

Shackleton Crossing – ASG40

Voyage Dates: February 26 to March 17 2011

Report: Tarn Pilkington

Date: 15/03/2011

Leader: Tarn Pilkington (New Zealand)

Assistant Guide: Mungo Ross (Scotland)

Team Members: (9 total)

Doug Scarborough (USA), George Szwender (Canada), Roger Smith (UK), Gabi Furtenbach (AUS), Tim Griffin (AUS), Ian Johnstone (UK), Paul Toomey (UK), David Chaplin (AUS), Mike Price (UK)

One applicant was declined in his request to rejoin the crossing after earlier withdrawing.

Overview:

The crossing was completed on the 7th, 8th and 9th of March 2011.

A very successful trip undertaken in extremely good weather due to a large anti-cyclone situated in the south Atlantic. A long warm period from October meant the glaciers were devoid of snow making for very open crevassed conditions. Travel was therefore difficult on the Crean and Fortuna glaciers and many extra hours were required to weave in and around broken ground. Fortunately visibility was excellent for most of the crossing as navigating through the crevasses would have been difficult.

Route Description:

We arrived at King Haakon Bay at 5pm on March the 7th and managed to walk 1.5 hours to just below the Murray Snowfield. Camp was set close to one of our way points (995) on hard ice.

The next morning we awoke at 4:20AM and were walking until 6AM in thick cloud.

Navigation was required for 1.5 hours until we approached the Tridents at which point the cloud begun to break.

It was decided to try descend from the lowest pass (south most) and this was achieved by traversing 300 metres above the icefall to rocks on the far right (true). A 50metre line was fixed and members descended on prussiks on hard ice and gravel. It was relatively straightforward to descend from this point to the Crean Glacier. From lower on the Crean we could see that the standard descent routes had very little snow with much exposed rock and hard ice. I would recommend that future parties consider using our route as it is quite straightforward and can be scoped easily from the top in good weather.

We reached the normal Aurora Crean camp location at around 12PM. From there the crevasses became very open and progress was very slow. There were three distinct bands of very broken ground, which usually took an hour to negotiate the three to four hundred metres. The Helicrash site was reached at 5PM and we decided to carry on over into the Fortuna as lenticulars were forming to the south. Camp was set at 7PM adjacent the waypoint 001 amongst crevasses.

The next day dawned cloudy and we were underway by 6AM. Threatening weather looked to be building to the west but clouds eventually burnt away and another beautiful clear day followed. Last year I was able to walk directly to the final waypoint to descend to Fortuna Bay. This year the crevasses began at just below the Nunatak and hard ice and open crevasses added many hours to the route. We initially tried descending slightly right of the icefall above waypoint 020 but backtracked to the centre of the glacier after a frustrating 1.5 hours. A route through was found close to the rocks near waypoint 020 using a narrow serac lead to a small patch of snow. From this point it was a easy descent to the bay and the first members arrived at around 12PM (In 2010 the same distance was covered in around three hours.)

After a quick Zodiac ride and a foot ware change aboard Polar Pioneer, six of the group continued over the pass to Stromness in around two hours.

Gritviken was visited the following day with the obligatory toast to Shackelton held at his gravesite.

Tarn Pilkington
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