

# Antarctic Tourism and the Maritime Heritage

Bjørn L. Basberg  
Economic History Section, Department of Economics  
Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration, Bergen  
[bjorn@basberg.nhh.no](mailto:bjorn@basberg.nhh.no)

September 2008

“What was the Ross Sea called before Captain Ross discovered it?”

*155 Questions actually asked by passengers during Arctic and Antarctic cruises*, compiled by R.K. Headland, (unpublished and confidential), Cambridge 2007.

## Abstract

Maritime activity in the Antarctic region goes back to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. It evolved from exploration and discoveries to commercial activities, especially sealing and whaling. Antarctic tourism is a more recent phenomenon, developing gradually from the 1960s. Today, more than 20.000 tourists visit the Antarctic annually – mostly on cruise ships.

The paper reviews the historical development of these activities. The main focus is on how the maritime heritage has been dealt with and interpreted by the tourists themselves and the tourist industry. One aspect of the analysis is to show how the maritime heritage has been related to the other main attractions of the Antarctic tourist like the natural sceneries, the abundant wildlife and the pristine environment. Given the historic over-exploitation of seals and whales there is a potential conflict between these different aspects of the Antarctic heritage. The analysis will also focus on the possible ambiguity in how the maritime heritage itself has been interpreted. On the one hand, it was about brave adventurers and polar explorers, on the other hand, it was about resource exploitation and commercial activities that are controversial among most Antarctic tourists today.

## I. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Maritime activities in the Antarctic region date back to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. They evolved from exploration and discoveries to commercial enterprises, especially sealing, whaling and fishing. Antarctic tourism is a much more recent phenomenon, developing as an

---

<sup>1</sup> Paper presented at The 5th International Congress of Maritime History, University of Greenwich, 23.-27. June 2008, Session 4C, The Uses of Maritime History in Present Tourism Development. The paper is part of a larger project on the Economic History of the Antarctic Region. It was written while I was a Visiting Scholar at Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge in 2007/08. I have received valuable comments as well as material from Bob Headland and Bernard Stonehouse for which I am very grateful.

industry mainly from the 1950s and 60s. Today, close to 40.000 tourists visit the Antarctic annually – mostly on cruise ships.

The paper reviews the historical development of these activities. The focus is on how the maritime heritage has been dealt with, and interpreted by, the tourists themselves and the tourist industry. One aspect is to analyze how the maritime heritage has been related to the other main attractions experienced by the Antarctic tourist, such as natural scenery, abundant wildlife and pristine environment. Given the historic over-exploitation of seals and whales there is potential for conflict between the wildlife attractions and specific aspects of the Antarctic heritage. The analysis will therefore focus on the possible ambiguity in how the maritime heritage itself has been interpreted. Concurrently, it was about brave adventurers and polar explorers. It was also about resource exploitation and commercial activities that are controversial among many Antarctic tourists today.

The paper is organised in the following way: Antarctic maritime history and heritage are defined and summarized (II). The development of Antarctic tourism is then reviewed (III). The two topics – Antarctic tourism and the maritime heritage – are brought together in the main section of the paper (IV). Aspects of the whaling heritage are dealt with in a separate section – Dealing with the controversial issues (V) before the final conclusions (VI).

## II. Antarctic Maritime History and Heritage

How should ‘maritime heritage’ be understood and defined? ‘Heritage’ may be defined narrowly or broadly. In some contexts it refers only to physical remains from previous generations; the historical buildings, sites, artefacts, ancient monuments – which remains a visible part of the history. In this paper I define heritage in the widest possible way, encompassing both the aspects of history that has been passed on to the present as well as

the physical remains.<sup>2</sup> In the context of Antarctica and tourism, this seems to be a natural approach. Both the physical remains and the history as such are fairly limited (at least compared to most other areas). The physical heritage in many ways is interwoven in the history. The physical aspects are also difficult to separate from the broader history when it comes to how the remains are presented, analyzed and interpreted for - and by - the tourists.

We will not go into a detailed description of the Antarctic maritime history. However, to put our topic into a proper context, we can summarize the main phases of the development, including the early discoveries and exploration, sealing, whaling, fisheries, scientific expeditions and tourism.<sup>3</sup>

The earliest human history in the region goes back to the seventeenth and eighteenth century when sailors gradually – by accident or on purpose – discovered the existence of the continent; the *Terra Australis*. These were voyages that penetrated south as well as circumnavigating the globe in the southern hemisphere and consequently discovered that there were islands and landmasses to the south. The voyages of Cook (1772-1775) and Kerguelen-Trémarec (1771-1774) may be said to conclude this first phase of exploration.<sup>4</sup>

The reports by Cook initiated the first exploitative industry in the Antarctic. Beginning in the 1780s, the following century may be termed the sealing period. Led by British and United States sealers, this developed into a substantial industry, characterized by large fluctuations in catches and several shifts in hunting grounds as seals (fur seals

---

<sup>2</sup> For a review of different heritage concepts as well as an argument for a wide approach, see D.C. Harvey, “Heritage pasts and heritage presents: temporality, meaning and the scope of heritage studies”, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 2001, p. 319ff.

<sup>3</sup> There is a large literature on Antarctic exploration and history. For the purpose of this paper, I rely on R.K. Headland, *Chronological List of Antarctic Expeditions and Related Events*, (Cambridge UP), Cambridge 1989. See also good overviews in A. Gurney, *Below the Convergence: Voyages towards Antarctica, 1699-1839*, (W.W. Norton), New York, 1997, A. Gurney, *The Race to the White Continent. Voyages to the Antarctic*, (W.W. Norton), New York 2000 and G.E. Fogg, *A History of Antarctic Science*, (Cambridge UP), Cambridge 1992. This section of the paper also relies on B.L. Basberg, “Perspectives on the Economic History of the Antarctic Region”, *International Journal of Maritime History*, XVIII, No. 2, 2006, where the Antarctic industries throughout history are reviewed.

<sup>4</sup> Headland, *op.cit.*, p. 26.

(*Arctocephalus sp.*) and elephant seals (*Mirounga leonina*) were almost exterminated in some areas – in an era totally lacking regulations.<sup>5</sup> A first peak in sealing occurred at South Georgia already before the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The next area to be exploited was the South Shetland Islands, discovered in 1819. In the next few years the sealers arrived in large numbers. In the peak season of 1821/22 probably as many as 100 vessels were operating throughout the islands. Then followed short bonanzas at other peri-Antarctic islands with peaks and collapses over the next decades, notably in the Crozet and Prince Edward Islands (1840s) and in Kerguelen and Heard Island (1850s). The South Shetlands and South Georgia experienced smaller peaks in sealing again in the 1870s. In the late nineteenth century the industry dwindled both because of over-exploitation and market conditions.

The fur seal populations recovered only gradually in the latter part of the twentieth century. The elephant seal populations were not reduced to the same extent and were hunted in limited numbers as an independent industry (Kerguelen) and jointly with whaling operations (at South Georgia) until the 1960s.

Some of the sealers made important discoveries along the Antarctic coast and have made their names into the history of Antarctic exploration (notably Smith, Weddell and Palmer). The first landings and the first winterings were made by sealers. Throughout the early and mid nineteenth century a number of national expeditions were sent out to explore the Antarctic (Bransfield, Biscoe, Bellinghausen, d'Urville, Wilkes, Ross). There were expeditions both in the 1870s and the 1880s -especially relating to the First International Polar Year, 1882-83. Then the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed a surge of scientific and exploration expeditions to the Antarctic. In particular,

---

<sup>5</sup> For reviews of the historical development of the Antarctic sealing industry, see Headland, op.cit., G. Deacon, *The Antarctic Circumpolar Ocean*, Cambridge 1984, B.C. Busch, *The War against Seals. A History of the North American Seal Fishery*, (McGill-Queen's UP), Kingston, ON 1985, A.G.E. Jones, "Voyages to South Georgia, 1795-1820", "British Sealing on New South Shetland" (Part I and II) and "The British Southern Whale and Seal Fisheries", *Polar Portraits. Collected Papers*, (Caedmon) Whitby 1992, M. Stevens, *Trade, Tactics and Territory. Britain in the Pacific 1783-1823*, (Melbourne UP) Melbourne 1983, A.B. Dickinson, *Seal Fisheries of the Falkland Islands and Dependencies. An Historical Review*, Research in Maritime History No. 34, St. John's, Newfoundland 2007, R. Burton, "History of Sealing", *Encyclopedia of Antarctica*, (Routledge) New York 2006, p. 875.

a major increase in activities occurred in the period from the 1890s and until the First World War – a period that is commonly known as The Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration. More than twenty expeditions, in addition to many relief missions, are recorded. In a context of maritime heritage and modern tourism, this is obviously the period that attracts most interest. The expeditions within this period were of various kinds. In the early 1890s, several expeditions from Norway and Scotland went south in the search of new whaling grounds (the *Jason* Expeditions, the *Antarctic* Expedition, the Dundee Expedition). Several expeditions explored new waters intending to penetrate as far south as possible (De Gerlache (*Belgica*), Borchgrevink (*Southern Cross*), Drygalski (*Gauss*), Nordenskjöld (*Antarctic*), Bruce (*Scotia*), Charcot (*Pourqui Pas*)). The geographical boundaries of the continent became much more established within this period. The most spectacular of the heroic age expeditions were, of course, the penetration of the continent itself from the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Scott's First Expedition (*Discovery*), Shackleton's expedition (*Nimrod*), Scott's Second Expedition (*Terra Nova*), Amundsen's Expedition (*Fram*), Mawson's Expedition (*Aurora*)). There were triumphs and tragedies that today represent the core of the Antarctic heritage. Although these expeditions focussed on the continent, the vessels were crucial elements of the whole expeditions, and they must therefore also be considered as part of the maritime heritage (see later). The end of the Heroic Age is usually associated with Shackleton's *Endurance* Expedition (1914-16) which also has become a main chapter of the heritage story – and thus, as we shall see, the attention of tourists today.

The next exploitative period is associated with the so called modern whaling.<sup>6</sup> Starting in 1904 at South Georgia, it developed into a major maritime industry. The nineteenth century global whaling had been mostly a United States industry. It had to some extent been operating around the peri-Antarctic islands, but its centres of activities were further north. The new industry, on the other hand, became a true Southern Ocean industry. For the first twenty years the whaling fleets operated around South Georgia and the South

---

<sup>6</sup> J.N. Tønnessen and A.O. Johnsen, *The History of Modern Whaling*, (Hurst & Co), London 1982.

Shetlands.<sup>7</sup> From the late 1920s, a dramatic shift occurred, initiated by technological developments (larger and more advanced factory ships), economic and political factors. While the operations at South Georgia mainly were based on shore stations, and the early South Shetland whaling used factory ships that were anchored in sheltered harbours, the new pelagic whaling operated independent of any land bases – in the Ross Sea and around the entire continent as far south as the ice-conditions permitted. Throughout the heydays of the industry – in the interwar years and until the early 1960s - thousands of whalers and hundreds of vessels annually operated in Antarctic waters. Although it led to sad consequences for the whale population, the industry is an important part of the Antarctic maritime heritage. One aspect of this is the fact that the whaling industry also had important links to the general exploration of the Antarctic. Even in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the continental coastline (and the continent itself) was not entirely mapped. The whalers themselves made many important discoveries as well as assisting logistically a number of scientific expeditions. The Norwegian *Norvegia*-expeditions between 1927 and 1931, are just one example.<sup>8</sup> The British Discovery Investigations, a long continued scientific program (1925-1951) was initiated by the needs for better understanding of the impact of the industry.<sup>9</sup> It represents a link between the whaling heritage and the heritage associated more narrowly with science and exploration.

The period after World War II may be considered a renewed era of scientific activity in the Antarctic. The first permanent stations were established during the war, and in the following years many more were set up throughout the continent. Especially the International Geophysical Year (1957-58) initiated research programmes involving twelve nations. 55 stations were established – the largest number ever.<sup>10</sup> Such activities are not strictly an aspect of the maritime heritage. However, given the geographical peculiarities, seaborne logistics has – as in the days of the pioneers – been a necessity.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> A recent account of this era; see I.B. Hart, *Whaling in the Falkland Islands Dependencies 1904-1931: A History of Shore and Bay-based Whaling in the Antarctic*, (Pequena), Newton St. Margarets 2006.

<sup>8</sup> B. Aagaard, *Fangst og forskning i Sydishavet*, Vol. 2, (Gyldendal) Oslo 1930, p. 491ff.

<sup>9</sup> Deacon, *op.cit.*, p. 63ff.

<sup>10</sup> G.E. Fogg, “History of Antarctic Science”, in B. Riffenburgh (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Antarctic*, (Routledge), New York, 2007, p. 485ff.

<sup>11</sup> Only in recent years has the construction of landing strips for aircrafts on the continent made ships less vital.

A large fleet of supply and research vessels (navy as well as civilian) has over the years navigated the difficult Southern Ocean and Antarctic waters and made their way into the maritime heritage.

The third and latest large scale exploitative maritime industry in the Antarctic is deep-sea fishing. The first commercial fisheries were organised by the whaling companies at South Georgia, but never really expanded there in the whaling period. It was not really considered a related business, and whaling in itself for most years generated a profit.<sup>12</sup> A real expansion started from the late 1960s led by Soviet trawlers. From the 1970s, fisheries gradually extended throughout the Southern Ocean and as far south as the South Shetlands and along some of the coasts of Antarctica. Several other nations entered the business, especially East Germany, Poland and Bulgaria. Japan and Chile also became active in these fisheries. Several different species have been targeted, especially the mackerel ice fish (*Champsocephalus gunnari*), Antarctic (*Dissostichus mawsoni*) and Patagonia toothfish (*Dissostichus eleginoides*) and krill (*Euphausia superba*). As with previous Antarctic industries, the control regimes in the early days were sparse, and over-exploitation and dramatically reduced stocks were the result. From 1982 a regulatory regime has been in place (CCAMLR) that to some extent has been able to regulate the industry. The Antarctic fishing industry today involves annually several hundred vessels and several thousand men, indicating a major activity.<sup>13</sup>

The last Antarctic maritime industry to be mentioned here is tourism. Tourism as an industry developed in the Antarctic from the late 1950s. Although there were organized tourist flights (or rather over-flights), this industry has primarily been based on cruise-ships. With a fifty year history, this industry has by itself become a part of the modern maritime heritage of the Antarctic. In the context of this paper, however, we will separate it from the earlier heritage because it is obviously not the heritage that the tourists

---

<sup>12</sup> For reviews of the development, see K-H. Kock, *Antarctic Fish and Fisheries*, Cambridge 1992 and D.J. Agnew, *Fishing South. The History and Management of South Georgia Fisheries*, St. Albans 2004.

<sup>13</sup> There are no reliable statistics on the size of the Antarctic fishing fleets. Kock, *op.cit.*, p. 208, refers to around 100 Soviet vessels already in 1990. Statistics on catches are collected by CCAMLR. For 2005/06 128081 tonnes (of which 106591 are krill) are reported within the convention area; see CCAMLR, *Statistical Bulletin*, Vol. 19 (1997-2006), Hobart, 2007, Table 2.

themselves have come to explore. We will review its development in a separate section of the paper.

Most Antarctic history and heritage have, as we have seen, maritime links which are also part of the maritime heritage – almost by necessity. Historically, nearly all exploration was ship based. This was, of course, also the case during the long period of discoveries of the continent itself. Even during the inland exploration and penetration and its climax with the attainment of the pole, the expedition vessels were crucial elements in the entire effort. It is no coincidence that the expeditions, despite their grand official names, are associated with their vessels; Scott's *Discovery* and *Terra Nova*, Amundsen's *Fram*. Shackleton's *Endurance* expedition is, of course, a special case. Although the plan was to traverse the continent, that part of the expedition never really started and eventually became the most famous *maritime* survival story in Antarctic history. Another aspect that deserves mentioning is that these three leaders of expeditions that were aiming at inland penetrations were all sea captains or officers (Scott – a navy captain, Shackleton and Amundsen – merchant marine officers), thus further strengthening the maritime aspects of their expeditions.

We will now turn to the aspects of the Antarctic maritime heritage that relates the physical remains. What remains are there today in the Antarctic region? Systematic surveys have been undertaken both on the continent and on the various peri-Antarctic islands, and the number of remains of various types are quite substantial. None of these surveys relates specifically to the *maritime* heritage, but the polar cultural heritage in general which are defined as “sites”.<sup>14</sup>

I distinguish the following types:

- Expedition huts
- Depots
- Scientific stations and bases

---

<sup>14</sup> S. Barr and P. Chaplin (eds.), *Cultural Heritage in the Arctic and Antarctic Regions*, (International Polar Heritage Committee of ICOMOS), Oslo 2004.



Whaling stations  
 Sealers and whalers sites  
 Cairns, graveyards, crosses, monuments, memorials  
 Anchorages  
 Shipwrecks  
 Lighthouses, beacons

The earliest human history of the Antarctic (the exploration of the seventeenth and eighteenth century) obviously left no physical remains because there were very few landings. The earliest remains date from the sealers of the early nineteenth century. Indeed, the sealers left numerous physical remains especially in the South Shetlands and throughout most of the other peri-Antarctic islands.

Within the Antarctic Treaty area as many as 80 sites are today designated as *Historic Sites and Monuments* (HSM).<sup>15</sup> They range from large sites (a former whaling station, scientific bases) to small busts, cairns or plaques, and are also, of course, varying in significance. There is no systematic overview of sites on all the peri-Antarctic islands, but that will altogether add up to much higher numbers. At South Georgia alone, about 80 sites are documented arriving mainly from the sealing and whaling activities there.<sup>16</sup>

Most historic sites are for obvious reasons land-based, but a large majority has strong maritime links.<sup>17</sup> Even the expedition huts relating the Heroic Age are often associated with vessels in the same way as the expeditions. The historic sites in the Ross Sea area are examples: Borchgrevink's Cape Adare Hut (*Southern Cross*), Scott's Discovery Hut at Hut Point (*Discovery*), Shackleton's Hut at Cape Royds (*Nimrod*), Scott's Hut at Cape Evans (*Terra Nova*) and Mawson's Hut at Cape Denison (*Aurora*).

---

<sup>15</sup> *Historic Sites and Monuments in Antarctica*, [www.polarheritage.com](http://www.polarheritage.com). See also P. Chaplin, "Antarctic Monuments and Sites", in Barr and Chaplin, *op.cit.*

<sup>16</sup> R.K. Headland, "Historic Sites on South Georgia. Evaluation and Protection", *Falkland Islands Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 2004, p. 110ff. K. Passfield and S. Poncet, *Report on the 2006-07 South Georgia Historic Sites Survey*, South Georgia Surveys Technical Report 07/1, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> There are a number of ship wrecks in the South Shetlands and at the peri-Antarctic islands. The restored vessels that form parts of the Antarctic heritage are without exception located in other places (*Fram* in Oslo, *Discovery* in Dundee, *James Caird* in London, *Southern Actor* in Sandefjord, *Grønland* in Bremerhaven, to mention some examples).

The former whaling shore stations, although distinctly shore based industrial plants (or rather communities), are also inseparable from maritime activities (the whale catching, the vessels, the ship repair yards etc.) and consequently a part of the maritime heritage.<sup>18</sup>

### III. Antarctic Tourism

While Arctic tourism originated and developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Antarctic tourism mainly belongs to the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although there were individual earlier visitors that may be defined as tourists, and also various plans for developing an industry, the beginning was really in the mid 1950s. In 1956 the first tourist over flight occurred. Two years later the first tourist cruise ship arrived.<sup>19</sup> However, for several years to come there was discontinuous activity, but from 1966 onwards cruise ships have visited annually. An Antarctic tourist industry gradually emerged.

The early development is closely associated with the Swedish-American travel entrepreneur Lars-Eric Lindblad. He organized the voyage in 1966. He also initiated the construction of a purpose built polar cruise vessel, the *Lindblad Explorer*, delivered from Uudenkaupungin Telakka in Finland in December 1969, “flying a ‘neutral’ Norwegian flag”.<sup>20</sup> It operated continuously in polar areas and other exotic waters around the globe until it foundered off the South Shetlands in November of 2007. The way Lindblad built

---

<sup>18</sup> The maritime links of these shore stations are discussed in B.L. Basberg, “A ship ashore? Organisation and living conditions at South Georgia whaling stations, 1904-1960”, *International Journal of Maritime History*, Vol. XIV, No. 1, 2002.

<sup>19</sup> Research on Antarctic tourism has developed for several years and resulted in publications that cover a wide range of aspects, including the historical development. See especially C.M. Hall and M.E. Johnston (eds.), *Polar Tourism. Tourism in the Arctic and Antarctic Regions*, (J. Wiley & Sons), Chichester 1995, T.G. Bauer, *Tourism in the Antarctic. Opportunities, Constraints, and Future Prospects*, (The Haworth Press), Binghamton (NY) 2001 and J. M. Snyder and B. Stonehouse (eds.), *Prospect for Polar Tourism*, (CABI) Oxon 2007. For more specific accounts of the historical development, see R.K. Headland, “Historical Development of Antarctic Tourism”, *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 21, No. 2-1994, J. Spletstoeser, D. Landau and R.K. Headland, “Tourism in the forbidden lands: The Antarctic experience”, in T.V. Singh (ed.), *New Horizons in Tourism: Strange Experiences and Strange Practices*, CAB International, 2004, B. Kolltveit, “Deckchair Explorers: The Origin and Development of Organised Tourist Voyages to North and South Polar Regions”, *International Journal of Maritime History*, Vol. 18, No. 2-2006, J.M. Snyder, “Pioneers of Polar Tourism and Their Legacy”, in Snyder and Stonehouse (eds.), *op.cit.*

<sup>20</sup> L-E. Lindblad (with J.G. Fuller), *Passport to Anywhere: The Story of Lars-Eric Lindblad*, New York 1983, p. 152. See also K. Shackleton, *Ship in the Wilderness. Voyages of the MS “Lindblad Explorer” through the last wild places on Earth*, London 1986.

and used the ship and organized the voyages in many ways became a model for Antarctic cruises until this day; the “Lindblad pattern”.<sup>21</sup> It consisted of a moderate sized vessel (50-100 passengers), expert guides with long experience from Antarctica, onboard lectures on topics ranging from science to history, landings in remote locations (giving the trip an exploration flavour) – and accommodation, food and beverage of high standards. The vessel was called an *expeditionary* cruise vessel. Links with the Antarctic maritime heritage were evident (see later).

The number of vessels and tourists increased in the mid 1970s, but then declined for several years. Again from the mid-1980s, there has been an almost continuous increase. The annual number of ship-borne tourists is now about 40.000.<sup>22</sup> In the 2006/07 season as many as 54 tourist ships (from large cruise ships to small sailing yachts) made registered visits to the Antarctic. A majority of the passengers travelled on about 30 cruise ships that made a number of roughly two weeks voyages on the main route between South American ports (typically Ushuaia (Argentina), Punta Arenas (Chile) and Stanley (Falkland Islands)) and the Antarctic Peninsula. Other popular destinations are the Ross Sea (from New Zealand or Tasmania) and some of the peri-Antarctic islands (South Georgia in particular). Only a few tourists come by plane (878 in 2004/05)<sup>23</sup>. A small and increasing group is the adventure tourists travelling in small sailing yachts or by plane to ski or climb mountains. So far, these visitors may feel that they are explorers or adventurers. When it comes to the cruise ships, however, we may today talk about an evolving mass tourism. Some of the vessels bring more than 1000 passengers aboard, and do not make landings.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> B. Stonehouse, “Tourism”, in *Encyclopedia of Antarctica*, Routledge, 2004, p. 1005.

<sup>22</sup> See Appendix A for summary statistics of the development. For annual data on early years, see D.J. Enzenbacher, “Tourists in Antarctica: Numbers and Trends”, *Polar Record*, Vol. 28, 1992. International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators (IAATO) publishes detailed statistics on several aspects of the industry. For the most recent development, see IAATO, *Antarctic Tourist Trends, 1992-2007*, [www.iaato.org](http://www.iaato.org).

<sup>23</sup> IAATO statistics. A very special niche of Antarctic tourism is the over-flights (no landings) taking place mainly from Australia and New Zealand. Annually 2-3000 passengers experience Antarctica in this way.

<sup>24</sup> In the 2006/07 season *Golden Princess* took 2425 passengers (and a crew of 1120) (IAATO statistics).

Where do the tourists come from? They comprise an international mix, but a majority come from the USA, UK and Germany – from wealthy countries where most global tourism still originate.<sup>25</sup> Cruise tourism as such is a special and expensive niche of the tourist industry, and Antarctic cruising again is a special and expensive niche of the cruise ship industry. Thus, the tourists themselves represent a special cohort. After surveying cruise ship passengers in the mid 1990s, Davis characterized the Antarctic cruise passenger as “between 64 and 75 years of age, travelling with a companion, highly educated, retired, and formerly in the field of business, medicine, teaching, science, office administration or travel/tourism”.<sup>26</sup> The trend for the last ten years or so, seems to be that the average age is going down (younger professionals), and the number of countries of origin is broadening somewhat.<sup>27</sup>

Since 1991 most of the industry has been guided by the International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators (IAATO), a volunteer member organization that makes guidelines, procedures and regulations for how activities should be conducted. Especially IAATO is concerned with guidelines relating environmental issues (pollution, behaviour relating the wildlife etc.). The guidelines also relate to the historic heritage to minimize adverse effects on the historic sites. Access to the sites is, in general, not restricted other than by the number of people allowed in each landing and by general behaviour guidelines. An important exception is the former whaling stations at South Georgia where entry has been banned due to their derelict state and the presence of hazardous materials (see later).

This leads us to our next issue; the relationship between tourism and the maritime heritage in a wider context.

#### IV. Antarctic Tourism and the Maritime Heritage

<sup>25</sup> E. Bertram, “Antarctic Ship-borne Tourism: an Expanding Industry”, in Snyder and Stonehouse, *op.cit.*, p. 162, and Bauer, *op.cit.*, p. 141 ff. See also IAATO annual statistics.

<sup>26</sup> B. Davis, *Wilderness Visitor Management and Antarctic Tourism*, (unpubl. PhD thesis), University of Cambridge 1995, p. 106.

<sup>27</sup> In the 2006/07 season the origin of the landed passengers from the major nations were as follows: USA (32.8%), UK (15.3%) and Germany (13.8%). That adds to almost 62% of the total – the same as in 1994/95. So, the cohort is still quite homogenous. IAATO publishes no data on passenger age.

What do the tourists see and learn when they visit the Antarctic on a cruise ship? In what ways are they exposed to the maritime history and heritage? To a large extent the maritime heritage is inseparable from the total experience. The waters the tourists are sailing through more often than not are named after the explores and are typically dealt with in guidebooks and onboard lectures (*Drake Passage, Ross Sea, Weddell Sea, Bransfield Strait, Gerlache Strait, Lemaire Channel* etc.). Then the cruise ships call on a large number of landing sites. In 2006/07 as many as 192 sites are recorded only on the continent, mainly on the peninsula.<sup>28</sup> Sites on the peri-Antarctic islands add significantly to this number. Since most of them are characterized by sheltered harbours and good anchorages, many were used by the explorers, the sealers and the whalers. Consequently they have a maritime history and many are named by the original users or to commemorate them. Often there are physical remains. So, although the main purpose of the landing may be to have a closer look at a penguin rookery or the general scenery, the heritage is unavoidable.

In Appendix B the most popular visitor sites (more than 5000 visitors annually in 2006/07) are listed. They are also classified according to three site characteristics indicating if the site can be associated with (1) History and Exploration, (2) Sealing and Whaling and / or (3) Wildlife and Scenery. As we can see, all the sites had a scenery or wildlife attraction (typically a seal or penguin colony combined with spectacular mountains and glacier / ice sceneries). However, a large majority are also associated with the history of exploration and science or the former sealing and whaling industries.<sup>29</sup>

In many cruise programs the historical and heritage links are made explicit. Especially Shackleton's *Endurance* expedition (1914-16) is widely referred to. In Snyder's words; "The heroic legacy of Shackleton's expedition remains a potent force in the history of Antarctic tourism.....[His] continued popularity is evident in the design of tourist

---

<sup>28</sup> IAATO statistics.

<sup>29</sup> One indication of the historical significance of the tourist landing sites are found in J. Hughes and B. Davis, "Management of Tourism at Historic Sites and Monuments", in Hall and Johnston (eds.), *op.cit.* In Table 14.1 they list more than 50 such sites ("Cultural resources attracting significant tourist numbers in Antarctica and sub-Antarctic islands").

itineraries, promotional campaigns and sale of Antarctic tours,...”<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the last voyage of the *Explorer* (former *Lindblad Explorer*) had been promoted as the ‘Spirit of Shackleton’. The participants obviously came much closer to the original experience than anyone had foreseen.

Cruise programmes and catalogues give abundant evidence to the strong association with the Antarctic heritage. In general, such catalogues are promoting the Antarctic in very similar ways and they all focus on how this region differs from other places. Expressions like “pristine”, “unique”, “extreme”, “isolated”, “remote”, “unspoiled”, “frontier”, “discovery” and “exploration” are repeatedly interwoven in any presentation. The unique sceneries and wildlife are always in the forefront in text as well as photos, but references to the history and exploration are also highly visible. Typically, the passengers are invited to follow in the footsteps of the great explorers and share their experiences. The Norwegian Hurtigruten Group is one example. You are invited to join “an exclusive group of intrepid travellers inspired by the legacy of Antarctic exploration” and “follow in the wake of Antarctic explorers”.<sup>31</sup> Noble Caledonia promotes their cruise program “Great Antarctic Explorers. Discovery the Far South” in the following way:

“In the spirit of Amundsen, join *Kapitan Khlebnikov* as she tries to push further south than any ship has gone before. From the vast ice shelf that thwarted Captain Ross, to the hauntingly empty huts of Scott and Shackleton, to Borchgrevink’s first winter camp among the penguins of Cape Adare, this voyage celebrates heroic explorers not as names on a map but fellow travellers who might reappear any moment pulling sleds across the ice.”<sup>32</sup>

Voyages of Discovery put it this way: “Embark of a peerless adventure that pays homage to the heroic explorers of the past.”<sup>33</sup> Society Expeditions invites to “Join us as we discover *Terra Australis Incognita*,...”.<sup>34</sup> No less.

---

<sup>30</sup> J.M. Snyder, “Pioneers of Polar Tourism and Their Legacy”, in Snyder and Stonehouse (eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 28. This “Shackletonmania” has even had wider implications. There is now a management literature focusing on the lessons we can learn from his leadership; see D.N.T. Perkins, *Leading at the Edge. Leadership Lessons from the Extraordinary Saga of Shackleton’s Antarctic Expedition*, (Amacon), New York 2000.

<sup>31</sup> Hurtigruten Group, Program, January 2008 – May 2009.

<sup>32</sup> Noble Caledonia Ltd., Antarctica (2006-2007).

<sup>33</sup> Voyages of Discovery, Antarctica (2007-2008).

<sup>34</sup> Society Expeditions, Program, 1989-1991.

The relationship between tourism and the maritime heritage may be examined also in many other ways. One is to study the guidebooks and analyze how the maritime heritage is dealt with. How is it treated compared to other aspects (the wildlife, the scenery, other aspects of the human history)? The general impression after analyzing this literature – and there are quite a few guidebooks that have been published throughout the last twenty years or so – is that the human history, and the maritime history in particular, is very much in the forefront of the presentations.<sup>35</sup> There are, of course, specialized guidebooks on Antarctic birds, other wildlife and flora, but the general Antarctic guidebooks, to my knowledge, have without exception substantial historical sections. In this way they resemble other tourist guidebooks. Such books represent a genre, and the Antarctic ones are not exceptional. The way the history is presented usually also follows a certain “recipe” with typical ingredients like “History and Exploration”, “The Heroic Age”, “The Sealers and Whalers” and “Scientific Expeditions” etc.

How do the tourists themselves look at the history and the maritime heritage as part of their polar experience? Especially from the 1990s, when the Antarctic tourist industry grew rapidly and there were increased focus and concern about its future, research on the industry also intensified. It emphasized management guidelines and nature impact studies, to a lesser extent the motivations and experiences of the tourists.<sup>36</sup> A few studies, however, have been conducted by way of questionnaire surveys undertaken onboard visiting cruise ships.

---

<sup>35</sup> These observations are not based on a complete review of such guidebooks, but a sample which should represent the genre; K. Crosbie, *Antarctica. Expedition Notebook*, Abercrombie & Kent 2002, R. Naveen, *The Oceanites Sites Guide to the Antarctic Peninsula*, (Oceanites Inc.) Chevy Chase (MD) 1997, J. Rubin (ed.), *Antarctica Travel Guide*, (Lonely Planet Publ.), 3 ed., 2005, anon., *Handbook to Polar Travelers – Antarctica*, (Hapag-Lloyd Kreuzfahrten), Hamburg 1998, C. Reinhe-Kunze, *Maritimer Reiseführer – Antarktis*, (Koehler) Hamburg 1997, S. Wheeler, *Antarctica. The Falklands & South Georgia*, (Cadogan Guides), London 1997, S. Chester and J. Oetzel, *South to Antarctica. A Handbook for Antarctic Travelers*, (Wandering Albatros), San Mateo (CA) 1995, B. Stonehouse, *The Last Continent. Discovering Antarctica*, SCP Books, Norfolk 2000, S. Poncet and K. Crosbie, *A Visitor's Guide to South Georgia*, (Wild Guides Ltd.), London 2005.

<sup>36</sup> B. Stonehouse and K. Crosbie, “Antarctic Tourism Research: The First Half-Century”, in Snyder and Stonehouse (eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 219.

Davis surveyed more than 600 passengers on five cruises to the Antarctic Peninsula and the Ross Sea in 1993/94.<sup>37</sup> On the question ‘Why are you visiting Antarctica?’ the answers (to given alternatives) were the following:

I am interested in polar regions	60%
I am a nature lover	66
This is my 7 <sup>th</sup> continent	27
I am accompanying my travel partner	22
I have visited the Arctic	28
My interest is in photography and filming	27
I enjoy seeing new places	79

The answers do not focus specifically on historical interests, but such interests are presumably included in the wide category that reflects a substantial interest in the polar regions (60%). On another question asking about pre-voyage preparations, 90% of the passengers responded that they had read books about Antarctica. 77% of them had read on Antarctic exploration.<sup>38</sup>

Such results should come as no surprise considering the social background of the tourists. As we described earlier, the typical Antarctic visitor are older, retired couples with a professional background. They have characteristics that “do not reflect a casual tourist population driven simply by curiosity”.<sup>39</sup>

A survey by Bauer was undertaken during two Antarctic seasons in the mid-1990s. It gives a somewhat different impression of the tourist interests. He asked cruise-ship passengers before and after their voyages about their motivations and what aspects of the experiences they mostly enjoyed.<sup>40</sup> The responses and samples were quite limited (three vessels and a total of 297 responses), but should nevertheless give an interesting indication of tourist views. Bauer did not ask the passengers about the maritime heritage

---

<sup>37</sup> Davis, *op.cit.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113 ff. The other topics of the pre-voyage reading were Wildlife (80%), Geology and Glaciers (49%), Wildlife photography (33%) and Science (47%).

<sup>39</sup> G. Cessford and P.R. Dingwall, “Research on shipborne tourism to the Ross Sea Region and New Zealand sub-Antarctic islands”, *Polar Record*, vol. 34, No. 189 – 1998, p. 102.

<sup>40</sup> Bauer, *op.cit.*, Chapter 6, Antarctic Tourists: Motivation, Expectations, and Images of Antarctica As a Tourist Destination, p. 141ff.



in particular, but about “History”, “Historic sites” and “Historic exploration” – which indeed include the maritime aspects. He asked them about their motivation for undertaking a voyage, their images of Antarctica as a tourist destination prior to arrival, their main interest while ashore, their impressions after their visit, and finally what shore activities they most enjoyed. The answers to the questionnaires are all very clear relating the historical aspects. While the wildlife and the natural scenery were appreciated by a large majority of the visitors, only 1-4% of the visitors listed history as an important factor. Below we have included one of the questionnaires as an example to give an indication of the different motivation factors the tourists were asked to consider. A question about the “Main interest while being ashore” had the following answers:<sup>41</sup>

Wildlife	56%
Scenery	11
Take photographs	11
Ice features	6
Flora	3
Historic sites	1
Scientific stations	1
Everything	3
Just being there	3
All else	3
No response	1

Summarizing his results, the historic sites, scientific bases and flora are mentioned by very few, while the fauna (in particular the penguins) and the scenic features including the ice rated high.<sup>42</sup>

Comparing the typical guidebooks with the results of Bauer’s survey shows a striking discrepancy. While Bauer concludes that “historic features were (...) only of minor importance”, the guidebooks typically have a broad coverage of the history.<sup>43</sup> The reasons for such differences may be several. One is the mentioned “recipe” style of the books. Another is the difference in interests between the average tourist (typically a

---

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, Table 6.9., p. 157.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>43</sup> Bauer, *op.cit.* p. 155.

debutant in Antarctica) and the guidebook author. The interest in the history may come with experience after the curiosity for the penguins has waned.

One reason for the extremely low score on historic sites in Bauer's survey must, however, also have to do with his method and the way the questionnaire was organized. The scores add up to 100%. Consequently, the respondents have only been allowed to indicate *one* interest as their main one. If a respondent had the heritage as a side interest, it is not reflected in the results. Other surveys allow several answers (i.e. indicating several reasons for the visit) and the history then appears as a more prominent motive for the tourists. However, a valid conclusion is probably that the history *is not* the prime motivation for Antarctic tourists. This view is also confirmed in other studies – even at cruises that were explicitly dedicated to history. Hughes studied one such cruise in the Ross Sea area visiting five historic sites. She concluded that most visitors were interested in the wildlife and “[I]nterest in visiting historic huts featured in many discussions and is perhaps the dominant secondary interest of most passengers”.<sup>44</sup>

Two studies from the Arctic – which in this case should be quite comparable – further confirm this thesis. They indicate that scenery and wildlife are the most important reasons for the voyage (more than 60% of the respondents) while history (and native culture) is indicated by more than 30%.<sup>45</sup>

## V. Dealing with the controversial issues

How is the whaling history and heritage dealt with in the context of Antarctic tourism? This issue relates primarily South Georgia, but also the South Shetlands with Deception Island in particular. The general guidebooks without exception deal with it, by and large

---

<sup>44</sup> J. Hughes, “Antarctic Historic Sites. The Tourism Implications”, *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 21. No. 2, 1994, p. 284.

<sup>45</sup> J. March and S. Staple, “Cruise Tourism in the Canadian Arctic and its Implications” (referring a survey in 1993 on board *Kapitan Klebnikov* on a Northwest Passage journey) and M.E. Johnston and D. Madunic, “Waste Disposal and the Wilderness in the Yukon Territory, Canada” (referring a survey of visitors in Yukon in 1992), both in Hall and Johnsen (eds.), *op.cit.*

in a very descriptive, “neutral” way avoiding political or controversial statements. The same is typically the case in cruise-programmes. The whaling history and the remains are usually mentioned in the itineraries, but downplayed rather than highlighted.

How the whaling heritage at South Georgia has been dealt with in relation to the tourists is an interesting case. The wildlife at South Georgia is unique, and descriptions like the Serengeti or Galapagos of the Southern Ocean are often heard – and is reflected in guidebooks as well as cruise programmes. However, although the island has penguins, other birds, seals and dramatic wilderness enough to attract the most blasé tourist, the whaling heritage, manifested in the abandoned whaling stations, adds decisively to the islands uniqueness. The “problem” is that they represent an industry that many tourists dislike. A majority of the remains are also very derelict and has for many years been considered as scrap rather than cultural heritage.<sup>46</sup> Society Expeditions in their 1989-91 catalogue probably reflect a common attitude within the industry and among the tourists themselves:

“From the pier where we dock, step into a moment out of time. Grytviken, a once bustling outpost, stands today as a whaler’s ghost town. Wrecks litter the harbour. Huge boiling vats rest silent near the beach. The wind whistles through artefacts laying exactly where the whalers left them. The entire settlement chronicles an era that is, thankfully, every day more distant”.<sup>47</sup>

The fact that the whaling stations, as we have mentioned earlier, have been closed for visitors since 1999 because of asbestos and other hazards, have added to the adverse feelings. Nevertheless, “[T]oday the abandoned whaling stations at Grytviken and Stromness form an important component of the tourism product in South Georgia”.<sup>48</sup>

Most tourists encounter the former whaling industry in Grytviken. All cruise ships go there. This is required because it is the port of entry. Grytviken is now also the only former whaling station where the tourists are allowed to enter since a major environmental clean-up there a few years ago. Furthermore, Grytviken has the only

---

<sup>46</sup> This is dealt with in more detail in B.L. Basberg, *The Shore Whaling Stations at South Georgia. A Study in Antarctic Industrial Archaeology*, Oslo 2004.

<sup>47</sup> Society Expeditions, *Program 1989-1991*, p. B 13.

<sup>48</sup> Bauer, *op.cit.*, p. 61.

church at the island and a small museum, established in 1990 as The South Georgia Whaling Museum.

Writing on Grytviken in his guidebook, Stonehouse reflects the ambiguity, but a somewhat more positive attitude, to the whaling heritage:

“Ashore visitors may spend an agreeable half-day wandering through the abandoned whaling station and visiting the restored manager’s villa, which has been converted to a museum. (...) If you regard all whalers as thugs and the whaling as the ultimate evil you will probably not be interested. However, here was practiced – under great difficulty and with much ingenuity – an industry that was honored in its time, employed many honest, hardworking folk (and probably a few rogues) and provided commodities that, for five or six decades, the world badly needed and was glad to accept”.<sup>49</sup> However, realizing that the main tourist interests point in other directions, he continues: “South Georgia’s other abandoned whaling stations have a lot to offer the industrial archaeologist, but are of limited interest to lesser mortals who have seen and absorbed Grytviken”.<sup>50</sup>

The main attraction relating to maritime heritage at South Georgia today is not the former whaling industry, but the Shackleton legacy. His grave in the Grytviken cemetery is a must-see and highlighted in most cruise-programmes: “Visit Shackleton’s grave and drink a toast”.<sup>51</sup> Stromness Harbour where the epic 1916 voyage successfully ended, is also a major point of interest. The fact that the museum has changed its name to South Georgia Museum and now has broader exhibits on the general history of the exploration of the island, probably corresponds to the interests of most tourists.<sup>52</sup> It is also an interesting example of how the heritage is something that may be created to celebrate the past while other aspects of history, although important, may be downplayed.<sup>53</sup> The Antarctic maritime heritage at large, with its conspicuous focus on heroes and explorers, offers abundant evidence of such biases.

---

<sup>49</sup> B. Stonehouse, *The Last Continent. Discovering Antarctica*, SCP Books, Norfolk 2000, p. 97.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>51</sup> Noble Caledonia, *Antarctica 2008-2009*.

<sup>52</sup> Basberg, *op.cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>53</sup> Such possible distinctions between ‘history’ and ‘heritage’ are made by D. Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, London (Viking) 1996. For a specific analysis of maritime history and heritage in this context, see A. Day and K. Lun, “British Maritime Heritage: carried along by the currents?”, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 4, 2003, p. 289ff.

## VI. Conclusions

The paper has defined and reviewed the Antarctic maritime history and heritage, and described the historic development of Antarctic tourism. The main focus has been to bring the two topics together – to analyze the role played by the maritime heritage in the Antarctic tourist experience. We have examined guidebooks, cruise programs, landing-sites as well as surveys of tourist attitudes.

Our main conclusion is that the history and the polar heritage *together* with and *integrated* with the focus on wildlife and nature seem to have been the main model for the “education” of the Antarctic tourist right from the start. Indeed, it can be traced back to the previously mentioned Lindblad model, or philosophy, of cruises with its focus on highly qualified lecturers covering a broad spectrum of topics – including history. In his study of polar tourism and its legacy, Snyder concludes that “[T]he features that uniquely characterize the polar tourism experience remain steadfastly rooted in two centuries of history”.<sup>54</sup> This is a very valid conclusion, indeed, and will also apply to the more narrowly defined maritime history.

When it comes to the so called controversial issues, the history and heritage of sealing and especially whaling, there is an obvious ambiguity in how they are dealt with. However, although this heritage tends to be downplayed rather than highlighted, it is still presented as an integrated part of the heritage and thus a part of the tourism experience.

What will be the future for Antarctic tourism? Whether it will further expand, and the rate of a possible expansion, depend on many factors. The industry is sensitive to economic and political factors worldwide. It is also operating within a geographical area with a high focus on environmental issues and control that eventually will lead to restrictions in total activities as well as in landings.<sup>55</sup> Accidents that lead to oil spills and adverse

---

<sup>54</sup> J.M. Snyder, “Pioneers of Polar Tourism and Their Legacy”, in Snyder and Stonehouse (eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>55</sup> For discussions on future prospects and concerns, see D. Landau and J. Splettstoesser, “Antarctic Tourism: What are the Limits?”, in Snyder and Stonehouse, *op.cit.*, p. 197ff., and also K. Bastmeijer and R.

environmental consequences have, so far, occurred very rarely and with minor effects. If the converse happens, the industry will face major challenges.

A further expansion of the industry will also change the Antarctic tourists themselves. A higher proportion of the “casual tourist”<sup>56</sup> may very likely be the consequence. It is difficult to predict if this will mean anything for the average interest in the heritage and history. It is also difficult to foresee what increased regulations will lead to in this context, other than the obvious consequence that some historic sites might be less available. Undoubtedly, the fascination in the polar heritage, the maritime as well as the general, will continue.

---

Roura, “Regulating Antarctic Tourism and the Precautionary Principle”, *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 98, No. 4, 2004, p. 763ff

<sup>56</sup> Chessford and Dingwall, *op.cit.*

Appendix A  
Summary seaborne tourist statistics

<i>Season</i>	<i>Seaborne tourists landed</i>	<i>Seaborne tourists non- landing</i>	<i>Tourist ships</i>	<i>Voyages</i>
1969/70	972	-	n.d.	n.d.
1974/75	3644	-	n.d.	n.d.
1979/80	855	-	n.d.	n.d.
1984/85	544	-	n.d.	n.d.
1989/90	2460	-	n.d.	n.d.
1994/95	8098	-	14	93
1999/00	16430	936	22	153
2004/05	22294	5027	52	207

*Sources:* For 1969-1990: D.J. Enzenbacher, "Tourists in Antarctica: Numbers and Trends", *Polar Record*, Vol. 28, 1992. For 1994-2005: D. Landau and J. Spletstoesser, "Antarctic Tourism: What are the Limits?", in J. M. Snyder and B. Stonehouse (eds.), *Prospects for Polar Tourism*, (CABI) Oxon 2007.

## Appendix B

Antarctic tourist visitor sites and site characteristics.

Sites with more than 5000 visitors in the 2006-07 season.

Landed and non-landed at the Peninsula and Continental sites.

<i>Site</i>	<i>Visitors</i>	<i>History and Exploration</i>	<i>Sealing and Whaling</i>	<i>Wildlife and Scenery</i>
Lemaire Channel*	20732	V	V	V
Cuverville Island	15607	V	V	V
Whalers Bay	15347	V	V	V
Goudier Island (Port Lockroy)	15266	V	V	V
Half Moon Island	13281	V	V	V
Neko Harbour	13107	V	V	V
Petermann Island	11241	V		V
Paradise Bay	10630	V	V	V
Neumayer Channel*	10441	V	V	V
Deception Island	10320	V	V	V
Almirante Brown	9314	V		V
Jougla Point	8927			V
Elephant Island	7737	V	V	V
Brown Bluff	7434			V
Aitcho Islands	6362		V	V
Pléneau Island	6258	V		V
Antarctic Sound*	6082	V		V
Skontorp Cove	5602		V	V
Paulet Island	5561	V		V
Waterboat Point	5318	V	V	V
Admiralty Bay	5167	V	V	V
Wilhelmina Bay	5088	V		V
Gerlache Strait*	5054	V	V	V

*Source:* IAATO Statistics for location and visitor numbers. The classification in site characteristics is done by the author.

*Note:* \* Non-landed sites