

Cruising Club News

VOL. XLVII, JANUARY 2005



PUBLISHED FOR MEMBERS OF THE CRUISING CLUB OF AMERICA

Sailing Toward Peace

The Breaking the Ice Project



Four Palestinians.
Four Israelis.
One Goal.

By Skip Novak, Great Lakes Station

Lucky to have launched and signed off with the shipyard in Durban, South Africa, on the eve of their bankruptcy (we made our small contribution), the 74-foot expedition sailing vessel *Pelagic Australis* left Cape Town on November 11, 2003, bound for Stanley in the Falkland Islands for her first charter of the austral season. Sadly, as is sometimes the owner's lot in life, I was left behind balancing the books, but happily balancing baby Luca on my lap, launched on November 25th. My partner, Rob Lansing, also retreated to his office in Chicago.

After a "just in time" delivery across the Atlantic, skipper Steve Wilkins met six guests and island guide Ewen Southby-Tailyour on December 6th for a

two-week cruise of the Falklands. Ewen was the Royal Marine who, during the 1982 war with Argentina, was seconded back into the service to

advise on the amphibious landings for the British task force and went on to play a major role in the successful campaign. This was a cruise for wildlife and/or war specialists, and the reports filtering back through the satellite system said the sailing between the many shallow anchorages was superb, with the Patagonian wind blowing fresh and dry.

***Pelagic Australis* on a magic day in Antarctic waters (main photo); (inset) the group of Palestinians and Israelis included two militants of the Intifada, an Israeli commando, a lawyer, and a Jewish/Ethiopian refugee. All had suffered. Could they live and work together at sea?**



Rough stuff in the Drake Passage (top); (middle) between weather systems, memorable sailing; (bottom) climbing the Hoovgaard Glacier, and anchored at Deception Island

BUT THIS CHARTER WAS REALLY JUST A TICKLER to carrying out our main goal, The Breaking the Ice Project, that began on the New Year. It is not often that we can claim a place for sailing in a Middle Eastern peace initiative, but on January 1st an international team of 16 flew into Puerto Williams on the Chilean side of the Beagle Channel to join *Pelagic* and *Pelagic Australis* for a 30-day expedition to Antarctica. Of those, four Palestinians and four Israelis had formed a coalition for the purpose of sailing to Antarctica for an attempt to climb an unnamed virgin summit and, if successful, name it as a peace gesture. Their "baggage" included a media and support team with a journalist, two cameramen, two mountain guides, a base camp manager, and a satellite transmission specialist. With our crew on the two boats we were 20 all up, from seven nations (that's counting Wales!).

The Breaking the Ice Project was the vision of two Israelis, one of whom, Doron Erel, had been a veteran of several sailing-to-climb expeditions on the old *Pelagic*. He is the first and only Israeli to climb Mount Everest and then go on to do the seven summits. The original idea was to climb a mountain in Asia, but it was evident before they went too far in the planning that the political spin in any of those countries would be a compromising factor. This is where Antarctica came in as the most neutral of territories, and hence my involvement in planning the sailing and climbing logistics. Endorsed by the Shimon Peres Foundation, Koffi Anan, the Dalai Lama, Mikhail Gorbachev, the German and European Parliaments and, of course, Yasser Arafat, the project evolved into a serious undertaking.

Although Doron had been across the Drake Passage four times before, he suffers terribly from seasickness, and we could expect the same from the others, none of whom had any boating experience whatsoever. This was part of the challenge—getting the two groups of people together in a hostile environment and seeing if they can function as a team, putting political issues aside.

After two days of verifying all the mountain equipment was ready and in order, briefings including how to live onboard (mainly a question of plumbing), how to manage seasickness, and practicing safety drills, we set sail from Puerto Williams with a reasonable forecast for the Drake Passage. The trick to cross the Drake is to leave on a dying southerly after the passage of a low through the straits. This makes for a bumpy start on the shelf water southeast of Cape Horn, but it gives you a good head start in making it

across before the next southerly shift, which usually occurs every few days.

One of the misconceptions here is to stand to the west to keep a "weather berth" on the target of Boyd Strait, which is the gateway in the South Shetland Islands to sheltered water and good protection at Deception Island. This is a mistake, and makes for an uncomfortable ride plugging into the prevailing westerly wind and sea. Rather, it is better to sag off as far as southeast, and maybe more, in the first 24 hours and put the wind and sea comfortably on the beam. As the breeze dies off and swings back into the north you will arc around back to course, and if you are sailing through a trough you will even have an easterly pushing you back to Boyd in the southern half of the passage. I have never struggled to make a landfall at Boyd in 15 years of Drake crossings!

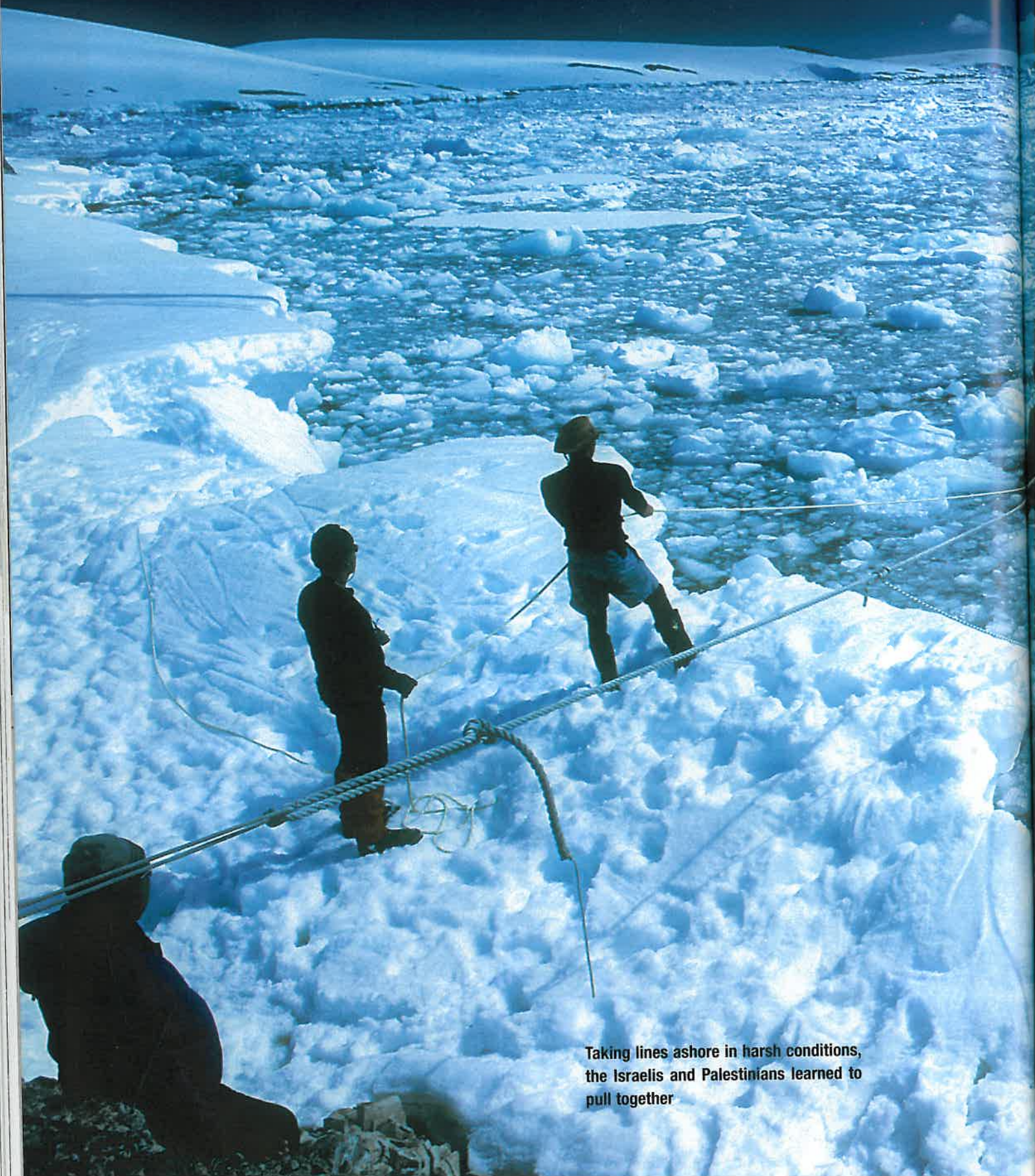
HAVING RANK NON-SAILORS ON BOARD IS ALWAYS a handful, and we try to keep them busy up until the time seasickness lays them so low that it is preferable to keep them in their bunks and well-hydrated. All stood watches, mixing the Palestinians and Israelis, and the crew engaged them in sail maneuvers and steering. I have to commend the Palestinians for continuing to pray to Allah in spite of the bearing on Mecca swinging through 30 degrees at a time. The attrition/success rate was about 50/50 by mid-Drake, but by the time we entered through the towering and fragile heads of Neptune's Bellows and anchored in Whalers Bay in Deception Island after a 65-hour passage, everyone came to life with the dinner bell. It was January 7th.

Deception is the well-celebrated semi-active volcanic caldera with a lagoon of turquoise water. The holding ground is poor in volcanic scree sloping deep, so we ran out one of our 150-meter polypropylene shore lines tied to a piece of scrap iron on the beach and tethered off nicely. As usual everyone was anxious to get ashore and "touch the land," almost a symbolic gesture after their ordeal at sea. We toured the old whaling station ruins and the TV team set up an interview on the beach with Evou, a right-wing Israeli lawyer and Nasser, one of Arafat's lieutenants in the Fatah movement. In spite of the "calm" crossing, a heated discussion broke out between the two when prompted by the hacks. All in Hebrew, we were told later it was about the Temple Mount—a recurring after-dinner theme throughout the voyage.

It must be pointed out that the eight team members were not young people, as with so many of these peace initiatives; rather, they all came with a history.



(clockwise from top) The two *Pelagics* rafted in Crystal Sound; the expedition was marked by challenging sailing and climbing, plus visits with local denizens; heading to Prospect Point, *Pelagic Australis* opens the way for *Pelagic*



Taking lines ashore in harsh conditions, the Israelis and Palestinians learned to pull together



Nasser had spent three years in an Israeli prison for launching a Molotov cocktail in the 1987 Intifada. Sulemein, at 29, went to jail at age 14 for sticking a knife into someone in the same Intifada; he emerged 11 years later having lost his youth. Evou, the lawyer, was at the time a prosecutor putting people like this in jail. Yarden, an Ethiopian Jew, lost five family members after the exodus of her people by foot, which included spending a year in a refugee camp in Sudan before the Israeli government airlifted them to Israel in Operation Hope in the late 1980's. Doron was an elite commando in his youth—stories better left untold.

The next day, we decided to walk the two hours across the island to a chinstrap penguin colony to loosen up stiff limbs in anticipation for the mountain epic ahead. It was an easy walk across a small ridge and then down to the beach on the southeast corner of the island, but on the return the weather had closed in and we returned by GPS waypoints in a blizzard. Some had not been fully prepared for this stroll and it was an eye opener for what might lie ahead farther south.

In my research I had selected a mountain area just north of the Antarctic Circle in a large inland reach called Crystal Sound. This was south of the Antarctic cruise ship traffic and little visited by yachts, as heavy brash ice could pose some problems. And we were early in the year for Crystal Sound, as it can be icebound with last year's sea ice well into January and early February. However, with an inexperienced mountain team such as we had, the geography here is less severe. Unlike further north in the well-traveled Gerlache Straits area, the glaciers here were wide, rolling, and the peaks at their heads looked "doable."


From Deception it took three days of inshore sailing and motoring to get to Crystal Sound, including a night at Cuverville Island and then at Hoovgaard for some mountain training on the glacier, where we climbed a minor summit. With both *Pelagics* tied side-by-side in these anchorages we had easy pollination between the support crew on the old boat and the team on *Pelagic Australis*, all in aid of "reportage."

Getting safely set up in this fashion usually meant an anchor down and four lines ashore, the object being to get into shallow water so big drift ice would ground out before clanging into the boats. Having lifting keels facilitated what looked like bold maneuvering. It sometimes took hours to rig all this up which was great "team building" for the project, and good fun mucking about in the dinghies. Each time you had to assume, although calm now, that it would

blow a hooly later. Strong winds on the west side of the peninsula blow from the northeast (the bottom of the lows marching from the Drake), which although less strong than the westerly on top (subtract speed of the low from the geostrophic wind speed) becomes katabatic, pouring down from the 5,000- to 6,000-foot-high peninsular plateau—winds in excess of 60 to 70 knots are common.

By January 10th, the proof would be in the pudding: Could we actually get to the landing place at Prospect Point which offered an easy ramp into the interior? We met brash ice about 20 miles from our target. The ice became thicker and thicker and eventually forced us more offshore in order to get south. A fine view of the coastline and the mountains behind brought the two Chamonix mountain guides to life, and we discussed possible objectives. We decided to spend another night in perfect still weather at anchor, this time in the Fish Islands south of Prospect Point. It was a minor struggle through the ice to get the two boats in the cove, but once there we were in a bombproof situation. Would the weather hold? We were only one and a half miles from the landing place.

The next day we forced a passage through thin, rotten sea ice—*Pelagic Australis* opening the way for *Pelagic* astern. We managed to put our bow on a shelf of rock right at the shore and we set up a breeches buoy to shuttle rucksacks, skis, tents, sleds, and satellite communication equipment on to the glacier's edge. We could not have done this if it was blowing, so there was some urgency here to get everyone and everything we needed ashore and part ways with the two motherships—they would return to the Fish Islands, wait, and pick us up, come what may.

THE REST IS HISTORY. On January 16th, after three days on the mountain and two camps in miraculously fine weather, the entire team of eight, plus the support group, summited what is now called The Israeli Palestinian Friendship Mountain. On the top, everyone hugged each other and then broke out the two national flags, plus a peace flag designed by a famous Israeli artist. Was the project a success? Somewhat, but as in all things in this conflict, it is a question of degree. Check out the summit photograph. There are only seven people. Why? Evou, at the last moment, refused to stand in front of a flag that Yasser Arafat had signed. 

For information on the Breaking the Ice Project go to:
<http://www.breaking-the-ice.de>



(clockwise from left): Climbers ascend The Israeli Palestinian Friendship Mountain; ringing in the New Year on *Pelagic Australis*; expedition leader Skip Novak; at the summit, and a bittersweet finale

