

On the way

[25. February 2019] Right now, we are southeast off James Ross Island in the western Weddell Sea breaking our way to the iceberg A68 and the Larsen C ice shelf. The distance to the northern tip of A68 measures ca. 75 nautical miles (nm), slightly over 135 km. To our working area, the area where A 68 broke of the Larsen C ice shelf, the distance is ca. 180 nm (330 km)...

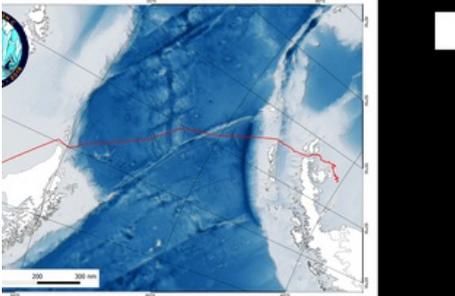


Fig. 1: Overview map and cruise plot. (Photo: Karte: S. Dreutter; Logo: A. Purser)



Fig. 2: Polarstern in heavy sea in the furious fifties. (Photo: K. Jerosch)



Fig. 3: Antarctic Sound. (Photo: K. Macsween)



Fig. 4: Rosamel. (Photo: Illustration A. Purser)

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Fig. 5: Charismatic megafauna. (Photo: Griffiths, Huw J.)

At the start of the week, we left Punta Arenas. Due to the delay in harbour operations, and despite our hopes, eventually, all our airfreight arrived at the ship and we were well equipped for the cruise. Monday morning the 18th of February at 06:00, the pilot came on board and soon after, the lines were cast off. This was the start of Expedition PS118 of the RV Polarstern.

During the first part of the journey, we sailed through the eastern part of the Magellan Strait towards the south Atlantic. Soon after we left the Magellan Strait, the ship turned south heading to the Antarctic Sound. In the beginning we were still able to see the Tierra del Fuego on our starboard side, but as soon as we passed Cape Horn and the Islas Estados, only the Drake Passage was between us and Antarctica. The Drake Passage with the 'furious fifties' fulfilled all expectations. On the 19th and 20th of February, we were caught in a gale making this night a rather unpleasant one. In addition, some of our fellow travellers struggled with seasickness. Nevertheless, some quite spectacular footage was recorded of RV Polarstern making her way across the Southern Ocean. In the afternoon of the 20th of February, the storm ceased and we all got a good night of sleep to recover. With moderate swell and light winds, we continued our journey until King Georg Island, the largest of the South Shetland Island, appeared on our starboard side in the afternoon of the 21st of February - our first glimpse of Antarctica. Already in the Bransfield Strait, penguins, seals and whales were surrounding the ship. Their abundances even increased when we entered the Antarctic Sound. Certainly, the evening in the Antarctic Sound, with whales, seals and Rosamel in the background, will probably be among the nicest impressions many of us will take home from this expedition. When we hit sea ice at the eastern end of Antarctic Sound, we had truly arrived in Antarctica.

In the meantime, the first scientific activities have started. Since we left the exclusive economic zones of Argentina and Chile, the hydroacoustic team works tirelessly to chart the remaining white areas of the ocean floor. And also, the sea ice physics, the biology and the oceanography teams have started to collect samples and data.

In the meantime, the RV Polarstern continuously works her way southwards and we hope that ice, wind and weather will support us. This morning, we passed the most southerly point that the British expedition with RV James Clark Ross reached in spring of 2018 when trying to access the calving area of A68 in the Larsen C ice shelf.

On board, everybody is well and we are quite excited while the crew does its best to bring us to our study area.

We send our regards from the western Weddell Sea,

Boris Dorschel on behalf of all PS118 expedition participants