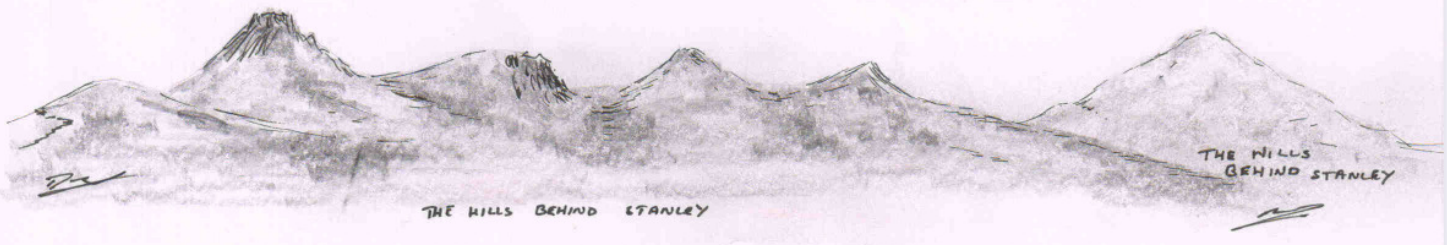
A Journey Around South Georgia

"A winds in the heart of me, a fires in my heels,
I am tired of brick and stone and rumbling Wagon-
wheels:
I hunger for the sea's edge, the limits of the land, "
Where the wild old Atlantic is shouting on the sand.
J. Masefield.

Wednesday 25th March 2009

The days of waiting and expectation are over, our ship, the Gregoriy Mikheev, came alongside the dock at Stanley in the Falkland Islands. By 1730hrs everyone, including Her Royal Highness and Admiral Laurence had boarded the vessel. Welcoming speeches were made and just after 1800hrs the ropes came off and the ship sailed. Passing out through the narrows and down Port William it was a glorious evening, looking behind, the hills to the west of Stanley vanished in that glorious purple light which seems to be unique to the Falklands. A great clutch of our people manned the upper decks gleefully recording Birds, Dolphins, Whales, indeed anything that moved. Before settling down to Dinner we were taken through the mandatory life-Boat drill, always good to know that the safety aspect is being taken seriously. An excellent meal followed served by our friendly stewardess's. A super end to a super day.



Thursday 26th March.

A brisk WNW wind picking up some white-capped waves contrasted beautifully against the blue sky. Albatros and Petrels wheeled around the ship, what a start to our first sea day. Our on board educational programme started with Prof. John Croxall giving a well balanced presentation on the issues of Conservation in South

Cape Petrel
Our constant companion

Georgia. The talk was both thought provoking and worrying. After a very pleasant lunch the afternoon lecture slot was taken by Prof. Andy Clarke who effortlessly presented the incredibly complex subject of Biological Diversity in Antarctica and South Georgia. It is wonderful to have people of such calibre as John, Andy and others on board to discuss these topics. The following seas and gentle motion has allowed most folk to get their sea legs and everyone is moving around the ship with the confidence of old salts. The evening

activity was slightly different from what had gone before but was, nevertheless, very interesting indeed. Prof Elaine Shemilt presented her superb art work and then gave a talk on how the SGHT was formed. It was really a great way to finish the day, some, continueing discussions further in the bar.

Friday 27th March.

A simply glorious morning, blue skies and a gentle following sea. Folk up for breakfast with a real spring in their step and the expectation of a wonderful day ahead. At 10·30hrs Gordon Liddle addressed the considerable problem of alien species on South Georgia particularly the situations regarding Rats and Reindeer. Removal of them will be both complex and expensive. Again very thought provoking and a subject we will hear a good deal more about as the cruise progresses. Later during the morning, our army of eager eyes on the outer decks spotted a group of Dusky Dolphins riding the bow waves, great excitement as people braved the passing shower to get a sight of them. Throughout the afternoon Whales of various species put in appearances to the delight of everyone. With this activity and the glorious sunshine it was hard to

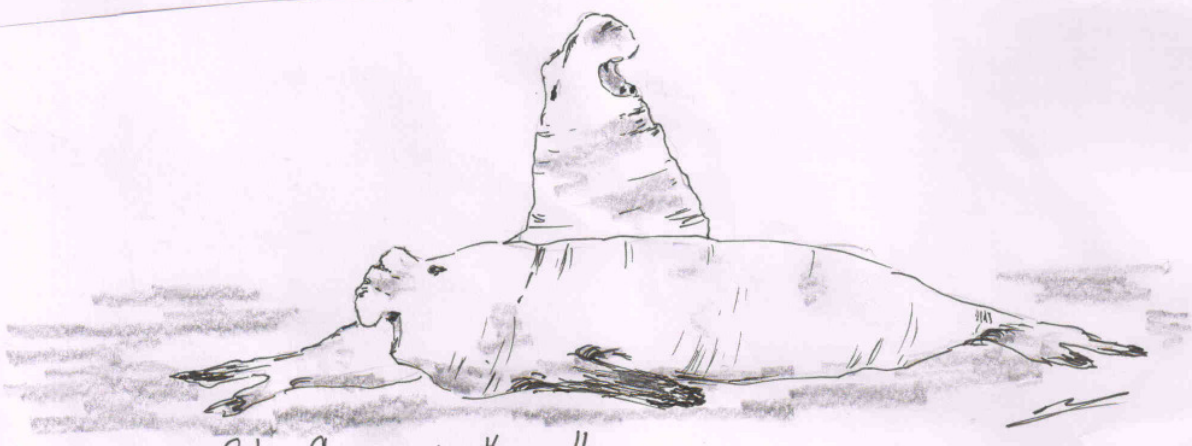
SHEATHBILL THE GARBAGE COLLECTOR

drag people in for the afternoon lecture. The effort of coming in was however, totally worthwhile as Dr Mike Richardson gave a most interesting presentation regarding the South Georgia fisheries. This is a feature which dominates most aspects of South Georgia life. A really excellent calm sunny day culminated in Prof Frederik Paulsen giving an interesting and well illustrated talk on visiting and planting a flag at the real North Pole. This, of course, is the seabed at the North Pole reached by using the two Russian MIR submersibles. The whole thing was a remarkable achievement.

Saturday 28th March.

A beautiful morning, the ship was full of excitement, for ahead on the horizon could be seen the mountains of South Georgia. Steadily the Mikheev closed with Willis Island and the outermost, the one first seen by Captain Cook's expedition in 1775. After a ling long everyone gathered in the Dining Room where Prof. John Croxall gave an introduction to Bird Island and its wildlife. Bird Island was our destination for the afternoon and John's talk further whetted our appetites for what we were about to see. In the late morning the Captain skilfully eased the vessel into the tricky anchorage off Bird Is. The anchorage at Bird Island is quite an intimidating place with large kelp beds and the sea breaking over reefs all around. A zodiac was soon in the water and a scout party on the way to the small British Research Station to liaise with them regarding the afternoons operation. Straight after lunch we began to go ashore, getting into the boats at sidegate was not easy as there was a considerable swell running, but everyone managed it safely. Ashore folk were divided into

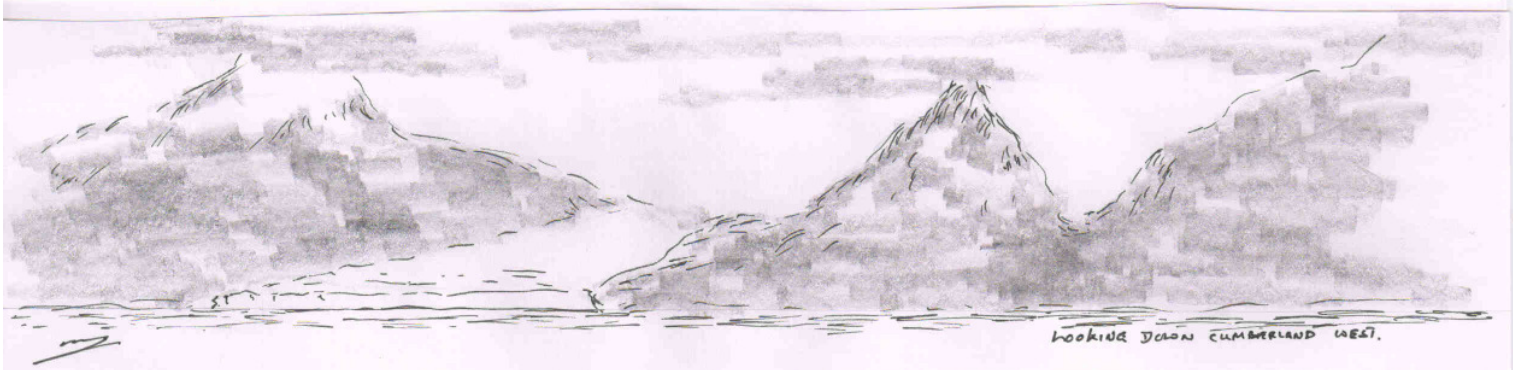
groups and followed the Royal party up to Wanderers Ridge. What a truly remarkable place this Island is, beaches covered in seals and Tussock covered in birds. I think everyone was hugely impressed by the Wandering Albatross, very large birds, total masters of the art of flying but so vulnerable to the hooks of the long line Fisheries. After a memorable two hours slipping and sliding around the upper reaches of the Island we returned to the Station and were greeted with a very welcome hot drink and cookies. A truly super visit ended with the last boat at 17.30hrs. Our complement was increased by one as we gave a lift to a base member. He had a medical problem and we were taking him to the main station of King Edward Point for a check up. This type of co-operation is so necessary in these isolated scientific communities. Once aboard there was a suprise in store, the Hotel department had organised a BBQ on the aft deck. What an excellent affair it was, superb meat, excellent punch and a truly fantastic display of dancing from the most unlikely candidates! By the late evening the weather had changed for the worst and very strong NNE wind was pounding down Bird Sound. So much so the Captain had to leave the anchorage and back off into the safer waters of the open sea. But what a day it has been, a walk around one of the least visited islands of the sub-antarctic!



Peaceful afternoon in the wallow

Sunday 29th March.

The severe overnight winds have slackened but left in their place a large bumpy swell from the NE. The effects of this we could easily feel as we lurched through the Stewart Strait on our way to the NE coast of South Georgia. Sadly the sea state was so severe that there was no chance of going to our



LOOKING DOWN CUMBERLAND WEST.

proposed landings of Salisbury Plain and Prion Is. But flexibility is the key and Stig-Tore stood in and presented, along with Jan, a superb CD containing archival footage of the Whaling Industry in the 1950's. Of particular interest was footage of the visit to South Georgia in 195 of Her Royal Highness's father, Prince Philip. After the presentation, lunch was taken which was followed closely by our arrival at our alternative destination of Stromness Bay. By the time we anchored, the low cloud had vanished to be replaced by glorious blue skies, illuminating the whole area in a most glorious light. Ashore we were greeted by Fur Seals and small groups of King and Gentoo penguins. This combination of pristine wildlife and remains of the old Whaling Stations is always a little bizarre. People wandered off in all directions, enjoying the walking,

sights of one of South Georgia's alien species, the Reindeer, and the superb surrounding scenery. The hours up to the last zodiac at 1730 hrs went very quickly indeed and it was a very happy group that gathered in the lounge swapping stories before Dinner. The evening activity was different from normal but very interesting and enjoyable. It was organised by Admiral Laurence. He had distributed a whole bunch of poems and stories which were read by a range of people. It was really a nice session in the cosy atmosphere of the Mikheev lounge. A very special way to finish the day and end the stay of her Royal Highness and the Admiral. Sadly they leave us in King Edward Point tomorrow.

Monday 30th March

The Mikheev remained anchored overnight in King Edward Cove and everyone enjoyed a very peaceful night. An early start was made in the morning to accomodate the vast range of activities that were happening during the morning. For most folk this meant gathering at the museum for the Princess Royals official visit just after 0930. Once completed people vanished to the four winds all enjoying the excellent weather. After a murky start the great peaks of the Allardyce Range had emerged in all their glory, breathtaking no matter how many times you have seen them. During the afternoon the Post Office and Museum shop opened, adding shopping to the days experience! As dusk gathered so folk reappeared from the four corners and it was a lively evening on board, many were the tales, some being slightly stretched as the hours ticked away.

Tuesday 31st March.

A beautifully calm night was spent at anchor in King Edward Cove. Some took an early boat ashore to attempt longer walks others had a more relaxed start. After the fairly frantic activities of yesterday, today was an ideal time to take in what has been going on at Grytviken and the surrounding area. Probably the biggest change, and certainly the one with most impact has been the installation of the new pipes and water turbines underneath Gull lake. This installation now supplies all the electricity for Grytviken and KEP. a truly excellent conservation measure. Over the next few weeks the builders accomodation block and the scar of the Dam roadway will be removed all heartening moves. The Museum continues to expand and improve, offering an insight into all facets of South Georgia's life and history. And over at KEP the BAS scientists continue to probe and to try and understand the complex mechanisms that keep the South Georgia

S.G Tussock Parodiochloa flabellata

ecosystem working. Lunchtime saw everyone back on board and soon after the Captain heaved anchor and we left for the short journey to Jason Harbour. We did have a short detour to view the wrecks of the two fishing vessels caught on the

Bar at the entrance to Moraine Fjord. It was only a few years ago that they were wrecked caught out by the notoriously fickle weather of South Georgia. We soon had a small example of this ourselves, arriving at the anchorage at Jason Harbour in beautiful calm weather, within a very short time the sky had become leaden, the wind increased and the temperature dropped. These changes have to be watched so carefully! However, it did not spoil our enjoyment of this delightful landing, King Penguins, lovely scenery and the historical old hut built by CA Larsen himself, the table still features some carved graffiti. After the landing and the excellent evening meal Stig-Tore gave an interesting description of the renovation of the old Managers house at Husvik Whaling Station, with luck we will see his work at first hand when we land at Husvik tomorrow afternoon. Everyone to bed with that warm glow of satisfaction.

Wednesday 1st April.

Another beautifully calm morning, everyone did a quick double check especially as it is April Fools day! Just before 0900hrs we entered Fortuna Bay and some minutes later came to anchor at the head of the Bay. We had company with another small cruise vessel, the Prof Multanovsky, she was landing her passengers in the corner at Whistle Cove so, in no way, did she interfere with our activities. We landed on the Eastern side and from there traced the last section of Shackleton's epic crossing of the Island in

1916. Our people enjoyed the walk enormously starting in wonderful weather, enduring a short sharp Hail storm and then continueing on past Stromness Station and ending at the old Leith Whaling Station. During our walk, the ship had sailed round from Fortuna and was there waiting in Leith Harbour to pick us up. Back on board it was time for Hot drinks and a meal also time to begin to embellish some of the tales of steepness of slope and deepness of Elephant Seal Wallows. Whatever it had been a challenging walk through superb countryside. Over lunch the Mikheev shifted position the short distance between Leith and Husvik Harbours, and once there everybody was soon ashore. The first port of call was the Managers House which had been lovingly restored by Stig-Tore and his team, what a really super job they have made of it. From here folk spread far and wide, many visiting the graveyard, what stories some of those stones have to tell. Others got to the 200 metre limit round the old factory ruins and viewed the silent ghosts within. A particularly evocative part of the factory is the hulk of the old Whale Catcher, the Karrakatta. She stands high and dry and was used as a stationary boiler to provide steam to the factory. Apart from the barks of the Fur Seals large numbers of Reindeer could be seen spread around the bay, this area is one of their favourite grazing sites. Folk were back on board by 1730, wash, shower and rest and then to the Dining Room to enjoy Marcello's latest excellent offering. During the evening Sacha and Svetlana kindly leant their copy of the Endurance Expedition and it was shown in the Dining Room. A really wonderful day, plenty of excercize, fantastic scenery and connection with History.

"I have flouted the wild, I have followed
its lure
Fearless, familiar, alone.
But a day must come when the wild
will win
And I shall be overthrown."

Robert Service.
quoted by Shackleton shortly before his death.

Thursday 2nd April.

After overnighting at Husvik anchorage dawn saw us leading south towards St Andrews Bay. We anchored at the mouth of the Bay just before ten. This place is notorious for its large swells and ferocious katabatic winds, neither were in evidence today. Just to check things out a scout boat went ashore, and the great news came back that all was well. Everyone tumbled into the boats and began the long journey ashore. Waiting for us was the shore party who ensured everyone was ashore safely. And once ashore people stood mesmerised by the beauty all around. Overnight a large snowfall had transformed everything with a robe of white. On the white carpet were thousands of King Penguins, outside the vast huddle were scattered Fur seals and the occasional pile of blissfully sleeping Elephant Seals. Moving away from the beach the popular viewing point were a range of small moraines. From these vantage points one could look down on the swathe of King Penguins below. This is one of the truly great wildlife views on earth. During the morning the

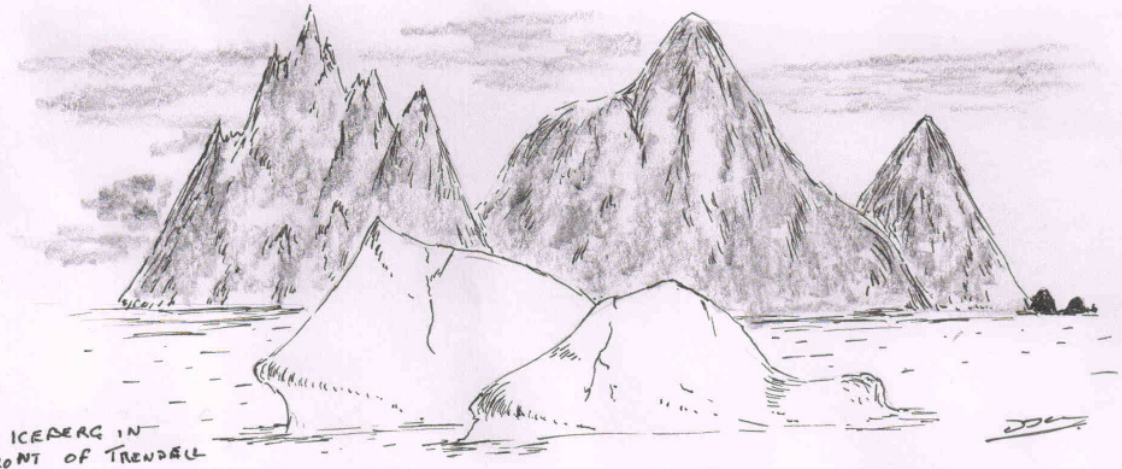
sky began to clear, the glaciers and peaks emerged, everything bathed in sunshine. It is hopeless to try and find words to describe the scene. The three glaciers, the Heaney, Buxton and Cook that tumble down from the mighty ramparts of Mounts Nordenskjold and Brooker were clearly defined and from our point of view, calm! Normally katabatic winds thunder down the glaciers and assault those who dare to land, we certainly have angels on board. It was hard to drag people away from the place and over a late lunch folk chattered away with the stories of what they had seen. But luck had been with us because once back on board

Moulting Gentoos Gold Harbour

the wind began to freshen from the South East and by the time we had arrived at our next destination of Ocean Harbour it was blowing Force 6-7. The swell was tricky at the side-gate and it was decided just to lower one boat and get the four men on board from the yacht Seal who would then be joining us for the trip back to Stanley. This was successfully achieved in the gathering gloom. It was frustrating not to be able to get ashore as the outline of the old Bayard looked so inviting in the evening light.

Friday 3rd April.

The Captain heaved anchor at around 0400hrs and by first light we were passing across the entrance of Royal Bay, the high peaks of the Salvesen Range being picked out by the first shafts of sunlight. A glorious morning, a fitting birthday tribute to Gordon and Ulf. At 0800hrs the Mikheev dropped anchor in Gold Harbour and in a well practiced routine everyone was soon ashore. Ashore in a wonderland, a sweeping curved beach literally covered in wildlife. Large piles of Elephant Seals gave way to huge numbers of King Penguins, smaller Gentoo penguins rushed through the masses to the quieter realms of the Tussock beyond. Fur seals were doing what seems to be their niche in life, blundering around annoying everything. Overhead Light mantled Sooty Albatross wheeled in their endless aerial ballet. Pintails arrowed low overhead and sheathbills paddled around trying to find anything feral. All this with the backdrop of the hanging Bertrab Glacier, what a place! We were also blessed with good weather, this is another spot that can change from heaven to hell with the onslaught of katalatic winds. It was a wonderful morning which went all



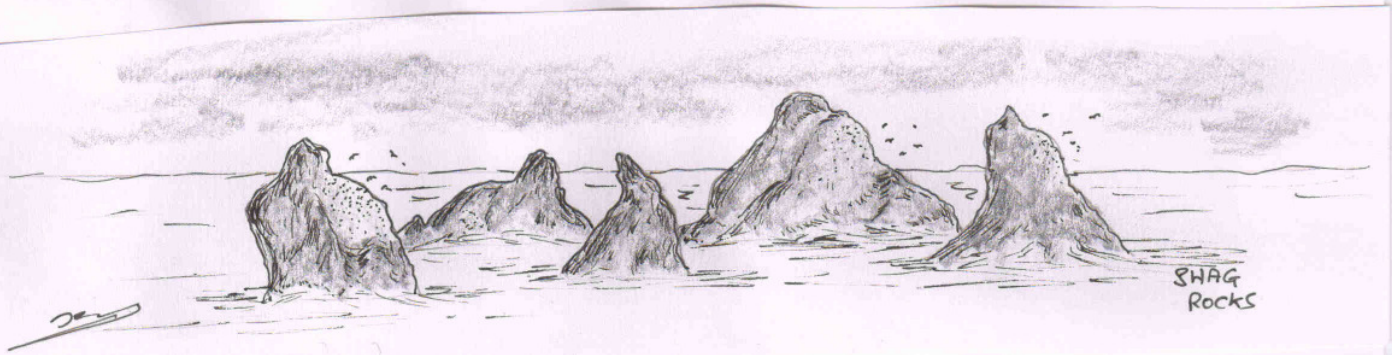
ICEBERG IN FRONT OF TRENDALL CRAGS

too quickly. By 11.30hrs we were at sea again heading south, heading for Cooper Sound. Midway on our trip we passed the jagged ferocious fang of Filchner Rock, a constant reminder of the hazards of navigation in this area. Around 1300hrs the anchor went down in the approaches to Cooper Sound, after a quick recce by the scout boat the landing went ahead. Ashore on a small beach then a little steep climb a quick battle through muddy and slippery tussock and there, we were in amongst the Macaroni colony. The beauty of these small yellow tufted penguins is not matched by their demeanor. Short tempered and highly aggressive to each other is the norm, who knows if this is as a result of having to climb to the most ridiculous nesting sites? The colony area also provided a wonderful lookout over the surrounding area. Immediately in front of us was the specially protected Rat free island of Cooper Is. Away to our west, the dramatic dark brooding mountains that surround the Drygalski Fjord area, this was to be our next point of call. From the anchorage in Cooper Sound our course took us to the south of Cooper Is and then directly north to the entrance of Drygalski Fjord. The approach is splendidly dramatic with the Trendell Crags coming straight out of the sea to over 1000 metres. Also guarding the entrance were several majestic icebergs the contrast between the white bergs and the dark brooding rocks could not have been greater. Inside the 4km long fjord the scenery was breathtaking, huge cliffs and tumbling glaciers. Even some whales were spotted, two juvenile Right Whales were identified. The Captain took us right to the end and the ship came to rest just in front of the Rising Glacier, cameras were certainly being worked very hard. As the ship turned away most

felt that was the end of activities, but no! There was one more suprise in store, a zodiac cruise up one of the side-arms known as Larsen Harbour. This is another spectacular narrow waterway ending under the remanents of the Philippi Glacier. It is also the only place in South Georgia where Weddell seals breed. And, although, totally the wrong time of year we were lucky enough to find one animal laying on the beach. The darkness was gathering rapidly as our happy bunch of travellers returned to the ship for a hot drink and Dinner. This, sadly, has been our last day in South Georgia but what a day it has been. Thoughts now turn to the South Atlantic and how it will treat us on our return to Stanley!

Saturday 4th April.

Either we have hunt the right thing or performed the correct dance because the Gods are certainly smiling on us. Both the wind and swell are in the North East pushing us gently along with a very comfortable motion. It was a typical sea day with lectures, bird and Whale watching. During the morning folk once



again had the opportunity to look at and buy some of Elaine's exceptional pieces of artwork. In the afternoon outdoor activities were the order of the day. Not long after 1600hrs the fang like Shag rocks appeared over the horizon. The Captain got as close as he dared in the big easterly swell. Everyone got a fantastic view of this remarkable, bird encrusted feature. After another excellent Dinner Deirdre entertained us with an excellent verbal and visual presentation of her crossing of South Georgia along Shackletons route.

Sunday 5th April.

Another amazing seaday with the wind and swell both holding an easterly direction, goodness we have been lucky. The morning lecture was given by Tony Martin and the subject, Antarctic Seals with particular emphasise on the Fur Seal. He gave a really interesting insight into the incredible population explosion that this animal has enjoyed over the last twenty years. No sooner had he finished than everyone rushed to the outer decks to see ten plus Hour-glass Dolphins playing alongside the ship. We have really had some great wildlife sightings this cruise. The day finished in fine style with David Munro giving a wonderful presentation about the very great Scottish explorer William Bruce, one of the whole raft of truly great explorers who have not featured in media hype. At this very moment in time we are sailing along one of Bruce's many discovery's, the Scotia ridge; South Georgia is of course, the visual manifestation of this underwater feature.

Monday 6th April.

Overcast, but gentle sea from the east, the Mikhaev rolls gently towards our final destination of Port Stanley. The petrels, our constant companions, watch on as during our final sea-day folk pack and finish up last minute projects. During the morning the LASHIPA team gave a presentation on Industrial Archaeology in polar regions. And in the afternoon Michael Moore gave a really excellent talk on "Whales at the hand of Man", containing much thought provoking stuff. The evening was dedicated to Farewell and thanks to the many people who have made this such a superb trip. There was also a chance to watch some photographic images of the cruise, Tony and Jerome had put

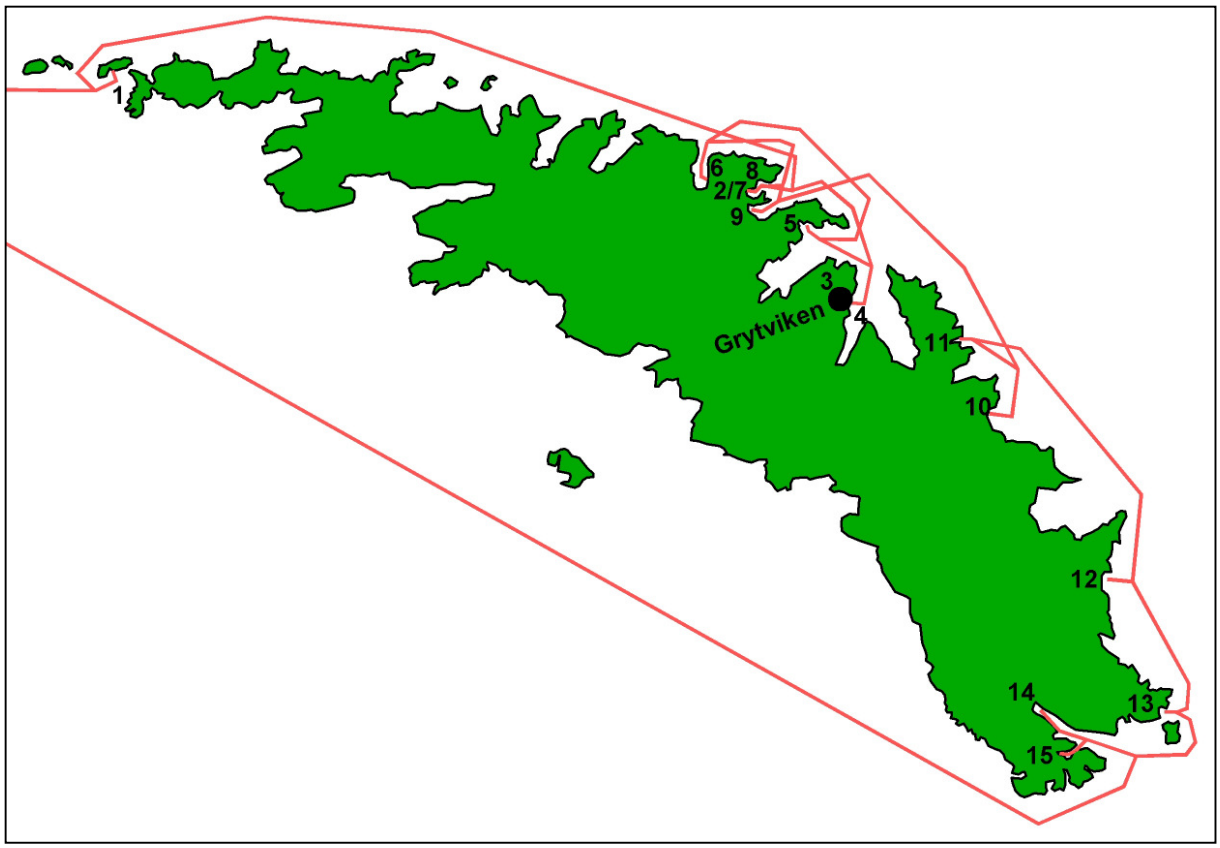
Lady Elizabeth
Whalebone Cove

together a thirty minute show featuring pictures from most members of the trip, a really excellent way of rounding things off.

Tomorrow morning we will be alongside in Stanley, it has been an excellent trip made even more so if this is the catyliot to eventually eradicate Rats from the Island of South Georgia.

"We know not where we are going
For the Ocean will decide,
For it is not the destination,
But the glory of the ride.

Anon.



1. Bird Island
2. Stromness
3. Grytviken
4. Moraine Fjord
5. Jason Harbour
6. Fortuna Bay
7. Stromness
8. Leith Harbour
9. Husvik
10. St. Andrews Bay
11. Ocean Harbour
12. Gold Harbour
13. Cooper Bay
14. Drygalski Fjord
15. Larsen Harbour

Triplog by Dave Fletcher.
Map by Rolf Stange.
This log can be downloaded from www.spitzbergen.de