



Thursday June 26, 2014

The boat motored through the night on the long cruise from Santiago Island to Isabela Island (yes, it is spelled with only one “l”). During the night we rounded the north end of the island and crossed the equator twice. We arrived in Tagus Cove on western Isabela Island in the early morning. A low ridge at the head of the bay marked the southern margin of a cinder cone that held brackish Lake Darwin on its interior. Dark basaltic cliffs on the right and gray tuff cliffs on the left bore the painted or incised names of the vessels of prior visitors. Birds, marine iguanas, and crabs covered the rocks along the shore, and penguins bobbed about in the water. We had a dry landing at the edge of a black basalt cliff and followed a narrow trail with guardrails sometimes present, and turned up a gulch where more names of boats appeared. The earliest visible inscription was from 1836, a year after Darwin had visited these islands.

Stairs appeared a short way up the gulch and we followed the stairway to the east ridge of the cinder cone containing Lake Darwin. We gazed at the dead lake below, four times as salty as seawater and looked for ducks or flamingos along the shore, but again none appeared. Later we made our way back down the rickety stairs to the gulch and then carefully stepped along the narrow pathway along the base of the cliff to the boat. All arrived unscathed, some quite thankful to not have fallen to their fate in the food chain.





The pangas took us along the western shore of the bay. A penguin waddled and hopped along the base of a steep lava cliff by the shore near a pelican that gazed at us warily. Marine lizards appeared here and there as well. Sally Lightfoot crabs scampered about. Flightless cormorants spread their raggedy, stubby wings while standing on the rocks, and others swam or dived under the water. All too soon the pangas turned around and returned us to our boat.

Most of us then donned our wetsuits and loaded back into the pangas for snorkeling

along the east side of the bay. We were dropped into the water perhaps a quarter of a mile from the Majestic along a steep rock wall. Clear azure waters along the sharply dropping wall revealed more color than we had seen at prior snorkeling sites. Hordes of fish swam in schools while others clung



to rocks or went singularly on their way. Sea stars and urchins, some with long needle-like spines, stalked along the rock wall. The underwater camera had quite a workout in this glorious setting, but sadly, I missed the swim-by of a penguin. Another of our group caught it on her Go-Pro camera and it appeared as if flying through the aquatic environment.

After another delicious lunch, the Majestic motored to Mangle Point on southeastern Fernandina Island. The Majestic stopped out far from the dark rocks, reefs and

breakers that foamed hundreds of yards from shore. Bright green foliage of mangroves marked our cruising goal and contrasted with the stark, dark volcanic background. We loaded into the pangas in a surging sea, carefully assisted by our crew, and then motored to the rocks guarding the entrance of a shallow, protected area within the mangroves. They had to maneuver very carefully through the rocky entrance into the shallow cove.

Sea lions and green turtles swam about the coves as



hordes of hideous-appearing black marine lizards lay strewn across black basaltic rocks and across each other. They snorted salty snot-like blows from glands near their nose that removed excess salt from their bodies. All colors of crabs scampered hither and thither across the rough rocks. Curious sea lions gazed about with heads well above the water, later teasing about with each other.



In another arm of the cove, dozens of turtles lounged or swam about. Occasionally one swam at high speed under the water, leaving a wake, though none of its shell was above the surface. The tide had gone out during our stay as our pangas threaded their narrow way through the ever- increasing rock heads peering from the sea. Waves splashed into foam on either side of the entrance, and we carefully made our way through the swells to the open sea. But the Majestic was nowhere in sight! We made some nervous jokes about

being marooned, but before long, our cruise boat appeared on the other side of the mangrove cove. Even the pangas gave wide birth to the treacherous waters seaward of the mangroves, and breaking waves far from land betrayed the reason: shoals abounded there. Once safe on board, we again had a lovely dinner with some socializing and music. Few stars were visible on deck, but the Southern Cross obligingly appeared between clouds. Below in the water some splashing fish that stirred up a swirling, star-like bioluminescence much to our delight. Afterward we rocked softly into a quiet sleep, no anchors or motors to wake us as we remained in our quiet anchorage for the night.