Atlantis in the Atlantic

The Experience Behind the Poem

A Personal Recollection by Vincent C. DaSilva

Around 1994, I arrived on the island of São Vicente, Cabo Verde, aboard the motor vessel *Judy Latrico*, where I served as First Engineer. The vessel was operating under contract with the United Nations World Food Program, transporting grain as part of its humanitarian relief operations.

We stayed in São Vicente for about seven days while the vessel discharged its cargo. Although I had traveled extensively throughout my maritime career, this particular visit held special meaning for me. My family originated from the island of Brava, and I had long wanted to visit Cabo Verde and experience firsthand the islands from which generations of my ancestors had departed to make their living at sea.

During our stay, I contacted my parents in the United States, who put me in touch with a cousin living on São Vicente. Through that connection, I met several people, including another relative who owned a restaurant called Café Lion. I was also introduced to a gentleman serving as Second Mate aboard a vessel operating out of Cabo Verde.

Unfortunately, after over thirty years, I can no longer recall his name. We eventually lost contact, although I have often wondered whether I might someday reconnect with him through relatives or acquaintances on the island.

During one of our conversations, the Second Mate and I began discussing diving. In addition to my engineering responsibilities aboard the *Judy Latrico*, I was also the ship's diver and the company's diver. As a result, I had my personal diving equipment aboard the vessel.

When I expressed an interest in exploring the waters surrounding São Vicente, he kindly offered to take me diving.

We gathered my equipment and drove from Mindelo to the opposite side of the island, arriving at a remote stretch of coastline near a large mountain. I remember being struck by the island's rugged volcanic landscape. Much of the shoreline was dark, almost black volcanic rock, giving the coast a dramatic, unusual appearance.

I also remember seeing homes being constructed along portions of the coast, a reminder that the island was changing even as its natural landscape retained much of its raw character.

After preparing my equipment, I entered the Atlantic.

What happened next became one of the most extraordinary experiences of my diving career.

As I descended to approximately 35 to 40 feet, I began exploring the volcanic seafloor. The bottom consisted mostly of dark rock, much like the shoreline I had entered from.

Then, quite unexpectedly, I encountered something I had never seen before.

Directly in front of me was what looked like a road.

It was a remarkably straight passage of pure white sand, approximately the width of an ordinary city street, extending across the otherwise dark volcanic bottom and continuing outward into the Atlantic.

What made the formation so unusual was not simply the contrast between the white sand and black rock. It was the appearance of the rock on either side.

The volcanic rock seemed to have been meticulously cleared away, leaving a relatively level surface along both sides of the sandy passage. There were no obvious piles of displaced stone or irregular heaps of rubble. To my eyes, it looked almost as though someone had deliberately pushed the rock aside to create a roadway.

I remember hovering above the formation, trying to understand what I was looking at.

After years of diving, both recreationally and professionally, I had encountered shipwrecks, reefs, rocky bottoms, and countless underwater formations. But I had never witnessed anything quite like this.

The white sand stood out against the surrounding volcanic darkness, and the passage seemed to continue endlessly into the distance.

My curiosity got the better of me.

I began following the sandy corridor, swimming farther and farther along its course, hoping to discover where it might lead. Yet the farther I traveled, the more it seemed to continue beyond my view.

Eventually, my remaining air supply required me to turn around and return to shore.

I never discovered where the passage ended.

When I surfaced, I could hardly contain my excitement. I spoke at length about what I had seen, describing the unusual white-sand roadway and the extraordinary appearance of the volcanic rock bordering it.

The experience remained with me long after the M/V *Judy Latrico* departed São Vicente.

Over the years, I have told the story to family members and friends on numerous occasions. Even today, I can picture that remarkable stretch of white sand disappearing into the blue Atlantic.

I have often wondered what natural forces might have created such a formation. Was it ocean currents, the island's volcanic geology, or some other process I didn't understand?

I have never claimed that it was man-made. I can only describe what I witnessed and the impression it left upon me.

But standing, or rather hovering, above that mysterious underwater passage, I could not help thinking about the ancient legend of Atlantis, the mythical civilization said to have disappeared beneath the Atlantic Ocean.

For a brief moment, I let myself imagine that I had discovered a road leading toward that legendary lost city.

That sense of wonder, mystery, and imagination eventually inspired me to write a poem titled *Atlantis in the Atlantic*.

Another, more personal inspiration also shaped the poem.

Among my Cape Verdean family connections was the poet **Jorge Barbosa**, whose literary contributions helped shape modern Cape Verdean poetry. With that family connection and my long appreciation for my ancestors' cultural and maritime traditions, I felt inspired to express my own experience through poetry.

I wasn’t trying to make a scientific discovery or prove Atlantis existed. I simply wanted to capture, in words, the extraordinary feeling of encountering something so unexpected beneath the ocean.

I wrote the original poem many years ago and published it on a personal website I maintained through Google Sites. Unfortunately, despite my efforts to recover the website and its contents, I have been unable to locate the original manuscript.

I am now revisiting that experience and working to recreate the poem, drawing upon memories that have remained remarkably vivid after over three decades.

One additional part of this story has always stayed with me.

During my visit to São Vicente, I had hoped to travel to Brava, my family's ancestral island. Unfortunately, weather conditions prevented me from making the crossing. Although disappointed, I left Cabo Verde with an unexpected memory that would remain with me for the rest of my life.

And perhaps that is part of the meaning of the experience.

I had arrived in Cabo Verde hoping to reconnect with my family's past. Instead, beneath the waters of São Vicente, I encountered a mystery that connected my lifelong relationship with the sea to my imagination, my heritage, and my interest in poetry.

To this day, I hope to return to São Vicente, locate that same stretch of coastline, and once again descend beneath the Atlantic to find the white-sand road.

Perhaps another diver has seen it. Perhaps someone familiar with the island's underwater geology can explain it. Or perhaps it will remain one of those personal mysteries that the ocean occasionally reveals to those fortunate enough to explore its depths.

Whatever the explanation, I will never forget it.

And that is the story behind my poem, *Atlantis in the Atlantic*.

Vincent C. DaSilva

An account of a diving experience off São Vicente, Cabo Verde, circa 1994.

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