

ANTARCTICA

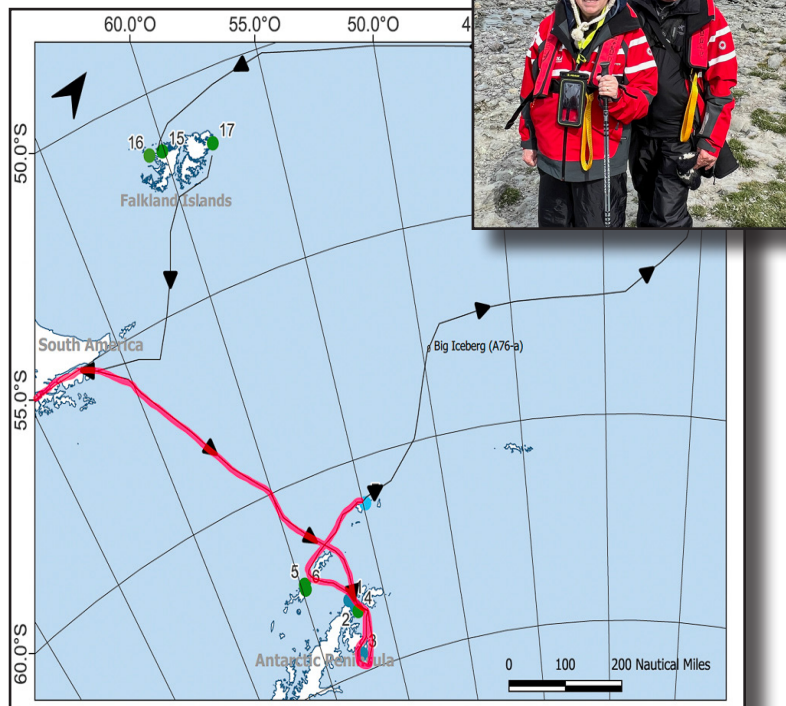
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After leaving Ushuaia we went east in the Beagle Channel, then south into the Drake Passage and towards the Antarctic Convergence. The Antarctic Convergence or Antarctic Polar Front is a marine belt encircling Antarctica, varying in latitude seasonally, where cold, northward-flowing Antarctic waters meet the relatively warmer waters of the sub-Antarctic. Antarctic waters predominantly sink beneath the warmer subantarctic waters, while associated zones of mixing and upwelling create a zone very high in marine productivity, especially for Antarctic krill. This line, like the arctic tree line, is a natural boundary rather than an artificial one. It not only separates two hydrological regions, but also separates areas of distinctive marine life and climates. The Arctic has no similar boundary because of the large bodies of land contiguous with the northern polar region.

A day into our two day crossing of the Drake Passage Wendy was injured when a large wave hit the side of the ship and sent her and the dining room chair she was sitting in tumbling across the dining room floor and into some cabinetry. The chairs did have anchor chains on them which secured them to the floor, but either Wendy's was not attached or maybe it became disconnected when a large wave hit the side of the ship and gave it a good rocking. The staff, expedition doctor and I all tended to Wendy as she laid on the floor, comforting her and identifying her injuries. After a time we got her back into her chair and insured it was secured. Once we got Wendy back in her chair she fainted from the trauma and immediately the ship staff were there again to help and support her. She was then taken to the ship infirmary, examined more thoroughly by both the expedition doctor and the ship's doctor and then we watched over her for a time there.

The ship's medical staff suspected damaged ribs and put her on a regiment of ibuprofen. We got her back to our room and in bed. In the first days after the fall, the ibuprofen proved pretty insufficient to handle Wendy's pain. I'd brought some oxycodone in our emergency travel medical kit for pain relief but the expedition doctor was against the use of narcotics that would make her balance even less stable and possibly influence her to make bad decisions about moving around in the ship and cabin. The ship's doctor was a little more inclined to use stronger pain medications, but the expedition doctor ruled. The reasons for being reluctant to use narcotic pain relief was understandable, the uncomfortable discourse between the doctors not so much and soon we never saw the ship's doctor again. I spent 100% of time with Wendy at this point, assisting with any and all movement, so we tried a small dosage of our oxycodone as her pain was pretty significant at that point. It was not affective and I decided not to increase the dosage. We were told by more than one fellow traveler that their doctor had recommended taking both ibuprofen and acetaminophen (Tylenol) together for pain and it worked for them. Somehow they interact with each other in some way to provide a narcotic-like affect for pain relief. We tried it and it did work better than ibuprofen alone and that became Wendy's go to medication for the rest of the time.

The ship staff asked if Wendy wanted them to change course and put in somewhere so she could medevac out, but by the time we got anywhere near where that would even be possible Wendy felt she could tolerate things and said no. We do have world-wide unlimited medical evacuation insurance (SkyMed) but decided not to put it to the test... yet... and we didn't on this trip. *Furthermore...* there were penguins to see!



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We both spent the next few days enjoying Antarctica from our room with a balcony, photographing the landscape and taking our meals in the room so I could tend to Wendy. While Wendy was not able to take part in any of the Antarctica Zodiac trips, in a few days (by the time we got to South Georgia) Wendy would persevere and go on some. By the time we made our last stop in Antarctica (an island) we felt Wendy was doing well enough that I could go on that last Antarctica Zodiac trip ashore.

We don't want to drag on about Wendy's injury though all our Antarctica Flying Pig Adventures travelogues, so we finish and jump ahead here to say that once we got back to our home in Poulsbo we got Wendy to more significant medical facilities. She has four broken ribs (of which two are displaced). Those will just have to heal in place over time and Wendy is able to tolerate the pain from those okay. Of more concern, and still producing pain and significant motion limitations, is a compression fractured vertebrae. We are still getting the compression fractured vertebrae addressed with a kyphoplasty procedure (called a *slab jacking* by the professionals). Patients of that procedure have claimed walk out without any more pain. We are hoping Wendy is able to say that too... and not just due to the drugs they will give her for the healing procedure. The more conservative prognosis is that 50% of the pain from the vertebrae injury will go away right away, the rest related to the vertebrae another 4-6 weeks. The rib pain will continue lessen, but over the healing process for some months.

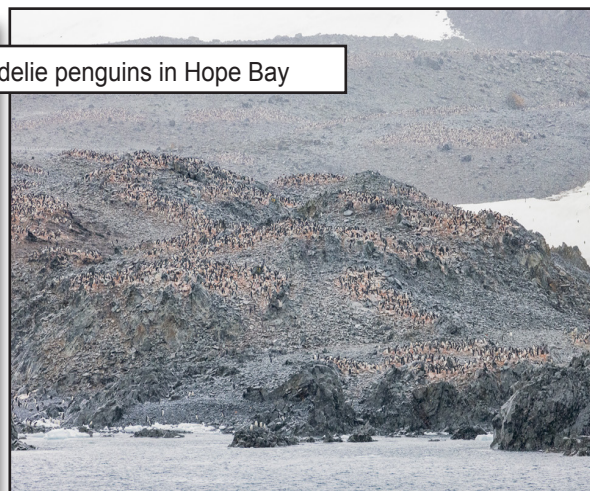


A view from our room with a balcony, out onto the Drake Passage and west to... forever. Calmer seas this day!

Hope Bay was our second stop on the Antarctic Peninsula after Gourdin Island. Hope Bay has been identified as an Important Bird Area (IBA) by BirdLife International because it supports one of the largest Adelie penguin colonies in Antarctica with around 125,000 pairs.



A few of the 250,000 or so Adelie penguins in Hope Bay



To the right is Esperanza Base, a permanent, all-year-round Argentine research station in Hope Bay. It is one of only two civilian settlements in Antarctica. Due to COVID-19 restrictions we did not visit any of the several stations in Antarctica we passed by.

The ship was anchored off Esperanza Base, loading and off-loading supplies and people.



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To the right and below, the expedition crew readies kayaks. The crew would tow them out into open water and the kayakers in their special orange dry suits and Yellow PFDs (Personal Floatation Devices) would take a Zodiac out to them from the ship. The expedition crew generally had blue jackets on with red PFDs and the tourists red jackets with the same red PFDs. We were all color coded for easy and prioritized recovery if necessary.

In preparation for taking us ashore, all the Zodiacs would be launched and hover, waiting to be called shipside to pickup a load of tourists. We were broken down into named penguin groups (the Adelies, the Gentoos, the Rockhoppers, the Chinstraps, etc.) and called down to disembark by that name.

Listening to the Zodiac drivers it became clear there was a very specific and unique protocol and communication used between the captain of the ship and the Zodiac drivers in the loading and unloading of 'souls' to and from the ship / Zodiacs and land.



For those that admitted they had come down with COVID-19 there was a separate Zodiac so they could take the Zodiac cruises and landings as well. On the ship they were asked to isolate and private rooms to do so were arranged.

Even after everyone tested negative before getting on the ship, COVID-19 found it's way on and in our small group about 20% contracted it.

The crew launches a typical boat load (ten) of tourists from the ship exit platform on a very calm sea.

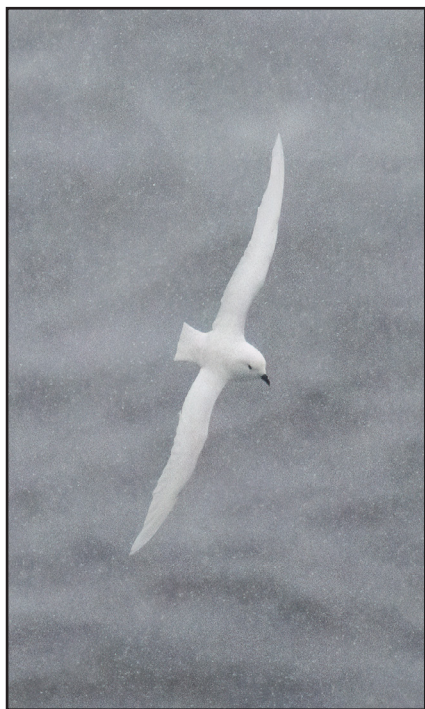


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Other than penguins, there was less bird activity in our Antarctica days than later on the trip (from Elephant Island to South George to the Falklands and back to Ushuaia). Ice and the landscape were the primary subject matter.

It snowed a few times during the Antarctica days, bringing out the Snow Petrel below.



Below is a Blue Petrel during some calmer seas and better weather.



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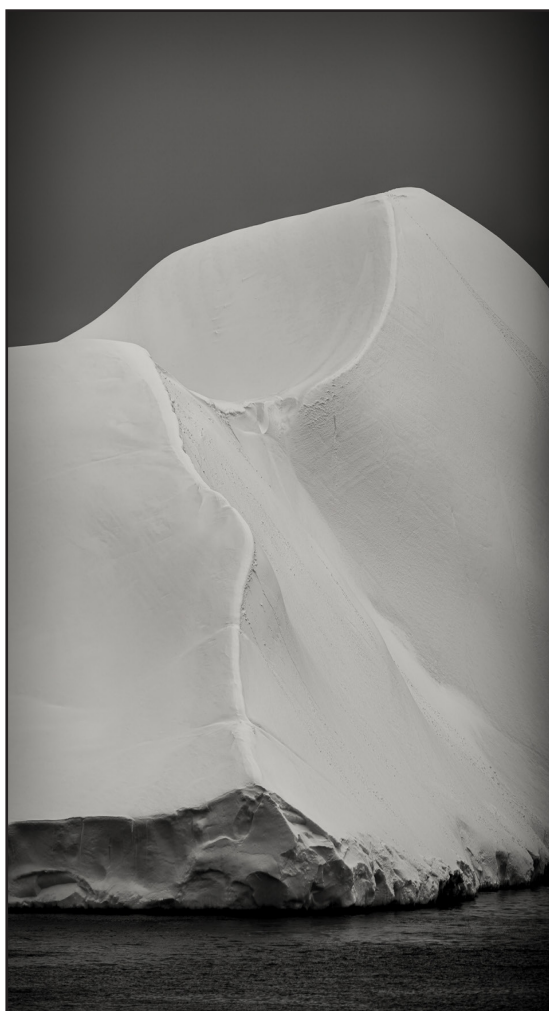
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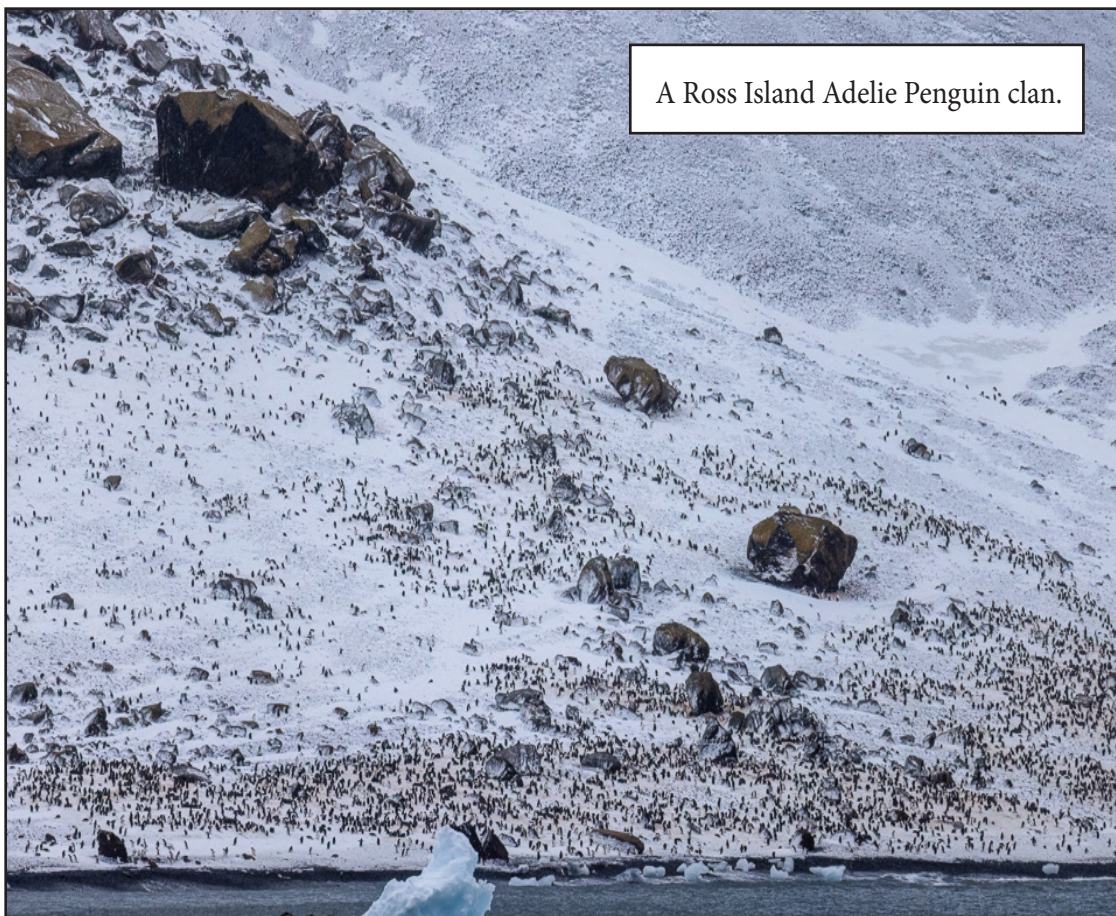


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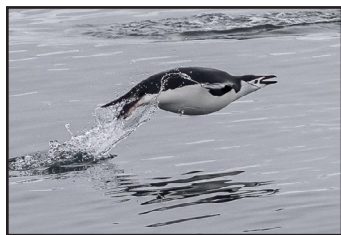
Below is the Ecuadorian research station Maldonado Station in Guayaquil Bay on the Aicho / Barrientos Islands of the Antarctica's South Shetland Islands.



A Ross Island Adelie Penguin clan.

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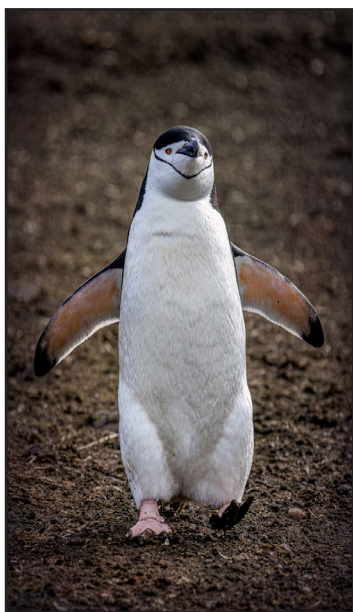
The last stop in Antarctica proper was Greenwich Island. This was going to be the last Zodiac landing the ship would make in Antarctica before heading off to South Georgia. While technically not part of the

Antarctica mainland, it was the last spot on this trip one could say they stepped foot on Antarctica.

Wendy was not well enough to go ashore yet, but with a week of recovery we felt that I could leave her alone long enough that I could go ashore. With a certain amount of sadness and guilt that Wendy was not coming along and a certain amount of apprehension of her well being without me there, we decided I could make an abbreviated trip ashore.



The penguins were very friendly. Upon finally making it to shore this extrovert Chinstrap Penguin was so happy to see me it rushed up to give me a hug!



The expedition crew scouts the areas we will land on shore and decides if it is even possible. I say possible, because if there is no safe spot to land, the waves being too big, the surf being too rough, or even as was the case at least once on this trip, there is just too many creatures on shore, there are no Zodiac landings. Sometimes, due to this or just because, the Zodiacs will just cruise around and we explore from the relative safety of the Zodiac.

If a landing is a 'go', the expedition crew will generally mark the areas we are to stay in with flags on poles. It reminded me of a ski slope.

Some penguins are trained guides. The Chinstrap Penguin to the right was helping me find the rest of the birding group after I'd apparently got separated from them and lost my way.



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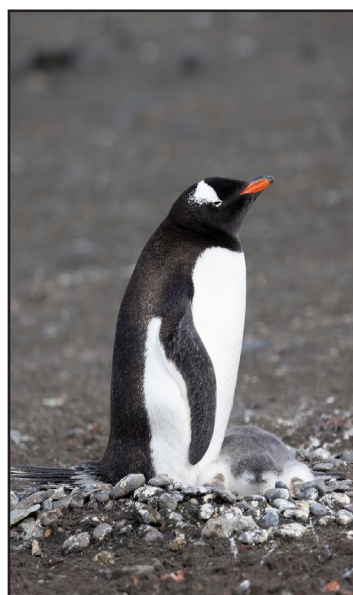
Gentoo Penguin and chick tender moment.



Some Gentoo Penguin adult discussion (not so tender moment)



An adult Gentoo Penguin giving these juveniles some sort of 'time-out'.



Some were quiet and some not-so-much.



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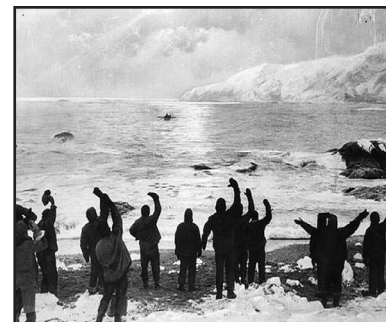
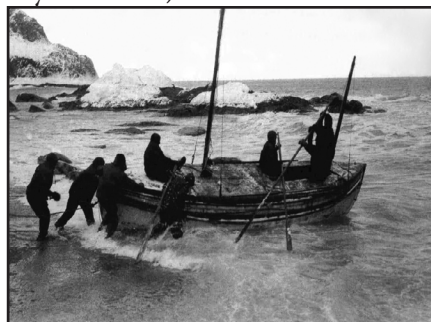
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We made a brief stop at Elephant Island in honor of the Ernest Shackleton expedition. After the Shackleton expedition ship Endurance was trapped in ice, then crushed, and then sank to the bottom of the Weddell Sea near where we had been in Antarctica, he sailed with his crew for five days and nearly 350 miles to the inhospitable Elephant Island. Far from any shipping routes, rescue was very unlikely. Consequently, Shackleton decided to risk an open-boat journey to the 720-nautical-mile-distant South Georgia whaling stations, where he knew help was available. Shackleton chose five companions for the journey. The remaining 22 members of the crew spent the winter months from April 24th to August 30th waiting for Shackleton to return and rescue them.

The images to the right is the spot those 22 crew spent the winter months, sleeping under an overturned life boat, eating penguins and seals.



The three images below are historical images of 1) the Shackleton crew that was left on Elephant Island, 2) Shackleton setting off for South Georgia Island and 3) the crew either waving goodbye to Shackleton or hello to their rescue some four months and a half months later (depending upon which bit of history one reads).



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To the right is the Captain Pardo bust on Point Wild where Shackleton's crew stayed, looking off towards South Georgia Island.

It was named for Frank Wild, leader of the party from Shackleton's shipwrecked expedition which camped and managed to survive on the point for four and a half months until they were rescued on August 30th 1916.

Luis Alberto Pardo Villalón was the Chilean Navy officer who commanded the steam tug Yelcho and took Shackleton to rescue the 22 stranded crewmen stranded on at Point Wild on Elephant Island.

Below, as we left, looking back at Point Wild the Pardo Bust and monolith monument to the crew, with a glacier backdrop on the background.



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A look back west at Elephant Island as we head east towards South Georgia Island.



Looking forward and east from Elephant Island at the sea stacks as we head to South Georgia.



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