



OH PIONEERS!

Inspirato Members head into a previously undiscovered passage on Cape Renard, Antarctica.

EXPLORERS CLUB

HOLLY BRYAN, INSPIRATO'S Manager of Experiential Travel, joined more than 90 members on a voyage to Antarctica in January. But neither she nor the other members expected to venture to an unmapped place few humans had ever seen.

We were four nights into our voyage on the *National Geographic Orion*, which we had taken across the Drake Passage from the tip of Argentina, and the grandeur of Antarctica was breathtaking. Between the Southern Ocean, the icebergs, the mountains, the sea life and the penguins, it truly was the most beautiful and otherworldly place I've ever seen.

That night Sean Powell, our expedition leader, asked us if we wanted to take the ship's Zodiac rafts through a hidden passage between Cape Renard and False Cape Renard that he'd only discovered when he was recently down in Antarctica on a previous expedition.

As he pointed out, the gap doesn't appear on maps, and as far as he knew, maybe

500 people on earth had ever seen and experienced it. Even though it was 10 o'clock at night and lightly snowing, no one wanted to miss out on this opportunity.

All 98 of us bundled up in our gear, loaded the Zodiacs and set off. The Antarctic night was still light (it was summer down there, remember), and we slowly motored through the pack ice to the passage, which, with its walls of snow and ice, felt like we were going to enter another dimension.

As we traveled deeper into the cut, the geography reminded me of a miniature, snowbound version of the Grand Canyon—the passage was only as wide as a football field is long.

After an hour of slow cruising, we came out on the other side and saw a small boat

in the distance. At first we wondered what it was doing there. Then we realized that while we were inside the passage, the ship had come around the cape to meet us. The small boat was sent to warm us up with steaming cups of mulled wine.

Later, back on board the *National Geographic Orion*, I saw the teenage son of one of our members sitting in the lounge with his head in his hands. I went over to ask him what was wrong.

"I'm only 16-years-old," he said. "I have the rest of my life to live, but how am I ever going to top this?"

With that I finally understood the power of Antarctica among the famous explorers of old and, for one night, us.

— AS TOLD TO GRANT DAVIS