



Sailing to Antarctica on Pelagic

This is the story of my first trip to Antarctica. by Lara Novak



My dad, Skip Novak, my brother Luca and I had just taken an almost two-day trip by plane from Cape Town to Ushuaia, Argentina, the town furthest south in the world. There we met my dad's boat *Pelagic*. Dave and Bertie, who work on the boat from time to time, met us there. My mom, Elena Caputo, would meet us later in the trip because she had to stay behind to work. She is a journalist and Nelson Mandela had died the night before we left. Dave would come with us as crew until she could join us.

We spent three days buying supplies in Ushuaia, during which Amy, Daisy, Andrew and Emma arrived. Andrew is a BBC filmmaker, and Emma is his wife. Amy is my age (12) and Daisy is 14. Andrew and his family were going to Antarctica with us because he was going to be filming two different things; a documentary on penguins at a former research base turned museum called Port Lockroy, and a clip on 'Children in Antarctica,' featuring Amy, Daisy, Luca and me.

On 10 December we signed out of Argentina, and set sail down and across the Beagle Channel to Chile. Amy and I spent a

lot of time up in the bow. That night, when we arrived in Chile, there was a huge luxury yacht anchored in the bay. The owner of the boat, *Maria-Cristina*, is a friend of my parents, and we were invited over for supper. Once we had all managed to squeeze out of the hatch of *Pelagic*, we were escorted by dinghies to 'the boat with the door'. After supper, one of the crew showed us where the TV is - you click a button and it comes out of a desk!

In the morning we took a long walk around to find our Christmas tree. When we found one, we took turns chopping it down and then we carried it back to the boat. It was a Canelo tree which is the traditional Christmas tree in Tierra del Fuego. To preserve it until Christmas, we stored it in the bow of the boat, where it is very cold.

The next day we started sailing down the last of the Beagle Channel, and as an early dinner we had crab that Dave had caught. We soon learnt that was a bad idea; once we entered the Drake Passage and the waves got big, the crab started to come right back up again. All the children, including me, were vomiting into green buckets. Amy was vomiting nonstop, so her bucket was nicknamed 'Chucky



Dad and Luca navigating the Gerlache Straits.

Bucky'. Daisy was doing the best of all the kids, so she spent most of the time in the pilot house. Eventually, I joined her, but Luca and Amy were still very sick.

I had decided to write a diary about my trip, as for most people it is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I also drew pictures. I had drawn two in Ushuaia, but my first sub-Antarctic drawing was of a Cape Pigeon; there were many flying around the boat, as well as different albatross species.

Eventually, Luca and Amy joined us. Amy started to feel better, and because she hadn't hydrated in a while, decided to risk some juice; big mistake. Almost immediately, Chucky Bucky had its work cut out.

On the third day, land was finally in sight. Our first anchorage was in Whaler's Bay, Deception Island. We took the dinghy ashore and sledged down a snow hill while Andrew filmed. Instead of sand on the beaches, there is ash, as Deception Island is a water-filled semi-active volcano, which means that it could still erupt. Amy and I decided to dip our feet in the water because there are hot patches of steam near the shore. The water smelt disgusting, like rotten eggs and garbage because of the sulphur. Just before we took the dinghy back, we saw two chinstrap penguins; the first penguins of the trip!

In the morning, we started sailing south through loads of icebergs with really cool shapes, and my dad taught us the different names for the different sized ice pieces: growlers, bergy bits and icebergs.

We eventually spotted Cuverville Island where, floating on an iceberg, we saw the first seal of the trip; it was a Weddell seal, and it



Typing to the shore was hard work.

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Adelie penguins at Yalour Island.

was incredibly fat. We anchored the boat and took the dinghy ashore, where we were greeted by a colony of Gentoo penguins. My dad, my brother and I watched the penguins walking up the trails they make in the snow, while Andrew filmed Amy and Daisy. Luca found the shell of a predated penguin egg that was eaten by a Skua.

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In the morning, we tried again to reach Port Lockroy. Close to the station, a giant wall of ice blocked our path. We tried to push through, and got stuck after about five seconds. We played cards for hours and hours after that, but in the morning we had drifted forward and could take the dinghy ashore. Helen, one of the people who was working at Port Lockroy, gave us a tour of the base on the island which, as well as being a museum, has a British post office. Thousands of cruise ship tourists each year send postcards from Antarctica to their family and friends back home. There were four girls looking after the base: Helen, Sarah, Kristy and Jane.

Port Lockroy was really cool. We were there for about two weeks, so we did a bunch of stuff, like collecting glacier ice with Sarah so that the girls at the base could have fresh water. We saw the first egg on the island hatch and the chick was so cute. Suddenly eggs were hatching

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Pelagic in brash ice.



A smiling leopard seal, a top predator.

everywhere! There were always predated eggs around as well, but I never saw them being taken by the Skuas. A Skua is a predatory sea bird whose main food sources are penguin eggs and chicks.

Luca and I were doing a survey on penguins. Luca observed 17 penguin nests and I four, because it meant I could examine each nest more closely. Each day we had to note the temperature, the wind, the barometer reading, the penguin's behaviour, how many eggs they each had and whether any eggs hatched. I named my penguins after my best friends, Saskia, Jaime and Emmaline, and the last one was a mix of my pet cat's names: Rotch (Rose and Scotch).

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On 24 December, my mom arrived on a cruise ship called *Ushuaia*, and Dave took her cabin on the ship and left. It was really cool that she managed to arrive before Christmas. On Christmas Day we all opened our presents, and I got some really nice things, including an iPad Mini! Amy and I then went in the kayak by ourselves, with my dad and brother following us in the Zodiac. Amy and I put on dry suits and went swimming in the shallow water. It was an awesome Christmas.

A couple of days later, we went to the top of Damoy Point with sleds full of camping equipment, including our tent. We set the tent up at the top of the glacier hill and Amy and I built snowmen. My family and I went camping that night, and the next day Andrew and his

family went. The day we got back from our night camping, my godfather, Jerome Ponset, met us on his boat, the *Golden Fleece*. He gave me a penguin carving made out of a Fur seal tooth, which he carved himself! He is really funny.

Amy, Daisy and I did the Polar Plunge. The Polar Plunge is when you jump into the water in just a swimming costume. I screamed the whole time because it was so cold! Luckily, my mom had warmed up water for showers.

We eventually said 'see you later' to the girls at the base and started sailing even farther south, to Yalour Island, which has a colony of Adelie penguins. Adelie penguins are really funny because they have a type of Afro hairdo. My dad's friend from Oxford University is doing a research project on penguins, and he has a camera trap set up on the island. We got to change the battery and memory chip for him!

We left Yalour Island and sailed on to Vernadsky Station, which is an Antarctic research base which is run by Ukrainians. It has the southernmost gift shop, and we bought some presents for friends. The people there gave us a tour of the station, and we got to see the machine that monitors the O-zone layer.

We then sailed back to Port Lockroy, and there were plenty of icebergs to take pictures of! While we were sailing, we went up the mast and I used the Go-Pro to take films. We saw a Leopard seal and I got a picture of it yawning.

We reached Port Lockroy and got a shock: the weather going back to Ushuaia was terrible! We had to be back for school, so when the next cruise ship arrived, we abandoned my dad and Andrew to take care of *Pelagic* and 'jumped ship'. The cruise ship was really cool, but I missed *Pelagic*. We spent one night in Ushuaia, said goodbye to Emma, Amy and Daisy and then flew back home, ending our adventure. ⚓

ED. Readers are welcome to submit their cruising articles for consideration. They must be accompanied by good quality high resolution (300dpi) image. Send to: editor@sailing.co.za



Getting some GoPro pics from high up!