

# CHAPTER 6

## WHERE TO GO WHEN YOU'RE DOWN THERE

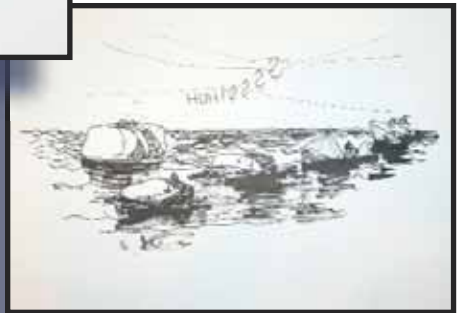
There are thousands of islands and sites of interest in and around the Antarctic. You will visit only a few of them on your adventure, but you will never forget any of those you see! The focus of this section of the book will be only on those islands and locales that are generally included in the itineraries of most cruise ships working out of the Port of Ushuaia, Argentina.

### Islands That Never Were



But before we begin – let's talk about islands that aren't really there... Much work has been done to scour historical records to discover the undiscoverable – islands that appeared on official marine

charts and did so for centuries, but which don't or didn't actually exist! How is this possible and why did it happen?



*Everything you ever wanted to know...*

*62°36'S; 59°55'W*

*Hub? What is this?  
Latitude and Longitude of course!*

To help pinpoint any place on Earth, the planet is divided horizontally and vertically by imaginary lines called latitudes and longitudes respectively.

Each degree of latitude is approximately 111 kms (69 miles) apart. Degrees of latitude are numbered from 0° to 90° north and 0° to 90° south. Zero degrees (0°) latitude is the Equator, 90° north latitude is the North Pole and 90° south latitude is the South Pole.

Longitudinal lines are also known as meridians. They converge at the Poles and are widest at the Equator. Zero degrees (0°) longitude is located at Greenwich, England.

To precisely locate points on the Earth's surface, degrees longitude and latitude have been divided into minutes (') and seconds ("). There are 60 minutes in each degree. Each minute is divided into 60 seconds. Therefore, in the example in the bubble above, Half Moon Island is located at 62°36'S; 59°55'W, which means 62 degrees, 36 minutes south of the Equator and 59 degrees, 55 minutes west of the meridian passing through Greenwich, England.

Please note that, in the text that follows, locations are given based on the best information available at the time this work was written. Sometimes it was uncertain, from the literature, exactly where the reading was taken on the island or mainland area, so contradictory locations were sometimes presented. That said, every effort was made to mark these locales as accurately as possible. My primary source for the latitudes and longitudes and the spelling of the Antarctic and Subantarctic place names following is the Second Edition (1995) of the Geographic Names of the Antarctic, compiled and edited by Fred G. Alberts and published by the United States Board on Geographic Names. Where no entry was included in the above-cited publication, other reliable sources were utilized to establish the location of the site, as were they for place names and locations within the Falkland Islands and southern South America.

## Antarctica - First Journey

Most operators offer a cruise into Paradise Bay to look at Suárez Glacier, ice fields and whales. Antarctic minke whales and crabeater seals frequently visit this bay. Above you, the cliffs rise sharply showing their face composed of porphyritic andesite, with obvious strings of green epidote, along cracks and fractures. Along this face, Antarctic shags nest precariously high above the cold seas. Glacial calving, avalanches and katabatic winds are regularly encountered on these cruises. A nunatak or nunataq (an exposed summit mountain or ridge not covered with ice or snow and lying within an ice field or glacier) rises through the surrounding glaciers.

First surveyed by the Belgians in 1898, Waterboat Point lies nearby. The point was surveyed and named by T. W. Bagshawe and M. C. Lester who lived here in a hut and waterboat from 1921 to 1922, while they studied the gentoo penguin colony. This two-man expedition was the smallest expedition ever to overwinter in Antarctica. A few chinstrap penguins also use the beaches and nest here. Named after the first Head of State to visit Antarctica, the Chilean Station, González Videla, is located here but is not open to visitors.



**I Just Wanna Go Home...** On April 12, 1984, the doctor at Almirante Brown decided that he had had enough and wanted to go home. When he learned that his return home had been postponed for an additional year, he thought that if he burned the base down, they would assuredly send him home – so burn it he did! To his surprise, after they were rescued by the U.S. ship *Hero*, he was ordered to remain at the base for another year as punishment!



**Camp Hill** (Location: 63°41'S, 57°52'W)

For the more vigorous visitors, this is the site to visit, as the routes inland are all uphill and physically challenging. The rewards include the exhilarating climb up the lichen-crusting rocks and the spectacular views from the 120-metre (390 ft) summit. Named after a geological camp established in the 1940s, few animals breed at the site, but Antarctic terns, kelp gulls and South Polar skuas and Weddell seals use the beach.

**Cape Burd** (Location: 63°39'S, 57°09'W)

This is another remote site that was occupied by base personnel in the early 20th century. The site is named after the base meteorologist, who died when his hut at Hope Bay burned in 1948. Rarely visited, primarily due to the dearth of wildlife, it does demonstrate excellent evidence of volcanic activity. Reportedly the lava remnants are reminiscent of pahoehoe lava. Chemical weathering of iron-rich minerals in the solidified lava provides interesting bursts of colour to the landscape. Evidence of pyroclastic activity (rock fragments of explosive volcanic origin, such as ash, obsidian and pumice) is widespread at the site as well.

## Antarctica - First Journey

This will assuredly be one of the most memorable places you will ever visit. Let me set the stage... the cobble beach unfolds before you with crystal clear water lapping along its shores. Gentoo penguins come rocketing in underwater and leap out onto the shore and scurry past you on their way to their nests.

Above you rises a small rocky hill, topped with more penguins and the inevitable skuas and kelp gulls. To your left is an abandoned Argentine refugio (named after Admiral Felipe Fliess (1872-1952), who was the commander of the Argentine navy), again surrounded by the ubiquitous penguins. As you walk past the hut, make sure you stay back a polite distance to ensure the birds have ample space. Watch for whalebones on the shore as you round a rock face. Above you rises a smoothly sloping hill with a well-worn trail along its edge, leading to its crest. You will have the opportunity to climb this and please do so, for the view will be worth it! At the top, you look down on the Gerlache Strait and Andvord Bay. As you patiently watch all around you, you might be lucky enough to see a major avalanche on the surrounding hills – don't worry where you are standing is perfectly safe – or a



*Can't Happen to Me! - Think not?*

These snowfields are active and dangerous; so don't wander away from your guides. A fall into a deep crevasse will assuredly end tragically and remember that rescue is not a guaranteed certainty!

*Everything you ever wanted to know...*

*Cryoturbated Rock???*

This is rock that is broken and cracked by constant thawing and freezing. Even large rocks will be affected. Cryosols are perennially frozen organic and mineral soils, such as one might find in the snow free parts of Antarctica. About 13% of the world's land is covered by cryosols.



largest king penguin colony in South Georgia. Grassy knolls that hide predators and seals surround the muddy alluvial plain – so walk carefully. Tussac grass, penguin poop, the incessant noise of bugling penguins and the inevitable scavengers complete the scene. The spectacle is unforgettable!



The site was named by John Chaplin, a Royal Navy Surveyor for the 1926-30 *Discovery* Investigation. Grace and Lucas Glaciers gleam in the distance – their bulk inching towards the sea at a crawl from the highlands surrounding the beach – their meltwater forming the fresh water rivulets that transect the nesting sites.

**Sandwich Bay** - See Gold Harbour

**Shag Rocks** (Location: 53°33'S, 42°02'W)

Six small islands make up the Shag Rocks, located 240 kms (150 miles) off the west coast of South Georgia. They cover a total area of less than 20 hectares (50 acres) and rise about 70 metres (228 feet) above sea level at their highest point. Wildlife abounds here and in the nearby rich Subantarctic waters. South Georgia shags, prions, Wilson's storm-petrels and southern royal, northern royal, snowy, grey-headed and black-browed albatrosses will likely be observed as you sail these waters.

Joseph de la Llana, aboard the sailing vessel the *Aurora*, discovered the Shag Rocks in 1762, and originally named them the Aurora Islands. In the early 1800s,

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offer a chance to buy a souvenir from the friendly military and biological personnel stationed here.

Above you rises a cliff where snowy sheathbills and skuas patrol the large chinstrap colonies (over 3000 pairs), searching for wayward chicks or unwary parents. Storm-petrels and kelp gulls nest on the scree slopes and rocky outcrops respectively, while several Antarctic terns and Antarctic shags share the beach with the gulls. Antarctic fur seals offer a stark reminder of the sealing industry based here in the 1820s.

