

AURORA EXPEDITIONS

ASG 73 REPORT

PENINSULA CLIMBING AND SHACKLETON CROSSING ATTEMPT



March 7th – March 24th

2018

Peninsula Climbing & Shackleton Crossing Attempt - ASG 73 - 2018

Report by : Tarn Pilkington

Date : 22/3/18

Voyage Dates : 7/3/15 to 24/3/15

Ship: Polar Pioneer

EXPEDITION OBJECTIVES

1. To climb peaks or complete alpine treks on the western and eastern sides of the Antarctic Peninsula
2. To follow Shackleton's route from King Haakon Bay to Stromness via the original route:

King Haakon – Razor back Ridge – Compass, Crean and Nineteen Sixteen Glaciers – descend via Breakwind Ridge to Fortuna Bay and continue to Stromness.

OVERVIEW

The 2018 March "In Shackleton's Footsteps Expedition" was composed of four crossers, two Peninsula climbers and two guides. The expedition certainly had a mix of challenging weather conditions and a number of alternate plans hatched. Ice conditions were heavy east of Roselle Island and the planned itinerary to the south in the Weddell Sea was changed to an exploration of the Joinville and Dundee Island areas.

This years crossing attempt was thwarted by very unsettled weather. King Haakon Bay was not reached at all due to heavy swell and wind and an alternate start at Possession Bay was abandoned due to rain, poor visibility and strong winds.

The crossers did however venture onto the lower Fortuna Glacier with the aim of getting to the Caird Nunatak. A complete lack of snow on the lower Fortuna Glacier made for slow going through the open crevasses. The original plan was changed and we returned via the Turnback Glacier to Fortuna Bay. The final leg from Fortuna to Stromness was completed in the afternoon in deteriorating weather.

Expedition Team

Guides: Tarn Pilkington IFMGA (NZ) & Anna Keeling IFMGA (NZ)

Crossers: Geoff Gledhill (AUS), Claudia Scneider (NZ), Michele Gilbert (USA), Josh Freedman (USA),

Daily Summary

Day 1,2 - 7/3/18 – Drake Passage and the Antarctic Peninsula

Meet aboard Polar Pioneer. First day at sea with equipment checks on board with purchases of extra consumables in Ushuaia. Mandatory emergency drills and briefings completed.

Day 3 - 9/3/18

Good seas meant a landing in the South Shetlands was possible at the Aitcho Islands at Barrientos Isl. on the second evening.

Day 4 – 10/3/18

Trinity Island

Mikkelson Harbour was reached early on the 4th day. An ascent of Borge Peak followed for the climbers while passengers landed at Bombay Island. Superb weather and snow conditions on Borge Peak made for spectacular views and a fast turnaround.

Day 5 - Monday – 12/3/18

Joinville Island

Ice conditions east of Roselle Island meant that further exploration of the Weddell was not possible. A small feature was climbed from Haddon Bay on Joinville Island.

Day 6 - Tuesday – 13/3/18

Brown Bluff

In the afternoon the climbing team went ashore on the Tabarin Peninsula for an ascent of a few hundred meters along the eastern flank of Brown Bluff.

Gourdin Island

Day 7,8,9 - 13th,14th,15th/3/18

Elephant island

Day 10 - 16/3/18

South Georgia

With a heavy swell and wind forecast for King Haakon it was decided to abandon this as a start point. The ship headed south with weather forecasts indicating a very brief clearance was possible on Monday the 19th. A plan to use Possession Bay as an alternate start was finalised.

Drygalski Fjord

Gold Harbour

Day 11 - 17/3/18

Salisbury Plain

Prion island

Day 12 - 18/3/18

Grytviken

Godthul

Day 13 - 19/3/18

Possession Bay

Despite a reasonable forecast we were met with strong winds and low cloud and rain. It was decided then to abandon this as a start point, instead heading for Jason Harbour.

St Andrews Bay

Day 14 - 20/3/18

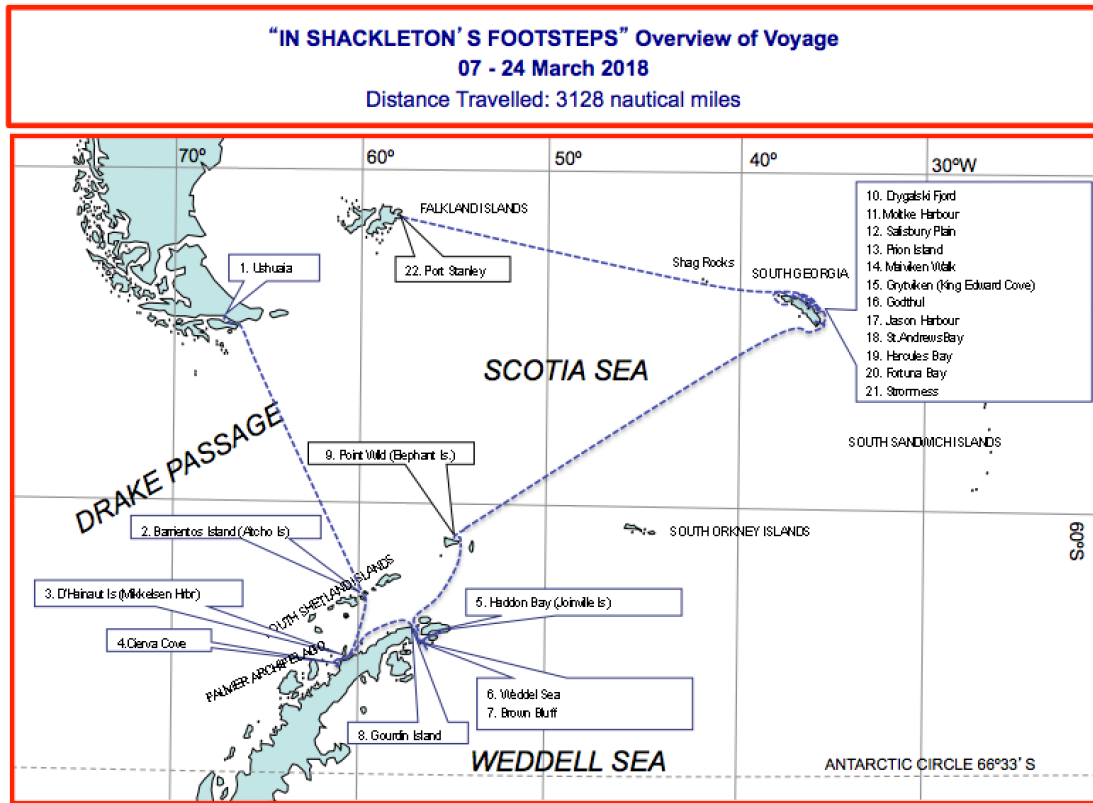
Fortuna Bay and Stromness

From Anchorage Bay we ascended up the Turnback Glacier reaching the "pinch" in good time. The Fortuna Glacier was very crevassed and made for difficult travel towards our planned goal of the Caird Nunatak. The original plan was changed and we returned via the Turnback Glacier to Fortuna Bay. The final leg from Fortuna to Stromness was completed in that afternoon in deteriorating weather.

Depart South Georgia for Stanley.

Day 15/16/17- 21,22,23/3/18 - At sea bound for the Falkland Islands.

Expedition Overview



SAFETY MANAGEMENT

A detailed safety and environmental plan was submitted with our application in early 2018.

Weather information

Daily Grib files were downloaded and proved to be very accurate. Unfortunately our five day window was raked with strong winds, precipitation and cloud cover. Staff at Grytviken also commented on how poor the weather was.

Supplementary weather information was sent from NZ and Buenos Aires.

Route planning

The planning of the expedition was undertaken in the same manner as previous years. We did however know that there would likely be less snow this year than previous years. Our plan was to avoid the lower Fortuna Glacier and the Turnback Glaciers by descending using the original route through Breakwind Ridge.

Contingency planning

We have used Possession Bay a number of times for both thwarted attempts and as a start point. It has proved reliable but due to its shallow nature, a long zodiac transit is required and is also exposed to wind.

We have not yet been able to scope an emergency descent route from the Nunatak area to Antarctic Bay but believe it is possible.

Client experience and screening

The participants were further screened and trained in the Trinity Peninsula area of the Antarctic Peninsula and in the Weddell Sea areas to ensure fitness and skill levels were sufficient. Supplementary training involving glacier travel, personal gear management, ice axe and crampon use and tent erection were completed.

Vetting client applications also remains crucial in the success of this expedition. The process for this years crossing again included a personal phone call between the Technical Adviser and all applicants. This helped ensure that actual experience and currency on resumes were valid.

Client equipment

The equipment clients brought along was satisfactory and a thorough gear check was undertaken early in the voyage. A gear list is supplied early on in the application process.

Communications

A Satellite phone with spare battery was carried for communicating with the ship.

Icom VHF handhelds with spare batteries were carried.

An Inreach device was carried by Guides and one of the clients.

Navigation

A new map was available from the BAS at 1:40,000 with certain sections at 1:25,000.

Gaia maps were downloaded onto Phones and works well as a backup to maps, compass and our Garmin GPS devices .

Our route is tracked via an Inreach device which also allows text and email communication.

