

# Mina<sup>2</sup> 2011/12 Southern Cruise

Transcription of Blog

15 November 2011 to 16 April 2012

## **Bureaucrats Force Mina2 to Cancel Falklands Cruise**

**15 November 2011: 0600**

**Position: 35:15.57S 057:03.66W**

I have spent the best part of four years planning the Ultimate Cruise to Antarctica. I've sailed half way round the world to get to Buenos Aires, home town of the Downstairs Skipper. After six months of preparations at home, I have spent the last month fitting Mina2 out with the long list of modifications, fortifications, repairs and extra equipment required for the extreme conditions we will be meeting. My sister Linda, and John my brother-in-law were flying in from London to join me for the first leg to the Falkland Islands 1100 miles to the south which, in the view of the very few sailors who have been there, is the best undiscovered cruising ground in the world. Then the Argentine authorities told me that we couldn't go.

The trouble started about a week ago. The DS had joined me to help with preparations and we were just climbing off the boat to go to the Aduana (customs) office to get some form or other signed, when a man with a gun turned up and issued me with a summons from the Prefectura (who are the maritime police force and coastguard). Although I had been meticulous in my paperwork ensuring that every tiny rule had been complied with, they had magic'ed up some alleged infraction and I was now forbidden to use the boat at all.

But first things first, we went to the Aduana who surprised us by telling us that the forms that they themselves had issued in March that had allowed me to leave the boat in Argentina for six months did not in fact allow me to do that, so I had committed an infraction and my boat would be impounded.

So Mina 2 had within one hour been impounded for alleged infractions, about which I could not possibly have known, by not just one but two separate bureaucratic agencies. Not a good day.

Thank God the DS had arrived as at least she was able to understand the words of the bureaucrats, if not their meaning. Eventually we managed to persuade both agencies that we were in infractionless, although one of the consequences was that what we had been told was our permit to keep the boat in Argentine waters for nearly three months had been randomly shortened to expire on 26 November. But not to worry, we were just about to set sail for the Falklands, and our route would take us 380 miles off the coast of Argentina – well outside their territorial limits.

Linda and John duly arrived and the day before our departure south we went along to the Aduana to get them to sign the ship's exit papers. No problem the man said, but

before they could do that, we would have to get Immigration to stamp our passports for leaving the country.

There is a little dispute with Argentina about the ownership of the Falklands. The Immigration officer looked at our papers which declared our next port of call as “Puerto Argentino, Islas Malvinas” (aka Port Stanley, Falkland Islands) and said that she could not stamp our passports because, as the Malvinas were clearly Argentine, we were not leaving Argentina. We called in the Aduana officer who argued with his colleague in the Immigration department that of course we were leaving the country, but Immigration resolutely refused to back down. They were almost at fisticuffs so furious was the debate whilst we looked on bemused. Actually we weren't fussed about our passports being stamped as we would all have left Argentina in any event before our tourist visas expired. But without the passport stamp the Aduana officer could not sign the ship's exit papers – and Mina 2 had to be out of the country within two weeks or it would again be impounded.

The only solution was to temporarily abandon our passage to the Falklands and instead sail across the River Plate to Uruguay, sign in and sign out and return to Buenos Aires where a new three month permit for the boat would be issued. This would delay our departure by two days but there was no option. This fascinating bureaucratic debate (which John described as Kafkaesque) had started at 9am and we eventually got back to the boat at 5pm to ready ourselves for our unexpected sail in the wrong direction.

Notwithstanding the delay, this enforced diversion to Uruguay turned out to be a real bonus. Colonia del Sacramento is a delightful, old, but well preserved colonial town and after the 7-hour crossing we enjoyed a wonderful evening before heading back to Buenos Aires the following morning.

By midday yesterday, with all our papers in order, Linda, John and I slipped our lines and headed out of the River Plate, leaving the DS in Buenos Aires to recover from the arduous physical work of the last couple of weeks. My back had gone out quite badly; I was in a lot of pain, incapable of bending let alone lifting, so transferring tons of supplies on and off the boat had fallen entirely on the DS's pretty shoulders whilst I visited physiotherapists and chewed Ibuprofen. I'm not quite sure what Linda and John thought about having a completely useless cripple as a skipper.

The fair winds that had been forecast for our scheduled departure date had by now passed and been replaced with forecasts of light and variable winds barely capable of moving the boat, so we filled up a dozen jerry cans with additional fuel. Now, at dawn, after our first night on passage we have, with the exception of a blissful four hours in the middle of the night, been motoring continuously.

### **Plans For The Great Southern Adventure**

**Position: 37:59.88S 056:23.90W**

**Date: 16 November 2011**

**Time: 0800 L 1100 UTC**

Sorry to have started the blog yesterday with a rant about the bloody bureaucrats in Buenos Aires. In fairness to them, they did say that the last time someone applied for a permit to go to the Falklands direct from Buenos Aires was about four years ago, since when all the rules have changed so I suppose it was hardly surprising that none of them had a clue what they were talking about.

I should of course have started with a run down on what our plans are for this season. They boil down into four almost separate cruises.

1. November/December - The Falkland Islands cruise
2. January - the epic and challenging Antarctic cruise
3. February/March - the Beagle Channel cruise
4. March/April - the cruise back up the coast of South America to Brazil

First off, and the one we have just started, is a long 1100 mile passage from Buenos Aires to the Falkland Islands. This should take about 8 to 10 days. We will clear into Port Stanley on the east side of the islands and then spend a couple of weeks heading round the south coast of the islands to the western end. The Falklands are renowned for their wildlife – penguins, seals and birds in particular - and this is what we are going for. Joining me on this leg I have my sister, Linda and her hubby John, both keen naturalists. Linda is about 5'2" and John is 6'9" – Little and Large. John keeps on banging his head on things; he can't sit in the cockpit and get his head under the sprayhood without cricking his neck; he does the washing up kneeling down, and there isn't a bed long enough on the boat to accommodate him (apart from mine and he's certainly not having that), so he curls up on the curved cushions in the saloon like a Cumberland sausage. Meanwhile, Linda almost has to stand on a stool to do the washing up.

John and Linda have their own Oyster 47 which they have been adventurously cruising for the last eight years and have crossed the Atlantic twice so they are both very experienced sailors and whilst this is the first time they have been cruising on Mina2, it is so similar to their boat they know their way around. This makes life very easy for me.

I would like to report that our first couple of days we've been roaring along with a stiff offshore breeze on the beam, but to do so would be very far from the truth. The fact is that either there has been insufficient wind to sail, or it has been coming from dead ahead. We have been pinned in by the shallow coast on our starboard side and to sail into the wind on the other tack we would be heading for South Africa, which is not the plan. Consequently in the last 40 hours we had only been able to sail for 5 hours – the rest of the time we have been motoring. Thank God we had the jerry cans on board that we will need for extra fuel in Antarctica. We filled these up before we left and it looked like we would be using them all up.

We have just passed the resort town of Mar Del Plata and the Argentine coast is sweeping to the west. This has enabled us to set our sails and, at last, turn the bloody engine off. What bliss.

We are now out to sea, rather than being in the sweet, warm, muddy waters of the River Plate. Yesterday I was in the cockpit wearing my swimming shorts, the temperature nudging 30 degrees. This morning I came on deck and it was absolutely

freezing in comparison. The water temperature had fallen overnight from 28 degrees to 15 degrees and the air temperature accordingly. The thermal underwear is beckoning.

Early this morning, Linda and John started seeing a lot more seabirds swooping around, and we had our first visit from a pod of dolphins. Things are good on the good ship Mina2.

### **Absent Downstairs Skipper Causes Crew to Starve**

**Position: 39:58.32S 056:55.71W**

**Date: 17 November 2011**

**Time: 0845 L 1145 UTC**

By 1800 yesterday evening we had been “sailing” for 62 hours of which we had had the engine on for 42 hours, travelling a total of 320 miles. That is more engine time than we needed over a three month period when we sailed from Portugal down the coast of Africa, over to the Cape Verde Islands and across the Atlantic – a distance of 4500 miles. With 800 miles to go we have used half the fuel in our tanks. Thank God we have the reserves in the jerry cans, but even so we will not now be using the engine unless we are absolutely stationary in the water, so it may take a little longer to get to Stanley than we had planned.

Since 1800 yesterday we have had a light breeze from behind us and have been goose-winging (mainsail on one side, big foresail on the other side) slowly at about 4.5 knots. Very pleasant. A lot more wind is forecast for later today and tomorrow from the same direction, so that should give us a good shove.

Now well out into the ocean, we have entered a different realm and we are surrounded by wildlife. We have had a couple of visits from Dusky dolphins and have had numerous birds wheeling around us including Cape petrel, Wilsons Storm petrel, Great shearwater, White Throated shearwater, Southern Great shearwater, Northern Great shearwater, Black Browed albatross, Southern Royal albatross and South American tern. We have passed Southern fur seals lying on their backs in the water applauding our progress by clapping their flippers, and we’ve been overtaken by flocks of Megalanic penguins swimming through the water – a naturalist’s paradise.

The sea and air temperature has fallen substantially and on the night watches it is a chilly 13 C. Last night I donned for the first time my Weazel suit which is a rather fetching one piece undersuit used by divers in very cold water. It makes me look like a Teletubby but I’m snug as a bug in twin duvets. Linda says it makes me look cute and she wants to roll me around the decks. She doesn’t yet understand what sort of a ship this is. If she tries that on, sister or no sister she’ll be clapped in irons, confined to her quarters and her ration of a Jacob’s Fig Roll at tea time will be withdrawn.

We have had a considerable shock. The Absent Downstairs Skipper emailed from her mother’s flat in Buenos Aires to say she had gone to the freezer (presumably to find ice for yet another stiff gin) and found a whole load of frozen chicken breasts, minced meat and pre-cooked chilli con carne that she had forgotten to bring to the boat. I’m not saying we’ll starve without these essential supplies (today we tucked into part of

the first of four entire fillets of beef we have in the fridge), but it wasn't exactly good for morale.

John rose to the emergency. He is a keen fly fisherman and he looked at the birds wheeling round the boat and said "I think I could hook one of them". Out came the fishing gear and in no time he was reeling in an enormous plump seabird that will make a feast for us this evening. Linda looked it up in her bird book. It is something called a Wandering Albatross. Linda remembers reading a poem about an albatross once, but can't remember the details.

Hang on, out of the clear blue sky there is a very menacing black cloud approaching, spitting forks of lightning. Better go.

### **Barreling Along in Half a Gale**

**Position: 42:17.25S 057:31.83W**

**Date: 18 November 2011**

**Time: 0945 L 1245 UTC**

Although we've now entered the Roaring Forties of the South Atlantic, the wind and waves have so far been kind to us. Compared to the first two days of motoring torture, we had an exceedingly pleasant day yesterday. Light to moderate winds from behind us, we were gently cruising along at 5 to 6 knots, rolling slightly but with little in the way of waves. By this morning the wind had picked up as forecast; it is now blowing half a gale with a bit more to come later today and tonight. We're currently romping along at about 8 knots but we have now met the adverse Falklands current which is reducing our speed over the ground to a little under 7 knots.

The consistently cloudless skies which we enjoyed for the first two days of the passage have changed as well. With this northerly wind pushing warmer moist air from the River Plate over the cooler water of the South Atlantic, it has often been misty and on a couple of occasions we have been enveloped for a few hours in damp, clinging fog. We are now almost exactly half way to the Falklands. With 570 miles to go we should be there in about four days if things go to plan.

There was less wildlife around us yesterday – a few shearwaters, petrels and albatrosses – but we did have one bit of naturalistic excitement. A fur seal suddenly appeared, swimmingly rapidly along with us at the stern of the boat. It was porpoising out of the water and careering either side of us. It stuck with us for about 10 minutes. None of us have seen a seal playing with a boat in this way before.

We pick up weather forecasts twice a day by satellite email, and the forecasts have been changing quite rapidly so it's difficult to be certain what's in store for us. But it looks like we will continue to enjoy these significantly stronger winds and higher waves – still from behind us which is comfortable – for another 24 hours or so. But then we will fall into the hole of a high pressure system for a day which will mean little in the way of wind, and variable in direction, so we may have to motor for a bit tomorrow before the next low sweeps south past the Falklands giving us more northerly sailing winds from behind us again.

Oh, I almost forgot. When I signed off yesterday, we had this enormous albatross on the poop deck, a little bit cross, all of us anticipating a succulent roast dinner in the absence of all the food still sitting in the DS's freezer at her mum's home, and there, approaching rapidly, was this menacing cloud spitting forks of lightning into the sea. All of a sudden Linda suddenly recalled the poem she had read about an albatross. It was called something like "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and it was all about this idiot on a ship that kills an albatross which triggered all sorts of storms and pestilence in punishment by the gods. The pestilence we already have on board, and frankly we could do without the violent storms as well. So we chucked the albatross overboard which seemed none the worse for his close call with our dinner table, and we prostrated ourselves on the poop deck in supplication to King Neptune. The cloud which was by now almost upon us released a fantastic thunderbolt which struck the water close to the boat, turning the sea into steam, and the cloud immediately dissipated leaving us once again bathed in sunshine and being wafted across the ocean by a gentle breeze.

John, who had caught the damned bird, is of course in disgrace and has had to spend most of the day on the Naughty Chair. The Naughty Chair is rather small and John is very big, so he's been sitting with his knees at the same level as his ears looking a bit like a disconsolate cricket.

### Snoopy's Blog

So here I am in the naughty chair – AGAIN !

I have sailed thousands of miles with this Captain, and I hear everything although I don't say much, and I think our Captain is getting a bit too autocratic for his own good. He seems to think I hero-worship him and to be honest I do most of the time. However enough is enough as I get sent to this naughty chair far too often and sometimes very unfairly. He doesn't appreciate how painful it is sitting with my tail between my legs for hours on end. In addition he always gives me the dogwatch and only one daily ration of peanuts and it's not very satisfactory even for this faithful hound. I know the crew must be thinking the same because I regularly hear flogging from up on deck, and this morning I picked up whispering between them and with my particularly acute hearing this is what I heard.

The tall one was saying "do you know he asked me to be the replacement spinnaker pole for the rest of this passage?"

The other one said "maybe we should just push him overboard".

Now call me Christian if you like but I think we could set him adrift in the dinghy, remind him that Shackleton managed 800 miles in a small boat to find South Georgia, and for a navigator of his experience he should be able to make it to the Falklands not much more than 400 miles away.

After looking down on the chart table for all these years from where my kennel is, I don't think I would have any trouble captaining the ship and crew to Pitcairn Island. Maybe we should all sleep on it and hope he mends his ways overnight.

**Mina2 Falls Apart in Full Gale**  
**Position: 44:26.51S 058:43.33W**  
**Date: 19 November 2011**

**Time: 0945 L 1245 UTC**

Well, we got the full gale we were expecting – and something else we weren't expecting. The wind rose to more than 40 knots for a number of hours and the seas rose correspondingly so we had 3 ½ metre waves riding under us from the starboard quarter (from the back but slightly to one side). We had a well reefed main and a reefed yankee on the other side, held out with the spinnaker pole (which is about 4 metres long and as thick as my thigh). Periodically a bigger wave than usual would push the stern of the boat round, but the new autopilot was coping extremely well. Mid morning a much larger rogue wave reared up, picked up the stern and spun us round. The strong wind caught the front of the yankee (it should have been behind the sail), there was a loud BANG and the spinnaker pole was thrashing around on the foredeck, detached from the mast, but still connected to the sail, high off the deck. A cast aluminium fitting that attaches the pole to the mast had sheared. Luckily both John and I were on deck and within a couple of minutes John had furled the yankee away, so the pole was now pacified and we went forward, lowered the pole onto the deck and lashed it securely.

It's not a major problem but undoubtedly an inconvenience. We only use the pole when we have the wind directly behind us, when it is very effective in giving us a (normally) safe and stable ride. However, I was straight onto trying to find a replacement for the fitting. I called Oyster Aftersales (who provide a fantastic service) on the satellite phone (the wonders of modern technology!) who started the process of identifying the precise part and where they could get one and courier it out by plane to the Falklands. Failing that, John (who is an engineer) believes we may be able to have one fabricated in Stanley.

As we head further south the nights are now becoming significantly shorter (it is approaching summer down here), but with the moon now not rising until about three in the morning, the nights are as black as pitch. On my midnight to 0300 watch last night, I saw a lot of lightning to the south and southeast, probably more than a hundred miles away. Perhaps it was as well our departure was delayed by the bureaucrats after all – we might have been in the thick of it. The sea temperature is now below 10 C so the night watches are carried out in thermals, foulies, woolly hats, boots and gloves.

We are now just more than half way there and are beginning to look at the weather patterns to calculate the best route. It's not simple. The forecasts are changing quite rapidly, but the closer we get, the more accurate they are likely to become. At the moment it looks like the wind will die today (which it has started) and back round from the north to the south. Sunday should see the stronger northerlies resuming again. But then on Monday and Tuesday strong winds are now being forecast from the sou'southeast. If we maintained a direct course to Stanley (sou'southeast) it will be bang on the nose and if progress were possible at all, it would be extremely uncomfortable. So we are keeping well to the west of the rhumb line, so we can sweep round to the east on our final approach and get a better angle on the wind. It will mean travelling further, but hopefully a lot more comfortably. My best guess at the moment is that we will arrive on Tuesday afternoon, but we may have to stand off overnight and enter at first light Wednesday.

On other matters, I've been inundated with emails from limp-wristed, tree-hugging, albatross-kissing conservationists, all horrified that John deliberately caught an albatross with a fishing line. So I have to admit that the account may have been slightly exaggerated or, more precisely, completely made up. During the long night watches I'm afraid I allowed my imagination to run riot a bit. I apologise unreservedly for any offence I may have caused. I feel deeply ashamed because this blog has always had a reputation for complete honesty with never any deviation from the absolute truth. (In fairness, the bit about the DS leaving half our food in the freezer in Buenos Aires is, in fact, completely true).

Joining us on our Great Adventure South, at his insistence, is Able Seadog Snoopy, ship's mascot and my constant companion for 35 years. He always likes to do the ocean passages and it was on our Transatlantic crossing a couple of years ago that he was such a help with watch keeping, sail trimming, and mixing the Mango Bombs with a Triple Gin Float that he earned his promotion from Ordinary Seadog. He has been kitted out by the DS with polar wear to keep him snug in Antarctica. He now sports a little woolly cap and a neck warmer. Last night as the temperature dropped ever lower, I saw him looking a little grumpy. "What's the problem Snoopy?" I asked. "It's my polar wear" he said "they smell like old socks" (not really surprising as they are in fact made from old socks) "and the DS promised me some mitts for my paws. I suppose she left them in Buenos Aires like half my food. My paws are f\*\*\*ing freezing". "SNOOPY!!" I cried, "how dare you use language like that, and do NOT be rude about the DS, your superior officer!" Snoopy was brought up short. He suddenly looked crestfallen and, without being asked, trotted over to the Naughty Chair where he sat with tears of shame rolling down his little cheeks. Bless.

### **Storm Force 10 in the South Atlantic**

**Position: 49:33.84S 059:02.33W**

**Date: 21 November 2011**

**Time: 1445 L 1745 UTC**

Sorry about not blogging yesterday. Just idleness really. So a bit of a catch up. Two days ago (19 Nov) we had a simply fabulous day. The sky had not a cloud in it, we had moderate winds from the side (the best and fastest point of sailing) and we were surrounded by hundreds of birds. It was Snoopy's turn to cook dinner. It was a bowl of Winalot followed by a pig's ear each for pudding as a treat.

Yesterday was good as well, but we were slightly apprehensive waiting for the wind to start picking up – the start of the stronger winds that were forecast. As the evening progressed, with a fantastic sunset, followed by a brilliant ceiling of stars, the wind slowly crept up.

I was alone on the midnight to 0300 watch when the trouble started. We were bowling along nicely in a little under 30 knots of wind from the quarter (back of the boat). We had the full yankee and staysail and a reefed mainsail. I had just popped down below to put on my foulies when I heard a shrieking noise and the boat started shuddering. I leapt, half-dressed, onto the pitch black deck to find that in the space of one minute the wind had rocketed from 30 knots to more than 60 knots. I had never been in a 60

knot wind before (about 70 miles per hour). It is the sort of wind that is so powerful it knocks chimneys and slates off roofs, and fells trees. With some difficulty, we rolled both headsails completely away with the large acres of heavy sailcloth whiplashing around with the crack of pistol shots. The wind quickly fell back, but in the twelve hours since then it has never been below 40 knots (Gale Force 8). For quite a lot of the time it is in excess of 50 knots (Severe Gale 9), and on several occasions it has been more than 60 knots (Storm Force 10). I would like to tell you the highest wind speed we've had, but I can't. Our wind speed indicator is digital and the designers obviously thought that no one would be mad enough to be out in winds this strong so it just stops at 60. In the old days we had analogue wind speed indicators with a needle and dial. This is the equivalent of the needle spinning round the dial twice and then falling off.

With high winds come high waves. I can not tell you how awesome are the waves around us. They tower above us as high as a three storey building, surging towards our tiny boat, lifting us, spinning us like a twig in a river, and occasionally dumping large quantities of water on us.

None of us have ever experienced anything like this. I'm not sure if John and Linda realised they were signing up for this, but they have both been brilliant. It is difficult enough standing up in these winds, let alone working on the foredeck, but sometimes we have to. It is like being driven in an E-Type Jaguar at the national speed limit, climbing over the windscreen and wandering about the bonnet, whilst being driven over a series of humpback bridges, at the same time having an icy cold fire hose aimed at you. The experience is on the one hand exhilarating but, on the other hand, at times not a little scary. We are very isolated out here, still 150 miles from the Falklands and any kind of help. And things can go wrong. But we passed a oil rig support vessel an hour ago and radioed him for a more precise forecast than we have access to. We were relieved to hear that the wind should start moderating after midnight tonight. Let's hope so.

For Mina2 this is probably just a dress rehearsal for the double crossing of Drake Passage to and from Antarctica in January, the roughest and most dreaded passage of water in the world. I have prepared her as best I can over the last few months for exactly these sorts of conditions. Let's hope I've done enough.

### **Mina2 Survives Storm – Arrives Safely in Stanley, F.I.**

**Position: 51:41.484S 057:51.5W**

**Date: 23 November 2011**

The storm continued unabated. For more than 24 hours we had been tossed around in the screaming winds and mountainous seas. We were feeling bruised and battered. How long would this last for? At one point, when we had had enough of the pounding and the wind was on the stops at a screaming 60+ knots, we heaved to (a way of just stopping the boat). Many modern boats can't heave to, but luckily Mina2 can. We just bobbed around, rising and falling in the giant waves. It was bliss and gave us sufficient respite to have a cup of tea, without kettles, mugs and scalding water flying around. But we couldn't stay hove to forever. We were being pushed by the Falklands Current at 1 or 2 knots to the north east which would drive us to the east of the

Falkland Islands. From there it would be very difficult to fight our way back against the prevailing westerly winds – next stop South Africa? So half an hour luxuriating in the comparative calm, we gritted our teeth, swung the boat south and continued the torture. By this time we had reefed the mainsail down to the size of a pocket handkerchief and, for the first time ever, had reefed the small staysail.

During the afternoon, Linda was on watch in the cockpit looking at the flock of birds that were wheeling around the boat. Whilst we were suffering the appalling conditions, they seemed to be relishing them. Linda leant down into the saloon and said “I’ve just seen a Cape Petrel flying backwards. That’s not a good sign is it?”

On my iPod I have a compilation of music called “Songs for Stormy Weather”. It has a selection of stirring tracks designed to stiffen the sinews, like the theme music from 633 Squadron, The Dambusters and Raiders of the Lost Ark, mixed in with a few hymns: For Those In Peril On The Sea and I Vow to Thee My Country and finishing up with Land of Hope & Glory, Jerusalem and the National Anthem. The compilation was played so many times we all knew the words backwards.

In the middle of the night I had gone down below for some well-needed sleep when half an hour later, there was a call from John in the cockpit. “The autopilot controller has packed up!”. John was now hand-steering in freezing 58 knots of wind in the pitch dark. We still had more than 12 hours before we would get to Stanley. The very idea of having to hand-steer in these conditions was unthinkable – but it would have to be done. The air temperature was about 5 C. With the fantastic wind chill factor of 50 knot winds, 10 minutes at the helm and you would be frozen rigid whatever protective clothing you had on. I’ve never seen John look really alarmed before. I did then, and I shared his alarm. This was disastrous news.

They say that long-distance cruisers own two boats: the one they’re sailing in and the spare one in the lockers. At this stage I didn’t know what the problem was, was it the controller or the new course computer that had been installed in Buenos Aires. The easier fix would be to change the controller and see if that worked. Thank God I had one on board. But first I had to take apart all the ceiling panels in the aft head to get to the back of the controller to disconnect it. Not easy in the tumbling conditions. Eventually we wired up the replacement controller – and BINGO!! – it worked. Our relief was immense.

As we approached the Falklands, the wind slowly moderated as we motored into Stanley Sound. It was bitterly cold. The bleak landscape was dotted with the bright yellow blossom of gorse. Linda said “You can tell it’s summer only because of the gorse. I can’t imagine what this place is like in the winter”.

I have for some months been in contact with Barry Elsby, the Honorary Representative of the Cruising Association who had been answering questions I had, and who had arranged for a berth for me. So, at 1315 Dave Eynon was standing by his jetty ready to take our lines. We had arrived after the most challenging passage any of us had undertaken. Job done.

Well, almost done – we had the entry formalities to go through. Within a few minutes, the uniformed Customs officer arrived at the boat together with a civilian. The civilian

introduced himself as the Chief Medical Officer for the Islands. He pointed towards the cruise ship lying at anchor in the bay. "I'm afraid to tell you that there has been an outbreak of Novovirus on the cruise ship. The Islands are therefore restricting entry until tests have been carried out. I will need a stool sample from each of you for analysis. Would now be convenient? Linda and I were open-mouthed. The Argentine bureaucrats had driven us mad, but they had never asked us to crap for them.

"Are you being serious?" I asked.

"No" he said grinning broadly and putting out his hand, "I'm joking. My name is Dr Barry Elsby. Welcome to the Falkland Islands".

Within minutes we had carried out all the paper work and had our passports stamped. Barry then went through with us all that we needed to do. By the end of the afternoon, with Barry's help, our spinnaker pole end had been taken away for repair and we had two full gas bottles in our gas locker.

Whilst the last two days had been a murderous experience, it was at the same time an incredibly valuable learning curve. These sorts of conditions we have to expect in the Southern Ocean, and it was good that Mina<sup>2</sup> had been stress-tested to this extent. She came through with flying colours. Previously in very strong winds, I had felt some anxiety at how she would hold up. But knowing how well she coped with winds and seas as strong as they were for as long as they were, slowly my total confidence in the boat built to the point where, whilst extremely uncomfortable, I felt completely relaxed.

Two new bits of kit need a special mention. We had fitted a new autopilot course computer (that steers the boat when we're not hand-steering which is most of the time). It was brilliant and much better than the old one. It steered in those ultra-demanding conditions, hour after hour, with much greater skill than almost any human. How it does it I don't know. The other success story was the extension to the spray hood that I had made up in Buenos Aires. It provided fantastically greater protection for the watch keeper from the bitter wind throughout the gale.

I would also like to thank John for coming up with ideas for strapping the deflated RIB (dinghy) to the fore deck, and the jerry cans full of diesel to the aft deck with such ingenuity (and many ratchet straps) that they didn't budge even whilst having tons of water slamming into them. Again, we now know that this will do for Drake Passage.

This blog would not be complete without mentioning my crew, Linda and John. The conditions we experienced were worse than any of us had ever experienced but they carried on standing their watches, and doing everything else with cheerful stoicism. I can't tell you how helpful it is to a skipper in those conditions to have two people on whom he can absolutely rely. They were just fantastic throughout, and I owe them both a great debt.

I've asked Linda and John to write about their take on the passage:

**Linda:**

Kind words indeed from the skip, but I can tell you it was fantastic having as skipper someone who was so unflustered and down to earth, making really good decisions about managing the boat in the extreme conditions. Good on you bro'!

So what was it really like? Impossible to put into words really. The noise of the wind screaming in the rigging was alarming in itself, and as the hours went on with no let up, became very wearing. The waves were towering, although we had experienced waves of similar or even greater height, maybe, coming out of the Caper Verde Islands three years ago. They presented Mina 2 with no problem at all, she just rose effortlessly over them. We did get the occasional slap from a wave coming in from a slightly different direction, but the boat just juddered a bit and then picked herself up again and moved on. As Tim says, as time went on, and it was clear that the boat could handle the conditions, anxiety levels dropped and it became exhilarating in a masochistic sort of way. Night time was different though. There was no moon, so it was pitch dark and all you had was the terrible howling of the wind and the waves coming out of nowhere at you. The wind of course, saved its worst for the middle of the night, when on Tim's watch it didn't drop below 45 knots. I found the best way to cope was to try and keep a lid on the imagination, which of course really gets going at night. My greatest fear was of gear failure which simply didn't bear thinking about. Mercifully, none of us was sea-sick. I can't imagine how terrible that would have been on top of everything else.

But this was only the last 36 hours. The previous 6 days had been very pleasant cruising, quite a lot of motoring, unfortunately, but latterly some good, comfortable sailing. Good food, good music, good company, and everyone getting enough sleep despite the 3 hours on, 6 hours off watch system – it was a very happy ship. We even started thinking that Maria might have enjoyed the passage and what a shame it was she wasn't with us. Just as well she stuck to her guns and gave us a fond farewell in Buenos Aires.

Now looking forward to some more leisurely cruising around the islands before bracing ourselves for the passage across to Ushuaia in a few weeks time.

### **John:**

The storm started when I was trying to sleep in the forward cabin – actually impossible with the waves crashing into the starboard bow and the very fractional movement of the anchor (which was strapped down hard) making a noise like being in a dustbin and someone thrashing the lid with a baseball bat. When I took over the watch from Tim at midnight he rather mildly said he wished the wind would go down a bit ! The next two hours was much the same at 45-50 knots of wind and occasionally up to the mid 50's. The autohelm failed just as the sky turned even blacker and I had to leap aft to take the wheel. Tim did a brilliant job replacing the control head in those conditions while I hand-steered for about 45 minutes and the wind peaked at 59 knots. It was very cold and very wet at the aft end of the cockpit and I was happy when the wind dropped to only 35-40 knots in the last hour of my watch. It felt like a calm after the previous 5 hours.

This was the most memorable passage I have ever been on, and an experience to recount at many a dinner table to come. Mina2 handled herself like the thoroughbred she is, and is a tribute to her designers and builders. We the crew came through it all tired but happy, to go ashore and pick the Victory pub (we had a choice of six) for a couple of beers and then back to the boat for fillet steak and ten hours sleep.

### **Disaster Strikes as Mina2 Prepares to Leave Stanley**

**Position: 51:41.484S 057:51.5W**

**Date: 27 November 2011**

Sorry everyone. Done the usual thing of getting into port and then been too busy to blog, but forgot to warn you. So apologies if you've been logging in every day for nothing.

We've now been in Stanley for five days. I've told you about our arrival, and being greeted, first by the owner of the quay on which we had arranged to berth, but shortly afterwards by the Customs officer and the "Medical Officer" demanding stool samples who turned out to be Barry Elsby who had been so helpful in giving me advice whilst I was preparing for the trip. Barry is the Hon Rep of the Cruising Association (a British association of cruising yachtsmen of which I am a member). He told me that he had been Hon Rep here for more than 20 years and we were only the fourth boat who had made use of his kindness and advice. Within an hour we had also been visited by Ian Bury with a large box of foul weather gear which has been incredibly generously loaned to me for our trip down south by none other than the legendary Skip Novak on who's Pelagic Australis I sailed down to Antarctica in February as a recce for my Antarctic trip in a couple of months time. Skip's two yachts provide incredibly good value cruises to the Falklands, South Georgia, Antarctic Peninsula, Cape Horn and the Beagle Channel. Details can be found on [www.pelagic.co.uk](http://www.pelagic.co.uk) (is that OK, Skip?).

We also received a visit from the son and son-in-law of owners of the farm at Port Stephens in West Falkland that friends have introduced us to, and who we will be visiting on our way down the islands. They invited us round to for drinks (in Stanley) the following evening.

There were a number of repairs we needed to have carried out (like, for instance, the spinnaker pole end which disintegrated on our way here), refilling gas bottles etc, and Barry was instantly on his phone sorting everything out for us.

Dave, who owned the jetty wandered up and said that a strong northeasterly was forecast overnight and the following day, and on his jetty we would be bouncing around, popping fenders and bending stanchions. Best, he said, to go to the north side of the enclosed harbour and anchor there until it quietened down. Having met the crew of a Swedish yacht (one of only two other yachts here) we went out with them for a meal and on our return as the wind was springing round and piping up as forecast, we slipped our lines and motored across the harbour to anchor in the delightfully named Fairy Cove.

We awoke after an enormously long and well-deserved sleep and it was still blowing old boots from the NE so we stayed where we were for the day. Just as well, as we

simply chilled and did a number of maintenance jobs rather than rushing around as we would have done had we been in Stanley. We needed the rest after the ordeals of the last couple of days.

Since returning to the jetty in Stanley, we have been taking on a massive amount of stores, redistributing everything on board and stowing it all. In September I discovered that I could send a one metre square box (that's a BIG box!) by ship to Stanley for not a lot of money, which solved a whole load of problems. It came down in a container on a military ship and we were expecting it to have been delivered to Stanley about a week before we got here. But when we arrived we were told that the Army had had a big delivery of ammunition on the ship which takes a long time to unload and my box of goodies hadn't yet turned up. Could be the end of the week, might be next week. Aaaargh! We couldn't leave before it turned up and everything was stowed. It contained lots of things without which we couldn't go to Antarctica: spare inflatable dinghy and outboard motor (my old ones from little Mina), 440 metres of rope to tie the boat into anchorages in Antarctica, some abandonment suits (dry suits you put on if you have to take to the liferaft – get into the water in Antarctica without one and you'll be unconscious in 2 minutes and dead in 10 minutes), an inflatable kayak (the ONLY way to see the wildlife close up), additional handheld VHF radios, and so on.

In addition there were the Big Shops. Stanley has a couple of excellent independent supermarkets. One sources a lot of their goods from Waitrose and the other from Sainsbury's. We had provisioned in Buenos Aires for our passage down here, but now we needed to provision not only for the next three weeks until we got to Ushuaia at the tip of Argentina, but also provision for the next three months with all the little British things that provide comfort and succour, like Mars bars, Fig Rolls, Hobnobs, Colmans Mustard, Mint sauce, Redcurrant jelly, Horseradish sauce, OK sauce, Heinz ketchup and baked beans, Fray Bentos tinned steak and kidney pies and a mountain of flour for Venetia to work on after her bread making course (the Argentine flour is, apparently not that good). But top of my list of priorities (as ever) was the alcohol. We had enough spirits on board (whisky and gin are remarkably cheap in Argentina) to raise the dead, but wine is a different thing. Bottles and boats aren't a good mix. They take up too much space and they rattle. Much better are 3-litre wine boxes. You take the bladder out of the cardboard and they wash around under bunks like a giant water bed. Boxed wine is not available in Argentina. This was my chance. I went along to the supermarket warehouse for the discounted bulk purchase. "I would like 60 litres of boxed Chilean Sauvignon Blanc please" "No problem, sir". "And I would like 60 litres of Cabernet Sauvignon". "Sorry sir, we're just out of that – we're expecting another delivery in a month's time" "What? You must be joking. Please can you double check". They checked. Nothing. No boxed red wine. I was beginning to sweat, and felt slightly dizzy. This was a disaster second only to a dismasting on a rocky lee shore in a tempest. But nothing could be done. I walked the two miles to the other supermarket and drew a blank there as well.

Now 2230 and we are up in 5 hours to set off at first light for our passage round to Goose Green. Part 2 will follow in due course when I will tell you a little about the Flaklanders and Stanley itself. Goodnight!

## **Reflections on Stanley**

**Position: 51:51.36S 058:54.6W**

**Date: 28 November 2011**

**Time: 1515 LT 1815 UTC**

During our five days in Stanley (well, four days if you exclude our day at anchor), we've met a large number of people. All incredibly friendly, welcoming and helpful. The population of the Falklands has risen to about 3,000, of which only about 200 now live in the "camp" in the countryside as, principally, wool sheep farmers. The rest live in Stanley itself. The town straggles along the south side of the very well protected harbour. Most of the houses are wood framed, clad with wood or metal and all have corrugated iron roofs. There is only one terrace of brick built houses (all the bricks had to be imported). Jubilee Terrace was built in 1887 but they too also have corrugated iron roofs all painted in bright colours.

One thing that is conspicuous by its absence is any sort of High Street with shops. Most basic things are available, although almost all imported from the UK but the retail outlets, few that they are, tend to be located in a warehouse in a backstreet. What Stanley does have in quantity is pubs – we had six to choose from. There was a brewery here – The Penguin Brewery – which John's company built, but it has now closed down, so the pubs now sell only bottled beer.

Meals can be found at some of the pubs but the only proper restaurant in town is the Malvina House Hotel, where the food is really excellent.

Right on the waterfront behind Mina2's mooring lies the Anglican cathedral built at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but there is also a Catholic church, a Tabernacle United Free church and even the Jehovah's Witnesses have a place here.

The landscape is barren and windswept. And the weather – oh dear, oh dear. We are now in the northern equivalent of late May and the daytime temperature has rarely risen above about 12 C. At night it drops to no more than a chilly 5 or 6 C. But what makes it seem even colder is the relentless wind. The Falklands are round the corner from Cape Horn and succession after succession of deep, tight low pressure systems sweep past Cape Horn passing south of the Falklands. So generally there is a very stiff, cold wind that can come at you from almost any direction. These weather systems are travelling so quickly that in the space of a few hours the wind can completely box the compass. And talk about changeable. One minute there are scuddy clouds interspersed with rays of sunshine, the next moment a black cloud is rushing towards you with torrential rain and the already high wind speed doubles in the squalls that accompany them. If the sun-loving Argentines were ever successful in taking the islands over, they would be deserted within a couple of years.

And talking of the Argentines, the conflict of 1982 and their poor relationship with their neighbours is always at the forefront of the Falklanders' minds. Since the bombastic Christine Kirchner became President of Argentina she has slowly imposed what amounts to an embargo on the Falklands. There have not been any direct flights from Argentina for a while. The Falklands used to get a monthly ship of supplies from Chile, but Argentina have now banned Chilean ships from sailing to the Falklands through the Beagle Channel (half owned by Chile and Argentina). Likewise they

effectively ban ships from sailing from Uruguay to the Falklands through what Argentina claims to be their territorial waters, so now almost everything has to be shipped from the UK. But the Falklanders survive – that is what they are good at. They are a lively community of tough but enormously friendly people, and they are thriving.

We had been intending to leave Stanley on Sunday to head south about the islands, first to Goose Green up the Choiseul Sound and the sight of one of the big battles of the '82 conflict. In the event the winds were so strong all day even by the ferocious standards here, that we left this morning at first light at 0430. Sadly the wind direction was bang on the nose, and to enable us to go the 65 miles to Goose Green before the next gale of wind arrives this afternoon, we have been motoring virtually the whole way. The real wildlife adventure starts when we get to West Falklands but nevertheless we have been escorted round to Goose Green by comical Rock Shags that are so stupid that as they fly close past us, they turn round to have a look at us and then nearly crash into our rigging, Megallenic Penguins that bob around in the water around us, and the tiny little Commerson Dolphins – only about a metre long – that have been playing around our bow

**Date: 28 November 2011**

**Time: 1200 LT 1500 UTC**

Ewen Southby-Tailyour is a remarkable man who has made an indelible impact on the history of the Falkland Islands. In the late 1970's he commanded the detachment of Royal Marines in Stanley. During that period, being a keen sailor, he spent a great deal of time exploring the islands, its beaches and anchorages. Taking scrupulous notes he came to know more about the coastline of the islands than anyone else. When Argentina invaded the Falklands in 1982, Ewen went to his bosses and said he might be able to help. He produced his detailed pilotage notes on every conceivable landing spot on the islands. His knowledge was invaluable to the British Task Force that liberated the islands, and Ewen played an active part as a Royal Marines officer in the campaign.

During that campaign, the lives of many brave young soldiers, sailors and airmen were lost. One of the tragedies involved a landing craft "Foxtrot Four" manned by Royal Marines under Ewen's command, that was rocketed whilst manoeuvring in Choiseul Sound, close to Goose Green. Eight men died. Their bodies have never been recovered.

After the conflict, Ewen wrote the definitive pilot book on cruising in the Falkland Islands and it is the bible for the few yachts that venture this far. Before I left for this adventure Ewen asked me, if I were to be in Choiseul Sound, whether we would pass by a position one nautical mile south of Johnson's Island – the exact point where the tragedy took place – and pay our respects.

At 1500 UTC this afternoon, Mina2 stopped at this position where we observed a one minute silence in remembrance of these brave men and, at Ewen's request, poured a

libation of whisky for each of the eight men into the waters above their graves. It was a moving moment for all three of us.

### **Goose Green**

**Position: 51:49.56S 058:58.27W**

**Date: 29 November 2011**

**Time: 1430 LT 1730 UTC**

The first I realised we were doing something rather unusual was the look of startled surprise on the Customs officers face. We were clearing out of Stanley and he needed to know where we were to visit in the islands on our way south west. "Goose Green, Port Stephens and New Island" I replied. "Goose Green?" he queried. "I've been in this job six years and this is only the second time I have known a boat go to Goose Green". The only reason for the few visitors to this famous 1982 battlesite is that it is 25 miles up the Choiseul Sound and most boats just go past. Not my boat. The Absent Downstairs Skipper is Argentine and 1982 was a traumatic time for us. The Falklands conflict completely dominated our lives and the memories of this tragic campaign were still fresh in my mind. John, too, has an encyclopaedic knowledge of the conflict. We both needed to visit the site of the first big land battle; meet the people of the first settlement to be liberated by the British troops, and to pay our respects at the site where Colonel "H" Jones VC was killed.

Making our way through the narrow twisting channel that leads to Goose Green we approached the large jetty and tied up. There were a couple of dozen houses dotted around the small bay together with numerous sheds and barns. It was mid-afternoon and the place was deserted. Eventually a Land Rover turned up and I went and asked permission to stay on the jetty. "You will be very welcome" was the response.

We were enjoying our anchor nip, when a young man appeared, introduced himself as Colin and welcomed us to Goose Green. In his mid-30's he was born and bred in Goose Green, went to work in Scotland for a while but returned six years ago. He is a joiner and works as the handyman for the settlement. He came on board and told us all about Goose Green past and present. He was a mischievous seven-year-old when he was playing on the beach back in 1982 and was surprised to see a soldier appear from behind the tussock grass. He'd never seen a soldier before. Excited he rushed back home to tell his Mum. Within minutes the Argentine troops were ushering all 140 inhabitants to the Community Hall where they said a meeting would take place. When the last of the inhabitants filed in, the door was slammed shut behind them and locked. They were held prisoner here for 32 days. For the first two days they were given no food or bedding. Colin may have found the whole thing quite exciting, but the adults did not.

Colin has a detailed knowledge of the local history and kindly offered to borrow a Land Rover the following day and take us round to see San Carlos Sound, "Bomb Alley", and all the memorials for the fallen including that at the site that Colonel "H" was killed. Colin is philosophical about their treatment at the hands of the Argentines. "They were soldiers. It was war. They had a job to do". So he quite understood my desire whilst here also to visit the sad lonely graveyard of the Argentine soldiers who lost their lives here. Young conscripts. Some of whom hadn't even been told where

they were. Just told that they were defending their country from “invaders”. It wasn’t their fault, but the fault of desperate, misguided politicians. Whilst we may feel pride on behalf of the British soldiers who gave their lives, I will be paying equal respect at the graves of the Argentine soldiers.

Goose Green settlement has changed a lot since 1982. Then it had 140 inhabitants. Whilst the enormous farm that the community supports remains the same size (a staggering 50 mile radius with an even more staggering 80,000 wool sheep). Now fewer young people wish to live in the “camp”, the technology is better (quad bikes for rounding up the sheep for instance), and the price of wool has slumped, so now there are only 42 people in the settlement. But it still has its own primary school with five pupils aged three to eight. The primary school teacher, Jackie, was the next to arrive to welcome us with a delicious cake. She asked if there was anything else we needed. “Apart from a good bath, not much” joked John. “I have the best bath in Goose Green – cast iron” said Jackie, “and a good shower with no shortage of hot water. Come along anytime. Just let yourselves in – nobody locks their doors here”. What a fantastic welcome.

Colin confirmed the Customs officer’s claim that few yachts visited Goose Green. He said that in the six years since he returned here, we were the first yacht he had seen.

In the evening we went up to the community café (open 9am to 9pm 7 days a week) and had a really excellent mutton pie with chips.

This morning I awoke to a bitterly cold and still very windy day. This is the season when all the 80,000 sheep are rounded up, sheared and then released, shivering, back onto the land. We went to the shearing shed where a gang of six shearers were working, wearing singlets in the freezing cold, showing off their well-muscled arms and extravagant tattoos as they sheared one sheep after another. In an 8-hour day shift they will each shear about 320 to 330 sheep. She pointed to one of the shearers. “He broke the record last year – 420 sheep in one day”. (That’s nearly one a minute for every minute of the eight hours). In the same shed they sorted the good bits from the offcuts, shoved them into a machine that compressed them into one-ton bales and stacked them up for transport back to Stanley to be shipped to the world’s markets.

I saw striding across the hills towards us a hiker in shorts. “You must have cold shins” I remarked as he walked down the jetty. “I’m Scottish” he said. “For me this is almost tropical”. Stephen had had a successful career and decided to have a mid-life gap year and has been travelling and walking down the entire length of South America. After a warming cup of tea on board, he joined us on a long walk across the hills to an extraordinary, long suspension bridge across an inlet which presumably opened up enormous acreage of additional grazing land the other side. It has the distinction, apparently, of being the southernmost suspension bridge in the world. It was built well over a hundred years ago it had rusted to the point where it looked close to the point of collapse. The wool price must have indeed been high to justify the building of this substantial structure. It’s just a shame that nothing can be done to save it.

**Delightfully Stormbound in Goose Green**

**Position: 51:49.56S 058:58.27W**

**Date: 30 November 2011**

We were hoping to set sail today for the next 60-mile hop south west down the coast, but the forecast was grim: south west F7 to F8 (gale force) occasionally F9 (strong gale), i.e. blowing old boots directly from the direction we wanted to go. It was a no-brainer. We were stormbound and we would be staying another day in Goose Green, tucked up safely on the jetty. We were not particularly concerned by this setback. Goose Green was a delightful place; much better weather was forecast for a few days after the gale, and we had factored in the inevitability of being holed up for a few days due to adverse winds.

Yesterday afternoon Colin came round with a Land Rover to take us on a tour of the San Carlos and Goose Green battle sites and the war memorials. Driving on the rough roads through the spectacular terrain reminiscent of the north of Scotland, we looked down from the hills over San Carlos Water (otherwise known as “Bomb Alley”) where the fleet of the British Task Force landed the British forces to recapture the islands in 1982. We then went to the graveyard where the fallen Argentine troops are buried. Surprisingly it was much grander and, even more surprisingly, in better condition than the memorials and graves of the fallen British soldiers. We stood in sad reflection of the meaningless loss of life of this conflict on both sides. Sadly, many of the graves were unmarked, the identity of the occupants being known only to God.

We visited the memorial to three members of the 59 Independent Commando Squadron, Royal Engineers. Behind the memorial was an ammunition box in which there were some empty rifle cartridges and, poignantly, a little plaque on which was engraved: “To Mike. Visited you December 1910. I will love you always. Gill”.

We then drove to the spot where Colonel “H” Jones VC was killed, marked by a small memorial. A few yards away was a dug out hollow in the hill in which was the Argentine machine gun crew that mowed Jones down as he charged over the crest of the hill in front of them. Given the lie of the land, a full frontal assault on the line of dug-in Argentine troops was exceedingly difficult and it is remarkable that the number of casualties was not very much higher than it was.

A couple of miles further on a lovely spot overlooking the rolling pasture is the memorial to the men of 2 Para, surrounded by a white picket fence. The fence is deteriorating and needs maintenance and a good paint. Shamefully, neither the British War Graves Commission nor the Falklands government seem willing to take responsibility for it, so Colin said that he and some of his mates will just come out and sort it out themselves.

Finally, we visited the single grave of Nick Taylor, the Royal Navy Air Squadron Harrier pilot who crashed and died very near the Goose Green settlement. Behind his headstone are some bent and tangled scraps from his plane.

Colin was incredibly knowledgeable about the campaign and was constantly stopping to point out the positions of the opposing forces and describing the difficulties they each faced. The whole thing was a very moving experience.

In the evening both Colin and Jackie the teacher came to the boat for dinner. As if he hadn't done enough, Colin brought with him as a present to the boat a wooden bowl

which he had turned from a fallen timber from the “Vicar of Bray” the famous wrecked ship that lies rotting behind the jetty. It is the only remaining wreck of a ship involved in the Californian Goldrush of 1849. It was an incredibly generous gesture and I will treasure the bowl as a wonderful memento of our visit here.

Jackie told us that her school children, and those from Stanley who were visiting, were to receive a visit today from Mr Greenland, a local historian who would tell them all about life in Goose Green at the time of the invasion. Kindly, Jackie thought to ask us to come along as well. Mr Greenland’s talk was fascinating describing, amongst many other things, the conditions of the inhabitants held captive in the Community Hall (no talk to young children is complete without some scatological reference, so when told that all the imprisoned locals had to eat for over a month were tinned tomatoes and crackers which gave everyone the squits, and there were only two loos for the 120 or more prisoners, the young eyes were wide open). The talk was made all the more immediate by there being several children there whose parents and grandparents were amongst the captives. When Major Chris Keeble with a weakened force of barely 200, with almost no ammunition left, bluffed the Argentine commander of almost 1000 well fed troops to surrender, they placed the Argentine troops into the large shearing shed (once the largest and still the second largest shearing shed in the world) which to this day still has “P.O.W.” and “P.G.” (the Spanish equivalent) painted in large white letters on the outside to protect the Argentine prisoners in the event of further attacks.

Jackie had also told me that one of her pupils was very interested in weather and had been collecting and analysing weather data at Goose Green and comparing it to other places where local people had gone to work around the world. Jackie asked me if I could talk to her about why weather was important to sailors. So I spent a happy half hour telling delightful 7year old Kia (I hope I’ve spelt your name right, because I know you’ll be reading this!) about how wind doesn’t go in a straight line but in enormous swirling circles which changes the direction of the wind, why it was important to us when we were sailing, and I took my computer along to show her some grib files to show her how we could see what weather was coming our way and how it swirled round. Kira was polite enough to feign interest.

However, Jackie’s greatest gift to us was the use of her bath and shower. We have limited supplies of water on board to keep us going for about a month, so showers are strictly limited. Jackie cannot know how much we appreciated a luxuriating soak when you hadn’t had a good wash for over a week!

Meanwhile. Linda has been busy, needles flying, knitting a little polar outfit for Able Seadog Snoopy, Ship’s Mascot. He now sits resplendent in our “Vicar of Bray” bowl with smart two-tone gloves for his paws and a seaman’s sweater, all knitted from Falklands wool. He looks the biz, and he knows it.

### **Unexpected Stop Off on Way to Port Stephens**

**Position: 52:07.732S 058:36.721W**

**Motley Bay**

**Date: 1 December 2011**

Rather than setting an overambitious itinerary of the Falklands we decided to restrict ourselves to no more than four sites, carefully selected. The winds are generally so strong that being holed up for days at a time is a probability rather than a possibility and we didn't want to find ourselves obliged to make the crossing over to the South American mainland in adverse conditions due to lack of time.

Clearly Stanley, on the east coast, had to be our starting point not least because we had to go through the formalities of checking in and out there. We were also determined to go to Goose Green, not just because the settlement played such a pivotal role in the 1982 conflict, but to see at work what is now the biggest sheep farm in the Falklands.

Just before I left Buenos Aires, I was fortuitously given introductions by friends to people in the Falklands. So I had been put in touch with Ann and Peter Robertson who, with their son Paul, farm at Port Stephens on the south coast of West Falkland (52 deg 06S 060 deg 50W). Everyone we have told that we are going to Port Stephens has said how fabulous it is there and how much we will enjoy it. That is where we are heading for now. We were also introduced to Maria and Ian Strange. Ian is a famous naturalist and conservationist who has built up New Island on western extremity of West Falkland (51 deg 44S 061 deg 17W) as a world famous nature reserve which is now run by their daughter Georgina. If there is one place in the whole of the Falkland Islands where one can see almost every species of fauna it is here. We can't wait.

After being delayed at Goose Green by severe gales yesterday, we decided to head off this morning for the 126 mile passage to Port Stephen. As we left the jetty the wind was a brisk 25 knots from the west. We had a tremendous sail hurtling back east down Choiseul Sound. The wind was from behind and we were romping along at 8 knots with just a well reefed mainsail. We were escorted out of the sound by lots of little Commerson dolphins porpoising alongside us through the wavelets. The sky was clear blue and whilst the wind was still cold, we felt the warmth of the sun on our cheeks. It was brilliant save for one thing. The wind, which we had rather been expecting to abate, was rising steadily. Soon the wind was fluctuating between 45 and 50 knots and had swung round to the south west which was exactly the direction we would be wanting to go once we were out of the Sound. Even in the Sound itself the wavelets had turned into 1 ½ metre waves. Once we got out into the open ocean it would be murder. So we quickly decided, with just 30 miles of the 126 mile passage covered, to duck into an anchorage in the lee of Motley Island and wait for the wind to abate properly as promised.

And what a fortuitous decision. Well protected from the waves, if not the wind, Motley Bay is completely isolated, surrounded by beaches on which strolled comic Gentoo and Megallanic penguins; the sky was filled with Rock Shags and Terns and Kelp geese and Steamer ducks huddled in the thick long strands of kelp which floated on the water. Certainly better than bashing our way through mountainous seas with a gale on the nose. We wondered when it was that a yacht was last anchored here.

We can't stay here for ever though. The wind is now slowly abating and soon we will have to don our foulies once more and head out into the ocean to do battle with the elements.

## **Mina2 Visits God's Own Country –**

**Position: 52:06.08S 060:49.78W**

**Port Stephens**

**Date: 4 December 2011**

Yesterday, Linda, John and I had what we all agreed was one of the most memorable days of our lives. The previous afternoon we had arrived at the remote farm of Port Stephens, owned by Peter and Ann Robertson to whom we had been introduced by Argentine friends.

After the constant high winds, squally leaden skies and freezing temperatures of the previous week, spring had sprung. We were now in a high pressure system: the skies had cleared, the sun was out and there was, blissfully and extraordinarily, no wind. We scraped the thermals off our bodies (we had been wearing them day and night for the previous ten days). Having anchored off the jetty and recommissioned the dinghy for the first time since Buenos Aires (it had been deflated and lashed to the foredeck) we went ashore to have tea with Ann and Peter. We were the first yacht to visit in a couple of years.

Peter, originally from New Zealand, has farmed sheep in Canada, then Patagonia, before settling in Port Stephens more than 50 years ago. Ann, an Argentine from Buenos Aires joined Peter 40 years ago. Apart from the absolutely stunning location of the farm, overlooking a large almost landlocked bay fringed with hills, one of the attractions of Port Stephens is its complete isolation. The farm is enormous – 50,000 acres rearing sheep for their wool, but also some dairy cattle and beef cattle. The whole lot is looked after by Peter and Ann, and their son Paul who we had met in Stanley. Their nearest neighbours live 40 miles away down a pot-holed gravel road. It would take them a round trip of three hours by Land Rover to borrow a cup of sugar. The road was only built a few years ago. Before then it would take them five or six hours to visit their neighbours by horse, and their supplies were brought in by ship every month or two. Their electricity is wind generated (so no shortage then) and their water comes from a spring.

As we had sailed overnight to get here, we went back to the boat for an early dinner and bed. Early yesterday morning, I awoke in this perfect bay to another beautiful, almost cloudless day. Beside Mina2, swinging to her anchor on the glass like water, were a variety of ducks and geese, then out of the clear water popped the head of a Gentoo penguin, which looked at me and then porpoised away. Different.

Later in the morning we took Mina2 to the other side of the bay and took the dinghy ashore to go for a long walk over a saddle in the hills. Verging on the hot (I should think it was in the 20's) we were almost in our shirt sleeves. The views from the top of the saddle down the rocky coast of West Falkland were unbelievable. The now still sea was a startling deep blue and in the shallows of the bays the water turned to turquoise lapping at the snow white sandy beaches. We crested a rise and there, clinging to the steep hillside was a large colony of cute little Rockhopper penguins sitting on their eggs. Absolutely magical. We continued walking down to the sea and round a headland to a sandy isthmus where there was a colony of literally thousands of Gentoo penguins with cattle grazing nearby. You could see the penguins through the small waves lapping the beach, streaking through the water at incredible speeds

before launching themselves onto the beach with an ungainly thump and a bump and then a waddle back to their nest to feed a chick or two. All the penguins were sitting on their little conical nests made from sand and stones, all of them exactly one penguin peck away from each other. Some were sitting on an egg or two, but most had one or two tiny little chicks nestling on their feet. As humans are not predators - well not here and not now - they were unfazed as we approached. We quietly sat down almost amongst them and just watched their comical interaction with each other and their chicks. The whole thing was utterly and totally ... well, words can't really describe it.

In the evening we returned to the settlement and tied up alongside the jetty. Ann and Peter joined us for dinner on the boat after another hard day's work gathering the sheep for shearing. It must be an incredibly hard life working such an enormous farm with such limited human resources and in such isolation. They have to be Jacks of all trades. If something goes wrong, they can't just call the maintenance man - it could be weeks or months before he would turn up - they just have to fix the problem themselves, one way or another. They riveted us with stories of what this isolated life was like, but our overwhelming impression was that of contentment. As Peter said at the end of the evening "We are lucky enough to live in God's own country". We have been greatly privileged to visit this country, albeit just for a couple of days.

This morning we were due to head off for New Island, our final destination in these wonderful islands. I was awoken by an insistent but faint hammering on my cabin door. I opened the door to find Able Seadog Snoopy in a state of excitement. He had been pawing over the charts looking at our impending passage from Port Stephens to New Island and had discovered that on the way we were to pass between the West Falkland mainland and Sea Dog Island (52 deg 00.3S, 061 deg 05.8W - go on - look it up on Google Earth). How many Seadogs would be there? Could we go ashore? Would they be Ordinary Seadogs or would they be important Able Seadogs like him, long in tooth and claw? Would they have a supply of Winalot? (we're running a bit short). Would it be too windy for him to go on deck and have a look through the binoculars? (Snoopy has been forbidden to go on deck in winds over 35 knots for fear that he be beaten to death by his own ears). I told the old fella to calm down - yes, we would be passing the island. Yes, there may be Seadogs there but, no, none as important as him. I told him that, sadly no, we wouldn't be able to land but yes, he would be able to go out on deck and look through the binoculars as no wind was forecast and we would be motoring.

And motor we did. Like we have done most of the way round the Falklands in truth. Either we've been holed up due to gale force winds, or the winds have been from the wrong direction, i.e. bang on the nose or, in the last day, no wind at all. But, as Linda says, it is soupy thick with wildlife which makes up for the fact that we are on the Motor Vessel Mina2.

### **New Island - Nature Reserve and Jumping Off Point**

**Position: 51:43.391S 061:17.93W**

**New Island**

**Date: 6 December 2011**

We had decided to take the inside passage round the south west end of the Falklands to get to New Island – not to avoid the vicious seas on this infamous lee shore that has seen the demise of so many ships over the centuries, as there was, exceptionally no wind, no big sea, and we were motoring - but because it seemed more interesting.

We passed between the mainland and Sea Dog Island. Able Seadog Snoopy donned his polar outfit and came into the cockpit to scan the island through binoculars with great excitement. He claims he saw a couple of Sea Dogs but, as the Absent Downstairs Skipper would say, “I’m not so sure”.

We went through the notorious Smylie Sound – a narrow gap between two islands with a shallow sand bank between them. We were advised that at spring tides the water can race through here at 10 knots. It was not spring tides and we had fortuitously arranged for our entry with the tide with us. As we approached the shallows, we saw our speed over the ground increasing rapidly; the water around us was bubbling like a cauldron and all around were whirlpools caused by the rapid water. We shot through with a 6-knot suck from the tide. We reappeared into what was almost an inland sea – islands all round and extremely well protected. The landscape at the west end of the Falklands is altogether more dramatic than the low lying hills of East Falkland. High sheer cliffs plummet from the many headlands into the sea. Even in these benign conditions the swell crashed into the sheer faces of rock sending spray shooting many metres up the cliff faces. This coastline in a storm must be awe-inspiring.

As we approached the sheltered anchorage off the tiny settlement at New Island at about 1600, we saw another yacht anchored in the bay. It was our old friends Dawnbreaker whom we had met in Stanley. A big Swedish 65 – 70 ft aluminium yacht, it had an international crew of Lars, the Swedish owner, Bob the Welshman, Tomas the Brazilian and Peter the Canadian. They have the same itinerary as me – heading for the Beagle Channel then going over to Antarctica in January, so we will see more of them over the months. Having anchored securely, we were invited over to Dawnbreaker for a drink or three before dinner.

New Island is a world-famous Nature Reserve. Bought by Ian Strange in the 1960’s (we had been introduced to Maria and Ian Strange and had met them in Stanley) it is now owned by a trust and the island is run by their daughter Georgina. Lying at the extreme western end of the Falklands, it is shaped like a crescent about 7 miles long. Georgina and her boyfriend are the only inhabitants, but in the summer months they are visited by a small number of scientists and conservationists who carry out research on the wildlife, of which it is stuffed full. It is also on the itinerary of some of the small cruise ships and, being an excellent point of arrival in the Falklands from the west and a jumping off point for going south west to the Beagle channel, they also see more yachts here than anywhere else apart from Stanley. Georgina said they saw perhaps six yachts a year. A supply ship visits every couple of months or so, but it carries no passengers so the only way on and off the island is by helicopter – extortionately expensive. The island has its own website whose address I can’t remember – just Google “New Island Falklands” – it’s well worth a look.

The following morning we awoke to a simply horrible day – foggy, damp and cold so we busied ourselves with maintenance jobs on board – refuelling from the jerry cans

and, excruciatingly, drilling holes into my beautiful soleboards to screw them down so they don't fly around and kill folk in the event of a knockdown or capsize in Drake Passage. Actually, the screws are pretty unobtrusive.

Talking of fixing things; a tribute to the greatest fixer ever. John is a practical and lateral thinking engineer and has been steadily going about the boat identifying all and any areas which could be fixed, strengthened or improved – whether it be devising the most secure way to strap the jerry cans and dinghy to the decks so they won't be washed overboard in the enormous seas to come, to fixing a potentially dangerous problem with the mainsail reefing mechanism. And a million other things besides. His help has been absolutely invaluable.

By the afternoon the weather had improved and as we had been here 24 hours and hadn't yet been ashore, we lowered the dinghy and motored over to the concrete jetty. There, tied to a post, was a note of welcome from Georgina. Having tracked her down, we went for a short walk, past the excellent little museum they have put together, and over a hill to an extraordinary amphitheatre of high rocks sloping down to a small bay which was completely covered in nesting birds. Sharing the same site were tens of thousands of Imperial Shags, Rockhopper penguins and Black-browed Albatross – which are absolutely enormous face to face. Amongst them strutted Skuas opportunistically looking for a distracted mother from whom to grab a snack in the form of an egg or young chick. Every type of bird has their favoured way of building their nests; the Shags have nests made of twigs and moss, the Rockhoppers build little conical mounds made from stones and mud, and the Albatross fashion extraordinary shaped mounds from mud alone – looking like potters' clay at the start of making a big pottery bowl. There is the constant noise of arguments as one bird gets too close to the nest of another, and meanwhile the sky is full of wheeling Albatross and Shags. The Albatross are the most graceful bird in the world whilst flying but landing on their tiny landing strip tends to be an ungainly thumping crash landing. You could sit and watch it all for hours.

Yesterday, the wind was forecast to come in strong from the north in the afternoon so we decided to leave early for a long walk to the very north of the island. It took five hours in total, not least because we needed to stop every few yards to look in wonder at yet another wildlife miracle. As Linda said, it is soupy thick with wildlife. Wandering along a track about half a mile from the sea, we would see groups of Magellanic Penguins. Not for them the overcrowded nests on the rocks overlooking a bay; their technique is to dig burrows in the soft peaty earth. One moment they are there in front of you and the next minute they're gone. Birds of every species abounded – all seemingly remarkably tame and unafraid of our presence. From the small crimson-chested Long-Tailed Meadow lark, singing joyfully on top of a wooden post, to numerous types of duck and geese all wandering around as families – mum, dad and several goslings. Skuas and Albatross wheeled overhead. Cresting a hill, all of a sudden John was being attacked by several scarce but aggressive raptors, the Striated Caracara. They swooped at him from every direction and would have taken a chunk out of his scalp if he hadn't been wearing a hat. After a couple of hours we reached the north shore and the rookery of yet more penguins – this time Gentoo penguins – the first we had seen on New Island. We were also hoping to see one of two of the much larger King Penguins and some Sea Lions, but sadly there was none.

As we returned to the boat, we saw that another yacht was anchored in the bay (Dawnbreaker had left for Staten Island early that morning). This was Kotick, a professional charter yacht owned by Alain, a veteran in these parts of some 20 years, with a party of French and Belgian guests. Six yachts a year and three had visited in just one day!

Exhausted from our long walk we chilled out on the boat in the afternoon as the forecast wind rose and rose until it was blowing a full gale with gusts up to more than 50 knots. Kotick swung to her anchor close by with all her crew ashore. In the screaming winds we saw a Skua hovering near her backstay trying again and again to get close to something in the rigging. We realised that Alain had the best part of half a sheep hanging there (this is a not unusual place for storing mutton down here). “Oh look” said John, “He’s got a lamb kebab in his rigging”. “Lamb kebab? What do you mean?” I asked. “Well” said John “it’s been Skua’ed”. How we laughed.

We plan to leave New Island early tomorrow morning for the 215-mile passage across to Staten Island by the Argentine mainland. The weather window looks favourable for a comfortable passage without too much wind – well that’s the plan anyway.

As I know you are all gagging for some pics, I will try and send, separately, a few small low def ones. When I get to broadband heaven in Ushuaia in a couple of weeks, you will be inundated!

### **Reflections on the Falklands**

**Position: 54:46.858S 064:24.37W**

**Puerto Hoppner, Staten Island**

**Date: 10 December 2011**

Previous blogs have filled in the detail of what we have done and who we have met in the Falkland Islands. But these are our overall impressions of the Falklands as a place; its people and its attributes as a cruising ground.

My memories of the Falklands will always be tainted by the memories of the hours that Maria and I spent in 1982 riveted to the television screen as, first, the soldiers of her country took possession of the islands they had always claimed as their own and still, sadly, do. Then watching the drama unfold as the British Taskforce sailed down to the South Atlantic and retook the islands with such great loss of life on both sides. The barren landscape was therefore very familiar and it was with a sense of deja-vu that the windswept hills of east Falkland revealed themselves as we limped into Stanley, battered and bruised from the pounding we had received on the way.

But we were to find there were so many aspects of the island: its people, climate and wildlife that were not revealed in the newsreels and documentaries that followed. The friendliness of our welcome was overwhelming. After the tortuous, confusing and sometimes purely obstructive bureaucracy in Brazil and Argentina, the friendly welcome from the Customs officer – our first contact with the Falklanders - was a breath of fresh air. It was all over and done with in minutes, everything very clear and straightforward. Barry Elsby, the UK’s Cruising Association representative on the island who couldn’t have been more helpful with the barrage of emails I sent him

during the planning stages, also greeted us on the dockside within minutes of our arrival, took us under his wing and generally made things happen. We had received a couple of introductions from Argentine friends and with this nucleus of contacts we were swept into Falklands society. Offers of the use of showers and washing machines (“Just come in and help yourself – no one locks their doors here – there’s no crime”); invitations to drinks and to meet the family abounded. On a couple of occasions both John and I, separately, asked someone on the streets of Stanley how to get somewhere. Immediately these strangers whisked us into their Land Rovers and took us wherever we needed to go, and then on to the next place and then delivered us back to the boat – complete strangers who became friends in minutes.

As we went round the islands we met more and more people, all of whom seemed to know everyone else in this friendly close-knit community, and every new person we met seemed to have a connection with most of the people we’d met before. By the time we left, we almost felt part of the community ourselves. It gave one a good, warm feeling.

Unlike the climate. Crikey, these people are Spartan. It is, after all, late spring / early summer and the same latitude south as Birmingham is north. For most of our time in the Falklands, the temperature struggled into double figures during the day and slumped, exhausted, into mid-single figures at night. And then there’s the wind. It was relentless. Spinning round from every point of the compass as the low pressure systems swept round from Cape Horn, it became quite exhausting. So when we got two days of clear skies, warming sun and low wind speeds it was like we had arrived in paradise. Everything in life is comparative.

But back to the people. I can’t think of anyone we met who didn’t give us a present of some sort. We were the recipients of loads of local produce from duck eggs, rhubarb, lettuce and spring onions (rare and valued commodities here), ultra-fresh chicken eggs, home-made cake, hand-spun Falklands wool, jerry cans, and the wonderful hand-turned wooden bowl from Colin in Goose Green. Barry and Bernadette’s son made us a long wooden pole to cut kelp off the anchor chain.

Most of the Falklanders still seem to have the conflict of 1982 and their relationship with Argentina still at the front of their minds, and no wonder. In the past there had been good, strong connections between Argentina and the Falklands. Many of the families who farmed the land in the Falklands also developed and farmed estancias in Patagonia. Many of the Falklands children went to boarding school in Argentina. Their relationship with the people of Argentina was, and to some extent still is, strong. But not their relationship with the politicians of Argentina, who have been using the Islands as a political pawn. It makes the Falklanders sad rather than angry.

An overriding impression was the devotion which everyone felt for the Falklands. But not in a jingoistic way. It is their island. It is their home, and in most cases has been for generations. On average, far more generations than the average Argentine family have been citizens of Argentina. Yes, most feel a very close connection to Britain, but they take pride in the fact that, apart from the cost of the defence of the people from the threat by Argentina, they are completely self-sufficient and always have been. The Falkland Islands, they point out, is a Protectorate of Britain – it is not part of Britain. It is the Falkland Islands and of that they feel proud.

They have a real fear of another invasion and its consequences to them and their families. Not surprisingly, given their past experience of when Argentina took possession of the islands in 1982. The Argentines imprisoned the entire population of Falklanders (in Goose Green) and looted their houses (in most places, including Stanley). Clearly there was no intention to win the hearts and minds of the residents. The clear message was that Argentina wanted the islands, but not its residents. But you can't send the residents back home – the Falklands IS their home. Peter Robertson, with his wife Ann, with whom we spent probably two of the most memorable days of our lives on their farm in Port Stephens has grandchildren on the island who are seventh generation Falklanders. Before that, his family came from New Zealand. He is not British – he can't even get a British passport – he is a Falklander.

The Falklanders feel particular bitterness towards the current president of Argentina, Christina Kirchner, who is once again stirring popular opinion in Argentina against them. She is slowly but surely trying to freeze them out economically. Until recently, apart from buying supplies from Britain and having them shipped here, the Falklands also received a monthly supply ship from Chile by way of the Beagle Channel, and other supply ships from Uruguay. The Beagle Channel is split down the middle – half is Chilean and half is Argentine. But the Argentines have recently and unilaterally forbidden any Chilean ship from passing through the channel bound for the Malvinas. So the Chilenos, bullied by their bigger, more powerful neighbour had no option but to acquiesce. The Argentine government has similarly coerced Uruguay to stop all shipping from Montevideo to the Malvinas.

It is purely vindictive. To the Falklanders it is an inconvenience but it will change nothing other than to make them even more resentful of Argentine politicians. These are not a people who are suppressed by the British, in need of liberation. These people have been surviving, contentedly, in a comparatively hostile environment in isolation for generations. They are supremely self-sufficient and used to sacrifices. They will survive.

Enough of that. The wildlife. Wow! Where does one start? The moment when one is escorted into every anchorage by several different species of dolphin or indeed, on a couple of occasions, by seals? The wheeling around of the boat at all times of numerous species of bird, some of the largest – the albatrosses, the smallest – the Wilson's Storm petrel, and the prettiest – the Cape Petrel's, all in their thousands? And the comical Imperial Shags, so inquisitive that they flew slowly along beside and in front of us, looking round at us to the point where they would almost bump into the rigging?

When ashore, it was the tameness of all the birds, their complete lack of concern about our human presence, that was startling. We waded through flocks of geese of so many varieties, ducked the aggressive approaches of skuas and the endangered striated caracaras (although it was we who felt endangered as they tried to scalp us). Numerous other species that Linda was ticking off so fast her pencil needed sharpening. But it was the penguins that were the highlight. The Rockhoppers that, well, hopped on rocks. The Magellanic penguins shyly burrowing in the peaty turf half a mile or more from the sea – one minute you see them, then they've disappeared

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### **From Heaven to Hell?**

**Position: 54:46.858S 064:24.37W**

**Puerto Hoppner, Staten Island**

**Date: 11 December 2011**

Between Staten Island and the mainland of Tierra del Fuego is a 16 mile wide stretch of water called the Straits of Le Maire. It has a reputation. The strong southwesterly winds that sweep round Cape Horn funnel themselves and the sea through this narrow gap giving rise to violent overfalls and tide rips. The pilot book says: "The crossing must be carefully planned to avoid the dangers represented by strong tidal currents. When strong winds are opposed to the tide, heavy overfalls are registered off Cabo San Diego, while violent eddies and strong tide-rips are encountered up to 5 miles off Cabo San Antonio. These phenomena can endanger even ships and must not be underestimated. ... In the vicinity of Cabo San Diego, due to the irregular bottom and the shape of the coast, the speed [of the tide] can reach 8 knots or more. The opposition of the [tidal] flow with the wind and the swell may raise overfalls of dangerous dimensions. Standing waves of up to 10 metres have been reported". The pilot book then goes on to say that for a small vessel, it is actually preferable to punch into both wind and tide (if that were possible) rather than wait for the tide to turn in one's favour and suffer the violence of the strait as described.

When we leave the heavenly perfection of our anchorage in Puerto Hoppner, we have no option but to go through this, one of the most dangerous channels of water in the world in order to make our way into the Beagle Channel. We have been looking at the forecasts developing over the last couple of days and we see a window of opportunity this evening. Not perfect conditions, but we hope to avoid the worst of the dangers.

Our two days in Puerto Hoppner have been magical, tempered by poor weather. The backdrop of the high mountains covered at the low levels by scrubby trees and moss is quite awe-inspiring. Yesterday morning we got out our new inflatable kayak and Linda and John went off to the head of the bay for a recce. We were hoping we might be able to walk up past the fast flowing river and waterfalls to the lake above, but as no one has touched this land ever, the tangle of fallen trees and thigh high moss beds made it impassable for such mature explorers as ourselves. Later in the morning the rain set in and it persisted for the rest of the day. So we turned the heater on, snuggled down and watched Cinema Paradiso on the computer screen.

Today we are getting everything bedded down for what could be a lively passage through the Straits of Le Maire tonight. Wish us luck.

### **Mina2 Survives To Sail Another Day**

**Position: 54:52.61S 067:19.54W**

**Harberton**

**Date: 12 December 2011**

We knew that the Le Maire Strait would be tricky, but what he hadn't expected was that by far the most dangerous part of the passage was getting out of the secluded little anchorage in Puerto Hoppner. The inner bay is half a mile long and quarter of a mile wide. The tide rises and falls by up to 2m every six hours. That's a lot of water that has to come and go and the only entrance /exit is the microscopically narrow channel we entered by. Only 15 metres across it was bad enough when we came in a couple of days before, in a flat calm at slack water. But when we came to leave yesterday, the tide was rising and there was an absolute torrent of water sluicing in through the gap

in the rocks. In order to get out we would be white-water rafting uphill. With barely enough room to squeeze a fender between our hull and the rocks, and with the rushing water desperately trying to slew us sideways, I gunned the engine to max revs and went for it. It was an agonising few moments as we inched our way against the inflow. After what seemed like hours but was probably just a couple of minutes, with enormous relief we eventually popped out the other side like a cork out of a champagne bottle. During the anxiety-laden operation it did occur to me that if the rushing tide-rip got the better of us, and threw us sideways onto the rocks upon which we would have been dashed to matchwood within minutes, we were more than a hundred miles from civilisation and help.

And we still had the dreaded ship-eating Le Maire to do battle with. Having read the Admiralty Pilot for South America on the subject, we assumed that we were doomed – only through extraordinary luck would we avoid being spun around a few times in the cauldron of overfalls before having a massive 10-metre standing wave crash on us time and time again until we sunk without trace like most of the other boats that have had the nerve to negotiate this, the killer of all passes.

We followed the Admiralty directions for any hope of survival to the letter, arriving at the right place at the right time of the tide and avoiding the edges of the channel. Yes, the wind was quite strong at about 30 knots – Force 7 – and the waves for the next few hours were all over the place, coming from every direction in breaking peaks which could have dumped on us, but none were particularly life-threatening. In the event, the crouching tiger turned out to be something of a pussycat.

But we had an unexpected bonus. Throughout our transit of the Le Maire Strait, we were accompanied by dozens of dolphins that put on a continuous display of aerial acrobatics. Leaping fully out of the water, they spun through the air, joyously twisting onto their sides or backs to crash again into the water. I enjoy being joined by dolphins and have done so on numerous occasions in the past, but never have I been privileged to witness a display like this. Most dolphins lose interest after a few minutes – some half an hour – but this went on for about four hours. We've never seen anything like it.

Once we emerged from the Le Maire Strait, we turned right for the long 80-mile passage up the Beagle Channel to Harberton, our next stop. At our normal average speed we were expecting to get there at about 0900. What we hadn't expected was an extremely strong current against us of between 2 ½ to 3 knots. So rather than travelling at about 6 ½ knots, we were barely able to achieve 4 knots. This meant that we didn't get to Harberton until about 3pm. But by that time, the leaden skies had cleared and we arrived in this historic place in warm sunshine and clear blue skies – a novelty for the Beagle Channel.

I will tell you all about Harberton tomorrow.

**Harberton - Past and Present**  
**Position: Estancia Harberton**  
**Date: 13 December 2011**

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, an extraordinary man called Thomas Bridges left England by ship with his young wife, as a missionary bound for Tierra del Fuego to bring Christianity to the Indians of this, the remotest part of the earth. Few people had ventured here. Some of these included Darwin and Fitzroy on their epic voyage on the Beagle. They had found the Indians to be savages, aggressive to white intruders. Undaunted, Thomas Bridges settled here and over the decades, risking the lives of him and his family on a daily basis, developed not only an eventual rapport with the Indians, but brought some to Christianity. However his greatest contribution was to record the way of life of these Indians and to compile a dictionary of their various languages. Later in life he retired from missionary service and the Argentine government in gratitude granted him 50,000 acres of land north of the Beagle Channel on Tierra del Fuego which Bridges named Harberton after the village in which his wife had been brought up in Devon. Thomas and his children almost single-handedly founded, then developed through faith, sheer force of will, and enormous physical fortitude, Tierra del Fuego whilst at the same time being the protectors of the Indians whom they had come to save, and whom they grew to love and respect.

One of Thomas's sons, Lucas Bridges, wrote a book called "Uttermost Part of the Earth" telling the enthralling story of this episode and chronicling these extraordinary people – both his family and the Indians – and the interaction between them. Sadly, all the Indians eventually succumbed to the murderous aggression and diseases which the subsequent European speculators brought with them and none now exists. But if it had not been for Bridges family, little would have been known about them. Instead we have a rich knowledge of them and their way of life. The book is now out of print in English but good second hand copies can be found on the internet. I commend it to you, because I have found the book totally inspirational, having read and re-read it over the last 35 years since I first met Maria (the Absentee Downstairs Skipper – or DS as she is known to her friends).

My sister, her hubby John and I are now anchored off the house at Harberton on the Beagle Channel – the same original house which was built in England and sent out here as a present from Thomas's wife's father, and reconstructed piece by piece.

The names of Bridges and Harberton are revered in Argentina, and particularly in Tierra del Fuego. They are the fabric of the historic culture of the area and Harberton is now a famous tourist attraction. One of the reasons for my previous fascination for the whole story is that Maria has a very distant family connection with the Bridges family. So as we were approaching Harberton I emailed Tommy Goodall, the direct descendant of Thomas Bridges, and his wife Natalie who is a famous naturalist and conservationist, who still own and live in Harberton to say we were arriving by boat and could we come and visit. We received a reply to say we would be very welcome. And indeed we have been made welcome.

We went ashore this morning to be greeted by Tommy and Natalie. We were invited to lunch and spent the meal talking about the family and Harberton in the past and as it is today. The traditional use of the land for farming sheep and cattle is sadly no longer viable – not because of the price of wool or beef is low, but because sheep and cows get stolen. Gangs arrive from the north at night, shoot the livestock, cut off the valuable bits, and load it into the back of their trucks to sell it. The estancia is so vast,

there is no way of policing it, so they have packed it in and have developed Harberton as a tourist attraction instead. Visitors now flock in by coach, car and by boat from Ushuaia 55 miles away. Linda, John and I were given a personal tour round the farm and the surrounding forest which is now a nature reserve. The sheep pens and the shearing houses, now empty but for the original equipment, are part of the living museum. Having read so much about Harberton and the family over the years, it has been an enormous pleasure to come here in my own boat and to meet Tommy and Natalie. I just wish the DS could have been here as well.

On another matter, I find that during the non-sailing season, when I am languishing at home planning the next adventure, I tend to put on a little weight, but the moment I am back on the boat it is easily shed again. In cold climes, such as we find ourselves now, the effect is even more pronounced. Though I say it myself, I now have the muscular and fat-free physique of a 20 year old. John, too, has noticed that he is having to put an extra notch in his belt to stop his trousers from falling down. Not so my sister, Linda. Oh, no. For some inexplicable reason the opposite seems to have applied to her. I don't know whether she's found the secret stash of Mars Bars, Twix and peanut butter that I've stowed beneath her bunk as part of our calorie-rich Antarctic rations, but she's positively ballooned. She arrived on the boat svelte like, but she now waddles around looking like she's wearing my Teletubbie suit the whole time. And she's just about to return home for all the excesses of Christmas. God help her. January's going to be tough.

Linda has also been blogging this trip on their boats blog:  
[www.blog.mailasail.com/suilven](http://www.blog.mailasail.com/suilven)

### **Final Destination – Ushuaia – Southernmost City in the World**

**Position: Ushuaia**

**Date: 15 December 2011**

After the ghastly bureaucracy in Buenos Aires, we were bracing ourselves for a resumption as we returned to Argentina (actually, technically we have never left Argentina as the Islas Malvinas, aka Falkland Islands, are of course Argentine). Sure enough as we entered the Beagle Channel on our way to Harberton, unseen eyes were upon us and we heard a call on the radio to “the white sailing boat near Punta Moat”. As we were right next to Punta Moat, we were white, and we had not seen another yacht for days it was clearly for us. It was the Argentine Coastguard. “Here we go” I thought, “Trouble”.

On the contrary, a young man speaking impeccable English wanted us to confirm who we were, where we had come from, and where we were going and when etc. I gave him all the answers, after which he said “Welcome, and if there is anything you should need, please call us on Channel 16”. Blimey! Since then we have had contact with the Coastguard a couple of times and they all start off with a polite “Good morning” etc. I can only assume that the Coastguard officials down south have all been sent off to charm school, but their counterparts in Buenos Aires have yet to go on that course. Or else, they are lulling me into a false sense of security.....

We had a wonderful last day in Harberton. A high pressure system has settled over the Beagle Channel and it is warm and sunny with little wind. We went to the Harberton Museum and hadn't realised that this was just a shop window for the serious scientific research carried out by Natalie and a team of students on the wildlife in the area. They have laboratories where they dissect and analyse each and every specimen of dolphin, porpoise, whale and penguin that they find, then share this data with other academic bodies around the world. Fascinating.

We then when went a long walk ending up at a river in which beavers had created a series of large dams and had their enormous nest(?) in the middle of one of the lakes they had created. Many of the surrounding trees had been felled by them and all the trees bore the marks of their razor sharp teeth. We didn't see any of the beavers themselves – they are nocturnal and wouldn't come out until about 10pm.

We upped anchor this morning at 7am and headed out into the Beagle Channel in a flat calm for our last 35 mile motor to Ushuaia, the southernmost City in the world and our final destination.

I'm a bit worried about Linda. She's behaving oddly. She has taken to waddling about, saying "I can't believe you sent it. Now everyone knows", and then bursting into tears. I haven't a clue what she's on about.

### **Southern Cruise (Part 1) Completed**

**Position: 54:48.819S 068:18.375W**

**Ushuaia**

**Date: 17 December 2011**

We arrived in Ushuaia without incident and have tied up on the jetty of the yacht club where there are about 10 other high latitude expedition yachts – some professional charter yachts and some private.

Ushuaia – the Southernmost City in the World – nestles at the bottom of an amphitheatre of mountains at the head of a large bay, well-protected from winds from all directions except for the east.

We were met by Roxanna, the Mrs Fixit for all yachts in Ushuaia, and now the Honorary Foreign Representative for the Royal Cruising Club, who immediately whisked us off to sort out the dozens of things that need to be done: refuelling (750 litres delivered in 200 litre drums!), refilling foreign gas bottles, getting broken things fixed etc. Quite what we (or anyone else) would do without Roxanna, I don't know. Amongst the other boats here are our friends on Dawnbreaker who invited us on board for a welcome drink on our first evening. Slightly sore heads the following morning!

Linda and John are leaving in a couple of days, so they have been racing around seeing the sights, visiting museums etc, whilst I have been winding down and getting on with maintenance stuff (I can do all these touristy things at leisure when the DS gets down here in February).

Yesterday afternoon, a large expedition yacht, Podorange, arrived and rather than being squished by her on the jetty, we untied, let her come in alongside the jetty and then went alongside her on the outside.

Last night we went up the mountains to an excellent restaurant with the most spectacular views overlooking the harbour. To my mind the best restaurants are those from which I can see my beloved Mina2, even if she is the tiniest dot in the distance. The speciality of the house is the local giant spider crab, centolla, which was just excellent.

When we returned to the boat at about midnight, we had found that a very stiff wind had unexpectedly sprung up from the dreaded east. The wind was whistling down the entire length of the Beagle Channel, and waves half a metre high were slamming into our stern. It was like being strapped to the dock in the open sea. All the boats were bucketing around and banging into each other. It was bedlam. The first problem was getting onto our boat. Podorange on the inside of us was about 2 metres off the jetty with bar tight lines and it took our combined crews (the Podorange crew was also stranded on the jetty) to haul her 40 tons close enough for us to leap across the foaming water onto her bucketing deck. We then had to haul Mina2's 20 tons close enough to Podorange to transfer onto our own violently moving home. We spent a while doubling up all our lines (if one had snapped – quite a possibility in these conditions - we would have slammed broadside onto the stern of Dawnbreaker in front with no chance of getting her off).

Sleep was out of the question. Apart from the violent rocking, the waves were hitting the stern with a clap of thunder and the whole boat vibrated from stem to stern. I lay awake until about 0300 when, mercifully, the wind suddenly abated and the sea slowly died down. This was my second almost sleepless night, so I'm looking forward to a long restorative nap sometime today if I can find the time.

The promised wifi connection at the yacht club is not operating properly so still bandwidth constrained, but I will try and get ashore sometime today or tomorrow and send some photos for you all to look at.

Meanwhile, as far as Part 1 of the cruise is concerned, job done!

### **Farewell Party for Linda & John**

**Ushuaia**

**Date: 18 December 2011**

Whilst Linda & John went off to the Tierra del Fuego National Park for a relaxing four-hour walk, the work of your long-suffering skipper continued. I had a long list of tasks to complete. One was to refuel with diesel for our long trip to Antarctica in a couple of weeks – and not just the main diesel tank but also the 20 jerry cans which would double our capacity (and without which we would not, for instance, be able to use our diesel burning cabin heater – so quite important). In total I needed to buy 750 litres. That's the best part of three-quarters of a ton. Almost everywhere in the world,

you simply go alongside the fuel pontoon and they pump the said 750 litres into your tanks. Simple. Not in Ushuaia.

Here you have to refuel by hand pump from enormous 200 litre drums. And they are not exactly delivered to your boat. First you have to find (in my case, four) empty drums. Then you call a taxi-lorry and load them up (it needs two people and, at this stage, they're still empty). You then go in the lorry to the petrol station 20 minutes away, fill them up and return; get the barrels off the lorry (they now weigh a quarter of a ton each) and man-haul them the several hundred yards down the rickety pontoon to the boat; borrow a hand-pump and then transfer the nectar liquid individually into the jerries and into the main tank. I'd just got to the very last bit when Linda and John returned from their relaxing walk. "Have you managed to get anything done Tim, or have you been sleeping?" Hahaha. Very funny. John wasn't laughing so much when he'd hand-cranking 750 litres into the jerries – and double fast because we were expecting guests any second.

As a suitable send-off for Linda and John after our epic 5-week cruise, we had invited a number of people round for drinks. As it was raining (actually, the first rain we've had since Stanley) we were all down below – about 16 in total, so quite snug particularly as Linda was now taking up the space of about three people. The guests ranged from the German/Chilean family on PolarWind that I had first met in Buenos Aires; the Swedish, Welsh and Canadian crew from Dawnbreaker that we first bumped into in the Falkland Islands, our new Norwegian friends from Anne Marie who had lent me the handpump; the French skipper/owner of the big Podorange that is alongside me; the Argentine Roxanna who has been sorting everything out for me, and Jonathan her English husband. Talk about the United Nations. But whatever the country they were from, they knew how to party and a good time was had by all.

This morning Linda and John finally packed their bags and, with tears in all our eyes after such a fantastically memorable five weeks, left for the airport to return to Buenos Aires for a night of tango dancing before heading back to London tomorrow. They were worried about carrying a bit of excess luggage. I would have been more worried about how Linda was ever to get on the plane – probably by fork-lift truck straight into the hold. It's really quite humiliating seeing one's sister let herself go so much and so quickly.

## **Meet The Crew**

### **Ushuaia**

**Date: 31 December 2011**

We are poised to start the great adventure. I will tell you all about the build up when I have a tad more time, but whilst we are still in broadband heaven (and therefore still able to send photos), allow me to introduce you to the crew for our Antarctic cruise:



**CapTim – now out of the clutches of the Absentee Downstairs Skipper who has remained in Buenos Aires, he is once again all powerful and infallible.**



**Ewan Edwards – Antarctic scientist – knows everything there is to know about Antarctic wildlife and a lot more besides. He is highly skilful at imitating the calls of all the Antarctic seals, penguins and birds at a volume that shatters plate glass windows.**



**Peter Barker – chip off the old block, but a lot less powerful and all too fallible. Intends to make a documentary of the cruise so the boat is not only full of booze, but also half a ton of camera equipment, tripods, dollies, booms etc. You can't even go to the heads without the event being filmed.**



**Venetia Kenney-Herbert. Has put more miles under the keel of Mina2 with me than anyone else. Inventor of the now legendary cocktail, the “Mango Bomb With A Triple Gin Float”. Her daughter has just got engaged to a lawyer specialising in libel litigation (congratulations to you both, by the way) so I will wait until I am in international waters, and will then dish the dirt on her.**



**Richard Close-Smith. Another Mina2 veteran. When advised to buy merino wool thermals for the cruise south he declined the advice saying “I’ve always found my silk underwear more than adequate for most occasions”. Hmm.**



**Able Seadog Snoopy. Ship’s mascot and bon viveur. Had to have major surgery this morning under a gin and whisky anaesthetic as his head had nearly come off. Story to follow.**

**The Great Adventure Begins  
Position: 54:56.10S 067:37.107W  
Puerto Williams, Chile  
Date: 1 January 2012**

After eight days of wonderful, warm relaxation over Christmas with the DS, Selina and Peter in Buenos Aires, and after a moving send-off party organised by Selina and her friends (hand-made bunting spelling “Buen Viaje”, origami sailors hats and a dubiously named but delicious cloudy cocktail called “Peter’s Jolly Seamen”), Peter and I met Venetia and Ewan at the airport on Wednesday for our 3 ½ hour flight to Ushuaia. As we flew over the Beagle Channel on our final approach, it was clear that

a serious storm was in progress with large breaking waves sweeping up the channel. Welcome to the Furious Fifties guys!

The first challenge was to get to Mina2 on her mooring via the AFASyN club launch before the mariner went off duty at 2000. The plane landed late at 1930, so Venetia and I legged it out of the airport and caught a taxi, leaving Peter and Ewan to retrieve our baggage. We made it with 3 minutes to spare. Bringing Mina2 alongside the jetty in screaming squalls of 40 knots without wrecking her was the second challenge but somehow we made it.

Within minutes, Saint Roxanna of Ushuaia was rushing down the pontoon to greet us, and to deliver the depressing news that the batteries I had ordered before I left for Christmas had not, as promised, been delivered on Tuesday and would not be delivered until Friday. Hey ho. Situation normal. It had become clear on our Falklands cruise that my batteries were on the verge of exhaustion and that the cold temperatures of the Antarctic were likely to be the final straw. If your batteries collapse then so does the ability, amongst other things, to use the autopilot (so we would be hand-steering in bitter conditions right the way across Drake Passage) or, much more importantly, use the communications systems from which we get our wind forecasts and to send our blogs to our adoring but demanding public. Going south without new batteries was unthinkable, but so too was the idea that after four years of planning and a limited time window available for our Antarctic cruise that the cruise be deferred.

Apart from the batteries, the other major task was the provisioning for the trip. I had already carried out a massive shop in the Falklands stocking up with all the things not available in Argentina including Mars bars, Fig Rolls, bacon, Colman's mustard, Scott's porridge oats, good flour for baking bread etc and, not least, boxed wine which is so much easier and space efficient to transport compared to bottles. You may recall that whilst I had been able to purchase a modest 60 litres of white boxed wine in Stanley, I had been shattered to find that no red had been available.

Venetia had already taken control of the provisioning, had drawn up a massively long list and took Peter off to the supermarkets, butchers and wine merchants. Later in the day they returned with trollies full of even more porridge and risotto rice, an entire dead sheep, but only 21 bottles of red wine. I was appalled and immediately sent them back out to try and trade half a ton of porridge for another 50 bottles of red wine. A compromise was reached. But even so, I'm afraid that to keep sufficient supplies for me, I'm going to have to ration the crew to no more than two bottles of wine per person per day. Venetia will find this particularly hard.

Talking of Venetia, when she arrived she was massively overweight – not in the same way that Linda became on the Falklands cruise; I'm referring to Venetia's luggage. It was like she had gold bars tucked away in her underwear. The truth became apparent when she unpacked two large tins of her legendary fruit cake that is so saturated in liquor that after more than one slice you are incapable of taking a watch. A valuable contribution to crew morale given the appalling lack of wine.

I was particularly delighted to find that on the yacht club jetty was Pelagic Australis and Miles, Laura and Dave who had taken me down to Antarctica in February for a

rece. After our first day's hard labour provisioning and getting the boat ready, we invited the three of them on board for a few serious gins.

On Friday, Saint Roxanna arrived with yet more bad news about the batteries. They certainly wouldn't arrive before Saturday, and if they hadn't turned up by midday we wouldn't get them until Tuesday because everything would shut down for the New Year celebrations.

Richard Close-Smith, the last of our crew also arrived on Friday, wafting in with his silk underwear two days after all the hard work had been done. To compensate, I have put him on heads cleaning duties for the duration of the cruise, cleaning the loos with his own toothbrush until they gleam.

Meanwhile, Peter had noticed that Able Seadog Snoopy was looking slightly odd with his head lolling around at a strange angle. We looked under his little neck-warmer and discovered to our horror that he had a gash in his skin so serious he was in danger of losing his head entirely. Both Venetia and Ewan have been on some heavyweight First Aid courses and immediately scrubbed up and took charge. Venetia was to be the surgeon and Ewan the anaesthetist. Ewan gently put a rag soaked in whisky over Snoopy's nose and the little fella, trying ever so hard to be brave but whimpering slightly, slowly drifted into unconsciousness. Venetia straight away was in there, suturing like crazy whilst Ewan monitored the vital functions. It was touch and go but Snoopy pulled through and is now back again in his Vicar of Bray bowl looking as chipper as ever.

Snoopy was not the only animal having problems on the boat. It is traditional that boats heading to Antarctica take an entire lamb or two as part of their provisions, hanging them in the rigging where they stay in prime condition as it is so cold. The problem was that Ushuaia had been, over the previous two days, abnormally warm. We tried to get Dolly, as our lamb is called, in the shade but even so she is smelling quite gamey already. I suspect that choice cuts off her will be making an early entry to the roasting tin.

Saturday morning arrived and still no news of the batteries. At 1140 I got a call from Saint Roxanna. "They've arrived, but you've got to get to the shop before midday to pay for them or they will be shut". I called a taxi and, with Peter in tow as translator, we sped to the battery shop with five minutes to spare. After quite a struggle carting half a ton of batteries onto the boat and half a ton of dead batteries off the boat, we got them installed, wired up, and I am delighted to say that they seem to be functioning perfectly.

So with everything now in place we were ready to leave at first light the following morning – New Year's Day. But before New Year's Day comes New Year's Eve. Party time. Venetia cooked a succulent dinner of roast chicken after which we took a bottle of champagne to the boat of some Norwegian friends for a party. Just before midnight we assembled on the jetty along with everyone else, armed with glasses of champagne and a bundle of time expired distress rocket flares (it is impossible to get rid of them legally these days). At the stroke of midnight rocket after rocket shot into the night sky (what there is of it this far south) and exploded into a bright crimson

glow. I pity anyone who was genuinely in distress and letting off a flare at that moment.

This morning we were up bright and early and trooping off to the Prefectura and customs for the laborious two hour process of clearing out of Argentina. That done we cast off and headed 25 miles east up the Beagle Channel to Puerto Williams in Chile to clear in (if you don't clear in to Chile you can't use their bays north of Cape Horn as a safe haven, and nor can you visit Cape Horn if the opportunity arises). After all the stress of repairs, battery replacement and provisioning, I can't tell you what a relief it was to get going at last. We had a fantastic sail down the Channel, broad grins on all our faces, to arrive at Puerto Williams at 1430.

Puerto Williams is a very small town, largely consisting of a naval base. It is famous for being the most southerly town in the world, and also famous amongst sailors for being the jumping off point for Antarctica. The hub for the yachts is the yacht club which consists of an old, grounded munitions ship called the Micalvi against which all the yachts tie up. On our arrival I was surprised to find very few yachts there – I suppose some had already set off for Antarctica since Christmas – and there was not a person in sight. The town has 2264 residents but in the four hours we were there, apart from officials we only saw a couple of other people. I suppose they were all at home cradling their heads after a night of drinking pisco sours.

It took us another three hours to clear into Chile, after which with a good weather window forecast for the crossing to Antarctica, we were ready to cast off and head for Cape Horn and the infamous Drake Passage!

### **Shakin' Drake**

**Position: 57:34S 067:38W**

**Drake Passage**

**Date: 2 January 2012**

At 1900 yesterday evening we slipped our lines from the Micalvi and motored out into the Beagle Channel to make our way 80 miles through the islands to Cape Horn and then south. Most of the night there was negligible wind and we were motoring. A peaceful start to what we knew would become a more challenging passage.

Our first destination is Deception Island in the South Shetland Islands just north of the Antarctic Peninsula. The horseshoe shaped island is a still active volcano and one enters the caldera through a narrow gap called Neptune's Bellows because of the funnelling effect it has on the wind. Once anchored in the crater itself, we can go swimming in the hot volcanic springs!

But first we've got to cross Drake Passage, the windiest and roughest stretch of water in the world. The distance across is 560 nautical miles and this will take about four days. We were half hoping that given the lack of wind it might have been possible for us to visit Cape Horn on our way past. But as we were approaching from the north the wind kicked in and was soon blowing 35-40 knots, making a landing on the cape impossible. We passed the Horn at 0800, with the drizzly cloud all but blotting out the famous rock about three miles away. We are now, at 2200, 100 miles south of Cape Horn and the sun is still well above the horizon..

The wind has remained at about 35-40 knots for most of the time since – at full gale force, quite a lot by most people's standards, but pretty normal for round here. The seas have been quite big as well, and all of us have been feeling queasy to a greater or lesser extent. Indeed, I was actually sick – the first time in 35 years. Still not feeling at my best, so I'm keeping this blog quite short. Good night all, from the Southern Ocean, and I hope to be blogging again tomorrow.

### **After the Shake**

**Position: 59:50S 064:56W**

**Drake Passage**

**Date/Time : 3 January 2012 1750 (10 mins to gin o'clock)**

Well, yesterday was, I have to admit, rather unpleasant. The conditions were not bad by Drake standards. The wind was strong but not too strong – and it was coming from the right direction, but the movement of the waves was uncomfortable and we all felt quite rough. Venetia and Richard fared better than Peter, Ewan and me and were stalwarts in producing regular hot meals, made easier by Venetia having pre-prepared a few just before we left.

One near casualty of the lumpy conditions was Dolly the Sheep. Tied inadequately by the skipper to the backstay, she tried to make a break for freedom. She was lashing around and in the process broke the Falkland built pole on the end of which we have our kelp cutter – a sharpened dutch hoe that we use to slash away the tons of kelp from the anchor chain in the channels. Ewan rugby tackled Dolly before she finally broke free, and has now lashed her to the backstay with webbing so that she now looks like a rather bizarre decoration in an S&M parlour. Clearly in Ewan we have a man on board who, like the skipper, understands the meaning of strict discipline

The other casualty of the lumpiness was the pride of the skipper. No longer the man of steel that everyone has grown to love and respect, but a listless, pathetic character, green of hue, lacking in strength, and incapable of showing even a modicum of leadership skills. Humiliating and shameful. Venetia realised the seriousness of the situation when she asked me if I wanted my usual gin on the dot of 1200 and I declined, asking instead for a mug of weak broth. But with the help of Richard and Venetia who were suffering the least, we muscled through the crisis.

What a difference 24 hours can make. Overnight the wind moderated from 35-40 knots to 20-25 knots; the seas now consist of highish 3 ½ metre waves, but they are long ocean swells; so much more comfortable. Under all white sail, with the wind on the beam, we've been battling along at 7.5 to 8 knots. And then, if things weren't perfect enough, the sun came out this morning and we've been basking in glorious sunshine without a cloud in the sky. Whilst we are only just half way across, this certainly is as good a Drake crossing as you could hope for.

We're all feeling 100% now and, as Richard put it, bouncing around like Tiggers, compared to yesterday when he said we all resembled the sedated inmates of a lunatic asylum.

A big difference is the temperature which has now dropped significantly. When I started typing this blog at 0530 the water temperature had dropped to 4.6C, the outside air temperature was 6.5C and inside the boat it was 9C. So the thermals are on and are likely to stay on until we have to chip them off with a chisel. Now, the water temperature is less than 1C. The reason for this is that we have now crossed the Antarctic Convergence. This is the line which runs right round Antarctica about 250 miles offshore at which the icy melt waters of the Antarctic continent meet the warmer waters of the Atlantic and Pacific. It is like a physical brick wall. Sailing south you go to sleep at the end of one watch nice and cosy and then wake up a few hours later absolutely freezing. It represents a brick wall for some of the fauna of Antarctica as well, who cannot survive in the warmer waters.

But whilst some animals and fish cannot survive in the warmer waters, we humans cannot survive in the colder waters. If any of us were to fall overboard now, we would be unconscious within 2 minutes and dead within 5 or 10 minutes. This is less time than we would realistically be able to turn the boat round and recover any casualty. So, basically, if you fall overboard, you're dead. As a result, falling overboard is something we're trying to avoid – lifejackets are de rigueur all the time and no one is allowed out of the cockpit without someone else being on deck at the same time.

The next hazard will be ice – very hard stuff that can knock a hole in the boat and sink us. We'll be talking about ice in a future blog.

The wildlife at the moment is disappointingly sparse. We had a brief visit or two from some Dusky dolphins, a few Giant petrels and a few Wandering Albatross. When the wind was up we also saw a few Wilson's Storm Petrels flittering around. I hope that soon we will be visited by the delightful Cape Petrels or Pintado. Ewan, our resident Antarctic bird specialist thinks it may be that as most of the birds are breeding at this time of the year that they are not straying this far from their nests. I hope to see rather more as we close Antarctica.

A highlight today was at teatime when we all had our first wedge of Venetia's divine fruitcake. Good thing it wasn't offered yesterday or it would have been feeding the fishes.

Sorry it has taken a bit of time to get the blog out today, but I've had my head in the engine room most of the afternoon attending to the Whispergen (our generator) which we use to recharge all the new batteries and which had decided to pack up, I think because of the dirty Argentine diesel. Anyway, I'm pleased to report that after a strip down and de-coking, it is now humming away again.

Our next seamark will be the Crossing of The Line – not the Equator on this occasion, but moving across the 60<sup>th</sup> parallel of latitude which officially is the line at which we enter Antarctic waters, and move from the Furious Fifties to the Screaming Sixties. We should be crossing the line in about an hour and a half.

**Trade Wind Sailing Without The Flying Fish and Bikinis**

**Position: 61:52S 062:53W**

**Approaching South Shetland Islands**

**Date/Time : 4 January 2012 1500**

We have concluded that Able Seadog Snoopy is not only Ship's Mascot but a Lucky Mascot as well. When his head was almost severed we were suffering from the wrath of Neptune; high(ish) winds, big(gish) waves and sea-sickness the like of which none of us have experienced in 35 years (well, I hadn't anyway). The moment ASD Snoopy had his operation, the wind and seas moderated, the sun came out and we were all bouncing around like Tigger again.

Since yesterday morning, we have had the most unbelievably good conditions for our crossing. The wind has been blowing so perfectly in both strength and direction (20-25 knots from the west) that it has been like sailing in the Caribbean trade winds, but without the flying fish and the bikinis. (When I made this observation to Venetia and Ewan, Venetia said "Well, perhaps I ought to take mine out then", to which Ewan asked "What? Your flying fish?" I'm beginning to think there's something a bit odd about Ewan).

By early this morning we had absolutely and definitely moved into the Antarctic Convergence. The sea temperature was fluctuating between +1.0C and -0.2C (sea water doesn't freeze until -1.8C). In the cockpit it was 1C but with the wind chill factor it feels a great deal less and you can't be without gloves for long before your fingers go completely numb. Down below it was a toasty 6C. So no reason for the crew to complain then. Indeed Peter, who had been on watch in the cockpit in his thermals and Weazle Suit, came down below to make a cup of tea and was almost passing out from the heat. The "conservatory" – the extension to the sprayhood which I had had made in Buenos Aires and which encloses half the cockpit - has turned out to be worth its weight in gold. We can keep watch in the cockpit in temperatures several degrees higher than outside and without the windchill. Brilliant.

Since the temperature has plummeted and we are getting closer to the land (now about 75 miles away), it has become quite foggy – quite common in this area - reducing visibility at times to as little 200 metres. In addition, there is an increasing probability of coming across ice which we definitely need to see before we hit it.

Ice round here at this time of year comes from icebergs which fall off the enormous glaciers that cascade glue-like down the steep mountains of the peninsula. These bergs can be absolutely enormous, hundreds of metres high and a mile or more across. Any full sized iceberg we would pick up easily on the radar. They are not the dangerous ones. What would threaten us are the "growlers" – the bits of ice that calve away from the icebergs and float perhaps only a metre high out of the water and 10 to 20 metres across. But below the water they are six times as big. Particularly in poor visibility such as we have now they can go unnoticed until you are almost upon them. But if you hit one, it could hole the boat - something we would wish to avoid if possible.

So we have changed the watch arrangements from having one person on watch all the time to having two people on watch so at least one is always on the lookout. In the event that we do get holed we have on board an array of extra equipment to quickly stem the flow of water and make the hull sound enough to get back across the Drake and to safety.

Whilst it's not over until the anchor's down, we only have about 12 hours before we turn the corner round Snow Island at the southwest corner of the South Shetland Islands and head the last 30 miles to our destination of Deception Island. And the forecasts don't look threatening. Indeed, since earlier this morning the wind has died and we have been motoring across Drake Lake. But I'm sure that Neptune and Drake will be saving things up for our journey home. Normally I hate motoring but now there is a plus side. I have on board a blow heater and whilst the engine is running we have enough power to have this purring away and making the cabin nice and snug.

Talking of snug, we were surprised to find ASD Snoopy's hat in Venetia's cabin yesterday. A mystery. We also noted that one of Snoopy's woollen mits was missing. Peter found it attached to the Velcro of one of Venetia's many layers of garments. Another mystery. We have concluded that Snoopy is getting out of his dog bowl in the middle of the night, and scampering into Venetia's cabin for a bit of a comforting snuggle. He is adopting Venetia as his new Mummy. Smart move, Snoopy. As Quartermaster, Venetia is the only one who knows where his supply of High Protein Winalot for Antarctic Sledge Dogs is. Venetia is also the only person who knows where the extra large tin of Celebrations chocolates are which have gone missing. You can't lose something that big, so I'm assuming she has secreted it away in her cabin for her own personal consumption. On one of my snap kit and cabin inspections I will be looking out for any telltale signs of crumpled sweet papers. If she gets through the whole tin she will end up the size of poor Linda.

### **Dolly Gets Skua'ed and We See Our First Big Iceberg**

**Position: 62:50S 061:43W**

**Rounding Snow Island**

**Date/Time : 5 January 2012 0100**

We had seen disappointingly few birds during the crossing of the Drake but as we closed the South Shetlands, out they all came to greet us. We have been surrounded by veritable flocks of birds, including Blackbrowed and Grey Headed albatrosses, Light Mantled Sooty albatross, Giant Petrels, Wilson's Storm Petrels, White Chinned Petrels, Southern Fulmars (much to Ewan's delight who is studying their northern cousins for his PhD), and the delightfully pretty Cape Petrels or Pintados with their black and white patterned wings and their comical way of skittering to a halt on the water, paddling like fury with their webbed feet.

But suddenly out of the flocks appeared a menacing bird that headed directly for the boat. It was a Brown skua – the carnivores of the Antarctic. It made directly for poor Dolly who was lashed, S&M style, to the backstay. After a couple of attempts the skua landed on her and started biting great chunks out of her. We all screamed and shouted and waved our arms, but it turned to us, looked at us with disdain and carried on. After a good few mouthfuls, it flew off. Ewan went aft to look at the damage. The skua, outraged that anyone else should approach what he now considered to be his property, screamed in again, grabbed Ewan's finger and wouldn't let go. Most of us would have been totally traumatised by this unprovoked attack, but Ewan just laughed. All in a day's work for him I suppose.

The skua persisted in trying to finish Dolly off, much to Venetia's concern – it would have made a bit of a dent in her catering arrangements - and she had to be discouraged

from beating the bird to death with a stick – not the done thing in Antarctica where the wildlife can touch you but you can't touch the wildlife.

Eventually, Ewan and I took Dolly down and put her in the cockpit pout of harms way.

We were approaching the gap between Smith Island and Snow Island in the South Shetlands when we saw a large white tower dead ahead. It was an enormous iceberg. It must have been hundreds of feet tall and was the most awesome introduction to this land of ice that we were entering. We are so far south now that it doesn't get properly dark at all, so even though it was after midnight we could see it very clearly as we rounded it and headed up the Bransfield Strait for the last 35 miles to our destination, Deception Island.

### **Safe Arrival in Deception Island**

**Position: 62:58.916S 060.34.016W**

**Whaler's Bay, Deception Island**

**Date/Time : 5 January 2012 0715**

At 0715 this morning, Mina2 and her crew fulfilled a dream as the anchor was lowered and dug into the terra firma of Antarctica. We have arrived, on my part the culmination of many years dreaming and three and a half years of planning. We entered the caldera of Deception Island through the narrow channel called Neptune's Bellows, so named because of the fierce winds that can funnel through it, in a blizzard of snow with chinstrap penguins porpoising through the water escorting us in. We have anchored in Whaler's Bay with the remains of the old whaling station slowly dilapidating along the shore. All around the shore line, steam rises and drifts to leeward from the geothermal pools of this still active volcano, and in which increasingly few of us are determined to swim in later in the day. Down below, it is snug compared with being on deck, but even so we are all in five layers of thermal clothing and steam comes out of our noses and mouths when we breathe. This is Antarctica after all.

The boat was tidied up after our passage of four days across the Drake before the celebratory bottle of champagne was produced from a locker (more chilled than if it came out of any fridge), the cork popped and the team photos taken. Able Seadog Snoopy declined a taste of champagne on the grounds that the last time he was given alcohol he had needles stuck in him.

We plan to stay in Deception just for the day and then head 100 miles further south to Enterprise Island, so there is a lot to do today. We have not had the dinghy on the davits (the crane at the back of the boat) as normal, but it has been deflated, turned upside down and strapped to the foredeck. So that has to be re-commissioned for shore parties to go for swims in the thermals, and walks ashore to visit the old whaling station and say hello to the lone elephant seal we can see snoozing on the shore.

### **A Day in Deception Island – Hot Baths and Amputations**

**Position: 63:37.4S 061:46.5W**

**En route to Enterprise Island**

**Date/Time : 6 January 2012 1800 – Gin o'clock (2100 UTC)**

When I came down here on Pelagic Australis as a recce last February, we had hoped to stop off at Deception Island but had been beaten back by strong easterlies, so this was the first visit for all of us. Having anchored in Whalers Bay at the east end of the caldera, we had a much needed sleep before launching the dinghy. The crew went ashore for an explore, whilst I stayed on the boat to do some skipperly things. (Generally, in these waters, we will always leave one person on board, not only to look after the boat in case the wind picks up and we drag the anchor, but also to be available to launch the spare dinghy in case anything were to happen to the shore party or its dinghy – swimming back to the boat is not an option). After a couple of hours Richard came back with Venetia and I went ashore.

Whalers Bay was where the big Norwegian whaling station was in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It later became a meteorological research station run by the British until the 1960's when the volcano erupted again and destroyed half the buildings. It was abandoned, but some of the original buildings still stand, albeit in an increasingly dilapidated state, together with vast rusting tanks and boilers, relics from the whaling past. Still lying on the beach are the wooden hulls of the waterboats that used to ferry fresh water out to the whaling ships, and piles of disintegrating water barrels. Standing at the back of the site are two lonely crosses of whalers who died in this desolate spot (many more were buried here but their graves were engulfed by the ash and lava during the last eruption). The site is now protected under the Antarctic Treaty. Dozing on the dark sandy beach were a lone Elephant seal and a lone Weddell seal around which waddled a number of Chinstrap penguins and the occasional Gentoo penguin. As a constant reminder that we were anchored in a still active volcano, the waters edge steamed with the geothermal heat which is just below the surface. The whole place had a rather surreal feel to it. A swim in the hot springs was not possible as you have to do it at low tide. This may have been a disappointment to Peter and Ewan but came as a relief to Venetia, Richard and me.

As we were approaching the entrance to Deception Island on our arrival, we were surprised and delighted to see a beautiful three-masted barque coming out. It was *Europa* which is a converted lightship that does charters down here. In the afternoon Hans Explorer, a small expedition cruise ship came into the bay and anchored, bringing its guests ashore for a tour of the site. At drinks time another yacht sailed in and went down to the bottom of the island to anchor in Telephone Bay. It was beginning to get crowded. At the far end of the island are two scientific research stations, one Spanish and the other Argentine. Overnight two support ships came in and anchored off the research stations. At breakfast time yet another yacht appeared. So much for the solitude of Antarctica. Deception Island was now resembling Newtown Creek on a Bank Holiday weekend.

On an expedition yacht such as *Mina2*, one has to be prepared for all and any emergencies and eventualities. Yesterday evening, we had to perform an amputation. Venetia, who is best qualified in these matters, scrubbed up (again) and selected her sharpest scalpel. With considerable skill and dexterity, the skin was opened, the muscle tissue cut away and the tendons severed. The limb came cleanly away and was rushed to the galley where it was stuffed with garlic and popped in the oven. Dolly had lost her first shoulder, and very delicious it was too.

Having awoken at 0430 to make an early start for our passage to Enterprise Island, I got the latest shipping forecast and we decided to defer our start, allowing us time to motor right the way round the caldera, a distance of about 10 or 12 miles. We passed the research stations and the now numerous ships and yachts, and arrived at Pendulum Cove where the best of the thermal springs are. We anchored, got the dinghy down and Richard rowed Ewan and Peter through the steaming sea to the beach. There was much posturing and breast-beating from the young males until they stripped down to their swimmers and threw themselves in. Seemingly it was rather nice as we had some difficulty in getting them to come out. It was the first time in a week that Peter's body had seen fresh water, and he was seen grabbing handfuls of volcanic sand and giving himself an exfoliating scrub. Eventually the two brave Turks emerged from their bath and extremely quickly got dressed (the air temperature was 1C) and returned to the boat for a warming cup of hot chocolate fortified with a tot of Drambuie. As we weighed anchor we heard over the radio that yet another ship, *Ushuaia*, was entering the caldera.

The plane we had taken from Buenos Aires to Ushuaia had largely been filled with a party of youngsters who were going down for an educational cruise. The tour leaders were veteran Antarcticans who Ewan knew. The ship they were on was the *Ushuaia* so as we passed them on our way out of the caldera we stopped for Ewan to have a natter with his mates over the radio. Ewan's socialising in the middle of the deserted continent being done, we at last turned the boat and headed out of the caldera for our next 18-hour 110-mile passage across the Bransfield Strait. We were barely in the mouth of Neptune's Bellows when the radio crackled into life again.

"Mina2 this is Verniki, over". Rather than the usual Spanish or French accent, this caller had the clipped tones of a British naval officer. Who on earth was it? I hesitantly replied. "Verniki, Mina2. Go ahead, over". The clipped tones came back "We are the blue motor yacht on your port quarter" I looked out of the window and saw this magnificent superyacht approaching the Bellows. I wondered what I'd done wrong. Had an infraction of the Antarctic Treaty Code been noticed. Or were we inadvertently flying our British ensign upside down?

The voice continued "As we've been coming down the coast of Brazil, we've been reading your blog so, seeing you, we wanted to make contact". (Honestly, dear reader, this is not one of my slight fantasies). I'd never been called by a superyacht before, let alone one who was complimenting me on the honest prose of my blog. I felt quite important, and wondered whether I should put on my peaked skipper's cap with "Cape Horn & Patagonia" in gold letters round the rim. The caller introduced himself as Richard, the captain. He said that he had spotted us in Ushuaia and had popped round to say hello and to see if we might need any support on our trip down south, but no one was on board. Support on our trip down south? Suddenly I had a vision of being piped on board and ushered to a shower with unlimited supplies of hot water, followed by a dinner of roast swan stuffed with truffles and foie gras. I nearly spun the boat round and followed Verniki back into Deception to take Richard up on his kind offer there and then.

One gets to see very few private motor yachts doing anything half as adventurous as coming down to Antarctica, so hats off to them. They were now on there way back

north having been down to the peninsula and, before signing off, Richard filled me in on the ice situation on the peninsula.

We had heard from some of the pro-boats who had been down to the Antarctic before Christmas that there was more ice there than they could remember in years. This might restrict how far we could go. But, they said, the situation can change very quickly. Sadly, it would appear that things haven't changed and it is still very clogged up. The Le Maire Channel (aka Kodak Valley) is impassable and it looks like we might not be able to get down to Vernadsky, the Ukrainian base in the Argentine Islands. Well, we will do what we can and there are many places further north that I didn't explore on my recce in February.

We are now almost across the Bransfield Strait. The sailing has been good with more fresh, but not too strong, winds on the beam. But the weather has been atrocious: absolutely bitter, it has been snowing or sleeting most of the day. Whilst we have to have at least one person in the cockpit on the lookout for ice, the only person who has relieved the automatic pilot of its duties and taken the helm was Peter, and that wasn't for long. He was in his black thermals, black Weazle suit with his black Sail Racing foulies\* on top. On his head: black neck-warmer, black balaclava, black woolly hat and black ski goggles. He looks like Daft Vader.

\* We owe a great debt to Skip Novak who has kindly loaned us our Sail Racing foul weather clothing for our trip south. Skip Novak, the legendary ocean racer and high latitudes sailor offers charters on the best specced yachts on the circuit, *Pelagic* and *Pelagic Australis*. Representing excellent value for money, details can be found on his website: [www.pelagic.co.uk](http://www.pelagic.co.uk).

(Skip, my blog readership is now almost in double figures, so I hope you'll be quite pleased with this endorsement).

**Position: 64:41.253S 062:37.848W**

**Cuverville Island – Part 1**

**Date/Time : 8 January 2012 2345 – Well after my bedtime – (9/1 0145 UTC)**

First up, apologies to all about the lack of blogs. Yes, we've been awake most of the time so, you might have thought, plenty of time to blog, but the fact is we've been a tad busy.

I left you a couple of days ago as we were having a cracking good sail, albeit in freezing sleet and snow, across the Bransfield Strait from Deception Island to Enterprise Island on the peninsula proper. 110 miles – about 18 hours. The cream on the pudding came in the evening when we saw a couple of blows, then the dorsal fins and finally the flukes of a couple of Humpback whales – the first we had seen on this cruise. But in the early hours the cream turned a little sour as we entered the Gerlache Strait, and the wind backed and came at us on the nose at gale force. Not wanting to turn the passage into a marathon, tacking back and forth down the Strait into a gale, we turned the engine on and ploughed our way into the literally freezing waves and spray, keeping a close look out for ice. It was miserable, but our destination was just four hours away, so we gritted our teeth and got on with it.

Half way down the Strait coming in the opposite direction was a small trawler type boat called the Hans Hanssen. To my slight surprise, Ewan picks up the VHF and calls them up.

“Hi there, is Dion on board?”

“Dion speaking”

“Hi Dion, Ewan here”.

“Ewan, what a nice surprise .... blah, blah”

“Blah, blah, blah.... “ goes Ewan. And the conversation continues until the Hans Hanssen is over the horizon.

The wind abated half an hour before our arrival, at 0515, at the tiny Enterprise Island where we tucked into a little bay at the head of which was a beached wreck, alongside of which the occasional passing yacht ties up. It is a safe, beautiful and deserted haven. Well, not entirely deserted. There was another yacht tied up alongside, *Happy Taurus II*. So we tied up on the other side of the wreck and after an unusually quick anchor nip we flopped exhausted into our bunks and slept. But not for long. This was the adventure a lifetime and there was no time to lose. We were all up again four hours later to the smell of a sizzling bacon and eggs brunch.

There was a rap on the cabin roof. “Is Ewan there?” called a voice. It was Hamish Laird, veteran high latitudes professional with whom Ewan had sailed from South Georgia to Uruguay at the end of his 2 ½ year stint as a research scientist on Bird Island. Hamish was on board *Happy Taurus II* as the professional ice pilot. For God’s sake, there are few enough boats in Antarctica. Does Ewan know someone on each and every one?

Breakfast over and it was action stations. Out came the inflatable kayak. Peter and Richard headed towards a high offlying island for a scramble up to the summit through the thigh deep snow for a photo opportunity, whilst Venetia, Ewan and I lowered the dinghy to explore the next door bay for some reported seals. I, having only had a couple of hours sleep if that, completely lost my senses and embarked without hat, gloves or waterproof trousers. When we returned half an hour later, I was like a block of ice. Once we got back, the tide was down and we clambered aboard the wrecked whaler, the *Governoren*, that we were tied up to for an exploration.

The *Governoren* was, I understand, the brand new pride and joy of the Norwegian whaling fleet in 1916. Shortly after arrival on the peninsula, a fire on board caught hold, and the skipper ran her ashore at Enterprise Island to allow the crew to escape ashore, and it has remained there ever since. Because of the extreme cold, everything here rots and rusts extremely slowly so, in the bilges at low tide, you can still find mounds of harpoon heads and coils of 100-year old rope. On deck lie enormous steam driven winches with the makers name still standing proud on the bases – made in Gateshead. The upper decks have been taken over by nesting terns which flutter to and from their nests, each with a plump krill (small shrimp which is the staple diet of almost every larger animal on Antarctica from penguins to whales) in their mouth. It was fascinating.

As part of the specialist kit needed for this expedition are abandonment suits – one-piece drysuits that you put on if you need to take to the liferaft. They’re not designed to keep you warm, but to keep you dry. If you got soaked in the freezing water here

you wouldn't last long. Ewan approached me. "Are the abandonment suits only for emergency?" he asked. "Can we use them to go snorkelling?" Over the week I have come to know Ewan, I knew he was slightly odd (he has conversations with penguins and seals – in their own language), but I hadn't realised he was actually certifiably insane. The boat was surrounded by ice for God's sake. He was rather hoping that Peter might come and join him. Basking in a steaming thermal pool in Deception Island is one thing, but volunteering to plunge into freezing water, pushing the ice out of the way to see a couple of krill was certainly not Peter's idea of fun. Ewan was on his own as he floated around like a corpse, face down in his fluorescent orange jumpsuit.

By this time we were ready for dinner. Fine dining on Mina2. And talking of one-piece suits, Richard appeared in the most extraordinary outfit – a skin-tight olive green affair with more zips than you can imagine – and some in the most unusual places. Mysteriously it also has a number of strategically placed holes covered with flaps. Richard claims it is an outfit worn by pre-Cold War Russian special services troops. Whether or not Richard had his silk underwear on underneath I shuddered to think. Photographs were taken, with Richard in what he clearly considered to be some sort of macho lunging pose. These photos will be published when we get back to broadband heaven in two or three weeks and I will open a competition amongst you blog-fans to suggest what the various orifices are for.

Hamish joined us from the *Happy Taurus II* for post-prandial digestifs and confirmed the bad news that we had already heard rumoured – this has been the coldest summer for more than 40 years and the ice south of Port Lockroy is still fast. The incomparable Le Maire Channel – Kodak Valley – is impassable and is likely to remain so. But there are many wonderful places to explore north of Lockroy and the following day we were to head for Cuverville, home to the largest colony of Gentoo penguins in Antarctica.

### **Visit to the Chilean Base at Water Boat Point**

**Position: 64:49.48S 062:51.349W**

**Gabriel Gonzalez Videla Chilean Base – Water Boat Point, Paradise Harbour**

**Date/Time : 10 January 2012.**

A trip to the Chilean base at Water Boat Point at the northeast end of Paradise Harbour was not really on the itinerary but having rather surreally bumped into their dayglo clad personnel at Cuverville (they were as surprised to see us as I was them) we thought we would drop in.

Just before we started untying at Cuverville for the 12 mile short hop to Water Boat point, we spotted a Humpback whale actually in the bay. It came within 50 metres of us which was pretty incredible. We saw another (or the same one) out in the open water as well.

To get to the Chilean Base we had to make our way through the Errera Channel which was stuffed full of ice from massive icebergs, through bergy bits, growlers and down to loads of brash ice. As we nudged our way through, looking for the clearer leads, at one point it looked like we might have to turn back and go the long way round via the

Gerlache Strait but eventually we squeezed our way through the ice and out the other end.

The Chilean base is on an island just 150 metres from the mainland of Antarctica. Water Boat Point is so-named because in the early 1920's two young men (aged just 19 and 23) as part of a small British expedition, overwintered here using an old whalers water boat as their accommodation (with only three foot headroom, "their matches were faulty, their ink froze and they suffered greatly"! ) The anchorage off the base is incredibly snug however. The entrance on the north side is partially blocked with grounded icebergs – which stops other ice coming in - and the other end has an isthmus which is only just covered at high tide which, again, stops ice from coming in. We tied in with three lines. Very secure. In the process of laying the lines, Peter and Ewan placed their first steps on the Antarctic mainland.

By the time we arrived, the weather had deteriorated. It was bitterly cold and there was a light drizzle of sleet, so, having tied in, we were pleased to get down below, turn the heater on and start drying out. We were contacted by the Chileans on the radio and arranged to go ashore and visit them at 1800.

As we arrived, they all came out to greet us. The base is staffed by 13 men: 7 Chilean Air Force, 4 Navy and two cooks. We asked what scientific work they carried out. None. They are there as support for any visitors to the area, and they have a couple of big inflatables and a helicopter landing pad which can provide Search and Rescue services if necessary. In the case of a medical emergency they can fly a helicopter in within two hours from their other base on King George Island in the South Shetlands to the north and at King George they have an airstrip from which one can be flown by air ambulance to Punta Arenas. Reassuring. But apart from that they seemingly have no responsibilities at all. As I have never heard of anyone at any time making use of these facilities, it must be a pretty boring post for 6 months of the year. They were quite open that probably the main reason they were there was to maintain a physical presence on the peninsula to justify their territorial claim over this part of Antarctica (also claimed by Argentina and Britain).

They showed us round their little museum and their display of rather tacky souvenirs (which none of us bought as we didn't have money on us) before inviting us into their lounge area with widescreen TV, loads of DVD's, comfy leather chairs and offered us coffee and biscuits. Rafael, the head honcho took advantage of Ewan, our resident wildlife expert, to show him a photo he had taken of a monster seal that he'd been unable to identify. Had he discovered a new species? Ewan disappointed Rafael by immediately identifying it as a young Elephant seal that hadn't yet grown its proboscis.

There are nesting Gentoo penguins all around the base and anchorage. Cute as custard – but the smell! On land they are comically ungainly, looking for all the world like little Charlie Chaplins, but in the crystal clear water they are transformed into little torpedos shooting around and under our boat at immense speed, incredibly manoeuvrable turning through 90 degrees without apparently even having to flap their wings and with no change in speed. To breathe, they porpoise through the water, occasionally bumping into our mooring lines floating on the surface.

The Chileans were very proud that their penguin colony had two very rare leucistic Gentoos (albino-like). Ewan believes there is only about one leucistic penguin per 10,000. However before we had returned to the boat we had already counted three of them, so the Chileans clearly weren't on top of the wildlife literally on their own doorstep.

We told Rafael that we were heading to Port Lockroy. His eyes lit up. He had heard of Port Lockroy and its team of four beautiful young women. "How many days will it take you to sail there" he asked. Days? He had me worried. This was the leader of a team that had been on the base for three months with nothing to do but provide SAR support for the whole area, which he presumably knew like the back of his hand. Lockroy is only about 25 miles away – no more than 4 hours for us and probably only an hour away in their fast inflatables. Rafael was amazed. So was I. God help us if we ran into trouble and called upon them to find and rescue us.

Before we left, we gave them a gift of a bottle of wine and some beer. They were touched and Rafael immediately reciprocated by giving us two bottles of Chilean carmenere wine that is bottled specially for their Antarctic bases. It went very well with the second of Dolly's shoulders.

We awoke this morning to find that it was still drizzling and bitterly cold. Visibility was still poor. So rather than shooting off to the Argentine base further into Paradise harbour, we've decided to hunker down and have a lazy day in this snug anchorage. In any event, we were told by the Chileans that the Argentine base was unmanned this year as they had problems with their generator.

### **Ewan**

It would be a lie to say I was *mildly* apprehensive about this trip. Having only met The Boss for a brief chat over a glass of wine and dinner in London in September, his sanity (or otherwise) was as yet unproven. After spending time on South Georgia and having met many high-latitude yachtsmen, I was aware that steel or aluminium hulls were the norm for visiting areas where the charting of hazards is less than comprehensive, and where ice poses a risk too ephemeral to appear on charts. I even knew of some strong wooden boats that had visited the Antarctic. But fibreglass? However I shouldn't have worried. *Mina2* is a strong boat, and since we left Ushuaia on New Year's Day I have had no reservations about the suitability of the vessel to the task. The sanity of the skipper, and indeed the rest of the crew, however, remains to be tested...

I have grown up with tales of the Antarctic since I was very small. My father worked for the British Antarctic Survey in the 1970s when sledges were dog-powered and there were no women south of Cape Horn. After I left university, I also worked for BAS, spending thirty months at the sub-Antarctic biological research station on Bird Island, from where I returned in June 2010, so I have experienced the wildlife, icebergs, and 9000ft mountains draped with enormous glaciers. However, no amount of photographs and stories have softened the experience for me, and each day I continue to be overwhelmed by the things we see on this voyage.

My only previous experience of seasickness came whilst crossing the Minch from Ullapool to Stornoway in a force 7, when rather than being out in the fresh air, I chose to sit down below and attempt to seduce other crew members with Oasis and Travis

songs strummed on a badly-tuned guitar, resulting in a swift dash to the heads. But the sea conditions as we left Bahia Nassau (AKA Bahia Nausea) and emerged from the shelter of Cape Horn left me feeling rather off-colour to say the least, for 24hrs. But the sun emerged, the wind moderated, Venetia's 'special pills' (whatever they were...) worked their magic, and the albatrosses made for a captivating distraction from the queasiness. By the time we crossed the 60<sup>th</sup> parallel, everyone was feeling fine again. Deception Island was a fascinating first Antarctic landfall. Exploring the old BAS base and whaling station and seeing other crew members meet their first penguin and seal made the whole visit feel very special. Personally I would have felt unfulfilled had Peter and I not managed a dip in the volcanically warm waters so was grateful to Tim for allowing us a pause at Pendulum Cove to wallow like seals in the shallows, before heading across the Bransfield Strait.

My interest in the polar regions relates largely to the animals that live here, all associated with the seas surrounding the frozen continent (as on land there is very little habitat to support life), so seeing our first humpback whales in the Gerlache Strait was a big moment. But my highlight of the trip until now was the hour or so spent in the company of two minke whales in Wilhelmina Bay, en route to Cuverville Island. A whale almost as long as the boat rolling on its side and looking you in the eye is enough to stir up considerable emotion. Even more so when you capture it on camera! Although, no amount of photographs and stories will ever be able to transcribe to friends at home about just what this place is like.

We've just arrived at Gabriel Gonzales Videla base, a Chilean research station in Paradise Harbour, and tomorrow we'll visit the Argentines at Almirante Brown base. I'm excited to see how the other nations live in the Antarctic, following my experiences with BAS.

Thereafter, although restricted by weather, sea ice conditions and our own abilities, we should have another week of exploring. Every day we've spent down here has thrown incredible sights at us (this morning's highlight was a humpback whale coming within 50yds of Mina2 whilst at anchor off Cuverville Island!) and I look forward to it continuing. I know I am not going to want to leave Antarctica when the time comes, so I must find ways of returning. Better get saving for that (metal-hulled) boat of my own!

### **Venetia**

Firstly, I want to put the record straight: Ben, Emma's fiancé, is a lawyer but does not specialise in libel – sorry Tim. The truth of the matter is that everything is SO amazing here that there has been no need to exaggerate or tell stories to make the blog more interesting. It is just impossible to describe how incredible this place is, words are just not enough. To be here in a yacht is just all the more special. The Minke Whales "playing" with us was a highlight, they were just so close to us for so long. At the same time we were surrounded by scenery you cannot imagine, but that was not all, there were seals on the ice flows and penguins around us in the sea and before very long we saw Hump Back Whales too. Talk about sensory overload! As always a huge thank you, Tim, for all the hard work you have put in to make this happen. This blog really only needed one word **WOW!**

### **Richard**

Having come off ice watch (at anchor, armed with a good book) at 4am this morning I had a well deserved lie in but, much as we have got to take a caring interest in each

others welfare, even I was a bit taken aback when, as I belatedly appeared for my porridge the skip enquired “Now how’s your little Pinkie Richard?” My response, “Err.....” showed a shameful lack of gratitude for yesterday I dropped a rock on my finger (as one does out sailing) and Tim produced a most impressive First aid kit which not only sorted out my finger but has temporarily exempted me from washing up duties. More seriously Mina2 has looked after us magnificently, in good part thanks to being so well prepared by Tim for the not inconsiderable challenges – and most importantly we are a happy crew.

### **Peter**

Penguins stink. They don’t mention that on Frozen Planet but the truth is that really they smell completely repellent. Thank goodness they’re also incredibly CUTE! Even when they’re stealing little rocks from each other’s nests they look kind of adorable. But it’s not just penguins that we’ve seen. As previously mentioned, we also saw whales. In an attempt to film them underwater I managed to snap one of our only iceberg-poking poles (I’m not sure if this is their official name but I think it is). That means that we’ve resorted to fending off huge chunks of ice from smashing into the boat’s hull using a shard of pole the size of a cricket bat. Still, all is very well indeed (and I got the whale footage too). This place really is unbelievable. I’d become so focused on the crossing of Drake’s Passage that I’d sort of forgotten about the fact that two weeks cruising around Antarctica awaited us at the other side but ever since we arrived we’ve been met with an endless stream of amazing experiences. I can’t begin to imagine what the next ten days will bring. And hopefully I’ll have got used to the penguin stench by then too.

### **Mina2 Visits Paradise and Then Has an Icy Night**

**Position: 64:49.43S 063:29.285W**

**Port Lockroy**

**Date: 13 January 2012.**

We awoke yesterday morning to find that the freezing drizzling sleet had stopped and, against the forecasts, the sun was shining albeit intermittently. The light on the surrounding mountains, glaciers and icebergs was dazzling. In these conditions one place you have to see is Paradise Harbour from the high hill behind the Argentine Base Brown. It is truly one of the most beautiful and spectacular views in the world. It was the whalers who named this place in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Not a body of men known for their aesthetic sensibilities, but even they knew Paradise when they saw it.

It had been our intention to head straight for Port Lockroy but we quickly changed our plans and sailed the five miles across Paradise Harbour to Base Brown first. When leaving the anchorage at Water Boat Point we saw a particularly large, flat ice flow with dozens of penguins on it. More were turning up. The flat top of the floe was about two feet above the water and the penguins were launching themselves out of the water to try and get “ashore”. Some made it with a thump and waddled across the floe to join their mates. Others didn’t make it, managing to get one foot on the edge of the floe, before losing their balance and toppling back into the water with a splash. Cute and comical wasn’t in it.

As we arrived at the Argentine Base Brown at the southern end of Paradise Harbour we saw, coming out of the anchorage tucked behind the base, the familiar light blue hull of our old friends on Dawnbreaker. We hadn't seen them since Ushuaia but had been in constant email communication with them, reporting each other's positions for safety reasons and, for reasons of pleasure, we have been copying each other in on our blogs.

The one thing every yacht owner that comes this far wants as a memento is a photo of his yacht sailing against the backdrop of the Antarctic mountains. This was our chance. We pulled alongside Dawnbreaker and transferred Peter and Ewan, our cameramen; pulled away, hoisted our sails, and did a couple of sail pasts whilst Ewan and Peter clicked and videoed us.

Once done, both Dawnbreaker and Mina2 went round to the Argentine base to disembark our crews for a visit. Having walked round the buildings (Base Brown is not occupied this year – apparently there is something wrong with the generators) the crews trudged their way through the thigh high snow up the steep slope to the rocky bluff overlooking the whole of Paradise Harbour. Down below, I jilled around in Mina2 for an hour or so waiting for their return. Once they had taken in the majestic view their descent was rather quicker than their ascent as they tobogganed down the steep hill on their backsides. We then headed across the Gerlache Strait for the 24-mile passage to Port Lockroy going the slightly longer route down the Neumayer Channel just southeast of Anvers Island. I remember when I came down here last February on Pelagic Australis as a recce that the Neumayer Channel was stuffed full of whales and we had heard reports from other yachts that there were lots of them this year as well. But by the time we reached the channel, visibility was closing in and it had started snowing heavily. In the event, we saw no whales in this stretch at all.

We rounded the corner into Port Lockroy, a large bay in which, unusually in Antarctica, the water is shallow enough to anchor without tying in. We saw Podorange, a French expedition yacht that we knew, anchored in the far corner. We also saw that the entire bay was covered in thick brash ice, growlers and bergy bits. We nudged our way nervously through the ice, wincing a little every time we heard and felt the thump of ice hitting the slowly moving bow and scraping its way down the length of the hull. Eventually we picked a spot that looked as clear as anywhere and dropped the anchor. It was to be a busy night.

We set an anchor watch of two hours each. The problem with ice is that it is constantly on the move. The wind will pick up from one direction and the ice heads towards you. You fend it off and it moves on. Then the wind shifts and the ice comes trundling back again. Meanwhile the boat is swinging around on its anchor and accelerating the speed of impact. Then the tide will change and you get another motorway of ice curling its way round the island in the middle, sometimes heading towards us but sometimes we escaped. So this was not an ice watch of sitting down below reading a book and occasionally popping one's head out to have a look. It was pretty much constant fending off with our one remaining pole.

But whilst all this activity was taking place there were plenty of other distractions. Periodically there would be a groan; a crack like artillery fire and a large chunk of the

ice wall at the end of the bay would come crashing into the sea with a roar, and a large wave would ripple across the bay. More ice to fend off.

On my watch there was a particularly large bergy bit, the size of a house, quite close by and thankfully not moving. But there was a crack; an enormous bit fell off and the rest of the berg capsized with a rush of water.

Then Venetia and I saw this enormous prehistoric looking head appear out of the water about 20 metres away. A Leopard seal was on the prowl for an early breakfast of penguin. The penguins (all Gentoos here) had been frolicking about the boat all night, swimming underneath us and then launching themselves with a plop onto a passing growler. But when the Leopard seal is on the prowl they all go into a frenzy and group together in one enormous flock, porpoising in and out of the water first one way then another. The Leopard seal has a neat way of preparing his meal. He'll grab a penguin in his mouth and slit its skin open with its razor sharp teeth; a couple of vigorous whips of its head and the penguin is skinned and ready to swallow. All that's left of the happy little penguin is its skin floating forlornly on the water.

Once the Leopard seal had eaten its fill it launched itself onto a iceflow barely 50 metres away and rolled over for a post-prandial snooze.

These words can only paint half a picture. As I've said before, this place and the experiences we are all having are, quite literally, indescribable.

Today, we have an important mission, for we are to present a tribute to Captain Lawrence Oates on the centenary of his death on behalf of the Royal Cruising Club to the UK Antarctic Heritage Trust, who run the old scientific base here in Lockroy as a museum. I'll be telling you all about that later.

### **Presentation of a Tribute to Lawrence Oates on Behalf of the RCC**

**Position: 64:49.43S 063:29.285W**

**Port Lockroy**

**Date: 14 January 2012.**

One hundred years ago, Captain Scott led the British expedition to reach the South Pole. Amongst his team was a soldier, Captain Lawrence Oates. Oates was selected by Scott to be amongst the five-man team to march 1000 miles south to the Pole and then man haul their sledges the 1000 miles back to their base camp.

The conditions were horrendous. Constantly held up by 100-mile an hour storms they were running seriously short of food; they were suffering from scurvy and, in the -40 C temperatures, they were suffering badly from frostbite. Oates, in particular, had such badly frostbitten feet that he was unable to walk as fast and as far as his comrades.

In the middle of a storm, he left the tent in which they lay with the words "I'm just going outside, and may be some time". He knew he was crawling to his certain death. He sacrificed his own life to give his comrades the chance of survival. Thus died "a very gallant gentleman".

At home in the UK, Oates was an adventurous cruising yachtsman and had been elected a member of the Royal Cruising Club. The club thrives to this day, and Richard, Venetia and I are members.

Today we were honoured to present a tribute to Lawrence Oates on behalf of the RCC to the UK Antarctic Heritage Trust who run the museum at the one time British scientific research station here at Port Lockroy. It has been placed on public display. It is a frame in which there is the RCC burgee and a brass plaque inscribed:

In tribute to  
Captain Lawrence Oates RCC  
on the centenary of his death

Presented by  
The Royal Cruising Club  
to the UK Antarctic Heritage Trust  
at Port Lockroy, Antarctica  
January 2012

**Caught In The Pack in Antarctica**

**Position: 64:49.43S 063:29.285W**

**Still at Port Lockroy**

**Date: 15 January 2012.**

The timing of this expedition to Antarctica was influenced by the fact that 2012 was the centenary of the Scott Expedition and the link that the RCC has with Lawrence Oates. So our presentation of the tribute to Oates to the UK Antarctic Heritage Trust on behalf of the RCC yesterday was the culmination of a few years planning. I had been in touch with the UKAHT for some time and they had not only said that they would be honoured to accept the tribute but that it would be publicly displayed at Port Lockroy. Port Lockroy was the first British scientific base in Antarctica and is now maintained by the UKAHT as an excellent museum. It is the one almost compulsory stop for all the cruise ships (and the few yachts) that visit Antarctica. Last year they had a staggering 17,000 visitors, almost all from cruise ships. (The number of private yachts getting over to Antarctica is probably no more than a dozen a year and we are the only private British boat this year). The charming Ladies of Lockroy (the base is traditionally run by young woman) were well briefed about our arrival and welcomed us warmly. By sheer coincidence, Cat Totty, one of the girls here, is a friend of a very good friend of Venetia which made the whole thing all the more personal. We went through a small presentation ceremony and Ylva, the Station Head, graciously accepted the tribute. A hook and a space were already prepared and within minutes the framed tribute was hanging in pride of place in the entrance to the main building. Quite a moment.

After the ceremony we were given a tour of the base and museum. The rooms are all as they would have been when the team of scientists worked here in the 50's and 60's still with the same food on the shelves of the kitchen and the portrait of Marilyn Munroe painted on the bunk room walls as a warm reminder of what they were

missing during their icy men-only tour of duty. The buildings lie amongst the reminders that in the 1920's this was a base for the whalers with enormous jaw bones of whales lying amongst the ruins of whaling boats. It is home, too, to a colony of nesting Gentoo penguins whose chicks are a lot bigger than those we have seen elsewhere on the peninsula. Part of the small island on which the base stands is a restricted area and the base staff are monitoring the difference between the penguins that nest here and those that have thousands of tourists shuffling past them. Their conclusions so far are that, if anything, the tourist disturbed penguins are doing better than their isolated neighbours because the tourists also put off the skuas that turn up for a snack of penguin egg or small chick. The base is also the southernmost British Post Office in the world, complete with red post box. The shop, where our tribute is now displayed, sells a wide range of souvenirs as well as postcards and British Antarctic Territory stamps.

We were rather hoping that we would be asked if we wanted to make use of their steaming hot showers but no luck there. Like us on Mina2, the base has no fresh water facilities other than for drinking and a little light sponging down. But at least the Ladies are invited aboard the numerous cruise ships that come in for showers.

We were delighted that the Ladies of Lockroy accepted our invitation to come over to Mina2 for a glass of champagne in the evening. The bottles came out of the bilges and had to be warmed up in the fridge before drinking!

Because of the abnormally large amount of ice choking up the southern part of the peninsula this year, the few yachts here are congregated in the northern part of which Port Lockroy is the hub, so we have had as many as five yachts at anchor here – three French charter yachts, an Italian superyacht Happy Taurus II (the owner, her friend, and five professional crew including Hamish Laird as ice pilot!) who we met at Enterprise Island, my old friends from Pelagic Australis including Skip Novak, and ourselves.

All the professional charter yachts are in contact with each other and Skip told us that one of the yachts had just managed to work their way through the Lemaire Channel, Kodak Valley, 10 miles to the south (albeit a yacht much bigger and stronger than Mina2). At the entrance to the Lemaire Channel are a pair of iconic pinnacle mountains familiarly known as Una's Tits (named allegedly after the wife of a previous Governor of the Falkland Islands). To hell with it, we would go and see how far we could get, and at least admire Una's Tits. So yesterday morning we set out. The plan was to get as far south as we safely could and then tuck round the back of Booth Island which forms one side of the Lemaire Channel to an anchorage at Port Charcot (which is not of course a port in the normal sense, but a bay).

It was bitterly cold and visibility was bad with flurries of snow. We made our way down the Peltier Channel and through some brash ice and out into the wide Gerlache Strait, heading south. There was a momentary cheer of self-congratulation as we passed the 65<sup>th</sup> degree of latitude. Add that to the 70 degrees north that we reached at the top of the Lofoten Islands in Norway back in 2004 and Mina2 had straddled more than 135 degrees of latitude. Very few private yachts have achieved that.

As we progressed, conditions worsened. This part of the Gerlache Strait is open to the Drake Passage and even though there had been little wind, a metre high swell was rolling in making it more difficult negotiating our way through the increasingly large growlers and bergy bits. Visibility was so bad that, as we passed the two iconic mountains, we could not even see their bases let alone the peaks themselves. The water temperature had fallen to minus 1.7C and sea ice was beginning to form. All of a sudden we found ourselves surrounded by very large growlers and bergy bits all rolling around in the swell and crashing together. We could be in between any of them with potentially disastrous consequences. We were now in a thick snow storm and it was increasingly difficult seeing where the narrow leads between the threatening lumps of ice were. Not a good place to be. The only responsible decision was to abort the exercise, and make our way out of the ice and back to Lockroy. It was a distinctly uncomfortable half hour trying this way and that in the heaving, crashing ice to make our way back to clearer water. We took turns at the wheel each of us quickly turning into snowmen as we tried to see what was ahead in the blinding snow that was now six inches thick on the decks.

At last we saw clearer water ahead. And none too soon as a 20 knot breeze had sprung up which would have exacerbated an already perilous situation. A big cruise ship passed us heading south but she was still in sight when we saw her slowly turn round. The conditions were untenable even for her.

As we headed back north into clear water, we put the sails up and in no time we were battling along, now out of the swell and in flat water, back to the comparative security of Port Lockroy.

### **Mina2 Probably Breaks Record**

**Position: 64:45.84S 064:04.86W**

**Palmer Station**

**Date: 16 January 2012.**

Both when I came down here in February last year and on this expedition to Antarctica, one thing is conspicuous by its absence – sails. There are a number of yachts down here – mostly professional charter yachts, but I don't think I've ever seen one actually with any sails up – they simply chug around everywhere under Perkins Power. There are reasons for this. Whilst the Drake may be the windiest passage of water on the earth, on the peninsula itself most of the time it is a flat calm. On those few occasions when there is wind it tends to be a screaming gale from the wrong direction. And if there is ice around it is much easier negotiating it under power than under sail.

However Sunday was one of the few brilliantly sunny days we have had and there was a light breeze. We had made an appointment with the US Palmer Station scientific research base to visit them only 15 miles to the west on Monday; we couldn't head south, as we had discovered the day before, because of the ice so basically we had nowhere to go and nothing to do. So we decided to break all the rules of Antarctic sailors and actually go for a sail. Barely off the anchor in Port Lockroy and we had the mainsail up and pulling us through the deep blue water. Just south of Port Lockroy is Doumer Island. It is diamond shaped, only about 4 miles

long and 3 miles wide but it forms one side of a spectacular fjord, the Peltier Channel. We sailed slowly up one side towards the enormously wide Thunder Glacier, glistening in the sun as it stretched higher and higher up Wienker Island. When we reached the glacier we turned almost through 180 degrees to tack and tack gain against the light breeze down the other side of the island with the spectacular range of high peaks of the Fief Mountains, other wise known as Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, to our left. At the bottom of the island we turned again and romped back in the direction of Port Lockroy to complete our circumnavigation under sail – possibly the first circumnavigation under sail since sailing ships started using auxiliary engines more than 100 years ago. We are all keen sailors on board and all of us delighted in these few hours of using Mina2 for the purpose she was intended – to use God’s own energy to sail past wondrous scenery. It was magical.

Rather than going straight into Port Lockroy again, we sailed just beyond and tucked into the entrance of Dorian Bay. We tried to enter this small shallow bay but touched bottom at the entrance, so we backed out and, as the wind was very light, put the anchor down just outside from where we dinghied ashore. Overlooking Dorian Bay are two huts – an Argentine refuge hut with the colours of the Argentine flag painted across the side, and a British hut that was used almost as an arrivals and departure lounge for British scientists in the 1950’s who were being brought in and taken off the peninsula by a small plane that used to land on skis on the glacier behind. Across the peninsula there are a number of refuge huts built by different countries to provide shelter for anyone who needs it in emergency. There is a stove and a supply of fuel and some tinned food (water, of course, is to be found just outside the door in white quantity). None of these refuges are ever locked. Indeed, no building in Antarctica is ever locked. Even those bases that operate only in the austral summer months, including Lockroy, are left unlocked when the team leaves in the autumn – just in case anybody needs the shelter they could provide in emergency.

The following morning, once again in brilliant sunshine, we left Port Lockroy for the last time, bidding farewell to the Ladies by radio as we left. We had been asked by Palmer Station to be there at 2pm sharp when they would be able to show us around, fitting into their busy schedule. (Palmer has a reputation for being unwelcoming to yachts – but we found exactly the opposite. So long as you give them notice and fit in with their schedule, they are enormously welcoming). We might need a little time to tie into the small creek called Hero Inlet off the base, so we set off to arrive at about midday. En route we received an email from the station head which said “Please be aware that we have a fairly tall iceberg in Hero Inlet at the moment and a good deal of brash ice as well”. This was some understatement . We arrived to find a particularly beautiful ice berg wedged in the entrance to the creek but allowing a narrow passage round it to the tying in point .... if you could get to it. The whole of the bay outside the creek was just one solid mass of brash ice. It was so thick, you could walk across it. You could see no water between the ice at all. As we are not used to this sort of thing and being acutely aware of our vulnerability if our propeller got damaged, we edged our way through with the carpet of ice crunching as our bow slowly pushed its way through. Having inspected the whole thing, I concluded that there were risks involved in tying in here, not least that if the wind picked up from the west and more ice compacted into the inlet, we might not be able to get out. And we were by now beginning to look for a weather window to leave Antarctica and return across the Drake Passage. So using the dinghy to push the bow round (the danger to the

propeller would be substantially greater if we were going astern) we made our way back out through the pack to the open water beyond.

Just to the west of the harbour are a group of islands and we found a convenient place to put the anchor down and tie ourselves in. No sooner had we completed the exercise than one of the inflatables from the base passed by and advised us that this area was restricted due to research on the nesting Adele penguins and we would have to untie and move to another place which they showed us too. But getting tied in, in the right place, was only the first part of the challenge. The only way to get to the base for our appointment was to take the dinghy through half a mile of the solid brash ice, which took a great deal of time. It was a total of two and half hours from the time Mina2 arrived and our presenting ourselves at the base. Flying proudly from the flagstaff were the Stars and Stripes, but below on the crosstrees fluttered the Union Flag, a courtesy to us during our visit. We felt quite touched.

The Palmer Station is the smallest of the three US scientific research stations. It operates throughout the year with 45 personnel in the summer and about 18 in the winter. There were so many contrasts with the Chilean base we had visited at Water Boat Point. There, there were a whole bunch of military personnel, chefs at a ratio of 1:7 and all of them with nothing to do but play with their Playstations. At Palmer, OK it was a warm sunny day with little wind, but the place was buzzing with scientific activity. Inflatables buzzed around the area loaded with personnel in their orange survival suits, and scientific equipment, monitoring seismic activity (there had been an earthquake in the South Shetland Islands, just north of us, only the day before), atmospheric (ozone hole etc) meteorology, and marine and terrestrial ecology (did you know that a tiny flightless midge is the largest animal that spends its entire life on Antarctica? – good one for the pub quiz). The facilities on the base are as you would expect of a government funded base of the richest country in the world. Their own satellite provides them with telephone calls and broadband internet connectivity. A desalination plant provides all the fresh water they could want (endless hot showers – can you imagine). They even had barbecues and a steaming hot tub outdoors. The restaurant had everything an American could eat including fresh coffee and popcorn machines. A gym and a widescreen cinema with enormous plush leather reclining seats. You name it, they've got it!

They've also got some brilliant fauna around. Adele penguins are cold-loving and as the Antarctic peninsula has been warming (the winter temperature has increased by no less than 6 C over the last 50 years). This is the most northerly rookery of Adeles this side of the peninsula and these were the first we had seen. However, the population is reducing so quickly that the experts think they will all have moved further south by 2014, so we got here only in the nick of time. They also have lots of Elephant seals here – the big ones where the males have the long nose proboscis. In our anchorage we are surrounded by them. And even if you didn't see them, you sure hear them. They make a noise like a cross between a frog and a burp, but incredibly deep and incredibly loud. The sound reverberates around the anchorage day and night long.

So with this background noise and after an excellent meal of Dolly's left leg we settled down for the night, albeit always with one person on ice and anchor watch.

## **Dramas in the Anchorage and Preparing for the Drake.**

**Position: 64:45.84S 064:04.86W**

**Palmer Station**

**Date: 17 January 2012.**

So, we'd settled ourselves down for a peaceful night with the anchor down and two lines ashore had we? The wind, which had been light and from the south during the cloudless sunny day picked up a little in the evening as a bank of cloud came in from the north west. At 0130 Peter, who was on ice and anchor watch, called me on deck. The wind had picked up considerably, blowing 35 to 40 knots from the northwest. The wind was now on our beam, strapped as we were between our anchor and the two long ropes that were tied to the shore, secured by wire strops that had been placed over rocks. Peter was concerned as he thought we had swung way across the channel and we were getting close to the rocks off the island the other side.

When we arrived in Antarctica two weeks ago it was completely light all night, the sun just over the horizon. But now the nights are closing in. Each night it becomes noticeably more dark and in the middle of the night now, it is not fully dark but it is distinctly gloomy. The rope on the windward side seemed too slack so we started to tighten it. We were hauling it in rather too easily and it quickly became apparent that it had detached itself from its rock. So that was why the boat had swung. There was now just the last remaining line holding our stern to the shore, and it was bar tight. If that broke, Mina2 would very quickly swing round and be on the rocks downwind of us. We needed to do something and do it fast.

I scrambled Ewan, and Peter dived down below to get his foul weather gear, boots and lifejacket on. They lowered the dinghy (with some difficulty as our bar-taut line was lying obliquely underneath it). They shot off in the now boisterous waves and driving icy sleet towards the shore. Ewan leapt ashore with the spare line and wire strop and re-secured it to a different rock, whilst Peter held the dinghy steady on the rocks as the surf pounded the shore. By now Richard, who had been alerted to the emergency by the sound of the engine running as a contingency, had joined me on deck. With the handheld VHF Ewan radioed back to us that the line was now secure and Richard and I hauled it tight, secured it to a winch and winched it tighter still. Slowly Mina 2 crabbed round and away from the rocks. The boys came back to the boat. The wind was still increasing and both lines were straining. We decided to put out a third line, so we went through the same procedure, my heart in my mouth as I saw these two brave young men disappear once more in the bucketing dinghy into the glim across the icy waves. Once we had the third line braced up, we all felt much more secure and went below for a hot drink.

And where, might you ask, was Venetia during this life-threatening crisis? Was she down below brewing up hot drinks for our returning heroes? No, she was not. Was she standing by the anchor chain ready to cut it away to allow us to escape from its clutches as it swung us onto the rocks when the final rope snapped under the strain of the storm-force winds? No, she was not. Venetia, was curled up in her bunk fast asleep during the entire episode. Snoopy was nowhere to be seen either. He had legged it to join Venetia the moment the trouble started.

The wind continued to howl throughout the night, heeling the boat over during the squalls. Highest wind speed recorded was 58 knots.

This morning the wind was still strong at 40 to 45 knots, so we decided to stay put. Even going ashore for a stroll amongst the Adelie penguins and the Elephant seals would not be without risk. So it was a lazy day with many of us catching up on sleep and reading. The one thing we didn't have to contend with last night, thank God, was ice but today, as the wind swung round a little, the odd berg started moving slowly down the channel towards us. This afternoon, one small berg, about 2 metres high and 10 metres long and wide came bumbling along and decided its chosen route would be between us and the shore, exactly where our three shorelines were. It may only have been two metres high but there was probably another 10 metres below the water. It probably weighed close on 1000 tons so slicing through three ropes with a breaking strain of just 5 tons each would not have represented a problem. Action stations again. Our SBS Rapid Reaction team donned their assault gear again and leapt into the dinghy. As the berg was touching the first of the ropes, the cockpit crew slackened it off and the boys managed to flick it over the front of the berg and along its top. Whilst re-tightening the first line we were letting off the second line for the same treatment. It was going well. But the third line got jammed on a protruding piece of ice. The berg continued its destructive course as we in the cockpit let out more and more line. The bitter end of the line however got jammed and as the line got tighter and tighter, I rushed below, grabbed a sharp knife and cut the rope before it started pulling the stanchions off the deck. It whiplashed into the water, went slack and was recovered and brought back to the boat by the SBS team for re-connection whilst the berg went majestically on its way.

Over the last few days, I have been studying the weather charts which we pick up by satellite phone, looking for a window in the weather for the 580-mile four day crossing of the Drake Passage, past Cape Horn and back to the comparative safety of the Beagle Channel.

The return journey across the Drake is the most perilous part of the entire expedition. The winds in the Drake are generally very strong and from the west or northwest. Whereas on the way over, sailing east of south, the winds are most often on your beam or slightly behind you, on the way back you are punching into the enormous seas unless you get lucky. Weather forecasts nowadays are pretty accurate over a couple of days, but looking out over four or five days they become much less reliable. The worst of the Drake weather tends to be round Cape Horn at the north of the passage and that is four days after you commit yourself and set sail. By the time you get there the forecasts can have changed dramatically, and rather than a benign crossing you can find yourself in the middle of a screaming Southern Ocean storm with enormous seas. To cap it all, as you approach Cape Horn you reach the continental shelf. The sea bed rises from several thousand metres to a few hundred metres and the enormous waves that accompany the storms are known to break violently and dangerously.

We had identified a window starting possibly this Wednesday. This was a couple of days sooner than I had hoped for, but the next window might not appear for a week or more. I have subscribed to a weather routing service for yachts which is run by a bunch of qualified meteorologists who are also sailors. The data they have access to is

a lot more comprehensive than the forecasts I can pick up, and with their own expert interpretation of the weather systems and the local conditions they can provide a better insight into the conditions we might expect. They emailed me this afternoon, confirming that the only window on the horizon was to start tomorrow evening (Wednesday). Even then, as the forecast looks now, it would be a race against time to get past Cape Horn and into the safety of the channels as early as possible on Sunday to avoid a good slapping from a deep low pressure system that is expected at that time. If it transpires that the front comes through sooner than currently forecast we will simply have to grit our teeth and battle it out.

So early tomorrow morning we will be leaving our anchorage at Palmer, get everything lashed down and make our way 70 miles north, past the Melchior Islands and out into the Drake Passage.

### **Approaching the Half Way Point**

**Position: 60:45.5S 066:30.3W**

**Date / Time: 20 January 0630 (0930 UTC)**

As I type, we are 230 miles from the Melchior Islands with a further 300 miles before we round Cape Horn and make our way into the channels of Tierra Del Fuego. So far no dramas. We've had some cracking good sailing in stiffish winds but right now we are motoring in less than 10 knots of wind coming from the north (where we want to go) as the centre of a depression passes over us bringing light and variable winds. But the wind should fill in again from slightly north of west by about lunchtime.

The moment we stuck our noses out into Drake Passage all our old friends who we hadn't seen for a couple of weeks came to greet us and accompany us on our perilous passage. Black-browed albatross swooped around us in their never-ending effortless glide whilst everyone's favourites, the pretty black and white speckled Cape Petrels, fluttered around in flocks, landing in the water beside us with a patter of their webbed feet, before taking off as one to circle the boat and land again.

The days had been rapidly shortening in Antarctica and, as we head north, they are shortening even more. Last night we had our first proper bit of darkness and as each night of the passage passes they will get progressively long.

It is still cold as we have not yet passed through the Antarctic Convergence where the (comparatively) warm waters of the Atlantic and Pacific meet the ice cold waters of Antarctica. Some people have emailed asking me how we cope with the cold.

This has been an unusually cold summer for the peninsula. Generally the daytime temperature on deck has been a fraction above freezing and the temperature at what passes for night at a little below. If there is any wind the chill factor is considerable and in a good blow it can be crippling cold unless you are well prepared. Down below without the heating on it is about 8 C generated by a combination of body heat and engine / generator heat. We have a diesel burning heater on board which blows hot air into the cabins. As we need to conserve diesel we only have the blowers on in the main saloon (in the cabins if you are cold you can get into your sleeping bag), and we have been able to run the heater for a few hours in the evening before and after

dinner, and perhaps an hour or two in the morning as everyone is getting up and having breakfast. With the heater on, it is still chilly by most standards at about 14C, but it's toasty warm for us.

There is a saying "There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing". We have all gone to a lot of trouble making sure that we have clothing that is up to the conditions. Most of us have thermal underwear, long johns and long sleeved vests, of merino wool which is one of the warmest materials by weight and doesn't start smelling like some man made fibres. Richard has gone his own way on this one and wears silk underwear instead. For the rest of us, perhaps a warm woollen shirt on top of the thermals and then the Weezle suit. These are specialist one-piece suits made to wear under divers' dry suits for diving in freezing water. It's a bit like wearing a thick tailored sleeping bag, but they are incredibly warm and absolutely perfect for these conditions. Peter and I bought them specially for the trip; Ewan already had a suit as he is a diver, Venetia, as a more lady friendly alternative to the one-piece, bought a pair of down trousers. Richard has gone his own exotic way on this one and has his extraordinary green Special Forces one-piece with all sorts of interesting zips and orifices. As for the extremities, out of the cabin almost all of us all of the time wear neck-warmers, gloves and hats. If there is a wind blowing, you will need a balaclava and if it is snowing then you'll need ski goggles as well. As for the feet, normal sailing boots, however lah-de-dah and expensive, would be incredibly cold – their soles are simply not thick enough to insulate your feet from the freezing decks. So we all have industrial boots worn in freezer warehouses with soles an inch and a half thick and steel reinforced toes. These are worn both on deck and ashore. They've worked out very well.

But there's no doubt you also acclimatise to the cold and whereas to begin with hauling in the long wet shore lines was always done with a pair or two of gloves, you will often see us hauling them in now with bare hands – it's simply easier.

In cold weather, you also eat a lot more than you normally do, with a heavy emphasis on lots of fat (butter is spread like cheese here) and starch. In the Falklands I bought half a ton of chocolates and biscuits. Venetia is now having to ration them. Lots of hot drinks are consumed with, in Venetia's case, a couple of healthy slugs of whatever she finds in the drinks cabinet as an additional warmer.

More on the special conditions of Antarctic expeditions tomorrow. Must grab some sleep.

### **Cold Weather Adaptations – Forgot some of them**

**Position: 60:05S 067:20W**

**Date / Time: 20 January 1400 (1700 UTC)**

Re my notes on how we cope with the cold temperatures, I forgot some of the most important bits:

1. On Mina2 we have what the marketing boys call a "deck saloon" which means that in the saloon (or what landlubbers might call the living room) we have, by boat standards, enormous bullet-proof glass windows which afford a

panoramic view whilst down below. But when the outside temperature of the glass is freezing, so too is the temperature of a large area inside. So I had acrylic sheets cut in Buenos Aires to the exact sizes of the windows, got a lot of Velcro and – instant double glazing. It works brilliantly well.

2. The other inspiration, and one of the few original ideas I've had in years, is what we affectionately call the conservatory which is a plastic extension to the sprayhood which provides an insulating tent which stops most of the cold air from rushing down through the hatch which has to be kept open most of the time. I had this made up in Buenos Aires as well, and it has been worth more than its weight in gold.
3. Sleeping bags. They're all very heavy duty, but even so, I for one have been crawling into mine complete with thermals, Weezle suit and two pairs of socks. Not so Venetia who retires to bed having changed into a fetching Wyncyette nightgown with matching nightcap with a bobble (and a nightcap in a glass) – but she also takes to bed half a dozen hot water bottles as well (and, occasionally, Able Seadog Snoopy for added warmth).
4. And by no means least, it is essential to have excellent heavy weather salopettes and jackets in these conditions – particularly when crossing the Drake. If you have anything less, you get wet and in these temperatures that would be murder. Skip Novak, legendary high latitude sailor, offered to loan me a set of foulies for everyone on board. I can't tell you how valuable they've been. Nor how good value are his top-of-the-range cruises to Antarctica, the Channels, South Georgia etc – details on [www.pelagic.co.uk](http://www.pelagic.co.uk).

### **Drake Crossing Progressing Satisfactorily**

**Position: 58:00S 067:46W**

**Date / Time: 21 January 0645 (0945 UTC)**

We are now about 130 miles from Cape Horn (out of a total distance from the Melchior Islands of 550) so about three quarters of the way across. After motoring for 16 hours yesterday when the light winds of the centre of the low passed through us, the wind kicked in yesterday afternoon as forecast. It's been a fairly consistent 35-40 knots since then, slightly forward of the beam – a not uncomfortable point of sail – and 3m waves. We've been sailing at about 7.5 to 8 knots which is satisfactory. In fact rather faster than we had planned, a consequence of which is we will be rounding Cape Horn (now, doesn't that sound grand!) in the middle of tonight – probably 0200 (0500 UTC).

The plan is, once round the Horn, to dive into a bay about 10 miles north, anchor, and have a good sleep on a horizontal boat. That's the plan anyway – we're not there yet!

We're being chucked about a bit, so a tad difficult bracing myself and typing the blog at the same time, so will sign off now.

### **Mina2 Weathers The Inevitable Drake Shake**

**Position: 58:00S 067:46W**

**Date / Time: 21 January 0645 (0945 UTC)**

It came as no surprise. It was the best weather window we could find in over a week, but a bit of a slap was forecast at the end of the Drake crossing. We are now approaching the end of the Drake crossing and a slap we are getting. The winds are now over 40 knots (a full gale) and the seas have built to probably 4 metres. The yankee (big sail at the front) has been furled away leaving the small staysail and a well reefed main. We're being chucked around a fair bit which makes the simplest things a struggle. Just disrobing to go to the loo takes ages as one impersonates a pinball in the heads.

We haven't had as many seabirds on the crossing as we would have liked, but this afternoon we got a handful of Wandering Albatross criss crossing around us. Richard got out his camera and clicked away. He now has several dozen photographs of sea and sky and barely a wingtip of an albatross.

This afternoon, for some inexplicable reason, I got a craving for Betty Crocker muffins for tea. What a palaver. As I got bounced around the galley there was more of the mixture on the floor, ceiling and walls than there were in the inadequate muffin cases. Eventually they came out of the oven. For some reason they were completely flat. Everyone looked at them in dismay. "They look fantastic" said Richard, although he was being literal rather than complimentary. "Wow" said Ewan on one of his rare excursions from his bunk "are they edible?". Peter said "These look absolutely disgusting". Actually, notwithstanding their unconventional shape, they were quite tasty.

Talking of domestic inconveniences, after three weeks of very cold weather, the boat is full of condensation and everything is dripping, including the walls and the bedding. But even this wouldn't account for the rapidity with which the bilges are filling with water. Normally Mina2 is a dry boat – not in the alcoholic sense, oh no – but in the sense that she doesn't leak and the bilges only occasionally require a pump out. Right now however, for some reason we have yet to ascertain, the bilges are filling every few hours. No problem pumping them out, bit something we'll need to investigate when we have more stable conditions.

So where are we now? About 32 miles from Cape Horn which at the rate we are tanking along at the moment, we should round it in about 4 hours – about midnight local time and 0300 UTC. So we won't see much of it which is a shame. After that we should be in the lee of the land and heading for a nice little anchorage a couple of hours away and tranquillity at last. But as we get buffeted by yet another green wall of hard cold water, it still seems a dream away.

**+++STOP PRESS+++MINA2 SURVIVES CAPE HORN STORM+++**

**Position: 55:49.372S 067:17.627W**

**Date / Time: 22 January 0230 (0530 UTC)**

**+++STOP PRESS+++MINA2 SURVIVES CAPE HORN STORM+++ OR HAVE THEY?+++**

At 0015 on 22 January 2012, Mina2 and her intrepid crew rounded Cape Horn. Her skipper had spent days planning to avoid any part of the crossing of Drake Passage involving anything more than half a gale (up to 34 knots). In the event we rounded the

Horn in the only way that this iconic landmark should be rounded – with 50+ knots of wind (that's close to 60mph – difficult to stand up in) and big seas.

Sadly it was at the dead of night so all we saw of this dramatic rock was the light of the lighthouse blinking through the driven spray every five seconds.

What he hadn't counted on was that this was the easy part of the evening. We'd fondly assumed that once we tucked round the back of Cape Horn the wind would abate. Huh! It got funnelled and increased further as we made our way the ten miles to the only anchorage anywhere near that could provide protection for us. Getting into an anchorage in 50 + knots of wind is one thing, but when it's an anchorage that you've never seen before its another. When its an anchorage that you've never seen even AFTER you've anchored there, well that's a whole different ball game. We nosed our way in using two GPS chart plotters (which, unhelpfully, disagreed with one another) and the radar and battling against the fierce winds dropped our anchor in hope and not a little fear. The anchor seems to be holding at the moment but only when dawn breaks tomorrow will we know whether we are within inches of the rocks are firmly snugged into the middle.

Meanwhile we won't be sleeping too well as the sound of the wind ripping through the rigging and trying to tug our anchor out of the ground is deafening. We all felt it was a little premature to crack open the champagne.

### **The Unreachable Star Has been Reached – and a Burial At Sea**

**Position: 55:49.372S 067:17.627W**

**Date / Time: 23 January 0230 (0530 UTC)**

Having survived the infamous Drake Passage twice, rounded Cape Horn in a Force 10 and had the most unbelievable cruise of Antarctica for two weeks, the dream has come true; the Unreachable Star has been reached. As we sat in the anchorage yesterday whilst 58 knot (Force 11) winds tried unsuccessfully to drag our anchor out of the seabed, we all reflected on our life-changing experience over the last four weeks. Whilst Peter and Ewan will have the chance of even greater challenges in the future, nothing can match this – the greatest adventure of Mina2. I believe I'm right in saying that more people climb Everest every year than the total number who have ever sailed to Antarctica in a private sailing boat without the support of ice pilots or professional crew. It is an achievement we can all be proud of.

We owe a lot to the boat. No glass fibre boat, designed more for the Mediterranean than Antarctica, is an ideal vessel for the particular risks of navigating in ice. However in Mina2 we have an incredibly strong boat, well-designed to cope with the tough conditions we encountered. Even during the Force 10 rounding of Cape Horn, we all felt absolutely confident that Mina2 would not let us down. And she did not. She is a fantastic boat and I am one very, very proud owner.

Nor could our epic adventure been achieved without the wonderful crew I've had with me. Richard, Venetia, Peter and Ewan all have their strengths and no discernible weaknesses. As a team I believe none could be stronger, and this has made my job so much easier. And as a bunch of people all with completely different personalities we

have all got on just incredibly well. We have had the most unbelievable time not just individually but together, and that has enhanced the experience for us all.

The crew have all looked after me unbelievably well. Solicitous to a fault, I'm hardly allowed to do anything. If I was enjoying a spell at the wheel in a strong wind and a big following sea, screaming along under full main and a poled out yankee, drink in hand, Ewan would grab the wheel and say "Why don't you take a break, Skipper, and let me helm for a while. Five minutes at the wheel in these conditions can be very tiring". Richard volunteered to plan the watch rota (who is on watch and when). I observed that he had not included me, leaving all the work to Richard and the others. "That's right Skipper" said Richard "that way you will be fresh and ready to take command in the case of any emergency". When we were all going ashore in the dinghy and having to negotiate some thick brash ice, Peter all but wrenched the outboard tiller from me and said "Come on Dad, I'll do the driving – why don't you sit there and enjoy the view". And whenever I come out of my cabin I always find Venetia with a bottle of gin in her hand. "Ah" she would say "I thought you were about to join us Skipper. Let me pour you a gin and tonic". The other day I was thanking them for looking after me so well. "Anybody would think you didn't trust me to do anything on this boat" I said. My, how they all laughed – a little longer and harder than I thought was strictly necessary. And I'm not sure I didn't notice some awkward glances being exchanged between them.

Today we had to perform our first burial at sea. It was a sombre and formal occasion. The body (or what sadly remained of it) was placed on a board, the RCC burgee respectfully covering the corpse. We all mustered on the poop deck. Hats off and heads bowed, a few words of devotion and gratitude to the life of the deceased were said before a salute was sounded on the bosun's whistle. The board was lowered and the backbone and tale of poor Dolly was committed to the deep.

Mind you, we damned nearly had another burial at sea a few days ago. In the middle of some thick weather in the Drake Passage, Peter was at the helm. All of a sudden, there was whistling noise and a very long, very heavy piece of solid stainless steel with a sharpened point at the end came whistling down from the very top of the mast from which it had detached itself, shot past Peter's head and impaled itself in the deck. As Richard said "That would have been an uncomfortable call to the Downstairs Skipper". Must remember to check the masthead fittings more often.

Having been stormbound in Caleta Martial for 24 hours, the forecast suggested that today the wind would abate a bit and back round to the southwest for a few hours before coming in super strong again from the west. This was the only opportunity we would have to escape for the next few days. So we were up early and at 0630 we raised the anchor and headed north for the 75 mile penultimate passage to Puerto Williams. As I type this blog we are half way across Bahia Nassau (aka Bahia Nausea) having just had an amazing visitation from a school of 15-18 Peale's dolphins who put on a spectacular display of gymnastics, just like they did when we were coming through the Strait of Le Maire, leaping out of the water and twisting and turning before splashing back into the water again. Magic moments.

## **At Last – The Celebrations**

**Position: 54:56.106S 067:37.164W, Tied Alongside The Micalvi, Puerto Williams**  
**Date: 24 January**

I last left you as we were crossing the 35 mile wide Bahia Nassau on our 78 mile passage back to Puerto Williams, being escorted by a large school of acrobatic Peale's dolphins. The sea was very confused all the way over the bay with conflicting waves coming from every conceivable angle. Had we not been hardened to being chucked around it would have been distinctly uncomfortable. No wonder it is known as Bahia Nausea.

Having headed north across the bay we started the slow turn west into the Beagle Channel. The Chileans, under whose bureaucratic control we were passing through these waters, are nanny-like in their interest in your progress. There are manned naval stations about every 20 miles and if you don't report into them by radio, they call you. As we were passing Puerto Toro (the southernmost village in the world) we were called up on the radio. We were told that a yacht was entering that had been trying to make their way to Puerto Williams, but the conditions were so appalling that they had to turn back. Did we want to stop off in Puerto Toro like them or were we to persist in our madness and try to continue west? We saw the yacht that had been repelled by the appalling conditions. It was a stout steel motor-sailor, built like a tank. If it was too much for them, it would be unpleasant for us at the least, whatever we had recently come through. OK, we said, we'll come in to Puerto Toro. Which we did, and tied up alongside the quay.

Puerto Toro is a king crab fishing village. In the season (not now) it is crowded with fishing boats. Now, it was deserted. Walking up the hill to the few houses we met a young girl. She explained that the population of the village was normally 27 but most people were away travelling just now and there were only two families there at present, one of which was the man from the naval station who had pleaded with us to come in. The whole place felt rather spooky and as we could see that the dark cloud from the west had dispersed, we decided to try our luck and push on to Puerto Williams, our destination.

In the event, after sailing through a bit of vigorous wind, we had one of the best sails we had had since the expedition had begun. And there was a strong incentive for us to get back to Puerto Williams. In the tiny port is a grounded ex-munitions ship called the Micalvi, against which yachts tie up. The Micalvi is legendary for being the southernmost yacht club in the world. It is where the few yachts that venture over to Antarctica congregate – and to where they all return, to celebrate their achievement in the Micalvi bar drinking reputedly the most lethal pisco sours in the world.

So yesterday evening we celebrated. And how. They say that one pisco sour is enough, two are too many, and three are not enough. Oh dear. By the time we were thrown out, I'm afraid to report that one of our company had to be carried out, singing, lifted onto the boat and put to bed. Whilst letting the side down rather, what goes on the boat stays on the boat, so I certainly won't be mentioning her name on this blog.

Today was tidying up day, with hangovers like none of us could remember. We are due in Ushuaia in two days time for the triumphal arrival to be greeted by the Downstairs Skipper amongst others. Everything on the boat was sodden with now

thawed condensation. And for a week or more there had been the pervasive stench of diesel on board and an unhealthy quantity of it in the bilge, source unknown.

Richard had a bad start. He was stumbling around, bleary eyed. “I say” he said “those pisco sours were jolly strong – I can barely focus”. It later transpired that he had forgotten the night before in his euphoria to take out his contact lenses. This morning he had popped in another pair of contact lenses on top.

Mattresses were thrown on deck for drying out. All the lockers were emptied, scrubbed clean, dried and re-stowed. Venetia, our Quartermaster, made out a list of all stores and where they were stowed, for the handover to the DS. We found the source of the diesel leak and remedied it (we hope). I tried to fix a bilge pump that had broken, without success.

Hopefully the enormous amount of hard work put in by the crew today will enable us all to explore this beautiful part of Tierra del Fuego tomorrow. Unless, of course, we make the mistake of visiting the bar of the Micalvi, alongside which we are tied, for the second night in a row.

### **Mina2 Skippers Reunited – Antarctic Crew Emotional Departure**

**Position: 54:48.8S 068:18.36W, Ushuaia**

**Date: 28 January 2012**

Sorry to have deserted you all for the last few days, but there’s been a lot going on. Yes, I’m afraid we did hit the Micalvi for the second night in a row for a further top up of pisco sours and, yes, we did wake up the following morning with more hangovers. But the cobwebs were brushed aside with what promised to be a light walk up the hill behind Puerto Williams called Cerro Bandera – Flag Hill. From the Micalvi you could see the tiny little Chilean flag fluttering at the top of the hill – it didn’t seem too far away.

Off we set along river tumbling down the valley and past beaver dams until we started heading up the hill. We found the track surprisingly steep for a while, until it got steeper still. Up the hill the track twisted, higher and higher and steeper and steeper. After an hour and a half of torture we were surprised to burst through the tree line where at last we could see our destination. As we craned our necks upwards, the tiny fluttering flag was now much bigger but seemed just as far away. After two hours we eventually reached the flag which, in reality turned out to be monstrously large. We met a couple of guys who said if we went just a little further to the TRUE summit, we would be greeted by the most spectacular 360 degree panorama. The true summit turned out to be a little further than we had anticipated and after three hours of solid climbing – 960 metres – we crested the very last crest and there, before us and all around us, was the most stunning view imaginable stretching more than 50 miles in each direction. On the one side we could see the Beagle Channel stretching from the Le Maire Strait to the mountains well beyond Ushuaia and on the other side a magnificent panorama of sharp-peaked snow-topped mountains, valleys and lakes. It was breathtaking. Whilst soaking in this spectacle, two enormous condors – comparatively rare this far east - glided towards us and hovered overhead. We returned to the Micalvi after six hours of hard walking, completely exhausted.

But no time for rest. We were to leave early the following morning on our very last passage of the cruise, bound for Ushuaia in Argentina 25 miles up the Beagle Channel where we were to be greeted by the Downstairs Skipper and our daughter Selina. During the three days we had been in Puerto Williams more boats had arrived. We were on the inside tied up to the Micalvi, but three other boats were now rafted up outside us. Close in front of us and behind us were also rafts of yachts four deep. They would not appreciate being woken at 0600 to let us out, so there was going to be a big manoeuvre with all the boats outside us untying and letting us out, and then we were all to return in a different order with us on the outside. All the other boats managed to get out between the narrow gap left by the boats in front of us and behind us. Now it was our turn.

It was drinks time and all the crews from all the other yachts were enjoying the late afternoon sun on their decks, glass in hand, assessing the skill of each skipper in extricating his boat from the melee of parked yachts. We started the engine, slipped our lines and started the tricky manoeuvre of going backwards and forwards, slowly turning the boat. I control the engine speed and direction with a handle by the wheel, pushing it backwards and forwards. As I was executing the 25-point turn, something rather awkward happened. The all-important handle came away in my hand. There I was, in reverse gear, moving at quite a lick and heading for a yacht just a few feet away with no way of stopping the boat (boats have no brakes). All I could do was turn the engine off, wave the handle in my hand and scream "I have no control". The embarrassing reality of the situation was immediately picked up by everybody. As my crew threw themselves to the back of the boat to try and fend us off the boat we were rapidly approaching, the bubble of conversation on the other yachts immediately ceased and every head turned towards us. Everyone in a "marina" loves a disastrous cock-up to liven up the evening. As we were straddled awkwardly across the moored boats, I flew down below to grab a few tools, an assortment of bolts and some gaffer tape and feverishly started to effect a temporary fix. What seemed to me like hours later, but was probably just a few minutes, I gingerly started the engine again and holding the tentatively repaired control stick in both hands whilst turning the wheel with my feet, we completed the manoeuvre.

All the boats involved then returned one by one and, last of all, we backed in again and tied ourselves on the outside of the raft. Minutes later, as I was doing a more permanent repair to the control handle, another boat trying to leave Puerto Williams went aground in the shallow water just opposite us. Two cock-ups in one evening. The voyeurs were delighted. Mina2 went to the rescue. We dropped our dinghy and took a line to the stranded boat and tugged her off with our winches. So at least we managed to claw back a little credit after our earlier humiliation.

Early the following morning we left Puerto Williams for the four hour final passage to Ushuaia. The Downstairs Skipper, and our wayward daughter Selina had arrived in Ushuaia the evening before to welcome us back from our epic adventure. As we sailed towards Ushuaia, we could see two tiny figures on the quayside waving handkerchiefs, and as the figures got larger we could see a large banner between them, proclaiming. "YOU'VE MADE IT MINA2!!!! WELL DONE!!". I have to admit I was having to brush the odd tear of emotion aside as we approached the quay and tied up. Peter and I sprang ashore and into the arms of Maria and Selina. Completely out of character for a rough and tough veteran Antarctic, but by this time I was trying

not to blub like a baby. The two Skippers of Mina2 and both our children were reunited once more.

Since our arrival, we have had a hectic time whilst the ever-energetic Richard has been trying to cram in as much as possible in the 36 hours before he, Venetia and Ewan were to fly back to Buenos Aires on the first leg of their long journey home.

After lunch today, the awful moment arrived when the bags were packed, the taxi was waiting and Peter and I had to say an emotional goodbye to our shipmates. We had together braved the most vicious seas in the world to visit the most remote, spectacularly beautiful but potentially treacherous continent in the world at the uttermost end of the earth, well beyond the reach of any rescue services. The sights we have seen, the wildlife we have encountered and the adventure we have shared can never be repeated and will never be forgotten by any of us. This is the story we will be telling our grandchildren.

Without my incredibly competent crew it could never have happened, and without them it would not have been half as much fun. I owe all of you: Peter, Ewan, Richard and Venetia an enormous debt, and give to you my heartfelt thanks for making my dream come true.

### **The End of the Photos – But Don't Go Away – More Excitements to Follow**

So that's the end of the photos, but don't go away. There is more to come. Tomorrow the DS, Selina and I are to be joined by old friends Christine and Fernando from Buenos Aires.

Together, we will be cruising the Chilean fjords of Tierra Del Fuego. I've been going through the itinerary with some of the pro charter skippers. They say that whilst you can't beat Antarctica for its isolated beauty and grandeur, and the achievement of getting there and back, the Chilean channels are in their own way every bit as beautiful and spectacular.

So calving glaciers, beaver dams and dramatic walks up spectacular mountains beckon. I can't wait.

I'll probably start blogging again in three or four days time.

### **Cruise of the Fjords of Tierra del Fuego Starts Here**

**Position: 54:51.490S 068:48.902W, Caleta Ferrari, Bahia Yendegaia**

**Date: 3 February 2012**

We've enjoyed a much needed wind down after the drama and excitement of our Antarctic cruise. I seem to have been sleeping about 18 hours a day so I clearly had a bit more catching up to do than I thought. But now, fully refreshed, we are all very excited about starting our cruise of the Chilean channels and fjords of Tierra del Fuego with their spectacular mountains and glaciers. I'd been so focussed on the more demanding Antarctic cruise that I hadn't spent much time researching the Tierra del Fuego cruise. So I've had to do a little cramming, but with the help of the many new

friends I've made in this wonderful community of serious (and mainly professional) high latitude sailors. I was afraid that after the ultimate thrill of Antarctica the channels of Chile might prove to be a bit of an anti-climax. But excitement of what is still to come has been triggered by comments from veterans of the area like "Antarctica is must see – must do, but to my mind the channels are even more spectacularly beautiful". Laura on Pelagic Australis with whom I went on my recce to Antarctica last February kindly spent a long time with me going through all the places we simply had to see. The pilot book is now annotated with Laura's comments like "Cool beyond belief" "Awesome!" and "WOW!!!". She said she was sooo excited for us as we simply hadn't any idea what an awesome time was ahead of us. So, yes, we're now pretty excited.

We've got a total of five weeks cruising the channels. Great friends Christine and Fernando joined us a couple of days ago and will be staying a couple of weeks, then another young friend, Andrew, will be joining Maria and me for a further three weeks. One inconvenience is that the airport where all our guests fly into and, importantly, the only place in the area where one can buy food supplies is in Ushuaia in Argentina and the channels are in Chile. The port at which one has to clear into Chile is Puerto Williams which is 25 miles down the Beagle Channel in the wrong direction. So you have to spend a couple of hours with the Argentine bureaucrats checking out, four hours or more getting from Ushuaia to Puerto Williams then a couple of hours with the Chilean bureaucrats checking in. And then one has to bash one's way into the relentless Beagle Channel westerlies to get back to where we started from and start the cruise, the whole procedure taking up the best part of two days at the beginning of the cruise and two days at the end.

Christine and Fernando live in Buenos Aires where the average temperature in the summer (which it is now in the southern hemisphere) is about 35C. The average temperature down here in the south is about 8C. So they arrived with a stunning array of quilted clothing, scarves, thick socks, gloves and bizarre headwear. One of Fernando's many hats is Peruvian wool which covers his entire face (which, granted, is a plus point) save for two holes for his eyes. He looks like a member of the Peruvian Ku-Klux-Klan.

I once received a card with a drawing of two men chatting with a cross looking woman in the background. One of the men was saying to the other "You know, if I hadn't got married I might have gone through life thinking I had no faults at all". And so it is with Skippers. Being Master Under God gives one an infallibility. My Antarctic crew were delightfully sycophantic almost to the point of grovelling. It felt pretty good. But it can get dangerous if one starts believing in the infallibility hype. Enter the Downstairs Skipper to bring my life back into balance. To be honest I hadn't realised quite how wrong I am, nor how often. Selina (our wayward daughter) has invented a new game. It's called Positivity Knocks. You get a positive point for any positive comment or compliment, and a negative point for every negative comment or criticism. I don't think the DS understands the rules – she thinks she's winning with minus 1000 points.

Yesterday, having cleared out of Ushuaia we motored down the Beagle Channel in, unusually, no wind to Puerto Williams. On arrival I was delighted to see that Polar Wind was there with Osvaldo, Juta and their little son Théo who I first met in Buenos

Aires. Also, fresh back from their Antarctic adventure, were my great friends, the reprobates from Dawnbreaker who we've been following around since we first met in the Falklands. So having got the paperwork sorted, we all ended up in the Micalvi. Too many pisco sours were drunk once again, particularly given we had an early start this morning. We had 47 miles to sail due west to our first stop of the channels cruise and, we wanted to get as far as possible before strong westerlies kicked in mid morning.

We were up at 0530 and off at 0615. The Beagle Channel is only 4 miles across but runs east-west for about 100 miles, high snow clad mountains on either side. The westerlies kicked in a little earlier than expected. and we've spent most of the day bashing into a steep chop which covered us in driving spray and stopped the boat dead in the water. Rather than averaging 6.5 knots, we were at times struggling to make 2.5 knots. It was all rather trying. At lunch time we stopped in a little protected anchorage (Caleta Martinez 54:54.833S 068:16.311W)- for a couple of hours for a bit of relief. And then we bashed on to Caleta Ferrari in Bahia Yendegaia. Ferrari is a small bay in the big fjord just to the east of Isla Gordon. The bay has a couple of houses lived in by a gaucho who supplements his income by taking sailors on horse-trekking trips and has been known to lay on asados – South American barbecues of whole Patagonian lambs. But this evening, we are just sitting at anchor after our long day and admiring the precipitace peaked mountains all around us, thickly tree clad on the bottom half and then bald and rugged on the top half above the tree line. At the edge of the bay, the colour of the water changes dramatically from a dark greeny blue to a milky light green from the melt waters from the glacier at head of the bay. We're looking forward to going ashore tomorrow and getting the kayak out for a bit of coastal exploration.

### **A Pause in the Cruise of the Fjords of Tierra del Fuego**

**Position: 54:51.490S 068:48.902W, Caleta Ferrari, Bahia Yendegaia**

**Date: 5 February 2012**

Yes, the sharp-witted amongst you will have noticed that two days on and we are still in the same place. The Cruise of the Fjords of Tierra del Fuego has got off to a slow start due to adverse weather. We knew from the forecasts that a couple of low depressions were coming through which promised strong winds for about four days. What I had underestimated was that the steep chop that the winds created in the Beagle Channel were capable of reducing boat speed by more than two thirds – turning a 4-hour passage into an unacceptably long 12-hour passage.

So yesterday we stayed for an extra day in Caleta Ferrari in the Bahia Yendegaia (58°24.33S 68°00.00W – check it out on Google Earth). It is a lovely little bay surrounded by mountains covered with thorny calafate bushes and beach trees, but it is just a stopping off place on the way to the fjords that have the spectacular glaciers. The weather has been atrocious. The wind is coming from the south west – straight from Antarctica, so the temperature has dropped to 3°C and wave after wave of sleety showers discouraged us from spending too much time ashore on bracing walks.

So we were all down below quietly reading or, in my case, fashioning an award-winning blog when we were jolted by a cacophony of fog horns. I looked out of the

window to find the bloody reprobates on Dawnbreaker had turned up to share the anchorage with us, after a hard 10-hour slog from Puerto Williams.

Meanwhile Dolly Mk2 had had her first amputation which was sizzling in the oven. Whilst it was cooking I popped over to Dawnbreaker with a bucket of absolutely clear Antarctic ice for a G&T or two. Dawnbreaker were horrified to hear that I was not creating a Cordon Bleu pudding for dinner and insisted that they come over after dinner with all the ingredients. Which they did.

The six of them arrived with two bottles of sparkling wine, and Ton Ton, the Swiss-Brazilian and self-appointed Chef on Dawnbreaker, took over our galley. Pears were peeled, cored and sliced and braised in a jus of fine white wine. Swiss chocolate was melted in a bain marie and the ice cream was put into the freezer. So after our dinner of succulent roasted lamb and sauteed potatoes, our taste buds were further bombarded with the delectable pud and washed down with fine wine. Then the drinking began.

The rest of the evening was, to be honest, a bit of a blur but suffice to say in the morning we counted amongst the empty bottles one of whisky, an entire bottle of Kahlua, and ten bottles of wine.

That wasn't the only thing I discovered in the morning. I popped my head out of the cockpit and there was Dolly Mk2, gone. Instead, hanging on the backstay, was a can of Heinz Baked Beans on which had been written "Dolly Mk3". I looked round to Dawnbreaker swinging to her anchor and there, at the top of her 100-foot mast was poor DollyMk2, stolen by the pirates.

We were heading off further up the Beagle Channel and had to recover Dolly Mk2, the source of about four further nourishing meals. We put a boarding party on board Dawnbreaker, daggers between their teeth, and after a light skirmish with the still groggy pirate crew, Dolly Mk2 was once again hanging from our backstay. Bahia Yendegaia where we had been anchored is very well protected and you can't tell what the wind is like in the Beagle Channel. But as we left the protection of the bay, we soon found out. It was blowing a full gale and whilst the white horses looked very pretty as they marched relentlessly towards us, our speed through the water was getting slower and slower.

The Chilean Armada keep a very close eye on all the shipping in their area, and particularly yachts. We had reported to them by radio as we were leaving Yendegaia and as we battled our way into the increasingly fierce winds they called us up. The conditions were worsening and they advised us to return to Yendegaia. We were already one day behind schedule so we advised them that we would plug on for the time being. But after half an hour with the wind now shrieking through the rigging at 55 knots, we threw the towel in, turned around and now with the fierce winds from behind us, we shot back in double quick time to the protection of the bay and to the same spot in Caleta Ferrari where we had already spent an unscheduled two days.

Meanwhile Christine, who is not renowned for her cast iron stomach, had taken one of her strong seasick pills just before we turned back. It was not until we reached the

tranquillity of the anchorage that it kicked in, so she spent the rest of the day like a drugged zombie.

It was getting colder and colder and as the endless clouds washed over the surrounding slopes, they were covered in a pretty mantle of snow. We went for another walk ashore, but it was so wet and cold that we returned to the boat for tea and homemade bread.

Tomorrow we are determined to press on regardless of the conditions. Having spent three years planning the cruise to the deep south, but having only a few short weeks to explore the channels, I'm not going to let a little discomfort get in the way of our plans.

**Slow Wet Windy Progress Down the Channels**  
**Position: 54:56.413S 069:09.401W, Caleta Olla**  
**Date: 7 February 2012**

Just before we left Caleta Ferrari we were returning to the boat in the dinghy when all of a sudden we were surrounded by some inquisitive Peale's dolphins who were swimming around us and under us, so close we could touch them with our hands. Being this close to nature is a very special privilege.

We set off in driving snow and a biting strong wind for the 25 mile passage further west down the Beagle Channel, motoring hard (as always in the channels going west, the wind funnels directly on the nose making sailing impractical for all but the most masochistic of purists).

Passing through a very narrow channel between the north shore and Isla del Diablo (Devil Island – 54°57.259S 069°07.228W), a couple of seals poked their head up and then dived as we approached. Shortly after, we entered the little bay of Caleta Olla – 54°56.413S 069°09.401W . One moment the wind was screaming but as we tucked round the headland there was instant tranquillity in this pretty little bay. We put the anchor down before dropping the dinghy to take two long ropes ashore (again being harassed by a school of three playful dolphins) which we tied to trees to hold our stern close to the shore under the protection of the trees.

Not long after we tied in, we were joined by the pirates on Dawnbreaker who had also been stormbound in Ferrari and, like us, were keen to continue their way west. A small fishing boat that uses the bay as a haven also came in. We bartered a couple of bottles of wine for an enormous quantity of delicious just-caught fish, neatly filleted by the Chilean fishermen.

Yesterday morning, something extraordinary happened. It stopped raining for a few hours and the wind abated from gale force to merely strong. We took advantage, donned our walking gear and set off for a challenging two hour walk up and over the hills in front of the bay. Appearing before us was the dramatic Ventisquero (glacier) Holanda seemingly coming from heaven itself as it descended through the mist and

ending abruptly with ice cliffs hundreds of feet high into a milky green lake. This was the first glacier we had come across in the channels and it was breathtaking.

Not all of us were able to enjoy the view from the top, however. The challenge of the rough terrain had proved to be too much for Christine so she and Fernando rested for a while before making their way back down the mountain to the dinghy on the beach. When Selina, the DS and I returned to the dinghy we were concerned that Christine and Fernando weren't already there – they should have arrived more than half an hour before us. My concern increased as the weather started getting much colder and the wind picked up again. Eventually I saw Fernando's head pop up from behind some reeds in the boggy marshland by the side of the mountain. What were they doing there? Then Christine's head emerged, looking completely exhausted and her face like thunder. They had had a murderous walk back down the mountain having taken a wrong turn which led them through thick forest, across fast flowing rivers and finally the swamp from hell. They were soaked through and near the point of exhaustion. Fernando said he felt like Shackleton. Christine's comments were colourful, but unprintable. But nothing that a change into warm dry clothes and a nice hot cup of tea couldn't put right.

Dawnbreaker had moved on during the day to Seno Pia 20 miles further west and her place was taken by Landfall, a small but pretty American yacht with Denis and Michael on board, who joined us on Mina2 for drinks at Happy Hour.

I know that this area at this time of year has a reputation for being quite wet, a little bit chilly and a trifle windy but after a week of relentless driving rain or snow in gale force winds and visibility so bad that one can barely see the spectacular glaciers, I'm wondering whether we aren't being just a little unlucky with the weather. And the forecasts are useless, far removed from reality in terms of wind strength and timing. Anyway, first thing tomorrow morning we intend to plug on, regardless of the conditions, to Seno Pia, the first of the "must see" fjords.

### **So THIS is What We Came For**

**Position: 54:47.800S 069:37.768W, Caleta Beaulieu, Seno Pia (Eastern Arm)**

**Date: 8 February 2012**

By 0800 we were untying the lines from the trees, bringing the dinghy back on board, weighing the anchor and then we were off for the last of the longer passages west, about 20 miles to Seno Pia. Predictably the wind was very strong, bitterly cold and coming directly from the direction we wanted to go. But we were now out of the wider stretch of the Beagle Channel and in the narrower Brazo Noroeste, so at least the waves heading towards us weren't large and breaking, so our speed was good.

We had just got a sailing angle and for the first time for a while had got some sail up and had blissfully turned the engine off. Being wafted at last by God's own energy, we were rewarded by the blow, then the unmistakable fin and back of a Minke whale. We watched it slowly rising, blowing then diving again for about 15 minutes before it worked its way east and out of sight.

Within three hours we were negotiating the very narrow, shallow and invisible gap through the submerged moraine into the fjord. Once through I could relax once more. The rain that had been lashing us had ceased and the sun was struggling to emerge from the reducing layers of cloud.

Seno Pia is a fjord carved by glaciers over millions of years. It is about xx miles long and ½ mile wide. Enormous mountains of granite fall almost vertically into the still, protected waters. Moving further up the fjord, it splits into two arms. We were heading into the eastern arm to a beautiful protected anchorage, but before we settled down for the day, we continued up the arm. By now, for the first time in a week, the clouds had dispersed and the sun was glinting on the numerous waterfalls cascading down the steep granite cliffs. All of a sudden we were negotiating our way round pieces of ice floating in the water. As we rounded a bend we were confronted with a magnificent glacier piling down the mountain in front of us and ending in a ice wall hundreds of feet high and a mile across. But we weren't yet at the end of the fjord so we continued slaloming round more, thicker and bigger bits of ice until yet another glacier, even more magnificent than the first, appeared before us. We continued, closer and closer until we were just a few hundred metres from the ice wall towering above us. We turned the engine off and floated in the still water listening to the grumbling and groaning of this vast river of ice edging forwards millimetre by millimetre, succumbing to the pressure of gravity on the weight of hundreds of millions of tons of ice behind it. Suddenly there was a roar like thunder and an enormous chunk of ice toppled over, shattering into a thousand smaller pieces as it collapsed into the water, setting up a tsunami that surged towards us. We rocked violently as the shock waves passed under us.

This was our own private show. The ice we had seen collapse had been sucked as moisture from the sea and settled as snow tens of thousands of years ago. After its millennial treacle-like journey down the mountain it was now being returned to the sea to its original state and parts of it would start the whole journey again. We had been privileged to see this moment. And it was our own private show. Nobody lives in this wild terrain; there are no tourist hotels here, no tripper boats; no cruise ships can enter this fjord. Only a handful of yachts each year are privileged enough to witness this noble performance.

And of course, the performance doesn't stop – ever. It started millions of years ago when the Andes and this extension of them first burst through the earth's crust, and it will probably continue for millions more years to come. Once we returned to our idyllic anchorage at the bottom of the eastern arm – with the most stunning view of the first glacier we passed - periodically we would hear what sounded like a clap of thunder as, day and night, the inexorable advance of the glaciers calved yet another iceberg. Half an hour after each clap of thunder, snug in our anchorage, we would feel the slightest ripple as the tsunami that had started five miles up the fjord made its way to lap at the small beach behind us.

Once we had tied into the little tree-lined Caleta Beaulieu, the inflatable kayak was chucked into the water and, escorted by the dinghy under oar-power, we all explored the bay and the pretty off-lying islands.

After dinner, we went back on deck to view the eerie light of the glacier as dusk settled. Above us stars twinkled through the clear sky – possibly the first I had seen for a couple of months. In Antarctica it was too light throughout the night for any stars to shine and, since my return to Tierra del Fuego, there has been constant cloud cover. Behind the glacier mountain a mysterious light loomed. It got brighter and brighter until a sliver of bright white light emerged which over the next couple of minutes evolved into the brightest of full moons. So many magic moments in one day.

### **What a Difference a Day Makes**

**Position: 54:56.682S 069:46.109W, Caleta Cinco Estrellas, Seno Tres Brazos**

**Date: 11 February 2012**

I left you in Caleta Beaulieu having had an amazing day with our first glaciers. In the pilot book that describes all the various anchorages in this area it says that there are reports that Caleta Beaulieu is peaceful and protected in all winds although there is an uncorroborated report that in a strong northwesterly wind, violent catabatic winds can bounce off the mountains and hit you from the south east. This uncorroborated report is now corroborated. We were anchored in deep water close into a corner of the bay with two stern lines ashore tied to trees.

I awoke at 0400 with the boat heeling at 10 degrees and the shriek of 50 knot squalls trying to drag the anchor out of its insecure holding ground and smash the boat into the rocky shore. It was not a relaxing night. I got Selina and Fernando to dress ready for action, including boots, as if the anchor gave way to the force of the williwaws we would have seconds to spring into action before we hit the very near shore. Whilst they slept fitfully, I slept not at all. But the 40 kg Rocna anchor, the Best In The World, did hold and we survived to sail another day. There were also added benefits. I spent the latter part of the night sitting in the cockpit under a full moon and a clear sky. The wind that had for the previous week been from the south west pulling icy cold winds up from Antarctica had shifted to the northwest and it was positively balmy.

Talking of balmy, when Selina had been quizzing the DS about weather conditions she should expect in Tierra Del Fuego prior to coming out, she had been advised to expect weather like an English summer in the Lake District, so Selina had arranged her wardrobe around a selection of diaphanous garments and one sweater just in case. She was thinking of balmy. When I heard this, I was thinking barmy. Selina has been cadging thermal underwear, fleeces, quilted outer wear and waterproof overwear from everyone she can.

The following day (Thursday the 9<sup>th</sup>) it was blowing hard in the Beagle Channel but, whilst there were catabatic squalls in the fjord, the water was flat. So we went the seven miles up the other, western, arm of the fjord to see what was at the top. As we motored along we passed through line squalls whipping across the water, and even more violent williwaws manifested themselves as tornado like spirals of wind and water, twisting and turning across the narrow fjord (which was why we were motoring – get hit by one of those with sails up and they would be shredded).

As we approached the head of the fjord a glacier appeared on our right. As we progressed, yet another appeared ahead of us and, mind-blowingly, as we approached the final turn yet another glacier, even more spectacular than the others, revealed itself

to our left. We were bang in the middle of a veritable amphitheatre of glaciers all around us, stretching for ever upwards to the very top of the towering mountains, all heaving, groaning and calving enormous falls of ice in front of us. Sorry – I can't really go on. I've just run out of superlatives.

We had intended settling for the night in a different anchorage further back down the western arm but given the violence of the squalls we decided to return to Caleta Beaulieu back in the eastern arm for the night, albeit in a slightly different spot, less vulnerable to the possibility of a dragging anchor in the continuing squalls.

The following morning dawned without a cloud in the sky and the wind had died to a mere Force 5. There had been a lot of glacier activity during the night judging both by the sounds of thunderous roars and also by the fact that a lot of ice was sweeping past our anchored boat. The sun was warm as we untied our lines, weighed the anchor and made our way just a few miles southwest across the Beagle Channel. Apart from Christine who would feel cold at midday in the Sahara desert, we had all shed mountains of outer layers. Selina was beginning to search out her many unused outfits. I thought I would trump her and as we sailed across the Beagle Channel I appeared on deck bear-chested in a pair of swimming shorts. Old habits die hard and, granted, the combination with my industrial industrial freezer boots and a woolly hat might have looked a little odd, but I felt I cut a dash as I posed for photos on the poop deck.

We made our way into Seno Tres Brazos on the north shore of Isla Gordon, and down to Caleta Cinco Estrellas - \*\*\*\*\*5-Star bay – named with good reason. Not only is it fantastically picturesque, but it also an amazingly good storm shelter – not that we were for the moment expecting any storms. Being on the north coast of Isla Gordon rather than the south coast of Tierra Del Fuego, there are snow-capped mountains but no glaciers, so the scenery is completely different. The same steep sided mountains but they are clad in old stunted trees, feet thick moss, berry clad bushes and little lakes. We were in epic hiking country.

The anchorage itself is one of the most perfect I have seen. After entering the inlet, with the now customary playful school of dolphins joining us, shooting round under both the boat and the dinghy, there is a narrow gap between some rocks with a tranquil pool beyond. A large waterfall cascaded into the pool at its head, and Ringed kingfishers flitted from branch to branch of the surrounding trees. We tied ourselves into the pool with four lines – two from the bow pointing forwards and two from the stern pointing back. Storm proof in

No time for even an anchor nip (can you believe it). The kayak was straight into the water and, together with the dinghy we were all off exploring this perfect cove and playing with the dolphins.

I'm a bit behind so I'll send this now. Part 2 of Cinco Estrellas will follow (I hope) tomorrow.

**+++STOP PRESS+++MINA2 IN MAYDAY DRAMA+++STOP PRESS**  
**Date: 13 February 2012**

**+++STOP PRESS+++MINA2 IN LIFE-OR-DEATH MAYDAY  
DRAMA+++STOP PRESS**

Today, Mina2 and her valiant crew were lauded as heroes in a life-or-death race to save a stricken yacht and its single-handed crew in the treacherous Beagle Channel.

So might the headlines scream throughout the world tomorrow morning. We were heading from Caleta Cinco Estrellas in Seno Tres Brazos to Seno Garibaldi, the last chance that Fernando, Christine and our wayward daughter Selina would have to see another example of the stunning glaciers for which this part of the world is renowned. Fortuitously we were delayed for an hour by the sighting of a number of Sei whales which we stopped to watch. These are the fourth largest whales in the world. More than 50 feet long they are bigger and a lot heavier than Mina2 herself. Magnificent creatures. Time after time we saw, close by, the enormous blow of spray as they surfaced and exhaled before their endlessly long back and characteristic fin curved out of the water and slowly submerged again.

The reason they were here was obvious. Even we could see in the water large quantities of small shrimps – krill – which are their staple diet. It is extraordinary that such a small animal can sustain such monsters. But the Sei whales have enormous mouths with filters called baleen. They suck in hundreds of gallons of water and filter out the krill by the thousand for a tasty snack.

These were the largest whales I had ever seen. Apart from those close by Mina2 we could see dozens of blows all down the Beagle Channel as we made our way 7 miles west heading for Seno Garibaldi.

But I digress – you may be wanting to hear of our Mayday drama. We were only 10 minutes from the entrance to Garibaldi having fought our way against the obligatory strong wind and boat-stopping chop when we heard a faint and intermittent call on the VHF radio.

“Mayday, Mxxxxy, Mayxxx, this is yacht xxaxp. My position is 5x° x5 South 069° xx West. I have lost my rudder and am drifting towards rocks. I require assistance”.

We waited 20 seconds hoping to hear the Chilean Armada (Navy), who have several radio stations down the coast, responding. Nothing. So we responded to the as yet unknown yacht at his uncertain position. All we knew was that he was in fear of his life and he couldn't be that far away as we wouldn't have picked up any signal. After several repetitions we got his position. He was close to the entrance to Seno Tres Brazos that we had left just a couple of hours before, and it was John, a single-handed Anglo-Norwegian sailor with whom we had been drinking only a few days before on Dawnbreaker. He was on his tiny 28 ft yacht Tramp which he had sailed alone all the way from Norway. Clearly we were the only people who had picked up his faint VHF signal. We were his only hope. We turned tail, put the engine on at full speed and hoisted all the sail we could. We would be with him in about 45 minutes. Would this be in time before he was dashed on the rocks?

We motor-sailed at breakneck speed towards Tramps position. After what seemed a lifetime we saw a small spec in the water under the menacing towering cliffs. A red

flare went up. John was clearly desperate. By this time we were able to speak clearly to John by radio and I suggested that he prepare a rope bridle attached to the strong points of his yacht to attach a towing line. (I didn't get where I am today without some practical experience of being towed by lifeboats). Mind you, it was difficult finding the airtime to communicate with him. We had reported the emergency to the Chilean Armada. The numerous personnel at the numerous radio stations along the Chilean coast have a pretty dull life doing nothing but keeping tabs on the perfectly safe yachts in their vicinity. This was probably the most exciting thing that happened to them for weeks if not months and they were all trying to contact us at once for updates. Not that they could do anything themselves – their nearest Search and Rescue vessel was probably 90 miles away in Puerto Williams. Luckily Fernando took control of the emergency channel talking to all and sundry whilst, ironically, John and I had to switch to a leisure channel to have any hope of communication between the stricken yacht and its potential rescuer.

We managed to get to John in the nick of time - he was just a couple of hundred metres from the rocks. To say we were relieved to see each other is an understatement. We got a line to him and began the slow tow 5 miles across the Beagle Channel to Seno Pia which had a large safe anchorage where we knew from the multitude of radio messages Fernando had been fielding that there were a couple of yachts there who could help John tie in.

Once we had towed Tramp close into the shore of the anchorage, we anchored whilst the other boats' dinghies got John snugged in and safe at last. I then went over in our dinghy. John had been seriously shaken by the ordeal and was probably suffering from shock. I took him back to Mina2 for a much needed (by both of us) stiff drink and something to eat.

John was seriously lucky that the delay to our departure that morning had meant that we had, only just, picked up his Mayday call – nobody else heard it, although they had heard our response which had caused a flurry of calls to us that Fernando was picking up along with dealing with the Armada. But for poor John, his problems are just starting. It will not be possible for him to manufacture a rudder without getting to either Ushuaia or Puerto Williams. Somehow he will have to persuade one of the few passing yachts to head back to where they came from and tow him back. Meanwhile, for Christine, Fernando and Selina, they never did get to see the last of the glaciers at Garibaldi. Our time had run out and after saying an emotional goodbye to John, we made our way out and headed for the much closer Seno Romanche.

### **Catching Up With The Blog**

**Position: Puerto Williams, Beagle Channel, Chile**

**Date: 16 February 2012**

#### **First of all: UPDATE ON TRAMP:**

**As I was typing this blog whilst motoring (yet again) west up the Beagle Channel from Puerto Williams in Chile back to Ushuaia in Argentina, Fernando called me on deck. "Isn't that your friend John on Tramp?" he asked. A small boat was sailing slowly past us half a mile away, heading east. I called Tramp on the VHF, whilst turning the boat to rendezvous with him. Yes, he had spent a day and a half rebuilding his broken rudder by cutting up his floor boards, sufficient at**

**any rate to get him back to Puerto Williams. I motored round Tramp and checked out his handywork. It looked good, and John looked happy beyond belief. And so was I. The DS and I'll be returning to Puerto Williams in about 5 days time when we'll be able to get together with John over a pisco sour or three in the Micalvi to celebrate his safe return.**

### **Back to the blog:**

One of the problems coastal navigating rather than bobbing about on the ocean blue is that you often need to change direction or you hit something hard. The navigation requires constant attention. And once one gets into port, you have to spend most of your time either in the company of bureaucrats or sorting out problems. Hence little time to fashion a blog for you, for which my humble apologies. The President for Life of the Mina2 Blog Fan Club sent me an email saying that my daily blog was, for her, like a mug of Ovaltine – without it she couldn't get to sleep. So, if nothing else other than to ensure Barbara a good night's rest, here we go again.

I need to back pedal to before the drama of the Mayday rescue. We were, if you recall, in the delightfully pretty Caleta Cinco Estrellas – 5-Star Bay. We were snugly tied in having been escorted to our little pool by a school of friendly dolphins and we'd been for a kayak around the bay.

This seemed the perfect spot to sacrifice the middle bits of Dolly Mk2. Fernando and I went ashore to find some dry wood to make a Chilean asado (BBQ). We identified a delightful spot of lush grass, moss and stones close to the boat, and started building the bonfire that would become the glowing embers over which Dolly Mk2's delicate ribs and chops would be cooked.

I cannot believe the mistake I made. I have more salt water in my bloodstream than I have blood. In terms of being at one with Nature's aquatic rhythms I'm right up there with Magellan and Moitessier. But over time, as the water level rose and our patch of idyllic grass, moss and stones was getting smaller and smaller, I realised that I had completely miscalculated the tide. Our flaming bonfire, soon to be barbecue, was in grave danger of being swamped. I tried my Canute routine, ordering the tide to stop rising, but rise it did. By the time we had Dolly's carcass smoking away over the embers, Fernando and I were standing by its side ankle deep in water, the ripples now lapping millimetres away from the embers. But Mother Nature was clearly just giving me a lesson and didn't want to spoil our meal, and we heaved a sigh of relief as the water first stopped rising, then ever so slowly started falling. Close call, and Dolly was as delicious as ever.

After gorging ourselves on the crispy, yet succulent, ribs of the lamb, Selina and I were sitting in the cockpit, the stars twinkling overhead. The waterfall was rushing down the mountain and splashing into the pool just feet from our stern. For me it was one of those magical evenings. For Selina it was clearly an irritation. "God, this is a noisy place" she said "last night I couldn't sleep for the sound of thunderous roars from the glacier, and now this. At what time do they switch this bloody waterfall off?". For all her so-called green credentials, I'm afraid that Selina is at heart a city girl.

The following morning we went for a walk up the surrounding hills, not least to get some photos of Mina2 sitting in her snug pool. This really is a hiker's paradise and perhaps if we return here on our second cruise beginning next week, we will try something a bit more challenging.

The next day we left for one last look at another glacier, before heading back to send Christine, Fernando and Selina back to their respective homes (actually, Selina doesn't have a proper home at the moment. She's probably dossing in a yurt somewhere). As we approached the entrance to Seno Garibaldi we heard the Mayday call, described in an earlier blog, that changed our itinerary somewhat. Instead, after the drama, we went to Seno Romanche and tied up in Caleta Morning near the entrance to the fjord (the other bays in Romanche are charmingly called Caleta Midday and Caleta Evening). Because of the day's excitements we arrived late at 1950 so had no time to explore the surrounding area.

The whole of the following day we sailed, rather than motored, for the first time I could remember. Returning east we now had the wind behind us – and what a wind. It was shrieking at 40-50 knots, but with just a bit of headsail up we were screaming along. As we passed the various Coastguard stations we were told that all yachts were being instructed to head for the nearest haven, but we charged on regardless – we were having far too much fun to stop. Notwithstanding, I think it was the coldest sail I've ever had – including Antarctica. The temperature was approaching freezing but we were constantly being lashed by torrential rain/sleet and the wind chill factor was something else. We stopped off for the night at a pretty little nook in the rocks in some islands near Navarino and continued the next day in much more moderate conditions to our Chilean destination of Puerto Williams and the Micalvi. And today we have to backtrack the 25 miles to Ushuaia to clear back into Argentina.

### **Change Of Crew in Ushuaia – Snoopy Has a “Friend”**

**Position: Ushuaia, Beagle Channel, Chile**

**Date: 19 February 2012**

We arrived back in Ushuaia a couple of days ago, feeling rather nervous. The Pirates of Dawnbreaker had declared war whilst accepting our hospitality on Mina2 by stealing Dolly Mk2 from our backstay and replacing her with a tin of Heinz Baked Beans relabelled “Dolly Mk3”. They then upped the anti (sic) by writing highly derogatory remarks about my blog on their website. I quote:

“An animated discussion of the appropriate use of Maydays quickly turned to the topic of a certain English blogger who writes the tabloid of blogs for the unwashed masses. We couldn't help but be appalled by his cavalier attitude towards life and death, and his profiteering from others misfortunes to boost his ratings with sensationalist headlines and grandiose stories. We can only hope that his readers will see through this grandstanding and turn to a more scholarly and respectable blog such as ourselves.”

You, Dear Readers, the unwashed masses? I can almost see you blanching at the insult. And so was I. How very dare they.

Of course, this is all driven by jealousy. They had heard that Mina2's blog was, in January, the most-read cruising sailor's blog in the universe with a hit count that reached many thousands (true, thanks to you all). Dawnbreaker's ranking, on the other hand, was pathetically low. To see why, have a look at [www.blog.mailasail.com/dawnbreaker](http://www.blog.mailasail.com/dawnbreaker). A great loss of Scandinavian face.

But such scurrilous accusations cannot pass without comment, so I managed to hack into Dawnbreaker's blog and posted a correction, together with a link to Mina2's blogsite so Dawnbreaker's few followers could see what a proper blog looks like.

It took Dawnbreaker less time to discover my hacked posting than I had imagined. They were incandescent.

As we approached the quayside in Ushuaia, the whole crew of Dawnbreaker were there waiting for us, bristling with indignation but, as we drew alongside, I waved a white flag of truce (perspicaciously handed to me by the DS sensing the ugly scene that was developing). Everybody fell about laughing, and the coarse reproaches of Dawnbreaker and the sophisticated crew of Mina2 are once again the best of friends.

The day before yesterday our wayward daughter, Selina, left after our memorable first two-week cruise of the Tierra del Fuego fjords. I pretended I was sorry to see her go, but after the usual divisive tantrums on board, and particularly after she tried to rip my carefully nurtured Antarctic beard from my face, frankly I was glad to see the back of her. She can go back to her yurt in the UK and good riddance.

What a shame she didn't get to meet Andrew, our latest crew-victim, who arrived 24 hours later. We'd not met Andrew before. He is the son of the brother of a close friend. Swiss/Argentine, he arrived after a long journey from Geneva. Charm personified, he came loaded with thoughtful goodies – multiple bars of the finest Swiss chocolate, nut cakes, and home-made cookies baked by his girlfriend. The only contra-indication is that he has a beard. Never trust a man with a beard - that's what I say. Also, disturbingly, he drinks nothing but water – no tea, no coffee, no alcohol. I'm not sure if this is a good thing or a bad thing. On the one hand he won't be drinking me out of boat and home like the Three Drunks but, on the other hand, can you really trust a teetotaler? But, as an indication of his sensitivity and thoughtfulness (so lacking in Selina) he brought, being an avid Mina2 blog reader, a little friend for Able Seadog Snoopy - an adorable, cuddly Swiss St Bernard dog.

ASD Snoopy got frightfully overexcited. Immediately they began sniffing each others bottoms, and in no time "Bernie" was licking Snoopy almost to death. Snoopy was in heaven. He's been on board for four months and has been craving a bit of dog company.

Tomorrow morning we say goodbye to Christine & Fernando who return to Buenos Aires and the DS and I, with Andrew, ASD Snoopy and Bernie clear out of Argentina once again and flog our way back to Puerto Williams to clear back into Chile for our Chilean fjord cruise Mk2 for the next three weeks.

**Chilean Fjord Cruise Mk2 Starts With Another Gale**

**Position: 54° 51.453S 068° 48.863W, Caleta Ferrari, Bahia Yendegaia**

**Date: 22 February 2012**

The day before yesterday we returned, once again, from Ushuaia to Puerto Williams to clear into Chile in order to start our second cruise of the Chilean fjords.

Ushuaia in Argentina is the place to and from where crew arrive by plane, and it is the only place with supermarkets where one can stock up with provisions for a long cruise. So it has to be the starting point for any cruise of the spectacular fjords and glaciers which branch off the Beagle Channel, starting 50 miles to the west of Ushuaia. Only problem is that Ushuaia is in Argentina and the fjords are in Chile and the only place where you can clear into Chile is 25 miles in the wrong direction at Puerto Williams. So the first two days and the last two days of any cruise is spent clearing out of and into the two respective countries and sailing the 25 miles away to Puerto Williams then battling against the fierce westerlies all the way back, past Ushuaia where one first started and on to the fjords.

So having cleared into Chile in Puerto Williams we left at breakfast time yesterday morning for the 42 mile first passage to Caleta Ferrari at the top of Bahia Yendegaia.

As we left Puerto Williams we saw the distinctive blows of the enormous Sei whales which we had seen before rescuing John Wheeler on Tramp. Since then I have discovered that it is almost unheard of to see baleen whales in the Beagle Channel so we have been very privileged to see so many.

As the morning progressed, the strong westerlies against which we were punching, became very strong westerlies. By lunchtime, even though we are in a channel barely 2 miles across – not exactly in the open sea, the waves were a metre and a half high and steep sided. Mina2 was bucketing through the chop. It was cold, wet and uncomfortable. By mid-afternoon we had barely covered the first 20 miles. The wind was now blowing a full gale with gusts of more than 50 knots across the deck and the constantly chattering coastguard stations announced that all the ports were closing on both sides of the channel. It would have been very late evening before we were likely to get to Ferrari, so we threw the towel in and went into a well protected anchorage opposite Ushuaia for the night. A few hours later our Norwegian friends on Anne Mari also came in seeking shelter, looking completely beaten up, and snuggled alongside us.

By this morning the winds had subsided but more very strong winds were forecast for this afternoon so we made an early start for the last 17 miles to Ferrari, leaving the crew of Anne Mari still sleeping. Twenty minutes before we reached the protection of the big bay, the wind rapidly increased and with it, the boat stopping choppy waves. We'd made it in the nick of time. Three hours later, who should come in but Anne Mari, the crew looking completely beaten up again. They said that, if anything, the conditions, which we had missed by a whisker, were if anything worse today than they had been yesterday.

Caleta Ferrari, overlooked by a range of sugar-coated mountains, has a small rather ramshackle farm house at the head, where Jose the gaucho farmer lives with Anemie, a Belgian woman who arrived by yacht and stayed. They keep horses and will take crews off for a few hours trekking which everyone says is a brilliant experience, fording deep rivers and seeing more of the wild countryside than could be possible for

even the most intrepid hiker. Sadly we found they had gone away, so we will leave tomorrow morning for our next stepping stone to the glaciers, Caleta Olla, and plan to return here at the end of our circumnavigation of the glacier ridden Isla Gordon.

I ferried the DS and Andrew ashore in the dinghy for a walk whilst I settled down to catch up with the blog (the sacrifices I make for you faithful readers is limitless). When they returned we were all marvelling at our good fortune at being able to enjoy such spectacular, tranquil anchorages when, to cap it all, a family of Sealions came frolicking around the boat. The magic of it all almost made us forget the low scudding clouds dumping sleet on us.

Andrew seems to have settled in well. He now runs the boat quite efficiently but has ruined his goodwill by beating both the other Skippers at Rummy on his first two games ever. The DS is also slightly concerned about Andrew's appetite. He eats for four and at this rate we're going to run out of food well before the end of the cruise. The DS says I will have to go out and catch a guanaco (llama) to supplement what might otherwise become a meagre diet.

#### **NEWSFLASH+++HEATWAVE HITS TDF+++**

**Position: 54° 47.815S 069° 37.618W, Caleta Beaulieu, Seno Pia Eastern Arm**

**Date: 25 February 2012**

I had told you, when we were in Caleta Ferrari, that we were intending to leave the following morning. It was not to be. We awoke to find snow had fallen overnight almost to the shore line. Pretty as a picture but bloody cold. Weezle weather. There was a French charter yacht with us in the anchorage, L'Esprit d'Equipe, that left early. Within two hours they were back again. It was still blowing old boots out in the channel and was too uncomfortable to continue. So we decided to stay put. Meanwhile we were visited by a family of sealions that frolicked together very close to the boat.

By midday the wind was still blowing a moderate gale but we ventured out and found the waves were lumpy but workable if we avoided slamming straight into the waves by motor-tacking with part of the mainsail set.

As we left Bahia Yendegaia we passed some rocks which the sealions had made their home. There was a colony of probably 40 or 50 lounging around enjoying the sub-Antarctic temperatures. I can honestly say that the last few weeks, when you take into account the wind chill from the strong winds, has been every bit as cold as Antarctica.

We had 25 miles to travel to our next stop, Caleta Olla. These names will be familiar to you as we are essentially, for the moment, following the same route as we did on our first channel cruise with Christine & Fernando. Just before the entrance to Olla we passed through the very narrow channel between Tierra Del Fuego and Isla del Diablo. Last time we passed through the swirling 3 knot tide rip we were joined by dolphins and seals. This time they were not to be seen, but we were delighted to be joined by five condors, flying unusually low and close to the boat. There is some debate on the boat, which frustratingly none of our volumes of wildlife books answer, as to whether condors or albatrosses have the wider wingspan – perhaps someone can look it up and

let us know - but, either way, condors at close quarters are truly magnificent birds with their enormous almost square wings and beautifully separated primary feathers.

On arrival at Caleta Olla at about 1600 we found three yachts already there, but they were all rafted together so there was plenty of room for us. The three yachts were, surprisingly, new to us. By now we know pretty much all the few yachts in this part of the world so it was nice to find someone new to meet.

Andrew, a vigorous young man, needs his exercise and has to be let off the boat periodically - a bit like letting the Labrador out for a run. So the moment the shore lines had been secured we heard the plop of the kayak being lowered into the water and he was off to the far side of the bay for the long walk up the ridge (the Shackleton ridge as Fernando described it after his arduous adventure with Christine) to view the spectacular glacier (Ventisquero Holanda) ever so slowly cascading into the high lake. The DS and I had been there – done that. So we tidied up a bit then took up the offer of our new neighbours to come on over and say hello.

We found ourselves in the very cosy saloon of a stout trawler-type motor yacht (the first of its kind we had come across in this area) – the Compañero – in the company of her owners, Jill Fredston and Doug Fesler. They had been in Chile for 18 months but they have been exploring the western end of the Beagle Channel which is why we hadn't come across them before. Jill and Doug come from Alaska where they are both avalanche experts but in their summers off over the years they have headed out into the wilderness – Jill rowing backwards and Doug kayaking forwards. They go off for three to five months at a time, taking all they need for survival – no shops where they go – camping at night and being at one with the wild natural world that they love. And we're not talking the Mediterranean. Their favoured areas are in the Arctic and sub-Arctic. They have covered more than 20,000 miles in Alaska, Greenland, Labrador, Norway and, to cap it all, a circumnavigation of Svalbard at 80° North. And there I was thinking that after my jaunt down south I might consider myself a bit of an adventurer. Think again, Tim.

Jill has written a book about it all: “Rowing to Latitude” (ISBN 0-374-28180-7) a copy of which she gave to me.

That, for me, has been one of the greatest things about coming down here. It's a very small community that explores these remote and beautiful areas. The majority are professionals who make a modest living by showing a small handful of paying guests just a passing glimpse of the extraordinary world that they have made their home, whether it be the gruelling passages over the Drake Passage to Antarctica, trips round Cape Horn or cruises in the channels of Tierra Del Fuego. Then there are the handful of amateurs like me who pass briefly through their world. For us it is the adventure of a lifetime but for the professionals, and for people like Jill and Doug, their whole way of life is an adventure. They live at the edge; all of them are larger than life characters; all of them are interesting and have fantastic (by normal standards) stories to tell, modestly told. To be so warmly welcomed into this community, albeit briefly, is a privileged and humbling experience and one I will never forget.

We left Olla yesterday morning. The forecasts had been predicting a temporary lull of a few days in the relentless low pressure systems and the associated very strong winds

that we have been enduring for the past few weeks, and we had a very relaxed motor 27 miles against the ever-diminishing wind up to Seno Pia. As we entered the large bay with no fewer than five glaciers at the head of its two arms, we were confronted by a lot of ice floating in the water. The last time we had been here we were towing little Tramp to safety. Thank goodness we didn't have to tow her through the abundance of brash ice and growlers that we now had to weave our way through. After a short diversion to show Andrew his first proper glacier from close up, we returned to the anchorage; tied in, and then went ashore for the steep climb up the hill behind to enjoy a spectacular over the fjord. And as an added bonus, the whole lot was swathed in sunshine – the first we had seen for quite a while. Spectacular.

It was a novelty to feel the warmth of the sun on our faces, and layer after layer of clothing was discarded. By late afternoon in this, the most spectacular of anchorages confronting an enormous glacier, the thermometer positively soared. It damned near got to double figures. Almost tropical.

### **Ice Thwarts Glacier Trip – Last Party With Dawnbreaker Set Up**

**Position: Caleta Beaulieu, Seno Pia Eastern Arm**

**Date: 25 February 2012**

Yesterday we spent a lazy day in Caleta Beaulieu overlooking the glacier ahead of us and listening to the rushing of the waterfall down the high steep cliff immediately behind us. The evening before we had heard long thunder-like rumbles from the glacier at the head of the fjord. Clearly a lot of ice was thundering from the ice cliff into the water, and by yesterday morning it had made its way down the fjord towards our anchorage.

Andrew took the kayak off to have a closer look at the nearer glacier and found some of the going quite tough, negotiating his way through the blocks of unyielding ice. Late afternoon and the sun had reappeared so we untied Mina2 and started making our way the full three miles up to the end of this arm of the fjord to have a look at the glacier that had caused all the noise and all the ice. We got half way before the ice became so thick we decided to turn back and have another go today, hoping that the ice would by then have dispersed.

In the evening we drank a toast to James, my nephew – Linda and John's eldest – and his new wife Kat on this, their wedding day, as the evening sun threw a pinky-red glow over the mountain tops all around, making them look like their peaks were on fire.

A couple of times a day I have to send an email to the Chilean Armada reporting our position – one of the requirements of the permit they issue to cruise this area. But at the same time we send and receive all our other emails as well. We had heard from Dawnbreaker that they were heading in this direction on their way west up to Valdivia on the Pacific coast of Chile.

When Linda, John and I arrived in Stanley in the Falkland Islands three months ago after our gruelling storm-force passage from Buenos Aires it was only minutes before Lars and Bob from Dawnbreaker – the only other visiting yacht in Stanley – came round, introduced themselves, told us where all the pubs were and suggested we get

together for a drink. Within a couple of hours we had the whole crew of Dawnbreaker on board Mina2 for an anchor nip to end all anchor nips of potent Brazilian caipirinhas (we provided the cachaça and they provided the limes). The tone of our relationship was set.

Lars and I had one strong bond from the outset. We were both embarking on the adventure of our lifetime. We had spent decades dreaming and years preparing for our trip down to the deep south, across Drake Passage and into the icy paradise wilderness of Antarctica – our own personal Everest. Since our first meeting in the Falkland Islands our paths have crossed and re-crossed time and time again, in Antarctica, Ushuaia, Puerto Williams and in the fjords of Tierra Del Fuego. They have stolen from us; we have hacked their blog and we have enjoyed numerous riotous evenings together. As they now head west and Mina2 heads east, this would be our final chance to get together for one last time. We have arranged a rendezvous for this evening in Caleta Cinco Estrellas in Seno Tres Brazos just a few miles across the channel from where we are now. Just to be on the safe side, Dolly Mk4 will be untied from the backstay and put somewhere beyond piratical temptation. It will, I hope and expect, be an evening to remember. Don't expect a blog too early tomorrow.

**Position 44:42S 060:28W**

**Date/Time: 2 March 1200 local (1500 UTC; 1600 UK)**

It is about Day 4 in ocean crossings on Mina2 that cabin fever sets in, and this crossing is no exception. Early indications have been that, when to give people warning of a particularly violent lurch of the boat, if anyone sees a very large wave approaching they shout "BIG WAVE". Now, every time the cry goes up, Tom and Lawrence grin inanely at each other and wave their arms around in the air. For God's sake, 134 years between them and they're acting like toddlers.

As we head north from the frozen south to the welcoming warmth of Buenos Aires, the temperature has been slowly but surely creeping up. The water temperature (which at sea closely correlates to the air temperature) started off at 7.5°C and is now 12°. You can now go into the cockpit to enjoy the sun without being wrapped up in multiple layers' gloves and hats. Sad though I am to be leaving the south, this is definitely one of the benefits and we're all looking forward to the real warmth of the sun.

### **First Signs Of Cabin Fever Sets In**

**Noon Position: 41:50S 059:12W**

**Noon to Noon Run: 182 miles**

**Date: 27 March 2012**

It is normally about Day 5 on an ocean passage that Cabin Fever sets in, or so it seems on Mina2, and this passage is no exception. The symptoms of Cabin Fever can range from nothing much more than slightly odd behaviour (difficult to gauge in Tom & Lawrence's case, as they behave oddly at the best of times), to certifiable lunacy. We haven't the full spectrum on board yet, but we're moving in that direction.

I thought it started yesterday when Tom started mumbling to himself in Cambodian. Anyway, false alarm, as it transpired he was listening to his Spanish language tape on his iPod. I don't know whether the fact I thought he was talking in Cambodian says so much about Tom's inability to speak Spanish as to my inability to understand it.

But Lawrence has definitely been losing it a bit. Tom had been having a challenging time making scrambled eggs for breakfast. As we rocked and rolled, one of the eggs awaiting cracking flipped over the rim around the work surface in the galley and plopped on the floor. Just as Tom had finished clearing up the mess, a second egg self-launched on to the floor. Tom was a bit upset judging by the vile language he was using. Trying to cheer Tom up, Lawrence said "Don't worry Tom, we've got loads more eggs at home. The hens are laying really well at the moment" And just now as we were looking at some Dusky Dolphins that had come to play with our bow wave, Lawrence asked "What do dolphins eat? Are they vegetarian?"

Meanwhile, Andrew remains more sane and more grown-up than the rest of us put together. And thank God for that. Last night, I was typing something on the computer when a more than usually violent lurch hurled my very small whisky and soda over the keyboard. Instant malfunction. Thank goodness I'm carrying a spare computer otherwise you wouldn't be getting this blog, and we wouldn't be getting any more weather forecasts. Anyway, Andrew who luckily knows everything and can fix anything, whipped the dysfunctional computer away from me and has stripped it down to its individual silicon chips. He will be reconstructing the computer later, doubtlessly adding a few enhancements whilst he's at it. Splendid fellow.

Meanwhile, the boat continues to sail herself to the sunshine with great speed. Just to prove yesterday wasn't a flash in the pan, our noon to noon mileage today was yet another very satisfying 184 miles. But as I type this with the increasingly warm sun getting lower in the early evening sky, the wind is now moderating as forecast. We will not be having any more high mileage days I'm afraid. Now two thirds distance, with 500 miles still to go, the frustrating part of the passage starts here.

### **The Aftermath of the Dawnbreaker Farewell Celebrations**

**Position: 54° 44.040S 069° 58.889W**

**Isla Pirincho, Seno Garibaldi**

**Date: 29 February 2012**

Happy Leap Year Day!

On our final day in Seno Pia, we took Mina2 into the western arm and up to the end of the fjord where one is surrounded by a fantastic amphitheatre of three glaciers. Although still Weezle cold, the visibility was rather better than the first time we were here, the steep mountains of the fjord soaring into stark contrast with the clearing sky as condors glided overhead. Melt water from the surrounding glaciers tumbled down deep gorges into the fjord all around. After taking in the breathtaking views for a while we turned our bow south. It was very beautiful and tranquil as we sailed out of the fjord for the seven mile crossing over the Channel to Seno Tres Brazos and into Caleta Cinco Estrellas for our rendezvous with Dawnbreaker. They were already there when we arrived at 1815, with fenders out ready for us to raft up to them, and the G&T's already poured, to which we symbolically contributed some of our remaining

gin-clear Antarctic ice. We both roasted lamb in our respective ovens and then brought them together for The Last Supper which took place in the capacious saloon on Dawnbreaker.

Caleta Cinco Estrellas – 5-Star Bay – has no dramatic glaciers but it is surrounded by beautiful hills, lakes and waterfalls – 5-Star hiking country – so the following morning, to clear the cobwebs from the excesses of the evening before, we all went ashore for a mega-hike. We climbed forever upwards getting better and better views of the two boats nestled into the little pool way below us on one side, and beautiful lakes with steep waterfalls plunging into them on the other side. At the summit, symbolic photos were taken of the two Skippers, Lars and Tim, shaking hands in mutual congratulation at having conquered their own personal Everests over the previous few months.

Andrew spotted a couple of much higher peaks far away and set off like a hare out of the trap for some more demanding hiking, whilst Lars with his friends Uno and Viola headed down towards the lake, high above and behind the anchorage, where we later saw photographic evidence that Lars stripped off for a plunge under the ice-cold waterfall. These Scandinavians are bonkers (but, in fairness, Andrew also went for a dip in the lake on his way back several hours later).

We both decided to stay one more night here and we had a repeat Farewell Last Supper, this time on Mina2 with the *Specialité du Bateau*, the skipper's famous Chili Con Carne.

Yesterday morning, there were deeply emotional scenes as the skippers and crews of the two boats embraced in final farewell as our respective vessels headed off in different directions – Dawnbreaker going west and Mina2 east.

We only had a short hop back over the channel to Seno Garibaldi, the first fjord on this cruise that we hadn't visited on our earlier cruise, so breaking new ground at last. Garibaldi is an 8-mile long fjord; very steep-sided it is reminiscent of the deep fjords on the west coast of Norway where I cruised on Mina2 in 2004. At its head is another spectacular glacier that has a reputation for calving heavily in the summer, enormous slabs of ice the size of a skyscraper plummeting off the front of the glacier with a thunderous roar, setting off a tsunami of ice.

As we were approaching the snout of the glacier we heard odd noises on one side of the fjord. We went to investigate and found, sitting on a platform of rocks a large colony of Southern Sealions with lots of young pups, all bickering and fighting. Amongst them strutted a number of Turkey vultures with their bright red heads, looking for the remains of any young pup that hadn't made it.

The mountains here plummet almost vertically into the water and we were able to get within a few feet of the colony. The Sealions didn't seem to notice us at all as we stood in the bow taking photographs. Observing wildlife this close is one of the privileges that cruising in this area brings. Seeing these creatures in their natural environment is just so exciting. Before we left the side of the fjord I demonstrated how steep-to the mountain walls were by getting so close that, from the bow, the Downstairs Skipper and Andrew were able to touch the towering cliff.

We continued to the snout of the glacier – having to negotiate only a little ice on this occasion – turned the engine off just a hundred metres from the towering ice cliffs and floated around for the best part of an hour waiting for some dramatic calving action. Apart from a couple of pathetically small falls there was nothing, which was a bit of a disappointment. But the weather was brilliant – the best day we have had weather-wise for almost three months - with almost continuous sunshine, the vast white glaciers standing out in brilliant contrast to the deep blue skies. We back-tracked a couple of miles down the fjord to a small island behind which we slung the anchor and took a long line ashore to tie to a tree for the night. As we have experienced in a couple of other anchorages, the dinghy with Andrew in it taking the line ashore was buzzed by a couple of inquisitive Peale's dolphins. It's a bit disconcerting being in a dinghy with dolphins throwing themselves out of the water and landing with an enormous splash just a feet away from you.

As we were enjoying our anchor nip, we saw another yacht a couple of miles away making its way up the fjord. Binoculars out: white hull, ketch, big doghouse. It must be "Victoria" a New Zealand yacht with Jim and Karin on board (there are so few yachts here that one knows pretty much all of them, and can identify them even from a distance). They anchored nearby, also with a line ashore to the island and, after a chat with them, we settled down for the evening.

The DS and Andrew had been sorting out a large locker with cans of food in and had come across a couple of tins of Hot Dogs that I had bought in the Falklands. Looking at the label I noticed that the ingredients were: Chicken (Mechanically Recovered) 72%. The next biggest component was water, followed by a long list of chemicals. I decided these were definitely not fit for the consumption of humans with any discernment, but I hoped that they may be attractive to Centollas, the delicious king crabs that scour the bottoms of the fjords, so I put a few pieces into my expandable lobster pot together with the remains of a tin of sardines to see if we could catch a large Centolla for tomorrow's dinner.

This morning, Jim and Karin weighed Victoria's anchor to head off to the glacier when we were all surprised to see a large cruise ship appearing from behind the island. It was the French "Boreal", one of the smarter cruise ships that ply this region with a couple of hundred passengers. I last saw her down in Antarctica. Being on deck reminded me to have a look at my lobster pot. I hauled it up to find a rather small and unattractive looking fish together with a very small crab – certainly not of the proportions I was expecting. Life is full of disappointments.

### **An Isolated Anchorage amongst 1000 Waterfalls and Williwaws**

**Position: 55° 07.006S 069° 53.300W**

**Estéro del 1000 Cascadas**

**Date: 2 March 2012**

We decided to stay another day in Seno Garibaldi so, in the morning, whilst I got on with some paperwork on board, the DS and Andrew went ashore in the dinghy for a steep climb up a waterfall. After lunch we weighed anchor for another excursion to the glacier, hopefully expecting to see a bit more action than the day before. We went close to the glacier snout, turned the boat broadside to it, cut the engine off and drifted,

the three of us sitting in a row in the cockpit waiting for a bit of dramatic calving. The DS said it was a bit like sitting in the front row of the stalls at a private performance. After an hour of creaks, groans and the occasional small bit of ice cascading into the water, there was an almighty crack and a vast chunk of the glacier dropped, seemingly in slow motion, vertically into the water with a roar of thunder. In a perfect semi-circle we could see a tsunami of water rise up, expand and head towards us. On with engine, turn the bows to the tidal wave and we bobbed around, feeling elated that after a combined viewing of two hours the glacier had at last delivered.

Satisfied at last, we turned the boat and headed back to the delightful Southern Sealion colony on the rocks. Spectacular glaciers are, well, spectacular, but we all agreed that the highlight of our visit to Garibaldi was our time spent just sitting feet away from the Sealion colony watching the crèches of pups skylarking around in the water and on the rocks; their anxious mothers trying to keep them under control, whilst the teenagers were constantly play fighting trying to assert their position in the colony's pecking order. Meanwhile the Big Daddys were roaring away just to let everyone know who was boss. One could sit for hours observing this community interacting with each other.

So absorbed in the antics of the Sealions one could almost miss the abundance of other wildlife that shared this spot with them; the Turkey Vultures hopping around amongst them looking for carrion (apparently their snack of choice is a nice fresh placenta); a splendid Condor that had settled on a rock just a few metres away and the beautifully coloured Ashy-headed Geese swimming in the water just by their side. Kelp Geese would fly past in pairs, the all white male and the black and white speckled female noisily communicating with each other with their different and distinctive honks. Nestling under a rock at the back of the colony we saw a pair of the flightless Steamer Ducks with a brood of now large chicks. And sitting on the rocks above were many of the ubiquitous Imperial and Rock Shags. Further out in the fjord we could see a pair of Peale's Dolphins arching out of the water, flashing their striped flanks. It is a nature-lover's paradise.

Yesterday morning a couple of cruise ships came up the fjord (it is one of the few fjords where the entrance over the ancient moraine bar is sufficiently wide and deep to allow cruise ships to enter). One of them anchored just opposite our little anchorage and dropped a bunch of inflatable dinghies to ferry their passengers the two miles to the head of the fjord and the glacier.

But it was time for us to move on. The wind, now light, had moved round to the north and there had been a dramatic increase in the temperature. With the sun now often appearing between the clouds, our thermal longjohns were at last (but probably just temporarily) surplus to requirements as we sailed gently out of the fjord with the wind behind us, across the Beagle Channel and dived down a pretty, narrow channel between Isla Gordon and Isla Thomson heading for the channel that runs south of Isla Gordon, the Brazo Sudoeste.

We had decided to go to a fjord interestingly called Estéro del 1000 Cascadas – the Fjord of 1000 Waterfalls. Not many yachts go to this fjord for some reason but it was on our way and we had time on our hands. The pilot book for the whole of the Chilean canals is a remarkable labour of love called the Patagonia and Tierra Del

Fuego Nautical Guide written over a period of a dozen years or more by an Italian cruising couple. It is known affectionately by all the sailors down here as The Italian Guide, or simply as The Bible. It has 700 pages with details of nearly 500 anchorages. The first part of the book has all sorts of comprehensive chapters about the history, climate, geology etc of the area. With only a dozen or so boats coming down here each year for the first time, sales of the handsome volume must be slim, but I can recommend it to anyone who enjoys a little armchair cruising as well (ISBN 88-85986-34-X).

The information in the Italian Guide about the Estéro del 1000 Cascadas was slim and there was no chartlet so we weren't quite sure what to expect, but we found ourselves in an extraordinarily steep sided and narrow fjord with yet another spectacular glacier at the head. We dropped the anchor and tied ourselves in off a small beach, not without difficulty – between the beach and the trees that we were to tie to, Andrew found there was a waist high swamp he had to wade through. Having dried off, Andrew then went off for a reconnaissance in the kayak to the glacier. Running down the steep mountains on all sides of us were dozens of waterfalls all cascading into the fjord. It was a noisy anchorage! It was also the most isolated we had been to. It is off the beaten track (probably because of the lack of detail in the Italian Guide) and we might have been the first yacht to anchor here for some years. Because of the steep-sided mountains all around us, if anything went wrong there would be no chance of being able to summon help by radio. Even the Iridium satellite phone had difficulty in picking up a signal. We were on our own. Yesterday morning as we were leaving, the crane that lifts the dinghy up broke. Our departure was delayed by a couple of hours as we took it apart, analysed the problem as one which would take some time to sort out, and cobbled together a temporary means of getting the dinghy up under the davits.

The wind meanwhile had been increasing and, as we finally made our way out of the fjord, we were being hit by 50 knot williwaws that came bouncing off the mountains, screaming across the water in a vertical spume of spray and heeling the boat at a crazy angle even though we had no sails up at all. These conditions in this isolated spot, tied in close to the rocks in the middle of a pitch dark night would have been unnerving to say the least. Once we found ourselves out of the fjord we were surprised to find that there was comparatively little wind, so we set our sails and headed for our next destination, Caleta Coloane.

### **Captain Lawrence Oates Remembered**

**Date: 3 March 2012**

You may remember that what triggered the timing of my adventure to Antarctica this year was the centenary of the Scott Expedition and the tragic death of Scott himself together with his Polar party. Amongst them was Captain Lawrence Oates who sacrificed his life to help save his comrades. Oates was a member of the Royal Cruising Club, as am I along with two other members of my Antarctic crew, Richard and Venetia. When at the ex-British scientific base at Port Lockroy in Antarctica we presented a tribute to Oates on behalf of the RCC which is now on public display there.

In preparation for this event, I did a lot of research into Oates, his passion for adventurous sailing, and his yacht *Saunterer*. Last summer I went for a memorable sail on *Saunterer* in the Solent in half a gale of wind which Oates would have enjoyed.

A couple of days ago, the RCC held their Annual Dinner. The guest speaker was Major General Patrick Cordingley, co-author of what I consider to be Oates best biography. I had heard Patrick speak about Oates at a lecture he gave last year and I knew that the RCC could look forward to an interesting and entertaining talk.

Given my involvement I was particularly sorry not to be able to attend, but my Antarctic crew: Richard, Venetia, Peter and Ewan were all there, together with Linda and John who had an experience every bit as challenging in helping me get the boat south from Buenos Aires to Ushuaia via the Falkland Islands and Staten Island.

Yesterday morning I got emails, one from Nigel Wollen, our Commodore, telling me that the evening had been a great success. I'm delighted that such a brave man has been remembered in this way in the month one hundred years ago that he met his heroic death, and I feel honoured to have played a part in that remembrance.

### **Caleta WOW!! and The Great Beaver Hunt**

**Position: 55° 05.776S 069° 48.638W**

**Estéro Coloane**

**Date: 4 March 2012**

In this, the most spectacular cruising ground I have ever encountered, possibly the best in the world, there are anchorages which stand out – the must-see's. Estéro Coloane is at the head of that list. When Laura of Pelagic Australis fame was going through with me the places I simply had to go to, she said of Estéro Coloane, "We call it Caleta WOW!!" Enough said.

All the fjords and bays here have different characteristics. Most have steep mountains all around them; many are overlooked by fantastic glaciers; occasionally the hills are sufficiently accessible to offer some first-rate hikes; some are pretty beyond belief, and a few are bomb-proof in whatever the often violent weather might throw at you. Estéro Coloane has all these characteristics and a few more. The inner bay is about a mile deep and a mile across. We arrived yesterday evening and tucked ourselves into a nook near the northeastern corner and tied ourselves in. Across the bay, directly in front of us, behind a low, wooded hill is a wonderful glacier that stretches up into the mountains beyond. To the left and to the right are other glaciers, all of them pouring melt water down the mountains in cascading waterfalls. And, by the bitter standards by which we measure Tierra Del Fuego, it was warm and windless.

I awoke this morning to something quite unique in my three month experience in these waters – a completely cloud-free blue, blue sky. We breakfasted early, got our walking boots on and took the dinghy round to a point that allowed easy(ish) access to the hill behind the anchorage. It was a steep climb but not too difficult and, as we climbed ever higher, we got better and better views looking way down into the bay at the increasingly small Mina2 and over the wooded hills to the glacier. (To my mind, the best restaurants and walks are those from which I can see my beloved Mina2).

After about an hour or so, we crested the 450m mountain and were able to look down the other side over the entire length of the Brazo Sudoeste – the Southeastern Arm – of the Beagle Channel and, opposite us on the far side of the Channel, over to the fjords and glaciers on the southern side of Isla Gordon. It was glorious.

We returned for a late lunch and (for me) a siesta, before our next adventure. The evening before, Andrew had gone off for a recce of the entire bay in the kayak. He reported having seen what he thought might have been a beaver in the water near the western shore. I knew that beavers were nocturnal and they didn't tend to venture out until the evening so at about 2000 we set off in the dinghy for The Great Beaver Hunt. There's nothing I like more than a good beaver hunt.

We disembarked at the western shore where a river of glacier meltwater rushed and gurgled into the bay. With Andrew at the vanguard leading the way (it would be useful indicator for the DS and me if we saw him swallowed up to his waist in one of the numerous boggy pools hidden beneath the undergrowth), we made our way up the shallow valley through the thick and wooded undergrowth. We were all on the lookout for the telltale signs of beavers but so far, nothing. After a while we spotted the stump of a small tree that was chiselled into a pencil-like end. Beaver work. Working our way further up the valley we saw more and more evidence. And then in a small pool we saw a beaver swimming around. It gave us a toothy grin while we took the photographic evidence before it dived below the surface with a plop of its tail. A little further on was a much larger pool and there, in the middle, was the large mound that the beavers had built as their home (sorry, can't remember the name of a beaver home). At the end of the pool was their dam – about 10 metres across and a full two metres deep and completely watertight. These animals are quite extraordinary. The Italian Guide makes no reference to the presence of beavers here and given the very few visitors to the area and the difficulty we had had in getting to their remote location, we wondered when was the last time that any human had been privileged to see this out of the way colony. Perhaps we were the first.

We saw a couple of beavers swimming around in the water, but as the evening was now drawing in quite quickly, we retraced our tracks to the dinghy and returned to the boat in the dusk for dinner.

As beaver hunts go, this was a good one.

### **The Great Krill Hunt in a Newly Named Caleta**

**Position: 55° 03.335S 069° 47.644W**

**Caleta Mina**

**Date: 5 March 2012**

Yesterday was our second full day in Coloane. There were still lots to explore. After breakfast we took the dinghy round a headland on the south side of the bay and clambered up a small hill and over rocks worn smooth by ancient glaciers until we came to the snout of the glacier that overlooks the bay. Glaciers we had come across up until now ended abruptly in vertical walls of ice hundreds of feet high that plummeted into the depths of the fjord. This one had receded to the point where it sloped to nothing on the bare rock. So we were able to clamber onto the glacier for a slippery walk.

And not just on to the glacier. Andrew walked under the lip of the glacier to explore an ice cavern and found that he was able to make his way under the glacier right to the front where he re-emerged. Although I suspect that the snout of this glacier had not collapsed for several years but had just been ever so slowly melting, it took someone with stronger nerves than mine to try this out.

We then took the dinghy further round the bay to the southeastern corner for a hike up a hill between two of the waterfalls that brought the meltwater down to the bay. As we got out of the dinghy we were confronted by evidence of lots of beaver work and there, just in front of us was a large pond, dammed by beavers with their homely mound in the middle. We climbed to the top of the hill over the crest of which was another, larger, lake into which a stream of meltwater flowed. Yet again, this lake had been created by beavers, but this time their dam was of spectacular proportions – about 50 metres long, and I have a photograph of Andrew (who is nearly two metres tall) standing at the base of the dam, the lip being another metre higher than him.

So it would appear that beavers are not quite the scarcity that I thought they might have been. In fact, the whole place would seem to be awash with them. Mind you, I'm probably right in suspecting that the beavers we had discovered the previous evening had been previously unseen by humans – why would you trample through impossible boggy terrain when you have even better examples of beavers with much easier access pretty much on your doorstep?

This morning we left Estéro Coloane and nipped only a couple of miles across the Brazo Sudoeste to Isla Gordon for a bit of exploration. Just opposite Coloane is a fjord with two bays at the entrance, one on each side, with a high island, Isla El Gorro, between them. First of all we wanted to see if we could transit the narrow channel behind the back of El Gorro. We inched our way through, eye on the depth sounder, and found there was plenty of water. No problem. I felt like Magellan. But I could have saved myself the trouble had I bothered to look in the Italian Guide where I later found a two line note saying that the channel was deep and clear.

Of the two bays, the western bay is featured in the Italian Guide with two anchorages detailed. But there was no information on the eastern bay so off we went in full exploration mode to investigate. We went in to the small bay and it looked ideal: not so deep you couldn't get the anchor down; not so shallow as to deprive us of access; sufficient accessible trees to tie ropes to, and none of the telltale signs of the bay being subject to williwaws (trees growing sideways or, even worse, no trees at all), and a good hike over the hills at the back to a couple of pretty lakes. It was also pretty and had the obligatory river rapids chortling in to the end of the bay. So here we are, anchored and tied in, in an as yet un-named bay.

Whilst going through the process of anchoring and tying in, I had difficulty getting either the DS or Andrew to concentrate on the job in hand due to their excitement that the water in the bay seemed to be blood red. The bay was absolutely crammed with shrimp-like krill, moving round in shoals so dense that you could not see through them – they looked like large red balls moving around the water. Krill are the staple diet of the larger baleen whales and I was concerned that with more than a good meal in here, we would suddenly find an enormous Sei whale muscling in to join us in the

small bay. The moment we were tied in, Andrew and the DS were planning how to catch a tasty lunch. As I had thrown out the child's shrimping net that the DS had insisted I use to scoop jellyfish out of the water whilst she was swimming in the Mediterranean, they were devising their own contraptions for catching the krill. Andrew had purloined one of my green bags in which I kept the tying-in lines, using bits of wire and lengths of wood to keep its jaws open, whilst the DS had tied a wooden pole to a colander. Off they went in the dinghy like excited children, playing for what seemed like hours, but failing to catch even one specimen so that we couldn't even identify which species it was. As Gret Krill Hunts go, this one was completely useless.

There are so many bays and islands in the whole of this region, and so few people who come here that many are still un-named – like the bay we are in. So it is one of the few places left on earth where there is the possibility naming a geographical feature. Indeed there have been a number of Royal Cruising Club members whose cruises in the region have been remembered in this way: Caleta Balaena, Caleta Sadko, Angostura Mischief, Isla Tilman, and probably several more of which I'm not aware. All these places were discovered in the sense that no one had known of their existence before or used them, and they were justifiably named after the discoverer or his vessel. But only spending a few short weeks down here, I don't have time for all that pioneering exploration stuff, and although I'm certain that we aren't the first boat to make use of this anchorage, nevertheless I hereby name the anchorage at 55° 03.33S 069° 47.64 "Caleta Mina" – not that anyone will know or care.

One thing we have been surprised and delighted about over the last week has been the dramatic change in the weather. On our first cruise of the channels just a month ago, the norm was a full gale of wind, almost sub-zero temperatures and a relentless precipitation of rain/sleet/snow. Almost like someone throwing a switch, about a week ago, the weather transformed. The winds went light. The temperature soared from near zero to double figures (because the wind had shifted from predominantly southwesterly (from the Antarctic) to northwesterly), and we started seeing more and more of this blue colour in the sky rather than the variform grey we had been used to.

The Tierra Del Fuego aficionados say that the best time to cruise down here is in the austral winter – not the summer. For technical meteorological reasons, there is less wind and more clear blue skies. The downside is that the days are very much shorter, and it is so cold that some of the bays freeze over and become inaccessible.

I'm just wondering, moving rapidly from summer to autumn as we are at the moment, whether we aren't in that honeymoon period when the weather systems have changed to give less wind and more sun, but the temperature has yet to plummet. To support this theory (which may be – literally – blown apart next week when the southwesterly storms and snow return), we have noticed that some of the leaves on the ubiquitous beech trees are beginning to turn from vibrant green to orange or red. Every day, we notice more and more of them. But, for the moment, we are just grateful for what we have – a perfect cruising ground and weather that doesn't turn its exploration into an SAS survival exercise.

**Hubble Bubble, Toil & Trouble – Crew Try To Kill Upstairs Skipper**  
**Position: 55° 04.409S 069° 33.501W**

## Caleta del Bosque, Estéro Fouque

Date: 7 March 2012

Why did I have to open my mouth in the last blog, talking about the settled spell of (comparatively) glorious weather? Yesterday morning, it was back to Weezle cold and it was raining again. In between particularly drenching squalls, Andrew cast off our four lines from the surrounding trees, the DS weighed the anchor, and we made our way back out into the Brazo Sudoeste to make our way further east to Estéro Fouque on the south side of the channel. It is a J-shaped fjord that penetrates Isla Hoste about 10 miles with, we are told, more spectacular glaciers at the end.

As we sailed serenely down the channel, goose-winged, we saw what looked like puffs of smoke bursting from the water. It was like we were in Iceland and geysers were blowing. It was more whales spouting. This didn't exactly come as a surprise. Given the quantity of krill we saw in Caleta Mina it was a reasonable bet that the whales would be in pursuit of their favourite food. We saw more than a dozen whales blowing at any one time. As we approached them we could see their backs and fins arching out of the water as they came up for air. Sei whales again. We followed a couple of pods but then decided we would stop harassing them and let them get on with their lunch.

During our short 1 ½ hour passage down the channel the rain had cleared and rays of sunshine were occasionally seen on some of the surrounding mountains. But as we entered Estéro Fouque another blanket of grey cloud sped down the channel and enveloped us once again in freezing drizzle so we trickled down the fjord to our chosen anchorage to give it time to clear a bit before the process of tying in.

The Downstairs Skipper has become increasingly interested in the flora of Tierra Del Fuego. Below the tree line, the mountains here are covered by an astonishing assortment of bushes, mosses and tiny little plants that thrive on the boggy peaty soil. The DS has latterly been spending much of her walks crouching, looking for new specimens to carefully lift, put into a plastic bag and return to her increasingly large garden of specimens that now lives in the cockpit. The reference books are consulted and new specimens ticked off. She has now involved Andrew in her new-found interest and sends him ashore with a shopping list of species to look out for. This time of the year the bushes are covered in berries, most of them edible, including the purple-mauve coloured Calafate (*Berberis buxifolia* or Box-leafed barberry). They say that if you eat these, your return to Tierra Del Fuego is assured. Then there is the post-box red Chaura (*Pernettya mucronata* or Prickly Heath). Eaten straight from the bush they taste a little bitter, but the DS and Andrew have been experimenting stewing them with a little sugar into a jam. Personally I'm going to infuse them in a little gin, a much more pleasant way of eating off the land.

The DS was particularly intrigued by a tree, Canelo (Winter's bark – *Drymis winteri*) which the native Indians used to counter scurvy, a disease caused by vitamin C deficiency and which causes your gums to bleed and your teeth to drop out before, finally, it kills you. Legions of sailors died from this disease before they worked out that citrus juice solved the problem. Here, where there are no citrus trees, the local natives (and Captain Winter, a member of Sir Francis Drake's expedition down here) used the bark from the tree to make an infusion rich in vitamin C. Andrew was

despatched, like the Sorcerer's Apprentice, to bring back some of the bark. I, meanwhile, went to my cabin for my customary post-lunch siesta. I awoke an hour later to find some bark simmering in a pan, and to be told that tea had been served. Mine was on the table. "Try some", the DS said nonchalantly. I took a gulp. Mmmm. It tasted like ginger. Not unpleasant. Andrew and the DS looked at each other and exchanged a chilling smile. Fifteen seconds later, there was an incredibly hot peppery sensation that covered first my tongue, then the whole of my mouth and finally spread down my throat. I was clutching my throat in considerable pain and my strangled voice came out in a hoarse whisper. "You've poisoned me!" I rasped. "Quite possibly" replied the DS "but at least you won't die from bleeding gums" she added encouragingly. Andrew looked on from behind, smirking.

If you don't get another blog in the next few days, would you be kind enough to alert the authorities.

### **Skipper Pulls Through – Visit to the Big Apple of Beaver Cities**

**Position: 55° 11.148S 069° 33.409W**

**Caleta Nutria, Estéro Fouque**

**Date: 7 March 2012**

I would like to report that after the mutinous poisoning of the skipper by his evil crew, I have spent the last couple of days fighting death, lying in my bunk delirious with fever and wracked with pain. However, that would be deviating from the absolute truth. The fact is that since I was tricked into sampling the witches brew, my gums haven't bled, none of my teeth have fallen out and I have no rheumatism, so it must have worked.

The weather has remained mixed with overcast skies and occasional drizzle but nothing that would stop us from continuing with our adventure. Yesterday morning we motored back eight miles down the deep fjord, stopping at a glacier on the way, parking the boat within 100 metres of it whilst Andrew got into the kayak with a bunch of cameras for a photoshoot of "Mina2 in front of glacier". After the photoshoot, Andrew went up to the snout of the glacier to get a lump of clear ice to supplement our diminishing supply of Antarctic ice for the G&T's (soon to be infused with locally picked berries). We then continued to the bottom of the fjord and anchored in a biggish bay, Caleta Nutria.

We had noticed that in the spectacular bowl at the end of the fjord, surrounded by an amphitheatre of high mountains and glaciers there was a wooded plain at the head of a valley that strongly indicated beaver country, viz, patches of completely dead trees standing bare and silver coloured amongst the dense forest. We took the dinghy round in the early evening to investigate.

What we discovered was a veritable beaver city; layer after layer of dammed lagoons reaching far back into the valley, the dams ranging from small affairs blocking the entrance to a small stream, to long twisting elaborate affairs of 100 metres or more. We were stunned by the landscaping on a grand scale that these small animals collectively construct with, as the DS put it, "eternity swimming pools, trickling water

features and rippling rivulets". (You may well be able to see them on Google Earth at 55° 11.3S 069° 34.5W).

As we sat patiently and quietly at the side of the large expanse, we were privileged to see a number of beavers swimming through the still pools very close to us. The moment they became aware of us (Andrew's scarlet jacket may have been a giveaway), within the blink of an eye their flat tail would whip up, slap the water, and they were gone, swimming into the murky depths. I said that witnessing such an extraordinary manifestation of nature I felt like David Attenborough. The DS said that I might *feel* like Atters, but with my Antarctic beard I *looked* like Bill Oddy. Rather unkind I thought.

When we came down to the bottom of the fjord on a recce a couple of days ago, we were greeted by groups of small dolphins of a type that we hadn't seen before. Out came the reference book on cetaceans and the only conclusion we could draw was that they were Black Dolphins, but as the book said they were so scarce that few had ever been observed we assumed we were wrong. The same dolphins came to greet us again as we arrived yesterday. I sent an email to Natalie Goodall at Harberton who is a world leading specialist on marine mammals in the area and she has confirmed that from our description they are indeed the scarce Black Dolphins (or Chilean Dolphins as they are now called). Quite exciting.

### **Mina2 Strikes Large Tree**

**Position: 55° 04.543S 069° 25.823W**

**Estéro Penhoat, between rings 1 & 3.**

**Date: 10 March 2012**

In the last week we have seen not one yacht; not one fishing boat, cruise ship, house or person. We have not heard anybody on Ch 16 on the VHF radio. We are completely alone in this, the uttermost part of the earth. Talk about a getaway-from-it-all holiday. (Yes, although the channels can be extremely demanding by normal cruising standards, I am reluctantly prepared to admit that, for me, this IS a holiday and not an expedition). The DS feels rather spooked by the total remoteness of the place. For me, curmudgeonly unsociable animal that I am, it is bliss. But all of us are revelling in the completely unspoilt wildness of the area, and the richness of its wildlife.

Yesterday afternoon we tied into one of the most bizarre locations that Mina2 has ever rested in. In Estéro Penhoat on the north side of Isla Hoste there are few places shallow enough to plant your anchor. All the sides are incredibly steep-to – 20 metres out from the rocky shore you have 50 metres of water under the keel. But against a particularly picturesque cliff with trees growing out of the cracks in it, someone – and no one is quite sure who – many years ago hammered in some stout wire cables with rings on the end for putting a rope through, and then painted a number on the sheer rock by each one: 1,2,3, and 4. We nudged Mina2's bow within touching distance of the rock where ring number 1 hung, and Andrew slipped a line through. We backed off, turned the boat and headed for ring number 3 where we did the same, and then tied ourselves fore and aft between the two, with the sides of the boat just a few metres from the high cliff wall. The procedure all sounds very controlled – well, it

was. Almost. As we were nudging our way towards ring number 3 with Andrew draped over the pulpit in the bow, rope in hand, the DS said “Watch out – you’re going to hit the trees!” I looked at the masthead. It was clearing the high overhanging branches by at least a metre. “Nonsense, woman” I retorted, “we’ll miss them by a mile”. At which point there was a loud crack and a branch fell on Andrew’s head. I hadn’t bothered to look at the forestay which had demolished a branch that was protruding much lower down.

As we were tightening the lines in this extraordinary berth, a colourful Kingfisher flitted by and sat on the branch of a tree just a few feet away from us. Just in front of the boat, nesting in the trees was a rookery of Shags: a few adults with their brilliant white breasts, and a load of youngsters, still all black. They were launching themselves off the trees hanging to the cliff, doing a couple of circuits and then landing back in the trees. It was school time for this year’s broodlings. Most made it. One didn’t. It threw itself off the cliff and plummeted straight into the water in front of us with a splash. It shook itself and then swum around a bit looking rather embarrassed.

Andrew went off for a 3 ½ hour kayak exploration to the end of the fjord and then tested himself against the rapids of a river in which small fresh water fish were darting around.

Talking of fish, one of the things that has surprised us is that we have seen absolutely no fish in the channels at all. We know they’re there because we saw a fishing boat in Caleta Olla about 5 weeks ago who sold us some of his large catch. But most places we sail in the world, you see fish swimming around near the shallows, but here there is nothing. God knows what the sea birds live off.

We’re now beginning to wind down towards the end of our cruise of the channels. Now heading slowly east back to Puerto Williams, having bashed our way west against the prevailing strong westerly winds, we are hoping to be able to enjoy some good downwind sailing on our return.

## **Blog Catch Up**

**Date: 22 March 2012**

Apologies about the lack of blogs recently, but at least I managed to find the time in Ushuaia to get the photos out which I hope you enjoyed.

As I write we are sailing north, back to Buenos Aires, but before I bring you right up to date, I’ll just fill in the gaps since I last wrote.

I left you at Estéro Penhoat, tied between the rocks, slowly heading east to Puerto Williams and the end of our channels cruise. Having had to bash our way all the way here against the strong westerlies that blow in the channels almost all of the time, we were keenly looking forward to some great downwind sailing. Dawn broke serenely with clear blue skies and absolutely not a breath of wind, so we had to motor all the way to our next anchorage, Caleta Yishka, where we stopped overnight. The following day we were to head 25 miles east to Caleta Ferrari again, hoping that the

gaucho Jose and his Belgian girlfriend Anemi would be there to take us horse riding. We poked our nose out of Yishka first thing in the morning. We could see the white horses galloping down the channel – just the sort of winds we had been hoping for. The only problem was that, cruelly, it was one of those very rare days when the wind was blasting from the east (the direction we were going in) and not the west. We had a murderous 5 or 6 hours motor-tacking into bone-crunching choppy waves in gale force winds of 35 knots, gusting over 50 knots.

Arriving at Caleta Ferrari just after lunch we discovered that, for the third time, no one was at home. We stayed overnight and in the morning we saw Anemi galloping round the bay, returning home. (Ferrari is very isolated. There are no roads anywhere near, and the only way in or out of the ranch is either by horse (two hours to get to the nearest track) or by boat).

So in the afternoon, we all went riding for three hours, gaucho style. Taking yachtsmen off on horse treks is just a sideline. Jose's job is to keep the populations of wild horses and cattle under control by selective culling. The horse meat is eaten not only by Jose and Anemi but also by the collection of ranch dogs. Eating horse meat is one thing, but for us city-dwellers it was a tad disconcerting to find lying casually on the ground sawn off horse shins complete with hoof, still covered with hairy skin.

The gaucho style of riding is different to genteel European hacking. The saddles are made of wood and covered with a few sheepskins – it's like sitting in an armchair – and the stirrups are just a coarse hoop of steel. None of your lah-di-dah rising trot here. You just sit in the saddle like a sack of potatoes whilst the horse trots along (which for us was most of the three hours) with your brain being jolted into your neck, all your internal organs alternately smacking your diaphragm and pelvis, and your vertebrae being subjected to sickening jars – all at a frequency of three times a second.

The scenery was fabulous - we felt like real cowboys riding through the shrubby flat land, looking up at the snow-clad mountains and fording deep fast-flowing rivers with milky green meltwater from the distant glacier. But the pain of trotting all the time started off as uncomfortable and after a while became excruciating.

I was feeling aches and pains all over the place for a couple of days, but the DS fared even worse, trapping a nerve in her back which was giving her considerable pain for a week or more. Quite an experience.

The following day we returned to Puerto Williams to clear out of Chile and after a couple of days, we left for Ushuaia to clear into Argentina where we were to prepare the boat and provisions for our long 1500 mile passage north to Buenos Aires. The DS was to leave Andrew and me, and we were to be joined by Lawrence and Tom who were flying out from the UK.

### **Mina2 Heads North Again**

So The Great Adventure is entering its final chapter, and its now time to take Mina2 back north to leave her in Brazil for the southern winter.

When preparing for this adventure over the last couple of years, I had been so focussed on Antarctica that I hadn't really spent much time in anticipating and researching what the Chilean channels had to offer. It was simply something that would follow on from Antarctica. In the event, the Chilean channels completely blew us away. You can't really compare them with Antarctica. They are completely different, but in terms of the variety of stunning scenery, including the glaciers, the world-class hiking and the richness of the flora and fauna, it is far, far away the most stunning cruising ground I have ever been to and, I suspect, one of the best in the world. The fact that it is such an exclusive, isolated cruising area enhances the experience. As Maria, the DS, said "After this, the Mediterranean will seem incredibly mundane". I have taken this to be a chink in her armour and, rather than having to retire to the lotus-eating fleshpots, I now have carte blanche to organise future cruises to Labrador, Greenland and Alaska. But I generally seem to misinterpret everything the DS says, so time will tell.

Few boats make it this far south and those that do are full of some of the most interesting people I have met. Everybody has a story or three to tell, many of them quite extraordinary, but they are told modestly. You get to know pretty much every other boat and the camaraderie both on the quayside in Ushuaia and Puerto Williams, and also in the channels on the rare occasion that you come across them, will be one of my enduring memories of the last few months. We have made many friends here. The lack of anticipation of the last 5 weeks cruising round the channels by the DS, Andrew and me made it all the more exciting and enjoyable. Being able to share this together has been a wonderful experience, so it was with a heavy heart that I said goodbye to Maria three days ago who was flying back to Buenos Aires to see her mother whilst we take the slow route back to BA on Mina2.

But before the DS left, The Beard left as well. My extremely fine Antarctic beard generated a lot of comment from all quarters, but none of them complimentary I'm afraid to say. Comparisons with Bill Oddy and David Blunkett were bad enough but the cruellest and final cut came from Peter, my son, bearded Antarctic himself, who said "Dad, your beard gives me the creeps. You remind me of Dr Harold Shipman". Weirdo twitchers and philandering left wing politicians is one thing, but for your own flesh and blood to accuse you of looking like a psychotic mass-murderer was the limit. The Beard had to go. When the whiskers came off the morning of the DS's departure my face, which hadn't seen the light of day for 2 ½ months, looked ashen-grey.

The evening before, Tom and Lawrence flew in from the UK to join Andrew in helping me get Mina2 back north to the warmth and tranquillity of Brazil for the southern winter. We are doing this in two long non-stop legs. The first is from the Beagle Channel up the South Atlantic Ocean, past the Falkland Islands, back into the River Plate to Buenos Aires. A distance of 1,500 nautical miles, it should take between 10 and 12 days. We will then spend about 6 days or so in BA where I will be getting rid of the weight of all the special southern equipment we are carrying and restowing all the hot weather, light winds stuff I left in BA in October. Andrew will be leaving the boat in BA, leaving the three old boys to complete the journey with a final 1,200 nautical mile passage from BA to Bracuhy in between Sao Paulo and Rio in Brazil. This final passage should take about 8-10 days. In less than three weeks sailing, we will have left the ice of the south behind and replaced it with palm trees. The water temperature will have increased from a Weezy 7°C to a humid 30°C. Layer after

layer of clothing will be discarded exposing our pallid skins to the tropical sun until, bronzed once again, we will decommission Mina2 and tuck her up for six months.

So – Meet The Crew.

**Andrew**, from Switzerland, you have already met. He is the 26 year old nephew of a great friend of ours in Argentina. He is an experienced sailor and has been an invaluable help and good company over the last four weeks when the DS and I were in the channels.

Then there are **Lawrence and Tom**. If you are a veteran Mina2 blog reader, you'll have met them before on several occasions, as they have both sailed with me on a regular basis since Mina2 started her cruising in 2004 (indeed Lawrence and I used to race together in the 70's and 80's). Do you remember the Three Drunks that drank their way down the coast of Brazil with me in December just over a year ago? Well, Lawrence and Tom are two of them (Richard, Admiral of The Watch and the Third Drunk is skiing at the moment, so couldn't come). They are both very old. Not much more to say about them really.

We left Ushuaia at 0900 on Tuesday morning. We came out of the harbour into the channel and 40 to 50 knot winds, but they were heading east, like us, so no problem. On our way along the Beagle Channel we were passing Harberton, the 125,000 acre estancia (ranch) owned by the descendants of Thomas Bridges who was the missionary who came to Tierra del Fuego in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to convert the Indians to Christianity. The copy we have on board of the famous book his son wrote "Uttermost Part Of The Earth" (an inspirational book that I strongly recommend: ISBN 978-1-58567-956-0) has been read this year by no fewer than 7 people so far, so we popped in for the day so the crew could have a look around before we set off. Natalie Goodall, the wife of the owner and who is a leading expert on dolphins and porpoises was very interested in hearing about our sighting of Chilean dolphins in Brazo Sudoeste. Andrew showed her photos of them. She confirmed they were Chilean dolphins and said that as far as she knew that was the first sighting of them in that area.

I'll send this out now, and hope to send another blog bringing you up to date, later today. But suffice it to say that we are progressing well.

### **Boisterous Conditions in the South Atlantic**

**Position 49:08.5S 061:01.0 – 140 nm NNW of the Falkland Islands**

**Date Time: 24 March 2012 2200 local**

This will be short because of the boisterous conditions. We left Harberton at 0130 early in the morning on 22 March. The reason we left in the middle of the night was that we had to pass through the notorious Le Maire Strait with its tide rips and ship-eating overfalls and standing waves, at low water at midday to minimise the danger.

In the event it turned out to be without problems except that the usually lumpy and chaotic sea you get in the strait did turn the stomachs of a few of the crew. We are now approaching three days at sea with mainly good sailing, having covered about

450 miles of the 1500 mile total. We did have to turn on the engine for a few hours yesterday when the wind went light, but apart from that we have been making good progress under sail with the wind from behind us.

As had been forecast, we are being overtaken by a cold front, bringing strong winds from the south and south west. These are likely to remain with us for the next 2 or 3 days. The conditions are uncomfortable but they are speeding us towards Buenos Aires. We currently have 40 knot winds directly from behind us. We have a poled out headsail on one side, well reefed, and the mainsail strapped down on the other side, also well reefed. So we are clipping along at just under 8 knots. The seas are getting bigger – about 3 metres, and are expected to get bigger still as the wind continues to freshen. The boat under autopilot is coping with the conditions rather better than her crew. In these conditions the boat is rolling quite considerably, and we are being chucked about like pinballs. Hence the brevity of this blog! But we are bearing up and only glad that we have the wind behind us – trying to go in the opposite direction against the winds and waves would be pure hell!

### **Aliens Spotted in the South Atlantic**

**Position 46:13S 061:04W**

**Date Time: 26 March 2359 local**

We've continued to make good, if uncomfortable, progress, our noon to noon run being 160 miles. We still have strong 35 to 40 knot winds from astern. We had been running directly before the wind, goose-winged, but as the seas began to build the rolling of the boat from one side to the other was doing our heads in. Everything was crashing around, including ourselves. So since early this morning we have been sailing marginally more comfortably with the wind 25 degrees off our port quarter, even if we're not going in precisely the right direction.

Just looking back on some of the highlights of the passage (which I didn't have the time or stamina to go into in last night's blog), our first incident occurred within seconds of casting our lines off in Ushuaia.

Lawrence's camera had been playing up, i.e. refusing to work. Not allowing him to take a photo of the yacht club as we left, with a cry of "Bloody digital camera" he flung it high in the air and into the water. The rest of us stood there, mouths agape. The thought flashing through my mind was that if he dealt with every bit of slightly malfunctioning equipment on the boat in the same way, then Mina2 would be completely empty by the time we got to Buenos Aires. The thought flashing through Andrew's practical Swiss mind was that the foolish man hadn't taken out the SD card before he lobbed it into the drink.

Talking of boat malfunctions, we have enjoyed a couple of little excitements. This morning a part of the reefing system for the mainsail broke, and jammed in a block. It took the combined efforts of three of us teetering around on the coachroof, with Andrew sitting astride the boom like a bucking bronco to free it. We have been able to cobble together a repair that will more than suffice for the rest of the passage.

Then when we were taking down the spinnaker pole today, it came adrift from the mast, missed Lawrence's head by a whisker, bounced on the deck and vaulted overboard. Luckily it was still attached to the boat by a flimsy bit of rope (the uphaul), so instead of floating away and sinking, it was smashing itself against the hull (we were speeding along at 8 knots at the time). It was recovered quickly by Andrew and me, but both these incidents made us wonder at the bravery, skill and strength of those who sail the oceans single-handed and have to deal with these sorts of situations all on their own.

And talking of single-handed sailors, on our first night out we passed a large trawler who called us up on the radio to find out who we were. They had been asked to look out for a Swedish yacht called Seastar with a single-handed sailor who was overdue at his destination. I hope and pray he is safe.

On a happier note, on our second day out, we celebrated Tom's 65<sup>th</sup> birthday. He opened his card and present from Robyn, his partner, which was a set of CD's of 60's hits which everyone has been singing along to ever since. Andrew cooked brownies in lieu of a birthday cake which, due to the vagaries of our hopeless oven, came out wedge shaped – soft and squidgy one end, and like a biscuit at the other end, catering for every taste. It may have looked like a cowpat but it tasted very much better. Tom's happy returns were toasted and we enjoyed the usual endless renditions of Happy Birthday.

The following day, Friday, we were given a terrific flying display by virtually every species of seabird we might expect to see in this area. There were hundreds of them, from the magnificent Wandering Albatross to the tiny Wilson's Storm Petrel, all wheeling around the boat for hours. Fabulous.

Last night, about 140 miles north of the Falkland Islands we saw what we thought might have been the lights of a few fishing boats over the horizon. But as time passed, they didn't appear, but the domes of light grew brighter and brighter. From the hours that it took to pass them way over on our starboard side, it was clear that they were a) absolutely massive and b) probably about 20 miles away. We assume that they were alien space ships, but they may just have been oil exploration platforms.

And today we were treated to a display of acrobatics by a group of Peale's Dolphins. Andrew has got some terrific photos of a couple completely clear of the water, which you'll see when we get into Buenos Aires.

### **Skipper Injured In Manic Tea Disaster**

**Position 44:42S 060:28W**

**Date/Time: 26 March 1200 local (1500 UTC; 1600 UK)**

We're following the cold front with its strong southerly / southwesterly winds up the South Atlantic and it's providing an exhilarating ride. We started off running directly before the wind but the consequence, as the seas built, was such uncomfortable rolling of the boat including everything in it, that we packed that in after the first day and have since then been battling along with the wind 25° off our stern which makes for a more comfortable but still very boisterous ride.

After several days of gale Force 8 winds, the seas have grown majestic. We are now 200 miles from the nearest land, (the coast of Argentina to our left), and from where the winds are coming from it is clear blue water as far as Tierra del Fuego more than 600 miles away, so there is plenty of room for a long 100 metre ocean swell to develop. In between these 4 to 5m high rollers are overlaying smaller waves generated by the current wind which climb like a ladder up the big rollers. The crests of many of the waves are breaking, sending brilliant white cock combs of water tumbling down the waves, contrasting with the deep, deep blue of the ocean. The waves are travelling a lot faster than we are, so they advance on us from astern. As each peak approaches, towering high above us, Mina2 kicks her pretty stern into the air and allows them to pass beneath her hull. Whilst the waves look beautiful and dramatic, they are not sufficiently big to be threatening to us (touch wood, fingers crossed). And, sadly, there is not a camera on earth which can recreate the shape and size of these waves – all photographs of waves at sea look pathetic compared to the reality.

These conditions are forecast to remain for the next 36 hours, by which time the cold front will have overtaken us and we will fall into the high pressure system behind it with much weaker and variable winds for the remainder of the passage, so we are enjoying it whilst it lasts. We have not been pushing the boat hard at all. Our sail plan of a deeply reefed mainsail and a scrap of headsail is based on comfort and safety rather than maximising our speed. Nevertheless, our distance covered over the last 24 hours, noon to noon, has been a more than respectable 184 miles over the ground, an average of 7.7 knots.

With more than 750 miles under the keel since we left Ushuaia, we are now just beyond the half way point. As is traditional on Mina2 on her ocean passages, we are celebrating the occasion with a glass of fine wine. Lawrence is in the cockpit on watch. Tom and I come on deck with three glasses of light coloured liquid and hand one to Lawrence. We raise our glasses and take a long sip. Whilst Tom and I savour the delicate nuances of the fine wine rolling across our palates, Lawrence spits his drink out. The next thing he spits out is a string of expletives. Well, what was he expecting other than water? He is on watch after all.

The boisterous conditions have exacted their toll. Last night, Andrew made a mug of tea for both of us. As he was climbing back into the cockpit, I offered to hold his mug and pass it to him. At that moment a rogue wave hit us at an awkward angle and the boat lurched at a crazily. I made a grab for a handhold, missed, and the next thing I was flying through the air, spraying scalding tea all over me. The first point of contact with the sole board (floor) was my elbow. A searing pain shot through it as I stumbled apologetically to my feet to make Andrew another brew. 12 hours later and it's still hurting a lot, but as I have not even a shadow of a bruise to show for it, I'm getting absolutely no sympathy from the crew. They'll pay for it, believe me.

Only minutes after my accident, I had made a cuppa for myself which I had put safely on a sticky mat on the saloon table. As luck would have it, Rogue Wave No2 hits us and my full mug of tea hurtled across the saloon and smashed into a thousand pieces. There's now more tea in the bilge than there is bilge water.

Just before dawn, Lawrence and Andrew were in the saloon when all of a sudden, after three days of continuous silence, the VHF radio crackled into life. They were surprised to find themselves listening to a long conversation between two fishing boats carried out in Japanese. Lawrence looked worried as he said to Andrew “Do you think the skippers gone the wrong way?”

**Position 44:42S 060:28W**

**Date/Time: 2 March 1200 local (1500 UTC; 1600 UK)**

It is about Day 4 in ocean crossings on Mina2 that cabin fever sets in, and this crossing is no exception. Early indications have been that, when to give people warning of a particularly violent lurch of the boat, if anyone sees a very large wave approaching they shout “BIG WAVE”. Now, every time the cry goes up, Tom and Lawrence grin inanely at each other and wave their arms around in the air. For God’s sake, 134 years between them and they’re acting like toddlers.

As we head north from the frozen south to the welcoming warmth of Buenos Aires, the temperature has been slowly but surely creeping up. The water temperature (which at sea closely correlates to the air temperature) started off at 7.5°C and is now 12°. You can now go into the cockpit to enjoy the sun without being wrapped up in multiple layers’ gloves and hats. Sad though I am to be leaving the south, this is definitely one of the benefits and we’re all looking forward to the real warmth of the sun.

### **First Signs Of Cabin Fever Sets In**

**Noon Position: 41:50S 059:12W**

**Noon to Noon Run: 182 miles**

**Date: 27 March 2012**

It is normally about Day 5 on an ocean passage that Cabin Fever sets in, or so it seems on Mina2, and this passage is no exception. The symptoms of Cabin Fever can range from nothing much more than slightly odd behaviour (difficult to gauge in Tom & Lawrence’s case, as they behave oddly at the best of times), to certifiable lunacy. We haven’t the full spectrum on board yet, but we’re moving in that direction.

I thought it started yesterday when Tom started mumbling to himself in Cambodian. Anyway, false alarm, as it transpired he was listening to his Spanish language tape on his iPod. I don’t know whether the fact I thought he was talking in Cambodian says so much about Tom’s inability to speak Spanish as to my inability to understand it.

But Lawrence has definitely been losing it a bit. Tom had been having a challenging time making scrambled eggs for breakfast. As we rocked and rolled, one of the eggs awaiting cracking flipped over the rim around the work surface in the galley and plopped on the floor. Just as Tom had finished clearing up the mess, a second egg self-launched on to the floor. Tom was a bit upset judging by the vile language he was using. Trying to cheer Tom up, Lawrence said “Don’t worry Tom, we’ve got loads more eggs at home. The hens are laying really well at the moment” And just now as we were looking at some Dusky Dolphins that had come to play with our bow wave, Lawrence asked “What do dolphins eat? Are they vegetarian?”

Meanwhile, Andrew remains more sane and more grown-up than the rest of us put together. And thank God for that. Last night, I was typing something on the computer when a more than usually violent lurch hurled my very small whisky and soda over the keyboard. Instant malfunction. Thank goodness I'm carrying a spare computer otherwise you wouldn't be getting this blog, and we wouldn't be getting any more weather forecasts. Anyway, Andrew who luckily knows everything and can fix anything, whipped the dysfunctional computer away from me and has stripped it down to its individual silicon chips. He will be reconstructing the computer later, doubtlessly adding a few enhancements whilst he's at it. Splendid fellow.

Meanwhile, the boat continues to sail herself to the sunshine with great speed. Just to prove yesterday wasn't a flash in the pan, our noon to noon mileage today was yet another very satisfying 184 miles. But as I type this with the increasingly warm sun getting lower in the early evening sky, the wind is now moderating as forecast. We will not be having any more high mileage days I'm afraid. Now two thirds distance, with 500 miles still to go, the frustrating part of the passage starts here.

### **You Can't Slow A Good Boat Down**

**Noon Position: 39:18S 057:53W**

**Noon to Noon Run: 164 miles**

**Date: 28 March 2012**

The southerly wind died yesterday evening as forecast and, after a short period of calm when we had to endure the unusual sound of the engine for three hours, a moderate breeze filled in from the west. The breeze reached its forecast strength of 25 knots but then continued to build until we were once again well reefed in 35 – 40 knots of wind – another gale, but this time from the beam, an even better and faster direction. So for the last 12 hours we have been tanking along at between 7.5 and 8.5 knots. Brilliant, brilliant, brilliant. And now being out of the Roaring Forties, everything seems a little less extreme. Our noon to noon run wasn't in the 180's like the last couple of days, but it was still 164 miles which is not to be sniffed at.

To add to our good fortune, the water temperature, which had been a chilly 7.5° C when we started the passage, is now a bath-like 16.4° and the air temperature has also increased correspondingly. It is the first time in months that I have been able to sit in the cockpit without being swathed in layers of clothing, hats and gloves.

This morning, we saw an enormous flock of birds wheeling around in the distance. Obviously a big shoal of fish were there. And where there are fish, you get dolphins. And, boy, did we get dolphins. An enormous pod of probably 100+ Common Dolphins or Hourglass Dolphins (the first of this species I have seen, and certainly the largest pod of dolphins I have ever come across) came zooming in towards us and surrounded the boat for about half an hour, shooting around and under the boat, porpoising in and out of the water with the occasional show-off hurtling fully out of the waves.

We are now closing the coast of Argentina and some time tomorrow morning we should be passing Pinamar, a resort town on the coast. This is where Andrew's granny,

Omi Lulle, lives. She will be 100 years old this year and still goes for a swim in the sea every day. Respect. The plan, so long as we are not there too early, is to sweep past tomorrow morning as close as the shallow waters will allow, and give Omi Lulle a wave, and dip our ensign in salute.

### **Salute To A Near Centenarian Granny**

**Noon Position: 36:38S 056:35W – In the mouth of the River Plate**

**Noon to Noon Run: 171 miles**

**Date: 29 March 2012**

We were expecting the wind to die in the middle of the night as we closely approached the coast of Argentina, but happily it stayed with us until this morning enabling us continue our pace in the now flat seas.

Our mission was to sail close past Pinamar and wave hello to Andrew's granny, Omi Lulle. The plan was to keep a mile offshore to clear some shallows just south of Pinamar, then head in to the shore so we were within waving distance of the beach. At 0530 I went down below for some sleep and left instructions to the watch-keeper to pass on to Andrew – maintain this course and wake me half an hour before we get to Pinamar.

Only the first part of the message got passed on. I was awoken by Andrew at 0700 to tell me that they were passing Pinamar. I went on deck. Pinamar was almost behind us and because we hadn't headed into the coast we could barely see the buildings, let alone wave to Omi Lulle.

This wouldn't do at all. You don't drag a 99 year-old lady out of bed at that hour for her to wave forlornly to a dot on the horizon. We tacked back into shore and headed for Pinamar. We crept towards the shallow beach until we were a couple of hundred metres away. Andrew could see his granny standing on shore waving frantically. Andrew grabbed our British ensign and waved it jubilantly in return. A lovely family reunion.

Andrew heard later by email that Omi Lulle had tried to organise a boat to come out to us with wine and empanadas (delicious Argentine pasties) but, as it is late in the season, none was to be found. So she went off to the Prefectura (the Argentine Coastguard and Naval Police) and asked them if they could help. Reluctantly, they told her that it wouldn't be possible unless it was an emergency. So Omi Lulle was thwarted in her kind gesture. But, Omi Lulle, it is the thought that counts and it was a thought much appreciated. We will be drinking a toast to your continued good health at lunchtime.

Mind you, given the anti-British sentiment in Argentina at the moment over the Falklands, and that we had been waving a large British ensign just yards off the beach, had we seen a Prefectura gun boat heading towards us I think I would have turned tale and headed full speed straight for Uruguay.

And who was the watch-keeper who failed to pass on the all-important second part of the message to Andrew? Well, we don't have a blame culture on board Mina2, but suffice it say that Lawrence has been sitting on the Naughty Chair all morning.

With the wind having now died completely and not forecast to return for a few days, our sailing is now over and we are motoring in flat seas into the entrance of the River Plate, and likely to have to motor for the last of the 200-miles of our wonderful passage. The wind has gone because we have now been overtaken by a high pressure system, and high pressure systems bring cloudless skies, brilliant hot sunshine and flat seas. So, even though we aren't due to get into Buenos Aires until tomorrow evening, everybody is feeling very demob happy. We're now tootling along the coast, down to shorts and no T-shirts, lounging on deck soaking up the warming rays. (I've reminded Lawrence that there's little ozone here and he will burn. But he won't listen and I know that tomorrow I'll have to report on his inevitable severe sunburn). Damp clothing is hanging out to dry and all the ports are open to dry out the accumulated condensation of months in the cold south.

One of the things we've been really surprised about is that we have seen albatrosses all the way on the passage, and we are STILL seeing them now in the mouth of the River Plate. It's a bit like seeing polar bears on the coast of North Africa (the equivalent northern latitude).

### **Arrivers and Leavers**

**Position: 34:26.905S 058:30.54W – Club Nautico San Isidro**

**Date: 04 April 2012**

The cruising world is divided into those for whom the best day is the day they arrive in a new port – the Arrivers - and those for whom the best day is the day they leave for the open sea bound for the next port – the Leavers. I am definitely a Leaver. When I'm at sea, I can't wipe the smile off my face, almost regardless of the conditions. I am master of my own destiny working with the natural forces of winds waves and tides. Arrival in port means the return of all the pressures imposed by the unnatural world – the bureaucrats, the re-provisioning, checking finances, dealing with accumulated emails and sorting out a miscellany of problems. It is tiring and often stressful.

Our time in Buenos Aires has involved all this and more, but it has also brought great pleasures as well. We are moored in the Yacht club / country club that Maria is a member of with its civilised restaurants, open acres of golf courses and several swimming pools. We also have many friends here and we have been juggling the time for boat jobs with meeting up with our friends for a final farewell (it may be a year or two before I return to Buenos Aires).

The cold front that swept us up so quickly from Ushuaia overtook us in the mouth of the River Plate and left us wallowing in the light winds of a high pressure system. BA had been suffering cold autumnal weather before our arrival, but we brought the sun with us and it has been hot and sunny since we've been here. Whilst I've spent most of the time so far working on the boat, Lawrence, Tom and Robyn (Tom's girlfriend who flew out to join us for our few days R&R) have been enjoying the facilities of the

club and yesterday took a ferry into town for a day's sightseeing. Tonight we are all heading into town for a crash course on dancing the Tango followed by a night of dancing ahead of Robyn's departure tomorrow morning.

The plan is that we leave early on Saturday morning for Angra Dos Reis in Brazil, between Rio and Sao Paolo to leave Mina2 for the southern winter. The passage is 1100 miles and should take between 8 and 10 days.

I probably won't post another blog until we set off.

### **Amputation Crisis on Mina2**

**Position: 34:59.3S 054:57.2W – off Punta Del Este**

**Date: 08 April 2012 1740**

We left Buenos Aires yesterday morning at 0815 for the final passage of our remarkable adventure – non-stop 1100 miles to Angra Dos Reis in Brasil.

The last few days in Buenos Aires was a hectic round of provisioning, refuelling, dumping excess Antarctic gear and re-loading all our hot-weather gear that we had left here; taking delivery of a replacement bimini and a new sun awning which also doubles as a rainwater collector, and farewell drinks and meals with all our old friends here.

Tom and Lawrence had been hoping, to take a ferry over to Colonia in Uruguay for a day trip, not least because Lawrence had a load of Uruguayan currency worth £600, which he bought when we stopped off at Punta Del Este on our way south last year. Time didn't allow for the day trip, so he went off on a round of the banks in Buenos Aires to try and change the money. As the afternoon dragged on, bank after bank looked at the pile of notes and said they couldn't help, which seemed odd. It was only later that Robyn (Tom's girlfriend) looked at the currency and found that Lawrence had been trying to change West African Francs, worth about 20p, which he had bought in Western Sahara when we had been sailing down the African coast a couple of years back.

Tom was also experiencing difficulties. In one shop he asked if they had a spray nozzle for a water hose. Yes, the shopkeeper announced triumphantly, went into the back of the shop and returned with a fire extinguisher. Later that afternoon, Tom was buying a couple of cartons of cigarettes and asked how much they were. With a quizzical look, the shopkeeper went over to some scales, weighed the cigarettes and gave Tom the weight to the nearest gram. Clearly he needs a bit more time on his Spanish language tapes.

Mind you, Tom & Lawrence came up trumps when they returned with a pair of waterproof loudspeakers for the stereo in the cockpit to replace the ones that had packed up – a welcome gift for the boat that had looked after them for so many thousands of miles over the years.

Then, inevitably, there were the bureaucratic complications of clearing us and the boat out of Argentina. We had allocated about two hours on our last day for the process.

Starting at 0900 we didn't complete the formalities until 1700. I've loved cruising down the coast of South America but one thing I won't miss is the stressful, time-consuming and mindless bureaucracy.

There was one other thing that spoilt our last day in Argentina. Lawrence. He had been complaining for a couple of days about a bit of athlete's foot. He started limping a little and then the whining started. "Ti-im, it really hurts" he moaned about every five minutes, now in full-on Pathetic Mode. I really didn't have time for this sort of whimpish behaviour. "Just pull yourself together. It's only athlete's foot for God's sake" I told him. The following day, Lawrence came whining again. "My whole foot is painful now, and I've got red lines tracking up my leg". That's all I needed. The stupid idiot had allowed his foot to become infected. We dragged him off to a pharmacist (by this time Lawrence was hopping on his one good foot, tears of self-pity pouring down his pathetic face). The pharmacist took one look at the manky foot and said that Lawrence really should go to a doctor, and straight away, but it was late afternoon and we were leaving at first light the following day. I wasn't going to allow Lawrence's irresponsibility to get in the way of our plans. Tom and I had discussed the matter and we were confident, whatever fate befell Lawrence, we could handle the passage with just the two of us, so we got the pharmacist to prescribe a seriously powerful course of penicillin which Lawrence started taking straight away.

It wasn't just the pain that made Lawrence feel uncomfortable. Tom is our Medical Officer (he's a retired dentist), and he unnerved Lawrence by arranging in a neat row on the saloon table a collection of blunt knives and rusting hacksaws together with our copy of "The Ship's Captains Medical Guide" opened at the page "How to Amputate a Manky Foot" and with a bookmark at the page on "Disposal Of A Body At Sea". (Actually, the recommendation is that you only conduct a burial at sea as a last resort. The preferred procedure is to store the corpse in the ship's deep freeze. But our deepfreeze is rather small and it would take forever cutting Lawrence into sufficiently small parts to jam him in. Anyway, the deep freeze is already full of rather good cuts of meat that Tom and I are looking forward to eating). Anyway, in the event, it seems that the penicillin has done the trick. Lawrence's foot seems to be on the mend, and the penicillin probably got rid of all sorts of other infections as well. Deep down, I think Tom was rather disappointed.

As we sailed away from Buenos Aires we noticed a few flies down below, and then more and more. God knows where they came from but we found we had a plague on our hands. There were all over the place, buzzing around and covering every surface. Enter "The Executioner". This is a recently acquired contraption. It's like a small tennis racquet with wires across it. Press a button and when it touches a fly or mosquito there is a loud crack, a flash, a smell of burning flesh and the fly drops dead. It's easy to use and quite brilliantly effective. During the course of the day, we killed hundreds of flies to the point where every sheet, sofa, table and floor was covered with little black singed corpses. Walking around was like walking on black corn flakes until Lawrence came up with the brilliant idea of getting the dustpan and brush out (how he found it I don't know – he's never used it before) and swept them all up. They could have filled a bucket.

Meanwhile, we have covered more than 200 miles since we left yesterday morning. Apart from a couple of hours yesterday evening when the wind died to nothing and

we had to motor, the sailing has been good – from every angle – the sea flat and as we progress, it is turning from the muddy brown of the River Plate to the blue of the open ocean, and the sky has been clear and sunny. At night we sail under a brilliant full moon. As I type, we are sailing a mile off Punta del Este where the DS, Selina, Peter and I have spent so many happy holidays over the years. Couldn't be better.

## **MOST OF THIS BLOG WAS WRITTEN YESTERDAY APOLOGIES FOR LATE POSTING**

**Position: 34:48S 052:46W**

**Date: 09 April 2012**

I'm sorry. I forgot to wish all our readers a very Happy Easter yesterday. I only remembered when I saw Tom hunting around, lifting up cushions and peering behind curtains. "What are you looking for?" I asked. "The little chocolate eggs. You must have hidden them somewhere". Honestly, it's like being in charge of a kindergarten.

We've had some bad news on the wind situation. The wind has now swung round to the northeast – the very direction we want to go. As you will all know by now, boats can't sail directly into the wind but have to sail in a zigzag which basically doubles the mileage and more than doubles the time it takes to get from A to B. We are on the western edge of a high pressure system that is stubbornly not moving. So the headwinds will prevail for no less than six frustrating days. Nothing could have been done about this – we couldn't have left BA any earlier and nor we could have left much later as we all have planes to catch from Rio. But we did allow quite a lot of latitude in time. We had planned to arrive in Angra Dos Reis 2 to 4 days before Lawrence and Tom's plane home, so this is our buffer.

When sailing from BA to Brazil one thinks of oneself sailing north, but more than 300 miles into the passage we are still in fact south of Buenos Aires, albeit a long way to the east. Currently we are heading east out to sea, and in due course we will tack and head north at last.

Now out of the muddy fresh water of the River Plate we have been joined by our old friends, the sea birds, including (and this still seems completely wrong this far north) Black-browed Albatross. It will be interesting if we still see any when we get to the latitude of Brazil about 60 miles north of here.

Notwithstanding the less than ideal wind situation, we're not exactly complaining. We are cruising along at a little over 5 knots in a gentle ocean swell with a brilliantly blue sky and a warm breeze caressing our skin. I had almost forgotten what it was like not being covered in multiple layers and smashing through mountainous waves in gale force winds. Quite pleasant really.

This morning I received an email which gave me enormous happiness. I summoned the entire ship's company onto the poop deck and ordered Able Seadog Snoopy to take one step forward. He looked a little nervous (not to mention a little warm as he has so far refused to take off his hand-knitted Falklands Wool Polarwear and it's now 22 C). I read out the email::

By Proclamation of  
The Royal Board of Naval Seadogs  
In recognition of the Heroic Achievements of Able Seadog Snoopy in the field of  
Polar Exploration  
Bringing Such Credit to All British Seadogs  
The Board Begg To Inform You  
that You are Hereby Accepted as a Member into the  
Grand Order of the Dog Collar  
And that you be promoted with immediate effect and shall henceforth be entitled  
Pet Officer Snoopy MDC

Signed: Admiral of Dogfleet, Lord Kay-Nign KCDC

The little fella was pretty choked, bursting with pride up as I shook his paw and the rest of the ship's complement threw their hats into the air and gave him three rousing cheers. Bernadette gave him an affectionate lick and I ordered the Quartermaster (Tom) to issue an extra ration of G&T's to all hands and a special dinner to be prepared of Winalot Extra for Superdogs in celebration.

I'm sure you will all wish to join me in congratulating Pet Officer Snoopy on the honour and promotion he has so richly deserved.

### **Skipper Stands Accused of Neglecting Blogfans**

**Position: 29:18S 048:39W**

**Date & Time : 13 April 2012 0400 (0700 UTC – 0800 BST)**

Well we're still alive – not that you would know it from any blog postings I'm afraid. And I don't really have any excuses except that I've been a bit busy with this and that, and when not busy I've been catching up with sleep.

I last posted three days ago when the wind had swung to the northeast and we were having to tack back and forth, but we were enjoying life in a gentle ocean swell. Well, things changed. The wind picked up, and then the sea built. The wind was only Force 6 – a mere zephyr compared to what we've grown accustomed to over the last few months - but beating straight into it we were having to live at a permanent 25 degree angle whilst at the same time the boat was surging up the steep waves and then plunging into the troughs. After 36 hours of coping with these conditions, it was becoming tiresome. The problem was that the forecast had changed significantly and it was now forecast to stay like this for a further four whole tossing, bone-crunching days. Worse than that, much stronger gale force winds were forecast towards the end of the four days and at that point we would be in the middle of a 450 mile stretch of coast with no safe havens to dive into.

Given how tired we had all become after just a day and a half of this, and as we were approaching the large port of Rio Grande, I decided it would be prudent to change our plans: go into Rio Grande and go through the whole ghastly procedure of clearing us and the boat into Brazil and wait there until the conditions changed. We arrived in the early hours of Wednesday morning and with enormous relief tied up alongside a boat

at the pontoon of the oceanographic museum. A very quick anchor nip and we all slumped into our blissfully steady bunks for a good night's sleep. I awoke at dawn and downloaded the latest forecasts to find that the prognosis had once again changed dramatically. The intense low pressure system had weakened considerably and was moving east much more quickly which meant that rather than expecting strong winds on the nose, we could now expect light and variable winds.

So, now no reason to stay, and given we had not actually been onshore, we quietly slipped our lines and beetled out of the harbour again before anyone saw us.

Since then we have been able to sail quite a bit, interspersed with a bit of motoring when the winds got light. But as I type in the early hours of Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, we have been motoring for six hours in almost no wind and it seems likely that we may be motoring for the next couple of days. Current ETA at our destination is Monday morning.

For the last few days, Lawrence has been fiddling around with the fishing tackle with a view to varying our mainly meat diet. The line goes out, comes back in, change the lure, vary the length and so it goes on. We are surrounded by fishing boats so there is every evidence of abundant fish in the area, but so far Lawrence has caught absolutely nothing. Completely useless.

Mind you, he nearly got more than he bargained for. Yesterday afternoon, Tom was on watch. The cry went up: "Shark! Shark!!" Lawrence and I rushed up on deck to see a large fin patrolling the water around the boat. I'd like to see Lawrence heaving a Great White onto the deck.

Incidentally, I had a bit of a personnel issue to deal with a couple of days ago. Lawrence came up to me and complained that whenever I mentioned him in the blog, he always came out as being a complete idiot. Well, yes. What does he expect me to do? Lie in the blog? Make things up? Over my dead body. The integrity of the blog is absolute and you can rest assured that it reflects nothing but a true and factual account of life on board. Anyway, I hadn't realised that Lawrence had wanted to keep his inept stupidity a secret.

Meanwhile, Pet Officer Snoopy has been taking full advantage of his promotion. As he now outranks both Tom and Lawrence, he has been ordering them around. Lawrence has had to spend most of his off-watch time throwing balls for Snoopy to chase and fetch, whilst Tom, the Quartermaster, is constantly being ordered to bring supplies of Winalot Extra to Snoopy's cabin "for inspection". That's the last anyone sees of them.

## **Super-Hero Lawrence Saves The Day**

**Position: 27:55S 047:32W**

**Date & Time : 13 April 2012 2215 (0115 UTC – 0215 BST)**

With one exception – and a major one – it's been a pretty routine day. To arrive at Angra Dos Reis at first light on Monday we only have to average 5.8 knots which is not demanding. So in the light winds and now flat seas we are enjoying, we have had

a combination of beam reaching under sail alone, a bit of motor sailing just to keep the speed up a bit when the wind drops off and, occasionally, when the wind dies even further we have simply motored. Not exactly an epic passage but we're all agreed that after the exceptionally good passage from Ushuaia to Buenos Aires we're well satisfied whatever this final passage brings.

Lawrence, bless him, has never given up on his fishing ambitions and has been tweaking this and changing that. Clearly he had attracted something, as at one point this afternoon there was a loud crack and the 50 lb breaking strain line just snapped – I'm not sure we would have wanted on board the monster that did that anyway. So another length of line and an expensive lure went the same way as so many others before it. I have lost lures over the years worth far more than if I had bought the fish we have caught at Harrods and had them helicoptered out to the boat.

Not fazed by this set back, Lawrence got out the Big Rod, put on one of my last remaining lures and half an hour later the end of the rod arched over and the line started playing out. Like a coiled spring, Lawrence had grabbed the rod and was playing the catch. With consummate skill he let the catch run a bit, then reeled it in ever closer. After what seemed hours of this life and death struggle between the two gladiators, Lawrence eventually brought alongside a large what we think but don't know 'cos we don't have a crib sheet is a yellow fin tuna (for those of you out there that might know, it is grey on top, bright yellowy green underneath, has a dome shaped head, a well forked tail, and a large sailfish-like dorsal fin).

Within minutes Lawrence had it clubbed to death by winch handle on the poop deck (the blood was all over the place, including some that splattered down the open hatch to my cabin staining the sheets of my bed – the DS will not be happy). It was then gutted and filleted and, as I type, it is simmering in a pan of butter, onions and garlic, ready to be served with some simple boiled and buttered potatoes.

What a fantastic performance. I may just have given the impression in some earlier blogs that Lawrence was a couple of sandwiches short of a picnic and, if I did so, then I openly admit that this would have been a completely inadvertent slur on his fine character. Lawrence is a hunter-gatherer supreme. Strong in mind and body he exemplifies everything I would wish to be when I'm a near-70 year old codger. No skipper could ask for a better crew member and I am proud to have Lawrence on board. And I bet that, at home, he is a devoted and caring husband to Carrie and an exemplary father to Keely. What lucky women they are.

### **The Passage From Heaven To The Passage From Hell**

**Position: 27:55S 047:32W**

**Date & Time : 15 April 2012 2215 (0115 UTC – 0215 BST)**

After such a stunningly good passage from Ushuaia to Buenos Aires, the laws of probability suggested that the laws of averages were going to catch up with us. And they have. This passage from Buenos Aires up the coast of Brazil has been the slowest, most frustrating I have ever experienced and, at 1100 miles, the third longest passage I have made, so the agony has gone on for ever.

By rights at this time of year we should have been enjoying balmy off-wind sailing all the way up, but for almost all of the time the wind has been absolutely slap bang on the nose. Given that we have a deadline to get Tom & Lawrence on their planes home (with sufficient time in port, I hope, to give me a hand with the heavy decommissioning jobs like getting all the sails down, flaked, bagged and stowed) slowly tacking our way up the coast – which would double the time and distance – was not an option. So we have had to either motor into the wind, or motor-sail just off the wind for most of the way. In the 92 hours since we left Rio Grande after our unscheduled stop there, we have had the motor running for a staggering 72 hours. The cost of the fuel aside, for someone who doesn't like using his engine at all it has been hell on earth.

Last night took the biscuit. Lawrence, who was on watch at the time got a bit of a shock when, within literally one minute, the wind swung through 120 degrees and shot up from a benign 20 knots to a sail-tearing 55 knots. It was the cold front coming through from the depression that has been creeping up on us. Whilst the wind speed moderated again as quickly as it had sprung up, in its wake the cold front brought confused short boat-stopping seas, and wildly fluctuating wind speeds and wind directions. So for the next 12 hours it was a frustrating, continuous process of trim sails in; trim sails out; reefs in; reefs out, port 20°; starboard 30°; engine on; engine off. And all this in heavy drenching, muggy rain. We were also alarmingly close to spectacular and almost continuous thunder and lightning. It was loathsome and I was extremely far from grunted. I think that part of the problem as far as I am concerned is that, psychologically, I finished the Great Adventure in Buenos Aires. So this is not a passage to another new cruising ground, it is a delivery trip to get Mina2 put to bed for the winter, and I now want to get it over and done with. The forecasts suggest good winds from behind us for the rest of the 170 miles, so I hope that the passage will at least end with some good sailing.

One of the few redeeming features of this whole passage is the terrific support and ever-cheerful company I've had from Tom & Lawrence (despite what earlier blogs might have suggested!).

### **Safe Arrival**

**Position: 23:06S 044:20W**

**Date & Time : 16 April 2012 1000 (1300 UTC – 1400 BST)**

Mina2 and her crew have arrived safely in the Bahia Ilha Grande. The God of the Winds redeemed himself yesterday, at last, by giving us a really good sail and, like childbirth (so I'm told) all the pain of previous days has now been forgotten.

We're wending our way between the numerous islands in the bay towards the marina at Angra Dos Reis where we will begin the tortuous process of clearing us and the boat into Brazil. And then we'll hit the Caipirinhas.

I'll post another blog in a couple of days with a summary of this, the Greatest Adventure.

Meanwhile thanks to all of you for tuning in.

This is CapTim on the good ship Mina2. Out.