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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

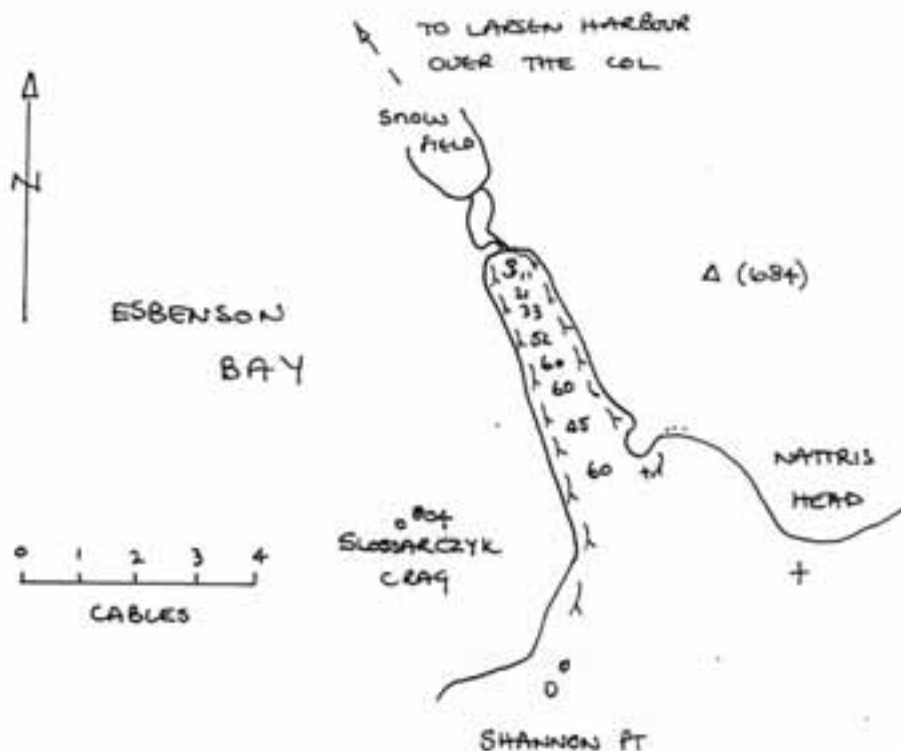
These notes have been prepared by the authors on the basis of the information they have been able to obtain in the course of their visit to the areas described. In particular, soundings shown reflect the route taken by the authors and the absence of soundings does not indicate that depths are necessarily 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safety of a vessel depends ultimately on the judgment of the skipper who should assess all information, published or unpublished.

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EBENSEN BAY

54°51'S 35°58'W

Chart 3597



The entrance to this bay is close SW of Nattris Head (the S entrance to Drygalski Fjord) with a large snowfield at its head. On a fine day, this makes

- most spectacular anchorage, but passing by the bay in a NW gale, there was
- constant stream of fierce williwaws blowing out of the mouth. This was also the case with both Smaaland Cove and Doubtful Bay.

The southern tip of South Georgia has a reputation for very turbulent conditions.

The entrance to the bay is straightforward, with bands of kelp lining each shore.

EBENSEN BAY, LOOKING SE



Anchor at the head of the bay in a clear patch in the thick kelp, in about 11m.

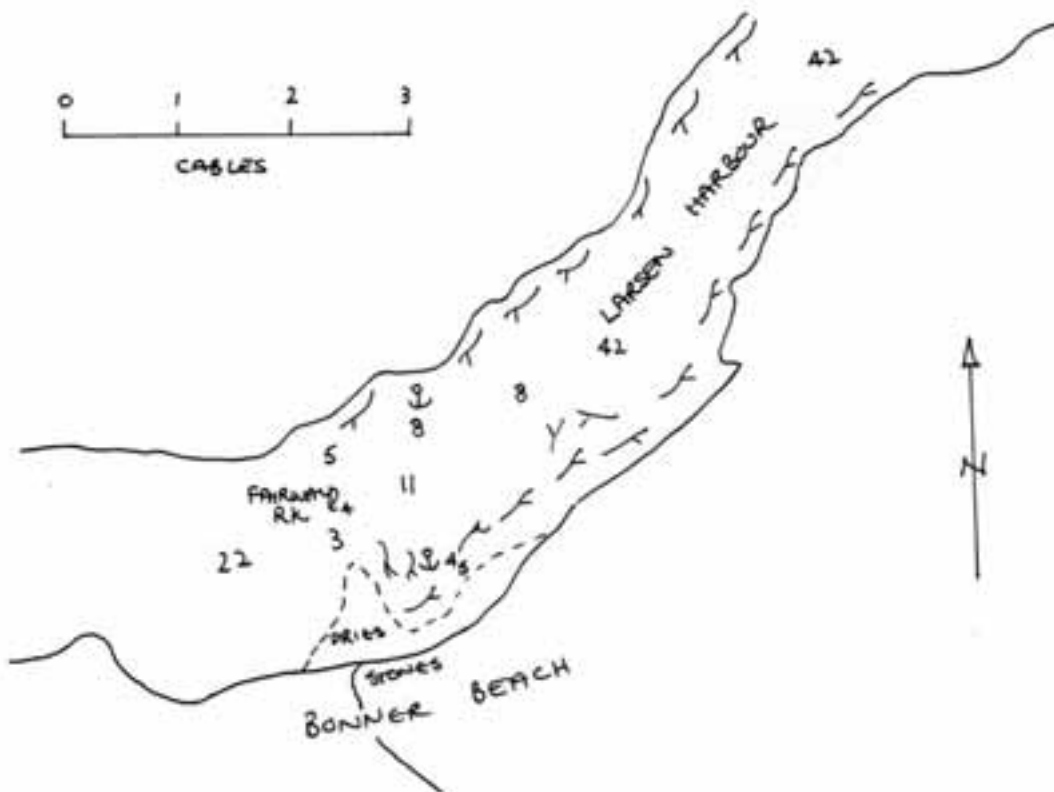
The Pilot suggests that there is a pass over the col to Larsen Harbour, but the snow bank leading up to it is very steep.

On Shannon Point, there is a Macaroni penguin colony.

LARSEN HARBOUR

54°50'S 36°01'W

Chart 3585, Larsen Harbour



This is a spectacular, high-sided fjord, with a glacier at its very head. There is good protection from the sea from all quarters, but apparently it is subject to fierce squalls in heavy weather. When visited by Badger, there was a S to SE gale blowing outside, but only the occasional gust was experienced in the harbour.

Anchor to the E of the Fairway Rock off Bonner Beach in 4.5m, mud, in a patch clear of kelp or off the opposite shore if it promises more shelter from the wind or squalls.



LARSEN HARBOUR. LOOKING N

Bonner Beach is reported to have Weddell seals on it from time to time, but there was none seen when visited in early January.

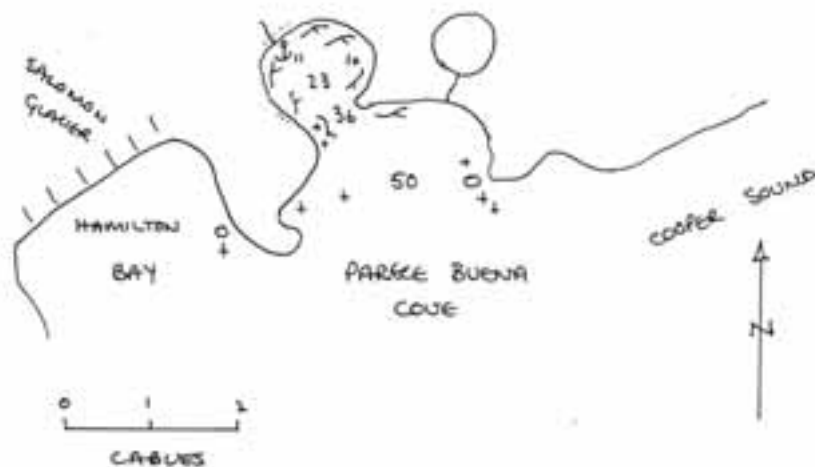
The low col, S of Bonners Beach, leads over to Ebensen Bay, but it is very steep and the snow slope on the other side is even steeper. There is a good stream near to the beach.

Whalers used to moor their catch in this harbour and the remains of an old barrel buoy are on Bonner Beach, near to the stream.

PARECE BUENA COVE

54°47'S 35°53'W

Chart 3597, South Georgia



PARECE BUENA COVE, LOOKING SE

Gerry Clark visited this cove and named it 'Parece Buena' (it appears good). It seems well named, as it offers shelter from the sea from all but the S and SE.

The cove has much kelp; we anchored off the beach at the N end in 11m, in a relatively clear patch.

On the beach here, are several large, old timbers from a ship. Although this appears to be a non-breeding beach, there were a lot of fur seals ashore.

COOPER SOUND

A passage leads between Cooper Island and the mainland. It is straightforward if the Cooper Bay shore is favoured. There are rocks off either shore and beds of kelp, but there is plenty of room to tack through.

On the several occasions that we passed through the Sound, the current usually ran eastwards.

To the W of Cooper Bay there is a colony of Chinstrap penguins on the beach, the only one in South Georgia. Further W on the hillside, is a very large colony of Macaroni penguins.

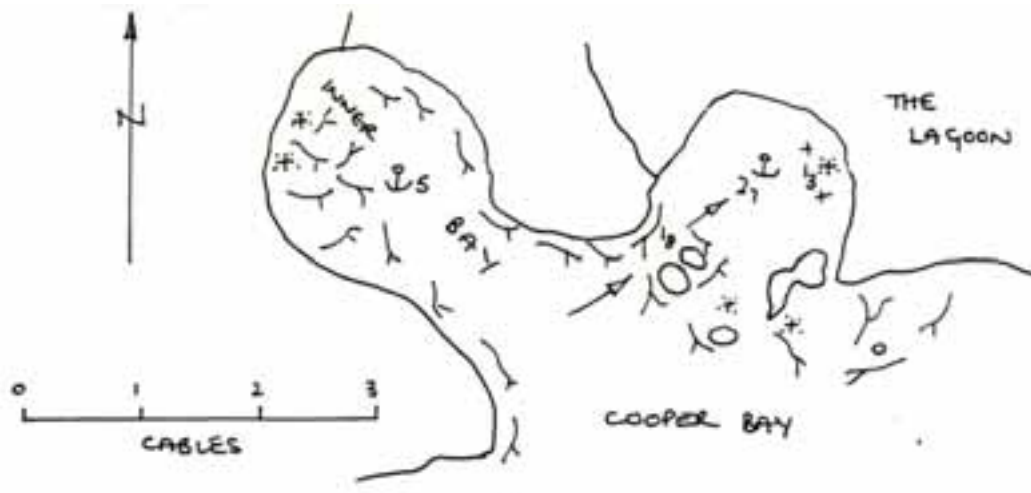


THE LAGOON, LOOKING SW TOWARDS COOPER SOUND

COOPER BAY

54°46'S 35°49'W

Chart 3597



Two good anchorages are available within the bay.

THE LAGOON

To the E of the entrance to the inner bay, is a small lagoon formed by the shore and a ring of rocks. The entrance is between the most W rock and the shoreline. There is kelp in this narrow channel, but it is at its thinnest near to the rock. We found a minimum of an estimated 1.8m at low water.

The lagoon itself offers complete protection from the sea, but it is very small and a yacht must be moored if it is to stay in the centre of the lagoon, where the depth is 2.7m. At the E side, there is a drying rock, off which are several underwater rocks with less than 1.3m over them.

There is a Macaroni penguin colony around the headland to the E of the lagoon. Ashore are a lot of Fur seals, but it appears to be a non-breeding beach.

INNER BAY, LOOKING SE TOWARDS COOPER ISLAND



INNER BAY

At the NW head of the Bay is an inner bay, offering good protection from the sea from all directions, with the exception of SE.

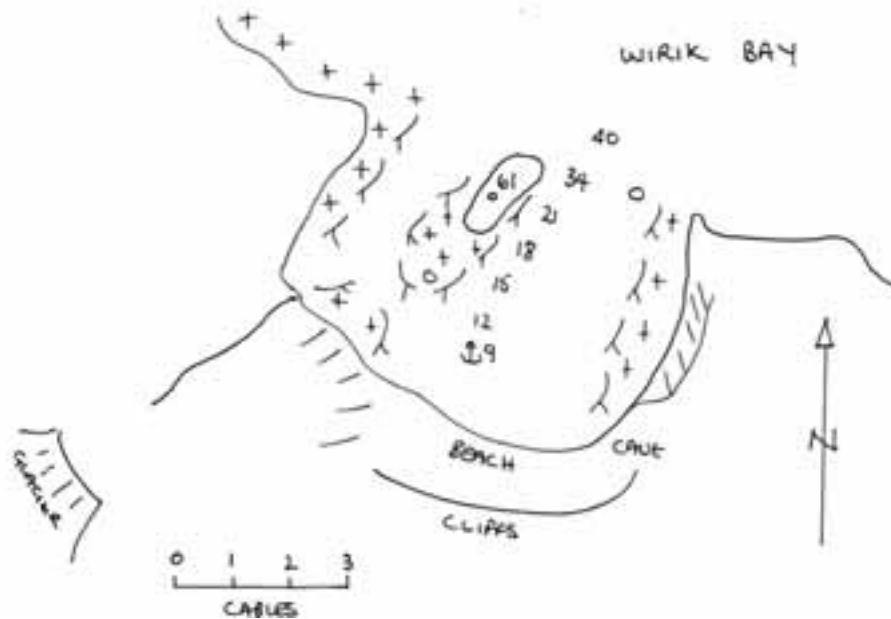
Although large amounts of kelp grow along the edges of the bay, there is a relatively clear patch in the middle.

Anchor in about 5m.

WIRIK BAY

54°45'S 35°51'W

Chart 3597



Two miles NW of Cape Vahsel is a small bay, giving good shelter from the sea from all directions but the NE.

The bay is identified from the tussac-covered island in the middle and is about 1 mile SE of a conspicuous tussac-topped island, standing a short way off the coast.

There is an above-water rock N of the SE entrance to the bay. Pass between this rock and the E side of the island in the bay.

Anchor at the head of the bay, S of the kelp that extends from the island to the shore in about 9m, good holding.

Spread along the beach at the head of the bay are the bones of a large whale, possibly a Blue or Fin and next to one piece of backbone is a rusty harpoon head.



WIRIK BAY, LOOKING NE

GOLD HARBOUR

54°37'S 35°56'W

Chart 3585, Gold Harbour



This harbour gives much better shelter than first appears on looking at the chart, with protection from the sea from SW through W and N to NE.

Anchor off the beach to the N of the Bertrab Glacier between the rocks off the beach and the first stream, in about 9m. There was no kelp here and very good holding. On Badger's visit, we sheltered from a NW gale in relative comfort and experienced no violent gusts.

The glacier is divided in two by a sheer rock face. The northern part calves into a lagoon behind a very shallow moraine spit, which seems to contain all the ice. The southern part calves into the sea, but it is some way S of the anchorage and in the conditions we experienced, there was no sign of ice in the harbour.

GOLD HARBOUR, LOOKING E



Alongside the banks of the stream, behind the beach, is a reasonable-sized King penguin colony.

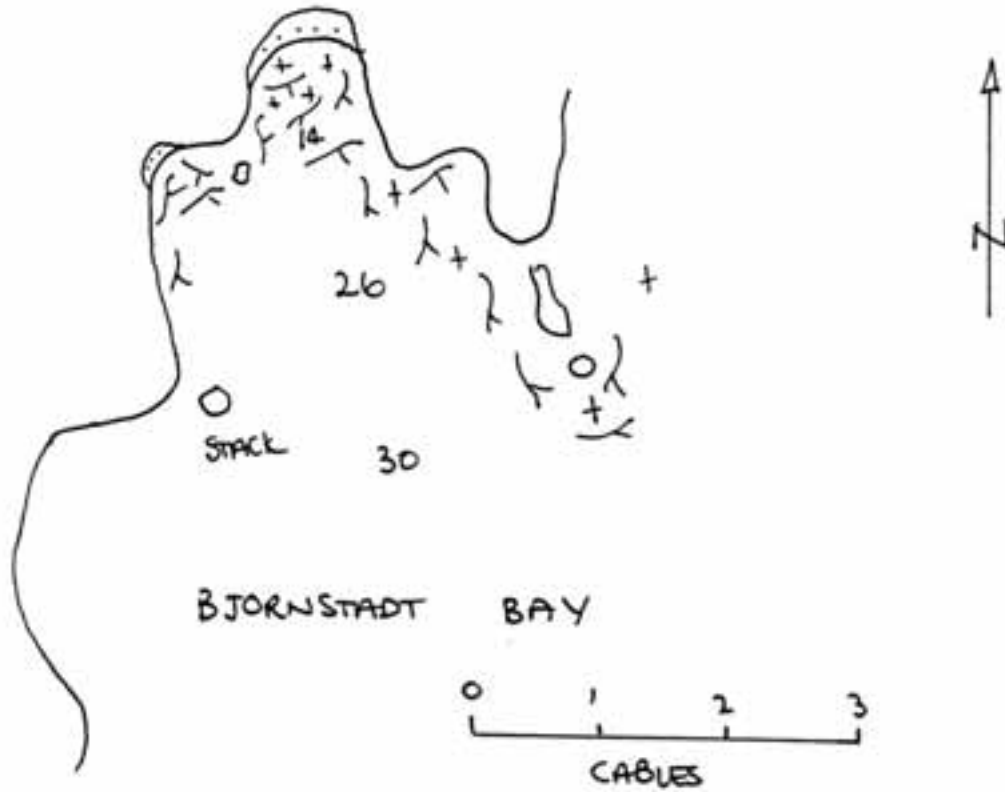
If the surf makes landing difficult on the beach, it may be easier to row over or around the moraine spit and land in the lagoon.

Care should be taken to avoid several below-water rocks.

BJORNSTADT BAY

54°35'S 35°55'W

Chart 3597



We sailed in to look at this bay, N of Gold Harbour. The head of the bay has a beach, but off it the kelp was very thick, with only some small holes in it.

It would be possible to anchor in these holes in a depth of 12m. Close inshore, several drying rocks were observed.

There is another cove to the W, but this also had large quantities of kelp.

MOLTKE HARBOUR

54°31'S 36°04'W

Chart 3585, Moltke Harbour



Royal Bay appears to be another windy place in South Georgia. There is a low pass at the head of the Ross Glacier that leads to the SW coast and this may well account for the strong winds blowing from the glacier on our visit. On entering and leaving the Bay, a fresh to strong W wind was blowing off the glacier, but offshore and N and S of the Bay there was a light NE wind. There was a belt of confusing winds and a nasty short sea between the two.

The W corner of Moltke Harbour near the SW end of the beach seemed to give reasonable shelter from the W wind with only a few squalls. From the sea, it is sheltered from S through W to NE.

Anchor in 7.5m, no kelp. There was only one small piece of ice in the harbour when visited, but S or E winds could well send in a large quantity.

The Pilot warns of extremely strong gusts in this harbour, no doubt associated with gales.

This is the furthest south that the southern reindeer herd ranges, as the Ross glacier forms an impassable barrier. An old BAS hut, which is used as a refuge, is sited on the NE side of the valley. The roof of the hut was rotten, when visited.



MOLTKE HARBOUR, LOOKING SE

On entering the Harbour, the remains of the German South Georgia expedition of 1882-83 can just be made out, situated on the N shore.

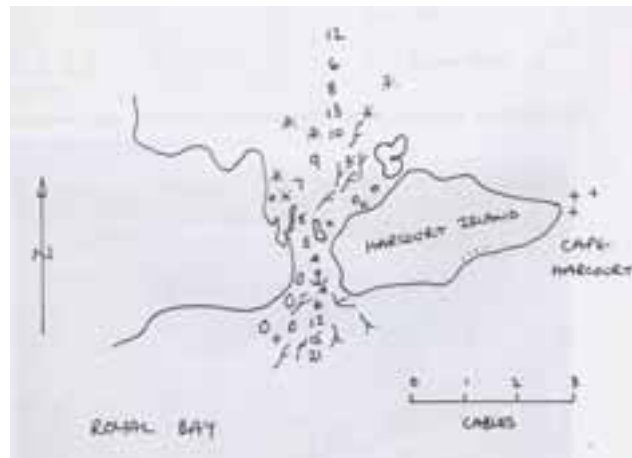
A landing can be made on the beach by the site, but it is a long row from the anchorage, especially if a fresh breeze is blowing.

It should also be possible to walk round from the head of the harbour, but this would mean traversing a couple of scree slopes.

HARCOURT ISLAND

54°30'S 36°00'W

597, South Georgia



A narrow strait separates Harcourt Island from the coast and in reasonable weather forms a shortcut inside Harcourt Island to and from Royal Bay. It is possible to anchor in this, off the island in a small pool.

The pool is approximately 50m across and a vessel will need to moor or to take lines ashore to keep near its centre. The depth is 4m and it is clear of kelp. The channel runs N-S and the anchorage is open to the sea from these directions, but is otherwise sheltered. When visited, there were a few pieces of ice on the beach on Harcourt Island.

The accompanying sketch chart and photographs show the channel and anchorage. This passage is probably best avoided in strong winds and/or a large swell. Harcourt Island seemed to be out of the line of the W wind blowing in Royal Bay.



ST ANDREW'S BAY

54°25'S 36°10'W

597, South Georgia



The shelter offered by the headland at the N end of the beach is better than it appears on the chart and provides protection from the sea from S through W and N to NE. Tuck well into the northern corner and anchor in about 5.5m. No kelp.

A very large King Penguin colony is situated at the moraine close behind the beach. In clear weather, with Mount Paget and the other peaks for a backdrop, it is a spectacular sight and a popular place for visiting wildlife camera crews.

To visit the penguin colony it is easiest to land S of the glacier stream, if the swell permits. The stream runs very strongly and is usually at least 60cm deep. Several people have been knocked over by the force of the current. The landing at the N end of the beach is less subject to swell.

ST ANDREW'S BAY, LOOKING S, CHANNEL BETWEEN FLAT ROCKS IN FOREGROUND



Near the round bluff that projects from the headland, there is a narrow channel in the flat rocks where landing may be possible, even with a large surf on the beach.

On the N side of the moraine, several hundred metres from the beach is a BAS hut, now used as a refuge.

Even if there is too much swell to land so that one can visit the penguin colony, it is well worth a sail along the beach (6m depth quite close in) to view this spectacle.

OCEAN HARBOUR

54°20'S 36°16'W

Chart 3597



This well-protected harbour is the site of an old whaling station, that was closed down in 1920, when it was amalgamated with Stromness. Not much of the buildings remain, but there is a narrow gauge steam locomotive lying on its side to the N of the site and the wreck of the Bayard can be seen on the S shore. This iron-hulled vessel was built in Liverpool in 1864 and was wrecked in 1911, when she broke adrift from the coaling jetty (the remains of which can be seen on the N shore) in a severe gale, was driven ashore and holed.

The bay is open to the E, but apart from this, there is complete protection from the sea. The chart shows a rock, but we saw no sign of it and the scale is too small to identify its position accurately. Once past the bluff, at the S entrance to the harbour keep to the middle of the bay where there is less kelp.

The remains of a light structure can be seen on the bluff.

Anchor near the head of the bay in 5.5m. There is kelp about, but it is not very thick.

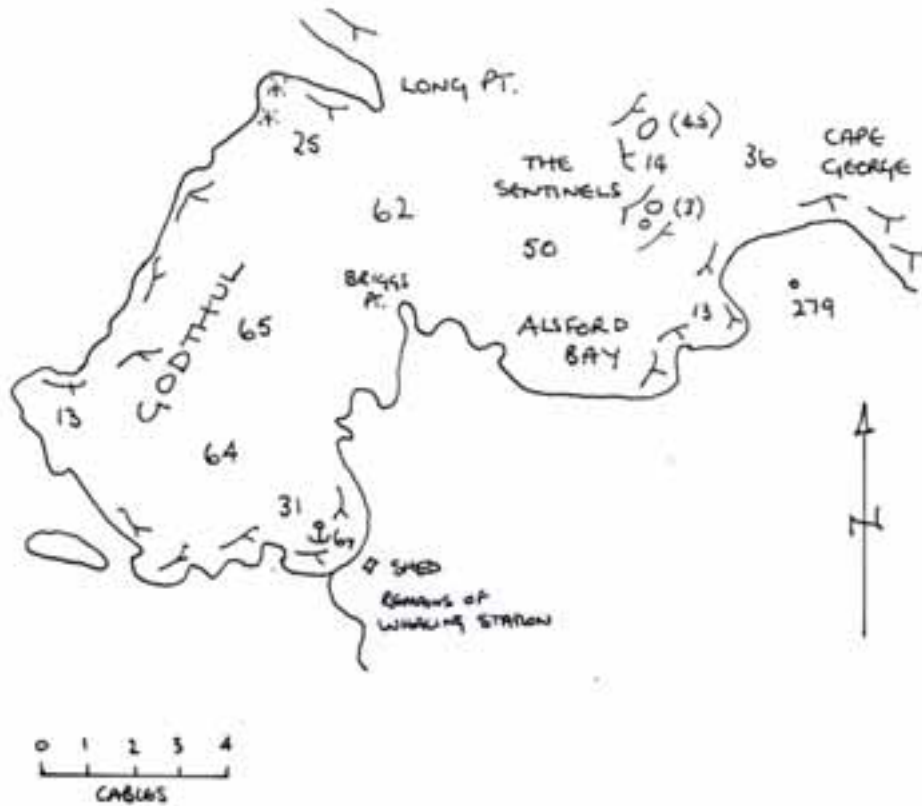


OCEAN HARBOUR, LOOKING NE.

GODTHUL

54°17'S 36°17'W

Chart 3589, Godthul



Godthul was another harbour used by the whalers, but here there was a factory ship and the whales were flensed, while they were still floating, from Jolle boats. Artifacts from these days can still be seen ashore; there are, for example, a couple of tanks, the remains of a shed, a heap of oak and steel barrels, three Jolle boats and several dinghies. The beach is strewn with whale bones.

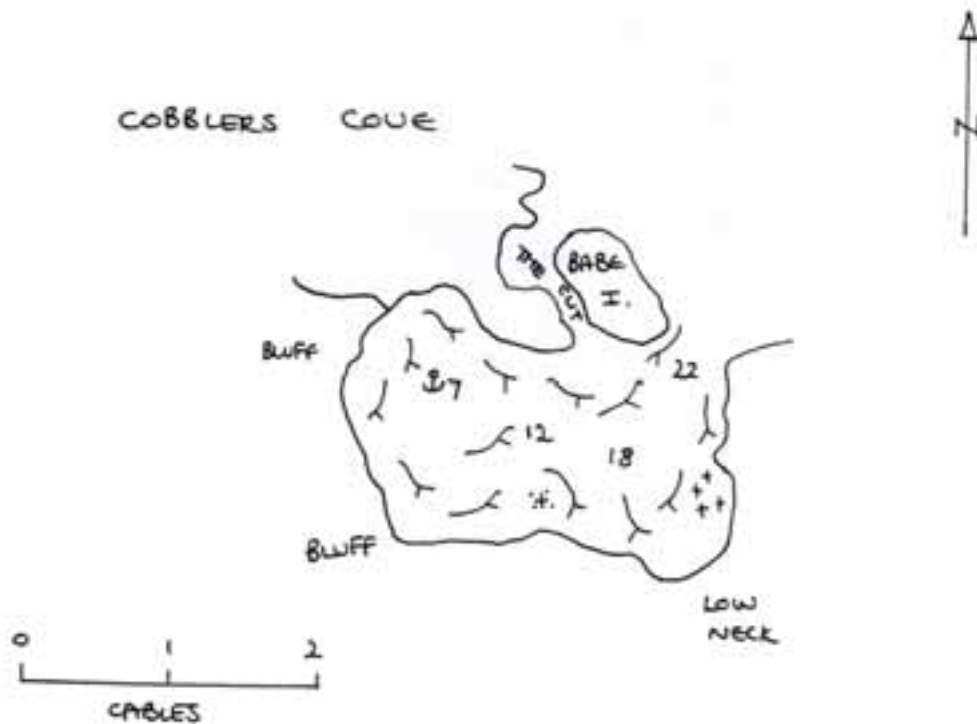


The ruins are in the SE corner of the bay and, tucked in here, there is complete protection from the sea. However, there is a 1 mile fetch with winds from the N or NW. Anchor in a patch clear of kelp, off the shed, in about 6.5m.

COBBLER'S COVE

54916-S 36°18'W

Chart 3589, Cobbler's Cove



A narrow entrance leads into this small cove, which offers complete shelter from the sea. The land to the NW rises very steeply, which suggests that this may well be a bad place for katabatic winds in a NW gale.

The entrance is straightforward and by taking a sweep to the S, once past the narrows, most of the kelp is avoided.

Anchor off the beach at the W end, in 6.5m, in a patch clear of kelp. Cobbler's Cove is shown as Pleasant Harbour on old charts.



COBBLER'S COVE, LOOKING NE

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