

Roaming Around Alaska – 2013

Cheryll and Rich Odendahl left our home in Michigan on June 2nd with our 25-foot Ranger Tug “Roam” in tow.



We spent the next five days trailering Roam 2500 miles to Anacortes, Washington. The trip out was uneventful except when a tornado touched down in North Dakota; 40 miles from where we were sleeping aboard Roam, parked in a truck stop. During the following days, we were stopped near the borders of Montana, Idaho and Washington by officials, and Roam was thoroughly inspected for invasive species. They checked her bilge, bottom and cooling system. She passed with flying colors.



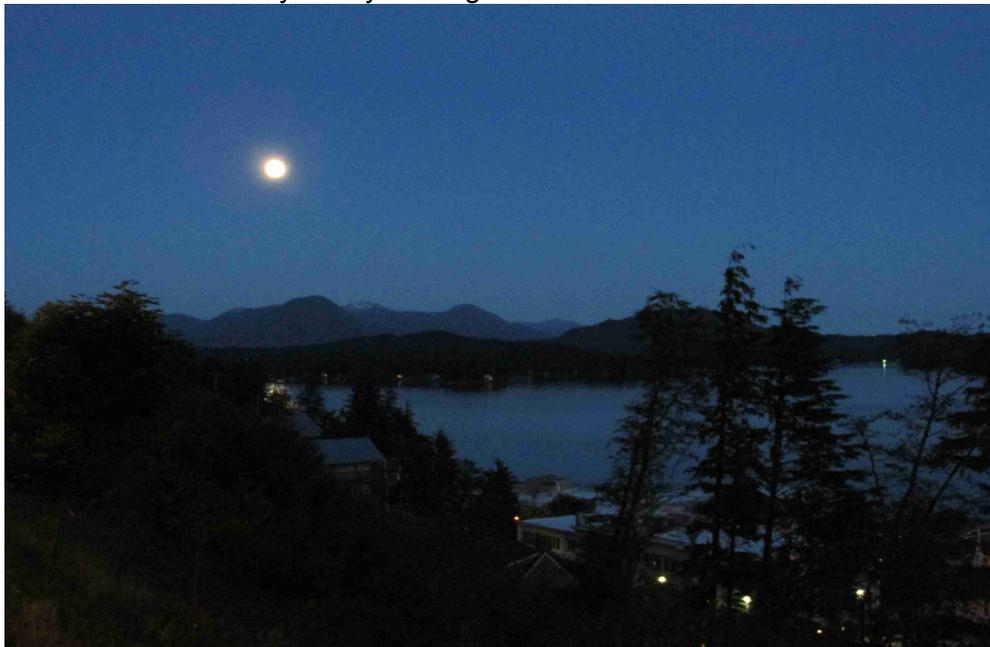
We launched the boat in Anacortes, and Rich's brother David, sister-in-law Lori and niece Hope came down to the marina to see us off. It took us twelve days to cover the 650 nautical miles (750 statute miles) to the Alaskan border. In Hartley Bay, British Columbia, a fellow Ranger Tugger gave us some freshly caught salmon. We have no fishing gear aboard Roam, but were quite successful along the way in trading beer and conversation for the "catch of the day."



Our favorite stop in British Columbia was at Verney Falls. In this picture, the waterfall is running strongly with melt-water from the surrounding snow-capped mountains. We've nosed Roam into the current. The current kept her from swinging into the rocks.



The tides in Alaska are over 23 feet, and the consequent currents can be very strong. Each day, Rich studied the charts and tables to determine when we should travel to take best advantage. On June 22nd, we left at 4:30 in the morning to cross the notorious Dixon Entrance, arriving in Ketchikan after nine hours. We were tired, but happy to be in Alaska. After customs formalities, we went to check out the city and found a poster advertising the 5K "Only Fools Run at Midnight". It's a celebration of the summer solstice in the land of the midnight sun. Rich decided that, tired or not, he was not going to miss this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. The moon was full and the course took him on an obstacle course downtown, where he dodged the drunks on the sidewalks outside the local bars. Afterwards, we walked two miles back to the marina and fell into a deep, well-earned sleep. This picture of the full moon over Ketchikan was taken by Cheryll during the walk back to the marina.



We saw thousands of eagles, hundreds of whales and dozens of bears. This eagle is clearly not interested in sharing his freshly-caught salmon.



We only saw one moose during the entire trip. This photo was taken entering Petersburg Harbor. We did not realize that a moose can swim at a speed of 4 knots!



In South Inian Pass we were surrounded by dozens of huge humpback whales. One whale surprised us when it surfaced within a boat length, and Cheryl felt the need to put on her life jacket. This picture was taken during the return trip in Wright Sound, British Columbia. We stopped for an hour to watch this pair of whales, breaching and slapping the water with their flippers. We were close enough to smell their breath, and it was bad!



We enjoyed the small fishing community of Elfin Cove on Chichagof Island where the marina toilet (below left) has a million dollar view. There are no roads and no vehicles, but we walked a boardwalk which hugged the forest shoreline of the harbor.



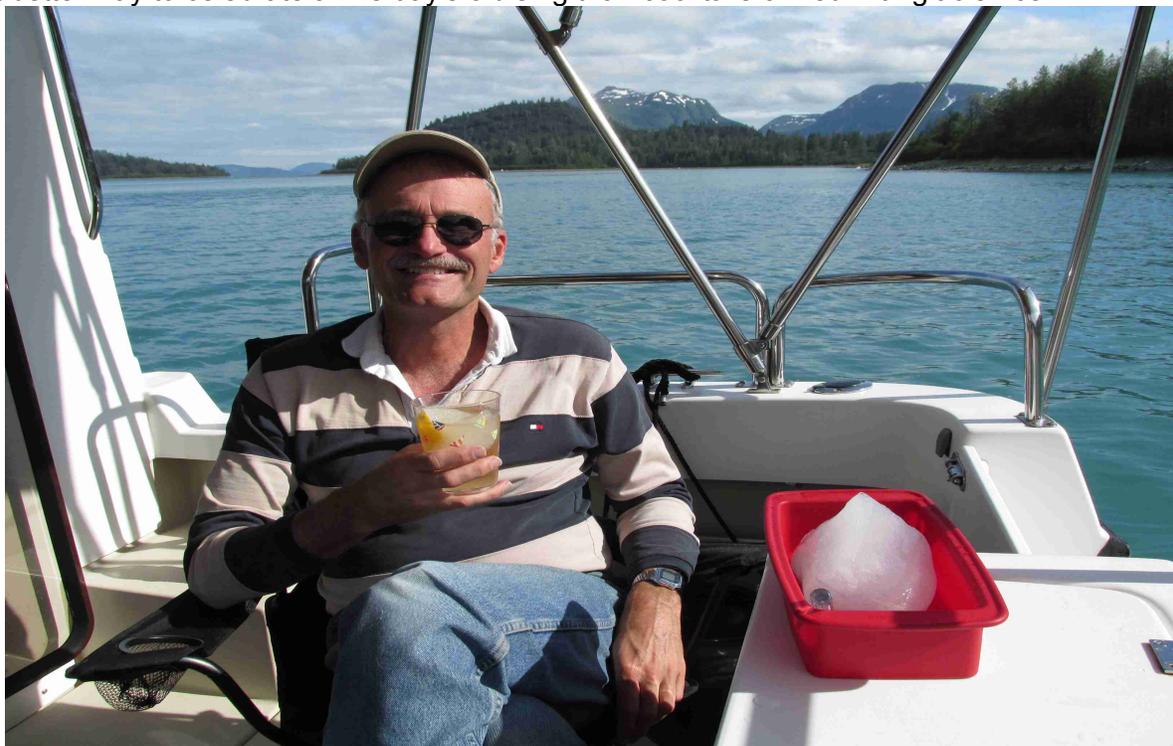
We spent five days in Glacier Bay National Park. This picture is from the bow of ROAM while anchored in North Sandy Cove.



Glacier Bay is a huge place and VHF radios can't reach the park headquarters from its edges. We had earlier helped another boat with a radio relay to park headquarters. After we caught up with them, they took this picture of us watching calving and dodging the chunkage at Margerie Glacier.



What better way to celebrate a fine day's cruising than cocktails chilled with glacier ice?



Alaska has a way of altering one's perspective. We thought that we had anchored just offshore, but when Rich went to row in, it was really a long way. The mountains have a way of making distances seem shorter than they really are. Ashore at Reid Inlet, Glacier Bay.



Celebrating our 20th anniversary on July 17th while anchored at Annie's Pocket with a three-dollar Jiffy Pop and a million dollar view.



Cheryll soaking in the naturally-heated thermal pool above the waterfall at Baranof Warm Springs.



The weather was great. The waters were mostly flat, and it was warm. Alaskans were telling us this was the nicest summer in 20 years. We saw water skiers without wetsuits in Wrangell. The only frustrated people were the sailors who only managed to sail a few hours all summer. In the picture below, Rich is relaxing after an evening dip at the mooring float in Anan Bay.



Roam is seen here tied to the seaplane dock in Kake (pronounced like "cake"). The harbormaster told us that it was fine to tie up for the night, as no seaplanes were coming. Our "neighbor" arrived 15 minutes later, so we quickly moved to the end of the dock. Rich went to bed early, and Cheryl spent the evening enjoying the view while listening to the whales spouting just outside the harbor.



We spent a peaceful night anchored in a secluded cove 22 miles from Wrangell. In the morning, Rich picked up the anchor and asked Cheryl to idle out towards the channel. Roam would not shift into forward. Reverse and neutral were OK, but no forward. Rich quickly dropped the hook and started into troubleshooting the problem. The lever on the side of the transmission would not move up and into forward. He was reading the service manual when the fifty-foot vessel "Oceans 11" cruised by, about two miles distant, and headed for Wrangell. We were out of cell phone coverage, so we radioed and asked them to arrange a tow for us when they got within range of town. After a couple of minutes, they came back and said they would tow us, and they did. It would take 4-5 hours at 5.5 knots against the current.

Rich did more troubleshooting and, about halfway to Wrangell, figured out that the problem was not internal to the transmission, but just a broken and jammed shift cable. He disconnected the cable and found that he was able to shift gears manually, using the lever on the side of the transmission. We dropped the tow, and Cheryl sat with her feet in the engine compartment as we entered the harbor in Wrangell while Rich yelled "Forward", "Reverse" and "Neutral" over the engine noise. We were able to find a replacement cable in Wrangell the next day, and had a spare sent ahead to us in Ketchikan. Roam is now shifting smoother than ever.

The wonderful people on Oceans 11 refused our offers of money for fuel or dinner. They only asked that we do something nice for someone else. Pay it forward. And we will.

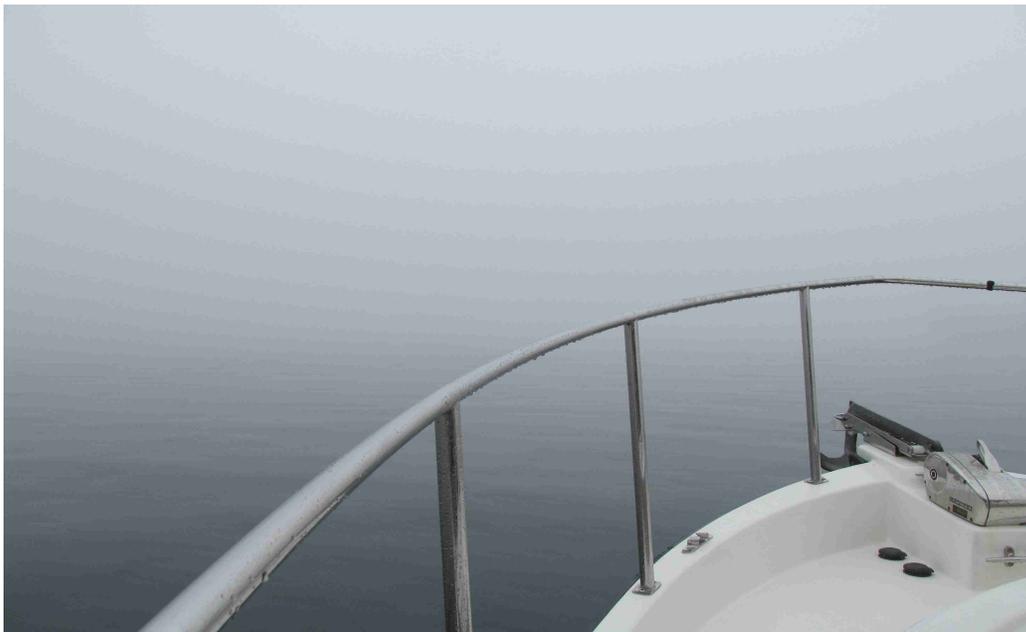
This picture was taken several days later in Misty Fjords. Oceans 11 is rafted with another boat and towering above Roam moored in the distance to the far right.



The standard advice in bear country is to make lots of noise and the bears will leave. We hiked an hour to an area with bears. Every blind corner Rich loudly said something like; "Any bears here?" After a while he got bored and switched to Monty Python quotes such as; "Bring me a shrubbery!" Then he switched to singing *The Impossible Dream*. "To dream the impossible dream!" One minute later; "To fight the unbeatable foe." At the next corner; "To bear with unbearable sorrow." Cheryll; "Honey! Don't say bear!" Rich; "Cheryll, don't say 'Honey'" The picture below was taken from about 75 feet before the bear grew tired of our discussion and wandered off.



After 6 and ½ weeks in Alaska, it was time to point Roam south, back into British Columbia, and on to Washington. Southeast Alaska is known for fog in August, and it was definitely time to leave. Roam is equipped with radar, but radar can't see the partially submerged logs that infest these waters.



As we headed south, anchorages were very crowded in comparison to Alaska, and the scenery, while extremely beautiful, was not as majestic as Alaska. We counted 50 boats anchored here in Prideaux Haven; a popular anchorage in Desolation Sound.



Roam moored and stern-tied at Butchart Gardens, near Victoria, BC.



This picture was taken in the Princess Louisa Inlet at Chatterbox Falls. A close second to Alaska.



The leaves on a few trees had started to change, so we headed home; anxious to see friends and family, but sad to see our journey end. We arrived back in Anacortes after 88 days on the water.

Fewer than 200 private boats complete the trip from the continental US to Southeast Alaska each year. Based upon conversations with harbormasters and park rangers, Roam, at 25 feet, was the smallest boat to make the round trip in 2013. She performed well, and Rich was able to repair the few minor technical problems that popped up along the way. We never saw a four-foot wave all summer. The temperature never topped 80 degrees in the afternoon and only twice dropped below 50 in the morning. We covered 2962 NM (3400 statute miles) at an average speed of 6.8 knots. Roam's engine ran 437 hours and drank 625 gallons of dead dinosaur juice. We are truly grateful to these prehistoric creatures. We also wish to again thank the captain and crew of Ocean's 11 for the tow. Rich's brother David helped us with logistics. So many others helped with local knowledge and advice. We appreciate you all!

Many of our friends asked how we could live together in close quarters for such a long time. An adventure like this requires close teamwork, tolerance and flexibility. Our relationship is as strong as ever, but Cheryl is looking forward to being home with showers and washing machines that don't have to be fed coins.

Alaska is an experience for which we will be forever changed. Future adventures will always be compared to this one.

The Statistics:

88 Days aboard Roam
2962 Nautical Miles (3409 statute miles)
437 Engine Hours
6.8 knots average speed – includes warm up, cool down, whale watching time, anchoring, docking
625 gallons of diesel burned by Roam
4.74 NM/gallon
\$4.71/gallon – average price of diesel (Varied from \$3.77 to \$6.40)
2 quarts of oil added between changes in Sitka and Anacortes
3 gallons of kerosene burned by the Wallas stove
4 one-pound green propane cylinders burned using the Magma grill
463 gallons diesel trailering; 5020 miles in the Silverado/Duramax diesel (10.8 mpg)
0 waves encountered taller than four feet
0 days spent waiting for weather – We did push ahead a few times to miss some unsettled weather.
1 day spent repairing Roam
7 days when the radar was used running in fog – slowly!
77 degrees F – Highest temperature
48 degrees F – Lowest temperature
69 degrees F – Warmest water temperature (Wrangell and Desolation Sound)
0 hours watching TV aboard – We did watch 3 DVD's
12 books read by Cheryl; Rich only read 2, but did spend many evenings studying the cruising guides, charts, tides and currents for the following day's expedition
0 other Ranger Tugs seen during 6 and 1/2 weeks in Alaska
4000 pictures and videos taken by Cheryl

Our world-wide trip reports are at:

<http://www.odendahls.com/>

The other adventures of Roam can be found at:

<http://odendahls.com/roam/>