



Jewels of the Arctic



17 – 30 August 2019 | Polar Pioneer



About Us

Aurora Expeditions embodies the spirit of adventure, travelling to some of the most wild and remote places on our planet. With over 27 years' experience, our small group voyages allow for a truly intimate experience with nature.

Our expeditions push the boundaries with flexible and innovative itineraries, exciting wildlife experiences and fascinating lectures. You'll share your adventure with a group of like-minded souls in a relaxed, casual atmosphere while making the most of every opportunity for

adventure and discovery. Our highly experienced expedition team of naturalists, historians and destination specialists are passionate and knowledgeable – they are the secret to a fulfilling and successful voyage.

Whilst we are dedicated to providing a 'trip of a lifetime', we are also deeply committed to education and preservation of the environment. Our aim is to travel respectfully, creating lifelong ambassadors for the protection of our destinations.



DAY 1 | Saturday, 17 August 2019

Reykjavik

Position: 21:15 hours
Latitude: 64°25'N
Longitude: 22° 530'W

Course: 291°
Speed: 12.1 knots

Wind Speed: 13 knots
Wind Direction: NE

Barometer: 999.9 hPa & steady
Air Temp: 12°C
Sea Temp: 6°C

The streets of Reykjavik were striped with rainbows, being gay pride week, with locals, visitors, storefronts, waiters and even city flags adorned in rainbow colours. Some of our adventurers got swept along by the throng of the afternoon Parade, and while the streets were humming with revelry, tourist activity and al fresco dining, our good ship *Polar Pioneer* waited excitedly at the dock to welcome us on a sunny, windy Reykjavik afternoon.

After being greeted by Expedition Leader Christian and Deputy Expedition Leader Robyn who checked us off, nabbed our passports and sent us off for a mug shot, we made our way up the gangway to find our cabins and settle in.

Onboard we total 53 passengers, 19 of whom have travelled with Aurora Expeditions before. All up we represent Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, along with our 21 Russian and 1 Ukraine crew men and women, and our Aurora team of twelve from Australia, New Zealand Finland, Philippines, Switzerland and Russia. It certainly is a multicultural ship's complement!

Once aboard, Expedition Leader Christian Genillard called us together in the bar for an introductory briefing where he talked about our plans for the coming days and introduced the Aurora team, some of whom have regularly worked aboard *Polar Pioneer* since its 2001 maiden season with Aurora Expeditions.

After a mandatory safety briefing it was time to don bulky orange life vests and pile into the two lifeboats for a safety drill. With the hatches closed, we started up the engines to gain the spatial and auditory ambience of a polar class life vessel.

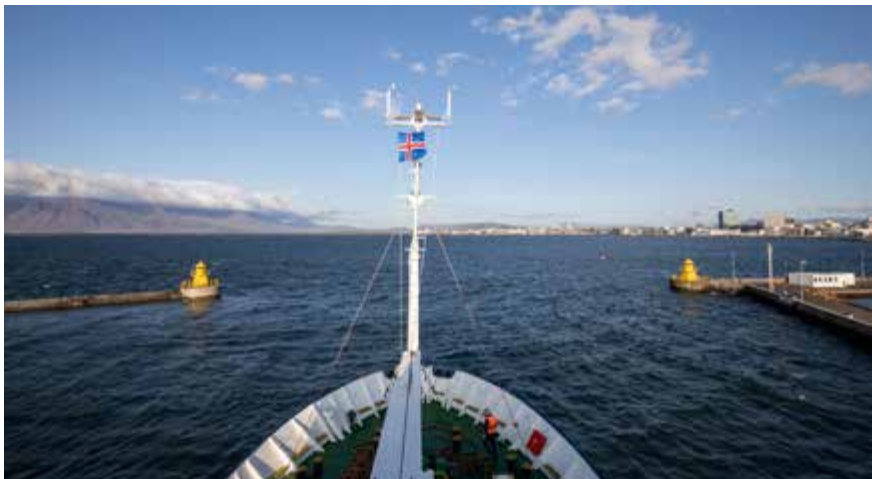
At 1900 we slipped our moorings, reversed away from the dock and made our way out of the sheltered harbour. The town of Reykjavik, its old, stately landmarks and uber modern architecture, receded into the distance. The pilot boat soon pulled alongside, our Icelandic pilot scampered down the rope ladder, stepped across to his boat and was spirited away.

We sat down in the dining rooms for a first dinner together, and met our two talented chefs Al and Bert, and stewardesses Sasha and Kat.

A spot of jacket exchanging took place in the evening, and our six kayakers took the opportunity to get together for a briefing and fit out with kayaking guide Daniel.

We felt the first bit of movement under our hull as we moved to open sea, though still gaining protection from Iceland's coast. We took a turn right and set a course almost due north for Greenland.





DAY 2 | Sunday, 18 August 2019

Denmark Strait

Position:	21:30 hours	Course:	10°	Wind Speed:	Calm	Air Temp:	4°C
Latitude:	68°14'N	Speed:	12 knots	Barometer:	1010.6 hPa & steady	Sea Temp:	4°C
Longitude:	23° 07'W						

Ours was a day at sea following a night with a bit of rock and roll thrown in as we plowed into northerly winds.

We had a good showing at breakfast, though for a few, the mention of porridge or eggs and bacon saw a dive toward the basket of dry toast and crackers. Nevertheless, when we made the announcement for Michael Bayne’s *Introduction to Photography* presentation, the lecture room soon filled with avid photographers. This was a lecture for everyone, from beginner to semi-professional, from phones to compact cameras to high end digital SLRs, where the triangle of Shutter Speed, Aperture and ISO suddenly made sense with visual comparisons to illustrate the results of different settings, speeds and depths of field.

Michael spoke with good authority on the advantages of sound composition and took us through a series of images to help us understand focal points, the rule of thirds (and when to break that rule), leading lines, and magic moments when an animal or bird makes eye contact with the camera. Immediately after the lecture we grabbed our smartphones and headed up to the bar for a workshop on settings and functions.

Video, slowmo, panos, time lapse, gridlines, zoom features: who knew a phone camera had so much power and so many nifty options! [Photographer beware when taking your precious phone out on the Zodiacs lest cold fingers and a slippery phone end in tears, with your phone committed to the deep!]

Dr Gary was next to join the educational circuit for a FAB presentation on the seabirds, shore birds and land birds we hope to encounter through the course of our Jewels of the Arctic voyage. Of the Northern fulmar, the last of Arctic seabirds to migrate south at the start of winter, we learned how its tube-nose enables a phenomenal sense of smell. Fulmars can detect volatile oils from seafood prey from many kilometres away.

Gary also told us other tidbits about bird behaviour, such as how an Arctic skua will feign a broken wing, leading its predator away from its nest so as to protect its eggs or chicks. Gary had us all petrified at the prospect of our skulls being pierced by the needle-sharp beak of an Arctic tern. Stand beside someone taller!

We forged northward, inching our way across the Denmark Strait. After a delicious lunch our afternoon was busy with preparatory briefings—environmental, safety in polar bear territory, and Zodiac operations. Will we ever remember all those sequences in getting on and off the ship? Thankfully, the Aurora team is here to assist!

The seas eased in good time for Captain’s Welcome drinks. Captain Aleksandr ‘Sasha’ Evgenov has been working on *Polar Pioneer* since its maiden voyage with Aurora Expeditions in 2001 and knows our vessel and polar destinations inside out. Captain wished us all good things for our voyage and was happy to chat about the workings of the ship. It was also a lovely opportunity to chat with fellow shipmates, enjoy Justine’s delicious punch and wile away the hour before a tasty dinner.





Hall Bredning, Bjørneøer, Sydkap

Position:	19:15 hours	Course:	10°	Wind Speed:	Calm	Air Temp:	4°C
Latitude:	71°14'N	Speed:	12 knots	Barometer:	1010.6 hPa & steady	Sea Temp:	4°C
Longitude:	23° 07'W						

Christian’s morning wake-up call announced our arrival at Greenland. We passed by Kap Dalton on the southern side of Scoresby Sund, the world’s largest and longest fjord system at 70°30’N, which we will explore during coming days. On the northern side of the mouth of Scoresby Sund is the small town of Ittoqqortoormiit, the most northerly town on the eastern coast of Greenland and 800 kms distant from its closest southern neighbour Tasilaq. Ittoqqortoormiit is a Greenlandic name translating to ‘those who live in the big houses’. Scoresby Sund itself is a massive fjord more than 50 kilometres across, while its network of subsidiary fjords extends inland for as far as 313 kms, edging against the Greenland Ice Cap.

With the flat calm conditions, Michael took the opportunity to run a seabird photo workshop out on deck, helping the keen photographers adjust their camera settings to suit the mode of photography.

Gary drew a crowd with his talk on Arctic mammals, walking us through the lifecycle of the mighty polar bear, *Ursus maritimus*, and introducing us to other species we hope to encounter during our voyage such as muskox, Arctic hare, Svalbard reindeer, and even the tiny stoat which makes a rare appearance here in north-east Greenland.

The middle part of Scoresby Sund is named Hall Bredning, and as we cruised north east through this tranquil stretch of water we were introduced to some of the massive Greenlandic Icebergs which calve from glaciers many, many miles to the west. Daugaard-Jensen Glacier is one of the most active, moving forward at a rate of 10 metres per day. The frozen behemoths drift down the fjord for hundreds of miles, some of them grounding in Hall Bredning, even though the waterway is a whopping 400 metres deep.



By mid afternoon we had reached Bjørneøer, Bear Islands, and it was here that we took our first exciting outing in Zodiacs. We congregated at the entry of a lagoon at the base of the Devil’s Teeth where we entered a quiet lagoon at the base of the peaks. Here we came ashore for a brief stop, ambling over rolling undulations thick with tundra: Arctic bell heather with lemony-white flowers, beds of crowberry and blueberry amongst forest patches of birch and polar willow. And what a view.

Zodiacs headed off to the next bay for views of more massive icebergs which drift in to Bjørneøer’s quiet bays from surrounding fjords. Enroute, Michael’s Zodiac spotted four Muskox, two on a low ridge line and two on the skyline. All of us had views of these prehistoric creatures before they bounded away, no doubt wary of humans given that their island home is a hunting ground for Ittoqqortoormiit. Eiders were in great numbers along these tranquil shores, with a flock flying over, and small ducklings dotting the water.

Winding our way back through more islands, we glided past tundra lush with polar willow, Arctic bell heather, Alpine bistort, blueberry and roseroot. Our small kayaking fleet had a marvellous first paddle, exploring the easternmost islands.

No rest for the wicked. After a delicious dinner we were back out into it, this time at Sydkap, the bergs offshore bathed in gilded evening light, to wander amongst the remains of a paleoe-skimo site, and take a leisurely walk along the coastline. Among the paleo gravesites two were partially open to reveal lichen-encrusted human skulls and bones. We wended our way back to our good ship, pausing to view the bizarre sight of a dead fox floating in the water, as the orb of sun dipped below the mountains.







DAY 4 | Tuesday, 20 August 2019

Røde Ø, Renodde

Position: 20:45 hours
Latitude: 70°27'N
Longitude: 26° 57'W

Course: 89°
Speed: 10.8 knots

Wind Speed: Calm
Barometer: 1010.6 hPa & steady
Air Temp: 10°C
Sea Temp: 3°C

What a place! What a day, that started in a big way at Røde Ø, Red Island, aptly named for its geology of Devonian ‘Old Red’ sandstone. Our Aussies were waxing lyrical, likening it to ‘The Rock’ and wondering how this monolith might compare size wise to that iconic ‘Down Under’ landmark Ayers Rock/Uluru. Uluru takes the ranking as the world’s largest monolith at 348 metres high with a 9-km circumference. Røde Ø is approximately 120 metres high with a 4.8-km circumference. What a treat to see this smaller ‘cousin’, but how entirely weird to have it surrounded by icebergs!

First off we inspected the mafic dyke where lava once intruded through the sedimentary layers of red sandstone and cooled into a structure of basaltic columns. These columns create a slice of dark columnar rock cutting through the side of the island.

And then there were the icebergs. So many! The maze of icebergs originates from two large nearby glaciers: Døde Brae in Vestfjord off Røde Fjord, and Rolige Brae off Røde Fjord. While Røde Ø is something of a resting place for icebergs, there was no shortage of might with some bergs reaching up to 60 or more metres in height. There was also some ‘heavy artillery’ going off in the form of calvings, with some lucky enough to see these events.

While the eastern side of Røde Ø is largely barren, with only pockets of vegetation and pairs of glaucous gulls perched on lofty nests, the western side is carpeted with lush tundra. We went ashore on a quiet beach to hike through the tundra to a headland that overlooked the frozen vista. Along the way we found vacated eider nests, and a carpet of tundra turning with the autumn colours. Of the three berries that grow in NE Greenland—blueberry, crowberry and bear berry—bear berry is outstanding in Fall for its brilliant red leaves, while the polar willow turns golden, and dwarf birch with its small serrated leaves, turns reds and yellows.

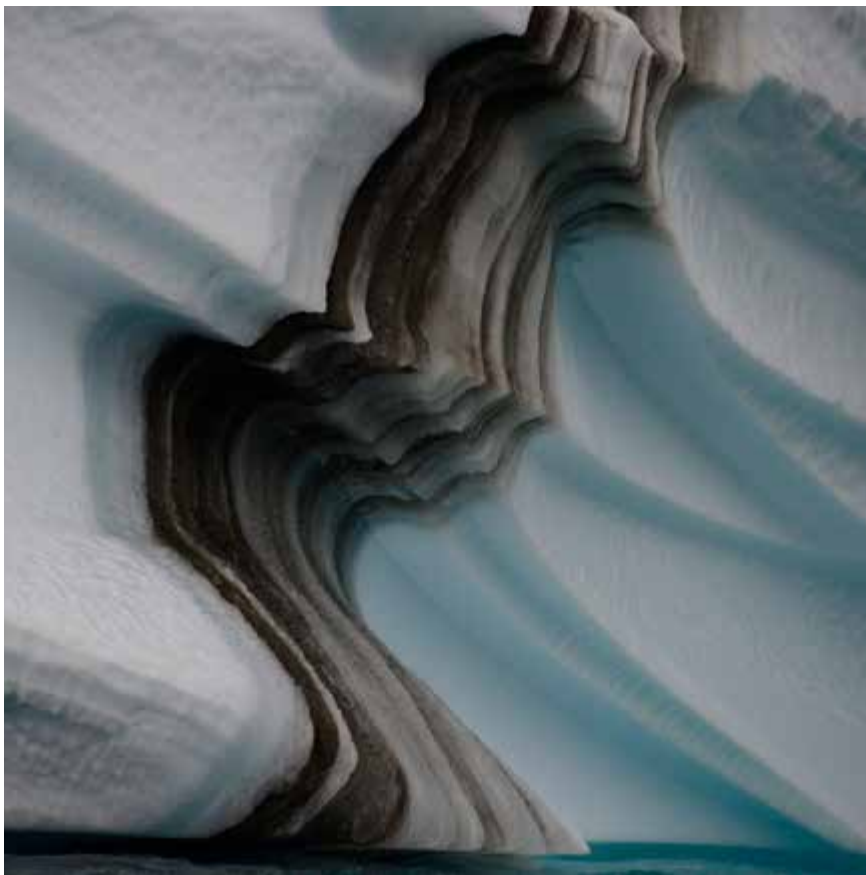
Daniel’s kayaking fleet made their way through the ice and came ashore at a small ice-studded cove where they climbed to a high point to gaze down at the wonderful labyrinth of ice.

Back onboard, after a scrumptious curry lunch, we headed out to nearby Renodde, Reindeer Point, for some special time on the tundra. Our walks took us along the coastline, past small tarns, and through some of the most prolific tundra. We saw plenty of evidence of it being premium muskox grazing territory with muskox droppings and tufts of qiviut wool, wherever we looked. Muskox have an outer layer of coarse guard hair, growing up to 60 cms in length, while beneath is the world’s softest, finest wool called qiviut, its insulating properties equalled only by eider down. It is common to see qiviut snagged on vegetation, or even on rocks where a musk ox had had a good back or bottom rub.

During our walks we visited a remarkable neo eskimo site—perhaps a gravesite, perhaps a cache, distinctly shaped in the form of a sea kayak. We can only speculate on the meaning of such a seemingly reverent object that has endured for centuries: perhaps it was the resting place of a formidable inuit hunter.

Some took a cruise to the junction of Vestfjord and were lucky enough to watch an iceberg fully roll in slow-motion ballet!

No sooner had we stepped back onboard than 17 unhinged passengers, and 4 certifiable staff and crew, proceeded to hurl themselves off a perfectly good ship into the frigid fjord. Thankfully all plungers returned.



DAY 5 | Wednesday, 21 August 2019

Ittoqqortoormiit

Position:	21:30 hours	Course:	313°	Wind Speed:	16 knots	Barometer:	1013.3 hPa & steady
Latitude:	71°46'N	Speed:	12 knots	Wind Direction:	SSE	Air Temp:	6°C
Longitude:	21° 40'W					Sea Temp:	3°C

At the mouth of Scoresbysund the coastal village of Ittoqqortoormiit sits on a hillside studded with small, colourful Danish-style houses, home to ~370 East Greenlanders and 50–70 sledging dogs.

In 1924, due to the driving force of Ejnar Mikkelsen Miki, a ship left Copenhagen for Scoresbysund, laden with building materials and provisions. A wintering party of seven was left to begin work on the construction. The following year 85 Greenlanders arrived from Ammasalik, a village 800 kms south. These pioneers formed the basis of today’s settlement.

On our arrival, bands of sea mist obscured part of the village, but soon gave way to blue skies. Robyn handed out town maps and we set off to explore, but first stop was the sledge dog feeding. In winter the working dogs are fed every two days but in summer, the resting months, they feed every third day. Because of a shortage of fresh meat this summer, the dogs’ diet consists of dry kibble supplemented with occasional meals of fresh seal or narwhal. Adult dogs are chained while puppies run free. We headed off in all directions, some to the small museum with its array of artefacts and kayaking memorabilia.

Nearly everyone took part in a spot of souvenir shopping, and stopped by the tent to sample muskox and watch Ruth spinning qiviut, the light, soft underwool of muskox. Some followed the high road up to Charcot’s memorial plaque and on to the soccer field, others wandered over to the hospital to say Hello. The police van arrived on the dock to stamp our passports. The local constabulary consists of a Danish senior officer posted up here for a year or two, and a local inuit officer. Many made the hike up the wooden steps and winding gravel road to the Met station to watch the release of the weather balloon, and to view the black and white photographic exhibition portraying the faces of the people of Ittoqqortoormiit.

Ittoqqortoormiit’s structure is based on the Danish social model, with free health care and schooling. The government owns the main supermarket and other facilities. The tax rate in Ittoqqortoormiit is 42% and the cost of living is high. Many choose to live here because of their strong affinity with the natural environment, and an aversion to city life.

Back in 1925 nearly all the village men were hunters. In the year 2001 when Aurora Expeditions was the first tourist vessel to visit the township, there were 50 licensed hunters. In 2019 there are 10. Hunting restrictions are rigid with the annual quota of 35 polar bears already met this season. A bear skin was stretched and hanging in the dry open air, along with muskox hides from a quota of 70 muskox. All food caught is sold or shared locally.

We returned to our good ship for lunch as we motored out of Scoresbysund. During the afternoon Michael met with our keen photographers for a workshop on lighting, and working with our cameras to make the most of light conditions. During the afternoon sea mist waxed and waned and occasional seabirds joined our course.

Before dinner we met in the bar for a recap, with a reminder that later in the evening our clocks were advanced by one hour to GMT/UTC +1. During the night *Polar Pioneer* set a course north to new adventures in Kong Oscar and Keyser Franz Josef Fjords.







DAY 6 | Thursday, 22 August 2019

Skipperdalen (Gateau Point), Vega Sund

Position:	21:00 hours	Course:	257°	Wind Speed:	8 knots	Barometer:	1013.3 hPa & steady
Latitude:	72°52'N	Speed:	10 knots	Wind Direction:	ENE	Air Temp:	12°C
Longitude:	24° 24'W					Sea Temp:	6°C

Skipperdalen, or Gateau Point as it is colloquially known, is nothing short of a geologist’s nirvana. Even for those of us who don’t spend much time pondering rocks and geological epochs, the sedimentary striations of the cliffs at Skipperdalen, and at the shore where we landed, were awe-inspiring. In morning light we went ashore to gaze upon this brilliant artwork of nature. Between 600 and 900 million years ago, sediments in fine layers of sandstone, mudstone, limestone, etc, were laid down on the floor of a shallow sea less than 200 metres deep, and continued to be laid down at the same depth for the next 300 million years. In eras to come, over a long geological time, intense pressure was applied to this sedimentary rock at the same time as it was slowly uplifted into an extensive mountain range, the layers twisting and folding as if they were plastic, in places breaking and faulting, to create what we now witnessed for ourselves on either side of the fjord, some layers at a 90° tilt to the opposite shore.

We took the opportunity to explore the region on foot, the long walkers heading off with Jukka and Febe, the medium walkers taking a stroll with Robyn, Christian, JB and Michael, and the beach combers spending time with Gary to learn more about the remarkable geology.

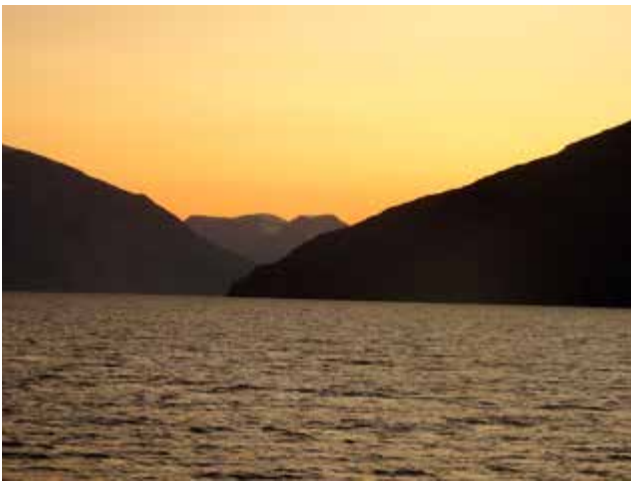
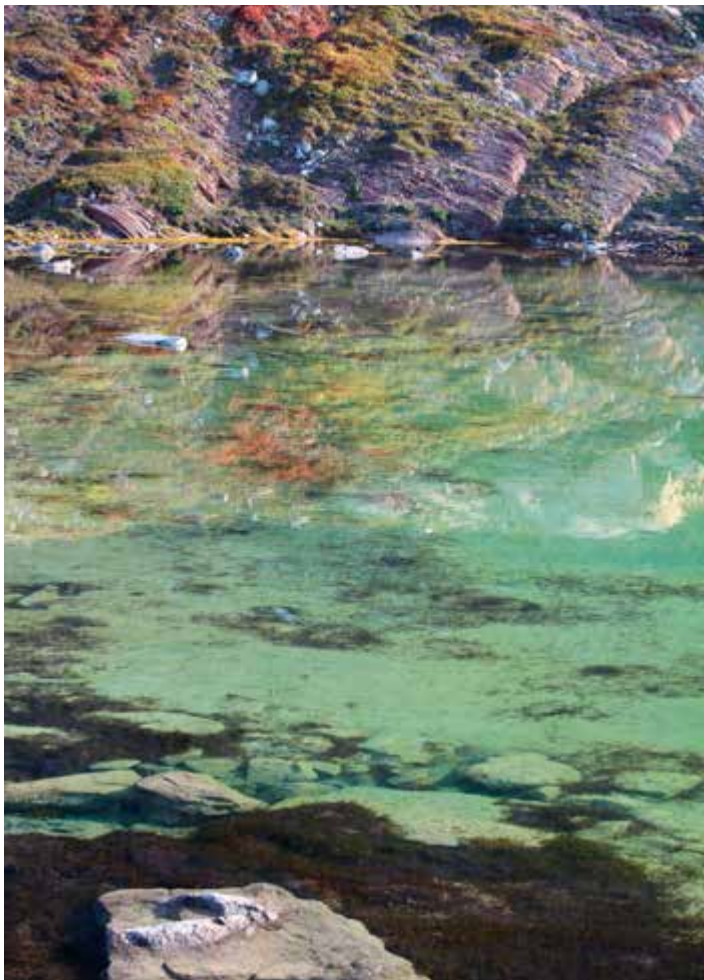
Each group had its own discoveries, the long walkers reaching an inland tarn and reveling in the magnificent views, the medium walkers stopping for close up views of red-leaved willowherb, purple saxifrage and mosses, then finding vantage points with Michael for photographs, the beach combers taking leisurely time to enjoy the vista and soak in the sounds of red throated divers, along with the silence and immensity of the fjord.

Daniel’s kayaking fleet were out in force and hugged the coastline, finally coming ashore for a wander up the valley where they, too, could take in birds-eye views of the fjord.

We returned to the ship for a delectable Philippino lunch – thanks Al and Bert – then came a radio call from Alex, an Aurora kayaking guide who was working in the region assisting a geology group, and making use of a small trapper’s hut in nearby Vega Sund. They had arrived back to their campsite to find their belongings strewn and torn apart by a bear, and the end window of the hut destroyed. The team were safe and after asking more about the location, we opted for a change of plan and headed down Vega Sund in the hope of seeing Mr Bear.

Along the way we spotted over 25 muskox, impressed that in this relatively barren landscape these large animals find sufficient vegetation to forage on.

We dropped off the paddlers to see if they could catch up to us, then reached the trapper’s hut in the late afternoon and went ashore. Our rifle guards carefully checked the surrounds and even made sure that the hut was not home to a resident bear! Once we had the all-clear we went ashore where we inspected large bear prints in the sand. We visited the tiny hut, built in 1929 by a Norwegian trapper and named Solveigs Hytte —Solveig’s Hut—in honour of his wife. This pint-sized dwelling would have been used as a satellite hut and with its single bunk, stove and coal supply, would have made a warm and welcome refuge in the winter months when trapping was in full swing. Our mighty kayaking team set to for some running repairs to the smashed window, boarding it up with limited materials and tools. Bravo, paddlers!



Attestuppan, Kjeruff Fjord, Blomsterbugten

Position:	22:15 hours	Course:	110°	Wind Speed:	Calm	Air Temp:	8°C
Latitude:	73°23'N	Speed:	10.4 knots	Barometer:	1005.3 hPa & steady	Sea Temp:	7°C
Longitude:	23° 53'W						

Up and at 'em, came Christian's call at 0530. The keen photographers clambered down the gangway at Attestuppan in the western reaches of Keyser Franz Joseph Fjord for a cracking dawn cruise. The cliffs behind the ship rise close to 2,000 metres from the waterline, while all around us, lofty peaks offered the promise of sunrise with their snow-covered tips turning pink with alpen glow. Michael set us straight with camera and exposure tips, and we focused our lenses and smart phones on the stately blue icebergs with their arches and frills, set against a mountainous background. The fjord remained gilded with the early light and whichever way we turned we found a new photo opp'. All too soon the call came over the radio that breakfast was anon: time to head home.

Our good ship made its way further west to the junction of Kjeruff Fjord for a short morning Zodiac cruise. Those who were hemming and hawing about whether they would head back out or take a nap, were so glad they chose to come, not only for the stunning bergs and mirror calm waters casting perfect reflections, but, lo and behold, a polar bear sighting. Yes! Our ace bear spotter Jukka made the call over the radio and all Zodiacs hot-tailed it to see a bear on the slopes engaged in eating a muskox!

This was a first for all of the Aurora team and we could only imagine how the musk ox met its untimely end. Strangely, other muskox wandered and grazed quite close to the bear, seemingly unperturbed or perhaps knowing that while he was feasting there was no immediate threat. Not only was it a phenomenal experience to see a bear in its natural habitat, and to see it in the midst of such a primal event, but as a reminder that even far, far west in the Greenland fjords, a bear may well be present.

Our cruisers also had the treat of seeing a pair of male musk ox take part in jousting, preparing themselves for the day when, as adult males, the dominance of the herd will be determined through battle, sometimes to the death.

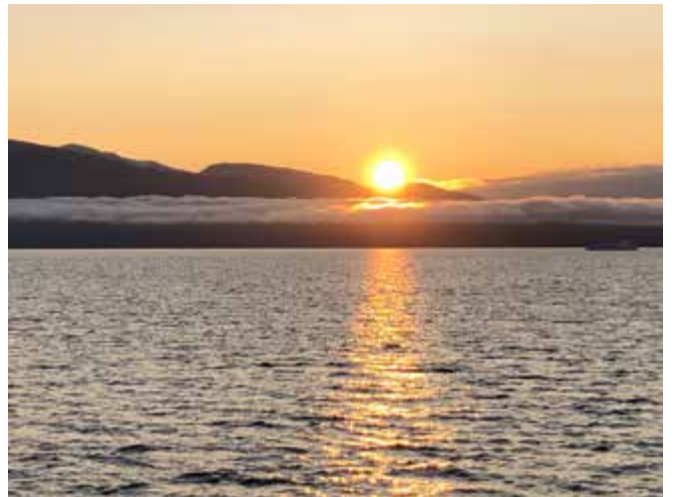
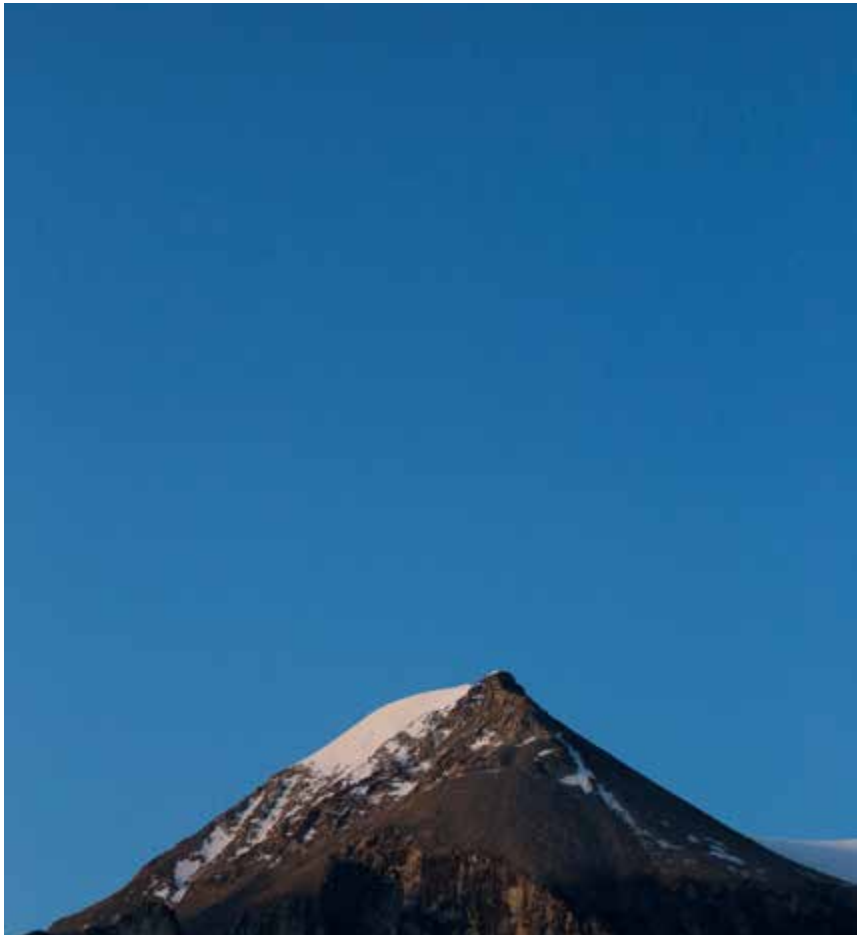
Back onboard we gathered on the flying bridge for a group photo, before relocating to the bow for a delicious al fresco lunch. Our wonderful galley team had prepared homemade pizza, salads, turkey and lamb. What a meal! What a backdrop as our ship motored eastward to Ymers Island for a late afternoon landing at Blomsterbugten.

But before we headed out, Christian brought us together to show us the sea ice chart and a severe wind forecast for our Greenland Sea crossing to Svalbard. We supported his proposal that we leave Greenland a day ahead of schedule to beat the storm, then in return spend an additional day in Svalbard, hopefully in the northern pack ice.

At Blomsterbugten we split into three groups. The two hiking groups headed over to Lake Noa for beautiful views of a lake that is visually striking for its pink hue resulting from red sandstone particulates suspended in the water. Our long walkers had good muskox viewings and even spotted an Arctic hare at a distance.

We arrived home in time for a wonderful BBQ on the back deck. Delicious fare, party hats, retro music, dance moves: a perfect way to finish a big day out.







DAY 8 | Saturday, 24 August 2019

Eskimonaes, Greenland Sea

Position: 22:00 hours
Latitude: 74°01'N
Longitude: 14° 18'W

Course: 70°
Speed: 8.2 knots

Wind Speed: 10 knots
Wind Direction: ESE

Barometer: 1013.3 hPa & falling
Air Temp: 4°C
Sea Temp: 5°C

After a big dance night out on the back deck, we were grateful for a late breakfast which began with hushed tones and a few sore heads. But with no rest for the wicked, soon after breakfast we layered up and headed out to our morning destination at beautiful Eskimonaes. The wind was blasting which put paid to our paddlers’ outing, but once in the lea of the headland we came ashore at a quiet sandy beach to explore this natural and historic site.

A traditional cabin still stands and is frequently used by SIRIUS Patrol, along with their contemporary, though less picturesque orange hut. The surrounds, with the burnt out remains of a former hut, give a clue to a chapter of conflict from World War II days.

Robyn explained that for East Greenland it was a war over weather, with several attempts by Germany to set up a secret meteorological station along Greenland’s east coast. Their first attempt at Kap Biot in 1941 was discovered and destroyed, which led to Greenland enlisting a group of Danish and Norwegian trappers to form the Greenland Sledge Patrol Service whereby, in addition to hunting and trapping, they would patrol the coastline by dog sledge and report any suspicious behavior, using a newly built cabin and radio station at Eskimonaes as their base. In 1943 the trappers discovered that the Germans had set up a meteorological station on nearby Sabine Island.

The Germans, led by Austrian Herman Ritter who had spent several seasons as a trapper in Svalbard and knew the trappers as friends and colleagues, realized themselves unveiled and needed to act quickly to stop the word getting out. They attacked Eskimonaes and set light to the base. Members of the Sledge Patrol managed to escape; however, one Danish trapper was shot and killed, which greatly affected Ritter. The Germans captured two others trappers and Ritter was enlisted with taking one of the prisoners down to Scoresbysund by dog sledge. Along the way they traded places and Ritter became prisoner while his old trapping companion became captor. Ritter was taken into captivity as an American POW and returned home at the end of the war.

In the early 1950s, after a hiatus, the Sledge Patrol Service was reinstated and exists today to maintain sovereignty and authority over NE Greenland, under the title of SIRIUS PATROL.

Our hikers enjoyed a breezy but beautiful walk over undulating tundra, stopping to inspect an old fox trap and admiring the surrounding views. The beachcombers took a stroll along the beach, finding many muskox tracks and some fox tracks.

With the wind still blowing strong we headed back to our ship under instruction from Captain Sasha who had turned the ship to give us a lee gangway. Once all aboard we sat down to another tasty lunch and farewelled Greenland as our ship turned out of Keiser Franz Joseph Fjord to set a course to Svalbard.



Greenland Sea

Position:	21:30 hours	Course:	42°	Wind Speed:	9 knots	Barometer:	1013.3 hPa & steady
Latitude:	77°07'N	Speed:	12.2 knots	Wind Direction:	SSW	Air Temp:	6°C
Longitude:	0° 27'W					Sea Temp:	4°C

It’s amazing how much you can fit into a sea day. First off Michael showed us how we might manage all those hundreds, even thousands, of beautiful photos, applying simple star ratings and, with a few simple steps, enhancing the final result. Michael followed up in the bar with the photographers ready to submit to the Photo Competition, and our voyage logbook.

With mild sea conditions Chief Engineer invited engine room tours and we discovered stairwells leading to hot and noisy places we’d never seen before. Six Russian and one Ukrainian crewmen work in the engine room: four engineers, two motormen and an electrical engineer. Like the bridge officers, our engineers work shifts of 4 hours on, 8 hours off.

Polar Pioneer has two 1,590 HP engines which use a total of 8,000 litres of fuel per day when cruising at 11–12 knots. This equates to approximately 335 litres per hour or 14 litres per engine per nautical mile. Two of the three 150-kilowatt diesel generators function continually to generate 300 kilowatts of power. The ship’s boiler holds 5,000 litres of working water used to maintain a cosy ship, to heat water for our use and to heat the main engines.

The ship’s 8 ballast tanks comprise 6 tanks of waste water (140 tons each) and 2 tanks of drinking water (128 tons each); plus 10 tanks of fuel (320 tons each) and 3 tanks of oil (22 tons each). On a voyage with conservative water use, *Polar Pioneer* uses 12.5 tons of water per day.

Up on the bridge we had a flurry of excitement when a blue whale was spotted — with camera in hand Glenn jumped to action to grab a photo of this enormous creature—the largest animal to have ever lived on earth. Another flurry of excitement happened after lunch with the opening of the ship shop. Our eager shoppers filled the bar and went home with some memorabilia of the Arctic.

In the afternoon Gary drew a crowd with a presentation on Arctic whales where we learned about baleen and toothed whales.

With our good ship fanging across the Greenland Sea, Christian followed with a presentation on another good ship—*Fram*—along with the story of the great Norwegian polar explorer Fridtjof Nansen and his remarkable feats of crossing Greenland and attempting to reach the North Pole in the mighty *Fram*.

Our sea day finished well after dinner with some feisty competition in the bar by way of the Arctic Quiz, with our Finnish Quiz Master providing plenty of comic relief!

As we close the distance to Svalbard, our thoughts turn to a wondrous new land. Covering an area almost as big as the Republic of Ireland, the main island of Spitsbergen with its population of 3,500 is still today a virtually unspoiled wilderness. The east coast is influenced by a cold sea current from Siberia and the resulting lower temperatures mean that frequent pack ice even in summer can make access difficult. The west coast is warmed by the Gulf Stream and can be reached by sea in summertime. The period of the midnight sun begins in the second half of April and lasts until the end of August, while the long Arctic night lasts from 28 October to 2 February. Overall, Spitsbergen enjoys a very dry, almost Steppe-like climate, although almost everywhere the subsoil is frozen to a depth up to 400 metres—permafrost. There are few mammal species on Spitsbergen itself; only the arctic fox and reindeer are entirely terrestrial along with a small vole which is restricted to an area near Longyearbyen. All other mammals rely in part at least on the sea—walrus, bearded, harp and ringed seal and, of course, the mighty polar bear.





Smeerenburg, Northern Svalbard pack ice

Position:	22:15 hours	Course:	1°	Wind Speed:	Calm	Air Temp:	6°C
Latitude:	80°12’N	Speed:	6.6 knots	Barometer:	1019.9 hPa & steady	Sea Temp:	6°C
Longitude:	11° 14’E						

It is fascinating to hear about a person’s life in a far-flung place, and Jukka painted an entrancing picture of his time living and working in Svalbard. A place driven by the cycle of the seasons, we learned of the dark months when the sun disappears for over three months, and how perpetual darkness impacts on life and outlook. Conversely, the months when the sun never falls below the horizon are filled with verve and activity; we got to see how the community of Longyearbyen thrives.

By mid morning the coastline of north-west Svalbard was in sight and what a picture it was—sharp mountain peaks for which Spitsbergen is named, powdered in snow, mountain valleys crystalline with glaciers. By mid afternoon we were motoring through Sørgattet, the southern entrance between Danskøya (Danish Island) and the mainland. We took a run up Smeerenburgfjorden to reach the small island of Amsterdamøya (Amsterdam Island) where we went ashore.

Translating to “Blubber Town”, Smeerenburg sits on a low-lying sandy plain, fringed by a lake busy with shorebirds. Here in 1620 the Dutch set up a land-based summer whaling station. The fjords were purported to be ‘boiling with whales’ and it was the slow moving Greenland Right Whale, or Bowhead, which was the desired prize—slow enough to reach by boats and oarsmen, an ample quantity of blubber and baleen, and a whale that would float once killed, enabling it to be tethered to a boat where flensers stripped off the blubber to be taken ashore to boil down to oil in large copper trypots.

Onshore we saw evidence of this process with the rims of blubber ovens still visible 400 years later from where boiling oil had overflown from its pot and congealed with the sand, gravel and brickwork used as a foundation.

Just as exciting was walrus! Five large bulls sporting tusks of various lengths had hauled out on the beach. After feeding on clams (thousands can be consumed in a single day), walrus will come ashore and rest for up to 10 days before returning to sea to forage. Hunted almost to extinction here in Svalbard, they were a valuable resource for their blubber, tusks, and even their skin, so tough that in the industrial era it was used as machinery belts. Since hunting was banned in the mid 1950s, the walrus have made a remarkable comeback on Svalbard and continue to do so.

While we were in the neighborhood we zoomed over to Danskøya to visit a group of harbour seals resting on the shoreline, and perched on rocks in the shallows. While these seals look like tiddly winks compared to a 1,500 kg male walrus, a male adult harbour seal weighs a respectable 100 kgs, while females are around 80 kgs.

We also viewed Virgohamna from the Zodiacs where Christian told us the story of Salomon Andrée’s ill-fated hydrogen balloon quest to the North Pole, which ended in tragedy.

After wending our way back to our cosy ship we headed north for a sublime evening weaving through loose pack ice, the midnight sun tracking low, the ocean glistening with ice and gilded with sunshine. A magnificent way to cross 80° North and top off our first day in Svalbard.





Monacobreen, Bockfjord, Moffen Island

Position:	20:30 hours	Course:	13°	Wind Speed:	31 knots	Barometer:	1010.9 hPa & falling
Latitude:	79°54'N	Speed:	12.5 knots	Wind Direction:	SSE	Air Temp:	8°C
Longitude:	14° 17'E					Sea Temp:	4°C

Our mighty kayakers were on the back deck and raring to launch off for a paddle alongside beautiful Monaco Glacier in Liefdefjorden. Conditions were perfect, without a breath of wind, the bay awash with brash ice from recent glacier calvings. We Zodiacers followed suit and soon enjoyed close up views of vivid blue icebergs before making out way around to the glacier. The Zodiacs turned off engines and parked themselves in a likely looking spot where the blue face of the glacier, alongside an ice cave, indicated a recent calving.

We waited, mesmerised by the sheer scale of the glacier and seracs sprinkled with moraine that give the top of the glacier its ‘rough hewn’ look. Enticing chunks of ice plopped into the water and with each bit of activity kittiwakes and glaucous gulls, along with their large chicks, congregated in the area on the lookout for a fish brought to the surface in the upwelling of water. We even saw a pair of Arctic skuas in flight terrorising a kittiwake for its meal, forcing the kittiwake to drop its catch from its beak.

Finally it happened. All were in place to witness a spectacular calving which sent out a forcible plume of water and spray. A sizable series of waves followed. Our kayakers turned their bows into it and rode the crests and troughs while the Zodiacs bobbed merrily up and down.

We hadn’t progressed much farther along the glacier in Zodiacs when Christian made the call for belugas. Sure enough, in an area where hundreds of kittiwakes had congregated with the upwelling from a river of water flowing out from beneath the glacier, was a pod of white whales. The whales hugged the glacier front and It was tremendous to see the pod porpoising at ease amongst the ice. Belugas are amongst the toothed whales, and at 4.5 metres in length for males, are about the same length as our Zodiacs. Males reach 1500 kgs while females are around 4 metres long and 1200 kgs.

When belugas calves are born they transition from a creamy grey to a dark grey, then start to fade year by year until by age seven females are all white and by age 12 males are all white. Belugas live to ~40 years.

Our kayakers also had a welcome visitor when a handsome bearded seal sporting an impressive moustache popped up close to their craft.

By late morning we were all feeling the chill from ‘the freezer’, enticed back to our ship for a defrosting cuppa.

After another tasty lunch we went ashore at Bockfjord, the site of Svalbard’s singular substantial hot springs. We hiked up the hill to see where 24°-degree water containing many minerals had left a large build-up of precipitation and mineral matter which also coated surrounding rocks.

Our walkers went further afield while our beach combers, in a rising wind, took to the Zodiacs in the hopes of seeing reindeer spotted by the ship’s bridge. Alas, a wet and choppy ride delivered no ‘pot of gold’ at the end, but we felt suitably intrepid and eventually turned tail back to our warm and cosy ship.

We gathered in the bar to chat about the day, then it was down to the dining rooms for a very tasty dinner, thanks to Al, Bert, Cat and Sasha.

In mounting seas we headed north after dinner and on the way passed by Moffen Island. This special nature reserve, a low-lying sickle-shaped strip of land with a sandy beach, is a favourite haulout for walrus, and we were able to view these heavy weights *en masse*.











DAY 12 | Wednesday, 28 August 2019

Northern Svalbard Pack Ice

Position:	21:45 hours	Course:	224°	Wind Speed:	11 knots	Barometer:	1005.3 hPa & falling
Latitude:	80°48′N	Speed:	11 knots	Wind Direction:	SSE	Air Temp:	1°C
Longitude:	16° 42′E					Sea Temp:	1°C

Oh what a beautiful morning; oh what a beautiful day...

Soon after breakfast we were crunching through pack ice in north-east Svalbard in the vicinity of Sjuøyane, the Seven Sisters, a group of seven islands, some named for members of a 1773 British expedition to the area. The most noteworthy is arguably Nelsonøya, named after the great Viscount Horatio Nelson who, in 1773 at the start of his career, served as midshipman on board the *Carcass*, part of the Phipps expedition which visited this remote part of the archipelago. Phippsøya is the largest island in the group; Nelsonøya is the smallest.

We were in amongst strong winds, but with the dampening effect of the sea ice, the only signs of tempest were the big sluggish swell, runnels of wind on open water, and a substantial wind chill when we stepped outside for a photo.

We spent the morning motoring alongside bands of pack ice, those in the bridge with binoculars glued to their eyes in the hopes of seeing a large white mammal.

Our chefs prepared a delicious lunch for us after which we returned to ‘bear watch’. We meandered around Sjuøyane, then followed the sea ice north throughout the afternoon, tracking its nor’westerly arc.

It was super exciting to spot walrus in the water among the ice—a group of five—and in addition a mother with her large pup. Female walruses separate from the herd and give birth alone on the pack ice in May. They then return to the herd and the female resumes foraging. Raising a pup is a long-term procedure, with the pup suckling for 2–3 years. Certainly the pup we saw with its mother was well along in age. The mothers take their young with them on foraging trips, and weaning takes place very slowly.

A tender moment was for us to see the pup wrap its flipper across its mother’s back while she sheperded her young to a comfortable distance. Females are sexually mature at about 10 years of age and will mate about nine months after the birth of their pup. Walrus live to about 40 years.

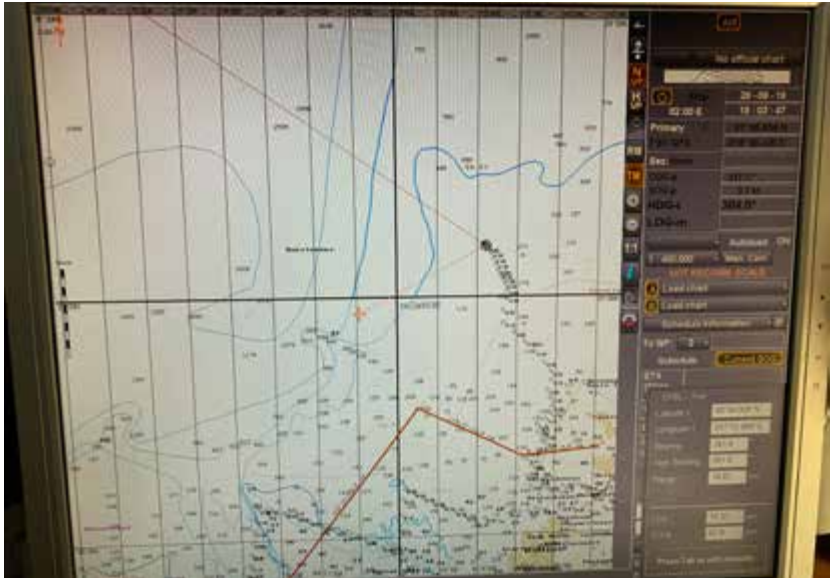
Another wildlife highlight was a group of harp seals, and Gary spoke more about these in his presentation on Arctic seals where we learned that harp seals are highly gregarious and frequently travel in groups—rarely are they seen in solitude.

We also had a good amount of bird life on or about the ice. Northern fulmars revelled in the windy conditions, while kittiwakes settled in numbers on ice floes, and guillemots and little auks bobbed on the water. We even saw a flock of juvenile common guillemots.

A glorious highlight of the day was the light and cloud formations. Lenticular clouds draped the Seven Islands, while the sky was all drama and tone with layers of mid-level cloud. The Arctic light is like no other, and the photographers were making the most of every second as we motored north and then nor’west, hugging the edge of the pack ice in search of a polar bear.

Alas, try as we might, our quest to find a bear was unfulfilled. We did, though, reach the impressive latitude of 81°05.984 North, equating to 989 kilometres shy of the North Pole, and 1,120 kms north of North Cape, the northernmost point of mainland Norway.

At 1830 we turned our nose sou’west, away from the wondrous pack ice and toward a morning destination in Kongsfjord, where new adventures await.



Kongsvegen, Ossian Sarsfjellet

Position:	22:15 hours	Course:	160°
Latitude:	78°31'N	Speed:	11.9 knots
Longitude:	10° 40'E		

We were down to the pointy end of the voyage with a disembarkation briefing and shipboard accounts to settle as we motored into Kongsfjord. We passed by Ny Álesund, a multi-national science research station and historic site, being the launch point for several attempts to the North Pole—Amundsen by sea plane in 1925, Byrd by plane in 1926, and Amundsen again in 1926 who survived his airship crash in Alaska.

By mid morning, with wind and chill in the air, we were out in Zodiacs to explore the frozen expanse of Kongsvegan, the southern part of Kongsbreen (King’s Glacier). This dynamic glacier is divided into north and south sections by the area of land known as Ossian Sarsfjellet. Each section of the glacier is about 4 kms wide.

Dan and his kayakers also launched off for a last glacier paddle, crunching through brash ice, and admiring attractive icebergs, their clear ice often indicative of age, having come from the lower part of the glacier which, under tremendous pressure from the volume of weight above, has most of the air bubbles squeezed out of the ice. Light penetrates deep into clear ice and reflects back only blue light waves, giving the clear ice an often piercing blue, almost luminescent appearance.

Some bergs were literally dripping mud from moraine picked up by the glacier and ferried great distances. The ‘Old Red’ as Devonian Sandstone is called, marks the sedimentary layers in the surrounding mountains, along with fine suspended particles in the water that give the bay its chocolate milk colouring in striking contrast to the blues of the glacier.

We observed plenty of birdlife at the glacier front—glaucous gulls, and hundreds of black-legged kittiwakes congregated at areas of a recent calving.

The contrast between the colour of the water and the piercing blue ice, at its most intense on overcast days, was a photographer’s heaven, as was the large ice cave which issued a couple of good calvings. A katabatic wind whipped down from the far half of the glacier and we all felt our inner temperature start to drop.



Wind Speed:	12 knots	Barometer:	1002.6 hPa & falling
Wind Direction:	ENE	Air Temp:	6°C
		Sea Temp:	3°C

Back onboard we warmed up with delicious lentil soup and a ploughman’s lunch.

Our afternoon landing at Ossian Sarsfjellet was our final chance to take a good walk and explore the surrounds. This area is known for its relatively lush tundra, and most particularly for the diverse range of species growing in the area.

Many headed off to the hills in search of wildlife and great views, some walked closer to home and enjoyed fabulous close encounters with Svalbard reindeer, a species distinct from mainland Norway reindeer with shorter legs and a stockier body. The reindeer we saw were in top form!

The beachcombers had their own adventure with an Arctic fox who bounded across the slopes beneath the kittiwake cliffs. Despite an injured hind leg, the fox was agile enough to climb to impossible heights in search of food. Of note was the transitional pelt. The fox’s tawny summer coat had given way to its thicker white winter coat still growing through, with faded tawny patches on the hind quarters.

The afternoon raced away. The time had come to pull our gumboots off for the final time this voyage, and to gather in the bar for Captain’s Farewell Drinks. Christian presented certificates and thanked the Aurora team. Michael announced the talented winners of the People’s Choice Photo Competition. Captain made a lovely speech and wished us well in our ongoing travels. ‘Don’t forget us,’ he said and we certainly will not forget our wonderful Russian crew, this stout little ship and our remarkable Arctic adventure.

Our chefs put together a delectable final dinner after which we filed down to the lecture room to relive the last 14 days, thanks to the fabulous voyage slideshow put together by Michael with many photo contributions.





DAY 14 | Friday, 30 August 2019

Longyearbyen

Position: 08:00 hours
Latitude: 78°13'N
Longitude: 15°36'E

Course: Dockside,
Longyearbyen

Wind Speed: 15 knots
Wind Direction: SE

Barometer: 1014.6 hPa & falling
Air Temp: 8°C
Sea Temp: 5°C

By Gary Miller

Thinking back to Reykjavik seems so much longer than two weeks when we boarded with such anticipation. With a fairly gentle crossing of the Denmark Strait (perhaps not the way some would describe it) and after a full day of briefings and lectures, we rounded Kap Brewster to enter the wonderful world of Scoresby Sund—the largest fjord system in the world. Our first encounter with Greenland was its massive icebergs in Hall Bredning and then to our first Zodiac cruise at Bjørneøer. There we got up close and personal with some of those white and icy monoliths.

It was a fitting beginning with a mix of big ice and high cliffs. We even spotted our first of many muskox. For the next 2 days we rounded the inner fjords of Scoresby Sund; visiting Syd Kap, Røde Ø, and Renodde. The experiences were varied and ranged from the spectacular to the sublime as we cruised among the blue and white icebergs surrounding red rock and walked in tundra where 1,000 years ago the Thule people lived and hunted. Some of us admired the rock, others the flowers and tundra plants; still we had a sharp eye out for wildlife.

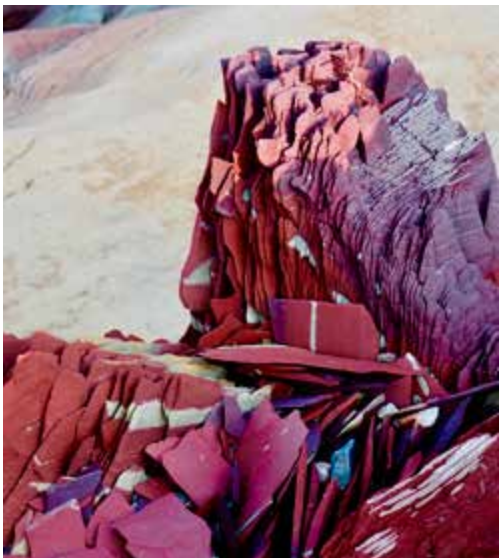
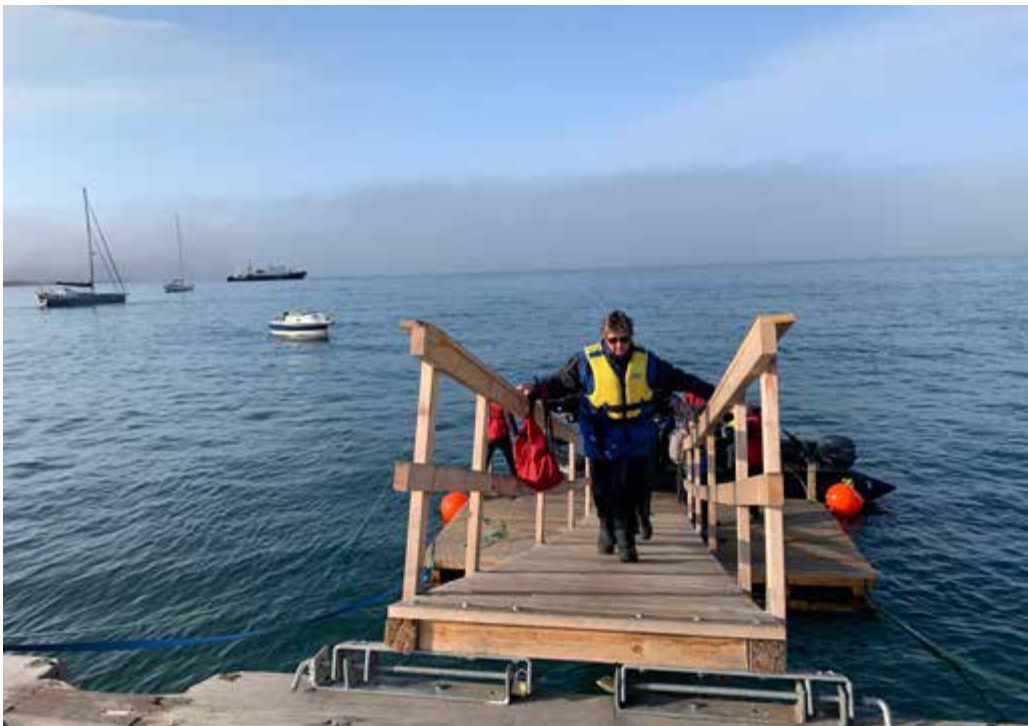
We finished our visit to Scoresby Sund with a visit to Ittoqqortoormiit. We had a beautiful balmy day there as we visited the small museum, maybe tasted a bit of musk ox, saw a demonstration of spinning qiviut, watched as a dog runner fed his team and saw the weather balloon launched from the top of the town. It was a relaxed and friendly morning with the locals.

Leaving Ittoqqortoormiit we had the afternoon to relax and reflect on Greenland as we motored toward the Keyser Franz Joseph Fjord system. We spent the next couple days enjoying the crazy striped rocks at Gateau Point, went on a wild bear hunt down Vega Sund to Solveig's Hytte where a couple days before a bear had broken out a window of the small trapper's hut. We saw plenty of musk ox, but the bear had gone. A dawn cruise for the keen photographers gave us magical light below Attestuppan, towering above the fjord filled with gleaming bergs. But Kjeruffjord gave us a polar bear!—feeding on a musk ox no less. With one last bumpy landing at Blomsterbugten, we said farewell to KFJ Fjord with the best BBQ ever, cruising through the fjord on a beautiful evening. Eskimonaes introduced us to the WWII history of Greenland and we enjoyed a final walk in Greenland because the forecast sent us to Svalbard a bit early.

At Smeerenburg we conjured up a whaling station from 1615 as a small group of walrus lay on the beach. Across the channel, Danskøya gave us the rare harbour seal and the ruins of Salomon Andréé and Wellman from their failed attempts at the north pole. Monaco Glacier gave us a beautiful morning and a magnificent calving. But the weather became cloudy and windy for our stops at Bockfjorden and our bear hunt in the pack ice to the far northeast. We sailed all the way to 81°06' North in search of bears but alas they eluded us.

We finally turned SW toward Longyearbyen. A visit in Kongsfjorden gave one more glacier, some reindeer, and a fox at Ossian Sarsfjellet. Last night we cruised into Isfjorden and on to Longyearbyen for our disembarkation. It's been a fantastic couple of weeks and the memories will last a lifetime.





Kayaking Log

By Daniel Stavert

Kayaking Guide: Daniel Stavert

Kayakers:

Ian Clare	John Flynn	Loris Higgins
Pat Danyluk	Sharon Fraser	Michael Shepherd

DAY 2 (PM): Bjørneøer(Bear islands) – Distance: 12.5 km

Arriving at the Bear Islands in the afternoon, the kayakers were primed and ready to get out paddling in Greenland. A slight breeze and some chop in the sea was quickly negotiated as the team gained the shoreline of the islands. Entering into the channels they had their first encounter with Greenland ice: huge slow-moving icebergs that were caught in the narrow waterways, and subjected to the inexorable forces of tide, wind, and erosion.

Rounding the point and out into the open fjord, the team took a moment to reflect on where they were, and to appreciate being fortunate enough to be able to kayak in Greenland. A brisk paddle back to the ship and all were aboard in the time for a well-deserved dinner.

DAY 3 (AM): Røde Ø (Red Island) – Distance: 8.5 km

With a slight breeze ruffling the water, the kayakers set out towards Red Island. The vivid colours of this ancient sandstone were a striking contrast with the white of the ice and the blue of the sea. Finding calm waters behind the island, the team soon also found a ringed seal quietly floating in the shallows. It regarded them calmly before the group continued paddling along the shore. Soon the kayakers had reached the main challenge of the morning: finding a channel through the thick field of icebergs. The currents and channels had pushed these huge bergs close together and for a little while it was a challenge to find a path, but soon the team was through and into open avenues and highways in the cityscape of ice. With the way through open, the kayakers landed on Røde Ø and hiked up onto the ridge. Their reward for the day’s effort was a hot chocolate and a view from above of more icebergs rolling and shifting in their chilly bay.



DAY 3 (PM): Rennode – Distance: 5.75 km

The breeze of the morning faded away and the sun attempted to come out as the kayak team set out. With mirrored conditions and sunshine, the colours of the icebergs seemed to come to life. As did the icebergs themselves as many began to roll and calve. The drama and noise of the ice was in distinct contrast to the serene calm of the sea and the bay.

After a few kilometres of ice paddling the team made landfall. Hiking over the springy heathlands of Arctic willow and dwarf birch, the kayakers followed Gary’s excellent directions up a hill, along a musk ox trail to a small alpine tarn and finally the kayak grave site—an inuit structure that seems to have been a gravesite for a respected individual. Moving out to the edge of the ridge the team stopped to enjoy views of the ice and the *Polar Pioneer* shining in the sun and calm seas. A short walk and a paddle home and the kayakers were getting ready to represent the team in the polar plunge.

DAY 4 (AM): Ittoqqortoormiit – Distance: 3.4 km

A small group set out this morning to explore the coastline around the small community of Ittoqqortoormiit. Paddling along the shoreline in the surging swell, the team enjoyed a waterline perspective of the town, its many colourful buildings, and the dozens of sled dogs in their teams, raising their heads and howling as the kayakers moved past.

With only a short paddle this morning the team soon turned to land on the beach. With a quick landing in the surging waves the two paddlers were soon ashore and quickly divested themselves of the paddling gear and into their land clothes. A great paddle completed in beautiful conditions.





Kayaking Log (continued)

DAY 5 (AM): Skipperdalen – Distance: 4 km

This afternoon a full contingent set out to enjoy the wide waters of Skipperdalen. A quick paddle down wind and the team could paddle along the shoreline, through shallow rocks and coves right up to the wide beach where the zodiacs had already landed. Gathering ashore the paddlers wandered up and into the curious stripes of colour, the twisted layers of stone, and the various seemingly inexplicable wonders of the geology of Skipperdalen. Mint green laid over deep purple or chocolate brown brought to mind endless confectionary comparisons as the group moved through the landscape. The wander took them up over the hill and amongst the heathland before returning to the warmth of the kayaks and an enjoyable run home to the *Polar Pioneer*.

DAY 5 (PM): Vega Sund – Distance: 7.89 km

With a polar bear somewhere in the fjord and the ship steaming for its last known sighting, the team left the *Polar Pioneer* to continue ahead, letting the paddlers have the peace of the sea and a chance to stretch out their arms. The distance seemed to vanish and soon the ship appeared around the point and the paddlers came sliding into the sand of the beach. There a hut showed the signs of the bear's presence.

Broken window panes and scattered charcoal evidence of its curiosity. With the hut exposed to damage from weather and wildlife the team took to engineering. Some curious usage of available tools led to Mike, Loris, and Ian stepping in and things were soon shipshape and tidied up.

A last highlight before the final run for the ship was finding the bear's prints on the shoreline. Its huge forepaws left massive indentations, seeming to amble along the sand, pausing for some unknown smell or sight before continuing towards the sea. Following its footsteps into the sea the paddlers launched back into the water and were soon home after another great paddle in Greenland.

DAY 6 (AM): Kjeruff Fjord – Distance: 6.5 km

Though some had been up early to see the sunrise, it was still a keen group of four who headed out for a quick paddle in Kjeruff Fjord. Heading along the shore towards a large iceberg the team was soon rewarded by their first good musk ox sightings from the kayaks.

The huge animal grazing up on the hillside seemingly oblivious to the watchers below. Soon another mammal came close. A ringed seal rose to the surface to breathe and stretch, before rolling onto its back and drifting along in the sunshine. Its occasional exhalations steamed in the still cool morning air. With the mountains and ice reflected crisply in the shimmering calm waters, the team revelled in the serenity as they turned their kayak noses for home.

DAY 9 (PM): Smeerenburg – Distance: 6.8 km

After a few days away from the kayaks, and a smooth crossing of the Greenland Sea behind them, the kayakers were keen to get in the water. A paddle into the calm waters of Smeerenburg was just what was needed. A gentle paddle in towards the shore led the team around the point and into Virgohamna, the site where in 1898 Salomon Andree had attempted to fly a hydrogen balloon to the North Pole. Whilst the history was interesting it was the curious harbour seals, or common, seals that drew our attention. Heaving themselves up on rocks, or cruising past, they kept their eyes on the kayaks before vanishing in a flurry of cold water.

The paddle across the channel to Smeerenburg itself was quick and smooth and soon the kayakers were on shore and ready to see a slightly larger pinniped up close. The walrus lay in a pile, snuggled up close to each other, their mouths open as they snored in the sunshine. A lone male in the shallows rose up occasionally displaying his huge tusks to the sound of camera shutters clicking. With the ship drawing in closer, the team took a moment to look at the remains of the 17th century Dutch whaling station before launching back into the sea and towards the *Polar Pioneer*.

DAY 10 (AM): Monaco Glacier – Distance: 7.67 km

The morning arrived calm and clear and the paddlers set out to explore the icy waters of Monaco Glacier. The tranquil waters seemed like it should be a quiet paddle, but the constant sound of brash ice crunching against the kayak bows, and the ever-present fizzing of melting ice everywhere, made for a surprisingly noisy morning. This constant background was completely eclipsed in volume when the glacier itself began to calve. With rumbles and cracks, ice chunks began to fall towards the water, some smaller and some tremendous entire columns of blue ice. The splitting crash as the ice separated from the glacier and tumbled into the sea was awe inspiring. So too was the dark wave of water that rose up under the kayaks, with each team working to keep their nose towards the swell and their eyes on more ice rising up out of the depths. With the chilly air seeping in to their drysuits the kayakers soon turned towards the ship and the warmth of lunch and a cup of tea.

DAY 12 (AM): Kongsbreen – Distance: 8.2 km

A brisk breeze welcomed the kayakers as they set out towards the mighty Kongsbreen, but they were soon paddling into the shelter of the hills and amongst the ice. The chocolate brown waters, run-off from the scree clad slopes above, were a sharp contrast with the luminescent blue of the glacial face.

The team kept moving and soon were rewarded with the beautiful glacier itself and its constant symphony of sound. The echoing crashes and gunshot retorts offered an auditory reminder of its constant motion. Everywhere the team looked a huge chunk of ice would plummet into the sea. With a constant headwind and morning trending to afternoon, the paddlers turned their nose for home. A fast downwind run and the *Polar Pioneer* was drawing near, and a climb up the ladder after a wonderful last paddle in the Arctic.

TOTAL PADDLES: 10

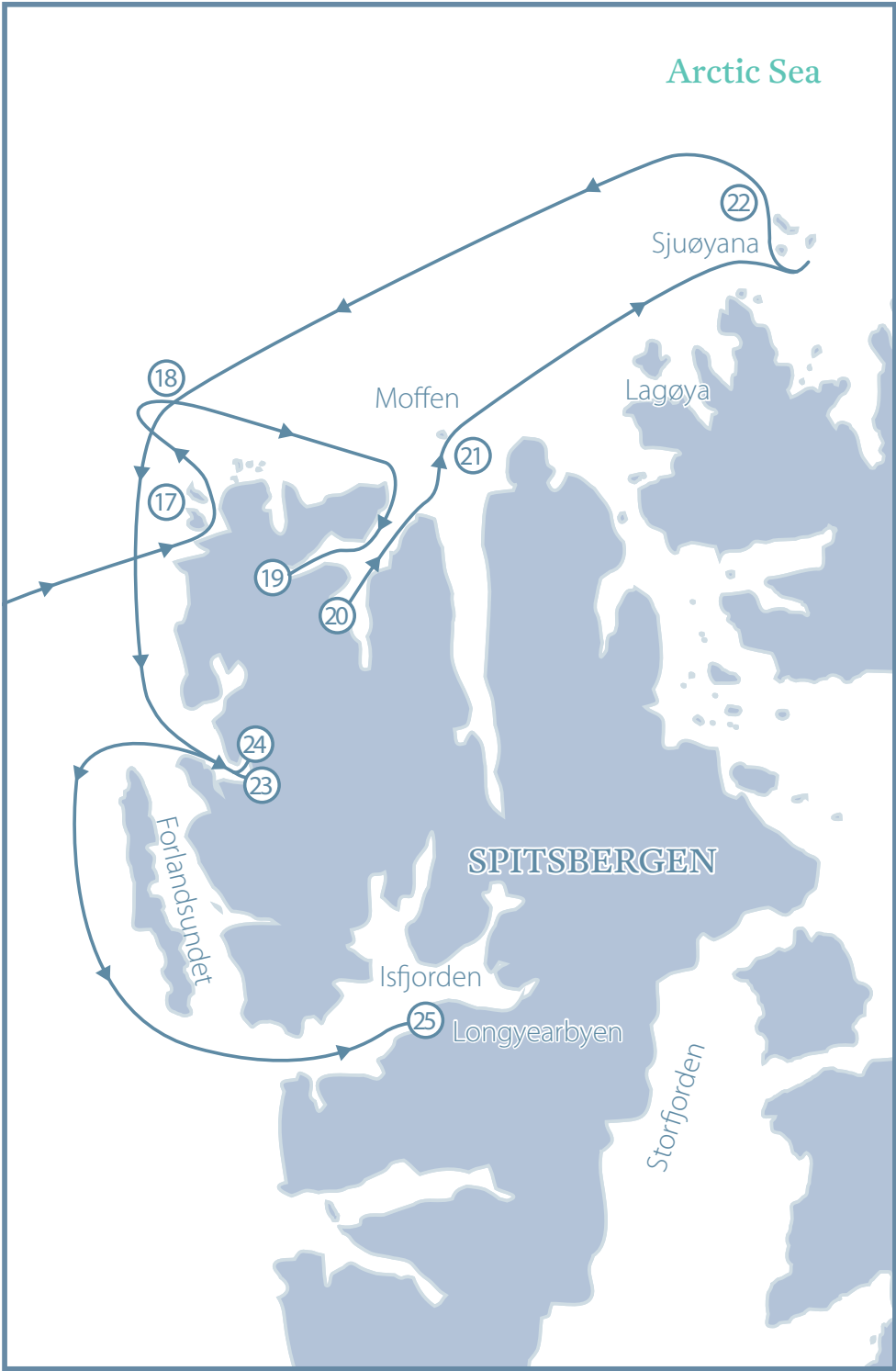
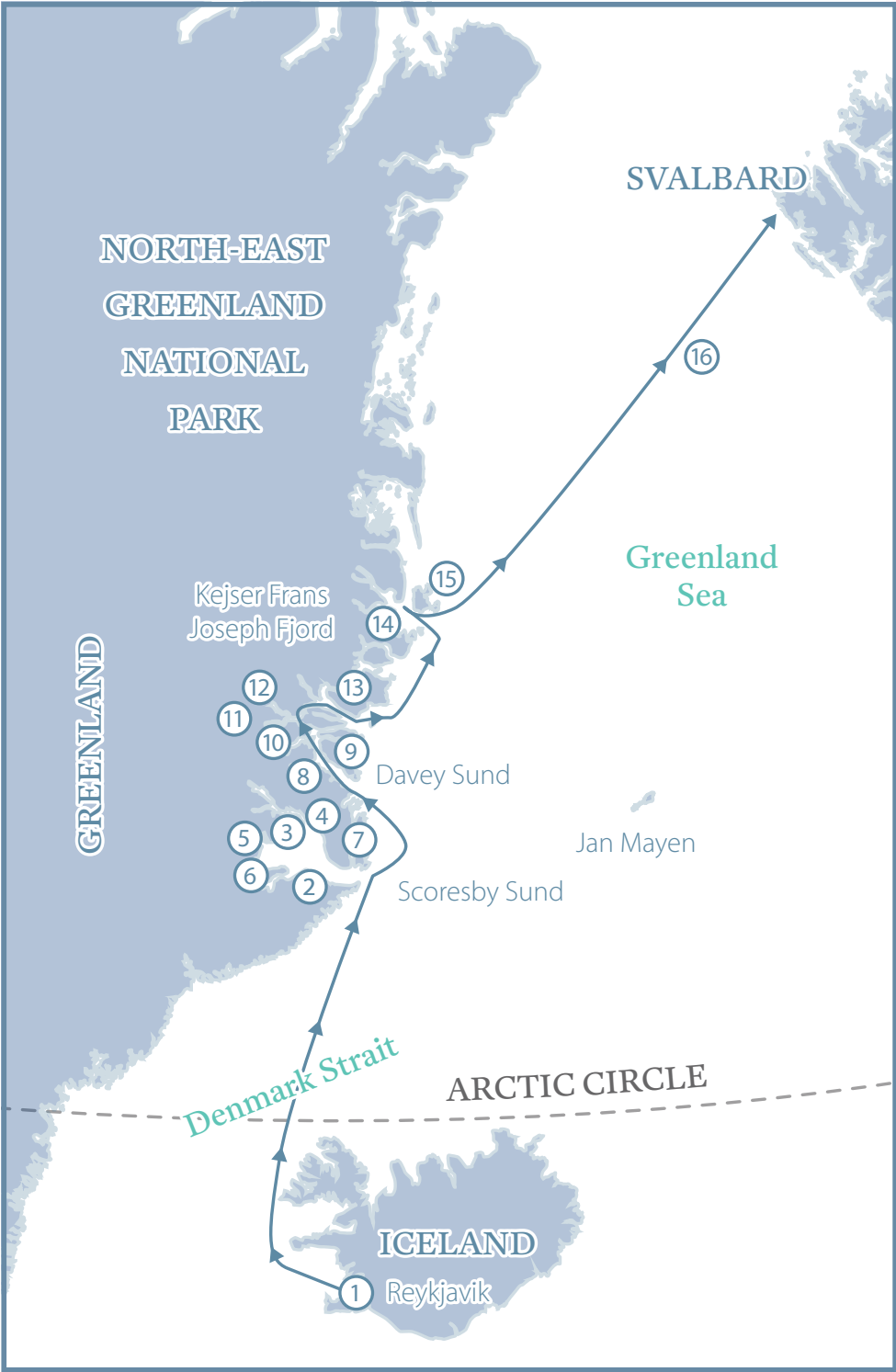
TOTAL DISTANCE: 71.21 km



Jewels of the Arctic

17 – 30 August 2019 | Distance Travelled: 2,540 nautical miles / 4,700 kilometres

Most northerly point: Northern Svalbard pack ice 81°05.984 N, 19°05.131 E

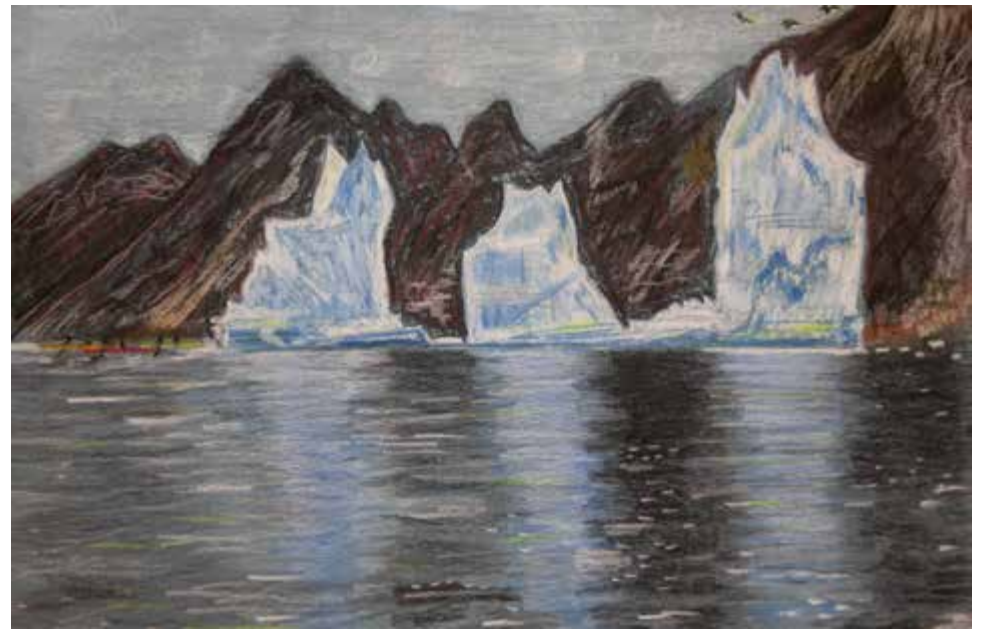


Destinations

- | | | | | |
|------------------|----------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 01 Reykjavik | 07 Ittoqqoortoormiit | 13 BBQ in Keyser Franz Joseph Fjord | 17 Smeerenburg and Danskøya | 22 Bear hunt in ice around Sjuøyana |
| 02 Hall Bredning | 08 Skipperdalen / Gateau Point | 14 Eskimonaes | 18 Sea Ice north of NW corner | 23 Kongsvegen |
| 03 Bjørne Øer | 09 Solveig Hut in Vega Sund | 15 East Greenland Pack Ice on departure | 19 Monaco Glacier | 24 Ossian Sarsfjellet |
| 04 Sydkap | 10 Dawn Cruise – Attestuppan | 16 Greenland Sea | 20 Bockfjorden | 25 Longyearbyen |
| 05 Røde Ø | 11 Zodiac Cruise – Kerjuff Fjord | | 21 Moffen Island | |
| 06 Renodden | 12 Blomsterbugten | | | |



Illustration artwork By Vicki Willing



Travelling with Aurora

By Mark Cochrane

"Polar Pioneer," she said,
'My dear.
Let's take a trip
To the Circle.'

'What Circle?' I said,
Confused in my head.
'The woman's gone mad
That's for certain.'

'The Arctic Circle,
You fool,' she replied.
So what could I be
But compliant?

'It'll cost a lot!'
I ventured to nod.
'twas then she said,
'What's it matter?'

'No matter my dear.'
I said with some fear.
For the woman can bite
When she's wrangled!

I did some quick sums,
For my sweet thing's cute bum only sits
business class
When she travels.

I figured it out,
And with little doubt.
We'd have nothing left
If we blew it.

'What's money?' she said.
'My darling, my honey.
I promise you fun
On the journey.'

So for seventy grand
A drink in my hand
I agreed and she booked
Our fine cabin.

'And there's a sojourn in Norway'
'Oh, darling, let's do it your way,
I'm here to please you
My petal.'

So here we are now
In the Circle of Bears
With ice on the bow
And behind us.

As happy as kids
So what, all the quids?
And I have a confession
To give you.

I'm just a plain man,
Who's had a small plan
And that was to take her
And spoil her.

To give her the best
Forget all the rest
And have a good time together.

And in old 'Pioneer',
With her lying near
I believe I may just
Have achieved it.

So to all of you here,
I wish you great cheer,
Of our time in this
Circle of Bears.

Be kind to each other
And never forget
What it is
That brings us together.

A love of our sphere,
Yes, it's threatened my dears.
And we may be
The threatened species.

It's action required
Not passions expired
Our world is quickly
Depleting!

Do whatever you can
Whenever you can
A little's a lot
When we're sinking.

Let's destroy Donald Trump
And the rest of the bunch
Of decadent minds
That are useless.

Let's stand firm for our world
Our Circle of Bears
And Aurora
Who's helped us to see it.







Bird species log

BIRD SPECIES	AUGUST													
	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Red-throated Diver				X		X	X			X				
Northern Fulmar	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Northern Gannet	X													
Pink-footed Goose						X		X						
Barnacle Goose			X	X		X		X						
Gyrfalcon														
Common Eider			X	X				X						
Long-tailed Duck														
Ringed Plover				X		X	X							
Purple Sandpiper														X
Ruddy Turnstone					X		X							
Pomarine Skua									X					
Arctic Skua		X				X				X	X	X	X	
Long-tailed Skua						X								
Great Skua		X								X				X
Glaucous Gull			X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	
Great Black-Backed Gull	X	X												
Herring Gull	X	X												
Black-legged Kittiwake	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Ivory Gull														
Arctic Tern	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	
Brunich's Guillemot			X							X	X			
Black Guillemot			X	X								X	X	
Little Auk			X					X	X	X				X
Northern Wheatear				X	X		X	X						
Common Redpoll														
Snow Bunting						X	X	X						X
Common Raven			X	X	X	X	X	X						



Glaucous Gull



Arctic Tern



Greenland Raven

Mammal species log

BIRD SPECIES	AUGUST													
	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Musk Ox			X	X		X	X							
Polar Bear							X							
Stoat			X											
Harbour seal										X				
Ringed Seal			X	X			X						X	
Bearded Seal											X	X		
Harp Seal							X					X		
Walrus										X	X	X		
Humpback Whale		X							X					
Blue Whale										X				
Fin Whale										X			X	
Sei Whale										X				
Minke Whale										X				
Beluga											X			
UNID cetacean													X	



Harbour Seals



Musk Ox



Svalbard Reindeer



Walrus



Arctic Blueberry



Roseroot



Mare's Tail



Alpine Bear Berry



Broad-leaved Willowherb



Polar Willow



Renodde tundra in fall colours



Fungus



Dwarf Birch in fall colours



Drooping Saxifrage



Arctic Bell-heather



Expeditioners

Ros Akhurst	Julie Brumpton	Bruce Dawkins	Margy Glaetzer	Allan Hill	John Maxon	Mike Shepherd
Barb Allen	Rosemary Chinchin	Janet Dawkins	John Harwood	Ann Hill	Maggie Merlin	Rosemary Shepherd
Alena Antonova	Judy Chivers	Michele De Permentier	Sandra Harwood	Alan Hopkins	Lynn Osmotherly	Lyndall Steed
Margaret Barr	Ian Clare	Debbie Flynn	Julianne Henneberger	Chris Hopkins	Jerry Perkins	Helen Tiffin
Marianne Bateman	Alison Cochrane	John Flynn	Mick Henneberger	Lisa Hynes	Lynne Perkins	Sonia Widderick
Helen Bird	Mark Cochrane	Sharon Fraser	Linda Hewitt	Jill Lowes	Judy Polkinghorne	Vicki Willing
Roz Brandt	Pat Danyluk	Helen Gilbert	Valda Hewitt	Ann Mackenzie	Lea Pope	
Linda Broschofsky	Glenn Darke	John Glaetzer	Loris Higgins	Heather Matthies	Michael Pope	



Expedition Team

Polar Pioneer Crew

With Thanks

Expedition Leader	Christian Genillard	Master	Aleksandr 'Sasha' Evgenov	Able Seaman	Igor Popp	Michael Baynes	Chris Hopkins
Deputy Expedition Leader	Robyn Mundy	Chief Mate	Vladimir Zimin	Able Seaman	Vasilii Berlizev	Linda Broschofsky	Maggie Merlin
Senior Naturalist	Gary Miller	Second Mate	Evgenii Aleksandrov	Motorman	Vladimir Zhukov	Julie Brumpton	Gary Miller
Expedition Guide	Jukka Ikonen	Third Mate	Aleksandr Kiselev	Head Stewardess	Svetlana Fedorova	Rosemary Chinchin	Robyn Mundy
Expedition Guide	Justin Febey	Radio Operator	Ilia Liamzin	Stewardess	Aleksandra 'Sasha' Belusova	Ian Clare	Jerry Perkins
Kayak Guide	Daniel Stavert	Chief Engineer	Evgeny Petukhov	Stewardess	Uliana Koval	Alison Cochrane	Lynne Perkins
Doctor	John Barry	Second Engineer	Pavel Voronov	Stewardess	Ekaterina Rumiantseva	Mark Cochrane	Michael Pope
Chef	Allan Estoque	Third Engineer	Aleksei Moiseev	Stewardess	Natalia Trofimova	Glenn Darke	Rosemary Shepherd
Sous Chef	Bert Cruz	Fourth Engineer	Yurii Horobets	Stewardess	Elena Liukshina	Debbie Flynn	Daniel Stavert
Hotel Manager	Justine Bornholdt	Electrical Engineer	Valentin Lomachenko	Russian Crew Chef	Denis Zhenchevski	Helen Gilbert	Helen Tiffin
		Boatswain	Aleksandr Agafonov	Yoga Instructor	Alena Antonova	Margy Glaetzer	Sonia Widderick
		Able Seaman	Rashit Ganiev			Alan Hopkins	Vicki Willing





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