

UNSEEN FIORDLAND, STEWART ISLAND & THE SNARES

on board HERITAGE ADVENTURER

28 February - 7 March 2023



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Day 1

Tuesday, 28 February 2023

Queenstown

Arriving in Queenstown from all corners of the globe, we checked into our accommodation for the evening and enjoyed our first dinner together. It was an excellent opportunity to meet our fellow travellers, some of our expedition team and to learn more about our upcoming adventures aboard *Heritage Adventurer*.

Day 2

Wednesday, 01 March 2023

Queenstown to Bluff

After a morning free to explore Queenstown, we piled into coaches and arrived at the Port of Bluff where, after showing our passports at the container wharf security checkpoint, we boarded our new home away from home, *Heritage Adventurer*. The Heritage team and ship crew greeted us at the gangway before showing us to our cabins.

After a sumptuous dinner our expedition leader Nathan introduced us to his team and outlined the plan for our adventures ahead. *Heritage Adventurer* set sail with the tide exiting Bluff harbour at approximately 2230 for our overnight course to Stuart Island.



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Day 3

Thursday, 02 March 2023

Rakiura / Stewart Island

We awoke in Patterson Inlet after our short overnight crossing to find *Heritage Adventurer* anchored in the lee of Ulva Island.

We then had our first chance to walk down the gangway and board the Zodiacs for the short, slightly bumpy, crossing to the predator free nature reserve of Ulva Island. There we were met by local guides led by Ulva, coincidentally having the same name as the island. They walked us through the old growth forests of Rimu, Miro and thin bark Totara, and helped us spot Saddleback, Yellowhead, Red-crested Parakeets, Fantails and many other birds. Meanwhile the Stewart Island Robins and Wekas came out demanding to be photographed. All in all, a great start to our expedition.

We enjoyed another excellent meal as the ship re-positioned to Kaipipi Inlet to drop off those who wanted to stretch their legs. They walked along an old logging road through regenerating bush choosing either the shorter or longer route. Tui and Kereru were seen along the way while our guides shared the history, biology and conservation of Stewart Island. Joining us at the village of Oban, we all had the chance to explore this iconic seaside destination with shopping, walking to Observation Rock and having a beverage at the South Sea Hotel.



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Day 4

Friday, 03 March 2023

Dusky Sound, Fiordland

At 0600, before dawn, we entered Tamatea / Dusky Sound. While it was still dark, the early risers were

already out on deck to catch a first glimpse of Fiordland after travelling around Puysegur Point during the night. The sharper eyed among us caught glimpses of Muttonbirds/Tītī or Sooty Shearwater and even Bluefin Tuna as we passed Five Finger Point in the pre-dawn gloom and came to anchor in Earshell Cove.

After breakfast we boarded the Zodiacs for a cruise in the sheltered waters of Earshell Cove – managing to avoid the squalls and swells crashing against the outer coastline. Rod pointed out how to distinguish some of the more common native trees in the canopy including Rimu with its vertical hanging foliage, Beech with its horizontally layered branches and the cauliflower-like green foliage of the Southern Rata trees. We saw gulls, followed a Pied Shag as it fished for Triplefins in the shallow waters. We also had good views of Kaka, Kereru, Tomtit and Bellbird/Korimako.

After a quick morning tea on board we were back into the Zodiacs again to head ashore and follow Lou up a steep narrow track at the head of Earshell Cove. Following a dry water course up to a hut clearing, we found a small lookout with great views across the basin and Earshell Cove.

There were a few squalls while up on the lookout along with a huge variety of ferns and liverworts which delighted Stella, one of our guides, who is also an expert in the botany of bryophytes (mosses and liverworts).

After another splendid lunch we steamed out of Earshell Cove past the entrance to Acheron Passage heading for our next anchorage at Sportsman Cove and Cooper Island. We headed through Cook Channel into the protected and beautiful Sportsman Cove – so named by Captain Cook who found an abundance of what were probably native Brown Teal in the sheltered water. Cook compared them to an English duck known as a 'widgeon' before his men opened fire and collected them for food.

After exploring the upper cove by Zodiac, we then re-boarded the ship and drew anchor passing back out through the narrow Cook Channel and made our way westward toward Cascade Cove. It is here where we anchored overnight in view of the spectacular Cascade Falls which tumble down the mountain before plunging beneath the jumble of boulders.

We had just enough time for a third Zodiac excursion ashore to Indian Island, so named due to Cook's encounters with a local Māori family. Cook encountered the inhabitants of Indian Island on his second voyage to the region. On his way to Pickersgill Harbour a Māori man accompanied by two women hailed Cook from the shore of the island. This sparked an exchange of gifts and grew into an ongoing alliance.

John and Lou recounted this history while showing us the historic firepits on the top of the island before showing us the exact site on the rocks where the first encounter took place. While on the island we also discovered the tiny cream flowers of the Easter Orchid with their heady vanilla scent and Stella showed us how one particular native liverwort becomes fluorescent under ultraviolet light.



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Day 5

Saturday, March 4, 2023

Dusky Sound, Fiordland

Overnight we made our way to Anchor Island, where James Cook had originally anchored *Resolution* in 1773, and the current home to about half of the world's population of Kakapo. We took a Zodiac cruise to visit the site of the first sealers camp at Luncheon Cove, where New Zealand's first European-style house and ship were built. Along the way we spotted several New Zealand Fur Seal pups which was encouraging

to see as this area had once been decimated by sealers.

After a quick re-location of *Heritage Adventurer* we landed at Astronomer's Point in Pickersgill Harbour. This is another site rich in history as it is where *Resolution* was moored for their 6 week visit. It is here that they rested, repaired and recovered from the rigours of the Southern Ocean, brewed the first beer, went botanising to discover and catalogue many new species, and cleared an area of bush to make astronomical observations that confirmed the accuracy of James Harrison's chronometer.

Over lunch we moved again, this time to make landing at Pigeon Island— home to Richard Henry, the godfather of New Zealand conservation. We learned that his efforts tragically failed due to the swimming prowess of stoats, but that he laid the foundation for the great work done on bird conservation by his successors.

We then sailed north through Acheron Passage, admiring the views and an appearance from a pod of Bottlenose Dolphins playing all around the ship. Then off to Deck 6 Aft for a celebratory barbecue.

As we sailed for Milford Sound, we caught up on the day's activities and prepared for tomorrow with the recap and briefing. What a day!



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Day 6

Sunday, 05 March 2023

Milford Sound, Fiordland

Heritage Adventurer steamed up the coast, arriving at the spectacular concealed entrance to Milford

Sound in the half-light. As the ship turned the corner into a narrow waterway, the rising sun illuminated cliffs streaked with tree avalanches and rockfalls. These were said to have been caused by an extreme rainfall event in 2020 that saw over a metre of rain fall in one storm. As we made our way up Milford Sound we saw the Southern Alpine Faultline where it crosses the fiord. Lou provided an informative commentary on the major landmarks including Mount Pembroke, The Lion, and Mitre Peak. As we came into view of Milford settlement our trusty expedition vessel turned for a closer look at the Bowen Falls, learning that the waters in the sounds are an extraordinary 350 metres deep. As we made our way back down Milford Sound a pod of Bottlenose Dolphins joined the cruise, riding off the bow of *Heritage Adventurer*.

Once our ship reached the mouth of Milford Sound we turned once again to the south, passing Poison Bay and the northern fiords on our way south to Doubtful Sound. While at sea we enjoyed spotting a variety of seabirds from the prow of the ship including majestic Southern Royal Albatross, elegant White-capped Albatross and the occasional endangered Westland Petrel. *Heritage Adventurer* entered Thompson Sound to the north of Secretary Island and cruised up the northern arm of the fiord into Blanket Bay. Here the team split into separate groups.

The first group made their way in groups of six to the eccentric floating barge known as the Blanket Bay Hotel. There they met local pilot Ben who helped us board a helicopter for a spectacular scenic flight up above Deep Cove with views back to Blanket Bay and Secretary Island with each group enjoying 20 minutes on the alpine plateau to marvel at the views and photograph the small alpine plants including white flowering Gentians and red Astelia berries.

While helicopter guests were ferried up and down the mountain, the second party set ashore at Secretary Island to follow a trapping track on foot. The trap line had become somewhat overgrown, but on the 90 minute hike the group encountered a number of interesting species. On arrival the group were greeted by a Weka foraging for mussels on the foreshore.

Along the track a black Fantail followed the group to feed on the insects disturbed by the footfalls. A flock of Brown Creepers appeared out of scrub, surrounding us, while our guide Stella spotted a liverwort while stepping over a log. On closer examination it proved to be a previously un-recorded species for the region!

The group took turns examining the tiny cluster of beautiful and intricate green liverwort leaves arranged in rosettes. At the end of the walk, as the group neared Grono Hut, we encountered a group of four black Wekas – a rare colour of the bird specific to southern Fiordland. As the group assembled for pickup at the back of the beach, one of the guides pointed out a large school of native Galaxias fish called Inanga inhabiting the peaty freshwater stream.

With all groups safely back on board, *Heritage Adventurer* cruised out of Doubtful Sound in spectacularly calm and clear weather setting course for the Snares. Dinner was served as the full moon rose and the sun set, illuminating the rugged coastline with pink and orange tones while diners admired the White-capped Albatross, Sooty Shearwater and the occasional Royal Albatross coasting along beside the ship.



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Day 7

Monday, March 6, 2023

The Snares/Tini Heke

We awoke to find *Heritage Adventurer* had made very quick time on our transit to The Snares. After breakfast we boarded the Zodiacs just after for a cruise that had it all. The dramatically folded granite rocks and cliffs dwarfed even the vessel, let alone us in the Zodiacs. The sky was full of wheeling birds, most notably the Buller's Albatross, and we became true Subantarctic Expeditioners with a splashy, bumpy ride to Ho Ho Bay. There the Snares Crested Penguins were on the rocks and in the water, along with a single Fiordland Crested Penguin. The juvenile Red Billed Gulls nearly landed on our heads while the New Zealand Fur Seals watched sleepily.

In the sheltered waters we got close up views of the 2 tree daisies – *Olearia Lyalli* and *Brachyglottis Stewartiae* – and the mega herb *Silbocarpa Robusta* (aka Macquarie Island Cabbage). Endemic Tomtit and Fernbirds were spotted between excursions into the many caves and inlets.

During the ride back we diverted via the Penguin Slide where many more bird species were identified, including the endemic Snares Cape Petrel, Salvin's Albatross, Sooty Shearwater, Antarctic Tern and the little Common Diving Petrel. As we pulled into the last bay before re-boarding, we observed fish jumping trying to escape from the seals below and the raft of birds above. A truly unforgettable morning in a wild, wild place. The dining room was buzzing at lunch.

As we traveled back north, we were educated and entertained by Lou, Glenda, Nathan and Rod as the realisation that our expedition was coming to an end dawned. The Captain hosted a Farewell Cocktail Party and Dinner after what seemed like only yesterday since we had enjoyed the Captain's Welcome. We enjoyed our last meal together and convened in the bar and lounge to view the slideshow of the voyage. Wow!

What a truly action-packed expedition this has been.



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Day 8

Tuesday, March 7, 2023

Bluff/Queenstown

Waking back in the Port of Bluff, we enjoyed our final breakfast with new friends before saying our

farewells to our expedition team, the ship's crew and departed on new adventures bound for Invercargill and Queenstown.



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