

The Antarctic Site Inventory



2004 Annual Report from Oceanites, Inc.

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GREAT UPSIDES . . . AND SOME CAVEATS

I am happy to describe, in almost all respects, a truly fabulous year.

As noted in my last report, Oceanites received a five-year grant from the U. S. National Science Foundation to begin long-term monitoring at Petermann Island in November 2003. We had an excellent "liftoff" season collecting baseline data that enables us to assess and monitor changes over the next four seasons. The Antarctic Site Inventory's work at Petermann and our season-long shipboard surveys resume this November.

Long-term conservation requires painstaking data collection over many years, and I'm enormously proud that Oceanites and the Antarctic Site Inventory continue setting the pace, and demonstrating the ability to reach Antarctic Peninsula sites frequently and cost-effectively. The field season that concluded in February 2004 was our tenth, and Inventory researchers now have made a total of 570 visits to 89 Peninsula locations.

More good news: As hoped, the second edition of Oceanites's acclaimed *Compendium of Antarctic Peninsula Visitor Sites* was published by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. It "debuted" at the Antarctic Treaty Experts' Meeting on Tourism (Norway) in March 2004 and was distributed to all Antarctic Treaty countries at the 27th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (Cape Town, South Africa) in June 2004. The great upside is that countries now are contemplating a continent-wide monitoring program, and the Inventory's methodology and database are in the middle of such discussions. Parties warmly received my Powerpoint presentation about the Inventory, and I will participate in a follow-up monitoring conference in 2005, sponsored by the Scientific Committee On Antarctic Research.

One caveat to note, however, is Treaty Parties' failure in Cape Town to adopt meaningful tourism guidelines, despite years of active discussion. The United Kingdom had developed a series of guidelines for key sites, based on the Inventory database, to assist visitors in minimizing or avoiding any potential disruptions to resident fauna and flora. In the final plenary session in Cape Town, the U.K. resisted efforts to water down its guidelines and, when no active discussion occurred, withdrew its proposal. This was a missed chance to put sensible guidance in place, but there remains the possibility that these guidelines will be revisited at the June 2005 Treaty Meeting in Stockholm.

Cape Town emphasizes, rather dramatically, the still-unfulfilled need to make useful, conservation-oriented, site-specific information readily and easily available to everyone who visits The Ice. In terms of Oceanites' moving this agenda forward, our intentions to launch a comprehensive scientific and educational website and to publish a second edition of our acclaimed *Oceanites Site Guide To The Antarctic Peninsula* aren't yet realized.

Consequently, we will renew efforts to bring the comprehensive Inventory database, maps, and other resulting products online and readily available on the web, and to produce a new edition of the *Site Guide*. We're committed to this outcome and trust that you, too, agree that information is powerful.

We'll keep striving — and with your help, ultimately, we'll ensure that this information reaches everyone who needs it or wants it.

Your support is much appreciated.

We continue occupying the cutting edge of Antarctic *science* and we also want to occupy the frontline of international Antarctic *education*. Oceanites remains the only wildlife or environmental non-governmental organization — US-based or international — that directly supports field studies adding to our collective knowledge of Antarctica, and to the successful, long-term implementation of the Antarctic Environmental Protocol.

We will continue our track record of securing Antarctica's future — and I hope that you'll work with us to keep our good work flowing.

Thank you for your support and all best wishes,

Ron Naveen

President, Oceanites, Inc

Principal Investigator, Antarctic Site Inventory

November 1, 2004

Antarctic Site Inventory Update

During the 2003-04 field season, Antarctic Site Inventory researchers made 67 visits to 31 different sites in the Antarctic Peninsula, seven of which are new additions to the Inventory database. In ten seasons from November 1994 through March 2004, the Inventory has made 570 visits to 89 Antarctic Peninsula locations. Our long-term monitoring at Petermann Island (described below) began in November 2003.

The Inventory's 11th field season — the Petermann field camp and our shipboard surveys — begins in November 2004. Aerial photodocumentation by the UK ice patrol vessel, HMS Endurance, particularly of Petermann Island, has been requested.

Experienced Inventory researchers working in the forthcoming, 2004-05 season include: Ron Naveen, Steven Forrest, Rosemary Dagit, Megan McOsker, John Carlson, and Iris Saxer. Joining the project are Ian Bullock, Stacey Buckelew, Kristy Kroeker, and Doug Gould.

Long-term Monitoring at Petermann Island

The Inventory's long-term monitoring and assessment project at Petermann Island had an excellent start. There are two, 3+ week sessions — the first coincides with the peak of penguin egg-laying (for nest censuses), the second with the peak of penguin chick-crèching (for chick censuses).

Exciting as it is to examine Petermann's penguin and shag populations and how they may be changing — and if so, why such changes are occurring, it also is a privilege to be working in such a spectacular, breathtaking, historically significant location. Petermann Island is where famed French explorer Jean-Baptiste Charcot overwintered in 1909 and many of the place names in the vicinity stem from his seminal explorations. Charcot's data and photographs are integral to our analyses.

Our main objectives are: mapping the entire Petermann coastline, as well as each and every nesting penguin group on the island; obtaining penguin nest censuses of all species at the peak of egg-laying, and penguin chick censuses at the peak of chick-crèching; obtaining accurate censuses of nesting blue-eyed shags and south polar skuas; and recording and coordinating on meteorological data with Ukrainian scientists at the Vernadsky Station (six miles to the south).

We also began a gentoo chick-aging study, tracking a number of nests with known age chicks, and photographically documenting chick growth. Knowing precise ages of chicks assists our determinations of population size and breeding success because the Petermann gentoos exhibit a wide variation in egg-laying dates from one end of the island to the other.

Our November 2003 arrival at Petermann was assisted by the US research vessel LAWRENCE GOULD, which had to crunch its way through 6/10ths ice in nearby Penola Strait. GOULD personnel assisted us in erecting our two Scott pyramid tents, a cooking tent, and a smaller sleeping tent on the snow, leaving as small a "footprint" as possible. We camped more than a hundred meters above the Circumcision Bay

shoreline, south of the shoreline refuge hut constructed 50 years ago by Argentina and now maintained by Ukrainians from the nearby Vernadsky Station.

Round #1 in November/December 2003 was cold — dipping as low as -9° C (16° F), but blessed with an abundance of blue sky and midnight sunsets. When Round #1 concluded, we took down the tents and stored our entire batch of equipment in the refuge hut. Round #2 in January/February 2003 was warmer and plagued by considerable rain. Because of heavy snow melt, we moved from the now slushy Round #1 campsite to flat boulders and rocks on higher ground. The season concluded in mid-February and, once again, we took down all gear and stored it in the hut for later retrieval by the GOULD.

In November, the first task was mapping the island using handheld Garmin eTREX GPS machines, downloading results into our Macintosh iBOOK computers. Maps were corrected as necessary, identification labels given to each penguin group, and then, these revisions were uploaded into our handheld GPS machines — allowing us to know, precisely, which of the 140+ Adélie and gentoo groups we were censusing.

Among the many highlights of the season was discovering a previously unknown concentration of breeding south polar skuas in the moss-laden, northwestern end of the island. Reaching this area required a climb of more than 130 meters. Our collaboration with Vernadsky Station personnel also proved rewarding. They assisted our GPS mapping of the Petermann coastline and our censusing of nearby locations like the Yalour Islands, whose Adélie penguin population hadn't been censused in 20 years.

The 27th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting

Why does one go to these meetings? My first Treaty Meeting was in 1994 in Venice and the 2004 meeting in Cape Town was my eighth, all as an NGO member of the U.S. delegation. Despite the expected, slow pace, my interest peaks because this is a consensus system — meaning that everyone agrees, or else nothing is accomplished. At times, it may require aiming toward a somewhat lower common denominator, but it also means that all countries are equal. Everyone has a voice, whether superpower or not. Simply as a matter of politics, it's quite interesting to watch the interplay as issues rise, simmer, percolate, and then, either fall or find themselves cast into Treaty regulations (measures) or guidance (resolutions).

The 1994 consultative meeting in Venice was preceded by a special session on tourism, but nothing happened. The Environmental Protocol To The Antarctic Treaty had just blossomed and some believed that an additional, separate annex was needed to cover potential tourism impacts. The stronger — and still prevailing — view is that another annex isn't necessary, and that the Treaty System has enough regulatory possibilities (e.g. establishing protected areas or management areas) to deal with any potential impacts. Unsurprisingly, with the number of tourists rising over the last decade, there are renewed calls for Treaty Parties to act.

At the 26th consultative meeting in Madrid in 2003, the U.K. took the lead by submitting a number of working papers.

One of these advocated guidance for visitation at key, highly sensitive/diverse sites, and it was particularly exciting that this proposal was based on the Antarctic Site Inventory database — obviously and potentially, a very nice affirmation of Oceanites' work in Antarctica.

These proposals spurred an experts' meeting in Norway in March 2004, with high expectations for progress at the subsequent Cape Town Consultative Meeting in June. From Oceanites' point of view, there was much praise for our Powerpoint presentation about the Antarctic Site Inventory's methodology and results, as Parties assembled as a Committee On Environmental Protection. The second edition of our *Compendium of Antarctic Peninsula Visitor Sites* was distributed to all Parties. Momentum built toward developing a continent-wide, environmental monitoring plan, with the Inventory's database in the middle of such discussions, and there will be a follow-up monitoring conference in 2005, sponsored by the Scientific Committee On Antarctic Research.

Unfortunately, during the second week, with Parties now taking up legal and administrative aspects of the Treaty, the U.K. proposal on site-specific guidelines reached an unfortunate end — at least for now. The site-specific guidelines were intended to minimize, if not totally avoid, any potential disruptions to resident fauna and flora at key sites, and included provisions regarding maximum number of visitation hours per 24-hour period and limits on the number of visitors at any one time.

There was some objection that no extant scientific findings relate potential impacts (e.g. declines or changes in penguin populations) to human presence. The converse argument, of course, is that precautionary management of Antarctica (as with other parks and sensitive locations) needs to be based on prudence — and that the proposed limitations exist and are accepted everywhere. In the final plenary session in Cape Town, the U.K. resisted efforts to water down the proposed guidelines and, when no active discussion occurred, it withdrew the proposal.

This issue isn't totally lost, certainly not with the still rising number of seasonal, Antarctic tourists (expected, in 2004-05 to exceed 20,000), and it won't be surprising to see this matter rejoined the 2005 Treaty Meeting in Stockholm.

Publication & Distribution of the Oceanites Site Compendium, Second Edition

The fully revised, second edition of Oceanites' *Compendium of Antarctic Peninsula Visitor Sites* was published (hard copy and on disk) by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (and, as noted above, distributed both at the March 2004 Treaty-sponsored tourism experts' meeting in Norway and at the 27th ATCM in Cape Town in June).

The *Compendium* covers all 82 sites visited and censused by the Antarctic Site Inventory in nine field seasons through March 2003, revises subarea maps and orientation maps, adds a large number of site-specific photodocumentation, updates analyses of visitor frequency and distribution, and adds analyses and discussion of each site's species diversity and sensitivity to potential environmental disruptions.

Previous site descriptions are updated and all site descriptions reformatted.

The *Compendium* is a key element in Oceanites' effort to make readily available all necessary information that ensures the least possible disruption to resident flora and fauna.

Education Priorities: Website & Site Guide

Support for Oceanites' *science* work — the field camp at Petermann Island and shipboard surveys in the Antarctic Peninsula — is presently secure. What has proved difficult is support for our *education* objectives.

Quite simply, Oceanites believes that "information is power" and that, by making a plethora of conservation-oriented information easily available to a vast, international audience, we nurture the conservation of Antarctica for posterity. Frankly, over a longer term, the more that Oceanites can distribute — the better.

To this end — to put relevant biological data, site-specific information, maps, and photographs in the hands of "Antarcticists" everywhere, we envision the most comprehensive, possible Antarctic website ever produced.

In our rapidly digitized world, we see this is the fastest, most reliable means of disseminating everything anyone ever wanted to know about this glorious continent to the Antarctic community of diplomats, scientists, conservation organizations, tour ship and yacht visitors, and the general public.

Importantly, keeping in mind that the Treaty operates concomitantly in four languages, the website aims in a similar direction — an English-language version initially, with Spanish-, French-, and Russian-language versions to follow. Ultimately, the website will contain a unique educational component — a virtual classroom that will allow interested adults and children to "plug into" a wealth of slide show or Powerpoint presentations, videos, and downloadable materials about key Antarctic subjects.

Contact Numbers

If you or your family's foundation would like to adopt one of these *education* initiatives — and make a definitive, long-term contribution to the long-term conservation of Antarctica, please contact Ron Naveen and Oceanites directly at:

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Cover photo:
Gentoo penguins at Petermann Island, by Ron Naveen
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