



Classic Antarctica

On board USHUAIA

Expedition Log

21th – 31th of December 2016

South Shetland Islands and Antarctic Peninsula

MASTER of the VESSEL

Waldemar Wichmann

EXPEDITION LEADER

Monika Schillat

HOTEL MANAGER

Hernán Escudero

CHEF

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GUIDES / LECTURERS

Leonardo González Miri (Assistant Expedition Leader,
Biologist)

Pablo Arias (Guide, Lecturer)

Martin Rosas (Guide, Lecturer)

Alejandro Fazzio Welf (Guide,
Lecturer)

PHYSICIAN

Dilia Martínez Mendez

Itinerary travelled:

21 December 2016: Ushuaia / Tierra del Fuego – Beagle Channel

22 December 2016: Drake Passage

23 December 2016: Drake Passage – Barrientos Island (Aítcho Island Group / South Shetland Islands)

24 December 2016: Hydrurga Rocks, Errera Channel

25 December 2016: Lemaire Channel, Andvord Bay, Neko Harbour

26 December 2016: Brown Station & Skontorp Cove, Gonzalez Videla Station (Paradise Bay)

27 December 2016: Port Lockroy (Goudier Island) & Jougla Point (Wiencke Island), Bancroft Bay

28 December 2016: Whaler's Bay (Deception Island), Yankee Harbour (Greenwich Island)

29 December 2016: Drake Passage

30 December 2016: Drake Passage / Beagle Channel

31 December 2016: Ushuaia / Tierra del Fuego

Total miles travelled: 1605



21st December

Ushuaia Lat. 54°45'S Long. 068°39'W

Wind: no wind, temp: 7°C, rain



M/V Ushuaia at the pier in Ushuaia

Once onboard, we settled into our cabins before gathering in the bar for a Welcome Cocktail. This gave us all a chance to meet our fellow passengers of the USHUAIA and the expedition staff, as well as part of the crew. Before inviting us for a welcoming toast, our Expedition Leader, Monika Schillat also presented our Assistant Expedition Leader and biologist, Leandro Miri and our guides and naturalist, Martin Rosas, Pablo Arias and Alejandro Fazzio Welf. They would help us understand the wonders we were about to explore and give lectures during the trip. Monika also introduced the doctor on board, Dilia Martinez Mendez and our hotel manager Hernán Escudero, who would be in charge of our well-being with a little help from his kitchen, dining room and cabin staff.

Departure was scheduled right after 6:00pm and shortly afterwards the ropes were lifted from the quayside and our expedition ship moved off and headed out into the Beagle Channel to begin the long journey to Antarctica. We would be at sea for two days and two nights, before reaching the South Shetland Islands.

We were sailing through the scenic Beagle Channel, heading for the open Ocean. But there was still more program to come and we had to head back inside for an important briefing on safety and an abandon ship drill. Shortly after, the ship's alarm sounded a signal to practice this emergency evacuation drill. Moving to our cabins, we donned ourselves with the warmest clothes we could find as well as our life jackets and then headed to the muster station, which was the back of the bar. After a roll call, we knew that everybody was acknowledged for and were led to the egg-shaped lifeboats. We felt quite safe but at the same time we were also hoping never have to use them at all.

A nice dinner awaited us shortly after the life boat drill giving a chance for everybody to get a bit more acquainted. The evening had not progressed for long as many went on deck to great scenery of the Beagle Channel, where also the first birds were spotted. The medium sized black browed Albatross, the sooty shearwater as well as the odd magellanic penguin were seen.

22nd December

At Sea – Drake Passage

Wind: North-East 10 knots, Snow, cloudy, air temp: 5°C

Once we had made it through the Beagle Channel the night before, we were on our way to the White Continent, heading South. A gentle sea followed us, the wind blew with 10 knots from the North – East and the day was ideal for our first lectures on board. Soon we grew our sea legs and most of us felt well. Leandro started the conference program with an “Introduction to the Seabirds of the Southern Ocean”, he gave us insights in the unique adaptations, these beautiful birds are equipped with and we couldn’t wait to go out and see them flying. But of course, with this little wind around, there weren’t many birds to be seen.

Soon it was time again for yet another lecture. We gathered in the bar to listen to Martin giving us an introduction to “Antarctic Ice”, which would help us to understand the differences in sea- ice, glacial ice and ice shelves as promised, that we details of the icebergs, once we and all around us grew steadily.

After an afternoon’s invited us back into interesting talk Age of Antarctic gave us stunning Belgian expedition “Belgica”, the first on the western side 1897.



well. We were would go into the different types of would see them life and expectation

snooze, Alejandro the lounge for an about the “Heroic Exploration”. He details about the on board the one to overwinter of Antarctica in

Monika followed with a briefing about tomorrow’s activities. We were making good progress, she said, and it was time to check our gear and get ready for our first landing. The Antarctic Treaty System has strict biosecurity protocols in place in order to avoid the introduction of non-native species, such as propagules, seeds and insects. Invasive animal and plant species pose a threat to Antarctica’s unique environment since slightly warmer temperatures at the Antarctic Peninsula have made them viable. Of course all of us wanted to comply with these simple measures, the Antarctic government had designed.

The evening was rounded with a lovely dinner and a documentary later.

23rd of December

**Drake Passage – South Shetland Islands
Barrientos Island, Aítcho Island Group
Lat. 62°24'S Long. 059°44'W**

Wind: 14 knots ENE temp: 1°C chill factor -5°C, Cloudy, later snow

During the morning hours we got together in the bar and lounge to inspect our equipment and outer layers, and had a look especially at the cuffs, Velcro, pockets, seams and hoods. The hotel staff had provided us with vacuum cleaners, so that we could clean out our camera bags and backpacks as well, boots and walking sticks we would wash this afternoon at the boot washing station next to the landing platform.

Mandatory briefings had to be held this morning. First we were introduced to the zodiacs, a brand of heavy duty rubber boats, which we would use for our excursions. The briefing was all about safety and how to properly use the boats. Rubber boots were delivered, cameras checked, batteries loaded and generally speaking we were preparing now for the big adventure, which awaited us. The second briefing was about the Code of Conduct in Antarctica, on how to be safe and environmentally responsible during our visit. And Monika confirmed the landing for this afternoon and we got very excited.

After lunch land was in sight! We approached the coast of the South Shetland Island!

The jagged mountains and magnificent glaciers of the South Shetlands made a stunning first glimpse of Antarctica. These islands form a volcanic arc due to subduction of ocean crust underneath the Antarctic Continent. They are the southern-most extension of a subduction zone which stretches from the northern end of South America all the way to the Antarctic Peninsula. Separated from the Antarctic Peninsula by the Bransfield Strait, this (335 mile) 540 kilometer-long string of eleven main islands and many smaller rocks lies northeast-to-southwest across the southern end of the Drake Passage. The major islands of the South Shetlands include King George, Nelson, Robert, Greenwich, Livingston, Snow, Deception, Smith and Low Islands.

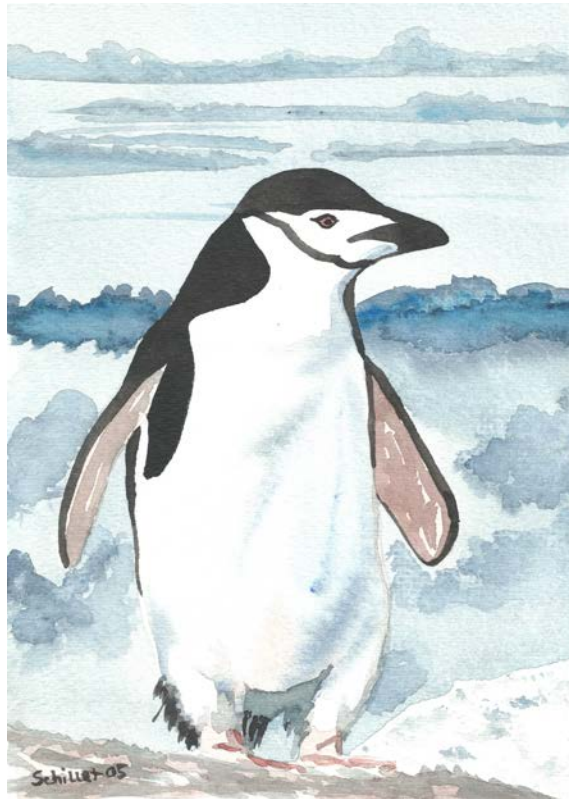
Our guides told us that the Shetlands were the warmest, wettest and most colorful part of Antarctica. The species diversity is enormous. Seabirds, such as pintado, storm, giant, and white-chinned petrels, nest on these islands. Large colonies of chinstrap and gentoo penguins are found on most islands. Elephant and fur seals also use these islands. Historically, this region was the focus of extensive sealing operations in the 1820s. In 1905, the first factory whaling ships anchored in protected bays within the Shetlands. The massive harvest of whales depleted the stock to only 5% of the original population. But our today's focus was all on penguins, and we couldn't wait to see them close up.

Finally it was time for our fist landing and we boarded the zodiacs to go ashore at Barrientos Island in the Aítcho Island group. The name had a funny ring to it, and we were told, that this dramatic series of rocky islands, the H.O. (Aitcho) Island group was charted and named in 1936 by the Discovery Investigations (1925 – 39) for the Admiralty Hydrographic Office. Later, cartographers established the spelling Aitcho instead of using initials and in Argentinean and Chilean charts, they would soon be named mistakenly Aítcho. By then, nobody did remember, where the name had come from and the name stuck. We aimed for the biggest of the islands, called Barrientos. Chinstrap and Gentoo

penguins nest here on gentle slopes, just above the main beach. We were surprised to see them already with chicks. Some of them must have hedged the same day or a day prior to our visit. The chicks were so tiny, that most of them had a tough time holding their heads in position. The parent birds sheltered them from the wind and predators, such as skuas and kelp gulls, which were hovering on top of them.

A group of lazing on the wasn't much they started to if they were going never made it to a got the just buddies

Back on board, in dinner, we got briefing on recap about the Wonderful places the next day. But about penguins be our new best understand both unique adaptations allow



better than most other animals. The more we learned, the more fascinated we were by these tuff little creatures. Good that we would see more of them tomorrow.

After dinner, most of us spent a couple of hours outside. There were humpback whales everywhere. And just, when we decided to call it a day and turn in, yet another group of those gentle giants would show up and invite us to stay a little longer.

24th December

Hydrurga Rocks

Lat. 64°08'S Long 061°37'W

Errera Channel

Lat. 64°41'S Long 062°38'W

Wind: 20 knots ENE temp: 0°C chill factor -8°, Cloudy, later snow

We had been sailing south for the entire night, first passing through the Bransfield Strait and then entering the very scenic Gerlache Strait. Most of us were up since 5 am, as we didn't want to miss anything. The Gerlache Strait is famous for its broad straits, mountainous islands, protected bays,

adolescent elephant seals was beach as well. At first there action to be seen, but soon rise and roar at each other as to do some sparring. They real show fight though and we impression, that they were hanging out in Antarctica.

the evening, just prior to together in the bar for a tomorrow's activities and a experiences, we had just had. were waiting for us again on first we had a lot of questions and felt, that they would soon friends. Leandro helped us to their behaviour and their adaptations.

These them to endure the cold

and narrow channels. A profusion of tall peaks humans have never climbed and vast glaciers flowing inexorably seaward are the physical features here. And there had been more humpback whales to be seen all around our ship. The wind had picked up a bit since yesterday and the sea was choppy for our zodiac ride to a tiny island, called Hydrurga Rocks. It lies east of Two Hummock Island in the Palmer Archipelago, and is named after the leopard seal, *Hydrurga leptonyx*. The island rises to approximately 82 feet (25 meters) above sea level and has a barren, rocky summit. The narrow shingle beach on the northern side of the island led up to snowy slopes, which were not easy to negotiate at times. Weddell seals lazed in the vicinity and there were small patches of chinstrap penguin rookeries on the few areas, which were snow free. We kept our eyes peeled, but couldn't make out any chicks this time. We were of course further South now and the temperature was also colder than in the South Shetland Islands, so it was very likely, that these penguins had started with the breeding later than their relatives up at Barrientos Island.

We avoided steep cliff edges on the way to the other side of the island where we stood for quite a



while watching the busy cormorant colony. And in addition to this blue-eyed shag colony, there were also kelp gulls and skuas nesting on the tiny island. But it was hard to pay attention to them, when two humpback whales passed by slowly. They were so close to the cliffs that we could see their blow holes clearly and even smell their fishy breath. This seemed to turn into a "whale of a day" and we hoped, we might see some more close up in the evening. As we had lunch, captain Wichmann repositioned the USHUAIA further south and deeper into the Gerlache Strait. Monika invited us to participate in a zodiac cruise later this afternoon. We split up into two groups and went cruising with six boats in the very scenic Errera Channel. This narrow passage lies between the western coast of Graham Land and Rongé Island. Huge glaciers flow down the mountain slopes directly into the sea. And today the channel was also littered with beautiful icebergs of different shapes and shades of blue. The sea had turned into a balmy mirror for castellated icebergs floating by as we sped along with the boats. Humpback whales were showing their backs in the distance and we approached them slowly. They were busy feeding in the channel and allowed us to stay in their presence this beautiful afternoon. What a wonderful gift for Christmas! Our conversations in the bar tonight were quite animated and expectation grew about the following day.

December 25th

Lemaire Channel

Lat. 65°06'S Long. 064°04'W

Andvord Bay

Lat. 64°50'S Long. 062°33'W

Neko Harbour

Lat. 64°50'S Long. 062°33'W

Wind: 8 knots, SE temp: 1°C

Today we wanted to reach Petermann Island, south of the Lemaire Channel. Other ships had tried getting there earlier this week with mixed results. Some made it through the channel, negotiating the pack ice, only to have to return immediately, as the ice was closing in after their ship very quickly. Others were stopped by a group of huge icebergs, blocking the southern entrance of the Lemaire Channel and hence making it impossible to go any further. But ice does move and we hoped we might get lucky and make it through the channel and beyond. After breakfast our captain and bridge officers sailed the Ushuaia into the channel southbound, but as we were half through a combination of pack ice and icebergs made it impossible for the USHUAIA to go any further and we had to turn around before manoeuvring would be impossible in amidst the ice.

Cruising the **Lemaire Channel** was awesome though. This 7-mile (11-kilometer) long, one-mile (1.6 kilometer) wide passage running in a northeast-to-southwest direction from Splitwind Island and False Cape Renard to Roullin Point and Cape Cloos, separates Booth Island from the Antarctic Peninsula. The channel was caked with ice and the steep walls covered in massive glaciers. The sights were absolutely stunning.

As we couldn't go any further south, we were heading north instead towards Andvord Bay, a deep fjord indenting towards the east of the Antarctic Peninsula. A zodiac cruise was offered around some amazingly huge castellated icebergs and in search of wildlife. Crabeater seals were hauling out on some ice-floes and we marvelled at the age of some of these heavily sculpted icebergs. Towers and caves, columns and terraces were part of their appearance. Some parts disintegrated as we floated by and reminded us to keep a safe distance from the frozen beauties.

Later this afternoon, our expedition staff invited us to land at **Neko Harbour**, further inside of Andvord Bay, where we were to step onto the continent proper. We landed at a sandy beach and went up onto the snow covered beach terrace. Most of us went up and around the elevated Gentoo penguin colony and had a beautiful, expansive view of the Gerlache Strait in the distance and also over the glaciers running into Andvord Bay just in front of us. The afternoon stayed sunny and we enjoyed our first continental landing in awe and silence.

At dinnertime we turned back to the ship, where the crew was waiting with a special surprise for us. They had prepared an Argentinean barbecue, also called *asado* for us. And before we started with the main course, they were giving out *choripanes*, tasty sausages in French bread. A general party spirit took hold of us. Life was good!

December 26th

Brown Station

Lat. 64°53'S Long. 062°52'W

Skontorp Cove

Lat. 64°53'S Long. 062°52'W

Gonzalez Videla Station/ Waterboat Point

Lat. 64°49'S Long. 062°51'W

Wind: no wind, temp: 6°C, first sunny, later slight cloud cover

Shortly after breakfast our captain sailed the USHUAIA into Paradise Bay, heading for our next destination, which would be the Argentine summer station “**Brown**”. It is located on the Antarctic mainland and would give us once more the opportunity to set foot on the Antarctic continent. There was nobody home, as the base personnel would only arrive towards the end of January. The 100-165 foot (30-50 meter) slope behind the station was covered in deep snow and afforded us a chance to hike upward for spectacular views over the entire bay. From the station we started to do a zodiac cruise along a glacial front in **Skontorp Cove**. The bay was full of grand icebergs and ice-floes. There was no wind, and a glorious sun was shining as well. This was paradise no doubt. On our way along the rocky coast, we also encountered two shag colonies, overlooking the bay. Juvenile shags followed us for a while and tried to keep up swimming with the zodiacs. We felt that we would easily be overcome by sensory overload. Eyes feasted on a glittering array of bouncy penguins, colossal icebergs, and mind-boggling scenery. And on top of everything the sun was burning. We were also still searching for the elusive leopard seal, but once again we had no luck. The bay showed signs of the presence of whales though, but we didn't see any, just the whale pooh on the surface. It made us happy nevertheless to see, that the whales seemed to find a lot of food in this area. And hence we had witnessed before how much they could take in with just one scoop and mouth full, we weren't really surprised that they had left the water's surface decorated.

After a short break and just before we went for another tasty meal, our expedition staff invited us to the bar for a toast on our wonderful voyage. The barmen had served Champaign and juice for our younger travelers.

So it was time for a short landing at yet another station. This time it was an inhabited one, “**Gonzalez Videla**”, also located at Paradise Bay. The base was Chilean and the friendly base personnel invited us into their quarters and little museum, offering shopping opportunities, tea and cookies. It was great to see a station from the inside and to have an idea, how they spend their month in Antarctica. A watch-tower offered great views over the bay with its huge glacial fronts and icebergs. The station was also surrounded by a huge colony of Gentoo penguins. Most of them were sitting on two eggs. Their chicks had not hatched yet and we thought that it must have been colder here than on the other spots we had been. Or maybe the birds just had to wait longer for the snow to melt and free their nesting sites. We also hoped to see an almost white Gentoo penguin, which nests here, but the light blond penguin celebrity was out fishing, when we arrived and didn't return in time for us to see it. What a pity! Leandro showed us some pictures later though. If he hadn't, we wouldn't have believed, that he had existed.

Just before dinner, our expedition staff invited us to the bar for a briefing about tomorrow's activities and gave us insights about lots of different aspects, of what we had just seen. Alejandro told us about the history of the stations. As early as 1921-1922, the Britons Bagshawe and Lester overwintered at Waterboat Point (now Gonzalez Videla Station). They were part of the British Imperial Expedition under the leadership of John Cope. Their Gentoo penguin study was the first in-depth account of penguin breeding biology ever accomplished. Their two-man expedition also was the smallest to ever overwinter in Antarctica. A little later it was Leandro's turn. He shared secrets of the penguins of the area and all too soon it was time for dinner again.

After dinner, we watched a documentary about the British Antarctic Museum and Post Office "Port Lockroy" with the title "Ice Cool Britannia" and felt well prepared for tomorrow's visit there.

December 27th

Port Lockroy / Goudier Island

Lat. 64°49'S Long. 063°30'W

Jougla Point / Wiencke Island

Lat. 64°49'S Long. 063°30'W

Bancroft Bay / Wilhelmina Bay

Lat. 64°30'S Long. 061°46'W

Wind: no wind, light cloud cover, later sunshine, temp: 2°C

Breakfast was a little earlier today, as we were awaiting base personnel from Port Lockroy to come on board and give us a little introduction to their base and the history of the station.

The operation Tabarin hut on Goudier Island has been restored into a Museum, and we almost felt, we would be able to go back in time and experience, what life must have been like back in the fifties of last century. Woolen underwear was hanging over the old oven in the kitchen, newspapers from the same time were laid out in the living room and a still young Queen Elizabeth smiled at us from a black and white photograph. The science room exhibited some of the equipment, which had been used later in the sixties for upper atmospheric research and in the darkened radio room, we could hear the same crackle, the radio operator might have heard during World War II, scanning the radio channels to listen in and hopefully detect possible enemy movements in time. The first group went to visit the station first and send their postcards from there.

The rest of us went first to Jougla Point, on Wiencke Island. We landed on the boulders and rocks, which slope upward to a flat area about 33 feet (10 meters) above sea level, then rises to an elevation of about 330 feet (100 meters). Inland, there is a broad panorama of steep and rugged mountain slopes, topped with glaciers. Snow cover was still considerable as we made our way towards some high outcrops, which were occupied by breeding Gentoo penguins. Several large glaciers flow into Alice Creek, east of Jougla Point. This small bay was still covered with fast ice and Weddell seals used the area to haul out. Another attraction were the blue-eyed shags nesting on the outer edges of Jougla Point. They were skittish and defensive, so we took great care not disturb them. From a safe distance we could make out up to three chicks in their nests. The youngsters were demanding to be fed. The beach was strewn with whalebones and we also found Xanthoria and

other crustose lichens on exposed rocks near the Gentoo colony. Soon it was time to change over and the second group visited the station on **Goudier Island**, while the first one came to see **Jougla Point**.

During lunch and for some hours more, the captain repositioned the USHUAIA north through the Gerlache Strait towards Wilhelmina Bay. There we would go for one last zodiac cruise in amongst icebergs and glaciers, hoping to find some more whales and seals as well. Sometime after 2 o'clock a call came from the bridge "Orcas at Starboard Side!" There was a group of at least eight individuals passing by close to the ship. No doubt they were in a hurry, but still it was great just to get a glimpse of them. Later and already in the vicinity of Wilhelmina Bay, we sighted dozens of humpback whales feeding in the Gerlache Strait. They seemed undisturbed by us passing by. What a sight!

Zodiac cruises in **Bancroft Bay**, at the northern end of Wilhelmina Bay started at around five o'clock for the first group and then at six for the second one. It was marvelous. Beautiful ice sculptures awaited us outside and tons and tons of hungry humpback whales, which were feeding all around us. They moved in groups of three and four, accompanied by seabirds. The intrepid birds were snatching the leftovers of the feast. Some of them were even bold enough to sit directly on the whale's heads. There must have been a huge quantity of krill available today. It was amazing to watch these gentle giants forage the sea in such great numbers.

After dinner, Monika invited us for a briefing about tomorrow's activities into the bar. We were going north again, heading for the famous Deception Island, where some of us were planning on having a polar plunge next day. A short documentary about the island's history rounded the briefing up.

December 28th

Deception Island: Whaler's Bay

Lat. 62°59`S Long. 060°34`W

Greenwich Island: Yankee Harbour

Lat. 62°32`W Long. 059°47`W

Wind: no wind, temp: 2°C, slight cloud cover, later sunny

Right after breakfast our bridge team sailed the USHUAIA through Neptune's Bellows, the narrow opening into the ring-shaped island of Deception. The navigation was spectacular to see, as our captain had to hug his starboard side and went very close to the cliffs with nesting Pintado Petrels. We stood on deck as our ship went through the narrow gap. Leandro told us, that Neptune's Bellows is named so because of the violent winds that sometimes blow across the mouth of the entrance.

Almost immediately afterwards it was time for our morning's landing at Whaler's Bay on the inside of the island. **Whaler's Bay** is the small bay first encountered to starboard after passing through a narrow opening called Neptune's Bellow's. Deception Island is ring shaped and 9.2 miles (14.8 kilometers) in diameter, enclosing the large harbor of Port Foster, which is 5.8 miles (9.3 kilometers) long from northwest to southeast and more than 3.5 miles (5.6 kilometers) wide. The remains of an abandoned British Antarctic Survey base are located between the hangar and the crumbling boilers from the Norwegian whaling operation. We walked on the broad and flat cinder beach, which extends over 330 feet (100 meters) from the water's edge to the steep inner wall of the caldera. The beach was strewn with volcanic ash and cinders of various sizes, which cover the old barrels, equipment, whalebones, and other debris from the whaling and research groups that once operated

here. Several meltwater streams from the snow and glacier above form channels cutting through the ash. Steam was rising from hot springs along the shoreline and although the shoreline had a strong, sulfurous odor, we all wanted to go in there for a swim. The sun warmed us up nicely and the low tide uncovered a boiling hot beach. Our expedition staff had brought the towels and so there was nothing to stop us from running into the sea and have fun!

We were aware though, that we were swimming in an active caldera. Deception is the largest of three recent volcanic centers in the South Shetlands. The island has erupted in 1800, 1812, 1842, 1871, 1912, 1956, 1967, 1969, 1970 and probably also very many hundred years prior to 1800. A club of brown, south polar, and hybrid skuas went also for a swim. They were cleaning their feathers in a small meltwater lake not far from where we had fun in the water.

Some lonesome Gentoo penguins appeared along the shoreline, where the water was heated and left some boiled krill and brittle stars on the beach.

On our way up to Neptune's Window on the higher slopes, we found patches of *Usnea*, spp. Lichens and *Deschampsia antarctica*, the flowering plant of Antarctica. From up there we had a wonderful view out to the sea, where we could make out the continent in the far distance. As we turned around, we could appreciate the ring-shaped island of Deception in its stark black beauty.

We went back for lunch on the ship and the captain sailed the USHUAIA for the next four hours north to Greenwich Island, another island of the South Shetland Island group.

Our last landing took us to **Yankee Harbour** on Greenwich Island. This small harbor on the southwest side of Greenwich Island is entered between Glacier Bluff and Spit Point. It was well known to American and British sealers as early as 1820. The harbor is enclosed by a recurved, coarse, gravel and cobble bar. A trypot from early sealing activities could be seen on this spit. We went up over well-developed raised beaches and raised beach terraces to see some young elephant seals lazing in the sunshine and also found much space to roam freely on this last outing of our voyage. We marveled at a navigational mast that resembled a railroad marker. Gentoo penguins nested on the terraces above the landing beach and a large glacier rimmed the east and north side of the bay. All too soon we had to go back to the ship and prepare for the crossing of the Drake Passage.

Breakables were placed in the drawers or on the floor in our cabins, we retrieved our expedition gear from the handrails and some of us also had to take some sea-sickness medication – just in case! We were promise though, that the crossing would be reasonably smooth with a light westerly wind, making the ship roll just a bit.

December 29th

Drake Passage

Wind: 20 knots, WSW temp: 0°C

We headed north again through the Drake Passage and shortly after breakfast, our lecture program started again. Pablo gave us an interesting talk about the "Antarctic Treaty" and how it works these days. It essentially holds in abeyance territorial claims made earlier last century by the United Kingdom, Chile, Argentina, Norway, Australia, New Zealand and France. No one owns Antarctica, and everyone is given access if they can get there safely. As of June 1997, there were 26 consultative – or voting – parties in the Antarctic Treaty system, generally those countries which have research

stations and are doing significant scientific work in Antarctica; another 17 countries – non consultative, or non-voting parties subscribe to the tenets of the Treaty. Since the Treaty first went into effect in 1961, the consultative parties have adopted adjunct treaties and protocols to the basic Antarctic Treaty; one is entitled the Convention for the Conservation of Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), and it adopts an ecosystem approach to managing Antarctica’s fish and krill resources. In 1991, the parties adopted an Environmental Protocol to the Antarctic Treaty, which among other things requires the prior environmental assessment of all proposed human activity in Antarctica, and prohibits all Antarctic oil, gas, and mineral exploitation.

Leandro followed later with a two fascinating talks about “Penguins” and the “Cetaceans of the Southern Oceans” and we bothered him with lots of questions. There was just so much, we still wanted to know about all the lovely creatures, we had seen during the voyage.

In the meantime we were zipping along northbound, mildly rolling with a South-easterly wind behind us. The Drake remained reasonable and we could even spot some more seabirds, maybe the last we would see for a while. A few albatrosses and Cape petrels seemed to wave us goodbye as they glided along beside the ship. Dinner was as good as usual, and most even managed to keep it all inside. As we exchanged stories about the days past, we realized that though we had all taken the same trip, our individual experiences varied quite a bit and it looked as if each of us had taken somewhat different journeys.

December 30th

Drake Passage and Beagle Channel

Today Alejandro started the lecture program with an entertaining talk about “History of the Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration”, which was much appreciated.

The waters calmed down during the afternoon as we entered the sheltered area in the lee of Cape Horn and later the Beagle Channel. In the afternoon, for the final recap the Expedition Staff had a surprise for us: A DVD containing the map of the journey, the wildlife checklist, notes on some of the lectures, our travel logs and a photo-show of pictures from the voyage. At night we dressed up for the farewell dinner and we toasted goodbye, a very nice way to conclude an unforgettable journey.

December 31st

Ushuaia, Argentina

Lat. 54° 48' S, Long. 068° 18'W

Dawn lit the ending of our trip. We had returned the same but much different, changed somehow by having conquered a continent known by so few, loved by so many. The beauty we had experienced in the Antarctic would stay with us. It was a memorable journey.

After breakfast it was time to go. Fare thy well, Ushuaia, you explorer of the Ice!

*The Captain, crew and Expedition Staff are pleased of having had you on board the USHUAIA. We hope to see you again and wish you a safe return home.
Thank you very much!*



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