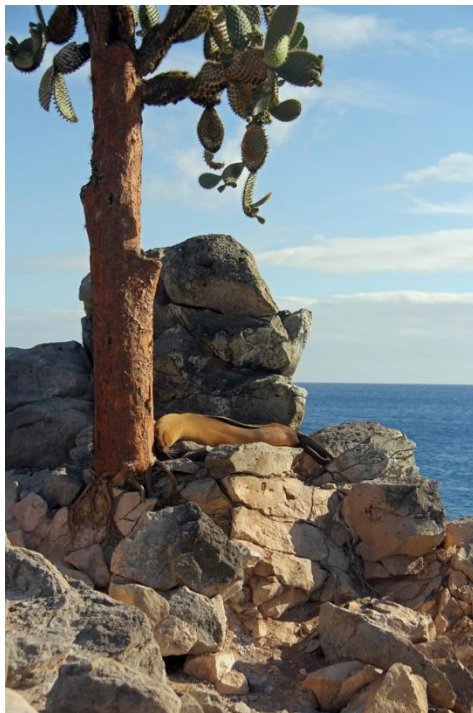


**Tuesday, June 24, 2014**

We awoke to the rattle of anchor chain dropping into its housing somewhere near the end of our berth. Earlier in the morning the engine start up had briefly awakened us, but the rocking of the boat lulled us back to sleep. We were up before the 6AM wakeup call and prepared for a hiking tour of Fondadero Bay followed by snorkeling in the same bay. When I went topside, we were abeam of the bay where dark blue water yielded to turquoise in the shallow bay. A lineament of rocks separated us from the bay save for a few gaps. The rocks plunged downward into the sea to the east, but rose as a ridge above a flat valley to the west.



After breakfast we loaded into



the pangas and cruised through a gap in the rocks guarding the north margin of the protected bay. Sea lions lay on the beach in scattered groups or alone and wandered about as their whims led, sometimes barking or making their strange noises while other seals swam in the shallows near the shore. Occasionally a sea lion gallop-waddled from the brush at the head of the beach to check things out. The shore angled upwards, bordered by higher ridges on either side in a graben-like appearance. In the opposite direction, it was easy to follow the geological structure as it descended from the higher lands into the bay leaving only the higher ridges exposed for a short distance above the water before they also plunged below the surface.

We walked carefully to avoid sea lion scat scattered about, then ascended a ridge overlooking the ocean past other sea lions, iguanas and lizards basking in the sun or hiding in the brush. The irony of a sea lion sleeping under tall prickly pear cacti captured out attention, while the Majestic gently rocked in the azure sea in the background. Around a bend in the trail, a land iguana became enamored with our guide, Cesi, and made flirtatious advances. I couldn't help noting that our charming guide had even given a cold-blooded reptile a warm heart.



After the hike, we went back to the boat for a time, then donned our snorkel gear and were taken back to the azure bay. After preliminary instructions, we entered the waters, cool and clear, to see multicolored fish, some floating about individually, and others in great schools, including schools of Galapagos mullet and of anchovies. Suddenly we heard screams of delight as sea lions joined our group, circling about, over, under, around, and through the snorkeling group. Sometimes they playfully bumped a snorkeler, and one grabbed a fin momentarily, teasing, playing and generally having a ball.



After the snorkeling, we motored on to South Plaza Island just north of Santa Cruz. North and South Plaza Islands rise as parallel ridges on the northeast end of Santa Cruz and are covered with cacti, low reddish colored plants, rocks and crabs along the shoreline. Tropicbirds soared by making strange calls to our delight. Other birds soared, dived about and kept us entertained.

Ashore on South Plaza Island, the rocks were polished into marbled appearance by excrement from the sea lions and birds and had the potential to be slippery. Various birds including cactus finches, swallow-tailed gulls, and tropic birds

grabbed our attention, while iguanas seemed as numerous as rocks. Atop the crest of the island brisk winds carried birds that soared almost effortlessly in the updrafts. Some dropped down here and there to their precarious-appearing roosts on the cliffs below.

The group was briefly sidetracked by amorous gulls; ah, it's the birds, now for the bees... We wandered farther along the ridge before descending back towards the water. The cries of the tropicbirds followed us all back to the boat and to our dreams of this marvelous place. After dinner, we went to the top deck to view the bright southern stars. The Southern Cross with alpha and beta Centauri alongside drew first attention, but then as eyes adapted to the dark, the Milky Way appeared nearly paralleling the horizon, arising in the area of Carina and rising slowly through the cross to the scorpion, to Sagittarius and on along the horizon. We marveled for a while under the bright starry skies, and then retired below. I played ukulele for a time, received a few compliments, to my surprise no boos, then retired with Fairy for the evening.