

March 5, 2023: Stanley's Steamer

Stanley, the Falkland Islands. 48 degrees Fahrenheit. Sunny. No wind.

Apparently, today is one of the very few days without wind or rain in the Falklands. It is as close to a perfect day weather-wise as I've seen on the trip. Our guide told us that tours on the Falklands are usually short as it's always raining and windy. Here is a shot that is of more or less the entire city of Stanley, where there is exactly one bank, one petrol station, and one ATM – at the petrol station; not the bank.

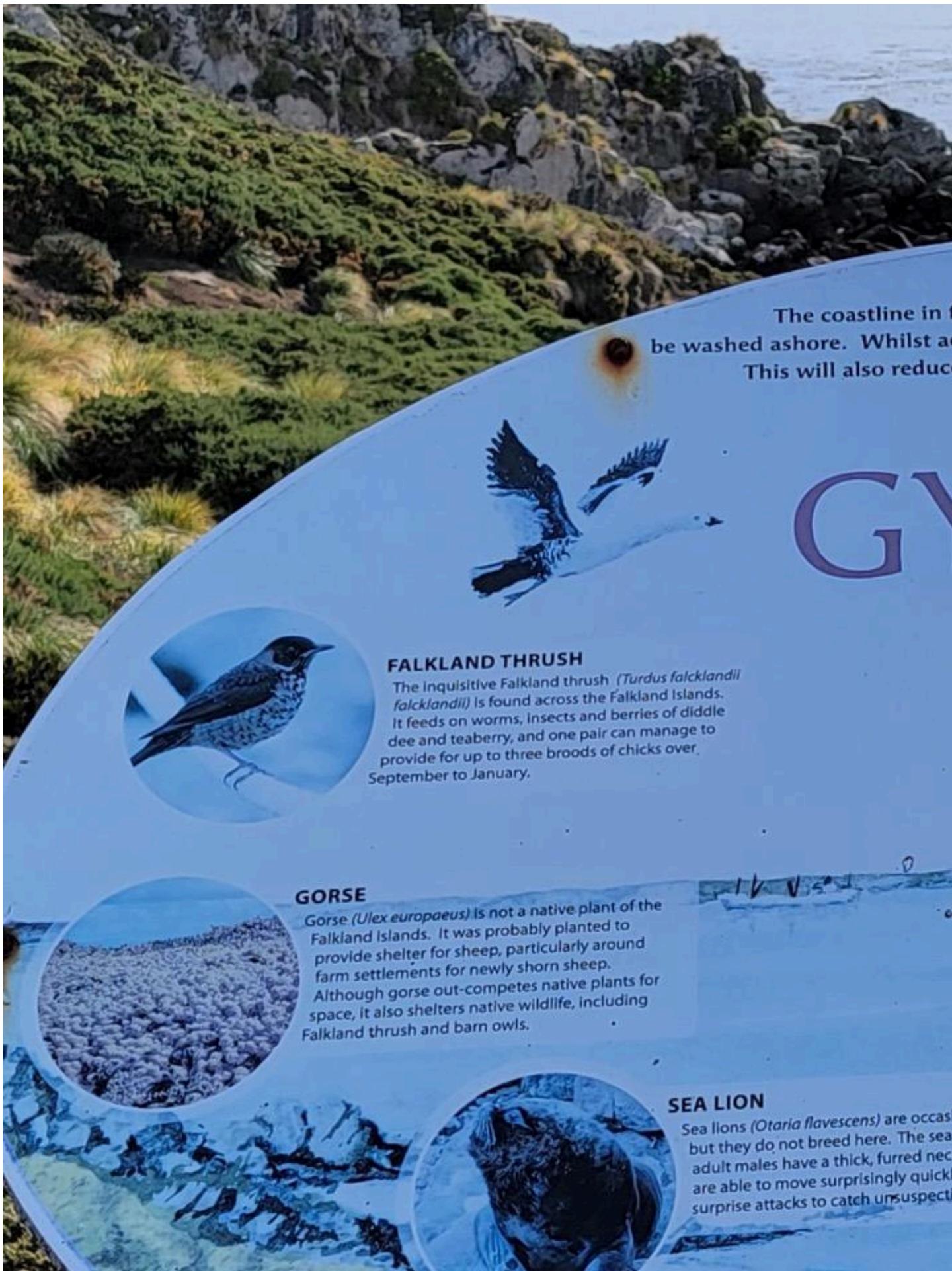


Yes, it is a city. One of the last acts of Queen Elizabeth's reign was to grant City status to Stanley.

I'm told Stanley has a higher than average per capita suicide rate. While I can understand the relentless wind and rain driving one to despair, I can't help but ask the question "didn't you know the weather was like this before you moved here?" Oh well. No suicides today, I think. Although, I have not seen a library or a movie theatre which would, I think, help lighten the load.

Today, we took a hike around Gypsy Cove. Very interesting. The most prevalent type of penguin is the Magellanic Penguin. They live in burrows in the ground. Here's a little guy enjoying his Sunday.





The coastline in f
be washed ashore. Whilst a
This will also reduc



FALKLAND THRUSH

The inquisitive Falkland thrush (*Turdus falcklandii*) is found across the Falkland Islands. It feeds on worms, insects and berries of diddle dee and teaberry, and one pair can manage to provide for up to three broods of chicks over September to January.

GORSE

Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) is not a native plant of the Falkland Islands. It was probably planted to provide shelter for sheep, particularly around farm settlements for newly shorn sheep. Although gorse out-competes native plants for space, it also shelters native wildlife, including Falkland thrush and barn owls.



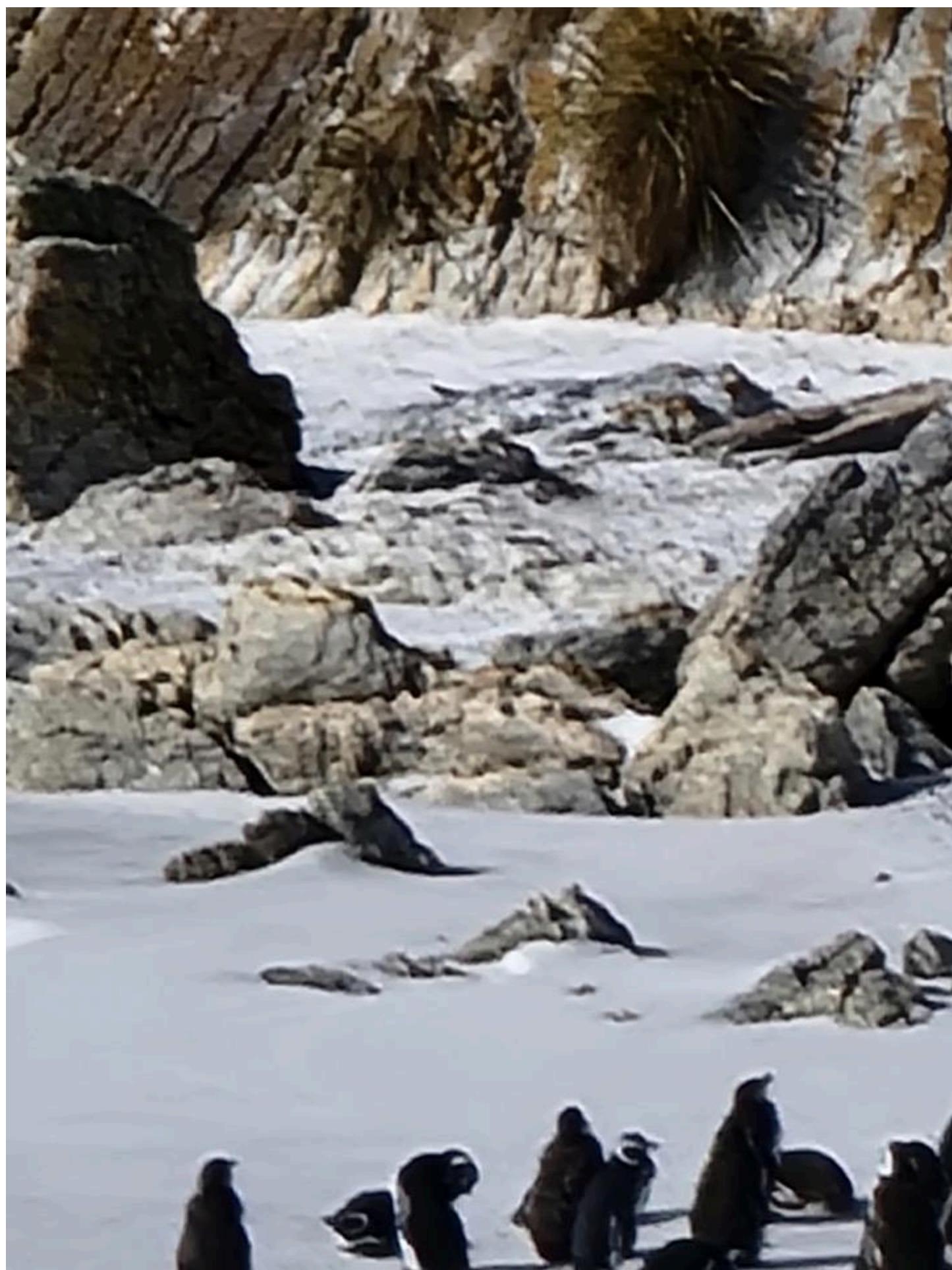
SEA LION

Sea lions (*Otaria flavescens*) are occasional visitors to the islands, but they do not breed here. The sea lions are able to move surprisingly quickly and can launch surprise attacks to catch unsuspecting prey.





Here are some other little guys enjoying a day at the beach.



It wasn't so long ago that anyone, including penguins, could not enjoy a day at the beach. The beach in the picture is at Yorke Bay, where the Argentinians laid 20,000 anti-personnel devices.





SISKIN

The black-chinned siskin (*Carduelis bárbarus*) is a small, mostly green and yellow bird and the male has a black head. The black-throated finch (*Melanoderà melanodera*) also flashes green and yellow, but the male of this species has a blue-grey head.

TUSSAC GRASS

Tussac grass (*Poa flabellata*) is an incredibly important habitat in Falkland Islands, providing protection and nesting habitat for land birds, insects and sea lions. Historically, much of the coastal islands would have been fringed with tussac grass, but unfortunately has been over-grazed by sheep in many places.

MOULTING MAGELLANIC

After breeding, Magellanic penguins come ashore for their annual moult.

And that's just at one beach. Their thinking was that the British would come from the west, with the prevailing winds. Therefore, they mined all the western beaches. Doh! The Brits came from the east.

The Conflict ended in June 1982. The last mine was located and detonated in 2022. The Falklands are theoretically now mine free. You know, like Belgium, where the odd cow gets blown up every once in a while when it trods upon a WWI mine.

And speaking of being Shanghaied, have a gander at this ship:



Apparently, it is a Russian fishing vessel that is being detained. Why, you may ask? Because the crew was press-ganged into service in Thailand. One of the crew jumped overboard and swam ashore to seek asylum. He related that thugs from certain nationalities' ships wander the waterfront bars and conk unsuspecting Thailanders on the head. When they wake up, they find themselves as crewmen on Russian fishing ships. Or Turkish ships. Or Chinese ships. Or Greek ships. Or Liberian ships. Or ... Being press-ganged is apparently a big problem throughout Asia, not just in Thailand. I thought stuff like that only happened in Eugene O'Neill plays. Aren't you impressed that I know this stuff? Get it? Impressed? The sad thing is that the Falklands won't take crewmen who jump ship because they don't have the resources to deal with the problem. So, the crewmen go back to their boats, where I'm sure they're forgiven for being silly ninnymuggins.

And speaking of geology, the geology of the Falklands is like that of South Africa. Apparently, when the continents broke apart, South Africa drifted east while the Falklands, which used to be attached, stayed put.





But I saved the best for last. Look at this bird:



Here, nice ducky, ducky. Quack, quack! This duck is called a Steamer and it is the meanest mofo in the South Atlantic. They will fight anyone – people, other birds, fish, dolphins (yes dolphins), and each other. When they get together, they start bitch slapping anything in sight. They’re like the Noller boys I grew up with. The Noller boys would be sitting on opposite sides of a room when, all of sudden, they would spontaneously combust into a fistfight. What’s that Faulkner story? The Rievers? The Stanley Steamers are like the Rievers.

Today is the 101st anniversary of Sir Ernest Shackleton’s burial. “To strive, to seek, to find, and never to yield.”

So that was my day. We’re back aboard the ship now, waiting to cast off for other parts unknown. Hope your day was good. Mine was a blast! Get it? Mine? Blast?

March 6, 2023: There Will Always Be an England

West Point Island - West Falkland Islands. 50 degrees Fahrenheit. Partly sunny. 30 knot winds. Calm seas.

1500 ft.

South Fur Is.

Gibraltar Rock

West Po

Like the old commercial, “your windsong stays on my mind.”

We walked into a headwind of about 30 knots for a mile and a half to see the rookery for the Black Browed Albatross and the Rockhopper Penguin. They breed and molt in the tall grass, which grows near the windward coast of West Point Island. Here they are:









Their breeding ground reminds me of the grass in The Thin Red Line. Fortunately for us, we had no Woody Harrelson getting shot in the butt.



West Point Island is privately owned. There is a Swedish couple who takes care of the island for the absentee owner. Most of the island looks like this:



However, there is a small caretaker compound on the leeward side of the island. I assume the owner is British, as evidenced by the flag and the garden.





They also grow a lot of their own food, as the nearest grocery store is in Stanley (There are actually 2).



The ashes of Lars-Eric Lindblad, the founder of our tour operator, are scattered here:



The place must have been important to him.

The Swedish couple have a satellite dish so they can watch ABBA videos and Volvo commercials. There is one solar panel. There is a windmill that pumps their fresh water:

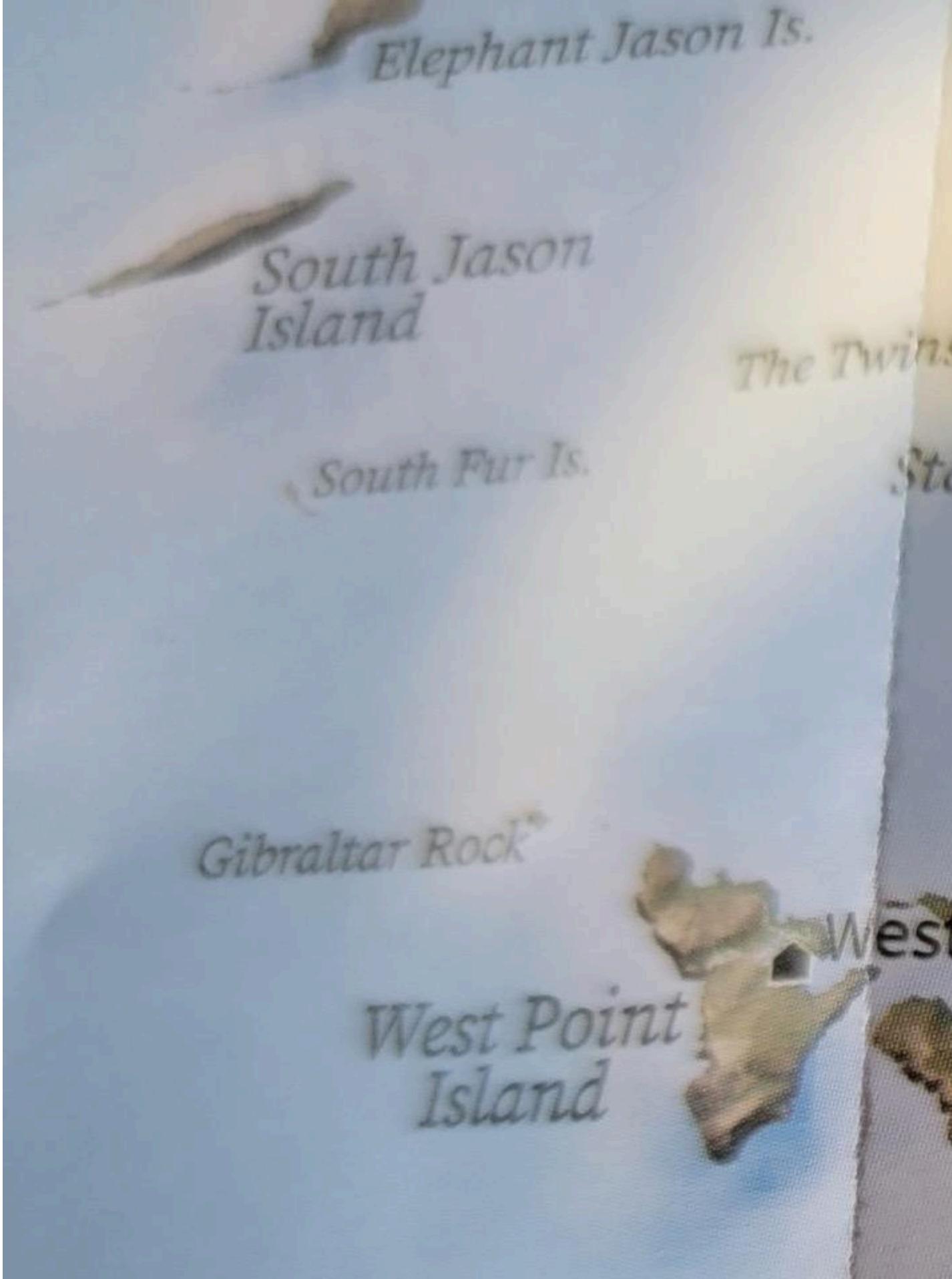
The winds are so fierce on West Point Island that the blades on the windmill can break. To solve this problem, the blades are affixed with springs.



They bop around in Land Rovers – just like in the rugged terrain of Dallas, where the Karens drive their little darlings to gymnastics.



During lunch, the ship repositioned to Carcass Island.



Elephant Jason Is.

South Jason
Island

The Twins

South Fur Is.

Sta

Gibraltar Rock

West Point
Island

West

Carcass Island is a sheep station. There are many of these “settlements” in the Falklands. The sheep are currently over this ridge, so we didn’t see any.

We did see some cattle, however.



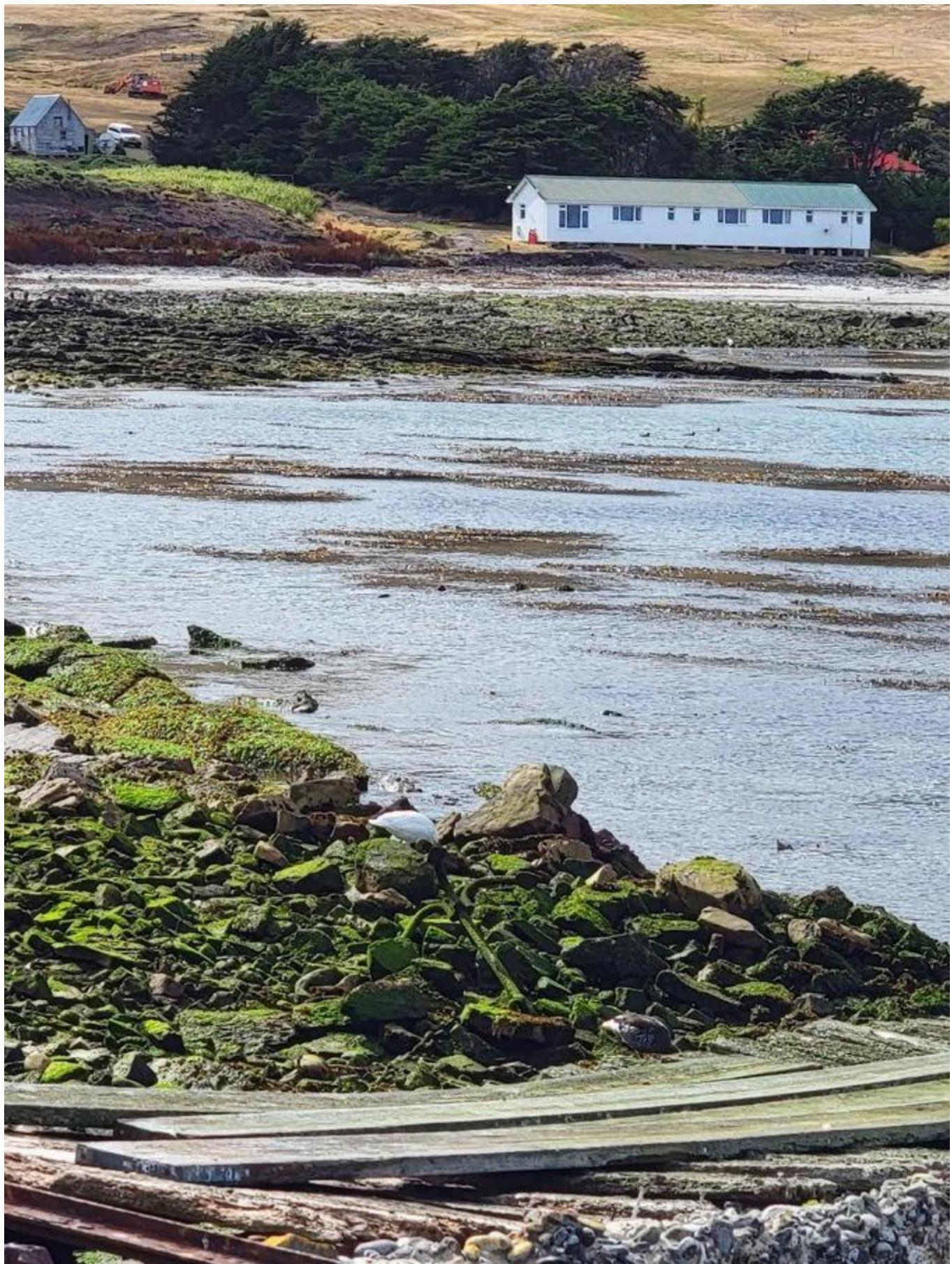
Falklands Islands sheep are what the locals eat. They are smaller than the sheep we are used to, and they take two years to mature instead of one. Therefore, they don't have much market value outside of the Falklands, except as overpriced delicacies in England. Falkland Islands beef, on the other hand, is useless. The meat is tough, and the cows are now mostly kept as pets.

There was a dairy industry in the Falklands until the late 1990s, when it became no longer economically sustainable. Reportedly, the milk was excellent, and the clotted cream was out of this world. The cheese, however, sucked, and that's what put the Falklands dairy industry out of business. Why did it suck? Not a lot of diverse grazing land, so no flavor.

Carcass Island struck me as "old Falklands." There's a ferry that cruises the islands once a week. It delivers mail, feed, equipment, etc. The ferry happened to be in the harbor today to drop off supplies to the 6 or so fulltime residents – including the first child I've seen since Argentina. I wonder what it's like to grow up in such isolation. Anyone seen Babette's Feast?

Carcass Island has a guest lodge, as do several of the islands. It's a great place to get away from it all, I suppose. However, there's not a lot to do except to start suffering and write your novel.

In true British fashion, a tea was offered to us at the "lodge" (more like a double-wide) where we could eat cakes, use the loo, and browse the art painted on rocks that was for sale. I took a pass as I found it all a little sad.



The Falklands are at a fulcrum point in their economic development. They have very low unemployment but it's a gig economy and everyone has 2 or 3 jobs. Like a lot of other places, they are having trouble retaining their young people. Their need for social services is outpacing growth as the local population ages. Solution? More money. How to get it? If I were a British Mickey Cohen, I'd put in a casino. Look what happened at Catalina. With all the pigeons....uh, I mean "passengers" that come in and out of Stanley in a given week, there would be plenty of players. There are several cruise ships that dock at Stanley in a given summer. We saw a Holland America 2000-passenger tub yesterday. With thousands of players a week, there would be plenty of money to keep Stanley viable. Where's Ben Siegel when you need him?

I'm only partly kidding. The Falklands are going to have to do something, or they will end up like those Scottish islands that are eventually abandoned; becoming nothing more than an archipelago of ghostly curiosities for future generations to shake their heads at and take a few photos. It would be a shame if that happens.



March 7, 2023: What's New?

New Island. 46 degrees Fahrenheit. Sunny. 30 knot winds. Light chop.

years.

Landsend Bluff

*New
Island*

Our last stop. We couldn't have asked for a more beautiful day.

New Island is just about as far west as you can get and still be in the West Falklands. It is a settlement. Much larger than yesterday's and in better shape.

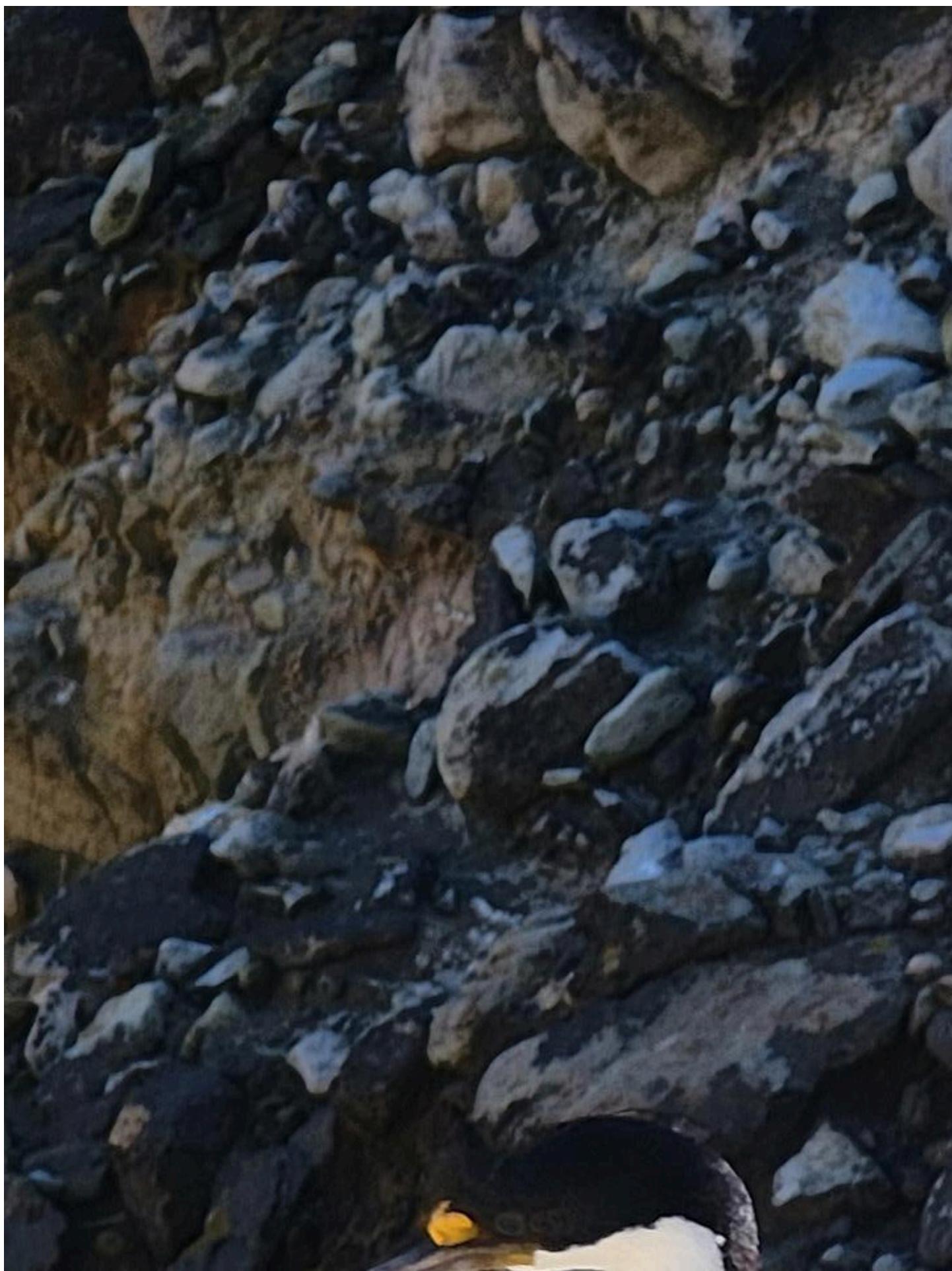


We hiked across the island to the rock cliffs on the windward side. Windward, indeed. It was a 30 knot headwind all the way – enough to take your breath away as you hike and to make you unsteady on your feet as you try to take some photos.

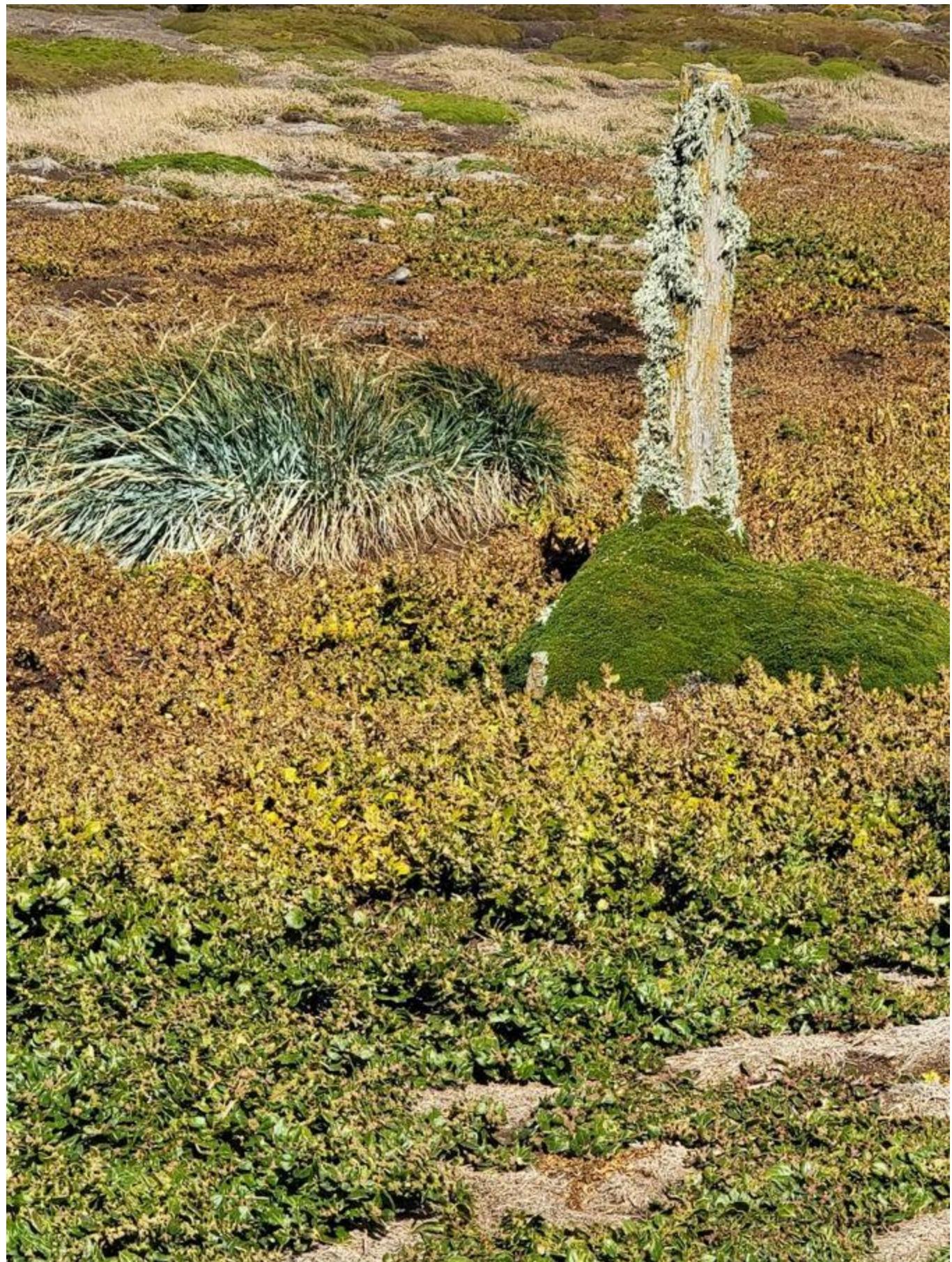
There is currently an outbreak of avian pox on the island. Avian pox is NOT avian flu. Avian pox affects the chicks. Little nodules grow on their joints, especially at the wings. Apparently, it does not affect the adult birds. We had to put our boots through a bio-wash on the way in and out of the rookery area. As was the case yesterday, the albatrosses and the Rockhoppers are molting.



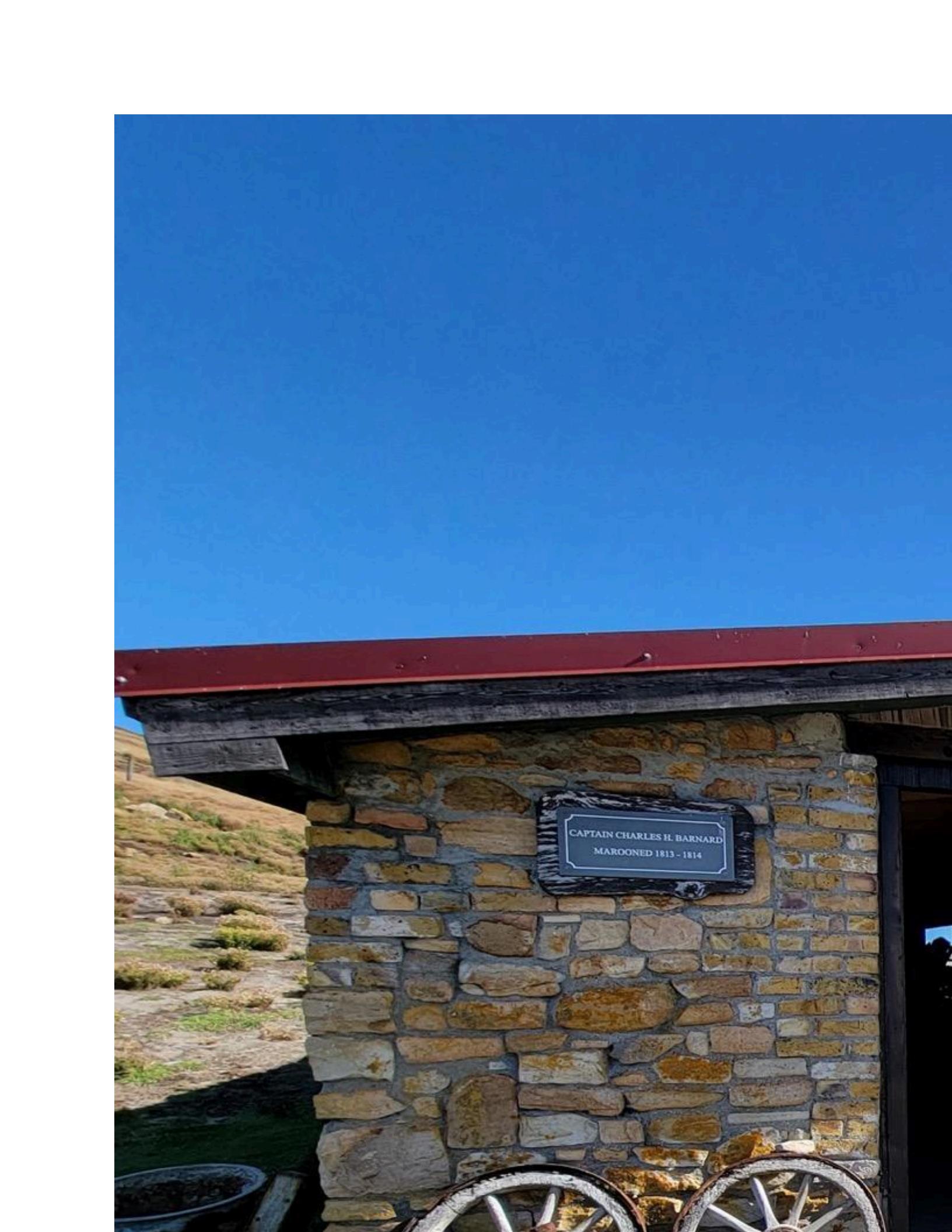




You will notice that there is much more vegetation than we've seen thus far, with a wide variety of grasses and other vegetation. Hence, more birds.



Here is Captain Barnard's hut:



CAPTAIN CHARLES H. BARNARD
MAROONED 1813 - 1814

Captain Barnard was marooned here from 1813 – 1814. Captain Barnard was a Nantucket whaler. He rescued the captain and crew of the “Isabella” – a British frigate that had run aground. What the British crew knew that Captain Barnard didn’t was that it was the War of 1812. In the “no good deed goes unpunished” department, the British captain said “thanks a lot, chump”, dumped Captain Barnard and his crew on New Island, and took Captain Barnard’s ship. Captain Barnard and his crew built this hut and lived there for nearly 2 years before they were rescued.



It is now lunchtime, and we are weighing anchor in preparation for making our way back to Ushuaia. We'll have a couple of presentations this afternoon and a talent show put on by the crew tonight. No doubt there will be much frivolity. While the shipboard part of our adventure is winding down, Adriana and I will have a couple of more days in Buenos Aires before we return to Dallas, so stay tuned.



March 8, 2023: The Last Shanty

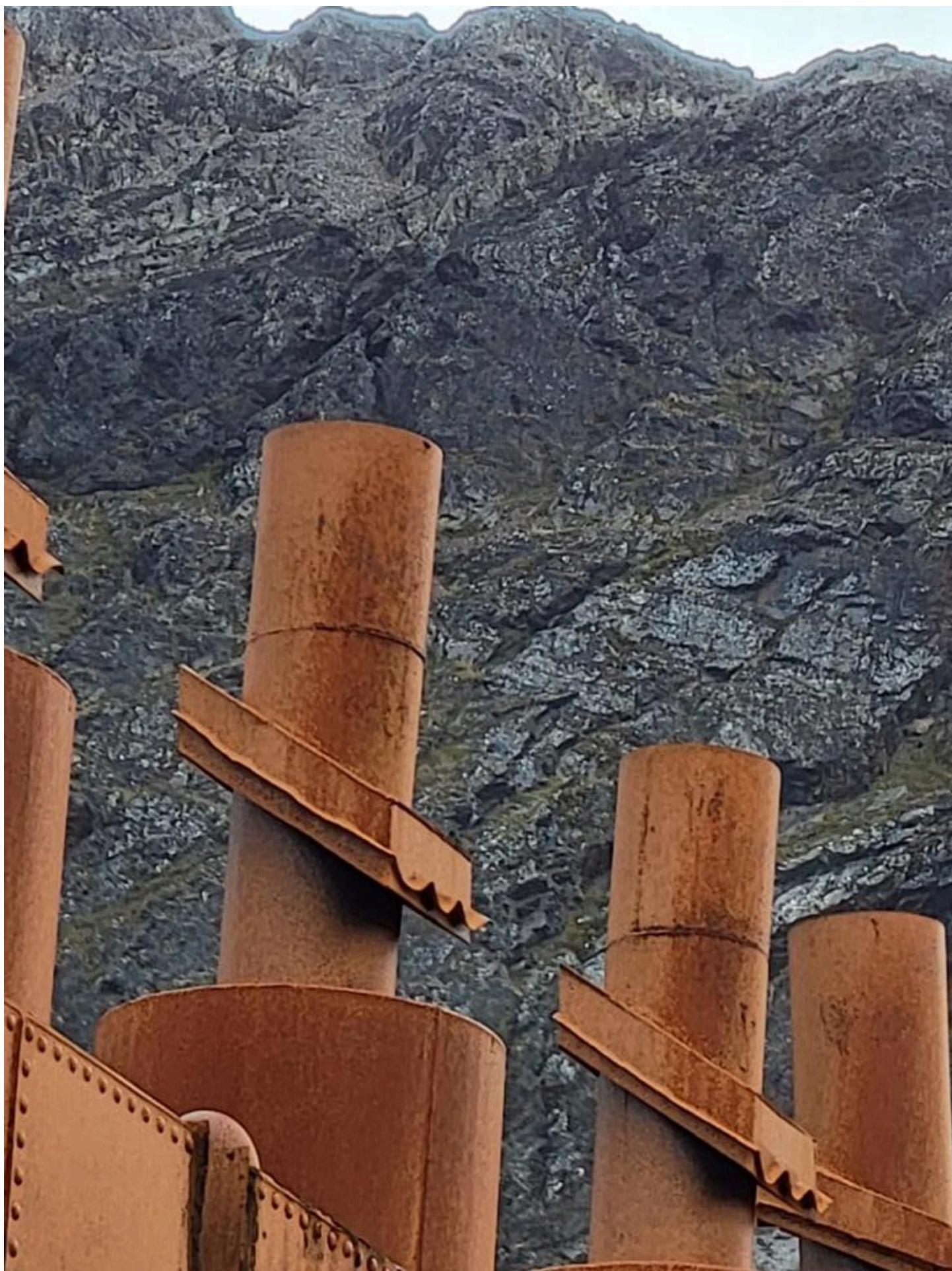
Our last day at sea. 46 degrees Fahrenheit. Partly cloudy. Calm seas.

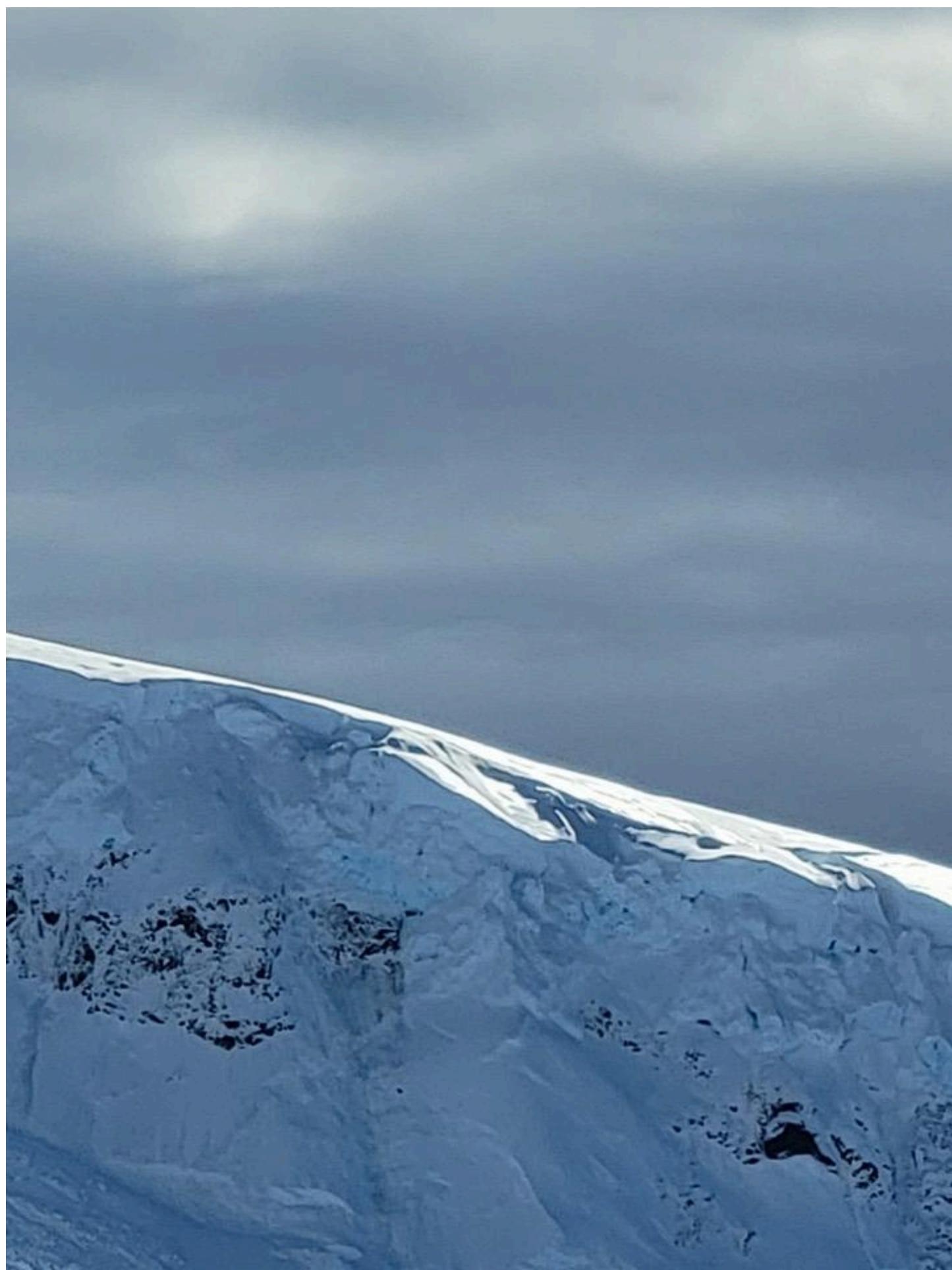
The outer islands of Tierra del Fuego are in view as we make our way toward the Beagle Channel. We should make Ushuaia later today. We will spend the night on the ship, then disembark in the morning. My understanding is the ship will have a half day turnaround, then set sail for Madeira late tomorrow afternoon. We'll be in Buenos Aires by then.

Fortunately, the seas are calm today. Yesterday, as soon as we left the protection of the cove at New Island, we were beset by high seas (30 feet waves again) until late last night, when it calmed down.

Today, we will have a couple of presentations, then the captain's cocktail party this evening. I suspect Adriana and I will figure out some packing this afternoon.

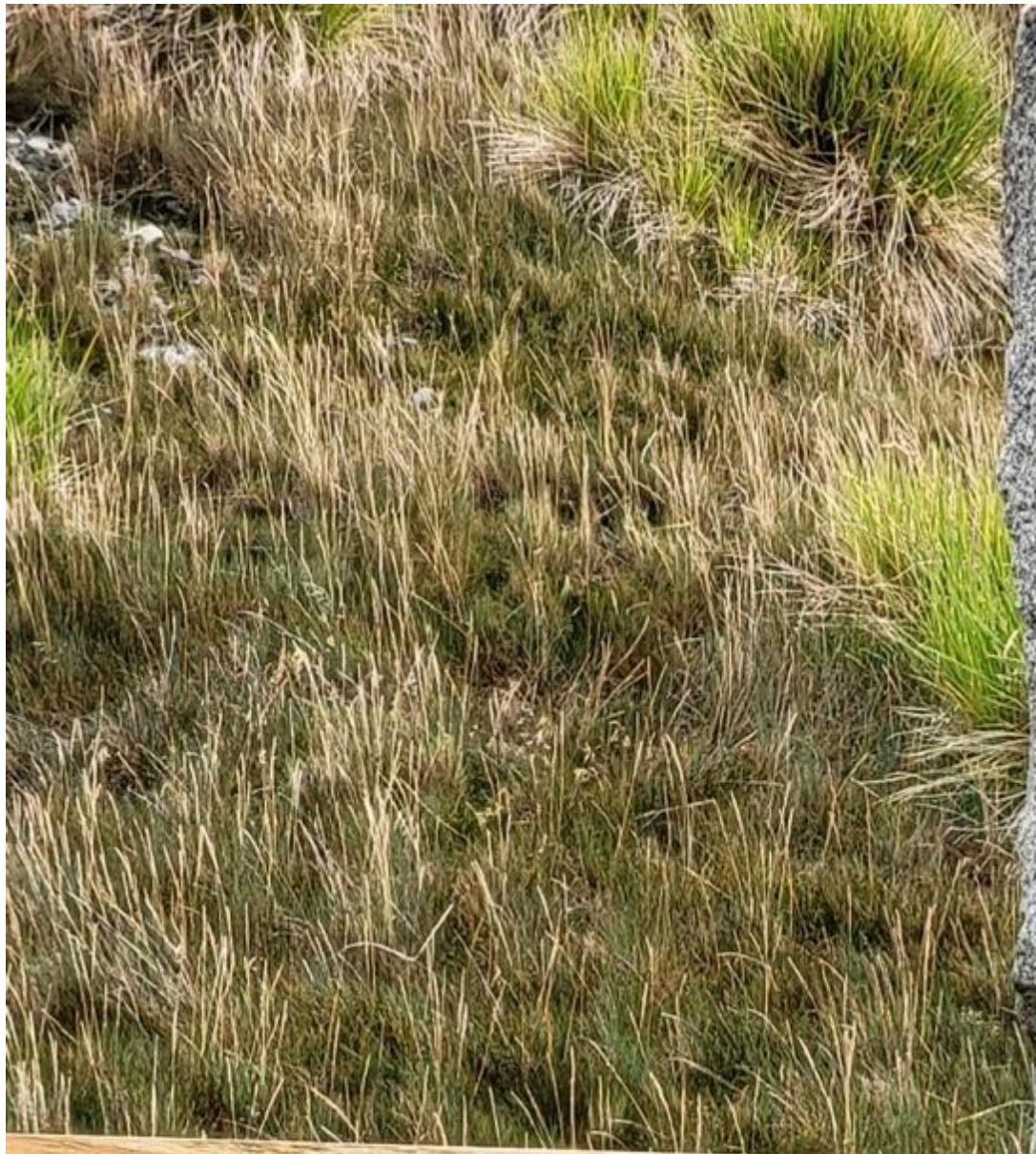
While we have a few days left of our trip, the main event is now behind us, so now seems a good time to share my 10 favorite pictures from Antarctica, South Georgia Island, and the Falkland Islands.



















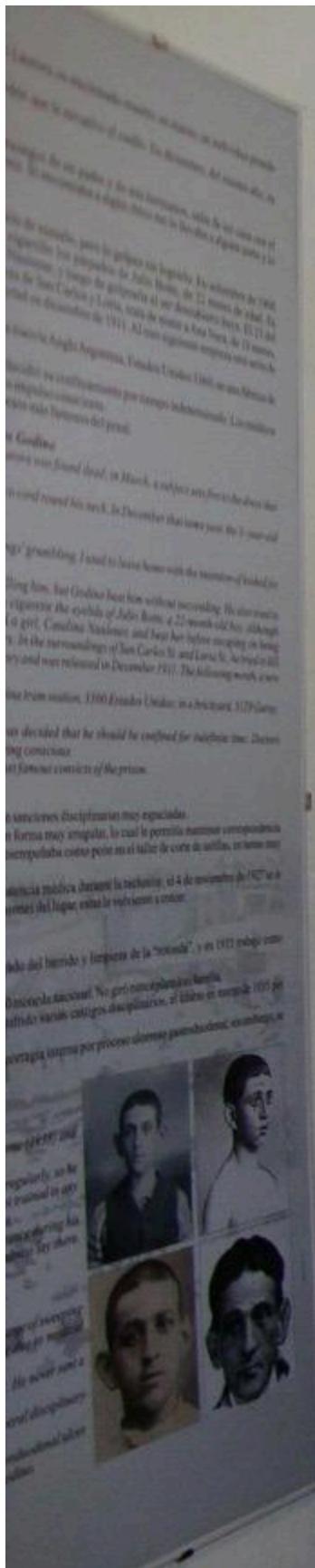




March 9, 2023: Waxing Pathetic

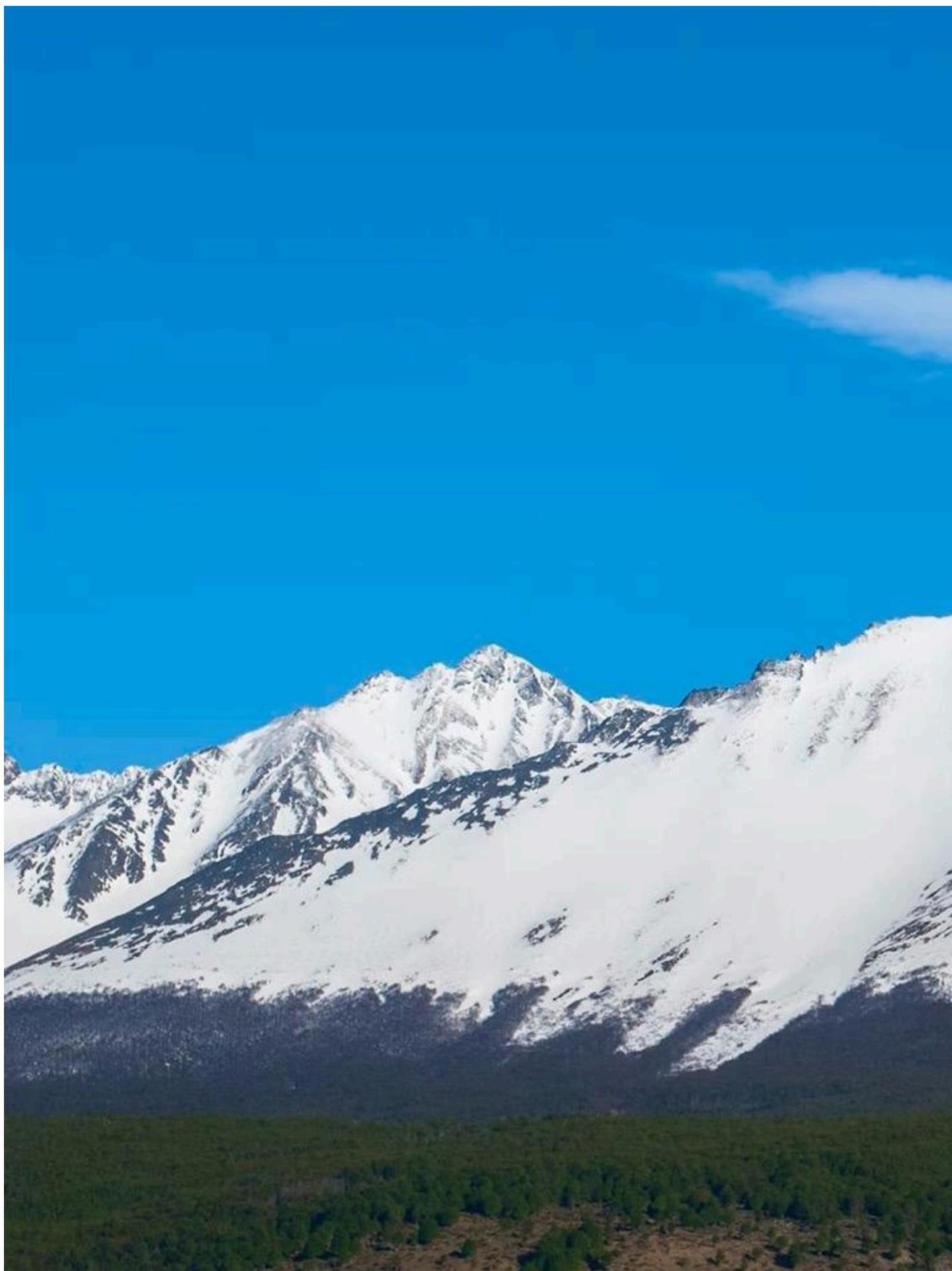
March 9: The day started on board our ship at 5:30 a.m. We had to get our bags to the gangplank by 6:30 a.m. After a hasty breakfast, they got us off the ship quickly and into the busses, bound for... prison. Apparently, the prison in Ushuaia was the southernmost prison in the world until 1947. It is now a museum, replete with creepy prison-garbed and guard-garbed wax figures watching you every step of the way through a bunch of cheesy exhibits displayed in what used to be the cells. It is, hands down, the weirdest museum I have ever been to.



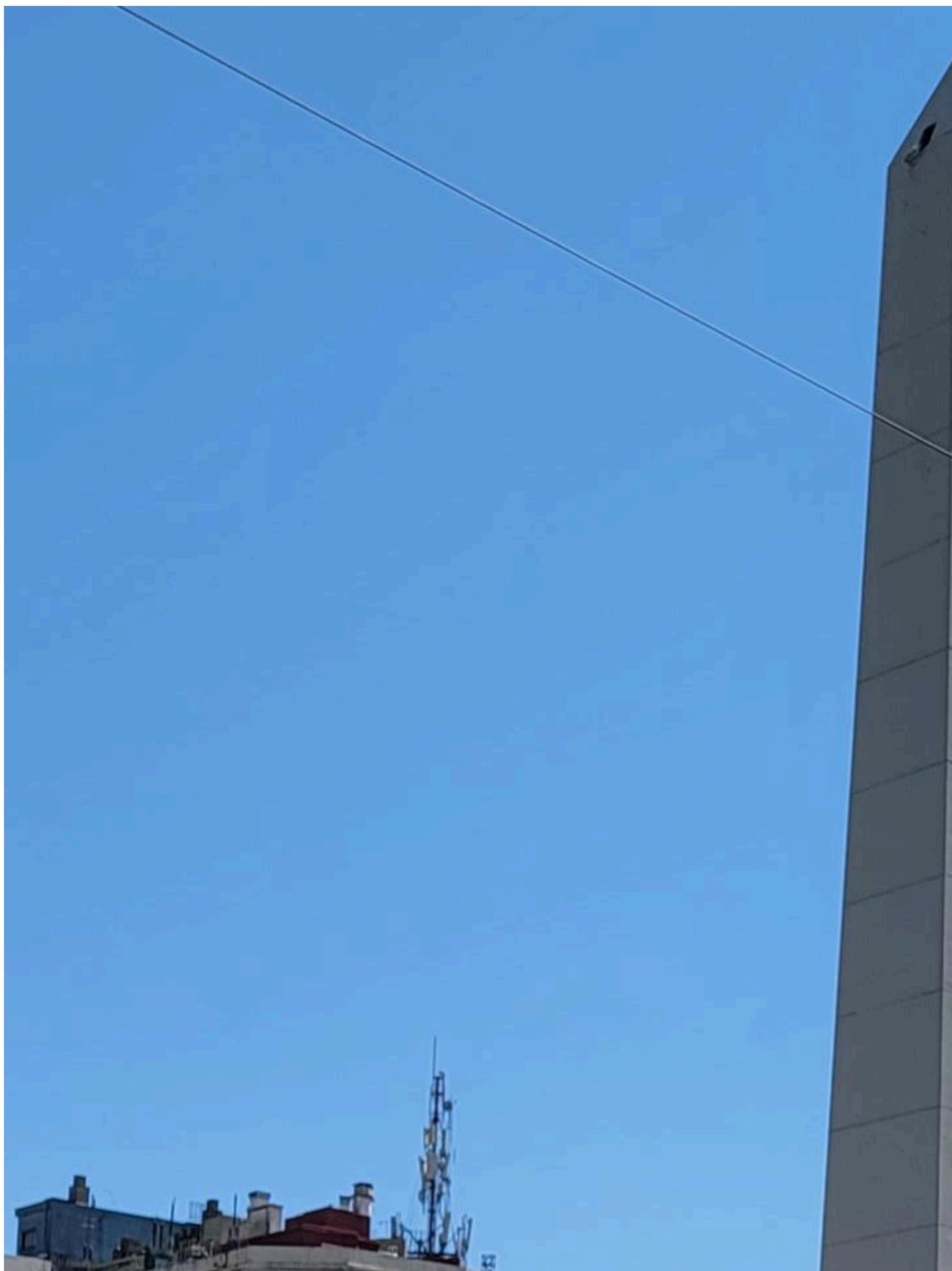


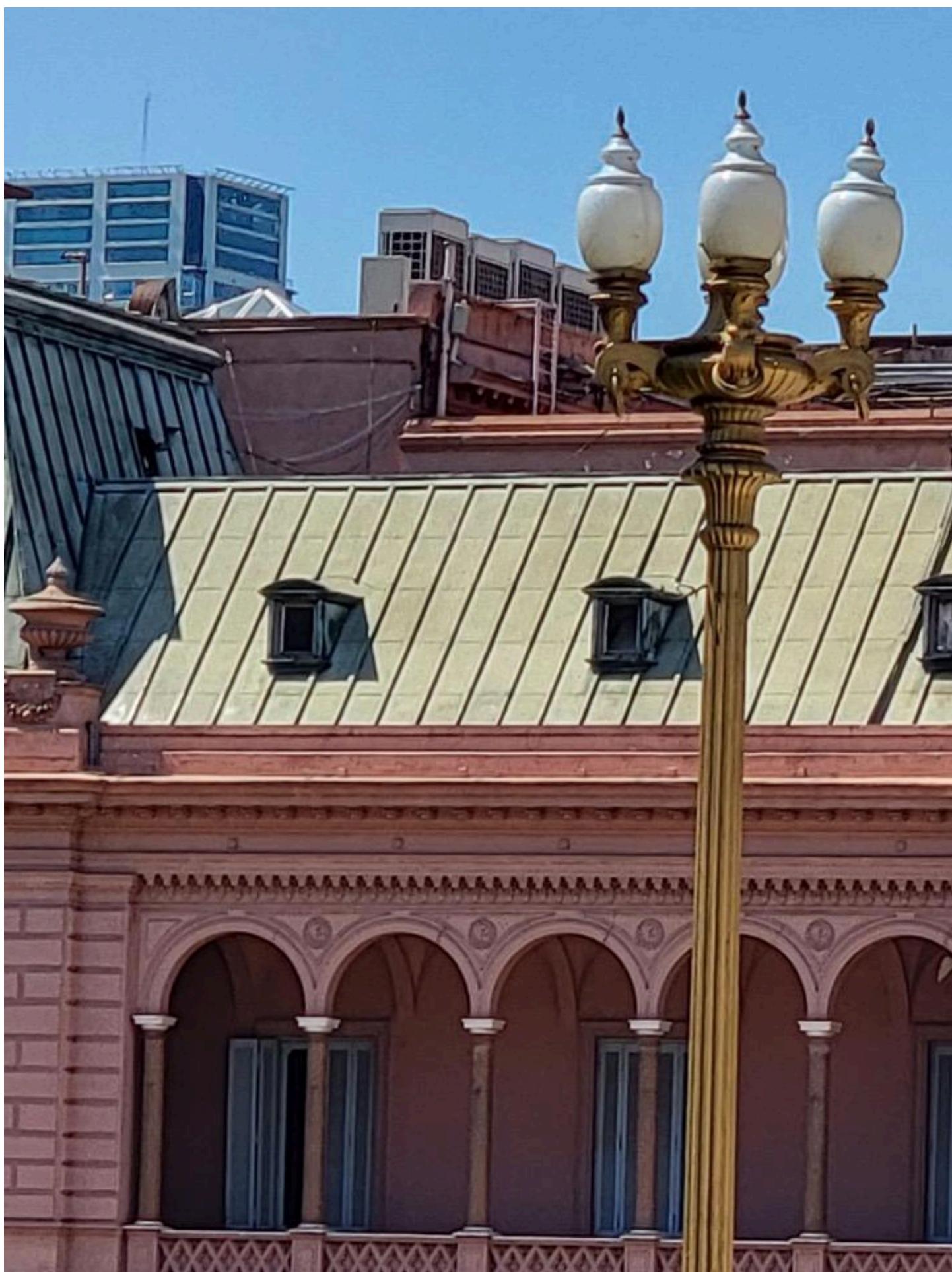


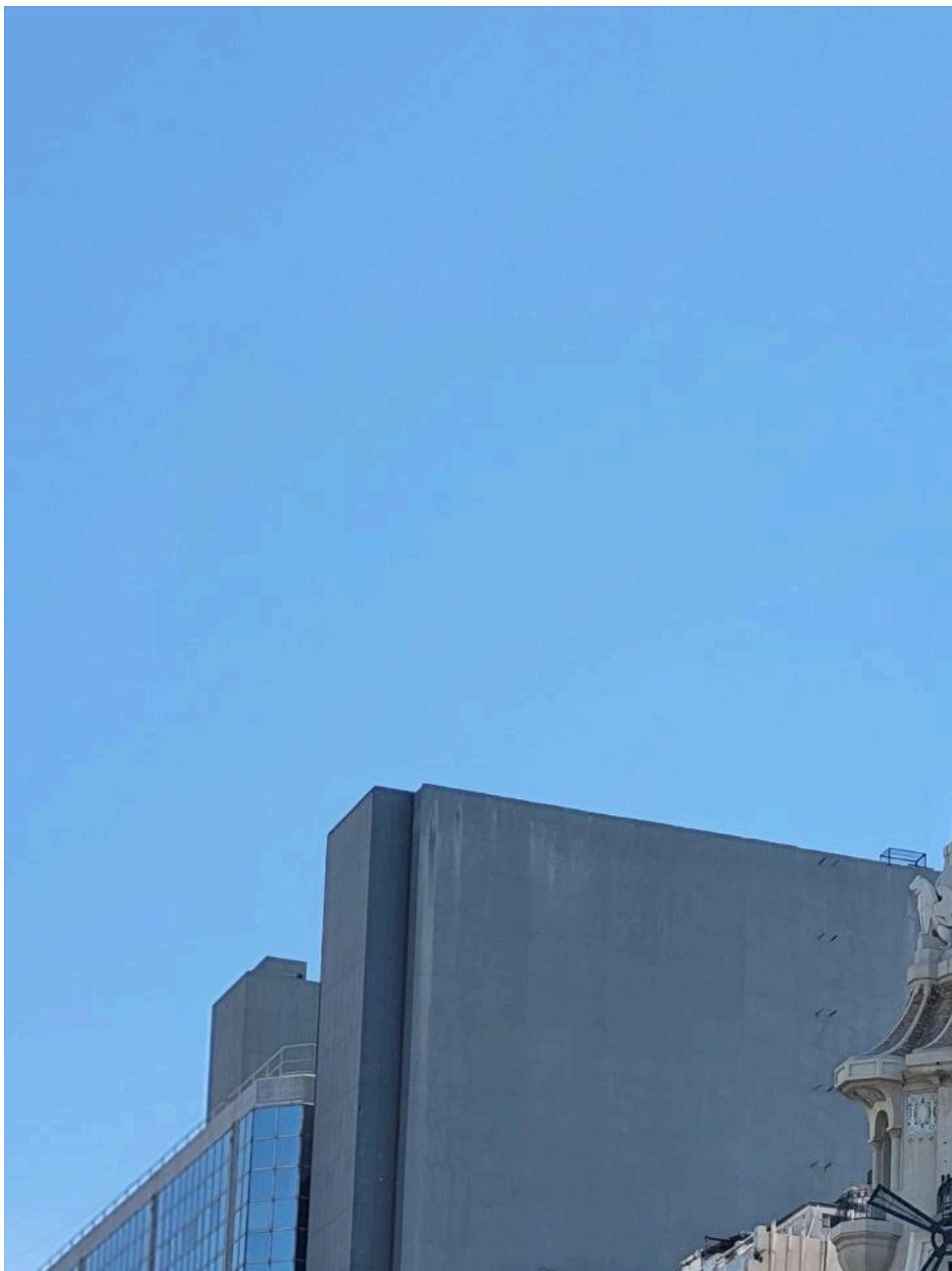
We got to the airport in Ushuaia at 10 a.m. It was in the '40s and we could see snow-capped mountains. The architecture reminds me of what I imagine Switzerland to look like.



It seems very outdoor oriented and the folks appeared to be happy. By 3:30, we were back in steamy Buenos Aires, which is pretty much the opposite of Ushuaia.







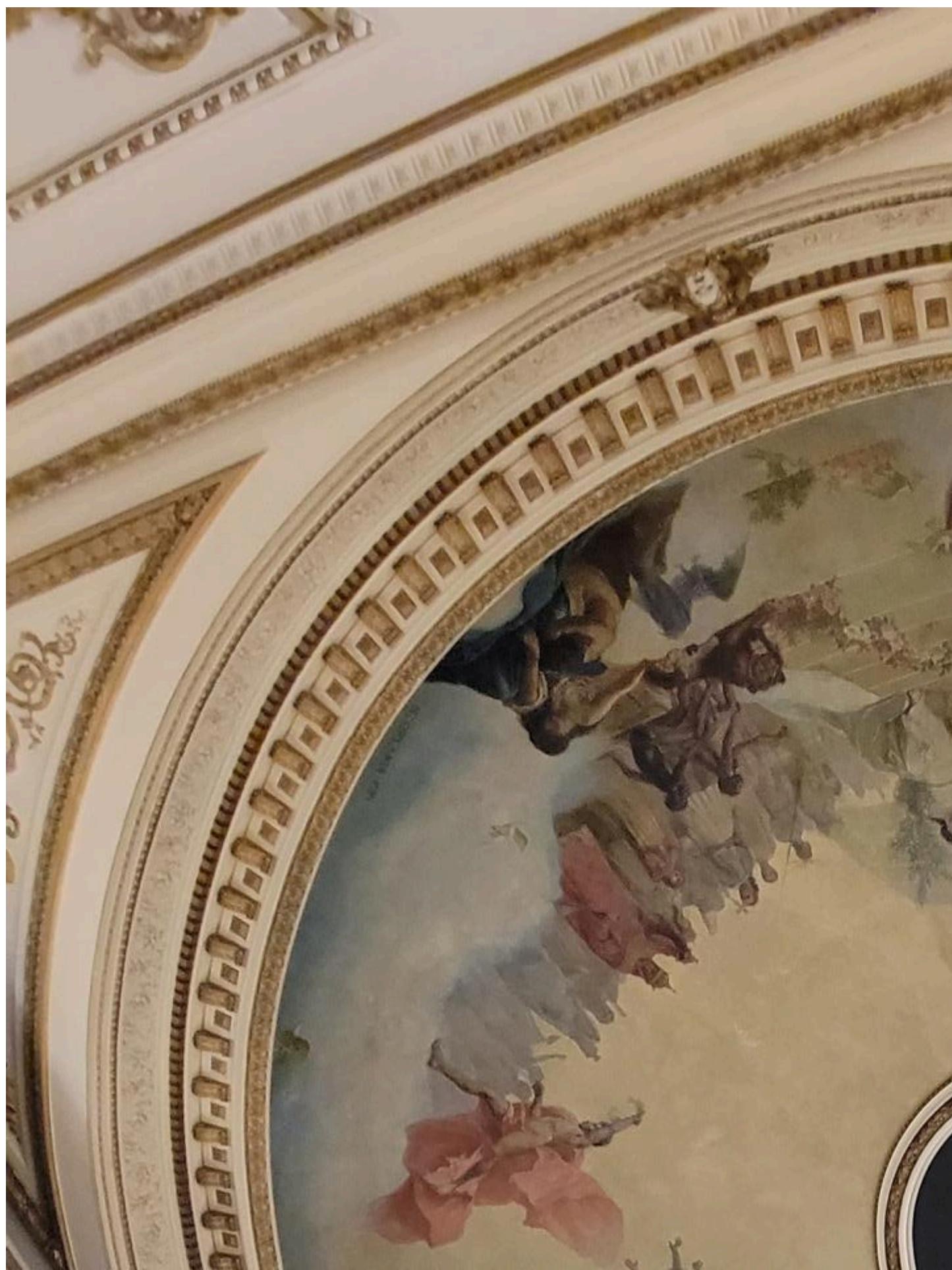
A few of us are laying over for a day or two, so we were able to have one last dinner with a couple of friends from the ship. And yes, it was a steak dinner. Although, I have to say I have been generally underwhelmed with the three bife de chorizo dinners I've had. Maybe I should have gone to that Outback after all. But, what the heck. It was great spending a little extra time with our friends from Brisbane.

It's been a long, weird day and I'm bushed. Plus, it's hot as butt. Time to head back to our comfy hotel for a good night's slumber and we shall reconvene on the morrow.

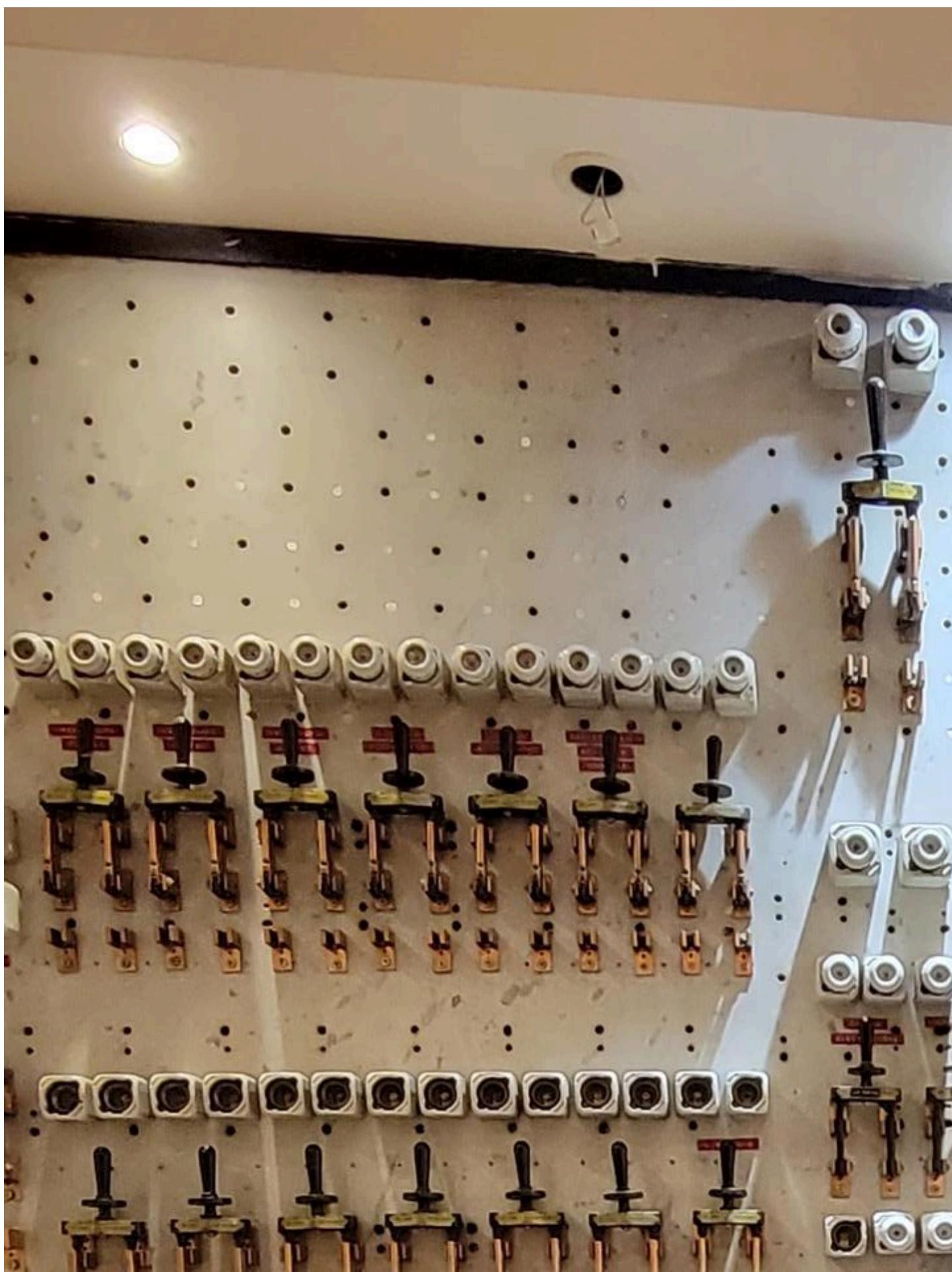
March 10, 2023: Tango Argentino

March 10: Crazy hot and humid. Real feel of 105. We walked to El Ateneo Grand Splendid, which is the famous bookstore we wanted to go to a few weeks ago. It is housed in what used to be a grand theatre. It was pretty cool. Here are a couple of pics.





The lightboard is only about one generation before the system I cut my teeth on. Eek.



It was at the little café on what used to be the stage that we said goodbye to the last of our friends from the ship. They're off to Brisbane this afternoon.

So, now it's just Adriana and me.

Here is a pic of something I can't figure out which is on Avenida Santa Fe – reportedly, the widest street in the world. How wide, you ask? So wide, it takes 3 traffic light cycles to cross the entire breadth. I have no idea what this is supposed to be and there are no signs. Once again, I turn to Deborah Steed - the doyenne of obscure arcana – for succor.



This evening, we were treated to a really great tango evening at El Viejo Almacen – one of the oldest traditional tango venues in Buenos Aires.

BALCARCE



El V
ALMA



It was one of those package deals they put together for cruise ships, so it was about 150 people from some behemoth, and us. Dinner was so-so. The wine sucked. The tango had vast cheesiness potential, but it was actually pretty great. Traditional tango orchestra – violin, piano, bass and 2 bandoneons. Excellent musicians all.



The dancers were first rate. Demonstrations of all of the traditional tango forms con muchos pasos finos.



Highlight No. 1 was what I assume is a traditional dance from the pampas which is a cross between River Dance, kodo drumming, acrobatics and synchronized gymnastics involving syncopated clogging with bolos. It was pretty spectacular. Highlight No. 2 was the legendary Hugo Marcel. He's old now, but still in great voice.



He sang a few numbers with all the passion of someone who's been at it for 50 years. I assume he owns the place. Either that, or he just can't give it up and has a regular gig at El Viejo Almacen. A splendid evening for our last night in Buenos Aires.

March 11, 2023: It's Fun to Stay at the Y M C A!

Remember way back when we had to cancel our driving tour of Buenos Aires due to Adriana's passport panic? We made up for it today. We had an informative 3 hour tour in 102 degree heat with a guide and a driver. A few highlights: La Boca is the old port and the place where tango originated. Sailors from all over the world would make port in Buenos Aires and, of course, after a long sea voyage, they would look for the nearest YMCA, a tall glass of ice-cold lemonade, and a prayer group. Unfortunately, the waterfront only offered entertainment of a different kind. While the sailors were waiting in line outside one of the local social gathering spots, the proprietors of the establishments would offer musical entertainment to keep the mariners occupied until their prayer meetings began. The musicians were largely Jewish and had trained at some of the finest conservatories in the world. Hence, tango music, largely derived from classical forms with improvisational touches taken from the musicians' native countries, was born. Of course, it was only a matter of time before the entertainment moved indoors and choreography was added by the Women's Auxiliary of the Chamber of Commerce as a means of selecting their canasta partners.

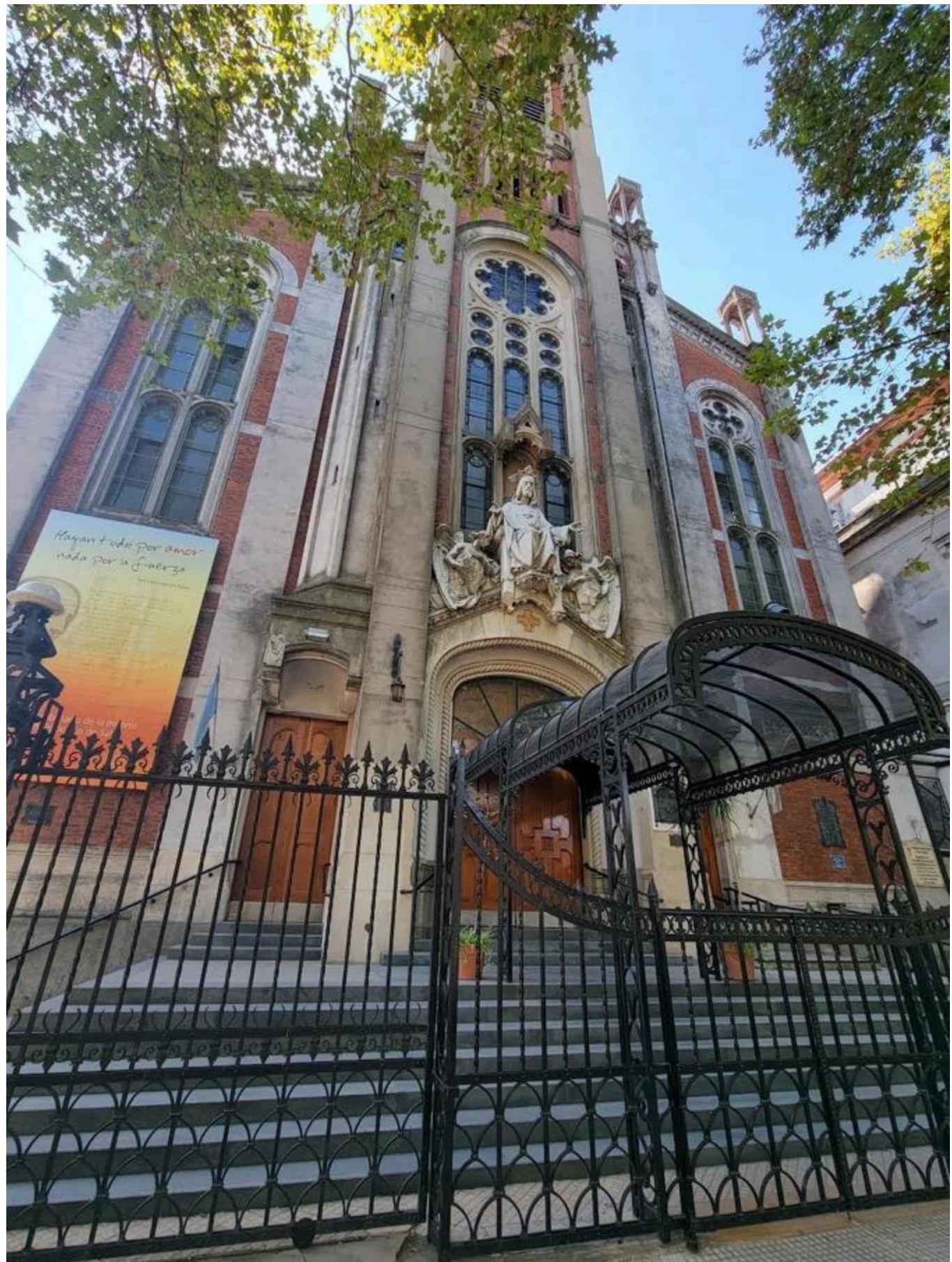




And speaking of ethnicity, Italians comprise 33 percent Buenos Aires' population; followed by 30 percent Spanish. Perhaps this accounts for the reason the best meal I had in Buenos Aires was Italian food. Buenos Aires also has the largest Jewish population in South America. I also found out why there are so few people of color in Buenos Aires. I don't think I've even seen 20 people with dark skin.

Argentina was liberated in 1810. As part of the new constitution, slavery was outlawed. Slave owners at the time were allowed to keep their existing slaves, but if any of them gave birth, the children would be free. Consequently, the slave owners sold their slaves to Brazil, where there wasn't any such restraint. Yeah. They weren't just whistling Dixie. Persons of color currently make up less than 1 percent of the population of Buenos Aires, and those people are mostly recent immigrants escaping the civil wars in Africa.

What I didn't see in Buenos Aires: Movie theatres, cemeteries, detached houses, and supermarkets. What I did see was the parish church attended by Pope Francis, who grew up in Buenos Aires.



On the way to the airport, there was some kind of hubbub which closed the autopista while about 40 armored police vehicles deployed. Consequently, we had to detour through what I assume is a typical neighborhood. Pretty grim.

So that's it. I'm now on the plane, headed for home. Tune in tomorrow for a wrap up.

Pax vobiscum.

Coda: The Rest is Silence

April 9, 2023. We've been back for almost a month and, after we both suffered through a week of Covid immediately upon our return, I've had time to reflect.

Did the trip change my life?

Not so much as my life was expanded by the experience. Curiously, the most profound moment for me was not an event I experienced firsthand. It occurred when our diver showed us a video of a leopard seal encountering another diver. Leopard seals are notoriously aggressive. They can even beat up orcas. When it encounters the diver in the video, it presents aggressively and makes angry. Then, it settles, then swims away, returning a few moments later with a dead penguin it presents to the diver. Was it a present? Was it a lesson in how to hunt on his turf? Who knows, but it touched me deeply and reminded me that we are only one among the many species that inhabit the planet we are doing our futile best to destroy. Zen master Thich Naht Hanh calls this the truth of "interbeing" – an essential interconnectivity with all of life, including plants, animals, and the rest of the natural world. We'll kill ourselves, and maybe faster than we think, but, ultimately, we won't kill the planet. We'll surely ding it a little and we'll continue to take some species out with us as we continue to commit a slow and torturous suicide, but the earth will renew. That leopard seal drove home to me the point that in the grand scheme of things we're not all that important, and we're not all that nice, and we're not all that generous.

This experience also made me wonder why I've spent 40 years of my life working in an office. Damn you, American Dream!

Was it worth the money?

Absolutely yes.

The world's a big, beautiful place and I'm grateful that I've gotten to see some of it. I hope you get a chance to see some of it too.

Was it worth getting Covid?

One of the men in Scott's ill-fated team was Teddy Evans (No. The other one). He cut his hand badly right before they left for the Pole and he hid his injury. Of course, it refused to heal in the Antarctic climate. Evans' hand became gangrenous and he became weaker and weaker. He

couldn't pull his share of the load and the others eventually had to tow him on a sledge. He died in a delirium somewhere on the Ross Ice Shelf. His physical degeneration was one of the contributing factors to the team's demise because he slowed them down, he continued to eat food, and because Scott refused to do what needed to be done. When Scott confronted Evans about hiding his injury, Evans replied "I thought it would be worth a hand to go to the Pole."

So, yeah. It was worth getting Covid.

Would I go back?

When we landed in Buenos Aires from Ushuaia, baggage claim was a mad scramble as most of our shipmates had connecting flights to catch. As so often happens, there were teary hugs and handshakes as we hastily scribbled phone numbers and email addresses; promising to look each other up the next time we're in town.... But of course, we lie to ourselves because we know we'll probably never see each other again, and our shared memories and bonds of friendship will recede into a comfortable "past."

By the time I hit Buenos Aires, the day to day was already slowly but inexorably encroaching. 1700 emails. Problems that needed solving. Real world time demanding my attention.

The South beckons, but we are dragged North with chains. And yet....there is the faint but persistent call of the ice.

Listen..... Do you hear it?

