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Next stop Antarctica!

**Tierra del Fuego, home to
the most southerly RYA training
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Beagle Channel



Ushuaia, Tierra del Fuego: the southernmost city in the world

As I stood at the little airport in Ushuaia, amazed at the stunning surroundings, I thought, “Wow! This is without doubt one of the most beautiful teaching locations in the world.” I mused that, while the bottom of the world is a long way down, it had been worth every minute of flying time to Tierra del Fuego – the most southerly tip of South America.

‘The islands that make up the archipelago of Tierra del Fuego were divided between Argentina and Chile in 1881. The main city is Ushuaia, which lays claim to being the southernmost city in the world. It’s a truly amazing place, surrounded by snow-covered mountains and, on the day I arrived, bathed in sunlight. Despite the approaching winter months, the spectacular scenery takes your breath away.

‘I was there to teach RYA coastal and yachtmaster theory and I knew immediately that my biggest challenge would be to keep my students focused on my course-to-steer lecture and not on the scenery or their nautical trip around Cape Horn that was to follow.

‘I had arrived on a great day – the sun shone and the temperature was above freezing. I was met by Stewart Richardson, the skipper of

Pelagic Australis, a 74ft aluminium sailing yacht, designed specifically for high-latitude sailing, owned and managed by Skip Novak. She is used as an expedition vehicle to access some of the most remote places in the world. Stewart advised me that, with the sun over the yardarm, we were to head straight for an Argentine *asado* (barbecue).

AND SO TO WORK

‘Following a couple of days’ grace and time to explore, the students began to arrive. Armed with my ‘dongle’ and extra teaching toys, we headed for the classroom in the Aeronautical Clubhouse, which was five

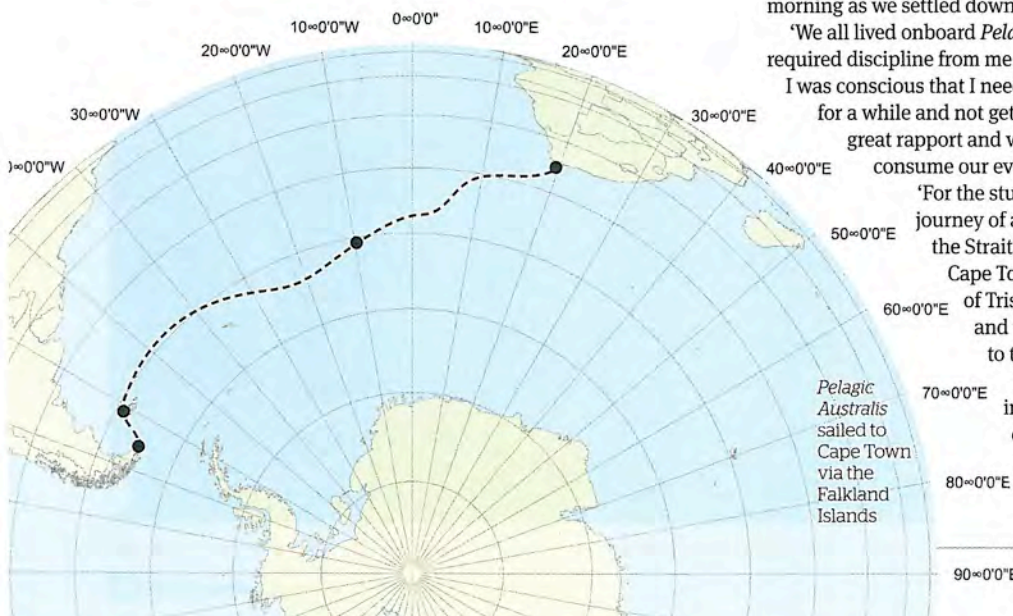
minutes’ walk from the marina. With windows on three walls of the classroom and only a light aircraft runway between us and Cape Horn, the view was very difficult to ignore and it was a challenging first morning as we settled down to study.

‘We all lived onboard *Pelagic Australis*. Living with the students required discipline from me; having set two hours of homework, I was conscious that I needed to leave them to their own devices for a while and not get involved. However, we developed a great rapport and were able to relax, not letting the study consume our evenings.

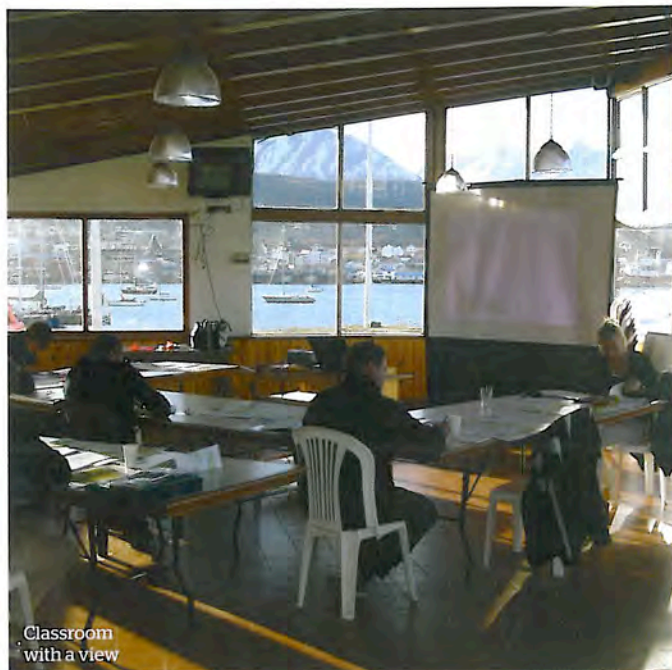
‘For the students, the course was to be followed by a journey of a lifetime through the Beagle Channel and the Straits of Magellan, around Cape Horn and on to Cape Town via the Falkland Islands and the island of Tristan da Cunha. It would be a wonderful and unusual trip and the perfect opportunity to try out their new-found navigation skills.

‘It was a pleasure and a privilege to teach in such fabulous surroundings and an experience I shall never forget.’

Emma Pontin reports on teaching in Tierra del Fuego



Pelagic Australis sailed to Cape Town via the Falkland Islands



Classroom with a view



Chris Hooper: 'Awe-inspiring anchorages and scenes of solitude and isolation'

Chris Hooper (60)

was a student on Emma's theory course before heading out to the waters of Argentina and Chile for his practical exam onboard *Pelagic Australis*.

About you:

Married with a grown-up family. I've recently retired from Lloyd's of London.

Sea credentials:

I spent a few years at sea in the Merchant Navy as a teenager in the 1960s before going to university. I've done some occasional dinghy sailing since then but have always wanted to learn to sail properly, so decided, with my wife's indulgence, this would be my retirement project!

Why this course?

I looked at lots of RYA courses but, having enjoyed being at sea in my youth, wanted something a bit more... Initially, I decided on a round-Britain trip, but then saw the *Pelagic* ad in *RYA Magazine*. After a look at the website and a couple of emails to Skip Novak, I signed up.

Any preparation?

I didn't want to go into this entirely blind so I did a one-week, non-stop trip from Portsmouth to Cascais in Portugal and the

delivery of a Bavaria 36 to the London Boatshow. There was bad weather on both trips but not enough to put me off the voyage!

The experience...

Getting to Ushuaia was an adventure in itself. Ushuaia claims to be the southernmost city in the world and has a frontier feel to it: snow-covered mountains, blue sky and crystal-clear air – the setting is breathtaking.

We stayed aboard *Pelagic Australis* with Emma, our instructor. She had a difficult job stopping us getting distracted by any of Ushuaia's many attractions, including the view from the classroom. The classroom was a short walk from the boat – it was toasty warm inside, while outside it was icy-blue cold with occasional flurries of snow.

With the five days of theory and exams out of the way, we set sail. We spent a few days in the channels leading off the main Beagle Channel and began to put our theory into practice. The channels were magnificent on mostly clear, crisp days. It was nearly mid-winter and we would wake in the morning to find ice on deck and a thin crust of ice on the sea's surface. The anchorages were awe-inspiring, with mountains,

glaciers and waterfalls plunging hundreds of feet into the sea. Scenes of solitude and isolation – we used the word 'awesome' an awful lot those first few days.

The anchorages were deep in the wilderness where, in addition to the anchor, bow and stern lines were run ashore and tied firmly to trees or rocks as extra protection from the fierce winds for which the area is famous. We didn't see any human life, but there was lots of wildlife: seals, penguins, albatross and many other sea birds.

Then it was time to take on Cape Horn – a high point for all of us. It lived up to its reputation. We went round it with four reefs in the main and staysail, before turning north-east and heading up through the Strait of Magellan. It was a 64-hour trip with winds of 55 knots plus, but *Pelagic Australis* is designed for these conditions and handled them easily. Even a novice like me felt secure and comfortable.

Good bits:

Our skippers, Stewart and Jess, had a relaxed but professional style. We had a range of experience onboard, from the novice (me) to someone who had sailed his own 43ft boat from the Mediterranean to Finland. Stewart and Jess adjust their teaching

to suit each person. They both have a super instructing style; building, encouraging and developing confidence and skill rather than making you feel a complete idiot.

The people were of different ages, nationalities, experience levels and, of course, views and opinions, which made for some good conversation.

And the food – I didn't expect such great-quality food. Mouth-watering Argentinean beef, unbelievably tasty lamb, *empanadas* (savoury pastries) and great Argentinean and Chilean wines!

Recommendations:

Get down there as early as you can. Buenos Aires and Ushuaia are great places to visit, with lots to see and do in both.

RYA training

Although this was an extreme training course in an outermost location, RYA training offers you the chance to experience boating adventures all over the world or in UK waters.

Email training@rya.org.uk or call 0844 556 9528.