



BIO-OCEANS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

Web Page Address: <http://fox.nstn.ca/~pitech/BIO-News/>

Issue 6

January 2000

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

I hope that each of you had a very Merry Christmas, and wish you all of the best for the New Year. May it treat you to good health and good fortune.

As we begin a new millenium, I look forward to an Association which continues to grow in enthusiasm, numbers and activities within both the association and the community, and to hopefully begin generating a list of accomplishments of which we can all be proud.

In a few months we are planning another social event whereby we can all get together for some fun and updates. As well, early in January, I have been invited to a Tuesday Club meeting, where our request to assist in further development of the BIO archives will be discussed and hopefully approved. This would mean that the equipment archive could be started, the paper archives expanded, and some of the material and photos which have already been gathered could be displayed for the enjoyment of Association members, BIO staff and visitors.

Again I ask you for your input and suggestions to help our Association to grow, to better fulfill the needs of our members. Thank you.

Bob Reiniger
President

MEMBERSHIP

To date, we have 120 members for the current year ending April 30, 2000. We are hoping that those who have not renewed are having "senior's moment" and have merely forgotten or procrastinated in sending in the \$5.00 membership fee. Please check your membership card, and if the expiry date is 1999, then your membership has elapsed. To facilitate renewals, the Executive at the November meeting approved renewing membership at \$5.00 annually, \$25.00 for five years, and \$100.00 for life membership. We already have seven renewals for 2001 and one for 2004.

We are very pleased to welcome the following members:

Bob Aggas	860-0935	Glen Caldwell	461-8045
Clinton Edmonds	823-1211	Pat Gilbert	435-2858
Doug Loring	861-2767	Steven MacPhee	1-613-258-0283
David Nettleship	826-2360		

"Great minds
discuss ideas;
Average minds
discuss events;
Small minds
discuss people."

- Anonymous

"Procrastination
is the natural
assassin of
opportunity."

- Anonymous

The telephone numbers are included in case you would like to add these names to the list enclosed in the July newsletter.

We have not been very successful in obtaining new names to let them know about the Association. Betty would greatly appreciate receiving this information, together with address, phone number, etc. Also, please advise if you have had a change of address or phone, or if you have not been receiving the newsletter, published quarterly. Please call Betty at 443-2572.

SOCIAL EVENTS

Cocktail Party

HMCS Sackville

November 5, 1999

Thirty-eight people attended the Association's second cocktail party on board the *HMCS Sackville*. Although this number was considerably less than the 52 who attended the 1998 party, the conversation was lively and comments were favourable.

Bosko Loncarevic's short review of the cruises undertaken on the *Sackville* some years ago by BIO personnel, and the scientific results and interesting stories that emanated from these cruises was interesting and very entertaining, and gave a clear picture of the oceanographic work undertaken while the vessel was under BIO management.

Although all those who attended certainly seemed to have a great time, we would have liked to have had a larger turnout, and are wondering if members would prefer another type of entertainment. Your comments would be welcome and very much appreciated.

BIO Christmas Party

BIO Cafeteria

December 24, 1999

Several people at BIO have mentioned that this particular Christmas party was more heavily attended than any party they have had for a number of years. Although no one can come up with an obvious reason for this, it was nevertheless, a good year to be there. The chowder was delicious, and set the tone for a very festive event. The Association was well represented, but it would have been nice to see an even larger number of our members. Those who did arrive seemed to be thoroughly enjoying themselves. It was especially good to see old friends and colleagues whom we haven't seen in such a very long time.

Let's try to get more of our members out next year – and if we haven't yet exchanged season's greetings this year – hope you had a Merry Christmas, and have a happy and healthy 2000.

COMING UP!**COMING UP!****COMING UP!****COMING UP!****A Social Night at the Owls' Club**

March 4, 2000

As we mentioned in our last newsletter, Sharon and Don Locke have once more shouldered the responsibility for this event, and Don has again received permission to use this comfortable clubhouse so beautifully situated on Lake Banook. An open bar will be made available. A small plate of snacks (your own choice) would be welcome, as would a donation to the Food Bank. The total cost of using the premises will be \$200, and to cover this, a charge of \$5/person is requested, payable on arrival. Please let Don & Sharon know if you plan to come (835-5209).

We enjoyed this particular evening so much last year that we are looking forward to repeating the experience.

Board games, bridge and other card games, quiet conversation, whatever a body wishes, a body can have. Come and enjoy the evening – you'll be glad you did.

WANTED – SUGGESTIONS FOR SPRING, SUMMER AND FALL ACTIVITIES

Since it is almost impossible to plan largish events in a short time, an include everyone who wants to participate, please start to think now about what type of activity would interest you during the warm spring, summer and fall months. We could have a picnic – and if so, would you want it to be held at Fairbanks Centre, as it was in 1998, or somewhere else? Would some of you golfers like to have a special get-together? How about a hike? Or a short bicycle trip? Do you want a lecture on birdwatching? Gardening? Please contact Jackie Dale (466-2584) if you have any suggestions or ideas.

PERSONALS

Many of you will remember **Joan Sim**, who passed away November 30, 1999 at Melville Lodge, Halifax, after a long-term ordeal with Alzheimer's Disease. Joan worked at BIO 1965-1976, after which she retired to Kingston in the Annapolis Valley. Our sincere sympathy is extended to the members of Joan's family.

CORRESPONDENCE FROM OUR MEMBER IN CHINA

Members of the Association Executive were delighted to receive a note from Ying Wang, who is with the Department of Geology and Ocean Sciences of Nanjing University. Ying has visited this area several times, and has spent most of that time with BIO scientists. She is well-known in her field, and will also be remembered by those who met her for her smiling face and congenial disposition. She has been a member of our Association since it began, and writes that she appreciates our attention toward organizational events, and especially appreciates receiving the newsletter. Every time she receives it, she feels a little closer to her BIO contacts – and sends her best wishes to all.

Thank you Ying, for your letter and good wishes. We all wish for you a happy and prosperous 2000.
(Ed)

BIO-OCEANS MEMBER PUBLISHED

The article below was extracted from The Mail "Letters", MacLean's Special Issue, July 1-18, 1999 – written by member Warren Forrester (Ed.)

The following information may be pertinent to the subject of natural birth ("as nature intended"). Shortly before retiring in 1981 as chief tidal officer for the Canadian government, I undertook the study of the timing of about half a million births occurring in Ontario in the years 1974 to 1977. My purpose was to answer the recurring claim that the birth rate, like the ocean tide, is affected by the phases of the moon. The statistical method I employed tested both for correlation between birth rate and the phase of the moon, and between birth rate and the days of the week. The results showed no detectable correlation with the phase of the moon, but a strong correlation with the days of the week. My studies showed that birth rate peaked in the middle of the week and fell markedly over the weekend. One is left to speculate as to whether this reflects a tendency for the medical profession to interfere with nature in the birth process or whether nature reflects the fact that God created the earth in six days and rested on the seventh.

MEMBER WALKS FOR TERRY FOX

In October, 1999 Association member Earle S. Wagner participated in the Terry Fox Run for the 18th time. Earle, who was 76 on Christmas Day, completed the ten kilometers at a fast walk (77 minutes). He estimates that over the past years he has raised a total of approximately \$4000 for the Terry Fox Run. Earle's faithful participation was originally motivated by a prevalence of cancer in his own family, and in particular by the loss of his 16-year-old son from the disease in 1970. Since then he has continued to dedicate his efforts in support of cancer research.

Congratulations and thanks to Captain Earle S. Wagner for his commitment. (Ed.)

THE TRAVEL CORNER**Travelling the British Canals by Narrowboat**

Plans for this exciting trip are progressing favourably, due to the willingness of 12 people to make a commitment, but most definitely due to the time and energy devoted to the project by Liz and Clive Mason. Since the last newsletter, we have set a date, reserved three boats, and received detailed information regarding our itinerary.

For this our first trip, we decided that a week together on the narrowboats would be ideal, and have agreed upon the dates of June 4th – June 11th, 2000, supposedly a good time of year with regard to weather and canal traffic. Weather, of course, is important for comfort, and we apparently will have a good chance of clear skies - and certainly canal traffic will be most important. Since none of us have taken such a trip before, it should be interesting to say the least, to watch 12 new "pilots-in-training". In addition, our detailed travel guide states that over the one-week period of our trip we will be opening (and closing) 96 locks!

We have received "floor plans" of our boats, which have excellent facilities, and even include TV and microwave – plus all the "necessities", e.g., boat hook, pole, plank, maps (we have yet to be told what to do with these).

A toepath follows the canal along the shore, and since these boats travel very slowly, one can take turns riding and walking.

Within the next two months, air travel will be booked, meetings will be held to review details, such as personal itineraries before and after the canal trip, luggage, necessary clothing, etc. We hope to have most of the details organized in time to bring you up to date in our April newsletter. We intend to enjoy every minute!

Potential Travel Plans for 2000

Over the past several months, a number of places have been mentioned as potential destinations for those of us who have been bitten by the "travel bug":

- 1) **Newfoundland** – by bus/car – 1-2 weeks – July? – to attend a festival of Newfie music and travel to some of the outports.
- 2) **PEI** – by bus/car – 2-7 days – between June and September – to take in beaches, theatre, walks, golf, etc.
- 3) **Nova Scotia** - 1, 2 or 3-day trips – between May and October – Annapolis Valley, South Shore, Eastern Shore, etc.

There is a massive number of festivals, concerts, bazaars and county fairs which take place in all four Atlantic Provinces from early June to late September. We could gather together carloads (or busloads, depending upon the number of people interested) and plan some exciting, interesting and fun-filled itineraries. Please remember that **everything** is flexible – places to visit, dates, methods of transportation, etc. are all up for discussion.

Our aim is to please as many people as possible, and to get at least some of these trips off to a running start. So please, let's hear from you. Call Jackie Dale (455-2584) with ideas and suggestions. If there is no answer, leave a message, she'll get back to you.

THE ASSOCIATION WEB PAGE

The word is out on the BIO-Oceans Web Page, and it's definitely a good word! Many people at BIO have commented very favourably on the quality of both content and presentation, and admit to returning to the website at regular intervals.

For this we have Bosko Loncarevic to thank. Bosko is one of the busiest of our retirees, yet he has taken the time to put his considerable talents to work and provide us with something of which we can be very proud.

Thank you Bosko. You, and others like you, are taking giant steps in the process of promoting a positive image of the BIO-Oceans Association.

For those of you who don't already know, the address of our webpage is

<http://fox.nstn.ca/~pitech/BIO-News/>

Contributions of Articles for Our BIO-Oceans Association Newsletter

I'm sure that it has already become obvious to the reader that this January newsletter is much thicker than any other previous newsletter. It is mainly the result of an urgent SOS sent out in our October 1999 issue.

We hope you enjoy the material, and remember that we have to produce another newsletter in early April. We are aware that this message definitely leans on the repetitive side, but our need is an ongoing one. Please send in bits of news, clippings that could interest our members, and don't hesitate to exercise your creative talents!

Heartfelt thanks go out to those who responded to that desperate cry for help. The result is apparent.

WHO AM I?

My origin was as a Halogonian.

Laboratory analyses were my initial assignment.

Research and quality were in the names of my organizations.

The brown mud of Minas basin is known to me.

Travelled around well known Atlantic Islands, by land and sea.

Assessed the wounds from an Arrow.

Hydrocarbons and evolved gas were found and determined.

Administration and planning was part of my career.

I have a relationship with Oceans Sector.

Have had a seasonal role in the entertainment business.

Travelled in South and Central America, Europe, and Asia.

The above is Puzzle #4 in our "Who Am I?" series. This one should be a piece of cake! Don't forget call Bob Reiniger (477-9833) or Dale Buckley (434-5734) to place your guess – as always, the first one to call wins the prize! (Ed)

WHO AM I (#3)?

(October 1999)

BRUCE CARSON

(Biography)

Originating from Halifax, Bruce completed post secondary technical training at the Bell Road Vocational School in 1961 and began work with the Naval Research Establishment in 1962. Initial colleagues at NRE included Tom Courtney and Ced Mann with whom Bruce continued to work when he came to BIO in 1965. His initial technical challenges were salinity titrations, calibration of inductively coupled salinometers, and deployment of bathythermographs (including the historic carbon and gold slide BTs). These assignment were carried out with John Lazier, Charles Ross and Art Coote.

A long career of oceanographic expeditions began in 1965 on board the *LABRADOR* in Baffin Bay where some of the earliest work by the Ocean Circulation Group was conducted. Technical support and electronic maintenance of this research was continued with *HUDSON* in the Labrador Sea and the Denmark Strait in 1966 and 1967, while working with Drs. Swallow, Val Worthington, Gary Metcalf and Ced Mann. Tracing water mass characteristics, new *in situ* CTD technologies began in the late 1960's and resulted in the first continuous mode detection of the Mediterranean Outflow in 1969 while working from the ill-fated *HUDSON* expedition to the Mid Atlantic Ridge and Portugal. At this time three ship's officers died (the captain died just before the departure, and the chief steward and ship's doctor died at sea). Another notable expedition on *HUDSON* was carried out in the Caribbean Sea in 1968 where marine geological research was carried out by Drs. James Marlowe, Grant Bartlett, Charles Schafer and others.

A highlight of Bruce's oceanographic experience was participation in the HUDSON 70 Expedition when he was the chief technical officer for physical oceanographic research through the Atlantic leg, and around South America to Chile. He also joined *HUDSON* again on this historic expedition during part of the passage through the Arctic Archipelago.

Other oceanographic expeditions and research projects were carried out from *DAWSON*, *THETA*, and *BAFFIN* with Neil Oakey, Bob Reiniger, Warren Forester, Jim Elliott and Ross Hendry, in diverse areas such as the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the Gulf Stream, and the Norwegian Sea. Bruce recalls that during the 1980's two of these expeditions were memorable for the impressive destructive power of the sea. On one of these, *HUDSON* was assigned the tragic task of retrieving bodies of eight crewmen lost from the sunken drill rig *OCEAN RANGER*. On the last expedition of the *BAFFIN*, in the Norwegian Sea, the fury of the sea inflicted severe damage to the ship and oceanographic equipment.

Bruce has great satisfaction in his contributions to oceanographic research at BIO where he acted as a technical coordinator and Senior Oceanographic Technician/Physical, until his retirement in 1995.

Charlie Ross won the prize for guessing Bruce Carson as the person described in our 3rd "Who Am I?" puzzle. It was, surprisingly, a tough one. Congratulation Charlie! (Ed)

OYSTERS ROCK-A-FELLER

by

Dale E. Buckley

A steady strong breeze blew across Malpeque Bay into Salt Creek, causing the Cape Islander boat to rock gently. This was the kind of day that made Mel feel uncomfortable. On the best of days, when the wind was gentle and the boat barely moved on the water, Mel was still anxious that our sampling should be completed as soon as possible so that we could return to stable land. Although Mel enjoyed the new experience of working on a research project in the pleasant rural setting of the northwestern part of Prince Edward Island, his student days in Toronto had not provided him with experience of sea sickness.

Having completed most of our survey of the small feeder creeks leading into the deeper water of Malpeque Bay, we were now in the process of obtaining samples of the soft silt and mud that was choking the channels along the tidal creeks. We had found that many of the areas that had previously contained ideal oyster habitats were now much impoverished because of the erosion of the soil around the creeks. Many of the red soil banks fringed with spruce and alders were being rapidly cut back by the relentless tide and wave action on the shore.

Our sampling with the long awkward rakes had found beds of oysters still located on some of the sandy banks around parts of the bay, but many of the specimens were a far cry from the oysters that had won the World Gold Medal in Paris in 1905. Our specimens were not items of beauty. The rough shells were distorted in elongated slabs that resembled trampled sheep dung. Mel could not appreciate that such an ugly shellfish could be desirable gourmet food. He might accept that if the flesh were removed in some remote fish plant, smoked and then canned, he might bring himself to sample a little on a saltine cracker. But the idea of consuming the raw flesh from the half shell was not something he would discuss, especially on days like this, when the motion of the sea was not exactly tranquil!

As I started the outboard motor on our small "oceanographic vessel", Mel prepared our sample containers for the next area of our survey near the mouth of MacLean's Creek. In past years this area had been one of the most productive oyster harvesting regions around Malpeque Bay. Several farmers still supplemented their income by raking a few barrels of oysters from the more sandy banks every year.

"I sure hope that old Mr. McLean does not decide to pay us a visit out here today" grumbled Mel. "I have enough difficulty understanding him on days when the wind is not blowing up a gale, like it is today."

We reached our sampling location and dropped our anchor in the soft bottom mud. I was pessimistic that we would find any good specimens of oysters in this particular locality. As we brought up our first samples, I had the feeling that Mel would not be content to spend much time at this site. The bottom mud was black and barren of any sign of marine life. As we laboriously picked through the mud to find even small specimens of mussels, a stench of decaying vegetation and hydrogen sulfide met our senses. I could see a perceptible change in Mel's complexion. Small beads of perspiration appeared on his forehead as we bent over the samples.

We were about to move to our next sampling site when we heard the faint familiar sound of wooden oars being stroked through the oarlocks on Mr. McLean's rowboat. As he neared our boat, I could see that the 86-year-old man was wearing his familiar red plaid jacket and dirty brown peak cap. As usual he had his hip waders rolled down below his knees. This was his normal attire for inspecting the strange activities of these scientists from the Marine Biological Station. Mr. McLean's family roots extended back into the early history of settlement on Prince Edward Island. In fact, the creek in which we were conducting our present survey was named after his grandfather.

Mr. McLean's knowledge of the creek and the surrounding area was a valuable source of historical data on the nature of changes that had occurred here in his lifetime. In his younger years he had been one of the successful oyster fishermen who harvested some of the best oysters that could be obtained in Canada. He was now still a robust senior citizen who remained active in maintaining his small farm at the head of McLean's Creek. He had grown quite hard of hearing, but this did not appear to bother him, especially when he held his conversations with the naïve scientists. In his mind, these fellows had little to say that was worth hearing in any case.

"What you fellers up to today?"

"Oh, we are still trying to find out where there might be viable oysters in this area, Mr. McLean" I replied.

"Shoot, there ain't no valuable oysters out here. You fellers should go up to the bank near my place if you want to find any oysters. That's where I got these fellers" said Mr. McLean, as he pointed to a few mud-encrusted examples lying in the bottom of his boat.

Well, we have to check all the possible areas for this survey” I informed him.

‘Yeh, I s’pose, if you got lots of time an’ nothin’ better to do”, said Mr. McLean as he picked up one of the oysters from the bottom of his boat. “You fellers ever eat any of them oysters that you do find?” he inquired as he took a rusted jackknife from his pants pocket. Mel quickly informed Mr. McLean that these were scientific specimens we were collecting, and that they were to be returned to the laboratory for study.

Mr. McLean’s gnarled old hands were still deft at shucking an oyster shell and retrieving the translucent flesh with one quick movement of the knife blade. A thought occurred to Mr. McLean as he dangled the blob of moist flesh on the end of the blade, “You young fellers interested in finding quahogs? Some of them down in the mud out in the bay.”

Mel watched in transfixed repulsion as he observed the old man suspend the fresh oyster flesh on the end of the knife blade. Could it be that the old man was going to eat this raw gelatinous substance? This act of consumption would be particularly noxious to Mel as he remembered that Mr. McLean had no visible signs of having teeth. On previous occasions when Mr. McLean had brought a sandwich out with him on his social visits, he had to ‘gum’ his way through the soft parts and discard the hard crust from the home-made bread. During these lunches it seemed that Mr. McLean’s stubble covered chin virtually touched his nose on the down bite.

Mel tried to divert himself to the task of coiling rope for the sampler, but his eyes were hypnotically drawn back to the spectre of the dangling raw oyster flesh. In one quick motion Mr. McLean tilted back his head and allowed the slimy oyster to fall into his open mouth. Nearly all of it entered the gaping orifice, but some of it treaked noticeably down his chin. This was quickly removed by the back of Mr. McLean’s hand being drawn across his mouth.

Mel’s quick lurch toward the outboard gunwale of our boat caused sudden rocking in both vessels. Surprised, Mr. McLean quizzically looked at Mel hanging his head over the side of the boat.

“What’s that about New Yark?”

Hope you enjoyed the above story as much as we did. Dale swears that it is true in every respect, but names have been changed to protect the innocent! (Ed.)

LOOKING FOR A MEANINGFUL ACTIVITY IN YOUR RETIREMENT?

Consider Youth Mentoring

I would like to introduce you to the Youth/Mentor Project we are delivering for Human Resources Development Canada, Bedford Office. Mentors and youth would be from the area served by that office: Bedford, Sackville, Waverley, Fall River, and East Hants. The spirit of the project is to recognize the talents, training, skills and wisdom of recently retired persons as valuable community resources to work primarily with high school students to facilitate an understanding of the relevance of education to work and to build career awareness. Schools will assist in identifying youth who would benefit from this project.

Mentoring may involve working individually or in groups. You will receive orientation and training as a volunteer in this area and you will have a support system at all times. There is no set time commitment. It really depends on you. It can vary from two to ten hours per week, or more. If you are interested in becoming part of this worthwhile project, or if you would like to have more information contact

Louise Vey, Project Coordinator
TRM Consulting (832-9866)

ALASKA CRUISE 1999

Ship: *Universe Explorer* (operated by World Explorer Cruises)

Ports of Call: Wrangell, Juneau, Skagway, Valdez, Seward, Sitka, Ketchikan and Victoria

By Liz Mason

You might think it would be easy to persuade a semi-retired oceanographer to go on a cruise – not so! Was it the thought of no experiment to worry about, no expensive equipment to be thrown over the side never to be seen again, or no night watch in the teeth of a howling Atlantic gale? I don't know, but only after I persuaded 8 old friends (one of whom we hadn't seen for 30 years) to join us did I detect a glimmer of enthusiasm.

On August 8th we flew to Vancouver, and boarded the *Universe Explorer* along with our friends around 1pm on August 10th. The weather was glorious that day as we sailed out under the Lions Gate Bridge and headed up toward Prince Rupert through Canada's Inside Passage. Many passengers were seen sporting little patches behind the ear, but to be honest I had difficulty believing I was on a ship for most of the time. The cruise turned out to be as good or better than we hoped. For one thing the weather on the coast of Alaska is totally unpredictable, also there is a lot of rain forest and that only exists where there is a lot of rain! Some years May and June are good and August is very wet, but fortunately this year August (or at least 10th-24th) was great.

It did rain cats and dogs in Juneau, and the morning in Skagway was damp with low cloud but cleared around noon. When it was fine it was absolutely glorious, and even when it wasn't, it was O.K. Other than Juneau the only wet weather was when we were "at sea" on our way to and from Seward and Valdez, which didn't matter. I thought that once out of the Inside Passage the trip would have been rougher – it was still like a millpond. There was virtually no vibration on board, which Clive said was due to the engine being a steam driven turbine or some such.

with plenty of storage space for clothing and suitcases (what bliss to unpack and not have to do the usual hauling of luggage in and out of hotel/motel).

I would definitely recommend an outer cabin – it's nice to open the porthole occasionally though the cabin was air-conditioned. The room was serviced at least twice a day.

We had chosen the Upper Deck which was one deck above the main dining room and one below the buffet style restaurant and bars which lead to the aft sun deck and the main lounge where the entertainment and lectures took place. I think this was a good choice. We also chose the second sitting for the evening meal (8pm) which gave one more time ashore on the days in port.

Part of the appeal of this cruise was that they stressed that getting all dressed up was not necessary. The men were very casual except for the Captain's Reception and Farewell Dinner (jackets and ties if you wanted to) and the women dressed up as much or as little as they felt like – but nobody seemed to care one way or the other.

We were particularly pleased with the meals. Five courses for the evening meal and one could in fact eat all five and still feel comfortable. I have never eaten so much smoked salmon in my life – especially good for breakfast. There was a barbecue on the aft deck at lunchtime most days and steak/roast beef was often on the menu so meat lovers didn't suffer.

There were a lot of interesting lectures on the geology, history, biology and anthropology of Alaska (several on each topic) spread throughout the two weeks. In addition we had the pleasure of hearing our good buddy Jim give two lectures on the work he and his colleagues have been doing on Utzi the Tyrolean iceman. Funnily enough, while we were in Skagway another iceman was discovered a few miles away in B.C.

The entertainment on board which of course like the lectures was entirely optional, was offered on the "travelling days" and we enjoyed it greatly. It satisfied a wide range of interests. The library was a very pleasant facility and included a computer lab which offered courses but did not have internet or email which I think was GREAT. What with no telephone or real TV this was a complete break from the usual pressures. You could run a mile around the boat deck at 7am or do stretching at 8am or aerobics at 8:30 – or you could stay in bed! Card games seemed to be going on here and there, and there were some videos on the TV in your cabin as well as movies around 9:30 in the Theatre. In other words no shortage of things to do. Actually I found that just trying to find your way around the ship was challenging enough both physically and intellectually. How on earth do you know which end is the pointy end once you are below decks? It certainly helps if you know an oceanographer.

Loads of trips to choose from on shore or you could just wander around to museums and shops. Incidentally ladies, Alaska has duty free imported jewelry – I am talking GEMS. In most ports there are shops called Columbian Emeralds and such. I couldn't understand at first why the Americans would bother to buy their jewelry in a tiny little place like Sitka when they could do so back home in San Francisco. The penny finally dropped – it's cheaper! Sitka was our favourite port – interesting history and fewer T-shirt shops – some lovely Inuit sculptures and Russian handicrafts. I even did some Christmas shopping. The other advantage of August is that being the end of season there were quite a lot of sales. Only 5% sales tax too!

We visited eight ports in all. Many of the main cruises go up and back in a week and visit only four. I thought I would be desperate to get off the ship after two weeks with that many people (750 + crew) but in fact I would have loved to have had an extra few more days and gone on to visit the Aleutians. The bigger cruise ships can carry over 3000 people on board. Some of our group went by helicopter or took seaplane flights over the mountains and glaciers and that was apparently fantastic. I went sea kayaking which was a good chance to try something new - much more comfortable than canoeing. We also took a great boat trip to the Kenai Fjords out of Seward and saw lots of whales, sea otters, puffins, etc. and of course glaciers. One of the most spectacular parts for scenery was Glacier Bay. Wonderful weather that day and incredible scenery. Also we took the White Pass Railway from Skagway to Bennets Lake B.C. and returned by bus, which I would highly recommend.

Our mid-range cabin and all the meals etc. cost about Cdn \$4500-5000/person or approximately \$2500/person/week which compares favourably with the other cruise lines – probably because there was no waterfall, casino or golf course on board. In all we spent about \$500 each on board for side trips, bar expenses, tips and purchases in the ship's gift shop. It would have been easy to spend twice that by doing a couple of the helicopter/seaplane trips, or less if you just explored the communities by foot which we often did. I was pleased that the staff was not pushy in any way and they told you all the good things that you could do on your own in port rather than pressuring you to take the trips which could be booked on the ship.

It was a wonderful holiday and I would highly recommend it - especially for a group of friends. I would also recommend that you book through CAA (20% off) as early as possible in order to get the best possible cabin for the price you want to pay. The Millenium will probably be even busier than 1999. If anyone wants more info they can call World Explorer Cruises at 1-800-854-3835. It is based in San Francisco. I dealt originally with a guy called Tom who was very helpful.

Sincere thanks to Liz for taking the time to provide us with such detailed information about their trip. Many of us still have Alaska on our list of "places yet to see". (Ed.)

CONTACTS FOR INFORMATION

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