



OCEANWIDE
EXPEDITIONS

Falkland Islands, South Georgia and Antarctica

13th February - 3rd March 2015

On board the

M/V Plancius



MV *Plancius* was named after the Dutch astronomer, cartographer, geologist and vicar Petrus Plancius (1552-1622). *Plancius* was built in 1976 as an oceanographic research vessel for the Royal Dutch Navy and was named *Hr. Ms. Tydeman*. The ship sailed for the Royal Dutch Navy until June 2004 when she was purchased by Oceanwide Expeditions and completely refit in 2007, being converted into a 114-passenger expedition vessel. *Plancius* is 89 m (267 feet) long, 14.5 m (43 feet) wide and has a maximum draft of 5 m, with an Ice Strength rating of 1D, top speed of 12+ knots and three diesel engines generating 1230 hp each.

Captain Evgeny Levakov

and his international crew

of 46

including

Hotel Manager:	Andre van der Haak	[Netherlands]
Chief Steward:	Beverley Howlett	[Britain]
Head Chef:	Heinz Hacker	[Austria]
Sous Chef:	Ricky Isnanto	[Indonesia]
Ship's Physician:	Judith Labohm	[Netherlands]

AND

Expedition Leader:	Kelvin Murray	[Scotland]
Asst Expedition Leader:	Andrew Bishop	[Tasmania]
Expedition Guide:	Ali Liddle	[United Kingdom]
Expedition Guide:	Frits Steenhuisen	[Netherlands]
Expedition Guide:	Christian Engelke	[Germany]
Expedition Guide:	Louwrens Haquebord	[Netherlands]
Divemaster:	Henrik Enckell	[Sweden]
Dive Guide:	Erin McFadden	[Scotland]
Dive Guide:	André Fahrni	[Switzerland]
Dive Guide:	Peter Webster	[United Kingdom]

Welcome you on board!

Day 1 – Friday 13th February 2015

Embarkation – Ushuaia, Argentina

GPS 08.00 Position: 054°48'S / 068°18'W



Ushuaia marks the end of the road in Argentine Tierra del Fuego. During the summer this sleepy yet rapidly growing town of 55,000 bustles with adventurous travellers and eco-tourism. Ushuaia duty free port flourishes with tourism but also boasts a sizeable crab fishing and small electronics industry. Ushuaia, (lit. “bay that penetrates to the west” in the indigenous Yaghan tongue) clearly benefits from its magnificent, yet remote setting. The rugged spine of the South American Andes ends here, but for many of us it signifies the beginning of a once-in-a-lifetime adventure.

It had been a sunny day but with some wind blowing

down from the mountains of Tierra del Fuego. At 4pm we made our way down to the port ready to join MV Plancius, our home for the next few weeks and were greeted by members of the Expedition team who sorted our luggage and sent us on board to meet Hotel and restaurant managers Andre and Beverly. We were then checked into our cabins with the assistance of our fabulous hotel team. There was some time to start finding our way around the ship before we were invited to the lounge on Deck 5 to meet our Expedition Leader, Kelvin Murray who welcomed us on board the ship. Andre, our hotel manager then took over the microphone and gave us a general overview of the ship; what is found where and what facilities we have on board. Shortly after this briefing our Chief Officer, Nikolay led us through the detail of the required SOLAS (Safety Of Life At Sea) safety briefing and abandon ship/lifeboat drill. At this point we were ready to leave Ushuaia so we made our way out onto the outer decks to watch the lines being lifted and Plancius set sail into the Beagle Channel. It was a beautiful evening and a great way to start our Antarctic adventure.



On hearing the ship's alarm we went to our cabins and collected our big orange life jackets and reconvened in the muster station, the lounge for our abandon ship drill. Once a check had been completed that we were all in attendance we went out to our lifeboats and had a short briefing about how to enter and we even had the chance to



look inside. We hope this is the only time we do see inside!

At 19:30 we met in the lounge once again and it was a chance to meet with our Captain, Evgeny Levakov, our Expedition Leader Kelvin Murray and the rest of the Expedition and Dive team and toast our voyage to the Falklands, South Georgia and Antarctica. A short while later we were invited to the dining room to enjoy the first of many delicious meals on board, prepared by Chefs Heinz and Ricky and their galley staff.

The first evening was spent familiarising ourselves with our cabins and the rest of the ship. In the early hours of the morning we would be leaving the Beagle Channel and heading out into the open waters of the South Atlantic Ocean, en route to the Falkland Islands.

Day 2 – Saturday 14th February 2015



At Sea en-route to the Falkland Islands

0800 GPS Position: 054°14' S / 064°20' W

Wind: W 5. **Sea State:** Moderate. **Weather:** Partly Cloudy. **Temperature:** +8°C.

During the early hours of the morning we had begun to feel a little more movement of the ship as we made our way out of the shelter of the Beagle Channel but it was still very calm conditions for this part of the South Atlantic Ocean so as Kelvin made his wake up call most of us were able to oblige and leave the cosy comfort of our bunks and make our way to breakfast at 8am.



Both before and after breakfast there had been lots of people out on deck, particularly the keen birders, enjoying both the birds and the sunshine. It was a reasonably calm morning and we were accompanied by a variety of species from the small Cape petrels to the larger Giant petrels and Black browed albatross.

The first lecture of the trip was held at 9:30 and Ali gave an introduction to the Falkland Islands; the first destination of our long cruise. She gave a pocket sized history of the islands and explained how the focus of the economy has shifted over the years from sheep farming to off shore fishing, particularly for squid. Sheep, wool and farm life still has a vital role in the life and soul of the islands and Ali was able to bring this all to life.

After the presentation the divers got together for their briefing and organisation of kit while the rest of us spent some time on deck and in the lounge enjoying the birds that were following the ship. Some of the Giant petrels were passing just overhead at the bridge level which made for some great photo opportunities.

Lunch was served and thoroughly enjoyed before there was time for everyone to head out on deck once more to enjoy some fresh air and the seabirds flying around the ship. Staff members were on hand to assist in some bird identification.

At 3pm we were invited to the lounge for a mandatory zodiac briefing to prepare us for landings in the Falklands and beyond. There was just enough time for a cup of tea before Ali presented part two of her lecture which, this time showed some of the wildlife and plant life that we will see during our time ashore in the Falklands. We were already looking forward to our visit before the talk but the photos of penguins, seals and beautiful Falkland flowers whetted our appetites



even more. She also talked about the future economy of the islands with the imminent oil industry in the waters around the islands.

At 6pm we gathered in the lounge for re-cap where Rosi's bar was decorated with Valentine's Day hearts and cocktails were on offer for those of us feeling romantic on our first day at sea. Andrew gave a condensed history of the geological formation of the Falkland Islands and Kelvin gave us more detailed information about the planned landings at Carcass Island and Saunders Island and there was definitely excited chatter in the dining room as we looked forward to the day ahead. What a great start to our voyage.



Pale Maiden, the National Flower of the Falkland Islands

Day 3 – Sunday 15th February 2015

Carcass Island and Saunders Island

0800 GPS Position: 051°18' S / 060°33' W

Wind: WSW 2. Sea State: Slight. Weather: Fog. Temperature: +10°C.



Many of us were up before the sunshine this morning as we made our final approach towards the Falkland Islands. It was very atmospheric with mist cloaking the hills of West Falkland and West Point Island just sticking out of the fog. Ahead we could see blue sky and as we sailed through the Woolly Gut we saw hundreds of Black browed albatross flying along the cliffs and lots of Rockhopper penguins in the sea.

As we came out of the other side of the narrow channel we could see the settlement of West Point Island in the early morning sunshine before we turned and made our way to Carcass Island, which was shrouded in fog.

As we dropped the anchor in Port Pattison we could barely see 20metres ahead of the ship but by the time we'd finished

breakfast the sunshine had burned off the fog and we were left with a bright, sunny Falklands day. At 8:30 the zodiacs were dropped and before too long we were making our way across the bay to the landing site at Dyke Bay. It really was a stunning morning and, with a white sand beach and turquoise water it almost seemed like the tropics. The presence of penguins dispelled this theory!

Once ashore Ali led us over the headland towards Leopard Beach. On the way we saw Upland geese, Striated caracara and of course penguins. Magellanic penguins were by their burrows while Gentoo penguins were in larger groups in the breeding colony. There were large numbers of moulting penguins huddled together in groups looking a little scruffy as their feathers were replaced in their annual catastrophic moult.

From here we walked over to Leopard Beach, by passing huge groups of Magellanic penguins on the way and found ourselves on a beautiful, white, sandy beach again more like a tropical island than an island in the South Atlantic. There were hundreds of penguins all along the beach and with birds coming and going in the surf it was a great place to spend some time in the sunshine.

From here Ali led us back over the dunes and we began our hike along the edge of the Tussac grass and along the hillside towards the settlement at the other end of the bay. There was lots to see long the way; penguins, geese and caracara

and Ali pointed out some of the plants such as Diddle dee, Scurvy grass and Pig vine. As the path dropped down towards the shore we saw Falkland flightless steamer ducks, Magellanic oystercatchers, kelp geese and the tiny,



endemic Cobb's wren before finally arriving at the settlement. Here, Rob and Lorraine McGill who have owned Carcass Island for over 40 years welcomed us into their home for tea and 'smoko', a traditional Falklands tea. Scones with fresh cream were a definite hit with everyone! We could have stayed all day soaking up the atmosphere of Carcass Island but there is always another place to move on to and we sadly made our way to the jetty and back to the ship ready to sail to Saunders Island for the afternoon.

During lunch (as if anyone really needed it!) we were lucky enough to see a number of whale blows which were identified as Sei whales, which are often seen around the Falklands at this time of year as they make their way back north after a summer of feeding on krill. As we approached the island the fog lifted a little allowing us to see a glimpse of the thousands of penguins which nest on The Neck of the island but by the time the zodiacs had shuttled us to shore it had descended once again making for a damp grey afternoon. Whatever the weather though the wildlife is still around and we were met by huge numbers of Gentoo penguins on the beach. From here Ali led us past the breeding colonies



and on towards the small King penguin rookery where we saw a number of quite young chicks still being protected by their parents. After watching these for a while we started the climb up hill to the Rockhopper penguins where many birds were standing along the stream moulting and drinking the freshwater. Our final destination for our walk was one of the Black browed albatross colonies that are found all along the steep cliffs of Saunders Island. It was a steep walk down to the birds but well worth the effort as we sat and enjoyed watching the chicks on the nest, many of which were beginning to get their adult feathers and were flapping their wings, strengthening them ready for their first flight in around 6 weeks' time. Adults were seen arriving at the colony and feeding their chicks and pairs of adults could be seen going through courtship rituals at the edge of the colony. It was a great place to just sit and observe these birds going about their business.



By around 5pm everyone was beginning to make their way back down towards the beach where, in the sheltered corner by the rock, Rockhopper penguins were coming back to the colony in huge numbers. They gathered offshore and then in one large group they rushed to the shore and were washed up onto the rocks by the waves. It is was a great chance to see these tough little birds in the natural environment, the sea.

All too soon it was time to make our way back to the landing beach, passing the Gentoos and Kings along the way. Despite the fog it had been an incredible afternoon, whatever the weather the wildlife is always there. Back on board there was time to freshen up before we were invited to the lounge where Ali talked about some of the birds we had seen during the day and Kelvin explained what our plans were for the next day in Stanley.

At dinner all the talk was about what a fantastic day we had all enjoyed in the remote, but very beautiful Falkland Islands.



Striated Caracara



Cobb's Wren (Endemic)



Dark Crowned Night Heron

Day 4 – Monday 16th February 2015

Stanley, Falkland Islands



0800 GPS Position: 051°41' S / 057°51' W

Wind: NNE 5. **Sea State:** Slight. **Weather:** Overcast. **Temperature:** +10°C.



Stanley is the capital of the Falkland Islands and is home to around 2,450 residents. The brightly coloured roof tops of the buildings all along the hillside stood out and it seemed a welcoming, cheery place as we stood out on deck watching the approach to the anchorage in the middle of the harbour. On the hillside opposite the town we could see words made of painted stones; Clyde, Dunbarton Castle, Endurance. These are the names of ships that have played a part in the history of the Falkland Island both past and present. Due to the forecast of inclement weather we started our morning's activities early. With a light breeze blowing we were shuttled ashore to be

greeted by Kelvin and the rest of the staff who gave a quick briefing and pointed out points of interest to us. Most of us took the opportunity to visit the tourist centre to obtain a map and orient ourselves. After this had been achieved we set out to wander the streets of Stanley and browse the tourist shops, ever on the lookout for a bargain and some souvenirs of our time on the Falklands. Christ Church was a well visited building and the monument made of whale jaw bones, whilst a grim reminder of our past, made us realise how large these animals can grow. Throughout the morning the wind increased and by 1100 the staff were on the lookout to recall us all back to the landing site. It was a very wet and exhilarating ride back to Plancius!!

Once we were onboard we had to wait for a short while as the winds were gusting over 60kts and this meant we couldn't safely raise the anchor with so many 'jigger' ships nearby. While we were having lunch the jiggers departed the harbour and soon enough we heaved anchor and followed them out of Port Stanley and into the Southern Atlantic once more.



The wind stayed the same unfortunately the swell increased and the ship responded by rolling more and more. This was a new and interesting turn of events although most of us were well medicated and not too affected by the increased motion.

To help distract us Ali gave a fun and informative talk about the Black browed albatross and the conservation efforts that are being undertaken to ensure the survival of these and the other albatross in the area. Louwrens rounded out the afternoon's entertainment with a look at how the Antarctic treaty and governing body came into being.

Following this we all retired to the dining room for another delicious dinner before making our way to our cabins, keen to try and get some

sleep as the ship continued to pitch and roll.

Day 5 – Tuesday 17th February 2015

At Sea en-route to South Georgia

0800 GPS Position: 051°46'S / 052°23'W

Wind: W 3. **Sea State:** Rough. **Weather:** Clear. **Temperature:** +8°C.



We woke up to a beautiful morning, the sun shining and a slight breeze from behind, ushering us towards South Georgia. After the excitement of the last two days at the Falkland Islands and the heavy swells from yesterday evening, we were happy to sit on the outside decks and enjoy the birds and sun.

Today was also a busy day getting ready for our landings in South Georgia. In the morning, Kelvin gave us a mandatory briefing about the IAATO, the International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators. The briefing went over all the protocols we must follow in order to be responsible tourists in Antarctica and South Georgia. After the briefing, we gathered up our outer gear and backpacks and came to the lounge for a thorough vacuuming to remove any seeds which we

may have inadvertently transported from home or may have got stuck in our Velcro in the Falklands.

After the tasty buffet lunch (and maybe a small nap) we continued with the on board lecturing program with Andrew telling us everything about the geology of South Georgia. It was a pleasure to follow his interest for rocks and his lecture made us truly aware of the fact that South Georgia “rocks”.

Just before dinner we gathered in the Lounge again for a recap. Kelvin told us about the Antarctic Convergence that we were just about to cross. The polar front, or Antarctic Convergence, is the biological barrier that defines when we have entered Antarctic waters. While the Antarctic Convergence is always shifting position, you can tell when you have crossed the front because of a rapid drop in sea surface temperature and a drop in air temperature.

The relatively calm weather continued through the night, which gave us only a slight rolling of the ship.



Day 6 – Wednesday 18th February 2015

At Sea en-route to South Georgia and Shag Rocks

0800 GPS Position: 052°57' S / 045°09' W

Wind: W 4. **Sea State:** Moderate. **Weather:** Overcast. **Temperature:** +5°C.



Today was our second day at sea travelling from the Falklands to South Georgia and we had reasonable weather and were making good speed as we all were roused to breakfast by Kelvin and the hotel team. We expected to reach the micro-continent of Shag Rocks late afternoon and after that sail on to South Georgia which we hoped to reach early tomorrow morning.

After breakfast Ali gave an introduction to South Georgia. She was lucky enough to spend nearly nine months living at the main base of King Edward Point and further visits in the years that followed maintained her interest and passion for this island. The lecture was about wildlife as well as about the history of the island, the sealers and whalers and about the current management and economy of the island. Most

of the income for the island comes from the fisheries, mainly for Patagonian toothfish and Krill which generates around £3Million a year.

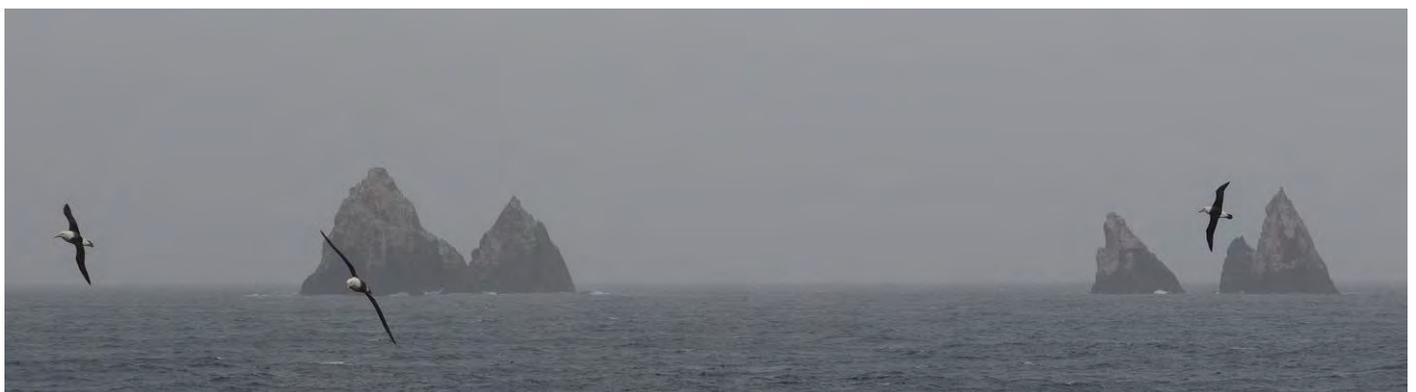
Later, Kelvin presented a talk the whales and dolphins of the Southern Ocean. His lecture also included various tips on how to identify the various species whilst at sea, including descriptions of the shape of the blows and the fins that are seen as the whale submerges again.

During the afternoon a mandatory briefing video was given on behalf of the South Georgia Government. This briefing is all about the dos and don'ts while visiting South Georgia, of which there seemed to be quite a few but this is a sensitive ecosystem that we are visiting and it is worth being vigilant.

Throughout the day the bridge crew and the expedition staff were on the lookout for whales from the bridge and the outer decks but other than a few blows on the horizon there wasn't much to be seen.

Around 1500 Shag Rocks became visible on the horizon. When we arrived in the vicinity large groups of birds started to fly around the ship. There were long flight formations of South Georgia shags, after which the islands are named, but also Black browed albatrosses and many White chinned petrels landing on the water in huge flocks. Antarctic prions and Giant petrels were seen and with this concentration of seabirds all the expedition staff were very surprised not to see some whales feeding in what are nutrient rich waters but that is the nature of wildlife; there is no real guarantee of what you will see.

Once we had all had a good view of the islands and the birds we then set course for the Bay of Isles, with Prion Island and Salisbury Plains as the landing sites for tomorrow.



Day 7 – Thursday 19th February 2015

Rosita Harbour, South Georgia

0800 GPS Position: 053°56' S / 037°36' W

Wind: W 6. **Sea State:** Rough. **Weather:** Cloudy. **Temperature:** +6°C.



Our initial plan for the day was to do a morning landing at Right Whale Bay where we hoped to see our first colony of King penguins and see some of the Fur seals that make South Georgia their home. However, due to the strong winds blowing in from the north the Captain, with his extensive knowledge of the island knew that there would be too much wind and swell for us to land on the beach and so the decision was made to continue to the shelter the Bay of Isles. As we entered the bay area we found some shelter in the Rosita Harbour which is tucked in at the north western corner of the bay. The weather was still not very great, with a strong north westerly wind but it was good enough to launch the zodiacs for a cruise around the bay area. Low clouds and drizzling precipitation was limiting our sight with this,

our first activity in South Georgia everyone was very keen to get in the boats and head out into the rain.

We cruised along the coast enjoying the sights, sounds and smells of South Georgia wild life. For many of us it was the first observations of the diverse wildlife and although there was a wide fringe of kelp vegetation in the bay the drivers all managed to find gaps in the choking seaweed to get us close to the beach and the rocks, where many Antarctic fur seals were waiting for us. There were many pups and cows on the beach and also in the surf there were huge numbers of pups taking their first swimming lessons and enjoying the waves and swell as it washed them backwards and forwards along the shore. Amongst the drag grey seals, which were very well camouflaged on the black volcanic rocks we also saw some honey blond leucistic pups. This blonde colour is caused by a missing gene which means that the animals don't have the correct levels of pigment in their fur. About 1 in 800 Fur seals are born with this condition and, given the high concentration of blonde pups in the bay we can assume that one of the breeding males last year passed this genetic flaw on to its offspring. Between the fur seals we observed some King penguins, Gentoo penguins, Skua's, South Georgia shag, Southern and Northern giant petrels and Wilson's storm petrels which were feeding on the surface of the water. We saw the impressive mountains around us composed of the sediment of the Cumberland Bay formation that was formed 130 million years ago.

After two rounds of zodiac cruising, feeling a little damp around the edges we all made our way back to Plancius to warm up with tea, coffee and lunch.

During lunch the ship was repositioned across the Bay of Isles to the sheltered side of Prion Island. As we did so the weather conditions seemed to improve and slowly the mountains and glaciers of South Georgia were revealed. It was fantastic to watch the misty clouds along the hillsides and see just how big the surrounding mountains really were. Prion Island, a tussac island in the middle of the Bay of Isles, is an important breeding site for Wandering albatrosses and the endemic South Georgia pipit. The Captain sailed the ship close to the island and the staff explored the possibilities of a landing by taking a scout boat to the island. However, the swell was so big at the gangway and the swell and waves on the beach were making conditions there impossible that a landing was not going to happen. From the ship we saw the Wandering albatrosses nesting between the tussac and we could see birds flying above the island as they returned from their foraging trips out at sea. Since Prion Island is a rat-free island many populations of vulnerable seabird species, including common diving petrels, white chinned petrels, giant petrels and Antarctic prions are abundant on the island.

Because of the continuing strong wind and the swell it was decided to go to Fortuna Bay for a very early landing the following morning. The journey down the coast of South Georgia was spectacular as the sun was setting over the mountains.

We might not have had the day we planned but it was still a good introduction to South Georgia.



Day 8 – Friday 20th February 2015

Fortuna Bay, Stromness and Grytviken

0800 GPS Position: 054°08' S / 036°48' W

Wind: WSW 4. **Sea State:** Calm. **Weather:** Partly Cloudy. **Temperature:** +6°C.



It had been a very nice, calm night on board with only gentle rocking as we sat at anchor in Fortuna Bay but many of us left the comfort of our beds early and were up with the sunrise to see what the conditions were really like and if it was possible to go ashore. A couple of staff had been in a scout boat to assess the conditions at the shore and it was deemed to be possible but it would definitely be a wet landing. At 6:15 the first zodiacs started to shuttling to the shore and were met by crowds of Fur seal pups and parading King penguins. It was almost a little overwhelming to begin with not knowing which way to look or where to point the camera but in the end it didn't matter which way it was pointed as the photo opportunities were all around.

Ali led a hike along the beach and up the glacial outwash plain to the main King penguin colony, passing seals and penguins all along the route. The group got smaller and smaller as they went as more people stopped to take photos. For those that made it to the colony, it was definitely worth the effort as there were lots of brown chicks at the edge of the colony as well as adults incubating eggs, hunched over with their precious cargo on their feet. Ali led the way up to a little hill which gave great views overlooking the colony which really helped get a sense of scale of the colony, even if it is one of the smaller ones in South Georgia.

All too soon it was time to head back to the beach (always the hardest part of the job for staff) but there was plenty to see along the way and, with seals and penguins all along the shore there was plenty to see and photograph whilst waiting at the landing site. The staff had done a great job of getting everyone on and off the beach safely and it just proved that, even in what looked like perfectly calm conditions, the surf and swell on the beaches here can still prove to be challenging.

Back on board breakfast was waiting and it was very welcome after a couple of exciting hours ashore. From here we re-located around the headland into Stromness which would be our location for the rest of the morning.



Outside of the bay there was blue sky and sunshine but as we got closer to the whaling station the clouds descended a little and visibility was not quite so good. This didn't stop us from going ashore, however and before too long we were stepping onto the beach, home to hundreds of Fur seal pups. The abandoned whaling station of Stromness is closed to visitors due to the risk of flying debris, collapsing buildings and asbestos so we stayed outside the 200 metre limit and just photographed the huge propellers and the rusting buildings beyond. From here Ali led a hike up the valley to what is known as Shackleton's waterfall. It was a flat easy route with only a few stream crossings along the way and before too long we were standing at the foot of the fall marvelling at the feat of endurance that led Shackleton to arriving here after his epic journey from Elephant Island.

From here we walked a little further inland, a route that took us past a very small group of Gentoo penguins and then along the hillside to a great viewpoint over the Stromness. Once back at sea level we found a route through the Fur seals and back to the landing beach. It had been a great morning ashore with a leg stretch

for those that needed it.

During lunch Plancius re-located around to Cumberland Bay East our next stop, Grytviken. Again the weather outside of the bay area was clear and sunny but one inside it was a little grey with hail and snow. Four seasons in one day! Once at anchor just off Hope Point the Government official and two representatives from the museum came on board to complete their various duties. Simon did the paperwork and stamped our passports while Sarah gave a talk about the Habitat Restoration Project to eradicate rats from South Georgia. So far the project has been completely

successful and with just one phase to go it seems that maybe the dream of so many people to get rid of rats from this special island may become a reality.

With the ship cleared we were able to go ashore with the landing spot just near the cemetery where Sir Ernest Shackleton is buried. Erin was on hand to pour us a warming whisky to toast 'The Boss' while Ali said a few words about the man and his achievements. At this point we were free to roam the whaling station of Grytviken, visit the museum, take a Shackleton tour or take a guided walk around the whaling station. The shop and Post Office saw good trade and everyone seemed to enjoy their time at this remote outpost. By 7:30 everyone was back on board including 15 guests from the Base and museum. It was a chance for us all to talk to the locals and find out a bit more about life in South Georgia and then enjoy a BBQ dinner on the aft deck. It was a chilly affair with gusting winds which sent lettuce flying around the deck but the food was fabulous and the drinks were flowing so it was a great evening for everyone.

By 9:30 it became apparent that the wind was really increasing so the decision was made for our guests to head back to shore but as they got ready at the gangway the wind suddenly increased to over 45 knots and boat operations were impossible. Everyone waited a while to see what would happen but the winds continued to scream across the bay so the decision was made to abandon the plans for a while, get some sleeping bags for our guests in the lounge and make everyone as comfortable as possible. The plan was to take them home as soon as conditions allowed which was at around 12:30 so not too late for staff, crew or guests. What a long, interesting and exciting day!



Day 9 – Saturday 21st February 2015

St Andrew's Bay and Moltke Harbour

0800 GPS Position: 054°26' S / 036°10' W

Wind: Light air. **Sea State:** Slight. **Weather:** Cloudy. **Temperature:** +6°C.



Kelvin's gentle tones roused us from our slumber at 0530 with some good news, the conditions were favourable and we would be going ashore at St Andrews Bay. St Andrews is home to the largest King penguin colony on South Georgia with approximately 250,000 breeding pairs of penguins. Including their chicks and the non-breeding birds there could easily be around half a million birds in the colony. Christian, Henrik and two Ab's shuttled us ashore and after a quick briefing by Kelvin we followed Ali and Erin as they scouted a path towards the King penguin colony. Halfway to our destination we encountered a fast moving, glacial melt water stream which Ali bravely waded into to find a section shallow enough for us to ford. She also had to take account of the hundreds of moulting penguins that were lining the river

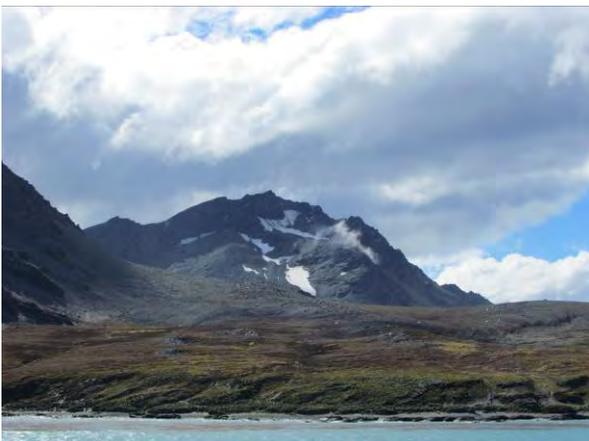
banks; disturbing them at this critical time when they are moulting and fasting really should be avoided. After waiting a few minutes for some more staff to make their way to the stream we were assisted across by members of the dive team in their dry suits and were able to continue on our way.

Ali found a way through the seals and groups of moulting penguins and as we started to make our way up the moraines we started to hear the colony with the trumpeting calls of the adults and the replying whistles of the chicks. Further up the hill the smell of nearly half a million penguins greeted us and on summiting the final moraine hills we were greeted with a stunning sight. It seemed most of the penguins were at home and the noise even from this distance was impressive. It was almost too much to take in as we all took the time to marvel at the brown, grey and white covered plain in front of us.



After spending a good amount of time at the lookout we started to make our way back to the landing and the curious King penguins who were wandering the shore line either waiting to go to sea or relaxing after returning. There were also several elephant seals hauled out nearby the landing and they were quite happy to ignore us as they had a plethora of photos taken in various positions of repose.

By 0900 we were all back on the ship and making our way to our late breakfast as Plancius weighed anchor and we set sail for our afternoons landing.



As we dropped anchor in Moltke Harbour the conditions were quite stable with a nice sun shining. Moltke Harbour is the site of a German scientific base that was established in 1882 as part of the International Geophysical Year. After a short while we were called to the lounge where Kelvin briefed us on the plans for the afternoon after we had completed our late lunch. Unfortunately, the predicted wind arrived not long afterwards and it maintained a steady 25-30 knots with much stronger occasional gusts. Operations were suspended while we waited for the wind to drop. Many of us took the time to rest up after our early morning and a lot of us spent the time sitting and chatting and just taking in the stunning scenery. This area of South Georgia is in the process of being cleared of rats and, during the afternoon the

two South Georgia Heritage helicopters that are involved in the project flew overhead and landed on the ridge

where at fuel and bait depot was located. They stayed on the ground for a short while and then took off once again heading in the direction of Grytviken. With such winds it is likely that their operations would be suspended for the day.



Conditions finally allowed a scouting boat to be dropped and a few of the staff members went for a closer look at several landing sites to see if it would be safe to go ashore. After investigating the sites it was realized that conditions were not suitable due to wind in the bay, swell on the beach and an almost impossible landing site and the landing was cancelled.

As an alternative however, the Captain took us out to some spectacular icebergs and amidst strong winds he superbly navigated the Plancius to best show off these towering blocks of ice. Kelvins eagle eyes spotted a nearby blow and after scanning the surrounding oceans we managed to spot several whales amongst the waves. These appeared to be Fin whales with one or two Humpbacks for good measure.

Captain turned Plancius for Gold Harbour, our proposed landing for tomorrow to coincide with the onset of dusk. Just prior to dinner we gathered in the lounge for an extended recap. We learnt about why icebergs float, more about the station at Moltke Harbour and also listened as Ali recounted to us her time spent at Grytviken as the South Georgia Post Mistress.



Day 10 – Sunday 22nd February 2015

Gold Harbour, Cooper Bay and Drygalski Fjord

0800 GPS Position: 054°45' S / 035°44' W

Wind: W 2. **Sea State:** Slight. **Weather:** Cloudy. **Temperature:** +4°C.



Many people were up very early in anticipation of the early morning landing at Gold Harbour but as we headed out on deck and onto the Bridge strong wind of 30-40 knots were prevailing down from the mountains beyond the beach, Katabatic winds which are so common on this mountainous island. Still, it was a beautiful sunrise light on the mountains close to our anchorage at Gold Harbour. After some further assessment and observation of the increasing wind the Captain and Kelvin decided to cancel the landing and reposition towards Cooper Bay as the wind was beyond our operational limits for the zodiacs. Incredibly, as soon as we left the bay, the wind speed dropped down to 12 knots and we enjoyed the sailing towards our next landing site. This is one of the frustrating things about Katabatic winds and the very localized weather conditions that are often found in South Georgia. Round in Cooper Bay the sun was shining and the conditions here were very favorable and we immediately dropped the zodiacs, when we arrived in anchoring position.

The plan was for the divers to go and dive along the northern shore of the bay while the rest of us took part in a split landing and cruise. The first four boats were taken ashore to land at a little beach where we could find the rare case of four species of penguins close together; Macaroni, Chinstrap, King and Gentoo penguins. There were Fur seals and Elephant seals in the little bay as well so there was plenty to see even at sea level. Frits and Lourwens had marked a route up the steep gully to get to the Macaroni penguin colony up in the tussac. It was a challenging walk, in lots of respects with Fur seals hiding in the tussac grass and mud between the grass bogs. It was quite difficult to see the penguins in the long grass but some viewpoints were established and everyone managed to get a look and photograph the birds in their breeding colony. The rest of the passengers explored the bay area on a Zodiac cruise. It was amazing to approach a beach full of Chinstrap penguins and rock outcrops filled with Macaroni on their way to and from their colonies higher up the cliffs. We also saw penguins jumping around our Zodiacs and could watch predators like Skuas, Giant petrels and Snowy sheathbills observing the penguin colonies and occasionally taking their share. As we changed over the two groups, the Zodiac cruisers now also got the chance to see the wildlife from shore and could walk up a steep gully through many premature Fur seals towards the Macaroni nesting sites. We all enjoyed this amazingly sunny and warm South Georgia morning, and also the scuba divers had a wonderful morning with penguins and Fur seals around them in the water.



Right after we boarded the *Plancius* again, Kelvin spotted some whale blows in the distance and we were soon within a couple of tail fluking Humpback whales and fast porpoising Minke whales close by. What a morning!

In the afternoon we sailed through giant icebergs towards Drygalski Fjord. The scenery of this barren fjord stood in quite sharp contrast to the green surroundings of the morning. Steep cliffs were rising up on both sides of the *Plancius* and glaciers flowed down the mountains. Andrew explained us the geological features of that fault zone we were sailing through. This area is the oldest part of the island with one side a remnant of Gondwana and it certainly had a wild rugged feel about it, almost and Antarctic feel with bare rock and glaciers. South

Georgia again showed us its windy, fast changing side with 35 knots blowing straight down the fjord so it was cold on deck taking photo but well worth it.

As we left South Georgia we were spotting several huge icebergs; the biggest of them called B17a, was nearly looking like a “wall of fog” in the distance. We were sailing along it for hours and were stunned by the pure majesty of its size.

On the Recap, Erin (with the help of the “actors” André and Peter) showed us the difficulty Fur seals mothers have to deal with in finding their pups. A very nice round-up for a beautiful South Georgia day!



Day 11 – Monday 23rd February 2015

At Sea to Antarctica

0800 GPS Position: 057°00' S / 039°00' W

Wind: NW 5. **Sea State:** Moderate. **Weather:** Partly Cloudy. **Temperature:** +4°C.



Having spent the previous few days immersed in the landscapes, wildlife and icescapes of South Georgia, today was a chance to rest and recollect on everything we had seen and done so far. Our 05:30 wake up calls, which we were slowly getting attuned to, were no more and this morning we enjoyed a leisurely start and a call to breakfast at 08:30. Although we all loved our early mornings on the beaches of South Georgia, it was nice to rest a little – we had more busy days in Antarctica ahead of us after all! Our destination tomorrow would be the South Orkney Islands and as we were officially entering Antarctica it was necessary to go through the biosecurity procedures again. Therefore, this morning we were back in the lounge with our outdoor gear, vacuuming up anything that may have stuck to our clothing and bags during our

landings on South Georgia.

Following lunch the vacuuming continued and those who were already done enjoyed some time to relax – whether spotting icebergs and wildlife from the bridge; enjoying a coffee and a good book in the lounge or looking through photos, everyone was enjoying the leisurely pace of the day.

At 15:30 a short film was played in the lounge giving more details about the Rat Eradication project on South Georgia. Having met many of the Rat Eradication team at Grytviken and having seen the helicopters flying at Moltke Harbour this was a project many of us had a keen interest in. What's more, the majority of us had seen the South Georgia Pipit during our time in South Georgia and as such the benefits of the project were known to us first hand.

This evening was our chance to support the project. At 17:00 Ali became our fabulous auctioneer for the evening. While in Grytviken she had picked up some unique artefacts and souvenirs from the museum and all of them were up for auction. Special t-shirts, photographs and signed guidebooks were just some of the things up for grabs. Some of the most popular items were a lovely little resin-cast elephant seal and a photo of a hard-hat diver entering the water in the 1960s. In total our efforts raised a fantastic £1455! Considering a donation of £90 is enough to clear rats from 1 hectare of South Georgia, this evening we have made a significant contribution to the project.

The remainder of our evening was spent enjoying our regular evening recap and a drink at Rosi's bar before heading down to the dining room for another of Chef Heinz' delicious dinners.



Day 12 – Tuesday 24th February 2015

Orcadas Station, South Orkneys

0800 GPS Position: 063°27' S / 056°51' W

Wind: SSW 4. **Sea State:** Slight. **Weather:** Overcast. **Temperature:** - 4°C.



After a quiet night with a little rocking of the ship the South Orkneys came into view during the early morning. The approach to Laurie Island and the Argentine base Orcadas looked good although there were some large ice bergs and some drift ice on the route. The landscape was certainly stunning. Very different from what we had seen so far and certainly much colder. The electronic sea chart on the bridge posed some challenges for the captain and the officers. The Plancius was sailing on land according to the chart. After some slow and cautious manoeuvring in the bay with one eye on the echo sounder and one on the ice the Plancius dropped anchor in the bay. The Argentine navy personnel on the base agreed to us visiting the base, despite the fact that they

hadn't received any of the e-mails that had been sent by Kelvin. It turned out that the Base Commander that he had e-mailed left the island 5 days previously! We expected to be on shore in about one hour but we are in an area where things tend to change quickly and while Kelvin briefed everyone about the landing the ice in the bay started to close in on us which would make zodiac operations almost impossible and endanger the safety of the ship. The Captain then decided to go around Laurie Island to the other side of the isthmus on which the station is built. The ice situation was much better there so no problems were expected. After about two hours we reached the new anchor position and after a quick lunch zodiac shuttles to the shore were arranged. The Argentine navy personnel led groups of 20 around the station, the museum in Magneto house and the remains of the 'Bruce' National Scottish Antarctic Expedition. Inside the station we were welcomed in the base living



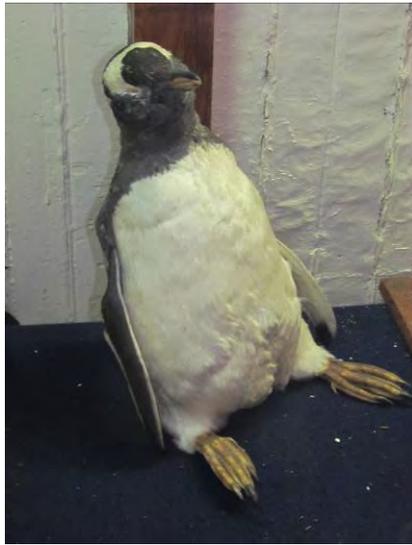
room with coffee and biscuits. Also there was the possibility to send postcards from the station. The winter crew of the station had just arrived and the people who were not to stay for the winter were being picked up next month. The summer crew of the station is 36 men and women, whilst the winter crew is only 18 men. Knowing that the sea around the South Orkneys will freeze completely in winter and that there will be a period of almost total darkness the station with its long corridors feels almost like a space ship.

Before returning to the ship a zodiac cruise was offered to those who still wanted to be outside. The wind had picked up a bit and the feel temperature got pretty cold. On the cruise mainly chinstrap penguins were seen as well as fur seals and elephant



seals.

During recap Andrew told us about the red snow algae which were plentiful on the glaciers around Orcadas station. The red patches in the snow are algae blooming, whereas the green patches are made out of algae flagellates. Frits then explained the origin of the kilometre and the nautical mile, both of which are distance units related to the dimensions of the planet earth. The meter is defined as $1/10,000,000^{\text{th}}$ of the arc distance between the geographical pole and the equator. This equals to 10,000km, hence the circumference of the earth is 40,000km. The nautical mile is defined as one minute along a meridian (latitude). The arc distance between the equator and the pole is $90^{\circ} \times 60' = 5400'$. While we know that that distance is 10,000,000 meter, one nautical mile is $10,000,000 / 5400 = 1851.85\text{m}$ or 1.852km. The ships speed is measured in nautical miles per hour, or knot.



Day 13 – Wednesday 25th February 2015

At Sea to Antarctica

0800 GPS Position: 060°52' S / 049°18' W

Wind: WSW 6. **Sea State:** Moderate. **Weather:** Clear. **Temperature:** 0°C.



As usual it was the deep Scottish accent of our Expedition Leader, Kelvin that woke us from our slumbers this morning ready for a day at sea heading further south to the Antarctic Peninsula. As we came up to the lounge Cape petrels could be seen all around the ship as if guiding us to the Antarctic continent. More than a hundred of these lovely birds were around our ship trying to find some food in the waves of the ship.

The first presentation was from Erin, who explained us the role of krill in the Antarctic marine ecosystems. She told us how life in Antarctica is depending on the presence of krill in the waters around the continent. She presented us the characteristics of the marine life and explained how this makes the marine ecosystems

very vulnerable for future temperature changes in the Antarctic waters.

Later in the morning Christian told us more about Hjalmar Johansen, one of the lesser known characters who explored the polar areas with Fridtjof Nansen and Roald Amundsen. With so many stories told about Shackleton, Scott and Amundsen it was refreshing to hear about a different but no less interesting character.

Lunch provided the usual welcome break in the day and a few people took the opportunity to enjoy a post lunch snooze; relaxation in preparation for the busy days ahead. With a flu/cold bug going around the ship a few people were feeling a little under the weather so 'duvet time' was very welcome for some.

In the afternoon Louwrens gave us an overview of the controversial whaling industry and described the developments in the only two whaling stations in Antarctica: Signy Island and Deception Island.

Further he told us about the origin and development of the International Whaling Commission.

Later in the afternoon Andrew gave the final presentation of the day about the geology of Antarctica. He explained how continental drift finally was responsible for the existence of the Antarctic continent and how many areas still demonstrate volcanic activity as the tectonic plates continue to move in this part of the world.

During our sea day we saw many birds around the ship. Beside the Cape petrels, there were three Albatross species (Grey headed, Black browed and Light mantled sooty), Southern fulmar, Blue petrel, the beautiful Antarctic petrel, and the tiny Wilson's storm petrel, tiny in comparison to the albatross species that are so commonly seen here. In the recap Kelvin told us more about the big iceberg B17A. With his amusing technical demonstration he showed us this 32 km long iceberg floating on the Thames in London passing by the House of Parliaments.

It certainly put things in perspective and gave a sense of scale to this enormous berg. It had apparently originated out of the Ross Sea and it floated around half Antarctica to reach its location a little south of South Georgia. Frits explained us the difference between sea ice and land ice and Andrew gave us further insight in the origins of the Scotia Arch.

Dinner was called and there was a definite air of excitement in the dining room as we all looked forward to our days ahead in Antarctica.



Day 14 – Thursday 26th February 2015

Brown Bluff, Weddell Sea and Antarctic Sound

0800 GPS Position: 063°27' S / 056°51' W

Wind: SSW 4. **Sea State:** Slight. **Weather:** Overcast. **Temperature:** - 4°C.



The wake-up call was scheduled for 7:30 but a lot of people were up and about before then enjoying the views as we sailed into Antarctic Sound. There were huge numbers of icebergs and we could see the mountain peaks of the Antarctic Peninsula on the starboard side of the ship as we made our way towards our destination for the morning, Brown Bluff.

With weather conditions set to deteriorate later in the day with increasing wind, Kelvin was keen to get everyone ashore as soon as possible so, during breakfast he gave a short briefing over the PA so that we were ready to board the zodiacs as soon as we'd finished our toast and eggs.

It was a short shuttle to the shore and we landed on the rocky beach between the stranded icebergs along the shore; our

Antarctic Continent landing. We were met by a number of Gentoo penguins along the shoreline; moulting adults and fledging chicks and with the huge rocky cliffs behind the beach it was a dramatic location for our morning landing. The plan for the morning was for the hikers to head up on to the moraines and to the side of the glacier while the rest of us walked along the beach towards where the Adélie penguin colony is found during the breeding season. The scramble up the rocky moraines was tricky but most people managed ok and before too long they were walking along the edge of the rocky bluff looking up at the icicles and down onto the glacier. Had they kept on walking they would have ended up at the South Pole but this wasn't the intention and before too long Andrew led them down onto the glacier where they found some small crevasses and cracks in the ice.

Down on the beach it became a bit of a game of Hunt the Adélie as the colony was completely empty as the breeding season was over for another year. These penguins have a short incubating and fledging period as they can breed a long way south where the summer season is short so by this time of year all the adult and chicks have left and gone to sea for the winter. A few were sighted along the shore line so they were the focus of many cameras but even without the Adélie penguins there was plenty to see and a group of Gentoo chicks were playing King of the Castle on a rock, fighting each other to be on top of the rock. Very entertaining! Towards late morning the wind started to pick up and the decision was made to get everyone back to the landing area and back on board the ship sooner rather than later. It was a very good decision as, by the time the last boats were shuttling back to the ship, the wind was strong and gusty making it hazardous for the drivers.



From here, during lunch, we headed further south and east into the top end of the Weddell Sea, entering the Erebus and Terror Gulf. There was a huge amount of sea ice and icebergs and although the conditions were windy and cold out on deck many people were wrapped up and outside taking photos of the landscape and wildlife. There were many species of seal hauled out on the ice floes; Fur, Weddell, Crabeater and Leopard and we were lucky enough to see a single Orca, Killer whale as well as a couple of humpback whales. The Captain did a great job of taking the ship close to some incredible bergs as well as manoeuvring carefully around smaller floes and with temperatures of -5°C and a wind chill factor of -16°C it was a real Antarctic experience.



As we came out of the Erebus and Terror Gulf the wind conditions deteriorated and we had 40 knots of wind blowing down Antarctic Sound but it was at that time that we had our best encounter with Orca. A small pod of animals were travelling at speed across the Sound and seeing them cutting through the spray was quite impressive. Quite an experience and certainly a cold one as many people tried to photograph them from the outside decks.

The strong winds continued as we made our way into the Bransfield Strait and it was really quite a sight from the comfort and safety of the lounge where we gathered for an extended re-cap with the staff. Andrew explained about the volcanic formation of Brown Bluff closely followed by Christian giving an interesting account of

the fated Nordenskjöld Swedish Antarctic expedition in 1902 which took place in this remote corner of the peninsula. Peter and Andre then explained about how the divers prepare for diving in this cold environment and Erin showed some fantastic underwater photos of Leopard seals and explained about their characteristics and breeding behaviour. Kelvin then gave an overview of our plans for tomorrow which would be spent up in the South Shetland Islands. Dinner was served and many people had an early night in preparation for an early morning wake-up call.



Day 15 – Friday 27th February 2015

Half Moon Island and Whaler's Bay

0525 GPS Position: 062°35' S / 059°54' W

Wind: Light air. **Sea State:** Calm. **Weather:** Cloudy. **Temperature:** 0°C.



A beautiful sunrise and the snowy peaks of Greenwich and Livingston Island greeted those of us who were up and about before Kelvins wake-up call this morning. The wind had dropped overnight and conditions were calm with a slight swell as the Captain dropped the anchor close to Half Moon Island, our landing for this morning. After a quick breakfast we boarded the zodiacs and were shuttled ashore under a partly cloudy but sunny sky. It had been snowing recently and the clean white snow contrasted nicely with the Chinstrap penguin rookeries we were here to visit. Ali flagged out a path to the eastern end of the island to the larger of the two rookeries which allowed us a nice leg stretch and a continuously changing perspective of the surrounding peaks of Livingston Island. There were numerous Fur seals very convincingly disguising themselves as rocks to scare the unwary traveller and Christian spotted a sleeping Weddell seal which we were able to approach to get some nice photos. Towards the end of the landing Christian led a small walk in the

direction of the Argentinian Camara Station before looping back to the landing site, allowing us to wander the shoreline of both sides of the island and discover more Fur seals lying in wait.

After a quick scrub of our boots it was back into the zodiacs and back to Plancius as we set sail for the afternoons landing at Deception Island.

As we approached Deception Island, Kelvin put on a short movie outlining the history of this famous volcano before Andrew explained to us the geological history of the area and the different sorts of rocks we would be encountering onshore.

Once we had safely navigated through Neptune's Bellows and the anchor was dropped in Whalers bay we made our way ashore. The long walkers set off with Louwrens and Andrew to attempt to climb up to Nipple Peak while the rest of us split into smaller groups and explored the remains of the whaling station and BAS buildings that were destroyed in the 1971 eruption. After a short while we walked over to Neptune's Window and looked out across the Bransfield Strait towards the Antarctic continent

which could be seen on the horizon under low cloud. This is a rare occurrence as the mountains of the Peninsula are about 60 nautical miles (111 km) away and the weather usually restricts visibility too much.

Towards the end of the landing we all made our way back to the landing site where the more fool hardy of our group



took the opportunity to partake in the Polar Plunge.

Many were hoping to take advantage of the geothermally heated waters of this active volcano but much to the amusement of the rest of us there was no heating, just cold Antarctic water and a lot of screaming.

After everyone was safely back on board Plancius the anchor was once again heaved and we set sail out of the caldera of Deception Island. We had survived! After a short briefing where Kelvin outlined our plans for tomorrow's activities we approached a beautiful iceberg where a couple of Humpback whales were seen along the edge. It was a perfect end to a fabulous day in the South Shetland Islands. It was then time, once again time to make our way to the dining room for another sumptuous meal before

retiring for the night in anticipation of our final day on the peninsula for this trip.



Day 16 – Saturday 28th February 2015

Cierva Cove and Mikkelsen Harbour

0800 GPS Position: 064°08' S / 060°58' W

Wind: NE 1/2. **Sea State:** Calm. **Weather:** Overcast snow. **Temperature:** - 3°C.



As we were woken up at 6:30 this morning we found ourselves in a world of ice and snow; we could see the coast of the Antarctic Peninsula with its huge glacier tongues, surrounded by icebergs, bergy bits and brash ice, and even snow was in the air. There were also occasional whale blows at the horizon and it certainly felt cold out on deck with over 20 knots of wind. However, as we made our way further into the shelter of the cove the wind decreased and it was quiet and still with just a sprinkle of snow falling. Soon after breakfast we departed on a zodiac cruise in Cierva Cove in relatively calm conditions and could enjoy this world of ice. We navigated the little boats through the ice and could see occasional seals hauling out

on ice flows or swimming in the water around the icebergs. Both Crabeater and Leopard seals were spotted. The icebergs with all their forms and colours gave us splendid photographic opportunities. All shades of blue and white could be seen; and also some very clear ice was around the boats. In addition we enjoyed a Chinstrap penguin colony on a little island, known as Penguin Island in the bay. The divers went out in their boats to dive around an iceberg and it turned out to be one of the best dives of the trip so far with a Leopard seal swimming around the divers and berg for around 20 minutes. Thankfully, it was in a playful mood and gave everyone an experience of a lifetime and some fantastic photo opportunities.

We had a couple of hours of re-positioning to get to Trinity Island and the little island called Mikkelsen and so had an early lunch en route arriving at our final destination in the early afternoon. The Captain anchored the ship a safe distance from the surrounding glaciers and a huge iceberg that was in front of the island.

It was blocking our usual access to the island. There was some quite strong winds as well so it was a long, bumpy ride around to the back of the island where the drivers did a great job of finding a safe channel through the shallow rocky approach. Right at the landing beach there were a number of Weddell seals hauled out on the snow and Fur seals were scattered around the area and with the little island home to a large population of Gentoo penguins it was a busy place for our final landing. There were a lot of small chicks still being brooded by their parents as well as fat fluffy chicks wandering around the edge of the colonies waiting for their parents to return from their foraging trips out at sea. In addition there were remains from the whaling period, especially huge bones, and the usual Argentine refuge hut. The island with its snow cone and round shape and a backdrop of a stunning iceberg was like an 'Antarctica in miniature'. So this was a wonderful last landing for our trip and the divers had an equally enjoyable finale with two Leopard seals swimming with them for much of their dive.



After we were all back on the ship we were enjoying some hot chocolate, with a little extra warmer on the top deck in the sunshine. Meanwhile, we could watch Humpback whale blows around the ship; what a nice 'Goodbye' to Antarctica. But now we had to proceed northwards through the Boyd strait between Low island and Snow Island towards the Drake Passage. At recap, Erin gave us more information about the Weddell seals, which we had spotted especially on the last two days, while Ali shared some details about the Gentoo penguins which we saw at every location during the whole trip. Kelvin gave us some information about the following day; the most important information for most of us was that the weather for the Drake Passage. For this notoriously rough stretch of water things did not look too bad at all.



Day 17 – Sunday 1st March 2015

At Sea in the Drake Passage

0800 GPS Position: 061°17' S / 063°25' W

Wind: NNW 3. **Sea State:** Moderate. **Weather:** Clear. **Temperature:** +4°C.

For a nice change it was the delightful voice of Beverley that announced the start of the day and a call to breakfast at 0800. The Drake Passage was being kind as predicted and we had only a slight swell to contend with as we made our way to the dining room. Out on deck it was clear and sunny so many people were out on deck enjoying morning coffee and tea in the sunshine.



Ali started off the day's lecture program in the lounge with an entertaining talk on the 'Ice Maidens of Antarctica', a look at the wives and girlfriends of significant Antarctic explorers as well as the women of polar history both past and present. The history of women in Antarctica is a short one with the first woman, Caroline Mikkelsen setting foot on the Antarctic continent in 1936. Up until the 1960's women, particularly in Britain were being actively discouraged from going to Antarctica to travel or work. Things have certainly changed in recent years.

Following a short break with time for coffee we once again adjourned to the lounge as Peter gave an inspired and informative insight into just a few of the things that occurred during his time living at the British Antarctic Surveys Rothera Station on Adelaide Island. Aided by photos of his time living on the ice he spoke about diving operations, table tennis games, working in the 'deep field' as well as digging a lot of snow. It was certainly an experience he will never forget and it seems he has been bitten by the 'Polar Bug' and

hope to keep returning to Antarctica.

During the morning the sun began to disappear behind a shroud of mist and those up on the bridge could see on the chart that we were approaching the Antarctic Convergence where the cold Antarctic waters meet the warmer waters to the north. This mixing of cold and warm often brings mist and we certainly had limited visibility for a few hours.

Following lunch and a short siesta for many Erin unraveled the mysteries of how whales have adapted to be able to dive so deep and not be affected. With the aid of some delicious props she demonstrated how pressures found at depth act on these impressive creatures and how their physiology has changed to allow them to stay submerged for so long. It was a fascinating insight to the lives of these animals at sea.

Shortly after this (and some afternoon tea) we were invited to the lounge to take part in a 'Polar Pub Quiz' with Ali and Andrew our quiz masters for the evening. Teams gathered and put their newly found knowledge and expertise to the test with questions about wildlife, geography, history and a ship trip round. This was followed by some fun photos of some of the species we have seen on our voyage, including a very bearded Andrew! The result of the quiz was close but with 39 points, just one point ahead of the next team, were the 'Antarctic Survivors', very worthy winners of the bottle of wine. Thank you and well done to everyone who took part.

At re-cap there was a chance to learn about the Ozone Hole from Frits. There was some complicated science to take in but with the aid of diagrams it mostly made sense! Kelvin then talked about the different types of Orca, Killer whales that are found in the Antarctic and how they vary in looks, characteristics, location and diet. We had been lucky enough to see Type B Orca in Antarctic Sound.

Dinner was called and once again the galley team managed to prepare a great meal for us. This evening we also had a chance to meet all the galley staff along with all the other members of the hard working Hotel team. They have looked after us well.

$$\rho_{liquid} * g * V_{displ} = \rho_{obj} * g * V_{obj}$$

$$\rightarrow \frac{V_{displ}}{V_{obj}} = \frac{\rho_{obj}}{\rho_{displ}}$$

What is this the formula for????

Day 18 – Monday 2nd March 2015

At Sea in the Drake Passage

0800 GPS Position: 056°11'S / 062°11'W

Wind: NW 4. **Sea State:** Moderate. **Weather:** Overcast. **Temperature:** +6°C.



During the early hours of the morning many of us were woken by increased movement of the ship. The wind had increased along with the swell so we were getting some bigger rolls as well as a few bangs and crashes against the side of the ship. Taking a morning shower proved to be challenging and it was quite quiet in the dining room when Beverly called us to breakfast at 8am.

Despite this, however it was a bright sunny morning and we were making good progress up to the shelter of Cape Horn where we hoped to find better conditions later in the day. We have been lucky so far with our Drake Passage crossing. During the morning we still had a lecture programme prepared for us with Frits starting the morning off explaining some of his work and research into heavy metal mercury and

the impact this is having on the Polar Regions.

Late in the morning Lourwens talked about the issue of Climate Change and how this, once again is effecting the polar regions of our planet. This is sometimes a controversial issue which inspires much debate and questioning and it is always interesting to get different views, ideas and opinions on it.

By this time it was nearly lunch time and many people spent the time packing and preparing for disembarkation in Ushuaia tomorrow as well as enjoying the warm sunshine out on deck. After our final lunch on board, a Philipino stir fried rice speciality, it was time to settle our accounts with Andre and Beverley so those nights in the bar, internet cards and the retail therapy all had to be paid for at this stage. It had been nice not to think about money and credit cards for a few days!

To relax at the end of the afternoon staff screened an episode from the BBC documentary series Frozen Planet, which showed some stunning footage of both the polar regions, the Arctic and Antarctic and the lives of the animals that have adapted to these extreme, hostile environments and indeed flourish in them. The film had some stunning images of the Killer whales washing a Weddell seal off the ice and it left many of us planning a return trip to the south and maybe a first voyage to the northern polar region. Staff and crew of Plancius would welcome you on board any time.

The final bit of housekeeping for the day was to return the rubber boots to the boot room. In the Falkland Islands these boots seemed much too warm for the summer days we experienced there but we were very grateful to have them on some of the wet landings of South Georgia and in the deep snow of Antarctica.



Later in the afternoon the Dive Team gave a presentation showing some of the things that the divers had seen on their underwater adventures throughout this voyage. It was a fantastic glimpse into a world that few people have had the privilege to experience and gave us a view into the cold waters of the Southern Ocean from the comfort of our lounge.

With a glass of Kir Royale in hand it was chance to join the Captain in a toast to our successful voyage to the Falkland Islands, South Georgia and Antarctica, despite the weather challenges we faced along the way. Highlights must include the sunny morning in the

Falkland Islands, the sheer numbers of Fur seals on the beaches of South Georgia, the King penguin colony at St Andrew's Bay, the huge tabular iceberg off the coast of South Georgia, the cold ship's cruise into the Weddell Sea and the sparkling sunny morning at Half Moon Island. We all have our own special memories of the trip and they will stay with us for a very long time to come.



Day 19 – Tuesday 3rd March 2015

Disembarkation in Ushuaia

0800 GPS Position: 056°21'S / 064°28'W

Today is disembarkation day in Ushuaia. Coming alongside, we were boarded by the Argentine officials who cleared our vessel and allowed us to disembark. On the pier we bade farewell to many of the friends we have come to know over the past 19 days, and had one last look at the *Plancius*, the ship that bore us faithfully on such an incredible voyage from Ushuaia to the Falklands, to South Georgia and finally on to Antarctica. This trip will last us a lifetime – in our memories, our imaginations, and in our dreams.

Thank you all for such a wonderful voyage, for your company, good humour and enthusiasm. We hope to see you again in the future, wherever that might be!

Total distance sailed on our voyage:

3408 Nautical miles

6311 Kilometres

On behalf of Oceanwide Expeditions, Captain Levakov, Expedition Leader Kelvin Murray and all the crew and staff, it has been a pleasure travelling with you.



World's Leading Polar
Expedition Operator

Kelvin Murray – Expedition Leader



Kelvin has explored and guided on every continent, every ocean and most seas. His clients include expedition companies, wildlife charities, National Geographic photographers and the acclaimed BBC Natural History Unit. He has been working with Oceanwide Expeditions since 2010 and has led multiple trips on their expedition ships *Plancius*, *Ortelius*, *Rembrandt van Rijn* and *Noorderlicht*.

Over-wintering with the British Antarctic Survey, he managed their scientific diving programme throughout the extreme environment of the polar winter. He has supervised over 1,400 dives in the Arctic and Antarctica.

Kelvin is a specialist in cetaceans, seals and Polar bears. Previously, he was Education Officer for the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society and has spent twenty years studying these animals. Through his company Silvertip, Kelvin proudly sponsors aspiring ocean champions with Our World-Underwater Scholarship Society, taking young explorers to dive in pristine wilderness.

Kelvin lives in his native Scotland where he still enjoys incredible diving and wildlife encounters. He recently began his greatest adventure when he became a devoted Daddy Bear.

Andrew Bishop — Assistant Expedition Leader



Andrew became interested in Antarctica and the polar regions during his studies at university. He made his first trip to the Great White Land in 2009 and has been returning as a guide every season since then.

Andrew grew up on King Island, a small Island off Tasmania, Australia, before moving to Hobart to further his studies in 1993. He graduated with a bachelor of science in 2001, majoring in geology and environmental geography. He has spent the intervening years travelling throughout Australia and overseas, exploring different countries and experiencing what other cultures of the world have to offer.

Andrew's work as a geologist has only enhanced his love of the outdoors and has seen him crisscross the Australian continent, taking him to some very remote and very hot areas of Australia. During his first trip to Antarctica in 2009 he contracted a severe case of the 'Polar Bug' and subsequently returns every year as a guide and lecturer for Oceanwide Expeditions, eager to cool off and to share his love and knowledge of Antarctica. Expanding his horizons he has been exploring and guiding in the northern polar regions since 2012, observing the fauna, flora and very interesting geology and geomorphology of Svalbard, Greenland and Iceland.

Ali Liddle — Guide and Lecturer



Ali has lived on both the Falklands and South Georgia, has published 3 books and when she is not running marathons is either on ships in the south or teaching children in the north.

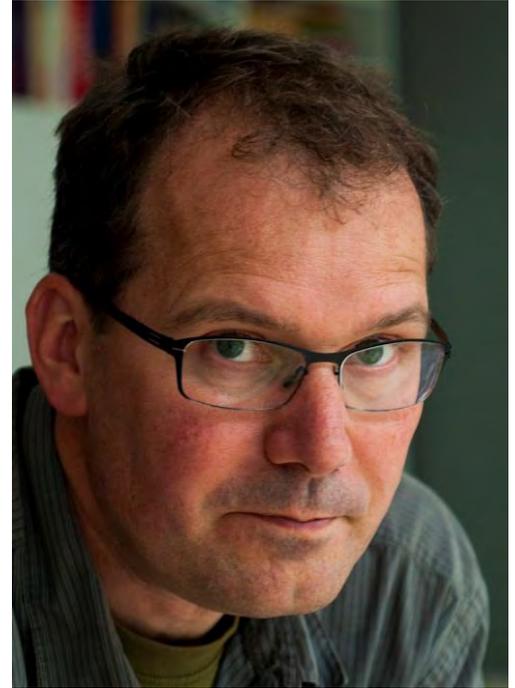
Originally from the UK, Ali spent 15 years living in the Falkland Islands where she worked as a Primary school teacher both teaching out in 'camp' and at the school in Stanley. Latterly, she was employed as Education Officer for Falklands Conservation and shared her time between classroom teaching and conservation. In 1997 she spent 9 months living on South Georgia where she ran the Post Office and took every opportunity to hike, ski and explore the surrounding peaks and coastline. She has published 3 books to date – Plants of the Falkland Islands and 2 art and craft books for children using penguins and albatross as the inspiration. Ali is a keen runner, having completed 3 marathons in the Falkland Islands and 2 in the UK and enjoys hiking and camping, particularly in remote corners of the Falkland Islands.

This is her fifth full season working on Antarctic and Arctic cruise ships and, for now, she shares her time between working on board *Plancius* and teaching in Northumberland in the UK, where she is currently based. She hopes to return to the Falkland Islands at some point in the future to continue living the island life she loves so much.

Frits Steenhuisen - Guide Lecturer

Frits Steenhuisen is an environmental scientist with the Arctic Centre of the University of Groningen (The Netherlands) where he specializes in spatial analyses and modelling.

His main research topic is global mercury emissions. This is part of the effort to explain the very high levels of mercury in the Arctic ecosystem and in humans. Frits also studies the distribution of radio nuclides in the Arctic for the Norwegian Radiation Protection Authority. Most of this work relates to the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP) in which he represents the Netherlands. On Spitsbergen Frits took part in archaeological fieldwork on 17th century whaling stations.



Frits first travelled to the Polar Regions in the early 90's, starting with an expedition to "Het BehoudenHuis", the wintering place of Willem Barentz on Novaya Zemlya. After several years of fieldwork and student expeditions to Spitsbergen and the Antarctic, he started working as a guide and expedition leader on Oceanwide Expedition ships in both the Arctic and the Antarctic.

Christian Engelke – Guide and Lecturer



When Christian is not in the high latitudes of Svalbard, Greenland or Antarctica, you probably find him playing around in wind and waves in his sea kayak around Tromsø in Northern Norway.

Since his first vacation to Norway, Christian has suffered severely under the quite widespread “Scandinavia-fever”. He has been exploring both the mountains and coastal regions of Norway, Sweden and Greenland by feet, on skis and in his kayak.

2008, studying engineering, Christian moved to Svalbard. After nearly three unforgettable years with many personal adventures and experiences as a guide at 78 degrees North, he moved “down South” to Tromsø in Northern Norway.

Since 2009 Christian is working as a freelance guide, both on day trips and longer tours all year around. In addition Christian works for the Norwegian Polar Institute and is a sea kayak instructor with his speciality being long kayak trips he is offering in the East Greenland Tasiilaq district, and around Tromsø since 2011.

After more than 5 seasons on Svalbard, Christian has lately been starting to explore the very South as well. Christian is very excited about the substitution of walrus for sea elephants and polar bears for penguins.

Louwrens Hacquebord — Guide Lecturer



Louwrens Hacquebord (1947) studied physical geography and archaeology at the Universities of Utrecht and Groningen. He has got his PhD at the University of Amsterdam in 1984 and was professor in Arctic and Antarctic Studies at the University of Groningen from 1994-2013.

Louwrens main study object is the exploration and exploitation history of the polar areas.

During his research he executed several excavations in polar areas.

Louwrens is Council member of the International Arctic Science Committee from 1992 onwards representing the Netherlands. He was vice-president of IASC from 2000-2008 and had several other functions in international polar organizations.

Louwrens took part in 21 scientific expeditions to the Arctic and Antarctic. In this way he participated in the First Dutch Antarctic Expedition to King George Island and Deception Island. He spent two month on Deception Island at Whalers bay. He wrote more than 300 scientific papers and several books about Arctic and Antarctic.

Last book was published three weeks ago and is called Wildernis, Woongebied and Wingewest. Een geschiedenis van de poolgebieden. Atlas/Contact, Amsterdam. Second print is prepared and will be ready within some weeks.

Henrik Enckell - Dive Master



Henrik is an experienced dive instructor and rebreather instructor trainer.

He was one of the first dive masters to bring tourists diving in Antarctica.

As instructor with six agencies (PADI, NAUI, IANTD, RAID, TDI and IART) he teaches all levels of recreational and technical diving up to Advanced Trimix CCR (Closed Circuit Rebreather) through his own company.

He's been diving for more than 20 years and teaching the last 16, specializing in technical CCR systems that enable close encounters with wildlife due to the absence of exhaled bubbles.

He is regularly involved in deep wreck expeditions all over the world. Some of the interesting wrecks he has visited are the WW2 disasters *General von Steuben* and *Wilhelm Gustloff* in the Baltic and *HMS Victoria* ("the vertical wreck") at 145m/475 feet depth off the Lebanese coast.

He has also led dive trips in the Antarctic and Arctic regions during 10+ years, guiding divers in these remote, challenging and many times undived waters.

Henrik has a M.Sc. degree in Electrical Engineering and a military background having served in peace keeping and peace enforcing missions in the Middle East and former Yugoslavia. He recently moved back to Sweden after living in Tokyo with his wife, three daughters aged 14, 11 and 9 and his newborn son.

Erin McFadden - Dive Guide and Lecturer



Erin is from the Scottish coastal town of Dunbar. Born and raised in Scotland, Erin decided to leave home at the age of 17 to pursue her interests in Marine Biology and Scuba Diving. Five months in the Bahamas cemented her passion for these interests and over the course of the next few years Erin worked in Cyprus and Zanzibar, as well as completing projects

in South Africa and Mozambique.

At the same time, Erin was working towards her degree in Marine Biology at the University of St Andrews in Scotland. After graduating in 2011 she was awarded the Our World-Underwater Scholarship Society's Rolex Scholarship for Europe. This prestigious scholarship saw Erin travel from the Canadian Arctic to New Zealand and many places in-between. During the year she took part in an array of diving courses and experiences, as well as gaining many insights into marine science and conservation.

Today Erin continues to travel the world for work. She has been with Oceanwide since July 2012, when she completed her first season as a Dive Guide in Svalbard. Now she works in both the Arctic and the Antarctic as both a Dive Guide and as an Expedition Guide and Lecturer. When not in the Polar Regions, Erin is either working on dive projects around the World, or spending time back home in Scotland.

Andre Fahrni — Dive Guide



André grew up in Switzerland – a country used to snow and the cold but not a very obvious place to dive. In 1999 it happened anyway and even though it was in the warm waters of Indonesia he started to dive. Becoming a dive instructor opened the door and allowed Andre to work and live abroad, which he then did on the Philippines, Maldives and

Sweden.

Not sure if the cold or warm water diving is his favorite, André fell immediately in love with Antarctica on his first trip there.

Equally happy when diving, skiing or hiking in the Swiss mountains these passions are his his preferred way to escape on weekends

Peter Webster — Dive Guide



Peter spent 16 months in the Antarctic as Dive Officer for the British Antarctic Survey, supervising and participating in the scientific diving work carried out at Rothera Research Station.

This involved diving from RIBs in summer or through holes cut into the sea ice during winter.

Peter graduated from Aberdeen University, Scotland with an MSc in Marine Ecology and Conservation. He is an enthusiastic environmentalist, loves the cold outdoors and enjoys photography.

Peter's predominantly cold water diving has ranged from his homeland Scotland, Iceland and the Antarctic and aims to dive somewhere warmer than 13°C soon!