



Expedition: Homeward Bound

Field Study: Conservation

Summary:

Homeward Bound is a leadership, strategic and science initiative for women, set against the backdrop of Antarctica. The initiative, turned global movement, aims to heighten the influence and impact of women with a science background in order to influence policy and decision-making as it shapes our planet.

THE EXPEDITION

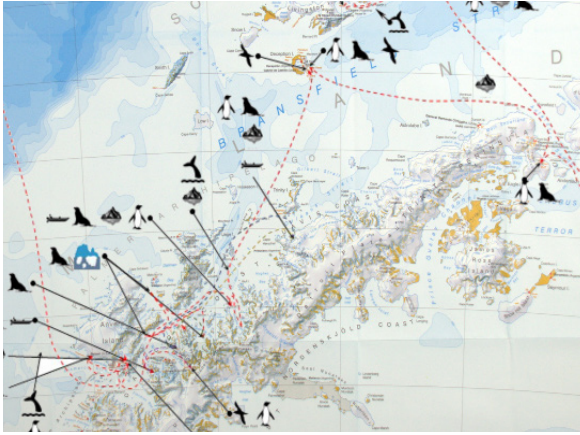
Launched in 2016, Homeward Bound gathered the first 76 women with critical science backgrounds from around the world, with an ultimate target of 1,000, to undertake a year-long state-of-the-art program. Homeward Bound aims to develop their leadership and strategic capabilities, using science to build conviction around the importance of their voices. The inaugural program culminated in the largest-ever female expedition to Antarctica, in December 2016, with a focus on the leadership of women and the state of the health of the planet.

The expedition was at sea for 20 days, having set sail from Ushuaia, Argentina. The expedition included state-of-the-art leadership and strategic planning training and science education, incorporating the most up-to-date research about the state and functioning of our planet, delivered by leading academics.



The participants and leadership of the inaugural Homeward Bound Expedition. Photo by Songqiao Yao.

Women are earning a significant percentage of college degrees and contribute to a significant percentage of our workforce. However, they are in the minority globally when it comes to executive decision-making roles. By developing the leadership and strategic skills of these women, and a strong, purposefully developed network, they will be able to impact policy and decisions towards a sustainable future.



The route of the inaugural Homeward Bound journey.

Regions of Antarctica are currently showing among the fastest responses to climate change seen anywhere on the planet. The study of the roles of Antarctica and the Southern Ocean in the climate system provides critical insights into global-scale change and the influence of human activities on environmental change. Moreover, the continent is iconic as a wild, beautiful and unique environment that has captured the imagination of many leaders in the past. The experience has created strong bonds, inspired action, and led to extraordinary collaborations between the women.

EXPEDITION GOALS

- Elevate each participant's leadership capabilities.
- Educate the team on the science of what is happening to our planet.
- Refine participants' skills to design and execute strategy, and to create plans for future collaborations as women working towards a sustainable future.
- To enhance these skills with 1,000 women over 10 years.
- To create active, non-hierarchical collaborations among the women both in small groups and as a collective.

WHO

Homeward Bound

WHAT

The largest ever female expedition to Antarctica

WHEN

December 2 - 21, 2016

WHERE

Antarctica

WHY

To heighten the influence of women with science backgrounds in shaping policy that affects the planet



Joanna Young, PhD candidate at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks.

- To contribute to and elevate the broader societal conversation about the role of women in leading the world toward a more sustainable future.

CHALLENGES FACED

Traveling along the Antarctic Peninsula is controlled by capricious weather and sea ice conditions. Maintaining flexibility in our day-to-day and sometimes hour-to-hour schedule was a necessity, as our planned destination could sometimes evade us due to strong winds or an ice-choked channel. Participants learned not to become too attached to any one particular landing site or curriculum module, as nature always had the last word! Trust in our faculty and expedition leader was crucial in order to successfully and safely navigate these changes.



Nina McLean and Shelley Ball carry the WINGS flag near bustling Adelie penguins at Brown Bluff.

Diversity among participants was also a topic aboard the ship. The range of expertise and career level of the participants was incredibly broad, and made for conversations that were rich in interdisciplinary and cross-generational learning – an element all participants agreed was one of the highlights of the trip. However, diversity in terms of race, culture and ethnicity was not as broad as participants and faculty alike envision for future years of the program, in order to also bolster the leadership capabilities of women from underrepresented groups. Moreover, with a vision of promoting sustainability globally, it is important that a multitude of nations are represented. Steps are being actively taken to broaden our network to reach a greater diversity of future participants and establish a substantial scholarship fund to support women for whom the fundraising cost of the program may be a barrier to participation.

The entire 12-month project has been peer-reviewed by 76 scientists and 8 faculty members. We were pleased to discover that we had largely identified the same opportunities to improve the project for 2017-18. We will increase the discussion on gender challenges in science, identify themes of expertise in the new participants and develop discussion themes around this, do more of the key leadership work on the ground before launching to build the team and our support for each other, and increase reflective time on the ship and collaboration in key areas of interest. Home-ward Bound has reached a significant global audience. We all accept the responsibility to keep up the momentum, and ensure year by year, each coterie improves the focus and outcomes for the next.

EXPEDITION RESULTS

In three weeks, we witnessed the endless glaciers, 200,000 member penguin colonies, and whale and seal species that depend on an ecosystem in balance. We established a network of 76 women scientists for whom the collaborations towards sustainability are only beginning. We learned what behaviors make the best leaders, how to identify our core values, and how to strategically align with our goals. We initiated a global movement through media coverage in the New York Times, BBC, Forbes and Upworthy. And, we launched the search for the 2018 participants, towards 1,000 women scientists at the leadership table. The Homeward Bound documentary, "Beautiful Minds – Agents of Change," has been selected this year as part of the global Good Pitch initiative, which matches film projects with a significant opportunity to change the world with philanthropists.



Glenna McGregor and Alison Davies carry the WINGS flag near a chinstrap penguin colony on Paulet Island.

ABOUT THE FLAG CARRIERS

The expedition comprised 76 women with critical science backgrounds. They covered a broad range of fields of expertise, occupations and career levels, and were selected based on their potential to use scientific knowledge and methods to have an impact on decision-making towards the sustainability of the planet. Professions included: astronomers, engineers, physicists, science communicators, environmental scientists, Antarctic and Arctic specialists, doctors and social scientists. This report was authored by Joanna Young, a PhD student at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.



Joanna Young.

EXPEDITION TEAM

For the full list of leadership and participants, see the Homeward Bound website.

CONTACT INFORMATION

<https://homewardboundprojects.com.au/>
<http://joannayoung.strikingly.com/>



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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

www.wingsworldquest.org
info@wingsworldquest.org