

The Antarctic Century

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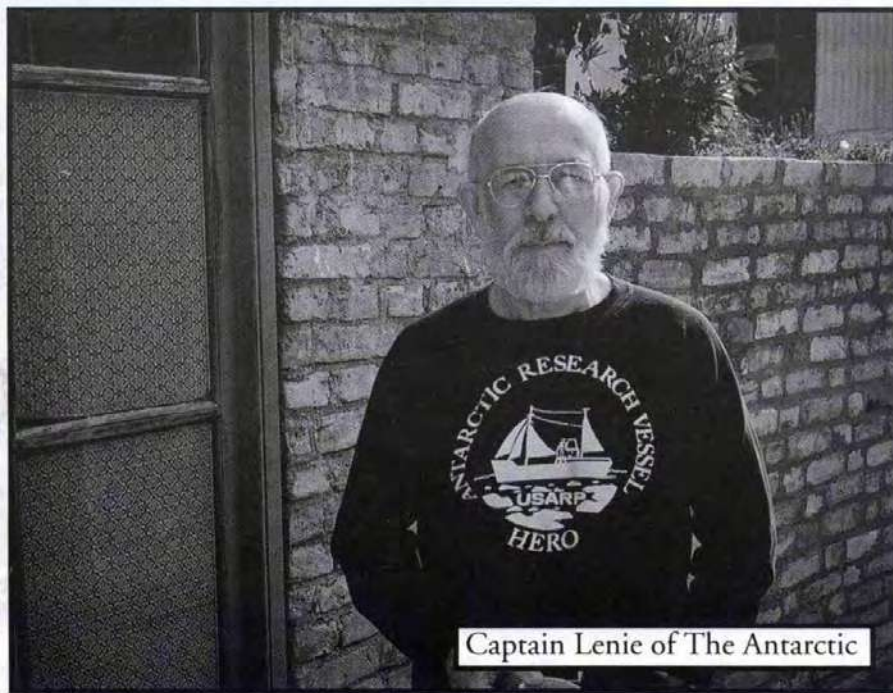
Captain Lenie of the Antarctic

by Ron Naveen

The man is a legend, certainly to many veterans of the U.S. Antarctic Program who have done scientific work with him, and more recently to many who have traveled with him in his capacity as icemaster in the tour industry. Captain Pietr Lenie is the former master of the U.S. research ship *Hero* and a bona fide Antarcticist of the first order. A true character. There are few people who inspire so much warmth and gratitude — and so many lively stories.

Courtesy of Michael Parfit, who wrote about Captain Lenie in the book *South Light*, there is this composite: About five feet two inches tall. Balding. White beard. Northwest European accent. Autocratic and opinionated, sometimes remote, and master of the long, cold stare named the stinkeye. Lenie was loved by the scientists because no matter what the time pressures, the weather, or the bureaucracy, Lenie got them to where they needed to go, in order to collect the data they needed to collect.

On his end of things, Lenie exudes obvious pride recounting stories about working with many researchers; for example, Mary McWhinnie, the late U.S. scientist whose lifelong work was krill, the lifeblood of the Antarctic ecosystem. In turn, many scientists



Captain Lenie of The Antarctic

show great affection for the man who cared so much about them and their work, and who clearly knew more than was shown on the nautical charts.

Robin Ross and Langdon Quetin, present-day krill scientists and adventurers, fondly recall Lenie's ability to get to the krill swarms they needed to study, despite the vagaries of wind and swell. No doubt, Captain Lenie loves to mention how the *Hero* could get to places that the new, larger, scientific vessels can only dream of reaching. David Parmalee, one of the Antarctic's renown ornithologists, remembers the season when Captain Lenie literally

took the *Hero's* bow right up to his study island, allowing him to jump to shore and get one last, end-of-season count.

The legend has to do with Lenie's uncanny memory and skill — knowing the rocks, knowing the special places that he had catalogued from long hours working the Antarctic. He kept his own "chartlets" and notes, many of which, sadly, were lost when the *Hero* was decommissioned. Robert Hofman, now chief scientist of the U.S. Marine Mammal Commission, recalls Captain Lenie's navigating through and around ice-clogged

Arthur Harbor as if it was the back of his hand, pointing out many rocks and ledges that were completely missing from the charts — or, indeed, rocks and islets that were inaccurately located on the charts.

Synonyms: Lenie and the *Hero*. The ship was a ketch-rigged motorsailer with 125 feet of white oak planking, three and four inches thick, protected at the bow with steel. The bottom was round, the hull green, the sails red.

Only 760 horsepower. Built in 1968, decommissioned in the early 1980s when the U.S. turned to a larger research vessel.

In early 1992, I specifically went to the tour vessel *Illiria* to meet and interview Captain Lenie. Indeed, I found the rumors to be mostly accurate. Lenie is a man of fierce pride who keeps returning to The Ice because he, like so many others, has an

incurable case of Antarctic fever. The days of *Hero's* glory may have passed, but the memories still burn brightly. As Michael Parfit recalls, Lenie was once asked: Who owns Antarctica? He said: "I own it. I have to be somewhere to run my ship around. And I've been there longer than anyone. It belongs to me."

I interviewed Captain Lenie on February 12, 1992.

Ron Naveen: What's it like being on the *Illiria*? How much different is it from the old days, moving from the *Hero* to an expedition ship almost three times bigger? Is this ship too large for you?

Pietr Lenie: Well, if nothing else, it's interesting. The ship's not too large for me. But it is too large for Antarctica. There are lots of problems in tight places.

RN: Do the expedition ships know where they're going? What about the large "love boats" that have never seen The Ice before?

PL: In most cases, the charts are not very accurate. The charts used before

radar. It makes a hell of a difference.

RN: How has the Antarctic changed since you came down in 1972 in the *Hero*? Is it getting too crowded?

PL: To begin with, there are too many stations. From 1984, when I stopped coming until 1989 when I returned, the number had seemingly doubled. Every time you put down a station — for whatever purpose, you're messing up the environment. Just on account

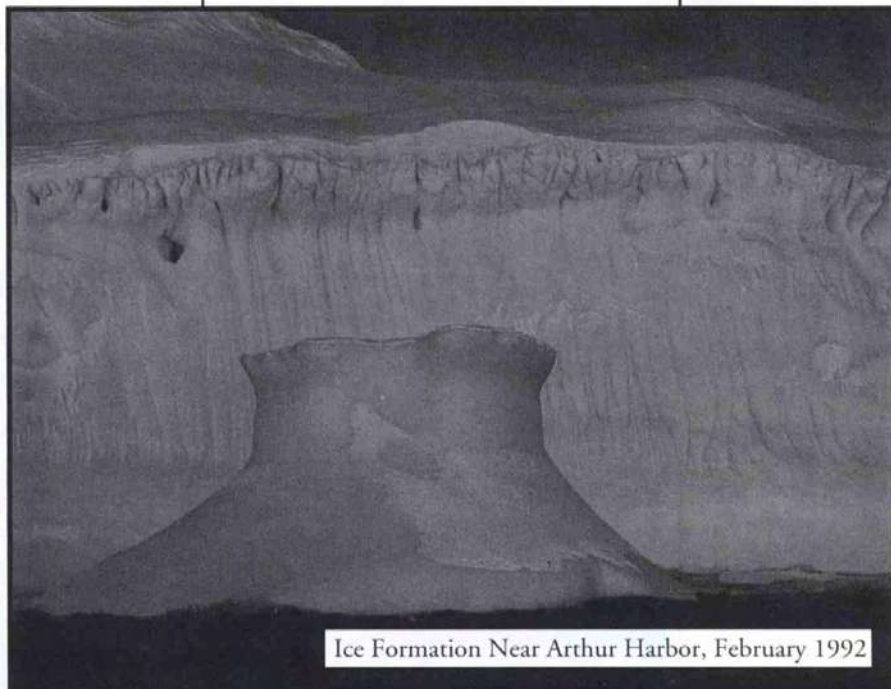
of the station personnel making a living. Then the environmentalists come down to protest, and they put their own base in.

RN: When did you first come?

PL: In December 1972. At that point, the *Hero* already had been operating for three years and she wasn't doing much good. I think they were thinking of

cancelling her work because when I came on board she was in very bad shape. Five captains in three years. And a changeover in crew that was hard to imagine. After a few years, we fixed her up to the point that we could live on her, and I could keep a crew in better conditions on the ship. Ultimately, I got her to produce more science per dollar than any other research ship in the world.

She was 125 feet long, 34 feet abeam, with a 16 foot draft. We carried 12 officers and crew, and 8 scientists as a rule. Of course, if we took any more scientists along, they'd have to sleep in the lab. Sometimes we got up to 25 total. Sleep where you can.



Ice Formation Near Arthur Harbor, February 1992

the Americans starting taking aerial pictures were very inaccurate. Now the outlines of the continent and the islands are charted much better. Of course, even with this improvement, there's still no way to take a picture of the bottom of the ocean. On some charts, still, islands appear in a certain location but don't actually exist in that location. Secondly, even where wide spots are shown, there still may be a lot of rocks in between.

The love boats don't have the equipment to find the rocks that are in between. The *Hero* had the sonar that could paint me a picture of the bottom, allow me to find the uncharted rocks. It is like an underwater

We operated mostly out of Punta Arenas and Ushuaia down to the Peninsula. The first few years I made two or three trips down and back, mostly for replenishment and changing station personnel. But once down, I'd mostly work with the scientists, running out of Arthur Harbor for 10-12 days, or for day trips, whatever they needed. We were a water platform for scientists.

RN: What happened in the 1980s?

PL: I think politics was involved. The Germans came up with a big ship, the *Polarstern*. Everybody started bringing big ships. Then in 1984, the *Hero* was cancelled out, the US National Science Foundation put the *Polar Duke* on the line, which happens to be leased from the Canadians, to begin work in 1985.

RN: Where is the *Hero* now?

PL: It's in Reedsport, Oregon, at a museum. It's been saved from the scrap heap and is being converted to a display vessel for hands-on, educational visits by school kids and others.

RN: All of the scientists I know who worked with you consistently talk about how the *Hero* took them in close, exactly to where they needed to go. You got the data for them. What are some of your memories of that work?

PL: That can't be done with the *Polarstern* and the *Duke*, of course. The *Hero* could go in practically on top of the rocks. Again, because of the sonar, as well as its small size, she was incredibly maneuverable. She was built out of white oak. In fact, if I wanted to, I could sit her on the rock and stay there for a while.

Now, don't get me wrong, you don't want to do that, but sometimes it has to be done. The last time I took Dr. [David] Parmalee to Dream Island, the

weather was really, really bad, we couldn't launch a zodiac, and it was going to be his last chance because the *Hero* was being decommissioned. I put the bow against the rocks so he could jump off, and kept it there for an hour while he did his thing with the birds. Now, if you try to do that with any other ship, you're in big trouble. It didn't bother the *Hero* at all.

Fantastic. It was a very nice little ship, very expensive to operate, but the science that she produced more than made up for it.

RN: Was she ever caught in bad weather? How did she take it?

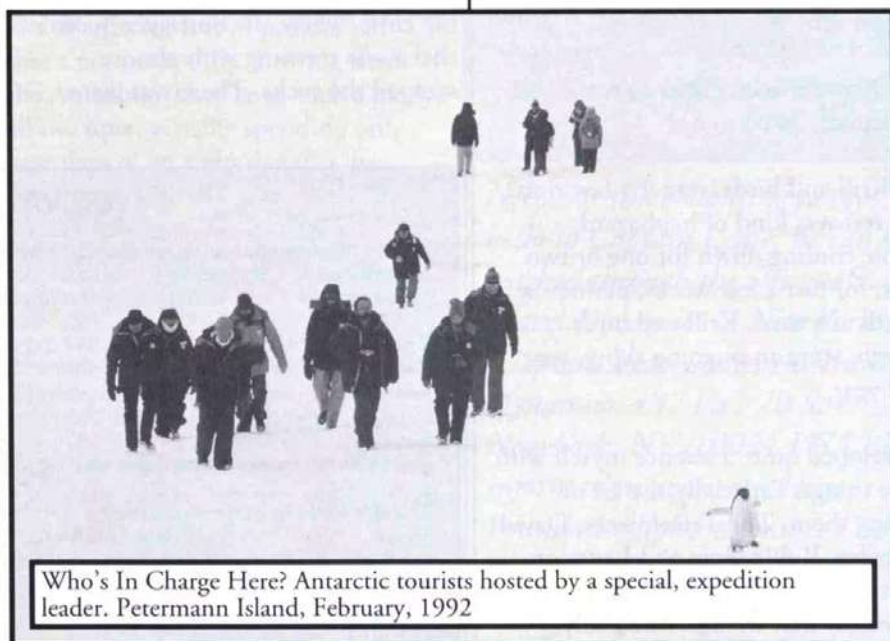
PL: She was tough and we always managed. Once, we had a fire on board, in very bad weather, south of Cape Horn. We were being blown south, couldn't make the Cape. We tried several times and just couldn't make it. Then, we noticed that the mainsail, which was by that time the only sail that we had left, started to rip and without that sail we couldn't steer. So, I got everybody out on deck, trying to get that sail down before it ripped away. I was on the bridge trying to steer the ship, and just about

the only one who wasn't waist deep in water on deck trying to get the sail down.

The other one not on deck was the chief engineer. But in the midst of this, he decided to go have a cup of coffee. He went into the galley, poured his coffee, turned the corner to go back to the engine room, when there was a big flash fire in the galley. He was standing right next to a fire extinguisher when it flashed, he grabbed the extinguisher, put out the fire and called me.

We got the sail down, took it under the fo'castle head to get it fixed, but in the meantime we lost total control of the ship and hove to. I went down to inspect the mess in the galley. Everything was destroyed except the stove. The wires weren't gone so we rigged up some extensions so the cook could start to cook again. By this time the sail was fixed and put back up, so we could once again steer.

Now, the weary crew's sitting in the mess hall finally having a meal, and the shouts ring out, "Fire in the galley." Some oil must have flown up in the ship's motion, and then flashed



Who's In Charge Here? Antarctic tourists hosted by a special, expedition leader. Petermann Island, February, 1992

when it hit the stove. We got it out, too. Never a dull moment on that trip.

RN: Have any distinguished scientists come to visit the *Hero*?

stamina. 24 hours a day if necessary, and then she'd do the 25th hour. I couldn't believe that woman. She had outstanding people assisting her. No matter what I did, they were ready to

hundred meters of water below me. The krill would be right alongside the cliff. How do you do that with a big ship?

The *Hero* was a terrific ocean-going, small ship. Not a 28-footer and not a huge research vessel. Just enough for decent equipment and a winch. Something specially for Antarctica. Not a converted fishing vessel. The kind of ship you could keep in The Ice.

RN: What's happened with you since you left the *Hero*?

PL: I inspected *Illiria* in 1986, before she went south for the first time, but actually have been coming down with her only since the 1988-89 season. Right after leaving the *Hero*, I went immediately back to sea so I could make some money. The Gulf of Mexico. North Atlantic. Mediterranean. I actually worked the Persian Gulf after the recent war, hauling back all of the equipment.



Antarctic Treaty Session, Venice, Italy, November 1992. See News section for details and results.

PL: Well, I'm sure I met some of these types, but you know, they all put their pants on the same way as me. I treated everyone the same, including the director of the British Antarctic Survey.

RN: Any particular science work you particularly liked to do?

PL: Krill and birds were my favorites. The rest was kind of haphazard, people coming down for one or two years, for just a few weeks, perhaps a month at a time. Krill and birds, though, were an ongoing thing, year after year.

I developed quite a science myself with those things. Especially the art of finding them. The Trivelpieces. David Parmalee. Robin Ross and Langdon Quetin. Mary Ann McWhinnie was one of my best friends. She really worked. She had an incredible

go.

The *Hero* could get to the krill. Like in Marguerite Bay. One of the big ships probably couldn't get in where I went. I would sometimes go in next to the big cliffs, where the outrigger boom that I was trawling with almost scraped the rocks. There was just a

I'm a union man — the Master, Mates, and Pilots. We provide qualified personnel where needed, and we never have a problem finding work. Don't exactly know where, but I go to the hall and the first job that I can take, I'm gone. Makes no difference what kind of ship.

SPECIAL THANKS

We are most grateful to Daniel and Polly Morgenstern, Glenn Mills, and the Electroline Manufacturing Company of Cleveland, Ohio, whose generous support has made publication of this issue of *The Antarctic Century Newsletter* possible.

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RN: What this I hear about a special anniversary?

PL: April of 1992 is 53 years at sea for me. I started in Belgium as an apprentice cook. I was 15. The first trip for that ship, and the first trip for me. I would have gone earlier but I couldn't get a job. I had joined the union, but it was a Catch-22. They wouldn't give you a union book unless there were jobs, and you couldn't get a job unless you were in the union.

They built this brand new passenger ship and needed over 300 new crew. I had an uncle working on another passenger ship. He told me to go to the company, that they'd give me a letter of recommendation, and, then, take it to the union to get a card. The union accepted the letter and when the jobs came up, they called my name.

RN: So you can cook as well as navigate?

PL: Well, I do a pretty fair job of cooking.

RN: What was the first ship you mastered?

PL: A small shunting tug in New York harbor. Never captain of a really big, big ship, although sometimes a second mate.

RN: Had you been to The Ice before the *Hero*?

PL: No. But I keep going back. Don't know why, 'cause I'm always losing money.

RN: What do you like best about Antarctica?

PL: It's clean. A fantastic place to travel. And I'm always hoping to find something new. The *Hero*, of course, was the last of the pure exploration ships. That is, people would get on her and say, "Go and see what you can

find." The only reason I stayed was that no day was the same as the one before. Always something different.

And if there wasn't any work to finish, we'd just go exploring. Those scientists were great. They always wanted to see what was around the next corner. Up until the last season in 1984, we still found a new place — new rocks, new depths. You get to meet a lot of different people that way.

The scientists have no sense of time or danger. The reason I was good for them was that, even though I wasn't a scientist, I realized what was or wasn't dangerous. Otherwise, some of them would have killed themselves. The dedication of some of them was hard to believe.

Once in a while a cocky one would show up and say that at his university, they had their own ship and he could tell the captain where to go. So I said, in that case, you should have brought your own ship and your own captain.

RN: Do you see any changes?

PL: Sure. Now I can go to places where there used to be a glacier and I mostly resent the short trips. There are lots of trips for lots of people, but that's not necessarily showing them the Antarctic. They're in such a hurry, all the time, actually spending only four days of an eight day trip in Antarctica.

RN: Is Antarctica becoming too bureaucratic?

PL: Yes. Too many fingers in the pie. They should have someone like me go down and straighten that mess out! With the right equipment of course. Harbormaster at Arthur Harbor. Find krill and birds for the scientists. Keep the science running. Sure. I could do all of those things — at the same time.

The Antarctic Century BOARD

"Where have you been, The Antarctic Century Newsletter?" Not in hiding, just coping with the recession. It has been a difficult 10-12 months for us but there's some optimism that a corner's been turned and that we can get back to maintaining a regular publishing schedule. At this point, given that in 1994 the Antarctic Treaty Parties will be holding annual, spring meetings, we're intending "double issues" in December/January (covering aspects of the upcoming science and tourism seasons in the austral summer) and June/July (covering the results and highlights of each Treaty Meeting). Special notices and issues will be mailed as warranted.

We are most grateful to those of you who have written to us and made contributions to *Oceanites* over the last few months. You've not been forgotten and we're glad that you've not forgotten the Newsletter. Thanks very much for your patience and understanding.

N.B. For those wanting to say hello to Captain Lenie, he can be reached through the offices of Travel Dynamics in New York. (Captain Pietr Lenie, c/o Travel Dynamics, 132 East 70 Street, New York, NY 10021 USA.) For information about the Hero Foundation, please contact Capt. Brian Shoemaker, The Hero Foundation, P.O. Box 73, Reedsport, OR 97467 USA.

Antarctic News

Antarctic Environmental Protocol. The Environmental Protocol signed by the Antarctic Treaty Parties more than a year ago, has not yet entered into force. As we go to press, only Spain and Ecuador have ratified the Protocol, while Peru and France seem ready to do so. Disposition in the United States has been hampered by arguments about possibly moving some National Science Foundation administrative functions to other agencies. However, with the ascendency of the Clinton-Gore administration, it is hoped that the differences will be smoothed, and that implementing legislation will proceed relatively quickly. There is more on this below, regarding the results of the latest Antarctic Treaty Meeting in Venice.

Tourism. The 1992-93 Antarctic shipboard tourism season is underway. If all trips fill — and that's probably unlikely, the total number of shipboard visitors would exceed 8,000.

The vessels involved this season include: Ocean Princess (Antarctic Peninsula; passenger capacity, 460; 3 projected trips); Columbus Caravelle (Antarctic Peninsula; passenger capacity, 250; 7 projected trips); Illiria (Antarctic Peninsula; passenger capacity, 140; 6 projected trips); Explorer (Antarctic Peninsula; passenger capacity, 96; 9 projected trips); World Discoverer; (Antarctic Peninsula; passenger capacity, 138; 8 projected trips); Frontier Spirit; (Ross Sea region; passenger capacity, 164; 3 projected trips); Kapitan Khlebnikov (Ross Sea region; passenger capacity, 130; 3 projected trips); Vavilov (Antarctic Peninsula; passenger capacity, 50; 4 projected trips); Professor Molchanov (Antarctic Peninsula; passenger capacity, 38; 8 projected trips); Northern Ranger (Antarctic Peninsula; passenger capacity, 95; 8 projected trips).

For next season, it has been announced that the Marco Polo, a 400-800 passenger vessel, will be heading to the Peninsula,

supposedly limiting its passenger load to 400 per voyage.

Venice Meeting. The Antarctic Treaty Parties held their regular, consultative meeting in Venice, Italy, November 11-20, 1992. The consultative meeting was preceded by a two-day, special meeting on Antarctic tourism.

The main success of the Venice consultative meeting was that Argentina moved away from its long-standing, contrary position regarding a Treaty Secretariat. There is now consensus on the need and importance of a Secretariat, and the meeting outlined terms of reference for such an institution. However, progress only went so far, because there still was no agreement on "where" to locate the Secretariat.

Both Argentina and the U.S. offered up their capitals as a site, but a decision must await further diplomacy. The U.K. could not (and may never be able to) agree on siting the Secretariat in Buenos Aires, and the suspicion is that another Treaty Meeting will have to take place — with no resolution on the site — before a possible third candidate emerges. A few weeks after the Meeting concluded, the U.S. informed other governments that it would not object to the Secretariat being placed in Buenos Aires, thus further isolating the U.K. and, perhaps, stiffening its opposition.

The Parties agreed to hold their next meeting in Japan in the spring of 1994, thus setting the stage for annual, spring, consultative meetings.

The U.S. position at the 1992 meeting was strong and consistent: that ratification and implementation of the Protocol must be the Treaty System's immediate priority. Spain and Ecuador have deposited ratifications, but only Peru and France

seem on the verge. However, all Consultative Parties expressed progress toward achieving deposits of ratification by early 1994.

The strong U.S. position drove the often contentious, but not very enlightening, discussion of tourism. The informal, two-day special meeting that preceded the main event was focused on the draft tourism annex pushed by the "Group of Five" (Spain, Germany, Italy, Chile, and France). The U.S. view was that the *need* for a new annex simply wasn't justified or adequately articulated by the Group of Five.

This sparring continued into the consultative meeting where Group of Five representatives continued to advocate new legal authority to regulate tourists. This contentiousness precluded virtually any discussion of the truly *operational* aspects of how the Treaty System might deal with this issue (what monitoring and regulatory mechanisms the Parties might utilize to deal with these impacts, under the Protocol and its existing Annexes — or otherwise). Much information about the numbers of tourists and locations of visits was submitted, particularly by the U.K. and to a lesser extent by the U.S.

In the end, the final Report of the meeting indicated that the Parties discussed tourism, that there was disagreement about the need for further legal authorities, and that tourism/visitation will be on the agenda for the next meeting.

Here lies some future argument: From public interventions during the meeting, it emerged that the Group of Five was interested, perhaps, in capping the total numbers of tourists going to Antarctica or in establishing "tourism sites" at which visits would be restricted. For their part, the tour operators seemed most concerned about having the Treaty Parties somehow endorse the operators' code of conduct, slightly oblivious to

comments about closing down or redirecting their operations.

The meeting increased fears that the Environmental Protocol might never enter into force. In fact, it may be reasonably argued that the Group of Five obsession with a new (and not well drafted) tourism annex is a subterfuge that allows these countries to avoid obligations ultimately tied to the Protocol's entering into force.

On the other hand, the ante's been raised substantially for getting U.S. implementing legislation through the new Congress as quickly as possible. While there's been some advocacy to move certain NSF functions to other agencies, the more pressing concern is that the Protocol is not yet operational, and won't be until all Consultative Parties deposit ratifications. All sides in the U.S. seem, now, to understand that a relatively early U.S. deposit of ratification is essential to forcing the progress of ratification in other countries.

An educated guess is that, long before the Treaty Parties themselves act on tourism, one or some U.S. agencies will be administering aspects of this industry. For example, it seems clear that the U.S. implementing legislation will require tour operators — in tandem, or individually — to submit environmental impact statements about their operations, prior to a season's commencement. This, in turn, will allow the full brunt of administrative review procedures and potential legal challenges to blossom.

Perhaps as a prelude to this future review, the Environmental Defense Fund already has asked the International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators (IAATO) to comment on particular deviations from IAATO's own guidelines by one operator and its passengers, recorded during the 1991-92 season by NSF observers.

Hail To No. 2! Congratulations to Al Gore, the first, true Antarcticist elected to the U.S. vice-presidency. To the best of our knowledge, Gore is the first vice-president (or president) to have visited

Antarctica prior to his election. For years, Mr. Gore has maintained a strong Antarctic focus in the U.S. Congress, and Antarctica is expected to have greater than usual visibility in the new Clinton-Gore administration. We wish the new team good luck! Incidentally, another candidate in the 1992 election, Admiral James Stockdale, who was Ross Perot's running mate, also had visited Antarctica previously.

The R/V Nathaniel B. Palmer. The new, U.S. Antarctic research vessel, Nathaniel B. Palmer, is on line and working. She is 308 feet long, 60 feet wide, has a maximum speed of 15 knots, and her engines can produce 12,270 horsepower. She has icebreaking capacity and can accommodate 37 scientists, with seven laboratories and 5,500 square feet of lab space.

Science Notes. This austral spring's Antarctic **ozone hole** was the largest ever recorded, continuing fears of increased human skin cancers around the Southern Ocean rim, and of potentially deleterious effects on the Antarctic ocean food chain caused by increased UV radiation. Scientific work on the latter possibilities continues this season at the U.S. Palmer Station, Anvers Island. . . . The U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) had to scrub its planned descent by the robot **Dante** into the Mount Erebus crater. There was a break in the robot's fiber-optic cable guidance system, which linked the half-ton robot with its base on the crater rim. The eight-foot-high, eight-legged robot was being tested for use on future Moon and Mars expeditions. . . . An Antarctic Weddell Seal population near Ross Island has shown a marked decline in birth rate, apparently coinciding with a climate disruption known as the El Niño/Southern Oscillation, when tropical water shifts markedly from the western to the eastern Pacific Ocean. This would be the most southerly biological effect ever noted for an El Niño event. . . . Recent **tourism impact studies** conducted at Half Moon Island will take place during the 1992-93 season at Cuverville Island. There had

been some suggestion of conducting these studies at Nelson Island; however, there was much uproar about this prospect because the Nelson study site is presently designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and is avoided by the tour operators. Indeed, under current U.S. regulations implementing the Antarctic Treaty, U.S. operators would need a permit before entering the Nelson site. . . . Stone Age art recently discovered in a flooded cave by French divers suggests the presence of **penguins in the Mediterranean** region, 18,000 years ago. . . . Fossils from a forest that grew nearly 300 million years ago in the Antarctic, indicate that the Antarctic was warmer and much more supportive of plant life than previously thought. Indeed, this new study of growth rings in Antarctic tree fossils shows that **the Permian Antarctic**, 290-245 million years ago, had well-defined seasons and wasn't frozen year-round. In fact, the lack of frost rings suggests that temperatures at this time were rarely below freezing.

Personnel and Expedition Notes. Greenpeace has dismantled its Antarctic station. . . . Ann Bancroft and a team of women are attempting a trans-Antarctic crossing this austral season. . . . Dr. Peter Wilkness is leaving his post as head of the Department of Polar Programs at the U.S. National Science Foundation.

Oceanites News. The Oceanites Antarctic Traveler's Code has been endorsed by Adventure Network, Inc. . . . Oceanites has completed a series of pilot environmental commercials, called **E MINUTES™**, which are intended for broadcast worldwide. A prospectus and further details may be obtained by writing Oceanites. . . . Fewer than 4,000 copies of **Wild Ice** remain available in the U.S. Copies may still be obtained by sending a check for US\$40 to Oceanites. The cost includes mailing within the U.S.; foreign postage will be billed separately. . . . The book has now been translated into Italian, Dutch, and German, and a French edition is expected in 1993. . . . Ron Naveen was invited to serve on the U.S. delegation to the recent Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting in Venice.



Breaching Killer Whale in the Southern Drake Passage,
January 1992.

