Sausalito—January 26, 2008
Vince Backen

*OR/V White Holly*

A visit to a working research ship.

On January 26th, Capt. Vince Backen has invited the Chapter to visit his oceanographic research ship, the *OR/V White Holly* docked by the Bay Area Model in Sausalito. You will have a chance to tour the vessel and learn some details about the plans to use this ship in the Northwest Passage this coming summer and the next.

Capt. Backen is planning to provide his ship for an expedition to find the remains of the *Erebus* and *Terror*, Sir John Franklin’s lost ships from the ill-fated mid-1800 expedition. All men were lost. Over the years remains of the crew were found. They had attempted to traverse overland to the south, but they were overcome by the cold. The ships have not been found, but Canadian researchers have identified magnetic anomalies in the suspected vicinity near King William Island.

The White Holly was built in Napa and commissioned on D-day. She is the former Navy lighter, YF-341 which the Coast Guard acquired for conversion as a coastal buoy tender after the war. Eight ships were built entirely of steel; they were originally designed to carry ammunition and cargo from shore to deep-draft vessels anchored off-shore. All had sufficient cargo space for storing equipment and an open deck and boom for handling large objects. Each was named for a plant, shrub or tree, prefixed by “White.” Backen acquired her in 2002 and has restored her to fine shape. He has used the ship for several research expeditions and for training mariners.

Vince is from Marin County and is a member of a family who have long fished professionally. As a teenager he worked fishing boats off Alaska. After achieving the status of a Bar Pilot, at the turn of the century he took the entrepreneurial step to acquire the White Holly. Come see his ship!

Nearby is the *San Francisco Bay Model*. Hidden below the slopes of Sausalito, this is a wonder for hydrologic study created by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers. Allow time to visit. The model will be open from 9 to 4 for self-guided tours.

Note venues and dates with care.

NEW DIFFERENT DATE

Our next event is at 1:00 on January 26, a SATURDAY, at the SF Bay Model Pier Sausalito.
Laurence Bergreen walks the walk and talks the talk. He researches his books himself; he goes to the places involved; he writes convincingly; he delivers a great lecture. He held forth on Marco Polo for our November meeting with informative details, interesting bits from his biography and responses to all questions with knowledge and detail. It was a pleasure to behold.

Our Vice Chair, Alan Nichols (right in photo), introduced the author of Marco Polo, from Venice to Xanadu. This was most appropriate, and appreciated by Larry, who was amazed that a fellow explorer had actually cycled the entire ‘Silk Web.’ Nichols was delighted in his read of this new book: “Bergreen has produced a major contribution to our knowledge about this most famous merchant from Venice, despite the plethora of books previously written and published—including many many translations of Marco Polo’s own writing.” He noted that Bergreen has placed the 16th Century into the context of the 21st Century; changes, of course, but similarities too!

Marco Polo was taken on his 24-year journey by his father and uncle; they had been in China before. Indeed, many others had, as well. But, they never wrote about their travels. Marco Polo found his place in history because he did. There were no Lonely Planet guides; the caravans moved slowly. He was 21 years old when he entered the empire of Kubla Khan after three years crossing the distance that Alan Nichols rode on his bicycle in months.

To his amazement Polo had entered the future, as Bergreen observes. Efficient city-states, like Venice had populations under 100,000. They were proud of mass-production techniques where their boats could be turned out as quickly as one each 15 minutes! All the better to maintain a good war footing, for there was constant battle with other city states. (Indeed, upon his return, Marco Polo himself was captured by Genoans—in whose confines he wrote his travel book.) In China, he encountered cities with a million people, high technology and a peaceful state (even under the ‘conquering’ Mongols.)

Befriended by Kubla Khan, the all-powerful ruler, Marco, his father and uncle, were encouraged to travel on the emperor’s behalf. In fact, they were retained with a ‘golden handcuff’, a golden document they carried assuring protection. No one would harm them under assured threat of death. Without this, their eventual return to Venice would be impossible—they returned only after Kubla Khan died at age 80!

Marco Polo’s book was passed around the nobility of Europe, pre-Gutenberg. It also became one of the first printed books. It inspired Columbus and Magellan. It inspired exploration. His tales of the Orient were not all accepted, some were considered ‘tall.’ Yet, as Bergreen has researched, over time all of his descriptions of places, customs, finances and cultures proved correct in the reports of later visitors and modern archeologists.

Read the book! (And, you might want to pick up others Laurence Bergreen has written: on Magellan, Louie Armstrong, Al Capone, NASA.) Good stuff.

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**Holiday Gathering**

In early December explorers from the Northern California Chapter gathered for conversation and fellowship at the home of Chairman Lee Langan and his wife, Karine. It was a sunny, almost balmy afternoon, and the food and wine were served by other members of this three-generation home: Oliver and Snow (Yingxue) and Susan, with young children Teo and Fin underfoot as were Carl and Tiberius, dog and cat.

Bill and Dana Isherwood, were present from Seattle (and Beijing). Bill a Chair Emeritus, was joined by two other former chairmen: Bob Schmieder and Steve Smith. Some sixty other stalwarts of our chapter spent the afternoon exchanging tales and plans and stories. The consensus was that this became an unusual opportunity to
Happy New Year!

We have a terrific line up of activities for the upcoming year. We have someone identified for each meeting, but some are still being refined. There is quite a mixture of topics and events. The intent is to provide a schedule that will draw larger attendance and invite new members to join The Explorers Club.

You will note that we are ranging farther a field than in recent years—at the end of May a weekend in the environs of the Monterey Peninsula is planned. In September we will again have a meeting on the San Francisco Peninsula. In January we venture across the Golden Gate to Sausalito. The rest of the meetings will find the comfort of our friendly Golden Gate Yacht Club.

To help more people attend we are also encouraging car pooling, and three individuals have volunteered to coordinate north, south and east possibilities. The idea is simple: contact these folks and they will try to assure there are rides for all. It will work if there is enough advanced notice! Let Anders know of your interest when you respond.

As we began a few years back, we have ‘chapter dues.’ These primarily support the newsletter printing and mailing although there are other small expenses that crop up each year. Note that ALL officers, speakers and helpers are completely voluntary, and there is no compensation. This is a long tradition of The Explorers Club, and we are incredibly fortunate to have the quality of presentations we hear each month. (The national officers, Board members and Committee management are voluntary as well. Only a small permanent staff are Club employees.)

So, please pay your dues promptly and willingly.

We send out about 325 newsletters each month. At one point we attempted to limit these and encourage email communication only. Several folks responded; the newsletter each month is on our web site in full color, and they are notified! Nevertheless, the number of members and ‘friends’ did not reduce the snail delivery very much. Upon reflection, the newsletter is a good way to promote the Chapter so a few more is just fine. If you know someone who would enjoy it, ask Steve to add their name.

The January meeting will be interesting and different; come; rain or shine. We’ll be prepared.  

---Lee Langan (FN99)
Northern California
2007-2008 Calendar of Events
(Venues will be identified at time of event.)

Our next Meeting
January 26 (Saturday)
OR/V White Holly, Vince Backen
SF Bay Model Dock, Sausalito

Future Meeting Schedule
February 22 (Friday) Larry Lansburgh
Amazon’s Dream People         GGYC
March 29 (Friday) in planning
April 25 (Friday) Jeff Morgan
Global Heritage Fund New Sites         GGYC
May 30-Jun 1 Hicks home; Monterey Peninsula
September in planning
October 24 (Friday) Guitty Azarpay
From the Silk Road to UC Berkeley.         GGYC
November 21(Friday) in planning

Meetings earlier the season
September 23 . . . . . . . . . . Rick Blake
Meteorite Collision near Sacramento
Gene & Sibyl Boudreau Home, Sebastopol
October 19 . . . . . . . . . . Brian Fisher
Save an Ant; Save a Planet: Madagascar
Golden Gate Yacht Club, San Francisco
November 8 . . . . . . . . . . Laurence Bergreen
Marco Polo
Golden Gate Yacht Club, San Francisco
December 9 . . . . . . . . . . Lee & Karine Langan
A gathering of Explorers
Langan home, San Francisco

January 2008

Vince Backen — OR/V White Holly
26 January — S.F. Bay Model Pier, Sausalito

January LOCATION

Date: Saturday, January 26, 2008
Place: White Holly, Bay Model Pier,
Sausalito, CA
Time: 1:00 - 3:00 On board, lunch
9:00 - 4:00 Bay Model open
Cost: $25 members and guests
(cost for provided hot lunch)
Please mail information (to right),
with payment, to Dr. Anders Jepsen
30 Jun 1 Hicks home; Monterey Peninsula
September in planning
October 24 (Friday) Guitty Azarpay
From the Silk Road to UC Berkeley.         GGYC
November 21(Friday) in planning

Reserve ___ spaces for January 26, 2008 at
OR/V White Holly,
Bay Model Pier, Sausalito, CA
Cost $25 each.
Prospective members are welcome.
Annual Dues payable @$25

Name: ____________________________
Address (if changed): _______________
Guest(s): __________________________

Advise if you desire a car pool!

A bit of a circuitous route, but
the Bay Model is well known!
Best Sausalito exit is north
Bridgeway.

Plenty of parking!

San Francisco Bay Model

OR/V White Holly

follow Marinship Way

Incorporated 1905

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