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SOUTH GEORGIA

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PETE and ANNIE HILL



The RCC Pilotage Foundation is grateful to Pete and Annie Hill for allowing us to publish their notes, arising from their cruise to South Georgia in their junk rigged yacht 'Badger', for the information and benefit of others. Any skipper tempted to cruise these waters should note their advice and cautions and only attempt the voyage in a well found vessel with a strong crew. They must be totally self contained and physically and mentally strong enough to cope with the fast changing conditions and the harsh environment. The rewards may be immense but the challenges are great – attention is drawn to the Caution below.

Readers are also referred to 'South Georgia Guide' by Andy O'Grady and Ulla Norlander. Along with other information about the South Atlantic, this may be found on www.rccpf.org.uk

Caution

These notes have been prepared by the authors on the basis of the information they have been able to obtain in the course of their visit to the areas described. In particular, soundings shown reflect the route taken by the authors and the absence of soundings does not indicate that depths are necessarily safe. The notes are in no way comprehensive and refer only to the conditions encountered at the time of the visit. Any plans are simply sketches and do not represent the results of a survey of the places referred to. They should be used with extreme caution. The RCC Pilotage Foundation and the authors has published these notes in the hope that they may be of some help to mariners but the safety of a vessel depends ultimately on the judgment of the skipper who should assess all information, published or unpublished.

To the extent permitted by law, the RCC Pilotage Foundation and the authors do not accept liability for any loss and/or damage howsoever caused that may arise from reliance on information contained in these pages.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

King Edward Cove
Cumberland West Bay
 Maiviken
 Carlita Bay
 Jason Harbour
 Allen Bay
Stromness Bay
 Husvik Harbour
 Stromness Harbour
 Leith Harbour
 Grass Island
 Cape Saunders Bay
Hercules Bay
Fortuna Bay
 Whistle Cove
 Small Bay
 Anchorage Bay
 Illusion Cove
Blue Whale Harbour
Cook Bay
 Elephant Lagoon
Prince Olav Harbour
Bay of Islands
 Beckman Fjord
 Prion Island
 Albatross Island
 Salisbury Plain
 Jock Cove
 Camp Bay
 Rosita Harbour
 Koppervik
Sitka Bay

Right Whale Bay
 Barber Cove
 Cairns Cove
Elsehul
Bird Island
 Bird Sound
 Jordan Cove
SW Corner of South Georgia
 Undine Harbour
 Coal Harbour
 Wilson Harbour
 Saddle Island Passage
 Ken Pounder Bay
 Cheapman Bay
 King Haakon Bay
Ebensen Bay
Larsen Harbour
Parece Buena Cove
Cooper Sound
 Cooper Bay
 The Lagoon
 Inner Bay
Wirik Bay
Gold Harbour
Bjornstadt
Moltke Harbour
Harcourt Island
St Andrew's Bay
Ocean Harbour
Godthul
Cobbler's Cove

INTRODUCTION

The following notes were made during a cruise to the islands in the summer of 1994-95.

It is hoped that their compilation will make more information available than is contained in *The Antarctic Pilot*, which will be of use to other Members in planning a cruise.

The danger of making such information available is that it does encourage people to go to these places themselves. This is all well and good, provided that they appreciate that conditions in the Southern Ocean can be extreme. Gerry Clark's book, *The TOTORORE Voyage* provides some very sobering accounts of how bad it can be and no-one should venture down to this area without first reading this book. Any yachtsmen sailing in these waters must be totally self-sufficient and prepared to extricate themselves from any eventuality. There are no rescue services and help should neither be sought nor expected from any of the few scientific bases. It should be remembered that it is impossible to replenish either stores or fuel.

As well as being meticulously prepared for sailing in these latitudes, a yacht's ground tackle must be heavy and reliable. Hurricane force winds in apparently sheltered anchorages are not uncommon and adequate ground tackle that will cope with these conditions, should be carried. This will mean that the anchors and chain will seem ridiculously oversized. Your life may well depend on it.

Weather conditions can change with extreme rapidity and a barograph is an enormously useful aid to weather forecasting.

The accuracy of available charts should not be relied upon. A number of rocks and shoals are unmarked and there are also large discrepancies in many areas between the position as indicated and that obtained by GPS.

The sketch charts included in these notes are just that. While I have tried to make them as accurate as possible, they should be treated with caution. In anticipation of the metrication of the relevant charts, soundings are given in metres, to an approximate mean low water springs level. Heights are also in metres.

Of necessity, *Badger* features in nearly all the photographs of anchorages. Not only does this show where we anchored, but it also gives a scale to the picture.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following people for the help that they extended to us: Tim and Pauline Carr. Pat and Sarah Lurcock, Rick, skipper of the *Abel-J*, Russ Manning, Sally and Jérôme Poncet.

Suggested Reading

The <i>Totorore</i> Voyage	Gerry Clark	ISBN 0-7126-2438-4
The Antarctic Pilot	H M Admiralty	
Southern Ocean Cruising	Sally & Jérôme Poncet	
The Island of South Georgia	R Headland	ISBN 0-521-42474-7
Log Book for Grace	Robert Murphy	
Seabirds	Peter Harrison	ISBN 0-395-33253-2
Wildlife of the Falkland		
Islands and South Georgia	Ian J Strange	ISBN 0-00-219839-8
The Great Antarctic Rescue	Frank A Worsley	
<i>Ice Bird</i>	David Lewis	ISBN 0-00-211737-1
<i>Mischief Goes South</i>	H W Tilman	ISBN 0-906371-22-8

Various articles on South Georgia by Tim and Pauline Carr, featured in *Yachting Monthly*, *Yachting World* and *Cruising World*, 1994-95

SOUTH GEORGIA

The island of South Georgia lies between latitudes 53°56'S and 54°55'S and longitudes 34°45'W and 38°15'W. It is very mountainous, with over half its area covered in ice and snow all the year round. The island lies within the Antarctic Convergence which accounts for the severity of the weather. South Georgia is a British Possession.

The island was first sighted by Antoine de la Roche, a London merchant, in 1675, but the first landing and exploration was carried out by Captain James Cook on his second voyage of discovery in 1775.

The first exploitation of the island was in the period of 1786-1802, when sealing was carried out to such an extent that stocks became too depleted to make the continued hunting of Fur seals viable. The next period of exploitation was whaling, which was carried out from 1904 until 1966; again this was discontinued when the animals were almost wiped out.

In 1982, South Georgia was invaded by Argentina at the start of the Falklands Conflict, but was retaken a few weeks later. Since then a garrison has been maintained at Grytviken but in 1995 this is being reduced to a minimum.

Administration

The post of Commissioner for South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands is usually held by the Governor of the Falkland Islands, although they are administered separately. Before visiting South Georgia permission should first be obtained from the Commissioner by writing to him enclosing a rough itinerary and basic details of the boat and crew:

The Commissioner for South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands
Government House
Stanley
Falkland Islands
South Atlantic
via London

There is generally no problem for a cruising yacht. If you are unable to apply in advance, then the boat should proceed directly to King Edward Point, where permission to cruise the island may be sought through the Marine Officer.

There is an entry 'fine' of £44, payable to the Marine Officer on arrival. An English cheque was accepted in payment.

Google Earth

These notes are based on charts. Google Earth provides a satellite overview of the island, and additional photographs.

Anchorage

The jagged nature of the terrain causes much turbulence when the wind reaches gale force and this can produce up to hurricane force williwaws, even in an apparently snug harbour. In the following notes, any reference to shelter refers to the protection given from the sea. Few anchorages are free from violent squalls under certain conditions.

The best weather is to be found on the NE coast between Cooper Sound and the Bay of Islands. The NW and SE tips of the island suffer from a greater amount of overcast and the weather is generally unsettled. The SW coast is open to the prevailing winds and is very exposed with few good anchorages - this coast should be treated with the greatest respect.

Pilot and Charts

South Georgia is covered in the Antarctic Pilot, published by H M Admiralty. The following charts are also available from the Admiralty:

Chart No 3596 General Chart

Chart No 3597 The Island

Chart No 3589 Cumberland Bays, Stromness Bay and Harbour charts Chart No 3585 Bay of Islands and Harbour charts

Chart No 3592 Willis Island, Bird Island and Harbour charts

Fur Seals

The Fur seal population has increased dramatically in the last few years and is now believed to be back to its pre-sealing levels on the Island, Because of this, many of the beaches are packed with Fur seals which can make trips ashore difficult. The worst time is the breeding season, October to early January, when they are particularly aggressive. Unless you have previous experience, your first trips ashore can be alarming.

From our experience, a bodger (a stick of at least four feet) should be carried by each person - a boathook, or an oar for example. Fur seals will often make what appears to be an attack, but pointing the bodger at them usually halts them and a light tap under the chin will deter the more persistent. Fur seals will also be found amazingly far up the hills in tussac grass, so be careful not to trip over one accidentally, as you will both get a fright.

For your first visit ashore, plan to go for only a short while, to get used to the seals. After a time you will become more blase and experienced people hardly bother about them at all. After the breeding season, they become much less aggressive, but are still very inquisitive.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Specially Protected Area

There two SSSIs and one SPA in South Georgia, ie Bird and Annenkov Island and Cooper Island. Full details of these areas will be found in Sally and Jerome Poncet's booklet, Southern Ocean Cruising.

Bases

There are two bases maintained by BAS. Bird Island has a year-round base with three people overwintering and as many as eight people there during the summer. The other site is at Husvik Harbour and is a summer-only base of four people.

KING EDWARD COVE

54° 16'S 36° 30'W

Chart 3589, Plan of King Edward Cove

King Edward Cove is in Cumberland East Bay, about half way along the NE coast of South Georgia. The administrative centre and garrison are housed at King Edward Point at the entrance to the cove. At the head of the bay is the disused whaling station of Grytviken.

Yachts normally berth at Grytviken alongside one of the wooden docks. Which are in a poor state of repair. The best place however, is alongside the old whale catcher, *Petrol*, at the S end of the whaling station, which, in the summer of 1994-1995 was holed and resting on the bottom. This berth has been used by Tim and Pauline Carr on *Curlew* for several years, summer and winter. Tie up alongside with the bow facing offshore and take a breast line ashore to the wooden jetty to the N. This will enable you to haul off *Petrel* in the case of an E wind and to ride out a blow in relative comfort. There is a depth of 3m, amidships, alongside *Petrel*.

The second choice is to tie up in the bight of the old plan, between the two piers and alongside the N one. Tie up facing E (offshore) and take a breast rope ashore to the S jetty (in poor condition), again to enable you to pull off in an E wind.

A third option is to tie up alongside either of the two wooden docks which have approximately 3m depth. It is advisable to set an anchor offshore, either to pull the boat off the pier in an E'ly or to assist in leaving the jetty in an E blow when it may well be untenable alongside.

The dock at King Edward Point has a depth alongside of 6m, but it is inadvisable to remain there except in settled weather. Even with a wind out of the E, the swell makes it uncomfortable for a yacht. During E'ly winds, a sheltered anchorage will be found in the bight of King Edward Point, in a depth of 8m, clear of the kelp.

Being the administrative centre of the island, King Edward Cove should be the first stop in South Georgia. The Marine Officer will call once the boat is secured and deal with the formalities.

There is a very good whaling museum in the old Manager's House at Grytviken. It has a small shop selling postcards and souvenirs.

King Edward Point has a post office. Mail is delivered by air at intervals of approximately two weeks. This is air-dropped into the Cove by an RAF aeroplane, sent from the Falklands. Surface mail and outgoing mail is sent via the supply ship at intervals of about two months. Incoming airmail should normally take around one month from Great Britain. South Georgia stamps with the King Edward Point frank are regarded as collectors' items.

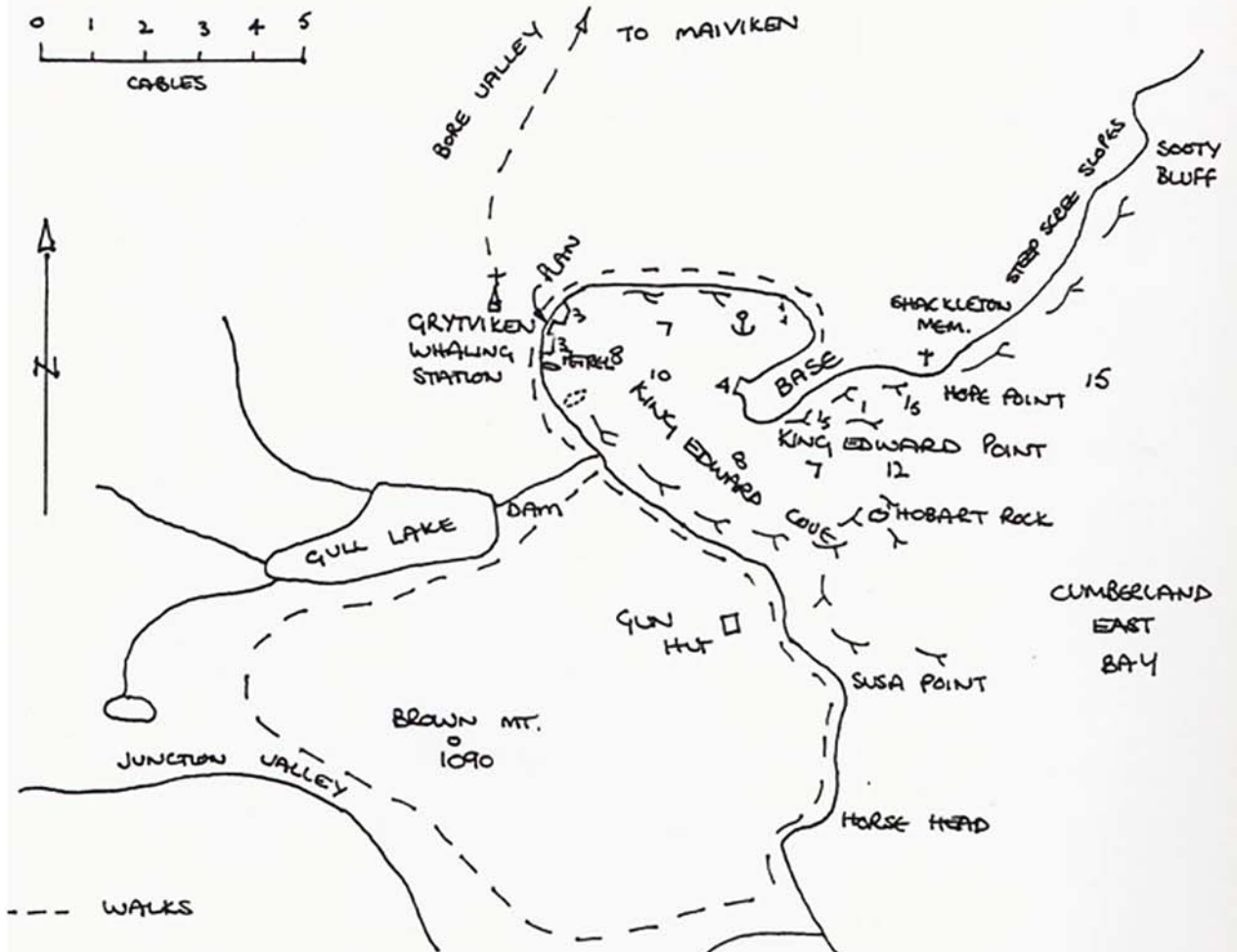
Water is obtainable from the stream inland of *Petrel*, with a grassy bank giving easy access. The big guano shed alongside the stream provides a good place to dry laundry. Water can also be obtained from a pipe near the shore, close to the Museum.

There are no other facilities on South Georgia.

The pecked line, on the sketch chart shows some good walks from Grytviken.

Sir Ernest Shackleton died of a heart attack on board the *Quest* at Grytviken, in 1922. The conspicuous white cross above King Edward Point is his Memorial. He is buried in the graveyard to the S of Grytviken.

- South Georgia -

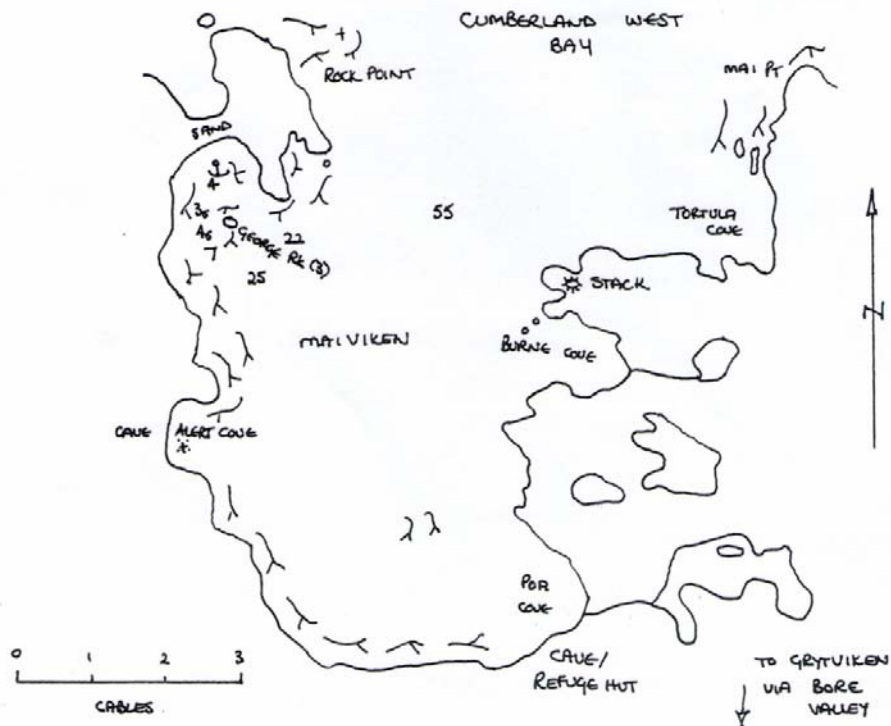


KING EDWARD COVE, LOOKING N TOWARDS GRYTVIKEN



CUMBERLAND WEST BAY

This is a large bay, with three glaciers at its head, namely the Neumayer, Geike and Lyell Glaciers. Small pieces of ice are often observed drifting out of the bay, most of which come from the Neumayer Glacier, the largest of the three



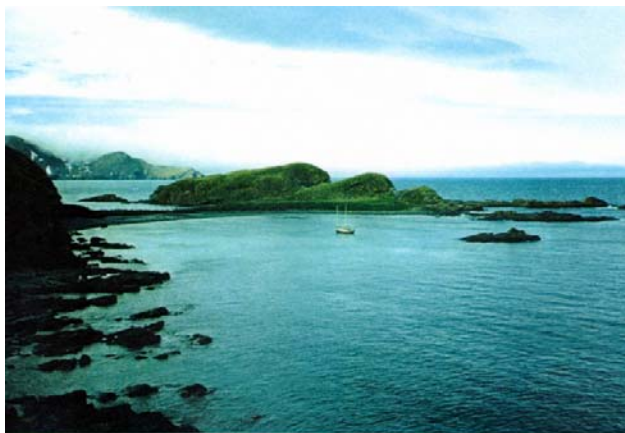
MAIVIKEN

54°14'S 36°30'W

Chart 3589, Maiviken

Situated at the southern entrance to Cumberland West Bay, Maiviken is a sheltered anchorage. The best protection is to be found in the N part of the bay. Anchor N of George Rock, in 4m, where it will be possible to find a patch that is clear of kelp.

On the two occasions that this anchorage was used by Badger, no swell or ice was encountered.



MAIVIKEN, LOOKING N, WITH GEORGE ROCK ASTERN OF BADGER

It is possible to pass either side of George Rock. The W passage is wider, but has more kelp than the one to the E.

In Alert Cove, which is half way down the W shore, there is an old sealers' cave, a short way back from the shingle beach.

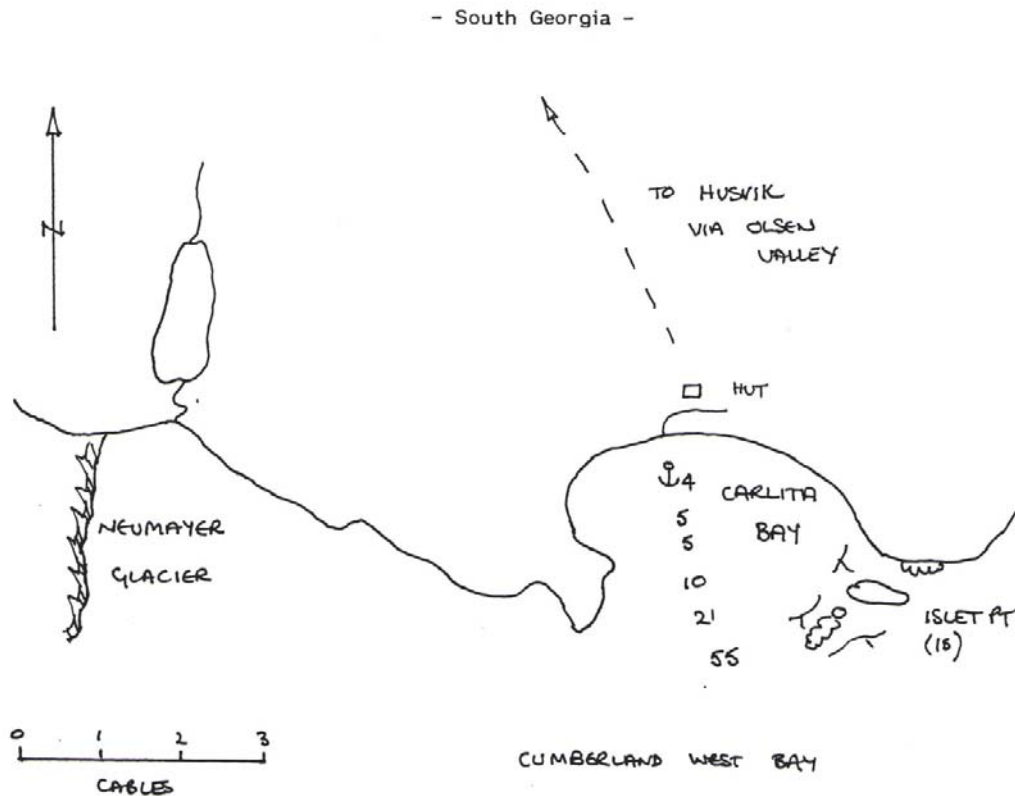
There is a refuge cave with emergency supplies in the SE corner of the bay. This is stocked and used by the garrison at King Edward Point. It is a 2 mile walk from the cave to Grytviken along the Bore Valley.

CARLITA BAY

(Horseshoe Bay on old charts)

54°14'S 36°39'W

Chart 3589, Approaches to Stromness and Cumberland Bays



During the whaling era, the Postman delivered the mail to the stations in Stromness Bay by rowing across Cumberland West Bay from Maiviken to Carlita Bay, and then walking over the col to Husvik and on to the other two stations. At one time, there was a Postman's refuge hut, but this has now gone. Instead there is a newer hut, built by BAS in the early 60's. It is used as a refuge hut by the Garrison and is stocked with emergency supplies. When we visited in 1995, the hut had been damaged by storms with the floor, walls and roof all having been displaced from one another. Unless it is repaired, it will probably not last long

CARLITA BAY, LOOKING E



The approach to Carlita Bay might well necessitate a certain amount of dodging around ice calved from the Neumayer Glacier. Anchorage was found off the hut, in 4m, mud with no kelp. The bay is well sheltered from the W through N to NE. On the occasion of Badger's visit, there was quite a lot of ice in the anchorage and because of this, it would not be advisable to leave a yacht unattended or to anchor overnight in this bay.

From Carlita Bay, it is a fairly easy 2½ to 3 hour walk to Husvik. A good view of the Neumayer Glacier can

be obtained by climbing the hill to the W of the bay.

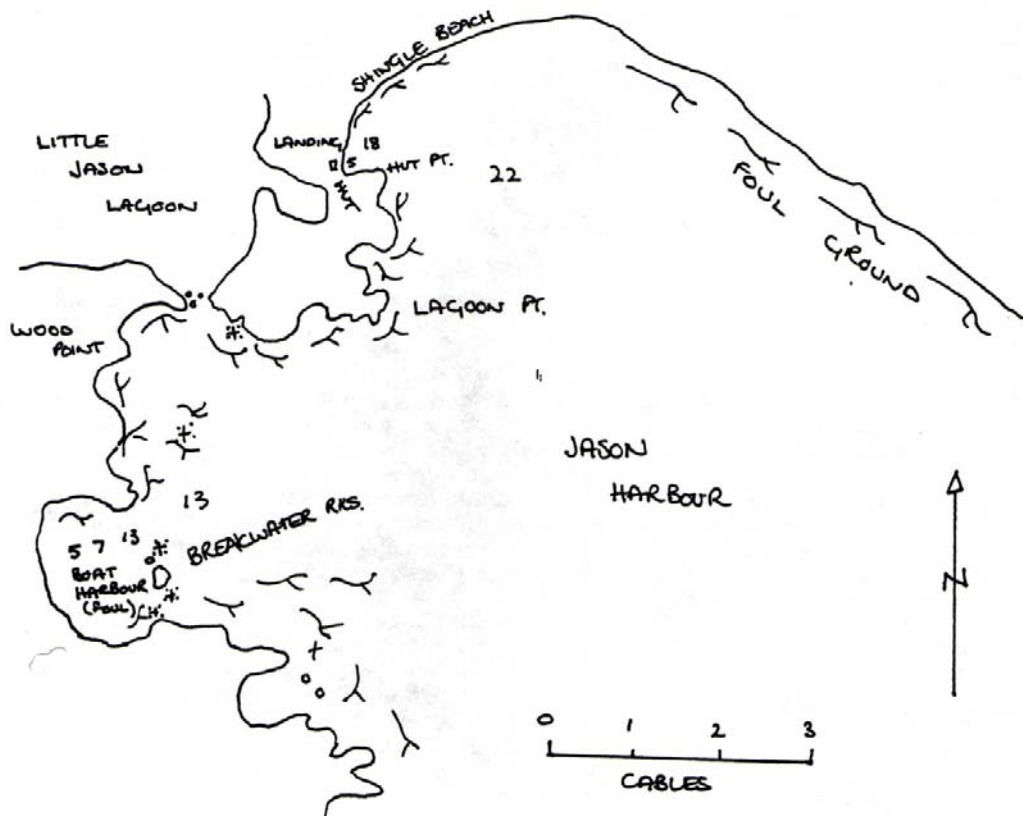
JASON HARBOUR

54°12'S 36°35'W

Chart 3589

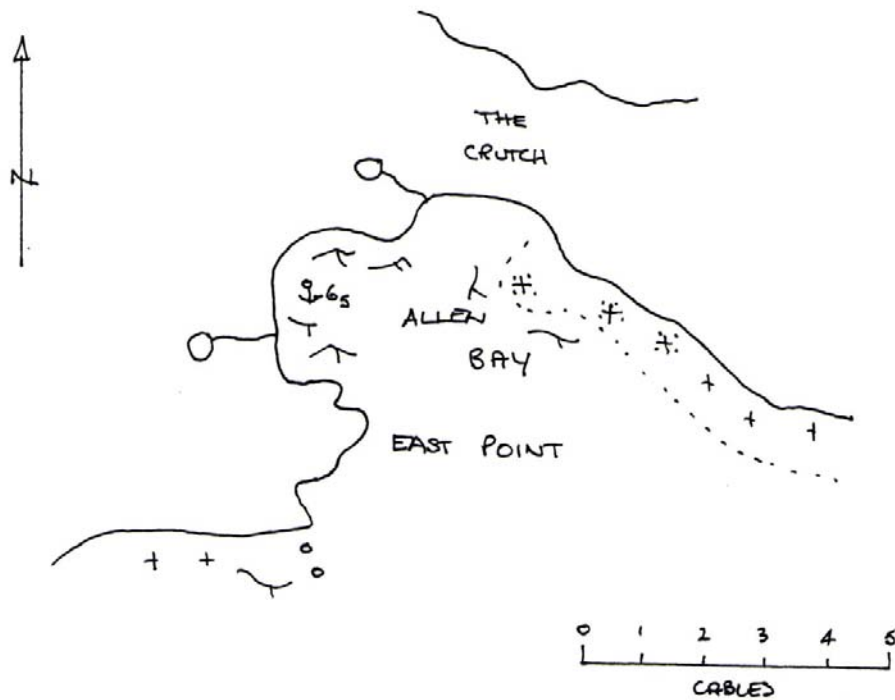
Badger visited Jason Harbour with the intention of anchoring in the Boat Harbour, but it was found to be completely filled with ice. The possibility of bringing up near Hut Point was also investigated, but depths of 18m were found, close up to the beach.

Apparently, the Boat Harbour is usually clear of ice.



ALLEN BAY
54°11'S 36°32'W

Chart 3589, Approaches to Stromness and Cumberland Bays



CUMBERLAND WEST BAY

An anchorage was found in the cove at the W side of this bay, in 6.5m in a clear patch among the kelp. It is sheltered from the SW through W to N. When we entered, the cove was almost ice free, but a few hours later, a bergy bit drifted in and threatened Badger's tranquillity. An alternative anchorage in Maiviken was chosen for the night.



ALLEN BAY, LOOKING S

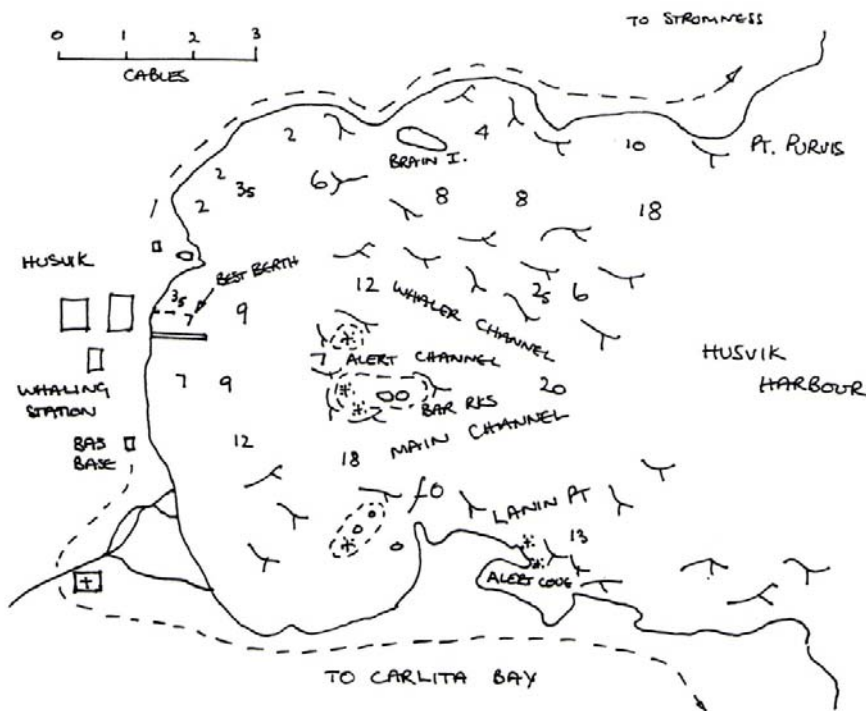
STROMNESS BAY

This is the next bay N of Cumberland Bay. It has three arms with a whaling station at the head of each bay.

HUSVIK HARBOUR

54°11'S 36°42'W

Chart 3589, Approaches to Leith, Stromness and Husvik Harbours



The southernmost arm of Stromness Bay contains Husvik Harbour. The centre of the bay is a mass of kelp with the Bar Rocks marking the S end. The main channel to the S of the Bar Rocks is the more straightforward. There is also a passage along the N shore, but there is some kelp here.

Suitable depths for anchoring will be found at the head of the bay. The wooden pier is in a very poor state, but it is possible to go alongside the N side. About midway along, there is a length of dock with an extra plank to make fending off possible. Prudence would dictate laying out an anchor to the N, in order to be able to pull away from the jetty in winds from this quadrant. The S side of the pier has a railway line; walking along this is the safest way to get ashore, but be very careful when using the jetty as it has many loose, missing and rotten planks. When visited, a couple of terns were nesting on the dock. A very sharp lookout should be kept if there are obviously agitated birds about because neither the egg nor the chick would be easily seen.

There are the remains of a whaling station here, in the usual ruined and vandalised state. Of particular interest is the old whale catcher, KarrakattA high and dry on the beach and used as a steam plant for many years.

BAS has a summer-only field station at Husvik and there are usually four staff. They live in the house at the S end of the factory. It would be courteous to contact them to avoid interfering with any of their projects or experiments, when ashore. Depending on their workload, offers of hospitality would probably be much appreciated.

HUSVIK HARBOUR, LOOKING SE

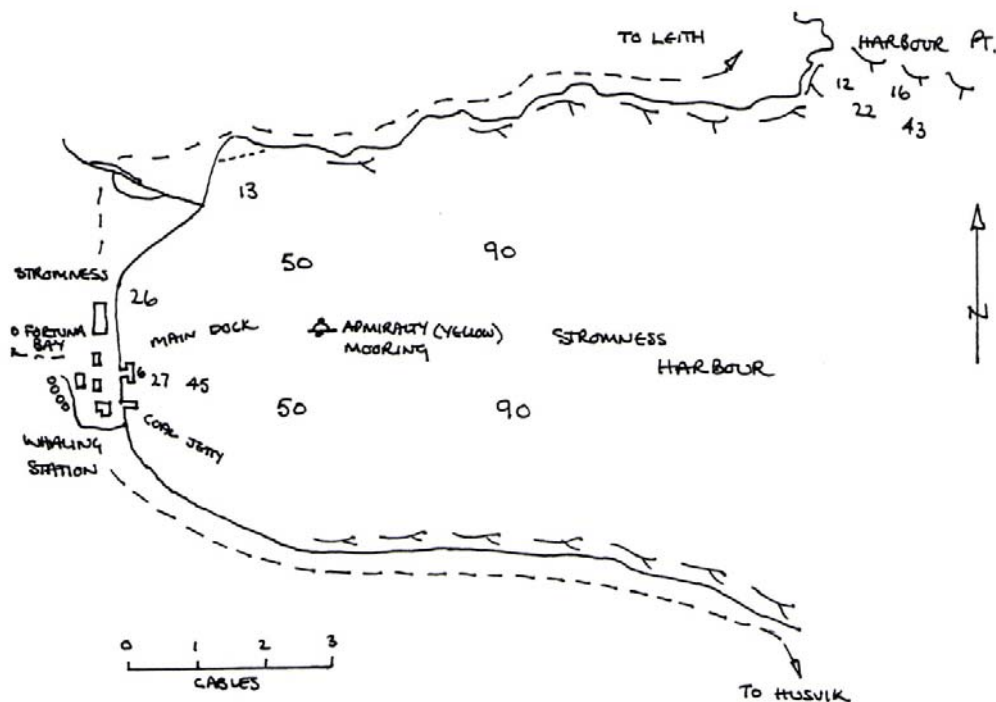


Good walking can be enjoyed in the area. A three hour walk, S up the Olsen Valley takes you to Carlita Bay or the Neumayer Glacier. It is possible to walk up the Karrakatta Valley and over to Fortuna Bay, as well as round to Stromness and Leith Harbours.

STROMNESS HARBOUR

54°09'S 36°42'W

Chart 3589, Approaches to Leith, Stromness and Husvik Harbours



This is the site of a whaling station, which was latterly used as a ship repair facility for the whaling fleets in the area. The main dock is in a reasonable state of repair and has some newish black, rubber ship fendering in places. There is a depth of 6m alongside.

Curlew reported that they often lie between the main dock and the one to the S of it, with lines to each. It is shallow enough to anchor between the docks until the boat can be tied up.

The bottom drops away sharply from the dock to over 30m, so it would seem impractical to lay out an anchor to hold the vessel off. Although Grass Island protects the bay from the E, there is still a 11 mile fetch, and it would probably be very uncomfortable alongside in a strong E'ly blow.

The station is of interest, but it is falling down and subject to vandalism. The Manager's Villa at the S end of the station, is where Shackleton and his companions arrived after crossing the island. A plaque to commemorate this has been placed outside the house on the land side.

There are walks to Husvik and Leith and a longer one over the col to Fortuna Bay.

The Pilot warns of very strong winds during offshore gales. A large, yellow mooring buoy maintained by the Admiralty, lies in the bay.

If obtaining water from the stream it is advisable to go well up above the tanks, which may be leaking and polluting the water.



STROMNESS HARBOUR, THE MAIN DOCK - LOOKING N

LEITH HARBOUR

54°08'S 36° 41'W

Chart 3589, Approaches to Leith, Stromness and Husvik Harbours

This was another whaling station and is more famous in recent years as the site of the start of the Falklands Conflict, in 1982. An Argentine commercial salvage operation was used to disguise the arrival of military personnel who eventually invaded the island. As a consequence of the salvage work (which was never completed) there is a huge pile of rusting machinery and parts by the main dock. Much more is scattered about making this station probably the worst eyesore on the island. While many of the buildings are still standing, time and vandalism have taken their usual toll.

The main dock is still in reasonable condition, with heavy fendering on the SE side which has a depth of 6.5m alongside. A dense patch of kelp exists between the shore and the SE side of the jetty, which makes it advisable to approach from the NE.

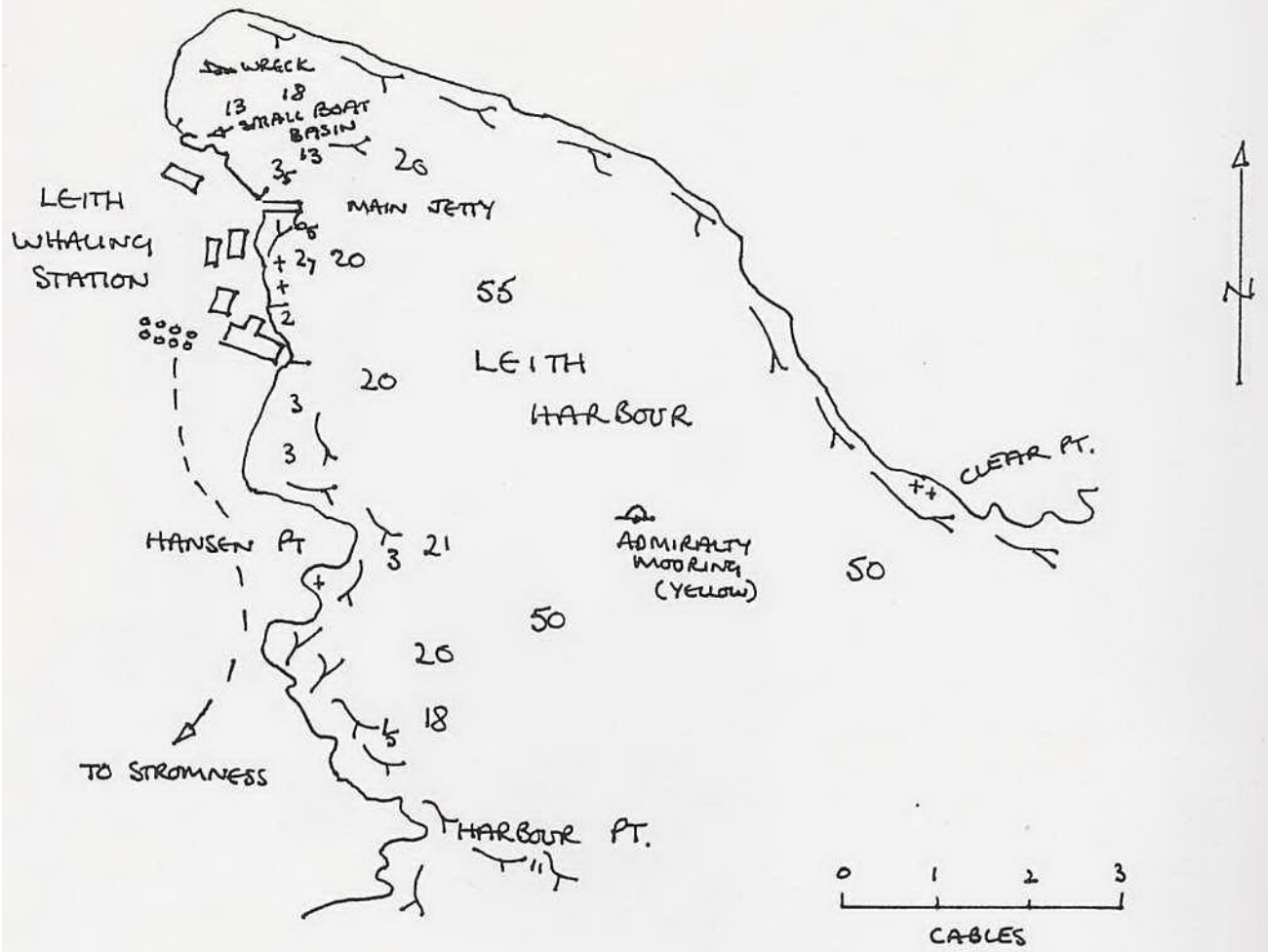
If intending to stay for several days, it is possible to moor in a small basin a short distance NW of the main dock. This offers good protection from the sea from all quarters. The NW corner of the basin is shoal with the remains of a small wooden boat showing at low water. The depth at the SE end is not known, but it is believed to be sufficient for most yachts. NW winds can blow here with extreme violence. Some swell may be experienced in the basin.

A yellow mooring buoy for the use of ships in Leith Harbour, is laid and maintained by the Admiralty.

LEITH HARBOUR, SMALL BOAT BASIN - LOOKING E



- South Georgia -



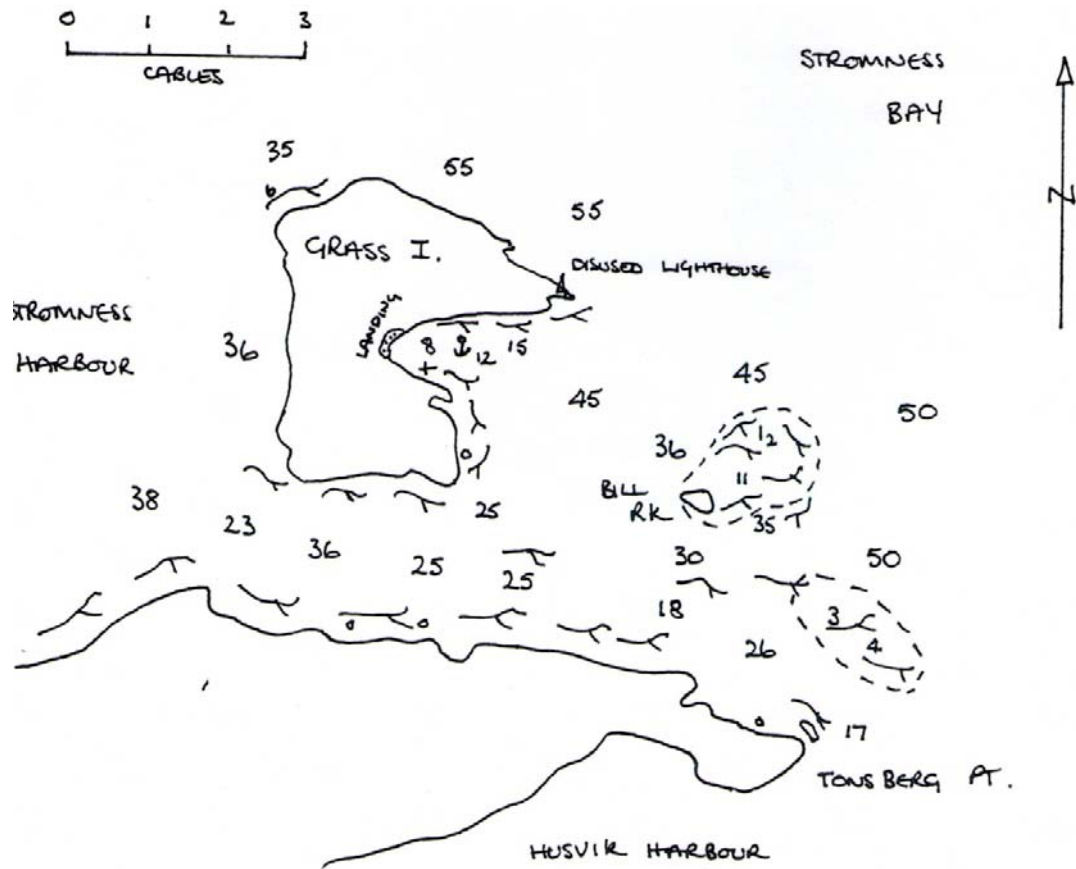
LEITH HARBOUR, THE MAIN JETTY - LOOKING NE



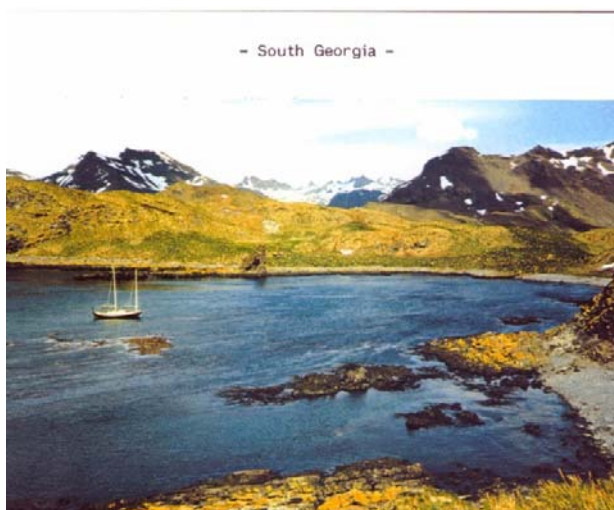
GRASS ISLAND

54°09'S 36°40'W

Chart 3589, Approaches to Leith, Stromness and Husvik Harbours



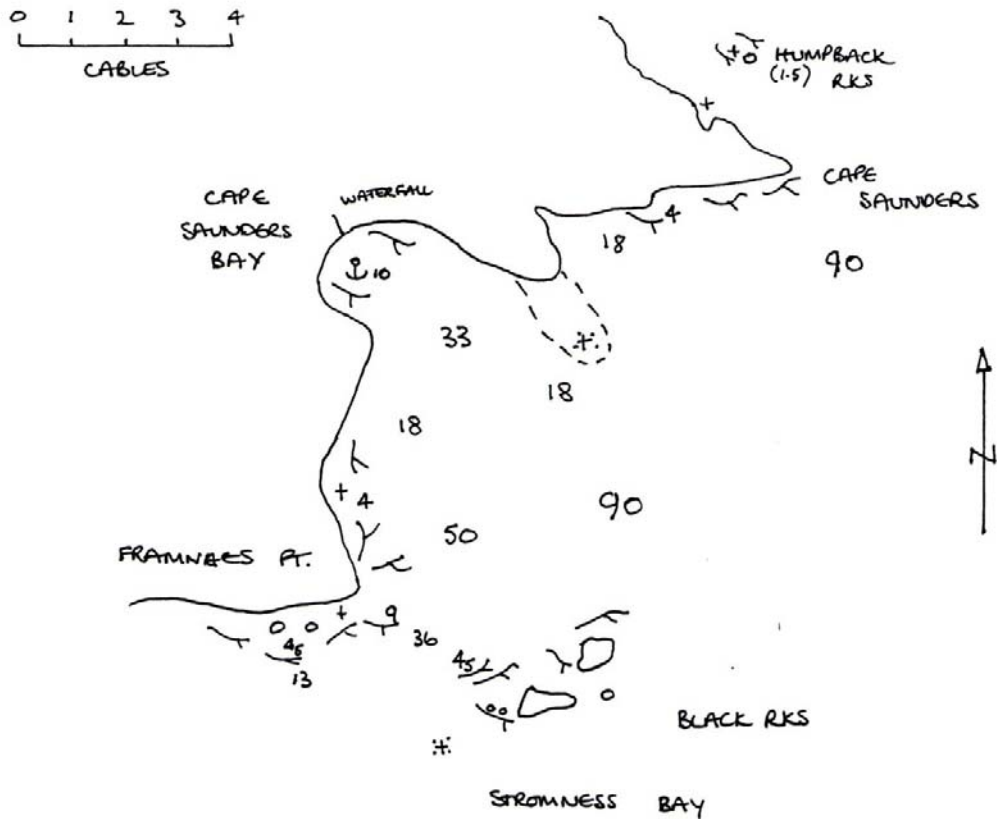
This island guards the entrance to Stromness Harbour. On the E side of the island is an anchorage giving good shelter from the SW through W to N, without the fierce squalls that apparently affect Stromness Harbour itself, in W'ly gales. It is, however, wide open to the E. Anchor in about 12m in a patch clear of kelp. It is possible to land on the beach to the W of the anchorage. The old lighthouse building on the E point of the island is still in quite good condition.



CAPE SAUNDERS BAY

54°08'S 3639'W

Chart 3589, Approaches to Stromness and Cumberland Bays



About 1/2 mile SW of Cape Saunders is an unnamed bay, offering a good anchorage with shelter from the N and W.

If coming from Leith or Stromness Harbours, it is possible to pass inside Black Rocks, but care should be taken to avoid the drying rock 1 1/2 cables W of the western islet. There is plenty of room to tack through the centre of the channel. Note that there is a drying rock, shown on the chart 2 cables S of the headland to the W of Cape Saunders Bay, which should also be avoided.

Anchor near the centre of the bay in 10m, in a patch clear of kelp. The bottom is fine sand, with kelp.

CAPE SAUNDERS BAY, LOOKING NW



17/12/2008