

The Third Voyage of Lumina

Petersburg and Wrangell

Post 8

We pulled into Petersburg in the late morning with the sun shining down on us and were directed to an empty berth by the harbourmaster. It is known as Little Norway due to the early Norwegian settlers but, unlike all those English named towns in foreign lands, I can't seem to find a Petersburg in Norway. It does however live up to its reputation with many Scandinavian looking buildings and plenty of Norwegian flags everywhere to celebrate their heritage. You can also buy Norwegian souvenirs there.

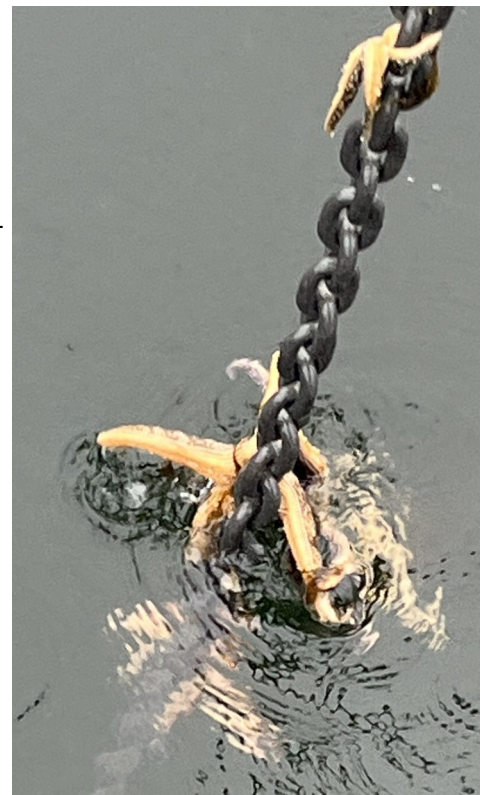


Needing to do an oil change and not sure if I had enough to fill the deep sump on the Volvo Penta we set off towards the marine store. On the way we passed a nice looking café and ventured in, despite it now being what you could only describe as "late lunch". There were some delicious looking snacks under the hot lamps that were awaiting us so we had an expensive lunch. Continuing on, we arrived at the store to discover that we could get oil on the fuel dock just below anyway so rather than carry it

Sealions hauled out on a navigation buoy outside Petersburg

the half mile back to the dock we left it for when we filled up.

Returning towards the pontoons we passed many roads with Scandinavian sounding names and a few we could recognise like Fram street and Gjoa street, named after the famous arctic ships of Nansen and Amundsen. On one side of the harbour is a long pier with many derelict buildings on it, these comprised a pair of fish plants, now there is only one operating in town on the other side of the harbour. The rise and fall of canneries and fish processing plants in this area has been going on for generations but there still seems to be a viable living to be made as there are plenty of fishing boats around of various genres and healthily there are even some new ones too. The one operating factory was busy with the drone of compressors from the central freezing plant and also those from containers waiting to be loaded on the next barge keeping you company as you pass. Then on the dockside there was often a queue of fishing boats waiting to have their catch sucked out of their holds by massive vacuum pump systems. I was interested to find out how fish are actually pumped without being damaged, essentially there is a large tank on the dock which either has a vacuum or pressure applied to



Attack of the chain eating starfish!



Norwegian style buildings in Petersburg

it. The fish are sucked into the chamber and then the pipe to the boat is closed and then they are blown away to the factory through another pipe. Each cycle takes maybe a few minutes with several cubic metres of fish moved each time. Certainly quicker than filling wicker baskets like they would have done in the old days!



Artistic gateway

Gas for cooking is a bit of an issue for yachts as virtually every country has come up with a slightly different fitting for their cylinders, this combined with the need to buy a new cylinder in each country is expensive and then what do you do with the old ones? In America there seems to be two types, one of which looked similar to ours and unlike Britain you can get your tank refilled rather than having to swap it. Intent on investigating I set off to the Piston and Rudder company who did this service whilst Carol went in the other direction for some alternative retail therapy. Arriving after a long walk back to only a hundred metres further than we had gone the previous day (a bit of homework the day before might have been an idea) I was told that the guy who did the gas was leaving that day. Oh that's lucky I said, that I am here now, however in American it seems that means he has already left! So my journey was in vain.

Petersburg is at the entrance to the Wrangell narrows so named presumably because they are actually nearer to Petersburg than Wrangell, but we won't hold that against



them. The tide flows through pretty fiercely and the fuel dock is right out on the end of the harbour in the channel. It looked like the current would be flowing parallel to the dock and I thought I could drift down and then, with the boat in reverse edge towards the pontoon. However with such a move, once you are committed you suddenly realise that it is actually setting towards the pontoon, by which time it is too late to change the plan. We made a pretty heavy landing but didn't pop any fenders or make any dents.

With 470 litres of diesel and a 5 gallon drum of oil the next problem would be getting away. To add to interest to the situation, just downstream of the fuel dock was the derelict pier from the close canneries, which if it all goes wrong, you would drift into and maybe under, not an inviting prospect. It would have been a good conundrum for the Yachting World magazine, you can't go with the flow forwards, if you simply reverse backwards rolling the fenders along the dock, the boat would simply pivot on the end and get swept round the head of the pontoon into others filling on the other side. So, with the bow line as a spring I drove the boat forwards, pushing the stern out and then very hard in reverse. Then with the bow thruster pushing the bow off the dock, we just about managed to reverse back far enough to clear the end of the dock before the stern had swung back towards it. A cautionary tale, always approach into the current, even if it looks straightforward!

Whilst we had been in Petersburg we had been avidly watching what was happening in Kodiak as there had been another earthquake offshore and there was a serious tsunami warning in place with the town being evacuated. We could watch on the Marine Traffic website as all the boats that could get going, including the ferry that was docked at the time, made a quick exit out to sea. In the end there was very little to show for it, with the usual armchair experts on the internet blaming authorities for wasting their time etc, but it was the first time the sirens would have sounded for real in 7 or 8 years, which makes their weekly test worthwhile at least and one day for sure it will really happen.



New Totem in Wrangell

Once through the Wrangell narrows, one of those places where you have to pay attention as the buoy in front which looks obviously like the next one, may not necessarily be the case and you might need to do a dog leg round a rock or sandbank first. Wrangell is much quieter than Petersburg and is a predominantly native town. Continuing on with the gas project and with the gas depot close by the harbour we made for it first. Here the reception was much better, showing the connector I had, we were invited to return with the gas bottles and they were duly filled. This was an excellent result because it saves buying any new

bottles and we now have enough gas on board to last another year, this being the first fill since Scotland last year.

Back on the boat I attended to the oil change and also for a treat, did the fuel filters as well as these haven't been done in a long time as our diesel system seems remarkably clean, probably due to the rapid turnover as we have put in 3500 litres since Scotland. The secondary filter looked pristine, and the primary one had only slight discolouration and nothing in the bowl despite 1000 hrs run.



With the oil change done, I looked out of the companion-way and in a walkway going to an island adjacent to the harbour was a procession of people, many in native dress chanting and banging drums. We had heard something about a new totem pile being erected



***Canoe carved from a single tree trunk, complete with repair
- Ray Meers would be impressed***

and all afternoon they had been taking fresh gravel over to the island on a dumper. We didn't realise they were preparing for this event the same evening, cutting it a bit fine maybe. Later on as the event subsided, we headed up to the busy bar and discovered that this was the first Totem pole to be erected since 1987 and was more of an event that we first thought.



Traffic in the harbour at Meyers Chuck

As we slip into a gentle routine of making a few miles and finding another idyllic anchorage there are a few places that really stand out and Meyers Chuck is one of them. It's a tiny community, mainly just of summer occupants but here unlike Elfin Cove there were no big fishing lodges, just privately owned cabins. There was a lovely walk through the forest to a beach and a sign telling that you could order hot cinnamon rolls to be delivered every morning. Not having much in the way of cash and unable to call the number for some reason we resigned ourselves to no morning pastries, however



Airport Lounge, Meyers Chuck

not long after 7am there was a tap on the hull and a lady was there with a basket. I explained that I didn't actually have enough dollars for a couple of rolls but she took what I had and we still got a couple of rolls.

The weather was now set fair, with wall to wall sunshine and the days of running the heater all night becoming a distant memory. The tides are a bit more of an issue here and whilst we could motor against the current if necessary it generally means that you have a 6 hr window to make good progress. Winds are generally light or non existent so sailing is often just to help you along rather than being the prime mover. There are plenty of lovely anchorages in sheltered bays and we are perfecting our crab and shrimp pot



technique. To keep things simple we have both pots tied together, and then connected to the anchor with about 5m of line. So when the anchor goes down, so do the pots. The best haul so far has been 5 crabs that are keepers (greater than 6ins and male), and 5 shrimp. We also had some massive Sunflower Starfish that have something like 16 to 20 tentacles. Fishing has taken a bit of a back seat since the freezer was filled with Halibut, however we are still trying to catch the elusive salmon which seem oblivious to everything we have in the way of bait or lures and jump all around us just to rub it in.



With Canada now virtually on the horizon we will be taking care to check in properly as we have just heard of a friend crossing on the east coast going north who got fined \$1000 for anchoring enroute before reporting in, but its not far across to Prince Rupert the first designated port of entry so even if we cant get phone signal we should be able to do it in person if necessary without too much trouble.

Watch out for whole trees as well as logs in these waters



By travelling in polar regions for the past couple of summers we have forgotten what its like to be actually hot and have to shelter from the sun but unaccustomed as we are we are making the most of it as apparently it normally rains a lot here...

All the best, Tim and Carol

[Website with all the old blogs](#)

