

Pelagic Australis

Beagle Channel – Falkland Islands – Tristan da Cunha – Cape Town

Arriving in Ushuaia with my mate Stew Walker after a long trip from Cape Town International, he and I booked into a little local hostel for the next 2 nights. Those first few days were the chilly ones whilst the two Capetonians acclimatized to this snowy town. Ushuaia turned out to be a bit larger and fuller of life than we thought. Wondering around for hours on end taking in the awesome sights and viewpoints of this magnificent area. Above the town lie monstrous snow peaks towering over the surrounding landscapes, awesome to look at no matter which corner of the globe you're from. The days went quick and before we knew it we were onboard Valhala, a double masted schooner, which belongs to a French couple who kindly offered to lift us across to Puerto Williams. This time of year we were grateful for the help as every single ferry and mode of transport across had been shut down for winter.



We arrived in Puerto Williams later that afternoon, just in time for sunset, Tierra del Fuego style. After being warmly welcomed onto our new home for the next couple of months by skipper Miles Wise, Laura the 1st mate, and Dave Roberts the 2nd mate, we tucked into supper. Pelagic Australis is the perfect example of what an expedition vessel should look like. She is by far the most equipped and well maintained boat I have ever seen. Everything is optimized and trimmed perfectly to perform at its very best potential. From the diesel reflex heater system downstairs to the layout of storage on the boat, she is fantastic in every way. For me, she is the most ultimate ocean going explorer.

The next couple of days flew by as we spent them in the classroom with our RYA instructor Ian, learning for the RYA Yachtmaster Offshore theory exam which we all happily passed with flying colours. The week of book work was over and we could finally depart Puerto Williams for our first anchorage on the way to Cabo de Hornos (Cape Horn). We spent the first night in Coleta Lientur, about 50nm North of Cape Horn. The night was very dark with winds gusting up into thirties. We didn't waste time the next morning, skipping breakfast and leaving for the infamous Horn. It wasn't long before we were passing Isle Hall and we could just see the 'end of the world'. We rounded at about 10:30am in absolutely dead calm conditions which was actually a bit disappointing after hearing the stories that come out of rounding the Horn. The ocean looked like a duck pond with maybe 5 knots of breeze. In a way I was looking forward to a roaring gale and 30ft waves, just so that it lived up to its name. After a beautiful rounding we managed to land the zodiac on the island in order to visit the lighthouse keeper and his family who have been allocated to live, isolated on the Cabo de Hornos islands for 2 years. He and his puppy were the welcoming party who lead us up to the house for a tour of their home and the surrounding areas. We must've spent only 20 minutes on the island with them and you could already sense how tough it must be to live in a situation like that. Separated from the outside world.



After our awesome visit to the 'End of the World' we continued to travel back into the Beagle Channel to explore various fjords and inlets, which were covered by glaciers and some of the most beautiful landscapes anyone could imagine. It's as if you've woken up in a National Geographic Documentary.

The channel part of the journey was by far the most amazing, but sadly went by quickly and we found ourselves already sailing out of the Beagle heading for the Falkland Islands. The purpose of the long trek back to Cape Town, South Africa, was to deliver Pelagic Australis for a re-fit at the end of her season.

The passage to Falklands was our first taste of Open Ocean on Pelagic and she once again proved herself worthy of the task. She is so well built to withstand huge waves and howling winds that you don't even realize how bad the storm is outside when you're down below. 20ft swells and 45knts of breeze and she sits steady whilst we have waves breaking clean over the pilot house. Every now and then we'd hit a rogue swell and the boat would feel on the edge of broaching but not once did we actually spin out. After a short 3 day haul we landed in Stanley Harbour welcomed by some of Miles' friends on a small rib. We tied up alongside the large work jetty and cracked open a cold one.

The days spent in Stanley were slow but still productive as we got the boat stocked and tidied up for the long haul across to Tristan da Cunha. The people in Stanley are extremely friendly and helpful, lending a hand where ever necessary. 5 days were spent preparing in the Falklands and on the 23rd we left. We had a tiny window of opportunity to leave as the forecast said we would be experiencing 45 knots just outside the island. Low and behold after an easy departure, just as we stick our nose out the bay the storm clouds roll in, the hail starts to pound and the wind picks up to around 55-58 knots. For the next couple of hours we endured the squalls until it died down to a 'comfy' 35-40 knots. When the wind is up at that force the entire boat screams as the wind slices through the shrouds and lowers.



After being rattled a bit coming out of Stanley we settled down and cracked on, optimistically hoping the weather would allow for us to land on Tristan da Cunha.

A couple of awesome meals later, up over the horizon popped the 2000m high peak of the volcanic island of Tristan. One of the most amazing things I've ever seen is the sheer cliffs of about 1000m high climbing straight out of the deep blue Atlantic. It is truly a wonder of the world.

We didn't waste time to get the anchor down and settle in for the night on the lee side of the island. Stew and I had a salt wash, shampoo and all, off the stern. The only problem was that there was a massive current so we made use of a long rope and a fender as our "Shower safety device". It should be compulsory on all ocean going vessels. Geniuses

The next day we inflated the zodiac and went ashore to meet the town's people and stretch our legs around the village. They even opened the supermarket just for us, as there are only 267 people that occupy the island. I bought myself a genuine Tristan beanie.



After 2 awesome days we sadly had to wave goodbye and set off over the horizon, heading for Cape Town. The ocean passages can be tough, trying to keep yourself busy all the time. After a while you get into a rhythm and the days start to burn as you live 3hrs on and 6hrs off of watch. I wasn't counting the days left to CT but the shifts we had to go. Sometimes they'd be tough trying to stay awake and others you couldn't sleep and ended up sitting with the watch afterwards too.

The system we used on the boat was awesome at keeping it organized and equal with who did what. The 3pm – 6pm shift was food duty, 12am-3pm was outside maintenance and the 9am – 12am was inside cleaning. So every day you would move to the next job. We had 2 groups of 3 and 1 group of 2 which was Miles (captain) and Mike Hood. From the very beginning of the trip I saw we had such an amazing team of guys and girls on the boat, from major lecturers at top universities to engineers and teachers.

After spending that much time together, everybody gets so close almost making us a family. It was such a great experience and I would fly out tomorrow to do it all again. From my point of view, the Pelagic programme is so well run and managed by Skip and his team that I would highly recommend it to anyone looking for an adventure or even to spend some days cruising around the Terra del Fuego fjords or Atlantic islands.

Thanks Miles, Laura and Dave. I could not think of a better team. And to Skip, thank you for opportunity to join the boat, it was something I will never forget.