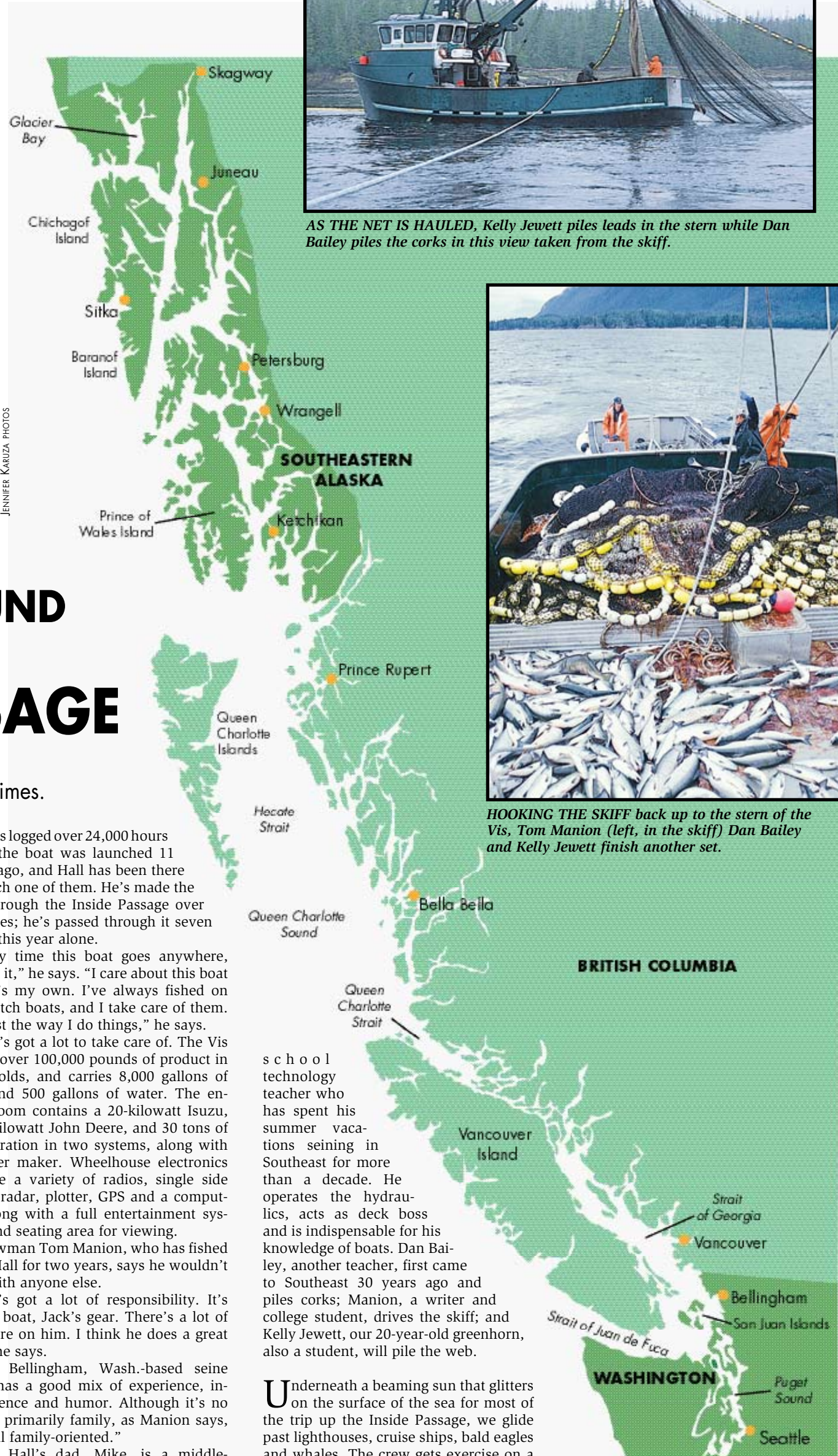


A FISHERMAN'S HOLIDAY for Tom Manion (rear), Dan Bailey and Kelly Jewett.



AS THE NET IS HAULED, Kelly Jewett piles leads in the stern while Dan Bailey piles the corks in this view taken from the skiff.



HOOKING THE SKIFF back up to the stern of the Vis, Tom Manion (left, in the skiff) Dan Bailey and Kelly Jewett finish another set.

HOMeward BOUND ALONG THE INSIDE PASSAGE

In Southeast Alaska, a salmon seiner's daughter returns to the scene of good times.

BY JENNIFER KARUZA

The first trip I made to the fishing grounds of Southeast Alaska was in 1982. At 8 years old, I played on the docks of Ketchikan with my sisters and watched at sea as my dad and his crew hauled bags of salmon onto the deck of our seiner. A decade later, I was on the crew, and I spent several years piling web, sorting fish and hitting the bars in town until my last season in 1996.

After a five-year hiatus, I wanted to know: Was spotting a jumper the thrill I remembered? Was the end-of-day dish of ice cream as satisfying? Were the First City Saloon and the Sourdough Bar as busy?

At midnight on July 2, I tossed my bags on board our fishing vessel, Vis (rhymes with "peace," and named for an island off the coast of Croatia), determined to find out.

My plan: join the skipper and crew for the trip up the Inside Passage, make an opening, and spend a few nights in town.

Our captain, 30-year-old Tim Hall, began fishing 15 years ago. He works year-round on the Vis, an 84-ton, 58' x 21' steel combination fishing vessel owned by my father, Jack Karuza. In addition to seining, Hall longlines for halibut and blackcod, fishes Dungeness and snow crab, and travels to California for squid and herring.

The Vis's main engine, a 600-hp Mitsubi-

shi, has logged over 24,000 hours since the boat was launched 11 years ago, and Hall has been there for each one of them. He's made the trip through the Inside Passage over 50 times; he's passed through it seven times this year alone.

"Any time this boat goes anywhere, I'm on it," he says. "I care about this boat like it's my own. I've always fished on top-notch boats, and I take care of them. It's just the way I do things," he says.

Hall's got a lot to take care of. The Vis packs over 100,000 pounds of product in two holds, and carries 8,000 gallons of fuel and 500 gallons of water. The engine room contains a 20-kilowatt Isuzu, a 60-kilowatt John Deere, and 30 tons of refrigeration in two systems, along with a water maker. Wheelhouse electronics include a variety of radios, single side band, radar, plotter, GPS and a computer, along with a full entertainment system and seating area for viewing.

Crewman Tom Manion, who has fished with Hall for two years, says he wouldn't fish with anyone else.

"He's got a lot of responsibility. It's Jack's boat, Jack's gear. There's a lot of pressure on him. I think he does a great job," he says.

The Bellingham, Wash.-based seine crew has a good mix of experience, inexperience and humor. Although it's no longer primarily family, as Manion says, "it's all family-oriented."

Tim Hall's dad, Mike, is a middle-

school technology teacher who has spent his summer vacations seining in Southeast for more than a decade. He operates the hydraulics, acts as deck boss and is indispensable for his knowledge of boats. Dan Bailey, another teacher, first came to Southeast 30 years ago and piles corks; Manion, a writer and college student, drives the skiff; and Kelly Jewett, our 20-year-old greenhorn, also a student, will pile the web.

Underneath a beaming sun that glitters on the surface of the sea for most of the trip up the Inside Passage, we glide past lighthouses, cruise ships, bald eagles and whales. The crew gets exercise on a

SOUTHEAST ALASKA SALMON SEINING: THE FACTS

- **Number of permits:** There are 360 Southeast Alaska seine licenses. Not all permits are active.
- **Size of participating boats:** Forty to 50 net tons average.
- **Fishing area:** Most of the seining in Southeast Alaska is done between 20 and 200 miles north of the Alaska/Canada border along the Panhandle, and stretches between Ketchikan and Juneau.
- **Depths:** Up to 15 fathoms.
- **Gear:** Boat, skiff, net and permit. The Vis net is 250 fathoms long, and about 350 meshes deep, with a 3 1/2-inch mesh, which gets you down to approximately 13 fathoms, depending on different variables such as line weight and amount of web.
- **Capital investment:** Between \$250,000 and \$1.5 million. For the Vis: Boat \$800,000, skiff \$60,000, net \$20,000, permit \$25,000. Smaller boats suited to seining only will have a much reduced capital investment.
- **Annual landings:** Seiners harvest between 70 and 90 percent of all salmon caught in Southeast Alaska commercial fisheries. In 1999, seiners harvested a record 75 million pink salmon. There were so many fish this year (2001) that fishermen were placed on a 60,000-pound limit per opening.
- **License and permits:** During the peak of the fishery, in 1991, they cost about \$100,000. Today, they sell for around \$30,000.
- **General regulations:** Seiners begin their season in mid-June at Hidden Falls, targeting mostly chum salmon. After the 4th of July, seiners can fish all over Southeast, and pink salmon become the primary target. The seine season ends in the fall with the chum salmon fishery. At the peak of the season, seiners work on a two day on/two day off fishing schedule.
- **Ex-vessel prices:** In 1996, landed unprocessed prices for Ketchikan permit holders were: sockeye \$1.07/lb., coho 61 cents/lb., pink 10 cents/lb. and chum 16 cents/lb.
- **Processing:** Seine-caught salmon are delivered in the round to buying stations on and off the grounds, and to canneries.
- **Markets:** Canned and frozen product.

bike Bailey has mounted on the deck, and we actually get suntans lounging on deck chairs and blankets.

Just under three days later, we arrive in Southeast and go directly to one of our "secret spots." Years ago, a record haul at this location took four hours to bring on board and spilled 60,000 pounds of salmon on deck.

Apparently, the spot is not so secret any more; several boats are milling around the area.

"It's changed from the way it used to be," Hall confirms. He points out a black bear wandering along the rugged shoreline, sniffing the edge of the water.

The crew hustles to prepare the boat for our first day of fishing. The skiff is launched over the stern and filled with fuel, the net is hauled out of the hatch and onto the back deck, deck chairs are stowed away.

Anticipation and eagerness to start the season emerge from all corners of the boat. Jewett, not sure what to expect, wanders nervously around the boat with headphones and a magazine. Hall sits in

the tophouse, keeping a steady eye out, waiting for jumpers to leap out of the water and dance about the surface, looking for some clue as to what may lay beneath the tranquil covering of the inlet.

At 11 p.m., we retire to our bunks, snuggled in blankets of heavy fog and the placid, tranquil silence exclusive to Alaska. After a few hours of restless sleep, Hall starts the main and we leap out of our bunks with surprising amounts of energy.

"You're never tired on game day, no matter how early you get up," Manion remarks.

Chatter and laughter fill the galley, eventually settling into a quiet intensity.

Mike Hall and Bailey grab their rain gear and stand on deck with "cups of mud," glancing about for jumpers. Jewett sits anxiously inside the galley, unsure of where he should be, and asks Manion to fetch his boots out of the locker.

At 5:45, Hall comes down from the wheelhouse.

"It's game time," he announces.

Manion looks at Jewett, still nervously perched at the table.



OFF THE STARBOARD side of the Vis, Dan Bailey (left) and Mike Hall reach for the skiff's throw-up line in the first and most critical phase of hauling in the net.

"Time to suit up," he tells him.

Our skipper is a former high school quarterback, and rounding out the crew are two youth coaches and a college basketball player. I can't help but notice how the sports metaphors are flying.

As if on cue, Manion walks out onto the deck and toward his skiff. "Seven minutes 'til game time, Coach," he informs Mike Hall on his way past.

"Let 'er go!" Hall calls at exactly 6 a.m. Like six other boats along the shoreline, we release the skiff, and Manion roars away toward the beach.

Exactly 15 minutes later, Hall gives Manion the OK to "shut the gate."

Manion makes the sharp turn and Hall turns on the hydraulics, signaling the gang on deck to get ready.

After a successful hand-off of the throw-up line and topline, the first fathoms of net come through the block, bringing with them the unmistakable sweet smell of salty air, fresh seawater and web.

"Slow the purse line down," Hall calls to his dad. If he purses too fast, the purse ring will lift the bunt-end of the net, and he could spill the fish under the lead line.

A second later, Hall gestures toward the hydraulic boom.

Discerning which of the skipper's hand gestures are meant for whom is an art form on a seiner. The hydraulics man and the skiff man have the daunting task of deciphering which of the frantic movements are for them, and what exactly they mean.

Mike Hall ventures a guess. "Move the boom over a little bit?"

"Yeah!" his son confirms over the noise.

The rings emerge from the water and Mike Hall stops the block. Tim Hall puts the ring bar through, and Mike simultaneously lifts the rings and starts the block. "Watch the stick!" he calls out, quickly followed by "Giller! Giller on the corks!"

Our first salmon of the season is on board — a little pink ("humpy") which Bailey plucks out and tosses forward. Next, a big chum comes through the block, and the bunt is upon us.

"Stop!" Tim Hall calls. Father and son trade places: Tim walks over to the hydraulics to raise the bag, and Mike walks to port and guides the bag over.

The first set of the season has brought 30 massive chums and one gigantic load of kelp on board.

Hall throws off the skiff's topline, and Manion roars around to the stern, waiting to be hooked back up to the boat. Mike Hall leaps over the web pile and shows Jewett how to straighten out the lines and hook the net back up for the next set.

Later in the afternoon, I sit in the tophouse with the Halls.

"There's not much in here," Hall decides. "But we're just getting the net wet. Getting in some practice sets."

Mike Hall agrees. "There was never much in here that you didn't see," he says. "If they were here, they were going crazy."

"Real nice fish, though," he adds. "It's early yet. Nothing to worry about. They're coming."

Outside the inlet, the wind has picked up, and no one is in any hurry to leave. There isn't any pressure today; it's just

our first opening. There will be plenty of time later for panic, races and full 15-hour back-to-back days.

"It's just not time yet. It's not August," says one skipper over the radio.

After hours of scratching away, Hall decides it's time to end the day. It has been successful in that the season is officially begun and our operation went well.

After unloading the day's catch at the tender waiting just outside the inlet, we relax with bowls of chocolate ice cream and enjoy the evening's feature presentation, "Scary Movie."

Sleep comes easy, and early the next morning we lift the pick and head for more promising fishing elsewhere.

Making the decision on where to set gear is not easy. You troll around, inspect different spots, and gamble on where the best one will be. You look for jumpers, factor in the tides and make a decision, hoping it's the right one.

After a splendid afternoon of traversing the sea underneath sunshine, light mist and a rainbow, Hall drops anchor at the spot where he's decided to take a chance.



THE SKIPPER OF THE VIS, Tim Hall, has been with the boat since it was launched 11 years ago.

The area appears to have an abundance of fish; schools of salmon beckon to us with their rolling and splashing. The temptation is too great; we have to stay and see if there is anything to the flurry of activity.

Some boats have started to make the trek south to Ketchikan from Petersburg. One skipper who has just made the journey is on the radio talking about the large number of boats up north.

"I don't know," he says. "I just don't like fishing around 200 of my closest friends."

Our longtime friend and fishing partner, Al Smith, has also just arrived south. While my shipmates and I bask in the afternoon sun, Smith's vessel, Spartan, emerges through the opening of the anchorage and ties up next to us.

After the customary exchange of newspapers, videos and gossip, it's dinnertime. Of course, fresh, ocean-caught salmon is on the menu. The gang on the Spartan, having just come from town, is dressed in jeans, shirts and tennis shoes. On the Vis, having been at sea for six days, we're dressed in several-day-old sweats and Adidas sandals.

"You can come and eat with us," Hall offers. "But you have to put your sweats on."

Shortly before dinner is ready, however, Smith spies another boat coming into the area. He races to untie the lines and thunders off to claim his spot. His plan is to jog all night for the first set in the morning, and Hall's plan is to wake up at 2 a.m. to jog for the second set.

The following morning at 6:05, Jewett



GOOD FOOD, GOOD FELLOWSHIP — Monte Trott (left) and Carson Hundoon of the *Lady Luck* join Dan Bailey, Kelly Jewett and Tom Manion for dinner on the *Vis*.

stands ready on deck with a plate of hot breakfast to drop into the bow of Manion's skiff as he grabs the towline. The breakfast/towline swap goes smoothly, and we start hauling our first set of the day.

Mike Hall watches the net as it comes through the block. "Watch your overhead! You got a big bag of jellies coming down!" he yells in warning.

In the end, the bunt spills only about 40 fish, but it's a good mix of sockeye, pink and chum. The crew grab the steel fish pushers and, standing in a V-shaped formation, push fish into the hatch to the tune of Mike Hall's "V for Victory!" and Bailey's "Power V! Power V!"

As the day wears on, not many fish are caught ("they're coming," Mike Hall

insists), and the most entertaining show becomes Jewett's fight with the ruthless jellyfish, which bite and burn their way across all exposed flesh. There is no known remedy for their excruciating, red-hot sting. He starts his day wearing goggles, and by lunchtime has a bandana wrapped around his face. By late afternoon, the bandana has been replaced by an entire T-shirt, and he swears the first thing he's going to do when he hits town is buy a neoprene mask.

"I've seen three or four jumpers come in — it's funny. You see them one after another, and then you don't see anything," Hall says to Smith.

Reports come over the radio; the consensus everywhere in Southeast is there are more jellyfish than fish. After another day of practice, Hall decides it's time to head in.

We enjoy an easy ride to town that evening and listen as Hall talks with his second partner, Vic Mandrich, of the *Lady Luck*. They discuss the day's events and make guesses as to when the next opening might be — specifically, if it will fall on the same day as baseball's All-Star game.

"We're selling tickets," Hall informs him. "We've got the galley TV and the top-house TV. Different prices for different

levels, just like the stadium."

"All right," Mandrich laughs, and puts in his order. "Mark me down for the lower level."

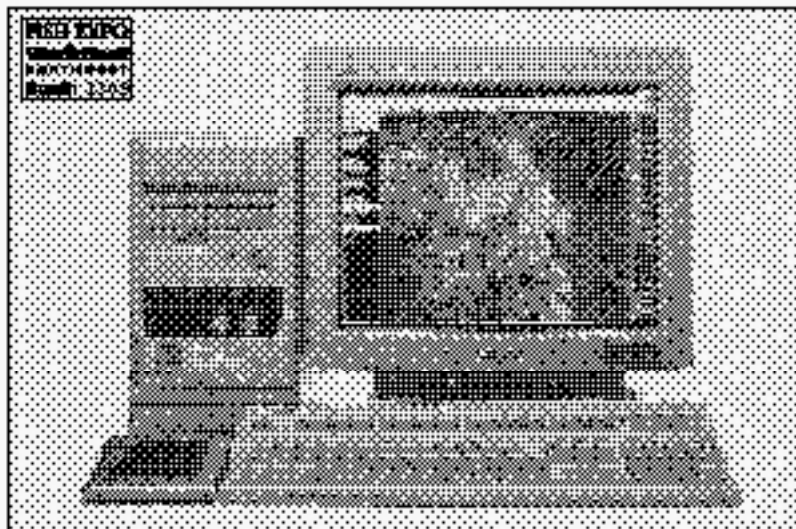
After locating our tender in the channel, we make our way to the west end of Ketchikan to Bar Harbor. Although it's well past midnight, Manion makes a swift move off the boat and towards town, looking for a cold beer after seven days at sea. Twenty-year old Jewett follows suit, but makes a quick return to his bunk, unsure whether he'd get in.

The in-town activities of the fleet in Ketchikan can hold almost as much importance as the fishing. Bar Harbor, specifically, is a hotbed of socialization, and I was ecstatic to find it had not changed. In Ketchikan, festivities begin the minute boats tie up, extend into the far reaches of the night when we close the bars down, and culminate with the rising of the sun as we stand on back decks or watch movies in wheelhouses. We don't dare shut an eye for fear of missing even one second of it — we have all winter to sleep. A common, lighthearted complaint of skippers on the steam back out to the fishing grounds is that their crew was up too late the night before and has become worthless.

The next morning, it's time for the rest of us to hit "The 'Can," as Bailey fondly

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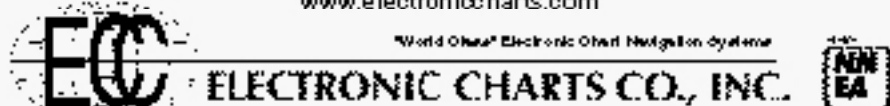


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refers to the town. After a few rounds at the bowling alley, we make our way to the Sourdough Bar. The place is famous for its pictures of boats in the Alaska fleet, including boats on rocks and men smiling in the midst of deckloads. The bartender, Noah, serves drinks underneath a mount-

ed 15-pound Kodiak-caught king crab, and we play pool next to a sign proclaiming "Welcome, Halibut Fleet."

"This is what we do when we're not fishing," Bailey says, happily sipping a cold beer and lighting a cigar. "We make sets at the Sourdough."

At Bar Harbor, our boat is positioned in such a way that each person wandering up the dock must pass us on their walk out of the harbor, and nobody passes by

without peering inside the galley to give a wave or a smile. The Spartan and Lady Luck gangs are permanent fixtures in the Vis galley, while crews from the Flamingo and the Favorite hover in the doorway. Skippers stand just outside offering enthusiastic hellos.

PURSE SEINING WITH HYDRAULICS

Purse seiners harvest salmon by encircling them with a large seine net, and after a 15-minute set, pursing the bottom tightly closed to capture the fish and bring them aboard. The net, which is attached to the boat on one end and to a skiff on the other, hangs like a curtain around the fish.

The Vis, a 58' x 21' combination seiner/longliner/crabber owned by Jack Karuza, is one of the only boats in the fleet to employ a hydraulic boom and crab block as part of its seine operation.

Used correctly, its benefits are many. When the boom is moved to the port side while hauling gear, the stern end of the vessel will swing to the starboard side, keeping the rudder and propeller out of the net. This eliminates having to tow with the skiff until the rings come up. A hydraulic boom also makes for more precise movement.

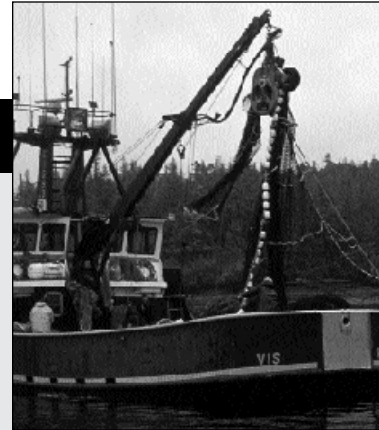
"The main thing is you can purse faster and haul faster, which means you can re-set faster," says Karuza.

The Vis keeps its crab block within easy reach after the snow crab season and uses it, instead of a deck winch, to purse dur-

ing the salmon season.

"It's safer, faster, uses less room on deck, and hauls from both sides with equal efficiency. It's less expensive to buy and there's less that can go wrong. There are no backlashes and the purse line piles on deck without twists. You have the ability to purse the whole net in 90 seconds in a panic. It's also easier to get on and off boat when switching fisheries," Karuza says.

A fish-trap-style brailer built into the bunt end of the net, and the ability of the crane to hoist 4,000 to 5,000 pounds of salmon with each lift, means the skiff never comes alongside the boat and a traditional brailer is never used at the end of the haul. "Our finale is very fast," Karuza says. — J.K.



A HYDRAULIC BOOM makes haul-back faster and more flexible.

When we first arrived in Ketchikan, bound for Bar Harbor, Hall had spoken with Mandrich over the radio.

"It's good to be home," Hall said.

Sitting behind Hall in the wheelhouse, I thought about a fleet that gives its skippers names like Grumpy Gus, Quarterpounder, and Dollar Bill. Of the sons who still fish with their fathers, and how old and new friends meet up each summer for a season of fishing, a few rounds of pool and a few games of bowling. A fleet with captains and crews who wave as they steam past each other at sea. The way we shout with glee at the sighting of a jumper. The toasts we make to "Skipper Dads," followed quickly by toasts to "Skipper Kids." A place where some of the best laughter, some of the best of everything in human nature can be found. Where, I firmly believe, most all the magnificence in existence is found.

Yes, I think.

It is good to be home.

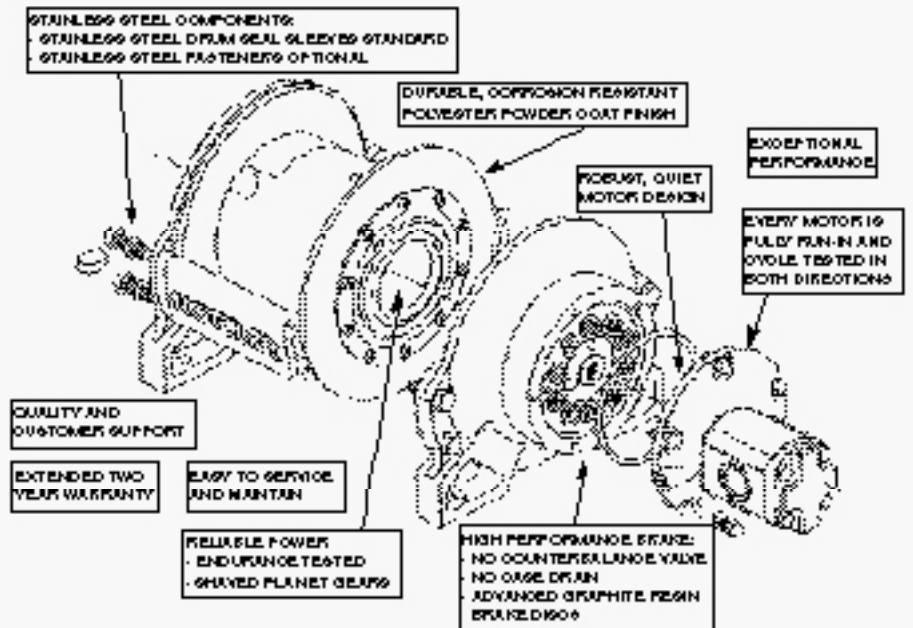
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