

Antarctic trip diary, Part 11

1/10/07

Why are 150 supposedly intelligent adults standing in dim twilight on the outside forward deck at 5AM with a cold wind and rain blowing in our faces? We want to watch the captain navigate the White Narrows, a tortuous narrow channel that can only be transited at high slack tide. It was quite a sight watching the ship pick its way through the passage. One by one, most of us realized that it was too dark for photos so we went to watch this from the inside observation deck. The remaining 100 or so passengers probably stayed in bed figuring that if the captain missed the turn, the crunch of the ship against the rocks would wake them. And if that didn't, the seven long blasts of the ship's horn (head to your muster stations, now!) certainly would. After the passage was cleared, we went back to bed and slept for another hour or so.

After breakfast, we headed up Estero las Montanas, a fiord with cliffs of amazing rock formations with many glaciers oozing their way down. Each one seemed more beautiful than the last and I was again thankful for digital cameras as I madly clicked away. The water has an aquamarine hue to it from all the glacier flour (ground up rock) deposited by the glaciers. The ship's geologist told us over the loudspeaker how to read glaciers: a ridge of boulders and gravel marks the point of greatest advance and the amount of time they have been receding can be estimated by the size of the vegetation in front of the leading edge. With few exceptions (sadly), most of the recession appeared to be quite recent.

This afternoon the expedition staff held an auction with the proceeds going to charity. One of the items was a yellow jacket Marco, one of the expedition staff, wore. Sandie was ready to bid until she found out Marco did not come with the jacket. Now if it had been Elke's jacket, I



would have felt very generous in my charitable bidding. Yes, some of the expedition staff are definitely eye candy. And if you're too old to appreciate it, you're probably too old to be doing Antarctic expeditions.

1/11/07

Today we spent slowly cruising through the fiords -- never ending vistas of glaciers, cliffs and waterfalls. Patagonia is different than Antarctica, but similar in that it is beautiful in a stark primordial kind of way. The wildlife here is dominated by seabirds, many of them albatrosses. In Patagonia, you can have all four seasons in one day, sometimes even in a couple of hours: winter sleet, spring breezes, summer sunshine and cold fall winds announcing the coming of winter again. But they often come in a random order.

Stefan, one of the expedition staff, is a very gifted photographer and he spent a lot of his spare time on this trip taking photos. This afternoon he had a slide show of his photos and will be selling a CD with them, the proceeds going to charity. Buying one is a no-brainer.

This will be the last entry from on the road; we have to pack up and get ready for an early departure tomorrow. In the morning, we visit a wild life preserve with a Magellanic penguin rookery and the afternoon is a charter flight to Santiago. The next morning has a visit to a Chilean winery followed by a trip to the airport where we spend a lot of quality time waiting for our flight back to the real world. Speaking of which, part of the magic of this trip, in addition to the awesome scenery, was that we completely dropped out of the real world. Since we left two and one half weeks ago, we have not seen a newspaper, TV broadcast or even the ship's 1 page summary of world news which they have in the library. Other than hearing a story about some guy in Iraq and a rope, we are totally out of touch with the world. And it is very nice.

