

Chasing Glaciers

A cruise through
British Columbia &
SE Alaska 2018



COSMIC DANCER V

Clive Woodman & Angela Lilienthal, Cosmic Dancer V – Sweden 38, May – Sep 2018

CRUISE LOG

*"Any worthwhile expedition can be planned
on the back of an envelope"*

Bill Tilman

Our plan for the 2018 cruising season was completely d 'accord with Tilman's philosophy. It went no further than saying we would set off as early in the season as possible, sail as far north into Alaska as the short summer season would allow, and then return to overwinter in Sidney.

The first part went to plan. Cosmic Dancer was lifted back into the water in Sidney BC on 26 Apr and in a consistently fine spell of late spring weather fitting out began in earnest. However, it wasn't long before the oft quoted saying "No plan survives contact with the enemy" kicked in.

The enemy in this case proved to be our yacht insurance company who, with just 2 weeks to run on our existing policy, dropped the bombshell that their underwriters would no longer provide cover for North America and Canada and hence they would not renew our policy, thus triggering a last-minute search for alternative arrangements.

It quickly became apparent that we wouldn't get a new insurer without commissioning both a full out of water survey, and a full replacement of our standing rigging which was a few months older than the 10-year limit imposed by many insurers. The first of these requirements would have been merely expensive to fulfil, but the latter was impossible to achieve at such short notice and would have involved delaying our departure by a season.

After almost 2 weeks of fruitless searching for alternatives, we finally managed to pressurise our existing insurer to renew, on the grounds that they had insured us to get to this particular part of the world, and therefore had a moral obligation to insure us to get away from it! However, it was not an easy won victory and it came at a price, an almost doubling of our annual premium.

It was 22 May before we could throw off our lines and start the journey north. Within a week we had rounded Cape Caution at the northern end of Vancouver Island, only to discover that sum-



Comox-Strathcona



T'lingit Totem



Misty morning in the Broughtons

mer had yet got this far north. 2 days were spent sitting out a 45-knot gale in Bella Bella before continuing north into the Great Bear Rain Forest, which lived up to at least the second part of its name.

For 8 days the relentless sound of rain beating on the cabin roof and against the back of our foul weather jacket hoods was our constant companion, whilst our Webasto cabin heater became our best friend. Meanwhile the only bears in sight were the ones to be found on a wall mural in Prince Rupert when we arrived there 2 weeks after setting out, thanks to some very favourable southerly winds which had accompanied the rain.

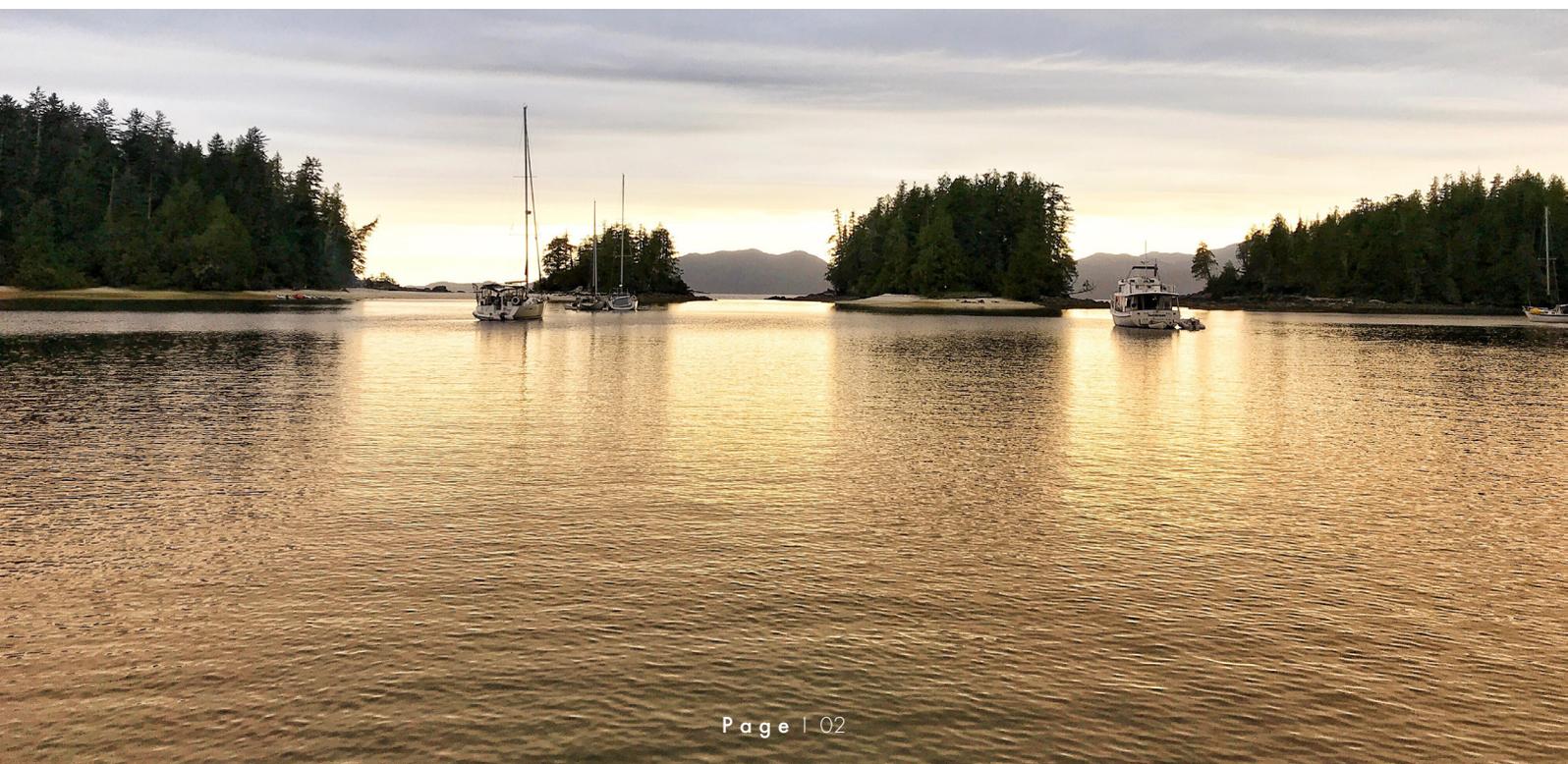
One of the highlights of this otherwise damp leg was that the many waterfalls lining the inside passage were in full spate, forming brilliant white slashes down the otherwise endless carpet of green forest that is the northern BC coast. At the foot of one such waterfall we watched a pair of humpback whales diving. Their spume was almost indistinguishable from the spray rising from the torrent, but their distinctive diving tail fins were vividly highlighted against the white backdrop of the falls.

Crossing the border from Prince Rupert, Canada to Ketchikan, Alaska brought mixed fortunes. On the negative side we were told that it would not be possible to get an extension for our US cruising permit obtained the previous season, and that we would need to be clear of Alaska no later than 8 Aug. Whilst this was a setback, it was not a disaster since it still gave us a full 2 months of cruising in Alaska.



Street art in Prince Rupert

Sunset at Fury Cove, Alaska





Misty Fjords National Park

On the plus side it heralded the arrival of summer, which although we did not know it at the time, would turn out to be one of the driest, sunniest and warmest summers in SE Alaska's history. We went on to enjoy 8 weeks of almost unbroken sunshine with no rain, a true rarity in a region which normally experiences up to 280 inches of rain per year.

Our first week in Alaska was spent enjoying the stunning mountain scenery of Misty Fjords National Park, a vast wilderness area only accessible by boat or seaplane. It was here that we were to discover that blue skies and bright sunshine don't necessarily make for settled sailing conditions in Alaska.

On misty overcast days in the Inside Passage it is quite normal to experience mirror calm conditions all day long unless a front is passing through. However, on bright sunny days by late morning thermally generated inflow winds often start funnelling up the fjords. These arrive without warning and in the space of minutes it can go from mirror calm to 30+ knots of wind.

After getting caught out the first couple of times we soon learnt that on a sunny day it didn't pay to sail without the staysail bent on and ready to hoist at a moment's notice, no matter how benign the conditions might appear at the start of the day.

From Misty Fjords we continued northwards up the inside pas-



Poppies in Petersburg



Sea lions



Fishing boat en route to Petersburg



Sawyer Glacier Tracy Arm

sage passing through Wrangell and Petersburg to reach Tracy Arm. Deemed by some to be even more spectacular than Glacier Bay, we were not to be disappointed, although we left with the distinct feeling that visitors in the not too far distant future may not be able to say the same thing.

The pilot talks about spectacular hanging glaciers on both sides of the Arm as you work your way inland to the Sawyer Glacier. The hanging glaciers have now largely melted, leaving behind glistening cirques of bare polished rock.

In this part of the world it doesn't take long before bare rock succumbs to the relentless tide of advancing rainforest which steadily envelops anything which is not permanently covered in ice. Already many of the Tracy Arm cirques are partially covered with new growth dwarf birch and it won't be too long before they are completely covered in rain forest, rendering Tracy Arm indistinguishable from so many other steep sided fjords in SE Alaska and British Columbia.

It was not only the hanging glaciers which are under pressure. As we worked our way up the Arm we were intrigued to see an AIS contact on our plotter which was apparently a full mile or so inland from the head of the fjord. At the time we put it down to interference to the signal caused by the slab-sided rock faces all around us. However, when we reached the head of the arm all was revealed.

The snout of the Sawyer Glacier is now almost 2 nm further inland than its



Harvesting ice for the evening cocktail



Iceberg in Tracy Arm



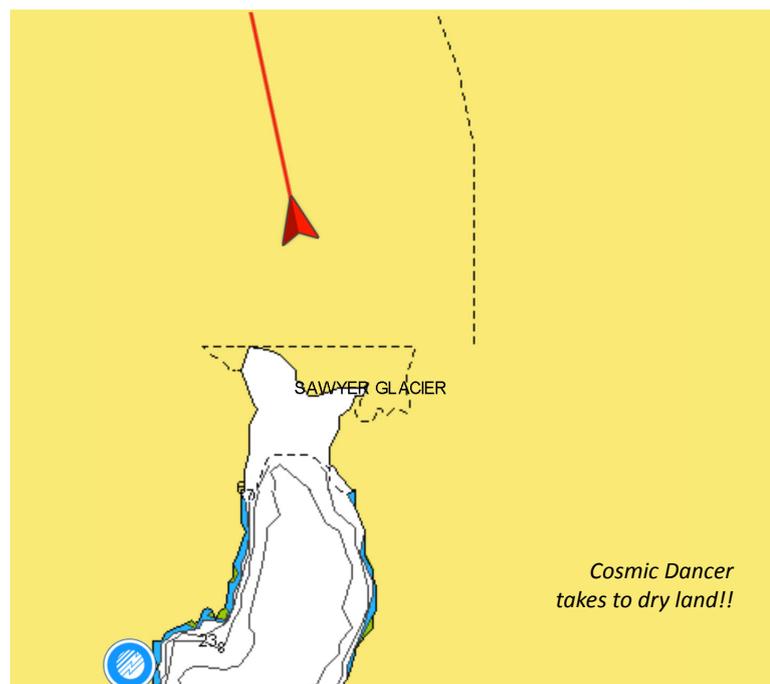
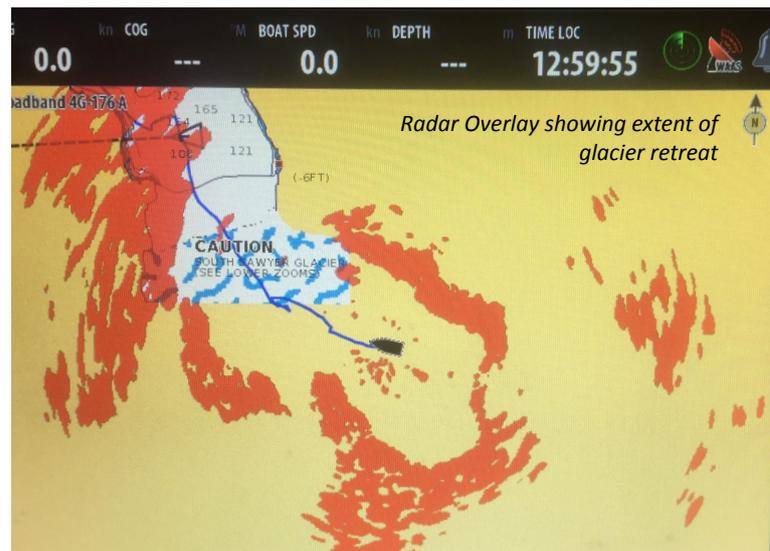
South Sawyer Glacier

charted position. As we approached the glacier for the unmissable photo shoot we had the rather unnerving experience of navigating over what our plotter assured us was dry land, but which our eyes said was definitely water, and water so deep that our echo sounder couldn't pick up the bottom!

However, for now there was still enough floating ice around that we were able to harvest some large chunks of it to put in our evening cocktail, but there was a strangely subdued feeling on board that evening as we sat down to enjoy our glacially chilled G&T. Part of it was being overawed by the sheer splendour of what we had seen earlier in the day, but tempered by a nagging feeling that the normal cycle of advancing and retreating tidewater glaciers was somehow drastically speeding up and going in one direction only.

From Tracy Arm we headed to Auke Bay to re-provision and consider our next steps. Our original plan had been to spend a couple of days in Glacier Bay before crossing the Gulf of Alaska to Prince William Sound and Kodiak. Despite our later than intended departure, and the failure to get an extension to our cruising permit, this was still just about achievable. We pressed on to Hoonah to wait for a permit to enter Glacier Bay and a suitable weather window for the Gulf crossing.

Although half the daily quota of permits to visit Glacier



Cosmic Dancer takes to dry land!!

Bay National Park are reserved for those like us who cannot predict their arrival date with enough certainty to apply 2 months in advance, we still had to wait for almost a week to be allocated a short notice permit.

Whilst there was no “enemy” this time to force a change of plan, nonetheless over the course of several days waiting for the permit, we came to the conclusion that it would be a crime to rush through so many wonderful cruising areas so quickly, doing justice to none of them. The decision was made not to cross the Gulf and instead spend the rest of our remaining cruising permit time in SE Alaska, returning the following season to explore Prince William Sound and Kodiak.

With this decision made, we went on to enjoy the wonders of Glacier Bay in perfect weather. The glaciers are as spectacular as those in Tracy Arm, although the distances involved in getting to see them are greater. However, for us the real highlight of Glacier Bay was the wildlife.

One night was spent at anchor in a small bay on the west side of Russell Island where we were surrounded by humpback whales swimming within feet of the boat as they fed close to the shore. Sea otters were to be found everywhere, lying on their backs with head and tail flippers out of the water like a Dead Sea bather, often with a salmon clasped between their 2 forefeet which they slowly gnawed away at like a giant ice cream cone.

The only thing to elude us was a grizzly bear. We anchored in all the places where we had been told it was impossible not to see bears feeding on the shore at night – yet we achieved the impossible! We had given up all hope of seeing a bear and were on our way out of the park when we spotted what



Cruise liner in Glacier Bay



Cosmic Dancer in Tarr Inlet, Glacier Bay



we thought was a semi submerged log in front of us. Leaping to the helm to take it out of autopilot mode and take avoiding action, we suddenly realised that the log was moving and that it had a large black glistening nose.

A grizzly bear swimming is not a thing of grace or beauty. Exercising a very inelegant form of doggy paddle, and only just keeping its nose above water, it resembles a young child, taking their first faltering strokes without a flotation aid in a swimming pool.

When we first spotted the bear, it was no more than a few hundred yards from the shore heading out to cross a 4 mile wide fjord. It was moving so slowly, and apparently struggling so hard to keep afloat, that we were convinced it would never survive the crossing. We were sure it was only attempting it because it had been on the losing side of a territorial spat with another bear.

Out of sheer curiosity we followed at a respectful distance behind with the engine idling. Whatever the bear lacked in elegance, it more than made up for in dogged perseverance. 3 hours later it had reached the other side but eschewed the chance of an easy landing on a gentle sandy beach, instead heading a further half mile towards what looked like a very inhospitable rocky shore, which at low tide had a near vertical drop of 20 foot to the water.

We were then mesmerised by the sight of this huge waterlogged bear pull itself up out of the water and up the 20 ft cliff with just his 2 fore feet. With nothing more than a quick nonchalant shake to get the worst of the water off, he then went on to demonstrate why he had just swum 4 miles. With one effortless swipe of a leg he brushed aside a boulder the size of a small saloon car to get at the black mussels nestling underneath it and started feeding on them.



If we ever had any illusions that a bear could never climb out of the water onto our boat whilst at anchor, then they were instantly dashed that moment.... and having seen how nonchalantly the boulder was moved we didn't have any faith in our wash boards preventing a bear from getting below. A mental note was made to never keep any mussels on board whilst cruising in Alaska!!

From Glacier Bay we headed to Elfin Cove, a magical small boardwalk fishing settlement, that from the accounts of everyone who has cruised through this area, never fails to charm anyone who stops there.

Knowing that some harbour masters in Alaska can get a little grumpy if you try to come alongside without first calling them, on our approach we put out a Ch16 call to "Elfin Cove Harbourmaster". After the second call there was a gruff anonymous response over the air, "There is no f***ing harbourmaster in Elfin Cove". Suitably chastened, we quietly tied up alongside a fishing boat and adjourned to the quirky local pub where we soon became embroiled in a fascinating variety of interesting and extremely enlightening conversations with the local fishermen.

It continued to the early hours of the morning when we found ourselves partying on the deck of one of the local fishing boats, drinking copious quantities of vodka chilled with ice straight from their fish holds. It was at that point our host admitted that it was him who had "enlightened" us over the radio as to the lack of a harbour master.... but there were no hard feelings and several more vodkas were drunk before people finally retired to their bunks, nursing not bruised feelings, but very sore heads the following day!

From Elfin Cove we took the outside route down the west side of Chigof Island to Sitka. It is a fascinating stretch of coast to sail along, full of wonderful wild anchorages, but seldom cruised by visiting yachts, and those that do often emerge with a tale to tell of a rock hit on route, largely because the area is so poorly surveyed and unmarked.

We were to be no exception. Having recently reread a selection of Roving Commission articles on cruises to the area it appeared that RCC members are not immune from hitting rocks in these parts. We were silently congratulating ourselves on having avoided a similar fate, when just a few miles out from Sitka we heard that horrible grinding sound of lead brushing against a rock the chart said wasn't there.

Fortunately, it was only a glancing blow, and the only damage done was



T'lingit Art Bartlett Cove



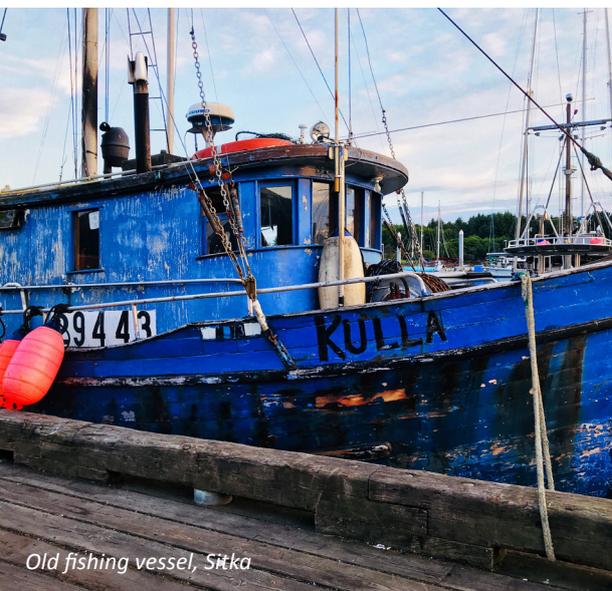
Sitka Harbour at dusk



Pelican Cove, Chichagof Island

to our egos. However, we had become complacent. After 2 seasons and 5,000 miles of cruising through the glacially formed fjords of the Inside Passage, where for the most part you can get within feet of the shore before your echo sounder registers anything, we had subconsciously fallen into the mindset of “if you can’t see it, there’s nothing there”.

The west coasts of Chichagof and Baranof are geologically very different from the Inside Passage, requiring a “step up in gear” when it comes to navigational vigilance, and we had failed to change gear.



Old fishing vessel, Sitka

The only consolation we could take from the incident came from subsequently talking with a local fisherman in Sitka who said “Don’t get too cut up about it...there isn’t a professional fisherman in Alaska to whom that hasn’t happened at least several times.... here we just call them “self-charted” rocks!!

We also took the view that “after a fall you need to get back into saddle straight away”, so rather than taking the more commonly travelled inside route from Sitka down the east coast of Baranof Island, we continued down around the equally wild and un surveyed west coast of Baranof, completing a circumnavigation of the Island before returning to Sitka.



Another peaceful anchorage

By now we were running out of days on our cruising permit and Angela had to return to Germany for an unavoidable work commitment. Howard Bell, son of Bob Bell (RCC), kindly agreed to join us for the passage back to Port Hardy, which passed with no drama more serious than a fuel blockage, although it proved annoyingly difficult to locate and clear. We made it back into Canada with just 12 hours remaining on our US cruising permit, a close call, but then no one could accuse us of wasting an opportunity!

Angela re-joined in Port Hardy, together with Ste-



South Wrangell Narrows

ven and Jane Anderson (RCC), for the penultimate leg to Vancouver. It was an unusual experience for us to have 4 people aboard Cosmic Dancer, and a real joy to sail with people who never like to miss an opportunity to get the “coloured” sails up, whilst sharing our love of the evening ritual of G&Ts on deck!

We blew the cobwebs off both our Spinnaker and Cruising Chute, which had lain sadly neglected in the forepeak for the past few years as they are a bit too much of a handful when sailing 2 handed, and enjoyed some wonderful downwind sailing through the Broughton Islands, Desolation Sound and the Straits of Georgia.

The finale of our 2018 season was joining the OCC’s British Columbia Rally, in an extremely social and party filled 12-day cruise through the Gulf Islands. It was a particular pleasure to meet Tom and Vicky Jackson (RCC) during the rally, since it was their accounts of cruising in Alaska & British Columbia which had played a huge part in inspiring us to cruise the area.



Purple Gins with Jane & Steven

It was even rumoured that the 2 participating yachts with RCC members aboard were to be found racing against one another on the rally leg from Sidney to Victoria - a completely scurrilous and unfounded rumour - even if subsequent examination of their GPS tracks did reveal that there was an suspicious amount of tacking on even the smallest of wind shifts, together with something that looked awfully like covering!

The Rally was a fitting end to a wonderful season. We had been on board for 150 days, sailed over 3,100 miles, visited some fantastic places, met many wonderful people, and even done a little bit of Alaskan “self-charting”. Very little of this had been in the initial plan, and we hadn’t always stuck to what little plan there was, but when it comes to sailing we are inclined to a philosophy once espoused by a hugely eminent American:

*"I have always found that plans are useless,
but planning is indispensable"*

Dwight D Eisenhower

In The Broughten Islands



Crew:

Legs 1 – 4 - Angela Lilienthal and Clive Woodman

Leg 5 - Clive Woodman and Howard Bell

Leg 6 - Clive Woodman, Angela Lilienthal, Steven and Jane Anderson

Leg 7 - Clive Woodman, Angela Lilienthal, Doug and Dale Bruce



Angela & Clive

Places Visited

Date	Place	Notes	Position
26/04/2018	Westport Marina	Fitting Out	48 40.8 N 123 24.8 W
22/05/2018	Port Sidney		48 39.2 N 123 23.6 W
23/05/2018	Telegraph Cove	At anchor	48 58.4 N 123 39.9 W
24/05/2018	Secret Cove	At Anchor	49 31.3 N 123 57.3 W
25/05/2018	Westview		49 50 N 124 31.7 W
27/05/2018	Okeover Govt Wharf		49 59.5 N 124 42.7 W
28/05/2018	Campbell River		50 2.1 N 125 14.6 W
31/05/2018	Waiatt Bay	At Anchor	50 16.5 N 125 13.9 W
01/06/2018	Port Neville	At Anchor	50 29.6 N 126 5.5 W
02/06/2018	Port McNeill	At anchor	50 35.9 N 127 5.6 W
03/06/2018	Fury Cove	At Anchor	51 29.3 N 127 45.5 W
04/06/2018	Shearwater		52 8.8 N 128 5.3 W
06/06/2018	Bottleneck Inlet	At anchor	52 42.6 N 128 24.4 W
07/06/2018	Coghlan Anchorage	At anchor	53 23.8 N 129 17.2 W
08/06/2018	Lewis Island	At anchor	54 1 N 130 16 W
09/06/2018	Prince Rupert		54 19.2 N 130 19.2 W
13/06/2018	Foggy Bay	At anchor	54 57 N 130 56.5 W
15/06/2018	Ketchikan		55 21.1 N 131 41.1 W
16/06/2018	Coho Cove	At anchor	55 16 N 131 22.5 W
17/06/2018	Manzanita Creek	At Anchor	55 35.1 N 130 57.9 W
18/06/2018	Behm Canal	At Anchor	55 53 N 131 48.5 W
19/06/2018	Thorne Bay	At anchor	55 40.2 N 132 31.2 W
20/06/2018	Wrangell		56 27.9 N 132 22.9 W
22/06/2018	Deception Point	At anchor	56 32 N 132 58.5 W
23/06/2018	Petersburg		56 48.8 N 132 57.7 W
26/06/2018	Cleveland Passage	At Anchor	57 13.3 N 133 30.7 W
28/06/2018	Tracy Arm	At anchor	57 48.6 N 133 38 W
29/06/2018	Auke Bay		58 22.9 N 134 39 W
02/07/2018	Hoonah		58 6.4 N 135 26.8 W
04/07/2018	Pleasant Island	At Anchor	58 22.7 N 135 35.9 W
05/07/2018	Bartlett Cove	At Anchor	58 27.5 N 135 53.2 W
06/07/2018	Blue Mouse Cove	At anchor	58 46.7 N 136 29 W
07/07/2018	Russell Island Cove	At Anchor	58 55.5 N 136 48.3 W
08/07/2018	North Sandy Cove	At anchor	58 43.2 N 135 59.1 W
10/07/2018	Elfin Cove		58 11.7 N 136 20.8 W
11/07/2018	Pelican		57 57.5 N 136 13.7 W
12/07/2018	Kimsham Cove	At anchor	57 41.3 N 136 7.1 W
13/07/2018	Sitka		57 3.5 N 135 21.3 W
17/07/2018	Eastern Bay	At anchor	57 9.1 N 135 26.5 W
18/07/2018	Yamani Cove	At anchor	56 40.9 N 135 11.3 W
19/07/2018	Port Walter	At anchor	56 22.9 N 134 38.7 W
20/07/2018	Bay of Pillars	At anchor	56 36.9 N 134 13.1 W
21/07/2018	Red Bluff Bay	At anchor	56 52.2 N 134 47.1 W

22/07/2018	Baranof Hot Springs	At Anchor	57 5.3 N 134 50 W
23/07/2018	Appleton Cove	At anchor	57 28.4 N 135 15.9 W
24/07/2018	Sitka	At anchor	57 3.4 N 135 21.6 W
31/07/2018	Beehive Cove	At anchor	57 11.2 N 135 26.3 W
01/08/2018	Baranof Hot Springs	At Anchor	57 5.2 N 134 50 W
02/08/2018	Portage Bay	At anchor	56 58.7 N 133 18.6 W
04/08/2018	Petersburg		56 48.8 N 132 57.7 W
06/08/2018	Deception Cove	At Anchor	56 32 N 132 58.6 W
07/08/2018	Meyers Chuck	At Anchor	55 44.4 N 132 15.5 W
08/08/2018	Foggy Bay	At Anchor	54 56 N 130 57.1 W
09/08/2018	Prince Rupert		54 19.2 N 130 19.3 W
12/08/2018	Spicer Island	At Anchor	53 45.1 N 130 21.3 W
13/08/2018	Patterson Inlet	At Anchor	53 27.4 N 129 47.1 W
15/08/2018	Shearwater	At anchor	52 8.9 N 128 5 W
18/08/2018	Codville Lagoon	At Anchor	52 3.7 N 127 50.2 W
19/08/2018	Green Island	At anchor	51 38.5 N 127 50.2 W
20/08/2018	Allison Harbour	At anchor	51 3.3 N 127 30.5 W
21/08/2018	Port Hardy		50 42.8 N 127 29.4 W
28/08/2018	Shoal Harbour	At anchor	50 44.2 N 126 30 W
29/08/2018	Port Neville	At anchor	50 29.5 N 126 5.4 W
29/08/2018	Fern Island	At anchor	50 37.2 N 126 38 W
30/08/2018	Blind Channel		50 24.8 N 125 30.1 W
30/08/2018	Helmcken Island	At anchor	50 24.2 N 125 52.5 W
31/08/2018	Gorge Harbour	At anchor	50 5.8 N 125 1.4 W
31/08/2018	Shoal Bay	At anchor	50 27.5 N 125 21.9 W
01/09/2018	Okeover Inlet		49 59.5 N 124 42.6 W
02/09/2018	Westview		49 50 N 124 31.8 W
03/09/2018	Smuggler Cove	At Anchor	49 30.9 N 123 57.9 W
04/09/2018	RVYC, Vancouver		49 16.5 N 123 11.2 W
07/09/2018	False Creek, Vancouver	At anchor	49 16.2 N 123 7.3 W
08/09/2018	Fisherman's Wharf, Vancouver		49 16.4 N 123 8.3 W
10/09/2018	Snug Cove		49 22.7 N 123 20 W
11/09/2018	Newcastle Island	At anchor	49 10.7 N 123 55.8 W
12/09/2018	Telegraph Harbour		48 58.6 N 123 40.1 W
13/09/2018	RVYC Long Harbour		48 50.8 N 123 26.2 W
14/09/2018	Ganges		48 51.4 N 123 30 W
15/09/2018	Port Sidney		48 39.1 N 123 23.7 W
16/09/2018	Victoria		48 25.3 N 123 22.2 W
18/09/2018	Royal Victoria YC		48 27.1 N 123 17.7 W
19/09/2018	Montague Harbour	At anchor	48 53.2 N 123 23.7 W
20/09/2018	RVYC, Vancouver		49 16.4 N 123 11.2 W
22/09/2018	Montague Harbour	At anchor	48 53.5 N 123 24 W
23/09/2018	Westport	Lay Up	48 40.9 N 123 24.9 W

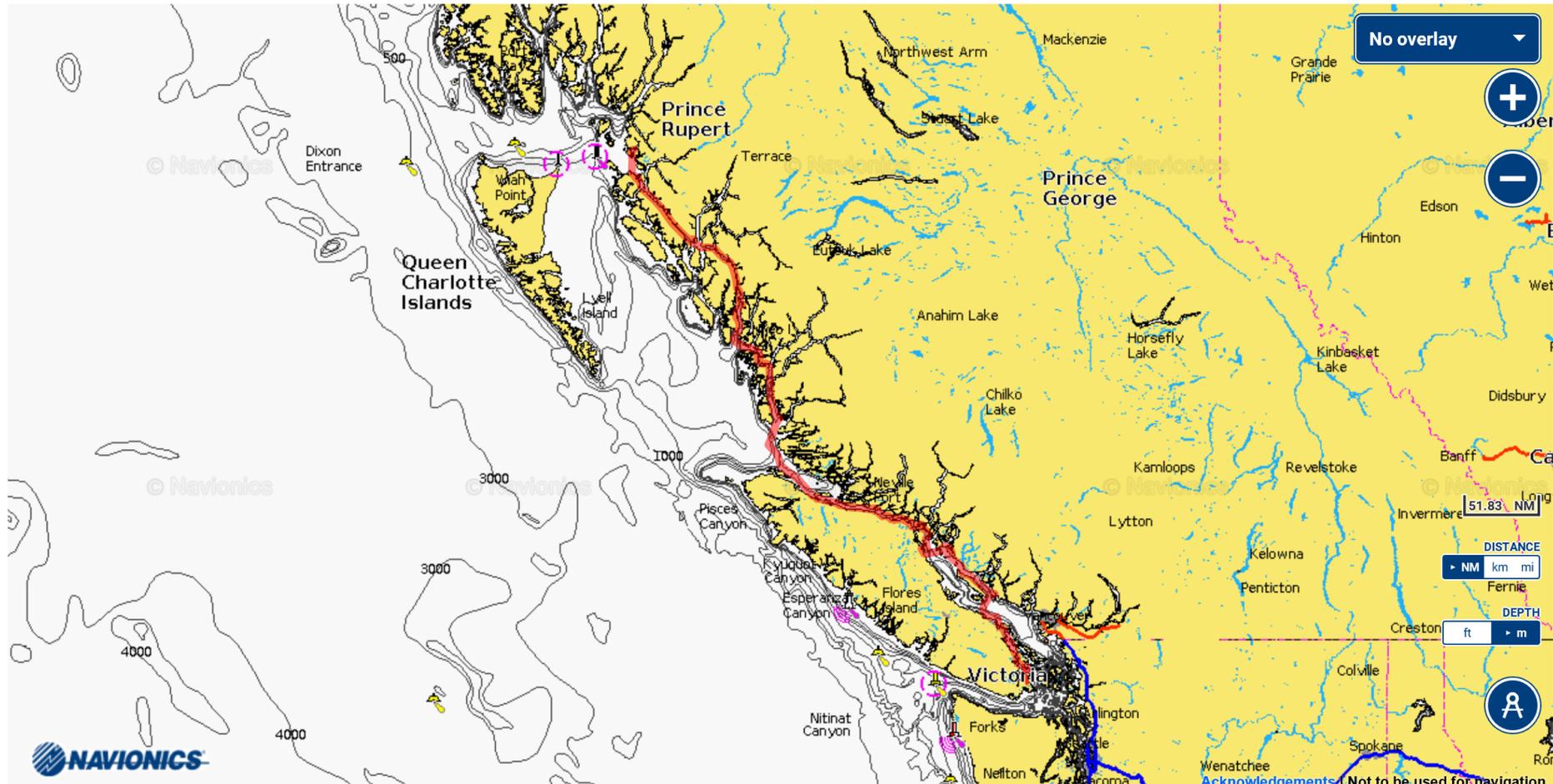
Cruise Length (Days): 150

Distance Logged: 3,120 NM

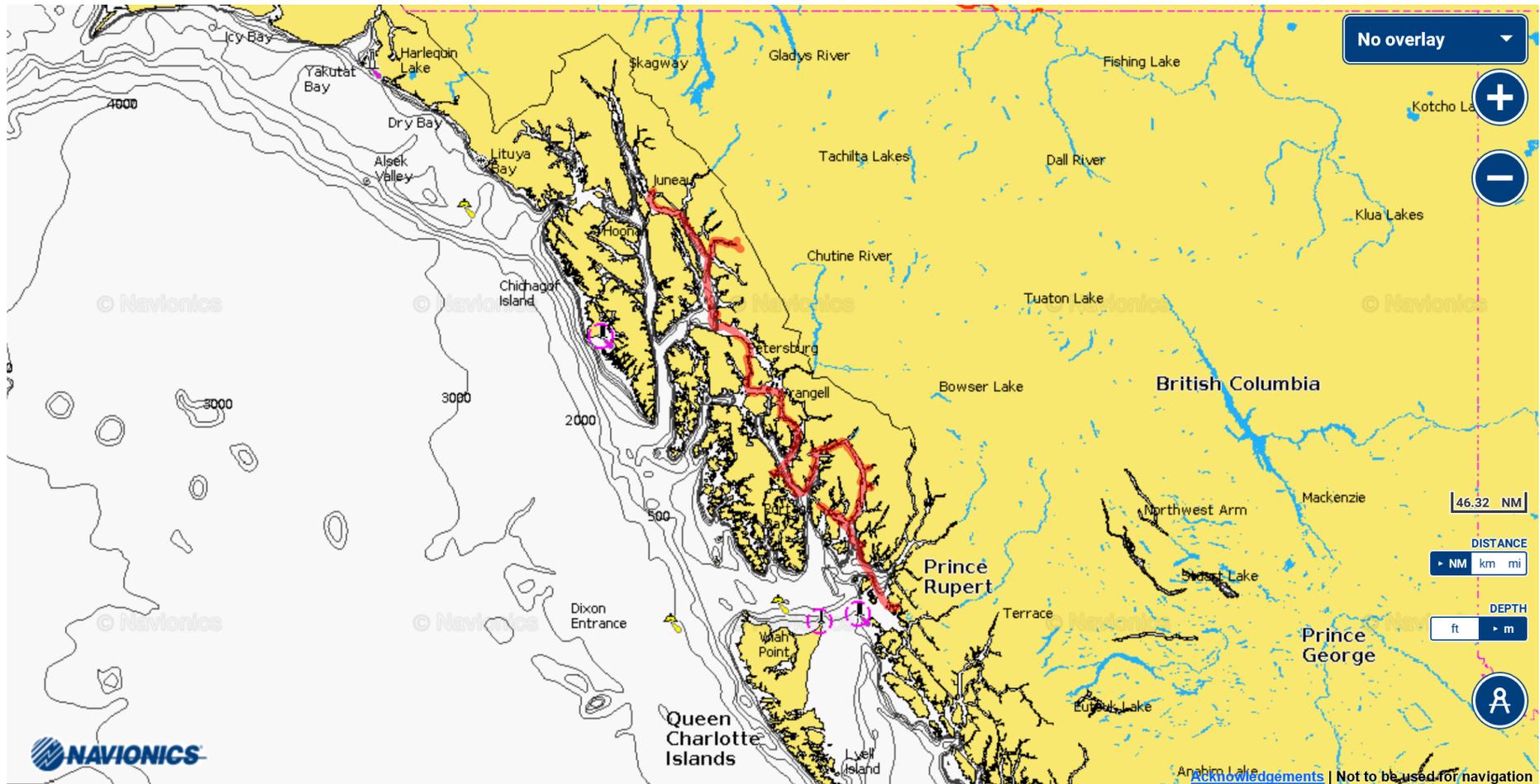
Tracks

(Zoomable versions of these tracks are available online at <http://cosmic-dancer.com/BCMap2018.aspx>)

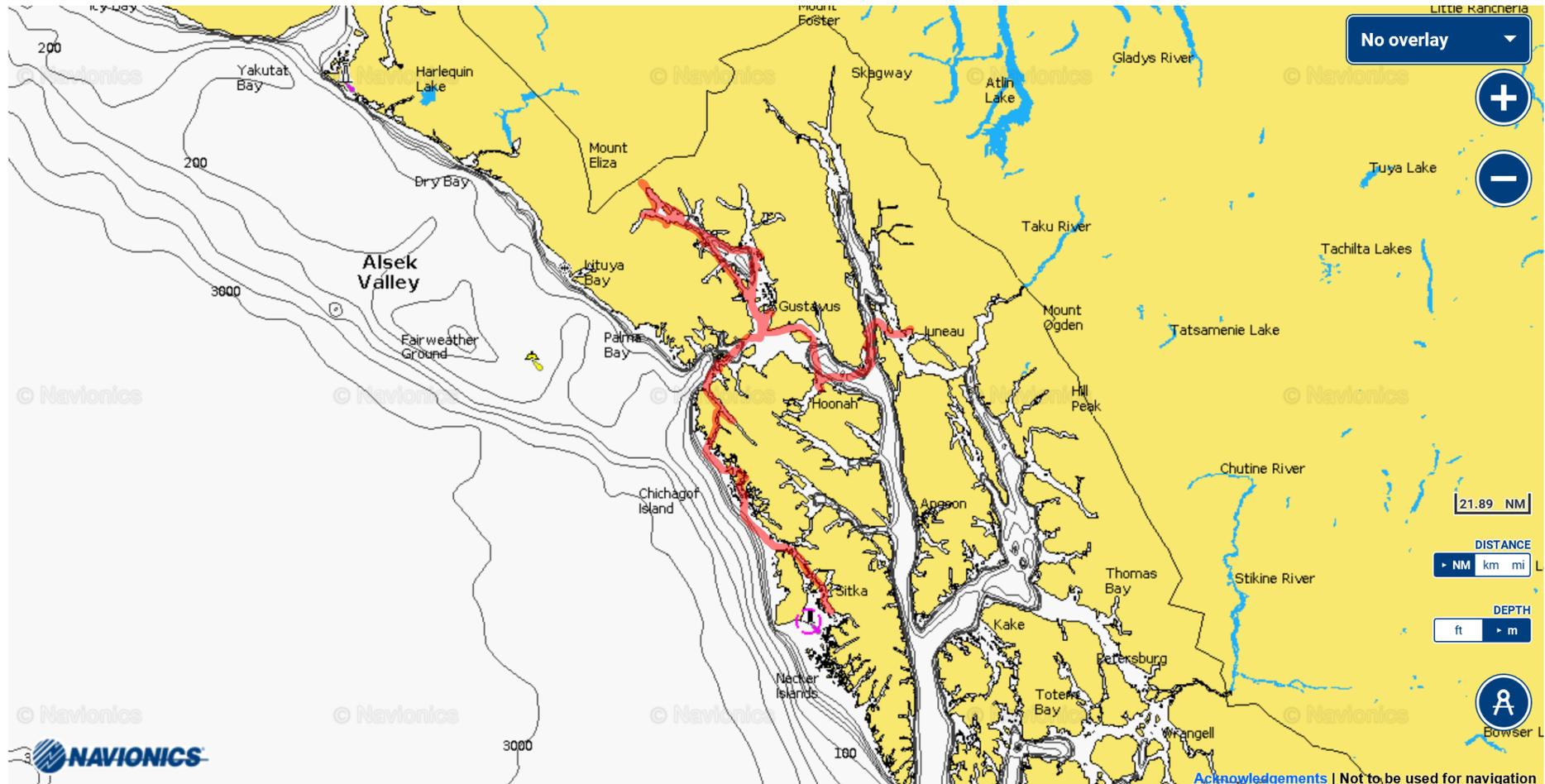
Leg 1 – Sidney, Vancouver Island to Prince Rupert



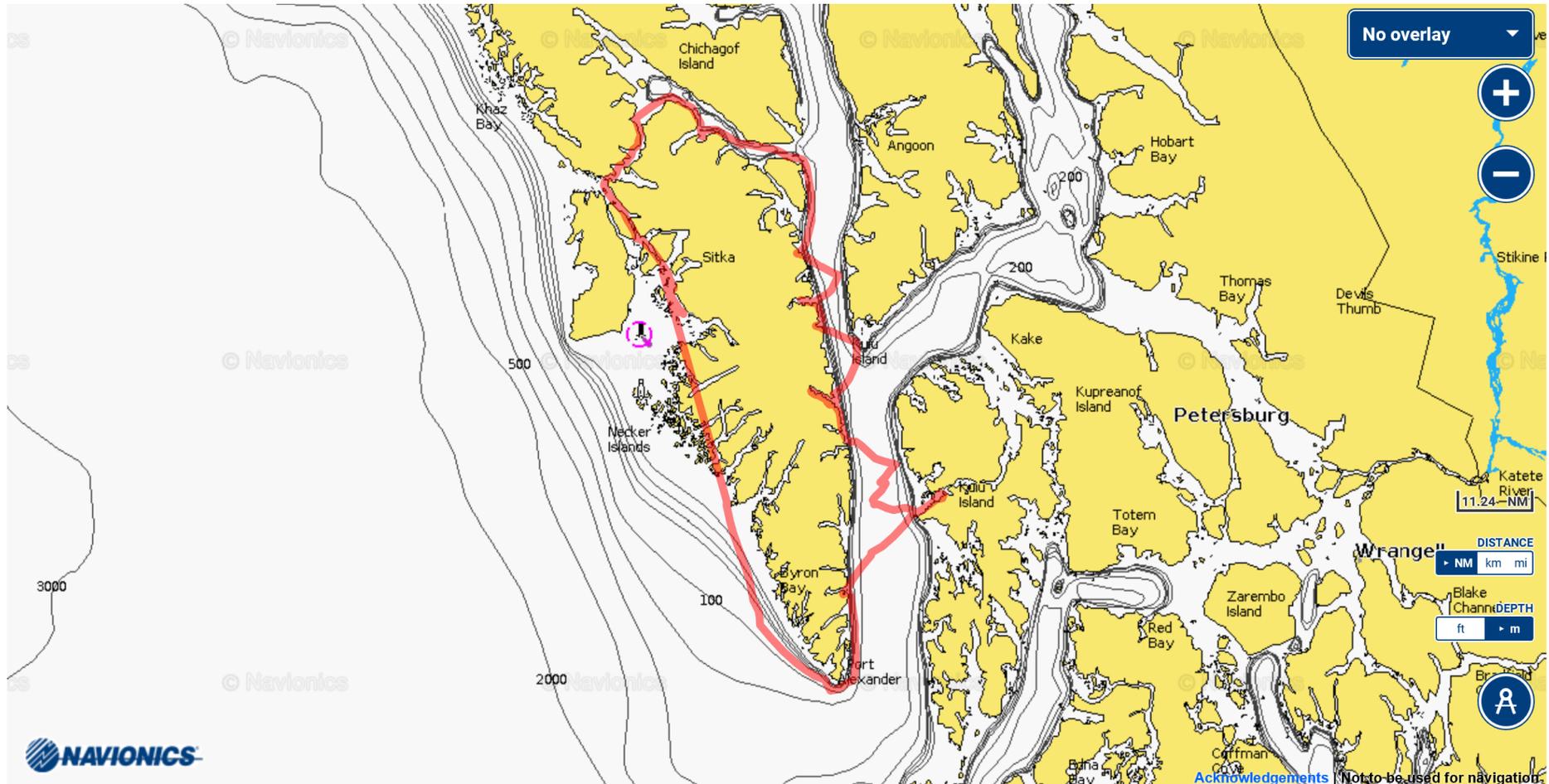
Leg 2 –Prince Rupert to Auke Bay



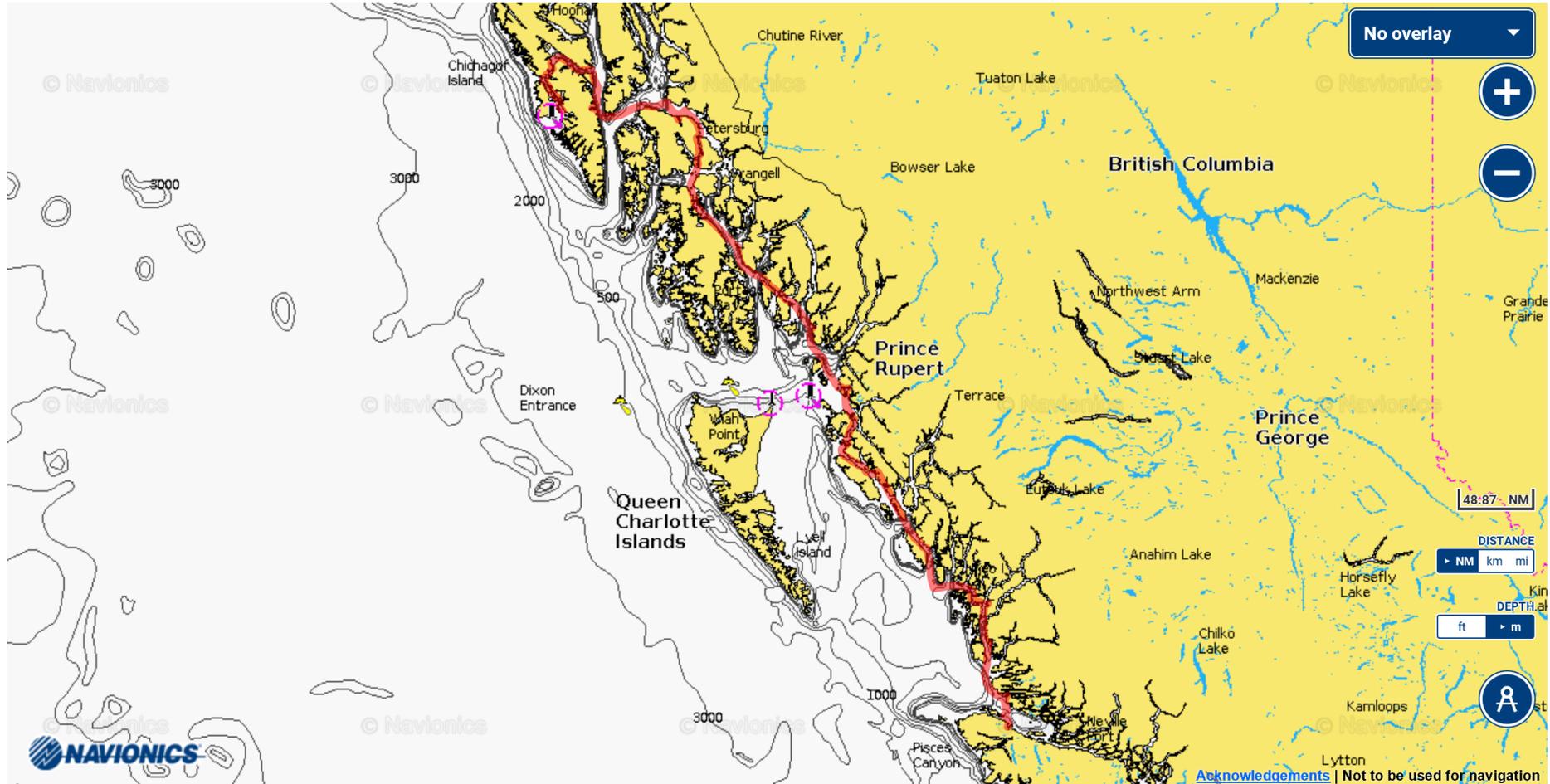
Leg 3 – Auke Bay to Sitka via Glacier Bay



Leg 4 – Around Baranof Island



Leg 5 – Sitka to Port Hardy



Leg 6 –Port Hardy to Vancouver



Leg 7 – Gulf Islands (OCC Rally)

