

DIVE LOG PLA 29-23

11.- 22. February 2023

DIVE TEAM:

Dive Team Leader: Henrik Enckell, **Dive Guides:** Catherine Buckland, Gonzalo Sabattini, and Tanja Bayer

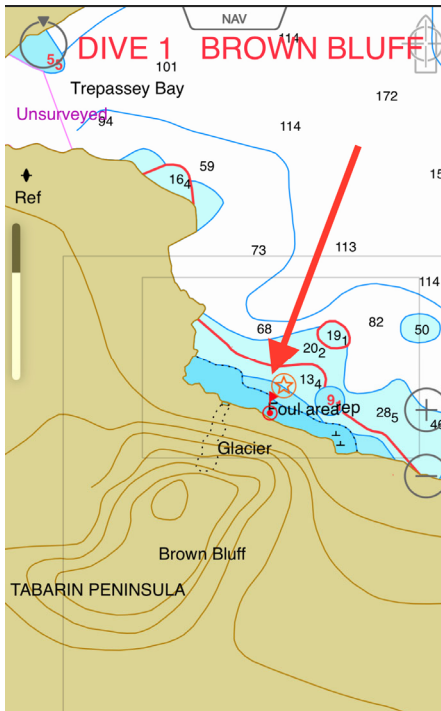
Divers and Snorkelers: Faith Ortins, Michelle Sutter, William Golley, Lauren Evans, Richard Witter, David Willis, Robert Scarzafava, Kelly Scarzafava, Dale Coburn, Peggy Coburn, Michael Kelly, Elizabeth Kelly, Wayne Weidemann, Elizabeth Weidemann, Carol Strachan, Beverly White, Shirley Robertson, Don Novielle, Suzie Dudas, Christopher Henry, Kathryn Henry, Troy Kunz, Daniel McMath, Jay Matzke, Audrey Garbacik, Donald Zwick, Marc Steurer, Martina Steurer, Lorne Sprackman, Kelly Sprackmann, Michael Williams, Kathleen Scarlett, Richard Salas, Victoria Pitt, Becky Kagan Scott, Kitrina Godding, Paulina Kayachanian, Diego Zalerno



We enjoyed a very smooth passage across the Drake and used the time to do our mandatory Dive Briefing and to get our kit ready in the afternoon before arriving at Brown Bluff. Some seabirds, mostly black-browed albatrosses, followed the ship on our way south. We arrived at the South Shetland Islands in the afternoon of Monday, the 13th of February. During the night we crossed Bransfield Strait and sailed into Antarctic Sound. The dive gear was prepared and everybody was excited to get in the water and dive in Antarctica!

DIVE 1: Brown Bluff Tuesday 14th February 2023

63°31.068' S - 056° 53.849' W

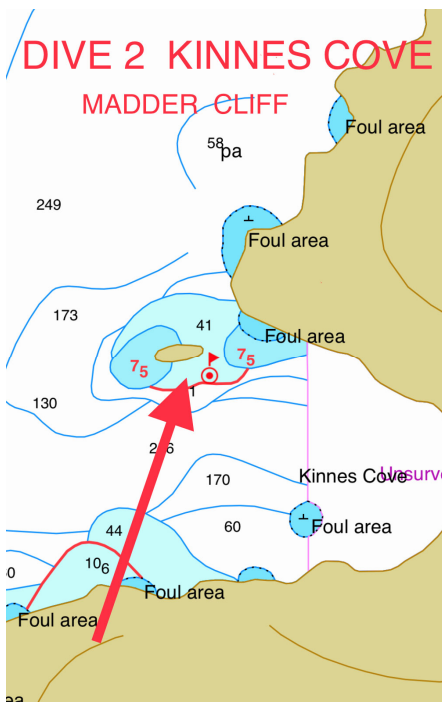


In the morning we arrived at Brown Bluff and started our operations. 4 Zodiacs for 24 divers were prepared and everybody got used to the procedures. While the shore party was landing on the left side of the beach, we choose the right side, just in front of the penguin colony. There were a lot of small icebergs in the water and we found some nice dive site for the check-out dive. The divers were able to adjust their weights and check all their gear in a safe environment. The sandy bottom had some nice invertebrates, like giant isopods, sea stars and even some small fish. And there were more than 4 leopard seals around the icebergs, two quite playful with the divers, that took off their dive kit and snorkelled with the leopard seal. After the snorkel there was still time to go ashore and look at the nice scenery with some geological specialties. What a great start for our adventure.



DIVE 2: Kinnes Cove Tuesday 14th February 2023

63°18.453' S - 056° 29.377' W



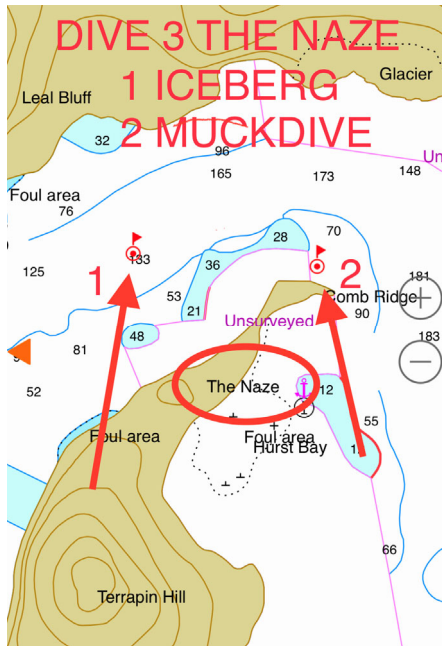
During lunchtime we crossed the Antarctic Sound and placed the ship in Kinnes Cove on Joinville Island. Groups were rearranged because some divers wanted to join the Snorkel team or go zodiac cruising. The small island at the northern entry of the cove was where we went. Penguins, Gulls and Cormorants were sitting on the rocks and on the southern side, there was a nice wall to dive on. Divers saw kelp and sponges, a beautiful colourful wall with sea stars, even some fish again and of course isopods and amphipods all around the place. The snorkelers found a piece of ice to play around and also saw some penguins going in and out of the water.

What a great way to end the first day of diving!



DIVE 3: The Naze Wednesday 15th February 2023

63°54.429´S - 057° 31.689´W / 63°54.559´S - 057° 27.419´W

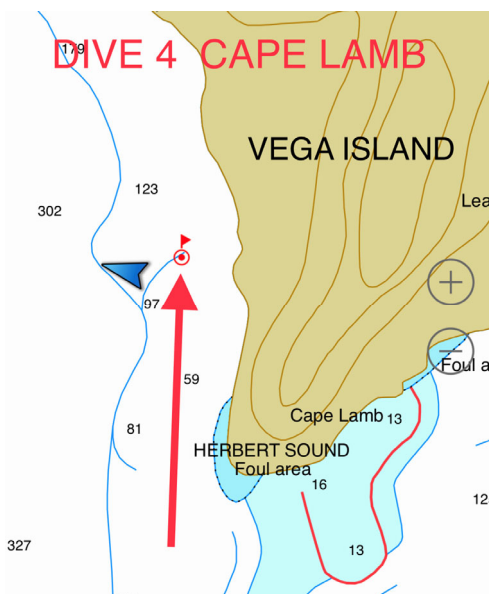


After sailing further south in the night, we arrived at a place called „The Naze“ in the morning. All the staff were on the bridge, because this was a new place to nearly all of the staff members. We had 2 groups of divers. One group wanted to explore this new dive site close to the shore, the other group wanted to dive on ice. The shore dive was a very unique Antarctic Muckdive. The sandy bottom was covered with isopods, small ones and also the giant isopod. A lot of tube worms were crawling on the bottom. The Iceberg-divers found a nice and stable iceberg to dive on. Not easy to get the buoyancy right, just depending on your distance from the berg. But what a great view, when you see 90% of the iceberg underwater for the first time. The colours, the structure and just putting your hand on an iceberg, which is several 10000 years old, was just fantastic! After the dive we had enough time to go to shore for a nice walk and looking for fossils.

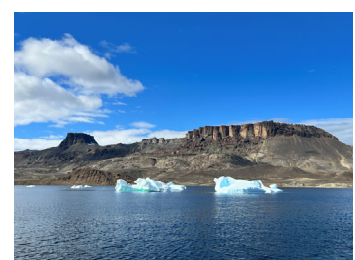


DIVE 4: Cape Lamb / Vega Island Wednesday 15th February 2023

63°53.157´S - 057° 38.133´W

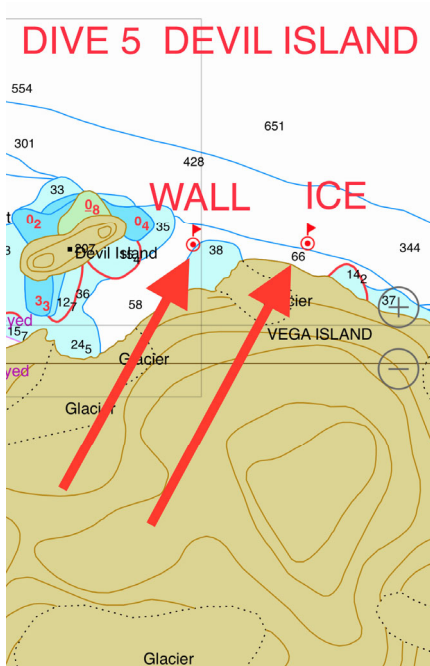


What an interesting place to be. On shore it looked like a mixture of a desert and the Grand Canyon. About 150m from shore we could detect a slope, starting from 9m down to more than 20m. So we descended on to a plateau of 8m and found the sandy bottom. There were different kinds of brittlestars, even the giant long-armed brittle star, seen everywhere. Other sea stars were hiding in the sand, so you could only see the tips of their arms. Staying at 18m and turning to the right, we found a nice little „oasis“ with a lot to see. There were yellow sponges, different coloured tunica, sea urchins, a sea spider and 2 fish, belonging to the „Antarctic cod family“ (Nototeniidae). Lots of pictures were taken and then we ascended for the safety stop.

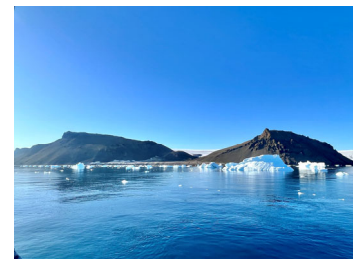


DIVE 5: Devil Island Thursday 16th February 2023

Wall: 63°47.322´S - 057° 16,408´W ICE: 63°47.869´S - 057° 12.165W

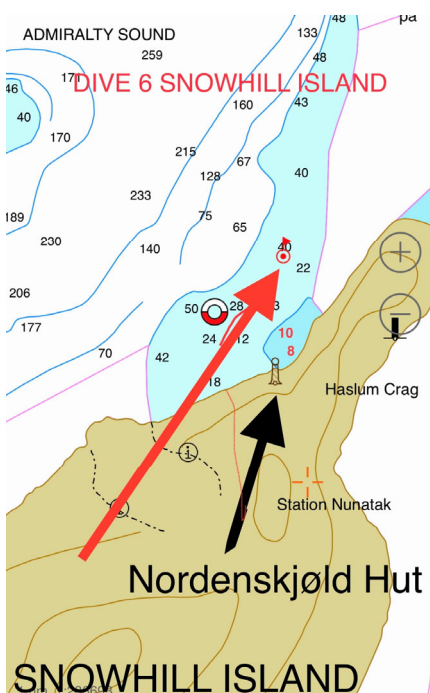


This morning some divers opted for an iceberg and some to explore a wall. Reasonable visibility greeted the divers on both dives. The wall had obviously been scoured by ice at some point, but there was still life in the cracks and overhangs of the wall. Snorkellers enjoyed seeing fur seals and a weddell seal in the water and they had a leopard seal cruise by and check them out! Afterwards they enjoyed being on an iceberg and then most of the divers and snorkelers opted to go to shore to see the adolie penguins.



DIVE 6: Snow Hill Island Friday 17th February 2023

64°20.194´S - 056° 59.419´W

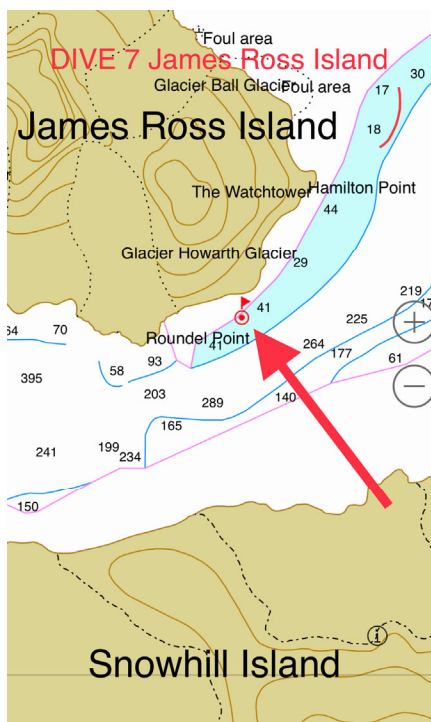


This area is usually covered in sea ice until later in the season, so to be able to be here and try to dive was really exciting. Exploration diving! Again some divers wanted to experience an iceberg underwater whereas others wanted to see what the seabed had to offer. The icebergs were mostly grounded as the whole area was quite shallow. A suitable iceberg was picked and the sun came out in time to give the divers some nice light underwater. Quite a current picked up during the dive moving lots of smaller chunks of ice past. Another group of divers had chosen to explore and some new and rare creatures were sighted - potentially even an unknown species! Always something to explore. Afterwards we got all of the divers and snorkelers on a piece of ice to get their photo in the sunshine. They enjoyed jumping off the iceberg afterwards!



DIVE 7: James Ross Island Friday 17th February 2023

64°23.328´S - 057° 19.401´W



Another expedition afternoon brought us to our southernmost point between the islands of James Ross and Snowhill. James Ross Island seemed to be a pretty nice landing site with slopes and some rocky hills around. So some of the divers tried this unexplored divesite. And sometimes it happens that you just get to see a lot of mud and silty ground. It was not really a great dive, but if you opened your eyes for the small stuff, you could find isopod and amphipods crawling along the seabed. Some of the divers skipped the dive also because the Polar Plunge was announced. But unfortunately it did not happen, because the beach conditions changed and the beach was muddy plus more than 2 knots of current in the strait between the islands. So the beautiful icebergs were moving fast in the sunshine. We still had a look around for some Emperor Pinguins to pop up. You never know, this is their feeding ground. The day finishes with a never-ending sunset and the new moon just set behind a tabular iceberg. What else do you need?!



DIVE 8: Yankee Harbour Sunday 19th February 2023

62°31.599´S - 059° 47.470´W

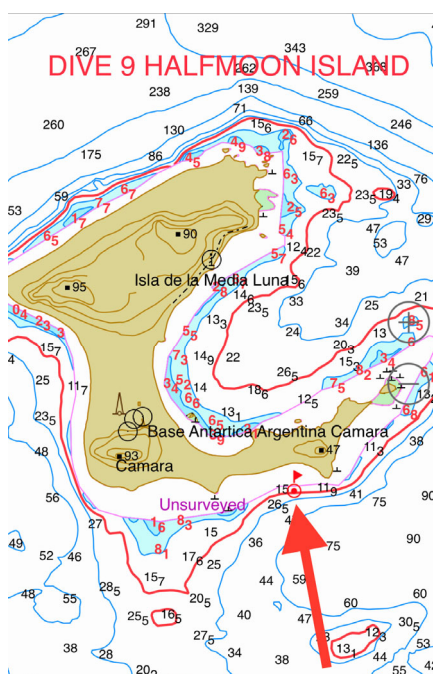
During the night we made our way, more than 175 nm, from the Weddell Sea to the South Shetland Islands. We anchored at Yankee Harbour on the southern side of Greenwich Island. From the ship we could already see a lot of penguins and seals on the island. Yankee Harbour is like a natural harbour made by a spit on one side. We decided to dive at the outside. Visibility was poor, because of the glaciers around. A gentle slope with some boulders was the topography of this dive. The divers saw sea stars and one group was lucky to see an Antarctic Cod opening his mouth. The mouth is totally yellow inside. After the dive most of the divers enjoyed

going ashore. A colony of gentoo penguins, a group of elephant seals and fur seals were waiting for them. The gentoo chicks were really fun to watch. Some of them even dared to tease the elephant seals and pick on them.



DIVE 9: Halfmoon Island Sunday 19th February 2023

62°35.901' S - 059° 54.109' W



12 divers were happy to do the very last dive of this great trip at Halfmoon Island. We only had to travel a short distance to the southwest, to get there from Yankee Harbour. Plancius anchored in the Bay of Halfmoon Island and with 2 Zodiacs we set off to the outside of the southeast end, where the chinstrap penguin is on the rocks. The divers went in and a gentle slope goes down from the beach. In some places they found boulders with kelp. Between the kelp they found isopods, sea stars, nudibranchs and small fish. Some divers saw penguins passing by. Visibility was only about 2-3 m, but the sun came out again and the glaciers in the background were just great. There was also time left to go ashore and have a look at the Chinstrap Colony. There were also some Gentoo Penguins, fur seals and even an elephant seal on the beach! Coming back to the ship it was time to rinse the gear, give back the weights and hang all dive gear to dry. The tanks were packed away in the forward hold of Plancius and everything got secured for the Drake Passage. It has been a wonderful time in Antarctica!



Thank you to the whole DIVE TEAM for an unforgettable dive trip in Antarctica!