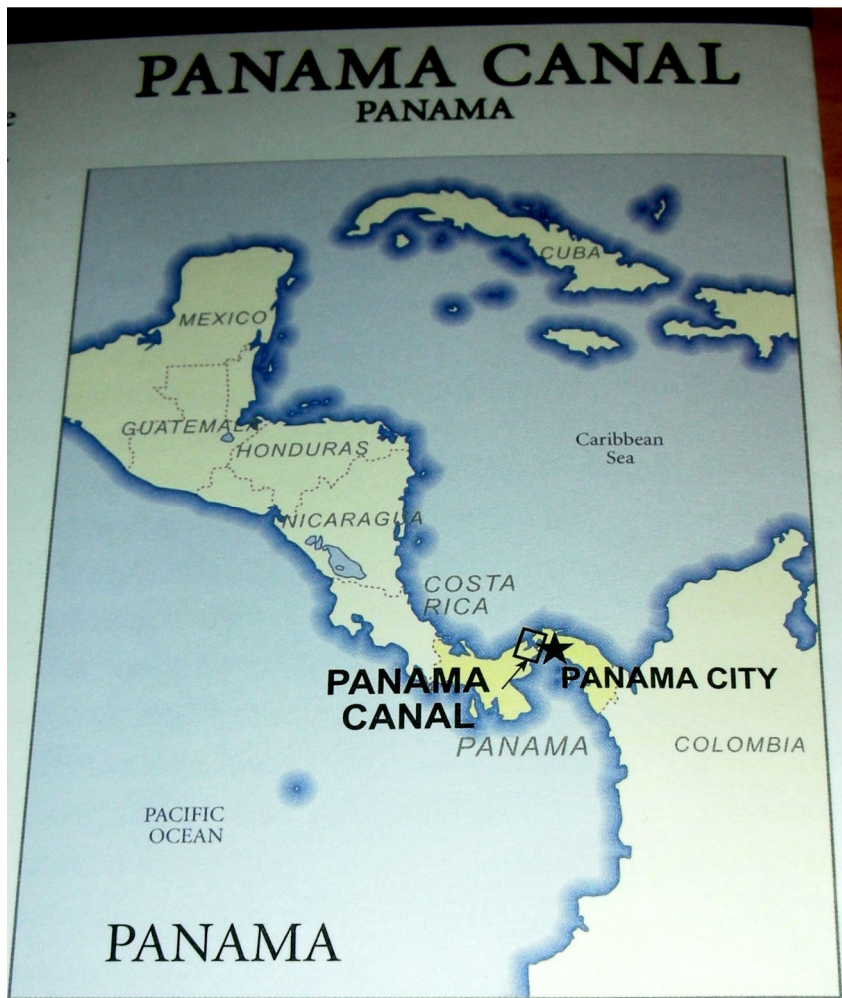
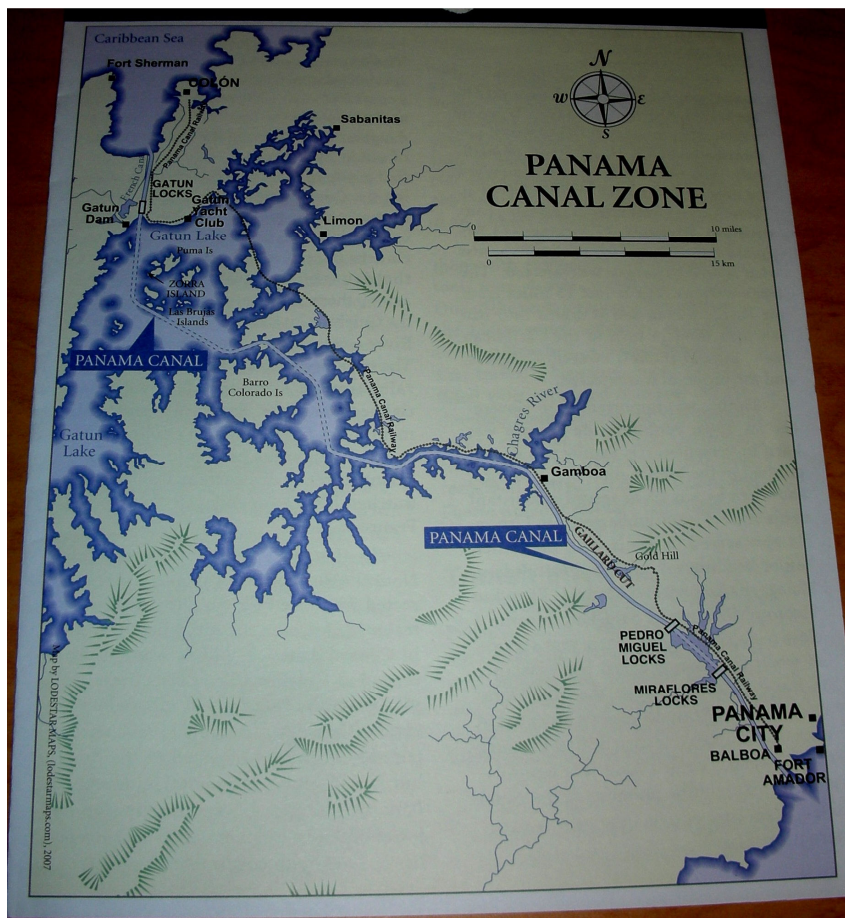


1/18/07 Day 4 – This was one of the highlight days of the cruise when we will pass through the Panama Canal. Our route will take us from the Caribbean Sea south to the Pacific Ocean through the locks, Gatun Lake, and the continental divide at Gaillard Cut.





The weather was perfect as the ship lined up at Gatun Locks in the dark about 6am.

By the time we entered the locks it was broad daylight and the passengers were lining the rails intently studying the operation.



This photo shows the approach to Gatun Locks from the Caribbean at the Panama Canal

We were fascinated by the opening and closing of gates on the locks and the very deliberate activity of the locomotives centering us in the locks and pulling us on to the next one. The Amsterdam had about 2 feet clearance on each side. The three Gatun Locks raised the ship about 85 feet up to Gatun Lake.

We had massive container and car carrier ships in adjacent locks passing through with us so it

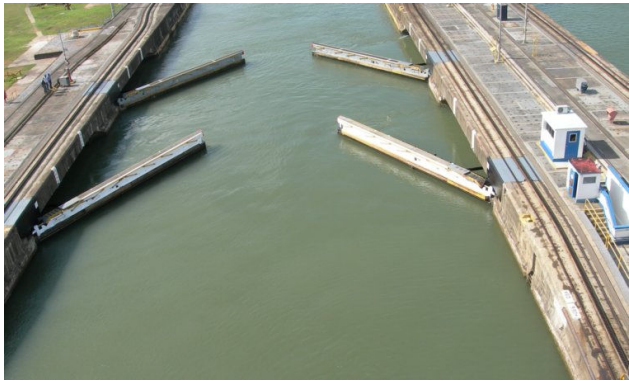
was also possible to view the lock procedures on those ships.



A car carrier ship on the left and Holland America's ms Volendam on the right going ahead of us through the third lock as we proceed into the first Gatun Lock.

The second Gatun Lock ahead was drained and the gates opened for us to proceed into the lock.





After the lock was filled with water and the ship raised to the next level the gates were opened so we could proceed.

A container ship was in the adjacent lock which would be filled with water to raise the vessel to the next level.

Information brochures for the Panama Canal were available and they were very helpful in describing the events and scenery passing by. Some factoids of interest from the brochure were as follows: length of Canal – 48 miles, average transit time – about 9 hours, ships per day about 35, highest toll \$141, 344 USD (Crown Princess 1993), lowest toll \$0.36 (swimmer Richard Halliburton 1928, 48 hours transit time). After the intense activity of passing through Gatun Locks there was a leisurely cruise through Gatun Lake. Construction of the Canal was completed in 1914 and at the time Gatun Lake was the largest man-made lake in the world. It was formed by using the rock and dirt from the Canal to form a long dam across the Chagres River.



Here is a picture of the spillway portion of the Gatun Dam which forms Gatun Lake. You could see that the lake was at peak capacity. However, during the dry season the constant draining of the lake through the locks and consequent low water level is a concern. This problem is being addressed in plans for additional locks in the canal where pumps will return the water to the lake rather than letting it flow to the sea as is currently being done.



Along the way through the lake we were treated to beautiful tropical scenery like this little island.

In addition to the locks, passing through the continental divide in the Gaillard Cut was a highlight of the day. The route selected for the Gaillard Cut originally had a maximum elevation of about 400 feet where it passed over the continental divide. Enough rock was

removed in the 10 years of excavation so that the Canal now passes through the Continental Divide at an elevation of only 85 feet. The excavation of the Gaillard Cut was the most imposing feat accomplished in the construction of the Panama Canal.



Here is a photo of the Gaillard Cut (formerly known as Calebra Cut) with Gold Hill on the left and Centennial Bridge for the Pan American Highway over the Canal in the background. The terraced hillside on the right is a result of the constant effort to control erosion of dirt and rock into the Canal and also to widen the narrow places.

Soon after passing through the continental divide we entered the Pedro Miguel Locks so the ship could be lowered to Miraflores Lake.

One nice feature of the Amsterdam was the large amount of rail space around the deck area to accommodate the 1200 or so passengers for viewing the passing scenes. There was no sense of crowding or concern that you might not be able to see what you wanted to see.



We had heard rumors that after 1999, when the US turned the Panama Canal over to the Republic of Panama, the maintenance and general appearance of the Canal Zone had deteriorated. We saw no evidence of deterioration from our perspective. The process of moving the ships through the Canal appeared to be seamless and the grounds were clean and well kept.

Finally, here is some Oak Ridge Public Library business that Barbara wanted to do. The Library has a program called "Where in the World is Your Library Card?" Patrons are encouraged to take pictures of their library cards in whatever place they may be visiting in the world. Well, here is Barbara's library card displayed on her hat in the middle of the Panama Canal.



While still within sight of the Continental Divide and the Gaillard Cut, the ship was lowered through the Pedro Miguel and Miraflores Locks back to sea level. Balboa and Panama City were visible on the port side as the ship glided south into the Pacific about 5pm. We dressed for dinner early and headed for the La Fontaine Dining Room. As we passed by the Explorer's Lounge the band music lured us onto the dance floor. Now this is our kind of evening, dancing first while we have the energy, and then dinner!