

# HELLO FROM THE KEP WINTERING TEAM

Hello from the BAS wintering team at King Edward Point (Rod, Sue, Dan, Ella, Erny, Hazel, Joe, Paula). This letter is intended to give you some useful info to help with your preparations for coming to South Georgia. If you have other queries please don't hesitate to e-mail us at [kpbc@bas.ac.uk](mailto:kpbc@bas.ac.uk) and we'll help you out.

You will have 54 kg of baggage allowance to fly down with (assuming you're on an MOD flight from Brize Norton to the Falklands). Note that the MOD are not flexible with their baggage limits, and will make you leave things behind if you are over the maximum weight.

You'll also have a personal box for bulky, heavy stuff – these 'P-boxes' will travel down to KEP on the BAS ship, *James Clark Ross* (i.e. *JCR*). The cargo loading deadline for the ship means that they need to be packed, labelled, and delivered to BAS Cambridge by 31<sup>st</sup> August. You will join *JCR* in the Falkland Islands and arrive at KEP around mid November.

A common observation made by most people as they pack their P boxes to go north at the end of their time at KEP is... "*I didn't use half this stuff!*" Thus, do think hard about what you want to pack in your P box.

## FOOD

We eat very well at KEP, there is a wide range of foods provided including some vegetarian food (quorn burgers/sausages, pulses, etc). The food ingredients stored at KEP allow for a very varied menu. The base supply of 'luxury items' such as crisps and chocolate is rationed out to ensure it lasts the year. There is a chandlery (store) in Stanley, Falkland Islands, which sells luxury goods such as chocolate, crisps, wines, and ales – some members of the base open an account and get purchases sent into KEP with the fisheries patrol vessel, *Pharos*. This is an option to have but it can be quite expensive. The bottom line is that you won't go hungry!

## DRINK

The base has a store of alcoholic drinks from which to stock the bar. There is a good selection at reasonable prices. Soft drinks in cans can also be bought from the bar. A ticksheet system is used for payment. Each base member marks their purchases on a sheet which is then added up each month and deducted from your pay.

## TOILETRIES

The basics are supplied for you at KEP: soap, shampoo, shaving foam, toothbrushes, toothpaste, fluoride mouthwash, floss, disposable razors, aftersun, sun cream (factor +30), lipsalve. Shower gel is not provided. Female sanitary items are provided (i.e. you buy your own supplies and reclaim the money from BAS ) and there is also a small amount stocked on station.

Bed linen, quilts, pillows and bathroom towels are also provided. We also have haircutting and beard-trimming clippers but you may want to bring your own.

## BAS KITBAG CLOTHING

BAS provide you with a basic clothing kitbag with all the essentials such as overalls, outdoor clothing and boots. However, you will need to provide your own casual/indoor clothing for base (i.e. jeans, t-shirts). Make sure you take your time to try out all the items from the BAS clothing kitbag when you're getting kitted out at Cambridge in September. Everything needs to fit properly – historically this is a bit of a rushed process but if you don't get it right in the first place, you're stuck for a year or two with uncomfortable clothes.

The field store contains some extra items of outdoor clothing for field and winter use. We have enough duck down jackets for all winterers to have one during their time here.

## PERSONAL INDOOR CLOTHES

The base is well heated and you shouldn't need anything significantly different to what you'd wear in the UK.

- Depending on your job, possibly hard-wearing trousers for outdoor work.
- Slippers, sandals, crocs, or other indoor-only footwear when wandering around inside. It's worth having a couple of pairs for the different buildings.
- Smart clothes for Saturday nights and special occasions. Possibly a couple of sets of smart casual and one posh, plus smart shoes.
- Shorts for summer and swimwear for the sauna.
- Some fancy dress stuff, face paints, hair dye, wigs, etc. We have a reasonable fancy dress cupboard on station, and a sewing machine.

## PERSONAL OUTDOOR CLOTHES & EQUIPMENT

BAS provide a basic outdoor clothing kit bag which will contain a waterproof jacket, salopettes, gloves, thermals, etc. However, it's worth bringing a few of the following items in addition, particularly if you are into outdoor sports or the gym.

- Trainers and clothing for the gym/running.
- Light weight waterproof jacket and trousers/salopettes.
- Lightweight windproof (softshell) jacket.
- Lightweight walking trousers.
- Good quality socks for skiing/hillwalking. BAS do provide these but it's useful to have a few extra pairs of your own.
- Sunglasses. BAS also provide these but they won't be prescription; if you need prescriptions sunglasses you can buy your own and claim some money back from BAS.
- Merino wool or similar high-quality non-cotton baselayers. BAS do provide thermal underwear but it's useful to have your own set that you know work for you.
- Warm ski/mountaineering gloves.
- Sun-hat. In the early summer (November to December) we get very high levels of UV and it's easy to get sunburned.
- Hat(s) – a woolly one and windproof one will be both useful.

### *Other useful outdoor items :*

- A lightweight synthetic primaloft type jacket can be handy for those cold winter days.
- Rucksack - we have plenty of large MacPac 60-80 litre rucksacks and a few smaller daysacks at KEP but you may prefer to bring your own. The most useful sizes are 35-40 litre for a daysack and 60-80 litre rucksacks for camping trips.
- Good quality lightweight dry-bags to keep kit in your rucksack dry. Very handy for cameras and lenses.
- Gaiters – there are a stock of old ones at KEP, but good to have your own.
- Fell running shoes - KEP offers some fantastic fell running opportunities and we hold an annual half marathon, the terrain is quite demanding and a good pair of fell shoes are worthwhile if you're a keen runner. Consider a pair that can take dobs/spikes if you think you'll want to get out in winter. A lightweight windshirt is also handy for running.
- If there's any personal outdoor equipment you particularly like, feel free to bring it. ***Note that all of the following items are all provided at KEP so there is no need to purchase them...*** down jackets, bivvy bags, bothy bags, walking poles, ice axes, crampons, snowshoes, handheld GPS, compass (MSE weighted), gaiters, head torch, whistle, map cases.

## SKIING & SNOWBOARDING

### *Ski equipment:*

KEP can offer some superb skiing during the winter; although in recent year's snow conditions have been relatively poor, with quite a bit of winter rain, so do have realistic expectations. If you want to be able to take the opportunities as they arise, then purchasing gear or shipping your existing kit down is a must – there are no skis nor snowboards for general use here at KEP.

There are no ski-lifts at KEP and you will have to earn your turns. Pure downhill skis are of limited use on South Georgia. If you have not skied before and are looking to purchase equipment, generally there are three different styles of skiing which can be practised here.

1. *Ski-mountaineering* (Alpine touring / ski touring etc) gear is very practical – it allows you to go uphill with a free heel and skins (which attach to the base of your skis and allow them to slide only forwards). When you plan to descend, you remove the skins and lock down the heel of your ski boots which allows for a normal alpine downhill descent. Most current skiers at KEP use this system.
2. *Telemark* is a magnificent style of skiing that maintains the freedom of the heel at all times. It is a graceful and hugely powerful technique but is tricky to master. Because of the design of modern plastic telemark boots which combine rigidity where it matters with a flexible toe section, they can be much more comfortable to wear for long periods than ski-mountaineering boots.
3. *Cross country (Nordic touring)* is an ideal way to travel on South Georgia during winter. There are no groomed tracks so avoid skinny track type skis and ere towards wider back country or Nordic touring kit. There are a good range of waxes available on base but it may be worth bringing a few of your own.

If you are new to snowsports and require advice on what constitutes a “set” of skiing gear, the following terms may help you...

*For ski-mountaineering, you will need:*

- a) Skis – fairly fat ‘All-mountain’ alpine touring skis (Black Diamond, Rossignol, K2 and loads of other good makes).
- b) Bindings – Alpine touring binding (Diamir Fritschi Explore or Freeride).
- c) Boots – Alpine touring boots (e.g. Scarpa or Garmont). Moulded insoles can be good, but make sure you keep the “generic” ones in case they don’t suit your feet. Stores can give advice on such things but of course they are trying to sell you things...
- d) Skins – to fit your skis (Black Diamond Glidelite or Ascension, Coltech, etc).
- e) Ski Poles - collapsible are far better for touring.
- f) Ski Crampons – certainly not essential but potentially handy for dealing with sections of very hard snow whilst touring.

There are a few key shops in the UK that specialize in touring/telemark skiing and who will be better placed to advise you than a standard ski shop. The guys from Backcountry usually come down to the Girton Conference and will be able to offer advice and arrange to kit you out in Ilkley, although this is often close to the packing deadline so it may be worth getting onto it before the BAS conference in September.

- *Braemar Mountain Sports in Braemar,*
- *Mountain Spirit in Aviemore,*
- *Backcountry in Ilkley, Yorkshire.*

It's essential to get your boots fitted properly in one of these shops, although the rest of the kit you could buy mail-order. However, the shops will be able to give you good advice and will probably give you a good deal if you buy everything from them.

Buying ski/boarding kit can be a significant investment and seem a bit confusing if you're new to it, don't hesitate to get in touch with any questions. Second hand gear may be a good option if you're unsure how much skiing you'll do after leaving KEP. Ex-winterers are sometimes keen to sell their ski gear so get in touch if you're considering this.

It's worth bearing in mind that South Georgia is a very rocky place and if your skis leave without at least a few scrapes then you're probably not trying hard enough. Note that we have plenty of kit for ski repair and tuning on station (scrapers, files, a very wide range of ski waxes, skin adhesives, etc).

If you've never skied before it may be worth trying a few lessons at a snow dome before you leave. It's certainly not essential, and people will be happy to give you some pointers once you're at KEP, but it might give you an idea of the basics before you get here.

### ***Snowboards:***

Snowboards are an option, and split-boards are making access to the backcountry far easier for our tray-hugging friends. Tommy the pioneer of South Georgia Split-boarding, has this to say: *"Split-boarding can be fun for all the family. You can appear cooler than skiers, yet have the practical edge..."* (N.B these are Tommy's misguided personal opinions, and do not represent the official views of the British Antarctic Survey).

Split boards are relatively new on the market and are rare in the UK. Typing 'split board forum' into Google will bring you to a dedicated site giving you an insight into what it's all about. Basically it's a board that has quick release bindings which splits down the centre to form skis, which can then have skins attached to allow you to skin up uphill sections and put an end to arduous boot packing (don't forget a set of collapsible poles).

## PHOTOGRAPHY

The scenery and wildlife at South Georgia are spectacular. Most people take down one or two cameras. If you're not into photography and don't think you'll get into it then one digital compact camera will serve you well if you look after it.

Most camera shops will tell you that you'll need the most expensive top end camera as soon as they hear the word "Antarctica" (or "Sub Antarctic") but the reality is that most cameras will work down here if you look after them and keep them dry. There's no need to get a high end digital SLR with waterproofing and seals.

- Batteries – at least 2 batteries, long exposures in the cold drains batteries fast.
- Memory cards – you can now get cheap memory cards of very high capacity. Ideally buy 2 or 3 memory cards of 8 or 16 MB capacity, at least if one fails you have a backup. Avoid cheap versions of memory cards and go for a reliable brand (SanDisk, Lexar, Fujifilm, etc).
- Digital SLR - there's a wide choice these days Nikon, Canon are the biggest brands but there's many others such as Sony, Olympus, Ricoh, Panasonic, etc.
- Recommend digital SLR lenses – a wide angle zoom (such as a 17-55mm) and a medium telephoto (70-200mm) are useful.
- Lens filters (for SLRs) – a UV filter protects the lens front and circular polarising filters are occasionally useful. Consider a graduated filter to balance out the light, the difference in snow capped peaks and the ground can be extreme.
- Tripod – a reasonably sturdy one, although with tripods there is always a trade-off between portability and stability (i.e. make sure that you can carry it in your rucksack all day!)
- Camera Bag – There can be moisture condensation problems associated with taking a cold camera into a warm building but if you leave it in a camera bag for a few hours then it won't be a problem. It's also useful to have a couple small dessicant bags. Camera/lens cleaning stuff – blower, cleaning cloths. If you're a keen photographer and into DSLR photography, then bring something to clean dust spots off the digital sensor (this may be useful at some point).
- Photo paper – we currently have an 'Epson Stylus R2880' colour photo printer, there is a limited supply of paper and ink cartridges so if you fancy doing lots of printing bring your own paper and possibly ink down. 'Epson Premium Semi-gloss Photo Paper' works very well and the printer will print up to A3+. It is possible to order in from the Falklands but more expensive than the UK.
- Film darkroom facilities are available at KEP for developing black and white photos on base (mostly used by the Doctor for developing x-rays). We have plenty supplies of developing fluids & photographic paper. Much of it is out of date but still ok. If you wish to bring your own developing fluids down you must contact BAS to get them properly packed and shipped.

## OTHER RANDOM THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Alarm clock (usually your mobile phone has one)
- Pyjamas.
- Spare watch and battery (consider waterproof for boating and outdoors).
- Money – pounds sterling and dollars can be useful for buying stuff on cruise ships.
- Your favourite mug!
- Musical Instrument (we have 2 cheap classical guitars, an electric piano and a tin whistle).
- Recent films – we have a large collection of digital films and quite a number of DVDs. However if there are new film releases it's worthwhile taking some down with you if you are a film buff as this is always appreciated. The latest TV series are also popular.
- Music – again, we have a huge amount of music on the communal network drives, but bring your own if you like and augment the collection further.
- Books – we have lots in a small library.
- Batteries for your electronic equipment to last a year. It's worthwhile taking your own rechargeable batteries, particularly AAA's and AA's.
- Laptop – most people bring a personal laptop for organising photos, writing a blog, watching movies, etc. There is wifi in the main buildings.
- 2 external hard drives (recommend at least 1TB in capacity) for photos, video, films, music, backup, etc. Most people prefer portable hard drives which don't need an external power supply but instead take their power via USB from the laptop.
- Binoculars if you are into wildlife (note that there are some pairs at KEP).
- 'Arts + crafts stuff'.
- Posters, photos, things for decorating your room.

A note on comms and the internet – we have a **very** limited internet connection supplied by satellite link (100 kb/s), which has to support all the base phones, internet use and science data. It is very slow in comparison with broadband and is liable to drop out during poor weather. It also requires people to be considerate about their internet use, so don't plan on doing much uploading or downloading of data, images, music or video. However, if you shrink images down smallish and don't exceed your fair share of the bandwidth, it's quite possible to keep a blog updated with photos as you go through the year.

The phone system at KEP works via Voice over Internet (VoIP) and unfortunately often has a significant delay. VoIP calls are relatively cheap (10p/minute) and the phones at KEP are effectively a Cambridge phone number. A range of satellite phone systems are available as an alternative and offer better quality phonecalls but are significantly more expensive (£1 per minute). Skype is sometimes an option for voice calls when no one else is using the internet.

You will need to think about setting up a phonecard such as 'BT Odyssey' before you come south. Details about this will be sent to you before BAS conference. If you plan on making frequent phonecalls calls to non UK numbers it may also be worth looking into other prepaid call cards which are available online (there are a lot of ones to choose from). If you forget to do this (like I did) it's easy to buy a phonecard online with your credit card once you arrive at KEP.

*\*\*\* Finally, ensure that your credit/bank card and passport **is not going to expire** whilst you are down south! This will make your life quite awkward when you want to return to the real world outside of South Georgia!!! \*\*\**

If you have any questions about life at KEP then please get in touch at [kpbc@bas.ac.uk](mailto:kpbc@bas.ac.uk)

We look forward to seeing you here in a few months.

Rod Strachan  
Base Commander