

## **Antarctica (via Drake's Passage) on a Dutch Square Rigger**

### **By Richard Lawson**

As hard as it is to believe, this headline encapsulates one of the most interesting presentations to the Cruising Division, given on 22 February 2017, by Club Member John Taylor and his close friend Rhod Cook.



Rhod Cook and John Taylor

During January 2016, both men were fortunate enough to join 'Bark Europa' on separate voyages, from Chile to Antarctica and return. Their voyages included travelling down and up the Beagle Passage and traversing Drake's Passage in each direction. Each crossing of the fully exposed Drake's Passage took approximately five days whilst experiencing some very wild weather. As a result of the time line, each expedition was able to spend about 10 days exploring areas such as Deception Island which is a dormant volcano/island and has a restricted access from the sea into a large harbour. Rhod's group even managed to land on Cape Horn which is most unusual, under normal weather constraints.

Each day, whilst on the Antarctic mainland, the ship's crew of 15 would have the 40 or so guests up and going ashore three times a day for exploratory hikes, wild life observation, or looking at disused out-stations, of Chilean, Ukrainian, or British origin.

The 'Bark Europa' was originally built in 1911 to act as a 'light ship'. At 350 tonnes and 150ft long she is to this day a very sturdy and well-built ship, plying passages around the world each year. During the 1970s the ship was converted into an expedition vessel specialising in excursion work. The vessel is managed by a trust, based in Holland, and both John and Rhod commented on the outstanding condition of the ship and how well maintained it is by the mixed crew. This seemed to be based on a policy of 'fix it now if possible.'



80 Members and their guests attended the presentation

The ship's annual programme includes three visits to the Antarctic during the southern summer, and John and Rhod were fortunate to experience two of the 2016 voyages. The ship's skipper was completing his ninth visit to the Antarctic and whenever it was possible for the ship to sail, the Bark was given every opportunity, whether by day or night, gentle or strong breezes.

Both John and Rhod concluded by saying what a unique and special opportunity they had both experienced ... one for the bucket list. And the images they displayed were outstanding!!