

# Flags over Antarctica

*Edward Kaye*

## Abstract

Graham Bartram's unofficial 1995 flag for Antarctica first flew over the White Continent on the last day of 2002. Ted Kaye raised it onshore at several locations on Antarctica's Danco Coast and the South Shetland Islands. He presented it to the commanders of the scientific bases of Brazil, the United Kingdom, and Ukraine and flew it on the expedition vessel M/V Orlova. One of several flags for Antarctica, the most recent design displays the continent in white on a field of United Nations blue. The designer explicitly intended to fulfill both reasons for "mappy flags" later identified by Mason Kaye (Maps on Flags, ICV XIX, 2001): *uniqueness* and *neutrality*. The actual flags were provided by Outpost Flags (Wisconsin, USA).

Under the 1959 Antarctic Treaty, the 12 countries most involved in the continent's history and exploration agreed to defer their territorial claims. 44 nations have now signed the treaty, although many maintain a presence there and fly their own flags or specific territorial flags in order to protect their interests.<sup>1</sup> Antarctica is thus the sovereign territory of no country, without an *official* flag of its own. However, several proposals for *unofficial* flags have been developed.

In 1985 Dr. Whitney Smith proposed a design for Antarctica: "on an orange background, off-center near the hoist, a design in white consisting of a pair of stylized hands framing a circle segment below a capital A." (Fig. 1). The circle segment represents the area of the globe below 60° south, the hands are for protection of the environment, the negative [orange] space between the hands and segment is the dove of peace, and the "A" is for Antarctica and combines with the segment to suggest the scales of justice. The color — "International Orange" — is commonly used for safety reasons in Antarctica because of its contrast with the generally white landscape.<sup>2</sup> He presented this design at an annual meeting of the North American Vexillological Association (NAVA). The flag was listed for a time in Armand du Payrat's *Album des Pavillons* but has since been removed.<sup>3</sup>

After reading about the Smith design in the *Chicago Tribune* in 1995, the team of Joanne Cooper and Stefan Tucker attempted to improve on it (Fig. 2). They wanted a more representational flag. Their design contained "an outline of the continent, a penguin, and a compass with the southern tip accented". The background color was meant to match the International Orange of the Smith design.<sup>4</sup>

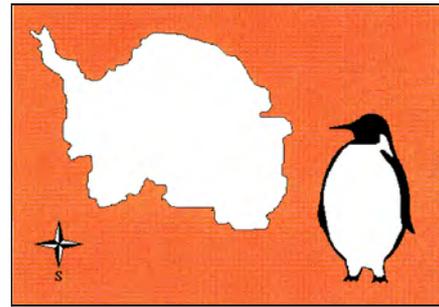


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*Figure 1 Dr. Whitney Smith's 1985 design for an Antarctica flag.*



*Figure 2 Joanne Cooper and Stefan Tucker's 1995 design for an Antarctica flag.*



*Figure 3 Dave Hamilton's pre-2000 design for an Antarctica flag, appearing on "Antarctican 50-dollar bills".*

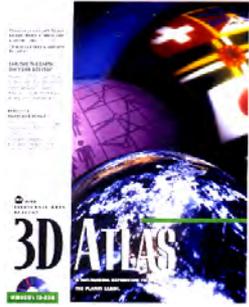


*Figure 4 Sir Ernest Shackleton's flag, from his 1907-09 Nimrod Expedition.*

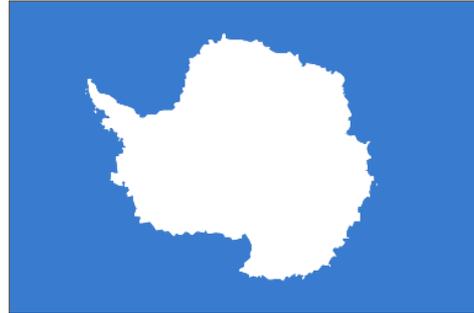
Dave Hamilton, a Canadian banknote collector, invented and designed a flag sometime before 2000 (Fig. 3). He found other Antarctic flags “to be very stupid-looking and boring”. He ascribes these meanings to his flag: “The pale blue stripe represents pack ice, the dark blue stripe represents the night sky, and the yellow stripe is a representation of the *aurora australis*. The famous stellar constellation ‘the Southern Cross’ is shown in the dark blue stripe at the right.” Hamilton runs the “Antarctica Overseas Exchange Office” in Vancouver, Canada, and placed this flag on his “Antarctican 50-dollar” bills.<sup>5</sup>

A colored picture of a waving flag on a small hill appears on the pages of a book on Sir Ernest Shackleton's 1907-1909 Nimrod Expedition to Antarctica (Fig. 4). The flag had five horizontal stripes, blue and white. It is not known if this was an expedition flag or if it was intended to represent the continent. While the meaning may be lost to history, blue and white are indeed the predominant colors in Antarctica.<sup>6</sup>

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*Figure 5 The 3-D Atlas, produced by Multimedia Corp. and distributed by Electronic Arts, contained 700 national and sub-national flags, including Antarctica.*



*Figure 6 Graham Bartram's 1995 design for an Antarctica flag, created for the 3-D Atlas.*



*Figure 7 A 3 ft. by 5 ft. polyester Antarctica flag produced by Outpost Flags, Wisconsin, USA.*

Graham Bartram designed a flag for Antarctica in 1995 when working for Multimedia Corp. in the UK as an engineer and technical director (Fig. 5). The producers of its electronic atlas recruited him to help with the flags to be shown on the profile page for each country. Called the *3-D Atlas* and distributed by Electronic Arts on CD-ROM, the atlas used over 700 flags in its table of contents to identify each national and sub-national entity. The project rekindled Bartram's childhood interest in flags, and he worked closely with William Crampton of the Flag Institute to develop the appropriate images for the atlas.

When Bartram found that Antarctica had no flag, he set out to create one (he was unaware of previous flags, such as Whitney Smith's design). The company used some of the first high-altitude cloud-free satellite images in the atlas. In them, Antarctica appeared white, pale blue, and pale pink, providing potential colors for the flag. Further, the United Nations jurisdiction over the Antarctica Treaty suggested the use of UN blue and white.

Bartram first considered for the flag a revised UN emblem, with its world map centered on the South Pole rather than the North Pole, thus placing Antarctica in the center, but he rejected that as "too fussy". Realizing that the continent's distinctive



*Figure 8 Gentoo penguins and the M/V Orlova in Antarctica.*



*Figure 9 Quark Expeditions specializes in tours to both polar regions in ice-strengthened vessels.*



*Figure 10 Expedition leader Susan Adie accepts the Antarctica flag from Ted Kaye, after entering Antarctic waters below 60° south latitude.*



*Figure 11 The Maltese ensign flies from the M/V Orlova's stern in the Beagle Channel.*

shape could be a strong, recognizable graphic element, he centered it, in white, on a field of UN blue (Fig. 6). He oriented the image with 0° Longitude at the top, consistent with the convention on the UN flag and honoring the British Prime Meridian.<sup>7</sup> He tried “very hard to come up with a flag with no political bias, so as not to get into the disputes between the UK, Chile, and Argentina” over Antarctica.<sup>8</sup> In using a map for these reasons, he anticipated and confirmed the thesis later promoted by Mason Kaye, that maps on flags generally reflect a pursuit of neutrality or uniqueness.<sup>9</sup>

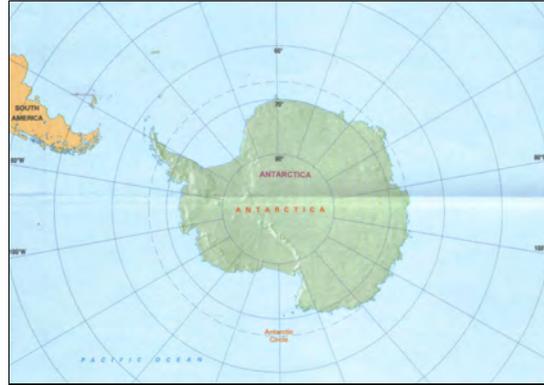
The CD-ROM sold over 2 million copies, making Bartram’s design easily the most-distributed Antarctic flag ever. In the credits, the atlas listed him as “Data Editor and Flag King”.

By 1998 Rick Prohaska, who owns Outpost Flags in Wisconsin, USA, had received several requests from flag collectors for any Antarctica design. He asked his Taiwanese vendors to manufacture the Bartram design in polyester, 3 ft. by 5 ft., with two grommets and a canvas header (Fig. 7). While most of the larger companies demanded huge minimum runs, one agreed to make the flag if it were also allowed to sell

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*Figure 12 Russian waitresses aboard the M/V Orlova honor their flag.*



*Figure 13 The shortest distance from any continent to Antarctica is across the Drake Passage between Tierra del Fuego and the Antarctic Peninsula.*



*Figure 14 Ted Kaye unfurls the Antarctica flag for the first time in Antarctica, on King George Island in the South Shetlands, 30 December 2002.*

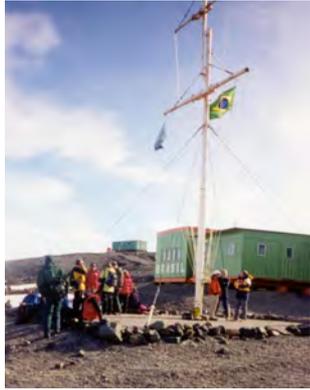


*Figure 15 A whale bone and a glacier witness the Antarctica flag.*

it. Prohaska reports that collectors are very happy with the flag, although he has sold fewer than 100. Outpost Flags has considered making other Antarctica designs (the orange Smith version and British Antarctic Territory) but has not found adequate demand.<sup>10</sup>

In late 2002, I traveled with my family on a 12-day expedition from Argentina to the Antarctic Peninsula, aboard the M/V Orlova, an ice-strengthened Russian vessel (Fig. 8) chartered by Quark Expeditions (Fig. 9). We made landfall in Zodiacs (small inflatable rubber boats) in the South Shetland Islands and on the Antarctic continent. We saw many species of seals, whales, seabirds, and hundreds of thousands of penguins, and we visited the scientific bases of several different countries. I took with me two dozen flags of the Bartram design, supplied by Outpost Flags.

On the first day below 60° south latitude, officially in Antarctic waters, I presented a flag to the expedition leader, who would use it throughout the trip as a map



*Figure 16 The flagstaff at Brazil's Commandante Ferraz Base, on King George Island, flies the United Nations and Brazilian flags.*



*Figure 17 The first "official" raising of the Antarctica flag by any nation in Antarctica, 30 December 2002, by a Brazilian scientist at Ferraz.*



*Figure 18 The flags of Antarctica, Brazil, and United Nations fly together at Commandante Ferraz Base.*



*Figure 19 The first continental flying of the Antarctica flag, at Brown Bluff (63° 31' S), 31 December 2002.*

during lectures (Fig. 10). Although the Orlova was Russian-owned, it was registered in Valletta and flew the Maltese flag (but only within sight of land — the crew stowed it after a few hours at sea; apparently it was their only ensign) (Fig. 11). The crew — sailors and stewardesses — were all Russian, and treated us to a Russian night. The stewardesses sang the national anthem for me (Fig. 12).

We sailed from Ushuaia, Argentina, south across the Drake Passage towards the Antarctic Peninsula. The distance to the continent from South America is far less than from Africa or Australia, and can be covered in two days (Fig. 13).

Brazil staffs a large base on King George Island, the largest of the South Shetlands. On the beach there, I unfurled the Antarctic flag for the first time (Figs. 14, 15).

Comandante Ferraz Base has a large flagstaff flying the Brazilian flag at the center and a United Nations flag on the side (Fig. 16). Through my guide, Luiz Antonio Pereira de Souza, a geologist for the Institute for Technological Research of São Paulo, I offered an Antarctic flag to the base. Eduardo Zapico, the vice chief of the station, agreed to have the flag hoisted (Fig. 17). This marked the first "official" raising of the flag by any nation in Antarctica (Fig. 18).

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*Figure 20 Debbie Kaye photographs the flying of multiple Antarctica flags at Brown Bluff on the Danco Coast.*



*Figure 21 Argentina's Almirante Brown scientific station at Paradise Harbor.*



*Figure 22 Argentina's Capitán Fleiss refuge at Neko Harbor.*



*Figure 23 The Antarctica flag flies at "Neptune's Window", on Deception Island.*

During our first continental landing, at a penguin rookery at Brown Bluff on the Danco Coast (63°31' S), I flew the flag again (Fig. 19). By all reports, this was the first time the Bartram flag had ever flown over the White Continent. We then unpacked the full set of flags and waved them all in the Antarctic breeze, creating memorable souvenirs for fellow passengers and for colleagues in vexillology (Fig. 20).

Argentina maintains several sites in Antarctica. We visited the unmanned Almirante Brown base in Paradise Harbor (Note the distinctive orange color of the buildings, matching the international orange of the Smith flag) (Fig. 21). We also visited the Capitán Fleiss refuge in Neko Harbor (Fig. 22). The Argentines appear to paint their flag on every building. Indeed, that day we saw an Argentine naval vessel cruising by to "show the flag" there.

At Deception Island, formerly the site of a major whaling station for many years and home to several current and former military and scientific bases, I flew the flag from the point called "Neptune's Window", a gap in the cliffs high above the volcanic crater (Fig. 23).



*Figure 24 Yelcho Base, a Chilean research station on Wiencke Island.*



*Figure 25 Chile's flag salutes the Yelcho Base from the M/V Orlova's flying bridge.*



*Figure 26 Whale bones form an impromptu "Jolly Roger".*



*Figure 27 The Antarctica flag flies at Port Lockroy, on Wiencke Island.*

We later cruised past Chile's Yelcho Base, named for the Chilean steamer that rescued Shackleton's crew from Elephant Island in 1916 (Fig. 24).<sup>11</sup> I raised the Chilean flag on the flying bridge, to the delight of one base resident who climbed atop the roof of its main building and waved in response (Fig. 25).

Those weren't the only flags we saw. At one point, we found an arrangement of whale bones, which depicted an impromptu pirate flag (Fig. 26).

In Port Lockroy at Wiencke Island stands the UK's first permanent Antarctic base, "British Base A". Established in 1944 as part of a secret operation to track German naval activities in the southern oceans, it remained a scientific base until its closure in the 1960s. It now houses a Museum of Antarctic Exploration and a small research station. We hoisted the Antarctic flag, carefully avoiding the penguins nesting all around the base of the pole (Fig. 27).

The assistant base commander insisted that the Union Flag remain flying above, relating how the previous month an Irish TV crew had asked to fly the Irish flag —

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*Figure 28 Penguins nest below the Port Lockroy flagstaff, flying the Union and Antarctica flags.*



*Figure 29 The last Union Flag to fly over British Base A at Port Lockroy before it was decommissioned in 1962.*



*Figure 30 British Antarctic Territory stamps cancelled at the southernmost post office in the world, at Port Lockroy.*



*Figure 31 The assistant base commander at Port Lockroy accepts the Antarctica flag that had flown over his base.*

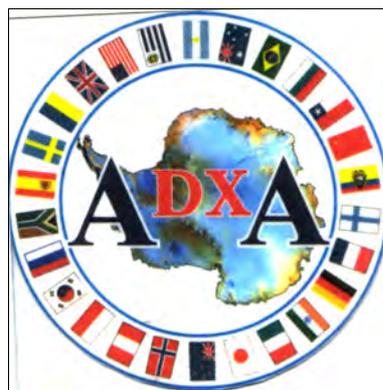
alone. That request was denied (Fig. 28). Inside the museum is a Union Flag with a plaque reading: “This flag, flown at Port Lockroy, was removed when Base A closed down on 16 January 1962. Donated to the U.K. Antarctic Heritage Trust by Edward Grimshaw (Assistant Scientific Officer, Base A, 1960-1962).” (Fig. 29).

Port Lockroy is the southernmost post office in the world, franking mail with stamps of the British Antarctic Territory (Fig. 30). The mail reaches world circulation by traveling through the Falkland Islands and then London. Later, aboard ship, I presented the flag to the assistant base commander. Note the flag hanging in the background, as well (Fig. 31).

The former UK Faraday Base on the Graham Coast, where observations were made which led to the discovery of the hole in the ozone layer, became the Ukrainian Antarctic Station Academician Vernadskiy in 1996. Its club logo features Ukraine’s



*Figure 32 The logo of the Ukrainian Antarctic Club at Academician Vernadskiy Station, on Galindez Island in the Argentine Island archipelago. “Club” in Cyrillic resembles “Kaye”.*



*Figure 33 A Vernadskiy Station patch with flags of countries involved in Antarctic exploration.*



*Figure 34 Vernadskiy Station commander Victor N. Sytov and Ted Kaye exchange flags.*



*Figure 35 The Ukrainian flag displayed at Wordie House, Vernadskiy Station.*

flag colors, and says “Ukrainian Antarctic Club” (Fig. 32). There, in the “Southernmost Gift Shop in the World”, one can buy souvenirs such as this patch with flags of countries involved in Antarctic research (Fig. 33).

I presented Base Commander Victor N. Sytov with an Antarctic flag; he in turn gave me one of the base’s Ukrainian flags, specially reinforced to withstand the Antarctic climate (Fig. 34). We flew it at an outbuilding, “Wordie House”, named for Shackleton’s geologist when the base was under UK ownership (Fig. 35). The base has a very popular recreation room, a complete British pub built in the 1960s by the station’s carpenters lonesome for home. Tourists often leave mementos, including this Norwegian flag signed by visitors from Norway’s base (Fig. 36).

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*Figure 36 Mason Kaye admires Norway's flag in the Vernadskiy Station pub.*



*Figure 37 Captain Andrey Rudenko, master of the M/V Orlova, accepts the Antarctica flag for his vessel from Ted Kaye.*



*Figure 38 Quark Expedition passengers pose on the aft stairs of the M/V Orlova.*



*Figure 39 Antarctica flag flying from the M/V Orlova's stern in the Drake Passage.*

At the end of the expedition, I presented the flag to the ship's master, Captain Andrey Rudenko, who toasted my gift and my flag tie (Fig. 37). When the 90 passengers posed for a final group picture on the aft stairs, they eagerly included the flag to represent their voyage (Fig. 38). And as the ship returned across the Drake Passage nearing Cape Horn, the Antarctic flag flew from the stern post, flapping successfully in the Antarctic wind (Fig. 39).

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Graham Bartram, Whitney Smith, Rick Prohaska, my fellow Quark expedition passengers on the M/V Orlova, the commanders of three Antarctic bases, and my family for their help on this paper and their support in the successful flag-raising endeavor that it documents. Thank you.

## Photo Credits

Rob Kaye  
Frank Becker, esq.  
Jason Sederquist, CPA  
Debbie Kaye  
Ted Kaye  
Luiz Antonio Pereira de Souza  
Debora Jacques, esq.  
Philip Hall, MD

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Antarctica*, Lonely Planet Publications, 2000, Victoria, Australia, pp. 60-01.

<sup>2</sup> FSS No. 1994/128, Flag Research Center, Winchester, Mass., USA. *The Flag Specification Sheet* dates the design to 10 April 1985. The field color is PMS 021.

<sup>3</sup> Flags of the World (FOTW) <<http://www.fotw.net/flags/aq!.html>>; “The orange A flag was added to the Album [*Album des pavillons nationaux et des marques distinctives / National flags and distinctive markings*, Service Hydrographique et Oceanographique de la Marine — France] in 1995 and later found to be incorrect and altogether discarded.” Armand du Payrat, 5 June 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from the designers to the Flag Research Center, 25 April 1995. They had researched flags and their design by referring to the 1995 *Grolier Encyclopedia* article by Whitney Smith.

<sup>5</sup> FOTW, *op. cit.* Comments by Dave Hamilton, 3 March 2000; image by Antonio Martins, 19 March 2000. Hamilton’s “Antarctica Overseas Exchange Office, Ltd.” website is <<http://www.bankofantarctica.com>>.

<sup>6</sup> FOTW, *op. cit.* Comments by Jan Melssen, 24 December 2000, referring to a manuscript described on the BBC1 website; image by Antonio Martins, 11 February 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Graham Bartram, telephone conversation, 22 March 2003.

<sup>8</sup> FOTW, *op. cit.* Comments by Graham Bartram, 22 July 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Mason Kaye, *Maps on Flags*, paper presented at ICV XIX, York, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> E-mail from Rick Prohaska, 25 January 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Sir Ernest Shackleton, *South*, 1920, pp. 218 ff.

**About the author**



Ted Kaye is managing editor of NAVA's *Raven, A Journal of Vexillology*, and advisory editor of *The Flag Bulletin*. A member of NAVA since 1985 and an organizer of the 12th International Congress of Vexillology in San Francisco in 1987, he serves as the chief financial officer of a small technology company and NAVA's treasurer. His articles have appeared in *Raven*, *The Flag Bulletin*, *NAVA News*, and *Flagmaster*. He recently compiled and published NAVA's guide to flag design *Good Flag, Bad Flag* and has consulted on several state, city, and organizational flag initiatives.

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