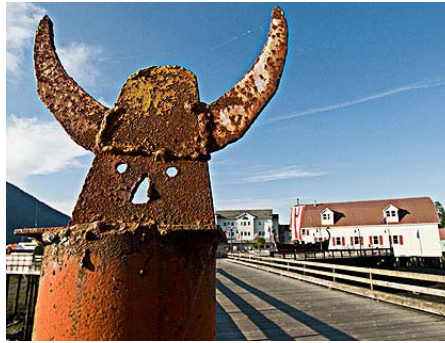


From the National Geographic Sea Lion in Alaska



Hudsonian white-face



Petersburg, Alaska

Ideal Cove & Petersburg, Alaska

The southern-most leg of our journey in southeast Alaska took place on Mitkof and Kupreanof Islands. The morning was spent cruising the murky waters of Le Conte Bay near the Stikine River. Large icebergs, discharged from the Le Conte glacier, dotted a distant moraine. Our anchor pierced the stillness of the water and we began operations at Ideal Cove.

Utilizing a fantastic boardwalk, we set out to explore this portion of the Tongass National Forest. Following the incoming tide up the beach, we explored the intertidal realm and marveled at the adaptations needed to survive there. In a nearby stream we watched very small salmon fight the river and wondered if they would make it to adulthood. We followed the stream to the forest and took in all the treasures that it had to offer. Marsh marigold, dwarf dogwood and rosy twisted stalk were in bloom and added a dash of color to the overwhelmingly green forest.

We weighed anchor and traveled to our next destination on Mitkof Island, the small community of Petersburg. Located at the northern entrance to Wrangell Narrows, this small town has deep Norwegian roots and its economy is heavily reliant on commercial fishing. Crossing the channel to Kupreanof Island via our Zodiacs, we explored the bog, or muskeg, near Petersburg Creek. It is here that we were introduced to adaptations not completely unlike that seen in the intertidal zone. In both locations water is prevalent but desiccation can limit distributions.

In the open expanse of the muskeg we could easily see bald eagles soaring high, hear ravens defending their nests and watch dragonflies show that they are the real kings and queens of the skies. Watching four-spotted skimmers chase each other is like a high-speed dogfight played out with banks and turns that will never be matched by human engineering. What I wouldn't give to watch the world zoom by my compound eyes just once.

Justin Hofman, Naturalist

