

Elfin Cove, Fjords, and Glaciers. 18-19 July 2019

Our next landing was at Elfin Cove, a small community whose main industry is tourism, and only about a dozen residents who remain for the winter. One of those residents was ferried out to *Le Soleal* to give us an introductory lecture before our visit. She explained that in the past their only contact with the outside world was boat, sea-plane, and ham radio, though nowadays cell phones have replaced the radio link, whose antenna needs repair, and satellite dishes were evident.

The town is located along the steep slope of a fjord. All of the buildings near the entrance to the fjord are linked by a boardwalk, while a narrow trail reaches a few further in. There are no roads -- a few trails go inland towards the Tongass National Forest and the interior of Chichagof Island. A community association takes care of some infrastructure, e.g. electric power and a fuel depot. Government is remote -- it would take a major crime to merit a visit from the state troopers. During the summer, there are perhaps a 120 residents, plus tourists, but almost all of them retreat to the south during the winter. The major industry is tourism. There are a few lodges that specialize in fishing and hunting. They offer packages that include lodging, food, laundry, guides, boat and other gear, and packing the catch in an insulated package. Air Alaska, unlike most American airlines, allow two free pieces of luggage, and we saw many of these insulated packages while waiting on line.



Figure 1. Boardwalk in Elfin Cove



Figure 2. Spotted slug in Elfin Cove

The next day *Le Soleal* sailed into Tracy Arm. The sides of this narrow fjord were spectacular, and ranged from forested slopes to sheer rock cliffs. The water hosted many ice flows, which “calved” off of South Sawyer Glacier, at the end of Tracy Arm. Several of these mini-icebergs hosted individual or packs of seals. Because of its small size and narrow draft, *Le Soleal* sailed almost to touching distance (so it seemed) of the glacier. We learned from one of the on-board lectures, that the Sawyer glacier is the combined flow of several glaciers, each being a slow moving river of ice. Rocky morass is pushed to the side of each of these flows, and is dragged (at a slower rate) by the glacial movement. When these ice rivers combine, the morass from each combine to form a rocky boundary between the elemental rivers. From time to time, we saw and heard hunks of the glacier face fall off into Tracy Arc.



Figure 3. Sailing towards Sawyer Glacier.



Figure 4. A couple of seals looking us over.



Figure 5. Tracy Arc landscape.



Figure 6. Sawyer Glacier. Note the dark bands of Morass separating the ice flow from different upstream origins.



Figure 7. Braving the cold and enjoying the view.



Figure 8. The right end of Sawyer Glacier.



Figure 9. More ice - more seals.



Figure 10. Intrusions in the rock face.