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REPORT OF
THE BRITISH 'PELAGIC'
ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION 1996



The Pelagic sailing off the Graham Land coast

An expedition grant aided and supported by:-

**The Foundation for Sport and the Arts
The Mount Everest Foundation
The British Mountaineering Council
Aerolineas Argentinas**

(Report compiled by Julian Freeman-Attwood)

+ 974

AIMS OF THE EXPEDITION

To attempt the first ascent of the 2,459ft (747 m) Cape Renard tower at the north-east end of the Lemaire Channel in LAT 65.01' S / 63.46' W. (West Antarctic Peninsula).

A recce of this objective was made by Freeman-Attwood in 1994 whilst engaged in the ascents of other peaks in the area.

Note: Cape Renard can now be classified as an island or giant sea stack as some glacial calving has resulted since 1994 in a 50 meter wide channel to the SE, which now separates the tower from False Cape Renard.

HISTORY

The earliest discoverers of land in this part of the Antarctic were Smith 1819, Palmer 1820, Weddell and Bellingshausen 1821. Not until the formation of the Falkland Island Dependency Survey (FIDS) in the early 1940's (the forerunner of the British Antarctic Survey BAS) was any attention paid to the climbing of Peninsula mountains. A substantial number of peaks have been climbed or attempted by FIDS or BAS personel over the years but few records have been kept since mountaineering activities were often frowned upon where science was the prime objective.

Major peaks like Mt Francais on Anvers Island were not climbed until the mid 80's and indeed only this year was the famous Mt Foster on Smith Island (South Sheiland group) finally climbed after attempts by Tilman in 66/67 and joint services teams in the 1990's.

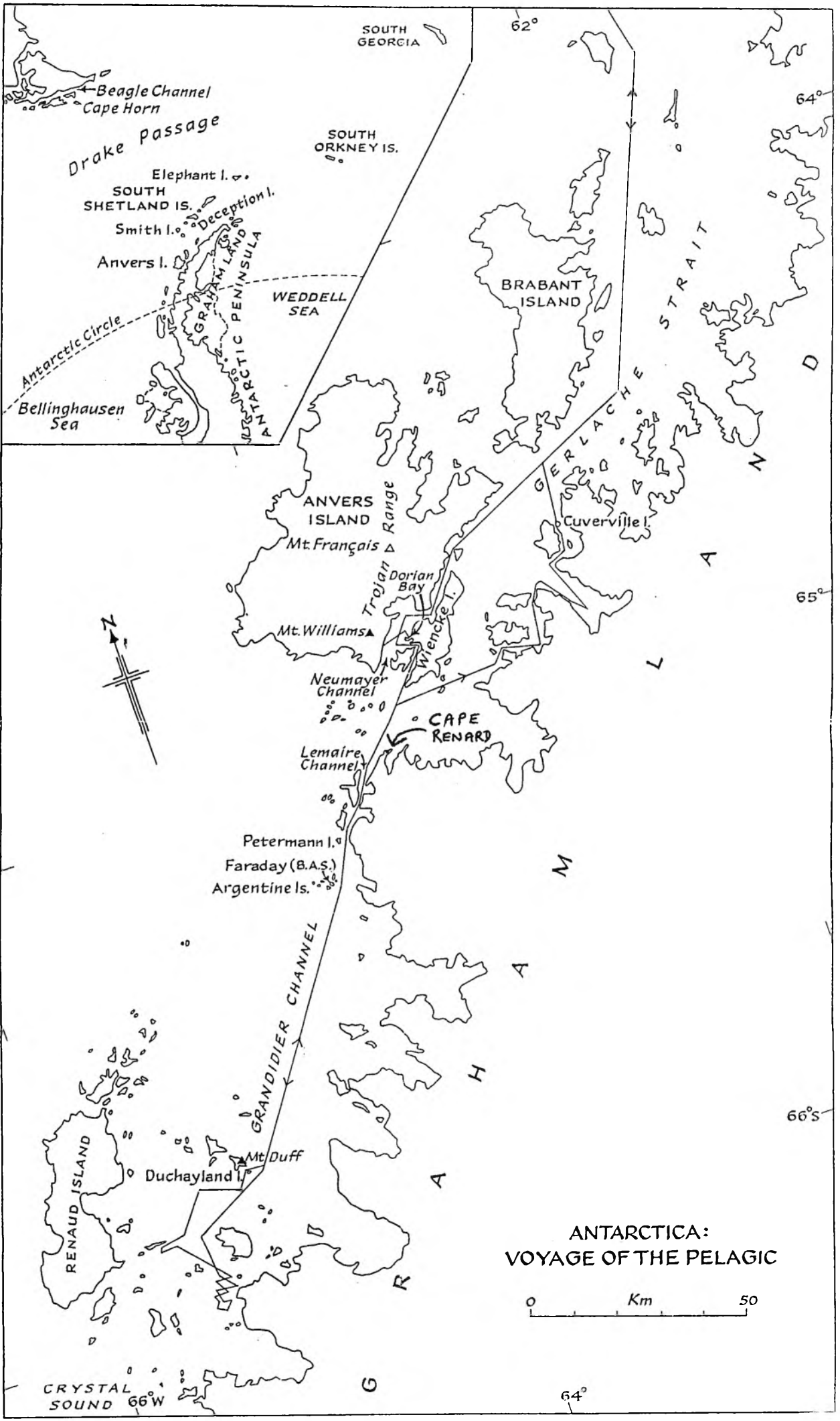
PERMITS

No permit is required to visit Antarctica under the Antarctic Treaty renewal 1991 although visiting parties are expected to adhere strictly to the environmental protocol in that treaty . Theoretically, vioiations to the treaty are dealt with by the government of the country of the offender. In time there may be an Antarctic Treaty council in its own right.

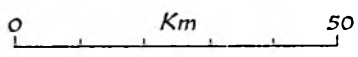
GRADING

Any gradings mentioned in this report are UK rock gradings and Scottish ice gradings.





ANTARCTICA:
VOYAGE OF THE PELAGIC



CRYSTAL SOUND 66°W

Expedition members

Caradoc (Crag) Jones. UK. Marine Scientist, 37 yrs. Previous expeditions:- 1st ascent Hunza peak in Karakoram, 1st British ascent Biblimotin, New route Kilimanjaro, 1st solo ascent Diamond couloir Mt Kenya, 1st ascent and solo east wall Peneto in Torres del Paine, led attempt Tierra del Fuego (Mt Sarmiento), 1st alpine ascent Mt Paget in South Georgia Antarctic, Ak Su Ranges Turkestan, / Mt Blanc, Mt Rose, Grand Jorasses (Croze spur), Dru couloir and NE pillar direct on Courtes in European Alps, two attempts on Ultras 1 in 1991 and 1994 with Freeman-Attwood, To summit of Everest by north ridge 1995 (4th British ascent). Solo ascent Imja Tse with F-A and Solo ascent Pokalde in Nepal. Rock climbing to E4 and ice to Scottish grade 7.

Julian Freeman-Attwood Forester, 41yrs. Previous experience:- New route TD Kilimanjaro; Mt Kenya west ridge; Ruwenzori's Mt Stanley and Baker; Attempt east face Shishapangma ; Karakoram snow lake 1988 ; Leader Antarctica 1990 expedition that achieved three first ascents on Island of South Georgia; Attempt on the unclimbed Ultras 1 in the Karakoram 1991; Outer Mongolia expedition 1992 with new route on highest peak; Leader 1993 Masaganang expedition to Bhutan; Antarctic Peninsula expedition 1994 achieving 2 first ascents with Skip Novak; British Ultras 1 expedition 1994; Tierra del Fuego expedition 1994 with Skip Novak ; Winter ascent Mt Blanc in European Alps, East face of Catinaccio in Dolomites Steger route; Rock climbing to Extreme severe 2 (E2/5c) and ice to Scottish grade 5.

Skip Novak was to have joined the climbing party but was sadly at the last minute unable to do so.)

THE VOYAGE OUT

One of the great problems in climbing on the peninsula is getting to the chosen mountain. Whilst an air flight can be arranged through ANI for parties wishing to climb Mt Vinson or the Queen Maud mountains in the continental interior, it is a boat that you need for the peninsula.

The yacht 'Pelagic' (from the latin for 'of the sea') is one of a handful of vessels that visit this region and was built by the well known Whitbread round the world captain, James 'Skip' Novak for the purposes of sailing / mountaineering. To facilitate navigation in shallow or uncharted waters, the vessel was built with a lifting keel comprising some 7 tons of steel encased lead. The boat is a 54ft long Bermuda rigged cutter and well able to cope with the horrors of the Southern Ocean.

Jones and Freeman-Attwood flew from Heathrow to Ushuaia (Tierra del Fuego) via Buenos Aires arriving 31st January 1996. The Pelagic was anchored in Ushuaia harbour and during the next 5 days we were fully occupied in buying food and getting the vessel ready for sea including some minor repairs to the rudder and stowing and lashing all gear in the focsle for the crossing of the notorious Drake passage. With Novak no longer coming on the voyage, the vessel was skippered by his extremely talented friend and sailor, Hamish Laird. The rest of the boat's company was made up of Choisik Dumas who did all the cooking (not the most enviable job on a boat) and 5 others who had chartered the boat for a photographic trip.

The final pair to come aboard were two butchered and skinned sheep which were hung high on the back-stays to dry and cure.

6th February.

Weighed anchor at 14.00 and had to motor into a light easterly in the Beagle channel to Puerto Williams on Navarino Island. This is Chilean territory and boasts of being the most southerly inhabited town in the world. The weather fax showed a large low having just tracked through the Drake with reasonable locking weather behind it, so we decide to get going the next day.

7th Feb

By late p.m. we are in sight of Cape Horn and out into the usual 25ft swell of the southern ocean with about 600 miles to sail to our first Antarctic Islands in the South Shetland group. We adopt a system of watches which works out at about 3 hours on and 6 off.

8th/9th/10th Feb

Despite moderate seas and some good sailing in which we managed to dodge most of the low pressures and squalls, some of us (including the author) felt uncomfortably sea sick. Enthusiasm in

such conditions reduces to zero and you wish you were anywhere but at sea. By the 10th we were feeling a lot better and sighted Smith Island on the horizon to the east. We had just heard that a group of New Zealanders had made a first ascent of Mt Foster, the highest peak on the Island some 2 weeks before. This had been achieved in proper Tilman fashion from a small boat on what is undoubtedly a very difficult coast to land on.

11th Feb.

By midday we had reached the sheltered Dallmann Bay and Melchior Islands lying between Anvers and Brabant Islands. Humpbacked whales were feeding and Mt Francais rose majestically to over 9,000 ft in a cloudless sky. By late pm we anchored in Port Lockroy, the site of an old BAS hut, next to the Yacht Northanger which had dropped the Smith Island party earlier.

12th Feb

With a half gale from the NE it looked very unlikely that we would be able to land Cape Renard which was now only three hours sailing to the south. Nevertheless by 11am, although still misty, the wind died and we set off past Wiencke Island (and Mt Williams which was climbed by Freeman-Attwood and Novak in 1994) towards the now visible Cape Renard at the far side of Flandres Bay.

We spent some time making a close recce for a camp site. No routes of safety presented themselves on the Lemaire Channel side, leaving either the east glacier, (where a camp would be very exposed or an ice cave difficult to dig) or a rock overhang on the north side only 25 meters above the sea where the steep climbing started. We opted for this latter overhang.

Luckily there was little sea swell that day and we landed making a total of 4 trips from Pelagic with the dingy. Just prior to landing, a very inquisitive humpback whale spy-hopped (when the head is stationary out of the water) within 5 feet of the boat giving us all a most special and unforgettable moment so close to such a gentle 45 ton giant.

Pelagic left at 5pm with a promise to return in 18 days on 2nd March. We landed with a VHF radio (useful only for line of sight transmission) and some flares. Jones and Freeman-Attwood spent the rest of the evening ferrying loads up to the overhangs and finding, to their delight, a rock cave going back some 40 ft into the mountain. This was very useful for storage and retreat in the event of weather becoming untenable but for now we pitched our two tents under the overhangs near the cave entrance where there was more light and more pleasant living conditions.

13th Feb

We spent the day organising all our gear and making a recce along to the west where Jones had sighted a likely looking steep rock gully line. Getting to the line was a slightly laborious business of 45% snow over hard ice but we decided to try out the gully next day.

The other obvious gully was one beginning some 500ft above our cave but getting to it was at this stage not at all obvious.

14th Feb

We traversed to the western gully which was generally free of snow. We found the rock to be sound basalt and not a rotten granite as we had expected. Crag led a fine E1 5b pitch to start and Attwood a 5a pitch to follow. With snow flurries starting we fixed our 2 climbing ropes and abseiled off. It seemed a good start and with every prospect of the first 4 or 5 pitches of the gully going free. The trouble was we hadn't bargained on the gully being a natural avalanche debris gully for much of the north face.

15th Feb

Not a very nice day and quite a lot of snow had fallen in the night. Traverse back along to the western gully. Spent most of the day just getting back to our 2 pitch high point and replacing the climbing ropes with 10mm semi-static line. Snow and water poured down in torrents and we realised that this gully needed to be fairly dry to succeed at all. Ab off and back to cave.

16th Feb.

Blows quite hard overnight and a lot more snow has settled and powder snow pours in a constant wave off the mountain. Nothing possible but to stay in camp. We are lucky to have a lot of fresh food to keep us happy.

17th Feb

The wind dies down to some extent but still continuing snow flurries. Very grey and overcast. Ice bergs have come in from the west and ice fronts are continually calving in what has become a monochrome world. We find a freshwater meltpool in the afternoon just above sea level which will save on the fuel we need to melt drinking water. Some killer Whales pass close by, Weddell and Crabeater seals lie oblivious on ice floes and bergy bits. Every day a humpback blows past.

18th Feb

At 7am it is still blowing with wet mushy snow and it is hopeless to consider climbing as our route from sea level is a rock route and certainly is not forming any good ice to make it a mixed route.

19th Feb

Wind and snow all day. Re-weight tent valances with rocks from sea level. 'Cabin fever' is setting in but we are powerless without a break in the weather.

20th Feb

Still snowing but we set off anyway at 6am for the western gully and try to ignore the snow pouring down it. Wind now NW blows into the gully giving unpleasant updrafts of spindrift to combine with that descending. There is no way to continue but at least we got up and out to have a look.

21st Feb

Weather still poor but we go back to gully. We jumar to high point through vast quantities of spindrift and descending shards of verglas but it is hopeless. The gully really must collect snow from a large area of face and it seems that our climbing on the first day was a lucky break. Freeman-Attwood felt we had spent long enough in this gully and another route must be searched for. Return to cave. Occasional brightness over Anvers Island. Even the irrepressible Crag is now happy to be out of the gully and we will pick up our fixed ropes another day.

22nd Feb

Finally a sunny morning. Up early and we decide to climb the sea ice front to the immediate east of the cave and pray it doesn't calve while we are on it. This will get us onto the east glacier where we can look for another route or traverse back across over our cave to the start of a big obvious snow and ice gully.

Crag does a fine lead up the hard blue grade V ice of the front and we worry our way through crevasses onto the glacier. We recce the east face where a possible line exists by linking a string of steep ice fields and rock steps together. Nevertheless we find a rock ramp leading back over our cave and where the ramp ended we continued up with pitches of 5a and another fine Crag lead of overhanging 5b with little protection to give access to the bottom of the snow gully.

We had only come to recce but we decided to continue. The gully (from where most of the powder that swept over our cave emanated from) looked about 6 pitches long and turned out to be 12 pitches. With some ice screws but mostly with rock protection in the gully walls, it went at Scottish 111 (average angle of 50%) with steps of 1V and V. By the time we got to this harder section it was intermitently snowing and quite a lot of powder was breaking off at intervals down the gully. Crag did an incredible job in white out conditions climbing the V step (which the author fell off seconding although in mitigation he couldn't see his hand in front of face let alone see a good axe placement) and as it was getting dark we could see a possible bivvi site 3 pitches on at the base of the summit block which looked about 200 meters high and in theory climbable except that now it was again plastered in snow.

Just as it was almost dark we found a fairly uncomfortable ledge to sit on with our legs dangling over the couloir and the sea nearly 2000 ft below. By any standards it was a miserable night with no sleeping bags although F-A had a down jacket. Crag hadn't brought one and began to regret it but did have an emergency plastic bivvi _____



↑
THE
ICE
FRONT

↑
B.C.

↑ THE WESTERN GULLY ABANDONED AS A ROUTE .

← FALSE
CAPE
RENARD

The Cape Renard Towers



Crag Jones leading hard rock to gain the gully.

bag which he got into with his crampons still on! It looked a fine sight with them sticking through the bottom of it. Luckily we had a stove and could have a hot brew which really saved our bacon but damp and icy snow flurries of powder persisted all night and somehow had the ability to chill us right to the bone at each gust.

23rd Feb

After 7 hours perched on our ledge, daylight brought with it no better weather. This is when we really needed a break as we were less than a day from the top and could have followed a continuing ice ramp for 100 meters before the more technical upper rocks.

But it was not to be and with snow falling we began an abseil retreat. It took 10hrs and 17 abs to reach the sea. The lower rocks had been hard as some of it meant difficult diagonal abs.

To give an alpine equivalent Crag thought our climb so far had been about the standard of, or perhaps a little harder than, the Dru couloir.

24th Feb

Typically, the next day was perfect sunny and windless. All we had needed was this weather to come in one day earlier. We rested and spoke to Pelagic on the VHF as she happened to be on our side of Wiencke Island on her way some 50 miles north.

25th Feb

Weather still good and we went back to the western couloir to pick up the two fixed ropes from the gully while conditions allowed. Even now there was a considerable amount of debris descending at terminal velocity. Good ridance to the gully. By now we were both heartily glad to be away from it.

26th Feb

The good weather still held and we were up early to try and find a route back to our high point but in such a way that we did not have to climb the ice front again. We found a good route on superb rock between our cave and the ice front which went free at HVS 5a and on which protection was excellent. Who says all peninsula rock is bad?

This got us to the ramp half way up to the couloir so we only had to climb the last 3 pitches again in order to gain it. Our intention was to fix these 4 pitches from the cave up to the couloir in order that we could still climb the mountain in the event of snow covered lower rocks.

Crag was leading on this pitch that we had climbed before and had moved diagonally from my belay and past a flake over which he had placed a sling runner. When some 10ft higher he had dislodged some stones which, on hitting the flake, had knocked it off pulling him off the face and down a steep rock gully towards a ledge. Luckily he didn't hit the ledge as the ropes caught over a pinnacle and stopped him. It also meant that there was no shock load on the belay



Climbing through the ice front



Crag Jones in the lower section of the gully



The final abseil to base

which consisted of one, admittedly good, hexagon. Nevertheless, Crag was severely winded, had also been hit by falling stones, and either had a very badly bruised or cracked rib in the kidney area of his back. It took some considerable time for him to get breath but it slowly dawned that this was luckily no major accident. In great pain he abseiled 2 pitches straight down to the cave with the last ab completely overhanging in its full 50 meter length. A meter of it just reached the glacier. The poor fellow crawled into bed and it was obvious that at best he would have difficulty in moving for a few days.

27th Feb

The weather was generally good for this day but it was the last one we would get and even if Crag had not been hurt we would not have had the window to get another shot at the mountain.

28th Feb

Snow, poor visibility and a SW wind bringing in a lot bergs and bergy bits. There would have been no question of climbing and Crag was still feeling very poorly. He may not have cracked a rib at all but one way or another the pain is at much the same level.

29th Feb

The injury is a little better but it snowed all night and some digging had to be done around the tents. We are lucky to be in such a sheltered spot near the cave.

1st March

Still poor weather and snow. This is much worse than the same time in 1994 and even in January of this year Novak had got 12 consecutive days of good weather hereabouts.

It is our last day before pick up but the sea swell is not at the moment good for being taken off. We start to pack and lower gear and barrels to sea level ready for the boat.

2nd March

Pelagic arrives at 8am on a good sunny morning to collect us. The swell has gone down due to the wind veering to NE so conditions are ideal.

We feel that we did all we could to climb what turned out to be a fine objective. No regrets there, but it must be said that the weather was not our friend. With the route being a rock climb low down, ice in the middle and rock at the top (with an ice cap on the summit) it required 2 days of sun to clear snow from rock and then 2 to 3 days to climb and descend. It is quite possible to get breaks longer than that on the peninsula and Cape Renard (the BAS name of Una's tits sounds better) is quite climbable. Like all exploratory climbs there are dead ends that take time to eliminate but the donkey work is

done. There is no doubt that it is worthy of a return match and would 'go' in a settled spell.

Even by early afternoon the weather again closed in and we sailed some 50 miles north to the Melchior Islands to shelter and wait for a break before tackling the Drake.

3rd and 4th March

Remain sheltering at Melchior and drinking large quantities of gin and tonic!

5th March

Set off across The Drake trusting our satellite weather fax. But as the old sage said 'there are lies, damn lies and Chilean weather forecasts.' After a little good sailing for a short while we got a light wind bang on the nose, namely due north. Sheeted mainsail amidship to reduce rolling and had to motor.

6th /7th / 8th March

All the time northerly, and all the time motoring. This would have been the perfect wind for sailing south! Just about 120 miles south of Cape Horn the wind veered west and we could cut the motor and increase our speed with all plain sail up. Then from force 4, it increased to 5 when we reefed the main, to 6 when we reefed the jib, to 7 with two more reefs in the main and the jib down, to 8 and a reefed staysail and finally through 9 to a 55 knot force 10 on beaufort scale when we bore right away to the east. Happily it hadn't all lasted for more than 6 or 7 hours and whilst the seas were large they had not had time to assume mighty proportions. When it had been blowing an 8 the sailing had been superb with much white water on deck but now it was back to our cursed light northerley which we punched into, painfully slowly through the night. We later heard that a boat some 100 miles north had been blown flat with mast in water sustaining considerable damage.

9th March

With continuing northerly slowly past the horn and on into the Beagle where we pulled into Puerto Toro for the night.

10th March

A beautiful day and good to see the green of trees again. Sailed via Puerto Eugenie to Puerto Williams for the night.

11th March

The last day and at 11 am we arrive back in Ushuaia. Flight back to UK 14th / 15th March.

ENVIRONMENT

When we left Cape Renard all packaging, tins and rubbish were taken back on board the Pelagic and returned to Ushuaia. Nothing was left at base in accordance with the Antarctic Treaty protocol.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For their financial support ,without which the expedition would not have been remotely possible, we would like to thank the following:-

THE FOUNDATION FOR SPORT AND THE ARTS

THE MOUNT EVEREST FOUNDATION

THE BRITISH MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL

For reduced airfares and no charges for excess baggage London to Ushuaia return we would like to thank:-

AEROLINEAS ARGENTINAS

**THE BRITISH 'PELAGIC'
ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION 1996**

**ACCOUNTS
EXPENSES**

<u>Travel</u>	
Air fares London-Ushuaia return x 2.....	£1418-00
Yacht Pelagic Ushuaia-Antarctica return.....	£3500-00
<u>Insurance</u>	
BMC insurance x 2.....	£ 422-00
<u>Equipment</u>	
Ropes, hardware etc ex Cotswold camping as per inv 27/1/96	£1247-45
Invernales boots and extra pegs ex Cotswold inv 29/1/96	£ 250-70
Ski glue ex Snow and Rock 28/1/96	£ 7-00
Replacing gear left at abseil points following expedition.....	£ 120-00
Batteries.....	£ 23-77
<u>Food</u>	
All supplies (from boat stock or ex supermarket).	£ 250-00
<u>Fuel</u>	
Camping gas cannisters and benzina blanca.....	£ 50-00
<u>Accommodation</u>	
Ushuaia (Vincente Cordini).....	£ 106-00
<u>Mail</u>	
Return ropes by mail due to excess baggage....	£ 35-00
<u>Pelagic cook</u>	
Wages.....	£ 50-00
Production and distribution of report.....	£ 100-00
Miscellaneous items / airport tax etc.....	£ 50-00
TOTAL EXPENDITURE.....	£7629-92

**THE BRITISH 'PELAGIC'
ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION 1996**

**ACCOUNTS
INCOME**

<u>The Foundation for Sport and the Arts.....</u>	£6000-00
<u>The Mount Everest Foundation.....</u>	£ 900-00
<u>The British Mountaineering Council.....</u>	£ 600-00
<u>Member's Contributions</u>	
Crag Jones.....	£ 64-96
J.F-A.....	£ 64-96
TOTAL INCOME.....	£7629-92

