

Selma Expeditions - the Shackleton Traverse - South Georgia 2016

**Report prepared for the Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands
by Krzysztof Jasica**

1. Introduction

The "Selma Expeditions - Shackleton Traverse 2016" was planned from 17 October to 21 October 2016. The team of three experienced and well prepared crew members of Selma Expeditions with extensive expedition experience, and support crew aboard the s/y Selma Expeditions, planned to follow Shackleton's route across South Georgia from King Haakon Bay to Stromness in memoriam of Sir Ernest Shackleton and his companions.

2. Background

After 15 years' exploration of polar regions, in 2015 we organized an extremely demanding expedition to the Ross Sea and Erebus area in the Antarctic region. It was an ultimate test of our polar and sailing experience and we successfully achieved all that was planned during that endeavour, such as sailing to the most southern edge of the Ross Sea or climbing Mount Erebus.

This unique project was dedicated to the memory of Sir Ernest Shackleton on the 100th anniversary of his heroic voyage aboard his vessel "Endurance". We have also used his motto: "By endurance we conquer" ("fortitudine vincimus") as the theme of our expedition. The main goal was to follow Shackleton's footsteps by visiting all the most important places associated with his Antarctic expeditions at the furthestmost and coldest edges of the earth's seas and oceans.

What we have accomplished:

- Arriving at all the most important locations associated with Shackleton's voyages during training (sailing to South Georgia, Elephant Island; Weddell Sea, Ross Sea)
- Reaching, under sails, the Bay of Whales (named by Shackleton 107 years earlier), and mooring to the great barrier of Ross Ice Shelf at 78° 43' 926 S.
- Reaching the top of Mount Erebus, the southern most active volcano on earth, at 3 794 m (12 448 ft) above sea level (it was the first Polish climb of this mountain). The very first climb was performed there in 1908 by members of Shackleton's expedition;


The planned traverse of South Georgia was to be the last and final step of our journey in Sir Ernest Shackleton's footsteps.

3. Support Vessel

a) S/Y Selma Expeditions - steel ketch designed by a Georg Azueppe-Brenner and was built in the shipyard CM Merret in Brittany. She is known for her sea-worthiness and possesses two independent steering positions, one situated in the cockpit, the second in the comfortable pilot house. The far forward section of the bow is cut off by a sealed bulkhead. The forepeak, engine room and stern compartment have water tight bulkheads. The main 80 kg anchor (Rocna type), spare 50kg anchor and ropes (4x125m) give the possibility of mooring in unusual/inaccessible places. Sonar helps to navigate the shallows and not well charted waters.

The design and equipment of Selma make her an ideal expedition boat destined to sail in a heavy weather.

S/Y Selma Expeditions is a member of IAATO with an Operator status.

		<p> length : 20,28 m breadth : 4,95 m H.A.W.L. : 3,96 m draught : 2,67 m hull : steel max crew : 12 sail rig : ketch sails : genoua no 1, genoua no 2, jib, spinnaker, mainsail, mizzen, storm sails sail area : 162 m² engine : Perkins 6.354M (122hp) </p>
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4.Description of the expedition



Date	Places to visit	Campsites	pus&ds
19-Oct-2016	King Haakon Bay - 0700 UTC		054°08,786' S 037°16,990' W
19-Oct-2016	King Haakon Bay-Shackleton Gap-Murray Snowfield	054°08,697' S 037°05,461' W	
20-23 Oct-2016	Murray Snowfield	054°08,697' S 037°05,461' W	
24-Oct-2016	Murray Snowfield - Possession Bay		
24-Oct-2016	Possession Bay - 1800 UTC		054°07,697' S 037°09,856' W



As envisaged, the expedition team consisted of Krzysztof Jasica, Jan Pechar and Przemyslaw Kruszynski.



S/Y Selma Expeditions left Ushuaia on 9 October, and reached South Georgia on 17 October. Due to severe weather conditions in the King Haakon Bay area, we had to wait in the Elshul Bay for the

weather to improve. We were receiving regular weather forecasts, and we realized there could be a 2 hour weather window during which it might be possible to leave the expedition team in the King Haakon Bay and at the same time allow S/Y Selma Expeditions to safely leave the Bay. It was the only such opportunity within a 5 days period, and required very precise sailing to land the expedition team in a quick and efficient way and have Selma turn back to look for safer waters. We had always known that it would be one of the risky moments of the expedition also because safety of the yacht was as important as the safety of the land team.

In spite of it being a very tight plan, the land team was safely delivered to shore on 19 October 0700hrs UTC at King Haakon Bay (054°08,786' S 037°16,990' W), and s/y Selma Expeditions left the bay still ahead of a strong southern wind which might have otherwise blocked her in. It was possible thanks to a very detailed plan, developed on the basis of weather forecasts, and choosing the right moment to leave the Elshul Bay because we arrived in the King Haakon Bay with hardly any wind which made all manouvers possible.

The land team left the shores of the King Haakon Bay and got to Shackleton Gap and Murray Snowfield, where they were caught by strong wind and heavy snow so they decided to camp there as the spot provided good protection against the weather. They put up tent at 1600hrs UTC and established contact with Selma Expeditions and informed them about difficult weather conditions and about decision to stay in the camp until the weather improves. They expected that the conditions further up in the mountains were getting more and more dangerous, with risks of avalanche and ice crevasses covered under snow. They requested weather forecast for the next 72hrs. Upon receiving it, they realized the weather might only improve on the 4th day, Sunday. Unfortunately, the weather did not improve on Sunday, and the weather forecast for the following two days did not look good, either. At that moment they decided that they would not continue with the traverse, and that on 24th October, Monday they would go back to the Possession Bay (which was one of designated emergency evacuation routes).



The weather on 24th October confirmed the forecasts: strong wind brought more snow, and visibility was much reduced, to 5 -10 m. With the waypoints pre-programmed in GPS, they were able to safely get to the Possession Bay.



The expedition team was safely picked up by Selma Expeditions in Possession Bay, at 054°07,697' S 037°09,856' W., on 24 October at 1800hrs UTC.

Conclusions:

We were aware that the weather will be the main factor to determine the success of our expedition. This is why we paid so much attention to prepare ourselves properly, including having access to up-to-date weather forecasts, and preparing emergency routes and procedures to account for adverse weather conditions.

We planned for a five day expedition, with 3 days of extra supplies. It was clear that after having spent 5 days in tent, waiting for weather to improve, we would not have enough time to continue. Therefore, the decision to abort the planned traverse and go back to the Possession Bay was the only correct one to take, without exposing ourselves to unnecessary risks.

As for Sir Ernest Shackleton, the safety of people was the most important factor, and therefore even though we have not reached our destination, we look at this attempted traverse of South Georgia as a good lesson and valuable experience for future expeditions.

Krzysztof Jasica
Expedition Leader
SELMA EXPEDITIONS Sp. z o.o.