

From the National Geographic Explorer in Antarctica



Video by Jim Napoli, Video Chronicler

Humpback whale fluke

Errera Channel & Neko Harbor

Snow was falling from gray overcast skies as the *National Geographic Explorer* greeted the morning here on the west side of the Antarctic Peninsula. The bridge is often the first place to visit after waking. With coffee in hand we scan the water ahead for wildlife and listen to the brief talk between the first officer and the watchman. The sky brightened as we sailed through the Errera Channel, one of the most beautiful stretches of coast here on the peninsula.

Following breakfast we anchored at Neko Harbour, one of the few places where one can actually set foot on the continent. One half of our contingent enjoyed an hour long Zodiac cruise while the others went ashore. The cruisers were treated to near views of massive icebergs and close encounters with three humpback whales. Those ashore focused their lenses on the nesting gentoo penguins or hiked up the steep hillside for a commanding view of the surrounding glaciers and mountain peaks. The trip down in the snow was easier for many who opted to slide down on their bottoms. Some even went back up for a second go.

The afternoon's activities included a much-anticipated kayak opportunity. Following a short safety briefing in the lounge, the sign-up sheets filled quickly. There was also a chance for another Zodiac tour among the icebergs that dotted the bay. But the highlight and unexpected surprise of the day was the arrival of several hungry humpback whales.

The remainder of the afternoon was spent in an over-the-top experience watching lunge feeding activity. Thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of photos were snapped from both kayaks and Zodiacs as a dozen or so whales burst from the sea with mouths agape and krill leaping on the surface. This activity continued in the bay for nearly four hours and exhausted our senses.

Thrilled with our good fortune, we settled into the lounge for our evening recap and shared images.

Steven Gould, Natural History Staff; Photo by Mike Nolan, Staff Photographer

