

Hong Kong to Southampton Voyage – Part 4

Great Adventure Travelogue

Part 4: Port Elizabeth, South Africa to Ascension Island

April 20, 2016

Dateline: South Indian Ocean

Latitude at Noon UTC + 2, 34.8 Degrees South, Longitude 21.7 Degrees East

Today we enjoyed a sea day between Port Elizabeth and Cape Town as we transit the site where the Atlantic Ocean meets the Indian Ocean. En route we will cross the Agulhas Bank, part of the African Continental Shelf, where water is a mere 270 feet deep , and go past the light house at Cape St. Francis where we will pass as close to the Continent of Africa as 28 miles. Later in the day we will pass a lighthouse built in 1864 at Cape Blaize. At noon today we had traveled 222 miles from Port Elizabeth, South Africa, with 210 to go to reach Cape Town. We have slowed to 12 knots in order to arrive at Cape Town first thing tomorrow morning. The air temperature was 68 F and the water was 70F. We spent quite a bit of time on deck where we found it to be cool and breezy.



Queen
Victoria's
Stack

There was quite a bit of shipping traffic here. With significantly lower fuel rates and increasingly higher fees to transit the Suez Canal, many ships find it is more cost effective to take the extra days to go around Africa rather than take the Mediterranean and the Suez route. This is hurting Egypt, which collects the Suez Canal fees. That coupled with the dramatic drop in tourism due to fears of terrorism has crippled the country's economy..

English is the official language along with Afrikaans – pronounced Ahf-ree-kahns), which was derived from the Dutch spoken by the first European settlers. There are also 9 Bantu languages of the indigenous people spoken here.

We had some interesting lectures to attend today. Cunard often has lecturers scheduled who address topics related to areas visited. On this leg of the journey, it was focused on the geography, culture, politics and wildlife of Africa. The first we attended was by the plastic surgeon, Dr. Alastair Lamont. who explained how he has performed plastic surgery on rhinos in a lecture entitled (pun fully intended): Rhinoplasty for Rhinos – Surgery in the Veld. Reconstructive surgeons often cooperate with veterinarians in the bush to save wildlife. He was actually called by his son who is a big game vet to perform skin grafts on a female rhino injured by poachers taking her horns, but not killing her. Dr. Lamont was able to take skin grafts from the rhino's belly and apply them to her face. He used tar to close the wounds until the

grafts could be made, since conventional methods were out of the question. The bottom line is the rhino is still ugly, but alive. This particular female not only survived, but had a baby.

Rhino horn is actually like a claw or nail. It is a myth that it is made from hair and a myth that it will increase male potency, but Asian cultures, particularly the Chinese are frantic for it and willing to pay thousands for it. There has been some work with "Dehorning rhinos to keep poachers from killing them, but they will grow back unless removed at the root. It is a cumbersome process, but one they have started doing at birth. The down side of this is that many poachers will kill them anyway just to avoid tracking them for days, only to discover their horn is gone. Rhinos should have a 50 to 60 year life-span. Chips are often inserted into the horn to be able to track them, but often they are already dead by the time they can get to them. They can often catch the poachers, but there are hundreds waiting to take their place because the trade is so lucrative. Rhinos are endangered, only a handful left in the wild and they often have armed guards. With over-population and under-employment of humans, this continues to be a major threat to their existence.

The skin thickness on a human is 5 ml., but on a rhino it is 1525 ml. With humans you can peel a piece of skin off by using a device like a cheese slicer. With rhinos there are many contours so shaving is not an option, so they have to go deep and use a medical sheet for a deep graft. Today there was a "graphic photo" warning since we had one passenger pass out at an earlier lecture with lots of gory images.

After a leisurely lunch, we attended a second lecture by Gavin Robinson about the myths surrounding crocodiles. Many people confuse crocodiles with alligators – the primary differences are that alligators are typically smaller with rounded snouts, darker hide, and with eyes that can see up as well as out, but not down and they have 76 teeth. They are found in freshwater

only in climates with consistently warm temperatures. Crocodiles have a more pointed snout and grow significantly larger with specimens averaging 12 feet. The largest crocodile ever recorded weighed in at 2,370 pound and measured over 20 feet. The largest alligator ever recorded was just over 15 feet, weighing a little over 1,000 pounds. Crocodiles can see below them as well as above so it makes for useful trolling for prey in the water and above it while looking for lunch. They can be found in any body of water where the temperatures range from 77 to 90 F throughout South Africa.

Crocodiles were once found in the Nile, but have since retreated southward. The early Egyptians believed they brought good luck and later generations used various parts for a sort of witch craft. Today it is still believed that a crocodile tooth will bring good luck. Crocodiles also played a role in ancient justice systems. If a person were to be accused of a crime, he would be thrown into a crocodile infested river. If he safely swam across, he was ruled innocent. If consumed, he was considered guilty as charged and then , of course, the execution was taken care of too – judgment and punishment all rolled into one. Hopefully no one had to go this route for petty crimes.

Crocodiles actually eat small stones to help them digest their food (sort of like the craw in a chicken) since they tend to take rather large bites and don't chew much. Unlike some reptiles, they do not hide their food and eat it later. They gorge themselves and nibble stones to help it go down. To kill their prey, they snatch it and take it underwater and rip pieces of it off by rolling over and over with it. This is termed the "death roll". They surface to eat however since they cannot eat underwater because they would drown. They store fat in their tails and can live off it for long periods of time in lean times.

They are often portrayed as villains, but they are essential to maintaining the ecological balance of their environment.

Crocodiles' eyes do make tears to keep their eyes moist. They actually have two eyelids, one for water and one for land. It is believed that the phrase, "crocodile tears", that has come to mean insincere sorrow, is perhaps attributable to the sorrow a crocodile feels for killing its prey. Only 1% of crocodiles hatched actually mature – the rest are eaten by other predators, so perhaps this is Nature's way of generating payback. A crocodile sheds his skin up to 3,000 times in his lifetime, allowing him to grow to his impressive size. His bite pressure can range from 3,000 to 5,000 psi, which explains the serious damage to his prey.

Crocodiles can swim at an impressive 35 miles per hour, getting their power from their enormous tail, which they also move back and forth for buoyancy. The females are somewhat fast and loose with multiple sex partners. The female takes the initiative and returns to those males she likes best (not sure what the criteria here is). The males are called bulls and the females cows, but this is quite reversed from the mammalian world in terms of aggression. The temperature of the water determines the sex of the offspring. If it is higher, they will be female, if lower they will be male. The female takes care of the young for 3 weeks, often carrying them in her mouth, but after that they are on their own and she will eat them if they come back to her – the ultimate in Tough Love from a parent.

They have been known to walk long distances, where they actually lift their cumbersome bodies and walk with their feet under them as a mammal would, rather than dragging them in sort of a belly walk, which they do around their water hole or river. They also have a belly power walk where they use their bodies in a snake-like motion if they need to move quickly. They can also launch themselves at prey in a rather explosive fashion, but cannot sustain the speed to pursue it so if they miss on the first try, they have pretty much lost it.

Hippos and crocodiles tolerate each other with sort of a

grudging respect. A hippo bite with those giant teeth is no small thing for even the largest crocodile and they have an abundance of much better targets, for which they don't have to worry about those giant teeth and a bunch of leftovers. At one point crocodiles were over hunted and almost became extinct. Now there are really too many in the wild. Lake crocs tend to be fat and lazy , but River crocs are more fit.

The Fashion Alerts continue – we actually saw what appear to be pajama bottoms on passengers in the public areas of the ship. I don't think they simply got locked out of their cabins while picking up a copy of the daily news in their message box in the hallway. These people must believe they actually are dressed.

April 21, 2016

Dateline: Cape Town, South Africa

Latitude at Cape Town, 33.54 South, Longitude 18.25 East

Cape Town, a city of 4 million people, has been described in many ways and probably most accurately a "world in one country". We were told it is also called the Mother City, but that doesn't seem to fit as well. Cape Town, a key to re-provision, also gained the nickname as the Tavern of the Seas with a thriving red light district and it was a favorite port of sailors.

It is 40 miles from the Cape of Good Hope. It is neither the southernmost point of the African Continent, nor the place where the where two powerful currents from the two oceans – the Atlantic and the Indian meet. That is at Cape Argulhas (90 miles to the east-southeast from Cape Town). The Cape of Good Hope is a navigational point where ships begin to travel a more easterly direction, than a southerly one as they round the Cape. The first to do this were the Portuguese in 1488, and who apparently had a bad experience because they called it the Cape of Storms originally. It became an anchorage for

fresh water for ships bound for the Far East, thus offering "good hope to crews" that they could actually make it that far. A Dutch ship foundered in the bay in 1647 and the stranded sailors began to grow vegetables and barter with the local people called the Hottentots for meat. Hottentot was a generic name given by the Europeans so they wouldn't have to deal with the pronunciation of their real tribe names, but today it is considered a derogatory name. The Dutch East India Company set up a permanent station in 1652. The first slaves were imported shortly thereafter from Indonesia, West Africa and Malaysia and trade became brisk.

In 1795 the British realized the strategic importance of the Cape and decided, like Gibraltar on the Mediterranean, that from this point they could control a vital trade route. They took control after the Napoleonic Wars in 1814, when the Dutch backed the loser in that battle – Napoleon. The Afrikaners, also called Boers – the Dutch word for farmers, were descendants of the first Dutch settlers. They were dissatisfied with the British rule, particularly after diamonds and gold were discovered in Kimberley in the 1870's. A bitter feud erupted ending in two Boer Wars 1899-1902. Self rule was granted to all provinces, but only whites could rule in Parliament and apartheid was the policy of the land.

We arrived at Duncan Dock, Berth E at the Cape Town Cruise Terminal early in the morning, awaking to overcast skies, 68 degrees F and cool breezes, a welcome change from the heat of the tropical Indian Ocean. This is the Queen Victoria's maiden call in Cape Town, the third most populous city in South Africa. It is the provincial capital of the Western Cape. Notable natural landmarks are Table Mountain and Cape Point which provides a natural harbor.



Bad Weather in
Capetown

We had planned to take the cable car to the top of Table Mountain today, but the skies are so low you can't even see this iconic landmark, rising almost 3600 feet above sea level, forming what in the American West it would be called a mesa. It is estimated to have risen from the sea floor 300 million years ago so it has plenty of time for the elements to level off the distinctive top of the peak. However, the cable car was closed because it was too windy, and so we settled for a half day city tour. The cable car itself is something to see, with each car holding as many as 65 people for the 4 minute trip. The highest point of the mountain is called Maclears Beacon. There is not a beacon in the traditional sense (emitting powerful light) but is a surveyor's waypoint in the form of a stone cairn, set there by Thomas Maclear in the 19th Century. When clouds settle on Table Mountain, they are referred to locally as the "table cloth". Today the table cloth totally smothered any sign of the mountain. Another sight we missed were the feral goats call "tahrs", which are originally from Himalaya, but they flourished here and became feral by escaping from the local zoo and multiplying.

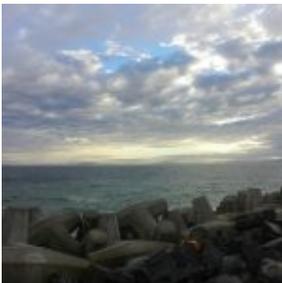


Beach East of

Capetown

Since the Dutch set up the first permanent European settlement in 1652, Cape Town has become a Creole melting pot in a multi-cultural, multi-racial city and multi-religion. Christians, Muslims, Jews and Hindus all worship here. There are beautiful golden beaches and flourishing vineyards against a backdrop of mountains, and lush greenery in parks and public spaces.

The famous Stellenbosch and Franschoek wine regions are a short drive away.



Robben Island
on the Horizon

As the fog lifted a little, we were able to see Robben Island, eight miles away. It is the site of the prison where Nelson Mandela spent 17 of the 27 years he was imprisoned by the government. The name means “Seal Island” in Dutch, but it served as a leper colony and prison even in colonial times. It is much like Alcatraz in San Francisco Bay – a “doable” swim in normal water, but the pounding surf and great white sharks tended to keep everyone on dry land. There have also been a number of shipwrecks including a ship carrying gold, but the waters are way too treacherous to attempt salvage. Supposedly the odd gold coin washes up from time to time so that keeps the beachcombers working. And speaking of working – the prisoners on Robben Island broke big rocks into little rocks all day – they were never used for anything, but it kept prisoners from lounging about all day and perhaps enjoying

themselves.



Victorian
Clock Tower

Our tour took us to Strand Street, once the waterfront main drag, but there has been so much reclamation, it is now in the middle of the old colonial town. We had hoped to be able to take a walking tour to see the gardens and the old buildings, but the rain discouraged that idea. The original town is very San Francisco like with steep narrow streets, and the climate is comparable as well. The small area formed between the mountains and the sea is referred to as the "City Bowl".

There are 57 million people in South Africa and the country is 70% black. There is 25% unemployment here and there are a lot of people standing around hoping for a day's casual labor. For those who actually have some money, it is the rand (once the Krugerrand which was a gold coin, but they have since gone to more traditional currency).



Houses of Bo
Kap

Our first stop was the former township of Bo Kaap. Back in the

days of apartheid (forced segregation, in a country ruled by whites) this area was occupied by the Malaysian Muslim population. People living here were descendants of Malay slaves brought here from the Far East by the Dutch. The National Party which ran the all white government under apartheid law, the residents here were classified as Malays and characterized as "exotic". They had very few rights. While others have now moved in, they are struggling to keep the character of the place with brightly colored flat roofed houses and cobbled streets. Most of the houses have a "voorstep" or porch like terrace in front with wrought iron rails. The government pays them to keep their houses painted in the traditional style.

Every day at noon a cannon is fired from Signal Hill , a smaller mountain adjacent to Table Mountain which has been a tradition since colonial times. The hill was used to send signals (e.g. storm warnings) via flags and to indicate the time for ships in the harbor. The ships could also put up flags to send signals (e.g." help we are sinking") . In the event a ship was in trouble, the cannon would be fired 3 times with an answering shot from another nearby battery. This was sort of an all hands on deck signal. At the far end of Signal Hill is a rocky promontory called the Lion's Head although, the likeness didn't seem readily apparent to us.

We drove up Tafelburg Road to the base of Table Mountain, and were impressed by the lush green of the parks and open land, and were struck by how wind-swept everything seems to be. With the fog as thick as cotton wool, the visibility was reduced to about 40 feet. We were told that the cable car still operated in the fog and that up the mountain a ways the fog was cleared by strong winds, but those winds are what kept us from traveling up in the cable cars.



Jaws and the Tourist

The weather here is largely formed by the clash of two oceans – the warm Indian Ocean meeting the cold Atlantic Ocean and the landscape is generally wind-swept. Seals are very fond of the abundant fish in the colder water and sharks are very fond of seals so that adds some extra excitement to the surrounding waters. Researchers have tagged great white sharks and have learned that they roam as far as Australia from these waters.

Our guide pointed out Whale Rock to us. It does look like a whale and they do have whales here including the much sought after Right Whale, so called because it yielded the most oil of any of the whales.



Beach at Camp Bay

The tour operator substituted a drive and some museum visits instead of our cable car trip and so we were bussed through the exclusive Camps Bay Area, which was quite reminiscent of Malibu in Southern California, with mega-mansions clinging to rocks above a beach. We made a photo stop at Maiden's Cove to

look back on an area they call Little Monte Carlo so maybe that is more apt than Malibu, with all the buildings stuck onto rocks jutting out in every direction. This area is protected from the wind by the mountains. There was a nude beach (a.k.a. naked tanning facility) for men only (our guide said it is a virtual sea of bums and willies) and it was banned due to popular outrage from people owning hillside homes that could see down into it. One woman complained that they were right there under her nose when she stood on a chair in her garden.

We drove by the Castle of Good Hope which has a museum in what used to be the Granary. It is the oldest surviving building in Cape Town, built between 1666 and 1679, for use by the Dutch East India Company to protect their re-provisioning stop. It was built in a pentagonal shape with 5 triangular bastions added on to give it the star shape it has today. The castle was never attacked, so it seems the trade route stop was safe after all, but perhaps it was a deterrent. It later served as a prison and army headquarters. It was once on the waterfront, but the waterfront moved with subsequent land reclamation.

We did a drive by of District 6 – a black slum that was bulldozed 25 years ago. People from here were relocated to townships such as Soweto so whites could use the land during apartheid rule. Pressure from the international community changed this. South Africa had no exporting due to world-wide boycotts and thus there was massive unemployment and their economy tanked.. It is still not developed today – no one of any race wants anything to do with it and it is owned by the government. We also saw the former Slave Lodge which is now a museum. The Slave lodge was the place where slaves were housed until they were sent to the white people who “ordered” them. They could be ordered with specialized skills such a “cook” or “lady’s maid.” There is a piece of the Berlin Wall here that was a gift to Nelson Mandela.



At the Botanical Gardens

Pretoria is the capital of South Africa, but Cape Town has the Parliament, housed in a big white building. We visited the natural history museum where we saw whales, native animals and ancient prehistoric animals as well as the biggest set of shark's teeth I have ever seen. From there we went to the botanical gardens and had a pleasant stroll amid hibiscus higher than our heads that had been pruned into trees. In the garden we met Shandra who was selling crafts that she makes to raise money to send her daughter to school. She had recently moved to Cape Town from a small town in the country to look for a job. Or Option B was that she would sing a song for you for about 40 rand which was the equivalent of \$3.00. We had her sing to us a song that she wrote herself. We enjoyed meeting her, but feel that Beyonce's career is quite secure – no threat here. Shandra asked where we were from and was quite surprised to have US visitors in her country out walking around the city. She said I could pass for a South African – well she had the southern part right anyway. I don't think she had ever met any Americans before.



Table Mountain

as Seen from
Victoria and
Albert Wharf.

Upon returning to the Queen Victoria, we took the ship's shuttle to the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront. (Albert was the Queen's husband, Alfred was her son). Work on the docks began in 1860 and Prince Alfred laid the first foundation stone. There are two main basins built later, once called the Alfred Basin, the other the Victoria, with a number of quays and jetties on each. All the old commercial and industrial buildings from the old days have been converted into shops, museums and restaurants. We had margaritas wine and a cheese plate at a waterfront restaurant called Meloncino on Quay 4. As we were enjoying the view – the skies cleared with beautiful views over Table Mountain and out to sea. Just as we were reconsidering an attempt to get up to Table Mountain, the skies darkened once again and the winds picked up so there was nothing to be done, but to order another bottle of wine and watch the seals and dolphins gliding around the wharves and piers.

We took the shuttle back to the ship. Once back on board we had cocktails and dinner. In the bar we saw Caitlyn Jenner's double, but her hairdo was pure Dilbert Office Worker Woman. It literally stood out from her head in a triangle. Also while at cocktails we observed that Americans might say something was "cool" or "great" but some of the Brits we have met say "brilliant". For example if you say "Let's meet at 6 for cocktails" – their response might be "brilliant" as in brilliant plan. I'm not sure what word they might use for a bright light or an exceptionally bright scientist for example. We also learned that today is Queen Elizabeth's 90th birthday. She has attended the launching all 3 of Cunard ships named Queen Elizabeth, the first in 1938 named for her mother, then the QE2 in 1967 and the Queen Elizabeth in 2010 named for herself.

April 22, 2016



Local Penguins

Today was our second and final day in Cape Town and we awoke to a chilly rainy day. We again took the shuttle to the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront to confirm what we already suspected, which was our boat trip to Robben Island was cancelled. We instead visited a coffee shop for a leisurely breakfast and then went to the local aquarium and also saw a 1942 warship the SAS Somerset. We had to be back at the ship by 2:30 and we had to clear South African Immigration on shore prior to departure. There was quite a bit of confusion among those passengers who did not understand that they had to go ashore and clear even if they never got off the ship. This delayed our departure to some extent, but the big delaying factor was the weather which grew increasingly worse. The harbor was closed to inbound and outbound traffic and none of the cranes were working in offloading ships at the pier. It was a good day to stay snugly inside and watch the weather through the windows of the ships lounges. We finally were okayed for departure at 7:30 and were warned that we would be encountering significant seas (up to 40 feet) once we cleared the harbor and so we readied our sea legs..

April 23, 2016

Dateline: South Atlantic Ocean

Latitude at Noon UTC +, 2 29.3 South, Longitude 15.8 East

This morning was much calmer after a raucous night with 30 foot swells, coming abeam (that would be to the side for anyone non-nautical). Well actually not so raucous for us – we both slept like babies in a cradle being rocked to sleep and the ship's deployment of the vertical stabilizer – two large outrigger- like things that can be utilized when the ship rolls- helped to some extent. Still those awake for it say it was a thrilling to mildly terrifying ride. Today was bright and sunny, quite welcome after the deluge in Cape Town yesterday. The weather was a cool 50 degrees F, but we were rapidly approaching tropical waters that would warm us up nicely. We stopped by the Purser's Office to collect our new Ship's ID and key cards, since with the completion of this last segment, we had achieved Diamond Status, the top tier for Cunard cruisers, since we had exceeded over 150 days.

We had a leisurely morning and listened to a lecture by a former Secret Intelligence officer which should have had us on the edge of our seats, but actually has us on the edge of comatose since he droned in such a monotone and his topic was about 40 years out of date (Cold War espionage – but not the cloak and dagger stuff – his group eavesdropped – no cyber intelligence here – and they mostly eavesdropped on Morse Code messages– slightly more modern than hieroglyphics, but not all that much. The ship was still rocking and so it was really hard to stay awake.

We noticed the rolling of the ocean is much like a narcotic or an alcoholic beverage. It makes you walk funny and nod off at odd times. We had so much enjoyed deck time, but today was much too windy so we stayed inside and played cribbage and read. At noon today we were making 20 knots – not the top speed of 24 the commodore had hoped for since we were battling a heavy wind and large swells.



Bundled up for Leisure Time

Today at noon we were traveling 15 miles off the coast of South Africa and would cross to Namibian waters at 2:00 p.m. We were traveling over the continental shelf of Africa in 560 feet of water. We have traveled 310 miles from Cape Town with 405 miles to go to reach Walvis Bay, Namibia. Swells of approximately 18 feet were rolling from the southwest, but because we had no white capping, the seas are said to be slight. The air temperature was 63 degrees F and so was the water. The cold Benguela Current welling up from the ocean depths and flowing northward was cooling down the water quite dramatically.

After lunch we listened to a classical guitar and violin duo playing Spanish music. They were very talented and entertaining. It put us in the mood to get back to Spain on our next trip. Since it was cold and windy on deck, I went to the gym for my miles (or should I say kilometers – I needed to do about 3.3 to equal 2 miles) using a treadmill. These treadmills have games to play while you “tread” so I had time for a few games of Solitaire and Sudoku – which makes the kilometers fly by. We went to the evening performance which showcased The Definitive Rat Pack. They were a trio out of London’s West End who perform Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis, Jr. songs. They were excellent – Dean and Frank were dead ringers, but this Sammy was much better looking than the original. By bedtime a fog had rolled in and we had to slow down considerably and sound our ship’s whistle periodically. This meant we were not able to make up all the

time from our delayed departure from Capetown so there would be quite a bit bustling about for tomorrow's arrival and tours in Walvis Bay, Namibia.

April 24, 2016

Dateline: Walvis Bay, Namibia

Latitude at Walvis Bay, 22.5 South, Longitude 14.3 East

During the night we had travelled up the southwestern coast of Africa in Namibian waters to Walvis Bay, the only natural, sheltered deep water port on what is called the Skeleton Coast. We awoke to pea soup fog and an announcement from the bridge advising that our arrival would be delayed due to the foggy weather and that all tours would take place, but departure times were being rescheduled. Before anyone could disembark every passenger would have to clear Namibian Immigration which was being set up in the Queen's Room (a large ball room) by bringing in 8 or so Immigration agents. Since there are over 1800 passengers, anyone doing the math could see that this was going to be a long and drawn out process. We got there early (I am married to Gary Palmer after all – late is never an option) and still we were waiting for over an hour for the ship to get docked and the Namibians boarded and set up. Our tour was moved from 8:30 to 11:00 a.m. so we had time for leisurely breakfast after clearing Immigration, which involved turning in a card filled out in advance with all the same information that was on the passport, presenting the passport which was stamped twice and handed back.

By the time we finished and ambled off to breakfast, the line stretched the length of the ship and was starting to double back. Fortunately the bulk of the passengers are British and they comprise the world's best queue-makers and so in general fisticuffs were avoided, but we did witness one grumpy lady on an electric scooter who was threatening to run amok in the

crowd. She may have been American, but her voice was too shrill to tell. If the passenger list had been Italian, Greek or any variety of Latin American, this queuing business could have turned ugly.

Fortunately, by 10:00 a.m. the sun had burned off the fog (which we would learn is a daily occurrence caused by the Benguela Current which introduces really cold water into warmer air on a daily basis). We finally got off the ship and allowed ourselves to be herded to a 4x4 vehicle where we met our driver, Simpson. Simpson was supposed to be both driver and guide, but he was really sketchy on the guiding part. He said he was from the Damara tribe and we figured they must not be much on talking because we asked him all sorts of touristy questions, but it was pretty much like playing ping pong by yourself. Even Gary, the most gregarious of people had to give it up, since Simpson got stumped on a softball question like how many people live in Namibia. (The answer to that according to Google is 2.3 million and this is in a country bigger than Texas so it is pretty sparsely populated). Simpson took a guess at the population of Walvis Bay at 5,000 and we later learned he was off by 80,000, but after all he said it was just a guess. He did point out the airport and the local KFC, so he did know a thing or two (or maybe only two) about Walvis Bay. Gary saw what looked like a golf course with brown fairways and brown greens and asked Simpson about it. He confirmed with 3 words "yes, golf course". We asked if they got many cruise ships into Walvis Bay and Simpson said yes there were many ships – they had one just last month. We figured Simpson must not get out much.

Our shipboard information told us that Walvis Bay was discovered as early as 1487 by a Portuguese explorer, but no one thought to colonize it until the Dutch did in 1793. That was a short lived colony because the British took over two years later. In 1910 Namibia became part of the South African Union. Once Namibia became independent in 1990, Walvis Bay

remained the property of South Africa. It was considered valuable because it has a deep water port. It was finally given to Namibia in 1994. It is one of the largest countries in sub-Saharan Africa and one of the least populated. Much of the country is arid, with two major deserts, the Namib and the Kalahari. There are high plateaus in the interior of the country ranging from 5,000 to 8,000 feet. The country was occupied by bushmen for thousands of years before the Portuguese arrived for a look-see. The climate was so harsh that even the European settlers were slow to converge on the scene (like 350 years slow). Finally in 1842 a German settlement called Swakopmund was established and Germany claimed sovereignty over the area, however the British had already said dibs on the Walvis Bay area, so it was part of South Africa for a time. With the discovery of valuable minerals, some real controversy erupted. South Africa became free from Great Britain, but they wanted to keep the parts of Namibia around Walvis Bay.. It was not until 1989 that free elections were held and not until 1990 that independence was declared. South Africa finally gave it up in 1994.

We set off with low expectations, but fortunately the scenery would soon speak for itself. We did have to show Simpson how to turn on the air conditioner in the vehicle. We think it may be his first air conditioned ride. We traveled in convoy with several other 4x4's, which was a good thing because we suspected Simpson had no idea where we were going.



Dune 7

Our first stop was in an area called Sossusvlei , whose

landscape was hard salt pan desert, surrounded by giant sand dunes, including the famous Dune 7. Gary asked about Dunes 1 through 6, and this pretty much stumped Simpson. Finally he said that Dune 7 is just a name that's all (and so we assumed it could just as easily have been called Fred). Later research into the matter gave an explanation that it is the 7th dune from the Tsauchab River (which still begs the question of the missing Dunes 1-6 unless they go unheralded and unappreciated). The other explanation is that it is the 7th highest dune in the world; however, it is actually the 6th highest at 1,256 feet and a rival dune in Namibia called Big Daddy is the 7th highest at 1,066 feet. Another mystery is that these dunes are referred to as "star" dunes when they actually have a pyramidal shape. They have multiple faces molded by the wind that radiate out from a central peak. These faces are formed by multi-directional winds which actually serve to keep the dune stable.



Rich Mining
Area of
Namibia

In the name "Soussusvlei", (vlei means marsh, so this is the Soussus marsh – which is something of a stretch – maybe when it rains there is a marsh – right now it is mostly hardpan.) It is part of the Namib-Naukluft National Park, home to one of the oldest deserts in the world. We noticed a number of mining operations. Simpson said he thought they were granite mines, but we later learned they were uranium mines – we were

not sure if he has a language issue or a knowledge issue, but suspect it may be the latter. There were small mounds of green here and there and mirages that look like water on the horizons. Power poles look to be marching off in the distance and water pipes parallel them offering a point of reference for those who may be wandering in the desert.



Simpson
Staying Close
to the Lead
Van

We visited two national parks, Namib Maukluft and Dorob, which means dry land, and which something of an understatement. We did not visit the town called Swampkomund – it didn't even sound enticing, but we understood it to be the site of a German settlement from the early days that was built on the site of an underground spring, which would make it pretty valuable real estate in these parts. They do have some deadly critters here, including the infamous puff adder. Simpson has to stay close to the other drivers because he has no idea where we are going (or how to find it if he did know. So in addition to looking out for puff adders, we all kept a sharp lookout for the other vehicles disappearing ahead in a cloud of dust.



The famous Welwitschia Plant

We drove into an area nicknamed “Moon Landscape and found it to be quite appropriate. We stopped to see the famous plant called welwitschia (also known as tree tumbo) in a valley by the same name, although some of our fellow travelers were “underwhelmed” and decided to stay in the sweltering vehicle. We chose to get out and try to catch a little desert breeze and see the plant. It looked mostly dead, but we were assured it was not. The noteworthy thing about these plants is their age and their botanical strangeness. The average plant here is between 500 and 600 years old, with the oldest known specimen estimated at 2,000 years old. It only produces 2 leaves, long leathery strap-like things that grow larger over the years, which get shredded into ribbons by the wind. They have male and female plants (distinguished by the shape of their cones), a short stem base and roots. And that’s pretty much the whole plant. At this same stop, there was lichen viewing – now that was a little underwhelming.



En Route to the Oasis

From there we were to go to the Goanikontes Oasis where we were to have lunch. En route we saw more uranium mines way in the distance. We wondered if the area might be radioactive – if so we may not have needed those night lights in the bathrooms. The landscape seemed to be a blend of other places we have been – a little Wadi Rum in Jordan, a little Moroccan Sahara and a little Texas Big Ben. An incredibly blue sky stretched from horizon to horizon, with the bare earth shown in shades of brown and tan, with deep shadows on the hillside ravines a dark chocolate.



Lunch Break at
the Oasis

At the oasis, lunch was a buffet sort of affair with fruit hidden under nets to keep the swarms of flies at bay. It wasn't particularly picturesque, but it was a splash of green (yellow green, but at least green). There was an old hotel there, still hosting guests, whose front desk sported a rotary dial phone – not a display – this was in use. The oasis slogan was "Where the road ends, our journey starts". This was indeed where the road ended, but as for the journey, all I could think of was the Grateful Dead lyrics about "what a long strange trip it's been".



Making Music at the Singing Rocks

Our next stop was at a group of rocky hills called the Singing Rocks. We trekked up one of them to reach a collection of boulders and our guides showed us how to play them. There was not much melody involved, but you did get different notes from striking different boulders with smaller rocks in certain places, with tones ranging somewhere between a gong and xylophone. The “sweet spots” were very apparent by the hollows worn in the boulders where people had been making music there for years.



Flamingos in Walvis Bay

While scanning the horizon for wildlife, we finally spotted a springbok on the way home right outside the city of Walvis Bay. Our biggest wildlife sighting was at our last stop, the Walvis Bay Lagoon that is part of the Walvis Bay nature Reserve, which is home to thousands of flamingoes and other

coastal bird such as pelicans, and Arctic terns There can be as many as 60,000 at any given time. As we exited the van at the pier to board our ship, I noticed the tagline for our tour operator which was called Abenteuer Afrika Safari (rough translation is Africa Safari Adventure). The tagline said "the coolest experience in the hottest destination". We had to agreed – cool experience on a hot desert.

April 25, 2016

Dateline: South Atlantic Ocean

Latitude at Noon UTC +1 21.1 South, Longitude 9.4 East



Navigating in
the Fog

Today we are traveling on the first of eight sea days to reach our next port of the Cape Verde Islands which are located off the Cap Vert peninsula in Senegal, the westernmost point in Africa. We are now officially in tropical waters, having crossed Latitude 23.5 South which marks the Tropic of Capricorn. A corresponding latitude, 23.5 degrees North marks the Tropic of Cancer, and so between these two latitudes, you would expect warm weather. The air temperature is warmer, but there is a 20 mile an hour wind blowing. These are the famed trade wind which in the days of sail, would propel ships westward to trade their goods. Our course is West Northwest and the winds are following out of the Southeast. We are only making 18 knots, due to the rough seas whipped up by the

winds slowing us down. We are gradually pulling away from the coast of Namibia (also known as the Skeleton Coast since so many ships have wrecked there), which is 230 miles away. We have traveled 307 miles from Walvis Bay with 897 to go to the Island of St. Helena, where we will only do a cruise by. The water here is well over two miles deep. We escaped the Benguela Current and its fog making tendencies and now have bright blue skies.

We had contemplated a little deck time, but it was still too chilly out on deck and so we stayed inside and read and listened to a slate of guest lecturers that we really enjoyed. First up was Peter Hawthorne, who spent many years as a reporter in Africa, dating back to the 60's when Kenya, Tanzania (then Tanganyika) and Uganda were all one country. He traveled and covered all of sub-Saharan Africa back in the days before the genocide of in Rwanda which killed over a million people in the 1990's. It was the Tutsis (very tall people) versus the Hutus (very short people) versus a pygmy tribe called the Twa (really short people in a very ugly conflict. These height differences made easy to figure out who was the "enemy" in case anyone was trying to blend in.

Then there was a slew of unsuitable people that unfortunately headed up various governments. There were the crazies, (e.g. Idi Amin), the thugs (e.g. Robert Mugabe) and the assorted tyrants that came on the scene as colonialism collapsed. Amid the political chaos, there was a slew of name changes – Northern Rhodesia became Zambia, Southern Rhodesia became Zimbabwe, Nyasaland became Malawi, and the Congo went from the Belgian Congo, to the Congo to Zaire.

In 1952 there was some major news for colonials. Princess Elizabeth was visiting a game lodge in Kenya when she got the news that her father, King George had died and she was now Queen. Hawthorne was too young to cover this story but he remembered it well. He went to Africa as a young man and never left. He covered both the imprisonment and the release of

Nelson Mandela 27 years later, and his election to the Presidency in 1994.

He covered the building of the Kariba Dam on the Zambezi River between Zambia and Zimbabwe and the massive project undertaken by Rupert Fothergill to save the wild animals from the ensuing flood. They hauled out and relocated thousands, but had a problem with chafing since they had to bind their legs together. Someone came up with the idea to tie them with ladies' silk stockings and that worked so well that the call went out for donations via the media. They were flooded (no pun intended) with enough silk stockings for just about every animal in Africa to have a pair.

Mr. Hawthorne had some great datelines in his reporting, such as the exotic Timbuktu, which was once a great trading center on the camel routes across Africa. Today it is a center of Islamic Culture located in the country which is now known as Mali, and unfortunately there is a civil war going on there today so travel to Timbuktu is risky at present and you might want to move it to the bottom of your bucket list.

He has also covered stories in Liberia where war also broke out, but seems to be more peaceable now. They have a Harvard educated woman president so she may have gotten things straightened out. An ironic note: this country once welcomed freed African slaves (and thus its name), and named its capital, Monrovia, after our President James Monroe. However, war broke out here when the freed slaves and their descendants became the elite class and oppressed the other people. That one is hard to figure out.

A favorite dateline of his was in the country of Swaziland in the town named "Sheba's Breasts" and in fact there are two mountain peaks somewhat resembling two perky little boobs. And those breasts are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to this being an intriguing place. In Swaziland, the country is very polygamous – men can take as many wives as they want, but

the reverse is not true for women. It appears to be no coincidence that there is the highest incidence of AIDS in Africa here. The King of Swaziland, currently with too many wives to count, still regularly takes a new one that he chooses from a pool of nubile young maidens.

Another favorite dateline of his was the village of Banana, Congo, where he and several other bored journalists when to on a whim and found they had no bananas there, and a whole team of journalists could not find out why it was so named.

He also covered stories in Mozambique and Angola, neither strangers to violence in recent years. Angola had a civil war that lasted from 1975 to 1995, killing over a million people and there are still land mines everywhere.

The great change factors that led to so much chaos in Africa were the end of colonialism, the end of apartheid and strangely, the collapse of the Soviet Union. Once the latter happened there was a steady stream of Russian made weapons coming into Africa to sell to the highest bidder, which sometimes was not so high. Mr. Hawthorne reports that in Ethiopia, the last time he was there, he saw an AK47 with ammunition being traded for two chickens.

The second speaker, Jane Corbin, quite famous in the UK, was the host of a BBC program called Panorama and she was an investigative journalist. Today's talk was about how she and other journalists followed Osama Bin Ladin over the years, (pre 9-11 and up to his killing) and like so many analysts believed that he was holed up in Pakistan. She believes that the government of Pakistan was either complicit or incompetent in his ability to hide in plain sight for so long. Problem: The killing of Osama Bin Laden has created a thousand Osama Bin Ladens, and thus we have ISIS today. An interesting point that she made was that of all the countries who have suffered from al Qaeda, Pakistan – the country who sheltered him, has suffered the most.

We had a quick lunch and then back to the theater for a very light hearted topic – the use of color in your wardrobe and how it makes you look. Three factors in your style – colors you wear, your shape and your personality. It was both entertaining and insightful and we were hoping she would talk to people about wearing socks with sandals, or stripes with plaids, but unfortunately the people who really needed the talk were not there. So it remains up the Fashion Police to stop this horror (whomever they, the FP may be – I only observe, I do not enforce)

In the afternoon we watched a movie, The Revenant, which we had heard many good things about. For us, knowing bit about hypothermia, we agreed, it certainly stretched the limits of credulity that this man survived for the number of days this supposedly covered. Not only that, to ride one's horse over a cliff and into a tree and dust yourself off and gut the horse and . . . I think I will leave it right there. There were so many far-fetched things – his avoiding deadly infection for one, but then there was the horse with a dead man on it leading the other horse. You had to wonder, how was he supposed to have made him giddy-up in a straight line? Gary summed it up best: I sure am glad we didn't pay for this movie. Other things we pondered were did Leonardo di Caprio have his pay cut since he never had to speak any intelligible lines and what does grunting pay in Hollywood now days?

We had dinner and went to bed early, worn out and cold from watching that movie, despite being in the tropics and sitting on our fannies all that time.

April 26, 2016

Dateline: South Atlantic Ocean

Latitude at Noon UTC+ 1 18.7 degrees South, Longitude 2.3 degrees East



Hot tub time

This is the second of eight days at sea and since we are moving through the tropics, it is getting warmer. We used the hot tub after breakfast since it is still cool enough to be appealing, and there we planned our day to spend some journal time and will hear more speakers.

While perusing the ship's daily bulletin we learned this nautical fact: Tonnage is a measure of the size of the cargo carrying capacity of a ship, not the weight of the ship. The term is derived from the taxation paid on "tuns" or casks of wine and was later used in reference to the weight of a ship's cargo, however in modern times it has come to mean the volume or cargo volume of a ship. Gross tonnage is the measure of the volume of all the ship's enclosed spaces. Net tonnage is a measure of the volume all the ship's cargo spaces.

Today we heard a lecture by the former US Ambassador to South Africa, Earl Irving, on what is referred to as the "Great Trek to the Transvaal". Once the Dutch were defeated, along with their French allies in the wars with Napoleon, control of the Western Cape fell to England. In the 1830's and 1840's, many of herdsmen, farmers and craftsmen, collectively referred to as Boers, decided to move into territory to the northeast. They just sort of pushed the people on the land, the Zulus, aside, and more or less homesteaded and created new republics. The term Transvaal means beyond the Vaal River. The people who made the journey were called Voortrekkers – a term roughly equivalent to that of pioneer. All went fairly well until the so called Boer Wars. The first one started in 1880 and only lasted 3 months when the British tried to annex some territory

of the newly formed republics and were quickly dispatched. The second one, for which they were better prepared, lasted from 1899 to 1902 and the Boers were defeated and were absorbed into the British Empire. Gold was discovered in this area of South Africa in 1886 so there was no way the British were going to let go of it.

After the Boer War the male prisoners of war were sent to the remote island of St Helena (the place where Napoleon was imprisoned almost a century earlier). Women and children were sent to concentration camps. Times were hard back then – with the average life expectancy at 53 for men and 54 for women.

At noon today we were inside the Tropic of Capricorn making almost 18 knots. We were 480 miles from the nearest landfall, the Island of St. Helena, having traveled 365 miles since noon yesterday. We are crossing the Angola Basin with a maximum depth of approximately 3.7 miles. It is one of the deepest in the world, but the Puerto Rico Trench which is over 5 miles deep has the distinction of being the deepest. However the Angola Basin is located on top of a fracture zone and continues to grow in depth as the tectonic plates shift and break apart. We will arrive at St. Helena tomorrow and will cruise past without stopping at their port. Winds are at 20 knots and the seas are moderate to rough. The air temperature was a very pleasant 76 degrees F and the sea was 68F.

In the afternoon the winds lessened and we attended a second lecture, this one by Peter Hawthorne, the journalist who wrote a number of pieces for Time magazine on African topics and also did work for the BBC. Today's lecture was on the life of Nelson Mandela and his auto-biography called The Long Walk to Freedom.

Mandela was born into the Xhosa (pronounced Cosa with a click or two added) in a small village called Mvezo and was one of 11 children. He became part of the African National Congress (ANC), which was banned by the government and this was how he

ended up imprisoned for most of his life. His original name Rolihlahla, but when he went to a British Methodist Missionary School, they did him the huge favor of calling him Nelson, as well as teaching him to speak English. He grew up amid a mix of Christian and tribal traditions. It was the custom at the time for the parents to pick out a wife for their sons. Nelson must have not liked their choice since he took off for Johannesburg and never came back to live in the village. He worked as a night watchman, and socialized in the few places where blacks could drink alcohol. He did attend a college for black men, where he was labeled a poor student and was eventually kicked out. He obtained most of his education, including a B.A. and a Law Degree as an adult while imprisoned.

Apartheid had been introduced in 1848 as officially the law of the land. Mandela, an admirer of Gandhi, embraced a policy of passive resistance to combat it. It was a crime for example for black people to go through a door marked for whites. Mandela was convicted of treason along with 150 other ANC members. In 1964 he was sent to Robben Island where he spent 18 years and was allowed one 30 minute visit per year with family or friends. While in prison it was said that he changed everyone he met, even the wardens.

When he was released, this slogan "One Man, One vote" came into use all over South Africa, propelling him to the Presidency of the country. Today South Africa is referred to as the Rainbow Nation, with the focus on equality of all colors, diversity and charity.

We attended another concert by the classical Violin and guitar duo, whom we enjoyed earlier in the voyage. He is Greek and she is Spanish and They met at the Royal Academy of Music and have traveled all over the world playing all sorts of music. Today's selection was Classical including Bach, Mozart and Pachelbel's Canon in D, which you hardly ever get to hear unless someone is getting married. It was truly beautiful

music in a great setting, the grand ballroom of the Queen Victoria, with the Atlantic Ocean rising and falling just outside the huge windows.

With sea days, we always have time to observe shipboard oddities which is always fun. We have sighted several Santas. The most Frequently sighted is the one I call Shakespeare Santa. He has snow white hair, bald on top with long sides just like the Bard of Avon. Also we keep seeing a woman pushing a wheel chair with no one in it. Now it could be that she is using it instead of a walker and then can sit in it when she wants, but I think the better story is that she has left her passenger somewhere and hasn't noticed he's missing.

We also have a dead ringer for George Washington, the powdery pony tail, the hawkish nose, the steely eyes, the stature – however this one is a woman. No word on a spouse who may or may not resemble Martha W.

Tomorrow we will have a “sail by” (although we are not a sailing vessel – it's just a term they use) of St. Helena Island, one of the most remote in the world and the former “home” to Napoleon when he was in exile. Although he lived in a house, he was a prisoner for all intents and purposes with no way off the island.

April 27, 2016

Dateline: South Atlantic, St. Helena Island

Latitude at Noon UTC+0, 16.2 South, Longitude 5.1 West

Overnight we crossed into the Western Hemisphere at Zero Degrees Latitude. We will be going further west to clear the western cape of Africa, before turning back east to finish up our cruise in the port of Southampton, England. We again set our clocks back and managed to sleep that hour away, just like we have the other five times we have set our clocks back. I had a pedicure scheduled and so I went to breakfast early, and

met Gary for a cribbage game before going in to hear two of the morning lectures. The morning was gray and overcast. We have traveled 448 miles since noon yesterday and are in water that is over 14,000 feet deep. At noon we would be 20 miles from the island of St. Helena and would sail by it from about 2:00 to 3:00. We were traveling at a speed of 18 knots and had a following wind of 15 to 20 knots. The air temperature was a balmy 75 degrees F and the sea was 77 degrees F.

The first lecturer was the style consultant we had seen two days ago, today talking about self image and our tendency to see the most negative things about ourselves when we look in a mirror. She also talked about body types for both men and women and a few pointers on how to make a part of your body look smaller (if you want too). Hint: Never, ever wear flowered prints on that body part that are any bigger than the width of your hand. I should go without saying that this is especially true if you are going to wear plaid someplace else on your body, but we've pretty much seen it all on this cruise.

The next speaker, on a much more serious note was Jane Corbin, the BBC correspondent. She talked about the Arab Spring, its causes and consequences and how events in the Middle East gave rise to Al Qaeda. We were thinking wishfully that if only this 20/20 hindsight could have been foresight for those in political power at the time.



On Deck for
the Cruise By

In the early afternoon we went out on the deck for “the sail” by of St. Helena Island. At first the clouds hung low and the visibility was poor, but as we rounded the west side, the sun came out and we were able to see the port of Jamestown on the northeast side of the island. St. Helena was the place of the exile and imprisonment of Napoleon Bonaparte, which given the fact that this is one of the most isolated islands in the world, it certainly took him off the board for military “hijinks” for a while. St. Helena was Great Britain’s version of Guantanamo Bay. They put Napoleon there so he could raise no more ruckus in Europe for a while. He was defeated in 1814 and sort of demoted , and sent to the island of Elba just off the coast of Italy, of which he was designated ruler along with a thousand troops. Not satisfied with that, he led them in battle against Britain once again, where was defeated at Waterloo, which is in current day Belgium. Since the demotion to Elba didn’t seem to dissuade him from warfare, the British decided they needed him to be even more remote and sent him to St. Helena, the British “Gitmo”.



St. Helena
Island

We had a “goose bumps” moment when our ship saluted the island with several long blasts and a few short ones of the ships whistled. We got a salute back from a supply vessel anchored in the harbor and two little orange pilot boats came out to ride along side us for a ways. As we cruised by we saw hundreds of flying fish (swimming and flying for their lives) and a number of dolphins playing right by the ship. The sun came out about then and created a magical afternoon – one of those

serendipity moments to remember. We continued on our northwesterly course toward our next "drive by", Ascension Island.

The world being a small one, as everyone acknowledges, we ran into a gentleman from a small town in Yorkshire England, whom we had met on the QE2 ten years ago. He invited us to his 80th Birthday Party to be held on board. He is the founder of the Duckling Club, a social organization among Cunard passengers. The official greeting from one member to another is two quacks and so is the response. It all got started in Darwin in 2001 when he met an Australian also traveling solo. Neither man knew the city so they agreed to explore together, and then a single woman joined them, and soon more single travelers were tagging along. Someone commented they followed him like ducks and thus the club was formed. He is still collecting friends and organizing trips ashore but he has to limit it to 8 to be able to manage it. There are 1700 members and he invited us to join and to come to his birthday party. He has over 2000 days cruising with Cunard and has amassed a large circle of friends..

April 28, 2016

Dateline: South Atlantic between the Islands of St. Helena and Ascension

Latitude at Noon UTC + 0, 11.9 South, Longitude 10.1 West.

We had another leisurely morning and afternoon, as sea days tend to be, including time on the Promenade Deck prior to a couple of lectures. The first was a very interesting lecture on the Afrikaaners, mostly descendants of Dutch settlers who both created and ended, along with Nelson Mandela, apartheid, the system and laws of segregation, with substantial benefit to whites and deprivation to black.

Afrikaaners (pronounced "Ahh-Free-Kah-ners" with emphasis on

"kah") were a white "tribe" of former Dutch Colonists who came to South Africa 350 years ago from Holland to work for the Dutch East India Company, the world's first multi-national trading company which essentially held employees in bondage. These employees and their children gained their independence from the company and became farmers, called free burghers. The French Huguenots, Protestants fleeing oppression in France by the Catholic Church, expanded inland and introduced vineyards in the countryside in Stellenbosch and surrounding areas. The aboriginal people, the Khoikhoi (pronounced "koikoi"), were essentially pushed aside by the colonists, taking the land in the name of the Dutch East India Company. Afrikaanders touted themselves as the superior race. Mixed race people were referred to as colored, but today it does not take on the pejorative aspect that the word has in the US. Seventy percent of African family had a black relative in the 1970's, yet the notion of white superiority still held sway.

In the second Boer War, the Boers lost 4,000, and the British lost 23,000, but the eventual result was a British victory. A young Winston Churchill was captured by the Boers, but escaped. Eight years later the British declared that South Africa would be a self governing dominion of Great Britain and more or less washed their hands of non-whites. The British were focused on gold and diamonds and the best way to ensure they could hang on to as much of it as possible.

The South African whites fully embraced apartheid and became an international pariah as their treatment of blacks became known world-wide. Apartheid policies included such atrocities as banning physical contact between blacks and whites during sporting events, white only restaurants and shops, making sex between white and other races a violation of the law. Whites could be kicked out of the Commonwealth for associating with a colored people. Frederik DeKlerk was the president in power from 1989 to 1994 when South Africa first started backing away from many of the apartheid rules and a move toward the

policy of one man, one vote. Then Nelson Mandela was elected in 1994 and South Africa dramatically changed for the better for good.

The second talk was by the style consultant who talked about much more frivolous things such as how different body shapes should dress. In addition to the typical Apple, (she called inverted triangle), Pear (Triangle) and Hourglass (same size top and bottom with smaller waist), she added Diamond (small top, small bottom, weight around the middle at the waistline) and Round (large all over). She also did the color thing and determined that I am a spring and so must rush home and throw away all the black and brown that my closet is full of – or just wear a scarf with it in the right colors.

At noon today our speed was 17 knots. Since noon yesterday we have traveled 408 miles. We have another 350 to go to reach Ascension Island where we will do a cruise by, taking us off our course for about 15 miles. We have had increased cloudiness and periods of rain with the convergence of the Southeast Trade Winds and the Northeast Trade Winds in what is called the Inter-Tropical Convergence Zones. Seas were moderate with low swells. The air temperature was 79F and the Sea was 81F.

This afternoon we enjoyed some deck time, the Country Fayre and lunch, followed by our usual brisk walk, shower and dinner. The “fayre” is a charity event put on by passengers and crew to raise money for selected Cunard Charities including the RNLI (the Royal Navy Lifeboat Institute) which provides rescue services for the British Isles. It is a combination rummage sale (jumble sale they call it) where people can donate clothing items, costume jewelry, handicrafts made by on-board knitters. There were also guessing games (how many jelly beans are in the jar, what does the cake weigh, which gemstone is the fake and so forth. A favorite was Splat the Rat whereby contestants attempt to hit a carrot shot out of a tube with a rubber hammer. There was a silent auction

for ship memorabilia, one minute seated massages offered, and smoothies and pastries to buy. Gary and I both donated a pair of shoes we did not love and did not care to haul back home. We were not sure if they sold, but in any event we did donate, plus we bought some tickets for the games of chance, so we feel we have done our bit for the RNLI.

Tomorrow we will arrive at Ascension Island, another out of the way spot we have never visited. The adventure continues.