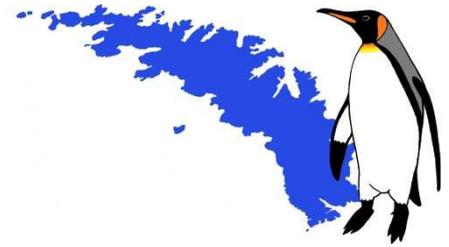


South Georgia Association Newsletter

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The Spring Meeting & AGM will be on April 28, 2017



Elephant seal family. The cow suckling her pup carries a satellite tag on her head. Photo Bob Burton

More to a museum than glass cases



A disparity in ages.

Last year's Autumn event was held at the Natural History Museum, South Kensington on November 18. Some 50 members and guests spent a fascinating afternoon in the Museum's Flett lecture theatre where they were welcomed by David Drewry and Museum hosts John Jackson (Head of Science Policy and Communication) and Tim Littlewood (Head of Life Sciences).

Four speakers gave presentations about their work at the Museum on South Georgia and the South Atlantic. Miranda Lowe (Manager of Higher Invertebrates Collections) gave an insight into the curatorial work of the Museum and highlighted the relevance of historical collections of marine invertebrates for oceanographic science currently being undertaken by scientists at other institutions, such as BAS.

Mark Adams (Senior Curator, Bird Group) described his research on sub-fossil skeletal remains of birds from peat excavations at what seems to be a unique site on

West Point Island, Falklands. Of particular interest was the discovery of a new species of caracara, together with several species of land bird known today on the Falklands - including both species of caracara which dominated the remains. Paradoxically, given their relative abundance, no seabird species has been excavated.

Madelaine Brasier (PhD student – Deep Sea Systematics) described her shipboard research in the seas around South Georgia using remotely operated camera systems and epibenthic sledges (which collect animals living on the seabed). She highlighted her specialist interest in bristle worms which grow to a very large size in the deep waters of the Southern Ocean.

Finally Anne Jungblut (Researcher, Botanical Diversity) gave an account of her South Georgia field and laboratory work on the invisible microbial ecosystems in glacier ice on the island. These systems are highly diverse and show differences between glaciers. Although the individual microbes are invisible, the communities colour the ice, form sediments in melt pools and have a substantial total biomass.

The audience of SGA members engaged actively with the speakers by asking questions and discussing their presentations. This continued into the reception afterwards in the Flett's foyer, stimulated by a display of animals from the Museum's collections. Wine and canapés were served and a large contingent went on to Carluccio's in South Kensington for a convivial dinner. Although the restaurant does not routinely accept large parties the manager who took the booking in advance has an uncle who had served on RRS *Bransfield* for a number of years. So a special effort was made to oblige us!

Paul Rodhouse

Spring meeting and AGM

Members will have had an email with the details and booking form and this is a reminder.

The evening starts with the pay bar opening from 5:45 pm and the Reception starting at 6:00 pm. The AGM starts at 7:00 and at 8:00 pm there will be a talk by Dr. David Vaughan, Director of Science, British Antarctic Survey, on 'Recent science highlights from British Antarctic Survey - Antarctica, sub-Antarctic, polar and beyond.'

For 50 years, British Antarctic Survey has been a leader in Antarctica science. Today it continues ground-breaking research in both polar regions, and wherever polar expertise can be applied. Dr. Vaughan will highlight some recent research helping us understand our planet and the plant and animals that live on it. Examples will include understanding past climates, exploration of the continent beneath the ice, to changes in fur seal populations on Bird Island.

Members are welcome to bring guests. Non-members may attend but not vote in AGM proceedings. Tickets for the evening to include the reception cost £18.00 per person. For enquiries please e-mail

secretary@southgeorgiaassociation.org.uk

Autumn event at Cambridge

We are planning to make use of the new BAS conference facilities to hold a one day meeting on November 10, 2017. The theme will be new and future science at South Georgia.

The emphasis will be on marine science, not surprisingly, and the speakers from BAS and elsewhere will present a series of short talks on a variety of topics that are helping to reveal processes that were unknown a few years ago and are giving scientists a much better understanding of the South Georgia environment. It is intended that the programme will be accessible to non-scientists and we hope that it will attract a wider audience.

There will also be an exhibition of paintings by Bruce Pearson and photographs by David Tipling.

The full programme will be circulated soon.

Island Invasives Conference, July 10 to 14, 2017

(www.islandinvasives2017.com)



This conference, hosted by the University of Dundee and the South Georgia Heritage Trust, will be the next in the series of IUCN Island Invasives events. The first two meetings in this series were held in New Zealand, the most recent in 2010, so the Dundee

conference is not only the first in seven years, but the first in the northern hemisphere. As such, it provides a unique opportunity for those in the field of island conservation to get together under one roof, including specialists and interested others from around the globe.

Seven of the world's foremost specialists in their respective fields will present keynote talks at this conference, on subjects ranging from island biosecurity to eradication problems, methodology and outcomes, to invasive plants and international policy. Details can be found at www.islandinvasives2017.com/invited-speakers/



Reindeer were a serious invasive on South Georgia.

Conference highlights include an icebreaker on the evening of Sunday July 9 at Discovery Point, with drinks and a tour of the RRS *Discovery*, and a Scottish-themed evening on Wednesday, July 12, at the fabulous Glamis Castle. Featuring hog roasts, freshly-harvested haggis, a fine vegetarian spread, pipers, dancers and a ceilidh (irresistible, traditional Scottish dancing for the uninitiated), this is a don't-miss event. Transport will be provided in both directions. Bars will be available for the purchase of wines, beers and, of course, an excellent range of Scotch whiskies. A selection of excursions will be on offer during the day on Wednesday.

The full conference programme will be published no later than April. Early bird registration is available until the end of April. Register now at

www.registerforevent.co.uk/islandinvasives2017/

If you would like to receive regular conference news and updates, contact: marie.shafi@sght.org. You can also get conference news by following @islandinvasives on Twitter. Please circulate news of the meeting to anyone who may be interested in attending.

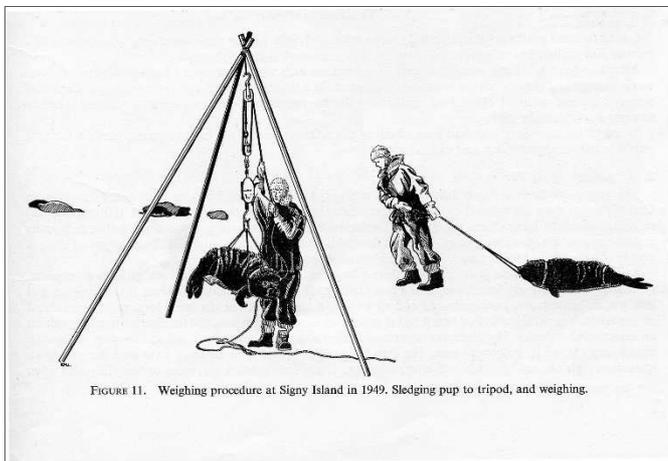


Invasive cow parsley among the native burnet.

**Dick Laws - Antarctic Scientist and Artist:
A Retrospective**

Dick Laws' career started as a zoologist studying elephant seals at the FIDS Signy Island base (1947-50). This was pioneering work on social and reproductive behaviour and Dick's method of determining the age of seals by counting annual growth rings in their teeth revolutionised studies of mammal populations. Dick then went to South Georgia (1951-52) where his further studies on elephant seals put their exploitation in the annual hunt on a sustainable basis. During this period Dick was also working on the whales brought into Grytviken.

Unfortunately Dick's workload at South Georgia did not give him the time for artistic pursuits that he had enjoyed at Signy and there are no grand mountain views or studies of sealing and whaling.



Weighing elephant seal pups.

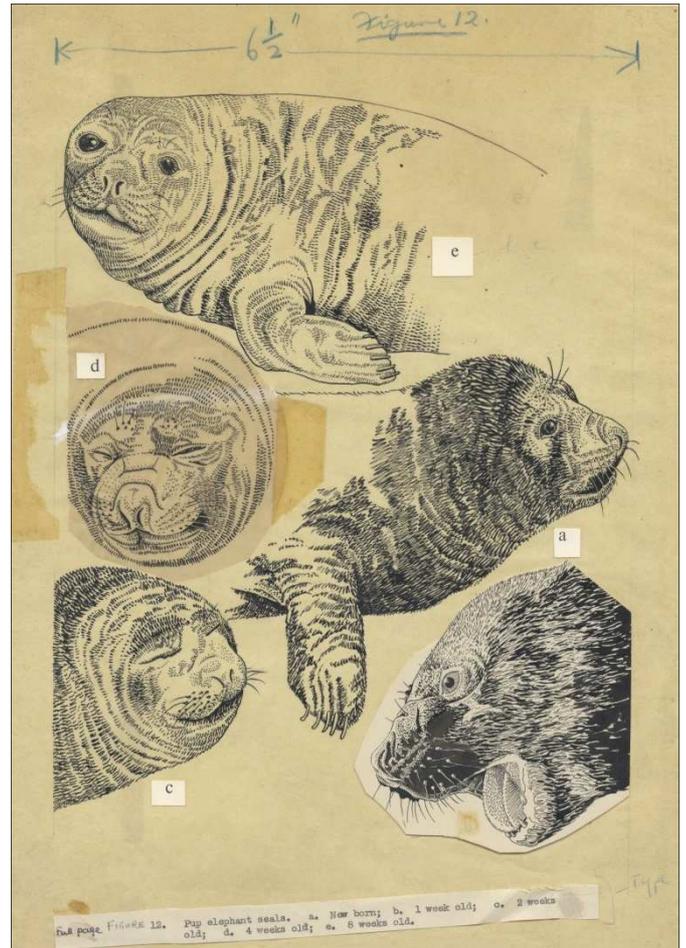


Skuas displaying on a whale skull at South Georgia.

From cold climate of the Antarctic, Dick's career as a 'large mammal zoologist' took him to the tropical heat of East Africa where he worked on elephants and hippos between 1961 and 1968. On his return to the UK, he joined BAS as Head of Life Sciences in 1969 and became Director in succession to Sir Vivian Fuchs from 1973 to

his retirement in 1987. While visiting the bases Dick was able to return to painting Antarctic subjects.

Dick's art is best known from the pen and ink drawings that illustrate his scientific papers and the exhibition was the first public appearance of watercolours of spectacular scenery and vivid animal life, all executed with an incredible eye for detail. The wellspring of his talent was shown by examples of field notebooks compiled while he was a schoolboy in the Lake District. The notes are written in immaculate copperplate and they are illustrated with delightful black-and-white drawings.



Studies of elephant seals for a scientific publication.



Albatross in Larsen Harbour.



The exhibition at SPRI.

The exhibition was curated by John Croxall, Bruce Pearson and Bob Burton and hosted by the Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge, from 1 to 25 March.

Thanks to generous support from the SGA, SGHT, UKAHT, BAS and St Edmund's College, as well as some private donors, it was possible to put on a high-class exhibition that did credit to Dick Laws' talents, and produce a catalogue that will be a lasting memorial to him.



The Preview attended by family, friends, colleagues and sponsors.



A plethora of *Endurance* placenames

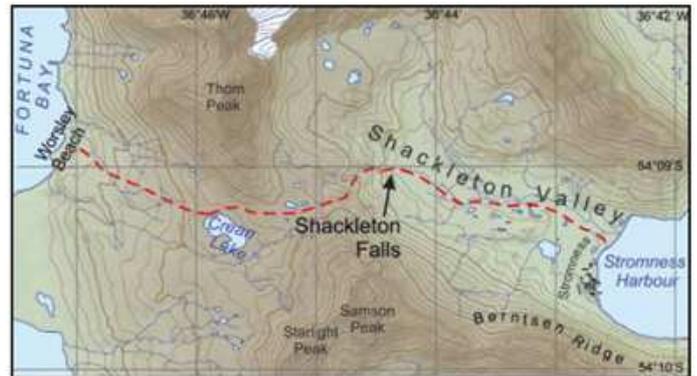
When Shackleton was looking for a possible route along the coast of King Haakon Bay, he gave names to several of the glaciers that ran into the bay. Unfortunately he did not leave any record of this. Frank Worsley wrote that he was honoured with the largest but he could not remember which one it was!

More successful was the naming of islands after Timothy McCarthy, John Vincent and Harry McNish (although the incorrect McNeish is used). Tom Crean has given his name to the Crean Glacier that flows into Antarctic Bay, which was traversed in the epic crossing of the island. Shackleton Gap is the name given to the pass between King Haakon Bay and Possession Bay which the three accidentally descended and had to climb back up.

Between Fortuna Bay and Stromness Harbour, there is an abundance of placenames that commemorate perhaps the best known event in South Georgia history. Worsley, who also has a mountain, gives his name to the beach where nowadays cruise ship passengers start their trek to Stromness. The route passes Crean Lake where Worsley wrote that Crean fell through the ice although Shackleton suggests that all three went floundering. For the last leg of the crossing, Shackleton claims the falls that they abseiled down and the broad valley leading to Stromness whaling station and safety.

Lining the route, there is Thom Peak named after Captain Ingvar Thom who skippered the whalecatcher *Southern Sky* in the first attempt to relieve Elephant Island, Samson Peak after the whalecatcher who retrieved the three men left at Peggotty Bluff and the Berntsen Ridge after Søren Berntsen, manager of Husvik who arranged for the loan of *Southern Sky*. Thoralf Sørle who welcomed Shackleton into the Stromness Villa is commemorated by Sørle Peak overlooking Shackleton's route.

Bob Burton



Just in time!

From the NASA Earth Observatory website



Cloud cover in the southern Atlantic Ocean often obscures satellite images of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands. But occasionally the clouds give way. On September 14, 2016, the Operational Land Imager (OLI) on Landsat 8 captured natural-colour images of South Georgia, where several glaciers are in retreat.

The image above shows the Neumayer Glacier. A blue line indicates its terminus, or leading edge, on September 10, 2000. In the past 16 years, the glacier has retreated more than 4 kilometres (2.5 miles). Like other large glaciers on the island, the Neumayer is a tidewater glacier that flows into the ocean.

'The glacier is on the verge of separation into two main tributaries,' wrote glaciologist Mauri Pelto in his blog. 'This will enhance calving from the glacier, and promote additional mass loss and retreat. This retreat will impact König Glacier to the north, which is connected to the Neumayer Glacier.' Just to the east, sediment stains the waters of Cumberland West Bay.

Roughly 30 kilometres (20 miles) to the southeast of the Neumayer, on the same side of the island, the Hindle Glacier has also retreated markedly since 2000—more than 3 kilometres (2 miles). Like the Neumayer, the Hindle used to merge with another glacier (the Ross Glacier). As recently 2002, the two were still connected.

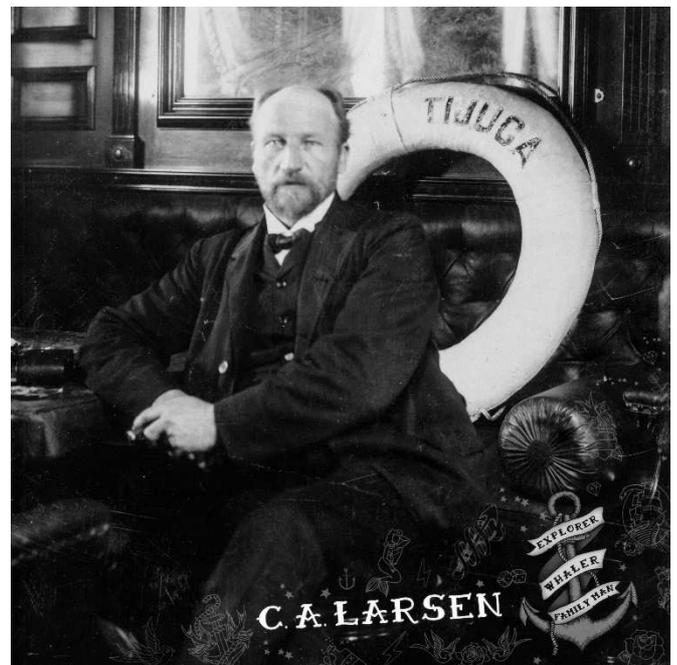


The writer of the note on this Earth Observatory website speculates that the retreat of the glaciers could have a significant impact on South Georgia's animals by allowing the spread of the non-native rats. She is seemingly unaware of the successful rat eradication programme. However, the images do emphasise how timely was the removal of rats and reindeer.

The BBC Science website has an article about recent research around South Georgia by the BAS research ship *James Clark Ross* and Germany's *Polarstern*. They have been plotting ancient troughs gouged out of the seabed by glaciers and the tell-tale moraines – walls of rock debris left at the farthest extent of the glaciers. At its fullest extent at the height of the last ice age - about 19 to 26 thousand years ago – the South Georgia icecap extended 50km or more from the coast to reach to the edge of the continental shelf. Thereafter, there was a rapid retreat as the climate warmed but in the last 10,000 years the ice cap has waxed and waned and never extended much beyond the present coast. The situation started to change massively since the 1950s and many glaciers are now in a rapid retreat.

A long awaited book on C.A. Larsen

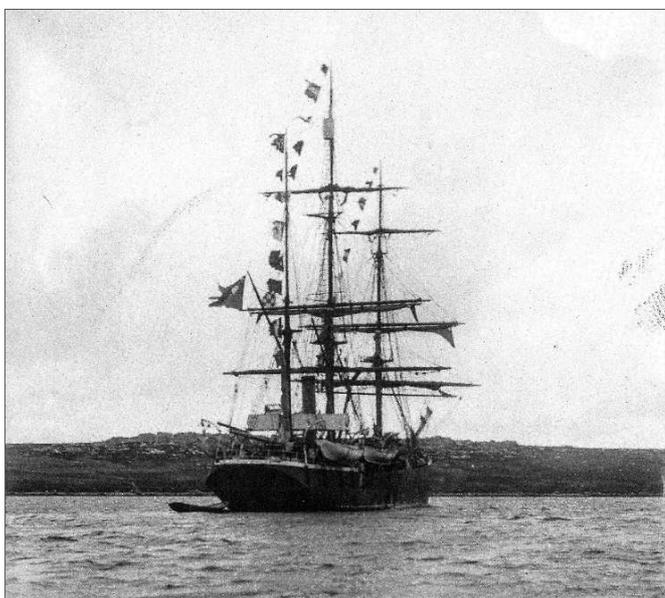
'Forgotten' and 'unsung' are epithets often applied to men who took part in the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration. Perhaps none is more overlooked yet more significant in this period of history than Carl Anton Larsen. This new book whose text is embellished with extracts from Larsen's diaries and many historical photographs is a necessary addition to everyone's South Georgia library.



The cover of C.A. Larsen Explorer Whaler Family Man

Geir O. Kløver (Director of the Fram Museum) writes: This book is one of the results of the Fram Museum's five-year research and efforts to secure enough material to promote the work and achievements of Captain Carl Anton Larsen. Thanks to the cooperation with Larsen's grandchildren and polar historian Beau Riffenburgh, we can now present the first book written about C.A. Larsen since 1929. The book accompanies the extensive exhibition *C.A. Larsen — Explorer, Whaler & Family Man*, which was opened at the Fram Museum on 2 December 2016.

C.A. Larsen led the first Norwegian expeditions to the Antarctic in the vessel *Jason* 1892 - 94. There he discovered new land and the first fossils on the continent, and even made the first ski trip. Seven years later, he was captain of the ship *Antarctic* during the Swedish Antarctic Expedition 1901 - 03. After the ship sank, he led his men through a very difficult wintering and following rescue attempt in an open boat during merciless conditions.



Antarctic in Port Stanley.

Barely out of the ice, Larsen motivated a number of investors to finance the establishment of a whaling station under his leadership in Grytviken, South Georgia. Towards the end of his life he took the initiative to establish A/S Rosshavet, the company which pioneered Norwegian pelagic whaling in Antarctica. Larsen was also the expedition leader and died on board the factory ship *Sir James Clark Ross* during the second season in 1924.



February 1905. Probably the first photo of the Grytviken station.

Larsen's activities in the Antarctic surpass those of most other polar explorers of the same era, and yet he is mostly unknown, even in Norway. The long-term ambition of the Fram Museum is to change this. Thus, in connection with the opening of the Larsen exhibition, we also released his diaries from the *Jason* and *Antarctic* expeditions, and a limited edition of the logbook from *Antarctic* kept by Larsen.

The diaries will also be available in an English edition in early 2017. This is the first time Larsen's own writings are made public. And what a story they tell. We are sure many readers will join us in being moved by his strength, enthusiasm and ability always to keep spirits up, even as his ship was sinking. Several excerpts of these diaries are included in this book.

Beau Riffenburgh writes

When most people think of the great figures of Antarctic history, the names that first jump to mind are the likes of Roald Amundsen, Ernest Shackleton, Robert Falcon Scott, and Douglas Mawson — explorers who faced incredible hardships on journeys into the interior of an unknown continent. If one is a little more familiar with



The Larsen family enjoys a snowball fight at Grytviken.

the exploration of the far south, then a couple more come to mind - perhaps Frank Wild, who participated in no fewer than five of the great expeditions of the Heroic Age, or Carsten Borchgrevink, the first to winter on the Antarctic mainland. Or one might be aware of some of the great ship captains, such as John King Davis and Frank Worsley, who spent years challenging the pack ice. Other pioneers include James Clark Ross, Adrien de Gerlache, Jean-Baptiste Charcot, and William S. Bruce.

But strangely, there is one man who is mostly forgotten today, despite having done all of this and more - captaining ships in Antarctic waters, discovering features on land and ice, skiing to places where no one had been before, leading heroic rescue attempts in an open boat, making significant scientific discoveries, and having perhaps the greatest economic impact of any individual ever in the far south. That man was Carl Anton Larsen. He didn't publish an expedition account and isn't commemorated by numerous memorials around the world, but there is little doubt that he was one of the key figures - as a leader, a visionary, a pioneer, and a manager - in the history of the Antarctic. For one achievement shines out over all the others: Larsen, more than any other single person, was responsible for the birth and growth of the twentieth-century Antarctic whaling industry.



*C. A. Larsen teases an elephant seal.
Photo Edward B. Binnie © Thomas Binnie*

C.A. Larsen Explorer Whaler Family Man is currently not available in bookshops. It can be ordered from the Fram Museum by emailing to john@framuseum.no.

The price is NOK 149 (approximately £14).
369 pages. Many photographs.

Continuing good news on the conservation front The first pipit nest at Hope Point

These photographs were obtained by Pat Lurcock. Pipits are now becoming commonplace at the cruise ship landing places. This must be the best, and certainly the most popular, indicator that the rat eradication programme has worked.



First the eggs.



Then the chicks.



A fledgling has learned to feed itself.

New stone carving discovered in Jason Harbour

Another stone, carved with a name and a date, has been discovered in a cove close to the old whalers' hut at Jason Harbour. I at first thought I had re-found a carved stone that Pat and I had found there 10 years before, but was intrigued as we remembered the carving to be difficult to decipher. This carving is clear. It reads either 'FINSBERG' or 'O FINSBERG', with the date 1912 below.



The newly found carving.

On returning from Jason Harbour, photographs of the stone were compared with those taken of the previous find and extraordinarily they were found to be two completely different carved rocks. The recent find had not been seen when the first discovery was made because it would have been covered by snow. Comparison of the photographs show the two carved rocks are within 5m of each other, the newly discovered one higher on the beach, just under the tussock grass line, whereas the older one was nearer the tide line.



The first carving.



The cove where both carvings were found.

News of the original find was published in this newsletter in the hope someone might be able to help determine what it said or its significance. It had been supposed the first rock may mark a sealer's grave. We now wonder if the word is Russian and would be glad to hear from anyone who thinks they may be able to determine if it is the name of a person or ship.

The newly found rock was presumably carved in 1912 shortly after the old Jason hut was built in 1911 as a shelter for those on the postal route between Grytviken and the Stromness Bay whaling stations. The old wooden table in the hut is heavily carved with names and dates, but none of the dates are as early as 1912.

Were the two stone carvers working side by side, or did one carving inspire the other? We will never know. We would love to hear from anyone who has a relative called Finsberg who may have worked on South Georgia, or who can help decipher the original rock's inscription.

Sarah Lurcock

Internet outage

Early in the new year King Edward Point lost its internet connection and communication with the outside world was limited to a satellite phone. Normal service was resumed six weeks later.

Your correspondent visited in late January and was told that the station staff were suffering from not being able to correspond with family and friends for the last two weeks. He showed little sympathy, being one of the generation that was allowed to send no more than 100 words to next of kin once a month. But it must be said that the blackout was a serious inconvenience for the science projects being unable to up and down load data, and no credit card transactions could be made in the post office and museum gift shop.

Hopefully, there will be a belt-and-braces setup in future. Or a good supply of pigeons.

**Interesting notes from Bird Island
(courtesy of British Antarctic Survey's 'Icesheet')**



*'Caitlin' on a BI beach with other leopard seals in the background.
Photo James Robbins*

Leopard seals at Bird Island have broken several records this season. We've had the second busiest season since records began in 1993, with 506 sightings. This began with the earliest sighting ever, on 19th February, and ended with the joint-latest sighting on 21st November.

The longest residency period ever recorded for an individual was also observed. This seal was seen over 228 days, although he was not always present around the island. The last few sightings provided great views of two seals killing macaroni penguins, on more than 21 occasions, which has provided invaluable data on the impact of predation.

The diet has been varied over the season, with skuas, giant and diving petrels, elephant seal and fur seals all being consumed. We have also had the most individuals seen in a year, with 87 photo-identified, 76 of which are new to the catalogue of individuals identified since 1993. This now contains 601 individuals.

As in previous years, the majority of leopard seals were juveniles, who migrate from the pack ice in high numbers when the sea ice is extensive and cold conditions prevail on Bird Island. During this busy season, we managed to deploy a geolocator attached to a flipper tag on a male that has frequented the island for several seasons. So hopefully that will be retrieved next year – providing important data on where leopard seals go after wintering here.

Overall, it has been a great year for leopard seal science, and one that all involved have enjoyed immensely.

James Robbins

White-chinned petrels are pretty incredible; they can circumnavigate the globe with casual indifference. They are the size of a small cat, but shaped like an albatross. If they could lay an egg on the Southern Ocean they probably would, but instead are forced to come to land and breed in underground burrows. They also have the ability to keep anyone sleeping on the north end of Bird Island station awake for the entire summer due to their incessant chatting.

More importantly, they have one of the highest incidental mortality rates of any Southern Ocean seabird due to their unfortunate tendency to compete for offal and discards from fishing vessels; sadly a very reliable food source. They are known to be killed in long-line fisheries off Southern Africa, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay, which has led to predictably rapid population declines and their consequent listing as 'globally vulnerable'.

The South Georgia archipelago is thought to hold the world's largest breeding population of white-chins (900,000 breeding-age pairs), with data from Bird Island critical in highlighting any population changes. In December 2016, we spent two weeks completing a whole-island census in order to provide estimates of the current population, to compare with previous findings from the 1980s and 90s. Any decrease would emphasise an increased mortality at sea.



Completing the census. Photo Lucy Quinn

Instead of counting every burrow on the island (which we would still be doing now!), we created quadrats across the island where habitat was deemed suitable for breeding white-chins. We then played the sound of their calls into 1,356 burrow entrances using trusty dictaphones. If the birds were home then they called back almost instantly (did I mention that they like chatting to each other?). This allowed us to get a reliable occupancy rate with minimal disturbance.

A census of this scale took a lot of effort, but we prevailed with disgustingly high team morale.

Tegan Newman

It is probably one of the few times that scientists have come to Bird Island to study something other than its wildlife. But here we are and we are interested in neither penguins, albatrosses nor seals; we just love peat. We have explored Bird Island's boggy areas to find the best coring locations on the west coast, where the winds are strongest and bring salty sea spray onto the land. We are part of larger project, involving scientists from the University of Exeter, BAS and international partners on the ACE

Expedition, working on reconstructing the strength and position of the Westerly Winds over the Southern Ocean by using peatlands as archives of past changes.

This information will help determine whether changes in the winds influence the capacity of the Southern Ocean to absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Bird Island is ideally positioned in the strongest belt of the Westerly Winds. Alex will look through the microscope to study how the communities of testate amoebae (micro-organisms with shells) have changed with salinity (the amount of salt spray blown inland is a proxy for wind strength) in the past.



Extracting a peat core. Photo Angela Gallego-Salla

We have walked all over Bird Island, falling in love with it along the way: up tussocky hills, along scree slopes covered in brightly-coloured moss and down the meadows where the albatrosses are king. We expected to find a good peat coring location with depths of a couple of metres but were pleased to find that the corer just kept

on going deeper and deeper into the sediment. We hit gold! We found 6m of peat below our feet. This is the deepest ever found on South Georgia, and as deep as any other peat record found in the sub-Antarctic (another 6m record was found on Marion Island in 1985).

It is hard to estimate without radiocarbon dating how old this peat might be, but it could be anything from 6,000 to 15,000 years old. We cannot wait to have it dated back in Cambridge! We are very grateful to our Bird Island family for all the support and their warm welcome.

Angela Gallego-Sala

Sir Cosmo Dugal Patrick Thomas Haskard



Sir Cosmo Haskard with his wife Phyllada.

On February 21 Sir Cosmo Haskard (he was knighted in 1965) died at his home, at home at Tragariff, Bantry in the Republic of Ireland, at the age of 100 years. He was Governor of the Falkland Islands and Commissioner for British Antarctic Territory from 1964 to 1970. During this period the British Labour government under Harold Wilson was discussing with the Argentinean government the possible transfer of the Falkland Islands. Little was known about this in the Islands and Haskard lobbied strenuously for the islanders' views to be taken into account. They wished to retain the closest possible links

with Britain. In 1968 the Foreign Secretary, Michael Stewart, gave assurances that sovereignty would not be transferred against the wishes of the islanders.

Haskard visited South Georgia several times but this was a period when little was happening on the island. His Governorship commenced just as the last whaling stations were closing and finished as British Antarctic Survey was taking over from the civil administration at King Edward Point. The significance of Haskard's tenure lies in his efforts to prevent an Argentine take-over which would, no doubt, have extended to South Georgia.

The Great Fire of Grytviken

Based on the reminiscences of two who were present: Walter Nurse and Bob Headland

It was on a late January afternoon in 1979 that a plume of smoke was seen over Grytviken and the fire alarms at King Edward Point were sounded. Walter Nurse, the fire officer, Derek Hamilton, the boatman, and engineer Geoff Leathers jumped in the base launch *Kumbayah* and headed across the Cove. The fire pump, a cantankerous affair that liked a whiff of ether before condescending to work, was lifted onto a trailer, together with hoses and volunteers, and was hauled by tractor around the shore road. More volunteers followed in the Land Rover.



The fire appeared to have started in the electrical stores which also housed old diesel generators and was spreading rapidly. As well as the timber structure, there was oil, grease and other hydrocarbons in the building.

The galvanized iron cladding made reaching the fire with the hoses difficult and it rapidly spread throughout the roofs of the electrical store and accommodation. It then spread quickly through the old power-house and into the roof of the adjoining oil separator building. Fortunately the weather was relatively favourable: only a light wind. (To have been regarded as fully favourable the weather would have needed to be chucking down with rain).

The response time was about a creditable 10 minutes but there was little hope of extinguishing the blaze. So firefighting was directed at stopping its spread beyond the three adjoining buildings. After the fire breached some high windows and ventilators in the roof of the separator building, this became easier because hoses could be directed inside against the metal roof. Fortunately all the separator tanks were empty so problems of burning whale oil and water did not arise.



Bob Headland, who knew the whaling station well, opened one of the old hydrants and found good pressure from the Bore Valley dam which is 56 m above sea-level. What to do with this supply was the next problem as, inevitably, KEP and Grytviken hose fittings were different. It took another investigation before a brass coupler with a hose was found lurking deep in the Guano Shed (anything brass was becoming rare in Grytviken by that time). It all fitted and worked, so hoses were deployed at the sea and land sides of the fire to prevent further spread. Eventually, after about three hours, a combination of running out of combustibles and application of the hoses reduced it. Many burning embers remained under a covering of collapsed corrugated iron and other building remains. This was damped down for much of the rest of the night, using the Grytviken hydrant system after the fire pump had been returned to KEP



Losses were the three adjoining buildings. The Pelton wheel turbine which had run continuously since 1912 and was still lighting the Kino survived almost undamaged, mainly because of a small flow of water inside it (and its robust construction). The dynamo it drove, in contrast, was burnt out – an unfortunate loss. Although there were spares at Grytviken it was not replaced. Worse for posterity, the fire destroyed the quarters of Ragnor Thorsen, the last caretaker who had left in 1971, where the papers on the last years of whaling at Grytviken had been stored.

The cause of the fire was never established although circumstantial evidence suggested a careless heavy smoker was involved.

From the archives



Discovery House in 1925. The brick chimneys have been demolished

Discovery House provided living quarters and a laboratory for the scientists of the Discovery Investigations. They lived in considerable comfort and had a steward to look after them.

In 1928 the magistrate wrote to the governor: 'I feel it is my duty to point out that the extraordinary waste of public money in connection with the "Discovery" Scientific Expedition here is not only exposing the British Administration of this Colony to ridicule but is liable to become a serious grievance on the part of the whaling community'. Part of the grievance was that salaries and conditions were much better for Discovery staff than for the government employees at KEP. Discovery House even had central heating, a flush lavatory and H&C running water for the bath!



The lounge with a coal fire.



Discovery scientists made their own entertainment.

Government Officers change at KEP

Pat Lurcock is retiring as Government Officer after an amazing 25 years. But he is not leaving the scene. Next summer he will be joining the rat monitoring team. His replacement will be Emma Jones who did a stint as GO in 2008. Simon Browning is also retiring and will be replaced by Paula O'Sullivan who has previously served as Boats Officer at KEP. It is good to see that the new officers are already familiar with the special conditions of working at South Georgia – and have returned for more!

The South Georgia Association newsletter is produced twice a year, in April and November. Contributions should be submitted, at least one month before publication, to the editor: Robert Burton, 63 Common Lane, Hemingford Abbots, Huntingdon PE28 9AW. Email: rwburton@ntlworld.com