

Marion Island newsletter

THE WANDERER

December 2015 and January 2016



FROM THE TEAM LEADERS OFFICE:



Hi everyone...

Wow, can you believe that we are in 2016. Time has lapsed so fast leaving behind 2015 with lots of fond memories during December and our traditional Maid Marion event which was well organized by the 'girls' of our team.

Our Christmas dinner was all posh with a table setting one could imagine being at an "a-la-carte" menu restaurant. Everyone pitched in to do a bit to transform the dining hall into a table setting that the pictures would best describe. The dress code was smart casual and it was good to see bow ties once again. The food, spirit and laughter accompanied the fine cuisine from starters to the main course ending with a classic dessert. The night continued with table games and ended off in the bar with pool and table tennis.

From that celebration more excitement spilled over into the New Years' events. Base skivvy days which is every Friday happened to fall on "Boxing Day" and New Years' Day respectively. However this was amended to the following day with a relief from the team.

January also saw a visitor to the island, although not a bird species but the yacht, Diel, which was manned by Mr Bernhard Diebolt and his crew. Their mission was to brave the roaring 40's and deliver a part for the Hydrogen Generator. They made the 9 day journey to Marion Island after getting a long awaited permit. A boot washing and inspection ceremony was done on the yacht by the ECO's which formed part of the strict regulations that one has to abide by when coming to the island. The last vessel anchored at Marion was the SA Agulhas 2 which made it peculiar to see a yacht anchored at Marion which rarely happens if never during an expedition year.

Their stay was a short one when they set sail for SA after an enjoyable time on the island. There were mixed emotions with seeing new comers at base but one can imagine how takeover would be to see many more people at base...so this was a touch of takeover! Mr Diebolt conveyed his heartfelt gratitude to the team during his stay and also emailed me to convey his gratitude to the team for the great hospitality and dinners they received...especially the humongous burgers.

The countdown has begun for the 300th day celebration on the island and then it will be the countdown for the "red taxi" to grace the shores of Marion.

Cheers and all the best until the next issue of the Wanderer!

Front cover: John Dickens

A few words from the editor



A belated Merry Christmas and Happy New Years to everyone back home! The team members of M72 wish everyone all the best for 2016!

For this edition of the Wanderer we have decided to join December and January. It is a long edition, full of all the wonderful on-goings here on the island.

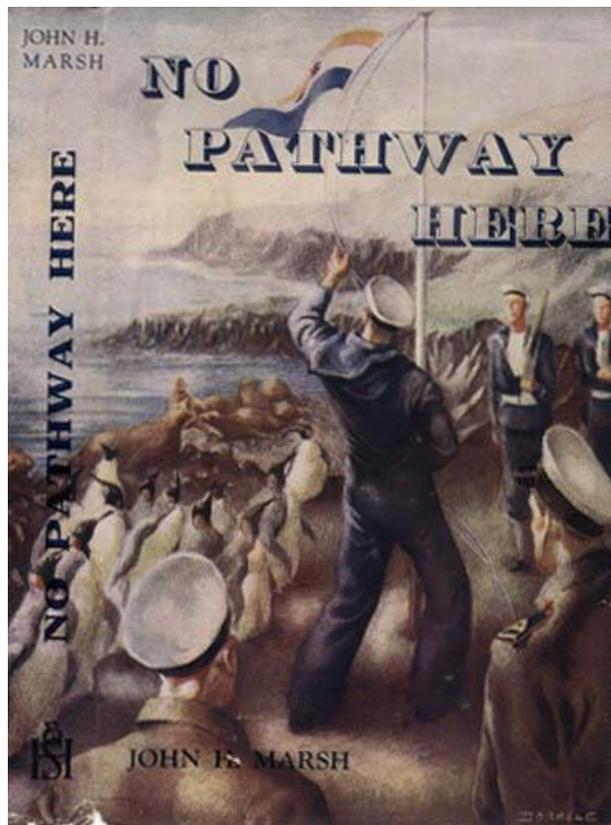
However, there is some bad news and some good news. The bad news is that there are no photos of the New Years celebrations in this issue. As many of you know, New Years Eve is when we decided to host the Maid Marion beauty pageantry. As a result, many of the boys are dressed like girls and we decided it best not to make these photos public. The good news is the team contributed LOTS of other photos for this edition of The Wanderer.

I hope you enjoy what we have put together!

Tegan Carpenter-Kling

Sixty-eight years ago South Africa held formal ceremonies ashore to complete the annexation of the Prince Edward Islands

By John Cooper, *Antarctic Legacy of South Africa*, Stellenbosch University



“No Pathway Here” by John Marsh, the story of the islands’ annexation

In January 1948, South Africa conducted ceremonies ashore on Marion and Prince Edward Islands to proclaim that:

“His Majesty’s sovereignty of Marion Island and Prince Edward Island is henceforth to be exercised by his Majesty’s Government in the Union of South Africa. God Save the King”.

The two proclamation ceremonies were conducted by Lieutenant Commander Paul Dryden-Dymond, officer commanding the frigate H.M.S.A.S. *Natal*. The first ceremony was held among the boulders in Cave Bay on Prince Edward Island on the 24th, followed by on Marion Island above Boulder Beach two days later on the 26th.

At each ceremony a naval guard of *Natal* ratings presented arms, officers saluted, a bugler sounded the “alert” and the Union of South Africa flag was “run to the masthead”. As the flag was raised the *Natal* fired a 21-gun salute from its four-inch battery. Civilians present had removed their head gear. The proclamation parties included cinematographer Ken Sara of *the African Mirror* and John Marsh, journalist and author, to record events for the media and for posterity.

On Prince Edward a case of champagne was produced after the formalities were over and the party toasted “the future of South Africa’s first colony” among the on-looking King Penguins and Southern Elephant Seals. On Marion Island wire netting had to be laid down to allow those participating to be able to stand to attention on the marshy ground. The need for secrecy over the islands’ annexation was now over and South Africa - and the World - got to hear of South Africa’s new overseas possessions.

With thanks to the South African Naval Museum, Simon’s Town for photographs and articles and the South African National Defence Force Documentation Centre, Pretoria for access to documents.

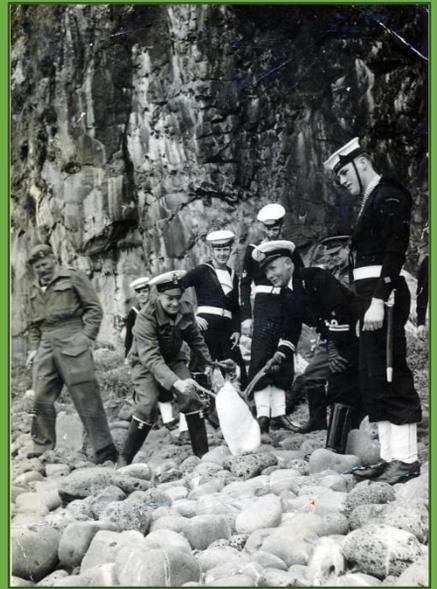
Reference Marsh, J.H. 1948. *No Pathway Here*. Cape Town: Howard B. Timmins. 200 pp.



Lieutenant Commander Paul Dryden-Dymond reads out the Proclamation claiming sovereignty of Prince Edward Island, Lt Peter Selk behind



After the Prince Edward ceremony, champagne...



...and a handshake with a reluctant king penguin



The South African flag is raised on Marion Island, S.S. *Gamtoos* and H.M.S.A.S. *Natal* at sea in the background



Lt Cdr Dryden-Drymond reads out the Proclamation document; *Natal's* armed guard behind with arms sloped

Christmas on Marion

You would think, being in the sub-Antarctic, that we would have a white Christmas... Sadly it didn't snow, but we did not complain that it was warm enough to dress up in something other than fleece. And we ate like kings!

Here is a sneak peak into our 100% Marion island Christmas



Food preparations



Check the dining hall



The feast!



merry christmas



The old age of an albatross

By Stefan

When I first started working with the wandering albatrosses (*Diomedea exulans*) here on Marion, I was blown away by their size. However, through the many months monitoring these birds, it becomes normal standing next to something with a wingspan longer than my own height.



Sadly, a lot of things on the island becomes part of normal life and we sometimes need a reminder of just how wonderful the things are that we experience every day. This reminder came for me when we found an albatross with a very old ring on its leg!

Doing some detective work (i.e. accessing the database) we found that the bird had been banded as a chick on Marion Island in the late 1970s and was one of the first 100 birds banded on the island, putting his age around 40 years old!

Albatrosses are at risk from human influences in many ways. The largest influence being that of long-line fishing vessels that result in seabird mortality when they try and snatch baited hooks. A second (hitting closer to home) influence is that of pollution. The oceans are littered with plastic pollutants and albatrosses that ingest it can end up dying from starvation as they are not able to digest it.

Banding of wandering albatrosses on Marion Island only started in 1976 and some of the birds we come across every day might even be older than 40 years old.

Standing next to a seabird that is older than you are is quite a humbling experience and one often wonders about the wisdom that it has acquired over the years. No wonder the oldest known breeding albatross is nick named "Wisdom".

It is our own duties to look at our actions and how they might affect the environment that we live in. In such a way we can ensure the survival of such marvellous birds as the albatrosses living to the old age of 40 and older!



Why Marion Matters!?

FIELD ASSISTANTS EDITION

by Abuyiselwe Nguna



As we approach the last session of our innings on this beautiful Island, I call upon my fellow field assistants to help me put together this month's article. I have asked all the field assistant groups to compose a 100 word summary on why Marion matters to them as a group, and what it means to them.

As you all know our field assistants are grouped as follows:

- Birders
- Botanist
- Sealer/Killer Whaler(s)

But yours truly (Geo) will not part take as I have something planned for later on ;).

As we all know, field assistant groups all have a different set of duties they have to perform and each group will most likely see the Island in a different light from the next group? We will start off with the...

Birders



Marion Island is truly a gem, not only because it is such a pristine conservation area but also because it hosts quite a vast number of seabird species. This island is home to about 29 breeding bird species, having a number of large bird populations and it is because of these large populations that the island are globally recognized and have been declared an Important Bird Area by Birdlife International. Also, because these seabirds are monitored so closely on the island, they are used as an indication of any changes in the sub-Antarctic marine ecosystem as a whole. Each year data is collected on seabirds that gives a general idea of ecological changes within the sub-Antarctic environments, from there conclusions in different fields of scientific research can be made and thereafter solutions derived.

The Prince Edward Islands are an important breeding ground for a large number of seabirds. There are four species of penguin, five species of albatross and at least 14 species of petrel that breed on both Marion and Prince Edward Island. These islands are also one of two breeding sites for Crozet Shags and one of three breeding sites for Kerguelen Terns. The Prince Edwards Islands are also an important breeding site for the Wandering Albatross as it hosts 44% of the global breeding population. The conservation of the island is of vital importance to maintain a healthy environment for the survival of these species.

- Janine Versteegh & Stefan Schoombie (PFAIO)

- Oyena Masiko (O&C)

Botanist



Plants on Marion Island pose an interesting dilemma for researchers. The system can be described as simple, with fewer vascular species and nutrient inputs than continental tundra. The more we discover the more complex these interactions become. The inclusion of bryophytes and various physiology experiments have opened many new doors and poses new questions. The botanical studies on Marion Island strive to test and expand on current ecological and ecophysiological theory. We also use the wealth of knowledge generated the past 50 years to test the effects of climate change on species distribution and physiological adaptation.

- **Marius Rossouw**

Sealers



Speaking for all three of us sealers, I believe that we got into this field of study and work because we love the outdoors and appreciate nature in all its forms and beauty. For those thus inclined Marion is an extraordinary experience, and working with seals and killer-whales is but an extension of this. Additionally, furthering our understanding of the natural world through scientific research brings us a good deal of fulfillment. And furthermore, to contribute in some small, seemingly insignificant way to the conservation of an unchanged, wild place – however small this island may be- is deeply rewarding, and something that I hope everybody can relate to. Marion matters to us sealers, as it should to everybody.

- **Benoit Morkel**

Marion Island is truly an amazing place, I would like to thank my fellow field assistants for taking time from their day to help with this article. Until next time. #MARIONMATTERS

Marion Island hosts visitors



Pierre Joubert

During December, rumours of visitors to the island where circling like Giant Petrels looking for Halfmoon. A yacht was supposed to arrive, bringing a team from the South African Weather Service to fix the hydrogen generator, which has been out of action for a few years. We filed this "yacht notion" under things unlikely to happen, like killer whales showing up when expected... Then suddenly, the first week in January, a yacht named *Diel* had left Cape Town harbour and set sail in our direction. The much-smaller-than-expected *Diel* came floating into view on 13 January 2016, ten days after their departure.

Three M72 members boarded the *Diel* for the boot-washing ceremony on the ship to ensure that the visitors brought no alien organisms on to our Southern Ocean gem. The people on board were really friendly and a variety of accents could be picked out: British, American, one that sounded Mediterranean, another from Europe and a blend of South African English.

It soon became apparent that these foreigners were not all here to fix the hydrogen generator. These are the most travelled people on earth who were granted a very VERY gracious opportunity to tick Prince Edward Island off their "places-to-go" list. Don, the American, is the world's most travelled man, with Bizon the Greek the second most travelled. Terry, the Chelsea supporter, and Joeren, the Belgian, also travel to the remote and inaccessible parts of our blue planet. Included in the crew was Bernard, the owner of the *Diel* who frequented Marion during takeover last year and Neviile, yachtsman and former Media24 employee. After being lifted on the island by the crane (left), meeting the team and settling in, Pierre and Nasipi took them to Ship's Cove.

That night Mpho made us a feast to welcome the visitors properly. Hamburgers and chips made to perfection, with toppings galore. Bizon made a toast, comparing the sailors to James Cook and Magellan, while hinting that there should be a trip to Heard Island. A few of the visitors asked where they should take their dishes. We showed them the macerator, the bones bin and all the rest. We spent the rest of the night chatting and having a good time with our guests.

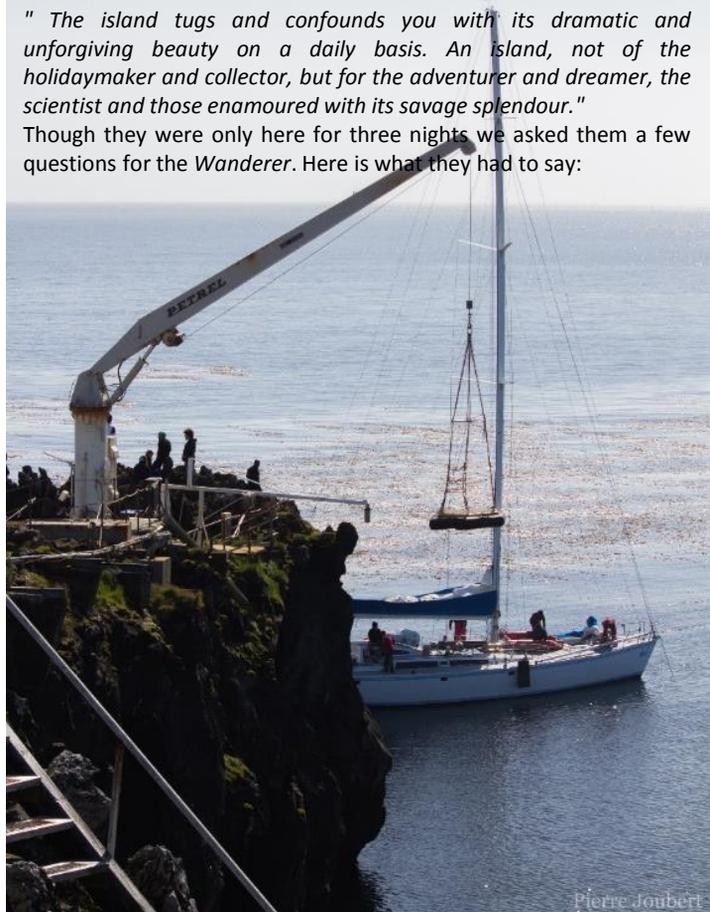
Day two A.J., our diesel mech, and Ewald, our radio tech, spend the rest of that day working furiously on the hydrogen generator. Luckily the power supply that was brought down by the *Diel* party worked and some of us got to see our first weather balloon deployment ever.

In the end we were sad when the visitors enquired as to why the island is not open to the public and did not fully understand the importance of this conservation/historical site. They could not understand why we live here for a year or why we keep coming back.

In the very poetic (and true) words of one of our experienced Marion scientist:

"The island tugs and confounds you with its dramatic and unforgiving beauty on a daily basis. An island, not of the holidaymaker and collector, but for the adventurer and dreamer, the scientist and those enamoured with its savage splendour."

Though they were only here for three nights we asked them a few questions for the *Wanderer*. Here is what they had to say:



Pierre Joubert

Owner:

Bernhard Diebold

Name:

Diel. Diel is the sponsoring company which stands for Diebold Electronics.

Technical specification of the vessel:

Sailing Yacht, Aluminium construction. 19.2m length, 5m beam, 3m Draft.

When, and where was the ship constructed?

Built in 1981 in Diepriver Cape.

Where does she dock, where has she been?

Royal Cape Yacht club. ^ Sout Atlantic races, last in 2003, came 1st in cruiser/racer class. 2 Antarctic cruises, antarctic peninsula, South Georgia.



Meet the visitors

*Bernhard Diebold (owner of the ship)
from Gout Bay, RSA*

**Profession:**

Engineer

Why did you come to Marion Island?

"To deliver spares for the hydrogen generator to facilitate upper air observations."

What were your first impressions of the island?

"Absolute magnificent. Got a view of the island in bright early morning light as opposed to previous landing in fog and rain."

Describe the voyage down to the island?

"Mixed bag, max wind 40 knots, some headwinds and calms."

If you had to describe Marion to someone back home, what would you say?

"You have to see and experience for yourselves to fully appreciate it."

Any other comments for readers that would love to visit the island?

"An experience of a lifetime."

Neville Poulter *From Cape Town*



Profession:

"Retired, Ex publishing executive media24."

Why did you come to Marion Island?

"Bernhard Diebold (owner/skipper Diel) asked me to join Diel for trip to Marion island as IT/Comms operator for the Marion island voyage to deliver parts for the Hydrogen Generator and helium for launching sonns."

What were your first impressions of the island?

"Beautiful. Also not unlike Scotland west coast and Western Ireland landscape. On further inspection Marion is completely unique and mind- blowing in its natural state."

Describe the voyage down to the island?

"First night out of Cape town a gale! Then some beating until about 40 degrees, then off the wind with strong winds and wild squalls. Then gradually colder. Overall not as bad as expected."

If you had to describe Marion to someone back home, what would you say ?

"An awesome natural wonder – totally unspoilt by man (special). Fantastic birdlife and seal life. A mixture of textures and spectacular landscapes – an artists dream."

Any other comments for readers that would love to visit the island?

"Be prepared to be blown away by the hospitality of the base staff- Great time and lots to learn – an amazing experience."

Babis Bizas *From Athens, Greece*

Profession:

"I was tour operator and now part-time tour leader"

Why did you come to Marion Island?

"I have been to all sub-Antarctic islands except Marion and Heard Island. I am impressed from their wildlife and I believed that the same would be in Marion. Indeed the visit to Ships Cove was astonishing."

What were your first impressions of the island?

"Volcanic Cliffs, impressive scenery and omnipresent sub-Antarctic wildlife. The king penguins and the various seals are the big attraction, especially the pups."

Describe the voyage down to the island?

"Rough, very rough and uncomfortable in a small sailing boat. I would love to travel with something bigger. Nevertheless all the "4" were excellent. Real old style sailors."

If you had to describe Marion to someone back home, what would you say?

"A wonderful place which is strange why remains closed to public and ordinary tourists. The British in South Georgia and the Australians in McQuarrie sub Antarctic islands receive more than 1000 visitors a year who contribute with the fees to the preservation."

Any other comments for readers that would love to visit the island?

"Be prepared to walk a lot, unless the ship will bring you here has zodiacs allowing to land in the coves around the island."

*Don Parrish
from Chicago, USA*

Profession:

"I'm retired and worked my entire 35 year career in the telecommunications at Bell Labs. This was a famous company and I was a pioneer in electronic switching. I helped shape the revolution in telecommunications in not only the USA, but countries in Asia, Europe and the middle East."

Why did you come to Marion Island?

"I am one of the world's top travellers and have worked for many years to visit everywhere. This means not only all of the countries, but political subdivisions, territories, island groups and important individual islands. As writing this, I am ranked #1 on mosttravelpeople.com."



What were your first impressions of the island?

"I saw it in perfect sunlight! I was overjoyed expecting rain, wind and mist. Then my impressions became even more positive when I met the people of the research station. They were all friendly and helpful. I felt right at home enjoying their enthusiasm for their work and how well they worked as a team."

Describe the voyage down to the island?

"Marion is not an easy place to visit. It was my privilege to be on the first private ship to Marion. It was small with a crew of 4 including the owner. I had travelled with the other 3 passengers before. The ship had no shower, no chair and no wifi. So conditions were challenging, nevertheless, we had a reasonable 9 day trip solving problems and getting along well. It was an adventure."

If you had to describe Marion to someone back home, what would you say?

"It is treeless and windswept. It has a rugged beauty with a lot of wildlife. The wildlife is everywhere! There are colonies of king, macaroni, gentoo and rockhopper penguins. Then there are the birds – amazing to see albatross and petrel nest just there in plain sight with no protection. The unique feature of the Marion are the "mires", google this word."

Any other comments for readers that would love to visit the island?

"This is a special place and figuring out how to get here is the hard part. It is an unspoiled jewel."

*Jeroen Agneessens
from a place near Ostend, Belgium (Middelkerke)*

Profession: *"Retired, I used to own a sound and light rental company (For Parties, concerts, etc.)"*

Why did you come to Marion Island?

"It's my ambition and hope to visit pretty much everywhere, but sub-Antarctic islands are particular favourites. I was also looking forward to the volcanic landscape."

What were your first impressions of the island?

"Very reminiscent of the Faroe islands. Green with dozens of volcanic cones. The base was very striking. The basal cliffs were beautiful."

Describe the voyage down to the island?

"It took 9 full days. The first three were rough but warm, at least. As it became colder and wetter... It wasn't very pleasant. On the bright side we saw plenty of albatross, petrels, storm petrels as well as whales fulmars and so on."

If you had to describe Marion to someone back home, what would you say?

"A magical emerald isle, full of little streams, crags and crevices that belong in a fairy tale of a hobbit movie. Penguins, albatross, various other seabirds, fur seals and elephant seals abound. Orcas are the icing on the cake. A deeply moving place."

Any other comments for readers that would love to visit the island?

"Come if you can! Try and convince the South African Government to permit limited, responsible tourism."

LOTS AND LOTS OF PHOTOS

Landscapes



John Dickens



Pierre Joubert



Pierre Joubert



Kate du Toit



Pierre Joubert



Janine Versteegh

SOME PLANTS FOUND ON THE ISLAND



John Dickens



Pierre Joubert



John Dickens



Pierre Joubert



John Dickens



Pierre Joubert



John Dickens

Penguins



John Dickens



John Dickens



John Dickens



John Dickens

Sub-Antarctic Skua



John Dickens



John Dickens



John Dickens



John Dickens



Janine Versteegh



John Dickens

Giant petrels (above)

Sooty and grey-headed albatross (below)



Janine Versteegh



Janine Versteegh

Crozet shag



John Dickens



John Dickens

Wandering albatross

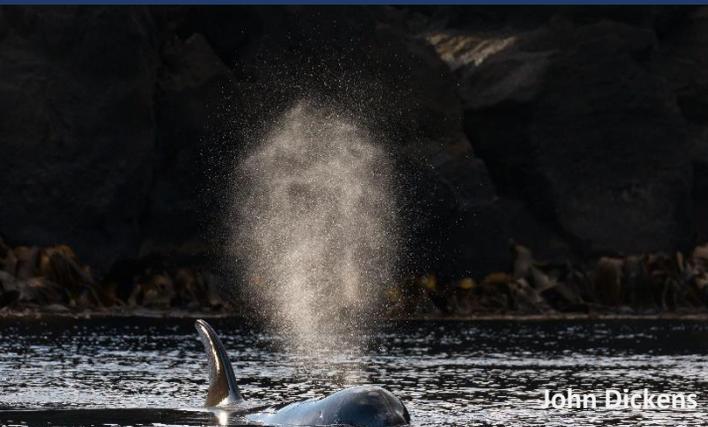


John Dickens



John Dickens

Killer whale



John Dickens



Stefan Schoombie

Seals



John Dickens



John Dickens

PUPPIES!!



We work hard and we play hard

