

Day 15, July 10, 2017

Healy, AK to Talkeetna, AK

BJ3 headed out ~ 8 straight for Talkeetna. SDA went back to Denali National Park for a quick hike. We left Sue's coach at the sled dog kennels, then drove back to the visitor's center to leave Ann & Dave's coach. We started hiking on the Taiga Trail to get to the Rocky Creek trail. It wound up through the trees on a hillside then opened up for a bit along a ridge. No breeze, cloudy and minimal mosquitos initially. Also no people on the trail. As we started coming down towards the kennels, we started swatting more mosquitos and started running into folks coming the other way. They were probably coming from the sled dog demonstration. The first group told us about a moose they had seen lying down, back away from the path. Stopped to chat with a 3rd group of people at just the right place and saw the moose. If we hadn't stopped, we would have missed it. Heard another group coming because they were calling to warn bears. Dave thought about roaring to tease them but didn't. A little later on, a family was coming towards us with the kids yelling "Hello, bears". Dave called back "Hello, lunch" which they thought was pretty funny.

Got to the dog kennels and looked around. They had some of the dogs out, available for petting. Lots of information about sled dogs, how to read them, what their job is and where they go to retire.

After leaving Denali, drove to Talkeetna. Coming into Talkeetna, saw Denali again today. Along the highway, it was too cloudy but later in the afternoon it cleared and was sunny around the mountaintop.

Had our 5:30 meeting/chat outside Sue's coach tonight because she had a makeshift table for munchies. Seven of us headed to Twisted Creek, the restaurant associated with Denali Brewing Co., for dinner. The Bobs went to Latitude 62° for dinner. Our dinner was very good. Ate outside and were able to watch the world go by. After dinner, a couple of us stopped for ice cream on the way back. Dave & Ann shared fireweed ice cream. Not remarkable in flavor and kind of like sherbet in consistency (we had some the next night from the ice cream store on the main street in Talkeetna which was much better). Sue had the huckleberry which she said was very good.

Later on, Dave & Ann hiked down past the airport, checking out the Trapped in Talkeetna place and the Climber's Memorial in the cemetery.

Day 16, July 11, 2017

Talkeetna, AK

In Talkeetna all day today. Had a leisurely breakfast, then decided to do laundry. Got that done by 10 and walked into town. Started at the Historical Society Museum so we could pick up a guide for the walking tour of Historic Talkeetna. Walked around town checking out the buildings then walked out the end of Main St. to the river. The Talkeetna River really moves along; faster, it seemed, than the Yukon in Whitehorse (which was pretty fast). To get to the river, one had to cross a bit of a stream. An enterprising boy stood in the stream by some stepping stones, offering to assist folks across the creek. He had a coffee can with a slit lid nearby. Gave him a dollar on our way back.

Walked down Main St. away from the river, headed back to the campground for lunch. Stopped at the ice cream place that was closed last night and got a dish of their Kahlua chocolate truffle. Not bad. Had lunch and went back to the historical society for the 1:00 ranger talk on Denali. He used a huge relief

map to talk about the history of climbing the mountain and the routes used. After his talk, we checked out the rest of the museum then went over to the ranger station to watch their short movie on climbing Denali. Came back to the campground to read for a bit until it was time to go to the airport for our flightseeing.

There were ten passengers in our plane. The trip had to be changed due to weather, so we didn't get to go around Denali, but it was amazing anyway. At times it seemed we were flying right next to a mountain or that we would be flying right into one. It was hazy/sunny when we left Talkeetna and the haze just hung over the mountains. Our pilot said it hadn't been there during his trip earlier in the day and he thought it was smoke from forest fires upwind. We were able to fly over it for the most part, so we saw the peak of Denali. Flew in and out of the mountains for about an hour then landed on Pika Glacier. To avoid crevasses, we landed near the head of the glacier on the snow. Overall a wonderful trip. Much smoother than expected.

Got back to the campground to drop things off then went into town again and had dinner with Jim & Jeanie at the Wildflower Café. Very good food and beers.

Day 17, July 12, 2017

Talkeetna, AK to Anchorage, AK

BJ3 was the first group to head out for Anchorage today. SDA made a breakfast stop at the Talkeetna Roadhouse before hitting the road. Quiches and a pastry were the breakfast choices. Almost to the Parks Highway on the Talkeetna Spur, we stopped at Kahiltna Birch Works to get some birch syrup and get a brief overview of their syrup making process (it's the same as making maple syrup, except birch trees are used instead of sugar maples). All kinds of birch-based products in addition to syrup.

Next, it was on to Wasilla and the Iditarod Headquarters. A couple of the Redingtons, maybe 3rd generation, were giving dog sled cart rides at the HQ. They also had 3 two week old husky puppies you could hold and pet. Nice video inside of the care and research that's gone into keeping the dogs safe, healthy and strong. Sue took a ride on the sled dog cart. Saw the Bobs coaches there when we arrived and they left while we were still exploring.

We stopped at a grocery store at the edge of Wasilla on our way toward Anchorage. Once that was completed, it took about an hour to get to the campground in Anchorage. We arrived around 3:00; BJ3 were already here and the Bobs pulled into the campground directly behind us. Dave went off to get an oil change for the coach and Beth & Jack walked to Costco to do some shopping. We met ~ 5:00 to learn about travel plans for tomorrow. After supper, played cards with Sue & Brandon for a while before folks headed off for bed.

Day 18, July 13, 2017

Anchorage, AK

We carpooled in three coaches to drive to Whittier for the 23 Glacier Cruise. Going through the tunnel was a new experience. We couldn't imagine how they could set things up so both cars and a train could travel through the same tunnel (it's really only wide enough to just accommodate a train). There's a one-lane road in the tunnel and the train tracks run down the middle. Traffic flows from one side, then

the other, and no one drives when there's a train. As a result, you need to plan your transit so that you allow enough time to get through and arrive before your next activity. We got to Whittier a bit early so walked around the town a bit. We came across an earthquake simulator so decided to check it out. 6.5 on the Richter scale is quite a bit of shaking!

Boarded the boat and found our seats because they were to serve lunch as we were departing. We ended up changing our seats to some much better ones. Lunch was either smoked salmon chowder or chili. Reports on the chowder were very positive. The chili was fine. The air was really hazy due to forest fire smoke, so we were unable to go down one of the fjords to see glaciers. We cruised by numerous glaciers and at one of them we were able to get quite close. We saw many harbor seals on the ice floes and lots of sea otters. Some were on their own and later on, we saw a couple of rafts of otters just lazing in the water. Our last stop was the kittiwake colony. Hundreds of them nesting on the cliff with a waterfall coming down the middle. The chicks were little balls of fluff.

Got back to Whittier and headed towards Anchorage. Our group, Jim, Jeanie, Dave & Ann, stopped at the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center to check it out. Their animals are there as a result of being injured, orphaned, illegally held, or from another wildlife center. They had all the native wildlife except Dall sheep and mountain goats. Apparently, these are considered farm animals and could cause disease problems with the wood bison there that are waiting to be re-introduced. It started raining while we were there and it turned into a bit of a thunderstorm. The foxes disappeared into their dens, so we weren't able to see the 2 different ones. The 4 wolves were really playful, even in the rain. We left shortly before they closed at 8 and continued on to Anchorage.

Driving along the Turnagain Arm, the tide was still out and shortly before we reached Beluga Point we were able to see the tidal bore heading up the arm. Jim & Jeanie had never seen one before so we were happy we were able to see it. Got back to the campground around 9:00 and called it a day.

Day 19, July 14, 2017

Anchorage, AK

All groups did their own thing today. SDA explored parts of Anchorage. Our first stop was Earthquake Park. It's an area that used to be bluffs overlooking Knik Arm that slumped down to the sea during the 1964 earthquake (a 9.2 'quake). They had diagrams showing how the different sections of the bluff moved and why it happened. It would have been a nice hike except for all the mosquitos. They were overwhelming and energetic and we didn't have bug repellent on. We kept moving, which helped, and hiked down the Coastal Trail to an interior loop of the trail. Unfortunately, that proved muddy and even more buggy.

From there, we drove down to the coast to Potter's Marsh. Here it was really windy so no bugs. We walked down the left boardwalk; saw some willets, Canada geese, a green winged teal and a spotted sandpiper. At the end of the boardwalk we saw a cow moose and her calf out in the marsh. The cow was acting very agitated and eventually they moved off. We saw signs on our way back warning of a moose with her calves, so we wondered if she had lost one recently.

We then drove back into Anchorage up to Ship Creek, as it indicated there was a fish ladder there. Didn't see it, nor did we see any fish in the water. Oh well. Continued on to the Alaska Cultural Heritage Center to explore there. They were giving an athletic competition demonstration in the entrance

building when we arrived so we watched that for a while. The individuals were attempting to kick a hanging target at shoulder height and higher using a specific technique that actually made it harder. We strolled out to the 5 dwelling examples on the grounds to learn about the different native groups' lifestyles and cultures. It was interesting to see and 3 of the dwellings had good interpreters inside to answer questions.

The whole group gathered around 6 to discuss our travel for the next 2 days and share what we had done during the day.

Day 20, July 15, 2017

Anchorage, AK to Glenallen, AK

All groups left between 9 and 9:30 this morning, heading for Glenallen. Our first stop was Matanuska State Recreation Area. It provided a great view of the glacier and had a short hiking trail along the lateral moraine. We took the short hike and learned more about the Matanuska glacier and the area surrounding it. On the road, we made several more photo stops, the most colorful one being at Sheep Mountain and Gypsum Creek. The mountain was volcanic in origin and very colorful: dark burgundy, slate green, pale to dark orange rocks and green vegetation. We saw no sheep but the signs describing the mountain's formation and the sheep licks was interesting. That was pretty much all to see until we got to Glenallen. There we stopped at the visitor center first to find any literature they had on Wrangell – St. Elias National Park and surrounding area. It turned out they had info about McCarthy and Kennecott but nothing about the area around the park visitor center.

We gathered ~ 5:30 to chat. Bob & Janet made s'mores for everyone. A bit later everyone drifted off to their own dinners and evenings.

Day 21, July 16, 2017

Glenallen, AK to Tok, AK

We (SDA) headed out ~ 9:30 this morning to go to the Wrangell – St. Elias NP Visitor's Center. It had a nice display inside and an exhibit building next door that was also informative. The viewpoint behind the center was very nice but the clouds were such that we could see no mountains. We stayed for the 10:30 ranger talk, which was very informal and wide ranging. In the visitor's center, we picked up information on several hikes in the park and headed out towards a couple of them. We were part way there when we realized the hike we had planned to take was ~ 45 miles beyond the visitor's center on a gravel road. Deciding that was too far, we turned around, got gas and headed toward Tok.

The Tok Cut-Off was probably the worst road so far that we'd driven on during this trip. The last 20 or so miles to Tok were OK and there were about 5 miles around mile 50 that were new road but the rest was very roller coaster and bumpy. Reached Tok ~ 4:15 as the last group to arrive. We had a (reindeer) chili dinner at 6 and then participated in the pancake toss afterward. If you tossed your pancake into the bucket, about a ten foot toss, you won a free breakfast. It was harder than it looked and you got only one practice throw. Nevertheless, several people did win a free breakfast.