

EXPEDITION REPORT

South Georgia – Shackleton Crossing

Report filed by: Guy Cotter – Adventure Consultants ltd.

Trip dates: 19 October to 8 November 2016

This expedition was operated in conjunction with Lindblad/Nat Geo expeditions to celebrate the 100 year anniversary of the crossing of South Georgia made by Shackleton, Worsley and Crean as well as it being the 50th anniversary of Lindblad expeditions.

Team

Guy Cotter – IFMGA Guide

Kevin Nicholas – IFMGA Guide

Peter Hillary – climber

Jamling Tenzing - climber

Jeremy Lindblad – climber

Alfie Saemundsson – climber

Tyler Cooper – climber

Brian Dagg – climber

Paul Pheby – climber

Rich Spritz – climber

Devlin Gandy - cameraman

TIMELINE

19 Oct -21 Oct	Guy and Kevin arrive Ushuaia to prep
22 Oct	Group members arrival day.
23 Oct	Training with group. Initial briefing, Sorted food, avalanche training.
24 Oct	Went to airport to meet group on arrival. Bus shuttle to national park a little further up the channel near border with Chile. Got on large catamaran for cruise to Ushuaia. Boarded ship around 3pm. Sailed out of channel and turned left toward the east
25 Oct	At sea, arrived into Falkland Islands late and anchored.
26 Oct	Visited New island. A short walk to NW side of island to penguin and albatross rookery over the ocean. In afternoon visited Sanders Island.
27 Oct	At sea. Sorted gear. Did a team briefing/discussion. Cleaned out all gear with vacuum cleaner and checked all boots, poles, snowshoes etc for contaminants and seeds.
28 Oct	At sea

- 29 Oct Arrived South Georgia into King Haakon bay. Visited Camp Cove where the James Caird first made landfall. Weather cold and precipitating lightly from Nthly $\frac{1}{4}$ winds around 20kph. We anchored offshore with early wake up planned for start of trek in morning. Forecast positive for midday on 30th with anticipated southerly change and clearing.
- 30 Oct Departed ship at 4.45am for beach to start trek. Sharps in 2 duffels. Cold and wet. We drove around 3km in the Zodiac and landed on snowy beach. Began walk at 6.10am. Hit first real snow fields after half an hour then put on snow shoes and roped up. Ascended to the right of the route to Possession bay, up to right of rock spur coming down from peak to the right. Weather gradually cleared although we had got wet from the northerly headwind we had started out in but dried out as the wind turned to the south and clouds disappeared as per the forecast. Came up onto shoulder and up long slope onto Murray snowfield. Signs of fresh slab avalanches on E aspects around the range. There was a layer of recent wet snow (~15cm) over a harder base. We headed to the right of obvious pointy peak to a saddle we arrived around midday in good visibility which revealed great views across the Crean glacier and (further down the slope) into Antarctic Bay. We descended into the Crean and encountered a sliding layer at ~10-15cm but didn't feel the surface consistency was bonded sufficiently to develop into slab avalanches but wet slide potential did exist. Sun rollers were coming off the peak to the right, indicating the effect of solar radiation that had been occurring prior to our arrival without developing into bigger slides. Kev led down, on his rope of 4, Peter with his rope of 3 next and my team of 4 last. A serac threatens the lower half of that slope that provides a threat to the lower half of that slope. After arriving on the base of the slope we carried on to the east, past big valleys that funnelled strong katabatic winds. We hiked past the medial moraines where people often camp and stopped at 5pm for a scheduled stop to call the ship to check in, and made camp there in fine weather and light winds.
- 31 Oct Awake at 4.30. Fine wx no wind. About -2C. High lenticular clouds. Departed 7.10. Got to Fortuna pass next to Nanatuk around midday and rested 30 minutes. There was an inversion to the east and 100m below the pass that covered all of Fortuna Bay with the summit of Best Peak still visible for rough navigation. We used GPS coordinates to assist with our navigation towards the bay and we regained visibility when below the inversion at around 250m. The NG Orion was waiting just off. We arrived at our pick up point at 2pm. Human

waste that was carried by each individual in WAG bags was disposed of in the ship's incinerator.

1 Nov After a tour of St Andrews Bay, we returned to Fortuna Bay to complete last part of crossing into Stromness which took about 2 hours walking time. We heard from the ship that there was still snow on the route and that it would be inappropriate to take guests from the ship on this section given the conditions. There were indeed some sizable snow patches although Kevin said snow cover was very light compared to the same time the previous year when he had completed the crossing. The walk would be snow-free later on in the season but after crossing it I agreed we wouldn't want punters in bad footwear on, especially if it was frozen as the final snow slope would be treacherous. From Shackleton's 'waterfall' at the base of the slope (what was he thinking?) we walked the final 40 minutes to the beach and boarded the NG Orion.

2-3 Nov Departed South Georgia.

5 Nov Arrived Falkland Islands, Port Stanley visit overnight

6 Nov Departed Falkland Islands

7-8 Nov At sea, arrived Ushuaia. Guests depart

9 Nov Guy and Kevin depart

Summary

Weather:

We were very lucky with weather and with the support from the ship's EL and Captain. We found Windyty was an excellent predictor of weather for this trip.

Times

We took 18 hours from King Haakon to Fortuna total trek time (incl stops) with 20kg packs. If ship is going directly to Fortuna Bay from King Haakon after dropping the party off, the trip to Fortuna Bay could be achieved in only 1 long day with very light gear, fast people, and only in perfect weather. In bad visibility it would be difficult and dangerous to achieve if you were unfamiliar with the route.

Communications:

We made Iridium calls to the ship at 1700hrs on day 1 and 0800 on day 2.

Equipment

Snowshoes worked well for early season as we kept ours on almost the entire crossing. In late season there is a lot of white ice and they wouldn't be so useful unless there had been a recent heavy snowfall. We roped our team of 11 people in groups of 4, 4 and 3. We had one person put a leg into a crevasse during the descent from Trident ridge into the Crean. We used TNF Bastion 4 tents with sewn on valances but due to fine weather these were not tested fully. We did not use pulks due to the short nature of the trip and relatively light loads.

Environmental

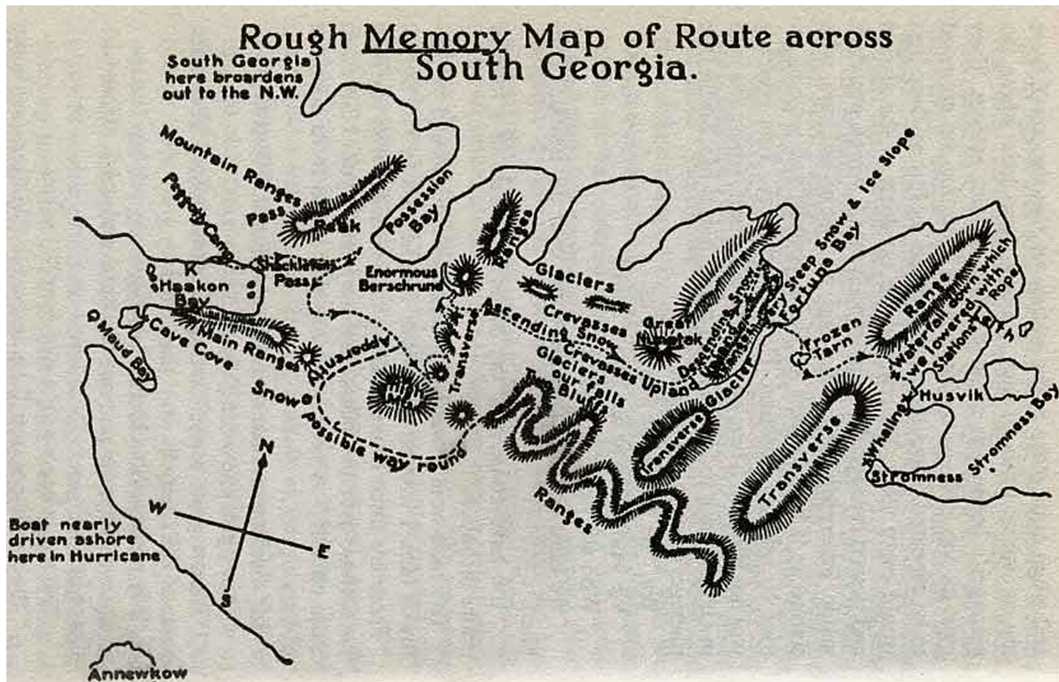
We used WAG bags for (solid) human waste that were carried by each individual and disposed of in the ships incinerator. All protocols for ensuring contaminants and foreign species were adhered to and no signs of previous trips was seen except on the Fortuna to Stromness trek and that was limited to footprints.

Navigation

We used the BAS 12A and 12B South Georgia Map in scale 1:200,000. There do not appear to be any good maps available in a more detailed scale (e.g. 1:50,000) that I could find. We did have a proven Nav plan on GPS that guide Kevin Nicholas had from 3 previous successful crossings.



The route we took over the Trident ridge was not as safe to descend into the Crean as other options further north along the ridge and I believe Shackleton crossed a lot further to the north than some have speculated. Worsley's map indicates they made 4 attempts to cross until they found the slope they eventually did descend. If I was to complete the Shackleton Crossing again (with the benefit of visibility) I would go to this route especially as it will be less hazardous with any loading that may have occurred on the East facing slope into the Crean.



The map clearly shows them making 4 attempts to cross and they may well have crossed closer to the peak in the photo above.



Overall a great trip over historical ground. I was impressed with the level of care taken by the Government of South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands to protect the environmental fragility of the region. There was no issue with compliance amongst our team who recognised what a privilege it was to partake in this trip.

Serac hazard to watch out for during the descent.



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