

## Antarctic Log: January 2005

**7 January (Friday):** Packing for two trips. Its summer in the southern hemisphere, but Antarctica is still cold and Patagonia is hot. Limo to JFK

**8 January (Saturday):** Arrive in Buenos Aires; trying to spot group members by their dress and demeanor. Bus to the Hotel. Cocktail party with short speeches. Met the Harvard rep Beverly Sullivan, the Harvard lecturers Warren and Nicki Zapol, and the Cruise Director Stefan. Warren is chief of anesthesiology at Mass General and is an expert on the diving behavior of the Weddell seal.

**9 January (Sunday)** Flight stopped in Calafate (nice clouds)



on the way to Ushuaia. We had a brief tour of town before boarding the M/V Orion.



We saw examples of the ancient Nothofagus tree here. (This is a tree that was present in Gondwanaland before plate tectonics pushed the continents apart.) Onboard the Orion, our cabin is large and nice. The ship is beautiful. Underway by 1800, out the Beagle Channel.

**10 January (Monday)** At sea, crossing the Drake Passage. Quite nice weather and quiet seas, so far! We crossed the Antarctic Convergence at about 54.5 degrees south latitude. The sea temperature dropped from 4C to about 1 C. The big Wandering Albatross is seen following the ship. Our first sighting of this famous bird. I can't make out the "dynamic soaring" they supposedly do.

**11 January (Tuesday)** Our first views of the islands off the Antarctic peninsula, and the first sighting of an iceberg. Zodiac landing on Penguin Island. Here are hundreds of Chinstrap penguins, and a few Adelie penguins. Lots of fighting and squawking. They pretty much ignore us as long as we get no closer than 4 meters. If you sit still next to

their well-worn path, they will come within two meters. They are busy with stealing pebbles from each other's nests, regurgitating food for the chicks and pooping. Red stains are "processed" krill.



*The first iceberg*



*Boarding the zodiac*



*A Gentoo pair and guest*



*Chinstrap penguins*

**12 January (Wednesday)** Landing at Larsen's Camp. The group is already getting pretty good at the zodiac landing routine. We organize in groups of ten, put on boots in the mudroom, life vests, flip the landing tag and use the two-hand grip with crew members to get into the boat. At the beach, slide to the bow, swing the legs over and wade ashore.

Here we see, Skua eating a penguin chick, big clusters of chicks, only Adelies here, blue-eyed shags colored like penguins, island dusted in snow with muddy penguin trails, sleeping Weddell seal, the adult penguins begin to "heave" for several seconds before the food comes up for the chicks. At sea, the penguins "fly" at high speed under water and "porpoise" out to breath without losing speed. One penguin porpoised into one of our empty zodiacs. He seemed pretty cool about it. The boat driver eventually lifted him out into the sea.

Warren lectured about his research on diving Weddell seals. Cool stuff. I talked about “The Southern Ocean” with emphasis on the high biological productivity.

Afternoon landing at Brown Bluff. About 100 Gentoo penguins and 1000 Adelies. Dark skuas constantly fly overhead looking for an exposed chick. Back on the ship, we hit a terrific wind storm in the Gerlache Straits. It might be a downslope of a katabatic wind.

**13 January (Thursday)** Landing on Cuvreville Island. Gentoo rookeries show no chicks. Some adults have small chicks hidden beneath; others are still eggs. These are a couple of weeks behind the earlier, more northern, colonies. A flat iceberg dropped a slab into water and oscillated slowly for several minutes with a period of 40 seconds.



*Cold water*



*Brian and Stuart doing the penguin walk*

Afternoon landing at Port Lockroy. Gentoos in large colonies and under the buildings. One Adelie wandered through the Gentoo rookery took some verbal abuse. The Gentoo babies are cute and fluffy – grey and white with orange bills while the Adelie chicks were all grey and muddy.



*Cute and fluffy Gentoos*

The station barograph showed a pressure of 990mb and steady. Such a low atmospheric pressure is typical of these high southern latitudes, in part explained by the warm stratosphere and part by the strong westerlies.

In the late afternoon, a visiting yachtsman fell into a crevasse above the station. The local post office personnel hauled him out. Stefan offered the assistance of the ship. He was brought on board. Warren, the ship's doctor and nurse Lynda Hurley tried to save him but without success. Antarctica claims another victim. The site of the accident was close to where Wilkes landed his airplane years ago. The victim was a software CEO who had made millions and was fulfilling a dream of sailing from 85 deg North to 65 deg South Latitude. He had just completed his mission and had gone to the top of a hill for photographs.

**14 January (Friday)** Landing at the closed Argentine science station Almirante Brown. Many in the group climbed to the top of a hill and slid down on the icy slope. Gene and I note that distant snow fields have a reddish tint; due to Rayleigh scattering. Afternoon landing on Melchior Island on the Pacific side of the archipelago.

**15 January (Saturday)** Visit to US/NSF Palmer Station. Warren helped to set this up. Staff noted a 8 degree warming in 50 years, and a retreat of the local glacier from Arthur Harbor. The Adelie population is dropping and Chinstraps and Gentoos moving in from the north. Also visited Torgeson Island penguin colony.



*Adelie Penguins*



*Palmer Station*

Ice in the Lemaire Channel slows our travel. We finally turn around as the zodiacs would not be able to work anyway. Good backdrop for the Yale and Harvard photos.



**16 January (Sunday)** Landing at Deception Island to see the old whaling station and airfield. At Hannah Point we saw large independent chicks. A wandering gentoo is chased away by the chinstraps, but three Macaronis are allowed to nest. Thirty or more male seals sleep on the beach. Females are still at sea. The penguins just detour around them on the beach. An adult and young humpback whale circled the ship and dove for krill while we follow in zodiacs. Their head shape is other-worldly with its white-striped baleen and lumpy snout. It's a mammal, just like us.

**17-18 January (Monday and Tuesday)** At sea across the Drake Passage. Final lectures. All together, I gave four lectures: Southern ocean, Antarctic Ice, Global Warming, and Wrap-up. I treated these lectures like a short course in high latitude geography. Some mal de mer during lecture 3. To kill time today, the Captain sailed NW, then turned east to "double" Cape Horn. Enter the Beagle Channel at 1900 hours .

**18 January (Wednesday)** Arrive Ushuaia early. Fly to BA. Goodbyes.

[Note: The ships tour staff produced an excellent log on a CD. This has a good map and great photos. Consult this for more detail.]