

South Georgia Jim Blyth group

Ski mountaineering from *Podorange* 15 September – 18 Oct 2014



Shoulder of Mt Regulator

Eight ski mountaineers and three sailors departed Stanley on *Podorange* on September 15th for a 35 day yacht supported ski trip to South Georgia. The members of the mountaineering team were Anto Baird, Dave Baldwin, Trevor Craig, Bethan Davies, Tilly Ross and Martin Vince with mountain guides Jim Kerr and Jim Blyth. The mariners were skipper Brice Monegier du Sorbier, Corinne Perron and Florent Gaillard.

We had a memorable time and it was with sadness that we parted company after our shared adventures. Five weeks on a yacht is a long time for mountaineers used to space but everyone did their best to make life on-board as pleasant and enjoyable as possible and in every way the trip was a great success. The mariners are to be congratulated for their calm demeanour, good humour and professionalism throughout. Sailing to and from South Georgia and exploring the Island on skis was a powerful experience for us all.

During our time in South Georgia we saw no-one on land other than at Grytviken and there were no other yachts or cruise ships. It was a great privilege to visit the island without any other signs of the outside world – we had the mountains and seas to ourselves.

We had no fixed mountaineering or ski objectives though we hoped to repeat the Shackleton traverse and visit and ski in the South of the Island. In the end we achieved neither of these aims due to the weather.

The reputation of South Georgia for weather and winds is well known but we were hopeful for sunshine and light winds on some days to be able to enjoy camping and skiing objectives further

from the coast. In the end we never had a sufficiently good weather window to consider using tents and only once did we have consecutive days of good weather. On all but five days it was windy, very windy or extremely windy, invariably from the SW to NW sector. SW and W winds gave an impressive Föhn effect which we made the most of by skiing close to the E coast. Winds from the NW brought poor visibility and precipitation. We were out on skis in some strong winds up to a force sufficient to knock one over. The idea of camping in such conditions was 'terrifying' as one of the team put it and most of us had done sufficient bad weather camping not to need to do more without a good reason. We had snow to the shore and preferred to make the best of each day by skiing from *Podorange* rather than spend time holed up in tents due to bad weather.

20 September – arrived Elsehul in the dark.



left – arrival Elsehul

21 September – 320m peaklet we called Mt. Wellington, on the Paryadin Ridge. 54°01'39.3" S 37°59'01.4" W.

Cold and windy walk in sailing wellies to Undine Harbour then up onto the little peak. The latter gave impressive views out to Bird Island and the Willis Islands. Insufficient snow to ski. Lots of wildlife.

22 September – shoulder of Mt Regulator, Right Whale Bay.

Very strong winds died by midday allowing us to make a landing at RWB. Perfect visibility and little wind. I chose not to take ice axes which was a mistake as we could easily have reached the summit of Regulator. However we greatly enjoyed skiing from two high points on the NE shoulder with the second run to the beach. Wonderful views and great skiing.



Undine Harbour



Ernesto 787m Regulator to the R off picture

23rd September – small summit above Blue Whale Harbour we called Petrol Pique 54°04'49.5" 37°02'21.4" W (WGS 84) 456m

Grey day but winds not too strong. An impressive, steep little peak requiring the use of a range of ski mountaineering techniques thus giving good practise. Roped up to the small summit. Practised crevasse rescue before returning aboard.



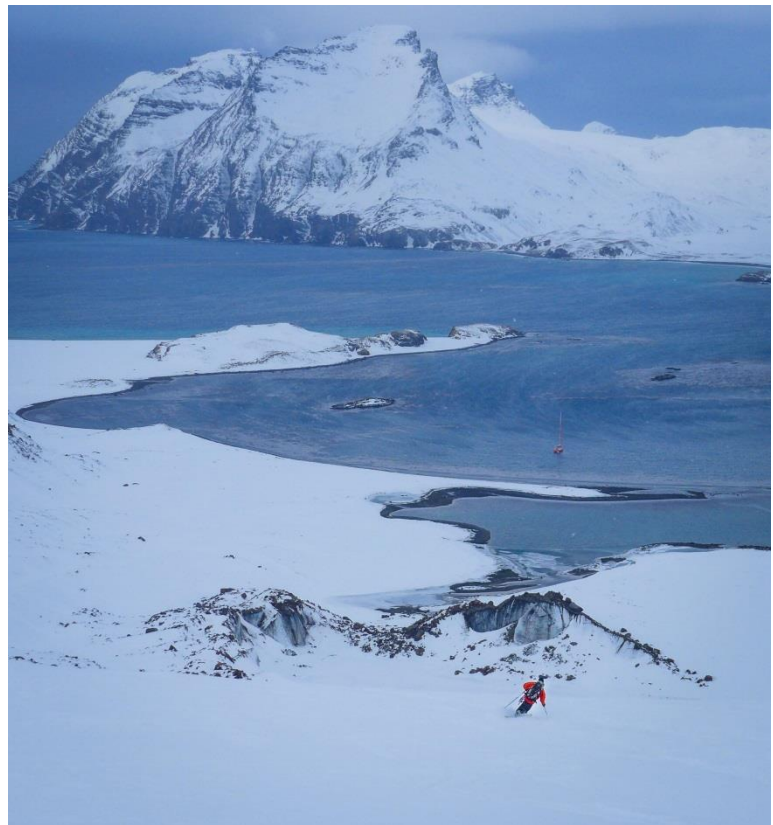
Left – Petrol Pique in the centre of the photo

24 September – Possession Bay to King Haakon Bay over the Shackleton Gap. Grey and overcast with strong E winds. We roped up to the Gap taking ropes off for the ski down. No sign of any crevasses. We enjoyed visiting the area around Peggotty Bluff then skinned

back to the Gap and skied to Possession Bay. Below – returning to Possession Bay after our visit to King Haakon

25 September – Isthmus Dome South 54°07.784'S 37°18.972'W (South America 69) 945m.

This was one of the best days of the trip with sunshine and very light winds. Low level cloud rolled in from the sea with a ceiling at about 600m. This prevented us from going to the summit of two other peaks I had spotted for this traverse. We skinned towards the Shackleton Gap breaking right up on to the top of the Purvis Glacier where we reached 'Compromise Point' 54°07.740'S 37°13.820'W (South America 69) at the head of the Morris Glacier. We enjoyed a great run down to above King Haakon Bay before a two hour, 800m skin to the summit of Isthmus Dome South. We found the name of



this summit and the fact it had been done in 1957 when we bought Alec Trendall's book on the mapping of South Georgia in Grytviken. We feel the mountain deserves a nicer name and one of the team suggested Mount Nubes. We enjoyed a great ski down to the col at the head of the Lucas Glacier before we disappeared into the cloud and on a compass bearing, reached Salisbury Plain.

26 September – Grytviken

Woke to miserable weather so motored to Grytviken where we enjoyed walking and visiting KEP and G.

27 September – Grytviken

This was a very windy day...! We set out to ski on the Thatcher Peninsula but soon turned around

due to the wind and zero visibility. Day spend visiting G & KEP.



View from Compromise Point over King Haakon Bay



Looking east towards Mt Ashley from the summit of Isthmus Dome South

28 September – Mt Hodges and Maiviken

Another very windy day but less so than the day before. We skinned as high as was sensible on Mt Hodges, continuing on foot with crampons to the summit. Descended and skied back to Grytviken from where we made a quick visit on skis to the hut at Maiviken.



Grytviken bad weather



View from Mt Hodges

29 September – Szielko Ice Cap

Dropped off at Sandebugten, clear vis at low altitudes but windy. In deteriorating weather and very high winds we made the col just before the summit 807m which I think is called Black Peak. We had already spoken with *Podorange* to re-arrange our pickup for Godthul rather than Ocean Harbour. Winds were so high and visibility poor so we kept our skins on for the descent from the col. Indeed we kept them on all the way to the shore at Godthul. G is not easy to reach from above and doing so involved some intricate route finding through cliffs and bluffs and some easy ice axe and crampon work on tussock grass! Thankfully we had sufficient visibility for route finding.

Jim Blyth

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30 September – E Point of the Szielko Range, 54°18'58"S 36°17'00"W
824m

Perfect weather and the wind dropped as we started skinning from Ocean Harbour. Route choice on the way up took care but there were always possibilities. The upper glacier gave easy skinning to the col between the central and eastern summits. The final ridge to summit was climbed on foot. After enjoying the wonderful 360° views we had a superb ski down and out onto the point dominating the N side of OH. Lovely viewpoint directly onto *Podorange* anchored in OH. This was the first day we saw the high summits of South Georgia, Paget, Roots Nordenskjold et al though they were in a huge Föhn cloud for most of the day. To us this

summit is Peak Podo. On upper glacier heading for Peak Podo



Approaching the summit of Peak Podo

1 October – Mt Fusilier E summit



Another cracker of a day though it started in flat light. Set off from St Andrews Bay on snow from the shore. The final approach gave relatively steep skinning to just below the summit which was reached on foot by a most enjoyable short ridge. Lovely ski down followed by a short skin back to the Col to E of Fusilier and then down to St Andrews Bay.

Photo left – skiing Mt Fusilier

2 October – Unnamed summit at 54.434176°S 36.278504°W
836m

Sunshine and calm this morning so we decide to go for a wander up the Heaney Glacier and do something from there. After a couple of hours skinning a bowl opened up to our R which was perfect for skinning and skiing and at the top of which were two



Approaching Emma



Summit ridge of Emma



Summit of Mt Emma

summits. We chose the higher, left most of the two which gave an enjoyable alpine ascent. This involved use of axe, crampons and rope and had a tricky step low on the ridge. The peak would appear to be the highest in the small group of mountains between the Heaney Glacier and the E branch of the Nordenskjold Glacier. If it doesn't have a name we would like to call it Mt Emma.

5 October – Jason Peak 665m

We departed from a landing point beside the Jason Harbour hut. Jason Peak gave a most enjoyable, varied ascent on skis and foot with the final snow ridge being quite exposed and requiring care on



Nearing the summit of Jason Peak

the descent. There was just enough snow to ski all the way from the shoulder before the summit down the N side (one ski belay used to rope folks on skis down a short section) to a pick up at Husvik Harbour. Snow on this N side was soft and heavy and the poorest we had skied.

6 October – ski traverse from Husvik to Worseley Beach, Fortuna Bay, via Stromness.

Flat light, damp and windy today. Snow was firmer though so we made good progress to the col on the Berntsten Ridge overlooking Husvik and Stromness. The descent towards Stomness was on soft, heavy snow then tussock. Skinning on soft snow we reversed the Shackleton walk to Fortuna Bay. Cold and damp.



Left – descending from the Berntsten Ridge behind Stromness

8 October - Prion Island

After yesterday's bad weather we were disappointed to have the same this morning so plans for ski mountaineering were abandoned and we visited the Albatrosses at Prion Island.

9 October – Unnamed Peak 54°02.284'S 37°29.495'W (WGS84) 494m from Rosita Harbour

Flat, grey light but no precipitation. Very strong winds, especially above 500m with all summits in wind cloud. Set off from Rosita Harbour for an ascent of the unnamed peak between there and the Brunonia Glacier. This had a very short section on foot to the top. We descended a short distance on foot then skied a great, steep line down to the Brunonia and the shore at Sunset Fjord. We skinned back up to the Col to the E of peak 494m and enjoyed two great runs down to Camp Bay before skinning up one final time for the ski back to the yacht in Rosita Harbour. Today gave some of the best skiing of the trip and a fun day out, staying low out of the worst of the wind. Our name for this peak is Mount Armistice.



Point 2050 'North View' from 55-56 survey in centre with the Col the survey team traversed to the right. Mount Armistice on the right. We skied from just right of the summit to the shore.



First run to Camp Bay



10 October – Bear 54°04.786' S 37°28.992' W (WGS84) 730m

A most unpromising start to the day saw cloud descending to the shore, wind and rain. This improved by 11am so we set off early in the afternoon for the mountain 'Bear' mentioned in Alec Trendall's book. It had been climbed once before from the Price Glacier to the south. We skinned up from Sunset Fjord, enjoying one hour of clear visibility and little wind before we

lost the former and recommenced the struggle with the latter. We summited on foot in zero vis, skiing down on a compass bearing back to Sunset Fjord. Another great little ski peak. Photo – descending from the summit of 'Bear'

11 October – Prince Olav Harbour

Poor weather again and the forecast is for more of the same so we decide to prepare for departure from South Georgia tomorrow, two days earlier than hoped. We enjoyed a short walk ashore in the afternoon.



Homeward bound

The weather did not improve on South Georgia over the next few days and our passage to Port Stanley went well so we made the right choice.

Safety Plan – our safety plans were thankfully not tested in any way.

Environmental Plan – we followed recommendations and common sense to minimise the impact of our presence. We saw no unusual wildlife (unusual to SG...) or environmental events.

Expedition Application and Processing – all fine

Summary – any visit to South Georgia is a challenging experience, particularly on a yacht. This was a big adventure for us all and one that leaves us with lasting memories of friendship, wild places, raw beauty, wildlife, remoteness, relentless wind, summits, skiing and much more. The expedition was a great success.



Founder members of the SGPC on the summit of Peak Podo