

**Shackleton Crossing – ASG56**

Voyage Dates: 11-30 March 2014

Report: Howard Whelan

Date: 26/3/14 All times are Ship’s Time (-3 UTC)

Leader: Howard Whelan (Australia)

Assistant Guide: James Kell (Australia)

Team Members: (4 total)

Shaun Cameron (UK), Andrew Pearce (UK), Marcella Dunne (Ireland), Karl Flynn (Ireland). One applicant, \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\* was denied participation based on ability after training on the Peninsula.

**Overview:**

Dates:

20 Mar - Arrive King Haakon at 1300. Travel to Shackleton Gap in 50-knot plus winds and return to ship.

21 Mar – Return to King Haakon Bay at 0530 for second attempt. Cancel crossing due to high winds, storm conditions on mountain and little chance of evacuation from Possession Bay in case of medical emergency.

22 Mar - Fortuna Bay to Stromness.

Complete crossing unsuccessful due to persistent, extreme storm conditions.

**Route Description:**

We arrived at King Hakkon Bay on 20th March at noon and, departed the beach at 1 p.m. in winds 30 knots and rising. Due to Grib files predicting 40-knot plus winds at sea level, my intention was simply to go to Shackleton Gap with the team to see how they travelled in storm conditions. (We’d only had a chance for one training session, at Brown Bluff on the Antarctic Peninsula, in perfect conditions). At Shackleton Gap the wind was blowing 50-60 knots, visibility 50 metres maximum. We returned to the ship in driving wind and rain. My intention was to take the ship around to Possession Bay and start from the north side the following morning, and link up with our route at Shackleton Gap. We anchored at Jonas Harbour, near Undine Harbour. The barometer continued to fall to 963 mb during the night. Between 0200 and 0300 the wind speed increased to 90-plus knots from the north. Although the wind was predicted to drop by 6 a.m. I realised the hurricane force winds would have created too much swell to make a landing in Possession Bay unlikely. Instead the Captain returned us to King Haakon Bay so we could be in position to depart at 6 a.m. At 0530, the winds in King Haakon Bay remained strong, gusting at sea level to 50 knots plus. The waterfalls on the south side of the bay were blowing uphill and there was no visibility on the mountains. I gathered the climbers on the bridge, explained the situation and cancelled the complete crossing, explaining that I hoped we’d at least be able to do the Fortuna-Stromness section. That afternoon we came around to the north side of the island and into an 8-10 metre swell and strong winds. Lenticular clouds the length of the island confirmed my decision to not proceed. On the afternoon of 22 March, conditions eased enough to go into Fortuna Bay. At 1615 our climbers and additional fit passengers departed from the beach at Fortuna Bay and successfully followed the waypointed route to Stromness. On the afternoon of 23 March, the climbers visited Shackleton and Wild’s graves at the cemetery in Grytviken.

**Client and equipment screening:**

With the exception of one person, the clients for the SG crossing were all capable of the trip. For the most part, the equipment clients brought along was excellent and a

thorough gear check was undertaken early in the voyage. We provided ice axes to two clients and several sets of prussick loops.

We were only able get out on one training session on the Antarctic Peninsula for a climb on Brown Bluff, where we covered glacier travel, self arrests, crevasse rescue and emergency procedures. Our fifth participant (\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*) was deemed to have insufficient skills, fitness and overall ability and was told that they could not come on the crossing, although they were invited, and came with us to Shackleton Gap and also from Fortuna to Stromness. Between Elephant Island and South Georgia, tents were erected on the ship’s back deck as a training exercise.

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

**Cooking /Food:**

Enough food was packed for four days as per the permit requirements. This included

dehydrated meals brought from the USA (by James Kell) for all participants for two nights, and two night’s pasta. (16 total). Muesli, sandwiches and snack food were taken from the ship with power bars purchased in America, and chocolate bars from the ship.

**Navigation:**

We used the 1:100,000 BAS Map - NZTM Zone 24 with Magnetic declination of seven degrees. I used an Aurora Garmin GPS’s with my waypoints. (Saved as “SHACK” and clearly marked.) I also carried printouts from Google earth at a scale of approximately 1:25,000 with the way points graphed on them. One was carried on the traverse and the other was posted on the office whiteboard with GPS coordinates for all waypoints.

**Emergency Procedures:**

I updated our emergency contingency procedure and briefed my emergency response team and handed out the necessary equipment.

**Insurance:**

All participants should have a rescue and evacuation insurance. All policies

Have been checked by the Aurora office. Medical forms and indemnity forms for all participants were checked at our initial briefing on board.



Howard Whelan

