

Alaska Cruise - TSC Summer Expedition aboard the Carnival Spirit

Sept. 6-13 - PART 1

By TC Ellen Eastham

Everyone has a bucket list, some with items written down, and some have that unwritten list of accomplishments they wish to make..... someday. Well one item was checked off the bucket list for a group of 29 from SCSC, Austin Skiers, and Beaumont Armadillo Ski Club that comprised SCSC Group. The group flew to Seattle, WA to enjoy a day of sightseeing, a visit to Pike Market, the original Starbucks, and the stores along the Waterfront. On Sept. 6, Tuesday, the group joined about 100 from TSC on the Carnival Spirit.

Leaving the spectacular skyline of Seattle was quite exciting. Mt. Rainier was high in the horizon 14,411' tall, the Seattle Needle was towering in the skyline, and the marinas were full of boats. The first night was TSC's evening social prior to dinner, with a table of gourmet appetizers, an introduction of the leaders of each club, and a time to meet 'n greet to get to know each other on the cruise. Overnight and Wednesday the ship cruised along the tree-lined coast in the frigid waters of The Alaska Inside Passage, on the journey that passes the area of Canada that separates Washington from the 50th State, past Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Queen Charlotte Islands, through the Hecate Strait and into the waterways of Alaska.

Wednesday was not the most enjoyable for many as when we were in the open sea, the ocean had small white caps and the boat rocked and swayed. Some had uneasy stomachs, and we were so glad to say that this was the only day with rough seas. There was an abundance of activities to do for the TSC group on the cruise ship such as attend "shopping" lectures, Las Vegas-style shows, triviathon, attend seminars about the excursions, ac-



Carnival Spirit ship as seen from a hilltop in Skagway

tivities poolside, head to the spa, workout in the gym, enjoy the heated pool and hot tub, or tried their luck at the casino. Some stayed in their cabin during the day to relax, and most had a balcony view of the open seas. The second night was the Captain's cocktail party prior to dinner, and a formal dinner served, with the group wearing evening dresses and suits.

Speaking of dinner, as everyone knows the food is amazing in both the quantity and quality on a cruise ship. There were such choices as "Breakfast on Deck," "Late Risers Breakfast," or open seating in the formal dining room. One could select lunch at the Grill, at the poolside, the deli, in the formal dining room, or the casual buffet dining. Pizza and ice cream was available 24 hours. The variety of desserts were tempting, both at the buffet for casual dining and evening formal dinners. As Roger Holzman stated, "The dessert bar - Sinful. If any of our group passed it without partaking after an already great dinner, great will power."

Thursday, the ship turned into the Tracy Arm Fjord. By definition a fjord is a long, narrow inlet with steep sides or cliffs, created in a valley carved by glacial activity. The contrast of the fjord was amazingly different from the rest of the trip. Icebergs could be seen floating in the water, with blue coloring as the rest of the light spectrum is filtered out and the blue is absorbed into the ice. There were a variety of iceberg shapes and an abundance of waterfalls plummeting down the tall mountainsides into the ocean.

As the rain began as mist, then much heavier, the waterfalls increased in intensity and were beautiful to photograph and to watch.

Marsha Lutz and **Ross Baker**, and a few others with SCSC boarded a small boat for the Glacier Explorer excursion to see exciting close-up views of the majestic Sawyer Glaciers. The remainder of the ship residents, viewed hundreds of waterfalls in the foggy horizon, but unable to view the glaciers.

Friday morning the ship pulled into port in Skagway, which was the prime start point for all the gold prospectors moving up into the Yukon in the great gold rush of 1898. The name comes from the native Tlingit word meaning north wind! There were numerous excursion choices for the day, so the group separated in many directions. **TC Ellen Eastham** took the "Skagway Street Car" aboard a signature 1920's yellow bus with a guided tour of the historic landmarks of the city and surrounding area. Skagway is a small city of about 800 residents, but with the arrival of numerous cruise ships in the summer, there are thousands of people strolling the streets during the day and selecting from a variety of excursions. **ATC Tom Danowski** visited the Bordello Brothel museum, which brought to life the provocative tales of enterprising women who worked in the "Red Onion Saloon" in 1898.

Sarah Granbery, **Marsha Lutz**, **Jennifer Lyle**, and **Sandy Fowler** had a fun (and cold) time at the Bald Eagle Preserve. They left Skagway on a ferry boat to Haines, then boarded a bus for a twenty minute ride to a camp on the Chilkat River where they had a wiener roast. They outfitted the group in warm clothes for the boat ride and then took off up the river to see bald eagles. The group was told there would be between 3,000 & 4,000 bald eagles in the area during October and November for the last salmon run of the season. They passed a couple of moose camps on the river banks but never saw a moose. In the afternoon most of the group took the train ride, the "White Pass & Yukon Route Railway for a 3 hour journey crossing into British Columbia, Canada, and high in the mountains.

The train ride was the highlight of **David George's** trip as he is a Model Railroad Hobbyist.



The views along the train ride were majestic and a vast difference of terrain. Sarah remembers the railway trip as cloudy and rainy, but as they began the descent down the mountains, they saw rainbows as the sun broke through the clouds. The group counted as many as 10 rainbows and a double rainbow! Upon return, many went to the "Red Onion" for a cold drink, visited a huge variety of touristy t-shirt shops, souvenir stores, which had Sarah Palin knick knacks.

The ship departed early Friday evening, and then Saturday morning pulled into our second port, Juneau, Alaska's capital, 3rd largest city in Alaska, and one accessible only by sea or by air. Again the choices in excursions were numerous. One well-known excursion in Juneau is the Mendenhall Glacier, which is Alaska's most famous glacier.

ALASKA CRUISE article to be continued.....see Feb. Sitzmarke. Read more about what Roger Holzman described as "The sheer beauty of Alaska makes it difficult to comprehend that it is actually part of USA. The ever enthusiastic Drivers on each of our tours so obviously in love & proud of their state, adding to our enjoyment of the awesome scenery. Yet none of them native Alaskans. One was from Ireland."

Group at TSC Mixer: Marsha Lutz, Sarah Granbery, Jennifer Lyle and Sandy Fowler.





Ross Baker on Glacier Explorer tour to view close-up the majestic Sawyer Glacier in Tracy Arm Fjord.



Breathtaking views aboard the White Pass & Yukon Railway Excursion. The railway was built in 1898 during the Klondike Gold Rush



An amazing sight to see: the Mendenhall Glacier in Juneau



Roger Holzman takes advantage of a beautiful sunny day as the Carnival Spirit left the Port of Juneau and cruises along the shoreline.



Alaska Cruise – TSC Summer Expedition aboard the Carnival Spirit

Sept. 6-13, 2011 – PART II

By TC Ellen Eastham

A group of 29 from SCSC, Austin Skiers, and Beaumont Armadillo Ski Club comprised the SCSC Group, that first flew to Seattle, WA. Part I Article was included in the January Sitzmarke, which described sightseeing in Seattle on Sept. 5, then the group joined about 100 from TSC on the Carnival Spirit to depart from Seattle's dock on Sept. 6. Dorothea Rasser with SkiEurope organized the tour for TSC. One full day was at sea with numerous activities and shows on board, then the ship traveled through Tracy Arm Fjord, with small icebergs floating by throughout the day as it rained the entire day. Day 4 the ship visited our first port in Skagway and many rode the "White Pass & Yukon Route Railway" for a 3 hour journey crossing into British Columbia, Canada. As we arrived in Juneau, the capital of Alaska for the 5th day at sea, the article ended in introducing the Mendenhall Glacier, which is Alaska's most famous glacier.

As I look back on an adventurous journey prior and new friends I met on this trip, we all in SCSC are so very lucky to have the companionship of travel mates for our adventures! We have those "have-to see" destinations in our minds, and Alaska is one of these on all of our lists! I would like to describe the Carnival Cruise aboard the "Spirit" and the 4 ports we visited: Skagway, Juneau, Ketchikan, and Victoria. The trip can be summed up by descriptive words: a variety of mountainous and vast ocean scenery, elegant ship décor, wide-range of entertainment, diversity of landscapes, gourmet and abundance of food, uniqueness, majestic land, amazing glaciers, numerous and interesting excursions, remoteness of a huge State, friendly and helpful crew, and so many wondrous words that each trip participant could describe to you in their personal thoughts of the trip! Alaska is a place that everyone dreams to go see, to travel across the state, whether by cruise, by train, some drive in a RV or by car to vacation. Alaska, derived from the Aleut word *alaxsxaq*, meaning "the mainland", also known as Alyeska, the "great land", should be on your list to explore the adventure.

The group participants were amazed at what we saw and the choice of selections what to do each day. As **Christie Burke** said, "Our Alaska Cruise was a delight with everyday something new. There were so many things offered on the ship and each day we came into an exciting and different port. It was awesome!" **Roger Holzman** described, "Mostly rain and heavy fog during our 3 days of cruising north to Alaska. Then we were blessed with sunshine for our tours of Skagway, Juneau & Ketchikan." **Tom Danowski** said, "Best excursion by far was the Skagway mountain railway. Second best? The ladies of the Red Onion bordello! Experience I least want to repeat - "Fun Day at Sea," which seemed more like a Not-So-Fun week, of rockin', rollin', and nausea! Seattle was beautiful, too."

Alaska is the largest state in the United States by area, one-fifth the size of the Lower 48, and Texas is $\frac{1}{2}$ the size of Alaska! It is the 4th least populous and the least densely populated of the 50 United States. Approximately half of Alaska's 722,000 residents live within the Anchorage area.

When we arrived in Juneau, the group spread out on a wide variety of excursions. Juneau is an interesting place, and unlike any other state capital because it is accessible only by sea or air. It has no flat land and it has a giant icefield blocking off any chance of land access. It has been said that there are no stolen cars in Juneau, just joy rides, as there is nowhere to go! **Roger Holzman** mentioned, "there were no **Sarah Palin** sightings in Juneau." However, everywhere in Alaska was proud of Sarah as the stores displayed her picture, book, and souvenirs.



Alaska Cruise Part II—Continued

Historical Juneau has narrow, angled streets and interesting architecture, the Alaska State Museum, the State Office Building, and the octagonal St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church. A must see is a visit to the remarkable Mendenhall Glacier. It regularly calves small blue icebergs, the size of a truck and house, into Mendenhall Lake, creating a spectacular foreground. Popular excursions are: Whale watching, Rainforest Canopy & Zipline, kayaking, eagle-watching, helicopter tour, dog sledding, and many more! A visit to the Red Dog Saloon, with sawdust on the floor and banjo-playing music, is a local favorite.

On Day 6, the Spirit docked in Ketchikan, the salmon and totem pole capital of Alaska. There are three major native tribes of the region: the Tlingits, Haidas, and Tsimshians. **Ellen Eastham, Marsha Lutz, and Sarah Granbery** explored the Saxman's native village with an excellent collection of totem poles. Totem poles are carved to honor deceased ancestors, record history, social events, and oral tradition.

The 7th day evening we arrived in Victoria, the moon was rising in the sky as we docked. It was too late for many tours, such as the infamous Butchart Gardens, however, many set out for bus tours to see the Empress Hotel, a tour of the city, and the harbor lights at night. It was about midnight when the ship left port to set sail for the final destination, Seattle, to arrive early the final morning.

Some memories by trip participants to describe the trip: **Sarah Granbery** "We had a fun time each night trying to guess what kind of animal towel sculpture had been left on our bed by our steward. It's kind of hard to guess when you're tired and full of good food and wine! I think we had a bulldog, a rabbit, a scorpion and different animals each night."

"The Broadway type shows in the theatre were great. But the best talent could be found in the small Clubs. Matthew & Tracy and their High Rise combo displayed awesome musical and vocal talent each night in Club Cool. Good dance music for **Melissa Ming, Don Macken**, and many of us. They were so willing to offer intimate conversations with us," As remembered by **Roger**. **Ellen Eastham** thought a trio to remember on this trip was **Vivian Ezenwa, Cecilia Newburn**, and **Christie Burke** as they were always together, and quite a variety of ages!

Cecilia Newburn concluded, "it was a good trip, due to the people and the fabulous weather we had!"

Sandy Fowler's best memory of the trip was "being told in Juneau by our whale excursion captain how fortunate we were to have been able to see both killer whales and humpback whales on an even more rare sunny day in Juneau. He went on to say that the odds of experiencing all of that simultaneously would be about like seeing a double rainbow. Well.....our group did indeed see a double rainbow on the train ride in Skagway!"

Marilyn and Mark Anderson had been on three cruises, out of Miami, and two from Galveston. They decided Alaska ought to be the next one. They heard about the TSC trip from a friend in CLASC, as it was meant to be! After busy weeks when they moved to a new city, and closed on a new home, when they checked in, they basically crashed for the week, and wanted downtime when not in port. They went into the Yukon Territory from Skagway, rode the dog "carts", and the train made for a fun day. They went whale watching and visited the Mendenhall Glacier excursion in Juneau, which were both everything they hoped it would be. Everyone had a great time at dinner, meeting new people, both with the SCSC group, in the TSC council, and others on the cruise.

TC **Tom Danowski** wrote the group before departing, "Don't forget to bring:

1 - Passport! 2 - Camera, camera battery, camera battery charger, extra camera memory card if you take as many pictures as **Ellen Eastham** does! 3 - Cell phone and charger; 4 - Binoculars; 5 - One bottle of wine or champagne; and 6 - Rain gear - I guarantee it will rain." Everyone definitely took a lot of pictures, drank wine and champagne, and it did rain!!! Tom summed up the trip, "I am ready to go again - as soon as that winning lottery ticket comes through!"



