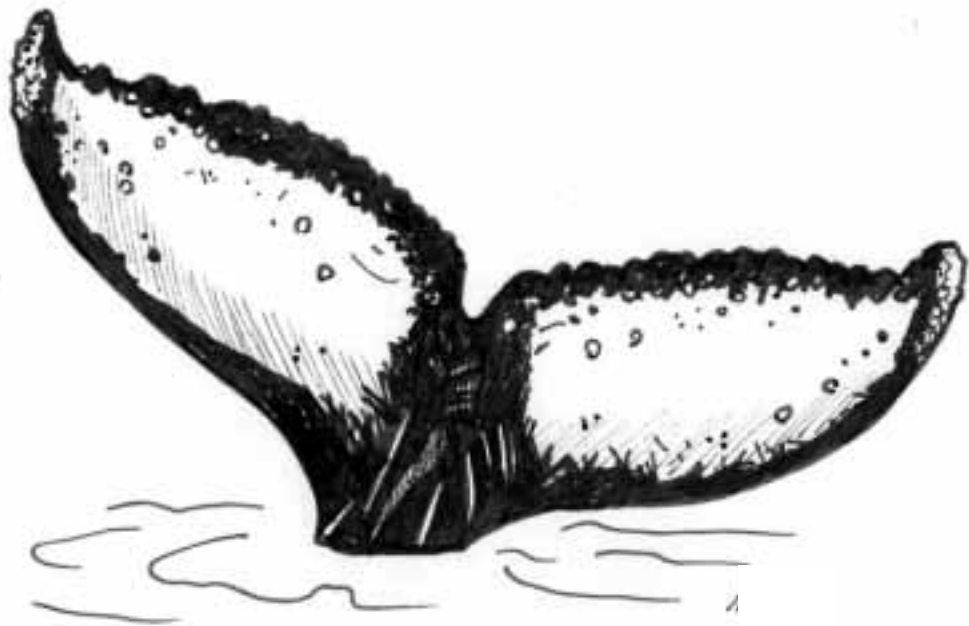


MV POLAR STAR  
EXPEDITION LOG

Antarctic Peninsula  
*In the Wake of the Belgica  
And Adrien de Gerlache*



24 January- 4 February 2008

Log written by John Harrison

Illustrations by Hannah Lawson, Chris and Vicky Furse and John Harrison

Wildlife List compiled by James Lowen

# *In the Wake of the Belgica And Adrien de Gerlache*

**24 January- 4 February 2008**

## **Officers of the Polar Star**

Captain	Jacek Majer
Chief Officer	Jacek Poniecki
Chief Engineer	Zenon Berger
2 <sup>nd</sup> Officer	Adam Tracz
3 <sup>rd</sup> Officer	Wojciech Paterek
1 <sup>st</sup> Engineer	Bogumil Chomicz
2 <sup>nd</sup> Engineer	Maciej Zochniak
3 <sup>rd</sup> Engineer	Ian Russ Balsacao
Hotel Manager	Natasha Hanson
Reception/Shop	Torill Berge
Head Chef	Bryan Hanson
Bar Staff	Bartolemeo Orcullo
	Girlie Bernandez
Doctor	Joe Rizza

## **Expedition Staff**

Expedition Leader	Damon Stanwell-Smith
Assistant Expedition Leader	Danny Edmunds
Expedition Staff	Mick Brown
	Simon Cook
	John Harrison
	Bernard Lefauconnier
	James Lowen
	Megan Tierney

Antarctica is ..

*'a period of the earth in its infancy, long before the advent of man ... Everything about it is new yet old; every sight is simple yet clothed in mystery.'*

Dr Frederick Cook, de Gerlache Expedition, *The First Antarctic Night*

**Thursday 24 January 2008**  
**Ushuaia, Argentina**

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Location:	Ushuaia
Position (18:00)	54°45' S / 68°30'
Air temperature	11°C/52°F
Sea	1m
Wind speed/ direction	Force 2 variable
Pressure	1013mb

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*Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever there is a damp drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially when my hypos gets such an upper hand of me that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off — then I account it is high time to get to sea as soon as I can.*

*Herman Melville, Moby Dick*

### **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 local Yámana canoe Indians) meaning “inner harbour to the westward”. In 1906 Argentina founded a penal institution in Ushuaia largely for political undesirables and the lowest scrapings of its jails; these prisoners were responsible for most of the pre-1940 construction in the town. The prison closed in 1940 and was incorporated into the Naval Base. Ushuaia now has a population of about 50,000. They are descendants of English missionaries who stayed on as farmers, of Yugoslavians, Romanian miners, of sailors from Spain and Italy who jumped ship here, of Chileans, a few Germans, and, in broad-cheekboned faces in the street, genetic memories still running through the veins of the native Indian population.

This is the southernmost city in the world, and it boasts graceful frame houses, self-made cabins, snug against the winds, and modern concrete buildings. But they all have the same roofs; there are no tiles here, you need metal sheeting you can bolt down.

A spectacular chain of mountains, the Cerro Martial, rises behind the town. The surrounding hill-slopes are now being developed with smart hotels and ski facilities. The ruined forest behind the town was caused by a terrible fire in 1918, which 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. The fire lasted three months and was so intense that even tiny trees were destroyed and the ground left open to erosion. It was eventually doused by torrential rain.

Our aircraft descended, between mountains still flanked with pockets of snow, to the landing strip which begins and ends at the shore of the Beagle Channel. The weather was more like Buenos Aires than Ushuaia as we landed in a city famous for having all four seasons an afternoon. We were quite happy to have summer linger all day.

On the harbourside there was a special ceremony to unveil a new statue of Adrien de Gerlache, who had created the model for many future small expeditions to Antarctica: the kind that were prove far more successful than the unwieldy large assaults favoured by the British and others until then. After long journeys for many, the red hull of the *Polar Star* at the end of the pier was a welcome sight. Once everyone was on board, Damon, our Expedition Leader met us in the observation lounge and introduced us to Captain Jacek who welcomed us aboard. Damon briefed us about the general operation of the ship and the operation of the expedition, before handing over to Claude Pauwels who welcomed a number of special guests, especially Baron de Gerlache.



First Officer Jacek gave us an introduction to the rules which would help ensure a safe trip for all. We learned about the large orange life-jackets which we tied round our necks and the orange lifeboats, which we did not: invaluable knowledge in a real emergency. Promptly, just after 18:00 we cast off and slipped out into the Beagle Channel, 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 on it: Charles Darwin. A lifeboat drill preceded dinner, and the evening drew into dusk with Peale's dolphins showing us the way into the open ocean, and south.

## Friday 25 January 2008

### Southbound Drake Passage

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Location:	Drake Passage
Position	57°04' S / 64°35'
Air temperature	10°C/50°F
Sea	1.5m
Wind speed/ direction	Force 4 N
Pressure	1011mb

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Conditions were very kind with calm winds and seas to help us acquire our sea-legs. A bright sky was overtaken by an atmospheric fog. After a well-attended breakfast with little motion of ship or stomach, Simon gave a presentation *Birds of the Drake Passage and Antarctica* on the ecology of seabirds. The ocean is home for most of the year to the relatively small proportion of bird species who specialise in the rich harvest of the seas. But those who adapt well can succeed in huge numbers. The light winds and fog which favoured our well-being do not tempt birds as much as strong ones, but there were good sightings including wandering albatrosses.

Damon gave a briefing on IAATO, and the guidance we must follow to minimise our impact on the animals, and the environment in general. After lunch, Danny, Mick, and James gave us tips on the best use of digital cameras in a friendly tutorial: *Digital Photography Questions*. Many had bought new equipment to get the best record of the trip, and they de-mystified the use of these smart but sometimes willful gadgets. At 18:00 we had our first Happy Hour at the bar, including, half an hour in, the first recap and briefing. Damon outlined our plans for the following day, and James coached us about the various whales we might see and the means of distinguishing them. John introduced the competition to spot the first iceberg.

After dinner, Irving Johnson's short film *Around Cape Horn* was shown to remind us that we had it pretty comfortable, compared with his maiden voyage on the *Peking*, one of the greatest of all the old Cape Horners.

## Saturday 26 January 2008

### At Sea Drake Passage, Barrientos Island

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Noon position	61° 39' S 059° 57' W
Air temperature	6°C/43°F
Sea	1+ metre swells
Wind Speed/direction	Force 2 N
Pressure	1004 mb

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We woke to more gentle winds and fair weather. We had passed the Antarctic Convergence during the early hours of the morning. Between 02:00 and 06:00 we entered the colder waters of the Southern Ocean and the air temperature fell from 6°C to 3°C; we were now geographically and ecologically in Antarctica. After breakfast Daniel

set up his stall in the library selling special commemorative stamps issued for the voyage, and at 09:45 Jozef gave a lecture *The Voyage Itinerary in a Historical Context*, looking at the places we would visit and how they featured in Adrien de Gerlache's original expedition. Megan then gave a lecture on the penguins we were likely to see and the ways in which they find different niches to exploit, and the ways in which they are adapted to the cold.

### **THE ANTARCTIC CONVERGENCE**

The Antarctic Convergence is a narrow zone undulating between 50 and 60 degrees south running right round the continent, and well defined by water temperature readings. It 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 clash, converge, and sink. The mixing waters provide a sympathetic environment for abundant plankton that nourish huge numbers of sea birds and mammals. However few organisms cross this radical boundary, so it defines Antarctic physically and ecologically.

After lunch, we had a fun time cleaning clothes and equipment to reduce the chances of our carrying seeds and other alien species into Antarctica. Soon after those planning to camp overnight at Almirante Brown reviewed and cleaned their gear and Damon briefed them about the logistics of the exercise. Meanwhile Simon, James and Mick held a birding session on the afterdeck in which the star attraction did not have feathers; it was a Dwarf Minke whale, an uncommon species distinguished by pale, almost white flippers when it was breaching. The entertainment continued with a showing of the film *Antarctic en Heritage* made by Henri de Gerlache, and introduced by his father, Bernard. After the film we found ourselves anchored in a bay surrounded by jagged hills, wild shores and saw-tooth rocks and reefs. This was the Aitcho Group of Islands named for HO – the Hydrographic Office. There was a recap and briefing where Damon outlined our plans for the evening landing and for the following day. James described the whales we had seen that day, and John talked about whether Francis Drake ever saw the infamous passage named after him.

Soon after dinner we descended the gangway with a high swell waiting to test our Zodiac boarding skills. Our drivers took us to a dark beach of coarse sand where hundreds of chinstrap and gentoo penguins waited with their chicks. There were views across the ridge of the island to another bay where a huge iceberg intermittently caught patches of low sunlight. We saw the birds for whom the penguin colony is a convenient larder: the snowy sheathbills, kelp gulls, and skuas. Bigger predators nest up on the hills: the southern giant petrels which seemed moderate sized birds in the huge spaces of the Drake Passage were revealed as big bruisers. There were a few of the beautiful white morph (a variant form of the norm) which has snow white feathers with small black patches. On the island opposite, some saw a Weddell seal hauled out on the beach as they returned to the ship. By 11:30 we were back on board eager to turn in to bed or to celebrate our first landing in the Polar Bar.

**Sunday 27 January 2008**  
**Deception Island and Liège Island**

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Noon position	61° 39' S 059° 57' W
Air temperature	6°C/43°F
Sea	1+ metre swells
Wind Speed/direction	Force 2 N
Pressure	1004 mb

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*"Who would believe in penguins unless he had seen them?"*  
*Conor O'Brien*



By 06:30 when Damon made his wake-up call, we were already entering Neptune's Bellows, the entrance to Deception Island's inner harbour of Port Foster. Captain Jacek took us through the narrow gap between the submerged Raven Rock, hidden from sight, and the towering Cathedral Crags, home of thousands of nesting pintados, and impossible to miss. Impossible that is unless there is heavy fog. But we were to enjoy the sight in much improved visibility when we left. We bore right into Whalers Bay, the home of sealers then whalers. The whole shore was once a stinking, riotous industrial site where whales were hauled ashore to be processed on the beach or, later, on a slip. The main Hektor Station, built in 1911 closed in 1931 when over-production caused prices to collapse.

A walk was organised up to Neptune's Window, led by Bernard, where the island's discoverer, Nathaniel Palmer, climbed

looking for birds' eggs and found a view which may have shown him the continental land of the peninsula, though neither he nor his Government, the USA, made such a claim at the time. Another hike led by Mick went out towards the old BAS hangar then up to Ronald's Hill, which gave magnificent views over the whole of the interior of the volcano. John patrolled the historic buildings describing the industry, spying and science which went on there.

Before returning to ship a terrible decision had to be made: to swim or not to swim. Staff used their experience to prospect with their shovels for warm water, but the tide defeated their efforts and it was a brave few (or a bunch of fools, depending on your point of view) who took the Polar plunge, driven by the desire to be photographed in water that was barely liquid.

## GEOLOGY OF DECEPTION ISLAND

Deception Island is only the top 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”. 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 hurriedly evacuated. No permanent occupants live on the island, but both Argentina and Spain have summer stations there.



Last Zodiac was at 11:15 then we wheeled around and went back through the tricky gap of the Bellows. To starboard, the stern of the *Southern Huntress*, a whaler wrecked here on midsummer's day 1957, reminded us of the price of misjudgment. After lunch Bernard gave a lecture *What is a Glacier?* introducing the science behind glaciers. He was interrupted by the kind of visitors you don't argue with: orcas, or killer whales, a pod bearing the slightly sulphur-coloured diatoms that marked them as one of the native Antarctic pods, and not summer visitors.

In place of the advertised movie, the Frank Hurley film *South* was shown, a reconstruction of film and stills taken during Sir Ernest Shackleton's 1914-17 *Endurance* expedition. Its Australian maker was, with Herbert Ponting, the best of the early Polar photographers, and it was eerie to see scenes familiar from photographs break into motion.

### SHACKLETON'S ENDURANCE EXPEDITION

Ernest Shackleton set sail on 27 August 1914, at the outbreak of the First World War; his goal: the first crossing of the Antarctic continent on foot. Their ship *Endurance* was beset by pack-ice in the Weddell Sea. As ice conditions worsened, the ship was crushed leaving the group stranded on ice floes. Shackleton's inspiring leadership saw the group survive the 20 month ordeal under appalling conditions. With the ice floes cracking up around them, the decision was made to leave "Patience Camp," their temporary home on the floe for 170 days, and launch the three ship's boats northward. After realizing that there was little chance of making Deception Island, where there were whalers, or Hope Bay, where there was a stocked hut, Shackleton and his men headed for Elephant and Clarence Islands. They spent days at sea in open boats suffering badly from hunger, thirst and wet and freezing conditions. A beach on Elephant Island was home for many months. On April 20, Shackleton announced that he would attempt to sail the twenty-two and a half foot long *James Caird* to South Georgia, 800 miles away. His desperate voyage to South Georgia, trek across the mountainous island to the whaling station of Stromness is one of the greatest of all survival stories.

Recap and briefing featured Mick on the soundscapes of Antarctica, Simon on killer whales. While dinner was being served, the staff were preparing for a classic piece of expedition cruising. Liège Island is never visited by tourist, the landing place used by Dixie from the yacht was too small for our purposes and so a scout Zodiac went down towards Macleod Point on the SE corner of the island. The only recognised Admiralty anchorage provided just 7.3 metres of water, and the Polar Star is currently ballasted to draw about 6.8 metres; it would be a tight fit. The scout boat found a long Zodiac route inside the reef and onto a narrow strip of shore where we were able to land everyone. This is one of very few landings ever made on the island. The rain which had dogged the beginning of the evening eased off and we experienced a lively Zodiac ride into the wind and waves as we returned to ship to celebrate with Jupiler or Leffe beer.



**Monday 28 January 2008**

**Brabant Island, Wilhelmina Bay and Louise Island**

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Noon position	64° 26' S 062° 15' W
Air temperature	5°C/41°F
Sea	1 metre
Wind Speed/direction	Force 5 SW
Pressure	999 mb

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The morning was warm for Antarctica as the scout boat went out to look for a possible landing place at Cape d'Ursel on Brabant Island. The location was not suitable but staff soon found a secure landing in Bull's Bay. Even as the first passengers were landing, we saw a powerful reminder of the natural forces which shape Antarctica. The face of the ice cliff across the bay collapsed and just over a minute later barely perceptible swells in the open water turned into waves that swept up the beach. Captain Fitzroy of the *Beagle* nearly lost two ship's boats in this way, the officers were so entranced by the calving that they forgot their boats were vulnerable on the beach. It was the young scientist Charles Darwin who realised the threat and averted them being stranded. A more friendly visitor was the Weddell seal which cruised around curiously, watching the aliens land.

As soon as we set sail for Wilhelmina Bay, flying the original flag of the *Belgica*, we saw humpbacks breaching dramatically, flinging most of their bodies out of the water and extending a flipper before crashing back into the ocean. Captain Jacek altered course and the whales put on the most extended show of breaching any of the staff had ever seen, continuing for over half an hour. Over lunch the weather improved and patches of blue sky expanded until it was a glorious afternoon. We rendezvoused with the yacht *S/V Euronav Belgica* and Julie and Robin were able to talk to and then meet up with Dad: Dixie Dansercoer, who came on board and was greeted warmly in the Observation Lounge. We then took the Zodiacs in to Louise Island named for Gerlache's sister. Staff had found a rocky ledge sufficient for a safe landing without disturbing the local resident Weddell seal, hauled out and taking a sleep. Gentoos and chinstraps were also making use of the land for preening and resting. The falling tide made us move landing places as a reef was exposed, threatening the Zodiacs' propellers. Zodiac cruises were made on the way back to the ship, one was enlivened by the front of a large berg calving. A Weddell seal was hauled out on an ice floe, and was very relaxed about being photographed, and a leopard seal was also reported.

At Happy Hour Dixie and his crew were toasted with champagne, and he said a few words about the experiences they had enjoyed. A full presentation would follow. Bernard gave a recap on erratic blocks carried by glaciers and icebergs, James described breaching and the mystery of its purpose. John described the process of naming Antarctica and the ways in which you could get your name on the map, some costlier than others. It was soon time to address the great barbecue prepared by Chef Bryan and his team on the Observation Lounge aft deck. Afterwards there was a photo-show of all the things the *Euronav Belgica's* crew had been doing: it wasn't all hard work!

**Tuesday 29 January 2008**

**Gand Island, Danco Island and Almirante Brown Base**

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Noon position	64° 20' S 062° 58' W
Air temperature	5°C/41°F
Sea	1.5 metre
Wind Speed/direction	Force 3 E
Pressure	1003 mb

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We woke to sunshine illuminating a light mist, and a ring of dramatic peaks as the backdrop to a large pyramidal berg sculptured with the lips marking previous sea-level lines. We hoped to make the first ever recorded landing on Gand (another name for Ghent) Island, named for the people of that Belgian city which had subscribed to Gerlache's expedition. The scout boat found a small cove with a shingle beach where a modest swell made landing possible. The Baron was in the first passenger boat ashore. Two fur seals were on the beach, and as well as penguins, there were blue-eyed shags on the rocks outlying the beach. We could climb up a short snow slope to walk around a small promontory, and slide back down to the shore. The weather was changeable, and a fog came along the channel until we could no longer see the dramatic berg and the ship was enveloped in a gauzy light.



When it was time to go, the *Euronav Belgica* took her leave beginning the long sail home; Dixie remained on board. We proceeded to the Errera Channel named after Paul Errera, another Gerlache sponsor, to Danco Island named after the magnetist, or geophysicist who perished on the expedition, probably because he could not or would not stomach the penguin and seal meat which their doctor, Frederick Cook, prescribed to keep them healthy during the overwintering. His island is dome-shaped and circular, and most of the snow has gone from the side that we approached. Mick led a path up through the gentoo penguins to a summit commanding extensive views of the channel. The weather decided to turn characterful again. Subsequent cruises in the Zodiacs experienced snow showers coming down from Cuverville Island, named for a vice-admiral who supported the Gerlache expedition. There were two Weddell seals, one

on a small floe, where it remained unperturbed for the afternoon, and another on a low island in the channel. In the bay behind were some fine bergs to slide between, and glimpses of passing seals and a quick sighting of a whale; it didn't even blow, but left a memory of a back, a fin and a dimpled pool lying in the water.

At recap Damon described the plans for the evening Zodiac cruise and camping. The weather made the camping look ever more heroic. Claude augmented and translated, and

Sebastian launched a photographic competition. Then it was time for an early dinner. We sailed past the Chilean Base of Gonzalez Videla, where a supply vessel was unloading. The new cruise ship *Fram*, (Norwegian for 'forward') named appeared out of the mist and anchored two miles astern of us. We dropped anchor by the orange huts of Almirante Brown Base, named after the founder of the Argentine Navy, and observed with surprise that the base, unoccupied two days before, now had a population of seven, from the Argentine Coastguard. Damon went ashore with Doc Joe, a fluent Spanish speaker, and the staff, although they had only arrived the day before, agreed with great courtesy and generosity not only to us landing, but continuing with the overnight camping.

Megan and John led the group of 21 through the old base and up the slope to begin assembling slender tubes on string and impossibly thin fabric into shelters against an Antarctic night. For those who prefer warm beds, Zodiacs first landed ashore on the Antarctic continent and then cruised round the corner to Skontorp Cove, where there was a feisty encounter with a leopard seal and then a quite extraordinary meeting between Mick's boat and a Minke whale. It came close and was touched and petted, and then nosed the boat gently around. We are still putting stones in Mick's pockets to keep him close enough to the ground to walk.



**Wednesday 30 January 2008**

**Neumayer Channel, Port Lockroy, Anvers Island and Torgersen Island**

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Noon position	64° 43' S 063° 13' W
Air temperature	3°C/37°F
Sea	1 metre
Wind Speed/direction	Force 3 W
Pressure	999 mb

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It was an early morning for campers, with a 04:45 call to strike camp. The sky was still dusky, and the yellow lights of the *Polar Star* below were reflected in the glassy waters of Paradise Bay. We had spent a night on the last continent: a rare experience. The two Zodiacs, anchored in a cove to keep them out of the path of passing ice, had been stranded by the tide, so with the kind help of passengers, the morning's exercise began with that little-recognised sport called Zodiac bouncing, to move them the short distance to the water.

The ship was soon under way at 06:37 into the beautiful Neumayer Channel named for Georg Neumayer, a great facilitator of Gerlache's and a number of other expeditions. Our destination was Goudier Island, the home of Port Lockroy. We received an onboard briefing from the Port Lockroy Base Commander, Rick Atkinson. Lockroy, on Goudier Island, is a former Operation Tabarin Base (A) which has been restored by the Antarctic Heritage Trust and is run by Rick, a former dog-sledder, and his assistants Rachel and Helen. The first Zodiacs landed at the base and we soon witnessed one of the most awesome Antarctic sights: the feeding frenzy for postcards and souvenirs. The second group did a Zodiac tour around the island, and to nearby Jougla Point, home to gentoos and blue-eyed shags. Seals were spotted in the water, probably Weddells.

Over lunch we cruised to Anvers Island, another Gerlache naming - for the Belgian province. We anchored off the US Palmer Station, which hosts very few visits each season, so we were fortunate to have a slot in their schedule. Base Commander ?? came on board and gave us a heavyweight briefing about the history and operation of the base. They conduct a lot of marine research including monitoring the effect of visitors on bird breeding at off-lying Torgersen Island. When boarding began, there was complex logistical juggling between ship, base and island, to respect Palmer's limit of 40 persons ashore. Staff could be heard chanting magic spells like 'Thirty from Torgersen to ship, empty to base.' The base, overshadowed when built by the now distant glacier front, had fascinating tanks of surprisingly rich and colourful marine fauna. It is luxurious compared with most, with a spacious lounge, fire, and of course, a kitchen baking chocolate brownies. Did anyone mention a shop?



### PORT LOCKROY

The Port Lockroy station is a British Antarctic Survey hut originally built in 1943 as part of the secret British Operation Tabarin to monitor possible German warship activity in Antarctica during WWII. It was then used as a meteorological station until its small size made it hard to install state-of-the-art equipment. After its closure in 1962, for many years the hut fell into neglect, then in the 1990s it was restored to the way it looked in the 1950s.

This is the most-visited place on the Antarctic Peninsula and with so much human traffic, the penguins offer an important study population for scientists interested in the effects of tourism on wildlife. Like everywhere else that studies the impact of tourism on penguins, the Lockroy results show that there is either no impact on breeding, or breeding is better. The reasons are not certain but it is likely that humans deter predators like skuas and gulls, and so reduce penguin mortality. This is not necessarily a good thing, since skuas have as much right to prosper as penguins. Such issues are part of determining good conservation practice everywhere, and are not unique to Antarctica.

Torgersen sported a large Adelie colony with blue-eyed shags, skuas, Wilson's storm petrels fluttering above and beautiful orange lichen on the quartzite rocks. During the afternoon's nautical equivalent of musical chairs, another boat joined in: the *Spirit of Sydney*, an Aussie yacht which *Polar Star* had met up with at Pléneau just before Christmas. Elephant seals were spotted on the island opposite our landing, three very russet-coated adults and a grey pup, a year or two old. The landing was completed a little late but, in time, everyone got to see everything. Bryan's flexible galley team put back dinner a little to allow us to clean up. Briefing took place afterwards: a busy day lay ahead. Finally, we enjoyed Leo's wonderful video footage of Mick meets Minke.

**Thursday 31 January 2008**

**Wauwerman's Islands, Flanders Bay, Lemaire Channel, Pléneau Bay**

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Noon position	65° 04' S 063° 57' W
Air temperature	6°C/43°F
Sea	Calm
Wind Speed/direction	Calm
Pressure	1003 mb

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Yes I know it shouldn't be this warm. The first Zodiac hit the water at 06:20 and we ran in the mile or so to a rocky outcrop that was our leverage for a landing on Wednesday Island (it's not easy thinking up names day after day on a long expedition). A high ice wall rose above us, so it was another chance to apply our bow-on landing technique, photograph each other in the early morning light and watch a liner, probably the *Prinzendam* glide past in the distance. It did give us an appetite for breakfast, to keep us warm during a ship's cruise around Flander's Bay and into the Lemaire Channel, as the sun began to pierce the clouds and lighten the scene. The 7 miles long channel (11

kilometres) separates narrow Booth Island from the mainland. At the north end, stood the twin peaks named after Una, the BAS Falkland Islands secretary who was many Antarctic men's last memory of womankind. It was a fine day to show off its reputation as one of the scenic highlights of the Peninsula. Once through, we turned the corner and anchored. Plans had been revised to take account of a new weather report forecasting very high winds in the northern section of the Drake Passage on 3 February, when we were scheduled to spend the whole day there. Damon briefed us on the revisions: we would forego our landing at Peterman, which offered only minor attractions that we had not already seen, do a Zodiac cruise off Pléneau Island, and turn the heat on and head south on both engines to do a midnight landing at Détaille Island, south of the magic Antarctic Circle.



Pléneau has a well-earned reputation for leopard seals and it came up trumps. We cruised in two phases of an hour each, and there were wonderful sightings of these magnificent predators chilling out on small ice floes. They are easily distinguished close-up by the clearly-defined neck, round head, and a chilling smile that seems to say 'I've just eaten your favourite cat.' There was also an iceberg 'garden' as the bay has many shallows and reefs which snag the drifting bergs.

During lunch we passed Peterman Island and the painfully named Port Circumcision, christened for the presumed date of Christ's Circumcision: 1 January. It was so called by Charcot, the leader of a privately financed French expedition which overwintered here in 1903-05 in the wittily named *Pourquoi Pas?* – the Why Not? A modern Argentine hut stood on the shore, and behind it were the yellow tents of the group of three researchers from Oceanites who are monitoring gentoo and Adelie penguins there, at the current southern limit of the gentoo. They can compare this with baseline information going back to Charcot: a unique resource. The Peninsula coast stretched south and the magnificent views were enlivened by minke and humpback whales. At four, John gave his lecture *A History of Whaling* with special reference to the Southern Ocean. It is a sad tale of exploiting a shared resource without any governance of a free market.

At eleven we crossed the Antarctic Circle at 66°33' South, in the beautiful waters of Crystal Sound. But this was not our final destination, and after midnight we slowed and anchored near the small island of Détaille, named for a director of the Magellan Whaling Company in Punta Arenas who helped Charcot in his 1908-10 expedition by holding stores for him at Deception Island. There was a little light in the cloudy sky as we landed on a rocky shore and climbed past a surprised fur seal and mad-eyed Adelies to a long wooden hut which was a British base abandoned in 1962. Things lay much as they had done 46 years before, magazines on the table, cutlery arranged in trays, and washing hanging over the cold stove. We looked round in the atmospheric light of torches, and climbed the rocky knoll outside to look down the channel where the south seemed to go on forever. But at three, our time had come to turn round and look north. This was our

furthest south, at 66°51' South and 66°47' West. The last Zodiacs saw a reddish moon take shape behind the clouds, as our wake dwindled into the isles and reefs, and the lights of the *Polar Star* beckoned us back to warmth and comfort.

### Friday 1 February 2008 Northbound Drake Passage

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Noon position	65° 07' S 067° 43' W
Air temperature	4°C/39°F
Sea	1 metre
Wind Speed/direction	Force 2 NNE
Pressure	1000 mb

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There was no sign of the forecast bad weather as we rose for breakfast. It was a morning of recovering from short nights and long days, of engine tours and lectures, beginning with Damon's *Life on a British Antarctic Survey Base* describing the three years he has spent in the South Orkney Islands as a diver and marine biologist. After lunch, Jozef Verlinden and Bernard de Gerlache de Gomery, introduced the film *Plein sud* which showed the setting up of the Belgian King Baudouin Base in Queen Maud Land. The leader of the second Belgian Antarctic Expedition, which carried out this work, was Gaston de Gerlache de Gomery, son of Adrien and father of Bernard. Happy Hour returned after several absences during evenings with landings. At recap, Mick and Megan ran a fun competition matching pictures of Antarctic creatures to tapes of their noises. In the

case of the elephant seal it was quite possible to identify the animal correctly, but still not know at which end of it the microphone had been held. John read a poem dedicated to Zodiac virgins.

After dinner Dixie gave a talk (*Ant*)*Arctic Matters* recounting his crossings of both the Arctic and Antarctic. It made you shiver just to watch.

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**Saturday 2 February 2008**  
**Northbound Drake Passage**

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Noon position	60° 39' S 068° 21' W
Air temperature	4°C/39°F
Sea	1 metre
Wind Speed/direction	Force 4 W
Pressure	1000 mb

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The fine sea conditions continued as we began our lecture programme with Megan: *Seals and Seal Research*. Megan described the seals of Antarctica and the array of methods which are used to study them and increase our understanding of their lives and behaviour. Mick then spoke on *Navigation at Sea*, tracking the methods that have evolved to help people find their way across the trackless seas. Modern GPS systems are extremely precise but they can fail. How many navigators could use the old methods?

The good conditions still held after lunch and we watched *Happy Feet*, a fun, animated film about penguins, full of good music. By passenger request, John held a workshop on travel writing in the library. Not for nothing are travellers' tales found out to be lies! This was followed by two short films relevant to the bases we had seen, one on the clean-up of British bases in Antarctica and the other on dog sledding, filmed at Détaille Island. No tractor or skidoo is quite the same as a big huggable husky dog.

Happy Hour brought the penultimate recap and briefing. James showed us the true size of the seabirds we had been seeing. John read out his poem about icebergs, Simon provided a recipe for penguins, and Mick read a poem of consolation for those who find English difficult and irrational: it is. Bernard sang a song about going to sea. Follow that. After dinner, Sebastian gave the results of the photo competition, and there was music and even dancing in the Observation Lounge.

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**Sunday 3 February 2008**  
**Northbound Drake Passage, Beagle Channel**

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Noon position	55° 16' S 066° 19' W
Air temperature	8°C/46°F
Sea	calm
Wind Speed/direction	Force 3 NNE
Pressure	1003 mb

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We were still ahead of the storm and the sea was tranquil as we went to the first of the day's presentations, where James, in *Albatross Conservation* talked about the problems

caused to albatrosses by poor fishing techniques. In *Cape Horn Ships*, John told us of the iron men in wooden ships who sailed Cape Horn in clipper ships to bring copper and guano back from Chile to Europe. When he had finished we were already in clear sight of the entrance to the Beagle Channel. After lunch it was time to settle accounts and wonder how many people had been drinking on your bar tab. At three, Yan Verschuere gave a talk in Flemish on *The Bears of Kamchatka* which will be a forthcoming expedition for Asteria in 2008. The Captain's Farewell Cocktail Party was followed by a voyage slideshow painstakingly and imaginatively put together by Mick and Danny with picture contributions from all staff. Chef Bryan and his team cooked another fine barbecue meal for the Farewell Dinner and we toasted our own farewells to a very special place.

**Monday 4 February 2008**  
**Ushuaia, Argentina.**

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Location	Ushuaia
Position (18:00)	54°45' S / 68°30' W
Weather	4 seasons in a day
Temperature	Totally chilled
Pressure	What pressure?

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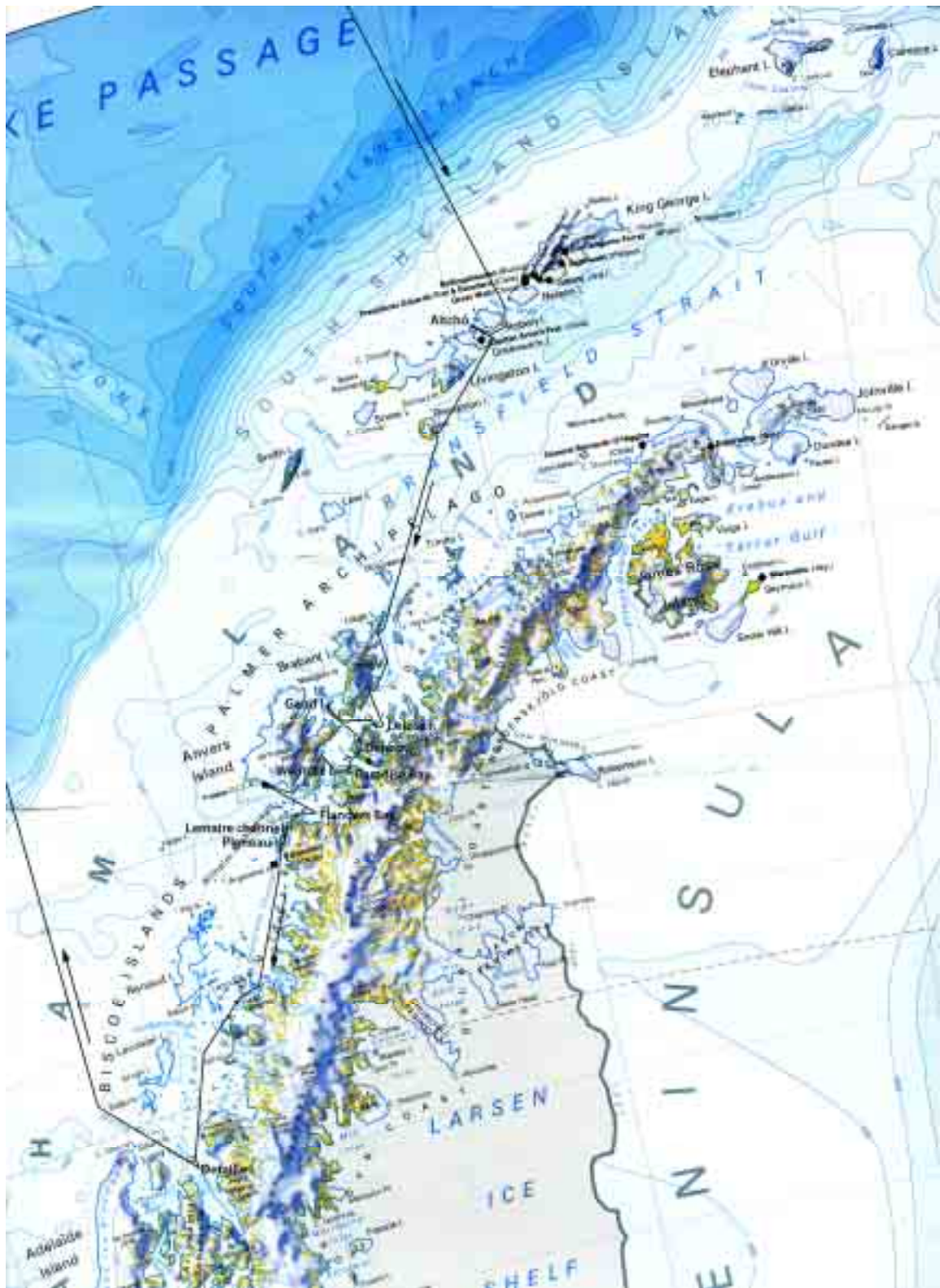
After Antarctica, Ushuaia now looked like a metropolis as we surveyed it from the ship. Once Customs and Immigration had cleared us, we dispersed to continue our journeys or spend a few days locally.

CLOSING THOUGHTS, Frank Todd on the grandeur and preservation of Antarctica:  
*"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. That such a wondrous, unspoiled place still exists on this beleaguered planet, is one of the real miracles of the 20<sup>th</sup> 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."*



We travelled 1876 nautical miles together.  
Bon Voyage. May your God and your luggage go with you.





Route of the MV Polar Star 24 January – 4 February 2008