

# Antarctic Explorer

Aboard *Sylvia Earle* | 27 January – 05 February 2023





# Frei Station, King George island

DAY 1 | Friday 27 January 2023

Position at 1500 on Jan 27

Latitude: 62°16.1'S

Longitude: 058°48'W

Course: 193°

Speed: 8.9 knots

Wind Speed: 3 knots from NE

Barometer: 981

Air Temp: 6°C

Explore. Dream. Discover.

—Mark Twain

Antarctica!

After months of planning, weeks of anticipation and long-haul flights from around the globe, we finally arrived at Punta Arenas, raring to begin our adventure.

At 7.30pm, we gathered in Hotel Dreams and were met by Tomas Holik – Aurora's Vice President of Operations. We were told about our attempt to fly the following day to King George Island on the South Shetland Islands and Jack led us through the IAATO guidelines (International Association of Antarctic Tour Operations) that we need to follow. Jack also spoke about careful measures to make sure that we're able to maximise our experience in Antarctica whilst also making sure that we give wildlife the right of way.

The following day with an early start, we headed back to Punta Arenas airport where we checked in, dropped our bags and jumped onboard the plane. Overflying the Southern Ocean while being treated to a two-course lunch, it was enticing to imagine the many expeditions that have journeyed across this rough stretch of ocean in centuries past.

Landing on King George Island from across the bay and into buses, we were met at the shoreline by the Aurora E-Team. We entered through the mudroom where we found our lockers, had our photo taken by Pia, and the hotel staff showed us to our cabins. Then it was time to explore our new home-away-from-home, the *Sylvia Earle*.

Onboard we total 110 Expeditioners with nationalities representing Australia (17), Canada (8), Chile (10), Denmark (3) Malaysia (4), the UK (10) and USA (58), along with 20 Expedition Team members and 86 ship's crew from all over the world.

We had time to unpack, settle into our cabins and enjoy a delicious first lunch before Expedition Leader Roger called us together to welcome us aboard the *Sylvia Earle*.

Afterwards, we received our lifeboat and safety briefing and readied ourselves for the abandon ship drill.

The sound of seven-short-one-long rings from the ship's signal system was our cue to don warm clothes, orange lifejackets and gather at the muster station to sample our safety gear. Our safety officers and crew guided us up to lifeboats to get us familiar with their whereabouts.

By 7:30 pm it was time to head into the dining rooms where a delicious meal was served complete with a delectable dessert.

While some enjoyed a nightcap at the Tektite bar, some of us wandered the outer decks while the rest of us made our way to our cabins for a much-needed sleep.



# Hydrurga Rocks, Graham Passage

DAY 2 | Saturday 28 January 2023

Position at 0700 on Jan 28

Latitude: 67° 07.85' S

Longitude: 061° 29.94' W

Course: 234°

Speed: 6.8 knots

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew, the furrow followed free: we were the first that ever burst into that silent sea.

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge

As the *Sylvia Earle* made her way south along the Davis Coast of the Antarctic Peninsula, there were cliffs covered in glacier ice as far as the snow flurries allowed us to see. Icebergs were floating on all sides.

As we anchored off Two Hummock Island, we could hear small floes bump and slide along the ship's hull.

After a few days of eager anticipation, we were ready for a full landing. The landing party headed off to set up Hydrurga Rocks, a small islet named for the genus of the leopard seal. After a lengthy transit on the bumpy Zodiacs, we found several Weddell seals sleeping serenely on the snow, while we watched a colony of chinstrap penguins going about their nesting business. They were stealing stones from each other's nests, some for hours at a time, others were simply sitting patiently on their nests feeding their chicks. Now in late January, these chicks are likely six weeks old and have managed to be fed a few good meals by their parents. Some of the parents were minding two chicks – chinstraps can raise and lay up to two eggs, but the survival rate is typically just above one due to predation from Antarctic skuas. Antarctic shags or cormorants also had some rather large chicks and were busy flying overhead with pieces of seaweed streaming from their bills to add to their own nest structures. We also noticed a few Antarctic fur seals; these males had likely left South Georgia about a month before and had lost up to half of their body weight during their navigation across the Scotia Sea. The snorkellers headed off for an excellent first snorkel and became exposed to the magical underwater world of Antarctica with rafts of penguins and sea angels.

After we were satisfied with watching the penguin antics, the last Zodiac left the shore and we returned to the ship.

After lunch, a siesta and a coffee in the Observation Lounge later, it was time for the afternoon's activities. The Zodiacs decided to transit Graham Passage – an ice-choked passage with glaciated scenery on all sides. Tucked behind Bluff Island, we boarded the Zodiacs and went exploring. Amongst the brash, growlers and bergy bits; we were treated to a feast for the senses. Some ice we noticed was clearer, others radiated a deep blue colour. Clear ice is indicative of very old ice that has broken off from glacier fronts, where the layers of snow and ice press down

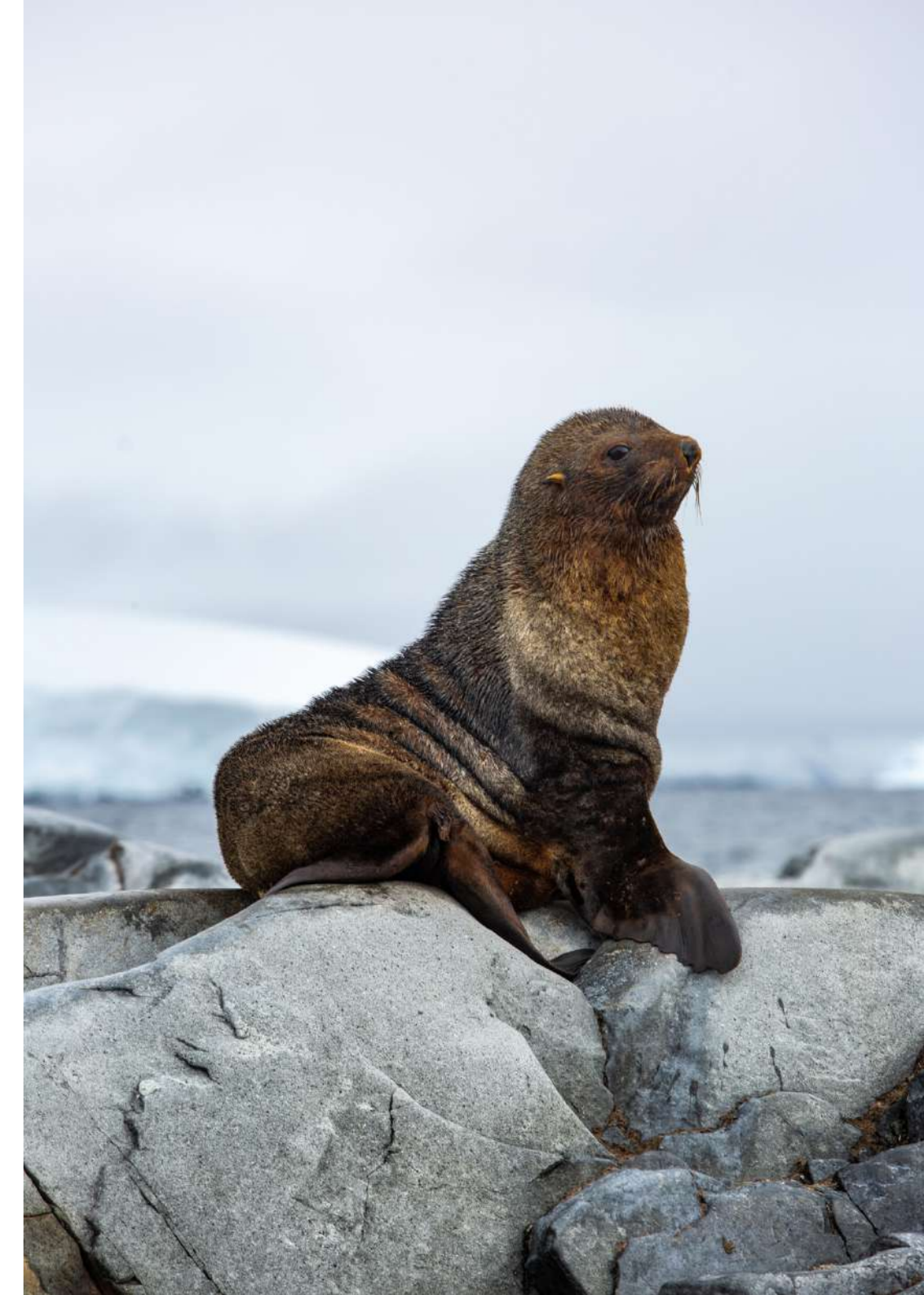
Wind Speed: 20 knots NE

Barometer: 979

Air Temp: 4°C

with such pressure that air bubbles are squeezed out of the ice. These air bubbles act as a prism through which wavelengths of light refract; without air bubbles, the light penetrates deeper into clear ice and refracts back only blue light waves, giving clear ice its blue hue.

Back onboard, Captain Artem welcomed us aboard and we toasted to a successful voyage before dinner and stumbling back to our cabins for a well-deserved sleep.



# Paradise Bay & Cuverville Island

DAY 3 | Sunday 29 January 2023

Position at 0700 on Jan 29

Latitude: 64° 50.36'S

Longitude: 063° 58.08'W

Course: 122°

Speed: 5.4 knots

Wind Speed: SSW

Barometer: 968

Air Temp: 6°C

The first view of Antarctica is always an iceberg. It may be a monolith hovering on the horizon, a barely discernible spectre looming out of the mist, or perhaps a sun-spangled, dazzling icon marking the gateway to this new world. It will undoubtedly be icebergs that leave the most lasting impressions on the imagination of visitors.

—Mark Jones, Wild Ice

What an outstanding morning for us early birds: whales close to the ship, a little bit of warm sunshine shining through the clouds, and lots of different sized icebergs as we entered Paradise Bay.

We had our usual nice big breakfast to prepare for our morning out, then we jumped in the Zodiacs to step foot on the Antarctic continent for the very first time. As we were getting out, humpback whales appeared in the distance, and we couldn't resist the urge to hang around in the Zodiacs and watch them as they passed by. It was fantastic to hear them blow as they came up to the surface to breathe, and we were even lucky enough to witness one of them slap the water with their flipper - such a great sighting.

After that, we were ready for the continental landing. The amazing expedition staff brought us ashore and we were welcomed to the beach by a group of lovely gentoo penguins. It was a great feeling to step on the seventh continent and walk around the beach with an awesome view of the glacier.

After a short walk on the continent, we got back into the Zodiacs to navigate around Paradise Bay and Skontorp Cove. First, we passed by the Argentinian Antarctic base, Brown Station, where scientists and officers from the naval forces spend the summer undertaking scientific research and maintenance of the buildings, among other tasks. Snorkellers were exploring the waters alongside the shore close to the base, looking for wildlife that live beside the coastline. As we continued navigating, we spotted an Antarctic cormorant colony. Adults and chicks were in their nests, but we could also see some recently independent juveniles hanging around the colony. The juveniles have more brown-coloured feathers than mature adults. Finally, right around the corner from the colony, the awesome Glacier Ventisquero Astudillo came into view, as well as lots of icebergs of different sizes and shapes.

Our Zodiac drivers navigated slowly around the clear waters and icebergs with the mountains and the glacier behind, giving us incredible feelings of serenity and contentment. We took deep breaths, soaking it all in, and turned to one another in awe with huge smiles on our faces.

We went back to the ship and got changed into our swimming suits for the polar plunge. Woohoo!!! What a great feeling to plunge into the cold water! We had a blast in Paradise Bay, ending with a thrilling salty bath in the ocean.

We sailed south towards Cuverville Island, where we set off for our afternoon landing. The weather changed considerably, and we had to wear lots of warm layers. We landed amidst a large colony of gentoo penguins – they were everywhere! There were some penguins laying on the beach, some coming out of the water to go back to their nests and some coming down the hill to go out to sea. Those of us using binoculars, or with the zoom of our cameras, were finally able to see the small chicks. It was snowing and the wind picked up from time to time, and you could tell the chicks in the nests were hiding from it by huddling down in between the legs of their parents. It is always a fantastic experience to stand by a penguin colony and observe them.

What a wonderful day it was! We finished the day with a nice recap full of information on icebergs, penguins and seals, then shared an early dinner to prepare for an early wake-up call.



# Polar Plunge

DAY 3 | Sunday 29 January 2023









# Lemaire Channel, Penola Strait, Port Lockroy

DAY 4 | Monday 30 January 2023

Position at 0700 on Jan 30

Latitude: 65°04.02'S

Longitude: 063°56.29'W

Course: Navigation in Lemaire Channel  
Speed: 2.3 knots

Wind Speed: SSW  
Barometer: 975

Air Temp: 2°C

In many ways, the Antarctic is a world of suspended animation. Suspended between outer space and the fertile continents. Suspended in time – without a local civilisation to make history.

—Diane Ackerman

We had a quiet wake-up call from Rodger at 6:30am informing us that due to low visibility we had not reached Lemaire Channel until now. The good news was that for those of us who like to sleep in a little, we were able to see the 11-kilometre-long Lemaire Channel while eating our breakfast.

Discovered by Dallman's German expedition in 1873-1874, the Lemaire Channel was not actually transited until 1898 when the Belgium explorer Gerlache travelled through and decided to name it after another Belgium explorer Charles Lemaire, who was exploring Congo at the time.

As we were delayed in reaching the Lemaire Channel, the morning's Zodiac cruise was replaced by a cruise around the Penola Strait, which was our southernmost point on this trip. It was very atmospheric with ice floes and snow falling outside, gradually accumulating on the deck. As the ship slowly turned around and headed north back up through the Lemaire Channel we could occasionally see towering peaks peering through the low cloud base. We had a couple of humpback whales that seemed to be following us as we slowly weaved our way through the narrowest spot of 0.8 kilometres. Weddell seals were spotted on ice floes, along with gentoo penguins, giant petrels, Antarctic terns and kelp gulls.

As we left the Lemaire Channel, the low clouds seemed to lift and when we finally arrived at Port Lockroy, sun shone down on the tiny little base and the great vistas of the mountains behind.

Port Lockroy, based on the north-western shore of Wiencke Island in the Palmer Archipelago, boasts the most operational southerly post office and museum in the world. Many postcards and memorabilia were purchased, all documented by our photographer Pia. Outside the base, the base's staff closely monitored us as we walked right by nesting gentoo penguins. Eggs and nearly hatched gentoos could be seen. The other half of the afternoon was shared with a trip around to nearby Jougla Point, where more gentoo penguins could be found along with cormorants, giant petrels, Antarctic terns and kelp gulls.



# Mikkelsen Harbour, Spert Island

DAY 5 | Tuesday 31 January 2023

Position at 0800 on Jan 31

Latitude: 63°54.87'S

Longitude: 060°47.73'W

Course: 350

Speed: 3.01 knots

Believe me my young friend, there is nothing, absolutely nothing, half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats... simply messing.

—Water Rat to Mole from Wind in the Willows

Day five of our amazing Antarctic voyage. We were awoken at 07:00 am by the dulcet tone of our Expedition Leader Roger's voice. Breakfast at 07:30 am then onto our first landing of the day.

Our ship the *Sylvia Earle* anchored off the small island of D'Hainaut in Mikkelsen Harbour. Originally chartered by the French Antarctic Expedition 1908-10 under Jean-Baptiste Charcot and named by the sixth Chilean Antarctic Expedition in 1952 for Lieutenant Ladislao D'Hainaut.

There are a number of shallow reefs in the waters surrounding the island hence our Zodiac drivers were on the lookout for rocks as we rode the Zodiacs to the shoreline. Once ashore we had time to free roam and see gentoo penguins, several with chicks, Weddell seals hauled out on the ice, fur seals on rocks, whale bones and a water boat, both remnants of the sealing and whaling industry. Of all the animals whose numbers were decimated by these industries, the fur seal numbers have recovered better than any other animal. The snorkel and kayak teams had time to explore the island before completing their activities.

Over lunch we repositioned to Spert Island for an afternoon Zodiac cruise. Conditions were in total contrast on the southern side of the island where our ship anchored to the conditions on the north. Ninety-six of us, adventurous types, set out on ten Zodiacs. We enjoyed the sight of two humpback whales as we cruised across to the coast of the islands. Many fur seals were hauled out onto the rocks, a leopard seal was sighted in the water and several species of birds had taken flight. Cruising past the passages between the series of islands we stopped to watch the swell of the ocean pounding through, making it very clear why we were staying on the outside of the islands today.

Cruising around to the north side of the islands our first sight was a beautiful natural arch and quite a lot of swell. This is where our Zodiacs proved to be the perfect vessels for these conditions. They are low to the ocean and ride the conditions.

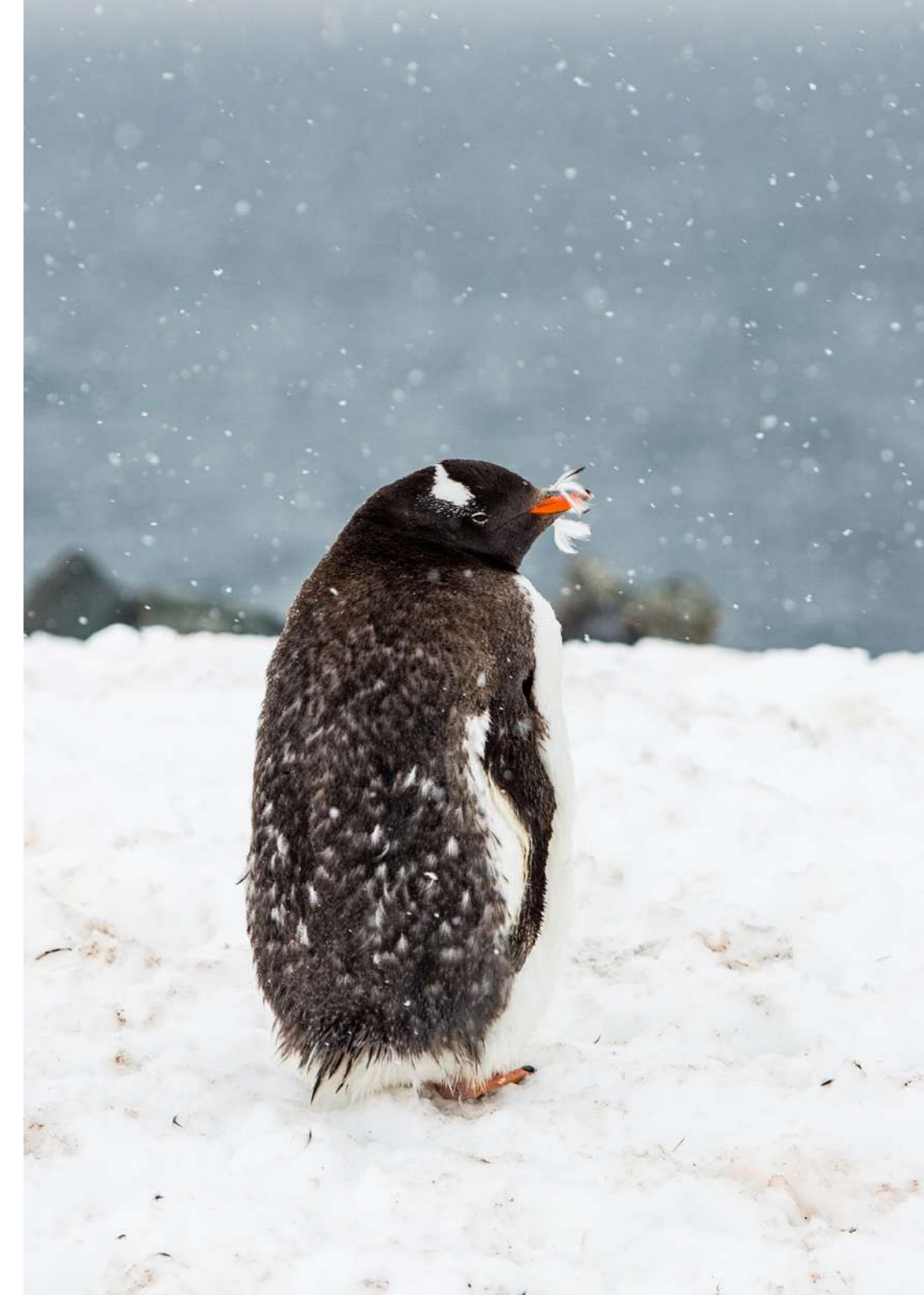
The kayakers were out on the water again, exploring the southern side of the islands. They poked their noses around to the northern side and realised very quickly why they were not venturing any further.

Wind Speed: 9 knots NE

Barometer: 982

Air Temp: 3°C

Back on board the Tektite Bar was buzzing with conversation on our day's activities. This was followed by our recap and briefing presented by members of the Expedition Team. Next, dinner and time to relax.



# Astrolabe, Gourdin Island, Hope Bay

DAY 6 | Wednesday 01 February 2023

Position at 1000 on February 01

Latitude: 63°08' S

Longitude: 058°21.8' W

Course: 060°

Speed: 7.9 knots

Wind Speed: 12 knots NW

Barometer: 977

Air Temp: 4°C

Antarctica is a separate world. One can feel its presence in the approaches, sailing south from more temperate climates. Standing on deck, one may follow the reeling albatross, feel the drop in temperature, the bite of the wind and the motion of the waves. Yet it is the presence of ice, from the first occasional fragments, escalating in shape, form, and frequency, and finally dominating all else, that brings assurance of arrival in Antarctica.

—Mark Jones, *Wild Ice: Antarctic Journeys*, 1990

We woke up to the sight of Astrolabe Island, with its steep and ice-covered cliffs wrapped in mystical clouds and mist. The island mainly consists of volcanic rocks, with one tip marked by some steep pyramid peaks rising out of the ocean, called the Dragon's Teeth.

Astrolabe Island was discovered by the French Expedition of 1837 – 40 under Captain Jules Dumont d'Urville, and named by him for his chief expedition ship, the *Astrolabe*. Originally the *Astrolabe* is an ancient astronomical instrument picturing a handheld model of the universe, consisting of a disk with the edge marked in degrees and a pivoted pointer. In navigation, the *Astrolabe* was used for calculating latitude before the development of the sextant.

In true expedition spirit, the *Sylvia Earle* spent some time with careful exploration of wind and sea conditions around the island. However, weather conditions didn't improve and we headed further to the north-east towards the Antarctic Sound. We sailed past Gourdin Island, one of the northernmost islands of the Antarctic Peninsula. Similar to Astrolabe Island, Gourdin was first discovered by the French Expedition of 1837 – 40 and named after Ensign James Gourdin of the expedition ship *Astrolabe*. Astrolabe Island supports a large breeding colony of about 14,000 adie penguins as well as over 550 pairs of gentoo penguins. It has been identified as an Important Bird Area by Birdlife International, underlining its significance for the penguin populations.

As weather conditions didn't allow for a landing at Gourdin Island, we turned eastward and headed around Cape Dubouzet into the Antarctic Sound. The Antarctic Sound is a stretch of water about 30 nautical miles long and between 7 – 12 nautical miles wide, separating the northeast end of the Antarctic Peninsula from the Joinville Island group further to the north.

As strong winds were sweeping the Antarctic Sound, the *Sylvia Earle* turned into Hope Bay, a protected bay surrounded by steep mountains and the majestic Arena and Depot Glaciers. In protected waters and under blue skies, we admired the sun rays reflecting from the white and blue glacier ice and took the perfect occasion for our group photo in front of this stunning scenery.

As we left Hope Bay we sailed past Esperanza Base, a permanent all-year-round Argentine research station. It is one of only two civilian settlements in Antarctica together with the Chilean Villa Las Estrellas. The base was built in 1953 and houses 53 inhabitants in winter, including 10 families and two school teachers. The base was also the birthplace of Emilio Palma, the first person to be born in Antarctica. Since then there have been at least 10 other children born at the base.

As we made our way toward the Weddell Sea, we could see the landscape changing, large glaciers and big icebergs appearing around the ship. The borders of the Weddell Sea are flanked by huge ice shelves which produce the large tabular icebergs that this part of the Southern Ocean is famous for.

In the evening we arrived at Brown Bluff, our landing site for the next morning. Over dinner we watched hundreds of adie and gentoo penguins porpoising around the ship, heading back towards their colonies at Brown Bluff to feed their chicks and await us for our morning landing.

After dinner, we were mesmerised by the singing voices of two extremely talented passengers in the bar. We hope to catch another evening like this at some stage. Stay tuned...



# Brown Bluff & The Naze, Weddell Sea

DAY 7 | Thursday 02 February 2023

Position at 0700 on Feb 02

Latitude: 63°30.06'S

Longitude: 056°57.57'W

Course: Drifting in Brown Bluff

Wind Speed: 7.6 knots E

Barometer: 985

Air Temp: 10°C

Beauty and grace are performed whether or not we will or sense them. The least we can do is try to be there.

—Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

We woke up to a beautiful, sunny day with glassy, calm conditions at Brown Bluff. We couldn't have asked for better weather!

We shared a fantastic morning ashore as Brown Bluff was teeming with wildlife. We even saw our first adelic penguins on land! A few fun facts about adelic penguins: they mainly eat krill but also enjoy fish, cephalopods and amphipods, they can dive up to 175 metres, they usually don't travel far from their colonies to hunt, they are known to walk over 60 kilometres across the sea ice to arrive at breeding sites at the beginning of the season, they lay two eggs between October and November, and breeding duties are shared by both parents. Regarding incubation, the gestation period for the eggs is around 34 days, and the chicks fledge after around 53 days. Their lifespan is 15-25 years, and these guys are the most southerly breeding brushtail penguin. During our time on Brown Bluff, we also saw many fur seals, and a Weddell seal, and some people were lucky enough to observe a leopard seal in the water. The kayakers had one leopard seal swimming around them and some of us saw one devouring a penguin. Leopard seals are similar to cats – they like to play with their prey in a cruel way, throwing around unfortunate penguins and torturing them while they are still alive. When the poor penguin has passed, they skin it by grabbing one end with their sharp teeth and thrashing the penguin side to side till it's just a fleshy carcass with little scaly feet attached.

Next to the hungry leopard seals were many giant petrels, kelp gulls and Wilson's storm petrels waiting for the right moment to scavenge for scraps. On shore, we saw adelic and gentoo chicks with funny-looking patches of fluff and mohawks as they were losing their chick-y down on their way to becoming full-fledged adults. Here the chicks were further on in their development than in other places in the peninsula that we have seen. Some of us got to go on a glacier hike led by Paulina, walking up onto the glacier and hearing all about the geology of the area.

As we repositioned to the Naze, we had the infamous orcas swimming alongside our ship. We really have seen it all now!

In the afternoon, we landed at The Naze, a beautiful long sandy spit in the Weddell Sea. As we walked around, we saw some sleeping Weddell seals, fur seals and some really cool old fossils. A great day all in all!



# At Sea, Whalers Bay; Deception Island

DAY 8 | Friday 03 February 2023

Position at 0900 on Feb 03

Latitude: 62°58.8'S

Longitude: 059°22.2'W

Course: 268°

Speed: 6.2 knots

Wind Speed: 22 knots W

Barometer: 982

Air Temp: 3°C

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.

—T. S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding'

We started our day with an amazing breakfast, as we always do. Unfortunately, the weather did not permit us to do a landing or a kayak tour this morning. Instead, we headed towards Deception Island through the Antarctic Sound and Bransfield Strait.

During the morning onboard the *Sylvia Earle* we enjoyed some wonderful lectures. Paulina shared her endless knowledge about volcanos, geology, and ice. Afterwards, Jack told us the exciting story about Nordenskjold with the cutest animation – loved it! It was truly amazing to hear about how Larson, Andersson and Nordenskjold ended up at the same place at the same time, against all odds, and together survived their long journey.

After lunch, we passed through Neptune's Bellows. What an amazing navigation through this narrow passage. We cruised around the caldera for an hour waiting for the wind to calm down.

We all landed safely in Whalers Bay, welcomed by fur seals on the beach. Some of us headed straight to Neptune's Window for the breathtaking view, while others headed for the whaling station and the "airport". Close to the cemetery we spotted skuas with chicks. Since we were on a beach, Nati conducted the Citizen Science microplastic project with some fellow expeditioners. Thank you so much for participating.

Whalers Bay is now classified as a historic site and monument. The whaling station was occupied in the period 1906 - 1931 and approximately 150 people stayed there during the summer months.

Some of our expeditioners were not impressed by the fact that the whaling nations never cleaned up the remains of the industry, while others found it satisfying to see nature doing its job by slowly erasing the whaler's existence.

Did you know that Baily Head on Deception Island holds the largest chinstrap penguin colony in the Peninsula? Thanks for info, Roger.



After our adventures onshore, we headed back to the *Sylvia Earle* for a hot cup of tea and delicious cookies. The daily recap was full of information and plans for the following day. Nati shared the result of the Citizen Science microplastic project with us, and luckily there was no microplastic in today's samples. She told us how the big microplastic survey helps scientists in their research and how we all can contribute from home or, in fact, anywhere in the world. Dot informed us of the history of the International Geophysical Year and the International Polar Year. Eddie showed us the fish of Antarctica – I love their names: dragon fish, crocodile ice fish, etc..

Listening to the kayaking sisters, Keira and Allegra, singing in the observation lounge gave us a beautiful ending to this wonderful day. Truly amazing! We loved every minute of it. Thank you so much, girls.



# Half Moon Island, Fort Point

DAY 9 | Saturday 04 February 2023

Position at 0700 on Feb 04

Latitude: 62°36.29'S

Longitude: 059°42.11'W

Course: 318°

Speed: 3.6 knots

Wind Speed: 15 knots W

Barometer: 972

Air Temp: 4°C

The test of man's willingness to pull back from the destruction of the Antarctic wilderness is the test also of his willingness to avert destruction globally. If we cannot succeed in the Antarctic we have little chance of success elsewhere.

—Professor Bruce Davis

Slowly the distant mountains came into view through the mist. Enjoying breakfast, we heard that we were in sight of Half Moon Island, one of the South Shetland Islands.

Viewed on the map, it's not hard to see how it got its name. Viewed from the bow of the ship, it had a long sweeping bay that arced from rocky point to rocky point. In the middle of the island, perched above the beach is an Argentine Base, Camorra, currently empty until next summer.

This little island has a healthy colony of chinstrap penguins and some resident fur seals.

The morning expedition was promising to be full of wildlife.

As the kayakers set off on a brave circumnavigation of the island, the Zodiacs began to shuttle us to shore. At the nearby landing site lie the remains of an old water boat used in the era of early whaling operations; it was remarkably preserved considering how close to the water's edge it lay, although it was evident the swell of the sea had done it some damage over the years.

Like a lot of penguin colonies, this site was a hive of activity, noise, and smells, with parents feeding chicks, skuas looking for opportunities for food, and fur seals either lazing on land or lolling about in the shallows.

The kayak group disappeared out of sight around one of the rocky headlands and were seen over an hour later coming around the other side. The snorkel team found a sheltered spot and once again braved the icy waters to view the beauty below. All of us returned to the ship with smiles on our faces, amazed again by what we had seen.

The afternoon outing was a similar story with an abundance of wildlife, but with a dramatically different backdrop. Fort Point is a citadel-like rock formation jutting stoically out from a sandy spit on Greenwich Island. It was not a long reposition to this site, where a huge glacier spilled into the sea in front of the ship and, beyond that, very high mountains disappeared into the mist and clouds above. Spectacular. Our "Plan A" was to land on the beach



and mingle gently around the fur seals, birds and penguins. The waves were, however, dumping onto the sand, and that beach was jam-packed with fur seals and birds. This made landing not possible, so we implemented "Plan B", a Zodiac cruise around the headland. The "rock fort" at this site rises so dramatically out of the sea. A small group of kayakers enjoyed their last paddle of the voyage around the stone giant. The waters here were busy with seals, penguins and, later, even a minke whale was spotted passing through.

This may have been our last outing, but it was by no means our least. What a view!

Our evening back on board was a series of thanks and farewells to the officers, crew and staff of the expedition. Kayakers and snorkelers had their final wrap-ups and toasts too. Then, it was time for the captain's farewell drinks and a lovely last meal.

After dinner, we all gathered to watch a breathtakingly beautiful slide show put together by Pia, our photographer on this voyage. There were audible Oohs and Aahs in the crowd as the images of our fantastic journey reminded us of just how much we had seen and done, as well as the friends we had made.



# Frei, King George Island

DAY 10 | Sunday 05 February 2023

Position at 0800 on Feb 05

Latitude: 62°12'S

Longitude: 058°56'W

Course: Anchor at Frei Station

Wind Speed: WNW

Barometer: 976

Air Temp: 5°C

Antarctica left a restless longing in my heart beckoning towards an incomprehensible perfection forever beyond the reach of mortal man. Its overwhelming beauty touches one so deeply that it is like a wound.

—Edwin Mickleburgh, *Beyond the Frozen Sea*

Our final day together aboard the *Sylvia Earle* was filled with mixed feelings – lots of hope, anticipation, and ambiguity around whether we would be able to disembark on the scheduled day and make it to our connecting flights on time, though some of us were secretly hoping we may be able to spend one more day on board with those we had come to cherish as friends. Many of our fellow expeditioners could be seen eagerly watching the *Greg Mortimer*, our sister ship, which was anchored alongside us, to see if their passengers arrived, which would put us in relatively good stead for our subsequent flight from King George Island.

In the morning, we enjoyed an entertaining virtual tour of the ship with our captain, Artem, and his team, and after packing our bags, we relished one final lunch together before listening to an interesting lecture from Roger and Jack about the Antarctic Treaty and climate change in Antarctica.

We passed time in the afternoon by sharing stories and highlights of our incredible voyage with one another, and in the evening we congregated in the lecture theatre to participate in a very amusing trivia quiz with Tamsin. Congratulations team "shit photography" on the win!

When the green light came through that the scheduled planes had departed Punta Arenas, it was time to load into the Zodiacs for one final ride across the Southern Ocean, on route to our flight back to Chilean Patagonia.

Feelings of gratitude and joy were widespread at the conclusion of our once-in-lifetime Antarctic experience with Aurora Expeditions. Memories were created that will remain with us long after the chill of this magnificent part of the world has left our bones. Many thanks to all who participated.



# Kayaking Log

**Kayak Masters: Vanja, Sigurd, Eamon & Ivan**

Number of Paddlers: 20      Total Paddle Outings: 9      Total Distance Paddled: 50.52 kms

<b>Paddlers:</b>	Alison Brownlie	Cole Rumbough
Kay Soderlund & Peter Steinberg	Boris Gersling	Manisha & Scott Digel
Sara Couch & Earle Baker	Lyn & Dan Terhorst	Moshe Wakil
Douglas Loynes	Stan & Leah Rumbough	Gary Shternfeld
Robert Petty & Carol Hitselberger	Allegra & Kiera Rumbough	

## 28 January 2023, PM: Graham Passage – 5.4 km

Ideal conditions for our first kayak outing. Fitting everyone into their kayaks just before departing the ship, we launched directly from the ship. Sliding out onto the water was what we had all been waiting for, and it was well worth it. Surrounded by huge ice cliffs and mountains in the distance we set out for a leisurely paddle. This was a chance to learn a few paddle tips and get familiar with our kayaks and gear. The ice clung to the walls beside us, we kept our distance. As frozen as this world is it can break off without notice.

Some bergy bits greeted us along the way, and we admired the different colours and shapes of the ice.

If this is what kayaking in Antarctica will be like, we are in for an amazing voyage.

The warmth of the ship awaited us and now we are all set and equipped for our outings tomorrow.

## 29 January 2023, AM: Paradise Harbour – 6.1 km

Paradise Harbour truly lived up to its name today. The sea was calm, the sky was clear, and the wind was no more than a breeze. Perfect. To top it off, most of the group saw a humpback whale as we entered the water.

Cruising along the rocky coastline we could see, hear, and smell the colony of cormorants on the cliffs and the small group of gentoo penguins that gathered around the Argentine Brown base. The rock cliffs here are very colourful. In places they are covered with a bronze lichen and then there are streaks of green malecite. We rounded a corner to one of the most impressive views on the Peninsula. Huge mountains rise out of the bay. Sweeping down the sides of these steep mountains are bright white glaciers that will sometimes break off into the bay. We can see from the fresh blue ice floating around, that it was not too long ago that these glaciers calved some sizeable pieces.

The whale we had spotted earlier was far off in the distance now, out of our range. We returned to the ship via a short landing across from Brown Base. This was our first landing on the Antarctic continent. A short snow fight to commemorate the occasion. A few gentoo penguins appeared out of the water and seemed a little confused at our presence. We left the beach to the little locals. On the way back the ship we spotted a Weddell seal lazing on the snow not too far from where we had landed. Surprises everywhere here. A real paradise.

## 29 January 2023, PM: Cuverville Island – 4.6 km

After such a great morning outing, some of our group decided to savour it and rest for the afternoon. The weather had changed since this morning too. A slight headwind and even snow greeted us as we paddled towards Cuverville Island. It was not a long distance and we took some shelter behind a rocky islet that was home to a large number of Antarctic terns and one lonely gentoo penguin. This islet had the remains of an old wooden water boat used in the early whaling operations. A huge rusty chain was also there as a reminder of those times. Not far along we paddled past a hillside of gentoo penguins. It was surprising how high these little birds would walk up the hill to make a nest. Continuing on, we entered a bay of very large bergy bits or small icebergs that seemed to have been washed into their final resting place, probably grounded on the rocky floor. Keeping our distance we admired these icy sculptures and found a clear path to the main landing site. A very large colony of gentoo penguins was well worth a walk around.

The return to the ship was more direct but still observing the penguins darting in and out of the water around us was special. With the wind behind us, we easily drifted back to the warmth of our vessel.

## 31 January 2023, AM: Mikkelson Harbour – 5.21 km

The weather was changing as we set out this morning. What was once calm and still was slowly turning into a light wind and even some snow. Still, it did not deter our group. We found a small rock islet to paddle to and observe two seals. A Weddell seal was relaxing, and a fur seal was a little curious at our arrival. From here we avoided some hidden rocks to land on the island in Mikkelson Harbour. A group of brave sheathbills soon were exploring on and around our kayaks, not at all concerned about the presence of so many people.

After a short walk to the other side of the island, we saw some remains of a whaling water boat. Some of our team decided to Zodiac back to the ship while the rest took to the kayaks. Rounding the island we weaved in and out of the rocky coastline and soon found ourselves cracking through a small band of brash ice. With the wind and snow behind us, we easily drifted back to the *Sylvia Earle*.

## 31 January 2023, PM: Spert Island – 6.94 km

We were all looking forward to Spert island, it grew larger as we approached and we could see just how tall and steep the rock cliffs were. The ship came in close to shore to avoid the rolling swell. We sent the kayaks off the ship without paddlers, then we got into them from the Zodiac.

Although there was a bit of swell the sea was still glassy smooth. In front was a large glacier with a dramatic backdrop. As we paddled along the rocky coast it was evident that all the swell and wind was on the other side of the peninsula. The channels that looked so inviting to explore before, were now sending out breaking waves to our side of the island. Safety prevailed and we decided not to be squashed on the walls of the narrow channels. After continuing along the peninsula past more channel entrances we made it to the very tip. The swell here was impressive and worth having a little paddle in. Before too long we were happy to turn around and use the power of the water to cruise back to the ship. Another great outing.

## 2 February 2023, AM: Brown Bluff – 8.54 km

Postcard perfect conditions this morning in the Weddell Sea. Brown Bluff rises steeply out of the sea, ominously, we could see and hear the thousands of adelic penguins all gathered along the shoreline. We would visit them at the end, for now there was some superb paddling to do. We set out from the ship aiming for a closer view of the active glacier in front of us. It was clear that this glacier had been busy for eons, carving its way around the back of Brown Bluff, picking up sediment and rock on its journey. A steeper glacier clung to the side of the Bluff like a giant frozen waterfall. We weaved our way through sculptural bergy bits, then a call came through that a leopard seal was closing in on our flotilla. We bunched up into two groups and watched as the streamlined animal swam to a bergy bit near us. He or she was maybe looking for unsuspecting penguins on the ice. The seal was also watching us, but it swam away uninterested in our colourful kayaks. That was a treat. We returned to the shores of Brown Bluff and soon we could see, hear and smell the huge colony of adelic. What a cacophony. At the landing site, the small waves washed us onto the shore where an audience of penguins awaited us. A short stroll around while the kayaks were towed back to the ship. Brown Bluff, fantastic.

## 2 February 2023, PM: The Naze – 2.63 km

This afternoon's paddle was advertised as a short challenging outing in the strong wind that we may have to call off at any time and return to the ship. Still, we had four brave single paddlers that joined two guides to face the elements. We towed the single kayaks to the beach below the high point of the Naze. There was relative shelter there, as well as a surprised fur seal further down the beach.

It was easy paddling with the wind as we drifted from iceberg to iceberg. Occasionally we would get some shelter behind a larger berg and sit and admire it before moving on to the next. To finish we individually drifted onto the safety Zodiac and returned to the ship with the string of red kayaks bobbing behind. Exhilarating.

## 4 February 2023, AM: Half Moon Island – 7.8 km

We had ambitions to circumnavigate the island this morning. The wind was up a little so we would assess it on the go. After rounding the first headland we found some shelter amongst the rocks, some fur seals did also. Half-moon has a decent chinstrap penguin colony on this headland, and we saw a lot of swimming and resting on the rocks. The far side of the island was more exposed to the wind and some swell. The team all decided to push on for a few kilometres, knowing the wind would eventually be behind us. Beautiful chunks of blue ice littered this side and soon would join the ice gathered on the beach. The great thing about circumnavigating an island is the ever-changing view and sense of achievement. As we rounded the last rocky point, seeing the ship again with huge snow mountains behind it, was also a comforting sight. A real sea kayaking outing this morning with a bit of everything.

## 4 February 2023, PM: Fort Point – 3.3 km

This afternoon's outing was a bonus. We arrived at Fort Point and decided it was too dramatically impressive to pass up. The sea was calm but with a wide rolling swell. We sent the kayaks off the aft of the ship and entered them from the Zodiac while we floated. There was so much wildlife on the beach that nobody could land. The waters off the coast were also teeming with life; curios seals cruising passed, penguins darting below and many

birds flying by to check us out. The steep cliffs of Fort Point loomed above us as we negotiated the gaps between rocks. This was a new spot to paddle for all our team and a great finish to a wonderful trip with such variety. Tonight, we would meet to toast our journey together and farewell the friends we had made. Thank you all.







# Snorkel Log

**Snorkel Guide: Anais Poulalion & Eddie Hauzer**

Number of Snorkels: 5                      Total Outings: 7

**Snorkellers:**  
Kerry Kaylegian  
Catherine Daley

Pauline Ohlson  
Edward Dudley  
Alan Fine

## 28 January 2023, AM: Hydruga Rocks

This was an exciting day – busy, but incredible. Yesterday, we landed in Frei after a day of being unsure if we were going to make it. The entire Aurora team came ashore to receive us and take us to the ship.

After a welcome meeting, briefings and vacuum activities, we finally met our snorkelling guides, Eddie and Ana. They briefed us about the entire program as well as our start time for the following day at 8am.

There we were, in the mudroom fitting our gear in order to check out Hydruga Rocks.

First, we landed ashore and, while our guides went out to scout the place, we went for a walk around the landing site to observe chinstrap penguins, shags, skuas and seals.

Then, we went to a small bay close to the *Sylvia Earle*, where we could see fur seals, sea angels and penguins under water.

The checkout was hard, but Eddie and Ana were there for us the whole time, remaining consistently attentive to us, explaining step by step all the new aspects of snorkelling in the freezing water of Antarctica.

## 29 January 2023, AM: Brown Station / Paradise Bay

We kept saying that we were the luckiest group ever, not just because our trip wasn't called off and we could fly from Punta Arenas to King George Island, but also because on this day we jumped into the Zodiac for our first continental landing, plus we saw four humpback whales! It was so amazing and simply wonderful to watch them swimming around, feeding, and when suddenly one of them was right in front of our Zodiac showing its fluke, we could hardly believe our eyes!

We headed over to our first continental landing site, which, for many of us, was the seventh continent we were to visit in the world, and we made our first step onto it! We found out that the group of scientists at Brown station, an Argentinean base, had arrived there just two days before us, so we could not visit. Nevertheless, we made a short landing in front of a massive glacier in the area of the site opposite the station.

Later on, Ana and Eddie picked us up and we went in front of the Station to snorkel with penguins. It was incredible there – we saw some penguins under the water, and we ended up staying 25 minutes in the water!!

Back on board, we prepared for the polar plunge, which turned out to be a piece of cake for our snorkelling group.

We then headed to Cuverville Island for an afternoon of admiring penguins, but this time on land.

## 30 January 2023, PM: Port Lockroy / Jougla Point

The excitement was high on today, as we had two landings planned and we were also going to be able to go snorkelling. After lunch, the girls from Port Lockroy gave us a briefing about what they do and how they manage to spend the entire summer on the base taking care of the museum and the shop. Yes, there is a shop in Antarctica! They have many things on offer and they use the profits from the shop to keep the base running. There is also a post office on site, which is the southernmost post office in the world, where we could send postcards to our loved ones – fingers crossed they will arrive in the next... three or four weeks.

Then, we stopped at Jougla Point, which is just in front of Port Lockroy. There, we found big whale bones, a gentoo penguin colony nesting, as well as nesting imperial cormorants.

To end our excursion day Eddie and Ana took us to a little bay where we could swim with penguins! This was an amazing moment, with the whole place just for us.

We had the honour to have Sigurd, one of the kayak guides, looking after us as our safety boat driver.

When we heard that we would have a BBQ in the evening, we couldn't wait!

## 31 January 2023, AM: D'Hainaut Island, Mikkelsen Harbour, Trinity Island

This was a cold day, but it did not stop us intrepid snorks! We visited a small landing site named Mikkelsen Harbour at the bottom of Trinity Island which was lined with ice cliffs. We saw some Antarctic terns, kelp gulls, gentoo penguins, skuas, and snowy sheathbills. They were on our Zodiacs playing like "round and round the tree", which was funny. From the other side of the island, we found six Weddell seals and many fur seals. There were huge whale bones and the wreck of a wooden boat.

After an hour of having a lovely wander around, Eddie and Ana picked us up to go to the other side of the site for snorkelling. We went over to a petite bay right below the Weddell seals. We could see ctenophore and salp, a ton of krill (many different types of them) and a small orange fish that the guides identified as a young notothenid.

We were lucky to have Jeb, the Zodiac manager, looking after us as our safety boat driver.

It was snowing throughout the whole of our operation, so we decided to call ourselves "snowy snorkellers". What a great morning!

## 2 February 2023, AM: Brown Bluff

Sometimes it is challenging to explain what we are experiencing within our group throughout the voyage. On this day we snorkelled in the Weddell Sea, something that is really uncommon. To get into the Weddell Sea the captain has to be sure about the wind to guarantee our return and Captain Artem is such a good sailor that he managed to take us there to enjoy the place and got us back to South Shetland Island safely.

We landed to see many fur seals and adelic penguins, some of whom were molting and getting ready to spend their winter in the water.

After an hour of exploring, our snorkelling guides picked us up to experience snorkelling with ice. Before we started, Eddie and Ana showed us a leopard seal feeding. It was slapping a penguin on the water, and Eddie explained to us that that is a common behaviour for them to rip the meat like that, after which many birds take advantage to feed themselves with the leftovers.

Following a briefing about what we should do if we encounter a leopard seal, we jumped into the Weddell Sea to have our cold weather bath.

We started our snorkelling around a growler, which is an iceberg a metre in height and less than five metres in length. Then, we continued towards the border of the brush ice. It was an amazing experience hearing the crunch of the air popping within the ice and feeling the 1 degrees Celcius water. We could see salps, jelly fish and krill.

After close to 25 minutes of swimming, we went back to our Zodiac and some of us practised our kicking method to launch ourselves into the vessel. We were getting better and better, and Ana and Eddie were very proud of us.

Heading back to the *Sylvia Earle*, we enjoyed the penguins jumping and swimming around us.

## 3 February 2023: Whalers Bay / Deception Island

Who would have thought that someday in our lives we would be swimming in the caldera of an active volcano in Antarctica? Well, we did it.

Deception Island is not like the other places we have visited. It is full of whaling-era history. On our way to the landing site, we could see the steam rising on the beach and detect the smell of sulfur. The buildings, silos and the wrecks of small boats were impressive. We could walk up to Neptune's Window, which has a great rocky shape.

One hour later, Eddie and Ana collected us to show us the place they had found for us. Every day while we are enjoying the landing they were off exploring and searching for the best snorkelling place for us. Today was pretty special, not only because we could see the remnants of the whaling era on land, but also because we could see it under water! We snorkelled over whale bones, and we could observe the interesting variety of rocks – the geology of the place is awesome.

## 4 February 2023: Half-Moon Island

Our last session of snorkelling was special. We swam around the outside of Half Moon Island, which gets its name because it actually looks like a half-moon in front of a massive glacier – so spectacular.

Before putting our fins in the water, we stopped by the landing site to see some chinstrap penguins, skuas, Antarctic terns and a lot of fur seals.

There we were in our Zodiac, our personal and private Zodiac with Ana and Eddie. Jeb was our safety boat driver, and he had everything ready for our last quick dip.

We found orange starfish, some fish that we thought were Antarctic cod or Antarctic spiny plunderfish. The different types of seaweed flowing back and forth with the swell were magic to watch. We felt like we were part of the Southern Ocean.

This program went well above our expectations. We learnt how to use the dry suit, suit ourselves up on our own, feel the cold water on our faces and to kick out of the water to get into the Zodiac. Now we know a little bit more about what is under the surface of Antarctica's waters and all the small things that we can see when we focus our sight, train our eyes, relax, and simply enjoy the wonders of snorkelling.

We are very happy to have been able to share this trip with you all – you really rocked in improving your techniques and we hope that now you are going home as Antarctic Underwater Ambassadors. Keep snorkelling and finding new exciting and colourful creatures.

Thanks for letting us be part of your Antarctic voyage.

Your snorkelling guides, Eddie and Ana.





## Bird and Mammal Sightings

Bird Species	January					February				
	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5
Gentoo Penguin		•	•	•	•	•				•
Chinstrap Penguin	•	•	•					•	•	
Adelie Penguin				•		•				
Giant Petrel	•	•	•			•	•			•
Antarctic Petrel				•						
Cape Petrel			•	•	•	•			•	•
Snow Petrel						•	•			
Antarctic Fulmar (Southern)						•	•		•	•
Wilson's Storm-petrel			•		•	•	•			•
Imperial Cormorant (blue-eyed)		•	•	•	•					
American Sheathbill (Snowy)	•	•		•				•		•
Skua (Brown and/or South Polar)		•	•	•				•	•	•
Kelp Gull		•		•	•			•	•	•
Tern (probably mostly Antarctic)			•	•	•			•	•	•

Mammal Species	January					February				
	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5
Antarctic Fur Seal		•			•		•	•	•	
Southern Elephant Seal										•
Weddell Seal		•		•	•		•			
Leopard Seal			•							•
Humpback Whale	•									
Orca		•	•	•		•	•			
Long-finned Pilot Whale							•	•		



## Citizen Science Log

Project Name	How many times was this project done during this voyage?
Secchi Disk	4
Cloud Survey	2
Snow Algae	2
Seabird Survey	1
Microplastic Survey	1
Happy whale	6
Zooplankton observation under microscope	2



from/to King George Island

Total distance: 1053 nm





## Expeditioners:

Stacie Abraham	Peter Custis	Carol Hitselberger	Patricia Pasternak	Rand Sola
Dennis Abraham	Laura Custis	Karen Hollands	Alan Pasternak	Peter Steinberg
Mike Agnew	Catherine Daley	Steve Hollands	Duncan Peerman	Jens Sundem
Pedro Tomas Allende	Scott Digel	Lawrence Hudson	Bob Petty	Moe Sundem
Ross Appleton	Manisha Digel	Ulla Jensen	Mimi Phu	Danny Terhorst
Earle Baker	Ed Dudley	Manuel Kaulen Westermeyer	Claudia Quiroz	Lynn Terhorst
Bill Becker	David Durant	Kerry Kaylegian	Andrea Ramirez Alvarado	Emilie Tobin
Sue Becker	Debbie Durant	Ray Kenny	Caryl Richards	Linda Toland
Nigel Bett	Michael Ellies	Khoo Khoo	Michael Richards	Mimi Valenti
Barbara Bett	Fiona Elsdon	Karin Khoo	Joyce Rodier	Richard Valenti
Valencia Botha	Davd Elsdon	Kevin Yi Hao Khoo	Joe Rodier	Moshe Wakil
Nic Botha	Felipe Errazuriz Irarrazabal	Barbara Kromka	Michael Rosenbaum	Peggi Watson
Ann Braga	Jim Field	Jens Kronborg	Allegra Rumbough	Cynthia Whitney
Larry Braga	Alan Fine	Lyne Lawler	Kiera Rumbough	Jean Williamson
Donna Briskin	Antonella Gandolini Ambrosoli	Grace Lieberman	Cole Rumbough	Paul Zahra
Ralph Briskin	Boris Gersling	Gerald Lieberman	Stan Rumbough	Steve Zappe
Allison Brownlie	Mark Grisar	Kelley Lieberman	Leah Rumbough	Krista Zappe
Brian Chang	Pablo Guilisasti Gana	Michael Lieberman	Tricia Sargeant	Tere Zegers Vial
Carolyn Chang	Vinitac Gulanikar	Douglas Loynes	Edwin Sargeant	
Nevin Chernick	Avinash Gulanikar	Tony Mansfield	Jamie Seaburg	
Louise Chernick	Karl Hanafin	Richard Ney	Christine Sharp	
Sara Couch	Ellen Hanafin	Pauline Ohlson	Gary Shternfeld	
Trinidad Cruz Fleischmann	Cristian Hargous	Say Hoon Ooi	Kay Soderlund	

## Expedition Team:

Expedition Leader: Roger Kirkwood
Assistant Expedition Leader: Jean-Pierre Els
Onboard Expedition Manager: Justine Bornholdt
Onboard Expedition Manager Trainee: Samantha Deer
Naturalist: Annette Scheffer
Naturalist: Natalia Rosciano
Historian/Naturalist: Dot Robertson
Historian/Expedition Guide: Jack Alscher
Geologist/Naturalist: Paulina Pierzak
Photography Guide: Pia Harboure
Expedition Medic: Belinda Denchfield
Expedition Guide: Tamsin Both
Kayaking Master: Eamon Larkin
Kayaking Guide: Sigurd Davidsen
Kayaking Guide: Vanja Davidsen
Kayaking Guide: Ivan Klochkov
Snorkel Guide: Ana Poulalion
Snorkel Guide: Eddie Hauzer
Zodiac Master: Jeb Pearce
Mudroom/Shopkeeper: Reza Rusooly

## Senior Officers & Heads of Department:

Master: Artem Kolmykov	Executive Chef: Allan Estoque
Chief Officer: Gabriel Eduardo Centella Molina	Sous Chef: Vinay Kumar Singh
Second Officer: Annika Yaneth Bulgin Nuñez de Zinkovskyy	Hotel Controller: Reynaldo Hernandez Cañeda
Safety Officer: Sergio Enrique Saldana Hernandez	Receptionist: Kateryna Tauzhnianska
Bosun: Leo Francis Magnaye Marzan	Receptionist: Jaypee Alota Abonitalla
Ship Doctor: Sofia Cocunubo Castellanos	Head Stateroom Attendant: Sotero (Terry) Agtagma
Chief Engineer: Praveen Kumar Kaushal	Bosun: Leo Francis Magnaye Marzan
First Engineer: Kristofer Al Carpio La Torre	Able Seaman: Raju Choudhary
IT Officer: Nathaniel Buhain Vibares	Able Seaman: Imam Santuso
Hotel Director: Osman Ozpolat	Able Seaman: Nestor Fernandez Arangorin
F&B Service Manager: Balvant Singh	Able Seaman: Rene Balsomo Casipe
Head Bartender: Rajesh Sugreev Murao	Able Seaman: Vladyslav Sinko
Chief Purser: Liza Merillo	Able Seaman: Dragan Zivkovic

## Photography thanks to:

Sigurd Davidsen	Pia Harboure	Eamon Larkin
Vanja Davidsen	Eddie Hauzer	Ana Poulalion





