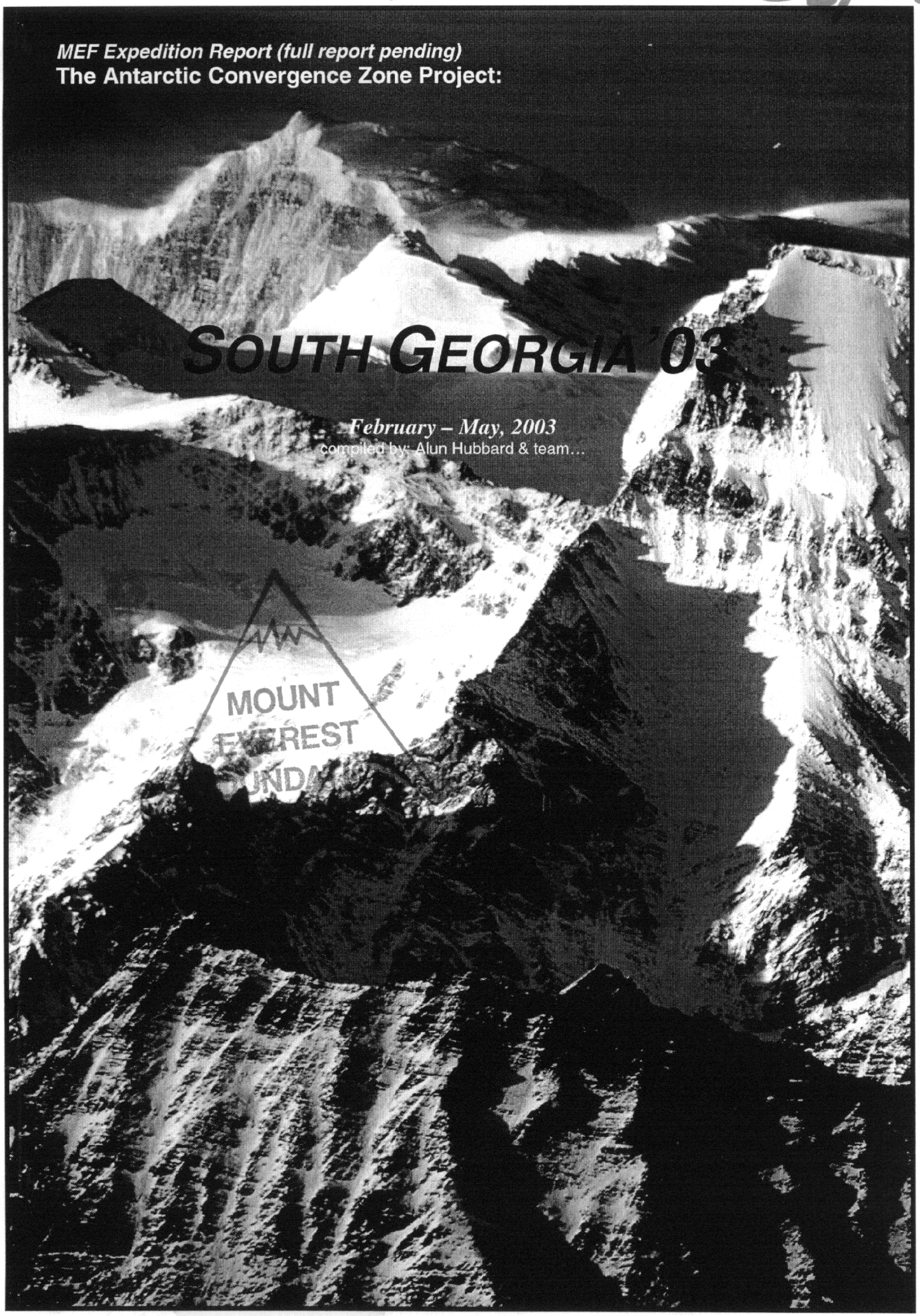
BMC Pt 03/09


MEF Expedition Report (full report pending)
The Antarctic Convergence Zone Project:
SOUTH GEORGIA '03
February – May, 2003
compiled by: Alun Hubbard & team...
MOUNT
EVEREST

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The Team

Leader & skipper – Dr Alun Hubbard, *Glaciologist* at Edinburgh University (33, Welsh)
Grant Redvers, *Environmental Consultant* (30, NZ)
Hamish Millar, *Unemployed Geologist* (25, British)
Davie Robinson, *Mountain Guide* (30, Scottish)
Stuart Holmes, *Geologist* (32, British)
Martin Stuart, Geologist (28, Canada)
Tim Hall, *Photographer* (42, British)

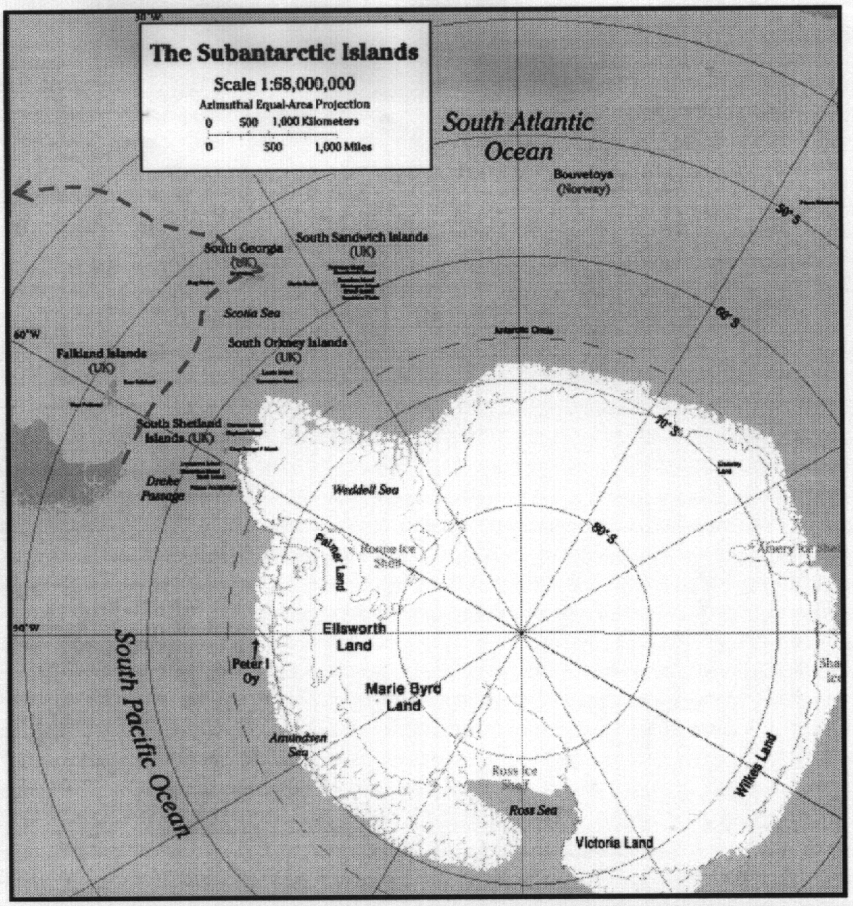
NOTE – This report has been submitted to satisfy the deadlines of the MEF and does not include the expedition's substantial scientific achievements. A full report including publications that have resulted from this expedition is pending and will be widely distributed when complete.

Acknowledgements

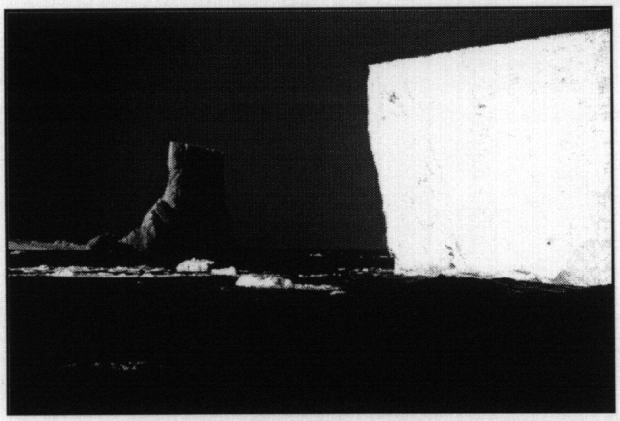
We would like to thank all those who befriended and supported us in Argentina, Chile and whilst in South Georgia itself. Special mention should go to Pat and Sarah Lurcock, Tim and Pauline Carr and the indefatigable crew at KEP who through thick and thin kept us primed, motivated and highly entertained whilst there. We are also greatly appreciative of the invaluable support of the RGS, BMC and MEF, without which this expedition would not have left port.

Frontispiece: *Mt Paget and its wind-swept East Ridge (top left) and the main summits of the Allardyce Range from the North Ridge of Quad5.*

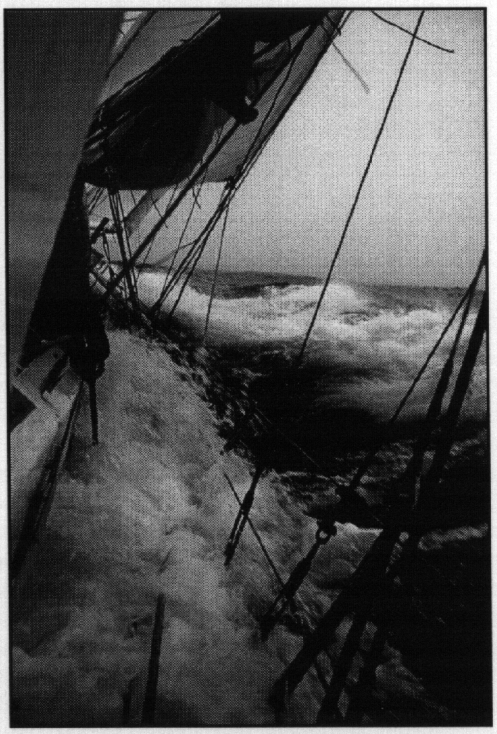
Overview



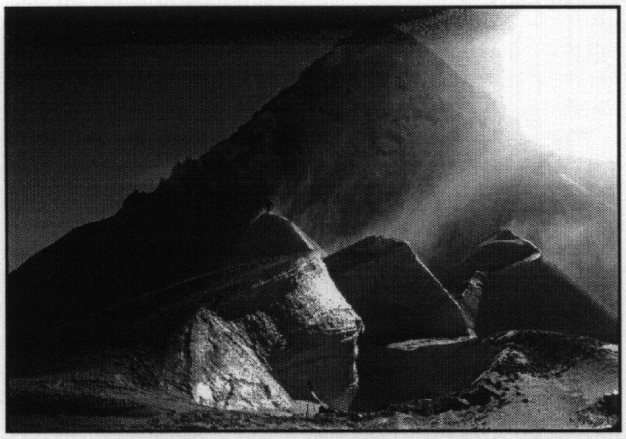
In early Feb'03 the seven of us aboard *Gambo* sailed from Ushuaia headed for South Georgia in order to attempt a number of unclimbed mountains and new routes, mainly on and around Mt Paget, the island's highest mountain at 2,950 m, but additionally at the southwestern end within the Salversson Range, which offers many unclimbed lower but steeper granite towers. Whilst motoring down the Beagle Channel, I inadvertently ran over a discarded and poorly marked mooring line which briefly became untangled in the prop. On immediate inspection, it appeared that we had been lucky and had escaped this incident Scot-free. Unfortunately, this was not to be and it culminated in a completely shot drive-plate some 4 days later; half way to South Georgia, which although it did not deter us, was to mar the expedition and our mobility throughout. The 1000 nm crossing to SG took 9 days, which included some strenuous sailing in some force 11 breezes whilst dodging some immense tabular ice-bergs and associated detritus. Due to the auxiliary (and generator) being out of action, without radar, in the name of prudence I decided to heave-too during hours of darkness, which slowed us down but still left us dangerously vulnerable to bergs on two separate occasions.



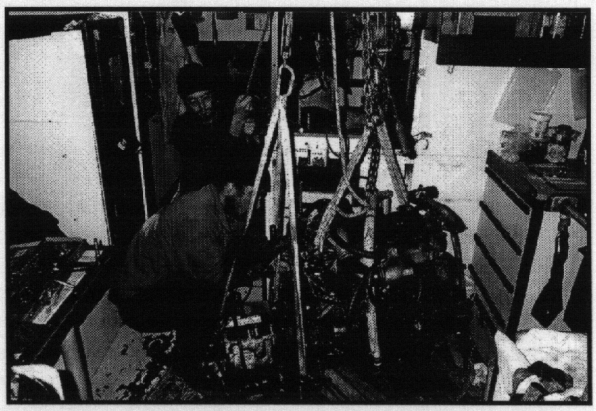
On 26th Feb and after 2 days beating in light winds, we made a very welcome landfall at King Edward Point. Within the next week, two separate teams set off while I went about lifting the diesel off its bed and splitting it to attempt repairs on the drive plate. Davie, Grant and Stuart headed out with a weeks food for the Quad Five/Paulsen area, and Tim Hall, Martin and Hamish set off on the 15 mile hike to St Andrews Bay with 10 days of food. The intention was to have a good look/see and attempt any routes/mountains that were considered do-able. Meanwhile, I had split the transmission from the diesel and cleaned out the buckled remains of what was the drive plate, and realised that repairs were going to be a tall order and that it would be wise to attempt to get a replacement shipped out from the UK. Over the next week both parties, somewhat bewildered by the nuances of SG weather returned empty handed and we divided to conquer again. This time, Davie, Grant, Stuart and I decided that a 'siege' style attempt on



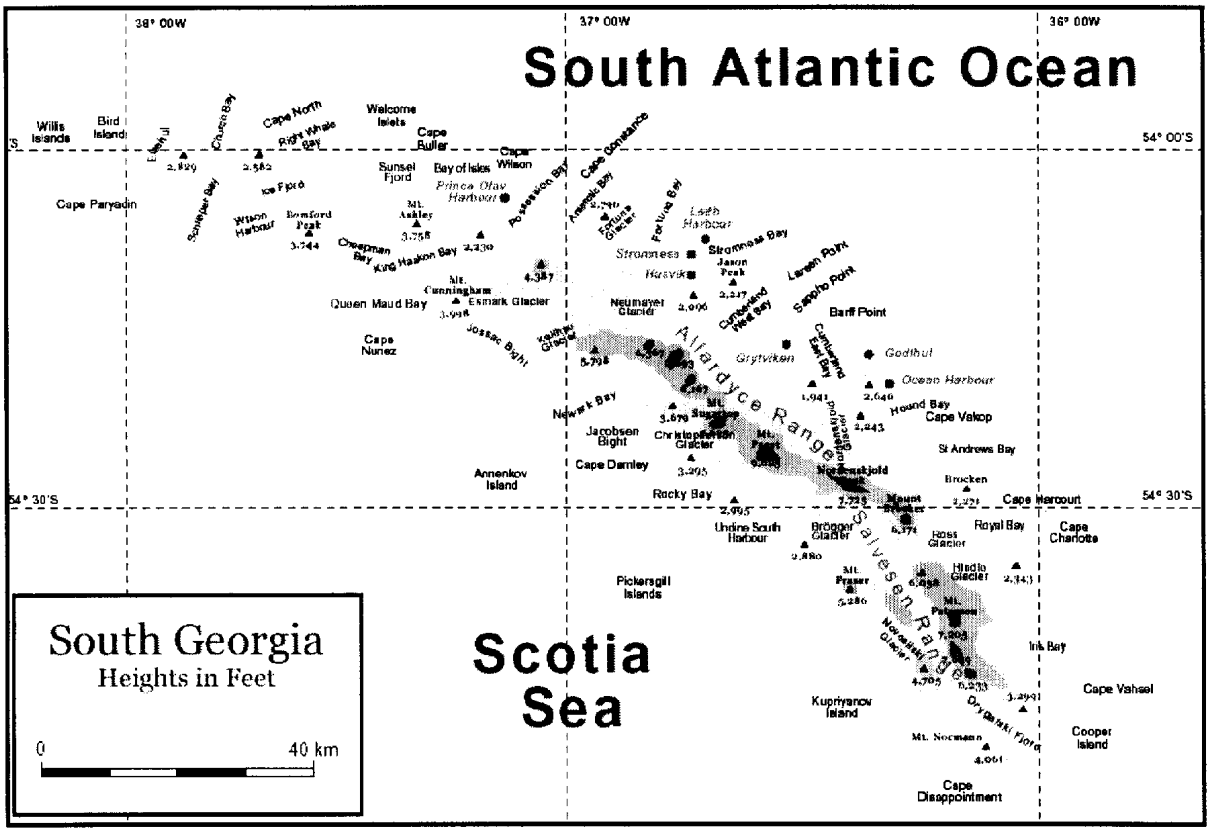
the unclimbed E Ridge of Paget was on the cards. On the clear morning of 9th March, we were relayed the 5 miles over to the Barf Peninsula, Cumberland Bay West, to commence the 10 km ski up the Nordenskjold Glacier. By evening, we'd progressed over 5 kms of rough crevassed terrain and in perfect weather decided to camp. The pressure was 990 mb. By 5 am, next morning the pressure was 952 mb and the breeze that ensued could be termed 'stiff'. Within an hour the tents were in shreds, Davie and Grant had lost their rucksacks and we were all forced to bivy in the remains of an inner tent which we did for the next 24 hours until the storm abated. With much kit bust or missing we retreated with our tails firmly between our legs. We returned to stories of near total calamity back at the boat and the worst winds experienced at Grytiviken for some 7 years (Pauline Carr). Apart from having her starboard gunnels and stanchions bent and dented as she was blown onto the dock, *Gambo* seemed to have faired well, unlike a visiting cruise-ship that was almost blown aground and had one of its 20' zodiac's flipped whilst attempting to recover a shore party.



By this time the 'climbers' were beginning to tire of conditions and both Davie and Stuart somewhat ungraciously bowed out of another attempt at Paget. So on the second attempt, I took the inexperienced but keen Hamish and Tim with me, and we set off on the 18th with 8 days of food for another attempt. Meanwhile, Davie and Stuart set off on another attempt at Paulsen/Quad5. In mixed weather, within 8 days and 2 camps we eventually made the col at 2,000 m marking the lower E Ridge of the mountain and after an awkward night snow-holing, Hamish and I got within 350 m of the summit in deteriorating weather. We retreated down to high camp in ferocious winds and pushed on down to our lower camp in darkness due to worries over dwindling food. During our time on the mountain, we dug twelve 4 m+ snow-pits with firn and density measurements, which will enable the assessment of inter annual accumulation. The next day was reasonable though and we were eventually picked up with perfect timing but a tenuous Zodiac crossing for a party thrown at KEP. Davie and Stuart had two decent attempts on Marakoppa but were repelled.



With the arrival of the last supply ship from Stanley it was quite evident that the 2 kilo replacement drive plate despatched from the UK with the GPO to the Falklands for the mere sum of £182 had not arrived (and was not going to for another 6 weeks!), so I reluctantly replaced the welded original and remounted the diesel. In great optimism we departed Grytviken the next morning under motor with no wind but breaking through a thin layer sea-ice which formed overnight. Out intention was to take a quick shifty to the south end of the Island with the idea of having a go at something within a day's range of the coast if the weather held, but within hours, during which we took a bathymetric survey across the snout of Nordenskjold Glacier, the bodged drive plate had blown and in rising winds, we pulled the zodiac aboard, waved goodbye to SG and set course for Mar del Plata, Argentina, some 2,000 nm off. The voyage back was slow, berg strewn and frustrated by either complete calm or strong headwinds. Two weeks later we were beating for westing around the outer Plata estuary when a NE'ly blew up and then we were within 10 miles of our destination in 50 kns trying to make lee-way. By Easter Sunday evening, after a perfect days sailing and accompanied by a stunning sunset we eventually



made it in to Club Nautico and an ice cool beer. We were all relieved to be off the boat marking the end of an arduous and frustrating but ultimately a highly satisfying and educating experience.

LandSat7 image (June,'03) of large tabular bergs and associated detritus in the Scotia Sea off South Georgia.

Independent Report from Australian Antarctic Division

from ANAN News 97/08, *May* 2003

WEATHER THWARTS ATTEMPTS ON FOUR SOUTH GEORGIA PEAKS

http://www.aad.gov.au/default.asp?casid=7397

Bad weather thwarted attempts last month by mountaineers from the 15-m ketch 'Gambo' to climb three previously un-climbed mountains on South Georgia, and to pioneer a new route up the island's highest peak. During the Canadian-registered yacht's month-long stay at the island, snow accumulation data on the upper Nordenskjold Glacier and a bathymetric survey of its ice front, were also gathered in support of a scientific research program.

Following a ten-week climbing and data collection program in the Antarctic Peninsula region in 2001-02, 'Gambo' spent the austral winter of 2002 in Puerto Williams, Chile (ANAN-70/02, 10 April 2002). The yacht set out from there for South Georgia in late February on the second phase of a combined adventure-research program whose scientific aim was to obtain data from remote ice fields as part of a study of the impact of global warming and human-made pollutants on southern regions (ANAN-48/03, 6 June 2001).

'Gambo' arrived at Grytviken on 3 March. As a result of engine problems, however, it had to spend most of its time there during its stay at the island. The seven on board therefore had to choose mountain targets that could be reached from the former whaling station.

One party of three made two attempts on three unclimbed mountains: Paulsen Peak (1,877 m), Quad Five (1,693 m), and Marakoppa (1,840 m), that lie above the Lyell Glacier in Cumberland West Bay; while a second group of three focused its attention on the so far unclimbed east ridge of 2,993-m Mount Paget, the island's highest peak.

Stuart Holmes, Grant Redvers and Davie Robinson made two unsuccessful attempts on Paulsen Peak, Quad Five and Marakoppa between 4 and 20 March. On their first attempt they left Grytviken on 4 March, their aim being to reach the col between Paulsen peak and Quad Five, from where access to both summits appeared to be relatively straight-forward. However, after climbing up the western branch of the Lyell Glacier, , their progress was blocked by an ice fall at around the 600-m level. Despite eventually reaching another col on the northern ridge of Quad Five, weather forced them to descend again, and they eventually returned to Grytviken on 7 March.

Holmes, Redvers and Robinson set out for their second attempt on 18 March and returned again two days later. In the intervening period they reached Quad Five's northern col for a second time where they spent the night. Strong winds and poor visibility the next morning forced them to descend to the Geikie Glacier, which they then trekked up as the col between Marakoppa and Quad Five lies near the glacier's highest reaches. Seracs, large blocks of glacier ice, were encountered as they ascended and, as it was not possible to find a suitable route in the continuing poor conditions, and there was an increasing risk of avalanches, they turned back and reached Grytviken on 20 March.

While that second attempt was underway, three other crew members were attempting their climb on Mount Paget. The three comprised Gambo's owner and skipper, Alun Hubbard, a glaciologist and climber who also took part in the 'Scotia Expedition' program on the island earlier in the summer (ANAN-89/02, 1 January 2003), Tim Hall and Hamish Millar. After being transported by boat from Grytviken on 18 March, they climbed up the eastern margin of the Nordenskjold glacier towards the col that lies between Mount Paget and Mount Roots at an elevation close to 1,800 m.

After a delay of four days due to bad weather, they reached the col on 25 March and camped, enjoying "stunning views" down to the south coast and along the Allardyce Range. The following morning, Hubbard and Millar set off for the final four-kilometre trek to Padget's summit in "great weather". Initially, they made good progress along the ridge, conditions varying between "soft sugary snow to excellent water ice".

However, half-way to the peak the climb became "more technical", requiring a route to be picked through seracs and up a small south face that ended with a steep ice pitch (to regain the ridge). From there, the pair skirted to the south of a sub-peak on forty degree slopes of firm snow, then up another steep ice pitch to gain the ridge proper, from where the last "relatively easy" push to the top of Mount Paget lay before them. Unfortunately, when the two men reached the 2,540-m level, and were "within 45 minutes" of their goal, the weather deteriorated and they decided to retreat.

The return journey in whiteout conditions and "phenomenal winds" was described as "difficult", and they were concerned about losing their trail. Once back at camp at the col, they and Hall packed up and descended to camp two. With food and fuel running low they eventually made it back to Cumberland East Bay the next day and were picked up on 28 March.

During their retreat they stopped at a camp site that had been established by a so far unidentified group that had crossed to the west coast of the Barff peninsula from St Andrews Bay earlier in the season. That camp had been 'blown out' and the Paget trio collected some overlooked snow stakes and tent wreckage.

'Gambo' eventually left South Georgia for South America on 30 March, with the six climbers and Martin Stuart, the seventh crew member, on board, but it was not known, at time of publication, which port it was headed for or whether it has yet arrived.

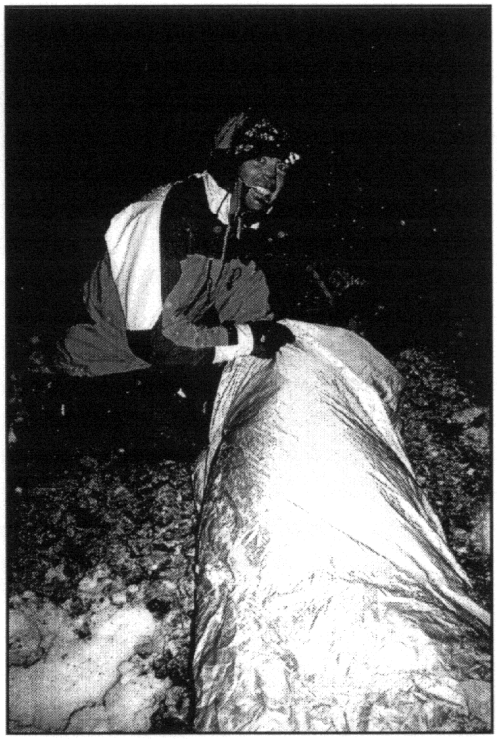
Hubbard originally envisaged conducting a third season with 'Gambo' in southern waters, visiting South African, French, Australian and N.Z. sub-Antarctic Islands in the Indian and Pacific Ocean regions with the yacht in 2003-04 (ANAN-48/03, 6 June 2001), however, no details of what is proposed for that season are available at this time.

Attempts on Paulsen Peak, Quad Five & Marakoppa

By Davie Robertson

In March 2003 climbers from the SV Gambo made two attempts to climb the above mountains. The mountains were chosen because they were unclimbed and accessible from Grytviken. The latter was a requirement because Gambo was jetty bound with engine trouble.

Paulsen Peak & Quad Five 3th – 8th March, 2003

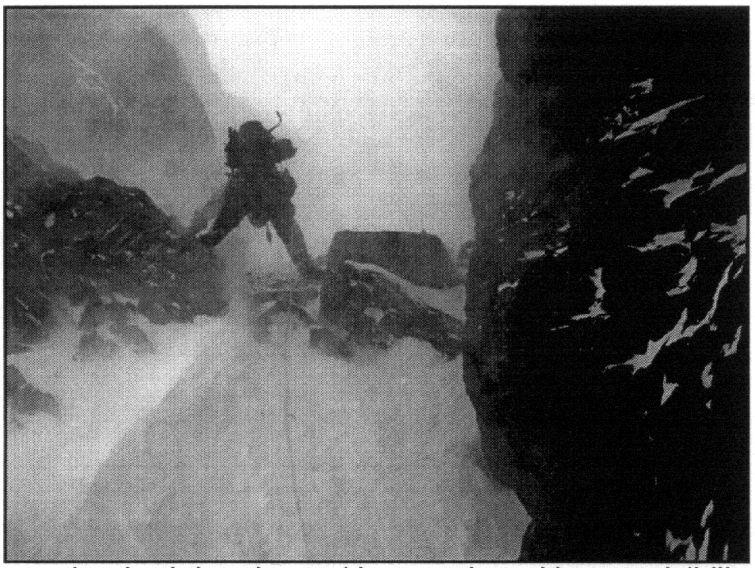


The climbing party consisted of Stuart Holmes (UK), Grant Redvers (NZ) and Davie Robinson (Scottish). We left late afternoon with a good 36-hour forecast and five days food. Our intention was to access the Western branch of the Lyell Glacier and from there climb to the Col between Paulsen Peak and Quad Five. From the Col both peaks look easily accessible. Paulsen looks the steeper of the two ridges. We made our way over to Harpon Bay by crossing Echo Pass in around two hours arriving just on dark. We spent a bit of time searching for the hut, which according to our map was supposed to be at the bottom of the Echo Pass drainage. We gave up and bivied in the tussock with a wee bit of sleet falling. The morning dawned clear and we found the hut that was is in fact 2 km further along the coast towards the Lyell Glacier. We dropped a couple of day's food there and made our way up the Lyell. Our general direction was SW and after 3-4 hours of moraine bashing we made it into the Western branch of the glacier. The travel got a lot easier at this point. An icefall at around 1700ft then blocked our progress. The climbers right of the icefall is threatened by active seracs on the East face of Quad5. There may be a route through the middle of the icefall but we didn't like the look of it. There looked to be some large transverse crevasses at the top?

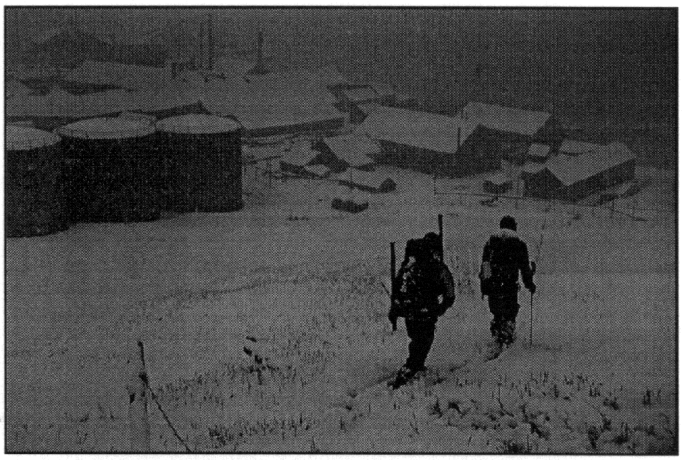
In deteriorating weather we then climbed to a Col on the North Ridge of Quad5 at around 1800ft. The intention being to either climbing the North ridge of Quad 5 or drop over the Col and attempt the NW face. The rock on the north ridge was choss, which ruled that option out. There looked to be a way down the far side into the Geike Glacier but access to the NW face looked marginal. It was late in the day with the weather getting worse so we decided to drop back into the Lyell and bivied at around 1000ft in light winds and snow. A quick exit the next day saw us back at the hut by mid morning. We spent a very pleasant day at Harpon Bay before heading back over to Grytviken the next day. Better luck next time?

Marakoppa 17th – 21st March 2003

Climbing team Stuart Holmes and Davie Robinson. The intention was to climb back to the Col on N. Ridge of Quad 5, drop into the Geike Glacier and access Marakoppa from there.



We left mid afternoon with a 24-hour weather window and crossed quickly to Harpon Bay. This time we crossed the Lyell low down in a westerly direction, which proved to be a better route choice than our pervious attempt. We crossed the moraine in an hour to where a snow lead on the true left makes travel straightforward. The night was clear and the moon full so we kept going and arrived at the Col on the North Ridge of Quad 5 at midnight. The sky clouded over and the wind picked up so we opted to bivi here for the night. The weather had deteriorated by morning with poor visibility, moderate winds and blowing snow. We down climbed the gully into the Geike, which proved easy apart from one short rock step. Once down we made our way to the head of the Geikie, which leads up to the Col between Quad 5 and Marakoppa. Winds were now strong and visibility was very poor due to cloud and blowing snow. As anticipated the way up to the Col was through more seracs, which we attempted to find a route through. After about half an hour we came to an impasse and no easy route was forth coming. The weather wasn't getting any better and the avalanche danger was increasing, as our aspect was lee to the wind. We decided to call it a day and head back to the Col we had bivied on. On our way down the Lyell we had another look at the first icefall but again decided against attempting it. We got to hut mid afternoon and returned to Grytviken the next day.

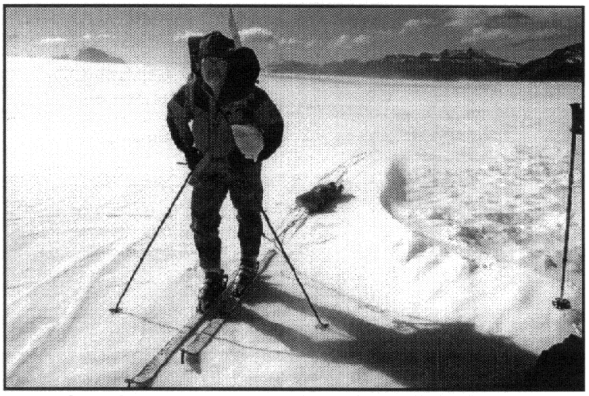


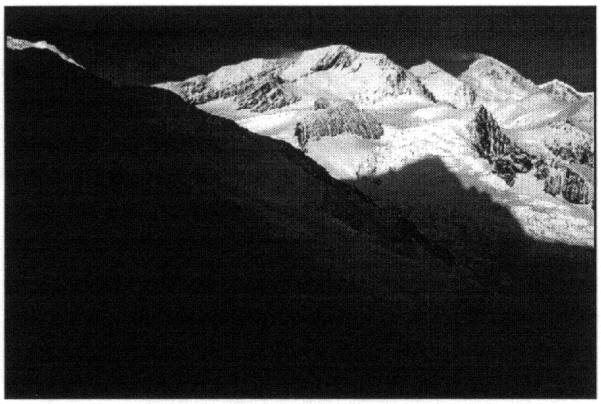
In general we found that this area was often prone to orographic cloud when other higher peaks were cloud free. The map we used had a 500ft contour which lacked detail and made planning hard. We were climbing late in the season and I think access would be easier late winter early summer. The icefalls we had trouble with may be viable option at this time of year. All three of these peaks look like they could be climbed with little trouble from the western side of the island. With such short weather windows good local knowledge and recce trips would be very worthwhile. Thanks to Pauline and Tim for their help and knowledge. We'd also like to thank Pat and Sarah at K.E.P. for their weather forecasts. It was a pleasure not summiting in such a beautiful place.

Davie Robinson, Grytviken March, 2003

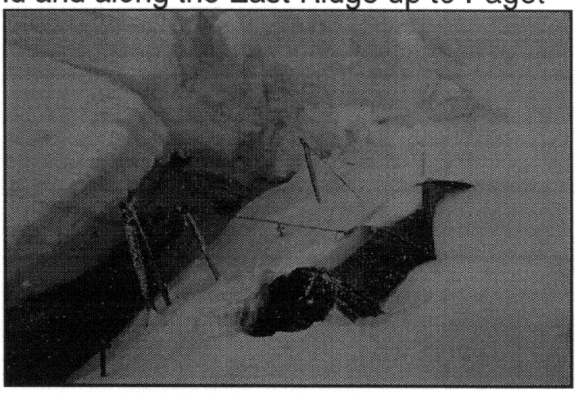
Attempt on East Ridge of Mt Paget

On 18th March, Tim Hall, Hamish Millar and myself off s/v Gambo set off in reasonable weather with a week's worth of food & fuel up the east margin of the Nordenskjold Glacier to have a bash at the above route, which we believe to be unclimbed. Armed with good info from Tim Carr & the 'S.G. Travel Book' we took an approach up to the obvious Col between Mt Paget & Roots. Given ideal conditions it could be done in a day in a big push, mid-summer. We took to skis at about 500 m asl and were



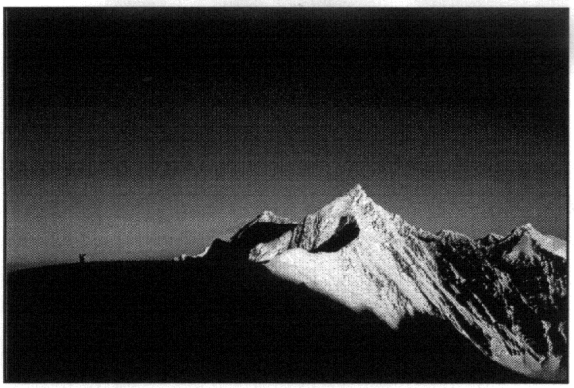


roped up for the numerous ice falls. Unfortunately, we got bogged down at Camp II (safe but within a ice fall) for 4 days in bad weather; time we used wisely attempting to concoct painless methods for consuming porridge and maximising our bladder capacity. Apart from a small windslab that was inadvertantly set-off, the route up to the col is relatively straight forward and mainly free from objective dangers. Once at the col (c. 1,800 m), the views down the South Coast of the island and along the East Ridge up to Paget and along to Roots are stunning. Well worth a quick visit for even those without climbing aspirations. Ideally, I'd like to see a furnicular railway up there – perhaps something along the lines of the Snowdon model with a nice shop selling cups of tea, post-cards & various knick-knacks at well inflated prices along with the option of a tandem para-glide down for the more daring (Skip? A business opportunity here?). But anyway, I digress.



Tim, not doing so well on a porridge diet sans Spicy Chicken Wings and evidently having had excess time examining his sanity, then baby-sat at Camp III (in a snow-hole of rapidly shrinking dimensions) leaving Hamish (a strong if possibly very foolish novice) and I to set off on the 4 km route in great weather at dawn of the 26th (Day 8). We made good and rapid progress along the ridge, which is simply put, just a stunning route. Conditions varied from soft sugary stuff to excellent water ice, broad in places to beautifully exposed arrete up to about 55° in places. The ridge was mainly cornice free and the crux is on the fore-peak about 2 km from Camp III at the col. Here, on slopes of about 40 – 50° we turned some seracs on the ridge to the left and headed across and up a small south face which ended with a steep ice pitch to regain the ridge. An simpler alternative would be to traverse onto the exposed and (for us) wind-slabbed NW face, but I didn't have my brown

trousers with me. We then skirted to the south of this sub-peak on about 40° slopes of firm snow and then via another steep ice pitch gained the ridge proper for the last, relatively easy push to the top of Paget. It was here that we got Gambo'd & the weather went pear shaped on us. We got to about 2,450 m asl, I believe within 45 minutes of the summit on easy 40° ground but decided to take the prudent move to retreat. Our route up was complex enough to have been worryingly problematic in retreat in a white-out without the benefit of the our tracks.



I am still not sure if I made the right decision but at least I am here to tell the tale. Even though the pressure was high & the day dawned cloudless, within an hour of setting off there was the tell-tale lenticular looming ominously over Paget. Within three hours, at our high-point the winds and cloud that hit us were phenomenal. We made a quick VHF call to hear sarah's heart-cheering dulcet tones and the weather forecast which was a decisive factor on not lingering. We took 4 hours to retreat in mostly white-out and high winds but it never felt really marginal (see the previous attempt on E Ridge!). On returning to Camp III we packed up and spent the evening retreating in the storm to Camp II since we were pretty over-committed and by now food & fuel were low. Although pissy, the next morning we had cheering plod back to the front of the Nordenskjold via a previous camp-site that a Gambo party had stayed at and which had literally got torn apart by the winds. We picked up a few bits of tent wreckage & some snow-stakes which had inadvertently been left behind in the rush to retreat. Be warned.

At our high point, Hamish and I said a few words at Sarah's request in tribute to Mark, a marine and previous Mt Paget summitter who, news had just come in, had tragically died in a helicopter incident in the war on Iraq.

Alun Hubbard,
Grytviken, March, 2003

St Andrews Bay, Sörling Valley, Ocean Harbour, Green Peninsula:
4th – 17th March
By Tim Hall

Early in the evening Hall, Miller & Stewart were dropped off by inflatable on the beach in Cumberland East Bay adjacent to the old BAS field Hut located at the NW end of the Sörling Valley. They explored the local area & then stayed over night in the BAS field hut, which is in good condition.

They started the day with a leisurely breakfast and an extended photographic session, bought about by the fine sunny weather. Due to the lack of snow on the surrounding hills they decided not to take skis & set out for St. Andrews Bay at 1000. An hour later and as they worked there way around to the Sörling Valley we came across a group of Marines and Sailors from HMS Endurance who had been camping in the valley for two nights. They stopped and spoke with them briefly. The route to St. Andrews Bay took them via Hound