

PO Box 16545 Portal, AZ 85632
Phone 520.558.1146 Toll free 866.900.1146 Fax 650.471.7667
Email info@naturalistjourneys.com



#### Early Arrival in Juneau

(Half the group who chose to take the ferry while others flew the next day directly to Gustavus)

Flights for those arriving in Juneau came in late at night, so the six coming in here independently booked some extra time to explore Juneau. Peg and Mary Jane got to a waterfront hotel, with a view of the city that was so much smaller than anticipated. In the morning they found the city cloaked by deep green forests, high waterfalls cascading from terrain above the trees, and some snow on the higher peaks. They also woke to the sight of large cruise ships anchored just shy of town that had not been there the night before. Friends of Peg's gave them a tour and their first touch of nature on the Prospector Creek Trail, a path just outside of town which was absolutely adorned with flowers, particularly robust red columbine. They had a top-rate lunch at the Twisted Fish, a waterfront restaurant with great ambiance, eclectic décor and really fresh, fabulous food. They all went for halibut in one form or another – a great start to the week ahead!

After lunch, they drove north of the city along the fjord, stopping at the striking Shrine of Therese and the nearby small but colorful Jensen-Olson Arboretum. Here a very tame Red-naped Sapsucker entertained them and they enjoyed seeing myriad blooms, wild and cultivated, growing side by side. A Bald Eagle pair chirped while flying over the tidal flats, landing in tall spruce on the shore. Peg and Mary Jane saw more eagles as they drove on to Eagle Beach, catching glimpses of glaciers in valleys above, but mainly being captivated by the 14 different eagles seen, heard and enjoyed. Visiting Mendenhall Glacier was intentionally the last thing on their day's list, so as to miss many of the day tourists. The plan worked; there was only one bus, and the soft light on the glacier was lovely. After that sight, they went to dinner at the Hanger, a popular waterfront restaurant where a first success was securing a parking spot and the

second nabbing a table with a great view of the water. Both concurred, this must be Alaska; daylight at 9PM (and onward) and sea planes coming and going as they ate!

## Our Southeast Alaska Adventure Begins!





July 12, 2012 Arrival in Gustavus / Welcome to the Inn!

Travel plans for our group were split, with six arriving mid-day by ferry from Juneau, and six arriving a bit later, 4:15, on a jet, having made connections in Seattle. The ferry left Juneau at 7AM, and our first



quickly watching Pigeon Guillemots, our first Humpback Whales, Harbor Seals, and Marbled Murrelets, the latter surprisingly common. Best of all we had a sun-bright day, one of the first of summer for residents here, so everyone was enjoying it fully. We could be out on deck comfortably, absorbing wildlife sightings and all the great scenery.

The staff of the Gustavus Inn greeted us at the docks, and from the moment we arrived, we were greetings were a bit bleary-eyed as we met an hour before departure. As the ferry departed, we livened up a bit after some coffee and especially after seeing the lovely views back on Mendenhall Glacier, the mountain esplanade, and the lush forests extending down to the sea. A Bald Eagle was sitting on the mast of the ferry; Rob got some great pictures of a bird that would become our unofficial mascot this trip.

The ferry was easy to navigate around; about 100 passengers were aboard, and we found a pretty decent homemade curried lentil soup for lunch. Time passed



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well taken care of. By evening, we already wished we had ten nights here instead of five! Still, five in one place on a tour is a luxury. We had time to settle in, unpack our gear, and take a peek at the Inn's abundant garden. Those of us arriving early walked over to the local coffee shop and art gallery, then to the local mercantile and a pottery shop that had an open kiosk so one could browse at leisure. It was great to fall into island life; no need for locks, an easy pace, and a feeling of being valued as visitors after the long, solitary winter.

We gathered for bar snacks at 5:30, before dinner. Tonight's creation was kelp salsa with chips, a very delicious salsa with a little kick, perfect for accompanying some of their crisp wines or the local Alaskan brews: Amber, IPA and white. The dining room felt like a cozy nook with large picture windows looking off to the Chilkat Mountain range. Each day the staff changed the table decor, freshened up the flowers from the garden, and tempted us with delicious fresh fare. Tonight's dinner was salmon, so fresh (caught in Cross Sound) it seemed to melt in our mouths, sourdough rolls, a salad of greens from the garden, and



for dessert – rhubarb crisp. The fish is all locally caught, and wild edibles such as beach asparagus were innovative options in our salad. To feel spoiled and well-fed, while eating such healthy food – divine!

#### July 13, 2012 Glacier Bay National Park

We woke to find out what makes the forests healthy and everything so GREEN – rain. Rain light enough to function in, but it came down steadily all day, with just a few breaks when the cloud mass raised her skirts. The staff from the Inn

took us about ten miles up the road to the Park Service docks, where we boarded the *Baranoff Wind*. Luckily seabirds don't mind rain, and we had a great time viewing Tufted Puffins, and one Horned Puffin that Emily spotted along the shore of Marble Island. We had good views of Pelagic Cormorants, and

delighted to hear the cacophony made by hundreds of nesting Black-legged Kittiwakes. The ranger kept up a nice running commentary, not too much and quite informative.

Peg and Greg were on the watch for one of our sought-after species – Kittlitz Murrelets. Right on cue, as soon as we got to some ice chunks from the glaciers, and gravel beaches cut by freshwater streams, there they were. Lots of them! It turns out researchers are here in the bay to study them, as this is one of the densest areas for Kittlitz Murrelets known and this species is on a rapid decline. They are studying how murrelets react to ships, comparing their



behavior to the more common Marbled Murrelets and also looking at their feeding success.

We spent a lot more time on deck than we were comfortable doing (it was COLD with the wind and rain) but we wanted to see species and scenery as we could. One amazing surprise, coming to a quiet cove with a stream entering it, was spotting a pack of wolves! It turns out they'd been here for about four days; Peg immediately recognized it as a rendezvous site, a safe place for young pups out of the den to learn of the

larger world. We saw two adults curled up and sleeping on the beach, and four very active pups playing on a flower-filled bench above them. The pups used the edge of the bank as a slide, doing what pups do best, wrestle and play. The adults slept, until the four pups came around one and, in combination with our disturbance, urged them up. Soon all were all off and away, though not hurried, and we grinned to know we had several minutes of watching wild wolves, a rare thing in this thickly vegetated country!

The next highlight was a lone Mountain Goat, feeding on what appeared to be lichens, or some

other ground-hugging plant, on a steep rock outcrop. We had eagles as regular entertainers, but one perched on a floating piece of glacial ice was a dramatic sighting. Ice chunks became more numerous as we motored up the sound. We parked before the front ice wall of a massive glacier, a huge ragged mass of ice, very dense, blue in color, though muted in effect on this cloudy day. We parked and took in the beauty, the sounds, and a bit of calving, though more would be possible on the rare sunny day. The weather was challenging this day for us, but the experience was worth coping with it – and we were lucky

that it stayed a light rain, us to see so many
On the way back, the
Kittlitz's Murrelets
waving to us from their
islet surrounded by
cozy in contrast our lodge
"home". Tonight we had
for bar snacks, and then
sablefish, creamy
with just a great ginger
Desserts came with
who could not decide —



making it possible for amazing things. team studying earned our respect, tents set up on a rocky churning ice. How felt on coming a smoked salmon dip the most delicious textured like butter, and soy sauce glaze. choices, and for those one of each!



July 14 Kayak Trip to Pleasant Island

We were not sure we'd be up to another challenge after our long cruise in the rain, but hey, it was a new day, we were fresh and the sun was shining brightly. We asked our kayak guides how many days like this they'd had this season and they said very FEW. How lucky we were. It felt as if summer arrived today; we learned what we could about the boats, our gear, and how we should steer and paddle, but there was nothing like hopping in.

Monica and John from Spirit Walkers, the outfitter for this excursion, were intelligent, competent guides and their enthusiasm helped us over any reservations. We paired up, mixing and matching couples, as several laughed as they described previous "divorcepotential" canoe rides. Pleasant Island was never covered by glacier ice, so it made for a great destination for naturalists, with the promise to explore. It took about an hour and half for us to get there, and en route we spied a few porpoises, Pigeon Guillemots, Bonaparte's Gulls and, on a rocky point, Surfbirds and Black Turnstones, the latter seeming to feed a chick.



Lunch was an epicurean event, with smoked salmon and halibut from the packing house in Gustavus; so fresh and good. They served it with crackers, cream cheese, capers, sundried tomatoes, a local salami, cheddar cheese and other goodies. For dessert, Monica had baked two kinds of cookies, one rich in chocolate, another a lemon shortbread. We sat on this



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We landed on a wilderness beach, full of pebbles and kelp and ancient colored rock. A ring of alder made it difficult to get into the woods, but we kept at it, and once inside felt it to be a magical place. Judy, a local resident knowledgeable in plants and especially edible plants, had our full attention as she lovingly went through the plant names, uses, and properties. We ambled along a deer trail, and all too soon were called back to lunch – it seemed that high wind warnings were to be in effect by 2PM and they wanted us safely on our way ahead of that.



lovely beach to eat; through binoculars we could watch whale spouts going off across the bay by Point Adolphus, so numerous that they seemed like geysers erupting, seven or more at a time. We ate all too much to crawl back in the boats and paddle, but duty called, and soon we were back on the water. We made good time going back.

Everyone enjoyed some afternoon free time. Some showered and napped, and some of us got on bikes to go photograph eagles. En route home, we stopped for a cappuccino at the local gallery. Bar snacks tonight drew ooh's and ah's as Dave Lesh, the owner, had conjured up Dungeness Crab sushi with avocado – yum! The sun was strong on the outside porch where we gathered. With views of greenery and mountains, we knew we were lucky and we lingered to enjoy it all. Dinner was halibut caught this day, cooked in a rich sauce of sour cream, mayonnaise and onion. It was served with grains, greens, and minted peas and carrots, and two desserts - another extravagant meal!



### July 15, 2012 Glacier Bay National Park Bartlett River Trail / TNC Preserve at Gustavus

We wanted to walk in the lush woods of Bartlett Cove, on the Bartlett River Trail, so today we returned to Glacier Bay National Park. Here we found our only disagreeable person of the trip, sadly a ranger who was to lead our hike. He told us to savor the journey, and then took off on a rip. We followed his first advice and soon left the negative effect of his attitude behind. All around us were

> Bartlett River Trail

wonders, large and small!

We bent over orchids and fungi, and yes, a slime mold Walter spotted with exclaim. Not a one of us could have kept up a fast pace, as the trail was full of ruts, muddy spots and small creeks to maneuver around. At our own speed we could learn, savor, and stay on our feet. We returned to lovely Glacier Bay Lodge which has large windows looking out on the fjord.



Quite close to the lodge, Walter spotted a Common Yellowthroat, and several of us saw a Red-backed Vole, a Red Squirrel and its middens, and we thoroughly enjoyed our wet walk through a world of forest and understory. We



learned about root hopping, the ecology of hemlock and spruce, and the biology of slime molds. We spotted lady's tresses and bog orchids, carpets of bunchberries, and sat on sphagnum moss carpets to rest. By lunch we had reached an open spot by the Bartlett Creek, where we found a Common Goldeneye and a Harbor Seal in open water. Midway through our picnic lunch some kayakers went by.

After the hike, we returned to the lodge; some enjoyed the rest of the afternoon for some R and R. Others wanted to hike at the nearby Nature Conservancy's Nangoon Berry Trail, a nearly flat and MUCH easier walk close to the lodge. Our walk was a flower fest, as we nearly waded through deep purple mats of wild iris, lupine as high as Greg's head; along the way we saw lots of Nangoon berry flowers, yarrow, a mixed flock of Chestnut-backed Chickadees and Townsend's Warblers,

Yellow-rumped Warblers, Forget-me-nots along the water channel, and wolf scat along the trail. It was a relaxing hike with good footing, easy to travel, and we enjoyed it fully. Every one of us were impressed our senior member of the group did BOTH hikes this day, for a total of 6.5 miles! Staff from the lodge came to pick us up, so we did not have to miss happy hour.



the shell, voila, Dave was there with a bowl of freshly shelled pieces. The rock fish, cooked in a parmesan crust, was equally delicious. We noticed that several locals joined us for dinner this night and no wonder as to why! They were all friendly and it was fun to visit before and after the meal.

Greg and Wynn had opted to go on the whale watch tour boat instead of hiking, and they both had big grins and great stories for us, having spent time very close within a large pod of whales.

Dinner came in a bowl of flowers, beautifully displayed fresh Dungeness crab. People dove in with delight and for those who struggled to open





# July 16, 2013 All day to explore Icy Straits on the Stoic and the Obsession

Getting ready for another day on the water, we ate a full breakfast, with spruce tip syrup on our sourdough pancakes, a choice of eggs, multigrain breads, rhubarb sauce, and homemade granola — what a way to start the day. We ate heartily as it was blustery and gray, but no rain — and then bundled up and off we went. We met two captains, Mike and Steve, at the dock and split into two groups of six. Pigeon Guillemots whistled from nest sites under the

docks. Humpback whales spouted all around; we'd catch up to them and down they'd go, then we'd chase after some other spouts. We got close to some, but all were intent on feeding; we could see details of their blowholes and had some fabulous opportunities to catch tail shots with water dripping off the flukes.

We navigated to several areas, and the weather held, with even some spots of sun breaking through. We spotted a couple of sea arches, cliffs with Pelagic Cormorants, and then a long area of ledges filled with Steller Sea Lions. Some were large beachmaster males, and they'd obviously been fighting; more than one had wounds that made us wince to look at them. Youngsters were vocal, growling and gaping; some in the water came close to the boats. The light was beautiful on these large pinnipeds.

Next up was a request from Carol – let's go see puffins. Off Mike would lead us, first to a group



of Tufted Puffins, with good views of a raft of them on open water, then a group of Horned Puffins,

tucked into dark
hollows of a sea
cliff. We passed
through a maze of
channels and
remarkably came
out to a small
village, the last thing
any of us expected.
It was Elfin Cove, a



community that caters to fisherman, with several lodges, marine fuel, a small café, a post office, and a store with supplies.

We explored two sides of the small community on boardwalks winding between homes. Karen spotted a game board stashed in a garage that looked slimed – Slug Race as the title told us why. A few members of



the group found the local pub, some enjoyed hot coffee and a real bathroom, and the rest of us wandered.

There were mossy banks, piles of fireweed, fishing floats, fishing nets, and a sense of the rugged sea and a small island's remoteness. It actually turns out it was on the larger island, Chichagof, which we'd paralleled much of the day, but the maze of coastline in Elfin Cove protected and gave it an intimate feel.

A couple of float planes came in to drop off guests; one brought the mail. After our visit, we headed towards home, winding our way between Humpback Whales, Pigeon Guillemots, Glaucous-winged Gulls, Marbled Murrelets, and scenery on a scale difficult to describe. The feeling of freedom we had this day, to be in small boats, close to the water, and able to go wherever we wished was just grand. We enjoyed talking with the captains about fishing, local politics, customs and stories. They did a marvelous job trying to line up whales diving with snow-capped peaks, helping us create



outstanding photos. The day passed quickly and we covered a lot of sea miles.

The fresh air and full day made us dash for hot showers upon our return, and oh how we delighted in the comforts of cozy Gustavus Inn. This was our last night, five in total, and we could have booked in for several more. No one minded that we had salmon again, fresh right from the sea – quite lovely! Dessert was a melt-in-your mouth cheesecake covered with raspberry sauce – too delicious.



**July 17** Walk in Gustavus / Flight to Haines Most of our group today took a walk with Bruce Paige, a retired Chief of Interpretation at Glacier Bay National Park. He welcomed us at his home, a four-acre area fenced to keep the resident Moose from dining on his gardens and plantings. He had a lot of bird feeders, and the night previous he had trapped a Northern Flying Squirrel to relocate it away from the feeders. It was marvelous to get close-up views of this curious, bigeved marvel of the mammal kingdom. Birding was quiet, with just six or eight species, but Chestnutbacked Chickadees were cooperative, Steller's Jays

group walked to an old Tlingit smokehouse; about all that was left was a rusty pail and some other debris,



but he wove a good tale of the native lifestyle before settlement. The walk passed through rural areas and homesteads; it was really a wander as much as a walk and the prize was finding a cow Moose off in the distance, crossing a clearing. The group learned a lot about those who had settled the area and some excellent natural history as well - a morning well spent and it was quite nice to get a walk in.

Inspired by Wynn and Greg earlier in the week, four of the group opted to go out for more whales, taking the tour boat

option that goes out twice daily. Whales are different each day, and this day they were widely scattered, so much so that our first two hours gave us only pretty distant views, though some were of whales breaching. We crossed Icy Strait twice, and finally our captain spotted a group of Humpbacks, back in the opposite direction. Sun was breaking through as we headed over; dramatic light highlighting the huge mountains that rim the straits. Being among this group of whales was absolutely remarkable. It was a large pod with two subgroups, six or seven in each one. At one point it was difficult to know where to look; we had whales on all sides, spouting,



diving, feeding, making sounds. One group lined up as if ballet dancers, the spouts going off in synchrony. When they dove it would be tail 1,2,3,4.... We had a good fifteen minutes or more of 'whale immersion' and when we tried to head back, two came up less than thirty feet from our boat. They lounged at the surface a bit, and moved off in no hurry – quite humbling to take in their massive size. We had worked hard to see them and find them but were so rewarded. Everyone walked off the boat with a glow.

We thoroughly enjoyed lunch at the Inn, as we'd mainly had picnics, and it was a treat to enjoy the cozy dining room with its rim view of flowers, friendly staff, and lovely food. We had a delicious soup and



There was little turbulence, and sun played in and out of clouds, painting the landscape with the most dramatic light. The "big" plane had views of Icy Strait on one side, and massive peaks on the other. The pilot was confident and skilled and with fairly smooth conditions we all got more relaxed, taking in the splendor of scenery with delight. Each view was more dramatic than the last, just a series of infinitely pleasing views of rugged peaks, icefields, glaciers carving through valleys, and on the ocean side, colors of jade and green. We were in flight about fifty minutes and the approach into Haines was dramatic, though to those in the "little" plane it was all the more

fresh spinach salad, followed by homemade cookies full of coconut, cranberries and nuts. We joked about eating before our afternoon flight, and we were all thrilled to see the sky clearing minute by minute.

The staff from Gustavus took us to a small airstrip where we awaited our planes. There would be two, one taking 8 passengers and the other four. They arrived quickly and, after weighing ourselves and all that we owned, we were soon strapped in, with no time to grasp what was ahead. Days later, at our final dinner, almost everyone rated this flight the single highlight of the trip, something no one had expected, and perhaps just described as sublime.



so. Being lighter, they fed through a hole in the clouds to skim the ice fields, catching views of jagged peaks on all sides, descending to Haines by following the path of the glacier. Karen described the descent as a feeling of skiing. We were thrilled with this flight, a great part of our Alaskan adventure.



The air company and our hotel helped with transport, and we settled pretty quickly into accommodations at the Hotel Halsingland, in historic Fort Seward on the hill. The sun held, and as it was such a lovely day, we elected to eat dinner at a waterfront restaurant, our only not so memorable meal of the trip, but a nice walk to get our bearings, and a glimpse into town life – Haines felt like a big city after Gustavus, with stores, streets, and a good

number of people roaming about. Everyone slept well tonight, after our many adventures.

July 18 Skagway / Train to White's Pass Skagway is famous as one of two jumping off points for the Klondike Gold Rush, one of the wealthiest strikes ever made, drawing over 100,000 hopefuls through incredibly difficult terrain to reach the riches in Yukon. Now a





tourist town to rival any, the National Park Service has stepped in to help make the history come alive between a bevy of gift stores and restaurants. We arrived by fast ferry from Haines, and had several hours to look around and spill away our own riches on purchases, on either side of the White's Pass train excursion. Amid the clutter we did find some treasures, but the best part of the day was the stunning scenery and fun of riding an historic train. We traveled up to the summit (the Canadian/US border) on the

Railroad. The engines pulled us up 2865 feet in twenty miles! There were some amazing trestles, stunning waterfalls, and sublime scenery all around. We could



look back on the boat harbor (filled with 1400 to 3000 or more passenger cruise ships), the town, and, in all directions, iceclad peaks. A



few of us spotted a Hoary Marmot. We were in the caboose, which was great as the rear deck gave us wide-open views. We

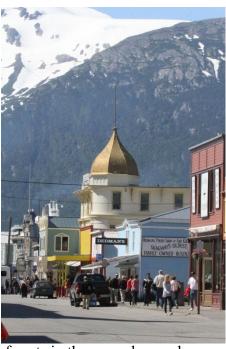
waved at each other at different viewpoints as the train bent around curves, and snacked on good ginger

cookies brought onboard by Peg. Time passed quickly, and at 6PM we boarded the fast ferry back to Haines. Tonight we enjoyed dinner and lively conversation in the dining room of Hotel Halsingland, where the owner, Jeff, took good care of us, finding special wines and suggesting appetizers like fresh made duck pate. We were glad to be back to indulgent delights!

July 19 Morning Nature Walk / Sheldon Museum, the Hammer Museum



This morning we took a hike in Chilkat State Park just outside of Haines. It was an easy hike in tall, open woods for the



first part, but full of roots in the second, so only part of the group continued on. They were rewarded with finding themselves on a rugged stone beach with no one else around, and views of water and mountains. A Common Raven came and posed, and we had a real treat when a flock of White-winged

Crossbills came down close enough to give us good views.

We crossed over a headland, watching a pair of eagles in the trees, when our eyes picked up a strange pattern of art on the round, polished boulders of the next bay. The lines looked like something carved by primitive peoples, but their origin turned out to be from tiny and abundant snails. We dropped on our knees to photograph and enjoy them. Indeed, between snail trails and wildflowers, we lost all track of time and suddenly realized we'd need to make a dash to keep our date to see the others at lunch – on the outside deck of the Fireweed Restaurant. We had some of the restaurant's innovative pizzas, and several had salads with smoked salmon from the business next door. We were informed that they ship; guess where we went after lunch?

Greg talked with some local carvers, and through his contact we had a chance to see the workshop and some of their projects, including restoring huge totem poles, and creating new pieces, one for the Haines library. Several excellent teachers live in the Haines area and it was gratifying to



see this art form very much alive. In the afternoon everyone was free; some relaxed at the Inn, and others walked down the hill (yes, we had to walk back UP this big hill) to a really outstanding museum featuring native art and artifacts of the Sheldon collection. We met for another very good meal at the hotel this evening, among the favorites being salmon caught that day, and duck confit salad.



July 20 July 20 Morning for Wildlife Watching and a Forest Walk / Afternoon Free to Explore/ Early Dinner and the Ferry to Juneau

We had a great morning with guides Judy and Ron from Alaska Nature Tours. We all wished we'd booked this outing for the full day! We drove out of Haines about ten miles to Chilkoot Lake State Park, searching for three Grizzly Bears along the way that had come to take advantage of the first Pink Salmon Run. They'd been seen quite

regularly, but it turns out the beautiful sunny weather we'd had for the last two days (T-shirt temperatures rare for Haines!) did not help our quest. The bears were likely sleeping in the shade, and as "dawn" viewing would need to be about 3:30AM, we were just out of sink with our hoped to see bears. We did set up scopes on two different active Bald Eagle nests and everyone enjoyed watching the chicks, and the

adult tending them. We had close-up views of Lincoln's Sparrows of which Rob got some amazing images. The river had that gorgeous pale jade and turquoise sheen of glacial milk, and set against a verdant canopy of green it was particularly striking. Judy Hall was our



plant expert. She has recently authored the second edition of



"Native Plants of Southeast Alaska", and is working on a book on fungi. We walked to a muskeg area where we found sundews, Mountain Hemlocks's, and a lot of interesting plants. Don was the history buff, and he told some great stories of John Muir. We learned a lot and the time went all too quickly!

We had some free time after lunch, and those who missed the museum the previous day went today, on recommendations of the others. Jeff of Hotel Halsingland was kind enough to do a special

dinner seating for us at 4:15 so we could make our appointed ferry, the 6:45 run to Juneau. It was very special to be the only ones in this lovely dining room, enjoying great food and a chance to talk about our favorite moments of the journey. What rated highly? Whales, wolves, the flight among peaks and clouds and, not surprisingly, time with each other. This was Naturalist Journey's first Reunion Trip, with a goal

of getting together in a beautiful place, at an unhurried pace to enjoy the landscape and each other. We all agreed it was a real success!



The ferry was an evening one, making for some tight turnarounds for those with early flights, but it gave us a chance to experience a lovely final sunset. We had views of a few more whale spouts, a few sightings of gulls and seabirds, some Pacific Loons, and a Sea Otter in the distance. Mostly we relaxed, brainstormed this trip report, and started to say our good-byes. I don't think a single person was ready to leave!

#### July 21 Homeward Bound

Some were off at the crack of dawn, and seven of us went in to see the marvelous Alaska State Museum in Juneau. A few were scheduled to stop in Ketchikan for an overnight and chance to see some of the native arts and culture, and the rest of us wound our way home. Great trip!



Photos by Peg Abbott, Carol Bratman and Wynn Johanson