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SOUTH GEORGIA

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PETE and ANNIE HILL



The RCC Pilotage Foundation is grateful to Pete and Annie Hill for allowing us to publish their notes, arising from their cruise to South Georgia in their junk rigged yacht 'Badger', for the information and benefit of others. Any skipper tempted to cruise these waters should note their advice and cautions and only attempt the voyage in a well found vessel with a strong crew. They must be totally self contained and physically and mentally strong enough to cope with the fast changing conditions and the harsh environment. The rewards may be immense but the challenges are great – attention is drawn to the Caution below.

Readers are also referred to 'South Georgia Guide' by Andy O'Grady and Ulla Norlander. Along with other information about the South Atlantic, this may be found on www.rccpf.org.uk

Caution

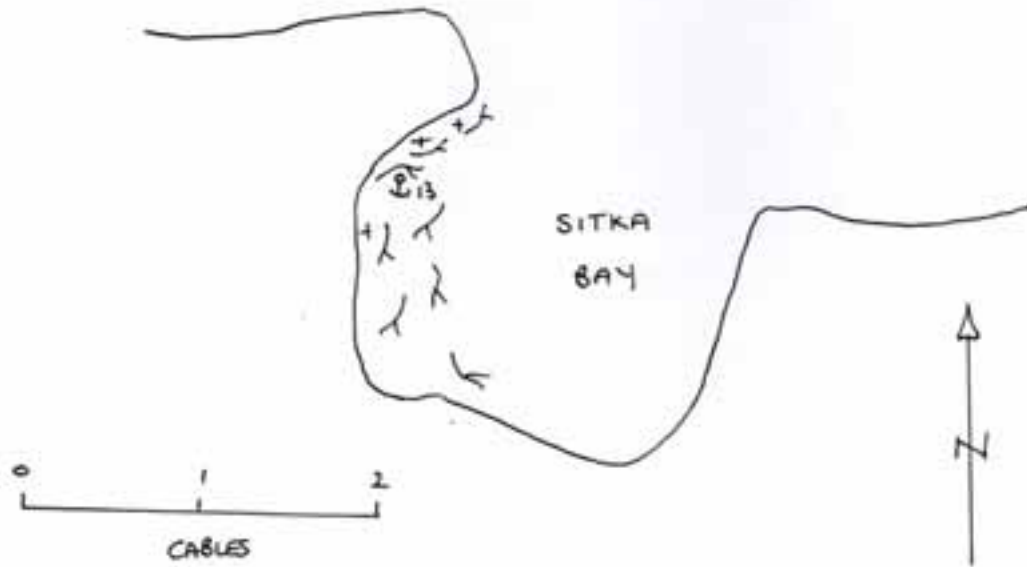
These notes have been prepared by the authors on the basis of the information they have been able to obtain in the course of their visit to the areas described. In particular, soundings shown reflect the route taken by the authors and the absence of soundings does not indicate that depths are necessarily safe. The notes are in no way comprehensive and refer only to the conditions encountered at the time of the visit. Any plans are simply sketches and do not represent the results of a survey of the places referred to. They should be used with extreme caution. The RCC Pilotage Foundation and the authors has published these notes in the hope that they may be of some help to mariners but the safety of a vessel depends ultimately on the judgment of the skipper who should assess all information, published or unpublished.

To the extent permitted by law, the RCC Pilotage Foundation and the authors do not accept liability for any loss and/or damage howsoever caused that may arise from reliance on information contained in these pages.

SITKA BAY

53°59'S 37°24'W

Chart 3585, Cape Buller to Cape Constance



This bay is 1 mile W of Cape Buller. Along this stretch of coastline there are many Black-browed mollyhawks nesting in the high tussac cliffs.

We anchored in the NW part of the bay, to get out of the worst of the swell, in 13m, in a small patch clear of the extensive kelp. There was shelter from the N through W to S.

When we visited, there was too much swell to land, but there are several beaches where landing should be possible. We found this to be rather a gloomy anchorage.



SITKA BAY, LOOKING SW

RIGHT WHALE BAY



At the head of Right Whale Bay is Binder Beach, a moraine beach with a very large King penguin colony situated at the S end.

There are two good anchorages, between them giving shelter from nearly all directions, although protection from the N to NE is a bit marginal.

BARBER COVE, LOOKING E



BARBER COVE

54°00'S 37°40'W

Chart 3585, Right Whale Bay

A reef of above- and below-water rocks extends SW from the N end of the cove. The outer end is marked by kelp. Pass W of this kelp and enter the bay between the kelp on either shore.

Anchor near the head of the cove, off the black, sand beach in about 10m. Good shelter can be obtained from NE through E to S.

CAIRNS COVE

54°00'S 37°41'W

Chart 3585, Right Whale Bay



This is regarded as the best shelter in the bay in the prevailing W'ly winds. We did not anchor here as the wind was E'ly at the time, but we sailed in to have a look.

Depths of 7.5m were found in the cove, clear of kelp, with good shelter from the S through W to NNE.

It should be possible to walk from here to Binder Beach to see the King penguins, but there are large numbers of Fur seals ashore. If the swell allows, it would probably be easier to land at Binder Beach from the dinghy.



CAIRNS COVE, LOOKING W

ELSEHUL

54°01'S 37°58'W

Chart 3585, Elsehul



This bay is at the W end of South Georgia and provides good protection from the sea in the inner part. Although it appears to be open to the NW, by tucking into the W side of the inner bay, shelter from the NW can be found.

Anchor in about 6.5m, outside the kelp, off the beach. The bottom is fine sand and provides exceptionally good holding.

When we visited, we anchored in the E side of the inner bay, outside the kelp in 8.5m, thinking to shelter from a NE gale. The whole bay was subject to hurricane force gusts from the N, with a big swell setting in. The anchor to which we were lying did not budge an inch. In retrospect, we would have been better off anchored on the W side: the gusts were as violent, but there was much less swell.

ELSEHUL, LOOKING SE

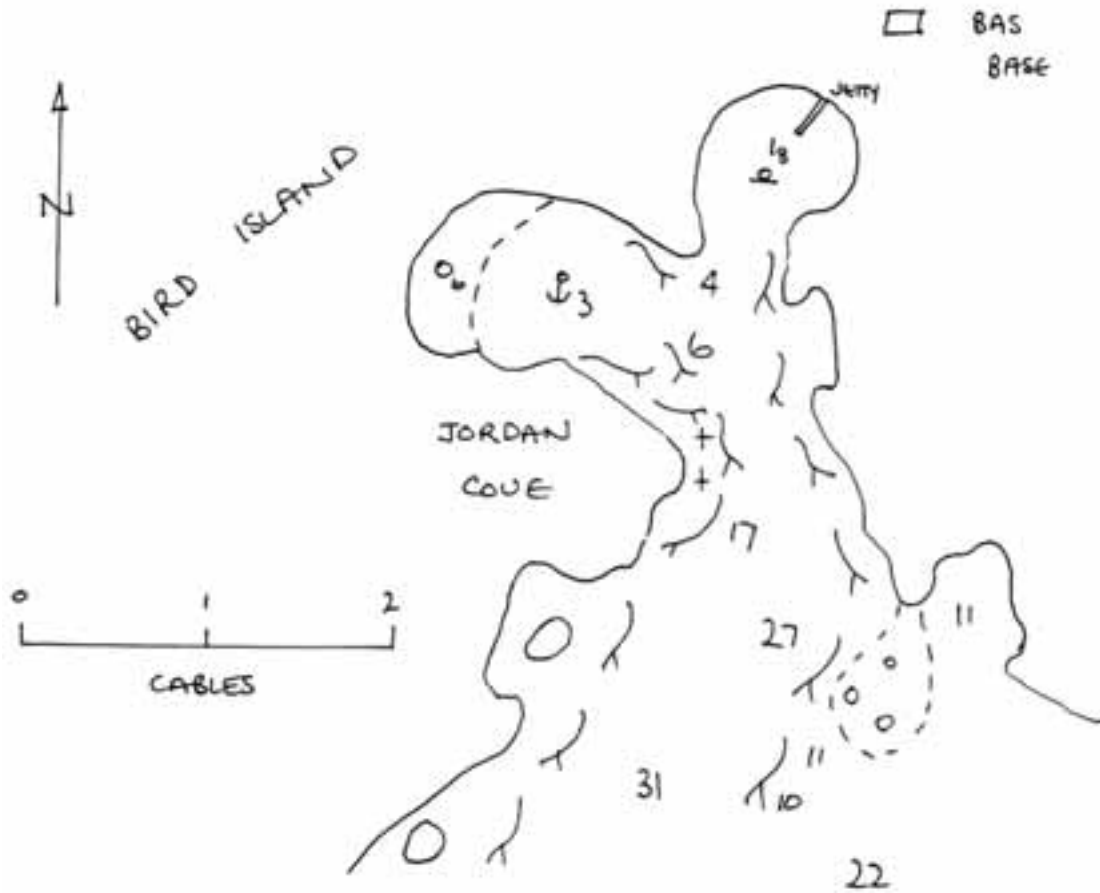


An old BAS hut, used for seal studies in the past, stands on the beach on the W side of the harbour. It is in a rather poor state, but still habitable. Next to it are three old try pots. A short walk over the low ground at the head of the bay, takes you to Undine Harbour on the S coast.

Water can be obtained from a stream at the NE corner of the inner bay.

BIRD ISLAND

Bird Island is a SSSI, hence visits to the island are not allowed unless special permission is obtained through the Assistant Commissioner to South Georgia. BAS have a base on the island at Jordan Cove, where birds and mammals are studied. Three people winter over and up to eight people spend the summer there.



BIRD SOUND

54°00'S 38°01'W

Chart 3592, Bird Sound

The Sound has shoals and the Hornaday Rock in the middle of the passage. There are two passages through the Sound, to the N or to the S of the shoals. The N passage is narrower, but by keeping close to the shore of Bird Island, it is straightforward.

On the day that we passed through the Sound, the shoals were breaking heavily and creating a very confused sea. I suspect that the wind normally blows either up or down the Sound. Sailing through, except with a following wind, would usually be extremely difficult.

Treat Bird Sound with respect.

JORDAN COVE

54°00'S 38°03'W

Chart 3592, Stewart Strait

At the W end of Bird Sound is a well-protected cove, with two arms. The approach is through a fairly narrow lead between kelp banks and rocks on either side, leading in a NE direction. The entrance itself is very constricted, with rocks on the W side and strands of kelp right the way across.

The north arm of the cove is the most protected, with swell rarely reaching in. The depth is apparently only 1.5m in the middle (less than is shown on the chart). Jerome Poncet laid a mooring for his 50ft Damien II in 1992. It consists of 250kg of anchor and chain. The orange mooring buoy gets lost from time to time, so if you are planning to use the mooring, you may have to drag for it. It is not known how often the mooring is inspected. If you are not planning to use the mooring, it may be worth having a trip line on your anchor. There is not sufficient swinging room to lie to a single anchor and Damien II always has a line ashore to the jetty.

The W arm is bigger and deeper. Anchor in the middle in 2.75m, where there is sufficient room to lie to a single anchor. This arm is apparently subject to some swell in gale force winds.



JORDAN COVE, LOOKING SW, DAMIEN II ON HER MOORING

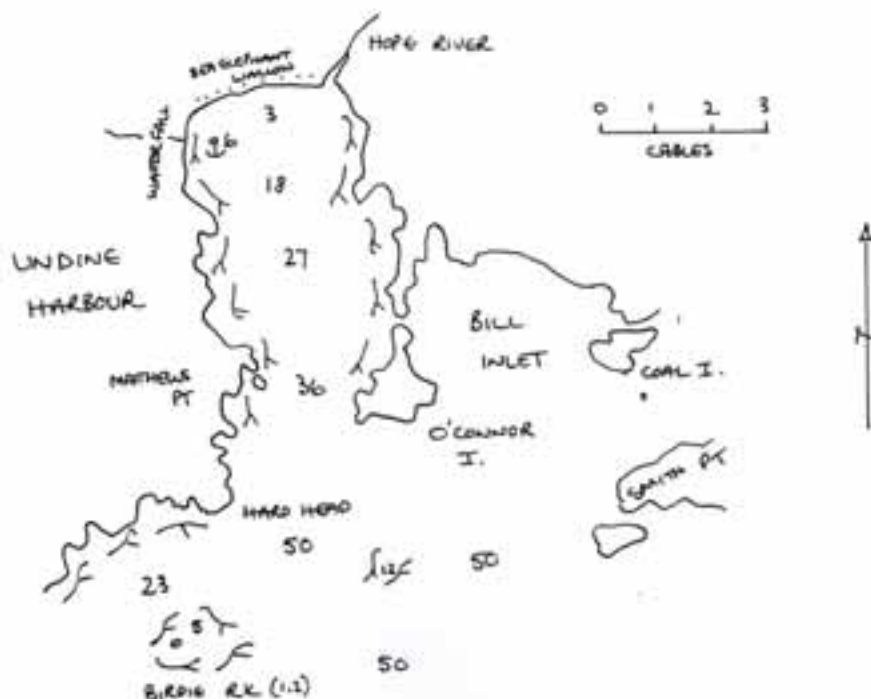
SOUTH-WEST COAST OF SOUTH GEORGIA

This coast is described in the Admiralty Pilot as being 'little visited', which is not surprising because it is much wilder than are the N and E coasts. From Cape Nunez SE, there are few harbours and it is a lee shore to a SW gale. Added to this is the fact that the surveys of the area are not complete and rocks and reefs exist that are not marked on the chart. There is usually a big SW swell along the shore.

Treat this coast with respect.

UNDINE HARBOUR

54°02'S 37°58'W Chart 3585, Undine Harbour



The approach to Undine Harbour is not straightforward, with shoals, kelp banks and the odd rock extending eastward from the Birdie Rocks to Grassholm. Passing to the NW of Birdie Rocks or N of Grassholm will give the clearest approach, but care should be taken, as there are several uncharted rocks. The entrance to Undine Harbour is easily identified with the conspicuous, flat-topped O'Connor Island (49m) marking the E side of the entrance.

UNDINE HARBOUR, LOOKING S



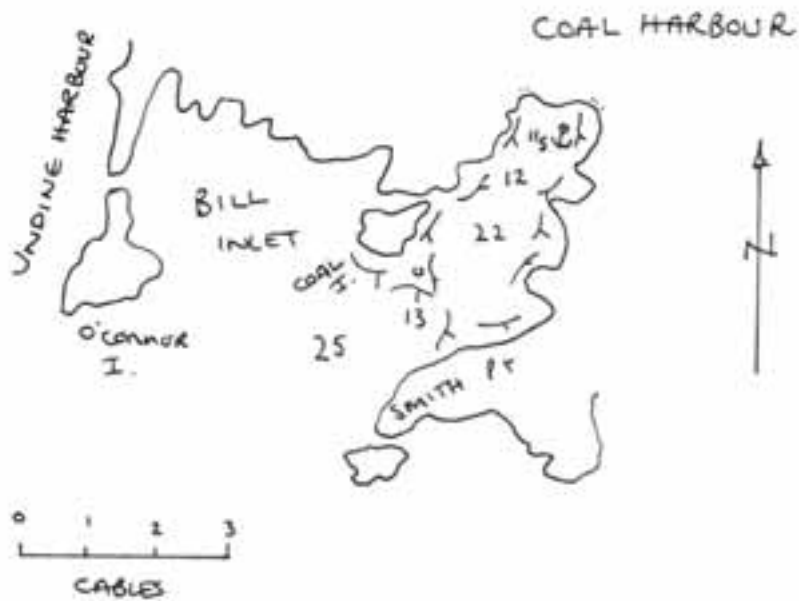
We anchored in the NW corner in 6m, mud, off the conspicuous stream and outside the extensive kelp. The harbour gives good protection from all but the S. When visited, the shoals in Discovery Bay seemed to dampen down most of the swell in the anchorage.

A short walk over the low land at the head of the bay takes you to Elsehul.

COAL HARBOUR

54°02'S 37°57'W

Chart 3585, Undine Harbour



This is an attractive bay, 12 mile E of Undine Harbour. The entrance has kelp extending all the way across, but this is thinner towards the SE side of the entrance. The kelp makes it very difficult to tack through.

The NE corner of the harbour seemed to offer the best anchorage, with a depth of 11.5m outside the kelp, off the small beach. There is good protection from all directions except from the SW.

The low, tussac-covered hills, make this harbour a very pleasant spot.

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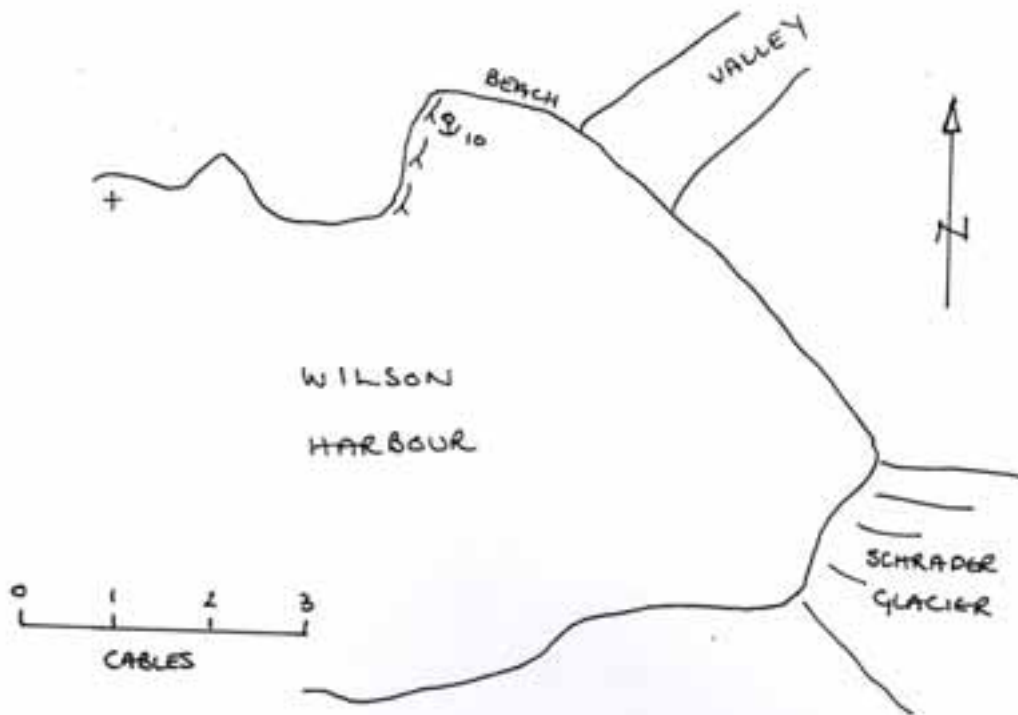


COAL HARBOUR, LOOKING NE ACROSS THE KELP-COVERED ENTRANCE

WILSON HARBOUR

54°06'S 37°40'W

Chart 3597, South Georgia



This appears to be one of the best harbours on the SW coast and provides much better shelter from the sea than is apparent from the chart.

Sail in to the bay on the N shore, near the head of the inlet. Tuck well in to the NW end of the beach and anchor in a clear patch between the kelp in about 10.5m.



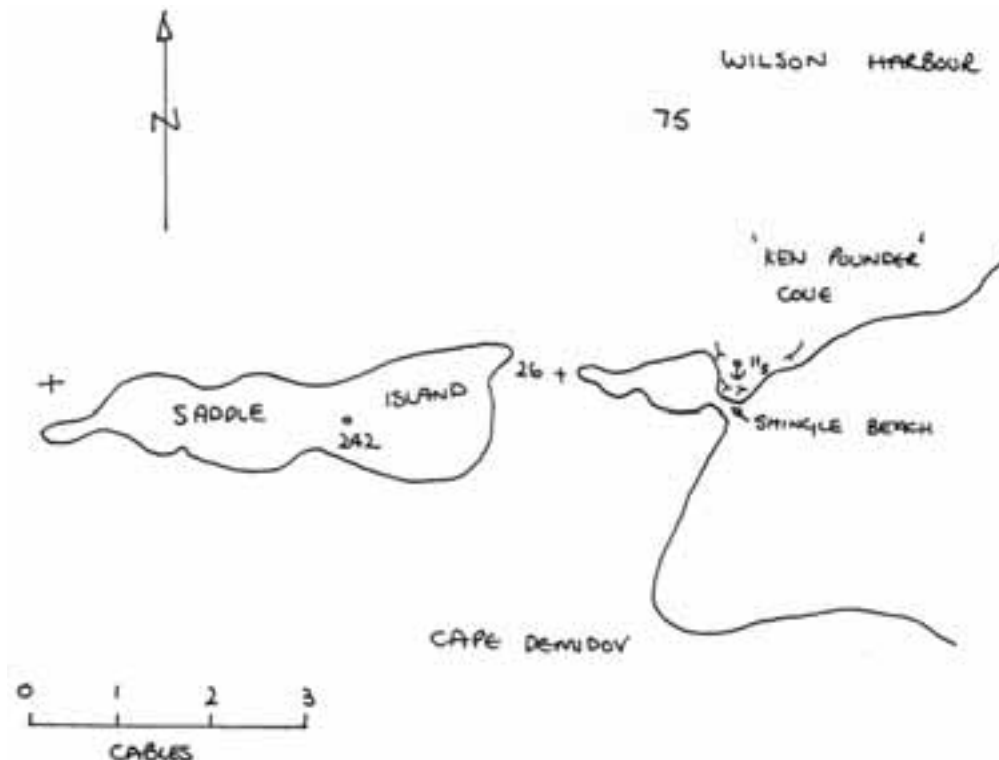
COAL HARBOUR, LOOKING NE ACROSS THE KELP-COVERED ENTRANCE

Good shelter from the sea is provided from W x S through N to E. The fetch from S winds is less than 2 miles.

The Schrader Glacier to the SE of the anchorage only has a fairly small calving front and when visited by Badger, there was very little ice in the bay.

The Pilot warns of occasional very strong winds blowing from the SE off the glacier.

SADDLE ISLAND PASSAGE



A clear passage exists between Saddle Island and the mainland, although it is somewhat restricted due to the kelp on either side. A minimum depth of 24m was found. When traversed, the wind was very variable in the passage and there was quite a jobble, which made sailing through very difficult.

KEN POUNDER BAY

54°08'S 37°43'W

Chart 3597

This small cove was named by Gerry Clark, who anchored here. On the general chart of South Georgia, an island is marked between Saddle Island and the mainland. This island is actually joined to South Georgia by a narrow, shingle isthmus, which forms the SW end of the cove.



KEN POUNDER BAY, LOOKING S TOWARDS THE SHINGLE SPIT

Approach from the NE and enter the cove between the kelp on either shore.

On the occasion of Badger's visit, we did not actually anchor, but it appeared to be possible.

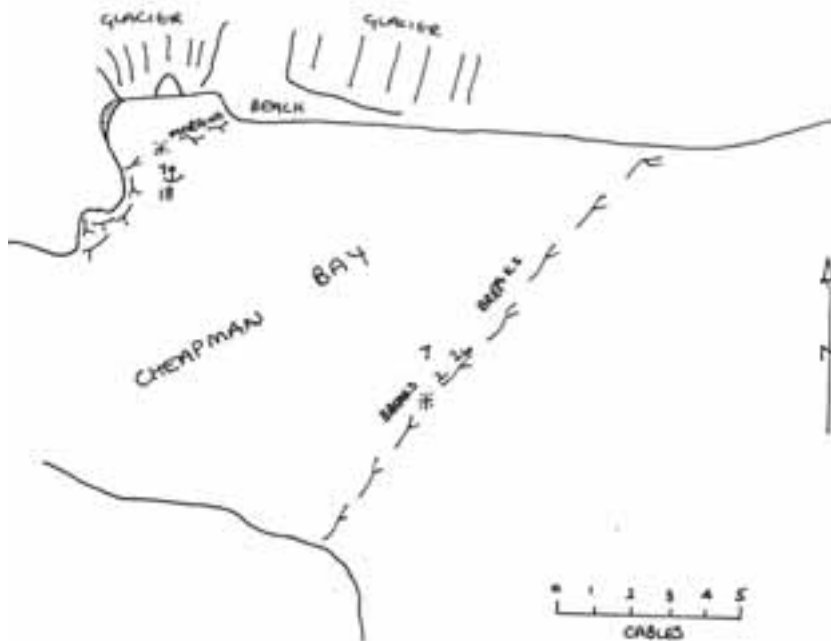
Anchor near the head of the cove, just outside the line of kelp off the shingle beach, in about 11.5m.

Shelter from the sea from the SE through W to NW. There was some swell in the cove.

CHEAPMAN BAY

54°09'S 37°33'W

Chart 3597



A band of thick kelp running SW-NE across the bay marks the terminal moraine. Towards the SW end of the kelp line is a conspicuous rock. Close NE of this rock, the kelp is much less dense. When entering the inner bay, we crossed this band of kelp about 100m NE of the rock. The minimum depth in the kelp was 3m, but just inshore of the kelp, the bottom shoaled to an estimated 1.5m at low water. Close N of the rock was a breaking wave, which suggested even shallower water.

On leaving the bay the following morning, we crossed the moraine approximately 200m NE of the rock. There was more swell and at times a breaking wave extended almost the whole length of the moraine, inshore of the kelp. When passing through this breaker, we were in 5.5m and found a minimum of an estimated 2.1m at low water just inshore of the kelp. Depths in the weed were about 3m. The kelp was fairly thick, but we motored through with no problems. A heavy swell from the S could possibly cause a yacht to be trapped behind the moraine until such time as it subsided.

Anchorage was found off the middle of the 3 glaciers at the W end of the bay. A kelp-marked, terminal moraine enclosed an inner pool off the glacier, with a drying rock in the middle of the kelp. We anchored outside the moraine in 15m with the depth rapidly increasing to 21m off the moraine.

CHEAPMAN BAY, LOOKING N



Close SW of this anchorage is a small cove, with a shingle beach, but it was completely choked with kelp.

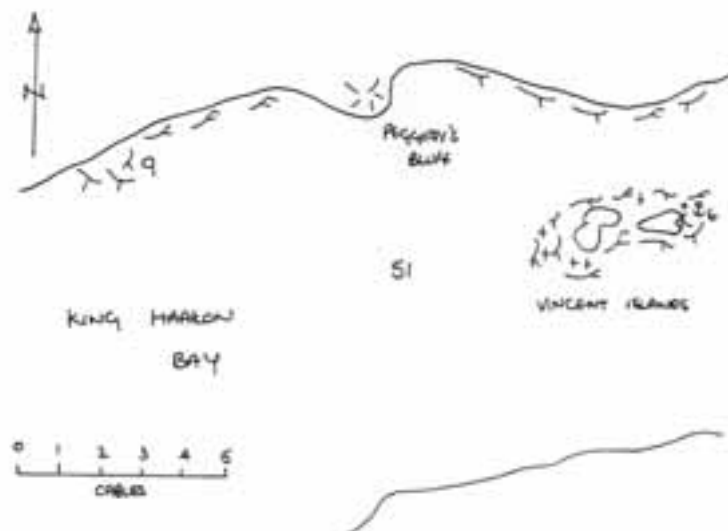
At the time of our visit, the glacier calved quite a number of small pieces of ice, which filled the inner basin and slowly streamed past us, creating much noise, if little danger.

This anchorage is in a most spectacular setting, with the glacier descending the mountain almost vertically. There is good shelter from the N and W and little swell.

KING HAAKON BAY

54°09'S 37°16'W

Chart 3597



This bay is famous because it is here that Sir Ernest Shackleton and his party landed after their epic voyage in the 22ft James Caird, to rescue the other men trapped on Elephant Island. In clear weather, it is a magnificent sight to sail up the bay, which has many glaciers descending to the sea.

Much of the entrance to the bay is blocked by McNeish Island, the McCarthy Islands and the shoals and rocks around them. When entering, either pass into Cheapman Bay and then N of McNeish Island, or keep fairly close N of Cape Rosa, at the southern entrance to the bay. If passing by Cape Rosa, look out for the tiny cove E of the Cape, where Shackleton made his first landing at 'Cave Camp'.

Half way along the bay, is a kelp-marked terminal moraine. Passing through the kelp N of the middle of the bay, we found a minimum of 8m. Towards the S shore is a clear channel through the kelp with a minimum of 24m; it is sufficiently wide to beat through easily.

Near the head of the bay, on the N shore, is Peggotty Bluff, a conspicuous, tussac-covered headland that appears to be an island, from some way off. This is where Shackleton made his second landing and from where he left to cross South Georgia to Stromness.

Shelter from the sea can be found from the NW through N to NE in the small bight to the W of Peggotty Bluff. It appeared possible to anchor in 10m, close E of a conspicuous kelp patch off the beach at the western end of the bight, but we did not do so.



EAST VINCENT ISLAND, LOOKING E TOWARDS SHACKLETON GAP

About 1 mile SE of Peggotty Bluff are the Vincent Islands. There is an anchorage at the E end of the E island in about 6m. Anchor in a clear patch in the kelp. The island gives shelter from the W. A shingle beach provides a landing close to the anchorage. Note the broken trypot, largely covered by tussac at the top of the beach.

McNeish, McCarthy and Vincent are the names of the crew of the James Caird who stayed behind while Shackleton, Worsley and Crean crossed the island.

17/12/2008