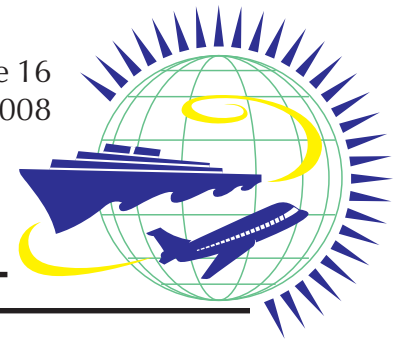


Routon's **ROUSING** Reports

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Welcome to the July, 2008 edition of RRR. Well – July was the plan while we were still traveling, but on our return home, reality, as usual, reared its ugly head, so the July issue has had a date change to October – again! This time reality included travel, but to the ophthalmologist for me and the dental surgeon for Helen. Cataracts and lens implants and a dental implant to fill the gap Helen had all during our “big trip”.

But enough of that, let's talk about the “big trip”. The trip, as advertised in the last edition of RRR, was on the first ever World Cruise for the brand new Queen Victoria, somewhat shortened for us when we had to get off in Los Angeles after only 17 days (of the 105). We did compensate some by making it into three trips: Helen's first overnight visit to New York City, the cruise itself, and a “land tour” in Los Angeles and Arizona.

Our New York City trip, like “our World Cruise”, was a bit short – 22 hours to be exact – but packed full. From our

arrival about 2PM it was sightsee Times Square and get tickets from TKTS for Helen's first Broadway play. At 5PM we had dinner with friends in a typical NYC steak house and rushed to get to the theater for the 8PM curtain of the “Farnsworth Invention”. Since we had been up since 5AM you would assume it was then back to the hotel for some sleep, but no. It was grab a cab and head to a late date for coffee and a visit with other friends in their 15th floor Manhattan apartment with views of the lights on the Chrysler building from one window and the Empire State building from the other. Then it was a slow stroll back with sight seeing in Manhattan at one in the morning. Seeing what? Well, the City never sleeps and the famous mural on the ceiling of Grand Central Station is there day and night. We did get a bit of sleep, made contact with our shipmates, Fred and Patti Ferguson, and then were on our way to board the Queen Victoria by noon. Short, successful, and Helen loved it – well maybe not so much the stroll

home on a clear but *chilly* January night.

As an aside, if any of you are planning a visit to the Big Apple, RRR does have a hotel to recommend – a half block off Times Square on 46th street. It is a Comfort Inn. The room was small but the bed was excellent, the bathroom worked, all was clean, and it was quiet for NYC. Excellent location and reasonably priced, including a better than average continental breakfast.

The sail away from NYC that night had been planned and organized by the City and Cunard to recognize three events: the Queen Victoria's maiden call, the final World Cruise call for the venerable QE 2, and the only time ever that all three of Cunard's Queens (including the QM 2) would be in the same port at the same time. The plan was for a gala “party” on land and sea with fireboats and fire works as the three ships sailed in parade out of the harbor. All was set. As could be expected there was a slight delay in getting the QM 2 over from Brooklyn, but all three were in line and starting to sail – unfortunately a bitter cold rain started at the same time. I knew we should have stayed in the bar. We did have the consolation that we and the QE 2 sailed abreast all the way to Ft. Lauderdale where with a tear in our eye, we finally said goodbye to the QE 2, an old friend.

I think there may be as many opinions about as there have been passengers on the new Queen, the Victoria, which I will hereby christen the QV. Helen and I liked her. To be sure, and especially from a World Cruise perspective, her staterooms have some serious deficiencies, stupid design choices by a short, probably unmarried, male engineer from somewhere in the Orient – although the ship was built in Italy. Let's get these problems out of the way first: totally inadequate drawer space for one let alone two people, marginal closet space, and an unbelievably small shower. For the shower they were forced to use a curtain, not a door as on the QE 2, because when washing your knees or below you must stick out somewhere,

The Grand Foyer of the Queen Victoria is grand!





The Queen's Room – from afternoon tea to gala parties at night.

and a position on your knees is a good way to wash your hair if you are over 5½ feet tall – absolutely unsatisfactory. The state-rooms are pretty, but pretty does nothing for usability.

Once outside the stateroom, what's not to like? From the Grand Foyer onwards, the décor is beautiful. Wood paneling, tasteful carpeting, subdued lighting, five star hotel décor throughout – “it speaks” casual elegance. It is quite the opposite of so many cruise ships that are full of chrome

and aluminum, flashing lights, pervasive rock music, and some idiot screaming “are we having fun?”. The QV theater continues the elegant theme and is called the “Royal Court”, a fitting name. It must seat between 800 and 900 people in a venue as good as or better than anything I have seen on sea or land. There are no posts or other impediments for excellent viewing, the acoustics are great, the seats comfortable in red plush with wonderful leg room, the stage is state of the art, and

The Chart Room – look for me here before dinner.



the décor is beautiful. For those who like “action”, the casino is substantial and without a major corridor running through the middle. The Queen's Room has a superb and very large dance floor – larger I think than the QE 2 even, the seating is greatly improved, and the décor is lovely. The shops are quite attractive and relatively out of the way; in fact, it was days before Helen and Patti even found them – not at all bad!

The facilities for dining are excellent and varied. The main dining room uses two decks in the stern and is both well designed and lovely. The Lido for casual dining features window views for all tables and food service stations you can figure out easily, unlike the QM 2. Also unlike the QM 2 you can find the people you agreed to meet for lunch. Just forward of the Lido is the Winter Garden, a large room with a retractable roof and a garden setting. A delightful place to read and relax – or to bring your lunch in from the Lido. The fun and food of the Golden Lion pub is brought over from the QE 2 but in a much larger area and without the distractions from a corridor running through the middle. For the special dinner or luncheon there is also a special place, the Todd English Dining Room with menus and recipes from the Boston chef of the same name. There is a cover charge here, but it is truly excellent and just right for a special event. (Our special event was because all Cunard “Diamond” status passengers were given a special, courtesy invitation for two, and, of course, with each of us being Diamond status... I took Helen once and she took me for a second visit.) And last but certainly not least there are the bars: one large one is forward and high with wonderful views ahead, one just for champagne, one intended for brandies and coffee after dinner, and my old favorite – the Chart Room with quiet music for cocktails before...or after...dinner.

In addition to these main facilities there are, of course, swimming pools (2), a gorgeous spa, a very large gym looking out over the bow of the QV, a coffee bar, a movie theater, a beautiful two story library, a computer room plus a computer class room, a card room, and, oh yes, I guess a disco somewhere. I didn't look for it. I also regret I cannot give you insight into the “Grills” area. We riffraff were not given the chance to see the private patio

and pool area and so on. (Maybe if I had told them I was a reporter for RRR???)

Prior to the cruise we were a bit concerned in regard to what service levels we might find. The early trips on the QM 2 were reported as nightmares, and, after all, this brand new ship with a totally new crew had had only one very short cruise before we boarded. I know there were some problems behind the scenes but the service was excellent in almost all areas. The dining room service was outstanding except for our wine steward who was both overwhelmed and, I think, ill suited to the level of service I expect. The musicians in all of the bars provided lovely music appropriate for their venue and the time of the day. The mini concerts in the Grand Foyer were delightful. One pianist became a favorite of ours – and fortunately he often worked in the Chart Room at cocktail time...delightful. The shows were very good indeed with a different and quality act every night. Even the production shows with the on-board company of dancers and singers were superior. I did have one major disappointment, however. For years I have been waiting to show Patti Ferguson that I can now cha cha without first consuming half a bottle of champagne, but, alas, shortly before the cruise Patti fell severely injuring her knee. She did get out of the wheel chair before sailing time but even with the rigid knee brace – or maybe because of it – she was in no shape for cha cha'ing.

This was Fred and Patti's first trip through the Panama Canal and the captain really opened things up so you could get forward and outside on multiple decks. You could get sunburned on four or five levels! For those of you who have not made the transit through the Canal, it is an all day, typically hot sun event. With the right reservation, first thing in the morning your ship eases up toward the Canal and out come two men in a row boat. Yes, a row boat. They are not there to collect the transit fee of thousands and thousands of dollars (still dollars – no pesos, please) but to catch the light lines from your ship and take them back to the side of the Canal where the "mules" await. Now, these mules were never animals but electric locomotives. Many think the mules pull the ships through the canal – not so. Each ship propels itself but ever so slowly which means the ship's rudder(s) is useless for control. Since the QV, like the QE 2 and all Panamax vessels only clears the sides of the canal by inches and the length of the lock by a few feet, the steel cables to the heavy mules are essential both to keep

TOP RIGHT: *Two men in a boat to get the lines – whatever works, right?*

MIDDLE: *Skip loaders seem to have the right of way as we are ready to enter the Gatun Locks.*

BOTTOM: *The water has receded just a bit more and the gates now open for us. Note the lines to the mule and the ship just leaving the lock in the adjacent canal.*



the ship in the center of the Canal, side to side, and to keep the ship from running into the lock gates.

Our passage was from the Caribbean to the Pacific. From east to west, right? Wrong. You start on the northwest and travel southeasterly. (You can save this for cocktail trivia.) Going in this direction, the three locks (Gatun Locks) lift you 85 feet to Lake Gatun. By the time you cruise slowly the 15 miles across the lake, you are sunburned with the most historic section of the Canal just ahead, the Gaillard Cut. The cut was named for the man who headed this project, but, sadly, died before he could see the Canal opened. This was the most difficult and deadliest section of the entire Canal to build. After almost nine years of work by 6,000 men, 60 million tons of dynamite, the removal of 100 million cubic yards of rock and dirt (160 trainloads *per day* to the dump site 12 miles away), Gaillard's crew had created a valley through the Continental Divide that was 1/3rd of a mile wide at the top and 153 feet deep, some 40 feet above sea level. Once through the Gaillard Cut your ship is first lowered 30 feet in the single Pedro Miguel Lock and then 52 feet in the Mira Flores Lock and you sail out under the Avenue of the Americas Highway and into the Pacific Ocean and, if you have been foolish, you head to the ship's doctor for serious medicine for your extreme sunburn.

Now some of you more observant readers may have noticed that we went up 85 feet but were only lowered 82 feet. Here is another cocktail party trivia bit for you. Sea level on the Pacific side is three feet higher than on the Caribbean side of the continent. Or put another way, if the French in 1881-88 had been able to achieve their goal of building a flat land canal, like their Suez Canal, maybe they could have lowered the level of the Pacific Ocean and created more beach front property in California. But apparently the French had not noticed that Panama, unlike Egypt, is not flat and went broke trying to build another simple ditch. A second factor discovered by someone after the US became involved is that the tidal range on the Pacific side averages 20 feet from high to low tide while it varies only a single foot on the Caribbean end of the Canal. For ships going through a flat canal with the tide it would have



Our last farewell to the QE 2 in Ft. Lauderdale.

been “surf’s up – whee”!! Between the difficulty of excavation and these ocean factors, the decision for a high level canal using locks was made shortly after the US took over the project.

One more interesting point for cocktail time is the story of Dr. Walter Reed for whom the lead US military hospital is named. Without his efforts and those of an English doctor, maybe the Canal could never have been completed. In 1900 Dr. Reed proved that the discovery three years earlier by the English that malaria was transmitted by mosquitoes was also true for the plague of the Canal workers, yellow fever. The extensive campaign that started in 1905 to stamp out mosquitoes enabled reasonable control of the yellow fever problem and helped assure the success of the entire project. Without this knowledge and the resulting control program, the French efforts in the 1880s cost the lives of thousands of workers.

From a hectic 22 hours in New York City to 17 days of busy, busy but relaxing (relaxing??) days on the QV, we went into six days of “three a day” meetings with friends in Los Angeles. Helen is now in awe of the freeway systems and the sprawl of what is loosely called “LA”. Despite the fact that I had arranged the meetings by geographical areas and time of day, we never drove less than 90 miles

a day, mostly at 60 MPH or more. To see all the friends we possibly could was hectic but completely worth the effort. One friend that we were able to see, albeit briefly, was gone forever just a week later. One never knows if there will be a next time, a next trip, or a next year.

As the song says (sort of), “By the time we got to Phoenix”, it was time to relax – at least in comparison. I lived in Phoenix some years ago (no, I’ll not say how many!), and I have never seen better weather in February. We enjoyed it thoroughly from cocktails and meals outside to lying in the sun and swimming in the outside pool. Our shipmates, Fred and Patti, live a couple hours away in Prescott but have a lovely condo in Phoenix and had invited us to use it – actually to share it with their college student grandson, Michael, which was fun in itself.

While relaxation for the three weeks in Arizona was our goal, we did do a bit of discovery in Phoenix and Helen found a whole new world in Arizona. One of the highlights in Phoenix proper was the Desert Botanical Gardens. Patti’s step mother, Helen Wooden, is a docent there and gave us a personally guided half day tour. Fascinating plants, some with beautiful flowers, that are designed to survive and thrive in the harsh desert climate. Unfortunately, we were about a month too early



QV's Winter Garden - cozy and warm or pull back the roof and let the sun shine in.

Not all Costa Ricans are this colorful.



to see the full results of the greater than normal rainfall the desert had received in the early months of winter. Already the desert was green with grasses but Helen Wooden assured us that in just weeks the wild flowers and blooms would be a sight to see. Maybe we can try again next year?? Another discovery in the Phoenix area was Lon's restaurant. Lunch in lovely outdoor gardens under a warm sun topped off with a delicious crème brulee. RRR is happy to report that you no longer need to go to Hong Kong for a world class crème brulee!

One weekend we traveled north to visit Fred and Patti in their mountain top paradise – and the weather again cooperated. We relaxed over coffees on the outside deck at 6,000 feet in February taking in their spectacular view of the San Francisco peak some 90 miles away. To give you some perspective, a few weeks earlier they had been snow bound! But just as the coffee and the relaxation was going great, they insisted on taking Helen to see some of the country. Have you ever heard of Jerome? Jerome was an active copper mine perched 3,000 feet up on the side of a mountain – and the whole town is still perched on the side of a mountain, literally. The one road in town “switch backs” its way down the mountain through the whole town. The copper

ran out some time back but the town still mines. Now they mine tourists in all the shops! And quite successfully. We were not able to find a place to park so we had to drive on through and skip the shops. Aaaaaaahhh (read with downward tone if female or upwards if male).

The next stop was the one that Helen still talks about – the red rock country of Sedona, unlike anything east of the Rockies. For those of you who are not familiar with the area, the town of Sedona sets in a shallow valley at the base of the Mogollon (Mug-ee-owen) Rim which is the start of the higher Colorado plateau. First, for eons one sea after another rolled over and deposited materials creating a multi-layered formation of sandstone waiting for the last sea to drain away. Volcanic action capped the east and south portions with an armor of basalt, and then water from the higher plateau slowly eroded the exposed and soft sandstone creating the valley and leaving outcrops of the brilliantly colored sedimentary stone. Finally, the desert wind put the finishing touches on the “sculptures” – some like ships and some almost like buildings in the distance. and all in layers of red rock. Why red? Each grain of sand was covered with iron oxide and over the many years of exposure to water and weather, you have plain old rust. Not romantic, but beautiful. Helen loved it, and the beauty I remember is still there, but I miss the little backwater town full of natural beauty and a little drive in restaurant on the main road that had wonderful hamburgers. (Of course, I also remember when you could go to Las Vegas and see a show for \$5 each. Also ancient history.) But despite the sprawl in both Phoenix and the high country and the increased traffic, our three week visit was most pleasant. With some luck, we hope to do it again – soon.

We have now set a new record for continuous time at home – five months. But we have been busy with non-critical medical things (just aging parts), catch up, and fix up. Helen has finally got me to move ahead with finishing the house decorating started last year. It was the old camel's nose technique. First, while in Akron it was a trip to the Amish country in Ohio to “save money” on a quilt for a new bedspread. Then, pushing the camel further, it was a new recliner for me followed by a new slider rocker for Helen.

And then a chest for storing blankets and the quilt. Now we are talking to the painter – I think the camel is fully in the tent. Sound familiar, gentlemen? Seriously, after 19 years it was probably time.

A bit of travel starts again as Helen will leave in early November for her semi-annual visit to Akron and the “migration of the birds” (Virginia with Helen’s help) drive to Florida. As soon as Helen gets back, we have to start getting ready for a very special event. For the first time since we were married, we will be home for Christmas – AND will have children in the house. Bill and Lara will be here with Grace and Will (ages 7 and 5). I have to get the chimney clean for Santa Claus!!!!!! We will also have to find the Christmas decorations, find a tree, and see if we still know how to trim it. To be honest, after Christmas we will probably collapse until late January when we hope to make a winter trip to Phoenix via Atlanta. Who knows, if we make the trip perhaps we can stop and see a few of you on the way. Well, you have been warned!

As always seems to happen with our end of the year travel schedules, I think I’d best send you our sincere and best wishes for the holidays now. May your season be joyous and may the new year bring good health and happiness to you and yours. May 2009 be a better year for all of us. Do let us hear from you; we are interested, and ‘til next time, *may a kind and loving God walk with us and with each of you.*

Amen.



Chapel of the Holy Cross built into the red rock of Sedona.



BOTTOM LEFT/RIGHT: *Routon's Green Acres – my first farm, and so successful that next year we plan to double the acreage (2 pots!)*