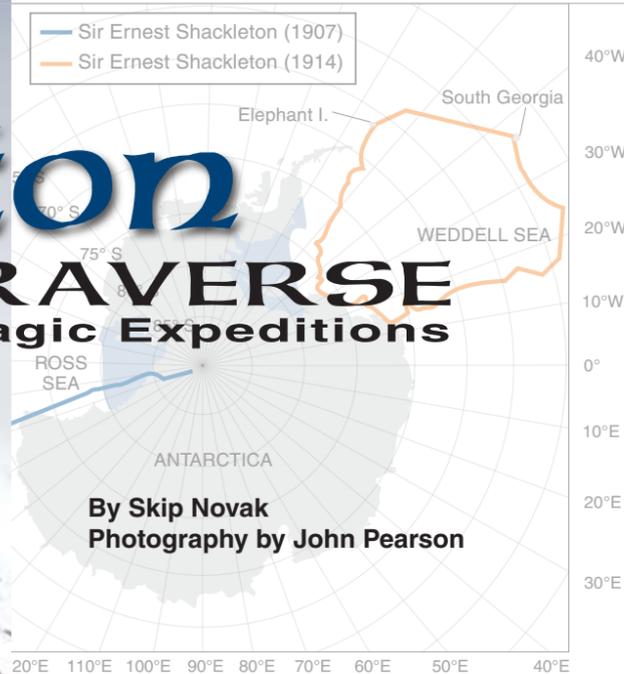


The Shackleton TRAVERSE Pelagic Expeditions



Skip Novak: Pelagic Expeditions



A skilled mountaineer and fearless sailor, Skip Novak formed Pelagic Expeditions in 1987 to provide people true adventure through 'go anywhere, do anything'

sailing expeditions to high-latitude destinations. For 20 years, Novak has led filmmakers, scientists and sportsmen on projects in Antarctic waters aboard the sailing vessels *Pelagic* and *Pelagic Australis*. Both are built and equipped to sail safely and with minimal maintenance in the world's most remote areas. A four time competitor in Whitbread around-the-world races, Novak skippered Simon Le Bon's *DRUM* in the 1985/86 race. In 1989, he was project manager and skipper of *FAZISI*, the Soviet entry. In 1997, Novak navigated the catamaran *EXPLORER* to a record in the Transpac and the next year co-skippered *EXPLORER* with Bruno Peyron for a Yokohama to San Francisco record. In 2001, he co-skippered *INNOVATION EXPLORER* to a second place in The Race.

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Arguably, the most challenging sailing expedition in our Pelagic menu is a voyage to the British sub-Antarctic island of South Georgia. 1,000 miles east of Cape Horn, this is a serious sailor's itinerary. The only way to reach the island is by boat because it is one of those rare locations with no airstrip. Of course, this is part of the attraction, what we call 'the real adventure.' The 750-mile downwind ride from Stanley, the closest point of departure point in the Falkland Islands, makes the return a potentially very rough upwind slog, as the island lies directly in the path of fast-marching depressions that continually issue forth from the Drake Passage. To get back [to civilization], some say that if you have the time, it is easier to keep going downwind 3,000 miles and sail for Cape Town!

This past southern spring (from October through December 2006), Pelagic Australis made two voyages to the island.

The first was an early-season 21-day trip in mid October to see the bull elephant seals battling on the beaches for the harems and subsequent mating rituals, as well as a visit to the prolific wildlife sites where millions of fur seals jockey for position among millions of penguins and other sea birds, including the threatened Great Wandering albatross. This concentration of wildlife lies along the wild beaches and tussock hills which fringe glaciated mountain ranges of Himalayan proportion.

From the turn of the 20th century, the island was the most significant shore base for the exploitation of southern ocean whales. The many abandoned processing stations, now corroded rust brown and collapsing since their demise in the '50s and '60s, are off limits to tourists for safety reasons. But a well-maintained





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museum at the island's administrative base at Grytviken tells the gory result of man's insatiable demand for whale products—principally fat for margarine.

Our second 'sailing to climb' expedition in November focused on what is now called the Shackleton Traverse. We allowed 28 days to make what, in the best conditions, is a three-day ski-mountaineering route. If successful we planned to visit the wildlife and historic sites and as the opportunity arose, ski tour at the south end of the island.

Sailing from Stanley (Falkland Islands) took us three and a half days, followed by two storm-bound days at Elsehul Harbour (South Georgia) on the north end of the island. A predicted light southerly flow settled conditions—at least for 72 hours – so we sailed back around the island's northwest corner and anchored in

King Haakon Bay, where Shackleton had first come ashore in the celebrated open boat the *James Caird*.

The next morning, six of us on skis and skins were off up the mountain, pulling sleds with tentage, safety equipment, food and fuel for five days. The weather on the island is notoriously unpredictable so our party of six carried four snow shovels. Digging a snow cave is not only a last resort, but also the first line of defence when surviving a storm.

Along the way, we made two glacier camps with spectacular views of the sea (when it wasn't snowing a whiteout). The highlight on the third and last day was a ski down a gully system to the beach at Fortuna Bay.



It was bright and sunny as we walked through bull fur seals staking out their mating territory, the occasional King penguin standing guard. With *Pelagic Australis* standing by, we jogged offshore. The skipper and crew met us in the Zodiac® for tea and biscuits.

Another two hours walking around the bay, fording a slowing glacial stream, and a climb on skis up and over another ridge brought us to a pass overlooking Stromness Bay and the ruins of the whaling station.

We followed our last ski descent from the pass with a gentle stroll through the firm ground of an outwash plain leading to the derelict station. Our mobile base camp *Pelagic Australis* was at anchor and plucked us from the beach. Thus ended another of our text book 'sailing to climb' expeditions for which we are best known.

With our main objective completed, we could now relax and enjoy the rest of the island, including a visit to Shackleton's grave at Grytviken (he died there in 1922 of a heart attack while leading a scientific expedition). His grave is the only tangible remains of his heroic story which is never far from people's minds when on this wild island.

An Anglo-Irish explorer, Ernest Shackleton's third trip to the Antarctic is among the most incredible adventures ever recorded. In 1915, after his ship *Endurance* was trapped in pack ice, he and 27 crew sailed three open boats to a bleak, uninhabited rocky crag called Elephant Island. From there, Shackleton and five men set out in a small lifeboat, with boulders for ballast, across 1,300 km (800 miles) of storm-swept ocean to South Georgia Island where there was a whaling station. Landing on the 'wrong' side of the island, Shackleton and two companions crossed 26 miles of mountains and glaciers in the dead of winter (The Shackleton Traverse), reaching the station after a 36-hour trek. With help from the station, the three remaining crew were recovered, followed by the rescue of the men on Elephant Island. Not one member of the expedition was lost. Shackleton died of a heart attack attempting to circumnavigate the Antarctic continent. He is buried on the island.

