

# AURORA EXPEDITIONS

## SHACKLETON CROSSING REPORT



**ASH002S**



**2 November – 19 November**

**2025**

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## **Shackleton Crossing Attempt & Antarctic Peninsula – ASH002S**

Report by: Tarn Pilkington

Date : 19 12 25

Voyage Dates: 1/11/25 to 20/11/25

Ship: MV Sylvia Earle

Guides: Tarn Pilkington (NZ) (Lead), Bronwen Waters (AUS) & Daniel Phillips (AUS).

Clients: (7 Total) - Odd Bolin , Jonathan Bolin, Jakob Bolin (Sweden) / Paul Zuchowski & Joe Oler (USA) / Michelle Hemmings & Andrew Denny (UK).

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### **EXPEDITION OBJECTIVES**

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

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

### **OVERVIEW**

The expedition team had several days on the Peninsula training ashore visiting Yankee Harbour, Half Moon Island and Brown Bluff. We also were extremely lucky to land twice on Elephant Island at the Endurance Glacier, and at Point Wild.

Crossing the Scotia Sea from Elephant Island where we had been blessed with fine weather our fortunes were to change. The forecast had two depressions crossing South Georgia with strong to gale force winds from the north with rain and then a change to gale force southerlies with snow above 300M. King Haakon Bay was reached early on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November. The weather was forecast to hold briefly until later in the day so we enjoyed good visibility until reaching the Murray Snowfield. From there it was a complete whiteout until reaching the Tridents late in the afternoon. Rain began to fall and persisted all night saturating tents and the upper snowpack. An updated forecast from the ship confirmed the earlier forecasts of a change to gale force southerlies and snow above 300M. With this information and no real improvement in the next 24 hours forecasted we decided to descend to Possession Bay. The descent was in whiteout with 30 knot winds reaching 50 plus knots below Shackleton Gap.

## **Daily Summary**

### **Day 1 - 2/11/25**

Ushuaia, Argentina

Meet aboard MV Sylvia Earle. First day with introduction briefings and mandatory emergency ship drills.

### **Day 2 – 3/11/25**

Ushuaia – training at Glacier Marital.

### **Day 3 & 4 – 4/11/25 – 5/11/25**

At Sea from Ushuaia to the South Shetlands and the Antarctic Peninsula.

### **Day 5 & 6 – 6/11/25 – 7/11/25 Antarctic Peninsula and Weddell Sea.**

Training completed at Yankee Harbour, Half Moon Island and Brown Bluff and

### **Day 7 – 8/11/25**

Penguin Island

### **Day 8 – 9/11/25**

Gibbs Island and Elephant Island. Scotia Sea.

### **Day 9 & 10 – 10/11/25 -11/11/25**

At Sea in the Scotia Sea.

### **Day 11 & 12 – 12/11/25 -13/11/25**

King Haakon Bay to Tridents / overnight then descend

## **Attempt Of The Shackleton Traverse**

We arrived at King Haakon Bay at 4PM on the 29<sup>th</sup> 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 13 & 14** – 14/11/25 – 15/11/25

St Andrews Bay, Godthul, Sandebugten, Rookery Point, Grytviken, Leith Harbour, Stromness.

Wedding at Grytviken with crossing participants Michelle hemmings and Andrew Denny.

Ship Leaves South Georgia and travels directly to Ushuaia.

**Day 15 & 18** – 15/11/25 – 19/11/25

At Sea - Expedition concludes in Ushuaia.

A detailed safety and environmental plan was submitted with our application several months out from the departure date.

### **Weather information**

The primary source of weather forecasting information was from the Windy app. Over the last four seasons we have grown increasingly confident with the apps ability to accurately forecast conditions 24 to 36 hours out especially around the Peninsula region and now more so on South Georgia. A greater degree of conservatism is required when dealing with weather systems that do not show an improving trend - we continue to work on a principle that the forecast has to clearly indicate this to confidently proceed beyond the Tridents.

### **Route planning**

Information from Skip Novak indicated that winter precipitation amounts were likely less than average. The photos from his September expedition gave us confidence that the cover on the glaciers would be sufficient to cross safely in November. We did however get one view of the icefall and the descent slope from the Tridents. The slope appeared to be cut off on the normal descent line - A line much further right would have been required closer to the seracs.

### **Contingency planning**

Our standard contingency plan of descending to Possession Bay was followed. Despite 50 knot plus winds, the ship managed to deploy double manned zodiacs with ballast for pickups.

### **Client experience, screening and training**

The expedition began in Ushuaia where the ship was prevented from leaving due to the swell forecast in the Drake. We used this time to train up at the Glacier Marital covering Avalanche Rescue and moving over snow. We had several 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 Specialist and the applicants to verify information. Where necessary training plans are put in place using Qualified Guides who provide an attestation of the clients suitability. This process in conjunction with our training on the Peninsula ensures that the participants are technically competent, physically fit and have the correct equipment which they can demonstrate sufficient personal skill.

### **Party Equipment**

The party equipment included and carried;

Party First Aid Kit and individual first aid kits and medications

3 X Pulks

Bothy Bag

3 X Tents

Steel Shovel and snow shovels amongst group

Toileting kits

Snow stakes and ice screws

3 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**

An Iridium 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 the ship. Messaging was also used with the Inreach device. Scheduled call times were set before departure. Weather forecast information was sent at the scheduled times via Inreach.

### **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. Thanks to the Government Officers and the Review Panel for processing it well ahead of our departure date.



Camp 1 – Murray Snowfield below the Tridents.



Camp Below the Tridents.



Endurance Glacier - Elephant Island

### **Distances and Times on Crossing**

Day 1

Distance: 12.46km; Ascent: 586m; Time: 7hr 32mins.

Day 2

Distance: 14.64km; Ascent: 94m; Descent 500m; Time: 7hrs 2 mins.