

# South Georgia Association Newsletter

Number 1 November 2001

## King Edward Point changes hands



*After 19 years' of military occupation, KEP has been returned to civilian administration after a major rebuild.*

The new Applied Fisheries Laboratory at King Edward Point was inaugurated at a ceremony on 22 March 2001 by the Commissioner, His Excellency Donald Lamont. Those present included the Director of the BAS, Professor Chris Rapley, Commander of British Forces, Falkland Islands, Air Commodore John Cliffe, and Dr Inigo Everson (BAS biologist after whom the accommodation block was named).

The ceremonies included the naming of the James Cook Laboratory and Everson House, a lunch with champagne air-dropped into Cumberland Bay, a service at the Whalers' Church and laying wreaths on the graves of Sir Ernest Shackleton and an Argentine sailor killed during the retaking of South Georgia in 1982.

BAS now has the principal responsibility to maintain the UK presence in South Georgia. The research station will be the centre for studies designed to provide scientific advice on sustainable management of fisheries around the island - the main source of income for South Georgia - and benefit the UK's input to the Antarctic Fisheries Commission (CCAMLR). Initial research will focus on five commercial species (Patagonian toothfish, icefish, *Martialia* squid, stone crabs and krill). Around 20 vessels, registered in a number of countries, including the Falkland Islands, Chile, Uruguay, Spain and South Africa, are licensed to fish within the 200 nautical mile management zone. This new fisheries science programme is a considerable step forward in managing valuable fish stocks in a way that sustains the populations of penguins, seals, whales and seabirds.

The extensive building programme resulted in some old buildings, including the post office and customs house, being destroyed but Discovery House and the old gaol remain. Shackleton House, dating from 1963 and housing BAS from 1969 and the garrison after 1982, is being demolished.

During the first winter under new management, KEP was occupied by eight BAS personnel, as well as the Marine Officer and Postal Officer.

After a BAS Press Release

### South Georgia Association: From pipe-dream to project

It was the Christmas cards that set me moving! When I first visited South Georgia 12 years ago, before my appointment as Commissioner, I was enthralled by the island, as are so many visitors. My affection for the place has endured and the idea of an association for South Georgia became a pipe-dream: the notion that South Georgia with its incredible natural environment and its short but eventful history needed, and could inspire, a grouping of those who knew it, wished to protect it and promote further study of it.

Two cards last Christmas bearing the KEP postmark offered strong encouragement from Tim and Pauline Carr and Pat and Sarah Lurcock. If they were in favour this was a real incitement to action. So as summer came I joined with Alexandra Shackleton and Bob Burton to form a Gang of Three to move things forward. We had encouragement from both Donald Lamont, the Commissioner for South Georgia, and from Alan Huckle, Head of the Overseas Territories Department of the Foreign & Commonwealth Office.

In September we summoned a Founding Meeting. This was an impressive gathering - explorers, scientists, journalists, three former commissioners - all of them sharing a deep knowledge of and affection for the Island. They were unanimous in supporting an association. An acting committee was set up, a constitution drafted and the first general meeting summoned. We soon found that there was also widespread support through the scattered community of 'South Georgians' - the ever-increasing numbers of people who have visited the Island over the years, for stays that have ranged from many years to a few days.

Which brings us to the present. What we in the Acting Committee look for are your endorsement of the objectives of the South Georgia Association, your views on what causes it should take up and your ideas for a programme for next year and the future.

David Tatham, Acting Chairman

## Trouble with the neighbours



Four o'clock in the morning and half the residents of King Edward Point are hanging out of their bedroom windows. None of them can sleep, so they might as well get up and watch the action. First it was all the bellowing, long low guttural belches, from the two elephant seal bulls whilst they sized each other up. Having each decided they were in with a chance of beating the other fellow, they had now come to blows. There is no ignoring 7 tonnes of elly blubber slapping together only feet from your bed.

The bulls seem to have been especially active this year. I think it is because there has been no convincing 'Big Daddy' keeping the smaller males in check. The colony has split into three harems and the most recently deposed bull goes and makes a nuisance of himself at one of the other groups. He may succeed in chasing off the next male along, and so the man shuffling goes on. They have been getting the reward of the fighting and waiting. With the pups reaching three weeks old, the mums come into season and the dominant bulls have been 'getting their flipper over'. This is not a gentle act of love: the flipper is used to pin down the unwilling female. Next he bites into her neck to discourage her from trying to get away, and so subdued she allows him to mate.

Last year's dominant bull did well, bagging most of the mating rights for himself. He was also fairly tolerant of humans watching all the action, until about the last week when for some reason he took to chasing people off. Several times I looked out of a window to see someone, camera in hand, sprinting away with the big elly hrumphing along behind. Most of the fit chaps around here can easily outrun an elephant seal on land, but with snow on the ground the bulls can get up an alarming extra turn of speed!

Although the elly colony is so close, mostly we don't notice the background noise of irritated females grumbling at nearby seals shifting position in the elly scrum, or pups barking out orders for access to the milk bar. But several times on Saturday night, when we join the BAS base members for a posh meal in their dining room, a well-timed belch from below the window has everyone in stitches. Usually some joker holds their gut and says "pardon me".....After several weeks we still find it funny.

My favourite elly time is when the early born pups are getting more active and taking to the water's edge to investigate their natural element. The pups peer about them with huge eyes, they play with bits of seaweed or mouth the boat



*Not Sarab! This photo was taken about 1910.*

fenders. Groups of pups mock fight, aping the more serious battles of their fathers, slapping blubbery necks together and pushing their opponents' heads underwater. There is nothing nicer than taking a Gin and Tonic down to the jetty edge on a calm evening to watch the fun.

Sarah Lurcock

## South Georgia website – Project Atlantis

An environmental web site for South Georgia, to be launched at the end of January 2002, is being developed by Project Atlantis at the University of Dundee. The site is being created to help improve the protection and conservation of the island's ecosystems, natural beauty and historic richness. Greater accessibility to environmental information, and a larger body of informed opinion and understanding of the environmental circumstances and challenges that face the South Atlantic region, will help to improve the conservation and protection of SG. The site will also be an educational resource for students in secondary education. A knowledge section will include some educational activities concerning introduced species and the fishing industry. The site will contain interactive IT, games and discussion topics.

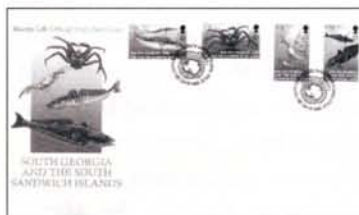
The completed web site will be aligned to the BAS web site with news from the two research stations on SG posted on both sites. A discussion board will enable audiences to ask questions and express their views. A news page will bring the latest developments and information. The web site will be regularly updated and developed as environmental challenges change and policies are re-focused.

The Project has the support of the SG Government at the FCO, together with the tourist and fishing industries, the British Antarctic Survey, the Hydrographic Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Scott Polar Research Institute.

The web site is still being developed but preliminary pages can be found at [www.sgisland.org](http://www.sgisland.org).

David Nicholls, Project Director

## Philatelic news

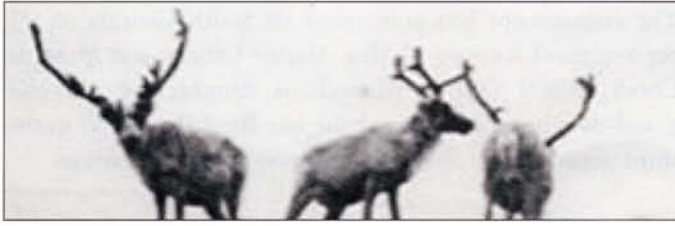


The **Marine Life** issue of South Georgia stamps was released on 22 October. For detailed information and purchases of South Georgia, Falkland Islands and

British Antarctic Territory stamps, contact the Philatelic Bureau, Stanley, Falkland Islands.

Website: [www.falklands.gov.fk/pb](http://www.falklands.gov.fk/pb)

## Where did the reindeer come from?



South Georgia has been a home to reindeer since their introduction by Norwegian whalers 90 years ago for sport and fresh meat. The two present-day populations stem from an introduction of 10 animals onto the Barff Peninsula in 1911 and seven animals into Husvik Harbour in 1925. There are now thought to be about 3000 reindeer on the island. The two populations are distinct because they are separated by mountains and glaciers, and no further animals have been introduced since the original 17. The introduction of so few animals created a historical genetic bottleneck and therefore very little genetic diversity exists in each population.

Two recent expeditions have given me the unique opportunity to investigate the link between genetic diversity and morphometric (body measurement) variation. It may help to explain how limited genetic diversity affects the amount of variation in body measurements in a population.

With the aid of a British Ecological Society grant, I have been able to make collections of tissue samples and skulls from both the Barff Peninsula animals and the source herd in Norway. DNA extracted from the tissue samples allows calculation of the genetic diversity and measurements of the skulls allow accurate assessment of morphometric variation, from which I can compare the two populations.

While on the British Schools Exploring Society (BSES) Millennium Expedition, we collected skulls and tissue samples from the Barff Peninsula and members of this expedition have been successful in tracing the Norwegian herd from which C.A. Larsen and his brother bought the original animals. Careful enquiries by Anna Smales led the trail to Sandefjord Museum where we learned that in 1911 the reindeer had been purchased from Ivar Opdal of Filefjell Reinlag in Valdres, central-southern Norway. We made contact with Asgrim Opdal, the great grandson of Ivar, and have made two visits to the present herd to collect samples.

There was even less information about the origin of the Husvik herd. All that was known was that the reindeer were taken to Husvik in 1925 but there was no information on their source. Indeed, accepted opinion has always been that the present day Barff and Busen herds are from different, unrelated stock on account of their very different behaviour. However, Chris Lipson contacted the library in Tønsberg where they found a cutting in the Tønsberg Blåd newspaper for 1924. This article clearly states that 'the (Busen) reindeer were arriving from Filefjeld'. This new evidence suggests that the two very different present-day herds share a common origin in the Filefjell herd, which makes the genetic study really interesting.

I have started the analysis while working part-time at the University of Durham and I aim to study the genetics of the

two populations in parallel. I hope to visit South Georgia again with BSES in 2003/4, when we plan to make a collection of samples from the Busen herd.

Fiona Hatchell

## Getting rid of rats

The introduction of common rats to South Georgia by sealers over 200 years ago has resulted in the severe reduction of burrowing petrel colonies and of the endemic South Georgian pipit along two thirds of the island's coastal tussac areas and on many offshore islets.

The eradication of rats is now a high priority objective and the Government recently commissioned a two-year research programme to investigate the feasibility of eradication, in collaboration with experts from the New Zealand Department of Conservation.

A limited baiting trial and monitoring programme was conducted in November 2000 on Grass Island, Stromness Bay. Poison bait was broadcast by hand by six operators and oil-soaked pine wood 'gnaw sticks' were positioned to monitor the presence of rats after baiting. Pre- and post-baiting abundance and distribution surveys of the bird population were conducted to monitor population changes, including those due to birds eating the bait.



Another way to get rid of rats.....

Results from two surveys, conducted three weeks and three months after baiting, show that there was no measurable impact on the bird population and no signs of any recent rat activity. Eradication will be checked in a follow-up survey in February 2002. Research is also in progress to determine the feasibility of rat eradication in more extensive mainland areas.

Sally Poncet

## South Georgia visitors

Pat Lurcock, Marine Officer, reports an expected 36 cruise ship visits in the 2001/2 season, including the first visit of *Vistamar* which can carry 250 passengers. Two yachts overwintered and another eight will visit this summer. About the same number of visitors are expected as in 1999/2000, the previous busiest season.

Two unusual visits include the 'Beyond Endurance' expedition which was supposed to climb Mts Paget and Roots to ski and snowboard down. According to the Antarctic Non-government Activity News (ANAN) website, they first attempted Mt Nordenskjöld, the second highest peak but

their base camp was buffeted by winds of at least 50-60 knots that blew down two of their three tents. They had to abandon a Shackleton Crossing but skied and snowboarded on Mt Norman. ANAN also reports that a ham radio group will visit South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands. It is understood to be hoping to make in excess of 100,000 contacts with ham operators around the world. They will be based at the manager's Villa at Husvik, which has recently received some repairs.

### South Georgia coinage



From 1909 to 1914, tokens known as *grytviksmynnten*, or less formally 'monkey money', were used at the whaling stations on South Georgia. But the first special coins to be legal tender for South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands were issued to commemorate the centenary of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother in 2000. The coins depicts the Coat of Arms of the Queen Mother garlanded with marguerites.

Although legal tender on the island, it would be unwise to exchange any of the Queen Mother coins for postcards or sweatshirts because they are worth much more than their face value. Manufactured by the Pobjoy Mint, £2 coins are available for £9.95 in cupronickel, £39.95 in silver and, with a face value of £20, £149.95 in gold (all prices are inclusive of VAT).

The Pobjoy Mint has also produced South Georgia coins in their 'Famous Explorer' Series. These are 'Antoine de la Roché' (first sighting), 'Captain James Cook' (first landing), 'Sir Joseph Banks' (who sailed aboard *Endeavour* with Captain Cook) and 'Sir Ernest Henry Shackleton'.

To order any of these coins or others, including a Falkland Islands coin to commemorate the 125th anniversary of the birth of Shackleton, write to:

**The Pobjoy Mint, Millenia House, Kingswood Park, Bonsor Drive, Kingswood, Surrey KT20 6AY.** Please quote 'SGA' with your order because the Pobjoy Mint will make a generous donation to the SGA for every coin sold through this Newsletter.

For further information on the Pobjoy Mint, visit [www.pobjoy.com](http://www.pobjoy.com).

The South Georgia Association newsletter will be produced twice a year, in November and April.

Contributions should be submitted, at least one month before publication, to the editor:

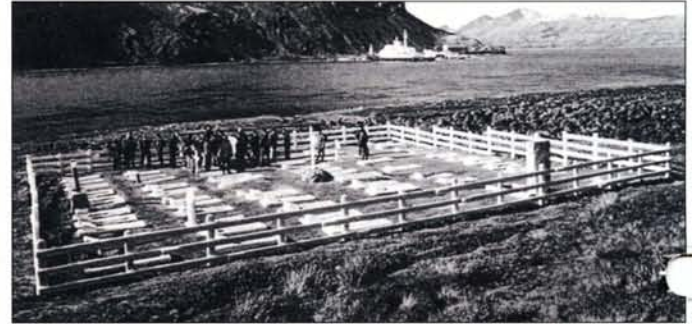
Bob Burton, 63 Common Lane, Hemingford Abbots, Huntingdon PE28 9AW.

e-mail: [rwburton@ntlworld.com](mailto:rwburton@ntlworld.com)

### Island romance

The engagement was announced on South Georgia on 21 September of Richard McKee, Marine Officer, and Miranda Cheek, Postal Officer. Miranda is daughter of Jan and grand-daughter of Betty and the late Basil Biggs and so the third generation of the family to live on South Georgia.

### Cemetery repairs



Tim Carr, Museum Curator, has replaced the cemetery fence which was in a sad state of disrepair after suffering years of rot and rampaging elephant seals. Tim has also made replicas of the 19th century sealers' grave-markers, including that for John Anderson (dated 1838) at Prince Olaf Harbour, and he has made a new cross for Felix Artuso, the Argentine sailor killed in 1982, and another for the men lost on the fishing vessel *Suder Havid* in 1998.



*Sealers' graves as they were when Grytviken was discovered by members of Otto Nordenskjöld's Swedish expedition in 1902.*

Until ratified by election, the SGA's Acting Committee is:

<i>Chair</i>	David Tatham
<i>Secretary</i>	Fran Prince
<i>Treasurer</i>	Roger Huxley
<i>Membership Secretary</i>	Stephen Palmer
<i>Newsletter Editor</i>	Bob Burton
<i>Members</i>	Angus Erskine, Bob Headland, John Heap, Skip Novak, Trevor Potts, Dave Rootes, Alexandra Shackleton
<i>Corresponding Member</i>	Sarah Lurcock (South Georgia)