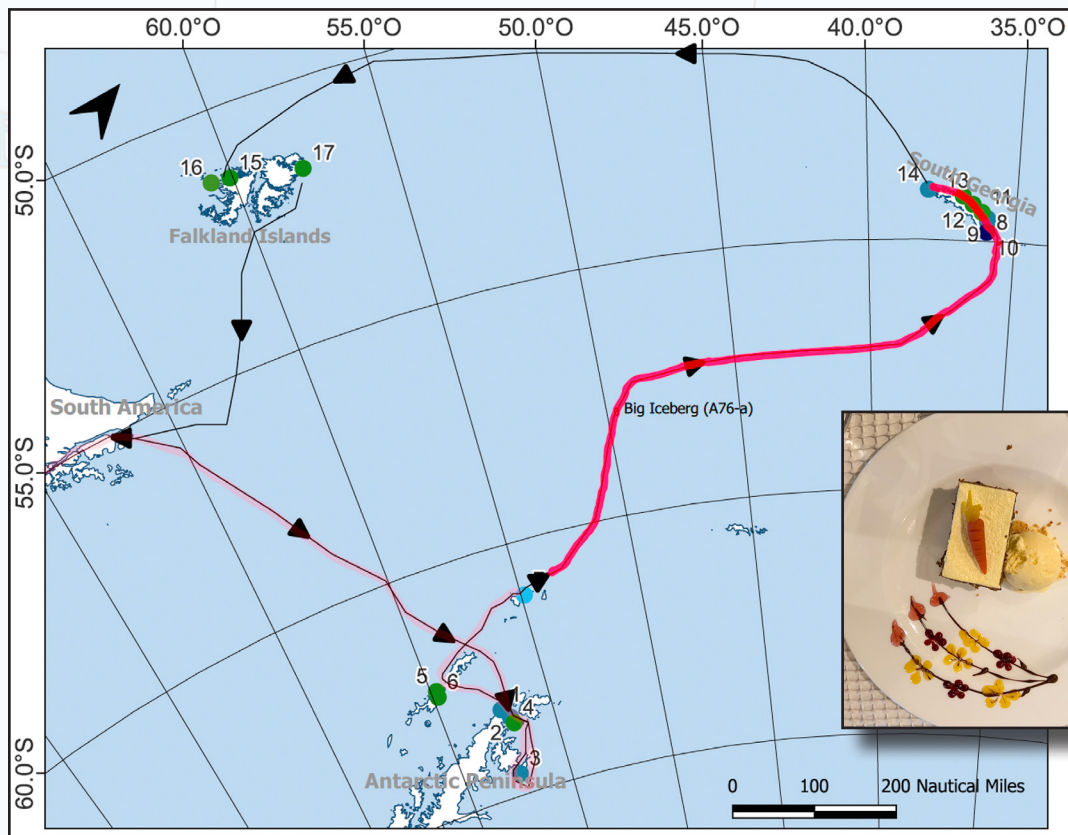


# ANTARCTICA

## PART III: SOUTH GEORGIA



From Elephant Island to South Georgia via the iceberg A76-a took a couple more desserts (days) of travel, but we reluctantly endured everything that came out from the ship's galley.

It took a few hours to pass the about 80 mile / 135 km length of A76-a, (it is about 15 miles / 25 km wide). It is smaller than when it calved off the Ronne Ice Shelf in the Weddell Sea mid-May of 2021 and 1,200 miles away but up until this point A76-a had kept pretty much the same size due to the colder waters, (albeit, the original A76 iceberg broke into three pieces, A76-a, A76-b and A76-c). As it continues north and into warmer waters it will melt much quicker.

Click [here](#) or the A76-a photos for a link to an interesting game to show how icebergs float.



The view of iceberg A76-a went from horizon to horizon as we passed by. While I could not find out how thick it is, the freeboard (the part above the water) is only about 10% of it's mass, 90% of it is below water. Other similar icebergs were measured to have a thickness of nearly 800 feet. That would make for about 80 feet of freeboard.

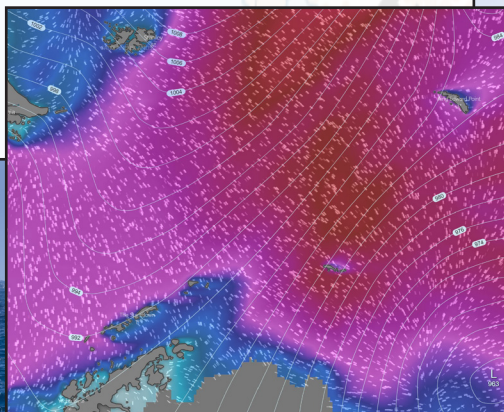
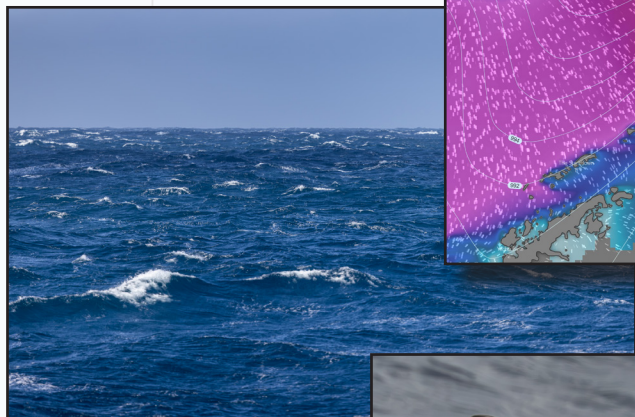


# ANTARCTICA

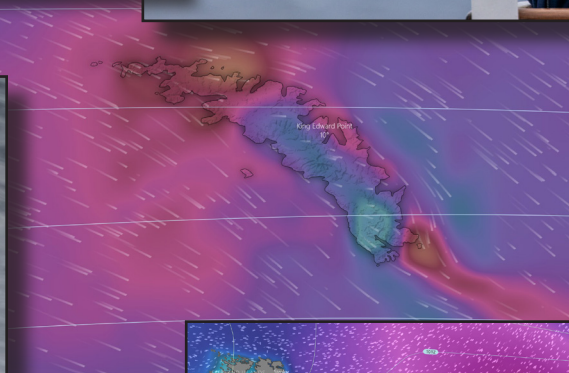
## PART III: SOUTH GEORGIA



None of the colored weather  
maps made it look like smooth  
sailing to South Georgia. Blue is  
good, red not so much!



We did see a few birds on  
the way, like the Cape Petrel  
to the right.





# ANTARCTICA

## PART III: SOUTH GEORGIA



We saw a few more icebergs, but certainly less and less as we made our way north into warmer waters. As we rounded the southern tip of South Georgia I expected to see all sorts of icebergs piled up there as my friend had seen just a few years earlier on his trip to South Georgia. There were none now and we wouldn't see any more for the duration of this trip.

South Georgia is about 100 miles (179 km) long and 1.2 to 24 miles (2 to 40 km) wide, 900 miles (1,450 km) east of Stanley in the Falkland Islands and about 1,270 miles (2,050 km) from where we started in Ushuaia at the southern tip of Argentina and South American continent.

South Georgia lies outside of the Antarctic Treaty area, but it is in the Southern Ocean since it is south of the Antarctic Convergence. The overall climate is sub-antarctic (cold, wet and windy). Recorded winds have topped 100 mph. And even in 'sheltered' Grytviken they record 90+ mph winds!

[Click here for Wikipedia information about the Antarctic Treaty System](#)

[Click here for Wikipedia information about the Antarctic Convergence](#)

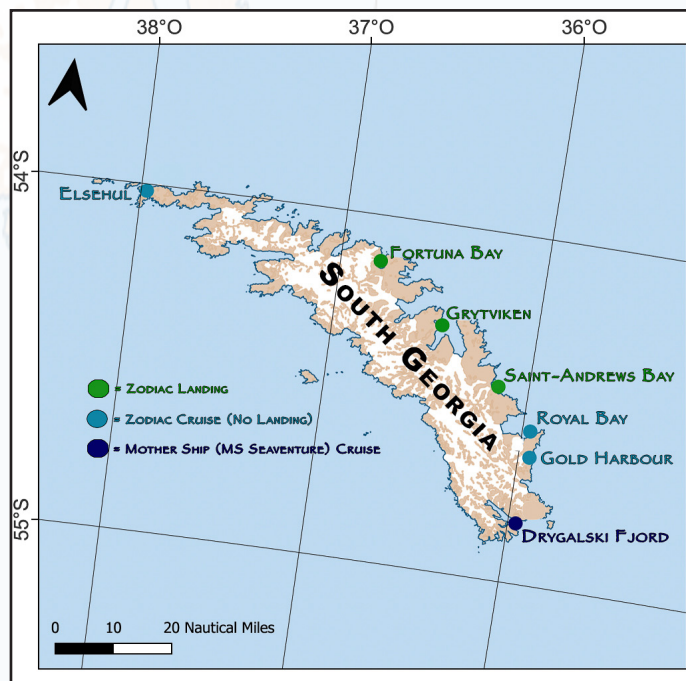
The coast line of South Georgia is very forbidding and unwelcoming to ships seeking shelter and protection, the west coast much more so than the east coast. While there are several safe anchorages in various fjords along the east side, many have no safe landing sites.

There are no permanent inhabitants on South Georgia, but there are government offices at King Edward Point (Grytviken) and Bird Island (just off the north-west tip of South Georgia). There is a summer staff at the South Georgia Museum in Grytviken as well.

Currently, half of South Georgia's 1,450 sq. miles (3,755 sq. km) is covered with permanent ice and snow.

About 60 smaller cruise ships (8,000+ people) visit each year. All ships that carry paying passengers to places other than Grytviken must be members of IAATO (International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators).

[Click here for IAATO information and the IAATO web site](#)



South Georgia is currently a British Overseas Territory. The United Kingdom claimed sovereignty over South Georgia in 1775. The territory of "South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands" was formed in 1985. Previously it had been governed as part of the Falkland Islands Dependencies. Argentina claimed South Georgia in 1927 and claimed the South Sandwich Islands in 1938. Argentina had a naval station in the South Sandwich Islands from 1976 until 1982 when it was closed by the Royal Navy. The Argentine claim over South Georgia contributed to the 1982 Falklands War, during which Argentine forces briefly occupied the island. Argentina continues to claim sovereignty over South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands as part of the Tierra del Fuego, Antártida e Islas del Atlántico Sur Province.



# ANTARCTICA

## PART III: SOUTH GEORGIA

South Georgia is well known for 'williwaws', sudden blasts of vicious wind that sweep down from the mountains. These winds are also called outflow winds (squamous winds in our own northwestern areas of Canada and Alaska) and are a type of katabatic or drainage wind. The dramatic lenticular clouds in the image below are clear indications of these air flows.



Our first stop on South Georgia was at Gold Harbor. We would not make it on shore here as there was just too many animals and birds for safe landings, but there was some Zodiac cruising. After the two days of mostly choppy seas across the Southern Ocean the calm and mostly protected anchorages of the eastern side of South Georgia were much appreciated.





# ANTARCTICA

## PART III: SOUTH GEORGIA





# ANTARCTICA

## PART III: SOUTH GEORGIA





# ANTARCTICA

## PART III: SOUTH GEORGIA



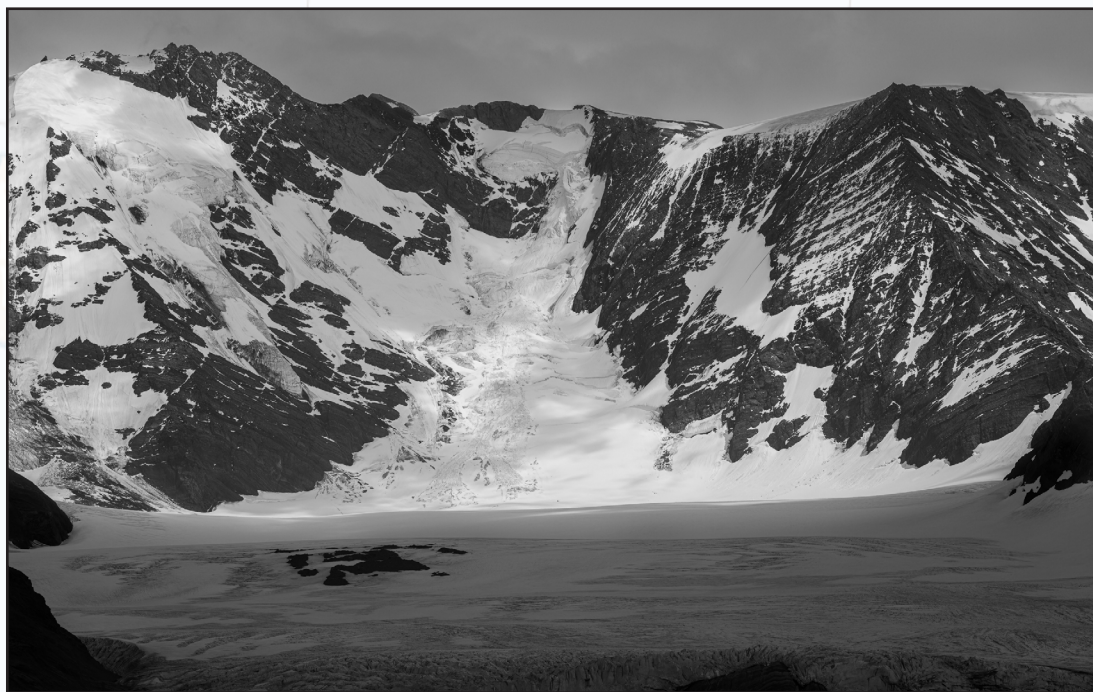


# ANTARCTICA

## PART III: SOUTH GEORGIA

We went onto Royal Bay from Gold Harbour where there were no landings but again Zodiac cruises.

Wendy was pretty sore from the morning Zodiac cruise so opted not to participate in the afternoon ones. It was the first time Wendy had tried any activities since being injured on the Drake Passage so we were being very cautious. While Wendy rested I photographed the landscape and passing birds as we traveled north.





# ANTARCTICA

## PART III: SOUTH GEORGIA

Below, the Wilson's Storm-Petrel shows off it's special trick. While the global population is estimated at 30 million, most people have never heard of or seen one (outside of all the birders we are traveling with of course). Wilson's Storm-Petrels live their entire lives out on the open sea.

These birds are too small to dive and wait for their food to get close enough to the surface to pick it off. So... they walk-on-water, pointing themselves into the wind, balancing between hovering and flying, and bounce along the water surface... walking-on-water. Some think that this walking-on-water might actually be a way to attract prey as well.

Much of what I say here is from an article written by Nicholas Lund as a contributor to the *Audubon Magazine*. I include a link here to that article if you would like to read more about them. You can click on this text, the image below or copy and paste the text: <https://www.audubon.org/news/wilsons-storm-petrel>





# ANTARCTICA

## PART III: SOUTH GEORGIA

There were lots of amazing clouds and fog. The sea based fog formation below lasted only a couple minutes as the strong winds and currents created then destroyed it. Another visual indication of a those famous South Georgia williwaws, albeit this one did not seem to approach the 100 mph mark.



At the entrance to Drygalski Fjord we passed two mile (3.2 km) long Cooper Island. It seemed to me a very mysterious island with those clouds and the offshore fog bank in the distance. Something misplaced here from the tropics.

From Wikipedia: "*As one of a handful of rat-free islands, Cooper Island is South Georgia's only Special Protection Area, it has large numbers of sea birds including snow petrels, Antarctic prions, 12,000 pairs of black-browed albatross, chinstrap penguins and 20,000 macaroni penguins. There are also a number of fur seals and this is one of the few places where they were not hunted by humans.*"





# ANTARCTICA

## PART III: SOUTH GEORGIA

We ended our first day at South Georgia with an evening cruise into the narrow Drygalski Fjord aboard the mother ship. The views and light were great. Drygalski Fjord is about one mile (1.6 km) wide and recedes about seven miles (11 km) into South Georgia. We were able to go the entire length of it due to the relatively small size of our ship.

We live in a small town called Poulsbo on Liberty Bay, where it is commonly said that the Scandinavians that settled the area did so in part because it's fjord-like setting reminded them of home. If you come and visit us and expect it to be Drygalski Fjord like... well... you might be disappointed some. While standing on deck and visiting with others as we cruised up and down Drygalski Fjord I was careful not to say anything like "we live in a fjord-like spot". It would have been, at the very least, incredibly misleading considering where we were.





# ANTARCTICA

## PART III: SOUTH GEORGIA



Our first stop the next day was Saint-Andrews Bay, a bight that is 2 miles (3.2 km) wide, where King Penguins form huge breeding colonies of over 300,000 birds and is (2021) probably the largest in the world. Because of the long breeding cycle, colonies are continuously occupied.

Cook Glacier, which once terminated in the bay, has retreated from the current beach since the 1970s, leaving a lake and gravel beach in its wake. Heaney Glacier and Buxton Glacier also terminate inland from the bay.

The shoreline as far as one could see was a mass of King Penguins, seals, sea lions and various other birds. There seemed to be more than at Gold Harbour, which gave us reason to think there would be no shore landings here either. There was much more beach area for sure, but still, from our perspective it was just as crowded as Gold Harbour. It is pretty hard to pick out individual penguins in the above panoramic composite of several images due to its 80 inch wide size but the images below show how crowded the entire shoreline was. The expedition crew did find a spot for safe(ish) landings and thus Wendy and I went ashore here.





# ANTARCTICA

## PART III: SOUTH GEORGIA





# ANTARCTICA

## PART III: SOUTH GEORGIA

There was plenty of ATC provided for bird landings as well as  
our Zodiac landings.



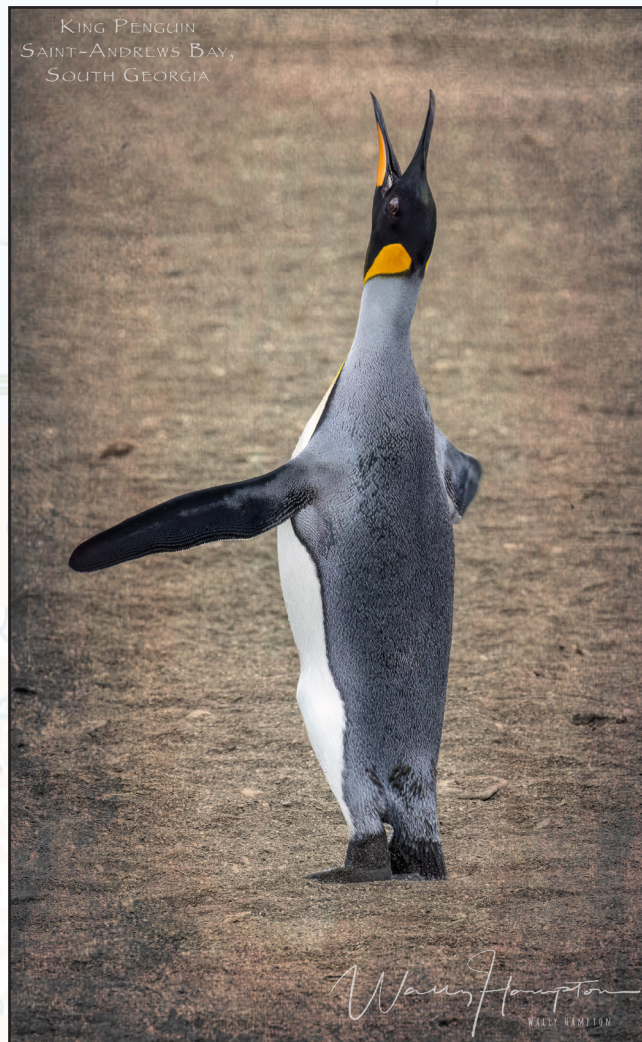
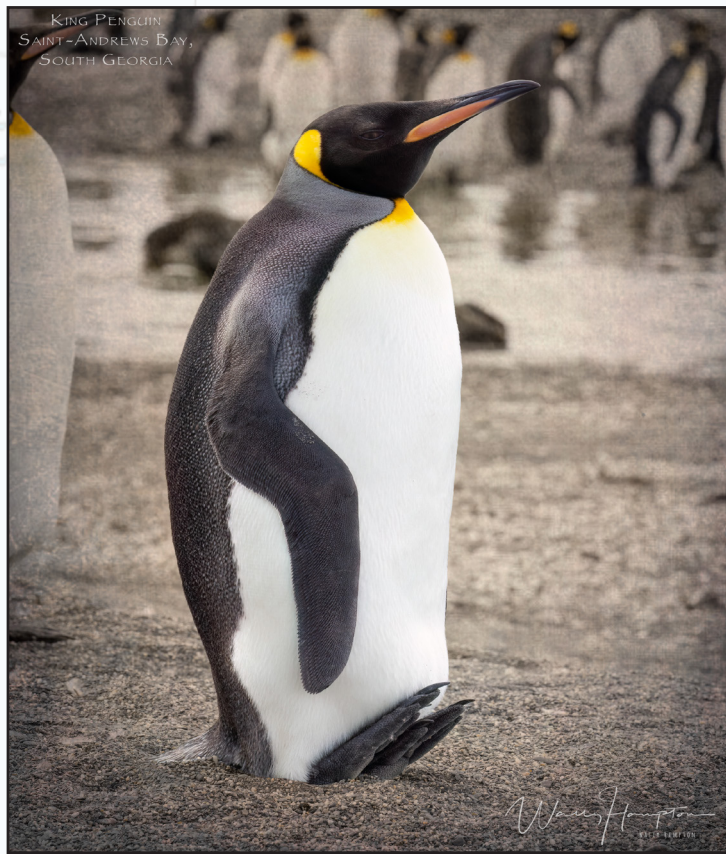
Sadly, there was evidence of drug use among the  
native population.





# ANTARCTICA

## PART III: SOUTH GEORGIA



King Penguin situation room.





# ANTARCTICA

## PART III: SOUTH GEORGIA



All too soon we had to leave Saint-Andrews Bay shore and head back to the ship.

Our next stop would be Grytviken, a former whaling station, the largest settlement on the island and considered the best harbor on the island. Grytviken means "*pot bay*" and was named so in 1902 after a Swedish expedition found old English try pots used to render seal oil at the site. Grytviken was re-established in 1904 on the long-used site of former whaling settlements.

Although the largest settlement on South Georgia, the island's administration is based at the nearby British Antarctic Survey research station at King Edward Point, just a few hundred yards away. The whaling station closed in December 1966 when dwindling whale stocks made it uneconomical.

Grytviken no longer has permanent residents. It is temporarily inhabited during summer months by a few staff

who manage the South Georgia Museum. The settlement has become a popular attraction for Antarctic cruises, with many tourists visiting the resting places of polar explorers Sir Ernest Shackleton and Frank Wild in Grytviken's graveyard.

Grytviken is the only former whaling station that allows visitors. The Prohibited Areas Order 2010 prohibits approach within about 700 feet (200 meters) to all others. These other whaling stations have been left to decay and are in fact dangerous to visit due to the collapsing structures, flying corrugated sheet metal (remember those williwaws), asbestos, fuel oil, and various other hazards. At a cost of about \$7.5 million USD to clean up Grytviken and make it relatively safe for visitors, doing so for the other whaling stations is fiscally impractical.







# ANTARCTICA

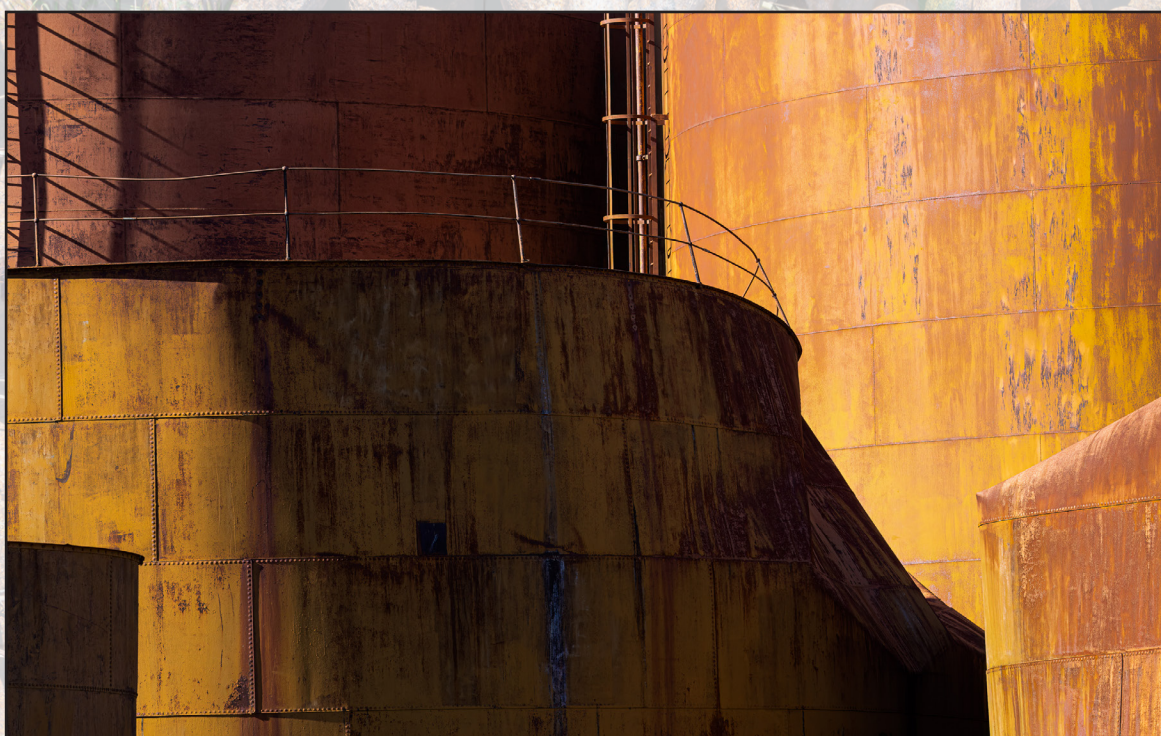
## PART III: SOUTH GEORGIA





# ANTARCTICA

## PART III: SOUTH GEORGIA





# ANTARCTICA

## PART III: SOUTH GEORGIA



These images are of the landscape around us while we were anchored in Cumberland Bay off Grytviken and King Edward Point.



King Edward Point, seen below as we came in (left) and then again as we exited in the late afternoon (right), is directly adjacent to Grytviken by a few hundred yards. Starting in the 1950s King Edward Point was the site of off and on again research stations. In late 1969 it became a major research station for the BAS (British Antarctic Survey) until it was occupied and then closed by the Argentine military during the Falklands War of 1982. After the Falklands War it was occupied by a small number of British troops until 2001 when it was rebuilt as a fisheries research station by the BAS for the Government of South Georgia. It still continues as a fisheries research station year round, with a staff of about two dozen people in summer and then about nine staff in winter.





# ANTARCTICA

## PART III: SOUTH GEORGIA



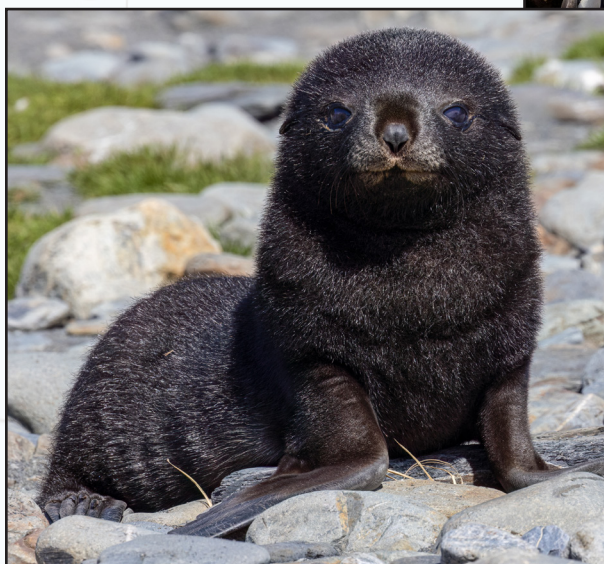
At our next stop and shore landing in Fortuna Bay I found all that is left of the reindeer that were introduced in 1911. While the reindeer did thrive they also seriously damaged the native habitat of South Georgia. Initially, the reindeer were intended to provide recreational hunting as well as fresh meat for the people working in the whaling industry. As the whaling industry came to an end in the 1960s, and in the absence of a permanently resident human population, the reindeer population were causing serious environmental damage. This led to a decision to eradicate them, a program carried out between 2013 and 2015.





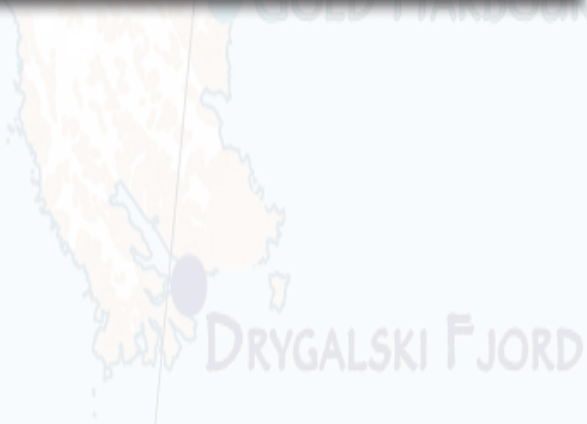
# ANTARCTICA

## PART III: SOUTH GEORGIA



● = ZODIAC LANDING

● = ZODIAC CRUISE (No L)



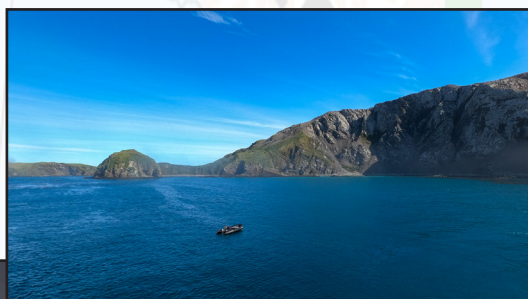


# ANTARCTICA

## PART III: SOUTH GEORGIA



Our last stop on South Georgia was Elsehul (also called Paddocks Cove). We took Zodiac cruises here, but no landings. What we did get was yet another lesson in South Georgia / Antarctic / Southern Ocean weather. It was clear, calm, and blues sky when we arrived and launched the Zodiacs. Once away from the mother ship for a while, the weather took a turn for the worse. Fog rolled in, got heavier, the temperature dropped (a lot), it got windy (a williwaw maybe?), and the waves and chop increased. As we all raced back to the mother ship there was a log jam of Zodiacs waiting to dump their anxious cargo back on board through the one portal door to do so. While we were not in any kind of imminent danger, the circumstances did made one aware of how *'being prepared for anything'* can really be the difference between life and death in some cases.





# ANTARCTICA

## PART III: SOUTH GEORGIA

BLACK-BROWED ALBATROSS  
SOUTH GEORGIA



Wally Hampton  
WALLY HAMPTON



# ANTARCTICA

## PART III: SOUTH GEORGIA

MACARONI PENGUIN  
PADDOCKS COVE,  
SOUTH GEORGIA



*Wally Hampton*  
WALLY HAMPTON

.END