



LOGBOOK



In the realm of the Polar Bear

Svalbard, July 2009

FRIDAY, August 15th

Longyearbyen

78°10'N 15°20'E

Barentsburg

78°00'N 14°00'E

Weather: Sunny, blue sky with few clouds, almost no wind.

Temperature: 7° C/45° F

After a sightseeing tour to the Svalbard Museum and around Longyearbyen we boarded the Polar Star. In the Observation Lounge welcoming cocktails and snacks were served. This was followed by an introduction by Expedition Leader Anja Fleig, the Captain Leszek Slawski, the Hotel Manager Florin Blaj and all the guides. In the evening we had the choice to either visit the Russian settlement of Barentsburg on a trip with the vessel "Polar girl", or alternatively visit the new Svalbard Airship museum.

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.

The Airship museum is a private museum led by the airship enthusiasts Ingunn Løyning and Stefano Poli and tells the story of the expeditions to the North Pole with balloons and airships in the years between 1899 and 1928.

In the early morning, the Polar Star sailed out of Isfjorden and passed the island of Prins Karls Forland on our way north.

SATURDAY, August 16th

Ny-Ålesund

78°50'N 11°30'E

Magdalenefjorden

79°30'N 10°30'E

Weather: Overcast. No wind.

Temperature: 6° C/43° F

After the late return to the Polar Star from Barentsburg, morning activities on the Polar Star

were relaxed. Axel gave a talk on the history of whaling in the Arctic in German, later on the obligatory security briefing and abandon ship exercise took place. In the afternoon 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 researchers from many different countries.

We had guided walks through the settlement, learning about the interesting history of this place. 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. Some of us also went inside the museum telling about the times when Ny-Ålesund still was a mining settlement.

Next to the Amundsen bust we heard about the many people starting their expeditions from this remote settlement. But the most interesting story was the one about the Norwegian Roald Amundsen and the Italian Umberto Nobile flying over the North Pole in an airship in 1926. Some of us walked over to the airship-mast that is still there. After that we enjoyed some time for ourselves and some shopping, in this peaceful place.

From the dock the ship headed north, past 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. 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. From the Polar Star, we had a close look at the peninsula 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 about 130 men buried here. At the beach, the remains from two blubber ovens could be seen where blubber from whales was rendered. At the end of the beach lies a small cabin where the Sysselmannen (Governor) has officers during the summer. We went close to the glacier front of the Smeerenburg glacier, and on the way out we discovered even two walruses hauling out on the beach which we could approach pretty close with the Polar Star.

SUNDAY, August 17th

Fugleøya

79°48'N 11°40'E

Moffen

80°01'N 14°30'E

Lågøya

80°21'N 18°24'E

Rossøya

80°50'N 20°23'E

Weather: Sun. Blue sky. Some clouds and fog banks in between.

Temperature: 6° C/43° F

This night turned out to be very short, as already at 3:15, Anja woke us up and invited everybody to a Zodiac trip! It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity! On our way through the islands of the north-west corner of Spitsbergen, on the island of Fugleøya, we had found a stranded dead whale and a group of polar bears feasting on it! We could see at least 6 bears: first, four of them were playing in the water, showfighting, swimming around us and enjoying themselves. The other two were resting in the boulder slope behind. Later on, they resumed feeding on the whale. The largest male bear stood on top of the whale and kept all the subdominant males on due distance. But as there was enough food for everybody, they eventually got their share as well. It was truly a spectacular early morning!

Due to our unplanned stop in the early morning hours we reached the walrus haulout on the island Moffen at late morning. We are not allowed to land there, as this island is the breeding site of some of the very few pairs of Sabine's gulls in the whole of Europe. But also from the distance of 300m we could clearly see about 40 walrus ashore and in the shallow water. After a close look at them we continued in a north-easterly direction towards our afternoon destination of Lågøya.

Lågøya is a large flat island surrounded by shallow waters. In these shallow waters, clams are abundant, and so are the greatest clam-lovers on Spitsbergen: the walrus! We landed in the vicinity of a large flock resting on the beach. Some were also in the water and came close to our zodiac boats when we anchored on the shore. Since the walrus resting in a big huddle

did not show signs of disturbance we approached them carefully. From pretty close, we observed their social interactions - and enjoyed their distinct odeur.

But the day was still not over! Late after dinner we started another zodiac operation, landing on the Northernmost island of the Spitsbergen archipelago, and at the same time Northernmost point of Europe, Rossøya. Some of us climbed all the way to the top, and we toasted on the northernmost point reached at this voyage! Only very few people have been closer to the North Pole than us in this moment!

MONDAY, August 18th

Alkefjellet

79°37'N 18°21'E

Svartberget

79°29'N 20°03'E

Bråsvellbreen

79°22'N 20°30'E

Weather: Sunny, blue sky. No wind.

Temperature: 6° C/43° F

After breakfast we approached Alkefjellet (the Auk Cliff). The fog was coming and going and there were big ice floes floating in the sea.

After breakfast we put the zodiacs on the water and we steamed off towards the glacier on the northern side of the cliffs. We cruised for a while in front of the glacier front that ends in the sea, and could see the difference in water between the melting water from the glacier and the salt and warmer (less cold) sea water. Then we headed for the birds.

We had not more than arrived before we spotted a polar bear on the side of the mountain. It was a young bear that had decided to spend the summer eating eggs, birds and grass. It was a chubby little fellow and we stayed and watched him for a long time, enjoying the sight of a gorgeous animal in its natural environment. The bear on the other hand couldn't have cared less about our presence.

We then continued to the impressive cliff face of the bird colony – the home to 60-80,000 pairs of 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 were patrolling the colony, looking for chances to take chicks from the colony.

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. It was a spectacular start of the day. To top it all off, we drove the zodiacs up onto a floe of sea ice which was thick enough to support our weight as we disembarked and revelled in standing on a floating piece of ice atop the Arctic ocean.



While we enjoyed lunch, the Polar Star repositioned towards Svartberget on Nordaustlandet on the Eastern shore of Hinlopen Strait. We went ashore and divided the group into different activity levels. The long walk lead on the top of Svartberget, where remains of a triangulation point of the joint Russian-Swedish Arc-de-Meridian expedition can be marvelled. Those of us who chose the medium walk were approaching Glitnefonna, one of the large ice caps on the Island of Nordaustlandet. The short-walkers took a relaxed stroll along the beach. We all experienced the Arctic desert landscape and had a closer look at the tiny high Arctic flowers that resist these harsh environmental conditions. Another small group went for a ride along the coast in a zodiac and had the chance to land on a small ice floe.

In the evening we sailed towards the Bråsvell glacier, a part of the great Austfonna icecap, situated on the remote east coast of Nordaustlandet. The ice shelf is approximately 180 km long, and it is said to be, together with the Icelandic Glacier Vatnajökul, the largest ice cap in Europe. Hot chocolate and rum, served by our guides, warmed our fingers while we stood out on deck. During the night we headed south to the Freeman strait.

TUESDAY August 19th

Freemansundet

78°15'N 21°30'E

Weather: Overcast, gusty winds around 30kn, little rain.

Temperature: 4 °C / 39 °F

We woke up in Freemansundet where we planned to do a landing at a bird canyon close to Kapp Waldburg in the morning. Unfortunately winds were very strong and so we had to abandon this plan. We continued to Kapp Lee, but also there, landing was not possible as the wind had picked up even more and turned more to the North. White caps on the waves and streaks of foam on the water indicated that we were up to Beaufort 7. So we went over to plan C and continued north into the sheltered Sundbukta, where at least we did not experience too much waves. Instead of landings, we heard a lot of interesting talks today, covering the topics ice, polar bears, flowers and marine biology. After the long and busy days since the beginning of this voyage, a relaxing day on board Polar Star was not that bad after all! The observation lounge and the bar were filled with chatter, others enjoyed reading a good book in the library. In the afternoon, winds were still not ceasing and so we decided to continue our voyage around the south cape of Spitsbergen and into Hornsund. This way we would have some more time the next day to explore this beautiful fjord.

WEDNESDAY, August 20th

Vestre Burgerbukta

77°01'N 15°55'E

Krykkjestupet

76°57'N 16°00'N

Weather: Overcast. No wind.

Temperature: 5 °C / 41 °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 streamed into Hornsund, the southernmost fjord on the western side of Spitsbergen. The tall peak of the highest mountain, Hornsundtind (1431m), was covered

with clouds but a lot of lower rugged peaks around were visible. They were sugared with fresh snow, and loads of icebergs were afloat in the side bays of Hornsund. On top of this stunning landscape, we spotted a Polar bear on shore! Immediately, we lowered our boats and started out for a spontaneous cruise.

From the small boats, we had great views of the bear walking along the shore. As the bear was out of sight, we cruised in between the ice bergs of Vestre Burgerbukta, one of the side bays of Hornsund. Paierlbreen, the glacier at the end of this bay must have been very active during the last weeks, as big chunks of ice in all colours, blue, green, white, brown, and black drifted in this bay. Some people made the first landing ever on small rocks in the bay!

As we came back on board, it did not take long until the next bear was spotted. This time it was a mother with a cub! We continued all the way down to the bottom of the fjord Hornsund. The fjord ends in an arena of ice, with glacier fronts more than 180° around. As we sailed along the glacier front we even saw another bear on a tiny ice floe from which it swam away.

In the afternoon we did Polar Star's first expedition landing at Krykkjestupet. Again several levels of activity were offered, from a short stroll along the beach and subsequent Zodiac cruise to a long walk over the tundra to the next bay, where we saw the remains of the Russian part of the Arc-de-Meridian expedition, as well as whale bones from the whaling period and a Norwegian trapping hut.. On an intermediate walk, also a bird cliff could be visited, and from a moraine ridge, we had a splendid view on top of the adjacent glacier Körberbreen. After an exciting afternoon on land we returned to the Polar Star for dinner.

However, the day was not over yet. After dinner Anja informed us that the Polar Star was under way to the Continental shelf off the West coast of Spitsbergen. There, we were on the whale hunt. In difference to whale hunt in the 17th century, we were however only using cameras instead of harpoons. One Fin whale got to our ship very close, and there were many White-beaked dolphins but they were feeding and not interested to come close and join the Polar Star. Towards midnight, we saw many Fin whale spouts at the horizon, but we did not manage to catch up with these very fast-swimming whales.

THURSDAY, August 21st

Trygghamna

78°15'N 13°51'E

Ekmanfjord

78°31'N 14°24'E

Weather: overcast and partly sunny; calm

Temperature: 8° C/47° F

In the morning we made an excellent landing at Alkhornet at the edge of Trygghamna (in Norwegian - safe harbour). Coming up onto the tundra from the coast, we explored the bird cliff and the lush green slopes below, which had a much more diverse flora than any other place we had seen thus far. Most of the plant species were carrying seeds already, but some were still in flower, like the Polar carse, the Drooping saxifrage or the Bog saxifrage. Many reindeer with calves were seen grazing on this rich vegetation, and Kittiwakes were constantly flying around the bird cliffs. As the highlight of the morning, we saw a Polar Fox! He was constantly running around with its nose to the ground, looking for some food that he might bring home to his burrow, where probably his cubs were waiting. Walking over the tundra, we had to keep good distance from the Arctic skuas, which may be very aggressive when they defend their nests and chicks!

Before lunch the ship left and set off for Ekmanfjorden. On the way, other activities like packing and disembarkation information kept us busy. Soon we arrived at Ekmanfjorden, where we split into activity groups again. While one group went on land to see a beautiful waterfall, others looked for fossils on the beach, or did a zodiac cruise in the area. Of special geological interest was the Flintholmen. This small island is in fact old seabed. When the glacier in the head of the Ekmanfjord did a surge in 1896, it pushed the sediment seabed forwards and up. As there once were ice boulders on the small island, the terrain on the western half is all bumpy while the eastern half is completely flat.

This protected bay was home to a rich vegetation, with species which we have not seen before, like the Black fleabane.

Time on our last landing flew by and before we knew it we were back aboard for the Captain's farewell cocktail party, a voyage slide show and a splendid Arctic barbecue outside the observation lounge.

In all we were 97 guests and guides onboard from 14 different countries:

Norway	16
France	6
Germany	41
Great Britain	9
Italy	5
Sweden	3
Russian	7
Danmark	1
Andorra	1
Canada	3
Japan	2
Austria	1
India	1
USA	1

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

Axel Krack

Kjersti Dale

Niklas Gerhardsson

Samuel Blanc

Simon Cook

Stefan Stoll

Steffen Biersack

On behalf of Spitsbergen Travel, the guide team and lecturers, ship's crew

& with help from Dr. Ann Lunden, thank you for travelling with us!



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.