

SOUTH GEORGIA – SALVESEN RANGE WINTER EXPEDITION 2014

MOUNTAINEERING TEAM

Mark Dravers (UK)
Rodrigo Jordan (Chile)
David McMeeking (UK)
Skip Novak (USA) – Joint Leader
Nick Putnam (UK)
Stephen Venables (UK) – Joint Leader

PELAGIC AUSTRALIS CREW

Dave Roberts (UK) – Skipper
Thomas Geipel (Germany)
Alec Hazell (UK)



SAILING SUPPORT TEAM

Duncan Cameron (UK)
Stephen Davis (Australia)
Roger Nilson (Sweden)
Jenny Underwood (UK)
Mark Underwood (UK)

The 2014 Salvesen Range Expedition was an interesting winter experiment which failed comprehensively to achieve any of its stated objectives. However, it remained hugely enjoyable and managed to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat by transferring successfully to the more amenable Allardyce Range where we made first ascents of all three of the Trident Peaks.



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The team boarded Pelagic Australis at Stanley on 16 August and sailed through The Narrows on 19 August. Strong southwesterlies with temperatures down to -5°C had the deck and lower rigging coated in three inches of ice by the time we sighted Willis Island on the morning of 23 August and everyone spent a busy afternoon chipping the boat clear as we anchored at Husvik that afternoon.



Strong southwesterlies (up to 35 knots) persisted the next day, as we sailed down the north coast to anchor in Moltke Harbour. On 25 August we continued south, stopping to go ashore at Gold Harbour, then inspecting Iris Bay as a possible alternative to our preferred entry point of Trolhull – impossible with the big swell running from the southwest. Clouds of blasting spindrift, acres or bare blue ice and a kelp-infested landing approach all conspired to make Iris Bay equally unattractive. So we motored on to try Plan C – Larsen Harbour, anchoring there shortly after dark.

Ever hopeful, the mountaineering team was put ashore the next morning to try the steep approach from the head of Larsen Harbour to the Philippi Glacier. Despite generous help from the support team, it was heavy work, pulling 16 days supplies up suspect slabby snow. Violent winds blasting over the col above were a further deterrent. We only made



it half way up the slope, before leaving a depot. With stronger southwesterlies forecast for at least five days ahead, we decided the next morning to abandon plans for the Salvesen Range and spent a rather dismal day lowering our heavy pulks all the way back to Larsen Harbour. For the Support Team, though there was the consolation of doing a thorough survey of the whole of Drygalski Fjord, checking for Weddell Seals (only four were spotted, this early in the season, in Larsen Harbour).

Plan X now came into operation: the mountaineering team would stick to easily accessible day tours, followed – we hoped – by a more ambitious camping trip in the Allardyce Range once the forecast improved. Needless to say, having regrettably abandoned a project two years in the planning, we were now blessed with immaculate weather – or at least immaculate in the weather shadow in the lee of Mt Paget.

On 29 August the Support Team snowshoed and skied from Ocean Harbour to Cumberland Bay East, while the Mountaineering Team skied up and down Black Peak. We tied up that night at Grytviken and the following day enjoyed perfect windless conditions on walks to Maiviken and a ski ascent of Petrel Peak.

The forecast now promised very gentle winds for the next few days, so the Mountaineering

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Team spent 31 August re-packing for a shortened sledging trip, hoping to ski from

nonchalant about the vicious katabatics blasting over Shackleton Gap. The combination of violent gusts overhead and hard ice underfoot made skiing impossible, so we cramponed up to the Gap, before veering east onto the Briggs Glacier, where the wind ameliorated slightly. That afternoon, 2 September, it took four hours to build a snow wall and pitch tents for our first camp.

Day Two was much better, with winds dwindling to almost nothing and blue skies overhead. We skied 8.5 km up the Briggs Glacier to camp on a perfect evening at c.830 metres beneath the middle Trident.



Toasting Shackleton at the Grytviken graveyard

Possession Bay to Fortuna Bay via the Kohl Plateau. On 1 September Pelagic Australis motored up the coast in a dead calm, until we reached our chosen entry point of Possession

Bay, where all hell broke loose. Determined to cling to any remaining shred of credibility, we ferried the gear ashore regardless. Personnel followed the next morning, trying to look



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Camp below Middle Trident

Day Three was overcast and windy, so we stayed put at the Trident camp.

Day Four dawned perfect so we skied up to the col between the Middle and South Trident peaks. As the Middle Peak was the highest and most interesting summit we decided to make that our first objective. It was a beautiful, classically alpine climb, with an

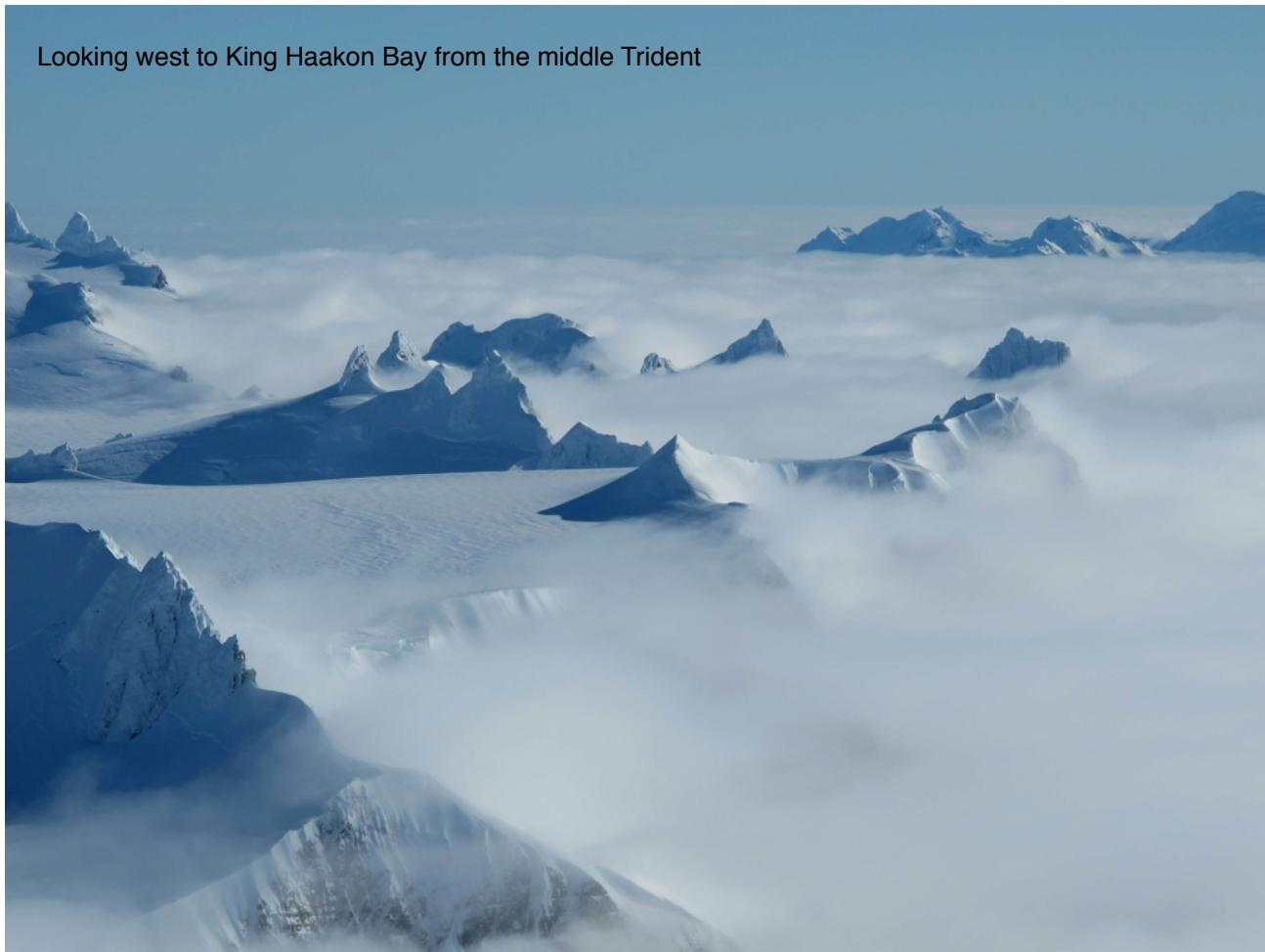
elegant curling snow ridge leading to a vertical step, bypassed by a 60 metres gully. A second, briefly vertical, step of fine South Georgian choss, plastered in rime meringue, gave some good sport, before the ridge eased off into the final snowfield leading to a broad spacious summit, marked 1337 metres on the current map. There was not a breath of wind, and all the mountains west to Bird Island and east to Paget, stood clear of a perfect cloud inversion. For Skip it was a day to equal his ascent of Paget several years ago. For Stephen, it was the best day he had ever had in six visits to South Georgia. The descent went smoothly, with three abseils from snow mushrooms and an Abalakov thread, followed by easy down climbing back to the col and an enjoyable ski from there back down to camp.



The summit of the middle, highest, Trident

SOUTH GEORGIA – SALVESEN RANGE WINTER EXPEDITION 2014

Looking west to King Haakon Bay from the middle Trident



On Day Five the campaign continued with first ascent of the South Peak – an easy snow shoulder followed by 60 metres of steeper rime-on-choss, and finishing with a sporting

summit nipple, where there was just room for each person to take turn standing on top. By lunchtime we were back in camp in deteriorating weather.

Day Six was less good – overcast, with a northwesterly bringing rain by the afternoon. So for once we managed a true ‘alpine start’, getting away before first light and finding our way through the murk to the col between the Middle and North Peak. We left skis there and Rodrigo led us through a whiteout up the final snow face to the summit.

South Trident summit



SOUTH GEORGIA – SALVESEN RANGE WINTER EXPEDITION 2014

Murky conditions on the north Trident



Having climbed all three peaks, we hoped to continue to the Kohl Plateau and explore the col from there to the König Glacier. But with rising winds and rain falling even at 830 metres, and the weather forecast to deteriorate further over the next few days, that prospect became less and less attractive. After an agonized discussion on the morning of Day Seven, we decided to cut our losses and retreat to Possession Bay. Even with the wind on our backs and going downhill it was a fairly tiring journey, with sticky snow underfoot; the general consensus seemed to be that our cowardice was actually quite sensible.

On Day Eight, 9 September, Pelagic Australis arrived at lunchtime to extract us from Possession Bay. The Support Team had enjoyed an excellent week of shore visits and

anchorages in Prince Olave Harbour, Salisbury Plain, Rosita Harbour, Blue Whale Bay, Fortuna Bay, Hercules Cove, Husvik, Carlita Bay, Cumberland West Bay, Godthul and Cobblers Cove. That night we anchored at Husvik.

With the whole team reunited, the plan now was for everyone to do the final stage of the Shackleton Traverse from Fortuna Bay to Stromness. Unfortunately the easterlies proved much stronger than forecast. With a huge swell and the wind gusting to 68.8 knots, even Pelagic Australis's powerful motor could only manage 2 knots progress. At this rate it was going to be almost impossible to reach Fortuna Bay, let alone *land* there. So the ever flexible Salvesen Range/Allardyce Range Expedition 2014 had to revise its plans yet again and beat a retreat to Elsehul, for a final afternoon's faffing, getting everything stowed ready for an early departure for Stanley, capitalizing on the east wind while it lasted.

We left Elsehul on the morning of 11 September and reached Stanley on the morning of 16 September.

We have suggested naming the three Trident summits after the Greek goddesses of the sea: Thetis, Thalassa and Tethys.

Stephen Venables & Skip Novak
Stanley, 8 September 2014

Descent from middle Trident with north peak on the left

