



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

**September 8 – October 13 2018**

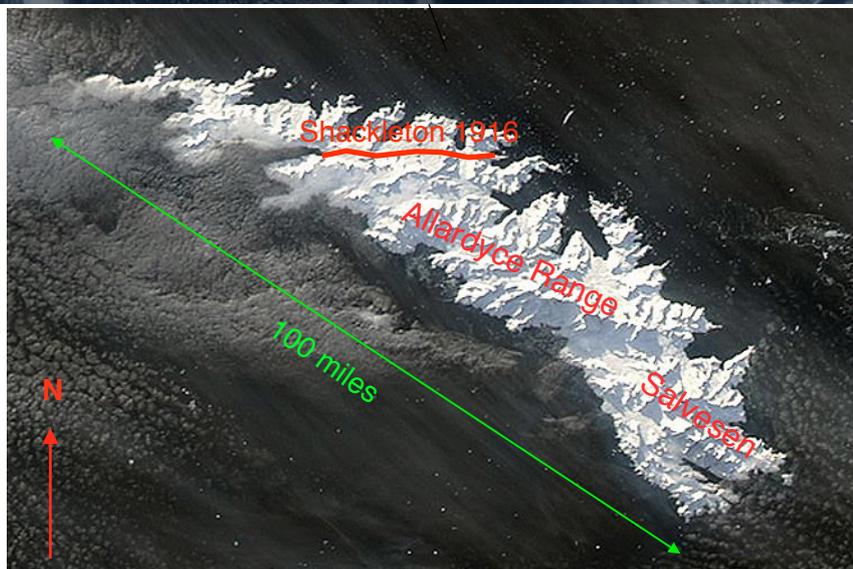
Sailing, wildlife and polar heritage

Ski-mountaineering with the possibility of first ascents



## BACKGROUND

I first went to South Georgia during the austral summer of 1989-90. At the end of that expedition, when we made first ascents of Mt Kling and Mt Carse, I assumed that this was a one-off trip. How wrong I was. I have now been back six times and each time I leave the island I am even keener to return to that magical combination of ocean, glaciers and mountains, inhabited by some of the most prolific wildlife anywhere in the world. Three of my seven expeditions have been to the Salvesen Range at the little-visited southern end of the island. The most recent, in 2016, achieved several first ascents, including the spectacular Starbuck Peak. However, there is still unfinished business. Several stunning peaks remain unclimbed; regardless of summits, the route we perfected from Trolhul, at the southern tip of the island, to the immense penguin colony at St Andrew's Bay, is a magnificent ski tour. That is our Plan A for 2018. If conditions are unsuitable, Plan B is to explore the more accessible – and slightly less weather-dependent – northwest end of the island. As usual, we also plan many other delights for the non-mountaineeing sailing support team.





#### EXPEDITION LEADERS

The 2018 expedition, like four previous ventures, will be led by me and the owner of the *Pelagic* fleet, **Skip Novak**, who has been sailing to remote mountains in and around Antarctica for over 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. To attempt any summits, he or she must also have some alpine experience of mixed and snow-and-ice climbing, ideally 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. The 74ft purpose-built yacht *Pelagic Australis* is probably the best-known sailing boat

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 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. Although all shore visits have to be cleared by the South Georgia government and comply with strict environmental safeguards, a small boat trip like this offers far more opportunities to get to know the island than a standard cruise on a large ship. If any of the support team has skiing experience, we will also try to organise some one day ski tours. On past expeditions this has worked very well.



*Gentoo penguins in King Haakon Bay, where Shackleton landed the James Caird in 1916*

#### 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 handful of resident British Antarctic Survey staff at King Edward Point.



*A day ski trip out of Ocean Harbour, on the northeast coast*



*The old whaling station at Grytviken still under winter snow in September 2014*

## EXPEDITION TIMETABLE

This is only a very **rough guide** to our possible schedule. The actual timetable once we reach South Georgia could well be completely different and will be dependent on weather and conditions. The 800 miles passage between Stanley and South Georgia usually takes four days, but has been done in just three. Occasionally we have to wait a day or even two in Stanley for the best weather window. Similarly, on the return passage we might have to leave a day or two early to avoid missing the weekly flight home. 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 8	Arrive Falklands from Santiago. Board <i>Pelagic Australis</i> .
Sept 9 - 13	Sail from Falklands to South Georgia.
Sept 14	Anchor at Trolhul if conditions are suitable.
Sept 15 - 30	Mountaineering party ashore. <i>Pelagic Australis</i> with support team visits Drygalski Fjord and continues to anchorages along northeast coast.
Sept 30	Mountaineering party rendez-vous with <i>PA</i> at St Andrew's Bay.
Oct 1 - 5	Further possibilities for joint excursions ashore.
Oct 6	Depart South Georgia.
Oct 10	Tie up in Stanley.
Oct 13	Depart Falkland Islands.

*Light-mantled sooty albatross*



*Fur seal*





LIFE ON BOARD  
*PELAGIC AUSTRALIS*

The boat 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 – usually on a rotating system of three hours on and six hours off. The boat provides foul weather sailing gear and lifejackets. Pelagic expedition contracts

include all food, wine, beer and soft drinks for the duration of the charter. Expedition members may contribute their own spirits if they wish. In my experience on eight expeditions, we have always eaten extremely well, with ample fresh meat, fruit and vegetables. Everyone normally helps with cooking and washing-up in the well-equipped galley. The large warm saloon is below deck at the back of the boat, with adjoining galley and communications desk. All the twin berth cabins are

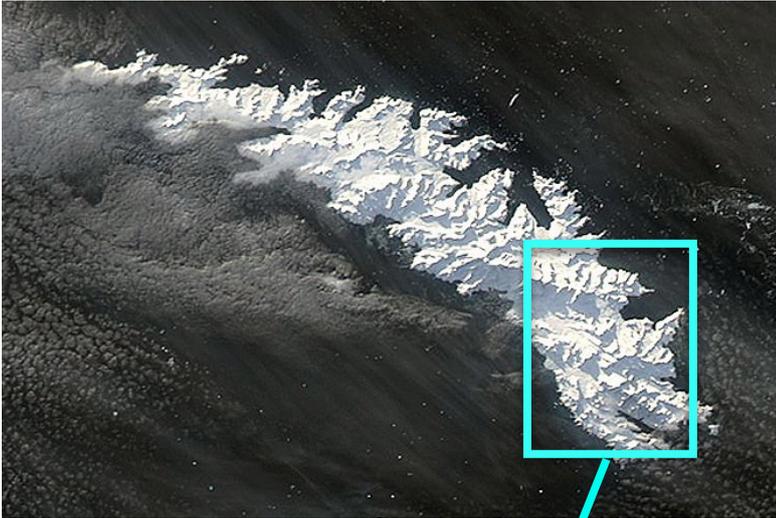
further forward, either side of the central lifting keel which enables *Pelagic Australis* to enter extremely shallow anchorages. Fresh food and mountaineering gear are stored in the spacious forepeak. The central pilot house, above the engine room, has room for several people to enjoy life above deck in completely warm dry conditions.



*Hoisting the mainsail in Stanley*



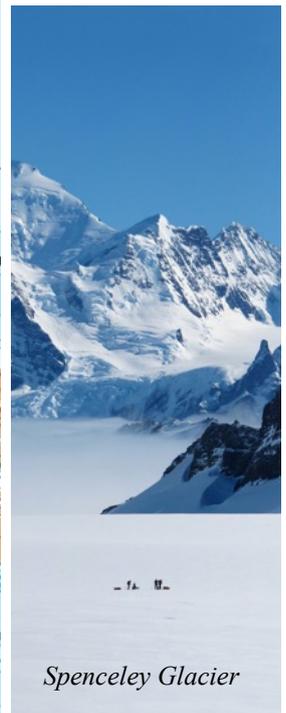
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SLEDGING ROUTE THROUGH SALVESEN RANGE

This route through some of the world's finest mountain scenery has been well tried and tested. Some of the most obvious unclimbed peaks are ringed in green. In ideal conditions, it is best started in the south from Trolhul. However, in many conditions – such as strong south-westerlies – landing at Trolhul is impossible, so it could be better to access the Salvesen Range from the north, starting at St Andrew's Bay.

The dotted red lines are alternative approaches from (and escape routes to) the very sheltered anchorage in Larsen Harbour, off Drygalski Fjord and Iris Bay.



*Spenceley Glacier*

## 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



*On the Novosilski Glacier in 2016, skiing past the unclimbed summit of Mt Dow. On the left are the slopes of Mt Carse – a possibility for a first ski descent.*

rucksack. The longest pulk serves as an emergency ‘blood-wagon’ should anyone get injured. 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. If we get the right combination of team abilities, weather and conditions, we will definitely attempt to climb at least one peak – ideally several. Operating from temporary bases, we will be able to climb more lightly, without pulks, switching from skis to crampons on steeper terrain.

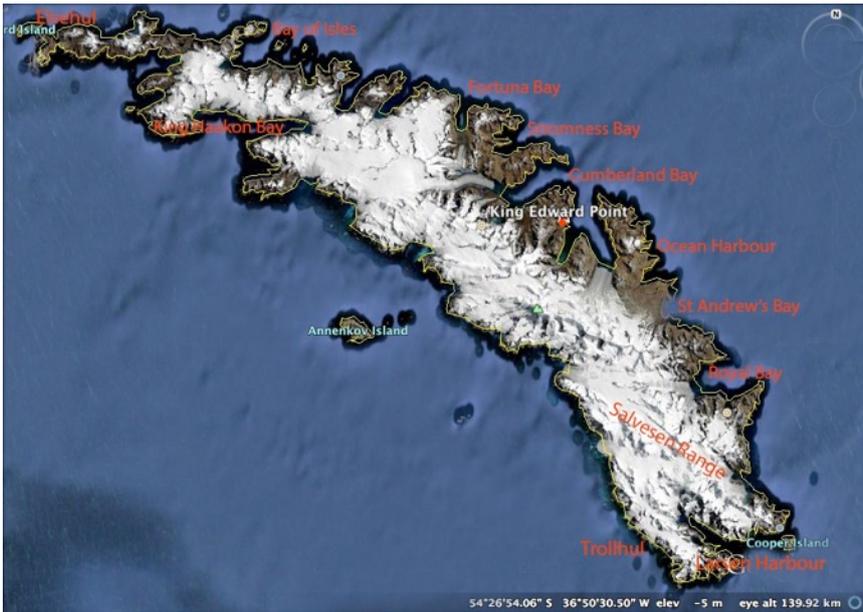


All these peaks on the north bank of the Spenceley Glacier are unclimbed. Smoky Wall is the highest, and probably most feasible. When we skied past in 2016, we spotted a likely line up the sunlit ramp.

## 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 of 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. 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. On every trip we spend some time anchored at South Georgia's first whaling station, Grytviken, now home to an excellent museum. In 2016 the support team joined the mountaineering party for a ski traverse of the final section of Shackleton's legendary traverse.



*The 2014 expedition toasting Ernest Shackleton at his Grytviken grave, with a replica bottle of the 1907 Nimrod Expedition whisky. His famous crossing of South Georgia with Tom Crean and Frank Worsley was made in May 1916.*

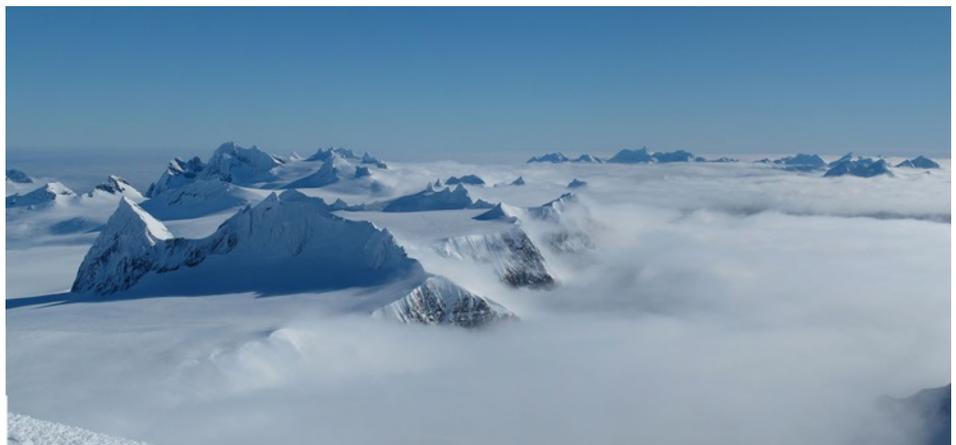


*A few of the tens of thousands of King Penguins in the Bay of Isles*

#### 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 objective further north, with a couple of stunning day ski trips, followed by a week



*The view west across Shackleton Gap, from the summit of Poseidon on the first ascent*

above Possession Bay, making first ascents of three new peaks. We hope very much that this time we *will* get onto those remote southern Salvesen peaks, as we did in 2016. However, should it

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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 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.

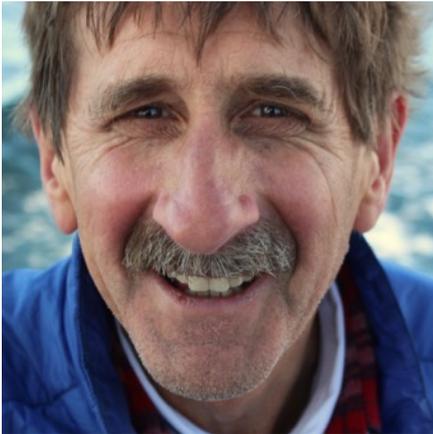
Another possibility would be to traverse through the mountains west of Shackleton Gap, possibly starting right near the northwest tip of the island, at Elsehul. However, in the absence of sufficient snow cover, this might best be done as a series of day trips, on foot, rather than ski. The point is that there are many, many options for adventurous traverses, climbs and ski runs. There is always more to do!



#### KIT LIST

We provide a detailed kit list for everyone who signs up for both mountaineering and support teams and we are happy to talk about what exactly you need to bring.

## 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 nearly thirty years, as well consulting for numerous other operators. He is also an extremely experienced ski mountaineer and veteran of many climbing 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, two to the Antarctic Peninsula and seven to South Georgia. Five 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.*



*Skip on the summit of Mt Baume on the first ascent in 2016*

## Price: £13,500 per person

This is a special group rate based on a party of 8 paying members, totalling £108,000 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, beer and soft drinks on board and ashore on South Georgia.

Specialist foul weather gear on board.

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

£200 per person South Georgia landing fee

### **Not included:**

Travel to and from Stanley (weekly Saturday flight from and to Santiago, Chile).

One or two meals ashore in Stanley.

Insurance.

Personal clothing and equipment.

Optional internet communications on board.

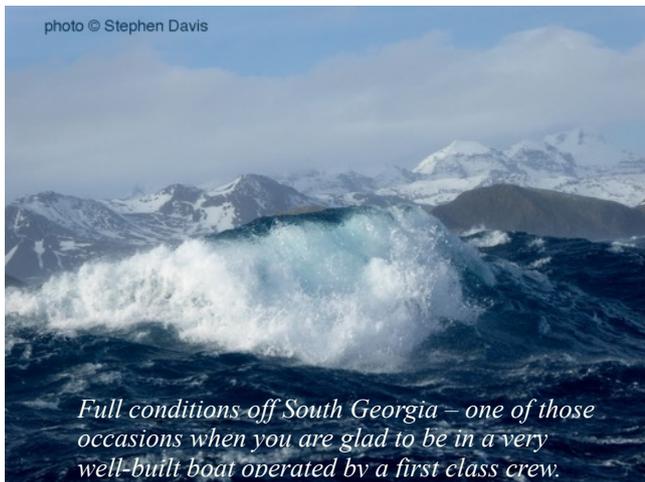
Airport transfers.

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

### **Booking conditions:**

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

On booking:	£4,500
20 January 2018:	£4,500
1 July 2018:	£4,500



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

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