



A yacht-based expedition to **The Antarctic Peninsula**

January 4 – February 1 2018

Skiing, sea-kayaking and wildlife-watching, based on the legendary

Pelagic Australis

Possibilities for ice climbing, snowshoeing and mountaineering





Neumayer Channel, with Mt Francais on the left

THE LURE OF ANTARCTICA

In 2013, after several visits to the subantarctic island of South Georgia, I finally achieved a thirty-years old dream and visited the Antarctic continent itself, aboard Skip Novak's famous 74 ft purpose-built high latitudes yacht *Pelagic Australis*. Our nine person team made several ski ascents in the northern part of the Antarctic Peninsula amidst the most spectacular scenery I have witnessed anywhere. I enjoyed the experience so much that I had to go back in 2016. That expedition was even *more* enjoyable, so I intend to return again in January 2018. To make this possible, I need to fill **eight places** on the boat. And to secure that slot before someone else grabs it, I need three or four people to commit *very soon*.



Ice arch near Hovgaard Island

ACTIVITIES ON OFFER

This will be a fantastic adventure. First of all, it is a chance to experience ocean sailing on a superlative boat, with an extremely experienced skipper and crew. Guests are encouraged to help with sailing the boat, and everyone does watches during the crossing of Drake Passage from Chile to Antarctica, which usually takes three days.



Compared to many yachts operating in the area, *Pelagic Australis* is spacious and well equipped. Everyone gets his or her own comfortable bunk in a heated cabin. Communal areas include a large, warm, dry pilot house on deck and below deck a large saloon and galley with room to sit



Kayaking in the Argentine Islands, near Vernadsky base.

variety of sites. For experienced skiers, this is a fantastic opportunity for off-piste skiing at the seaside, with the occasional penguin for audience. Needless to say, there are no ski lifts, so we have to climb – usually on skins – to earn our descents. The latter could be anything from a quick couple of hundred metres down a gentle slope before lunch, to a big day out on Mt Français, which one American guest summarised gleefully last year as 'Two-thousand-two-hundred vertical of powder. Wow!' (And that was metres, not feet).

Mt Français was a serious expedition, with a 30 kilometres approach and overall round trip of four days. My inclination for 2018 is to concentrate more on relaxed day trips from the boat. These could vary from a gentle 90 minutes up-and-down on Cuverville Island to an eight hours round trip up and down Mt Scott, which must be one of the finest ski mountains in the world.



The skipper doing his first ever ice climb, near Vernadsky base.

everyone round the dining table. There is a large stock of both preserved food and fresh meat, cheese, fruit and vegetables on board, plus plentiful stocks of soft drinks, beer and wine. Although the crew are always excellent cooks, guests are encouraged to help with cooking too.

This is our floating base camp. Once we get to the Peninsula she will take us to a series of stunningly beautiful anchorages. Unlike passengers on large cruise ships, we have the chance to go ashore frequently and spontaneously, to a huge

For those who do not ski (and those who do) there are lots of other activities. Many happy hours can be spent just soaking up the transcendent scenery and watching the abundant seals, penguins, whales and other wildlife. There is also a chance to experience Antarctica's fascinating exploration heritage at the Port Lockroy museum, and at other bases such as Vernadsky, where the ozone hole was first discovered. The calm channels on the Peninsula are perfect terrain for the boat's two sea kayaks. (In 2013 we spent a wonderful morning kayaking amongst the icebergs to visit an Adelie penguin colony near the Argentine Islands). There are also snowshoes on board and there is the possibility of trying some ice climbing.

If our team includes any experienced ski mountaineers wanting to tackle something fairly ambitious,



Ski approach to Mt Luigi di Savoia



Perfect powder on Mount Scott

I hope that there will be a chance for me to settle some personal unfinished business and climb Mt Luigi di Savoia. Having tried it twice unsuccessfully, I am very keen to get to the top of this magnificent peak above Port Lockroy. This would involve pulling sledges, with a tent and supplies for one overnight camp, followed by a climb on crampons to the summit and back, and a beautiful ski descent back to the boat.

If people were really keen for a longer camping trip, I would be very happy to do another trip up Mt Français, highest peak in the area, or another of the peaks on Anvers Island. Or perhaps Brabant Island.

The great thing about travelling on an independent yacht is that we can be really flexible and maximise the possibilities for everyone to have a good time. And we could include a self-contained team of two or three mountaineers more keen on technical climbing than skiing.



Returning to 'Access Point' after an ascent of Mt Français

When it comes to the return passage, the skipper always tries to pick a promising weather window. If that means arriving back in the Beagle Channel with a day or two to spare, it is a great opportunity to spend some time amongst the forests, fjords and islands of Tierra del Fuego.

REQUIREMENTS FOR SKIERS

On an ideal day, on the easiest slopes, with a well-packed snow crust, we could find short descents equivalent to a simple red run in the Alps. However, anyone wishing to enjoy these potential runs needs skis with touring (randonnée) bindings and skins, for the uphill work. And needs to know how to use them! (If you are a masochistic free heel purist, Telemark skis are also fine). As virtually every inch of terrain in Antarctica is crevassed glacier, each skier will also need a climbing harness with emergency rescue kit (prussik loops, slings, karabiners etc).

Anyone hoping to attempt more ambitious ascents and descents, will need to be a competent off-piste skier, with experience of alpine or equivalent ski touring, and some experience of basic



An afternoon run below Mt Luigi di Savoia



Summit team on Mt Scott with Lemaire Channel behind

alpine mountaineering (ie climbing with ice axe and crampons). If you are a good skier but have not yet done any touring, it is perfectly possible – in a week's training this coming winter – to acquire the requisite experience.

If you are keen on the potential skiing, but unsure of how you will cope, the best thing is to discuss it with me now. On past trips virtually everyone has coped well and enjoyed the skiing. However we have had a couple of guests who were not entirely realistic about their abilities and had to drop out of the skiing excursions. (They still had a very good time, just without the skiing). If you sign up for the expedition I will send a full kit list and can advise you about helpful suppliers.



REQUIREMENTS FOR NON SKIERS

If you have no skiing experience – or no desire to ski – this is still a wonderful way to see the Antarctic Peninsula. Apart from good health and a willingness to live for four weeks at fairly close quarters with up to fourteen people, no special qualifications are required. Pelagic crews are always extremely experienced and pride themselves on organising interesting shore trips.

In addition to going ashore in the Zodiac, kayaking is a fantastic way of getting close to stunningly beautiful ice floes and wildlife. The only equipment you will need – apart from a camera with many Gigabytes of memory – is standard cold weather protective clothing and warm boots. (Pelagic Expeditions provides foul weather sailing gear). Again, if you sign up for the expedition I will send a full kit list and can advise you about helpful suppliers.



PELAGIC AUSTRALIS
Pelagic Australis is probably the best-known commercial yacht operating in the Southern Ocean, purpose-built for expedition support work, with ample storage space for mountaineering equipment, comfortable accommodation, a large convivial saloon, excellent galley, lavish larder and well-stocked wine cellar. She also has a powerful motor to supplement the sailing rig and ensure that no-one ever misses his flight

connections on the journey home. The lifting keel also enables her to anchor or tie up in very shallow waters sometimes inaccessible to other boats.

For detailed specifications and the full story of the Pelagic fleet, visit <http://www.pelagic.co.uk>

WEATHER AND CONDITIONS

We will be sailing in early January – high summer in Antarctica, when all the channels on the west side of the Peninsula *should* be clear of sea ice, and the weather is generally very good. On the February 2013 trip we had mixed weather initially, but that was followed by a week of unbroken sunshine. At sea level the temperature can often be well above freezing during the day; in 2013 it was so fine one day that we all went swimming. (Well, I managed three strokes). Snow conditions ranged from immaculate powder high up to perfect spring snow at sea level.



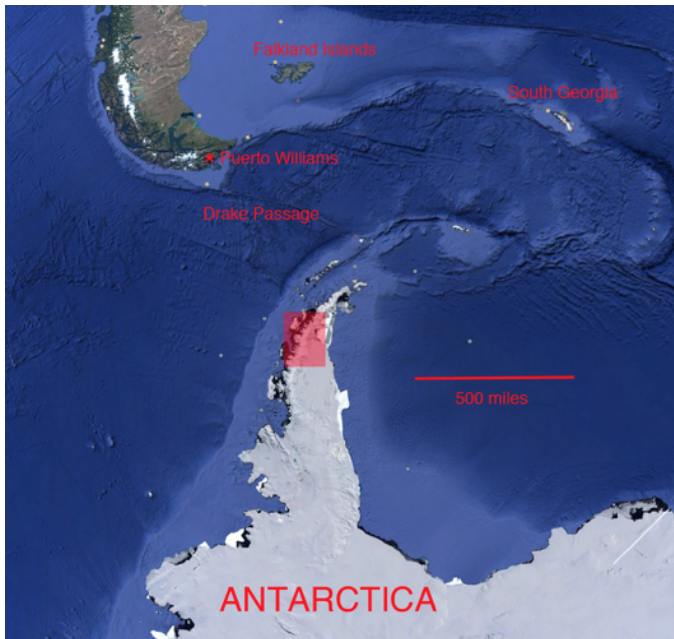
Pelagic Australis parked on sea ice at Port Lockroy



In January 2016 there was much more ice in the channels, so some plans had to be revised as we went along, but we still managed a satisfyingly full programme.

The notorious Drake Passage can be trying. In 2016 stormy weather delayed our outward departure by a couple of days, but once we were clear of the South American continent conditions were not too rough. On the return trip we motored past Cape Horn in a dead calm. In the

sheltered channels on the Peninsula conditions are normally very calm, sails are furled and we motor everywhere.



EXPEDITION TIMETABLE

This is only a **very rough guide** to our schedule, based on previous expeditions. The exact programme we eventually follow could be completely different, depending on weather, and on the composition and ambitions of the party. This is merely a suggestion of possibilities, based on what worked well in 2013 and 2016.

Jan 4 Arrive Puerto Williams from Punta Arenas. Board *Pelagic Australis*.

Jan 5 - 7 Sail from Puerto Williams to cross Drake Passage.

Jan 7 Overnight at Melchior Islands.

Jan 8 - 9 Cross Gerlache Strait to Cuverville Island. Kayaking. Visit Gentoo penguin colony. Skiing on Cuverville Island. Possible ascent of Mt Tennant on Rongé Island.

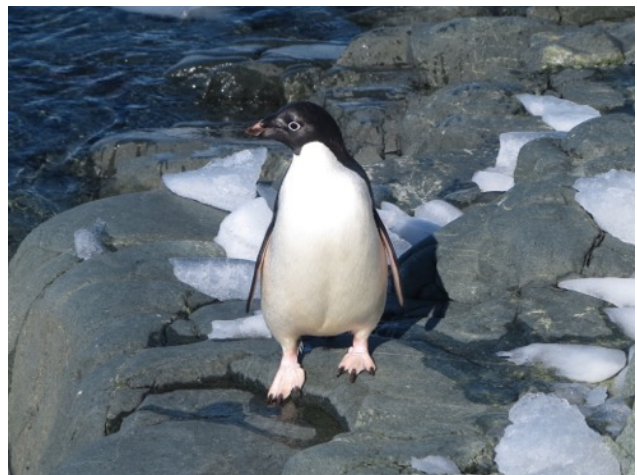
Jan 10 Sail to Neumayer Channel. Possible skiing on north tip of Wiencke Island. Anchor at Port Lockroy.

Jan 11 - 13 At Port Lockroy. Visit museum. Skiing on slopes of Jabet Peak. Two day expedition to climb Mt Luigi di Savoia for experienced ski-mountaineers.





- Jan 14 Sail south through Lemaire Channel. Possible ski traverse of Hovgaard Island. Overnight at Plénau Island.
- Jan 15 - 16 Visit iceberg graveyard and Plénau Island Gentoo colony. Ski ascent of Mt Scott. Continue south to Vernadsky Base.
- Jan 17 Ice climbing on Argentine Islands near Vernadsky and visit historic Wordie House.
- Jan 18 Kayak to Adelie penguin colony. Sail to Waddington Bay. Ski ascent of Mt Demaria for experienced ski mountaineers.
- Jan 19 - 26 Further possibilities for ski ascents on Anvers Island and/or Brabant Island. Visit further wildlife sites such as Paradise Harbour.
- Jan 27 - 29 Return voyage across Drake Passage
- Jan 30 - 31 Spare day in Beagle Channel and return to Puerto Williams.
- Feb 1 Leave *Pelagic Australis* and return to Punta Arenas.





THE LEADER

Stephen Venables has been climbing for 40 years and has made first ascents all over the world, including a new route up Mount Everest without supplementary oxygen. He is a past president of both the Alpine Club and the South Georgia Association and has published eleven books about his mountain travels. In the far south he has made one expedition to Tierra del Fuego, two to the Antarctic Peninsula and seven to South Georgia. This will be his eighth expedition aboard *Pelagic Australis*.

www.stephenvenables.org

Please note that although Stephen Venables has extensive experience leading polar ski-mountaineering groups, he is not a certified mountain guide.

Price: £12,800 per person

This is a special group expedition rate based on a party of 8 paying members for 28 days on board *Pelagic Australis*. (The advertised charter rate for a group of eight on the Pelagic website is actually higher – £14,700 per person for 28 days).

Included:

Twenty-eight days charter of *Pelagic Australis*.

All food, soft drinks, wine and beer on board and ashore in Antarctica.

Specialist foul weather gear on board.

Communal mountain camping, cooking and climbing equipment, including pulks.

Not included:

Travel to and from Puerto Williams.

Food and accommodation en route to Puerto Williams (probably a night each way in Punta Arenas).

Final night dinner ashore in Puerto Williams.

Insurance.

Personal clothing and equipment.

(Full equipment list and advice provided on signing up for the expedition).

Optional personal internet communications on boat.

Booking conditions:

Your contract will be with Pelagic Expeditions, and the payment schedule is:

On booking:	£4,267
1 June 2017:	£4,267
1 December 2017:	£4,266

For full terms and conditions see the Pelagic website:

http://www.pelagic.co.uk/over_terms.asp#prices



Stephen photographed by Jamie Pearson, near the summit of Mt Français, in January 2016.

I do hope that you will be able to join us on this wonderful adventure. And please get in touch if you would like to discuss our plans in more detail.

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