

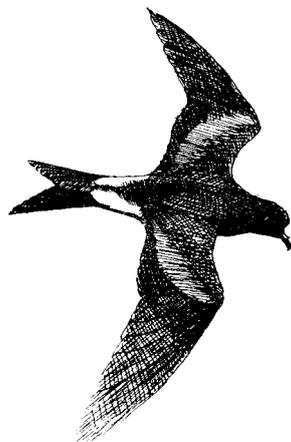
A Circumnavigation Of Svalbard aboard S.Y.Jonathan 111

15th July to 13th August 2008



Expedition Log Book

Compiled by expedition members



www.island-expeditions.co.uk

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Left to right Danny, Mischa, Nigel, Cecilia and John

Some of the views expressed in this log are personal to the writers at the time and may not be those necessarily expressed by either the skipper or expedition leader

*Front cover: Jonathan lying at anchor off the island of Makeøyane, Liefdefjorden by
Nigel R Winn*

Group photo: Danny Green

Island Expeditions Log for a circumnavigation of Svalbard aboard yacht Jonathan 111 from 15th July to 13th August 2008

Day 1: *Tuesday 15th July 2008*

Position: *78° 10.00' N 15° 20.00' E*

Weather: *Light cloud*

Location: *Longyearbyen*

We transferred all our kit and equipment from the minibus onto the yacht Jonathan 111, our home for the next month. It all took some stowing and Mark the skipper still had one or two more things still to organise as well as a couple of items to collect first thing in the morning. After our berths were allocated we eventually turned in at 02.00 hrs.

The plan was to leave as early as possible in the morning but in the end it was 10.00 hrs before we eventually set off motoring with no wind! Our first destination was the head of Billefjorden, an arm of Isfjorden hopefully dropping the anchor just off the hut at Skottehytta. The weather in the distance looked to be clearing and as we progressed the sun eventually came out and the sky cleared.

Once on our way Nigel gave us a mandatory briefing on Polar Bear security, the use of Zodiacs and protocol ashore. We were also informed that the itinerary may have to be radically changed as it looked unlikely we could get through the Hinlopenstretet at the moment because of the ice conditions. A better option may be to head south and do the circumnavigation in reverse in order to give the Straits chance to clear.

We then prepared our packs so we could set off for a walk as soon as we were at anchor.

The original plan was to try and reach Tarantellen a huge nunatak, so called because of its bizarre shape like an enormous tarantula spider perched on a mountain top. Once ashore and having assessed the terrain it became very quickly apparent that this would be beyond the capabilities of most of the group, so we decided to defer any attempt to reach it until next day and then only by the fittest. A group of Polish scientists were resident in the hut studying the processes involved with solifluction and after a long chat with them about the route we ended up just going for a walk along the strand flat instead. We even managed to borrow two pairs of waders to help cross a river (Nigel, Danny and Mischa provided the shuttle service!). The highlight of the day turned out to be finding a pair of resident Long-tailed Skuas which are rare in Svalbard, at first we thought from their behaviour they were breeding however after watching them from a distance for a short time this proved not to be the case. They were in fact foraging on the multitude of insects among the tundra, a big change from their normal diet of Lemming in other high arctic areas. The weather was so warm it had brought out swarms of mosquitoes as well, a rare event in Svalbard and was slightly reminiscent of the Scottish Isles!

Danny and Nigel also obtained some good shots of Barnacle and Pink-footed Geese with young in the low evening light which was amazing.

As this was our first day everyone had been so pre occupied with photographing birds and flowers we all seemed just to lose track of time and it was 05.30 hrs before we actually got back to the boat after an excellent first day. We were all ready for food and a long sleep.

Day 2: Wednesday 16th July

Position: 78° 30.00' N 16° 00.00 E

Weather: Sunny, bright and calm

Location: Skottehytta, Billefjorden and Nordenskjoldbreen Glacier

Our body clocks are all out of sync because of the beautiful weather we have had over the last few days, the conditions have been perfect for photography and we have made the most of these favourable conditions. By the time everybody was up and ready it was gone 14.00 hrs in the afternoon and as we had decided to split the group up the day before John, Cecilia and I watched as Nigel and Mischa set off on their long hike to Tarantellen. It would be fifteen hours or more before we would see them again. The rest of us were to spend the day around the Nordenskjoldbreen glacier, so Mark raised the anchor to move position to the Glacier. Glaciers can be dangerous places in a Zodiac because of calving. The resultant waves can tip Zodiacs over so Mark suggested wearing the survival suits for this cruise. This turned out to be easier said than done as we had great difficulty getting inside our suits. In the end we managed it and the Zodiac looked like it had three tellytubies inside.

As we approached the glacier the ice floating in the water was beautiful and we said it would be great to see some birds resting on them and sure enough we came across some Northern Fulmars and managed some great pictures of them preening and displaying. Moving further towards land we then came across an Arctic tern that was sitting on some beautiful ice which was being fed by its partner, which is part of its courtship ritual. The pictures we managed to get were beautiful and for me have been the favourite from the trip so far. That was until we came across the Bearded Seal! Cecilia spotted it and we quietly moved towards it being careful not to spook it. Once we had got to a certain position the engine was turned off.

Mark was excellent at positioning the boat and in the end we got so close to this beautiful marine mammal, we could use a variety of different lens to capture close-ups and more wide-angle pictures to show it in its environment. This Bearded Seal was a beautiful example as it had a wonderful colouration to its fur which is caused by iron compounds from soft bottom substrates adhering to the hairs of the face and fore flippers while the seal feeds. This chemically reacts with oxygen when brought to the surface the rust is on the fur rather than in the seal. We also spotted a ringed seal but this species was much harder to get close to so we didn't get any pictures but a little later we did spot another Bearded Seal resting and this one looked completely different from the first in fact it had such a different coat it looked a different species. Black Guillemot and Brünnich's Guillemot were also spotted but we didn't manage any pictures of these. Spending time around the glacier and amongst the ice was a fantastic experience. Back to the Jonathan 111 to raise the anchor and set back to Skottehytta to be in position to collect Nigel and Mischa from their long expedition to Tarantellan.

Nigel and Mischa eventually arrived back at 02.30 hrs. The gruelling hike had taken them 15hrs having to cross several rivers and a large moraine field followed by a steep valley covered with ice sheets. Luckily there was no risk of avalanche as only a little snow remained in the vital areas above the route. The last part was a steep ascent to the summit at about 920m. but in the end they decided to turn back due to dangerous ice approximately two hundred metres short of the rock, a big disappointment but the best call under the circumstances. The rock itself is truly majestic it is a huge cathedral like structure on legs in such an imposing position that

totally dominates the whole valley. Nearby we could also see Kittiwakes, Fulmars and a few Ivory Gulls flying around the cliff face and it would have been exiting to explore this area more fully. Next time we will make it underneath it!

Hiking with a rifle and flare pistol as well all safety gear was incredibly energy sapping as the last kilometre was up very steep loose scree and three steps forward resulted in two backwards almost like an elevator. The route down was hard on the ankles too but the ice axes proved invaluable supports. The river at the valley bottom had risen quite substantially too due to heavy glacial melt throughout the warm day, however with good technique it did not pose an obstacle and they crossed successfully.



Nearing the summit of Tarentellan

Nigel R Winn

Day 3: *Thursday 17th July 2008*

Position: *78° 41.80' N 16° 3.00' E*

Weather: *Cloudy and misty*

Location: *Skottehytta to Fridjovhamna, Bellsund*

We have had two fantastic days of brilliant sunny weather with clear blue skies and light breezes so I was slightly disappointed to emerge on deck to dull, grey clouds and soft misty rain. I had awoken to the gentle rhythm of the yacht sailing and the sound of lapping water against the hull instead of the clamour of the engine.

Mark had begun sailing at 4.00 am whilst we slept, except for John who stood two watches. The distant snow topped mountains on either side of the yacht were wreathed in low cloud and the temperature had plunged. We were on route for Bellsund and an anchorage at Fridjovhamna. In the light winds, the sails were goose-winged or 'wing to wing' as it is also known. We were making good progress at about 5 knots. Everyone else was fast asleep. The day turned into a time for catching

up on sleep. I stayed on deck, well wrapped up against the chill wind. I enjoyed helping with the sails and winches. The sun attempted to break through at one point and finally the wind died and Mark had to motor again, the course controlled by the auto-pilot as he tried to snatch a few moments of sleep in the corner on deck every now and then.

There was some discussion about when we would undertake the hike to Ingeborgfjellet near Varsolbukta to see the Little Auks, a colony of some 100 thousand pairs. This was the purpose of our current passage south-west. On this trip we are not concerned about day or night since it is always light and for photographic purposes, we are finding the light at 02.00 hrs perfect! Thus our days are very flexible and we eat and sleep when necessary. I find it difficult to just sleep at any time (though I am improving!)

Nigel suggested I had a beer for lunch so I could have a few hours sleep in case it was decided to walk on our arrival. The strategy worked and when I woke up, we were arriving at the anchorage. Weather conditions were dull with poor light so it was decided to do the walk the next day. Nigel made an impromptu supper of tinned ham and baked beans – I thought I wasn't hungry as we had had soup for lunch but as usual after a glass of wine the sight and smell of the food was too overwhelming!



Skipper Mark-umh!

Cecilia James

Day 4: *Friday 18th July 2008*

Position: *77°46.20' N 14°36.50' E*

Weather: *Mixed sunshine and cloud with a cold wind*

Location: *Fridtjovhamna and Camp Millar, Ingeborgfjellet, Bellsund*

After a long passage we spend the night at anchor aboard Jonathan in the lagoon of the Fridtjovhamna glacier at the entrance to Bellsund.

Because we were all tired we started the day a bit later than usual and after breakfast we went ashore at 1.30 pm

We had planned to walk to the Little Auk colony and this was around 3 miles distant along the shoreline from the landing place. It was impossible to land near the colony because of the exposed nature of the coastline so this was going to be the best option. To get there we had to cross quite a lot of glacial moraine and a few pieces of ground that were still covered with snow and ice but overall the walk was easy.

On our way there we took some shots of flowers and a very curious reindeer, as well as a very photogenic Arctic Skua perched on a rock with a backdrop of Knott weed.

On arriving at the colony we firstly had a sandwich and drink. It was necessary to climb up the mountainside which was formed from lots of loose boulders and rocks. It was quite difficult to find a comfortable place to sit and wait for the little Auks. After that we spend our time photographing the birds.

Very nice birds to see with their funny sounds, it's just as if they are laughing all around you. They had nests deep among the boulders, you could hear their partners calling. Many of the birds had crops filled with food.



Little Auk

Danny Green

When we had taken some good pictures we made our way back to Jonathan. Around 17.30 hrs we arrived at the landing place from where Nigel called Mark on his VHF to pick us up and take us back aboard. In the evening Mark surprised us by offering to do the cooking. He made a rice dish which was well received before we later adjourned to bed after a long day.

Day 5: Saturday 19th July

Position: 77°46.20' N 14°36.50' E

Weather: Low Cloud Damp

Location: Fridtjovhamna -Poolepynten –Sastangen in Forlandsundet

We set sail at about 02.00 hrs. My body clock is all over the place as its still light! After a short sleep Mark called me to take a spell on deck to give him a break. The wind was variable so had to call him to reset sails I am far from aware of how to run this boat but hopefully that will change. We arrived at our new anchorage off Poolepynten at midday, Swiss yacht was just leaving so after a brief conversation with them we were soon ashore to take the short walk to the Walrus haul out. Unfortunately soon after we set off a helicopter came in quick and low over us (and the walrus!) landing on the opposite side of them to us! A party disembarked and set off quickly approaching the walrus very fast and close. Nigel was not impressed at all and thought this was disgraceful behaviour and after the party failed to respond on the VHF went over to see what was going on. To our amazement it turned out to be a party of guests with the Sysselemann who are the governing authority and police on Svalbard. After a brief exchange of views Nigel returned and we then waited at a distance until the party boarded the helicopter before going ourselves to take some pictures and enjoy the encounter. They are the most amazing creatures; there must have been sixty or seventy of them. They appeared to be grumpy constantly bickering amongst themselves so the group is never still. After everyone was satisfied with their pictures we returned to the boat and set sail for our night anchorage on the East side of the Fotlandsundet located on the north side of the Sarstangen spit.

Day 6: Sunday 20th July.

Position: 79° 50.00' N 16° 00.00' E

Weather: Low lying Cloud cover (Damp)

Location : Magdalenefjorden

We set sail from the northern side of Sarstangen at 09.00 hrs in the morning for Magdalene fjord. We didn't have to wait long for a bit of excitement as Nigel somehow set fire to the cooker (although he swore blind that it wasn't his fault) we soon had it under control and breakfast was served which was a nice treat today because it was bacon and eggs. After breakfast we were relaxing and downloading images when Mark shouted Whale, which was a Minke whale. Although I never saw it breach I did see it near the surface of the water which was a great sight as I haven't seen one for years. When we set off the wind was going to be in our favour (which was south easterly) but the wind completely died and the rest of the journey had to be by motor. The calm conditions were perfect for photographing the beautiful stretch of

coastline along the west coast of Albert 1 land. The Glaciers were indeed spectacular and the light although dull added a really moody feel to the pictures we were taking (I will look forward to processing these as I have tried a technique where I will stitch four images together to create one big panoramic image). We arrived at Magdalene fjord at 20.30 hrs and I was impressed with this beautiful fjord especially the deep blue colour of the glacier. As soon as we anchored we were greeted by a friendly Black Guillemot and he came so close to the boat to give us excellent views. Tomorrow morning is going to be an early start to walk along side this beautiful fjord.

Day 7: Monday 21st July 2008

Position: 79° 34.00' N 11° 02.00' E

Weather: *Sunny periods interspersed with mist and low cloud*

Location: *Magdalenefjord- Smeerenburg/Amsterdamøya-Virgohamna/Danskøya*

Having arrived and anchored in this beautiful fjord the evening before, we were scheduled to make an early start for a hike to the Gullybreen glacier looking at the graveyard of the early whalers dated around 1615–1644 and the remains of some of the flensing ovens on the beach. Before going to bed I had gone on deck to savour the wonderful, peaceful atmosphere. Calm waters provided perfect mirror images of the surrounding snow clad mountains worthy of recording. I noticed the fjord was surrounded by a yellow sandy beach, the first I had noticed in Svalbard.

In the event, there was some confusion about the time on the yacht clock – I was actually up and dressed by 06.15 hrs – no-one else seemed to be stirring by 06.25hrs so I called Nigel and he informed me the yacht's clock was half an hour fast but since no-one else's timepieces agreed – we decided it was a red herring from Mark! Nigel cooked a superb breakfast of bacon, eggs and mushrooms which set us up well for the day. We eventually managed to get ashore just after 08.00 hrs which was long before the arrival of any cruise ship.

I soon discovered the shortcomings of my oil rigger wellington boots which are not full length so my right foot was swamped with icy water as I scrambled out of the zodiac ashore!

We spent some time looking at the graveyard. An appropriate monument giving the history of the site had been constructed on the beach from bleached, old timbers which are prevalent flotsam on all the beaches in this area, logs of varying sizes washed up from arctic Russia. We walked across the rounded pebbles along the shingle beach – they come in every shade of grey – and then scrambled over larger boulders. Wet moss grew between them but I only noticed one clump of purple saxifrage in flower. There were no other flowers to be seen. Melt water streams trickled down the hillsides from patches of snow still lying on the slopes. We noticed Eider duck, Arctic Skuas and terns en route. The bay was filled with both large and small lumps of ice broken off from the glacier – some were transparent and clear like beautiful crystal and others delicate shades of turquoise. The only sounds, apart from the calling of the birds and trickling of the streams, were the creaking and cracking and dripping of these icebergs slowly melting. They formed a stunning foreground for landscape photography. As we neared the glacier, a flock of barnacle geese, which had been resting on the small beach, took to the water in an orderly line.

We made our way, as close as was prudent, to the glacier for photos of the many blue hues in the ice. Whilst we were there, we heard ominous thunder booms and watched warily to see if the glacier was calving but we could see no sign and John thought the noise indicated avalanches high up the mountains, the tops of which were completely

shrouded in mist. We made our way back and as we approached the beach, Nigel alerted us to an Arctic fox running and dodging back and forth whilst being harried by the Arctic Skuas. It circled around us running fast. A much smaller and daintier animal than our fox, it dashed wildly over the tundra nose to the ground circling the pools and ponds. Its fur was chocolate brown and was moving so fast that I didn't bother to get out my camera just concentrated on watching with my binoculars. Nigel, Danny and Mischa decided to try and get closer to it and retraced our track – suddenly to my amazement, the fox doubled back and came running as if to meet us. I had by this time also returned along the track and crouched down in utter disbelief as the fox approached me closer and closer – no time for photography, just moments to instil its image in my memory – it paused in front of me. Was it expecting to be fed? I was transfixed by its orange eyes. Then it was off again darting hither and thither, pausing only to scent mark a patch of moss with back leg cocked. What a magical experience for me!

We left the fjord and sailed on to the island of Amsterdamøya and anchored just off the site of Smeerenberg, an old Dutch whaling station.

Smeerenberg means 'blubber town.' The remains of the ovens consist of circles of large stones moulded and blackened by heat now filled with wind blown sand. The monument stated that whaling had taken place between 1618 –1655 and the site had housed 200 men in 15 houses. For me, the whole area had a terrible feeling of morbidity, pathos and a coldness of death about it which made me very sad. It was totally silent apart from the plaintive and mournful cries of a Red throated diver. The poignancy was highlighted when we came upon the huge bleached, algae stained bones from a Bowhead whale and a vast piece of vertebrae. They were so easy to catch and the whalers took such huge numbers, the species was totally eradicated from the area.

Nigel was anxious to search the ponds and lagoons for the sight of a Grey Phalarope so we continued walking along the shoreline trying to keep to firmer ground. Then Nigel spotted a seal on a rock just offshore –as we approached, it was identified as a young ringed seal, a species we had not currently photographed so we decided to stalk it to see how close we could get. We were careful and patient and finally all managed to take some good shots – it looked great in my viewfinder and I immediately felt happier. We walked on to look at a big cairn of rocks which turned out to be the graves of some of the whalers. Because of the permafrost, bodies cannot be traditionally buried and the cold preserves them so graves are rock covered. The worn planks from the coffins protruded from the cairn and black slate gravestones marking the bodies were placed haphazardly on the pile. The chill feeling of this doom laden place was further consolidated. I was anxious to return to the yacht but Smeerenberg had not finished with me yet – two more bootfuls of tundra mud finally completed the afternoon! We were just entering our anchorage off Virgohamna when we got our first sighting of a Polar Bear for the trip. It was a rather nervous and scraggy looking young bear foraging on the rocky shoreline with a radio transmitter attached to a collar around its neck. It was soon in the water and set off across the sound to Amsterdamøya from where we had just come.

Day 8: *Tuesday 22nd July 2008*

Position: *79°40.00'N 10°30.00'E*

Weather: *Mostly cloudy with a little sun*

Location: *Virgohamna, Danskøya-Indre Norskøya-Sallyhamna*

This morning we woke up lying just off Virgohamna with Amsterdamøya across the sound. This gives me as a Dutch guy a good feeling and prompts some history from the old days!

After breakfast around 09.00hrs we landed at Virgohamna. There we could see the remains of the Harlinger kookerij first used by the Dutch whalers around 1636.

Translated this means “a boiling pot” There were also the remains of some Dutch whaler’s graves.

We also saw some little mounds where the blubber ovens were originally situated. They produced oil from whale blubber .A so at this location were the remains of hangers and houses which were constructed by various expeditions as a base to reach the North Pole by airship and balloon.

In the year 1896 it was Andree, a Swede, who made the first attempt to get to The Pole. A gigantic hanger was constructed of wood to house his balloon.

Finally his balloon was launched in July 1897 but his attempt failed and nothing was found until 1930 when the three bodies were found on the island of Kvitøya

After Andree’s unsuccessful expedition it was Wellman, an American, who was next to try to reach the Pole with an airship. He also failed. We walked around the edge of the piles of rusting metal pipes and wood which is all that now remains.

Around 10.00hrs Mark picked us up again with the zodiac. Jonathan was lying next to a Norwegian oceanographic research ship that was doing some survey work and they had kindly offered to top us up with fresh water for the rest of the voyage. They told us also that they had spotted a small group of seals nearby and from their description it appeared they might be Harbour or Common Seals, as they are sometimes called. They are quite rare for Svalbard as this is the northern limit of their breeding range and there is only a small group on the north end of Prins Karls Forland

One of that guys offered us all a lift with their “Buster” type rib to get close to them as our zodiac was now back on Jonathan and lashed down on the foredeck .This was very good especially as Nigel’s hunch turned out to be right and we took some good pictures of them in classic postures..

Jonathan then headed off north and on our way we had radio contact with another Dutch yacht named ‘Catch Up’ who informed us they spotted a Polar bear on the South east tip of Indre Norskøya and very near the shoreline. As we were so close to that position we decided to go and investigate.

We were lucky the bear was still there and quite close for photography. Eventually the bear went into the water and then swam away across the sound to Sallyhamna.

Later we made a landing on this island. Nigel, Danny and I went ashore to take some shots of the little auks which were there in huge numbers. The colony is low down and near to the shoreline .The light was good and the backdrop stunning with the snow clad peaks. After some great shots and almost frozen fingers from the cold wind we went back aboard before Mark repositioned us for the night in Sallyhamna.

Lucky for us, John and Cecilia had stayed on board to prepare our meal.

After supper we chatted about what we saw that day and went to sleep with the sun still shining brightly well after midnight whilst the entrance to the fjord was invisible, covered with a low thick blanket of mist. We could also clearly see the tracks of polar bears crossing the snow covered mountainsides around us.

Day 9: *Wednesday 23rd July 2008*

Position: *79° 49.00' N 11° 40.00' E*

Weather: *Sunny with very low cloud and mist*

Location: *Sallyhamna*

We raised the anchor to sail the short distance to a historic site on Ytre Norskøya (*The furthest north of the Norway's*) where there is a whalers graveyard and also a lookout point right on the top of a hill which was used to spot Bowhead whales. Unfortunately the weather closed in quickly with fog and low cloud so we decided not to land but to press on with the long passage ahead to Leifdefjorden. This was some distance but with two head sails and the main out we made good progress even though there was not very much to see due to thick fog. After the twelve hour journey the last part under motor we arrived in Leifdefjorden dropping anchor just off Andøyane or *duck Island*. For me it was a good day's sail spending time at the wheel and learning more about the boat and once at anchor we cooked our evening meal before turning in after midnight looking forward to the next day.

Day 10: *Monday 24th July 2008*

Position: *79° 49.00' N 11° 40.00' E*

Weather: *Sunny (Morning) Foggy (afternoon)*

Location: *Andøyane and Makeøyane Islands in Liefdefjorden*

After anchoring overnight we set off to explore the beautiful island of Andøyane. The weather was fantastic again and it was not long before we came across our first target species of the day Grey Phalarope. This beautiful wader is a fascinating bird as it spends the majority of its life at sea feeding on pelagic zooplankton but during the summer returns to the high arctic to breed. It is also unusual amongst birds as it has a complete roll reversal where the female does all the courting and the male takes on the incubating and rearing of the young with the female playing no part at all. The female is also the more brightly coloured of the pair so this was very high on my target list. The small pool where we found them supported about ten birds and after photographing the males I then spent the next hour targeting the females or female as it turned out to be as I could only find one. We then thought we heard a zodiac engine and were worried that a cruise ship had arrived so we set off in search of our next target of the day, King Eider as Nigel had seen them here many times before but after a long search no joy on this occasion. We then moved from this island to Makeøyane which in my opinion was the best places we have visited so far. The weather had changed drastically from the morning with low lying fog coming in over the fjord. All the small ponds on this island supported pairs of Red throated divers and there were also a lot of Arctic terns breeding as well. Our first subject for this island was a very confiding Arctic Skua and allowed us all to get close enough for some excellent images. We also found a Snow Bunting's nest which was accessible enough to enable us to photograph them returning to the nest. We didn't give it long so as not to disturb them too much. Then we came across a frozen lake where small pockets of ice had broken along one edge leaving a polynia and this was alive with birds. About sixty Grey Phalaropes were busy feeding and also Long-tailed ducks which were incredibly approachable. A Brent goose was also around this area and again was very approachable and we managed to get some close shots of it too. Back to the boat for dinner and just as I thought we had enough excitement for the day I spotted a Polar

Bear walking through the middle of the island where we had just been walking, it was looking for tern eggs. This brought home the reality of bumping into one of these guys at anytime and a stark reminder that you can never relax in this environment.

Day11: *Friday 25th July 2008*

Position: *79° 20.00' N 13° 00.00' E*

Weather: *Dull, grey mist over mountain slopes*

Location: *Bockfjord*

We are so flexible with our time on this trip that night has become day so I am not sure what I should be including in my log today. The sobering and sudden appearance of a huge Polar bear wandering across the island on which we had all been happily photographing waterfowl a few hours previously had made us all think! Mark had taken Nigel and Danny out in the zodiac to see if they could get some pictures but it moved inland too quickly. I think it was then about 02.30 hrs!

We set off for our walk to the hot springs in Bockfjord at 13.00 hrs. This walk was a first for Nigel who had heard about the springs but not been there. On the map it seemed to be about 5 or 6 kilometres and we had to walk right to the head of the fjord. Despite the possibility of boggy conditions I decided to risk wearing my walking boots. After landing in the zodiac on a rough sandy beach, we walked along the shore line over boulders and discarded logs before being forced onto the fringe of the beach which was soft mossy bog wet from mountain streams. It was a lot more comfortable to walk on even if rather soggy. The fjord was strangely silent, devoid of bird calls apart from a pair of Arctic Skuas and distant Kittiwakes. Purple sandpiper was seen on the strand line. Eventually we arrived at the base of the moraine from the glacier – melt water was tumbling down a waterfall in a roaring cascade and the area was littered with loose debris and big boulders and there did not seem to be a safe traverse. So we headed down onto the wide, flat, sandy fjord bed. It was tough walking despite being flat as one's boots sank into the sand if you stood still for too long – your whole boot gradually became totally absorbed as if in quicksand. It was a trifle alarming! When we came to a particularly wide and fast flowing river – there was some dispute about the disadvantages of getting soaking wet feet. This resulted in a difference of opinion over whether we should go back and cross a patch of ice and climb across the raging torrent or get wet feet crossing the shallow estuary the precise depth of which was unclear! Nigel insisted that crossing the ice was not an option and it was the shallow water for everyone or we return to the yacht! The guys were very protective and took my hand to help me across – the first river was fine and I managed to retain my dry feet but the next proved deeper and my boots were filled. After that, caution was thrown to the wind and I waded across as if I was paddling on Slapton beach in summer- the temperature was, however, several degrees lower since it was melt water from the glacier.

We made it to the shoreline and rested for a while eating our various snacks before walking on up and over the cliff. We were looking for signs of steam from the 'hot' springs eventually we came across a bare, stony area and found a small pool surrounded by strange encrustations. There was also bubbly slime of a neon yellow colour and brilliant emerald green mosses. When I dabbled my fingers in the pool, the water felt cool rather than icy and as it was only the size of a tiny basin – all delicious thoughts of a warm bath in the hot water tragically vanished. I'd forgotten my towel anyway. Suddenly bubbles began erupting from the depths of the pool and continued

to do so spontaneously at intervals. Beyond the first pool, we found other fascinating terracing made from calcification from the limestone deposits which resembled in miniature the rice terraces in the Far East. We spent some time searching for other pools and examining the delicate patterning of the fragile terracing. All the time, kittiwakes were calling as they flew up and down the fjord far below us. I found a good example of knotweed to photograph and the flowers in this area were fantastic, Moss Campion and several saxifrages, we think we also found Polar Willow. Purple saxifrage grew in abundance across the bare gravel areas. As we set off to return to the boat, Nigel found a set of small interconnecting dens dug into the hillside belonging to arctic foxes –

There was evidence of white fur from their winter coat and scattering of bleached bones and old scats around the entrances. By this time it was 18.45 hrs and I was not looking forward to the return journey as it had taken four hours to walk there but in the event, we arrived back at the beach by 21.00 hrs. We washed our boots in a fresh water pool and squeezed out our soaking socks before returning to Jonathan.

Mark then repositioned us to just off Makeøyane where at around midnight, Nigel, Danny and Mischa returned to the island for further photography as the light was so superb – they did not return until 06.30 hrs! I took lots of landscape pictures of reflections of the mountains – mirror images in the perfectly calm water and retired to bed about 03.00 hrs – it had been a great day and I was pleased with myself that I had managed to cope with such a long trek.

Day 12: *Saturday 26th July 2008*

Position: *79° 30.00' N 13° 30.00' E*

Weather: *Sunshine with no wind*

Location: *Makeøyane*

Today we started off by making a landing just a few minutes after midnight on Makeøyane. Mark dropped Danny, Nigel and I off by zodiac in the most amazing low soft light conditions I had ever encountered.

The day before we also landed on the island and had had some good sightings but the light was poor on that occasion. The first interesting bird we saw was an angry Turnstone which probably had a nest or chicks nearby.

After that we went to the pond where we saw a lot of Grey Phalaropes and some Long-tailed ducks the day before. But on arriving there it was much quieter and the Long-tailed ducks would not allow us to get as close to them as previous, There was also a Red-throated diver on the pond but it was also difficult to get close to for any sort of photography.

As time passed by the Phalaropes arrived again at the pond around 04.30 hrs. We spent another hour photographing these and the noisy Arctic terns before returning to Jonathan to sleep. When we woke up early in the afternoon we made our way to Murchisonfjord .

To get there we journeyed across eighty degrees north and sailed around the headland known as Verlegenhuken .

Verlegen which is the Dutch word for 'shy' means that this piece of shoreline is unpredictable .After that we crossed the Hinlopen Strait which was quite rough .

Around an hour later crossing this strait we arrived in Murchisonfjord where we found a good place for spending the night and dropped the anchor. We then had our meals and a few drinks before going to sleep.



Arctic tern, Makeøyane, Liefdefjorden

Nigel R Winn

Day 13: *Sunday 27th July 2008*

Position: *80° 01.00' N 18° 23.00' E*

Weather: *Cloudy and foggy with a very light wind*

Location: *Murchisonfjord*

Following breakfast Mark and Nigel appraised the next few days going through our route and where we want to go. So much depends on the weather but the chances of continuing on seem to be improving as reports of the state of the ice seem to be getting better. Once the anchor was up we had a leisurely motor round the fjord spending time photographing some Black Guillemot and also a Walrus on the ice flows. The sun came out and it was incredible peaceful drifting amongst the brash ice. Whilst we were preparing sandwiches a Polar Bear was sighted a long way off but on closer investigation had move inland. After a good photographic session we went to an accessible point on the shore where a fast flowing stream entered the fjord, there we could fill up with water by ferrying jerry cans with the zodiac from the stream back to the boat to fill the tanks. We have used 120 Litres water in 5 days for all washing and drinking for all six of us. Someone must be washing not sure it's me! We also managed a little hose work so the boat is looking tidier. We then returned to our previous night's position to drop anchor and to cook our evening meal. The days are going quickly and we barely have time to take everything in before its bed time again.

Day 14: *Friday 28th July 2008*

Position: *80° 01.00' N 18° 23.00' E*

Weather: *Bright but a little overcast*

Location: *Murchinsonfjord and Russøya*

We had planned to set off straight away from this beautiful fjord but Mark suggested we have one more look on the ice for Polar bears and was that a good call because no sooner had we set off we had spotted one on the shore. It was a mad rush to get all our kit ready and as we got closer you could see her rubbing herself on the snow (wish we were closer for that shot) she was very inquisitive about the boat getting closer and then she stood up on her hind legs for a better look (boy was that a good shot!!)



Polar Bear, Murchistonfjorden Danny Green

We were all busy photographing her on the shore line in the snow when suddenly a really large Male appeared over the brow of the hill coming with a mission and he was making a beeline for our friendly female. It was so quick how he appeared that it really does bring it home how quickly things can change up here and you have to have your wits about you at all times. Our female quickly ran off obviously feeling very threatened and after taking some further images of the male we decided to move on and see if we could follow the female from a distance. By the time we had spotted her again she was on the other side of the island entering the water to swim across the channel to the other side. We followed her in Jonathan at a distance and watched as she scrambled onto the ice on the other side. Mark expertly moved the boat amongst

the ice and we were able to take some fantastic shots of her moving along the ice and jumping from one flow to the next, an amazing experience! She then disappeared over the horizon so we then moved on only to find two walrus resting on an ice flow where we had another great encounter in this beautiful fjord. We then stopped off at Russøya en route to see the historical Russian orthodox cross constructed by the Pomors. It is one of two still standing in the archipelago, the other being located on the nearby island of Krossøya. The Pomors came from the White Sea area of Russia as trappers between 1700 and 1850. The remains of their huts can still be seen and bones from walrus and other animals lay scattered about – the whole area is extremely sensitive and highly protected. We sailed on with the weather improving to Alkefjellet where we were scheduled to arrive just after midnight, at which time the sun should be rising in the east giving maximum light on the cliffs for photography.

Day 15: *Saturday July 29th 2008*

Position: *79°30.00' N 18°00.00' E*

Weather: *Calm Sea, blue skies and sunlight initially followed by wind increasing with rough seas hale storms and snow.*

Location: *Alkefjellet ,Fosterøyane Hinlopenstretet*

We had sailed from Murchisonfjord towards Alkefjellet heading south east through the Hinlopenstretet between Spitsbergen and the island of Nordaustlandet. It was some time in the past couple of days that Mark had told us that Jonathan was only the fifth yacht to ever visit these places so far north. It made me realise, once again, how incredibly fortunate I was to be exploring such a fantastic place on such a beautiful boat, safe in the knowledge that our skipper was one of the best – his experience and knowledge of the area second to none, though I am not sure he quite understands my passion about the flowers!

The towering cliff of Alkefjellet were clearly visible some way off – vast pillars like organ pipes of dolomite rising 300 feet sheer from the sea. On every available ledge from the bottom upwards, crammed in together like sardines in a tin were Brünnich's Guillemots which have a long stripe alongside their upper mandible. At the very top of the cliff, countless kittiwakes wheeled in white clouds. A cacophony of cries and calls echoed around the boat. Before we cruised along the cliff, we saw that the boat Havsøl, which the BBC had chartered to film their new multi series "Frozen Seas" was anchored there too. This was an opportunity for Mark to get some diesel from the boat as he had good friends on board. Nigel and Danny exchanged information about what we had seen and done with cameraman John Aitcheson and his producer Miles. They had been filming both the birds and Arctic foxes which patrol beneath the cliffs waiting for casualties. Once the diesel was transferred into the tanks – Mark attempted to leave but found to his horror that there was something wrong with the gears on the yacht – this was very serious and involved the quick demolition of my cabin in order to find exactly what the problem was – it was a broken cable, serious enough but not irreparable. It took some time for the repairs to be completed by Mark, John and Mischa, meanwhile the sunlight on the cliff improved as the shadows shortened. It was the wee small hours of the morning before finally we could begin our cruise below the cliffs. The sheer numbers of birds was so overwhelming that I just could not decide where to point the camera. I thought the most incredible viewpoint was looking beyond the cliff out to sea.

The birds leaving and returning resembled a thick black swarm of bees against a backdrop of snow blanketed slopes and brilliant blue sky. This was a truly

extraordinary sight which further accentuated the unbelievably vast numbers of breeding birds. Rafts of guillemots followed the boat floating on water patterned in greens and browns from reflected sunlight. We watched a Glaucous gull feeding on a dead guillemot; it dragged the carcass back up onto a rock every time it slipped below the water out of reach. The whole experience was so absorbing, we felt we just could not drag ourselves away – there was so much happening all the time. Then just as we had decided to leave, someone spotted an arctic fox high up on the snowline. It was slowly descending to the lower slopes within camera range so Mark edged the yacht into the cliff as close as he could. This fox was bigger and looked more robust than the previous one we had seen, its coat was grey with white patches under its body and wisps of longer fur from its winter coat still remaining on its back. Our patience was rewarded when the fox came down to eyelevel and I managed to capture the gaze from its orange eyes. This was a real thrill for me. Regretfully we had to leave the birds, fox and sunlight behind as Mark was anxious to find an anchorage. The sea conditions and weather deteriorated as we left Alkefjellet. We motored on and on, Mark looking for a safe place to anchor and hide away from the increasing wind. He tried three different locations on the Spitsbergen side of Hinlopenstretet before finally heading across to Fosterøyane a small island in the middle of Hinlopen which has very accessible colony of Little Auks and lots of Black Guillemots nesting. It is also a good location for Polar Bear and Nigel had seen them here on a few previous visits among the Little Auk colony. Alas we could not anchor where we had wanted in the beautiful little cove where the Auks were nesting on the boulder beach, as the holding was too rocky so we settled on a position tucked in between the main island of Fosterøyane and a small satellite island off its north east point. We were reasonably well protected from the strong north westerly and the anchor seemed to be holding well although the bottom was a little on the rocky side. Mark was more comfortable when Jonathan was secured with an additional stern line ashore before we went to bed. Nigel assisted by Mischa took the Zodiac and rope ashore to do the necessary securing around a big boulder.

If there was any wind shift in the night we would be in for a bumpy ride or indeed would have to move as there was an exposed channel just to the west of the little island.

The ferocity of wind increased to a high-pitched scream and the wind turbine on the stern of the yacht revved itself up to such a frenzied pitch it could have easily launched itself into space! The anchor alarm was set and everyone turned in.

After a good sleep people began to stir at around 18.00 hrs and we had not moved or dragged the anchor at all. It was not long before Nigel informed us that we would not be moving until the wind had decreased and it might be better to have another hour or two in our bunks. Most of us did not need a second invitation for this as we were all tired.



At anchor with shore lines Fosterøyane

Image by Nigel R Winn

Later in the day Mark, Nigel, Danny and Cecilia went ashore to stretch their legs and have a brief look around the small island securing an additional shore line in the process. There was a small party of Brent Geese with young and a few Arctic terns in residence but not much else on this rocky weather beaten outpost.

Day 16: *Sunday 30th July 2008*

Position: *79° 36.60' N 20° 42.40' E*

Weather: *Overcast with wind decreasing and calmer sea*

Location: *Fosterøyane and Palanderbukta, Nordaustlandet*

We woke up to find that the strong winds of the previous day had abated considerably but there was still a lot of swell in the sea and we were rolling around somewhat. However it was decided to move on to Palanderbukta and find an anchorage in the fjord there rather than stay another day at our present location.

Before we could move the shore lines had to be set free and the heavy and wet ropes coiled on deck. Nigel, Danny and Mischa went ashore to do this (Danny nearly being “lost in action”) But after the zodiac was pulled back to Jonathan we were soon underway and everything soon coiled and stowed.

Once in Palanderbukta we sailed close to the southern shore of the fjord and headed for a position just off the old trappers hut located on the Strand flat at the bottom of Palanderdalen. We had intended going for a walk up to the plateau but as Mark was unsure he would be able to pick us up again due to more high winds forecast we decided to sail across to the Northern side of the fjord which was better protected from the northerly wind and drop anchor near the M.V. Havsel.

After a light lunch Nigel, Mischa and Cecilia went ashore for a short walk. It was amazing how many flowers were growing on the barren shores of Nordaustlandet and

Svalbard Poppy's seemed to be everywhere. It wasn't long before there was more excitement as a message came over the VHF that Jonathan was under attack from a female walrus and calf, and it seemed that the zodiac had been punctured in the process (even though it was a good 1.5m out above the water!)

This turned out to be true and Steiner, a colleague of Mark's came on the radio and offered the stranded shore party a lift back to Jonathan on their "buster" type tender. On returning to Jonathan it transpired the attack had been captured on camera both by Danny and John, as well as the BBC crew on Havsel. John Aitcheson had taken some good shots of the walrus attacking both the stern of the yacht and puncturing a blue fender clearly showing the animal's tusks at least 1.5m out of the water!! Both Mark and Nigel had never seen such an aggressive walrus before.



Jonathan "under attack" Image by kind permission of John Aitcheson BBC

After all this excitement we were invited to join Jason and the BBC crew for a few drinks and nibbles which was a pleasant change.

Day 17: Monday 31st July 2008

Position: 79° 36.60'N 20° 42.40'E

Weather: Cloudy with Strong winds

Location: Palanderbukta, Nordaustlandet

We were still on the M.V. Havsel having drinks with the BBC film crew at midnight so did not get back to Jonathan until around 01.30 hrs. Food was then cooked whilst we prepared to patch the hole in the Zodiac that the Walrus had made. The puncture on the cone of the zodiac finished up inside the saloon, sealed off from the rest of the craft lying in the cockpit with sheets. This was it needed heat from the saloon to help the patch cure properly! Once this had been accomplished we all went to bed.

When we woke in the morning the weather was still bad with a very strong wind blowing so there was not much that could be done. The patch on the zodiac was inspected by Mark and after some minor adjustments were made it was declared fit for use. Later things started to calm down so we set off under motor for a look around the fjord. We negotiated our way right up to the head of the fjord amongst the ice to have a look at the Palanderbreen and Ericabreen glaciers. We were especially on the lookout for nesting Ivory gulls and a small cliff near a Kittiwake and Brünnich's Guillemot colony between the two glaciers was a former site but was not occupied this year. This turned out to be a really good trip a real bonus with the way the weather had been a few hours previous. There is so much to see and we were all impressed with the views around the fjord. We eventually returned to our original anchorage at about 02.00 hrs and turned in for bed after dinner.

Day 18: *Friday 1st August 2008*

Position: *79° 36.60'N 20° 42.40'E*

Weather: *Sunny and calm*

Location: *Palanderbukta, Nordaustlandet*

This was Total eclipse day. We had set the alarm to witness this magical moment in the high arctic and with great foresight Cecilia had brought some special glasses to view it safely. It wasn't total for us but was very close so it turned out to be a very special experience. Our target in this fjord was to find a colony of Ivory Gulls. This beautiful Arctic bird is in serious decline throughout its range and to find a colony is a tall order but we had some recent information on their location.

We decided to try one site first so we set off up an undisclosed mountain ridge where we thought the birds to be. The weather forecast was not looking to good with high winds expected and it would be difficult for Mark to collect us by zodiac from this location so we decided to take enough equipment and rations to last us three days. It was a difficult climb to the top but our efforts were rewarded almost straight away as we found one bird sitting on top of a small rock stack in beautiful light. It was my first ever sighting of this bird and it has got to be one the most beautiful birds in the world and a stunning sight. We went further along the cliff looking for others but initially without success. We did however see a few Black Guillemots which were ideally poised for some great photography. On heading back to the first place where we saw the Ivory Gull there was now four sitting on the one stack, this was a great opportunity for some classic pictures of this beautiful bird. After a careful approach we got as close as we dared without disturbing them and actually managed to get the four birds in one frame. We would have liked longer to photograph these beautiful birds but Nigel stressed the weather was unpredictable and the need for caution around these threatened birds and we also didn't want to risk having to spend the next three days ashore so we headed back down after a fantastic encounter.



Ivory Gulls

Nigel R Winn

Our next location was to be Wahlenbergfjord but we decided to stop off briefly at a Walrus rookery en route. There were several mothers and pups visible and it was thought that our assailant, a couple of days previous, was probably a resident here. As we approached Wahlenbergfjord we were greeted by some stunning Icebergs and growlers all set in some fantastic scenery but as it was coming to the end of the day and after midnight and my log I am sure Cecilia can add a few pages instead.



Ice in Wahlenburgfjorden

Nigel R Winn

Day19: *Saturday August 2nd 2008*

Position: *79°40.00'N 21°30.00'E*

Weather: *Bright, sunny, calm with light winds*

Location: *Wahlenbergfjord, Nordaustlandet*

When I woke up from what was either an afternoon or late evening nap and came up on deck, I was amazed to find we were sailing through a fjord of fantastic, turquoise blue icebergs carved with tunnels and holes through which the extraordinary yellow desert-like landscape ashore could be seen. There were hills and cliffs which appeared to be completely barren stone and sand with patches of snow still lingering in the crevices and on the slopes – we could have been in the Namib but for the icebergs and growlers. The water was extremely calm with a mirror like quality which reflected patterns of incredible colours – blue, orange, brown, beige and white. These I managed to capture on the camera. The fjord was deep and is located almost in between the two huge ice caps. Only a narrow fertile plain of land called the Rijpdalen and Helvetesflya containing rivers and lakes separates the two. This is reputed to be a corridor for Polar bears and is amazingly fertile, it is green and mossy almost more so than the area around Longyearbyen! The quest for the perfect shot of Ivory Gulls continued unabated, so there was intense excitement when an Ivory Gull was identified sitting on a small iceberg in front of the glacier. Everyone rushed to get cameras, lenses, spare batteries and cards and there was a palpable feeling of tension as Mark very carefully and skilfully and oh so slowly negotiated Jonathan through the ice towards the bird. Everyone took pictures when it was hardly more than a dot in the viewfinder just to ensure there was at least 'one in the bag'. We hardly dare breathe as the bows of the boat edged closer and closer and still the 'precious' bird continued to perch on the iceberg – perhaps it was indeed frozen itself?

Fortunately Jonathan has the advantage of stealth due to a very quiet engine.

Gradually, to my amazement, this beautiful and rare completely snow white bird with black legs and a pale beak enlarged in my viewfinder. The sunlight accentuated its dazzling plumage. How utterly fantastic for me – unable to trek with any speed due to the weight of my camera equipment – I had not wanted to attempt the marathon climbs up vertical cliffs and hold up the boys as they searched for these elusive birds and so had not even seen an Ivory Gull.

To gaze on one, now life size, through my camera lens, was an experience from a dream. I felt a bit of a fraud. Sadly most of my shots are just 'soft' – too much self-induced pressure I guess. Eventually the bird tired of all the attention and flew off. Everyone anxiously scanned the backs of their cameras for a replay.

After this Mark steered Jonathan through the ice flows and across a shallow bar which protected the entrance into a beautiful sheltered lagoon called Kløverbladbukta the most perfect sheltered anchorage. There must have been only inches spare under the keel as we entered! A Russian survey boat was anchored some distance outside the entrance and a helicopter was spotted on shore which was undertaking shuttle trips somewhere up the Rijpdalen. There is a large hut and some snowmobile sheds boxed up for summer nearby, it is not obvious as to whom they belong or their purpose.

After dinner, we retired to bed about 05.00 hrs scheduled to rise at about noon! Nigel was anxious to walk up the corridor named Rijpdalen between the two great glaciers to a distant cliff which was a nesting site for Ivory Gulls. Having been on the boat for two days, I was looking forward to a good walk. I left my tripod behind as it was anticipated to be quite a trek. As we set off in the Zodiac, Nigel spotted two seals resting on ice flows, which looked very like Harp seals from a distance, rarities, but

we were unable to get close enough to confirm his hunch. We scanned the shore for Polar bears and I thought I had seen one but it was a reindeer. We took quite a while to decide where to land as there were hundreds of eider ducks and flocks of geese grazing on this amazingly fertile area of the otherwise barren Nordaustlandet . Eventually we arrived, dispensed with wellies and life jackets, put on walking boots, shouldered our gear and set off. It was perfect conditions for walking, flat tundra with only the occasional soft, mossy bog to negotiate. I felt overwhelmingly happy and content once again out in the sunshine in such an amazing and beautiful place - a feeling which has been constant throughout this trip. The wide open scenery with rocky outcrops stretched for miles in all directions, exquisite tiny flowers, now familiar, in purples, yellows and white carpeted the ground between a rainbow of greens in the mosses, orange lichens brightened grey rocks and in the distance, the blue waters of the fjord lay dimpled with glowing icebergs. All this was set against a backcloth of yellow desert hills splashed with white snow between the jagged glaciers.



Branevatnet and lunar landscape from high up on Carfaxhaugen, Helvetesflya, Nordaustlandet *Nigel R Winn*

This was an almost Tolkein like world. In addition, it seemed we were the only privileged witnesses. We had not been walking long when we came upon two young reindeer. I was anxious to take better pictures of reindeer so we all sat down and I was thrilled when they decided to approach us quite close enabling me to take some great shots. We walked on across the tundra, pausing every now and then to scan for bears. We climbed a rocky tor called Carfaxhaugen with scree slopes and paused at the man-made cairn on the summit. There was some reference to an expedition from Oxford University on a plate within the cairn. From here, the views were even more spectacular with the red hulled Jonathan, in miniature, anchored in the sparkling silver sunlit lagoon far below us. Danny organised a group photo using the timer on his camera and we ate cookies and sweeties before moving on. It was surprisingly warm

as we were sheltered from the light wind so soon I had to start removing clothing! We walked on, heading for a gorge with a wide river flowing through, beyond which, in the far distance, was the rugged cliff on the edge of the glacier – our destination. Danny was suffering from a blister on his toe – stupidly all my medication was on the boat. We stopped again just above the river and had another snack. The crossing of the river was a worry for me – although Nigel had offered to piggyback me across, the water was flowing fast, muddied and grey so it was difficult to gauge the depth. I gathered that I was not the only one with concerns. I certainly did not want to get wet, icy cold feet before continuing to walk miles to the cliff and return. There followed a discussion about whether or not to proceed – Nigel decided that we should abandon the trek – a big disappointment for him but a difficult situation when dealing with a group of people of varying capability. We then decided to explore the edge of the frozen lake called the Branevatnet. We came upon a really weird bare lunar landscape with red earth pinnacles and towers reflected in deep blue pools. We went down for a closer look, mindful of bears. There was purple saxifrage and spider plant even in this barren place. After walking through the hillocks, we climbed back up the scree slopes and made our way back towards the lagoon photographing well antlered reindeer on the way and I found more flowers to intrigue me in the middle of a bog. We lay down on the beach for a doze before Mark arrived in the zodiac – he then took us to various ice flows with resting seals – mostly Bearded – for some backlit photography before forcing the zodiac through newly freezing chunks of ice – as it was fresh water ice, it was not so sharp as salt water ice and thus did not damage the newly repaired zodiac. What an amazing day!

Day 20: *Sunday 3rd August 2008*

Position: *79°41.30' N 20° 57.00' E*

Weather: *Sunny, clear and Calm*

Location: *West of Ismasefjellet, Wahlenburgfjord, Nordaustlandet*

Today Nigel, Danny and Mischa were going to explore a cliff on the southern shore of Wahlenburgfjord which used to support a colony of about 35-40 pairs of Ivory gull. This colony was first studied over fifty years ago by Bateson and Plowright who camped here for over three weeks in 1958. With the recent decline in breeding numbers of this species we thought we would be very lucky if we found any in residence at all, but we thought it worth a shot since we were so close to the site. The cliff in question is immediately to the west of the Ludolf Schjelderupbreen glacier on Ismasefjellet and is only really accessible up a narrow ridge leading up on to the plateau at around one thousand feet. It was a hard slog straight up from the shore but after about an hour we had reached a prominent shoulder and were ready to tackle the ridge. A very obliging female Ptarmigan posed for us at this point and we were all able to get some fine shots as the light and camel coloured backdrop was stunning! It took us another hour to reach the plateau, the last hundred metres was a scramble up a very steep gully with lots of loose rocks.

Almost at once we came across the remains of a camp and amongst the items lying very well preserved were bamboo tent poles, plimsolls, food tins, a knife, fork and spoon set, a comb and even an unopened tin of dubin (as good as it was the day it was left!)

Whoever was camping here had to leave in a hurry! Could it have been from the Bateson and Plowright expedition in 1958 as all the items left seemed to be from that sort of period??

We moved along the edge of the cliff past a very well constructed cairn at 321m. Another thought was that this could be some sort of memorial stone as if there had been an accident/disaster here in the past as trig points are unheard of in this region. We covered about two miles of cliff and drew a blank with the Ivories, there was however a very noisy colony of Kittiwakes all feeding young and numerous pairs of Black Guillemots nesting as well. This was not surprising but unfortunately is the trend in Svalbard over the last decade or more.

We made our way back to the gully descending the first section in turn to avoid dislodging stones. Danny had a brief attack of vertigo but after a bit of reassurance soon settled down once the difficult bit was done. After that it was an easy descent down to Jonathan which was lying of the shore below us.

By this time the fjord was flat calm with not a breath of wind so Mark had dropped the anchor and come ashore with the zodiac taking Cecilia and John for a walk.

Day 21: *Monday 4th August 2008*

Position: *79° 27.50' N 20° 07.70' E*

Weather: *Light breeze becoming overcast*

Position: *Svartberget East of Augustabukta*

Midnight found us motoring down the Hinlopenstretet and after four hours or so we dropped anchor just east of Augustabukta behind a little spit at Svartberget. This gave us some protection from the wind which was north to north westerly. After dinner and a few drinks we finally turned in around 05.00 hrs.

We were up for breakfast at around 12.00 hrs when the cruise ship Polar Star dropped anchor very close to us in order to land its passengers on the nearby beach. The captain very kindly invited us to go over for coffee but we declined the offer as we felt the need to push on. The plan was to visit the island of Karl Alexanderøya, an island looking like the top of an extinct volcano with high external cliff walls but a very interesting hollow central area filled with black sand only accessible at one place on the north east point.

Just before we reached the island a call was received on the radio from SY "Arctica" who was approaching from the east. They reported a bear sighting on the island of Behmøya and also gave us information on their circumnavigation (done in reverse to ourselves) the most relevant to us was that the Freemandsundet (the passage between Barentsøya and Edgeøya) was blocked by ice the day before. They had no choice other than to return back down the straight almost at the top (eastern entrance) and come via the Heleysundet (between Spitsbergen and Barentsøya). This is a difficult piece of water to navigate and requires some accurate passage planning to get the timings right as the tide runs through here at seven to eight knots on spring tides. We soon approached Karl Alexanderøya motoring round the island, which is quite unique in that it has a high density of breeding Glaucous gulls. It is the only place in Svalbard that Nigel knows where this species nests in more than just loose numbers. There were probably about seventy or eighty pairs in quite a dense concentration on the south easterly cliffs. There was in fact too much swell to land so it was decided to press on. We had been sailing most of the journey although the wind had been variable, as had the weather with a mixture of sun and cloud.

Next stop was the island of Kiepertøya where we planned to drop anchor in its lee and wait in order to enter the Heleysundenet at the right time and state of the tide. Just before we arrived a Polar Bear was spotted foraging among a colony of arctic terns on

one of the smaller islands in this Bastianøyane group, as timing was now critical and the wind now blowing hard we decided not to stop and investigate further.

Day 22: *Tuesday 5th August 2008*

Position: *78° 40.80'N 21° 15.10'E*

Weather: *Cloudy with sunny intervals*

Location: *Heleysundet*

The long sailing days continue as we need to get some miles under our belts if we are too get to some of the other locations we intend to visit and also get home in time. The excitement of the day was waiting for the right tide to go through the Heleysundet. High water was at 07.00 hrs and this would make the passage easier as this is slack water. We passed Kapp Payer to starboard and were set off Kapp Muhry at the entrance to the sound almost an hour early. Mark decided that we should go for it and although the tide was running hard against us things would soon settle down at slack water. We all donned our lifejackets and extra clothing as a precaution then set off out into the sound with a little trepidation and the motor almost on maximum “revs”. We were hardly making way as the current was so strong running like a river in pace with whirlpools, eddies and boiling water everywhere. This was a truly spectacular sight. We kept in close almost under the northerly cliffs as the channel here was less agitated and although the engine was flat out we were only making 1.5 knots over the ground. Up ahead there were thousands of kittiwakes foraging in the disturbed waters as food was being brought to the surface by the tide ripping over the seabed. Almost the whole population of resident Kittiwake in the colony at Diskobukta are thought to feed here in this location where at certain times of day there is an abundant food source just under the surface water layer. We found it increasingly hard to make way so Mark decided to head off into a small bay on the northern shore which was calm at its head for an hours wait until slack water arrived. Sure enough it wasn't long before the waters calmed so we headed out of our anchorage, this time the tide had changed and we were being carried in the direction we wanted to go. It was time for some sleep so as soon as we were safely through Mark headed for Bakanbukta where we managed to drop anchor at 78° 40.80' N 21° 15.10' E. It was a shallow bay quite exposed as we could not get in as close as we wanted but a few hours sleep was all that was needed before our next leg of the journey towards Sundbukta on Barentsøya. This passage was good so it was an ideal opportunity to catch up with the log and some serious downloading of the images. We arrived in the lagoon at Sundbukta at about 23.00hrs and as people were in need of stretching their legs it was decided that we would go and explore Sundneset. Nigel informed us that this was one of the very few sites he knew where King Eiders could be regularly seen.

Day 23: *Wednesday August 6th 2008*

Position: *78° 12.47' N 20° 56.24' E*

Weather: *Misty, dull cold wind*

Location: *Sundneset, Barentsøya*

We anchored and went ashore, scrambling out of the zodiac on the rocks. The day continued dull and grey and there was poor light for photography. The island was carpeted with all the flowers I had grown to love, so tiny, often almost prostrate and

yet so colourful and prolific, their survival as much of a struggle, in my opinion, as for the other wildlife. They seem to grow out of nothing though the mossy bogs obviously provided good conditions. They even made use of the minerals gleaned from old whalebone that has almost fossilised; tiny clumps growing all along the length of the bones. Some sheltered underneath or close to reindeer skulls and bones. Photographing them was a real challenge and difficult to achieve without prostrating oneself across the wet tundra as well – a tripod was a must and even a whisper of a breeze caused them to shudder. Identification was not easy either as the photos in the current flower book available often failed to show the leaves properly – important as there are several types of buttercup for example.

We walked across the island, vigilant for bears. I was struck by the overwhelming silence – no bird calls – not even the sound of the wind. We found several ponds with Red throated diver, Barnacle geese, long tailed duck and a possible sighting of female King Eiders due to their different shaped bills but no male King Eiders. John spotted an Arctic fox on the skyline but it quickly disappeared and we watched an Ivory Gull being chased by an Arctic Skua. We visited a trapper's hut which was in very good condition though the roll of toilet paper was decidedly mildewed and probably not fit for purpose! We left our details in the visitor's book. We scrambled down over the rocks to board the zodiac and get back on board for supper and a good nights sleep. Mark was up at 09.00 hrs in order to get us underway for Diskobukta. Most of us were still sleeping when we motored out of Sundbukta. Unfortunately the day was deteriorating and the wind and swell increasing. After about three hours we arrived at Diskobukta, it was a long sweeping approach from a northerly direction as the bay is very shallow and a direct approach not possible. The nearest we could get to the canyon was about 1.5km and the guano from the thousands of kittiwakes had made a very conspicuous green area on the canyon floor which was clearly visible at a huge distance. We also had company as the Alexy Mareshev already had a party ashore and were just leaving. Mark and Nigel discussed the situation and decided a landing from our small zodiac this far out was a too risky particularly as the wind was forecast to increase. On our next passage in Storfjorden, we were surrounded by many whales which were very exciting. It seemed as if the area was a good feeding ground. Groups of birds hovered over patches of sea, an indication perhaps of whale activity below. There was much discussion about the identification of the whales as they were a long way off. First sightings were thought to be of a pod of Orcas, as several had large characteristic dorsal fins clearly visible. Later and still at long range either Minke or Fin whales were observed but identification was difficult because of the distance. The blows could be seen way out on the horizon and one a definite Minke came so close to Jonathan that we could actually hear the blow. The journey continued, the yacht always accompanied by lonely, soaring fulmars.

Our next destination was to be the island of Delitschøya but there was some debate about where to anchor for the night. Nigel had told Mark about Habenichtbukta close to Svarttangen which is a good anchorage but can be exposed from the west. This would also be interesting because it also has a very well preserved Pomor settlement and the site of a former English whaling station. We did go and check it out but there was quite a bit of swell getting inside and the tide was low so we decided to press on around the headland to a nearby charted anchorage.

Day 24: *Thursday August 7th 2008*

Position: *77° 27.00' N 21° 12.00' E*

Weather: *Cloudy with some wind*

Location: *Off Kvalpynten, Edgeøya*

We were still sailing around midnight and had just past Kvalpynten on the south west tip of Edgeøya. There was several rock falls from the towering cliffs above one of which was very spectacular leaving clouds of red dust! It was half an hour later before we dropped anchor in Keilhaubukta settling down to our evening meal which was eventually ready at 01.30 hrs. There is no rest bite on this trip and the anchor was up again at 12.30hrs and we were again underway to Delitschøya. It was very windy with quite a swell running and everyone was excited about our plans for the next few days. Our hopes were soon dashed when we observed large tracts of first year pack ice which were consolidated with no openings and as we approached closer it became obvious our path was blocked and there was no way of reaching our destination.

Mark and Nigel discussed the options and going round the outside of it still wouldn't guarantee us getting to our destination. There was nothing else we could do other than return to our previous anchorage and consider our options for the remaining few days. This was a huge disappointment and a low point of the trip for us all.

As most of the islands in the Tusenøyane group were still inaccessible because of ice and also because there was quite a lot of swell with more wind forecast there seemed little point hanging around this area. We had planned to visit Bolscheøya and Aekongen which was now not possible so a plan B was put into place. After considering the weather forecasts the revised plan was to have a good meal then set off immediately and get the long passage across the Storfjorden to the Sørkapp out of the way while we had the wind in the right direction. A four hour watch system was implemented for the next eighteen hours while we undertook the crossing. Mark and Mischa took the first watch as we got underway at around 19.00 hrs.

Day 25: *Friday August 8th 2008*

Position: *77°30.00' N 20°10.00' E*

Weather: *High cloud light winds*

Location: *Storfjorden*

We had a very long sail following the discovery of ice in the east Tjuvjorden area. I had a sleep early and was then on watch from 02.30hrs for three hours. It was a quiet watch the wind died away and we had to take the sails in and motor. Following the watch I went back to bed. Mark and Mischa had a definite sighting of a Humpback whale on their watch which was a first for the trip. We arrived in Sommerfeldtbukta eventually at 00.11hrs and dropped anchor. The cruise ship Stockholm was at anchor in the bay and was dropping people ashore on the east side of the bay. Once we were all up and had breakfast (some of us catnapping at the table as it had after all been a long night) we went ashore on the west side of the bay. The area was a very flat place with lots of ponds but very little life although there was signs that there had been geese and we heard Red throated divers in the distance. The only birds seen were Greater black- backed gull, kittiwakes and Arctic Skuas. The ground at times was very soft and Cecilia lost one of her wellingtons at one point and managed to put her sock into the wet muddy gloop. There was a curse and she shouted that she was "livid" then threw the boot back into the mud. None of us dared to laugh. The walk

took us round the peninsular and back to the shore where we started. We were picked up by Mark and returned to the boat after a fifteen minute zodiac ride. Following our evening meal we managed a reasonably early night.

Day 26: *Saturday August 9th 2008*

Position: *76° 42.00' N° 16 16.00' E*

Weather: *Overcast with limited visibility and light easterly winds.*

Location: *Stormbukta*

Our next destination was to be Stormbukta on the west coast of Spitsbergen but before that we would have to go around the point at Sorkapp. Mark decided that there was enough water and calm enough conditions to risk a shortcut through the narrow passage called the Mesundet. After a bit of tricky navigation between the rocks we were soon through and out onto the west side once more. There was not much swell as we made our way up to Stormbukta which has a very exposed landing beach and made even trickier by all the outlying rocks exposed at low tide. Any wind from the west would definitely prohibit a landing. All was going well until we got close into the shore, suddenly the zodiac engine propeller caught a submerged rock and there was an almighty shudder! Luckily it didn't shear and we managed to row the last few metres to the shore. The scenery around this area was very spectacular with raised beaches and what looked like limestone escarpments. Nigel took us to a very accessible Kittiwake colony that had quite a few birds nesting at low level and was very accessible for photography. This was some consolation after we had missed the larger colony at Diskobukta earlier in the week. The slopes under the cliffs were very green and Scurvy grass seemed to be growing everywhere. It was not long before we had a visit from a young arctic fox that was scavenging in every nook and cranny under the cliffs.

As the landing was exposed Nigel did not want to spend too long ashore so we had a brief look around the ruins of a nearby hut, which was supposed to have been a former German radio station, although this could not be confirmed.

We made our way back to the shore and to the entrance of a cave that had a warm sulphurous torrent running out. After a few quick photos we were picked up by Mark in the zodiac and on our way again. This was one of the trickiest landings of the trip and it was a relief to be back on board safely and underway again. We made our way up into Hornsund and dropped anchor just off the Polish base.

Day 27: *Sunday August 10th 2008*

Position: *77° 00.00' N 15° 32.00' E*

Weather: *Overcast, poor visibility with fog and drizzle*

Location: *Polish research station, Hornsund*

There was a brief glimpse of the sun as Nigel took us all ashore in the zodiac Mark had opted to do some jobs onboard Jonathan throughout the morning. We were not sure if any of the scientists would be up as it was quite early and a Sunday morning of course. However it was not long before we were spotted and kindly invited into the station for morning coffee and cake with the friendly staff. We were given a full guided tour of the station, which was incredibly well organised before finishing off with a walk down to point which is the site of a former whaling station and a place where the staff on the base have a memorial and place for quiet meditation. The weather was changing to drizzle and low cloud as we boarded Jonathan again. Mark

then repositioned the yacht further up the fjord just off Sofiebogen, which is directly under the towering cliffs covered with thousands of seabirds.

The plan was to visit a fox den that had been used regularly over the last few years. Nigel had got some particular close up shots here last year. As luck would have it the den located under some massive boulders was not in use this year so we drew a blank. Even more surprising was that we did not even see a fox anywhere, maybe the trappers had cleaned them out as the nearby hut is regularly used. We did manage to get close to a flock of Barnacle geese grazing among the boulders to get a few good shots. We made our way up along the shoreline of the fjord to a small lagoon that served as a bathing place for thousands of Kittiwakes. Mark then picked us up in the zodiac off a much more accessible shingle beach.

We had just got back on board Jonathan and started removing all our wet gear when Danny shouted out excitedly “Beluga, Beluga” There were five to six of them feeding close inshore and closely following the shoreline. We pulled up the anchor in haste and tried to follow them but it was in vain. After about an hour of searching we eventually gave up and headed for the lagoon behind Ammonittoya our new anchorage for the night.

Day 28: *Monday 11th August 2008*

Position: 77° 01.00' N 16° 22.00' E

Weather: *Light drizzle, overcast and calm*

Location: *Ammonittøya, Hornsund*

After a long sleep we started to stir around 11.00hrs. The weather was still dull and overcast so we decided to explore more of the fjord with Jonathan.

Firstly we motored up to see the Hornglacier. This was a beautiful area with very high cliffs but because of the low fog we could not see much of the surrounding peaks.

After that we crossed into Burgerbukta to another superb glacier. This one was very active and regularly calving off big chunks. It was not long before a huge section calved with a resultant tidal wave. We were of course a safe distance away but it was none the less a spectacular sight.

After that it was time to leave Hornsund and make our way back up to Isfjorden once again. It was nearly 19.00hrs before we were eventually out of the fjord as we pushed on to Trygghamna and Alkhornet through the night.

Day 29: *Tuesday 12th August 2008*

Position: 78° 14.50' N 13° 51.00' E

Weather: *High winds and heavy rain*

Location: *Trygghamna, Isfjorden*

We had arrived at Trygghamna in the early hours and there were also two other yachts at anchor in the bay. The wind was blowing hard from the north with a big swell running and obviously everyone had the same idea and needed somewhere to hide.

We had just got there in time and sailing through the night had proved a good move. Everyone was very tired and it was well after midday before anyone started moving, Nigel had planned to take everyone up to the seabird cliffs at Alkhornet in a last ditch attempt to secure some pictures of Arctic fox but as the weather was so appalling it was decided to stay aboard. The rain never let up all day so the opportunity was missed.

Day 30: *Wednesday 13h August 2008*

Position: *78° 10.00' N 15° 20.00' E*

Weather: *High winds and swell decreasing throughout the day*

Location: *Trygghamna to Longyearbyen, Isfjorden*

We were awoken around 02.30 hrs by the sound of the anchor alarm as we seemed to be dragging quite considerably as the wind had shifted. The neighbouring yacht simultaneously came on the radio in a bigger panic than us but once they noticed we were awake they went quiet. Mark wound in the anchor as then moved position and re anchored. This time it held very well and we managed to sleep the rest of the night. The wind had abated somewhat by morning as we set sail on the last leg of the trip for Longyearbyen. It was a brisk sail with certain sadness among us that the trip was coming to an end and our adventure was nearly over. We entered the small wharf at 15.00hrs and after a last lunch loaded all our gear into the minibus and set off for the hotel. We had a farewell dinner at 20.00 hrs at the Base camp restaurant in town before saying our final farewells.

And though the soil of the whale of the remote country of Spitsbergen does not produce vegetables suitable or sufficient for the nourishment of a single human being yet its coasts and adjacent seas have afforded riches and independence to thousands.

-William Scoresby, An account of the Arctic riches (1826)



Arctic Terns on ice

Danny Green

List of Birds Seen:

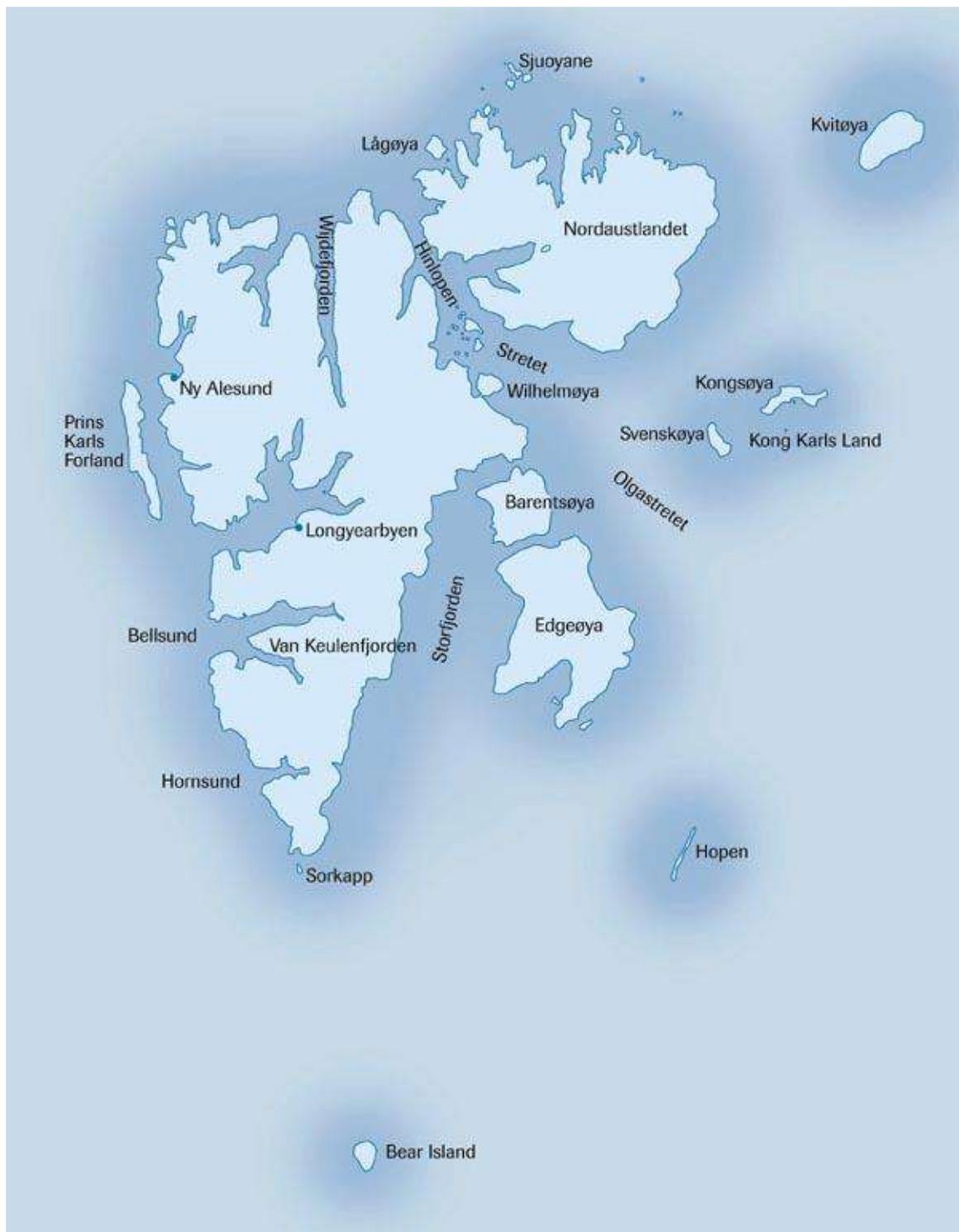
Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>
Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>
Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>
Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>
Pale-bellied Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla hrota</i>
Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>
Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>
Rock Ptarmigan	<i>Lagopus mutus</i>
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
Purple Sandpiper	<i>Calidris maritima</i>
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
Grey Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus fulicaria</i>
Arctic Skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>
Long-tailed Skua	<i>Stercorarius longicaudus</i>
Great Skua	<i>Catharacta skua</i>
Glaucous Gull	<i>Larus hyperboreus</i>
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>
Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>
Ivory Gull	<i>Pagophila eburnea</i>
Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>
Brünnich's Guillemot	<i>Uria lomvia</i>
Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>
Black Guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>
Little Auk	<i>Alle alle</i>
Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>
Snow Bunting	<i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>

List of Mammals Seen:

Arctic Fox	<i>Alopex lagopus</i>
Polar Bear	<i>Thalartos maritimus</i>
Atlantic Walrus	<i>Odobenus rosmarus</i>
Ringed Seal	<i>Pusa hispida</i>
Bearded Seal	<i>Erignathus barbatus</i>
Northern Minke Whale	<i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i>
Beluga	<i>Delphinapterus leucas</i>
Svalbard Reindeer	<i>Rangifer tarandus latyrhynchus</i>
Humpback Whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>
Harbour Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>

List of Flowering Plants Seen:

Polar Willow	<i>Salix polaris</i>
Snow Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus nivalis</i>
Mountain Avens	<i>Dryas octopetala</i>
Purple Saxifrage	<i>Saxifraga oppositifolia</i>
Bog Saxifrage	<i>Saxifraga hirculus</i>
Drooping Saxifrage	<i>Saxifraga cernua</i>
Tufted Saxifrage	<i>Saxifraga cespitosa</i>
Spider Plant	<i>Saxifraga flagellaris</i>
Svalbard Poppy	<i>Papaver dahlianum</i>
Mountain Sorrel	<i>Oxyria digyna</i>
Moss Campion	<i>Silene acaulis</i>
Arctic Bell-heather	<i>Cassiope tetragona</i>
Hairy Lousewort	<i>Pedicularis hirsuta</i>
Woolly Lousewort	<i>Pedicularis dasyantha</i>
Scurvy-Grass	<i>Cochlearia officinalis</i>
Arctic Mouse-ear Chickweed	<i>Cerastium arcticum</i>
Yellow Arctic whitlow-grass	<i>Draba bellii</i>
Knotweed	<i>Polygonum viviparum</i>
Fringed Sandwort	<i>Arenaria pseudofrigida</i>
Arctic chickweed	<i>Stellaria humifusa</i>
Nodding Lychnis	<i>Silene wahlbergella</i>
Bog saxifrage	<i>Saxifraga hirculus</i>
Tufted saxifrage	<i>Saxifraga cespitosa</i>
Arctic Cottongrass	<i>Eriophorum scheuchzeri</i>



Total distance covered on trip:
1233 nautical miles

