



**NOAA Teacher at Sea
John Schneider
Onboard NOAA Ship *Fairweather*
July 7 – August 8, 2009**

NOAA Teacher at Sea: John E. Schneider

NOAA Ship *Fairweather* (S-220)

Mission: Hydrographic Survey

Geographical Area: Shumagin Islands

Date: July 21-26, 2009

Position

In Port – Dutch Harbor, AK

Personal Log

The days we spent in Dutch Harbor were a combination of 8-hour work days and evenings spent in town at either the Harbor View Sports Bar and Grill or the Grand Aleutian Hotel. The crew and survey techs put in full days, then go out for a couple of hours using the liberty van. Everyone's usually back aboard by midnight or so (the van stops running at 2300, but the town's only about a 20 minute walk.) In Dutch and Unalaska, there are houses of worship, museums, a Safeway, a clinic (which I got to visit ☺ after stepping on a nail), a community indoor pool and a post office. There are also a couple of ship supply places that have excellent quality gear at a minimum markup considering how far away we are.

For me, there were four events that were particularly of note. First, before now I had only ever seen one bald eagle in the lower 48 and a half dozen or so in Kodiak. In Dutch, they are all over the place! I was able to get to within about 7 or 8 feet of a couple of them and got several excellent pictures. These

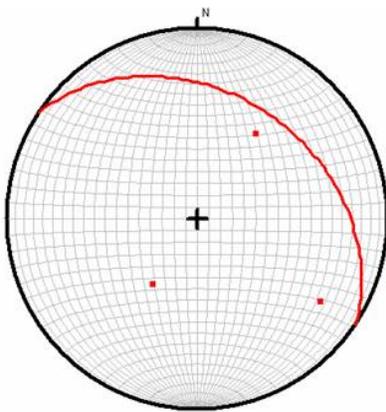


Left: A juvenile bald eagle preening himself; Below, an adult bald eagle.

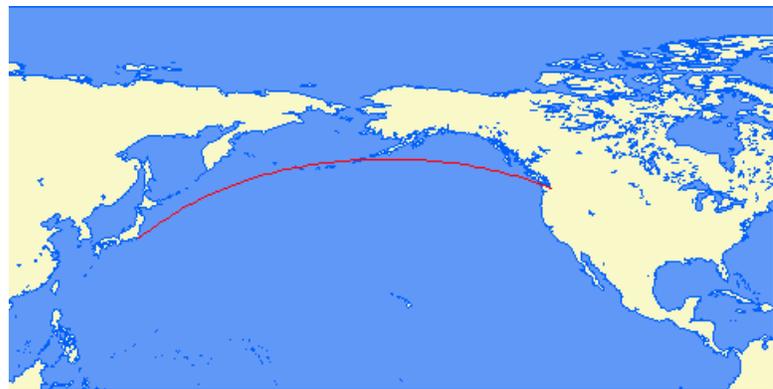


birds get to be about 3 feet tall and the talons on the juvenile pictured are about an inch long! I took well nigh 100 pictures and had trouble selecting which ones to include. They are stunning animals.

Second, I knew that Dutch Harbor had been bombed by the Japanese in WWII as part of the diversionary action prior to the Battle of Midway. What I never realized was WHY they would bomb a remote, nothing, minor outpost and attack and occupy Attu and Kiska farther out in the Aleutians. The answer lies in spheroid geometry! (OK all you math phobes, this is a cool one that's not too hard to grasp.) Simply put, the shortest distance between any two points on a sphere (the Earth) is the distance along the surface created by a plane created by three points: the two points in question and the center of the sphere. In other words, it cuts the planet in half! (The red line in the illustration.)



Spheroid geometry (diagram courtesy USNA)



Great circle rout from Tokyo to Seattle (diagram from <http://gc.kls2.com>)

On the diagram at right, the red line is the great circle route from Tokyo to Seattle. As you can see it passes right through the Aleutians. The battle in the Aleutians is sometimes referred to as the “Thousand Mile War” and is largely unknown, However, the Aleutian Islands are the “back door” to attacking North America. That’s why, after the bombing of Dutch Harbor six months after Pearl Harbor, the United States made a concerted effort to fortify the Aleutians and take



Quonset hut on Mt Ballyhoo



Gun emplacement overlooking the entrance to Dutch Harbor

back Attu and Kiska. By the way, the landings on Attu and Kiska were the first landings on American soil by an enemy since the War of 1812! There are reinforced concrete bunkers and Quonset huts all over the Dutch Harbor area and the fortifications atop Mount Ballyhoo are among the most well-preserved and extensively built in the United States. The fact that our military – both men and women – were stationed in such an inhospitable frontier should be taught to all of our students.

Personally, I am thankful to one of my professors, Jack Lutz, who was stationed on Adak, 350+ miles West of Dutch Harbor. Freedom isn't free and we are very lucky.

So, this information about great circles should lend a bit of insight to the questions I posed earlier about the D.E.W. Line (used for radar protection in the event of Soviet missile launch over the North Pole) and why we encountered ships sailing from North America to Asia while passing through Unimak Pass (It's right in the middle of the great circle route!)

On our last day in Dutch, the CO and 5 others including myself went to the old cemetery in Unalaska. Buried there is Karl Mueller of the U.S. Ship *Surveyor*. He was one of the earliest Americans to work on surveying the Aleutians and was drowned in 1938 when his survey launch hit a previously uncharted reef. For more information on the NOAA personnel lost in the line of duty, see

<http://www.history.noaa.gov/hallofhonor/lineofduty2.html>. It's important that we know our history in order to appreciate our present and look forward to the future.



Grave marker of Karl Mueller. The *Fairweather* crew maintains the grave and established a benchmark on the marker.



Crab legs, lox, salmon, biscuits w/ crab gravy, kippers (Plate #2 with dessert yet to come!)

The last notable event in Dutch was the combined “wetting down” and Sunday Brunch for the new officers. As I pointed out on one of my first logs, CO Doug Baird was promoted to Captain and Mark Andrews was promoted to Lieutenant JG. LTjg Andrews generously invited me to the wetdown and brunch which was attended by the entire crew. The wetdown was at the Grand Aleutian on Saturday night and Sunday brunch was there also. These two events were really something special and the camaraderie was great to experience. Thank you, sirs.