



LOGBOOK



In the realm of the Polar Bear

Svalbard, June 2009

FRIDAY, June 12th

Longyearbyen - 78° 10' North, 015° 20' East & Barentsburg - 78° 00' N, 014° 00' E

Weather: overcast and a little windy
Temperature: 7° C/45° F

Guests arrived in Longyearbyen Thursday night and Friday morning. Friday at approximately four o'clock, after a sightseeing tour to the Svalbard Museum and around Longyearbyen, guests boarded the Polar Star, placed at the coal harbour, due to heavy ship traffic in the Advent fjord.

After check-in, welcoming cocktails and snacks were served in the Observation Lounge. This was followed by an introduction and a presentation by Expedition Leader Anja Fleig, Captain Jacek Majer, Hotel Manager Natasha and all the guides. A lot of practical information was given while we sailed away from the town. Dinner was served as we sailed west along Isfjorden to the Russian town of Barentsburg.

Barentsburg is located in Green Fjord and is a Russian coal mining community with around 400 inhabitants from Russia and Ukraine. It is a family community with around 15 children. We had a guided tour around the city with two local guides. We visited the community and were entertained by an entrancing folklore show in the theatre.

Afterwards we embarked Polar Star again and sailed out of Isfjorden, passing the island of Prins Karls Forland. A gathering of the photo group was held in the library after Barentsburg, and plans were made for the rest of the week concerning their activities.

SATURDAY, June 13th

Ny-Alesund - 78° 50' N, 011° 30', Magdalenefjorden - 79° 30' N, 010° 30' E & N, 80° 00' N, 013° 18' E

Weather: clear and sunny in the morning, overcast in the afternoon, sunny in the evening
Temperature: 6° C/43° F

In the early morning we came into Kongsfjorden and arrived at Ny Ålesund, the world's northernmost community. Ny-Ålesund is a former mining settlement that has become an important international research centre - mainly on the atmosphere and ozone layer, but also geological, biological and glacial research is carried out here by many different countries. We had guides in town, where we divided into three different groups, one German speaking and two English speaking.

Next to the Amundsen bust we heard about all the people starting their expeditions from this remote settlement, like the Norwegian Roald Amundsen and the Italian Umberto Nobile who flew over the North Pole in an airship in 1926. Due to lots of snow, we did not walk over to the airship-mast. After the guided tour, the guests enjoyed some time for themselves and some shopping.

Then we headed north, past the seven glaciers, towards Magdalenefjorden. This is the most well known fjord in Spitsbergen and also one of the few places where big cruise ships are allowed to come. It is a lovely fjord with peaked mountains on both sides and an impressive glacier at the end. These are supposed to be the mountains Willem Barents first saw when he discovered Svalbard in 1596, naming the biggest island Spitsbergen (peaked mountains) after them.

Entering the fjord, a snow-covered peninsula stuck out from the southern shore. This is Gravneset ("the grave-yard peninsula") where Dutch and English whalers from northwestern Spitsbergen came to bury their dead in the 17th and 18th centuries. There are 150 men buried

here. Down on the beach but hidden under snow there are remains from two blubber ovens where blubber from whales was rendered. At the end of the beach lies a small cabin where the Syssemmannen (Governor) has officers during the summer.

From the boat we saw some Walrus in the water. In the snow on top of the ice there were bear tracks, and a few people got a look at a bear far away close to the glacier. The bear hid behind some ice though, and was not spotted by everybody.

We headed further north and then east where we hit the ice by Raudfjorden. The hours after dinner were spent in the ice where people were on the look for wildlife. Bearded seals and birds like kittiwakes, fulmars, arctic terns, puffins, guillemots, and little auks were spotted, and in the late night/early morning even a minke whale was caught on camera. The night was spent locked in the ice at 80° 00' N, 013° 18' E.

SUNDAY, June 14th

Sailing north – furthest north position: 80° 00' N, 013° 27' E

Weather: Sunny and overcast
Temperature: 6° C/43° F

Due to lots of ice in the north area, the proceedings of the ship were slow. The plan was to reach the walrus haul at Moffen, and then proceed to the western part of Sorgfjorden to pick up a ski expedition team from Spitsbergen Travel. However, the ice was thick and eventually we had to turn. We reached 80 degrees north 013° 27' east where we parked the ship into the ice and had a landing on the ice where aquavit was served.

Two bears, a mother and a one and a half year cub were spotted on the way to Moffen, and later in the evening another two bears was spotted sailing back to Raudfjorden. A few walrus were also seen in the water en route.

The night was spent heading south towards Raudfjorden and the North West Corner, since ice conditions forbade us to complete the circumnavigation of Spitzbergen.



MONDAY, June 15th

Raudfjorden, 79° 40' N, 012° 00' E, Ytre Norskoya, 79° 50' N, 011° 30' E & Bjørnfjorden 79° 39.5' N, 011° 14.0' E

Weather: Overcast but still airs, sunny at times
Temperature: 6° C/43° F

We started the day with a landing at Ytre Norskøya. We landed on the snow covered beach and split up into different groups for different hikes. This was our first true wilderness landing so all of the guides came prepared for bears, being armed with rifles. Some had a short walk to a small colony of Little Auks and some were more adventurous and reached the top of the island. The snow made things a little difficult and slow but it was good to be off the ship and on "dry" land.

After lunch we headed for Smeerenburg where we anchored up in Bjørnfjorden and had a Zodiac cruise in the waters in front of the Smeerenburg glacier. We came very close to a walrus resting on an iceberg.

The evening was spent in an educational mode, with oral presentations from Trude concerning the history of Svalbard (English), and Arne concerning whale hunting (Deuch). The photo group continued their daily recaps.

The night was spent sailing south towards Van Keulenfjorden.

TUESDAY, June 16th

Van Keulenfjorden, Ingeborgbukta 77° 33.8 N, 014° 56.2 E og Bellsund, Ingeborgfjellet

Weather: overcast, windy, and snowy in the afternoon

Temperature: 3° C/37° F

After a night of heavy winds we woke up to grey skies. The first landing of the day was on the east side of Richardodden, in Ingeborgbukta, where we went by Zodiacs to the shore. Our landing place was on a gently-sloping beach, which made getting ashore very easy. There was an option of three walks this morning, of different length and pace. Almost three hours were spent on this landing.

After lunch we went to Ingeborgfjellet where we went ashore and walked a bit up a bird mountain where Little Auks were nesting. We listened to the bird sounds for a while and took pictures. Afterwards, some went back to the boat while others hiked for about an hour on the tundra along the beach and spotted a small reindeer herd with calves, Barnacle geese, and Snow buntings. The wind picked up, and it started snowing so the last group on the beach really got to experience how the arctic summer can be.

After dinner a Deuch version of a polar bear DVD was displayed in the observation lounge and the photo group gathered as usual in the library.

WEDNESDAY, June 11th

Hornsund, 76° 59.0' N, 015° 50.0'E

Weather: sunny in the morning, overcast later with low visibility and light snow

Temperature: 3° C/37° F

This morning found us approaching Hornsund ('Horn Sound'—named for the finding of a reindeer antler by the men of an early

exploration). On the way we passed close to the Polish research station, on the north side. When we arrived at Hornsund, a stunning sight was revealed – jagged, snow and ice-covered mountains all around the ship. The morning before lunch was spent cruising Vestre and Austre Burgerbukta, and in Austre Burgerbukta, at the end of the fjord, we spotted a polarbear lying down on the ice. As we turned and continued deeper into Hornsund we spotted two more bears on the ice, a hunting mother in front of a seal hole and her cub resting nearby on the ice. After taking pictures, we returned the way we had come to be ready for our afternoon landing at nearby Gnålodden.

Our next landing place was landing place was below the 759 m/2,490' cliff, upon which many Kittiwakes and Brunnich's Guillemots were nesting. Some of the slopes below the rock face were carpeted with the pink flowers of the abundant Purple Saxifrage and there was also scurvy grass in bloom. Also in the area was a pair of Arctic Foxes, mid-way in their moult from a white winter coat to a brown-and-white summer one. The first people off the ship spotted one of the foxes.

Guides were posted around the perimeter of the landing site so that we could wander freely and look at, for example, the Pomor site, a grave, the old trappers hut and the hot spring. The water was so hot that it was impossible to even dip a toe into it, let alone bathe! The views across the water were terrific and got better as one climbed higher up the slope towards the bird cliff.

After dinner the Polar Star headed out of Hornsund and Arne L gave a presentation on arctic expeditions with dogs. After dinner was spent searching for whales, and a group of dolphins were seen, as well as five Minkwhales.

THURSDAY, June 12th

Trygghamna, 78° 14.5' N, 013° 51.0' E & Skansebukta

Weather: sunny & calm

Temperature: 6° C/43° F

We had good fortune with the weather today, and the first landing of the day was in Trygghamna (in Norwegian - safe harbour). As in other places that we visited, purple saxifrage was much in evidence, as were good numbers of both Pink-footed and Barnacle Geese as well as Great Skua, Fulmars and Kittiwakes. Walking conditions were very good so everyone was able to do as much or as little as they liked.

Back aboard, we sailed southwards back into Isfjorden and round the corner eastwards to the entrance of Billefjorden. On the way, other activities to keep us busy included more information on packing and disembarkation. Soon we arrived at Skansebukta, with its immense fortress-like cliff where fulmars nest by the thousand. Here we had the opportunity to just wander around on our own between guides placed out in the landscape. Of interest were the beached boat, the old gypsum mine with its railway track still to be seen between the beach and the entrance to the adit, lots of flowers and an old trappers hut now used by a local club. On the way back to Polarstar we detoured round the corner to a small cliff where puffins can be seen at breeding sites where they are sheltered by a roof over their heads; there were also a few Black Guillemots and Brünnich's Guillemots, and further down a colony of Kittiwakes. Time on our last landing flew by and before we knew it we were back aboard for the Captain's farewell cocktail party, a slide-show of our voyage and a splendid Arctic barbecue on the stern deck outside the observation lounge. Then it was time to pack!

In all we were 96 guests and guides onboard from 15 different countries:

New Zealand: 2
Italy: 1
Sweden: 5
Czech: 1
Germany: 35
Great Britain: 14
Holland: 7
Norway: 7
Thailand: 2
Belgium: 2
Denmark: 6
France: 4
Switzerland: 6
Spain: 2
Australia: 2

During the cruise 8 polar bears were seen, however two of them were probably seen twice, plus colonies of kittiwakes, Brünnich's guillemots, puffins and little auks; we saw foxes and reindeer, walrus and minke-whales. We also broke through ice with the ship and sailed past stunning and dramatic scenery.

On behalf of Spitsbergen Travel, the guide team and lecturers, ships crew and officers we thank you for choosing us as your companions throughout this adventurous journey in the most beautiful parts of Spitsbergen.

We hope this logbook will make you remember this adventure, again and again...

***Anja Fleig, Expedition Leader
Trude Mørkved
Arne Liaklev
Tim Walker
Kirsti Lund Vik
Niklas Gerhardsson
Olof Selander
Arne Kelterhein***

& with help from Dr. Dave and his wife!



Man's five senses are sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. Spitsbergen Travel's vision is to create joy by stimulating your senses in a way that you never forget. We hope that this last week has alerted all five senses... FOREVER!

Are you sad to leave Svalbard? Interested in knowing more about trips during the winter? You can find more information on our website www.spitsbergentravel.com or in our catalogue.