

## The Alpine Club Antarctica Expedition 2010 – Summary Report

The Alpine Club Antarctic Peninsula Expedition 2010 was a seven-man expedition, led by Phil Wickens, and achieved six first ascents on the Antarctic Peninsula, including what may have been the highest unclimbed peak on the northern mainland of the Peninsula.

The team, consisting of Derek Buckle, Mike Fletcher, Stuart Gallagher, Richmond MacIntyre, Oliver Metherell, Phil Wickens and Dave Wynne-Jones, sailed from Ushuaia in Argentina aboard Spirit of Sydney, a 60ft Aluminium ex-racing yacht, to the Antarctic Peninsula. The team left Ushuaia on 24th November and returned late on 22nd December.

Crossing the Drake Passage, which takes about four days on a vessel such as Spirit of Sydney proved challenging for those with any tendency for sea-sickness (only one member of the team was not sick!) and it was with delight that land was sighted four days later. The highest gusts noticed were 65 knots - not extreme by Southern Ocean standards. All members of the team were expected to crew and take turns on watch, with a 3 hours on, 6 hours off roster throughout the voyages.

After a day anchored at Port Lockroy, and a warm-up ascent of nearby Jabet Peak, the team sailed to the southern sector of the Lemaire Channel. A potential landing site had been identified on aerial photos which proved to be viable and, from there (where) they travelled inland for two days up the Hotine Glacier to establish a camp on the glacier at 850m).

All except one member were on skis, with one of the skiers using short skis (blades). Overall there proved to be little advantage/disadvantage in terms of overall speed. In descent the skis were clearly faster, though this was often offset by the time taken to deal with skins. In general it was felt that the longer skis were best option. The blades did not seem to work well since they did not provide the glide or crevasse protection (spreading the weight over larger area) of the longer skis yet still had the issues of applying and removing skins/harscheisen etc.

Each members food fuel and equipment was split between a rucksack and a waterproof smooth-sided bag. The bag was hauled with a 1.6, plastic pipe over 4mm cord. attached to the base of the rucksack. The pipe provided sufficient stiffness in the system to deter the bag from fouling the skis in descent. A spinner (Black Diamond rotor or equivalent) was used to prevent the system from twisting. This system proved sufficiently robust for this trip, but the bags showed some wear by the end of the trip, and were no longer water tight. (They had also been used as solar stills, so losing their water-proofness was inconvenient.

The seven team members were split between three tents. Rations consisted of Argentinian sourced porridge/muesli mix for breakfast, muesli and chocolate bars during the day, and dehydrated meal brought from UK as main meal in the evening. Cooking was carried out on hanging gas stoves in the tents. It was necessary to melt snow to for drinking water. Black plastic bags as solar stills to accelerate melting of snow. Overall the team was achieving a fuel efficiency of approximately 5 man days per 220g gas container, mainly using Primus pans sets with built-in heat exchanger.

From this camp the team made the first ascent of Nygren (1,454m), which gave relatively straightforward climbing, with short steps of 60 degree ice and an unnamed peak that is erroneously referred to as Mt Shackleton on a new British Antarctic Survey map.

Shackleton has been climbed a number of times in recent years but 'False Shackleton' remained virgin. The climbers have proposed the name Mt Faraday for this 1,476m peak, after the nearby, former British Antarctic Survey base. The route up 'False Shackleton' took line up the north face somewhat to the east of the summit to avoid seracs, and to be well clear of a section of the face which had recently avalanched. The face was generally at about 45 degrees, with some complexities and steeper sections to avoid crevasses on the face.

Then, in perfect visibility they made the first ascent of Mt Matin via the South West Ridge.

This peak, which was named by the French explorer Charcot after a newspaper, had been designated an altitude of 1,369m on existing maps. The team found it to be more than 1,000m higher at 2,415m, making it possible the highest summit on the northern Peninsula mainland (Parry and Francais to the north are higher but lie on islands). The route itself was a straightforward ski ascent - skis were removed only for a section of a few hundred metres in ascent. The decent from the summit to camp ( approx 1600 vertical meters) was done entirely on skis and made for a memorable run. That day was also memorable for the coldness of the day. Though the visibility was perfect there was a stiff wind on the summit, with estimated air temperature of about -20 degrees C. In these conditions windchill is extreme. Several members used self-combusting heat pads in boots and gloves that day to retain adequate temperature of extremities.

Camp was then moved to the coll at approx 500m between My Nygren and Mt Cloos, Mt Cloos forms the steep east side of the Lemaire Channel, and ascents were made of both south and north summits. The latter,

and higher, gave several pitches of steep and objectively threatened climbing through an active serac barrier. By coincidence the owners of Spirit of Sydney had been looking at Mt Cloos from their anchorage when the team reached the summit and were able to photograph a team member on the top from several miles away.

The team then returned to the same place in Deloncle Bay where they had been dropped and were collected by the yacht Spirit of Sydney. After a rest day and recuperative excursions in the Spirit of Sydney's sea kayaks the team then sailed to the south side of the Ferguson Channel at the entrance to Paradise Harbour, where they made an ascent of Banck. which proved to be a very straightforward ski peak, which Phil Wickens skied down from the summit.

Then it was on to Andvord Bay to make the first ascent of Inverleith (2,038m) via the broken north face. This was a well-known objective and another high virgin peak close to the coast. The weather forecasts indicated a short weather window in which to make the ascent, so it was with the wind gusting to 55 knots that five of the team were dropped at Steinheil Point, and dragged a camp up to about 650m. With strong winds still prevailing a spot somewhat sheltered by a spur of Dallmeyer Peak was chosen as camp. High walls were built around the tents to offer further shelter. Next morning the team ascended to coll between Dallmayer and Inverleith, then left the skis and climbed approx 1000m up the face, finding a route through seracs and crevasses to a shoulder at the edge of a classic whale-back shaped summit. There remained about 300 meters of altitude to gain over a couple of miles in soft snow to an indistinct high point. Descent was by the same route. There were a few minor penetrations of crevasses with arms and legs on ascent and descent, but no significant falls.

Radio contact with the yacht indicated that bad weather was expected to arrive next day so next morning, so the team descended next morning to Steinheil to be collected by Spirit of Sydney. True to expectation the weather turned, by then the yacht was comfortably anchored at Port Lockroy and the team was enjoying a veritable feast.

After two days the forecast indicated that conditions in the Drake Passage were likely to be suitable for our return so we set sail for Cape Horn. The return leg was less challenging in terms of sea-sickness, but included a very near miss with a humpback whale which surfaced directly in front of the boat, and was only avoided by swift evasive action by the skipper. The whale song of the animal was clearly audible in the boat as we passed within inches of it.

In summary the expedition was extremely successful in terms of achieving our mountaineering objectives, and safely operating in the Antarctic environment. The experience and expertise of the owners of Spirit of Sydney were crucial to safety, and the excellent food and hospitality aboard meant that the team was on top form. The level of productivity of the team was also in part due to favourable weather condition during the time in Antarctica, and the fact that the team established camps some distance ashore which positioned them to make best use of time when the weather was marginal.

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