



Expedition Log

# Antarctic Peninsula

22<sup>nd</sup> February – 5 March 2007

*M/V Aleksey Maryshev*

*М/В АЛЕКСЕЙ МАРЫШЕВ*



*The **Aleksey Maryshev** 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 Maryshev 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 – Yuriy Gorodnik  
and his Russian Crew of 18**

including

1<sup>st</sup> Mate: Sergey Glazunov  
2<sup>nd</sup> Mate - Gennadiy Vishnevskiy  
3<sup>rd</sup> Mate - Pavel Kulinich  
Radio Engineer - Zodiac Driver: Sergey (Marconi) Polyak  
Boatswain: Andrey Kochanov  
Able Seaman - Zodiac Driver: Sergey Ushakov  
Able Seaman - Zodiac Driver: Eduard Skarina  
Cabin Stewardess: Valentina Lokhovinia  
Cabin Stewardess: Elena Ushakova  
Laundry Services Stewardess: Tatyana Zaromyanyuk  
Dining Room Stewardess: Olga Filimonova  
Dining Room Stewardess: Lyubov Demchenko

and

Expedition Leader – Rolf Stange (Germany)  
Guide/Lecturer – John Harrison (Great Britain)  
Guide/Lecturer/Dive Master – Rupert Krapp (Germany/Norway)  
Guide/Lecturer/Dive Master – Mike Murphy (Great Britain)  
Guide/Lecturer – Albert Beintema (The Netherlands)  
Hotel Manager – Alan Hogan (Canada)  
Head Chef – Frank Metselaar (The Netherlands)  
Sous Chef – Beverley Howlett (N. Orkney Islands)  
Ship's Physician – Dr. Alin Stoica (Germany)

**And 47 of us from Canada, France, Great Britain,  
The Netherlands, Spain, Turkey, and the United States**

**22nd February 2007 – Ushuaia / Tierra del Fuego, Argentina**

16:00 Position 54°45' S / 68°30' W  
Temperature Air: 12°C, Water 8°C,  
Lightly overcast with gusty breeze.

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.

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 Mountains 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.

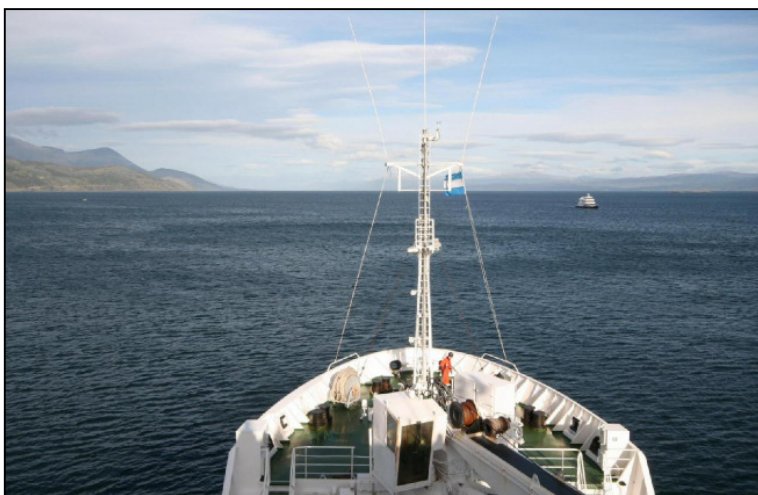


At 5.30 p.m. we met in the dining room for the first time, and Rolf Stange, our Expedition leader gave us a short introduction to the staff and the ship, followed by a welcome from Alan Hogan, our hotel manager. The polar bug had long ago bitten all members of the expedition staff. Rolf trained as a geographer, is the author of several books and a seasoned guide and expedition leader in the Arctic, Antarctic and South Atlantic areas. Through his travels he has developed a wide-ranging knowledge of the geological processes, formations and features of these areas. Our guides, dive master Mike Murphy, Rupert Krapp, John Harrison, and Albert Beintema, also possess years of

experience in expedition cruising. Mike Murphy's polar-experience dates back to 1984, where he had first joined the Lindblad Explorer as a zodiac driver and guide. He now also leads diving expeditions in both polar regions. Rupert is a marine biologist and scientific diver, who has been travelling and working in polar seas for several years as a scientist as well as expedition guide. John trained as a geographer and environmental planner, and now works as a writer and lecturer. He discovered his passion for the area, its physical geography and history, nearly ten years ago when he was travelling as a passenger, researching a book. Albert is an ecologist with a passion for remote islands. He did research on the ecology of penguins and other birds, and wrote books on the Antarctic and Tristan da Cunha.

The hotel department on board the *Aleksey Maryshev* was led by Alan Hogan from England. The cooks, who would take care of tasty meals during our voyage, were Frank Metselaar and Beverley Howlett. Dr Stoica, 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 not have to consult with him too much!

Captain Yuriy Gorodnik was still 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. Just prior to sailing, Sergey, our gentle giant of a 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, behind the bridge. 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. Finally, the ships docking lines were hauled in at around 18:00 and we set sail out of the harbour. The Beagle scenery was a delight, with seabirds already following in our wake. Dinner awaited us, giving a chance for everybody to get a little more acquainted. After dinner, it was time for an evening stroll on deck to further admire the wonderful scenery.



Our Antarctic adventure was about to start!

### **23<sup>rd</sup> February 2007 – Southbound in Drake Passage**

Position at 07.30h: 56°07' S / 65°14' W

70 nm to Beagle Channel, 412 nm to the South Shetlands

Temperature Air: 8°C, overcast, light northerly winds, some swell

Today we could relax and recover from our flights in the relatively tranquil Drake Passage. We were well acquainted enough with the ship to find our way to the dining room for breakfast, and again at 10:30 for Mike's lecture *Seabirds of Antarctica*. He outlined the main groups of oceanic and shore birds we would meet in the Drake and along the Antarctic Peninsula. The Divers had a meeting with Mike and Rupert to brief them for the exciting but demanding conditions ahead.



In the early afternoon we were visited by three hourglass dolphins, with the characteristic continuous wavy ribbon of white along their sides. There were few seabirds around, to practise our skills on, but a wandering and a black-browed albatross were seen, as well as a blue petrel and a white-chinned petrel. At 15:30, there was a presentation by Albert: *Who Discovered Antarctica?* Strange to say, the discoverer of the last continent is not a household name in the same way that Columbus is (for discovering America 500 years after the Vikings!) Captain James Cook inferred a large landmass from the size of the bergs and the rocks they carried, William Smith sighted the S. Shetlands in 1819, and British, American and Russian vessels were there the next year.



### **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 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> 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 16<sup>th</sup>-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.

At 17:00 Rolf gave us an introduction to *Plate Tectonics*, describing how the slow movement of continents shapes and re-shapes the face of the earth over eons. Antarctica is a relatively modern phenomenon, composed of the West area where the Peninsula lies, which relates more to S America, and a piece of old Gondwanaland to the east, once attached to Australia. At 19:00 dinner was served and we relaxed before letting a still-kindly Drake rock us to sleep.

### **24<sup>th</sup> February 2007 Southbound Drake Passage**

Position at 07:30: 60°13' S / 61°44' W

140 nm to S Shetlands

Temperature Air: 4°C, very light breeze, grey, light fog and mist

We woke to another day of kind seas, with little wind and only the long swells from former winds to roll us gently. During the night we had crossed the Antarctic Convergence and the air was typically misty. Because of the low winds, it was again a quiet day for seabirds; they like to exploit the energy of a big blow. At 10:30, Rupert gave a presentation on *Penguins* the 'natives' of Antarctica, and we learned about the different habits of the friendly, flightless birds who are waiting for us to arrive and photograph them.

In the afternoon, John gave a talk on *The History of Whaling* an account of whaling from the earliest days, through the classic days of sail, described in Moby Dick, to the modern industrial era: a sobering tale of ill-used resources.

Late in the afternoon we saw large whales which caused us to defer our next event to study them. They were large with big blows, not humpbacks with their characteristic high back and high-fluked dive. The brownish colouring was typical of fin whales, but the size more like their smaller cousins, the sei whales. Perhaps they were adolescent fins. At 17:00 we all gathered again in the lecture theatre where Rolf briefed us on the do's and don'ts of Antarctic behaviour, and the right and wrong way to climb in and out of our zodiacs. Soon we will be doing it for real.

After dinner at 19:00 we discovered it was Alan, our Hotel Manager's birthday. He was presented with a fiery cake in the bar and slices were available for those who still had room. Many made it an early night to prepare for an early start in the morning.

## 25<sup>th</sup> February 2007 – South Shetland Islands

Position at 05:30 a.m.: 62°23' S / 59°44' W

Temperature Air: 4°C, grey but steadily clearing, calm sea, little wind.

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Our early morning call was at 05:30. The *Aleksey Maryshev* had anchored all night just off Barrientos Island in the Aitcho Islands group, ingeniously named after H-O, for the British Hydrographic Office. A short Zodiac ride took us past rocks guarding the cove where chinstrap and gentoo penguins stood sentry on the low promontories above. We were soon planting our feet in the sand of Antarctica, or more accurately, the thick blanket of seaweed along the shore. The gentoo chicks, most in full adult plumage by now, formed a curious reception committee and came close to examine the

new visitors. Mike's shiny new canoe bag looked like a very exotic blue penguin, and received a lot of attention. There were also young male fur seals along the shore; we stayed at a respectful distance from these playful but sometime aggressive animals.

A narrow low ridge separated us from a longer beach where the young adults had dispersed, and were washing themselves in the shallows, and socialising or resting on the beach. Skuas kept an eye out for any birds not in the pink of health. But offshore, there was a larger predator: John spotted a leopard seal which advertised its presence by flinging a hapless penguin around to throw it out of its skin. When it had taken the main meat, southern giant petrels, skuas and even little Wilson's storm petrels moved in to clean up the leftovers. When we had enough pictures of young penguins pulling at our straps, pecking our trousers, and in some cases trying to burrow under kneeling photographers, Mike led a



walk. We climbed the flank of the hill up to cliffs sporting fine views back to the ship, and over a magnificent



bowl surrounded on the landward side by basalt organ pipes, with a dramatic needle of rock in the centre. When we descended we found a few elephant seals still suffering their annual catastrophic moult: the loss of not just their old hair, but their old skin, an irritable time for these monsters of the seal kingdom. There were more fur seals and another rock with fine basaltic columns, possibly formed by slow cooling in a side vent of an old volcano. Behind was a large shingle beach the centre of which was too high to have been formed by current storms. It may



represent a line of old storm beaches left high and dry after the end of the last Ice Age, when reductions in the weight of ice allowed the land to rebound upwards slightly, a process known as isostasy.

Reluctantly, after just two or three hundred more penguin pictures, we returned to the first beach to zodiac back to the ship. There was a cruise down the Bransfield Strait, named after a British naval officer who was one of the first down here after the discovery of the *Terra Australis Incognita*. It was around 5.5 hours sailing to the far end of the S Shetlands, and the famous Deception Island. There was a brisk wind raising waves of several metres, but it was a following sea and a comfortable ride for the *Maryshev*.



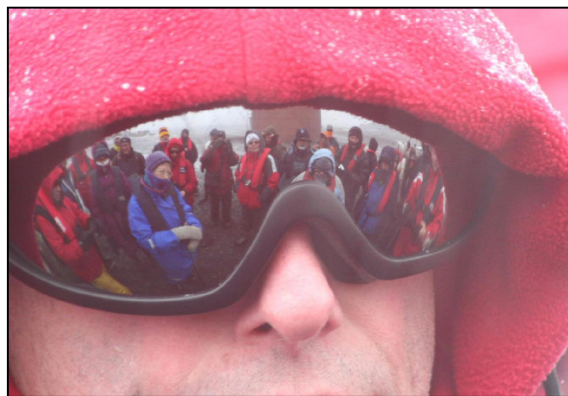
After lunch, Mike gave a presentation on *Pinnipeds*, more familiarly known as seals, sea-lions and their northern cousins the walruses. We expect to see maybe five types on this trip. The colour of some species is quite variable, so it is useful also to look at shape and behaviour, including where they are hauled out. By 16:30 we were passing Neptune's bellows, the U-shaped bite in the cliffs from where the young sealer Nathaniel Palmer, climbing for birds' eggs, looked east and saw more land – which would turn out to be the Peninsula, though he never claimed it

as continental land. Captain Gorodnik 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. It ran aground on 21 December 1956. A turn to starboard brought us into Whaler's Bay, and a short zodiac drive into stiff winds brought us ashore in one of Antarctica's most famous locations, the caldera, and active volcanic island of Deception. It 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.



Once we were all ashore, John gave us a guided tour of the historical remains. Deception is a microcosm of the different phases of use and occupation of Antarctica. First came sealers, then whalers. Scientists were hot on their heels, and later spies, more scientists and tourists. The first Antarctic flights were made

in 1929 when Hubert Wilkins flew a Lockheed Vega over the Peninsula. 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 disputations between the two countries. The weather continued challenging but it was a taste of the harsh reality of polar weather, snow driven fiercely over the beach of volcanic ash. A few fur seals showed the quality of their insulation, the snow lay on them without melting. The stray gentoos and chinstraps along the beach looked a little less pleased with matters. Facilities were available for a polar plunge, but the prospect of getting wet then dressing in cutting winds deterred everyone from testing the limits of their hypothermic tolerance. The towels all went back dry, pleasing Tatanya in the laundry.



Meanwhile, Mike and his divers were preparing for their first 'checkout' dive, a dive where they would test their equipment and check their new weight belts, supplied by the ship. They dropped their zodiac anchors 200 metres downstream from the landing site, making sure they were well out of the way of any passing zodiacs. They dove in only two metres of water just out from the beach, but it was not easy, as the wind and waves were crashing into the boats and divers, nevertheless, they completed the necessary dive and would now be ready for the upcoming wall dive tomorrow.

Still in poor visibility we returned to ship and the comfort of hot chocolate waiting with Alan on the foredeck, a warm bar, and a tasty supper. After which episodes three and four of *Life in the Freezer* were shown in the *Maryshev Theatre*.

## 26<sup>th</sup> February 2007 – Cuverville Island, Errera Channel and Neko Harbour

Position at 05.30h: 62°23' S / 59°44' W

Temperature Air: 4°C, low clouds, no wind

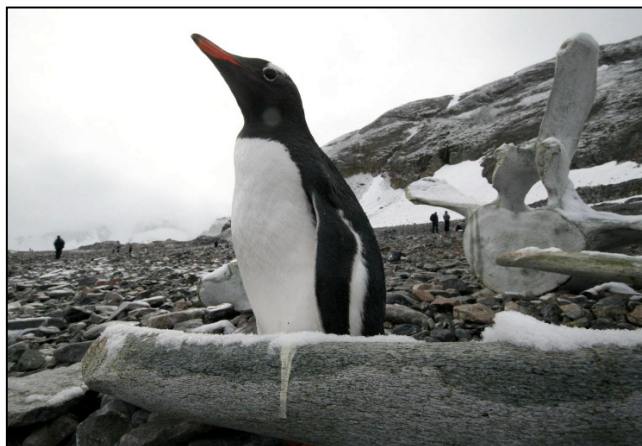
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We awoke to calm seas but limited visibility, due to low cloud. We were anchored off Cuverville Island, named after a minor French admiral, in the entrance to the Errera Channel. Most of the rest of the scenery here was named by, and largely after, the *Belgica* expedition of 1897-99. It was an international team led by the Belgian Adrian de Gerlache (Gerlache Strait) and sponsored by Madame Errera (Errera Channel) and Monsieur Rongé (Rongé Island). Their magnetic expert, Emile Danco, was one of the first to die, of a heart condition exacerbated by his refusal to eat fresh meat to combat scurvy. He swore he'd rather die than eat penguin and seal meat: and that's just

what happened. Danco Island and Danco Land remember him. Further south is Wiencke Island, named after the youngest seaman on board, Carl Wiencke, who was washed overboard in the Bransfield Strait, on a deck overloaded with badly stowed cargo, which he was trying to make safe.

We went ashore among large icebergs and landed on a boulder beach with a penguin welcoming committee, representing the largest gentoo colony on the Peninsula. The chicks were perhaps not quite as advanced as those at Aitcho but they looked in good time to complete their moult to adult plumage before the big freeze brings winter back to the south. They came up to us to inspect clothes, bags and cameras. One liked Rolf's back-pack so much, it plumped it up and lay down and went to sleep. It was not eager to relinquish it when time came for the last zodiac.



Round the corner to the right, there were furs seals resting, and a penguin carcass being disputed by skuas, who mostly seemed more interested in a good scrap than a meal. On the way back to ship, we enjoyed a zodiac cruise to see some of the large scenic bergs and find a fur seal and a crabeater seal on different floes. The crabeaters are krill specialists, and like to haul out on ice to digest their high-protein food.

Mike and five of the divers took one zodiac and headed for east side of Cuverville, where Mike knew of a nice wall: a near vertical drop-off. It turned out to be a most incredible dive, as halfway through, they were joined by two very curious leopard seals. After finishing the dive, all five went back in the water for a further 30 minutes and snorkelled with the leopards, who were having a wonderful time just swirling in and out of the divers.

Before lunch, there was still time to appreciate a ship cruise through the Errera Channel, and soon after, we arrived at Neko Harbour, named for Japanese whaler which used to frequent it.



This was our first **continental landing!** It's still a privilege to belong to the small club of people who can say that. For some of us it was also the seventh continent: congratulations! There was a tot of complimentary vodka waiting to toast the continent, especially welcome to the divers when they came ashore later. There were gentoo penguins along the shore, now dispersed from their nests, and skuas and





someone needs help. It is checked and restocked 2-3 times a season by the naval icebreaker Captain Irizar. The short steep glacier was rumbling during our stay and there were some minor ice falls but no true calving. Mike and the divers decided to try for a penguin dive, submerging just 50 metres offshore in about four metres of water and waiting patiently for the little feathered creatures to appear. Murphy's Law was back again. The

kelp gulls higher up still defending territory aggressively though their chicks were now fully grown, and flying. There was also an Argentine refuge hut, one of 45 owned by the Argentines and Chileans. This one contains emergency stores available to anyone in trouble. There is also a hand-cranked radio which sends a unique call-sign alerting the Argentine authorities that



penguins just remained on the beach watching the bubbles surface and decided they had eaten enough and it was time to merely relax onshore. Never mind, the divers continued their dive down the sloping seabed and many were quite happy just observing the varied marine life.

We stayed in the shelter of Neko Harbour for dinner, since Frank and Beverley and the staff had prepared a barbecue on the foredeck with music and complimentary drinks. There was a leopard seal visible on a nearby floe and a very scenic berg came right alongside to be photographed. At dusk we weighed anchor and turned the bow south.

## 27<sup>th</sup> February 2007 – Lemaire Channel, Booth Island and Vernadsky Base

Position at 07.00h: 64°57' S / 63°33' W

Temperature Air: 1°C, no wind, reduced visibility

Today we woke up to more calm seas. A snow petrel had alighted on the foredeck and was unable to take off from the slippery surface until assisted by Albert. This bird is pure white except for its legs, beak and eyes, and is a true ice specialist. It nests the farthest south of any bird, farther, even, than the emperor penguin.

Breakfast was scarcely over when we entered the Lemaire Channel, and were met by humpback whales. The Lemaire is a beautiful narrow channel between the mainland to our port, and Booth Island to our starboard. A light dusting of snow picked out the grain of the rocks. The waters were almost wholly ice-free, allowing us to choose our course beneath mountains rising over a thousand metres to either side. At the southern end we turned into Pleneau Harbour and anchored in a sheltered bay on the other side of Booth Island.

Half of us began with a zodiac cruise, the others went ashore at a narrow isthmus, on the other side of which was Port Charcot. This wealthy Frenchman invested his own fortune in two Antarctic expeditions, one in the *François* and another in the *Pourquois-pas?* – the *Why Not?* He overwintered in this little cove and undertook studies of penguins, an interesting place to do so, since it is almost at the southern limit of the gentoo's range,





and studies have continued in the past few summers on nearby Peterman Island, to look at how the colony there is prospering. There is evidence that both gentoos and Adelies are moving south, possibly in response to warmer temperatures on the Peninsula.



hilltop unwise. His old anchorage was full of ice, including some clear, old glacier ice: very photogenic. The zodiac cruise took us among some of the bergs from which this ice had come, and we learned how to read some of the history of each berg from former water-lines. Many were lucky enough to see not just a leopard seal on a floe, but one taking an active interest in the potential food value of rubber pontoons. It played around the zodiac and we could feel its huge jaws testing out the rubber. The divers went straight for the icebergs, this would be their first



The divers were in the water in no time and had a wonderful dive, exploring the blue channels and caves beneath the sea.

After lunch, a short cruise took us to an anchorage some distance off the Ukrainian Vernadsky Base, a closer approach being impossible in poorly charted waters full of reefs and shallows. At the base we were greeted by scientists who undertake year-round research at the base. Up until 1996 it was the British Faraday Base and, along with Halley in the Weddell Sea, was responsible for discovering the sharp seasonal decline in the intensity of the ozone layer, a band of unstable heavy oxygen molecules containing three atoms instead of two. It plays



There were gentoo penguins and a few Adelies, our first, scattered over the rocks. Fur seals rested in the little valley behind, but skuas would not let walkers rest and dive-bombed us. It made any attempt to walk up to Charcot's cross and cairn on the



chance to dive ice. While looking for the perfect iceberg, several Leopards were spotted and seemed friendly and curious. Mike suggested they snorkel with the seals, but Murphy's Law was apparent, as every time the divers slid over the side of the zodiac, the Leopards decided to move on, a frustrating and tiring exercise. After several tries, Mike decided to find a nice iceberg to dive around. It took only minutes before they found two icebergs, one for Mike and one for Rupert.



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l role in blocking out harmful solar radiation. Man-made chemicals are now known to promote the breakdown of the molecules back into ordinary oxygen, lowering the level of protection from radiation. On the lighter side, the base also has one of the better retail opportunities in Antarctica, including a Post Office and bar, with home-made vodka distilled from potatoes. Around the corner was a historic building known as the Wordie Hut after James Wordie, the geologist on Shackleton's 1914-17 *Endurance* expedition. Built in 1947, and extended in 1952, it was closed in 1954, except for emergency use as a refuge. It is now preserved as a monument to the

meteorological and other research carried out there, and is a fascinating time-capsule, including an unopened packet of Pemmican, felt bootliners, a crystal ball to measure sunlight, and records of the dogs kept and bred there.

Vernadsky offers the best dive sites in Antarctica, its marine life is rich and diverse and often Leopards prowl the area. Mike, Rupert and three divers anchored their zodiac just opposite the base, onto a wall that they had dived many times. And once again, it turned out to be superb, with an enormous variety of marine life. Huge colourful sponges clung to the wall, and in amongst them lay gigantic nudibranchs (shell-less snails) up to 15 centimetres, probably the largest in the world. Beautiful sea anemones and star fish were clinging to the rocks everywhere. All too soon the dive was over, but everyone enjoyed their brief encounter with the best marine life Antarctica has to offer.

Before returning to ship, there was an opportunity for a brief zodiac cruise among some more stately icebergs, with glimpses further south of pinnacles and spires belonging to yet more princely ice palaces. After Dinner, the final episode of *Life in The Freezer* was shown.

## 28th February 2007 – Antarctic Circle, Detaille Island

Position at 07.00h: 66°20' S / 67°33' W

17nm to the Circle, 45nm to Detaille Island

Temperature Air: 2°C, calm, long swells, light sunshine 7

Rolf's 07:00 morning call gave us early warning that we were approaching a very special imaginary line on the earth's surface. Shortly after breakfast, at 08:40 we gathered on a foredeck newly cleared of the night's snow, and poured champagne, and watched the numbers change on the GPS's until the magic figure 66°33' appeared. This is the Antarctic Circle, and south of here, everywhere gets at least one day per year where the sun does not rise, and another when it does not set. Just as Albert was getting into the swing of explaining exactly why this happens, two humpback whales appeared and his audience disappeared quicker than the majestic tail-flukes to our starboard.



The sea continued clear and the weather fair and the *Maryshev* made good progress to Detaille Island named by Charcot for a helpful Punta Arenas merchant who arranged for provisions to be available for the expedition at the Magellan whaling station on Deception Island. At 66°51' S it was our **furthest south** point on our journey. Our passenger John Thorne had worked here fifty years before, and led us up to the long wooden hut that had once been his home. It closed in 1958, but has received attention since, although it was plain then clean-up ten years ago had only been partial. John Thorne gave a brief talk about life at the base, and answered questions as we looked round, making the place come to life once more.

Inside there were poignant details of everyday life, sticking plasters, old drugs, blank meteorological forms, and the timeless essentials of British cooking: porridge, HP sauce and pickles.

We could also walk to the hilltop above and survey the bay, feel the edge on the wind, and only imagine what it must be like to take readings in 100 mph winds (160 kph). There were fur seals all over the snow beneath, and Weddell Seals on the beach. It was our first look at these and at Adelie penguins in any numbers.



Mike had never dived Detaille Islands before, so this would be a 'wildcard' dive. With five divers, Mike and Rupert anchored their zodiacs, just below the first hut on the rocks. It was a wall dive, with reasonable marine life, but certainly not spectacular, nevertheless, it was great to have the opportunity to dive south of the polar circle, a dive that probably only a few hundred people in the world had achieved.



Back at the ship we found out that the usually efficient zodiac operations had been held up by a very singular seal. Our Russian crew drivers, Eddie, Sergey and Marconi returned to their moored boats to find one had been commandeered by a large, silver-grey crabeater seal. And it wasn't going to move in a hurry. Attempts to prod it with an oar resulted in it rolling on its back and asking for more. We used the other boats to get everyone back, towing the occupied boat to the bow, out of the way. Attempts by Mike and others to scare it succeeded only in provoking some very aggressive snarling, and a display of teeth and bad breath. The seal didn't react well either. Eventually, they managed to thread a lifting strap through the handlines of the pontoon, and tip the seal out. This had been done before, but the seal had leapt straight back in! This time the zodiac was hoisted aboard. Unfortunately we lost a paddle which floated out of reach,

but it was not safe to retrieve it with the seal still close.

The fun and games delayed lunch until 14:15 but the hotel staff showed their customary flexibility and nothing was wasted when hungry appetites went below! We turned back north and rested in the afternoon, and enjoyed more real Antarctic weather: the season was clearly turning at the end of summer. At 17:00 John told the story of Shackleton's *Endurance* expedition of 1914-17, the most remarkable of all polar escape stories, using many of the images from the photographer Frank Hurley's record. Our ship seemed a more comfortable and comforting place afterwards. Dinner was set back a little until 19:30, then a showing of the first episode of *Blue Planet* wrapped up the day.

### 1 March 2007 – Lemaire Channel, Port Lockroy and Danco Island

Position at 07:00: 65°09'S / 64°05'W 3 nm to Lemaire Channel

Temperature Air: 0°C snow and reduced visibility, fresh breeze.

Grey light through our portholes was evidence of snow on the decks, making them very slippery, and more falling from a leaden sky, often in dense flurries. Around breakfast-time we arrived once more at the entrance to the Lemaire Channel, but it largely had to be imagined. There were glimpses of rock walls whose texture was highlighted by the powdery new snow, and the snouts of glaciers drifted in and out of view through the mist and snow. Mike and his divers left the ship first as soon as the anchor went down. Their dive site was Damoy Point on the northwest coast of Wiencke Island. No sooner had they arrived, two medium sized Leopard seals joined them in the vicinity and seemed extremely curious. By the time everyone was dressed in, the seals had lost interest and swam away. The dive site itself has a nice gradual slope covered with boulders, stones and kelp, but the highlight of the dive was the abundance of the very colourful endemic 35 arm sea stars, all sizes from 10 to 60 cms across. A nudibranch and also a giant isopod were seen, and hundreds of other sea stars, limpets and amphipods. It was a superb 'critter' dive.

The 'dry' folk went in to nearby Port Lockroy, Base A in the wartime Operation Tabarin. It was a monitoring station until 1945, then became a meteorological base, studying the ionosphere, and in particular, phenomena known as 'whistlers', radio noises that result from lightning discharges from all over the continents to the north being channelled down the earth's magnetic field. It is a convenient way of monitoring huge areas for atmospheric electrical activity from a small number of bases. As the equipment became more sophisticated, the base fell out of use, out of repair, and became a hazard to wildlife. The United Kingdom Antarctic Heritage



Trust was set up to restore this and other sites, furnishing Lockroy in the style it would have been around 1962. Rick and Gerrard currently run the Base and Post Office and excellent shop. Rick, a veteran of the old sledding days, came aboard to give us a talk about the site and their work.

Out on deck hard dry snow pellets were falling, and where they fell in the sea, they did not melt, but formed greasy sheets. The winter was on our doorsteps. We took the zodiacs in under a rock on tiny Goudier Island, beneath large rusting chains set there by whalers for mooring. The island is also the subject of ongoing studies to monitor the effect of tourism on the bird life there, particularly the gentoos. An area higher up the hillock is cordoned off from visitors, and the breeding success of the two areas is monitored and compared. Typically, there is either no difference between the two in terms of penguin-rearing success. Sometimes the tourist part does better. This may be mixed news, as skua success seems a little lower in the 'resort', so maybe the presence of people is making it harder to predate on the chicks, not a desirable impact, however mean a skua may look compared with a penguin chick. Skua chicks look cute too. Okay, not for long. When we went back to the ship, the sun had broken through; it was like a different day. Rick and Gerrard were also near the end of their stay, they were scheduled to be picked up in four days time.



sounds of Antarctica. In the mid-distance we could see the former Russian research vessel (read: spy-ship!) *Sergey Vavilov*, dwarfed by the landscape and seascape. Others of us stayed close to the shoreline, which was scattered with small ice. The *Maryshev* was troubled by somewhat larger pieces drifting by, and moved closer to Cuverville Island. On the way back, with the weather improving all the time, and the light on the hills making it ever more beautiful, some of us opted to detour to sea leopard seals on small floes, a marvellous end to the landing.

This was a new spot for the divers and Mike and Rupert picked a rugged rock face on the mainland, just east of Danco Island, as a likely dive site. It turned out to be just fine, not quite a sheer wall, but certainly a sharpish incline. The rocky ledges had much in the way of marine

In the afternoon we returned through the beautiful Neumayer Channel, and then the Errera Channel, to arrive at Danco Island. This small, domed island at the entrance to the Errera is home to more gentoo penguins and a very nice walk to the small ice-cap with views all round the island and along the Errera Channel. Nearly twenty people made it to the top and enjoyed, along with everything else, three minutes of staying silent to enjoy the quiet



life, and the dive was enjoyed by all five of the divers. On their way back to the *Maryshev*, they came across three Leopard seals on separate ice floes, and were able to get wonderful photographs of them, as they seemed totally indifferent to their intruders. While photographing the third seal, three Minke whales came by and circled the divers' zodiac for more than 20 minutes: another superb afternoon.

After dinner, we continued cruising towards Wilhelmina Bay, passing, at dusk, between

islands that seemed to form a barrier, but parted miraculously at the last minute.



## 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2007 – Foyn Harbour, Enterprise Island, Gerlache Strait, Melchior Islands

Position at 05:45h 64°34'S / 62°00'W

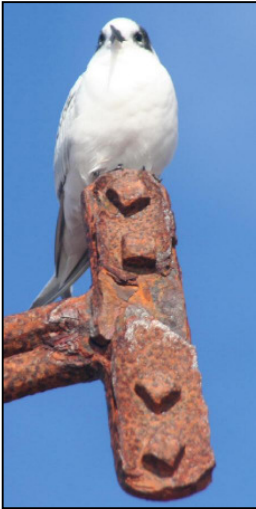
Temperature Air: 0°C, calm, clear.

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We awoke in a bay surrounded by mountains smoothed with fresh snow, reflected in the softly rippling waters of Foyn Harbour. The history of the site belies this appearance. Foyn Harbour is named for the whaler *Svend Foyn* christened after its owner, the inventor of the cannon-fired explosive harpoon, which made him a millionaire. The divers were the first group to depart the ship, as they needed the extra time to dive the wreck *Governor*, a Norwegian whaling transport vessel that burnt and sank in Foyn harbour. Mike needed to split the divers into two groups, which made for a much more pleasant dive, with less silt

being kicked up by too many divers on the one site. Both dives were excellent with good visibility and lots of colourful marine life, and the largest nudibranchs in the world. The *Governor's* propeller was enormous and lay in 20 metres of water and was literally covered in kelp, soft corals and tunicates: so much to see.



It was an

absolutely wonderful dive, in the most perfect conditions, flat calm protected waters and brilliant sunshine, what more could a diver wish for!

The 'normal' people slipped down into the placid waters and took a leisurely zodiac cruise along the shore, looking at the icebergs, and finding shallow bays where young Antarctic terns and blue-eyed shags were gathered in groups to learn what adult life was like before the severe test of oncoming winter. They were very tame, and allowed us to take photographs much more easily than adult birds would permit. The morning was again cold, and the surface of the sea was forming into pancake ice, the thin plates which rub up against each other and form rims, like glass lily-pads. There were fur seals along the shore, and signs of former whaling in the form of mooring posts, and two old whaleboats hauled high on an islet. Finally we came to a bay where a larger wreck nestled in the shallows, beneath a low ice-wall: the *Governor* to translate the Norwegian name.



Back on deck, Alan was waiting with hot chocolate with optional rum for those needing a little help to thaw out toes and other small body parts for which a sense of feeling was just a memory. Sadly, this was our last excursion. When the divers were all aboard, we set sail through Wilhelmina Bay and out into the Gerlache, in perfect conditions. The weather stayed with us as we approached the Melchior group, with humpback whales blowing all around the ship, and one showing its tail flukes a mere 50 metres from the starboard side. We passed the Argentine Melchior Base, watched by the personnel onshore, and slipped past the last long lines of rocks, and into the Drake. As we did so, there was a surprise birthday cake and champagne for passenger Muzaffer Aksoy, a birthday venue he will not forget!

## 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2007 – Drake Passage, en route to Ushuaia

Position at 08:00h 61°12'S / 64°05'W (400 nautical miles to the Beagle Channel)

Temperature Air: 3°C, almost no wind, some swell.

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It was good to have a wake-up call beginning with a nice number, like 8. The Drake was still being kind to us and our typing, as we signed up for the email exchange list, looked very sober and correct. At eleven, there was a fascinating presentation by Mike: *Diving Expeditions in the Polar Seas*, a round-up using stills and video of some of the wildlife our diving colleagues had been seeing at close quarters. For some reason the biggest laugh

was the off-camera voice of a woman screaming as leopard seal tested the zodiac pontoon with its teeth: easy to laugh when you are watching from the safety of the dining room. All through the morning there were sightings of fin whales, the second biggest of all the whales, after the blue. After lunch, there was a detective tale, told by Rupert, about *The Hole in the Ozone Layer*. This was particularly interesting as the Peninsula lies pretty well under the middle of it, and we had visited Vernadsky where much of the break-through work was carried out. It also answered the question of why we don't have an equivalent hole in the north; there are special polar clouds which are catalysts in the process which form much more readily above the more extreme cold of Antarctica. Nevertheless, after a cold winter, there are definite thin points in the Arctic, and we have to wait to see if the huge cut-backs in use of CFCs will reverse this.

To wrap up the afternoon, Albert told the story, in *Antarctic Penguins*, of research he had carried out on Elephant Island, the home of the bulk of Shackleton's men during the time he sailed to South Georgia to arrange their rescue. Albert was relieved in more conventional style. In the evening there was a dramatic colouring on the moon, reddish, which soon proved to be a partial eclipse; we were lucky to have a clear night in the Drake to observe it. There were slightly bigger swells coming in but still nothing to worry us and we maintained a speed of over 10 knots northwards.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> March 2007 - Drake Passage, en route to Ushuaia**

Position at 07:30h: 56°45' S / 65°31' W

137 nm to the Beagle Channel

Temperature Air: 5°C, light winds and moderate swell

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Another civilized wake-up call introduced us to an overcast but fair day. Dolphins soon joined us, swimming beneath the wandering albatross that was circling the ship. Starting at ten o'clock, those of us who were interested in the inner workings of the ship were offered engine room tours, where we would be introduced to the engine control system as well as get a chance to look at the two main engines, the auxiliary engines, water and climate control systems, grey water recycling systems and even the shaft and gearbox. It was a noisy but fascinating tour.



This was our last day at sea, so Rolf gave us some disembarkation instructions at eleven o'clock, including details on our arrival and transfer times, and luggage handling. For the remainder of the morning, we were offered another lecture by Rupert: *Life on an Ice-Breaker*, detailing his work on the German research icebreaker *Polarstern*. After lunch, John gave a presentation on *Sailing Ships Around Cape Horn*. Our little Antarctic adventure could not be compared to the hardships and challenges these sailors had had to face! They were iron men in wooden ships. To close the afternoon, Albert showed some slides of the longest pelagic voyage in the Atlantic, the Atlantic Odyssey, which is destined to visit such remote

islands as Gough, Tristand da Cunha and St Helena. To round this off, Rolf offered us some pictures and stories from the "other end of the world", the Arctic, where he had been working and travelling extensively, both on *Oceanwide's* ships and on his own. For those of us who had not been there yet, it was certainly an interesting preview of what could become a future holiday destination.

We ended this day at sea with one final dinner *Chez Alan* in the Maryshev dining room, and then it was time for one last test of our courage and bravery: time to settle our bar, souvenir and satcom accounts with Alan and Rupert!

#### **5<sup>th</sup> March 2007 – Ushuaia**

Position at 0900h: 54°50'S / 68°20'W

Temperature: a lot warmer than Antarctica!

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In the morning, the *Aleksey Maryshev* 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: 1948 nm = 3604 kms = 2252 statute miles**

**On behalf of Oceanwide Expeditions we wish you a safe journey home  
and hope to see you again sometimes, maybe in another polar region.**



**[www.oceanwide-expeditions.com](http://www.oceanwide-expeditions.com)**

Log compiled by: John Harrison.

Proof-reading: Mike Murphy.

Images, maps, layout: Rolf Stange.

Group photo of divers (Neko Harbour) Mike Murphy.

Species list: Albert Beintema.

Rupert kept the overview.

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

### **Lecture and presentations list**

22 <sup>nd</sup> of February:	<i>Welcome aboard</i>	Rolf Stange, Alan Hogan
	<i>Safety Briefing</i>	Sergey Glazunov, 1 <sup>st</sup> mate
23 <sup>rd</sup> of February:	<i>Seabirds of Antarctica</i>	Mike
	<i>Dive Briefing</i>	Mike
	<i>Who Discovered Antarctica?</i>	Albert
	<i>Plate Tectonics</i>	Rolf
24 <sup>th</sup> of February:	<i>Penguins</i>	Rupert
	<i>The History of Whaling</i>	John
25 <sup>th</sup> of February	<i>Seals</i>	Mike
28 <sup>th</sup> of February	<i>Shackleton</i>	John
	<i>Good Behaviour in Penguin Country</i>	Rolf
2 <sup>nd</sup> of March:	<i>Cetaceans</i>	Mike
3 <sup>rd</sup> of March	<i>Diving in Polar Seas</i>	Mike
	<i>The Ozone Hole – a detective story</i>	Rupert
	<i>Antarctic Penguin Research</i>	Albert
4 <sup>th</sup> of March:	<i>Engine Room Tours</i>	Rupert & engine room crew
	<i>Disembarkation Details</i>	Rolf
	<i>Life and Research on an Icebreaker</i>	Rupert
	<i>Sailing Ships around Cape Horn</i>	John
	<i>Travelling in the South Atlantic &amp; Arctic</i>	Albert & Rolf

## Species list

### Birds:

<i>Pygoscelis papua</i>	Gentoo Penguin
<i>Pygoscelis adeliae</i>	Adelie Penguin
<i>Pygoscelis antarctica</i>	Chinstrap Penguin
<i>Diomedea exulans</i>	Wandering Albatross
<i>Diomedea melanophris</i>	Black-browed Albatross
<i>Diomedea chrysostoma</i>	Grey-headed Albatross
<i>Phoebastria palpebrata</i>	Light-mantled Sooty Albatross
<i>Macronectes giganteus</i>	Southern Giant Petrel
<i>Macronectes halli</i>	Northern Giant Petrel
<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	Antarctic Fulmar
<i>Daption capense</i>	Cape Petrel
<i>Pagodroma nivea</i>	Snow Petrel
<i>Pterodroma mollis</i>	Soft-plumaged Petrel
<i>Pachyptila desolata</i>	Antarctic Prion
<i>Procellaria aequinoctialis</i>	White-chinned Petrel
<i>Puffinus griseus</i>	Sooty Shearwater
<i>Oceanites oceanicus</i>	Wilson's Storm-petrel
<i>Fregetta tropica</i>	Black-bellied Storm-petrel
<i>Phalacrocorax atriceps</i>	Blue Eyed (Imperial) Shag
<i>Chionis alba</i>	Pale-faced Sheathbill
<i>Catharacta maccormicki</i>	South Polar Skua
<i>Catharacta antarctica</i>	Brown Skua
<i>Larus scoresbii</i>	Dolphin Gull
<i>Larus dominicanus</i>	Kelp Gull
<i>Sterna vittata</i>	Antarctic Tern

### Note:

Wandering Albatross, Grey-headed Albatross, Light-mantled Sooty Albatross, Northern Giant Petrel, Antarctic Fulmar, Soft-plumaged Petrel, Antarctic Prion, White-chinned Petrel, Sooty Shearwater, and Black-bellied Storm-petrel were only seen during the crossings of the Drake Passage.

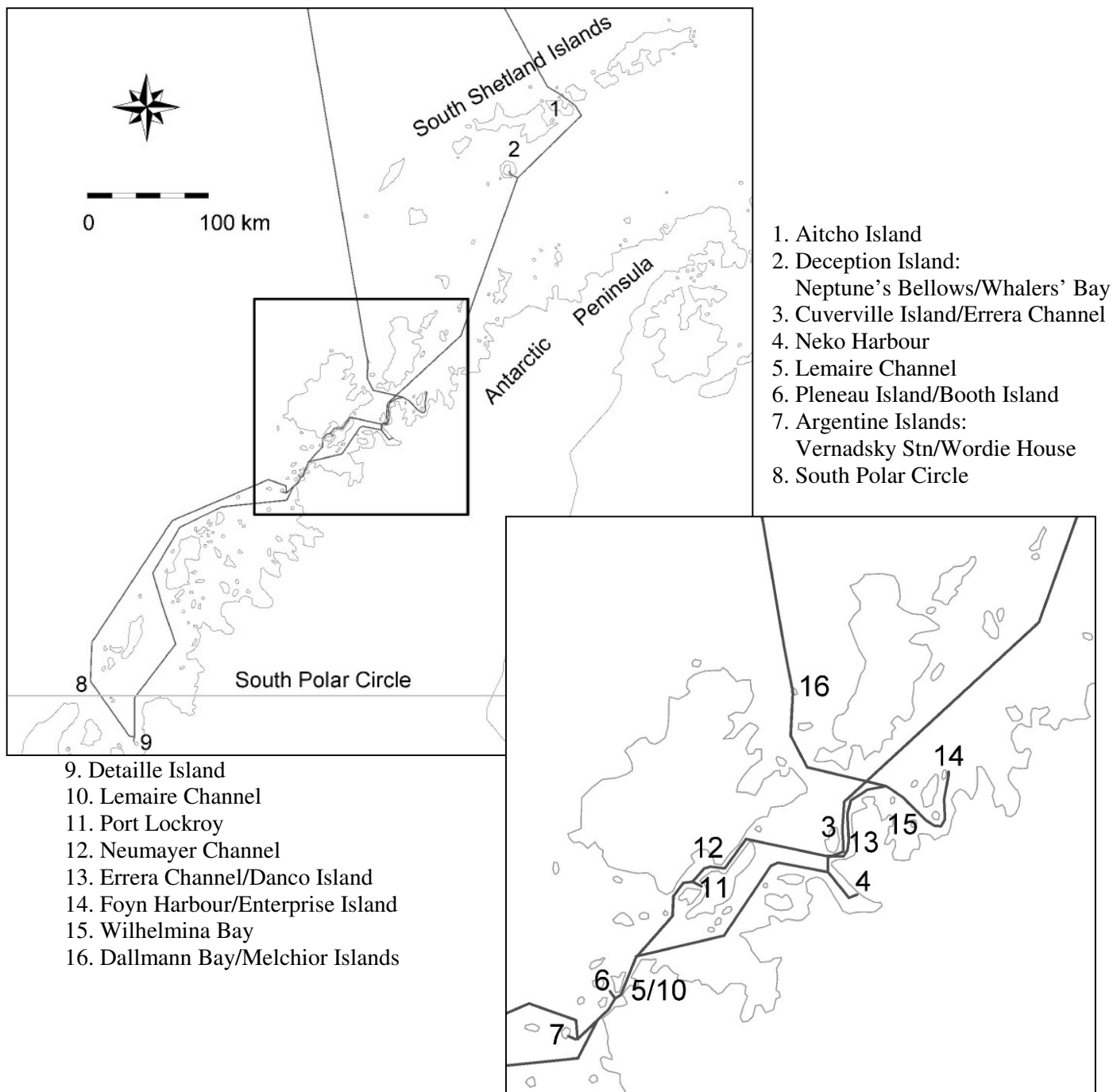
### Marine Mammals:

<i>Balaenoptera physalus</i>	Fin Whale
<i>Balaenoptera bonaerensis</i>	Antarctic Minke Whale
<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>	Humpback Whale
<i>Lagenorhynchus cruciger</i>	Hourglass Dolphin
<i>Mirounga leonina</i>	Southern Elephant Seal
<i>Hydrurga leptonyx</i>	Leopard Seal
<i>Leptonychotes weddellii</i>	Weddell Seal
<i>Lobodon carcinophaga</i>	Crabeater Seal
<i>Arctocephalus gazella</i>	Antarctic Fur Seal

### Note:

Fin Whale and Hourglass Dolphin were only seen during the crossings of the Drake Passage.





DATE	DIVE SITES	DIVE TYPE
25 Feb 2007	Whalers' Bay	Checkout dive
26 Feb 2007	Cuverville Island	Wall with Leopard seals
	Neko Harbour	Beach dive for penguins
27 Feb 2007	Pleneau Island	Iceberg dive
	Vernadsky	Wall dive
28 Feb 2007	Detaille Island	Wall dive
1 Mar 2007	Damoy point	'Critter' dive
	Danco Island	Gradient dive with 'critters'
2 Mar 2007	Enterprise Island	Foyn Harbour, wreck 'Governor'

