

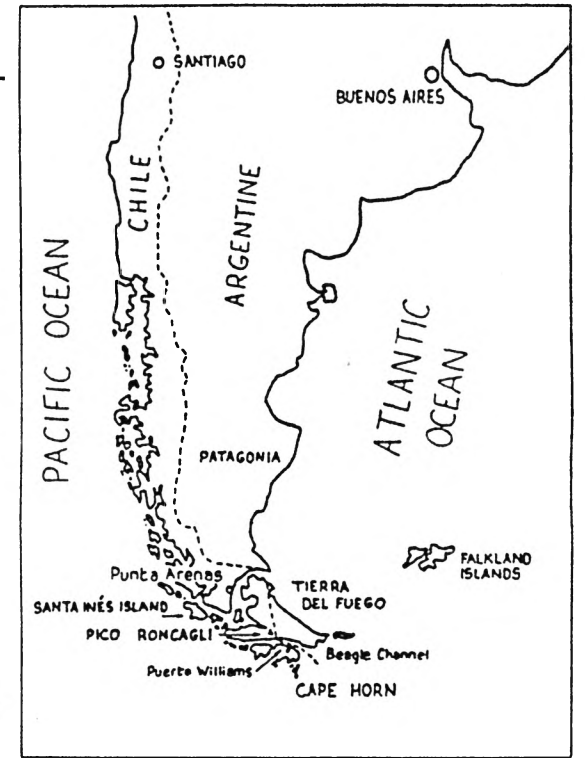
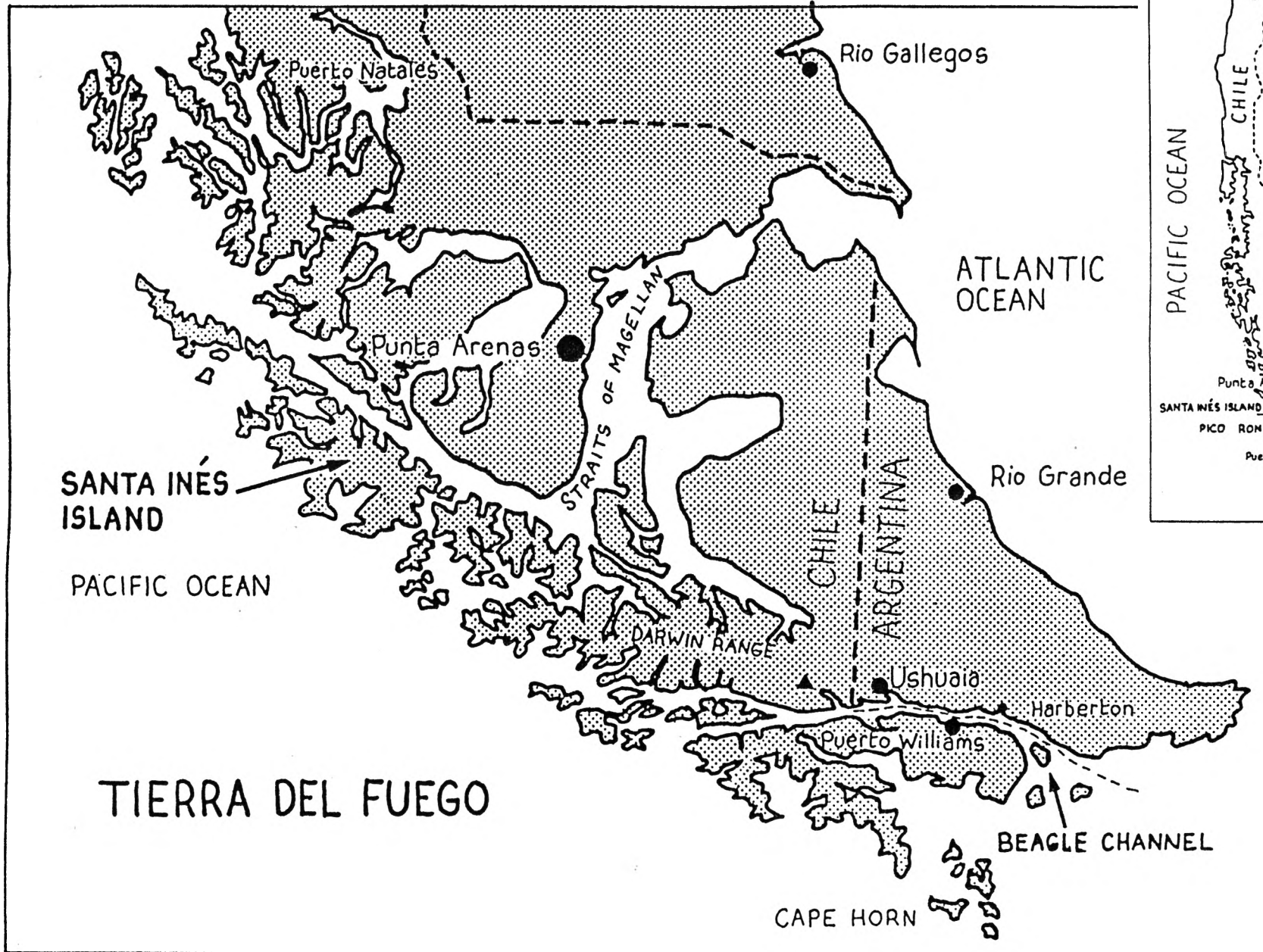
THE SANTA INES ISLAND EXPEDITION - 1985.

REPORT BY: Iain Peters

Renny Croft

Rowland Perriment

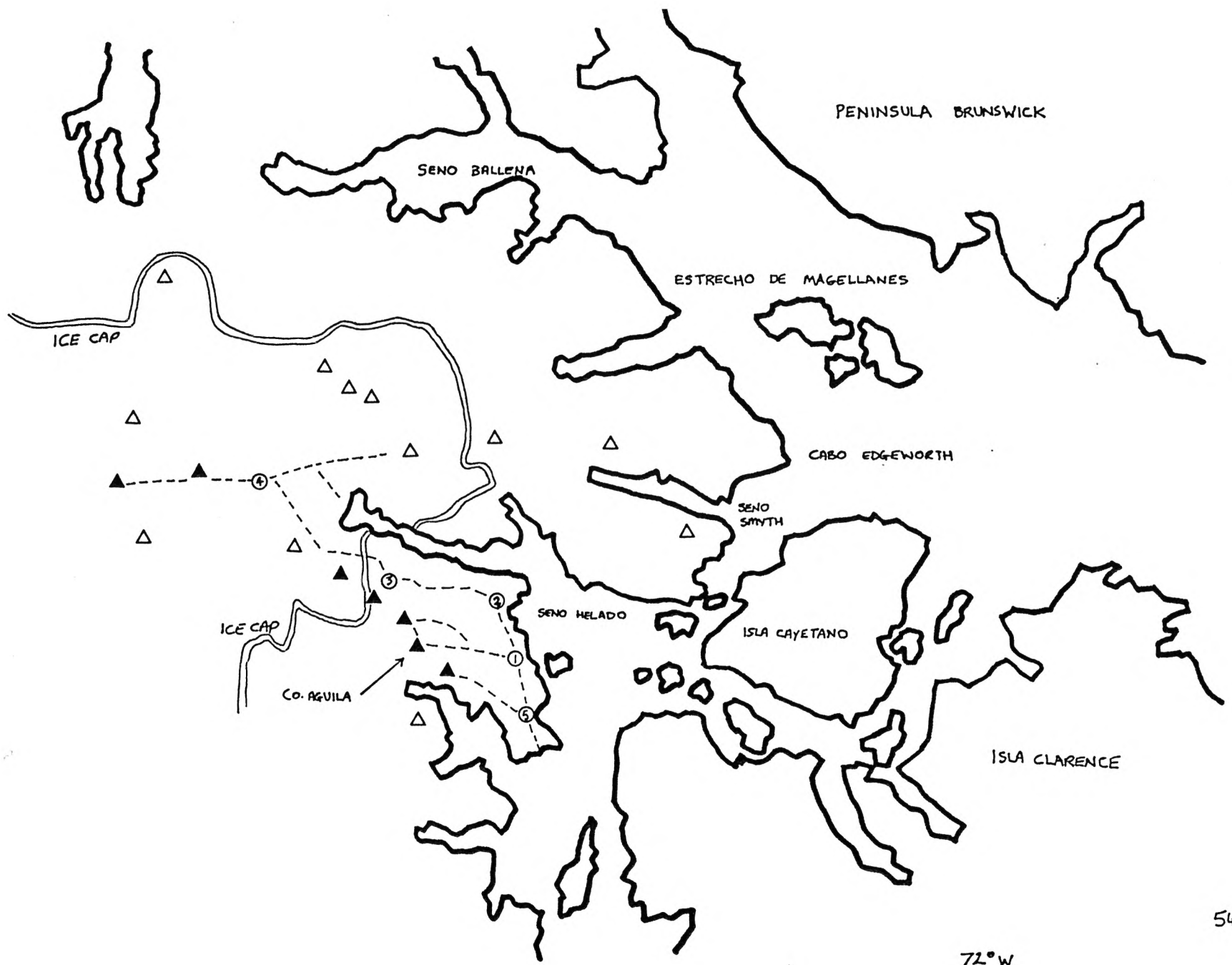
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72°W



ISLA SANTA INES



54°

72°W

SANTA INES ISLAND, JANUARY/FEBRUARY, 1985.

ROWLAND PERRIMENT.

Renny and I arrived in Punta Arenas on the 2nd. January. Iain met us at the airport and quickly put us in the picture of how he had been somewhat frustrated over the last week with his attempts to organise transport and obtain permission to visit Santa Ines Island. Information as to the whereabouts of the cheapest accommodation, cheapest bars, etc. were also forthcoming. The Chilean Navy told us that Sant Ines Island was in a restricted area and that we wouldn't be allowed access. We were entirely dependent upon the Navy for permission to explore the island and for transport to and from it.

Eventually, after many persistent visits, they agreed to allow us to go to Santa Ines - from that point on they couldn't have been more helpful.

January 10th.

We boarded the 'Aquila' (a Chilean Navy supply boat) on the 9th. January and, after a false start due to radar problems, found ourselves sailing down the Magellan Straits at dawn on the 10th. of January. Watching the sea and the surrounding mountains slowly take shape and form as the light increased was an ideal setting for the start of our adventure to Santa Ines Island.

The blustery wind was blowing heavy clouds across the sky and their effect constantly changed the weather. One minute clear with the orange glow of the rising sun, the next much darker and menacing. Frequent heavy showers and the keen wind kept us on the lee side of the boat.

Our thoughts wandered to the early explorers of this part of the world - Magellan, Drake, Darwin, and others who had found their way through the incredibly complicated chains of islands that form the southern coast of Chile. Taking sailing boats into these uncharted, unexplored and difficult waters must have been true exploration.

By midday we had sighted Santa Ines Island. We turned south and followed the east coast along the Canal Barbara.

A narrow passage between some small islands, and we were presented with the spectacular sight of the Icy Fiord. A thousand foot icefall at the head of the fiord and snow covered mountains made us feel that we would not be disappointed with Santa Ines.

Even though we couldn't see the terrain above the icefall, due to low cloud, we were sure that somewhere near there we would find a route onto the interior glaciers. Our plans took a knock for the worse when, instead of landing us close to the icefall, we were put several miles down the peninsula from it. We were told that shallow water prevented the boat from entering the fiord.

I was dismayed at the potential thought of days of load carrying through impenetrable rain forest. The woods in southern Chile are generally very dense, especially in the remoter islands, where there are very few animals grazing and travelling through them and usually several feet of thick spongy moss covers the forest floor. Load carrying under such conditions is sheer hell.

Although disappointed with the landing site we were pleased to be at last under way, but there was also a sobering feeling of commitment in the backs of our minds as the naval boat disappeared and we realized that it was just us and Santa Ines Island for the next month come what may.

High water was our first real problem, as expected the woods offered no campsites whatsoever. Eventually we were forced to level a platform out of a small, gravelly beach not knowing whether we would be above the high tide level.

January 12th.

We had decided that probably the best way to get an idea of the lie of the land was to climb a nearby peak from which we could hopefully work out an

access route to the glacier. January 11th. was spent moving to a suitable campsite to attempt a climb the next day. The climb was technically only a scramble but covered many types of terrain. Our campsite was literally on the beach. Above the beach was a continuous belt of rain forest, the thick impenetrable terrain we had feared. Fortunately, at several points it was no more than a couple of hundred yards across and then we gained access to open boggy moorland with only a few scattered low growing bushes. The moorland gradually gave way to more rocky ground until at about 1,200 ft. we were climbing along grassy ledges and low angle rock. The snowline was about 2,000 ft. The snow was wet and soggy and upward progress was tiring. The summit at 3,200 ft. was reached in rain and wind with poor visibility which unfortunately precluded our hopes for finding a route onto the glacier. We called the peak 'Cerro Aquila.'

January 15th.

After a couple of days of almost continual rain we set out for another summit again hoping to find a route onto the glacier. This time we scrambled up and along a long rocky ridge.

At times we could look across at the icefall at the end of the Icy Fiord but to get to it would involve crossing several steep, densely wooded bays. To be able to move anywhere we had to get above the tree line. As we gained height the cloud lowered and the keen westerly wind soon brought rain with it. The summit of our chosen peak was in cloud but by contouring off the ridge we gained a snowslope leading to a col which we hoped would lead us to the glacier. We reached the col in strong winds and rain and were disappointed to see over the other side yet another valley. Frustrated at the route not appearing to open out for us, we climbed another couple of hundred feet out of the col and on the bare, rocky, windswept ridge above we could just make out the difference between the grey " of the glacier and the grey of the clouds.

We turned our backs on the wind, rain and mist knowing that we had found the route to the glacier.

January 17th.

In order to be in a good position to go for the glacier we decided to move our campsite up the peninsula. We found a sheltered campsite about 600 ft. above sea level where the trees started to thin out. The day we did the main carry it was hot and sunny and we all spent the afternoon sunbathing - much to our regret, as later we were infested with small red mites whose bites tormented us for the rest of the trip.

January 18 - 20th.

Frustrating days all psyched up to go for the glacier, but continual rain and wind left us in the tent most of the time.

January 21st.

A slight improvement in the weather enabled us to go for the glacier. We set out with a week's supply of food hoping to be able to spend a week camped on the glacier exploring and climbing a couple of peaks.

It was familiar ground up to the ridge above the glacier, then we had to descend a steep scree filled gully to reach the ice. The glacier was badly crevassed but it was bare ice, so we felt relatively safe crossing it unroped.

Across the glacier was what looked like a potential campsite which was a curious little valley in the ice between the main glacier and the rocky mountainside. On reaching the valley the only suitable campsite was a small patch of snow that filled the bergshund. Everywhere else was either rock or ice with no potential campsites around. We leveled a makeshift platform for the tent and gladly got inside to a brew. After a meal it was good to lie in the tent listening to the rain and wind. We were excited at the prospect of finding out what lay in the interior of the island.

January 22nd.

The weather on the 22nd. dashed all hopes of any ideas of further exploration. During the night the wind had built up to gale force and the tent was continually blasted by wind and rain. Even though we were camped on a glacier it never snowed, always rained. The wind and rain continued throughout the day, never letting up at all.

By evening time the tent was becoming a bit unstable because the rain was melting the snow around the tent at a phenomenal rate; the tent was gradually being perched up on a platform. Renny spent quite a long time banking snow back up around the tent but still came back in muttering something about keeping our headtorches and boots handy throughout the night.

January 23rd.

By morning the tent urgently needed re-pitching. We managed to squeeze it into a new position on our fast dwindling patch of snow then, with the weather appreciably better, we headed westwards towards the interior of the island. We hoped to be able to climb a peak and also get a better impression of the interior of Sant Ines, weather permitting of course!

We had not been able to get a good view of the area we were in, so we headed westwards not knowing what we would find. The initial problem of crevasses was overcome by climbing up on a snow ridge from the glacier and traversing three small rock peaks. The character of the surroundings changed, very little rock to be seen at all. Before us was a scene of big rounded peaks completely covered with snow and ice. The weather conditions were windy and cloudy, and sometimes it was difficult to define where the peaks stopped and the cloud started.

We roped up now because the telltale signs of crevasses showed through the snow and set off across the snowslopes with the sobering thought in the backs of our minds that this was ideal terrain to get lost in with bad visibility.

The higher we went the stronger the wind blew. Our efforts were further frustrated by the wet, soft snow and in the huge expanse of whiteness we never seemed to get anywhere. The only point that gave us any perspective on our surroundings was the thin line of our tracks across the snow. Eventually we spotted a small black area of rock which appeared to be on a high point of the horizon. We headed for this with no clear indication as to how far it was. Reaching it we were rewarded with fine views to the south and the rest of the island. Our altimeter read 4,400 ft. and we were on the watershed of the island; to the east were the vast snow domes with hardly any definition, while to the south and west we could see to the coast. A view of heavily crevassed glaciers, snow and rock peaks losing height to blackish, dark grey, barren hillsides stretching away to the coastline. Beyond that was the ocean dotted with numerous small uninhabited, desolate islands. We were looking at the land which had the full force of the furious fifties which scream their way around the southern ocean uninterrupted for thousands of miles until they hit this area of islands around Cape Horn.

We didn't stay on the summit long because we were eager to get back across the icefields before the weather closed in, and we knew it would be a long hard plod back to the relatively sheltered campsite.

January 24th.

We were pleased with our achievements of the 23rd. and I could have quite happily have spent the 24th. resting and eating, but the day dawned fine, quite a strong wind, but fine blue skies. Days like this in the mountainous areas of South America are so rare that we were obliged to put them to good use. We therefore decided to attempt another peak, directly across the main glacier, that drops into the Icy Fiord from our campsite.

It didn't look very far across the glacier, but distance was deceivign and all the crevasses seemed to go the wrong way. It took us two hours of

zig-zagging and crevasse jumping to reach the other side. We were all feeling tired from yesterday and sometimes it was a real effort to keep going; a definite feeling of running on empty. The weather was deteriorating, our old enemies the wind and rain were on us again. We continued hoping we would be able to make the summit and get a fair way back before conditions got too bad. The conditions deteriorated faster than we could climb and, about 600-700 ft. short of the summit, we were forced to return. The wind was blowing with such force that in some gusts it was impossible to stand against it. The descent was difficult, at times we had to squat in the snow and wait until the wind gusts had passed before being able to move on. Returning across the glacier was a never ending plod through the maze of crevasses, head bowed into the now torrential rain and wind. We eventually reached the tent soaked through and very tired. We all crawled into our sleeping bags with our wet thermal gear on, having no other dry clothes, and drifted into a clammy slumber.

January 25th.

We all had a cold and uncomfortable night, but thankfully the morning was fine and enabled us to have a mammoth clothes drying session. We finished the last of the porridge this morning; only flour left now to make into a gruel for breakfast.

January 26th.

Iain had a particularly bad night. The tent had now become very uncomfortable, the snowpatch having melted to such a degree that the tent was perched precariously on its platform and headroom inside was reduced by half. We were getting low on food and so decided that we should start heading back down to friendlier campsites. Iain was in a bad way, suffering from a very bad headache and feeling feverish. We camped on a snowpatch at the edge of the glacier. That night I think we were all looking forward to getting off the glacier and camping in friendlier surroundings.

The short time we had spent on the glacier had had its effects. The almost continual rain and wind, and especially the unceasing flapping and noise of the tent, had worn us down.

January 27th.

Iain was still ill. His headache was so bad that he could only move if he took 'Fortral' to ease the pain. The weather was kind to us today. I took one last look (the best view we had) at the snow covered peaks and glaciers then descended from the world of rock and ice and snow to the world of vegetation. We spent two days resting. Iain was slowly recovering and there were two more days to get to the spot where the Chilean Navy was to meet us. We had four days to spend on the island before the Navy was to pick us up. Iain is very interested in the plants which grow in that area (amongst the southernmost plants in the world) and spent a lot of time collecting specimens and seeds where possible. Some of the botanical interest rubbed off onto Renny and me and we spent time collecting seeds and photographing plants. Our main preoccupation, however, was food. We had somewhat miscalculated our requirements and ran very short of food, especially towards the end of the trip.

The small amount of food we had left was continuously supplemented by mussels. At every low tide we would collect them and they were definately the staple diet for the last few days.

The luxuries of real bread and scrambled eggs followed by a hot shower were unbelievable - but that's what happened on the 4th. of February when the Chilean Navy picked us up.

EQUIPMENT REPORT.

RENNY CROFT.

From the early stages of planning our expedition to Santa Ines we knew we would have both vastly different weather patterns to deal with and very different types of terrain. From previous experience gained in the Darwin range (to the east), we took with us a range of equipment that would enable us to deal with everything from ski-traversing and rock climbing through to moderate ice-climbing. As things turned out we had little recourse to much of the gear and only used 'the basics' - indeed, much of the heavier skiing and climbing equipment was left down at the landing spot. This left a nucleus of gear that we can honestly say was well tested.

As on all trips there were certain 'favoured' items - and not the ones that would seem all that obvious. Just before we left Dick Turnbull at Alpine Sports gave us three base-ball style ski caps. These proved to be brilliant both low down and on the glacier, giving good protection to the face from both the wind and sun. With a chin-strap on they would have been even better. Our ski sticks were very useful as an aid when negotiating the horrendous beech forests, stream crossing, stabilizing when carrying heavy loads and probing on the glaciers. They also had the advantage of making excellent clothes drying racks! Both Rowland and I used our Helly Hansen Duplow Lifa suits throughout the four weeks we were on the island and found them to be excellent, being both very warm and quick drying. Indeed, with fibre-pile over the Duplow and Goretex over that, we needed little else in all but the very worst conditions. Our greatest asset though was our Winter Gear 'Diamond' dome tent. It never leaked, stood up well on a rain swept glacier (when all around was collapsing) and took the three of us with gear very comfortably. We experienced no problems with the poles and all appreciated, in winds right off the southern oceans, its roominess and sturdiness.

Here, then, is a run down on the equipment that we used:

Boots: We all used Koflach 'Ultras' and found them both warm and comfortable. Our main complaint was their bad stitching. On the three pairs the tongues all came apart very early on and this was soon followed by the main stitching between the plastic shell and the gusset by the ankle. Near the end of the four weeks on two pairs of the boots the stitching on the back of the inners had worn through badly. The lacing system on the outers had the tendency to 'eat' laces quickly - annoying on a wind swept galcier with cold hands. We also took some Zamberlan 'Alpenlite' boots for lower level use and to wear close to base camp. These proved to be excellent, very comfortable and quick to wear in.

Gaiters: Iain and I used Berghaus 'Yeti' gaiters which were brilliant for stream-crossing, bog-walking and above the snowline. However, the rands were soon very tattered due to the different terrains encountered and after two to three weeks we were beginning to have doubts about their usefulness. Rowland used ordinary nylon standard gaiters and found them O.K. but found some of the stream crossings a lot more traumatic!

Socks: We took with us the loop-stitched variety supplied by Europa Sport. To put on a dry pair of these after a couple of days out on the glacier was sheer luxury. Very comfortable socks.

Underclothing: We used our Helly Hansen Duplow Lifa continuously for the four weeks and were very impressed. I was using an ordinary Lifa top and a Helly Hansen fibre-pile jacket in conjunction with the Duplow and found there were few occasions when I needed further insulating layers. It also dried out very rapidly both on and off the body. We had with us Helly Hansen fibre-pile salopettes which were good, though when worn by themselves proved to be a little draughty round the middle.

Protective layers: Phoenix provided us with goretex jackets and salopettes made from 'Strata' cordura goretex. This gear was given very heavy usage right

from the start but I must make the point here that on a future expedition I would not consider 'Strata' as a suitable material. After a very short time we were noticing a considerable amount of moisture on the insides of the garments especially from the knee area down on the salopettes and around the shoulder and arm areas on the jackets. The reason for this was the 'roughing up' of the already open-weave material caused water to be held on the surfaces of the clothing hence stopping the goretex from working properly. Having said this we did find the gear well made and, if we had used ordinary 'Taffeta' goretex, would have been very pleased with the performance.

Mitts, gloves, etc.: We used Mountain Equipment 'Expedition' mitts which leaked badly around the seams and were cumbersome - though warm. We also used different types of 'thermal' inners and found them effective.

Sacks: Europa Sport provided us with Lowe 'Triolet' sacks which were spot on for the amount of gear we had to carry. We also appreciated the adjustability for different loads and their comfort when carrying.

Sleeping bags: Iain and I used North Face 'Snowshoe' bags which were warm, well cut and exactly right for the conditions. Lowe compression sacks were a distinct advantage when manipulating them into sacks, however. Rowland used a down bag and had a few more problems when keeping the damp/condensation at bay.

Karrimats: We used the 'Five Season' type and found them adequate - though once or twice on the glacier we noticed the cold start to strike through.

Tent: As mentioned, we took the Winter Gear 'Diamond' (now called the 'Nova') - brilliant.

Climbing gear, etc.: Very much left to personal choice so quite a range was taken. Europa Sport supplied us with Beal 8.8 Everdry ropes which were just right for the type of climbing undertaken and we appreciated the saving in weight and handling ability.

Food: Apart from some dehydrated meals we took out with us, all the food was

bought in supermarkets in Punta Arenas. Prices were very similar to those in the U.K. (except chocolate - very expensive) and we were able to stock up on excellent corned beef (Brazilian!), dried fruits, porridge, pastas, soups, etc. On a future expedition down to that area we would not bother taking any food from England with us, just generally more of it next time!

Stoves: I took my M.S.R. multi-fuel which was very efficient and economical. At most of the camps we used fires for cooking but higher up the stove was brilliant.

BOTANICAL WORK.

IAIN PETERS.

A secondary objective of the expedition was to make a plant collection on behalf of Sr. Edmundo Pisano, senior botanist at the Patagonian Institute in Punta Arenas, and to undertake a seed collection for Kew Botanic Gardens in London. This was a continuation of a programme, started Iain Peters in 1978/9, and carried out on three previous expeditions, to make comprehensive collections of the unique flora of the Cape Horn region, both as plant samples for herbaria, and to obtain good quality seed for planting trials by the Forestry Commission Research Station, various British universities and other individuals and organisations.

Santa Ines Island, being unexplored and unvisited, presented an exciting opportunity to develop these studies. The glaciated and mountainous interior of the island confines the vegetation to a comparatively narrow strip - on average 4-5 kilometres wide, The high precipitation and the generally poor acid soils limit the number of species, the greatest variety being present in a very narrow strip along the coastline, extending inland only where the deeper river valleys provide shelter and improved drainage.

The predominant tree association is *Nothofagus betuloides*, *Pilgerodendron uviferum* - both evergreen, with the latter being a conifer similar in appearance to the Northern Hemisphere's cupressus species. *N. betuloides* forms the climax forest, but also common are *Drimys winteri* with a thick understorey comprising *Berberis buxifolia*, *B. ilicifolia*, *Fuchsia magellanica* and *Escallonia* Sp:. The heath-like *Empetrum rubrum* is also common in association with *Pernethya nucronata*.

Higher up on the marshy moorlands *Nothofagus antarctica* occurs in scrub form and is the hardiest species growing near the snowline at around 500 metres, where we also found *Embothrium coccineum*.

This is only a brief summary of the vegetative species of the island, a full

report is being compiled for the Patagonian Institute and copies will be available at the expedition address.

Following the completion of the mountaineering phase we spent ten days at or near sea level and commenced seed and plant collections. Apart from the above mentioned species, Renny Croft discovered two examples of the evergreen shrub *Desfontaina spinosa*. We subsequently learned that this was the westernmost record of the species which is more commonly associated with the shores and channels of southern Chile. Seeds from the bush have been dispatched to Kew Gardens.

Unfortunately, we were rather too early for the main fruiting season which occurs in March/April. However, the success of this phase of the expedition was, in fact, that a general reconnaissance has been made which will be of great use in 1986 when Iain Peters will return to the island and region for more comprehensive studies and collections.

FINANCE.

Initially, the expedition had hoped to raise enough finance in order to be able to acquire an independent means of sea transport to enable some of the expedition members to stay in the field for a longer period. Unfortunately, despite considerable efforts, we were not successful in finding sponsors. The grant aid we received from the British Mountaineering Council and the Mount Everest Foundation was thus a major factor in helping us achieve what we did.

<u>INCOME.</u> (£)		<u>EXPENDITURE.</u> (£)	
B.M.C. GRANT	400	AIR FARES	2400
M.E.F. GRANT	600	HOTELS	200
LECTURES	100	TRAVEL IN CHILE	50
PRIVATE DONATIONS	60	NAVAL TRANSPORT	200
MEMBERS' CONTRIBUTIONS	2500	FOOD	200
		EQUIPMENT	500
		MISCELLANEOUS	100
TOTAL INCOME: £3,600		TOTAL EXPENDITURE: £3,600	

THE SANTA INES ISLAND EXPEDITION - 1985.

Sponsored by the Mount Everest Foundation and the British Mountaineering Council.

PERSONNEL.

Iain Peters, 36.

Tree Surgeon. Three previous expeditions to Tierra del Fuego. Seed collections made during these trips on behalf of the Forestry Commission, Royal Horticultural Society and the National Trust. Lives in Devon and is a keen rock climber and mountaineer.

Renny Croft, 32.

Television cameraman. Experienced rock climber and mountaineer with experience in northern Norway, Spain, The Dolomites, U.S.A. and Mexico. Lives and works in Leeds.

Rowland Perriment, 32.

Horticulturist. Mountaineer and canoeist. One previous expedition to Tierra del Fuego. Other experience in the Himalayas, the Alps and the U.S.A. Lives and works in Cheshire.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

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