Early in this year’s ‘Shelter in Place’, a copy of My Life with Ndoto arrived in the mail, and for a week I was transported around Africa by its very pleasurable reading. Written by NorCA Chapter Member Teresa O’Kane MN’13, it’s a report of the expedition of the author and her husband to visit elephants in their natural environment. Ndoto means ‘Dream’ in Swahili and is the name given to the 40-year-old Land Rover that they acquired to achieve that long time dream.

My life with Ndoto is a remarkably light and readable memoir that shares the joys and pains of such an experience -- driving around southern and eastern Africa. It took them to an Africa far different from the structured world of safaris and star-rated hotels ordinarily available to would-be explorers. Over the course of the year, and 48,000 km on a wide variety of roads, Ndoto visited 15 countries from the Republic of South Africa all the way north to Uganda and Kenya along the eastern side of the continent.

Along the way, O’Kane describes the people she came into contact with, ranging from sophisticated professionals and business people who helped them along the way, to the simplest of individuals and families who make up most of the populations of the different countries. She experienced many of the travails of that population by the day-to-day issues of keeping Ndoto running, and maintaining all the supplies of food and fuel that are a part of life. Their policy of offering lifts to people walking on the road took them to simple abodes and lifestyles of the working population.

The interest in the local animal world led them to learn how to identify specific spoor and scat, as well as provided some guided walks to test their newly developed skill. But primarily it took them to most of the animal reserves that are known. This led to specific encounters with elephants, rhinos and even a hippopotimus ‘encampment’ keeping cool in the summer heat, as well as an experience with the dreaded tsetse fly, all documented in some detail.

The emotions of the author in response to the issues of health, poverty, corruption, environment and the strength of human spirit are all apparent as she honestly reports her feelings along the way. Her love for Africa, its people and its wild life are all palpable. This book is a joy to read.

My Life With Ndoto by Teresa O’Kane MN’13 may be ordered from Amazon

A Rhino that survived dehorning

More Ndoto pictures on page 2

Review by Anders Jepsen MN’03
This documentary takes us on an extremely personal and intimate expedition to Pitcairn Island, highlighting the history of the island and its ancestry relating to Captain William Bligh and Fletcher Christian. The film describes a modern effort, supported by the Royal Geographic Society, to recreate events on ship and land to understand the circumstances of this famous historical British navy occurrence. The expedition was led by Glen Christian, a descendant and biographer of Fletcher Christian. The goal of the expedition was to help unravel the mystery of the mutiny while also understanding the ancestry of the people currently (1982) living on Pitcairn Island.

Based on the report prepared by Captain Bligh when he finally managed to get back to England, the film imagines how Christian and a few of the crew were able to take over the Bounty. Bligh and those crew who did not mutiny were put on a lifeboat to fend for themselves; they eventually navigated back to land, and Bligh eventually made it back to England. In the meantime Fletcher, the mutineers and the Tahitian passengers sailed on, eventually finding an unpopulated Pitcairn on which they settled. This serves as the introduction to the present day crew and the Taiyo, a modern equivalent to the historical Bounty, on which the crew sail to Pitcairn.

Like the original Bounty, a modern crew of 15 volunteers from several countries gathered in Papeete to crew the ship Taiyo, and to duplicate the Bounty’s course of 200 years ago. The documentary goes back and forth between life on the Taiyo and Christian’s journey to ultimately land on Pitcairn Island. The expedition turned off all modern technology in order to recreate the adventure of the Bounty by navigating using old world methods.

After five weeks at sea the Taiyo reached Pitcairn Island and a program of search was begun for relics, artifacts and clues to the islands hidden past. This involved crawling around on the cliffs and beaches. Divers then surveyed the local waters and found remnants of the Bounty. In particular, the lifestyle of the current residents is described through the images of local residents going through their daily lives. There are brief mentions in the historical record of the difficulties of the intermingled cultural difficulties between the European crew and the Tahitians. The result is that eventually all the crew save one were annihilated and the remaining population was made up of the offspring that remained. It is somewhat disturbing and illuminating when the film’s narrative goes back in history to describe how the native Tahitians were so enamored by the Englishmen’s light skin, (the crew of The Bounty), they showed no moral restraint in response to this affection. As a result, there are many Pitcairn individuals today that bear the features of the original Fletcher Christian.

The film paints current Pitcairn life as a Utopian society born of necessity. Various activities are shown, such as the simple commerce of the lone store open 3 hours a week, and motor bike tours of the island trails; the barefooted goat hunting expedition is indeed one of the many highlights of this hidden gem.

* The 1980s were very different from today. As Explorers we must not only try to understand other cultures, be it religious, ethnic or racial, but embrace and support all people. We must try and be humble and remember the privilege that has allowed us to travel the world in search of our various passions and fields. True exploration is to listen, not talk, to understand rather than be understood. “Island of Bounty”, is a nice example of such truths.

Review by Jimmy Friedman MN’19
FOUNDER’S AWARD WON BY
BOB SCHMIEDER FE’86

Presentation by Lee Langan

I am delighted to present the Northern California Chapter’s award for distinguished service, the Charles Elkus Founder’s Award, to Dr. Robert Schmieder FE’86.

The award was established two years ago, and Bob follows Mike Diggles in receiving this recognitions from his peers.

We all know the recipient well, for he has devoted countless hours in the service of our chapter of The Explorers Club. Close to all are the memories of the many years aboard the Cordell Explorer to Angel Island for our summer gathering and the return where Bob treated all aboard to a wonderful tour of the Bay, before docking in Berkeley—at which point, Bob would indulge in a glass of wine -- but never while captaining the boat. Who could forget?

He served as Chapter Chair from 1995-1998, in the twentieth century! Preceded that as Vice Chair from 1992 and as Secretary from 1989.

His tour de force was the organization of the first and second Golden Gateaway, the first and successful attempt at organizing an ECAD outside of New York. It was not fully understood by the east coast at the time, but was a rousing success with Jim Fowler and his animals, Walter Cronkite, Paul MacCready (the pre-Solar Impulse aviation designer) and others. Two nights to remember. That is where many of us first met Buzz Aldrin! It was my amazing introduction to the Club.

Besides his day job as a preeminent scientist, Bob led the exploration of the Cordell Bank before it became a national preserve to the expert flag-expedition organizer who has beamed ham-radio signals from around the world. We are proud to acknowledge our mentor and friend with this distinguished award.

ZOOM TALK REVIEW

ROW ACROSS AN OCEAN AND FIND YOURSELF

By Roz Savage. ZOOM talk given on Friday May 22, 2020

Roz Savage had recently published a book entitled The Gift of Solitude which she wrote to deal with the isolation that is part of ‘Shelter in Place’. She began by talking about her rowing achievements as the source of the ideas in her book. She spoke about having been in a rut, quitting her job, spending 3 months in Peru and becoming aware of environmental degradation. She decided to row across the Atlantic Ocean in order to bring attention to the environment; dealing with all the attendant issues showed her that she was could deal with crises and triumph over them.

It was in that three and half months of solitude that she became a different person, aware of the value of optimism, and of self reliance. She dealt with broken oars, failing radio telephone, stereo and other equipment, and possibly losing her boat and all that was in it. And she overcome it all without phoning for help on her satellite phone, an option she considered when her radio phone died in mid-ocean. She spoke about how she got outside her comfort zone and what she learned from it; how these struggles forced her to recalibrate herself. And of how the simplicity of life on the ocean helped her to find herself.

The real issue is getting the confidence in oneself ....‘that you might be able to do it.” When asked how one might be able to do something, the reply was “Start doing it until you know how to do it.” She continued by pointing out the down side of worrying about the things that could go wrong, the danger of defeating oneself, calling it the ‘fallacy of future fears’.

In reply to a question about rowing prior to doing the Atlantic, Savage admitted to rowing for Oxford, but felt that much more important than that were the issues that arose while on the ocean, issues that were much more significant than simple college crew. One major crisis was the failure of her phones while speaking with her mother. She described an inner shift when that ‘umbilical cord’ was broken; she became more self-aware. No access to weather forecasts, ‘now it’s just me’. Ten years later, she admitted that she could finally say that she was grateful for all the tough things that had happened on that voyage. Today she cherishes her solitude and the mental stimulation of her 4- to 5-mile walks in the British countryside. Savage is the first woman to row solo across three oceans: the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian. She was awarded the MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) in the Queen’s Birthday Honours 2013 for services to environmental awareness, and fundraising and is active as a motivational speaker. AJ
FROM THE CHAIR — June 2020

In normal years, many of us would be on expeditions and doing our summer field work; but this is not a normal year. As you know, we cancelled our in-person meetings for March, April and May and switched to Zoom meetings. We started with a presentation by David Hirzel about a field trip in Pacifica that he wants to lead when we can meet again. We virtually toured the San Andreas Fault and then went to the coast. Roz Savage took us through the joys and stresses of her trans-oceanic rows that were an inspiration for her newest book, Gifts of Solitude: A Short Guide to Surviving and Thriving in Isolation. Roz undertook her trips to highlight the importance of the oceans and conservation and since her long-distance rows, she has dedicated herself to blogging, writing and speaking about protecting our planet.

We finished our regular season with two more zoom meetings. The May 29th meeting was our Annual Meeting, followed by a conversation with Bonnie Tsui, author of Why We Swim. This meeting started with a surprise presentation of the 2020 Charles Elkus Award to Bob Schmieder. We wanted to make the award a surprise and in Bob’s own words, he was gobsmacked. His wife, Kay, had hidden the award in their house for over a week and was ready to hand it to him once Nancy Elkus and Lee Langan had finished with the discussion about the award and then about the very deserving recipient. The Annual Meeting concluded with the election of Paul Freitas MN’10, Kim Chambers, MN’16 and Jimmy Friedman, MN’19 for three- year terms as elected directors. The strength of the chapter depends upon the commitment and energy of the Board, the officers and the members. Many thanks to Paul Freitas, Jim Hurson and Sandra Cook for three-years of service to the chapter, to Paul for running successfully for a second term and to Sandra for agreeing to serve for another year.

Following the Annual Meeting, newly elected Kim Chambers jumped into a different role and participated in the evening’s program by interviewing Bonnie Tsui and her inspiring book about swimming. Bonnie and Kim often swim together at the Dolphin Club and the conversation was one between two good friends. It was a pleasure to be able to listen in.

Our final presentation, perhaps for the season, was by Eliot Hodges. Eliot introduced us to the various ways to visit the Grand Canyon; stand on the rim and look around is a R1 visit. Hike down to the river and up to the other rim is a R2 visit. Hike down to the river. Up to the other rim and back to your starting point is a R3 visit. If you don’t have a camp site, you have to keep going since overnight visits are carefully controlled and unregistered guests are not allowed. Eliot’s first attempt to do a R3 trek stopped as an R2 and he had to hire a taxi to get back to his car. But, in his second attempt, in 2019, he completed the R3 trek in just 20 hours. He was not alone; he headed down the south rim in the dark with other hikers, and hours later followed a line of headlamps of people hiking back up to the rim. He even had time to take some photos of his day. All the zoom presentations are on our web site. If you missed any of these events, pour yourself a coffee or other beverage, grab a snack, and watch them.

Presently there are no plans for any summer events. As the Bay Area move into Phases 2 and 3 of the Covid 19 response, we might try to have a picnic. We might also have a few more zoom meetings throughout the summer — If you have ideas for topics or want to volunteer for a presentation, please share them with me or another officer.

Finally, I am sorry to report that Norden ‘Dan’ Cheatham, LM, went on to higher exploration last May. He suffered from a cardiac event and was 82 years old. Dan had moved to Davis several years ago, so we have not seen him in recent years, but the club was always special to him. Among his many accomplishments, Dan set up the UC Natural Reserve System, now almost 50 years ago and was always involved with the California Native Plant Society. His sister Nonna, also a club member, is living in Pebble Beach.

Lesley Ewing, FN’93

EDITOR’S NOTE:
The Chapter newsletter serves its members not only by keeping them up-to-date on events of the Chapter but also by providing a forum in which members can express their thoughts and ideas. Notes submitted by members will be printed as time and space permit.
MEETING VIDEOS
Our Chapter tries to record all of our dinner meetings. Videos of recent speakers’ presentations are available on the Chapter Website.

WANT TO GET INVOLVED IN THE INNER WORKINGS OF THE CHAPTER?
There are lots of tasks that come up during the course of a year: speakers, meetings, field trips, membership, newsletter, etc. A good place to get started is by volunteering to serve on a committee. Talk to any of the Chapter Officers or Directors.

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA CHAPTER 2020 DUES
The Northern California Chapter dues are paid for the calendar year. Dues are now due for 2020.

Sirdars have annual dues of $50.00. In addition to their national dues, members have optional dues of $25.00. Dues can be paid by check payable to The Northern California Chapter of The Explorer’s Club or by paypal. If you use paypal, there will be a $2.00 fee for the service. If you pay by check, please mail your check to Anna Freitas, 161 Camino Posada, Walnut Creek, CA 94595.

Please note that Northern California Chapter dues can be tax-deductible depending on your individual tax situation.

ECAD 2020
ECAD 2020, initially postponed until October, has been cancelled. HQ will send a note soon about options for ticket holders. Call HQ if the provided options do not fit your situation.

ECAD 2021 is being planned now, with one option to be an outdoor event somewhat later in the Spring. Check the main website for more details closer to Spring 2021.

Embedded Content:
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- WANT TO GET INVOLVED IN THE INNER WORKINGS OF THE CHAPTER?
- NORTHERN CALIFORNIA CHAPTER 2020 DUES
- ECAD 2020
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