



In Shackleton's Footsteps



20 March – 06 April 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 20 March 2019

Ushuaia, Beagle Channel

Position:	21:50 hours	Course:	84°	Wind Speed:	5 knots	Barometer:	1007.9 hPa & falling
Latitude:	54°55'S	Speed:	9.4 knots	Wind Direction:	E	Air Temp:	11°C
Longitude:	67°26'W					Sea Temp:	9°C

Finally, we were here, in Ushuaia aboard a sturdy ice-strengthened vessel. At the wharf Gary and Robyn ticked off names, nabbed our passports and sent us off to Kathrine and Scott for a quick photo before boarding *Polar Pioneer*.

Once all our luggage was accounted for, we congregated in the bar where Expedition Leader Gary talked about our plans for the coming days and introduced us to the Aurora team.

Onboard we total 46 passengers with nationalities representing Australia (32), Canada (3), Czech Republic (1), Netherlands (1), United Kingdom (3), United States (6), along with 14 Aurora Expeditions' staff, and 22 Russian crew.

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 in the two lifeboats proved cosy.

Our Argentinian pilot climbed aboard and at 1900 we cast off lines and eased away from the wharf. What a feeling! The thriving city of Ushuaia receded as we motored eastward down the beautiful Beagle Channel, the water dotted with giant petrels who sat motionless, becalmed by an absence of wind. The wildlife bonanza was off to a good start with the sighting of a large group of black-browed albatross who took off from the water, and several South American sea lions.

On our portside stretched the beech forested slopes of Argentina, while Chile, its mountain-tops shrouded in mist, lay on our starboard side. Conditions felt calm and easy.

We gathered in the dining rooms for our first delicious dinner together prepared by chefs Al and Bert, and served by stewardesses Dasha and Anna.

Daniel met up with his five kayakers after dinner for a fit-out session and briefing, but for other weary travellers, we found our way to our cabins for a good night's sleep.







DAY 2 | Thursday 21 March 2019

Drake Passage

Position:	20:15 hours	Course:	156°	Wind Speed:	22 knots	Barometer:	997.3 hPa & rising
Latitude:	58°29'S	Speed:	11.9 knots	Wind Direction:	SW	Air Temp:	4°C
Longitude:	63°28'W					Sea Temp:	3°C

Well, it wasn't a horrid Drake, but still we reeled and staggered our way to the breakfast dining room, taking on acrobatic feats so as to balance cups, bowls and plates and get them to the table in one piece. Onward our ship rolled, doggedly forging south.

We had our first wondrous views of albatross: black-browed albatross, a lone grey-headed albatross, and the biggest of all—a wanderer. These mighty seabirds veered across our bow and wheeled about the ship.

We were in for a lively introduction to seabirds with Roger who gave us a rundown on foraging patterns. He 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. The wandering albatross, with an enormous wingspan of 3.5 metres, is capable of foraging journeys that span thousands of ocean miles and may take months. Except to breed, a seabird is at home on the ocean. We took a firsthand look at Roger's research into albatross and penguin populations on three remote islands off southern Chile. Scaling rugged cliffs to reach albatross colonies competed for dare devilry against images of the tiny campsite perched on a rocky ledge impossibly high above the waterline.

The Great Antarctic Iceberg Competition launched with glory and riches promised to the expeditioner who can guess, or calculate, the closest time and position of our first iceberg.

Our lazy day rolled on, with a delicious lunch then a presentation by Alasdair on the early explorers' first encounters with Antarctica. From the ancient Greeks whose mapmakers conceptualised the existence of Antarctica, to Cook's 18th century voyages of discovery to the ice, to scientific exploration, to 19th century sealers who pushed south in hopes of commercial gain, we saw the coastline of Antarctica slowly taking shape.

The afternoon brought an easing of sea conditions, although the deep westerly swell still had us gripping handrails as we lurched about the ship. The fog vanished and the sun shone through, offering a friendlier persona to this notorious passage of water.

Captain's Welcome Drinks was time to gather in the bar to enjoy Kath's delicious punch and canapes. Gary introduced Captain Aleksandr (Sasha) Evgenov who warmly welcomed us to his ship and wished us fair weather.

At around 2200 we moved south across the Antarctic Convergence, which brings a biological and geographical shift into Antarctic waters—and a sharp drop in air and water temperatures.

At around 0400 tomorrow morning we will cross 60° South, placing us politically in Antarctica. When might we see our first icebergs? Our first penguins? Big discoveries await!



DAY 3 | Friday 22 March 2019

South Shetland Islands

Position: 20:23 hours
Latitude: 62°33'S
Longitude: 59°32'W

Course: 220°
Speed: 11 knots

Wind Speed: 17 knots
Wind Direction: SW

Barometer: 999.9 hPa & rising
Air Temp: 2°C
Sea Temp: 1°C

Important preparations got underway in readiness for our Antarctic landings. Vacuum cleaners whirled, briefings were delivered, and by the end of the morning we were fully apprised of turning tags, boot washing stations, five-metre distances from penguins, and how to hurl ourselves in and out of a Zodiac. Whew! How will we possibly remember it all on the day? Luckily the Aurora team will be on hand to assist.

At 12:10pm, just minutes after Robyn announced that our iceberg competition was about to close, we had our first iceberg sighting. Admittedly the berg was a long way off, and seemed to wax and wane in the swell, but there it was showing on the radar and visible with bare eyes.

The swell kept up but by now most of us had gained our sea legs and navigated the hallways and stairs with aplomb.

We sat down to another tasty lunch then the keen photographers joined Scott for an introductory session on photography. Scott provided some excellent tips and tricks on caring for our cameras in this icy, salty, maritime environment.

By mid-afternoon we were nearing the South Shetland Archipelago, a 540-km string of eleven main islands and many smaller rocks located off the north west of the Antarctic Peninsula. But looming on the distance was one whopper of an iceberg—a tabular berg that rose to an estimated 60 metres in height.

We simply couldn't stand not to get closer so Chief Mate Vladimir altered course and we made a beeline for the berg. Things are farther than they look in Antarctica and it took us about 90 minutes to get up close. What a treat! This towering monolith likely originated far down in

the Weddell Sea, broke away from an ice shelf and slowly drifted northward to the top of the Peninsula powered by the currents of the Weddell Gyre. The ocean around the berg measured 149 metres deep. Knowing that 8/9ths of the berg is hidden underwater, chances are this over-sized berg was grounded.

Despite bitter wind and freezing temperatures, we braved the outdoors for fabulous views and photos from up on the flying bridge and along the fifth deck. Chief Mate took the ship on a circumnavigation of the berg and we made the most of the afternoon light with highlights and shadows that showcased the textured faces of the ice.

Back indoors we brought our frozen fingers back to the life. Soon we were motoring past Table Island and through English Strait amid an otherworldly landscape of jagged islands and skerries. We reflected on the sealing days of the 1820s, on what a cold, bleak, miserable existence it must have been for the men who came to the South Shetlands to slaughter fur seals by their thousands.

For the short term that the industry thrived before the seals were decimated, seal pelts paid handsomely and it was a race amongst the sealers to find and guard the location of new hunting grounds.

The great orb of sun tracked low and by evening the sky was bathed in colour. Photographers once more spilled out on deck to soak up the gilded scene.







DAY 4 | Saturday 23 March 2019

Cuverville Island, Neko Harbour

Position:	23:00 hours	Course:	301°	Wind Speed:	28 knots	Barometer:	1013.3 hPa & steady
Latitude:	64°45′S	Speed:	5.1 knots	Wind Direction:	NE	Air Temp:	1°C
Longitude:	62°53′W					Sea Temp:	0°C

By Alasdair McGregor

Weren't we the lucky ones, eh! After running short of time and daylight for a landing last evening, it was with enormous anticipation and excitement that we woke to calm seas and clear skies as *Polar Pioneer* scooted down the Gerlache Strait to our first landing for this voyage. Picture perfect is barely an adequate tag to attach to the sight of the pink light dawn brushing the mountains of Brabant Island on our starboard side as we cruised towards Cuverville Island.

By around 09.30 we were in position, separated from our landing site by a loose cordon of eroded icebergs which sparkled in the clear morning air. Once ashore we spread out in either direction along the foreshore and inland a short distance. Meanwhile, the kayakers revelled in the calm conditions weaving in and out of a crystal labyrinth of ice.

For many of us the landing marked was marked by the added thrill of a first encounter with a penguin. Even this late in the breeding season there were still quite a few moulting Gentoo chicks, and others that, while their moult was complete, had not yet committed to the hazards of open water.

For an unwary young penguin danger was certainly close at hand, and sure enough, a hapless Gentoo soon fell prey to a leopard seal. In a graphic display of the merciless power of nature, the leopard toyed with the penguin for what seemed like an eternity. Giant petrels came in for their fill, and even tiny Wilson's storm petrels were there to clean up the smallest scrap. Nothing is wasted in nature.

From tiny petrels to the leviathans of the ocean, we were privileged on our return journey to the ship to linger near sleeping humpback whales. In a process known as 'logging', humpback whales lie quite still on the surface of the water, and every few minutes exhale great clouds of vapour as they breath. Having gorged on krill during the Antarctic summer, they were simply resting up for the long northwards migration ahead.

With a delicious curry lunch fortifying us for the afternoon's adventures, *Polar Pioneer* cruised down the magnificent Errera Channel to Neko Harbour and another unforgettable landing. While some of us were content to wander the shore, others took to the heights and were rewarded with one of the great Antarctic views.

More logging humpbacks, azure blue icebergs to cruise or paddle past, and it was back to the ship in the early evening for spot of madness. The *Polar Pioneer* swim team was in session! ... plungers did the deed, either from the bottom of the gangway, or, for the truly foolhardy, a great leap from deck four.

Hot showers and the sauna got a solid workout as our trusty ship slipped away into a soft and silvery evening, and one special Antarctic day was sadly at an end.



Enterprise Island, Mikkelsen Harbour

Position:	20:15 hours	Course:	57°	Wind Speed:	17 knots	Barometer:	993.3 hPa & falling
Latitude:	63°55'S	Speed:	9.2 knots	Wind Direction:	ENE	Air Temp:	1°C
Longitude:	60°36'W					Sea Temp:	0°C

Antarctica, our fickle friend. Who would believe this Siberian winter after our sublime first day of sunshine? We woke to wind-driven snow showers which froze on the decks and turned the ship to ice. The air hovered at 0° Celsius but we were cosy inside our heated cocoon. We were on the lookout for whales in Wilhemina Bay and sighted several blows from humpbacks. Alas, the whales were on the move and sailed by at a fast clip.

We made our way north past Nansen Island to the end of Enterprise Island which, grouped with Nansen Island, was originally named “The Nansen” by Adrienne de Gerlache of the *Belgica* expedition. In more recent years the smaller island was renamed Enterprise Island by the UK Antarctic Place-Names Committee to commemorate the enterprise of whalers who toiled here during the summers of 1916–1930.

Out we went, undeterred by wind or snow. Our brave flotilla of Zodiacs was joined by Dashing Daniel and his perky paddlers for whom the wind and swell proved a tad too lively for their small craft.

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 divers.

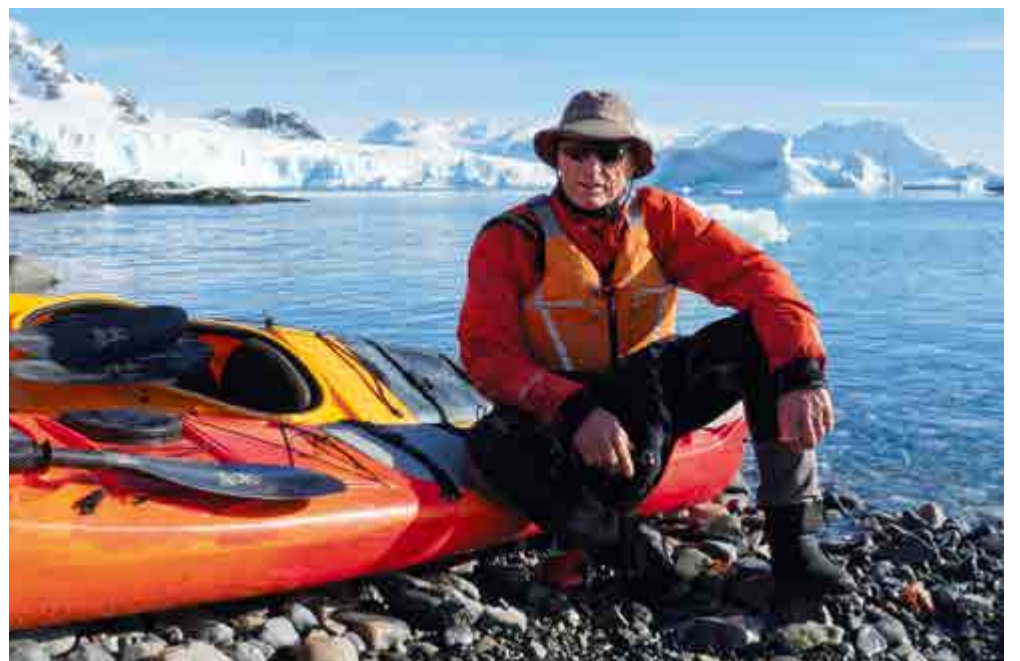
Antarctic fur seals seemed to adorn every sheltered corner of Enterprise while Imperial cormorants nested on outcrops.

Our return ride to the ship was in driving snow and a sizable swell, creating sporty conditions at the gangway. Nevertheless, the ship’s complement did a mighty job and soon we were all safely aboard.

The afternoon was given to two wonderful talks by our team—Roger speaking about Antarctic penguins and seals, Ian speaking about the *Belgica* Expedition, being the first known Antarctic “winter over” in the Bellingshausen Sea on the Antarctic Peninsula in the late 1890s. From the get go, the expedition was blighted with troubles: engine failure, one man lost overboard and another who died of heart failure, lethargy, low spirits, scurvy, and ultimately, being trapped in the pack ice. Thankfully the following summer *Belgica* escaped the ice and returned to Europe, having completed extensive mapping of the Antarctic Peninsula and bringing home valuable scientific findings.

By late afternoon we had arrived at Trinity Island, home to Mikkelsen Harbour where we found an iota of shelter from the wind and a manageable swell. 22 hardy souls ventured ashore to watch gentoo penguins looking just as penguins should on snow, and to explore the higher reaches. A wet and bouncy ride home but we wouldn’t have missed it.







DAY 6 | Monday 25 March 2019

Gourdin Island, Brown Bluff, Weddell Sea

Position:	21:00 hours	Course:	335°	Wind Speed:	8 knots	Barometer:	986.6 hPa & steady
Latitude:	63°13'S	Speed:	12.6 knots	Wind Direction:	SSE	Air Temp:	0°C
Longitude:	56°54'W					Sea Temp:	-1°C

Gourdin Island emerged in the distance; the land mass dusted with fresh snow. The wind was up but the swell manageable for Zodiacs, so in we went to explore. An impenetrable moat of brash ice hugged the shoreline, and with no easy place to land we opted to stay in Zodiacs and explore the island from the water.

The call came—leopard seal! It introduced itself to each boat, diving beneath our craft, rolling belly-up, showing off its “leopard spots” before bobbing up beside the next craft. We played nicely together in the brash ice but when the leopard took a nip at Robyn’s Zodiac, and then Daniel’s, it was an end to the friendship.

We made our way counter clockwise. At the first headland a handsome group of chinstrap penguins gathered on the rocks, readying to take to the water. But with a leopard seal around, no penguin wants to be the first penguin in. Adopting a strategy of safety in numbers, the penguins wait and wait, jostling one another, inching closer to the water’s edge until, when the sheer force of the crowd grows too great and the first one takes the plunge, all others follow in rapid succession. No one wants to be last!

Another call came from Anne—the leopard seal was following, a little too curious for comfort. It came up behind Febe’s boat and took a hearty bite, puncturing the fin of the pontoon. For Febe it was pronto back to the ship. The rest of us continued on our way, seeing chinstraps perched so high up on the island that it gave us a whole new sense of appreciation for their athleticism and fortitude. Fur seals were hauled out on a rocky beach and a couple lounged on ice floes. Small glacial bergs, strikingly blue, appeared to be illuminated from within. We continued around the island and back to our waiting ship.

Our afternoon was a second landing on the Antarctic continent. Brown Bluff is the exposed portion of a glacial volcano, its tuff cliffs embedded with lava “bombs”, such as the “chocolate chip” boulders we saw scattered around. Along the beach the sculpted boulders were covered in brilliant orange crustose lichen to add to the splendour of the scene. Gentoo penguins to-ed and fro-ed looking fat and healthy. The shoreline was littered with grounded ice floes, most of which are remnant pieces of sea ice from previous winters, some measuring two metres or more in height.

Back at the ship the kayakers were experiencing a little adventure. Just as kayaks were launched the wind got up. Dave and Carolyn got themselves back to the ship but others found themselves sailing downwind with a very strong current, with little chance of being able to paddle back into a strengthening headwind. Marcel, Aiden, Wendy and Ann took shelter behind a large iceberg while Daniel paddled to the rescue, soon after assisted by Febe in his Zodiac.

Rescue mission accomplished, Dan and his paddlers came ashore to enjoy a regular landing, soaking up the sunshine and ice.

In beautiful evening light we made our way into the head of the Weddell Sea where humpback whales appeared in every direction. Captain got us close and we watched for 30 minutes as they fed. What a fantastic sight. Our scheduled recap got underway, but was quickly interrupted by orcas. A mad dash outside for great views of the pod before returning inside to reminisce over the first high octane days of our voyage.



Elephant Island

Position:	21:00 hours	Course:	50°	Wind Speed:	22 knots	Barometer:	991.9 hPa & steady
Latitude:	60°27' S	Speed:	12.5 knots	Wind Direction:	NNW	Air Temp:	1°C
Longitude:	53°06' W					Sea Temp:	1°C

By Alasdair McGregor

The day dawned steely Antarctic grey yet peaceful enough. One might have thought that there was good reason to sleep in to the very last, but Gary’s early wakeup call had us thinking a trip to the bridge might be worth it. And worth it, it was! A 10-natuical mile (17 kilometre) long tabular iceberg had appeared on *Polar Pioneer’s* radar.

This giant had calved from one of the ice shelves of the Weddell Sea and was now drifting slowly at the whim of wind and current, destined to eventually break into ‘daughter’ bergs, which themselves might be several kilometres in any horizontal dimension. And this berg was nothing compared to some that rival the size of small countries!

We’d made excellent time despite the detour around the berg, and the forbidding cliffs of Cape Valentine at the very eastern tip of Elephant Island soon hove into view. This was where Sir Ernest Shackleton and his men, after being trapped in the Weddell Sea since January of the previous year, first made landfall in April 1916. The conditions looked good for a Zodiac cruise at least, and there was even talk of a landing at this rarely visited place of enormous historical interest.

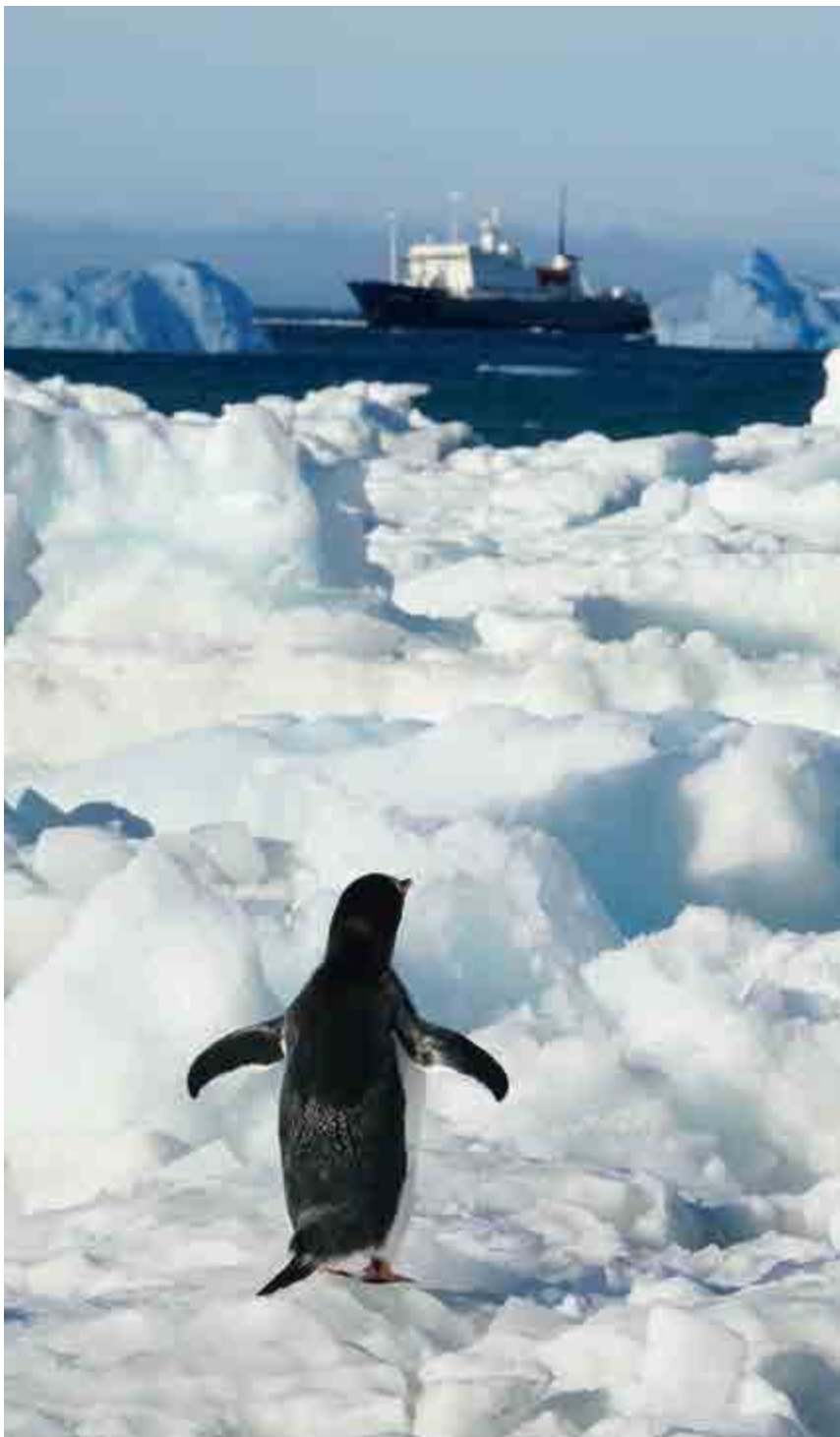
But on seeing the swell at the gangway, Gary decided that the prospects of safe entry and exit from the gangway was not good, and so we headed along the coast to Point Wild.

From time to time enough of the cloud shrouding the heights of the island lifted and revealed a severely impressive world of rock, ice and untrodden snows. And literally all around the ship – puffs of spray – the blows of countless fin whales punctuated our journey. One whale came so close to the ship that its belly could be clearly seen as it took evasive action.

We might not have been able to cruise at Cape Valentine, but Point Wild was a different story. The gangway proved a challenge in the lazy swell but we all managed to climb into the Zodiacs for an up close glimpse of a place of vital significance in the Shackleton story. It was at Point Wild that most of the expedition anxiously waited out the winter of 1916, while Shackleton and five others headed off to South Georgia to seek help. It is hard to imagine how anyone survived such an ordeal, and what a thrill it was to get so close to where such a powerfully evocative episode in Antarctic history took place.

Back on board and warmed up, Alasdair gave us the down payment on two talks on Shackleton’s expedition, in part as background as to why anyone would attempt such an ambitious feat as crossing Antarctica. And to round out a wonderful day and bring us squarely into the 21st century, Scott give us a talk on how to get the best out our smart phones and I-pads when wielded as cameras. One wonders what use Shackleton’s expedition photographer Frank Hurley might have made of an I-pad at Point Wild?







DAY 8 | Wednesday 27 March 2019

Scotia Sea

Position:	22:15 hours	Course:	50°	Wind Speed:	24 knots	Barometer:	990.6 hPa & falling
Latitude:	57°29’S	Speed:	13 knots	Wind Direction:	W	Air Temp:	3°C
Longitude:	45°24’W					Sea Temp:	1.2°C

We rocked and rolled through the night but by morning the wind and swell were pushing us along at good speed across this vast 800-kilometre stretch of ocean. The Scotia Sea was named in 1932 for the expedition ship *Scotia* during the Scottish National Antarctic Expedition led by William S. Bruce.

Fog waxed and waned but we had sightings of an array of seabirds: white chinned petrels, soft-plumaged petrels, Antarctic prions, black-bellied storm petrels. Three of these four species are tiny yet manage to survive and thrive in the midst of this wild ocean.

Roger spoke to us about Antarctic whales—just as fascinating was the field work he has done in connection with whale strandings. So far on our voyage we have had a bonanza of fin whales, which belies the fact that this species is still recovering from near decimation during the whaling era.

For those itching for a bit of retail therapy, the ship shop launched its end of season sale, and saw a frenzy of eager shoppers.

As we inched closer to our destination at South Georgia, it was time to learn more about caring for this island without introducing alien species. We set about vacuuming our clothing and bags and attending a film and briefing. During the Norwegian whaling days, rats and house mice were inadvertently introduced to South Georgia. The Norwegian whalers intentionally introduced reindeer as an alternate to seal and penguin meat, and just a few years ago the reindeer were culled by professional shooters.

South Georgia boasts the monumental accomplishment of ridding the island of rats and mice by aerial baiting with the use of helicopters and GPS trackers—a project that took several summers and a large amount of funding. Aurora Expeditions, its passengers and staff, along with many other Antarctic tour operators generously contributed to the cause. Follow-up work continues and looks promising, which makes it vital that we do our bit to ensure no reintroductions.

Alasdair regaled us with the gripping conclusion of the Shackleton epic, the drama illustrated by Frank Hurley’s evocative photographs. We learned of Shackleton’s desperate voyage across the Scotia Sea and his 36-hour walk over the glaciated mountains of South Georgia. It took Shackleton four attempts to rescue his men back at Point wild, but on 30 August 1916 the Chilean tugboat *Yelcho* successfully steamed in to Point Wild under the command of Piloto Pardot.

We spent a riveting hour after dinner with Ian who shared his ‘out there’ travel escapades, the most audacious being his quest to ski to the South Pole from Antarctic coast! We watched the fitness and strength training lead up to the adventure, which then played out in the ‘Lunatic’ documentary Ian filmed during his trek.

Such a mammoth effort physically and mentally to trudge uphill across endless kilometres of sastrugi in bitter cold, perpetual southerly head winds. A fantastic accomplishment.



Image Credits: All photos by Frank Hurley, courtesy of the Mitchell Library collection at the State Library of New South Wales.

Scotia Sea

Position:	20:45 hours	Course:	55°	Wind Speed:	22 knots	Barometer:	1001.3 hPa & rising
Latitude:	54°50' S	Speed:	7.2 knots	Wind Direction:	SW	Air Temp:	3°C
Longitude:	30°00' W					Sea Temp:	2°C

Onward we forged in a lazy roll, mile after mile of deep dark ocean. Albatross and petrels joined our course, making the most of the breezy conditions.

In the morning Gary educated us on ice caps and icebergs. We learned that the Antarctic ice dome rises to three kilometres in height, and ever so slowly flows downhill to the edges of the continent. Sometimes the fringe of ice rests on ocean as an ice shelf or slicks out as a floating ice tongue, rising and falling with current and tide. In other places the ice snakes its way through the valleys of mountain ranges to form glaciers.

Ice shelves far down in the Weddell Sea are likely where ‘our’ large tabular bergs originated from, the current sometimes bringing them as far north as South Georgia. They are distinctive in shape not only by their large size but by their table-top shape in contrast to glacial bergs which calve dramatically from glaciers to form irregularly shaped bergs.

Roger educated us on the wildlife of South Georgia, in particular the large fur seal population which now lives and breeds all around South Georgia. Fur seals have returned in such great numbers following the end of the sealing era that most recent estimates calculate a worldwide population of 5 million, 95% of which breed on South Georgia. A new seal for us will be elephant seals and these are a sight to behold with males weighing up to 4 tonnes, the females by comparison a sylph like 900 kgs. Records show that elephant seals dive to 1,000 metres, with a main diet of squid, plus about 25% fish. Their name comes not only from their elephantine size but from the trunk-like proboscis of adult bulls once they reach about 8 years of age.

Al and Bert put on a delicious lunch of soup and sandwiches with home-baked bread, then it was off to the lecture room to hear about the life of Australian photographer Frank Hurley. Not only is Hurley renowned as expedition photographer on Shackleton’s expedition, his images immortalising the drama of the *Endurance* being broken up by pack ice, but Hurley previously worked as expedition photographer on polar explorer Douglas Mawson’s 1911–14 Australasian Antarctic Expedition to Commonwealth Bay south of Australia. Hurley’s extraordinary life included excursions to the Dutch East Indies and Papua New Guinea, photographs from two world wars, and Australian scenic photography in his later years. Jannette as a young girl had the privilege of meeting the elderly Frank Hurley and spending an afternoon with him being shown his photographs.

Our three junior explorers stayed busy in the afternoon with a scavenger hunt which took them roaming around the inside decks of the ship. The rest of us caught up on reading and rest, enjoyed chatting over a cuppa and time on the bridge before joining Scott for his talk on composition and light. We learned very useful tips on constructing our photographs, getting down low to the eye level of our subject, making use of depth of field to isolate a subject, and considering the “rule of threes” that help compose an aesthetically pleasing image.

In the wee hours we expect to arrive at our destination on South Georgia’s south coast. A new adventure awaits!





King Haakon Bay, Cape Rosa (Cave Cove)

Position:	20:45 hours	Course:	120°	Wind Speed:	6 knots	Barometer:	999.9 hPa & steady
Latitude:	54°46′S	Speed:	6 knots	Wind Direction:	SW	Air Temp:	5°C
Longitude:	36°43′W					Sea Temp:	3°C

By Alasdair McGregor

A nice warm dry ship is always a treat after a spot of adventuring, don't you think? But let's not get ahead of ourselves here – it's best to start at the beginning in recounting such an action-packed day, full of history and scenic grandeur.

Polar Pioneer had made fabulous time from Elephant Island, so we waited until dawn to enter King Haakon Bay on the south-western coast of South Georgia. We cruised up this first of the island's majestic fjords and were ready to jump into Zodiacs very soon after breakfast. It was windy out, but it's South Georgia – what else were we to expect? *Polar Pioneer's* anchorage was a little further along the bay than Peggotty Bluff, another of those critical spots on the Shackleton trail. Peggotty Bluff was where Shackleton and his five companions rested up before he, Crean and Worsley headed off into the unknown. Some of us were content to meander along the shore, making our acquaintance with a pair of inquisitive king penguins, while the rest climbed a convenient hill and surveyed the mighty glaciers sweeping down from Shackleton Gap and the milky, turquoise-green, sediment-filled waters of the bay.

The gap was of course the entry point for those three hardy souls of early last century making their way into the island's mountainous interior and the next herculean effort among many in their fight for survival. For us, it was far less dramatic, but in a quiet and personal way it was

momentous. There was time to venture further on and approach the foot of the nearest glacier, linger close to a pile of moulting elephant seals, or just revel in our first encounter with king penguins.

Polar Pioneer then cruised back along the bay while we enjoyed a delicious lunch of soup and schnitzel. Before long we were at Cape Rosa at the extreme western end of the bay and potentially another appointment with the Shackleton story. With the ship in position, Gary made a careful assessment of the gangway and the possibility of making a landing at this little spot loaded with historical significance. It was at Cape Rosa, or more precisely at Cave Cove – a mere slot in the headland – that Shackleton and his companions first made landfall in May 1916 after their ordeal of sailing in the *James Caird* from Elephant Island.

If our adventurous landing by Zodiac did one thing, it gave us an even greater admiration for the skill and seamanship of Shackleton and his men. At times, we were finding it a challenge to unload, load, and spin the boats in the surge. What must it then have been like with heavy wooden boat? Some us went for a walk to higher ground with Juan and Ian, and wisely, the kayakers paddled merrily about outside the cove with Daniel. And there, in the corner of this tiny inlet, was the 'cave'. If you half closed your eyes, you could just see them there laid out in their sleeping bags around a little flickering fire.





Moltke Harbour, Godthul

Position:	21:00 hours	Course:	270°
Latitude:	54°13'S	Speed:	4 knots
Longitude:	36°18'W		

Wind Speed:	20 knots	Barometer:	990.6 hPa & rising
Wind Direction:	W	Air Temp:	4°C
		Sea Temp:	3°C

Our morning plans for Gold Harbour were blown out the porthole with 35-knot gale-force northerly winds, and a band of icebergs forming a barrier to our anchorage area. Onward we steamed in search of protection from the wild. Moltke Harbour in Royal Bay looked protected and entirely inviting. We even had a warm, dry ‘Foehn’ wind blowing, a regular phenomenon here at South Georgia, being a land-based wind generated in the lee of mountain ranges.

The sky was a weather observer’s bonanza, with sun and billows of cumulus cloud in one quadrant, a double rainbow in the direction of nearby Weddell Glacier, lenticular clouds perched above Royal Bay, and mist swirling around the higher ranges.

Onshore our kayakers launched into their craft and tootled around the coastline of Moltke Harbour, enjoying fur seals and scenic surrounds. The corner of the beach was resident to a group of elephant seal weaners and nearby them the big boys—a haulout of adult males going through their annual moult.

Those of us on land took off for a walk, some to the higher reaches for spectacular views, others along the length of the broad beach. Wind whistled down the central valley and at times we struggled to remain on course. Then the call came from Captain—please return to the ship as the wind was rapidly strengthening. Just at that time a squall hit close to shore and toppled one of the kayaks. Dan and Roger to the rescue!

We could see out to the ship that fierce squalls were coming out of Weddell Glacier and whipping up the bay. These katabatic winds are commonly associated with glaciers and ice caps,

and occur when cold air literally flows downhill, sometimes with formidable force. Little did we know the ferocity of what was in store.

One by one the Zodiacs made their way back to the ship amid plumes of sea spray and breaking waves. The ship was shunted sideways with the force of the wind which soon squalled at over 50 knots. Gangway man Sasha often stood waist deep in frigid water but one by one he hauled each person across to safety. Last to come was Scott and Juan’s Zodiac and now the wind had increased to a ferocious 60 knots!

The bay turned white with spindrift. Wind howled. The stout little Zodiac inched its way from shore to ship where team, crew and passengers did a fantastic job of managing a difficult gangway. Out on the back deck, Daniel had his work cut out getting his Zodiac that was ferrying three empty kayaks up on the hook. Staff and crew on the back deck had their work cut out hauling in each Zodiac onto deck, the Zodiacs having now turned into one-tonne flying kites. Captain was busy in the bridge getting our ship safely out of the maelstrom, the ship on an awkward lean with the power of the wind, and back to the relative “shelter” of 30-knot ocean winds. An epic morning and well done all round.

Late afternoon saw us enjoying a windblown “sunset cruise” at Godthul (Good Cove). This was the site of an old whaling shore depot, evident by an abundance of whale bones littered along the beach. After a Zodiac cruise around the bay with a guest appearance by a leopard seal, we made a brief visit to the site before romping home to our cosy ship for a delicious dinner.







DAY 12 | Sunday 31 March 2019

Grytviken, Jason Harbour

Position: 21:30 hours
Latitude: 54°10'S
Longitude: 36°39 W

Course: at anchor,
Husvik Harbor

Wind Speed: 8 knots
Wind Direction: SW

Barometer: 990.6 hPa & rising
Air Temp: 5°C
Sea Temp: 3°C

BY ALASDAIR MCGREGOR

If any description could sum up today, it would be a day of contrasts. The morning dawn seemed to herald a South Georgian ground hog day – blowing and raining, with the occasional flurry of sleet, just like much of the previous day

We approached the entrance to King Edward Cove in early morning light, but Captain Sasha was concerned about *Polar Pioneer* dragging anchor, so he stood well out in Cumberland Bay. Customs formalities over; the ship declared rat free and our outerwear proclaimed squeaky clean by the government officer; we then took to the Zodiacs for the longish and wet ride to shore. Our first stop was the Grytviken cemetery where we paid homage to the two most famous people buried there – Sir Ernest Shackleton and Frank Wild.

As the drizzle came down, Alasdair gave a short impromptu talk explaining how, given his extraordinary life, Shackleton ended up being buried in this remote, but entirely appropriate, corner of the earth. The cold and blustery conditions only seemed to heighten the poignancy of the scene.

A group photo taken, we were then free to wander around the old whaling station and surrounds. The museum was a must, with the added bonus of a spot of retail therapy on the side. Then there was the post office and the despatch of those post cards that might just reach friends in time for Christmas. The replica of the *James Caird* was tucked away in a purpose-built building next door; and for those in search of some spiritual contemplation as the whalers of old might have experienced it, there was a Sunday pilgrimage to Grytviken’s beautiful church.

Further afield, some of us even made the trek to the memorial cross erected to the memory of Shackleton by his comrades from the Quest Expedition back in 1922.

Back on board for a delicious lunch of pizza and ice cream – thanks Al and Bert – there was just enough time for a power nap while *Polar Pioneer* found her way into Jason Harbour in readiness for the afternoon’s outing. Where it had been blowing a gale and raining in the morning, our time ashore at Jason Harbour was to be bathed in sunlight and blessed – for the most part – by moderate breezes. There was even the chance for kayaking.

What a beautiful setting! A sickle-shaped cobbled beach backed by a maze of tussock grass extended back to majestic bare hills and rocky spires rising skywards. Tucked in a quiet corner of the bay just near our landing spot was a tiny hut that once acted as a whalers’ post office, but looking for all the world like the perfect weekend hideaway shack.

Some of us were content to wander the beach enjoying encounters with fur seal pups, South Georgia pipits and pintails, and a small colony of king penguins, while others explored the nearby lagoon or took in the expansive view form further inland. A day of contrasts indeed – filled with fascinating history and the grandeur of South Georgia.



DAY 13 | Monday 1 April 2019

Fortuna Bay, Stromness Harbour, Hercules Bay

Position:	20:30 hours	Course:	at anchor, Hercules Bay	Wind Speed:	10 knots	Barometer:	993.3 hPa & steady
Latitude:	54°07'S			Wind Direction:	SW	Air Temp:	5°C
Longitude:	36°40'W					Sea Temp:	3°C

The waters of Fortuna Bay glittered in that typical South Georgia combination of sunshine and rain cloud. Onshore, 31 expeditioners sat amongst the fur seals preparing for the Shackleton Walk. Muck boots were exchanged for hiking boots, walking poles were adjusted, layers pulled off and put on, and a group photo taken to seal the deal. Off we forged into the tussocks. It was slippery going up the grass slopes to the plateau that overlooked Fortuna Glacier where Shackleton, Crean and Worsley first descended in May 1916.

With Robyn in the lead and the three youngsters biting at her heels, our walk took us across grassy slopes, over a stream bed, up beyond the vegetation line, across hillsides of loose shale, the stone fractured by the constant thaw and freeze.

At Crean Lake Alasdair delivered a reading from *South*, (aka the Holy Gospel according to St Ernest). Those words had us imagine the moment when the morning work whistle from Stromness Whaling Station resounded through the mountains; for Shackleton, Crean and Worsley a thrilling, evocative sound that heralded safety and rescue.

At the 300-metre elevation mark the wind blasted at our backs. At the nearby saddle we snuggled down behind an outcrop of rock to fuel up on snacks, hear a further reading and take in the views of Stromness Whaling Station.

We safely navigated the downhill scree scramble other than several inadvertent bumsides at the last stage of the slippery grass slopes near Shackleton Waterfall.

Time for a rest at this historic site before striding out across the broad plain with its many braided streams and to the beach at Stromness. Fur seal pups greeted us, along with Gary and our transit party who had enjoyed a scenic cruise from Fortuna Bay past Hercules Bay and via Leith Whaling Station. Our Zodiac drivers showed us Stromness Whaling Station, pointing out the manager's residence where Shackleton, Crean and Worsley were taken for coffee, cake, a bath, and fresh borrowed clothes after walking into the station as three wild, shaggy beings, unrecognisable to those they encountered.

Our chefs had a scrumptious lunch waiting while our good ship made its way to Hercules Bay. The sun shone, the wind calmed and we Zodiaced leisurely around this majestic bay with its mind-bending geology and resident colony of macaroni penguins. Our kayakers disappeared for a serene paddle, winding through bull kelp to explore the nooks and crannies of the coast-line. Everyone on the water revelled in the magnificence of the Hercules Bay—the amphitheatre of mountains, the folded rock, sunlight on the orange lichen, the waterfall, and winding strands of kelp upon which tiny pipits fossicked.

What better way to complete a spectacular bay than with a BBQ on the back deck. Kathrine, Al, Bert, Dasha and Anna magically produced platters, meats, seafood and drinks, while party hats, dance music and good company set the scene for a fun night. What would those macaroni penguins have made of it all?







DAY 14 | Tuesday 2 April 2019

Salisbury Plain, Prion Island

Position: 21:00 hours
Latitude: 53°51'S
Longitude: 38°15'W

Course: 280°
Speed: 10.3 knots

Wind Speed: 19 knots
Wind Direction: NNE

Barometer: 999.9 hPa & falling
Air Temp: 14°C
Sea Temp: 3.6°C

The golden orb of sun slid above the horizon, gilding the Bay of Isles and its splendid surround of mountains all dusted with fresh snow. A cracker of a day, sunny and calm, perfectly timed for our morning at Salisbury Plain.

Whichever way we looked were king penguins: frolicking in the ocean, sashaying along the beach, and condensed in a wall-to-wall colony of adults and chicks amongst the tussocks and up into the higher reaches. At its peak, Salisbury Plain is estimated to total 250,000 birds during the moult period. Astonishing to think that what is now the second biggest king penguin colony on South Georgia was resident to only 350 pairs back in 1912.

In summer, the kings take foraging trips 250 kilometres north to rich feeding ground at the polar front, and regularly travel 100 kilometres per day to and from the colony. Some of the kings we saw returning to the colony had bellies so round and laden with krill, that they plodded inland at a labored pace.

Some kings were on eggs which are incubated for 54 days before hatching in Autumn. Chicks of these so-called 'late breeders' risk starvation and struggle to make their first winter; those who do survive fledge at the end of the following summer.

Fur seals were in abundance—mothers suckling their young, and countless fur seal pups cavorting in the shallows and just wanting to have fun.

Our kayakers had a stupendous paddle along the shoreline. Immediately around them the water teemed with penguins attracted to the streamlined kayaks and their sporty occupants.

Pintail ducks flocked in shallow ponds amongst the tussocks while we humans were not so at ease wading through the fetid sludge, some of us getting a little more mud than we bargained for.

Ours was a morning of sensory overload—the sheer spectacle of so many birds, the acrid smell, the throng of the colony, the way the light danced upon the shoreline. As several people remarked, it was a total privilege to experience all this wonder.

After four hours on shore we reluctantly farewelled the kings and returned to our ship for a tasty lunch. There was little time to rest because our afternoon outing was just across the way at Prion island, home to breeding wandering albatross. Up the boardwalk we went to the plateau at the summit of the island where seven wanderers on pedestal nests each tended a chick. These albatross, who take turns at sitting on the nest for weeks at a time are Masters of Zen; little wonder given that it takes about 80 days just to incubate the egg. During this time, albatross foraging trips have been recorded as covering distances of 7,500 kilometres in less than two weeks! Chick rearing takes 278 days, amongst the longest of any bird.

We had time to enjoy one last lovely Zodiac cruise, exploring the coastline of Prion Island with its lichen-rich rock, its long swirls of kelp, the song of pipits and a deep, dark sea cave.

A pre-dinner recap led by Roger recounted vivid memories and impressions of five sensational days at the island of South Georgia.







South Atlantic Ocean

Position:	20:30 hours	Course:	274°	Wind Speed:	33 knots	Barometer:	979.9 hPa & falling
Latitude:	53°12'S	Speed:	9.2 knots	Wind Direction:	NW	Air Temp:	6°C
Longitude:	44°51'W					Sea Temp:	3.8°C

We relished the extra sleep in that comes with a sea day, and even with our ship ploughing into a big nor’westerly wind and a substantial swell, the busy dining rooms at breakfast time suggest that on the whole we have gained good strong sea legs throughout our voyage. Spare a thought for our two hard working chefs Al and Bert, and stewardesses Anna and Dasha who in rough weather perform acrobatic feats in the galley and scullery in order to cook and serve three delicious meals each day. Thank you, team.

It was a day to kick back, enjoy time on the bridge on the lookout for seabirds, and to increase our knowledge of Antarctic history. First came Ian who gave us a run-down on three pivotal characters of Antarctic aviation history—Australian polar explorer Hubert Wilkins, the first to fly in Antarctica at Deception Island in 1928, and Americans Richard Byrd and Lincoln Ellsworth who took flights south of the Antarctic Circle and were the first to map areas of Antarctica from above.

We learned that Robert Falcon Scott and Ernest Shackleton were the first polar explorers to become truly airborne in Antarctica, surveying the local terrain in hot air balloons during their expeditions of the early 1900s.

Some dabbled with the idea of starting their packing but with the seas increasing, even moving around the cabin took some doing. It became a day of catch up—filling in journal entries, reading, cards and games, reviewing and editing scores of photos taken over the last days.

Scott was busy in the bar with submissions for our People’s Choice Competition which are now on display in the bar. What a tremendous collection is it! Be sure to submit your vote for your favourite photo in each category. One vote per passenger and staff!

Alasdair continued our educational program in the afternoon with the stories of polar scientific explorers Dr William S. Bruce who led the 1902–04 Scottish National Expedition to the Antarctic Peninsula, Dr Jean B. Charcot who led two French Antarctic Expeditions between 1903 and 1910, and Dr Otto Nordenskjöld who led the Swedish Antarctic Expedition of 1901–04.

To most of us these explorers are largely unknown and yet, as Alasdair recounted, they each have tales to tell of daring, hardship, adventure and loss, at the same time as bringing home significant contributions to Antarctic scientific knowledge.

While our ship pitched and shuddered, the Shackleton devotees enjoyed the relative stability of the Deck 2 lecture room where they were treated to the finale of the Shackleton movie. Then it was time for a drink or two in the bar before another tasty dinner.







DAY 16 | Thursday 4 April 2019

South Atlantic Ocean

Position: 20:15 hours
Latitude: 52°41'S
Longitude: 51°29'W

Course: 283°
Speed: 9.2 knots

Wind Speed: 28 knots
Wind Direction: W

Barometer: 983.9 hPa & falling
Air Temp: 6°C
Sea Temp: 5.7°C

Chief Mate Vladimir summed up the weather by saying that nature wants to let us know who is in charge. During the night our small ship pitched and jolted in big seas, plumes of spray thrown high across our bow. But by morning the expected reprieve arrived and we were at last able to walk rather than stagger around the ship.

Between packing our bags we had several diverse presentations. Robyn shared her and Gary's year in Antarctica, working on a science project with emperor penguins at Auster Rookery. Her story followed the breeding cycle of the emperors from when they first return to the rookery once sea ice forms in April-May, to the winter months when the males incubate the egg while the female heads out to sea to forage, travelling 50 kilometres to reach open water. The chick hatches in July-August, the heart of winter, timed with the return of the females. We saw the harsher side of life with maverick females trying to abduct a chick after returning to find they had no chick of their own.

By December, though, the chicks have grown to 16 kilograms in weight thanks to the feeding effort of both parents. By now the chicks are shedding fluffy down as their adult plumage grows through. The parents stop returning to the rookery to feed their chicks in late December through January at which time the fledgling chicks, hungry for a meal, follow adults out to the ice edge to begin 'teenage' life in the water, fending for themselves.

Roger followed with an informative if not sobering talk on climate change and its impact on the polar regions.

Our boys and girls in the galley produced another fine lunch after which we spent varied time about the ship before Gary's presentation on sea ice. Aurora prides itself on the expertise and calibre of our guides and on this trip we are fortunate to have not one but two highly experienced naturalists in Roger and Gary who have spent a good part of their long career 'walking the walk' in the polar regions.

By late afternoon the wind had increased and once again our ship felt the movement of the waves sweeping through from the west.

Tomorrow we have a busy day as we close the last leg of our voyage to Stanley where we can expect temperatures of around 8°C with strong winds and the possibility of rain. A bracing Falkland Islands day!



Nearing the Falklands

Position:	16:00 hours	Course:	272°
Latitude:	51°46'S	Speed:	10 knots
Longitude:	56°05'W		

BY ALASDAIR MCGREGOR

Our negotiation of the Drake Passage, the run from the Antarctic Peninsula to Elephant Island, and then the crossing to South Georgia, had us all lulled into something of a false sense of security. But by the second night of *Polar Pioneer's* passage from South Georgia to the Falklands, the seas were up and we were captive to just what the Southern Ocean is capable of. Cabins were rearranged as if by some phantom force and we all did the involuntary stagger, alas with no alcohol imbibed!

Not that the waves were anything out of the ordinary – perhaps five to six metres maximum – but they were enough, for just an instant, to send our imaginations rocking and rolling in the direction of a really big sea. There was talk that *Polar Pioneer* might be hit by 10 metre waves on her turnaround journey in a couple of days' time, heading south to collect a group of Polish scientists from King George Island. *Polar Pioneer* would no doubt delay her departure with the aim of avoiding such conditions.

The voyage must be nearing an end if a disembarkation briefing is called, and the first item on the day's program was a session with Robyn about what to expect when we reach Stanley, and the 'delights' of flying from the military airport at Mount Pleasant. 'Now where did I pack those loose batteries?'

Then there was the event that could not be avoided – settling accounts in the bar with Kathrine. One account recipient was heard to mutter: 'surely I didn't drink that much – it must have been all the laundry that I sent down to Deck 2?'



Wind Speed:	30 knots	Barometer:	995.9 hPa & falling
Wind Direction:	NNW	Air Temp:	7°C
		Sea Temp:	6°C

To distract us from our aching credit cards, Roger turned on a terrific late morning presentation; in part reminiscing about his many years of rich Antarctic experience, and part a cautionary tale of what can go terribly wrong in such unforgiving places as Antarctica and the islands of the Southern Ocean.

There was even a treasure hunt on one of the rugged islands of the Drake Passage that Roger has studied. Alas, there was no Spanish treasure secreted in a cave to get his blood racing, but instead, a subterranean stampede of South American sea lions!

By this time the seas had quietened somewhat, and with our last lunch for the voyage over, it was Scott's turn to entertain us. For such an accomplished wildlife photographer, the Falkland Islands are overflowing with subject matter and the bounty of the natural world. Some species were now very familiar to us – king and Gentoo penguins for instance – but seeing them on expansive, white sandy beaches was something entirely new. With Scott's vivid imagery in mind, all of us would now be tempted to make a return visit to the Falkland Islands, and linger for a while.

And so sadly, on to final moments from this amazing late-season taste of Antarctica and South Georgia – Captain's farewell drinks and the traditional end of voyage slideshow –sending us on our way, so much the richer in memory and experience.







DAY 18 | Saturday 6 April 2019

Stanley

Position: 07:30 hours
Latitude: 51°41'S
Longitude: 57°49'W

Course: At anchor,
Stanley Harbour

Wind Speed: 27 knots
Wind Direction: W

Barometer: 997.3 hPa & falling
Air Temp: 6°C
Sea Temp: 6°C

Our final morning on *Polar Pioneer* was a rush of luggage and farewells. It was a happy and sad time after a great trip. Port Stanley is a beautiful town, capital of the Falklands, buildings colouring the shoreline. A wee bit of the old mother country in the South Atlantic.

Several weeks earlier in Ushuaia, Argentina, we had gathered together as group - passengers, staff and crew - for *Polar Pioneer's* last expedition to Antarctica for Aurora Expeditions. It was wonderful way to share such an adventure, on this well-tested ship and with our small group. The adventure had an over-riding theme as well – to travel in ‘Shackleton’s footsteps’. We experienced Antarctica, visited Elephant Island where Shackleton farewelled most of his men, crossed the Scotia Sea to South Georgia, and enjoyed the history, scenery and wildlife of that windy island.

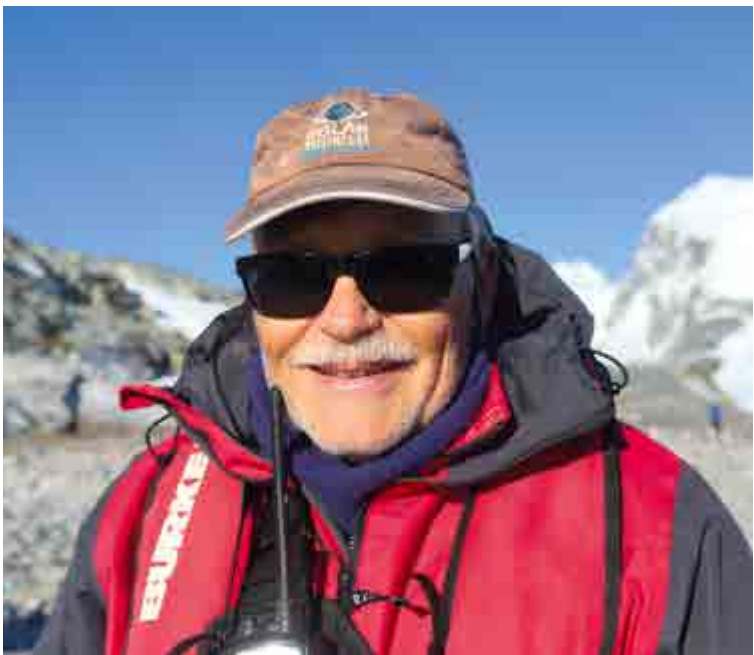
Sun and wind, how they moulded our voyage.

Drake Passage was nice and calm. On the edge of the South Shetlands we experienced ‘Arrival’ in the form of a giant iceberg. Then we hit Antarctica. Gentoos on Cuverville, snow at Neko, woolly weather at Enterprise, fog at Mikklesen Harbour, a Zodiac-hunting leopard seal at Gourdin, ice along the shore at Brown Bluff. A huge tabular iceberg made us detour then fin whales surrounded us at Elephant Island. Point Wild was wild – Zodiac cruising in big seas, too rough for a landing. Then, like the *James Caird*, we crossed 800 nautical miles of open ocean to King Haakon Bay on South Georgia.

Our time at South Georgia was a many-act play. The stage was set by wind, waves and wildlife plus the Shackleton history. We began at Peggotty Bluff (some put their feet on a glacier) and Cave Cove, with its funnelled swell.

During our two-hour visit to Moltke Harbour, the wind went from calm to 60 knots, Godthul was protected with whale bones littering the beach. Grytviken – Shackleton’s grave, whaling station, museum, wind – Jason Harbour – sunshine and pintails. Our walk from Fortuna Bay to Stromness, imagining the saga for Sir Ernest, Worsley and Crean, followed by an afternoon Zodiac cruise in Hercules, with its folded rocks and macaroni penguins. BBQ night on the back deck. And there followed the final act – king penguin city at Salisbury plain. This had the encore of albatross on Prion Island. Pipits sang for us everywhere.

The sailing days across to the Falklands gave us time to collect thoughts, share photos and stories and understand the isolation and inaccessibility of Antarctica, and the oasis of South Georgia. This has been one of many trips in each or our lives, one shared with good hearted friends. It will never be forgotten.







Kayaking Log

By Daniel Stavert

Kayaking Guide: Daniel Stavert

Kayakers:

Dave Cotgrave	Sarah Pemberton	Wendy Trajhanova
Ann Kirkhope	Gillian Scoular	

DAY 4: Cuverville Island – Distance: 3.4 km

Morning arrived in the Antarctic Peninsula and the kayakers climbed down the ladder and into their vessels for the first time. In the brilliant sunshine and blazing whiteness of snow and ice, the team set out on their first excursion. Above the calm water the golden light shone on ridges and mountains cut clean against a blue sky. A gentle wander amongst some immense icebergs led into the small bay at the edge of Cuverville Island. There the team landed and set foot on land for the first time in days. Surrounded immediately by gentoo penguins, the paddlers sat and stood around the boats as they, and the kayaks, were investigated by these inquisitive young penguins. A roll of a large grey back heralded the arrival of more local wildlife.

Two huge leopard seals patrolled the shoreline, gliding in and pulling a frantic penguin from the crowd. Whilst the penguin wasn’t seen again, the quick return of the seal made the team hope it had escaped. Soon it was time to return to the ship. A short paddle, interrupted gladly by dozens of porpoising gentoos, and the team was home after an astonishing first kayak in Antarctica.

Neko Harbour – Distance: 5.1 km

The Antarctic continued to be kind to the expedition. A sunny glorious afternoon welcomed the paddlers as they entered Neko Harbour. The mirrored water reflected the panorama of the mountains that surround the bay. Their jagged edges shining in perfect outline on the water as the kayaks cut through the calm. The sudden exhalation of whales caught the ear of the team and they pushed through some thick brash ice to find two humpbacks logging on the surface. These two sleeping cetaceans gently rose and fell with each immense breath.

A leopard seal on a floe regarded the kayaks with curiosity as they paddled past. Between the crackling brash ice, the sleeping whales, the leopard seal, and the overwhelming vista that surrounded, it was hard to know which way to look. Leaving behind this dilemma, the team headed for shore and soon were able to land on the continent itself, to be welcomed again by hundreds of inquisitive gentoo penguins. With the light beginning to fall the team returned to the ship, climbing the ladder and readying themselves for the challenge of the polar plunge.

DAY 6: Brown Bluff – Distance: 2 km

After a blustery morning at Gourdin Island, the kayakers were keen to get off the ship and into their boats. With the wind dropping in the Antarctic Sound the team got ready. Launching out into the water a strong current was immediately felt next the ship, and within a few moments the wind began to pick up. Ann and Wendy made a valiant effort to hold their ground downwind of the ship, whilst Marcel and Aiden began to drift quickly out towards the Weddell Sea.

With Dave, Terry and Carolyn safely re-boarding the ship, Daniel raced downwind and made sure Wendy and Ann were doing ok before reaching Marcel and Aiden, still doing their best to turn into the wind. Within a minute Febes had arrived in a Zodiac and was busy scooping up paddlers out of the ocean.

First out were Marcel and Aiden, before Ann and Wendy gracefully fell into the boat. Returning to the ship in the rising winds and spray, the paddlers could see their comrades on the ship and were glad to see them returning the ‘ok’ signal. The team regrouped in the Zodiac, and soon all were on shore and enjoying penguins and the ice in close to land; safe, dry, and glad to have experienced the truly dynamic nature of the weather of Antarctica.

DAY 10: Cape Rosa – Distance: 4.2 km

Arriving in the morning at Peggotty Bluff, deep inside King Haakon Bay, it looked like the island would deliver on its reputation as the wild island at the edge of the Scotia Sea. Strong winds kept the kayaks on board for the morning but in the afternoon the wind began to drop and Daniel began to be hopeful. A lumpy sea and an unsteady ship could not dissuade the team who got into a Zodiac and motored into the shelter of Cape Rosa, launching their kayaks there.

Three keen kayakers, Ann, Wendy, and Dave, set out through the confused sea, following the rocky coast past curious blue-eyed shags and their chicks, and fur seals rolling their sleek furry bodies in amongst the caves and coves. The choppy sea gave the group a sense of empathy for Ernest Shackleton and his men as they arrived here for their first landing after crossing the Scotia Sea from Elephant Island over one hundred years ago.

A last turn into the swell and the group called for a taxi, with driver Anne happy to make a pick up in her Zodiac and return us the comfort of the ship. An exciting first paddle in South Georgia complete.





Kayaking Log

By Daniel Stavert

DAY 11: Moltke Harbour – Distance: 3.8 km

Blue skies and sunshine greeted the paddlers as they rose on their second day in South Georgia. With a line of calm water visible beneath the western cliffs of Moltke Harbour three paddlers took up the challenge. Launching from the beach, Dave, Ann, and Terry set out to explore this sheltered zone. The colourful boats moved in and around amongst surging rocks and swirling kelp as occasional blasts of wind came whipping off the cliffs or from the fjord to the south.

With the short excursion time complete the team returned back to the beach and were almost ashore when drama struck. A down gust of wind from the cliffs above came dropping onto Ann and Terry. The rush was at least ten knots stronger than any other gust the team had felt. Instantly their kayak flipped over and they were swimming. In a few moments Daniel was alongside and dragging them gracefully back into their kayak where Roger met them in a Zodiac and took them ashore. With increasing winds the team took Zodiacs home after a wonderful, if slightly more exciting than planned, outing.

DAY 12: Jason Harbour – Distance: 4.6 km

The blue skies and calmer waters of Jason Harbour were a welcome change in the mood of South Georgia. Sliding away from the ship the paddlers headed into towards the beach, cruising along its edge before landing inside a small nook in the headland. A short walk along the coast took the team to a little gathering of king penguins. Soon though, it was time to get floating again, and the team set out to explore every inch of the coast. Fur seal pups would erupt in a flutter from the water, pause as we slid past, and then gambol away again.

Rounding a rocky point into a secluded cove, Dave requested a landing and soon the three paddlers were ashore on their private sub-Antarctic beach. The local elephant seal pups turning their big eyes in open curiosity, their loud cries heard over the ever-present warbling of the fur seals.

As lenticular clouds began to build overhead, and the windy mood of the island began to reassert itself, the team was glad to take a ride from Robyn back to the *Polar Pioneer*. Another great paddle complete, in some welcome sunshine, here in the southern-ocean paradise of South Georgia.

DAY 13: Hercules Bay – Distance: 4.8 km

After a chance to stretch their legs on the morning's 'Shackleton Walk', a fleet of five kayakers set out from the ship in Hercules Bay. An almost perfectly sheltered cove, the looming hills and steep cliffs that circled the bay kept out the ocean's swell and came close to keeping the wild weather of South Georgia at bay. Despite this the occasional squall would come rushing down the walls and skitter across the water, causing the kayakers to put their heads down and dig in with their paddles.

Soon though, the team had made it into the shelter of the cliffs and the protection of the kelp, its forest of swirling strands dampening the wind. Easing in behind the kelp and close up to shore the intrepid five began to explore the surging coastline of the bay. With giant petrels relaxing in the calm and the near constant twittering of South Georgia pipits, there was always something to look at. Soon the main attraction appeared. Macaroni penguins sent out their raucous cries across the water, and the team took a long moment to enjoy this view of a new species of penguin.

The clear calm water beckoned on, and led by Ann and Wendy, the group continued around the bay before poking the nose of their kayaks out beyond the shelter of its walls. The descending cloud, and the choppy waters, suggested a turn for home. The return of whitecaps and darkening skies hastened a quick paddle and ever graceful clamber up the rope ladder and home.

DAY 14: Salisbury Plain – Distance: 4.4 km

Morning dawned on the expedition's last day in South Georgia. For the last excursion the ship had arrived at one of the largest king penguin rookeries on the Island. So as to enjoy time seeing the spectacle on land the paddlers went ashore by Zodiac, landing in the tumult and chaos of a hundred thousand or more raucous penguins. With plenty of time on hand, the team was able to enjoy this overwhelming experience up close before Daniel arrived to meet them on the beach with the kayaks.

Soon the team had splashed through the surf and were out in the glowing blue sea. Within minutes the kayaks were surrounded by hundreds of diving and leaping penguins, surfacing all around the boats and wheeling and turning in every direction. Paddling along the shoreline to the north an entourage of thousands followed every move the team made. Their every action was observed by hundreds and hundreds of watchful swimming birds. Fur seal pups also made their presence known, cartwheeling in and out of the surf and crying out for their mothers between astonished gulps of air when they caught sight of the colourful plastic boats sliding past. Grouping together, the paddlers paused to drink a little hot chocolate, take a moment to treasure where they were and what they had experienced, and to allow the wind to send them home to *Polar Pioneer* for one last clamber up the rope ladder.

Total paddle outings: 8

Total distance paddled: 32.3 km

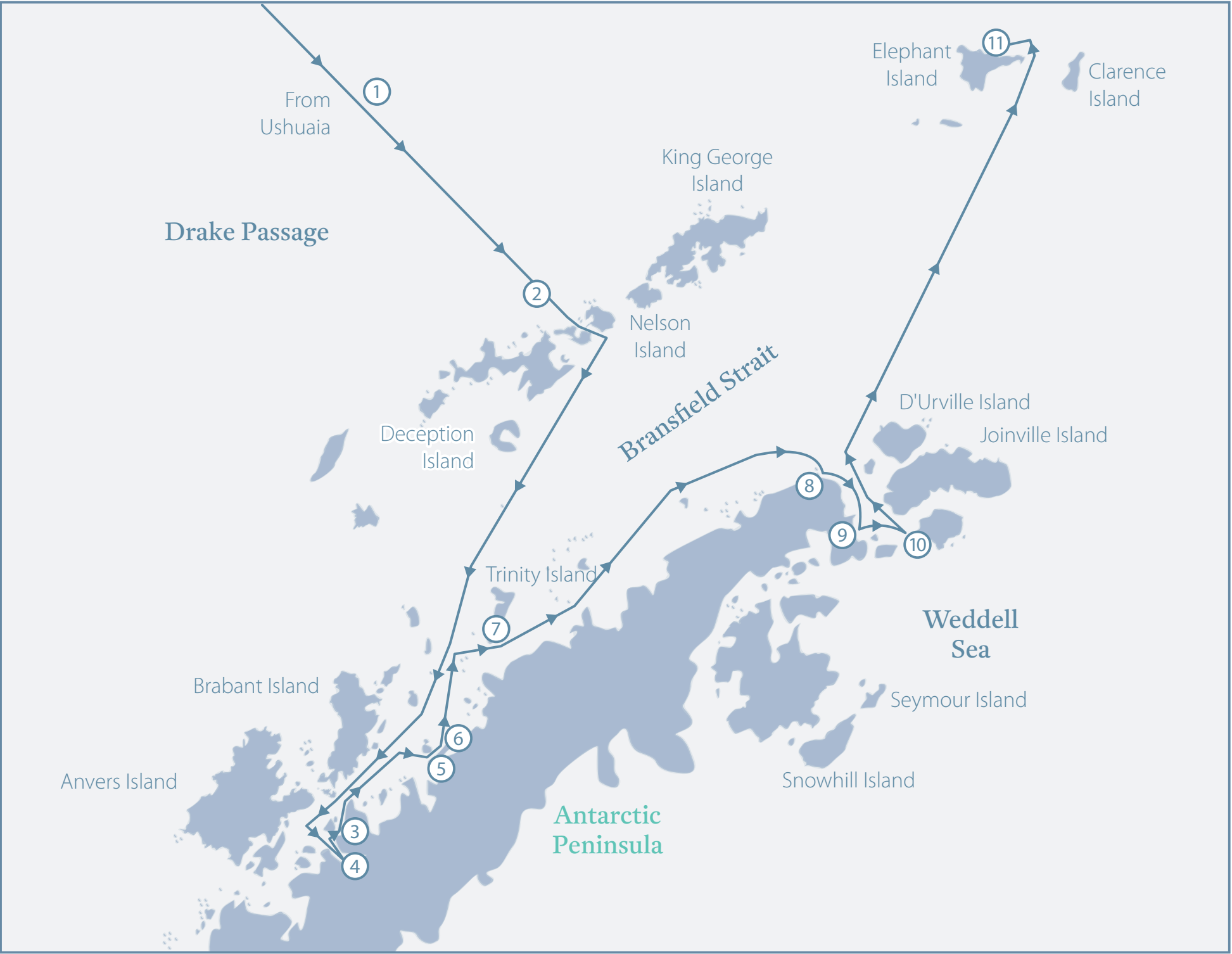




In Shackleton's Footsteps

20 March – 06 April 2019 | Distance Travelled: 3,040 nautical miles

Southernmost point of voyage: 64.83° S, 62.67° W

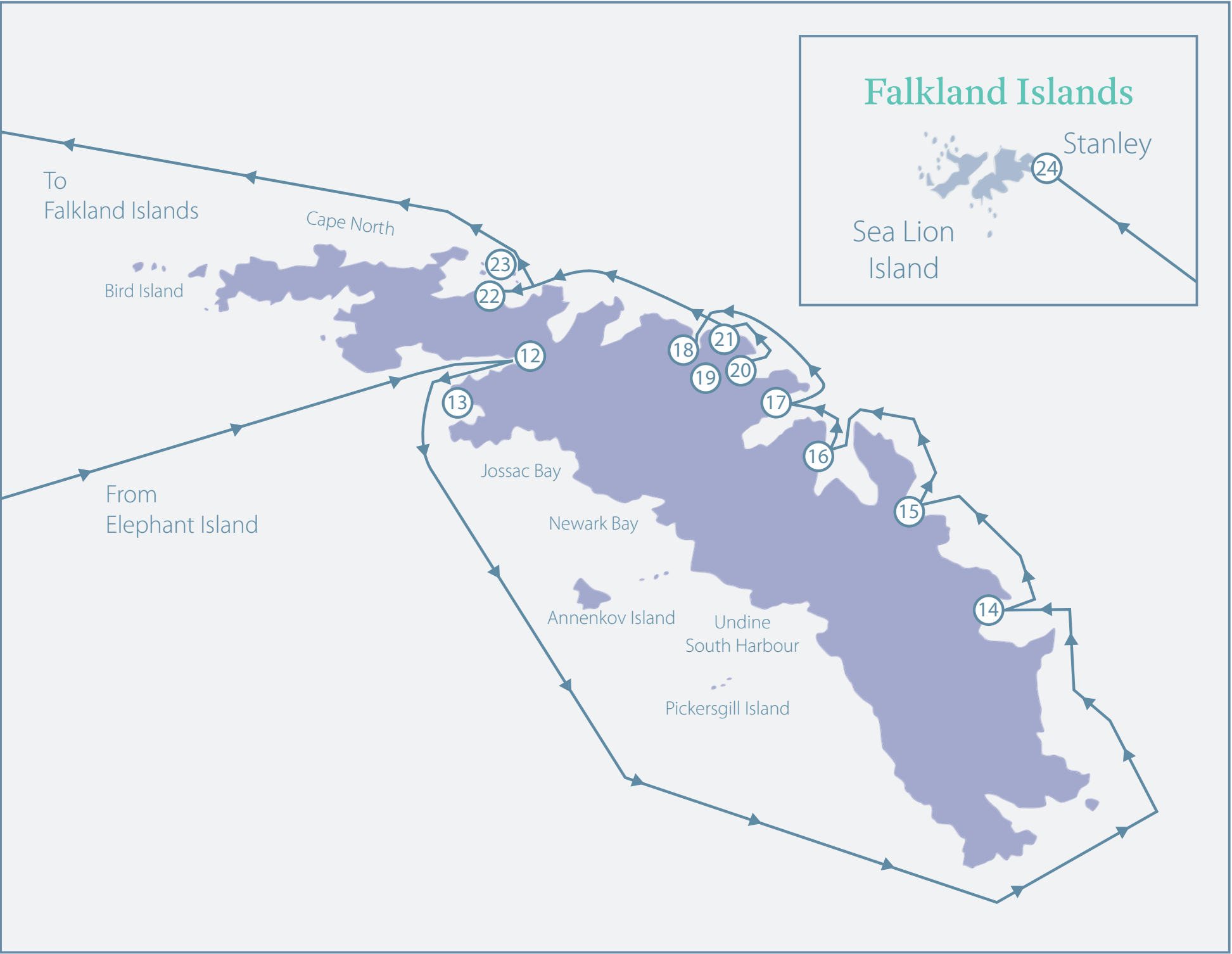


Destinations

- | | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Ushuaia (Argentina) | 5. Willhemina Bay | 9. Brown Bluff |
| 2. Giant iceberg | 6. Enterprise Is | 10. Weddell Sea |
| 3. Cuverville Is | 7. Mikkelsen Harbour | 11. Elephant Is |
| 4. Neko Harbour | 8. Gourdin Is | |

In Shackleton's Footsteps

20 March – 06 April 2019



Destinations

- | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| 12. Peggotty Bluff, King Haakon Bay | 16. Grytviken (museum, whaling station) | 20. Stromness (whaling station) | 23. Prion Island (wandering albatross) |
| 13. Cave Cove, King Haakon Bay | 17. Jason Harbour | 21. Hercules Bay (Zodiac cruise) | 24. Stanley |
| 14. Moltke Harbour | 18. Fortuna Bay (beach landing) | 22. Salisbury Plain (king penguins) | |
| 15. Godthul | 19. Shackleton Walk | | |









Bird species log

BIRD SPECIES	MARCH - APRIL																
	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5
King Penguin										X	X	X	X	X			
Gentoo Penguin				X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X			
Adelie Penguin					X	X											
Chinstrap Penguin					X	X	X		X								
Macaroni Penguin													X				
Rockhopper Penguin		X															
Magellanic Penguin																	
Wandering Albatross		X							X		X			X	X		X
Royal Albatross																	X
Black-browed Albatross		X	X				X	X	X	X	X				X	X	X
Grey-headed Albatross		X	X				X		X		X				X		
Light-mantled Albatross			X				X		X	X						X	
Southern Giant Petrel			X	X		X	X	X						X			
Northern Giant Petrel	X	X							X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
White-chinned Petrel								X	X	X	X				X	X	X
Southern Fulmar			X			X	X										
Cape Petrel						X	X	X	X	X							
Antarctic Petrel			X			X											
Snow Petrel				X													
Soft-plumaged Petrel							X	X	X								X
Blue Petrel																	
South Georgia Diving Petrel																	
Antarctic Prion							X	X	X	X	X	X					X
Fairy Prion																	X



Macaroni Penguin



Giant Petrels



King Penguin



South Georgia Pipit

Bird species log

BIRD SPECIES	MARCH - APRIL																
	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5
Great Shearwater										X	X	X	X	X			
Sooty Shearwater				X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X			
Wilson's Storm-Petrel					X	X											
Black-bellied Storm-Petrel					X	X	X		X								
Imperial Cormorant													X				
Antarctic Cormorant		X															
South Georgia Cormorant																	
Rock Cormorant		X							X		X			X	X		X
Kelp Goose																	X
Yellow-billed Pintail		X	X				X	X	X	X	X				X	X	X
Falkland Steamer Duck		X	X				X		X		X				X		
Turkey Vulture			X				X		X	X						X	
Snowy Sheathbill			X	X		X	X	X						X			
Chilean Skua	X	X							X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Brown Skua								X	X	X	X				X	X	X
South Polar Skua			X			X	X										
Dolphin Gull						X	X	X	X	X							
Kelp Gull			X			X											
Antarctic Tern				X													
Arctic Tern							X	X	X								X
South American Tern																	
South Georgia Pipit																	
South American Tern																	
South Georgia Pipit																	



Wandering albatross with chick



Gentoo Penguin



Snowy sheathbill



South Georgia pintail ducks



Brown skua

Mammal species log

MAMMAL SPECIES	MARCH - APRIL																	
	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	
South American Sea Lion	X																	
Antarctic Fur Seal				X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X				
Leopard Seal				X		X					X	X						
Weddell Seal				X		X												
Crabeater Seal				X	X													
Southern Elephant Seal										X	X	X	X	X				
Hourglass Dolphin																		
Commersons Dolphin																		
Peales Dolphin																		
Killer Whale (Orca)						X												
Southern Right Whale																		
Humpback Whale				X	X	X												
Antarctic Minke Whale			X	X	X	X												
Blue Whale																		
Fin Whale							X		X									
Sei Whale						X								X				
Unidentified whale																		



Elephant Seal



Fur Seal



Elephant Seal



Humpback Whale





Expeditioners

Terry Andruess

Shari Annable-Pemberton

Roger Bellette

Nicole Bryce

Mark Colley

Dave Cotgrave

Marcel De Graaf

Beverly Dillon

Carl Dillon

Brian Dougherty

Gerke Faber

Helen Faber

Imogene Gillespie

Jannette Greenwood

Edgar Hamilton

Ian Hume

Ann Kirkhope

Nicola McDaid

Aiden McDaid

Mia McDaid

Dylan McDaid

Bruce Mitchell

Greg Nelson

Chris Olsen

Eric Pemberton

Sarah Pemberton

Gretchen Peterson

Dick Pollitt

Russell Rolls

Cresene Sanglap

Gillian Scoular

Jane Sharpington-Recny

Deidre Smith

Leverett Smith

Nigel Stoke

Martin Tattersall

Sue Tattersall

Mark Tattersall

Sally Tolmie

John Tolmie

Jo Tovia

Wendy Trajhanova

Donna Trickey

Sue Watt

Marianne Wehby

Carolyn Wiseman



Expedition Team

Expedition Leader:	Gary Miller
Assistant Expedition Leader:	Robyn Mundy
Naturalist:	Roger Kirkwood
Historians:	Alasdair McGregor Ian Evans
Kayaking Master:	Daniel Stavert
Photographic Guide:	Scott Portelli
General Assistant:	Anne Oyasaeter
Expedition Guides	Justin Febey Juan Miramon Melgar
Doctor:	Mari Fleri
Head Chef:	Allan Estoque
Second Chef:	Herbert Cruz
Hotel Manager:	Kathrine Ersando

Polar Pioneer Crew

Captain	Aleksandr Evgenov	Able Seaman	Dmitry Belousov
Second Captain	Vladimir Zimin	Able Seaman	Aleksandr Kiselev
Second Mate	Sergei Abramaov	Able Seaman	Rashit Ganiev
Third Mate	Evgenii Terentev	Motorman	Dmitrii Litvineko
Radio Operator	Dmitry Korchevskiy	Stewardess	Daria Boykova
Chief Engineer	Denis Strelkov	Stewardess	Alina Glazkova
Second Engineer	Pavel Voronov	Stewardess	Svetlana Fedora
Third Engineer	Britvin Maksim	Stewardess	Anna Plavina
Electrical Engineer	Viacheslav Deviatkin	Stewardess	Iliana Koval
Boatswain	Valerii Riabtcev	Stewardess	Elena Liukshina
		Russian Crew Chef	Denis Zhenchevskii

Photo Credits

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Roger Bellette	Eric Pemberton
Nicole Bryce	Dick Pollitt
Dave Cotgrave	Scott Portelli
Marcel De Graaf	Russell Rolls
Beverly Dillon	Gillian Scoular
Helen Faber	Deidre Smith
Jannette Greenwood	Leverett Smith
Roger Kirkwood	Daniel Stavert
Gary Miller	John and Sally Tolmie
Bruce Mitchell	Wendy Trajhanova
Robyn Mundy	Donna Trickey
Chris Olsen	Sue Watt
Sarah Pemberton	Marianne Wehby
Shari Pemberton	Carolyn Wiseman





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