

Gough Bunting

April 2007



April month certainly proved that the season is changing. Gone are the summer months of shorts and t-shirts, and even the braver team members were seen to be wearing long sleeve tops. Things in the bar are as hot as ever due to our weekly pool competition. The winner each Sunday earns himself a very colourful beanie and bragging rights for the week.

We have been a bit more base bound due to the bad weather, but Petrus and I did manage to do a rather epic hike around the island during the month.

One of the most important events of the month was Dineo's birthday which we celebrated with her on the 29th. I'm told that she is almost off the calendar. We had a very enjoyable evening, sitting on the floor eating and drinking some good wine.

Ed.



The Queen of Gough poses with her court on her Birthday

The cold months

While sitting here writing this article, I am all dressed with all the warm clothing that the department has issued us with. The point behind this is we are in one of the coldest months, May. With temperature dropping to as low as 5 degrees Celsius, you can imagine....



The view inside the birthday tent

In the past month we didn't have as many outings as we would like because the weather was not that good. If it is not raining, there where strong winds or it was just cold and cold.....but some of the team members managed to do a few trips though. (The weather is not my excuse; I was working when they went out).

The big thing we did last month was celebrating Dineo`s birthday on the 29th. We know that Dineo

does not like camping that much, so we decided to take the camp to her. We made her a "camping" party. We made a special tent for her in the bar. It was a "lekker" night for all of us.....I hope she enjoyed that day as much as we did. (I wonder how old is she this year.....)

Till next month

*Tshifhiwa-wa-Vho-Nthaduleni uri:
Masha.*



The G52 Metkassie's

Life as a Metkassie

Ultimately very rewarding. Working shifts has its pro's and con's. As a metkassie you work dayshifts and nightshifts according to a roster. I have taken a liking towards nightshift.

Dayshift:

First rule; go to bed early. This however doesn't materialize. The earliest is probably 1:00 am or even 2:00 am. A good nights rest is always good for your body cycle, but as a metkassie your cycle just gets flipped around. Once in bed I set my alarm for 5:30 am. Then for some odd reason I struggle to fall

asleep. With the ringing of the alarm, still deurmekaar I put it on snooze, just five more minutes (except for phone numbers and an alarm clock a cell phone is of no value here). Finally I just get up and get dressed, pay a visit to bathroom and make my way to the office, about 50 meters from my room. The shift starts at 06:00am and ends at 15:00 pm. Readings are done every hour consisting of visual observations (clouds, visibility and any weather phenomena) and electronic parameters (temperature, pressure wind, rain and humidity). These readings are called METARS – routine aviation reports – then every three hours, starting at 06:00am SYNOPSIS – surface report from a land station depicting current visual and electronic parameters – are reported. At 10:30 am an upper air sounding is done, this where I go mad and attach a Radiosonde to a balloon filled with hydrogen (a very hostile gas). This



Jonty holding the Radiosonde and upper air balloon

instrument is used to measure temperature, humidity, pressure and wind data in the upper levels. Just after eleven I go down to crane point do the seatemp measurement. The data is also used to compile climate data – the average conditions of the atmosphere together with the extreme changes that occurred during the years. In between readings I catch up on some administration, general maintenance and some other interests.

Nightshift

Very laid back compared to dayshift, and for me that find it hard to sleep at night just perfect. The shift starts at 18:00 pm and ends at 03:00 am the next morning. This time only synops are done three hourly with an upper air sounding at 23:00 pm. After midnight the previous days' data

(Measurements,

Observations, Upper air and 5min data) is downloaded and sent to Pretoria (Climate Systems).

All real-time data is transmitted to Pretoria where it is used for forecasts for, wait for it, Mzantsi. Thus observations done at Gough are vital for forecasting weather for Mzantsi as systems passing Gough more often than not makes its way to Mzantsi.

Another added bonus is the weather itself. All four seasons in a spate of a day, or even less, the different and magnificent cloud formations. Being able to see the stars and moon so bright, the birds in there hundreds filling the sky at dusk makes being a metkassie all the worthwhile.

JK

Tyd:

Every man's life lies within the present, for the past is spent and done with, and the future is uncertain.

(Marcus Antonius)

Deur die eeue het tyd mense gefassineer, baie tyd, navorsing is aan die studie van tyd bestee. Einstein, Stephen Hawkins en vele ander het volumes oor tyd geskryf. Dit maak nie saak of jy 'n briljante fisikus of 'n straatveër is nie almal van ons ervaar tyd en die effek wat dit op ons het.

Tyd reguleer almal se leefwyses, wanneer ons moet opstaan, eet, slaap ensomeer. Gough eiland en sy burgers leef in tydskaal van hulle eie. Deur die loop van die tyd wat ons op die eiland is verwyder die meeste hulle horlosies of die batterye raak klaar. Einstein sal 'n leeftyd hier kan spandeer om die toepaslikheid van tyd te bestudeer.

Die meeste eilanders verloor hulle konsep van tyd. Dag en nag word somtyds omgeruil, dae en nagte word

verleng. Diesel enjins word 01:00 in die oggend gediens, pasiënte word 24:00 in die nag gesien, verslae word 04:00 in die oggend geskryf om maar net 'n paar voorbeelde te noem.

Om 16:00 in die dag iemand 'n bord Rice Cripies te sien eet is glad nie snaaks nie, vir sommige is dit die norm en nie die uitsondering nie. Eilanders is ontspanne persone juis omdat hulle buite die beperkinge van tyd leef. Die enigste anker wat ons het is aandete. 19:30 ses dae van die week word ons net herinner dat tyd wel nog bestaan.

Brian, ons spanleier, is die enigste een wat die stres van tyd ervaar. Die arme man moet probeer om sin te maak uit die tyd verskille. Hy het die verantwoordelikheid om te verseker dat alle verslae en artikels op die regte tyd gestuur word. Probeer om in sy skoene te staan, jy moet Eilanders wat geen konsep van tyd het nie oortuig dat dit weer daai tyd van die maand is!

Petrus



A typical supper on Gough Island

A walk to Tafelkoppie

I was lazy, I mean very lazy I remember telling Brian that the weather is not good, then Brian said “There won’t be good weather like today, Dineo. Let’s go”, then we go. Every time I go out I see different shape of rocks as well as mountains, it’s beautiful. The way up to Tafelkoppie was muddy, but it wasn’t that bad. I asked Brian to show me the graves of people who passed away long time ago, somewhere around 1960s so they say. This is the pic while I was there.



Later this month I was growing up. The guys organized a party for me, it was awesome. What I liked most about my birthday was the present, it just made my day.

That’s it..... for this month!

Dineo

From the Diesel Mech

We have the pleasure of living in a world heritage site. The emerald green island surrounded by the icy waters of the Atlantic, the gorgeous albatross' and elusive buntings, the playful seals and the noisy penguins. We have learnt many things about ourselves and our colleagues here, some easy, and some very hard lessons.



Ruin Ridge and Tafelkoppie in snow



Seal Beach



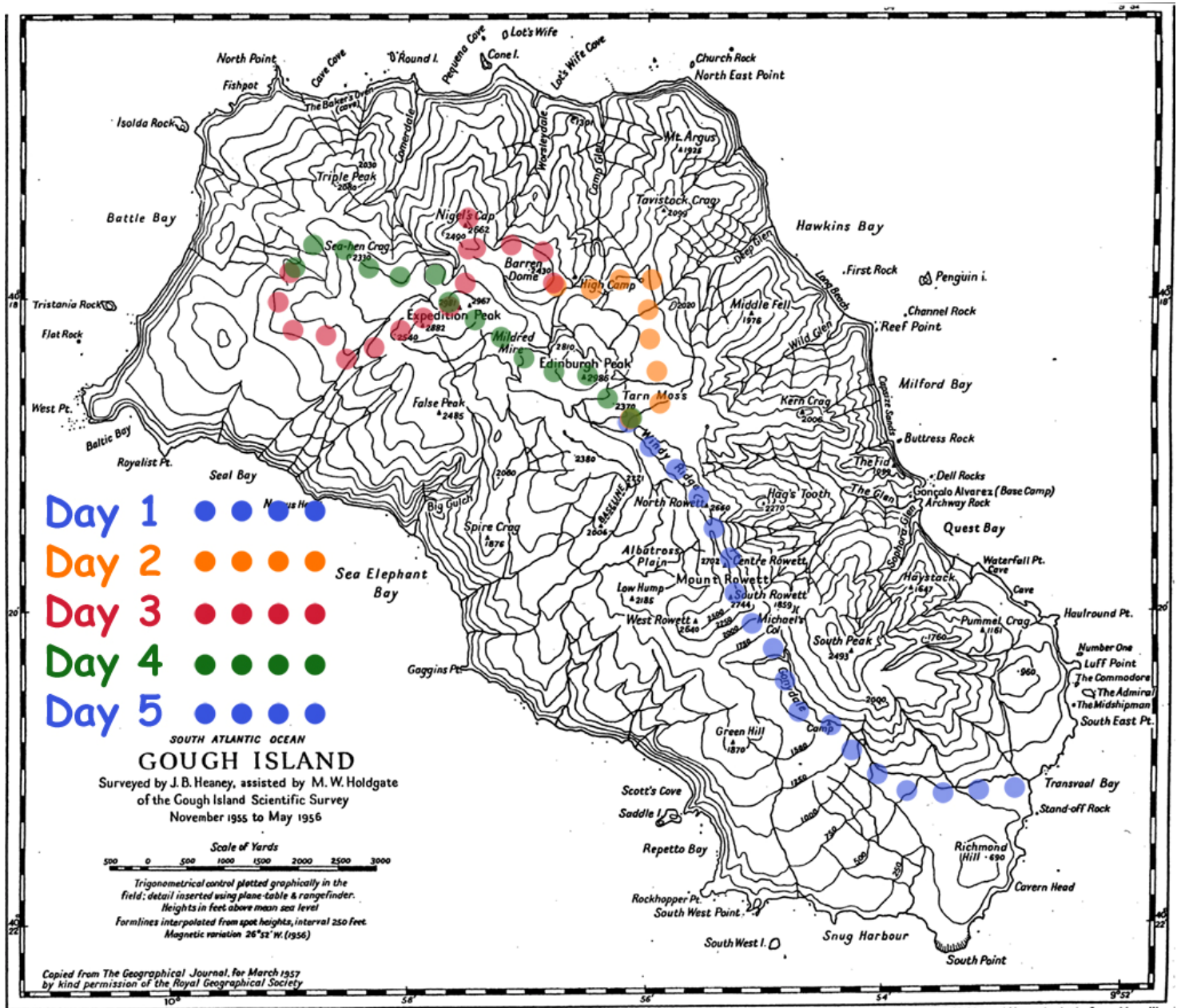
Look at the type of Penguins we have

*From
Thulani*

To the north and back.

By Brian Bowie

It has sort of been one of my goals to visit the north of the island, and for some reason during the best weather months of the year I was enjoying swimming in the rivers and reading in the sun. None the less I managed to convince Petrus (our Medic) that we should head out mid April to the north of the island. I think sometimes in life it is better not really know what you are getting yourself into. Petrus had done the trip before on his previous expedition, and to his credit he agreed, despite knowing what he was getting himself into.



Map of Gough Island

Day 1

So the initial plan was to set out on Monday 16 April but as many things on the islands everything is weather depending and due to some rain and mist on the mountains we decided to wait and see. The next day the pressure was rising and upon looking at the synoptic chart we decided to head out. Planning ahead never seems to be part of my vocabulary so I quickly packed. Frantically trying to remember all the stuff I vowed to take last time I went camping. We were planning to go camping for roughly 4 days so Petrus and I sat down to decide what food we should take and the following is a list of what we took:

- 8 packets of two minute noodles barbecue flavor.
- 3 tins sardines
- 2 tins mussels
- 2 tins tomato paste
- 1 tin tuna
- 1 tin bully beef
- 1 packet cashew nuts
- 1 packet sultanas
- 500g oats mixed with brown sugar, powdered milk, and sultanas in a zip lock bag
- 6 bags of coffee (Tea bag type bags)
- 6 bars of chocolate
- 6 packets of cup a soup
- 2 blocks of Gouda Cheese
- 1 packet Pro Vita
- 1 zip lock bag filled with an assortment of spices
- 1 bottle of Tabasco (Very important)

At 11 am in the morning we finally set out with our rather heavy packs towards Waterfall Camp at the foot of Edinburgh Peak, the highest peak on the island. The pathways were rather damp which was expected to due to the rain we had had over the last few weeks. We made our way slowly towards Swemgat getting used to the additional weight which we were carrying on our backs. Across two rivers and we were shortly making our way across Holey Plain. You might notice the extra 'e' in the name Holey. This is due to the fact that the plain is better known for the number of holes that hide under bushes in the path than it being a Holy place. As we walking across Holey plain I noticed that most of the yellow nosed albatross chicks had finally left their nests. The first major uphill (one of many to come in the following days) was Moorhen Rise making its way up to Gony Dale. Slowly we plodded on occasionally stopping for a drink of water and a chat.

Now at this point I think I should make a comment on walking Gough. Many times people can't understand that it takes us an hour to walk a kilometer on the island. Walking on the island is not easy and as I will also describe later the underfoot conditions are as variable as the weather. Getting tired is a guarantee, but I am always surprised how a short break to get your breath back will help the legs moving again, even after a long days walk.

We were climbing a path that we had both walked a number of times, so I spent some of my time walking noticing how some of the plants have started to die away with the approach of winter. The higher we rose the vegetation started to decrease in height. As we entered a thick section of Fern Trees which look rather more like bushes, I made my last radio call with the base for 4 days at Baboon Rock, a rock that is in the shape of a baboon, a quite well photographed landmark on the path up to Gony Dale. As we made our way into Gony Dale I noticed that the Rowetts our next uphill on the far side of Gony Dale was covered in mist. I can't say I was surprised because I have only ever walked across the Rowetts once with clear skies. As we entered Gony Dale my eyes were automatically drawn to the first Tristan albatross that saw on a far ridge, doing its courting dance with another Tristan albatross. We passed a number of nests, and the recently hatched chicks are popping their head out from under their parents' bodies. With some of the larger chicks, their parents were sitting next the nest.

By this time the vegetation had changed mainly to what can best be described as a type of sponge, walking on which has sometimes been compared to walking on a mattress. The walking on the well walked paths in Gony Dale is not so bad since the surface has been compressed but once you divert off these paths the going is a bit slower and more tiring. Half way across Gony Dale we left the path and made our way towards the foot of South Rowett. The view up South Rowett is always a daunting one. From far the slope looks impossibly steep. From a bit closer it is seen to be walkable, just. There always seems to be a debate on the island on the best Route to Waterfall Camp from Gony Dale. To many the steep climb up South Rowett seems like a waste of energy and instead a longer route up around West Rowett, across a wet albatross Plain and up The Ramp to Waterfall Camp is preferred. Petrus and I don't believe in this school of thought, (Maybe we are just suckers for punishment?) so we made our way up a dried up river bed, which provided a harder surface to walk up. Unfortunately the river bed only goes half way up South Rowett, and therefore had to leave our hard underfoot conditions and make our way onto the softer, moist slopes.

It sometimes feels like two steps forward one step back walking in those conditions. One of the benefits of going up South Rowett is the view that starts to unfold the higher we walk. We were able to see Hag's Tooth to the east, looking menacing at us, with the river flowing down the valley into the Glen, the site of the original base built on the east coast of the island. But as was expected we started to move into the mist nearer the top and our visibility was reduced to roughly 100m, the path also gets rather muddier near the top requiring a bit more effort. A much needed break was taken at the top. The reason we favor the route up South Rowett is that once you are up on the ridge the walk to Waterfall Camp it is a very comfortable walk along Middle and North Rowett and down Windy Ridge to Waterfall Camp (This is assuming there is no wind). We therefore knew our two major uphill climbs for the day were behind us as we continued on. Despite the fact that the visibility was reduced due to the cloud, it was quite easy to follow the paths along the ridges, and although we were starting to feel the day's walking in our legs we made our way down Windy Ridge. By this time the cloud had come down and even at lower altitudes visibility was reduced. It was across a short section of bog and we made our way into Waterfall Camp at 6pm.

Waterfall Camp is at the foot of Edinburgh Peak the highest peak on the island, and is named after the rather small waterfall near the campsite. We quickly set up the tent at the generally accepted camping spot near the river before the light faded. When you are camping with someone else often things happen without much conversation. Erecting the tent is a good example of this. After a long day walking without any real lunch we quickly set out to get the stove on.



The campsite at Waterfall Camp

Petrus even decided to miss his much favored cup of coffee, for supper to be made sooner. Once the stove was going and the water was on the boil we were cooking by torch light. Supper was 2 packets of two minute noodles, 1 sachet of beef flavoring from the two minute noodles packet, a tin of bully beef, mixed spices, a packet a creamy mushroom cup a soup and lots of Tabasco. A “meng en moes”, but very good. After washing the pots in the river using a piece of moss as a scourer, we retired to the tent. The time was 7:15 pm. The team in the base were 15 minutes from dinner and we were rather tired and ready to sleep. I quickly fell asleep, but awoke later to the low hum of Petrus snoring, and the occasional scurrying feet of the mice running over the tent. Remembering I packed some ear plugs I popped them in my ears and slept well the rest of the night.

Day 2

It had been a mild night by Gough standards, some strong winds with a bit of rain. I noticed in the tent that it was starting to get light, so I popped my head out of a flap of the tent. Mist. Not a very positive start to the day. I dragged myself out of the tent and trudged down river in Gumboots and shorts, for the morning business. Ablution facilities away from the base are none existent. It involves kicking open a hole in the mossy bog, doing your business and for toilet paper, a nice moist piece of moss. You get different grades of moss from rough to soft. Once back in the tent, I pulled out my Sudoku book and did a couple puzzles. Feeling like the morning was passing, I popped my head out of the tent again, the cloud looked like it was starting to lift. After a brief discussion with Petrus, we decided to get going. First things first though, and a pot of water was on the boil for some coffee. The left over of the hot water was added to some oats for breakfast. We quickly packed up camp, and started down the river, slowly getting used to the aches and pains from the previous day's walk. I was walking on areas that I had never been to before.



The freefalling waterfall on the edge of Tarn Moss

The area below Waterfall Camp is called Tarn Moss. It is covered in what we like to call mires or bog. Basically huge areas of soft and very moist moss, whereby while walking across you are guaranteed to sink into, often quite deep. We always love to trade horror stories of how deep we sank into the bog, and as I am sure they can often tend to be a bit like fishing tales, it is not uncommon to sink in further than your knee. There are also many theories on walking across the bog. They vary from walking with sticks, bending your knee to lessen the pressure of your foot going down to as quick as possible. They all have merit but none of them help you when you are knee deep in bog, your gumboot is caught in a suction in the mud below and you have to crawl your way out. Petrus has theory that some people can walk across bog better than others. This may be more due to the fact that he probably sinks into the bog more than most.

We quickly left the river which was running east and we started to head north moving around Edinburgh Peak. This was our first section of bog for the day, it was certainly not the last for the day or trip

either. Some footprints were still visible in the bog from previous trips. Footsteps seem to remain for a long time in the bog. Following someone else's footprints is risky business, since you are assuming the footprints belong to someone who had a better idea about walking across mires than you do. This unfortunately is not the case. It often only once your foot has sunk quite deep, do you see that there are also footprints back tracking from the position to take another route. I'm sure the extra weight of our backpacks did not help our cause but we eventually made our way onto a ridge running down from Edinburgh Peak that we had been aiming for. Happy to be on some harder stuff we quickly followed the ridge to edge of a cliff. Below us we could see Deep Glen, a very rough valley with a river carving its way down towards the sea. We could see a beautiful free falling waterfall to our right, with the water being blown in the wind freefalling at least 50 meters before hitting the river bed below. We pulled out our Gough Island Map to check the names of some of the peaks in our view. I promptly named a smaller one Cameron Crag, hoping that it might catch on.

We followed the cliff edge north, hitting even worse patches of bog. Petrus got stuck at one point in the bog, which I found rather amusing (I'm not sure if he did). After helping him out he had two rather wet feet (and socks) and wet pants. We continued along the cliff edge until a new

valley opened up to the north of us, Camp Glen. I threw down my rucksack, and went off with my camera, while Petrus took advantage of the break to empty the cold water out of his gumboots. I was happily snapping away, taking in my first view of the north of the island. We were still quite high up so the view was very impressive with the steep valley running down to the coast and the sea laid out as far as the eye could see. If I looked towards the west I could see the edge of Barren Dome. I could also see that cloud was no longer lifting and it had already covered Edinburgh Peak and the top of Barren Dome.

The initial plan in the morning was to head towards GP (Giant Petrel) Plain on the north west of the island. It was still a long way to walk from where we were, and the idea of doing it in the cloud was not very appetizing. We now followed the cliff edge west as it ran towards Barren Dome. The wind had picked up from the north and the skuas were making use of the wind to float above our heads as we struggled across the bog. Maybe they were hoping that after we sunk too deep in the bog we would not be able to get out. Fortunately for us, this was not the case, but the going was slow. At one point I felt some drops on my face. As I looked around it did not appear to be raining. Yet I was still feeling the odd water drop. We crossed a small stream and it all made sense. The wind blowing from below was blowing the water from waterfall below up. I stood there for a while watching the sun light the droplets as they rose.

We crossed the last boggy section (Some of us on our knees) and after a short walk we were at the stream at the foot of Barren Dome. Barren Dome is quite remarkable in terms of Gough Island. With an island with such diverse plants and under foot conditions, Barren Dome is as the name suggests, barren. There are hardly any plants on this rocky hill, and in terms of walking compared to the rest of the island, paradise. Petrus and I decided to have a lunch next to the stream as the cloud seemed



Camp Glen as seen from Barren Dome Camp

to be closing in on us. We ate our lunch consisting of cheese, provitas and cashew nuts under a boulder. On some of the older maps a camping spot was indicated near where we were having lunch and since the cloud was low, we decided to find a level spot and make camp. After going through the routine of putting up the tent, we put all our necessities for the evening ahead in the tent, these are:

- 1 space blanket placed as a sheet on the floor of the tent
- Two camping mattresses
- Two sleeping bags
- 3 Torches (1 head-lamp, two hand torches)

2 books (1 novel for Petrus and 1 sudoku book for Brian)
1 notebook
2 pencils
1 pillow (my luxury item)
2 polar fleeces (1 used by Petrus as a pillow)
2 pairs of gloves
1 pair of ear plugs

Despite the low cloud we decided to explore the area a bit and walked down the stream to the cliff on the edge of Barren Dome. Once again the Camp Glen valley I had admired earlier stood before us. It was good to finally be able just to sit and admire the view, taking in the various contours, imagining possible walking routes down the steep ridges, watching the various birds flying in the wind. Petrus and I eventually made our way back to the tent to put the pot on the boil for some coffee and whiskey. Petrus had brought some excellent single malt in his hip flask, the coffee was good too. We decided to get into the tent for a mid-afternoon nap, and just as I nodded off the rain started to fall. I awoke to some heavy rain and the darkness of the tent. We heard the increase in flow of the stream below us. Opting to stay in the warmth of the tent and our sleeping bags, we enjoyed a quiet dinner of sultanas, cashew nuts and chocolate. I fell asleep quite quickly again, but I was always aware of the heavy rain and winds outside. The mice were also busy. Both Petrus and I would flick sections of tent from where we heard mouse noises. Eventually I grew tired of this game and I popped in the ear plugs and drifted off.

Day 3

Upon waking in the morning, we could hear the rush of water following in the stream next to the tent, but at least the rain had stopped. Popping my head out, all I saw was low cloud. Hoping this would start to lift like the day before, I went about my morning ritual. When I returned to the tent, Petrus was reading his book, “The Edge of Vengeance” by Jeremy Jones, so I settled into a couple sudoku puzzles. The next time I checked the cloud was lifting and I got my first view to the west of the wall of rock rising up to Expedition Peak, the second highest peak on the island. The rock looks like a wave of rock, even with the slight curl on top. Very impressive. I too could finally get a better look at Barren Dome. It seemed almost like a moon landscape with almost no plants on it compared to lush green of the peaks around us.

With a cup of coffee and some oats, we packed up camp with the blue sky appearing above us. It even warranted us having to put on some sun-screen. In high spirits we set off up Barren Dome. I really don't want to over state the point



Brian enjoying the view of Camp Glen, while walking up Barren Dome



The view of Barren Dome and Edinburgh Peak from Nigel's Cap

but walking on solid rock on Gough really is a rare occurrence. It almost feels wrong, too easy. We certainly weren't complaining. We were quickly up Barren Dome and with no cloud to obstruct the view, Camp Glen was even more impressive. The sea glistened in the sunlight. We were both happily clicking away with our cameras at all the new views, despite the cold wind that was starting to pick up from the north. I couldn't get over the rocky surface below our

feet that looked like a dry river bed. Petrus, having been there before even made the comment that there seemed to be more plants than before. He was certainly looking very hard to see those extra plants. Unfortunately Barren Dome passed quickly due to the favorable underfoot conditions and soon we were at the foot of Nigel's Cap. Nigel's Cap, I'm told is named after some guy called Nigel, who lost not his cap but actually his cup. Apparently there was something lost in translation. I was keen to get to the top of Nigel's Cap for the view (and to say I had been there), although it was not on our route for the day. Despite the fact that we dropped our packs the walking up the hill was slower due to the all too familiar soft underfoot conditions. Foot prints on the north of the island are rare, but I found that Nigel's Cap did appear to be a bit of tourist attraction due to the few foot prints that I saw.

Walking on Gough can be very tiring and testing, but it is certainly not without its rewards. There it was a 180 ° view of the north of island. It is funny how in life we set ourselves small goals. Mine was to see the north of Gough Island. Petrus pointed out Sea Hen Crag and Triple Peak to the west, two names that I had heard about, but now I got to see them with my own eyes. From Nigel's Cap the plan was to walk up a rocky section of Expedition Peak, and follow a ridge down onto Sea Hen Crag, and from there it should be fairly straight forward in GP Plain, where we planned to camp for the evening. There was a hill in GP plain that Petrus was looking forward to getting the GPS co-ordinates of, I was looking forward to camping in a spot that I heard a lot about. It would be about another 24 hours until we did actually walk on Sea Hen Crag. We could see wisps of cloud forming as the cold north wind blew up the valleys. Remembering, how the cloud came in during the afternoon the two previous days, we decided to get going, hoping not to get caught on Expedition Peak in the cloud.

We quickly picked our packs and started up Expedition Peak. Despite the steep gradient we still rose quite quickly since there were large sections of exposed rock. As we rose, we saw the cloud

steadily getting thicker. We rushed up hoping to get a view of the correct ridge down to Sea Hen Crag, before we lost visibility. By the time I got up the cloud had moved in and wind was really starting to pick up. I sat down for a break of some chocolate and to put on my outer shell jacket for some protection from the wind. Petrus made the comment “All we needed was the cloud to stay away for another 30 minutes”, we would see later how telling his comment was. Petrus and I discussed our options. We had our GPS’s but we only had the GPS co-ordinates of a camp-site previously used by Petrus in GP plain. Turning back and going down to Barren Dome camp was not an option, and both Petrus and I were both pretty confident that we had seen the correct ridge from Nigel’s Cap. So we started to follow the ridge.

At this time I should tell you, that Petrus (who likes his gadgets) always carries a hand held “mini weather station”. With it we always monitor air pressure, air temperature, wind chill and even wind speed. On Gough it is always a good idea to monitor the air pressure to have an indication of low pressure systems that might be above the island. A simple rule of thumb is if the pressure is rising, head out, if it is dropping head home. Unfortunately we were a bit far from home to follow this rule, so we just headed on.

The wind on the ridge was really starting to gust, with the maximum gust that Petrus measured being 71.8 km/h. This type of wind with a full pack, is rather tiring. A lot of energy is used just to stand up right. At least we were walking down hill. We kept on expecting to arrive on Sea Hen Crag, but it never came. In the mist with visibility down to 30 m, even following a ridge can be a bit difficult. Apparently there was only one ridge down to Sea Hen Crag, and you couldn’t miss it. The GPS showed that we should be heading more north, but the ridge kept on going west. Every fork in the ridge, would lead to more discussions. It would appear later, that we had in fact taken the road less traveled. We kept on seeing what we thought were foot prints, but we would always lose them.

“It must just be down here”

“This doesn’t make sense”

“Do you think Sea Hen Crag is this way?”

“Let’s check the map again”

“Maybe that ridge is Sea Hen Crag?”

I remember marking a spot on my GPS that looked kind of level in case we had to make camp somewhere. I must emphasize however that we never felt in danger. Despite that fact that we were lost, it was still early afternoon, and worst case scenario we still had a tent and sleeping bags for protection. The ridge kept on going down, so we did too. We stopped wondering where Sea Hen



Petrus walking in the mist, near GP plain.

Crag was and decided to keep heading down and see where we would end up. At least the lower we got, the less the wind blew and visibility got a bit better. Eventually we ended up at a stream. Following the stream we were sure that GP Plain was just around the corner. It was strange to see a number of sootie albatross chicks right next to the stream. Normally sootie albatrosses make their nests on cliffs. I named the unknown stream sootie River. I decided to scurry up a ridge for a better view, when I saw the cloud had lifted for a while. I could see that we were on the edge of a plain. I knew from my GPS that we were around 1.5 km south of our camp site, but I thought that this plain was surely part of GP plain. I was wrong.

We started to head north, as the cloud closed in again. The distance on the GPS was a straight line distance and since we had come down the wrong ridge, we had to now walk around Sea Hen Crag, which involved also walking over some of the lower ridges running down from Sea Hen Crag. We were also walking on some of the worst conditions on Gough. It was a very soft bush that sunk very deep for each step. I kept on trying to walk in a straight line to the camp site and every time we would find the way blocked and we had to head up another ridge. By this time both Petrus and I were getting very tired and taking breaks virtually every 50 m. The various albatrosses also seemed a bit more edgy, making more noise than we were used to when we walked past them. I guess they don't get many visitors this part of the island. By this time it had also started to rain. Despite the low cloud we could still occasionally see a Tristan albatross or a skua flying past in the mist.

We stopped at a stream, which we were pretty certain that was part of GP plain to refill our bottles. Petrus asked me how far was left. I replied that it was only 500 m. Unfortunately we continued to go up and down various ridges. We noticed some Giant Petrels on a ridge next to us and with the light fading, with rather tired legs, we found a not so level section that was sort of clear of plants and decided to make camp. We were 200 m short of Petrus's previous camp site. Gough is not a very big island, so often the distance covered is quite short, it's the underfoot conditions that make walking difficult. Just to give you an idea, it had taken us 2 hours to walk just over 1 km.

We quickly put up the tent in the rain and got a pot of water boiling for supper, we were rather hungry since we had skipped lunch due to the walking in the mist. We had set up camp very close to two Tristan albatross nests, with the chicks sitting on the nest and the parents sitting alongside. They didn't seem to be very worried about the weather.



A Tristan albatross feeding its chick in GP plain.

Supper consisted of 2 packets of two minute noodles, tuna with the water, mussels with the oil, 1 sachet of beef flavoring, mixed spices and loads of Tabasco. In my tired state, a finer meal I have not eaten. Once in the warmth of our sleeping bags, we shared a couple of sips whiskey. Despite the uneven surface we setup camp on, I quickly fell asleep that night. I awoke to the sound of very heavy rains and strong winds hitting the tent. The wind would hit us in waves. Often we would hear it before it hit us. The sound of the rain in the tent was incredible. Petrus was also awake. Often weather like this can linger for a number of days. Right now though there was not much Petrus and I could do, except hope that the tent holds and try and get some sleep. Once again my ear plugs came in handy.

Day 4

We awoke to the stillness of morning. Such a contrast to the weather we had experienced the night before. Once again the cloud was low, but hoping that the cloud would lift in the morning like it had the two previous days we decided to pack up camp. We also decided to skip breakfast in order to get going earlier, we didn't want to get caught in GP plain. It was amazing to see the two Tristan albatross chicks next to our tent that morning. It was almost like nothing had happened the night before, sitting calmly on their nests. One of the parents came down and started to feed its chick, I stopped packing up and quickly got my camera. Thoughts of our tiring walk the day before faded away, as I watched the chick insistently pecking at its parent's beak like Oliver asking for more. The parent finally obliged with some rather smelly fish oil that it had stored up for this occasion. The Giant Petrels were also flying low, with their heads up having a conversation in mid air. I think the best way I could describe a Giant Petrel it that it has character. They always seem to be in groups cackling at each other. I always enjoy watching them "at play". The sun was fighting through the cloud, which was promising sign for the day ahead.

As the cloud continued to lift, I finally saw Sea Hen Crag above us, that elusive Sea Hen Crag which we had spent so much time looking for the day before. Unfortunately on Gough it's more often than not a case of "What goes down must go up". It was going to be a bit of a climb up to Sea Hen Crag. The bad weather had done nothing to improve the walking conditions. We slowly made our way up to the ridge running to Sea Hen Crag, with our legs still feeling a bit heavy. I found this climb up to Sea Hen Crag very uncomfortable. I often think walking is very much a head game. I needed to give myself a little bit more motivation to get up there that morning. Stopping halfway up, Petrus and I shared some



The view GP Plain on route to Sea Hen Crag

cashew nuts. I sat there looking at GP Plain with the sun light starting to light it up. “Beautiful”, I pulled my camera out and took a picture. I told Petrus with a laugh, “We came all this way, we might as well take a photo.”

As continued up the ridge, cloud appeared to be coming in again. I went ahead hoping that I could get a view of way along Sea Hen Crag before the cloud came in. As I made it to the top and had a look across Sea Hen Crag, I could just recognize one of the ridges before the cloud closed in. I sat down, put on my woolen gloves under my leather gloves since it was getting colder. I ate some chocolate and drank some water while I waited for Petrus, I felt some sleet hitting my checks. I wasn't looking forward to another day spent trying to find our way in the cloud. Sea Hen Crag is also a mire, so the best way across it is to stick to the edge, where the walking is the easiest, but still quite boggy. Luckily there where a number of foot prints in the bog, so after Petrus took a break too, we followed these.

Once again we were back to the various bog walking techniques, I was finding the bent knee, walking stick approach the most effective. I went on ahead again and as I got to the edge of Sea Hen Crag the cloud had started to lift. I dropped my pack and started to have a look around for the easiest route up to Expedition Peak. I recognized sections of the ridge that we had walked on the day before and I let out a laugh. We had taken the wrong ridge from Expedition Peak. We had spent so much time the day before wondering if were going the right direction and I found it rather amusing that in the end we had taken the wrong ridge to start of with. I'm not sure if Petrus shared in my amusement. His comment the day before about having 30 minutes extra clear skies was so true, we would have easily seen the correct ridge.

As we headed up a nice rocky slope to Expedition Peak, I was happy to leave Sea Hen Crag behind us. Once again however the cloud came in again, almost at exactly the same spot as the day before and once again we discussed our options. We could head the longer route, but lower altitude route via Barren Dome, since it appeared that the cloud was not covering the lower altitudes or we could take the straight line route to Waterfall Camp over Expedition Peak and Edinburgh Peak. In good weather this would have been the obvious choice since the walking conditions although steep where generally on the firmer ground of ridges. The views on clear days from Expedition and Edinburgh Peak are also amazing. We decided to take our chances and head over Expedition and Edinburgh Peak.

The weather was certainly getting colder and by now the wind was blowing from the south. As we walked towards to the top of Expedition Peak, we saw some sleet and even some snow flakes blowing by in the wind. At the top of Expedition Peak the ambient temperature was 1.7 °C and with wind chill it was -4.5 °C. It was very much a case of walking ourselves warm. The top of Expedition Peak was a none event due to the cloud and we headed down the south east ridge, towards Mildred Mire, which is the shoulder between Expedition and Edinburgh. Once again the cloud started to lift and luckily it was to stay that way for the rest of the day. We were in high spirits, enjoying the downhill, enjoying the views around us and amazed at having seen some snow on Expedition Peak. One of the few times you really enjoy the soft underfoot conditions on Gough is going downhill on it. It cushions your knees and it is a case of just letting your legs go as you head downhill.

Mildred Mire is a bit boggy, but we quickly crossed it and started up the slightly boggy slopes of Edinburgh Peak. It was slow going and our legs were really feeling the previous 3 days hiking. I recently completed Apsley Cherry Garrard's, "The Worst Journey in the World", which is his experience of Captain Scott's last expedition in 1910 to 1913 where Scott and 4 others lost their lives in trying to reach the South Pole for the first time. I am by no means trying to compare my story of my five day hike to any of the experiences experienced by the various people on Scott's expedition. Those guys were hardcore. However whenever I was feeling a bit tired or the pack was getting a bit heavy, I kept on thinking of how tough those guys were and how they pulled much heavier weights for over 2 months. This was always enough motivation for me. I might add though that chocolate and water also helps.

On my previous walk up Edinburgh peak it had been done in the cloud, so although I had been there before I hadn't seen the views. I was therefore thoroughly enjoying the views as we continued to rise up. One of the things I love on Gough is all the various strange rock formations that we see. These aren't always very big, but often they are in very interesting formations. There were quite a few examples of these on Edinburgh Peak. I guess walking can also be filled with many clichés, one of them being "Just one step at a time." It is however very true and eventually we were standing on top of Gough on Edinburgh Peak.



Two tired walkers on top of Edinburgh Peak. Windy Ridge and Rowetts can be seen in the background

The view was magnificent. Once again Gough had provided us with our reward. I wouldn't want to be anywhere else in the world. I just kept on turning around trying to take it all in. I have had a few times in my life when what I'm seeing is so amazing that it doesn't feel real. This was one of those moments. When on top of Edinburgh, I could see virtually the whole island and the Atlantic Ocean surrounding it. I recognized so many of the ridges and peaks from my various walks on the island. After 7 months on Gough I finally felt that I could finally say that "I know this island."

After many photos, we followed the highway of footprints down the other side of Edinburgh Peak towards the familiar camping site of Waterfall Camp. After setting up camp and a late lunch of cheese and provitas, we had a mid afternoon nap. Before supper we enjoyed a whiskey coffee, while we reminisced about the previous 4 days walking. Supper was 2 packets of 2 minute noodles, 1 sachet of beef flavoring, tomato paste, tin of sardines with



The walk down Edinburgh Peak to Waterfall Camp

the oil, tin of mussels with the oil, mixed spices and our dear old friend Tabasco. We both slept very well that night, I think we were hardly even bothered by the mice running around the tent. There was some rain over night, but not much.

Day 5

We awoke to the all too familiar sight of misty weather. The conditions were far from perfect, but we knew the route quite well from Waterfall Camp to the base, and it was easy to follow. We were both looking forward to a nice warm shower, and a warm meal not consisting of 2 minute noodles. Once again we skipped breakfast, packed up camp and started to retrace our steps of 4 days before. We quickly found Windy Ridge to live up to its name with a very strong wind ripping from the west. It got steadily stronger as we followed the foot path up towards the Rowetts, by the time we got to North Rowett it was gusting at 50 km/h. We were leaning into the wind while walking. Once I had to sit down because I felt like I was being blown over. Other times the wind would all of a sudden stop briefly, and I would lose my balance since I had been leaning into it. It was as if the island had decided that we hadn't experienced enough weather during our trip.

The rain in the wind was stinging our faces and the sound of the rain hitting our jacket hoods was incredibly loud. Slowly we made our way along the Rowetts to South Rowett. It was incredible

how as soon as we got into the lee of South Rowett, how quiet it was. We knew that that was the last serious uphill of our trip and we quickly devoured a bar of chocolate and some sultanas. Petrus commented, "I've eaten more chocolate on this trip than since I arrived on the island." We made our way down to and across Gony Dale. I was able to talk to the base via radio again and they were quite relieved to hear from us. Even the temperatures at the base had been quite low the day before. Within a couple of hours we dragged our tired, very smelly and very satisfied bodies back into base. It's good to go hiking and it's also good to go home. We thoroughly enjoyed a nice cold beer on our arrival. That evening after weighing ourselves we found that I had lost 2 kgs and Petrus 4 kgs.

It had been an amazing trip, with some of the worst weather that the island could throw at us. At times the walking was tough, but I also enjoyed that part of it. I'm really glad that I got to see parts of this island that many people don't manage to get to. I'm also a sucker for harsh weather, I really enjoy experiencing it. Finally as Petrus told me on our last night at Waterfall Camp, "This is the stuff that memories are made of."



*Petrus checking the map while waiting for the water boil.
Taken at Barren Dome Camp*

Personality of the Month
Dineo Matsana
Assistant Meteorologist

Can you please tell us about yourself?

I'm Dineo Matsana, I enjoy being around people so that I can get to know different kinds of personalities.

You recently celebrated your birthday, how old are u?

I don't feel very comfortable taking about my age; I'm in my late twenties, fair enough isn't it?

How did you end up here at Gough?

A very special friend of mine, he told me about this and I just fell in love with it right away. He has never been here before, but he will be here to experience it himself and spend the whole year just like I did. I like the sound of it!

Where do you call home?

I'm from Bushbuckridge in the village called Arthurstone, A very quiet place with lots of fruit and veggies. I have spent my childhood and my teenage years there, but now as a big girl I spent most of my time in Pretoria and Johannesburg

What do u like most about Gough Island?

Wow.....Gough Island, I like the shape of the mountains, the song of the birds, sound of waterfalls, looking at the sea, more special when it's rough, checking the seals even though I'm bit scared of them, it's vegetation, weather changes. Gough is a very cool place, and I also like the fact that I need not have to worry about what to wear nor my hairstyle. I like it here and everything about it.

How does it feel to be the only lady on the team?

It's amazing, actually I'm speechless, I don't know how to answer this, 'coz by



Dineo at Hag's Tooth

saying it feels good is like I'm lying to myself, It's more than good, I can't find the exact words to explain how I feel.

Being the only woman in the island, how are you coping around five guyz?

I have never been this happy my whole life till this moment here, It feels like paradise, Oh...God they make me happy.....very happy all of then, I mean all. It's like it can be like this my whole life, which of is not possible. I feel so sad knowing that I have to live my life without them. I have learnt so much about them, I grow up in the family that is surrounded by woman, so being around guyz is something so different.

How many mice have you caught so far on the island?

I'm scared of mice, especially if Jonty brings it to me once dead.

So I have never even tried to trap it. Tin and Tshifhiwa, they are good in this field so I don't stand on their way.

We hear that you specialize at making pizzas, is this true?

Oh yes! I just like the taste of it, it's my favorite meal.

What do you miss the most in Mzantsi?

I miss my son, my family, friends, chicken with bones, fresh fruit and veggies, and I also miss shopping.

What plans do you have after Gough?

I am thinking of taking another expedition and to pursue my career.

What message can you give to other women who would like come to the island?

Just take each day the way it comes and if u feel sad, lock your room and tell God what u want 'coz with him you'll never go wrong. Build friendship with you're team members. That's the best way to start.

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Brian opening another bottle of Durbanville Hills Shiraz to be enjoyed by the team

From the Weather Office

CLIMATE STATS: April 2007

Ave. Max Pressure	1011.0 hPa
Ave. Min Pressure	1000.6 hPa
Ave. Pressure	1005.7 hPa
Max Pressure	1027.4 hPa
Min Pressure	986.5 hPa
Ave. Max Temp	16.1 °C
Ave. Min Temp	10.0 °C
Ave. Temp	13.3 °C
Max Temp	19.8 °C
Min Temp	4.4 °C
Ave Humidity	76 %
Max Humidity	96 %
Min Humidity	48 %
Max Wind Gust	38.2 m/s or 137.5 km/h
Total Rainfall	335.9 mm
Highest in 24 Hours	83.5 mm
Total days with rain	26 days
Total days >1mm	17 days
Total Sunshine	139.1 hours

Gough 52 Birds

Gough Bunting

Brian Bowie

Sub-Antartic Skua

Thulani Jakalashé

Gough Moorhen

Jonathan Kotze

Sootie Albatross

Dineo Matsana

Yellow-Nosed Albatross

Bigfish Mashau

Tristan Albatross

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