

Ski expedition across South Georgia onboard m/v Plancius 18 October – 04 November 2010



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EXPEDITIONS

The international Oceanwide Expeditions South Georgia ski crossing team 2010

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Introduction

Oceanwide Expedition organised and implemented a ski crossing of South Georgia following the historical footsteps of Shackleton, Crean and Worsley along the route across the glaciated interior of the remote South Georgia island from King Haakon Bay to Stromness. An international team of six participants and two mountain guides have successfully completed their self supplied ski traverse in 4 days, 3 nights with field camps at Murray Snowfield, Great Nunatak and Fortuna west side. The expedition hauled sledges and used skis .

The 'Exclusive South Georgia' expedition offered two adventure options: the sea voyage was designed for "sea explorers" (with zodiac and hiking excursions) and the land expedition was organised for "ski explorers". The sea explorers (the majority of the passengers) were based on the ship m/v Plancius and explored the Island's northern coastline in 8 days (23 - 30 October, 2010), while at the same time the ski explorers traversed the Island on a self supplied ski trek from the South coast (King Haakon Bay) to the North coast (Stromness Bay) in 4 days (23 - 26 October, 2010).

After both expeditions have rejoined at Stromness Bay, all passengers continue to enjoy the latter part of the South Georgia cruise itinerary (26-30 October, 2010).

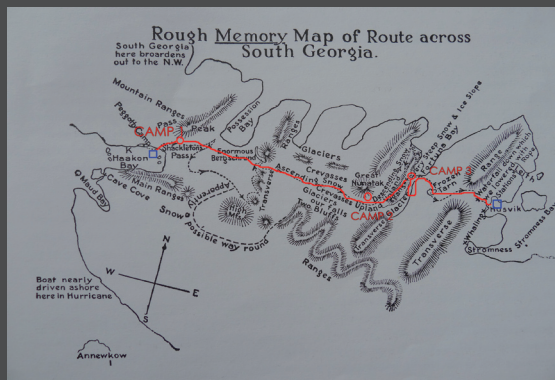
Expedition Objectives

The expedition objective was to achieve a self supplied ski traverse of South Georgia from South coast (King Haakon Bay) to North coast (Stromness Bay) hauling pulkas (sledges packed with approx. 30-35 kg) across a total distance of 40 – 50 km retracing sections of the historic Shackleton route from 1916.

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Reports on Activities - South Georgia 2010:

The standard post visit report for the expedition vessel was completed by the Expedition leader of m/v Plancius after the completion of the voyage.

The weather and snow conditions were favourable for the crossing, mostly good visibility, good snow cover. The expedition experienced one night with strong gusts blowing at "Camp Nunatak". The ski expedition was prepared for the worst weather conditions, and "lie-ins", therefore carried all necessary polar equipment and plenty of food supplies that could accommodate the ski group for up to 6 days in the field.

The crossing is an ultimate challenge, best time to be achieved at the end of the southern winter. Daylight was sufficient with sunrise at approximately 6 am and sunset approx. 8 pm. The expedition experienced heavily crevassed glacier terrain (Crean Glacier and Fortuna Glaciers still covered with snow), alpine ridges, steep and avalanche prone slopes, and steep gullies. During beach walks the expedition passed some typical wildlife, i.e. elephant seals, fur seals and penguin rookeries. The grass/rocky hills near the shore lines were free of snow.

The route of the ski crossing followed mostly the historical route of Shackleton, Crean and Worsley from 1916, starting the ski trek at King Haakon Bay (Peggotty Bluff) across the interior mountains and glaciers to Stromness Bay. Due to excellent weather conditions the crossing was accomplished in the time frame of 4 days with 3 camp nights, 30 hours net walking time. Camps were erected on Murray Snowfield (first camp), Great Nunatak (second camp) and Fortuna west side (third camp). The crossing party hauled sledges and used skis from King Haakon Bay to Fortuna Bay where the ski equipment was picked up by the support vessel m/v Plancius. For the latter part of the crossing, from Fortuna to Stromness, all members of the expedition walked lightweight without sledges and skis.

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The expedition also achieved to climb a yet unnamed Nunatak on the west side of Fortuna Bay (temporarily referred to as "Plancius Nunatak"). Prior to the expedition most expedition members gathered for a pre expedition meeting, rope skills and crevasse rescue training at Wiesbadener hut in the Austrian Silvretta mountains. The pre expedition meeting was targeted at refreshing individual mountaineering skills which are required and essential for preparation of a potentially demanding ski crossing on glaciated terrain across one of the remotest islands in the world (lack of SAR and medical facilities)

Peak climbed

The expedition also achieved to climb a yet unnamed Nunatak on the west side of Fortuna Bay (temporarily referred to as "Plancius Nunatak") on 29 October 2010. The Nunatak is indicated on the satellite image, and situated at S 54,08.418' , W 036,51.338' . The ascent route followed a straight line from Fortuna Bay towards Fortuna Glacier, approx 2,5 km inland, 500 ascent. The climb did not involve any technical mountaineering, rather scrambling across steep scree slopes and snow fields. All eight members of the ski expedition team successfully climbed the Nunatak. The Nunatak is a great orientation aid for a possible escape route from Fortuna Glacier to Fortuna Bay . This may help future crossing parties that need or wish to abort their final push descending the steep slope following the East side of Breakwind gap.

Relevant dates, locations and camp sites:

18 October 2010 : Embarkation Montevideo , Uruguay

19 – 22 October 2010 : at sea

23 October : skiers start early evening at Peggotty Bluff, King Haakon Bay. First camp was erected on Murray Snowfield, approx 300 a.s.l. Calm weather conditions.

24 October: Early rise at first camp , crossing of Murray snow field in two rope parties. Ascent of Trident Ridge and descent to Crean glacier. Second camp was erected at Great Nunatak. The weather was good for most of the day, wind conditions changed from calm to strong gusts in the evening.

25 October: Early rise at second camp , crossing of Fortuna Glacier to Breakwind Ridge in two rope parties. Ascent of Breakwind Gap and descent of steep gully to Fortuna Bay (approx 200 m above shore line). The gully is prone to rock fall. Third camp was erected above the shore line of Fortuna Bay west side. The visibility was good and wind conditions calm.

26 October: Early rise at third camp , descent to Fortuna Bay west side to meet a support zodiac from m/v Plancius for equipment pick up. The expedition team continued the trek equipped with day pack only to Stromness along the Shackleton walk from Fortuna Bay to Stromness Harbour. The party crossed a river at Whistle Cove and snow fields above Shackleton valley without problem. The ski crossing of South Georgia was completed at 14.00 hours , 26 October 2010 in Stromness, and all members rejoined the expedition vessel m/v Plancius.

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27 – 28 October: At sea for landing programme along the North coast of South Georgia.

29 October: The ski expedition team successfully climbed the Nunatak on west side of Fortuna Bay.

30 October: final landing day onboard m/v Plancius on South Georgia.

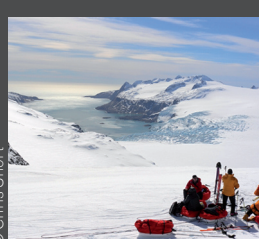
31 October – 04 November : at sea from South Georgia to Ushuaia/Argentina.



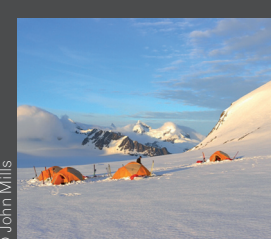
Approaching Trident.
©Mario Trimeri



Ascending Murray Snowfield.
© Christoph Hoebenreich



Break at Trident.
©Chris Short



Camp at Nunatak.
© John Mills



Crevasse Training.
©Mario Trimeri



Descent to Fortuna Bay.
©Mario Trimeri



South Georgia Ski Team.
© Oceanwide Expeditions

Safety plan

The safety plan was successfully implemented. Prior the expedition all potential candidates had to submit individual tour reports to Oceanwide Expedition. Reports were evaluated by the mountain guide team. Following the initial evaluation of the application process all physical capable and experienced ski mountaineers were selected and asked to participate in a pre expedition training course focusing on all facets of glacier travel. Participants were physically conditioned and experienced in order to participate in strenuous exercise in alpine environments with potential extreme weather situations. The ski crossers were familiar, and also refreshed, their rope skills and crevasse rescue techniques either in Alpine Introductory Courses or pre expedition training. The size of the group was ideal, client/guide ratio of 3:1 (Oceanwide Expeditions promoted the crossing with a ratio of 4:1). The support vessel m/v Plancius was in good reach at any time. The land party maintained daily Iridium satellite schedules with the bridge officer or the expedition leader of the vessel.

Schedules were set at 06.00 am, and 21.00 pm broadcasting a factual status report on time, position, status, expected progress (next camp site), weather and emergency exit routes for the day. The schedules were reported and filed by the officer or expedition leader onboard. It was agreed that full emergency will not be called until after 24 hours after last confirmed call. All daily schedules were implemented as per plan. Medical arrangements were sufficiently taken care of by the expedition doctor in cooperation with the ship's practitioner. An advanced first aid medical kit was carried throughout the crossing. Pre medical assessments of participants were part of the screening process, which all participants passed to the satisfaction of the organizers.

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A medical evacuation insurance was mandatory. Safety equipment was carried by the guides and participants, i.e. shovels, satellite phones, VHF's, solar panels for recharging batteries, first aid, avalanche probes and avalanche receivers, mountaineering kit.

Environmental plan

All biosecurity checks were carried out for all passengers onboard m/v Plancius to prevent the introduction or transfer of any organic material including animals, plants, seeds, soil and diseases. Procedures were clearly laid out in the pre travel documents for all passengers, as well as practically implemented onboard (equipment and clothes check, vaccum sessions, inspections etc). The ski crossers were mostly situated on large ice fields in the interior of the Island, thus environmental impacts low. All rubbish was taken back to the ship for disposal.

Expedition Application and Processing

It is long but important process for both parties (Expedition Assessment Panel and applying organisation) to understand the factors of problems that may arise from total isolation. The structure is strict but necessary to comply with. Applying organisations with positive track record, and who are known to the Expedition Assessment Panel should receive faster confirmation of future permits.

Summary of achievements

1. Ski crossing of the historical Shackleton route of South Georgia from King Haakon Bay to Stromness in 30 hours net walking time within a time frame of 4 days, 3 nights in the field.
2. Climb of Nunatak as indicated on the satellite image. The Nunatak is situated at S 54,08.418' , W 036,51.338' , 500 a.s.l..

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Oceanwide Expeditions is the winner of the 17th Annual
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