

West Chichagof Island, 1973

This was the year of my introduction to sea kayaking. With absolutely no experience, I started out with the most dangerous and remote voyage of all, ill-equipped, and with essentially no skills on the ocean. I and my companions were very lucky. When I match my fragile craft and rudimentary skills to conditions I would encounter in later years, I know that I would not have survived them then, and would not be writing this today. As a Forest Resources graduate student at the University of Washington, I had a research assistantship at the US Forest Service Experiment Station just off campus. Ron and Dave were grad students working with me.



Me, modeling contemporary kayak fashion somewhere off West Chichagof Island

The previous year, I had seen an advertisement in National Geographic for Folbot folding kayaks. I thought it would be nice to have a boat that I could keep in a closet that use to paddle around lakes, so I ordered a 17-foot double. The idea of taking it out on saltwater hadn't really occurred to me. I wasn't particularly attracted by the San Juan Islands, which seemed suited only for yachts.

In the early spring Ron bought a slightly used Klepper double, and we began to talk about where we could go in our boats. At the time, there were two planners from Tongass National Forest in Southeast Alaska working with us. The Alaskans suggested paddling north from Sitka to West Chichagof Island and on to Pelican, where we could catch a float plane back to Juneau. We found some maps and photos, they described what we'd see, and we were thoroughly hooked. Dave and I would use my boat, and Dave enlisted another grad student, Mike, for Ron's partner in the Klepper.

All we had to do was book an Alaska Airline flight to Sitka and paddle away, assuming we had a month's worth of food and supplies with us too. We were backpackers, so we had all the camping equipment already, and knew how to make up and pack dried meals. We carefully assembled the materials, packed into ziplock bags and garbage bags inside nylon stuff sacks. We knew nothing about dry bags.



I didn't know any other sea kayakers, and actually assumed that there weren't any. I was wrong about that – there was a small core that had been paddling folding and fiberglass kayaks made by their club around the Pacific Northwest for years. In fact, one of them was my FORTRAN teacher at the UW, Tom Steinburn, but we didn't make that connection until about five years later. So, we were on our own to figure out what we would need.

The Folbot needed some attention to make a sea-going craft out of something designed for Florida lily-ponds. First, the seam that joined the hull to the deck leaked, which was not satisfactory since it was located about two inches above the waterline when loaded to capacity. I duct-taped the whole length on the outside, and brought along plenty to spare.



The Folbot, me in the back and Dave in front wearing his plastic poncho.

It had no rudder, though it did have pintels for one. It needed one badly, especially in any wind. I made it out of fibreglassed $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch plywood, added a plywood set of foot-pedals, and connected it up with nylon cord.

The rudder was as large and heavy as a barn door, but it steered the boat very well in all conditions. It certainly created drag, but as it turned out the Folbot was faster than the Klepper with its metal rudder, to the extent that Ron complained about letting him get ahead sometimes to discover things first.



The large single cockpit surrounding both seats had no spraycover. I made one out of nylon pack cloth and secured it around the wooden coaming with boat-cover snaps. For openings I made a short tunnel that could be cinched up with a drawstring. For easier entry, I added a zipper that extended forward to about knee level. To make it more waterproof I added two overlapping flaps that secured with Velcro. The last item was curved plastic tubing sewn into the cover near my lap to raise it up and prevent a big puddle from forming there. Since the zippered opening intersected this, I had to use two pieces that met when the zipper was closed. This arrangement actually worked quite well. Serious deck-washing would over-tax it, but we did take and shed splashed waves frequently with only minor leaks.

For our paddling attire, we used our hiking clothes, and since copious rain was to be expected, I brought a rubberized foul weather jacket abominably stiff for paddling. Dave brought a water-repellant rain coat which soon gave up that quality, and he did most of his paddling in a plastic poncho. For personal floatation, we had boat cushions to sit on, and to be extra safe, I had a canoe life jacket too long and rigid to fit over my spray skirt (so it had to fit down into it, at the expense of watertightness). Dave had an old fashioned horse-collar life ring.

For footgear, we got rubber and leather “shoe-pac’s”. We were going to have to wade a lot on all sorts of nasty bottoms, since we needed to protect our fabric boats from contact with the shore. These boots were waterproof for wading up to about ankle-level. We had to stand in water deeper than that while loading our boats, and so they leaked, and my feet were almost always damp. For some reason, I didn’t discover rubber knee-boots until several years later.

We’d been warned that the open Pacific, which we’d have to traverse for distances, would be rough. What would we do if we capsized? To prepare, we went to Seattle’s Green Lake in early July. My Folbot had football-size flotation bags that inserted into each end, and the Klepper had air sponsons along each side, which also tensioned the hull. Armed with plastic bailing cups and sponges and otherwise empty boats, we donned bathing suits and tipped over into the warm water. The filled boats floated within an inch of their large cockpits. We floundered around trying to assist each other, or just empty our own. When we reached in to bail, the coaming dipped under water and even more came in. After an hour of fruitless effort, we had to conclude that we had simply better not tip over up there.

Arriving in Sitka on June 6, we went to stay with two VISTA lawyers that Dave knew. Working for this domestic version of the Peace Corps was about as lucrative as a steady diet of pro-bono work, but this couple graciously welcomed us into their little house and gave us their living room floor for our sleeping bags and massive pile of gear. In the morning they went off to work, and we set off to file our float plan with the Coast Guard.

We marched across the bridge to Japonski Island and into the Coast Guard station. In their boat basin was an officer presiding at a podium. He eyed us warily as approaching trouble and put up his stiffest officious front in defense. We explained that we wanted to let them know we were paddling from Sitka to Pelican via West Chichagof. His look became even stonier. “Sir, I would not recommend it.” Nonetheless, we were not deterred,

and wanted to file a float plan. Grudgingly, he tore off a half an envelope and handed us a dull pencil. Our completed plan went back on to the podium somewhere, and as we walked back over the bridge to town, we agreed that should we fail to turn up again, the Sitka Coast Guard would assuredly never have heard of us nor our float plan.

Talking to people in Sitka, the brown bear we were sure to encounter always came up. Most insisted we had to carry guns, and big ones. Others, including the local Sierra Club elder, Jack Calvin, thought that practicing good “bear etiquette” was even better. Avoid dense brush where a surprise confrontation might occur, always wear a bell to announce yourself, and hang your food away from camp. Lacking both budget and expertise for firearms, we went to a fisheries supply store and bought troller bells. These little bells, designed for sheep or goats perhaps, are used by commercial salmon trollers to alert them that a fish is on the line. Worn around our necks, we tinkled as we walked. “I feel like a cow,” said Dave.

Dave kept a journal on this trip, which was a big help to me in recollecting details, and inspired me to keep my own on later trips. Dave had plenty of time to write in it in camp – he brought just one thin paperback that he re-read four times while waiting for one of us to finish ours. It was a long wait for mine, since I think I had something thick like “Lord of the Rings”.

After picking up a few last items, we all felt ready to go by early afternoon. After putting together our boats in the front yard, we made numerous trips lugging gear several blocks to a crumbling war-time amphibian ramp. The tide was coming in, so we stacked our gear on a little hump on the lower part of the ramp and set the boats nearby.

Our boats now seemed tiny and our gear pile monumental. We set to work to find just the right place for everything. Alarmingly soon the tide was under our boats and lapping at our hardly-diminished pile. Frantically we stuffed where we could and stacked what we couldn’t on the deck. As the water crept up and into our boots, we put it all in somehow, leaving small cavities for ourselves. At last, I climbed in to the rear cockpit, and discovered that it was too tight to wedge my butt all the way down on to my cushion, but it would have to do. Thus suspended, I departed Sitka.

It was 2 pm, and it started to rain just as we left (locals told us that it always rains at 2 o’clock in Sitka). It started light, and got heavier during the next four hours. But the winds stayed calm, and we followed the road north out of town to the Alaska Ferry terminal, where all man-made features ashore ceased. Then on through the Siginaka Islands, and into narrow Olga Strait, only a few hundred yards wide. By six o’clock we had covered ten miles, and were soaked, cold, tired, and ready to camp.

The woods above the rocky beach were lovely – deep moss amongst dripping sitka spruce. We built a big fire to warm up and dry out, then set to work on our tents. As I pounded the stakes, I noticed that I was placing one of them in a large bare spot the size of a dinner plate. And I discerned a pattern of similar ones alternating in both directions along the shore. We were camping on a brown bear trail. Creatures of habit, they prefer to step in the same ancestral footprints. We held a conference. Mike was alarmed, but the rest of us were too tired and wet to move. So we rang our bells, talked loudly, and hoped our smoke would advertise our presence from afar. And, I moved my tent stake.

During the long evening until the light faded after eleven, we watched a procession of fishing boats, tugs and barges, and sea planes traversing the strait. We also kept an eye out for approaching ursine traffic. During the brief hours of darkness, I spent more time listening than sleeping. I reflected that, only ten miles out of Sitka, we were not off to a good start. We would have to be more observant in locating our camps to avoid the wrath of these formidable, territorial bears. We were learning, but fast enough?

The morning was clear and bright, and we were understandably anxious to be on our way early. We were able to do a more leisurely job of loading our boats this time, and discovered that - as every expedition sea kayaker does - things mysteriously fit much better after the first day. At least I could nestle down to my seat cushion.

We discovered that Olga and the next strait, Neva, have currents that ebb and flood in opposite directions. We had to fight the ebb current for the remainder of Olga, but then caught a nice ride out of Neva Strait. (Later, I learned to time this passage, riding into Olga on the flood current, waiting at their confluence for the ebb, and then riding it out in Neva).

The sun continued to shine and a little breeze blew at our backs, making up for everything the day before. I opened the zipper on my sprayskirt to let the sun warm my legs. A seiner passed us going the same way. Our laden Folbot floated like a submarine, and it didn't take much for the seiner's wake to spill right over the coaming and into my lap. It was not enough to swamp us, but it left me with a lot of sponging and very wet pants. Lesson two learned.

That night we made it to a cove in Salisbury Sound. This is the junction between Baranof and Chichagof Islands, and most of the traffic to and from Sitka turns east into Peril Straits. From here we would be going west into the open Pacific and around the exposed Khaz Peninsula.

We found a pleasant campsite, with no bear signs. We also discovered that the fiddleheads of the local variety of bracken ferns were just at the right stage for eating, raw or steamed. We had these nightly for the next few weeks until they became too bitter with maturity. Eagles soared overhead, seals peeked at us in the cove, porpoises rolled by beyond, mink scoured the rocky beaches, and no bear appeared. The delight of the place was marred by the huge quantities of plastic and metal can detritus we found on the beach, thrown overboard from vessels both foreign and domestic. We noticed it everywhere we went.

Our third morning was back to the original pattern - driving rain. By late morning we decided the seas seemed calm, so we headed out. But as we went west into the open ocean the swells became quite large. A westerly wind made for slow going. The swells were big enough that I took a Dramamine, for the last time in my life. The rest of the passage occurred in a drowsy fog much worse than sea sickness. Perhaps it cured me of the latter; I never felt sea sick again, regardless of the swells.

We came around a point and into the last refuge, Leo Anchorage, before the exposed Khaz Peninsula. All of us were wet, cold, and sore. The tension of paddling on that powerful and uncaring ocean had worn hard on all of us. But the campsite was fair and bear-free. By the time we got our camp set up I was feeling fairly normal again and went into the woods to collect fiddleheads. They were plentiful and I concentrated on filling a bag in addition to snacking.

Then I had the sense of being watched. In alarm I glanced all around, but saw nothing. Gradually I calmed down and realized that an internal alarm had been ringing, warning me that I had let my guard down. Here we took the role of prey - ever aware of our surroundings and expecting danger. It was an attitude that didn't leave me as long as we stayed on Chichagof, and that I quickly reassumed whenever returning to kayaking in Southeast Alaska.

Just before dinner time a troller came into our cove to anchor for the night. Ron and I paddled out to try to buy a fish. Instead, they gave us three red snapper, and we made a very fine dinner.

The Potato Patch



The morning of rounding the ten-mile-long Khaz Peninsula was perfect – cloudless, windless, and a low swell. We went about a mile off shore where the seas were calmest. We rolled up and down over the glassy swells, and rafted up together for a late morning snack. A gentle breeze from behind pushed us along. At about the half way mark we came to the “Potato Patch”. We landed on a perfect white beach (like Greece, Dave said), with no surf. Behind were low sand dunes strewn with mossy old logs and wild strawberries. We’d been told that this was where the Tlingits had grown some tuberous root crop.

We lazed in the sun, explored, and photographed this place. But the need to finish the peninsula with this gift of weather was too strong to stay. Several hours later we rounded the north tip into a group of islands. We found an easy landing on the lee side of one of them, walked across to the ocean side, and found perfect camp in trees overlooking the Pacific. Best of all, the island was so small that a resident brown bear was unlikely. The sunset was stunning pinks and oranges, finally setting at about 11:30. We found we were falling into a pattern of staying awake as long as the light held, but this evening we continued reading and talking by the fire as the light faded until Mike observed that it was getting brighter again on the eastern horizon while you could still see the glow to the west! Went to bed about 2. It was a pattern that stayed with us – rarely to bed before midnight, and sometimes sleeping in until noon if we weren’t going anywhere.

The fine weather continued another day, so we opted to rest. Ron and I decided on a day trip south into Slocum Arm behind the peninsula to look at some major stream estuaries there. We paddled into one of these, Waterfall Cove, winding up a shallowing stream surrounded by wide grassy flats. A half mile up stream we saw two bears apparently eating vegetation.

For a better look, we got out and stood up in water to our ankles. To the side, a bear came out of the brush about a hundred feet away and stood looking at us. There was nothing to do – where could we go? There was no water deeper than a foot anywhere near. So we stood frozen, waiting to see what he would do. With exaggerated care, he turned and marched back toward the brush, like a cat retreating from a confrontation. Apparently when he thought he was out of sight, he broke into a slow lope and disappeared. Ron and I headed for deep water.

The following day we headed into one of the fjords, with the plan to portage across to Sisters Lake, a tidal lagoon where we would find the abandoned powerhouse from the Chichagof gold mine. The mine itself was located several miles north by the lagoon’s outlet.



By examining our maps closely, we found the spot where we had been told there was an old portage route across to the lake. There was no sign of it, and after a difficult scramble through brush and fallen trees, we found the lake. We spent an hour clearing a rough path across, and then another before we had our boats reloaded on Sisters Lake

The old powerhouse was located on a large stream on the east end of the lake. Across the stream was a cabin. It was occupied by two prospectors – Floyd, a geologist about thirty, and his assistant, Russ, just out of Sitka high school.



West Chichagof, like other areas of southeastern Alaska being studied for Wilderness designation, was crawling with contract prospectors, busily seeking to nail down claims for various mining companies before these areas were “locked up”, a litany of complaint we would hear again and again. In fact, during our shopping in Sitka, there was a petition on one store counter advocating that Alaska succeed from the Union, primarily because of such Federal restriction. It had lots of signatures.

Both Floyd and Russ were friendly, and invited us to set up our tents next to the cabin. Russ was constantly carrying a large-caliber rifle, and told us he'd just chase off a bear coming down the stream by shooting near it. So we had some incentive to set up camp under the umbrella of Russ's rifle.

I walked up to the old powerhouse. A huge pipe came down from a lake up the mountainside. The turbines and generators were gone, but there were lots of big dials and throw-switches, and power lines led off north toward the mine. Mike got out his fishing gear and immediately caught a bunch of Dolly Varden trout in the stream. We had that for dinner and a dried cheese cake mix for dessert.

“Fire!” yelled Russ from the cabin. We could see flames shooting to the ceiling. He had lit off their Coleman gasoline stove, unaware that a pool of it had leaked out of the burners. Without hesitation, Floyd picked it up, carried it out the front door, and threw it out onto the gravel stream bed. The cabin was saved, but he paid the price for it with second and third degree burns on his hands. They had few first aid supplies, so Dave, who had some EMT training, cleaned and dressed them from our kit and gave him a painkiller. It was a short-term remedy, and he would need medical attention soon. They had no radio, but fortunately they were to be picked up by a plane in two days.

We spent the morning at the powerhouse. Floyd's hand was in bad shape, and Dave and Mike went with him in their outboard skiff looking for a cabin with a radio, without success. Late in the day we decided to move to Chichagof mine. The tide was ebbing so we should find a good ride out. Floyd and Russ would come to find us there in their outboard skiff if they needed help.

We left about 6 and arrived about 10. The tide flow worked well, with a fast but easy sluice through several narrows. As the evening progressed, we saw eight bears, some as close as a hundred feet away. One sight was unusual – a sow with three new Beagle-size cubs, wrestling and tumbling while the mother foraged, all oblivious to us drifting past.

At last we came out into Klag Bay and saw Chichagof ahead. It was really a ghost town. Several hundred people had lived and worked here from the early 1900s until the mine was closed during World War II (apparently gold was not a national priority). There was a hospital, store, and a club house. At its heyday, its shafts, tunnels, and stamp mills produced a single gold brick every two weeks. Now most of the buildings were either burned, or in a serious state of decay.

One, the administration building, was still serviceable. Built on pilings over the tide flats, it was a two-story structure with a kitchen, bathroom, oil-barrel wood stove, and a good roof. In late-evening drizzle, we gratefully moved in.

Exploring outside, none of us were comfortable. "A kind of hellish place", Dave wrote, "old buildings mostly fallen down, rotting in the super moist climate, and all overgrown with the brush. It gives me the creeps." We had the sense that we might come around a corner and be face to face with a bear. Abundant scat affirmed that.

I did have to do one thing out there before dark. No water came out of the taps. But I could see a black plastic hose running out of the building and up the hill. Ringing my bell, I followed it up and found its end had been dislodged from a small pool in a stream. I weighted it underwater with some rocks, and we had running water. This was the first of several such impromptu water systems along the coast over the years that I tweaked.

There was an oil-burning range in the kitchen. We were able to light it, but its best was a feeble yellow flame. So we did the best we could cooking on the curved top of the oil drum stove. I took a sponge bath, but later Dave and Mike discovered that the range had a water heater connected to it, and they were able to take tepid showers. It was the height of luxury.

The morning dawned with wind and rain. We weren't going anywhere today. So we read, stoked the stove, and explored the building. Upstairs I found chits for exchange at the company store, and all sorts of clerical ledgers. I later learned that the gold bricks had been kept up here too. One of them was stolen by two masked robbers.

At mid-morning, Floyd and Russ arrived. His hand was much worse, and he had to find help. Dave and Mike agreed to go with them to try to find someone with a radio, and they headed out into the rain and mist in the skiff. Dave described what happened:

We went all the way to north of Goulding Harbor and found or saw no one. Floyd seemed to accept this. Four layers of clothing soaked through. Headed back and got lost once in the wrong bay, spotted one plane flying across our bow, but didn't see my flare. I was getting really depressed when a plane appeared, flowing low to the east of us heading north. We swung in a circle and I lit a flare. Best sight of the trip was watching him circle and suddenly bank sharply and approach for a landing. Took Floyd and Russ straight to the hospital in Sitka, and also took our map. So another problem exists – how do Mike and I find our way back to Chichagof? Saw two more bears and whales. Never shivered so much in my life as we ducked in and out of every cove looking for Elbow Passage. Took us a while, but we finally found it and spotted the town. Went to a warm fire and sleeping bag with hot tea.

While they were gone, something else happened. As Ron and I lounged by the stove, the door burst open. We expected a bear, but it was something else. Something large, soaking wet in mechanics overalls, a frame pack, and a huge 44 magnum pistol strapped around the waist. He was yet another prospector, who had come over the mountain from Kimsham Cove. Expecting to have the place to himself, he was equally surprised to see us, and not pleased. This wild-eyed man stayed less than a minute, said he'd head toward another place down the beach, and warned us that a sow and cubs were nosing around at the other end of "town". He departed.

In the morning the weather reversed itself yet again – sunny and glassy seas. We beached Floyd's skiff for him or his company to retrieve, and went west out of Klag Bay and into the Myriad Islands, a small labyrinth fronting the open Pacific. We were all glad to be out of the backwaters, and the morbidity of Chichagof particular, and back in the freshness of the open coast. We found another perfect Pacific-fringe island where we could land on the back side and walk across to a campsite in heather overlooking the rocky outer coast. Far to the north we could see the high peaks of the Fairweather Range west of Glacier Bay, and even the glaciers coming down to the sea.

About a mile due west were two islets called the White Sisters, pigmented by bird droppings since it is a major nesting site. It is also a rookery for a large colony of sea lions. Their barking, growling, arguing, came and went on the wind, night or day.

A troller approached the White Sisters, circled the rookery, and opened fire with a shotgun at the mass of sea lions. There was pandemonium. We were horrified, and watched as this went on for almost a half hour, with over thirty shots fired. Using my small telescope on highest power, I was finally able to make a good guess at the boat's name – "Greta".

It left the White Sisters and headed south. About a half hour later, the Coast Guard helicopter came along, and we saw it dip down to check on the troller. We made a note of the time and approximate position.



Watching the troller shooting sea lions at the White Sisters

We knew that this was a serious violation of the new Marine Mammals Protection Act, and when we got to Juneau, we went straight to the Federal Building to report it to the US Fish and Wildlife Service. They were very interested, as this would be the first prosecution of this law. They called the Sitka Coast Guard, and in minutes had confirmation from the helicopter's log that matched ours. It was the "Greta", a boat out of Sitka.

Later, we learned what came of this. The trial was held in Sitka and a huge contingent from the fishing community showed up. Sea lions are the bane of salmon trollers. They often follow them, diving to take fish off the line before they can be reeled in. As one troller later told me, it is especially distressing when they take just a single bite of their favorite part, thus ruining a large king salmon that might otherwise bring \$100. Many fishermen carry a firearm to deter them from following, and some shoot to kill. But this was genocide.

The Greta's skipper, an old Norwegian, stood up and roared, "I've always shot sea lions, and I always will!" The audience cheered. In spite of his lack of repentance, he was given a small fine, and it seemed probable that little would change between sea lions and fishermen, except that they might be more circumspect about being observed. Some probably agreed that mass murder at the rookery was too much, but I thought it best to keep a low profile when I went through Sitka with my kayak in later years.

From the Myriad Islands we moved north, winding back inland past Kimsham Cove, just a few miles as the crow flies from Chichagof Mine. Our next major destination several days ahead was White Sulfur Springs, a hot spring and Forest Service public-use cabin. The hot pool had been built up in a covered bathhouse adjacent to the cabin. Given our grubby condition, its appeal was very strong.

To get there, we needed to get to the open ocean through Dry Pass, a notoriously bad shallow opening where the swells tended to break, especially on ebbing tides. As we approached, we found a powerboat anchored nearby, and we were invited aboard for a beer. It was one of the first of many times I experienced the uneasiness of suddenly being invited into civilized home-like surroundings, conscious of my essence gleaned from days in the same clothes alternately soaked with saltwater and wafted with campfire smoke, and almost afraid to sit on their cushions. Nonetheless, we enjoyed the beer and an hour's conversation before going on our way, though Dave noted, "Drunk on a beer, Randy tried to paddle away without the paddles." Perhaps it's just as well I don't remember that.

Dry Pass was breaking constantly over one portion, but the rest seemed not to break, though the waves were steep. We decided to push through, and with waves coming over the bow and thoroughly soaking Dave, we made it. Once into the open ocean, it was easy to paddle north to White Sulfur Springs. Landing on the rocky beach in front of the cabin and bathhouse, we were disappointed to see people already there. But not as much as they were – they were honeymooners who had just been flown in from Sitka. And they had the cabin reserved. In consideration to them we camped about a quarter mile away and arranged with them to visit the bathhouse late in the evening.

We stayed at the springs for six days, partly because some severe bad weather blew through. For two nights we were able to move into the cabin when no one else was there. It was good timing, as a storm blew in during the night which shook the cabin. We weren't going anywhere in our boats, and spent the next day marveling at the huge surf and gale-force gusts from the safety of the beach.

We had plenty of visitors, some arriving by boat and others by floatplanes and helicopters. Jack Calvin arrived from Sitka with a Sierra Club group, invited us to share dinner with them (including fresh grapefruit and cheesecake), and advised us about reporting the sea lion shooting incident in Juneau. Other visitors were mostly local, mostly dropping in for a soak in the springs. Some were Forest Service, including the two planners that had suggested the trip in Seattle! After exclaiming about our lack of guns, almost all the locals delighted in telling us chilling bear stories, how brownies can do sixty feet in two jumps, one hundred feet in six seconds, etc.

Running short of food, we finally found a day when the ocean seemed quiet enough to go on, though barely so. We would have to go outside again to round Point Urey. The swells were huge, to the point that we easily lost sight of one another and even the nearby land when down in the troughs. There were many offshore rocks, including submerged ones – my first exposure to intermittent "boomers." We had to observe carefully ahead for signs of breaking, and steer a winding course through the rock gardens off the point. As Dave noted, "at one point there were breakers on all sides of us – we were down in a little hole with green water all around. There were times when you'd paddle and have your left hand under water and then not be able to touch the water at all on the other side." At last we rounded the point into the placid channel of Lisianski Strait.

We had only one more overnight before Pelican, and it was memorable. We pulled into Stag Bay, a very steep-sided fjord. The only level spot we could find was an alluvial gravel bar covered with grass. Yet another lesson was learned – spring tides also cover such grass, and our tents were briefly flooded during the night.

At last, Pelican. It was a fishing town with a cold storage plant, a long boardwalk, café, and (Dave's observations) "two bars (white and brown), two booze stores, a steam bath, and a jeep for a fire truck." Everyone was very friendly and interested in our journey in flimsy boats. Since we would have to wait two days

for the scheduled seaplane to Juneau, we were offered an empty room to sleep and store our gear above the Pelican Café.

There was plenty to keep us busy. We met the “Blue Jacket”, a fifty-foot sailboat from Port Angeles converted to troll fishing. They were working on their gear and we helped them do things like tie special knots at intervals on their lines so that they could tell how much cable was reeled out. I walked down to the cold storage, and watched them throwing four huge halibut into the inlet, about a thousand pounds of fish, which was unmarketable either due to not being fresh enough or too much mercury. A colossal waste, but a treat for the crabs waiting under the pilings. Dave and Mike were invited to the Baptist preacher’s house for scrabble and some proselytizing.

On the final day, our Grumman Goose took us to Juneau. It was a memorable flight, taking off with my feet below the waterline, past some mating whales, and minutes later, gazing down at yet two more brown bear strolling along a mountainside.