

1/21/13 - Day 16 – Easter Island, Chile: After 4 days at sea we arrived at Easter Island and everyone was anxious to go ashore and explore the mysterious statues. Easter Island, which has the Polynesian name of Rapa Nui, is part of the nation of Chile. To simplify commercial ties the island is kept in the identical time zone with Chile (same as Eastern Time Zone in the USA) even though it should be a few time zones to the west of Chile. Looking at a world map Easter Island can be seen about due south of Denver Colorado, which is on Mountain Standard Time in the US. Accordingly, it didn't get fully daylight where we were until about 7:30am. However, when it did get daylight we had a wonderful view of Easter Island from the ship.



Easter Island was sighted by a Dutch ship on Easter Sunday in 1722 and got its name from that event. The huge stone statues lined up along the shore could be seen from the sailing ship and the story of how they came into existence has captured the attention of people ever since. It turns out they were called Moai by the natives and were part of a form of ancestor worship where the huge stone image represents a powerful and beneficial ancestor who faced inward from the sea and protected the living descendants in the villages. It is estimated they were carved in a 250 year period between 1250 and 1500 CE. There were probably about 3000 Polynesian inhabitants on the island when

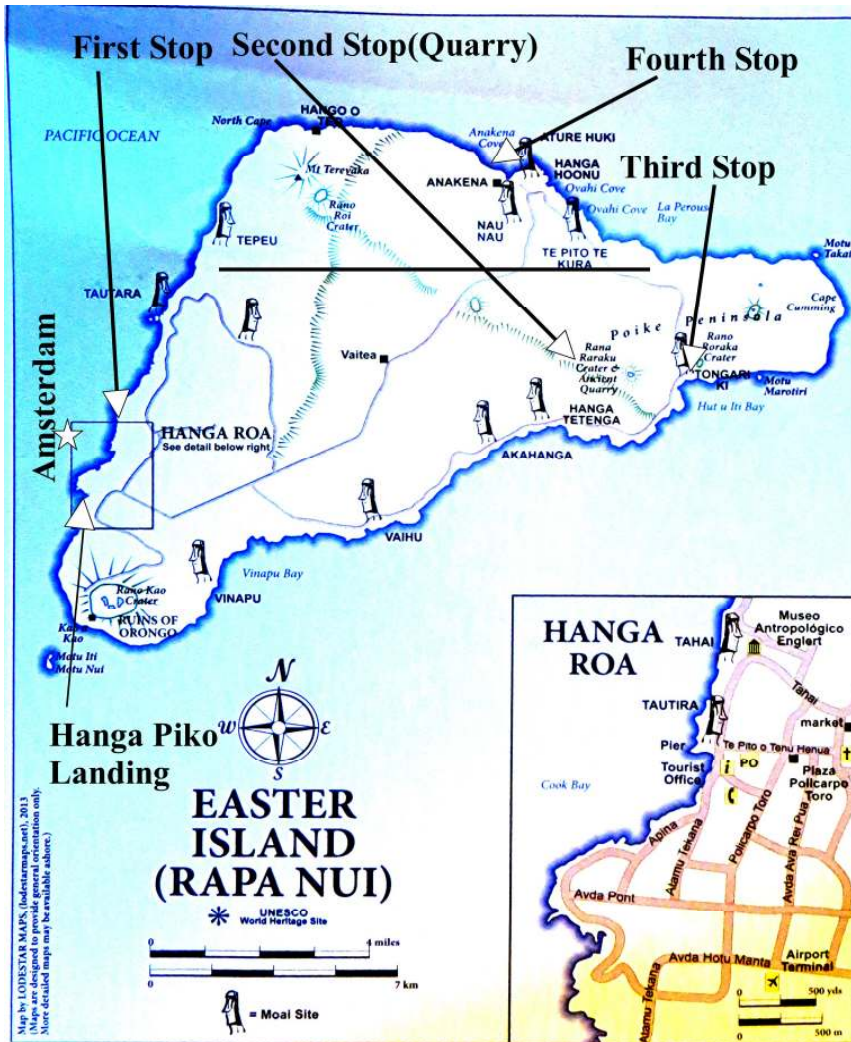


first sighted by Europeans but the civilization was in a state of decline because of deforestation and general depletion of food resources. When subsequent European explorers visited the island over the next 100 years it was apparent that there had been tribal warfare with most of the statues being pulled down as a form of punishment for the enemy clan. In modern times nearly 900 statues have been identified and about 600 of them have been restored to an upright position. Today we would be seeing both restored and prostrate statues on display by the National Park Service and tourist industry.

The location of Easter Island and the main town of Hanga Roa is shown on the map on the left. We had been here on a cruise in 2007 and enjoyed it immensely so couldn't pass up an opportunity to return. Our experiences on that

visit were posted on a blog with the address www.2007gwv.thestansfields.com .

We had signed up for a Holland America Tour today named “Mystical Moai Statues” and it was scheduled to leave the ship by about 9:00am. Captain Mercer had warned us that the large rolling swells coming in from the south would present a real challenge for the boat crews and passengers when getting on and off the ship. The Amsterdam was anchored off the southwest coast of Easter Island near the town of Hanga Roa. This location presented the least risk to life and limb of the crew and passengers. It was a slow process but by 10:30 we were loaded onto a tender boat. As shown on the right from inside the tender boat there were three of the crew helping each of us get on board as the boat rose and fell 4 or 5 feet next to the relatively stable gangway platform.



The tender boat took us on a bouncy ride into the small harbor of Hanga Piko in the town of Hanga Roa. The boat landing spot and the location of the tour stops we made today are shown in the map of Easter Island on the left.

Once we got off of the tender boats we were assigned to a 7 passenger van. Our guide’s name was Nicolas and he was in charge of three vans. He rode in one of the vans from stop to stop and then at each stop explained what the display was all about.

Our first stop was just north of the town of Hanga Roa on the coast where there was a Chilean National Park displaying the Moai in a beautiful coastal setting. Within the park there was a plaque giving special recognition to a man named William Mulloy who apparently dedicated his life's work to restoring of the Moai on Easter Island. The Moai were erect and facing inland towards where a village might have been in ancient time, as



shown in these pictures. The Moai are all made from a compressed, soft, porous volcanic stone called tuft. Some Moai had hats made from a porous red volcanic rock. One of the Moai had white eyes made from coral and set into sockets carved into the porous volcanic rock. Most of the Moai originally had the white eyes but over the years they have been lost or taken by souvenir hunters. Not all Moai had hats but installation of the eyes was considered an essential and final act of empowering the Moai to

protect the village.

Nicolas said that the "hat" was actually not a "hat" but represented for the fact that the particular ancestor being represented normally had very long reddish colored hair coiled and piled on top of his head. While we were at the park there was a Polynesian souvenir vendor who had his hair done up in this traditional way and we got a quick picture of it as shown on the right. This may have been what Nicolas was referring to.

Another event at the first stop was that Barbara's library card made an appearance in front of a row



of Moai resting on their platform called an Ahu. It turns out the Ahu is as sacred as the Moai itself and we were warned not to step onto the Ahus. Ancestors and sacred artifacts were buried in the Ahu.

When we had all explored the park and Moai the vans were loaded and we drove about 10 miles to the east side of the island and our second stop at the site of the Rano Raraku Ancient Quarry. This was where the Moai statues were carved out of a cliff consisting of the soft porous volcanic rock called tuft. Here we found the most dramatic display of Moai, both standing and the fallen ones lying on the ground, as shown in the following pictures. The carving was done with simple tools made out of a very hard volcanic stone called flint.

A current estimate is that these statues were carved over a 250 year period from about 1250 to 1500 CE. But we wonder how the army of skilled craftsmen was organized to produce and transport these giants. Sadly, the Easter Island Stone Age society had no written language so historians and anthropologists are left mostly with speculation and oral tradition to explain how it took place.



Nicolas pointed out a less used path leading up a steep hillside toward the vertical cliff of porous volcanic rock. He said there were some sites up there where Moai had been partially carved and then apparently abandoned. We managed to go up and take a few photos of the reclining Moai still trapped in the rock. There were several carvings in the rock cliff but we had to stay on the approved walkways so it was not possible to get good photos clearly showing all the Moai. There was a reasonable view for one of them that



we photographed. Hopefully the general form of the Moai can be seen emerging from the rock in the picture on the left.

It is astounding to think that the ancient stone carvers could do such a massive amount of work with just flint axes and smaller carving tools. They would carve around the Moai and eventually break it free of the rock formation. One theory is that they would then use levers to pry it up into a standing position. They would then tilt the statue on its base. For example the left side would be raised and pushed forward, and then the right side raised and pushed forward to “walk” the Moai to a desired location. The process was much like a couple people might use to

move a large refrigerator even though it’s too heavy to lift. In the case of the Moai, large numbers of skilled people must have been needed regardless of the method employed.

Some idea of the texture of the compressed volcanic tuft is given by this picture of a Moai surface, as shown on the right.





An example of the red stone making up the hat is shown on the left. The white material on the stones was firmly attached lichens.

From the quarry site we traveled a couple miles to our

third stop at the site of Ahu Tongariki. This site provides one of the most iconic images from Easter Island. It is probably this view that left an unforgettable impression on the original Dutch explorers when they saw it in 1722.



Nicolas explained that the original platform or “Ahu” had space for 16 Moai but only 15 are thought to be originally standing and that is what we see today. According to Nicolas the 16th statue lies several hundred feet away lying on the ground. It didn’t quite make it to the Ahu from the quarry. We got a picture of the fallen Moai with the Ahu Tongariki in the background, as shown on the right.





We got our obligatory photo together in front of the Ahu Tongariki, as shown on the left.

Then we got a picture of our table mates, Bob and Jessi, as shown below.



With our pictures taking and exploration accomplished we assembled back at the vans and then continued on to our fourth stop of the day. We were headed to Anakena, about 6 miles away on the northern shore of Easter Island.

There is one asphalt paved highway on Easter Island and it runs on an inland route from Anakena through the village of Vaitea to Hanga Roa on the southwest coast. All of the roads we used today were oiled but not paved and we got a thorough shaking by the pot holes as we moved from one site to the other. Here are some pictures of our road and the beautiful countryside we passed through.



This picture on the left was taken through the windshield with the title of our tour showing. The road was rough but not dusty because of the oiled surface.

Horses roaming the unfenced land was a common sight. We were told that horseback riding is popular on Easter Island but we didn't see any examples of people riding horses.



We arrived at Anakena and were impressed by the idyllic South-Sea-Island appearance of the place, as shown below.

The setting was beautiful with a wonderful white sand beach. Numerous people were enjoying the surf and walking on the beach.



However, we were here to see “Mystical Moai Statues” so we turned our eyes away from the inviting beach to a row of Moai shown below.

This exhibit was part of a National Park and very well maintained. The Moai were basically the same as the ones we had seen at the three previous stops. They were standing on a massive Ahu that was protected by a guard rail to keep people from walking on the Ahu. The exhibit appeared to be part of an effort by the Easter Island people to restore as many of the Moai as possible and present them in a way that is easily accessed by tourists. There was a lack of signs in English that would explain the significance of this particular site or general information about the Moai.





However, there was this one graphic sign, shown on the left that did not need English wording even though it was provided. Nicolas warned us “Please don’t sit under the palm trees!”

This fourth stop completed our tour of Easter Island and our caravan gathered for the return to the tender landing in Hanga Roa.

As mentioned before, the road from Anakena to Hanga Roa was nicely paved and we rolled along through beautiful countryside.



Along the way we got photos of some typical houses beside the road.





When we got to Hanga Roa we turned down a street near the harbor and the Amsterdam came into view, riding at anchor off the coast.

Our driver took us to the landing at Hanga Piko. It was about 3pm and we were a little concerned about the rough seas and the difficulty of returning to the ship so we decided not to explore Hanga Roa but return to the ship by the earliest possible tender boat. In the picture below, tour vans are unloading and a tender boat with orange roof is waiting at the dock for passengers. At the lower left is a shade tent with chairs thoughtfully provided by the Amsterdam staff for us to wait until a tender was available to take us to the Amsterdam.



After about a 20 minute wait we were able to catch a tender boat. As we climbed into the boat we noted that the coxswain was an officer with gold braided shoulder boards. Usually one of the sailors handles coxswain duty so this was a clue that conditions were more difficult than normal. Another clue was that one of the heavy plastic windows near the bow was broken and covered with plastic sheet to keep water from coming in.

Once we were into the narrow channel with waves pitching us up and down by 5 or 10 feet as well as sideways and with sea water cascading over the windshield we knew this was going to be a rough ride. Although the trip was exciting (Barbara compared it to Mr. Toad's Wild Ride at Disney Land) we were all safely deposited on the Amsterdam, with a sigh of relief by 4pm. It was the roughest tender boat ride we had ever experienced but the crew handled it flawlessly.

After returning to the ship we learned that because of the worsening sea conditions, Captain Mercer at 2pm had cancelled further tender boat trips to the pier by people wanting to go ashore. Unfortunately, some people with afternoon tours scheduled missed this opportunity to see the Moai and other sights of Easter Island. However, the Captain's decision was in the best interest of safety for passengers and crew negotiating the rocky entrance to the harbor and passengers being deposited on the gangway landing from a pitching tender boat. We also learned that windows had been broken on two of the boats when they were lowered into the water.

As we were eating dinner at 6pm we could look out the windows at the rear of the dining room and watch the tenders bringing the last of the passengers back from their visit to Easter Island. We noted that it had begun to rain and that made conditions even worse. Before it got dark the Captain announced that all the passengers had been returned without injury and we were getting underway. Earlier champagne had been served to all the dinner guests as a token of appreciation by the Amsterdam for the rough day had by some passengers, now with all passengers back on board unhurt there was additional reason for celebration.

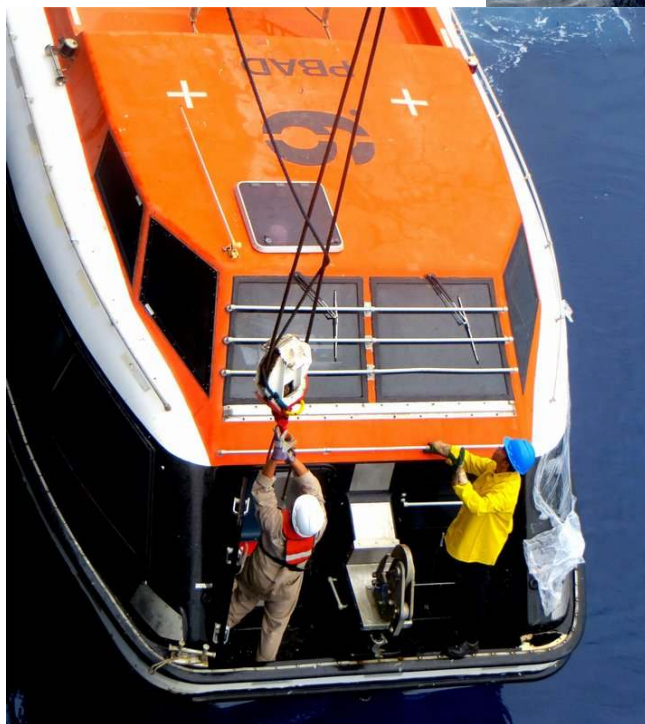


There was just one tender boat left in the water to retrieve. We took a picture of the loan tender boat getting ready to approach the Amsterdam for pickup at its davit.

The cables and two heavy pick-up devices were down and ready for the boat to come alongside, as shown on the left.



As the tender boat got closer we could see that it was one of the boats with a broken window that was now covered with plastic sheet.



The coxswain skillfully positioned the boat under the two pick-up devices that were simultaneously lowered by an operator on the Amsterdam. Now comes a really dangerous part. The white pick-up device, probably weighing about 100 pounds must be grabbed by the two men in the front of the boat and while the boat is wildly pitching they must hook it through a heavy steel loop attached to the bow of the tender boat. In the picture on the left one sailor has grabbed the pick-up device to steady it while the other sailor stands ready to help if the boat pitches suddenly to the left.

All the onlookers were happy when the brave sailors corralled the swinging pick-up device and had it firmly attached to the tender boat. A similar drama was unfolding at the stern of the tender boat but we couldn't see that. Note the plastic sheeting over the broken window behind the man with the yellow jacket. That heavy plastic window was probably broken by the swinging pick-up device earlier in the day when the boat was released. The risk to the men is that they or some important body part might be crushed between a solid object and the swinging pick-up device.



With the tender boat safely attached to the davit pick-up cables the operator on the Amsterdam gently lifted the boat free of the water and up to deck level, as shown on the left.

The tender boat was quickly attached firmly to the deck railing of the Amsterdam. The boat hatch was opened and sailors happily piled out to the cheers and clapping of their friends and the Amsterdam passengers who had been anxiously watching the drama



unfold. The davit operator who had so skillfully controlled the pick-up cables can be seen at the top middle of the photo. Unfortunately, the head of this important individual didn't make it into the photo.

This was a very happy ending to a grueling day for the Amsterdam boat crews and other staff members who work so hard to show us passengers a good time on Easter Island. We are grateful for what they do for us.

Now we head for Pitcairn Island where after two days at sea we will anchor and view the island from the ship since there are no tourist facilities there. There are about 50 people living on the island. They have been invited to come on board the Amsterdam where there will be an opportunity to chat with them and pick up some of their handicrafts.