

# The Log

A Trip to Alaska – July 2022

## *Chapter One - The First Day*

**Destination:** Juneau, Alaska

**Target:** The [Pacific Catalyst](#) Southeast Alaska small ship cruise.

The trip did not start well. At 5 pm the day before my flight out of Fort St John, I had a phone call from the boat organiser saying that the trip had been cancelled. A guest on the Catalyst tested positive for Covid two days into their trip and it spread through the boat. The crew had Covid and there was no backup.

Initially I missed the call, being on another call sorting out a last-minute important issue on the project, and got first wind of the problem via voicemail. I was finalising my packing and preparations that had been ongoing for weeks. All those travel insurance measures I'd put in place started swirling in my head. Too hard! Too bad, I'd go anyway. I'd find something to do in Juneau and its surrounds. Too much planning had gone into this trip, and I needed a break; the first real holiday since arriving in Canada some 18 months before. That was long enough to have forgotten how to travel. It seemed like so much had changed, the Covid rules changing and evolving, and me still effectively a newcomer to North America, it was like starting afresh. So I had been through a lot, for my little brain, to get organised for the trip. I couldn't bear the idea of cancelling and arranging something new. My flight was the next morning. I would go.

The trip all started because of a friend from NZ, my old boss and mentor, Bryan Leyland, contacting me to see if he and wife Jane could swing by my region as part of their extended travel beyond the Hydrovision conference in Denver. They'd heard about an Alaska boat cruise from another colleague and were looking into it. Well, Fort St John is a great place, don't get me wrong! However, it's not really within 'swing-by' distance of anywhere, and I didn't have a lot to offer them if they did. So I suggested "I'll join you on the boat trip", not knowing anything about the boat trip. From there it evolved, it transpired, it was investigated, queried, booked, paid, prepared for, dreamt about, readied for, and, then, cancelled. Bugger.

I woke early after my restless sleep, actually a sleep-in 'til 6 am, I was on holiday after all, to messages from Bryan. He'd found another boat! I had to be out the door in 2 hours to catch my first flight. I messaged that I'd look into it at the airport when I was checked in. That I did, and it seemed too good to be true, that another cruise was available, with spare cabins, perfectly within the timeframe to keep existing flights. I'd just needed to change the flight from Petersburg, where the Catalyst trip was to conclude.

"We'll book tomorrow" was the message from Bryan. He had his NZ phone roaming enough for texts. He was in Portland, or Seattle, somewhere. Great! I could continue with my 3 flights, to Vancouver, Seattle and through to Juneau, and worry about new plans later.

The flights were terrific. Hot sunny summer day, mostly clear skies. It was fascinating to see snow still on the mountain ranges this far into summer. Black ridges tracing patterns between snow-covered valleys and glaciers. My goggle eyes stayed peering out the window for the whole time of my first flight to Seattle, scanning the many waterways surrounded by distant snow-capped ranges. The volcanic peaks of Mt Rainier and another (St Helens?) towering above everything around them, like two large rugged versions of Mt Taranaki.

The first two flights were in Dash 8 aircraft. 2 seats each side. Squeezed into the seat, you rub shoulders with the adjacent passenger, and that's across the aisle. The flight from Seattle to Juneau was on an almost real plane, 3 seats each side. We queued for the runway, half a dozen, nose to tail. From my port-side window-seat over the wing, I could see the shadow of the tail fin of the plane in front of us. I had prime view along the wing as the tip rose about 2 metres before the rest of the plane took off. You have to marvel at all the mechanical systems at work in that dynamic base structure.

We headed out more towards NZ before turning north, taking us over the Olympic Park mountains, also still holding a heavy snow cover. As we passed over Vancouver Island, a veil of thick fog or very low cloud trailed out to sea, clinging to the edge of the coast. An easterly breeze was carrying moisture from the hot land, which condensed into cloud immediately on reaching the ocean.

The afternoon sun was about 30 degrees above the horizon, reflecting off the water and silhouetting the land. We must have flown straight over the John Hart and Jimmie Creek hydro schemes that I had contributed to in early stages a decade earlier, now complete and running, but I couldn't see them in the glare and haze.



Approaching Juneau, the cloud cover thickened and blanketed all view of the Alaska coast islands. Descending into the airport, we buffeted through dark clouds into a Jurassic scene of forested mountainsides looming through the drizzly mist, their snow-capped peaks disappearing back up through the cloud cover. A very different climate to the 30 degree C sunshine we had left in Seattle. The shuttle ride to the hotel first passed along a coast reminiscent of NZ South Island west coast (in the rain) and then more like Milford Sound (in the rain) when we reached the hotel.

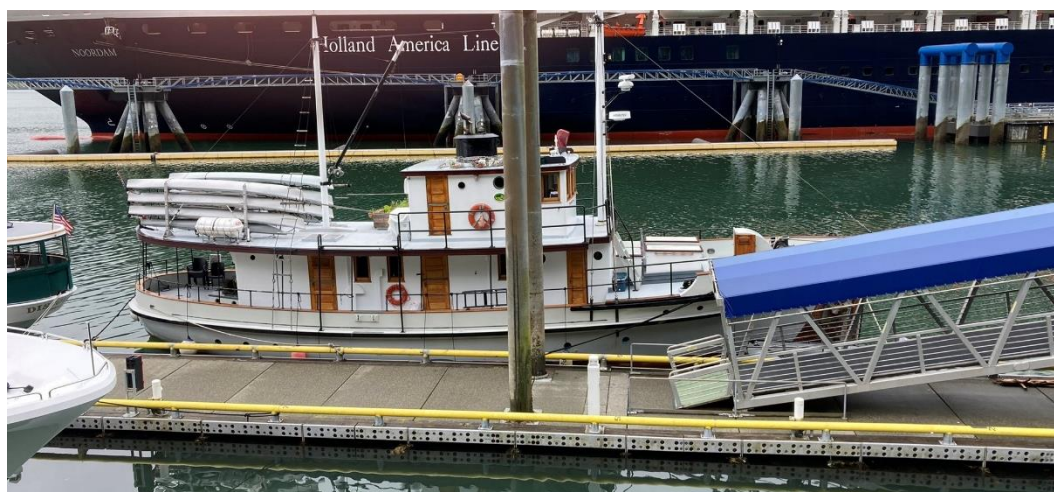


## Epilogue to Chapter One - The Day After

The Catalyst organiser put us in touch with another tour organiser. A Skype call and a stream of emails later, we had cabins booked on the Lindblad Expeditions vessel, [National Geographic Sea Bird](#), leaving on Saturday (23 July), a day later than the Catalyst trip would have. Not quite the same character as the Catalyst, but it looks interesting anyway.



Luckily The Driftwood Hotel could put us up for another night – there was virtually no other accommodation left in Juneau. For the rest of the day, we explored downtown Juneau. About 4 huge cruise ships at the docks right in town. The Catalyst sitting at dock in covid isolation.



The weather is not great. Drizzle most of the time, and forecast to continue. We'll find some excursion to do on Friday, then we join the Sea Bird on Saturday afternoon. The trip is Juneau to Ketchikan, arriving there on 28 July. I will probably overnight there and get a flight back to Juneau on 29<sup>th</sup> to resume the rest of the planned trip (Seattle for 30-31 July and back to FSJ on 1 Aug).

### *Another Epilogue - The Subsequent Day After*

Friday, 22 July – A further day in Juneau.

A more drizzly day, greyer, colder. 11°C. Eggs Ben at the Sandpiper Café next to The Driftwood Hotel. Booked accommodation in Ketchikan – the last few rooms available. My wonderful support in Vancouver changed my Petersburg flight for Ketchikan-Juneau on the evening of 29 July. That will give 1.5 days in Ketchikan.

Whereas the Catalyst had gumboots for us to borrow, the Sea Bird requires we bring them. It's mainly for the couple of yards between Zodiac and dry ground for shore excursions. That became the main activity of the day, finding boots – not all that easy, but achieved. Plans to visit the [Mendenhall Glacier](#) were abandoned as the drizzle continued to build and our energy dwindled after boot hunting. It had been a mini expedition via local Juneau buses.



Back to The Driftwood to shift to our new room and check preparations for the revised boat trip. The nearby waterfall was still as murky as it was on day one.

