

1/24/13 - Day 19 – Pitcairn Island (British Overseas Territory): Today we stopped a couple miles off the coast of Pitcairn Island in the South Pacific. Pitcairn Island has about 50 inhabitants and after many years as a British colony its status was changed to British overseas territory, the last remaining in the Pacific Ocean. Pitcairn Island would be just another obscure remote island except for the fact that in 1790 there was a mutiny aboard the British navy ship named Bounty and the mutineers eventually settled on Pitcairn Island. It would still have remained a little known island but an exciting human saga involving the mutiny and Pitcairn Island unfolded and it was the subject of books and at least two highly successful motion pictures.

The story begins with Captain Bligh, who was the captain of the Bounty and on a mission for the British navy to bring breadfruit plants from Tahiti to British colonies in the Caribbean. The breadfruit was to provide a cheap source of food for the slaves working in the sugar plantations. Captain Bligh was a stern master of the Bounty; dealing out lashing and other punishment occasionally but his discipline was actually less cruel than was common in those days. Nevertheless, some crew members were unhappy under Captain Bligh and in 1790, after leaving Tahiti with a load of breadfruit plants; a disgruntled sailor named Fletcher Christian led a mutiny and took over the Bounty. Captain Bligh and some loyal sailors were put off the ship in an open boat. An amazing fact was that Captain Bligh and his crew survived and they were rescued. In fact, Captain Bligh went on to a successful career in the British military eventually ending up as a governor for one of the provinces of Australia. The part of the story that gets most of the attention is what happened to the mutineers.

After setting Captain Bligh and his crew adrift in an open boat the Bounty, under the direction of Fletcher Christian sailed back to Tahiti to pick up some Polynesian men and women who had formed friendships with the Bounty sailors while they were previously in Tahiti. The Bounty then sailed around in the South Pacific looking for an obscure place to land where the British navy would not find them. They eventually landed and settled on Pitcairn Island. The ship, Bounty, was burned to avoid it being sighted and the British and Polynesian residents of Pitcairn Island set about making a life for themselves in this tropical haven. It turned out that there was conflict over the women and perhaps other matters so that it was not a happy situation. Fletcher Christian was killed in conflict within three years after landing on the island. However, the community survived and in 1937 the population was 233 people.

Since 1937 there has been a steady migration away from the island, primarily to New Zealand, and the population is now fewer than 60 people. Fishing is productive and the soil is fertile so the inhabitants can be self sufficient. However, they supplement their income with manufacture of goods for the tourist industry. There is no airport on the island so equipment and other commodities they want from elsewhere are delivered to them by passing freighters. Tourist facilities on the island don't exist but they have promoted the practice of cruise ships anchoring off shore while islanders, loaded with souvenirs from Pitcairn Island board the ships and sell their goods to the passengers.

Unfortunately, two or three weeks ago a cruise ship with passengers infected with the H2N3 flu virus stopped by and when we arrived about half the island population was sick with the flu. The H2N3 virus is highly contagious and passengers on cruise ships are particularly vulnerable to infection because of the close quarters. Consequently, to avoid infecting people on the Amsterdam, Captain Mercer cancelled the plans for the islanders to board the Amsterdam to sell their wares today. This action represented a significant loss of revenue for the Pitcairn Island people so an alternate plan was put in place. People on Pitcairn Island came up with a list of foods they would like to have and where they could be spared by the Amsterdam they were donated to the islanders. In addition there would be a slow cruise around the island so that passengers could get a good look.

This morning, about 10am Pitcairn Island came into view, as shown by the picture on below. The Amsterdam came to a stop within a couple miles of the island to await the



arrival of a boat from the island to collect the food supplies that were being donated. The islanders came out in a large open long boat with about 10 people on board, as shown in the picture on the right.



They came along side the Amsterdam and boxes of supplies were passed out to the people in the long boat, as shown on the right. Care was taken to avoid contamination of anything on the Amsterdam with flu virus.



After the transfer was completed the Pitcairn Islanders pulled away from the Amsterdam. There were happy waves and cheers going back and forth between the Pitcairn people and the Amsterdam passengers lined up along the rails, as shown below.



The Amsterdam then got underway and we cruised slowly around the island in a clockwise direction. A map of Pitcairn Island is shown on the right. The map was obtained from the journal we had written when we visited here in 2007

(www.2007gwv.thestansfields.com). Our starting point for the cruise around the island today was at the location shown as the Amsterdam anchorage in 2007.

There apparently is some relatively flat land on the island that is suitable for farming. However, the shoreline presents nearly continuous steep cliffs of rock or thick vegetation. We took the following pictures as we circled the island. It has



some beautiful aspects but it certainly doesn't look like Pitcairn Island could ever be marketed as a tourist destination for relaxing on a tropical white sand beach.

The picture on the left is of Bounty Bay where the mutineers burned and sunk the Bounty. The only development on the Pitcairn Island shoreline is what appears to be a boathouse on this narrow beach.

This picture of the hillside above Bounty Bay shows some of the houses on the island. These houses appeared to be substantial structures nested within the trees.



This picture on the left is of the northern tip of Pitcairn Island as seen from the Amsterdam at the start of the cruise around the island.

This picture on the right shows the southeastern tip of Pitcairn Island.



This cliff structure shown on the right is on the southern shoreline of the island.



As we reached the northern tip of Pitcairn Island and the end of the circumnavigation Barbara couldn't resist whipping out her library card to record this brief visit.

We had a surprise at the northwestern tip of the island when a sailing ship came into view, apparently lying at anchor. The information we got was that this was a Norwegian ship that



had stopped for a visit at Pitcairn Island. The rather exposed anchorage gave testament to the short supply of good docking facilities at Pitcairn Island.

The Amsterdam had completed the cruise around the island and now set a course northwest towards Tahiti. We got one more picture of rugged Pitcairn Island as it disappeared in the distance.



At this evening's formal dinner the theme was "Mutiny on the Bounty" with the staff dressed in "mutineer" costumes. Our head waiter, Iwan, stopped by to add his playfully stern countenance and colorful costume to this picture on the left.

The good ship Amsterdam continued westward towards our next port of call. The seas were calm and the temperature warm so we looked forward to the next two days at sea as we sailed on to Papeete, Tahiti.