

By KATHY ANDERSON

Lucky Star Days in Prince William Sound

All who've been there would agree that Prince William Sound is one of the prettiest places on earth. The only trick is that the best way to get there is by boat, the best way to fish it is by boat, and without a doubt the very best way to explore it is by boat. Lucky us—for three days, we lived on a boat to-end-all fishing boats, the 54-foot custom aluminum yacht *Miss Brizz*, which is based out of Seward. Add beautiful weather, great fishing, a good crew, some very nice folks onboard, and you get pretty close to paradise. For three days, we would thank our lucky stars that we had joined this adventure.

My husband Patrick and I had hardly had chance to meet our captain, crew, and fellow travelers before the silver action took center stage. Captain Mike Dunn found a really sweet spot at the head of Resurrection Bay, just 30 minutes from our Seward port. Dwain Trost of South Dakota was onto a nice size coho within 15 seconds of our anchoring. His wife, Pat, was into one in 30 seconds, and before three minutes passed, all four of us were fighting fish.

“Fast and furious” doesn’t begin to describe the mayhem—at one point, these strong salmon had tangled all four of our lines. It was a testament to the skills and quick reactions of crewmembers Rich Pederson and Ben Ward that we landed all four of these fish. We asked the crew how they did it, and they grinned and answered “Gamakatsu,” but we knew it was their agility at work, too. That, and our lucky stars.

We limited out pretty quickly, and Mike decided we

A Prince William Sound glacier as seen from the deck of the *Miss Brizz*. South Dakotan Pat Trost with a first coho (Inset). © Kathy Anderson

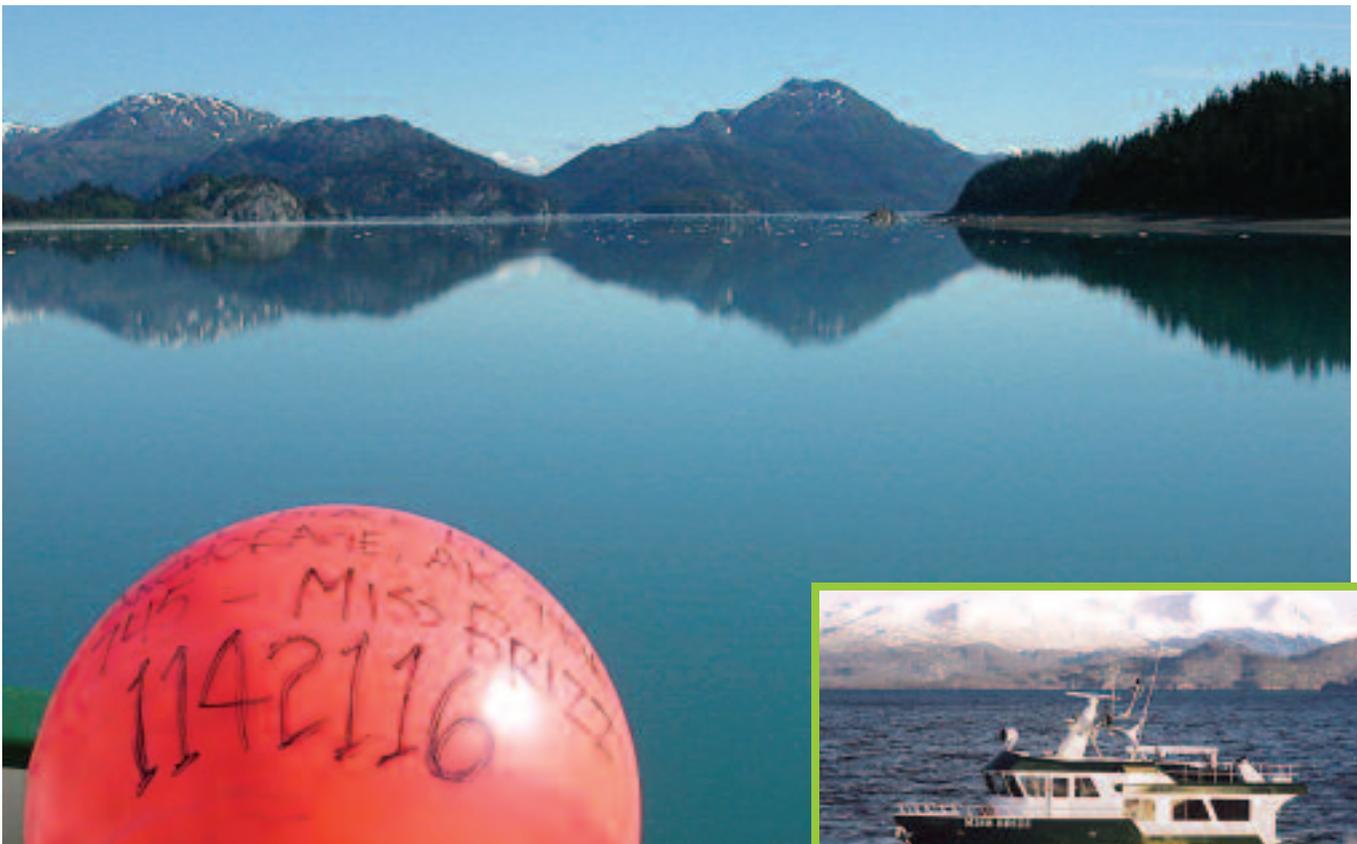




should head for Cape Clear on Montague Island, a three-hour trip from our "Silver City." The run gave us a chance to meet everyone and to find out more about the boat. The *Miss Brizz* was built to owner Tom Konop's specifications in 2003 by Anchorage builder, Sea State One Marine. Tom obviously knows a lot about fishing and boating and he and his wife Nancy have taken amazing care designing and outfitting her. The Peregrine Boat hull is one that's been favored for years by commercial fishermen, so she's indisputably seaworthy. She has two powerful engines, twin Luger 6140's rated at 700 HP each, which give her not only a fast cruising speed (up to 14 knots) but also that extra edge of maneuverability if the weather should turn. The electronics package is state-of-the-art and includes many dual systems including radar, DGPS, and echo sounders, as well as the latest 1000 watt Simrad. The fishing deck is spacious at 150 square feet, giving fishing clients the luxury of landing room. There are three gorgeous staterooms, three high-class heads, and a living area that includes a gourmet kitchen, a leather couch and recliner, and a plasma television with a DVD player. Not a bad place to relax after our fishing frenzy!

When we reached Cape Clear, Captain Mike initiated his "Pinnacle Plan" for halibut and rockfish. The theory was this: We'd start on a pinnacle at a 60-foot depth and drift while the current was running at its fastest. The drop-off around the pinnacle was to 250 feet, so we had to be extra vigilant to keep our lead on the bottom. It sounded like a good plan, but then the sharks intervened. Patrick actually landed three of them simultaneously on one rig, and the rest of us pulled in about a dozen, one at a time. The joke became, "Is it a non-shark?!" We decided to rename the spot "Jaws Alley," even though these harmless dogfish were just pretenders to the Great White throne.

Mike moved us to 150 feet of water next, seeking and finding halibut. The crew rigged up double circle hooks with herring and lead varying from 2 to 3 pounds. Patrick did his multi-hitter trick again, and actually brought up two chickens on one rig. He assured us that two 20-pound halibut were a lot harder



A glassy Prince William Sound bay. © Kathy Anderson
At right, the *Miss Brizz* under power. © Tom Konop



to bring up than one 40-pounder! We all enjoyed some halibut-catching at this spot before the darn dogfish invaded again. We laughed at them, noting that they aggressively chased a hooked shark and would probably not mind eating their own cousins.

As we reeled in for the final time that evening, we couldn't help but notice that the weather gods were treating us as well as our marvelous crew was. We could see a monstrous rainstorm back towards Seward, but here in our private part of the sound, our lucky stars were showing nothing but blue sky and 6-inch seas. We motored over to anchor in McLeod Harbor, while all around us crazy pink salmon were popping out of the water like kernels in a bag of microwave popcorn. So far, we'd seen otters, loons, sea lions, cormorants, kittiwakes, gulls, eagles, mergansers, and two kinds of puffins, all of which we noted on our official "critter list." Mike did a great job pointing them out and, for special sightings, he took detours to give us a closer look.

Dinner was served alfresco, on the upper deck. Here we were, in a gorgeous sheltered anchorage, in 60 feet of perfectly flat water, feasting on baked shrimp, homemade carrot cake, and

good wine. We weren't sure what the best part was, soaking up the magic of this private harbor or being just 20 minutes from prime fishing waters for our morning run.

On Friday morning, we awoke to the sound of, well... nothing. There were absolutely no waves lapping, no indication short of looking out our porthole that we were even on the water. It was almost worrisome. Patrick and I snuck out onto the deck at 6 a.m. and spent about half an hour just basking in the solitude. No waves disturbed the harbor and no clouds were overhead, just a few puffy white strands strafing the horizon. A pair of herons stalked one beach, and Patrick spotted three deer, a doe with her babies, making their way through the puddles on the other. The fawn leapt to keep up with mama, but the yearling, clearly the mischief maker, dallied behind and pursued every distraction.

While the rest of us ate breakfast, Patrick rigged up his trusty baitcasting rod and jigged his crippled herring, landing a few entertaining pinks. We set out at 8 a.m., and it was great to know that we would be

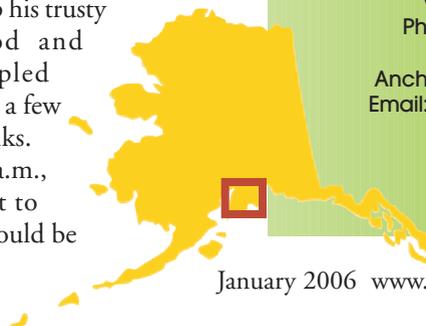
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Alaska Wilderness Voyages specializes in custom charters in Prince William Sound and the Kenai Fjords. Tom and Nancy provide the ultimate in flexibility, and you can tailor your trip to whatever mix of fishing, hiking, sightseeing, and bird and wildlife watching you'd like. The boat departs out of either Whittier or Seward, depending on weather and your itinerary.

The Konops typically charter the boat to groups of four or six, but they have occasionally, as in our case, combined smaller groups. Your charter can include meals and a cook, if you like, or you can bring your own food and prepare your own meals.

The 2006 price ranges from \$550—\$800 per day per guest, depending on the food arrangements and the number of guests on board.

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hours ahead of the fleet. Mike had us in halibut water shortly, and the crew rigged five halibut rods and one salmon rod. Pat Trost was the champion at reaction time, and in response to the first dip of a rod tip, she landed a nice 30-pound halibut. Next, the smaller rod sprang, and she landed a gorgeous silver.

It was a jumper—much to our pleasure, this fish took several acrobatic twirls before succumbing, and we marveled at its bright green back as Ben took it from the net.

In between all the nice chicken halibut we landed, we caught and released several small ones. Pat asked if the young ones would remember their experience. Mike responded that fish with a long, continuous caudal fin, like halibut, are more primitive than species with separate dorsal and caudal fins, like salmon. He jokingly characterized the halibut as “dumb and dumber” and told us that in his opinion, the fish would not learn from their experience. We wondered, though, if they at least knew they were lucky.

As we headed for our lunch spot at Knight Island, Dwain spotted three separate pods of Dahl porpoise within a 200-foot radius of the *Miss Brizz*. It was like a waltz—one, two, three, chomp, chomp, chomp—they were the Esther Williams troupe of the sound! We were momentarily disappointed when Mike started motoring away, but we quickly realized the method to his madness as one pod came to enjoy our bow wake. It was dizzying to watch as they played loop-the-loop at 8 knots, bobbing and weaving, disappearing and reappearing. We were sorry when they left us after about 20 minutes, but the next thing we knew, a humpback whale breached on the horizon. Then another one appeared off to port, lazing along, giving us a tail wave goodbye. Just as we were congratulating ourselves on being fortunate enough to experience a cetacean triple-header (those lucky stars again!), Pat spotted dozens of humpbacks in the distance off our starboard. We could see four blows at once, and Mike said they were head-to-head, “corralling” their food. Fifteen minutes into this incredible display, Patrick noticed four orcas heading towards us, two of them pluming. What a luxury it was to be able to invest 40 minutes of a fishing day in whale-



Dwain and Pat Trost with a pair of Prince William Sound silvers. © Tom Konop

watching, and still be confident that we'd catch our limits.

We anchored for lunch at Snug Harbor and went up top for another delicious home-cooked meal. We were intending to recount our magnificent morning, but the crew had hooked up some salmon rods and we kept being called down to pull in fish. Who could mind that interruption? We brought in dozens of fish, some pinks and many silvers, including two 15-pounders. Somehow we manage to finish our meal, too, and, a few silvers shy of our limit, we cruised to the south end of Knight Island. Here, with the pinks popping like popcorn again, and to the tune of "Can't Get No Satisfaction" on the stereo, we got our satisfaction in the form of a silver limit.

Mike headed the *Miss Brizz* to Tiger Glacier in Icy Bay while Ben cleaned our catch. As we entered the small bay that was to be our overnight resting spot, a seal stood guard on an iceberg and welcomed us to his territory. We were still blessed with cloudless skies, but we could feel the chill from the glacial fields. The next morning, we once again awoke to complete quiet, and from the deck at 6 a.m., Patrick spot-

ted a single male orca fin, then another, gliding along the edge through the narrow iceberg field. They gave us three blows, then stole out of sight. Over coffee and muffins, we found ourselves reluctant to leave this special haven. We heard an eagle, we watched the murrelets congregating, and we even noticed two lone silver salmon sniffing their way through the glacier-silted water. More entries for our critter list!

After breakfast, we ventured up the passage that was pre-navigated by our morning orcas. Two women in a red tandem sea kayak glided by in the distance, and we waved. It occurred to us theirs was only the fourth boat we'd seen in 24 hours, and it reminded us how lucky we were to be here.

As we slowly approached Tiger Glacier, some spurious clouds cascaded down the rugged peak to our left. The floating ice got closer and chillier, but we were amazed at how warm the sun was. Something about being that close to a glacier springs all your senses to action. A backstroking mother sea otter went by with a pup on her belly, and we thought we could see them smiling at us. The seals were bobbing like basketballs and we could practically smell the ice. Mike cut

the engines and started to drift at one mile out. The silence wasn't really silent, though, and we marveled at the creaking ice and picked out four distinct waterfall cascades before we saw them. The distance to the glacier seemed more like 500 feet, and our confidence in our visual perspective waned. We all whispered. The glacier calved. We noticed some frozen jellyfish, who had, accidentally, I'm sure, drifted into the glacier field, and we couldn't help but wonder if they'd thaw and live another day if they were lucky enough to drift away again.

When we'd had our fill, Captain Mike turned us around and motored for about an hour to anchor in the middle of the several picturesque islands. Apropos to our lucky-star experience, the islands are named the Pleiades, after the Seven Sisters star cluster. They form a ring around some very interesting bottom structure that yielded several good-sized halibut and rockfish. We had a salmon rod out, also, and it provided some special entertainment for the day—Patrick was bringing in a silver and, as he reeled it close to the boat, another silver attached itself to the second hook in full view of us all. Needless to say, the fish did not cooperate with each other, and we lost them both but gained a story.

While Pat, Dwain, and I continued to tend the boat rods, which were set between 60 and 150 feet, Patrick noticed some schools of silvers just below the surface. Ever the sight-casting aficionado, he rigged his baitcasting rod, jiggged his Crippled Herring and was rewarded with three pinks, two rockfish, and a bright, shiny silver.

After lunch, we had to head back to Seward. As we relaxed over another wonderful dinner en route, we reflected on our good fortune. Our "critter list" numbered 26, and we'd be taking home plenty of salmon and halibut. We'd had an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to visit and fish Prince William Sound up-close and personal in Alaska's best weather, and we'd made new, good friends. We were all thanking our lucky stars!



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