

Bergy Bits

The Newsletter of the Friends of Antarctica



Alan working on the vertical Whistler antenna (J. Hardy)

Busiest Port Lockroy season ever

The museum was open for the summer season between the beginning of November to the first week in March (approximately 18 weeks as compared with nearly 13 weeks with previous year). There were over 15,000 visitors (10,661 last year) and this increase was partly because the team were able to come in 6 weeks earlier in the season. During this period 42 cruise ships visited.

Approximately 75,000 pieces of mail were posted, a 56% increase from last year which is somewhat above the 41% increase in the number of visitors. With more visitors and improved shop layout sales were better than ever. Sales from the shop constitute much needed funds for the conservation of the historic sites, not just on the Peninsula, but also in the Ross Sea. Thanks go to the hard-working team: Rick, Sally, Jo, and Gerard.

In December the team was joined by conservation advisor and old base leader Alan Carroll. Alan had last been to Port Lockroy when the base was at its operational height between 1954 and 1957. Alan, while not being photographed with passengers was kept very busy sorting, recording, and placing items previously taken out of Danco Island and Prospect Point. He also found time to install a low-voltage lighting system in the radio room and bunkroom which meant that a tilly lamp no longer had to be lighted. He also undertook other vital tasks too numerous to mention.

Perhaps the highlight of the season was a visit by the Trust's Patron, HRH The Princess Royal. It formed part of an official visit to the Antarctic arranged by the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office Polar Regions Unit. The Royal visit took place on the eve of International Polar Year (2007-08) - 50 years on from International Geophysical Year (1957-58) when, her father the Duke of Edinburgh visited the Antarctic Peninsula. The Princess was accompanied by the Trust's Chairman Philippa Foster Back who was making her first visit to the Peninsula. Philippa has previously visited the Ross Sea Huts, where her grandfather Frank Debenham was a member of Captain Scott's last expedition.

Debenham went on to found the Scott Polar Research Institute.

The Princess Royal's visit to the Peninsula fitted in with a survey of the historic sites. As *HMS Endurance* was tasked with getting the royal party around the bases the "heritage team" made the most of the logistical support to visit the Historic Sites. The aim of the Survey (a joint venture between UKAHT, the British Antarctic Survey and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office) was to guide the conservation of historic sites Port Lockroy, Wordie House, Deception Island, Horseshoe Island and Stonington Island - and to assess the options for the remaining abandoned bases - Detaille Island and Damoy Point. The team was also able to visit View Point and Hope Bay. It was led by John Shears, the head of the Environment division at BAS. The other three members were Michael Morrison; conservation architect on the Ross Sea huts; Dave Burkitt, a previous Project Leader at Port Lockroy; and Brett Ahrens, a microbiologist from the University of Minnesota who has also been working on the fungal and mould growths in the Ross Sea huts. Brett was also particularly interested to look at the American 1939 East Base at Stonington.

The team was picked up from the Falkland Islands and spent four weeks completing the survey, the majority of the time being spent on board *HMS Endurance* but with nights ashore at Stonington, Lockroy and Deception Island. There was sufficient time for a reasonably detailed condition survey of the main hut at all the sites and for an inspection of all the other structures, the kennels, balloon sheds, emergency stores, anemometer towers etc which are a major contributor to the character of these sites.

There is much to be done at all the sites with an urgent need for repairs to several of the huts. Detaille Island was a particularly fascinating site very little disturbed since it was abandoned in 1959. The report due out soon, will form the basis of a long-term, 10 year Heritage Strategy for the old bases.



Our Chairman, Our Patron (Laphot, K. Whybrow, *HMS Endurance*)



Horseshoe (M. Morrison)



Detaille (M. Morrison)

And now for two more out of the ordinary trips by Friends of Antarctica:

Jean Makin travelled aboard the *Kapitan Khlebnikov* with Quark Expeditions from Ushuaia to Lyttleton anti-clockwise. Here she recounts her journey.

A semi-circumnavigation of the Great White Continent must be the ultimate goal of all Antarctic addicts. Few adventurers sail beyond the Peninsula, but our ice-breaker was heading for the Bellingshausen and Amundsen Seas enroute for the Ross Ice Shelf and the historic huts. Leaving civilisation far away we were told we were one of the most remote and isolated vessel on the planet.

As it grew wondrously cold and cathedral icebergs towered off port and starboard bows, through the great Antarctic white, appeared dark shapes... cliffs then glaciers, ice-falls and mists. We had 'found' Peter 1 Island in the Bellingshausen Sea. Fewer than 800 people have ever set foot on this remote island. And we could see why – only the first few got to land the then the excursion had to be aborted because of icebergs approaching the ship.

Six long days' passage through the Bellingshausen and Amundsen Seas, rarely visited because of their remoteness, persistent pack-ice, fog, katabatic winds from the continental ice sheet, were punctuated by stimulating lectures by the team of Antarctic experts. Flights aloft aboard our two helicopters afforded breath-taking views of the KK as she ploughed through the pack-ice to create leads.

Behind schedule due to unpredictable early summer pack ice many times we were forced to change course to find a passage to open sea. Planned landings at Siple Island and Cape Colbeck were impossible. Located on what is known as the Phantom Coast, the least explored coastline of Antarctica, they had to remain a mystery to us.

Orcas off the port bow on Day 16 heralded our approach to the Bay of Whales and the great Ice Barrier – the Ross Ice Shelf; equivalent to the size of France with mile upon mile of immense vertical cliffs over 30 metres high and exceeding 200 metres below the water line. At 9pm, the Captain gave permission to land us by helicopter on this barren, pristine wilderness where the only signs of civilization were bottles and glasses of champagne placed in the ice by our first-



Cape Evans Interior (M. Morrison)



Cape Evans Biology Meteorology Lab (C. Brentnall)



Cape Evans Butter Store (C. Brentnall)

footing expedition team for a celebration toast!

At the Southern extent of Ross Island lie the spectacular Dry Valleys, a 20 minute flight from the ship which was now 'garaged' in the ice for two days. A seldom-visited region of Antarctica where virtually no precipitation has fallen for millions of years. A desert wasteland with unusual granite formations eroded by katabatic winds from the pole and mountain glaciers coloured by sand and rock blown in the ice. They are the nearest known conditions that could be encountered on the planet Mars. In these latitudes, in the

summer the sun never really sets. It dips down to the horizon for a few minutes and proceeds to rise again. With blue skies over Mount Erebus and a cabaret provided by resident Emperor and Adelie penguins our two days were idyllic. Day 19 arrived and was to be another highlight of my expedition ... the historic huts!

Shackleton's Nimrod Hut at Cape Royds is being carefully restored by the NZAHT and their representative was at the entrance allowing eight visitors at a time to enter after removing debris from boots. The hut stands in a sheltered area of volcanic rock near an Adelie penguin colony. Everyday life is portrayed in shelves of tins and bottles, packing case bunks, socks on the line, waistcoat and mittens, boots and domestic implements all once warmed by Mrs Sam's stove. His signature survives on one packing case. There was a sense of light and hope in the Boss's hut.

In contrast Scott's Terra Nova Hut at Cape Evans holds a great sadness. Bigger but darker than Shackleton's hut, 12 visitors are allowed inside, this was where my great heroes had lived and their spirits filled the hut. Ponting's famous photographs came alive. There was the

wardroom table, the Tenements, Scott's cubicle and desk, Atkinson's laboratory, Ponting's darkroom and the galley with Edwardian provisions. Alone for a few moments in the stables I could imagine Oates tending the ponies. All the accounts I have read over the years of Scott's expeditions could not really prepare me for the reality of what he and his men endured. Though abandoned there is a feeling of habitation in this historic shrine to human endeavour.

At Cape Adare surrounded by a colony of an estimated population of 250,000 Adelies stands the 1900 hut of Borchgrevink, the first building erected on the Continent. A tiny hut that only permitted four visitors, it was hard to imagine that it once housed ten explorers!

The wonder of these sites may be lost to future generations if we don't act now to protect them. Antarctica changed by life. A momentous voyage with great companions all sharing in an unforgettable experience.

And now the least visited of the historic huts..... a visit to Mawson's Huts, Cape Denison, Commonwealth Bay by Robin Macdonald

I have always been keen to visit areas rarely visited by other people and an opportunity to be on the first cruise ship to visit Commonwealth Bay for some years was no exception. The Spirit of Enderby an ex-Russian research vessel operated by Heritage Expeditions sailed from Dunedin on 5th December 2006.

Sir Douglas Mawson set up camp at Cape Denison during the 1911-14 Australasian Antarctic Expedition and the huts there are now scheduled Historic Site and Monument 13. Mawson described the area around Commonwealth Bay as one of the windiest places in Antarctica. Our arrival there certainly seemed to confirm this. A deep depression to the north produced gale force winds and after waiting off shore overnight the winds had not improved so we sailed east along the Mertz Glacier which now extends much further into the Southern Ocean than when Mawson's expedition explored it over 95 years ago.

After a number of aborted attempts over a couple of days, at last we received a welcome radio message from The Mawson's Huts Foundation working party that the winds had died away completely so we hurriedly made preparations for a visit ashore.

The wait certainly proved worthwhile as the weather provided one of those magical days when Antarctica is seen in all its glory. Clear skies, no wind and views as far as the horizon it was certainly a day to make sure protection from the sun was fully in place.

So far the Foundation has sent six

major expeditions to the huts in the last ten years and on this visit had renovated the roof of both the living hut and the adjoining workshop so that both are now secure and snow cannot enter. The work had been carried out using the exact dimension and cut of the tongue and groove Baltic pine boards from the same company in Finland that Mawson's original supplier in Australia used in 1911. It was very hard to see the difference between the original and new wood. When they had started their work it had been necessary to use a chain saw to remove blocks of frozen snow so that they could gain access.

The original fabric of the hut laid down remains in place and the re-cladding has been carefully placed over the top of this, hopefully preventing further ingress of ice and snow. The innovative over-cladding design being employed for this project will protect the original roof by encasing it in new materials that are in keeping with the original timber style and which can be removed in future to allow access to the original material. This work is being carried out with the full support of the Australian Government which had given a \$320,000 grant as well as considerable logistical support provided by the Australian Government Antarctic Division. (See www.mawsons-huts.org.au for more historic and modern views)

The living hut has suffered the loss of some of the contents over the years and whilst this is very sad it is possible some of them may appear at some time in the future as they include the table. Despite the losses there were still many items of great interest including the dark room where photographs had been developed and some of the chemicals are in bottles which still carry readable labels. A pair of trousers hanging on a nail in the centre of the room looked as though they had been recently hung and a large supply of reading material was stacked as it would have been at the time of the expedition. Various items of stores were still in place on shelves as they would have been all those years ago and on another side of the room more stores including bottles were just visible through the ice and will emerge over



Alexine at Mawson's Huts (R. Macdonald)



Inside Mawson's Hut (R. Macdonald)

the next few years. Mawson's personal room is probably much as it was when last used by the explorer with a spool of thread on a shelf by the entrance giving it 'a lived in feel'.

The new roof will provide good protection for the contents and allow the interior to gradually become free of snow when other interesting bits of history will come into view. Most of the other historical items were buried in snow at the time of my visit, including the magnetic hut which is believed to be in a state of collapse, but the rusting remains of opened tins could be seen just to the north of the workshop.

Several years ago a working party renovated the Memorial Cross which was erected in the memory of Ninnis and Mertz who lost their lives in a journey across the ice. The views over the area from this point are stunning and a fitting place for a memorial to these two brave men.

By midnight the temperature was dropping quickly as the sun reached its low point in the sky and it was time to return to the ship and set sail for our next destination. It had been a great privilege to visit this rarely visited piece of Antarctic history.



Mawson's huts (D. Killick, MHP)



New Roof Cladding (R. Macdonald)

The Newsletter of the Friends of Antarctica

Help us save Scott's hut, Cape Evans

Now that the future of Shackleton's hut is secure (thanks to the Audrey Dance estate (see BB23) and the conservation work well underway the Trustees and other friends are focusing on an urgent appeal to raise £3 million to save Scott's Hut. This will pay for the conservation of the hut structure and its 8,000 heroic age artefacts.

We've had an excellent start. On 23 February the Culture Minister David Lammy announced a pledge of £250,000, to be jointly funded by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to kick-start the UKAHT's campaign to restore Scott's Hut at Cape Evans. This pledge represents an about-turn in the Government's attitude to supporting the project, as they had previously maintained no government funds were available and was warmly welcomed by Philippa Foster-Back.

We still have a long way to go and for this new major appeal we have employed Alison Hope, a professional fundraiser, who will work with us on a part-time basis to raise money from trusts, companies and individual donors.

If you would like to support the Campaign to Save Scott's Hut please send a donation to the UKAHT office. If you do have any suggestions or contacts who you think might be interested in supporting this particular project do let us know! **Alison can be contacted on tel: 0117 9244951 or Alison@ukaht.org**

Meanwhile work will continue through the winter at Shackleton's hut at Cape Royds. The conservation team will be kept busy by some interesting new finds made during the latest Antarctic summer work season. They were discovered while snow and ice were being cleared out from under the hut. These included: a woollen undershirt labelled Bertram Armytage, an Australian member of the Nimrod expedition; rubber and felt boots still lined with straw to insulate the team's feet; a complete dog harness; several

crates of matches; and two pristine crates labelled Mackinlay's Rare Old Whisky.

Whyte & Mackay, who now own the Mackinlay brand, still proudly possess the letter Shackleton wrote in June 1907, acknowledging the whisky which the Mackinlay company had donated to his expedition. So far the team has refrained from sampling the whisky!



Mackinlay's Whisky (P Terry, NZAHT)

The specialised carpentry and conservation work teams carried out many other jobs at

Cape Royds over the summer. The carpenters completed recovering the roof. After removing all the accumulated ice from under the hut, they inspected the subfloor framing and repaired it where needed. They then installed a protective membrane to stop melt water flowing under the hut and refreezing. They repaired parts of the exterior timber cladding, the steps at the main entrance, dog kennels and pony fodder boxes, and doors, windows and shutters as required.

The conservators worked on site to conserve fragile glassware, large items such as the Mrs Sam stove and the acetylene lighting plant, and other items which could be conveniently treated there. In addition they put back in their correct places the 730 items which had been conserved over the preceding winter at the Scott Base lab, and packed some 400 items to be conserved in the lab over the coming winter.

Dates for your diary...

With the onset of the International Polar Year there are lots of activities planned....

National Maritime Museum- Freeze Frame: Burning Issues - 5-week polar lecture series - Saturdays, 2-30 June 15.15-17.30, £30/£20

The National Maritime Museum celebrates International Polar Year 2007 with an engaging programme of events including an exhibition of pioneering polar photography, a polar film season and this series of talks by explorers, artists, historians and scientists. Covering cultural, social, environmental and historical responses to the polar regions, the talks aim to uncover this fast-disappearing and final imaginary place on Earth. For more details contact 020 8312 8560 or see www.nmm.ac.uk/server/show/ConWebDoc.21493

Natural History Museum - Ice Station Antarctica

25 May 2007 - 6 April 2008, £7

A family exhibition put together by the Natural History Museum in partnership

with British Antarctic Survey. Using a combination of stunning, high quality visual imagery, interactive activities and real Antarctic objects, the exhibition will create a series of mini-environments for visitors to explore. Families will get to grips with a variety of exciting Antarctic challenges (under the guidance of the Base Commander), from coping in sub-zero temperatures and riding a skidoo to collecting ice cores. They'll meet Antarctica wildlife, experience some of the extreme nature of the continent and explore the skills it takes to work in, and care for, this frozen frontier. More details on

www.nhm.ac.uk/visit-us/whats-on/coming-soon/ice-station-antarctica/index.html

With Scott to the Pole - The RGS exhibition of Ponting's photographs is touring Hampshire's museums from May to December. Contact Hampshire Museums Service for more details. The exhibition is available for hire by contacting the RGS.

Port Lockroy has come a long way from its wilderness years between 1962 and 1996. Below we reproduce a memoir from Captain Heinz Aye.

Since 1977 I have been travelling to Antarctica. On each voyage I visited Port Lockroy with the ship's carpenter, boatswain and 2 AB's. Until 1995 we always needed to close the windows and use wooden planks to block up the broken windows. We shovelled

out the snow and noted water dropping from the ceiling in the sleeping room. We made notes in the wet dairy book, and took documentary pictures. For me it was always a special feeling when I left Antarctica at the end of the season knowing the abandoned station was prepared for the coming winter. But as the years went by items got 'lost'; one of the two generators, parts from skis, kitchen equipment, records, parts from the radio room, even one of

the guest books. So how happy I was happy when in 1996 the British Antarctic Survey began its renovation. It is especially pleasing to know that Rick Atkinson, who worked on that renovation is now the Project Leader.

Captain Aye has now completed 104 voyages to the Antarctic, carrying over 12,000 passengers, always as Captain and Icmaster on tour ships. His name is commemorated under the name 'Ayekliff' on James Ross Island.

Friends of Antarctica

New Annual Subscription Rate...

After 12 years without change we now feel that we must raise our annual subscription level from £20 to £25. If you pay by cheque or standing order, enclosed with this newsletter is a form. We have looked into taking Direct Debit but it was overly expensive for the relatively small numbers of subscriptions we receive. But it does make putting the subs up more problematic! So please fill in the form and return it. Standing order is by the far the most cost effective way for us to receive your contribution.

Re-vamped website

If you are already on the email list you should have heard about the re-vamping of our website just before Christmas. We are still very much part of the coalition of Antarctic Heritage Trusts and you can reach the site via www.heritage-antarctica.org or www.ukaht.org. You can now make a donation for Captain Scott's Hut online.

Electronic Bergy Bits

Another way to cut our admin. costs would be for you to receive Bergy Bits by email to printout and read. I know that lots of us still prefer to receive journals by post so do not feel in any way obliged to go for this option. And if you have gone for this option already and don't like it, please let me know.

Tax-deductible subs for USA

For US tax payers we have set up an arrangement whereby your donation /s ubscription can be tax-deductible for amounts over US\$250. If you are an annual member you may like to consider paying for five years in advance. For more details please contact the office on info@ukaht.org or +44 1291 690305.

New Leaflet

We have now produced a new 'Friends of Antarctica' leaflet mainly for UK use. For Port Lockroy we will integrate the existing visitor leaflet with the Friends of Antarctica leaflet to minimise on paper and confusion. Be in touch if you would like leaflets to distribute.