





# A JOURNEY BEGINS

Every adventure begins with the first step. *Argo*, our Outer Reef 880 Cockpit Motor-yacht, was built and commissioned to travel south and fully explore Central and South America with a family crew of three. With such an adventure in mind, *Argo's* first step was a thorough shakedown cruise, not simply around a bay, but a voyage to Alaska to fully understand *Argo's* capabilities and to be within reach of ports that could provide any necessary repairs.

*Words & Photos: Andy Ulitsky*



Mariners who are lucky enough to travel the Inside Passage come to see unique places, wildlife, and people. When we set out north on our own journey to Alaska, we looked forward to such an adventure.

Over the years, we have shared many fun adventures, and on the sunny day of our send-off we embarked on yet another. "We" being Andy Ulitsky (photographer, scribe, and half of the brother-in-law pair), Paul Hawran (owner, captain, and the other, pain-in-the-neck brother-in-law), and Chris Holodny (our nephew, Marine, First Mate, and Andy's godson). Whether mariners are involved in the design and build of their boats, as we were, or acquire a finished vessel, getting a feel for the vessel is critical. Initially, we focused on *Argo* - all system checks, handling characteristics, engine sweet spots, sounds, performance, electronics, and our place among other boats. Sure, before the actual delivery are sea trials and marine surveyors, but it becomes very real when you take off on your first trip with a new boat. As the song goes, "You don't know what you've got until you lose it." You will undoubtedly lose

something in the roughest seas and far offshore.

*Argo*, commissioned in 2015 in Victoria, B.C., is a special vessel. She was the 68th hull built by Outer Reef Yachts, a company that started in 2001 to fill a void in the passagemaker market for reliable, long range, semi-displacement vessels (*Argo* displaces 110 tons) built for stability, reliability, the ability to be operated with minimal crew, and affording cruising independence. *Argo* commenced with the basic Outer Reef design providing a high brow, Portuguese Deck, and a keel designed to provide comfort, speed, and stability in varying sea conditions. The equipped 3,500-gallon fuel tanks allow *Argo* to travel greater than 3,500 miles at displacement speeds or greater than 2,500 miles at semi-displacement cruising speeds.

Such capabilities will be needed on our planned voyage, which includes the Galapagos and around Cape Horn, Patagonia, and the fabulous glaciers and fjords of Chile. Our intermediate stops are San Diego, the Sea of Cortez, the Mexico Coast, and Costa Rica. This was not envisioned as a rushed trip. On board we have our dive

**Continued on Page 62**

Continued from Page 61

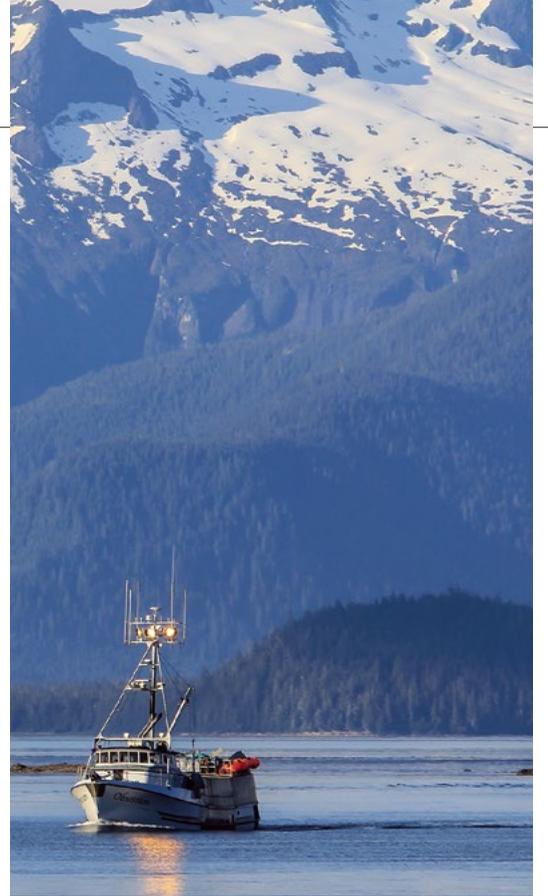
gear and scuba compressor ready for eventually warmer waters.

Redundancy and reliability were a major consideration in *Argo's* build, keeping in mind that in the middle of the Pacific Ocean "two is one and one is none." Wherever possible, *Argo* was built with two: twin main propulsion engines, twin gensets, twin anchors with twin hydraulic windlasses, and a myriad of back-up electronics, including twin computers. Systems were built with independence to each other, allowing ease of switching to backup systems and having backups to backups. A large inverter and battery banks afford *Argo* independence at anchoring locations.

*Argo's* boat deck arrangements provide ample space for a large tender, kayaks, jet skis, and land-based toys such as scooters. Comfortable and spacious accommodations, in conjunction with substantial

storage areas, are key elements. A critical component for *Argo* throughout the purchase consideration of an Outer Reef was the retention of value, high quality construction, and after-delivery service and support. Retention of value after three to five years of cruising is most often found when builders have limited or no inventory builds, no extra profit dealer networks, and quality after-sales service. Outer Reef Yachts check all of these boxes and delivers continual support years after delivery.

During those first few hours of our voyage to Alaska, we passed among the Gulf Islands where we took the time to really appreciate the views of the Islands. To starboard, we passed the city of Vancouver, the last large metropolitan area we would see for some time. We passed Gabriola, just chugging along with enough open water to get a slight roll



despite the 21-foot beam and ABT Trac 250 stabilizers with 12-square-foot fins. All mechanicals seemed fine and we were getting accustomed to the electronics. By the time we passed Denman Island, the Strait began to narrow. The islands ahead blended together as if one large land mass, but soon we could see channels ahead. Between Hoskyn and Discovery channels, we chose the latter, reluctantly passing by the more beckoning Desolation Sound. The weather was good and our first day was going well. Outer Reef had shown that they build a solid boat and always offered assistance, but we were determined to be the trouble-shooter sentinels. To ensure a proper shakedown cruise, we decided to monitor and document all of *Argo's* systems with a more formal process. Here are the high-lights of our process and some advice for you that we learned along the way.

## MAIN ENGINES

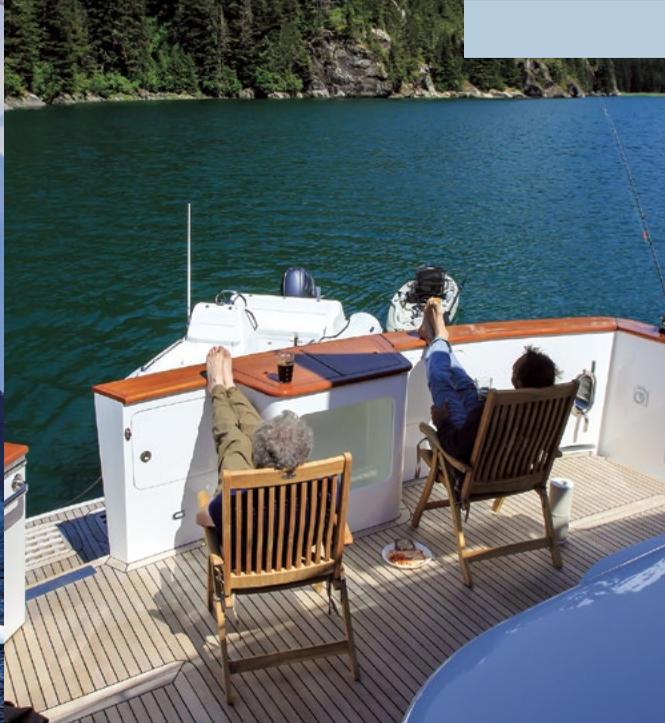
How better to check propulsion (twin Caterpillar C-18 Acert 1001 bhp), but to have fun by applying full throttle for a period of 10 to 15 minutes, as per manufacturer specs? First time, everything was fine and documented in our log, each of us moving from helm to engine room to assure location familiarity. We double-checked electronic and analog displays (RPM, temperatures, instinctively tapping gauges, etc.). Months later in our journeys, we found that only in running full throttle did we uncover an overheating issue, which Outer Reef diagnosed as being the result of the mixture of two different coolants that coagulated in the heat exchangers, reducing raw water cooling. A thorough cleaning and replacing with new coolant was the fix.

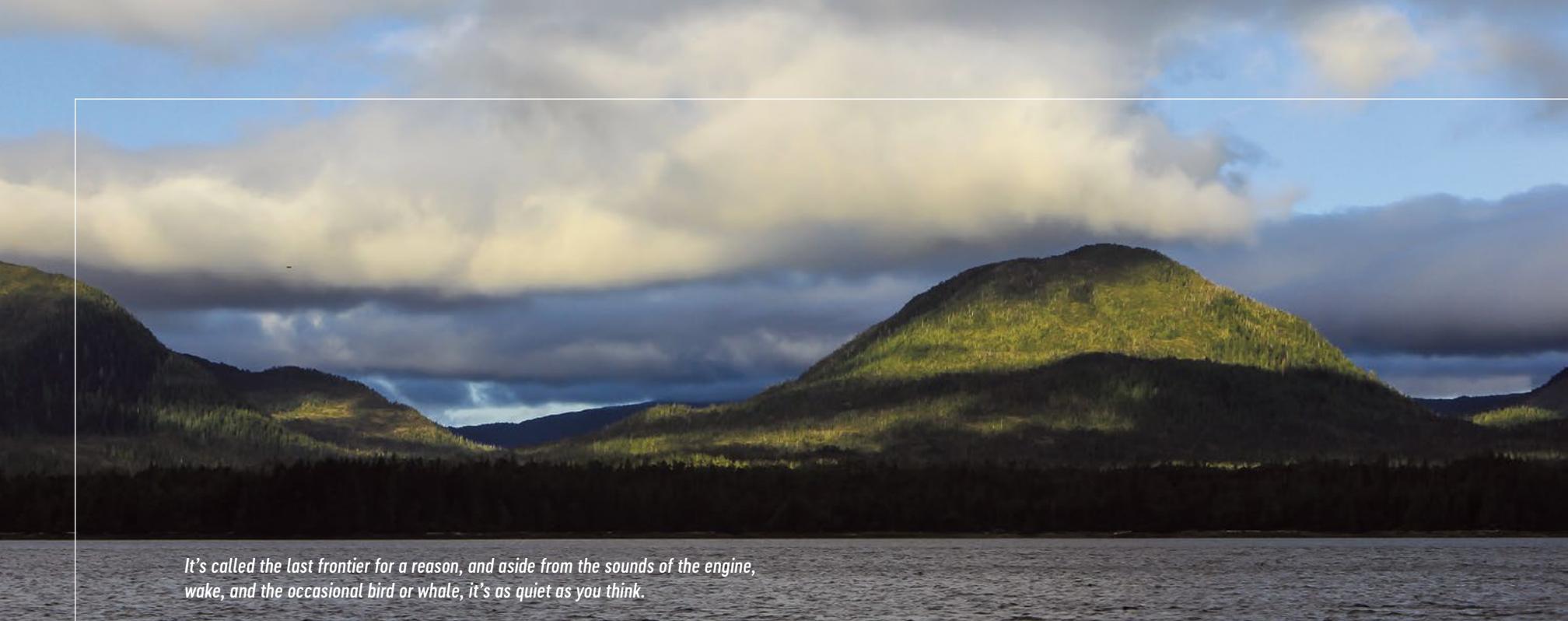
## ANODES

Any seasoned or novice mariner knows that unprotected metal exposed to

Continued on Page 64

*The Argo shakedown cruise wasn't all business. Top photo is an aft facing shot of the deck and various water toys ranging from the dinghy to the kayak. Bottom left is an iceberg, a beautiful reminder to keep somebody on watch at all times, and the crew kicks back on the transom in the bottom right on a sunny day.*





*It's called the last frontier for a reason, and aside from the sounds of the engine, wake, and the occasional bird or whale, it's as quiet as you think.*

**Continued from Page 62**

salt water can be severely damaged by electrolysis if not properly grounded with sacrificial anodes. Electrolysis can occur from stray electrical currents originating from either the vessel or stray currents arising from marina shore power that is improperly grounded. *Argo* has over 15 anodes in the engine room systems alone. During a later routine bottom

we could note the location, number, and date each anode was checked.

Before we could get to the next system check, evening was approaching and we pulled into Campbell River for dinner and sleep. We were really stoked, impressed by *Argo's* abilities and Outer Reef's great build. Paul had indeed spec'd out a fine boat, his fourth build. Having looked at engine and mechanical details during our first day, we simply enjoyed the entire boat and, as the sun set, the wonderful staterooms. We were pretty cocky and more relaxed about our own skills and ready to rest. Our first night was worry-free and restful. *Argo* requires 100 amp service (easily provided by the marina) and is equipped with two Northern Lights generators. Redundancy is everything on a vessel – again using the military expression- “two is one and one is none.”

Early next morning we cast off and were deep in the Inside Passage with Quadra Island to starboard in the Seymour Narrows. An interesting side note, we saw Ripple Rock on our charts which, before it was blasted in 1955 by the Canadian government, had resulted in over 120 vessels damaged or lost plus 114 lives since 1875. The demolition was then the greatest non-nuclear explosion in the world. Seymour Narrows can still be treacherous and mariners familiar with the area focus on the tide tables. On our return trip from Alaska we entered Seymour Narrows with the current running with *Argo*. As we approached the Narrows, we were cruising at approximately 10 knots. However, as we passed the Narrows, our speed increased to over 21 knots as we were pushed by the currents. As Outer Reef said, “It's all in the keel,” and indeed, *Argo* maintained solid steerage. We had a quiet, canyon-like run up to Port Hardy entering Queen Charlotte Strait. Next up, Cape Caution entering Fitz Hugh Sound. Along the coast was a reassuring sounding anchorage called Safety Cove. That served as a reminder to continue checking and understanding other *Argo* systems.

## OIL & FUEL LEVELS, FILTERS

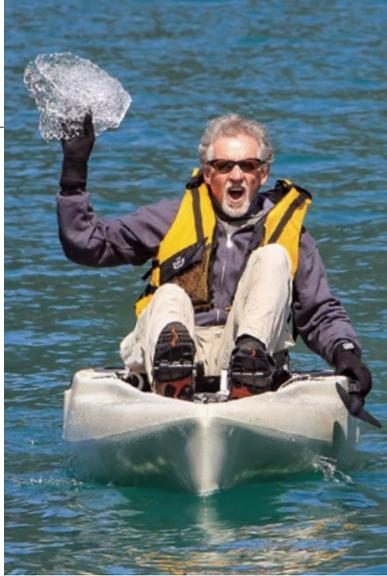
Each morning prior to starting the engines, we checked fluid levels. We only started engines while we were in the engine room to get familiar with the sights and sounds, and we also wanted to check accessibility of various areas in the engine room that might be obstructed by hoses and electrical

**Continued on Page 66**



*Clockwise from top: Large cruise ships are frequent visitors along the way to Ketchikan; Whales too; Looking out at the icy waters of Desolation Sound, which even in summer are filled with chunks of glacier ice.*

cleaning, a diver noticed an unusual discoloration of the starboard propeller. Only later during a haul out did we learn that a grounding brush attached to the starboard shaft was slightly gapped, only noticeable if you were looking for it. This little gap removed the necessary ground to the shaft and propeller, causing the discoloration of the propeller and possible serious damage due to electrolysis. Not relying on memory alone and to make future checks easier, we set up an erasable board where



*Left to Right:  
The author, spending some time off the boat, with genuine Alaskan ice; Close to the shore, Ketchikan's houses rest atop pilings; Buddy greets the Argo crew in Butedale.*

**Continued from Page 64**

conduits. Operating convenience can sometimes be a secondary consideration in building a vessel. No insult intended as there are a lot of hoses which need to be accommodated. However, we needed to get familiar with the engine room and, where necessary, arrange for hoses to be moved later to more accessible areas in the engine room.

**ELECTRICAL CONNECTIONS**

All reputable builders spec to ABYC standards, especially where it comes to electrical and electronic connections. This isn't something you can routinely check everywhere, but awareness of potential problem areas helps. For example, a few weeks into our trip, the electronic connection between the engine and the controls was lost. Obviously, this is a big problem as the failure results in loss of throttle control with the starboard engine. In this case, it was important to know whether you have a backup control, where it's installed, and how to engage it quickly. Don't add user error and a new learning curve to an extreme system error. Test these backup systems and know how to engage them prior to any failure.

**WATER SYSTEMS**

Water makers combined with AC and DC pumps, holding and accumulator tanks, and hot water heaters all provide Murphy a grand opportunity to rear his ugly laws and at the worst

time possible. They are fussy creatures, proper pressure needs to be delivered to both low and high pressure pumps, and the filters have an enormous impact on the level of high pressure needed to convert salt water into fresh. If the fresh water holding tank runs dry (at the fault of the owner/crew), what are the steps to take? First, shut down the water heaters. Without water in the tanks the heating coils can burn out. Second, engage the water maker and ensure proper pressure at the high pressure pump. Third, and here's the good part, find the fresh water pumps and reprime the AC and DC pumps. Recall that operating convenience is a secondary consideration and it's amazing the places builders will locate the fresh water pumps. You will need all the dexterity of Cirque de Soleil gymnastics, like Chris in the photo, to get the system up and running.

Finally, and this is critical, check your coffee maker. Ours gave up the ghost and despite our surgical efforts, we had to admit defeat and make plans for a backup, yes, redundant, coffee maker.

While not a system issue, make sure you've brought along all appropriate navigation charts and plotting tools. Computers, GPS, etc. are all wonderful, but even with backups, electronics can fail, as happened to us years ago in fog approaching Seattle. How often have mariners traveling in a remote area found a failure in the electronics and wanted to smash a computer against the bulkhead?

Having checked and logged systems and headings, we began looking for our second night's harbor. As we entered Fisher Channel, we hung a left into Luma Pass. While tempted by Bella Bella (only limited moorage) and New Bella Bella (a larger native village with a small harbor and some services), we headed instead into Shearwater Marina. Shearwater greets visitors with a large (120-foot by 20-foot) mural portrait of 17 individuals representing Hailtsuk First Nations in cultural regalia, local citizens, and war veterans. The mural was painted on the original Royal Canadian Air Force hangar built during World War II. As you enjoy the history, scope, and detail of the mural, turn around and look at the rusting hulk of a beached boat as an added incentive to keep checking operating systems.

The next day was a keeper, heading north up the narrow channel toward Chatham Sound. We were feeling more relaxed and enjoyed the perfect weather. There were no towns or villages on either side heading into Finlayson Channel nor any as we passed Klemtu to port. Up along the much narrower Tolmie Channel passing the coast of Princess Royal Island, we nearly missed the little bay, again on our port side across from Work Island, marking the only sign of habitation on an otherwise long drive. We had arrived at Butedale, a real trip back in time.

**Continued on Page 68**

*Clockwise from top left: Chris jams himself into a crevice to fix a fresh water pump; exploring Shearwater; the remains of Butedale's logging past; Mooring Argo on Butedale's ancient pilings was a difficult task.*



Continued from Page 66

Our initial impression was that a bomb had scored a direct hit. The caretaker of the former Canadian fishing/logging/mining establishment founded in 1916, Cory and his dog greeted us in the most welcoming way, waving us in.

Maneuverability proved to be a key shakedown issue beyond all the system checks we had performed. Docking a 110-ton boat in a stiff wind blowing with countercurrent into a rickety, water-level bouncing dock missing planks of wood is a good test. *Argo's* maneuverability aided by bow and stern thrusters performed beautifully with Cory's help to tie us down. Cory was all smiles, ruffled, and weather-beaten with a well-worn baseball cap atop his head. His loyal, playful dog, Buddy, seemed especially happy to see us, or maybe just any other humans.

Once secured and looking like confident mariners, Cory escorted us on what he called "the 20-minute official Butedale tour." We cautiously followed him and Buddy on the heaving dock network, avoiding missing boards and jumping gaps between sections of dock. Roller logs littered the area, many of which Cory and Buddy towed in with a small skiff whenever they spotted one loose off shore. To reach land from the dock, since any ramps had long ago fallen into the water, we had to ferry ourselves, two at

a time, across some 20 feet in a very old aluminum boat strewn with sloshing stuff (cans, rags, gasoline, a bail-ing bucket) by pulling on an overhead rope.

Butedale operated as a fish cannery until the 1950s and at its peak employed 400 summer workers. A sizable lake 500 feet above the factory provided power via a small dam. By 1985, the place was done with just a husband/wife caretaker. When they left (screaming, probably) the site sold, was abandoned, and looted over the next two years by squatters who began demolishing the buildings for anything of value. Cory was the sole caretaker and had only been offsite once over two years. He said he was happy with Buddy and the 350 black bears (some of which could in fact be white Ghost or Spirit bears) wandering around. There was actually

a "guest house" Cory had set up in case anyone needed a place to overnight: "Ten dollars a person per night." No ratings yet online.

The next day, *Argo* and our adventure continued north. We were looking forward to glaciers and growlers and anchorages to test out the anchors, capstans, and windlasses. Once anchored, we also wanted to test the davit operation, and we still were waiting for a chance to blow the Kahlenburg triple-trumpet horn. More adventures, and the Horn around South America, await!

*Our thanks to the personnel at Outer Reef who were available to answer and help, and if needed, fly staff to our location to resolve any operating issues. Their commitment to customer service and owner relations are not just words — they live it.*

NWY



Fearless crew Chris Holodny, author Andy Ulitsky, and owner Paul Hawran.



SNUG HARBOR  
RESORT  
San Juan Island

A RESORT FOR ALL SEASONS

- 20 Spacious Cabins • 60+ Slip Marina
- Waterfront Event Room

BOOK YOUR  
CABIN NOW!

WWW.SNUGRESORT.COM  
CALL 1-360-378-4762

# PERFECT LINES

Photo: Andy Ulitsky ♦ Words: Norris Comer

## Alaskan Argonauts

*Argo* is a custom-made Outer Reef motoryacht built to owner Paul Hawran's specs. The vessel, Hawran's fourth build, was commissioned in 2015 in Victoria, B.C. as the 68<sup>th</sup> hull built by Outer Reef Yachts. She is a semi-displacement yacht at 110 tons that lives by the military motto "two is one and one is none," with system redundancy as a core principle. *Argo* completed a successful shake down cruise from Victoria, B.C. to Alaska and now sets her sights on an adventure around Cape Horn and lands beyond. With 3,500-gallon fuel capacity and twin Caterpillar C-18 Acert 1001 bhp engines, she can go the distance: 3,500 miles at her cruising displacement speed of 10 knots. She has her work cut out for her, but *Argo* should be up to the task and whisk her passengers away on adventures of a lifetime.

