

Antarctic trip diary, Part 5

1/3/07

It snowed again last night. We went out on deck this morning and there was an inch of slushy snow over everything. It won't last long because today is a perfect summer day in Antarctica: sunny with temperature in the high thirties and little wind. The sun makes the surrounding snow covered cliffs even more photogenic. I am convinced that it is impossible to take a bad photograph down here because the scenery is so impressive.

This morning we visited the British station at Port Lockroy. Sandie's Viking ancestors would have been very proud of her today as she stormed ashore from a Norse boat to loot and sack a British island. Actually, Port Lockroy station is operated by the British non-profit Antarctic Heritage Trust which runs a small museum and a store at the station. So the loot was put into a sack after it was properly paid for; one must change with the times. The entire station is on a rock island about 4 acres in the middle of a beautiful cove. Three people run the station over the summer months along with a gazillion Gentoo penguins. The store profits are used to fund the station and the research they do on the effect of tourism on the penguins. At this station, it is beneficial as the stream of tourists keeps away predators. This is one of the most highly visited sites along the Antarctic peninsular. There also was a Dutch bark (3 masted sailing vessel) there at the same time. Photographing it against the ice cliffs is like taking a photograph of a scene during the age of exploration in the nineteenth century.



After lunch, the overcast returned as we headed up the Neumayer channel. It is like the Lemaire channel but wider. The water was glass smooth so the snow covered cliffs were reflected in the water. We passed a small expedition ship enroute. After that, nap time to rest up for the afternoon event.



We had a half hour tour of Wilhemina Bay in the Cirkel boats late this afternoon. Considering that we haven't seen a sunset in several days, the idea of leaving for a boat tour at six or seven at night is not unusual. Your energy level stays high throughout the day and evening because of the extended daylight. Back at Wilhemina Bay, we saw a fat lazy crabeater seal lounging on an iceberg, the derelict remains of two water barges (large wooden boats used to carry fresh water out to the whalers) and for me the remains of a steel whaleboat which was beached in 1915 after having caught fire. Imagine, a ninety year corrosion test! (These are the things that turn your corrosion engineer author on.) Interpreting the condition of the wreck got my intellectual juices flowing.



Tomorrow looks to be another exciting day. The plan is to sail around to the eastern side of the peninsula where few expedition boats venture. What we do and when we do it is iffy because things will be very dependent on the condition of the ice over there. It is usually much worse than the western side of the peninsula where we have been for the past few days.

