



**NOAA Teacher at Sea
Stephanie Wally
Onboard NOAA Ship RAINIER
August 28 – September 10, 2005**

Log 2

NOAA Teacher at Sea: Stephanie Wally

NOAA Ship RAINIER

Mission: Eastern Prince William Sound Hydrographic Survey

Date: Saturday, September 3, 2005

Weather Data from Bridge

Time: 2000

Cloud Cover: Low Clouds

Visibility: 10 nm (nautical miles)

Wind: Light Airs

Sea Wave Height: 0'

Swell Wave Height: 0'

Sea Water Temperature: 12.8°C

Sea Level Pressure: 1011.0 mb (millibars)

Temperature: 11.7°C

Science and Technology Log

This evening, after the regular workday and data gathering were complete, some of the crew visited the face of the Columbia Glacier. We headed there in a skiff, driven by Coxswain Carl Verplank. The Columbia Glacier is the Sound's largest tidal glacier. In 1984 it began to recede, going through a process called "calving." We were lucky enough to witness this process, as huge chunks of the glacier broke off and plummeted to the water. Fortunately, we were at a far enough distance away not to capsize from the swell. The iceberg pieces that break off do not make a soft "kerplunk" sound, but rather a loud, grinding noise that echoes around the face. As seen in the photo below, the massive glacier towers over our crew and skiff.

I have been onboard for nearly a week now, away from the city, immersed in nature. In contrast to city life in the San Francisco Bay area, wildlife is everywhere here in Prince William Sound. It's not every day in San Francisco that I see the back of a humpback whale slowly moving through the water, or a Golden Eagle taking off from a nearby rock. In Alaska, these sights are common when one takes the time to observe. On the launch boats, it's easy to spend time studying the shoreline through binoculars or just listening to the quiet calm of the surrounding water. The ice often makes a crackling noise while it is floating and breaking on the water, giving way to our "icebreaker" skiff.

Also of note in the below photo are the snowy peaks of the Chugach Range, which is one of the most precipitous coastal mountain ranges in the world. As the glacier retreats toward the mountain backdrop, harbor seals and sea otters find new feeding areas, and birds find new places to nest. In class, we will further investigate how the geological process affects ecosystem habitats. NOAA is on the forefront of this exploration since they are the ones collecting the data of the surrounding ocean floor and water depth.

Question of the Day: What is a *glaciologist*?



Figure 1 The Columbia Glacier