

Chesapeake Paddler



Publication of the Chesapeake Paddlers Association, Volume 16, Issue 7

August 2006

Alaska—Of Kachemak and Icy Bays

By Dave Meyer

"I'm going to Alaska," I said to Marshall Woodruff after a Georgetown Pirates' gathering in early June. He told me that he was considering organizing a future club trip to The Great Land and that I should gather some useful information.

My experience kayaking in Alaska was a tale of two worlds: One civilized but beautiful, and another remote, wild and mysterious. I spent a week on the Kenai Peninsula in Homer, and in or around lovely Kachemak Bay. My second week was spent in Wrangle/St. Elias National Park in Icy Bay, in one of the most remote parts of the Gulf of Alaska. Homer offers many amenities in town and on the bay. There is a vast parkland six miles across the bay that is dotted with small cabins that can be rented and with numerous gravel beaches for camping (note to file: snoozing while waiting for a water taxi on a warm day on a gravel beach can be very comfortable once you get all of those warm round stones positioned just right!). One could kayak there for a week or only a day. I choose the latter because I was sampling a little of everything that Maritime Alaska had to offer (biking, hiking, fishing, strolling on the local beach and certainly, kayaking) and I only had 7 days to work with. Besides, Week 2 was going to be spent on the most remote guided kayak trip that I could find in Alaska. Homer was wonderful; great food, great people in a lovely, larger-than-life Alaska setting.

Week 2 began in a sleepy little fishing town on the Gulf of Alaska known for two things: Steelhead trout and surfing. Apparently Yakutat has the best breaks north of California. I had a day to kill before my Alaska Discovery trip headed off to Icy Bay and I wanted to go for a hike, instead of a surf. "Do you have a gun?" asked the lady at the lodge when I asked if there were nice hikes around Yakutat. Since the trout and salmon were running, the Alaska Brown Bears (Grizzlies by another name) were e-v-e-r-y-w-h-e-r-e. We did take that hike, but we also took along Russell, a local, with his sawed-off shotgun.



Dave and Lisa in their Klepper double on Icy Bay *photo by Dave Meyer*

The Icy Bay trip began by boarding a bush plane with balloon tires capable of landing and taking off of gravel beaches. 30 minutes later we were touching down at the Icy Bay "Airport." We flew over the Malispina Glacier on our way. Wikipedia states that "the Malispina Glacier is so large that it can only be seen in its entirety from space." Larger than the State of Rhode Island, it is the largest glacier in North America. It is hard to describe, but it is very, very BIG. Upon arrival, we lucked out because a group was concluding a week in Icy Bay and they had already assembled the Kleppers—the collapsible tandem kayaks that we would paddle for the week. It was amazing that these rudder-equipped, canvas-sided boats would float after being loaded with all our gear. Paddling a heavily loaded Klepper is like paddling a dead whale. Nonetheless, they fit in inside a plane, hold a lot of gear and they got us from the landing strip in the middle of nowhere to the faces of calving tidal glaciers, and to our campsites each night.

Ours was a small group; a family of three and two middle-aged singles plus two guides. "Don't get too far ahead", Solan chastised me. "Those icebergs will roll or split and you don't want to be anywhere near them if they do." I

pondered this from the stern of my Klepper, trying to remember everything I knew about icebergs (hmmm...90% of the ice is below the waterline...right?).

At 4am it sounded like a 747 had crashed into the campsite as we were only 150 yards from the face of a glacier when an office

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building-sized chunk fell away. I rolled over and reached for my earplugs and the guides jumped out of their tent to make sure that the resultant wave wouldn't flood our tents 10 feet above the waterline. The soundscape of Icy Bay is truly eerie. It is dominated by the sound of rolling thunder as ice falls and shifts in the numerous glaciers that feed it. We were blessed by favorable weather that made Mount St. Elias viewable every day but one. Rising nearly 19,000 feet from the water of the bay, it is the tallest coastal mountain in the World and the second largest mountain in the U.S.

We kayaked and hiked around a big chunk of Icy Bay during our trip. It was several days before we heard a human sound that we hadn't made ourselves when a couple of bush planes flew past in order to show the bay to the less adventurous. It was peaceful, remote and hauntingly beautiful and the perfect tonic for a man turning 50 who wanted to experience the Wild (with a capital "W").

[Editor's note: Those wanting to see more of Dave's Alaska adventure, check out the pictures at <http://share.shutterfly.com/action/welcome?sid=8AZtGLFs3cOH8QJ>

Mount St. Elias, Sarah and Solan, our guide on Icy Bay. photo by Dave Meyer



Pool Practice To Commence—SQUEAK UP MOUSEKET-EERS

—After Labor Day, the MNPPC Fairland pool may be available for kayak practice. If anyone is interested drop me an email at jspinner2@verizon.net or call at 301-559-3345. Reservations aren't needed until the end of October, but I don't have the cost or times for this year. Expressions of interest will help me express the demand for this service, making the pool management more prepared for the influx of paddlers. Expressing your interest will help me make arrangements early.

Joan Spinner
Pirates of the Pool

Horsefly Paddles Patuxent—

The summer doldrums must be setting in. Except for a few boats fishing off of the tripod, no one was out...including kayakers. I got delayed at work and didn't make it to the launch until 6:05. If I missed anyone...my apologies. It was a nice evening for paddling. The horse flies thought so as well, and half dozen or so rode my boat out to Drum Point and up the Calvert coast a bit. These guys made great training companions. As long as the boat was moving at a good clip they'd hunker down on the deck and enjoy the ride. When I stopped, they'd swarm back into the cockpit and start chewing on my legs. I tried burying the bow in the occasional wave, to wash them off, but they were too quick for that. So we just came to an understanding, I'd keep paddling and they'd stay up on the bow.



Nothing else as exciting as the flies to report. The Osprey young look like they're just about ready to move out. The jelly fish seem to be thinning a bit...and the water is just about bath temperature. Fuel prices seem to be dampening the boat traffic and thunderstorm wannabe's are making for nice purple sunsets. As scary as the temperatures seem, evenings on the water are still quite pleasant...as long as you keep the boat moving. Same time and place next Friday!

Don Polakovics
Pirate Co-King
Pirates of the Patuxent

Sugarloafers Rip Rolls and Swallow Sushi—The Sugarloaf Pirates had a cool, delightful evening of rescue and rolling practice in the blood-warm waters of Little Seneca Lake at Black Hills Regional Park on August 1. David Shamus helped the crew learn some new techniques and polish some old ones. Your editor showed up to give people someone to rescue. Best of all, Barbara Cook and

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