

South Georgia Association

Newsletter

Number 4 April 2003



A Conference on "The Future of South Georgia: A programme for the next 10 years"

This important discussion, organised by the SGA, will be held on 18-20 September, 2003 at the British Antarctic Survey, Cambridge. It is supported by the Government of South Georgia and South Shetland Islands, the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and the British Antarctic Survey.

Invited papers will cover environmental research and management, fisheries, tourism, preservation of heritage and governance. There will be ample time for discussion of these subjects by delegates.

Attendance will be limited. To receive further information, register your interest by writing to The Secretary SGA, Scott Polar Research Institute, Lensfield Road, Cambridge CB1 2ER, or e-mail to conference@southgeorgiaassociation.org.

Grytviken clear-up - Norwegian hope for preservation

The whaling station at Grytviken played a central role in the history of the Southern Ocean and Norway's development as an industrial nation. The Minister of the Environment, Borge Brende, has publicly endorsed Norway's strong interest in preserving the station's cultural heritage and has offered to co-operate in achieving this aim during the asbestos removal programme planned for this austral spring.

In Newsletter No 3, Russ Jarvis, the Assistant Commissioner for SGSSI, described the asbestos situation that is critical to the fate of Grytviken. He reported that, as the collapse of the station buildings accelerates, the new research facility at King Edward Point might have to be abandoned if the asbestos is not removed from Grytviken. The estimate for this work is in the order of £10M, which is beyond the resources of the South Georgia Government.

A team from Morrisons has visited Grytviken to investigate ways of removing the asbestos. Burial under the football pitch appears to be the favoured option. Meanwhile the Government is looking into ways of funding the operation.

At the request of the SGA Committee, David Tatham has written to the Commissioner, Mr Howard Pearce, drawing to his attention the report by Dan Weinstein that indicates how a full clear-up of all the whaling stations could be substantially subsidised by the sale as scrap of the metal in the buildings. At the time of publication, we await news of the Government's decision.

Norwegian heritage experts, Gustav Rossnes of the Directorate for Cultural Heritage and Stig-Tore Lunde of Institut Minos, accompanied the Morrisons team to investigate the possibilities of saving some of the factory machinery. Subsequently, the Commissioner has visited Norway to confer with heritage experts and others interested in preserving relics of the whaling industry at South Georgia. Rossnes and Lunde, with Bjorn Basberg of the South Georgia Archaeology Project, have produced a report on the Industrial Heritage Values of Grytviken. Their conclusions are:

'The Grytviken whaling station has a great potential for future industrial archaeology investigations, and accordingly represents a valuable resource as scientific source material

and as an enduring basis for the experience of present and future generations. In order to preserve the cultural historic source values, one should to the greatest possible extent focus on passive preservation, i.e. the site should as far as possible remain as it is today, an industrial historic ruin. Some preservation work to prevent decay may be carried out, such as to stabilise certain structures so as to reduce the rate of decay.

'The extent of preservation works and conservation should also take into account the uniqueness of the site. The truly unique functions of the whaling shore stations were the production plant and its equipment and layout (the cookers, the flensing plan, and the guano dryers). The cookers are the greatest icon of the whaling industry and demonstrate a line of continuity in the nearly 400-year history from the blubber ovens on Svalbard to the cookers on South Georgia

'Morrison International Ltd is preparing a project description for environmental clearance work. It will define specific actions to remove the known sources of environmental pollution (asbestos, heavy oil). As regards removal of parts of the facility for other reasons, we require that proposed actions are supported by adequate arguments and that they are carried out in a manner which reduces their extent to a minimum and which is least harmful. Big changes to the existing structures will significantly reduce the plant's industrial heritage values. A comprehensive demolition of the buildings and production plant will reduce the remainder of the cultural memorial to a sort of open-air museum with some individual items of production equipment exhibited here and there on the site

'When the report on the plant's environmental and technical status is available, an action plan needs to be prepared with assessments and specific selections to convey the story of the historic monument after the environmentally harmful components have been removed.

'It would seem vital to focus on an information set-up for the area so that the ability of the plant to tell its own story is retained, regardless of which solution is finally adopted. One challenge will be to strengthen the museum activity on South Georgia, both as regards collection and storage of artefacts and in communicating the history of Grytviken and the whole island.'



Worries about visits to wanderers

The South Georgia Albatross Survey, funded by the Government of South Georgia and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, began in November 2002 with a visit to Albatross Island to census wanderer chicks, followed by a second visit in January 2003 to count breeding pairs.

The project links in with GSGSSI's management of the South Georgia fisheries: although very few seabirds are now killed within the South Georgia fishery itself, GSGSSI is committed to working with the international community to reduce seabird mortality due to long-lining activities, and the assessment of the current population size of South Georgia's albatross populations is part of that effort.

In addition, GSGSSI is concerned about the potential interactions between wandering albatross and tourism activities, and in order to develop a conservation management plan for the islands, has been supporting a long-term monitoring programme to document wanderer breeding success and visitor management.

Research such as this requires not only funding but reliable logistical support, and once again, cruise ships were of great assistance with *Explorer*, *World Discoverer*, *Lyubov Orlova* and *Bremen* providing the transport to and from Albatross Island for me and assistants Philippe Poupon and Celia Bull.

This is the fifth consecutive season that I've been working on Albatross Island, which is long enough to see that the number of wanderers returning to nest undisputedly continues to decline. This year there were 143 birds on eggs, compared with 175 in 2001 and 179 in 1999. At Bird Island also there appears to be no sign of a change to the downward spiral caused by toothfish, swordfish and tuna fishing fleets that are killing seabirds in their tens of thousands every year.

The monitoring work on Albatross Island also confirms that both visitor numbers and the impact of fur seals on the island's vegetation continue to increase. However, neither appears to be affecting the breeding success of wanderers which has remained at 70 - 80% over the five years. What is obvious though, in addition to the decline in breeding birds, is that non-breeders during courtship congregate on the upper slopes of the island, so avoiding the lower fur seal-covered areas. This is a pattern that has also been observed on Bird Island and indicates that the birds are undoubtedly affected by disturbances such as fur seal activity. Research at the royal albatross site on Taiaroa Head in New Zealand,

The bird of ill omen?

Sign of the times: a male wandering albatross displays to another male. More females are killed by longline fishing so the males are short of mates.

Thanks to the rigorous enforcement of a sustainable management regime on the longline fisheries around South Georgia, losses in these waters have dropped by a stunning 95%. However, illegal longline fishing still poses a major threat to South Georgia albatrosses, but will the increasing numbers of visitors also become a problem at some breeding colonies?

shows that large numbers of people also have an effect. With the increase in visitors since the 1970s, courtship is increasingly conducted out-of-sight, with fewer first-time breeders nesting in view and the chicks of those that do moving significantly further away when they are old enough to wander from the nest.

While Albatross and Prion Islands receive only a fraction of the number of visitors to Taiaroa Head, they are among the most popular visitor sites at South Georgia. This year 43 landings were scheduled at the islands, with eight ships arriving in a 10-day period in late November, six during three days in mid-January and five during three days in March.

We witnessed several landings and had the opportunity to observe interactions between visitors, wanderers and fur seals, and also to see how the Code of Conduct for these sites is being implemented by cruise ship staff.

When the Code was first drafted, there was a total of 1600 cruise ship visitors and 22 landings at both islands. Although the Code still appeared to afford the degree of protection required, due in part to the cooperation of and compliance by expedition staff and passengers alike (there is no enforcement by Government of the code; visitors are required to comply voluntarily, the expectation being that the IAATO policy of self-regulation will ensure adequate compliance and environmental protection). This season's 43 landings with possibly over 4000 visitors represents an increase of 100%. Significantly too, there were new ships, new companies and new staff. This level and type of visitation introduces new areas of concern, particularly for sensitive sites and the way in which landings are coordinated.

The Code of Conduct contains the necessary measures for individuals and groups to minimise their impact within the 1999 management framework for the island. But if there is no limit on the number of visits to the islands, then the framework needs urgent review. In commissioning the research, Government have anticipated such a review, and the need for a restructuring of the current management framework. Over the next few months, GSGSSI will be reviewing the findings of this research, and in consultation with IAATO and other interested parties, will be looking at various management options.

Sally Poncet

Celia Bull, Sally's assistant, was sufficiently perturbed by her experience on Albatross Island to write to the Commissioner. Her letter and his reply are reproduced with permission.

Dear Sir

I have just returned from the most fantastic experience in South Georgia. I was field assistant to Sally Poncet on Albatross Island for 10 days. Camped in a tiny hollow amidst the tussock grass in exceedingly wet conditions, we spent many hours talking; over cups of tea; holding binoculars to the eyes on the edge of cliffs; agog at the wanderers on nests, displaying and soaring overhead. The beauty and exquisite nature of this most spectacular and astounding of places courses in my veins.

I followed Sally. Where she placed her foot, I placed mine. Where she looked, so did I. What she saw, she taught me to see. I looked, I learned and I am overwhelmed with wonderment at it all. And with sadness. Sally and I were constantly aware of our presence. Sometimes we'd joke, 'Save the island, don't go out of the tent!' We were paranoid of our impact on the island, on the delicate vegetation, our disturbance to birds and seals, and yet we both felt convinced that the work we were doing here was important and necessary. Discovering the huge drop in nesting birds among the wandering albatross alone is justification and cause for action while little or nothing is known about the numbers of burrowing petrels.

I witnessed the cruise ship phenomenon. I saw the damaging and disruptive effects inflicted by the sheer number of people who visited during my short stay. Landings are all controlled and managed by people who care about the environment but the existing education and codes of conduct are not sufficient. Passengers are generally not agile. Visits are made to the closest birds. Distributions are changing. The birds are moving higher and further away from visitors. Moss and liverwort banks are destroyed through lack of knowledge and mobility. Fur seals are viewed as a problem rather than wildlife. The popular catchphrase: 'take nothing but photos, leave nothing but footprints' sticks in the throat when conditions are gloomy and cameras flash, and footprints sink deep, destroying years of growth, disturbing nesting birds above and below ground. Please!

I spent three weeks on cruise ships to and from South Georgia during which time I had many discussions with passengers, lecturers, organisers and crew alike who are all dismayed by their impact. All recognise the need for change. Arguments differ. Some say 'We should not be here, close the island!'. Others moot for continued visits believing them to be an important contribution towards albatross awareness. How? From what I witnessed humans are yet one more unmitigating factor in the birds' increasingly desperate struggle for existence. If people want to see these birds in their mating and nesting habitat, they should have a positive impact, through education, practice and funding.

The longline fishing problem is starting to be addressed by governments: In the United States, fishing practices and vessels are controlled using stringent laws and heavy finan-

cial penalties and I understand that the South Georgia government has banned longline fishing during the summer months. However the albatross wanders far and wide and no single government can control the fishing industry. This problem has to be addressed globally. SAVE THE ALBATROSS campaign is attempting this, but when dealing with all things commercial, money speaks.

What can be done in South Georgia is to protect and help these birds in their breeding habitat, with as little visitor impact and as much benefit to the birds as possible. The present code of conduct cannot cope with the increasing numbers of visitors. Yet closing the island would not necessarily give extra protection to the birds as visits by humans are only one of the factors giving cause for concern. Inspirational action is needed. Visits that incorporate education, guiding and a financial return to help expand awareness, finance research and help combat the main demon against which these birds struggle: longline fishing.

I hope with all my heart that you find the best way to act, because there has to be action if these wonderful birds and their habitats are to survive.

Yours sincerely and hopefully

Celia Bull

Dear Ms Bull

Thank you for your letter of 11 February, which has just reached me, about your recent experience in South Georgia working as Field Assistant to Sally Poncet on Albatross Island.

I too have just returned from my first visit to South Georgia and share many of your impressions. What an extraordinary and spectacular place it is!

I was interested to read your concerns about the dilemmas involved in managing the demands of tourism, fishing and other human activities alongside the extraordinary wildlife in this special environment. These are issues with which the Government of South Georgia is grappling hard. There are no easy answers, but I hope I can reassure you that we share many of your concerns. Thank you for your interest. I hope you are able to revisit South Georgia at some time in the future.

Yours sincerely

Howard Pearce. *Commissioner for South Georgia*



Molly paints South Georgia



Getting up early to bake bread for up to 18 BAS folk, taking part in the weekly 'scrub-out', and cooking a three course dinner on a Saturday night is all part of the rich pattern of life down here. I will have had over three months based at KEP just to paint - an amazing privilege generously provided by the Shackleton Scholarship Fund and the South Georgia Government - and I am not looking forward at all to leaving this extraordinary island in early March.

On my arrival in early December my aim was to sketch anything and everything that moved or didn't. This was not so easy, especially on *Polar Bound* - a 47 ft arctic exploration vessel I was lucky enough to spend a week on with owner David Cowper. We rolled like the proverbial pig, even in flat calm, so getting to grips with pencil and paper had its problems, but we did manage as far as Cape Disappointment.

Not deterred I set off again on the boat, this time also with Sarah Lurcock and the two Museum summer staff. So plenty of scope with the whaling stations, small gentoo and king penguin colonies and everywhere the fur and elephant seals. Every artist has to have a garret, and mine started out in the Post Office where poor Sarah was 'cornered' while I took over every surface and wall area with scribbles and easels, pens and paint - Sarah's 'space' was not only for all Post Office materials, bags and stamps but for her asbestos counting equipment. As I was about to start moving out into the corridor and comms. centre with my etchings it was suggested I take up residence in the boat shed. This was not as bad as it seemed - centrally heated, window with a view, and three generators below. However, I was in the spares depot with shelves and shelves of loos and wires and electrical doodahs - I just covered them all up with sketches and paper and canvas and rolls of brown paper on which I have experimented with oil bars and penguins, neocolour, and dilapidated whaling stations - the mechanics have no chance of finding anything until I leave.

Molly Sheridan

The story of Brutus

The hulk of *Brutus* lies abandoned at Prince Olav Harbour. She has received little publicity because she is rarely visited. *Brutus* was built as the *Sierra Pedrosa* for the Sierra Shipping Company. The 'Sierras' have been described as being very attractive vessels, and could easily be identified among other sailing vessels by their smart appearance. They were painted white and beautifully kept, the house flag consisted of a white cross having two arms on a square blue background with the legend 'Per Mare'. The sailing qualities appeared to be very pleasing too. The 'Sierras' have been noted for respectable voyage times such as *Sierra Blanca* London to Sydney in 77 days.

The final voyage of the three-masted full-rigged ship under the name of *Sierra Pedrosa* ended untimely in Table Bay, South Africa, during a terrific north-west storm, which parted her anchor chain and drove her ashore close to the mouth of the Salt River during the afternoon of 30 July 1889. Before the vessel stranded, the Table Bay lifeboat managed to rescue 32 of the ship's company, including the captain's wife and child. One of the crew remained on the vessel overnight as he was below decks during the attendance of the lifeboat. He was eventually brought to dry land the next day. However, much to the annoyance of his rescuers and amusement of the hundreds of spectators on Salt River beach, he insisted on first changing into his Sunday best clothes!



Brutus aground near Cape Town

A local syndicate bought the hull for a 'mere song', lightened the vessel by discharging most of the coal and managed to tow the ship off the beach. Being of steel construction, she was found to have suffered little. It was later stated that a fortune was made out of the investment. In accordance with sailors' superstition she was renamed *Brutus*, and after some time resumed trading.

Some 13 years later *Brutus*, under the command of Captain John Chalmers Dallachie, and belonging to J.S. Ritchie of Dundee, sailed from London on the 3 June 1902 with a crew of 26 and a general cargo for Cape Town, and arrived in Table Bay in the late evening of 14 August 1902. The following morning the wind freshened with mist, heavy rain and squalls; a second anchor was let go. The wind and sea increased at about 0330 and the vessel started dragging

her anchors. Shortly afterwards she ran aground. Distress signals were sent up and the crew all managed to get off safely, once again thanks to the Table Bay lifeboat.

At the court of enquiry the vessel was described as being well found and equipped, also fully manned. The Captain was found not to be at fault and the stranding was said to be due to the heavy weather, which was later referred to as 'The Great Gale of 1902'. It was later realised that *Brutus* had stranded very close indeed to her previous grounding on the same beach in 1889.

Once again the ship was successfully refloated, and it is worthy of note that an article in a Cape Town publication, 'The Outspan', printed in 1927 referred to the 'Great Gale' and said it was most unusual for a vessel to survive a stranding on this beach. It must therefore be a testament to British shipbuilding of that time for the *Brutus* to survive two strandings in that location. *Brutus* however did not resume trading as previously, but was moored in Table Bay for several years. She was used for coal and petrol storage and also as a training ship for the Cape Town naval cadets.

Apparently at some time before World War I she was moved to Walvis Bay, to be used by a local whaling company for storing barrels of whale oil. Shortly after the outbreak of war in 1914, a new important role developed for the *Brutus*. Germans had raided the small settlement at Walvis and taken away the local policemen and other non-German European males as prisoners of war, leaving the women and children behind. Not long after this, the Union-Castle liner *Armada Castle*, having been converted to become HMS *Armada Castle*, arrived and took on board the abandoned women and children. They were given every comfort possible. However the presence of these 'unusual' passengers in a warship at sea during hostilities must have been somewhat difficult for all concerned.

Brutus was seen to be laying snugly at her moorings. She was inspected and a cleaning party from HMS *Armada Castle* was despatched to prepare the old sailing ship for yet another use. The women and children, together with their possessions, were taken to the *Brutus*, thus creating a new home for them. Due to an infirmity, the magistrate of Walvis had not been made a prisoner of war, and now found himself in command of the *Brutus* and its occupants. It was recorded as 'a position he found not to be exactly a bed of roses'. HMS *Armada Castle* provided the *Brutus* with provisions and fresh water etc for several weeks, until the unfortunate women and children were trans-shipped to Cape Town. After this latest episode in her life, *Brutus* was left to her more familiar existence as a roost for the seabirds of Walvis Bay.

The *Brutus* was to get yet another lease of life at an even more remote place than Walvis Bay. Early in 1918 two whalecatchers towed her to her final resting place at Prince Olav Harbour, South Georgia. This itself was no mean feat, conducted long before the days of towing winches, Kort Nozzles, enclosed wheelhouses etc. Whalecatchers were designed to tow, but as a 'type of hip tow' with one or more whales chained to the vessels' sides. The two catchers used for the tow were identical, *Truls* (Captain Marthinsen) and

Traveller (Captain Andersen). It appeared that a 'run crew' might have been on board the *Brutus*, as a Captain Pedersen is described in records as being the master of *Brutus* when the vessels arrived at South Georgia.

For the next 12-13 years *Brutus* was used as a coal hulk. Coal was needed at the whaling stations (before conversion to furnace oil), not only to keep the steam whalecatchers at sea but also to fire the hungry boilers that supplied the steam to enormous bone saws, numerous winches, blubber cookers, and to heat the accommodation.

Prince Olav Whaling Station ceased operating in 1931. *Brutus* parted her moorings and was wrecked some time after. During calm weather it is relatively easy to climb aboard her. Although partially submerged, there is still plenty of ship to look at, and her original name *Sierra Pedrosa* is still discernable on the bow.



Brutus at Prince Olav Harbour

During the clean-up of the whaling stations by Marine Salvage Services in 1989/1990 I had been briefed to look at the *Brutus*, if time permitted, with a view to salvage and floating her over a submersible pontoon in a similar manner to the salvage of S.S *Great Britain* from Sparrow Cove in the Falklands in 1970 (I was a diver/rigger on that project). Unfortunately, it would have been an even more onerous task than the *Great Britain*, due to the state of the vessel, logistics and the amount of preparation required to float the old lady. The interest was from a South African nautical historian who would have liked to see *Brutus* restored and berthed at Cape Town.

No doubt the *Brutus*, ex *Sierra Pedrosa*, will remain in her present condition for many years to come, only to be viewed by the privileged few who are able to visit Prince Olav Harbour. Meanwhile, the cormorants and other seabirds of Antarctica will maintain lookouts and keep watch on this lovely old vessel with such a fascinating and chequered past.

Lyle Craigie-Halkett

Wildlife excitements at KEP

'What's that?' called out Howie, the boatman on the 'Quest'. Five pairs of eyes followed his pointed finger and settled on a shallow black lump a few hundred feet from the little boat. It disappeared below the dark water, then resurfaced a little further on, the callosities on the big head helping its identification as a southern right whale. A back, a fin and a fluke appeared at various times and eventually it dawned on us that there were actually two whales. Howie turned off the boat's engines and we drifted as the whales swam closer.

The second whale was a lot smaller. It was a calf! It seemed more curious, while the adult was content to keep its distance. The excitement grew as the little whale came closer still, then just 20 feet away it dived below the boat. We held our breath and waited for it to surface the other side, but it surfaced right under the bow, blowing loudly.

It was a moment that I will always remember, like those other special times when, in my 10 years here, I have seen whales in the bay: a pod of killer whales with a baby the size of a dolphin seen from the bow of a cruise ship; a lone southern right whale feeding in the kelp off Hope Point; and a humpback mother and calf cruising the bay spotted while sitting in my lounge. It is such moments that may see me staying here another 10 years!

And another thing: there have been a lot of moulting king penguins around King Edward Cove this year, 40 or more at KEP and as many again at Grytviken. On one of their last weekends on South Georgia, outgoing Base Commander Steve Brown and scientist Judith Dickson were camping near another large group of moulters over at Penguin River. Jude noticed one of the penguins was not a scruffy moulted like the others. It sat stock still, shoulders hunched and a white belly flap bulging over its feet. Through careful observation Jude was able to confirm there was an egg balanced on its feet.

There are no King colonies we can walk to from KEP, so the prospect of one just an hour's walk away is exciting. Progress of the broody King was eagerly followed. It was good news again when on March 17 the chick was seen and named Jude. Unfortunately, by mid-April it had disappeared, probably to fill the stomachs of passing skuas.

Sarah Lurcock

Discovery House Exhibition Centre

Discovery House, the Discovery Investigations Marine Biological Station on King Edward Point, is to become an exhibition centre that will celebrate the achievements of the scientists who took part in the Discovery Investigations of the Southern Oceans and demonstrate the current research that underpins the South Georgia fisheries. The post office is also to be moved into Discovery House. It is hoped to establish the exhibition centre in 2004/5.

The Discovery Investigations were established to carry out scientific research aimed at the preservation of the

whaling industry in the Falkland Islands Dependencies which was showing signs of overexploitation. The scientists' work was primarily concerned with the biology of whales in order that informed decisions could be taken on preserving the whaling industry by managing and conserving the whale stocks in the Southern Ocean. Discovery Investigations spanned some 35 years and resulted in a significant leap forward in the scientific understanding of the Southern Ocean.

Discovery House was commissioned in 1924 to house the marine laboratory and living quarters for scientists studying the whales brought into Grytviken. It was a pre-fabricated timber framed kit that was erected by Norwegian crews from Grytviken in 1924, and was fitted out and ready for use in 1925. Discovery House was in use until 1931. It was later used as a workshop by BAS and the garrison.



The comforts of a coal fire, Discovery House 1928.

In early 2002 all asbestos was removed and the building made safe. Project Atlantis was commissioned to research the achievements of the Discovery Investigations and to make a proposal to GSGSSI for an exhibition centre in Discovery House. The intention is to create a high quality exhibition centre that will house interactive displays using the latest technologies. A feature of Discovery House would be a webcam link providing a window that opens up South Georgia to young people in education worldwide.

The plan is to re-create the laboratories and to display some of the scientific equipment used by the Discovery scientists at sea. It is hoped the centre will display laboratory equipment such as that used in 1924 and any of the Discovery equipment such as the Continuous Plankton Recorder designed by Sir Alister Hardy (and facetiously known as the 'Horse's Arse'), the Lucas Sounding Machine, Eckmann Reversing Bottle and a Pressure Gauge. If any SGA members can help in locating old scientific equipment, please get in touch with me at Project Atlantis, 23 Springfield, Perth Road, Dundee, DD1 4JE, tel: 01382 348159 or email d.v.nicholls@dundee.ac.uk.

David Nicholls

New exhibits at the South Georgia Museum

The new History of Administration Room shows how the government of the island has developed from the Letters Patent, and the visit of HMS *Sappho* in 1906, to the present day. The events of 1982 are documented with several of the items and photographs presented by Col. Guy Sheridan, Commander of Landing Forces. The subsequent British military presence over the next 19 years is illustrated by plaques and photographs from Shackleton House.

A second display shows the whalers' trades and emphasises the self-sufficiency of the whaling stations. There are exhibits centred around the carpenter's bench, the blacksmith's shop and the foundry, as well as some items representing the plating shed and the machine shop. BAS personnel restored a twin-cylinder vertical steam pump (c. 1940s) and a Bolinder diesel engine (c. 1930s).

Curlew goes home

Tim and Pauline Carr's venerable cutter *Curlew* has left South Georgia after just over 10 years berthed alongside the whalecatcher *Petrel*. She was loaded into the hold of RRS *James Clark Ross* in mid-February and will stay with the ship until June 17th. *Curlew's* destination is the new National Maritime Museum Cornwall (NMMC), in Falmouth, only a few hundred yards from where she was built in 1898. It is envisaged that she will be kept afloat and sailed under NMMC management.

Curlew has taken the Carrs on a 25-year circumnavigation, spending one or two years in some favourite places and ten years in the south Pacific with hurricane seasons spent in Australia or New Zealand. Later years were spent exploring higher latitudes from the Arctic to Antarctica before finally settling in South Georgia 10 years ago.



Paget summit missed again

Seven expeditioners, based on the yacht *Gambo* recently attempted the east ridge of Mt Paget, also Paulsen Peak, Quad Five and Marakoppa. All were previously unclimbed but the attempts were thwarted by bad weather and difficult ice and climbing conditions.

The Paget group headed for the obvious col at 1800m

between Mt Roots and Mt Paget. After being weathered in for four days, two of the group set off on the remaining 4km to the top. At 2450m, just 45 minutes from the top, they were hit by phenomenal winds and decided to retreat.

At their highest point the two mountaineers said a few words in tribute to a previous Mt Paget summiter Mark Stratford. Mark was a Royal Marine Mountain Leader, who died in a helicopter crash early in the Iraq war. He had reached the summit with a German expedition in 1995, while on his four month tour of duty on the island.

Alun, skipper of *Gambo*, is a glaciologist at Edinburgh University and had earlier visited South Georgia with a Royal Scottish Geographical Society expedition. This second visit allowed him to complete an accumulation survey across the upper Nordenskjöld Glacier, and a glacier front and bathymetric survey. He will enter the survey results into a computer model to predict the glacier's response to climate warming. But before he even left the Island, his initial findings led him to say 'The Nordenskjöld appears to be dynamically unstable and well over-extended at the moment. I believe that the glacier is likely to undergo a catastrophic retreat in the next few years.'

Sarah Lurcock

Book Review:

PESCA A history of the Pioneer Modern Whaling Company in the Antarctic. Ian B. Hart

First edition 2001. Revised edition 2002. Aidan Ellis. ISBN 0 85628 299 5. 548 pages, illustrated, £45.00

The whaling station of the Compañía Argentina de Pesca Sociedad Anónima of Buenos Aires - Pesca for short - at Grytviken came into being through the vision of one man, Carl Anton Larsen. He had realised the potential for whaling in the Antarctic and had identified Grytviken as an ideal site for a whaling station.

The history of Pesca follows the course of other branches of the whaling industry throughout the world: 'initial success, high hopes, and vast profits....and final collapse'. Within a few years of whaling starting at South Georgia, Larsen and others were voicing concerns over the drop in whale numbers. For the remaining years of the Grytviken operation, there was a continual struggle to retain profitability. In 1960, Grytviken was sold to a British company Albion Star Ltd. In 1962, the station closed but was then leased to the Japanese. Even their efficient operation, with meat going for human consumption, became unprofitable and whaling finally ceased at Grytviken in December 1964. 53,973 whales had been brought in since 1904. The collapsing whaling station at Grytviken and the museum in the manager's house that Ian Hart helped to establish are monuments to Man's endeavour at establishing heavy industry in a desolate, distant corner of the world. But the last legacy of the whalers is a huge bill for the removal of



Grytviken in 1909. The Argentine corvette Uruguay, famous for relieving Nordenskjöld's Antarctic expedition is berthed behind the old manager's house, burnt down in 1914.

asbestos lagging and, at the time of writing, it is unclear whether anything of the whaling station will be preserved.

The two main strands running through this book are management of the whaling operations at South Georgia and the financial manoeuvres in Buenos Aires. Larsen was the link between the two. He was often at loggerheads with the office in Buenos Aires because they did not understand conditions at South Georgia; for instance that whaling stations belonging to rival concerns had to help each other by lending equipment. Larsen left Grytviken in early 1914, thereby missing meeting South Georgia's other great hero, Sir Ernest Shackleton, by a few months.

Hart also describes the human side of life at Grytviken. Contemporary photographs record strangely normal lives of babies, dogs, chickens, picnics and billiards evenings amid the stench and squalor of the whaling station.

A copy of PESCA is an essential reference book for anyone interested in the history of South Georgia or the whaling industry. It is a work of some scholarship based on Ian Hart's lifelong interest in the history of whaling in the South Atlantic.

Robert Burton

(Abridged, with permission, from Polar Record.)

Elsehul hut

In December 1975 a prefabricated wooden hut was built at Elsehul for Séamus McCann and his team who were making detailed studies of fur seals. The hut was occupied for several summers and then abandoned to the elements. In recent years, it was clear that the elements had done their worst and the hut was beginning to collapse. Part of one wall had fallen out and the interior had become a dormitory for fur seal pups.

As part of the BAS programme of removing abandoned

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

Contributions should be submitted, at least one month before publication, to the editor: Robert Burton, 63 Common Lane, Hemingford Abbots, Huntingdon PE28 9AW. e-mail: newsletter@southgeorgiaassociation.org

bases, RRS *Ernest Shackleton* visited Elsehul on April 11 and the hut was demolished and taken on board, together with some hazardous wastes, for disposal.

Rare stamps found



A completely imperforate sheet of South Georgia 1972 Shackleton 1½p stamps was offered for sale at Bonhams in London in April, but with an estimate of £12,000 to £14,000 it was not sold. This is a previously unrecorded variety, obviously a major rarity, and the sheet was part of a suitcase full of Falklands and Dependencies sheets which the vendor had bought some 20 years ago. He found the imperforate sheet but did not tell or show it to anybody until now. This issue was printed by a relatively unknown company, Alden & Mowbray Ltd, which is otherwise not associated with stamp printing, especially not for the Falklands and Dependencies. Therefore it is not impossible that the sheet was actually issued together with the regular perforated stamps through the normal channels, the Crown Agents or the F.I. Post Office. The imperforate sheet has the same watermark (CA sideways to the right) as the regular stamps and is in every respect identical to perforated stamps. It has also been confirmed that this is the only known imperforate sheet from this source.

I have now become the agent for the sheet and it will be broken down and offered as Singles £300, Pairs £600, Blocks of four £1,200. Prices include registered postage worldwide and cheques in both Pounds and Dollars are accepted (exchange rate £1=\$1.60). Contact me: Box 19541, S-104 32 Stockholm, Sweden. Tel: +46-8108362 (work), +46-86118727 (home) (10 May 10 – June9: +1-403 380 2428), Fax: +46-8108361 E-mail: stefan.heijtz@home.se

Stefan Heijtz

Diary Date

22nd May. 2nd Annual General Meeting

Royal Overseas League, London at 6.00 pm. It will be preceded by a reception and followed by a showing of the film "At the Gates of Antarctica" by Ludwig Kohl Larsen.

See enclosed flyer for details.