



Shipping News

Aurora Expeditions Newsletter - September 2004

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CRUISING TO THE HEART OF NATURE

Here in Sydney sunrise is gradually getting earlier and is colouring our mornings with the hope of spring. That would sound a bit tame to our Polar Pioneer crew, who come from Murmansk and St Petersburg. But in Antarctica the sea ice edge will be changing quite fast now – the Antarctic summer is coming.

Those who attended our Midwinter celebrations in the Jelly Room at the Melbourne Aquarium will, I am sure, agree that it was a great delight to share festivities with Antarctic legend and friend Dr Phil Law. Peter Malcolm and Steve Bell entertained us with tales of their winters in Antarctica whilst Davini and Leora, their wives, excelled as judges of the hat competition.

Greg really enjoyed his taste of the Amazon River, where he found himself caught up in the web of humanity that clings to the banks of the river for survival. Meanwhile my tropical sojourn this year was to Borneo with old friend Lincoln Hall and family. We all stood on top of Mt Kinabalu (4095 metres) in the province of Sabah – stunning views in all directions after an unrelenting climb through orchid-draped jungles and then over glaciated granite slabs to the summit.

Our VIP Aurora Club is gaining momentum, and 'Aurora family' members are reaping the benefits of their loyalty with discounts on voyages. Once you have done two voyages with Aurora you automatically become a member. For each person who joins, Aurora has pledged funds that are held in trust for future environmental research.

Over the years, I've taken several small groups of Aurora people along the Silk Road. By the time you read this, my little caravan of adventurers and I should be there again, laden with incense, myrrh and maybe a few more carpets?



JO LLOYD

http://www.auroraexpeditions.com

Aurora Expeditions

AMAZON, LAST CHANCE

Pink dolphins rise to greet a golden dawn, a rainbow flash of macaws screech overhead and sleepy children in dugout canoes emerge from the emerald forest, their curiosity masked by dark eyes and shy smiles. The unearthly roar of howler monkeys shatters a lively dawn chorus and our day truly begins. In 2005, we shall again take *Polar Pioneer* along the 3720 kilometre navigable length of the Amazon River, through the planet's last great tropical forest. We don't plan to visit the Amazon again in 2006, but rather we'll seek out different adventures for our little ship. So, if you'd like to join us on the Amazon, now's the time to reserve your berth for 2005.



HOWARD WHELAN



JOHN BAZZANO

SCOTLAND 2005

Wild Scotland here we come! Our plans are now settled. *Polar Pioneer* will spend 11 days, from 11 to 21 July 2005, cruising around the nether regions of Scotland between Aberdeen and Oban, and berths are already filling. We plan to visit some of the hundreds of remote, unspoiled islands that form a wild fringe around the Scottish mainland. Places like Fair Isle and St Kilda, as well as the treasures of the Orkneys, South Shetlands and Outer Hebrides, and the better known Skye and the edges of the western Highlands where they meet the sea.

We hope to visit some of the world's largest seabird colonies – raucous places filled with gannets, fulmars, arctic terns and delightful puffins. We also plan to explore ancient villages, scarcely changed in 5000 years, and to ponder the mystery of huge monoliths that marked the change of seasons.

Inevitably somewhere along the way we will sing and dance and enjoy a single malt or two.

Give us a call if you would like more details.



DAVID COLFELT

DOCTOR ON ICE

Many readers know Dr Vicki Slinko, dear friend and doctor on Aurora voyages.

Today will be fine and crystal-clear. At present, though, the land below me is carpeted in thick fog caching the pink-gold light of sunrise. Islands of forested hills float on white cotton wool as I gaze from my farm over three northern NSW World Heritage areas: Mt Warning, the Border Ranges and the Nightcap escarpment. Will I go brush-cutting, or prune my trees? My plantation of rainforest timbers, started six years ago, needs tending.

That's when Greg Mortimer first asked me to work as a doctor with Aurora. I refused, because my tree planting would clash with those trips to Antarctica. But I added "Please ask me next year". I'd already been to the Peninsula, and longed for the brisk cold when I was bent over my back-breaking mattock and watering in and fertilizing the plants. But now my forest's worth it.



Greg did ask again, and I was exalted to be going to South Georgia. The reality didn't disappoint, with jagged peaks rising from magnificent glaciers emptying into the ocean, wildlife-packed black sand beaches, marauding fur seals concealed in tussocks, and haunting cries of light-mantled sooty albatrosses overhead. After this, I became addicted – Antarctic and Arctic opportunities alike were too enticing to pass up.

The momentary highlights of colour have gone from the dense white below me now. It reminds me of pack ice the Russian crew negotiates Polar Pioneer through; Crystal Sound, the Weddell Sea, northern Svalbard and the Ross Sea have all taught me that ice and nature rule.

Now wisps of cloud appear in the blue above me. Like occasional scraps of reindeer or musk ox hair you find caught on rocks in the Arctic or, more ominously, that of Kanook – the polar bear.

It takes hours for the fog to dissipate today. When the Arctic ice and snow finally melt, another carpet appears – tundra flowers – miniature gardens in riotous colour that cling to any nutrient above the permafrost. Horizontal forests of dwarf birch and willow appear – they'll turn orange-red in the autumn. Whole hillsides are covered in plants that don't even reach your knees.

Thankfully my trees are now much taller than that.

Tourists help save the albatross

Aurora, along with other member companies of the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO), has received messages of thanks from scientists involved in albatross conservation projects. About US\$35,000 was contributed by the tourist industry in 2003/04 to research on bycatch of seabirds in fisheries, and funds are now being allocated to relevant projects. Scientists Graham Robertson and Deon Nel commented that an earlier award of US\$6000 by IAATO encouraged further donations by other wildlife charities, and helped to secure over \$US100,000 from the Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem Programme, to study the bycatch of seabirds, sharks and turtles during fishing off the South African, Namibian and Angolan coasts. Deon added that "from a reasonably moderate, but very important contribution from IAATO, we have been able to grow our activities and funding base to cover three countries, several fisheries and several groups of species. This is a nice success story of how seed funding from IAATO can actually result in a catalytic impact."



DAVID COLFELT

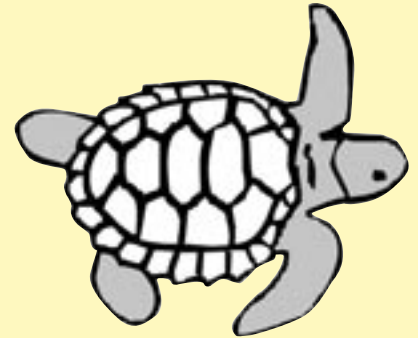
ANTARCTICA IN ACTION

An underwater volcano was recently discovered in Antarctic Sound, at the northernmost tip of Antarctica, in an area with no previous record of active volcanoes. In April, the US research vessel, *Laurence M. Gould*, investigated an area where mariners had reported discoloured waters. It found a volcano standing 700 metres above the seabed with its top about 275 metres below the ocean surface. Video recordings showed barren patches of dark black rock not yet colonised by life, rock dredges recovered abundant fresh basalt, and temperature probes revealed signs of geothermal heating. The scientists involved concluded from this preliminary data that the volcano has been active recently. Maybe you'll sail close by on one of Aurora's Antarctic voyages!

KIMBERLEY SEA TURTLES

by Mick Guinea

Nesting sea turtles always evoke wonder and awe as they leave the relative safety of the water and make their way laboriously across the beach to the security of the sand dunes. At most sea turtle nesting beaches this crossing between marine and terrestrial worlds occurs after dark. Yet the flatback sea turtles on Bare Sand Island, Northern Territory, nest during daylight hours, especially when high tide occurs in the afternoon.



This year, Aurora Expeditions's landing at Bare Sand Island coincided with just such an event. Separated by only a couple of metres and 200 million years of evolution, a female flatback sea turtle left the water and moved towards and among the observers sitting motionless on the beach. Soft sand associated with a dip in the beach deterred the turtle from nesting.

She returned to the water, unperturbed by her audience. This dip in the beach caused many nesting turtles to return to the water over the next two months, when volunteers from Charles Darwin University in Darwin and the AusTurtle community group patrolled the beach, tagging nesting turtles and releasing hatchlings.

A welcome is extended to Aurora's readership to participate in the tenth year of research at Bare Sand Island during June and July 2005. For more information please contact Mick Guinea at Charles Darwin University (michael.guinea@cdu.edu.au) or www.austurtle.org.au.

DREAMING OF A TRIP INTO SPACE?

Space tourism is close to becoming a reality, with several significant developments in recent months. Aurora is excited to be part of this embryonic industry, through its ongoing association with Space Adventures Ltd (SAL).

In June, SpaceShipOne made the first private space flight, taking pilot Mike Melville to over 100 kilometers above California's Mojave Desert. SpaceShipOne is one of over 20 teams competing for the Ansari X Prize. This US\$10 million prize will be awarded for the first group to successfully conduct two privately financed space flights with the same craft, capable of carrying three people, within two weeks of each other.

SAL has already taken two space tourists to the International Space Station (ISS) and has secured a dedicated flight to carry three more tourists to the ISS in November 2005. For those for whom the US\$20 million price for an ISS visit is a tiny bit too

high, the estimated US\$100,000 price for a sub-orbital flight may be more achievable. SAL has taken deposits from more than 100 potential passengers for sub-orbital flights, and expects sub-orbital tourism to commence in 2006 or 2007. In preparation, SAL is investigating locations for a suborbital spaceport, and in July announced Australia as the leading contender. Meantime, the company already offers zero gravity flights.

And, in other news, geologists in Antarctica have found a meteorite of Martian origin, drawing another link between space and the icy south.

If you've always wanted to travel to space, contact Aurora for details – maybe now's the time to join the queue!



GRYTVIKEN WHALE SCULPTURE

Helen Denerley, a sculptor from Scotland, plans to spend six months in South Georgia this austral summer creating a humpback whale sculpture. The whale will be fashioned out of scrap iron from the old Grytviken whaling station. With its huge flukes pointing towards the old whaling buildings and its head pointing towards the sea, it will be a vivid reminder of the days when 1.4 million whales were killed in the Southern Ocean

to provide oil for lighting, lubrication, margarine and soap. The industry became unviable when many species were on the brink of extinction. The Project is seeking funding and can be contacted on:

gritvikenwhale@hotmail.com;

and some of Helen's work can be seen on:

www.ssw.org.uk/folk/Denerley/denerley.html.

ANTARCTIC SKETCHER

by David Gibb

Earlier this year I voyaged to the Weddell Sea and Antarctic Peninsula as passenger on *Polar Pioneer*. We were particularly lucky with weather and I sketched nearly every day. I enjoy working outdoors, trying to capture as much as possible in the time.

Sketching Antarctica has many challenges. At Robert Point art merged with sport, as I drew furiously while racing with an advancing fog bank. On other landings, Adélie penguins demonstrated an uncanny knack of moving whenever I



started to sketch them. At James Ross Island I couldn't resist the fossil hunt, leaving little time to draw the outback-like landscape. Strong wind thwarted sketching efforts at Church Point and Botany Bay, so I turned my attention to Red Island, but I refused to let hail stop me sketching on Deception Island.

However, I drew Vega Island on one of several beautiful clear sunny days – this one finished with an unforgettable back-deck barbecue that evolved into a disco surrounded by the scenic panorama of Duce Bay. Narrow channels like Errera and Lemaire were also highlights, as snow-laden mountains towered above us, their sheer sides plunging into an icy sea. But best of all was Paradise Harbour where, while other passengers explored among sculptured bergs, I sketched for two hours, soaking up sights and sounds of mountains, ice, water and wildlife. Memories return as I work on a larger version of that sketch, so I'm happy that my coloured pencil technique proceeds at a glacial rate in my studio – it just prolongs the experience..

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AURORA EXPEDITIONS 2004/2005 JOURNEY CALENDAR

Dates	Destination	Ship	Options	Trip Leaders
9–19 Nov 2004	Antarctic Peninsula	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>	Scuba diving, kayaking, camping	Greg Mortimer, Margaret Werner, Dr Gary Miller, Al Bakker
19 Nov – 7 Dec	Falklands, South Georgia, Antarctic Peninsula	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>		Greg Mortimer, Margaret Werner, Dr Gary Miller, Dave Burkitt
2–20 Dec	Falklands, South Georgia, Antarctic Peninsula	<i>Akademik Shokalskiy</i>	Extended hikes, Alpine Crossing Option	Peter Malcolm, Michael Travers, Santiago Imberti, Colin Monteath
7–18 Dec	Antarctic Peninsula, Climbers and Photographers	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>	Camping, climbing	Don McFadzien, Robyn Mundy, Henrik Lovendahl, Dr Gary Miller, Tashi Tenzing, Darren Leal
18–28 Dec	Antarctic Peninsula Christmas Trip	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>	Camping, kayaking	Don McFadzien, Robyn Mundy, Dr Gary Miller, Simon Sharpin
28 Dec – 7 Jan 2005	Antarctic Peninsula New Year's Voyage	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>	Camping, kayaking	Don McFadzien, Robyn Mundy, Dr Jenny Scott, Simon Sharpin
7–25 Jan	Falklands, South Georgia, Antarctic Peninsula	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>		Howard & Rosy Whelan, Dr Jenny Scott, Syd Kirkby
25 Jan – 5 Feb	Weddell Sea & Antarctic Peninsula	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>		Howard & Rosy Whelan, Dr Jenny Scott, Dr Paul Willis
5–16 Feb	Across the Circle	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>		Howard & Rosy Whelan, Dr Roger Kirkwood
16–27 Feb	Across the Circle, Climbers and Photographers	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>	Climbing, diving	Kieran Lawton, Sue Werner, Dr Roger Kirkwood, Tashi Tenzing, Steve Bell, Henrik Lovendahl
27 Feb – 18 Mar	Antarctic Peninsula, South Georgia, Falklands	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>	Alpine Crossing, Extended hikes	Kieran Lawton, Sue Werner, Dr Roger Kirkwood, Tashi Tenzing, Steve Bell, Steve Martin
10–25 April	Amazon voyage (up river)	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>		Greg Mortimer & others TBA
25 Apr – 9 May	Amazon voyage (down river)	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>	Kayaking	Greg Mortimer & others TBA
6–16 Jun	Kimberley Coast Broome-Broome	<i>Coral Princess</i>	Kunmunya hike, helicopter sightseeing	Mike Cusak, Chris Done, Dr Garry Darby
17–27 June	Kimberley Coast Broome-Broome	<i>Coral Princess</i>	Kunmunya hike, helicopter sightseeing	Mike Cusak, Chris Done, Dr Garry Darby
27 Jun – 7 Jul	Kimberley Coast Broome-Darwin	<i>Coral Princess</i>	Kunmunya hike, helicopter sightseeing	Mike Cusak, Chris Done
11–21 July	Wild Scotland	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>		TBA
28 Jul – 7 Aug	Spitsbergen Circumnavigation	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>	Sea kayaking, tundra hikes	TBA
7–17 Aug	Spitsbergen Circumnavigation	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>	Sea kayaking, tundra hikes	TBA
17–30 Aug	Spitsbergen–Greenland–Iceland Jewels of the Arctic	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>	Sea kayaking, tundra hikes	TBA
30 Aug – 12 Sep	Iceland–Greenland–Spitsbergen Jewels of the Arctic	<i>Polar Pioneer</i>	Sea kayaking, tundra hikes	TBA



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