

Kayaking the Kenai Fjords/Prince William Sound While remembering the Exxon Valdez

This was a trip with Sweet Juanita (you may know her as Janet). So...it was not to be the normal grunt trip in which we simply jump into sea kayaks and disappear into the cold waters of the North Pacific. Instead...Juanita had told me...about the time we hit our 70s...that she did not want to sleep on river gravel in bear doo-doo anymore...the end of an era.

We've done many areas of Alaska and the Yukon in kayaks including Glacier Bay, Icy Strait, the Yukon River, and various Inside Passage locations as well as the Norwegian Sea. We had never seen that portion of Alaska south of Anchorage through the Kenai Peninsula and Prince William Sound and the many glaciers dumping directly into the sea (tidewater), as well as looking at the plant and sea life after the devastation from the Exxon Valdez.

So...after a 2 week truck camping expedition of the peninsula in late May with essentially no bear encounters, we set off on the 4+ hour train trip known as the Coastal Classic which winds from Anchorage, south around Turnagain Arm and through the valleys and mountains to Seward, the harbor from which we would sail.

Sail you say? Yes, remember the part about river gravel and bear doo-doo....? Well, I had made a deal with a Sailboat Captain and a Kayaking outfit out of Seward. So...it would essentially be a "mothership trip" with kayaks aboard. As well, a knowledgeable Captain Mike and First Mate Emily, who was an amazing young scientist as well as professionally trained kayaker. In addition, two ladies from

Southern California who had never kayaked in the open sea...an interesting combination.

So, after an overnigher in a great old Hotel with stuffed animals of all shapes and sizes surrounding us, we slipped out of the Seward Harbor into Resurrection Bay (Seward pronounced Soo-ward) on the deck of the Sailboat with kayaks lashed down beside us, and almost immediately became one side of a bubble net for several very enterprising humpback whales. The bubbles surrounded us on 3 sides and one of the humpies popped up to scoop up the bubble-netted contents and looked at us. I got a picture of his eye. That is how close this encounter was...

The rest of the morning and the early afternoon was consumed getting out of Resurrection Bay, navigating the big swells in the open sea in the little sailboat and turning north again to enter Aialik Bay and anchor somewhere in protected waters to kayak to the Aialik, Skee, and Pedersen Glaciers.

Each time we kayaked in this and other bays later, the process was pretty well orchestrated with kayaks being lashed to ropes and pulleys from the main mast and swung by us over the edge and down to the water's edge. From there we would kind of roll into the kayaks (big doubles) and then help the others.

Through the next 3 days we kayaked and moved camp (the sailboat) from glacier to glacier and bay to bay, we skirted glaciers and sat amid icebergs and approached the caving ice, seals with pups on ice bergs, and felt the changes in temperature of at least 10 degrees F. as we closed on the glaciers. In some cases, waves from the caving rolled

out to us, but we never got close enough to chance swamping. Doing that would give you about 15 minutes of survival time.

What struck me most about the environment both marine and land that surrounded me in most places in the Fjords was the lack of low lying land with soil. Instead, there was rock or snow or ice sitting next to sea.

It was definitely not like South East with bears, moose, and eagles everywhere on lowland next to the water. The habitat for that was largely absent. On the other hand, when we walked the shore lines of the bays where there was beach, I saw no obvious signs of the massive oil coverage of the late 80s and 90s. I'll bet it is still there if you dig.

As for the trip, it is doable for folks in decent physical shape. You do not need to be an expert kayaker. You do need to be able to do some pretty interesting contortions in navigating in a bedroom the size of a small closet. Also.....IT IS SPECTACULAR!

