

Journey to the South

Argentina, Antarctica, South Georgia & The Falkland Islands

by Laurie Harris



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Dedicated to all the travelers out there. Visiting all the continents once wasn't enough so I have to do it all again.





Antarctica, South Georgia & The Falkland Islands

USHUAIA - USHUAIA From December 19th 2019 to January 3rd 2020

LE LYRIAL
PONANT



Captain Christophe Colaris



Buenos Aires

Our journey southward started in the capital of Argentina - Buenos Aires. Outside of North America, South America is my most visited continent with this being my fifth trip to the continent. Excluding the USA and Canada, Argentina is one of my most visited countries along with Bahamas and Japan. This would be my third time visiting the country.

After checking in to the upscale Palacio Duhau - Park Hyatt Buenos Aires hotel in the exclusive Recoleta district we took a stroll down the central Avenida 9 de Julio taking in the Obelisk and image of Evita Peron on the Ministry of Public Works Building. We would stop for lunch at the best Indian restaurant in Buenos Aires - the Dehli Mahal. After lunch we would head across the avenue (incidentally the widest street in the world) to the shopping district for some shopping, eventually ending up at the renown Galerias Pacifico shopping mall.

We would then head back to Palacio Duhau for our welcome briefing and cocktail reception.





San Antonio de Areco

On our second day we would travel an hour and a half outside of Buenos Aires to the small town of San Antonio de Areco to become immersed in the culture of the gaucho. We would learn more about this Argentinian-style cowboy through a visit to the Gaucho Museum.

We would then travel to a nearby ranch converted into a resort, La Estancia la bamba. We would enjoy a traditional multi-course lunch of various grilled meats and local dishes. Following lunch we would be entertained by the horsemanship skills of the gaucho while sipping on yerba mate tea. The displays included snatching a ring hanging from a rope with a pencil while at full gallop, lassoing a rhea, a boisterous game of pato and traditional gaucho dances and singing.









Ushuaia

Our journey southward would start in earnest with a flight to the southernmost city in the world - Ushuaia. Ushuaia (or *Fin del Mundo*) is perched at the bottom of South America in the Patagonia region. This remote frontier town was once a prison colony with its high surrounding mountains and treacherous seas making it virtually inescapable.

After arriving we would enjoy lunch at the Arakur resort located high in the hills overlooking downtown Ushuaia. We would then take a hike in the adjacent Cerro Alarken Nature Reserve.

In the afternoon we would board Ponant's Le Lyrial cruise ship and begin our journey to Antarctica. After passing through the Beagle Channel we would emerge into the seas off of the Cape Horn to make the two day crossing of the Drake Passage. Although notorious for its near constant rough seas, on this crossing we would experience both the calm *Drake Lake* on the first day and the rough *Drake Quake* on the second day.





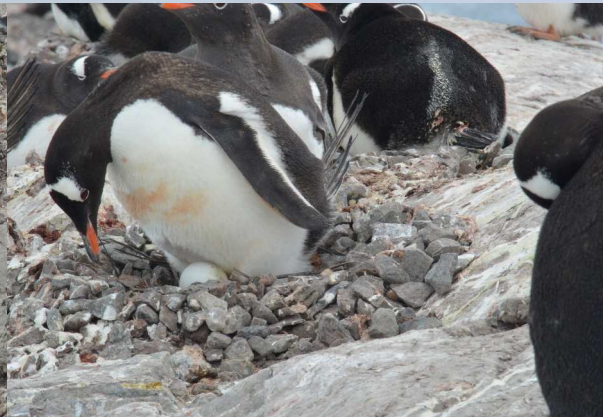
Neko Harbour

Our first two stops in Antarctica would be the only time we would set foot on the continent proper. The other stops would all be on islands that make up the Antarctic peninsula. This would be Dwayne's first time setting foot on Antarctica and his seventh and final continent visited. This would be my second time in Antarctica and my fifth continent visited more than twice. I used this opportunity to once again fly the Bermuda flag from Antarctica as I had 9 years prior at Neko Harbour.

Neko Harbour is home to a Gentoo penguin colony and most of the penguins were lying in their nests on newly laid eggs. On occasion when the penguin would reposition or perform an ecstatic display we could see the egg beneath them. Also visible was the featherless patch allowing them to have skin contact with the egg in order to keep it warm. Also seen lounging on the ice were Weddell and crabeater seals. Across the way from our landing we witnessed a small avalanche. The previous group had witnessed a glacier calving in the same spot with the large chunk of ice causing a large wave in the harbour.









Paradise Bay

On my previous trip to Antarctica which was earlier in the season we were unable to make a landing at Paradise Bay due to too much ice onshore. We instead cruised around the bay in the Zodiacs. This time I was actually able to set foot on land. Paradise Bay is home to Argentinian Base Brown (or Brown Station). They were just setting up the station for the season when we arrived. In exchange for using their dock for our landings we provided them with a number of barrels of fresh water.

Paradise Bay is home to a colony of Gentoo penguins and also blue-eyed shags, cape petrels and arctic terns which inhabit the colorful, rocky cliffs. While ashore we hiked to the highest point and took the quick way down by sliding down the 100 foot hill. Before heading back to the ship we took a quick Zodiac tour of the bay. As our ship departed we saw our first humpback whales swimming in the Gerlache Strait.









Cierva Cove

For our second day in Antarctica we headed to Cierva Cove, a location known for spotting humpback whales. Onshore we were able to spot our first chinstrap penguins and Adelie penguins along with the ubiquitous Gentoo penguins. The penguins were soon forgotten as the humpback whales were spotted. We were treated to many close encounters and many were trying to capture that perfect photo of the tail fluke as the whale dived.









Mikkelsen Harbour

In the afternoon we went ashore at Mikkelsen Harbour. This location is a well protected harbour and anchorage and thus used by many whaling ships in the early 1900s. As a result the beach remains littered with the bones of some of the largest whales such as blue whales and fin whales alongside the remains of the whaling boats used to catch them.

Waddling amongst this 100-year old graveyard were Gentoo penguins, Adelie penguins and Weddell seals. While onshore we were treated to our first major snowfall.









Penguin Island

On Christmas Eve we visited the volcanic island known as Penguin Island. The volcanic cone Deacon Peak was draped in snow for a festive atmosphere. Penguin Island is mainly home to a colony of chinstrap penguins but a few Adelie penguins were also present. We were fortunate to arrive to see many newly hatched penguin chicks. Some guests opted to make the long climb up Deacon Peak while others stayed below to take pictures of the many baby penguins.





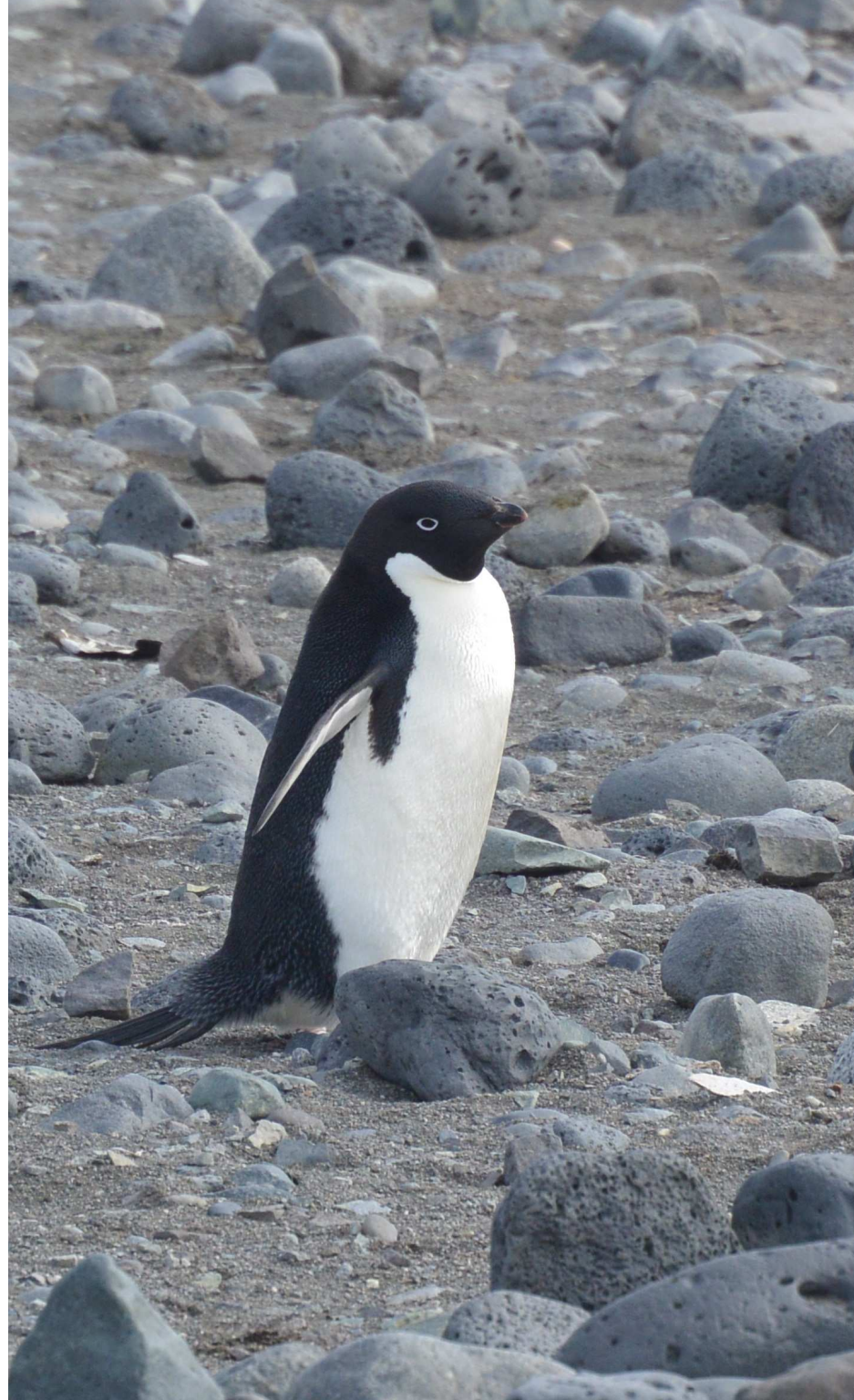




Turret Point

Immediately across from Penguin Island is the much larger King George Island. Our afternoon excursion was the spit of land called Turret Point on King George Island. By the time we went ashore we could see that all of the snow on Deacon Peak had now melted in the cold Antarctic sun.

Turret Point is home to a large number of elephant seals along with the occasional Adelie penguin. Most of the elephant seals were onshore undergoing their annual molt where they shed their outer layer of fur and skin. The scene onshore was a cacophony of grunting and snorting from the lounging seals.









CHRISTMAS NIGHT

337
337

Grand Salon Équinoxe
Main lounge

Christmas Day

Our Christmas Day was spent at sea in the Southern Atlantic en route to South Georgia Island. During the day it appears Santa Claus was able to locate our wandering ship and all of the children aboard. A little late after his nightly rounds but still well received.





Cooper Bay

After two days travel we arrived at South Georgia Island. This remote island is part of the British Overseas Territory of *South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands*. This island was the site of many whaling stations during the first half of the 20th century. It is now presently a mostly uninhabited nature reserve. In the summer, the clear turquoise waters and clear blue skies could easily fool you into thinking South Georgia to be a tropical island if you ignore the occasional iceberg floating by, the snow capped mountains in the distance and the near freezing temperatures.

Our first stop in South Georgia was a Zodiac tour of Cooper Bay at the southern tip of the island. Onshore we could see the usual chinstrap and Gentoos penguins but more importantly our first macaroni and king penguins. Also onshore were elephant seals and fur seals.







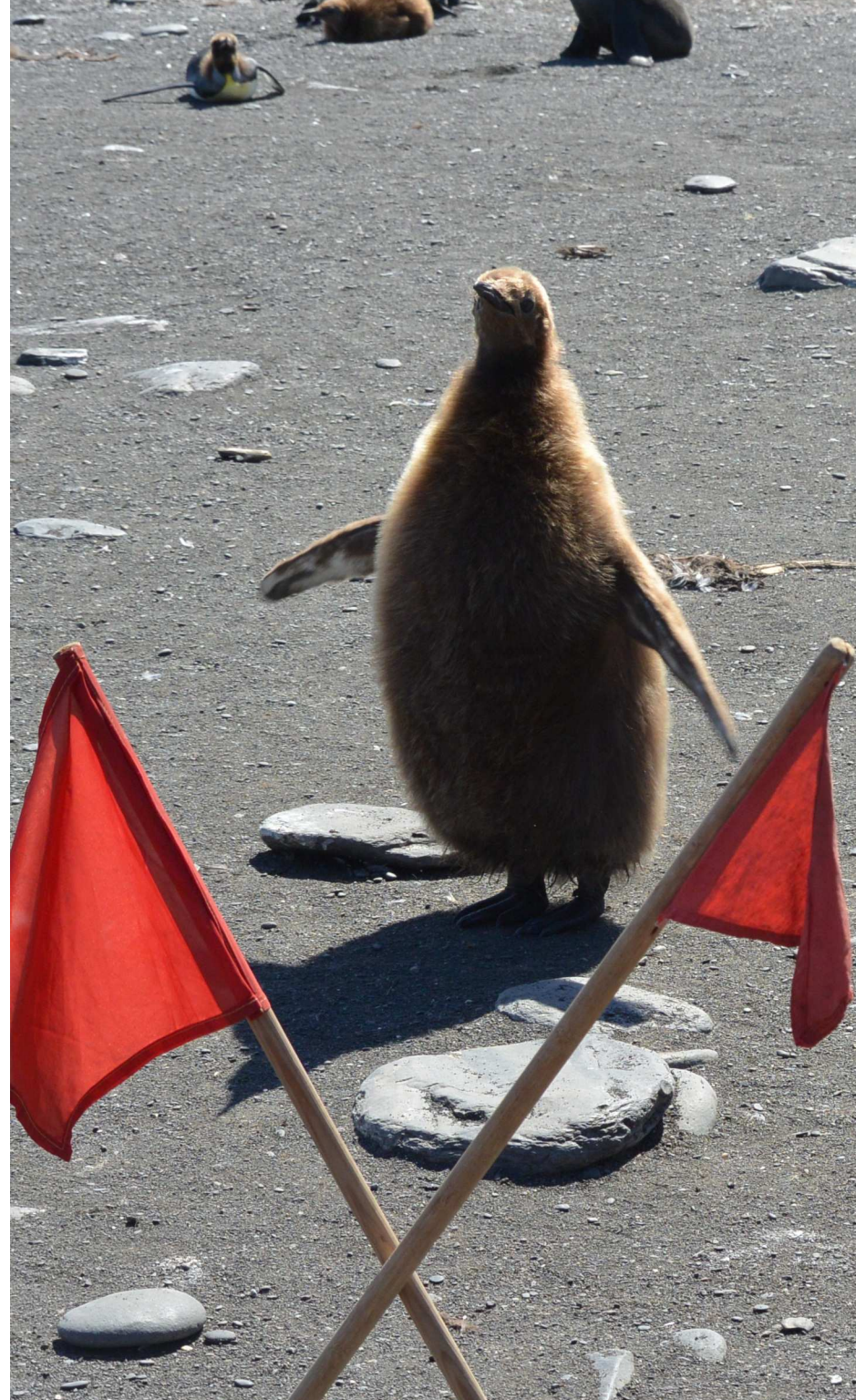


Gold Harbour

In the afternoon we went ashore at Gold Harbour for a more up close look at the majestic king penguins and fur seals we had been warned about.

The king penguin is the second largest penguin species after the emperor penguin. Like the emperor penguin they are able to breed all year round. Each colony will thus consist of eggs, chicks, and adults. Also like the emperor penguin, king penguins do not make nests but instead balance their eggs and newly hatched chicks on their feet. King penguin chicks grow very large, very fast soon becoming *Oaken Boys* with their distinctive thick brown coat of feathers. Unable to swim with these thick coats, the chicks won't head to sea until a number of months later after shedding the brown feathers to reveal the gold, black and white feather markings of their parents.

South Georgia is also home to many fur seals. We were warned to steer clear of the sometimes aggressive young males who have been known to bite the curious explorer who got too close.







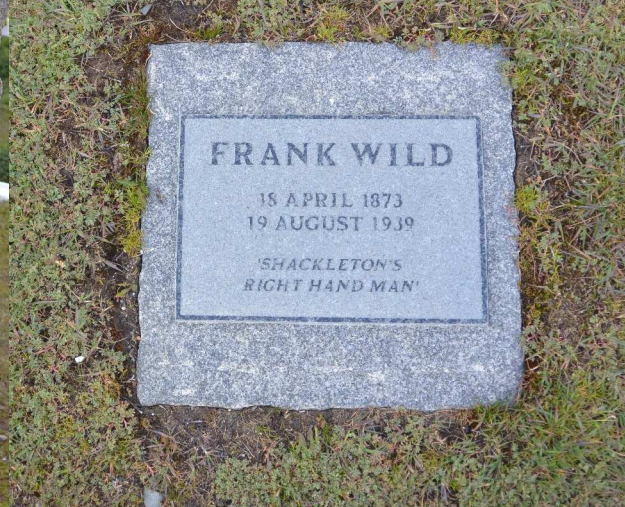
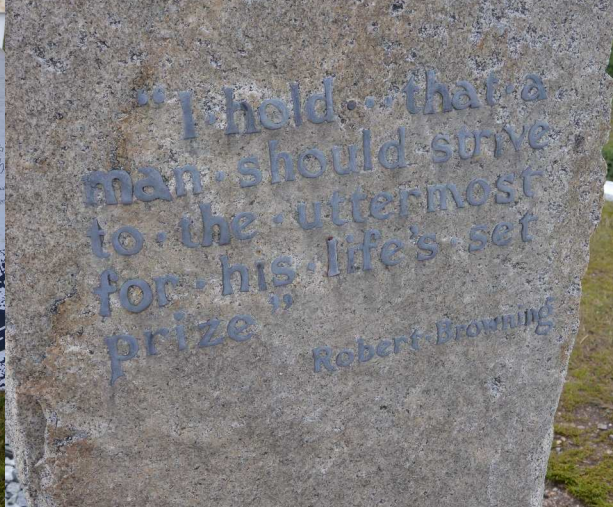


Grytviken

Grytviken was the largest whaling station on South Georgia. South Georgia's capital is located just a short distance away at King Edward Point at the mouth of the bay.

Grytviken is notable for its connection to arctic explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton. After his boat was destroyed during the ill-fated Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition, Shackleton and five of his men boarded a small long boat and made the long, arduous journey from the Antarctic peninsula to South Georgia. Landing on the uninhabited southern coast he and two of the men trekked over the central mountains of South Georgia to the whaling station at Stromness on the northeastern side of the island. It was from Grytviken that Shackleton launched the rescue mission to recover his remaining men still in Antarctica. Shackleton would later die in Grytviken while about to launch the Shackleton-Rowett Expedition. His widow requested he be buried in the Grytviken cemetery. The ashes of his right-hand man Frank Wild would join him in the cemetery in 2011.









Fortuna Bay

In the afternoon we moved to Fortuna Bay to hike inland to see a large king penguin colony. Many of the *Oaken Boys* in the colony could be seen shedding their final brown feathers signaling their entry into adulthood.

We were also advised to carry hiking poles to ward off the minefield of young male fur seals that were scattered across the beach. In many cases our expedition team members were present to do this for us but in some places the guests had to fend for themselves. We were given instructions on how to discourage the fur seals from approaching but one aggressive male on my return refused to back down. Fortunately I was with a handful of other guests and we were able to get the fur seal to retreat.



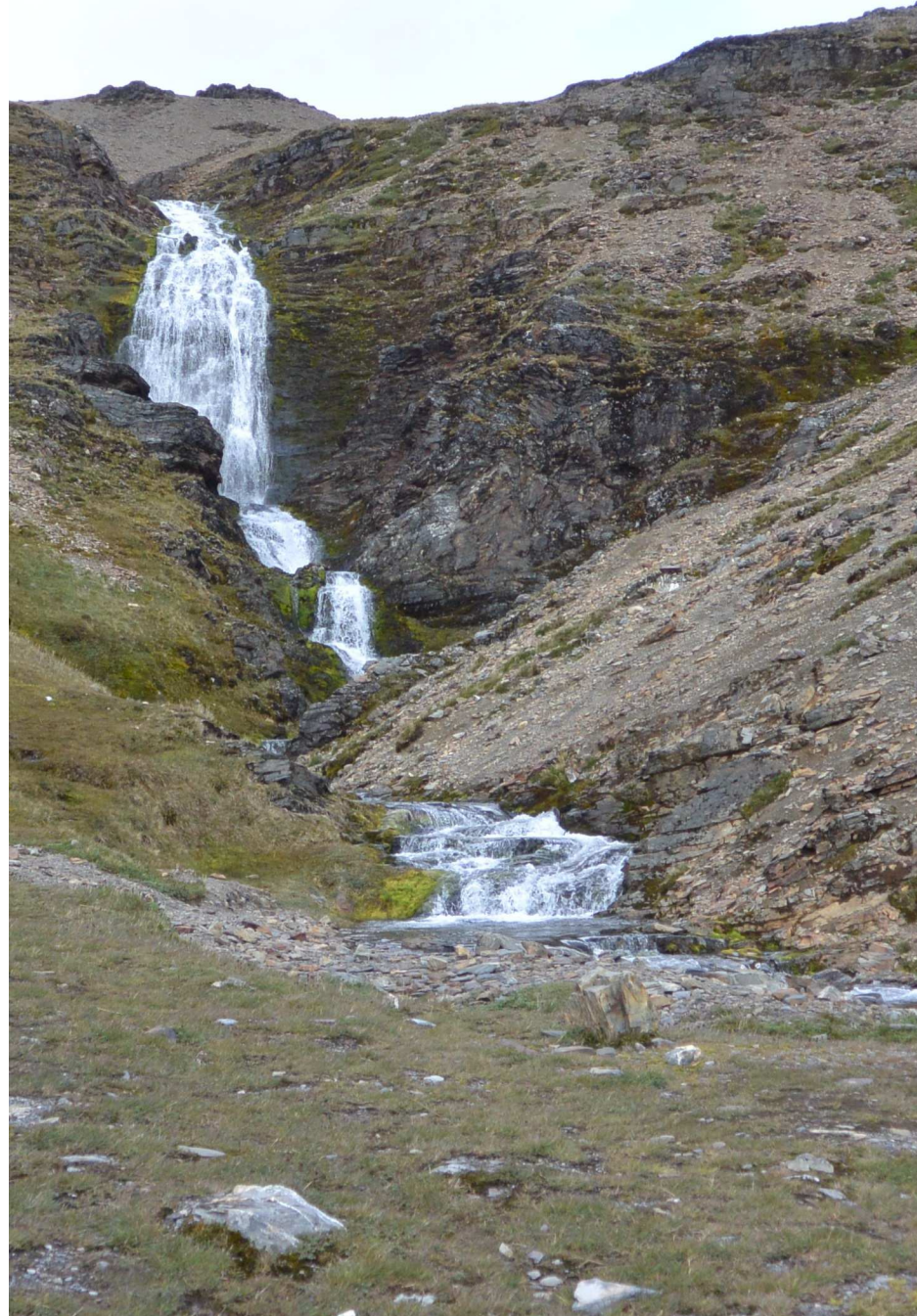






Stromness

The Stromness whaling station was the location Shackleton reached after his trek over the South Georgia mountains at the conclusion of his failed Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition. We trekked a mile and a half inland to see the waterfall Shackleton and his men descended before making their way to the whaling station.

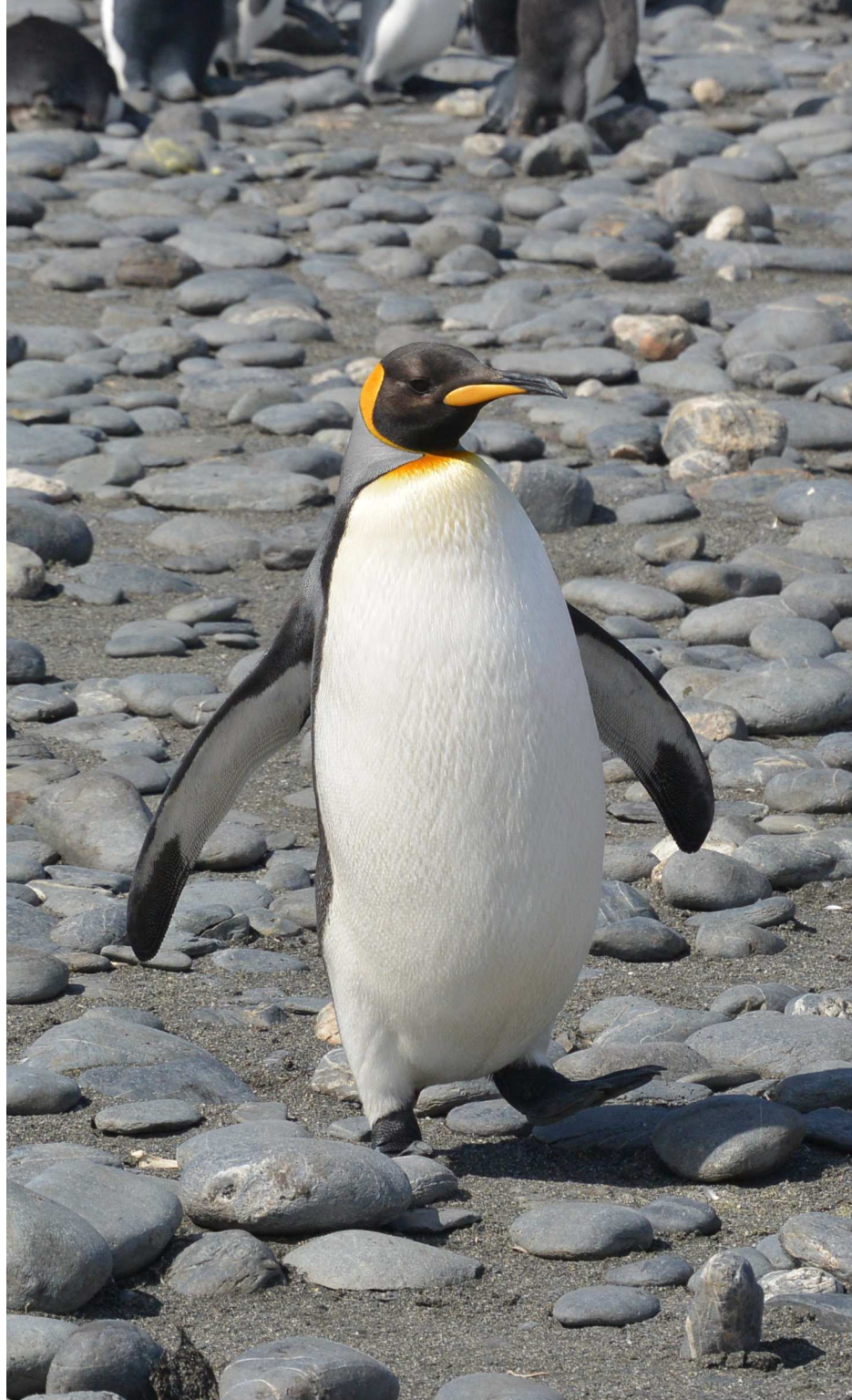




Salisbury Plain

For our final stop in South Georgia we visited Salisbury Plain, home to the second largest king penguin colony in South Georgia. Consisting of up to 60,000 penguins, the scale of life on display is indescribable. It is said the area between Elsehul Bay and Salisbury Plain is believed to have more wildlife per square foot than any other place on the planet.

We then returned to the ship to make our two-day journey to The Falkland Islands.









The Falkland Islands

Our final destination was a New Years' Day stop in The Falkland Islands, a British Overseas Territory with a population of about 3400 people.

Arriving in the captial Stanley, we opted to take a tour of the battlefields of the Falklands War of 1982. We learned of the conflict started by the Argentine invasion of the island and visited major sites of the conflict where wreckage and shrapnel still litter the landscape. Our tour ended with a visit to the 1982 Liberation Memorial and nearby Thatcher Drive.

From the memorial we took a short stroll to the Historic Dockyard Museum to learn more about the maritime history of the island. We would then explore downtown Stanley including the Christ Church Cathedral and its iconic whalebone arch made from the jaws of two blue whales. After a lunch of traditional fish and chips we mailed postcards to ourselves before returning to the ship.







Parque Nacional

Tierra del Fuego

BAHIA LAPATAIA



República Argentina

Aquí finaliza la Ruta Nac. N°3

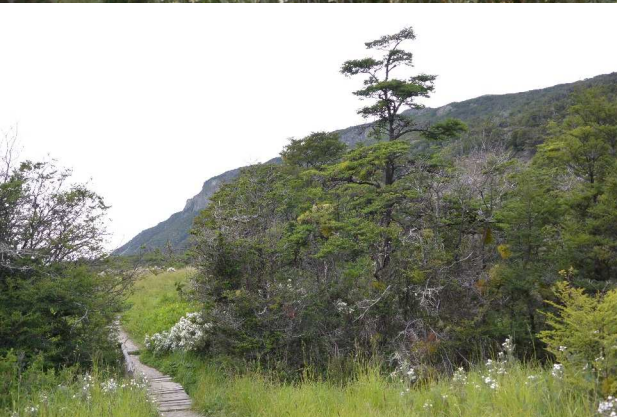
Buenos Aires 3.079 Km.
Alaska 17.848 Km.

Ushuaia

After arriving back in Ushuaia we would take a tour of the Tierra del Fuego National Park. The park is the southern end point of the Pan-American Highway which runs from Prudhoe Bay, Alaska in the north all the way down to the park. Amongst the wide range of flora and fauna we were able to spot a Fuegian red fox and Upland geese. After the tour we had a tea break consisting of dulce de leche cake and hot chocolate. We would then board a charter flight for Buenos Aires before heading back home to complete our once in a lifetime expedition of the southern reaches of the planet.









Journey to the most southern parts of the planet on Abercrombie & Kent's cruise of Antarctica, South Georgia & The Falkland Islands. The journey begins in the metropolitan Buenos Aires before embarking on the Le Lyrial cruise ship in the southern most city in the world - Ushuaia. After crossing the notorious Drake Passage the travelers explore the various islands of the southern Atlantic Ocean, experiencing some of the most diverse and plentiful life in this remote and isolated region of the world.

