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Expedition Log **Antarctic Peninsula**

26th January – 5th February 2010

On board the

M/V Plancius



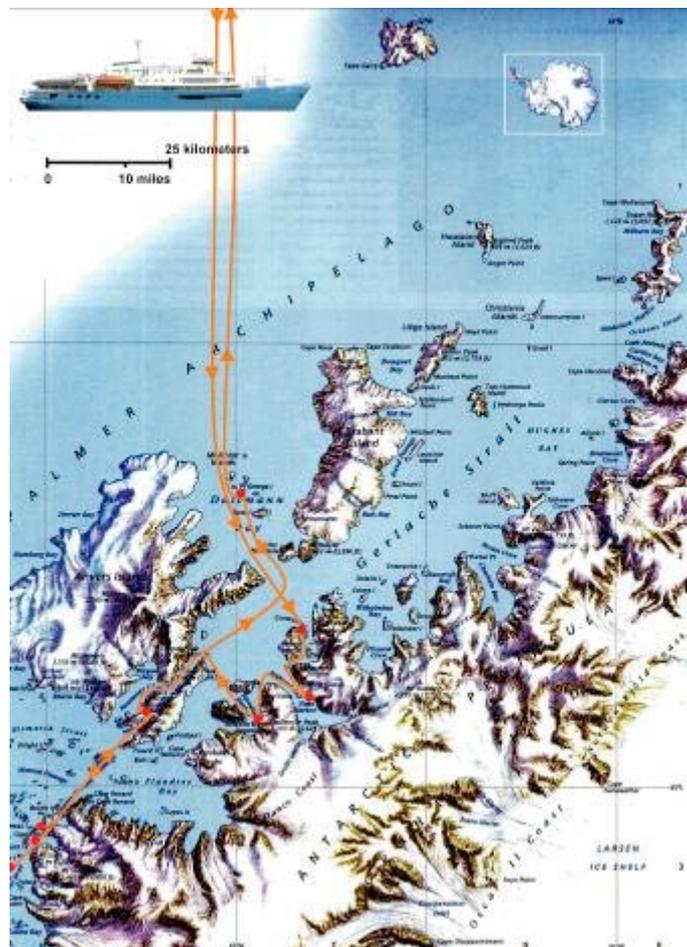
Plancius was named after the Dutch astronomer, cartographer, geologist and vicar Petrus Plancius (1552-1622). Plancius was built in 1976 as an oceanographic research vessel for the Royal Dutch Navy and was named "Hr. Ms. Tydeman". The ship sailed for the Dutch navy until June 2004 when she was purchased by oceanwide Expeditions and completely rebuilt in 2007 and converted into a 110 passenger vessel. "Plancius" is 89m (267 feet) long, 14.5m (43 feet) wide and has a maximum draft of 5m, with an Ice Strength rating on 1D. Top speed of 12 knots with three diesel engines generating 1230 hp each.

With
Captain Yury Gorodnik
and his International Crew of 34

and

Expedition Leader – Jan Belgers (Netherlands)
Assistant Expedition Leader – Anjali Pande (New Zealand)
Guide/Lecturer – Stephen Bailey (USA)
Guide/Lecturer – Fritz Hertel (Germany)
Guide/Lecturer – Elke Lindner (Germany)
Guide/Lecturer – Jim Mayer (UK)
Guide/Lecturer – Shane Murphy (USA)
Guide/Lecturer – Jordi Plana (No Fixed Abode)
Kayak Guide – Louise Aide (USA)
Hotel Manager – Natascha Wisse (Netherlands)
Restaurant Manager – Francis De Buck (Belgium)
Head Chef – Ralf Bartel (Germany)
Sous Chef – Mario Hribernik (Austria)
Ship's Physician – Dr Jan Muhring (Netherlands)

And 75 of us from Australia, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, South Africa, Switzerland, UK and the USA.



26th January 2010 - Ushuaia, Argentina

Position: 54°15'S, 68°19'W

When passengers embarked at 4pm, they were greeted at the reception by Natascha and Francis and then were shown to their rooms by the stewardesses. Shortly afterwards the baggage arrived, hopefully to the correct room. After everyone had settled in, we congregated in the beautifully airy panorama lounge with floor to ceiling windows. Here we were introduced to Jan, our Expedition Leader, and the rest of the expedition team and hotel staff. We departed the jetty around 6.30pm and soon afterwards did the lifeboat drill which is always a bit of fun and games getting kitted out in big orange life vests. After a role call we headed out towards midships to the lifeboats.



Then we had some time to admire the scenery as we sailed along the Beagle Channel in the evening light, seeing the odd Magellanic penguin in the water, before being called to the dining room to sample the fine cuisine prepared for us by the chefs.

Lifeboat Drill

27th January 2010 – Beagle Channel / En route to the Antarctic Peninsular

Position at 08.00hrs (GMT-3): 56° 28'S, 65°53W, 83 nm from Ushuaia.

Weather Conditions: Moderate swell, overcast with occasional sunshine, air temperature 6°C.

At sea in Drake Passage on our 600 nautical mile voyage from Tierra del Fuego to Antarctic Peninsula.

We woke to moderate swells, mild breezes and an overcast sky. A buffet breakfast was enjoyed by some in the dining room while others, a bit unsteady on their feet, took nourishment in their cabins.

Drake Passage, usually regarded as the roughest ocean on earth, is named for the Elizabethan Vice Admiral, slaver, politician and privateer Sir Francis Drake who plundered gold-laden Spanish galleons bound for Spain from Inca conquests in Peru. Drake was blown south into these stormy seas after entering the Pacific via Magellan Strait in 1578 during the second circumnavigation of the world.

The first known transit of this tempestuous sea was recorded in 1616 by Dutch merchants Willem Schouten and Jacob le Maire; Schouten named Cape Horn for his birthplace, the Dutch city of Hoorn.

Elke initiated our lecture series with her talk about Antarctic avian life, followed by Steve with his discussion of Southern Ocean seabirds. Jordi later joined Steve with a brief talk about working with Black-browed Albatrosses.

With the 12° roll of the ship, about 50 of us appeared in the dining room for a delicious lunch. After the meal, and for some a pleasant ramble on the deck searching for birdlife, lectures continued.

As Shane was about to begin his talk on Antarctic discoveries before 1850, we were treated to an impressive display of Hourglass Dolphins racing the *Plancius* southward on the port side amidships. Elke followed Shane with a similar lecture in German. Anjali rounded out the afternoon with a talk about the Antarctic foodweb which is based on Krill, earth's largest biomass.



Contemporaneous with the afternoon lectures, Louise introduced her kayakers to the procedures and practices they'll need for their adventures ahead.

We finished out the day with a movie.

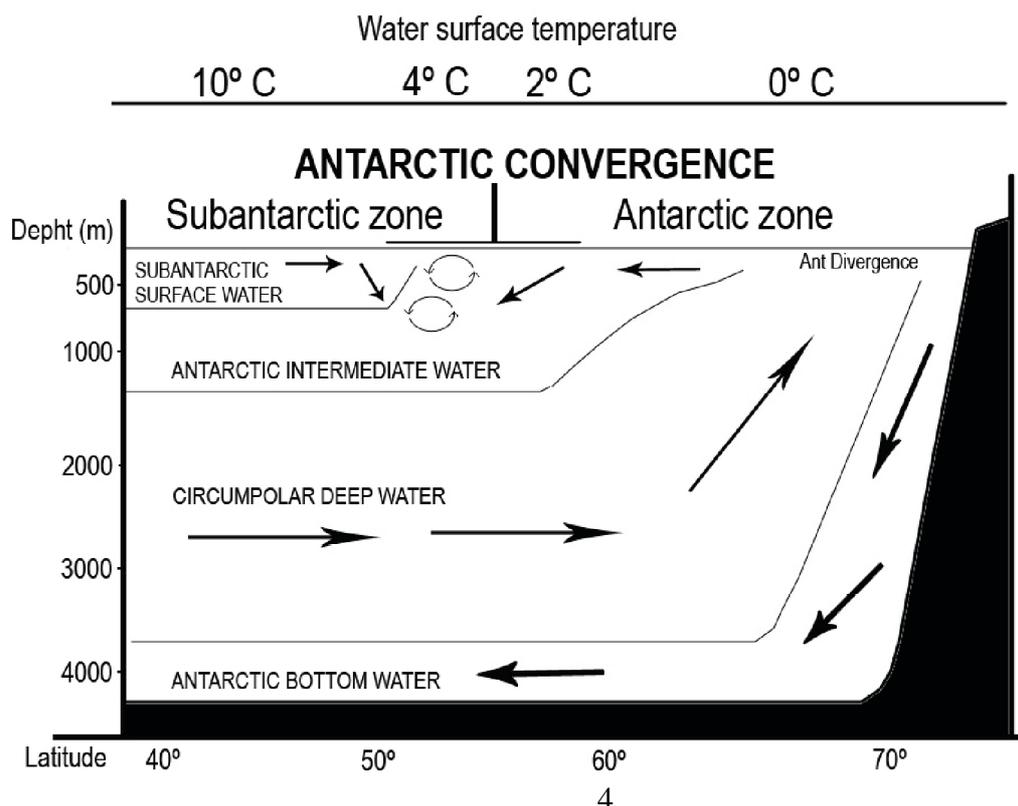
Words by Shane Murphy, photo by Jordi Plana

28th January 2010 – Drake Passage

Position at 08.00hrs 60°48'S/ 64°25'W, 234 nm to Cuverville Island. Ship speed 11 knots.

Weather conditions: Calm Sea, No wind, air temperature 4°C.

During the night we sailed into Antarctic waters. The change had been subtle, just a slight adjustment in the salinity and temperature of the seawater. We had crossed the Antarctic Convergence. It defines a region where warmer waters from the north collide with the colder, denser, and less saline waters from the south. And the colder water (Antarctic Intermediate Water) sinks beneath the warmer (Subantarctic Surface Water) creating an area of mixed waters.



Found approximately between 50°S and 60°S, the Convergence is marked by a sudden, rather than gradual drop, in water temperature. The rapid temperature change across the front is linked to the strong eastward flow of the Antarctic Circumpolar Current. This current stretches for more than 20,000 kilometres around the whole Antarctic continent with a massive flow, driven by some of the strongest winds on earth.

The Convergence is the biological limit of the Antarctic ecosystem and though there is often an increase in wildlife, there is no visible change in the sea. We entered a nutrient-rich ocean, where enormous amounts of



Krill, a keystone species to life in and around Antarctica, are found, providing an abundant food supply for birds and marine mammals.

This map shows the distribution of the main surface oceanographic features around Antarctica, we can see in red the main current system around the continent (Circumpolar Current) and the relative position of the Antarctic Convergence.

Neptune continued to treat us kindly and the experienced crew and staff commented that Drake crossings doesn't get much calmer than this. Meal-time attendance was commendable, and all of us expedition travellers were optimistic that conditions would remain the same.

The official program on board continued with two mandatory briefings by Jan and Anjali. The first talk focused on IAATO (International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators) regulations that help minimise the impacts of tourist operations in Antarctic. One specific hope behind the efforts is that some of the modern adventurers will develop a sense of stewardship and civic responsibility to maintain the Seventh Continent and its seas as a wilderness park for future generations. The second point of business was the briefing on Zodiac safety, an introduction on how to safely move in and around the motorized rubber boats that we would soon be using several times a day for landings and cruises.

At some point during the day a cleaning session took place in the bar, where Steve and Shane assisted us getting our clothes and gear vacuumed, with the purpose of preventing the introduction of any alien plant species seeds that might be hiding in pockets or carried in Velcro into the Antarctic system.

During this Drake journey we didn't spot many seabirds flying around the ship. This is because the winds were fairly calm, and the large albatrosses need windy conditions to fly. But the sights included some Prions, Cape Petrels, a few Storm Petrels (Wilson's and Black Bellied), Southern Giant Petrels, Black Browed Albatross and the largest ones, the Royal and the Wandering Albatross.

A bit before dinner time the first Antarctic land was spotted, Brabant Island, with its huge glaciers and high mountains. And during desert our first iceberg was sighted!

By now, everybody was in the mood for going ashore!... but we would have to exercise patience until the morning...not an easy feat once you've come this far... Here we come, Antarctica!!

Jordi Plana

29th January 2010 – Arriving in Antarctica and our first landings

Position at 08.00hrs 64°32'S/ 62°32'W, Gerlache Strait.

Weather conditions: Calm Sea, No wind, increasing sunshine!



A momentous day indeed, and with remarkably clement weather for its enjoyment! We packed three exciting landings into our first day in Antarctica, including our first steps onto the Antarctic continent itself! The morning featured Cuverville Island (64°41'S 62°38'W), an easy landing on a cobble beach to experience the sights, sounds, and aromas of the area's largest Gentoo penguin colony. For most of us this was our first intimate exposure to nesting penguins. A couple of thousand attractive Gentoos tramped along on their "penguin highways," trumpeted like donkeys, squabbled, begged, fed their half-grown fuzzy grey chicks, and continued to steal nest pebbles from each other. Three interlopers from nearby colonies – two Chinstrap penguins and an Adelie penguin – were spotted along the beach by alert observers.

The green slopes above attested to the relatively rich vegetation of this site: lush mosses, colourful lichens on the rocks, and even grass. Overhead the South Polar skuas fought with each other while keeping their eyes alert for exposed eggs or unguarded chicks below. We



saw a skua take a penguin egg, upsetting some people until they realized that an egg unhatched by the end of January had no chance of producing a surviving chick. Two resting male Antarctic Fur Seals tolerated our approaches. As if in a dream world, many of us were loathe to return to the ship, even for the delicious buffet lunch that awaited us.

At Neko Harbor (64°50'S 62°33'W) we took another step of a lifetime: the first on the Antarctic continent! For many people this represented the end of a quest to set foot on every continent. A bewildering assortment of multicolored rocks failed to distract us from another lively colony of Gentoo penguins and yet more superb photo oportunities. The sky had clouded up somewhat, but that only made our surroundings more scenic. Magnificent fractured glaciers tumbling down the steep mountains and dropping small amounts of ice while sounding ominous warnings of cracking thunder from deep within their slowly flowing ice interiors. Luckily all their sound and fury signified nothing, as no tsunamis gushed to sweep us from the placid beach. In fact, it remained calm and balmy, though numerous ice bits drifted in the harbour and amused us during zodiac rides to and from the beach.

Following a cruise through the spectacular Gerlache Strait, our entrance to Paradise Bay (64°54'S 62°55'W) found us spotting Antarctic Minke whales and Humpback whales. Our very busy first day programme continued into the evening with a landing at the unoccupied Argentine base, Almirante Brown. Some chose to climb the steep snow slope for the view and the playful slide back down. We added sightings of Antarctic terns and Snowy sheathbills to our species list. The dark grey sky began to release tiny snowflakes – just enough to add even more atmosphere to the idyllic calm evening zodiac ride around Paradise Bay. After checking the cliffs with their nesting colonies of Antarctic Shags, we turned our attention to finding seals hauled out on ice floes. Including a nice trio in the water, the total of cooperative Crabeater seals swelled to nine, but the biggest star was a female Leopard seal. When we found a Weddell Seal hauled out on land it capped a six-marine-mammal day.

The Zodiac parties followed the kayakers into the far corner of the bay to marvel at the magnificent glacier front, with numerous tilting towers seeming just about ready to calve icebergs, plus some splendid indigo ice caves. We may have become a bit cold on the outside by the time we glided back to the *Planicius*, but no doubt we all felt warm in our hearts to be finishing such a perfect first day in Antarctica, filled with an endless procession of never-to-be-forgotten experiences.

Words by Steve Bailey, photo by Jordi Plana

30th January 2010

Position at 08.00hrs 64°46'S/ 63°20'W,
Dorian Bay, Port Lockroy & Jougla Point

Weather conditions: Calm Sea, No wind,
Cloudy



A brief, shrill electronic BEEP! broadcast throughout the ship brought sleepers from pleasant dreams abruptly at 6:30AM.

After recovering from the too early wake-up at a generous and attractive breakfast buffet, our first landing of the day was at Dorian Bay (64°49'S 63°32'W), first explored and named by Jean Charcot who led the French Antarctic Expedition, 1903-05; Dorian was a member of the French Chamber of Deputies who helped sponsor Charcot's expedition. Landing at Damoy Point, we explored a hut used by airmen and their support staff who landed airplanes on the glacier not far above the hut. The supplies they delivered were used at Port Lockroy, Wordie House and other similar locations during Operation Tabarin, a secret British military mission to thwart German activities in Antarctica during World War II. These days, the Dorian Bay hut functions as a shelter and rest stop for yachtsmen visiting the area.

Here, we wandered the surrounding hills, photographed Gentoo penguins and their chicks, or simply enjoyed the expansive vistas. An interesting diversion was the change in our pick-up site necessitated by the dropping tide, not to mention the extra work it caused for the staff.

After a tasty lunch of beef stroganoff, vegetarian treats, salad and a selection of breads and cheeses, our three landing groups were incorporated into two groups, one headed to Port Lockroy, the other to Jugula Point (64°50'S 63°30'W). After visiting the two locations the groups switched areas, giving all a chance to buy souvenirs and books, mail postcards, or photograph gentoos, cormorants and whalebones which

comprised an impressive composite skeleton. A group of Minke whales swam along the starboard side of the ship as we boarded the zodiacs to begin the tour(s).

Port Lockroy is more than a gift shop! It's also a museum that lives history. Who knew it would open such an intriguing door to the past, into the mysteries of ionic research, wartime heroism, or British Antarctic Survey sledging history between 1944 and the early 1960s?

Returning to the *Plancius*, we set a record: everyone remembered to turn their tags to Green from Red, indicating they were onboard.

The day ended with a surprise BBQ dinner—spare ribs, chicken & pork with all the special trimmings which make such occasions so memorable (not to mention freezing temperatures)—on the back deck where we were joined by the Port Lockroy staff and some of their friends, ten guests in all.

Shane Murphy

31st January 2010 What a wake up!

Position at 06.00hrs 64°53'S 43°42'W
Entrance to the Lemaire Channel

Weather Conditions: Light breeze,
scattered clouds.



By the time of the wakeup call, the *Plancius* was positioned to enter the Lemaire Channel. This legendary waterway is an 11 kilometres long, approximately 1.6 kilometre wide passage which runs northeast-to-southwest from Splitwind Island and False Cape Renaud in the North to Roulin Point and Cape Cloos in the South, separating Booth Island from the Antarctic Peninsula. The Lemaire Channel was discovered by Dallman's German Expedition of 1873-74, and later named for a Belgian explorer of the Congo (who was never there...), and was first navigated by Gerlache's Belgian Expedition in 1898. Ever since then, the mountains looming over the ship and the ice that can clog the channel makes it one of the most exciting and spectacular waterways in the world. We enjoyed the passage through of one of the most famous and dramatic waterways of the Antarctic.



Afterwards we dropped anchor just south of the Lemaire Channel, between Booth Island to the north and Pléneau Island to the south, in the Penola Strait (65°12'S 64°05'W), where we did a Zodiac cruise among several massive grounded icebergs in magnificent weather conditions.

One by one, the Zodiacs were dropped off the ship and dispersed in couples across what's informally referred to as 'Iceberg Alley' to afford some independent exploration. The first iceberg visited gave a great result. Not only was it beautiful but a curious Leopard seal was swimming around the blue foot. We had great views and saw incredible swimming and diving displays, as it decided to hang around our Zodiac for the better part of half an hour.

Afterwards, ... why not keep looking around for another Leopard seal or new surprises in the area? Off we went... We were lucky again as, after a while, another one was located resting on an iceberg. And after that, while cruising around spectacular icebergs, several more seals were spotted, like the Crabeater (the most common pinniped in the world) less animated, but at least easily observed as they had hauled out on numerous ice floes to rest and sleep. Soon it was time to head back to the ship for lunch and to get ready for the next activity, a landing on Booth Island, at Port Charcot.

Some of us climbed up quite a steep slope covered with snow to a historic memorial on top of the highest point and were rewarded with a great panoramic view all around.

After a few minutes, on our way back to *Plancius* two then three, no... five! Antarctic Minke whales were sighted and we all directed the zodiacs towards the area where they were. What a good half an hour of whale watching we had! The whales were not scared of the Zodiacs, surfacing close to us.

Ok, after this - what else? Just back on board and the ship and surprise! Happy hour in the bar before having dinner! And after a nice dinner the people willing to camp in Antarctica were brought ashore to spend the night on a snow field in Hovgaard Island (65°08'S 64°08'W), in the Pléneau area.

What a great day for all of us!

Jordi Plana



Port Charcot, is located in Booth Island and named after the French Explorer Jean-Baptiste Étienne Auguste Charcot who discovered it during his first Antarctic expedition in 1903-1905 on board the vessel *Français*. This expedition initially was set up as a mission to save Nordenskjöld, who had been reported lost. But after realizing that the ship *Uruguay* had accomplished the rescue, Charcot turned his sights to the Western Peninsula, discovering Booth Island among other locations. When he returned to France he was acclaimed a hero by all but his wife, a grand daughter of Victor Hugo, who divorced him.

1st February 2010 Petermann Islands

Position at 08.00hrs 65°10'S 64°07'W

Weather Conditions: Cloudy with snow showers, light northerly wind.



Today we traveled less than 20 miles, but we experienced much in that limited area. All of us, but especially the kayakers and campers, continued to benefit from extraordinarily kind, calm weather. After collecting the campers from Hovgaard Island, we sailed south to Petermann Island (65°10'S 64°10'W) for a splendid landing. Besides the inevitable colonies of Gentoo penguins, we enjoyed the minority population of Adelie penguins – of all penguins the species most characteristic of Antarctica.



A short trek to the south end of the island rewarded us with a vast panorama of icebergs plus the mountains and glaciers of the Antarctic Peninsula marching out to the southern horizon. A light snowfall was just enough to remind us that we were enjoying Antarctica at nature's benevolence. Meanwhile a frisky Leopard seal proved that it had learned the trick of biting the end cone of Shane's zodiac to deflate it!

Another short southward ship cruise brought us to the Argentine Islands for a whole suite of afternoon activities.

We alternated between Zodiac cruising and visits to Wordie House and the Ukrainian Vernadsky Station (65°15'S 64°15'W). Wordie House dates from 1947 and was a small British research station before the main Faraday Station was built close by. The latter station gained fame for discovering the ozone hole in the atmosphere. In 1996 the British sold Faraday Station to the Ukraine, which continues the long temporal series of atmospheric measurements. Wordie House offered a snapshot of Antarctic lifestyles in times past. Vernadsky Station, on the other hand, showed

the very friendly Ukrainians conducting serious research while playfully retaining much of the British flavor of the longtime Faraday Station – including the illicit pub with homebrewed vodka.

But the prime highlights of the afternoon for most of us was the Zodiac cruise. By then we were almost jaded from so many point-blank views of Crabeater and Leopard seals amidst icebergs .

Then the call of “whales!” was heard on the radio, and zodiacs converged on the open bay. Three Humpback whales – a mother, her calf, and an adult friend – were feeding and they were allowing us to watch them as long as we wanted. “Poof! Poof! puff!,” the three leviathans breathed as they surfaced, often displaying their knobby heads. Over and over again the three humped backs arched presaging the raising of their broad, strikingly patterned flukes as they plunged into steep but shallow feeding dives, often angling sideways.



Initially the little giant usually did not show much of its flukes, but then it too began to throw its flukes skyward like a more-practiced Humpback. This prolonged spectacle was a dream exceeded for many of us, and it was with great difficulty that we finally tore ourselves away from the entertaining trio. Well into the evening people remained blissfully awestruck by this climax of yet another amazing day in this grand unscripted theatre of exquisite wild nature.

Words Steve Bailey, Photos by Shane Murphy & Jordi Plana, Zodiac Damage by A. Leopard Seal.

2nd February 2010

Argentine Islands,
Lemaire and Nuemayer Channels
to Melchior Islands

Position at 06.00hrs 65°13'S 64°14'W

Weather Conditions: Calm Sea, Partly
Cloudy with a lovely sunrise at 05.15hrs



Wake up call came early this morning for the 15 hardy campers, 11 of whom had spent the night out in the open! Jim woke the group at 5am and they were rewarded with a lovely sunrise over the mountains of the Peninsular. The campers took down and packed the tents before returning to the ship. That first cup of coffee back on board tasted great...although some campers were more focused on the chance to use a real toilet again!

Plancius weighed anchor just after 06.00hrs and we took a long ship's cruise via the lovely Lemaire Channel and the broad, glacier framed Neumayer Channel. Calm seas and no wind give us excellent reflections of the mountains and ice in the water. Many people wrapped up against the cold and stood on deck filling their memory cards!

Just after lunch we reached our destination for the day, the Melchior Islands (64°19'S 62°57'W). Sixteen of the Melchior islands are named for letters in the Greek alphabet: Alpha, Beta etc. We Zodiac cruised amongst the many narrow channels, grounded and floating icebergs to see what we could find. Antarctic Fur seals were the only residents of the otherwise unoccupied Argentinean station "Melchior." Further around the island of Gamma we saw several groups of chinstrap penguins.



Our expedition cruise took on a really adventurous flavour as we sailed our Zodiac into un-charted waters. The island of Omega is split into two by a narrow channel that is not shown on the charts. The shallow sound is a real test of a Zodiac driver as it weaves between ice cliffs. Both Jim and Anjali cleared the cliffs but then ran aground! There was nothing for it but to jump over the side and pull the boats through to clearer water. Once safe, Jim emptied the water from his boots and several passengers provided replacement socks.

Each Zodiac pair found their own adventures, including close encounters with Krill, mesmerizing blue ice and a pair of Humpback whales. We were back on board at around six o'clock in order to begin the two day transit of the Drake Passage northwards. Just as we were sitting down to dinner, a few Antarctic residents came to wave us off: three humpback whales to starboard side and four on the port side, raised cheers in the dining room as we sailed away.

Jim Mayer

3rd February 2010 – At Sea, in the (very calm) Drake Passage

Position at 08.00hrs 61°43'S 64°05'W

Weather Conditions: Foggy, calm sea with 8m/s wind from the north north east.

Wake up call was at half past seven, and we were now on the open ocean doing good speed. Antarctica had faded out of sight but was clearly still at the centre of discussion among the passengers who freely shared photographic images and experiences of our voyage with one another.

Sadly no more running up and down the ship getting dressed and undressed for the landings, running up and down looking for the life jackets and no more stepping in the Zodiacs.

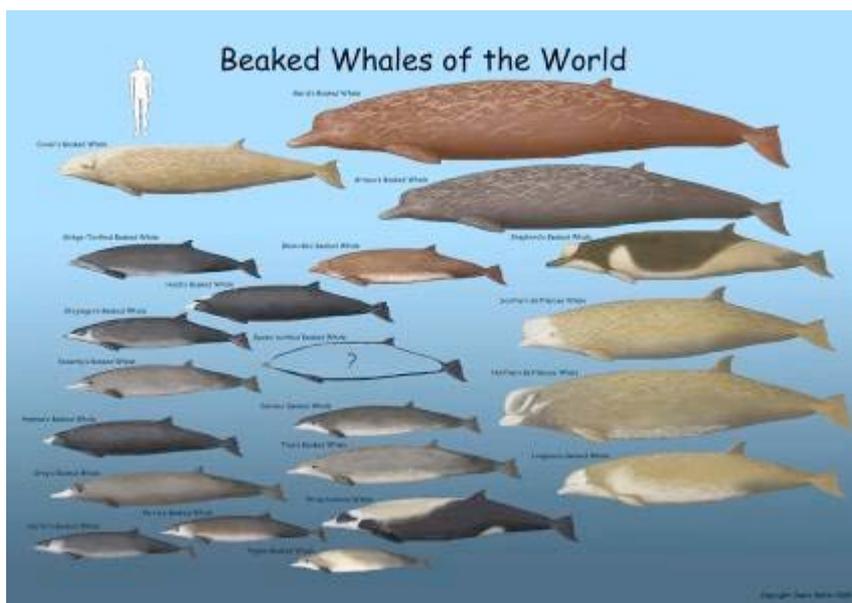
Luck was still on our side as the *Plancius* was sailing the Drake Passage in calm seas and barely a light breeze of wind. The whole morning the ship was surrounded by dense fog. These weather conditions were not the best for spotting wildlife. Many seabirds rely on good visibility and wind to wander in the ocean looking for something to feed on.

After lunch Jordi gave a talk about his work as a scientist involved in a Humpback Whale program, in Southern Patagonia and Antarctic Peninsula. He explained us how the researchers work with these amazing whales in photoidentification and population genetics, presenting some recent results of this work. By the end of the lecture all of a sudden we got out of the fog that had accompanied us from last afternoon. This event could probably be related with a change in the water surface temperature of about 2°C, raising from approximately 2°C to 4°C in a short distance, most probably indicating that we were already crossing the Antarctic Convergence.

From then on the sky turned pretty blue, sunshine and almost perfect sea conditions offering us an amazingly smooth Drake crossing. Good seas for proposing something interesting like the preparation of a slide show with the best guests pictures to be shown tomorrow, and the chance to share our contact information in an e-mail list, as sadly the trip is finishing pretty soon and many of us would like to keep contact with the new friends made during our “Antarctic experience” in *Plancius*.

Before dinner we had an interesting meeting in the bar with all the expedition staff, just to ask questions and add commentaries on Antarctic issues. This session brought up interesting ideas from politics and history to wildlife, and also some whales quite close to the ship, that turned out to belong to the beaked whales group.

Words by Jordi Plana.



4th February 2010 – At Sea, in the Drake Passage

Position at 07.30hrs 56°51S, 65°49'W, 60nm from Cape Horn & 90nm from the Beagle Channel.

Weather Conditions: Wind from the south at 10m/s

It actually happened: The complete voyage had good weather every day! For our second day northbound across the feared Drake Passage a tailwind helped push the ship's speed to over 14 knots. The westerly swell was gentle, so we took only mild rolls. After early dark clouds, the sky cleared to fair and provided excellent light with which to photograph the various plumages of Wandering, Southern Royal, and Northern Royal albatrosses, with a few Wanderings repeatedly passing just a few meters from the camera lenses.

Lectures continued with a mixture of history and wildlife including Shanes retelling of Shackleton's epic survival adventure in the Weddell Sea.

With the smooth sea, Plancius raced into waters protected by the Cape Horn Islands, and in the afternoon we entered the east end of the Beagle Channel. That assured a quiet night waiting for our appointment with the Ushuaia pilot. What better time to reflect on an Antarctica voyage that bordered on the perfect?

Words by Steve Bailey

5th February 2010 – Ushuaia

Position: 54°15'S/ 68°19'W



Photo by Jordi Plana

The harbour from which we departed comes into sight, completing our circular voyage. Our trip has come to an end, but the journey will last a lifetime in our memories. We all made new friends, and shared beautiful encounters with nature. Just as Jack London says, "happiness is only real when shared."

Total Distance travelled: 1445 Nautical Miles/ 2688 Kilometres