Expedition Log

Antarctic Peninsula

05-15 March 2007

M/V Aleksey Maryshev

M/V АЛЕКСЕИ 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 metres) long, has a draft of 12 feet (3.5 metres) 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

1st Mate: Sergey Glazunov
2nd Mate - Gennadiy Vishnevskiy
3rd 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)
Dive Guide – Jonas Sundqvist
Hotel Manager – Alan Hogan (Canada)
Head Chef – Frank Metselaar (The Netherlands)
Sous Chef – Beverley Howlett (N. Orkney Islands)
Ship's Physician – Dr. Valentin Kelbing (Germany)

And 47 of us from Austria, Canada, The Netherlands, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and the United States

5th March 2007 – Ushuaia, Tierra del Fuego, Argentina
16:00 Position 54°45' S / 68°30' W
Temperature Air: 2°C, Water 7°C,
Overcast with gusty snow showers.

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step (Lao Tse)

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 has 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 17:30 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, 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. Jonas has been an instructor for 13 years and a former dive-centre owner whose working experience includes both polar regions.

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 Kelbing the ship's physician, had worked and travelled with Oceanwide before, 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 keep him busy.

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 practise this emergency evacuation drill. Returning 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 not long after 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 further 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!

6th March 2007 – Southbound Drake Passage
Position at 08.00h: 55°46' S / 65°31' W
60 nm to Beagle Channel, 430 nm to the South Shetlands
Temperature Air: 6°C, overcast, strong winds

Great things have small beginnings (Sir Francis Drake, 1540 –1596)

Before we got out of bed, we could sense a slight shift in the weather, especially those of us who had been thrown out of bed. The famous Drake Passage was treating us to a Force 8 gale. We were well acquainted

enough with the ship to find our way to the dining room for breakfast, and again at 11:00, for the first lecture *Seabirds of Antarctica*, though many were confused when Mike arrived because the announcement had definitely said the talk was being given by the best-looking staff member. He outlined the main groups of oceanic and shore birds we would meet in the Drake and along the Antarctic Peninsula. Despite the

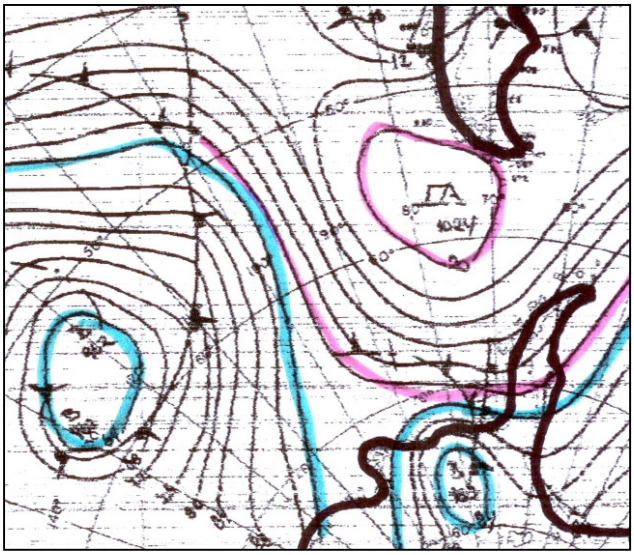
strong winds, there were few seabirds around to practise our skills on, but a wandering and a black-browed albatross were seen, as was a southern giant petrel, and the much smaller, swifter, soft-plumaged petrels, and cape or pintado petrels.

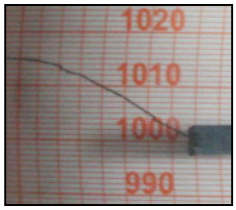
The Drake Passage

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, know 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.





Weather-chart and bathometer, 07th March 2007

During the early afternoon, the captain altered our planned course to sail a little west of south instead of SSE, in order to have the weather coming from a better quarter. This helped reduce the ship's motion and make life on board a little safer and more comfortable. At 15:30, there was a presentation by Rupert *Life on an Ice-Breaker*, detailing his work in the Weddell Sea on the German research icebreaker *Polarstern*.

The afternoon's erudite entertainment was rounded up at 17:00, when 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 eaten or worn, according to your luck, and we relaxed before letting the Drake beat us to sleep.

7th March 2007 Southbound Drake Passage
Position at 08:00: 58°14' S / 64°41' W
290 nm to S Shetlands
Temperature Air: 5°C, cloudy, good visibility, wind falling

Antarctica is still very difficult to reach. The most isolated continent, it must be earned, either through a long, often uncomfortable ship voyage, or an expensive airplane flight. Weather and Ice – not clocks or calendars set the schedule.
Antarctica - Lonely Planet Travel Guide (1996)

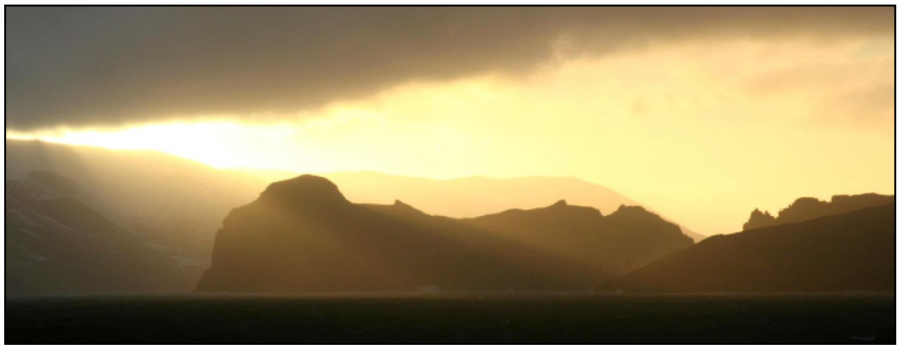
We woke to another day of rocking seas, but not as violent as the previous day. At 10:30, Rupert gave a presentation on *Penguins* the 'natives' of Antarctica, and we learned about the different habits of the friendly, flightless birds who are waiting for us to arrive and photograph them. The winds continued to hit us from close to head on and slow us down; no ship sails at her best in such conditions. Lunch was well-attended as most people had adapted to conditions and had developed some kind of sea-legs. However the decks were slippery and the wind strong, so the outside areas were closed to everyone, and remained so for most of the southwards journey.
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.
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. We also learned about the guidelines for behaviour around wildlife. Soon we will be doing it for real.

8th March 2007 – South Shetland Islands
Position at 07:30 a.m.: 61°41' S / 60°35' W
Temperature Air: 3°C, overcast, wind Force 6 Westerlies

For sheer downright misery give me a hurricane, not too warm, the yard of a sailing ship, a wet sail and a bout of sea sickness

Apsley Cherry-Garrard (who sailed South with Captain Robert Falcon Scott)

The night passed more calmly and many were glad to catch up on sleep missed the previous two nights. But during the day we entered into the sphere of influence of another low pressure sitting just to the west of the Antarctic Peninsula. The wind rose again and was more or less directly onto our bow. It rose up to Force 10, Storm Force, at its peak with winds exceeding 60 miles per hour, around 100 kilometres per hour. It provided spectacular action for those feeling well enough to make the bridge. In the afternoon we began seeing ice, and soon there were a pair of really big bergs away to our starboard. We were headed for the English Strait, between Greenwich and Robert Islands, to scout the possibility of a landing at Aitcho Island. The distinctive blocky mass of Table Island came into view, skirted with teeth-like rocks, and soon we had some respite from the heavy seas. However it took only a binocular survey from the ship to see that the surf at the shore would make a safe landing at Aitcho impossible. We could however see many hundred penguins along the shore, and the unoccupied Chilean Base nestling between two hills. We continued through into 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* in 1819. Rolf, planning 'on his feet' decided to head for our next planned landing at Deception Island, normally around five hours sailing away at the southern end of the South Shetlands. We turned onto our new course; guess where the wind was coming from.



At 16:30, Rupert 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. Crabeaters, for instance,

prefer ice, Weddell seals like rocks. Personally, I'm still hooked on mattresses.
Despite the Captain choosing an adventurous course to save distance, it was not until dusk 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 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, 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. From the bridge, John gave us a guide to the principal historical remains. 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. But after a short cruise towards the shore, the wind was so high that the captain veered hard to port and we came up into the eye of the wind and then sailed down Port Foster. The windward side of the ship was almost impossible to stand on. The drama of the scenery was still unmissable in the sober light, and we savoured the excitement of navigating across one of Antarctica's most famous locations, a caldera which is still volcanically active. As darkness fell we left and continued south, fingers crossed for better weather soon.

9th March 2007 – Foyn Harbour
Position at 07.00h: 64°09' S / 61°25' W
Temperature Air: 2°C, southerly gale, clear sky

Who would believe in penguins unless they had seen them?

Conor O'Brien

We awoke to clear skies creating a marvellous setting for the mountains of the Peninsula to our left, and Brabant Island and other, smaller islands to our right, all covered with fresh snow. The wind was still on the nose, so the morning's plans were moved back a little. We were sailing the Gerlache Strait, named after Adrien de Gerlache, a wealthy Belgian who put together an international team in his ship the *Belgica*. Their expedition came south for 1897-99. He was 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.

Mike called a meeting of the divers at 09:00 to brief them on the first dive. Around half past ten we were ready to begin our first excursion. In the welcome shelter of Wilhelmina Harbour, we found ourselves out of the wind and the waves: a great relief. The history of the site belies this tranquil appearance. Foyn Harbour is named for the whaler *Svend Foyn* christened, in turn, after its owner, the inventor of the cannon-fired explosive harpoon, which made him a millionaire. It was a favourite refuge for the whalers during the short southern season. The divers were heading for the wreck of the *Governor*, a Norwegian whaling transport vessel that caught fire and was beached there in 1916. They arrived at the wreck in perfectly calm sea conditions, no wind, and what appeared to be excellent underwater visibility. Mike had decided to split the divers into two groups so as to not overcrowd the dive site, but the first priority was to check out their new weights and equipment in the shallow water at the back of the *Governor*. After ensuring everyone was comfortable, they commenced their dive, entering the water at the protruding bow of the ship, and descending slowly along its hull, until finally reaching its massive four bladed propeller, resting at the bottom at 20 metres (65 feet) It was an absolutely superb dive with so much to see: colonial sponges, the huge endemic white nudibranchs, sea anemones, sea stars, ribbon worms and many others. What a great way to start their diving adventures.

The rest of us also went to the wreck first as part of 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. There was a brief landing at one of the spots where whaling debris was visible onshore: boats and various iron goods, and, in one cove, a scatter of wooden barrels.

After lunch we were still enjoying almost cloudless skies, although there was a light breeze with a cold edge to it. The ship sailed out of Wilhelmina Bay along the east shore of the Arctowski Peninsula, named after the Polish scientist of the *Belgica* expedition. There were whales blowing, mostly humpbacks, and one of them tail-fluked very close to the ship. Emerging into the Gerlache Strait once more, we lost our protection but it was still smooth sailing compared with our introduction to Antarctic weather. The former Soviet research vessel *Sergey Vavilov* passed us going in the opposite direction. She was a specialist listening vessel which used to monitor communications between western vessels, using a chamber in the hull through which eavesdropping equipment could be lowered.

We continued south until, just after 18:00, we came to the entrance of the Errera Channel, and past Cuverville Island, named after an admiral, a minor French admiral, but I expect his mum was proud of him. We anchored about a mile from Danco Island and took zodiacs in to the shore, weaving between bergs and forcing the last five metres through blocks of ice along the shore. A

leopard seal patrolling the offshore area added interest. We stepped onto the base of an old jetty which served a small British base hut here, and were met by gentoo penguins. Most were this year's chicks in full adult plumage, but there were also a few breeding adults still being chased around for food. There were also some chicks which still had the fluffy grey and white down. The down is not waterproof, nor does it insulate well when wet, so they must complete a moult soon or they will be unable to fend for themselves when winter comes. Some passengers also noticed an adult with white above and below the beak, and a white collar. Any significant variation from standard plumage is rare. We also saw white pigeon-like birds, called snowy sheathbills, they are the smallest of the scavengers which live off the colonies. They have memorably been described as looking like depraved chickens. Last zodiac at 20:30 took us back to a hot supper after a long and beautiful day, rewarding us for our tough initiation ceremony in the Drake.

10th March 2007 – Damoy Point/Port Lockroy, Lemaire Channel, Booth Island
Position at 07.00h: 64°45' S / 62°44' W
Temperature Air: 1°C, overcast, calm

Glittering white, shining blue, raven black, in the light of the sun the land looks like a fairy tale. Pinnacle after pinnacle, peak after peak, crevassed, wild as any land on our globe, it lies, unseen and untrodden.

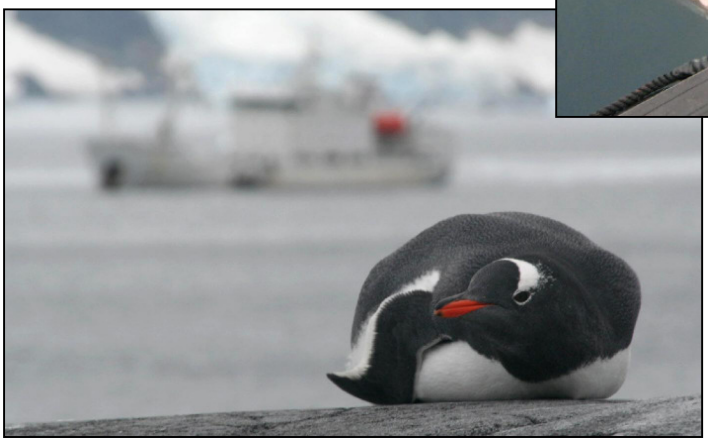
Roald Amundsen, describing the Lemaire Channel

Today we woke up to more calm seas. We dropped the divers off Damoy Point while the 'dry' folk went round the corner to nearby Port Lockroy. Mike knew of a great spot where they were sure to find the 35 arm sea star, another creature endemic to the Antarctic continent, and find them, they did, in fact, many of them. The gentle rocky slope is a haven for marine life: forests of kelp, nudibranchs, Isopods, limpets and millions of amphipods. It was another incredible dive, and just as they came out of the water, a huge leopard seal came swimming by with a gentoo penguin in its mouth. It played with the poor helpless creature for 20 minutes, allowing it to escape from its jaws many times, letting it think it might survive if it was fast enough. But the leopard knew it had no chance, he just teased it until he was hungry enough to eat it.

The 'dry folks' took the zodiacs in under a rock on tiny Goudier Island, beneath large rusting chains set there by whalers for mooring. The British staff who run it during high season had recently left, but we had permission to enter; John gave guided tours outlining the background to its three uses: for espionage, then science and now tourism. It began life as 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, completing the work in 1996.

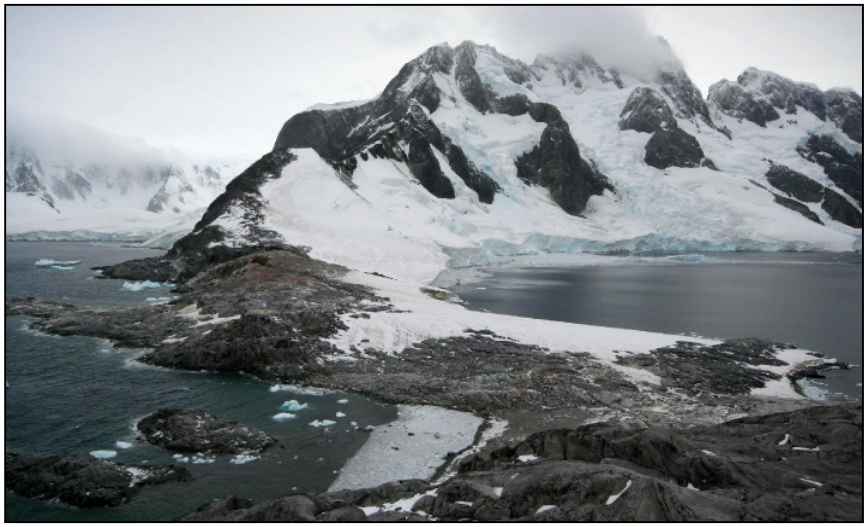
The island is also the subject of ongoing studies to monitor the effect of tourism on the bird life there, particularly the gentoos. An area higher up the hillock is usually cordoned off from visitors, and the breeding success of the two areas is monitored and compared. Typically, there is either no difference between the two in terms of penguin-rearing success. Sometimes the tourist part does better. This may be mixed news, as skuabreeding success is lower in the visited area, so the presence of people may make it harder to predate on penguin 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. Back on board we headed south and 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.

Some 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.

There were gentoo penguins scattered over the rocks, and for those who walked towards the hill, there was the experience of being dive-bombed by skuas. A few intrepid souls braved them to climb up to Charcot's cross and cairn on the hilltop. The zodiac cruise took us among some of the bergs from which this ice had come, and we learned how to read the history of each berg from former water-lines. Many were lucky enough to see a leopard seal 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 chance to dive ice. While looking for the perfect iceberg, several leopards were spotted and seemed friendly and curious. The three diving zodiacs split up and found their own iceberg and within minutes the divers were in the water, exploring the icy bergs with their blue channels and scalloped surfaces. As if the magnificence of the icebergs was not enough, two of the diving groups had leopard seals join them for the duration of their dives. It was a truly incredible experience, even though the divers had been briefed on leopards, they were all taken by surprise and their responses ranged from wonderment to sheer terror! As the divers terminated their dive, they quickly ditched their tanks and weights, donned their snorkels and masks and went straight back in the water to swim with the Leopards. Diving does not get better than this!

11th March 2007 – Paradise Harbour, Errera Channel, Cuverville Island
Position at 07.00h: 64°53'S / 62°52' W
Temperature Air: 1°C, calm, overcast

Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in case of success.

Apocryphal advertisement for Sir Ernest Shackleton's *Endurance* Expedition

The morning brought more calm weather. While the ship drifted off the Argentine Base Almirante Brown, we took a zodiac cruise along the rock and ice cliffs around Oscar Cove beneath the Petzval Glacier, one of Antarctica's most actively calving glacier fronts. Thankfully, the towering *séracs* stayed in place above our heads as we explored the different types of ice, including some very clear ice, with nearly all the bubbles squeezed out of it. If it came from the Peninsula, it might be thousands of years old; John kidnapped a piece for the bar. After an hour, we landed beneath a small moraine and broke out the vodka, kindly provided by the hotel department, to toast this very special landing: our **continental landing** on the main body of Antarctica. It's amazing how many people will take a drink at ten in the morning if it's

free. For some it was also their seventh continent. Congratulations! Rolf organised a group photo, so it will be impossible to pretend you solo skiied there. It will be placed on his website to capture (details at the end of this log.) Meanwhile while we were gulping vodka, Mike and the divers were performing another dive, this time a 'wall' dive just off the Argentinean base of Almirante Brown. The wall was sheer, dropping to more than 100 metres, and hosting multitudes of marine life species, including the giant isopods. It was another great dive with smiling faces everywhere.

In the afternoon we cruised back northwards entering the beautiful Errera Channel once more, passing Danco Island and sighting the cruise ship, and former Soviet research vessel, the *Akademik Ioffe,* and its zodiacs. We continued the short distance to Cuverville Island which has the largest colony of gentoo penguins on the Peninsula. There was a zodiac ride into a rocky beach. We immediately saw nature red and raw: two skuas attacked a gentoo chick rendering it helpless but not dead. This is a time of high mortality for the young birds, they do not yet have the skills or experience to care for themselves well. Out in the bay another threat waited:

leopard seals. Like the skuas, they are adept enough hunters to include a play element in their hunting, and we saw one playing with a penguin for more time than we cared to watch. But along the beach life was more tranquil for the majority of the birds. Most of the breeding birds seemed to have left, although a few were still being successfully pestered for food by large fat chicks. The young birds, distinguishable by their deep black backs and smaller white eye patches were extremely friendly and curious. All we had to do was sit down and wait for visitors. We also saw those smaller scavengers still active: snowy sheathbills.

While we were enjoying our landing, the divers looked again for more icebergs and this time were lucky instantly. Almost all the divers not only had a remarkable ice dive, but once again were visited by curious Leopards, this time the leopards were a little more intimidating blow bubbles and nudging the divers. Mike decided to terminate the dives and everyone was happy to exit the water even though they had the 'Dive of Their Life' Taking their zodiacs back closer to the beach, the

divers were placed on top of a small iceberg for their group photograph, and who should want to join them, another Leopard seal!!! A wonderful afternoon for everyone.
For the dry folk, our zodiac cruise back provided chances to see whales, around a dozen humpbacks were lazing around in the mouth of the channel. It was a lucky evening to have this, as tonight was BBQ night and the show went on all through the delicious hot food prepared for us by Frank and Beverly on the foredeck and eaten with complimentary drinks to music. Some danced for love of the art, many to help keep warm. As Charcot would have said: *Pourquois Pas?*

12th March 2007 – Vernadsky Base Drake Passage
Position at 06:15: 65°11'S / 64°07 'W 3 nm to Lemaire Channel
Temperature Air: 0°C overcast, good visibility, calm

I have often had the impression that to penguins, man is just another penguin
- different, less predictable, occasionally violent,
but tolerable company when he sits still and minds his own business.

Bernard Stonehouse in his book 'Penguins

Morning found us approaching an anchorage some distance off the Ukrainian Vernadsky Base, a closer approach being impossible in poorly charted waters full of reefs and shallows. At 65°11' south it was our **furthest south.** Rolf had made a 06:15 call so that we could make an early visit before setting out for the Drake. Unfortunately the base had no early bird like Rolf, and the newly-arrived staff were a little bit slower from their beds. But soon we were greeted by scientists who undertake year-round research at the base. The early arrivals were also greeted by a leopard seal. Vernadsky was first the British Argentine Islands Base, later renamed the Faraday Base. Along with another British Base, Halley in the Weddell Sea, Faraday 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 a vital role in blocking out harmful solar radiation. Man-made chemicals like CFCs are now known to promote the breakdown of the molecules back into ordinary oxygen, lowering the level of protection from radiation. In 1996 Faraday was sold to the Ukraine for one pound, a bargain for both countries as Britain would otherwise have had to pay the high costs of decommissioning it. 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.

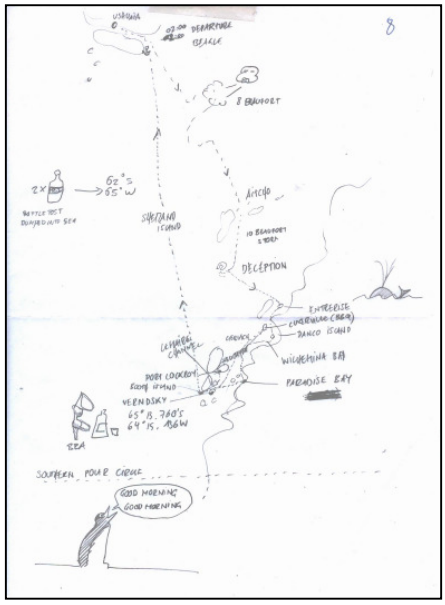
Mike and the divers headed for an incredible wall dive just opposite the station. It is perhaps the best 'critter' place in Antarctica, with giant colourful sponges, nudibranchs, giant isopods, sea anemones, small rock cod and magnificent soft corals. Every diver spent at least 35 minutes underwater and came up freezing but exhilarated, and there was still time left to pop over to the station for a quick home-made vodka, courtesy of the Vernadsky staff!
Just after 10:00 we headed back, sadly bidding farewell to Antarctic terra firma. Many were fortunate to see leopard seals again on the way back, and one took a particular interest in the raising of the zodiacs. At 15:00, sun-block was recommended for Rupert's talk giving the low-down on *The Ozone hole – a detective story*. Rupert revealed the whole mystery. This was particularly interesting as the Peninsula lies pretty well under the middle of it. It also answered the question of why there isn't 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.

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 in the Dining Room. We dressed normally.

13th March 2007 – Northbound Drake Passage
Position at 08:00h 61°27'S / 65°14'W
411nm to Beagle Channel
Temperature Air: 2°C, light wind, good visibility

Strange: There is always sadness on departure.
It is as if I cannot after all bear to leave this bleak
waste of ice, glaciers, cold and toil

Fridtjof Nansen



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. Around 10:00 large blows up ahead turned out to be three fin whales, distinguished by their long backs and the late appearance of the dorsal fin, and the non-appearance of the tail flukes. At eleven, there was a fascinating two-part presentation by Rolf: *Glaciers – Rivers of Ice.* He described the functions and processes of the powerful erosional tools which dominate this continent. They make good ice for drinks too.
After lunch, Mike described a world he has known very well in *Ruffy Tuffy Divers,* all about professional divers – well, all the news that's fit to print. For a man crippled by modesty he did a fair job. Afterwards he added an impromptu look at some pictures of the wildlife our diving colleagues had been seeing at close quarters. At 17:00 John gave a short introduction to the politics and administration of Antarctica, a continent without constituent countries, and a rare success story in the sometimes shabby history of international statecraft.

14th March 2007 - Drake Passage, en route to Ushuaia
Position at 08:00h: 56°49' S / 65°48' W
131 nm to the Beagle Channel
Temperature Air: 7°C, light winds and moderate swell

He who commands the sea has command of everything

Themistocles

Another civilized wake-up call introduced us to an overcast but fair day. It was good to enjoy another day of calm, and Dr Valentin did not have to use much of his stock of motion sickness medicines. Starting at 09:30, 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 Mike: *Whales*, detailing all you might want to know about the mighty giants of the seas. 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, Rolf showed some slides of the longest pelagic voyage in the Atlantic, the Atlantic Odyssey, which is destined to visit such remote islands as Gough, Tristan da Cunha and St Helena, as well as from the "other cold 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!

15th March 2007 – Ushuaia
Position at 0800h: 54°50'S / 68°20'W
Temperature: a lot warmer than Antarctica!

A journey is a person in itself; no two are alike.
And all plans, safeguards, policies and coercion are fruitless.
We find after years of struggle that we do not take a trip; a trip takes us.

John Steinbeck

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.

I am the albatross that waits for you at the end of the earth.
I am the forgotten soul of the dead sailors who crossed Cape Horn from all the seas of the world.
But they did not die in the furious waves.
Today they fly in my wings to eternity in the last trough of the Antarctic wind.

Sara Vial - Poem inscribed on the albatross sculpture at Cape Horn

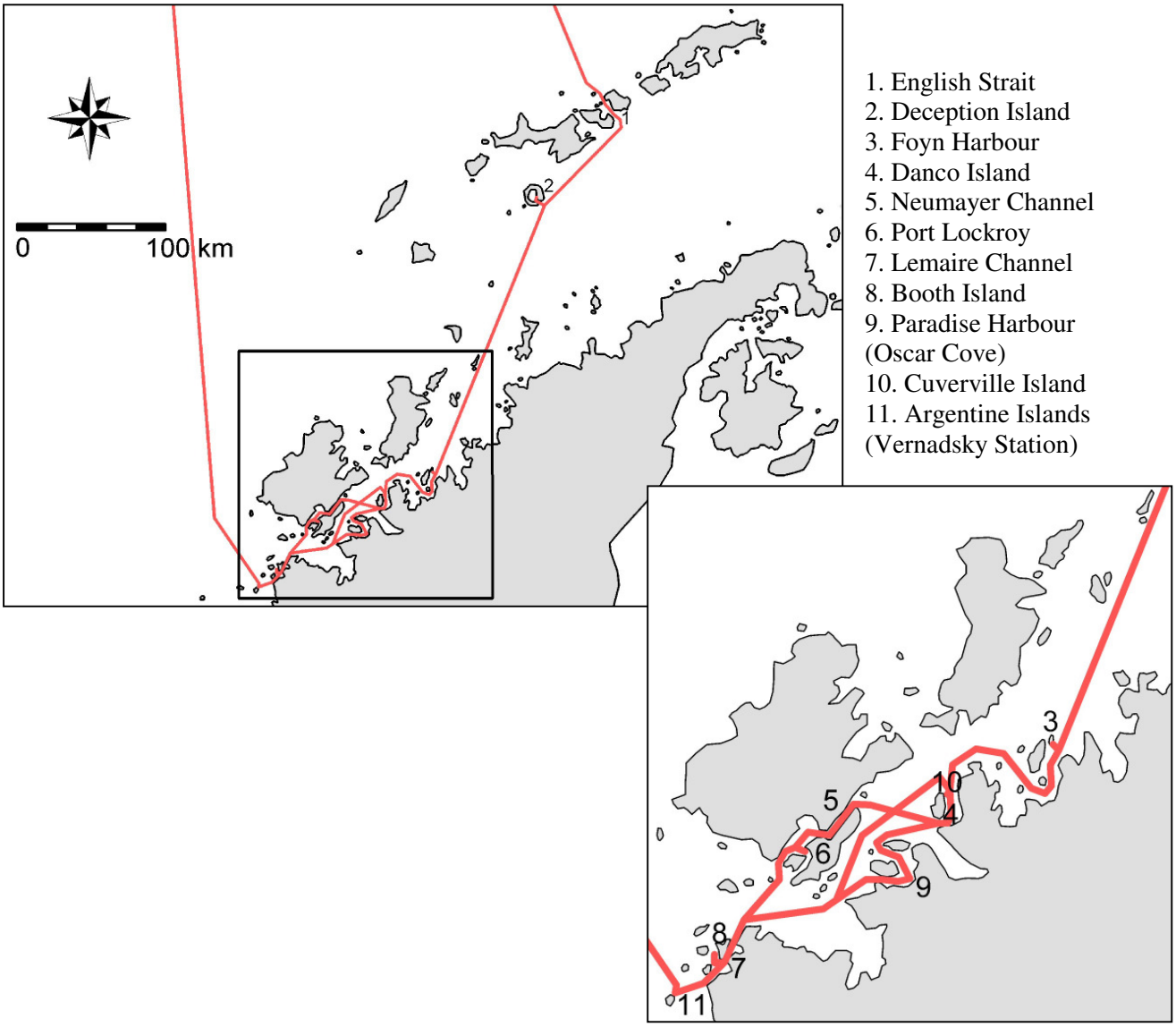
Total length of this trip: 1660 nm = 2988 kms = 1868 statute miles

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

Log compiled by: John Harrison.
Proof-reading: Mike Murphy.
Images, maps, layout: Rolf Stange.
Photos of divers (at Cuverville Island): Mike Murphy.
Species list: Rupert Krapp

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



1. English Strait
2. Deception Island
3. Foyn Harbour
4. Danco Island
5. Neumayer Channel
6. Port Lockroy
7. Lemaire Channel
8. Booth Island
9. Paradise Harbour (Oscar Cove)
10. Cuverville Island
11. Argentine Islands (Vernadsky Station)

DATE	DIVE SITES	DIVE TYPE	GPS POSITION
9 Mar 2007	Enterprise Islands	'Governor' wreck, Foyn Harbour	64°32 S 62°00 W
10 March	Damoy Point	'Critter' dive for 35 arm star fish	64°49 S 63°31 W
	Pleneau Island	Iceberg dive with leopard seals	65°05 S 64°02 W
11th March	Paradise Bay	Wall dive	64°53 S 62°52 W
	Cuverville Island	Iceberg dive with leopards	64°41 S 62°36 W
12th March	Vernadsky Station	Wall dive	65°14 S 64°15 W

Lecture and presentations list

05th of March:	*Welcome aboard*	Rolf Stange, Alan Hogan
	Safety Briefing	Sergey Glazunov, 1st mate
06th of March:	*Seabirds of Antarctica*	Mike
	Life and work on an icebreaker	Rupert
	Plate tectonics (1+2)	Rolf
07th of March:	*Penguins*	Rupert
	The History of Whaling	John
	Good Behaviour in Penguin Country	Rolf
08th of March	*Seals*	Rupert
12th of March	*The ozone hole*	Rupert
	Shackleton	John
13th of March	*Glaciers (1+2)*	Rolf
	Ruffy tuffy divers	Mike
	The Antarctic treaty	John
14th of March:	*Engine Room Tours*	Rupert & Engine room crew
	Disembarkation Details	Rolf
	Cetaceans	Mike
	Sailing Ships around Cape Horn	John
	Travelling in the South Atlantic & Arctic	Rolf

Species list

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

Balaenoptera physalus	Fin Whale
Balaenoptera bonaerensis	Antarctic Minke Whale
Megaptera novaeangliae	Humpback Whale
Lagenorhynchus cruciger	Hourglass Dolphin
Hydrurga leptonyx	Leopard Seal
Leptonychotes weddellii	Weddell Seal
Lobodon carcinophaga	Crabeater Seal
Arctocephalus gazella	Antarctic Fur Seal