

St Helena is one of the most unique places Sunflower has visited. It is one of the most isolated places on the planet where a diverse group of 4000 people live, 1200 miles from the coast of Africa, 1700 miles from Cape Town, and 1800 miles from South America. There is no airport and NO CELL PHONES. The island is 47 square miles of steep valleys and ridges rising to 2690 ft. The RMS (Royal Mail Ship) St Helena occasionally provides the only transportation for people and supplies. Their only other visitors are a few yachties or cruise ships on their way from Cape Town to Brazil, the Caribbean, or the Mediterranean. We saw NO ships on the last 8 days of our 1700 mile passage here.

But despite the isolation, for more than 3 centuries Great Britain has taken very good care of its territory and its people and it seems a very healthy, happy, comfortable, and friendly place to live. Every place we walked and toured people would say hi, or wave and smile, like they do in the little farming communities of Kansas where my father's parents lived. These are communities where everyone knows everyone and figures out how to get along and get things done.

When we discovered cracks in our wind vane steering and asked who could weld stainless Steel, everyone wanted to help and it was unanimous that Adrian was our man, but he would be hard to find and was very busy. You don't just call Adrian on his cell phone, because there aren't any, so the lady at the hotel offered to drive me to his shop. It turned out that his man Wayne could do the job if Adrian approved, and in due course I was directed to see Wayne's mother, Ivy, who runs the Wellington House. She called Adrian's wife who located Adrian in Annie's Pub. Ivy called him there and it was decided that the parts would be done that Saturday afternoon. Wayne did a great job and was very pleased that he had fixed a part that is critical to getting our boat to the Caribbean.

One of the high-points of our stay was Robert's tour. Robert drove the school bus for 28 years and in his 70's started showing people his island. It was surprising how many beautiful, lush valleys were hidden in the interior with spectacular views of the sea. At the governors mansion the planet's oldest land animal crawled up to us to check us out with his one good eye. Jonathan, a Seychelles Giant Tortoise, is thought to be around 178 years old. The British have planned a state

funeral for the time when the vet can no longer keep Jonathan frisking about the grounds.

The main focus of the tour was the houses and grounds where Napoleon was exiled. The exile is still a strange story to me - that a man who caused so much carnage in Europe would be supported in such style. There is still a major French consulate and staff to support and maintain the house, the grounds, and Napoleon's imperial image. There are also several forts and gun emplacements that are a legacy of the danger that Napoleon loyalists might try to break him out of exile again.

You always meet interesting people on tours and on this one I sat next to John, the Chief Magistrate of the territories of St Helena, Ascension, and Tristan Da Cunha (an even more remote place). He was escorting his niece, from London, on the tour. He wears many hats in the British administration and provided interesting insights. He said the British public was getting tired of the 30 million pound per year subsidy for the island's 4000 inhabitants and hoped to make the island self-sustaining by putting in an airport and other infrastructure, such as the nice new mooring field for yachts. We got a view of the valley where the airport is under construction, and this is a major project - filling in a deep gorge to make a runway for the big jets. This 1/3 billion pound project has been slipping and is now expected to finish by 2017. Everyone here has mixed feelings about this new connection with the planet, but all agree that big changes are coming.

Maybe we will stop here on our way back to South Africa some day - after there have been a few successful landings. Maybe we will take time to climb the 699 steps of Jacob's ladder, say hi to Robert and Jonathan, stay with Ivy in the Wellington House, and see the many other walks and sights we didn't make time for on this visit.

Dave and Kathy Blanding