

BONNIE LAMMAR

Ice Boat, 2015
Archival pigment print, 12 x 12 in



COURTESY: THE ARTIST

DAN LINEHAN

Surfing on Rocks of Ice

Observing Penguins
at the Glacier

Once I caught sight of the little wood hut on the foothills of Mount Skittle at the northern edge of St. Andrew's Bay, South Georgia, my decision where to go first was obvious. A subantarctic island about 1,100 miles east of the southern tip of Argentina, South Georgia is the world's largest breeding ground for king penguins. I figured that the half a million of them waddling around weren't going anywhere. My boots had gotten swamped in the waves getting off the Zodiac, but after a few minutes, I didn't notice the sloshing thanks to my thick wool socks.

After I reached the hut, I could see why this landing was one of the most impressive in all of South Georgia. Not some abandoned shack from the whaling days, the hut was a solidly constructed outpost with four steel cables stretching from the roof to heavy-duty anchors in the ground, similar to how campers tie down tents with stakes. This precaution would have been completely overblown any other place on Earth. But here at the bay, two dominant glaciers—the Cook and the Heaney—loomed ahead of me.

The glaciers extend down from the mountains toward the coast, and deadly, high-speed winds form over these glaciers with little warning, racing downward from the mountain peaks to the shore at speeds greater than 100 miles per hour. Called katabatic winds, they can occur all over South Georgia, but they are notoriously powerful and rapid forming here at St. Andrews Bay. Before I had set off on my own, the expedition leader, Ron, still clad in his waterproof survival suit, reminded everyone who came ashore of an incident that happened here while he was leading an expedition in 1998. Furious winds had stranded members of his landing party. It had taken nine hours before the winds had died down enough for them to be evacuated. "We'll be watching for signs," he told us. "If we see something developing, we'll have the ship sound its horn. Come to the landing site immediately."

Wind was not the only force that could knock open the hut's door. From time to time a venturesome elephant seal would find its way uphill, break in to seize some shelter, and leave behind a housekeeping disaster.

The view from the hut was good but not good enough. I hiked farther up, reaching an overhang on a high cliff wall. Enormous black patches draped over the glaciers, the slow moving shadows of clouds. Straight out ahead, where