

# AMUNDSEN SOUTH GEORGIA SKI EXPEDITION 2025

## INTRODUCTION

This was a ski mountaineering expedition based on the motor sailing vessel *Amundsen*, run concurrently with the Shackleton Traverse expedition on sister ship *Vinson of Antarctica*. In contrast to that expedition, ours stuck to day ski trips, returning each night to the boat. Despite some trying weather and occasionally icy conditions, we managed to complete several excellent excursions.

## EXPEDITION TEAM

Stephen Venables – expedition leader (UK)  
Kirsty Maguire – deputy leader (UK)  
Jennifer Coombs (UK)  
Chuck Gates (USA)  
Martha Holmes (UK)  
Mark Lindborg (USA)  
Titus McDermott (UK)  
Peter Radosta (USA)  
Kevin Russell (USA)  
Richard Tolkien (UK)

## AMUNDSEN CREW

Paul Guthrie (UK) captain  
Jacob Bonnick (UK)  
Mariana Esperón (Spain)

## OUTWARD VOYAGE

The ski team boarded *Amundsen* at Stanley public jetty on August 23 and spent the following day doing safety briefings and stowing gear, before casting off to anchor close to the Narrows. At 9.00 am on August 25 we set off alongside *Vinson of Antarctica*, blessed with good winds, so that



both boats could sail straightaway. The first icebergs were sighted on the radar on the evening of August 27 and the following afternoon both vessels sailed through the Shag Rocks gap. After another foggy night necessitating a close lookout for icebergs, both vessels reached the Willis Islands at dawn on August 29, ninety hours after leaving Stanley Harbour. After passing through Bird Sound, *Vinson* made for the anchorage at Right Whale Bay, while *Amundsen* continued east to tie up at Grytviken shortly after dark.

## SKI EXCURSIONS FROM GRYTVIKEN

After a very windy night, August 30 dawned cold and bright. After inspection by the government officers, the whole ski team set off for an introductory tour towards **Echo Pass**. On our return to Grytviken, *Vinson* – with no suitable forecast for starting the Shackleton Traverse – arrived to tie up alongside. The following day the two vessels' ski teams combined forces for a magnificent tour up to **Glacier Col**, with a deviation on the descent via Hestesletten. This 17 kilometres circuit from Grytviken makes a fantastic ski tour in early spring when snow lies right down to the beach, but care needs to be taken, when reaching the coast at Hestesletten, not to disturb the fur seals which, this year, had already taken up residence at the end of August. September 1 saw bad weather, as predicted, so the day was occupied with visits to the museum, an



Climbing towards Glacier Pass

## AMUNDSEN SOUTH GEORGIA SKI EXPEDITION 2025

'observation' by the government officer and the cooking of a large dinner finishing with chocolate mousse. Fair weather returned on September 2, so we joined forces again with the *Vinson* team to ski over to **Maiviken** and back, with some of the team also climbing Mt Hodges).



Descent to Maiviken



Return to Grytviken

### SOUTH END OF THE ISLAND

It was now time to head south. At 9.00 am on September 3 we said goodbye to *Vinson* and left Cumberland Bay to motor sail down the coast to Larsen Harbour, anchoring there at 6.00 pm. The following morning we motored back round to Hamilton Bay to ski up the Salomon Glacier. When we landed here in 2024 we used the east corner of the bay, where there was just a small colony of King Penguins, about two hundred metres up from the beach. This year the situation had changed dramatically, with the entire beach – and a large area of the glacier snout – occupied by Gentoo penguins. So we landed instead at the west corner of the bay, where at 11.00 am there was just a handful of Gentoos and a few fur seals. (However, by evening the situation had changed dramatically and Martha Holmes counted a total of 9,500 Gentoo penguins across the entire glacier front. A separate report has already been submitted to the government). We skinned up the **Salomon Glacier**, with the intention of reaching the col at its head. However, with cloud



Returning to the west corner of Hamilton Bay, on foot, to avoid disturbing the new colony of Gentoo penguins.



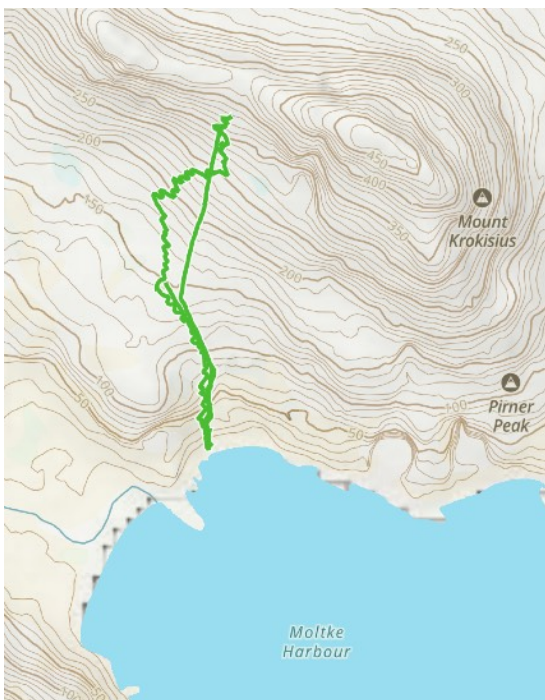
## AMUNDSEN SOUTH GEORGIA SKI EXPEDITION 2025

building and the wind strengthening, we decided to stop about a kilometre short of the col, at 520 metres, and ski down from there. Descending the Salomon is a gentle trundle, but on this occasion icy conditions and a near whiteout made it more challenging. Returning in the late afternoon, we found the west beach transformed, with hundreds of Gentoos returning from the day's fishing. So, rather than ski the last stretch, we cramponed slowly and carefully down to the beach, where Jacob and Mariana did a series of heroic surf landings to get us all back on board Amundsen for an excellent dinner of Patagonian Toothfish with new potatoes and beurre blanc.



Deceptive sunshine at Gold Harbour, where the surf was too high to allow a safe landing. The background slopes to the right of Amundsen would give excellent accessible skiing.

September 5 was designated a wildlife-watching day, so we left Larsen Harbour and motored back up the coast to Gold Harbour. It was a sunny day but a windy one, with the surf too high to allow a beach landing. So the King Penguins could only be admired from a distance, before we continued northwest to anchor in Royal Bay at Moltke Harbour.



Murky conditions above Moltke Harbour.

A new depression was now approaching, but the weather on September 6 was still reasonable enough (cloudy with moderate wind) to allow for a short ski tour on the slopes above **Moltke Harbour**. Conditions were mixed, with patches of sheet ice on the upper slopes, but beautiful spring snow on the final 200 metres down to the beach. In fact the lower gully was so good that we climbed back up and did it all over again.

On September 7 we remained at anchor in Moltke Harbour. Royal Bay's infamous katabatic winds put on a fine show, with gusts recorded up to 72 knots, so we stayed put at

## AMUNDSEN SOUTH GEORGIA SKI EXPEDITION 2025

anchor, with no attempt to go ashore. The day passed pleasantly enough with cooking, baking, practising crevasse rescue techniques and celebrating the captain's birthday.

### OUTINGS FROM HUSVIK

The forecast now was for a steady improvement building to high pressure for our final days on the island. So we decided to concentrate our efforts towards the northwest end, motoring to Husvik on September 8 and spending the afternoon going ashore there for a beach walk. In 2025 we had

found a pod of elephant seals and newborn pups on the beach here. This year, arriving two weeks earlier, we found the main beach deserted, with just three or four bull elephants in the tussock on the east side of the bay, along with a scattering of fur seals and the usual Giant Petrels, South Georgia Pintails and South Georgia Pipits.

Fine weather was forecast for September 9 so we motored round to Fortuna Bay to attempt the **final section of the Shackleton Traverse**. Keen to avoid the König river crossing, we landed in the southeast corner of the bay at Worsley Beach. A short walk round the beach, taking care to stay inland of a solitary fur seal, took us to the first short boot-up through the snow-smothered tussock, before donning skis and skins. It was a fine but cold day – several degrees below zero – with a breeze, so we kept picnic stops to a minimum. Nevertheless, with a party of varying abilities and fitness, it took five-and-a-half hours to make the crossing to Stromness. The best ski route deviates slightly from the official walking route marked on the BAS map, with the best descent line varying from year to year. On this occasion the descent was a joy, on beautiful semi-powder snow and the best line was to follow the gully towards the Shackleton Waterfall, before breaking out south at the 150 metres contour, to take a long descending traverse right, then back left to the outwash plain. As usual at this time of year, it was possible to ski all the way down to the beach.

Continuing the Shackleton theme, the following day seven of us made the crossing of **Breakwind Gap** from Anchorage



Crossing the Fortuna–Stromness col.



Descent to Stromness.



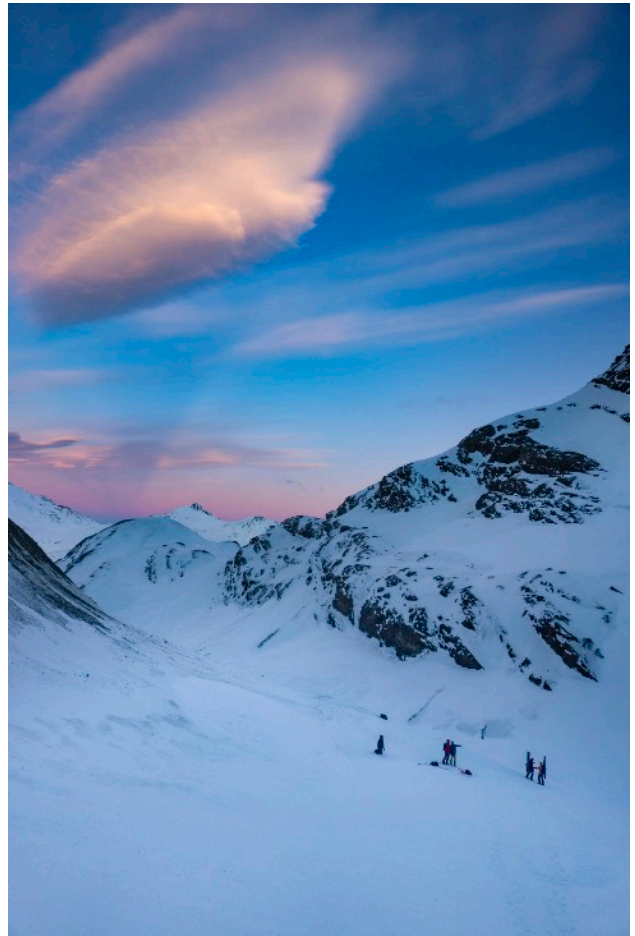


## AMUNDSEN SOUTH GEORGIA SKI EXPEDITION 2025

Bay. The sun shone brightly and the wind blew fiercely on the Fortuna Glacier, with some gusts nearly blowing us over. So progress was slower than expected. Glacial retreat here has



Titus McDermott booting down from Breakwind Gap.



Arriving at the start of the lower gully.



progressed noticeably, even since 2024, with the final climb to the gap slightly steeper, and the descent to easy ground on the far side now longer. The lower descent gully has now become even steeper, with more bare rock showing. On this particular afternoon it was also very icy, forcing most of the party to descend sections in crampons. In the lower gully, the skiable snow petered out, so we had to boot down slowly, reaching the beach after dark for a heroic nighttime pickup by Jacob and Mariana.

### PURVIS GLACIER

Continuing west, on September 11 we landed in Possession Bay, about halfway between Zero Point and Adventure Point, to ski up the Purvis Glacier to the broad 475m col leading south to the Shackleton Gap. From the col we descended to Assistance Bay. This made a perfect short day ski tour: three hours steady climb to the col, followed by forty minutes beautiful descent on a perfect surface all the way down to the beach.





Assistance Bay from near Shackleton Gap.

## BAY OF ISLES

We spent the last two days anchored off Salisbury Plain in the Bay of Isles, with *Vinson* anchored alongside (now that she had offloaded her Shackleton Traverse party). September 12 was sunny and mercifully windless, giving everyone a long-awaited chance to spend some quality time penguin-watching. At this time of year the King Penguin colony is a fraction of its size in high summer, with a lot of open space between all the different creches of chicks and attendant parents, along with the usual opportunistic Giant Petrels. As on the other beaches in early September, we saw just a few mature elephant seals and a handful of immature fur seals. There was also one leopard seal near the landing site.

The skipper Paul suggested generously to delay departure on September 13 until the late afternoon, so that we could enjoy one final ski tour. We decided to head to the Murray Wall, on the left bank of the **Grace Glacier**. The logical approach would be from Paul Beach, but this

would have necessitating re-anchoring both vessels when the *Amundsen* crew was busy preparing for our returning voyage and for moving Titus over to *Vinson*. So the boat stayed put and we made the long trek across Salisbury Plain and the endless moraine hummocks of the much retreated glacier front, taking two hours to reach the start of the side branch on the far side. Once there it took around 45 minutes to make a steepish climb to the col at the head of the northern corner of the side glacier. The col is marked 535m on the map and read 580m on the altimeter. For



*Amundsen* at anchor next to Salisbury Plain

## AMUNDSEN SOUTH GEORGIA SKI EXPEDITION 2025



Salisbury Plain in high summer 2019, showing our 2025 ski route up the lower Grace Glacier to a col on the Murray Wall.



Descent to the Grace Glacier.

a longer outing, a good alternative would be to head towards the higher col further south and continue from there to the summit of the unnamed c.750m peak dominating the south side of the glacier branch. For us, though, there was just time for a perfect descent to the boat, arriving in time to stow gear and prepare for departure at 5.00 pm.

### RETURN VOYAGE

The return voyage to Stanley took a little over four days, with northerly and southerly winds giving good sailing most of the way. Only on the final day did we have to contend with familiar head-on motoring into a westerly. At 2.30 am on September 18 we anchored just inside the Stanley Narrows and later that morning we tied up at the public jetty. The rest of that day was spent cleaning and packing gear. September 19 was a free day, so two of the party opted for a rock climb on Mt Harriet. Never has a 'V

Diff' felt so hard – a series of short upward bursts, between re-warming numb fingers, whilst trying also to cling on and avoid being blown off the crag. All experienced in glorious sunshine under an azure sky. After the crew dinner and a final session of singing sea shanties and seventies songs with guitarists Gates and Lindborg, the ski team left for home on September 20.

### EXPEDITION DIARY

August 23 Arrive Falklands and board *Amundsen*.  
August 25 Anchor up at 8.00 am and depart Stanley.  
August 29 Arrive Willis Islands at dawn. Tie up in Grytviken at 7.00 pm.  
August 30 Grytviken. Government inspection in morning. Ski to Echo Pass in afternoon.  
August 31 Grytviken. Ski to Glacier Pass and back via Hestesletten. Fine weather.  
September 2 Grytviken. Ski to Maiviken and back. Fine weather.  
September 3 Leave Grytviken and motor sail to Larsen Harbour.  
September 4 Ski up Salomon Glacier to 520m and descend in cloud and snow.  
September 5 Motor from Larsen Harbour to Gold Harbour, then anchor at Molkte Harbour.  
September 6 Short ski outing from Molkte Harbour in deteriorating weather.  
September 7 At anchor in Molkte Harbour. Wind gusting to 72 knots.  
September 8 Motor to Husvik in improving weather.  
September 9 Ski from Fortuna Bay to Stromness. Fine but with a gold wind.  
September 10 Ski up Turnback and over Breakwind Gap. Very strong winds.  
September 11 Ski up Purvis Glacier and down to Assistance Bay. Cloudy but calm.  
September 12 Anchored at Salisbury Plain in fine weather. Morning swim and penguin watching.  
September 13 Ski up Grace Glacier to col on side glacier. Up anchor at 17.00 and leave SG.  
September 18 Arrive Stanley at 10.00 am



## AMUNDSEN SOUTH GEORGIA SKI EXPEDITION 2025



Full ski team (minus Stephen) and Amundsen crew celebrating the birth of Richard Tolkien's granddaughter.