



A spring expedition to the sub-Antarctic island of  
**South Georgia**

**September 10 – October 15 2016**

Sailing, wildlife and polar heritage

Ski-mountaineering and first ascents in the Salvesen Range



## SOUTH GEORGIA – SALVESEN RANGE EXPEDITION 2016 – SHACKLETON CENTENARY

Stephen Venables in association with Pelagic Expeditions

### BACKGROUND - Stephen Venables

I have been six times to South Georgia and I still haven't kicked the habit. Two of my previous expeditions were to the Salvesen Range – to my mind the most exciting area, at the southern end of the island. In 1990 with Brian Davison I made the first ascent of Mount Carse. In 2010 I returned to ski right through the range, from Royal Bay to Larsen Harbour. In 2014 I returned again with Skip Novak, but difficult conditions sent us packing. Although we achieved three first ascents further north, there is still unfinished business in the Salvesen Range. And we feel compelled to celebrate the centenary of Shackleton's 1916 crossing of South Georgia with a suitably adventurous expedition of our own!

### EXPEDITION LEADERS

The 2016 expedition, like four previous ventures, will be led by me and the owner of Pelagic Expeditions, **Skip Novak**, who has been sailing to remote mountains in and around Antarctica for 25 years.



### MOUNTAINEERING TEAM

We are looking for up to **four mountaineers** to join us. It is essential that each team member is a competent off-piste skier who can handle all types of snow and terrain. He or she must also have alpine experience of mixed and snow-and-ice climbing to around grade D (alpine 'difficile'). During the main climbing/skiing phase we will probably spend around ten days ashore, travelling on ski, towing all our gear in pulks. We will climb as two ropes of three or three ropes of two.

### PELAGIC AUSTRALIS

The only way to get to South Georgia is by boat and all expeditions on the island have to be self-sufficient. *Pelagic Australis* is probably the best-known yacht operating in the Southern Ocean, purpose-built for expedition support work, with ample storage space for mountaineering equipment, comfortable

accommodation, a large convivial saloon and a powerful motor to supplement the sailing rig. The voyage from The Falkland Islands normally takes four to five days and once we reach South Georgia *Pelagic Australis* makes a perfect floating base camp, with an inflatable zodiac for accessing landing points around the island.

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

### SAILING SUPPORT TEAM

In addition to the mountaineering team, we were offering **at least four places** to people who would like to experience South Georgia's unique landscape and wildlife, without being committed to technical climbing and skiing. While the mountaineering party is ashore, the support team will

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have the chance to visit some of the islands' magnificent beaches and natural harbours, explore the old whaling stations, go for mountain walks and enjoy the island's incomparable wildlife.

### LATE WINTER SEASON

We have chosen the late-winter/early-spring season for several reasons. Recent climate change has resulted in ever less snow cover during the summer, making the glaciers increasingly difficult to negotiate. By arriving at the tail end of winter we should have ample snow cover and slightly cooler temperatures, making glacier travel much more efficient and enjoyable. For the mountaineering party it makes perfect sense. For the support party there could be the chance –



denied to regular Antarctic cruises – to see South Georgia almost entirely cloaked in pristine snow, whilst still being able to enjoy most of the wildlife which makes the island so special. The bull elephant seals, for instance, will just be coming ashore to start their battles for control of the breeding beaches, while many of the birds, such as the albatrosses and the King Penguins, are on the island all the year round. In September we will almost certainly be the only humans on the island, apart from the resident British Antarctic Survey staff at King Edward Point.

### EXPEDITION TIMETABLE

This is only a very **rough guide** to our likely schedule. The actual timetable will be highly weather dependent and, as always on South Georgia, we will need to be flexible. We have extended the normal Pelagic charter from four to **five weeks** to give ourselves time to enjoy the island fully.

Sept 10	Arrive Falklands from Santiago. Board <i>Pelagic Australis</i> .
Sept 11 – 15	Sail from Falklands to South Georgia, to anchor at Elsehul or Husvik.
Sept 16	Sail south to anchor in Royal Bay. Visit gentoo penguin colony.
Sept 17	Continue south, visiting Gold Harbour then anchoring in Larsen Harbour.
Sept 18	Final packing for mountaineering party in Larsen Harbour.
Sept 19	Sail round to Trollhul to land mountaineering party with 10 days supplies.
Sept 20 – Oct 4	Mountaineering party ashore. Support party exploring beaches and harbours along northeast coast.
Oct 5	Mountaineering party back on board <i>Pelagic Australis</i> .
Oct 6 – 8	Possibility for further ski/mountaineering excursions.
Oct 9	Depart South Georgia.
Oct 13	Tie up in Stanley.
Oct 15	Depart Falkland Islands.



*View south from Spenceley–Novosilski Col*

### MOUNTAINEERING OBJECTIVES

The southern end of the Salvesen Range is perfect ski-mountaineering terrain, with broad easy-angled glaciers ideal for towing pulks between peaks. The best landing point (favourable weather permitting) will probably be Trollhul, on the south coast, from where we can climb quickly onto the Graae Glacier. The best exit point – which we used in 2010 – is the steep, descent into Larsen Harbour, a sheltered and most spectacular anchorage which can be used in any weather. If we take food and fuel for a maximum of ten days, we have a chance of attempting several peaks, all within easy ski distance of each other. Here are some of the possibilities:

#### **Mt Fraser** 1611m

Unclimbed, un-reconnoitred peak, two days from Trollhull.

#### **Mt Baume** 1912m

One of the highest unclimbed peaks on the island, named after a member of the Carse 1950s survey expeditions. From Mt Carse in 1990 I spotted a likely route up the South Ridge, although the final section could be quite tricky.

#### **P.2089m**

An unnamed, unclimbed peak which has been beckoning since 1990. It would involve some exciting negotiations around rime mushrooms and would need careful reconnoitering to assure a safe route. There is another spectacular unclimbed peak further south on the same ridge.

#### **Mt Paterson** 2196m

Has only been climbed once – in 1958. The exciting thing would be to make a ski ascent and descent.

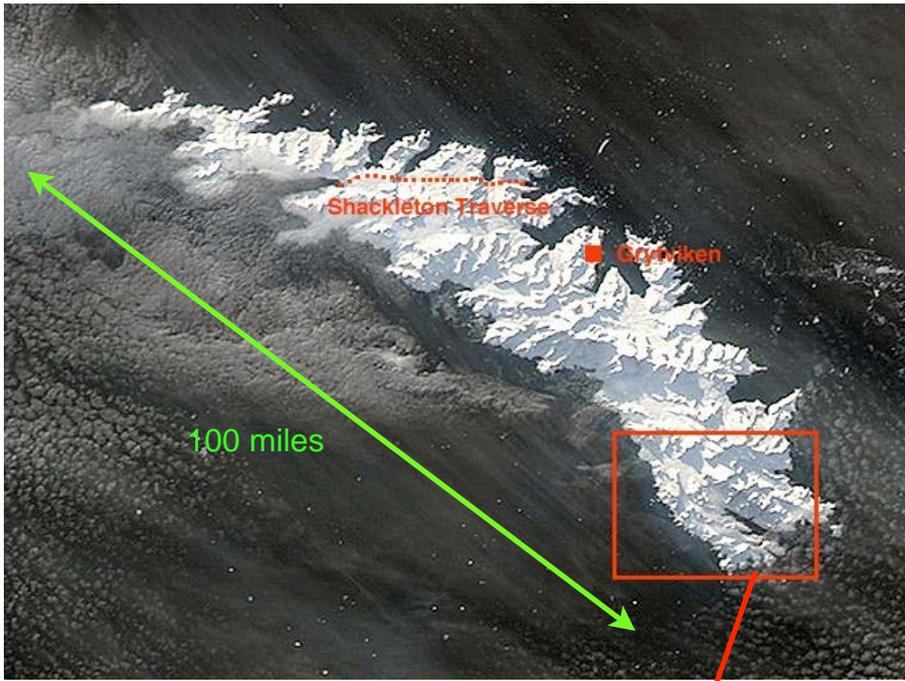
#### **Mt Carse** 2231m

Has only been climbed once – by Brian Davison and me in 1990. The southeastern summit remains untouched and might be a feasible ski objective.

#### **Starbuck Peak** 434m

Short easy approach to a spectacular final rock wall/ridge, which might prove impossible. A stunning unclimbed summit

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**Mt Dow**

A difficult looking unclimbed peak next to Mt Carse.

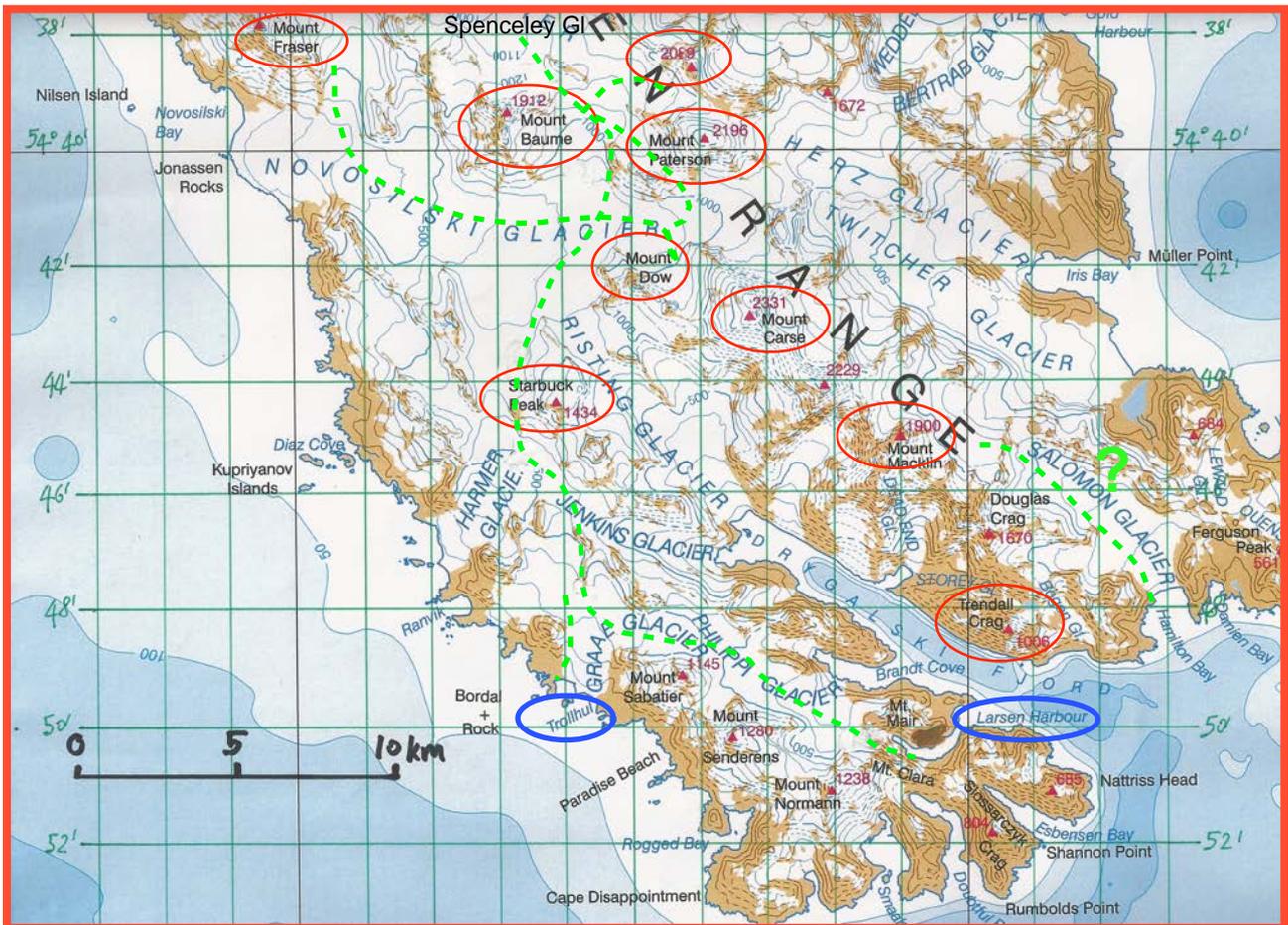
**Mt Macklin 1900m**

Another of the big unclimbed summits. Unknown approach up Salomon Glacier needs further research.

**Trendall Crag 1006m**

Unclimbed. Would give some fine alpine rock climbing straight from the boat.

And many more possibilities ...

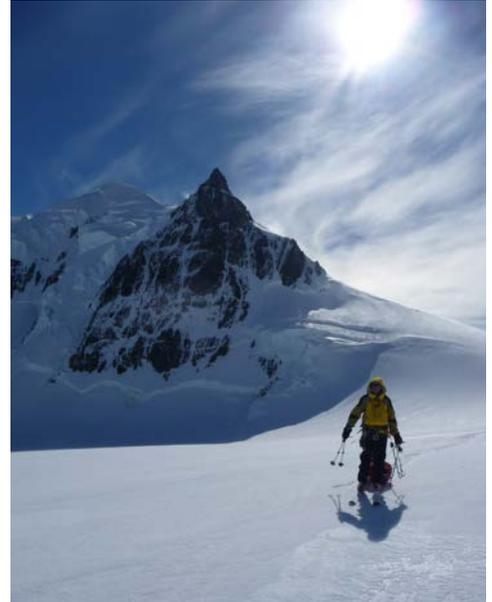


main sledging routes

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*Mt Baume is perhaps the most obvious and tempting unclimbed peak on the island. This picture on the left was taken from the south in 2010, showing a possible route up the South Ridge. The picture below was taken the previous day, as we skied over the Spenceley–Novosilski Col past Baume. The bottom picture was taken in 1990 from near the summit of Mt Carse.*



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*The upper picture was taken in 2010, just after crossing the Spencely-Novosilski col. The lower picture was taken a little lower, as we set up camp looking out to sea. Mt Paterson might prove a perfect peak for a ski ascent and descent.*



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*The enticingly pointy unclimbed summit of Starbuck Peak. In the bottom picture it appears on the right, above our 2010 camp on the Harmer Glacier, reached by a wonderful ski descent.*



*Sunset view out to sea from the same camp. The pinnacles have never been climbed!*

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*The wonderful spring snow descent into Larsen Harbour – skiing right down to the beach – followed by the always welcome return to Pelagic Australis. The unclimbed rock ridges of Trendall Crag are in the background. The bottom picture shows the 2012 Antarctic Peninsula team celebrating with post-climb dinner in the saloon.*



### FOOD AND SUPPLIES

Pelagic expedition contracts include all food on board and ashore, throughout the charter, plus all wine and beer. Expedition members may contribute their own spirits if they wish. Everyone normally helps with cooking and washing up in the well-equipped galley.

### SAILING WATCHES

*Pelagic Australis* is run by a professional skipper and crew, but everyone is encouraged to help with the sailing, and all team members do watches on sea passages. (These are not onerous – last year it was four hours on, every twelve hours).





*Pelagic Australis sailing down the east coast of South Georgia past the Salvesen Range.*

#### INLAND TRAVEL FOR THE MOUNTAINEERING PARTY

We will travel on ski wherever possible, as this is the fastest, safest, most enjoyable way of getting around the glacial interior. Pelagic Expeditions has a variety of pulks, so everyone can tow their own kit, plus a share of communal gear and supplies – infinitely preferable to carrying a heavy rucksack. We will take two large Terra Nova tents, each with reinforced flysheet, double poles and spacious cooking/storage porch each end. These tents are well tried and tested. However, even the strongest tents have been known to succumb to South Georgia blizzards, so we always carry a steel spade and snow saw for digging emergency snow-caves.

From temporary bases, we will be able to travel more lightly, without pulks, switching from skis to crampons on

steeper terrain. With a bit of luck we should be able to attempt two or three unclimbed peaks.

*Camp on the Philippi Glacier, just above Larsen Harbour. Cloud-shrouded Mt Macklin and Mt Carse in the distance.*





*Blue-eyed shags beside the wreck of the Bayard, in Ocean Harbour*

#### NON-MOUNTAINEERING DELIGHTS

An expedition to South Georgia is much more than a mere mountaineering trip. For everyone on board – and in particular for the sailing support party – there are many other fascinating attractions: the unique heritage of the old whaling stations, the greatest concentration on pelagic wildlife in the Southern Ocean, beautiful natural harbours and beaches, stunning hill walks and, of course, the

landmarks such as King Haakon Bay and Stromness, made famous by Ernest Shackleton's legendary crossing of the island at the end of his extraordinary open boat voyage in 1916.

*Light Mantled Sooty Albatross*



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*King Penguins at Salisbury Plain, on the northeast coast, midsummer, with the lower peaks clear of snow.*



*Gentoo Penguins*



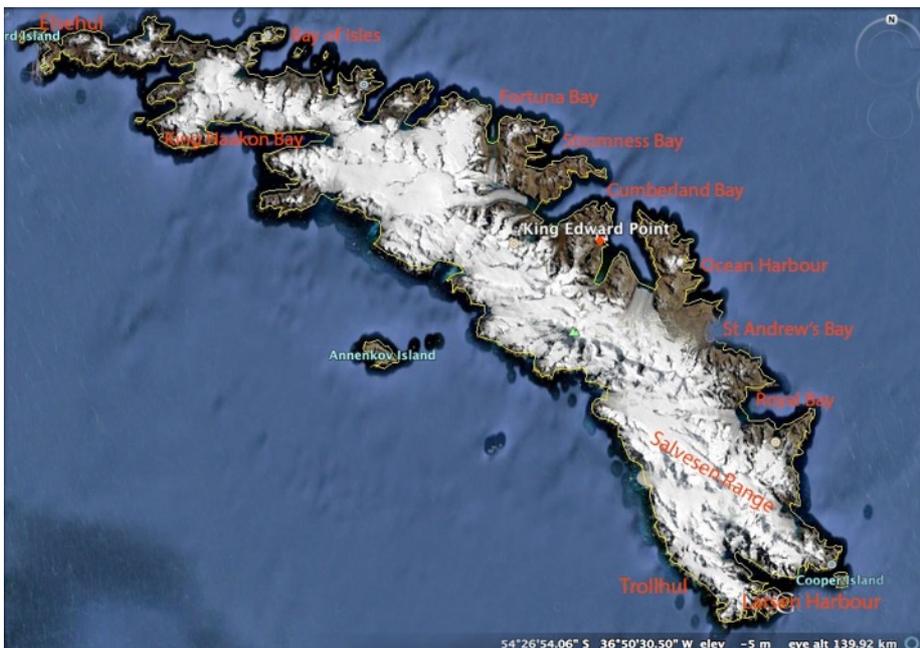
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*The 2014 expedition toasting Ernest Shackleton at his Grytviken grave, with a replica bottle of the 1907 Nimrod Expedition whisky. 2016 will be the centenary of Shackleton's legendary crossing of South Georgia with Frank Worsley and Tom Crean, after the open boat journey from Elephant Island.*

In 2014 we made sure that the sailing support party had a busy time. Excursions included ski and snowshoe trips between Ocean Harbour and Cumberland Bay, visits to the Wandering Albatross

nests in the Bay of Isles and a survey of Weddell Seals in Larsen Harbour. Ferocious winds forced us to cancel a planned snowshoeing/skiing journey across the final stage of the Shackleton Traverse, but that – and a visit to King Haakon Bay, where the James Caird landed in 1916 – will be on the list of possibilities for 2016.



## PLAN B FOR THE MOUNTAINEERING TEAM

When you go on a trip to South Georgia you have to be phlegmatic, flexible and prepared to tear up the expedition plan, re-think objectives and start all over again. That's what happened in 2014 when persistent strong winds, spindrift and possible avalanche danger stopped us from getting established in the Salvesen Range. It was disappointing, but it didn't stop us having a fantastic time. We simply switched to more easily accessible objectives further north, with a couple of stunning day ski trips, followed by a week in the Allardyce Range, making first ascents of three new peaks.

We hope very much that this time we *will* get onto those remote Salvesen peaks.



*Skiing out of Ocean Harbour.*



*Kohl Larsen Plateau photographed whilst descending from the first ascent of Central Trident Peak, 2014.*

However, should it again prove impossible, there are lots of enticing objectives for a suitable Plan B. Most tempting, probably, would be to make a ski traverse from Possession Bay to Fortuna Bay via the Kohl Larsen Plateau. This is the higher – and actually more enjoyable – route which Shackleton might have taken in 1916, had he had a map (which didn't exist in those days). It passes through stunning country and there remain several unclimbed peaks along the way. And there are many, many other possibilities all around the island.

## THE LEADERS



**Skip Novak** has sailed five times round the world, three times as skipper on the Whitbread Race. But his real love is sailing to remote polar mountains. He was one of the pioneers of high latitude charters and has been sailing his Pelagic fleet to remote locations for twenty-five years. He is also an extremely experienced ski mountaineer and veteran of many expeditions to Antarctica and South Georgia.

<http://www.pelagic.co.uk>



**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. In the far south he has made one expedition to Tierra del Fuego, one to the Antarctic Peninsula and six to South Georgia. Four of those expeditions he co-led with Skip, and he is looking forward to continuing that partnership.

<http://www.stephenvenables.com>

*Please note that although both Skip Novak and Stephen Venables have extensive experience leading polar ski-mountaineering groups, they are not certified mountain guides.*

## Price: £12,800 per person

This is a special group rate based on a party of 8 paying members, totalling £100,000 for 35 days. (The advertised group charter rate on the Pelagic website is actually £117,600 for only 28 days).

### **Included:**

Five weeks charter of *Pelagic Australis*.

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

Specialist foul weather gear on board.

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

### **Not included:**

Travel to and from Stanley.

One or two meals ashore in Stanley.

Insurance.

Personal clothing and equipment.

Optional internet communications on board.



*The old whaling station at Grytviken – site of the South Georgia Museum.*

*NB Price the same for Mountaineering Team and Sailing Support Team members.*



*2010 team rejoicing at reaching the heart of the Salvesen Range.*

**Booking conditions:**

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

On booking:	£4,267
10 May 2016:	£4,267
30 July 2016:	£4,266

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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