

Center for Extended Studies & Lifelong Learning  
At Prescott College  
Aboard The MV Discovery in Prince William Sound

# EXPEDITION LOG

September 21, 2008 – September 28, 2008

Log written by Jill Hewins Pictures: Jill Hewins & Discovery Voyages  
Wildlife List compiled by Tom Fleischner



"To the lover of pure wildness Alaska is one of the most wonderful countries in the world." ... "it seems as if surely we must at length reach the very paradise of the poets, the abode of the blessed."

-- John Muir - "Travels in Alaska" --

## The MV Discovery



Captain: Dean Rand

1<sup>st</sup> Mate: Sam Guse

Chef: Matt Tocchini

Prescott College Naturalist & Faculty Member: Tom Fleischner

Prescott College Host: Jill Hewins

### Expedition Members:

David Meeks

Grace Meeks

Lindsay Bell

Lynne Beszant

Tom Bell

Maile Urbaska



Sunday September 21, 2008



Our first official trip day included lodging at the Susitna B & B in Anchorage, Alaska and a planned group dinner at 7:30 PM that evening. Most of us arrived a day or two early to take in the Anchorage sites, meet local congressional candidates, bike the Tony Knowles Coastal bike trail, take small airplane flights, and bird around the Anchorage area.

On Sunday morning we awoke to breaking clouds and no rain! We met over breakfast and dispersed for the day with a plan to depart around 7:15 PM for dinner at the Glacier Brewhouse. Our first group meeting took place at the restaurant. After introductions, Tom explained his role as the naturalist and we each shared a little bit about ourselves and enjoyed a fine dinner - most of us opting for the chowder and the halibut and passing on dessert. In a cold night air, we walk back to the B & B to rest up for tomorrow's adventure into Prince William Sound.



Monday September 22, 2008

Our first day on the boat. Over breakfast the peaks of the Alaska Range show themselves in full sunlight for the first time and completely draped in snow. Our Discovery 1<sup>st</sup> Mate, Sam, arrived at 10 AM to pick us up, smiling and riding a unicycle, ready to drive us over to Whittier to meet up with the Discovery boat. As we drove up Turnagain Arm, in full sunlight we were amazed at the beauty of the mountains (and the termination dust covering the peaks), the fall colors on the Black Cottonwood trees lining the roadway, and the overall beauty of the drive. Beluga whales were making their way up the arm as well and we stopped to take pictures and admire the views. We caught the 11:30 tunnel opening to Whittier.

Driving through the tunnel carved out by our military in World War II, was an eerie 2.5 mile experience.



At Whittier we met Captain Dean, Happy the boat-dog, and Chef Matt. Matt welcomed us with oysters, salmon spread and hot teas. I suspect that this is a great omen for what might be ahead of us in the food arena. Sam settled us into the boat and our cabins. Her instructions included what she called "the only rules on board: no showers before breakfast and no foreign objects in the toilet". In our cabins our luggage and our properly sized gum boots (Xtra Tuff's) were waiting for us.



Around 1 PM, we depart Whittier with blue skies and sunshine! The crew remarks on how rare sun has been the entire summer and I know this is another great omen for us. Snow capped peaks surround the waterway, glaciers are hanging into the sea, and the air is fresh and cool. Tom Bell takes his watch at the front of the boat for whales and bird sightings. In just a few hours after arrival, Matt summons us to our first meal onboard - butternut squash soup, seafood salad and fresh

bread and butter.

In the late afternoon we explore Nellie Juan Glacier, the Captain and Sam take us ashore on recently exposed land. Our naturalist Tom teaches that this is some of the newest land on the planet due to the recently retreating glacier. (aside from the Hawaiian volcano created land). And we get our first glacier calving experience - a loud lightning-like crack and splashes into the sea. Today we spot Harbor Seals, Sea Otters, Surf Scoters, and Kittiwakes. Like an outdoor art studio, ice pieces are floating in the sea and these sculpted formations show us halibut, hippos and whale-like shapes.





Back onboard we enjoy seafood “Alaskan” risotto, salad, wines, fresh homemade bread and of course, dessert. Our post-dinner talk is about Alaskan politics and the geology of the region. Captain Dean teaches about the shifting plates with great passion and understanding. We’re off to bed with stars overhead. Jill opts to take the “night-watch” for northern lights and sleeps outside off the back deck. Despite the clear night, no northern lights appear.



## Tuesday September 23, 2008

We wake to overcast skies and dead silence. Matt has early morning coffee ready and the Captain is enroute by 7:30 AM. Matt serves an "open" breakfast from 7:00 - 9:30 a.m. and it's great with fresh breads, fruits, cereals, and special quiches. We head through Knight Island Passage and Dangerous Passage towards Icy Bay.



Captain Dean slowly navigates us through Icy Bay and into Nassau Fjord - our boat creeps into the bay with ice chunks everywhere and as we enter deeper the water becomes ice "soup". At the edge of the cracking and calving face of Chenega Glacier, named after the local native community of Chenega, the Captain turns off the engine and we just float in the ice. The massive 200 square mile Sargent Icefield funnels ice down a wide mountain valley, forming a one mile long, 200 foot high wall that topples giant blue chunks into the sea. Harbor seals use the floating ice as resting platforms and safe places. They are curious about us at first and then they just go back to their work of absorbing sun and resting. After what seems like hours of listening to the cracking



glacier, we are summoned to onion soup, salmon orzo salad and more fresh bread. We head back out of the ice soup to explore the coast where we walk among toadstool tussocks and grassy muddy bogs. The area is filled with evidence of bears, salmonberries and blueberries and we enjoy some steep hillside hiking to overlook waterfalls.



Tom Bell spots humpback whales this afternoon! And we spend an hour drifting around the whales. We can hear the spouting and notice that one of them has a sinus condition.



Our evening talk from Tom is about the retreating glaciers in southern Alaska. We do learn that there are a few advancing glaciers as well. We learn about the moraines and talk a bit about global climate change and the effects it will continue to have on the glaciers. Tonight we enjoyed a delicious dinner of fresh salmon and of course, bread and dessert while the Captain motored us along Knight Island for the evening's anchorage in Lucky Bay.

**Wednesday, September 24, 2008**



We wake to drizzle but a warmer morning and floating ice all around the boat. Matt serves French toast, fresh fruit and muffins.

We kayak right from the boat over to Mummy Bay this morning. Enroute we see seastars in the tidal areas, eagles perched and flushed by our arrival, and our requisite daily sightings of Harlequin ducks, pelagic cormorants, sea otters and river otters. Today's lunch is another



winner: hot soup, fresh bread and salad. After lunch the Discovery heads over to explore Channel Island - a wildlife refuge for most of the year for nesting seabirds now gone for the winter. Most of our group explores the shore and comes back with a bounty of riches (see pictures). We also stop to watch Steller's Sea Lions at a well-known haulout. Our travel this afternoon across an open channel means rougher seas and we play "going on a picnic" and other games to distract us from the choppy waters.

Once out of the channel, the water turns peaceful and the Captain takes us into a narrow passage that opens out to what feels like a lake in Maine. We anchor at Disk Island for the night. Matt serves a fabulous dinner of filet mignon, green beans, mashed potatoes, fresh salad and of course fresh bread. We enjoy champagne and tiramisu to celebrate Jill's birthday.



This evening Dean's daughters entertain us - we watch powerpoint presentations they put together about seabird research in the sound. Tom follows with a talk on why natural history is important and when finished he sends us off to bed to contemplate this thought: "We are what we pay attention to". We all ponder what are we paying our attention to and is it what we expect of ourselves?

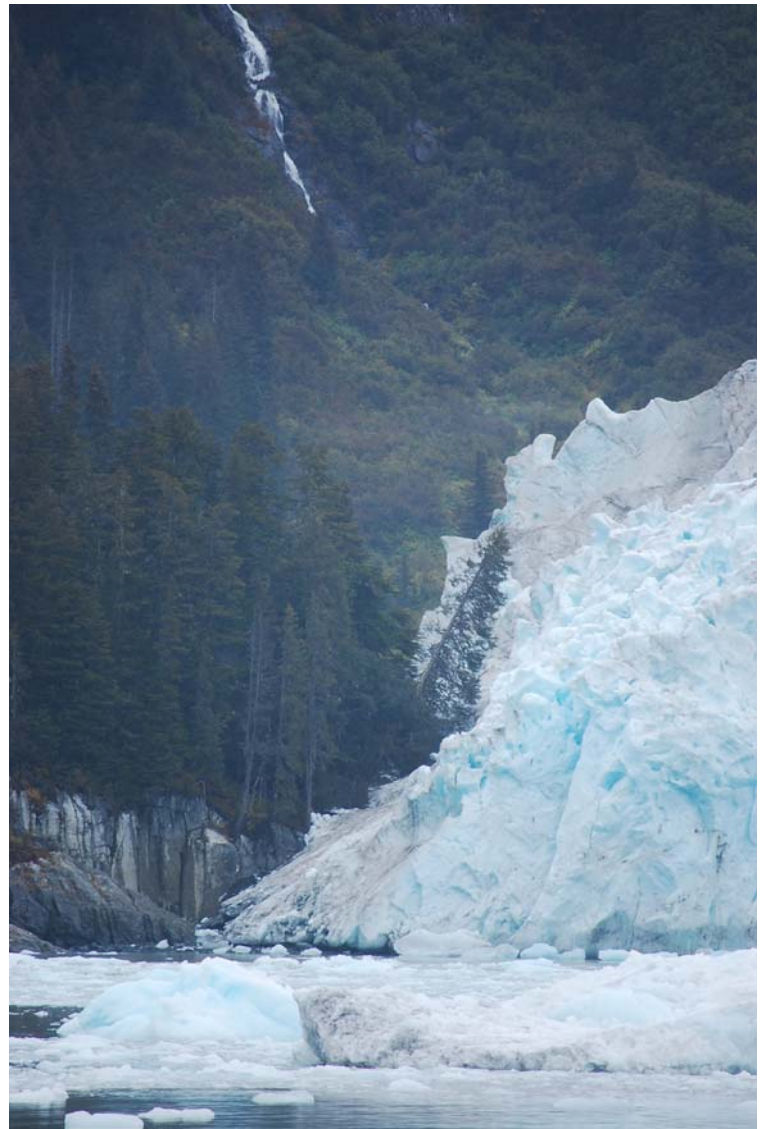


Thursday September 25, 2008

We awake to a very light drizzly rain and over breakfast we are off to Meare's Glacier - an advancing glacier in the Sound. As we approach we see that it is taking down trees as it moves. We sit on deck to watch the ice blue walls and the big ice chunks in the water turn on their undersides. With Sam and Matt, we skiff over to the land to explore on foot where the trees are being eaten by the glacier.

Tom offers a great impromptu lesson on the importance of lichen and the mosses. We walk on a heavy mossy and boggy land. We can hear the glacier calving but can only see the waves below - it's unnerving to hear so much noise all around us.

This evening we anchor in Jellyfish Cove below a most beautiful waterfall - Cascade Waterfall. Hundreds of jellies are surrounding the boat and we learn that there are two types: Moon or Lionsmane jellies. Unfortunately they clog up the generator, shutting down the lights and forcing the Captain to move the boat a bit away from the falls.



We played games before dinner over glacier-ice gin & tonics and dinner was another winner: fresh halibut, broccoli, salad and always fresh bread with a chocolate pudding dessert. This evening we spent our time talking about strange animal behaviors and anomalies in the animal world in an attempt to stump our naturalist, Tom.



## Friday September 26, 2008

Today we all slept in even later than usual. After breakfast we travel to Eaglek Bay to visit the oyster farm of Oyster Dave. With the sun shining down on us,



Oyster Dave gives us a lesson on how he raises oysters - it's quite a process of over 3 years before they can be sold or eaten. We make a brief stop at Puffin Palace in the Dutch Group, one of the many small islands and the summer home to a colony of Tufted Puffins, but unfortunately they had

"gone to sea" for the winter. We head northward through the quiet and beautiful narrows of Esther Passage to Port Wells where many glaciers fall into the sea. We stop for a hike through a cranberry bog and up to a ridgetop where the Chugach Mountains completely reveal themselves. Captain Dean takes us into Surprise Glacier to watch massive calving - this is our best show yet. Matt prepares Oyster Dave's oysters and we enjoy a fabulous cocktail hour at the edge of Harriman Glacier. Enroute to our last anchorage we enjoy our final dinner on board: lamb, salad, veggies, cheesy polenta and did I mention fresh bread.



Tom leads us in a discussion about how we can integrate this once in a lifetime experience into our day to day lives. He suggests we try writing down some thoughts while we are still

here rather than waiting until we return home. We share what images and impressions we will take away from the journey.

## Saturday September 27, 2008

This morning we explore the land overlooking Harriman Fjord and Surprise Glacier. We hike upland for amazing views of the Chugach mountain range and glacier-valleys. Down below us we see a black bear, eagles and the most amazing views in the Alaskan fall sunshine. Captain Dean tells the story of the 1899 Harriman Expedition that named these glaciers and the monumental journey that it was. For lunch, Matt cooks up the best fish and chips style halibut ever and all of us overindulge. We head for Whittier and begin to see signs of civilization: a total of 6 other boats as we enter into the channel leading to our docking. In a rush to catch the gate for the 4:30 [ferry](#), we say quick goodbyes and we are off to Anchorage and the Susitna Place for one final evening together.



Thanks to the Discovery Crew, Tom Fleischner and our whole expedition team for a fabulous journey in one of the most stunningly beautiful areas of the world.

The Center for Extended Studies at Prescott College plans a yearly journey in Prince William Sound - for our current trips check the website: [www.prescott.edu/cesll](http://www.prescott.edu/cesll)

**Birds and Mammals Observed**

**Prince William Sound**  
(including Turnagain Arm, Cook Inlet)  
**22-27 September 2008**

**Prescott College Center for Extended Studies and Life-long Learning**  
**aboard M/V Discovery**

Compiled by Tom Fleischner

**BIRDS**

**Order Gaviformes**

Family Gaviidae

- Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*)
- Common Loon (*Gavia immer*)

**Order Podicipiformes**

Family Podicipedidae

- Horned Grebe (*Podiceps auritus*)
- Red-necked Grebe (*Podiceps grisegena*)

**Order Procellariiformes**

Family Hydrobatidae

- Fork-Tailed Storm-Petrel (*Oceanodroma furcata*)

**Order Pelecaniformes**

Family Phalacrocoracidae

- Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*)
- Pelagic Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus*)

**Order Anseriformes**

Family Anatidae

- Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*) [\*TA]
- Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*)
- American Wigeon (*Anas americana*) [\*TA]
- Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)
- Harlequin Duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*)
- Black Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*)
- White-Winged Scoter (*Melanitta fusca*)
- Surf Scoter (*Melanitta perspicillata*)
- Goldeneye sp. (*Bucephala* sp.)
- Common Merganser (*Mergus merganser*)

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**Order Falconiformes**

Family Accipitridae

- Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)
- Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)

Family Falconidae

- Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*)

**Order Charadriiformes**

Family Charadriidae

Killdeer

Family Scolopacidae

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*)

Black Turnstone (*Arenaria melanocephala*)

Red Knot (*Calidris canutus*)

Family Laridae

Jaeger sp. (*Stercorarius* sp.) [probably Parasitic Jaeger, *S. parasiticus*]

Bonaparte's Gull (*Larus philadelphia*)

Mew Gull (*Larus canus*)

Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*)

Glaucous-winged Gull (*Larus glaucescens*)

Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*)

Family Alcidae

Common Murre (*Uria aalge*)

Kittlitz's Murrelet (*Brachyramphus brevirostris*)

Marbled Murrelet (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*)

**Order Coraciiformes**

Family Alcedinidae

Belted Kingfisher (*Ceryle alcyon*)

**Order Piciformes**

Family Picidae

Downy Woodpecker (*Picoides pubescens*)

**Order Passeriformes**

Family Corvidae

Steller's Jay (*Cyanocitta stelleri*)

Black-billed Magpie (*Pica hudsonia*) [\*TA]

Common Raven (*Corvus corax*)

Northwestern Crow (*Corvus caurinus*)

Family Paridae

Chestnut-Backed Chickadee (*Poecile rufescens*)

Family Sittidae

Red-Breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta canadensis*)

Family Turdidae

Varied Thrush (*Ixoreus naevius*)

Family Emberizidae

Fox Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca*)

Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*)

## MAMMALS

### ORDER ARTIODACTYLA

Family Bovidae  
Mountain Goat

*Oreamnos americanus*

### ORDER CETACEA

Family Balaenopteridae  
Humpback Whale

*Megaptera novaeangliae*

Family Monodontidae  
Beluga

*Delphinapterus leucas* [\*TA]

Family Phocoenidae  
Dall's Porpoise

*Phocoenoides dalli*

### ORDER CARNIVORA

Family Mustelidae  
Northern River Otter  
Sea Otter

*Lontra canadensis*

*Enhydra lutra*

Family Phocidae  
Harbor Seal

*Phoca vitulina*

Family Otariidae  
Steller's (Northern) Sea Lion *Eumetopias jubatus*

Family Ursidae  
Black Bear

*Ursus americanus*

### ORDER RODENTIA

Family Sciuridae  
Red Squirrel

*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*

[\*TA=seen only at Turnagain Arm, Cook Inlet]