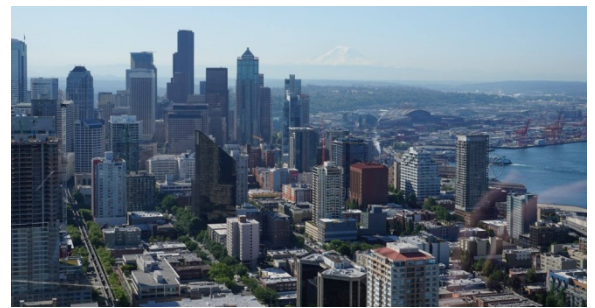




Exploring Alaska

May 29th, 2015 – June 5th, 2015 Volume 1, Issue 1



A View of the City

Contents

Sailing on Open Waters	2
Whales, Glaciers, and a Rainforest	2
Glacier Point Wilderness Safari	3
Docked at Skagway – An Epiphany	3
Tracy Arm Fjord	4
Adrena LINE Zipline Adventure Tour	4
Reminiscing	5

Our journey begins in Seattle, Washington, where the weather was unseasonably warm and sunny for that time of year. For some, the journey began days before the ship left port. For others, the journey began the same day as the ship was scheduled to leave port at 4:00 PM on Friday, May 29th. For myself, the trip to Alaska began on May 27th. I was lucky enough to have family in town I had hoped to see and they were more than happy to have me visit for a few days.

My first day in Washington state, I saw only what I rode passed. My aunt and uncle both had work and my cousin was at school, so I was left to my own devices in the home. The view they had reminded me of home.

My relatives live in Auburn, Washington. There wasn't really anything spectacular about the city itself, but where my relatives lived, there was definitely something to talk about. They

lived on the side of this very tall hill. Too short to be called a mountain, the hill was tall enough to have pressure difference between the top and the bottom. The place was covered in a forest, one similar enough to that in the Colorado Rockies to allow me to draw a connection.

On the second day in Washington, my aunt was gracious enough to allow me to borrow her vehicle for the day. I used the privilege and went to both Tacoma and Seattle. To say the least, I enjoyed Tacoma much more. Both cities had their hills – and Washington state sure has a lot of very steep hills – and yet Tacoma seemed more well adapted to the hills. The roads were wide and the turns smooth. In Seattle, the roads were so narrow, it felt like I was in New York City that had suddenly gained topography it never had before.

Beyond the congestion of the streets in Seattle, there was a lot

of towering skyscrapers, while in Tacoma, the building seemed to go with the hills. The hillside was more predominant versus the buildings. Seattle was more of an attempt to conquer the hill.

For the short amount of time I was there, I found that I missed the flatter plains of Colorado with the mountains to the west. Mount Rainier, though a cool landmark, was bizarre on the horizon. It stood out so much, it was like someone had taken one of the mountains in the Colorado Rockies and stuck it on the horizon without the rest of the mountain range. It was my aunt who told me it was an active volcano.

From the volcano to the ridiculously steep, forest covered hills, Seattle and the surrounding cities were just like any city I've ever been to: full of people attempting to either work with nature, or around it.



Sailing on Open Waters

As an experienced Cruiser, Sea Days are familiar. There have been three with each 7 day cruise I have been able to travel on and this one was no exception. As is common, there was a single sailing day at the top of the week, and two sailing days near the end of the week. While generally left to our own devices on these days, there were set times to meet for class.

In preparations for the cruise, certain groups were assigned certain areas so that, when we met for class, we could share the information we had on the topics we were assigned and to talk about the things we learned on the excursions we went on.

It was really interesting to hear the statistics on the glaciers, how all but a small percentage are receding and how the melting permafrost wasn't helping things. While rather relaxed, all the students were very active in the conversations, giving input on

topics they knew something about or asking a question of another student or a professor to dig deeper into the conversation.

There was a wide amount of topics discussed in the classroom and each one was as fascinating as the next. Conversation never fell short.

Beyond the classroom experience, there was quite a bit to do. There were shows and guest speakers in the main theatre while there were other events happening in other locations around the ship.

One of the productions in the main theatre was about a couple that found love beyond the years and lifetimes in a musical setting. Coming from a theatre background, the play was enjoyable but reminded me of a high school production. The sets were very well done and creative. The costumes were quirky but looked good from my

viewpoint. The singing was ok with only four people – the leads – actually singing. The plot wasn't overly clear.

On the top most deck, there was a miniature golf course. I discovered on the first hole that is you putt the golf ball just right and a tad too hard, it would actually go in between the panes of glass that created the upper deck's railing and fall to lower decks. Lucky I hadn't struck the ball hard enough to send it into the ocean.

The sailing days also opened up opportunities for seeing ocean life from the boat. There were sightings of whales, seals, and orcas. Some were too far out to really make out. There was a possible pod of orcas off the starboard side that didn't fully surface but it was a cluster of eight to ten spouts that were 100 or so feet away from the boat.



Playful Youth

A calf will play at the surface while the mother is feeding

Mothers and calves tend to be the only pairings

Whales, Glaciers, and a Rainforest

Juneau, Alaska was the first port where the first excursion would occur. The first half of the excursion was whale watching. During the wait for the boat, there were close to eight bald eagles flying around. To the surprise of many, the bald eagles did not sound like those portrayed in movies. The call was much higher and, in a way, softer. It was more like a woodwind instrument. To some, it was rather disappointing to hear such a call from a bird that is supposed to be fierce and a symbol of freedom.

Soon, we were leaving the pier and heading out into the open waters. The whales were active, especially a calf that was slapping the water with its tail and just flopping about.

Returning to the pier, the excursion continued more inland. The bus ride was smooth and came with snacks. After the ride, there was a short hike to

Mendenhall Glacier. The glacier use to reach far beyond the lake that had formed before the glacier and, even in the last 100 years, the glacier has receded at a rapid rate.

While there was no trekking up to the glacier's face, there were some icebergs close enough to get an idea of what it would be like to see the glacier up close. This was thanks to one of the icebergs rolling over. The underside of the glacier was a gorgeous, rich blue and the ice itself looked like glass. In a few hours to a few days, the blue ice would turn white as the exposed surface of the glacier started to melt and produce air bubbles that would reflect all light, not just the blue wavelengths.

The lake itself was made completely from glacial runoff, meaning that the water was freezing. The glacier and the glacial runoff did cool the air down quite a bit at the lake and

in the surrounding areas. From where the bus was parked to where we stopped, the temperature dropped a good few degrees.

Along with the temperature difference from the bus to the lake, there was a difference between the plant life as the areas shifted and changed. The bus was parked in an older part of the forest but, through our hike, we came across a very large area of new growth that looked a bit like Vegas landscaping in its sparseness and shrubby covered ground. The glacier settling and receding in certain areas caused a difference in the growth rate of the surrounding forest.

The trek back through the forest revealed a salmon spawning river and a beaver working diligently. Sadly, it was the off season so there were no swarms of salmon swimming upstream.



Glacier Point Wilderness Safari

With a long day set out before us, we left early to head for the Davidson Glacier. The excursion had a lot of participants in it even outside of the class. It started out with a boat ride across the water through the land masses around. There was a brief stop to see some sea lions before continuing on our way. There was a brief glimpse of Haines where there was a cruise ship anchored. Our guide informed us that Haines has an annual Alaska Bald Eagle Festival when over 3000 bald eagles gather in the area. The guide even shared a bit about the fact that the bald eagles use two different types of trees to survive.

When we reached land, we met up with our guide for the rest of the excursion who happened to be our boat guide's twin. The very large group piled into a school bus and everyone miraculously fit. The bus started off down the trail.

You would never imagine that a school bus would be able to handle the terrain that the driver was taking us through but the bus didn't seem to have that much trouble with the steep climbs, drops, and turns the trail took. We wound our way through the trees to the drop off location where we gained life vests and

rain boots. There were even coats for those that hadn't bundled enough. The announcement of more layers available only made sense once we were at the glacier. First was a canoe ride up stream to where the glacier was at.

After everyone had donned the gear given to them, there was a mild hike to the river. It was rather pleasant, not too hot and not too strenuous. When we reached the river, the very large group was separated out into five groups that clambered into five separate canoes. The first stretch of the upriver ride was all under man power. Each person in the canoe had a paddle and worked together to shove the canoe forward in the water till we were clear enough to use the four horse power motor on the back.

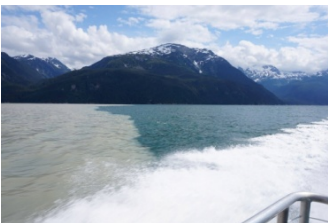
As we approached the sandbar in front of the Davidson glacier, the temperature had dropped at least 10° from where it had been when we had boarded the bus. The water again was all runoff from the glacier, meaning it was freezing, but we were closer than they had been in a while. The sandbar in front of the glacier changes with the water that runs out from the glacial melt. The

banks never stay the same for long.

The stay was short. Many found cool rocks and got pictures. There was even a vein of marble that we had gone past on our canoe trip.

The ride back was much faster and a lot less strenuous. The guide was able to use the motor for the entire trip back to the trail and the hike was the same. Once we reached the camp where the bus had parked, we shed the gear they had given us and piled back in. At the end of the bus ride was lunch before the returning boat ride. It was on the way back that we saw activity.

There was a large outcrop of rocks completely covered by sea lions and the boat drifted passed to allow many to take photos. A bizarre occurrence was a whale feeding in the silt zone, an area where the fresh water glacial runoff meets the sea water and creates a very distinct line. Generally, because of the silt, the whales don't feed in that area due to the lack of visibility. This was not only feeding in this area of murky water, but was doing it in shallow waters. It was a cool sight, none the less.



Docked at Skagway – An Epiphany

When the excursion at Skagway ended, many went off to explore the town and this resulted in a canceling of the group dinner. Not really up to going to the buffet for dinner, I went to the dining hall at our normally scheduled time and asked for a table of my own. There was a moment where they had me sit down off to the side and wait as they figured where to place me. After all, I was usually a part of a group of 14.

I was lucky enough to be seated at a small table right next to where dinner is normally held, meaning I would be under the same waiters for that evening. I was thrilled.

Each staff member that usually waited on our tables came over, asking where the others were at. I was entertained by their questioning.

Unlike previous nights, someone was playing the piano. My position did not give me a very good view of the pianist but it did allow me to watch the dining room as I waited for my food.

Dinner was pleasant and the time by myself was welcomed. It was part way through the main course that I realized I wanted to go cruising on my own. I wanted to do a cruise with no one else but myself and have full control on what I do and do not do. A part

of that came from, from the five cruises I've been on, it's always been with a group of people. The first three were with my immediate family which made up a small group of five people, so that wasn't horrible. The fourth was with both my immediate and extended family, creating a large group of 13 and, while not horrible, it was a bit tiring. This being the fifth one with 18 other people was a bit much. While I enjoyed the cruise greatly, it showed me that I wanted to do this on my own. The fact that one of the servers brought me three scoops of ice cream from learning that was what I normally ordered for dessert may have had a large hand in my epiphany as well.



Tracy Arm Fjord

You never realize how large of a hand a glacier has in molding the landscape till you go in a very large cruise ship through a fjord and have another, while small compared to the Jewel of the Sea, very large vessel pass in the opposite direction within the fjord. The best way to describe it was like a canyon but, instead of steep cliffs on two sides, it was a very tall, rather steep mountain range of which had such a deep valley that it was flooded with water deep enough to allow a cruise ship to pass through.

At the end of the fjord is the Sawyer Glacier. The glacier itself has two points of contact now in the fjord due to the glacier receding. There one point at the end of the main path of the fjord and the second point is at the end of a branch near the end of the main path of the fjord.

The view was stunning but there wasn't much activity from the

glacier itself. There did seem to be some animal activity at the mouth of the fjord. There was certainly enough ice in the water to suggest that the glacier was normally very active.

Some of the ice bergs were utilized by the wildlife as places of rest. A seal had claimed such a piece of ice as a resting spot, giving a very clear scale on just how large the ship was to all the ice, and how large the ice was as well. Some of the chunks of ice were small, about the same mass as a desktop computer, and some had the same mass as a bus. From the decks of the ship, unless there was something there as a way to measure scale, it was hard to dictate just how large any of the icebergs or even the fjord itself though there were a few things that helped give a bit of insight to just how massive the fjord was.

One of the most stunning aspects of the fjord were the waterfalls. Many went from the top of the fjord to the water level below. The amount of distance some of these waterfalls traversed were impressive. From the ship's position, some of the waterfalls looked like thin creeks rather than raging waterfalls.

Just as the waterfalls did, the tree line came right up to the edge of the water, if the rock faces allowed it. Some of the peaks in the fjord were so high that there was a tree line at the tops of the ridges.

While there wasn't a whole lot of life in among the trees or alongside the boat, there were traces of it; seals and orcas were seen sporadically throughout the entire journey through the fjord.



I really liked being Spiderman. It allowed for a very cool perspective of the forest we were flying through.

Adrena LINE Zipline Adventure Tour

Victoria, British Columbia, Canada was very beautiful. As the last port before heading home, there was the opportunity to do something other than whale watching. Ecstatic to take the opportunity to zipline again, I chose to separate from the class and go on my own adventure with Adrena LINE Zipline Adventure Tour.

The excursion began with a decent bus right through Victoria and into the forest northeast of the city. The ride was nice and I was in good company with people I had met on the cruise a few days prior. When we reached our destination, we were separated into the two grouped previously created before we had left the pier. I was part of the first group, leaving the people I had known and going with a group that, while not complete strangers, were strangers enough. At Adrena LINE, there was the opportunity to rent a

GoPro for the journey and two of the people in the group chose to take it up.

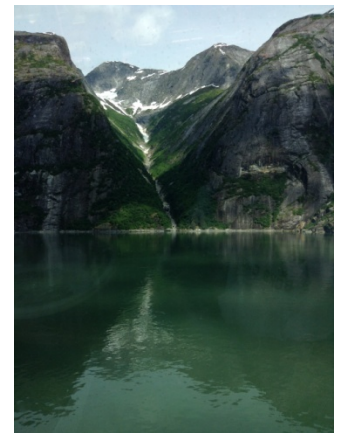
We were harnessed, helmeted, and given a brief pep talk then it was on to the training line. It was a 30 foot line that was maybe 15 feet off the ground at average. It was a short, quick ride but it was a nice warm up. From there, we did a short hike to a jeep, clambered in, and went for a ride that rivaled that of the Glacier Point Wilderness Safari's bus ride.

We reached the first line. This was the point of no return. From here, it was a commitment to go through the entire course. There was going to be no ways down from the tree tops beyond the zipline itself.

Now, I have a fear of heights that is a little strange. I didn't have that much of an issue with the platform heights, nor the ziplining itself. I very much enjoyed the

ziplining and the platforms had rather spectacular views. My fear of heights started to work on me when we had to cross a suspension bridge. We were tethered in and the darned thing was sturdy, but there was just something about it that triggered my fear of heights where the ziplines and the platforms did not. While it wasn't a near crippling fear like the last time I had gone ziplining, it was still enough to whack me out for the last few platforms. Not even after the suspension bridge did my enjoyment of the zipline itself diminish.

What was cool about this particular zipline was the fact that they allowed us to hang however we wanted. That meant we could hang upside down like Spiderman or hang like a rag doll. I really liked being Spiderman. It allowed for a very cool perspective of the forest we were flying through.



Reminiscing

I am not a science major. While science is enjoyable and I am good at it, my strength comes from the arts. I am grateful to Professor Keah for allowing me the opportunity to take this course even as a Theatre major in her Weather and Climate class that had only been together for a few weeks. While not like the typical science class I had ever been on, the chance to do something like this on my own through school

was amazing. I have told and will continue to tell my friends at school that, if they ever get the chance to take this course – if it is offered again – to jump on it, even if all they are doing is getting upper division credits.

This course did so much more than fill credit hours that I need so that I can graduate in three semester. It allowed me to see a bit of how science is applied, to

hear the professors talk about their elements in their elements. It was an opportunity to see a new state, a new city, to see what it was like beyond the Rocky Mountains. It was a chance to explore somewhere and something new. While I am not a science major and may never be, I know through this course and the other science courses I have take that, if all else fails, there is a door open for me in this area of knowledge.

About Our Organization

Wanderer's Magic is a personal organization that deals with illustrations and business artistry.

Ashara Smith, the wanderer behind the magic, strives hard to promote well crafted pieces of

work and a brighter day. Each piece created with the Wanderer's Magic logo is done with pride.

