



**NOAA Teacher at Sea
Tara Fogleman
Onboard NOAA Ship JOHN N. COBB
June 1 – 14, 2007**

Date: 9 June 2007

Location: Southeast Alaska—Wrangell and Petersburg

Mission: Alaskan Harbor Seal—Pupping Phenology and Site Monitoring

During the past few days, we have continued to monitor seal haulout sites in waterways between Wrangell and Petersburg. At each rocky reef site, Dave Withrow (Chief Scientist) observes the seals from the small skiff and makes an initial count of adults and pups using his gyrostabilized binoculars. These binoculars are an important tool because they provide a clear, stabilized image of the seals, even when the user is on a movable object such as the skiff. If possible, Dave then directs Chris to drop us off at a nearby rocky island, so that we can observe the seals on land from a closer viewpoint. Throughout the observation process, it is important that we do not “spook” the seals—they are easily frightened by the sounds of nearby boats or visual cues such as the shape of a human figure. When the seals feel threatened, they quickly slip off of the rocks and into the water, making it difficult to get an accurate count.



In this photo, a female harbor seal and her pup are hauled out on a rocky reef island covered in kelp. At high tide, many of these rocky reef islands are completely submerged in water.

The JOHN N. COBB has also made two stops along the way at the towns of Wrangell and Petersburg. At both towns, we have picked up supplies for the rest of our journey,

including a fuel filter and extra fuel for the small skiff and groceries for the remainder of our meals. Because we docked at each town overnight, I was able to get off the boat and do some exploring at each location.

Wrangell—

Wrangell is the smaller of the two towns, with a population of only 2,500 residents. The primary industries of this town are crab, shrimp, and fish processing, though tourism has played an increasing role in the recent years. Dave, Dan, and I walked through the downtown area, which was mostly shut down for the night since we had arrived after six. However, some kids were still out, skateboarding on the empty sidewalks or hanging out at the local ice cream shop and arcade. We purchased ice cream (a luxury not available on the JOHN N. COBB!) and walked down to Petroglyph Beach, an area of beach strewn with rocks and boulders that contain carvings created by the Tlingit, the natives of Alaska. The forty-something carvings scattered along the beach consisted of spirals, circles, and other geometric images that represent a variety of animals and objects from the daily life of the Tlingit.



Petroglyphs, which are ancient carvings created by the native people of southeastern Alaska, are found on several boulders along the beaches of Wrangell.

Petersburg—

A few days later, the JOHN N. COBB docked in Petersburg. This town is slightly larger than Wrangell and is located at the northern end of the 21-mile Wrangell Narrows. As we approached Petersburg from the water, I could see rows of neatly painted houses in an assortment of bright colors and a large marina filled with fishing vessels and smaller boats. The town was laid out by a Scandinavian Peter Buschmann, who started a salmon

cannery and sawmill there in 1897. The Scandinavian influence can still be observed today—I encountered numerous Viking references as I strolled through the town, including a large statue of a Viking ship and ancient Viking symbols etched into the downtown sidewalks. The town of Petersburg continues to thrive today, due to successful fishing, tourism, and shellfish processing industries.



The town of Petersburg, Alaska was laid out by a Scandinavian man named Peter Buschmann, who started a salmon cannery and sawmill in the town in 1897. Evidence of Petersburg's heritage is found throughout the town, and each year, the town holds a Viking celebration that draws residents and numerous visitors.

After walking around downtown Petersburg for a couple of hours, a few of us decided to take a hike to stretch our legs and get a little exercise (it's hard to get a good workout on the JOHN N. COBB!). The day was unseasonably warm—temperatures were in the 70s—and so we grabbed some water, put on some walking shoes, and headed up Mt. Petersburg. The scenery was beautiful, and as we neared the peak of the mountain, we encountered snow! Being from Georgia, we don't see much snow—and we never see snow in June—so I was quite excited. After making a few snow angels and having a small snowball fight, the sun began to set and so we headed back down the mountain.

Visiting these two towns was a wonderful cultural experience—I had a chance to see a glimpse of life in a small fishing town in Alaska. The people of these towns were rugged and good-natured, and they seemed to be excited about the upcoming summer season. For many of them, their lives depend on the oceans, and it is important to them that the natural resources contained in their waters are protected and sustained for future generations.