time together. We are all now retired and have started taking two vacations each year, one in the winter and another in the late summer or early fall.



This vacation almost didn't happen. Marcia and I planned to be busy all summer and fall selling our house in Upstate New York. We put our home in the Saratoga region of New York on the market in mid-May and it sold immediately! Kal and I started scrambling to find a suitable vacation destination and make plans; no time for our normal "meticulous" planning and in-depth review of multiple potential tours and itineraries. We focused on Alaska as a good late summer destination. Many of the tours, cruises and prime dates were sold out. We were finally able to secure the tour/cruise shown on the map to the left. We're not sure it's the best we could have come up with but we believe it will be fun and interesting.

We will first join a thirteen day *Globus* guided tour commencing in Anchorage Alaska. We will travel by motor coach and train to Denali National Park, home of the tallest mountain in North America, Denali (Mt. McKinley). Then we travel north to Fairbanks Alaska, on to the "gold mining" towns of Dawson and Whitehorse in the Yukon Territory of northwest Canada, and back into southern Alaska, finishing up the tour in Anchorage. We will then board the Holland American Line's cruise ship *Zaandam* for a seven day cruise of southeastern Alaska and the "Inside Passage" to Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

Highlights should include whale sightings, cruising Glacier Bay National Park, and day long stops at the ports of Haines, Juneau and Ketchikan Alaska.

Marcia and I are staying at our daughter Jaime's townhouse near Pittsburgh while our new home is being built north of Pittsburgh. This morning Jaime drives us to the Pittsburgh Airport where we catch an early 6:15 AM United Airlines flight to Chicago. After a three hour layover we depart Chicago at 10:05 AM on another United Boeing 737 for the 6+ hour flight to Anchorage Alaska. We've paid a little extra for seats in their "Economy Plus" section and are quite comfortable with the extra leg room.

It is a great day for flying and we enjoy the views of the farms and lakes of Minnesota, the Dakotas and west central Canada and then the beautiful Canadian Rockies and the coast and mountain ranges and glaciers of Alaska. The views in B.C. and Alaska are amazing! We fly past Mt. Logan, at 19,551 feet the highest mountain in Canada.

We land in Anchorage on time at 1:30 PM Alaska time which is four hours behind Eastern Daylight Savings Time. We are transferred to our hotel for the night, the Hilton in downtown Anchorage. We meet our Globus Tour Director, Colleen, who gets us checked in and up to speed. We are glad to hear that there will only be 27 folks in our tour group!



Marie and Kal have a later start today. They drive from their home south of Dayton Ohio to the Cincinnati Airport where they board a 1:30 PM Delta flight to Minneapolis. An hour later they board a 3:15 PM Delta flight. Their 5-1/2 hour flight lands in Anchorage at 6 PM.



None of the four of us has ever been to Alaska. We have learned that Alaska is by far the largest state in the Union; larger than Texas, California and Montana combined. Alaska's coastline is longer than all of the other states combined. With a total population of 731,449 (half of whom live in the Anchorage metropolitan area) it is the fourth least populated state and by far the least densely populated with only about 1.2 people per square mile. Alaska was purchased from Russia in 1867 for \$7.2 million (\$118 million in today's dollars) and was called "Seward's Folly" because it was thought to be a very bad decision by Secretary of State Seward. It became an organized US Territory

in 1912 and was admitted to the Union as the 49<sup>th</sup> State on January 3, 1959. Alaska's economy is dominated by the oil, natural gas and fishing industries. Tourism is also an important industry. The Alaska landscape features miles of arctic tundra, dense forests, more than three million lakes, tens of thousands of islands, massive mountain ranges and numerous active volcanos. Glacier ice covers some 16,000 square miles of land and 1,200 square miles of tidal basin. With over 100,000, Alaska has half of the world's glaciers.

The climate of the southeast "panhandle" of Alaska is a mid-latitude oceanic climate. It's relatively mild with an average high temperature in the winter above freezing. The climate of Anchorage and south central Alaska is mild by Alaska standards due to the proximity of the sea. The climate of interior Alaska is subarctic but some of the coldest and warmest temperatures occur in the region around Fairbanks where summers can have temperatures reaching into the 90's and winters with low temperatures of -60 degrees Fahrenheit. The climate in the extreme north of Alaska is Arctic with long, very cold winters and short cool summers. This part of Alaska is famous as the "land of the midnight sun" where the sun never sets in the summer and never rises in the winter. The more central part of Alaska, where we will be, also has long summer days but more so in the early summer. Where we will be, in mid-August, we can expect sunrise at about 6 AM and sunset at about 9:30 PM. The weather forecast for our trip looks promising. We should have high temperatures in the 60s and 70s, lows in the 50s and hopefully not too many clouds or much rain.

Tomorrow we head north to remote Denali National Park!

### **Alaska Trip – Day 2 – Wednesday August 14 – Anchorage to Denali:**

We are up early this morning in Anchorage Alaska. Their time is four hours behind what we are used to. When we are up at 5 AM here it's like 9 AM back home. This Sheraton looks a "little worn out" but is very comfortable; good air conditioning, great beds and an excellent shower.

Our group meets for breakfast at 6 AM and we enjoy meeting our fellow travelers. Eight are from Australia, one couple is from Canada, a lady is from South Africa and the rest are from the USA. After a group picture we board our motor coach and meet our driver, Bill. The motor coach looks brand new and there is plenty of room for the twenty seven of us. The day starts with a high overcast. Temperature is in the mid-50s. We leave Anchorage and "civilization".

We drive north for about an hour to Wasilla (Sarah Palin's hometown) and stop at the Iditarod Center. We see exhibits and a video commemorating the annual 1000 miles dog sled race, which was inspired by the 1925 dog sled rescue run to rush diphtheria antidote to the snowbound town of Nome. We get to see real sled dogs and puppies!





After another hour heading north in the motor coach we reach the town of Talkeetna. At 11:20 AM we board the Alaska Railroad for a 122 mile trip to Denali Park. The weather has started to clear and we have some sun. Oh Wow...what a surprise...we board a huge "Wilderness Express" train coach. The first level has a kitchen, dining area and an open viewing area. The upper level has panoramic windows and luxury seating for 150 people. Our little group of 27 will have the whole train car to ourselves as well as a railroad tour guide, four servers, and the kitchen staff for the 4+ hour train ride to Denali Park!

We learn from our "Railroad Guide" that the Alaska Railroad was first built between 1914 and 1923 and runs for over 400 miles between Anchorage and Fairbanks. During Alaska's short tourist season (mid-May through mid-September) the observations cars are run. For the rest of the year the railroad hauls freight and standard passenger cars mainly for residents. We will be traveling on the scenic segment from Talkeetna to Denali National Park. We are served drinks at our seats. The views are outstanding. Later, we all go down downstairs to the dining lounge and enjoy a great lunch.





The train seems to maintain a speed of between 30 and 40 miles per hour so trying to view scenery and wildlife is not difficult. We are on the lookout for animals but only see birds; a few eagles and some swans. The real attraction is the wilderness scenery...mountains, rivers and forests. We slowly cross the 350 foot high *Hurricane Gulch Bridge* built 91 years ago. We go through a 2500 foot high pass in the *Alaska Mountain Range* that is also the continental divide; from here on the rivers flow north to the artic. The commentary from the railroad guide and the servers is interesting and humorous. This is really a most relaxing ride.





We arrive at Denali Park Station a little before 4 PM and are met by Bill and our motor coach. Bill has driven ahead of the train, picked up our room keys and deposited our luggage in the rooms we will be staying in for the next two nights at the Denali Bluffs Hotel. No hotels, restaurants or shops can be built inside of the National Park so we stay right near the park entrance. Tour Director Colleen warned us when we left Anchorage that we were entering the “Last Frontier” and that our future accommodations would be “rustic and nothing fancy” (despite the high prices posted on the backs of the room doors)! Our hotel is a collection of rustic buildings on a hillside but appears to us to be quite acceptable. Good TV reception and free internet!

Dinner tonight is another treat. We are taken inside the park to a private room in the Murie Science Research Center. We are served a good buffet dinner and then enjoy an excellent presentation from a naturalist with *Alaska Geographic*. It’s a good one and we learn a lot about Denali Park and the flora and fauna in its “intact ecosystem”. Great preparation for tomorrow when we will explore sixty two miles into the park.

### **Alaska Trip – Day 3 – Thursday August 15 – Denali National Park:**

We’re up early this morning after the first of two nights at the Denali Bluffs Hotel in Alaska. We are surprised to see light rain falling. We enjoy breakfast at the hotel and at 6:45 AM meet to start our eight hour *Tundra Wilderness Tour* of Denali National Park. This is included as part of our Globus Tour package.

We have learned that Denali National Park contains the highest mountain in North America, Mt. McKinley (or Mt. Denali as the Alaskans call it). The mountain is 20,300 feet tall. The park was first established in 1917. What is unique about Denali is the National Park Service's goal of maintaining it as a "Wilderness Park". This means maintaining the park in its natural state and not allowing modifications to the land, flora or fauna. For example, a large wild fire (started by lightning) is now burning near the park. No efforts will be made to contain it as this is a natural occurrence. There is only one road into the park (the one we will be on today) and access by road vehicles and to other areas of the park by hiking campers is strictly controlled and restricted.

Tour access to the park is only on buses run by the National Park Service. They run 32 buses per day during the short season (mid-May through mid-September) for single tours in the park; i.e., only 32 buses for only one trip each day. They do run another 20 buses for shuttle service along the 90 mile park road.

We board our bus which like all the Park Buses looks like a modified school bus. We meet our vivacious driver/tour guide Mary Jane. She tells us she's been leading these tours for eleven years and has college degrees in biology and animal behavior. She states that the 6.2 million acre park is the size of the state of Massachusetts. Surprisingly, she informs us that this huge park only contains 300 Grizzly Bears, 2000 Caribou, 2000 Dall Sheep, 200 Moose and 49 Wolves, the animals we are hoping to see! She says there are ten times as many Grizzlies around Anchorage due to the ready availability of salmon. The ecosystem of Denali is really "desert", kept green by moisture from the permafrost and without enough edible food, especially during the winter, to sustain a larger animal population. She tells us that this is not a wild game preserve; nothing is done to alter nature. If the winter is severe and the moose is starving, no external food is introduced; the wolves take care of the ailing moose, and the wolf population expands for a while before the moose population rebounds!

We will be driving 62 to miles into the park, on the only road, and then returning by the same route. Mary Jane tells us the first 15 miles are paved, the next 20 miles are good dirt/gravel, and the last 27 miles are very narrow, winding and poor dirt/gravel.

We start off at about 7 AM on the initial paved section. The light rain has stopped but the mountains are somewhat obscured by the smoke from the wild fire. We sure can smell the smoke! We are delighted to quickly spot a moose. Mary Jane stops the bus. She has a camera with a strong zoom lens and shows pictures of the moose on video screens in the bus. We take our own pictures. We soon spot the Alaska State bird, the Ptarmigan.





We next spot a Caribou. Mary Jane says it's a bull with a full rack and probably weighs 400 pounds. We also see many cute Artic Ground Squirrels right along the road and several Dall Sheep high up on the sides of steep slopes. We eat the box lunches the tour has supplied us with. The scenery is quite nice...glacial rivers and many overlooks. Smoke from the wild fires obscures our views. We are not able to even get a glimpse of Mt. McKinley through the clouds and smoke.





We drive on a narrow road up on the side of the cliff, climbing to a height of 4000 feet. Mary Jane continues to give us good commentary on the life cycles of the various flora and fauna in the park. At the 62 mile mark we turn around and return to the park entrance. We spot many more Caribou on the return. We finally spot what we've really been hoping to see...a Grizzly Bear eating berries and bulking up for the winter. The bus returns us to our hotel at 2 PM after a most informative and unique but rather exhausting tour of a wilderness park. The bus was really not very comfortable.



Dinner is on our own tonight and the four of us walk into the small town and have a nice pizza dinner on the outside deck of the McKinley Hotel overlooking the Nenana River. We are looking forward to tomorrow; we have big plans for our last morning in Denali!

#### **Alaska Trip – Day 4 – Friday August 16 – Denali to Fairbanks:**

We wake up this morning after the second night at the Denali Bluffs Hotel near the entrance to Denali National Park in Alaska. We are delighted to see clear skies, bright sun and no sign of the smoky haze from the nearby wild fires; the wind direction must have shifted! The four of us, along with several others on our tour, have previously signed up for an optional excursion this morning, *Fixed Wing in Denali*. This excursion had been highly recommended to us by Marcia and Marie's cousin Judi. We will fly over Denali Park and around Mt. McKinley in a small plane. However we know that the operator will not fly in poor weather and if it is overcast there will be little to see. Thus we are very happy seeing fair weather this morning!

At 7:30 AM we are picked up by a van from Denali Air and transported a few miles to their private air strip where we check in and weigh in. We see our plane, a six seat twin engine Piper Navaho, and meet our pilot, Connie. He is an older gentleman (about our age)! We later learn that he's been flying for 45 years and teaches flying and runs a private airstrip near his home in Iowa. We board our plane and are assigned seats. I am assigned to the co-pilot's seat which I assume is due to my computer simulation flying skills but soon learn it has something to do with my weight and Connie's desire to get the plane off of the ground. Everyone has their own window.



We take off a little after 8 AM and spend the next hour flying over Denali Park. We cover about 200 miles on a course along the Alaska Mountain Range and around and seemingly through the highest mountain in North America, McKinley. This is an amazing experience in crystal clear weather. Mt. McKinley is most impressive. It is 20,320 feet high and rises from the 2500 foot high Park floor. This gives McKinley a greater "total rise" than any other mountain in the world. For example, Everest is over 29,000 feet high but rises from a plateau that is at a level of 11,000 feet. Connie and a pre-recording give us good commentary on what we are viewing and he points out to us the different ascent routes taken by the mountain climbers that attempt to climb McKinley during the May through June climbing season.



We land a little after 9 AM and thank Connie for a wonderful experience. These few pictures do a poor job of showing the amazing sights that we saw.

We leave our hotel at 10:30 AM for the 112 mile drive to Fairbanks. We found the Denali Bluffs Hotel quite acceptable. We stop at the Park's Visitors Center and watch a delightful 18 minute movie *The Heartbeat of Denali*. We then drive ten miles north and stop for a nice included lunch at the "49<sup>th</sup> State Brewing Company". Driving further north we take a forty five minute rest stop at the mostly native town of Nenana, famous for their "When Will The Ice Go Out" lottery.



We arrive in Fairbanks, Alaska's second largest city (35,000 people in the city, 85,000 in the county) and check into our hotel for the next two nights, The Wedgewood Resort. Initially built as lodging for Alaska Pipeline workers in the 70's, our rooms are quite like apartments with a kitchen, dining room, living room and two bedrooms. Most comfortable. A world class automotive museum, *The Fountainhead Antique Auto Museum*, is on the property grounds and I very much enjoy touring the museum and seeing their 80 beautifully restored cars from years 1903 through 1938.



The four of us enjoy dinner at the hotel restaurant and retire for the night. Tomorrow we explore Fairbanks.

### **Alaska Trip – Day 5 – Saturday August 17 – Fairbanks:**

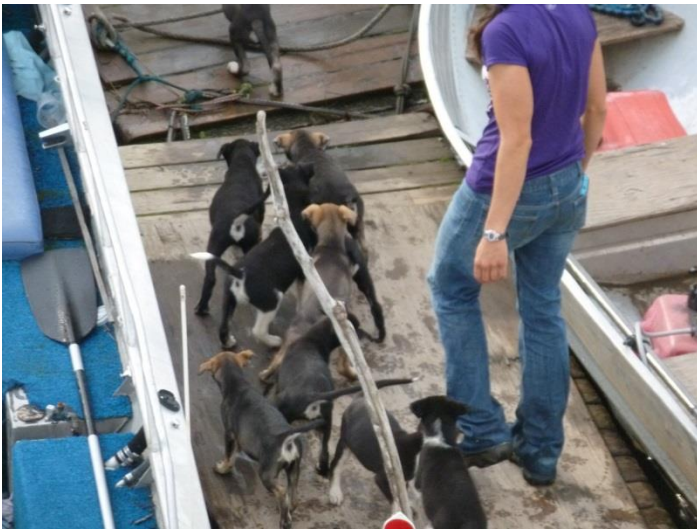
We are up after our first of two nights in Fairbanks Alaska. We are several hundred miles north of Anchorage and are surprised at how early it starts to get light (about 4:30 AM). It does not really get dark until 11 PM. We all left word at the front desk to phone us in the middle of the night if the *Aurora Borealis* (the Northern Lights) came out; we had missed them the night before in Denali. This is a common front desk service in Alaska but we did not receive a call last night so we assume atmospheric conditions were not correct. Even though we are only 120 miles south of the Arctic Circle the temperature today should reach the mid-70s. It's forecasted to be a partly sunny day.

Today we explore Fairbanks, the second largest city in Alaska. We motor to downtown and board the paddle wheeler *Discovery III* for a three hour trip in the Chena River. This trip turns out to be quite a well-choreographed and enjoyable excursion. At the first river bend we stop and the professional narrator/tour guide describes what we will next see; a

bush pilot will take off and then land back in the river in his Piper Super Cub equipped with floats. The pilot then chats with the narrator over the intercom system. Back underway, we pass some beautiful riverside homes.



We next stop in the water in front of the *Trailbreaker Kennels* run by Dave Monson and his family. Dave is the husband of four time Iditarod Race winner Susan Butcher (who passed away from cancer several years ago). Dave talks to us via a microphone connected to the boat's PA system and he describes his kennels and the raising and training of sled dogs. We enjoy watching about ten sled dog puppies cavort. Dave then takes a sled dog team on a long run around the property. At the end the dogs are released and jump in the river to cool off; much fun to watch.



We continue down the river and our river boat stops in front of a re-created Athabasca Indian Village. A young lady deftly shows us how Indians catch salmon and filet and prepare salmon for preservation in a "smoke house". The lower grades of preserved salmon are kept for the dogs while the higher grades are for human consumption. Our boat then continues down river to the muddy confluence with the Nenana River and the Captain describes the difficulties of navigation in the shallow Alaskan rivers.

Our boat now turns around and returns to the Athabasca Village and docks. We exit our boat and spend the next hour in the village. We watch three demonstrations on how the natives lived in the 1500s, in the late 1800s, and then on how they used available materials and animal hides to make garments, tents, and utensils. We next enjoy twenty minutes of free time. Most of us spend it in an area featuring sled dogs with their trainers. We learn that the lead trainer will be competing in the February 1<sup>st</sup> 1000 mile Fairbanks to Dawson dog sled race, *The Yukon Quest*.



We return to the paddle wheeler and travel up river back to their headquarters. Departing the boat at noon we are next driven to downtown Fairbanks where we have two hours to have lunch and explore. Downtown Fairbanks is even less impressive than downtown Anchorage. That's OK as we sure didn't come to Alaska to spend much time in cities.

At 2 PM we drive out to view a section of the Alaska Pipeline. We have learned about this engineering marvel...an 800 mile oil pipeline built from Prudhoe Bay on Alaska's frozen North Slope to the ice free port of Valdez on the Gulf of Alaska. The portion we view is similar to about 400 miles of the pipeline. The pipe is suspended on supports to insure that the pipe (warmed by the hot oil and the additional heat generated by the friction of oil moving through the pipe) does not melt through the "permafrost" frozen ground and break. Special radiators (the projections from the top of the supports) drive refrigerant down through the supports in to the ground surface and the permafrost.



We now spend an interesting hour and a half at the *Museum of the North* located on the pretty campus of the University of Alaska-Fairbanks.

We return to our hotel. Later the four of us walk a few blocks and have a nice dinner at *Geraldo's*, a good Italian restaurant. Tomorrow we will depart for four days in the Yukon Territory of Canada.

#### **Alaska Trip – Day 6 – August 18 – Fairbanks to Dawson City:**

We wake up early today after our second night at the Wedgewood Resort in Fairbanks. We enjoyed our large “apartment” size rooms but the hotel location is a little remote. We have a very long day ahead on the road. Our motor coach will depart Alaska and drive into the Yukon Territory of Canada, eventually arriving at Dawson City.

We depart Fairbanks at 7 AM and stop at noon for lunch at Fast Eddie's Restaurant in Tok. During our morning drive we have a couple of nice rest stops at interesting historical sites and see where the pipeline crosses the Tanana River. Our Tour Director Colleen keeps us entertained with more narrative about Alaska and shows us an excellent PBS Documentary on the building of the Alaska Pipeline. The weather this morning has been rainy and smoky as we have been driving near more wild fires.



After lunch we turn north on the Taylor Highway to drive to the “Top of the World”. The road soon turns into a narrow dirt and gravel road climbing up through rather desolate but beautiful country. This road is only open during the summer months. We see a Moose and spot many Caribou. Colleen gives us historical background on the Klondike Gold Rush of 1898 and what to expect in Dawson. Mid-afternoon we stop at the unique Alaskan town of *Chicken*. We learn that Chicken is not connected to the grid and has a summertime population of 50 and a winter population of 14. Roads to Chicken are only open in the summer. We take a rest stop in Chicken, using their outhouse and shopping in their General Store. Fellow traveler Paul (from Australia) and I enjoy a cold one in the saloon with its unique wall and ceiling covering of perhaps a thousand caps.







The road deteriorates as we climb to 4575 feet. Our driver Bill does an excellent job keeping our motor coach on the 1-1/2 car-wide dirt road. With just twenty seven tour members we continue to be most comfortable on this coach and its excellent suspension really does a great job of dampening out the bumps. We soon clear "The Top of the World" and then clear Canadian Border Control and enter the Yukon. We gain an hour as we are now on West Coast Canada/USA time. We have learned that the Yukon is the westernmost and smallest of Canada's northern territories. It was established as a territory in 1898. While large in land area The Yukon's population only numbers 33,898 people. We will stay for two nights each in The Yukon's two largest cities, Dawson with a population of 1,327 and the capital of Whitehorse with a population of 22,898.

We stop on the way into Dawson and get good views from a high lookout point of Dawson and of the Klondike and Yukon rivers which join in Dawson.



Descending towards Dawson we find we have to cross the Yukon River to enter Dawson. There is no bridge connecting our "highway" with Dawson. There's a free 24 hour ferry. In the winter the residents just drive cross the frozen river. For two weeks in the spring (when the frozen ice is going out) and in the fall (before the ice gets thick enough) there is no route across the river. The weather has turned quite nice...70+ degrees and sunny.



We enter Dawson at 7:30 PM and check into our hotel for the next two nights, The El Dorado. The rooms are quite comfortable. What a friendly hotel! Dinner is on our own but most all in our group enjoy socializing and dining in the hotel's bar area. After dinner the four of us walk around Dawson. It's still very light at 10:30 PM. Tomorrow we explore Dawson and the Gold Strike areas.

#### **Alaska Trip – Day 7 – August 19 – Dawson City:**

We are up after our first night at the El Dorado Hotel in Dawson City in the Yukon Territory of Canada. After a good included breakfast at our hotel we all board our motor coach for a morning that will be mostly devoted to the *Klondike Gold Rush of 1897*. Marcia bundles up, thinking we are 120 miles above the Arctic Circle rather than 120 miles below!

Our first stop is the site of "Discovery #1" or "Claim #1" where gold was first discovered on Bonanza Creek near Dawson on August 17, 1896. This triggered the Gold Rush and Dawson grew to a city of 40,000 people by 1899 (down to 1,327 today). Our excellent Tour Director Colleen shows us how the miners would pan for gold. All of the gold in the Klondike region is what is called "placer gold" or small particles or flecks of gold that need to be found and separated from creek beds. Gold being 19 times denser than water, and 6 times denser than sand, will always sink to the bottom of a basic or sophisticated sifting/separation device.



Our next stop is a fascinating one: *Gold Dredge #4*. A dredge is a machine that mechanically dredges large amounts of a creek bed and separates the placer gold flakes from rocks and sand. This site is now maintained by the Canadian Government as a historical site and we are given a tour of #4, the largest dredge ever built, by an excellent tour guide.

The design, mechanics and operation of this huge, custom made machine are fascinating but too complex to describe here. #4 operated from 1913 until 1959. It required only a four man crew to run and ran 24 hours a day for about 200 days a year. #4 extracted 9 tons of gold in its 46 years of operation. A collapsed dam resulted in the sinking of #4 in 1960 and the Canadian Government started renovating it as a historical site in 1991.



We next stop at an establishment that lets each of us pan for gold “the old fashioned way”. After some good instruction and a demonstration we each try our hand at gold panning and most of us find some real gold flakes (but not enough to convince any of us to stay...especially with winter coming on)!



We next drive to a nice overlook where we view Dawson City and the confluence of the Klondike and Yukon rivers.



We return to our hotel at 1 PM. A short while later Marie, Kal, Marcia and I head out for a walk through Dawson City. By now the sun has come out and temperatures are in the 70s. Dawson is a quaint, compact town with about eight streets each about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile long paralleling the Yukon River. Only one street, Front Street, is paved; the rest are packed dirt. The structures fall into three categories: old buildings from the very early 1900s that have been restored, newer buildings in the style of the originals, and abandoned and unrestored buildings from the 1900s. Many of the latter category lean at strange angles. This is a result of being incorrectly constructed on “permafrost”. Permafrost is prevalent in the northern  $\frac{2}{3}$  of Alaska and the Yukon and is present when the ground, just under the surface, is frozen year around for at least 2 years. If you build a structure on permafrost that is not correctly isolated/insulated from the ground once you start to heat your finished building it will melt the permafrost and the building will start to sink into the ground! We’ve seen several examples of recently built structures rendered inhabitable due to poor construction and “permafrost sag”.



We next walk along the Yukon River fronting Dawson City. The Yukon, at 1950 miles, is the third longest river in North America. It originates in the northwest corner of British Columbia and flows north and then west across Alaska before

flowing into the Bering Sea in extreme western Alaska. We have learned that the Yukon was used as the main transportation route by nearly all of the miners coming to the Klondike and Alaska gold rushes. They either came by the *southern route*, landing in Skagway and hiking over the Chilkoot Pass (see the picture below of the miners climbing the pass; they had to make several trips as the Canadian Mounties would not let you proceed any further until you had enough provisions to last a year...2000 pounds) and eventually proceeding down the Yukon to Dawson, or the *western route* which entailed taking a steamship to western Alaska and then a riverboat up the Yukon all the way across Alaska to Dawson.



As we had skipped lunch we had an early dinner at *Sourdough Joe's* restaurant. They specialize in cod, halibut and salmon. We all had the salmon and it was very good. (Sourdoughs by the way are people who have spent at least one complete season cycle in the Yukon.)

Globus Tours has supplied us with admissions to *Diamond Tooth Gertie's*. This is a gambling casino run by the Canadian Government; the only one in the Dawson area. Gertie's has a musical show fronted by Gertie and her four dance hall girls. Everyone on our tour makes plans to go to the 8:30 PM show. The four of us are a little late in arriving but other members of our group have saved us four spots at

the very front of the front table and we are all in place before the show begins.

The show is quite good. Gertie has a good voice and personality and her dancers are amazing. Of course they try to get the audience to "participate", especially the guys, and then we realize why our tour group saved the very front seats for us!



Tomorrow we travel south to Whitehorse, capital of the Yukon.

**Alaska Trip – Day 8 – August 20 – Dawson to Whitehorse:**

Today we leave Dawson. We very much enjoyed our two night stay at the El Dorado Hotel; friendly staff, good food, and comfortable large rooms with flat screen TVs and free internet. We first stop at the Danjoa Zho Cultural Center and learn about the 1<sup>st</sup> Nation people (the Han Indian Tribe) that were displaced by the growth of Dawson, how they survived and their status today.



Our motor coach now starts south on the Klondike Highway for the 333 mile drive to Whitehorse, the capital of the Yukon. We stop at a spot overlooking the Tintina Trench where a 300 mile long tectonic shift occurred in pre-historic times. The weather is overcast with temperatures in the 50s. It starts to rain. We are frequently slowed by road construction. They use the four months of good weather to repair damage to the roads caused by their “eight months

of winter”. Tour Director Colleen shows us an interesting video on the riverboats that used to travel the Yukon between Whitehouse and Dawson before the completion of the Klondike Highway in 1960. We continue to enjoy the other folks with us on this tour and we continue to be most comfortable on our motor coach. The seats have excellent leg room and there are only 27 of us in a 46 seat motor coach; plenty of room to spread out or even go to the back, lay down and take a nap. Colleen makes sure we rotate seat positions each day. Our driver, Bill, does a great job.

By noon the weather has cleared, the sun is out and temperatures are in the 60s. We stop at a country drive in for lunch and enjoy the views of the nearby Yukon River. We continue on through beautiful, empty country.



As we are passing Lake Labarge Colleen reads us the poem *The Cremation of Sam McGee* by the “Klondike Poet” Robert W. Service: (There was a cremation on Lake Laberge but what follows is a fictional tale)

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## **The Cremation Of Sam McGee**

*There are strange things done in the midnight sun  
By the men who toil for gold;  
The Arctic trails have their secret tales*

*That would make your blood run cold;  
The Northern Lights have seen queer sights,  
But the queerest they ever did see  
Was that night on the marge of Lake Lebarge  
I cremated Sam McGee.*

*Now Sam McGee was from Tennessee, where the cotton blooms and blows.  
Why he left his home in the South to roam 'round the Pole, God only knows.  
He was always cold, but the land of gold seemed to hold him like a spell;  
Though he'd often say in his homely way that he'd "sooner live in hell".*

*On a Christmas Day we were mushing our way over the Dawson trail.  
Talk of your cold! through the parka's fold it stabbed like a driven nail.  
If our eyes we'd close, then the lashes froze till sometimes we couldn't see;  
It wasn't much fun, but the only one to whimper was Sam McGee.*

*And that very night, as we lay packed tight in our robes beneath the snow,  
And the dogs were fed, and the stars o'erhead were dancing heel and toe,  
He turned to me, and "Cap," says he, "I'll cash in this trip, I guess;  
And if I do, I'm asking that you won't refuse my last request."*

*Well, he seemed so low that I couldn't say no; then he says with a sort of moan:  
"It's the cursed cold, and it's got right hold till I'm chilled clean through to the bone.  
Yet 'tain't being dead -- it's my awful dread of the icy grave that pains;  
So I want you to swear that, foul or fair, you'll cremate my last remains."*

*A pal's last need is a thing to heed, so I swore I would not fail;  
And we started on at the streak of dawn; but God! he looked ghastly pale.  
He crouched on the sleigh, and he raved all day of his home in Tennessee;  
And before nightfall a corpse was all that was left of Sam McGee.*

*There wasn't a breath in that land of death, and I hurried, horror-driven,  
With a corpse half hid that I couldn't get rid, because of a promise given;  
It was lashed to the sleigh, and it seemed to say:  
"You may tax your brawn and brains,  
But you promised true, and it's up to you to cremate those last remains."*

*Now a promise made is a debt unpaid, and the trail has its own stern code.  
In the days to come, though my lips were dumb, in my heart how I cursed that load.  
In the long, long night, by the lone firelight, while the huskies, round in a ring,  
Howled out their woes to the homeless snows -- O God! how I loathed the thing.*

*And every day that quiet clay seemed to heavy and heavier grow;  
And on I went, though the dogs were spent and the grub was getting low;  
The trail was bad, and I felt half mad, but I swore I would not give in;  
And I'd often sing to the hateful thing, and it hearkened with a grin.*

*Till I came to the marge of Lake Lebarge, and a derelict there lay;  
It was jammed in the ice, but I saw in a trice it was called the "Alice May".  
And I looked at it, and I thought a bit, and I looked at my frozen chum;*



*Then "Here," said I, with a sudden cry, "is my cre-ma-tor-eum."*

*Some planks I tore from the cabin floor, and I lit the boiler fire;  
Some coal I found that was lying around, and I heaped the fuel higher;  
The flames just soared, and the furnace roared -- such a blaze you seldom see;  
And I burrowed a hole in the glowing coal, and I stuffed in Sam McGee.*

*Then I made a hike, for I didn't like to hear him sizzle so;  
And the heavens scowled, and the huskies howled, and the wind began to blow.  
It was icy cold, but the hot sweat rolled down my cheeks, and I don't know why;  
And the greasy smoke in an inky cloak went streaking down the sky.*

*I do not know how long in the snow I wrestled with grisly fear;  
But the stars came out and they danced about ere again I ventured near;  
I was sick with dread, but I bravely said: "I'll just take a peep inside.  
I guess he's cooked, and it's time I looked"; . . . then the door I opened wide.*

*And there sat Sam, looking cool and calm, in the heart of the furnace roar;  
And he wore a smile you could see a mile, and he said: "Please close that door.  
It's fine in here, but I greatly fear you'll let in the cold and storm --  
Since I left Plumtree, down in Tennessee, it's the first time I've been warm."*

*There are strange things done in the midnight sun  
By the men who toil for gold;  
The Arctic trails have their secret tales  
That would make your blood run cold;  
The Northern Lights have seen queer sights,  
But the queerest they ever did see  
Was that night on the marge of Lake Lebarge  
I cremated Sam McGee.*

Robert William Service

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We stop at an overlook above the "Five Fingers". These are the rapids on the Yukon above Whitehorse that caused problems for the gold rushers and the steamboats.



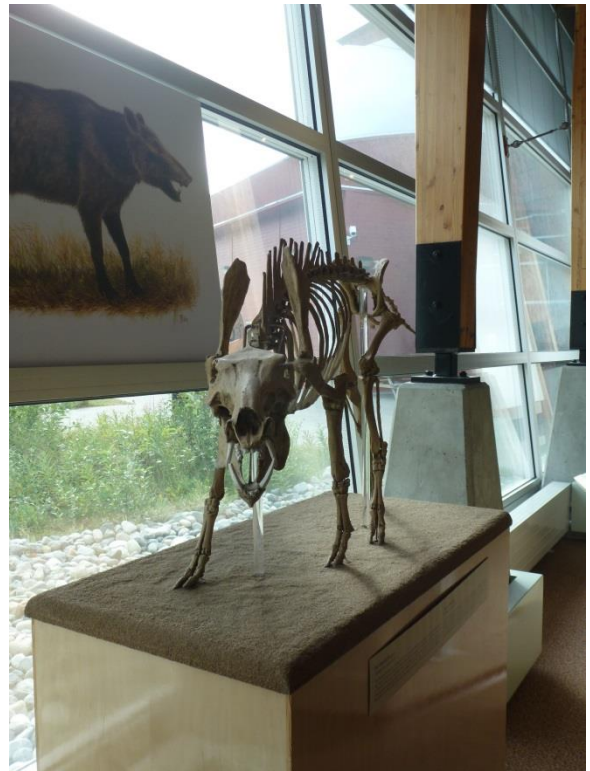
At 5:30 PM we enter Whitehorse, the capital of the Yukon Territory. With a population of over 20,000 Whitehorse has 2/3rds of the total population of the Yukon. We arrive at our hotel for the next two nights the Best Western Gold Rush Inn located in the downtown area. The four of us walk a short way to *Giorgio's Cucina* and have a good dinner at this Italian Restaurant. It is a pleasant weather night and we enjoy the downtown area of Whitehorse more so than Anchorage or Fairbanks. Tomorrow we explore Whitehorse.

#### **Alaska Trip – Day 9 – August 21 – Whitehorse:**

We are up after the first of two nights in Whitehorse the capital of Canada's Yukon Territory. Today we explore this town. We board our motor coach at 8:45 AM and head towards Miles Canyon. On the way we spot a young Eagle near its nest. We arrive at Miles Canyon and view the Whitehorse Rapids. The rapids were a major impediment for river traffic until a dam was constructed in 1959 raising the level of the river and eliminating most of the rapids.

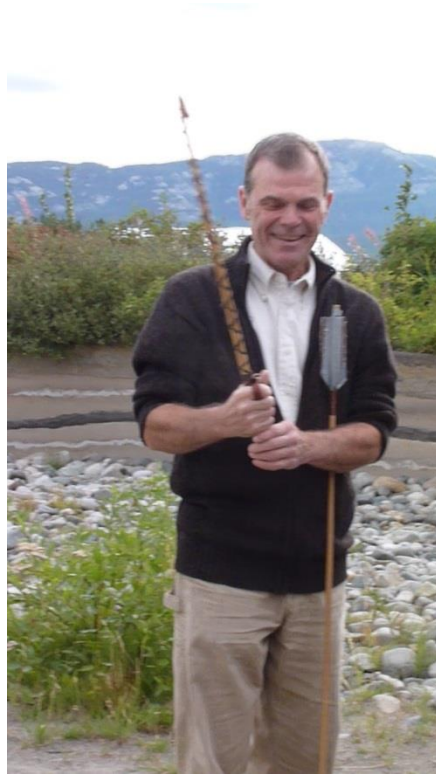


Today's weather is not great; overcast with a brisk wind and temperatures in the 50s. We next stop at the *Beringia Interpretive Center* where we will spend an hour and a half. We have an excellent museum guide, Tyler, who tells us he is a trained naturalist and paleontologist. We learn that 20,000 years ago during an ice age so much water was tied up in glaciers and the ice cap that the seas were lowered by 300 feet and Siberia and Alaska were connected by a wide land bridge. This bridge is called "Beringia". Also, due to their dry climate most of Alaska and the Yukon were free of the ice cap. Over Beringia migrated animals and later *Homo sapiens* from Siberia into Alaska and eventually into the lower portions of North America. We view the reconstructed skeletons of ancient animals like the Woolly Mammoth.



We go outside and learn about the *Atlatl* an ancient device using the lever principal to propel a spear. The *Atlatl* was used widely in North America for hunting until the bow and arrow were invented in North America about 1200 years ago. We take turns using a replica of the device and Kal takes the prize for the best and longest throw.





We next drive to see the SS Klondike, a Yukon riverboat that travelled the 400 miles between Whitehorse and Dawson from 1937 until 1955.



We enjoy some free time before boarding our motor coach at 3:30 PM and driving out to Muk Tuk Kennels. Here we meet Frank Turner a multi-time musher/competitor in the Iditarod and Yukon Quest 1000 mile dog sled races. He has retired now but maintains a home, with help from interns, for 100+ sled dogs on his expansive property along the river. Frank's love of dogs is apparent and we enjoy his talks about his time as a musher, how he takes care of his dogs and how forming a strong dog sled team can have similarities with building teams at work and in life. We next get to meet all of his dogs! *(Note from Marcia: Although I was covered in dog hair by the end of my kennel visit – I had a wonderful time. All the dogs are people friendly and seem to love attention. Sadly, in the one picture, you can see that the dogs liked my scarf better than me 😊. Frank has over 100 dogs. Food alone is \$50,000 per year – add in supplies and vet visits, and you can see that his operation is costly. During the summer he does motivational talks and hosts lunch and dinner visits. During the winter he does beginner through advanced sled dog training. We're pretty sure all these activities are quite pricey in order to get all the bills paid. He has his own dogs and rescues dogs, but does not sell any dogs. He will occasionally adopt one of the dogs out to someone he thinks will be an exemplary owner).* At 6 PM we enter his nice

house and sit down for an excellent dinner prepared and served by his interns; a nice salad, bison, elk and chad and a good desert. Then it was back to the hotel to rest for our next day's long bus journey.



Tomorrow we leave the Yukon and drive back into Alaska.

### Alaska Trip – Day 10 – August 22 – Whitehorse to Tok:



We wake up after our second night at the Best Western-Gold Rush Hotel in Whitehorse Canada and get ready to leave the Yukon Territory. The Best Western was fine except for the slow (but free) internet service.

Today we will have our longest day on the road, traveling 383 miles from Whitehorse in the Yukon to the very small highway junction town of Tok in southeastern Alaska.

Leaving Whitehorse we again pass their airport. They have an interesting "weathervane". A restored Boeing DC-3 sits on top of a pedestal and moves freely; always pointing into

the wind. We have passed the airport several times in the last two days and the DC-3 is pointing in a different direction each time.

Just outside of Whitehorse we turn on to the Alcan or *Alaska Highway*. We will take this two lane highway all the way to Tok Alaska. The Alaska Highway was built in the 1940s to connect Alaska with lower North America, running 1100 miles from Dawson City, Alberta Canada to Fairbanks Alaska. Our Tour Director Colleen plays for us a good PBS video documenting the building of the highway. We learn that the road was built on an expedited basis by the US Army Engineers between March and November 1942 to insure the defense of Alaska and Canada from a possible invasion by Japan. It is considered a great engineering accomplishment. Soldiers drove the road through dense forests and over multiple mountain ranges. A particular problem involved building the road over the permafrost (ground frozen for at least two consecutive years). When they stripped off the surface they exposed the permafrost which quickly melted and turned into mud. 40% of the Army Engineers on the project were black soldiers who surprised many by doing consistently excellent work in temperatures that reached forty below zero.

It has turned into a nice sunny day with temperatures in the 60s. We see some unique structures like an old wood suspension bridge built across a river in 1920 and a church built from a Quonset hut.



We make several rest stops along the way often at visitor centers with short movies or historical markers to absorb. We stop for lunch at a motel restaurant on a large lake. The scenery is excellent; better than we expected. We pass the Kluane National Park and Preserve, home of the highest mountain in Canada, Mt. Logan at 19,551 feet.





The road becomes increasingly rough and our driver, Bill, slows down to cross many of the obvious frost heaves. We have additional delays due to road repair. We finally cross the border into Alaska, clear US border control and stop at the Tetlin Wildlife Refuge. We lose an hour of time as we are now in the Alaskan Time Zone.



We arrive in Tok, the small, dusty “junction town” at 5:30 PM. We are staying in our most basic accommodations of the tour, Young’s Motel. We know we will have good food at their adjoining restaurant, Fast Eddie’s, as we had lunch there on our way to the Yukon. Marcia spots a Dachshund trying to drive the family motor home.



We have a good dinner at Fast Eddie’s. Tomorrow we drive to Valdez on the Gulf of Alaska.

**Alaska Trip – Day 11 – August 23 – Tok to Valdez:**

We wake up today after a good night’s sleep at the “basic” Young’s Motel in the remote junction town of Tok, Alaska. Our motel was fine. We especially liked their free and fast internet service. After a good breakfast at Fast Eddie’s we board our motor coach at 9 AM for a 254 mile drive south to Valdez on the Gulf of Alaska.

It is a cool, rainy, cloudy and foggy morning. Visibility is poor. As in most all of our travels, outside of a few big cities in Alaska and the Yukon, there is very little traffic. We see an occasional truck, a few locals in their cars or pickups, sometimes another tourist coach and maybe the campers and trailers of folks who have driven up the Alaska Highway. Buildings are rare. Almost no homes and a roadhouse/restaurant/bar about every twenty miles but only about one in three are still in operation. Gas stations are few and far between. Bill tops off our motor coach’s fuel tanks every night “just in case”. We figured we’d be driving through the most populated part of Alaska but this emptiness surprises us.

We drive by the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. We cannot see anything so Colleen puts on a nice video about the park.





We learn that this park is larger than Switzerland and has nine of the sixteen highest mountain peaks in North America. In fact their unofficial motto is "Larger than Switzerland and with Higher Mountains". Colleen tells us that like many of the Alaskan parks Wrangell-St. Elias is almost inaccessible as there are roads only at the park's periphery. To really get into the park you need to hike in many miles or be flown in by a bush pilot.

After a tour of the park's nice visitor center we stop at a roadhouse and have a good lunch.

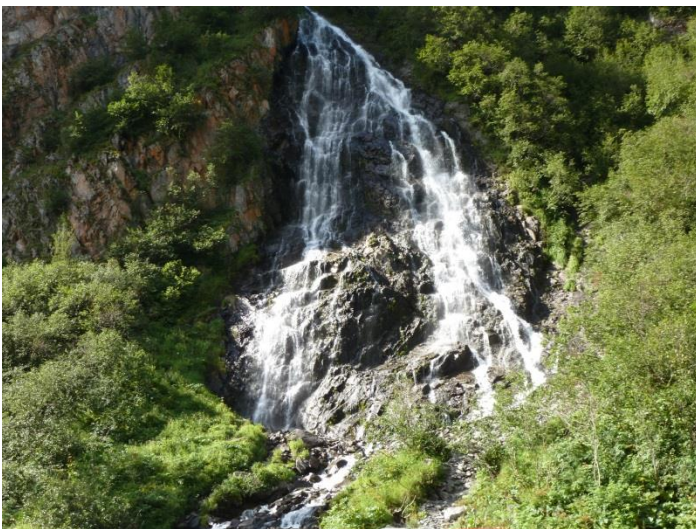




As we leave our lunch stop we note that it has stopped raining and the sun is trying to come out. Our next stop is at the Worthington Glacier and fellow traveler Darwin takes our picture with the glacier behind us.

Continuing on we get occasional glimpses of the Alaska Pipeline as it winds its way towards its terminus at Valdez. This section of Alaska receives a lot of rain and they call it “the Switzerland of Alaska” as it is very green and mountainous. It is now sunny and about 62 degrees. After crossing the Thompson Pass at 2678 feet we stop and get pictures of waterfalls. I also get a picture of our

Tour Director Colleen and our Motor Coach Driver Bill.



We arrive in Valdez, a coastal town of about 4000 people, at about 5 PM and are dropped off at the Valdez Museum. Colleen and Bill go ahead and drop off our luggage at the hotel and pick up our room keys. The small museum has interesting exhibits on the Gold Rush period, the growth of Valdez, the earthquake of 1964 and the Exxon-Valdez oil tanker disaster of 1989. At 5:30 PM we are picked up and taken to the Mountain Sky Motel.



The four of us quickly exit the motel and walk about one half mile to a stream where salmon are said to be spawning. Indeed we find the stream where salmon have returned to the site of their birth, after three years of living and growing in the sea, to spawn and then die. Shortly after we leave a black bear arrives to insure nature’s cycle of life is complete, much to the delight of some of our tour group members that had stayed.

We next walk to the Valdez docks, admiring the views of the mountains towering above the town. We watch the salmon fishermen unload their catch and workers fileting salmon at the docks. We have dinner at a Chinese restaurant and turn in early. Tomorrow we are up early for what should be a trip highlight; a seven hour boat cruise across Prince William Sound.



### **Alaska Trip – Day 12 – August 24 - Valdez to Anchorage**

We are up early at the Mountain Sky Motel in Valdez Alaska. Bags out at 5 AM and then breakfast at the Totem Pole restaurant before meeting in the hotel lobby at 6:45 AM. This is a day we have very much been looking forward to...a seven hour boat trip across the mountain rimmed and wildlife filled Prince William Sound. However we have been concerned about the weather forecast. I check the forecast online and see that *Weather.com* is sticking with their all-day forecast of dense clouds and constant rain while *Accuweather* is staying with their forecast of clear sunny skies and temperatures in the mid-60s!

We are transported a short distance to the Valdez docks where we board our boat just before 7 AM. It is *The Columbia Spirit* operated by the Stan Stephens Company. The boat can seat 40 people at tables of four in the inside cabin so our group of 27 is quite comfortable. A bathroom and galley are down below. The boat has front and rear outside viewing areas, exterior walkways on the port and starboard and a glassed in viewing area up behind the Captain. Globus has chartered the boat just for our group and we will be traveling from Valdez and into some scenic bays before docking at Whittier (far left on the map). Bill is driving the motor coach from Valdez to Whittier where he will pick us up at 2 PM.



We leave the docks at Valdez in heavy fog. We can't see a thing as we motor down the Valdez arm of Prince William Sound past the Alyeska Oil Terminal; the end of the pipeline. One of the crewmen brings around a diagram of the terminal and explains what we are missing. Our boat has a young four person crew that is very knowledgeable and most friendly. We especially enjoy the excellent narrations from the Captain, Chris. The water is smooth as glass.

Suddenly we break out of the fog into bright sunshine...the *Accuweather* forecast will prove to be the correct one! The Captain starts spotting wildlife and steers the boat towards shore for better views. We see Black Bears "playing" with the salmon trying to exit the sound and swim up spawning streams. We see several Bald Eagles and are told that there are 2500 pairs of eagles in Prince William Sound. We spot River Otters and Dall Dolphins.



We see an oil tanker entering the Valdez Arm. Just as it passes in front of *Bligh Reef*, where the Exxon Valdez ran aground in 1989, Captain Chris gives us his version of what really happened.



We pass many scenic islands and have great views of the mountains surrounding the sound. Soon we start to enter *Columbia Bay*. The plan is to head up the bay to view the *Columbia Glacier*. The Captain says we can only go as far as the icebergs and the fallen ice from the front of the glacier will allow. Soon he tells us that the bay appears surprisingly free of ice and our Tour Director Colleen tells us that she's never seen the bay this clear nor has she ever seen the tops of the mountains behind the glacier NOT obscured by clouds. We all agree that we are having a special day.

For about an hour we travel up the bay, dodging small icebergs, and we are able to get unusually close to the ten mile wide and 400 foot tall face of the Columbia Glacier, the second largest tidewater glacier in North America. All in the crew are excited at the great conditions and they grab their own cameras and take pictures. We enjoy watching Sea Otters swimming in the bay and resting on icebergs. We also see colorful Puffins. One of the crew members fishes out from the water a large chunk of crystal clear ice and we pass it around.



We leave Columbia Bay and round Glacier Island where we spot a resting area for *Steller Sea Lions*. We learn that they are related to the California Sea Lions and the females can weigh 650 pounds and the males up to 1250 pounds. We enjoy hearing them bellow and happy that the prevailing breeze prevents us from smelling them!

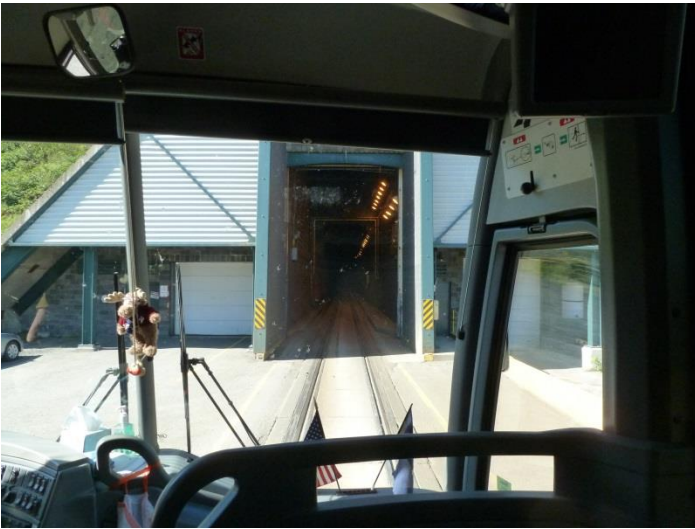


As we near the western side of Prince William Sound we start to encounter fishing boats. They are working to catch salmon and Captain Chris describes their techniques.

The crew serves us a delicious lunch at our tables. The main course is Chicken Alfredo.

We pass and view the Harvard and Yale Glaciers before docking at the picturesque town of Whittier at 2 PM. The skies are clear and the sun bright. Colleen remarks that she has never seen, in all of her tours here, Whittier when it has not been cloudy and/or rainy. All on our tour agree that this has really been a perfect day and one great boat trip.

We quickly exit the boat and board our motor coach. We have learned that the only way into and out of Whittier by road is through a one lane 2-1/2 mile long tunnel. The tunnel was drilled through a mountain during World War II to establish a rail line to the ice free port of Whittier. Now, a road has been added over the tracks for wheeled vehicles and if we don't get to the entrance by 2:15 PM we will have to wait a half hour as traffic moves in one direction only for each half hour. We just make it!



We stop at the other side of the tunnel and enjoy more great views



We drive to Gridwood and stop at the *Alyeska Ski Resort*. Mari and Kal go for a hike while Marcia and I ride the tram to the top of a 2400 foot mountain and get good views of the Turnagain Arm of the Cook Inlet and more glaciers.



We have a nice farewell dinner at the Alyeska Ski Resort and drive back to Anchorage.

As we near Anchorage we are excited to be able to see Mt. McKinley (Denali) twenty miles in the distance. We are told that this is a rare occurrence! As those in our group that did not fly over Denali (like the four of us did) never saw the mountain while we were at Denali National Park we stop and take photos of the tallest mountain in North America. We check into the Sheraton Anchorage Hotel. At sunset Marcia, Kal and Marie get more great photos of Mt. McKinley.



