



Expedition Log

Antarctic Peninsula

21st – 31st March 2008

M/V Grigoriy Mikheev

ГРИГОРИЙ МИХЕЕВ



MV Grigoriy Mikheev was a research vessel used by the Russian Academy of Science, now under a long-term contract to Oceanwide Expeditions. The ship was built in Finland in 1990 and is an ice-strengthened vessel. The Mikheev is 210 feet (66 meters) long, has a draft of 12 feet (3.5 meters) and can reach a top cruising speed of 12.5 knots. The passenger capacity is 48, in addition there is a Russian crew of 19, three international hotel and catering staff, five international expedition guides and polar experts and one emergency doctor.

With

**Captain Andrey Khoroshaylov
and his Russian Crew of 18**

including

1st Mate: Stanislav Nedelko
2nd Mate – Alexey Nazarov
3rd Mate – Alexander Nozdryukhin
Radio Engineer - Zodiac Driver: Oleg Orlik
Boatswain: Yuriy Sabol
Able Seaman - Zodiac Driver: Dmitriy Ivanov
Able Seaman - Zodiac Driver: Vitaliy Zuev
Stewardess: Lina Tishchenko
Stewardess: Nina Ivanova
Stewardess: Yulia Tuchkova
Stewardess: Elena Petrova
Stewardess: Irina Kortikova

and

Expedition Leader – Rolf Stange (Germany)
Dive Master/Lecturer – Jonas Sundquist (Sweden)
Guide/Lecturer – Jordi Plana (Spain/Chile)
Lecturer/Dive Master – Jonas Thormar (Denmark)
Hotel Manager – Francis de Buck (Belgium)
Head Chef – Tobias Fritz (Austria)
Sous Chef – Beverly Howlett (Scotland)
Ship's Physician – Claudia Vernooij (The Netherlands)

**And 39 of us from Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Ireland, The Netherlands,
Russia, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States**

21st March 2008 – Ushuaia / Tierra del Fuego, Argentina

16:00 Position 54°45' S / 68°30' W

Air temperature: 12°C, nice and sunny.

We landed in Ushuaia, the place which markets itself as “El Fin del Mundo” (The End of the World). The rugged spine of the Andes stretches the entire length of the South American continent, coming right down to meet the sea here at the southern tip of Chile and Argentina. The four-hour flight from Buenos Aires over the flat, dry Argentine Pampas and Patagonia was highlighted by the plane's steep descent over the snow and glacier-capped peaks to the airstrip which projects straight out into the Beagle Channel. The scenery includes extensive fjords reminiscent of parts of Norway.

At four in the afternoon the staff and crew were ready to welcome us on board, where we had time to find our cabins and to unpack and rest a little.

At 5.20 p.m. we met in the dining room for the first time, where we were welcomed by Rolf Stange (Germany), our Expedition leader who gave us a short introduction to the ship, followed by Jonas

With a rapidly growing population of 55,000 people, **Ushuaia** is a flourishing duty free port with a fishing industry particularly famous for its crabs (centolla). There are other new industries as well, notably electronics. The new buildings and roads give the appearance of a latter day “frontier town” and one of the few remnants of the last century is a beautiful Victorian timber building right on the harbour. Its first owner purchased the so-called Casa Beban building through a catalogue over a hundred years ago. The museum in the former prison had a fascinating and well-arranged series of displays.

Sundquist, the divemaster, introducing himself and his dive guide Jonas from Denmark. The polar bug had long ago bitten all members of the expedition staff. Rolf trained as a geographer, is the author of several books and a seasoned guide and expedition leader in the Arctic, Antarctic and South Atlantic areas. The expedition team was completed by Jordi Plana from Spain/Chile, who was specialized in marine mammals and would guide as ashore.

The hotel department on board the *Grigoriy Mikheev* was led by Francis de Buck from Belgium. The cooks, who would take care of tasty meals during our voyage, were Tobias Fritz (Austria) and Beverly Howlett (Scotland). Dr Claudia Vernooij, the ship's physician, had been working and travelling with Oceanwide before, in Arctic waters, and therefore came with a wealth of knowledge about cold climate, emergency medicine and motion sickness remedies. But of course we hoped that we would meet her in the bar rather than in the hospital!

Captain Andrey Khoroshlaylov was busy on the bridge, but we would see him later. He had an experienced crew of 18 Russian officers, sailors, engineers and service personnel on board.



Finally, the ships docking lines were hauled in at around 18:00 and we set sail out of the harbour in the most beautiful sunshine. Just after leaving, Stanislav Nedelko, our first officer, gave us an important safety briefing on the upcoming lifeboat drill. Shortly after, the ship's alarm sounded a signal for us to practice this emergency evacuation drill. Moving to our cabins, we donned warm clothes and life jackets and proceeded to our muster station, near the lifeboats. Most of us completed the exercise by climbing inside the egg-shaped lifeboats. We all felt quite safe inside, although certainly not overly comfortable, and happy to return to our cabins. Dinner awaited us, giving a chance for everybody to get a little more acquainted.

Our Antarctic adventure was about to start!

22nd March 2008 – Southbound in Drake Passage

Position at 08.00h: 56°11' S / 65°47' W

415 nm to the South Shetland Islands

Air temperature: 10°C, overcast, wind force 6 and swell, cloud cover

Today we could relax and recover from our flights in the Drake Passage, which presented itself in an average mood, considering the season – a fact that did not keep some of us from not liking it.

A first good *Mikheev*-style breakfast was followed by bridge excursions. Many of us had already signed up to be organized into smaller groups for this purpose, but the whole operation was condensed down into one group at least for the moment, as many of us had decided that bed was a better place to be due to the movement of the ship.

In the afternoon, Jordi invited us for an introduction into the seabird world of the Southern Ocean. And indeed, we had already seen a veritable choice of these: the great Wandering Albatross was around our ship for most of the day, constantly accompanied by several smaller Black-browed Albatrosses and the odd Grey-headed Albatross, to mention the most important ones. Giant Petrels were seen several times, and smaller birds included Prions with their elegant, swallow-like flight. Even a first whale was seen in the afternoon, although it could not be identified.

Later, "Jonas the incredible Swede" followed with an appetizer for diving at the cold ends of the world. In the evening, we rounded the day off in the *Mikheev*-cinema with the first part of *Life in the Freezer*. Our appetite for Antarctica grew with every mile that we sailed southwards!

The Drake Passage

The Drake Passage geologically opened about 22 to 30 million years ago, and connects the Atlantic with the Pacific Ocean, south of Tierra del Fuego. The South Shetland Islands lie south of this strait, which is here about 800-900 km wide. The Drake played an important part in the trade of the 19th and early 20th centuries before the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914. The stormy seas and icy conditions made the rounding of Cape Horn through the Drake Passage a rigorous test for ships and crews alike, especially for the sailing vessels of the day. Though bearing the name of the famous 16th-century English seaman and explorer, the Drake Passage was, in fact, first traversed in 1616 by a Flemish expedition led by Willem Schouten. Sir Francis Drake sailed through the Straits of Magellan to the north of Tierra del Fuego, although he was subsequently blown south into the more extreme latitudes west of the passage by a Pacific storm. The passage has an average depth of 3400 m (11,000 feet), with deeper regions of up to 4800 m (15,600 feet) near the northern and southern boundaries.

The winds through the Drake Passage are predominantly from the west and are most intense in the northern half. The mean annual air temperature ranges from 5°C in the north to -3°C in the south. Cyclones (atmospheric low-pressure systems with winds that blow clockwise in the Southern Hemisphere) formed in the Pacific Ocean traverse the passage towards the southern end. Surface water temperature varies from near 6°C in the north to -1°C in the south, with the temperature altering sharply in a zone near 60°S. This transitional zone is known as the Antarctic Convergence, or Polar Front. It separates the sub-Antarctic surface water from the colder and fresher Antarctic surface water. At depths of between approximately 500 to 3000 m there occurs a layer of relatively warm and salty deep water. The maximum extent of sea ice occurs in September, when between 25% and 100% ice cover extends as far as 60°S. Ice floes occasionally reach Cape Horn.

The water within the passage flows from the Pacific into the Atlantic, except for a small amount of water in the south that comes from the Scotia Sea. The general movement, known as the Antarctic Circumpolar Current, is the most voluminous in the world, with an estimated rate of flow between 950 to 1500 Mio cubic metres per second.

23rd March 2008 – Southbound in Drake Passage

Position at 08.00h: 59°25' S / 62°04' W

215 nm to the South Shetland Islands

Air temperature: 0°C, overcast, decreasing wind force 4 and swell, cloud cover

Most of us would remember this night as a moving experience, as the swell had reached considerable size due to winds that reached more than 20 m/s during the early hours. Bed was certainly not a bed place to be under these conditions, and anybody who might have seen us from outside would probably have suspected us of major take of stimulating liquids – but really, the liquid that made us move was everywhere outside the ship, rather than inside.

We had crossed the Antarctic convergence during the night, the invisible boundary zone that separates more temperate waters in the north from the cold Antarctic water body that surrounds the last continent. In other words: we had entered Antarctica, ecologically speaking. The political dimension followed soon, as we crossed 60°S during the day, thus entering the area that is governed by the Antarctic Treaty.

Chess was played, books were read, birds were observed and lectures were attended during the day, as conditions calmed gradually down. Rolf called us together for a mandatory introduction to rules of *Good Behaviour in Penguin Country* ("IAATO-briefing") – after all, these polite creatures would meet us in in tailcoat, so we simply had to live up to Antarctic standards of etiquette. This, by the way, also

included some remarks on distances that we had to keep and other measures to make sure we would not molest any wildlife and some important information to make sure our operation would be safe. He also added some information about our plans for the days to come.

Jordi took over to give us an introduction to the *Penguins of the Antarctic Peninsula*, whom we were looking forward to meet during the days to come.

After lunch, Rolf continued with an introduction to *Plate Tectonics*, a rather solid matter that was received warmly by those who were delighted by the thought of good, solid continental crust of granitic composition rather than the ever-moving liquid that we had everywhere around us. In the later afternoon, Jonas the Swede made sure the divers were updated with all information that was needed for the days to come, and even some non-divers (rumour had it that some evil soul would call them the "normal people") were said to have attended this event out of sheer curiosity for all the exotic gear that was to be used for purpose that no mere mortal could ever understand.

Another good dinner and the next part of *Life in the Freezer* rounded the day off.

24th March 2008 – South Shetland Islands

Position at 06.30h: 62°31' S / 59°19' W

Drifting near Robert Island

Air temperature: 0°C, gentle breeze, overcast

We had spent several hours drifting near Robert Island during the early morning and the engines had just been restarted when Rolf's wake-up call sounded through the ship at 0630 hours. We had an early breakfast, while the *Grigoriy Mikheev* was approaching an anchoring position near Aitcho Islands, a small archipelago situated in English Strait between Robert



and Greenwich Islands. Aitcho Islands were named after the Hydrographic Office ("HO"). At 0830, the long-awaited moment had finally come: we were ready on the front deck, equipped with life-jackets, waterproof gear, warm clothes and rubber boots. Ready for action! Some of us kept a nervous eye on the weather, as the wind was gradually picking up and snow showers were blown across the ship as we boarded the Zodiacs. Some minutes later, we stepped ashore on a pebble beach to be greeted by small groups of Gentoo and Chinstrap Penguins. Large whalebones were bleaching under the Antarctic sky, and Skuas and White-faced Sheathbills were patrolling the scene, hoping for injured or sick penguins or carcasses. We investigated the beach and all of us had the pleasure to meet curious Penguins, who would just walk up to us. They could not read and did not know anything about the 5-metre-rule!

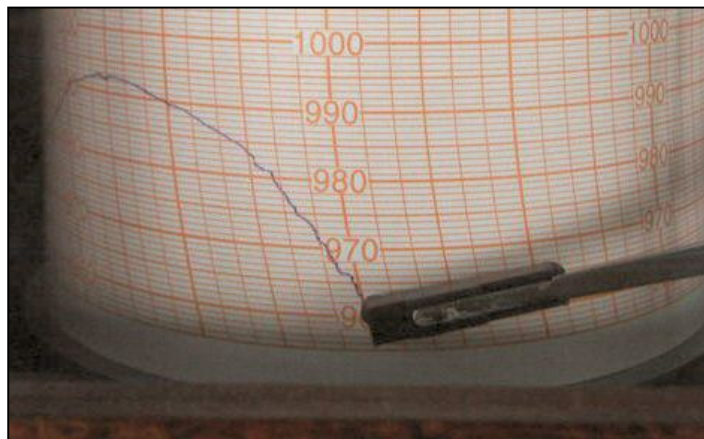


Most of us walked up a ridge and down to the shore on the other side of Aitcho Island, which was just a narrow Isthmus at this site. The strength of the wind was incredible on top of the ridge, and groups of Penguins were seeking shelter just under the ridge.

Finally Rolf decided it was unwise to stay any longer, and after a somewhat choppy ride we were soon back on board the *Grigoriy Mikheev* to warm up in the bar. The windspeed at the ship had picked up to more than 20 m/s – a solid force 9 on the Beaufort scale! During our stay ashore, the ship's anchor had been dragging across the ground for almost half a mile and our Captain was quite relieved when the

anchor was up again and the ship under steam.

We were heading for Deception Island, about 50 nautical miles from here, hoping for better conditions there as it was pretty clear that Zodiac operations were not an option in these conditions. The weather chart looked quite frightening, featuring a strong low-pressure system – we were glad not to be out in the Drake Passage anymore! And the Barograph showed an interesting curve, that could best be described as a near-vertical drop.



It was shortly after 15:00 that we passed below Neptune's Bellows, the U-shaped bite in the cliffs from where, in 1820, the young Nathaniel Palmer, climbing for birds' eggs, looked east and saw more land – which would turn out to be the Antarctic Peninsula, though he never claimed it as continental land; he was not an explorer, but a sealer. Gerlache would eventually name this part of the mainland Palmer Land. Captain Khoroshaylov took us safely through the channel between Cathedral Crags, towering to our right, and the hidden menace of Ravn Rock to our left, which had snared the whaler *Southern Hunter* still visible on the shore on our port side, after running aground on 21 December 1956. Deception Island itself was named by Palmer who had nearly given up being able to land when he found the entrance into Port Foster, a natural harbour almost as big as Rio de Janeiro's.

A turn to starboard brought us into Whaler's Bay. Deception is a microcosm of the different phases of use and occupation of Antarctica. First came sealers, and then early scientists and whalers, who left the rusting remains of Hektor Whaling Station in the centre of the bay. The first Antarctic flights were made in 1929 when Hubert Wilkins flew a Lockheed Vega over the Peninsula. The aircraft hangar to the left of the other relics was built later by the British Antarctic Survey. More scientists were hot on their heels, and later spies and tourists. The first international football match in the last continent was played here: the English crew of *HMS Snipe* beat the Argentine crew of the *Seaver* by 1-0: one of the more peaceful disputes between the two countries. The drama of the scenery was unmissable, and we savoured the excitement of navigating across one of Antarctica's most famous locations, a caldera which is still volcanically active.





Soon, the anchor went down, and despite of a still considerable breeze and near-horizontal precipitation including both rain and snowfall, it did not take long until we found ourselves in the Zodiacs again. The "dry folks", as Rolf would occasionally refer to the non-divers, although we were soon to be anything but dry during this rather wet landing, had the opportunity to join Jordi on a hike up to the famous gap in the cliffs at the southern end of Whaler's Bay that is called Neptune's Window, and we had plenty of time to

explore the remains of the old stations: the British "Base B" established during Operation Tabarin (named after a night club in Paris) in the late years of the Second World War and the above-mentioned Norwegian whaling station. It was fascinating to walk around between all the remains – truly an open-air museum of Antarctic history! We were also amazed and amused by the number of Gentoo Penguins that crowded the shoreline.

This was also the time for the first dive, the dive that so many of us have been looking forward to for almost a year. Two zodiacs, marked number one and three, slowly headed for the beach. There were 16 of us that had come down here to dive and to our help we had the dive master Jonas Sundquist from Sweden (later known as "the Barbarian") and the dive guide Jonas Thormar from Denmark (later known as "the Viking").

Whaler's bay is a perfect spot for the first mandatory check-up dive. The bay is partially sheltered from the wind, the "warm" water at Deception Island (+3°C) gives us a nice and comfortable introduction to the Antarctic waters and the sloping bottom is covered with black lava sand that makes it easy to enter the water and to gear up. It also brings a certain atmosphere to the site. The dive site itself doesn't offer that much to see when it comes to critters and vegetation but that was quickly compensated by the small groups of penguins that joined us during the dive. It took a few minutes before all of us had sorted out the gear and started to get comfortable and properly weighted in the water but once that was ok we could all enjoy the first dive...and the penguins that were swimming around like rockets in the water. What a start to this adventure...

Once we were all back on board again, the Captain took us safely through Neptune's Bellows once again, and during dinner we set course for Antarctica proper, the peninsula and near-by islands further south.

25th March 2008

Antarctica: Enterprise Island, Wilhelmina Bay, Errera Channel: Cuverville Island/Danco Island

Position at 07.00h: 64°26' S / 61°51' W

8 nm to Enterprise Island

Air temperature: -2°C, strong wind

We woke up to witness an amazing scenery when Rolf's wake-up call sounded through the ship at the rather merciful time of 07:00. Completely ice-covered islands were not far, and behind it all, the mighty, ice-capped mountain range of the Antarctic peninsula. We were still steaming down the Gerlache Strait, the southern continuation of the Bransfield Strait (between the South Shetlands and the Antarctic Peninsula), approaching this morning's destination, and it did not take long after breakfast until we were ready to start. Anchored in Plata Passage, the northern continuation of Wilhelmina Bay, on the eastern side of Enterprise Island and Nansen Island, we were delighted to see that the relative protection of this area was indeed enough to provide shelter from the strong winds of the more open Gerlache Strait. A short Zodiac ride took us to a sheltered cove with the wreck of the *Governor*, a whaling ship that caught fire and sank in 1916. From there on, we kept exploring the coastline and small off-lying islands and, most importantly, a number of grounded

icebergs, including some real beauties with deep-blue stripes in sunshine! The unexpectedly good weather conditions allowed us to complete a circumnavigation of Enterprise Island, and our Zodiac cruise lasted for almost 2 ½ hours until we were finally back on board the *Grigoriy Mikheev* – a fine achievement that



included a full load of Antarctic experience. Once the non-divers (some like to call them the normal people...) had left the ship and disappeared behind the icebergs it was time for us divers (also referred to as the pirates) to enter the zodiacs and head off to Foyen Harbour for a wreck dive on “the Governor”.

The wreck is beautifully stranded in a small sheltered bay that normally offers excellent diving conditions. The wreck beautifully rests on the sloping bottom of the bay with its bow sticking up above the surface and the propeller located at 20 meters depth. On both sides of the wreck you can find whalebones and vertebrates lying on the bottom together with 35-armed sea stars, brittle stars, and other various forms of critters. The dive was nice and calm and we already seemed to be coping well with the cold water. A wreck dive in Antarctica ... this was certainly something to tell your diving buddies at home!

We still had some time before lunch, so we enjoyed the passage of the ship through Plata Passage and the extremely scenic Wilhelmina Bay, where we saw several Humpback whales peacefully swimming between the icebergs.

Soon after lunch, we were anchored near Cuverville Island near the Errera Channel.

The scenery was amazing, flat calm waters, the sun trying to break through over the glaciers and the amazing silence, the kind of silence you only can get in Antarctica. It was time for dive number three and for us divers to experience some classic iceberg diving, and maybe even a leopard seal or two. Our dive master, Jonas “the incredible Swede”, had a good feeling about some close encounters and thoroughly scouted the area for potential icebergs. After rejecting a few of them that didn’t meet the standards he finally found the perfect iceberg. It was a quite low, but fairly big and very beautiful iceberg that was grounded at about 20 meters depth. A few meters below the surface there were some nice shelves and overhangs that looked like potential leopard seal hide-outs ... this was it! Some of us pirates were going to get the thrill of our lifetime; we just didn’t know it yet.

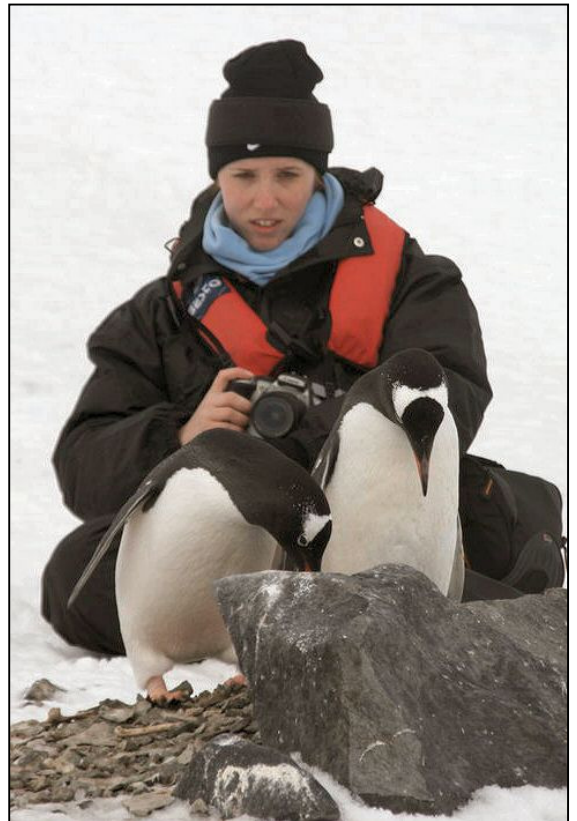
It only took about two minutes from the time the last buddy team descended until a large female leopard seal was scouted at the surface. As customary for that situation the amount of bubbles dramatically increased at the surface ... there were some serious air sucking going on around the iceberg and this seal really gave us a taste of what it’s like to dive with this amazing creature. The tale even tells stories about some nibbling going on under water ...

After a while some of us had had enough and returned to the surface, some more pale than others, but we we’re all happy. We just had our first encounter with a leopard seal ... and what an encounter!



A several mile long but very enjoyable Zodiac ride that included some stops near icebergs brought us – the "dry folks" – to Danco Island, where we landed on a convenient gravel beach to be welcomed by a large number of Gentoo Penguins. We were surprised by the number of animals that were still present so late in the austral summer, and we enjoyed the presence of these curious and friendly creatures.

Some of us enjoyed the wildlife on the beach and slowly ventured across the gravel plain to the eastern side of the island to see the panorama of the near-



by Antarctic peninsula, but most chose to join Jordi for a hike to the top of the island, over rocky slopes to an altitude of approximately 1200 decimetres – where were the oxygen bottles!? The panorama view over the whole Errera Channel was more than a reward for the climb.

The way back to the ship had even more excitements to offer. Some of us spotted some more Humpback whales, and one Zodiac encountered no less than about 20 Crabeater seals near an iceberg, most of them swimming – an unusually high number.

Spirits were high during dinner, when we were discussing today's adventures and they grew to even higher levels when Rolf outlined our plans and hopes for tomorrow, including the option to send postcards from the museum at Port Lockroy – which would have to spend the winter in Antarctica before the postman would come to collect them in November!

26th March 2008

Antarctica: Port Lockroy/Damoy Point, Neumayer Channel, Paradise Bay

Position at 07.00h: 64°49' S / 63°30' W

At anchor at Port Lockroy

Air temperature: 0°C, calm, mostly cloudy

We had spent a calm night at anchor in the protected little bay of Port Lockroy, between Wiencke and Anvers Islands. Today, the divers were the first ones to leave, to give them enough time to complete their operations at Damoy Point, while the "normal people" went ashore on



tiny Goudier Island. Damoy Point is a very nice place for wall diving and it's located just around the corner from Port Lockroy, only a few minutes from where the ship anchors. The site was almost fully protected in the lee of the shoreline and those of us pirates that chose to skip the visit to museum in favour of the dive geared up and slipped into the cold waters, ready for an interesting "critter" dive.



The attention of the divers were quite quickly drawn away from the critters though and tended to be shifted towards the female leopard seal that had decided to join in on the fun. For the rest of the dive the seal was very inviting and generous and occasionally the seal would leave one buddy team to join another, just to make sure that all divers got a fair share of the encounter. It was an absolutely fantastic dive and most of us felt a little bit more secure and better prepared for the rendez-vous than we did on the last dive.

The historic British 'Base A', **Port Lockroy**, is located at 64°49'S, 63°29' W on the tiny Goudier Island, just off Wiencke Island, on the Antarctic Peninsula. The Base has been designated as an Historic Site and Monument under the Antarctic Treaty. It is owned by the UK Natural Environment Research Council, of which the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) is a component body. It is operated by the BAS during the austral summer under the guidance of the UK Antarctic Heritage Trust (AHT), and is currently one of the most visited sites in Antarctica.

History

During the Second World War, the British Government dispatched a secret mission, code-named 'Operation Tabarin', to establish small bases on the Antarctic Peninsula. Its task was to report on enemy activities and to gather meteorological data. 'Base A', Port Lockroy, was built on Goudier Island in February 1944. Some of the timber used in the construction of the building was salvaged from the abandoned whaling station at Deception Island. The eight man wintering team was led by Commander James Marr, who, as a young Boy Scout, first visited Antarctica under the leadership of Sir Ernest Shackleton.

After the war, the base was handed over to the civilian Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey (FIDS), which became the major international scientific organisation that is now the British Antarctic Survey (BAS). From 1948, the station played an important scientific role, including the first measurements of the ionosphere, and the first recording of an atmospheric whistler, over Antarctica. Port Lockroy was a key monitoring site during the International Geophysical Year of 1957/58. When BAS re-located its science to other sites on the Antarctic Peninsula, the base closed in January 1962 and subsequently fell into disrepair.

Following a conservation survey by the UK Antarctic Heritage Trust (UK AHT) in 1994, Port Lockroy was recognised for its historical importance and designated as Historic Site and Monument No. 61 under the Antarctic Treaty. A conservation team undertook the renovation in 1996.

Wildlife

Between 700-800 pairs of Gentoo Penguins (*Pygoscelis papua*) nest on Goudier Island. The population, and breeding success, of this colony is monitored by BAS (see below).

Small numbers of Snowy sheathbills (*Chionis alba*) also breed on Goudier Island, and Dominican gulls (*Larus dominicanus*) and Subantarctic skuas (*Catharacta skua*) nest on the nearby Bills Island.

Blue-eyed shags (*Phalacrocorax atriceps*) and Antarctic terns (*Sterna vittata*) breed at Jougla Point, and Crabeater seals (*Lobodon carcinophagus*) also breed locally at Port Lockroy.

Environmental Monitoring

When the base re-opened in 1996, an environmental monitoring programme was established to investigate potential visitor disturbance to the resident colony of gentoo penguins on Goudier Island. Results show that the large numbers of visitors have had no discernable impact on penguin breeding success, which is more closely linked to local environmental conditions, such as snow cover or the availability of krill.



The "normal people" enjoyed not only the museum, but also the extremely friendly wildlife on Goudier Island in shape of sociable Gentoo Penguins and curious White-faced Sheathbills. And on top of it, the sun was bathing the whole scenery with mighty glaciers all around us with its warm rays! This was

Antarctica as we had been dreaming of it for a long time. But it was not over yet for the morning. We boarded the Zodiacs and a few minutes later we were surprised to find ourselves not on the ship, but on Jougla Point, a rocky headland just



across the bay from Goudier Island and part of Wiencke Island. Next to even more Gentoo Penguins, we had free access to the "Jougla Point Whale Biology Open Air Museum": earlier visitors had put a complete whale skeleton together from bones that whalers had left behind about one century ago! Although there was no absolute certainty regarding the species – it might have been a Humpback Whale or a Southern Right Whale – and we were told that it was very likely to be a composite of skeleton remains of several individual animals, we were quite impressed by the size the animal once must have had and many photos were taken. Finally, it was time to return to the ship, as we still had plans before lunch: a passage through the very scenic Neumayer Channel between Wiencke and Anvers Islands, a passage that took almost one hour and it was hard to come down to the restaurant in the end. During lunch, we crossed Gerlache Strait once again and entered one of the most scenic and famous places of Antarctica: Paradise Bay (officially Paradise Harbour). Mighty, glacier-covered mountains were towering around this protected bay.

The Shag wall, located just next to the former Argentinean base Amirante Brown, in Paradise



Harbour, was the chosen location for the afternoon dive. A sloping wall filled with sponges, all kinds of critters, nudibranches, kelp, gorgonians and loads of other nice stuff. Despite a leaking dry suit and some glove problems it was a very good dive. The silence and the tranquillity of the bay were overwhelming and once the dive was finished all pirates set foot on the continent at the Argentinean base. Champagne was passed around to cheer the moment and before stepping into the zodiacs again for a cruise amongst the glaciers and icebergs, pictures were taken, snowballs were thrown, snow angels were made and Jonas "the Barbarian" challenged the divers to a snow ball fight... None of the divers were brave enough to accept the challenge though so "the Barbarian" easily won the fight by walk over. "Take all you can...give nothing back!"

The zodiac cruise offered mirror like waters and icebergs in multiple colours and we took the opportunity to sit still and listen to the silence for a few minutes with



our engines shut off. At the end of the cruise we went over to an amazing glacier rippled with deep blue ice and the whole scenery was reflected in the calm waters. It's easy to understand why this bay is called Paradise harbour... Just when we turned around our zodiacs to head back for the ship to get out of our suits and, a huge piece of the glacier came loose

and fell into the water with a roaring sound, wiping out the reflection of the glacier in the water... It had been a grrreeeeaaat day!

At the same time, the land-lovers found themselves in the Zodiacs again to explore the place. We made a brief stop at the Argentine station Almirante Brown, that had been abandoned for a couple of years but rumour had it that it was planned to be re-opened and indeed those who knew the site could see that some construction work had been done recently. Just around the corner was a steep cliff with a colony of Blue-eyed shags, some of which were still at home, and with some interesting colouration: orange lichens and blueish-green copper-bearing minerals.

But the highlight without any doubt was Skontorp Cove, a side branch of Paradise Bay. It seemed as if nature had put all its considerable powers into the creation of one of the most beautiful and impressive places one could possibly imagine. Heavily crevassed glaciers crept down steep, dark rockwalls to form high, broken ice-cliffs at sea level, ready to calve new icebergs at any time. We kept a respectful distance, but for the time being the glaciers remained calm. Nevertheless, we could witness



another powerful part of the chain that transports ice from mountain tops down to sea level: repeatedly, pieces of an overhanging ice cliff at the plateau-shaped summit of a mountain not too far from the coast broke off to form white avalanche clouds, and we were happy to witness this from a safe distance.

We continued our cruise between some icebergs to arrive at a rocky headland on the southern side of Paradise Brown, on the corner between Skontorp Cove and Oscar Cove. It was a nice place at 64°55'S/62°53'W, lost in the middle of nowhere, framed in between large glaciers, where we stepped ashore to set foot on the last continent: Antarctica! From here, the South Pole could be reached on foot, a walk of 2,787 km (1,732 statute miles) as the crow flies. A piece of cake! Only the steep, avalanche-swept slopes of the surrounding mountains kept us from conquering the Pole from here. As it was, we turned our attention towards a Weddell Seal that was lazing around on the rocks, not really paying too much attention to us, before we were surprised with champagne and a toast to one of our fellow passengers who had had the pleasure of celebrating her birthday during this voyage!



We did not forget to take a group photo and finally made our way back to the ship, not without saying hello to some Crabeater Seals who were enjoying life, lying in the sun on a bergy bit (a small iceberg). We had been out for almost 2 ½ hours again, a

considerable time for a Zodiac cruise in these temperatures, and we were happy to get warm again in the bar or under the shower – but what did cold feet matter in the light of the experience that we just had enjoyed? It would not take us longer than some minutes to get warm again, but the memories would last for a lifetime.

In the evening, the ship moved out of Paradise Bay with its drifting icebergs to anchor south of the Neumayer Channel near Wauwermans Islands to spend a calm, safe night. For all of us who could still take some more Antarctic experience, *Life in the Freezer* was continued in the *Mikheev*-cinema.



27th March 2008

Antarctica: Lemaire Channel, Argentine Islands/Vernadsky Base, Pleneau Island/Booth Island

Position at 07.00h: 64°54' S / 63°45' W

At anchor at Wauwermans Islands (south of Neumayer Channel)

Air temperature: 0°C, breeze, cloud cover

During breakfast, we were already sailing again, further south towards the southernmost position of our voyage. As soon as we left the restaurant, the *Grigoriy Mikheev* entered the famous Lemaire Channel. With the Antarctic Peninsula towering on portside (left side, east) and Booth Island (maximum elevation 980 metres) on starboard, the passage was only a few hundred metres wide and about 7 nautical miles long. It seemed almost as if it was blocked by a group of

icebergs, but a gap opened as we got closer. Several Humpback whales were searching the icy waters for food.

South of the Lemaire Channel, we entered a wider strait called Penola Strait where even more whales were seen, including a distant pod of Orkas. We set course for a small group of rocky islands called Argentine Islands and at 10:00, the anchor went down. It was here the Ukrainian station Vernadsky was situated. It was originally established after the Second World War a few hundred metres south of its present-day position, but had been moved later and named Faraday Station, run by the British Antarctic Survey (BAS), until it was sold to Ukraine in 1996 for one Pound Sterling – a bargain for both sides, as BAS was thus relieved from the obligation of removing everything after abandoning the station, while the Ukrainians wished to have a station in Antarctica at the same time. Faraday was crucial in the discovery of a regular depletion of the stratospheric ozone layer that is commonly referred to as the "ozone hole", and it has one of the longest continuous meteorological records of the Antarctic Peninsula. The continuation of these important data series alone, that are invaluable when climate change is discussed, would fully justify running the station which was renamed Vernadsky by the Ukrainians, but there is more work going on including marine biology, geoelectricity and seismology. In recent years, Vernadsky produced amongst others data that suggested at an early stage that a seismic shock that originated in southeastern Asia was indeed coming from a nuclear explosion in North Korea, and meteorological data have shown a regional warming of almost 5°C between the late 1950's and present time!



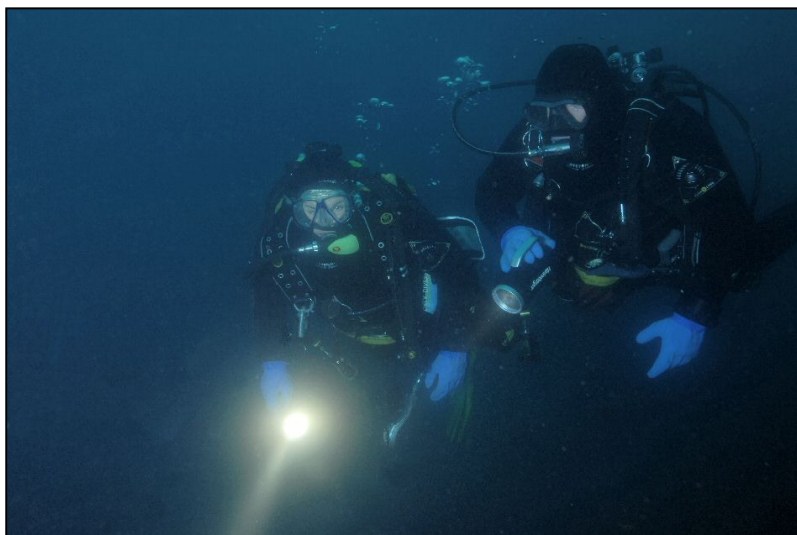
Being faced with such dramatic evidence during our guided tour through the

laboratories of Vernadsky base, we decided to retreat to the famous Faraday bar and recharge our batteries with some strong liquids offered by the friendly station staff. The station stamp was busily used and postcards were sent.

We did not miss the opportunity to visit Wordie House, a few hundred metres further south at 65°15'S/64°16'W and thus the absolute furthest south position of our voyage! Wordie House was the original station building and served now as a museum, nicely kept to demonstrate how life in the early days of systematic research in Antarctica might have been. We also explored the surrounding ice-free part of the small island and enjoyed the view across Penola Strait to the Antarctic Peninsula, before we boarded the Zodiacs once again, cruising through a narrow channel with a dramatic ice cliff towering above us, and returning to the ship, where we found that waves at the gangway had reached considerable height, but all of us managed this challenge well with the help and advice of the crew and staff operating the boats and the gangway.

Next to the option of a station visit, the area offers great wall diving with all kinds of critters, sponges, anemones, antarctic cod, nudibranches, estrella stars and much more. The two Zodiacs anchored just opposite the station and the divers rolled back into the water, buddy team by buddy team. Even though leopard seals are often spotted at this site, once back into the Zodiacs again the divers were quite





happy that no leopard seal paid a visit on this dive. It's easier to focus on the wall and the small stuff if you don't have a big jaw, full of teeth following you the whole dive. Before going back to the ship again we enjoyed the calm waters of the small canals behind the Vernadsky station and took the chance to go inside the Wordie house, where we teamed up again with the non-divers. Soon afterwards, we were all back again on the *Grigoriy Mikheev*. We turned the bow towards the north and were soon back near the Lemaire Channel,

but this time we stayed on the outer side of Booth Island to drop anchor and start our afternoon excursion.

The wind was very strong, an estimate 8 or 9 on the Beaufort scale. That didn't stop most of the divers though, once a pirate, always a pirate and it'll take a lot more than a small "breeze" to stop us! Just before leaving the ship we had a problem with one of the Zodiacs and while waiting for that to get fixed we did get a little cold before even entering the water. Because of that many of us planned to make a short dive but the iceberg that we dove on was so beautiful so we nearly forgot all about cold fingers and the wind up on the surface. While gearing up for the dive in the strong wind and the big waves we spotted a leopard seal at the surface but once we got into the water it chose to head off for another iceberg, which gave us time to enjoy the iceberg. The ride back to the ship was a different experience that added on to the already adventures ending of our Antarctic dive odyssey. Strong

winds, big waves and lots of salty sprays that washed over us and filled our mouths... But the barbarian and the Viking both stood strong and safely (and so did Dima, Jordi and Rolf with the "normal people" and they didn't even need dry suits for this!) brought us back to our mothership while we all happily sang our pirate theme for this trip... "Yo ho, yo ho, a pirates life for me...!"



Also the non-divers did not hesitate to board the Zodiacs again despite of considerable winds. The shapes and colours were incredible! And so was the way back north again, as we still wanted to make a landing on Booth Island, due to strong headwinds and waves – a splashy ride and a real adventure that most of us thoroughly enjoyed (which should not keep individuals from disliking the occasional cold shower of seawater that was impossible to avoid during the trip). Near Booth Island, we encountered large number of Gentoo Penguins in the water, curiously following our boats. These

animals had obviously already left their breeding sites behind, returning to the water as the element that was truly theirs, but we found still considerable numbers ashore when we stepped on to the stony beach in a protected little cove. It was almost difficult to walk against the wind when we walked up the rocky ridge, and the windblown scene was truly Antarctic – after all, this was the coldest and windiest of all continents! Usually, it is also mentioned that it was the driest one of them all, but this distinguishing feature of Antarctic climate was less obvious today. We explored this wild place for a



little while, searching for some Adelie Penguins that might be around. Unfortunately, this quest was rewarded with success only when the first Zodiac had already left: quite close to the landing site, there were four of these black and white, truly Antarctic penguins.

Just before we left, we became witnesses to a polar drama that was an everyday event in these waters: a Leopard seal chased a Gentoo penguin in the water, obviously playing with the poor bird before seriously moving in to kill it by violently shaking it through the air until the body was literally shaken out of the skin. We observed the bloody spectacle with a mixture of fascination and shiver, being aware that all creatures are part of the food web and the penguin had to give its life to support that of a larger animal in much the same way that it had taken countless crustaceans to nourish itself. Most of us nevertheless thought that the poor creature would have deserved a less painful death. Once back on board, we warmed up only to dress warmly once again, this time for dinner: our hotel staff, Francis with his two chefs Tobias and Beverly together with the crew, had prepared a very special dinner to celebrate our successful voyage: a true Antarctic BBQ! We enjoyed various goodies from the grill and salad bar and later, our dancing rubber boots were put into good use.



28th March 2008

Antarctica: Lemaire Channel/Deloncle Bay

Drake Passage

Position at 06.00h: 65°04' S / 64°02' W

At anchor at Booth Island

Air temperature: 2°C, breeze, partly clouded

Much to the disgust of those of us who had engaged in some serious partying last night, our expedition cock crowed at a time so ungodly that it shall remain unmentioned here. But were we far down south in Antarctica, more than 650 nautical miles sailing to the civilized

world, and if we were to make a final excursion than an early start was the one and only option. During an early breakfast, the *Grigoriy Mikheev* sailed just around the corner, back into the Lemaire Channel and stopped in the middle of this most scenic and famous place the Antarctic Peninsula had to offer. Zodiacs were lowered on the water once again, and we stepped



down the gangway to explore Deloncle Bay on the eastern side of the Lemaire, framed by the mountains and glaciers of Antarctica. We soon found out that the wind inside the bay was actually stronger than in the main channel, so we decided to stay in the Lemaire Channel to enjoy the icebergs that were drifting there, providing some interesting challenges for our bridge crew at the same time. It was not long until a Leopard seal was found swimming near one of the bergs, and we spent some time in the area, waiting for the seal who seemed to be playing with us, showing up at unexpected locations but always near the boats.



But there was even more to come. Sharp eyes spotted a small group of Humpback whales, and our drivers set course for these majestic creatures, four of them in total. The whales seemed to be somewhat undecided as to the direction of their travels, and we made a large circle following them at a respectful distance. Several times, their heads came far out of the water, maybe they were curious

about us as much as we about them? We could hear the mighty airflow of their breathtaking – an altogether stunning experience and the most beautiful way to say farewell to Antarctica that anyone could imagine.

Finally, it was time to get back on board again. We said goodbye to the whales and soon thereafter the Zodiacs were secured and the ship prepared for the open sea. We still had some time, as the first leg of our voyage back to the Beagle Channel led us through several of the scenic waterways, starting with the Gerlache Strait and then entering Dallmann Bay between Anvers and Brabant Islands. Our hotelmanager Francis took the opportunity to invite us to his world-famous *Mikheev* shop to purchase various souvenirs – "shop til you drop" ☺ was the motto for the early afternoon, while we passed the Melchior Islands, a small archipelago in Dallmann Bay, to enter open water off the Palmer Archipelago (Brabant and Anvers Islands). With still more than 600 nautical miles sailing to the entrance of the Beagle Channel and another 50 miles from there to Ushuaia, we prepared for some hopefully calm days at sea and a well-deserved and certainly well-appreciated rest after the adventures of the last days. The afternoon was only interrupted by Jordi who invited us for a talk about Antarctic seals, while the ship started to roll in the swell of the Southern Ocean. Snowfall reduced the visibility to almost zero, while the wind was picking up, letting vivacious white horses gallop over the crests of the waves. An IMAX movie about Antarctica rounded the day off for everyone who felt like a visit to the *Mikheev* cinema.

29th March 2008

Drake Passage

Position at 08.00h: 61°16' S / 64°12' W

388 nautical miles to the entrance of the Beagle Channel

Air temperature: 3°C, calm, some swell, partly cloudy

The wind had died down considerably during the night and a nice, sulphurous-yellow sunrise could be observed by those who were already up and about just before the wake-up call sounded through the ship at 08.00. A rather calm morning was interrupted only by Jordi who gave us an introduction to his good marine mammal friends, the whales. Later, the lecture programme was continued by Rolf with the second part of his talk about plate tectonics and Jonas the Dane with his presentation about sea-ice and associated invertebrates. At the same time, we were making good progress, heading north out of Antarctic waters towards Tierra del Fuego.

30th March 2008

Drake Passage

Position at 08.00h: 57°03' S / 65°44' W

130 nautical miles to the entrance of the Beagle Channel

Air temperature: 6°C, light westerly breeze, some swell, grey, reduced visibility

A final day on board, sailing northwards across the Drake Passage towards the Beagle Channel. Rolf gave us a short briefing about disembarkation, followed by the second part of the film about Shackleton's famous *Endurance*-expedition. In the afternoon, some slides from Oceanwide Expedition's voyages to the Arctic certainly let the desire grow to see this other, cold end of the globe that is so totally different from Antarctica! But the certain highlight of the day was the slide presentation that included the best slides of many photographers amongst us, compiled and presented by Jonas, the incredible Swede. It was incredible that we had actually seen and experienced all this within the last couple of days!

In the evening, we dropped anchor for a couple of hours in the entrance to the Beagle, where we had to wait for the pilot. We met Francis in the bar for our last Antarctic adventure, settling our accounts, enjoyed a last, calm evening on board the *Grigoriy Mikheev* and made preparations for departure, that was to come soon, far to soon, tomorrow morning.

31st March 2008 – Ushuaia

Position at 0900h: 54°50' S / 68°20' W

Temperature: a lot warmer than Antarctica!

In the morning, the *Grigoriy Mikheev* reached the pier in Ushuaia and our journey to Antarctica came to an end. We left our luggage outside our cabins ready for collection and had our final breakfast together, then went down the gangway for the last time, saying farewell to our fellow travellers and our hotel and expedition team who had been looking after us for the past days. Some of us left directly for the airport and further connections home, while others headed for hotels and tours in South America.

Total length of this trip:
1,735 nm = 3,215 kms = 1,998 statute miles

**On behalf of Oceanwide Expeditions,
 we wish you a safe journey home
 and hope to see you again, anywhere between the poles.**

www.oceanwide-expeditions.com

Log, maps, photos, layout: Rolf

Dive log: Jonas the Swede.

Printing: Jonas the Dane.

Jordi kept the overview and compiled the wildlife species list.

Underwater images: Brian Clargo – thank you!

All photos in this log were taken during our voyage.

**This log with colour photographs and the group photos can be downloaded from
<http://www.spitzbergen.de>**

List of lectures and presentations

Date	Subject	Lecturer
22 nd March 08 (and following days)	Bridge excursions	Rolf
22 nd March 08	Seabirds of Antarctica and the Drake Passage	Jordi
22 nd March 08	Diving beneath Polar Seas	Jonas the Swede
22 nd March 08	Life in the Freezer (Part I)	Documentary
23 rd March 08	Good behaviour in Penguin Country ("IAATO-briefing")	Rolf
23 rd March 08	Penguins of the Antarctic Peninsula	Jordi
23 rd March 08	Plate tectonics (Part I)	Rolf
23 rd March 08	Dive briefing	Jonas the Swede
23 rd March 08	Life in the Freezer (Part I)	Documentary
24 th -26 th March 08	Life in the Freezer (Part II-VI)	Documentary
28 th March 08	Seals of Antarctica	Jordi
28 th March 08	Antarctica	IMAX documentary
29 th March 08	Whales	Jordi
29 th March 08	Plate tectonics (Part II)	Rolf
29 th March 08	Sea ice and its inhabitants	Jonas the Dane
29 th March 08	Shackleton (Part I)	Movie featuring Kenneth Branagh
30 th March 08	Shackleton (Part II)	Movie featuring Kenneth Branagh
30 th March 08	The Arctic	Rolf
30 th March 08	What have we done? Our voyage reviewed.	Slides of various photographers, presented by Jonas the Swede

Wildlife Check list

Black-browed Albatross (*Thalassarche melanophris*)
Wandering Albatross (*Diomedea exulans*)
Royal Albatross (*Diomedea epomorpha*)
Grey Headed Albatross (*Thalassarche chrystosoma*)
Light Mantled Sooty Albatross (*Phoebastria palpebrata*)

Southern Giant Petrel (*Macronectes giganteus*)
White Chinned Petrel (*Procellaria aequinoctialis*)
Sooty Shearwater (*Puffinus griseus*)
Cape Petrel (*Daption capense*)
Southern Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*)
Antarctic Prion (*Pachyptila desolata*)
Blue Petrel (*Halobaena caerulea*)
Wilson Storm Petrel (*Oceanites oceanicus*)
Black Bellied Storm Petrel (*Fregetta tropica*)
Magellanic Diving Petrel (*Pelecanoides magellani*)

Kelp Gull (*Larus dominicanus*)
Dolphin Gull (*Larus scoresbii*)
Chilean Skua (*Chataracta chilensis*)
South Polar Skua (*Chataracta maccormicki*)
South American Tern (*Sterna hirundinacea*)
Antarctic Tern (*Sterna vittata*)

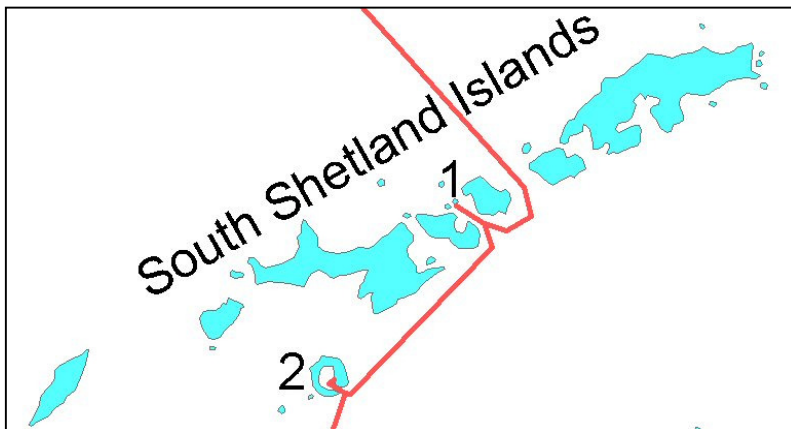
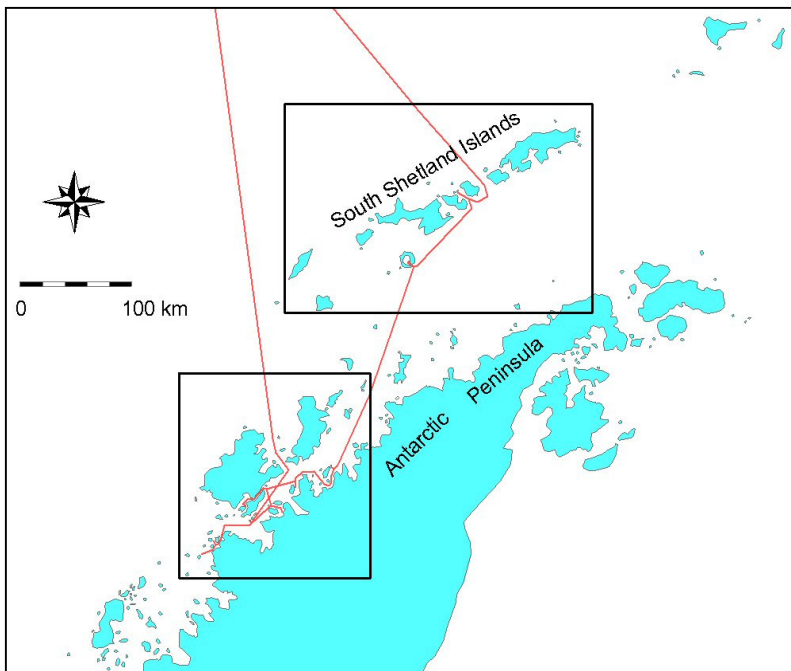
Imperial Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax atriceps*)
Blue-eyed Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax bransfieldensis*)

Snowy Sheathbill (*Chionis alba*)

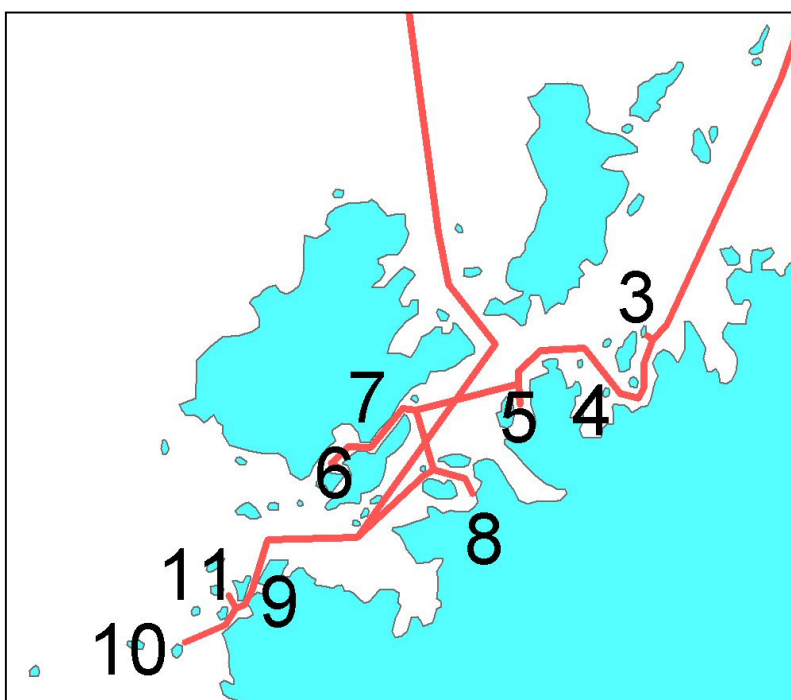
Adelie Penguin (*Pygoscelis adeliae*)
Gentoo penguin (*Pygoscelis papua*)
Chinstrap penguin (*Pygoscelis antarctica*)

South American Fur Seal (*Arctocephalus australis*)
Antarctic Fur Seal (*Arctocephalus gazella*)
Sea Lion (*Otaria flavescens*)
Crabeater Seal (*Lobodon carcinophaga*)
Weddell seal (*Leptonychotes weddelli*)
Leopard Seal (*Hydrurga leptonyx*)

Peale's Dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus australis*)
Hourglass Dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus cruciger*)
Orca (*Orcinus orca*)
Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*)
Sei Whale (*Balaenoptera borealis*)
Fin Whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*)



1. Aitcho Island
2. Deception Island (Whaler's Bay)
3. Enterprise Island (Governor)
4. Wilhelmina Bay
5. Cuverville/Danco Islands
6. Port Lockroy/Damoy Point
7. Neumayer Channel
8. Paradise Bay
9. Lemaire Channel
10. Argentine Islands/Vernadsky Base
11. Pleneau/Booth Islands
12. (=9) Lemaire Channel/Deloncle Bay



Dive Sites:

Dive #	Date	Location	Latitude S	Longitude W
1	March 24, 2008	Deception Island, Whaler's Bay, Check Dive	62°59.356'	60°34.379'
2	March 25, 2008	Enterprise Island, "The Governor", Wreck dive	64°32.450'	61°59.882'
3	March 25, 2008	Cuerville Island, iceberg dive/Leopard Seal	64°41.046'	62°38.165'
4	March 26, 2008	Port Lockroy, Damoi Point, wall dive/Leopard seal	64°49.180'	63°31.270'
5	March 26, 2008	Paradise Bay, Shag Wall, wall dive	64°52.681'	62°50.897'
6	March 27, 2008	Vernadsky Station, wall dive	65°14.830'	64°15.320'
7	March 27, 2008	Pleneau, iceberg dive	65°05.530'	64°02.280'