



Expedition Log

Antarctic Peninsula

21st – 31st March 2008

M/V Grigoriy Mikheev ГРИГОРИЙ МИХЕЕВ

MV Grigoriy Mikheev was a research vessel used by the Russian Academy of Science. The ship was built in Finland in 1990 and is an ice-strengthened vessel. The Mikheev is 210 feet (66 meters) long, has a draft of 12 feet (3.5 meters) and can reach a top cruising speed of 12.5 knots. The passenger capacity is 48, in addition there is a Russian crew of 19, three international hotel and catering staff, four international expedition guides and polar experts and one emergency doctor.



With

Captain **Andrey Khoroshaylov**
and his Russian Crew of 18

including

1st Mate - **Stanislav Nedelko**

2nd Mate – **Fikret Rustamov**

3rd Mate – **Pavel Torbik**

Radio Officer – **Nikolay Manshev**

Boatswain - **Yuriy Sabol**

Able Seaman / Zodiac Driver - **Dmitriy Ivanov**

Able Seaman / Zodiac Driver: **Vitaliy Zuev**

Stewardess - **Lina Tishchenko**

Stewardess - **Nina Ivanova**

Stewardess – **Natalia Kornysheva**

Stewardess: **Elena Petrova**

Stewardess: **Svetlana Vorobeva**

and

Expedition Leader – **Jonas Sundquist** (Sweden)

Guide/CME Group Leader/Lecturer – **Rosy Whelan** (Australia)

Guide – **Jamie Watts** (UK)

Guide – **Martin McGrath** (UK)

Hotel Manager – **Gemma Heaney** (New Zealand)

Head Chef – **Marcelo Canel** (Argentina)

Sous Chef – **Juan Almonacid Soza** (Chile)

Ship's Physician – **Dr Arend Jansen** (The Netherlands)

And 45 of us from Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Japan, Argentina, the United Kingdom and the United States

Tuesday 10th February 2009 – Ushuaia, Tierra del Fuego, Argentina

16:00 Position 54°45' S, 068°30' W – Leaving Ushuaia. Air temperature: 12°C, breezy.

We landed in Ushuaia, “El Fin del Mundo” (The End of the World), where the spine of the Andes finally drops down into the sea. It started out as a bright afternoon, but a strong breeze gusted in and out, and even a bit of rain. At four in the afternoon the staff and crew were ready to welcome us on board. We met in the dining room, where we were welcomed by Jonas Sundquist, the Expedition Leader, introducing himself and his team.

The lines were hauled in at around six this evening and we set sail out of the harbour to head down the beautiful Beagle Channel. Charted by Robert Fitzroy, accompanied by Charles Darwin aboard the ship that gave the Channel its name, this waterway is still largely as rich and as wild as the early explorers found it.

Just after leaving, First Officer Stanislav Nedelko and Jonas gave a safety briefing on the upcoming lifeboat drill. Shortly after, the ship’s alarm sounded a signal for us to practice this emergency evacuation drill.

Then a chance for dinner, to soak up the Beagle Channel, and then to rest – even getting as far as the end of the world was a long way for most of us, and our voyage had only just begun.

Wednesday 11th February 2009 – Southbound in the Drake Passage

Position at 08.00h: 56°06' S, 065°47' W – Northern Drake Passage. Air temperature: 8°C, overcast, wind force 7-8 and choppy swells of 5-6 metres



Today was a tough start. The Drake Passage showed us what it’s capable of, a reminder of the raw power of nature, but also, perhaps, of this huge, thick band of wild sea that keeps Antarctica pristine and isolated from our interference. The weather slowed us down and the crew were constantly changing course and speed to keep us moving towards our destination.

The Drake Passage

The Drake Passage geologically opened about 30 to 45 million years ago, and connects the Atlantic with the Pacific Ocean. Since then it has been the narrowest part (about 800-900 km wide) of the Antarctic Circumpolar Current (ACC), by far the largest moving body of water on earth, and the only current that completely encircles the globe. By isolating the Antarctic, the ACC has allowed the continent to become earth’s ‘freezer box’, cooling down the climate of our planet and leading to the series of glaciations we have had over the last few million years.

The Drake played an important part in the trade of the 19th and early 20th centuries before the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914. The stormy seas and icy conditions made the rounding of Cape Horn through the Drake Passage a rigorous test for ships and crews of the sailing vessels of the day. Named after Sir Francis Drake, who may or may not have inadvertently been blown down into the passage by a storm, the Drake Passage was first traversed earlier in 1616 by a Flemish expedition led by Willem Schouten.

The passage has an average depth of 3400 m (11,000 feet), with deeper regions of up to 4800 m (15,600 feet) near the northern and southern boundaries. The winds through the Drake Passage are predominantly from the west. Cyclones (low-pressure systems or depressions) formed in the Pacific Ocean constantly move through the passage. Half way across the passage is the Antarctic Convergence, or Polar Front. This is the largest biological barrier on earth, separating sub-Antarctic surface water from the colder and fresher Antarctic surface water.

Thursday 12th February 2009 – Southbound in the Drake Passage

Position at 08.00h: 59°17' S, 062°29' W – Southern Drake Passage. Air temperature: 2°C, bright, decreasing wind force 1-2.

The Drake calmed down this morning, and we could now see that we were accompanied by the fantastic bird life of the Southern Ocean, as well as several whales. Almost everyone seemed to come clear of the fog of seasickness that had plagued a few, and the atmosphere on board was one of anticipation.

In the early hours we had crossed the Antarctic Convergence, so were now, ecologically if not yet politically in Antarctica. As a result the temperature of the water we were travelling over was several degrees cooler. A crisp, bright, fresh day.

Wandering and Black-browed Albatrosses, as well as several species of Petrel, accompanied the boat, and most spent the day watching the birdlife and the occasional whale, in between presentations.

Friday 13th February 2009 – South Shetlands Islands; Deception Island and Hannah Point, Livingston Island

Position at 06.30h: 61°03' S, 060°39' W. Moving through Nelson Strait in the South Shetlands. Air temperature: 1°C, gentle breeze, bright with some cloud

We awoke to be greeted by dramatic views of the South Shetlands Islands. Dark volcanic islands capped with thick domes of ice. The wildlife was immediately apparent, and there were penguins porpoising through the whole area, along with hundreds of Cape Petrels as well as other seabirds. Larger fauna were also seen, Humpback whales were spotted all through the morning.



We were heading for Deception Island, the caldera of an ancient (yet still active) volcano. As we approached the narrow entrance of Neptune's bellows, another surprise – a group of Antarctic Dwarf Orcas passed us by. These Orcas are smaller and slendrer than the species of Orca found outside the Antarctic, and the colour a more muted, grey and cream pattern rather than the more vivid black and white of 'normal' Orcas.

Neptunes Bellows is the name of the narrow and dramatic channel through the rim of the crater into the caldera and Port Foster inside. Captain Khoroshaylov took us safely between Cathedral Crags, towering to our right, and the hidden menace of Ravn Rock just below the surface to our left.

A turn to starboard brought us into Whaler's Bay. Deception is perhaps the most sheltered harbour in Antarctica, as well as one of the most accessible. As a result it has become a microcosm of the different phases of use and occupation of Antarctica. First came sealers, and then early scientists and whalers, who left the rusting remains of Hektor Whaling Station around the bay. The first Antarctic flights were made from here in 1929 when Hubert Wilkins flew a Lockheed Vega over the Peninsula. The aircraft hangar to the left of the other relics was built later by the British Antarctic Survey, whose base 'B' was set up here during the forties. More scientists were hot on their heels, and later spies and tourists.

Most started with a walk up to Neptune's Bellows, the U-shaped bite in the cliffs from where, in 1820, the young Nathaniel Palmer, climbing for birds' eggs, looked east and saw more land – the Antarctic Peninsula. He may or may not have been the first person to see the continent, he was certainly the first to have recorded it.



After a look around the site, it was time for the brave and foolish to take the polar plunge. The tide had dropped since we arrived, revealing a steaming shoreline which showed the active nature of the volcano, and took the edge off the cold just a teeny, tiny bit for the Whalers Bay swim. The water was still only 1 degree Celsius. Once we were all back on board again, the Captain took us safely through Neptune's Bellows once again, and we headed just a little north, to Livingston Island.

This afternoon's site was Hannah Point, perhaps the most species-diverse wildlife site in the Antarctic. There was simply too much wildlife to land everyone ashore, so half of us at a time went ashore, the other half zodiac cruised the shoreline and the spectacular glacier across from the point. What little wind we had in the morning was gone, and the sun burst through over a flat sea.

Ashore we got our first real look at Antarctica's penguins. They could be divided into three groups. The first were the busy adults – large, with long tails and a brown, 'beaten up' look to their back feathers after a busy season raising chicks. The second group were the adults who had finished rearing their chicks and were moulting. They stood singly or in loose groups, moving very little to save energy – they cannot go to sea when they are moulting so must spend a couple of weeks just standing, saving their energy and 'squeezing out' a new waterproof set of feathers. The last group were the chicks, mostly moulted through with plumage very similar to that of their parents, only a cleaner, greyer colour. They were almost ready to head out to sea for the first time, but for now were still hoping to be fed, so wandered around begging any adult passing by (or indeed any human who sat down nearby) for food. On the beach and in the colony groups of Elephant Seals were also moulting,



gathered together in smelly wallows, sleeping, occasionally waking up to bellow at each other. Several Fur Seals dozed or wandered the rocks, and a young Weddell Seal lay on the beach at the point. The day just got better and better.

As the light started to fail, we took the zodiacs back to the Mikheev to have dinner, and to head across the Bransfield Strait, south east to the Antarctic Peninsula.

Saturday 14th February 2009 - Antarctic Peninsula, Gerlache Strait area; Cuverville Island, Gerlache Strait, Neumeyer Channel, Port Lockroy

Position at 07.00h: 64°30' S, 062°22' W. Moving south east down the Gerlache strait towards Cuverville island. Air temperature: 1°C, light air force 1-2

We awoke in the Gerlache Strait, the sheltered channel separating the Antarctic Peninsula from Brabant and Anvers Islands. We were surrounded by the mind-blowing scenery of the Antarctic Peninsula, with two- to three-thousand metre peaks rising straight from the sea, with a thick layer of glacier creeping over into the sea. As we approached our first site for the day, the winds dropped away and the sun strengthened – a beautiful morning.



We anchored near Cuverville Island near the Errera Channel, then disembarked via zodiac. Moulting penguins meant that we could not move very far along the beach, so we just sat and enjoyed the penguins and the stunning views out across icebergs across the Gerlache Strait to the peaks of Anvers Island thirty or more miles away. Some climbed higher off the beach for a higher vantage point.

A curious young Leopard seal followed the zodiacs ashore. Soon we were ready for a zodiac cruise around the large bergs in front of Cuverville Island. As lunch was beckoning, after half an hour or so we started heading back to the vessel, but the



cruise was not over yet.



A Dwarf Minke Whale was spotted. We slowly headed towards it, and stopped our engines. After a few minutes, there was no sign of the whale, so we decided to head back. This was the moment the whale surfaced, just a few metres away from the boats. He (?) then proceeded to visit every zodiac in turn, swimming close enough underneath for us to see his eye looking up at us, and catching us with the spray from his blows.

During lunch we headed out across the Gerlache Strait, passing Humpback whales and even two spy-hopping Elephant seals, before entering the narrow Neumeyer Channel. This high-and steep-sided channel is almost entirely glacier, with very little rock showing. It shone in the afternoon sun, and Leopard and Fur seals were seen as we traversed the fifteen mile long channel.



We anchored off Goudier Island, site of Port Lockroy, which was British Antarctic Base 'A'. The base has been restored as a museum, as well as a gift shop and

(of course) a post office. Postcards were scribbled, gifts were bought and money was funnelled into the UK Antarctic Heritage Trust. We also enjoyed the feel of a restored 1950s base, the company of the station staff, and the adorable Gentoo Penguins outside the hut. While half of us were at Lockroy, the other half zodiac cruised the bay. The bay is surrounded by sheer glacier walls – one reason it is so sheltered. Opposite Lockroy is Jougla Point, where we could see some of the whale skeletons left behind by the early whalers.



A Leopard Seal eyed us dozily from a small floe just off the base, and a Minke Whale gave us a couple of 'fly-bys' on the way back to the ship.

Back on board, we hosted the Lockroy staff for dinner and some impromptu live music, courtesy of Michael and Matt, with backing vocals (which were delivered with great enthusiasm and which varied in quality from the sublime to the ridiculous) from the rest of us.



Sunday 15th February 2009 - Antarctic Peninsula; Lemaire Channel, Petermann Island, Vernadsky Base, Pleneau Bay

Position at 06.00h: 64°58' S, 63°44' W. At the mouth of the Lemaire Channel, heading south. Air temperature: 0°C, wind force 1-2, mostly cloudy

An early start today, to try and squeeze in as much as possible in our southernmost area. Before breakfast, the *Grigoriy Mikheev* headed south in the famed Lemaire Channel. With the Antarctic Peninsula towering to the east and Booth Island to the west, the passage is only a few hundred metres wide and about 7 nautical miles long. Scattered brash ice and bergy bits made navigation something of an exercise in concentration for Captain Khoroshaylov. Humpback and Minke Whales were spotted, and Leopard seals, as well as a single Weddell Seal, sat on floes in the channel.



Just south of the Lemaire Channel was our next stop, Petermann Island. Petermann gave us a chance to meet Antarctica's quintessential mascot – the island is the most northerly colony of Adelie Penguins in the western Peninsula. Most of the Adelie chicks were nearly fledged, with the comical 'mohawk' or 'afro' tufts of down feathers on top of their heads where they can't reach them. It's easy to see how these dumpy little penguins have become so beloved the world over. The southernmost and most purely Antarctic of all

penguins, Adelies may be declining, perhaps due to the warming climate. On this island researchers have watched the slow takeover of the Adelie's turf by a now much larger Gentoo colony. The rolling, pale rocks and snow cap of this beautiful island gave us all a chance to stretch our legs.

After lunch we headed to our southernmost point on the Argentine Islands; the Ukranian Vernadsky station. Originally named Faraday Station, the base had been run by the British Antarctic Survey (BAS), until it was sold to Ukraine for one Pound – a bargain for both sides, as BAS was spared the cost of removing the base. Faraday was where the ozone hole was discovered, and has one of the longest continuous meteorological records of the Antarctic Peninsula. Meteorological data collected at the base have shown a regional warming of almost 5°C between the late 1950's and present time!



The tour ended up, inevitably, in the renowned Faraday Bar, where we chatted with the charming base members, shot some pool, shot some Ukranian whisky and admired the souvenirs, the stamps and the bra collection at the bar.



We had to leave, to squeeze in an extra zodiac cruise before the barbecue. This was something special – the iceberg graveyard in Pleneau Bay. A loose ring of rocks and islands with deeper water in the middle, Pleneau gathers icebergs small and large as they drift past. Arches, tabular bergs, low floes and sculptures of all

shapes and sizes filled the bay. And then we found the seals. A Crabeater and a Leopard seal on a floe at first, then we found them. First a glimpse of a Leopard seal atop a berg, then there were two in the water around and under the boats, then another on a floe, another on an island, yet another. One was twisting and turning under and around the



boat, graceful in a way no other seal is. Another less bold youngster kept his distance. The seals on the bergs watched us lazily. The winds had picked up and cold as much as anything made us head back to the ship – with big smiles on our faces.

Marcelo, Juan, Gemma and her team had been working hard as we played, preparing an Antarctic Barbecue. The backdrop, Pleneau Bay, was gorgeous, the winds died down, the food was great and the company was great.

Monday 16th February 2009 - Antarctic Peninsula; Waterboat Point, Paradise Bay, Gerlache Strait, Dallman Bay and Drake Passage

Position at 07.00h: 64°52' S, 63°15' W. Off Waterboat Point at the entrance to Paradise Harbour.

Air temperature: -2°C, light breeze, bright and sunny.



Alas, our last day in the Peninsula and we found ourselves in the Gerlache, at one of the mouths of Paradise Harbour. At the entrance to the harbour is Waterboat Point, one of the few fingers of the Antarctic Peninsula it is safe to land without fear of glacial calving. A Chilean base, Gonzalez Videla, sits on the point. So here we had it – a chance to set foot on the continent of Antarctica.

The morning was – yet again – bright and sunny, and we started by cruising amongst some beautiful icebergs around the point. The Chilean base members were waiting to greet us, and we went ashore to visit their home. The whole point was covered with Gentoo Penguins, including one leucistic (pale due to non-production of the dark colour in the feathers) penguin, and we took some time to wander, some of us ending up in the museum/ souvenir shop, most of us in the observation tower.

Then it was time to head back, hot chocolate on the bow and anchor weighed, and we headed out one last time across the Gerlache.



It was a beautiful day, and we could see the ice-topped spine of the peninsula for dozens of miles to the north and south behind us. Ahead, the Humpbacks were around and about, and as we passed through Dallman Bay we even had some breaching (jumping out of the water) nearby. The swell started to build and we moved into the Drake. It had been an intense and fabulous few days, and now it seemed to catch up – afternoon naps seemed to be the order of the day.

Tuesday 17th February 2009 - Southern Drake Passage, northbound

Position at 06.00h: 61°17' S, 064°17' W. Southern Drake Passage, heading north.

Air temperature: 3°C, strong breeze, 5 metre swell.

Last night not many of us slept very much, and today was less than restful – the Drake Passage was not too gentle with us. Still, we made good time, and those visiting the bridge were treated to the spectacle of the Southern Ocean, and some of the seabirds that inhabit it, including a handful of Wandering Albatrosses. Somewhat milder this afternoon, so we could catch up on some sleep.

Wednesday 18th February 2009 - Northern Drake Passage, northbound

Position at 08.00h: 56°57' S, 065°49' W. North of the convergence in the Drake Passage, heading north. Air temperature: 2°C, calm, force 2-3, 2 metre swell.

A much easier day in the Drake, and the Wandering and Black-browed Albatrosses and other seabirds were still with us. The sun was out, and by mid afternoon we were approaching the Patagonian Continental Shelf. Heading into the gorgeous Beagle Channel, we were on the lookout for dolphins, as well as the rich seabird life of Patagonia.

Michael once again led the entertainments, organising a Limerick competition this afternoon.

We arrived at the Pilot Station, surrounded by the beautiful and wild Beagle Channel, and sat down for a last dinner, and then our voyage slideshow that Jonas had been working on. Reflections on a fabulous ten days in the greatest remaining wilderness on earth. We said our goodnights, and waited for the Pilot to take us as we slept back to Ushuaia.

Thursday 19th February 2009 – Disembarkation in Ushuaia

Position at 07.00h: 54°45' S, 068°30' W. Air temperature: 8°C, light westerly breeze, bright.

Returning once again to the end of the world, the *Grigoriy Mikheev* reached the pier in Ushuaia and our journey to Antarctica came to an end. We had our final breakfast together, then went down the gangway for the last time, saying farewell to fellow travellers, crew and staff. Still quite a way home for many from the 'big white' at the bottom of the world.

Total length of this trip:
1,643 nm = 3,043 km

**On behalf of Waterproof Expeditions,
we wish you a safe journey home
and hope to see you again, anywhere between the poles.**

www.waterproof-expeditions.com

Log, maps, photos, species list: Jamie, Jonas, Martin, Rosy
All photos in this log were taken during our voyage.

List of presentations;

Date	Subject	Presenter
11 th February 09	Seabirds of the Southern Ocean	Jamie
11 th February 09	Antarctic Exploration	Rosy
12 th February 09	Overview of Antarctica	Martin
12 th February 09	Penguins	Jamie
12 th February 09	'River of Krill' – Antarctic Ecosystems	Jamie
12 th February 09	IAATO briefing and guidelines to going ashore	Jonas
16 th February 09	Antarctic Seals	Jamie
17 th February 09	Whales	Jamie
17 th February 09	Making of 'Happy Feet'	Rosy
17 th February 09	Ice	Martin
17 th February 09	Poles Apart	Jamie
18 th February 09	Two Years on South Georgia	Jamie
18 th February 09	Diving under Polar Ice	Jonas
18 th February 09	Slideshow of our voyage	Slides of various photographers, presented by Jonas