



## Snettisham/Taku 2007 – 9: Chocolate Chip Cookies August 4-6

On Thursday afternoon my cousin Jeannette and her husband Ben arrived for nine days of Juneau adventure with the family. As one of the most avid readers of my trip reports, there was no question that she and Ben would visit the homestead. With Sweetheart Creek scheduled for the following week, we decided to head down over the weekend aboard the *Alaskan* with my parents and all three dogs (Nigel, my parent's dog Rosie and my cousins' dog Jaeger). Using the *Alaskan* had the added benefit of transporting the brand new 30" propane range that my dad generously purchased and set up for me to add to the comfort of the homestead. Thanks Dad!

Saturday morning we met up at my place and man-handled the range into the back of my dad's pick-up truck, cutting Ben's finger in the process. Thankfully Jeannette is a nurse, so she skillfully cleaned and duct taped the wound while I finished loading gear. We met up down at Aurora Harbor and loaded the range onto a dolly for the ride to the *Alaskan*; of course it was low tide so the ramp was steep, but it looked scarier than it was. We got all the other sundry gear down and loaded onto the boat while it was still in the boat house; then my dad pulled the *Alaskan* out against the dock and used the winch to unload the little Boston whaler that sits on the aft deck. I started up the engine and took the skiff all the way around to the inside of the float and tied it up in the *Kathy M's* slip. My mother and I took off to fuel the *Kathy M* while the *Alaskan* began heading down the channel with everyone else, leaving us to catch up.

Unfortunately the Golden North Salmon Derby was taking place and it was a beautiful Saturday, so the fuel dock was predictably busy and no one seemed to be in any kind of a hurry. We pattered around for what must have been close to half an hour before the tiny boat (which can't have had more



Jeannette, Ben and the dogs at the lodge

than a 10 gallon tank) finally left the dock. After fueling up, we took off down the channel to chase the *Alaskan* which had made it nearly to Pt. Arden by the time we caught up. After my mom and I clambered aboard we secured the tow line and got up to speed again for Snettisham. It was a lovely day and my cousins and I were sitting on the broad bow of the *Alaskan* when we entered the port. Seeing something interesting on the mountainside that I wanted to view with binoculars I hurried back to the wheel house only to find several inches of water flowing across the deck just behind it, coming from one of the deck drains. I alerted my parents and my dad headed down to the engine room where he found cooling water (sea water) shooting out of the starboard engine through the a plug. Water had filled the bottom of the bilge and was nearly onto the engine room floor. We shut down that engine and went the rest of the way on the port engine, allowing the water to drain back out on the other side of the deck. We soon anchored up at Snettisham.

Although the tide was low, I thought there was enough water to get the *Kathy M* in close to shore so we loaded up the gear and the dogs, then put the range on the bow and carefully made our way in. Rosie (a Chesapeake retriever) was having intestinal troubles and leaking badly from the rear end. With four people, three dogs, and all our gear packed into the 22' boat, this had unpleasant and amusing (in retrospect) consequences. Every time Rosie turned around she rubbed against something, leaving behind slimy gifts on such things as bread, wine, and Nigel. Poor Nigel later got a quick bath even though he never rolled in anything!

Arriving on shore, we were able to pull the *Kathy M* right to the beach and the four of us labored to haul the range up the new rock path through the meadow and onto the porch of the cabin. After giving my cousins a tour of the property, we moved the range to the back wall of the lodge and, after some debate, determined where to set it up. I put the propane tank on the shelf I'd made for the water filters outside, did some quick measuring, and cut a hole in the wall with a hole saw. It all went together flawlessly and I even had handy a solution of soap and water to check the propane connections. I'd seen my parents do this many times at the lodge, but was tickled to see it actually work. A bubble appeared consistently in one spot which stopped when we tightened the connection.

Then we turned on the propane and looked for the pilots to light. The stove top ones were easy enough to find, but the oven pilot proved more difficult, mostly because the instructions were so inanelly complicated. We were meant to remove all the oven racks and unscrew and remove the floor of the oven just to access the spot. It turns out that we can easily enough access it through the door at the bottom of the stove, so I'm not sure why the instructions were so complicated, but we did have to hold down the oven temperature dial to get it to light. Of course I was very anxious to try it out. All the burners flared up right away—I had a real stove! But I wanted to bake something. I'd made cookie dough at home the night before, but regrettably left my cooler on the *Alaskan*. My mother was good enough to go pick it up and see how my dad was doing with the engine.

In the meantime, the rest of us relaxed. Ben went to fetch beers cooled in the freshet while I searched in vain for a bottle opener for the wine. Giving up, I decided to show my cousins how to open a bottle of wine with a boot (a classic camping trick taught by my Spanish professor at UAS). Basically, one person holds the bottle upside down while the other strikes the bottom with the heel of a heavy boot. This forces the cork out very slowly until you can grasp it with your fingers and simply pull it out. I've done it many times. When Rory visited the homestead earlier this summer we refined the trick using a rubber mallet (common on construction sites but not so much at campsites). This worked much more efficiently, so I right away grabbed the mallet. At first Jeannette held the bottle with a towel over the end while I whacked away; after some time with no apparent effect, Ben took over holding the bottle and I increased my effort. After one good whack the bottle shattered in his hands and the wine spilled onto the porch and the ground beneath. By the grin on Ben's face I knew he wasn't seriously hurt, but this was the second time he'd cut his hand that day! Although we had one more large bottle of wine, Jeannette made due with a mini bottle of pinot grigio with a twist top until we got ahold of a corkscrew. So, if you try to open a bottle sans corkscrew, I'd recommend sticking to a boot!

While we waited for my mother to return we put up the hammock and relaxed on the front porches in the sunshine. When the cookie dough arrived I discovered that I was without cookie sheets, so made them on the brand new broiler pan instead. They were heavenly!!! I think everyone there will agree. As I started dinner, Jeannette and I chatted and soon my dad came ashore to join the festivities and check out the new range in action.

At about six, we watched a boat pull in with one of my kayaks on board. Travis, Torsten, and their friend Greg had arrived after a day at Sweetheart Creek. Torsten had tangled nets, gone swimming, and lost gear to high tide and all three had fought off droves of noseums all day. None of them seemed particularly cheerful. I gave Greg a tour, fed everyone cookies, then said goodbye to Torsten and Greg as they took off for town. Travis stayed on to accompany the *Alaskan* back to Juneau the next day. Dinner was dill halibut baked in the oven with rice and zucchini cooked on the stove top—what a fabulous range! This was only my second time cooking halibut so I was quite pleased and more than a



After supper in the lodge

little relieved that it turned out so well. My mother had procured a corkscrew, so with dinner we drank a local wine that Jeannette and Ben had purchased while in Germany. An ROTC, Jeannette first served in Germany, then Pakistan after the earthquake, then moved to Hawaii for training before being stationed in Fairbanks. We'd spent little time together since we were kids so it was great to catch up that afternoon around the lodge. With my cousins, my parents, Travis, and three dogs, it was probably the largest group I've ever entertained down there and it felt great to have guests.

After dinner we stayed and chatted in the lodge for some time; once my parents took off for the *Alaskan*, the four of us moved onto the porch until after dark before retiring to our cabins.

The next day I managed to rise before anyone else, started a fire in the wood stove, and put the kettle on to boil on the range (I can't describe how cool it was to just walk up and turn on a burner). My parents had left their milk in my cooler over night, so I kayaked out to the *Alaskan* in the hopes that I'd catch them before breakfast

with a milk delivery. By the time I got back the other three had showed up and we spent a leisurely morning around the lodge. At about eleven, my cousins and I decided to go for a kayak, leaving Travis at the lodge with the dogs.

Unfortunately, the tide was rather low, so we had to drag the kayaks over considerable mud before reaching water. I tied on an extra kayak for my mother and we took off to pick her up at the *Alaskan*. Nigel and Jaeger were not pleased with our departure, despite Travis's presence. They



whined and waded after us, following along the shore. Finally Nigel returned to the lodge with Travis, but bolted away again the first chance he got. By the time we arrived at the *Alaskan* both dogs were in the river paddling after us like crazy. Silly dogs. It would have been a very long swim for them (and then what?) so I paddled as hard as I could to cut them off and told the others to go without me. Both dogs returned to shore with me and Travis met up with us with some rope to subdue them. I was tempted to return with them, but eventually left the dogs tied to Travis and caught up with the others at River Point. I paddled around the corner, watched a few curious seals, then left them to continue exploring while I returned to clean up and start lunch.

This time the tide was way out so I had to drag the kayak at least a hundred yards across the mud. I could see Nigel at the lodge and was surprised that he didn't come to greet me. As I approached I discovered Nigel and Jaeger in doggy jail, tied to the porch for being naughty and running after us. Not feeling sympathetic, I left them there for a while as I went about my errands.



Nigel and Jaeger in doggy jail

Once the others arrived we ate quesadillas (cooked on top of my amazing range) and cookies for lunch, then lounged around in the

balmy sunshine outside. Lying in the hammock with my eyes closed and the sun on my face I could have been a thousand miles away on vacation. It was one of those true summer moments that we SE Alaskans have to store up in order to face the winter ahead and I relished it.

But, we had more adventuring to do, so we cut off our lounging all too



Mom, Ben, Jeannette, Travis and the dogs enjoying the sunshine

soon and loaded up the *Kathy M*. After transferring some of our gear and Travis onto the *Alaskan*, the rest of us headed over to Sweetheart Creek to show Jeannette and Ben around and look for bears. We watched some folks fishing with cast and dip nets, but alas, found no bears.

In the meantime, Travis and my dad had pulled anchor, so we met up with them in Gilbert Bay and took off for Juneau. While we were on shore, my dad had solved the mystery of the flooded deck and whittled a plug to stop the leaking. Apparently mechanics and others in the engine room had routinely dropped electrical tape and other bits of trash into the bilge until the main bilge pump screen was plugged. The auxiliary bilge had come online, but the scupper into which it pumps was plugged so the water couldn't go overboard. One of the drains



Jeannette and Ben at Sweetheart Creek

from the deck behind the wheel house shares the scupper with the auxiliary bilge, so the bilge was able to pump the water onto the deck when it couldn't go overboard. Mystery solved! The leaky plug itself appeared to be a less-than-permanent fixture installed by one of the mechanics who must have lost the proper one. At least, that's my limited understanding of what happened!

By this time I was thoroughly exhausted, so I retired into the forward cabin for a nap. At about 6:00 we reached Taku Inlet and after a hasty dinner on board, my cousins, mother and I boarded the *Kathy M* and left Travis and my dad on the *Alaskan* for the ride home. We veered off with Nigel and Jaeger and headed up the Taku to meet my brother and sister-in-law at the Bullard's Landing cabin. The ride was pleasant and the water high; our big excitement was finding a herd of five moose together on the way. We arrived at about 7:30 and after my mother anchored the boat in the river we spent the rest of the evening in the warm and cozy cabin. Hopeful of berries, I was surprised to find that the strawberries (usually past their prime by then) were only beginning to set and were still weeks from maturing. Recall that in mid-May there was still several feet of solid snow on the ground! Still more than worn out, I left the others to chat into the evening and collapsed into my hammock for the night at 10:00 pm.

Next morning I slept in as late as I could for the first time in weeks. The clouds had lowered and it threatened to rain after five beautiful days. We had a slow morning

around the cabin, then decided to go explore the avalanche behind the meadow. This required crossing a wide slough, so we needed water transportation. My mother has a canoe with an engine mount and a small outboard (power is absolutely necessary in order to move against the river's current), but we could only fit three people comfortably. We decided to split up. Mike, Ben and Jeannette all went in the canoe while my mother, Amelia and I hiked back with the dogs. Unfortunately, Jaeger was distraught at being left

behind. We twice coaxed him to follow us through the woods behind the cabin but both times he skillfully disappeared and returned to the beach or the cabin. We finally tied a line to his harness and followed him downriver toward the entrance to the slough as he pursued his parents. We hiked through the first growth forest surrounding the cabin before breaking out into patches of strawberries along the bank. There were what appeared to be fox tracks in the sand at the edge of the water; Mike and Amelia said they'd seen wolf tracks too. We wandered father down stream until we broke out into the meadows near the slough, hurried by Jaeger's ambition to meet up with Jeannette and Ben. There we turned back toward the mountain, wading through head high grasses thick with seeds and avoiding the stands of willow. Though it hadn't yet started raining, our pants were quickly soaked by the dew. When we hit the slough, we started walking north along the shore looking for the canoe and leaping across small tributaries. The others had turned around farther upstream and were searching for us, somewhat delayed by Jaeger's loyalty.



Mom and Amelia tramping through the meadow



Crossing the slough

I soon saw grasses moving upstream and Mike emerged, followed by the canoe from around the corner. We met up, released Jaeger, and soon began ferrying people across

the slough. Jaeger was happy to swim, but I invited Nigel into the canoe; he leapt in without hesitation and crossed peacefully. Once on the other side we stepped back in time several months to early spring. The ground was recently exposed from under the avalanche; boulders lay here and there among the scrub, deposited by the snow. I called them “avalanche erratics.” Some of the willow bushes were heavily harvested by beavers and we marveled at how large the wood chips were. We soon began to clamber up the avalanche slope, mist pouring down from higher up. We hiked up to a large protrusion in the snow where there must be an enormous boulder or other obstacle that forced the snow to bulge. From there we were rewarded with a stunning view of the valley, though the glaciers across the river were obscured in mist. The placid brown slough with its borders of lush green grass gave an otherworldly quality to the landscape below.

On the way back we switched groups. Mom, Amelia and I took the canoe along with Nigel, the



Looking up the avalanche

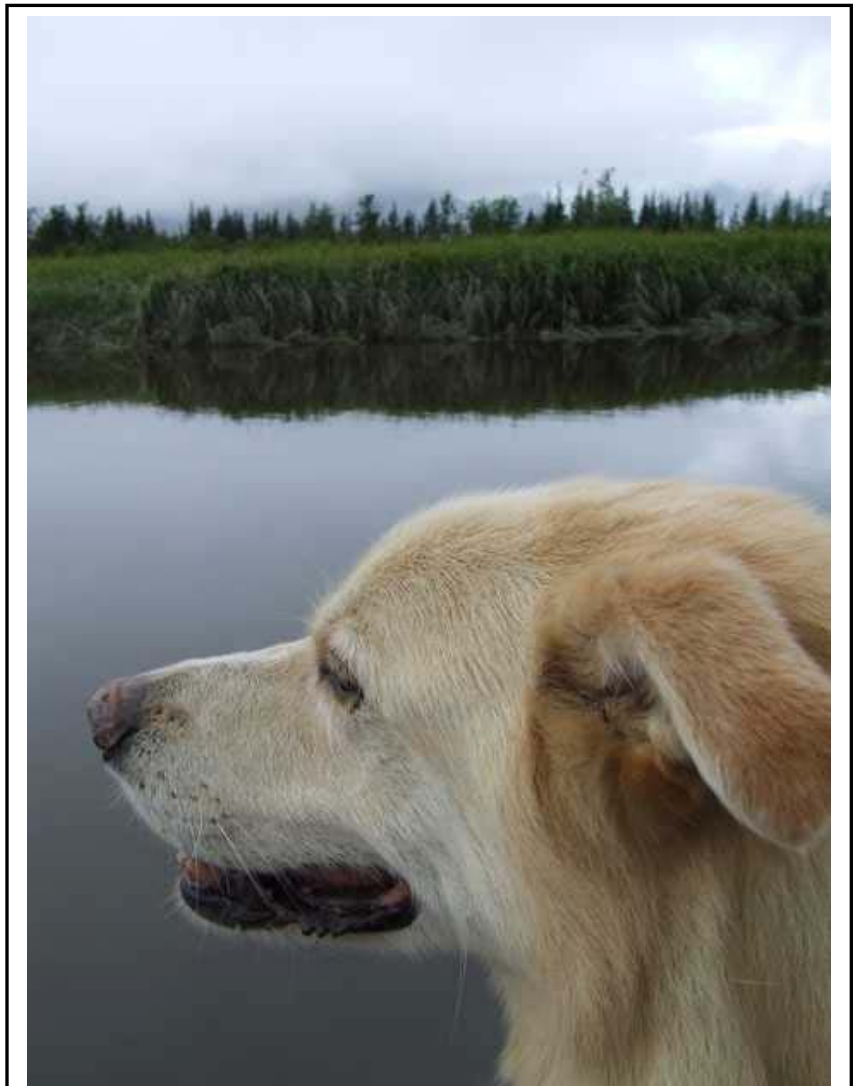


The slough and meadow from the avalanche

born-again boat dog. He was amazing. The hikers made it back to the cabin at the same time that we did. We removed the engine, hauled the canoe up on the bank, and returned to the cabin to warm up. Snacks and quesadillas for lunch, a little resting and warming up by the fire, then packing up for home. We took off around five o’clock with the intent to visit the Taku Glacier on the way

down. However, the wind was kicking up, the river was choppy, and the tilt on the engine was being finicky so we decided to head home. The rain started in earnest as we neared Jaw Point, in time to meet up with the first gillnetters. Gillnets are relatively long and shallow nets that float on the surface supported by small buoys and kept vertical in the water with weights at the bottom. The “cork line” on the surface is hard to pick out but it always ends with a big orange buoy. The other end is usually attached to the boat. Seeing a gillnetter adrift is a good sign that its net is in the water, but where it is in relation to the boat is anyone’s guess. You have to find the orange buoy and go around it, once you’ve determined whose buoy it is. In most cases multiple boats fish the same area and the nets hopelessly overlap so it’s difficult to determine how to avoid the nets without careful examination (often at close range) of all buoys. It is a task I rather enjoy, to the bewilderment of my mother who loathes running this gauntlet.

It didn’t help that the windshield wipers were broken, rendering it impossible to see any detail through them; we had to keep windows open, which was just as well with six people and two dogs in the cabin steaming things up. My mother drove with her head out the side window while Ben or Mike stood watch though the center window searching for the elusive orange buoys. Around Cooper Pt. I took over driving for a while, just in time for the swells to start up. From Cooper to Pt. Bishop we rode straight into them, 2-3’ seas, the spray splashing on the bow and anyone who happened to be looking out the center window. We were mostly free of gillnetters in that section until we rounded Bishop and headed toward Pt. Salisbury, now in the trough or quartering the seas. It was a rather tense few minutes, but we found all the buoys and pulled through.



Boat Dog in the canoe

The seas and the gillnetters slowed us down so we didn't make it home until 7:30, in time to unload, shower, eat and fall asleep in preparation for work the next day....all this adventuring is exhausting!



Heading home down the silty river