



LOGBOOK



In the realm of the Polar Bear

Svalbard, July 2009

FRIDAY, July 3rd .

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

Weather: Sunny, blue sky and almost no wind.
Temperature: 12° C/45° 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 a lot of 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 town 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.

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

SATURDAY, July 4th

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

Entering the fjord, a snow-covered peninsula stuck out from the southern shore; this is where we landed with the Zodiacs. This is Gravneseet ("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 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 Sysselmannen (Governor) has officers during the summer.

After dinner we went close to the glacier front of the Smeerenburg glacier.

In the evening Polar Star sailed north, passing Norskøya, and then north-east crossing 80 degrees north at approximately 00.30. We reached the walrus haulout on the island Moffen at approximately 01.30 in the morning where we spotted 25 walruses and 2 polar bears ashore.

We were the lucky witnesses to an unusual faceoff between two of the most powerful Arctic inhabitants- the walrus and the polar bear. As the bear approached the protective herd, the walruses retreated in a cloud of dust but eventually held their ground, even threatening the bear with their tusks. With midnight sun from behind, this meeting of giants was an impressive sight to see.



SUNDAY, July 5th
Alkefjellet 79° 36.7' N, 018°
20.5' 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. We got close into the impressive cliff face – 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 fledged speckled dull brown chicks, and the adults were patrolling the colony, looking for chances to take eggs from the colony. We also saw Black Guillemots and Fulmars. 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. 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.

Torellneset and Blåsvellbreen 79° 21.5' N,
020° 44.6' E

After lunch, Polarstar headed towards Torellneset on Nordaustlandet, named after the famous Swedish geologist Otto Torell. We found a haul out of approximately 50 walruses on the beach and were able to approach them 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 where almost no grass is growing. Although we discovered blooming flowers of Purple Saxifrage, Svalbard Poppy and Arctic Cinquefoil.

In the evening 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, with swirling mist that lifted to reveal 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. The mist turned into heavy fog and we left the glacier heading south to search for a passage through the Freeman strait. In the evening the fog disappeared and sailed on in the beautiful light from the midnight sun.

MONDAY, July 6th

Edge Øya, 80° 34.0' N, 018°
18.2' E

Weather: Sunny, blue sky. No wind.
Temperature: 3° C/37° F

Our plan for this day was to sail through the Freeman-strait. However, because of heavy and impenetrable ice we had to change our course and instead head south-east and sail along the island named Edgeøya. We spent some exciting hours sailing along the ice searching for polar bears.

As the morning unfolded, we spotted two individual polar bears hunting on the ice, which we approached slowly with the boat, approaching them to approximately 300-400 meters. After lunch, as we sailed in open waters once again, we had the luck of seeing a female polar bear with her cub swimming in the sea, crossing from one patch of drift ice to another. We slowed, but so as not to stress the cub, did not follow.

Though four polar bears in beginning of one day was already more than we hoped for, the afternoon brought a more intimate meeting with the king of the Arctic. A large male was spotted not far into the drift ice, and we parked the ship into the ice to stop the engine and see if the bear would come closer. The curious bear approached, through the mist, and investigated the ship as it lay in the ice. He could probably smell the good food from the crew mess. Not finding any available food, he lay down and kept an eye on us. With his attention on us, he didn't see that another male was approaching from behind. When the second bear was about 10m away, he finally discovered his company, an old male with many fight marks on his snout and darker yellow fur. The two males cautiously approached one another, sniffing and circling. With a growl and a toss of a paw, they determined who was boss, which was the older of the two. Having settled his dominance, the older male investigated the boat, coming within a meter of the hull, allowing us to look directly down from the bow in safety at the most dangerous of Arctic wildlife. The younger male went 50 meters away and laid down to wait. As the older bear slowly and calmly left, the younger returned to check out the boat once again, all in all giving us two hours of viewing polar bears within 10 meters of the ship- what an opportunity!

After such a stimulating day, what could be better than a nice zodiac cruise in wind and waves? A few of us braved nearly whiteout fog and windy swell to take a zodiac cruise around the Ryke Yseøyene, part of the group of islands on the remote and windswept south-eastern coast of Edgeøya, called Tusenøyene. Not knowing what to expect, we set off into the fog, where we clung to the coast of the snow-packed

island. Right around the first cove, we surprised a resting male polar bear, who raised his head at our approach, but looked calmly down from his position on top of a thick icefoot instead of getting up. The first two zodiacs managed to catch a glimpse of a mother polar bear and her two cubs, but they retreated into to the fog before the last boats in the group could see her.

TUESDAY July 7th Menkeøyene, Ziegler- og Delitschøyene, Andre`-tangen.

Weather: Sunny, blue sky and a windy.
Temperature: 6 C/ 43 F

In the morning we woke up at anchor near Halvmåneøya in bright sunshine. Large ice floes were following the strong current and banging against the bow with great booms, so it was decided that boarding zodiacs for a landing would be dangerous. Thus, we moved to the Menkeøyene further south, where eight zodiacs were deployed for an exploration of the area. Some boats went into the sea ice and happened upon a group of three large walrus resting on a floe, after which we explored the large icebergs which had calved off glaciers up north and had collected on the shallow ground near the islands. The sun was bright and the ice was blue, and all boats did their fair share of icebreaking as they moved in and amongst the floes. The last two boats were lucky enough to see a polarbear on an icefloe quite close to them, which had been hiding earlier on the island.

The afternoon held another zodiac cruise, this time around Ziegler and Delitschøyene, Andre`-tangen, on southwestern Edgeøya. Two groups explored the area separately, and both saw amazing sights. One group came upon a swimming polar bear, though ice which it could have swum from was many tens of kilometres away. It came up on land on Zieglerøya and quickly headed for a place to take a rest after its long swim. Birdlife on and around the islands was abundant, and we saw grey phalaropes, red-throated divers, barnacle geese, pink-footed geese, long-tailed ducks, and arctic skuas. One group had the amazing luck to witness an unusual happening: walrus attacking and eating pink-footed geese! Many walrus attacked the swimming geese simultaneously, using their tusks, their teeth and their flippers to hold the birds underwater and kill them. This has never

before been witnessed, and even the resident goose scientist onboard had never heard about such behaviour. Finally, we visited a trapper's cabin at Andre'tangen built by Henry Rudi in 1946, where 50 walrus were hauled out on the beach, and evidence of past walrus hunting was present.

WEDNESDAY, July 8th

After nearly a week of sunshine, this morning we woke up to dense fog as we came back to the west coast. Nevertheless, we continued on our way to Hornsund, and as we entered the fjord, the fog lifted to reveal one of the most stunning landscapes of the trip: tall peaks, among them Hornsundtind (1431m), plenty of icebergs, and mysterious fog. We investigated several glacier fronts, including west and east Borgerbukta and Brepollen. The abundance of flat fjord ice was the resting ground of many ringed seals, and as a result we saw two polar bears hunting on the ice in near a glacier front.

In the afternoon, we took a walk at Gåshamna, where the long hikers saw very interesting and unusual geological landforms, and the medium hikers explored the wide glacial valley and the flowers is contained. At the shore were huge bowhead whale bones, remnants of the whaling period. The short hikers may have had the most adventuresome experience, getting thoroughly stuck in the fine silt mud, which claimed six rubber boots, but didn't manage to catch their owners, who escaped in their socks all the way back to the zodiacs. Arctic heroes!

THURSDAY, July 9nd

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

Weather: overcast and partly sunny; calm
Temperature: 6° C/43° F

In the morning we saw our first 'true' Svalbard summer weather- overcast and raining. However, 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, and glaucous

gulls, Brunnich's guillemots, little auks, Atlantic puffins, and kittiwakes were seen up on the cliffs.

Back aboard, 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 Brunnich'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 79 guests and guides onboard from 6 different countries:

Norway	3
France	27
Germany	25
Great Britain	18
Italy	4
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
Arne Kelterhein
Arne Liaklev
Allison Bailey
Kirsti Lund Vik
Niklas Gerhardsson
Olof Selander
Steffen Biersack*

& with help from Dr. Johann Ræder!



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.