

Travels and Adventures Aboard the American Tug *Miss Liberty*

by Chas Garbe



This is copy of the blog that I wrote the summer of 2006 about the commissioning of our new boat Miss Liberty and our two month cruise on the Inside Passage.

When we decided to purchase an American Tug 34, we were encouraged by Tom Nelson, the president of TOMCO, to use the boat on the west coast before shipping it to our home in Wisconsin. They said we could pick the boat up right at the factory, cruise with the boat over summer and then the factory would help us ship it to Wisconsin.

We thought that was a great idea and made plans to free up our schedule for a boating trip running from June 10 to Sept. 10. We ordered the boat a year in advance to have it available at our chosen date of June 12.

In preparation for the trip I read six travel logs of other people who had done the Inside Passage. I also read every cruising guide written on the subject and decided that a trip of at least La Conner to Ketchikan was doable with my boating skill level and time allotted. The trip turned out to be a once in a lifetime experience. I have written the following trip diary in part to encourage others to do this trip with their new American Tug and to give boaters a feel for what the trip is like.

Sunday, May 28, 2006



This is our American Tug 34 under construction in La Conner, Washington. It should be completed around June 12.

Friday, June 9, 2006



The neighborhood Garbes had a great 60th birthday party for me and a big send off for Barb and me. We thought it would be a great symbolic starting date for our great venture.



We talked to the factory and they said everything is on schedule for a June 12 launch.

Saturday, June 10, 2006



We are ready to start on our trip from Hudson, WI to Seattle. We won't be sleeping in our RV because it's full of things for the boat.

Thursday, June 15, 2006



We had an exciting day today. We watched the factory roll our completed boat outside and then launch it for the sea trial. We spent the morning in Seattle purchasing the remaining charts we needed and buying boating gear.

Monday, June 19, 2006

The factory released the boat to us this afternoon. Kurt Dilworth then gave us training in our new boat while we moved it from La Conner to Anacortes. We will be in Anacortes the rest of the week while the boat completes commissioning. Needless to say the first ride in our boat was real exciting.

Friday, June 23, 2006



Here are the results of our week outfitting the boat in Anacortes. This picture shows the window screens made by Doug Comstock.



Anacortes Marine Electronics installed Furuno radar, chart plotter, auto pilot, depth finder, GPS and two Icon radios.



Eric Paul from *by Design* did an incredible job on the graphics.



Cap Sante Marine sold us a Boss 8.5 tender with a 9.9 hp Honda motor and installed a Sea Wise system to secure everything on the swim platform.

Saturday, June 24, 2006



Saturday was spent shopping for the rest of our boating supplies. We left a lot of money at Wal-Mart and West Marine. We spent the afternoon stowing everything away.



Our son John, whom will travel with us for the first half, spent the evening doing a tender “sea trial”. By his smile it must have passed. Tomorrow we will head to the San Juans for some boating practice.

Sunday, June 25, 2006



We spent Sunday on a 60 mile shakedown cruise from Anacortes to the San Juan Islands and then back to La Conner. The weather was perfect with no clouds, 80 degrees and no wind except in the afternoon. The picture shows Mt. Baker in the distance.

Wednesday, June 28, 2006



Everything seems to be in working order on our new boat and we've completed our new owner briefings so we left on our trip this morning. We spent yesterday buying the rest of our supplies and packing. Last evening we had a training session on the operation and maintenance of our engine from a Cummins factory rep which was very helpful. We traveled 30 miles on our first day and stopped at Friday Harbor in the San Juans. This is a picture of the harbor. Tomorrow we head into Canada.

Friday, June 30, 2006



This is Dodd Narrows, our first serious rapids on the Inside Passage. It's on the lower east coast of Vancouver Island near Nanaimo. We stayed in Pirate's Cove last night just south of here. We crossed the Strait of Georgia this morning. It was like glass. We're at Pender Harbor this afternoon looking around and buying some supplies. We'll spend the night at Harmony Island Marine Park.

Saturday, July 1, 2006



We entered Princess Lousia Inlet this morning and found a mooring buoy to tie on to. Then we took the tender on a tour of the inlet. This first picture shows us in front of Chatterbox Falls.



We took a two hour hike up the mountain on the roughest trail I have ever been on but the view at the top of the inlet was fantastic. Sunday we will head towards Lund.

Monday, July 3, 2006



This is Dent Rapids, the last of three major rapids that are together on the Inside Passage. We had heard so much about how dangerous they can be that we didn't know what to expect. We followed the cruising guides' instructions and timed our passage for slack water. We found them to be quite tame at that time. Dent has a whirlpool that forms called Devil's Hole that can suck a canoe down. We anchored at Port Harvey for the night.

Tuesday, July 4, 2006

We left out anchorage at 6:00 this morning and found Johnstone Strait calm so we sped up to 15 knots to get to the top of the strait before the winds came up. Later in the day we entered Queen Charlotte Strait and had our first heavy weather, with waves 3 to 4 ft. and spray on the windows continually. Our tug gave us a comfortable ride at our cruising speed of 8 ½ knots.



We'll anchor at Walker Group Islands tonight and if conditions are good, we'll leave early to cross Queen Charlotte Sound. As we go around Cape Caution opposite the top of Vancouver Island, it will be one of the few times we will be exposed to the open ocean on this trip.



Barb puts on a big feast for John and me every night. No hardships here.

Wednesday, July 5, 2006



We left our anchorage at 5:30 for an uneventful three hour crossing of Queen Charlotte Sound. No complaints. We stopped early so we could go hiking along the ocean at Pruth Bay. We anchored there for the night with this sailboat. It was the first cloudy day since we left Wisconsin June 10.

Saturday, July 8, 2006



We stopped in Butedale for the night. It's an old fish cannery ghost town that quit operation forty years ago. John wanted to check it out. A delightful retired older gentleman is the caretaker. We hired his granddaughter, who was staying with him for the summer, to give us a tour.

Sunday, July 9, 2006



Sunday morning we stopped at Bishop Bay Hotsprings for a delightful hot tub soak. It's just this building out in the middle of nowhere that everyone on the Inside Passage stops at.



We spent the night at beautiful Lowel Inlet anchored in front of Varney Falls. The current from the falls kept us facing away from the shore. A beautiful trawler next to us had to leave when the wind pushed him out of the current and he swung too close to shore. He left just as it was getting dark and we felt for him because he had an hour or two of travel to find another anchorage. The bottom drops off so fast it's hard to find an anchorage that's not too deep in the area.

Monday, July 10, 2006



We stopped for the night at the Prince Rupert Yacht Club. Prince Rupert is a small town but a very large port because it's at the end of the Canadian National Rail Line. They load grain and coal for export. We walked into town for groceries and checked out their local museum. Found a nice restaurant on the waterfront for supper.

Tuesday, July 11, 2006

After leaving Prince Rupert we crossed Dixon Entrance. It's 95 miles from Prince Rupert to Ketchikan including 30 miles open to the ocean. We had weather reports of gale and storm warnings late evening yesterday and overnight. The morning brought clear skies and little wind so we headed out. We traveled at 15 knots for the first half and then back to 8.7 knots for the last half. We lucked out and had calm to small ripple seas most of the way.

We usually cruise at 8.7 knots because that puts us at about 2 miles per gallon, my trip goal for fuel use. In the future on shorter trips I plan to cruise closer to 8 knots, which should get us 3 miles/gallon. Seven knots will get us close to 4 miles/gallon but that's too slow for me. Cruising at 10 to 15 ½ knots is a consistent 1 mile/gallon, so we usually only travel at 8 to 8 ½ or 15 knots.



Ketchikan has the cruise ships, four when we arrived. They are quite a contrast to the small town atmosphere and mountain background.



I will think of the small float planes most though when I think of Ketchikan. I would say there are about thirty of them at the dock giving sightseeing rides to the cruise ship travelers. When they land, some only thirty seconds apart, they look like a snake of dots in the sky. When they take off it sounds like WWII fighters doing a bombing run, their engines at full throttle going by in quick succession.

Thursday, July 13, 2006



We stopped at the Anan Wildlife Observatory northwest of Ketchikan this morning. They only allow sixty visitors a day and we didn't have reservations so we were lucky to get three spots that were cancellations. We anchored out and took the tender up a creek to meet a ranger who instructed us how to safely hike the ½ mile trail to the viewing platform. The platform is near a small falls where black and brown bear along with eagles fish for salmon. It was the experience of a lifetime. We ran into one bear on the trail but he went on his way and left us alone. The viewing platform has a three foot fence around it and two park rangers to answer questions. We were 15 to 20 feet from this grizzly and just 5 to 10 feet from some black bears. The mothers had the cutest little cubs. The bald eagles were everywhere and very close.

For the night we stayed at Wrangell, a wonderful small Alaskan fishing town. We had the most wonderful fresh prawn (large shrimp) for supper.



There is an eighteen foot tide here and this fishing boat was parked on a grid at high tide so it could be worked on when the tide went out. We visited with Chris and Judy Boyle on the AT-34092 Alyssa. They were heading south after being on the northern end of the Inside Passage. They encouraged us to keep heading north and to go into Tracy Arm. They assured us that this was the type of boating our AT 34 was made for. It was very reassuring to know we weren't getting into things we couldn't handle by heading further north.

Sunday, July 16, 2006



We stayed in Petersburg Harbor last night. This is a small harbor with a fishing fleet and two canneries. They don't have special slips for cruising boats. You stay in a fisherman's slip while he's out fishing. The two block main street is just bustling with people going about their business. They have a six week tourist season and a three month fishing season to make most of their income for the year. Temps are 55 to 60 but they don't have much freezing weather in the winter. We just loved the town.



From Petersburg we headed north through Stephens Passage and came across a bay full of Humpback whales. (20 to 25+). We stopped the boat for an hour and a half and had 7 whales swim right near the boat. We watched them dive repeatedly and breach at least a dozen times, two times right next to the boat. A breach is when they fly out of the water and then turn and crash to the water on their backs. It was quite thrilling. It was a very still day so we could hear them breathe and make loud sounds like a bull.

Tuesday, July 18, 2006



We headed up the narrow 22 mile long Tracy Arm to see Sawyer Glacier that calves icebergs into the sea. The route is lined with 5,000 to 6,000 foot mountains that drop straight into the sea. The water is over 1,000 ft. deep and full of ice. Water temp. is 33 degrees.



Today we went up Endicott Arm to see Dawes Glacier which was just as great as yesterday. Every boater should try to do this sometime. Our boat was made for just this kind of boating. This is as far north as we have time to go. Like they say in Labrador, it's not the end of the world but you can see it from here!

Wednesday, July 19, 2006



We stayed at a small government float on Entrance Island in Hobart Bay. We shared the float with a 3rd generation Norwegian salmon fisherman from Petersburg. He had a wonderful boat and answered all our questions about the fishing industry. He also showed us how to spot the mountain goats on the mountain in the background.



Not to be outdone, we have our own fisherman in residence.

Thursday, July 20, 2006



This is Thomas Bay, NW of Petersburg. It has giant mountains, a neat glacier and is a beautiful spot. We have anchored here two different times now.

Tuesday, July 25, 2006



We stopped in Vixen Harbor last night. It's a beautiful little cove just big enough for two or three boats to anchor. We choose places to stop from one

of the four guidebooks we carry. We like Don Douglass's books because they cover every cove and possible stop on the Inside Passage and Charlie's Charts because it only covers the must see spots that shouldn't be missed. We choose only the best anchorage to stop at and our anchor has always set easily and the water is usually dead calm. We are quite often the only boat in the anchorages and we usually go exploring with the tender in the evening. We almost never go ashore because of bear issues.



This is Meyer's Chuck newspaper, phone company and post office. Barb was reading the guidebook and said this was a place we should stop for



awhile. So we pulled into Meyer's Chuck to look around. It turned out to be a delightful harbor with a nice government dock. There are no businesses there, just 15 to 20 very interesting cabins and a nice hike through the rain forest to the opposite beach. It's always nice to find a good spot to get off the boat for awhile and hike around. Great stop.

Wednesday, July 26, 2006



We started clock-wise around Behm Canal on the way to Misty Fjords National Monument. Once you get off the Inside Passage in Alaska the boats are relatively few. Today we didn't see another boat on the Behm. It's very remote with no radio reception of any kind. There are always sport fishing boats from fly-in camps and commercial fishing boats around somewhere so there's emergency help if you need it. It's just that if you have a break-down help is slow to arrive and very expensive because of the distances involved. This is a picture of Klu Bay off Shrimp Bay where we anchored. It's my favorite anchorage of the trip. Steep mountains all around, two small creeks for bear watching (we didn't see any), a big rock with a dozen seals and lots of eagles.

Thursday, July 27, 2006



Today we went through two fjords (Walker Cove and Punchbowl Cove). In Punchbowl Barb and John took a mile hike along a mountain stream and waterfall to a beautiful lake. I stayed on the boat because it was too deep to leave the boat anchored unattended (120 feet). The maximum depth that we can anchor overnight is 90 feet. Most nights we anchor in 60 to 90 foot depths. We never anchor in less than 30 feet so we don't have to worry about the tide. The fog and haze cleared off quite a bit today so we could see the snow-covered mountain tops. We used a private buoy to tie up for the night. The tour companies use it during the day.

Saturday, July 29, 2006



Today we flew home from Ketchikan for a six day break. We need to attend to some things on the farm and check up on the grandchildren. The picture is downtown Ketchikan and in the foreground is the empty cruise ship dock. The cruise ships don't normally stop on weekends. The harbor in the center is Thomas Basin where we left the boat. Son John will stay on board until we return for the second half of the trip.

Saturday, August 5, 2006



We flew back to Ketchikan and are ready to start the second half of our trip, from Ketchikan to LaConner, WA. John, who was watching the boat while we were home, flew home today. The airport is on the other side of Tongass Narrows from town so we took John over to the airport dock with our boat.

Sunday, August 6, 2006



Nancy and Jerry, on the left, are our new crew for the trip to La Conner. After a day of sightseeing, grocery shopping and boat familiarization

yesterday in Ketchikan, we're starting out this morning. We made a short stop at the Native American village of Metlakata. It had a great harbor and we enjoyed a walk around town. We sampled some homemade treats at a



food booth in the city park. We spent the night in Foggy Bay shown in the picture. It's at the halfway mark to Prince Rupert.

Tuesday, August 8, 2006



Today we traveled down Greenville Channel and stopped at Baker Inlet. The narrow entrance is 60 feet deep but gets down to only 30 feet wide. The picture shows it as we left in the morning at slack tide but we entered it at two hours before slack the night before. We definitely wouldn't do that again because it was a very turbulent three knots and we had to add a lot of power to maintain control. We forgot it was spring tide. (Tides change the most at new and full moon and are called spring tides.)

Thursday, August 10, 2006



There are a half dozen fjords claiming to be the most scenic of the Inside Passage but our vote goes to Gardner Canal. We'll let the pictures show why. The navigation is easy and the waters hazard free and we rarely see another boat.



Tuesday, August 15, 2006



We stopped at Ocean Falls today and I fell in love with the town. It was a paper mill with 5,000 residents but after the mill closed 30 years ago the population is down to 30 winter residents and 100 summer residents. The town is trying to be reborn as a retirement community. It was a fun place to explore. The picture is the power dam above the town.

Wednesday, August 16, 2006



Today we anchored in Eucott Bay and went to the hot springs there. The water comes out of the mountainside very warm and people have taken rocks and concrete to make a large hot tub.



We also passed the monument that marks the site where Sir Alexander Mackenzie completed his overland journey across Canada to the Pacific, several years before Lewis and Clark.

Thursday, August 17, 2006



We've seen such great scenery, all the special animals and birds, and had such great experiences that when we start out in the morning it's hard to imagine we can have yet another exciting day, but we always do. Today as we went out into Dean Channel we came across a large pod of killer whales. We shut the motor off and drifted among them while they put on a good show feeding on salmon. From there we went into South Bentinck Arm and came across two chinook helicopters flying timber down the mountainsides. The danger and flying skill level were beyond belief. We watched as they dropped the logs into the water in front of us.



Then we went to the end of South Bentinck Arm and anchored for lunch in front of some world class scenery.



We ended the day hiking up from Larso Bay to the largest red cedar in B.C. It was nearly 20 ft. in diameter at the base. So goes another incredible day of adventure.

Friday, August 18, 2006



I thought Ocean Falls had a picturesque setting for a town but I think Bella Coola has it beat. We stopped here in part to see the local museum and learn more about Mackenzie and the settlers from Minnesota that founded the town. We met an Indian carving a totem pole. We asked him the meaning of the figures on the pole and we were treated to the history of many Indian legends.



This is to prove that no one goes hungry on this boat.

Tuesday, August 22, 2006

We spent 8/19 at Fury Cove primed for a crossing of Queen Charlotte Sound early in the morning. The morning weather report said 1.8 meter waves and swells so we waited a day for better weather (we spent the day at Duncanby Harbor, a sport fishing resort.) The crossing the next day went just fine and



we stopped at Sullivan Bay for the night. The photo shows Pierre's Bay, a small floating resort where we stayed last night. It's a whole new side of boating staying at these small resorts. Things are very social in the evenings sharing stories, visiting other boats and having group dinners. Last night was a big spaghetti feed. Bring your own plate.

Thursday, August 24, 2006

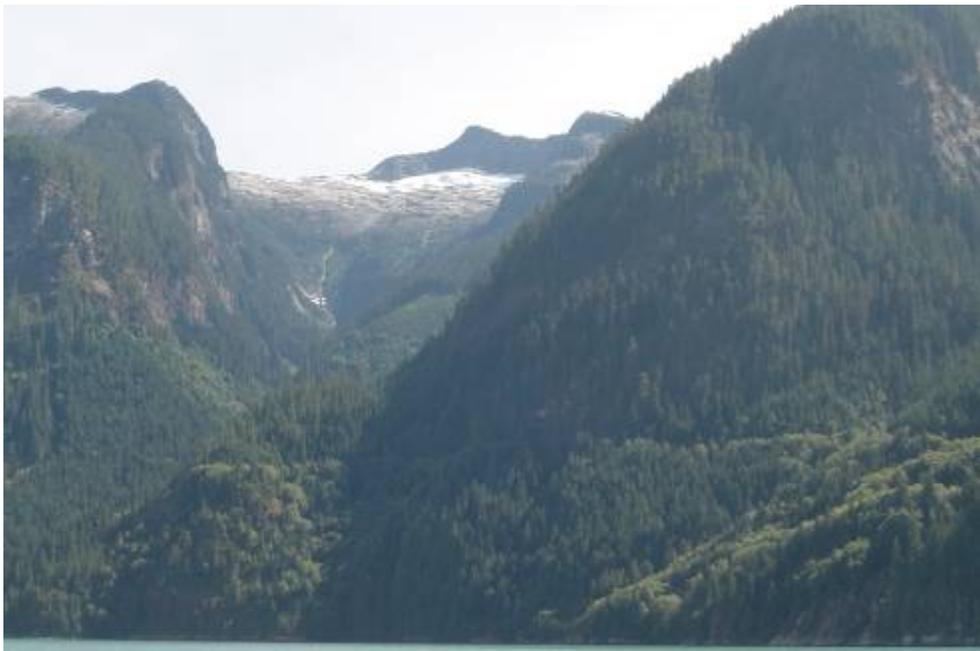
We left early this morning from our anchorage in Forward Harbor and headed to Campbell River on Vancouver Island. Shortly after getting under way we had our first black bear spotting since Nancy and Jerry have been aboard. We spotted him walking along the shore during low tide. Our route which took us through Johnstone Strait was slow going because of a 2 ½

knot current against us and rough seas. We went through Seymour Narrows at slack tide and it was of no concern. In Campbell River we visited the



museum and saw a movie on the demolition of Ripple Rock. Ripple Rock was a hazard in Seymour Narrows that sunk many boats at the cost of more than 100 lives. The blast to remove it in 1958 was the largest at the time since the atomic bombs of WWII.

Friday, August 25, 2006



We explored Desolation Sound today including going up Toba Inlet.



We spent the night in beautiful Prideau Haven with twenty other boats. This is the first short-sleeved shirt day we've had in seven weeks and we've seen a dramatic increase in the number of pleasure boaters.

Saturday, August 26, 2006



We went on a great hike in Teskerne Arm before leaving Desolation Sound this morning and ended up anchoring in Buccaneer Bay for the night.

Sunday, August 27, 2006



Montague Harbor is a large protected cove where close to a hundred boats are anchored with us tonight. We can see two other American Tugs also anchored here. The bay has a Marine Park on the north end where we spent the afternoon hiking and exploring the beach. This is all part of an island filled with vacation homes.



In the evening we hopped on the Pub Bus which picks up customers at the campground and harbor. It takes you through the hills for the wildest bus ride I've ever been on to the local pub. It was a night to remember.

Wednesday, August 30, 2006



Yesterday we crossed back into the United States and spent the night at Roche Harbor in the San Juan Islands. It's a fairly large harbor of mostly transient boaters. The picture shows some of the summer homes they're building there. It was a fun place to explore. At dusk everyone joins together on the dock for lowering of the flags and firing the cannon to mark the end of the day. At nine this morning we were treated to a carillon concert echoing through the harbor. I found the boating in the shallow water of the San Juans some of the most challenging navigation of the trip. We didn't care for the hot dry weather here either. I guess we miss B.C. and Alaska already.



Today, after eight weeks on Miss Liberty, we're safe and sound back in La Conner, Washington.

Sunday, September 3, 2006

Our trip statistics are as follows:

57 day trip – of which 3 we didn't travel including 1 because of weather

2921 total miles traveled

26 days at docks, 25 days anchored and 2 nights at moorings

402 engine hours

51.2 miles traveled / day

1.8 miles / gallon at an average speed of 8.7 knots

(We did a lot of travel against the current that hurt our mileage some.)

Weather – Of the ten weeks weather on the West Coast, we had eight weeks of sunshine (mostly cloud free), ten days of light fog and mist, and two days of all day rain.

Waves – 60% of the time mornings were dead calm
34% of the time mornings were one foot seas
5 % of the time mornings were three to four foot seas
1 % of the time over four feet

Whatever the wind condition was in the morning it almost always increased in the afternoon and died down again late evening. So always leave early in the morning!



We're keeping good company here at the transient dock at the La Conner City Marina while we get the boat ready to ship home. It's been fun watching the boats come in and out over the holiday weekend. The Swinomish Channel runs right along the dock so there are plenty of boats to watch there too. We've been busy the last two days washing, waxing, cleaning, oiling teak, doing maintenance and moving things to our RV for the trip back to Wisconsin. Today I'll change oil and service the main engine and generator. Tomorrow I'll winterize the boat.

Friday, September 8, 2006



Jerry DenAdel of Associated Boat Transport came this afternoon and loaded our boat on his truck to take it to Washburn, WI on the southern shore of Lake Superior. It took over three hours to load and fasten everything down. The boat is an oversize load, almost 14' wide and 15.1' tall. During a lot of the trip he will have a car going ahead of him with a vertical pole 15' 1" high on its bumper checking clearance of the overpasses. We know from our drive out he will have a lot of overpasses too low on the freeway that he will need to go around. Having said that I think we will have to hurry to stay ahead of him in our RV on the way home.

Wednesday, September 13, 2006



Miss Liberty arrived safe and sound today in Washburn, WI on Lake Superior. She has lots of road dirt but not a scratch otherwise. The marina washed her for us and then left her in the travel lift overnight so we could put the railing back on and mount the tender back on the swim platform.

Thursday, September 14, 2006



Here is Miss Liberty's home for the next eight months. The marina starts to launch boats for the year about May 15. We rented a slip just up the road at Pike's Bay Marina for next summer. We plan to spend a full year in Lake Superior before we move on.

This is the end of our diary of taking delivery of our new American Tug 34 and embarking on a 3,000 mile trip on the Inside Passage to Alaska before bringing the boat home to Wisconsin. As you can probably tell, we just loved the trip and our new boat. We can't wait for next summer to come. If you have any questions or comments feel free to contact us at garbe@pressenter.com.

Chas Garbe