



Antarctic Explorer



11 – 20 March 2019 | Polar Pioneer



About Us

Aurora Expeditions embodies the spirit of adventure, travelling to some of the most wild and remote places on our planet. With over 27 years' experience, our small group voyages allow for a truly intimate experience with nature.

Our expeditions push the boundaries with flexible and innovative itineraries, exciting wildlife experiences and fascinating lectures. You'll share your adventure with a group of like-minded souls in a relaxed, casual atmosphere while making the most of every opportunity for

adventure and discovery. Our highly experienced expedition team of naturalists, historians and destination specialists are passionate and knowledgeable – they are the secret to a fulfilling and successful voyage.

Whilst we are dedicated to providing a 'trip of a lifetime', we are also deeply committed to education and preservation of the environment. Our aim is to travel respectfully, creating lifelong ambassadors for the protection of our destinations.





DAY 1 | Monday, 11 March 2019

Punta Arenas, King George Island, Bransfield Strait

Position:	21:00 hours	Course:	132°	Wind Speed:	25 knots	Barometer:	993.3 hPa & steady
Latitude:	62°39'S	Speed:	4.5 knots	Wind Direction:	N	Air Temp:	-2°C
Longitude:	58°01'W					Sea Temp:	1°C

After months of planning, weeks of anticipation and long-haul flights from around the globe, we took a final flight from Punta Arenas to arrive at King George Island, raring to begin our Antarctic adventure.

After changing into gumboots and walking down the winding gravel road, Expedition Leader Gary gave us a briefing at the beach, educating us on how to launch into Zodiacs for the transit to our waiting ship. Thankfully sea conditions had eased throughout the morning, making the step of faith from Zodiac to gangway manageable, especially with the helpful support of our Zodiac drivers and Russian gangway man.

Onboard we total 53 with nationalities representing Australia (43), Canada (1), Denmark (1), United Kingdom (5), United States (3), along with 12 Aurora Expeditions' staff, and 22 Russian crew.

After the early start in Punta Arenas it was time for home-made soup and a bite to eat before Gary called us together to introduce the Aurora team and give a lifeboat and safety briefing.

The sound of seven-short-one-long rings from the ship's signal system was our cue to don warm clothes, bulky orange lifejackets and gather at the muster stations to sample the ambience of a Polar Class life vessel. Even without a full complement of Russian crew, the seating arrangements in the two lifeboats proved cosy.

We then upped anchor and steamed away from the "big smoke" of King George Island. The clouds remained low and driving sleet iced the decks; we were happy to be viewing the frigid surrounds from the comfort of our cosy cocoon. Once out of the bay, *Polar Pioneer*

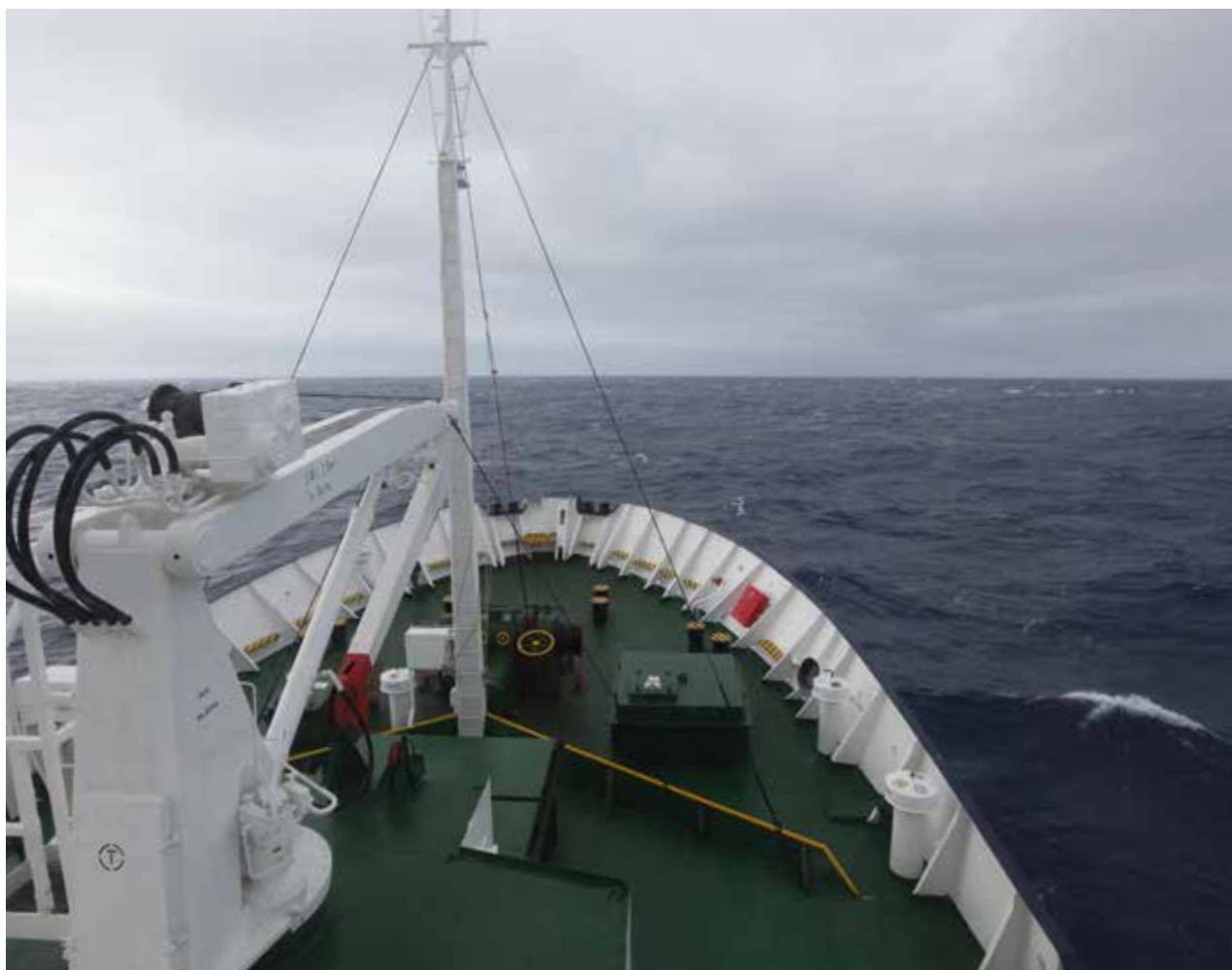
set a south-easterly course from King George Island, across the Bransfield Strait toward the northern tip of the Antarctic Peninsula.

The remainder of our day was abuzz with important environmental and safety briefings, and vacuuming, in preparation for our first outing in Antarctica.

The world of ice and whales took hold in the early evening when we passed by a mighty tabular berg measuring five kilometres by one kilometre. Soon after, the spouts of several humpback whales.

In the evening we enjoyed a friendly drink in Kathrine's bar, then a tasty dinner prepared by our two chefs Al and Bert and served by stewardesses Dasha and Iliana.

Daylight drew to a close, and with it the first touches of movement under our keel—our cue to take to our bunks for a sound night's sleep.



DAY 2 | Tuesday, 12 March 2019

Brown Bluff, Antarctic Sound

Position:	21:00 hours	Course:	At drift
Latitude:	63°07'S	Wind Speed:	06 knots
Longitude:	57°06'W		

Who could believe the magic of the day? Some woke to a blush of daybreak that brightened into blue sky and a crisp sunny day. A gorgeous Antarctic day.

We were at Brown Bluff on the Antarctic continent and it was high time to go ashore. Out to sea rested mammoth tabular bergs that break from ice shelves deep in the Weddell Sea and drift north with the Weddell Gyre. Closer to shore was a vista of multi-year ice floes—remnant slabs of frozen ocean from winters gone.

From the landing site a group followed Steve up the snowy slopes to inspect remarkable geology. Brown Bluff is itself the exposed portion of a glacial volcano, its tuff cliffs embedded with lava “bombs”, such as the famed “chocolate chip” boulder which lived up to its name.

Icicles hung from the cliff face; waves clinked and tinkled across a cobbled shoreline; grease ice and pancake ice formed upon the sea before our eyes. Moulting gentoo penguins stood forlornly, waiting for their new feathers to grow through. Fully fledged gentoo chicks were apparent by their shiny black coats and remnant tufts of down. Snowy sheathbills, the only Antarctic bird that does not have webbed feet, scavenged for tidbits. Kelp gulls wheeled overhead.

The morning raced by and soon it was time to return to a delectable lunch, with thanks to chefs Al and Bert.

Our afternoon course for Paulet Island was quashed by a formidable barrier of sea ice—ice and bergs as far as the eye could see. Close by we spotted two humpback whales “logging”



(as sleep is called in the whale world). Captain brought the ship to a dead halt and when the whales gently woke they spent time lazily circling the ship’s bow.

With so much blue sky and glistening ice, why not launch Zodiacs and kayaks for an afternoon cruise and paddle?

Alas, only three Zodiacs were loaded before fast-moving ice closed in around the ship. It took all Captain’s efforts to simply get the ship turned around and out to clear water. Gary and Steve’s Zodiacs followed *Polar Pioneer* but where was Robyn’s Zodiac? Trapped in the ice is where they were! With the lagoon of water around Robyn’s Zodiac diminishing and no prospect of a channel opening up within the maze of ice, there was only one thing to do—man and woman-haul the Zodiac across the ice. Could they do it? Robyn drove the Zodiac up onto the ice and then, in true Shackleton style, the waiting team sprang into action—one, two, *HEAVE*... dragging the Zodiac across the ice floe, launching it back into water, then onto the next icefloe, and a third, for more of the same. Slowly the Zodiac inched closer to the ship and the ship to the Zodiac. Finally, a happy reunion, with the many onlookers and advisers lining the ship’s bow and flying bridge giving a rousing welcome home! Well done to all.

Our day closed with a lively hour in the bar for Captain’s Welcome Drinks. Kathrine mixed some tasty punch, our chefs prepared canapes, and Captain Sasha offered a warm welcome to his ship, recounting his many years on *Polar Pioneer* and sharing an aptly thematic moment from the Weddell Sea, one that involved the ship being stuck in the ice.









The Krill

by Moira Finucane

*The people they were lovely
The food it was nutritious
The berths were extra cosy
And the coffee just delicious
The Polar Pioneer was
really quite a thrill*

*But nothing will compare
to the day I saw the krill.*

*The first landing 'twas geolic
And the rocks were extra thrilling
The sun shone bright upon us
The team were smart and willing
I recorded ice and penguins
And I thought I'd had my fill
But nothing could compare
And nothing ever will
To the sheer crustacean splendour
Of the day I saw the krill.*

*Robyn took us boating
And dropped us on a floe
We felt profoundly clever
Till we'd nowhere left to go
We were trapped! "The
ice move faster"
As our Russian captain cried
And although we were heroic
We really could have died!
But Robyn led us through it
And as a leader, well she's brill'
But nothing can compare*

*Not even Robyn can compare
Not even baleens can compare
Well, I guess you'll guess my thrill
For the day in the Antarctic
When I saw the scarlet krill.*

*We were pushing ice intrepid
Holding back with our bare hands
The pack ice ridge upon us
With Robyn in command
I was sitting on the portside
Frightened of a spill
I looked down when I saw them
At least five and maybe more
Eating algae
Waving forearms
Well not forearms
maybe krill arms
Well Roger says "pleopods
filtering basket arms"
And they looked like
shrimp but colder
I yelled behind my shoulder
If we never get much older
And in watery graves we moulder
We can die such happy sailors
Neither wind nor ice prevail us
I tell you we've hit heaven
Because right here I've
counted seven
Seven gorgeous krill!*

*Well, the clamour 'twas amazing!
The ice it started crazing!
The krill they moved their feelers
The waters parted to reveal us
Gary and the sailors
Were astonished
And the whole ship to be honest
Could not believe their ears
That despite their deepest fears
Of losing Robyn and her crew
As early as Day 2!
That we were saved by the
will of seven fearless krill!
And I believe that it bears mention
By my most sincere intention
Is to raise a glass of swill
To the undisputed thrill
Of the fine Antarctic krill.*

*Now other things occurred, yes
Penguins, whales, seals,
volcanoes, glaciers, yes
And dazzling seas around us
Nature's beauty did abound us
But! From the splen-
dour of the whales
To the red poo penguin trails
To sheathbills fluffy tails
You know who is responsible
Fearless feelers to the till
The exoskeletal crusader
For ecologies that thrill
The hero of the food chain
The one, the many krill*

*In parting I would like to say
For ecologies that thrill
For folks that want a future
Come on! Let's save the krill!*



DAY 3 | Wednesday, 13 March 2019

Gourdin Island, Astrolabe Island

Position:	20:40 hours	Course:	218°	Wind Speed:	20 knots	Barometer:	1001.3 hPa & falling
Latitude:	63°23'S	Speed:	12.1 knots	Wind Direction:	W	Air Temp:	2° C
Longitude:	59°14'W					Sea Temp:	0° C

Our approach to Gourdin Island on the north-west tip of the Antarctic Peninsula afforded a view of spectacular tabular bergs originating from the Weddell Sea. Gourdin Island is home to a population of adelic penguins, but now, having reared their young and left their nests, all but a smattering of adelies were to be found amongst the chinstraps and gentoos. The gang-way and ride across to the island was wet and bouncy, but once onshore we went exploring. Some climbed to the high point for spectacular views of the continent and a horizon studded with massive bergs. If the wind was gusty at sea level, it was even stronger on the summit of the island. Snowy sheathbills fossicked around the shoreline and pairs of skuas made short work of any available penguin carcass. Out in the bay a large leopard seal patrolled the shoreline and took great interest in each Zodiac that came or went. For penguins leaving or returning to the island it is a game of chance and the reason why penguins prefer to enter the water *en masse*. If you are the only penguin your prospects of being taken by a leopard seal are high; if you are one amongst several dozen, the odds of survival are more in your favour.

Where do the Adelies, gentoos and chinstraps go once their chicks are reared and they finish their annual moult? At the end of summer, as the ocean threatens to freeze along the length of the peninsula, the brushtail penguins head out to open water and spend the winter foraging near the ice edge. For juveniles, who roam for three years before becoming sexually mature, the winter is harsh and mortality is high. But for adults, come spring they return to the same nest site on the same island to begin a new breeding cycle.



After lunch, Roger spoke more about brushtail penguins in his presentation. He walked us through the cycle from when the penguins first return to their nest sites in spring, and the various courtships, nest building and stone stealing that forms part of penguin life. Roger also spoke about the seals we have seen and are most likely to encounter on the peninsula: crabeater, weddell, fur seals and leopard seals.

We motored south to Astrolabe Island, discovered by French explorer Dumont D’Urville in the late 1830s and named for his expedition ship *Astrolabe*.

The wind blew too strongly for the kayakers but the Zodiacs got out and explored the eastern side of the island with its lofty chinstrap penguin colonies. Imperial cormorants are also residents of the islands and were in great numbers on one small islet. We motored through the channel between ‘The Devil’s Teeth’ before returning to our ship amid a display of humpback whales.

After dinner, historian Ian Evans enthralled us with his adventurous capers, highlighted with his epic 2015 ski from the Antarctic coast to the south pole. The documentary he produced has won a number of awards and it was obvious to see why. An inspiring way to finish off an adventurous Antarctic day.





Artist Robyn Sutherland



DAY 4 | Thursday, 14 March 2019

Hydrurga Rocks, Enterprise Island

Position: 20:45 hours

Course: At anchor

Latitude: 64°31'S

Longitude: 61°58'W

Wind Speed: 6 knots

Wind Direction: SW

Barometer: 989.3hPa & falling

Air Temp: 2° C

Sea Temp: 1° C

A chill breeze blew. Snow covered the decks, but off we went, dressed in all our layers, to Hydrurga Rocks. This low-lying outcrop is adjacent to Two Hummock Island famed as the site of the first skier in Antarctica—no less than polar explorer Roald Amundsen who worked as Chief Mate on the Belgica Expedition in 1897–99. Our ride to the island was one of grandeur, taking in a beautiful glacial berg drifting near the ship, admiring its form and textures, and understanding how the multiple waterlines on a berg are indicative of the berg's dynamic existence with pieces breaking off, the berg tilting and turning, and coming to rest in a new position.

Onshore, fur seals squabbled while chinstrap penguins marched over slippery stones to the upper reaches of the island. Hydrurga Rocks, named for the leopard seal *Hydrurga leptonyx*, is home to an array of species including imperial cormorants, kelp gulls and a good collection of seals.

Except for Moira who would happily have set up camp on Hydrurga Rocks, the snow finally got the better of most when the wet seeped through to skin. Time to head back to the mother ship for dry clothes and a warm cuppa. Luckily in this polar desert things dry out quickly.

The afternoon found us at Enterprise Island and though big fat snowflakes fell, the wind dropped out, making for entirely lovely conditions for both a Zodiac cruise and paddle, crunching through a crisp layer of grease ice.

At Enterprise we saw remnants of the whaling days with stanchions embedded in rock, navigational markers and the remains of two large water boats. A highlight was the wreck of the

Norwegian whaling factory ship *Guvernøren* which, at 5,459 tons gross, was considered state of the art technology in 1913. The ship boasted rotary cookers for a guano plant in which whale meat and bone were processed into fertiliser. In the 1913–14 summer, *Guvernøren* amassed 22,610 barrels of oil and 2,500 sacks of guano from 544 whales. But on 27 January 1915, while working in Wilhelmina Bay near the east side of Enterprise Island, the ship went up in flames. Hoping to save both crew lives and whale produce, the captain ran the ship aground on the east side of Enterprise, at a bay now called Guvernørhava. While all 85 crewmen were saved, 16,615 barrels of whale oil were lost. Nowadays, the wreck of *Guvernøren* provides a safe shelter for yachts and has become a 'hot spot' for SCUBA diving.

Kayakers and Zodiacs stopped to admire a lazy leopard seal basking in a turquoise swimming pool.

Back onboard, Kathrine had Kahlua hot chocolate waiting for us, Anne had engine room tours on offer, while the sauna enticed a group. Before dinner Roger hosted a lively recap where we shared many rich impressions of our voyage so far.

A little retail therapy never goes astray, so after a tasty dinner our petite ship shop was opened to an eager crowd.



Cuverville Island, Neko Harbour

Position:	21:15 hours	Course:	205°	Wind Speed:	32 knots	Barometer:	979.9hPa & falling
Latitude:	64°49′S	Speed:	5.7 knots	Wind Direction:	W	Air Temp:	2° C
Longitude:	63°10′W					Sea Temp:	1° C

What a day. What a day! Before breakfast we steamed south to Cuverville Island located in a majestic part of the Antarctic Peninsula. As we launched Zodiacs, humpback whales were spotted which resulted in a most sensational hour! Most of the whales gradually headed out of the bay, but one humpback who we believe to be a young adult, befriended us in the most exhilarating way. Not only did ‘our whale’ linger around Zodiacs and paddlers, he repeatedly visited each craft, performing whale acrobatics by rolling over, waving a flipper, showing off his flukes, spyhopping by rising vertically until his enormous jaw and tiny eyes were entirely out of the water so as to see us and all that was happening above the surface. He repeatedly dove under each Zodiac then popped up alongside in a great blow of breath and audible call before circling around and visiting the next. While he was enormous compared to our small Zodiacs and kayaks, he was in complete control of each movement, particularly so with his placement and care around the kayakers. We were in humpback heaven! Several times after spyhopping our whale simply flopped on his back, splayed his pectoral flippers and rolled as if in sheer relaxed joy. We in the Zodiacs were beside ourselves with joy to have the company of such an impressive, intelligent and affable wild animal. Camera shutters whirled, memory cards filled amid squeaks and gasps of delight.

Finally we farewelled our whale and made our way in to Cuverville Island for a wonderful hour with gentoo penguins. Some chicks had their adult plumage while others were still covered in a coat of downy fur.

A leopard seal appeared in the shallows and promptly snatched a gentoo chick. Our kayakers looked on from close quarters as the leopard seal shook its meal to pieces by flinging the

dead penguin back and forth. Giant petrels waited in the wings for pieces of stray flesh and the remains of the carcase, while their petite cousins, Wilson’s Storm petrels, danced upon the water, plucking droplets of oil and minuscule scraps of flesh.

On return to the ship and at the sheer mention of the Polar Plunge, 30 of our ship’s complement proceeded to fling themselves off a perfectly good ship into 0.1°Celsius water! No one lingered in the frigid water; rather, there was a beeline for the sauna.

Neko Harbour was our afternoon destination. The water was flat calm and mist hung low around the mountains. We went ashore to this very special place which now evokes tranquillity in contrast to a once thriving whaling centre. The harbour was named for the floating factory *Neko* which operated in the area in 1911–12 and 1923–24.

A group of us climbed to the higher reaches and spent time at a rocky outcrop mesmerised by the panorama of glaciers and mountains. Other than the ice issuing several booms and rumbles, this serene harbour was a place to simply take in the magnificence and magnitude of Antarctica.

Snow fell and our plans for an outdoor BBQ were relocated indoors. With thanks to Kathrine, Al, Bert, Dasha and Iliana, we enjoyed a fab evening with delicious food and tasty gluwain, dance music, party hats, birthday cakes and fine company. An extra special Antarctic day.



















DAY 6 | Saturday 16 March 2019

Lemaire Channel, Pleneau Island, Port Lockroy

Position:	21:45 hours	Course:	58°	Wind Speed:	33 knots	Barometer:	985.3 hPa & steady
Latitude:	64°26'S	Speed:	11.7 knots	Wind Direction:	NE	Air Temp:	3° C
Longitude:	62°08'W					Sea Temp:	1° C

Gary’s early morning wake-up call heralded our arrival at the northern end of the famous Lemaire Channel, 12 kms long and up to 1.6 kms wide. Early morning was dim as we made our way into the channel where, on either side, towering mountains dissolved into the mist. The mountains of Booth Island on our starboard side, and those of the continent on our portside rise 900 metres out of the water and plunge below the water line to a similar depth.

A captain’s greatest nemesis is ice and there was no shortage of it stretched across the Lemaire. Captain Sasha and Chief Mate Vladimir found a safe passage through and then it was clear water the rest of the way. We passed by the southernmost chinstrap penguin colony before rounding the corner into the bay to a swarm of grounded icebergs.

Our valiant kayakers headed off toward the ice as did each of the Zodiacs. We wound our way through a maze of shapes and textured ice, some of the eroded bergs reminiscent of a scene from *Game of Thrones*, others taking the form of fantastical animals. We had striking patterns in the ice with fluting and ‘golfball’ patterns that result from air bubbles popping on the surface of the submerged ice. The pop creates a tiny abrasion which, over the course of a couple of days, is eroded by the movement of the water into remarkable patterns. Similarly, air bubbles run up the side of the submerged face of ice creating a minuscule line of abrasion. The sea current rapidly gouges these lines into furrows, exposed once the berg rolls..

The wind began to make itself known and one by one the Zodiacs wended their way back to the ship. Our paddlers had their work cut out paddling a big distance but soon they were up the rope ladder and safely back on deck.

We motored north back through the Lemaire and after a scrumptious pizza lunch made our way through Neumayer Channel and onto Port Lockroy.

Port Lockroy is the site of “Base A”, a sturdy wooden base built in the 1940s to carry out listening work during World War II along with scientific research. Nowadays the main hut is a museum. The British team who maintain it over summer had left for home about 10 days before. Luckily, Anne was able to enter the hut and post our postcards in the shiny red pillarbox. Next November when the team returns, our mail will be franked, bagged and will set sail on the next available vessel travelling to the Falkland Islands. From there it will be flown to England to join the regular postal system. A circuitous journey but definitely worth waiting for!

Offshore, three of our hardy paddlers joined Daniel for a workout in brisk winds. The rest of us switched between Goudier Island with its huts and gentoo penguins and nearby Jougla Point to visit imperial cormorants and gentoos, and to study a whale vertebrae assembled some years ago, exposed when the snow melts away toward the end of summer.

We returned to our cosy ship, warmed ourselves with showers and hot drinks, spent relaxed time in the bar then gathered together for another fine meal.

Steve topped off the day by offering a terrific geological overview of the different ways in which rocks are formed as a lead in to the geology of the northern part of the peninsula. He focused on Deception Island and its recent volcanic eruptions. Be up and about as we line up with the island’s treacherous Neptune’s Bellows and make our way into the caldera.



Deception Island

Position: 20:45 hours
Latitude: 62°18’S
Longitude: 59°47’W

Course: 358°
Speed: 11.2 knots

Wind Speed: 13 knots
Wind Direction: W

Barometer: 990.6 hPa & rising
Air Temp: 2° C
Sea Temp: 1°C

Soon after breakfast we positioned ourselves outside Deception Island, ready to enter Neptune’s Bellows amid squalls of wind from the west. Captain and Chief Mate were on the bridge for this precision manoeuvre through a narrow passage of navigable water. A wrecked ship on the opposite side of the entry is testament to the difficulties that this perilous entry-way can pose. Those who braved the outer decks felt the full brunt of the wind as we made our way past Neptune’s Window with sun striking the rust-coloured cliffs. We swung close to a sea stack that rose from the water like a sentinel.

Once we rounded the corner the caldera revealed an enormous waterway which, as Steve described, is the result of the rim of the volcanic cone having collapsed into the magma chamber. In the case of Deception Island, thermal activity is still very much apparent at low tide with steam rising from the black volcanic shoreline. The whiff of sulphur permeated the bay.

The remnant buildings include large rusted tanks which, sad and sobering to reflect upon, were once filled to the brim with the oil from the flesh and bones of countless whales. The ramshackle buildings, including an aircraft hangar, were part of a British base which was all but buried and destroyed by the volcanic eruptions of the late 1960s.

After a wet and wild rise ashore we shook ourselves off, zipped ourselves up, secured our hats and scampered off in all directions.

Deception Island volcanic eruption, whalers bay 1968–69:

From Vivien Fuchs, *Of Ice and Men*

Snow began to fall while volcanic material rained down, knocking one of the men to the ground and damaging the radio he carried. Sheltering precariously under the rucksacks, they moved to the protection of some rocks as soon as possible, and then down to an old corrugated iron shed in Whalers Bay. In poor visibility, the splash of falling debris made it seem as if the bay was boiling, and birds could be seen flying desperately about seeking shelter.

Ripping sheets of corrugated iron from the walls of the hut, the men carried them over their heads, cautiously making their way along the beach towards base, where they hoped to use the transmitter to report their dire situation. Much of the old whaling station had been carried away by the melt water, which had deposited a vast quantity of ash and large blocks of ice. The shore line had been extended ninety yards to seaward, the jetty had disappeared, and the old whalers’ cemetery had vanished.

A hole, twenty feet wide, had been cut right through the old wooden base hut...the generators were almost buried in debris, while the tractors parked outside had been swept away to sea...

Steve led a scenic walk up to the higher reaches behind the hangar for close inspection of the rocks, and panoramic views of the island’s structure. Selina celebrated St Patrick’s Day with a bagpipe performance in one of the old whale tanks. Others hiked the length of the beach to Neptune’s Window to stand braced against the howling gusts and survey a fierce, magnificent ocean.

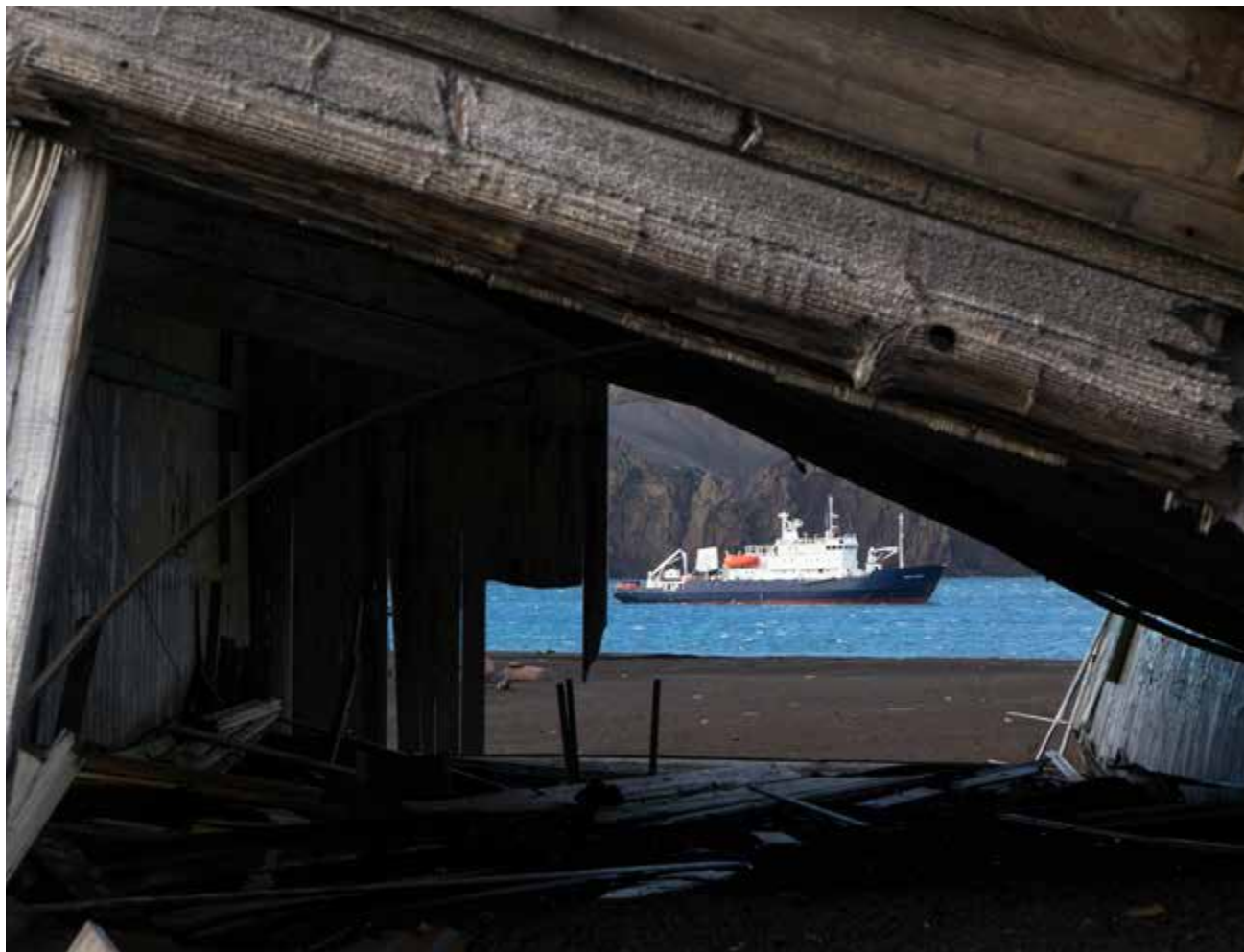
Our fur seal friends lined the shoreline without causing too much bother to passersby. At this time of the season, the breeding complete, they are more interested in snoozing than maintaining territory.

We arrived back onboard amid plumes of seaspray, but being seasoned gangway climbers it was onto the ship and into dry clothes in no time.

After lunch, enroute to our afternoon destination, Scott gave a presentation on how to gain the best results from phone photography. Our hopes for a final landing in the South Shetlands were dashed by 40-knot westerly winds which made it impossible to even launch Zodiacs. We ran the ship downwind and opted for a group photo out on the bow with the ice capped mountains in the background.

After dinner we headed out into the Drake and felt our ship roll and pitch.







DAY 8 | Monday, 18 March 2019

Drake Passage

Position:	20:50 hours	Course:	328°	Wind Speed:	14 knots	Barometer:	1002.6 hPa & rising
Latitude:	58°06’S	Speed:	13.5 knots	Wind Direction:	SW	Air Temp:	3° C
Longitude:	64°52’W					Sea Temp:	4.5° C

Our first day at sea felt decidedly lazy—a chance to catch our breath after the brisk pace of Antarctica. Our ship tracked northward, the westerly swell creating a sluggish roll. We had a good showing at breakfast which meant that the dreaded *mal de mer* had not taken hold.

Seabirds appeared throughout the morning—black-browed albatross, cape petrels and storm petrels—leaving us wondering why a bird would choose to be all this way from land. But as Roger explained in his talk on Southern Ocean seabirds, this stretch of water is home to seabirds large and small, who only need come to land to breed and rear their chicks. The wandering albatross with its enormous 3.5 metre wingspan, takes phenomenal foraging journeys across thousands of kilometres of ocean, and as well as resting on the ocean, is able to ‘cat nap’ on the wing, keeping one side of the brain awake. Roger spoke about the contrast in wing anatomy between the “flappers” such as skuas and cormorants with their relatively short, deep, low ratio aspect wings, and the “gliders”— large albatross with their long, sleek, high aspect ratio wings.

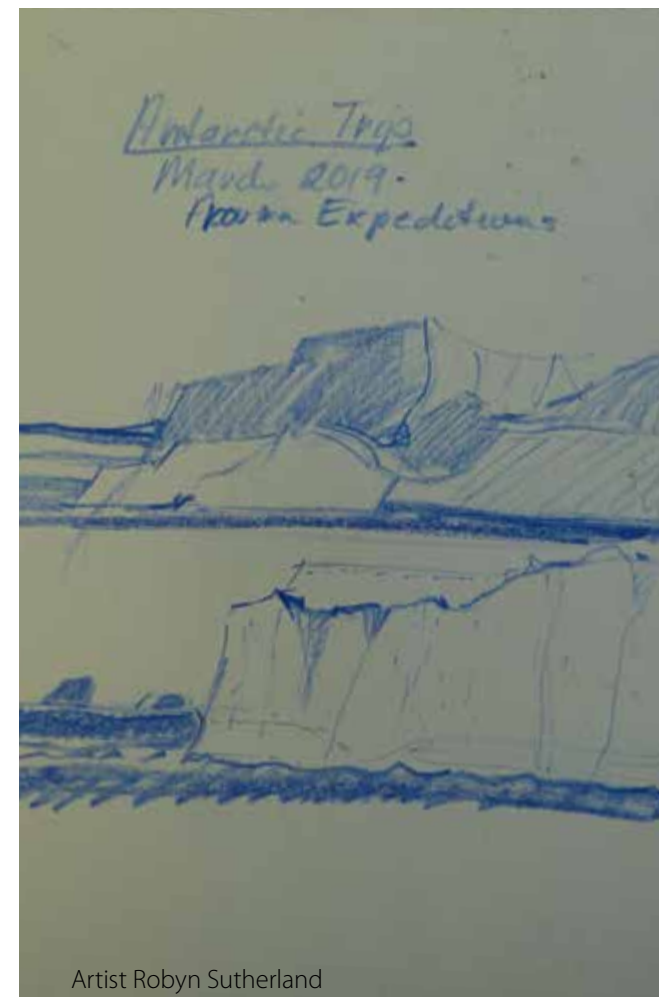
Next on the educational circuit was Ian, who enthralled us with the story of the Belgica Expedition, led by Adrienne de Gerlache, whose ship became locked in the pack ice in the Bellingshausen Sea and subsequently was the first to winter over in the late 1890s. From the get go, the expedition was blighted by trouble: engine failure, one man lost overboard and another who died of heart failure, lethargy, low spirits and scurvy. But finally the *Belgica* escaped the ice the following summer and returned to Europe, having completed extensive mapping of the Antarctic Peninsula and bringing home valuable scientific findings.

By midday we had passed north over the 60° South latitude line to place us beyond the political boundary of Antarctica. During the afternoon the sea and air temperature began to climb, indicating we were passing north of the Antarctic Convergence into relatively warm subantarctic waters.

Gary educated us on all kinds of ice—freshwater and seawater, and we got to understand the Antarctic ice cap, 3 kms high at its dome, which slowly flows downhill to the edges of the continent where mammoth ice sheets and glaciers calve off to form icebergs. As for sea ice, the continent of Antarctica doubles in size each winter with its wide valance of frozen ocean.

Captain Irvine Johnston entertained us next with his remarkable 1929 footage and inimitable narration of a voyage around Cape Horn, east to west, during an “A-One storm”, sailing on one of the last great Flying P Line commercial tall ships.*

**Around Cape Horn* DVD is available online from Mystic Seaport, USA



Artist Robyn Sutherland



DAY 9 | Tuesday, 19 March 2019

Drake Passage, Beagle Channel

Position: 21:00 hours **Course:** at anchor, Beagle

Latitude: 54°57'S

Longitude: 66°53'W

The weather gods looked ever so kindly upon the notorious 1,000-kilometre stretch of ocean known as Dark Passage. Not only did we make tremendous speed, but conditions were delightfully easy with a tailing wind and gentle roll.

As we neared the land mass of Tierra Del Fuego in the morning, the wind increased, as did the swell, reminding us of the force of nature. The passageways suddenly became trickier to negotiate. Still, there was a good showing for breakfast and perfect timing with our approach to Cape Horn soon after. We crowded in the bridge and ventured out the bridge door to experience the 40-knot winds and plumes of spray washing over our bow. In the distance, the shadowy headland of Cape Horn waxed and waned in the spindrift.

Cape Horn is the southernmost tip of the American continent, discovered in 1616 by the Dutch sailor Willem Schouten, along with Jacob Lemaire. In the days of sail, rounding the Horn from east to west was a major event. It usually meant a dramatic shift in sea and weather conditions as the ship moved from one ocean system to the other. The meeting point of the Atlantic and Pacific breeds violent and unpredictable weather. A Chilean naval detachment is stationed at the Horn, manned by officers posted from their normal base of Puerto Williams in the Beagle Channel.

Black-browed albatross, white-chinned petrels and shearwaters wheeled around the ship, totally alive and suited to these storm force conditions.



Wind Speed: 00 knots **Barometer:** 1009.3 hPa & rising

Wind Direction: calm **Air Temp:** 11° C

Sea Temp: 5° C

Once *Polar Pioneer* rounded to the east, our world turned calm as we motored northeast alongside the islands.

We eagerly joined Bettina for a talk on life in Greenland. Bettina will be joining Aurora's 2020 Arctic Inuit voyage as a cultural specialist and she shared with us a wonderful snapshot of the life, people, flora, wildlife, beliefs, diets and celebrations. Thank you, Bettina.

Steve attracted a full house with his talk on Antarctic dinosaurs, and shared with us some video filmed for Australia's *Catalyst* television program on the discovery of dinosaur tracks in the north-west Kimberley region of Australia.

In the hour before dinner it was time for our last formal gathering in the bar with Captain's Farewell Drinks. Gary thanked his team along with all the passengers who helped make this such a fine voyage. Certificates were issued and Captain Sasha offered a nice speech, wishing us all well and inviting us back. Our boys in the galley and girls in the scullery put on a fabulous dinner, and at last we had an opportunity to publicly thank Al, Bert, Dasha and Iliana for all their great work.

After dinner we gathered in the lecture room where Daniel shared a selection of the haikus submitted for the competition, and there were some beauties amongst them. So, too, an absolutely fabulous Favourite 3 Slideshow with an incredible diversity of images, reminding us what a special range of experiences we have had over these 10 days.







DAY 10 | Wednesday, 20 March 2019

Ushuaia

Position:	07:30 hours	Course:	docked at Ushuaia	Wind Speed:	5 knots	Barometer:	986.6 hPa & rising
Latitude:	54°48’S			Wind Direction:	NW	Air Temp:	8°C
Longitude:	68°18’W					Sea Temp:	5°C

BY ROGER KIRKWOOD

Our final morning on *Polar Pioneer* was a rush of luggage and farewells. Ushuaia is a beautiful town, buildings colouring the shoreline, surrounded by sharp peaks. Tied up to the long wharf, we disembarked. It was a happy and sad time after a great trip that began over a week ago on King George Island.

We had arrived at KGI by plane and on departing, our random-access memory filled with briefings, we headed across Bransfield Strait. Next morning, we woke to our first landing at Brown Bluff. It was sunny and cold – the sea was starting to freeze. The shore was dotted with gentoo penguins, a fresh dusting of snow and volcanic rocks that had tumbled from the brown cliffs above. Ice – brash, bergy bits, growlers and icebergs – sparkled in the water. Kayakers silently coasted through. A brilliant first landing.

After lunch Zodiacs were deployed to explore pack-ice, but the swiftly moving floes turned the outing into a Zodiac recovery mission – one being dragged over several floes to regain its freedom. The sunny weather played its part in making this a most memorable day.

A bouncy gangway greeted us at Gourdin Island - brisk wind, slippery ice covering the shore. Views from the top were breathtaking – as was the blasting wind. We saw Weddell seals, a lurking leopard plus gentoos and fur seals – our friends for most landings. The afternoon was at the Dragon’s Teeth of Astrolabe. A Zodiac outing – dodging bolts of wind to a roost of cormorants, cliffs of wheeling Antarctic fulmars, narrow channels and seals.

Hydrurga had snow flurries a small elephant seal and chinstraps. Enterprise had mist, the wreck of the steel whaling ship, *Guvernøren*, a leopard seal in its iceberg lair, and white islands rising into low clouds.

Then came Cuverville. A superb humpback entertained us: spying, rolling and tumbling around Zodiacs, kayakers and the ship. A rare experience. A nonchalant leopard seal randomly plucked a couple of gentoo chicks from the frolicking group at the shore, thrashed them to pieces (to the joy of dancing Wilson’s storm petrels) then fell asleep on an ice floe.

Neko Harbour was atmospheric – a wonderland of big fluffy snow-flakes, ice towers, pink granite rocks, a walk up snow to the view, and a villainous giant petrel making short work of a gentoo chick. Lemaire Channel, Pleneau iceberg cruising, Le Maire Channel, Port Lockroy—in rain with its British base (closed) and neatly arranged whale bones.

Contrasting with the white of the peninsula was the black of Deception Island. Volcanic sand, bleak crumbling buildings – a history we partly admire and partly feel shame about, the whaling era.

We had a benign Drake, although on approaching Cape Horn we felt a good roller-coaster swell. Swinging past, we headed for the Beagle. Ushuaia, the last morning – farewells, take cares, and saludos ... *hasta la proxima vez*.

A selection of voyage haikus

*Stillness of morning
The glow of pink through the clouds
Sunrise to behold
(Karen, cabin 307)*

*Gliding in a dream
Beached whale into zodiac
Embarrassing fail
(Heidi, cabin 310)
Penguins black white orange
Flapping, jumping, calling out
A Leopard seal's lunch
(Frances, cabin 503)
Inky black ripples
sweep infinity's surface
Snow falls from above
(Bev, cabin 301)*

*Steep, upwards terrain
Sliding downwards through moraine
Tattered pants to claim
(Debbie, cabin 507)*

*Dark wings over white ice
Gliding with purpose unknown
Giant Petrel, all alone
(John, cabin 301)*

*Ice flows in the sea
Drifting in the sparkling sun
Where are you...Robyn
(Martin & Jean, cabin 506)*

*My god, it's a whale.
Oh my god, it's underneath
Oh my, oh my god.
(Rossy, cabin 302)*

*Icy water awaits
Quick slither into kayak
Adventure beckons
(Sue, Cabin 309)*

*Deception's Cinder
Cetaceans in the Cauldrons
Boil Blubber Plunder
(Michael, cabin 306)*

*Resonant Russian
Deep rise and fall of cadence
Dawn breaks on the bridge.
(Tessa, cabin 405)*

*Storm petrels flying
Penguins waddling on the shore
Humpback whales at play
(Jaan, cabin 307)*

*She descends again
Yellow fluke brings fifty gasps
How can we give back?
(John, cabin 406)*



Kayaking Log

By Daniel Stavert

Kayaking Guide: Daniel Stavert

Kayakers:

Frances Deegan	Michael Reeves	Len Walter
Steve Jeffrey	Rossy Reeves	Sue Walter
Mike Newton	Veronique Sellies	Colin White
Jamie Prell	Brigid Sundborn	Ann Winton

DAY 1: No paddle

DAY 2: Brown Bluff; Antarctic Sound – Distance: 3.5 km

The morning began cold and icy. With frozen rudder cables and thick ice on the kayaks, the team spent a few minutes fitting their boats and getting ready to launch. Soon the paddlers undertook their first descent of the rope ladder, into waiting boats, and out onto the cold sea.

Paddling into the shore, the kayak team weaved in and amongst bobbing icebergs and crackling brash ice, pausing beneath the high hills of the bluff to marvel at the glacial moraines that loomed over the penguin colony below. Turning to the east, the team moved towards the landing. But first they had to negotiate almost frozen sea that lay between. Pushing through this water of almost slushy consistency, the whispery sound was unforgettable in the cold clear air. Turning in towards shore, the team made their landing on the continent itself, hauling the boats up, which looked like colourful beached seals onto the cobbles. The paddlers turned to admire gentoo penguins scattered everywhere. A few minutes on shore and the team was ready to return to the comfort of the warm kayaks, to defrost the hands, and make their way back through the ice and to the waiting *Polar Pioneer*.

DAY 5: Enterprise Island – Distance: 4.5 km

After a windy morning, the kayak team trusted their leader one more time and set out into the waters around Enterprise Island. A gentle rolling swell pushed the team in amongst the channels of the island. The snow settling on the water creating a layer of white, silencing noise that dampened the sound of paddles as the kayakers moved deeper amongst the islands. Signs of the whaling history of the bay soon appeared: waterboats and mooring posts, then the rusted hulk of the Guvernøren came into view. This old whaling vessel, wrecked in 1915, offered a very present reminder of the commercial history of the peninsula. Leaving the vessel behind, the paddlers were investigated by a docile leopard seal, and our paddlers took a moment to appreciate the wonder of being in kayaks in Antarctica. Soon though, the ever-falling snow, and the cold drew us back to *Polar Pioneer* and the end of a very Antarctic afternoon on the water.

DAY 6: Cuverville Island – Distance: 4.5 km

Setting out this morning into the calm waters of the Errera Channel, the paddlers intended to explore the island, but no sooner had they entered the water than the deep sigh and exhalation of a sleeping humpback whale echoed around the bay. The group approached and spent a few minutes with this slumbering cetacean. Soon, however, Daniel had the group paddling on, when a rumour came over the radio of more humpbacks to be found and the team followed out into deeper water. There a humpback whale was investigating every Zodiac it could find, and with the kayakers’ arrival, they too were subject to its friendly scrutiny. Rising out of the water to spyhop, rolling on its back, flukes and pectoral fins were on full display. Several times the whale rolled on its belly and slid under the whole kayak group, who were rafted together to create a stable platform.

The paddlers enjoyed a full half hour before continuing their mission to explore the island. Yet, on arrival, another distraction! This time by the local leopard seal, picking penguins off the beach ‘like candy’ as Michael observed. This apex predator casually took prey then swam out behind the shelter of an iceberg to separate flesh from bone by flinging the dead penguin back and forth.

An amazing morning at Cuverville, with the rawness and wonder of Antarctica on full display.

Neko Harbour – Distance: 8.5 km

Entering into Neko Harbour the cloud lowered itself down to the water. The mountains were obscured from view with only the lower hem of their glacial faces a clue as to their size and mass. The kayak team entered the water and paddled out into this mysterious landscape; the soft falling snow, and the still surface of the sea offered a true dreamscape.

Moving from iceberg to iceberg, the paddlers moved with a hushed silence in the serenity of the bay interrupted only by the sudden rumble and crash of glaciers calving somewhere in the gloom—a shattering sound in a place of such peace.

With the group beginning to feel the chill, they turned back to the ship. Which lay in dim shadow in the falling snow and fog. An atmospheric image to finish this truly beautiful afternoon.

DAY 7: Pleneau Island – Distance: 8.2 km

After an early morning transit of the Lemaire Channel, the kayakers entered the water intent on exploring the ice-choked waterway between the towering cliffs of Booth Island and low-lying Pleneau Island. A shallowing of the ocean floor and strong currents drives icebergs into this constricted bay and grounds them. Into this shifting landscape of streets and alleyways, the kayakers entered. The huge buildings of ice moved surprisingly quickly to reimagine their geography. The team moved through this subtle labyrinth, stopping to admire and photograph the ever-varying sculptures of the iceberg garden. As the moring came to an end, the paddlers turned for home. Several likely streets turned into cul de sacs but finally they found a laneway between two huge bergs and out into open water. A final paddle into increasing winds and they were back alongside *Polar Pioneer*, gracefully tumbling into the Zodiac and up the rope ladder into welcoming warmth of our cosy ship.

Port Lockroy – Distance: 5.1 km

A dedicated few set out this afternoon. Paddling into the teeth of the wind, the brave three pointed their bows to the shores of Jougla Point and Goudier Island. Arriving after some strenuous work, they hugged close to the shore, enjoying the calm between gusts and watching penguins arriving and departing the rocky shores. Turning the corner they pushed through some brash and made a landing on the shore of Jougla Point. Arriving in a flurry amidst brash ice, gentoo penguins, and blue jacketed passengers, they took a few minutes in the rain and cold to marvel at the blue whale skeletons and a quick rock chat with Steve our geologist. With rising winds and sleety rain, it was a short and chilly stay on shore. A quick return to the kayaks, which had been briefly occupied by penguins, then the three rode the tail winds back to our floating home.

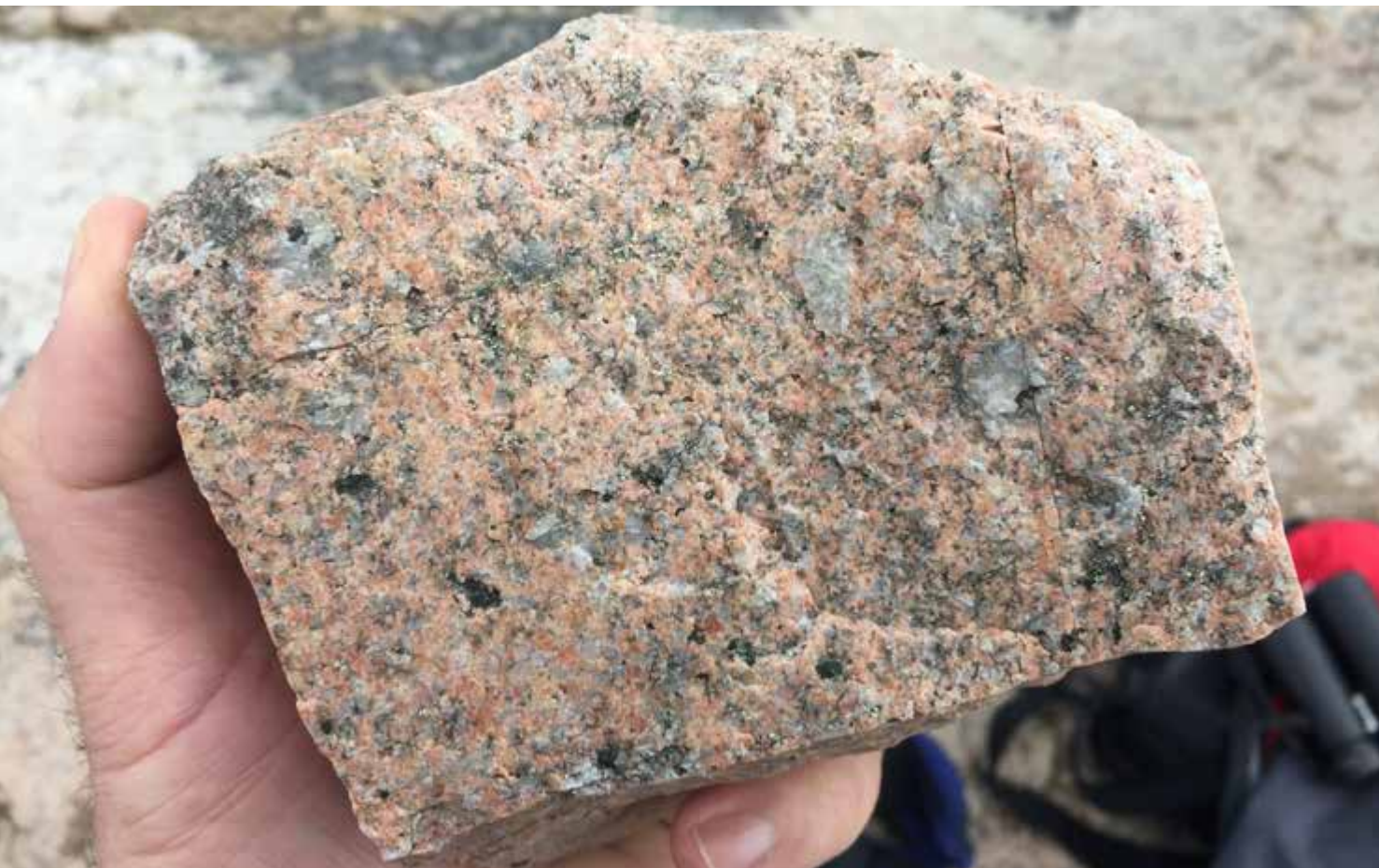
DISTANCE PADDLED: 34.3 KILOMETRES IN 6 PADDLES







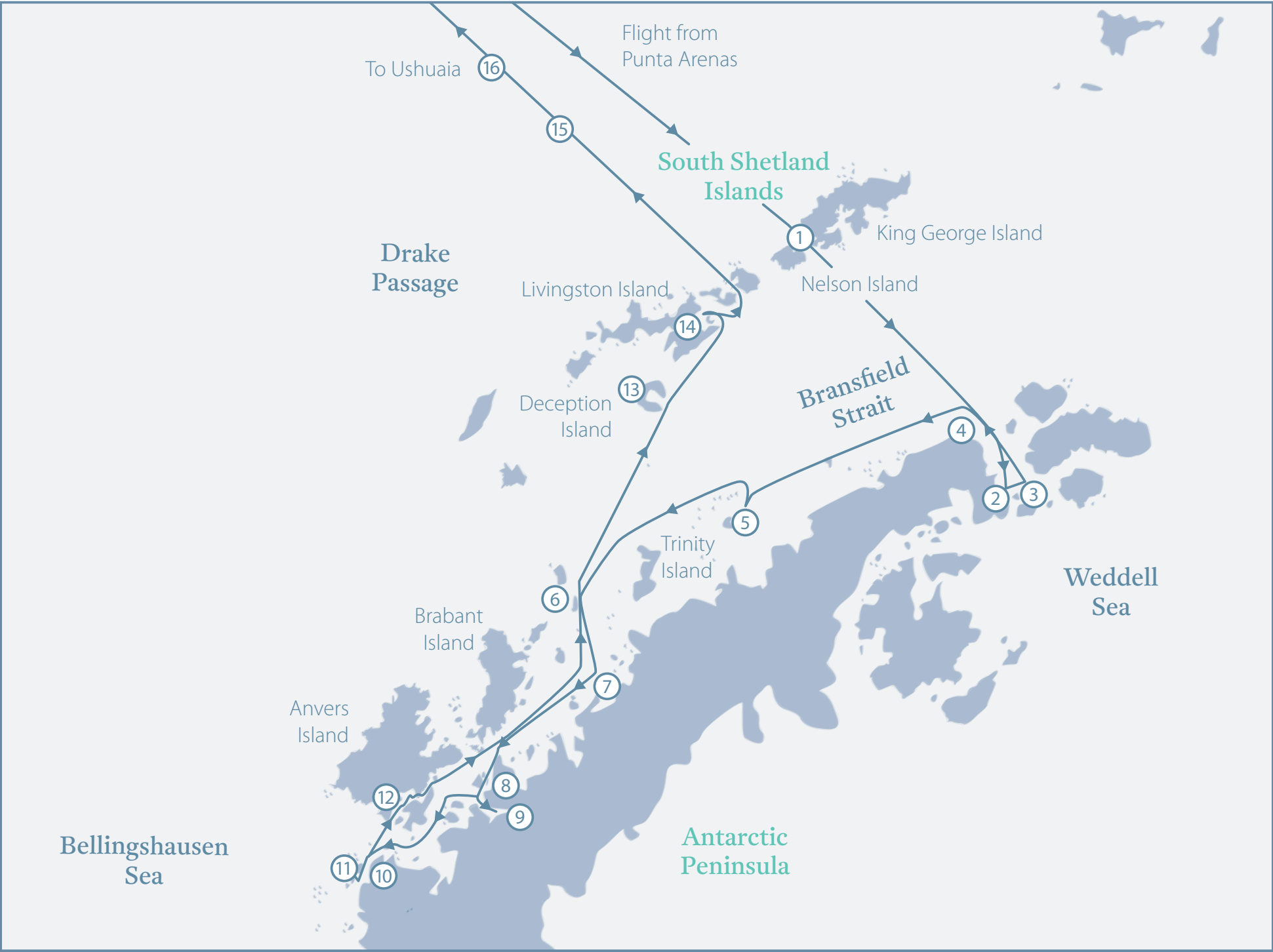




Antarctic Explorer

10 – 20 March 2019 | Distance Travelled: 1,220 nautical miles (2,257 kilometres)

Southernmost point of voyage: Pleneau Island 65°07.1S, 64°01.2'W



Destinations

- | | | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 01 Frei Base (King George Is) | 05 Astrolabe Is (Zodiac cruise) | 09 Neko Harbour | 13 Whaler's Bay (Deception Is) |
| 02 Robyn's boutique adventure | 06 Hydrurga Rocks | 10 Le Maire Channel | 14 Half Moon Is (too windy) |
| 03 Brown Bluff | 07 Enterprise Island | 11 Pléneau Is (Zodiac cruise) | 15 Drake Passage |
| 04 Gourdin Island | 08 Cuverville Island | 12 Port Lockroy/ Jougla Point | 16 Ushuaia |



Bird & Mammal Log

Bird Species	March								
	11	2	3	14	15	16	17	18	19
Gentoo Penguin	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Chinstrap Penguin		X	X	X					
Adelie Penguin		X	X						
Wandering Albatross								X	
Black-browed Albatross							X	X	X
Grey-headed Albatross									X
Southern Giant Petrel	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
White-chinned Petrel									X
Cape Petrel								X	X
Snow Petrel		X				X			
Blue Petrel								X	
Soft-plumaged Petrel								X	
Wilson's Storm-Petrel	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	
Black-bellied Storm-Petrel								X	
Southern fulmar			X				X		
Sooty Shearwater									X
Imperial Cormorant									X
Antarctic Cormorant		X	X	X	X	X			
Snowy Sheathbill				X		X			
Brown skua	X		X	X		X	X		
South polar skua		X			X	X	X		
Kelp Gull		X	X	X	X	X	X		
Antarctic Tern	X	X		X	X	X			

Mammal Species	March								
	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Antarctic Fur Seal		X	X	X	X	X	X		
Leopard Seal		X	X		X				
Weddell Seal			X	X					
Crabeater Seal		X			X	X			
Southern Elephant Seal				X					
Minke Whale		X			X	X	X		
Humpback Whale	X	X	X	X	X		X		



Gentoo penguin chicks



Fur seal



Gentoo penguins



Leopard seal



Chinstrap penguins



Snowy sheathbill



Humpback whale



Gentoo penguins



Fur seal



Humpback whale



Humpback whale



Expeditioners

Rabih Aboudargham
John Bailey
Steve Bell
Sue Bennett
Heidi Bullough
Frances Deegan
Rita Di Genua
Kevin Doig

John Farhall
Eliana Field
Dickie Field
Moir Finucane
Jaslyn Hughes
Katherine Jafari
Steve Jeffrey
Tessa Jones

Rod Katz
Debbie Klingberg
Ian Klingberg
Michael Lannan
Selina Lyons
Jeff Marsh
Jen Mills
Martin Moore

Jean Moore
Mike Newton
Karen Oitmaa
Jaan Oitmaa
Bettina Ovgard Petersen
Jamie Prell
Terry Redman
Natasha Redman

Rossy Reeves
Michael Reeves
Nick Robbie
Olli Robbie
Veronique Sellies
Phill Sherlock
Jenny Smith
Brigid Sundborn

Roger Sutherland
Robyn Sutherland
Bev Thiele
Vida Viliunas
Ben Wachtel
Terry Wachtel
Sue Walter
Len Walter

Elizabeth Walter
Howard Wheatley
Irene Wheatley
Colin White
Ann Winton



Expedition Team

Polar Pioneer Crew

Photo Credits

Expedition Leader:	Gary Miller	Captain	Aleksandr Evgenov	Stewardess	Daria Boykova	Rabih Aboudargham	Robyn Mundy
Assistant Expedition Leader:	Robyn Mundy	Second Captain	Vladimir Zimin	Stewardess	Alina Glazkova	Steve Bell	Karen Oitmaa
Naturalist:	Roger Kirkwood	Second Mate	Sergei Abramaov	Stewardess	Svetlana Fedora	Heidi Bullough	Bettina Ovgard
Paleontologist/Geologist:	Steve Salisbury	Third Mate	Evgenii Terentev	Stewardess	Anna Plavina	Frances Deegan	Scott Portelli
Historian:	Ian Evans	Radio Operator	Dmitry Korchevskiy	Stewardess	Iliana Koval	Kevin Doig	Jamie Prell
Kayaking Master:	Daniel Stavert	Chief Engineer	Denis Strelkov	Stewardess	Elena Liukshina	John Farhall	Rossy Reeves
Photographic Guide:	Scott Portelli	Second Engineer	Pavel Voronov	Russian Crew Chef	Denis Zhenchevskii	Dickie Field	Oliver Robbie
Doctor:	Mari Fleri	Third Engineer	Britvin Maksim			Eliana Field	Veronique Sellies
Head Chef:	Allan Estoque	Electrical Engineer	Viacheslav Deviatkin			Jaslyn Hughes	Phil Sherlock
Second Chef:	Herbert Cruz	Boatswain	Dmitry Belousov			Steve Jeffrey	Jenny Smith
Hotel Manager:	Kathrine Ersando	Able Seaman	Valerii Riabtcev			Tessa Jones	Daniel Stavert
General Assistant:	Anne Oyasaeter	Able Seaman	Aleksandr Kiselev			Roger Kirkwood	Brigid Sundborn
		Able Seaman	Rashit Ganiev			Debbie Klingberg	Robyn Sutherland
		Motorman	Dmitrii Litvineko			Selina Lyons	Elizabeth Walter
						Jeff Marsh	Sue Walter
						Jen Mills	Irene Wheatley
						Gary Miller	Colin White



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