



# LOGBOOK



*In the realm of the Polar Bear*

*Svalbard, 21<sup>st</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> August 2009*

*Logbook written by Tim Walker*

## FRIDAY, August 21<sup>st</sup>

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

**Weather:** Bright sun followed by clouds!  
**Temperature:** 7° C/45° F

Our day started with an introductory meeting and briefing at the Spitsbergen Hotel. After that we were well-placed to visit the Svalbard Museum, where the history of Svalbard and its resources—coal, furs, and whale-oil—was displayed, or could spend the middle of the day sightseeing around Longyearbyen, with signs of its history of coal-mining visible around us. In mid-afternoon we boarded the *Polar Star*, lying at the town pier. Once we were aboard and had found our cabins, we watched our luggage sway up in cargo nets.

After settling in, welcoming cocktails and snacks were served in the observation lounge. This was followed by an introduction by Expedition Leader Anja Fleig, the Captain Leszek Slawski, the Hotel Manager Florin Blaj and all the guides. There was also a lifeboat drill as we sailed away from the town and dinner was served while we cruised towards the Russian mining town of Barentsburg.

It is located in Green Fjord and is a coal mining community with around 500 inhabitants (including 14 children) from Russia and Ukraine and is the only place in Svalbard where you find some farming; they have pigs and a greenhouse. Cattle, which they had for a long time, are no longer held in the little farm because they have all been eaten. We had a guided tour around the town with two local guides and were entertained by an entrancing folklore show in the theatre. Later on, after everyone had embarked *Polar Star* we sailed out of Isfjorden and passed the island of Prins Karls Forland on our way north to many anticipated adventures.

## SATURDAY, August 22<sup>nd</sup>

Ny-Alesund, 78° 50' N, 011°  
30' E, Magdalenefjorden, 79°  
30' N, 010° 30' E

**Weather:** Cloudy, then brightening  
**Temperature:** 5° C/39° 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 guides in town, where we divided into different groups and 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 “northernmost” here, this was 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. Some of the keen photographers played hide and seek with a young arctic fox amongst the houses.

Next to the Amundsen bust we heard about all those 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 the snow 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, sighting the first drift ice shortly after lunch, past the seven glaciers and many pointed peaks. These are the mountains Willem Barents first saw when he discovered Svalbard in 1596, naming the biggest island Spitsbergen (peaked mountains) after them. After lunch, we received a thorough briefing on Zodiac techniques and where to find our life-vests, and were informed on the appropriate behaviour for respecting wildlife and cultural remains in the fragile Arctic environment. Our guides displayed the

multiplicity of their talents by becoming shoe-shop assistants and fitting us out with rubber boots of (very nearly) the right size to use for 'wet landings'.

Magdalenefjorden 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 beautiful place with peaked mountains on both sides and an impressive glacier at the eastern end.

Entering the fjord, a prominent peninsula stuck out from the southern shore; this was Gravneset ("the grave-yard peninsula") where Dutch and English whalers from northwestern Spitsbergen came to bury their dead in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> 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 field officers during the summer.

Once we had sailed past, the captain took us to the edge of the ice snout on the Waggonway Glacier at the head of the fjord. Despite the clouds, there was a lot of blue ice to be seen – a breathtaking sight.

We then moved north-east through Sorgattat, a narrow strait, into Smeerenburgfjorden. We anchored up south of Smeerenburg in the lee of Amsterdamøya. From there we had the chance to use the small rubber boats called 'Zodiacs' to transfer to our first 'wet landing'. Virgoamna was our destination, situated on a little bay on the north shore of Danskøya. This site was rich in history, having been a whaling station in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, and then used by several expeditions to reach the North Pole by balloon. We learnt about the heroic but ultimately misguided attempts of the Aeronautical Engineer Salomon August Andrée to conquer the Pole in a specially constructed balloon, 'Örnen' and also the attempts of Walter Wellman to fly his Dirigible 'America' from the same site. Much of the remains of the America project can still be seen including the remains of the hangar, and heaps of rusting iron filing used to make the hydrogen gas.

By now, it was late in the night, but our hardworking guide team was already taking us on to the next site of interest. A dead Minke Whale had been spotted washed ashore, and it was rumored that there would be bears in the vicinity! We were not disappointed. As we got

close to the shore in our Zodiacs, we could see four bears on different parts of the beach, and later on they moved into the water for play fighting with each other.

## SUNDAY, August 23<sup>rd</sup>

### Hinlopenstretet: Alkefjellet and points south 79°35.8'N 018°26.4'E

**Weather:** foggy and still, then sunny  
**Temperature:** 5° C/39° F

We woke to find the *Polar Star* had moved north-east during our short rest toward the low atoll of Moffen, with our first, sparse, sea-ice scattered around us. As we cruised past the shingle beach, we counted a herd of over 10 walrus hauled out near the southern tip of the island, which is a nature reserve and part of the Northwest Spitsbergen National Park.

During our onward journey, Tim gave the first lecture of the trip on the Ecology and Environment of the Arctic. After lunch, we had a photo-lecture on Seabirds by Simon, our avian expert.

In the meantime, the Captain skilfully manoeuvred us into Hinlopen Strait and brought us close to the Alkefjellet (the Auk Cliff). The weather was not co-operative — thick sea fog. However, luckily there was no wind, so it was all Zodiacs in the water for a tour along the nesting colony of Brünnich's Guillemots—densely populated as such colonies usually are, with black-and-white birds shoulder-to-shoulder on many ledges.

Our GPS navigation led us directly to the foot of the basalt cliff. Right next to the water was a sub-adult polar bear! Since the bear was waiting for the ice to return, it was not interested in us and preferred sleeping, which meant we could approach and get photos.

Although it was difficult to see, many of the Brünnich's Guillemots were raising their chicks, bellies pressed against the cliff at the back of the narrow ledge. From time to time, a fledged chick would be pushed off the cliff by an adult for their new life in the water. A few adults were seen ferrying fish back to the cliff, which would be an indication of hungry offspring still waiting. The weather being calm there were more birds

than usual in the water at the foot of the cliff. Many were so close to the boats that we could easily see the fine white line along the gape that is a mark of this species. In the air above there was a non-stop traffic of birds going out to feed or returning; and all the time the din of their cries. Here and there were kittiwakes nesting in niches and corners. There were nests of glaucous gulls, with active chicks, and the adults were patrolling the colony, looking for chances to make away with eggs or chicks of the nesting guillemots and kittiwakes.

After lunch we cruised south down through Hinlopen, and suddenly the sun was out! On the way, we saw a magnificent walrus basking on an ice floe. He was unconcerned by our presence and our cautious approach allowed us to get very close. As we moved south, the pack ice got denser and suddenly the sharp eyes of the guides picked out two polar bears on the ice. They were very far away and the thick ice floes restricted our movements, but through binoculars we saw them clearly. However, they were not interested in us and eventually moved off.

## MONDAY, August 24<sup>th</sup>

### Kvitøya – the White Island and a bear! 80° 04.6' N, 031° 17.5' E

**Weather:** Overcast, then brighter  
**Temperature:** 2° C/35° F

Anja's cheerful voice woke us at 07.30, informing us that we had made very good progress towards our next objective – Kvitøya. We had to cover many more miles to get to the White Island, but ice conditions were benevolent, and the chances were good. After breakfast, Tyrone gave a detailed lecture on Engineer Andrée and the background on his expedition to our Scandinavian guests. While this was going on our Guides up on the bridge spotted a polar bear alternatively swimming and traversing ice floes. The bear exhibited true mastery of the environment, and was surprising fast-moving between water and ice. This was followed by a lecture on Walrus by Axel in German.

After lunch, the pack ice closed in and we slowed our speed for safe ice navigation. Heroic Tyrone gave a second summary talk of Andrée and the Örnen flight in English. At about 15.30 we saw the 410m high ice cap of Kvitøya

showing itself on the horizon. We were as far east as Istanbul! As we got closer the weather improved, and we had a wonderfully clear view of the island and Andréeset. However, the very fast currents and dense ice made a Zodiac landing at the beach too dangerous. Instead we tried to drive *Polar Star* into a thick ice floe so we could experience life as a walrus! However, the Captain was not happy with the depth under the keel, and wisely moved out into deeper water. After dinner, the wind died, and it was perfect conditions for a zodiac trip to a large ice floe, to toast Andrée's team and his achievements. It was impressive to be so far from civilization, with the ice capped island in the background.

Later that evening a film was shown at the Kvitøya Kino Klub – on Polar Bears and Svalbard by National Geographic.

## TUESDAY, August 25<sup>th</sup>

### Freemansundet, Kapp

Waldburg 79° 50' N, 022° 31.9'

E & Kapp Lee 78° 01.5' N,

020° 44.2'

**Weather:** overcast and foggy  
**Temperature:** 4° C/37.5° F

This morning, we woke to a foggy seascape – not unusual for the time of year! We were making full speed for Freemansundet, the channel that separates the islands of Barentsøya and Edgeøya. While we steamed for Kapp Waldburg and our first destination, Kjersti entertained us with her lecture on the 'Mysterious Ocean'.

After lunch, we arrived off Barentsøya, to visit an important Kittiwake nesting site. After a 'wet landing' and a short hike over the tundra, we arrived at a natural cleft in the rock, which had been eroded by the icy meltwater off the mountain above. Hundreds of pairs of kittiwakes were wheeling in the air and landing on vertical ledges. At the base of the cliff two juvenile arctic foxes were continually searching for food. They showed no fear of us, and carried on, much to the delight of the wildlife photographers in the group.

Our second landing of the day was at Kapp Lee on Edgeøya. After a short Zodiac trip, we

arrived in a shallow cove with some huts and masts dotted along the shore. The huts belonged to Norwegian trappers who overwintered here in years past. There were also remains of Pomor hunters dwellings who had taken advantage of the high densities of commercially valuable species. The white masts were meteorological stations recording data and sending it directly back to Longyearbyen. The beach was very shallow, and caused the Zodiac drivers some difficulty to get off at low tide, and get us back to *Polar Star* for dinner.

After Anja's evening recap and briefing, we had an extended cinema evening including National Geographic's Kingdom of the Ice Bear and Andrée's balloon expedition.

## WEDNESDAY, August 26<sup>th</sup>

### Hornsund; Gnålodden & Krykkjestjupet

76° 58.2' N, 015° 27.7'

& Brepollen 77° 02.4' N, 016° 34.6'

**Weather:** low cloud with sunny spells, windy  
**Temperature:** 7° C/45° F

During the night, as *Polar Star* rounded the southern point of Spitsbergen, Sørkapp, and soon after breakfast were turning in to Hornsund ('Horn Sound'—named for the finding of a reindeer antler by Jonas Poole, an early whaler). While we were steaming towards our first landing, Stefan gave a lecture on 'Plants of Spitsbergen' in German. We passed close to the Polish arctic research station, on the north side of Hornsund and dropped anchor off the imposing 759 m/2,490' cliff at Gnålodden.

The cliff is an important breeding site for Kittiwakes and their cries filled the air above us. For our first landing of the day, the guides showed us to the Pomor site, an old grave from the whaling era, the old trappers hut and the view into Vestre Burgerbukta. We also had an opportunity to see the Blue Fox, which is the other variant or 'morph' of the Arctic Fox. This rare animal was much prized by hunters due to the high price fetched for the coat. 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 evidence.

After lunch, we did the second landing of the day at Krykkjestjupet, on the south side of Hornsund. Stefan introduced the long hikers the different plants of the tundra—the Spitsbergen Glacier Poppy, saxifrages, different willows, and the moss campion. Pomorine Skuas and Kittiwakes patrolled the shoreline over our heads. All enjoyed the stillness and immensity of the Arctic landscape in the soft light.

For the long hikers, we trekked as far as Gåshamna (Goose Harbour) where in the 17<sup>th</sup> century there had been a large shore station of the open-boat whaling era, with remains of many skulls from Greenland Right Whales and foundations of tryworks. At one place, a trapper had later used the trywork remains to support one side of his hut and a whale cranium as building material on the other. We first walked up past the foundations, still in place, of the building that had housed the Russian contingent of the Russian-Swedish 'Arc de Meridien' scientific study on the shape of the earth at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

After dinner we cruised east to Brepollen, a very large glacier. Before we arrived, Olle gave a very interesting lecture on ice and climate. After he finished, we moved out to the decks to observe the glacier front, and watching some impressive calvings into the bay.

## THURSDAY, August 27<sup>th</sup>

### Trygghamna, Isfjorden, 78°

14.5' N, 013° 51.0' E

Skansabukta, Isfjorden,  
78°37.8' N, 014°34.4' E

**Weather:** overcast and very windy  
**Temperature:** 5° C/37° F

We awoke bathed in sunshine as we sailed into Isfjorden. After breakfast we reached the mouth of the narrow inlet of Trygghamna, where we anchored off Alkhornet. After Anja's morning briefing we spotted two Minke Whales in the fjord. Landing on a narrow shingle beach, we scrambled up a little cliff to reach the turf at its top. Then we had an easy walk uphill across wet mossy permafrost in the direction of a towering triangle of limestone that housed Kittiwakes and

Fulmars. The cacophony of Kittiwakes calling provided a sound track to the landing. Several groups of sleek and well fed reindeer were grazing on the fine mossy turf of the flat ground at the foot of the slopes, and we saw Arctic Skua in several places. Here and there we found skeletal remains of birds and reindeer including one intact leg. We found remains of an old fox-trap, with the heavy stones of the deadfall still in place on top of the wooden frame that was half-buried in the ground. From our vantage point up the slope, we could clearly see ice-wedge polygons on the flatter ice-rich permafrost at the foot of the slope.

We observed that the geology of the area was very different on the east and west sides of the Fjord. On the west side it was strongly metamorphic, with clearly visible planes of limestone, slate and quartzite. On the east side was much younger sedimentary rock which had been preferentially eroded into more rounded shallower slopes. After jumping back in the Zodiacs we were soon back aboard to head further up Isfjorden to Skansebukta.

There were yet more interesting geology and mountains to watch as we sailed deeper into Isfjorden. 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. 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 mine, and an old trappers hut now used by a local club. On the way back to the *Polar Star* we detoured round the corner to a small cliff where puffins were standing at attention at breeding sites where they were sheltered by a roof over their heads; 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! From here it was but a short sail to town and the end of our voyage.

In all we were 99 guests onboard from 10 different countries:

FRANCE - 21 people  
GERMANY - 16 people  
SWITZERLAND – 2 people  
NORWAY - 20 people  
SWEDEN – 22 people  
UK - 12 people  
USA – 4 people  
AUSTRALIA – 2 people  
ITALY – 1 person

During the cruise we saw polar bears, walrus, seals, whales, arctic reindeer and both blue and arctic foxes. Also colonies of kittiwakes, Brunnich's guillemots, and puffins. In addition we 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  
Axel Krack, Assistant Expedition Leader  
Simon Cook  
Tim Walker  
Kjersti Dale  
Niklas Gerhardsson  
Stefan Stoll  
Samuel Blanc***

***and help from Dr. James!***



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.