

**Wednesday June 25, 2014**

We awoke around 6 AM before the wakeup call, and I went topside to look at the surrounds. Overcast muted the sky and sunrise. To the left the steep slopes of Rabida Island appeared to port and the volcanic landscape of Santiago to starboard. Cinder cones marked the slopes of Santiago and some obviously new lava flows appeared barren, stark, and dark compared to the adjacent vegetated land they had overrun.



After another lovely breakfast we loaded into the pangas and motored to a rocky red beach between a rise and a red tuff cliff that appeared very unstable. Along the way we passed green turtles that rose here and there to breathe and to gawk about. Just beyond the beach, a brackish lake held potential for flamingo sightings, but alas none were there. A starving sea lion pup on the beach languished to our sympathy, a victim of some cruel circumstance of nature.

We headed up the rocky trail between cacti and brush with Galapagos doves and finches darting about. Boobies plunged into the rippled ocean, and frigate birds soared overhead. A few lizards appeared, but we did not see any land iguanas. We did see many sea iguanas, however, in precarious perches in the rocks overlooking the ocean. Red rocks contrasted with the blue waters while gray skies loomed overhead, with scattered breaches hinting of blue skies to come.

After the walk over the ridge and around and back again, we climbed into our snorkeling gear and eased into the water at the red, gravelly beach. Waves of red silt and sand beneath the water appeared barren at first, but shortly sea stars and then fish appeared. We followed a rocky ridge



where various brightly colored fish drifted by, sometimes in large schools. One group of surgeon fish appeared to have over 100 individuals, all over 2 feet long. Anemones also covered some of the rocks, and a sea lion swam by without regard to the snorkelers in its waters. I took many photos, not knowing how they would turn out since it was my first time using this camera. Later I discovered some real treasures in the group of photos, including a close pass by the sea lion.

All too soon we were loaded onto the pangas and taken back to the boat. Dinner was excellent again with delightful, fresh food wonderfully prepared. We had over 3 hours to wait until our next land and sea adventure at Egas Point on western Santiago Island. Some rested or napped, but most of us savored our surroundings as the Majestic rocked and rumbled towards our next destination.



Tuff, ash, and lava flows intermingled around the shore and low cliffs, while ruins of an old house overlooked the bay forlornly above a small eroding bluff. The beach consisted of soft black sand that was comfortable to the feet unlike the prior beach that day. We followed Cesibel up a short incline and stairs and along the flat flanks of the island for a time. Then we reached basaltic flows that fingered into the sea with channels of



collapsed lava tubes surging with water and life. Crabs and sea lions covered spaces in the areas in and around the gaping rocks. We scrambled about on the dark, rough rocks, then passed over a stony bridge as blue clear water ebbed and flowed below.

The hike continued along the rocks past birds, beasts, and tide pools and then back to the beach where we entered the water among jutting rocks. We snorkeled around rocks awash with the light surf. Fish swam about in every direction flashing contrasting colors and a striped eel stretched warily from a deep crack in the rocks. Playful seals darted about in the waters as well, coming up to our faces at times and then swirling away.

That evening the crew had decorated the salon area for the birthdays and provided balloons, songs, cake, and good humor. Later we went out to marvel once more at the bright, sparkling southern stars and constellations.



Eel watching from its lair.



Sealion playing with snorkelers.