



**Exploration Antarctica:
Antarctic Peninsula**
(formerly West Ridge of Mt Parry first ascent)

Post-expedition report

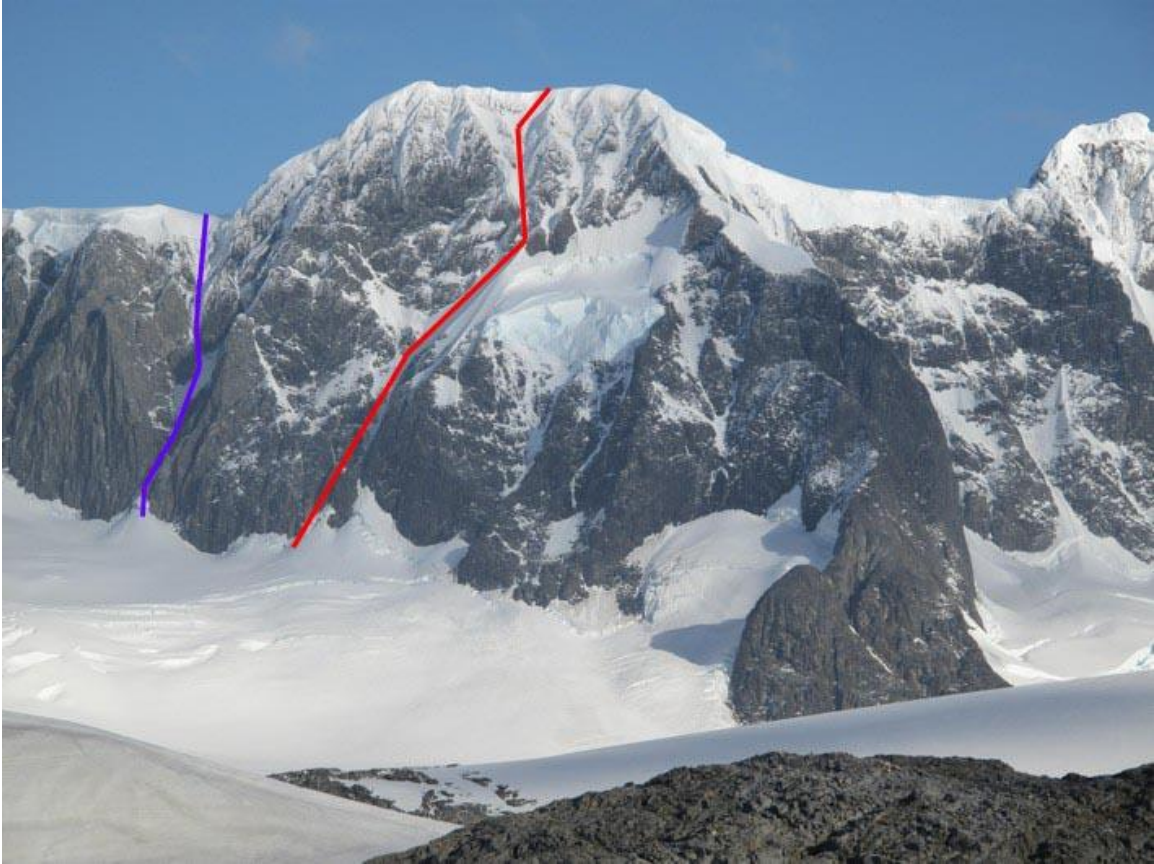
By Penny Goddard, Lydia Bradey and Dean Staples
March 2010



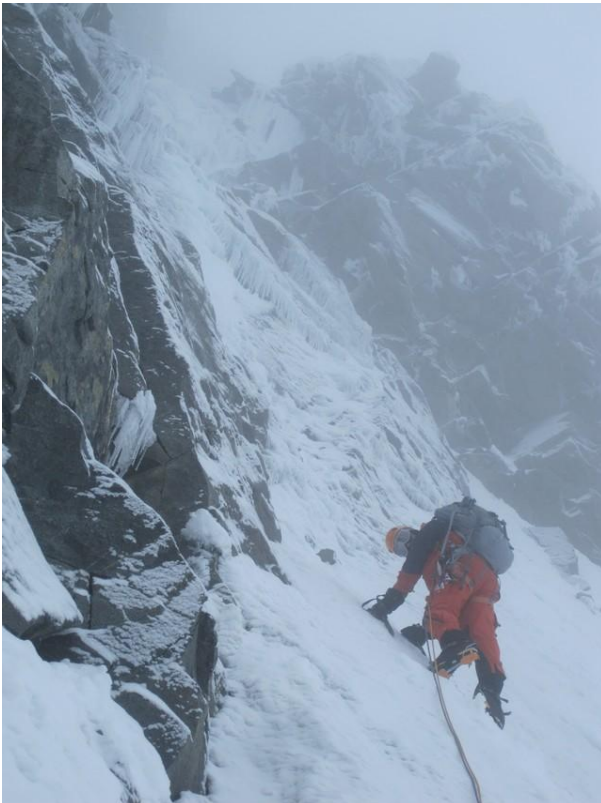
Trip itinerary

- Feb 9:** Depart New Zealand for Buenos Aires.
- Feb 10:** Buenos Aires to Ushuaia.
- Feb 11-12:** Ushuaia. Last-minute shopping for provisions and exploring the town. Team receives news that a French team (www.nomanslandproject.com) has made the first ascent of the West (north-west) Ridge of Mt Parry.
- Feb 13:** Clear Argentinean customs and board *Australis*. Motor to Port Williams, Chile.
- Feb 14:** Clear Chilean customs in Port Williams. Strong southerly winds cause delay in departure for Drake Passage.
- Feb 15:** Move to Port Toro to anchor.
- Feb 16-18:** Cross the Drake Passage under motor and sail.
- Feb 19:** Arrive in Melchior Islands at 5am. Climb to summit of Eta Island for view of surrounding peaks. Make a reconnaissance to the base of the west (north-west) ridge of Mt Parry to assess the landing and the route. Also to spot any other potential new routes (none found). Weather forecast not favourable for an attempt on Mt Parry. Anchor in Melchior Islands.
- Feb 20:** Early start. Sail to Wiencke Island. The team completes a north-south ski tour traverse of the Harbour Glacier across Wiencke Island, and meets the yacht at anchorage in Port Lockroy.
- Feb 21:** Lydia and Dean ascend Jabet Peak, and spot a potential new route on the First Sister in the Fief Range. Penny rests to try and cure a cold.
- Feb 22:** The team skis to a camp under the First Sister (four hours).
- Feb 23:** Ascent of the East Face of the First Sister: believed to be a new route, 12 pitches of ice and snow, NZ alpine grade 5. Descent via 7 x 60m abseils down a gully between the First Sister and Mt Luigi. Back at camp after 14 hours of climbing.
- Feb 24:** Pack up camp and travel back to the yacht in a blizzard. Yacht relocates to Paradise Bay, spotting minke whales en route.
- Feb 25:** Rest day in Paradise Bay. Visit Argentinean *Almirante Brown* Base and explore by zodiac, spotting more whales, seals and penguins. Plan to climb on Lemaire Island tomorrow.
- Feb 26:** Poor weather (snowing) – Lemaire Island climbing postponed. Explore Andvord Bay with yacht. In the evening, the team camps on south side of Lemaire Island under potential new steep ice route.
- Feb 27:** Team climbs 7 pitches of very steep, sustained and sometimes thin and technical ice (NZ alpine grade 5+) in poor visibility (and completes about 2/3 of entire route). Team elects to retreat from the route at 3pm due to a large remaining distance and the rate of progress being too slow. Descend via abseiling the route. Picked up by yacht late evening.
- Feb 28:** Rest day. Motor through east edge of Flandres Bay and into Hidden Bay, looking for potential climbing routes (no landings here). Very windy conditions. Through Lemaire Channel to anchor at Hovgaard Island.
- March 1:** Weather forecast unfavourable for next alpine objective. Penny makes ski ascent/descent of Hovgaard Island. Lydia and Dean explore by sea kayak.

- March 2:** Team climbs and skis off Demaria Peak. We later spot many humpback whales in Collins Bay and anchor at Vernadsky in the Argentine Islands. Overnight there is a very strong wind storm.
- March 3:** Poor weather. Team visits historic British Wordie Hut and climbs to high point on Argentine Islands. We visit the Ukrainian base for evening birthday party. Plan to approach Lumiere Peak tomorrow.
- March 4:** Poor weather (rain and wind). Wait for improvement in weather but it deteriorates to heavy snow. Change objective to one-day ascent of Cape Perez.
- March 5:** Ascend Cape Perez. Reach the summit as the weather begins to deteriorate again.
- March 6:** Poor weather continues. Boat moves to west side of Booth Island (anchored at Hovgaard) to get into position for an alpine start on a possible new route on west face of a unnamed Booth Island peak.
- March 7:** Rain and low visibility in morning. Change plan. Make ski ascent/descent of Mount Scott (tricky landing). Great long ski descent.
- March 8:** Planned ascent of Booth Island peak again abandoned due to stormy weather. Boat drags anchor overnight in extreme winds and relocates to a (hopefully) more sheltered anchorage at Peterman Island.
- March 9:** Boat leaves Peterman Island anchorage in the early hours of the morning in a major swell and danger of grounding. We later make a crossing back overland across Peterman Island to retrieve dropped and cut shore lines and head to anchor at Port Lockroy.
- March 10:** Team makes a ski descent of Jabet Peak. We head to anchorage in Melchior Islands.
- March 11:** We spend the day in the Melchior Islands waiting for an improving forecast.
- March 12-14:** We cross the Drake Passage to an anchorage near Cape Horn.
- March 15:** We motor to Port Williams and are held there by customs officials due to complications with other passengers' visas.
- March 16:** We motor to Ushuaia.
- March 17:** Team departs for New Zealand.
- March 19:** Team arrives in New Zealand.



Above: Route on First Sister of Fief, Wiencke Island. Our line of ascent is in red and the line of descent is in blue. Photo P Goddard



Left: Dean Staples leading a pitch on the First Sister. Photo L Bradey



Above: First Sister of Fief. Photo L Bradey

Below Left: Dean Staples leading on the south side of Lemaire Island. Photo P Goddard

Below Right: Penny Goddard leading on the south side of Lemaire Island. Photo L Bradey





Above: Dean and Lydia on Cape Perez. Photo P Goddard



Left: Dean and Penny on Demaria Peak. Photo L Bradey

Conclusions and recommendations

Conditions and Equipment

We encountered very hard ice on steeper routes and soft, deep, wet snow on other occasions. Every style of climbing is available in this region and conditions can vary hugely over the course of a visit, as well as over a season.

We found touring skis and skins useful for access to some peaks. On other occasions, the snow was stripped back to bare ice on the glacier, making skis almost a hindrance. Climbing here may require an arsenal of equipment, including touring skis and skins, avalanche transceiver, shovel and probe, technical ice climbing tools and technical crampons, general mountaineering tools and a decent rack of ice screws, snow stakes and rock protection.

Although we did not do any technical rock routes, some beautiful unclimbed rock pinnacles exist which would require a full rock climbing rack.

It is advisable to bring a good repair kit and spares. We encountered very good ice climbing conditions and hence used up all of our V-thread material early in the trip. Luckily the boat had some useful supplies.

By late in the season, glaciers are broken and the crevasses often capped, making access difficult. Parties going ashore should be skilled in crevasse travel and rescue and whiteout navigation.

Being dropped off ashore with overnight kit, including a tent, is a good safety strategy. Most boats will provide a hand-held VHF radio. However, these have a line of sight range of about 13nm. Carrying a satellite phone allows for a communication backup – check that the boat also has a satellite phone. Parties need to be prepared for self-rescue. Land-based/ technical mountain rescue is very unlikely to be available by any outside party.

Contrary to expectation, it rains in Antarctica and a good set of waterproofs is essential. It is worthwhile having a separate set for use on the yacht, along with gumboots and several pairs of spare gloves (these were provided by *Australis*). Temperatures were moderately cold (similar to winter in New Zealand). We did not have access to temperature gauges, but at a guess, temperatures ranged from about -10°C (overnight) to about +15°C (occasional hot sunny days).

Rusting of ice axes, crampons and skis occurs quickly due to contact with sea water. It is worth taking care to rinse this equipment after travelling ashore and removing them to a dry storage environment.

Landings

Getting off the boat onto the shore can take up to several hours. Our experience was that it took half an hour for a straight-forward landing and unloading, where the zodiac left the boat at anchor and zipped us across to the shore. Note that if the seas are choppy or there is a lot of ice in the sea, then the zodiac may do more trips with fewer people and gear each time. A more complicated landing, where the boat has to move from its harbour and travel through sea ice or poor visibility may take four and a half hours or more. Hence, we elected to camp ashore in order to achieve alpine starts.

When assessing landings, it is important to identify any unstable ice cliffs in the bay and be ready to move quickly upslope once ashore. We tended to kit up several metres above the waterline whenever possible to avoid any potential wave. (People have been washed off land by the wave caused by a collapsing ice cliff).

Weather forecasts

To source a good weather forecast for mountaineering, it would be useful to have somebody at home sending relevant information, such as barometric pressure, freezing level and precipitation forecasts. The wind forecasts used on the yacht were very accurate for wind, but inferring alpine weather from these was mostly futile. In general however, weather coming from the north into the region sends warm moist air onto the land and causes cloud and precipitation, while southerly quarter winds tend to be associated with clearing weather. We saw both confirmation and contradiction of this rule on our trip.

A French team climbing in the region reportedly paid a significant sum for an accurate local weather forecast. They can be contacted via their website www.nomanslandproject.com .

Maps

We used the 2008 British Antarctic Survey 1:250 000 map “Brabant Island to Argentine Islands” (Series BAS (UKAHT) Sheet 2. (ISBN 978 1 85531 311 8) www.antarctica.ac.uk

We also made use of the navigational charts on board *Australis*.

Currency

In Argentina we were able to withdraw funds in Argentinean pesos from New Zealand bank accounts at several ATMs. However, these were often closed for large parts of the day during the hours of siesta. In the Chilean Puerto Williams, a harbour often visited on the way out of the Beagle Channel towards Cape Horn, Chilean currency is required. US and UK currencies are often exchangeable in Ushuaia.

Environmental protection and permits

We prepared a Initial Environmental Evaluation for the NZ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), which had to be approved by the Minister. This was a lengthy document, requiring research of relevant Acts. Such a process is likely to be a prerequisite for any climbers from countries which are signatories to the Antarctic Treaty. Commercial boats operating in the region have the option of becoming members of the International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators (IAATO) and such operators are likely to have their own environmental impact management plan.

To access the base of Mount Parry, we had to enter an Antarctic Special Protected Area (ASPA) and applied for a permit to enter this from MFAT as well. In order to receive this permit, the yacht supplied their own permit from the Australian Antarctic Division to MFAT. It is noted that other teams climbing in the region did not always possess the necessary permits to enter areas. There is no regulatory body enforcing the rules of the Antarctic Treaty in the region.

Medications

For seasickness we found *phenegan* (promethazine hydrochloride) to be the most useful drug. This is a non-prescription drug and can be bought in many places worldwide. It needs to be taken prior to encountering rough seas or swell, as once one becomes sick it is hard to reverse the nausea.

Life on a yacht involves living in close quarters with others, so illnesses are easily transmitted. We carried a plethora of drugs, including those to counteract infections, gastro-intestinal problems and sinus problems. We sourced these in New Zealand.

Potential Climbing

There remains a myriad of possibilities for new routes in the Antarctic Peninsula region. Generally the western faces of many peaks are steeper and hold the most unclimbed terrain. On our trip we encountered unusually good ice climbing conditions. However, conditions are subject to considerable seasonal variation. The glaciers provide good ski mountaineering, but later in the season the crevasses appear to be open and routes need to be studied from the boat.

Many summits and ridge tops are heavily ‘mushroomed’ or corniced. This was the case with the top-outs for a lot of appealing steep face lines. The French team mentioned earlier were quoted as saying that one needs wings for one’s ice axes. They were referring to something that clipped on and not something ecclesiastical.

Yacht Charter

We recommend *Ocean Expeditions* (www.ocean-expeditions.com) as their yacht *Australis* is very comfortable and well-appointed for expeditions, with a large storage hold for gear and comfortable quarters. It is also able to make the crossing of the Drake Passage faster than any other charter yacht regularly operating in the region, which is a huge advantage, both for time-saving and for conservation of climbers' energy (being on the Southern Ocean is exhausting and takes time to recover from). Furthermore, we found them to offer the most economic charter option.

The skippers have many seasons' experience sailing in the region supporting climbing and other adventurous expeditions. They were very willing to help us achieve our aims.

Reference Material:

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Gildea, D, *Information on Ice*, American Alpine Journal 2007

Gildea, D, *Climbs and Expeditions Antarctica*, American Alpine Journal 2005

New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, www.mfat.govt.nz

Ocean Expeditions Ltd, www.ocean-expeditions.com

Acknowledgements

The expedition would not have been possible without the generous support of Sport and Recreation (SPARC) (NZ) and the Mount Everest Foundation (UK).

Others who kindly supported us include: Backcountry Cuisine (NZ), R and R Sport (NZ) and Black Diamond USA.

For providing advice on routes, conditions and logistics: Damien Gildea, Ben Wallis, Skye Marr-Whelan, Greg Landreth, Bruce Dowrick, Tarn Pilkington and Darryl Thompson.

This expedition was undertaken in memory of our friend Jonny Morgan, who inspired us, hoped to join us, and sadly died in an avalanche in July 2009. Jonny made the first ski descent of Mount Francais (2825m) on Anvers Island and would have "come back to the Peninsula in a heartbeat".