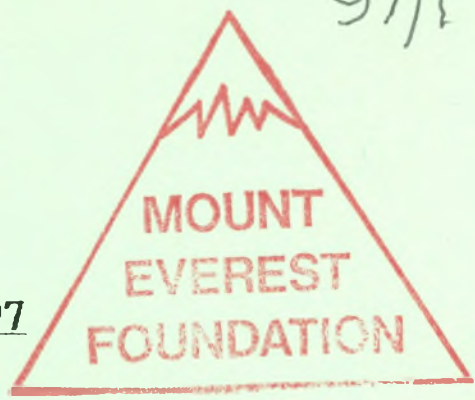


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REPORT OF
THE BRITISH
CERRO AGUILERA EXPEDITION 1997
 and reconnaissance of Mt Aosta and Mt Italia
 in the Darwin Ranges of
 Tierra del Fuego.



Compiled by Julian Freeman-Attwood.



**Pelagic at anchor off Seno Agostini
 North-western Darwin Range.**

+523



EXPEDITION MEMBERS

DOUG SCOTT: 54 years / British.

Mountaineer, author and lecturer. Vice president of the British Mountaineering Council and one of the world's most renowned Himalayan climbers.

EXPEDITIONS: (Too numerous to list fully) but 35 expeditions to Asia. Mountains include Everest SW face (first British Ascent), Shivling, Kangchenjunga, Shishapangma, Broad Peak, Mt Vinson (Antarctica), MacKinley, Aconcagua, Kilimanjaro, Elbrus, Changabang, Makalu, Baruntse, Chamlang, Jithchu Drake. Has recently completed the 7 summits. (With Freeman-Attwood and Novak on 1st Ascent Mt Pelagic in Tierra del Fuego 1994.)

JAMES 'SKIP' NOVAK (Master of vessel and leader of the sailing voyage.) Race sailing Captain and Mountaineer; 42 yrs.

Previous experience:- Novak was navigator on King's Legend in the 1977/78 Whitbread round the world race. He captained Alaska Eagle in the 1981/2 race and was project manager and captain of Simon le Bon's boat ' Drum' in the much headlined 1985/6 Whitbread. He wrote about that voyage in his book 'One watch at a time'. The Soviets chose Novak as consultant and captain for their entry Fazisi in the 1989/90 Whitbread. He wrote another book of that voyage 'Fazisi'.

{ Novak then built his own vessel 'Pelagic' in order to fulfill his climbing ambitions to mountains in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean where only a boat would get him there. The secret of the vessel is it's lifting 7 ton keel enabling it to land climbers in otherwise inaccessible places or out of harm from the larger icebergs. }

EXPEDITIONS:- 1979 Agui Verte, Courturier Couloir, Chardonnay north face Alps; 1979 Cook range New Zealand; 1980 Mt Aspiring Cook range New Zealand; 1983 East face Mt Cook; 1988 Antarctic Peninsular Mt Luigi on Wienke Island; 1988 South Georgia expedition; 1989 West face direct Batian on Mt Kenya; 1991 Antarctic Peninsular expedition south face Mt Verne, Pourquoi pas Island, Pilot Peak, Larouy Island (first ascents) and Sharp Peak; 1993 Tierra del Fuego Mt Francois east ridge; 1994 with Freeman-Attwood Antarctic Peninsular first ascent Mt Williams on Anvers Island and Mt Duff on Duchaylard Island; 1994 with Doug Scott and Freeman-Attwood on first ascent Cerro Pelagic from Seno Agostini; 1995 South Georgia expedition to Mt Paget; 1996 Antarctic Peninsula ascent of Mt Scott.

JULIAN FREEMAN-ATTWOOD British, Forester, 42yrs.

EXPEDITIONS:- 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 Ultar 1 in the Karakoram 1991; Outer Mongolia expedition 1992 with new route on highest peak plus 5 other peaks; Leader 1993 Masagang expedition to Bhutan; Antarctic Peninsula expedition 1994 achieving 2 first ascents with Skip Novak; British Ultar 1 expedition 1994; Tierra del Fuego expedition 1994 with Doug Scott and Skip Novak ; Winter ascent Mt Blanc in European Alps, East face of Catinaccio in Dolomites Steger route; Rock climbing to E2 / 5c and ice to scottish grade 5. 1996 Antarctic Peninsula north face of Cape Renard Tower.

FRANCIS MacDERMOT British 33yrs.

EXPEDITIONS:-1986 Solo Mt Kinabalu, Borneo. ; 1989 un-named peaks Torres del Paine, Chile; 1991 Aiguille du Tour ; 1993 Various routes on Aiguilles Rouge and Midi; 1993 Attempt with Novak on Mt Aguilera in Chilean Patagonia; Ascent of Mt Francia with Novak in Darwin Range Tierra del Fuego; 1994 Antarctic Peninsula Mt Duff on Duchaylard Island; 1994 ascent of Mt Williams on Anvers Island with Novak and Freeman-Attwood; 1994 Ascent of Mt Olivia Tierra del Fuego with Novak; First ascent Cerro Pelagic with Doug Scott, Novak and Freeman-Attwood and then attempt un-named peak in Seno Espana, Darwin Range; 1995 member of British Hanuman-Saptasring expedition to Garhwal Himalaya; Alps Frontier ridge with Novak; Rock leads HVS and ice to Scottish 1V.

POSITION OF THE MOUNTAIN

Cerro Aguilera lies in an area that must be considered one of the most pristine wilderness areas on the South American continent or indeed anywhere in the world. It is a mountain standing aloof and apart from the other peaks of the interior rather as does Monte Sarmiento in the western Darwin Range.

Position: South Lat 50 25 ; West Long 73 47

Altitude 2438 meters (7,996 ft).

PREVIOUS EXPLORERS TO THE SOUTHERN ICE CAP

In mid December 1955, the great seaman explorer Bill Tilman reached Calvo Fiord after a passage from Punta Arenas. Between then and the 27th January 1956 he made the first traverse of the ice cap via the Calvo glacier, the Calvo Pass and the Bismark Glacier to Lago Argentino placing 11 camps and returning by the same route. He remarked on the fine peak of Aguilera but did not attempt to climb it. His sailing cutter 'Mischief' had sustained damage during this period having struck a rock in an area that is still inadequately charted.

In 1957, '60, '62 and '64 the renowned climber Eric Shipton visited Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego. His southern ice cap journey lasted 52 days from the Jorge Montt glacier to the Upsala glacier making ascents en route of Cerros Don Bosco and Murallon. He did not attempt Cerro Aguilera.

ATTEMPTS ON THE MOUNTAIN

In 1985/6 a joint British / Chilean expedition led by F. Medina and M. Hickman and comprising 9 other climbers approached the ice cap through Fiordo Andrew on a scientific and climbing attempt. Their efforts on the mountain could get them no higher than 4,000ft due to

very severe weather. They did nevertheless manage to ascertain that Aguilera was a volcano.

In November 1993 Skip Novak, Frank MacDermot, Peter Evans and Hamish Laird landed to the south east of Aguilera from the sailing vessel 'Pelagic'. The incredibly tangled nature of the coastal forest and again severe weather meant that they only achieved the lower glacier levels but the expedition served as a useful reconnaissance.

No known attempts on the mountain have been made since.

THE 1997 AGULIERA EXPEDITION

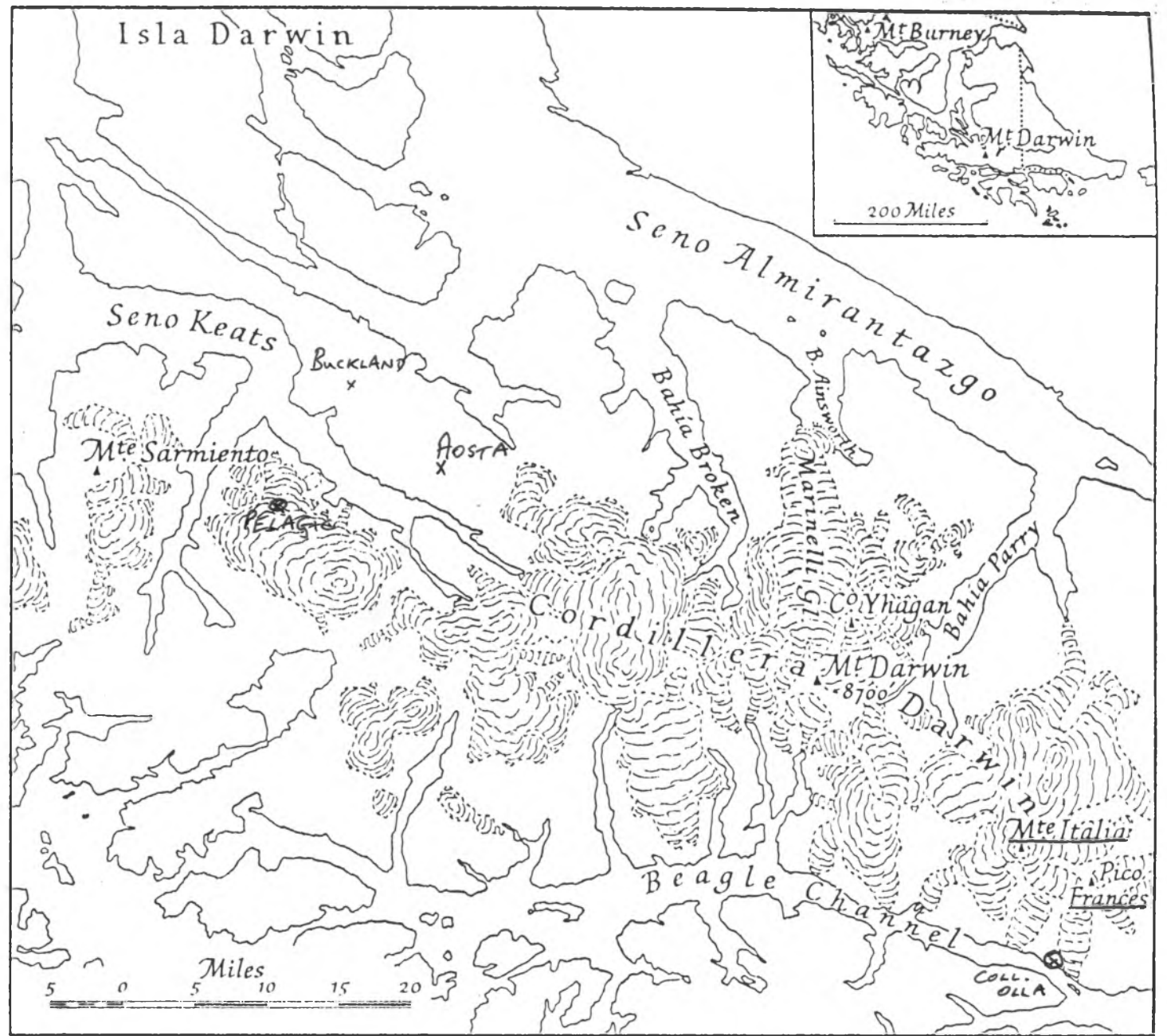
From the beginning various events conspired against us.

Firstly Doug Scott was sadly unable to come on the expedition due to a leg injury sustained in Malaysia just prior to the start of the trip.

On the first of April , Frank MacDermot, Julian Freeman-Attwood and Emily Rothschild (who was to assist Hamish Laird in crewing the boat), flew to Buenos Aires and on down to Rio Gallegos on the Atlantic coast just north of the straits of Magellan. We crossed Patagonia from there by bus en route to Punta Arenas and thereby entered Chilean territory.

On arrival we found Skip Novak's vessel, the Pelagic, was at anchor. It soon became apparent that there were problems for us. Hamish Laird, who is the first mate of the vessel and often the captain when Skip is elsewhere, had sustained a knee injury some 2 weeks earlier and this had only got worse. He had no alternative but to return to the UK for treatment as he could barely walk on it. This meant that the only man with sufficient experience who could be relied on to stay with the vessel whilst the climbers were ashore, was now no longer on the expedition. The anchorages near Aguilera are tricky, the fiords not well charted and one of the most important jobs is the safe keeping of the boat on any sailing / mountaineering venture. Understandably Skip was simply not

THE DARWIN RANGE OF
TIERRA DEL FUEGO





**A glimpse of the difficult unclimbed summit of Mt Aosta
seen between the endless storm fronts 1997.**



**In good weather!
The same area in 1994 with Scott, Freeman-Attwood and Novak
on the summit of Cerro Pelagic (unofficial name)
with Sarmiento in the background.
(Photo MacDermot)**

prepared to sail to the west coast without Hamish and the attempt on Aguilera was out of the question completely.

The only alternative, in order to try and get some useful exploratory climbing accomplished, was to go south to Tierra del Fuego to try an unclimbed mountain or new route in the Darwin Ranges.

On the evening of the 5th April we left Punta Arenas and headed south for some 35 miles before anchoring in Starvation Bay on the Brunswick Peninsula. The 4th and 5th April plus a part of the 6th were the only good days for the next 2½ weeks.

By the evening of the 6th we were in Seno Agostini, where the team and Doug Scott had climbed in 1994 making the first ascent of a peak in the Cordon Navarro which we unofficially named Cerro Pelagic>(*see photo). This and the Agostini fiord are situated just to the east of Mt Sarmiento, named by Darwin as the most sublime mountain in the world. On this trip we were destined never to see that mountain properly or any other.

We anchored in Seno Encanto (Enchanted Bay), so named by Agostini at the time he made the first ascent of Mt Buckland which rises dramatically to the north of the bay. With a rising wind, and unsure holding, we left Encanto the next morning to take a look at an impressive unclimbed peak further along the Buckland range called Mt Aosta (*see photo). Scott and I had always reckoned this would make a challenging and worthwhile project and we had always wanted to see around the north side of the peak to recce a route there. Mindful of that Skip had asked the Chilean Navy for permission to enter the fiords to the north, but had been declined for the dubious reason that the eastern end of the Almirante fiord is close to the Argentine border. We believe that they do let Chilean and joint expeditions go into the area at times but their attitude seems to alter from year to year.



A panorama of the Darwin Ranges.
(again taken in 1994 and unseen during 1997)
back left horizon are Mts Francais, Italia, Bovet and Roncagli
with the long massif of Mt Darwin center horizon.
(climber Frank MacDermot).

We caught a brief glimpse of Aosta for about an hour and ascertained a possible route to the southern glacier through a tangled mass of forest. In the process of this recce we ran aground twice, but Pelagic's lifting keel got us out of trouble as usual.

With bad weather now firmly established, and with no good anchorage near Aosta, we headed west some 12 miles to a small bay (Baia Qieta) just to the north of Sarmiento to await better conditions. Gales persisted for the next 5 days although we did do a recce to the lower part of the glacier coming down from a 5,000ft outlier to Sarmiento which we had an eye on climbing as well. We never got a chance for that and even tried to leave the bay on 12th April only to be blown back into shelter.

On 13th April we finally left the bay in continuing sleet although the wind had died somewhat to around 25 knots. We motored around to the east side of Sarmiento and made a short recce towards the east glaciers in driving rain. Nevertheless, the forests here were particularly lush consisting of two species of southern Beech (*Nortofagus Antarctica* and *Pumilio*). The former were turning to autumnal yellow and orange and grow on great moss beds with branches festooned with lichen and burrs.

With no possibility of better weather (the vessel had a weather fax on board) we abandoned the area completely and headed back through Seno Keats and into Magdalena fiord off which we spent the night of 13th April. We were now thinking that if we were to achieve any climbing at all we should head around into the Beagle Channel and attempt a new route on something at the east end of the Darwin range where there is usually somewhat drier conditions being at the rain shadow end of the range.

The next morning we headed towards the Cockburn channel where we had to head out into bigger unprotected seas to the west of Cape Horn. A large lumpy sea was running into the sound and with some of us feeling a bit queasy we sailed between beam and close hauled for 30 miles before turning into a small fiord and anchorage (which we knew of from 1994) to await better conditions to continue into the Beagle.

We were now to be pinned down for 4 more days by incessant gales, trying to break out once, only to be beaten back by frenzied white water even though we were in sheltered waters with no running sea.

Novak, MacDermot and Freeman-Attwood did manage to snatch a few hours of better visibility to climb a small peak in this rocky and rather beautiful area around the Brecknock peninsula, the most westerly point of mainland Tierra del Fuego. To give an idea of the vicious nature of the weather, there was a waterfall near our anchorage some 300ft in height dropping into the fiord over granite slabs. At times, none of this water was reaching the sea but being blown vertically upwards and dissipated by the massive 'willy-waws' that frequent the area.

On 17th April we finally managed to move on 50 miles east to near Chair Island in continuing gales. This island is at the west end of the Beagle Channel.

The next morning's weather was no better but we were able to continue to Seno Olla (having taken a look into the iced up fiord of Seno Pia

below Mt Darwin en route) and there we anchored for 3 days. This would be our last chance for climbing and things looked good as we had our first starry night and moon rising over Mt Francais. This was climbed by Novak and MacDermot 4 years previously. Theirs was in fact only the 2nd ascent of the mountain after Eric Shipton's ascent in the early 1960's.

The next day Novak, MacDermot and Freeman-Attwood set off in good weather to recce a possible new route on Mt Italia (7,000ft). From the beach we followed a wooded moraine ridge up to 1,000ft seeing a group of Guanaco on the way. At the snow line we put on snow shoes (the snow was deep and unconsolidated due to such a period of precipitation) and continued to one of several rock butreese which we could scramble up. A long gully got us up to above the Mt Francais south glacier at a height of about 3,500ft. From here we could see that with an abseil onto that glacier we could gain access to Mt Italia over a high col. Conversely the col could be reached from another valley to the west which was densely wooded to 1500ft and down onto which we now looked. The weather was changing again but we decided to get back to the boat by descending two steep rock gulleys to the woods and contouring around to the Guanaco ridge. This took hours of floundering in deep snow and amongst roots and fallen rotten trunks of timber. We arrived back at dusk with at least these two options for an approach to Italia the next day. If lucky we might knock it off in a 36 hour push.

Some fierce gusting gales blew all night and in the morning visibility was down to 500ft. Going back up the mountain was futile and we were thoroughly demoralised. The only thing to brighten the day was a friendly kingfisher, some crab in our crab pots, and some grey mullet in the net.

Time had now run out, the weather had beaten us, and with the oncoming winter Novak had to get his boat back up to Buenos Airies some 16 days sail north. We left Seno Olla on the 20th and headed for Puerto Williams on Navarino Island to which one must go to exit Chilean territory before arrival at Ushuaia (Argentina). We left Puerto Williams and arrived in Ushuaia on the 23rd April which ended the expedition.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON WEATHER

On some expeditions you can look back and wish you had done more having perhaps missed some oportunities. We can safely say on this trip that we were never given a chance to do any climbing and that whenever it was possible to leave the boat, to at least do some reconaissance, we did so.

Tierra del Fuego is renowned for its low pressure systems but Skip Novak had never had such a prolonged period with no breaks whatsoever, in 10 years experience of the region. We had decide to go in April as there is some evidence that autumn weather is more settled than in summer and that slightly colder air would make for better snow conditions.

Of course one of the alluring aspects of climbing in the region is that, due to bad weather, there is still a great deal of fine mountains to be climbed if you have the patience to try them and if you are prepared to be disappointed. We consoled ourselves with remembering that time is never wasted in reconaissance !

**THE BRITISH CERRO
AGULERA EXPEDITION 1997**

ACCOUNTS

EXPENSES

Air fares.....3 x £761.....	£2283
Food.....3 x 20 days x £10.....	£ 600
Gas.....on board.....	Nil
Accomodation Buenos Aires, Punta Arenas and Ushuaia..	£ 346
Bus and taxi travel.....	£ 58
Boat charter.....	£1000
Insurance.....3 x £149.....	£ 447
Equipment.....all in individual possession.....	<u>Nil</u>
Total.....	£4734

INCOME

Members personal contributions.....	£2434
Foundation for Sport and the Arts....	£1000
The Mount Everest Foundation.....	£ 700
The British Mountaineering Council...	£ <u>600</u>
Total.....	£4734

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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THE FOUNDATION FOR SPORT AND THE ARTS

THE MOUNT EVEREST FOUNDATION

THE BRITISH MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL