

## 1997 EXPEDITION GALAPAGOS

June 24, 1997. I am on this trip with son Evans, his wife, Charity and grandchildren Peter and Connie. We are traveling under the auspices of Stanford University's Alumni Association. Because I am a dedicated Delta Medallion flyer and like all the perks I get for logging 25000 miles a year, I decided we would use Delta as much as possible, flying to Miami, and connecting with Saeta Airlines into Quito. This turned out to be the wrong decision and things started to go wrong when we left Atlanta almost an hour late! By the time we got to Miami we had only a half hour to get to Saeta, which was at the other end of the airport, and we sprinted over there as fast as we could only to be told that the flight had closed and left and that we should have been there 2 hours ahead of time! Since we had talked with Saeta that very morning and reconfirmed and they knew our itinerary this last comment seemed unfair. So we sprinted back across the airport to Delta and after Delta pounded on the computer, they finally came up with an alternate flight to Quito on American the next night. They also provided us rooms in the airport hotel, and so here we are, with a whole day ahead of us in Miami instead of Quito! Not what we had planned. Another bad part was that Saeta had now closed their counter and would not open it until noon tomorrow so we have no luggage except what is in our hand luggage.

We also have to get Saeta to endorse the tickets over to American. We finally have a late dinner at the Top of the Port restaurant. Charity borrows my bathing suit for a swim in the hotel pool and finally we got to bed about 10:00.

Wednesday, June 25. After much discussion, Evans and Charity decide to stay at the airport to cope with tickets, baggage and so forth (it took them two hours) and I call Don Wright, John's brother-in-law, who lives in Perrine, and he came in and took me and Peter and Connie to South Beach of Miami Beach. The area is known for it's restored art deco buildings. We have sandwiches at a sidewalk cafe and the kids walk on the beach, which is known for the people as much as the ocean. Peter reports that the sights included two Moslem ladies, clad from head-to-toe, next to a topless sunbather. It was better than sitting around the airport all day. Finally at 5:00 American takes off for the 3 1/2 hour flight to Quito and we are met by Metropolitan Tours who are handling Stanford's arrangements. They take us to the Hotel Hilton Colon and check us in. We leave early in the morning for the Galapagos.

June 26, 1997. Bags out 6:15. We took the bus to the airport for flight on Tame Airlines to Quayaquil, connecting to Baltra in the Galapagos. The only problem was they insisted on taking away my hand luggage and checking it, and I fretted all the way to Quayaquil when I finally raised cain and told them I might die without my medicine and they grudgingly returned it to me for the hour and half flight to Baltra, arriving about 11:15. After a long stand in line in the sun, we finally clear Galapagos customs and are bused to the M/N Santa Cruz. John and I were on this ship about ten years ago. She seems due for fresh paint but other than that all is fine. We have a so-so buffet lunch, an orientation lecture, get unpacked and have lifeboat drill while we travel the 15 miles to Santa Cruz Island and Dragon Hill. There are ninety-five of us on the boat including the staff which means the ship is operating at capacity. One third of us are juveniles, ranging in age from 7 to 17! There is a preponderance of little kids 10 or so years old, but there are also a few grandparents as well. Everyone seems very pleasant.

I had never been to Dragon hill in my three previous visits, as it has only been opened as a destination in the past two years. Only the smaller boats are now allowed to go to Plazas Island, where the large land iguana flock lives. Here at Dragon Hill the land iguanas are being reintroduced since they now have the wild dog population under control. However it was disappointing to only see one (perhaps the groups ahead of us had scared them off). But our walk was interesting through dense vegetation and we saw a lot of small birds, yellow warblers, finches, and many mocking birds, some of which were building nests. Also we saw one flamingo, one night heron and a number of pelicans.

The ship is divided into five groups. We are in the frigate group and to my relief it is all mature people, not the ten and eleven year old set. A couple of us are ardent bird watchers so we move slowly and really get to enjoy everything. Our naturalist guide is Juan Carlos. Back on board about 6 PM, we had a much needed and wonderful shower and then moved to the lounge for

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review, tomorrow's orientation and a welcome cocktail party with the ship's crew (all in white) being introduced. I was so tired during dinner I could hardly keep my eyes open and retired early.

June 28. We awake in Tagus Cove on Isabella Island, where high on the cliffs are all manner of graffiti, left by mariners of old (and some not so old). We are taken by panga (small boats) along the shore and roosting on the steep sides of the bay are blue-footed boobies, noddy terns and pelicans. We also found a large flock of Galapagos penguins that dove all around the boat. High above us was a Galapagos hawk. It was all most interesting and fun.

The second activity for the morning was a climb up the cliff to a small volcanic crater containing Darwin Lake. I have made this climb 3 times before and see no point doing it again, but the rest of the family makes the trek.

During lunch the ship moves across the sound to anchor near Point Espinosa on Fernandina Island. This is a highlight of any Galapagos trip. We came ashore to a sea lion family in the cove and a bull sea lion snorting and calling to his herd. Nearby were masses of marine iguanas. Our walk along the shore discovered many other interesting sights ... lava lizards, Sally Lightfoot crabs in their bright red shells, lava terns, more sea lions, a great blue heron and so forth. Finally we went out to the end of the point (or almost the end, they won't let you go all the way anymore), where another mass of marine iguanas baked in the sun and some flightless cormorants were nearby. Connie spent her time making friends with all the sea lions and would even lie on the sand near them and talk sea lion language with them. The last time I saw this heavenly spot (ten years ago), crashing surf made the point even more dramatic! One interesting change was that we used to land at a small dock, but now the dock can only be used at high tide since the land has uplifted about 5 feet. An active volcano dominates Fernandina Island.

On the way back to the ship we detoured to see some more Galapagos penguins. Bill Durham, a Stanford professor lectured us that evening on the selection of the different animals in the islands, but I was too sleepy to absorb it! The group is interesting. Most everyone has everyone has some tie-in to Stanford, although that is not a criteria for coming. Our tie-in is that Evans and Charity met at Stanford.

Stanford has a number of "family adventures" each summer and many have been on multiple ones. They do a nice job of having a separate program for the "young explorers".

Saturday, June 29, 1997. We are at Santa Cruz Island where a small settlement called Porto Aroyo, houses the Darwin Research Station. Here they incubate and hatch the tortoise eggs, raise them to the age of five years and then re-release them on their native island. To do so earlier would cause them to be killed by the introduced rat and goat population, which has almost caused these giant tortoises to go extinct. There used to be many more varieties of tortoises from the different islands and "Lonesome George" an 100 year-old tortoise is the last remnant of his species. A search of zoos around the world has failed to find him a mate, so included in his pen are two similar lady tortoises hopefully to preserve at least half the species, but so far, Lonesome George, has not become a father! Nearby is another pen of 85-100 year old male tortoises, which used to be people's pets. You can enter the cage and get quite close to these giant beasts.

After the research station we were free to walk back into town and shop the many small tourist shops along the way. Most of it was T-shirts, but I was also pleased to find Connie a large wooden carving of a sea lion. Then we went by panga across the harbor to the Delfin Hotel where we had a barbecue lunch and swim in their pool. The water was cool and nice but the two hours in the hot sun only protected by beach umbrellas was too long and I am afraid Charity is getting sun poisoning which she is prone to do. Connie vomited up her lunch. We later conclude it may have due to the mayonnaise.

After lunch they loaded us into buses and we went up to the highlands in the center of the island. Driving through rural scenery, we climbed to 2500 feet and discovered two huge sinkholes in a scalesia forest. The umbrella like trees reminded us of broccoli and they are members of the daisy family. We took a bird hike through the forest and were lucky enough to see the famed vermilion flycatcher on two occasions. Many in the frigate group are avid birders and kept spotting various finches and so forth. The walk in the woods was cool and thankfully not too

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muddy, as we had been warned. Connie was still sick in her stomach and spent the time on the bus, but we walked around the crater edge seeing a Galapagos dove.

One thing so different about this trip is that I have never been here at the end of the rainy season. And because of it and the El Nino, the foliage is so lush! In January and February (my previous trips) everything is arid and brown. In those months you see nesting sea birds and their chicks. At this time of the year the emphasis is on the smaller birds that are attracted by the insects in the lush growth.

We ended the excursion at a mile long lava tube, which was interesting to walk through although some of the crude ladders we had to climb or descend were treacherous with their slimy handrails. Water dripped on the electric lighting and us from above was dim but fortunately our leader, Juan Carlos, had a flashlight.

I must mention the El Nino, which is a warming of the water that causes havoc in the bird and animal population. This year is an El Nino year and many birds will have an unsuccessful mating season since their food source is so scarce. For instance, many of the marine iguanas will die since the seaweed they live on does not grow in the warmer water.

Back on the ship, the ship doctor gave Connie a shot to stop her vomiting. Showers felt so good. After dinner some local musicians and dancers entertain us. I did not stay up for the lecture!

Sunday, June 29. One of the differences between this and other trips has been how very "Ecuadorian" everything is. All of the staff is from Ecuador, with the exception of Gregory, the German cruise director, who is married to Marielle, the Ecuadorian who runs the ship store. In the past some of the naturalists have been from other countries such as the United States. The hardest part for me is the constant referring of the islands by their Spanish names. Today we visited one of my most favorite islands, Hood, but now it is called Espanola.

We went ashore at Gardner Bay where a sea lion colony littered the beach with nursing mamas and young who would swim with the tourists! I snorkeled along the rock coast for awhile and saw many schools of fish, but the undertow was difficult to manage and I was tired from the sun so I retreated to the ship early and rested until the rest of the family came back on board.

Lunch was a typical Ecuadorian meal and had some delicious potato and cheese pancakes and a suckling pig among other delicacies.

After lunch we had a slide lecture by Bill Durham on Darwin theory, and it was hard to stay awake. Meanwhile the ship moved to Punta Suartez, one of the highlights of any cruise. The last time I was here (in February ten years ago), it was alive with nesting sea birds and their adorable chicks. Today we saw no chicks but we did see the mating behavior of the blue-footed boobys and albatrosses. The boobies display their big blue feet in a sort of dance and the male bird ceremoniously presents his lady love small sticks for nesting material. Since the boobies do not build a nest preferring to lay their eggs directly on the ground, this is somewhat redundant. The albatrosses employ a sort of fencing duel with their beaks as part of their ritual. We also saw a nesting Galapagos hawk and swallow tail gulls and the hooked nose Hood mockingbird. Then there were the masked boobies and Galapagos doves. We had a wonderful walk across the island to see the blowhole on the windward side. The walk was difficult since the island is very rocky and at one point I fell trying to keep up with Juan Carlos. Scraped myself up badly enough to have to visit the ship doctor when I came back aboard but no real harm done. As usual, fell into bed exhausted after dinner.

Monday, June 30. Rabida Island, with its red sand beach and a nearby lagoon with 3 pairs of flamingos. The flamingo is the only animal whose upper jaw moves and this is so he can put his head under water and scoop up the shrimp that give him his unique pink color. The flamingo population has decreased in recent years since some sea lions took over the lagoon and prey on the young. Now that the El Nino is warming the water in the sea, the sea lions are giving up the lagoon and hopefully the flamingo population may increase.

We snorkeled off the beach along the rock shore and saw fish and sea urchins. The fun part was that the baby sea lions swam with us. On the way back to the ship I saw a sea turtle swimming nearby. After lunch I napped while the lecture was going on and was all ready for North Seymour Island. Here we encounter the giant frigates for the first time. The frigates like to nest among the

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blue-footed boobys for they are poor fishermen and they like to steal their food from the boobys. Perhaps booby is a good name for a bird so dumb that he nests with his enemy! We found some frigate chicks in nests, the first chicks we have seen in contrast to my earlier visits when there were chicks everywhere! Some marine iguanas had climbed up on the island and were eating one of the land plants. These iguanas were thin because the El Nino has destroyed their natural seaweed food and they are trying to find a substitute. The frigate birds were mating. The male frigate has a big red pouch under his neck that he blows up to attract the females, who fly overhead. But the lady frigates are picky and will often fly down to inspect the ardent males and then pass them by.

Tuesday, July 1, 1997. We wake off Bartolome Island, a most scenic and volcanic island. When I climbed to the peak on a previous trip, it was a real scramble up the volcanic sand. Now the park service has built wooden stairs, which helps us reach the summit and the gorgeous view. After the view we went to the beach near Pinnacle Rock, which is almost always pictured when an article appears on the Galapagos. Here we had the best snorkeling so far...many kinds of fish and interesting lava formations on the floor of the sea. As I approached the shore I found myself swimming with the Galapagos penguins that are so very fast in the water. During lunch the ship moved to nearby Santiago Island (also known as James). We went ashore to the black lava sand beach. This island was once the home of a salt mine and traces of buildings and so forth remain. There are also many introduced varieties of plant and animal life. We had a wonderful hike along the shore over the smooth lava rocks, with tidal pools. On the far side of the point we finally came to the grotto where I remember swimming with the fur seals on one of my first trips to the islands. Just as the sea lions came on the current from California, the fur sea lions and penguins came on the Japanese current from Chile. The fur seal (or sea lion) looks like the other sea lions except he has a thick fur coat and a stubbier nose. He is a nocturnal fisherman and at this time of the day most of them were lying around their grotto sleeping, a big bull, and a number of smaller animals. One lay on his back in the water, flippers neatly folded, snoring away. They used to be endangered when they were hunted for their thick pelts, but now they have recovered much of their population and are protected. We came back to the beach for snorkeling but I had had enough for one day and caught the first panga back to the ship. People reported the snorkeling wasn't that great since the black sand made it hard to see anything.

Wednesday, July 2, 1997. Genovesa or Tower Island. It is one of my most favorite islands because of all the wonderful birds that live there. This is the home of the red-footed boobies who live with the great frigates who rob them of food every chance they can get. There are also a number of swallowtail gulls, which were nesting at this time. We saw several chicks and two adults that fought over a succulent squid. We also found a tropicbird and her young. These birds are very beautiful with white feathers and a long trailing plume of a tail. Numbers of them flew overhead but it was a treat to see them up close in the nest. We walked along the sand for a while, then forded a tidal pool and climbed up to near where the directional signals for the island are located. Here we had a great view across Darwin Bay, which is the harbor for the island. We saw masked boobies and Galapagos doves. Back on the beach the pangas picked us up and took us to the other side of the bay where we had a chance to snorkel near the steep shore. After lunch there was another lecture from Bill Durham on socio biology, and whether humans evolve the way animals and birds do. Then at three we went back in the pangas for a ride along the cliffs, where the swallowtail gull, tropicbird and masked boobies nest, to a place where we could make a steep and somewhat slippery climb up to the top of the cliff. Here it looked as if nature had landscaped a garden of tropical plants and we crossed this area to the ocean side of the island where above lava flow hundreds of birds circled overhead ... frigates, boobies and storm petrels. We spotted two of the Galapagos short-eared owls waiting for a petrel to come their way. Although these birds are nocturnal they sit out in the sun during the day. A good buffet dinner and then we packed in order to get off the ship tomorrow. It has been a really nice cruise and Stanford has done a very good job keeping us all happy.

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Thursday, July 3, 1997. So we returned to Baltra and flew back to Quito and checked back into the Hilton Colon about 3:30. Went with Charity to shop for souvenirs but didn't find anything I wanted. We were taken to the restaurant La FONZA that night for a festive farewell dinner complete with music and speeches.

Friday, July 4. We had an interesting experience at the Quito airport. They lined us all up on the tarmac and told us to put our bags down in front of us. Then they turned loose a dog to sniff everything. The only thing that didn't pass was Connie's wooden sea lion, which had to be examined very carefully to be sure it was not a container for drugs!

Flew Saeta back to Miami and found it a very nice airline with lots of legroom and first class meals and service. Caught an early plane home to Atlanta and was home about 5PM.