

# ANTARCTICA AND THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

TRAVELLERS' CLUB MEETING 4<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2008



Lindsay Vowels came up especially from Melbourne to give her address to twenty-eight of us on a lovely day in May.

Lindsay is a veteran of our Society's study tours where it was noted that she liked using her camera (our club really likes photos). She mentioned that she came home with 900 plus shots from the Antarctic adventure.

Lindsay began:-

- (a) by confessing an interest in Antarctica from childhood (1957 Geophysical Year)
- (b) by listing numerous topics, aspects and issues that define a continuing public interest in the frozen continent (from whaling and oil deposits to nature conservation & global warming) due to media reports about scientific research & exploration
- (c) by protesting that she was a humble, unqualified yet interested amateur addressing an audience of highly qualified experts.

Well, Lindsay, with this intro you have inadvertently established your credentials and high level qualifications as a Traveller which is what the club is really about (not expertise or academic achievement).

The address was an account of a boat tour in late February 2007 which required special layered warm clothing; covered 3,944 nautical miles in 20 days, encountered average wind force of 4 but not allowed on deck during force 7/8; experienced temperature ranges from minus 13 to plus 12 degrees Celsius, included many side trips on shore, involved continuous learning from observation and enjoyable tuition. From the vibes transmitted by our speaker, the tour proved an absolute glitch free delight.

“Polar Star”, a converted Swedish ice-breaker, out from Halifax, registered in Bermuda, ready to set out from Ushuaia in Patagonia was “a nice neat little ship ...comfortable”. Everyone on board spoke English:- 87 passengers (60% UK, 30% US), Polish captain, Australian chef and doctor, a staff of academically qualified experts mostly British (scientists, historian, German geologist, Australian marine biologist etc), obliging helpful crew members one of whom (from Newfoundland) played his guitar every night. The equipment included zodiac motorized dinghies/tenders to ferry 10 at a time to and from land and a superb library of Antarctica themed books, audio-visual documentaries and movies including Frank Hurley’s Shackleton, Gregory Peck’s Moby Dick, and Al Gore’s An Inconvenient Truth.

The voyage ranged from 54 degrees south latitude (Ushuaia) through the Beagle & Drake passages to the South Shetland Islands 64 degrees latitude, then via the Antarctic Peninsula (Deception and other islands) to the South Orkneys 60 degrees latitude, South Georgia 55 degrees, the Falklands 52 degrees and back to Argentina’s province of Patagonia (Ushuaia). Lindsay owned up to only one episode of feeling scared – some parts of the voyage required ice-breaking by the ship which in no way disturbed the comfort of the passengers – throughout the voyage sea sickness was absent.

WILDLIFE was everywhere to be seen. “The Albatross is magic to watch and we saw so many other birds”. The staff and passenger bird watchers generously helped out so within a couple of days Lindsay could identify different birds, dolphins, different types of whales and seals, and penguins, penguins, penguins. Moulting elephant seals, leopard seals feasting on penguins and the stench of droppings when going ashore – too many seals.



ICEBERGS surrounded the ship for 11 days and their amazing colors and shapes provided “an Art Gallery floating past your window”

VULCANOLOGY and geology was explained via lectures, diagrams and experiences on shore especially at Deception Island where the group swam in the hot springs inside a caldera (volcano) that is predicted to reactivate sooner or later (1959 saw the last activity and abandonment of the whaling settlement).

HISTORY and heritage remnants were seen at almost every landfall. The Scandinavians, particularly Norwegian whalers, preceded the British in Antarctica and Lindsay showed us their abandoned buildings and mentioned their explorations several times in particular Larsen’s stone hut on Pilot Island and the sinking of his ship “Antarctica”. The British settlements in South Georgia and the Falklands recall Shackleton (whose grave is in South Georgia) and the 1984 war with Argentina.

ANTARCTIC PENINSULA seemed to be the highlight/climax of the voyage with five landings (cold! Minus 13 degrees) including Halfmoon, Snowhill, Deception , Devils Islands and Browns Bluff where there was a whiteout/zero visibility due to white fog. Lindsay mentioned her skill in boarding/disembarking from Zodiacs and the beauty of the icebergs during a Zodiac cruise.

SCIENTIFIC BASES included the Argentine scientists on Halfmoon (suspected of secret oil drilling); the British scientists at Signy in the South Orkney islands and at South Georgia. They have 15 month contracts – two summers and a winter. Research projects include tracking migration patterns of seabirds and Patagonian tooth fish, the plankton lifestyle, the nutrition of penguins. Meteorology, geology, the breeding and migratory patterns of the royal southern albatross.

FALKLAND ISLANDS very loyal and very British (don't mention Argentina) – a British colony since 1611, economy based on livestock farming –capital Stanley is “like stepping into a 1920s Agatha Christie village”.

There was an interested discussion by several audience members who had been there.

Lindsay's conclusion was an encouragement to visit Antarctica which provides both adventure/stimulation on land/ice and relaxation on the ship looking at wildlife and icebergs passing by. She invited us to look at her printed photos during afternoon tea.

Thank you Lindsay! All those tutorials, field trips, observations, photos, audio-visuals on site, plus today's presentation have earned you the Travclub diploma in Antarctic Studies – congratulations!

'Ela Taranto