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### **BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE (January 2020)**



#### **Nightingale Island**

*The Reverend Canon Andrew Neaum became the “House for Duty” Anglican priest of the lovely Boldre Benefice in August 2013. The Vicarage in which he and Diana live is on the edge of the New Forest, a couple of miles north of Lymington in Hampshire. He is old fashioned enough a priest to visit his flock in their homes, but “house for duty” clergy are supposed to work only two days a week and Sundays, which means visiting everyone in the parish takes a long time. The following are the **January 2020** weekly ruminations, aired prejudices and footling observations that in the weekly pew sheet augment his visits and help keep folk in touch week in and week out. Earlier articles are available from the Article Page on this Website:*

*<http://www.andrewneaum.com/articles.htm>*

## **THIS AND THAT (332)**

### **Returning to Tristan da Cunha 2012 (32)**

#### ***Thursday 4 October, 2012 continued***

On our return from Nightingale we inquired about our passports. They had been left with the Purser on the *Agulhas*, and so had gone on off to Gough Island without us. We were assured that they would be seen and stamped as a matter of course. So the South African authorities who had stamped us out of their land would not be disconcerted to find in them no evidence of where we'd been.

#### **Preparing to leave**

Peggy called in with a present for us, as too did Rhianna, Lars and Trina. The Parish Council and Congregation gave us a model island longboat made by Peggy's husband. In the evening I ate with pleasure the tails of the two sizeable crayfish in the fridge and Diana heated up leftovers from the lamb we'd had the night before, for which I had had to take the baked potatoes out of the oven in order to fry them brown, the oven not being up to the task.

Our luggage tomorrow is to be picked up at 10.00am and we are to be at the helicopter field at 3.00pm.

#### ***Friday 5 October 2012 7.45am***

We have eaten the last piece of bread as toast for breakfast and washing is on the clothes line. It is another fishing day. The gong went at about half past five, though it looks a little windy. The Island's lee is elsewhere perhaps. The trip in the RIB has left me with a broken blister on my elbow and aching thigh muscles.

We've now just returned from our last Matins. These have been lovely sessions for which we have used the South African rite, sitting in a pew looking out over flax and low cottage roofs to the great ocean. We have missed only one day since being here and that was yesterday as we waited to field a phone call about the Nightingale trip.

I took the remnant of our ancient carrots to the cows roaming the village, to see if they would eat them with as much enthusiasm as they crunch potatoes. One cow obligingly ate a single specimen, the others were disdainful of them. I suspect that they will return to them later, for they appear to eat pretty well anything.

#### ***Later: 10.55pm South Atlantic ocean***

We are now safely aboard the *Agulhas*. The day went as final days tend to, mostly in tidying up. I did manage a trip down to Garden Gate beach where I was able to take a photo of the old rock pools with the tide far out, and I sighted several of the fish we used to catch as boys. They darted at great speed from one pool to another. I could have caught one with my hands trapped in a small corner of a pool as sometimes we did as lads. I also got some good shots of a pair of the red legged and billed Tristan terns.

We arrived at the field to be helicoptered off, kissing many, but missing others because those without immediate family to bid farewell stand behind the field's stone wall not in front of it. On the ship we are in the same cabin as on the voyage to the island. We had to go down to the hold to get our suitcases which had been collected from the front of the house at about 10.30. I had eaten three of the four eggs left, well before lunch, two of them duck eggs, I trust there will be no evil consequences.

Our last meal was split-pea dhal. We'd packed our two spicy sauces, and so it was blandly unmemorable. We followed it with tinned fruit, South African pineapple, enjoying mightily, as we have all holiday. Given the limitations of the single, small supermarket, eating has called for improvisation, imagination and stoical perseverance.

#### **Helicopter or longboat**

We were surprised to notice from the helicopter a number of caves and a little beach or two beneath the low, black cliffs of Mordor (the lava plateau). An arch carved by the sea as well as the

caves indicate that some lava is softer than the rest. The flight took all of two minutes. So much easier than our departure in 1956 when we and all our possessions were ferried out in painted canvas longboats and we had to clamber up a rope ladder to board a British Petroleum tanker upon which we hitched a ride gratis. I still buy BP petrol in preference to any other, if there's a choice.

## **This and That” - 19 January 2020**

### **Returning to Tristan da Cunha 2012 (31)**

*Thursday 4 October, 2012 continued*

Nightingale is a 1.2 square mile tidbit of an island. It is estimated that for 39,000 years there was no sign of volcanic activity there at all. In 1961 when the earth began to quake on its larger neighbour, Tristan da Cunha and the lava from a new volcanic cone there destroyed the crayfish canning factory, the island's two good boat landing beaches and threatened the village as well, it was to Nightingale that the population decamped for safety, before heading to Cape Town and England.

In 2004 there occurred on Nightingale itself a six-hour-long “earthquake swarm”, and sightings of floating pumice. Earthquake swarms are clusters of minor to moderate earthquakes occurring over a period of hours, days, weeks or longer, but without a distinct main shock. It's thought they result from the activity of subterranean liquids under seismic pressure. So not quite as safe as assumed.

#### **Drifting for 7000 miles**

The other great event in Nightingale's history was the wreck of the bulk carrier MS Olivia in 2011. Human error allowed the ship to run aground. All the crew were saved, but 800 tons of fuel leaked into the ocean to coat an estimated 20,000 rockhopper penguins. Eventually the ship broke in two and the huge cargo of soya beans around the wreck reduced sea life by removing oxygen from the water. One of the ship's empty lifeboats drifted off into the ocean. A couple of years later, in 2013, it beached itself on the shores of the Coorong National Park in South Australia, about 7000 miles away.

On our short visit to Nightingale in 2012, the terrain was honeycombed with nesting burrows. They emitted the unmistakable pong of such seabird colonies. Many family holidays in Australia were spent on the coast near Port Fairy. On our last evening, as dusk fell, we'd take fish and chips to eat in a shearwater rookery as the birds plopped silently from the sky to scurry down their nesting holes. The scent on Nightingale took me back to those happy times.

On the way to the centre of the island we passed a colony of northern rockhopper penguins. Delightful to behold with their green-gold tassels they appeared sleek and healthy. Best of all though were the yellow-nosed albatrosses sitting fearless of us on their great humped nests.

#### **The return**

All too soon, because of the need of the Norwegian to catch his ship home, we had to return to Tristan. After a sandwich lunch in bright sunshine we made our way back into the dinghy and then the RIB. Diana had repacked our haversack in a way that meant I could use it as a cushion, and I settled myself down with my back against the wheel house. Unfortunately two of us were urged forward to provide better ballast, so I was back in the position I'd occupied on the way to the island, though on the other side and so exercising different muscles. With the haversack to sit on the return was more comfortable, I didn't have to use my hunkers and upper leg muscles except when anticipating a truly shocking drop from a monster swell.

We approached Tristan's southernmost tip, Stonyhill Point where we noticed a black lava plateau similar to the 1961 extrusion at the Settlement. We were then treated to close views of the forbidding Tristan cliffs and great and sometimes cavernous gulches.

#### **The island circumnavigated**

Sandy Point was especially interesting. In the lee of the island it is the driest and warmest

spot on Tristan and we noticed a good stand of tall conifers, and a green roofed hut. Apparently the cattle got in and ruined all the apple trees whose fruit we went by long boat to collect in the nineteen fifties. We passed some thin but flowing waterfalls and awe inspiring gulches, evidence of frequent and heavy rain, though the two thousand foot cliffs are proof of the sea being more effective at erosion than rain. We rounded the Bluff and into sight of the Settlement, passing the *Agulhas* and the *Baltic Trader* and so into the harbour, glad to have made it to Nightingale and circumnavigate Tristan.

## **This and That” - 12 January 2020**

### **Returning to Tristan da Cunha 2012 (30)**

***Thursday 4 October, 2012 continued***

Nightingale and Inaccessible are two uninhabited islands close to Tristan. Geologically they are far older and not as closely related to Tristan as used to be thought. Nor is there a shelf between the two of them and Tristan and so the 25 mile stretch of water over which we travelled to arrive at Nightingale is immensely deep.

#### **Guano, eggs and carcasses**

Because Nightingale is very much lower in altitude than Tristan its weather is more benign. Not so frequently cloud-shrouded there is more sun and less orographic rainfall. As we battered and slapped our way over the ocean to get there, a variety of seabirds skimmed the waves and we stopped briefly near a fishing boat to watch a pot of crayfish being pulled up, it being a fishing day. At last, after about an hour or more of exhilarating, but spine-jarring travel, we arrived at a tussocky fragment in the middle of nowhere. It has a small, attractive, conical peak, and a guano-whitened, rock shoreline.

It was good to be there at last. My brother and I, when boys on Tristan, were considered too young to make the trip. My sister Susan, with a couple of friends, did. In those days they sailed there in longboats and stayed several nights to collect guano for the potato patches and birds eggs and carcasses for food. Carcasses were also rendered down for oil. On their return I remember eating fried albatross eggs, a single one filling the pan, and boiled rock-hopper penguin eggs, their whites a pale translucent blue.

#### **Eating albatross and penguin eggs**

As with the aborigines in Australia, the islanders are granted certain rights to traditional practices. They can still today harvest sea bird eggs, though in a carefully monitored and sustainable fashion. In 2011 the huge, soya bean laden bulk carrier, *MS Olivia* was wrecked on Nightingale. The resultant, dire oil-spill caused havoc with wild life and led to insurance claims asserting a loss of livelihood due to the suspension of egg harvesting. So no fishy-tasting egg yolk gobbling for me on this trip. Thousands of oil-damaged penguins were rescued, penned and fed by islanders.

There's no beach to land on. Access requires stepping from a boat onto a sloping slab of rock. Difficult in calm weather, impossible in wild. On the slab as we approached were three or four seals. A young islander with us leapt out as we drew near the rock, whereupon we backed off until with help from several naturalists camping on the island, he dragged down a small dinghy safely stowed well above wild high water. We transferred from the RIB to the dinghy and in two trips all made it safely onto the slippery slab. Diana got a foot wet, but otherwise our precautions to avoid a predicted dousing (sou'westers and waterproof trousers) were not necessary. Spray, even on the way across, was minimal. However it was cold enough for a beanie, jersey and a wind proof jacket.

#### **Vicious little thrush-like birds**

As soon as we were ashore and in sheltered sunlight, we realised that it was going to be warm. We left a lot of gear down at the landing place, high above any likelihood of it getting wet,

but took my haversack with its lunch, not realising then that we would be back almost before lunch because of our kill-joy Norwegian companion. The shortness of the visit meant we didn't get to the island's ponds or a comprehensive view of the place. On the way to where we had to turn back though, we passed lots of Yellow nosed albatrosses on their nests, beautiful birds, nesting serenely on or next door to the path, unperturbed by human proximity. Islanders call them mollies.

The path was littered with the carcasses of little "night birds" a type of prion that burrows to nest. They are killed by the skuas which abound and dive bombed us whenever we passed by their great, green eggs laid in the grass with no nesting material at all. We also saw the endemic buntings and the starchies, the latter a fairly vicious little thrush-like bird that feeds off the prion carcasses and is not beyond killing them itself particularly their fledglings.

## **This and That" - 5 January 2020**

### **Returning to Tristan da Cunha 2012 (29)**

*Thursday 4 October, 2012 continued*

It's ten to seven in the morning. I look out to a calm sea over a dry stone wall, against which grow more yellow than orange nasturtiums and clusters of arum lilies. The latter seem to thrive in all sorts of remote places. They're as much a feature of St Helena as Tristan.

We should soon hear if we're going to Nightingale Island.

*Later 3.35pm.*

We did make it to Nightingale. Having been told it was off, then on, we were advised to be on the wharf by half past eight. Our boat was a RIB (Rigid Inflatable Boat) with two large outboard engines. As we waited to leave I wandered around and behind some containers and discovered a large piece of pumice. Not the pale, delicate variety that in days gone by we used after a bath to scrape our calloused feet smooth, but coarse, rough, black rock like aerated chocolate. I then walking out to the furthest tip of the wharf and noticed that in the central gap of the base mountain I could just see the snow covered peak of the island. It's always invisible from the settlement proper.

We eventually clambered down into the RIB and I went up to the front. Diana, sensibly, sat in the rear where there were a few seats. It transpires that the trip had indeed been called off because the boat's owner and captain wanted a day's holiday to enjoy a barbecue. However, Françoise, the visiting psychiatrist's wife, questioned those responsible with some asperity and insisted, the day being perfect, that it would be iniquitous if we didn't go. So we went. The amiable brother of the boat's owner at the helm.

#### **A Norwegian spoiler**

There was an elderly Norwegian man with us. He had come on the *Baltic Trader* upon which he was due to leave. Disappointingly, because it was to sail for Cape Town at three o'clock in the afternoon, so our visit to Nightingale would have to be curtailed, though he did indicate that he could, if necessary, return to Cape Town on the *Agulhas*. He is doing a story on Tristan about a Norwegian expedition to the island in 1937, which apparently mapped the island efficiently for the first time. To have to curtail our trip to get him back to the *Baltic Trader* was disappointing, but he had probably been relegated to the *Baltic Trader* having been squeezed off the *Agulhas*, as we very nearly were, so he deserves a degree of charity.

He was cumbered with huge cameras and took a lot of time over photos. On our departure from the tiny island, getting onto the little dinghy from the rock to go out to the RIB, he left us holding his socking great cameras. So it was us who took the risk of dropping them into the sea during this tricky manoeuvre.

#### **An exhilarating trip**

The 25 mile voyage to Nightingale was challenging. Simon and I had the worst of it because we were the furthest forward. The boat went like the clappers, but the price paid for this

was to ride not naturally with the swell over and down the waves, but rather to blunder and bounce forward in spite of them. The front of the boat slapped down with force enough to shatter your spine. Truly awful, especially as I had no cushion and so sat on the boat's flat, hard bottom. Ideally you would sit on the boat's side which is air-filled and springy, but this was too risky. The sea was fairly calm, but as always out in the great ocean, there was a good swell and we were jarred every minute of two.

I eventually learned to deal with this in a way that spared my back. Instead of sitting on my backside, I squatted on my hunkers, riding each fall of the boat with my thigh muscles. Clever and adaptive, but when I got off the boat my ham's were so strained I could hardly walk for a while and I still feel week in the legs.

It was an exhilarating trip though. The view of Tristan as we roared past Burntwood in bright sunshine was glorious. The snow covered peak shone brilliantly in clear sunlight and the livid greenness of the mountainside contrasted impressively with the blackness of the gorges.

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