

# Berners Bay Trip Information



Written and Provided by: Alaska Boat & Kayak Rental Shop

## General

Berners Bay, located within the Tongass National Forest, is located a couple miles north of the Juneau road system. It is framed by the Antler and Gilkey river drainages to the north, Lion's Head Peak to the northwest, Lynn Canal and the Chilkat Mountain Range to the west, and unnamed peaks of the Coast Range to the east. The bay is home to an abundance of marine and land wildlife: humpback whales, orca, harbor seals, porpoises, sea lions, black bears, brown bears, deer, wolves, and even moose. There are numerous primitive camping sites and a U.S. Forest Service cabin at the head of the bay. One of the great things about Berners Bay is the ease of access to true Alaskan wilderness.



## Getting There

Berners Bay is best accessed from Echo Cove at the north end of Glacier Highway, about a 30 mile drive from Auke Bay. Alaska Boat & Kayak has foam blocks/straps available to secure the kayaks to a vehicle for transporting. From Echo Cove you paddle 2 miles northwest into Berners Bay. To the back of the bay is an additional 7 miles to the north.

## Recommended Itinerary

Berners Bay is best experienced as a 2 or 3 day trip. The tidal current in Echo Cove can be strong, as such it is best to paddle into Berners Bay on a ebbing tide and out of Berners on a flooding tide. Depending on your paddling ability and departure time will help you determine where to camp. It is recommended to check out the wild flowers at the back of Berners Bay and the waterfalls at Sawmill Creek and another that is accessed from a trail beginning at the Forest Service cabin.

## Campsites

While paddling in Berners Bay there are several locations to get out of your kayak to camp or stretch your legs. Most people will camp on the eastern shore of Berners Bay and all of the primitive sites listed below are along that shore. There are places to camp on the western shore as well, but they are not as established and typically are more rugged camping. Anytime you are camping on the coast of Southeast Alaska it is important to be aware of the tides, particularly if you decide to pitch a tent on the beach. Many people have woken up in the middle of the night in a waterbed. It is also important to carry all gear (including kayaks) well above the high tide line.

### Camp 1 – Sawmill Cove

This site is well established, located on a salmon stream, and has a short trail to a big waterfall. The cove has a large tide flat and at low tides it can be a long carry to get from the water to the campsite.

This campsite is frequently used by people and when the salmon are running, bears. It faces the Chilkat Mountains and has water available.

#### Camp 2 and 3 – “Slide Path” Cove

These campsites are both in the same cove. They have nice beaches with small rocks and minimal sea weed, barnacles and mussels. Camp 2 faces Lions Head has two small streams in the area and is somewhat hidden (walk up into the woods to find it). Camp 3 faces the Chilkats, has a larger stream and is obvious to spot as it is used more frequently by campers.

#### Camp 4

This site faces the back of Berners Bay and Lions Head Peak, it has a nice beach with a stream, and is less visible. To access the best camping site find the small social trail through the beach grass leading into the forest.

#### Camp 5 – Back of Berners Bay

The back (or head) of Berners Bay is a large mudflat/delta formed by the Lace, Gilkey and Antler rivers. Brown bears frequent the area on land and harbor seals play in the water. Due to the large tideflat it is crucial to be aware of the tides and camp well above the high tide line. The best place for access is on the eastern side where a small river flows out. Even when the tide is low it is possible to paddle up this river to reduce the length you will need to carry your gear.

### Cabins

There is one cabin located at the back of Berners Bay. This cabin is rented out by the USFS and sleeps 5 people. At the mouth of Berners Bay, two miles west of Echo Cove are two State owned public use cabins, Cowee Meadows Cabin and Blue Mussel Cabin. Both cabins sleep 8 people. Check online for availability and to make a reservation for any of these three cabins.



### Leave No Trace

Berners Bay is a wild area that receives minimal impact from humans, particularly anywhere on the land. One of the great things about the area is that it looks the same as it did hundreds of years ago. In order to preserve this wilderness character for future travelers it is important that you follow the seven Leave No Trace principles. Below are the seven principles as well as some additional guidelines.

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare: make sure that you have all of the appropriate route knowledge, clothing, gear, safety equipment and food so that you do not have to disturb the natural environment (i.e. cut pieces of trees to make a shelter because you forgot a tent)
2. Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces: choose tent sites that will not destroy fragile plant life, avoid using the same footpaths to prevent social trails from forming

3. **Dispose of Waste Properly:** Pack out all trash – this includes biodegradable things such as apple cores or orange peels, human waste should be dealt with in the intertidal zone in areas where the current will flush the waste out to sea, if you choose to use toilet paper then pack it out!
4. **Leave What You Find:** Unless it is trash left by previous travelers
5. **Minimize Campfire Impacts:** Use a stove to cook on, if possible avoid making fires altogether, if you choose to make a fire then build a small fire in the intertidal zone, only burn wood up to the diameter of your wrist and make sure that everything is burnt completely, no one wants to see large charred pieces of wood floating around or on the beach where they camp
6. **Respect Wildlife:** Follow the Alaska National Marine Fisheries Service wildlife viewing guidelines and regulations by not approaching marine mammals closer than 100 yards and limiting time to observing one individual to 30 minutes. Keep your food in bear resistant containers to prevent the bears from getting into your food and becoming habituated to people. Keep a clean kitchen free of micro food trash, we DON'T want to feed ANY wildlife...even squirrels, birds, voles, and mice.
7. **Be Considerate of Others:** If there are other travelers in the Arm, keep your visual and auditory impact to a minimum. Follow the other LNT principles so that future travelers can appreciate the Wilderness to the fullest extent.

## Marine Wildlife

Seals, porpoises, orcas, humpback whales, river otters, and sea lions can all be spotted in Berners Bay. Seals are typically found near the river deltas and are more wary of kayaks than motorized boats, so please try to stay more than 100 yards away from the seals hauled out on shore if at all possible. Sea lions and humpback whales are more common and space should be given when encountering these marine mammals.

## Bears

Berners Bay is home to both Brown Bears and Black Bears. It is important to follow bear camping guidelines. Food must be stored in bear resistant containers or properly hung from a sturdy branch at least 12' off the ground and 8' from the nearest tree trunk. Food and other "smellables," such as toothpaste and deodorant, should be kept away from the tents. Cooking should be done away from camp in the intertidal zone so that all the associated smells will be washed away by the ocean. It is recommended that you bring along bear spray and noise makers, such as whistles and signal horns, particularly if you are camping along the river delta at the back of the bay.