



# LOG OF MV POLAR STAR

## The Antarctic Finale



**24<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY– 14<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2009**

Written by Joel Turner  
Edited by Ali Dean  
Species List: Mick Brown

# MV Polar Star

## The Antarctic Finale

<b>Captain</b>	Leszek Slawski
<b>Staff Captain</b>	Dariusz Zarwalski
<b>Chief Engineer</b>	Zenon Berger
<b>Second Officer</b>	Roberto Sain
<b>Third Officer</b>	Jerry Malapad
<b>Hotel Manager</b>	Florin Blaj
<b>Head Chef</b>	Robert Ward
<b>Doctor</b>	Susan Newton

<b>Expedition Leader</b>	Hannah Lawson
<b>Expedition Staff</b>	Summer Allman
	Chris Bateman
	Mick Brown
	Louise Cunningham
	Ali Dean
	Joe Koch
	Joel Turner
	Andy Wenzel

### Tuesday, 24<sup>th</sup> February - Leaving Ushuaia

**Time:** 12:00

**Latitude:** 54° 48.6' S

**Longitude:** 68° 17.7' W

**Wind:** Force 2 Variable

**Sea Conditions:** Calm (wave height 0 – 0.10 m)

**Pressure:** 1006 mb

**Temperature:** 15°C

Bright sunlight lit the snow-capped mountains that surround the port of Ushuaia, a stunning backdrop as we arrived at the gangway of the *MV Polar Star*. Although



renowned for its changeable weather, today this curious town at the southern tip of Argentina was blessed with fine conditions. Our robust, ice-strengthened vessel was dwarfed by the monstrous *Carnival Splendor* that floated on the opposite side of the dock. This huge cruise liner with rooms for over 2,000 passengers, towered above the port, pristine white, as 85 Antarctic explorers walked past her modish hull, eager for adventure. An air of

excitement and anticipation surrounded our ship as we climbed aboard while her Captain and crew were busy making final preparations for a 19 day expedition that would cover over 3000 nautical miles across some of the world's most unpredictable seas. Once everyone was aboard and luggage had been distributed to cabins, Hannah, our Expedition Leader met us in the observation lounge for an initial briefing. She introduced us to Captain Leszek who personally welcomed us aboard his ship and led a toast to the voyage. The Expedition Staff then introduced themselves and gave brief indications of their specialist interests and experience. Staff Captain Darek followed with a safety briefing, highlighting a few important rules which would help ensure a safe trip for all. All briefings concluded in time for us to watch the ship leave the dock at 18:15, churning up the water as she manoeuvred which created a banquet of small crabs for opportunist seabirds including kelp and dolphin gulls. At 18:30 we had the mandatory lifeboat drill which brought us out onto deck in bright orange life jackets, mustering under the lifeboats as would be expected in an emergency. It was then time to find the dining room and enjoy our first meal onboard.

## USHUAIA

Ushuaia lies at the extreme tip of South America, on the island of Tierra del Fuego, the land of fire. Its name is derived from a Yaghan word (the language of the nomadic Yámana Canoe Indians) meaning "inner harbour to the westward." In 1906 the Argentine state founded a penal institution in Ushuaia largely for hardened criminals. The prisoners were responsible for most of the pre-1940 construction of the town. The prison ceased operation and was incorporated into the Naval Base in 1940. Ushuaia now has a population of about 60,000 permanent residents. They are descendants of English missionaries who stayed on as farmers, of Yugoslavians and Romanian miners, of sailors from Spain and Italy, who signed off or jumped ship here, of Chileans who came looking for work, of a few Germans, and just a handful of people bearing some blood from the veins of the native Indian population.

This is the southernmost city in the world, and it boasts graceful frame houses, self-made cabins and modern concrete buildings; but they all have the same roofs. There are no tiles here, only metal sheeting that is bolted down. The slopes are now being developed with smart hotels and ski facilities.

A spectacular chain of mountains, the Cerro Martial, rises behind the town, to the north. The ruined forest behind the town was caused by a terrible fire in 1918. The fire began to the west of town and raged eastward, so out of control that the townspeople thought they might have to take to the sea in boats. Doused by torrential rain, the fire, which had lasted three months, was so intense that all vegetation was destroyed and the ground left exposed to erosion.

The last hours of the day were spent navigating the Beagle Channel; so named after the ship which circumnavigated the world between 1831 and 1836 with a certain young man on board, learning his trade and leaving his indelible mark in history: Charles Darwin. The Ushuaia port authority supplied a pilot to navigate us safely through the channel while the expedition staff helped to spot wildlife from the bridge. We passed a large Magellanic penguin rookery on Martillo Island; the beaches around the colony littered

with these back and white birds. Occasionally we saw these penguins swimming out in the channel close to the ship. Black-browed albatrosses, southern giant petrels, South American terns and blue-eyed shags were all seen flying around the ship. We were also passed by two South American sea lions that swam through the water off our port side. Hannah pointed out the southernmost town in the world; Puerto Williams, Chile. Originally a naval base founded in 1952, the settlement now has a population of 2000 people including one of the last fluent speakers of the language spoken by the Yámana Canoe Indians. This tribal group was encountered by Darwin during his time in the Beagle Channel. We also passed Gable Island, opposite Puerto Williams, which was central to the creation myth of the Selk'nam Indians. They believe that this small island floated above a huge flood that covered the Earth and as a result all life derives from survivors that took refuge there. It was dark well before a small Port Authority boat pulled alongside our moving vessel to pick up their pilot and Captain Leszek resumed control of the ship, setting a course across the Drake Passage. Some of us ventured to the bar but many of us chose to retire to our cabins in order to recover from journeys of various duration.

### **Wednesday, 25<sup>th</sup> February – At Sea, Drake Passage**

**Time:** 12:00

**Latitude:** 56° 59.7' S

**Longitude:** 65° 21.3' W

**Wind:** Force 5 West

**Sea Conditions:** Very Rough (wave height 4 – 6 m)

**Pressure:** 1009 mb

**Temperature:** 10°C

Our day began at 07:30 with the first of Hannah's wake-up calls. A force 4 wind blew across the decks from the west and the ship rolled heavily in a 3 meter residual swell. Hannah urged us to make our way out on deck and enjoy the wonderful morning. The sky was clear and bright; perfect conditions to watch the many seabirds that followed the ship. Mick was out on deck early to help us identify white chinned petrels, Wilson's storm petrels, cape petrels and Magellanic diving petrels alongside some larger birds; the black-browed albatross, royal albatross and Southern giant petrel among them. Stately wandering albatrosses also circled majestically around the ship, their varied plumage indicating differences in age.

At 09:30 Mick Brown began the expedition's lecture programme with *Birds of the Drake Passage and Antarctica* which gave us a general introduction to some of the fascinating sea birds we would be seeing throughout our time in the Antarctic. After a short break to refill our cups with tea and coffee and enjoy some fresh air on deck, we reconvened for a lecture with Joe Koch. His presentation, *Ice Worlds*,



explored the varied ice features of Polar Regions and how they are affected by increasing global temperatures. After we had enjoyed our first lunch of the expedition, Hannah made announcement that we had been joined by a light-mantled sooty albatross and recommended that we come out on deck and watch this elegant small albatross on the wing. Summer continued the educational programme at 15:00 with her talk, *Early Antarctic Exploration*, which took us through the history of Antarctica up to the 1890s. At 16:30 Andy concluded the day's lectures with his fascinating talk, *Tales of Whales I Have Known, Part 1*.

After a long day of learning, many of us took advantage of the ship's Happy Hour and relaxed together in the observation lounge. Those who made it to this evening's recap and briefing were reminded by Hannah of the importance of keeping "one hand for the ship" at all times while we are in open seas. She also demonstrated the safest way to walk around the ship, just like the humble penguin. Mick took over the microphone to give us some information about the albatrosses we had been seeing around the ship all day, illustrating points with his own fantastic photos of the day. He passed onto Joe who explained the circumpolar current and its effect on Antarctica as well as pointing out that we would be passing through the Antarctic convergence at some point overnight. Joel introduced the *Great Antarctic Iceberg Spotting Competition*. A competition sheet was posted in the observation lounge where we could guess the time and day we expected to see our first iceberg. A mystery prize would be waiting for the lucky winner. After dinner the BBC Planet Earth film *Frozen Seas* was shown with fantastic footage of the variety of life that exists in the waters of the Polar Regions. Those who preferred to spend the evening out on deck had great views of two soft plumaged petrels that flew past the ship and ended a wonderful day looking out across the open ocean ending in a fine sunset at 20:45.

## **Thursday, 26<sup>th</sup> February – At Sea, Drake Passage**

**Time:** 12:00

**Latitude:** 60° 50.8' S

**Longitude:** 63° 09.3' W

**Wind:** Force 4 Southwest

**Sea Conditions:** Moderate (wave height 1.25 – 2.50 m)

**Pressure:** 1006 mb

**Temperature:** 5°C

Our wake-up call came this morning at 07:30. The sky was grey and overcast but visibility was good and a temperature of 4°C made for a comfortable time on deck. The swell was hitting the ship on her starboard side which resulted in some roll although significantly less than yesterday's movements. There were still 178 nautical miles between us and the South Shetland Islands meaning that if conditions remained good, we would arrive sometime in the early hours of tomorrow morning. After a well attended breakfast, Louise invited us to the observation lounge for her lecture, *Southern Seal Safari* which investigated the numerous pinnipeds that we would encounter on our expedition. Mick continued, after a half an hour break, with his presentation: *Penguins – Feathered Fish* which explored the remarkable lifestyle of this unique group of birds and their ability to cope with extreme conditions, deep dives and long distance feeding forays. Just as the doors to the dining room were opened for lunch, Hannah made an

announcement that two fin whales were swimming close to the ship. We came out on the starboard side of the ship to see these huge giants pass us, occasionally breaking the surface to expose their sleek backs and prominent dorsal fins. After lunch the expedition team showed the film *Antarctica: A Frozen History Part 1*, produced by the History Channel.

At 16:00 we convened in the observation lounge for an expedition overview led by Hannah which explained the IAATO (International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators) guidelines that are so important in protecting Antarctica from the negative impacts of tourism. We also attended the mandatory Zodiac briefing as our first trip out in the boats would be tomorrow morning. The rest of the afternoon was spent engaging in two pursuits. For the first we donned extra pairs of socks and selected a pair of rubber boots for the expedition and secondly we vacuumed our coats, bags and waterproof trousers in line with the IAATO recommendations. This entertaining afternoon led nicely into tonight's Happy Hour and by 18:30 we had all made it into the observation lounge for recap and briefing. Hannah had only just begun when an announcement came from the Bridge that there were whales ahead of the ship. The recap session was abandoned



and we made our way out onto the bow to watch 5 large fin whales pass us by. As the fastest of all the whale species; it was incredible to see the speed in which they propelled their huge bodies through the water. At one point we were also joined by several hourglass dolphins; these smaller animals making an already special experience even more memorable. Dinner followed soon after and at 20:30 we reconvened to continue with our briefing on

tomorrow's itinerary with Hannah and the team. Summer put our proposed landing at Deception Island into a historical context; describing its discovery and subsequent use as a base for sealing and whaling. Andy concluded with a short presentation on the fin whales and hourglass dolphins we had seen today. The first episode of the *Secrets of Antarctica* series was then shown to round off a long day.

## **Friday, 27<sup>th</sup> February – Deception Island, Half Moon & Aitcho Islands**

**Time:** 12:00

**Latitude:** 62° 34.5' S

**Longitude:** 59° 51.3' W

**Wind:** Force 2 Northeast

**Sea Conditions:** Smooth (wave height 0.10 – 0.50 m)

**Pressure:** 1006 mb

**Temperature:** 2°C

Hannah's wakeup call came as a bit of a shock to many this morning at 05:00. The sea was calm as we approached the famous, volcanic Deception Island, with the sun slowly rising to light up its snow dusted peaks. Hannah announced that the Captain would soon

be undertaking the remarkably tricky manoeuvre through Neptune's Bellows: the small pass into the island. Captain Leszek took us through the narrow gap between the submerged Raven Rock, hidden from sight, and the towering Cathedral Crags, with absolute precision. Coffee and croissants were then available in the observation lounge where we could see the Zodiac drivers readying their boats for the landing. The views over Port Foster well justified the early start to even the most consummate of sleepers.

### **GEOLOGY OF DECEPTION ISLAND**

Deception Island is the remains of a previously much larger volcano that is mostly submerged. Port Foster (max. depth 190 m) is a breached caldera that formed when the centre of the volcano collapsed below sea level after a huge prehistoric explosive eruption. Eruptions have continued at irregular intervals, the first historically recorded by Wilkes in 1842 who saw "the entire south rim of the crater on fire", and the latest episodes occurring in 1967, 1969, and 1970. The 1967 eruption destroyed a Chilean scientific station at Pendulum Cove and a British station at Whalers Bay and required evacuation of the bases under emergency conditions. The eruption in 1969 destroyed both the Chilean and British bases, and the whaling station, and the five British personnel were evacuated hurriedly. No permanent occupants live on the island, but both Argentina and Spain have summer stations there.

Zodiacs ferried us to shore towards the rusty ruins of the Hektor Whaling Station where we were met by Hannah. A male fur seal was resting in the rusty remains of the dry dock which stood only metres from the landing site. We were reminded to keep our distance as these seals can be aggressive and carry a very nasty bite. After a short time the seal emerged and made its way around to the other side of the metal structure in search of solitude. Summer was walking around the remains of the disused station to answer any of our questions and offer information on the history of this incredible place. A walk was organised up to Neptune's Window, led by Mick, where the island's discoverer, Nathaniel Palmer, once climbed looking for birds' eggs and found a view which is said to have shown him the continental land of the peninsula. Cape petrels played in the updrafts from the precipitous cliff that plummets nearly 200 feet to the rocky shore below. These petrels could be seen in various locations around the cliff, many of their young fledglings were seen flexing their wings to build up important flight muscles. We also encountered a cape petrel chick that was resting on the cliff edge. This almost fully fledged chick, having apparently made its first flight, had decided to recover for some time before engaging in this new pursuit again.



We were joined by numerous fur seals on the shore and watched both Antarctic and brown skuas washing in the fresh water pools above the extent of high tide. Unfortunately the conditions were not right for the geothermal waters to reach the beach but this was not enough to discourage some keen swimmers. Absolute chaos unfolded;



quick dashes into the water for photos were accompanied by screams as the true temperature of the water was realised. As our valiant swimmers left the water and dried themselves off before Zodiacs were waiting at the beach for the return journey. A well deserved breakfast was ready for us back on the ship, during which the Captain and crew began our navigation to Half Moon Island.

At 09:00 we passed the ship *Europa* to port. This barque of nearly 600 tons was built in Hamburg early in the twentieth century. At 56 metres in length and with a mainmast that rises to 33 metres above water, she is a fine example of a coastal trading square rigger and was beautiful as she sailed past us. Around 10:15 the ship encountered a localised snow storm that briefly dusted

the ship, this unexpected weather soon passed us by giving way to brighter skies. We were passed by three humpback whales close to our starboard side, readily identified by their big, bushy blows and distinct dorsal fin. Two of the whales showed their tail flukes ahead of shallow dives as they moved past the ship. The first iceberg of the trip was officially spotted at 10:39 as we motored alongside the ice covered southern coast of Livingston Island. Just before our arrival at Half Moon Bay, the ship turned to starboard and we slowed to watch two humpback whales that were resting on the surface, occasionally lifting their flippers and flukes out of the water.

As we anchored off Half Moon Bay, the mountains of Livingston Island were lit by the morning sun to dramatic effect. The temperature outside was 2°C and conditions were perfect for our second landing of the morning. We could see Teniente Camara Station, an operational Argentine Base, above the boulder beach; blue and white flags adorning the orange huts. Ali explained that the volcanic andesite rock that forms the bay was crosscut by a number of basaltic dykes that were weathered green, brown and orange. We landed on a small beach and were briefed by Hannah before leaving the boats to explore the island. On our way to the chinstrap penguin colony we passed the wreck of an old wooden water boat that would once have taken fresh water out to larger whaling ships. The chinstrap penguin chicks were moulting, soon they will fledge and their parents will stop feeding them. Mick pointed out a group of Southern giant petrels that were washing on the shoreline, occasionally one would come ashore to give us good





views of its whole body. It was possible to walk right along the beach to the Argentine station, passing many fur seals on the way, to meet the friendly staff there and visit their small shop. We sent numerous postcards care of their postal service and they agreed to stamp our passports with the official base stamp. We returned to the ship after our brief visit, care of our Zodiac water taxis, just in time for lunch.

After a short time to rest and watch the wonderful landscape that was passing the ship, we arrived at our final destination for today. Approximately 1.5km in length, Barrientos Island lies in the Aitcho Island group and is dominated by steep cliffs on its northern coast which slope gently down to its southern extent. As we waited for the ship anchor, a minke whale passed us to port, it was clearly significantly smaller than the other cetaceans we had seen so far on the voyage but nevertheless a great encounter. Our Zodiacs headed to the eastern end of the island, past groups of porpoising penguins, where Hannah was waiting to greet us onshore, surrounded by hundreds of both gentoo and chinstrap penguins. We picked our way carefully along the beach, occasionally receiving a tentative peck on the boot from these surprisingly tame penguins. We passed through colonies of both types of penguin, both with fledging chicks, and watched skuas skulking between the birds looking for easy food. The gentoo penguin chicks, often larger than the adult birds, could be seen chasing a parent around the beach in an attempt to get food. These 'food chases' can often last a long time until either the chick gets tired from the chase or receives some well earned nourishment, regurgitated by the adult.



Fur seals were abundant throughout the island, some resting on their own and others, in larger groups, play fighting on the green moss. The entire centre of the island was covered by an extensive moss carpet which is highly susceptible to damage. For this reason, we were asked to follow the flagged route that extended out along a stream bed extremely carefully as to limit our impact on this vulnerable area. The pass that divides the west and east

sides of the island offered fantastic views, not only across the rest of the island but out across the other volcanic Aitcho Islands. Ali was standing below the pass on the western side, next to a huge tower of columnar basalt. This massive rock feature was formed when magma solidified within the neck of a volcano. Since this time, the volcano walls have eroded away to leave the more resistant basalt 'plug' standing proud of the surrounding rock. Louise and Andy were enjoying the wonderful marine mammals that were hauled out at the end of the western peninsula. A Weddell seal rested close to the shore on the boulder beach, next to a lone elephant seal. Further around the bay were two more elephant seals, hauled out together on a thick bed of seaweed. This extremely photogenic pair were a highlight of the landing for many of us. Soon it was time to retrace our route back across the island to the landing site and picked our way through the gentoo penguins back to the boats.

After dinner we met in the observation lounge for a late recap and briefing. Hannah began with an outline of tomorrow's activities and then handed the microphone to Ali

who gave us more information on the incredible geology we found at Barrientos Island. Joel announced the winner of the *Great Antarctic Iceberg Spotting Competition*; the prize of a fluffy macaroni penguin going to David Withall. The film *Operation Tabarin* from the *Secrets of Antarctica* series was then shown which documented the WW2 operation that established the first British Antarctic Base.

## Saturday, 28<sup>th</sup> February – Gourdin Island and Brown Bluff

**Time:** 12:00

**Latitude:** 63° 09.5' S

**Longitude:** 57° 14.9' W

**Wind:** Force 4 East

**Sea Conditions:** Calm (wave height 0 – 0.10 m)

**Pressure:** 1007 mb

**Temperature:** 1°C

Hannah woke us at 07:00 this morning and urged us to make our way out on deck before breakfast to witness the sea of ice which we were passing through. Different shapes, sizes and colours of ice could be seen, including some old sea ice floes. The ship meandered round these obstructions, occasionally passing huge tabular icebergs. We could see Gourdin Island ahead as visibility was good although the sky was rather overcast. We would need to wrap up warm for our first landing today as temperatures had plummeted overnight to a chilly 0°C.

As soon as we arrived at anchor off Gourdin Island, a scout boat was lowered and the expedition team went to investigate the landing site. The island was discovered by Captain Jules Dumont d'Urville on his 1839-40 expedition and named after one of his officers. The icebergs around the island were so fantastic that Hannah decided to plan this morning's activity as a Zodiac cruise around the ice with a short expedition landing on Gourdin Island undertaken at the discretion of the drivers. Before we could begin loading the Zodiacs, the ship was forced to relocate in more open water as icebergs were moving close to our hull and threatening to damage the gangway. After about 20 minutes, the Captain was satisfied with our new position and we began to fill up the boats. It was a fantastic morning out on the water, driving around the icebergs and using their different sizes, colours and features to help understand their varied histories. Snow petrels were occasionally seen gliding elegantly around the bergs, their pure white feathers giving them an almost dovelike appearance. In contrast to the irregular shaped icebergs, flat ice floes were also seen. Our drivers explained that these pieces of thinner, floating ice were formed by the freezing of the surface of the sea at around -1.8°C. We passed by crabeater, fur and Weddell seals as they relaxed on top of these various bergs and floes. Some boats were even lucky enough to



see a leopard seal jump out of the water onto an ice floe and catch a chinstrap penguin as it stood on top. Each driver conducted their own expedition landing, taking their boat to the rocky shore and giving us a short time to explore. Three types of penguin have rookeries on this island. Adélie, chinstrap and gentoo penguins share the island's snow free rock outcrops to support their colonies. Snowy sheathbills were never far away from these guano rich rookeries, scavenging around the rocks for food. Numerous Antarctic fur seals were scattered around the sandy beaches and rocks, often sitting in a doglike fashion, their pointed noses and external ears clearly visible. There was however enough space to pick a suitable path around them in order to get closer to the penguins.

On our return to the ship, some boats passed a large berg that was being used as a resting place for numerous penguins that were feeding in the bay. We stopped the boats and watched as tired penguins arrived, jumping high out of the water and landing on the berg. At the same time, rested penguins were walking to the edge of the ice and diving, often 2 metres through the air, back into the water. Once back on the ship, the engines started up and we began our navigation through the Antarctic Sound towards Brown Bluff. This would be our only landing on the continent of Antarctica and therefore an important stop for those wanting to tick off that elusive seventh continent.

Just before we arrived at anchor, Hannah spotted an Emperor penguin in the distance and asked the Captain if he would change course and investigate further. Captain Leszek took us very close to the juvenile penguin and we had fantastic views of a species that is uncommon this far north on the peninsula. It stood on a large, flat iceberg along with a



fur seal that had hauled out; both seemed surprised to see our huge red hull towering above them. It was clear that the penguin had been injured on the back of its neck which would likely have been sustained in an encounter with a leopard seal. After 15 minutes we continued to our anchorage and a scout boat made its way to shore. The blues and greens of the sea met the browns, oranges and greys of the high cliffs of Brown Bluff which in turn disappeared under the pure white of snow and ice that capped its peaks; the views were stunning. Icebergs and brash ice littered the bay which made for an interesting drive into shore. This particular beach landing is well known to expedition staff as a 'propeller killer' due to the large numbers of submerged rocks on the approach. The drivers came in slowly, lifting their engines slightly where

appropriate and motored through a small channel between the obstructions. Once on the beach we had a short briefing from Hannah which instructed us on areas to avoid due to nesting birds. We were then free to wander the beach, staying a safe distance from fur seals, and get acquainted with the Adélie and gentoo penguins. Summer and Ali were based at the end of the beach at the penguin colony and were also pointing out a fur seal which was missing its hind flippers. This seal showed no signs of injury which suggested a congenital birth defect. A flagged route also led up the moraine behind the landing site which offered wonderful views across the iceberg choked Antarctic Sound. Instead of

heading straight back to the ship, our drivers explored the ice for a short time. We encountered fur, Weddell, leopard and crabeater seals that had hauled out on the ice, all of which allowed us to get close enough for some fantastic photographs. As we motored around the bergs, we were passed by groups of porpoising penguins on journeys too and from the shore. In some places the ice was so closely packed that our Zodiacs were forced to do some mini ice pushing of their own to get back to the ship.

We were all back onboard the ship by 18:30 and dinner was served at 19:00. As we were finishing our meal, Hannah announced that the ship was beginning her navigation through the stunning Fridjof Sound; an ice choked channel that exists between Jonassen and Andersson Islands and the Tabarin Peninsula of the Antarctic continent. We made our way out onto deck and watched as the ship pushed through the ice, often sending shudders through her strengthened steel hull. At our evening recap and briefing, Hannah explained the plan for tomorrow and passed onto Mick who had produced a short presentation on the emperor penguin we had seen today, using his own photos of the day to illustrate his points. Summer then guided us through the complex story of Nordenskjöld's expedition where three separate groups of men, stranded in different places through a series of misfortunes, escaped from the clutches of the Weddell Sea. After this recap, those of us who returned to the bridge were treated to some night navigation; the Captain using the ship's fog lights find a path through the field of ice.

## Sunday, 1<sup>st</sup> March – Devil & Paulet Islands

**Time:** 12:00

**Latitude:** 63° 45.9' S

**Longitude:** 57° 07.7' W

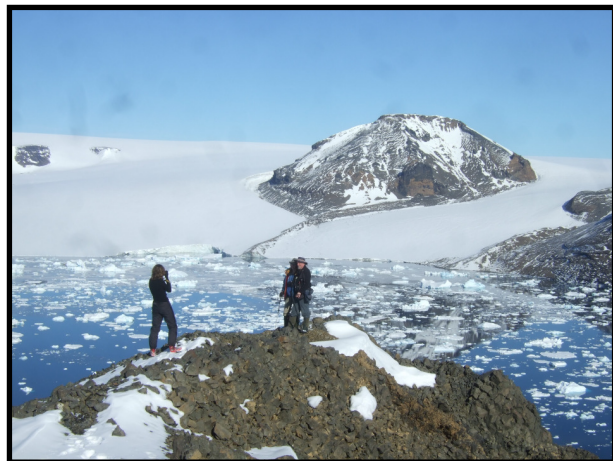
**Wind:** Force 3 Northeast

**Sea Conditions:** Calm (wave height 0 – 0.10 m)

**Pressure:** 1006 mb

**Temperature:** 3°C

Bright sunlight and blue skies greeted us as we woke this morning at 07:00. The views from the ship were incredible; flat calm water creating fantastic reflections everywhere we looked. Devil Island was situated to our port with Cape Well Met ahead of the ship and was separated from us by an expanse of icebergs and ice floes that were loosely packed together. The island itself was discovered by Nordenskjöld and named for its two protruding horns. Cape Well Met was also named during the same expedition to commemorate the reuniting of his shipmates on this peninsula of Vega Island. We could see both leopard seals and fur seals from the ship as they rested on floating ice and soon we were in our Zodiacs, cruising through the ice on our way to shore. Our drivers picked a path through the ice, stopping to take a closer look at points of interest along the way. When we arrived at the gravelly beach, Hannah briefed us in the boats



and pointed to a set of steps that had been cut in the steep ice wall behind her that would be our route off the shore.

Mick had flagged a trail up to the top of the western horn which was a rather slippery and strenuous climb. The views from the peak were breathtaking and more than justified the effort of making the climb. The sea of ice below us stretched out to the horizon, the blue of the sky and water, a stunning contrast to the white of the bergs and floes. We could see



our tiny ship, floating in the midst of this Antarctic vista and could trace the network of leads that our Zodiacs had taken to shore. Few people ever have the chance to witness this icy wilderness and we all felt privileged to be here, looking out to the horizon, on such a perfect day. Summer led a gentler walk over the pass in the centre of the island to a point with views over the ice cliffs of Vega Island. We were careful not to disturb the Adelie penguins, many of which were moulting and avoided the Antarctic skua nesting area that was closely guarded by these

large birds. Our drivers took their time as we cruised back from shore, stopping for photos and searching for wildlife. Four boats were lucky enough to encounter a minke whale in a patch of water clear of ice. The whale swam around the Zodiacs several times, the clarity of the water allowing us to see the full body of the animal as it past by. After about 5 minutes it moved away from us and we returned to the ship. As soon as we were all accounted for at the gangway, the ship began its navigation towards Paulet Island. This 3 hour journey was estimated to take a little longer today due to the ice conditions which would certainly slow the ship. We spent the afternoon watching the ice drift by, occasionally seeing seals along the way. Mick took a group photograph on the bow at 13:30, even Captain Leszek came down to join the crowd that had gathered.

We arrived at anchor off Paulet Island at 15:50 this afternoon. The small, circular island which is approximately one mile across sat off our port side. Discovered by a British expedition led by James Clark Ross and named for the Right Honourable Lord George Paulet of the Royal Navy, this island is an important breeding site for Adélie penguins. Although most of these penguins have now left the island after a successful breeding season, we could see some individuals that had been slow to leave. Soon Zodiacs were driving us to the shore past numerous large icebergs. Hundreds of fur seals lined the beach and were also spotted, hauled out on the ice. Hannah greeted us and pointed us in the direction of a flagged route which would guide us through the plethora of fur seals that littered the hillside. Along the beach, to the right of the landing site, a steep hill rose up from the shore. This was covered by a large Antarctic cormorant colony, where both juvenile and adult birds stood together. We watched them flying out to sea and returning, often in classic v-formation, their shadows racing across the white of the ice below.

Some of us chose to climb to the top of the hill behind the landing site where we gained great views over the island's two melt water lakes and its rocky shoreline. Summer was positioned at the remains of the stone hut which was the wintering site of Captain Carl

Anton Larsen and his 19 crew of the wrecked vessel *Antarctica* that sank in 1903. She answered any questions that we had about the history of this island. As the last boats were leaving the shore to return to the *Polar Star*, the Captain was forced to move ship. A group for large icebergs had drifted very close to the vessel and were touching the hull in several places. It would be impossible to operate the gangway in these conditions and therefore the last



three Zodiacs were forced to wait on the water for the ship's relocation to more open water. Chris managed to lower a bucket of beer down to the boats that were waiting and we rafted the three together and drank to another fine day. Eventually, the Bridge informed our drivers that they could approach the gangway and we all climbed aboard and headed to the dining room for dinner.

As the sun set over the flat, calm water, oranges, reds and yellows reflected out across the sea. We stood on deck and watched as we sailed away from the Antarctic Peninsula, the first leg of our voyage drawing to a close. We stopped briefly to watch a southern right whale that occasionally threw its tail fluke out of the water and sent v-shaped, forward projecting blows into the air before continuing on our journey towards the South Orkney Islands.

## Monday, 2<sup>nd</sup> March – At Sea, sailing to the South Orkney Islands

**Time:** 12:00

**Latitude:** 62° 22.8' S

**Longitude:** 50° 31.1' W

**Wind:** Force 2 Northeast

**Sea Conditions:** Smooth (wave height 0.10 – 0.50 m)

**Pressure:** 1005 mb

**Temperature:** 3°C

It is not everyday that blue whales are spotted from the Bridge of the *MV Polar Star*, but that is exactly what Hannah's excited wake-up call described this morning. We quickly dressed and headed out onto deck, eager not to miss this rare opportunity to see the



world's largest species of whale. The staff were equally excited as this was to be the first sighting of blue whales this Antarctic season. Louise and Andy were out on deck and pointed out 4 individuals as well as 2 fin whales that were

swimming in the area also. The blue whale blows were spectacular in size, often rising to 9 meters in height and as the whales passed the ship within 500 metres we could clearly see the mottled blueish-grey pattern of their skin. Alongside this wonderful encounter, in the distance we could see the largest tabular iceberg of the voyage to date. Lit up by the morning sun, this floating mass of ice looked like land with a length of 22 nautical miles (calculated by the Bridge officer). It really was incredible to think that this was a free floating block of ice that would likely remain in the Southern Ocean for many years to come. Breakfast was served as the whales left the vicinity of the ship and we headed down to the lively dining hall.

Louise began her lecture, *Exploitation of the Southern Ocean* at 09:30 but after only 10 minutes, Hannah was heard over the PA system announcing killer whales off the bow of the ship. Three distinct pods of orca were seen patrolling the waters around us, a total of perhaps 50-60 individuals. This Antarctic species did not carry the classic black and white colouration but was slate grey and white. The presence of diatoms gave the white eye patches and prominent white saddles an orange discolouration. There were also three fin whales in the area and both Louise and Andy spotted behaviour that suggested that the orca may have been hunting these whales. A humpback whale also passed the ship and we spotted another blue whale in the distance. The presence of so many different cetaceans in one area supported the notion that we had found a nutrient rich 'hot-spot' where krill would have been swarming in abundance. This would attract all manner of marine mammals that all rely on this food source in one way or another. Louise concluded her lecture at 11:00 and by the time lunch was ready, we could look back over an incredible morning and realise how privileged we had been to encounter all these fabulous species of cetacean.



The presence of so many different cetaceans in one area supported the notion that we had found a nutrient rich 'hot-spot' where krill would have been swarming in abundance. This would attract all manner of marine mammals that all rely on this food source in one way or another. Louise concluded her lecture at 11:00 and by the time lunch was ready, we could look back over an incredible morning and realise how privileged we had been to encounter all these fabulous species of cetacean.

The second part of *Antarctica: A Frozen History* was screened in the observation lounge at 15:00 this afternoon and was followed by another film from the *Secrets of Antarctica* series: *Dog Sledging in Antarctica*. This training film from the 1950s explained the techniques employed when using dogs for transportation across the ice and snow. At 16:30, Andy focused on the cetaceans that we had seen earlier in the day in *Tales of Whales I Have Known – Part 2*. During this lecture he explored the physiology and natural history of orca, fin and blue whales. As Andy's lecture was drawing to a close, Hannah announced that the ship would soon be passing a large iceberg with hundreds of chinstrap penguins stood on its steeply sloping side. As we neared the iceberg we could see that the penguins would need to jump a long way out of the water to reach a spot on the berg that they could rest on, timing their jumps with the raising swell to maximise their chances of a successful leap. Mick explained that this is the natural habitat for these penguins for the part of the year that they are not on land in their breeding colonies.

We joined Hannah and the expedition team in the observation lounge at 18:30 for tonight's recap and briefing. She outlined tomorrow's planned landing and passed onto Summer who entertained us with a history of Orcadas Base which was set up in 1903 by William Bruce as part of the Scottish National Antarctic Expedition 1903 – 05. Mick wrapped up with a quick summary of the various seabirds that had been following the ship throughout the day. Tonight, after diner, the film *Happy Feet* was shown in the observation lounge. For those who preferred a drink, the Polar Bar was very much open.

## Tuesday, 3<sup>rd</sup> March – Laurie Island, South Orkney Islands

**Time:** 12:00

**Latitude:** 60° 45.9' S

**Longitude:** 44° 41.1' W

**Wind:** Force 5 South

**Sea Conditions:** Slight (wave height 0.50 – 1.25 m)

**Pressure:** 1007 mb

**Temperature:** 1°C

Hannah woke us at 07:00 this morning, as the ship entered Scotia Bay. Orcadas Base was sat directly ahead of the ship on a gravel beach in the middle of the island, its orange huts clearly visible. The temperature on deck was 2°C and the sky was overcast with squalls of



rain visible on the horizon. There were lots of beautiful icebergs lying grounded off the island which would make for great ship cruising later in the day. After a short Zodiac drive into shore, Hannah briefed us at a beach busy with fur seals and welcomed us to the station. The base is occupied all year round and 15 men currently lived there. Guided tours showed us the historic remains of Omond House and the cemetery which included both graves and cenotaphs (memorials to the dead which do not contain the

body). Eight years ago the commander, cook and meteorologist went out in a boat and never returned. Those are the three most recent memorials, all facing north to their homeland. There was also a museum recording the science conducted there and rooms reconstructed in the style of the earlier eras of occupation. We could also visit the main social area where postcards and a few items were on sale, with complimentary coffee and chocolate. The *Polar Star* was able to say a small thank you for their hospitality by bringing fresh eggs and whisky ashore.

The wind had increased during our time onshore and some larger surf had developed at the beach. This necessitated a change in the way the shore landing team dealt with incoming boats. Chris and Joel stood in the surf wearing chest waders and directed the boats in. Mick and Joe would drive their boats into shore at speed, turning hard to port in front of the catchers who would spin it through 180° and drag in backwards up the beach. This process leaves the Zodiac in a far more stable position, bow to the incoming waves.



Using this technique, the shore landing boys filled the boats and cleared the beach, setting everyone on their way back to the ship.

## THE SCOTTISH NATIONAL ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION

Oceanographer William Speirs Bruce was 35 years old when he led the Scottish National Antarctic Expedition. He shunned publicity, refused to publish a popular account of the trip, and declined a position on R F Scott's 1901-04 Discovery Expedition because he thought the aim of rushing to the South Pole was sensationalist. So as not to compete with Scott he confined his recruitment and fund-raising to Scotland, and it was only the generosity of James and Andrew Coats, who gifted £30,000 of the £36,405 budget, that made it possible.

In summer he planned to make hydrographic studies of the Weddell Sea because it was little explored, and in winter to study the wildlife at a base in the South Orkneys. He was thoroughly professional, consulting both Nansen and the architect of his ship the *Fram*, Colin Archer, before buying the 248-ton *Hekla* which was refitted and renamed *Scotia*. They pushed to latitude 70°25' S before, on 4 February, coming back north to Laurie Island, named for the publisher of the first charts of the South Orkneys, then called the Powell Islands after their co-discover Captain George Powell. After three days the sea froze.

Besides living in the ship, they built a stone hut 18 feet square to a design by architect R T Omond and named for him. They kept busy with botany, geology (correctly identifying the islands as part of the Scotia Arc, and related to the Andes), marine biology, ornithology (this was the first time nesting penguins were studied) and cooking. Their favourite penguin recipes were the breasts fried with onions or curried. During late winter and spring they surveyed the island. That summer Bruce sailed to Buenos Aires, negotiated the continued use of his base by Argentina and returned with three Argentines. Ormond House was transferred to the Argentineans as Orcadas Base, the Latinised name for the Orkneys. The *Scotia* finally returned to the British Isles on 15 July 1904.

Bruce's reputation has a low profile outside the circle of people who study and respect Antarctic science for its own sake, and not as a means to glory; it's just what he would have wanted. Orcadas is now the longest continuously occupied base in Antarctica, and that is his true legacy.

As we left Laurie Island at 11:50, we passed several huge icebergs, some of which had large groups of penguins resting on them. One berg had an incredible, polished marble-like appearance with deep translucent blues and greens. We watched a small group of Southern giant petrels and Wilson's storm petrels feeding on a dead penguin in the water next to this iceberg. The rest of the day was spent on a course to South Georgia, wind and swell rolling the ship enough to remind many of us to take our sea sickness medication.

At 16:30, Summer presented her lecture *The Antarctic Treaty* and explained the unique structure that governs this icy wilderness which has no indigenous population. Happy Hour followed shortly after which led into an important briefing on South Georgia, where we all signed a declaration agreeing to follow the important bio-security measures that are in place to protect this unique island. After dinner this evening, the BBC film *The Bountiful Sea* from the *Life in the Freezer* series was shown in the observation lounge.

## Wednesday, 4<sup>th</sup> March – At Sea, Sailing to South Georgia

**Time:** 12:00

**Latitude:** 57° 43.8' S

**Longitude:** 39° 46.6' W

**Wind:** Force 3 Southeast

**Sea Conditions:** Very Rough (wave height 4 – 6 m)

**Pressure:** 1015 mb

**Temperature:** 1°C

A change between time zones overnight had robbed us of an hour in bed meaning Hannah's wake-up call caught many of us by surprise this morning. The sky was grey and overcast and the ship was rolling and pitching in a rather unpredictable way due to a confused 4 metre swell. Force 6 winds were perfect for the black-browed and grey-headed albatrosses as well as the various petrels that followed the ship, playing in the updrafts that we create. After breakfast, Joe presented his lecture *General Geology* which introduced us to the various concepts of Earth Sciences with specific examples drawn from Antarctica. At 11:00 we welcomed our guest lecturer, John Shackleton to the stage to give his talk, *Shackleton & Irish Men in Antarctica*. A relation of Sir Ernest himself, John initially covered the *Nimrod* expedition which was Shackleton's nearly successful attempt to reach the South Pole coming within 97 miles of his goal before having to turn back. He then went on to describe the *Aurora* expedition which was tasked with the laying of food stores ahead of Shackleton's proposed 1914-16 trans-Antarctic voyage; a feat of logistics that was masterminded by Shackleton himself. He also covered aspects of the subsequent loss of the *Endurance* and her crew's heroic journey from the Weddell Sea, via Elephant Island to South Georgia.

Lunch was served at 12:30 after which the film *South* was shown in the observation lounge. We were entertained by Hurley's legendary film record of Sir Ernest Shackleton's ill-fated transpolar expedition (1914-1917) which ultimately resulted in a heroic battle for survival. After this film had finished, the Chief Engineer and his team took advantage of the reasonable sea conditions to run a series of engine room tours which took us deep into the bowels of the ship. It was a privilege to experience this area of the ship which remains very much behind closed doors. All of our questions were answered and we emerged from below with a far better understanding of our ship. Those who were out on deck this afternoon were treated to good views of a light mantled sooty albatross that joined us for a short time. Hannah showed a film produced by the Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands about visiting the island and she followed with a short talk about the wildlife we were likely to encounter there.

As Happy Hour drew to a close, Hannah briefed us on tomorrow's landings and Summer gave us a brief history of the highly successful German explorer Erich Dagobert von Drygalski, for whom the fantastic fjord that we would be visiting tomorrow morning was named. This innovative explorer, boasted the first hot air balloon flight in the Antarctic and used a wind turbine to generate electricity during his time on the ice. Mick took over the microphone to demonstrate his famous rope trick, which illustrated the wingspans of several sea birds, ending with the majestic wandering albatross at nearly 12 feet. It was then time to make our way to the dining room for our evening meal.

At 20:30, the observation lounge was once again transformed into a cinema to watch *The Ice Retreats*, another episode from the BBC series *Life in the Freezer*. This film followed the arrival of spring in Antarctica and the antics of various ocean travellers that return at this time to breed.

## Thursday, 5<sup>th</sup> March – Drygalski Fjord, Cooper Bay & Gold Harbour

**Time:** 12:00

**Latitude:** 54° 47.5' S

**Longitude:** 35° 47.8' W

**Wind:** Force 6 Southwest

**Sea Conditions:** Slight (wave height 0.50 – 1.25 m)

**Pressure:** 1013 mb

**Temperature:** 6°C

Mick made this morning's wake-up call at 06:30 as the ship passed the southern tip of South Georgia: Cape Disappointment. Famously named by Captain Cook at the end of his second Antarctic voyage that failed to find the peninsula of the fabled Terra Australis Incognita, this southern extent of South Georgia proved that the land was nothing more than a large island. Although overcast, the rising sun created a beautiful orange hue along the horizon which lit up the snowy mountains of the wild island that lay before us. 30 knot winds raced across the surface of the sea from the north, taking the tops of the waves with them. From our warm vantage point on the Bridge, the decks looked distinctly

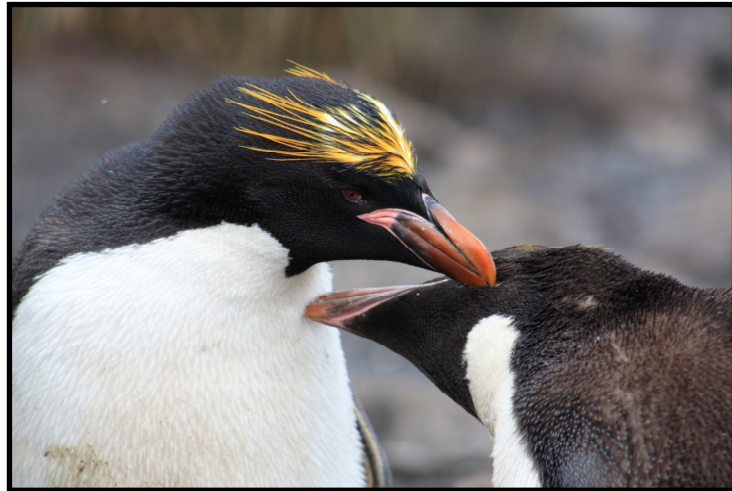


inhospitable at this time in the morning. Captain Leszek took us on a scenic cruise up Drygalski Fjord to show us the wonderful scenery and huge Risting Glacier that descended steeply at its head. The ship slowed as we approached the snout, within just 300 metres of the ice cliff, and we were lucky enough to witness a large calving where huge blocks of ice fell into the water below creating tsunami style waves. Wilson's storm petrels and Antarctic terns were surface feeding in the water, made

nutrient rich by the glacial outwash. Occasionally gentoo penguins were also seen swimming in the milky water, its cloudy appearance due to suspended sediments originating from glacial erosion. After a short time to take in the sights and photograph the glacier, the ship made a slow turn and navigated back down the fjord and out into the ocean. Florin announced that breakfast was served.

We arrived at our Cooper Bay anchorage at 10:30 and Hannah dropped a scout boat into the water to assess the conditions. Due to large swells swamping the portside gangway, the Chief Officer ordered the starboard gangway to be used in order to make use of the lee created by the ship. The ride to shore was hampered by wind, sending spray over the boats but soon we arrived at the rocky shore, negotiating beds of kelp on the way, to where the landing team were waiting. We had our first encounters with king penguins

this morning, right next to the lifejacket bags on the beach, their iconic yellow neck patches and large, regal stature making them unmistakable. We then walked up to the top of the hill, a scramble at times, through tussac grass and past numerous aggressive fur seals to the macaroni penguin colony. Mick was waiting for us and answered any questions we had about the birds. The Zodiac drivers held offshore as there was too much swell at the beach to anchor. Instead of taking us straight back to the ship we cruised around the bay, spotting elephant seals hauled out on the beach, Southern giant petrels resting on the water and hundreds of fur seal pups, sitting on rocks and playing in the kelp. Soon it was time to brave the gangway again, our sailors did a wonderful job of helping us onboard and the last Zodiac was lifted at 13:30.



Our Captain set a course for Gold Harbour and began his navigation over lunch. Our approach to Gold Harbour was stunning. The glacier that spilled over the mountains above the beach was glistening and the greens of the tussac grass below was lush against the black sand beach. Soon we were heading into shore by Zodiac, approaching the ‘wader boys’ who were duly waiting for us, waist deep in the surf. Directly behind the landing site was a small meltwater stream flowing down toward the sea; offering a safe harbour for lots of young fur seals. To the left of the landing site there was a large group of male elephant seals hauled out together by the stream. Occasionally one seal would change position slightly which would send a wave of annoyance through the closely packed group, often leading to a short confrontation. King penguins covered the beach, wandering around in their regal manner. There were several chicks further down the



beach, the brown ‘woolly’ feathers giving these youngsters a comical look. It was hard to imagine that in the near future they would shed this plumage for the stately black, white and yellow of the adults. We weaved our way along the beach, avoiding the advances of juvenile fur seals, until we arrived at the tussac grass that marks the foot of a huge glacial moraine which dominates the southern part of the bay. Joe led a hike up the moraine which looked down over a large lagoon and the largest concentration of the king penguins. We passed several nearly fledged giant petrel chicks on this walk and found piles of rat droppings, suggesting large populations of

these problematic rodents. From this vantage point we saw large pieces of ice fall from the glacier high above and smash onto the rocks below.

Mick led a hike on the opposite side of the beach which climbed high above the landing site, and over the hills beyond. He went in search of nesting light-mantled sooty albatrosses and, even though many of his followers left him to return to the safety of the beach, those who remained loyal were rewarded with the promised encounter. One albatross was found on its nest before flying off to join its mate that was soaring around above, the sky behind them filled with beautiful lenticular cloud formations. We were all back onboard by 19:15, well before dusk set in. Hannah asked us to make sure that we shut the blinds in our rooms whenever we had our lights on to limit the amount of birds that get drawn to the ship and hit us in the night. After a very short after dinner recap and briefing it was time to relax ahead of tomorrow morning's early start.

## Friday, 6<sup>th</sup> March – St Andrew's Bay and Grytviken

**Time:** 12:00

**Latitude:** 54° 26.2' S

**Longitude:** 36° 10.1' W

**Wind:** Force 5 Northwest

**Sea Conditions:** Slight (wave height 0.50 – 1.25 m)

**Pressure:** 998 mb

**Temperature:** 8°C

Early dawn light gave us our first views of St Andrew's Bay. Rain was falling and a fresh breeze blew across the water. We could see the glaciers that flow down from the mountains to the beach, along with the huge mounds of moraine that they have deposited over the years, now covered in vegetation. Melt water streams ran across the glacial outwash plain, transporting fresh water and suspended sediments out into the bay. As we left the ship, the rain was heavy but the sea was calm and soon we were at the shore, surrounded by thousands of king penguins. Fur seal pups ran towards us on fake charges which were easily repelled with a sharp clap of the hands. Elephant seal weaners could

also be seen wallowing in the melt water stream behind the landing site, playing together and practicing rearing up and fighting which would soon be the key to their success as breeding males. We followed a flagged route around the beach and up over the grassy moraine to where Andy was waiting. From here we looked down on the largest king penguin colony in the world and sensory overload. The



sight, sound and smell of the colony, estimated at 400,000 birds, was breathtaking. Nothing could have prepared us for this experience, something that few people ever have the chance to see. Huge groups of penguins stood in various stages of their 'catastrophic'

moult which begins at the end of their breeding cycle and takes approximately 3 weeks, during which time the birds are unable to go to sea and feed. We walked close to the edge of the colony and saw parent birds guarding tiny chicks and eggs under flaps of skin between their feet. At this stage the chicks are naked, growing their brown 'woolly' feathers in the weeks that follow. During this time they are closely brooded by both parents. At one point, the sun actually broke through the clouds to clear the rain and douse the colony in sunshine as well as drying off our soaking wet clothes. This fine weather lasted long enough for us to take some wonderful photographs and see the sea of colourful plumage in good light. On our return to the boats however, the katabatic winds began to blow and rain engulfed the bay once more. The last Zodiac to leave shore returned to the ship in 45 knot winds and requested four staff at the gangway to make boarding the ship a safe operation. We were all back onboard ship by 11:15, albeit a little wet in most cases.

Our navigation to King Edward Point and Grytviken was slowed considerably by strong headwinds, putting us behind schedule by at least one hour. It was a little after 15:00 when we finally pulled into Grytviken Harbour and were Zodiaced to the shore to a small cemetery where several elephant seals were enjoying a fine wallow. There were spots of rain in the air as we approached the little cemetery containing the final resting place of



Sir Ernest Shackleton, who died here in the harbour on 5 January 1922, once again sailing to Antarctica. We drank a toast with whiskey to 'The Boss', may he enjoy his rest among the old sailors, still looking south. We were then free to explore the rusty ruins, museum and shop, the restored Norwegian Church and the old catcher boats lying in the shallows. The museum had recently built a new display which featured a full size replica

of the *James Caird*, the small boat that delivered Shackleton and his hardy team of men from Elephant Island to South Georgia, a journey which took sixteen days. It was astonishing to see the size of the craft and we tried to imagine what that experience must have been like for those heroic men. Many of us took the opportunity to write postcards and send them from the Post Office which was set up back on the ship by staff from King Edward Point.

The katabatic winds that occasionally raced across the bay, gusting at over 40 knots, made the job of getting us all back to the ship slightly more challenging than expected but by 19:15 we were all onboard. Due to the inclement conditions outside, our BBQ dinner was cooked in the ship's galley and presented as a buffet in the observation lounge for a relaxed and informal meal. We had invited staff from Grytviken and King Edward Point, as well as a couple of yachters who were currently moored in the shelter of the bay, to join us for the evening. After a fantastic spread and plenty of opportunity to speak to our guests, Joe and Hannah delivered them back to shore at around 21:00 where we were thanked for our hospitality, a gesture that was reciprocated in light of our wonderful

afternoon in Grytviken. Many of us chose the option of an early night ahead of tomorrow morning's pre-breakfast landing although there were some who kept the barmen busy late into the night.

## **Saturday, 7<sup>th</sup> March – Fortuna Bay, Stromness & Hercules Bay**

**Time:** 12:00

**Latitude:** 54° 09.6' S

**Longitude:** 36° 42.2' W

**Wind:** Force 1 Variable

**Sea Conditions:** Calm (wave height 0)

**Pressure:** 1009 mb

**Temperature:** 5°C

Our early morning 'bing bong' came at 05:30 this morning as the sun was rising over the mountains that surround Fortuna Bay. The weather was bright and gave fine views of the northern faces of Mount Spaaman, Larssen Peak and Marikoppa that form the backdrop from which the König Glacier flows. The melt water from this glacier was flowing into the sea and turning it a milky colour with its nutrient rich sediment. Antarctic terns could be seen surface feeding in this area; fluttering gracefully out of the air and landing on their prey with precision. Croissants and muffins were waiting for us in the observation lounge, as well as hot drinks to warm us up ahead of our morning excursion. The Zodiacs

were already zipping around on the water, readying the landing sites and warming their engines. Our first stop was Whistle Cove; a small beach where we could sit and watch the king penguins coming and going. There were hundreds of fur seal pups both onshore and playing in the shallows. Those in the tussac grass could be seen feeding from their mothers who were mostly less than four years old themselves. Around the corner



was a small cave, next to which a group of large elephant seals were hauled out together. Several caribou were also spotted behind the landing site.

Those who had planned to undertake the hike from Fortuna Bay to Stromness (affectionately referred to as the *Shackleton Hike*) were given water and chocolate bars to keep them going through the morning and ferried across the bay by Zodiac to the start of the walk. Those who chose to take the leisurely option and enjoy the scenic sail around to Stromness Harbour were then driven back to the ship. Soon 36 of us were briefed on the shore before setting off to walk the last 5 kilometres of the epic 3 day crossing of South Georgia undertaken by Tom Crean, Frank Worsley and Sir Ernest, ending in Stromness on 20<sup>th</sup> May 1916. Once the fur seals in the tussac grass had been identified and a suitable route picked, we headed up the mountainside following our hike leader Mick Brown, passing several caribou on the way. The first part of the walk contained most of the hard work, rising to a ridge above Crean Tarn at a little over 300 metres where many of us

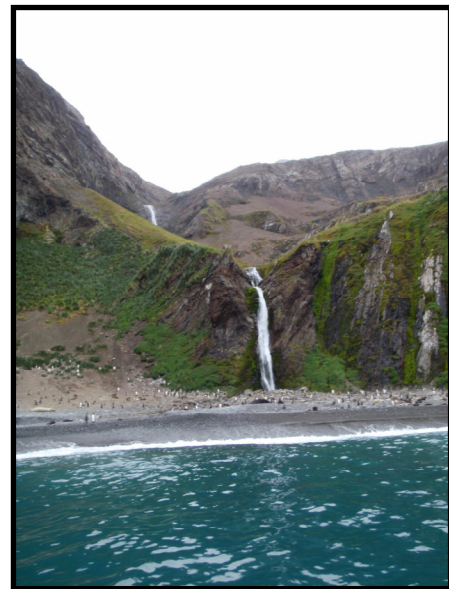
stopped to re-fuel on biscuits and water. The scenery that surrounded us as we crossed the saddle was beautiful, offering plenty of fantastic photo opportunities although occasional light sleet meant our cameras were best covered up. We all gathered for a group



photograph on the summit of the pass and enjoyed a few minutes rest. Before beginning our decent, we came to the spot where Shackleton saw the famous folded Z-shaped sandstone strata in the headland; he knew at once that he stood above Stromness Harbour. We looked down over the glaciated valley below, Stromness Whaling Station sitting on the shore in the distance, and watched the Polar Star motoring towards her new anchor point, sounding

her horn to announce her arrival. We made our way down the hillside, stopping briefly next to the famous waterfall down which Shackleton and his men climbed and along the huge glacial outwash plain to where the rest of the expedition team were waiting at the beach, having created a safe landing spot amid the fur seals. Hannah led a short walk for those who had opted out of the main hike. It followed the perimeter of the old whaling station (access within 200 metres is prohibited due to the risk of flying debris and asbestos) to a small cemetery, the resting place of whalers and ship repairers who lost their life in this treacherous place. This short walk also climbed to a small hill behind the station to look down over the ruins. As we were ferried to the ship we looked back at the ruins of the old whaling station that sat behind the fur seal laden beach, where Shackleton was welcomed back to the world after an absence of 18 months. Back on the ship, many of us watched through binoculars as some of the expedition team returned to shore to attempt to free a caribou that had become entangled in wire on the beach. Thankfully they found a way to cut the animal free and it ran off into the hills to tumultuous applause.

The early part of the afternoon was spent on ship. We ate a well earned lunch together and then rested ahead of our Zodiac cruise at Hercules Bay. On arrival, we could see that there was a noticeable swell in the bay but Hannah assessed the conditions at the gangway and decided that the cruise would be possible. Each boat followed the shore, stopping at points of interest along the way. At the head of the bay, a lovely waterfall cascaded down to the beach below where fur and elephant seals shared space with gentoo and king penguins. We came across a lone chinstrap penguin, likely from the colony at Cooper



Bay, which was standing on rocks and undertaking its moult. Further round the bay we found the macaroni penguin colony and wondered at how these tiny birds managed to reach their nests that sat high above the shore on the tussac covered mountainside. Our



drivers took us close in to rocks where yellow tufted adult birds stood alongside chicks at various stages of their development, some almost fully fledged. A skua was busy feeding on a dead penguin right in the middle of the group. Extensive kelp beds gave our drivers some problems, especially after all boats turned off their engines and watched a light-mantled sooty albatross on its nest. We drifted into the kelp and oars were used to paddle out into clear water. The albatross put on a fantastic display after we had first spotted it high on the mountainside, leaving its nest and soaring close to the shore past out Zodiacs before returning to its grassy mound. Soon it was time to return to the ship where Happy Hour was underway. In her briefing, Hannah broke the news that we would be having another pre-breakfast landing tomorrow morning; news which was again met with mixed opinion. Andy continued with a short presentation on fur seals before Mick played a sound recording that he had made at Cooper Bay. We all closed our eyes and were transported back to the beach, this time our imagination filling the picture. Many of us retired to our cabins early tonight in view of tomorrow morning's proposed wake-up time.

## Sunday, 8<sup>th</sup> March – Salisbury Plain & Prion Island

**Time:** 12:00

**Latitude:** 54° 01.5' S

**Longitude:** 37° 14.5' W

**Wind:** Force 2 Northeast

**Sea Conditions:** Smooth (wave height 0.10 – 0.50 m)

**Pressure:** 1018 mb

**Temperature:** 8°C

Zodiacs were motoring around the ship long before Hannah made her morning wake-up call at 05:45. The staff were already on the water, assessing the landing conditions and preparing the boats and it was not long before they were ready to take us ashore at Salisbury Plain. It was a bright morning with very calm sea conditions although there was



enough surf at the beach to necessitate stern landings, the wader boys spinning our boats on arrival. Behind the long, black sand beach we could see several glaciers winding through the mountains, huge mounds of brown, unsorted moraine at their flanks contrasted with the lush greens of the grassy meltwater plain. Hannah briefed us onshore and pointed out a huge female leopard seal that was resting on the beach to the right of the

landing site. All of the staff agreed that it was the largest that they had ever seen in their combined years of work in South Georgia and were genuinely amazed at its bulk which was easily double the average. Various bones lay around the landing site, some of the larger skulls from adult male fur seals with their large incisors still intact. We walked along the beach towards the second largest king penguin colony on South Georgia with

an estimated population of 125,000 birds, passing thousands of fur seal pups along the way. All stages of the annual breeding cycle could be seen from our position at the edge of the densest part of the colony which expands up the hillside by 1-2% every year. On our return, Zodiacs were still being spun at the beach and everyone was safely off the beach and onboard the *Polar Star* by 08:30. From deck, Prion Island could be seen in the distance. The short navigation to our next anchorage was undertaken as we ate a much needed breakfast and soon after leaving the dining room, Hannah announced our arrival.

We anchored off Prion Island, in the Bay of Isles, at 09:20 and prepared for a landing which would take us close to nesting wandering albatrosses. These birds have a declining worldwide population of about 17,000 birds, 4,000 of which breed in South Georgia. Prion Island has a breeding population of 50 pairs. Soon Zodiacs were in the water and we found it possible to weave through the extensive kelp beds that surround the island, to reach the shore. We could clearly see the boardwalk that ran from the beach up into the tussac grass and as soon as we were ashore we were assigned groups for guided walks, a rule which is imposed by the SGSSIG (South Georgia & The South Sandwich Island's Government) for the protection of these unique birds. We passed hundreds of fur seals on our way up the wooden walkway, stopping occasionally to take in the wonderful views across the water to the snow capped mountains of South Georgia. A series of viewing platforms extended out, deeper into the tussac from where we gained fantastic views of the wandering albatrosses sitting on their nests, occasionally stretching out their huge wings and then folding them back against their bodies in three separate jointed sections. The lack of wind meant that we did not see any of these mighty birds in the air. Northern and Southern giant petrels were also nesting among the albatrosses, their large chicks nearly fledged in most cases and often as large as the parent.

### **WANDERING ALBATROSS FACTS**

- Weight of bird: 9-10kg males, 7-8kg females.
- Most birds pair for life.
- Life expectancy: adult breeding bird banded in 1958 on Bird Island is now older than 55!
- Minimum age of first breeding 8 yrs, average 11.
- Chicks are fed lipid rich stomach oils which accumulate fat.
- When 8 months old, birds can weigh 50% more than adult.
- Chick-rearing period 278 days.
- Adult birds will travel as far as 7,500 km on foraging trips lasting less than 2 weeks
- They are poor divers, never going below 60cm.
- They eat primarily squid but also fish and krill.
- Females tend to forage in more northerly waters and are therefore more likely to be caught on long lines.
- Breeding Cycle:
  - Egg laid: December
  - Incubation: January/February (75-83 days)
  - Hatch: early March
  - Chick: April to Mid November (258-288 days)
  - Fledging: November/December/early January

Hannah had split us into two groups for the landing so as not to crowd the boardwalks and while half of us were onshore, the others were out in the boats on a short cruise around the islands. All boats had slightly different experiences but most of us were taken close to the seaweed covered rocks where tiny South Georgia pipits were hopping in search of food. These birds allowed the boats really close to them and we all



got fantastic photographs. Andy's boat was lucky enough to encounter a large flock of Antarctic prions, perhaps over 1000 individual birds, which flew around his Zodiac and settled on the water close by. It was great to see the very birds that the island was named after in such large numbers. Hannah taught nearby boats the art of making a kelp whistle and proceeded to blow various high pitched notes. All cruises headed back to the ship before lunch where we joined the other half of our group to share our experiences.

Many of us spent the early afternoon out on deck or on the bridge, watching as the ship navigated north, past Bird Island, leaving South Georgia behind on course for the Falkland Islands. At 16:30 Andy presented his lecture *Living in Polar Seas*, where he talked about the tremendous adaptations that some animals have for living in cold waters. He targeted such questions as why fish don't freeze and how creatures live and dive in



such cold waters. He ended with a short demonstration which involved immersing his face in ice cold water for 85 seconds whilst Joel monitored his heart rate. In keeping with the predicted dive response, his heart rate plummeted from 113 bpm to 44 bpm within that time before increasing rapidly up to 115 bpm in the few seconds that followed the demonstration. Happy Hour began shortly after and ran into tonight's recap and briefing. Where Ali showed a few images of the 70 mile long iceberg that broke away from the Ronne-Filchner ice shelf in 1998. For 6 years it made its way through the Weddell sea and across the Southern Ocean before grounding off the east coast of South Georgia. During the few weeks that followed, this mass of ice broke up into thousands of smaller icebergs which made their way into Cumberland Bay

throughout the summer of 2004-2005 before completely melting before the winter of 2005. Mick concluded by playing a sound recording taken next to a group of elephant seals, similar to those that we had been seeing throughout our time in South Georgia. The incredible noises that filled the observation lounge transported us back to those wallows, the staff adding a visual re-enactment on the stage to rapturous applause. The BBC film

*The Race to Breed* from the *Life in the Freezer* series was shown in the observation lounge after dinner this evening before we all retired to our cabins after a long and fulfilling day.

## Monday, 9<sup>th</sup> March – At Sea, Sailing to the Falkland Islands

**Time:** 12:00

**Latitude:** 52° 59.2' S

**Longitude:** 44° 13.1' W

**Wind:** Force 4 Northwest

**Sea Conditions:** Moderate (wave height 1.25 – 2.50 m)

**Pressure:** 1021 mb

**Temperature:** 7°C

We woke this morning to a calm Scotia Sea. A light breeze (force 1-2) blew across the decks and a small, one metre swell meant hardly any movement of the ship. We still had 540 nautical miles to go before our arrival in Stanley harbour but for the moment at least, conditions looked favourable for an enjoyable day on deck. Hannah informed us that a beautiful wandering albatross was making close passes of the ship,

along with several black-browed albatrosses that were using the little wind on offer to keep them airborne. White-chinned petrels and larger Northern and Southern giant petrels joined the ship after we had eaten breakfast when king penguins were also spotted in the water. At 09:00, Alison presented her lecture *My Homes away from Home* which gave a personal



account of her experiences working for the British Antarctic Survey. After a short break, Summer's lecture at 11:00, *Race to the Pole*, described the four separate expeditions that attempted to reach the South Pole at the beginning of the twentieth century. The *Discovery*, *Nimrod*, *Fram* and *Terra Nova* all aimed to make their lasting mark in history. Lunch was served at 12:30 in the dining room and for those who craved a relaxing afternoon in the observation lounge, the blinds were shut and we watched Kenneth Branagh in *Shackleton* (part 1 of 2). This fine dramatisation began the epic story of the *Endurance* and her voyage into the ice of the Weddell Sea. The film was followed at 16:40 by Mick with his lecture, *Greenwich Meantime – Navigation at Sea*. He explained how early navigators managed to solve the problem of determining longitude using celestial navigation. This had all changed by the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century, following the invention of John Harrison's marine chronometer, which made it possible to fix longitude without the need for complex calculations making a previously difficult task relatively simple.

The weather deteriorated throughout the day, from this morning's benign conditions to force 7 winds and a large 4 metre swell this afternoon. The ship responded to this change as expected and we experienced both pitching and rolling throughout the rest of the day. Louise began tonight's recap session with a fascinating talk on krill, explaining its

significance to the whole ecosystem of the Southern Ocean. Mick concluded by showing a short video that he had shot of the entangled caribou at Stromness and the successful attempt that was made to free it. After dinner tonight, episodes 4 and 5 of the *Life in the Freezer* series were shown in the observation lounge.

## Tuesday, 10<sup>th</sup> March – At Sea, Sailing to the Falkland Islands

**Time:** 12:00

**Latitude:** 52° 14.8' S

**Longitude:** 51° 41.3' W

**Wind:** Force 7 Northwest

**Sea Conditions:** Very Rough (wave height 4 – 6 m)

**Pressure:** 1012 mb

**Temperature:** 11°C

The ship's emergency bells woke us up this morning at around 05:30. Hannah quickly dispelled any worries that we may be sinking with an announcement that apologised for this false alarm. Those who managed to get back to sleep, woke two hours later to the 07:30 'bing-bong' and got ready for breakfast. Currently 283 nautical miles from Stanley, we were sailing in a foggy sea with force 6 winds driving across our decks. It was 8°C outside but visibility was poor at a maximum of 200 metres, not that this stopped us from



watching the magnificent seabirds that followed close to our stern. Every now and again a larger roll would rock the ship side to side which kept things interesting while moving around. Louise took us *Behind the Scenes of Science* with her 09:00 lecture. She described how various marine mammals are studied, specifying the contemporary techniques that are used and went on to explain that scientists have also realised the

potential of using certain species as data collectors. The elephant seal for example, often dives to depths of 2000 metres, and by attaching devices to the animal, important oceanographic data can be collected. After a quick break for fresh air, Joe entertained those in the observation lounge with his fascinating lecture on climate change from a Geologist's perspective, a hot topic that never fails to generate a healthy discussion. Those who chose to spend their morning out on deck were treated to wonderful sightings of soft plumaged petrels around the ship. Lunch was served at 12:30.

The afternoon's entertainment began in the observation lounge with *Shackleton* (part 2), the second instalment of the tale which began last night. Some of us chose to head to the bridge instead in order to watch the ship battle force 8 winds and waves around 6 metres high. The sun was shining and lighting up the vast clouds of spray that occasionally hit the bridge windows, creating mini rainbows around the ship. At 16:40, Mick and Summer collaborated to present an *Introduction to the Falkland Islands* which gave a brief

overview of the history and wildlife we could expect to see during our stay there. A short recap and briefing was held before dinner although the lounge was not as full as usual thanks to the ‘corkscrew’ movement on the ship. After a rather quiet dinner, the expedition staff agreed to screen *Happy Feet* as our evening feature. The *Polar Bar* was also open until the early hours of the morning as we enjoyed a few drinks together.

## Wednesday, 11<sup>th</sup> March – Stanley, East Falkland

**Time:** 12:00

**Latitude:** 51° 41.2' S

**Longitude:** 57° 51.1' W

**Wind:** Force 5 Southwest

**Sea Conditions:** Smooth (wave height 0.10 – 0.50 m)

**Pressure:** 1008 mb

**Temperature:** 13°C

The 07:30 wake-up call was somewhat easier to bear this morning after gaining an hour’s sleep overnight thanks to a change in time zones. The Captain was still on a course for Stanley and good progress overnight meant an arrival time of around 11:00. The ship was still shrouded in fog and light drizzle fell on the decks where a force 6 wind made for rather blustery conditions. Hannah suggested that soon we would find some shelter from the islands which would hopefully lessen the ship’s unpredictable movements. At 09:00 Mick gave a presentation in support of the *Save the Albatross Fund*. Tens of thousands of these seabirds are killed each year, caught on baited hooks which are laid by the long line fishing boats. Our support is needed to help regulate legal fisheries and prevent illegal pirate boats from operating. These pirate vessels are responsible for a significant percentage of this mortality. Mick finished by introducing a raffle aimed at raising some money for this cause, the prize being a wonderful expedition map designed and produced by Hannah, incorporating her own artwork.

Many of us went out on deck to watch our approach to Stanley, its colourful houses visible under the low cloud that hugged the hill tops. The city of Port Stanley was established in the 1840s and now has a population of 2,200 people. It has a distinctly English feel; the red phone box standing outside the visitors centre and the availability of quality tea are testaments to that historic link. Many of us chose to eat our lunch in Stanley at one of the many restaurants and pubs; with a last Zodiac time of 18:00 we had time enough to explore the city. The expedition team had recommended several places of interest: the southernmost Anglican Cathedral in the world with its blue whale jaw bone arch marking the entrance to the churchyard, the small yet fascinating Stanley museum, full of memorabilia about the maritime, farming and military history of the islands, and the Post Office and Philatelic bureau. It was also



recommended to spare a little time to walk along the waterfront to see the historic wrecks, especially the mizzen (back) mast of the *SS Great Britain*. When built, it was the largest and most innovative ship in the world. After a long career, it acted as a store for the Falkland Island Company before being towed back to the dock where it was built in Bristol in 1970, leaving the mast behind in Stanley for posterity. Two excursions had been planned for this afternoon, one was a guided walk of Stanley, taking in the highlights, and the other was a coach based tour of the city and its hinterland. We had signed up to our chosen trips during an earlier recap and briefing and met our respective guides at 14:30.

Throughout the afternoon the weather had steadily improved until the city of Stanley was basking in warm sunshine. The Globe Tavern had a series of picnic benches outside, a perfect spot to enjoy an afternoon drink in the sun. Zodiacs ran back to the ship every hour from 16:00 until the last Zodiac left the shore at 18:30 to get us back onboard in time for dinner. A young South American sea lion swam up to the jetty during the shuttles and showed its displeasure at us using his favourite haul out spot for our operation. The customs officials explained that this sea lion often jumps onto the pontoon to rest and as it raced around the Zodiacs, jumping out of the water and growling, we could see that it was unimpressed with our presence. Once back on ship, we ate dinner and the night set in, a full moon glowing down on the water to stunning effect. This evening we met in the observation lounge at 20:30 for a briefing on tomorrow's activities. Mick also showed a short video clip of the sea lion that had made its presence felt at the jetty earlier in the day. After this entertainment, the film *Killer Whale Islands* was shown. This documentary followed Nigel Marven as he travels from island to island in search of killer whales, stumbling across other wildlife of the Falklands along the way.

## **Thursday, 12<sup>th</sup> March – Carcass & West Point Islands, West Falkland**

**Time:** 12:00

**Latitude:** 51° 18.3' S

**Longitude:** 60° 33.5' W

**Wind:** Force 5 Northeast

**Sea Conditions:** Smooth (wave height 0.10 – 0.50 m)

**Pressure:** 1015 mb

**Temperature:** 13°C

Hannah woke us at 06:50 this morning, slightly earlier than expected due to the beautiful conditions outside. The vista from the starboard side of the ship was lit pink by the early morning light, the moon still hanging in the sky with its craters clearly visible with the naked eye. With almost no clouds in the sky and a temperature that already reached 10°C, it was clear we were in for a fantastic morning at the very least. The ship was making her way past Sedge Island to starboard and Saunders Island to port through a residual swell that rolled the vessel slightly.

Lying at the northwest of the Falkland Islands archipelago, Carcass Island takes its name from the *HMS Carcass*, which visited here in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The island is dominated by Mount Byng, which stands at 700ft (214 metres) above the shore and is made up of hard, white quartzite deposited as sand in a shallow sea approximately 400 million years ago. Due to abundant vegetation cover in the form of tussac grass and

various shrubs, as well as the absence of cats, rats and mice, the island has a spectacularly large population of small birds.

The Zodiacs pulled onto a small sandy beach where the smell of kelp assaulted us on arrival. Kelp and upland geese were wandering around the beach as we put our lifejackets in the bags and prepared for the landing. Mick led a long hike across the island which walked down to Leopard Beach on the south side and then climbed to a wonderful vantage point in the centre of the island for panoramic views. At the very outset of his walk, Mick led his group in song with a rousing rendition of *Oh What a Beautiful Morning* which rang out around the hills. Leopard Beach was stunning with its white sand beach and turquoise shoreline, some of us were even tempted into the water for a paddle as blackish oystercatchers patrolled the kelp for food. We passed an area of burned tussac grass that still lays wasted from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century sealing days when this grass was cleared to force out the fur seals. The burning not only destroyed the



foliage but also the roots that feed through the peaty soil, killing the whole plant. Both Magellanic and gentoo penguins stood together in moult, both looking uncomfortable as they shed their old feathers to make way for the new. The rest of the walk was spent looking out for the various songbirds of the island which included great sightings on military starlings, black throated finches and dark faced ground tyrants. Hannah

took a more leisurely walk, along the lowlands with the exception of one unexpected up hill section, exploring similar flora and fauna along the way.

We arrived at Rob and Lorraine McGill's cottage and were welcomed inside for their famous tea and cakes. It was great to sit out in their little garden and enjoy the various birds that hopped around in search of titbits. The large caracaras sat on top of fence posts and out buildings, occasionally flying down to the grass of the garden and stalking around us looking for easy food. When we were ready to head back to the ship, Zodiacs were waiting on the small beach below the house to pick us up. While we ate lunch on ship, the Captain started up our engine and began a short navigation to West Point Island, 6 miles away. On our approach to West Point Island, Hannah announced that the ship was being flanked by a group of Peale's dolphins on our starboard side.

Soon the Captain informed Hannah that we had reached our next destination, West Point Island, in the North West corner of the Falklands group. Soon Zodiacs were back in the water and we enjoyed a short ride into a sheltered bay with a small jetty. Some of us were lucky enough to see a group of four Peale's dolphins swimming close to the shore. They swam in the wake of Joe's Zodiac for a short while before losing interest and swimming out of the bay. The owners of the island, Roddy and Lily Napier, once farmed sheep on its hills but are now involved in offering visitors a unique Falklands experience. A long hike, or a lift in a vintage Land Rover, took us across the top of the island where we saw



upland geese wandering the short grass. The track took us to Devil's Nose, a narrow headland of quartzite, which is home to another bird colony: predominately black-browed albatrosses and rockhopper penguins. From the shelter of the tussac grass, we were able to observe the birds at close quarters without stressing them. The two are very tolerant of each other, except when a crash-landing albatross falls into a rockhopper's nest-space; they are certainly not afraid to stand up and defend it. We saw both adult birds and fledging chicks sitting on top of the tower-like nests, both now similar in size. Chicks could be seen badgering their parents for food and after enough persuasion often succeeded in receiving a regurgitated morsel. Occasionally an albatross would pass us through the tussac, its feet making a distinctive slapping sound as they walked.



On our return from the colony, there was a welcome cup of English tea with home baked cakes waiting for us at the Napiers' homestead; snug in the shelter of the leaning cypresses (*Cupressus macrocarpus*), introduced trees which survive in conditions so tough that there are no native tree species. Several striated caracaras (known locally as Johnny Rooks) hopped around us as we sat in the garden, constantly testing our resolve by making lightning dashes at the cakes that lay on our china plates. After we had had our fill, we thanked our hosts and hopped back into Zodiacs bound for the ship. As the ship sailed out through Woolly Gut, between West Point Island and West Falkland, two sei whales were briefly seen off our starboard side. Dinner was served soon after our arrival back on ship which was followed by a briefing on tomorrow's lectures. Mick treated us to another of his sound recordings, this time reminding us of the impressive black-browed albatross and rockhopper penguin colony at West Point Island. The final episode of the BBC's *Frozen Planet* series was shown in the observation lounge to round off a long day.

## Friday, 13<sup>th</sup> March – At Sea, Sailing to Ushuaia

**Time:** 12:00

**Latitude:** 53° 50.6' S

**Longitude:** 63° 50.7' W

**Wind:** Force 7 West

**Sea Conditions:** Very Rough (wave height 4 – 6 m)

**Pressure:** 993 mb

**Temperature:** 11°C

Our final day at sea began with Hannah's 07:30 wake-up call. We were making good progress with only 100 nautical miles to go until reaching Staten Island where we would make our course change for the Beagle Channel. The Captain expected to reach the lee of South America late this afternoon, hopefully before a forecasted change of wind direction, which would no doubt affect the ship. Currently force 7 winds and a 2 metre swell were producing comfortable conditions.

We joined Hannah at 09:30 for her lecture *Wilson of the Antarctic*. She introduced us to Edward Wilson, the exceptional explorer, researcher and artist who travelled to Antarctica with Scott. Summer continued the morning's education after a short break with her lecture, *The Beagle, Darwin & Ushuaia*. This talk explored the history of the land that greeted Darwin at the southern tip of South America and how it affected his future. This lecture was especially relevant as 2009 is the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Darwin's birth and the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his writing of *The Origin of the Species*. Those of us who were spending time on deck enjoyed fine views of black-browed albatrosses, giant petrels and Magellanic diving petrels.

After lunch the staff showed one of their favourite films *Around Cape Horn*, a short montage of unique footage shot from all parts of one of the mighty P-Line Cape Horn square riggers: the *Peking*. Matchless commentary by Irving Johnson, spoken over the silent film he shot as a young man, from the perspective of a robust old age makes this an unforgettable piece of cinema. The Captain's Farewell Party at 18:00 was followed by the voyage slideshow, painstakingly put together by Chris with picture contributions from all staff. Chef Bob and his team put together another fine meal and we toasted our own farewells to new friends and of course some of the World's most unique and memorable places.

*"Virtually every visitor to the ice returns to "civilisation" converted into a passionate, life-long South Polar Ambassador. The enriched lives of these privileged few will never again be the same for they have truly experienced paradise on earth. That such a wondrous, unspoiled place still exists on this beleaguered planet, is one of the real miracles of the 20th century. The indescribable splendour of the magnificent final frontier and its remarkable wildlife must be forever regarded as an irreplaceable international treasure that justly deserves to be protected indefinitely for future generations."*

(Frank Todd, 1988)