

Gough Bunting

December 2007



My first Christmas away from home!

The festive season through the eyes of Charlene.



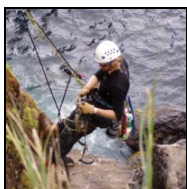
Facing it

I felt I had to say something...but the feeling's gone now.



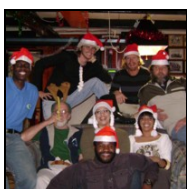
But is it Art?

Aside from the usual after hours activities like reading and writing some expedition members have applied themselves to being artistic.



Tackling Gough's alien invasive plants

The Sagina team have been very busy the past two months surveying and removing invasive plants from the cliff faces on the island.



Festive season's festivities and activities

Hiking, Partying and Tinsel. A guide to Gough festive season.



Hiking

Kholekile is fast becoming the hiking and outdoorsman. Recently he went with the *Sagina* team to Tafelkop bringing his total to 4 times.

My first Christmas away from home!

On Gough Island there has been a lot of firsts! December began with Mel and I going on an excursion alone, we decided one morning to go to Swemgat, it started raining after that but we still wanted to go, Mel got into some work that I thought would last forever. Then at about one o'clock she was finished and we were off. On our way there we saw that some of the Yellow-nosed albatrosses had chicks already! It was so cool to see these small fluffy balls with beaks. We also celebrated a birthday early in December, Richard is one of the RATS, we had a party which was good and I enjoyed myself, we wanted to give him an Island experience. We also put up the Christmas tree after Mel went on and on and on about it! In the end we as a team put up one tree in the bar and decorated the bar, the other tree went into the TV room.

After waiting for three and a half months, I at last saw the first Sooty albatross chick! It was so cool, I also saw the second one about two days later, and I am a very happy girl! We sent out the invites for Christmas.



The day before Christmas we prepared some of the food so that we did not have to get up too early on Christmas day to prepare the food. On Christmas Eve we had a party to celebrate us as a team (in the South Atlantic) waiting for Christmas. Christmas morning we got up and added the final touches. Father Christmas was here to handout the presents, we had some very good surprises in opening the presents. I had a wonderful day, my new friends made it as special as it could be. That afternoon we got another surprise when John took out a cake with blue and white icing and a white albatross on it! That was wonderful having tea and cake together.

So as you can see December has been a very busy month for us on the Island as it was for all in South Africa. I have only this to say, Merry Christmas (although it is late) and may you have a prosperous 2008!!! Till next year!



- Charlene Oppel

Facing it

So you are plodding along quite contently. The days pass quietly and you start thinking that you are strong and you can handle it. Then one day, one innocent telephone call to your sister sends you to Blubber Valley (and I am NOT talking about seals).

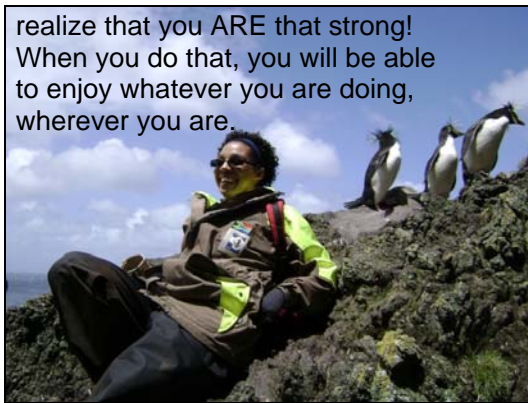


At times like these you just have to sit down and take a good, long, hard look at your life and realize that you are indeed getting a little bitty too big (NOT, I repeat, NOT old) to still be crying for the nest!

Now you have to face your fears,



realize that you ARE that strong!
When you do that, you will be able to enjoy whatever you are doing, wherever you are.



If you happen to be on an awesome island with myriad possibilities...well, that can't exactly hurt your cause, now can it?



- Mellany McPherson

But is it Art?

Gough Island is a lonely place. It used to be a lot lonelier before the email was around. There are not any places of recreation here. Nor any shops sport fields or even parks. So evenings mostly revolve around dinner and socializing with your team members. Some use this opportunity to engage in artistic pursuits.

When you have a look around the base you notice quite a number of these works. Decorating the more public areas of the base like the dining room and the lounge.



The Bar lounge has a lot of the art of previous expeditions. Decorating the walls, and in some places the ceiling has everything from wooden carvings, paintings to cardboard cut-outs. Larger than life depictions of famous rock stars (of the 80's maybe?) are painted on the walls. Bathed in the light from the mirror ball made from an old fishing buoy.

In the passage towards the bedrooms in the old base someone decided a more tribal look was just the thing. Beautiful Nguni designs line the walls and doorways.



Hag's tooth by W Stockton Acrylic on hardboard.

In the dining room a surreal depiction of Hag's tooth hangs proudly. A peak on the island as W Stockton saw it during the 36rd expedition.



Nguni Corridor

All this creativity is not just confined to the pre-television teams. The current team has also proven its originality.

Mellany is a skilled painter. As gifts she has created a few miniature paintings from a number of photos she had.

Sarel has made a few wooden items for the bar-lounge and radio room. Although this is probably not high-art it is beautifully made as well as practical.

Brian Schultz, one of the Sagina Team, is into eastern arts. The haunting melodies from this bamboo instrument are not just a testament to the maker of the flute, but also to the players skill. Shakuhachi

Maybe this lonely place is the best place to be to have your soul enriched and your mind inspired to create.

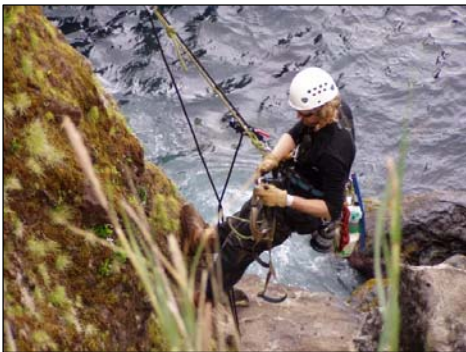
-Johan Hoffman

Tackling Gough's alien invasive plants

For the third summer in a row an alien plant eradication team is visiting Gough. The primary aim is to eradicate a small, inconspicuous plant found growing on the sea cliffs close to the weather base in Transvaal Bay. For this purpose each summer team has included professionally qualified rope-access technicians to reach the plants in safety. The plant, *Sagina procumbens* or "Procumbent Pearlwort", has the ability to spread into natural environments, smothering the natural vegetation, as it is doing at South Africa's Prince Edward Islands. The plan is to eradicate the plant, first noticed on Gough in the late 1990s, before it gets completely out of control.



The enemy at close range: flowering *Sagina*.



Brian descends the sea cliff using a double-rope safety system: note the blowtorch and sprayer clipped to his belt.

This summer's team consists of John Cooper, project leader, and rope technicians Richard Halsey and Brian Schultz. We arrived on the fishing ship *Kelso* in late November and since then have made over 200 rope-assisted drops on the cliffs and removed five 55-l boxes of plants – that will be dumped at sea on our return voyage, expected late next month. We use three methods of attacking the plants: mechanical removal using paint scrapers, followed by heat treatment with hand-held blow torches to kill seeds in rock cracks and herbicides (using garden sprayers) to

kill emerging seedlings in the soil. These tools are carried clipped to our climbing harnesses, along with the usual climbing equipment.

The project is funded by the UK's Overseas Territories Environment Programme via a two-year grant to the

Agriculture and Natural Resources Department of the Tristan da Cunha Government. The project also includes a component to develop quarantine procedures to reduce the risk of further species of alien plants reaching the islands: this will include careful attention to inspecting and cleaning equipment and supplies at source in Cape Town before they are sent to the island.

We are grateful for the hospitality the Gough 53 team is extending to us, and to the South African National Antarctic Programme for logistic support.

-John Cooper, Honorary Tristan Conservation Officer



Brian uses a large blowtorch to burn off seedlings in an infested patch of ground.



Richard climbs into a cleft at Snoekgat after a difficult-to-reach plant.

Festive season's festivities and activities



We started our festivities early with Richard's birthday on 8 December. Even though we were not so well organised, we had a great party.

On 23 December there was an outing to check new Tristan Albatross nests at Tafelkop. For me it was an opportunity to see adult Tristan Albatrosses for the first time since I missed the last trip to Gonydale where there are quite a lot of them. We got there, started with collecting marking poles from old nests, climbing up and down the mountain, which was a good exercise.

It was a cloudy but hot day except on top of the mountain where it was windy and cold.

On our way back we went to the cave before heading back to the base. We had a party on Christmas eve, exchanged and received gifts on Christmas, a big lunch followed and we ended the day with a late afternoon tea with a special Gough 53 cake which John brought all the way from Cape Town.

I was also part of the team that went to Tumbledown on 26 December. On our way there we got to explore two caves, one of which is a home to another bird species, a good hideout from the Skuas. The other one is bigger and not dark enough and that explains why there were no birds in it.

At Tumbledown we walked among the penguins and thought we will be able to sit down, relax and eat lunch there but with the seals adding their smell to that of penguin droppings there was no way we could enjoy our food there. As a result, myself, Kholekile, Mellany and Sarel climbed back to the top, ate and rested for a while before coming back.



We ended the festive season and the year with another party on New Year's Eve dressed as pirates.

I wish you all peace, prosperity and lots of blessings.

-Nkoane Mathabatha

HIKING

It was partly cloudy and a lovely morning to take a long walk to the peak of the hill. The guys were also keen to go and do their work (to check new nests of Tristan Albatrosses). It is never an easy thing to walk up the hills because of the vegetation, and we had to rest along the way and view the Island from the top of the hill.

This is a picture to show you that we are still enjoying our time and there is nothing to worry about (sorry about the petrol increase). A Seal is taking a nap and a Penguin is watching. I hope you enjoyed your Christmas and I wish you a prosperous new year!!!

-Kholekile



Team Leader's Note

ALL the well wishes had been done so lets all take on this new year with a renewed spirit and make it the best ever for the rest of our lives.

The team spirit is high and every body is well and ready to tackle the New Year!!!!
ENJOY the letter till next time.

-Sarel "seemonster"

Climate Stats: December 2007

Pressure

Ave. Max	1011.5 hPa
Ave. Min	1003.5 hPa
Average	1007.3 hPa
Maximum	1019.7 hPa
Minimum	991.0 hPa

Temperature

Ave. Max	17.1 °C
Ave Min	11.3 °C
Average	14.2 °C
Maximum	21.0 °C
Minimum	7.0 °C

Humidity

Average	77%
Maximum	96%
Minimum	49%

Max Wind Gust	31.7 m/s or 114.1 km/h
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Rainfall

Total	222.2 mm
Highest in 24h	46.2 mm
Total days with rain	23 days
Total days >1mm	18 days
Total sunshine	144.2 hours

Gough 53 team members

Charlene Oppel – Meteorologist

Johan Hoffman – Radio Technician

Kholekile Cita – Medic

Mellany McPherson – Meteorologist(snr)

Nkoane Mathabatha - Meteorologist

Sarel Steyn – Diesel Technician
(Team Leader)

Sagina team members

John Cooper – Project Leader

Brian Schultz – Rope Access Tech

Richard Halsey – Rope Access Tech