

AURORA EXPEDITIONS

SHACKLETON CROSSING

REPORT



ASG092G



20 November – 8 December

2024

Shackleton Crossing Attempt & Peninsula – ASG092G

Report by: Tarn Pilkington

Date : 8 12 24

Voyage Dates: 20/11/24 to 8/12/24

Ship: MV Greg Mortimer

Guides: Tarn Pilkington (NZ) (Lead) , Mike Roberts (NZ), Paula Roberts (NZ)

Supporting Guides on ship: Bronwen Waters (NZ) , Peter Wainwright (Canada)

Clients: Michael Whaley (USA) & Jim Van Boven (USA)

EXPEDITION OBJECTIVES

1. To follow Shackleton's route from King Haakon Bay to Stromness via the original route:

King Haakon – Razor back Ridge – Compass, Crean and Nineteen Sixteen Glaciers – descend via Turnback Glacier to Fortuna Bay and continue to Stromness.

OVERVIEW

The expedition team had spent five days on the Peninsula training ashore and had successfully climbed Mt Tennant and attempted Domier Peak in the Neumayer area.

This year's crossing attempt was thwarted by unsettled weather patterns with strong to gale force winds, rain and low cloud in the 48 hour forecast. King Haakon Bay was reached late in the afternoon of the 29th of November. The team of four made good progress in whiteout and rain to the side of the Murray snowfield above Shackleton Gap and made camp for the night – NOTE: Jim Van Boven withdrew from the team the previous day. Due to forecasted winds, poor visibility and rain it was decided to abandon the crossing and re route to Possession Bay for a pick up on December 30th.

The final leg from Fortuna to Stromness was started late in the afternoon on December 1st

Daily Summary

Day 1 - 20/11/22

Ushuaia, Argentina

Meet aboard MV Greg Mortimer. First day with introduction briefings and mandatory emergency ship drills.

Day 2 - 7 – 21/11/22 – 26/11/24

At sea – Gear Checks and Safety Briefings. IAATO, biosecurity and zodiac briefings completed. Alpine skills ashore included Avalanche rescue training, Sled hauling and glacier travel on snow shoes and climbing skills.

Day 8 - 10 – 27/11/24 – 29/11/24

At sea from Elephant Island, South Shetlands heading for King Haakon Bay, South Georgia. We completed SG Bio Security checks and the mandatory briefings with trip preparation tasks including sled rigging, food and group gear allocation and tent erection practice.

Attempt Of The Shackleton Traverse

We arrived at King Haakon Bay at 4PM on the 29th to slight seas with moderate winds from the NW. The cloud base was 100-200M above sea level. The shoreline was reached at 520PM and the team began walking up the river to the Shackleton Glacier. Rain fell all through the afternoon and through the night. Saturated snow meant snow shoes were used after a short section of hard ice to the camp site above the glacier in rocks just short of the Murray Snowfield. Camp was established by 715PM with the Sched at 8PM. The forecast from the ship for the following day indicated increasing winds to gale force, rain and low cloud. The long term indicated gale force winds increasing again to over 40knots at 600M.

Day 11 – 30/11/24

Murray Snowfield to Possession Bay

Rain and low cloud greeted us in the morning. With the deteriorating forecast it was decided then to abandon the crossing and re-route to Possession Bay via Shackleton Gap. We met the ship late in the afternoon and sailed to Antarctic Bay and then on to outside Hercules Bay the following morning.

Day 12 – 1/12/22

AM: Hercules Bay

PM: Fortuna Bay to Stromness. The final leg from Fortuna to Stromness was started late in the afternoon on December 1st after visiting Hercules Bay in the morning where gale force winds and rain were encountered. The final section was completed with general passengers in four hours with broken cloud becoming rain and gusting easterly winds on the pass.

Day 13 – 2/12/24

Grytviken

St Andrews Bay

Day 14 – 3/12/24

Right Whale Bay

Day 15 - 16 – 4 – 5/12/24

At Sea

Day 17 – 18 - 6/12/24

Falkland Islands

Day 19 – 7-8/12/24

At sea

Day 20 – 9/12/24

Expedition concludes in Ushuaia.

SAFETY MANAGEMENT

A detailed safety and environmental plan was submitted with our application in 2024.

Weather information

The primary source of weather forecasting information was from the Windy app. Over the last three seasons we have grown increasingly confident with the apps ability to accurately forecast conditions 24 to 36 hours out especially around the Peninsula region. With disturbed westerly systems there is less confidence in actual accuracy as there can be larger forecast variations. A greater degree of conservatism is required when dealing with such weather systems and we work on a general principle that the forecast has to show an improving trend to proceed beyond the Tridents.

Route planning

The planning of the expedition was undertaken in the same manner as previous years. Information from Grytviken indicated that winter precipitation amounts were perhaps average and therefore allowed us to have confidence in the cover on the glaciers. An earlier expedition had crossed on skis in late October and had reported good snow cover with minimal crevassing issues. We found good snow cover on the sections encountered.

Contingency planning

We have used Possession Bay a number of times as a start point and as a pick up after abandoning attempts due to weather or other factors. The ship found a good close anchorage in Possession for a short zodiac transit.

We have good photographs of the entire Possession bay area and this year ship cruised Antarctic Bay. We saw potential for escape options if injury or weather forced a group into the upper bay. These options may become more difficult as the snowpack retreats from lower elevations.(See pictures attached).

Client experience and screening

The expedition began in Ushuaia and there were ample opportunities to train at locations on the Peninsula. This anti clockwise scheduling of the ship allows guides and clients to train intensively and work out any personal or group gear issues. The application process includes an assessment of resumes and a personal phone call between the Alpine Activity Supervisor and the applicants to verify information. Several applicants are turned down each year due to insufficient experience, lack of currency or the inability to provide a skills attestation from an independent guide.

Party Equipment

The party equipment included and carried;

Party First Aid Kit and individual first aid kits and medications

2 X Pulks

Bothy Bag

Tents

Steel Shovel and snow shovels

Toileting kits

Snow stakes and ice screws

2 Ropes

Cooking equipment

Guide and client equipment

A thorough gear check was undertaken early in the voyage. A gear list and South Georgia Biosecurity information was supplied during the application and preparation processes. Individual equipment included;

Avalanche Rescue Equipment

Axe and crampons

Snow Shoes and ski poles

Meals and snacks for four days

Communications

A Satellite phone with spare battery was carried for communicating with the ship. Icom VHF handhelds with spare batteries were carried. A Garmin Inreach device was tracked by a computer on the ship. Messaging is possible with the Inreach device. Scheduled call times were set before departure. Weather forecast information was confirmed at the Sched. times.

Navigation

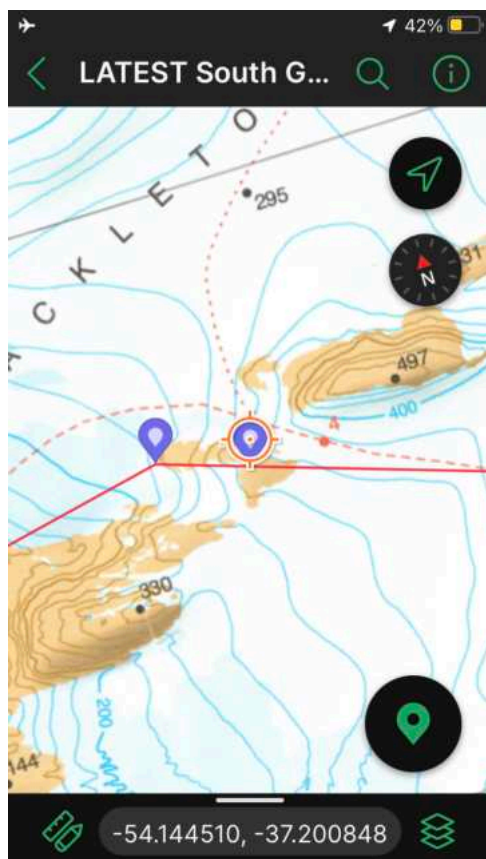
Guides used the BAS produced map of the crossing and South Georgia with scales at 1:40,000 with certain sections at 1:25,000. This map was Geo referenced and was available for navigation using the Avenza app.

Application and Permitting process

The application was submitted on time. The application was processed and received well ahead of our departure date.



Camp 1 – Murray Snowfield



Camp 1 tracked position



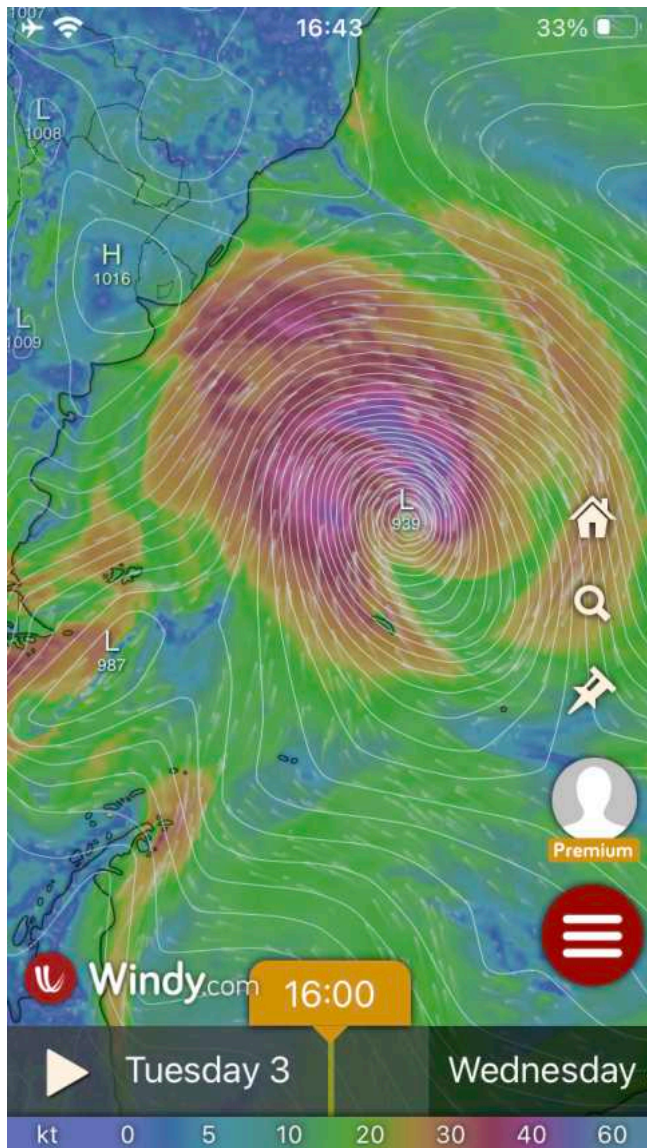
Descent from Shackleton Gap to Assistance bay



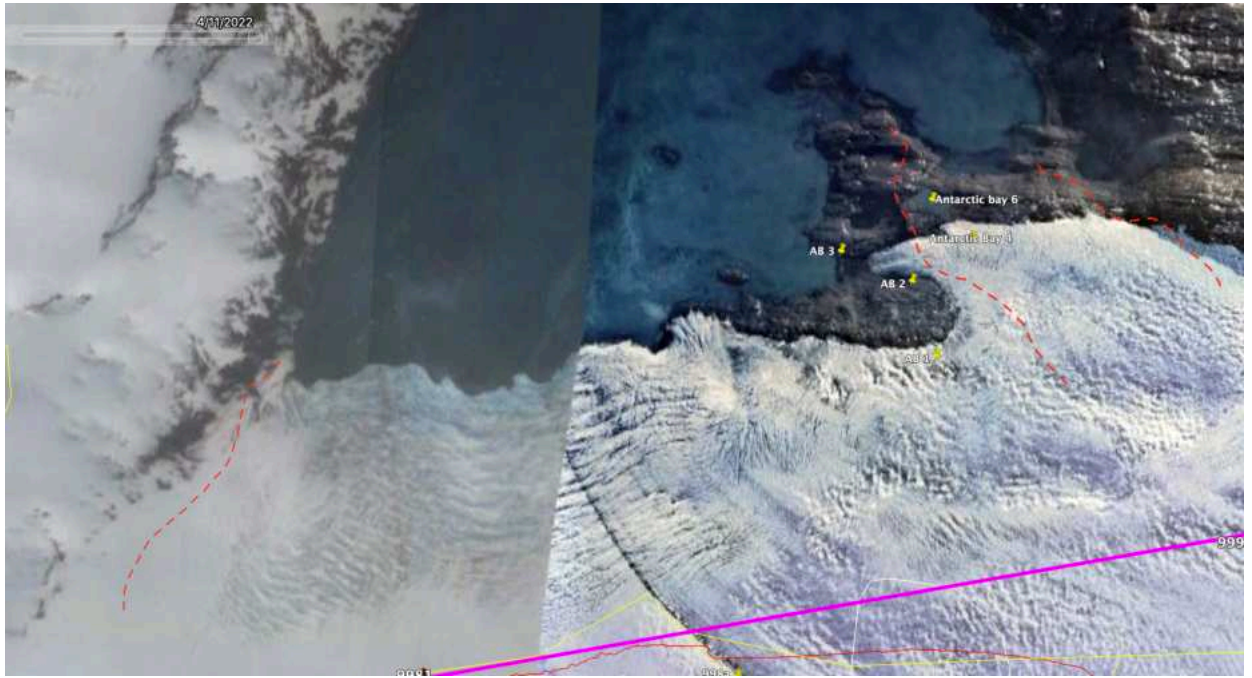
Descent along Assistance Bay



Above Assistance Bay



Depression forecast of 939mb that crossed over SG from the 29th of November.



Possible 3 escape routes in observed conditions 30/11/24 – orange lines