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Reinstalling the memorial plaque of *Le Pourquoi Pas?* on Petermann Island (Charcot's cairn 1909, HSM 27)

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Information Paper submitted by France and IAATO

Summary

At the end of the Antarctic summer season 2014-15, the memorial Plaque of *Le Pourquoi Pas?*, with the list of the crew of Jean-Philippe Charcot's vessel, was found on the ground, close to the cairn on which it was fixed on Peterman Island. The cairn and the memorial plaque itself were listed HSM no 27. The French delegation at the ATCM was alerted and a plan was established to reinstall the plaque as soon as possible. The work was carried out on January 13th, 2016 by the crew of the French vessel *L'Austral*, belonging to the tour operator "Ponant", Member of IAATO

Background

During his second voyage to Antarctica, Jean-Baptiste Charcot stayed on Petermann Island¹ (Antarctic Peninsula) from January to November 1909. He erected on this island, at the top of Megalestris hill, a cairn on which he affixed a lead plate with the names of 30 officers and crew members of *Le Pourquoi Pas?* The original of this plaque is now in the National Museum of Natural History in Paris, but a replica was put in place some years ago by the United Kingdom. The cairn and its plaque were listed as Antarctic Historic Monument (HSM 27) by the Recommendation VII-9 of the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting held in 1972 in Wellington (New Zealand).

At the end of the Antarctic tourist season 2014-2015, a tour operator member of IAATO visited Petermann Island and found that the plate was detached from its wooden base and lying on the ground (Figures 1 and 2). He put the plate between the stones of the cairn to avoid any further damage and informed IAATO.

Restoration of the plaque

IAATO alerted the French Polar Institute and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development as soon as it was informed in May 2015. It was decided to ask the "Ponant", a French company organizing tourist trips to Antarctica and IAATO member, to refit the plate, on behalf of France, at one of its passages on Petermann Island during the tourist season 2015-2016.

As a result, the crew of *L'Austral* put the plaque of *Le Pourquoi-Pas?* back to its original position on the cairn on January 13th 2016 after having carefully cleaned it (Figures 3 to 5). The work was coordinated by Nicolas Dubreuil, Head of Expedition Corporate at "Ponant", and made under the direction of Olivier Marien, Master of *L'Austral*, and José Sarica, Expedition Leader.

This very fine achievement will allow thousands of tourists who annually visit the site to recall those exceptional men who participated in this human adventure in Antarctica in the early days of the twentieth century.

¹ Petermann Island occupies the 6th rank in the list of the most visited site in the Antarctic Peninsula. During the 2014-2015 season, more than 9500 visitors have landed on this island (source : <http://iaato.org/tourism-statistics>)

The French government expresses its sincere thanks to the persons involved in this operation and with the present IP wants highlight the exemplary collaboration which prevailed between IAATO, “Ponant” and the French authorities on this occasion.



Figure 1 – The cairn at the end of the 2014-15 season. (Photo Phil Wickens)



Figure 2 - The plaque of Le Pourquoi Pas? detached from the cairn and lying on the ground. (Photo Phil Wickens)



Figure 3 – Cleaning of the plaque on board L’Austral. (c) Ponant



Figure 4 (on right) – The plaque fixed on a new wooden plate. (c) Ponant



Figure 5 – The crew of *L'Austral* posing in front of the cairn Charcot's cairn on Petermann Island after having re-affixed the plaque. (c) Ponant