



Coming up Gastineau Channel, downtown Juneau to the right

### **Snettisham 2008 – 4: Delivery June 20-21**

Saturday June 14<sup>th</sup> my lumber arrived from Hoonah, a huge bundle of hemlock siding from Icy Straits Lumber and a few rough cut cedar boards piled on the back of a truck. My dad, Travis, myself, and a hired hand met up at Aurora Harbor around noon to begin packing it all down to the *Alaskan*. After my second trip carrying three or four boards balanced on my back all the way down the ramp and along the dock past several rows of slips the whole endeavor seemed hopeless and I figured we'd be there until midnight. It didn't help that I was hung-over and tired. On the way back from the second trip I grabbed a flat harbor cart that I thought we might load up more efficiently and discovered that the boys were already filling up other similar carts when I got back to the truck. We soon settled into a routine. Travis and the truck driver loaded up the carts while the hired hand delivered the lumber to the *Alaskan* and handed it up to my dad and I to stow on board. We put as many as we could in the master stateroom aft, then a stack on either

side on top of it, then a bundle on either side of the wheelhouse. Sarah came down and helped load the last of the lumber. In the end, it only took us about an hour and a half and really wasn't painful at all.

Our intent was to leave town Thursday morning and deliver the lumber on the rising tide in the afternoon, tendering to shore with the *Kathy M* (my parents' 22' Hewescraft). The



Dale fueling the Alaskan

*Alaskan* (my dad's newly refurbished 55' steel boat) was to return the next day, leaving the *Kathy M* for my return voyage on Sunday. I was looking to spending a long weekend at the homestead and possibly accomplishing something.



The *Alaskan* at anchor at Snettisham

Unfortunately, it was raining Thursday morning and, although I was ready to head down and hope for the best (after all, you can never predict the weather in Juneau), my folks thought it wiser to wait until the next day when the forecast moderately improved. My beautiful, kiln dried interior siding would only suffer if it got wet, it was true. Exhausted after a very stressful week, I took most of Thursday off of work anyway. Naturally, by noon all clouds had dispersed and the day was gloriously sunny.

Friday morning we tried again. I packed up, picked up Dale, and we had the *Alaskan* loaded and underway by 9:30. As we pulled out of the boat house, we suddenly realized that no one was left on the dock to drive the *Kathy M*! We pulled back close to the dock and my mother jumped off the bow. My dad, Dale, my aunt Vicki and I headed out of the harbor and waited anxiously in the channel for the *Kathy M* to appear, not certain that

it was entirely ready (they'd only launched it two days before). After what seemed an eternity, we finally saw her peek out from between the boats in the harbor, barely able to squeeze under the ramps at low tide. We headed over to Trucano fuel dock where an enormous catamaran yacht was taking up the entire outer face. We snuck to the inside of the float and tied up, followed by the *Kathy M*.

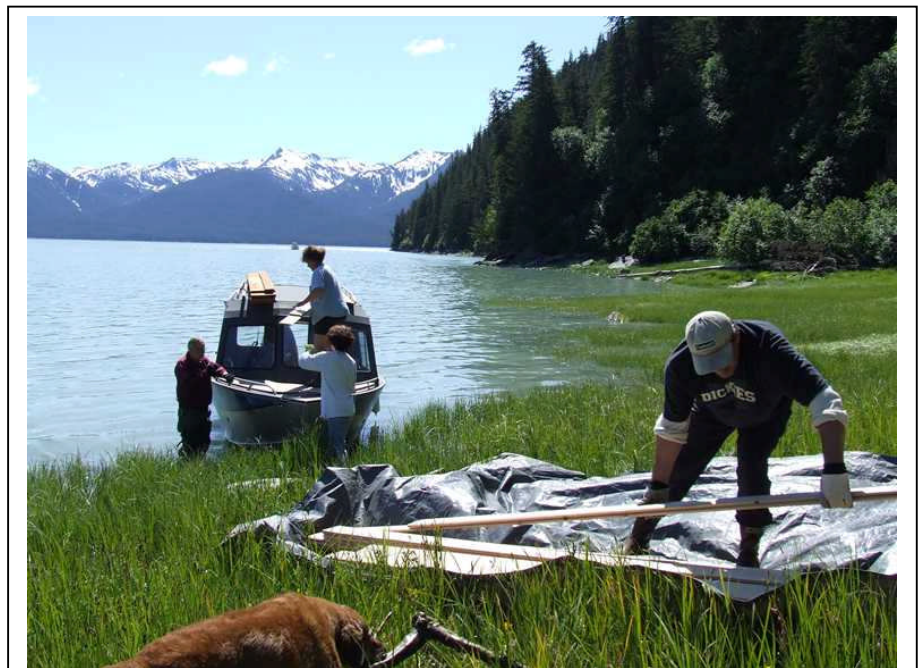


Loading from the *Alaskan* to the *Kathy M*

Our first struggle was getting the cap off the fuel tank of the *Alaskan*. Although the lumber piled on the side of the wheelhouse didn't cover the cap itself, it was right next to it and didn't leave enough room to use the unscrewing tool efficiently. I was just about to start moving lumber when Dale heroically managed to get it off. I'm not sure how he did it. Meanwhile, my mother and Vicki had finished fueling the *Kathy M* and were filling the spare gas tanks. Suddenly I heard alarmed voices and saw gas spilling out the middle of one of the five-gallon jerry jugs. A bear had bitten two holes in the side of it, which no one realized until the entire jug was full and it was leaking out. We got some oil absorbent pads and tried in various ways to drain the tank without spilling fuel all over the place. We found a plastic coffee can and Vicki bent it to form a makeshift spout, then we used it to transfer gas first to another jerry jug (until it was unbearably full) and then into the *Kathy M*'s fuel tank (which was also already more or less full). It was painfully slow and I felt terrible about the splashes of gas that wound up in the ocean as I attempted to funnel the gas into the small opening as the boat rocked back and forth. The whole time I could feel the eyes of the yacht owners on us, drinking morning cocktails on the back deck and watching the clearly incompetent Alaskans scrambling all over the place trying to fuel up, dressed in old clothes and chattering on about bears biting holes in fuel tanks. It's always something!

We did eventually pull ourselves together and left the dock at the same time as the yacht. We tied a line to the *Kathy M* to tow her, took my mother on board, and headed out under the bridge, myself at the helm. It was beautiful weather to begin with, but by the time we reached the end of the channel a dark cloud settled in and it started to sprinkle, then rain. We could see that the sky was clear just ahead (on the other side of the inlet) and it seemed so tantalizingly close that we held off covering the lumber on the back deck for some time (I'd covered the rest earlier in the week). We finally slowed down and everyone else covered the lumber for me while I watched the wheel. About 30 minutes later the rain stopped and we uncovered it again so it could dry in the sunshine.

The trip south was lovely, and I remembered just how much I enjoy standing behind the wheel. We reached Snettisham at about 2:30, anchored up, and started loading the *Kathy M*. We transferred siding first from the side of the wheelhouse onto its roof and all of us headed to shore with the dogs and the gear. The tide took us



Loading onto land

close to the log on the beach and the normal high tide mark. We spread a tarp on the grass and offloaded everything; Dale and I stayed behind to begin packing siding up to the lodge while the others returned to the *Alaskan* for another load. It was sunny and swelteringly hot and I quickly took off my hip waders and changed into a tank top.

An hour and a half later I was drenched in sweat, my shoulder was sore from resting lumber on it, and I was totally blissed out in manual labor euphoria.

How I'd forgotten the satisfaction of working with my hands!--of seeing something take shape out of physical labor, accomplishing something so tangible, of finding that sweet spot on my back over and over again where the lumber becomes weightless. Last summer I experienced this regularly as a relief from the more intellectual and ethereal accomplishments of weekdays at the office...but this summer had up to that point yielded little. I know, it's a trite observation, but nevertheless. It didn't hurt that the day was flawlessly beautiful, elegant purple irises blooming in the meadow surrounded by pink shooting stars and yellow cinquefoil, all brilliant in the sunshine.

It took five or six trips on the *Kathy M* get all the lumber to shore. Dale and Vicki traded off staying on land with me, and one time I was left alone. I'm proud to say that in the time it took them to return with another load I'd hauled every stick of lumber from the previous batch onto the porch and had most of it sorted and put away. We stacked as much of the 8' pieces inside the lodge as we could, and piled the rest (10' and 12' lengths) onto the porch. It's beautiful stuff, hemlock from Chichagof Island. My dad



Post loading beer on the porch (Mom, Vicki, Dale)



Lumber on the porch

dropped off the last load and returned to the *Alaskan* while the rest of us had a cold beer while sitting on the lumber on the porch. Another moment of perfection. By this time we were getting peckish so we started up the propane stove and put in a lasagna my mother made in advance. I took everyone on a tour of the property, then returned to the creek to wash up in the icy water before dinner. By the time I got back, the propane had run out, the lasagna was just perfectly cooked, and I ate like there was no tomorrow. After dinner my mother returned to the *Alaskan* for the night and the rest



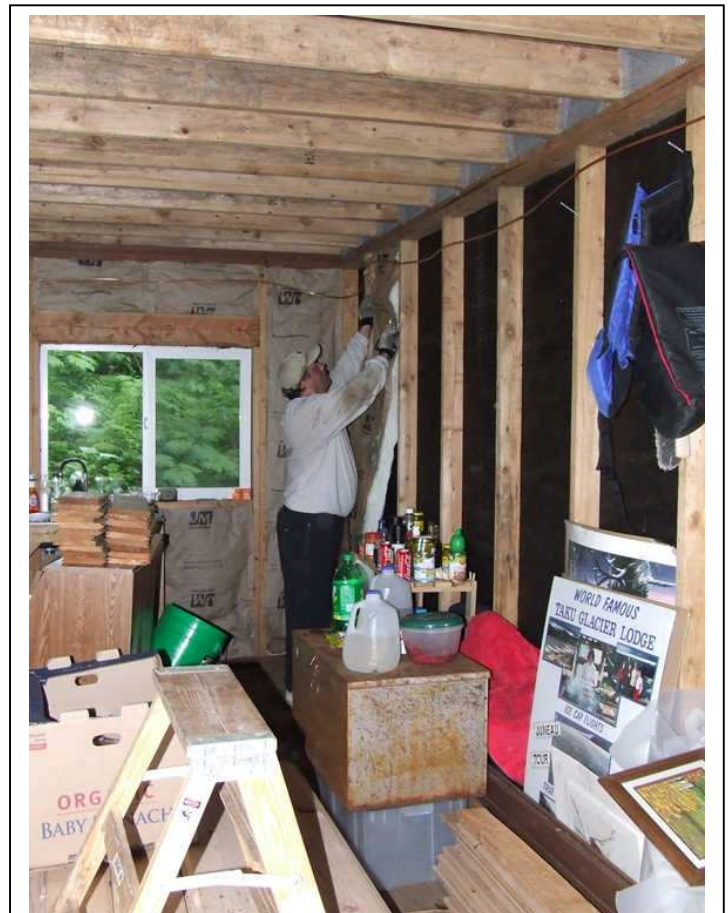
Debbie cutting insulation on the porch

of us sat around finishing the wine, drinking jack daniels, and telling secrets.

After a sound night's sleep in my cabin, I forced myself out of bed and got to work at 8:00 continuing the wall insulation inside the lodge. I started out cutting insulation on the lower decks in front of the lodge but was soon chased onto the covered deck by sprinkles. I worked for two hours and had the second wall and part of the

third wall completed when Dale appeared. A whale was working its way around the inlet the whole time. Dale and I worked together (I cutting and he measuring the spaces and securing the insulation in place) until we were half way through the fourth wall. Then my mother came to shore with Rosie, Vicki appeared, and we all had a quesadilla lunch. There was some bad news. The main engine on the *Kathy M* was not spitting out cooling water like it should, casting doubt on whether the engine was being cooled sufficiently.

Dale and I finished the insulation after my mother and Vicki left to test the engine, then we got to work making cross pieces to nail between the studs. I'd decided the night before that, against my original intent, I would run the siding vertically instead of horizontally. It all looks good, but the boards are mostly eight foot lengths, making it awfully convenient to slap them up vertically without a lot of squaring and cutting. But, to make that work, we needed something between the studs to nail the middle of the boards to so they wouldn't flop around with nothing securing them between the top and bottom plates. We measured the spans between the studs, started the generator, scrounged up some scrap 2"X4"s, and I measured and marked while Dale cut. It wasn't much fun trying to nail those pieces into the studs, especially with insulation in the way. Everything in the lodge was clustered around the stacks of



Dale insulating

lumber and couch in the middle of the room so we could access the walls, which made everything crowded and difficult to find. I was cranky by the time my mother and Vicki arrived with the news that the cooling water still wasn't flowing through. Not interested in overheating the engine on a 40 mile run back to Juneau the next day, the only logical choice was to abort the rest of the trip and return to Juneau on the *Alaskan*.

So we whacked at those silly boards until they were all in place (which took a bit of last minute skill-sawing by Vicki) and packed up. Everyone pitched in wonderfully despite my less than desirable mood. My dad picked us up and we took off at about 4:00. While we pulled anchor and tied on the *Kathy M* to tow, Vicki and I watched a whale on the other side of the inlet lunge feeding at the edge of the sandbars. More than every other surfacing was a dramatic lunge and I wished I was out there in a kayak. Apparently there are capelin in the area. A second whale surfaced as we took off toward Gilbert Bay. Dale drove until we left Snettisham, then I took over and drove the rest of the way to



Happy Nigel

town. I was over-the-top exhausted, but driving was wonderful, and the only thing that kept me awake. We made it to town without event and I was home by eight, thoroughly worn out after only a 24 hour stint at the homestead. But, at least the siding is there and the wall insulation is done! After I put a vapor barrier over the last three walls I'll be able to starting putting up siding.



Iris in front of the lodge