



Southern royal albatross, Campbell Island

Anisotome latifolia, Campbell Island

WILD SOUTH

Anne-Sophie Pagé learns to slow down during a memorable voyage to the “forgotten islands” of the South Pacific. Photos by **Tobias Hayashi**.

The Southern Ocean was a wild one. The kind where salt-caked hair stood up on end and seasickness remedies are made redundant. At that moment, as our boat sailed south towards New Zealand’s biodiversity-rich sub-Antarctic islands, the Southern Ocean became my ocean – with eyes closed, leaning over the centre of the bow, I learned how to fly. Dipping and soaring like my ancestors and those yet to come.

Slow down.

I often found myself wanting to stop time on our voyage south, and, for a split second, I realised I could, before a gentle rock from a wave would re-emphasise the transition from present to past. It made me understand people’s desperate need for photographs – forever trying to capture that feeling of “now”. I joined them in their frantic focusing

on a rare snipe, yet by the time the photo was taken, the bird was gone. The snipe looked at me, and I did not look back.

A friend said to me under the stars one night that all sub-Antarctic creatures are blurry, and it is only now that I am fully grasping the meaning of those words. My photo roll stops at Enderby Island with a build-up of distracted, unfocused edges. After that, my camera became an ornament – I surrendered to the now.

And the now was wonderful. I edged on the side of caution and avoided eye contact with a New Zealand sea lion on Enderby Island. I watched the sun set at midnight sprawled out on my back absorbing the eternity of the waves. I listened to silence for the first time in my life. I sat among the albatross and learned their local dialect. I was not a wallflower – I was a megaherb

exposed to the raw and honest innocence of the island landscape and those that call it home.

Life is full of pivotal moments. For me, the act of stepping onto a shore that had defeated all attempts of human settlement was emotionally stirring. The history of these islands is a perfect example of mother nature lifting a middle finger to humanity and the destruction we bring. The island did not need me, yet I desperately needed it.

I live to seek out the wilderness. A love of adventure on the surface but standing in a blanket of fog on Campbell Island forced me to internalise my desperate need for reassurance that our world is ok, that hidden corners remain unspoiled. In the silence, a pipit scurried around my feet completely unaware, and I couldn’t help but feel that I was intruding, because I was.

My relationship with the bird was incredibly delicate. One wrong move, and I would shatter its trust. I hated that power.

The sub-Antarctic islands comforted my green angst. Yet at the same time, they terrified me. To cope in the face of a climate and biodiversity crisis, one can search for a silver lining or apply a band-aid. For me, the islands were both. They gave me hope that Earth has retained some of its natural authenticity, but, as I watched the people standing around me, I couldn’t help but wonder if the beautiful landscapes were masking the extent of global destruction – by dulling our sense of urgency.

Antarctica holds a mythic weight similar to outer space, but to me the sub-Antarctic Islands are the kingmakers. They are relatable. They are the Otago Peninsula but on steroids, and if used right they can form a model for change. I was sent

on this voyage to remind people these nature-rich islands are more than just far-flung names.

One by one, the islands rose out of the water to greet me – The Snares, Enderby Island, Auckland Island, and Campbell Island – to most of the world, they are forgotten. I can’t shake the feeling there is a reason for this. Environmental activism makes up the foundation of who I am, and generating passion for our natural world fuels my actions. Yet there is part of me that wants to keep what I experienced on these islands a secret. And I’m not sure why. Maybe it’s the risk of exploitation that stems from awareness. Maybe it’s the fear that people won’t see what I see. Maybe I am just being selfish. Forgotten or not, my voyage south was quite simply the highlight of my life. I may be back on dry land, but the waves continue to rock me.

■ Anne-Sophie Pagé and Tobias Hayashi experienced the sub-Antarctic islands courtesy of Heritage Expeditions – see www.heritage-expeditions.com.



Writer Anne-Sophie Pagé is an Otago Peninsula local and grew up sharing her backyard with penguins and sea lions. She is halfway through a vet degree at Massey University and plans to use her knowledge as a soon-to-be vet to assist in mitigating New Zealand’s biodiversity crisis. With six years of experience as a wildlife guide, she uses her job to foster emotional connections between individuals and the environment in the hope of developing a holistic sense of kaitiakitanga among all of us in the face of climate change. To read more of her environmental perspectives, visit www.greenangst.com.



Australian-based photographer Tobias Hayashi was another Enderby scholar, who travelled to the sub-Antarctic islands on the same voyage as Anne-Sophie. Growing up in Brisbane, Tobias first fell in love with land birds, then seabirds, and finally reptiles, mammals, and butterflies. More recently, a degree in botany and zoology at the Australian National University taught him the fascination of plants, including native orchids. Tobias started documenting nature when he bought his first camera in 2008 – see <http://www.tobiashayashi.com>.



New Zealand sea lions, Enderby Island



New Zealand pipit, Enderby Island



Rockhopper penguins, Auckland Island



Southern royal albatross



Campbell Island snipe