

Antarctica Triplog December 6 – 22

December 6 (latitudes: Chicago 43 ° 84 ' N. Miami 25 ° 79 ' N) Flew to Miami and stayed near the airport at the Hilton overnight. We arrived late enough that we just rested and got to sleep early. This was a really smart thing to do, and we were able to start the trip feeling really rested.

December 7 Because of our early night, we had a leisurely breakfast at the hotel and got to the airport by 9am. Flew to Buenos Aires (34 ° 60 ' S) and stayed downtown at the Hilton overnight. The flight was uneventful, and arrived about 10:45 pm. We were met by a driver and a representative from Abercrombie and Kent, who filled us in on what would happen in Buenos Aires, gave us an information packet, and took us to the Hilton. They were very impressed that we had read all the information that A&K had sent us and remembered it. When we checked in we were pretty tired, but repacked our luggage for the hot days in Buenos Aires (it was in the 80's) and got to sleep about 1am local time. We had lost 3 hours since leaving Chicago, so our bodies were really not yet all that interested in sleep.

December 8 We had a relaxed morning, with breakfast in the hotel lounge, and then walked in the area. We tried to get money from several ATMs, but it was a holiday, so the ATMs were out of money, and we finally got some from the hotel desk. Also the museums we wanted to go to were not open. We walked across the Calatrava pedestrian bridge and over to the Plaza de Mayo and around the square, including the Casa Rosada, the president's office building, which is pink, and the cathedral. In the cathedral a service was going on and we didn't want to interrupt. We got back to the hotel and finished packing, then took a taxi over to the Sofitel where we were meeting the tour.

When we got to the Sofitel, our room was not ready, which was what we expected, but we found our friend Ann Perinchief (who had joined the tour after hearing about it from us) and went to the café with her to have a late lunch. About 3:10 the hotel staff came to the café and told us our room was ready. We arranged to meet Ann for dinner at 6:30 and went to the room to get settled. Ann called at 4:30 and had just gotten into her room and decided that she would skip dinner.

The Hilton is in a popular area that has a lot of new architecture. The area around the Sofitel is totally different, older, but very clean and with interesting buildings, and clearly where the money is in Buenos Aires. For example, as we were walking back from dinner, we passed a shop that had three silver tea services on beautiful wood tables, and that was the complete display for that shop.

About 5 or 6 blocks from the Sofitel is a small area under a highway overpass with 10 restaurants, 5 on each side of the street, with all but two of them pretty upscale. The walk to the area is along gorgeous old buildings that are well kept up, and the people on the street are in suits, and the women wearing lots of expensive looking jewelry, plus more casual people like us. We picked the restaurant that looked best for small amounts of food, since we weren't very hungry, and just ordered appetizers. This worked out very well.

While we were there, we had some interesting street theater on the block of the street with the restaurants. Two cars pulled up on the other side of the street, and started alternately backing up and pulling forward in unison. This went on for a few minutes, then they did a U turn and did the same thing on our side of the street. Finally they parked illegally, with their flashers flashing, and then the guy got out of the front car and went back to the second car, and they talked for a while. They were fat and wearing extremely expensive black suits and haircuts...we said, "bodyguards". Then we realized that there were 5 or 6 of these guys walking up and down the block, peering into the restaurants and pretending to be looking at an art exhibit on the sidewalk. This went on for a while, with the guys talking on cell phones occasionally, etc. Then finally a very expensive looking couple pulled up on the wrong side of the street and got out of their car. The bodyguards got hyper alert, and the woman walked a few paces off while the man had a meeting with another guy who was not one of the bodyguards. He drove off and the couple went into one of the restaurants across the street. We decided that he was either a very high politician or mobster or just very rich and had lots of bodyguards. The bodyguards paid us no attention at all when we left.

December 9 We overslept, so went down later than we had intended to the official breakfast with the rest of the tour group. Ann was still there, and we arranged with her to do a walking tour and have lunch before coming back to the hotel for the official bus tour of the city from 2 to 6 pm.

We had a nice walk from the Sofitel. We looked at restaurants along the streets for a place to have lunch, but ended up at a modern shopping mall, which was decorated for Christmas (including a Santa for the children), where we had an interesting lunch that included a "pumpkin cake" ... a thick pumpkin thing rolled in bird seed. Fortunately I took a picture of it, since I can't find a recipe on google. I went to a book store in the mall; they didn't have the books I wanted in Spanish, but they did have some CD's and the worker was very helpful when Steve asked him questions in Spanish.

On the walk we passed the area where Steve had broken his hip 13 years ago. Now it has a corrugated iron barricade around the wall. We didn't set out to go to "the wall", but we were looking at a ship that we wanted to see, and the direction we were going looked like the way to get down to it...just like 13 years ago.

On the bus tour, we got a much better overview of the city than we had before, and visited areas that we would never have gone to on our own. We had three stops: a cemetery, Cementerio de la Recoleta, that had a lot of the cultural history of the city (and was a bit bizarre...the monument for Eva Peron is there, for example, considered a "must see"); the cathedral area that we had already been to in Plaza de Mayo; and an art area, Boca del Rio, that was really more junk than art, but reminded us of one of the community art districts in Havana. The walls of the buildings were painted in bright colors and there were a couple of people in costumes pretending to dance the tango. They drove us through the embassy area (very ritzy) and along the dock area that has been converted to high-rent shops. The environmentalist Jim McClintock (who was our main speaker on the ship) was on our bus, so of course we introduced ourselves and presented our "environmental street creds". He was really nice and seemed happy to meet fellow academics.

At the reception at the hotel that night, Steve was chatting with him and a tour member came up and started arguing that there was no such thing as climate change. Obviously, he hadn't read the book (or ever read a book.) The reception was fun but noisy. People kept talking over the poor A&K organizer who was trying to make announcements.

Our luggage was picked up outside our door around 9 pm, and we checked on it to make sure it was put in the right luggage stack. It was put on a truck and on the way to the airport at 2 am, and we next saw it in our cabin on the ship. We tried to get some sleep since we had to be up at 4 am for breakfast at 4:30 and the bus for the airport at 5:45, but there was a big thunderstorm and I woke up at 2:30 and couldn't go back to sleep.

December 10 (Ushuaia 54 ° 80 ' S) Because we were awake so early, we had plenty of time to get ourselves together, get breakfast, check out and get to the bus to the airport.

I don't actually remember much about our flight to Ushuaia, except that there was cloud cover most of the flight. It was a charter flight and the plane had been bought from American Airlines (we recognized the seats...they had not bothered to change the seat covers) so we were in an environment that we were used to. Since it was a charter, they didn't even bother to speak Spanish, but gave all of the announcements in English.

When we landed, we were loaded onto a bus and driven around Ushuaia, which is pretty small, being the southernmost city in the world. Peron, in his day, worked hard at increasing the population by opening a prison and developing some industries (household appliances, for example) and more recently, the country has developed factories to build Sony tablets, etc., to supply Argentina instead of importing them from Mexico. Along the harbor are the cruise ships at a dock, and then along the coast, a lot of shipping containers stacked up. There are a few buildings with very interesting architecture (seemingly Norse influence) and then the prison building and so forth are just block style buildings. Because of the recent influx of residents, there is not enough housing, which means that people are building their own houses (pretty ramshackle) on state land, and then demanding services (water, sewer, etc.)...they are basically squatters.

For lunch we were taken to a brand new hotel, the Arakur, that isn't completely finished; but the restaurant is ready, and we were offered huge quantities of food. The hotel is on the top of a hill and they have protected vast areas around the hotel including lots of forest. There is a really lovely walk through the forest that ends at the peak of the hill with an amazing view over to the mountains, with touches of snow on them, and down to the town. Also at the restaurant, they "checked us in" to the ship, taking our passports and giving us room cards to our cabins that we would swipe to leave or return to the ship, buy anything, or to get into our rooms.

At 4pm, we started the bus ride back down to the harbor and our ship. When we got to the dock, they welcomed us with glasses of champagne and sent us off to our nice clean cabins. Our luggage, boots, parkas, and backpacks were all there, and we were told to try everything on to make sure it fitted since we couldn't trade them once the ship left dock. The boots were a little tight on my calves, but I decided that they would be ok, and the parka had sleeves that were pretty long. We rented the boots, since I was not particularly interested in lugging them home. Since the parka and

backpack were included in the trip price, we knew we would take them back with us. As it turned out, I really loved the boots and they fit perfectly when we were out. By this point, we were a bit punchy from lack of sleep, but excited to be on the ship.

At 6pm we had the required emergency drill, where we all put on life vests and went to the theater and heard about the safety procedures. We walked past our lifeboat on the way back to our cabin (Each of the two lifeboats holds 150 people.) Then at 7pm we had an introduction to the crew and ship, also in the theater. (It's just like a fancy movie theater with red plush seats...it even has cup holders at each seat...except they give you wine as you enter. I'm not sure how that's supposed to improve your retention of important information, but it did make everyone happy.) It was a very large crew that included "our" environmentalist, photographers, a geologist, an ornithologist, etc., who all encouraged us to ask questions any time. And all would be giving lectures during the trip.

The bad news was that there was a big weather system moving along the Drake Passage with hurricane strength winds; so we did not leave port until 8am the next morning. (We were originally scheduled to leave that night.) But the good news was that there was time in the schedule to avoid the heavy seas and still get to the sites that we wanted; and we were all for an easier passage. I really didn't want to use the anti-seasick patches unless we had to.

After the crew introduction, we had dinner in the main dining room. I had some amazing potatoes and cabbage, and my dessert was a chocolate tart with ice cream (it said walnut ice cream, but I'm not sure about that...)

December 11 The ship did start out at exactly 8am. And Steve and I immediately went back to sleep for another half hour. We had a huge breakfast, wonderful over-easy eggs and great bread and cheese. We were told that as long as we were in the Beagle Channel, there would only be mild waves; then at 12 when we got to the ocean it would pick up and we would have about 15-foot waves. The first thing we did after breakfast was to put away everything in the cabin that might slide or break, and housekeeping moved our balcony wicker furniture into the cabin (fortunately it was pretty small, but it was a small cabin so it did get in the way.). We went out on deck and watched the birds; and also went back up on deck between the various lectures.

The first lecture was at 10 am, on "Seabirds of the Southern Ocean". The ornithologist showed lots of photos of birds to help us identify them. The second lecture was at 11:30 on the geology of Antarctica, continental drift, volcanos, etc. with very pretty pictures of the continental shelves.. About 12, we could feel the theater start to move, so we were clearly out in the ocean. After this lecture was lunch, and we could really see the height of the waves. After lunch we went back out on deck briefly and then came to the cabin. At this point the waves were more like 30 feet high. Steve went off at 3pm for a lecture on the early explorers, and I started watching it on streaming video in the cabin and immediately fell asleep and slept through the whole thing. And we did the same thing for the 5pm lecture on photography. Steve spent a lot of time out watching birds while I was sleeping.

At 7pm was an Expedition Recap of the day, and it turned out that we were in a Beaufort force 10 storm with over 50 mph winds. This is just about the worst level of storm that the ship can still cross in, which gave us real bragging rights. We were glad

to be on this ship...it has modern “aileron” stabilizers, so 30-foot waves just moved the ship up and down (no rolling) and occasionally caused things to slide off tables. In dock in Ushuaia we saw the ship that National Geographic uses, and that we had originally tried to book. It’s a much smaller, older ship, so we were glad that we ended up on the newer ship.

We were very careful at dinner, because of the waves, and I just had soup and cheese and lots of water. After dinner we went to the lounge area to look out the windows at the birds. No one was allowed out on deck or on their balconies during this storm, of course.

December 12 We had a lot of sleep that night, and in the morning the waves weren’t as high as the previous afternoon. They still had the decks closed off, and we were not supposed to go out on our balconies or take showers yet, but I did take a shower...very carefully. At 9:30 the first lecture was on Marine Mammals. We went back to the cabin and then went to the second lecture on birds at 11:15. Lunch started at 12:30, and we sat around talking for a while. Steve went up to look for birds. While we were in the lounge in the afternoon, we were hit by a rogue wave about 100-feet high. Very exciting. Dishes were broken, a large heavy bowl of popcorn went flying, but everyone was fine. And boy do we have bragging rights.

The next lecture was at 3pm, by the environmentalist, Jim McClintock, and then at 5pm we had a mandatory briefing about conservation rules for behavior on shore. Plus they told us what sights to expect when we got to Antarctica the next day. It sounded like there had been a lot of snow and the penguins had just laid their eggs. We would see eggs but not as many chicks.

At 7 pm was the captain’s cocktail party and at 7:45 the captain’s dinner. At the cocktail party, we were sent into the auditorium with drinks, and waiters came around with trays of hors d’oeuvres. It was odd because the seats restricted movement between groups. We just sat down with Ann and talked with people right around us. The Captain gave a welcome speech and presented the main officers, who were all in their dress uniforms. Then we went to dinner. The dinner was 6 courses (fortunately small, but all good), including a sorbet. It was not formal; but people did seem to go out of their way to wear something a little nicer than usual. A few men, including Steve, had brought jackets and ties.

December 13. At about 4 am we crossed the Antarctic Convergence into Antarctica territory. We slept through it, and when we woke up there were various sizes of ice blocks in the water. The winds were much calmer now. We got to the Antarctic Sound (63 ° 20 ' S) about 10 am; there were lots of ice-capped hills, large icebergs, and an occasional island. It was sunny, though occasionally there were some clouds. The ship went as far as it could until it met sea ice that blocked the passage. The wind was still a little high, so they decided we couldn’t do a water tour on the Zodiacs. We were pretty disappointed, thinking that we would not get an expedition at all. But the Captain took us back to Brown Bluff and it turned out that conditions were the best in a couple of years, and the winds weren’t as strong, and the landing could take place. Brown Bluff is on the mainland, so when we stepped out of the Zodiac we were on mainland Antarctica!!! (63 ° 30.88 ' S). Even more exciting was the fact that there were lots of penguin

rookeries, with two types of brushtail penguins, Adelies and Gentoos. Many were sitting on their nests, incubating their eggs, and a few chicks had just started to hatch, so we got to see one baby being fed by its mother or father. Also, the small icebergs in the bay were really beautiful. After this we had a briefing and dinner. The ship then headed west overnight toward Half Moon Island.

December 14. We were up at 5:30 am, and were surprised to see that we were still underway. We made jokes that they had decided to keep going north and take us back across the Drake Passage. Fortunately, we soon saw Livingston Island (62 ° 36 ' S), a fairly large island in the South Shetland group, and we knew that Half Moon Island was off the coast of Livingston. At about 5:50 am we had a fairly quick breakfast, got into our gear, and at 7:00 am we were on a Zodiac out to Half Moon Island.

It's a beautiful little rocky island full of Chinstrap Penguins, so we had now seen all three of the brushtailed penguins in their natural habitat. They were at the top end of the island; and in the other direction (which was a fairly easy slope but we kept sinking into the snow as we walked) there were two Weddell seals just lying on the snow. Conveniently, one of them lifted its head and started scratching its flippers together just as I was making a movie of it. And when we got back to the Zodiac, a young seal had pulled up onto the beach, and was just lying there resting.

At 12, we had a recap and briefing, then lunch. We were underway during lunch, on our way to Deception Island (62 ° 59 ' S) where we saw more penguins and seals.

We were taken out on the Zodiac at 5pm. While we were in line for the Zodiac we started chatting with the couple behind us in the line. He said he had been born in West Virginia. Ann, Steve, and I all started laughing, and he gave us a funny look, so I explained that I had been born in West Virginia. His parents had been born in Marlinton and he had actually been there.

On Deception we were able to hike down a lava beach. There were Gentoo and Chinstrap penguins just wandering the beach, porpoising in the water, and wandering on the granular lava beds that filled the space between the shore and the hills. At one point we were able to leave the shore and climb a hill to see down the other side, which was a bit strenuous because we were first climbing in snow and then on rock (that area was much steeper). Also, our boots were so heavy that it made any walking a little difficult. We had a limited view across to the Antarctic Peninsula, and a view up of lots of birds flying around their nests and down to the sea washing into a cove. There was a Weddell seal just lying in the snow at the fork where we started the climb to the view. We saw lots of birds, especially skua and Pintados (cape petrels). Since there is a geothermal spring on Deception, some people swam in the warmer, but still very cold, water; but not us. Deception Island is the remains of a caldera and we were in one section on the inside. It snowed on us most of the day, but a very light snow that just collected in sunglasses that were hanging around my neck, etc.

By the way, all of the sites we visited are protected, as is all of Antarctica. The crew went out first and marked off with flags the area that we are allowed to walk in. We had to stay 5 meters from the animals (but of course they can come closer if they want to...fortunately, they often wanted to.). And we were not allowed to take or leave anything while on the islands.

And a bit about clothing. I loved the boots. On these outings, we wore two pairs of socks, one silk and one very thick wool, that come to the knees, three layers of pants, starting with a silk base layer, a mid layer, a top layer and then a waterproof layer, wool hats and two layers of gloves. The first day we needed all of these, and were warm but dry; but here we were sweating from the climb. All the layers dried very quickly once we were back in the room.

When we were all back on board, the Captain circumnavigated the inside of the caldera and then we sailed south toward the Gerlache Strait.

December 15 We started the day in the Gerlache Strait (64 ° 30 ' S). We had planned to sleep in, since our Zodiac tour didn't start until 9am, but at 7am the captain announced that there were two humpback whales sleeping in the water near the ship. We got our clothes on and went on deck to take photos until the whales swam away. There were a few penguins in the water (there were both Gentoo and Chinstrap) and lots of beautiful small icebergs. We had breakfast, and then were taken on a Zodiac tour of the bay near Enterprise Island (64 ° 32 ' S). The first stop was the same two humpback whales, now sleeping near some of the little icebergs. We watched them for a while, then found some penguins and terns, and some Crabeater Seals lying on one of the little icebergs. They actually eat krill, not crabs. Before sailing on, we spotted two Minke whales (they were far enough away that I couldn't get a photo). As we got underway, we could see lots of beautiful small icebergs and some penguins swimming. Steve had gone up on deck and I was taking a lot of photos of the icebergs from our balcony. The captain announced two more whales, so I went up on deck so fast that I didn't think to take my coat. I was cold, but it was worth it.

Our next stop was Cuverville Island (64 ° 41 ' S), which is very small. The land close to the sea is covered with Gentoo colonies, with the Gentoos racing around, stealing each others' nest rocks, talking to each other, sliding into the sea, etc. We couldn't see any chicks, but lots of the penguins were incubating eggs. We were able to walk in the snow a pretty long distance down the island and get a good look at several of the colonies. On our way back to the ship, in the Zodiac, we were taken around the bay to look at the different small icebergs that had run aground in the bay.

The day had been incredible and it got better. Just as we were sitting down to dinner, and the dining room was pretty much full, the Captain announced that there was a school of 100 or more Orcas ("killer whales") approaching the ship, including some babies. Everyone rushed up to the decks and took photos for an hour, then went back down to the dining room.

It was really incredible to see such a huge pod of Orcas all together, not to mention that they were ORCAS and there were BABIES!!! I'm not sure I could tell the babies from the adults. I would be focusing the camera in one area and suddenly realize that an Orca was coming up in another area. They surrounded the ship about 100 yards away. They weren't surfacing on any regular pattern, which made it hard to know where the next one would surface. We finally finished dinner and went to bed.

December 16 We woke up at 6:45 am to find that the ship was at the beginning of the Lemaire Channel (65 ° 4 ' S). We threw on our clothes and rushed out on deck. Because of all of the ice, we moved very slowly.

After an hour we still weren't in the channel, so we decided to go have a quick breakfast. When we got back out on deck, we still weren't really in the channel, so we felt like we really hadn't missed anything. The channel runs between the mainland and some islands, with a very narrow passage. During the time we spent in the channel, we saw several seals, including a leopard seal. We think most of the seals we saw were Crabeaters. We also saw penguins in the water several times. Fortunately, the ice had shifted enough so that the ship could get through the icebergs, and we made it all the way through. That was our furthest south, 65 ° 6.94 ' S.

At the end of the Channel, there was too much sea ice to lower the Zodiacs, so we turned around and went back through the channel. We got back to the north end of the channel about 11 am (because of all the ice, we had to move pretty slowly). They decided that it really wouldn't work to lower the Zodiacs into the sea ice at the north end, either, plus it would delay the afternoon schedule. We then headed north toward Paradise Bay. We had a briefing at noon and then lunch. During the briefing they told us the schedule for the rest of the day and the next. Palmer Station was iced in, so we couldn't get in. Too bad, since this had been planned to be the gift shop visit and place to mail postcards. Instead, we got an expedition to Brown Station.

At 3pm we took the Zodiac to Brown Station (64 ° 53 ' S) on the mainland, which gave us a second mainland Antarctica landing. This station is still used by Chile in the summer, but was not open yet. There were lots of Gentoo colonies around the bits and pieces of the station. The station itself was a bit strange to see, after we had seen no human buildings for a while. Basically the island has a little peak covered in snow, and we could climb as high as we wanted to. The snow was a couple of feet deep, so when our feet sank in, it was hard to pull out again (especially with our wonderful, heavy boots). We climbed up about a third of the way to where we could see down into a little bay, and we had a good view of glaciers. After we visited the penguins, we went back to the Zodiac for a tour of the bigger bay, and a Minke whale swam through. We could only see its back. On the Zodiac tour, we were shown a Cormorant (Antarctica shag or blue shag) nesting area and saw at least one chick being fed. Lots of the birds were nesting, but it was up a cliff, so hard to tell whether they had eggs or chicks. We were also able to see Adelie penguins and cormorants resting on an ice floe. It was a beautiful bay with lots of icebergs. Our driver for the Zodiac was one of the naturalists and really funny. One of his jokes was that the staff of the ship is bipolar. (They spend half the year in the north pole area and the other half of the year in the south pole area). As we approached a large iceberg, we saw two Zodiacs stopped and fastened together: we pulled up, and one of the Zodiacs had some staff members handing out champagne. This was a nice surprise for A&K to give us.

Back on board we cleaned up and had dinner.

December 17 We anchored in the Errera Channel off the western coast of Graham Land so we could do an excursion to a small island, Danco (64 ° 42 ' S), which is close to the mainland. Our Zodiac left the ship about 9 am and landed on a very rocky beach. The rocks were from 4 to 6 inches in diameter up to a couple of feet, including a few larger ones that we could sit comfortably on. Gentoo penguins were going in and out of the water along the beach, walking along the beach, and climbing up and down the snow-covered hill between their rookeries and the water. Their tracks have created

penguin “highways” up and down the hill. We just stood and watched. It was about 36 degrees while we were on the island, so at times we were too hot in all our gear and actually unzipped our coats and took off our hats. But when there was wind or the sun went behind a cloud, it was cold again and we zipped back up. The penguins were hot, and ate snow or slid on the snow to cool off. When we finally left the island, we were given a brief tour of the bay in the Zodiac, and saw a Weddell Seal sleeping on a small iceberg.

When we got back to the ship we took quick showers and went up to a BBQ lunch, which was served out on deck. We were freezing, so ate as quickly as we could. The idea was to give us a view of the narrow part of the Errera Channel that we were moving through, but we were so cold that we couldn't enjoy it. We got some dessert and brought it back to the cabin (apple tart and chocolate mousse...an interesting combination) and discovered that Steve's camera was missing. After half an hour of searching, the crew found it, so all was well. (It wasn't the camera that I was worried about, but the memory card that had all his photos on it!) The crew took funny pictures of themselves before returning the camera, to give us a “souvenir”. We then sailed toward the historic British base, Port Lockroy and were in some interesting “brash ice”.

At Port Lockroy (64 ° 49 ' S) the ship crew was going to mail our postcards, and we were going to shop; but the ice had blocked the entrance to the station so we couldn't get in. They decided that even if they could have gotten a Zodiac into the station, it would have taken an hour each way, would have been unsafe, and we might not have gotten out again.) The crew was amazingly apologetic about the fact that we missed Port Lockroy, but we could see that they were completely right to avoid trapping us in the ice at the station. We headed for the Melchior Islands, hoping to do a Zodiac tour once there.

As we went through the Neumayer Channel, the landscape was dramatic. We were pretty close to the hills on each side, with stark black rocks and white ice and snow coverage. We were in brash ice a lot, which slowed us down, and we could see the water freezing around little ice floes as we passed through them. Steve managed to find a couple of seals on ice floes. We think one was a leopard seal, but we're not sure about the other.

We weren't sure what was going to happen. Then the Captain announced two humpback whales, and we rushed up to the deck. They played with us for a while. Then the Captain announced that the Zodiacs would be lowered to go to the whales. We watched the two whales a few more minutes, then went to our cabin to put on our expedition clothes.

This was an amazing Zodiac trip. We chased after the whales and they were playing with us. They zigzagged through the area and would suddenly pop up behind us after they had been in front of us. This went on for a while and then they found a krill area and settled there for a while to feed.

When we got back to the ship we changed and went to dinner as quickly as possible, as the ship started back into the Drake Passage. We felt the swell right away. The Captain correctly predicted that it would be much smoother than on the way down, and neither of us needed to put on the anti-seasick patch again.

December 18 A very restful passage, with lots of eating and talking and watching for birds. Mostly we saw petrels. The naturalists were out on deck, so could tell us what the different birds were. There were talks during the day, but I skipped them all and just relaxed. We had to return our wonderful boots. I finally decided that they were too big and heavy to carry back to Chicago, so turned them in, but I've missed them (especially as I type this when there is a blizzard raging outside in Chicago). The Captain's farewell reception and dinner were in the evening, and it was fun to relax and talk about all the things we had done on the trip.

December 19. The crossing continued to be smooth and restful, sometimes even calm and placid. We saw Wandering Albatross, Blackbrowed Albatross, and Greyheaded Albatross during the morning from the top deck of the ship, and more Cape Petrels and some Chilean Skua. There were again naturalists on deck to help us identify the different birds. We took tons of photos; and they turned out better than I expected, since the ship was moving, the birds were moving, the sea was moving... We had a disembarkation briefing before lunch and a preview of the trip DVD. As we entered the Beagle Channel we saw more birds, but not the Albatross nesting in the cliffs, or the Magellanic Penguins that we had hoped to see. We docked during dinner, then put our checked luggage outside the door to be sent off to the airport. (We didn't see it again until we picked it up in Buenos Aires.)

December 20 We were up early for breakfast and left the ship at 8:15 am. We waited in the lounge until they called our group, then boarded a bus for a drive to the Tierra del Fuego National Park. At the park we had a drive through a very pretty forest, with lakes and a few birds, including black-headed swans in two of the lakes and some geese. I had heard of black headed swans, but never seen them, of course. We stopped for a view back over the Beagle Channel, with a photo op at the "end of the world" and at the park Visitor's Center for chocolate cake before heading for the airport.

The flight was uneventful, but delayed, and on the same plane that brought us down to Ushuaia. When we got to Buenos Aires it took a long time to collect the luggage; but our driver from the hotel was waiting for us and got us to the hotel pretty quickly. We had food in the lounge and rearranged the luggage a little. On the ship, I had packed the tropical clothes and the clothes we would need to get back to Chicago on the top layers in the suitcase.

December 21 A long uneventful flight to Miami. Even customs was uneventful and we were through in half-an-hour. Overnight at the Miami Airport Hilton.

December 22 Uneventful flight home.



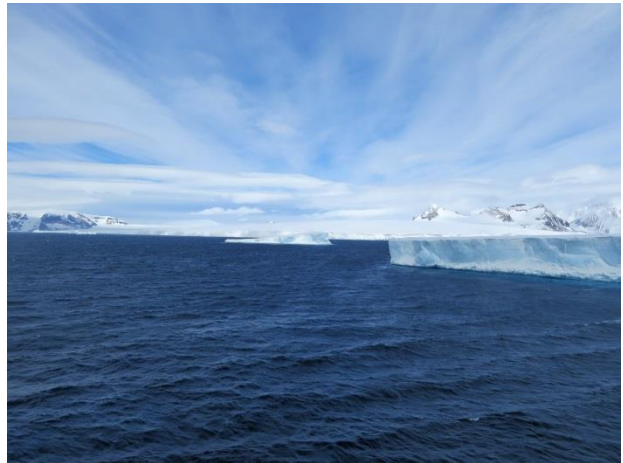
Tree hugging in Patagonia



Above Ushuaia



Safety drill on board the ship



Antarctica with icebergs in front



On our 7th Continent!



Adelie Penguin rookery on Brown Bluff



Adelle penguin on Brown Bluff



Adelle chick with parent



Weddell seal on Half Moon Island



Gentoo penguins on Half Moon Island



On Half Moon Island



Chinstrap penguin on Deception Island



Squa sleeping on Deception Island



Pintados (cape petrels)



Steve on Deception Island
Nansen I.



Humpback whales sleeping near



Crabeater seals on ice floe



On a Zodiac



Iceberg in Gerlache Strait



Humpback Whales



Penguins on iceberg



Gentoo colony on Cuverville Island



Orcas



Lemaire Channel



Antarctica shag on nest



Penguins and Cormorants on ice floe



Penguin "highways" on Danco



Sheathbill



On Danco





Humpback whales playing with us



Albatross



Ushuaia



Black-headed Swans



"The end of the earth"

