

Trip Notes

Patagonia and Antarctica – January 2010

Jim, Ben and Connor Russell

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| Thursday 31-December-2009 - Melbourne to Santiago Depart 0700 Arrive 1200 | Day 01 |
| Friday 01-January-2010 - Santiago de Chile | Day 02 |
| Saturday 02-January-2010 - Santiago to Punta Arenas Depart 0820 Arrive 1145 to Eco Camp Torres del Paine National Park | Day 03 |
| Sunday 03-January-2010 - Eco Camp Torres del Paine National Park | Day 04 |
| Monday 04-January-2010 - Eco Camp Torres del Paine National Park | Day 05 |
| Tuesday 05-January-2010 - Eco Camp Torres del Paine National Park | Day 06 |
| Wednesday 06-January-2010 - Torres del Paine National Park to Punta Arenas and Ushuaia | Day 07 |

Week 2

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| Thursday 07-January-2010 - Ushuaia Embark Polar Pioneer 1600-1700 - Day 01 | Day 08 |
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Expeditioners will gather in Ushuaia, and have time to explore the bustling community that lays claim to being the world's most southerly town. It sits beneath the spectacular mountains of Tierra del Fuego on the edge of the Beagle Channel. There are plenty of things to keep you occupied while waiting to board *Polar-Pioneer* at 1600 (4pm). You could take a trip to the Lapataia National Park by train or bus, or visit the small museum, which has informative displays about the original inhabitants and the current population of Tierra del Fuego.

Ushuaia is a duty free port with a reputation for its Argentine chocolates, cheap alcohol and leather goods, a great place to buy souvenirs and presents. There are a host of excellent restaurants available whether for a quick coffee, or for an excellent meal of king crab or an Argentine barbecue.

Our competent Russian crew will welcome us aboard *Polar Pioneer* in the afternoon. Sailing down the Beagle Channel, we will settle into shipboard life and enjoy our first meal on board, as the crew set our course" for the Falkland Islands.

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| Friday 08-January-2010 - At sea towards the Falkland Islands Day 02 | Day 09 |
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Cruising towards the Falklands we will commence our lecture program. During the voyage's various sea passages, we will learn about the wildlife, geology, history and geography of the Falklands, South Georgia and the Antarctic Peninsula. We will be given guidelines for approaching the wildlife and talk about the implications of the Antarctic Treaty, as well as being briefed about using our Zodiacs (inflatable rubber boats) for excursions from the ship.

Our various destinations are a photographer's paradise, for the professional and amateur alike. There will be discussions about how to protect your equipment from salt water and tips for taking good pictures.

The mood on board is definitely casual. A favourite pastime is to stand at the stern deck watching the many seabirds, including majestic albatrosses and giant petrels, following in our wake, skillfully using the air currents created by the ship to gain momentum. Feeling transformed, we approach the Falklands, receptive and open.

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| Saturday 09-January-2010 - Landing on the Falkland Islands Day 03 | Day 10 |
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Early this morning we should pass Beauchene Island, which has a huge colony of nesting black-browed albatross. No landing is permitted here, but just passing close to this wild and remote island lashed by giant waves, the air filled with swooping diving birds, provides a sense of the power of nature.

Weather permitting, we may visit New Island, half of which is owned by naturalist Ian Strange who is dedicated to the study and preservation of the wildlife on Sea Lion Island. To get ashore we will use Zodiacs. A short walk across the grassy slope behind Ian's farmhouse brings us to a large rock-hopper penguin colony, balanced on the edge of spectacular cliffs that drop steeply to the crashing surf.

Between the penguins' nests are gentle black-browed albatross sitting serenely upon beautifully moulded mud nests. The air is filled with soaring albatross, turkey vultures, skuas and many species of sea birds. We will also visit a small colony of Magellanic penguins whose burrows can be seen amongst the tussock grass. If we have time, we may also visit West Point Island where we will enjoy the hospitality of the family that owns and farms this island. We may walk or be ferried by jeep to another rock-hopper penguin rookery and black-browed albatross colony.

Alternatively we could set a course for Sea Lion Island, a low-lying island that appears dull and uninteresting as we approach. But don't be fooled! The mud flats, beaches and tussock grass are teeming with creatures including, of course, the sea lions that breed here. If we land on Sea Lion Island we will spend most of the day here, and take a walk to a cliff top where rock-hopper penguins nest beside blue-eyed shags. Sea Lion Island is one of nature's gems.

Breaker Island

Sunday 10-January-2010 - Stanley, Falkland Islands Day 04

Day 11

If time allows, we will visit Stanley, the capital of the Falklands. We can visit the museum, go shopping, post letters or simply enjoy a beer at the Globe Hotel. We will leave the Falklands about lunchtime to head for South Georgia.

Monday 11-January-2010 - At sea bound for South Georgia Day 05

Day 12

Our lecture program will resume and we can share our experiences of the Falkland Islands. Between the Falklands and South Georgia you will be entranced by the ceaseless flight of the many seabirds that follow our wake. You may decide to join the whale watchers on the bridge, or just relax and read a favourite book. If time and weather conditions permit we could pass close to Shag Rocks, a fascinating group of jagged rocky islets protruding from the sea. Blue-eyed cormorants fill the air; their precarious nesting sites are white with guano. We should approach South Georgia some time during late afternoon on the sixth day. South Georgia is a tiny speck in the South Atlantic Ocean, located in one of the most desolate parts of our planet. A 3,000-metre mountain range forms the spine of this long, narrow island. Between the mountains, shattered glaciers carve their way through tussock grass to the deeply indented coastline.

Tuesday 12-January-2010 - At sea bound for South Georgia Day 06

Day 13

Wednesday 13-January-2010 - South Georgia Day 07

Day 14

To us, South Georgia is one of the most beautiful places in the world.

Though geographically speaking the island lies in the sub-Antarctic area, as do the islands of Macquarie and Heard, it has a climate more in keeping with the true Antarctic regions. This is because South Georgia lies wholly within the Antarctic Convergence.

South Georgia is a British possession, having been claimed and named for King George III on 16 January 1775 by Captain James Cook, who records in his journal:

"The wild rocks raised their lofty summits till they were lost in the clouds and the valleys lay buried in ever-lasting snow. Not a tree or a shrub was to be seen, no, not even big enough to make a toothpick. / landed in three different places, displayed our colours and took possession of the country in His Majesty's name under a discharge of small arms."

Quote from "Antarctic Housewife" by Nan Brown.

On 20 May 1916, Sir Ernest Shackleton, Crean and Worsley stumbled into the busy whaling station at Stromness, hungry, exhausted and covered in grime. They had just made the first ever crossing of the mountains of South Georgia from King Haakon Bay, to find help for their three exhausted companions left at

Cave Cove and rescue for the men they had left on Elephant Island. They had sailed in the James Caird for 16 days under horrendous conditions and found safety in the tiny entrance of Cave Cove. This epic story of survival had begun with the sinking of his ship, the *Endurance*, in the Weddell Sea six months earlier.

As we explore South Georgia, we will have the opportunity to reflect on Shackleton's epic journey.

Some of the glorious destinations we plan to visit in South Georgia are listed below:

Grytviken

Originally a Norwegian sealing and whaling Station, it was finally abandoned in 1965. Here we must be careful to avoid stepping on sleeping elephant seals as we skirt the ruins of factory buildings peering into the past, trying to imagine what it was like when whale processing was in full swing.

Abandoned ships lie sunken alongside old wharves, while pitted concrete walls remind us of the more recent Falkland's War, which started here.

Sir Ernest Shackleton died from a heart attack during his final expedition on board the *Quest* on 6 May 1922. His body was laid to rest at Grytviken and we will make a pilgrimage to visit the cross his men erected in his memory looking out across beautiful Cumberland Bay.

St Andrews Bay

The sandy black beach is a resting place for hundreds of elephant seals that haul out on the shore to moult. Behind the beach, the sight and sound of tens of thousands of king penguins at different stages of their breeding cycle will be overwhelming. The glacial river that runs into the sea here will be alive with penguin chicks and elephant seal pups testing their aquatic skills. If we lift our gaze from the wildlife for a moment, we will glimpse the snow-capped peaks of some of the world's most spectacular mountains.

Godthul

Imagine indented bays lined with bleached whalebones, teeming with fur seals and with penguins just "hanging about". Here you have the opportunity to clamber through the tussock to a spectacular plateau offering magnificent views across the island and the waters beyond. A careful descent leads us to a magnificent Macaroni penguin rookery.

Prion Island

We will aim to visit Prion Island where we can sit quietly to watch serene wandering albatrosses sitting proudly on cute downy chicks. We may be blessed by the performance of an intimate courtship dance, or may witness a youngster being lovingly fed. We watch adolescents exercising their wide wing spans, trying to launch themselves into the air, as they realise that Mum and Dad will no longer feed them and they must leave the island in search of food.

Other stunning wildlife destinations we may visit include:

Elsehul Bay, Royal Harbour, Cooper Bay, Drygaiski Fjord, Larsen Harbour, Stromness
Leith Harbour, Salisbury Plains, Rosita Harbour, Right Whale Bay, Possession Bay and Gold Harbour

Week 3

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| Thursday 14-January-2010 - South Georgia Day 08 | Day 15 |
| Friday 15-January-2010 - South Georgia Day 09 | Day 16 |
| Saturday 16-January-2010 - South Georgia Day 10 | Day 17 |
| Sunday 17-January-2010 - At Sea Day 11 | Day 18 |

Leaving South Georgia we head across the Scotia Sea in a southwesterly direction towards the South Orkneys, a stunning group of remote and isolated islands.

Monday 18-January-2010 - South Orkney Islands Day 12

Day 19

The ocean takes on a whole new perspective once we are surrounded by the surreal presence of floating ice sculptures. The memory of the sight of your first iceberg will remain with you forever. Today we may make landings on and around the South Orkney Islands. We aim to visit beautiful Shingle Cove on Coronation Island where we may have our first view of Adelie penguins. Alternatively, we may visit the Argentinian station of Orcardas, where the remains of the 1904 Bruce Expedition but can still be seen.

Tuesday 19-January-2010 - At Sea/Elephant Island Day 13

Day 20

Today we set course for the Antarctic Peninsula. Our recaps and lectures will resume and there will be time to gather strength for the busy days ahead. We will attempt firstly to land on historic Elephant Island at the outer limit of the South Shetlands.

A host of choices is now open to us and, depending on the ice and weather conditions, the western side of the Antarctic Peninsula is ours to explore. Our experienced leaders, who have made countless journeys to this area, will use this expertise to design our voyage from day to day. This allows us to make best use of the prevailing weather and ice conditions and wildlife opportunities.

As we are so far south, we will experience approximately 18-24 hours' daylight.

There is plenty of time for sleep when you get home!

Elephant Island

If the weather is kind we will aim for Elephant Island, a half-submerged mountain cloaked with an ice sheet at the northern limits of the South Shetlands. After their ship the *Endurance* was crushed in pack ice in the Weddell Sea, Ernest Shackleton and his men climbed into three open boats and finally, on 14 April 1916, made landfall on this tiny toe of rock and ice in the vastness of the Southern Ocean.

The men had not been on land for sixteen months! We may sail past Cape Valentine to see the beach where the men first put ashore. Weather permitting; we hope to follow the coastline six miles west to Point Wild. We will attempt to make a landing where the men eventually set up camp under two of their upturned open boats and some old tents, while Sir Ernest, Worsley and four other crew members sailed to South Georgia for help. Conditions at this point are often unsuitable for landing due to the large swells surging around hidden rocks, but it is always worth a try! Just to set eyes on this hallowed site could send shivers down our spines.

Wednesday 20-January-2010 - Antarctic Peninsula Day 14

Day 21

Once we arrive in the calmer waters of the Bransfield and Gerlache Straits, we will generally make landings or Zodiac excursions two to three times a day. Sometimes we will cruise along spectacular ice cliffs, or make contact with whales. Our Australian or New Zealander chefs will prepare delicious meals that, accompanied by good conversation, will become a focal point of our shipboard life.

There are many exciting places we can choose to visit. A sample of these follows:

Robert Point

A fine example of the South Shetland Islands. A tiny toe of land that is literally alive with wildlife. Here we will find two species of penguins breeding, chinstraps and gentoos. It is not uncommon to find wallows of elephant seals that are 40 beasts strong. Giant petrels nest on the ridgeline. The vegetation consists of mosses, lichens and the only grass species that grows in Antarctica. All this is set against a stunning backdrop, of the mountains and glaciers of the surrounding islands.

Half Moon Island

A wildlife rich island tucked into a neat bay at the eastern end of Livingston Island. On a clear day the glaciers and mountains of Livingston Island dominate the scene. There is a large chinstrap penguin rookery tucked in between basaltic turrets coloured by yellow and orange lichens. Gulls nest on these turrets and there are often fur seals and elephant seals hauled out on the pebble beaches. At one extremity of the island there is a large colony of nesting blue-eyed shags. At the other end lies a small Argentine station that is sometimes occupied by scientists conducting research on the penguin colony and surrounding waterways.

Deception Island

Visiting Deception Island is like making a journey to the moon. We sail through the narrow opening of Neptune's Bellows to enter the flooded volcanic crater. Inside is an unworldly scene, virtually devoid of life. Glaciers flow down from the edge of the crater, littered by black volcanic ash.

We can explore the lifeless remains of a derelict whaling station and a vacant British base, or climb to the rim of the crater. Steam rises from the shore indicating that the water is actually warm enough for a swim, for those who dare. Outside the crater, if conditions allow, we might land at Bailey Head to explore the enormous chinstrap penguin rookery that featured in David Attenborough's *Life in the Freezer* series.

Paradise Harbour

A protected bay surrounded by magnificent peaks and spectacular glaciers, the rocky cliffs of this unforgettable piece of heaven provide perfect nesting sites for blue-eyed shags, terns and gulls. The serenity of Paradise Harbour envelops us once the sound of the dropping anchor fades from our ears. This is a haven for whales and sometimes we meet humpbacks, orcas and minke, as well as crabeater seals, as we explore the bay in Zodiacs. Imagine being so close to a whale that when he surfaces to blow, the fishy spray of his exhalation momentarily blurs your vision. Words cannot describe this experience.

Lemaire Channel

If the ice conditions allow, standing on the bow of *Polar Pioneer* and quietly moving through the narrow Lemaire Channel will be one of the highlights of our voyage. Cliffs tower 700 metres directly above the ship. The water can be so still that perfect reflections are mirrored on the surface. Often gigantic icebergs clog the channel, creating navigational challenges for our captain and crew, and they may even obstruct our passage.

Other places we may visit around the Antarctic Peninsula are:

Pleneau Island, Penola Strait, Neko Harbour, Andvoord Bay, Vernadsky, a Ukrainian scientific base, Port Lockroy, an historic British base that is now a museum and post office, Paulet Island ... or a variety of other surprises.

Week 4

Thursday 21-January-2010 - Antarctic Peninsula Day 15 **Day 22**

Friday 22-January-2010 - Antarctic Peninsula Day 16 **Day 23**

Saturday 23-January-2010 - Drake Passage Day 17 **Day 24**

Time to head back to Tierra del Fuego, with lectures and videos to complete our Antarctic education. This is a time for reflection and discussion about what we have seen and felt, and the impact this voyage has had on our attitude to life.

As we approach the tip of South America, our Captain may sail close to legendary Cape Horn, weather conditions permitting.

Sunday 24-January-2010 - Drake Passage Day 18 **Day 25**

Monday 25-January-2010 - Ushuaia to Buenos Aires Depart 1105 Arrive 1522 Day 19 **Day 26**

Tuesday 26-January-2010 - Buenos Aries to Melbourne Depart 1950 -

Day 27

Wednesday 27-January-2010

Day 28

Thursday 28-January-2010 - Arrive Melbourne 0750

Day 29