

Shipping News

Aurora Expeditions Newsletter - April 2004

Volume 8, No. 1

Cruising to the Heart of Nature

Would you believe it, I actually stood on the top of Mt Wilhelm in Papua New Guinea (4509 metres) in my 60th year!? It wasn't easy for me. It took me twice as long as it took Greg to climb to the summit, and by the time I got there, cloud had replaced the view. Jeffrey, our PNG guide, and I sat on top and ate our 'Vita-Weat' biscuits and jelly snakes after taking the obligatory summit shots. The highlands of Papua New Guinea evoked a myriad of emotions – stunning scenery, mysterious and remote fog-shrouded valleys, the presence of witchcraft and tribal unrest – all adding to my treasure trove of memories.

Our second season of cruising along the mighty Amazon is gearing up again, much to the delight of Polar Pioneer's crew, who revelled last year in the challenge of dodging submerged logs rather than recalcitrant icebergs, and they really got into the Boi Bumba dancing at Parintins. Greg is planning to join Kapitan Gena and the crew on one of this year's voyages. It will certainly be a change of pace for him, taking in the tropical atmosphere and vivid green terrain.

Mawson's Antarctica in December 2003 was probably one of the most outrageous voyages that we have set out to do.

Outrageous because of what we wanted to achieve, despite the uncertainties of ice and weather. A great deal of energy and heart went into this voyage, and we were thrilled to be joined by so many past passengers, whom we consider good friends. As well, we made new friends with the brave 'first-timers', some of whom had never been to sea before. Landing at Boat Harbour to visit Mawson's Hut twice in the one day was truly an unforgettable and moving experience. We won't mention our long, circuitous route around that accursed band of pack ice, but Father Christmas (Don Roberts) did manage to find us. We had, simply, a fantastic time. Thought for the day: sometimes we learn more about ourselves by not achieving what we set out to do in the first place?

We are looking forward to heading off along that well-travelled road across China to Samarkand, Tashkent and Bukhara, in September 2004, to play the Great Game yet again.



JACK TAYLOR

Margaret Werner

Aurora Expeditions

Amazon 2005

We're excitedly gearing up for our second Amazon season, with two trips in April and May. We're delighted that Rhan, Ed and Hugo will again join Howard as staff on Polar Pioneer, to intro-



JOHN BAZZANO

duce our passengers to the wonders of the Amazonian environment and its wildlife, history and people. Rhan's passion for the Amazon Basin's hydrology and botany, Ed's detailed knowledge of Amazonian history and thrilling accounts of the lives of the rubber barons, and Hugo's skill at spotting and identifying the wildlife he grew up with on the river in Peru are the secret weapons for making a fascinating journey. We still have a few berths available in 2004. Alternatively you may like to put your name down early for the cabin of your choice in April or May 2005, when we plan to repeat our Amazonian adventures.

ADDITIONAL VOYAGES 2004-05



SUE WERNER

Antarctica and South Georgia are too good to be missed, so we're excited to add two extra voyages to our 2004/5 program. On an 11-day Antarctic Peninsula voyage on Polar Pioneer (9-19

November 2004) you'll observe the frenzy of the wildlife breeding season, as Antarctica is gradually released from the clutches of winter sea-ice. Kayaking and scuba diving options are offered, subject to minimum numbers. And, after our successful Mawson's Huts voyage in 2003/4 on board Akademik Shokalskiy (sister ship of Polar Pioneer), we've chartered the ship for a 19-day voyage to South Georgia, the Falklands and Antarctic Peninsula (2-20 December 2004). We'll offer experienced alpinists the option to retrace Shackleton's crossing of the mountains of South Georgia, subject to a minimum of five participants. Our 2004/5 berths are filling extraordinarily fast, so hurry to book your spot!

Arctic and Greenland Delights

In August and September 2004, we've introduced two new 14-day voyages, combining East Greenland and Spitsbergen. As well as exploring the harsh and dramatic Greenland coast, each voyage includes two to three days in western and northern Spitsbergen, enjoying tundra hikes and keeping an eye open for polar bears, walrus and Svalbard reindeer.



Kayaking amongst Greenlandic icebergs

ALBAKKER

This is an extract from a letter by Ian Sanderson in 26 December's Sydney Morning Herald.

My wife and I enjoy expedition cruising and have undertaken more than two dozen such cruises using a number of different companies. This past northern hemisphere summer we did three consecutive cruises with Aurora Expeditions. Based on our experience, none does it better. Their ship, the Polar Pioneer, is as well equipped as an expedition ship can be. The Aurora staff and ship's crew were all superb. Never have I seen people work so hard to ensure a good time was had by all. On-deck barbeques in which passengers and crew intermingled, dancing together, etc, broke down language barriers (the crew were Russian) and we became as family in the first days of each voyage. This is what made these cruises so unique. There was no 'them and us'. The onboard lecturer, Dr Gary Miller, of Perth, delivered superb talks. In our travels we have been fortunate to have great lecturers on voyages, but none better than Gary.

Our three cruises took in Spitsbergen and the east coast of Greenland, some of the most spectacular scenery on Earth, every bit the equal of Antarctica.

Perils of Antarctic Skua Research

Many readers know naturalist Gary Miller and bar tender and assistant expedition leader Robyn Mundy from our Antarctic and Arctic voyages. This season, they escaped Aurora's clutches to study skuas at Australia's Davis Station.

Gary is researching avian diseases in skuas and their reproductive success. Gary, with Robyn as field assistant, lived for several weeks in an Antarctic 'Apple' field hut, monitoring more than 180 nests and sampling 130 adults and over 150 chicks. On hut-bound days, with winds of 40 knots hampering research, they penned some emails. Initially Robyn's affection for the skuas grew, but then waned when Adélie penguin eggs and chicks appeared and the skuas were in "culinary heaven as the chicks grew plump and tasty". She reports that "The task of skua field assistant is rarely glamorous. As well as being screamed at and thwacked in the back of the head by maniacal skua parents, I am being shat upon on an all-too-frequent basis! But I still hold a soft spot for the feisty little blighters. These days I go armed with a flurry of yellow ribbons flying from my trusty bamboo pole. As long as I hold it above my head it deflects some of their attention."



Robyn Mundy, skua research assistant

GARY MILLER

Albatross Gaming and Conservation

Following ratification by five nations including Australia, the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels came into force on 1 February 2004. Twenty of the world's 24 species of albatrosses are considered endangered, with some threatened with immediate extinction. Loss of habitat and interaction with long-line fishing operations are major threats. In January, Ladbroke's Big Bird Race was announced, allowing bets on the progress of eighteen Tasmanian shy albatrosses during their five month 6,000 mile pilgrimage from Tasmania to South Africa. Electronic tags will provide both scientific and wagering data. Profits will fund seabird conservation projects.



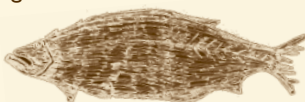
Royal albatross at Campbell Island prepares for takeoff

DAVID COLFELT

Kimberley Fish Trap Discovery

By Len Zell

An exciting aspect of working as naturalist on Aurora's expeditions is exploring interesting new places. Last season in the Kimberley we made a fascinating discovery on Rankin Island. We had seen an aerial photo showing small pools of water and decided to investigate. We discovered that the pools had almost dried up. We found some incredible stone beach ridges and cladding on nearby hillsides. We also found a stone construction about 100 metres long and 75 centimetres high that may be a sophisticated fish trap, with a cave nearby showing evidence of habitation. Surprisingly, it's about



2 metres above present sea level. We believe the Aboriginal people arrived in Australia about 40,000 years ago, when sea level was very different from now.

So is it a fish trap? And when was it built? I'm working with Aurora, University of New England, Western Australian Museum and the traditional owners to research these questions, and to ensure appropriate management and protection of the site.

Last August Len published *A Guide to the Kimberley Coast* (\$35.95). It can be ordered online at www.wilddiscovery.com.au, or contact Len at len@lenzell.com. Maybe it will inspire you to join one of our four Kimberley Coast journeys in June, July or August 2004.

Awesome Mawson and the Mawsonettes

Annie Crowe and Susie Lyons visited Boat Harbour on 17 December 2003. Here's an excerpt from Annie's diary.

We'd reached Commonwealth Bay and were going ashore! Greg's face shone like a beacon as he led us to Mawson's Hut. Braving strong chop and intense spray, we landed on the ice. There, snuggled among the rock and snow, was the hut, glowing orange in the light. Sooze and I walked the ice dune 'til we could no longer see the warmth of the homestead. As far as we gazed were huge white cliffs, the wide plateau, bergs in the far distance, and a cross wedged into rocks as a memorial to dead explorers who now lie preserved in an icy crevasse.

We lingered over the fine display, then wandered off to pay our respects to the dead, via Adélie penguin rookeries where birds flapped protectively in front of nests, warning us off their territory.

The hut beckoned, so down we went, keen to peep into the lives of its inhabitants. Used crates and tins lay all around. Ice had long since invaded the interior, but the layers of peoples' lives were spread before us. "Don't step on the artifacts,"

warned Stu, our man from the government. "Artifacts?" Or old bits of wood and glass, boxes, cast off boots, socks and jumpers, well past their use-by date?

The Mawsonettes then circumnavigated the rocky outcrop to find where the cliffs met the bay. Around the ragged rocks we ran, past protesting Adélies, to see the magnificent ice cliffs meet the blue waters. So overwhelming, we could almost reach out and embrace their jagged faces. We lingered long in this lovely place.



Mawson's Hut, at the windiest place in the world

DAVID COUFELT

Blue Whales in the Bonney Upwelling

by Pete Gill

Pete is a whale researcher and very dear friend who has travelled as Naturalist on several Aurora voyages

Once common in Antarctic waters, blue whales were almost wiped out by commercial whaling during the 20th century and are now rare and endangered. Worldwide, they feed in a few exceptionally productive areas. Since 1998, I have studied blue whales off southwest Victoria and southeast South Australia, where they gather to feast on abundant krill in the nutrient-rich waters of the Bonney Upwelling.

Blue whales arrive in November–December from tropical wintering grounds and depart in May. A maximum of 47 have been sighted from the air. Krill distribution changes daily, and blue whales constantly search for the densest aggregations and then attack in spectacular feeding lunges. Krill abundance also attracts fin and sei whales, dolphins, seabirds, seals, tuna and squid, making this one of Australia's richest marine ecosystems.



Blue whale letting off steam

PETE GILL

From 2004, the Blue Whale Study will use the sailing catamaran, *Pelican*, allowing extended periods of access to the whales. We will take paying volunteers to learn about the whales and our research. Future voyages may follow migrating blue whales. For information, see www.svpelican.com.au or ring Pete Gill on (03) 5529 5227.

New Scottish Islands Voyage

Aurora is planning for an 11–12 day Scottish Islands voyage from Aberdeen to Oban on Polar Pioneer in July 2005. We'd first head north to the Orkneys (and possibly Shetlands), and then explore the western Scottish islands including the Outer Hebrides and Skye.

A challenge is choosing between the wide variety of fascinating places to visit. Prehistoric sites include standing stones and Neolithic burial chambers from around 3000 BC. More recent sites include Scottish Brochs (2000-year-old fortified towers thought to have protected against Roman slave traders), sites of Viking raids and World War 2 relics. And there are plenty of options for visiting castles and remote communities, taking walks to absorb the atmosphere of these wild coastlines, visiting seal and puffin colonies, and viewing spectacular sea stacks and rugged mountains.

Let us know if you may be interested in exploring this fascinating area, so that when details are finalised, you can get in early to book the cabin of your choice.

MIDWINTER EVENT

Finally in Melbourne

*Greg Mortimer, Margaret Werner and the Aurora Team
cordially invite you to the*

Aurora Expeditions Midwinter Dinner

*To be held in the Coral Atoll at
The Melbourne Aquarium,
Corner Queenswharf Road & Kingsway
Melbourne*

*Monday 21 June 2004
at 7.00 pm*

*Dress: The Great Antarctic Hat Competition
\$90 per person, includes 3 course dinner and drinks*

Rsvp by Friday 11th June 2004

Call Aurora on 1800 637 638

AURORA EXPEDITIONS 2004/2005 JOURNEY CALENDAR

Dates	Destination	Ship	Options	Trip Leaders
7-17 Jun 2004	Kimberley Coast Broome-Darwin	<i>Coral Princess</i>	Kunmunya hike, helicopter sightseeing	Mike Cusack, Chris Done, Len Zell
18-28 June	Kimberley Coast Darwin-Broome	<i>Coral Princess</i>	Kunmunya hike, helicopter sightseeing	Mike Cusack, Chris Done, Len Zell
19-29 July	Kimberley Coast Broome-Broome	<i>Coral Princess</i>	Kunmunya hike, helicopter sightseeing	Mike Cusack, Dr Garry Darby
30 July - 9 August	Kimberley Coast Broome-Broome	<i>Coral Princess</i>	Kunmunya hike, helicopter sightseeing	Mike Cusack, Dr Garry Darby
27 July - 6 August	Spitsbergen Circumnavigation	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>	Sea kayaking, tundra hikes	Henrik Lovendahl, Sue Werner, Dr Gary Miller, Al Bakker, Dave Burkitt
6-16 August	Spitsbergen Circumnavigation	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>	Sea kayaking, tundra hikes	Henrik Lovendahl, Sue Werner, Dr Gary Miller, Al Bakker, Dave Burkitt
16-29 August	Spitsbergen-Greenland-Iceland Jewels of the Arctic	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>	Sea kayaking, tundra hikes	Henrik Lovendahl, Sue Werner, Dr Gary Miller, Al Bakker, Dr Paul Willis
29 August-11 Sept	Iceland-Greenland-Spitsbergen Jewels of the Arctic	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>	Tundra hikes	Henrik Lovendahl, Sue Werner, Dr Gary Miller, Dr Paul Willis
9-19 November	Antarctic Peninsula	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>	Camping, kayaking, scuba diving	Greg Mortimer, Margaret Werner, Dr Gary Miller
19 Nov-7 Dec	Falklands, South Georgia, Antarctic Peninsula	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>	Extended hikes	Greg Mortimer, Margaret Werner, Dr Gary Miller, Dave Burkitt
2-20 December	Falklands, South Georgia, Antarctic Peninsula	<i>Akademik Shokalskiy</i>	Alpine crossing option	TBA
7-18 December	Antarctic Peninsula Climbers and photographers	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>	Camping, climbing	Henrik Lovendahl, Dr Gary Miller, Robyn Mundy, Darren Leal
18-28 Dec	Antarctic Peninsula Xmas trip	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>	Camping, kayaking	Dr Gary Miller, Robyn Mundy and others TBA
28 Dec-7 Jan 2005	New Year Antarctic Peninsula	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>	Camping, kayaking	Dr Jenny Scott and others TBA
7-25 January	Falkland Islands, South Georgia, Antarctic Peninsula	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>		Howard & Rosy Whelan, Dr Jenny Scott, Syd Kirkby
25 Jan-5 Feb	Weddell Sea & Ant. Pen.	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>		Howard & Rosy Whelan, Dr Jenny Scott, Dr Paul Willis
5-16 February	Antarctic Peninsula Across the Circle	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>		Dr Roger Kirkwood and others TBA
16-27 February	Across the Circle Climbers and photographers	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>	Climbing, diving	Kieran Lawton, Dr Roger Kirkwood, Tashi Tenzing, Steve Bell, Henrik Lovendahl
27 Feb-18 Mar	Antarctic Peninsula, South Georgia, Falkland Islands	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>	Alpine crossing, extended hikes	Kieran Lawton, Dr Roger Kirkwood, Tashi Tenzing, Steve Bell, Steve Martin
10-25 April	Amazon Voyage (upriver)	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>		TBA
25 Apr-9 May	Amazon Voyage (downriver)	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>	Kayaking	TBA

Please call or email us ...

- if you'd like to receive Shipping News by email
- to borrow one of our professionally produced videos of our voyages
- if you'd like friends or family included in our mailing list

Slide Shows

We'd love to see you, along with your friends and family, to share the thrill of travelling to Antarctica, the Arctic, Greenland, the Amazon and Australia's remote Kimberley coast with Greg, Sue, Michael or a very special guest.

Phone (+61) 02 9252 1033 / 1800 637 688 Fax (+61) 02 9252 1373 Email: auroraex@auroraexpeditions.com.au Web: www.auroraexpeditions.com.au



POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA

182A Cumberland Street
The Rocks, Sydney, NSW 2000
Tel. 02 9252 1033 or 1 800 637 688
Facsimile 02 9252 1373
Email: auroraex@auroraexpeditions.com.au
www.auroraexpeditions.com.au
ABN 65 002 925 313