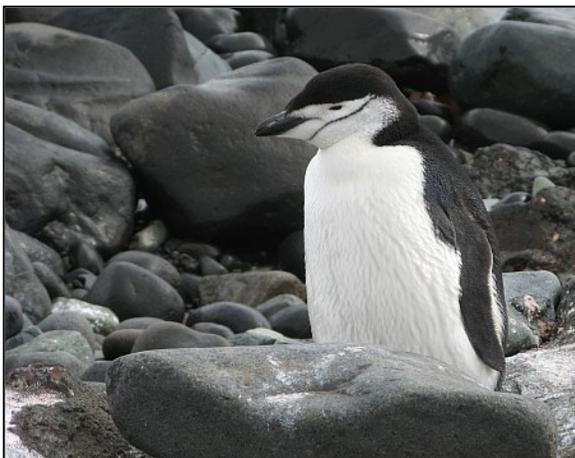


Antarctic trip diary, Part 8

1/5/07

We were gently rocked in our sleep last night as we crossed the strait to King George Island. The island's position just north of the peninsula makes it one of the more accessible parts of Antarctica so many nations have research stations here. You need to have a research station in Antarctica in order to have a seat at the table with the treaty group. Our ship was delivering six Polish scientists to begin a term at their Arctowski Station (no ethnic jokes, please). Those who wanted could visit the station but we chose to spend our time visiting wildlife.

The beach was littered with bleached whalebones from days gone by. The penguin colonies consisted of both Adelies and Chinstraps, sometimes called London Bobbies because of their markings. Sandie again had a close encounter of the best kind with a couple of Adelies. Also on the beach, where ever they wanted to be, were a small group of elephant seals. Watching them lumber along the beach made one think of Sumo wrestlers inching along on their bellies. We also saw some of the indigenous plant life to Antarctica, pearl wort and a grass. Many of the rocks had various mosses and lichens on them so the place had more color than one would have expected.



As usual, our time on shore passed all too quickly and we had to head back to the ship. Getting in and out of the Cirkels today was a bit tricky because we had two foot chop but everyone seemed to manage.

This afternoon we started back across the Drake Passage to return to the real world. Once again, the keyboard keeps moving under my fingers so the key that gets struck is as much luck as it is intent. Many of us have a little feeling of sadness this afternoon because we will truly miss this beautiful enchanted place. I really hope that we as a species don't screw it up.

1/6/07

The swells picked up quite a bit yesterday afternoon coming in off the stern quarter which minimizes the slamming. It's a softer motion but very unpredictable and the intensity is much greater than when we came over. Our dinner table is in the last row at the stern where motion is magnified. As we were enjoying our salad, a huge swell hit us. In what appeared to be slow motion, Mike, who was sitting opposite me, goes toppling over backward in his chair with this look of total surprise on his face. Every glass and wine bottle also tipped sending their contents sloshing toward Mike who is still trying to figure out what is happening. Sheila, who was sitting beside him, also caught some of the flow but at least her chair didn't topple. The rest of us are desperately trying to do damage control before Mike, who is now on the floor, becomes totally inundated in water, wine and lettuce. Staff came running over with napkins to help but they had their hands full because there were two other tables across the stern which had similar events playing out. Fortunately, no one was hurt and we all had a good laugh.

The rest of the meal was uneventful but nobody dared to fill their glasses with more than two fingers worth, just in case. At the end, Sandie gets up saying "I hope I can do this remaining upright". A perfectly timed swell sent her and her chair pirouetting across the deck about ten feet until she ended up between the back wall and another diner, who graciously complemented her on her version of the Drake Shuffle, with her chair as her partner no less. The evening movie was about Shackleton which seemed more realistic because the theater was pitching just like his ship. When we finally got to bed, my Viking wife fell asleep in nothing flat, probably dreaming of other coastal settlements to sack and loot. This morning, seas had calmed down a bit so we should have a relatively easy transit across the passage.

