

2006 COOK ISLANDS

Monday, July 24, 2006. The National Geographic and Emory University teamed up to offer this trip. The theme of the expedition was the Genographic Project directed by Spencer Wells. The Genographic Project, through the use of DNA, explores the ancient migrations of Homo sapiens out of Africa 20,000 or more years ago.

The limousine people felt I should leave early because of commuting hour, As a result I was at the gate for the Los Angeles flight by 8:30 AM. My plane doesn't leave until 10:20 AM!

My cell phone rang. It was Evans. They don't believe he is on an e-ticket. Or else they think I have a boarding pass with his name on it. I don't. Somehow Evans was in Delta's computer as holding a paper ticket. It took him an hour to straighten it out. Evans and Charity didn't get to the gate until we were boarding.

When I presented my boarding pass they were surprised there was no paper ticket attached to it. We then found we were seated three abreast, which had not been the plan. We never did figure out how the mix-up occurred. Evans elected for the middle seat. It was a long flight.

I had a wheelchair at LAX, but it only took me to a handicap bus stop. We waited in the hot sun. It took 3 cell phone calls before the handicap bus arrived.

The check-in with Air Tahiti Nui was smooth and we were given invitations to Qantas business class lounge. This was the other side of the security barrier. There was no line and soon we were ensconced in the lounge. Evans and Charity went off in search of some food, but I found a very nice sandwich and some fruit, which more than satisfied me. I also found that for \$7.95 I could log onto Neptune, the LAX Internet service. Thus the rather long stopover passed pleasantly.

Air Tahiti Nui left a good hour late and we all agreed business class was a great improvement over coach!

It is an 8-hour flight to Pipette, the capitol of French Polynesia. We had a lovely dinner and I soon put on my mask and tried to sleep, with limited success.

It was after 9 PM when we finally touched down. We were met and taken directly to the National Geographic Endeavor. I have a pleasant single room complete with Internet service. Charity and Evans are right next-door.

We had a buffet supper before turning in.

<https://www3.nationalgeographic.com/genographic/>

<http://www.neptunenetworks.com/about.html>

<http://www.polynesianislands.com/fp/>

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/gliderking/69399723/in/set-1494976/>

Tuesday, July 25. Woke up at six, my usual time, so I must have absorbed the 6-hour time change okay. I did some unpacking and then got dressed and went up for the 7:30 stretch class. I did much better with this class than the one I attended in India. The hardest part was doing 16 repetitions when I am used to only 10.

After breakfast we had our safety drill. It was very well presented. Then we were introduced to the Natural History staff. We have a large one, everything from bird experts to underwater experts. Most of them have been with Lindblad for a long time. Lindblad handles National Geographic's travel arrangements.

The main lecturer is geneticist Spencer Wells. Using DNA markers he has concluded that everyone on earth is descended from a mitochondrial Eve who lived in Africa 200,000 years ago. The National Geographic made a film of the book. We had been told that the purpose of this trip was to collect DNA samples from the Cook Islanders. It seems that that will happen at a future time. Spencer is now working on setting it up.

I collected a snorkel and flippers and was out on deck to see us enter the beautiful lagoon of Bora Bora. This is a breathtaking sight with the twin basalt peaks of Pahia and Otemanu dominating the landscape. They rise to 2300 feet above sea level.

Evans and Charity wanted to spend the day on nearby Motu Tapu (Motu means islet in Polynesian). I decided to take the Island Tour. When I was here in 1988, there was very little here. This has changed.

We took Zodiacs in to the dock. Here a truck awaited us for our sightseeing tour. With a roof over our head and all the windows down, it was remarkably cool.

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Our Polynesian driver regaled us with multitudinous facts. Such as there are two Japanese girls on the island as well as two blacks. The majority of the population is protestant and every village has a modern church.

What he didn't tell us is that the natives don't have a "B" in their language and call the island Pora Pora, which means, "first born". Polynesian legend says this was the first island to rise from the sea. Its ancient name was Vava'u, which suggests the original inhabitants of this seven-million-year-old island, might have come from Tonga. I assume Spencer Wells is addressing the problem with his DNA samples.

There were some interesting sites to see but our driver went out of his way to stop at uninteresting places. I would have like to more closely examine the standing stones with markings from ancient religious sites or the coconut husks drying to make copra. These were just pointed out in passing. They did crack open a coconut at one place so we could taste the meat.

It was sad to see that the only thatched roofs were at the numerous hotels and tourist spots. The natives live in concrete block buildings with tin roofs. Even sadder is the fact that the shore is lined with trash, everything from deserted automobiles to soda bottles. Apparently no one sees any point in cleaning this up although they keep their own yards tidy.

Our last stop was at "Bloody Mary's", established 1978, where we were treated to clean restrooms and rum punches or Bloody Marys. The ladies room was picturesque with a small artificial waterfall in which to wash your hands.

I don't understand why Lindblad even offers this tour. They had warned us it would be touristy, but I didn't even consider it that. It was a waste of time.

I spent a short time in some tourist shops near the dock but was happy to get back to the air-conditioned Endeavor.

Tonight was the Captain Leif Skog's welcome cocktail party. He introduced his crew before we adjourned to dinner.

<http://www.expeditions.com/?sc=3YGEADV6&wt.srch=1>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mitochondrial_DNA

http://www.mapsofthepacific.com/cook_islands/index.html

<http://www.boraboraisland.com/>

<http://www.tahiti-tourisme.com/islands/borabora/bora-bora-activities.asp>

<http://www.bloodymarysborabora.com/>

Wednesday, July 26. A day at sea. I was awake early and went on deck for the "Bird watching". There were not many birds for we are way out in the middle of nowhere.

I went to the stretch class. Sheila really raised the bar today. It was much harder. Much of it was done standing, which I find hard to do. I also found it hard to keep up. I told her after the class about my bad back and how I had been taught to stop if anything hurt. She told me that I would get stronger each day! We shall see.

After breakfast, Richard White gave a talk on the seabirds of the Pacific. He started with the frigates and then told of the boobies. Much of what he said I already knew. Since the room had been darkened for the slides, the rocking of the ship made me fight to stay awake.

Then we had an hour break before Spencer Wells' talk on the science behind the Genographic project.

But a whale was spotted and everyone raced out on deck to look. The whale was swimming just under the water. You could see the "foot prints" he made with his fluke. These were readily discernable as flat spots in the sea. The ship turned and followed him for some time. I saw him blow three or four times and surface twice. No one seemed to be able to identify his species. Whales are not common in this part of the Pacific.

Finally we came back to the lounge for Spencer Wells talk. He is a most dynamic person with a PHD in genetics. Spencer has done research in DNA that shows everyone on earth is related. To understand his work, one should read his book "The Journey of Man".

In the simplest of terms, our DNA is long enough to reach to the moon and back. It is expressed by a series of letters. Periodically there is a mutation or typographical error in the letters. These errors are called markers. We all carry a marker from a mitochondrial Eve who lived 200,000 years ago in Africa. There were other Eves but other mitochondrial lines are extinct. They may have only had sons, or no children and so forth.

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Sixty thousand years ago our earth was at the end of the last Ice Age. Mankind was almost wiped out by the rigors of the climate. Perhaps only 2000 people survived. A prehistory Adam of that time carried a Y chromosome that all men carry today.

The northern hemisphere was covered with ice and the ice sucked up the moisture on earth. Africa did not have ice, but it became a desert. The tribes had difficulty finding food and the first migration out of Africa began about 30,000 years ago. Tracing the DNA markers, Spencer found that this first migration followed the coast and went to Australia where their marker is found in the Aborigines.

20,000 years ago another migration out of Africa carried people into the Middle East. From here, some went on to Europe where they lost the pigmentation of their skin. Some went on across Asia and from there crossed the land bridge into America. The DNA of these people is found in the Navaho Tribe.

In the Neolithic times, the tribes discovered agriculture. Not being dependent on game meant they could spread out even more. As they pushed into Europe they encountered another humanoid species, the Neanderthals. Homo Sapiens superiority overcame the Neanderthals who became extinct.

Spencer has traveled around the globe seeking indigenous people to find more about how the earth was populated. Most recently he was in Chad and now he wishes to collect samples from the Cook Islanders who live in an isolated world.

He addressed the fact that we look different. This is a surface phenomenon probably due to sexual attraction. Certain cultures find some features more desirable than others. As they breed with the people they admire, the features become more emphasized.

It is interesting that the Palestinian and Jewish men carry very similar DNA. They were closely related as recently as 2000 years ago.

Later, John Kernan and Mike Greenfelder gave talks about the Coral Reef.

It is Evans birthday and the dining room had planned a celebration. Unfortunately, he and Charity left the table early. The roll of the ship caused a lot of early departures.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neanderthal>

<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0107403.htm/>

<http://www.uvi.edu/coral.reefer/>

Thursday July 27. I overslept and got to the stretch class late. It was either the feeling of being rushed or the instability of the ship, but I fell over doing "downward dog" and wiped out the person next to me. She was very nice about it but I noticed she moved her mat away. Sheila has made it harder and harder and I don't know how long I can keep this up.

The fifteen Cook Islands are a protectorate of New Zealand. Atui is a small island surrounded with surf. An ancient volcano sank leaving behind a coral reef. The New Zealand government built a sea wall to create a small harbor.

We went in by zodiac. Natives blowing triton shell horns marked our approach and a native band played while we were decorated with fragrant leis.

Climbing a small hill we found a fleet of pickup trucks waiting for us. We were lucky and drew the one whose "storyteller" was Paiere Mokoroa. He is an ariki, one of the three chiefs on the island that has a population of about 500.

He loved his island and spent much time telling stories about how the earliest settlers had come and had a village where now only a coconut grove stands. They traded coffee, cotton and ropeyard, a braided rope made from the copra with the traders who traded things like knives or calico. In the 1940s the exchange system broke down and now the only exports are copra and Valencia oranges.

Our driver was the Chief of Police. Since there are only 3 policemen and they take turns at being chief, it is not a big honor. In fact, one of the three isn't even on the island at this time. There isn't much crime on the island but they do sometimes have to settle fights between drunks and so forth.

We drove through lovely tropical jungle to view the site where Captain Cook landed in 1777. Mr. Mokoroa made it plain that Cook didn't discover Atui, the Atuians did!

Our next stop was at a former swampy area called Te Rora where the early settlers lived and grew their crops. They had everything they need there, both water and food. Some people

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started to fill in the swamp and today the water is far underground and the only crop they grow is taro.

We stopped at Ziona Tapa, the adobe one hundred and fifty year old church built by the missionaries. Tapa means sacred so the church name is Sacred Zion.

Inside we saw the pews that were set aside for the Ariki (chiefs). Originally people sat with their clan, but today you can sit anywhere,

I found the clock on the altar interesting, picturing it perhaps as a timer for the sermon. This was not so. A visitor gave it as a gift. There is another clock on the wall as well.

We finally came to where our "feast" was held. A buffet was set up with all sorts of native dishes. As we enjoyed our meal, the drummers and dancers performed.

Unfortunately the first string dancers are away at a competition, but the second string did fine. At the end they selected partners from the audience and Evans was one of those selected. He didn't do as well as a couple of ladies, but he tried.

We were taken back to the ship for lunch! I wasn't hungry after the feast and skipped it.

In the afternoon we were taken to nearby Takutea, a bird sanctuary. This small island has never had a permanent population.

To get on the island we had to wade for about 100 yards over the coral, trying to avoid stepping on the sea urchins and sea cucumbers. I should have brought my cane! However some friends offered an arm and I managed to get to shore.

High overhead were circling frigate birds. These birds are pirates and will chase a mother bird returning with a fish for her chick. They will attack it until she drops it. They cannot land on the water themselves. They also will carry off an unwatched chick.

We were divided into four groups. Evans, Charity and I drew Mike's group. We walked a bit on the beach and found several red-tailed tropicbird chicks in the scrubby growth. They were large enough so that the mothers weren't around to guard them.

Then we turned into the island and could see numerous red-footed booby nests. Many of the chicks were ready to fledge, but we did spot one fluffy white young one. The nests were high in the trees and we saw several adult birds fly in to feed their chicks.

On the ground were some amazing hermit crabs. These were land crabs, and they were big enough to carry around a fairly large shell. Bright red, they scurried away from us.

The vegetation got thicker and thicker and soon we were scrambling under branches and over branches. It was a much more strenuous walk than I had anticipated. Then Mike got lost! We wandered around for some time until he found the trail we had been on and we backtracked. Everyone was glad to see the beach again.

A hot shower felt very good before going up to hear the recap in the lounge. The best part was the presentation of Dennis Cornejo, the undersea expert. He makes the fish he photographs seem so amusing. A film is being made of our trip and I hope they include his dialogue as well as his shots for we really laugh to hear his descriptions of the fish.

At dinner we finally got to celebrate Evans birthday. The waiters presented him with a strawberry crowned cake and sang to him accompanied by a guitar. It was quite a presentation.

<http://www.cookislands.org.uk/atiu.html>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Takutea>

<http://www.photovault.com/Link/Animals/Birds/IPelicanformes/Species/FrigateBirds.html>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red-tailed_Tropicbird

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red-footed_Booby

Friday, July 28. Aitutaki. Polynesians first settled the island about 900 AD. Captain Bligh of the Bounty was here April 11, 1789, seventeen days before the famous mutiny. He returned in 1792 and is remembered by the population for having introduced the papaya or pawpaw to the island. This island has the second largest population in the Cook Islands. Some 1400 people call it home. The first missionary to the Cook Islands, John Williams, came here in 1823 and established the first Christian Church in the Cook Islands.

While we were waiting to board the zodiacs, I spotted some humpback whales nearby. They blew about four times and then two of them dived.

We were greeted on the island with triton shell trumpets and leis before being treated to Polynesian dancing. This performance was more sophisticated than the one on Atui and the

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performers had grass skirts made from the wild hibiscus. A TV program called Survivor is being filmed on the island and many of the islanders are involved with it.

Charity, Evans and I ended up in a private minivan with Captain Chief as our driver guide. His real name is Tiki that means statue. There are eight villages on Aitutaki. Captain Chief told us about many of the plants on the island. One is called noni, and it produces a juice with medical properties.

He took us to Te Poaki O Rae Marae, pointing out that the bigger trucks could not show us this. Marae are ancient ceremonial spots. Here were standing basalt stones. Some that were closely bunched he called the ancestors. There were smaller stones forming a large circle. The islanders once lived within the circle of stones so the ancestors could protect them, I later learned from a man that had been working with an archaeologist on the island that these stones are over four hundred years old.

Then we went to another Marae. The main feature of this one was a huge "footprint", perhaps two feet long, supposed to be that of the ancestor who stomped on the rock and broke it apart.

Nearby was the largest banyan tree I have ever seen. It crossed the road with its long dangling tentacles.

We then went to the high point of the island for a panoramic view. This also gave us a view of the telephone and television receiving stations. We drove past the airport. The Americans had a base here during the Second World War. They built the airport and dredged the approach channel to the island.

For a last stop we went to the Samede club and had a refreshing swim in the lagoon before enjoying a delicious ice cream, banana and fruit juice float.

After lunch on the ship we went off to snorkel on the reef. There was a lot of surf cascading over the reef and it was obviously causing too much sand to be in the water for good visibility. Our boat was moved further up the reef. Finally "Major" our driver sent Bill one of his passengers over to scope the situation. He reported all was well. I went in and swam to a nearby coral head, but the reef was dead and it was very murky. Evans urged me to come further out, but there was also a current and I gave up. Major had to pull me back on the boat. I didn't have the strength to climb the ladder. The swimmers came back but none seemed to have seen much.

Then Major decided the wind had died enough and he went back to our original destination. We were the only boat that did and we got to see a giant clam with all her family, as well as loads of sergeant fish, one wrasse fish and what I call a ghost fist but Major felt must have been a goatfish. I have looked up goatfish but they are not the almost transparent fish I have seen.

We were then supposed to stop at an island for sun and sand. I don't do sun and sand. Luckily one of the men had to be back for a filming of Survivor, so we had a speedy ride back to the island where we met our Zodiacs.

<http://www.aitutaki.com/>

<http://www.czimages.com/CZMemories/Fishing/humpbk1.htm>

<http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/people/A0852334.html>

<http://www.dcpphotoimages.com/pres0047.html>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triton_\(mollusk\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triton_(mollusk))

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marae>

<http://www.tv.com/survivor/show/4742/summary.html>

<http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/banyan+tree>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giant_clam

<http://members.tripod.com/mark26/wrasses1.html>

<http://www.seafriends.org.nz/enviro/fish/goat/goatfish.htm>

Saturday, July 29. Palmerston Island. I woke up very stiff and sore. After breakfast I went to see Sheila, the yoga teacher and massage therapist. I had an incredible massage. She called it Shat Tsui. Encouraging me to breath out during the pressure, she also employed several stretching techniques.

Just as I finished they were loading the Zodiacs for Palmerston Island. The island has no harbor and we needed a pilot on the Zodiac to guide us through the reef. Palmerston is a true coral atoll, unlike the volcanic islands we have seen.

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Captain Cook first discovered Palmerston and named it for the First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Palmerston. The island was uninhabited at that time but there were twelve ancient graves from an earlier time. There are only about 50 residents on the island today and they were all there to greet us.

We started with a short prayer service for these islanders are very religious. Then we were welcomed with the children of the village singing and dancing for us. "Welcome to Palmerston Island. This is what you want to see." It was very sweet.

We were divided into groups for a guided walk around the island. First the simple church which is in need of restoration after the last hurricane. This area of the world had four hurricanes last year.

In the church year is the grave of William Masters, the first inhabitant of the island in 1863. He came here with two Polynesian wives and acquired a third one later. Almost everyone on the island traces his genealogy back to him, although they now refer to him as William Marston. Masters sounded like Marston in the founder's strong Gloucester accent. He propagated a huge family, reigning as its king. After he died there were disputes about the next ruler and the British resident at Rarotonga appointed William's oldest son, Joel, to be the British Resident and Magistrate.

There is a Palmerston Yacht club where visiting yachtsmen can get a shower or spend the night. In the club was a magnificent mahogany table carved on the island.

The Palmerston Country Club seemed to be a private home. It had many places to sit and was obviously an island gathering place. A picture of William Marston stood on a small table.

Palmer, our guide, showed us how to open a coconut by pushing it onto a spike stuck in the ground. He later showed us some of the other plants. The noni is a medicinal herb in great demand. We saw breadfruit trees. In short no one would starve on this lovely atoll.

We saw another graveyard. Each of the three clans has their own. The three clans are the descendants of each of William Marston's Polynesian wives. There was also an ancient graveyard with black basalt stones.

We didn't get to the school in time for the soccer game but there was a marble game going on. The Palmerston Lucky School is one room divided into 3 sections. For higher education the children must go on to Rarotonga. Near the school was a vegetable garden that the children had planted. It is difficult to grow vegetables here since there is no true soil, as we know it. However, the tomatoes seemed to be flourishing.

Then we walked to where there had been a swamp, now filled in where crops could be grown. We also saw one of the artesian wells on the island. Fun as it was, it was also very warm and I was glad to get back to the air-conditioned ship.

There was a snorkel trip in the afternoon. Charity and Evans went, but I was too tired. It would have been difficult because the snorkeling was in deep water with two Zodiacs lashed together with a platform between. I am sure I would have needed help getting out of the water.

Dinner was a barbecue back on the pool deck. We sat with Walter and Diane Ariker who are from Connecticut, Cynthia Cannady, from Switzerland who went to Stanford with Evans and Charity, and William and Nancy Perry. The talk was of genealogical roots. Bill's roots are Finnish and he went to Finland to meet his relatives. One of the children was a dead ringer for his daughter, third cousins. For entertainment that night, there was a talent show. There are 17 members of the Rieder family on board. Many of them demonstrated their talents. We had a composer who played a love song he had written for his girl. An opera singer, Betty Jean Rieder, has an amazing voice. We even had a belly dance for entertainment.

http://www.holisticonline.com/shiatsu/hol_shiatsu_home

<http://www.ck/palmston.htm>

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/PRpalmerston.htm>

<http://www.herbalsafety.utep.edu/facts.asp?ID=35>

<http://www.marblemuseum.org/index.html>

<http://www.frfoundation.org/>

Sunday, July 30. A day at sea. After breakfast, I went to the lounge for a preview of the DVD we are invited to buy for \$50 each. It is amazing how good it is with National Geographic

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photographers both underwater and on land. Needless to say, I bought a copy. My own pictures look so bad by comparison.

Spencer gave his last lecture and talked of the future of the Genographic project. Everyone on this trip had been invited to submit a cheek swab for his or her own DNA. I am a member of Haplogroup H. My own markings show my Paleolithic ancestors left Africa 20,000 years ago and went to the area around the Black Sea. From there they went into Europe. Evans shows his Y chromosome line reaches back to northern Europe where he may have had a relationship to the Vikings.

The general public is invited to send off for the kits and I certainly recommend people to do so. When people realize we have one ancient root in Africa, perhaps they will realize that the racial and religious wars we have are wrong. Sexual selection has made us look different but we are all brothers under the skin.

He then had "office hours" and I think half the passengers were there with their questions. He pointed out once again that the men who have the Y chromosome all go back to one Adam, but the mitochondrial lines go back much further. Men tended to stay in their tribes and brought in wives from other tribes. Thus the female lines are more complex and subject to mutations.

After lunch I returned to my stateroom to start organizing for debarkation. At four I had another wonderful massage with Sheila. I wish I could take her home with me! While I was dressing in my cabin, I was able to hear Steve Maclean give his lecture on Captain Cook.

The Captain had a farewell cocktail party and we had dinner. I ate vegetarian. I know I have put on weight on this trip from all the good food.

Monday, July 31. We anchored outside Rarotonga and Zodiaced in to the town. After the usual Lei greeting we boarded buses for a tour of the island. Rarotonga is the largest of the Cook Islands and is its capital. Unlike the other islands we have seen, its volcanic origin is still apparent with high peaks covering the central part of the island. Lush countryside surrounds the peaks.

Our guide is a member of the Henry family, a descendant of an early chief. Our first stop was at the church where we saw a decorated Henry grave, a recent governor of the island. We walked beyond to the library and had time to see the small museum attached to it.

Mr. Henry pointed out the hostels. Each island maintains one so the islanders have a place to stay when they come to visit. Everything is very full right now for they are celebrating Constitution Day. Teams of dancers and drummers have come from all over the Cook Islands to compete. It was tempting to go to see the competition, but according to the guide you had to go two hours ahead to get a seat and late arrivals were turned away.

We cut through to the center of the island where the road was called the sacred way. This was the original road on the island. Our guide pointed out a ruined palace and an old marae. There were plantations along the way of coconuts, papaya and even tomatoes. The whole island is lush with greenery.

We were shown the black rocks where legendary Aitutaki warriors reputedly dropped the stones they had stolen from Rarotonga's Mount Raemaru.

We made a stop at a Noni factory. The plants are soaked for over a year to produce the final product. The guide told us it is the cure everything from arthritis to diabetes! I sipped it and found it not pleasant. Evans felt it smelled of creosote! We did not buy some to take home, even though we were told it sells for many more times the price in the states.

Then we went to the Perfume Factory where they were selling all sorts of lotions and perfumes made from the plants on the island. I did buy some coconut soap as a souvenir.

At last we came to our lunch stop: Trader Jacks. We were the last bus to arrive and the only seats left were far from the porch with its view of the water. We waited and waited. It was an hour before they brought us our beverages and by the time two hours had passed we had only been given our appetizer. This was a nice tuna dish. It was hot and I was getting very tired. I don't understand why this wasn't better arranged. Any restaurant would be overwhelmed with 125 visitors arriving at the same time. They should either arrange a buffet or take some of the group back to the hotel.

I decided to just catch the 2:00 o'clock bus to the hotel, but it was pulling out of the parking lot as I went out. I determined to catch the 2:45. Thus when the spaghetti arrived I only ate a few bites.

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It was made with smoked fish and not too good. However I did make the 2:45 bus and got to the Edgewater hotel. I never had time to investigate the shops near the restaurant.

The hotel looks out at the reef with crashing surf that boils over it. There is also a good wind blowing for we are on the windward side of the island. They had assigned me a room on the third floor. I was too tired to climb the stairs so they moved me to a first floor room and I was soon stretched out on the bed asleep.

At six I went for a massage. The massage therapist was an Indian who had been raised on Fiji. He gave a good massage, but it wasn't as good as Sheila. He did, however, make me feel much better.

The group was taken to a restaurant for dinner but we opted to buy our own dinner in the hotel. It was East Asian night and I had a passable curried chicken

<http://www.ck/raro.htm>

<http://www.edgewater.co.ck/>

<http://www.traderjacksrestaurant.com/>

Tuesday, August 1. The last day. At ten a bus arrived and took us up into the highlands to Highland Paradise. A black cat came out to greet me and sat in my lap and purred. I seem to attract cats!

This was an ancient Polynesian fortress of the Tinomana tribe. After the missionaries came, the tribe was relocated to a location near the sea. In 1983 Raymond Piranji, a descendant of the Tinomana Ariki, acquired the site which was overgrown with vegetation. He started the restoration now run by one of his daughters.

We were draped with roti, a native plant, to pay homage to these ancient Polynesians. Then our guide gave a Maori prayer before we set out. She told us how the early tribes on the island would fight and they would eat their enemies.

There was an old Marae that had been destroyed by the missionaries in 1823. However, unlike the others we have seen, you could almost see how it had been. Although it had originally been covered with a building of some sort, no trace remains but the black stones. Four terraces led up to an altar and she pointed out what seemed to be graves. In olden days human sacrifices were held here. There were no bones in the "graves" but perhaps the bodies were laid on top of them. No one really knows.

The grounds are a lovely botanical garden. However, there has been a lot of rain and it was muddy. My stool cane kept getting bogged down, so I did not take the full walk. Instead I sat on the lovely terrace watching the surf and the ever-present imported Mina birds. The birds are pests throughout the Cook Islands. They have eradicated all the other small birds on the island by eating their eggs.

One of the Natural History staff, Brent Houston, was there and he told me about a prairie restoration project he was working on in South Dakota. He is leaving the ship to go home and move, but returning in 6 weeks.

They served us some refreshing drinks, fruit and a raisin cake before taking us back to the hotel. After lunch, Evans and I caught the local bus into Avarua, the capital. There are two bus routes, one runs clockwise, the other counter clockwise around the island. A round trip cost \$5 New Zealand dollars (about \$3 US).

The object of our trip was to look at black pearls. Right next to the terminal was Bergman and Sons. They had some lovely jewelry. Black pearls are graded by size, shape, color and luster. I must have tried on twenty rings before I found a beautiful black green pearl with small diamonds on each side. It cost far too much, but I have not spent anything on this trip except for things like massages. I consider this the ultimate souvenir of the south Pacific. They offered me champagne, but I settled for water. Then Martha, one of the clerks, took us back to the Edgewater. So I know I spent too much, but I will enjoy the ring.

Although the hotel offered an elegant buffet, I settled for a club sandwich for supper. We checked out at seven PM for our ten thirty PM flight.

When I booked, there was no business class available between Rarotonga and Papeete so we are in the back of the bus for the first hour and a half. I lucked into three seats abreast and curled up and slept the whole way.

<http://www.highlandparadise.co.ck/>

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<http://sres.anu.edu.au/associated/myna/index.html>
<http://www.ck/pearls.htm>

Wednesday, August 2. At Papeete everyone had to get off and go through another security check even for in transit. It seemed to take an age before we finally made it to Air New Zealand's business class lounge.

Then we got back on the same plane! But this time it was in the front cabin, albeit the last row. The foot rests don't come up as high as Deltas but the seat was comfortable enough and I slept most of the 8 hours to Los Angeles. I woke up with a head cold.

It was 2:00 PM Los Angeles time when we caught a shuttle to the Radisson Airport Hotel. The hotel offered "high speed" Internet access but it was even slower than the satellite Internet we had on the ship. I got on the phone and booked another cruise with Lindblad for next summer to Spitzbergen. I slept an hour or so and then Charity, Evans and I went up to the cocktail lounge on the top floor for drinks and snack food. Then it was back to bed for a short night.

<http://www.airnewzealand.com/gateway.jsp>
<http://www.radissonsas.com/>

Thursday, August 3. Wake up call at 3:30AM. Caught the 4:00 am shuttle from the hotel to LAX and checked in for our 6 AM flight to Atlanta. Evans had managed to split out reservation so that Charity was on one reservation, the two of us on another. Charity is not Gold Medallion so is not eligible for an upgrade. Evans and I were and managed to get a free upgrade into the front cabin. We both felt a little guilty in deserting her. However, being in first meant we were served breakfast and had more legroom for the final leg of our journey.

PICTURES of the trip can be found at

<http://www.harrell.smugmug.com/gallery/1739426>