



EXPEDITION LOG

Antarctic Peninsula
and the Polar Circle

Aboard MV POLAR STAR



February 4th - 15th 2010

Images courtesy of the non-film expedition team

WE SAILED WITH

Captain	Leszek Slawski
Chief Officer	Piotr Zengota
Chief Engineer	Zenon Berger
Second Officer	Jerry Malapad
Third Officer	Mark Paul Deposoy
Bosun	Bernardo Gonzales
Head Chef	Bryan Hanson
Hotel Managers	Natasha Hanson & Janet Aurelio
Doctor	Amama Thornley
Expedition Leader	'Mighty' Megan Tierney
Expedition Staff	Gilles Bourque
	Simon Cook
	Lori Gross
	Hannah Lawson
	John Sparks
	Ursula Tscherter
	Phillip Wash
Expedition Staffing	Peter Thornley
Ice Pilot	Little Mo

Day 1: Thursday, 4th February - Ushuaia and the Beagle Channel

'A journey is a person in itself, no two are alike. And all plans, safeguards, policies and coercion are fruitless. We find after years of struggle that we do not take a trip; a trip takes us.'

John Steinbeck (1902-1968)

Latitude: 54° 48.6' S

Wind: breezy

Air Temperature: 12°C

Longitude: 068° 17.8' W

Sea Conditions: calm

Average Speed: 11 knots (kts)

Renowned for its changeable weather, Ushuaia provided rain, wind and sunshine too. The town is situated in a very dramatic position on the Beagle Channel. Facing Chilean territory to the south, it is backed by lofty, snowy peaks, which are the southern end of the mighty Andes. In the late afternoon we made our way along the bustling dock, passing various ships that were welcoming their own passengers, until we arrived at the *MV Polar Star*. Our home-from-home awaited us and it was a larger, more robust vessel in comparison to the small, Russian expedition ship on the other side of the dock. It was clear that we were not boarding just any cruise vessel; this was a unique expedition vessel, with a long history of adventure in the harshest of environments. An air of excitement and anticipation surrounded us as we climbed aboard.



Once everyone was aboard with their luggage, Megan, our expedition leader met us in the observation lounge for an initial briefing. She introduced us to Captain Leszek who welcomed us aboard and raised a toast to the voyage. The expedition staff then introduced themselves and described their specialist interests and experience. Our Chief and Safety Officer, Piotr, followed with a safety briefing, highlighting a few important rules which would help ensure a safe trip for all. As we left the dock the sun came out, and the wind picked up a little.

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, all with 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 and raged eastward, so intense 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 bad that everything, even the seeds, was destroyed and the ground was left open to erosion.

The general alarm on the ship sounded at 18:30. The Captain announced that this was a mandatory lifeboat drill and that we should take our bright orange lifejackets and assemble at our muster points on deck 4 under the lifeboats. Portside cabins to the port side and starboard to the starboard side - simple really, that is if you have figured out which end of the ship is which yet! After being accounted for by the officers it was time to find the dining room and enjoy our first meal on board. During dinner we passed the southernmost town in the world, Puerto Williams, on the southern (Chilean) side of the Beagle Channel. Ushuaia, with its 60,000 inhabitants, on the north side of the Beagle, claims to be the southernmost city in the world. Puerto Williams was originally a naval base founded in 1952; the settlement now has a population of 2,000 people including one of the last fluent speakers of the language spoken by the Yámana canoe Indians. This tribal group was encountered by Charles Darwin during his time in the Beagle Channel.

The last hours of the day were spent navigating the Beagle Channel, which was named after the ship which circumnavigated the world between 1831 and 1836 with Charles

Darwin on board. The Ushuaia port authority had provided a pilot to navigate us safely through the channel whilst the expedition staff helped to spot wildlife from the bridge. Magellanic Penguins were seen swimming around the ship and on the beach at their nearby colony whilst Imperial Shags flew low across the glassy channel, occasionally passing flocks of South American Terns surface-feeding on the water. We were also lucky enough to see our first few Black-browed Albatrosses. The small boat that collected the pilot arrived after dark and from then on we were on our own - en route to Antarctica and many exciting adventures!

Day 2: Friday, 5th February - at sea, northern Drake Passage

'There must be a beginning of any great matter, but the continuing to the end until it be thoroughly finished yields the true glory'

Sir Francis Drake

Noon report

Latitude: 56 ° 44' North

Wind: 10 kts, southerly

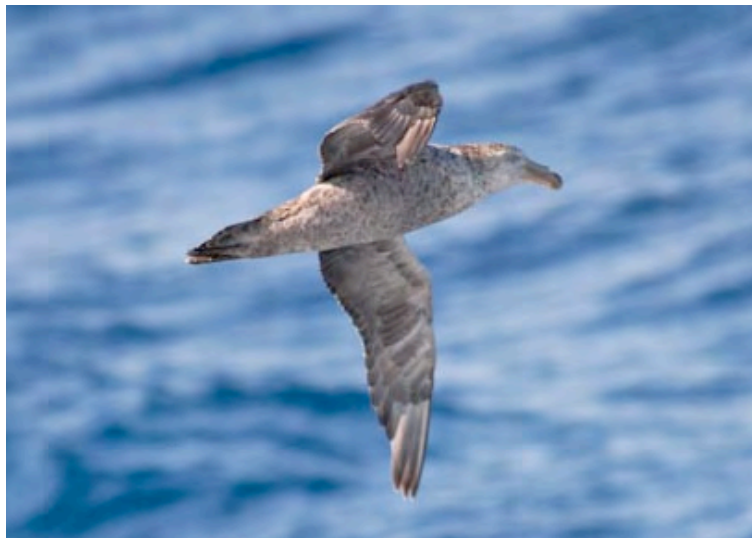
Air Temperature: 6° C

Distance sailed from Ushuaia: 178 nautical miles (nm)

Longitude: 065° 46' West

Sea Conditions: getting calmer

Speed: 9.1 kts



Today the pre-breakfast hours were the best for birds, with four species of albatross spotted. The largest two were the Wandering and the Southern Royal, each of which has a wingspan of up to 3.5m/12'. This is the greatest wingspan of any bird in the world and the birds looked very much at home in what for us is a hostile, alien environment. At times they came very close to the ship but the lack of anything to provide a sense of scale meant that gauging size was extremely difficult. Other

interesting species included Southern Giant-Petrels, White-chinned and Soft-plumaged Petrels and several tiny storm-petrels. The wind and waves that caused us so many difficulties this morning didn't affect the birds at all! Luckily, as the day progressed, the sea got calmer and calmer and we were blessed with a bright, sunny sky.

After breakfast we were able to learn a great deal more about the seabirds of this region when John spoke elegantly, eloquently and excitedly on the subject during a lecture in the lounge. As we got to know the ship and our travelling companions better, more activities unfolded - an exciting jacket exchange, a fascinating lecture by Hannah about ice, an albatross video by round-the-world yachtswoman Dame Ellen MacCarthy, a lecture by

Lori about the marine mammals of the region and a chance to watch a documentary from the BBC television series 'Pole to Pole'.

During the day we saw another cruise ship but this one was huge, 294m/964 feet long. It had a strange name, the *Celebrity Infamy* or *Infidelity* or *Inability* or *Infirmity* or *Infinity* or some-such. It was a monster, anyway. After an exhausting day, bed came as a welcome relief.

Day 3: Saturday, 6th February - at sea, southern Drake Passage

'I now belong to the higher cult of mortals, for I have seen the Albatross'

Robert Cushman Murphy

Noon report

Latitude: 61° 19' S

Wind: 18 kts, easterly

Air Temperature: 3° C

Distance sailed from Ushuaia: 437 nm

Longitude: 065° 18' W

Sea Conditions: calm with swell

Average Speed: 13.2 kts

This morning we were all pleased to find that the sea was much, much calmer than yesterday so we finally had a chance to unwind a little and begin to enjoy our passage to Antarctica. Everyone was pleased to see that the clear skies and sunshine were still with us. Sometime during the day there was a noticeable bump but it was only the ship crossing the Antarctic Convergence.

THE ANTARCTIC CONVERGENCE

The Antarctic Convergence, or Polar Front, is a narrow zone (up to around 30 kms wide) undulating between 50 and 60 degrees south. It encircles the continent and is best defined by continuous water temperature readings. The mixing zone is sometimes marked by a belt of fog or mist where warm, more saline currents coming south from the tropics meet cold, denser, less saline currents moving north from Antarctica. These conflicting currents converge, mix and sink. The mixing waters provide a sympathetic environment for abundant plankton that nourishes huge numbers of sea birds and mammals. However few planktonic organisms can cross this biological boundary, so the convergence delineates Antarctica from an ecological point of view. The political boundary is 60° South.

Once again, there was plenty going on inside the ship. Activities included: 'Can't run, fly even worse' (penguins, John), 'Incredible Hunters' (feeding of cetaceans), an expedition briefing with Megan, 'Rubber Boot Challenge' (interactive game) and 'The Great Vacuum Party' (indescribable), plus an after dinner photographic presentation and workshop with Lori and Simon.

Today there were not so many birds around the ship but the lucky few saw distant whale spouts, inconspicuous Southern Bottlenose Whales, frisky Hourglass Dolphins and a very playful Antarctic Minke Whale, which was right beside the ship. Late in the afternoon the first penguins (Chinstraps) were seen and we were then invited out onto the deck to see our first Humpback Whales. This very exciting encounter was of a female and her large calf. They stayed very close together and made frequent splashes with their long pectoral flippers. We could also see their heads, spouts, backs, parts of their tail flukes and stubby dorsal fins. After watching for a short while we were soon heading south again, towards unseen but much anticipated Antarctica. It was a good day but we had to get to bed, since an early start was planned for tomorrow!

Day 4: Sunday, 7th February – Lemaire Channel (65° 04' S, 063° 57' W), Petermann Island (65° 10' S, 064° 10' W) & (continental) Prospect Point with the Fish Islands (66° 01' S, 065° 23' W)

'Penguins are beautiful, interesting and funny. They are a pleasure to watch even though they do smell and their voices are not melodious.'

George Gaylord Simpson

Noon report

Latitude: 65° 10' S

Wind: flat calm

Air Temperature: 2° C

Distance sailed from Ushuaia: 722 nm

Longitude: 064° 10' W

Sea Conditions: flat calm

Average Speed: at anchor

Megan woke us up very early today for two reasons, a) it was sunny (again!) and b) both land and icebergs were close by. The land was Anvers Island and we were cruising along the very dramatic south coast, heading east. Soon some distant spouts were spotted and they belonged to a group of about 15 Killer Whales. As we drew closer the vapour could be seen coming up from the heads of the animals. They were coming towards us so we slowed down to see them better. Unfortunately, there weren't interested in us so didn't come very close. Anyway, almost immediately afterwards, we came across some Humpback Whales, which we watched for a while before turning to the south towards the fabled Lemaire Channel.



This well-known stretch of water is about seven miles long and was discovered by a German expedition under Dallman in 1873-74. It was traversed in December 1898 by the Belgian Antarctic Expedition under Gerlache and was named by him for Charles Lemaire,

a Belgian explorer of the Congo. We found the channel to be very dramatic as well as being very narrow in places. Lots of ice in the water was complemented by ice all over the towering mountains and all the ice in the numerous glaciers. Numerous Humpback, Antarctic Minke and some Dwarf Minke Whales were seen close to the ship, which was very exciting. We also saw our first Leopard Seal, on an ice floe. After our dramatic transit of the channel it was only a short distance to Petermann Island but even more whales appeared, including two sleeping Humpbacks!

While the last few zodiacs were shuttling the last of us ashore a very curious Minke Whale appeared right beside the ship. At one point, very close to the gangway, it turned onto its side so that it could look up at the people lining the rail! Gentoo Penguins greeted us at the shore, where we got out onto wave-smoothed rocks. There were some good options available. One was a walk to the northern end of the island for stunning views and Antarctic Shags and both Adélie & Gentoo Penguins. The chicks were starting to move around and looked very comical. The other was a walk in the opposite direction to a high point, from which the views of both the Antarctic Peninsula and the southern end of the island were obtained. We also had views of a big avalanche, on the mainland side of the Penola Strait. All too soon it was time to head back towards the zodiacs but before returning to the ship many of us had the chance to do some zodiac cruising around the southern end of the island. Here, on a small iceberg, there were six Crabeater Seals (plus a single krill swimming in the water). Nearby was more ice and a Leopard Seal was spotted sleeping on top of a small piece (bergy bit).



Lunch was next; then there was an engine room tour as the ship weaved in and out of the icebergs that lay across our path like a string of frosty pearls. It was quite a long way to our next destination so many of us took the opportunity to catch up on some sleep. However, it wasn't long before we were interrupted by a 'bing-bong' - more whales ahead of us! This was an extraordinary and remarkable encounter. In sight were perhaps 20 more Humpbacks and some came really close to the ship as they continually dived to feed. We saw their long pectoral flippers, heads and blowholes, backs and stumpy dorsal fins and their tail flukes, which were continually thrown high up into the air. The whales were corralling their prey with streams of bubbles, which were very easy for us to see from our vantage point on the ship. How many thousand photographs were taken, I wonder?



At recap the first iceberg sighting was announced as being at 03.30 at 64° 44.6' S, 064° 41.1' W. The lucky prize winner had a choice of either an ice cube or a Polar Star hat. After dinner we found ourselves safely at anchor close to Prospect Point, the former site of a British hut. Antarctica has reserves of both titanium and uranium but Phil (a Canadian, eh? and likened by some to Sgt. Bilko) astutely reminded us that the Brits were here prospecting for an even scarcer element, unobtainium. The mainland was very close to the ship and the sea was full of ice, from large bergs to plentiful brash ice. Not far away was a group of small islands called The Minnows. The zodiacs set off and did their own thing, with a landing on the continent itself being a high priority for everyone. Luckily the waters edge was ice-free so getting ashore was very easy for us. Scattered everywhere were hundreds of conical limpet shells. They are eaten whole by Kelp Gulls, the flesh is digested and the shells are then regurgitated, often at favourite places.

It was also possible to drive right up to the Minnows and get close to small groups of Adélie Penguins. On one island there was also quite a large group of Antarctic Shags and they too had large, dirty-looking chicks. In addition to the landing and birding we also spent a long time cruising through and around the ice, the blue icebergs were particularly attractive. Being completely silent for a minute or two revealed that our surroundings were full of different sounds, such as the popping of ice in the water. Once back on board, we then went further south.

Day 5: Monday, 8th February - Crystal Sound (66° 23' S, 066° 30' W) The Gullet (67° 10' S, 067° 38' W), & Detaille Island (66° 51' S, 066° 47' W)

'Imagine a place bigger than the U.S. or Europe, sunnier than California, yet colder than the freezing compartment of your fridge. Drier than Arabia, higher than mountainous Switzerland, emptier than the Sahara. Only one place in the world fits that description. It is Antarctica, the strange, but beautiful continent at the bottom of the Earth.'

This is Antarctica, Joseph M. Dubert

Noon report

Latitude: 67° 10' S

Wind: light airs

Air Temperature: 6° C

Distance sailed from Ushuaia: 884 nm

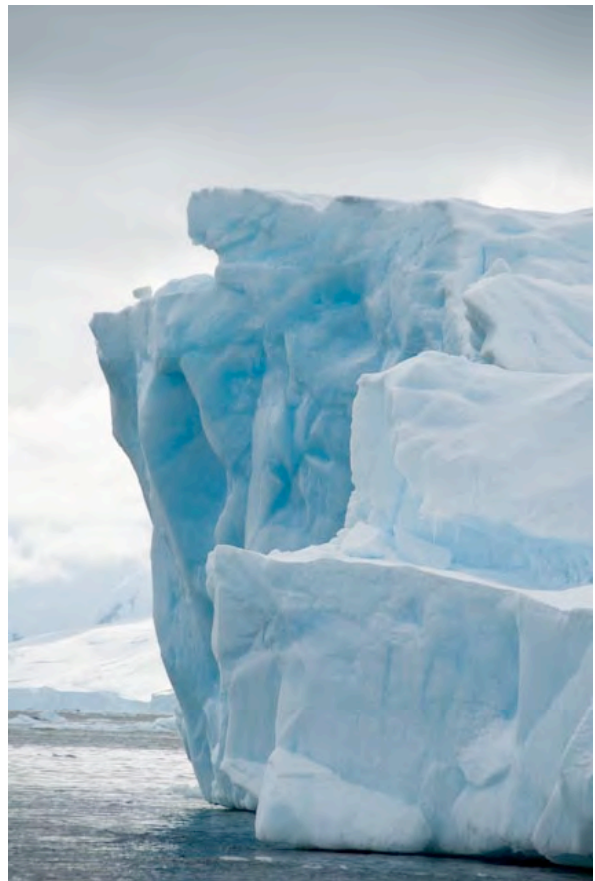
Longitude: 067° 38' W

Sea Conditions: calm

Average Speed: drifting

Mighty Mighty Megs (as she is known to her Aussie mates back home) woke us all up early today with the exciting news that we had crossed the Antarctic Circle in the early hours of the morning @ 04.08. It was in this area, later on, that we reached the southernmost point on our voyage - 67° 10.5' South (067° 30.7' West). The Captain guided the ship through the narrow channel, dodging bergy bits and icebergs along the way. The ship also slowed down when an avalanche sent a plume of snow out over the water. The sea was flat calm and after the ship came to a halt in The Gullet we disembarked and went off in the zodiacs to explore the area. Megan had divided us into groups so that we all got just over an hour on the water. Around us was an icy wonderland, with plenty covering the land and floating in the sea too. Hannah's first group claimed to have got even further south but, since there was no 'buddy boat' to substantiate the claim, it was rejected out of hand. Too bad.

A sleeping Humpback Whale was located and gave some of us a good idea of its size. Difficult to see (unless lucky) were the local Antarctic Minke Whales. Flying around us were Snow Petrels, Wilson's Storm-petrels, Brown Skuas, Kelp Gulls, Southern Fulmars, Antarctic Terns and a few Southern Giant-Petrels. There was a lot of ice in the water and dozens of Crabeater Seals were asleep on many of the larger pieces. Not so easy to find were the Antarctic Fur Seals and Leopard Seals but we did get very close views of this reptilian-like predator in the end. One or two impromptu landings were made and one group, who landed to see some red and green



snow algae, were told by their driver that they were standing on the continent. The same people had a strange experience with the strong current at the entrance to a wide channel. Although their zodiac was stationary two icebergs swept past it at 'high speed' on either side.

During lunch the sun came out properly and before long we arrived at Detaille Island for a look at the long-abandoned British hut. Even though it was very windy and splashy in the zodiacs we made it safely to the still snow-covered island. To quote, "Base "W" is designated as Historic Site and Monument No. 83. It is sited at the northern end of the island. It is noteworthy as a relatively unaltered British scientific base of the late 1950's, providing an evocative insight into the way the bases were occupied during this period. It was built in 1956 and closed in 1959 due to the difficulty of access [heavy sea ice]. It was subsequently re-occupied for six months in 1965/66. During its short history as an occupied base it contributed towards the geophysical programme of the International Geophysical Year (IGY). In addition to the base building there are also dog kennels, an emergency store, fuel drum and cargo depots, an anemometer tower and wireless masts."

Looking inside the hut was like going back in time - your author found a diary for the year of his birth (long after Phil's) and found that he arrived on a Monday. Other things of interest inside included the generator room, tins full of now long-forgotten brands of food, English and Canadian magazines from the 1950's, a joke book, a telegram from Prince Phillip congratulating the men on the high standard of their housekeeping and a cricket bat from the Antarctic series, when the Brits trounced the Aussies. Ah, glorious days..... As soon as we were back aboard there was a toast outside the lounge to our crossing of the Antarctic Circle and we re-crossed it on our way north at 20.58. A film about Humpback Whales and a session in the Polar Bar with our friends rounded off the day nicely.

Day 6: Tuesday, 9th February - Pleneau Island (65° 06' S, 064° 04' W) and Palmer Station (64° 46' S, 064° 04' W)

'An Antarctic expedition is the worst way to have the best time of your life.'

Apsley Cherry-Garrard

Noon report

Latitude: 65° 02' S

Longitude: 063° 53' W

Wind: 22 kts, gusting to 30-40

Sea Conditions: whitecaps

Air Temperature: 7° C

Average Speed: 11.4 kts

Distance sailed from Ushuaia: 1,076 nm

This morning the weather was flat calm again and around breakfast-time we passed Petermann Island on our way north. There were lots of whales around, some of which we saw from the zodiacs later on. It was only a short ride from ship to shore and a curious Leopard Seal near a small iceberg proved to be a bit of a distraction for us. Pleneau Island provided plenty of interest, in the very sunny conditions. It was possible to walk up

to a couple of vantage points for an overview of all the grounded icebergs nearby. The Gentoo Penguins all had large chicks, which were constantly amusing us with their antics. Not quite so amused was the largest of the three Southern Elephant Seals, which reared up angrily but impotently whenever a chick came close.

In addition to the island visit, it was also possible to go out in the boats for a short cruise. The nearby icebergs were very impressive and there were at least two Leopard Seals in the area. Some of us got very good looks when one came very close to the boats, looking up at us as we looked down on it. Other marine mammals were in the area too - Antarctic Minke Whales. They were feeding and not interested in the boats but it was possible to drive along with them and see them surfacing and hear them exhaling. Once the ship's emergency drill was over and the lifeboat was back aboard we rejoined the ship. After heaving the anchor the Polar Star set off through the Lemaire Channel on her way to (the American) Palmer Station. The water here was glassy but just a short distance to the north the wind was very strong indeed and at times blew spray up into the air. The waves got bigger and bigger and reminded us just how quickly things can change. Hannah pointed out the famous Una's Tits; towering, colossal, majestic, snow-capped, twin peaks shaped not like chickadees, as Simon explained later but something else.



On the way to Palmer Station the wind increased in strength and was blowing at 40-50 knots. The waves were breaking and spray was being blown along the surface. Luckily, when we arrived at the anchorage the wind had dropped to only 30-40 knots so we managed to stay fairly dry in the boats. The original station was built on Anvers Island in 1965 but the present buildings began to be erected in 1967. The first new building, the biology laboratory, opened its doors to science in 1970. Now the station has two major buildings, several smaller structures, two large fuel tanks and a dock for support and research ships. There is a marine biology laboratory and atmospheric science is also supported.

We were very kindly supported too. As we arrived we were welcomed and taken off in small groups for a comprehensive tour of the facilities. On the way around the site we were taken through the gift shop (its funny how all tours these days manage to include gift shops!) and many of us succumbed to temptation. Once our credit was used up there was the offer of free hot drinks and succulent brownies in the upstairs mess area. It was a very nice way to end our short visit here. Later on, just as dinner was ending, we made our

approach to Port Lockroy, where we anchored for the night. Megan had to wait a while to talk about living and working in Antarctica because the sun shining on the clouds, icebergs and many snowy peaks demanded to be photographed first.

Day 7: Wednesday, 10th February - Port Lockroy (64° 49' S, 063° 30' W) & Paradise Harbour (64° 53' S, 062° 52' W)

'Who would have ever believed in penguins unless he had seen them'
Connor O'Brien

Noon report

Latitude: 64° 49.5' S

Wind: Flat calm

Air Temperature: 4° C

Distance sailed from Ushuaia: 1,122 nm

Longitude: 063° 30.2' W

Sea Conditions: glassy

Average Speed: weighing anchor

Port Lockroy was established in 1944, abandoned in the 1960's and restored in 1996. It is now the second most visited place in Antarctica, after Deception Island. The morning dawned bright, clear and sunny, allowing perfect views of the surrounding mountains, including the Seven Sisters. After a very informative talk by the station personnel we were off in the boats to see the place for ourselves. We were split 50/50 between the museum/gift shop/post office and nearby Jougla Point, where there was the opportunity to climb up a hill for an overview. The penguins made us very welcome, there were a few shags in among them too and the whale bones were very impressive. The Gift Shop Girls also made us very welcome and were more than happy to take our funny little pieces of plastic and coloured paper in exchange for wonderful mementoes of our visit. The museum was a fascinating place to visit and the fellows outside were hard at work on the new accommodation building.

The penguin chicks, due to the heat (11° C), were not very active and a lot of them were huddling in the shadow of the old boat shed in an effort to stay cool. Other chicks out in the open were attacked by skuas, a Southern Giant-Petrel was on the lookout for easy pickings and the Pale-faced Sheathbills were trying to get food from adults feeding chicks. In among the gentoos there was a solitary, lost Chinstrap Penguin; a very unusual visitor here. It wasn't



only the chicks that were affected by the heat of the sun - several people apparently lost all reason and plunged into the clear but icy water. Perhaps they thought that they too

were now penguins? Whatever the case, most of them very soon realised that they, unlike the penguins, *weren't* adapted to Antarctica so they exited the water rather rapidly! Once everyone was back aboard, the ship weighed anchor and we set off. Our route took us north up the spectacular Neumayer Channel and across the Gerlache Strait, towards our next, continental, destination.

On the way up the channel the wind started to pick up until, out in the Gerlache, it was gusting in excess of 40 knots. Andvoord Bay, where Neko Harbour is situated, was even worse, with the wind lifting the surface of the water up into the air as spray. Neko Harbour looked a little more sheltered but as we approached the anchorage a huge calving from the adjacent glacier caused powerful waves to pound the beach where we were due to land! A number of penguins were swept away - literally surfing along the beach! By the time the anchor was down and the first boat was lowered, the wind had picked up considerably, causing a nasty swell. The latter made it unsafe to operate at the gangway so we turned tail and fled.

Not far away was a huge, old, castellated iceberg that was full of blue caves with arches and pillars too. Around it swirled a number of delicate-looking Snow Petrels, which were oblivious to the wind. Passing the Chilean station at Waterboat Point, we were soon just off the unoccupied Argentinean station a few miles to the south. Unlike the Gerlache Strait and Andvoord Bay, here we found peace and tranquillity, man. Oh yeah. It was only a short ride to this alternative continental landing and on the way some of us saw a Leopard Seal chasing a penguin. The seal was around throughout our stay and chased two other birds but without catching either of them. In one Gentoo nest there were chicks that were just a few days old, whilst around the corner at the Antarctic Shag colony, the young ones were almost ready to leave.



One option was to walk a little way up the hill for an overview of the area and in the calm conditions this was a popular choice. Another option (although everyone participated) was to go on a short cruise along the cliffs to see not only the shags but also the vein of copper on the cliff. Right at the water's edge there were several of the confiding Cape Petrels whilst at least two Wilson's Storm-petrels spent a long time flitting around before finally landing awkwardly on the steep slope. It was probable that they had nests and chicks, safe from skuas, under the rocks. "All

aboard!" was soon called so that we could get back for the gastronomic highlight of the voyage - our Antarctic barbecue! The chefs had done a wonderful job out on the stern, as had the melon-carvers and penguin-producers. The food was delicious, especially if eaten

outside. Everything was calm and serene and the landscape that surrounded us was spectacular. In particular, the numerous icebergs and glaciers seemed to glow blue in the evening light. Later on, the unseen setting sun caused distant, snowy mountaintops to turn a deep salmon pink colour - what an end to the day!



Day 8: Thursday, 11th February - Cierva Cove (64° 09' S, 060° 57' W) & Mikkelsen Harbour (63° 54' S, 060° 47' W)

'Watching the coast as it slips by the ship is like thinking about an enigma. There it is before you – smiling, frowning, inviting, grand, mean, insipid or savage, and always a mute air of whispering, come and find out.'

Joseph Conrad

Noon report

Latitude: 64° 09.' S

Wind: 4 kts, west

Air Temperature: 5° C

Distance sailed from Ushuaia: 1,250 nm

Longitude: 060° 57' W

Sea Conditions: calm

Average Speed: weighing anchor

Early this morning snow fell on the deck and the wind was blowing at more than 30 knots but by the time the ship reached the anchorage it had dropped to the low 20's. During our time in the zodiacs at Cierva Cove the wind died to just a very light breeze. Most boats

were out for the best part of three hours and took advantage of all that was on offer. In addition to the customary glaciers and snow-capped peaks there were a number of interesting icebergs to look at. One large one had a deep cave in it, another had numerous grottoes and, further away, there was even a blue berg to check out.

Despite the natural beauty of the land and icescapes, it was the Humpback Whales that stole the show. There were a number in the area that all seemed to be feeding and they seemed almost oblivious to our presence. Most boats had whales surfacing, fluking and diving very close to them whilst others saw the whales swim right underneath them! For such large animals they knew exactly where they were in relation to not only us but also the ice floes. Some of the whales were curious and swam towards the boats but mostly they were intent on feeding. One boat spotted a Minke Whale that was pretty curious. It swam right up to the people and surfaced several times right alongside the zodiac and even followed it when the humpies were seen a little distance away.



Antarctic Fur Seals were seen both in the water and on the penguin island. The latter were chinstraps and we were able to get very close to the rock ramps that the birds used to get into and out of the sea. Just around on the other side of the island there was ice in the water and around the ice were at least two Leopard Seals. Others were seen elsewhere too, including three by the iceberg by the ship at the end of the cruise. Many people had excellent views of these seals, either from the zodiacs or from the ship. Once we were safely back aboard (some had to be quick at the gangway when the iceberg started moving towards it!) it was no surprise to see many people in the lounge going through their humpback pictures.

The morning may have been grey and overcast but the afternoon got better and better. Eventually the sun was blazing down and although our breath was still condensing it felt very warm. On the little island in Mikkelsen Harbour there was a welcoming committee of Antarctic Fur Seals, which were bounding about in their excitement. Once they had dispersed, a trail was marked across to the other side of the island, which was littered with yet more breeding penguins - gentoos this time. Right next to our landing spot were reminders of the whaling days, in the form of an old, wooden boat and, much more poignant, piles of bleached whale bones. Once we had seen all there was to see the zodiacs took us on a cruise around the bay, in which there was quite a lot of ice. On two

pieces there were Leopard Seals and both seemed untroubled by our presence. For some of us they were the closest views yet.

Not far away was the most interesting species - fur seals. All males, they were swimming around the boats, resting on rocks or jostling for position on a nearby beach. By using the current through the narrows here it was possible to drift past the seals at very close range. Despite our proximity, they virtually ignored us. Some, though, swam very close to us and displayed their remarkable underwater skills. Their twists, turns and rolls looked just like an underwater ballet. The ones on land were continually making dog-like whimpers and when downwind of them there seemed to be an awful lot of testosterone (or something far worse) in the air.

Day 9: Friday, 12th February - Telefon & Whaler's Bays, Deception Island (62° 59' S, 060° 34' W) & Half Moon Island (62° 39' S, 060° 37' W)

*'What is travelling? Changing your place? By no means!
Travelling is changing your opinions and your prejudices.'*

Anatole France

Noon report

Latitude: 62° 59' S

Wind: 4 kts, northerly

Air Temperature: 4° C

Distance sailed from Ushuaia: 1,351 nm

Longitude: 060° 34' W

Sea Conditions: flat calm

Average Speed: weighing anchor

At some unreal and unearthly hour this morning three violent shocks greeted us: 1) we were woken up, 2) we found ourselves whisked across the sea in cold, open zodiacs and 3) we had to follow a crazed mountain goat up a steep volcano! Although the hotel department had put early morning coffee and muffins in the observation lounge instead of at the summit, the climb was well worth the effort. After scrambling up in our layers of clothes and rubber boots we had a good idea what the penguins go through when they



scale the heights to reach their colonies. The views over Port Foster were breathtaking and, looking down, we could see both the Spanish and Argentinian stations on the shoreline. Off in the distance was the entrance to the flooded caldera, Neptune's Bellows, which some of us were up to see earlier on. Across the water, in Pendulum Cove, steam could just be seen rising from the beach. The ship looked tiny and many

pictures were taken, especially when the sun started to break through the cloud and illuminate small areas of the snowy hills. Breakfast was well-earned but it didn't last long, for Whaler's Bay was just around the corner. By now the sun was blazing down on us but that didn't last long either.

Turning hard left, the ship was soon at anchor and most of us were quickly zipping over the water to explore the area. There was a choice of the old, derelict aircraft hangar, the old, derelict British Antarctic Survey huts or the old, derelict, whaling station. Alternatively, there was an option to walk along the beach and up to Neptune's Window, a gap in the caldera wall. Lots of steam was coming up from the edge of the water so a wallow was excavated with a pair of shovels and the Great Antarctic Plunge began. With encouragement from the assembled masses, a surprising number of people peeled off their outer layers and dashed into the sea. Many were able to completely immerse themselves before reason took over and out they came. The wallow was a bit smelly (from the sulphur, I hasten to add) but it was very convivial. Of course, many pictures were taken too!

GEOLOGY OF DECEPTION ISLAND

Deception Island is the sub-aerial remains of a previously much larger shield volcano that is 80% 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 ejected lava from the magma chamber below the surface. Smaller eruptions have continued at irregular intervals for at least several thousand years, the first historically recorded by Wilkes in 1842, who saw 'the entire south rim of the crater on fire;' 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 five British scientists returned only to be evacuated again the following year when an eruption destroyed both the Chilean and British bases, and the whaling station. No permanent occupants live on the island, but both Argentina and Spain have summer stations there. The volcano is still active and steam can be seen from fumaroles around the caldera rim. The emergent flanks of the volcano exhibit examples of basaltic lava flows, ejected scoria and broken lava from cinder cones, and bedded ash fall-deposits.

On the way to Half Moon Island the sun came out and it stayed like that for the rest of the day. At times the sea was glassy and there were lots of icebergs around, especially large tabular ones. Whales were plentiful and one Humpback leapt clear of the surface twice and fell with a huge splash. Behind Half Moon Island lay the glorious, snow-covered mountains on adjacent Livingston Island. They provided a perfect backdrop for pictures of the Chinstrap Penguins and Antarctic Fur Seals. The young penguins were very large and active but the colonies were swimming with liquid guano and many chicks were plastered with the stuff. The smell was pretty strong too and was more than some of us could

stomach. The seals were mostly benign but one or two people got a big surprise when they were chased by one! This was the last landing of our expedition so everyone savoured the moment and enjoyed the very last zodiac ride too.



On the way from the island we passed another Humpback Whale and another cruise ship sailed in to take our place. After dinner Ursula informed us about Minke Whales and the setting sun shone on adjacent islands and icebergs. Sailing through Nelson Strait, towards the Drake Passage, we met a gentle ocean swell, which rocked a number of us to sleep.

Day 10: Saturday, 13th February - at sea, Drake Lake

'On the open, limitless ocean, where time is meaningless and the horizon is always out of reach, there is nothing to mark one's progress save the occasional and unexpected cry of a bird, splash of a dolphin or spout of a whale.'

Simon Cook

Noon report

Latitude: 59° 56' S

Wind: 6 kts, northwesterly

Air Temperature: 4° C

Distance sailed from Ushuaia: 1,579 nm

Longitude: 061° 45' W

Sea Conditions: very gentle swell

Average Speed: 11 kts

It seems hard to believe that our time in Antarctica is over but it is true, we are on our way back to Ushuaia and trees. On the outside the weather was mostly sunny but with overcast conditions too. Our luck with the weather was still holding out and we were blessed with a flat calm sea. There was just a gentle, rolling swell to contend with but since we were all experienced 'old salts' by now it was no problem for us. Conditions were ideal for spotting both marine mammals and birds but there were few of either to be seen.

The most numerous bird species was a very surprising one, Chinstrap Penguin. Every few minutes, from 06.37 onwards, small groups were seen in front of the ship. Finally, just after lunch, an iceberg was spotted and when we closed in we could see penguins on board. The ship circled the berg and in total there were three Chinstraps in the water and another 29 on the ice itself. This was the furthest north in the Drake Passage that any of the staff have ever seen an iceberg and they came up with a theory to explain the continual sightings of penguins during the day. The supposition was that as the iceberg drifted farther and farther away from Antarctica the penguins, realising that they had goofed by making the wrong lifestyle choice, slipped off quietly in small groups to head south again.



Inside the ship there was plenty going on in the observation lounge - in the form of lectures (Hannah's 'First [Antarctic] Things', Megan's 'Project Penguin and Ursula's 'Minke Whales') and films ('The End of the Line' and the remarkable 'Around Cape Horn'. The latter is available from Mystic Seaport Film & Video Archives, Mystic, CT 06355, USA, 'phone +860-572-0711, www.mysticseaport.org). Another item on the agenda was to remove our belongings from the wet gear room. After days of hectic landings and zodiac cruises it was also time to catch up on some sleep, eat some more, review photographs and video footage, nap in the captain's chair on the bridge (Simon, supposedly 'on watch'), catch up on our journals and wonder if the bargain-basement \$50 charge for signed copies of this log was actually really worth it.....

Day 11: Sunday, 14th February - at sea, northern Drake Lake

*'I am the albatross that awaits you at the end of the earth. I am the forgotten soul of the dead sailors from all the seas of the earth who rounded Cape Horn, they did not die in the fury of the waves, but fly today on my wings towards eternity
in the cry of the Antarctic winds'*

Sara Vial (quotation from the Albatross Monument, Cape Horn)

Noon report

Latitude: 56° 16' S

Wind: 17 kts, south-southeast

Air Temperature: 5° C

Distance sailed from Ushuaia: 1,847 nm

Longitude: 066° 04' W

Sea Conditions: gentle swell

Average Speed: 11.3 kts

For almost the last time we were woken by Megan's dulcet tone over the public address system. Although the weather was mixed, with sunshine and showers, the sea was still calm. During the course of the day the wind picked up a little but, because we had had such a calm crossing, we didn't mind a bit. There were a few birds around us today, including Black-browed, Grey-headed and a huge Wandering Albatross. The mammals were not as easy to spot so there were only brief views of Hourglass Dolphins and a single Fin Whale.

After breakfast our focus was on the inside of the ship - listening to John (War on Whales) and Hannah (The Heroic Age). In the morning came another voyage highlight - account settlement. Shortly before midday Cape Horn was spotted but it was still just over 50 miles away from us. As time went by we got closer and closer to this infamous lump of rock in the Southern Ocean. By the time lunch was over the horn was obscured by rain and it was still obscured when this log closed for production. Did it reappear? After our last happy hour the Captain was our host for a toast to our trip. All the crew and staff appeared to celebrate our voyage. This was followed by a superb photographic review of our highly successful voyage. All that remained was to eat our last dinner on board and sail back along the Beagle Channel to our berth on the dock in Ushuaia - journey's end!

Many of us have waited years for this voyage of discovery whilst some of us have had only a very short time to prepare for it. Whatever the case, it is an adventure that we will never forget and one that we will carry with us wherever we go in the future.

And finally,

'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

**Together we have sailed 2,058
nautical miles or 2,367 statute
miles or 3,810 kilometres**

**We look forward to sailing with
you again!**



WILDLIFE LIST	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th	13th	14th	15th
	Beagle Channel	Drake Passage	Drake Passage	Ant. Peninsula	Antarctic Circle	Ant. Peninsula	Ant. Peninsula	Ant. Peninsula	S. Shetland Islands	Drake Lake	Drake Lake	Beagle Channel
BIRDS												
Gentoo Penguin, <i>Pygoscelis papua</i>				X		X	X	X	X			
Adelie Penguin, <i>Pygoscelis adeliae</i>				X	X	X						
Chinstrap Penguin, <i>Pygoscelis antarctica</i>			X				X	X	X	X		
Magellanic Penguin, <i>Spheniscus magellanicus</i>	X											
Macaroni Penguin, <i>Eudyptes chrysolophus</i>										X		
Wandering Albatross, <i>Diomedea exulans</i>		X	X								X	
Southern Royal Albatross, <i>Diomedea epomophora</i>		X										
Light-mantled Sooty Albatross, <i>Phoebastria palebrata</i>			X									
Grey-headed Albatross, <i>Thalassarche chrysostoma</i>		X	X							X	X	
Black-browed Albatross, <i>Thalassarche melanophris</i>	X	X	X							X	X	
Southern Giant-Petrel, <i>Macronectes giganteus</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	
Northern Giant-Petrel, <i>Macronectes halli</i>			X							X	X	
Southern Fulmar, <i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>					X							
Cape Petrel, <i>Daption capense</i>		X	X				X		X			
Antarctic Petrel, <i>Thalassoica antarctica</i>												
Snow Petrel, <i>Pagodroma nivea</i>					X		X					
Soft-plumaged Petrel, <i>Pterodroma mollis</i>		X	X									
White-chinned Petrel, <i>Procellaria aequinoctialis</i>		X	X							X	X	
Sooty Shearwater, <i>Puffinus griseus</i>		X									X	
Antarctic Prion, <i>Pachyptila desolata</i>			X							X		
Slender-billed Prion, <i>Pachytila belcheri</i>		X	X									
Blue Petrel <i>Halobaena caerulea</i>		X	X							X		
Wilson's Storm-petrel, <i>Oceanites oceanicus</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Black-bellied Storm-petrel, <i>Fregatta tropica</i>		X	X							X	X	
Magellanic Diving-Petrel, <i>Pelecanoides magellani</i>		X									X	
Imperial Shag, <i>Phalacrocorax atriceps</i>	X										X	
Rock Shag, <i>Phalacrocorax magellanicus</i>	X											
Antarctic Shag, <i>Phalacrocorax bransfieldensis</i>				X	X	X	X	X	X			
Upland Goose, <i>Chloephaga picta</i>	X											
Flightless Steamer Duck, <i>Tachyeres pteneres</i>	X											
Pale-faced Sheathbill, <i>Chionis alba</i>						X	X	X	X			
South Polar Skua, <i>Catharacta maccormicki</i>					X	X	X	X				
Chilean Skua, <i>Catharacta chilensis</i>	X											
Brown Skua, <i>Catharacta antarctica</i>				X	X	X	X	X	X			
Dolphin Gull, <i>Larus scoresbii</i>	X											
Kelp Gull, <i>Larus dominicanus</i>	X			X	X	X	X	X	X			
South American Tern, <i>Sterna hirundinacea</i>	X										X	
Antarctic Tern, <i>Sterna vittata</i>				X	X	X	X	X				
MARINE MAMMALS												
Humpback Whale, <i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>			X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
Fin Whale, <i>Balaenoptera physalus</i>		X								X	X	
Sei Whale, <i>Balaenoptera borealis</i>				X								
Dwarf Minke Whale, <i>Balaenoptera species</i>				X								
Antarctic Minke Whale, <i>Balaenoptera bonaerensis</i>			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Killer Whale, <i>Orcinus Orca</i>				X								
Southern Bottlenose Whale, <i>Hyperoodon planifrons</i>			X							X		
Hourglass Dolphin, <i>Lagenorhynchus cruciger</i>		X	X							X	X	
Antarctic Fur Seal, <i>Actocephalus gazella</i>				X	X		X	X	X			
South American Sea Lion, <i>Otaria byronia</i>	X											
Southern Elephant Seal, <i>Mirounga leonina</i>						X			X			
Leopard Seal, <i>Hydrurga leptonyx</i>				X	X	X	X	X				
Crabeater Seal, <i>Lobodon carcinophaga</i>				X	X	X	X					
Weddell Seal, <i>Leptonychotes weddellii</i>					X			X	X			

