

## South of Fifty

Shackleton Traverse – South Georgia 2015

### Expedition Report

#### Support vessel

SV Faraway is a 12m, aluminium yacht. She has 5 berths and was purpose designed and built for high latitude sailing by the skipper and owner; Gert van der Linde. Faraway proved to be a very capable, reliable and sturdy support vessel.

#### SV Faraway Summary Itinerary

|                                  |                                |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Depart Cape Town                 | 17 <sup>th</sup> July 2015     |
| Arrive St Helena                 | 26 <sup>th</sup> July 2015     |
| Arrive Buenos Aires              | 27 <sup>th</sup> August 2015   |
| Depart Buenos Aires              | 11 <sup>th</sup> October       |
| Arrive Puerto Madryn             | 20 <sup>th</sup> October 2015  |
| Depart Puerto Madryn             | 22 <sup>nd</sup> October 2015  |
| Arrive Stanley - Falklands       | 27 <sup>th</sup> October 2015  |
| Depart Stanley – Falklands       | 05 <sup>th</sup> November 2015 |
| Arrive Grytviken – South Georgia | 10 <sup>th</sup> November 2015 |
| Depart Grytviken – South Georgia | 19 <sup>th</sup> November 2015 |
| Arrive Tristan da Cunha          | 30 <sup>th</sup> November 2015 |
| Depart Tristan da Cunha          | 30 <sup>th</sup> November 2015 |
| Arrive Cape Town                 | 10 <sup>th</sup> December 2015 |

#### Team Composition

|                    |                           |               |
|--------------------|---------------------------|---------------|
| Gert van der Linde | Skipper / yacht owner     | South African |
| Nick Leggatt       | Navigator / skipper       | South African |
| Brian Valentine    | Expedition Leader / crew  | South African |
| Scarre Celliers    | Expedition navigator/crew | South African |
| Ian Manson         | Exped Biosecurity/crew    | South African |

#### Expedition Objectives

- To attempt the Shackleton Traverse.
- To enjoy the vistas, fauna, flora and history of the island of South Georgia.

## Summary of events

Gert van der Linde plus one crew delivered Faraway to Buenos Aires from Cape Town. Ian Manson and Gert then brought her to Puerto Madryn where the balance of the team joined the vessel. Final stores and supplies were purchased in Puerto Madryn. After a fair down wind passage with spells of motor sailing we arrived in good time at Stanley in the Falklands with the intention of taking on fresh stores, fuel and water and departing as soon as possible for South Georgia. This plan was delayed extensively by a series of inclement weather systems delaying our departure. We took advantage of the time sight seeing on the Eastern Falkland Island and gained a good knowledge of life on the island (as well as the coffee shops, diners, bars and restaurants!). The great hospitality of the locals and local authorities was much appreciated. Our delayed departure was rewarded with fine poled out down wind sailing to South Georgia and a spectacularly calm day for a dawn arrival at King Edward Point / Grytviken. Clearing in was achieved quickly and we motor sailed back northwest immediately for King Haakon Bay / Peggotty Bluff. This was a hard up wind motor sail that took its toll on boat and the team. Fair conditions allowed us to pass through the Bird Island passage and we anchored just off Peggotty Bluff to be put ashore. After a short double carry we were on ski's with sleds in tow and headed for the Shackleton Gap when a plastic ski boot delaminated from the boot sole. We were forced to abort the traverse and call Faraway back for a pickup at Peggotty Bluff. We licked our wounds and head to Undine Bay, via the Bird Island passage again to Elsehull Bay, Olav Harbour and Possession Bay. Contact was established with Pat Lurcock at King Edward Point and he came to the rescue offering to lend substitute boots! We returned without delay to Grytviken where we very gratefully collected the equipment, overnighted and returned up wind again the next day to Possession Bay. Weather forecasts quickly dispelled any hope of returning to King Haakon Bay / Peggotty Bluff in the near future and we thus decided to access the traverse route via Possession Bay and the Shackleton Gap. A late decision to work within the forecast but very limited weather window had us ashore and on skis at 14h30 on the 15<sup>th</sup> of November. We skinned up fantastic snow conditions to arrive at the wind scoop of the Trident for our first camp in still conditions. The 16<sup>th</sup> dawned very overcast and we delayed breaking camp in the hope that visibility would improve. With the knowledge of fast approaching bad weather we soon gave up the wait and traversed to the west of the Trident and descended in near white out conditions. Snow conditions deemed this safe and only one open crevasse was crossed. By midday we were in the middle of the Crean Glacier when we were knocked over by a wall of snow, spindrift, and moving air. We were all knocked over repeatedly and it soon became apparent that we were unable to progress further. We dug a pit, built snow walls and, after substantial effort, double pole pitched our tent. The night was wet and "robust". The tent thankfully stayed up. Faraway recorded 72knots at anchor and had the tender upturned. Given our altitude and exposed position in a wind funnel on shore we assume that we experienced well in excess of that wind velocity, probably near 100knots. We awoke to improving but still challenging conditions the next day and, being aware that there was more weather to follow, we made a hasty departure. Travel conditions were good though icy, with a strong tail wind that was both beneficial and

troublesome. At the Great Nunatak and in increasing winds we decided for safety sake to descend to Fortuna Bay via the Fortuna Glacier rather than via the Breakwind Gap (which had been our original route preference). It was quite apparent that in the cold conditions we would be unable to dig a shelter again if required. The descent via the Fortuna Glacier was straightforward and Faraway awaited our arrival at 15h30 on the 17<sup>th</sup> November. After a warm night on board we completed the traverse from Fortuna Bay to Stromness. This was a most enjoyable and relaxing conclusion to a great outing. Faraway was once again awaiting our arrival and after a brief visit to the Neumayer Glacier we returned to Grytviken. Borrowed equipment was returned and we enjoyed the hospitality of the King Edwards Point Staff in our tours of the tourist attractions. After a quick visit to the wreck of "Bayard" in Ocean Harbour we set sail for Tristan da Cunha on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November.

### **Equipment**

Boot/gear failure very nearly scuppered all our planning, costs and efforts and we were exceptionally fortunate to have had the unexpected but much appreciated assistance provided. We travelled on skis and used waterproof bags with shoulder straps on small plastic sleds with a light day load shouldered in backpacks. This proved a good method of travel and easy for double carries and steep ascents and descents. We were roped for the majority of travel time on the glaciers. Our tunnel tent, stove and other general mountaineering equipment proved adequate.

### **Navigation, Contingency Plans and Escape Routes**

We pre-loaded way points on our GPS providing options for varying circumstances and eventualities having gained useful relevant information from prior expedition members and extrapolated off maps. Laminated maps and a compass were also carried. This general arrangement proved more than adequate and we had no difficulty with route finding and navigation. Glacier and general snow conditions were pristine for travel on skis with skins and sleds.

### **Communications**

We made use of a Delorme Tracker with messaging facility to another of the same devices on board Faraway for progress and rendezvous communications. This proved very effective and also provided position reports to friends and family as well as a designated safety monitor in South Africa. We also carried a VHF radio and Inmarsat satellite telephone.

### **Biosecurity/Bioprotocols**

We adhered rigorously to all stipulated protocols and did not note any sign of rodent or other undesirable life on the island.

## Weather

We experienced all of South Georgia's notorious moods. Weather forecasting and passage planning by Nick Leggatt with the assistance of GRIB files and passage planning software was a massive advantage. This also proved enormously beneficial for the traverse in terms of anticipated conditions and expectations. Patience is most certainly a virtue in this environment.

## Administration and costs

The Expedition Permit Application as well as the issue thereof was handled very professionally, promptly and without complication, as was the Visitors Permit Application. The permit and visitors costs are very high in particular given the high cost of the undertaking in general and the limited time actually spent on the island. This is magnified with deteriorating currency value in South Africa. As a private expedition, and with no members being registered with IAATO, we were required to clear in at Grytviken prior to making landfall at Peggotty Bluff (or elsewhere on the island). This requirement is onerous given that the predominant current and winds are down the east side of the island as this implies a hard upwind return after clearing in. It would be beneficial to future non IAATO expeditions to have the option of clearing in and induction in Stanley. Given the degree of compliance through the extensive permit administration and excellent information available on the website, as well as the required check in and information collection in Stanley, this appears more than achievable.

## Conclusion

We are most grateful for the opportunity to have visited South Georgia, for the administrative assistance and considered response from the Expedition Assessment Committee as well as the GSGSSI. All efforts made to maintain this pristine location are also hugely recognised and appreciated! The expedition was all and more than anticipated and a most memorable outing indeed.

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