

By DANA STABENOW

# Haines Idyll

**The only other time I've ever been to Haines** was in 1972, when my University of Alaska Fairbanks Reporting of Public Affairs class went to Juneau to report

on the Legislature. We drove from Fairbanks to Haines to catch the ferry to Juneau, and repeated the trip in reverse to get home. This was February or March and it was dark for most of the day and, for me, Haines was just a ferry terminal, not an actual town.

Last year my friend Irene invited me down to a remembrance gathering in honor of six members of the Gaanaxteidi family. Irene grew up in Haines, and her friend Jill was going to be adopted into the Raven clan, and Jill and Irene and Irene's cousin Rose and I would be driving down together.

Almost 800 miles by road from Anchorage, located at the top end of the Lynn Canal at the top of Alaska's Inside Passage, Haines began life as a summer fish camp for the Tlingits who lived in Klukwan, about 20 miles up the road. Naturalist John Muir showed up in 1879 and, along with missionary S. Hall Young, finessed a Ms. Francina Haines of the Presbyterian Home Missions Board out of enough money to finance a mission there (hence the name of the new town). In 1902 the U.S. Army built Fort Seward west of the town site. The fort was named for William H. Seward, the secretary of interior who engineered the Alaska Purchase from Russia (two cents an acre, don't forget, still the best deal the United States ever made).

The fort was decommissioned after World War II and the buildings sold as surplus to five retired officers who had served there. They renamed it Port Chilkoot, a name still used today. They planned to create an arts community, which has been partially realized because what was the fort hospital is now home to Alaska Indian Arts, a nonprofit corporation dedicated to the preservation of the art and craft of the

Pacific Northwest native tribes. A totem pole is under construction and, Rose says, "The smell of cedar hits you in the face when you walk in the door."

The town itself has paved streets with curbs but no stoplights. It doesn't have any chain restaurants or big box stores or traffic jams. What they do have is a smile and a "hello" from everyone you meet, as well as tall mountains, vast glaciers, deep blue waters lapping at lush green cliffs, with salmon jumping everywhere you look, eagles and bears loitering with intent. The community has a laid-back quality I've seldom found anywhere else, even in Alaska.

Life is still lived around fishing, though, following a statewide trend, where there used to be nine operating salmon canneries in Haines there is now only one. That's if you don't count the Tsirku Canning Co., where com-

mercial fisherman Jim Szymanski has reconstructed an old cannery line and runs it at one-tenth the normal speed, explaining each step to visitors.

"There's something about Haines that encourages people to pursue their passion," says Michelle Glass of the Haines Convention and Visitors Bureau. "Oh, look, an eagle," she adds as we're driving out to Seduction Point.

There's a lot of "Oh, look, an eagle" in local conversations, because the 48,000-acre Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve is located in Haines, which inspired the passion of retired high school teacher Dave Olerud to pretty much single-handedly create the American Bald Eagle Foundation, which monitors and interprets the habits of the 4,000 eagles on the preserve. There's the tiny Great Land winery which recently won an award for its onion wine (I don't even want to know) and, oh yeah, the Hammer Museum. Yes, really, it's in Irene's brother Ronnie's old house on Main Street, housing a collection of 1,200

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**The Hammer Museum** in Haines houses a collection of 1,200 hammers. For the price of admission, Carol Pahl [RIGHT] will show visitors every one of them.

ROSE STASCO

hammers. For \$2 admission, Carol Pahl will introduce you to every single one. There are wagon pin hammers that did double duty as hitching pins. There are bill poster hammers with magnetic claws. There are tack hammers and paving hammers and a whale blubber hammer and a Waterford crystal hammer and sugar and salt hammers and gavel and fur stamps and bookbinder's hammers and cobbler's hammers and

## Do It Yourself

### ■ The Haines Convention and Visitors

Bureau has a great little trip planner, which includes Haines history, things to do and where to eat and stay.

■ **Accommodations in Haines** are plentiful and range from hotels to B&Bs to an RV park to a state campground. E-mail [hcvb@haines.ak.us](mailto:hcvb@haines.ak.us) or call toll free (800) 458-3579 to have them mail you a copy.

■ **For information on the glacier tour** and other tours with Chilkat Cruises, including a package deal for a ride on the historic White Pass & Yukon Route, go to [www.chilkatcruises.com](http://www.chilkatcruises.com) or call toll free (888) 766-2103.

■ **Alaska Indian Arts** has its own Web site at <http://www.alaskaindianarts.com> with some great pictures of masks and totem poles. You won't smell the cedar but it's not a bad second best.

■ **Check out the Sheldon Museum** at [www.sheldonmuseum.org](http://www.sheldonmuseum.org) or (907) 766-2366. Contact the Tsirku Canning Co. at <http://www.cannerytour.com> or call (907) 766-3474.

■ **Contact the American Bald Eagle Foundation** at [www.baldeagles.org](http://www.baldeagles.org) or call (907) 766-3094.

Larry shrugs and rolls his eyes. "Oh, at least," he says.

"At least?" I say to Rose, who is along for the ride, and I do like my mother taught me, I keep one hand always for the boat.

We zoom over to Skagway to pick up our passengers and then zoom out of the harbor again, only to stop on a dime when Larry spots a humpback cow and calf feeding. "That's the best part about this tour," Larry says. "We're fast enough that we've got time to stop and look."

Larry noses the boat up to the Glacier Point beach, we climb on buses and drive through the forest primeval to the edge of a lake. From the other side rises Davidson Glacier, a steep, showy river of ice. They load us into canoes and we paddle right up to it, close enough to see the sun turning the fractures and fissures an almost painfully glorious range of blues from forget-me-not to turquoise. And then, when we turn around to paddle back, the entire Chilkoot Range is looking down its collective nose at us with a properly lofty disdain. That moment right there was worth the whole trip.

There are a ton of events around

which you can structure your visit in Haines, including a summer solstice bicycle relay race from Haines Junction to Haines (160 miles last year, with 1,200 participants) that has sparked rivalry between Haines, Skagway and Whitehorse, their Canadian neighbor to the north. In August there is the Southeast Alaska State Fair and, in November, the Alaska Bald Eagle Festival, including tours of the Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve.

Gold is still mined in the nearby Porcupine mining district, where you can visit an actual ghost town. The Sheldon Museum and Cultural Center houses an extensive Tlingit collection as well as exhibits on pioneer days and gold rush history. And then there is the usual Alaska stuff, fishing for salmon and halibut, sea kayaking, hiking, biking, camping, fishing and boating.

My week there was an idyll, and I'm going back to look at the rest of those hammers just as soon as I possibly can

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my personal favorite—little wooden drink hammers that the flappers of the Roaring '20s would use to tap the table to applaud shows, including one from the Cotton Club in Harlem.

I could have spent all day in the Hammer Museum but I had to tear myself away to go on a glacier cruise, oh darn. Chilkat Cruises runs the fast ferry between Haines and Skagway, 35 minutes point to point, and then they hit the gas with the *Chilkat Express*, a 65-foot catamaran equipped with four 800-horsepower Caterpillar engines coupled to four Hamilton water jets. "Just how fast is this boat?" I ask Larry Sweet, Chilkat Cruises' senior captain. "Forty, 42 knots?"