

CIRCUMNAVIGATION OF SOUTH GEORGIA

OCTOBER 20 - NOVEMBER 8, 2011



Friday, October 21, 2011 Santiago, Chile

We gathered in Santiago after long days of traveling for a lovely, outdoor cocktail party on the *Hotel W*'s top floor. While enjoying the sunset and stunning views of the city we were introduced to Zegrahm's expert staff, our guides for this much-anticipated 20th-anniversary voyage to South Georgia and the Falkland Islands.

Saturday, October 22 Santiago / Stanley, Falkland Islands / Embark *Sea Spirit*

Traveling by plane and bus, we arrived mid-afternoon at Stanley, the picturesque capital of the Falklands. Cruise director Lisa Wurzrainer and expedition leader Mike Messick welcomed us onboard the *Sea Spirit*, our comfortable floating home for the next few weeks. We grabbed a bit of lunch and then explored Stanley until it was time to sail.

The ship made its way out of Stanley Harbor and into the Scotia Sea. We marveled from outer decks at gorgeous white sand beaches, our first penguins and albatross, and a stunning sunset. Gentle swells rocked us to sleep as we headed for South Georgia.



Sunday, October 23 At Sea

Our first day at sea was spent getting to know the ship, watching seabirds and whales in the sunshine, and learning about the wildlife and human history of South Georgia and its surrounding waters. Peter Harrison introduced us to his favorite bird, the albatross; Geoff Renner provided an eloquent overview of the South Atlantic's geology; Jack Grove spoke about cetaceans—whales, dolphins, and porpoises—of the southern ocean; and Carmen Field shared the incredible story of Sir Ernest Shackleton's Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition of 1914-16. Between lectures we donned binoculars and cameras for the albatross, prions, giant petrels, and cape petrels following the ship. Several cetaceans, including hourglass dolphins, fin whales, and a minke whale, were spotted by keen-eyed wildlife watchers over the course of the day, as well.

At the welcome cocktail party we met Captain Denis Radja and his officers, then dined with new friends as the ship continued its journey westward.

Monday, October 24 At Sea

Another fine day at sea began having sailed across the Antarctic Convergence. It was colder on deck but the seabirds were still plentiful, soaring gracefully above the waves around us. Peter's lecture on South Georgia birds made us excited for all we were likely to see, and Jack's presentation on seals and fisheries gave us new insights into the complex marine life around the island.

In the late afternoon we arrived off Shag Rocks, outcroppings of guano-covered schist full of nesting South Georgia shags. These black and white cormorants flew all around the ship, along with southern fulmars, black-browed albatross, cape petrels, giant petrels, prions, and a couple of Kerguelen petrels.



Tuesday, October 25

Elsehul / Right Whale Bay

Our first landing on terra firma at South Georgia was in sunny Elsehul, a deep bay rimmed by tall, dark peaks. We went ashore by Zodiac at the isthmus between Elsehul and Undine Harbor and hiked into the tussock to observe light-mantled sooty and gray-headed albatross, as well as gentoo penguins, all at the beginning of their breeding season. Some of us hiked with Geoff across the island to a quiet beach in Undine Harbor populated by elephant seals, a few king penguins, and a lone fur seal. Just above the landing site, we enjoyed a cliff-top view of a large elephant seal harem on the beach below, where at least six of the pups in the harem were born while we were ashore.

Many of us also went on Zodiac tours of the bay, where we saw giant petrels feeding on an elephant seal pup carcass, beautiful *Durvillea* kelp swaying in the surf like inflated pasta, South Georgia shags with their vivid blue eyes, and molting king penguins.

An afternoon landing at Right Whale Bay was the first of several visits to a king penguin colony on South Georgia. We strolled with our lecturers along the beach above masses of elephant seals, stopping to watch seal cows nursing their pups, and giant seal bulls challenging each other within four large harems. The king penguin colony was rimmed with fuzzy brown chicks, or oakum boys, waiting for their next meal. Adult kings stood around molting on snow patches and in small streams, a few posing for us below a pretty waterfall.





Wednesday, October 26

Salisbury Plain / Prion Island

Though 35-knot winds prevented us from landing at daybreak, we were shuttled ashore after breakfast to a beach brimming with king penguins. Those of us wanting to stretch our legs joined Geoff for a hike up the hill nestled between Grace and Lucas Glaciers. Some of us climbed up into the tussock grass with Peter Harrison and Shirley Metz for a view overlooking the colony, a mosaic of black, white, and brown. As the sun broke through the clouds, we dodged the occasional fur seal resting on tussocks, observed fantastic fights between elephant seal bulls, and spent time photographing glistening king penguins arriving on the beach.

After lunch we landed at Prion Island, a rat-free refuge for the wandering albatross, the largest flying bird in the world. A small elephant seal harem, a few young fur seals, and some gentoo and king penguins met us onshore, and we were lucky to see an adult albatross fly in and briefly feed its chick. Peter explained that these youngsters had been sitting here for about 250 days and would soar away from this island in two to three weeks. As we moved up and down the boardwalk, we also had nice looks at South Georgia pipits and pintails feeding among the clumps of tussock. What an amazing wildlife day it had been in the Bay of Isles!





Thursday, October 27

Fortuna Bay / Stromness Bay

Our morning ashore in Fortuna Bay afforded a lovely mixture of wide open space for exploring, and we were given five hours ashore here to study the penguins, visit an old sealers' cave, and hike into the hills or across the rocky plains for fantastic vistas to photograph. We also were given an opportunity to watch the huge elephant seals in action from Zodiacs offshore.

After lunch the Shackleton hikers were dropped off by Zodiac on the opposite side of Fortuna Bay. Twenty-nine intrepid souls joined Rick Price, Peter, and Geoff to retrace the final 4.5-mile leg of Shackleton, Crean, and Worsley's crossing of the island on their mission to save comrades back at Peggotty Camp and Elephant Island on May 20, 1916.

While the hikers made their way overland, the ship repositioned to Stromness Bay and anchored off Stromness Whaling Station. The rest of us went ashore to a beach with, once again, elephant seals. Some of us hiked up to the waterfall that Shackleton, Crean and Worsley were forced to lower themselves down through at the end of their ordeal, meeting up with our hikers coming down from the hills above us. Others took shorter strolls toward the waterfall along a milky stream and spent time observing the seals. Two elephant seal cows gave birth during our landing—a sight that thrilled the few who were lucky enough to be watching when it happened!





Friday, October 28 Grytviken / St. Andrews Bay

The ship anchored in Cumberland Bay for the morning and we gathered in the Oceanus Lounge for a presentation by Sarah Lurcock, Director of the South Georgia Heritage Trust office, on the rat eradication project being undertaken by the Trust. We then went ashore at Grytviken and assembled at the whalers' cemetery where Sir Ernest Shackleton is buried. Peter gave an impassioned toast to "The Boss" as we sipped and raised our glasses of Irish whisky. From the cemetery we continued along the path to explore the abandoned whaling station, investigate the dilapidated buildings, learn about the boats and gear used during the heyday of whaling, and visit and ring the bells in the historic whalers' church, built in 1913. We spent lots of time in the remarkable museum and post office, and enjoyed seeing the replica of the most famous of Antarctic boats, the *James Caird*.

By mid-afternoon we were on a long sandy beach carpeted in over 8,000 elephant seals! We had to be on our toes as we traversed the beach, always keeping an eye on testosterone-charged bulls galumphing from one end of a harem to the other. St. Andrews Bay is also home to the island's largest king penguin colony with over 100,000 pair of birds. We joined our experts for hikes along the beach and up to a knoll overlooking an endless river of penguins. Almost as far as the eye could see were courting kings, with bunches of brown, downy chicks lining the glacier-fed stream running through the heart of the colony. Reindeer grazed on the hillsides around us and the ever-present skuas and giant petrels scouted for their next meal. What a wildlife extravaganza this place was!





Saturday, October 29

Royal Bay / Moltke Harbor / Godthul

Stiff winds blew as we watched the staff scout a landing at the Royal Bay king penguin colony. However, unpredictable breakers on the shallow bar between the ship and the beach created conditions that made a landing here unsafe.

So the *Sea Spirit* moved north to Moltke Harbor, a historic site featuring relics from the 1882-83 German International Polar Year expedition. Rowdy, juvenile fur seals romped among the tidepools and tussock as we hiked to the remains of the expedition buildings, listening to Geoff's description of work and life here. From the station site, most of us continued up a hill to reach a busy, but quiet gentoo colony. The penguins constructed nests of peat and moss, pairs copulated, and mates performed the bow-hiss display with each other. Heading back down to the Zodiacs, we had an outstanding view across the bay to the Ross Glacier, which periodically produced a thundering sound as it calved ice.

In the afternoon we entered the small bay of Godthul and split into two groups – long hikers and beachcombers. Hikers walked among the clouds along the shore of a frozen lake and photographed gentoo penguins. Along the beach we poked around in mats of kelp and the plethora of whale bones; some of us spent time watching elephant seals, hoping an obviously pregnant female would deliver her pup while we were onshore... alas, we left her to an unattended birth.





Sunday, October 30

Gold Harbour

Several dozen of us went ashore before daybreak at this amazing beach harboring wall-to-wall wildlife under the backdrop of a hanging glacier. We had only a one-way corridor along which to walk as we watched the comings and goings of seals, penguins, albatross, and scavenging birds. The din of the elephant seal harems, combined with the trumpeting and whistling of king penguins, pounding surf, and occasional thunder of ice falling from the far-off cliff top provided a surreal soundtrack to the commotion all around us. Elephant seals snoozed, nursed, gave birth, bred, and died along the beachfront while oakum boys, some frantically waving their flippers, investigated the visiting yellow and black “penguins” among them. Some of us climbed up through the tussock to stand eye-to-eye with a nesting light-mantled albatross. And we viewed a picturesque lake and lagoon from atop a tussock cliff or a Zodiac—a more stunning scene we could not imagine.

Much of the afternoon was spent on deck in blustery winds watching seabirds and marine mammals galore. The ship tucked into Cooper Bay to spot some macaroni penguins, before we continued westward, past a beautiful iceberg that had drifted north from the Antarctic continent, to Drygalski Fjord. As we made our way to the Risting Glacier, most of us bundled up and were on the decks to see the pinnacles of ice, towers of 200 million-year-old igneous rock, and snow petrels flying around the ship. En route we encountered a most amazing feeding frenzy of seabirds... and orcas! At least ten orcas were spotted, feeding among the birds on what may have been the remains of a seal.





Monday, October 31

Cape Rosa

Brisk winds whipped up the sea as we arrived abeam of Cape Rosa. Gusts of nearly 45 knots gave Mike reason to switch the day's plans for landings, and we headed east toward Peggotty Bluff with an icy backdrop of Shackleton Gap and Murray Snowfield. Sleet came down as we listened to Geoff's description of the *James Caird* crew's activities from May 15 – 19, 1916, enjoyed the antics of a friendly weaner, investigated invertebrates and low-growing plants, explored the wide open landscape, or photographed South Georgia shags nesting on the headland.

After lunch we donned our waterproof gear and rode enormous swells toward Cape Rosa. The intrepid among us landed on the surf-pounded, cobble beach to view the famous cave where the *James Caird* and her crew first landed after their arduous 800-mile journey from Cape Wild on Elephant Island. This relatively small, shallow cave on the east side of the beach must have felt like the Ritz to those bone-weary travelers; re-enacting the arrangement of the men's sleeping bags, some of us lay inside the cave for a few moments trying to imagine what might have been going through their heads on those long nights in May 1916.

We departed from South Georgia after "tying the knot" of our circumnavigation at Elsehul. Bouncing around in lively seas, we celebrated Zegrahm's 20th-anniversary and Halloween with cocktails and funny outfits at the photo booth, listening to stories told by Jack and Peter. Despite some spills of glassware and plates, casualties of the tossing seas, the ship's crew was able to serve another wonderful meal before we retired for the evening.



Tuesday, November 1

At Sea

The ocean glistened brilliantly as we sailed west for the Falkland Islands. Rick lectured on his diving work with the British Antarctic Survey and some of the interesting marine life found in the Southern Ocean's depths; Geoff spoke about plate tectonics and the origin of rocks at South Georgia and along the Scotia Arc; and Tony Chater gave his unique perspective on the 1982 invasion of the Falklands by Argentina. At recap Peter urged us to consider contributing to the South Georgia Heritage Trust's *Sponsor-A-Hectare* project to eradicate invasive rats from the island, which many of us were happy to do. By the time this voyage had ended, our group would donate more than \$30,000 to sponsor, and thus protect, over 130 hectares on South Georgia!

Wednesday, November 2

At Sea

Another sunny day in the Scotia Sea was spent learning about birds of the Falkland Islands from Peter; Geoff lectured on the 1951-57 mapping surveys, a series of four expeditions led by Duncan Carse, at South Georgia; and Rick shared his experiences as a researcher in the Antarctic. The latter part of the afternoon was passed observing and photographing Atlantic petrels and other seabirds jostling around the ship, or watching *Grandma: The Oldest Albatross*, a wonderful film about New Zealand's famous royal albatross. At recap Mike Murphy showed a video with footage from dive trips in the Antarctic and an aggressive leopard seal's antics around his Zodiac.

Thursday, November 3

At Sea

The seas had calmed considerably for our final day in the Scotia Sea. More of us made our way into the fresh air out on deck and between meals and lectures found time for whale and seabird watching. Carmen gave an overview of marine invertebrates found in the Southern Ocean, and Tony shared photos and stories of his life over the past 40 years on the Falkland Islands. In the afternoon we caught up on journals, watched birds from the outer decks, and viewed a film on Scott's ill-fated 1911-12 overland journey to and from the South Pole. In the evening we gathered in the Oceanus Lounge for a hilarious round of *The Liars Club*—we had no idea our experts could tell such fibs!



Friday, November 4

Saunders Island / Carcass Island

Our first day in the Falklands began on the magical shores of Saunders Island. Heading up from the beach, we found gentoo penguins quietly incubating eggs in their nests of pebbles and peat on scattered knolls across the island's isthmus. We strolled up onto a hillside of short grass where deep burrows into the peat indicated the homes of Magellanic penguins. These shy birds peered out at us and periodically popped up for a brief stretch in the sunshine. We passed the bones of a sei whale as we followed sheep trails along the slope to see our first rockhopper penguins and nesting black-browed albatrosses. A lone macaroni penguin loafed on the rocks in the midst of its crested penguin relatives, its bright orange crests often blowing sideways in the wind. Heading back down to the beach, we had incredible views of the surrounding islands and the expansive, surf-swept beach lined with gentoos.

Many of us lunched outside in the sunshine and donned our outer gear for an afternoon landing at Leopard Beach on Carcass Island. Some of us hiked nearly four miles across the countryside, called the 'camp' by kelpers, to the island's settlement and home of Rob and Lorraine McGill. Others took a shorter walk with our naturalists to find new Falkland birds and plants. We all hiked between clumps of tussock grass and found vivid, red-breasted long-tailed meadowlarks, snipes, wrens, Magellanic penguins, ruddy-headed geese, and upland geese. At the McGill's house, we enjoyed an awesome and delicious offering of tea, cookies, and cakes.

After a little rest back onboard and a short briefing on the next day's activities, we ate supper while the ship sailed northwest, leaving a spectacular sunset in our wake.





Saturday, November 5

Steeple Jason Island

As the sun rose, the craggy peaks of Steeple Jason Island and its massive black-browed albatross colony became beautifully illuminated. Onshore the staff helped us navigate slippery, angled sandstone rocks before we set off across the hillsides to watch and photograph rockhoppers and albatross. Boulders draped with vivid, orange lichen contrasted beautifully with the emerald green cushion plants dotting the slopes. We wove our way through giant pedestals of tussock to arrive at the edge of the colonies. Rockhoppers were in the early stages of breeding and created quite a din as they squawked and displayed with each other. The albatross, on the other hand, were relatively quiet. Throughout the colony pairs found each other, preened, billed, and brayed as we looked on and admired their tenacity.

We also enjoyed long Zodiac tours along the island's kelp-rimmed coastline. Some of us saw rockhoppers loafing on rocks near the water and a South American sea lion female sleeping on a ledge. All had fantastic looks at albatross resting on and taking off from the sea, their huge paddle-like feet plodding clumsily along the surface until they got airborne and transformed into masters of flight.

A barbeque lunch, featuring Carcass Island lamb, was enjoyed out on deck upon our return to the ship. We sailed away from Steeple Jason in sunshine with a light breeze blowing and very little swell; a fine beginning for our crossing to Tierra del Fuego.

After a relaxing afternoon at sea, we gathered for the voyage's final recap. Each staff member had the opportunity to share their thoughts, summarizing what we'd seen on Steeple Jason, recalling highlights of our two-week expedition, and expressing gratitude to all who'd made this the trip of a lifetime for each and every one of us.









Sunday, November 6

At Sea

The seas had increased a bit overnight, causing a list to starboard onboard, but the ship continued to maintain a good speed. We teetered our way back and forth between our cabins, the dining room, and the lounge. Peter told tales of the most famous historic attempt, 100 years ago, to find the emperor penguin and the first modern-day venture, a 1992 Zegrahm expedition, to spend time at an emperor penguin colony in Antarctica's deep south. After a little break to get some fresh air and watch seabirds, with the coast of Argentina visible in the distance, we joined Shirley to hear the remarkable story of her 1988-89 overland journey to the South Pole, where she became the first woman to reach the bottom of the earth by ski.

By early afternoon we were at the mouth of the Beagle Channel, with land on both sides of the ship and in quieter waters. We packed our belongings, traded photos and addresses with new and old friends, bird-watched from the decks, and met for an ice cream social in the Club Lounge during the afternoon.

The *Sea Spirit* remained at anchor, waiting for the pilot, as we enjoyed the captain's farewell cocktail party and dinner. After this fine meal, we gathered in the lounge for Mike Moore's *South Georgia and Falkland Islands Slideshow* – a fantastic visual overview, set to charming music, of all we'd done and seen on this voyage. As we slept the ship sailed up the Beagle Channel, heading for the pier in Ushuaia.

Monday, November 7 Ushuaia, Argentina

City lights reflected on the glassy water as we tied up at the dock in Ushuaia. Having packed up the last of our belongings and said good-bye to new friends and shipmates, we headed down the gangway in bright sunshine and were whisked away to the airport for flights home. We had experienced the planet's most amazing islands and now looked forward to sharing our memories of these spectacular places with friends and family for many years to come.



Photo by Mike Moore





Mike Messick



Lisa Wurzrainer



Jack Grove



Peter Harrison



Shirley Metz



Tony Chater



Carmen Field



Cheli Larson



Mike Moore



Mike Murphy



Rick Price



Geoff Renner

Photo log text by: Carmen Field

Photography by: Mike Moore, Shirley Metz,
Jack Grove, Peter Harrison & Walt Pomeroy

Produced by: Sara Mulnix

*This photo log has been produced by Zegrahm Expeditions and is the property of Zegrahm Expeditions.
Any unauthorized use of images included is hereby prohibited.*