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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

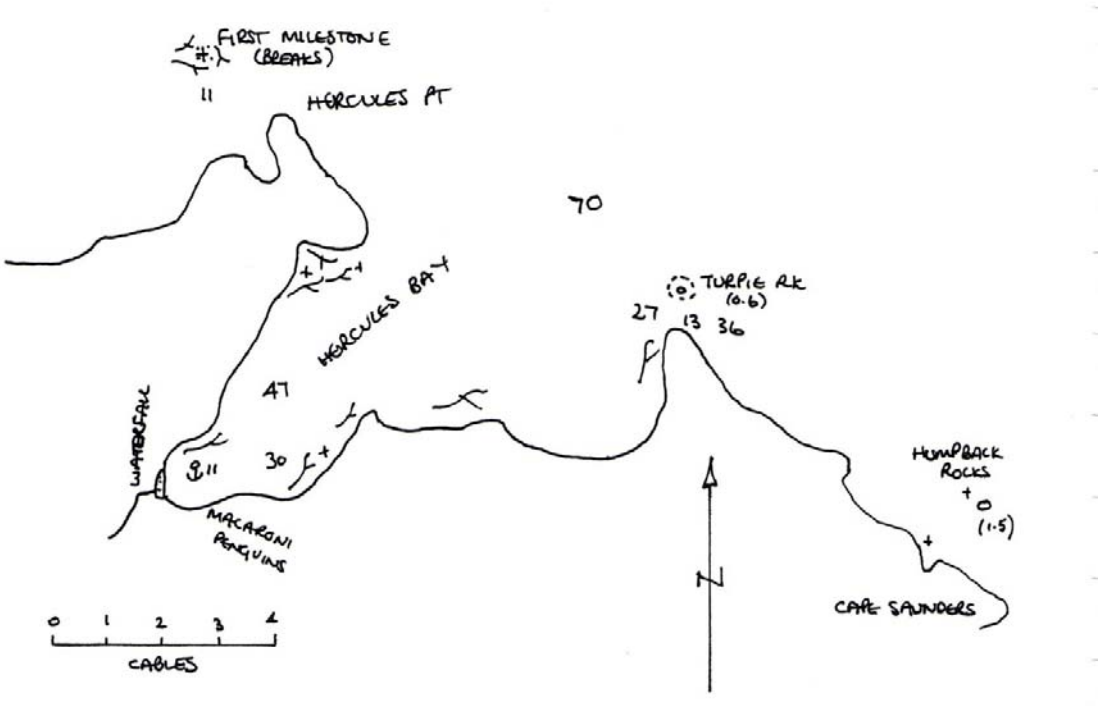
Caution

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safety of a vessel depends ultimately on the judgment of the skipper who should assess all information, published or unpublished.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.

HERCULES BAY

54°07'W 36°40' Chart 3589, Approaches to Stromness and Cumberland Bays



The entrance to this bay is situated 1 mile WNW of Cape Saunders. There is deep water inshore of Humpback Rocks and Turpie Rock.

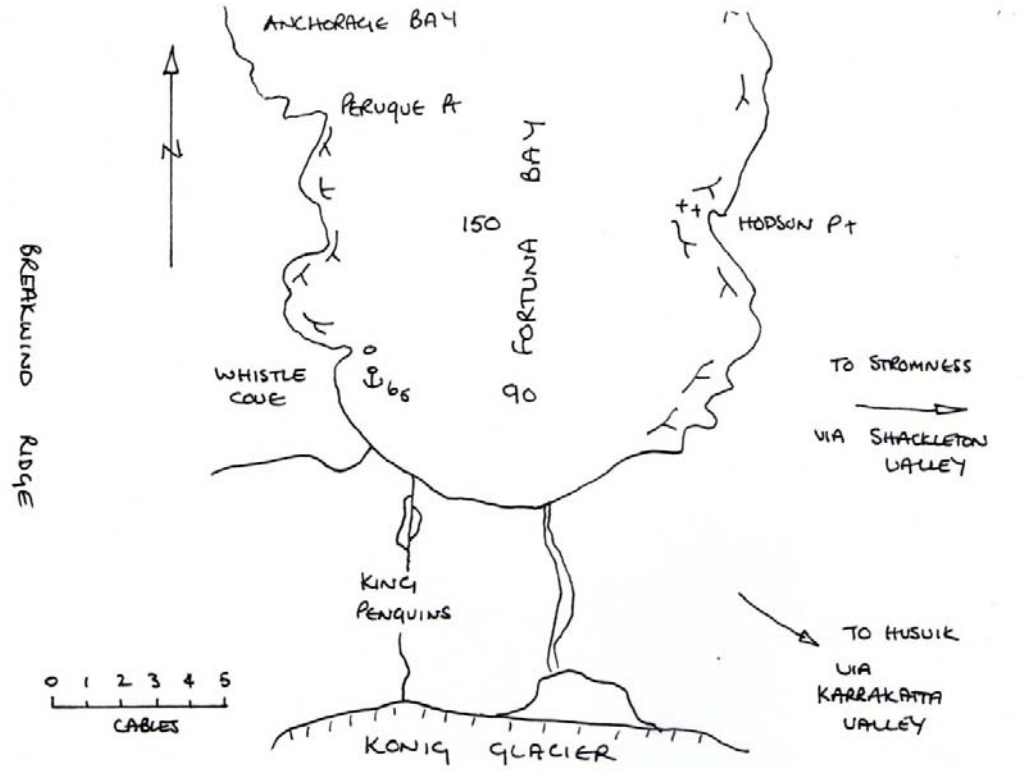
The bay appears to be clear of dangers, except possibly close inshore. At the head of the bay there is a conspicuous waterfall; sail towards this and anchor in 11m. The bottom seems to be clear of kelp. There is good shelter from all directions with the exception of the NE'ly quadrant.

When visited, Fur seals, sea Elephants and King penguins were seen on the beach, in front of the waterfall. On the cliff to the S of this beach there is a large colony of Macaroni penguins.

This is a delightful anchorage and well worth a visit.

HERCULES BAY, LOOKING SW

FORTUNA BAY



This is an attractive bay with the Konig Glacier and the S arm of the Fortuna Glacier flowing towards the bay. Both of these have retreated back from the shoreline. Although the broad expanse of these glaciers may well give rise to strong local winds, none was experienced in the light NE'ly conditions prevailing on the occasion of Badger's visit.
Three anchorages were visited and shelter can be found from all but the North in one or other of these.

WHISTLE COVE

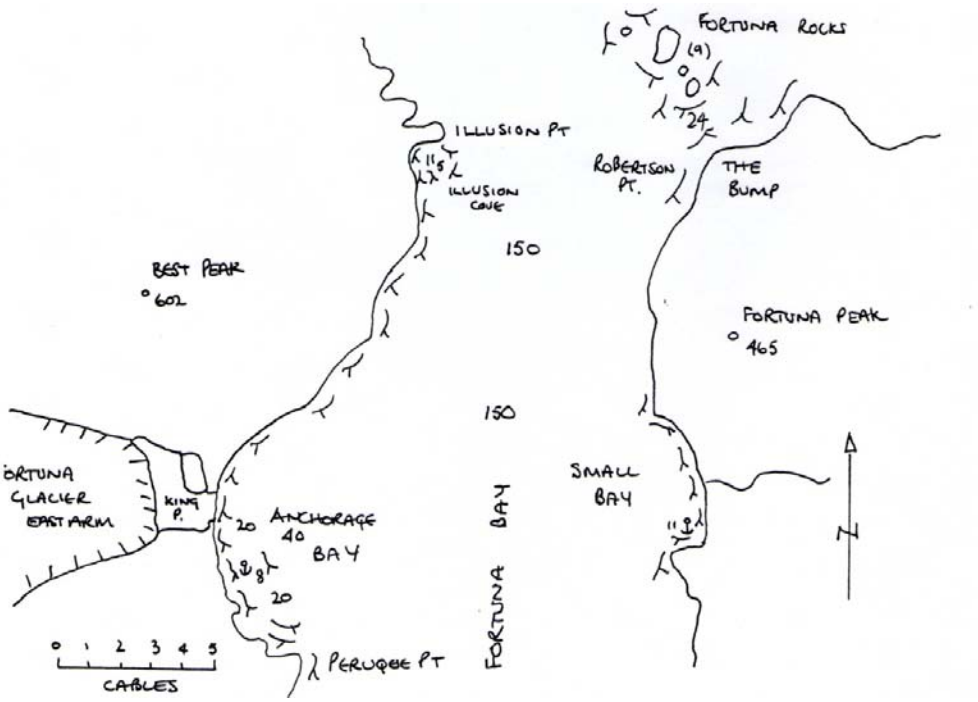
54°09'S 36°49'W 3585, Fortuna Bay

This cove is at the SW corner of the bay and provides a good anchorage from where a visit can be made to the King penguin colony, situated on the moraine at the W side of the Konig Glacier front. Anchorage was found in 6.5m, fine sand, with no kelp. The cove is sheltered S through W to NW.

There were only a few Fur seals ashore here.

SMALL BAY

54°07'S 36°47'W 585, Fortuna Bay



SMALL BAY, LOOKING S

Situated halfway down the E shore of Fortuna Bay, there is good shelter here from the NE through E to SSE. Anchorage was found at the S end of the bay in 11m, in a patch clear of kelp.

ANCHORAGE BAY

54°07'S 36°49'W Chart 3585, Fortuna Bay

Anchorage Bay is by the S arm of the Fortuna Glacier. On the occasion of Badger's visit, it was found possible to anchor S of the southern of the two streams entering the bay. There is a sizeable kelp patch off the beach and clear water inshore of it. Depths are 8m and there is plenty of swinging room. Shelter can be found from NNW through W to S.

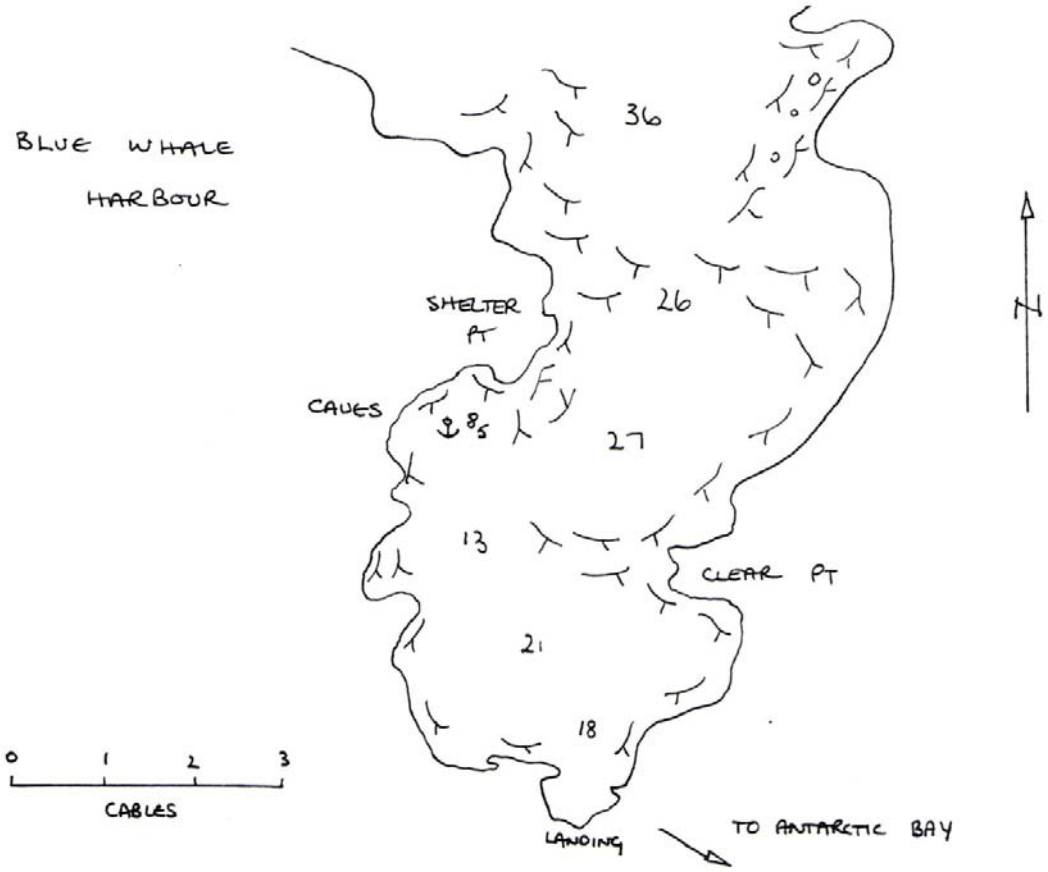
ILLUSION COVE

54°06'S 36°48'W Chart 3585, Fortuna Bay

A small cove is formed S of Illusion Point. There appears to be an anchorage in 11.5m, in a patch clear of the extensive kelp. This ought to give shelter from W and N.

BLUE WHALE HARBOUR

54°04'S 37°01'W Chart 3585, Blue Whale Harbour

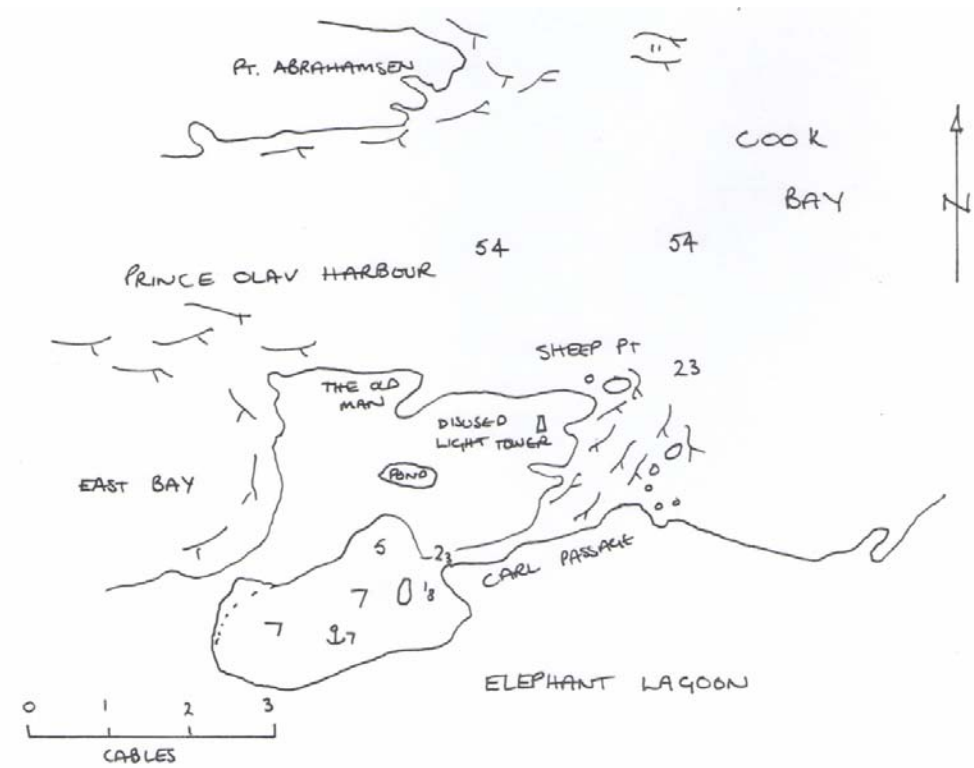


This harbour is situated on the E side of the entrance to Possession Bay and is one of the more sheltered anchorages in South Georgia. The entrance has much kelp in it, but a clear passage can be found by favouring the W side. The best shelter appears to be in the NW cove, SW of Shelter Point and off the caves, in 8.5m, in a patch clear of kelp. Blue Whale Harbour is open only to the N, but in the recommended anchorage, protection from this direction will be given by Shelter Point.

A pleasant and easy walk can be taken to visit Antarctic Bay. This will be found by crossing the low col to the E of the harbour. It is possible to land on the beach S of Clear Point.

BLUE WHALE HARBOUR, LOOKING NW

COOK BAY



Cook Bay is to the North of Possession Bay. The latter has the reputation of being the windiest spot in South Georgia and certainly, on the day on which Badger crossed its mouth, the wind was blowing hard from the glacier at the head of the bay, while until then, the wind experienced had been F3 from NNE. Possession Bay was named by Captain Cook in 1775, when he made the first landing on South Georgia.

ELEPHANT LAGOON

54°03'S 37°08'W Chart 3585, Prince Olav Harbour and Approaches

At the S end of Cook Bay, at the entrance to Prince Olav Harbour, is this almost totally landlocked lagoon. The framework of the old lighthouse on Sheep Point makes a convenient landmark to find the entrance. Close S of Sheep Point is the Carl Passage, which is the narrow entrance to the lagoon. There is much kelp around here, but an almost clear lead can be found through it with above water rocks on either hand.

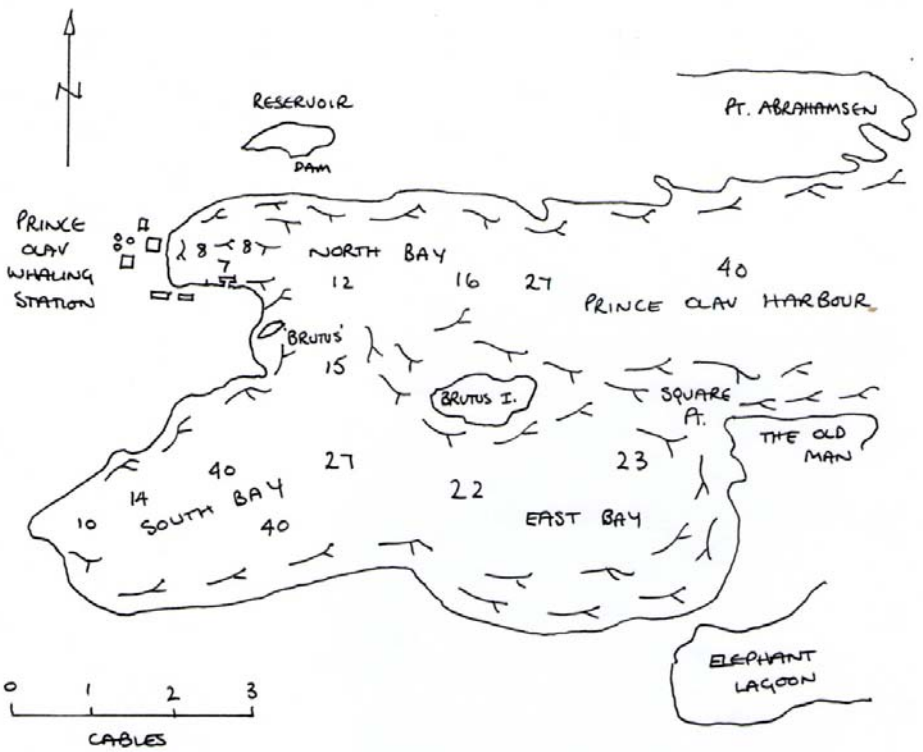
ELEPHANT LAGOON, LOOKING E TO THE CARL PASSAGE

The narrowest part of the channel is just before the lagoon is entered and is approximately 25m wide. The chart indicates a minimum depth of 1.8m and on the occasion of Badger's visit, soundings suggested that this is still the case. A minimum of 2.3m was found, at approximately half tide, near Springs. Most yachts should have no trouble in entering, if they wait for half tide.

Anchorage was found in 7.5m, mud. It is possible to land on most places around the shore. South and East Bays are reported to be very windy places, which suggests that Elephant Lagoon probably suffers the same. Recommended in settled weather.

PRINCE OLAV HARBOUR

54°03'S 39°09'W Chart 3585, Prince Olav Harbour and Approaches Prince Olav Harbour, North Bay



The old whaling station is situated in North Bay. To enter this, pass N of Brutus Island (Saddle Island on old charts) and thread your way through the kelp beds. There is really too much kelp in North Bay to consider anchoring. The wooden jetty is in a poor state, but is strong enough for a yacht to tie up to, with 7m of water alongside. There is no fendering on the dock and a fender board would be most useful. The decking on the jetty is very rotten and care should be taken when walking about on it.

PRINCE OLAV HARBOUR LOOKING SE

If intending to stay for more than a brief visit, it may well be worth considering tying up bow and stern between the W end of the dock and a short wooden pier further W. Curlew ties up in this manner when visiting the harbour.

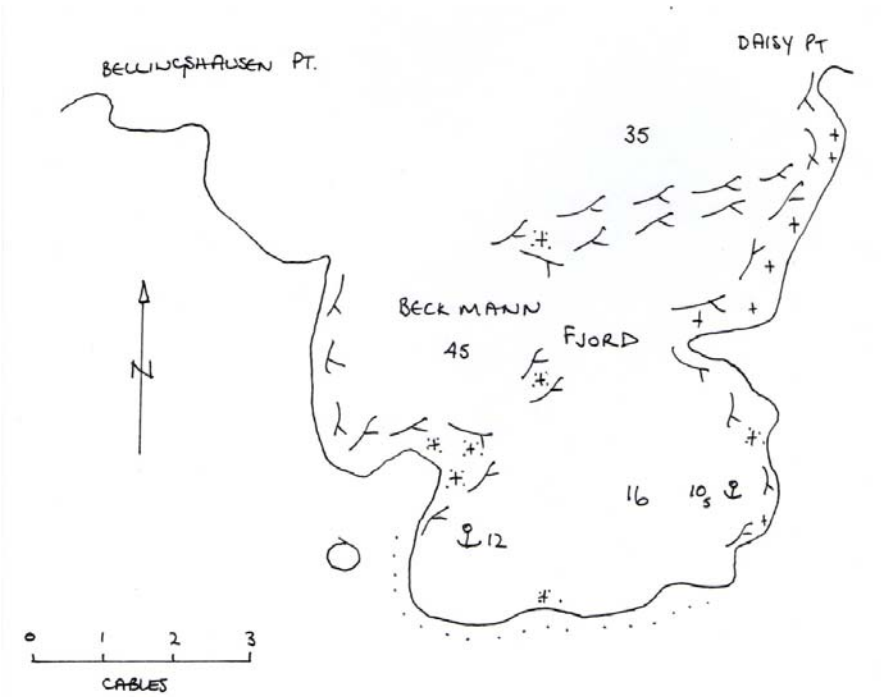
The whaling station was abandoned in 1946 and the buildings are in a poor condition, but there does not appear to have been as much vandalism here as at other sites. Consequently, the station is less depressing than most. The hulk of the Brutus is lying, half submerged, S of Pig Point. She was a three-masted, iron-hulled vessel, 76m long and 1686 tons. She was built in 1883 by J Reid and Co. of Glasgow and was first named Sierra Pedrosa while owned by the Sierra Shipping line of Lima. After coming to South Georgia, she was used as a coaling hulk alongside the jetty, before ending her days on the beach.

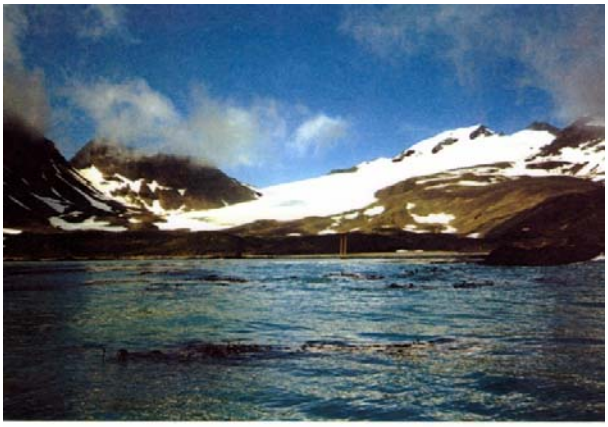
BAY OF ISLANDS

This is an aptly-named bay about 10 miles long and containing within its compass, a number of low, tussac-covered islands. Several of these are nesting sites for Wandering albatross and the big, white birds, dotting the islands, can easily be seen from quite some distance away. It was around here that Robert Murphy, the naturalist on board the whaler, Daisy, spent much of his time when in South Georgia, which he recorded in A Logbook for Grace. He did the initial survey of the area, which was used until quite recently, and named many of the islands and other features.

BECKMANN FJORD

54°03'S 37°11'W Chart 3585, Cape Buller to Cape Constance





BECKMANN FJORD, LOOKING S

This fjord lies at the E end of the Bay of Islands and provides two anchorages. There is a long line of kelp extending from the E shore across the entrance; pass to the W of this. Various other patches of kelp have to be avoided once in the fjord. A drying rock lies about 200m off the small headland separating the SW and the SE extremities of the fjord.

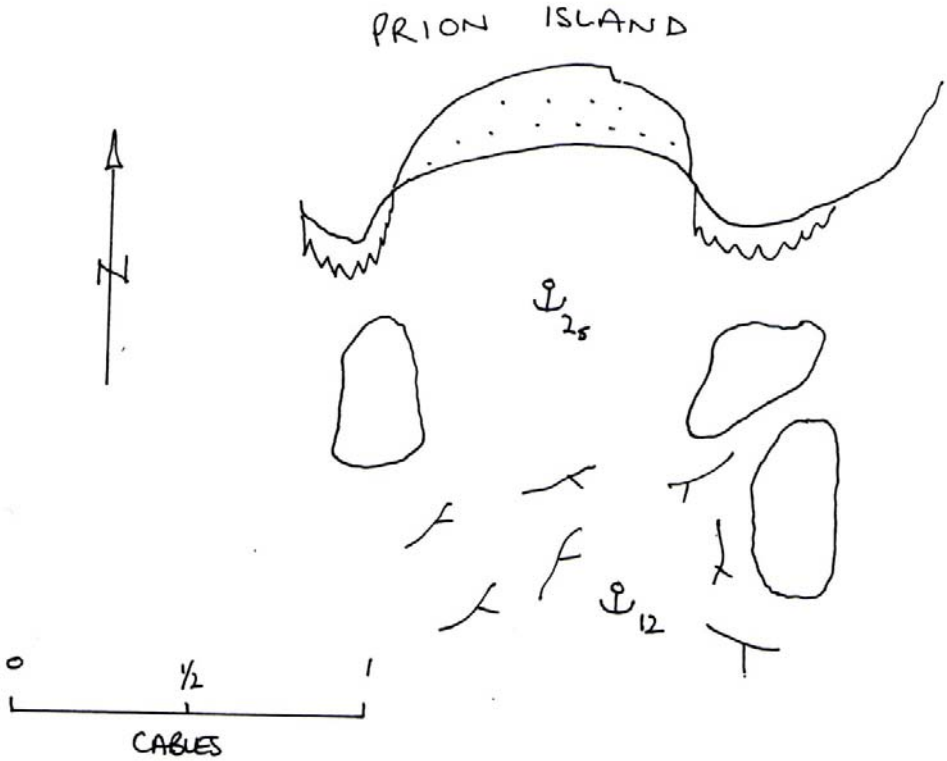
The first anchorage is found in the W corner of the SE part of the bay, behind the small headland mentioned above. There are quite a few rocks close to the headland. Anchor clear of the kelp, near the beach, in 12m. This gives shelter from NW through W to S.

Off the beach, at the E side of the SE corner of Beckmann Fjord, we found 10.5m, clear of kelp. This anchorage would give shelter from N through E to S.

When visited, there was little swell, but this was probably the exception. Beckmann Fjord may well give the best shelter from the E in the Bay of Islands.

PRION ISLAND

54°01'S 37°15'W Chart 3585, Cape Buller to Cape Constance

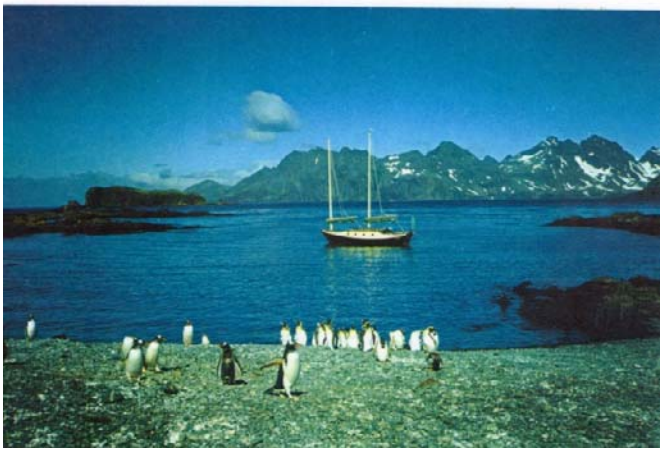


A very small cove is situated at the SE corner of this island. Approach from the SE and work your way in through the kelp between the two rocks, as shown on the sketch chart. Once inside the kelp, there is a small basin, about 90m across, close to the beach.

Anchor in the centre in 2.4m, sand and a little weed. There is shelter from the NW.
This tiny anchorage is fine for a short stay in fair weather. Several Wandering albatross nest on the island.

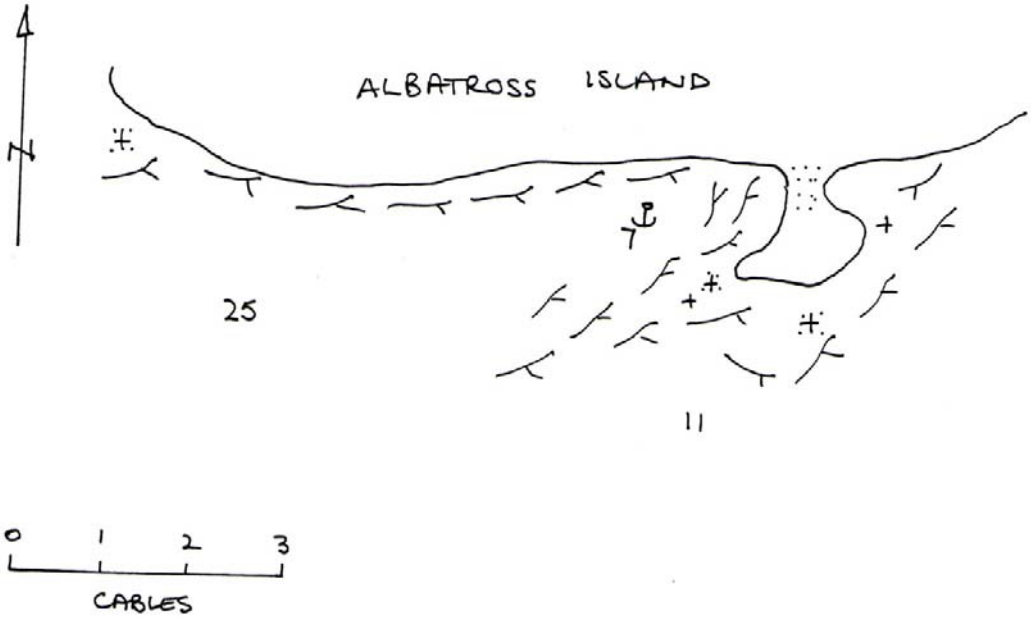
It is possible to anchor outside the cove in 12m in a clear patch in the kelp. This is also sheltered from the NW.

PRION ISLAND, LOOKING S



ALBATROSS ISLAND

54°01'S 37°20'W Chart 3585, Cape Buller to Cape Constance



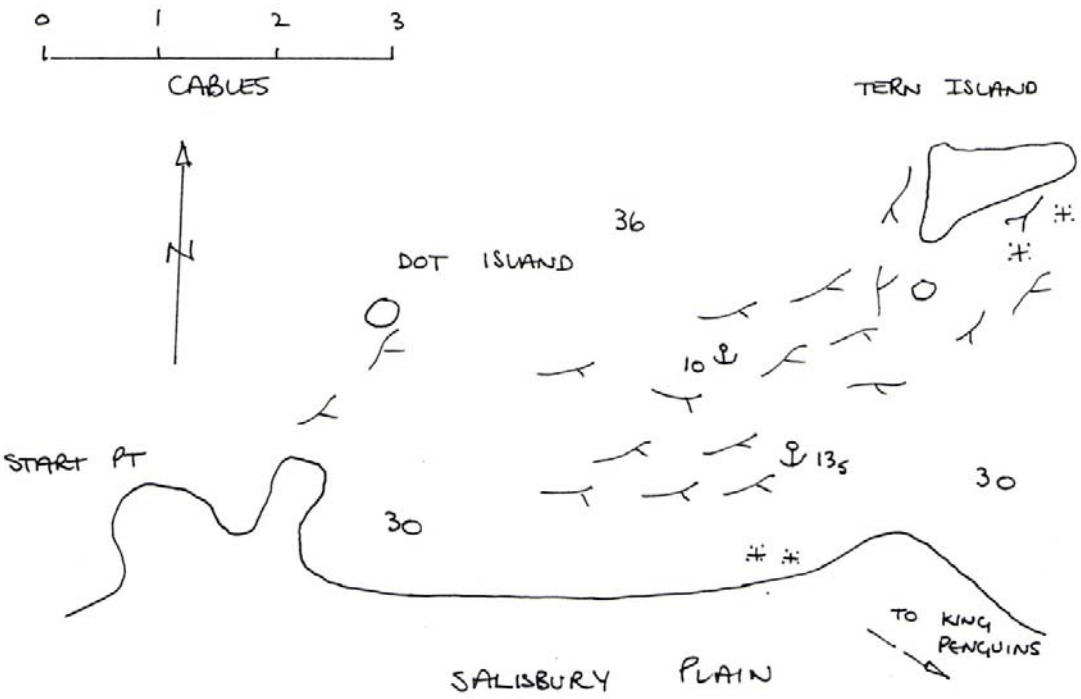
At the S end of this island, there is an anchorage off a shingle beach. This is the Miracle Cove mentioned in Gerry Clark's The TOTORORE Voyage. A reef extends SW from the S tip of the island, marked by thick kelp beds. Enter the cove from the SW, heading NE towards the beach, between the line of kelp and the kelp along the shoreline.

Anchor near the beach in 7m, clear of kelp. It is sheltered from the N through E to SE.
There are many Wandering albatross nesting on the higher ground and also some Giant petrels.

ALBATROSS ISLAND, LOOKING SW

SALISBURY PLAIN

54°03'S 37°20'W Chart 3585, Cape Buller to Cape Constance



The most outstanding feature of this area is the enormous King penguin colony that lies a little W of the Lucas Glacier. The best place from which to visit this rookery seems to be off the long beach, SSE of Tern Island. There are a couple of drying rocks close to the beach here and large beds of kelp.

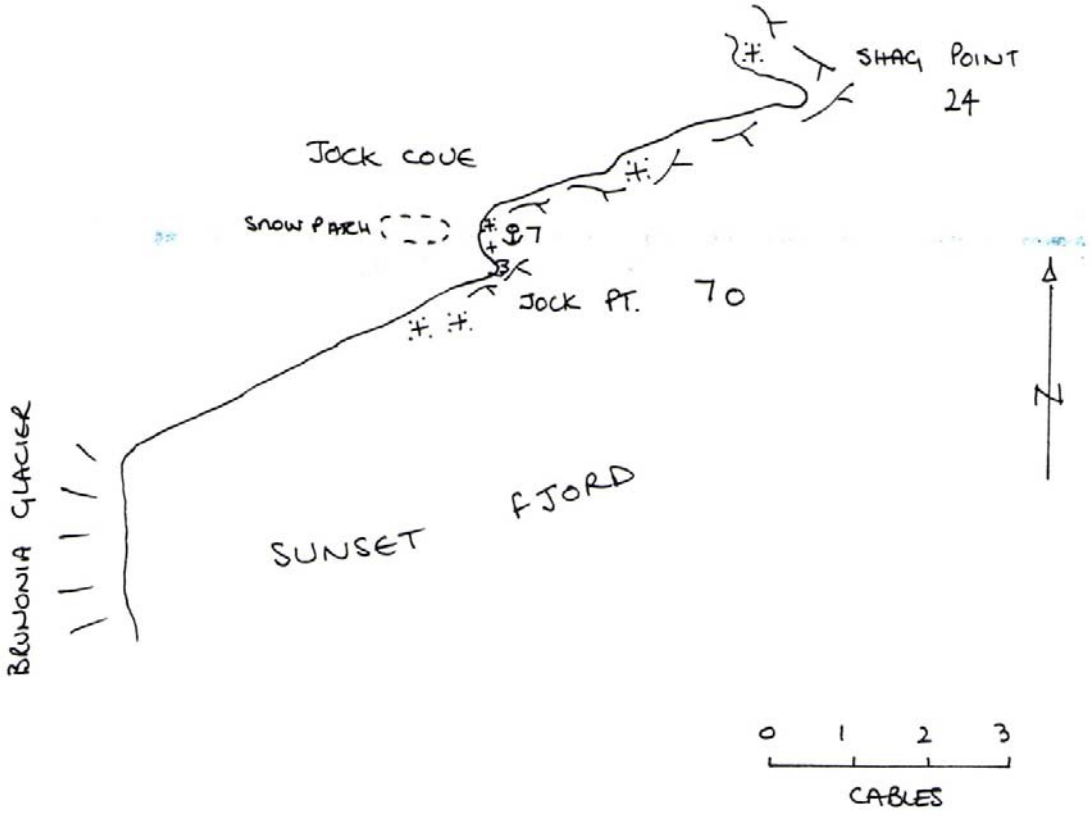
We found a small patch clear of kelp near the E end and anchored in 13.5m. It was found that there was shallower water further offshore in 10 to 11m, again in small areas, clear of kelp. There is shelter from the W and S.

The penguin colony can clearly be identified from the anchorage and it is an easy walk with relatively few Fur seals about. Landing on the shingle beach may well be difficult if there is any swell.

SALISBURY PLAIN, LOOKING NW, BADGER ANCHORED IN THE CENTRE

JOCK COVE

54°02'S 37°26'W Chart 3585, Cape Buller to Cape Constance



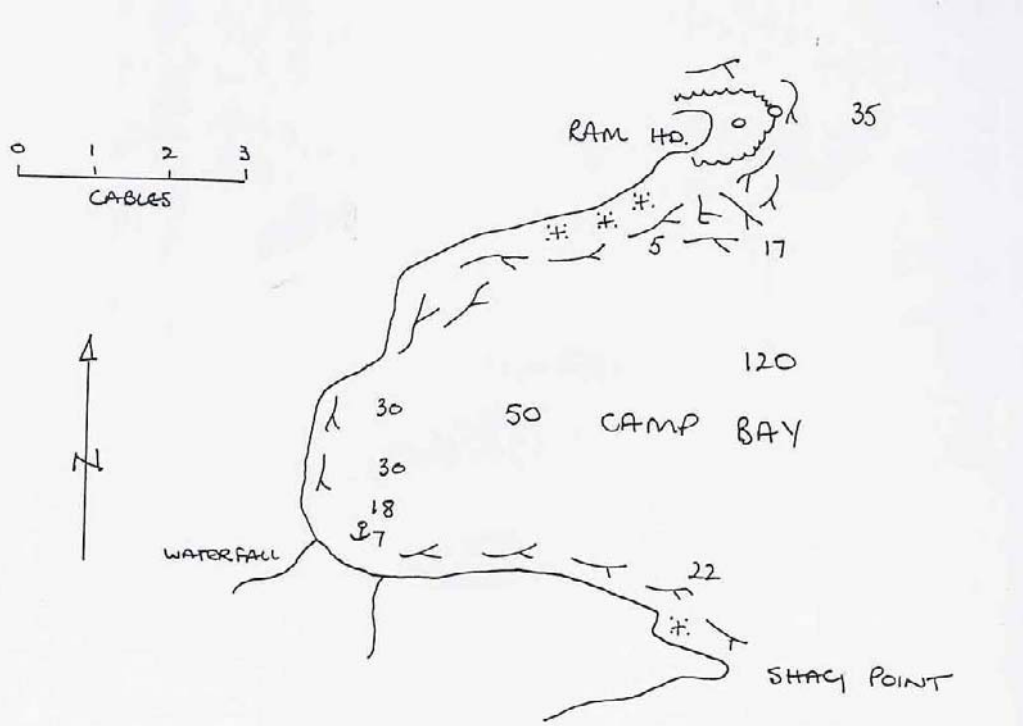
On the N shore of Sunset Fjord, the headland of Jock Point forms a small Cove.

Anchorage can be obtained in 7m off the shingle beach clear of kelp and sheltered from SW through N to NE. Small quantities of ice from the Brunonia Glacier were in the Fjord, but there was no ice in Jock Cove, when visited. The Glacier is receding and now has only a small calving front.

JOCK COVE, LOOKING E

CAMP BAY
54°02'S 37°27'W Chart 3585, Cape Buller to Cape Constance

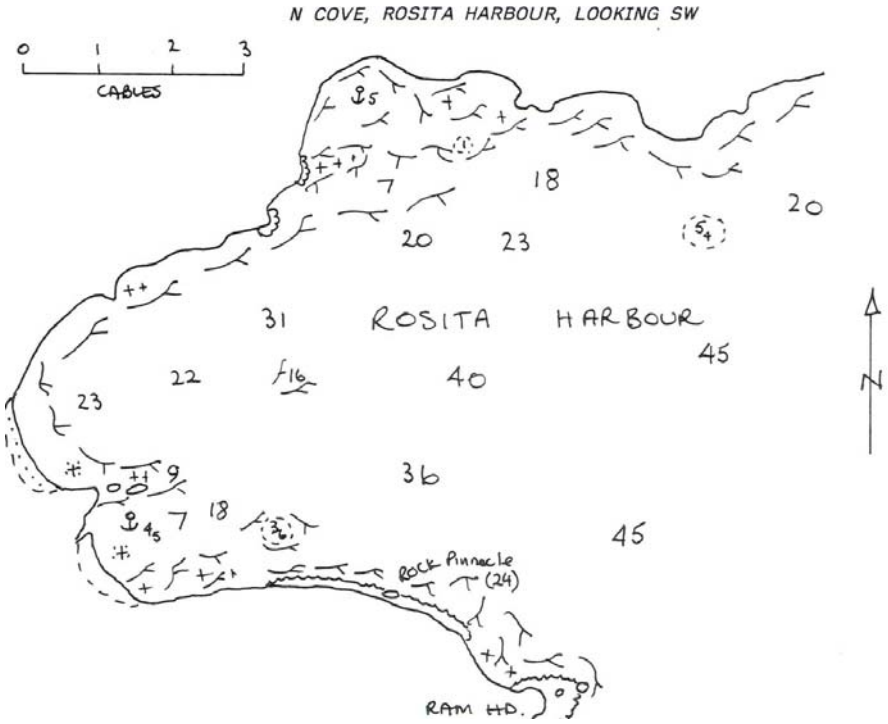
We anchored at the SW corner of this bay, in 7m, clear of kelp, off the small waterfall running down the moss-covered rock. We were sheltered from N through W to SE.
According to the Admiralty Pilot, the wind does not appear to blow very hard in the bay.



CAMP BAY, LOOKING W

ROSITA HARBOUR

54°00'S 37°26'W Chart 3585, Rosita Harbour



This is generally regarded as the best anchorage in the Bay of Islands. There are two possibilities:

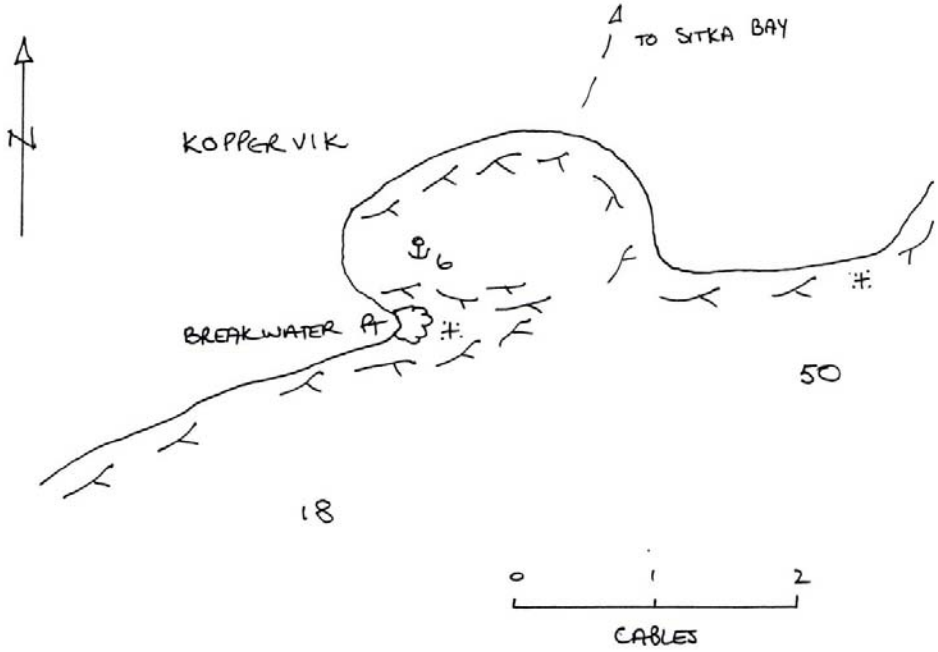
(i) The N cove is the preferred anchorage. The cove is guarded by a lot of kelp, but there are clear leads through which you can weave your way in.
Anchor in the large, clear patch, close to the shore in about 5m. Good shelter can be found from SW through W to NE. Although the cove is open to the S and E, with a 4 mile fetch, the extensive kelp beds may reduce the seas to make the anchorage tenable.

(ii) A kelp-marked reef divides the head of the bay in two. S of this reef and off the beach, is an anchorage in 4.5m, clear of kelp. Approximately one third of the way along this bay there is an underwater rock, near to the beach. When anchoring, ensure that you have sufficient swinging room to clear this. The S shore of the bay has extensive kelp beds off it. This anchorage is sheltered from the SE through W to N.

N COVE, ROSITA HARBOUR, LOOKING SW

KOPPERVIK

54°00'S 37°24'W Chart 3585, Cape Buller to Cape Constance



Koppervik is a bay about 1 mile SW of Cape Buller. The W end is protected by Breakwater Point and forms a small cove. A kelp reef extends E from Breakwater Point.

When entering, pass to the E of this reef and then follow the clear lead through the kelp to the head of the cove.

Anchor in 6m, clear of kelp. There is shelter from SW through NW to NE. On the N side of the bay, a low col leads over to Sitka Bay, but it is very steep on the Sitka Bay side.

KOPPERVIK, LOOKING SW