



# BEYOND FIORDLAND TO OUR WILDEST ISLANDS

*Located 700km south of Bluff, Campbell Island is a conservation cornerstone of the five wild, remote and rugged island groups that make up New Zealand's subantarctic UNESCO World Heritage Site and is the first stop of an 11-day legacy voyage visiting The Snares, Campbell Island, Auckland Islands, Stewart and Ulva Island and Fiordland.*







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1. Previous page: Looking out over Carnley Harbour from the Southwest Cape on Auckland Island
2. Spirit of Enderby departs the Port of Bluff adventure bound
3. Hooker's sea lion pups among the grasses on Enderby Island
4. Southern royal albatross gamming it up on Campbell Island
5. Wading through meadows of megaherbs on Campbell Island

I didn't know what a megaherb was two days ago; now I'm wading waist-deep through meadows of the super-sized alien blooms along the soaring clifftops of Campbell Island, New Zealand's southernmost subantarctic island.

It feels like we've stepped onto the set of a '70s sci-fi movie as we pass the nodding golden cylinders of *Bulbinella rossi* and dusty pink cauliflowered spheres of *Anisotome*, as hirsute, vivid green leaves of the Macquarie Island cabbage (*Stilbocarpa polaris*) and golden tussocks brush our legs, and waves crash on rocks below. Offshore, the tempestuous Southern Ocean swirls around the snaggletoothed outline of Dent Island – the last refuge of the Campbell Island teal (the world's rarest duck) before rats, predators, cattle and sheep were eradicated allowing the island to be reclaimed by nature.

The first stop on an 11-day legacy voyage – 'Beyond Fiordland: New Zealand's Wildest Islands' – run by pioneering Christchurch-based, expedition cruise company, Heritage Expeditions, Campbell Island is now a conservation cornerstone of the five wild, remote and rugged island groups that make up New Zealand's subantarctic UNESCO World Heritage Site. Sitting 700 kilometres south of Bluff it is notoriously cold, wet and windy, averaging just 650 hours of sunshine a year. Despite the unforgiving climate, adaptable, unique and rare life flourishes here. Today is overcast and breezy, with well-timed patches of sunshine – the perfect conditions in which to tackle the full-day Northwest Bay hike around the now

uninhabited island, a former sealing, whaling, farming and, more recently, weather station.

Island immersion is immediate; once ashore we're navigating snoozing Hooker's sea lions (the world's rarest) in the low lying areas, and nesting southern royal albatross dotting the megaherbs and tussocks at higher altitudes. Traversing the undulating landscape we're regularly stopped in our tracks by



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the ever-changing vistas and expansive fields of megaherbs framed by endless ocean. Numerous photos later we are in complete agreement with botanist Joseph Hooker who famously declared Campbell Island as having a "floral display second to none outside the tropics".

However Campbell Island is far from being just megaherb nirvana. During the day our animal encounters include meeting a feisty skua parked in the middle of the track watching us steely-eyed as we detour around her and the brown downy feathers in the undergrowth that reveal her chick. Lunch at Capstan Cove in Northwest Bay sees us joined by rockhopper penguins and a young male Hooker's sea lion that hauls out onto the rocks in front of us. Sleek of fur and with a bristling mane, he quizzically sniffs at expedition leader Aaron Russ' boot and watches us eat before losing interest and collapsing into a nap with a laboured sigh.

The highlight comes in the afternoon amongst the enormous animated inhabitants at the southern royal albatross colony. Watching nature-documentary-come-to-life displays – nesting couples affectionately grooming, juvenile birds engaged in the raucous dating game of 'gamming' all flapping wings and clacking bills, others gracefully wheeling in the sky above, clumsily landing, and launching themselves into the air with a running take-off – proves endlessly fascinating.

"The best way I can describe it is think of them as teenagers hanging out at a street corner, or mall," says Aaron of the gamming sessions, as birds looking to get their gam on literally crash the party. "Many birds," he continues, "will partner up for life having met through these early courtship encounters."



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#### Photography

1. T Kraakman, Heritage Expeditions
2. Heritage Expeditions
3. A. Russ, Heritage Expeditions
4. E Bell, Heritage Expeditions
5. T Bickford, Heritage Expeditions





Aaron, a zoologist, along with his younger brother Nathan, a trained chef, grew up as part of the family business, taking inquisitive travellers to some of the most remote and least visited shores on the planet, and has intimate knowledge of these islands and coasts. Their pioneering father Rodney built up Heritage Expeditions on the cornerstones of responsible travel, combined with raising awareness of and supporting conservation issues. This season the mantle has been passed to the Russ brothers who are passionately continuing their father’s enthusiasm and the family’s 35-year legacy for sharing one-of-a-kind wildlife opportunities, immersive cultural experiences, and unrivalled access to the world’s most wild and beautiful places.



6. Yellow-eyed penguins waddle down to the water on Enderby Island  
7. Hooker’s sea lion greeting on Enderby Island  
8. Beach life on Sandy Bay, Enderby Island

Photography  
6-7. K Ovsyanikova, Heritage Expeditions  
8. T Bickford, Heritage Expeditions

Indeed, our voyage aboard the repurposed Russian polar research vessel *Spirit of Enderby* is a celebration of New Zealand’s wilderness, harking back to the company’s first expeditions, cruising The Snares, Campbell, Auckland, Stewart and Ulva Islands, and Fiordland. As a Department of Conservation partnership voyage, a percentage of our fares help fund the ongoing protection of the places we visit.

Deemed ‘comfortable travel’, swilling cocktails poolside is eschewed in favour of adventurous and authentic expeditions aboard an authentic expedition vessel helmed by a Russian crew plus a multicultural expedition team of botanists, ornithologists, naturalists and experts in their field. On-board entertainment comes in the form of educational lectures, with the aim of getting you off the ship and out amongst nature as much as possible, with options for both the more- and the less-energetic guests. The 50-passenger capacity induces a more intimate voyage with the added bonus of less waiting around when it’s time to disembark on your next adventure. Hearty, wholesome and delicious fare is the order of the day in the dining rooms where top Australasian chefs turn out a buffet breakfast, lunch and welcome three-course dinner following your day’s activities, from a busy galley and, depending on the weather, sometimes under trying conditions.

Having experienced a taste of those trying conditions courtesy of the power of the Southern Ocean overnight, we’re pleasantly surprised to wake to splendid subantarctic sunshine off Auckland Islands’ Enderby Island. Following the eradication of cattle and rabbits in the early 1990s, Enderby Island (part of the archipelago of Auckland Islands) has returned to its natural state.

Greeted by the full sensory assault of Hooker’s sea lions littering the beach at Sandy Bay, we have to wait for a break in the troops of yellow-eyed penguins waddling to and from the shore to feed hungry chicks hidden in the undergrowth, before we cross and sit down to watch life and near-death play out along the golden stretch of prime real estate.

As with most property it all comes down to location, says Aaron.



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During mating season the sea lion bulls come ashore and fight over the premium sections of beach, the aim being that the cows will be wooed by their 'entrepreneurial' prowess and join their harem. The bigger the bulls, the better the spot, which appears to be the middle of the beach where all the action is taking place. Clouds of sand erupt and cows and pups scatter as lines in the sand are crossed and statuses are challenged amid the bellowing, belching and bared canines of rumbling bulls brutally resolving their territorial disputes. All are scarred, many freshly, and it all plays out with calving cows and pups caught in the crossfire, yet remaining miraculously unscathed. We watch two pups born amid the ongoing chaos, while opportunistic skua fight over the afterbirth and younger males test out their strength in the outer suburbs.

With much to explore on what many consider the most beautiful of



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the subantarctic islands, we spend the day traversing an 11-kilometre loop of the island trekking through wind-pruned corrugations of rātā forest onto a boardwalk and through fields of megaherbs. The golden heads of the *Bulbinella rossi* stretch into the horizon atop a carpet of moss studded with tiny orchids and Enderby Island gentian creating the perfect Kodak moment.

Making our way around the island we startle, and are startled by, numerous lounging sea lions, marvel at ominous UFO-shaped clouds, and watch tiny Auckland Island tomtits flit between megaherbs above a giant petrel chick, the wind ruffling its downy feathers as it patiently waits for its next feed. We stroll by waddling penguins, nesting southern royal albatross and spot the rare and endemic Auckland Island banded dotterel, teal, snipe and shag, the latter with beaks filled with nesting



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material, red-crowned parakeets and sack out in the long grass listening to a bellbird singing amid a flame-tipped rātā forest canopy, rounding out a full day and memory cards.

*Spirit of Enderby's* bow knives through the glassy water of Carnley Harbour as we approach neighbouring and namesake Auckland Island. The majesty of the morning sun glittering over the water and the dramatic rolling hills, inspires us to get amongst it and clamber 200 metres up the often tricky Southwest Cape where we are rewarded with jaw-slackening scenery down the harbour and enjoy spending time perched above the white-capped albatross colony taking in the flurry of activity below.

Setting our course for Musgrave Inlet, we're joined by a raft of rockhopper penguins diving through the waves of our wake as they head out on an expedition of their own. Hugging the jagged coastline in our Zodiacs, we explore the dark confines of a sea cave, and pass through an arch into a surreal open-topped cathedral where crystalline blue water meets colourful

marbled walls crowned with cascading lush vegetation.

Overnight the weather turns and the 'Roaring Forties' are living up to their name when we reach The Snares, home to more nesting sea birds than the British Isles combined. The wind and swell sees us cruising the archipelago's ragged coastline from the safety of *Spirit of Enderby*. The Southern Ocean's wild weather, however, does little to deter the wildlife as Snares crested penguins, sooty shearwaters, and numerous petrel and albatross are all spotted, while voyagers taking advantage of the open-bridge policy join Captain Dmitry Zinchenko as dusky dolphins dive through the waves ahead of our bow as we sail towards Stewart Island.

If it wasn't for our eagle-eyed guide, we would have missed seeing the pair of roosting morepork perched in the rotting tree hollow on Ulva Island, their mottled brown feathers effortlessly blending with the gnarled tree. We meet our guide, Ulva(!) Goodwillie at the predator-free native bird haven and explore the island's teeming birdlife under ancient stands

- 9. Meeting the locals on Enderby Island
- 10. Auckland Island tomtit sits among the megaherbs on Enderby Island
- 11. Ominous UFO-shaped clouds on Enderby Island
- 12. Exploring Musgrave Inlet
- 13. Campbell Island teal, the world's rarest duck, in Perseverance Harbour

#### Photography

- 9. T Kraakman, Heritage Expeditions
- 10. A Fergus, Heritage Expeditions
- 11. T Kraakman, Heritage Expeditions
- 12. T Kraakman, Heritage Expeditions
- 13. C Todd, Heritage Expeditions

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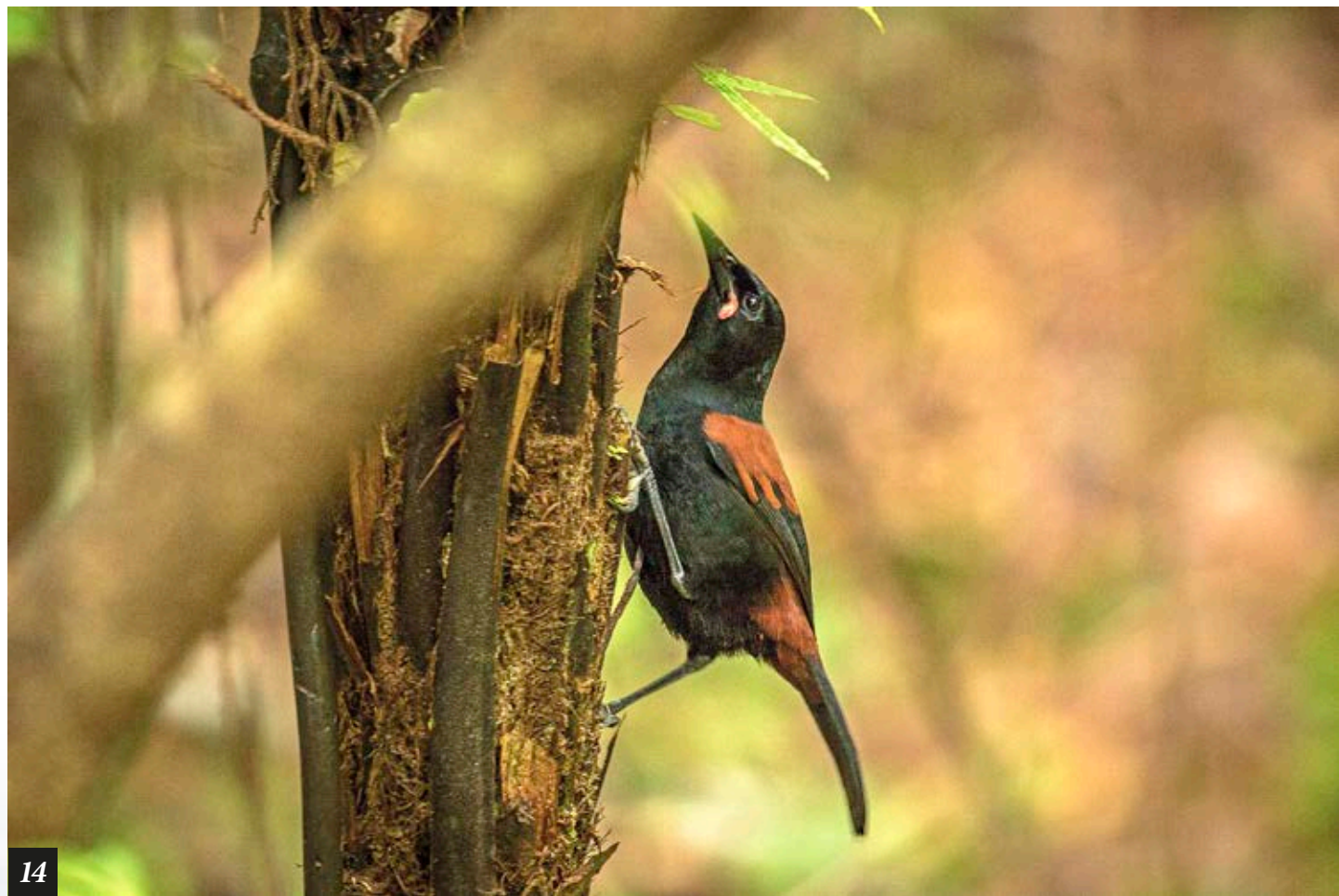


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of rimu, tōtara, lancewood and moss-covered miro.

Pausing mid-sentence to identify and spot specific birds from the chorus of birdsong, Ulva's enthusiasm quickly rubs off as we encounter a roll-call of native birds including Stewart Island robin and weka, brown creeper, tūi, oystercatchers and their chicks, tomtit, kākā, red-crowned parakeet, kererū and fantail. During two special moments, four chattering yellowhead hop across branches overhead, and a pair of saddlebacks chase each other around the group proudly showing off their distinctive markings. The afternoon's hike through Stewart Island/Rakiura forest is a flutter with kererū and tūi, and leads us round to Halfmoon Bay where we explore the quirky town centre of Oban.

From quirky to primordial majesty, the 'go big or go home' ethos is no more apt than in Fiordland where clouds scud the ragged peaks of steep glacier-cleaved granite mountains streaked with waterfalls and cloaked in forest down to sea level. Skipping over the brackish water in Zodiacs we set off to 'conquer' Secretary Island, taking the rare opportunity of traversing a Department of Conservation stoat-trapping track to a mountaintop lake with on-board DOC ranger and expert storyteller Lindsay Wilson.

Climbing 700 vertical metres over three kilometres, with 29 traps to check along the way, this day-hike through lush virgin forest of mānuka, rimu and beech

is not for the faint of heart.

Only used four times a year, the often boggy arduous ascent – carpeted with mosses, ferns, lichen, alpine orchids and sticky, bright-red clusters of carnivorous sundew plants – rewards with grand-scale alpine scenery. Over a tannin-stained lakeside lunch we reflect on the project's success – having found all 29 traps empty – as Lindsay tells us about the Department's plans to establish kākāpō on nearby Cooper Island once it's predator free.

Back on board *Spirit of Enderby*, we chart our course to Cascade Cove where our trusty Zodiacs ferry us to the take-off barge for a flight with Southern Helicopters. Soaring over glittering waterways and the podocarp forest-cloaked spines of Anchor and Resolution Islands puts into perspective the intense geological forces that created the endless untamed wilderness below. Touching down on Mt Pender we're greeted by local identity, biologist and author Ken Tustin/'Moose Man' as well as staggering vistas across constellations of islands stretching to the horizon and dotting the winding fiords.

**14.** Saddleback encounter on predator-free Ulva Island

**15.** Checking out the view from the halfway mark on Secretary Island

**16.** A lakeside lunch awaits on Secretary Island

**17.** Exploring the remote fiords, inlets and waterways of Dusky Sound by Zodiac

*Photography*  
14-15. C Todd, Heritage Expeditions  
16-17. C Hill, Heritage Expeditions





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At our feet, the plant life is putting on its own display with fragrant miniature alpine versions of colourful megaherbs *Bulbinella rossi* and *Anisotome* discovered amongst the shimmering alpine grasses. Equally captivating and impressive as their gigantic subantarctic cousins, they perfectly bookend these lands of extremes. 🌿

**18.** Panoramic view from atop Secretary Island

**19.** Snares crested penguins test the water at The Snares

*Photography*

18. C Hill, Heritage Expeditions

19. T Bickford, Heritage Expeditions



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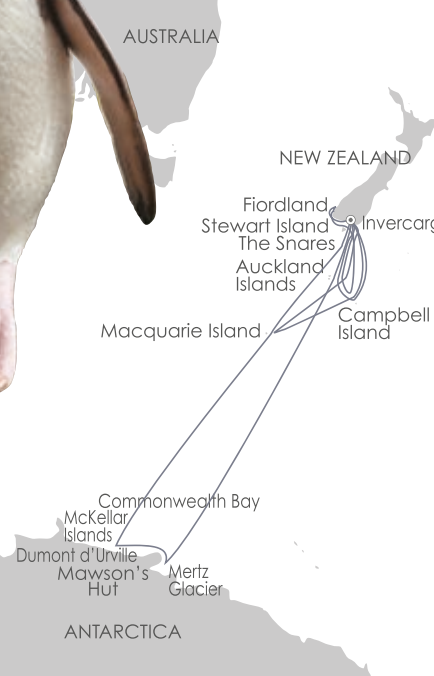
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