South Georgia Association Newsletter

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The GSGSSI patrol vessel Pharos SG off Gold Harbour, with tabular icebergs (Photo Steve Brown)

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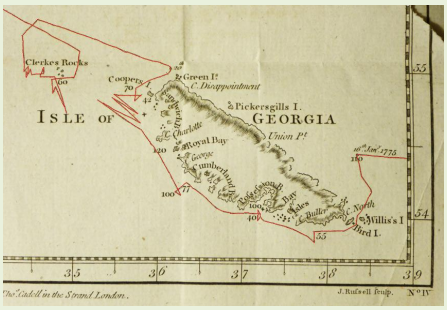

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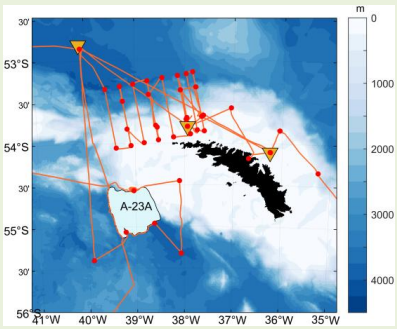

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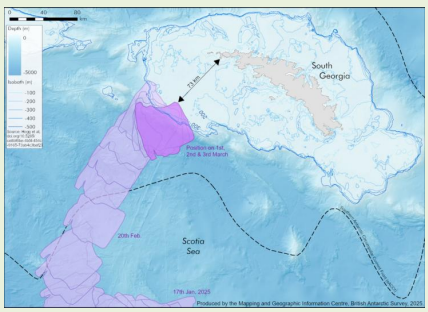

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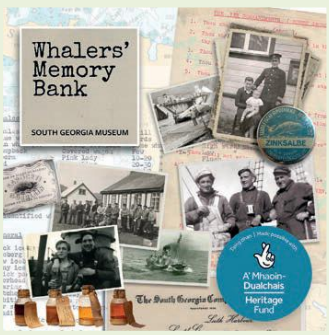

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South Georgia Association summer event: *The Association is holding an in-person, two-day event 4-5 July 2025, with the theme of* ***Marine Science at South Georgia****.*

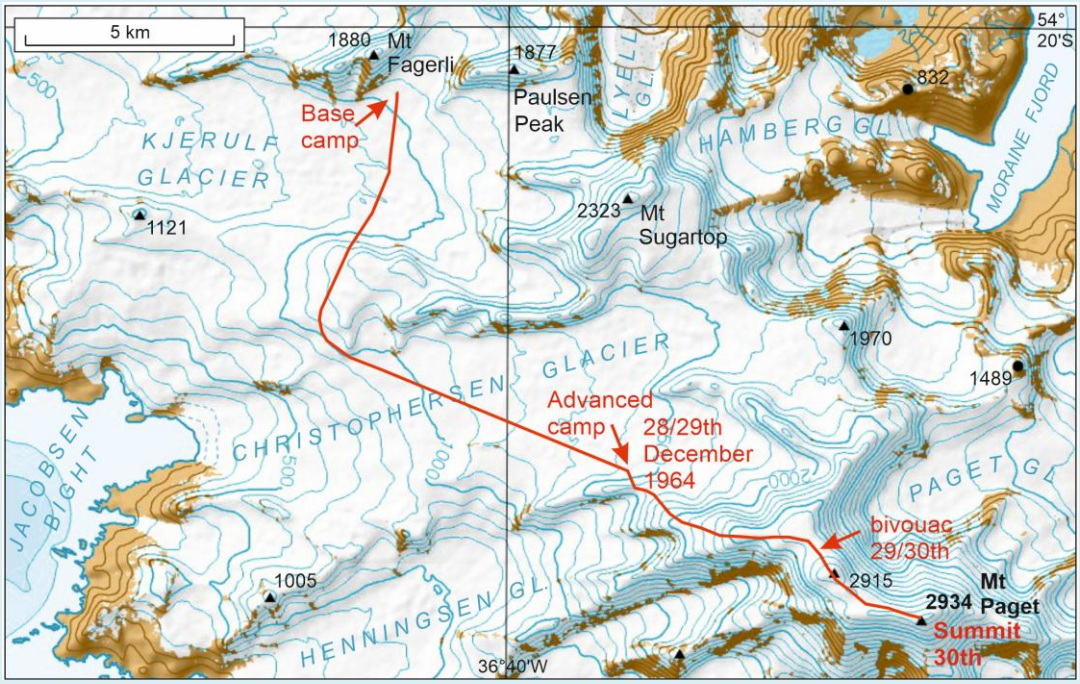
It will be packed with informative talks, with plenty of opportunities to catch up with old friends and make new ones. The event also includes a short AGM for Association Members, and presentation of the Morag Husband Campbell medal.

It is being held at the Aurora Innovation Centre, British Antarctic Survey, with an optional evening meal at the Gonville Hotel, Cambridge on the evening of Friday 4 July. Cost is £30 for both days only (£50 non-members) or £105 (£125) including the meal. See p. 4 for details.

The First Ascent of Mount Paget, December 1964 John and Hilary Chester

Mount Paget, 2934 m, the highest peak on South Georgia, was first climbed on 30 December 1964 by the Combined Services Expedition to South Georgia (CSESG). The 60th anniversary of the ascent fell after publication of the November 2024 newsletter, and almost in 2025! An account is now published here. It was written by John and Hilary Chester, based on the expedition diary of John Chester.

In 1964/1965 there was a Combined Services Expedition to South Georgia. Part of the plan whilst there was to attempt to climb Mount Paget from a mountaineering base camp at about the 4000 ft (1220 m) contour (on the DOS 210 1:200,000 scale map) on the eastern side of Mount Fagerli. On Christmas Day, the party to attempt the climb was announced. I could not believe it when I heard my name! Tom Lynch was to lead and me and Simon Down were to accompany him.



The route taken for the ascent, from John Chester's diary and advice from Tom Lynch.
Map based on: South Georgia, 1:200,000 scale map, BAS (Misc 12A). British Antarctic Survey.

By 9.30 am on Boxing Day (26 December) we were packed. Then the rations for twelve days were sorted and we set off, seven of us pulling the very heavy sledge. The four who were helping had to get back to base that night so we pressed on as far as we could. After about five hours, they left us and we pressed on to reach the Christophersen Glacier, doing two more trips for the remainder of the equipment. The next morning (27 December), the weather was not too good - warm with a complete whiteout. We moved camp heading on a bearing taken from the map. We had to be careful because the magnetic forces here put the compass right out. We travelled on for well over an hour, set up camp at about 4500-5000 ft and about 200 yards from the NW ridge of Mt Paget, and went back for the remainder of the kit.

The next day, the 28th, we woke to blue skies and no cloud! Being able to see Sugartop and Annenkov Island, we managed to get ourselves sorted out. We did some filming and got the kit and three days food ready for the assault before settling in for a good night's sleep.

We were up quickly, had breakfast, and left the main tent standing, with a note inside telling of the proposed route as a precaution. Skis on, we set off up the side of the ridge under the cloudless sky with thousands of stars until the sun broke through. We left the tents at 5.30h and reached the ridge top at 6.30h. At a crevasse we roped up and Tom led the way as the sun gave a warm glow.

Photo right: Simon Down (L) and John Chester (R) on the Paget plateau, just before packing up and moving off for the summit (Photo Tom Lynch).

At 12.15 we found a place that would make a good bivey (bivouac). Leaving the mountain tent, primus, food and fuel we pressed on to the first summit at 9,565' (2915 m).

When we reached it, we decided it would be a good place to spend the night, so we quickly went back for the kit. We chopped the tent into the solid ice and sorted out the inside. What a laugh! A tent 6' x 4' x 3 1/2' (1.8 x 1.2 x 1 m) sleeping three men and having room to cook. On the 30th December, we were up at 4.30h. There was a slight wind and snow was hitting the tent, but a cloudless sky with stars and the moon and a little spindrift. Primus on, breakfast cooked, crampons on, roped up and we were away at 5.30h.

We reached the first summit at about 6.30h. The sun was rising and there was a carpet of cloud below us at about 4000', hiding the sun, but it slowly forced its way out as though it set fire to everything on the way, painting everything red, orange and yellow as far as one could see. To the north, we could see the twinkling lights of Grytviken, but only 2 miles away and 165' higher was the summit of Mount Paget - a pink crown of ice on top but darkness below. We left for the final stage at 8.20h. We were standing on the summit at 9,625' (2934 m). What a moment! We took photos etc, pinned the flag down and left.

It didn't take us long to get back to the bivey tent, where we had a bite to eat, a drink of coffee, packed and came down. We picked up the skis and skied down to the camp under the ridge, where everyone was hungry.

On the 30-31st, the weather had broken during the night and we awoke to high winds and driving snow from the west. We had a good meal, but stayed in the tent until 23.45h when we boiled up some rum fudge and toasted the New Year in.

On New Year's Day (1965), the weather was still bad, so we stayed in the tent, repairing kit etc. We made the decision that we would leave the next morning whatever the weather.

Tom woke us up the next morning with breakfast all ready. It took us two hours to move off with rucksacks loaded with 80 lbs (36 kg) each. The rest; tents, food, ropes and fuel, were all put into a large polybag and pulled. There must have been 120 lbs. It was a long slog in foul weather, sleet and rain. We covered 10 miles (16 km) in 10 hours on skis, falling into crevasse after crevasse. When climbing up slopes that were too steep for the skis, we were up to our waists in soft wet snow. We pitched camp, had a quick meal and went to bed.

On 3rd January, we had high winds, driving snow from the west and it was impossible to move. The food pile was scattered all over the place with one box 400 yards down the glacier. The front main tent guy had snapped, so that had to be repaired. The following day, we were up early ready to go down to the Jacobsen stores camp (at Jacobsen Bight). We loaded everything up and set off. After about an hour, we met up with the rest of the team. We kept very quiet until the last minute and shouted "We've climbed her!" What a magical moment!!

On the summit of Mt. Paget. Simon Down, (L); John Chester (centre) Tom Lynch (R). (Photo Tom Lynch)

Simon Down and Tom Lynch looking back at the summit (Photo John Chester)

Simon Down and Tom Lynch on the descent. Looking NW towards Jacobnsen Bight (Photo John Chester)

John Chester was born in Hull in 1938. He was in the Scouts and the East Riding Mountaineering Club. He joined the RAF at 17, became a Senior Aircraftman and served with the Mountain Rescue Team. Whilst based in Cyprus for four years he climbed extensively in Turkey, and went on several other trips to climb Kilimanjaro and other mountains. He was thrilled to be selected for the CSESG. After the expedition John left the RAF for family reasons and stopped serious climbing. He had a later career teaching and working with disadvantaged teenagers and the elderly. He has known his wife Hilary since they were in primary school.

Tom Lynch was in the Parachute Regiment, and had a background of skiing, rock climbing and all-seasons mountaineering, and had done a previous couple of seasons mountaineering in the Alps. After the expedition he remained serving in the Paras, eventually reaching the rank of Major. He went on to climb in Greenland and the Himalaya and later did a tour of duty as Chief Instructor at the Joint Service Mountain Training Centre.

Simon Down was a Royal Marine Commando and aviator, and saw operational service in Borneo. He sadly died of a degenerative health condition when still very young.

Patrick Fagan, the expedition surveyor is the only other surviving member. He remained in the military, eventually becoming Major General, and Director of the School of Military Survey. Mount Fagan on South Georgia is named for him.

The Editor would like to thank Hilary Chester for her help in preparing this article and Tom Lynch for his assistance, especially in defining the route taken for the ascent, and the use of his photographs.

South Georgia Association Summer event

4-5 July 2025 at the British Antarctic Survey, Cambridge

The South Georgia Association is holding an in-person, two-day event 4-5 July 2025, with the theme of ***Marine*** **Science at** ***South Georgia****. It will be packed with informative talks, with plenty of opportunities to connect with like-minded individuals. Whether you're a seasoned member of the SGA, or a non-member, and curious about South Georgia and the Antarctic, this event is perfect for everyone. Don't miss out on this opportunity to learn, explore and have a great time!*

The event is hosted by The South Georgia Association at the Aurora Innovation Centre, British Antarctic Survey, Cambridge.

The site is on the western side of Cambridge, and has good road access. There is disability parking on site, and ample free parking within a few minutes' walk. Cambridge Railway Station is a bus or taxi ride away.

Aurora Innovation Centre at British Antarctic Survey, Cambridge.

Presentation topics, by leading experts, include:

Friday 4 July:

Mapping South Georgia from Cook to the present day; British Antarctic Survey archives – an overview.

Saturday 5 July:

South Georgia seals and sealing; Whales – past present and future; New predator science; New insights for ecosystem science at South Georgia; Marine management and protection; New threats, including climate change.

There will be plenty of breaks with free tea and coffee to catch up with old friends and meet new ones!

The SG Association Annual General Meeting will take place at 15.15 on the Friday, followed by the Morag Husband Campbell medal presentation

There is an option to join us on Friday evening at the Gonville Hotel, Cambridge.

Tickets: £30 for both days only, and £105 for both days and Friday evening meal, for SGA members (£50 and £125, non-members). **Booking closes 6 June 2025.**

Full details are available on the SG Association website (https://southgeorgiaassociation.org/category/events/)

Bob Burton Award Updates:

Robert (Bob) Burton had a long-standing association with South Georgia, starting as a bird and seal researcher at Bird Island in 1971-72, and made a huge contribution to the island over his lifetime. He left a generous legacy to the SGA, and this has been set aside towards supporting South Georgia related projects, known as Bob Burton Awards. All SGA members and those with an interest in South Georgia can apply for this funding for projects relating to the island. For more on how to apply visit: www.southgeorgiaassociation.org/initiative-fund/

1) South Georgia pipit study **Katie Wells, Marine Biologist, British Antarctic Survey**

It may not have the wingspan of a wanderer, or the flashy plumage of a cape petrel, but the South Georgia pipit is a well-loved inhabitant of the island, sought out by visiting ornithologists and amateur bird watchers alike. It has a catchy tagline, being the world's most southerly songbird, which it often readily lives up to. A pipit is usually heard before it's seen, its unmistakable song travelling far from its elevation high above the tussock, reminiscent of a skylark.

It's hard not to be taken by its recovery story. In 2011 the South Georgia Heritage Trust and Friends of South Georgia Island started a decade-long Habitat Restoration Project to eradicate invasive rodents from South Georgia. Prior to this, ground-nesting pipits were restricted to only a handful of rat-free sites, predominantly on Bird Island, with an estimated 3000-4000 breeding pairs. Their re-colonisation of mainland South Georgia following the removal of rats was by all accounts almost immediate, with singing pipits rapidly occupying their preferred coastal tussock habitat, no longer at risk of predation. With their short-generation length, pipits were anecdotally seen at numerous sites around the island within just a few years.

Their recovery was one of many positive outcomes from the eradication project, and yet there is very little objective data with which to celebrate it. The pipits weren't here, and now they are! With support from the South Georgia Association (SGA), and the Royal Naval Birdwatching Society (RNBWS), this summer season I have been studying pipits with a view to filling this data gap. As well as the objective of providing tangible information on population density post-eradication, defining a replicable methodology will enable long-term monitoring that could inform future conservation action should rodent or invasive invertebrate incursion occur.

South Georgia Pipits are often seen enjoying Hope Point at King Edward Point (Photo John Dickens).

Fieldwork for the project comprised two aspects, an observer walking established transects recording pipits, and the placement of audio recorders at these sites. Prior to the upswing of the summer season, five 500 m transects were marked out using GPS at key sites; two at Maiviken, two at Discovery Point, and one along the King Edward Point to Grytviken track.

Surveying along these transects commenced in September, when the first pipits were heard. Despite deep snow still lingering from the winter season, the birds were seen singing, chattering in small groups, forming bonds for the summer season.

An observer (Cameron Fox-Clarke) walks the Maiviken transect. Despite the deep snow, birds were making the most of the exposed vegetation! (Photo K. Wells)

The aim was to achieve at least three repeats of each transect, with an observer walking slowly along the route, recording every pipit seen or heard, their behaviours and distance from the transect. Care was taken to ensure birds were not recorded twice. Transects were repeated throughout the summer, at Maiviken finding an average of 4.6 and 4 pipits per transect across eight repeats on each. At Discovery Point, no pipits were recorded on transect 1 (four visits), and an average of 0.5 pipits were recorded on transect 2 (six visits). No pipits were seen on the KEP track during surveying. With its sheltered swathes of tussock, Maiviken is ideal pipit breeding habitat, so these initial contrasts between sites are perhaps unsurprising.

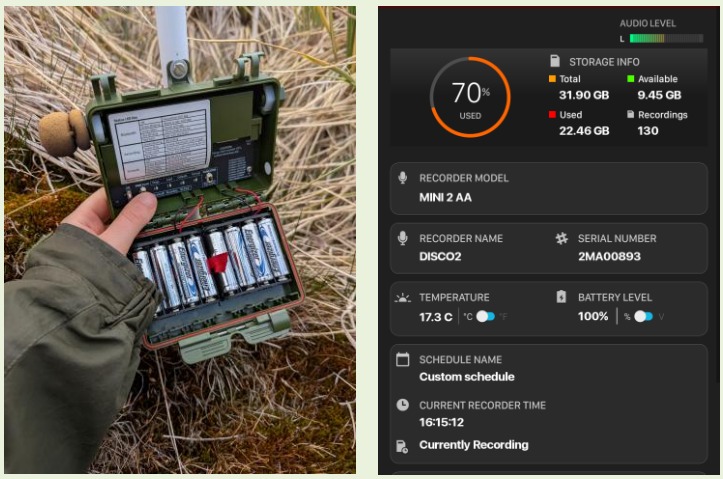
Opportunistically, shorter (200 m) transects were carried out at sites further afield to provide additional scope. These included sites on the Barff Peninsula; Sorling Valley and Hound Bay, and Greene Peninsula. Of particular interest was Prion Island, which was rat-free prior to the eradication, and where many pipits were seen and recorded during the wandering albatross census trips this year (October 2024 and January 2025). An average of 4 pipits were seen across four transect repeats in October. During this visit, a nest with fledglings was also seen even at this early stage of the season.

Alongside this physical surveying, audio recorders were placed at the Maiviken and Discovery Point transects. These are SongMeter 2 minis, which were programmed with a recording schedule and placed out into the field for the entire summer period. Battery levels and memory card space could be routinely checked simply by standing nearby to the recorder and connecting a phone via Bluetooth. They were set to a recording schedule of 1 hour pre-, 4 hours post- sunrise, and 4 hours pre- and 1 hour post- sunset. This is with the assumption that songbirds are particularly active around dawn and dusk, but with a wide enough window to capture activity well into the day.

A SongMeter mini deployed data at Discovery Point (Photo K. Wells)

Over winter, these recordings will be analysed using a software taught to cluster certain types of bird calls into distinct groups. Although individuals cannot be differentiated with audio alone, these clips will offer proof of occupancy, as well as a gauge of activity levels through the season.

It has to many seemed a quiet summer for pipits, with numerous cruise ship expedition leaders, as well as seasoned islanders, reporting a lack of pipits at usually reliable sites. In this case, it will be difficult to pick apart a potential cause, with theories including the particularly harsh 2024 winter, or the unknown impact of avian influenza on this species. For this reason, the start of the 2025-26 breeding season will be particularly interesting to observe, and underlines the importance of collecting long-term data. Data analysis will be undertaken over the austral winter, and I look forward to sharing some of the conclusions drawn after that period.



Inside the SongMeter unit (L). The information displayed on the phone screen when connected to the SongMeter in the field (R). (Photos K. Wells).

The team would like to thank the South Georgia Association for their support, through the Bob Burton Award. The funds were used to acquire the two SongMeter mini audio-recorders, batteries and memory cards. Also, Cameron Fox-Clarke, Tom Hubbard, Louis Day and Christopher Stokes for their assistance in fieldwork and equipment placement. Katie Wells was already working at King Edward Point.

2) Virtual Viola (based on an update from Norman Court, project manager to the Viola Trust)

The Viola Trust is working to virtually repatriate the old Hull steam trawler *Viola* (later known as *Dias*) to her home port of Hull. Bob Burton Award Funding is being used to complete a virtual reality realisation of *Viola* and her long and varied history. The resulting 10-minute VR film will be shown in the South Georgia Museum, on cruise ships visiting the area, and in UK and Scandinavian museums. *(See the detailed article at p.9 in Newsletter 47, November 2024).*

The project team have completed the film, and in late March presented a first trial exposure to the Brethren of Trinity House in Hull, major funders of the process. At the time of writing, wider release of the film is under a moratorium while a formal public launch is organised, to maximise the publicity and news exposure for the Viola Project. The SG Association will provide a further update in the next Newsletter and aim to organise a showing or online link for the final film.

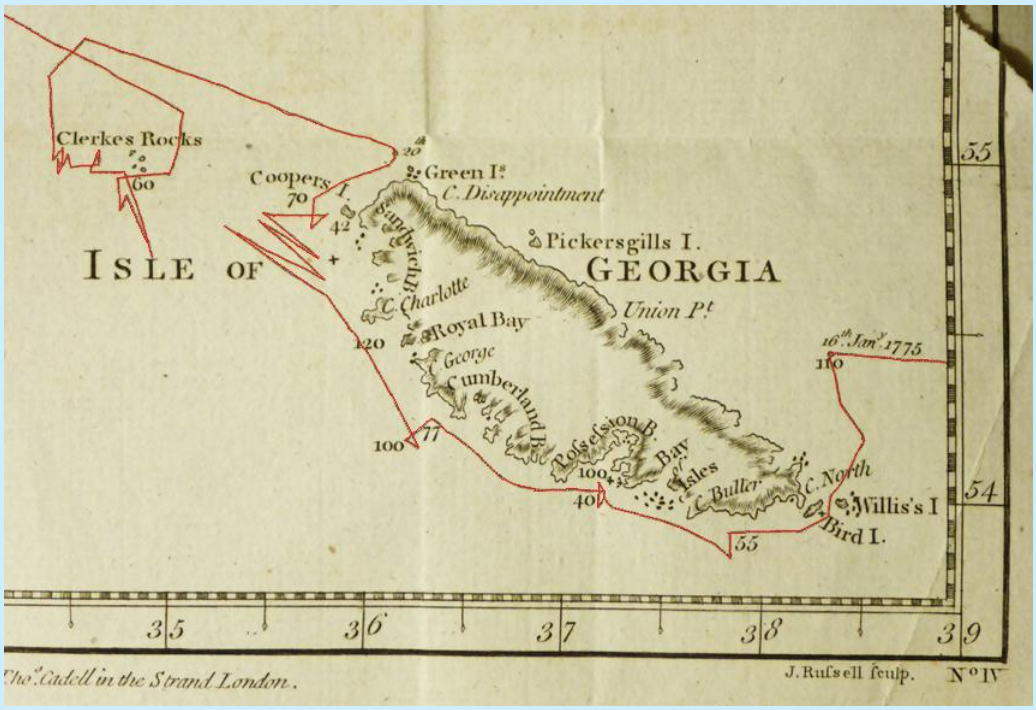
Captain Cook place names at South Georgia

Adrian Fox, and Elena Field (UK Antarctic Place-names Committee)

Place names on South Georgia are a fascinating short-hand for the history of exploration, sealing and whaling, and science on the island. This article is the fifth in a series highlighting significant place names on South Georgia and focuses on the earliest names, dating from Cook's first charting of the island in January 1775.

South Georgia was probably first sighted by Antonio de la Roché in April 1675. It was later sighted and circumnavigated by the Spanish trading ship *Léon* in June 1756, but its position and extent remained in doubt until Cook made the first chart of the island between 15 and 24 January 1775. He also applied the first place-names, naming 18 major features on South Georgia. After leaving South Georgia the expedition saw the western side of the South Sandwich Islands between 30 January and 3 February, 1775, but in very poor visibility. Cook thought this land might be part of a southern continent, and named it Sandwich Land after the Earl of Sandwich, First Lord of the Admiralty at the time, and applied a further five names there.

Cook used four categories of names: Sponsors and important figures at home, (particularly the Admiralty and the Royal Family); Officers and crew on the expedition; Significant events, and Descriptive names. These categories of names are still the foundation of good practice for toponymy on South Georgia and Antarctica.



Extract from: James Cook, Chart of the Discoveries made in the South Atlantic Ocean, in His Majesty's Ship Resolution, under the Command of Captain Cook, in January 1775, W. Strahan and T. Cadel, London, 1777. (Public domain). Note: South at the top!

Cook's names, following the route taken around South Georgia on the chart above.

Note that Cook used possessive nouns in his names, e.g. Clerkes Rocks, but modern naming practice is to drop the possessive 's' as Clerke Rocks, and Cook used Isle rather than Island.

16 January 1775

Isle of Georgia: (now South Georgia) for George III (1739-1820), King of England, 1760-1820.

Willis Island: The Island group at the far west of South Georgia. Cook called the largest island, (now named Main Island), *Willis's Isle* after Midshipman Thomas Willis, RN, of HMS *Resolution* who first sighted it, but Cook also used the name *Willis's Isles* for the whole group of islands.

Bird Island: Named *Bird Isle* "on account of the vast numbers [of birds] that were upon it".

Cape North: The northernmost point of South Georgia, between Church Bay and Right Whale Bay, named descriptively, (originally applied by Cook to the feature now called Cape Alexandra).

17 January

Cape Buller: The western entrance point of *Bay of Isles*, named after John Buller (1721-86), MP for East Looe, 1747-86, and a Lord of the Admiralty, 1765-79.

Bay of Isles: The large bay between *Cape Buller* and Cape Wilson, named descriptively.

Possession Bay: Between *Bay of Isles* and Antarctic Bay, Cook made the first landing on South Georgia there on 17 January 1775 and took possession of the island for King George III.

Cumberland Bay: Bay between Larsen Point and Barff Point, separating into two arms, Cumberland East Bay and Cumberland West Bay, named after Henry Frederick, Duke of Cumberland (1745-90), brother of King George III.

18 January

Cape Charlotte: SE entrance point of *Royal Bay*, named in honour of the birthday of Queen Charlotte (1744-1818), Queen Consort of King George III of England.

Cape George: Eastern entrance point of Godthul. Cook thought it formed the western point of *Royal Bay* and named it after George III, in association with *Cape Charlotte*.

Royal Bay: Between Cape Harcourt and *Cape Charlotte*, named by Cook in association with his names *Cape Charlotte* and *Cape George*.

19-20 January

Sandwich Bay: Is not in modern usage. Cook named the whole bight, between *Cape Charlotte* and Cape Vahsel, now including Iris Bay and Gold Harbour, *Sandwich Bay*, after John Montagu, Fourth Earl of Sandwich (1718-92), First Lord of the Admiralty, 1771-82.

Cooper(s) Island: (now Cooper Island) named after Lieut. Robert Palliser Cooper, RN (d. 1805), First Lieutenant of HMS *Resolution*.

Green Isle/Islets: Named from their greenish appearance.

Cape Disappointment: The southernmost point of South Georgia, named to mark Cook's disappointment that South Georgia proved to be an island instead of a southern continent.

Pickersgill(s) Islands: A small group of islands and off-lying rocks 23 km SE of Annenkov Island, named by Cook after Lieut. Richard Pickersgill, RN (1749-79), of HMS *Resolution*, 1772-75.

Union Point: Is not in modern usage, now called Cape Nuñez, a name from the whalers' era in use from 1911, probably for Captain Nuñes, of Comapañia Argentina de Pesca.

24 January

Clerke(s) Rocks: 75 km ESE of Cape Vahsel, running E-W for 11 km, named after Charles Clerke (1743-1779), Second Lieutenant in HMS Resolution.

Note that this group includes the sea-stack features 'Nobby' and 'The Office Boys', named by the Discovery Expeditions in 1926-30, in a notable departure from Cook's naming principles! 'Nobby' is British naval slang for someone with the surname Clark or similar.

Eleven more names associated with Cook's voyage have been adopted since, including four for him: *Cook Bay* and *Cook Glacier* on South Georgia; *Cook Rock* and *Cook Island*, South Sandwich Islands – of course Cook would never have named a feature for himself.

With thanks to the masterwork: Hattersley-Smith, G., 1980. *The history of place-names in the Falkland Island Dependencies (South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands)*. Cambridge, British Antarctic Survey, 112pp. (British Antarctic Survey Scientific Reports, 101). https://nora.nerc.ac.uk/id/eprint/509184.

South Georgia Science: Updates on some of the science projects active 2024-25

1) Update on Darwin Plus Hungry Humpbacks, South Georgia 2025 Field Season

Jennifer Jackson, Stephanie Martin, Amy Kennedy, Nico Lewin, Joanna Kershaw, Eva Marie Bonnelycke, Glyn Miller Jones, and Sally Hesketh

For a second austral summer season, a five-person international team of researchers worked on the BAS-led Darwin Plus research project, "*Hungry Humpbacks: Measuring seasonal foraging intensity at South Georgia.*" In the 2024 season, the breakup of a large iceberg to the north of King Edward Point (KEP) impacted survey efforts, and not all of the research goals were achieved.

The 'Hungry Humpbacks' team.

Due to underspend from Darwin Plus funding and support from SGHT and FOSGI, there was an opportunity for an additional field season. The focus would be to conduct boat surveys, use drones for body conditioning images, collect skin and blubber biopsy samples, and attempt to satellite tag.

The team arrived and worked at KEP from mid-January until mid-March, when three team members departed, while the drone pilot and project manager stayed until early April. Working in South Georgia has its challenges, and this season, the team experienced lots of foggy days, plus bad weather with large swells impacting data collection.

Drone flights from the GSGSSI jet boat.

Despite this, they surveyed on 13 different days with sightings of humpback whales, southern right whales, Antarctic blue whales, fin whales, and minke whales. Drone images and identification photos were collected on most days. Biopsy samples for genetic, hormone, and isotype analysis were collected from 22 humpback whales and seven southern right whales, more than in the 2024 season!

Southern right whale mother and calf pair

GSGSSI RIB 'Sooty' approaching three humpback whales

An additional season contributed to the overall project aim of obtaining scientific evidence to improve the Government of South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands' capability to sustainably manage its krill fishery by incorporating the level of impact that whales, the largest krill predators, have on the fishery. This season proved the team's motto of "If it were easy, everyone would do it" over and over again!

The team are grateful for all the support of the Government officers, South Georgia Heritage Trust team, builders, and BAS team during this field season.

2) Western Core Box programme and sampling around giant iceberg A23a

Sally Thorpe, Sophie Fielding, Geraint Tarling, British Antarctic Survey

In February – March 2025, we undertook a multidisciplinary science cruise around South Georgia and the wider Scotia Sea onboard the RRS *Sir David Attenborough*. The cruise, led by Geraint Tarling and Sophie Fielding from the British Antarctic Survey with 80 scientists, technicians and ship's personnel, comprised four distinct phases, the first and last of which were carried out in South Georgia waters.

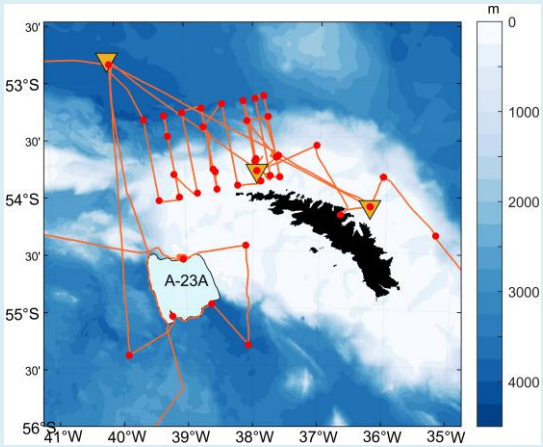
The cruise began with a repeat occupation of the British Antarctic Survey Polar Ocean Ecosystems Time Series (POETS) – Western Core Box (WCB) survey. The WCB survey has been running since 1996 and is designed to understand the long-term variability of the marine ecosystem, in particular Antarctic krill biomass, at South Georgia. This work also assesses the distribution and abundance of other large zooplankton and micronekton (which includes small fish such as lanternfish), and the physical environmental variability at South Georgia. This time series, which now spans 30 years, is one of the longest ecological time series of data in the Southern Ocean feeding information into management of waters around South Georgia and to the wider Southern Ocean through CCAMLR.

The WCB survey consists of four pairs of 80-km long acoustic transects to estimate krill biomass, with associated netting activities and measurement of the water properties.

The participation of scientists from the multi-institute, multinational BIOPOLE programme further enhanced insights from this year's survey. BIOPOLE is focussed on understanding the processes of nutrient delivery and carbon sequestration in the ocean and carried out biogeochemical water sampling during the WCB survey.

They also undertook trawls of the seafloor at two sites around South Georgia to investigate the transfer of carbon from the sea surface to the seabed.

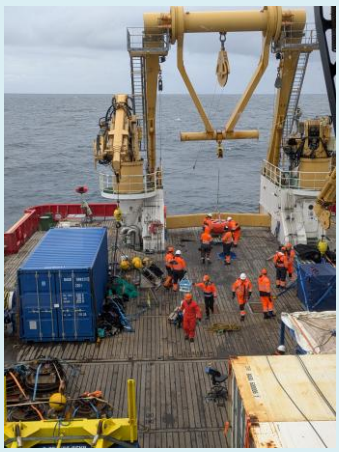
Marine mammal and seabird surveys were also completed along the WCB acoustic transects, as well as during daylight hours throughout the cruise, whenever weather permitted, giving us insight into the distribution of whales, seals and seabirds that can be linked to the other datasets that we collected.

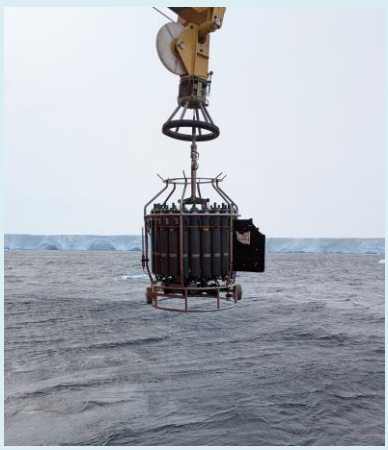


Cruise track during RRS *Sir David Attenborough* science operations around South Georgia, February – March 2025. The locations of the moorings (yellow triangles) and science stations (red circles) are shown.
Outline of iceberg A-23A on 10th March 2025 digitised by BAS Mapping and Geographic Information Centre. As of mid-May 2025, A-23A remains grounded in this location.

While at South Georgia, we also recovered and redeployed three long-term moorings for the WCB and PRESCIENT programmes. Moorings are sets of instruments attached in series to rope or wire that is tethered to the seafloor. These are left in place for a year or more to monitor the ocean, giving us valuable year-round data.

Two of the moorings are deployed on the South Georgia shelf with instrument arrays designed to monitor the ecosystem, particularly the presence of krill and whales. The third mooring is located in the deep ocean northwest of South Georgia and is focused on understanding carbon cycling associated with the strong phytoplankton bloom that occurs in this region each year.





(Left) Mooring operations taking place on the aft deck of the RRS Sir David Attenborough. (Right) Sampling the ocean at giant iceberg A-23A.

After several weeks carrying out additional research in the wider Scotia Sea to undertake a repeat occupation of the A23 long-term oceanographic transect that runs south from South Georgia into the Weddell Sea and ecological studies around the South Orkney Islands for BIOPOLE, we returned to South Georgia to complete the mooring operations from earlier in the cruise. This provided an unmissable opportunity to sample around the newly grounded giant iceberg, A-23A, on the western shelf of South Georgia, having closely monitored its journey across the Scotia Sea during the cruise. Measurements to determine the nearby plankton community and the influence of the iceberg on the physical and biogeochemical properties of the ocean were taken along all four sides of the iceberg, with a swath survey to map the seafloor also completed on its northern side.

This cruise offered us the opportunity to see a fantastic amount and diversity of the wildlife that South Georgia is famous for, from the smallest microscopic algae that form the intense phytoplankton blooms, to zooplankton (particularly an abundance of Antarctic krill) that fuel both the marine and the land-based ecosystems, through to the most majestic of higher predators (blue whales, southern right whales, humpbacks) as well as the slightly smaller but equally charismatic birds (including penguins and albatrosses) and seals (Antarctic fur seals). All in all, the research cruise was a great success, providing a wealth of invaluable data that will allow us to further our understanding of the operation of the South Georgia ecosystem.

We are grateful to the officers, crew and science support teams of the RRS *Sir David Attenborough* who enabled the delivery of this long and complex research cruise with skill and enthusiasm.

Further information on the science programmes is available here:

- Western Core Box: https://www.bas.ac.uk/project/poets-wcb/
- A23 oceanographic section: https://www.bas.ac.uk/project/a23-repeat-section/
- BIOPOLE: https://biopole.ac.uk/
- PRESCIENT: https://www.bas.ac.uk/project/prescient/

See the article on p. 12 for an update on iceberg A-23A, and Newsletter 47 article *Icebergs and South Georgia* for wider information about icebergs at South Georgia.

3) GSGSSI science at King Edward Point Jaimie Cleeland

King Edward Point (KEP) Research Station, operated by the British Antarctic Survey for GSGSSI and the UK Government, remains a scientific hub of South Georgia. Since 2001, its research has underpinned the sustainable management of the region's marine ecosystem, and since 2012, it has contributed to the stewardship of the UK's largest Marine Protected Area, covering 1.24 million km².

This past year has welcomed new members to the KEP science team. Dr Jaimie Cleeland joins as Science Manager, bringing over 15 years of experience in marine predator ecology and fisheries bycatch working in the Australian and South African Antarctic Programs. Kate Owen, well known on the island, steps into the Marine and Fisheries Scientist role. Her background includes inshore fisheries work with the IFCA and seal research at the Cornwall Seal Sanctuary.

Marine Biologists Katie Wells and Rhi Nichol are at the forefront of fieldwork. Katie, now in her second year, and Rhi, fresh from her first busy summer, monitor seals and seabirds around the Thatcher and Barff peninsulas and conduct fisheries surveys aboard the FPV *Pharos SG*. Together, the team continues to deliver science to support the sustainable management of South Georgia's unique ecosystem.

Senior Predator Scientist Dr Claire Waluda and Professor Martin Collins continue to play a crucial role in translating KEP's scientific findings into policy through the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR).

Groundfish survey sheds light on South Georgia's marine ecosystem

The waters around South Georgia are among the richest in the Southern Ocean, teeming with marine life beneath icy peaks. In February, scientists from the KEP science team embarked on a two-week groundfish survey aboard the fishing vessel *Sil*, focusing on species living 300–750 metres below the surface.

Led by Professor Martin Collins, the team investigated the abundance of mackerel icefish and juvenile Patagonian toothfish—species central to South Georgia's sustainably managed fisheries. This long-running survey, first conducted in 1988, now contributes over three decades of critical data used to guide fisheries policy and monitor climate impacts on the ecosystem.

Despite battling 50-knot winds and four-metre swells, the team completed a record number of trawls and tagged more toothfish than any year in the past two decades. Each tagged fish offers insights into movement and growth patterns.

The survey also ventured into deeper waters than ever before, supported by the UK Government's Blue Belt Programme. This yielded remarkable finds—dagger-tooth fishes, king crabs, warty squid, and juvenile skates—some destined for the Natural History Museum in London.

For the first time, the team trialled a Neuston Net to collect larval fish from surface waters. Dr. Lorena Romero Martinez, BAS Postdoctoral Fellow and larval fish expert who was involved in the expedition says: "*The successful deployment of the Neuston Net and capture of larval fish is really promising. It allows us to identify different species in South Georgia's surface waters, develop an identification guide for fishery observers, and improve bycatch management in the krill fishery.*"

The groundfish survey team onboard fishing vessel Sil, with a Patagonian toothfish. (Photo: Jaimie Cleeland)

The results will be presented at the upcoming CCAMLR meeting in Hobart, reinforcing South Georgia's role as a global leader in marine conservation and science-led fishery management.

Sounding the Shelf: Marine life revealed through ECHO surveys

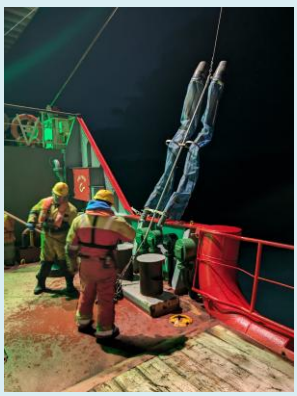
Marine biologists Katie Wells and Rhi Nichols have set out from KEP aboard the FPV *Pharos SG* seven times over the last year to continue their mission: tracking the seasonal patterns in density of krill and whales on the South Georgia shelf.

This is part of the year-round ECHO Surveys, named after the high-frequency echosounder used to detect krill swarms beneath the surface. While acoustic data is continuously gathered, Katie and Rhi scan the horizon from the bridge, recording sightings of whales and seals as they follow the krill.

Each evening, the work shifts below the surface. Using a fine-mesh trawl net, the team samples krill and other zooplankton to study their diversity, density and size distribution.

With seven surveys completed over the past year, vital data on intra-annual changes in krill abundance has been collected.

During the January survey, Jaimie Cleeland, Katie and Rhi were treated to remarkable number of whales: 242 observed—including fin, humpback, and southern bottlenose whales—were counted in a single day.



The krill net and evening deployment from Pharos SG. (Photos: Jaimie Cleeland)

Unusual environmental conditions have made this season's work even more important. Record winter krill catches and unprecedented sea ice reaching the South Georgia shelf have raised questions about ecosystem change. The data collected will help interpret changes in predator populations and support in-season estimates of krill biomass—critical for sustainable fishery management. Through the dedication of the Marine Biologists; Katie and Rhi, the ECHO Surveys are providing a clearer picture of the forces shaping South Georgia's marine ecosystem—and the wildlife it supports.

Monitoring South Georgia's top predators

The predator monitoring programme at KEP, led by Katie Wells and Rhi Nichols, remained vital for understanding South Georgia's evolving ecosystems. As part of the CCAMLR Ecosystem Monitoring Programme (CEMP), with Maiviken designated a CEMP site since 2008, Senior Scientist Dr Claire Waluda supported diet research on Gentoo penguins and fur seal counts, ensuring findings feed directly into CEMP analyses.

Antarctic fur seals were surveyed at four Maiviken beaches—Poa, Burnet, Little, and Tortula—using fixed-point photography every 2–3 days during breeding. Female counts peaked above 400 in December, indicating strong return and breeding rates for the 2024/25 season. Pup counts and monthly weighing, a full-team effort, provided key insights into population health, marine productivity, and krill availability.

The Maiviken Gentoo penguin colony also thrived, with a record 782 nests and 1,178 fledglings. Chick weights remained consistent with recent years, enriching long-term datasets that support regional conservation.

Monitoring extended to elephant seals, giant petrels, and wandering albatrosses. In October 2024, Katie and John Dickens confirmed 24 of 29 wandering albatross chicks fledged on Prion Island for the 2023/24 season, but later the following survey recorded only 20 chicks from 30 eggs for the 2024/25 season—the lowest hatching success in 15 years. These long-term censuses, supported by South Georgia Surveys and KEP staff, were critical for assessing ecosystem health and sustainable wildlife management.

From September to December, daily elephant seal monitoring at King Edward Cove by the KEP science team tracked arrival and peak pupping. Additional drone surveys and ground counts by John and Katie at St Andrews, Hound Bay, Greene Peninsula, King Edward Cove, and Maiviken marked the programme's seventh season of broader population assessments.

Fur seal mother and pup (Photo: Jaimie Cleeland)

Gentoo chicks at Maiviken (Photo: Jaimie Cleeland)

Update on Avian Influenza: Tracking the Impact of Avian Influenza Across South Georgia's Wildlife

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) was first confirmed in South Georgia in October 2023, initially detected in brown skuas on Bird Island. The virus rapidly spread, severely impacting several species, including elephant seals and wandering albatrosses. A new outbreak began in September 2024 near King Edward Point, primarily affecting Antarctic fur seals, with pup mortality reaching up to 80% at Stromness by January. Elephant seals showed symptoms, but population-level impacts were less severe than the previous season.

The KEP science team, led by Dr. Jaimie Cleeland and Kate Owen, together with Bird Island Science Manager Dr. Ash Bennison and support from the South Georgia Government, coordinated extensive monitoring along the northern coastline. Key sites surveyed during peak mortality (November–January) included Cooper Bay, Gold Harbour, Fortuna Bay, St Andrews Bay, Prion Island, Stromness, Maiviken, Greene Peninsula, Harpon Bay, and Salisbury Plain.

Over 300 carcasses were sampled this season by the KEP team and biologist Jono Stevenson to track HPAI spread. No birds tested positive, but the virus was confirmed in fur seals and elephant seals, indicating ongoing impacts on marine mammals. Sampling efforts focused on outbreak sites, with numbers adjusted based on mortality levels.

In its second season, Project Avalon—formerly led by Jenny Foster-Davidson; Elaine Fitzcharles, Jono, and the KEP team—investigated potential human exposure to HPAI through environmental sampling at KEP and Bird Island. Targeting areas where field teams might encounter the virus, including colony paths and carcass sites, the first season detected HPAI in soil beneath carcasses and in muddy water from a wallow but not in lakes or distant soils. In 2024/25, over 50 soil and water samples were collected; results are pending, though localised contamination near carcasses has been confirmed.

A third HPAI project at KEP, led by Amandine Gamble (Cornell), Augustin Clessin (Montpellier University), Jaimie, and Kate, collected blood, swab, and scat samples from live birds and seals across South Georgia. Unlike carcass sampling, this approach provides critical data on infection exposure, recovery, and immunity across species, ages, and sexes. Augustin joined sampling efforts in November, focusing mainly on gentoo penguins, skuas, and giant petrels. Analysis of these samples is ongoing.

Additional note: The impact of HPAI on South Georgia's elephant seals Connor Bamford, British Antarctic Survey. *Connor is speaking about seals and sealing on South Georgia at the SG Association's Summer event* *(see p.4).*

As part of two Darwin Plus projects (DPLUS109 in 2022 and DPLUS214 in 2024), researchers from British Antarctic Survey conducted population counts at the three largest southern elephant seal colonies on South Georgia – Hound Bay, St Andrews Bay, and Gold Harbour. These counts span the period before and after the confirmed arrival of HPAI in 2023. Data show that, following the virus's emergence, the number of female seals returning to these key breeding beaches declined by an average of 46% ± 13.5% during the peak of the breeding season.

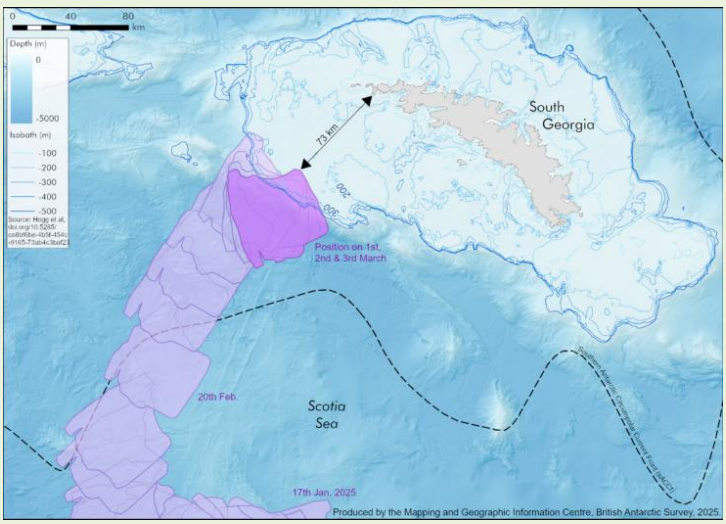
While it is not yet possible to determine whether this decline is solely attributable to HPAI-induced mortality, other factors such as deferred breeding or population redistribution may also be contributing. However, the magnitude of the observed change strongly suggests that this virus has had a substantial impact on the world's largest breeding population of southern elephant seals. The true extent of this event will likely only become apparent through long-term monitoring of recruitment trends, underscoring the necessity for support for these activities.

Iceberg A23a approaches South Georgia

The article 'South Georgia and Icebergs' by Andrew Fleming in Newsletter 47 highlighted that the next tabular iceberg on its way to South Georgia would be A23a. It calved from the Filchner-Ronne ice shelf in the southern Weddell Sea in 1986 and the largest remaining fragment, A23a, grounded soon afterwards, remaining stuck to the sea floor until 2020.

It escaped the Weddell Sea ice in late 2023, but paused again about 200 km north of the South Orkney Islands to spend several months in late 2024 spinning in the same location in a rotating ocean current above a seamount, called a Taylor Column.

It has since travelled towards South Georgia and at the time of writing in May 2025 is grounded on the continental shelf to the south west, about 73 km from land.



The route the A23a iceberg has taken since 17 January 2025 – and that it has been static since 1 March.

(Graphic - Mapping and Geographic Information Centre, British Antarctic Survey)

It is currently about twice the size of greater London, and, at least in satellite images, appears to be maintaining its structure. It is expected that warmer waters, combined with the action of waves and tides, will lead the huge section of ice to break up into smaller icebergs and eventually melt. Now it's grounded, it is even more likely to break up due to the increased stresses, but exactly how and when this will happen impossible to predict.

In an interview on the BAS website, 4 March 2025, Dr Andrew Meijers, an oceanographer at British Antarctic Survey, who co-leads the OCEAN:ICE project that aims to understand how the ice sheet affects the ocean, said:

"If the iceberg stays grounded, we don't expect it to significantly affect the local wildlife of South Georgia. In the last few decades, the many icebergs that end up taking this route through the Southern Ocean soon break up, disperse and melt. Commercial fisheries have been disrupted in the past however, and as the berg breaks into smaller pieces, this might make fishing operations in the area both more difficult and potentially hazardous", and:

"It will be interesting to see what will happen now. From a scientific perspective we are keen to see how the iceberg will affect the local ecosystem. Nutrients stirred up by the grounding and from its melt may boost food availability for the whole regional ecosystem, including for charismatic penguins and seals. We have several ongoing studies looking at exactly how 'megabergs' influence the ocean circulation, its chemistry, and the ecosystems they support". (*See Science report on p.10*).

FPV *Pharos SG at Gold Harbour (Photo: Steve Brown)*

South Georgia Government news *Compiled by the Editor, mainly based on the GSGSSI website.*

Enhanced Marine Protected Area measures

Enhanced Marine Protected Area (MPA) measures for the South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands area officially came into force on 22 April 2025, following signing of new legislation by Her Excellency the Commissioner, Alison Blake CMG.

These strengthened protections, announced in early 2024 following the conclusion of the MPA 5-yearly expert review, include a significant expansion of areas closed to all fishing activity. The newly designated 'No Take Zones' now cover over 470,000 km² — representing 38% of the MPA. In addition, a further 31,000 km² of pelagic closed areas mean that krill fishing is now prohibited across more than half a million km² within the MPA.

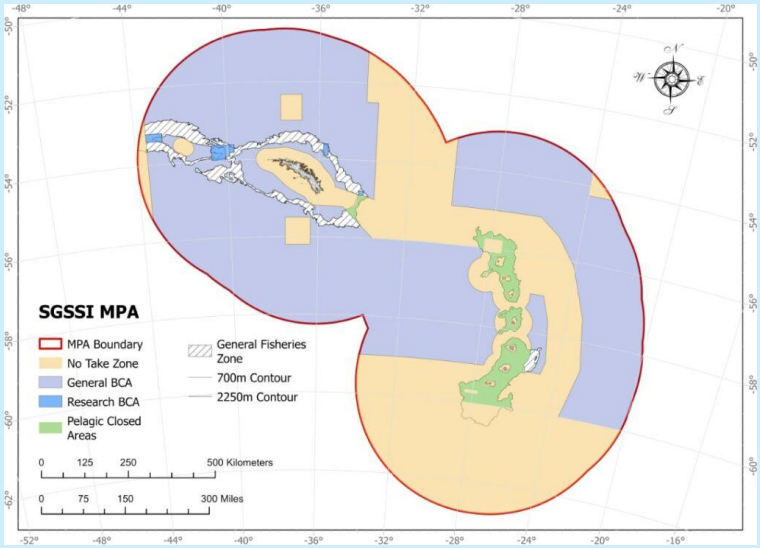
These enhancements build on SGSSI's robust marine protection framework, where tourism and sustainable fisheries are strictly regulated. Existing measures include seasonal closures that limit krill and toothfish fishing to winter months to reduce potential interactions with breeding seals and seabirds, as well as a ban on bottom trawl fishing across the entire 1.24 million km² MPA.

During the five months when highly regulated, licensed fishing is permitted, 40% of the MPA will now be closed to krill fishing. Additionally, 95% of the MPA will be closed to longline fishing, with prohibitions applying within the general benthic closed area—spanning all depths shallower than 700m and greater than 2,250m—as well as within a network of research benthic closed areas at fishable depths, designed to safeguard vulnerable habitats and species.

The greatly expanded and interconnected network of No Take Zones not only protects the most biodiverse and potentially vulnerable marine habitats but also includes regions identified by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs).

Together, the SGSSI-MPA and the Territory's world-leading, ecosystem-based approach to sustainable fisheries management make a significant contribution to global sustainability goals and the UK Government's commitment to long-term marine conservation.

Image right: Map of the new MPA measures



A new Electronic Permit System for visitors

On 7 April 2025 The Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands announced that they will launch a new electronic permit system (EPS) for visitors to the Territories in advance of the next tourist season, replacing the current system of levying landing fees by an individual visitor permit charge.

The cost of a visitor permit will be set initially at £200 (broadly similar to the current structure of £146 for visits of up to three days, £26 for each further day, capped at £250).

The Government anticipate bringing the new procedures into force in June 2025, with applications for permits being accepted from August onwards, and will provide further information and guidance in due course. What this will mean is that every person that intends to visit, unless otherwise exempted, will need to apply and pay for a permit at least 14 days before arrival through an easy to use web-based application portal. Applications can be made on an individual basis, although recognising that most visitors arrive by cruise ship, operators are encouraged to apply on behalf of their guests through a bulk application service.

Commissioner for South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands Alison Blake CMG noted that "The introduction of the Entry Permit System is the culmination of work and consultation to develop a modern permit system that will support increasing tourism interest in South Georgia. The Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands will do all we can to ensure that the transition to the new system is made as easy and smooth as possible for operators and tourists wishing to visit this fragile and unique wonder of the natural world. The new system will help us to manage increasing tourism and support long-term conservation in South Georgia."

Recruitment for 2025-26 austral summer

The Government are recruiting for several roles for the 2025-26 austral summer. The closing date for applications is 6 June.

Seasonal Government Officer for a 33 Month Contract

Post Officers, (2 roles) 6 month contract.

General Builder, **Carpenter** and **General Hand**, to join the Building Team, 6 Month Contracts.

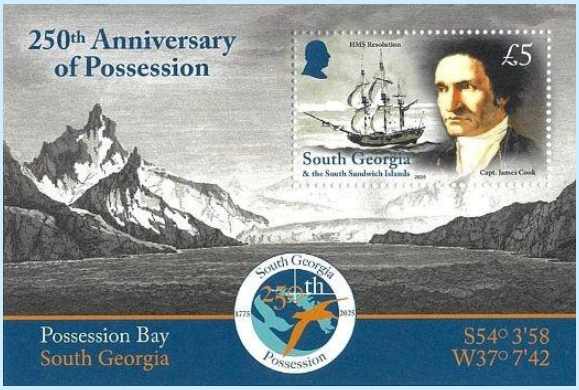
Full details are available on the GSGSSSI website, linked from the Home page.

There is an interesting article about the role of Government Officers on South Georgia, by Nadine Orme, on the GSGSSSI website (https://gov.gs/life-on-south-georgia-as-a-government-officer/).

Recent stamps

Falkland Post Services Ltd are producing stamps to mark the 250th anniversary of Cook's landing on South Georgia. In this anniversary year they celebrate South Georgia and its change from a little-known island to a thriving UK Overseas Territory which is globally renowned for championing science, conservation and sustainable management. Each set of stamps issued this year will focus on a different element of South Georgia and shine a light on both its history and its future.

The first issue, released on 17 January 2025 commemorates Possession itself and the start of South Georgia's 250-year journey from obscurity to the modern age.



250th Anniversary of Possession, First Day Cover.

More information is available at:

https://www.falklandstamps.com/

Definitive set of 12 stamps on the theme of weather

The second issue (above), released on 31 January, focuses on weather - an element of South Georgia which is as captivating and challenging now as it was 250 years ago.

South Georgia Heritage Trust update **Jodie Price, SGHT**

It has been a busy season in South Georgia! We had 109 ships visit with over 15,000 visitors, we delivered 144 Whaling Station tours, and we opened the Main Store at Grytviken 55 times! We also had a record-breaking online auction in April with just under £56,000 raised for SGHT and UK Antarctic Heritage Trust.

Off-island, SGHT has been working tirelessly to ensure that the Key Table, Part 1 of the Whale Memorial installation goes smoothly in later this year – have you seen our timelapse of its fabrication? (link below photos, right)

There will also be a fantastic opportunity to see it before it heads off when South Georgia Island comes to Dundee Waterfront as part of a new festival organised by SGHT called **Whale of a Weekend - 27 – 29 June 2025**.

The Key Table, which will be on display at Whale of a Weekend, is part of the artwork *Commensalis*, which was created in response to the flensing plan at Grytviken. This 5-metre diameter Corten steel table will be patterned with one original rivet from Stromness Whaling Station to represent every 50 whales killed in South Georgia's waters during the years of the whaling industry.

The remaining six 'Spirit Tables', which are still to be made, will be adorned with intricate patterns of shining stainless steel rivets to celebrate the different species of whales hunted, that are now making a remarkable return to the island's waters. Through the Whale Memorial, SGHT is raising funds

The Whale Memorial key table under fabrication, and completed

https://www.facebook.com/SouthGeorgiaHeritageTrust/videos/1620264031954786

to support vital research to aid the ongoing recovery of whales in the Southern Ocean.

As well as the opportunity to see the sculpture outside the V&A Dundee, the Whale of a Weekend festival will provide an inspiring mix of art, history, and conservation. Whether you're a history buff, art lover, budding scientist, or just looking for a fun family day out, there's something for everyone.

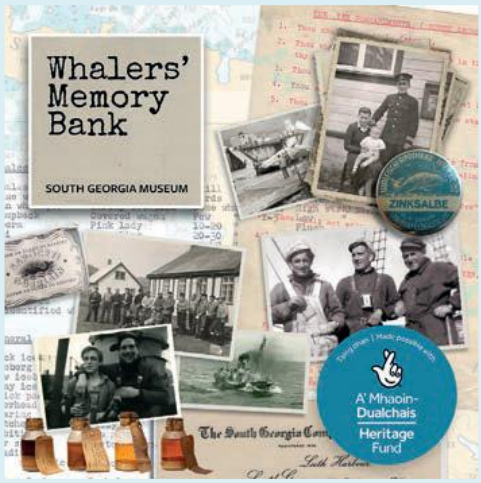
Events are taking place at our two venues, Discovery Point and V&A Dundee and include talks and screenings about Shackleton, Endurance and the work inspired by the SGA's Bob Burton to save Stromness Manager's Villa, as well as whale-themed storytelling and art activities for families.

We will also be unveiling the new Whalers' Memory Bank with historian Dan Snow. Created by South Georgia Museum the Memory Bank is a brand-new living, growing digital time capsule where veterans of the whaling industry, their families and communities have come together to share their stories with a wider audience. For more details, you can visit our dedicated webpage at sght.org/WOAW/

In 2025-26, subject to Government permission, we hope to send a team of skilled Norwegian carpenters to Stromness Whaling Station, to stabilise the Manager's Villa, the building reached by Shackleton, Worsley and Crean after their traverse of South Georgia to rescue the crew of Endurance. Without intervention this historic building is in imminent danger of collapse.

A fund to save the Villa was begun years ago by our great friend, the SGA's late Robert (Bob) Burton, and we hope to install a plaque at the Villa commemorating Bob's contribution, along with the major donors who have made the work possible. We are still fundraising for this project, as well as for installation of the Whale Memorial, Part 1 (the Key Table) at Grytviken next season.

Whale of a Weekend - 27 – 29 June



The Manager's Villa at Stromness

South Georgia Association News

Events:

Online talks: On 17 January, Dr Bruce Mair, Geologist, gave a well-received talk 'Cook's Landing – 250th Anniversary and Geology Fieldwork 200 Years On'. The talk is available on the SGA website (under the resources tab).

The Association is planning a second online talk on a different theme later in the year.

Summer event: The Association is holding an in-person, two-day event 4-5 July 2025, with the theme of Science at South Georgia. It is being hosted at British Antarctic Survey, Cambridge. For further details, see p. 4 and the SG Association website. **Bookings close on 6 June**.

Membership news: The Association currently has a paid-up membership of 160. There are 47 still to renew from January 2025, and 31 outstanding from 2024. If you are one of these – please renew!

Medal Congratulations: The Chairman and Committee would like to congratulate Sarah Lurcock on her well-deserved award of the Polar Medal earlier this year: Antarctic to 2024: Mrs Sarah Lurcock, BSc. Museum Manager, Registrar, and Postal Officer South Georgia.

Also, congratulations to Alexandra Shackleton for the award of the King Charles III Coronation Medal, by the Canadian Crown. Alexandra was honoured for her 'leadership in advancing Polar heritage', including for her James Caird Society role and for her patronage of the Shackleton Quest Expedition, which in June 2024 located the wreck of Sir Ernest's last ship' (off the coast of Newfoundland, Canada).

South Georgia Association Committee roles: The South Georgia Association is seeking new Committee members to fulfil the Treasurer and Secretary roles. These are both voluntary roles. Committee meetings are held two or three times a year (in person/zoom). Details of the existing Committee Members are available on the SG Association website.

Do join us in supporting South Georgia and bring your skills to help us take the Association into its next phase of growth. We need you, and for your part you would be giving back, deepening your knowledge of that precious jewel of the South Atlantic, and joining a lively group of likeminded people on the Committee.

The Treasurer role involves:

1) Financial control for the Association by: Operation of the Associations' bank account, book-keeping, budgeting and preparation of financial reports to the Committee, and 2) The preparation of annual accounts and liaison with the Society's auditor.

The Secretary role involves:

1) Organising Committee meetings. Discuss the agenda with Chairman and send out to the Committee, along with previous meeting minutes, and any papers. Book the meeting venue, normally Falkland House, London, along with an option to join online. Take meeting minutes, check with the Chair and distribute.

2) Organise the AGM in liaison with the Chair. This is either in May, at the Royal Over-Seas League, London, with an evening reception and speaker, or included in another SG Association event. Take minutes of the AGM, check with the Chair and distribute. 3) Administer the award of the Morag Husband Campbell Medal. Morag Husband Campbell left a legacy to SGA which has been used to cast a medal in her name and has been awarded every year since 2018 to a nominated person who has contributed to the understanding, appreciation and promotion of SG. 4) Proof read the newsletter in liaison with the Editor. 5) Act as initial point of contact for the Association.

The holders of both roles would also be expected to contribute to the Society as a Committee Member – attending Committee meetings twice yearly, the AGM and other events, and being an advocate for the Society.

For full job descriptions, and to express interest in either role, please contact the current Secretary, Fran Prince at:

(secretary@southgeorgiaassociation.org)

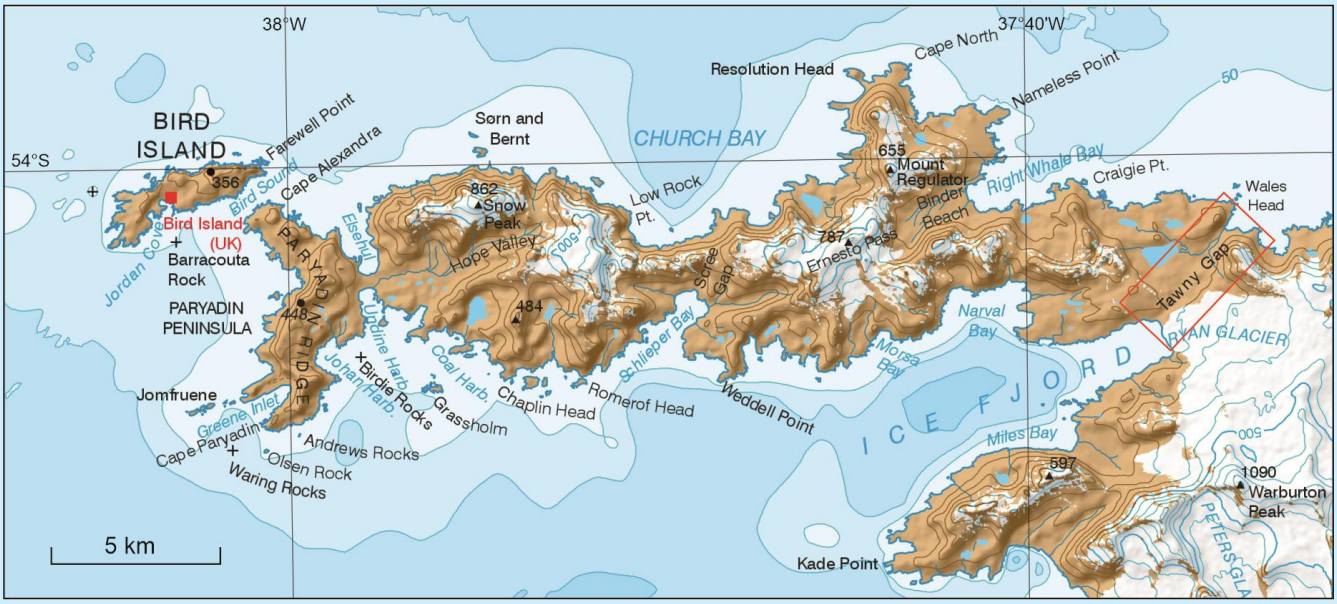
Trans-South Georgia Highway Ronald Lewis-Smith

The narrow isthmus between Elsehul and Undine Harbour, in the far north of South Georgia, is a well-known crossing point from the north to the south sides of the island for the local populations of seals and penguins. However, the distance is only about 500 m and the maximum height over the tussac-clad terrain is barely 15 m.

On 2nd January 1971, during the BAS Botanical Survey of South Georgia (1967-74), Jerry Tallowin and I landed from RRS *John Biscoe* at the north-eastern end of Ice Fjord to examine the flora and vegetation in that area of the fjord. We had several hours there but, as the coast proved rather uninteresting botanically, we headed inland up a gentle valley towards the col known as Tawny Gap, at an altitude of about 100 m.

At that time the valley was covered by the northern flank of Ryan Glacier but is now, 55 years later, totally deglaciated. While trekking up the valley it soon became clear that we were following a well-worn track in the snow which bore all the signs of seal activity. About a kilometre inland we encountered a young elephant seal, heading downhill towards the fjord.

We also noticed occasional penguin footprints, feathers and excrement along the route. When we reached the col we had a clear view down another small valley to a cove to the south of Wales Head. There were groups of elephant seals and some penguins on the small tussac-backed beach, just as there were on the beach in Ice Fjord where we had landed. It appeared that we were following an established wildlife route.



Map based on: South Georgia, 1:200,000 scale map, BAS (Misc 12A). British Antarctic Survey.

The overland distance between the two beaches is 3.5 km, while the journey by sea is approximately 75 km. The route must be quite strenuous for elephant seals, but much less so for the more active fur seals making the crossing. However, in 1970 fur seals were scarce and I don't recall seeing any on either of the two beaches, although a few dozen were seen at Undine Harbour and Schlieper Bay a couple of days earlier. Following their population explosion over the next decade it probably became a regular short-cut from north to south and vice versa. The pass possibly also served as a rat-run, literally, between the two sides of the island. It was on the previous day, at Shallop Bay, that we found the first evidence (as mouse-runs) of mice on South Georgia.

Editor's Note: Thank you to all the contibutors, and the proof readers at the South Georgia Association.

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