

## Take a Walk on the Wild Side - Julie George (Francis) YHS 1966

"In November 2011, **Frank Wild** completed his final journey from Johannesburg, South Africa to the Whalers' Cemetery in Grytviken, South Georgia, when his ashes were placed by me in a grave next to that of his long-time friend and 'Boss', Sir Ernest Shackleton.

So, following a memorial service in the Norwegian Lutheran Church in Grytviken where Shackleton's funeral service had been held in 1922, I found myself leading a procession of 80 or so people along a rugged path, surrounded by penguins, feisty fur seals and elephant seals, and carrying a casket containing Frank's ashes to the Grytviken cemetery. With me were two of my brothers, Brian & Martin Francis, my niece Carina and husband Ian, and my husband, Steve. To get to South Georgia, we had flown to Buenos Aires, and then to Ushuaia (the southern-most city in the world)



Where we boarded the Russian flagged, "Akademik Ioffe", a modernised ice-strengthened vessel originally designed for polar research and built in Finland. A BBC-produced 1-hour documentary called "Frank Wild: Antarctica's Forgotten Hero" is soon to be released which tells the story of this voyage, the memorial service and burial, and of Frank's achievements as a polar explorer.

Frank Wild was one of the greatest Polar explorers, the only man to have served on five expeditions to the Antarctic during the Heroic Age and also one of only two men to have been awarded four bars to his Polar Medal.

In 1901, Wild joined Scott's *Discovery* expedition, in which he served with distinction.

In 1907, he joined the *Nimrod* expedition and was chosen by Shackleton as a member of the four-man party, which attempted to reach the South Pole. They got to within ninety-seven miles of the Pole when they were forced to turn back.

In 1911, despite pressing invitations by Scott to join him on his fateful *Terra Nova* expedition, Wild joined the Australasian Antarctic Expedition (AAE) and was chosen by Mawson as leader of the eight-man party, which established the Western Base on the Shackleton Ice Shelf and spent 12 months exploring Queen Mary Land.

In 1914, he joined Shackleton's *Endurance* expedition in an attempt to cross the Antarctic continent via the South Pole. The *Endurance* became trapped in the ice in the Weddell Sea, where eventually she was crushed and sank. After many months on the ice, all the expedition members reached Elephant Island, where Wild displayed outstanding fortitude and leadership when Shackleton left him in charge of the 21 men for 4½ months, while he and five others sailed the *James Caird* to South Georgia to seek help.

Upon returning to the UK in 1916, Wild was commissioned Lieutenant in the RNVR and served in various capacities in Russia until the end of the 1914-18 War, after which, he and his great friend Dr James McIlroy departed for Nyasaland to try their hand at farming.

In 1921 Wild and McIlroy received a telegram from Shackleton asking them to join him on the *Quest* expedition. Sadly, on 5 January 1922, while in Grytviken Harbour, South Georgia, Shackleton died of a heart attack and Wild took over the leadership of the expedition until its completion in September 1922.

In 1923 Wild emigrated to South Africa to farm cotton. After many hardships during the great depression, and various occupations, Wild died in Klerksdorp, Johannesburg in 1939.

On our trip, the penguins, seals, dolphins and whales (even a few reindeer) were fascinating to see, but the best experience for me were the icebergs – they were so big and blue and we spent many hours drifting in our zodiacs amongst the floes taking in the peacefulness of Antarctica.

Our homeward crossing of the Drake Passage rated an 11 on the 1-12 Beaufort Scale, where 12 is a hurricane. At the Captain's Dinner on our last night at sea in the dining room, I needed three dinners as the first two slid off the table to my feet. Fortunately, my chair was secured but not so for brother Martin who joined Alexandra Shackleton's table twice uninvited along with glass of wine in one hand and a bottle in the other, quite proud of saving both each time – there were roars of laughter amid gasps of horror as we rocked from side to side. The trip was a memorable one all round.

Two new traditions have now begun:

Every ship's captain to sail into Grytviken walks up to the cemetery and toasts both Shackleton and Wild, takes a sip and then throws the remaining whisky on both gravesites; and at approx 3pm every Saturday afternoon, Joy Francis (now 94) the last "Wild Child", and Julie toast "Uncle Frank" with a tot of whisky, replicated from the supplies found under the floorboards in the Ross Sea Depot (laid for Shackleton and his men had the *Endurance* not been crushed in sea ice) and found nearly 100 years later – a most pleasant tradition!"



Joy Francis & Julie toasting "Uncle Frank"