

Lumina through the North West Passage

Through the Bering Sea to the world of Crab and Salmon

Post 18

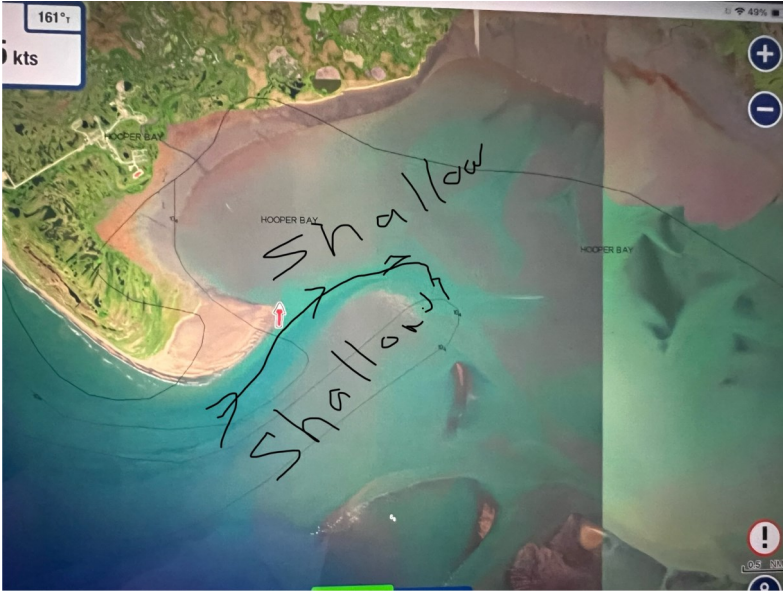


The Bering Sea had always been, together with getting trapped in the ice, one of the challenges of the trip. For those of you who have watched “The Deadliest Catch” on television, then these are exactly the same waters that we have now to cross. All the books will tell you that you really need to be out of Nome by the middle of September and here we are on the 16th just about on target.

With an oil change done on the engine and new oil and fuel filters, we slipped the lines in Nome early on the 16th aiming to make it to Hooper Bay whilst the worst of some weather blew over and then on to False Pass in the Aleutian Islands where we can make our final turn to the east and Anchorage.

Initially we sailed but most of the leg was done motor sailing to keep the speed up as it was essential that we made it to Hooper Bay. This first leg took us all of the first day, a night and till evening the second day. Soon after we left Nome, Thor a bigger yacht with bigger engine came steaming by but we just about managed to hold off Voyager a similar sized boat from overtaking us. As we neared Hooper Bay we got some local info from Thor who had been talking to the captain of a Tug moored there. This proved invaluable.

able as the charts were just about useless and with the sea generally being shallow (<10m) and the bay being full of sandbanks. We dropped the anchor just in time to give Voyager the heads up on where we had almost run aground.



Sending a bit of local knowledge on to a boat behind us

After a blustery night we were off again the next morning at first light, to head for False Pass. This would be a 3 day/2 night passage where once again we would have the engine on most of the time to maintain the speed. Once again Thor passed us early on, and Voyager soon after but I was confident of my timings because whilst it was important not to be too late, there is also a fearsome current in this pass and we had been warned to take it at the right time. So, on the afternoon of the third day as the weather improved we began to see the outlines of impressive mountains on the Aleutian chain of islands.

These start out as a peninsula and the head across towards Russia marking the boundary between the Bering Sea and the Pacific Ocean. With the volcanic mountains being quite high they also have a major effect on the weather almost forming a barrier to

the weather systems as well as the oceans, ensuring that the lows that come barrelling across from the west either track to the north or south of the islands. These depressions are similar to our autumn storms that are sometimes remnants of Caribbean hurricanes, these are very similar and seem to arrive every two days or so. Either way its not an area to linger in as the autumn progresses. With an email from Victor reverberating in my ears warning us in the most forceful way that we



can not to attempt to go through in the dark, we arrived at the northern side of False pass just before the tide turned to the south with just about enough time to make the ten miles or so through to the False Pass dock almost on the other side. Voyager was about an hour or so ahead and had bashed their way through against the current and even though it was almost slack we still had about 2kn against us at times.

The channel was well marked including the sharp turn to avoid some shoals, which with the waves break-



ing over made sure the short cut was particularly uninviting. As we came towards the narrow at the Northern end the whole sea was busy with otters, I had only seen them maybe a handful of times in Scotland but here we must have seen 20 or 30 swimming around and eating fish whilst floating on their backs watching us pass by. After about a couple of hours and in the rapidly fading light we entered the very well appointed False Pass dock with its massive floating pontoons and tied up opposite Voyager. A fishing boat was in front of them and they came to help us with

Heading down towards False Pass with the volcanoes of the Aleutians coming in to view

the lines and the two deck hands were very impressed with the journey that we had made even resorting to google maps to see exactly our route.

False Pass gives an impression of being a scary place and I guess to the old sailors it would have been but we can power against pretty much any natural current if we need to, and the fishing boats can too, so this shortcut being the first passage through the peninsula is fairly well used. The dock and harbour facilities for a boat were great with the floating pontoons designed for fairly large fishing boats. On shore there was a large fish factory which also looked pretty new and stacks of refrigerated containers waiting to be filled, and other turned into accommodation blocks. Little did we know that this story of boom and bust would become very evident at our next port.



Crab pots waiting for the season to start. "If you get trouble from a bear you can just climb up on top" we were told...

So again at first light we left False Pass with the morning tide taking us out the rest of the way into the Pacific Ocean just a few miles away. Once out and with a favourable wind we set course to the East and another fishing harbour of King Cove. For those watching the Deadliest Catch, the port where the boats featured are based, Dutch Harbour is about 50 miles to the west of False Pass and unfortunately a de-



Lumina safely in King Cove amongst the fishing boats

tour we don't have time for. Once out of the pass we could see the Tug Bristol Wind on the AIS ahead of us. We have been seeing this tug and its tow for days, he was ahead of us as we got to Nome, left shortly after us but then overtook us as we overnighted in Hooper Bay. We then overtook him on the route down to False Pass but once again they had overtaken us whilst sleeping in the harbour at False Pass. He had come through the pass with a 100m barge in tow on a 200m towline including negotiating the sharp turn and was now once again up ahead. All day we gained on them as we actually had pretty decent wind to help us along. As we got to Dutch harbour they were just changing the tow so that they could go alongside one of the jetties at the fish factory and we slipped by, and into the harbour to tie up next to Thor and Voyager who were already there.

With another blow coming by we had a couple of days in the harbour to look forward to, although we were immediately greeted with warnings about the bears that were around with strict instructions not to go wandering round at night. The whole area around the harbour was filled with stacks of crab pots. Compared to those used at home these are pretty substantial things, made of solid bar, about 6ft square and a couple of feet high. Alongside the road the stacks were made so you could climb up the in the event of a bear approach, all very reassuring. We ventured out in the morning and across the road from the entrance to our dock was the supermarket a lady was standing outside and she informed us that it would be open at 12. Bears, yes there are a couple who live in the bushes on the hill behind the supermarket but don't worry they only come out at night and first thing in the morning.... We started wandering down the road towards the settlement of King Cove and hadn't gone more than a hundred yards further when a truck stopped and the driver enquired if we were from the Tug. No we said feeling we almost knew them anyway. It turned out that this was the local Pizza restaurant and although closed, the tug had persuaded him to open for the evening cooking session. I said we and the other two

boats would also be interested so the arrangement was made.



Model boats moored on the lake

We continued walking, past the fish factory which seemed a bit on the closed side, to the village. We passed a small lake that had several model boats moored on it. They varied from the Titanic to the local crab boats with various warships and even a sea plane in between. All the while since we left the dock we had been accompanied by a couple of portly aging labradors. Now in the settlement we would come across other dogs but our escorts were obviously the boss dogs of the town as every time what looked initially like it would turn into a good scrap always ended up with the other dogs backing down. Our friends stuck by us

obviously taking their task very seriously and when we turned round at the far end of the village they did

too. We had now completely circumnavigated the fish factory which probably took up as much space as the village and could see the tug and barge behind us tied up to the jetty within the realms of the factory. Returning we needed to get to the tug so squeezed past a fence and into the factory complex. It was obviously closed with all entrances boarded up, however it was a fascinating labyrinth of buildings all carefully signed. There were boiler houses, generator sheds, maintenance buildings, accommodation blocks, mess hall, shop, bar etc and of course the factory building itself. We eventually found our way out to the front where the barge was, with the tug moored on the outside.

The Tug captain was negotiating with probably the caretaker as during the night the barge had managed to break one of the bollards it was tied to. It didn't seem to be such a big deal as the timber bollard, about a foot in diameter didn't look in too good shape anyway. We then had a good chat with the Tug captain and got the full story of King Cove. A couple of year earlier there



Our escorts resting whilst we talked with the tug captain

had been a glut of salmon and not only had the fish factory had trouble processing it quickly enough it turned out that they had bought thousands of tons of fish from the boats that, with the market oversupplied, and an export market to Russia stopped meant that they had fish they couldn't sell at a profit. The



King Cove with the fish factory in centre and harbour around to the left.

Peter Pan fish factory and employer of hundreds of people failed to open for the 2024 season. This means that there is no where here to land fish, a large harbour with good shelter and facilities but no market for the boats to service. They now have to go to other places, like the factory at False Pass to unload. It is the perfect example, like I see I horticulture all the time, where the old established facilities, whilst initially are more profitable than new ones as they don't have the capital to repay, eventually get outclassed by newer more efficient plants that also don't have the high maintenance costs. The Peter Pan company had been bought from the receivers by the competition but it looks unlikely that it will re-open. The future for the village and port looks uncertain. There has obviously been a lot of money put into the dock facilities owned by the council, and the supermarket and fine chandlery owned by the new company are still open, but if the boats gradually base themselves elsewhere so they can land fish and crabs where they are based the place will slowly die.

So this brings us to the pizza man. It turns out that the tug captain used to work with him on the boats but he had always wanted to open a pizza place which he had at last done in his home port of King Cove. Unfortunately just as soon as he had opened, the company folded and his main marked of the transient fish worker never came this year. Anyway between the tug boat and three sailboats we gave him an unexpected bonus on a windy Sunday night.

Tomorrow at first light we continue what seems like a bit of a holiday as we start the remaining 300 miles

or so to Homer where we will haul out. The intention will be to take it easy with short hops over the next week or so depending on the weather of course.

All the best

Tim and Carol

[Website with all the old blogs](#)



Skipper makes a visit to the grocery store complete with proper American paper bag just like in the movies