



South Georgia & Antarctic Odyssey



16 January – 02 February 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 | Wednesday 16 January 2019

Ushuaia; Beagle Channel

Position:	19:38 hours	Course:	106°	Wind Speed:	12 knots	Barometer:	1006.6 hPa & steady
Latitude:	54° 51' S	Speed:	12 knots	Wind Direction:	W	Air Temp:	11°C
Longitude:	68° 02' W					Sea Temp:	7°C

The land was gone, all but a little streak, away off on the edge of the water, and down under us was just ocean, ocean, ocean—millions of miles of it, heaving and pitching and squirming, and white sprays blowing from the wave-tops...and we had the sky and the ocean to ourselves, and the roomiest place I ever did see...
— Mark Twain, Tom Sawyer Abroad

After weeks of excited anticipation and long, long flights from around the globe, we finally landed in cloudy Ushuaia, our departure port for our Antarctic and South Georgia adventure. At 1600 we arrived at *Polar Pioneer*, met the Expedition staff who proceeded to gather our passports and take a mugshot. We clambered up the gangway and were shown to our cabins. Then it was time to explore the nooks and crannies of our cosy new home.

On-board we total 52 adventurers with nationalities representing Australia (26), Canada (2), Hong Kong (1), India (2), United Kingdom (8) and United States (10), along with 8 Aurora Expeditions staff and 22 Russian and 3 Filipino crew.

We explored the decks, ventured down to the dining rooms for tea and coffee, then climbed up and down the various staircases. Howard then called us together to introduce the Aurora team and give a lifeboat and safety briefing. The sound of seven-short-one-long from the ship’s horn is our signal to don 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 finally had time to settle in to our cabins, explore the ship a little more and soak in the amazing mountain scenery of Ushuaia before our departure. At 1830 we slipped our lines heading east down the Beagle Channel. Smelling our last trees for some time and already spotting a plethora of winged wildlife our voyage had begun.

Hard as it was to tear ourselves away from the magical scenery and fair weather of the top deck the delicious smells of the galley beckoned. Now with a good appetite we enjoyed the sumptuous meal that our amazing chefs Al and Bert had prepared. Sufficiently satiated some braved the deck again to enjoy the cool evening air while others relaxed into their new home to debrief on the day’s events.







DAY 2 | Thursday 17 January 2019

At Sea in Drake Passage en route to Antarctica

Position: 19:30 hours

Latitude: 58° 16 S

Longitude: 63° 56'W

Course: 148°

Speed: 12 knots

Wind Speed: 11 knots

Wind Direction: E

Barometer: 993.3 hPa & steady

Air Temp: 5°C

Sea Temp: 5°C

I now belong to the higher cult of mortals, for I have seen the albatross.
— Robert Cushman Murphy, early 20th century American naturalist who voyaged to South Georgia on a whaler. He is also the author of the charming Logbook for Grace

During the night, we made our way out of the Beagle Channel and into Drake Passage. Where we were met with the urgent sway of open ocean as our sturdy *Polar Pioneer* forged its way south. Breakfast was a lively affair as mugs and cutlery zoomed their way from one end of the table to the other. Some braved 'mal de mer' in search of sustenance, while others decided to forego dining room smells and remain horizontal for the morning.

Our educational program began with a very pertinent lecture by Ben as he extrapolated on why the Drake Passage is so named. Ben told us how in 1578, Queen Elizabeth commissioned an English privateer, Sir Francis Drake to find the 'Great South Land'. He was blown off course as he travelled beyond the Straits of Magellan and reached 57° S before turning north again. We are sailing his namesake today.

We also learned how penguins got their names! From the Welsh word for white head: pen=head, gwyn=white. The rest of the morning was spent watching waves roll by from the bridge, reading, or acquainting ourselves with the ceiling of our cabins.

We were called to the dining rooms for a fantastic lunch of spaghetti and meatballs prepared by Al and Bert – superheroes of the sea-days! A post-prandial snooze was enjoyed by many as we were rocked to sleep by the swell.

Drake Passage is part of the Southern Ocean, the youngest ocean on Earth, formed a mere 30 million years ago. The narrow passage that we are traveling, between the tip of South America and the Antarctic Peninsula is where the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean meet and is also the narrowest stretch of ocean where the circumpolar current flows through. Because of this, Drake Passage holds the world record for the highest average waves and wind combination in the world, something that we felt a hint of today.

While we experienced the discomfort of the Southern Ocean's skin, beneath us it is teeming with life, all quite comfortable– from microscopic phytoplankton to nine species of baleen whales! Hopefully, we will encounter more of the Southern Ocean wildlife in the days to come.

The afternoon brought more useful knowledge. Alex showed us tips and tricks of how to take the best expedition photos. He covered the function of our camera, how to best prepare for cold weather with valuable (and sensitive!) equipment as well as how to think about composing a photo. All very nifty tricks!

As the afternoon drifted into evening, we relaxed in the bar or continued to familiarize ourselves with our bunks, a good book in hand.

As our first day at sea came to an end, we had become well-acquainted with the Drake's squirrely mood and as a result, hopefully are getting our sea-legs. Our anticipation for the continent to come grows with each plunge further south.



DAY 3 | Friday 18 January 2019

At sea, Drake Passage

Position:	18:20 hours	Course:	151°	Wind Speed:	20 knots	Barometer:	987.9 hPa & steady
Latitude:	62° 11'S	Speed:	11.9 knots	Wind Direction:	SSE	Air Temp:	1°C
Longitude:	59° 52'W					Sea Temp:	3°C

The Antarctic Convergence is perhaps the longest and most important biological barrier on earth, as formidable as any mountain range or desert. It is an obstacle to the dispersion of birds, fish, and, most important, plankton.
— David G. Campbell, The Crystal Desert, 1992

Morning dawned on a fog-strewn vista. Peering out our portholes, we encountered waves of the open ocean undulating out into the grey unknown. Not long after, we crossed the invisible line of the Antarctic Convergence and water temperature dropped from about 8° down to a chilly 4-5°. It will become even colder as we venture further south.

A morning of briefings! Aurora helped create the International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators (IAATO) and as inaugural members, we abide by the guidelines we helped create, guidelines that have now been ratified by the Antarctic Treaty signatories. The aim of non-disturbance to places we visit is the key message we carried away from Matt’s briefing. Having less than a “minor and transitory impact” means future generations will also enjoy this pristine but fragile environment.

Howard and Elena described how our landings and outings in the Zodiacs will take place and briefed us on the plans for tomorrow. Further preparation for our landings included a biosecurity check; vacuuming all our gear that we will be taking ashore, to ensure it was not harbouring any unwanted pests or seeds.

A little lie-down after lunch for some, while others ventured to the bridge and were lucky enough to spot both a royal and light-mantled sooty albatross flying near the ship. Watching these winged wonders soar above the waves is truly mesmerizing. Others peered through the ever-lifting fog to catch a glimpse of our first iceberg.

Matt introduced us to the flightless, feathered birds that we hope to encounter in the days to come. We learned some identification tips and tricks for the three brushtail species: gentoo’s with the orange beak, chinstraps with the ... chin-strap and Adelie’s with the black head and white circle around the eye.

Iceberg ahoy! At around 1800 our first iceberg appeared through the mist, tremendous in its mysterious beauty. After a gob smacking dinner, the wind continued on at 20 knots +, and it was apparent that it would not be an enjoyable evening to brave the weather outside. So, we continued on to our morning’s destination.

With Robert Island to port and Greenwich Island to starboard, we sailed through the English Strait. Ben elucidated on the sealing history from 1820-1823, when this area was ‘sealing-central’. Although the sealing industry was quite significant in Antarctic history, it has left few physical remains to allow its memorialization.

The eerie mist accompanied us into Bransfield Strait and seemed to hint at what adventures lay ahead – just out of sight.







DAY 4 | Saturday 19 January 2019

Enterprise Island, Cuverville Island

Position: 20:25 hours
Latitude: 64° 45' S
Longitude: 62° 41' W

Course: 78°
Speed: 2.6 knots

Wind Speed: 2.6 knots
Wind Direction: E

Barometer: 971.9 hPa & falling
Air Temp: 3°C
Sea Temp: 3°C

Antarctica is the windiest place on earth. Wind dominates all activity, sets schedules, imperils lives, makes one a hostage indoors.
—David G. Campbell, *The Crystal Desert*

We awoke to a foggy morning with tantalising glimpses of Gerlache Strait appearing through the mist. We breakfasted early in anticipation of our Zodiac cruise along Enterprise Island, and the weather cooperated as visibility improved to reveal snow-covered hills and icebergs of all sizes. By nine o’ clock, lifejackets donned, tags turned and boots washed, we were ready to board Zodiacs for our first venture into this ethereal seascape. Enterprise Island was so named because it was the hub of the region’s whaling industry in the early 20th century. Over 24 years, from 1904-1928, approximately 200,000 whales were taken for oil and bone - a far cry from their protected status today.

Our exploration of the coast took in a selection of icebergs, from the size of a dining table to floating mountains, moulded by the waves and wind into curious and beautiful forms. With hungry young to feed at this time of year, there were plenty of Antarctic terns busy fishing in the area. We also encountered two Weddell seals and a lone gentoo penguin, and made the acquaintance of the local cormorant colony, watched over, in slightly macabre fashion, by two skuas. In this area there is a very visual reminder of the island’s past in the shape of the wreck of the Norwegian whaling vessel *Guvernøren*. In 1915, the blubber vat aboard the *Guvernøren* caught fire and with 5,000 barrels of very combustible whale oil on board, the rest of the vessel soon followed. The ship remains burnt and beached to this day, remarkably well-preserved after 104 years.

The colourful flotilla of kayaks meandered their way along the coast as well, all kitted up for the their ‘shake-down’ paddle.

After lunch, we set out for Cuverville Island, home to the largest population of gentoo penguins on the Antarctic Peninsula. There are several rookeries on the island and now, at the height of the breeding season, there is much activity. We dispersed along the rocky landing beach, with one energetic group climbing the steep slope behind it, and enjoyed spending time witnessing the lives of these plucky and endearing birds - making the long and sometimes tricky walk to and from their nests, seeing off skuas, trying to keep peace with their neighbours and feeding their chicks. We were also lucky to see the beginnings of gentoo life from eggs being rolled on parents’ feet up to hatched chicks being fed from the mouth of its parent.

Before dinner, we gathered in Kathrine’s bar for a delicious drink to toast our Captain Sasha and the crew who work so hard to take care of us on this voyage. Having worked with Sasha for over 18 years, Howard spoke of our good fortune to have a captain with ‘fundamental Antarctic experience.’ The bar was jovial and buzzing as the dinner announcement was called and we merrily moved along to the dining rooms.

After dinner we sailed through a tranquil Errera Channel, mesmerised by rafts of gentoos bathing and shimmering ice.



Lemaire Channel, Pleneau Island, Port Charcot

Position:	20:20 hours	Course:	55°	Wind Speed:	10 knots	Barometer:	979 hPa & steady
Latitude:	65° 02'S	Speed:	14 knots	Wind Direction:	NNE	Air Temp:	3°C
Longitude:	63° 59'W					Sea Temp:	0°C

*I have eaten raw seal meat and caviar:I have drunk melted ice and champagne.
I have lived the life that suited me
And took risks without complaint.
If I could live my life over again
I'd do it all in exactly the same way.*
—Frank Hurley, 1885–1962, expedition photographer on Sir Douglas Mawson’s
AAE 1911–14, and on Sir Ernest Shackleton’s Imperial Trans-Antarctic
Expedition 1914–17

A hard-boiled egg under a glowering sky signalled our breakfast situation this morning. Beckoning us gently into its icy charm, the Lemaire Channel, with seven exquisite miles of plunging peaks that guard the narrow passage between Booth island and West Graham Land. Fifty shades of Antarctic grey in sky, mountain and ice greeted us as our ice captain and crew slowly threaded through the ice obstacle course.

Envision the *Belgica* under Adrien De Gerlache, pushing south to who knows where and eventually being the first ship to unintentionally, or perhaps intentionally, overwinter in Antarctica with the crew slowly succumbing to the winter madness. We sidled slowly through to the ice-berg graveyard surrounding Pleneau Island and it was like poking around in a freezer.

In almost tropical conditions, paddlers and Zodiacs slipped off into the pack ice on the adventure of our lives nuancing the Shackleton story. Leads were lost and found, mainly by Charlotte, gentoos looked bemused by the advancing fleet and crabeaters continued with their somnolence.

New larger penguins jumped and posed on small brashy bits hoping their fellow expeditioners would not abandon them, and ice collectors foraged for exquisite subjects to photograph and frame. Lost in this constantly-moving smorgasbord of the ice world, we thought we heard a Weddell seal sing, reminding us of the story of sailors succumbing to sirens in the past.

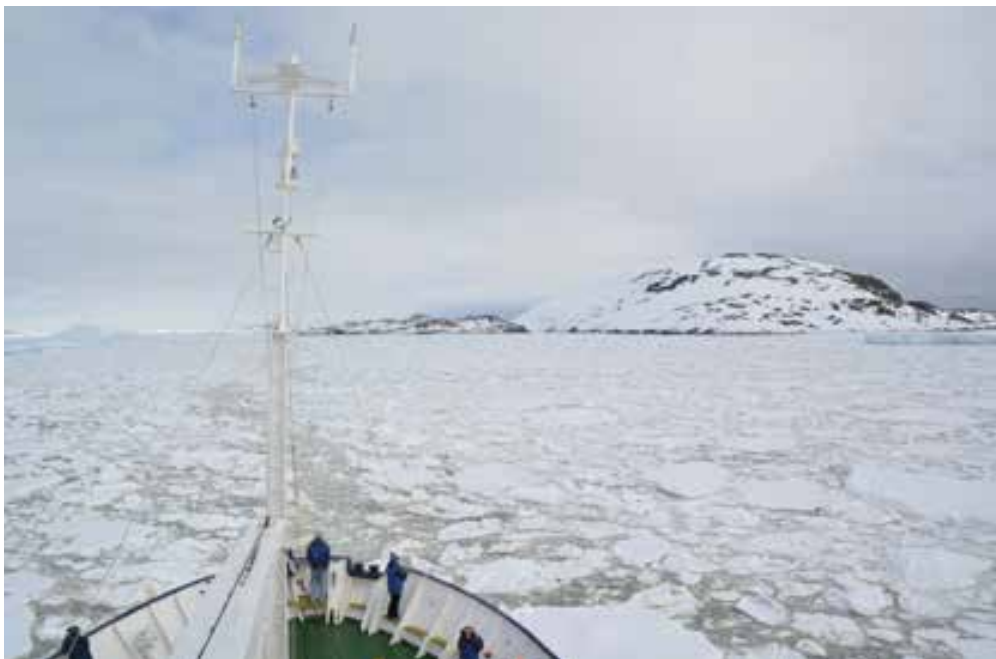
With paddles windmilling through the ice landscape, the kayakers returned from their own more local commune with the ice to race for the ship as the pack threatened to engulf them.

A fishy lunch quickly enjoyed was interrupted by a variation in the ship noise suggested that we were now in thicker pack ice that looked like a giant slushy. On the horizon, a yacht rescue was being enacted while wonderous castles of ice erupted around us and, everywhere a cornucopia of crabeaters. As the world’s most abundant seal and with a dog-like snout, they are the true denizens of the ice pack. Crabeater, however is a misnomer as these seals are world leaders in krill chomping, with the odd ice fish for side order. Gentoo penguins popped in and out of the water as they regarded our passage, but after checking with the yacht skipper to make sure the rescue was in hand, we made a nifty turn in worsening ice conditions and headed north again.

The Lemaire return voyage spookily closed in on us, with the temperature dramatically dropping and the racing current evident, as Matt stated “like someone had pulled out the bath plug”

Our evening delight proved to be a dramatic cruise then landing with a climb to Charcot’s memorial on Booth island (well done Ollie) interspersed with encounters with cruising crabeaters and lolling leopard seals. Our intrepid kayakers paddled through the gently falling snow, the colourful flotilla quickly turning to white. What a day!







DAY 6 | Monday 21 January 2019

Almirante Brown Station, Paradise Harbour, Portal Point

Position:	21:30 hours	Course:	24°	Wind Speed:	6 knots	Barometer:	992 hPa & falling
Latitude:	64° 13'S	Speed:	10.2 knots	Wind Direction:	NNE	Air Temp:	3°C
Longitude:	61° 35'W					Sea Temp:	2°C

I have often had the impression that, to penguins, man is just another penguin – different, less predictable, occasionally violent, but tolerable company when he sits still and minds his own business.
—Bernard Stonehouse, Penguins

“Good morning everyone,” Howard’s dulcet tones filtered through as we opened our eyes to a new day in Antarctica. Peering out our portholes, we found ourselves in a misty-grey Paradise Harbour. Breakfast was leavened with eager anticipation – our first landing on the Antarctic continent! Just in time for our disembarkation, the wind picked up to a feisty 25 knots making the Zodiac ride to shore a bit bumpy.

The base leader Maria Florencia, clad in her carrot-orange, weather-proof jacket greeted us as we clambered up stairs to Argentinean Base Brown. Working here from January -March, these scientists are studying fish and the effects of fishing in the area.

Huffing and puffing, we climbed the snowy Stairmaster up through the station, up past the gentoos and their chicks, up to the highest point we could reach. Gazing out from the precipitous viewpoint we could barely make out our lovely *Polar Pioneer* through the heavily falling snow. “Whooee!” A cry of delight rang out from the first of our intrepid bum-sliders as they gathered speed, swerving down the luge-like corridor of snow. Amidst giggles and exhilarated smiles, we loaded back on to the Zodiacs in search of large marine mammals.

Bobbing like an oversized buoy, a humpback whale was taking a morning snooze, its blowhole rising to the surface intermittently to fill its hefty lungs. Some Zodiacs zoomed towards a bird cliff covered with cormorants on nests. Fuzzy chicks popped their heads up searching for mom or dad, hopeful for a tasty meal. These fantastic birds are incredible in their adaptations for living by the ocean. With water-proof feathers they can dive up to 70 metres in search of fish, with an extra eye-lid evolved especially for seeing underwater.

At the back of the bay, Skontorp Glacier cascaded down the valley, ending dramatically at the waterline as towering seracs that appeared to be frozen in mid-tumble. Perhaps we have encountered the castle of the Ice Queen, one wondered, ruling majestically over the ends of the earth.

A far cry from the windy Zodiac departure in the morning, we seemed to glide back to the ship through a serene setting, water smooth as silk. Al and Bert treated us to their local Filipino delicacies and we gratefully filled our bellies and warmed up with a hot meal.

The Danco coast spread out in all its grandeur for our afternoon outing. The sky a textured monochrome contrasted with the endless white peaks crowding the coast. Our Plan A of landing at Portal Point was thwarted by the call of “whales!” We whizzed towards three humpbacks that were diving and blowing with unhurried grace. A rainbow-perfect ice arch was next on the menu and we took our share of photos before moseying around an artistically-inspired iceberg garden.

Another incredible, jam-packed day.



Astrolabe Island, Gourdin Island

Position:	21:15 hours	Course:	264°	Wind Speed:	3 knots	Barometer:	983.9 hPa & steady
Latitude:	62° 52'S	Speed:	10 knots	Wind Direction:	E	Air Temp:	5°C
Longitude:	58° 26'W					Sea Temp:	3°C

There is only one short link in the food chain between a diatom and a one-hundred-ton blue whale – between one cell and the largest of all animals – and that link is the Antarctic krill.
—David G. Campbell, *The Crystal Desert*, 1992

For many of us, yesterday morning may have been one of the most atypical of our lives. An alarm, a well-worn routine, familiar places, perhaps a commute? No. Instead - penguins, seals, seabirds, icebergs and the spectacular backdrop of Astrolabe Island.

Just north of the Trinity Peninsula, the northernmost part of the Antarctic Peninsula, Astrolabe Island was named by French explorer, Jules Dumont D’Urville, after his ship. As we approached, the tips of its peaks disappeared mysteriously into the mist above us. Zodiacs craned down and loaded, we began our early morning cruise. Chinstrap penguin rookeries, inhabited by some of the fittest penguins in Antarctica, soared steeply up from the waterline. Cormorants nest here, as do Antarctic fulmars. For many of us, it was our first opportunity to see these graceful birds.

Seals were in good supply- Weddells, crabeaters and a fur seal which came ashore and, to the delight of those watching, had a good scratch and roll around in the snow. For many, the jewel in the crown was an enormous leopard seal resting on an iceberg close to shore. She - likely to have been the case, as female leopard seals are larger than males - was just alert enough to raise her head a few times, giving glimpses of the distinctive head and powerful jaw of this species and affording some great photo opportunities.

Back aboard the ship, we tucked into a well-earned late breakfast, followed by more photographic treats, this time in the shape of an Antarctic photography workshop run by Lauren, one of our professional photographers.

After lunch we set off for our final Antarctic landing – Gourdin Island. The island is home to all three species of brush-tailed penguin: gentoo, chinstrap and Adélie. We spent a fantastic afternoon immersed in their world. Large rafts (the collective noun for penguins in the water!) emerged gleaming from the ocean with full bellies whilst others stood poised to go to sea, scanning for predators before taking their leaps. It was excellent to see plentiful well-grown chicks, some even beginning to acquire adult feathers.

Many folks hiked to the top of island and, marvelling along the way at how high some penguins will climb to build nests, and reaching the summit to be rewarded with 360-degree views including the Antarctic plateau and iceberg-studded ocean. Some of us witnessed a Weddell seal beaching virtually at our feet. It was hard to tell whether us or it was the more surprised, but it took having an audience in its stride - or should I say stroke - and settled down for a snooze.

Before dinner we gathered in the bar to recap our Antarctic experiences. Ably facilitated by Howard, we shared our reflections on our adventures to date - piquant, thought-provoking and in many cases funny.

Antarctica had one last treat for us. On the way to Elephant Island we were able to make a stop at the iceberg A57A from the Larsen ice shelf before steaming further north.







DAY 8 | Wednesday 23 January 2019

Elephant Island, Point Wild

Position:	19:30 hours	Course:	60°	Wind Speed:	15 knots	Barometer:	990 hPa & steady
Latitude:	60° 58'S	Speed:	12.5 knots	Wind Direction:	NNW	Air Temp:	6°C
Longitude:	54° 25'W					Sea Temp:	1°C

The hut grows more grimy every day. Everything is sooty black. We have arrived at the limit where further increments from the smoking stove, blubber lamps, and cooking gear are unnoticed. It is at least comforting to feel that we can become no filthier...from time to time we have a spring cleaning, but a fresh supply of flooring materials is not always available, as all the shingle is frozen up and buried by deep drifts. Such is our Home Sweet Home.

—a crew member writing about living conditions at their Elephant Island camp

Still fatigued, but suffused with the excitement of having faced the complexity of the calculations needed to determine that A57A was 22 kms long, the morning was mellow. As Holly declared, today was a time to relax and reflect on the wonders of the last few days, memories fresh in our minds after the recap. The sea mollycoddled us, but the skies were still murky. Film buffs watched the first episode of Shackleton, showing his ability to charismatically wheedle money out of rich benefactors from the jute and tobacco industry to purchase two ships. After 500 applications, including one from three jaunty girls, the final 54 were chosen for the Imperial Transcontinental Expedition.

Paralleling our own journey through ice packs and floes, we travelled with Shackleton’s men from the moment the electric lights of the dying ship were eventually snuffed: “She’s going boys”. Their eventual race from the crumbling ice floes of Patience Camp, surrounded by orcas and massive crushing ice, was a desperate dash to any land after 16 months at sea. Our own struggles against wind, current and packing ice probably contributed to our understanding of the dangers involved – and these were faced with limited food and water in desperate, miserable conditions for seven days in the boats.

So, Elephant Island reared its wild, gothic, threatening and magnificent topography out of the sea, wreathed in ethereal cloud and promising anything but solace. Hugging rocks and fingering pebbles however proved to be heaven for these men intoxicated with the feeling of terra firma. Cape Valentine, known by American and British sealers in the 1830s, proved to be too vulnerable to tide driven waves, so Frank Wild proved his incredible worth again by finding a better beach seven miles to the west and the men reluctantly accepted this decision to move camp.

Our own approach to Point Wild through lifting mist, crashing waves laced with ice blocks, and glacial cracks and falls was equally as dramatic. Chinstrap penguins chattered as we raced through a quirky channel to survey the eroding site where Frank Wild supported the 22 men. Still in desperate straits in this isolated area – Shackleton realised that the only answer was an astounding sea journey of 800 miles across some of the most tempestuous seas in the world in what amounted to a coracle! We imagined the upturned boats offering little comfort to the remaining men over the most miserable 4 ½ months before their miraculous rescue.

Today fabulous tabular wedding cake icebergs crowded the bay – each adorned with penguin ornaments. Cheering them on in their attempts to use wave power to launch them onto the precipitous ice slopes, we watched them crampon up with their claws. Not always successful, but these champions of persistence were heartily cheered by their Zodiac advisors. Porpoising penguins pirouetted through pintado (cape petrel) rafts in the swell as we surfed our way back to the ship for a fabulous surprise – the “rare as penguin” teeth, Point Wild Polar Plunge. Seventeen wildy wacky plungers entertained the crowd – David had a paparazzi failure and even did a second take back-drop for us.

Chattering penguins had nothing on the buzz from the bar after this jaw dropping day – Point Wild proved to be completely up to its name!



DAY 9 | Thursday 24 January 2019

Scotia Sea, towards South Georgia

Position:	19:20 hours	Course:	55°	Wind Speed:	30 knots	Barometer:	979.9 hPa & falling
Latitude:	58° 32'S	Speed:	11.6 knots	Wind Direction:	NNE	Air Temp:	4°C
Longitude:	46° 38'W					Sea Temp:	3°C

Now we clung to a battered little boat, “alone, alone- all, all; alone, alone on a wide, wide sea”. So low in the water were we that each succeeding swell cut off our view of the sky-line.
—Sir Ernest Shackleton, South

The Scotia Sea gently rocked us awake and we opened our eyes to a new day. Not too much sway, mind you, just enough motion to remind us that we were in fact sailing at all, despite being on one of the world’s most tempestuous oceans. The easy swell lasted throughout the morning and we reveled in the stability of the breakfast table.

To prepare for arrival at the magical isle of South Georgia, we once again complied with the mandatory environmental guidelines that allow us to step foot on land. Cozied up like sardines, we managed to fit all 52 expeditioners into the lecture room for an illuminating movie on how to minimize our impact on South Georgia. Charming pan-pipes accompanied us on our journey through the do’s and don’ts of South Georgia, bringing home just how much is needed to protect one of the world’s natural hot spots. As privileged visitors, we all play a part in keeping it pristine and wild.

The purring of vacuum cleaners filled hallways as we hauled our gear to the bar or the lecture room to clean whatever organic matter we could find from our clothes and equipment. Nozzles searching the pockets and corners of our packs was the mornings’ entertainment. We scoured Velcro and gumboot soles in search of sneaky seeds and unruly hitchhikers. We signed the requisite paperwork and then, phew! We were free to enjoy our day at sea.

Matt regaled us with sea-bird identification tips and tricks during his late-morning presentation.

After another scrumptious lunch from Al and Bert, it was time to relax. The gentle roll became more assertive as we rocked in our bunks, reminding us that we are but a speck on this vast ocean. These leisurely and languid days give us a rare opportunity to take stock of where we’ve been. We have not only seen, but touched, heard and of course, smelled a bit of the White Continent.

To further our Shackleton education, Ben recounted the epic journey of endurance that he and his 27 men survived over 100 years ago. As we confidently and cosily sail between Elephant Island and South Georgia over two days, we can appreciate the tenuous circumstances that Shackleton and five other men faced during the same journey, but over 17 days in the tiny, gallant James Caird.

Our portholes resembled washing machines as we pressed on through the evening’s white caps. South Georgia is located south of the Antarctic Convergence, is 170-km long and two to 40 kms wide. And though we’ve set our sights to exploring this jewel of the South Atlantic in the days ahead, don’t forget to head up to the bridge today to search for some of the many seabirds Matt described, and marvel at the wonders of the Scotia Sea.





Heading towards South Georgia, Scotia Sea

Position:	18:25 hours	Course:	58°	Wind Speed:	12 knots	Barometer:	987.9 hPa & steady
Latitude:	56° 14'S	Speed:	1 knots	Wind Direction:	NNW	Air Temp:	4°C
Longitude:	39° 44'W					Sea Temp:	4°C

At 12.30 pm we ran the boat ashore on a low beach of sand and pebbles, with tussocks growing above high-water mark. Just east of us was a glacier snout ending on the beach...The spot was separated from the mountainside by a low Moraine bank rising twenty or thirty feet above sea level. Soon we had converted the boat into a very comfortable cabin a la Peggotty, turfing it around with tussocks which we dug up with knives.

—Sir Ernest Shackleton, South

A steady loping roll sped us through the night, and deposited us in a morning spangled with sparkling blue in the midst of the Scotia Sea. The Scotia Sea is one of six seas that are part of the Southern Ocean (the others are the Weddell, Ross, Amundsen, Bellingshausen, and Cosmonaut seas). It is contained in the basin of what is known as the Scotia Arc, an elongated undersea horseshoe ridge, extending out from the Antarctic Peninsula, turning back on itself at the South Sandwich Islands at the Southern Ocean’s deepest point (7412m deep!), and running along another ridge back towards the Drake Passage. Our destination, South Georgia, is an exposed part of this ridge.

With the treat of a clear sky, the horizon raced further away than we have had so far, emphasising the magnitude of the journey of the James Caird across this very body of water in May 1916. The morning sunlight proceeded to showcase the Scotia Sea at its very best – a rolling swell that was lively but not threatening, a stiff breeze whetting but not piercing, and Southern Ocean birds wheeling and looping around bow and stern – or in the case of Wilson’s storm petrels, dancing and dipping.

From the vastness of the ocean we turned at mid-morning to the micro world of one of the region’s most important and successful plant types – lichen. Alex shared with us his wonderfully vivid images and fascinating explanation of how these ubiquitous lifeforms survive and thrive in Antarctic and sub-Antarctic regions. There is something extra-terrestrial about these intriguing plants under a microscope, a melding of fungus and algae producing a hardy plant type adapted to the variations of Antarctic climate. And beautiful, splashing rocks with a palette of colours and textures.

As our trusty *Polar Pioneer* trailed out its furrow, so we sat down to a (well-earned?) Ploughperson’s Lunch. While some caught up with the rest of the Shackleton story, others made the most of the day photographing on the back deck, which proved to be a popular destination for birds and people to encounter each other. The sun’s radiance started to diminish, and as a sign that the game was up, a large wave was shipped across the back deck, catching a few on the hop. Photographic processing proceeded apace indoors, interrupted by a talk by Ben on the history of South Georgia. First discovered by Captain Cook in 1775, as sad as it was to hear, the island’s past has been dominated by the slaughter of 1.3 million Antarctic fur seals and elephant seals (1785-1815), and then whales (1904-1965). The start of the whaling industry was one of the reasons that the island was taken over by Great Britain in 1908, and ever since has been governed as one of the Falkland Islands Dependencies.

Luckily the fur seals have bounced back to almost near their pre-sealing numbers, so Matt could give us a lecture late in the day explaining the breeding, living and behavioural habits of the seal species we are expecting to enjoy on our South Georgia landings. We crossed our fingers for good weather, as under lowering skies we sat down to another scrumptious dinner – sans ‘jugged hare’ – that appeared from the magic box that is Al and Bert’s galley. We closed our eyes, arrowing towards our first encounter with the wonders of South Georgia on the morrow.







DAY 11 | Saturday 26 January 2019

Cooper Bay, Drygalski Fjord

Position: 21:00 hours **Course:** 310°
Latitude: 54° 28'S
Longitude: 35° 53'W

Wind Speed: 33 knots **Barometer:** 985 hPa & falling
Wind Direction: WNW **Air Temp:** 4°C
Sea Temp: 3°C

*Be content with a little light,
So be it your own.
Explore and explore.*
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

It started with a berg ... a tabular, then another and another! As the forbidding and savagely dramatic mountains of the Salvesen range eventually threw off its lenticular and fohn wind clouds, we had our first glimpse of South Georgia, a submarine link between South America and Antarctic formed 200 million years ago. Cooper Bay, a “macaroni out of the hat” was a most unexpected landing – thanks Howard! Balmy and sheltered, slopes of impossibly green-flowering tussac flowed down to the crustose lichen orange at the shore line. The results of recent rat eradication on the island were obvious in the lofty flitting of the world’s most southern song bird, the South Georgia pipit. Cruisers spotted diving terns, large cormorant babies, fur seal synchronised swimmers and lolling elephant seals watching us tetchily from their moult on the raised beach shore line. Larger than life penguins, described by Holly as a set of magistrates surveying the scene, were the forerunners of the snaking line of king penguins standing guard along the melt stream from the receding Quensel Glacier. Gentoo and chinstrap penguins porpoised and played around the Zodiacs in the swell and swirling kelp.

Our landing kindergarten-coralled many very fresh fur seal pups, and halted us with cries of adoration. Fur seal numbers now being four million, it is hardly conceivable that they were thought to have been nearly extinguished, with recovery only from a small remaining colony around Bird Island off South Georgia’s northernmost point. Clumping up the stream bed like a spaghetti string on their way to the macaroni colony, our penguin spotters were flummoxed a little by the expansion of the macaroni colony.

All agreed that exotic headgear makes Macaronis, named after fashionable London spivs, the nattiest of penguins and they are also the most numerous in South Georgia. Kayakers shot the channels while holding onto the waving hair kelp and had baby fur seals playfully nibble their kayaks. Alex shouted the many intrepid manoeuvres that were required for safe belly flops into the Zodiac and back onboard.

A wonderful lunch later and the ship pushed South to Drygalski harbour – a plunging fiord with the retreating Risting Glacier snout, milky aquamarine waters and needle spires of the Salvesen Mountains to the east, and a momentary whale sighting. An uncharted moraine front on the ship charts. Howard personalised the ice retreat by describing the surveyance journeys of Duncan Carse in the 1950s, accompanied by one of our Aurora historians, when they skied down the glacier front to the sea – now climbing ropes would be required! Snow petrels and albatrosses wheeled, flotillas of cape petrels were snacking at the glacier snout and fur seals flapped as the captain did a very smooth U turn into winds at times reaching forty knots and we retraced our wake to Larsen Harbour. Captain Larsen’s whaling fleet utilised this safe harbour in 1894 before establishing Gritviken as the first whaling station in 1904.

Aforementioned 40 knot winds, very wetting rain and mini tornadoes quashed all hopes of a Zodiac /kayak outing this afternoon but observing a force 10 gale from our cosy ship was just as rewarding.

Hot coffees and early beers lubricated our passage through a pod of humpbacks off Gold Harbor on our way to a twilight reconnaissance at Moltke Harbour. South Georgia has already cast her spell!



Godthul, Gold Harbour

Position:	22:35 hours	Course:	320°	Wind Speed:	18 knots	Barometer:	1007.9 hPa & rising
Latitude:	54° 23' S	Speed:	6 knots	Wind Direction:	NNW	Air Temp:	6°C
Longitude:	35° 57' W					Sea Temp:	5°C

In intense excitement we watched the chronometer for seven o'clock when the whalers would be summoned to work. Right to the minute the steam whistle came to us, borne clearly on the wind across the intervening miles of rock and snow. Never had anyone of us heard sweeter music. It was the first sound created by outside human agency that had come to our ears since we left in December 1914. —Ernest Shackleton, from his journal, May 1916, on the last leg of his South Georgia alpine crossing from Fortuna Bay

What a day for wildlife and scenery! Early yesterday we approached St Andrew's Bay, Plan A for the morning. However with winds blowing in excess of 40 knots (75 km/h) at the ship and even more close inshore, Mother Nature had ruled out Zodiac launching. So, we headed north to the more sheltered bay at Godthul. A pleasant surprise for our morning outing.

Mountains with a dusting of fresh snow enclosed an almost perfectly circular bay, fringed to one side by a stony beach and emerald-green tussac. Here we landed, to be greeted by fur and elephant seals, gentoo penguins, including a striking white morph, and king penguins - a first acquaintance with them for many of us.

The rusting boilers of a small whaling station stood reminder of the human history of the bay, along with hundreds of whale bones, bleached and scoured over the years. Much of the group wended their way up to the tarn-studded plateau behind the beach and found, along with excellent views, pintail ducks, gentoo colonies and giant petrel nests with huge fluffy chicks in situ.

There were plenty of South Georgia pipits around, a heartening indicator of the success of the rat eradication project on the island. To top it all off the sun became more and more evident, highlighting the hillsides and glinting off the water. As lunch progressed we headed back towards St Andrews Bay, but the winds were still very strong so we turned our sights further south to the spectacular Gold Harbour, home to over 25,000 breeding pairs of king penguins.

This was an opportunity to experience the wildlife of South Georgia on a grand and intimate scale. The king penguin colony stretched away almost as far as the eye could see, whilst many of us witnessed the details that make up daily life here - king penguins incubating their eggs, giant petrels preying upon the colony, juvenile fur seals exercising their swimming skills in the surf and elephant seals jousting.

Penguin fluff in the air, fur seal calls mixing with king songs in a dramatic duet painted the scene for our afternoon stroll along the beach. There were also one or two not-so-everyday events such as elephant seal investigation of a camera tripod (in which, unfortunately, the tripod came off worst!).

How different the demeanour of these elegant king penguins from their more frantic brush-tailed cousins! Calm and stately as befits their name. Some birds could not contain their curiosity over their human visitors and their inquisitiveness made for some fantastic 'up close' meetings. Back aboard the *Polar Pioneer* for a late dinner, all talk was of the marvels of the day. Another spectacular day full of surprises on South Georgia.







DAY 13 | Monday 28 January 2019

Fortuna Bay, Stromness Harbour, Grytviken

Position:	22:25 hours	Course:	27°	Wind Speed:	30 knots	Barometer:	993 hPa & steady
Latitude:	54° 16' S	Speed:	10 knots	Wind Direction:	NW	Air Temp:	6°C
Longitude:	36° 27' W					Sea Temp:	4°C

It had been arranged that a gun should be fired from the relief ship when she got near the island. Many times when the glaciers were ‘calving’ and chunks fell off with a report like a gun, we thought that it was the real thing, and after a time we got to distrust these signals. As a matter of fact, we saw the Yelcho before we heard any gun. It was an occasion one will not easily forget.”

— Second-in-Command Frank Wild, recounting the crew’s rescue from Elephant Island, more than four months after Shackleton and five others had left the island to secure rescue.

A bleary-eyed breakfast we enjoyed, with visions of king penguin chicks still dancing in our heads from our fabulous evening prior. No rest for the adventurous they say! Without further delay, 40 hardy souls accompanied by 7 eager expedition staff rugged up and were shuttled to shore for the six kilometre walk from Fortuna Bay to Stromness Harbour. Well-fed, watered and dressed in sensible layers, our hike was a far cry from Shackleton, Worsley and Crean’s experience over one hundred years ago. Nonetheless walking in their footsteps did seem an homage venerating their epic journey of survival in 1916.

The jagged ridge of Admiralty Peak and the Wilkens Peaks beyond the König glacier set the scene as we plodded up through tussock mounds. Our dear *Polar Pioneer* seemed rather miniature in the bay below as it sailed from view, hopefully to reappear in Stromness. Myriad mountains surrounded us as we climbed higher, higher and higher. The chilled-out 12 who remained onboard enjoyed a leisurely cup of tea and time to reflect on the magical evening before. Visibility was lost in cotton wool clouds, but was regained as we sailed into Stromness Harbour, just as the walkers came over the pass.

Once a busy whaling hub of South Georgia, this region hosts three abandoned whaling stations: Husvik, Leith and Stromness. Leith was the largest station on South Georgia from 1909 to the 1960’s when whaling was finally banned in the region. Over a thousand workers worked on stations and ships all over South Georgia at the height of its whaling industry.

The eerie rust-covered remnants still haunt the shore, a reminder of history from the not-so-distant past. Rosy-cheeked expeditioners streamed down past Shackleton Waterfall and criss-crossed the braided watercourse until a mine-field of fur seals and nesting Antarctic terns presented the final hurdle of our journey. A nursery of chocolate-brown baby fur seals greeted us at the shore, armed with growl and bluff as we loaded back onto the Zodiacs.

Mmmmmm, had we earned our meal today! Delicious smells of pasta carbonara wafted through the halls and Al and Bert’s effort once again soothed our rumbling tummies. Never have our boots and waterproof pants and bags been so thoroughly inspected and cleaned as this afternoon. Heeding Howard’s warning of the strict biosecurity measures, we diligently vacuumed our pockets and nit-picked our Velcro in expectant anticipation of the inspection before our afternoon outing.

The lovely Danni came onboard from the South Georgia Heritage Trust to share significant information about the hard work that’s been done over decades to rid the island of invasive species – specifically rats and reindeer. Then we were shuttled to shore for a toast to ‘the Boss’ with a dram of whiskey. Thus began our Illustrious afternoon at Grytviken.

A colourful flotilla of paddlers was seen toodling around the point and enjoyed their own toast with a slop of Irish whiskey. Back onboard Al, Bert, Kathrine and the stewardesses were busy at work preparing a night of festivity, fun and scrumptious food. We danced the evening away in King Edward Cove.



DAY 14 | Tuesday 29 January 2019

Prion Island, Salisbury Plain

Position:	19:15 hours	Course:	300°	Wind Speed:	38 knots	Barometer:	973 hPa & falling
Latitude:	53° 57'S	Speed:	6.7 knots	Wind Direction:	NNW	Air Temp:	5°C
Longitude:	37° 25'W					Sea Temp:	4°C

My good friend the governor said I could settle down at Port Stanley and take things quietly for a few weeks. The street of that port is about a mile and a half long. It has the slaughterhouse at one end and the graveyard at the other. The chief distraction is to walk from the slaughterhouse to the graveyard. For a change one may walk from the graveyard to the slaughterhouse.
— Ernest Shackleton

This morning delivered the fug of last night’s BBQ. Remnant memories of crazy hats and dancing were quickly washed away in freezing rains that enveloped *Polar Pioneer*. Looming through sheets of mist and rain our destination (Prion Island) materialised in the distance. Sadly, Howard’s wake-up service announced that persistent rain and increasing winds had thwarted our dawn adventures, and we all lay down to catch a few more minutes of precious sleep.

Post-breakfast brought a new window of opportunity; Zodiacs were launched and loaded with folk from the starboard cabins. Ashore, we split into small groups and proceeded up the board-walk hoping to see the majestic wandering albatross. What a special moment it was to see six breeding pairs moving about, preening and taking to the air. Alongside the wanderers, a few northern giant petrels tended their nests. A rapid weather change, together with urgent chatter over the radio, hailed a swift departure from the island.

As the ship moved to a more sheltered location, the adventure of re-embarking began. A strong northeast swell and cyclonic northwesterly winds worked against us, but our Russian sailor, Igor, stoically worked in waist deep water, while we persisted and our nimble steps back up the gangway. brought us safely on board.

Beaming with adrenaline, we dried off and warmed our hands on the life-saving bar heaters on the bridge. The sun finally made an appearance and the clouds lifted to reveal the peaks and flowing glaciers of the Bay of Isles. In the distance the vast open expanse of the Salisbury Plain appeared covered in dandruff, or was that penguins?

The sun didn’t last long and with our bellies full of lunch we ventured out to land at the Salisbury Plain. The weather turned yet again, but with the thoughts of our last hours in South Georgia foremost in our minds, we pressed on and managed to land all port and starboard folk safely, albeit a little wet, on the beach. The vastness and density of the king penguin colony that lay before us was overwhelming. It’s a rare but humbling experience to feel small and out-numbered as a human in today’s world, and Salisbury gave us all that feeling.

Back on board, and ploughing into a stiff headwind as we made our way along the northern coast of South Georgia, we were accompanied by an array of seabirds demonstrating their superb skills on the wing.

Thanks South Georgia, despite your inclement weather, your mountains, glaciers, beaches, tussac and diversity of wildlife will be remembered by us all.





Farewell South Georgia. Scotia Sea heading for the Falklands

Position:	20:20 hours	Course:	280°	Wind Speed:	30 knots	Barometer:	987.9 hPa & steady
Latitude:	53° 17'S			Wind Direction:	NE	Air Temp:	3°C
Longitude:	42° 33'W					Sea Temp:	3°C

Remember those fabulous multiple-choice postcards from the 70's and 80's? While we don't have the cheesy images to go with it, the style of today's *Penguin Post* harks back to those days, and is somewhat interactive...see how you go.

1. This morning at breakfast:

- a) I ate porridge.
- b) My hard-boiled eggs ended up on the floor.
- c) I quarelled with my fellow diners over who had the Vegemite.
- d) I was in my bunk zonked out on Phenergan.

2. During Matt's lecture about living and working in Antarctica:

- a) I learnt that it is possible to go without a shower for three months.
- b) I felt grateful that I was in Antarctica on the *Polar Pioneer* and not the 'melon' or the 'smartie'.
- c) I had a great nap and dribbled on the shoulder of my friend.
- d) I was in my bunk zonked out on Phenergan.

3. During the day:

- a) I scrubbed penguin poo off my clothing.
- b) I braved it on the bridge, fancying myself as a true salty seadog.
- c) I was in my bunk zonked out on Phenergan.
- d) I reviewed my photos and wished that we could turn around and do it all over again.
- e) All of the above.

4. When looking out to sea, I saw:

- a) a group of Cape petrels darting in and around the ship and waves
- b) a young black-browed albatross
- c) lots and lots and lots of water
- d) a bright blue Phenergan fairy dancing before me

5. Whilst watching Howard talk about the making of Happy Feet:

- a) I wondered whose feet were happy and why?
- b) I gained a new appreciation for the work put into animated films.
- c) I started planning my next trip to Antarctica to see the Emperor penguins.
- d) I marveled at the interior decoration of the good ship Braveheart.

6. At the voyage recap:

- a) I tried to be invisible when Ben was looking for volunteers to talk.
- b) I developed a nervous twitch when Matt mentioned the words "Prion Island".
- c) I waved madly to try and get the microphone so I could share my memories of the seal... and the time the king penguins... and when I got that shot.. and...
- d) The Phenergan fairy got me again.

7. My evening consisted of:

- a) Making merry in the bar with my old and new friends.
- b) Watching the roll and splash of the Scotia Sea.
- c) Watching penguins sing and dance.
- d) Attempting to spill as little popcorn as possible on the lecture room floor.





South Atlantic Ocean, edging closer to the Falkland Islands

Position:	21:45 hours	Course:	283°	Wind Speed:	25 knots	Barometer:	995.9 hPa & rising
Latitude:	52° 30' S	Speed:	9.5 knots	Wind Direction:	WSW	Air Temp:	6°C
Longitude:	50° 10' W					Sea Temp:	5°C

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

At the start of our second day heading northwards to the Falklands we were greeted by sun, seabirds and a smoother sea - plus a lone fur seal, somewhat far from home. The casualties of the day before had largely recovered, aided mostly by Lesley's excellent care, along with time and a bit of kindness from Mother Nature in the shape of an easing wind and swell.

The morning was Falklands-themed. After admitting that he'd had quite a bit of trouble finding positive aspects to the islands' history, Ben persuaded us - perhaps inadvertently - that now may well be the best time to visit. Tourism is an important contributor to the economy, endemic wildlife such as the Upland goose is recovering from hunting and unlike in Shackleton's time, there is more to do in Stanley than walk from the church to the graveyard. Fred regaled us with tales of sheep and cattle shifting and Upland goose hunting in his talk: The Falklands in the 1970s: a lonely but free life in the southern edge of the world. He spent time there in 1978 as a journalist for Smithsonian Magazine and gave us fascinating insight into Island life.

Creativity abounded today. New limericks appeared on the notice board at a rate of at least one per hour, and many folk took some time to upload their photos for sharing or potential voyage log inclusion. We clearly have plenty of enthusiastic and talented photographers on board and even better, a real range of photographic styles. Modern technology has its pros and cons but it's fantastic to be able to share memories so readily. Imagine asking Frank Hurley for a copy of one of his glass plates. Another great benefit of the 21st century was underlined by Lesley's lecture on Medical Mysteries of Antarctica. Early travellers in this part of the world had not only the dangers of cold and remoteness to contend with, but also lack of knowledge about physiology, the effects of constant darkness and nutrition. It induced a new wave of appreciation for our excellent food, modern clothing, heated ship and access to advanced medical knowledge. Perhaps it also served as a timely reminder as several people were seen at the fruit bowl afterwards - never hurts to top up the Vitamin C..

Late afternoon brought a chance to see Claude Lorius' beautiful and thought provoking *Ice and the Sky*. The evening induced stiff competition and intellectual rivalry in the form of the Great Antarctic and South Georgia Quiz. Seven teams were locked in battle: Lost Wanderers, Niceberg, NPE, Welsh Choir, Kooky Kayakers , SA Great and Penguin Poo with the eventual winners the Kooky Kayakers after a nail-biting tie break with the Lost Wanderers.



2019-1-31 Limerick Contest

Contributions anonymous

A lovely young chinstrap called Peter
Thought all of his neighbours stones sweeter
He created a nest
That was truly the best
An absolute wondrous world beater

There was an old humpback called Luke
Fed up with folk having a look
With their cameras and phones
He was sick to his bones
So waved them goodbye with his fluke

There was a fellow called Howard
Who certainly was no coward
He courageously took us ashore
And worried he job may be no more
Then lo and behold he got us
back aboard and showered.

They set out across the Scotia Sea
Shackleton they pretended to be
But their only real fear
Would Kathrine run out of beer??
Confident Sasha would deliver them safely

Our history buff was called Ben
Telling talks of brave Shackleton's men
He had wild curly hair
Regaled stories with flair
And toasted 'the boss' at Grytviken

Wandering Albatross – oh what a treat!
Getting to Prion oh what a feat!
When the sea got too rough
Getting aboard-that was tough
But Igor's strong arm would not be beat

A physician she wanted to be
But her true love was always for the sea
When her patients got sick
She had quite a trick
Sedate them so she could be free!

A young elephant seal called Joe
Lay down for a snooze in the snow
But as soon as he started
He belched, snored and farted
So his mates made him get up and go

A leopard seal called Finn
Loved to eat penguin
He would lunge at the ice
Any berg would suffice
Some days he knew not where to begin!

There was a young naturalist called Matt
About which any critter he could chat
When not seasick and pale
He'd point out a whale
And ellies all blubbery and fat

We'll miss howards wakeup allure
Though it leaves us a little unsure
"Is he done?" (cue: applause)
Or just taking a pause

Reluctantly he raised a toast
For a man considered most
Shackleton he will uncover
The real truth we will discover
Instead of lecture he did roast/his true
feelings have been doagnosee

Elena was nervy
The tags were topsy-turvy
Who was off, who was on
was her main worry

The waves throw up their white foam spray.
Caught by the wind they are carried away
We don't know where
Its all up in the air
Like so many words people speak and say

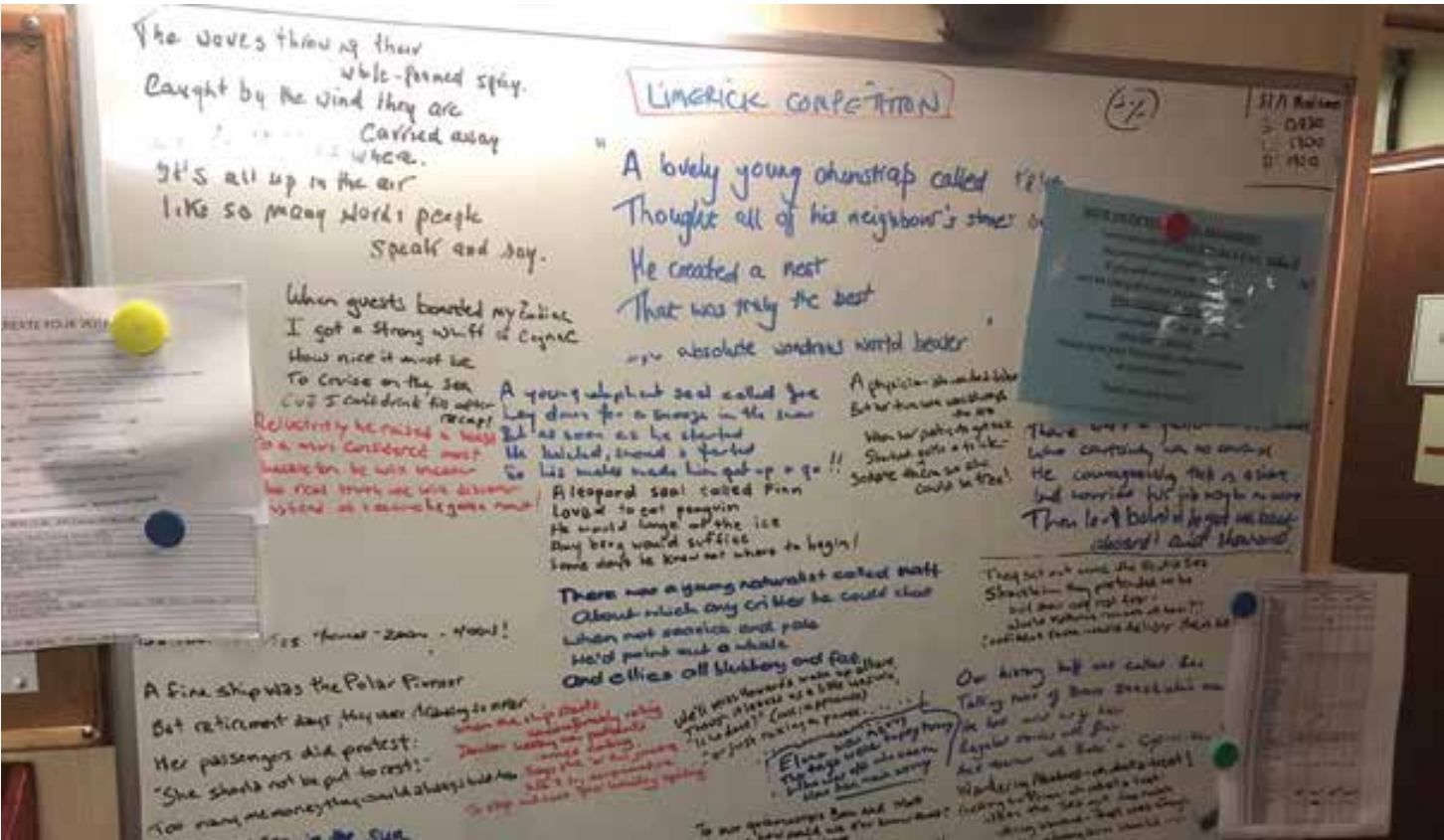
When guests boarded my Zodiac
I got a strong whiff of cognac
How nice it must be
To cruise on the sea
Cause I cant drink till after recap!

Reluctantly he raised a toast
To a man considered most
Shackleton he will uncover
The real truth we will discover
Instead of lecture he gave a roast

A fine ship was the *Polar Pioneer*
But retirement days, they
were drawing so near
Her passengers did protest
"She should not be put to rest!"
Too many memories would hold dear.

A day at sea in the sun
We are having boat-loads of fun,
From lecture to outer deck
To the dining room for a peck,
We cant believe our journey is almost done.

The dance floor was shifting and heaving,
The travelers sad for the leaving,
Penguin moves fast on the floor,
Ellie seals pushing out the door,
Today the spirit of Stanley
we may be receiving!





DAY 17 | Friday 1 February 2019

South Atlantic Ocean, nearly there

Position:	18:00 hours	Course:	284°	Wind Speed:	26 knots	Barometer:	1005.3 hPa & steady
Latitude:	51° 56' S	Speed:	12 knots	Wind Direction:	SSW	Air Temp:	6°C
Longitude:	55° 14' W					Sea Temp:	3°C

We live in a wonderful world that is full of beauty, charm and adventure. There is no end to the adventures we can have, if only we seek them with our eyes open
— Jawaharlal Nehru

Poetry by Marcel Whales

There she blows,
there she goes
just ahead of us,
she was that close.
Gliding through a glassy sea,
this is what we came to see.
This is all she knows,
this is what she's meant to be.
This her genius
just ahead of us:
the fulfilment of a day
a stone throw away,
on the ocean of the mind
a foot print left behind.

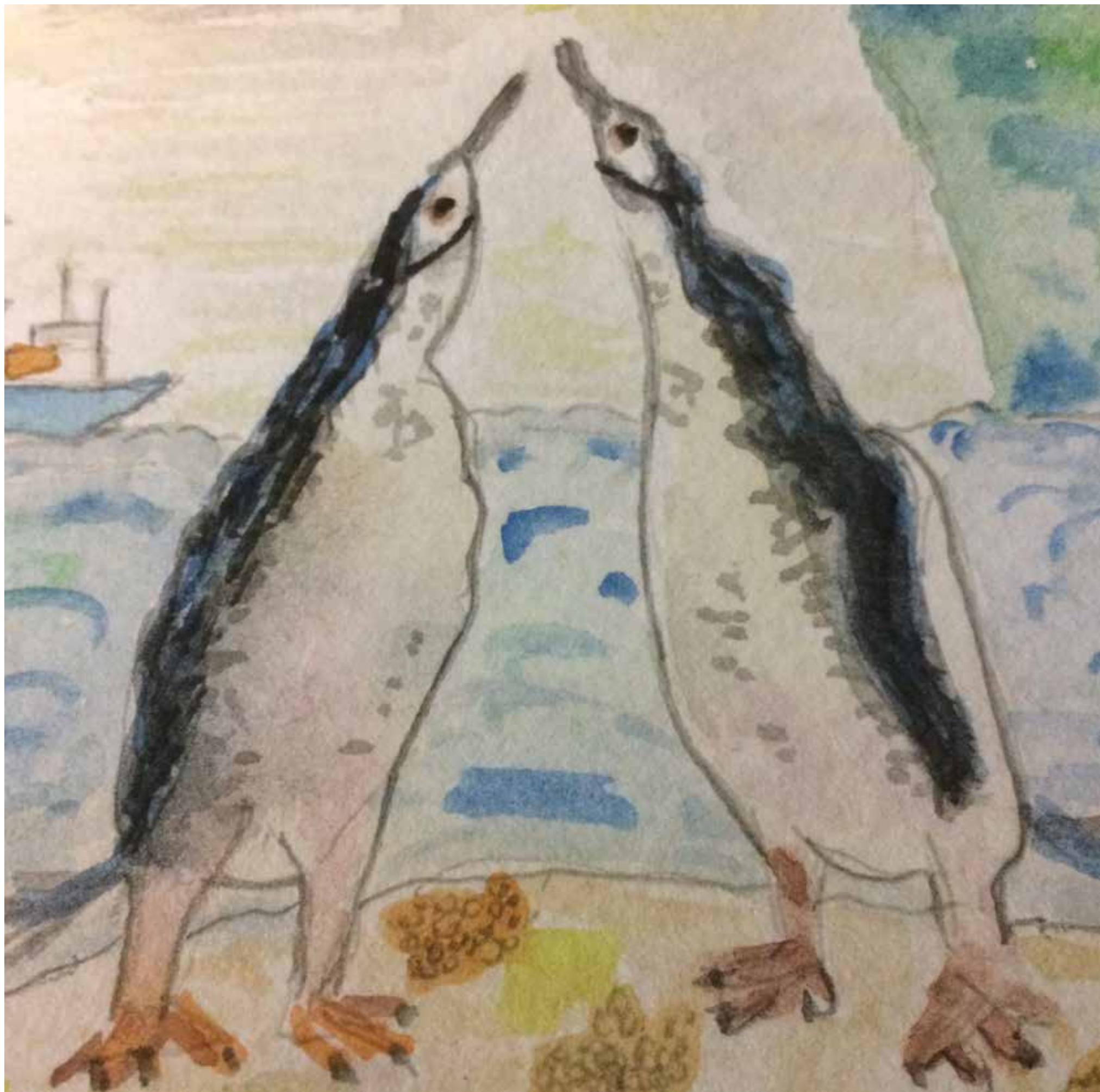
Limericks

1. The gale at forty knots had gone mad,
but what a glorious welcome we had.
Hundred thousand Kings were waiting
for us on arrival, greeting and trumpeting.
No king or queen was ever received like that.
2. Elephant Seals were lying in a heap,
they were catching up on badly needed sleep.
They snorted as if farting through their noses.
It was a far cry from the smell of roses
and the life and dive in the ocean deep.
3. Two Kings were walking the walk.
One followed closely the other, they did not talk.
They waddled and strutted in unison, stately and erect,
heads thrown backwards to comical effect.
That is how they walked and did not talk.
4. I found paintings under my feet on the rock,
They were quite fresh, more so than my socks.
They looked natural in the Sub-antarctic sun.
I wondered who did them, how they were done,
masters of the spontaneous whom nothing could shock.

5. The waves throw up a white-foamed spray.
Caught by the wind it is carried away
we don't know where.
It is all up in the air
like the words people speak and say.

Ode to South Georgia — Lesley Cadzow

Historical views of whale and seal industrialisation,
Returning wildlife makes South Georgia a special destination,
Lenticular clouds and winds katabatic,
Macaronis and prions in numbers dramatic
The detritus and junk of whaling stations past,
Now taken over by Ellies in thigmotaxis all massed.
Sunrise vistas spike fiercely over Allardyce Peaks,
Unlikely to miss while the Boss (Howard) never sleeps!
Furry fluster on beaches, king penguin delight,
A slice of paradise, we've all had a big bite!
In our mind's eye James Caird tumbles troubled and tossed,
Across Scotia Sea, Worsley keeps six from being lost,
With only hooch and a cocoa to ward off the freeze,
While on Polar Pioneer we have plenty pasta and beers!



Stanley, Falkland Islands

Position:	08:00 hours	Course:	Alongside in Stanely
Latitude:	51° 40' S		
Longitude:	59° 51' W		

Wind Speed:	15 knots	Barometer:	988 hPa & rising
Wind Direction:	SW	Air Temp:	7°C
		Sea Temp:	6°C

We live in a wonderful world that is full of beauty, charm and adventure. There is no end to the adventures we can have, if only we seek them with our eyes open.
— Jawaharlal Nehru

*Graduate Student Wanted,
For hazardous journey, small wages, bitter cold, constant danger, safe return doubtful, honour and recognition in case of success.
Research project into the little know red breasted pinniped – found in small numbers close to north and south poles. Breeding habits unknown, tend to congregate near bars and urns. Believed to vocalise using rectangular voice boxes held in front flipper. One of few known mammals to react negatively to krill.
For particulars contact S.G.H.T who are looking to conserve these creatures.*
— Rowan Simpkin

The morning began once more with Howards soothing sounds bringing us around to consciousness. This is it, the last day of our journey on board the *Polar Pioneer*. Most of us continue on to Santiago together and from there we go our separate ways.

We have transited the Scotia Sea to reach far flung destinations, shared our experiences, whether we be walkers, kayakers, history buffs or naturalists. Different viewpoints of the same experience, just as each and every one of us will take away our own unique lived experience from our marvelous time aboard. A privilege to witness these untouched, remote places of beauty and serenity, we hope that you are able to carry that peace with you in your heart when you return home.

Last night our trip of a lifetime ended as it began, with a cocktail in hand at our Captain’s Farewell Drinks, we toasted our voyage and our new friends. From all the Aurora staff, a big thank you, to all expeditioners for sharing this journey with us. Thank you also for your great humour, enthusiasm and adventurous spirit. May your memories live long and bright!

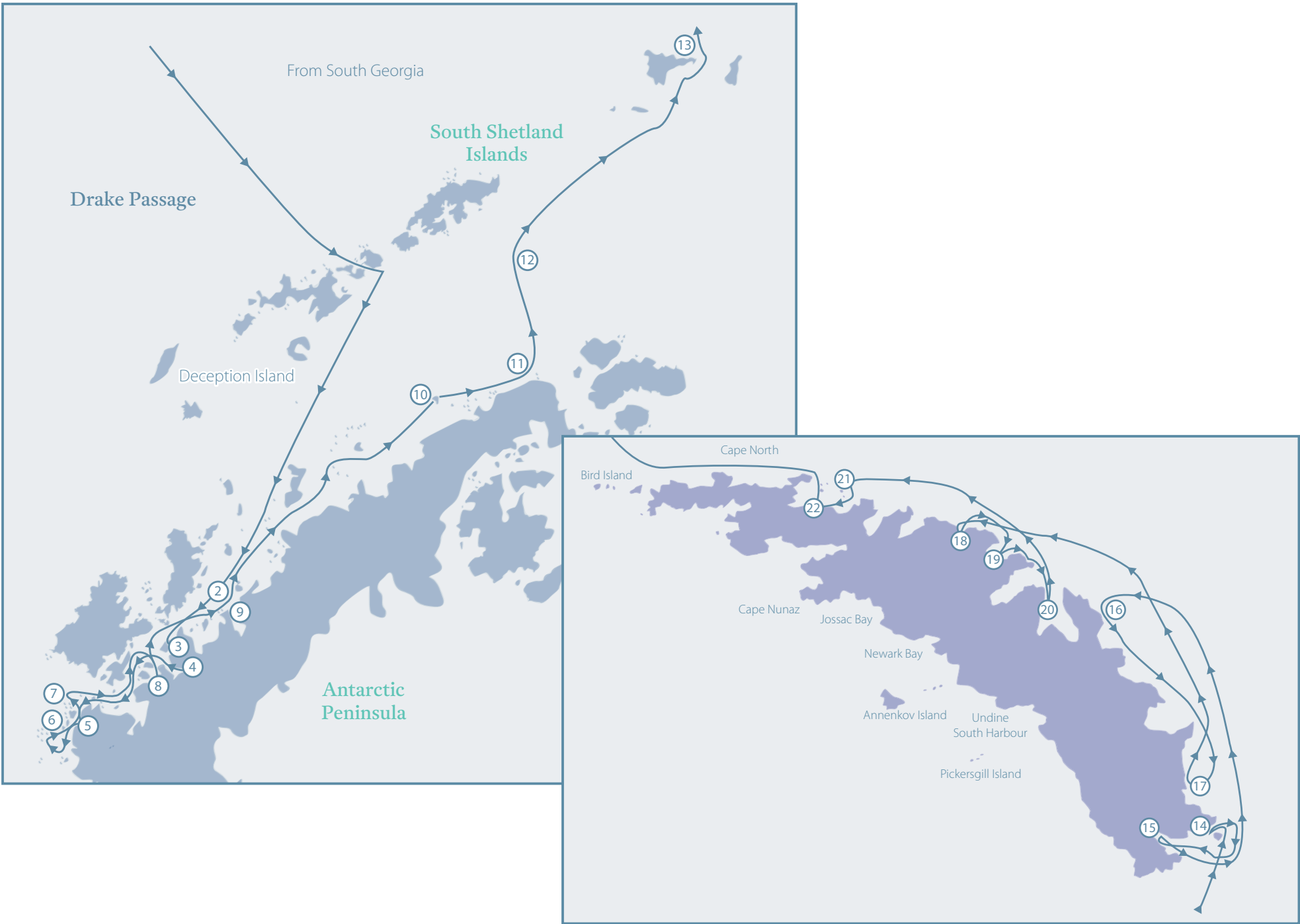




South Georgia & Antarctica Odyssey

Antarctic leg of Voyage

16 Jan.– 02 Feb. 2019 | Distance Travelled: 3,202 nautical miles | Southernmost point of voyage: 65°10' S, 64°07' W



Destinations

- | | | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Ushuaia | 7. Port Charcot | 13. Point Wild, Elephant Island | 19. Stromness Station |
| 2. Enterprise Island | 8. Brown Station/Paradise Harbour | 14. Cooper Bay | 20. Grytviken |
| 3. Cuverville Island | 9. Portal Point | 15. Drygalski Fjord | 21. Prion Island |
| 4. Errera Channel ship cruise | 10. Astrolabe | 16. Godthul Harbour | 22. Salisbury Plain |
| 5. Lemaire Channel | 11. Gourdin island | 17. Gold Harbour | |
| 6. Pleneau Island | 12. Iceberg A57A | 18. Fortuna Bay | |







Kayaking Log

By Alex Chavanne

Kayaking Guide: Alex Chavanne

Kayakers:

Liz Burrows	Lis Sutherland
Robert Elliott	Graeme Clarke
Jeff Kilbreth	Janine Clarke
Fred Strebeigh	Lisa McMeeken
Hannah Sutherland	Ingrid Kuster

DAYS 1 TO 3: At Sea

DAY 4 (AM): Enterprise Island – Distance: 4.5 km

After a bumpy Drake, everyone woke refreshed the morning of the 19th of January in Antarctica. A light snow was falling as the kayakers met for the first time on the back deck, and adjusted and fiddled with equipment to make everything fit and work correctly. After a paddle talk and some helpful tips on how to use these boats, all ten kayakers walked down the rope pilot ladder and deftly entered their kayaks. We set off amid snow flurries towards several grounded icebergs and enjoyed the scenery while paddling towards a shipwreck. We all had an enjoyable first experience in Antarctica, and started to get the hang of the boats while we made a quick trip back to the ship before it sailed onto the next landing site.

DAY 4 (PM): Cuverville Island – Distance: 6.7 km

The wind was coming down as we left the Gerlache Strait and entered the Errera Channel on our way to Cuverville Island, but nevertheless, at our anchorage it was still a bit bumpy getting off the ship into our kayaks. Everyone was up for a challenge though and we all got in the boats safely and away from the ship amid the looming grounded icebergs. Once away from the ship, the sea calmed and we enjoyed a perfectly pleasant paddle in calm water around Cuverville, passing nesting birds and deep blue icebergs. After weaving through larger grounded bergs, we made a shore landing and spent an hour observing and admiring the penguins at their nesting site. A quick paddle back to the Polar Pioneer ended the day well and we were “welcomed onboard” by the Captain, a few days late because of poor weather on the crossing. A fabulous first day.

DAY 5 (AM): Pleneau – Distance: 4.1 km

A calm sail down through the Lemair Channel brought us to our mornings landing site of Pleneau and we were greeted by lots of broken-up sea ice. The ship took us slowly inside the bay and we were able to have just enough room to launch the zodiacs and kayaks. We couldn’t paddle far, but we made the most of a short distance paddle by weaving through ice channels, running our boats up onto floes, and getting out for a break on a floe for a group photo. As the paddle progressed, the sun came out and with still conditions the reflections of the surrounding islands made for a stunning paddle. On the way back, all the kayakers lined up in single file as Alex chose a passage through the closing sea ice.

DAY 5 (PM): Port Charcot – Distance: 5.2 km

We got off after dinner amid heavy snow flurries and paddled out amongst the ice in the fading light at Port Charcot to wrap up the day. The water was near freezing and the snow falling on top had created what one paddler called a sea slushy, and our kayaks slipped through it gracefully as clouds hung low and snowflakes dusted our kayaks. Paddling amongst the ice, we spotted a leopard seal and made sure not to come too close, lest it take a nibble out of one of our boats. We cruised on and spotted several crabeater seals and also many porpoising penguins, and as the Polar Pioneer came out of the ice, we met it for a smooth kayak recovery and back onboard for a drink.

DAY 6 (AM): Skontorp Cove – Kayak cancelled due to strong winds

We pulled out of the Gerlache into our landing site and the sun came out for what seemed like the first time since Ushuaia. With our spirits lifted and lots of energy, the kayaks pulled off and paddled towards a field of grounded icebergs. Sliding over water without a trace of wind, the kayaks slipped through liquid mercury with deep blue towers looming overhead. Stopping for photographs along the way, we mingled with icebergs and frolicked with penguins and made a nice long paddle to end the day.

DAY 7 (AM): Astrolab Island – Distance: 6 km

Before we could get breakfast, the kayaks were out on a calm but misty morning around Astrolab Island’s infamous Dragon’s Teeth. While cape petrels wheeled overhead, chinstrap penguins darted in and out of the water between our boats and we paddled along cliffs teeming with life. Nesting fulmars were within arm’s reach, as were penguins, perhaps perplexed at what they were looking at. Weaving through the teeth and narrow passages, we made a big loop and paddled into a breeze and against the current to work up our appetite for breakfast back onboard.

DAY 7 (PM): Gourdin Island – Distance: 6.9 km

Sailing up from the south to reach the tip of the Peninsula, the Polar Pioneer was again beset by wind and snowfall. Many of the paddlers today had opted to go to shore and spend time communing with three types of penguins you can find at Gourdin Island. A strong current was ripping around the ship, putting up standing waves in THE spot the ship was planned to anchor, so we asked the captain to put us in at drift away from the chop. Paddling hard, we could barely keep up with the ship and pushed to get in around the island and penguins. Once in shore, we cruised amongst penguins and rolling icebergs. Coming around to the east side of the island we paused for some minutes as hundreds of penguins surrounded our boats, porpoising about and filling us with a sense of being in an ocean alive. We paddled into shore and spent some time with the thousands of penguins before returning to the ship via zodiac.

DAY 8 (PM): Point Wild – Kayaking cancelled due to big swell at ship



Kayaking Log

By Alex Chavanne

DAY 11 (AM): Cooper Bay – Distance: 6.5 km

Though a stiff breeze was blowing around South Georgia, we found just a little bit of shelter for a paddle on this morning of our second part to our voyage. We set off from the ship in 20 kts of wind and tucked close into shore. Following the guide boat, several paddlers got a surprise as a big wave came in and water in the narrow channel surged, but all was ok when as we kept paddling strong. The wildlife was copious, and we followed the coast around to a small protected bay where dozens of fur seal pups were playing and wrestling in shallow water. It may have been a case of equal interest, as perhaps these were the first kayakers these seals had seen, and the first fur seal pups these kayakers had seen. Paddling along shores littered with molting king penguins and young elephant seals jousting we ended up on shore and went for a walk up to the macaroni penguin colony. We wrapped it up on the beach by cleaning off all the mud and fur seal excrement that we had fallen into, then paddled hard into a 25 to 30 kt wind to get back to the ship

DAY 12 (PM): Gold Harbor – Distance: 4.5 km

The wind was still strong outside the bay but as we dropped anchor at Gold Harbor, the wind came down and the sun came out again. We set out for a paddle toward an embayment laying below two hanging glaciers. The swell was up though, and a big surf was breaking over shallow rocks, so we swung the bows of our kayaks down the beach. We paddled along with a strong

breeze in our faces, king penguins poking their bills up, and curious fur seals chasing our paddle strokes. With the sun on our faces, we pulled onto the beach and were immediately greeted by a dozen elephant seals, grunting and rolling around. We spent a good amount of time onshore and then paddled back into a mounting wind back to the *Polar Pioneer*.

DAY 13 (PM): Grytviken – Distance: 6.4 km

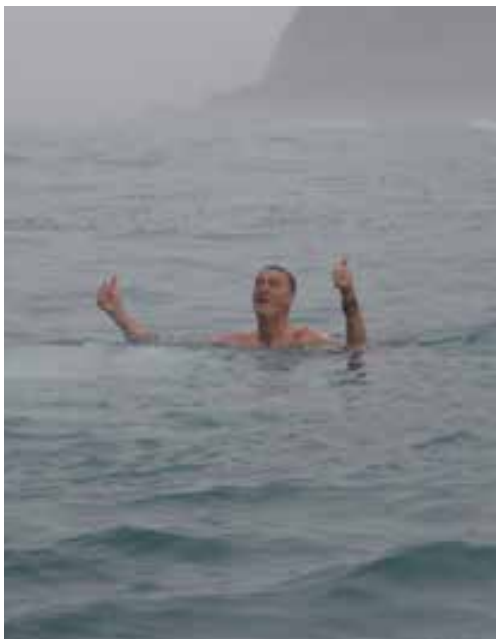
This group of kayakers were all keen, and on all occasions most opted to go out paddling. Even with the gift shop in Grytviken beckoning, we decided to go out to the shipwrecks outside the bay of Grytviken. It was a lovely paddle, we flew with the wind down to the wrecks, and once there, we made a toast, not to miss out the toast that was being made at the grave of Shackleton. A bit of whiskey helped steel ourselves for the 3 kilometres back to the remains of the whaling station into the wind. On our back, we were privileged to hear the plaintive cries of sooty albatross, which we had seen few of this trip to South Georgia. It would be our last paddle of the trip, as a real storm blew in the next day and was too much for paddling.

DAY 14 (AM & PM): Prion Island & Salisbury Plains – Cancelled due to storm

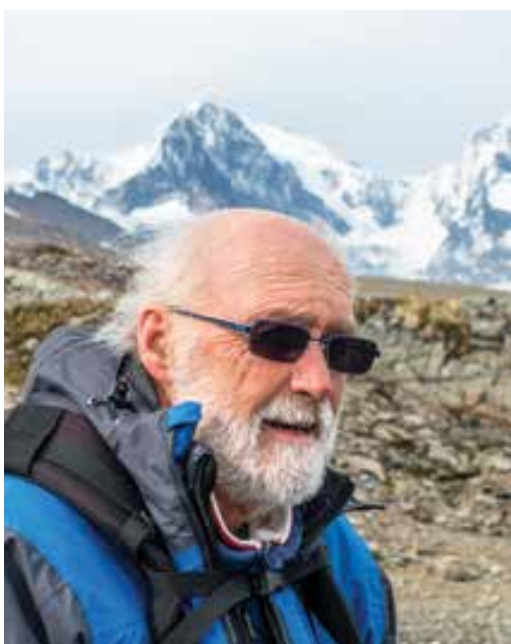
DISTANCE PADDLED: 63.7 KILOMETRES IN 11 PADDLES













Bird species log

BIRD SPECIES	JANUARY - FEBRUARY																	
	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2
South Georgia Pintail																		
Magellanic Penguin	X										X	X		X				
King Penguin											X	X	X	X				
Adelie Penguin							X											
Gentoo Penguin		X		X	X	X					X	X		X				
Chinstrap Penguin				X	X	X	X				X	X		X				
Macaroni Penguin												X						
Wandering Albatross		X								X	X			X	X	X		
Southern Royal Albatross		X																
Black-browed Albatross		X	X							X	X			X	X	X		
Grey-headed Albatross													X	X				
Light-mantled Albatross			X							X	X			X	X			
Northern Giant Petrel		X	X					X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Southern Giant Petrel		X	X	X		X		X		X	X			X				
Cape Petrel		X	X				X				X							
Snow Petrel					X						X							
Antarctic Petrel																		
Antarctic Fulmar (Southern)			X	X			X											
Blue Petrel		X	X								X	X						
Soft-plumaged Petrel											X							
Antarctic Prion		X	X	X							X	X	X	X	X	X		



Bird species log

BIRD SPECIES	JANUARY - FEBRUARY																	
	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2
Slender-billed Prion															X	X		
White-chinned Petrel		X	X					X			X	X	X	X	X	X		
Great Shearwater															X	X		
Sooty Shearwater		X													X	X		
Wilson's Storm-petrel		X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Black-bellied Storm-petrel			X															
Grey-backed Storm-petrel																		
Diving Petrel (sp.)											X			X	X			
Antarctic Cormorant				X		X					X				X			
South Georgia Cormorant											X							
Imperial Cormorant	X			X	X													
Rock Cormorant						X												
Snowy Sheathbill						X	X						X	X				
Chilean Skua																		
Brown Skua	X	X		X		X				X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
South Polar Skua				X	X													
Kelp Gull	X			X								X	X		X			
Dolphin Gull																		
Antarctic Tern				X	X	X					X	X	X	X				
South American Tern																		
South Georgia Pipit																		



Gentoo Penguin



Macaroni Penguin



Skuas

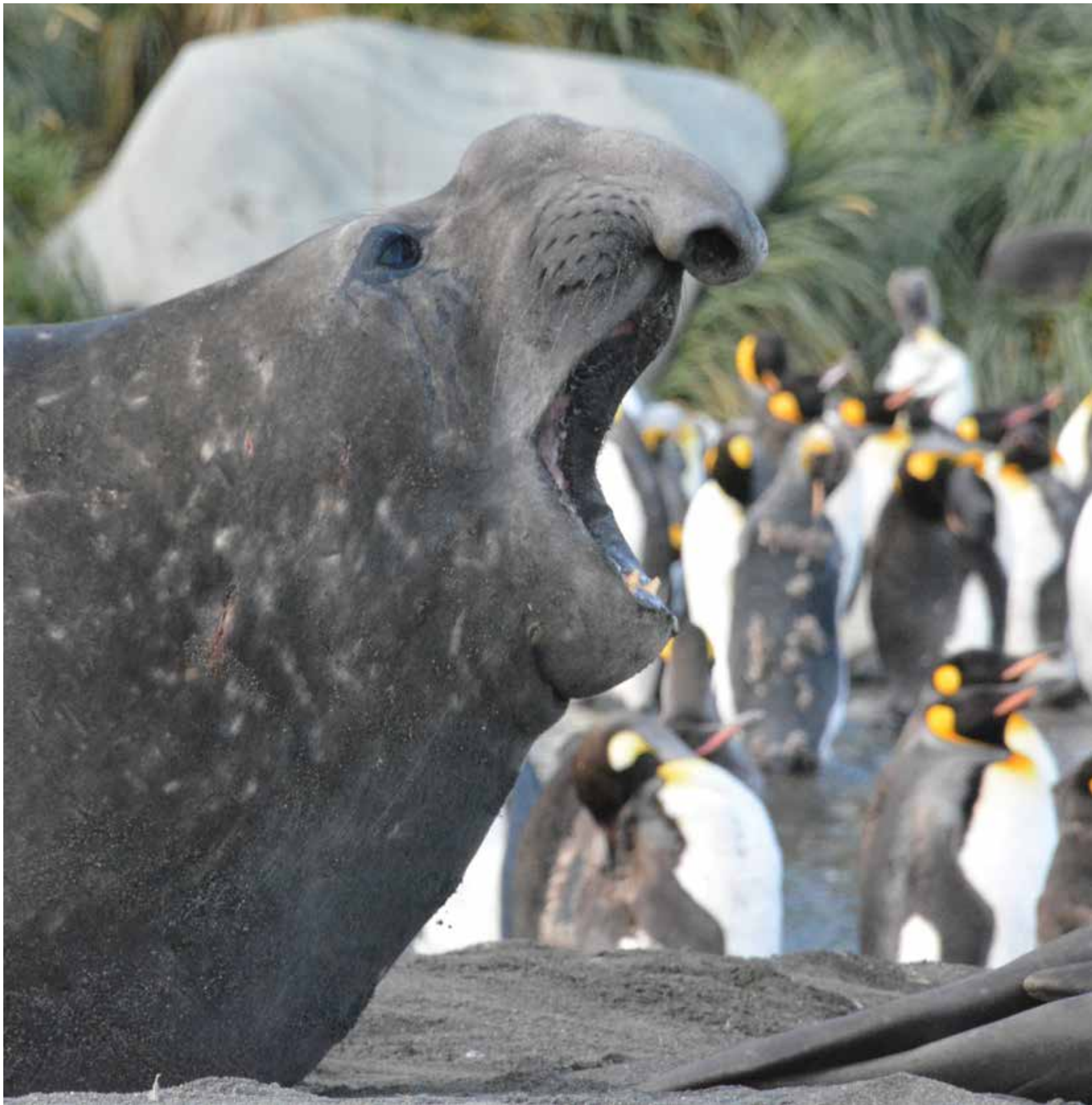
Mammals species log

MAMMAL SPECIES	JANUARY - FEBRUARY																	
	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2
Antarctic Fur Seal						X	X			X	X	X	X	X				
Southern Sealion																		
Southern Elephant Seal					X						X	X	X	X				
Crabeater Seal				X	X	X	X											
Weddell Seal				X	X													
Leopard Seal				X	X		X											
Sei Whale																		
Fin Whale				X					X	X								
Humpback Whale				X		X					X	X						
Antarctic Minke Whale				X	X													
Southern Right Whale											X							
Sperm Whale																		
Killer Whale (Orca)																		
Hourglass Dolphin																		
Peale's Dolphin																		





Elephant Seal







Expeditioners

Holly Antolini
Dicy Apperson
Lauren Bath
Suzanne Beauchesne
Richard Birch
Judy Birch
Lynn Brown
Bruce Bryan

Liz Burrows
Ski Cahall
Mark Chambers
Deb Chambers
Charlotte Chambers
Ollie Chambers
Carmen Chiu
Graeme Clarke

Janine Clarke
Mary Conroy
Jann Cooney
John Cooper
Jim Cundy
Maria Cundy
Fabrizio De Leon
Gail Eierweiss

Robert Elliott
Maria Gonzalez Cuadrado
Anna Holdsworth
Marcel Hoog Antink
Chris John
Maddie Jones
Jeff Kilbreth
Levy Klots

Ingrid Kuster
Sue Martin
Lisa McMeeken
Mary Metzler
Owen Morgan
Rachel Page
Declan Page
Vasudha Pangare

Ganesh Pangare
David Roper
Kirsten Roper
Barbara Shore
Fred Strebeigh
Eric Sumithran
Beatrice Susil-Sumithran
Hannah Sutherland

Lis Sutherland
Graeme Wilkinson
Tracey Withers
Yeu Jin Yoon



Expedition Team

Expedition Leader	Howard Whelan
Assistant Expedition Leader	Elena Wimberger
Assistant Expedition Leader Trainee	Clare Ainsworth
Naturalist	Matt Pauza
Historian	Ben Maddison
Expedition Assistant	Anne Oeyasater
Doctor	Lesley Cadzow
Kayaking Guide	Alex Chavanne
Hotel Manager	Katherine Esrando
Chef	Allan Estoque
Chef	Herbert Cruz

Polar Pioneer Crew

Captain	Aleksandr Evgenov	Head Stewardess	Evgeniya Chemiris
Second Captain	Vladimir Zimin	Stewardess	Daria Boykova
Second Mate	Sergei Abramaov	Stewardess	Alina Glazkova
Third Mate	Anton Bogdanov	Stewardess	Svetlana Fedora
Radio Operator	Dmitry Korchevskiy	Stewardess	Anna Plavina
Chief Engineer	Denis Strelkov	Stewardess	Iliana Koval
Second Engineer	Pavel Voronov	Russian Crew Chef	Denis Zhenchevskii
Third Engineer	Britvin Maksim		
Electrical Engineer	Viacheslav Deviatkin		
Boatswain	Dmitry Belousov		
Able Seaman	Valerii Riabtcev		
Able Seaman	Aleksandr Kiselev		
Able Seaman	Igor Popp		
Motorman	Dmitrii Litvineko		

Photo Credits

Clare Ainsworth	Ingrid Kuster
Lauren Bath	Sue Martin
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Richard Birch	Mary Metzler
Lesley Cadzow	Declan Page
Mark Chambers	Rachel Page
Ollie Chambers	Hannah Sutherland
Alex Chavanne	Graeme Wilkinson
Mary Conroy	Elena Wimberger
John Cooper	
Jim Cundy	
Maria Cundy	
Marcel Hoog Antink	
Maddie Jones	
Jeff Kilbreth	

Ship's log written by Elena Wimberger, Clare Ainsworth, Lesley Cadzow, Ben Maddison, Matt Pauza – Pengiun post text edited by Howard Whelan – Log compiled by Elena Wimberger



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