



# LOGBOOK

July 10-16, 2009



**In the realm of the Polar Bear**

**Svalbard, July 2009**

## FRIDAY, July 10<sup>th</sup>

### Longyearbyen

78°10'N, 015°20'E

### Barentsburg

78°00'N, 014°00'E

**Weather:** Overcast afternoon, with clouds clearing to sun in the evening.

**Temperature:** 12° C/54° F

After a sightseeing tour to the Svalbard Museum and around Longyearbyen we boarded the Polar Star. After checking-in, welcome cocktails and snacks were served in the observation lounge. This was followed by an introduction and a presentation by Expedition Leader Anja Fleig, the Captain Jacek Majer, the Hotel Manager Florin and the guide-team. We received practical information and had a lifeboat drill as we sailed away from the town. Dinner was served while we sailed south-west along Isfjorden to the Russian settlement of Barentsburg.

Barentsburg is located in Grønfjorden (Green Fjord) and is a Russian coal mining community with 400 inhabitants from Russia and Ukraine. It is a family community with 15 children. We had a guided tour around the city with two local guides and were entertained by an enchanting folklore show in the theatre. Though we arrived in overcast skies, as we explored the town, the sun appeared and a calm summer-evening feeling fell over the town, which overlooked the expansive, sparkling Isfjorden.

At 22.30, the Polar Star sailed out of Isfjorden in the sun and passed the island of Prins Karls Forland on our way north to many anticipated adventures.

## SATURDAY, July 11<sup>th</sup>

### Ny-Ålesund

78°50'N, 011°30'E

### Magdalenefjorden

79°30'N, 010°30'E

## Moffen

80°00'N, 014°26'E

**Weather:** Sunny, blue sky. No wind.

**Temperature:** 6° C/43° F

In the early morning we came into Kongsfjord and arrived at Ny Ålesund, the world's northernmost community. It is a former mining settlement that has become an important international research centre - mainly on the atmosphere and ozone layer, but geological, biological and glacial research is also carried out here by many different countries. We had guided walking tours in town, where we divided into different groups and some went bird hunting (armed with a telescope only!). The rest of us had a cultural and historical overview. During our time here we looked at the old train that was in use in the mining period. Among everything else here holding the title "northernmost", this train is the northernmost railway in the world. We walked through this small town with colorful wooden houses from before World War II. Some of us even went inside one of them - where they have made a museum - and we could see how people were living in the early 1960's.

Next to the Amundsen bust we heard about the many people starting their expeditions from this remote settlement. But the most interesting story is the one of the Norwegian Roald Amundsen and the Italian Umberto Nobile making the first successful flight over the North Pole in a zeppelin airship in 1926. Some of us walked over to the airship-mast which still remains. After that we enjoyed some time for ourselves and some shopping, in this peaceful place. A family of polar foxes was spotted living beneath the Dutch research cabins- two adults and two small black furry cubs. Watching the young ones tumble around as the adults set their hungry eyes on the nearby barnacle geese was fantastic. Arctic terns, Svalbard reindeer, eider ducks, barnacle geese, Arctic skuas, and snow buntings were all seen, in addition to the Greenlandic dogs owned by researchers living in Ny Ålesund.

From the dock the ship headed north, past high alpine mountains characteristic of the northwest of Svalbard, passing the seven glaciers, towards Magdalenefjorden. This is the most well known fjord in Spitsbergen and is also one of the few places where big cruise ships are allowed to come due to its deep waters. It is a lovely fjord with peaked mountains on both sides and an

impressive glacier at the end, the Wagonway glacier. These are supposed to be the mountains that the Dutchman Willem Barents first saw when he discovered Svalbard in 1596, naming the biggest island, Spitsbergen, (meaning pointy mountains) after them.

Entering the fjord, we landed by Zodiac on a peninsula on the southern shore, which boasts one of Svalbard's only sand beaches, complete with clear blue glacier water. This beautiful place is called 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 140 men buried here, in coffins placed atop the permafrost and covered with stones. Down on the beach there are remains from two blubber ovens where blubber from whales was rendered. At the end of the beach lay a small cabin where the Sysselmannen (Governor) has officers during the summer, two of which came by the Sysselmannen zodiac, checking on one of the most important historical sights on Svalbard. We walked a ways inland, seeing the little auks soaring in the skies above us as they went to and from their nests on the mountain which towered above us. A ringed seal played in the shallow waters near the beach.

Then it was back to ship, to cruise by the scenic front of the Wagonway glacier in the very end of the fjord. After dinner, Polar Star sailed north, curving around the northwestern tip of the island and heading to the island of Moffen in the north. After the evening recap, Allison gave a talk about her research with little auks in Hornsund Fjord. At around 11pm, we could see the pack ice on the horizon, and soon we were in it, cruising amongst the floes in the midnight sun. The first walrus was seen on an ice floe only 10 minutes later, and we saw more and more walrus- and even a bearded seal- hauled out on ice floes as we neared the island of Moffen and then north-east crossing 80 degrees north at approximately midnight. At Moffen, around 80 walruses were seen on the beach.



## SUNDAY, July 12<sup>th</sup>

### **Alkefjellet**

79° 36.7' N, 018° 20.5' E

### **Torellneset and Blåsvellbreen**

79° 21.5' N, 020° 44.6' E

**Weather:** Sun. Blue sky. Foggy in the evening.  
**Temperature:** 6° C/43° F

After breakfast we approached Alkefjellet (the Auk Cliff), and sunny, calm weather conditions were favourable for a zodiac cruise beneath the bird cliff. Atop the cliffs was a large icecap, and we started the cruise near a vertical ice fall, where the ice cap fell off into the sea over the cliffs. While we were driving along it, we witnessed its impressive power, as a huge chunk of ice calved off near the top, falling 200 meters and crashing into the sea.

We got closer to the impressive cliff face of the bird colony – the home to 60,000 nesting Brünnich's Guillemots—densely populated as such colonies usually are, with black-and-white birds shoulder-to-shoulder on every ledge. There was a constant whirr of birds around the zodiacs as adults came to and fro, some visibly ferrying fish back to the cliff. Here and there were kittiwakes nesting in niches and corners. Glaucous gulls, with large speckled dull brown chicks, and the adults were patrolling the colony, looking for chances to take eggs from the colony. Three polar foxes were seen nimbly traversing the grassy slopes at the base of the colony, hoping for eggs or fallen chicks. They were surprisingly good climbers, and we understood why the Brünnich's Guillemots were forced to nest on the small ledges on the vertical cliffs, away from hungry foxes. We also saw Black Guillemots and Black Legged Kittiwakes nesting, as well as the regal Northern Fulmar. The cliffs themselves are very impressive – vertical columns of basalt, intruded into an area of sedimentary rock, stained white and pink with the accumulated generations of guano. With the waves crashing at their base and the cacophony of birds - it was a spectacular start of the day.

After lunch, Polar Star headed towards Torellneset on Nordaustlandet, named after the famous Swedish geologist Otto Torell. We found a haul out of approximately 30 walruses

on the beach and were able to approach them quietly on foot to a distance of 30 meters, in separate groups. We also did three hikes: a long, a medium and a short. On the long hike up the hills northeast of Torellneset we saw several Svalbard reindeer one with a calf, living in this harsh high Arctic environment with almost no grass, though we discovered blooming flowers of Purple Saxifrage, Svalbard Poppy and Arctic Cinquefoil. The geology was particularly interesting, with evidence of ancient beaches which were now some 30m above sea level- a result of the upheaval of the land after the end of the last Ice Age.

During dinner we sailed towards the Bråsvell glacier, a part of the great Austfonna icecap, situated on the remote east coast of Nordaustlandet. Sunday evening revealed a dramatic approach to the glacier face, a 25-m vertical wall of pale-blue ice, looking as though it was cut with a knife. The ice shelf is approximately 180 km long, and it is said to be the second largest ice cap in Europe. Countless meltwater streams snaked down its surface and cascaded from the top of the glacier down to the sea, shimmering in the midnight sun. We drank hot chocolate and rum, which warmed our fingers while we stood out on deck. As we left the glacier front, a polar bear mother and her cub were spotted on the sea ice nearby. We slowly approached, giving the pair their room, but were able to get a good look at them as they rested and rolled on the ice. After an hour with the bears, we headed south to search for a passage through the Freeman strait, which has been packed with ice since winter.

## MONDAY, July 13<sup>th</sup>

### **Eastern Edgeøya**

78°00' N, 24° E

### **Ryke Yseøyene**

77°48.6' N, 25° 01.4' E

**Weather:** Overcast. No wind.

**Temperature:** 6° C/43° F

After a night of navigating southwards through the ice, we woke up near the eastern mouth of Freemansundet (Freeman strait), which separates the islands of Edgeøya, to the south, and Barentsoya to the north. The purpose was

scouting the ice conditions in the strait to see if it was passable, as it has been filled with fast ice throughout the summer. Surprisingly, we found it open. Knowing that we could come back to pass the strait, we sailed south again, along the ice edge east of Edgeøya. In the sea ice after breakfast, two polar bears were spotted, though shallow waters prevented the Polar Star from getting close to the bears, a mother and her young cub.

Sailing in open water along the ice edge towards the southeast, we listened to lectures given by Steffen about ice, in German, and by Ingunn about the airship exploration of the North Pole in the early 1900's, in Italian.

During the lectures, another polar bear was spotted, and we parked the boat in the ice to get a better look. It was a large male, and we watched as it calmly navigated the moving and world of sea ice. Lunch was postponed for the bear watching, but finally we came in to warm up and have a nice meal.

After lunch, those standing out on the back deck having a coffee were surprised to see a bear quite close, standing on a floe only 50m from the boat. The boat slowed from its course along the ice edge and turned into the ice, and we observed the bear for half an hour.

After lunch, as we sailed in open waters once again in the direction of the remote island group called Ryke Yseøyene. These are part of the Tusenøyene ('thousand islands') on the remote and windswept south-eastern coast of Edgeøya. Arriving around 5pm, a few of us braved nearly whiteout fog and windy swell to take a zodiac cruise around the islands, not knowing what to expect in the mist laden islands, which were only partly visible from the ship. We cruised along the coast of the strange, desolate looking islands, which are only a few meters in height. A thick 'ice-foot' still was clinging to the side of the islands, a combination of freezing sea swells and winter snow which compacts along the beach into thick ice. In places, glacier ice from faroff glaciers was stranded in the shallow waters. We rounded two islands and found the ship again in the fog. A wavy ride back to the ship, and we were back onboard for warming up and eating a nice dinner.

Before dinner, Arne gave a lecture about his experiences crossing the icecap of Greenland by ski and making a three month trip by dogsled in the north of Greenland. After seeing for ourselves how the Arctic is in the summer, his pictures showed us how these landscapes are

when held in the long and bitterly cold grasp of winter.

## TUESDAY July 14<sup>th</sup>

### **Freemansundet**

78° 13'N, 21° 54'E

### **Bird Canyon, Barentsøya**

78° 15.7'N, 21°57.1'E

### **Kapp Lee, Edgeøya**

78° 13'N, 20°30'E

**Weather:** Foggy morning, clearing to high clouds after breakfast. Afternoon, windy.

**Temperature:** 6° C/43° F

This morning we awoke in the Freeman strait, which had, until this week, been filled with pack ice, blocking passage for all ships wanting to get west into Storfjorden (meaning 'large fjord') which lies between Spitsbergen and Edgeøya. Today, however, the Polar Star had its first chance this summer to pass these waters. Though the fog was thick in the morning, after breakfast it cleared enough to see some light in the sky above the Freeman glacier on the far side of the fjord. After the pack ice left our landing site, we went ashore near a canyon filled with nesting kittiwakes. On shore we saw our first spider saxifrage (*Saxifrage platysepala*) which has a deep red rosette of leaves from which beautiful, fragile looking tendrils extend outward like the legs of a spider, with little buds at the end. Each of these asexual buds can create its own plant, an Arctic adaptation to the unpredictability of insect pollination and fertilization. Passing through surprisingly rich tundra vegetation, we walked into the canyon, where thousands of kittiwakes screeched overhead. The nests, which are made of a combination of soil and plant material, held together with excrement, clung to the sides of the cliffs. We even saw a polar fox and her two cubs, playing around their den. Back onboard, we listened to a lecture by Ingunn in English about the fight for the north pole by zeppelin airship. The two leaders of the first successful expedition, Norwegian Roald Amundsen and Italian Umberto Nobile were both strong characters, and after their trip split ways in disagreement, after Amundsen took the majority of the fame for the accomplishment. Later, Nobile made a second attempt, this time

to conduct more research on the still-unknown northpole. Unfortunately, his airship, 'Italia' crashed, killing some of the crew and leaving the rest, including Nobile, stranded on the ice. In the biggest Arctic rescue effort in history, nearly 2000 men searched for the lost party by ship, plane, and airship. Even Amundsen put aside his personal disagreements to look for his old partner, but disappeared with his airship and was never found. As we learned, many strong nationalistic and personal feelings surrounded this period of Arctic exploration. As a showcase of this period in Arctic and aviation history, an airship museum was built in Longyearbyen last year by Ingunn and her colleague Stefano Poli, and we saw a nice slideshow about its creation.

After lunch, we arrived at Kapp Lee, on the northwestern side of Edgeøya. Strong catabatic winds were blowing at speeds of up to 40 knots, whipping up waves and making any zodiac operations logistically unsafe. Catabatic winds, cold, strong winds, are created on glaciers and icecaps and are particular to the polar regions, and often can be quite temporary in duration. Thus, we waited an hour and, sure enough, the seas calmed down enough to let us make a landing. With just a little sea spray in our faces, and a few walrus in the water, we arrived onshore at Kapp Lee, which has both a rich history and beautiful surroundings. As far back as the 1700's, Russian Pomor hunters used this site as a base camp, and ruins of their huts are still in evidence. Additionally, there was an octagonal cabin made in 1904 from the Norwegian hunting period. Still standing and protected with a thick layer of peat at the base, the beautifully situated cabin will be restored by the Sysselmannen (Governor) this summer. Two small cabins nearby were built in the 1960's and have been used for research almost continuously ever since, for sea ice measurements and meteorological recordings from the weather mast on the point, among other things. The polar bear in the Svalbard museum in Longyearbyen was shot here, as the bear charged at a small group of researchers.

This whole area was subject to intensive exploration by CALTEX in the late 1960s, which was looking for oil and gas. Shortly thereafter, however, it was entirely protected by the Norwegian government, stopping any potential drilling. Standing on this pristine point, with the colourful tundra stretching out along the bay, the ancient cabins resting quietly, it is hard to imagine the oil platforms and infrastructure that could have been standing here today had the area not been protected. What a

blessing! After the landing, we began steaming southwards, towards the south cape, watching a movie about polar bears along the way.

## WEDNESDAY, July 15<sup>th</sup>

### Hornsund

77° 16'N, 16°00'E

**Weather:** High clouds; calm

**Temperature:** 6° C/43° F

We returned to the western side of Spitsbergen today, having rounded the south cape in the middle of the night. As we ate breakfast, the Polar Star steamed into Hornsund, the southernmost fjord on the western side of Spitsbergen, revealing some of the most stunning landscapes of the trip: tall peaks, among them Hornsundtind (1431m), mirror-like waters filled with deep blue icebergs, and massive glaciers. Orange trickles of rusty iron oxide made long lines down the rocky mountainsides, contrasting with the black stone. We investigated several glacier fronts, including west and east Borgerbukta and Brepollen. Near the front of the glacier in east Borgerbukta, a polar bear was spotted just as it slipped from the northern bank into the water. We watched it swim amongs the big blue glacier ice pieces, climbing out on a few to look at us. It smoothly swam to the other side, emerging, shaking, and walking along the beach. The glacial meltwater in this fjord contained a dark reddish brown silt, and as it emerged the bear looked dark brownish where it had been under water, but its head was still yellowish white.

In the afternoon, we took a walk at Gåshamna, where the long hikers saw moon-like landscapes and unusual geological landforms in a foggy and eerily calm atmosphere. Taking a few moments of silence on coast, we absorbed the unique quiet of this place. The medium hikers explored the wide glacial valley and the flowers it contained. At the shore were huge bowhead whale bones and blubber ovens, remnants of the whaling period. The tundra was rich and green surrounding the bones and ovens, indicating that the nutrients added to the ground by the whale blubber had an effect which can still be seen today.

Leaving Hornsund after dinner, we headed west, out to the continental shelf dropoff, where the

deep, cold water is forced upwards, bringing nutrients to the surface and causing a rich bloom of life and krill, the food of whales. We were lucky to spot a humpback whale taking advantage of this abundance of food. For an hour and a half, we watched them surface, blow, their slick wet backs slowly curving forward and then showing a tail fluke as they dove. Beautiful!

## THURSDAY, July 16<sup>nd</sup>

### Trygghamna

78°14.5'N, 013°51.0'E

### Skansebukta

78°30.7'N, 016°4.0'E

**Weather:** Sunny and breezy

**Temperature:** 6° C/43° F

The sun returned this morning! With our faces absorbing in the warm morning sun, we made an excellent landing at Alkehornet, near Trygghamna (in Norwegian - safe harbour). Coming up onto the tundra from the coast, we explored the birdcliff and the lush green slopes below, which had a much more diverse flora than any other place we had seen thus far. Many reindeer with calves were seen grazing on this rich vegetation. Two families of glaucous gulls were nesting along the rocky coast, northern fulmars coasted in the winds over the point, and on the cliffs Brunnich's guillemots and kittiwakes were seen nesting.

Back onboard, we sailed southwards back into Isfjorden and around 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, lots of flowers (including the rare boreal Jacob's ladder) and an old trappers hut now used by a local hunting and fishing club. On the way back to Polar Star we detoured round the corner to a small cliff where puffins could 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 93 guests and 8 guides onboard from 12 different countries:

Germany	47
Great Britain	17
Norway	11
Italy	10
Australia	3
France	2
Austria	2
Slovenia	2
Switzerland	2
Denmark	2
Netherlands	2
America	2
Sweden	1

*On behalf of Spitsbergen Travel, the guide team and lecturers, ship's crew and officers would like to 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  
Steffen Biersack  
Arne Liaklev  
Allison Bailey  
Kirsti Lund Vik  
Niklas Gerhardsson  
Øystein Barane  
Ingunn Løyning*



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](http://www.spitsbergentravel.com) or in our catalogue.