



A yacht-based expedition to **The Antarctic Peninsula**

December 30 2024 – January 27 2025

Skiing, sea-kayaking and wildlife-watching,
based on the latest purpose-built high latitudes
77ft sailing expedition vessel in the Pelagic fleet.





Neumayer Channel, with Mt Français on the left.

THE LURE OF ANTARCTICA

In 2013, after several visits to the peri-antarctic island of South Georgia, I finally achieved a thirty-years old dream and visited the Antarctic continent itself, aboard Skip Novak's famous 74 ft purpose-built high latitudes yacht *Pelagic Australis*. Our nine person team made several ski ascents in the northern part of the Antarctic Peninsula amidst the most spectacular scenery I have witnessed anywhere. I enjoyed the experience so much that I had to go back in 2016. That expedition was even *more* enjoyable, so I returned in 2018, 2019 and *again* in 2020. Then Covid intervened. And then *Pelagic Australis* was sold. But now I can announce resumption of business with **a new Antarctic Peninsula expedition in January 2025**. We will be sailing on the latest addition to the Pelagic fleet, the new as yet unnamed Pelagic 77, sister ship to *Vinson of Antarctica*, due to be launched in May 2024.



Ice arch near Hovgaard Island.

ACTIVITIES ON OFFER

This will be a fantastic adventure. First of all, it is a chance to experience ocean sailing on a superlative boat, with an extremely experienced skipper and crew.

Guests are encouraged to help with sailing the boat, and everyone does watches during the crossing of Drake Passage from Chile to Antarctica, which usually takes three days.



Compared to many yachts operating in the area, the Pelagic vessels are extremely spacious and well equipped. Everyone gets his or her own comfortable bunk in a heated cabin. Communal areas include a large, warm, dry pilot house on deck and below deck a large saloon and galley with room to sit everyone round the dining table. The desalinator insures enough fresh water for everyone to



Kayaking amongst the Gentoo penguins.

have regular hot showers and the boat is equipped with daily internet access. There is a large stock of both preserved food and fresh meat, cheese, fruit and vegetables on board, plus plentiful stocks of soft drinks, beer and wine. Although the crew are always excellent cooks, guests are encouraged to help with cooking too.

This is will be our floating base camp once we get to the

Peninsula, taking us to a series of stunningly beautiful anchorages. Unlike passengers on large cruise ships, we have the chance to go ashore frequently and spontaneously, to a huge variety of sites. For experienced skiers, this is a fantastic opportunity for off-piste skiing at the seaside, with the occasional penguin for audience. Needless to say, there are no ski lifts, so we have to climb – usually on skins – to earn our descents. The latter could be anything from a quick couple of hundred metres down a gentle slope before lunch, to a big day out on Mt Français, which one American guest summarised gleefully as 'Two-thousand-two-hundred vertical of powder. Wow!' (And that was metres, not feet).

Mt Français was a serious expedition, with a 30 kilometres approach and overall round trip of four days. My inclination for 2025 is to concentrate more on relaxed day trips from the boat. These could vary from a gentle ninety minutes up-and-down on Cuverville Island to an eight hours round trip up and down Mt Scott, which must be one of the finest ski mountains in the world.

For those who do not ski (and those who do) there are lots of other activities. Many happy hours can be spent just



Pelagic skipper doing his first ever ice climb. Minke whale visiting the boat.
climb, near Vernadsky base.



Ascending and descending Mt Scott

soaking up the transcendent scenery and watching the abundant seals, penguins, whales and other wildlife. There is also a chance to experience Antarctica's fascinating exploration heritage at the Port Lockroy museum, and at other bases such as Vernadsky, where the ozone hole was first discovered. The calm channels on the Peninsula are perfect terrain for the boat's two sea kayaks. (In 2013 we spent a wonderful morning

kayaking amongst the icebergs to visit an Adelie penguin colony near the Argentine Islands). There are also snowshoes on board and there is the possibility of trying some ice climbing.

If people were really keen for a longer camping trip, I would be very happy to do another trip up Mt Français, highest peak in the area, or another of the peaks on Anvers Island. Or perhaps

Mt Parry on Brabant Island – another perfect ski peak. The great thing about travelling on an independent yacht is that we can be really flexible and maximise the possibilities for everyone to have a good time. And we could include a self-contained team of two or three mountaineers more keen on technical climbing than skiing. When it comes to the return passage, the skipper always tries to pick a promising weather window. If that means arriving back in the Beagle Channel with a day or two to spare, it is a great opportunity to spend some time amongst the forests, fjords and islands of Tierra del Fuego.



Returning to Access Point after an ascent of Mt Français.

REQUIREMENTS FOR SKIERS

On an ideal day, on the easiest slopes, with a well-packed snow crust, we could find short descents equivalent to a simple red run in the Alps. However, anyone wishing to enjoy these potential runs needs skis with touring (randonnée) bindings and skins, for the uphill work. And needs to know how to use them! (If you are a masochistic free heel purist, Telemark skis are also fine). As virtually every inch of terrain in Antarctica is crevassed glacier, each skier will also need a climbing harness with emergency rescue kit (prussik loops, slings, karabiners etc).

Anyone hoping to attempt more ambitious ascents and descents, will need to be a competent off-piste skier, with experience of

Skiing to the top of Hovgard Island.





alpine or equivalent ski touring, and some experience of basic alpine mountaineering (ie climbing with ice axe and crampons). If you are a good skier (competent on black runs and off-piste) but have not yet done any touring, it is perfectly possible in a week's training to acquire the requisite experience.

If you are keen on the potential skiing, but unsure of how you will cope, the best thing is to discuss it with me now. On past trips virtually everyone has coped well and enjoyed the skiing. However we have had a couple of guests who were not entirely realistic about their abilities and had to drop out of the skiing excursions. (They still had a very good time, just without the skiing). If you sign up for the expedition I will send a full kit list and can advise you about helpful suppliers.



REQUIREMENTS FOR NON-SKIERS

If you have no skiing experience – or no desire to ski – this is still a wonderful way to see the Antarctic Peninsula. Apart from good health and a willingness to live for four weeks at fairly close quarters with up to thirteen people, no special qualifications are required. Pelagic crews are always extremely experienced and pride themselves on organising interesting shore trips.

In addition to going ashore in the Zodiac, kayaking is a fantastic way of getting close to stunningly beautiful ice floes and wildlife. The



only equipment you will need – apart from a camera with many Gigabytes of memory – is standard cold weather protective clothing and warm boots. (Pelagic Expeditions provides foul weather sailing gear). Again, if you sign up for the expedition I will send a full kit list and can advise you about helpful suppliers.



Crabeater seals in Penola Strait.



Vinson of Antarctica.

THE BOAT

The new 77ft vessel is identical to *Vinson of Antarctica*, which was based closely on Skip Novak's famous *Pelagic Australis*, purpose-built for expedition support work, with ample storage space for mountaineering equipment, comfortable accommodation, a large convivial saloon, excellent galley,

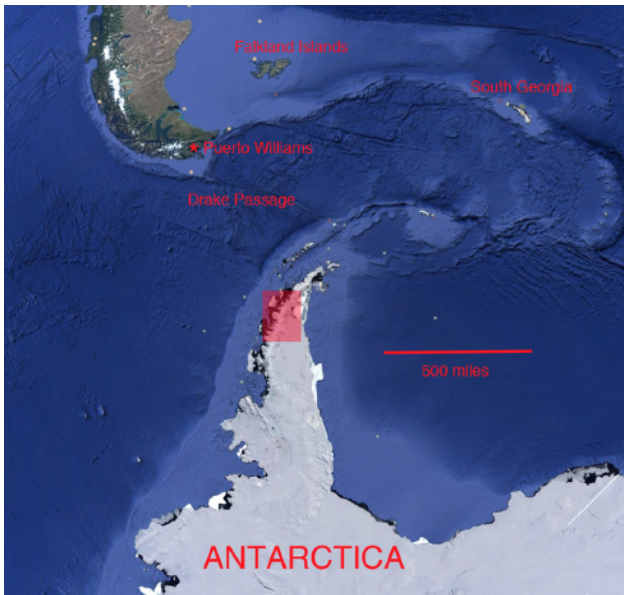


Awkward landing for Mt Scott.

lavish larder and well-stocked wine cellar. The shallow draft also enables her to anchor or tie up in very shallow waters sometimes inaccessible to other boats. The powerful twin motors ensure that return passages are always completed to schedule, and no-one misses vital flights home.

WEATHER AND CONDITIONS

We will be sailing in early January – high summer in Antarctica, when all the channels on the west side of the Peninsula *should* be clear of sea ice, and the weather is generally very good. On the February 2013 trip we had



mixed weather initially, but that was followed by a week of unbroken sunshine. At sea level the temperature can often be well above freezing during the day; in 2013 it was so fine one day that we all went swimming. (Well, I managed three strokes). Snow conditions ranged from immaculate powder high up to perfect spring snow at sea level. In January 2016 there was much more ice in the channels, so some plans had to be revised as we went along, but we still managed a satisfyingly full programme; in 2018 no landings were thwarted by ice.

The notorious Drake Passage can be trying. In 2016 stormy weather delayed our outward departure by a couple of days, but once we were

clear of the South American continent conditions were not too rough. On the return trip we motored past Cape Horn in a dead calm; in 2018 it was much rougher. In the sheltered channels on the Peninsula conditions are normally very calm, sails are furled and we motor everywhere.

EXPEDITION TIMETABLE

This is only a **very rough guide** to our schedule, based on previous expeditions. The exact programme we eventually follow could be totally different, depending on weather, and on the composition and ambitions of the party. This is merely a suggestion of possibilities, based on what has worked well on five previous expeditions. Nearer departure time, once we know the full team, everyone's abilities and their aspirations, we will probably draw up a revised timetable. But that will almost certainly be revised again once we get to the Peninsula!



Dec 30 Arrive Puerto Williams from Punta Arenas. Board the boat for safety briefings and welcome dinner.

Dec 31 - Jan 2 Sail from Puerto Williams to cross Drake Passage.

- Jan 3 Visit semi-active volcano at Deception Island.
- Jan 4 - 5 Sail south to Gerlache Strait and Cuverville Island. Kayaking. Visit Gentoo penguin colony. Skiing on Cuverville Island. Possible ascent of Mt Tennant on Rongé Island.
- Jan 6 Sail to Neumayer Channel. Possible skiing on north tip of Wiencke Island. Anchor at Port Lockroy.
- Jan 7 At Port Lockroy. Visit museum. Skiing on slopes of Jabet Peak.
- Jan 8 Sail south through Lemaire Channel. Visit 'iceberg graveyard' near Pléneau Island. Possible ski traverse of Hovgaard Island. Overnight at Pléneau Island.
- Jan 9 - 11 Further activities in vicinity of Pléneau Island, including ski ascent of Mt Scott.
- Jan 12 Sail south to Argentine Island. Visit the Ukrainian Vernadsky Base.
- Jan 14 - 19 Sail back north. Possible skiers camping expedition to climb either Mt Français on Anvers Island, or Mt Parry on Brabant Island. Non skiers visit Paradise Bay, Willhemina Bay and Charlotte Bay.
- Jan 20 - 21 Further wildlife site visits and short ski excursions.
- Jan 22 - 25 Return voyage across Drake Passage
- Jan 26 - 26 Spare day in Beagle Channel and return to Puerto Williams.
- Jan 27 Leave the vessel and return to Punta Arenas.



THE LEADER

Stephen Venables has been climbing for 40 years and has made first ascents all over the world, including a new route up Mount Everest without supplementary oxygen. He is a past president of both the Alpine Club and the South Georgia Association and has published eleven books about his mountain travels. In the far south he has made one expedition to Tierra del Fuego, five to the Antarctic Peninsula and eleven to South Georgia. This will be his fourteenth expedition with the Pelagic fleet.

www.stephenvables.org

Please note that although Stephen Venables has extensive experience leading polar ski-mountaineering groups, he is not a certified mountain guide. If there are more than three or four skiers in the party, he will be assisted by another experienced ski-mountaineering leader.



Price: £18,000 per person

This is a special group expedition rate based on a party of 8 paying members for 28 days on board the new Pelagic 77 boat.

Included:

Twenty-eight days charter.

All food, soft drinks, wine and beer on board and ashore in Antarctica.

Specialist foul weather gear on board.

Use of the two onboard inflatable sea kayaks.

Communal mountain camping, cooking and climbing equipment, including pulks, if require.

Not included:

Travel to and from Puerto Williams.

Food and accommodation en route to Puerto Williams (probably a night each way in Punta Arenas).

Final night dinner ashore in Puerto Williams.

Insurance.

Personal clothing and equipment. (Full equipment list provided on signing up for expedition).

Booking conditions:

Your contract will be with Pelagic Expeditions, and the payment schedule is:

On booking: £6,000

31 June 2024: £6,000

1 November 2024: £6,000

For full terms and conditions see the Pelagic website:

http://www.pelagic.co.uk/over_terms.asp#prices

For detailed specifications and the full story of the Pelagic fleet, visit <http://www.pelagic.co.uk> and www.vinsonofantarctica.org

ANTARCTIC PENINSULA EXPEDITION 2025
Stephen Venables in association with Pelagic Expeditions



I do hope that you will be able to join us on this wonderful adventure. And please get in touch if you would like to discuss our plans in more detail.

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