

LOG BOOK

Svalbard, August 16th – August 21th 2009





Map of Svalbard with possible landing locations. In the log book you will find numbers on the sections. Those numbers refer to the locations on this map.

August 16th 18:00, 78°10'N

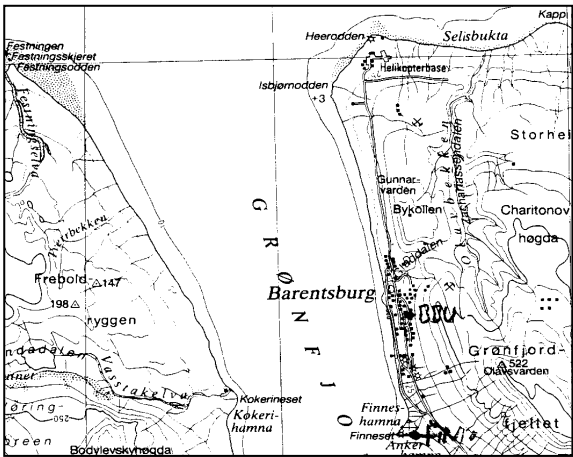
Longyearbyen

This is a Norwegian settlement and the 'capital' of Svalbard. It's named after an American, John Munroe Longyear, who started the first coal production in the Longyear valley in 1906. It was bought by a Norwegian mine company in 1916. Today, the town is a modern town with almost every civilised facility you can imagine. The population is app. 2000 and increasing.

Longyearbyen was originally a mining community, but now science and tourism are slowly taking over. After breakfast at the hotel we went sight-seeing in "town". We visited the museum and the gallery. At 17:00 we embarked on board the MS Expedition and the Spitsbergen Adventure Cruise started. The ship sailed out of Adventfjorden and west towards Barentsburg, passing the former coal mining settlement Grumant and Colesbay.

21:00, 78°14'N

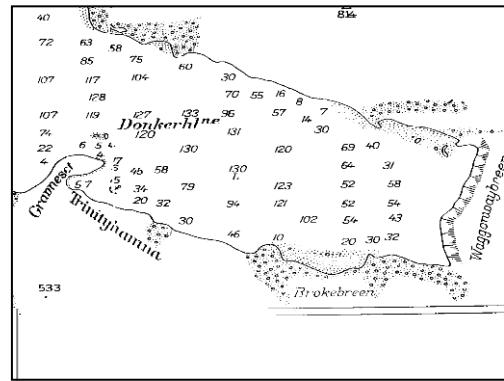
Barentsburg



Barentsburg is currently the only Russian settlement on Svalbard – it used to be two more: Grumant which closed down in the 1960's and Pyramiden which closed down in 1998. Barentsburg is a mining settlement on the east side of Grønfjorden. The first house was built in 1912 by a Norwegian company and then sold to a Dutch company; The N.V. Nederlandsche Spitsbergen Compagnie. It was bought by the Russians – from the Dutch – in 1932. In Barentsburg there are currently app. 500 inhabitants. We went on a guided tour with 2 Russian guides, and some joined a genuine and entertaining Russian folklore show, which the mine workers perform in their spare time. We also visited the hotel, and some of us tried the Russian Vodka.

August 17th 10:00, 79°30'N

Magdalenefjorden

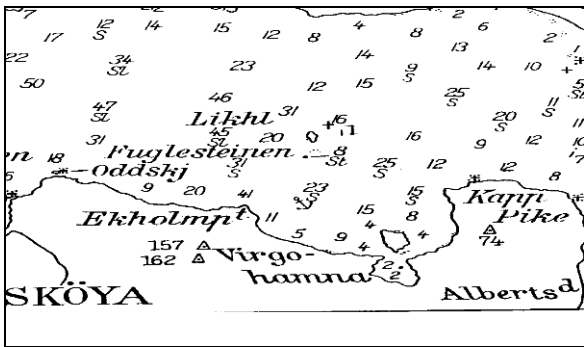


Today we woke up on the way into Magdalenefjorden which is one of the best known fjords on Spitsbergen – it is a beautiful fjord with jagged mountains. These are said to be the mountains Wilhelm Barents first saw when he discovered Svalbard in 1596 and named the biggest island Spitzbergen (Pointed Mountains) after them.

In the Magdalenefjord, a peninsula reaches out on the south side. The outer part of the peninsula is a small hill, called Gravneset. Here the Dutch whalers from NW Spitsbergen came to bury their dead in the 17th and 18th century. Today stone gatherings and wooden coffins remain from the around 130 graves. We all went ashore at Gravneset this sunny and windy morning and did a walk in the area. The guides told the whaling history of Svalbard and everyone got a close look at the old blubber ovens situated on the beach. These were used in distilling oil from the blubber of the whales in the 17th century. Afterwards we walked towards the Gully glacier further in the bay.

13:00-19:30, 79°40'N

Sørgattet, Smeerenburgfjorden, Bjørnefjorden



After lunch we sailed through Sørgattet - a narrow strait connected to Smeerenburgfjorden. We watched the spectacular mountains and glaciers around us while cruising up the fjord - this fjord that once was crowded with huge bowhead whales and hundreds of whale hunters. After that we sailed into Fuglefjorden, a little fjord at the north western corner of Spitzbergen.

In Sallyhamna, the location of a trapper cabin, we did a zodiac cruise. Drifting along the beach, we spotted a dead Finwhale floating in the water. Two polar bears were relaxing on the small hill, stuffed and happy.

This was an amazing occurrence and not a common sight in Svalbard waters! It occasionally happens that carcasses float ashore, and Polar Bears, foxes and scavenging birds feed on it, however, there is no doubt: we were EXTREMELY lucky this day!!!

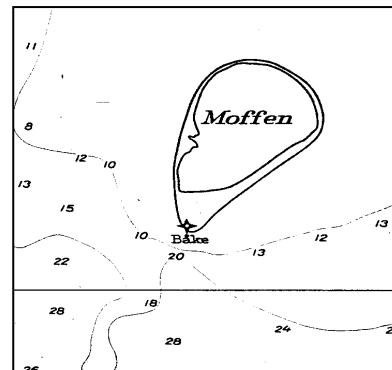
But, this wasn't the end of the lucky spree...

21:30, 80°N

As we sailed out of Schmeerenburgfjorden, we set course north towards the 80th parallell. There was no drift ice present so we managed to pass the 80°N parallel after dinner. We celebrated this happening with a toast of champagne on the aft deck. The North Atlantic is in fact the only place on the planet where you can be almost certain to pass the 80th parallel with a ship - as this far North in the northern hemisphere is mostly ice-covered and at 80°S you will hit a continent. An interesting thought is that there were hardly any other people between M/S Expedition and the North Pole at this time!

After celebrating the 80th parallel, we sailed towards Moffen Island that we reached 23.30.

21:00, Moffen

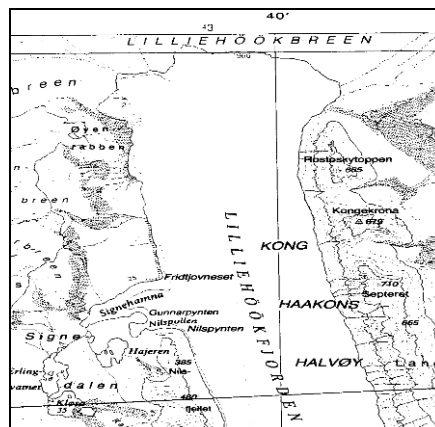


Moffen is a 'lagoon', slightly north of 80°N latitude. It is a very flat and peculiar ringshaped island and its maximum altitude is about five meters. This small island is mostly known for heaps of male walrus chilling out on the beach, and appr. 20 of them were luckily present this evening!

The Moffen island is classified as a protected nature reserve and no ships are allowed closer than 300 metres from the shore. The reason for this is that Moffen is a reserve for the walrus, the flora and some seldom bird species that are nesting there. It is interesting to know that the walrus is the largest seal species in the Arctic and weighs up to two metric tons (calves weigh approx. 80 kilos when born). Characteristics for this massive marine animal are its impressive tusks, absence of beauty, lack of charm and a rather unpleasant smell. At least some people say so...

09:00, 79°16'N

Krossfjorden, Lilliehökbreen and Cadiopynten



We woke up this morning as we were entering Lilliehöökfjorden. After breakfast we went for a zodiac cruise along the Lilliehöök Glacier. This area is named after two Swedish men who were part of several expeditions around 1840. The air was clear and the sun shone through a thin cloud cover. The sea was calm with ice floes scattered all over the bay in front of the glacier. We could see that the glacier had been active lately, and had "calved".

In the beginning of the fjord we can see a place called Signehamna, from the ship. The names in this area are from the expeditions of prince Albert 1st. Gunnar Isachsen was the leader of the expeditions and Signe was his wife's name. In this bay Signehamna, the Germans established a weather station during the second world war.

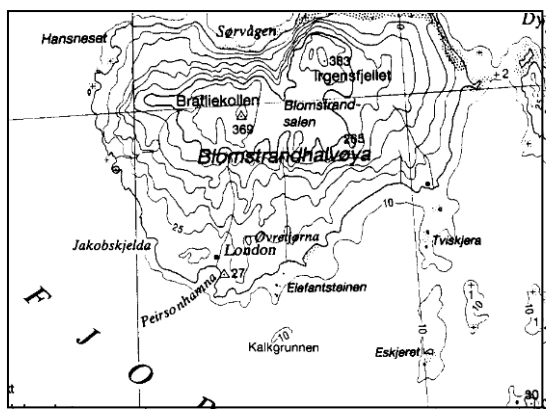
During our zodiac cruise to the glacier, the guides told us more about the Svalbard glaciers, and facts about this particular glacier while we could enjoy the spectacular view of this nearly 8-km-wide glacier front.

Some funny curious bearded seals played in between the ice floes. Some of us were lucky to see two Ringseals too!

After lunch we passed a bird cliff called Cadiopynten that divides the Krossfjord into two smaller fjord branches, Lilliehöökfjorden and Möllerfjorden. We watched the birds for a while and could view birds like Brunnich's guillemots, Kittiwakes, Little Auks and even a few puffins! The cliff was very green, with a lot of vegetation. But because of the late season, many of the birds already have left for warmer places on the earth. As we know, all the birds that we find on Svalbard only stay here for the summertime. Except for the ptarmigan, which stays here all year around.

16:00, 78°58' N

Ny-London, Blomstrandhalvøya



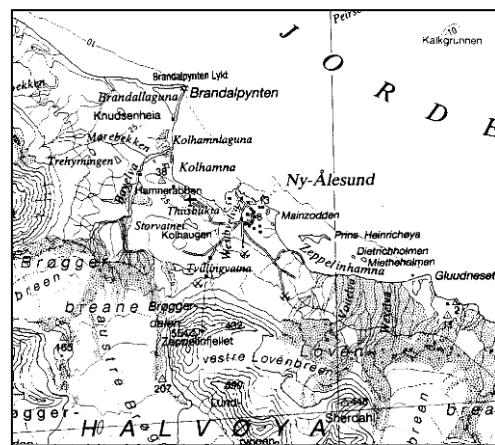
We had a pleasant walk among the remnants in Ny-London, which is situated across the fjord from Ny-Ålesund on the south shore of the island Blomstrandhalvøya. This camp was built up in 1911 by Northern Exploration Company (NEC) – and led by a man called Ernest Mansfield, hence the name of the camp; "Camp Mansfield". Mansfield tried to extract marble on the island – which he believed to consist only of pure marble. Nevertheless, the quality of the marble was not very good, and the amount quarried never reached a commercially important level during the few years of operations. During the years of the war in 1914-1918 there was no activity in the marble quarry, and the adventure ended in 1920.

At the north side of Blomstrandhalvøya you can see The Blomstrand Glacier. In fact, "halvøya" means peninsula which actually people used to think it was – however as the glacier retreated, it revealed open sea between the glacier and the Blomstrandhalvøya, indicating that it had never been a peninsula.

On the other side of the Blomstrand Glacier – on the main land – Spitsbergen Travel's second trekking camp is located right at the beach with a view towards the calving glacier. Here we once more exchanged trekking groups.

20:30,
Ny-Ålesund

78°50'N



Ny-Ålesund is the world's northernmost community. Ny-Ålesund is a former mining village which has become an important international research centre - mainly on the atmosphere and ozone layer but also geological, biological and glaciological research is carried out here. Downtown Ny-Ålesund you will find a small centre with a shop, a post-office and a museum. The guides gave us here a sightseeing tour around in the city, before we had some time on our own to do some shopping.

The English whale hunter Jonas Poole discovered the first pieces of coal on the riverbank on the south side of the Kongsfjord in 1610. Another three hundred years were to pass before commercial exploitation on the coal deposits commenced. The first mining period was 1910-1929 and the mines got closed down because of economical problems.

Ny-Ålesund was the focal point for the world's attention several times during the 1920's. In 1925 Roald Amundsen attempted to reach the North Pole from Ny-Ålesund with the seaplanes N24 and N25. In 1926 Amundsen returned to Ny-Ålesund, accompanied by the American Lincoln Elsworth and the Italian Umberto Nobile, to set out on a joint expedition with the airship "Norge". This expedition was a success. The airship flew over the North Pole as planned and landed in Teller, Alaska.

In 1945 until 1962 we experienced the second mining period. But the problem with the coal layers in Ny-Ålesund is that they are almost vertical and gases develop in the mines. 70 miners have lost their life in the mines of Ny-Ålesund and the worst accident of them all happened November 5th 1962. Late at night that day there was a big explosion in the Esther Mine and 21 miners lost their life. A committee made an investigation and they concluded that the Norwegian state should have been more concerned about the safety in Ny-Ålesund. Since Kings Bay was a state-owned enterprise, the public blamed the government. In August 1963, Prime Minister Gerhardsen and his government resigned as a result of this tragedy.

Research started in Ny-Ålesund in 1964 and during the 1990's research increased from 4,100 man-days in 1990 to 10,031 in 2000. Each year scientists from at least 15 nations run more than 120 research projects. From March/April to October these scientists live and work in this little settlement. However, in the dark period of the year only about 35-45 persons overwinter in Ny-Ålesund. These people are doing daily meteorological measurements and taking care of everyday life and maintenance.

August 21th

Farewell gathering

We gathered with the captain, the ship's crew and the guides for a farewell 'ceremony'. Certificates were handed out for passing the 80°N latitude, and the true heroes among us received certificates proving that they took a swim in the chilly arctic water! Clean-Up-Svalbard pins were also handed out to those who deserved it.

So this is the end of the Svalbard summer adventure for this time.

Are you sad to leave Svalbard? Are you curious about what it is like in the winter? Grab a copy of our catalogue or visit www.spitsbergentravel.com. We hope to see you back again for another arctic adventure.

The ship's crew, the guide team and Spitsbergen Travel wish you a safe and pleasant journey back home.

Kind regards,



Cruise guides;

Martin (EL)
Heiko (AEL)
Remi
Stephane
Siv
Thomas.