

Expedition Report – S.E.A. Expedition

Introduction:

A group of seven people, Markus Gujan (mountain guide – expedition leader), Adrian Raez (mountain guide), Andrea Badrutt, Manfred Walter (all from Switzerland), Wolf Kloss, Tina Uebel (both from Germany) and Ray Timm (USA) crossed South Georgia in memoriam of Sir Ernest Shackleton, who did the same crossing 100 years ago, under slightly different circumstances.

Route Shackleton Crossing:

Date	Description	Distance	Altitude [m.ü.M.]	Campsites
18.12.2015	King Haakon Bay	200 m	10	King Haakon Bay (S54 08.875 W37 14.278)
19.12.2015	King Haakon Bay – Shackleton Gap – Murray Snowfield – Trident Pass	18 km	540	Trident Pass (S54 09.420 W37 05.150)
20.12.2015	Trident Pass – Crean Glacier	12 km	325	Crean Glacier (S54 08.933 W37 00.296)
21.12.2015	Crean Glacier – Fortuna Glacier – Fortuna Bay	16 km	10	Fortuna Bay (S54 07.663 W36 49 570)
22.12.2015	Fortuna Bay – Stromness	10 km		

Log Book:

We sailed the vessel ‚Santa Maria Australis‘ from Port Stanley (Falkland Islands) on Monday, December 7th 2015, straight to Elephant Island, where Shackleton had to leave the major part of his crew behind before he set out to South Georgia. We arrived at Elephant Island in a heavy storm on Friday, December 11th 2015.

After a short visit of this historical and hostile place (where Shackleton’s men spent several months) the following day, we continued our journey to South Georgia on Sunday, 13th..

18.12.2015

We arrived at King Haakon Bay early in the morning. After breakfast we sorted our equipment and brought it ashore with the dingi. The first night we spent at King Haakon Bay sleeping in our tents, used our stoves and checked our whole gear carefully, concerning function and completeness. After dinner we brought part of the equipment towards the first glacier we would have to cross, just to where the snow began. This walk took about one hour.

19.12.2015

Early in the morning the rest of the vessel’s crew (five people) came ashore and helped us to bring the rest of the equipment up to the edge of the glacier. The conditions were favourable: no wind, good and hard snow surface and perfect visibility. We had four pulkas to transport our equipment in: Three of them without their special harness (these items were lost in the luggage of LAN Airlines), which would make descents considerably more difficult.

After we had passed Shackleton Gap the terrain became steeper and less smooth than expected and we lost altitude and time.

We arrived at the Trident Passes at 4:00 p.m. and, after taking a look down on the Crean Glacier, we decided to pitch our campsite for the night under the Tridents and attempt the descent on the next morning. The weather forecast was good, which meant that we didn't have to hurry. After dinner we checked out the three passes and decided to take the first one (the one furthest north). Here the ascent would be harder than at the other passes, especially in regard of the bringing the pulkas up, but the slope down was looking smooth and straight.

20.12.2015

After a good night and a small breakfast we brought the pulkas up to the pass and lowered them by rope down to the Crean Glacier. This action took a few hours and meant 420m of lowering the pulkas by rope. The slope was ideal to ski down, perfect snow conditions. The Crean Glacier was covered by snow as well and the conditions were favourable. At 5:00 p.m. we set up campsite on the glacier – we decided to continue the following day because the deep snow was utterly energy consuming and tiring. The weather had been sunny during the whole day, with low winds.

21.12.2015

After a beautiful sunrise we took off. A few hours later the weather changed and we had almost no visibility due to heavy snowfall. For the first time during the crossing we had to navigate by GPS to stay on track. During our way down the Fortuna Glacier the weather improved and we realized that we would have to take a short descent and then keep further to the left of the glacier to avoid an area of crevasses. After skiing down a steep slope we arrived on the moraine of the Fortuna Glacier, about 500m away from the beach of Fortuna Bay.

We brought our equipment close to the shore and set up our last campsite. The beach was full of animals (fur seals, sea elephants, penguins and birds). The 'Santa Maria Australis' was anchoring in the bay. After lunch the vessel crew came ashore for a drink.

22.12.2015

In the morning we brought all the now unnecessary equipment aboard the vessel and walked along the coast of Fortuna Bay in walking boots (often avoiding the beach because of the masses of quite aggressive fur seals). In order to reach the other side of the bay we had to cross the river which comes down from the König Glacier. The river was more than half a meter deep.

Part of the vessel crew joined us on the Shackleton Walk from Fortuna Bay to Stromness. We met them close to the pass. We passed the waterfall on the north side of the ridge and walked over to Stromness, where the vessel picked us up.

25.12.2016

After a nice 'Christmas Carol Singing' in Grytviken's church and an extended dinner on the vessel, we took an early ride with the 'Santa Maria Australis' to be dropped off ashore at the far end of Cumberland East Bay. Our aim was to get up to the Nordenskjöld Glacier, from where we intended to make a few ski tours in the next three days. The glacier was heavily crevassed and thus impossible to walk on. Neither was there any snow at its sides. So we had to carry our equipment along the moraine until we found a very nice spot to set up our basecamp.

26.12.2015

To explore the area we set out on ski, and we faced several small ascents and descents before we were able to take a look into the next valley. Finally we were standing on a peak, unnamed on our map, left to the peak marked on the map with an altitude of 3.452 ft. From there we had a very good view to Sutton Crag and Mount Paget. The glacier was looking very wild, and we faced strong westerly winds. We were happy to be reasonably sheltered on the leeward side of the peak. Taking a very nice ski run down a glacier we returned to the basecamp after a short hike. The weather was good – lots of wind in the west, very good ski conditions.

27.12.2015

Starting out from the basecamp we first took the same way as on our return the day before. We hiked up the whole glacier up to a pass; we went left towards the ridge belonging to a peak of 3.452 ft. There we set up a ski depot; then we climbed on short rope up to the highest point. From the top we had a nice view as far as Grytviken. We took the same way back to the basecamp. In the evening it started to snow lightly.

28.12.2015

From the basecamp we took off in northwesterly direction towards two little peaks, which we passed to descend on the other side to a little lake. From there we started another ascent in southwesterly direction up to a pass, followed by a nice ski ride down to the little glacier where we had been the day before. We hiked up another nameless peak. A great skiride down the glacier – then back to the basecamp.

After this trip we carried our equipment back to the beach, where we were picked up at 5:00 p.m. by our vessel ‚Santa Maria Australis‘.

Safety:

All participants of the expedition had glacier experience. In April the whole crew (except Ray) took part in a glacier training in the Swiss Alps. We had a GPS track of the crossing which was quite accurate. Every evening we had telephone contact via satellite phone with the vessel, to report our position and get the latest weather forecast.

We had prepared several escape routes, one was back to Haakon Bay, one was Possession Bay, and one was Antarctic Bay.

Equipment:

We had three tents, four stoves, enough food, four pulkas, 170m of climbing ropes, an ample set of medical supplies; all participants had crampons, skis, ice axes, ice screws, beeper, shovel, probe and basic climbing equipment.

Environmental aspects:

We collected all rubbish in garbage bags which we brought back to the vessel ‚Santa Maria Australis‘. We did not testify any impact of other humans.

Our Expedition had no negative impact on South Georgia’s nature or wildlife.

Summary:

The expedition was perfectly planned and everything worked very well. We had ideal circumstances, fair weather, mild temperatures and low winds. The snow conditions were favourable for a ski crossing and for the ski tours we undertook. The risk of avalanches and crevasses was low.

No injuries occurred and all participants were always in a good mood.