

Friends Connecting to Friends

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The Galapagos Islands by Joyce Wineland

My partner Bruce Kuhl and I visited the eastern islands of the Galapagos Islands in September 2016. This was a National Geographic trip conducted by Lindblad on a ship named Endeavor. The Galapagos belong to Ecuador. They are volcanic in origin and are on both sides of the equator in the Pacific Ocean.



National Geographic Endeavor



Joyce and Bruce with Tortoise Shell

We saw a variety of plant and animal life, much of which is endemic to the Galapagos Islands. The animals represent the branches of the animal kingdom: birds, mammals, reptiles, fish, and other aquatic creatures.

An endemic species is the marine iguana, the only species that spends much time in the ocean. Since it absorbs a lot of salt, it ejects it by “sneezing,” expelling it from glands near their noses. That was one of the first things we saw when we arrived! Land iguanas live in the Galapagos, too.



Marine iguana

Galapagos penguins are endemic to these islands and live the farthest north of any penguin, even north of the equator. They never see snow or ice!

Galapagos sea lions are adorable. This was their birthing time, so we saw many baby sea lions, most with their mothers. One touching scene was a baby sea lion being harassed by a mockingbird. The bird walked around the baby, poking at it, but the baby did not know what to do. After about a minute the mother came to comfort her baby and chased the bird away. In one of the towns, we saw several sea lions napping on the lounge chairs!



Mamma sea lion protecting her baby from harassing mockingbird



Sea lions napping on lounge chairs



Waved albatross mating ritual

We saw many baby and juvenile birds in puffy down (cute) or some down and some feathers (not so cute!)

There is a large colony of waved albatross. This must have been their mating time since Bruce captured photos of several pairs in their mating ritual, which prominently features clacking their beaks together. They are the largest birds in the Galapagos.

Blue-footed boobies are birds that are well-known in the Galapagos. Their feet really are bright blue! They are larger than a dove, but smaller than an albatross. Unfortunately, we did not get close to any, but did see many red-footed boobies and Nazca boobies, and their young.

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known in the Galapagos. Their feet really are bright blue!



Red -footed booby



Galapagos tortoise with longneck



Sally Lightfoot crab

We saw the many varieties of Galapagos tortoise at the Darwin Research Station on Santa Cruz Island. They are the largest living species of tortoise and have a life expectancy of over 100 years. Their size, shell shape, and length of neck varies depending on the type of food they eat.

Sally Lightfoot crab cannot be missed. It is bright red in color.

When we went snorkeling, we saw a wide variety of fish, sea stars, sea urchins, sea cucumbers, corals, and other sea creatures.

The fish included several varieties of parrotfish, razor surgeonfish, rainbow wrass, creolefish, king angelfish, and many others. Oh, don't forget the white-tipped reef shark! We saw many, but they ignored us.



White-tipped reef shark below me in the water



Blue sea star



Sea cucumber and sea star

The blue sea star is a skinny one. Chocolate chip sea star is chunkier, with a light-colored body and dark brown conical bumps. There is also a peanut butter chip sea star which is more yellow with light brown bumps. And many other varieties. I am not sure why the sea cucumber was laying across a leg of the sea star, but I captured their picture together.

Bruce and I are very grateful that Ecuador keeps the Galapagos Islands pristine. A few thousand people live on a few islands, but most islands have little evidence that humans ever landed there. The government tightly controls which ship can go to each island each day, and how many people can be in each location. We must stay at least 6 feet from any animal, even if it comes up to us, to allow them to continue their natural behaviors.

Mount St. Helens by Cathy Kuehne

I've always been in awe of natural disasters and have found none more fascinating than the volcanic eruption of Mount St. Helens on May 18, 1980. I tuned into the nightly news starting in March when the buildup period of earthquakes, steam venting and partial collapse started and followed it through its eruption and subsequent spread of its plume that rose 15 miles into the atmosphere and eventually deposited ash in a dozen states. Planning our vacation to the Pacific Northwest in 2007, Mount St. Helens was our first stop.

We flew into Portland, Oregon, and spent the first night outside Castle Rock, Washington. The next morning, we stopped at the nearby Mount St. Helens Visitor Center, which is run by the Washington State Parks Service. It has exhibits showing the events leading up to and following the eruption on May 18th, displays of the cultural and physical impact of the explosion, and a working seismograph that still monitors activity at Mount St. Helens.

We then travelled an hour east on Route 504 through the Cascade Range to the Johnson Ridge Observatory at the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument. The observatory was named after the young volcanologist David Johnston, who was camped out on this ridge observing the volcano when it blew. His final words were "Vancouver, Vancouver, this is it." He was never found. We passed over 14 bridges on 504 that had to be rebuilt after the eruption. Part way up the mountains the scenery changed from lush forest to the ghostly moonscape of the 230 square miles debris field that resulted from the eruption.

We had no view of the collapsed mountain on the drive up and still couldn't see it from the Observatory parking lot. Our first view of it followed the introductory film at the Observatory when the curtains in the front of the auditorium parted, revealing floor to ceiling windows and a dramatic view of the remains of the mountain. The audience gasped. A deck at the back of the building provided great views of the lava dome, crater, pumice plain, and the landslide deposit, even when shrouded with clouds.



View of Mount St. Helens from the Johnson Observatory



Spirit Lake with log raft in foreground



Prairie Lupines (lower left) were the first native plants to regrow. They can take nitrogen from the air rather than the soil.

We then hiked down to Spirit Lake and along Harry's Ridge (named after Harry R. Truman who refused to leave his lakeside lodge and became a minor celebrity after dying during the eruption). The terrain along the trail was desolate in some places but showed remarkable regrowth of vegetation and small mammal activity in others. The eruption deposited volcanic debris and thousands of pyrolyzed trees into Spirit lake, forming a 600-foot wave and resulting in a floating log raft that was still visible after 27 years. Later in the trip we stopped at the South side vantage point at Windy Ridge, which is just 5 miles from the crater. A 365-step boardwalk climb to the top of the hill (and clearer weather) provided an even better view of the crater, devastated pumice plain, and log-choked Spirit Lake.



View of Mount St. Helens crater from Windy Ridge vantage point

If you would like to hike to the summit of Mount St. Helens for the most spectacular views, the trailhead begins near here. It is a strenuous hike (which we opted not to do), climbing 4,598 feet in 5 miles. A permit is needed between April 1 and October 31.

I left the area saddened for the loss of life and habitat from the blast but spirited and fascinated by the rebirth that was taking place.

A nice YouTube video on visiting the area can be found at

<https://youtu.be/E1S1izY2wY>

North Tract Photos by Greg Crites



Muskrat at Bailey Marsh



Snapping Turtle lay eggs at Peppers Pond



Piebald Buck