

Day 1 ~ Monday 21 July, Flight to Anchorage.

I can't remember the last time we set the alarm for 3:40am. Ugh!

Route 20 divides in a V as we approach Rockford. For some distance there are six lanes. The road is being resurfaced; a sign announces right lane closed. I want to go to the right following the bypass, but dutifully move left. The lanes are marked by fluorescent drums. I find myself trapped in the wrong lane. A car speeds by where I want to go. I have to stop and snake between the drums. Confused, I just follow his tail lights. It is still dark. This is not fun.

The bus from South Beloit is already more than half full. We fill up, the driver radios for a backup and leaves directly for O'Hare without any more stops. Lucky to get a seat.

I have upgraded our seats and pre-printed boarding passes from home. In the terminal I am faced by a row of touch screens. The last time I just waived the bar coded boarding pass under a scanner to get baggage claim checks, but of course someone has "improved" the system. Faced with menus I don't understand, I respond too slowly and the wise computer asks if I want more time or assistance. "If you are that smart, you should know what I want... a human!"

"No sir you don't scan, just enter the confirmation number on the bottom of your boarding pass."

Why didn't the person who programmed the thing just have it say that?

Security goes better. We clear. It is only thirty minutes since we reached the terminal.

It starts to rain, hard. Then a crack of thunder. I watch the baggage handlers unload a plane in the next bay. The baggage is getting soaked. "Hope ours is under cover."

McDonalds presence is only a tiny counter, no place to sit, but between the cashiers and cooks, there must be a staff of fifteen, who can barely keep up. I stand and wait. Jan guards our luggage, but is not rewarded with hot chocolate. They only have coffee.

We board. There is not much space in the overhead compartments, but our carry on luggage is small. The plane is full but no one takes the window seat next to Jan.

The plane does not move. Finally the Captain announces that the ground staff have taken cover because of the lightning.

Now we are rolling. We stop. Oops, we are going back. Captain again, "The right engine won't start." We sit. The left engine shuts down. It is getting hot.

"No Jan, we can't fly on one engine."

We are 30min late but finally taxiing. Please, no more excitement. Wheels up, one hour late.

A burly male flight attendant struggles to close an overhead door. After several minutes he gives up. A petite lady attendant gets out of her jump seat and swats the unruly door closed. Passengers clap, she waves.

"The on board food selection is shown on page 145 in the Hemispheres Magazine."

Looks like they have some decent chicken or turkey sandwiches.

"Today we are only serving breakfast which consists of fruit and banana bread."

Oh well.....

"May I look?" Actually it looks pretty decent. "We will have two." There is fruit, cheese, crackers, yogurt and, yes, banana bread. I would have preferred to eat further into the flight.

Half way through the flight our burly flight attendant demonstrates that he has now learned the secret of closing the overhead. Lots of laughs.

Time goes by. I am hungry again, but no food to be had.

Touch down. Anchorage is a relatively small airport. We wait for bags at the carousel. "No Jan, I'm not buying you new clothes." Finally our cases arrive. The Tauck tour guide greets us as the Oakes. How did she know that.

The drive to our hotel, the Captain Cook, is about twenty minutes. It is surprising how much influence he had in the Pacific.

We check in. The hotel occupies three towers. Our room is on the 17th floor. Our bags arrive almost immediately. Nice.

I need a snack, so we go looking for food. A porter suggests a coffee shop three blocks away, but when we find it, the owner informs us the kitchen closed at 3:00pm. We walk in the drizzle back to our hotel and find Fletchers, a nice pub, where we share a chicken sandwich and reasonable brew. The service is slow. We chat with a couple on our tour. He is English, she German. They live in Brussels.

We put on ponchos. "Can I have a map, and which way is down town?" The drizzle continues. Strange creatures live in Alaska. Anchorage has no striking architecture but shows off beautiful flowering plants hanging in pots or corner gardens. I have never seen such enormous flowers or cabbages.



Downtown Anchorage.



Strange Creatures Live in Alaska.

Back at the hotel we change and head for the reception in the Quarter Deck. "Good evening, my name is Neil, your tour director." Aptly named, the room is at the top of tower 1, tenth floor. We mingle, make small talk then stand in a semi-circle to introduce ourselves. Unlike other tours, most of our party have only taken one or two tours.



Hotel Captain Cook.



The only Orca we saw.

At the open bar the tender mixes strong drinks. Four tables, each seating eight, are lined up along the window wall. The meal is superb; a fillet steak and halibut. We are served wine. The feast closed of course with cr me Brulee.

Neil gives us instructions for tomorrow's departure.



The flowers are brighter, and cabbages bigger due to long daylight hours and temperate moist air in summer.



← Dinner here.

Polar bears live much further north and west. This one sits in the gift shop.

