

TELEMARK ANTARCTICA: Unparalleled!

by Patrick Morrow

Pat Morrow è un fotografo professionista oltre che telemarker. Insieme alla sua compagna **Baiba** sono a Livigno per questa settimana. Giovedì presenteranno una serata di diapositive relative ai loro viaggi nel mondo in Telemark

Pat Morrow and Baiba Morrow are well known among the Telemark population. They are both here in Livigno and Thursday will show some of their pictures around the world with Telemark skies

Hundreds of ice bergs lay below us, as if glued to the cobalt Vuarinet surface of the water: They resembled bits of cotton that had been chewed by a food processor and spat out onto a freshly varnished tabletop. As we skimmed low over the water, my reverie turned to awe when I realized that every third or fourth berg carried enormous hitch-hikers — dozing crabeater and Weddell seals.

A few seconds later, we touched down on the soft glacial snow of Jones Sound, halfway down the 1,600 km long Antarctic Peninsula. It was good to be back in Antarctica. As our ski-equipped twin otter drank thirstily from three of the fuel drums that had been cached there by boat the year before, I took stock of our situation. We were far from our stressed-out world in the northern hemisphere and already, my mind was beginning to slow down and focus on the simpler things in life — like the spiritually uplifting scenery of Jones Sound. The mountains formed a tight horseshoe around the inlet, and if hadn't been for the ocean at our backs, we could have been on an icefield deep in the heart of the Karakorum Range in Pakistan. We pitched our tents, strapped on our skis, and headed for the perfect corn snow on the nearest slope.

This was my fourth visit to Antarctica. The first, in November, 1984, had been less than idyllic. Within hours of touching down at the tip of the Antarctic Peninsula, we had been hammered by a hurricane force wind. Our chartered plane had not only been damaged but nearly blasted into oblivion in the Southern Ocean.

A year later I returned. This time my team of nine flew effortlessly to our original objective: Antarctica's highest summit, Mt. Vinson (4897 m). Fifteen flying hours and 3,000 Km from South America, the massif presented one of the most rewarding skiing challenges in my career. Not only was it the most isolated one of the most rewarding skiing challenges in my career. Not only was it the most isolated ski run in the world, but it had only been climbed three times before. No one had even thought of skiing it on telemark gear.

Our merry band savoured a steep 300 m powder run on the slopes above camp one. Higher up on the mountain, the grueling conditions of ice and crusty snow in the two icefalls would keep us on our toes, and sometimes on our noses. Our equipment and approach to skiing here was no different from that used in any other arctic region. Our only specialized piece of gear was a carpenter's rip saw which we used to cut blocks in the compact snow for building protective walls in front of our tents at each of our four camps.

From our elevated perspective on summit day, the whole expanse of the 300 km long Ellsworth mountain range called out to be explored on ski touring equipment.

On their northern aspect, the mountains spill almost 4800 meters into the ice-bound Weddell Sea, and to the south, the Polar Ice Cap swallows them at half-height. The Ellsworths form the largest range in the interior, and with the inherently stable weather and snow conditions during the November-to-January summer season, they are the most attractive.

Grab a map, and I'll take you on a tropical air excursion to the "last continent", which I did a few years ago with nine other nature lovers in a private group. In the southern Patagonian city of Punta Arenas, Chile, we shook off our pisco sour hangovers and boarded the Adventure Network International chartered



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