

The Sandwich Islands / Antarctic

'The most awful place in the world.'(Captain J. Cook, 1775)

by Heide Wilts – www.freydis.de

Introduction

We are on our way from Cape Horn to the Cape of Good Hope and are now moored safely at Fipass, the enormous new pontoon at Port Stanley on the Falkland Islands. Rasmus, the God of the Wind and the Sea, was well-disposed towards us during the first stage of our Antarctic



voyage which is to last four months. Our knowledge of the area from many previous cruises was, of course, a great advantage. It is new ground, however, from now on. We get ready for the longest part of the voyage: from the Falklands to South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands and then on to Cape Town via the Tristan da Cunha group of islands - eight weeks at a stretch with one crew through an area which is still only partly mapped and avoided not only by small yachts but also large ships due to its frequently and rapidly changing weather conditions - fog, storms and icebergs. We are naturally under no illusions as regards sailing in Antarctic regions, after all the storms we have weathered there on the icy coast or out at sea in previous years, and after the painful experience of being stranded on Deception Island in the winter. However, a passion is not to be killed by setbacks. It is the white dots on the globe which intrigue us. On these remote, inaccessible and relatively unexplored small islands we hope to find landscapes, flora and fauna in their original state which are rarely to be found elsewhere. We simply cannot resist the sirens of distant "fairy tale worlds" where we have learnt to marvel at nature and its continuous superiority to man despite our much praised and alleged progress. It teaches a humility which makes one content and grateful. On the other hand, I do not wish to conceal the uneasiness and doubts which I felt as we decided to sail once more in this icy region. I have not yet got over the experience of being stranded there. I am still plagued by nightmares: even now I can see Erich disappearing in the waves and I wake

up bathed in perspiration. We have hardly left South Georgia when the wind freshens up considerably to Force 7 -fortunately still from astern. The Southern Ocean Current drives us forward too. We race along at full speed -10 knots! - through the turbulent watery landscape. It is about 400 sea miles to our next destination, the South Sandwich Islands. Nobody seems to know any details about this chain of small "forgotten" islands. They are seldom visited and even more seldom does someone set foot on them. In fact, we were hardly able to get any information about them on the islands of South Georgia and the Falklands, the administrative centres. We discovered by reading our maps and the Antarctic Pilot that the islands are part of a flat submarine ridge forming an eastward facing, convex arc, extending from north to south over almost four parallels, and almost reaching the 60th. Most of the islands are of volcanic origin. Some of them, like Zavodovski and Candlemas, are even still bubbling inside.

In winter and spring the islands - as far as one knows - are surrounded by pack ice from the Weddell Sea. They are believed to be free of ice again in about December or January, although this date seems to vary from year to year. James Cook discovered a series of ice covered peaks which seemed to him to be separated by deep bays and which he named "Southern Thule" or "Sandwich Land" after the fourth Lord Sandwich. (The man who is supposed to have been the first to put a filling between two slice of bread.) He did not recognise them as islands but considered them and the icebergs to be part of a mountain range belonging to the icy coast of the legendary "southern continent" for which he had been constantly searching. 'It is still uncertain whether the different protruding peaks represent a continuous land mass or separate islands. Perhaps this question will remain open for many centuries to come, since voyages in this desolate area of the world are not only dangerous but of no advantage to human beings,' wrote George Foster, one of the scientists who accompanied Cook aboard the "Resolution". However, less than half a century later in 1819, the question was settled by Gottlieb von Bellinghausen, an officer of German descent in the Russian Royal Navy. He discovered Zavodovski, Leskov and Visokoi, the group in the north, and was able to identify them without any doubt as islands. His artist Michailow captured the islands so well in his illustrations that they are still printed today in the Arctic Pilot. In 1911 Wilhelm Filchner reached the Sandwich Islands on the "SS Deutschland", a journey which took place in very bad weather with waves, according to Filchner's estimation, twenty meters high!

The storm also greatly hampered the scientific work. I wonder what we are going to meet? The little information we have certainly sounds as though we are not going to be bored but is it not this element of uncertainty which awakes one's curiosity most? In the strong wind, Freydis, otherwise a sluggish boat, glides over the waves as if she has wings. She needs this kind of wind to be truly in her element. On other days we would have rejoiced, but today we have the dangerous edge of the continental shelf ahead of us where the depth of the seabed abruptly rises from 2000 m to 100 m. A lot of stranded icebergs will probably await us there and, if the wind is strong, a high, breaking sea. Additionally, the Clerke Rocks, a series of isolated rocks, emerge steeply out of the water there. We had hoped not to reach this hazard until the early morning. By daylight it would, with all probability, have been quite easy to avoid and, in fact, a fascinating experience. But as it is, we find ourselves in this predicament in the dark. In order to slow down we could heave to, but who likes to do that when the sailing conditions are optimal? So on we went. Who knows, perhaps there is not any ice there anyway? There is ice! As night falls, we can just make out the exposed rocky crags, black against the sky, like crumbs strewn over the sea and behind them a dense, endless mass of enormous icebergs. Unreal, yes, an unreal silhouette! I sense the approach of the front line of a far superior enemy, an Antarctic army of ice. It is as though the whole thing is being staged to prevent intruders, like ourselves, from getting through to the mysterious Sandwich Islands. I wish it were daytime, and the wind would ease! An unbelievable picture on our radar; a broad line of white dots, all icebergs, stretches like the Milky Way across the screen . Shortly afterwards, we are groping our way through a seemingly endless labyrinth of ice using our radar and at the same time looking out constantly into the pitch black night. All the members of the crew are on deck and are scared out of their wits. Erhard and Danko are up front at the bow giving Erich directions. Frequently they call out contradictory instructions. Freydis is surrounded on all sides by white walls and the roaring of breakers. For the first time, the whole crew has to be on duty and they are all frozen stiff due to the cold and biting wind. The risky zigzag course through this supernatural world lasts for four hours, until at last we see an open sea ahead of us, and we can breathe a sigh of relief. Those off duty can go below deck and revive themselves and their stiff limbs with hot tea and soup. By the morning the wind draws ahead again from the north-east. The whole of the

following day we are tossed around in the rough seas; we are flung back and forth and only manage a mere 4 knots despite this martyrdom. Cramped, cold, wet - the crew members are reminded of the ghastly rather than glossy and romantic sides of seafaring, and consequently spirits on board plummet. Areas of low pressure build up now and again at sea and, especially on long, arduous cruises, mental depression also. There is hardly a yachtsman who can claim to be completely immune to these mood swings. Birgit, otherwise the "cheery one", is crying, as she is at the end of her tether due to seasickness. Her only wish is to get off. Karl comforts her in his way with the following biblical quotation: "And even when it was good, it involved work and trouble. Do not forget that, children!". Many birds accompany us faithfully: wandering albatrosses, mollymawks, terns, diving petrels, storm petrels. Sometimes jackass and gentoo penguins race with us. The glass is falling slowly and steadily, making us uneasy. There are still a hundred and sixty sea miles to cover by the evening to the island of Leskov which lies slightly west of the arc described by the other South Sandwich Islands. However, Leskov, as we can tell from the Antarctic Pilot, is no place of refuge in a storm. All round the island the sides are precipitous, without a single sheltered bay. It is still 200 miles to Candlemas where we hope to find a fairly safe anchorage. During the night we encounter another group of icebergs. Why always when it is dark? Our radar certainly shows all the big icebergs, but it is unreliable as regards growlers which often disappear behind mountains of waves or become invisible in the troughs between the waves. A small growler is only ten meters long with eight tenths floating beneath the surface but weighs a thousand tons. A collision with one would be for Freydis just as fatal as a collision with a giant iceberg. The crew has no alternative other than to keep a close watch from the bow hour after hour, until the night has passed. The temperature has fallen in the last few hours, and is only 2° above zero. The glass has reconsidered the situation and is now reacting neutrally. We have to slant tack southwards. With a north-easterly Force 5 wind we cannot head directly for the island. We hoist the jib to get closer to the wind, in the hope that it will change direction soon. Our schedule is thrown out slightly. We are supposed to arrive in Candlemas the following evening. There are still 145 long, arduous miles to go. However, we cannot complain all the same; anything is better than a storm. The worst, that could happen to us, would be a storm blowing directly towards us. Icebergs and growlers in flying spray and high foaming seas are hardly

discernible. To stay in such an inferno would be like playing Russian roulette or a gigantic game of billiards with lots of white balls, and the red one is Freydis. We are all fairly "whacked"; hardly surprising after the strain and lack of sleep during the last couple of days. Fortunately, despite everything, spirits on board are "high" again. Erhard continues to amuse us all with his witty comments. He teases Karl when he comes on watch with his face bloated and tired-looking by saying: 'Those who wake up creased in the morning have got all day to get themselves straightened out.' Karl replies: 'Try telling the creased sea that instead.' As the wind dies down, the sea actually becomes smooth as though it has taken Karl's hint to heart. We are sailing on a starboard tack again. At seven clock Leskov comes into sight and a little later the islands, Visokoi and Zarodovski, which are just steep volcanic cones. Two hours later we find ourselves weaving our way between the magnificent, colossal masses of transparent, bluish ice crowding around the island of Leskov and then on along the steep, inaccessible rock face. A miserable little patch of pebbly beach appears where, despite the surf, one could perhaps land with a dinghy, but immediately behind it, the rock face rises up again vertically. The island, which has been levelled off at a height of 200 metres, is almost completely covered by glacial ice. The smell of sulphur, which wafts in our direction, tells us that the volcano is still active. The Antarctic Pilot gives us no further information on this point. We must not lose any time now as we need a safe berth for the night. We therefore head for Candlemas and Vindication. These islands are the remains of an enormous submerged volcanic crater separated from one another by the two mile wide Nelson Channel. 46 miles to go. We are very curious as to what awaits us there. We wonder whether it will be possible to climb up the active volcano with the ominous name of "Lucifer", what kind of animals live there, whether we will be able to go ashore there at all, whether there will be a good berth and whether, there too, the rock faces will rise up vertically out of the sea. And what will "Medusa Pool" be like? According to roughly sketched charts where there are no depth references, it is a small lagoon with a narrow entrance to the Nelson Channel. And what about Gorgon Pool, Chimaera Falls, Sarcophagus and Demon Point, Sea Serpent and Kraken Cove? Erich comments: 'One thing we can be sure about is the macabre imagination of the person who named the places there.' Birgit laughs: "I don't care. All I know is that I am going to go to the first best supermarket there to buy fruit and vegetables for a salad, even if they were

grown at Sarkophagus Point.' Having suffered a ghastly bout of seasickness in the last few days, Birgit has obviously now got over the worst and feels like eating again. She is, however, going to have to wait quite a while for fresh supplies. Aboard Freydis today there is sauerkraut on the menu - highly recommended as a remedy for scurvy ever since Cook's voyages. We pass by Visokoi a few miles to the west. The mountain top is veiled in low hanging cloud - or is it vapour and smoke? It looks as though the top has been cut off by a razor blade. Shortly after and not far away we see three humpback whales with a calf. A wonderful picture when they send up their fountains resembling submarine geysers. They are not bothered by us in the least. In the late afternoon in good visibility and pleasant sunshine we arrive at the group of Candlemas Islands (so-called because they were sighted by Cook on this date). 'The island lies there in front of one - smiling, reluctant, inviting, magnificent, mean, outrageous or barbaric and always silent, always with the same expression whispering, come and see for yourself.' Joseph Canard's description refers to a quite different island but precisely catches the aura of the one ahead of us. We have now reached the destination of our dreams and desires; we feel a sense of relief mixed with pride and euphoria. I can only compare it to the immense sense of joy I felt ten years ago when we discovered the world of ice in the Antarctic for the first time aboard Freydis. My fellow yachtsmen and women feel similarly as Karl's comment demonstrates: 'It's like Christmas and Easter all rolled into one.' In front of us lies a reef which stretches in an easterly direction from the island of Vindication in the west to Candlemas and well over halfway into the Nelson Channel. Depending on the direction of the wind it provides a natural barrier to the icebergs. Once stranded there, they become part of a gigantic cemetery for icebergs. We will not be able to anchor here, for sure. While searching for a suitable anchorage we sail round Candlemas, a fascinatingly ugly, incredibly exciting, complex and many faceted monstrous product of hell, which shows us that our map is hopelessly out of date. Where we are now looking for an entrance to Medusa Pool the sea has washed up a broad barrier of boulders. The former lagoon is totally cut off from the sea. However, "Lucifer" gives off smoke and vapour as in the old days and its 240 m high crater walls opalesce in red, sulphurous yellow and violet in an unusually attractive way. In contrast to the flatter, and mostly ice-free neighbouring island of Vindication, Candlemas is almost completely buried under an ice sheet and has as well as Lucifer two other

considerably higher mountains, Mount Andromeda 550m high and Mount Perseus. The person who gave them their names was obviously well versed in Greek mythology. Fortunately we have Schwab's "Greek Legends" in our ship's library and can read up about it. In order to appease the Gods, the beautiful Andromeda, had to be chained to a cliff where she was left to the mercy of a monster - this must be a reference to the reeking, smoking "Lucifer" - from which Perseus rescued her, and for which reason she then became his wife. Both the summits are, indeed, very close to one another. We are filled with amazement as we sail past slopes comprising of transparent ice masses sometimes reaching down to the water and past dark, precipitous walls of basalt formed like organ pipes and embellished with crystal clear stalactites. We pass small shingly bays packed with penguins and the deepest blue icebergs we have ever seen. A great attraction - there are not only navy blue and bottle green icebergs, but even ones brightly patterned like agate. The shades of red on the surface are slightly less awe inspiring as they stem from the penguins' excrement which exudes a disgusting all-pervading smell. Admittedly, it is difficult to tell which is the greater offender, the hoardes of penguins huddled on each beach or the volcano. Masses of penguins jump up through the water on to ledges and plateaux, clutching on to the sides of the icebergs and clambering up as though they have climbing irons on - using their beaks as an ice pick. They then sit there like tourists on crowded yachts. They also try to board Freydis, mostly by taking a bold leap out of the water. When peering like inquisitive children for a moment through the panes of the saloon, they often hit their stomachs on the hull. Having sailed around the island once, we anchor in a bay on the north side in the evening. We are well protected from all winds except those from the north. As the wind is now blowing from the south-east, there is no danger for the time being. Nevertheless, we pay out sixty metres of chain and mark the anchor with a buoy on a life line, just in case. The bay is edged with dark sand, coarse pumice and a ridge of large, rounded boulders. Beyond there is a small lake, a part of the possibly silted up Medusa Pool which, as we have discovered, has now also been cut off from the sea in the west. After a relatively quiet night -although even without a storm there is enough swell and roaring from the surf- we go ashore in the dinghy without hardly getting our feet wet. What an exciting feeling it is to visit an island where the "inhabitants" are hardly likely to have ever set eyes on a human being before -just like landing on a

foreign planet! Scores of chinstrap penguins populate the water, the boulders and the lake beyond with its dark ashy beaches. A few fur seals, elephant and Weddell seals mingle with the throng. We climb to the foot of Lucifer through, what could be called the gateway to hell, a labyrinth consisting of black, prickly lava masses and grotesque, primeval looking rock formations held together by bridges of ice. The gentoo, jackass and Adelie penguins sit crouching with their families, like little black and white demons, in between the lava spikes in the caves, gorges and crevasses. On the elevated dart-like spikes the gulls are keeping a look-out for prey, injured animals, abandoned young birds and unguarded eggs. Higher up again giant petrels are squatting with their snow white brood. If we unintentionally get too close, they snarl angrily at us like fur seals. We climb up steep slopes of tuff and volcanic ash, passing the nesting places of smaller kinds of storm petrels, right up to the edge of the crater. There we are enveloped in vapour enriched with hydrogen sulphide and have to be extremely careful not to sink with our shoes into a hot, brick red pulp from which fumaroles emerge and not to slip on to the sulphurous yellow inside walls and into the hot ashy throat. Here at the top, one hears the shrill cries and cawing of the birds and only in the distance the roaring of the breakers. It is refreshingly quiet. We have a superb view of Freydis and the bay and the two lakes in the north and west of the island, separated by a plateau of sand and ash, which even has a narrow strip of wonderfully green vegetation on it. We stand there for quite a while, carried away by an overpowering, imposing but threatening world of nature. Its force is immediately perceptible in the vulcano's boiling hot breath, in the cold wind sweeping past us, in the dazzling white foaming sea thundering against the jet black rocks and reefs, and the ubiquitous gigantic blocks of ice wandering along mysterious routes. Despite a lull by the evening, nasty, high rollers in the bay cause Freydis and ourselves to roll mercilessly back and forth in our berths all night long. The next morning we are exhausted. Danko can hardly move and is suffering badly from sciatica. However, he has his own private doctor, Birgit, who gives him two injections and puts him out of his misery. Without Danko, Karl and Erhard have to work flat out to heave in the anchor. Karl spurs on his fellow watch keeper who is leaning over the pulpit, puffing and panting as he tugs at the chain: 'For your birthday I'm going to give you a chain to tune up, then at last you will get fists like chain grabs.' Let us leave this inhospitable bay and set off with the light, rising, south-easterly wind in the

direction of Zavodovski. Once again we pass en route the bleak island of Visokoi, one thousand metres high, with its peak veiled in cloud. We sail along close to its steep rocky shores. In amongst the stranded icebergs we encounter the two humpback whales and the calf again which we had met the last time we were in the area. This time they swim, blow and dive so close to our boat that we are not only able to recognise their shiny "hump" with the wrinkled dorsal fin but also their long, white flippers on the underside. This particular kind of whale, which moves in such a leisurely and unsuspecting fashion and hardly makes any attempt to get away, was inevitably the first and easy victim of the whalers who operated from the stations on South Georgia and liked to hunt them down in the South Sandwich area. We are, therefore, all the more delighted as we almost rub shoulders with these sturdy, native fellows. The crew is so carried away taking photographs that they constantly get in each other's way. The sun shimmers eerily through the ever increasing veil of mist, as we approach the legendary island of Zavodovski. On discovering it, F.G. Bellinghausen wrote the following: 'In the north, thick black clouds hung in the sky and as they kept their shape and position, we assumed there must be high ground in the proximity; and so it was, in fact. After both ships had continued to sail in this direction for another two hours, we saw again another rather dark looking, mountainous island. As there was a foul smelling mushroom cloud rising from and then dispersing at its peak, it was, without doubt, volcanic. The volcano, however, continued to spew out foul-smelling smoke.' He named the island after Commander Zavodovski, who was in charge of the second ship on the expedition and who together with his men even set foot on the island. The island is nothing other than the volcano which stages, even if somewhat undramatically, regular eruptions, rumbles and emits hot smoke and hydrogen sulphide gases. Its ominous name "Mount Asphyxia" is not unjustified. Larsen, a whaling captain, who came across the island in 1908, was poisoned by the aggressive gases and nearly died. He returned to South Georgia seriously ill. Something similar could have happened to us. We sail round the island in search of an anchorage and find two somewhat more pleasant bays in the west with narrow strips of black sand. Behind the sand, dark walls rise up vertically, covered with obscure blobs of colour and sulphurous yellow rills steaming and billowing from countless holes, caves and cracks, which further up are completely shrouded in mist. Caravans of penguins wander one after the other up along the narrow, zigzag paths, and gather on

small, dangerously steep ledges covered in snow and ice. Although the sea is relatively calm, we are not going to risk anchoring here in this steaming inferno - even the water is steaming. The pungent, penetrating vapours in our noses warn us not to stay too long. When looking at the penguins on the wall, Erich comments: 'That must be a special combat unit, perhaps they have gas masks?' The island resembles a fortress. In the north, east and south it is bound by a ten to fifteen meter black lava base, above which an extensive plateau stretches, gradually rising and occasionally terraced, to the foot of the peak of the partly glaciated volcanic cone. This whole plateau is covered with penguins, penguins everywhere, nothing but penguins. There are said to be between 12 and 20 million on Zavodovski, an island with a diameter of 5 kilometres. Between 12 and 20 million screeching, rowing, protesting chinstrap penguins -just imagine that! In the midst of it all there are a number of other kinds of penguins like the jackass, Adelie and king penguins. Here is where it is all happening! One hears it, sees it - and smells it. The main thing is to be here; that seems to be their motto. We think so too, of course, and anchor at a depth of sixteen metres with forty metres of chain in a flat bay in the south-west of the island where the air seems less contaminated by the volcano but perfumed mainly by "Eau de Pinguin". Unfortunately the bay is completely exposed to the sea. We spend a peaceful and refreshing night here, despite the many icebergs in front of us, an unpleasant swell and being surrounded by jagged, lava peaks resembling the frothy mouth of a monster baring its teeth. The night is only broken by the anchor watch. There are all sorts of reasons why one has to be constantly wary in these waters.

In the morning the ship is tossed about terribly in the swell and the chain becomes caught up in one of the lava teeth. We pay out ten more metres of chain and all is well for the time being. The mist has lifted, the sun is shining, and we can at last see the fuming summit of the volcano. After a Zavodovski breakfast, a breakfast where even the freshly made scrambled eggs smell foul, Erich and Erhard set off in the dinghy with the outboard motor in search of a place to land. On account of the high rollers which thunder against the land I do not feel easy again, until they return safely. Their exploratory trip was unsuccessful. They did not find anywhere to land there. We disentangle the chain, weigh anchor and move to the south side for the rest of the day. Under the present wind and weather conditions the only place to land is obviously here.

We all, except Birgit cross over in the dinghy to a small cleft in the lava base. Birgit has had enough of the smell of volcanoes and penguins - and for today at least - she has only one wish and that is to be in the Caribbean. In the breakers Eva falls overboard. With great presence of mind Erich is able to pull her back into the boat. In these icy temperatures - only 2°C - not a joke but a matter of life or death! We also got more than just our feet wet. The fresh clothes we had packed so that they were water tight were a godsend. Suddenly a growler breaks apart right next to us; the penguins squatting there tumble into the water. As they fall into the waves, some of them are hit by the heavy pieces of ice which are being beaten against the stony beach. They escape with only broken limbs. Of course, the gulls have seen this. They just have to wait Another penguin is luckier. It fell, evidently a while ago, head first into a deep crevasse, deep at least for a penguin, and is hopelessly stuck. Erhard goes to a lot of trouble and succeeds in pulling the little fellow out by its tail feathers - he almost got stuck there himself. The general feeling is that he deserves a lifesaving medal. Of course there are several old friends lying about on the beach: fur seals, elephant and Weddell seals. However, here on the island of Zavodovski, they do not have a say in anything, no, they have no say whatsoever. This territory is under majority rule which means it is governed by the chinstrap penguins. They look like little guard officers, self- assured and, at times, fairly militant little fellows - real fighters. Even if we keep our distance when we pass by their colonies, several of them, probably the "watch keepers," inevitably dash towards us, protesting rudely - at least, so it seems to us, as they come right up to us, squawking loudly and wildly flapping their wings. They give us the feeling that they are not frightened of us in the slightest. There comes a point when Danko has had enough of this perpetual harassment. Like David and Goliath, he stands up in front of one of the little creatures and yells at it: 'Can't you see that I'm much bigger than you are, you miserable, noisy, little brat? Who the devil do you think you are?' Without a word the little fellow turns round, lifts its little tail and squirts a reddish brown liquid on to his boot. An expressive and legitimate reaction. But all the same -we feel at home in this world of "A thousand and one penguins".

The crater is enveloped once more in mist, we do not dare to climb up. We prefer to wander and wade through the rapid, glacial streams, which have carved deep paths into the many layers of guano and ash, following them back to their source

in Mount Asphyxia. We then climb up to the higher terraces of the bleak plateau where a couple of pathetic patches of algae shine like oases in the desert. The green "lungs" of the penguin cities in Zadoski are nothing to write home about. We are let off lightly on our return trip through the surf to board Freydis. Birgit has made "lasagne" which we devour as we are ravenous. And then straight into our berths. The night is short. At four in the morning it is all hands on deck. We set sail. Course set: 28 degrees. Destination: Tristan da Cunha. After such a high spot as the South Sandwich Islands we are back again to normal sailing. Our situation is similar to that of an alpinist who not only climbs up mountains but also has to go down again. We have to get out of the danger zone again. Not until we get beyond the convergence into moderate latitudes, can we relax, only then may we delight without reservations in what we have achieved and experienced. But we have a long way to go until then. The risky and dangerous journey back across probably the loneliest and stormiest sea on this earth comes much harder than the journey out. Not only because there is no longer the lure of a "star attraction" at the end, but because much of our energy has been spent and our thirst for adventure in icy regions stilled for the present. The distance to Nightingale, the most southerly island of the Tristan da Cunha group, which lies far to the north-east on the 37th parallel, is 1,284 sea miles - according to the GPS. That is the longest passage so far on this cruise. A north-westerly wind Force 6 is blowing. The sea is rough and the visibility is appalling. In the morning Erhard discovers a new "island", not yet marked on the map. Sadly, nothing comes of "Erhard's island" as it turns out to be a tabular iceberg. As night sets in we see exciting marine phosphorescence: horizontal streaks shining like neon lights in the sea. For a short while, the stars are visible but then mist develops ahead of us. By constantly keeping a look-out we prevent our colliding with growlers or icebergs. Why do the nights have to be so pitch black? There does not seem to be a moon anymore in the southern hemisphere. It has not put in an appearance for weeks. It is as though we are sailing into a "black hole". There is a general feeling of insecurity - the eye has no point to fix on, except the vacillating, perpetually turning compass needle. The movements of the ship are felt to be alarming, reeling and spinning in thin air, in a void. At the same time we live in constant fear of the lurking danger of crashing into sharp edged icebergs which are hard as steel. At night on this sea of loneliness, one is aware of being small and at the mercy of the elements, completely powerless. The air

has become milder and the glass is dropping dramatically. In the evening: a storm from WNW with heavy squalls. Karl the helmsman, receives icy, salt water showers time and again. Erhard calls down: 'Karl showers so often that he is starting to develop flippers.' When sailing on the port tack, the lavatory overflows. A valve is corroded and cannot be closed. Eva is desperate: "Karl, right the ship!" In no time a large quantity of water is sloshing around in the bilge. Having heaved to and taken in three reefs, we pump it out and seal off the outer valve to the sea water supply for the lavatory. Wind Forces of 9 to 10 all day. Inside the ship it is pleasant - as always actually when we heave to - although the ten metre high waves now rolling towards us sometimes cause the ship to heel over so much that all sorts of things are propelled through the ship like flying missiles, and the crockery rattles in the cupboards, sounding as if everything is about to break. Despite the rough sea and the danger that pots and pans may hurtle through the air, there is potato soup with corned beef and sausages for lunch. When eating, it is inevitable that, now and again, a spoonful will land up partly or completely somewhere else. Afterwards we even attack the well assorted book box, have a read in our berths and listen to music cassettes. But outside the mood is apocalyptic! Utter chaos! A bad storm with gale winds. Every half hour the watch changes. Erich considers whether it would be better to scud with bare poles. The danger that the sea will break directly over the ship would not be so great. However, we would not drift at one to two knots anymore, like the ice, but then sail at greater speed ahead of the storm. The danger of colliding with an iceberg would increase in the darkness. Eva is finding it difficult to climb back into the top berth. While she is making vain attempts to do so, Hans Albers sings "hop over everything," and "come onto the swing, Louise". I think Louise would have something to say if she had to get onto our kind of swing! An atmosphere of alarm once again. White enemies are surrounding us and heading for us! They are swaying and bouncing relentlessly towards us, closer and closer, through the angry sea. In the chaos and flying spray one can hardly discern them or distinguish them from the white wave crests of the breakers We quickly turn on the engine. A "last minute manoeuvre" is called for. Shortly after, an unfamiliar sound. Erich: 'The cooling pump has had it. What a goddamn nuisance! It just had to happen now.' He works against the clock with Erhard in the engine-room. They rid the clogged propeller of small pieces of ice and try to start the engine again. It works. We break through the

hostile circle around us, shake them off and escape through the flood of breakers to where at a safe distance we can heave to again and wait for the next onslaught. In the morning the wind turns WSW and eases slightly. The glass rises. At eight o'clock we set sail. At last we are making headway. We are glad about this, even if the going is tough. We must get away from the ice and over the convergence. Karl repairs the demolished semi-cardanic supports of our cooker. During the night, it was knocked about so much by the sea that it took off on its own. Then we have some hot coffee, bread and honey. The crew feels on top of the world. They are glad that they and the ship have survived the storm. It is only another 200 miles to the convergence and the wind is blowing from astern. What more could you want? The sun is peeping through the clouds. We are gliding through mountains of deep blue sea with shiny white crests. It is a scene you could fall in love with, if it were not for the fact that one is sitting in this little nutshell exposed to all sorts of adversities. And yet, this gives an honest picture of this kind of sailing, this way of life: challenge, danger, joy and horror. Spoke too soon! By midday the wind begins to draw ahead. The glass is falling ominously. At eight in the evening there is no question of making headway anymore. One breaker after the other pounds against the ship, and Force 9 to 10 winds whistle through the rigging. We have no alternative other than to heave to again and spend another moonless night "living it up" (and down!) in this raging sea. In the morning, I hear Eva calling to the skipper: 'We have nothing but growlers round us, we must get away as fast as possible.' So we start the engine once more and take off straight through the middle. This time we do not escape the mob so easily. One of the little monsters gives us a bad knock in the stern. There is an almighty crash, leaving us with yet another dent to remind us of the Antarctic. Still fifty miles to go to the convergence. The wind turns south and the angry sea dies down. We are sailing again, hurrah!

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