

Antarctic trip diary, Part 6

1/4/07

I woke up this morning to the nice gentle rocking that let me know we had left the protection of the islands off the western side of Antarctic peninsula. We had rounded the northern tip of the peninsula and were headed toward the Weddell Sea. Out the window through the mist were tabular icebergs that had broken off the Larsen ice shelf, which lies further south in this sea. Sadly, the shelf has shrunk dramatically in recent years from global warming. This makes me angry because those who should show some leadership on this issue instead have their heads stuck up where the sun don't shine. As we headed into the straits, the swells decreased but the wind and chop picked up making the issue of landing at Brown Bluff dicey. Gradually, conditions improved so we were able to go ashore.

Brown Bluff is an imposing brown cliff with a stony beach in front of it. Several huge boulders of the same sedimentary rocks as the cliffs were scattered around the beach. Forces of nature had shaped these boulders into the most beautiful shapes. Between the boulders and the icebergs, I have seen more beautiful sculpt in the past few days than I would in a year visiting the world's museums. We can imitate nature, but we'll never best it.



Brown Bluff is really all about penguins, acres and acres of them; mostly Adelies but also quite a few Gentoos. The chicks here were much bigger, probably because, being further north, breeding had started sooner. The Adelies are the comics of the penguin world so the shore time was spent just watching them, up very close, as they bicker and waddle and generally go about the business of raising the next generation. It was interesting watching them bunch up on shore because no one wanted to be first to jump in the water; you never know if there is a leopard seal lurking off shore. Finally, one jumps or is pushed and the rest of the pack follows immediately. A fun morning and I hated to return to the ship.

