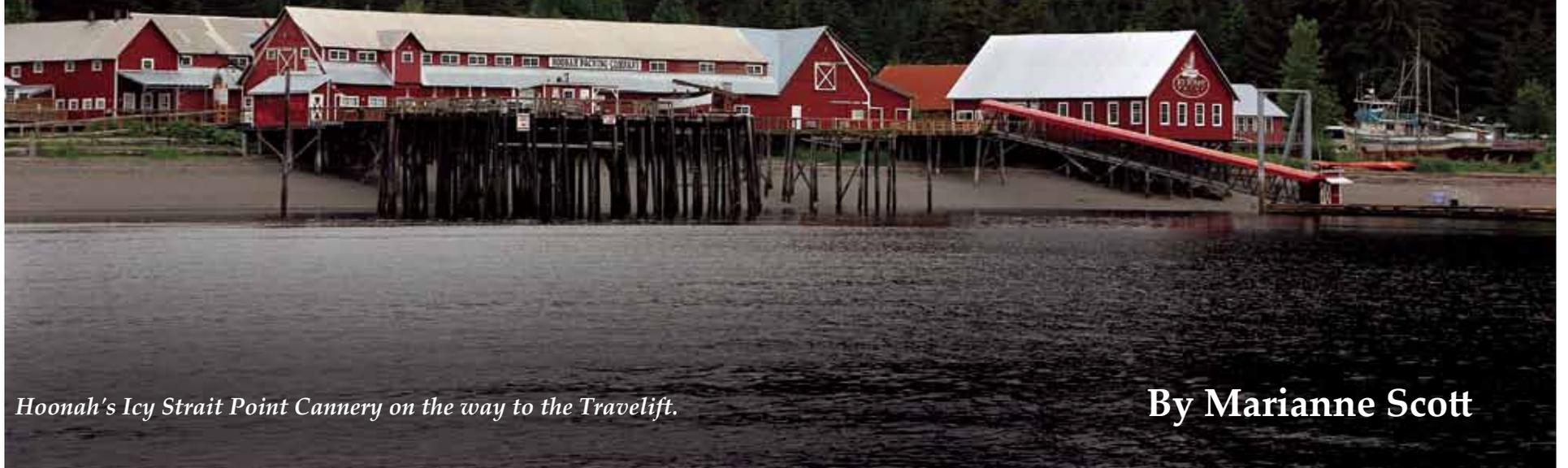


# Alaska Bound

## -Part 14



Hoonah's Icy Strait Point Cannery on the way to the Travelift.

By Marianne Scott

### Beyond the Stars' prop goes walkabout and the Scotts learn and appreciate more of Alaska's culture

**A**fter three sunny and two fogged-out rainy days in Glacier Bay, we pulled into Bartlett Cove, site of the Glacier Bay

Park offices. Our guest, Janet, was leaving the sailboat to return to Victoria. Conveniently, we had the privilege of staying at the wide,

sturdy dock for three hours. Fenders out, mooring lines ready, David steered toward the dock, swinging *Beyond the Stars* to line her up. But

as he put her in reverse to get closer, the boat remained too far for Janet and me to jump off. "You'll have to go forward. I can't make it," I called out. "It's too far."

David pushed and pulled the gearshift but *Beyond the Stars* stayed put. "I can't get the transmission into gear," he shouted. "I think the Morse cable has broken." I saw a small fishboat ahead of us with the fisherman busily hosing out his cockpit. "Sir," I yelled. "We've lost power and need your help." He and another man sauntered over and we were able to throw them our lines and tie up.

Our first job was to inform the Park officials of our boat problem and her inability to leave the dock. The rangers were most gracious and extended our visiting permit, usually strictly enforced to the days allotted. No cell phone coverage is available in the Park and the staff allowed us to use the Park landline to call marine suppliers in Juneau. Yes, they could fly out a new Morse cable once we'd measured its length.

We spent the next couple of hours emptying our aft starboard storage space—we call it the "garage." The cables run under the floorboards. We tested the cables;



*Beyond the Stars* is lifted out of the water.

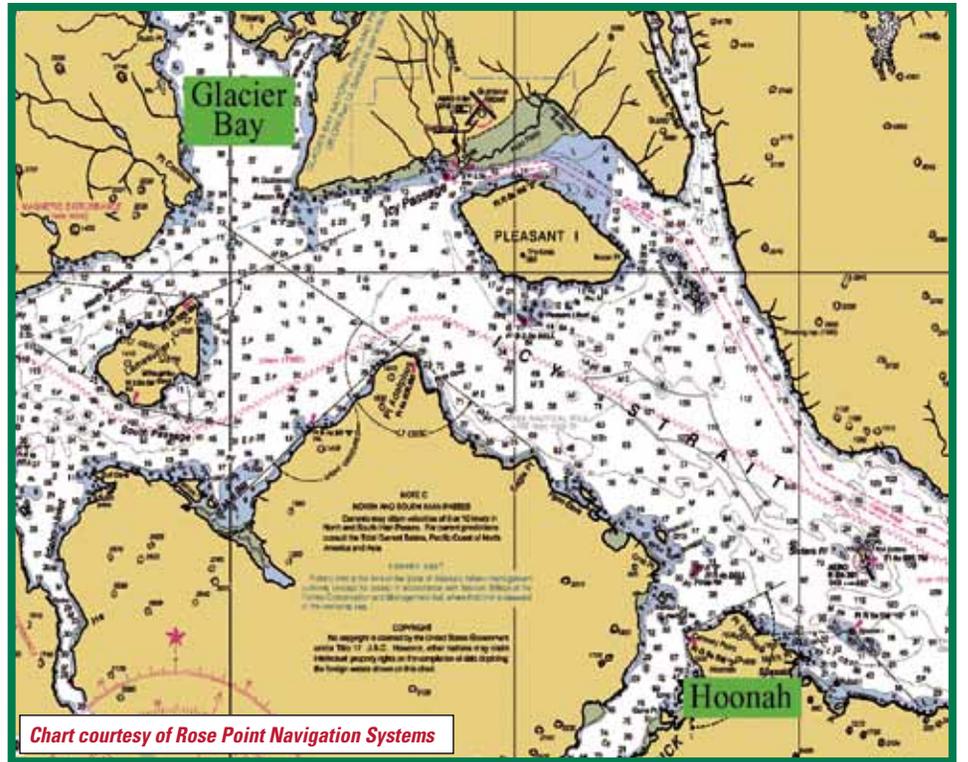
all seemed operational but the boat still wouldn't move when put into gear. After much discussion and copious advice from dockwalkers, a staff member gave us the name of a local Gustavus mechanic, Bob Chase, who specializes in automobile repair and snow plowing, but "knows a lot about everything mechanical." And so it turned out.

The next morning, Bob, a huge teddy bear of a man, arrived with his friend Stu Cook, ready to squeeze themselves into our boat's innards. David saw the two walking down

the passageway and wondered if he had to pay double for the help. David conferred with the two men.

"I've checked what I can and Morse cable seems OK, but I'd like you to go over everything I've done and anything else you think might be the problem." They climbed aboard and double-checked the cables, the transmission fluid, anything that might be amiss. All of this reminded me of a statement offshore sailor Pamela Bendall once made to me, "The definition of offshore cruising is fixing your boat in exotic places."

*Harbormaster Sherry Mills welcomes us back to Hoonah.*



Everything seemed in perfect working order, yet the boat remained stationary. Bob sat quietly in the cockpit and, looking at David, said, "How about the prop? Could it have fallen off?" My heart skipped a few beats. Could that be the issue? We hadn't considered that horrible possibility, thought it unlikely but it had to be checked out. Ours is a \$3,500, three-bladed Flexofold propeller, manufactured in Denmark. It would be nigh impossible to replace in this isolated part of the world.

Fortunately, Stu Cook owns diving gear and went home to get his drysuit and tank. While awaiting his return, Bob became a congenial tour guide, squeezed us into his pickup truck and drove the 13 miles to Gustavus, where he's spent most of his life.

About 400 people reside here and they're as attached to this place as all the Alaskans are to their towns. Bob pointed out his house in passing—it could use more than a few buckets of paint—with about 30 or so cars and



*Kystcamp is towing Beyond the Stars to Hoonah.*



*A humpback slides by as we're being towed.*

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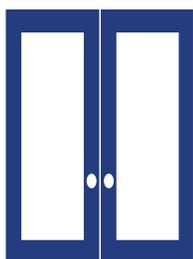
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pickup trucks arranged around the yard.

"Are you repairing all of those, Bob? I asked, a bit in awe.

"Yeah, it takes a lot of time to locate the parts and then get them up here," Bob responded.

Gustavus, like all towns and villages in "South East" as Alaska's panhandle is known, can only be reached by boat or plane. Proud of his town, Bob graciously took us to check out the local art gallery and espresso bar, then the supermarket called ToshCo. Most items were Costco products brought in from the Juneau store—prices are roughly double.

"The owner's name begins with a T, so he gave his store this tongue-in-cheek name," laughed Bob. We bought a few staples and then toured the Gustavus harbor, with a single sailboat and a few sportfishers. Here, like some of the houses we'd seen, black-speckled old fishing boats were mouldering away in the saturated climate—the rainforest jungle is reclaiming the plywood and colonizing the fiberglass.

By the time we returned to the dock, Stu had donned his diving gear and went into the water to inspect our shaft. "Bob has guessed right. There's no prop," Stu announced popping up from the water. "I'll tell you though, we can't just leave that prop down there," he said. "It's too expensive to lose and I'm going to find it. It's only 30 feet down."

Bob and David kibitzed alongside the dock, feeding out the line they had tied to Stu—just in case he needed a quick haul-out. As we'd estimated where the prop had blown off and watching Stu's oxygen bubble up, they tugged the line to guide his explorations: left, right, go back, go forward. His diving suit had seen better days and filled with the chilly water. The gathered crowd opined how unlikely it was to find the prop in the thick muck of glacial silt carpeting the bottom.

"He'll stir up that finely ground rock flour and he'll never find it," was the common consensus. But Stu persisted, coming up regularly to ask for more and more weights to reduce his buoyancy.

"I need to be able to walk on the bottom," he said, "so I can explore the area where I think the prop might be." We dug out every bit of lead on our boat and another sailor offered their fishing lead sinkers, which finally sank Stu.

We watched the bubbles as Stu wandered around in the turbid water. Abruptly, a hand appeared above the water holding a shiny brass trophy. He'd found it! Everyone applauded.

Stu re-emerged and all of us gathered around Bob Chase's truck to examine the prop. All the pieces seemed to be there. The only question? Was the connector on the shaft equally intact?

## Return to Hoonah

Reattaching the propeller underneath the boat in the cold silty water, with its 16 finicky parts and set bolts, was out of the question. So we gratefully accepted the offer of Victoria friends Lioba and Stefan to tow us with their Nauticat 32, Kystcamp, to Hoonah, about 31 nm miles away. Hoonah had been our last stop before visiting Glacier Bay (see Northwest Yachting June 2015) and, luckily, it has a 220-ton Travelift serving vessels all around the region. The assistant harbormaster, Arlen Skaflestad, told us they could make time for us in their schedule as long as we arrived by Friday afternoon, as he was taking a few days off.



Diver Stu Cook with the recovered propeller.

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Assistant Harbormaster Arlen Skaflestad lashes his boat to ours to enter the Travelift.

The forecast was for higher winds and chop, not propitious for a smaller sailboat towing a bigger one. The Park officials graciously allowed us to stay at the dock for two extra days. When the winds were forecast to be light with minimum chop, we fashioned a bridle and deflated and folded our dinghy so it wouldn't interfere with the Travelift.

Stefan's sailboat pulled us across Icy Strait's still waters (fortunately, few iceberg show up these days), with several humpbacks blowing and curving their triangular backs on port. Some sea otters were doing the backstroke and dove as we neared them. The far-off mountains were cloaked with aprons of vagrant clouds. At one point, we had enough wind to put out the jibs and increase our speed from the 4 knots we'd been making. As we neared Hoonah, we telephoned the harbor office's Sherry Mills and then Arlen, the assistant harbormaster. He assured us again he could accommodate us that afternoon. "We have no locomotion so we'll need help to get into the slings."

"No problem," said Arlen, confidently. "I'll get you in with my boat. I used to work in a Juneau boatyard and have done it a thousand times."

He showed up in his vintage, twin-engine Tolleycraft, cell phone firmly attached to his ear, and tied us together. Because of his last name, I asked him if he, like master carver Gordon Greenwald, had some Norwegian ancestry. "Yup," he said, laughing loudly. "Gordon is my cousin. We're 'Tlingwegians.'"

Slowly we entered the wide Travelift, whose side pilings protected our hull with thick rubber jackets, although spikey, scratchy barnacles colonize the areas below the waterline. We tied up temporarily to the pilings while Arlen docked his boat. Awaiting his return, a gentleman's head appeared above us and called out, "Do you have any old towels? The slings are fully encrusted with old bottom paint you don't want to transfer to that nice yellow hull of yours." Appreciative, I went to dig

out towels. Replacing them is a bit less expensive than new Awlgrip paint job.

Then the same gentleman came back a few minutes later with four cardboard boxes he'd gathered at the nearby grocery. He tossed them down and told us to line the slings with them. They worked—no marks on our yacht. (Note to Hoonah Harbor—use that power sprayer you own to remove the gobs of bottom paint from the slings). Arlen pressed the buttons on the remote and shortly afterwards, we'd been boosted ashore. Fortunately, the connector that holds the propeller on the shaft was still attached and within the hour, our prop was back on. The piece acting as a lock washer was firmly bent (it had opened and allowed the prop to set off on its walkabout), and Loctite applied liberally.

**Marianne Scott** is an award-winning writer who has covered the marine scene for two decades. She has contributed to Northwest Yachting since 2001. Her sailing experiences include a round-trip voyage from Victoria to French Polynesia, circumnavigating the Baltic Sea, traversing the canals and rivers of the Netherlands and just completing a 2,700 nautical mile voyage to Alaska. She and her husband, David, also enjoy finding the nooks and crannies of the BC coast on their Hanse 411, s/v *Beyond the Stars*. Her books include *Naturally Salty*, *Coastal Characters of the Pacific Northwest* and *Ocean Alexander—the first 25 years*.



The same gentleman who'd lobbed us the boxes came over to help again, abandoning the polishing of his spiffy Nonesuch sailboat, *Amity*. Bob Hutton is a retired Hoonah teacher who, besides covering other subjects, mainly taught music. "My specialty is the trombone." He was generous with his time, dexterous and even drove home to get a tool that would make it easier to tighten the prop nut. Although many boaters help each other, Bob went way beyond the call and we are grateful for his efforts, and much enjoyed meeting him. It was one more illustration of Alaska's culture of welcoming strangers into their midst—and to provide assistance.

Arlen came back to lower us into the water and collect the \$500 Travelift fee. We started the engine, put *Beyond the Stars* in gear, and the prop smoothly moved us to our berth in the harbor marina. Hurrah!

Harbormaster Sherry Millshad reserved a "hot berth" for us (when someone leaves a slot and a visitor can occupy it) and came down to the dock. She hugged us both and told us everyone in town knew that our prop had gone walkabout. It was a wonderful, warm welcome after the anxiety over our propulsion system.

We were extremely lucky that Bob Chase had thought to point out a possible prop loss, that Stu Cook had been persistent enough to find it in chilly, murky water, that our friends Stefan and Lioba were willing to tow us across Icy Strait, that Hoonah was nearby and has a Travelift, that Arlen hadn't yet gone off on his holiday, and that Bob Hutton had tools and help on offer. Terrific, generous people all helping us.

We have the fondest memories of Hoonah and its friendly citizens. Of all the towns and villages we'd visited, this was my favorite. *nwy*

Photo below - All 18 parts fit back together.

