

Halibut, anyone, please?

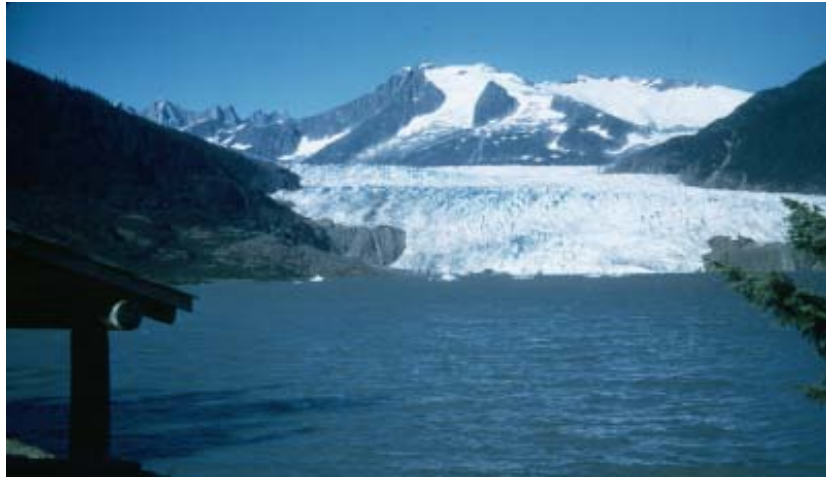
Over the last umpteen years the City of Juneau, Alaska obtained several independent water systems that served various parts of the city. As the city grew so did the water systems until they became so intermingled and overlapping that they became increasingly difficult to operate and to maintain an acceptable level of service to its customers. In 1957 the city engaged CH2M to do an engineering investigation and to make recommendations for improving the complex system.

At that time Partners Holly Cornell and Archie Rice shared responsibility for the firm's municipal water projects. This one was assigned to Archie as Partner in Charge, and as I was not heavily committed right then I was named as the Project Manager.

I'll not forget the first trip Archie and I made to Juneau to negotiate the contract and to develop the plan for doing the work. We stopped in Tacoma enroute to discuss funding of the project with a federal agency located there, then checked into the Winthrop Hotel for the night. The hotel's dining room provided a perfect setting for an equally unforgettable dinner. Thick, red carpeting blended well with the walls of dark wood paneling, and with dimly lit chandeliers overhead the effect was unquestionably old-world European. We both ordered a steak. The continental atmosphere was enhanced when the waiters, two of them, dressed in red and gold tunics, delivered our steaks to the table in large metal platters with flames rising three inches above the meat. The food was as good as the visual effect--a memorable experience for a young, impressionable engineer.

That night was a restless one. I'm sure we were both excited about our upcoming adventure, and were anxious to get started. Eventually, the morning came and we headed for SEA/TAC and Pan Am's ticket counter to check in for the flight North. Pan Am flew their

luxurious "Stratocruiser" on the Juneau run those days, except the downstairs lounge was closed because it was full of baggage. Nevertheless, it was a delightful flight.



Mendenhall Glacier terminating into Mendenhall Lake. The structure on the left is a skaters' shelter for when the lake freezes over.

Juneau's mayor, Molly MacSpadden, a man with a deceiving first name, met the plane and welcomed us to his fair city. The road from the airport into the city proper went close to Mendenhall Glacier, one of the area's main tourist attractions, so Molly stopped to give us a close up view. In town he dropped us off at the Baranof Hotel, Juneau's finest, where for the first time I would be a paying guest.¹

Although I had been in Juneau before, Archie had not and probably visualized it as a frozen, snow-covered, frontier town. When we left Corvallis I noticed that Archie had an unusually large amount of luggage, but I didn't say anything. In the hotel room I found out why Archie had so much baggage; he had packed two pair of long johns, wool shirts and socks, and a thick, heavy topcoat that must have weighed a ton. The next morning he dressed very warmly expecting the worst. That day, Juneau's temperature went up into the 80's experiencing its warmest day of record.

Over the next few days a satisfactory contract was negotiated, and we were given several tours of the water system with explanations of the problems the city was experiencing. With

¹ Sixteen years earlier, between my Junior and Senior years in high school, I went to Alaska to work for the summer. I ran out of money in Juneau, and spent two nights sleeping for free in the lobby of the Baranof. The management must have been very understanding as they didn't say anything.



Archie Rice and Mayor, Molly MacSpadden in front of Mendenhall Glacier.

this bit of exposure and information Archie and I headed home to expand and detail our study approach.

Over the next several months I made several trips to Juneau to examine the system first-hand. Juneau's primary water source was, and is, Gold Creek, a portion of which was diverted into a leaky old pipeline in Last Chance Basin, a couple of hundred feet higher in elevation, and a half-mile or so away from the city. One "sticky" problem to overcome was that at times during the winter the water was colder than freezing but was kept from turning to ice because the water was flowing rapidly in the stream. As soon as the water was introduced into the city piping system, the movement slowed down and the water tended to freeze the pipes solid.

Through a bit of luck, Archie and I developed a concept for replacing the leaky old pipe and at the same time warm the water so it wouldn't freeze when it became still. The concept involved an abandoned gold mining tunnel that ran under the mountain from Last Chance Basin to a point not far from the city's main

reservoir. Conversion of the tunnel into a water conduit would save the city a lot of money by not having to reconstruct the pipeline. And, the heat from the granite walls of the tunnel would act as a heat-exchanger, warming the water to above freezing temperature as it passed through the tunnel. The research and conceptual design required to verify if this was a practicable solution was the most interesting task I had ever undertaken. It proved to be workable, and was eventually built.

In the early fall of 1958, Archie accompanied me on one of my trips to Juneau. We finished our business with the city staff and still had an afternoon and evening with no planned activities. Mayor MacSpadden, knowing of our interest in fishing, suggested we borrow his boat, motor and fishing tackle and try to catch a salmon. His boat was moored at Auke Bay, not far from the city. It was a pretty, sunshiny day, of which there are not many in Juneau, so it didn't take any urging for us to accept the Mayor's invitation.

We trolled back and forth through Auke Bay, and out into Stephens Passage without getting



Last Chance Basin, December, 1957. The city's water intake is beside the Gold Creek sign.

a strike. We were about to quit when all of a sudden my pole bent almost double. I had a fish on! With Archie giving me unnecessary instructions I played the fish for 10 or 15 minutes, enough to feel the muscles in my arms begin to complain. By then I was beginning to doubt that I had a salmon on the other end of the line--the fish was too lethargic. Some more pulling and tussling brought the fish up to where we got a good look. It was a rather large halibut, at least by



Auke Bay from the Glacier Highway. The area we fished was out past the small island and to the right which is Stephens Passage, the main shipping channel.

my standards. We discussed whether to keep the fish or to return it to the briny deep, and as halibut is such a delicacy we chose to save it, not thinking about what to do with it when we got back to land.



Ken with 40 pound halibut he caught in Stephens Passage near Auke Bay. That's Ken in the plaid shirt.

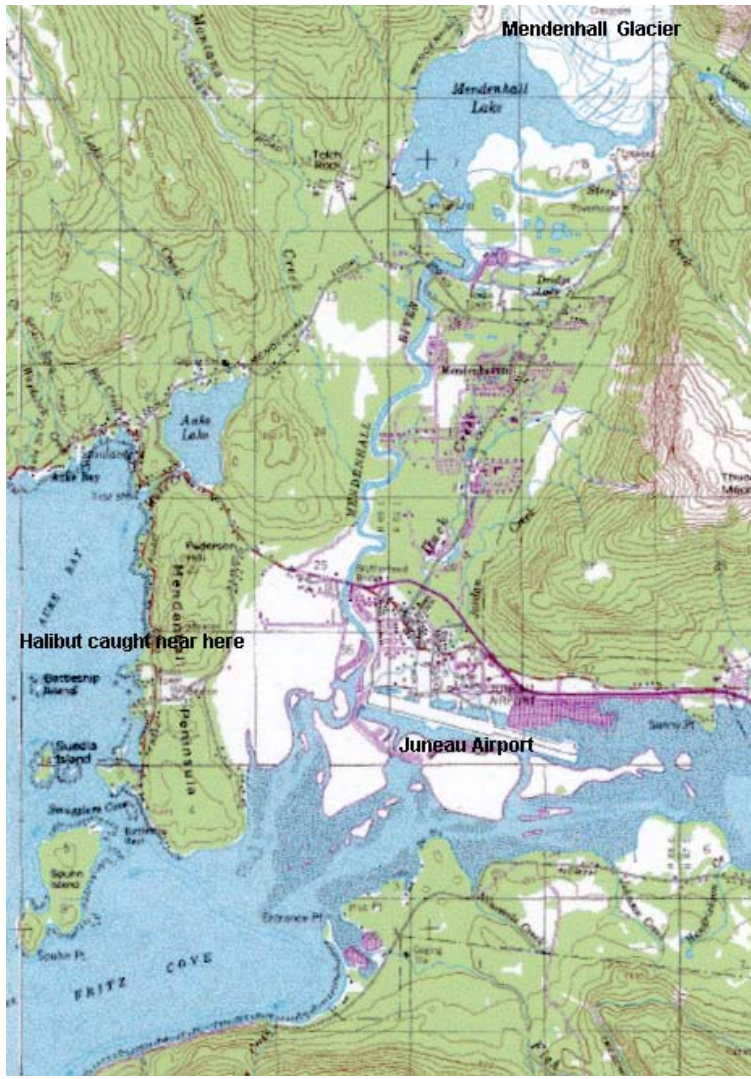
The fish was boated, a picture taken, and we headed for shore. As soon as we got to a phone we called the Mayor, sure that he would be delighted to have the spoils of our venture. He wasn't home. Next we went into town and offered it to some people we recognized---they turned us down because they had too many halibut steaks in their freezers.

Then, one of us had a GREAT idea. Let's trade the halibut for a few drinks, so off we went to our favorite watering hole, the Red Dog Saloon, with me carrying the fish over my shoulder. When we posed our offer to the bartender, he said, "Get out of here!"

Not far from the Saloon was a meat-and-potatoes restaurant that catered to the dock workers. It was run by a Chinaman that could understand English but spoke it very poorly. As he ran a low overhead operation Archie and I figured he would be interested in the fish. When I suggested he take it in exchange for two dinners he exploded with a tirade in Chinese that we could not understand, but his meaning was quite clear.

Our last ditch effort was to go down into the Indian Village. Surely, some of these near poverty level folks would be happy to have a fresh halibut free of charge, we postulated. No takers!

Sadly, we went to the docks and tossed our prize into the sea from which it came. We were sure the crabs would be happy to accept our offering.



Map of the Auke Bay area Northwest of Juneau. Scale is approximately 3/4 inch = 1 mile.



Juneau from the air, December 1957.



Pan Am "Stratocruiser" December. 1957.

Contributed by Ken Bielman, 2009