

Post-Trip Report: Sea Kayaking in SE Alaska

Glaciers and Grizzlies and Bioluminescence – Oh My!

Addie Langworthy & Lily Frost

1. Food and rationing (what did you eat, not enough, enough, or too much, what would you change, etc.)

Our first ration period was 10 days, and our second was 19. This made planning our rations slightly difficult. For both sections, we planned 15 days of food. This meant we had leftovers to carry into our second ration period, but our protein options and certain snacks were scarce. Fortunately, we received a gift of canned salmon, Lily caught a large pink salmon, and Scott provided a small ration drop-off close to the end of our expedition. It all worked out well in the end, and we ate well. However, it would not have worked as well with our original ration plan.

Specific favorites from our trip were the dehydrated veggies, powdered hummus (for snacks and seasoning), bouillon packets for nearly every dinner, and high-calorie emergency chocolate for challenging moments. We did not use our powdered potatoes or protein powder. It would have been nice to bring along our own flour and yeast to make dough. Additionally, we were fortunate enough to receive gifts of canned salmon, fresh veggies, crisp apples, and even a bag of chocolate chip cookies.

2. Equipment (what did you end up not using, what did you wish you had brought, etc.)

All in all, we packed very well for the expedition and our equipment functioned throughout. Our tow ropes, sponges, and bilge pumps proved helpful with boat care. We never used our spare stove, but we had space to carry it. Our personal gear was sufficient to keep us warm and dry throughout the trip. There was nothing we wish we had brought.

However, we found that it was nearly impossible to hang our bear hang correctly. This method does not work well on beaches with weak, short, scraggly trees. Instead, we prioritized stuffing as much as we could into our bear cans. We had one adjustable bear can that fit well in our kayaks, and it could expand to store more food when out of the boat. It was a great help.

Our water sources often contained tannins, and bringing two water filters proved critical for our trip. We used our gravity filter for the majority of the expedition. However, it became clogged and filtered our water very slowly. At this point, we switched to using our pump filter. This worked well until it broke during the last days of our trip. We returned to using the slow gravity filter. For a month-long expedition in areas with tannings in the water, it is important to have ample water filtration materials.

Addie had difficulty with my dive booties. With the cold waters and long paddles, her toes would often go numb when wearing them. When she got out of the boat, half her foot was numb and would look white or gray/purple. It took a very long time for them to warm up and recirculate. She began paddling with a layer of socks underneath my booties, which helped, and she would also paddle in Xtra Tough boots to avoid the problem entirely.

3. What worked, what didn't, and why

We altered our route to better align with our goals for this expedition. We both valued having time to take in and fully appreciate our environment, which we did not feel we could achieve with our nearly 400-mile route, going as far north and south as possible. Instead, we designed a route circumnavigating Mitkof and Kupreanof Islands with stops in mainland glacier bays. This was the right choice for us and ensured success for our expedition.

The greatest help in our expedition planning was the work and personal advice of Scott Roberge. He was a kayak guide in Petersburg for many years and developed kayaking routes throughout Thomas Bay, Kupreanof, Mitkof, and LeConte Glacier for the Forest Service. We used many specific campsites and water sources from his work to inform us about our route ([Tongass National Forest | Water Activities | Forest Service](#)). Additionally, we discussed our route with him in person before our departure. His thorough knowledge helped prepare us for areas of higher bear density, the tides in Rocky Pass, rip currents entering Thomas Bay, a specific NOAA weather forecast program (<https://forecast.weather.gov/MapClick.php?lon=-133.22&lat=57.058>), incredibly beautiful campsites, and historic landmarks. Truly, his help at the start of our expedition made our experience, both planning and on the water, so much better. We also received advice from locals in Kake and adjusted our plans to integrate their favorite places. This worked well and took us to wonderful places we didn't even know existed.

The elements that didn't work well are described in the food/rationing and equipment sections.

4. Travel logistics (how did you end up getting to/from the experience, what should others know)

Throughout the trip, we received wonderful support during travel. In Bellingham, we smoothly rolled our boats onto the ferry with our parents' help getting our gear together. The Alaska Highway System is very easy to navigate and was an incredible way to travel. In Petersburg, we were greeted by Lily's family friends who put our boats in the back of their truck and housed us for a night. The one struggle in Petersburg was finding white gas. We almost had to postpone our departure because it was so difficult to find. Nonetheless, we found a gallon and departed the next morning.

In Kake, we received another warm welcome from John, who housed us for two nights. We were connected with him through a friend of Lily's. We left our boats covered near the water and stayed in his warehouse. One difficulty was that we arrived during the town's salmon festival, so no one was working at the grocery store. It was closed, and we spent an extra day to buy groceries for our re-ration.

When we returned to Petersburg, Lily's family friends supported us once again. We pulled our boats onto their beach, and later that night, they drove Addie and her boat to the Petersburg ferry terminal. The greatest logistical challenge was certainly moving the boats from place to place, but kayak carts and heavy-duty tie-down straps made it possible for us to walk our kayaks and load them onto vehicles.

Permitting/government relations (any hang-up, what should others be aware of, etc.)

In using the Tongass National Forest lands the way that we did, we did not need to acquire any specific permits. Before leaving for our trip, we went into the regional forest service office and discussed our plans, purchased maps, and they even provided us with a printed copy of Scott's kayaking routes. Those

who are interested in fishing would need to acquire a fishing permit for the number of days they plan on fishing. We did this at the hardware store; a permit for the year cost \$100.

5. Leadership and group dynamics (how did your team operate, any challenges, etc.)

We worked well together throughout the trip. Every day, we both kept track of our plan, route, and timing. Each night, we would work together to create/confirm our schedule for the next day. It was a key piece of our success that both of us were accountable for knowing and executing the day's plan. After we landed, Addie usually started on dinner, and Lily set up the tent. We divided camp chores naturally.

We respected each other's boundaries, and specifically, our different comfort levels on the water. When one of us made it clear we felt unsafe on the water, there was no pressure to continue pushing forward. That was the end of the conversation, and we would make a plan to land. I, (Addie), am so grateful for Lily's acceptance of all my fears, on and off the water. I felt supported and knew I could trust her. This created a strong foundation for our trip that made any small issues over schedule or rations powerless to truly harm our dynamic.

6. Safety and risk management concerns (how did you manage risk in the field, did anything unexpected come up, etc.)

Day-to-day, our biggest risk management concerns were on the water. The day before each paddle, we checked the weather, wind, and sea forecasts. If we were making a crossing or expected cold/wet weather, we wore our wetsuits and paddle jackets. On the water, we remained within talking distance. For the majority of the expedition, we paddled in calm waters with 1 ft waves or less. We diligently planned our paddle with the tides, moving with the water when possible and always passing through areas of complex hydrology during slack. For kayaking, timing on and off the water is critical for safety and success. Our easiest and most effective risk management strategy was keeping close track of the time, the tides, and planning with these factors prioritized.

The largest risk to our safety was strong winds. While weather in the Tongass Rainforest mainly comes from the south and is cloudy and wet, it can also shift to come from the north. A high-pressure system in the Gulf of Alaska brings in clear weather, but also very strong winds due to the warming land. We learned to be wary of sunny days, as north winds caused our largest problems as described later.

We were very cautious with wildlife on and off the water. When our route took us by whales, we pulled in close to shore and waited for them to pass. There were no issues here. Additionally, every time we pulled into shore, we announced our presence very loudly for any bears in the area. From our off-the-water to on-the-water time, we kept our bear spray on us. We followed proper bear safety, and while we saw black bears a few times, all our encounters were calm. Our only negative experience with wildlife was with sea lions. There was a large group that was very territorial and became angry as we paddled by. We quickly paddled out of their space, and eventually, they stopped following us.

An unexpected challenge was working with tides in the mudflats. We paddled into many mudflats that were only accessible during high tide, and dramatic changes in the tide occur quickly. Fortunately, we were good at planning for the tides, but it is important to know that paddling in mudflats greatly limits one's freedom to arrive and depart. Occasionally, we were left stranded in the mud and unable to paddle into or out of our destination. At this point, we portaged our boats, so everything did work out.

7. Specific route descriptions & concerns (did you have to make in-field changes, did anything unexpected come up, etc.)

North Winds Part 1: Our first three days of the trip, we faced 15-knot north winds. This was due to a high-pressure system in the Gulf of Alaska that brings clear, warm weather. However, it also brings extremely strong North winds that increase throughout the day. On the first day, the weather began calm, and we continued as far as we could along our planned route. We remained close to shore in case we needed to bail out. Once the wind reached 15 knots with much stronger gusts and the waves were white-capped, we pulled to shore as quickly as possible and camped for the night. The next morning, we got on the water early to avoid stronger afternoon winds. Nonetheless, the conditions were very rough, and we only paddled 3 miles. During this time, we remained very close to each other in the water, kept up constant communication, and pointed our boats into the waves when possible. After this, we were no longer in Fredrick Sound and harbored in Thomas Bay, which was more protected. We spent the next days exploring the bay as planned, and weather conditions improved.

North Winds Part 2: The North Winds also proved an issue at the end of our trip. We were on the south of Mitkof Island, going northeast to LeConte Glacier. Sumner Straight goes west from the south of Mitkof and meets Fredrick Sound, coming from the north, in Dry Straight. This is a shallow area where opposing currents meet, meaning the water moves fast, collides/divides in opposing directions, and can be rough. To address the difficult water conditions, we paddled through this area at slack tide when the water is the calmest. However, the North winds were picking up. We crossed 1 mile from Mitkof to Dry Island, and during this short crossing, faced 3ft waves with whitecaps and wind gusts of at least 20 knots. We remained close, communicated frequently about our comfort and plan, and pulled in right after the crossing to our planned campsite on Dry Island. Unfortunately, this weather continued and intensified the next day. We paddled out a little the next day, but we turned around because neither of us felt comfortable. Consequently, this left us without a lot of fresh water remaining. We carefully rationed our water, found a bucket of rainwater, and pushed to make it to fresh water the next day. This was our only incident with running low on water; otherwise, our 20L storage was sufficient.

Devils Elbow in Rocky Pass: Rocky Pass is a narrow waterway between Kuiu and Kupreanof Island. It is infamous for its abundance of big rocks and challenging, fast-moving water. It receives input from Frederick Sound, in the north, and Sumner Straight, in the south. Consequently, there is a narrow, rocky, shallow area in the middle where water converges/diverges, known as Devils Elbow. We expected this section to be the most challenging paddling of our route. However, we planned to be on the water during slack and were diligent with our timing. As a result, this section was one of the easiest paddles of our trip. Our experience was like floating down a lazy river. In the morning, high tide was not large enough for us to exit the mudflat. This forced us to portage our boats and go around Devil's Elbow again. It was a massive rush to make it on the water at the right time.

LeConte Glacier: While paddling up to LeConte Glacier, we faced strong winds coming off the face of the glacier. Waves from the wind compounding with boat wakes from tours made our position very unstable. As a result, we did not get very close to the glacier.

Fog in Fredrick Sound: The last two days of the trip, bad weather rolled in. A fog bank surrounded our camp, preventing us from crossing from the mainland to Petersburg on the 17th. We woke very early on the 18th to try and cross before the fog grew thick at Frederick Sound.

Local recommendations: We made multiple in-field changes based on locals' recommendations. This included visiting a small island with white sand beaches, going on a two-night backpacking trip up to a lake in the muskeg, and hiking up a game trail to the top of a ridge overlooking Petersburg. Every campsite recommendation from Scott was great.

8. Daily Course Log

Jul 17th: Lily & Addie met in Bellingham and rolled their kayaks onto the ferry for Alaska at 4pm!



Jul 18th: On the ferry.

Addie: "This is splendiferous. We are in a magical land of fairies, trolls, sea monsters, and wind spirits. Today we must've spotted 5 or 6 whales on separate occasions?"

Jul 19th: Arrived in Petersburg 8 pm! We were picked up at the ferry terminal by Lily's family friends and spent the night sleeping in their home.

Jul 20th: We organized our gear, picked up last-minute groceries and equipment, and completed a dry run of loading boats. We enjoyed a big dinner with Lily's family friends as our last meal.

Addie: "I'll be too excited to sleep but need to because it's a long paddle ahead. It's happening."

Jul 21st: On the water at 7 am, leaving from the beach of the house. We crossed Fredrick Sound (about 4 nmi) in ideal conditions, and headed north towards Thomas Bay. The weather conditions dramatically worsened, and we decided to crash-land at a random site along the mainland before making our planned campsite. Our total mileage for the day was 14 nmi.

Addie: "We should have known by the lightning strike that things were gonna be a doozy, but then everything seemed to calm and lovely. A splash of the drizzle that placed us in the ocean's orchestra as rain drops bounced off the water and then the sun came a shinin' down on us."

Jul 22nd: On the water despite rough conditions. The entrance of Thomas Bay was shallow, rock studded, and full of complex rip currents. This was very difficult paddling, and we pulled to shore as soon as we entered the protected side of Thomas Bay. We only paddled 3 nmi.

Addie: "Today was not as crazy. It began a lil coocoo but calmed down, unlike our lovely friend the wind."



Jul 23rd: The weather significantly calmed, and we paddled 8 nmi in 3 hrs from the entrance of Thomas Bay to Cascade Creek at the south end. It was a beautiful paddle with a gloriously roaring waterfall awaiting us at the end. We attempted to hike to an alpine lake, made it to ~1,500 ft of elevation, and went 4 miles round trip. The trail through the rainforest was wonderfully ragged, muddy, overgrown, and enchanted.

Addie: "I love water; the sea, river, glaciers, and clouds all unite here in a dance."



Jul 24th: Departed from the south end and paddled north to Baird Glacier. This bay is a magnificent fjord landscape. We stopped for lunch in a small cove, visited Baird Glacier, made friends with many seals, and then paddled back south towards the entrance of the bay. It was a long, lovely day ending at 12 nmi miles total.

Addie: "What can I say except today was another glorious day here. We are at our 4th campsite, a stunning view of two glaciated peaks right outside my tent. Another day with no oh f--- moments and my soul is at peace... We also saw a porcupine in one of these spots! I've never seen something so chubby and spikey at the same time, an urchin of the land dare I say?"

Jul 25th: We navigated 7 nmi to our campsite at the entrance of the bay from Jul 22nd. The conditions were perfect, and calm day to prepare us for crossing Fredrick Sound. With 5 days of the expedition under our belt, our sea legs were setting in!

Addie: "Here it is so distinctly obvious that science cannot rationalize or simplify this world in an attempt to explain it – no, it is and always will be untamable magic."

Jul 26th: We left the mainland behind us and arrived on Kupreanof Island. We paddled south 2 miles before the crossing to avoid strong currents entering/exiting Thomas Bay. The crossing was 4 nmi, with wind and waves developing 2/3rds the way through. We took a rest before paddling north to our planned

campsite at 12-mile creek. Unfortunately, a bear was strolling where we planned to camp, so we attempted and failed to find a different campsite. In total, it was about a tiring, 12 mile day.

Addie: "Wowza, I knew it was coming cause the trip was getting' too easy. Wee oh f--- moments today but just as always going to sleep tight in tent with Lily... please please please let the bears be nice, just like Winnie the Pooh."

Jul 27th: We paddled another 12 nmi along the north side of Kupreanof Island from 12-mile creek to Portage Bay. Fortunately, the waves and water were on our side. Before departing, we paddled up the tidal creek for a picnic and saw many fish, juvenile bald eagles, and another black bear along the way.

Addie: "what a dream."



Jul 28th: Rest day at Portage Bay!

Addie: "It's been lazy and luxuriant. Huckleberry pancakes for breakfast, snuggling up in the sleeping bag, reading 'To the lighthouse,' yoga, fire blazing, a stroll. Who could ask for more? Oh, and a tea party with calzones on their way."

Jul 29th: We paddled 12.5 nmi to Big Creek and felt we were growing accustomed to this mileage per day. This site is halfway along the north side of Kupreanof Island, and one of Scott's whale watching recommendations.

Addie: "I can hear the whales breathing as I write. When we arrived to this beach (Big Creek), I asked Lily if that was thunder we heard for the sky was dark, but no, it was the whales spouting"



Jul 30th: From Big Creek, we had a 5-mile paddle to the beach just before Schooner Island. It was supposed to be calm and easy, as the next day was our push to Kake. However, Addie accidentally angered sea lions, and we had to paddle as fast and hard as we could to get out of their space. Fortunately, the sea lions were not actually harmful.

Addie: "Today, I got charged by sea lions. I have never looked down the jaws of a wild creature like that."



July 31st: This was our longest day of the trip with 20 miles of paddling through rain, fog, and whale feeding grounds. We decided to push to Kake, our re-ration site, from Big Creek because Scott warned us about the black bears in this area due to the Kake trash dump. It was not an easy day, but sea stars, dolphins, humpback whales, egg-yolk jellies, otters, seals, and yes, even sea lions filled our path. We also received an incredibly warm welcome in Kake from John and spent our evening at their dog-salmon festival. This marked the end of the first part of our trip and 105 nmi of paddling!

Addie: "11 miles in at this point, cold, exhausted & half of my feet numb. We seek shelter under tarp and make steaming drinks. Quesadillas are up next and as I'm taking a munch out of mine and Lily is horribly burning hers, I see our boats suspended in water. Out Lily dashes! Superwoman on the scene, waste deep in the water hauling our 2 boats to shore."



Aug 1st: We took a rest day in Kake to organize our rations, review our route plan, and visit the town's annual dog-festival. (The grocery store was also closed due to the celebration, so we could not leave until the next day.) We competed in a tote race, paddling in a fish cooler box with shovels, and finished second!

Aug 2nd: We departed Kake in the afternoon for a short paddle (4 nmi) to White Island. As the name suggests, it is made of white sand and like a tropical island dropped in SE Alaska. This was a recommendation from multiple locals, and was a very special place to spend a night. It is among a group of small Islands in the Keku Straight off of Kuiu Island.

Addie: "this must be an enchanted fairy island for the grasses are too lush and painted with red, purple, and white wildflowers. The trees have far too many tangles of drooping moss. The jagged flow of rocks, pebbly white, carved black, and moss covered far too intricate."



Aug 3rd: We set out on a long paddle to the entrance of Rocky Pass. It was an 18 nmi paddle day, and neither of us was expecting it to be that long. We were searching for the legendary rocks that form a pizza stove and possibly found it. Nonetheless, our position set us up well for our next day paddling through Rocky Pass.



Aug 4th: Paddling through Rocky Pass proved a sweet delight! Despite our worries, it was very calm and our cautious planning provided us an excess of time. We arrived at Devil's Elbow at slack and faced no

issues. In fact, we barely had to paddle because the water was simply carrying us along the wonderful landscape of micro-islands. Our mileage was 12 nmi.

Addie: "the water was as calm as a sleepin' baby. What a lovely ride down the lazy river of rocky pass."



Aug 5th: We woke at 4:30 am to find the high tide too low to fill the mudflat. Consequently, we had to portage our boats and make it around Devil's Elbow a second time before high-slack passed. Fortunately, we worked efficiently and got on the water in time. Our second challenge was finding a fresh-water source. Due to lack of rain, the tidal creeks ran low and were predominantly saltwater. We pulled our boats over on a mudflat and hiked over a mile upstream for fresh water and fishing. Lily caught a fish! This was a wonderful side quest that sadly ended with carrying our 2 loaded boats half a mile across the mudflat. Additionally, by the time we made it back on the water, the current was no longer in our favor. Nonetheless, a massive dinner of fresh-caught Alaska salmon made it all worth it. From Devils Elbow we paddled 8 nmi to the southern Keku Straight islands where we camped.

Addie: "The portage? Devils Elbow twice? Can't find water? Caught a fish? Saw a bear? Hauled full boats across mud flats? Willed our boats against the current? Saw a raft of 20 otters? Paddled with a mass of dancing birds above our heads? Have a private island for the night? Ate fresh-caught wild Alaskan salmon cooked over a campfire for dinner? Oh wow. What a day."



Aug 6th: We decided to keep our camp and go for a day paddle to a neighboring cluster of Islands, the Monte Carlo Islands. It was a 6 nmi paddle round trip with lots of exploration and berry picking along the way.

Addie: "I saw a whale slapping its tail over and over again – hard down on the surface of the water, creating an explosion of white foam and the sound of thunder."

Aug 7th: Our paddle returned us to Kupreanof Island, but now we were on the south side along Sumner Strait! It was 15 nmi to Agate Beach through thick kelp beds, little rocky islands, and snowy mountain views.

Aug 8th: From Agate Beach, we paddled 4 1/2 nmi to Little Totem Bay, which has remains of an old indigenous village. After exploring what remnants we could find (fishing gear & a small hut), we continued another 5 nmi to Moss Island to camp.

Aug 9th: We overslept our 4:30 wake-up by an hour, but sprinted through loading boats and paddled fast. As a result, we made it to Kasheets Bay at 10:30, right before high tide. It is all a mudflat at low tide, so arriving at high tide was essential. However, we were planning to backpack up to Kasheets lake and could not find the trailhead. We spent many hours feeling stranded and wandering through the mudflat.

Miraculously, Lily finally found the trailhead, and after our 11-mile paddle, we backpacked 3 miles up to Kasheets Lake.

Aug 10th: We had a layover day to enjoy Kasheets Lake, the muskeg, and the nearby waterfalls!



Aug 11th: In the morning, we hiked out of the muskeg and back to the sea. In the afternoon, we paddled from Kasheets Bay to Green's Camp. It was a struggle to time everything well because we could not leave the mudflat until high tide, but we needed to cross the Wrangell Narrows (6 miles away) at slack, as currents may move 6 knots or more. We paddled our strongest with only 2 short breaks for 2 hours. After this battle, we rested in Lighthouse Cove before paddling another 9 miles to Greens Camp. It was a horrible rocky beach, but it was our meeting point for Scott's re-ration as it connects to the Mitkof Highway. We also saw a small pod of Orcas as the sun set!



Aug 12th: Scott kindly delivered us a small re-ration of food before we paddled out. This was our last paddle in Sumner Straight before returning to the waters of Fredrick Sound. Our route was 10 nmi from Greens Camp to Little Dry Island. Little Dry Island sits at the intersection of 4 waterways: Fredrick Sound, LeConte Glacier, the Stikine River, and Sumner Straight. This section is all mudflats with tall grasses disguising it as a prairie. The majority of the paddle went well, but the North wind increased when we crossed from Mitkof to Dry Island creating rough waters.

Aug 13th: The wind persisted, and we were unable to leave Little Dry Island. Unfortunately, we were stuck and running out of fresh water. As we were in a mudflat, we needed to wait for the next high tide the following afternoon to depart.



Aug 14th: Fortunately, the strong winds passed, and we paddled from Dry Island to inside LeConte Glacier Bay! The entire paddle, we raced the ebbing tide to leave the mudflat zone before the water did. Entering LeConte Bay was indescribably powerful. Towering ice bergs filled the green glacial water and arriving there brought an overwhelming sense of accomplishment and pride in ourselves. We also had access to fresh water!



Aug 15th: A day paddle to visit LeConte Glacier!





Aug 16th: We paddled 12.5 nmi north along the mainland to Moonshine Creek flowing off the Horn Cliffs. A very calm paddle day, saying goodbye to the icebergs.

Aug 17th: We hiked up a game trail to the ridge of the Horn Cliffs. It was over 1,500ft elevation gain in under 1 mile. We wandered through the muskeg in the rain before climbing back down for warm tea.

Aug 18th: We paddled back to Petersburg! We woke at 3 am, were on the water at 4:30 am, and completed our 5.5 nmi Fredrick Sound crossing by 6 am. Fog engulfed Petersburg, so we stuck close to shore. We arrived at our host's house (the Bowens) at 7 am! The rest of the day, we cleaned up our gear and enjoyed our time in Petersburg with Lily's mom and family friends.

Aug 19th: Addie got on the ferry for Bellingham at 3 am and departed from Petersburg.

9. Itemized Budget (the amount you received and the amount you spent – provide as much detail as possible. We recommend saving all receipts to make this part easier)

Travel Expenses

Gas (Colorado Springs to Bellingham)

\$421

Flight (Colorado Springs to Seattle)

\$270

Ferry (2x Bellingham to Petersburg)

\$1,028

Ferry (Petersburg to Bellingham)

\$514

Flight (Petersburg to Anchorage)

\$281

Rentals

Outdoor Ed Rental Gear

\$515.91

Food

Costco

\$557.82

QFC

\$41.94

Hammer and Wikan

\$94.04

Kake General Store

\$32.07

Shipping

USPS

\$131.70

USPS

\$94.04

Navigation

Charts

\$39.58

Map

\$15

Books

Pojar's Plants of the Pacific Northwest

\$34

Sibley Birds West

\$25

Miscellaneous

SAR Insurance

\$79.00

Camp fuel

\$44.94

Carbon offsets

\$8.21

First Aid

\$208.43

Total Trip Expenses

\$4,435

Funding Received

\$5,000