Expedition Report – Kayaking to Save the Albatross, South Georgia expedition

January 30th to March 27th, 2010

By Hayley Shephard

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Expedition Objective:

Kayaker Hayley Shephard set out to kayak solo around South Georgia to help raise awareness for the Albatross. Her support vessel was Northanger, owned and skippered by Greg Landreth and Keri Pashuk. Magnus was their deckhand and Bethanne was the kayak support person.

Summary:

Hayley onboard the sailing vessel Northanger departed from Ushuaia on January 30th, 2010. Only three days away from reaching South Georgia Greg suffered a severe injury while working under sail, on the drive shaft. Half of his index finger got completely torn away from his right hand. We changed course to the Falkland Islands seeking medical assistance, arriving three days later. Greg went into surgery while Hayley and Bethanne searched for a replacement crew member. After a two week search, Brian Cartwright, an experienced skipper offered his services and Keri accepted. We departed the Falkland Islands on February 17th, arriving into Elsehul on the 23rd. A gale-force storm kept us at anchor until the 25th, finally arriving into Grytviken late afternoon.

After clearing customs and going through the visitors procedures with Keiron at King Edward Point, Hayley went to retrieve her kayak which had been delivered a month ago by one of the Quark ships which she has worked on. While unwrapping the kayak, she discovered numerous gel coat fractures as well as a meter long section of hull completely separated from the top deck. The following two days consisted of the crew helping repair the kayak and Hayley rigging her backup kayak ready.

On February 28th, Hayley departed from Grytviken to begin her attempt at being the first to kayak solo around South Georgia Island for the Plight of the Albatross. She had a 5 week buffer to do this, however 3 weeks had already been used up by the unexpected incidences that caused this 3 week delay. Pat Lurcock mentioned that they were experiencing one of the worst summers on record so to get all the way around South Georgia Island was not looking too hopeful with the time that we had remaining.

Storm after storm caused Hayley to experience few days on the water and numerous days on shore. At Nameless Point, Keri announced that Northanger would not go any further and suggested the termination of the expedition. A bad storm system was about to hit and they needed to be anchored in Prince Olav Harbor which meant going back the way we came.

By this time it was obvious that we had run out of time, the Northanger and crew had commitments elsewhere and there simply wasn’t enough good weather to get the mission accomplished. After hunkering down on Northanger in Olav Harbor, Keri agreed to drop Hayley, her gear and kayak in Ocean Harbor so she could spend her final day paddling on a coast she had yet to paddle and at least arrive into Grytviken by kayak, not sailing vessel. She arrived on March 17th into Grytviken, stopping to visit Shackletons grave before arriving at Northanger.

Due to an earthquake in Chile, causing the Santiago airport to be closed, Hayley and Bethanne were forced to change their flights going back to Canada. The only ones available were leaving from Buenos Aries. Returning on Northanger, a journal that would take a few weeks, it would cause them to miss those flights and no other flights were available for months after. Hayley contacted the only tourism vessel that would be in South Georgia and were invited to travel from Grytviken to Ushuaia, via the Falkland Islands onboard the Prince Albert 2.

The expedition to circumnavigate South Georgia Island by kayak, solo was not completed, however what has come of Hayley’s efforts offers much success. She is currently doing presentations across North America, making a documentary film and writing a book, all focused on raising public awareness for the Plight of the Albatross. Please see summary below for more details.

Reports on Activities:

February 28th, 2010 – Hayley departed King Edward Point by kayak

Arrived first camp – Leith Harbour S54 08’ 867 and W 36 41’152

NW 40-45 knots blew for 2 days

March 3rd – Hayley departed Leith Harbour

Arrived second camp – Just inside of Cape Saunders S54 08’409 and W36 38’766

Winds were still too strong on the outside so was not able to go around Cape Saunders.

March 4th – Hayley departed Camp inside of Cape Saunders

Arrived third camp – Hercules Bay S54 07’607 and W36 40’458

March 5th

Winds blew SW 35 knots all day

Hayley met up with Northanger for 30 minutes, they then continued to Prince Olav Harbor

March 6th – Hayley departed Hercules

Arrived fourth camp – Beach behind The Guides S54 05’446 and W36 50’ 743

Forced off water due to 25Kn winds gusting 35kn. Winds lasted for another day.

March 8th – Hayley departed The Guides

Arrived fifth camp – Rosita Harbor S54 01’128 and W37 27’323

Met up with Northanger, exchanged back-up kayak with the fixed, mended and looking rather like Frankenstein, Necky kayak. Found out today that it won’t be possible to get around the north tip and down the SW side with the time we had left.

SW wind 35 knots blew for 2 days

March 10th – Departed Rosita Harbor

Arrived sixth camp - Salisbury Plain

Hayley kayaked and camped here for two nights mainly for filming purposes.

Strong katabatics for the two days that I stayed.

March 12th – Departed Salisbury Plain

Arrived seventh camp – Craigie Point S54 01’214 and W37 34’631

March 13th – Departed Craigie Point

Arrived Nameless Point, Hayley met up with Northanger on the water, expedition terminated; made our way to Prince Olav Harbor, and having received permission to land on Prion, we stopped for filming purposed on Prion for 2 hours.

March 15th – Departed Olav Harbour onboard Northanger

Arrive deighth camp - Ocean Harbour S54 20’398 and W36 15’872

March 16th – Departed Ocean Harbour

Arrived ninth camp – Cumberland Sound East, camped just around the corner from Grytviken

My final night camping in South Georgia

March 17th – Departed Cumberland Sound East campsite

Arrived Grytviken and board Northanger.

March 18th – Met up with Prince Albert 2, for the pre-arranged ride for Hayley and Beth-Anne to Ushuaia and both kayaks a ride to the Falklands.

Thankfully the Prince Albert 2 had a day excursion planned in South Georgia before heading to the Falkland Islands. We were fortunate to spend the day with their passengers and staff on Salisbury Plain and Prion Island which created more opportunities for filming.

This was followed by two days in the Falkland Islands stopping in Stanley where we dropped off the kayaks. The final day in the Falklands was spent on Saunders Island and West Point.

March 27th – Arrived Ushuaia expedition complete, well kind of.

Safety Plan:

-Due to doing the expedition in late summer, Hayley did not have any difficulties with excessive ice while paddling at sea, or aggressive wildlife while on shore. The weather however was atrocious, more so than usual. Broad bands of storms came through and lingered, one after the other leaving very few safe paddling days.

-The Northanger was often more than a day’s sail away so communication via VHF radio was just about non-existent. Most of our communication was done through text messaging via Sat phone or email through Global Marine Networks. At all times they knew where Hayley was through this communication as well as the tracking device which Hayley carried onboard.

-Weather forecasts were passed sent from Northanger via text messaging which was very helpful.

-It was crucial that Hayley at all times, remain completely self-sufficient through the entire expedition. Northanger was simply unable to be anywhere near Hayley while she was underway nor could they anchor in the bays where she was camped. The bays were simply unsuitable to anchor the Northanger safely. They simply had to look after themselves, anchoring in places which would offer protection from prevailing and/or forecasted winds, as well as katabatics. While underway, Northanger travelled well offshore to stay clear of reefs, rocks and uncharted waters.

-On 3 occasions Hayley met up with Northanger. Once was to exchange kayaks, the other was the need to fully recharge all batteries and the final rendezvous was the day the expedition was terminated.

-A few comments regarding gear. Hayley’s Iridium satellite phone was an older version and both batteries did not hold charge. It is crucial to have top-notch equipment, particularly communication equipment. All other equipment stood up to the windy and harsh conditions of South Georgia.

Environmental Plan:

Kayaking and camping alone around South Georgia Island had minimal impact on the environment and wildlife.

-When selecting a campsite Hayley’s first priority was to camp in the area where least wildlife existed. The animals just left her to it and no aggressive behavior was ever shown apart from a few bluff charges by juvenile Fur seals.

-To avoid any accidental transporting of rats or mice at all times her kayak hatches were closed, tent zipped up and drybags closed and stowed either inside her tent or kayak.

-Due to frequent high winds while on shore and the need to keep an eye on all equipment, Hayley seldom ventured far from her campsite therefore limiting any impact on the surrounding area. No extended walks were taken while she was camped on shore.

Expedition Application and Processing:

The application process was straight forward and effect. It was a very beneficial process that only encouraged thoroughness throughout the entire expedition planning process. It reinforced the need to prepare and plan for every aspects of adventure travel.

Hayley appreciated the open communication between applicant and assessors. It was made clear to Hayley the items that she needed to address and after having done so; the application moved forward.

Summary:

Although the expedition wasn’t completed as Hayley had planned for and hoped, there were many aspects that lead to a successful expedition.

-Hayley’s dream was to kayak solo around South Georgia to raise awareness for the Albatross whose many species are listed as threatened, vulnerable or endangered.

Was Hayley successful?

Well, she kayaked alone around parts of South Georgia – *Check*

She camped alone around parts of South Georgia – *Check*

Hayley had thousands of people following her track and blog, becoming aware of what is happening to the Albatross – *Check*

Hayley continues to raise awareness by doing numerous presentations in schools, communities and clubs telling her adventure story, introducing people to the magnificent Albatross and informing them of the threats that Albatross and other seabirds and marine life are facing due to human impact. In her presentations she offers simple solutions for individuals to make a different and help Save the Albatross.

Since returning from the expedition, Hayley has appeared on numerous news stations and her articles and photos have been published in magazines worldwide. Both the film and book will reach varied ages and numerous audiences and they too will be introduced to the magnificent Albatross.

On a more personal note; Due to the numerous setbacks and challenges both Hayley and the Northanger crew had to face, the lessons learned, the accomplishments and experiences had were more meaningful and valuable than they would have been if everything went the way it was planned.

-Hayley’s resilience was broadened and her perseverance strengthened as she overcame the many obstacles and lessons she had to face.

-She became more flexible when forced to move from Plan A to B to even plan D at times, making the best out of trying situations. The greatest lesson was coming to terms with the fact that no matter how meticulous your planning is, in any walks of life, things don’t always go as planned.

-However, one thing did remain in Hayley’s control and that was her attitude and response towards the expedition and how it all turned out. Was this expedition a success or failure? It really depends on how you look at it.

-Such intermit time alone in nature always reminds Hayley how crucial it is that we as a specie remain connected to our natural world. This is the only way that we will move in a direction that preserves and protects nature and all those who dwell on this precious planet. Don’t ever underestimate the power of what being alone in nature can do for you, your friends and family and our planet earth.

*Thank you to all those who supported Hayley, encouraged her and who believed in her.*

*She would not have got as far as she did without you.*

***May the Albatross fly in our skies forever.***