

CHAPTER 7

THEY WALKED THIS LAND BEFORE US

A Preface to Our Time in the Antarctic

There is value in starting at the beginning of man's entrance to the region, for it defines how recent our presence here is and the difficulty we have had in trying to conquer this land – a place that refuses to be taken. But it would be presumptuous of me to believe I could adequately discuss the rich history of the Antarctic in this book, for herein, I certainly do not pretend to be able to offer a complete historical chronicle of the “who, what, where and when” for the Antarctic. However, since this may be the only book that you, as travellers, will ever read before or after your journey to the southern Polar Region, I trust a brief outline of who explored this land, the trials they faced and the outcome of their efforts would be of value.

Exploration in the Antarctic began much later than in many other parts of the world. While the Fertile Triangle, all of Europe and Asia were being explored and exploited, other places remained unknown and untouched. Africa, Australia and the Americas followed many millennia later, but they too still preceded the inroads into this southern continent by many hundreds of years. In fact, this land of ice and snow was only suspected to even exist long after many early explorers travelled to its very brink – so formidable was the task and so daunting the conditions! Ships literally travelled within miles of its shores and never caught sight of it! Here is a selected chronology of its important history ...

Antarctica - First Journey

- 1616 Lemaire sights “Kaap Hoorn”.
- 1738 Jean Bouvet de Lozier departs France, aboard the *Aigle* and *Marie*, on a voyage to search for the “Cape of the Austral Islands” in the southern oceans. He sights massive tabular icebergs off Antarctica and comes within sight of land, now called Bouvet Island.
- 1765-67 Port Egmont is established as the site of the first British settlement in the Falklands.
- 1772 Chevalier Yves-Joseph de Kerguelen-Trémarec sails with his two French ships the *Fortune* and the *Gros Ventre* to explore the southern oceans. He discovers and claims the Kerguelen Islands. On his return to England, he discovers and explores South Georgia. James Cook, on his 1772-75 voyage aboard the *Resolution*, rediscovers, names, and makes a first landing on South Georgia.
- 1773 On January 17th, James Cook becomes the first person to cross the Antarctic Circle, eventually reaching 71°S latitude, but he never actually sees the Continent.
- 1775 South Georgia is claimed for the British by Cook, who also discovers most of the South Sandwich Islands.
- 1776 Carcass Island, Falklands, is surveyed in 1766 by John MacBride, captain of the *HMS Carcass*.
- 1792 The Shag Rocks are discovered by Joseph de la Llane aboard the *Aurora*.
- 1819 Captain William Smith, a sealer aboard the *Williams*, reports seeing land, which, based on his reported latitude, places him at the South Shetland Islands. He lands on Livingston Island and is recognized as the first person to land on the South Shetlands. He also discovers King George Island, which he claims for Britain. Also in 1819-20, Bransfield maps the South Shetlands and sights and maps portions of the Antarctic Peninsula. Fabian Gottlieb Von Bellingshausen (1819-21) charts the south coast of South Georgia and discovers the Traversy group of the South Sandwich Islands.

Ice Cold Facts

On November 23, 2007, the *M.V. Explorer* sank off the coast of the South Shetland Islands. Built for Lars Lindblad in Finland, the *Explorer*, or the “little red ship” as she was known, first sailed to Antarctica in 1969, as the first ‘purpose built’ ship, designed to carry tourists to this emerging vacation destination. Her history included two groundings, one in 1972 and a second in 1979. It was on the latter that Brad Rhees, now an Expedition Leader with Quark Expeditions, first sailed to Antarctica. He recounted some of her accomplishments to me recently when I worked with him aboard the *Clipper Adventurer*. Amongst her many firsts, she sailed/was:

- ▶ The farthest north
- ▶ The farthest south
- ▶ The first to travel west and later east through the northwest passage in Canada
- ▶ The first to travel through the northeast passage
- ▶ Travelled the farthest up the Amazon River
- ▶ The first to circumnavigate James Ross Island in the Weddell Sea
- ▶ The first expedition ship to visit the Falklands



Everything you ever wanted to know...

Zodiac Tender Boats

The invention of the Zodiac is often credited to Jacques Cousteau, who reportedly designed this U-shaped rubber boat to facilitate his oceanographic work. History however does not support this fact. Around 1910, the first modern day “coracles”, inefficient and unreliable, were designed and used primarily as floats. In response to the sinking of the Titanic, where it was identified that insufficient lifeboats were available on most passenger liners, Goodyear invented a technology to make life rafts of square-shaped inflated rubber tubes with a rigid floor.

Pierre Debroustelle’s 1937 design was the first known to be designed in a U-shape and was the first boat of its kind to be certified by the French Navy. Its wooden transom was added around 1943. The invention of the outboard motor in 1909, by Ole Evinrude, greatly expanded the versatility of this craft. In the 1950s, Dr. Alain Bombard was the first to design a craft consisting of an outboard engine, a rigid floor and a boat-shaped inflatable superstructure. The former airplane manufacturer, Zodiac, built that boat and Jacques-Yves Cousteau began to use it around 1953. “Zodiac” became the word commonly used for inflatable boats and tenders.



CHAPTER 8

GETTING THERE AND COMING HOME SAFELY!

Before You Go

It is critical you think about all your needs before you leave home and anticipate what you might do if your vacation is interrupted by ill health or injury. It is also essential that you visit your doctor, travel clinic and dentist before leaving home. Have a complete medical or physical, including checking your heart, blood pressure, and respiratory and gastro-intestinal systems. It's far better to know if you have any problems before you leave home than to find out about them once you are on board the ship. Knowing permits you the luxury to respond to concerns rather than react to them. Get your dentist to look for any problems that might flare up while you're away. Do you wear dentures? What happens if you break them or lose them? Do you have any abscesses that might require attention? See your eye doctor and make sure your glasses and contacts are in good order. Bring extra saline solution and an extra case for your contacts, in addition to both your distance and reading glasses.

Before You Get To Your Port of Call

As you travel to your final Port of Call, think about what you'll be doing on the way. Will it be hot? Is there potential to contract a disease? Are there parasites? These are not pleasant thoughts, but they are things you should consider!

How high is the risk to you the traveller? Remember, you will face a higher risk if you travel to the rural areas of developing countries, for longer periods of time, and stay at 2-3 star facilities or camps. Likewise the risk is much lower in developed urban centres, where your comfort is assured at 4-5 star hotels.

CHAPTER 9

MARINE SUPERSTITIONS

To some, the belief in superstitions is deemed childish and foolish, but, for others, it guides their very lives and gives them hope when all else fails. Mariners are particularly bound to their superstitions and beliefs. But don't kid yourself, this is not a new phenomenon, nor one that is likely to quickly pass, as superstitions have been with us since the days of Pliny and before.

Seafaring folk treat the sea with respect and reverence, where they know they will live or die by its whim. Emotion, trust and sometimes desperate hope guide the sailors to trust and the superstitions to work. Founded in lore, religion, anecdotal inferences, occasional blind trust and sometimes simple fabrication, they don't have to make sense – they only have to be believed!

To the scientifically minded, the foundations for superstitions are often hard or impossible to explain, but this isn't about science, this is about believing and trusting in omens to keep you safe, housed and fed. If you personally do not believe in superstitions, respect those who do and respect the contribution they bring to the richness of maritime culture. And while you think about them, remember you too may be superstitious in your own way.





About the Author

Geoff's interest in nature began at 13 years of age when he wandered through the woods and countryside near his Canadian home, learning about nature first hand. From the time he went to university to study wildlife to when he worked for Parks Canada and the Ontario Ministry of the Environment, he has dedicated his life to protecting and studying wild things – be they birds, mammals, insects or plants. After his retirement in 2006, Geoff headed off on a new career path, where he put his life long studies to work – he became an expedition and interpretive guide. He has led numerous trips to Antarctica, Svalbard, Russia and Alaska, eastern Europe, Cuba, Borneo and Tanzania. A prolific author, Geoff wrote a previous book on mammals, is widely published in nature magazines and newspapers.

Specializing in both tropical and polar environs, he has travelled the world, visiting over 55 countries on all seven continents, where he has shared time with polar bears, Amazonian snakes and piranhas, observed the private lives of lions, avoided riots in Venezuela, hiked the Andes, camped with Pademelons, walked with penguins and canoed Ontario's northern lakes.

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The author at Brown Bluff