

Across The Arctic Circle

Aboard *MV Greg Mortimer* | 17th to 30th May 2023





Aberdeen

DAY 1 | Wednesday 17th May 2023

Position at 1900 on 17th May

Latitude: 57°12,2'N

Longitude: 001°56,3'W

Course: 038°

Speed: 14.7 knots

Wind Speed: WNW 3

Barometer: 1035

Air Temp: 14°C

Explore. Dream. Discover.

—Mark Twain

It was 16:00 when our buses pulled in at the harbour of Aberdeen. Our ship, *MV Greg Mortimer*, was waiting for us alongside the pier while crew members were finalising their operations and preparations for our departure. Expedition staff led by legendary Greg Mortimer himself greeted and welcomed us onboard. We were about to embark on a remarkable voyage across the Arctic Circle from Scotland through Norway, with Svalbard as our final destination.

After making our way up to the reception we were greeted with welcoming drinks by the fantastic hotel staff while our bags magically appeared in our cabins. After we settled into our cabins, it was time to meet the expedition team in the lecture theater. Introduction to the ship, the crew and the team was followed by a very important Zodiac briefing and an even more important safety drill. Once we got ourselves accustomed with all the procedures, our ship left the harbour of Aberdeen at 18:00, giving a few horn signals as it went. It was time to start heading north.

Leaving mainland Scotland behind, we were heading north-east, due to pass the Orkney Islands overnight. The seas were kind to us, and we observed first Gannets gently gliding through the air. For the first part of our voyage, we are set to explore Shetland and Orkney archipelago. Remote, peripheral and ancient islands of Scotland bear presence of ancient history going back 6,000 years BC. Neolithic settlements can be found all around the islands and some of them are really well preserved, which can give us an indication of how neolithic people used to live. Fertile soils and fish-rich seas were very favourable for early settlers and that's why the Orkney islands and Shetland were inhabited throughout the centuries. Iron Age as well as Pictish kingdom remains add to the rich history of Northern Scotland.

In the 8th and early 9th century the Orkneys and Shetland saw a huge migration of Norwegian settlers and the islands were annexed by the legendary Norwegian king Harald Fairhair. The Vikings were inhabiting the island for centuries from then on. The Orkneys were absorbed by Scotland in 1472, and the people inhabiting this area called themselves "comunitas Orcadie", which is where the future name came from. Our first landing the following day is due to happen on Fair Isle, a tiny island between the Orkneys and Shetland, famous for its birdwatching and knitting. It is set to be a great introduction to the rich history of the islands and first-hand experience of how the local people have managed to live here for centuries.



Shetland, Scotland

DAY 2 | Thursday 18th May 2023

Position at 0600 on 18th May

Latitude: 59°25,2'N

Longitude: 001°34,4'W

Course: 000°

Speed: 8.1 knots

A first walk in any new country is one of the things which makes life on this planet worth being grateful for.

—Charles William Beebe

The first day of an expedition is always one of great anticipation that we try to balance by having realistic expectations of what our experience might be. It's fair to say that most of us had our expectations far exceeded the second Fair Isle came into view.

Opening the curtains in the cabin early in the morning revealed a light fog and overcast skies with the green hills of Fair Isle just visible. We dropped anchor in a lovely cove rimmed with sea cliffs which had hundreds if not thousands of Norther Fulmar nesting right on the rocky face above the sea.

As we approached in our inflatable Zodiac skiffs, we got a sense of just how sleepy this little island is. Not much human activity at all. A couple of cars parked on the pier to shuttle us to town and a ranger was present to show us the Puffin colony residing on a nearby cliff only a ten-minute hike through sheep pasture away.

The puffins did not disappoint! Hundreds of them had established burrows along the top of the sea cliff and it was mayhem as they flew in and out on foraging missions. The birds head out to sea in search of small fish sometimes packing ten or more into their colorful beaks. In fact, these little guys have such colourful beaks that some refer to them as the clowns of the sea. As if to further earn the nickname they have bright orange legs and feet giving them a stunning look. In my humble opinion they are in fact way to beautiful too be called a clown.

A 45-minute walk into town through the mist let us briefly into the lives of the islanders who are crafts people hand knitting many delightful goods from the local sheep wool. It was surprising to us just how open and chatty some of the locals were, and we intently listened to their gems of information.

After a delightful lunch onboard, the ship repositioned us to the Island Shetland and more specifically Jarlshof historic site. We took the Zodiacs once again into shore and made a wet landing in shallow blue water smack in the middle of a beautiful crescent shaped sandy beach. In order to access the site, we'd take a stroll down the beach while enjoying the small waves lapping at its shore.

The Jarlshof Prehistoric and Norse settlements in Shetland are one of the most important and inspirational archaeological sites in Scotland. This extraordinary site has a complex of ancient settlements which cover more

Wind Speed: WSW 5

Barometer: 1032

Air Temp: 7°C

than 4,000 years of human history. We were amazed to find such a range of archaeological treasures in one place, including late Neolithic houses, a Bronze Age village, an Iron Age broch and wheelhouses, a Norse longhouse, a medieval farmstead, and a 16th century laird's house.

The local guides imparted us with their unique knowledge of the of the site, giving way more information than I could ever provide you with here. Walking through the small nooks and crannies of the site was a real delight. Some of the pathways are so tight between the stone walls that you must crouch down to make passage through them. This had the added benefit of getting you out of the wind that always battered us.

This wind was also stirring up the sea a bit and made for a interesting Zodiac ride back to the ship. The boats had to come in stern first to the beach as to not take breaking waves over the transom filling the boats with water. The journey back was a wet one for some of us, but nothing dangerous. If anything, this served as a reminder that we are not on a regular cruise. This is an expedition! On to tomorrow!



Orkney, Scotland

DAY 3 | Friday 19th May 2023

Position at 0600 on 19th May

Latitude: 59°00,6'N

Longitude: 002°51,6'W

Course: 276°

Speed: 13.8 knots

Wind Speed: S 3

Barometer: 1035

Air Temp: 8°C

Our ability to perceive quality in nature begins, as in art, with the pretty. It expands through successive stages of the beautiful to values as yet uncaptured by language.

—Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac

The second full day of adventure during our voyage started off with an early morning arrival at the port of Kirkwall in the Orkney Islands. As our trusty ship, the *MV Greg Mortimer*, pulled gracefully into the pier at Kirkwall under the skillful command of our captain and crew, the sun started to poke through the clouds and welcome us to what would become yet another memorable day in Scotland.

Shortly after a scrumptious breakfast, we walked down to the pier to embark upon our first outing of the day. Most of our number then loaded up into a set of coach buses for a tour of the main sights of the Orkney Islands.

During our half-day venture, we travelled across Orkney to some of the archipelago's most important historic sights. This included a stop at the St. Magnus Cathedral in the town of Kirkwall, where we learned a bit about John Rae: He was an Orkney-born polar explorer who is perhaps best known for discovering what happened to the men on Sir John Franklin's infamous 1845-1848 expedition, disappearing while attempting to traverse the Northwest Passage.

Other highlights of our day in Orkney included stops at the Neolithic henge and stone circle known as the Ring of Brodgar and the incredibly well-preserved Neolithic site at Skara Brae. While at Skara Brae, we also had the chance to visit Skail House and to learn more about the general history of the area.

After we finished the morning out at Skara Brae, we headed back into Kirkwall on our coaches. Upon arriving at the pier, many of us decided to head into town for lunch at one of the city's many cafés, restaurants, and 'chippys'. As soon as we had our fill of local goodies, we reembarked our trusty ship and set sail from the Orkney Islands to continue on our journey.

Back on the ship, we enjoyed a laid-back afternoon before a rollicking recap that included yet another entertaining quiz for us all to test our newfound Orkney knowledge. And with that, it was time to head to the restaurant for dinner before settling into our cabins to rest up before our last day of adventure in Bonnie Scotland.



Unst, Scotland

DAY 4 | Saturday 20th May 2023

Position at 0600 on 20th May

Latitude: 60°41,8'N

Longitude: 000°46,1'W

Course: 337°

Speed: 6.7 knots

Wind Speed: SSW 5

Barometer: 1037

Air Temp: 7°C

Birds have it better than we do,
In many ways, and here are there,
with wings they fly by day and night,
and never have a cancelled flight,
with feathers they have clothes that always fit,
in styles that never change a bit,
and what we envy most, I'd say,
with bills they never have to pay.

—Anonymous

We embarked on an exciting journey to Hermaness National Nature Reserve, where the fog and wind added an air of mystery to our exploration. The weather conditions were challenging, but we were determined to immerse ourselves in the untamed beauty of this remote sanctuary nestled on the rugged cliffs of the Shetland Islands.

After a wet arrival on shore due to the waves and typical Scottish mist, we hopped on the only bus on the island of Unst and made our way towards Hermaness, while our experienced local guides told us about the challenges of living in such a remote place as well as about the birds we were about to visit.

As we ventured along the foot-trail, the fog enveloped us, obscuring the vibrant colours of the landscape. Despite the limited visibility, we could hear the distant cries of seabirds carried by the gusts of wind. The anticipation of encountering the diverse wildlife within the reserve fuelled our excitement.

Through the mist, we glimpsed the graceful flight of gannets with their distinct yellow heads, soaring above us with apparent ease. Their presence amidst the turbulent weather reminded us of their resilience. As we continued, the fog gradually lifted, revealing the majestic cliffs that dropped dramatically into the churning sea below. This rugged coastline was truly breathtaking and came as a surprise to many of us as we inched our way towards the slippery edge of the cliff.

After our first view of the incredible coastline at the end of the boardwalk, we slowly made our way to the bird cliffs. On our way we caught a glimpse of Muckle Flugga, the iconic northernmost point of the British Isles, and its beautiful lighthouse. We were left in awe of the work it must have taken to build a lighthouse in such an inhospitable place.



After a few minutes of walking along the wet grass we turned and gazed upon the 170 metre high bird cliffs. There, close to 30,000 pairs of gannets nested. The strong winds gusting over the cliff edge really allowed us to immerse ourselves in the harshness of this environment. Our encounter with the birds was truly remarkable. Gannets with their striking yellow heads soared gracefully above us, defying the forceful gusts of wind. Their wings sliced through the mist, leaving a trail of ethereal beauty in their wake.

Despite the foggy and windy conditions, our journey through Hermaness National Nature Reserve was a memorable experience. We witnessed the remarkable resilience of wildlife and marvelled at the breathtaking cliffs that stood against the crashing waves.



At Sea

DAY 5 | Sunday 21st May 2023

Position at 0600 on 21st May

Latitude: 62°29,9'N

Longitude: 003°41,4'W

Course: 055°

Speed: 11.3 knots

Wind Speed: S7

Barometer: 1034

Air Temp: 7°C

The land was gone, all but a little streak, away off on the edge of the water, and down under us was just ocean, ocean, ocean – millions of miles of it, heaving and pitching and squirming, and white sprays blowing from the wave-tops,and we had the sky and the ocean to ourselves, and the roomiest place I ever did see and the loneliest.

—Mark Twain, Tom Sawyer Abroad

Sailing, sailing over the Ocean Blue...!

Neptune was very kind overnight as we departed the Scottish Isles bound for the Norwegian Coast, rocking us gently as we dreamed of Vikings, Picts, lambs, puffins and “newspaper syndicates” of gannets. For those insomniacs amongst us, there were vivid images of sheep to count lazing on the lovely, rolling green Shetland and Orkney landscapes.

Who knew how exciting, busy and educational a day at sea could be?!

The kindness of the officers on the bridge kicked the day off after yet another scrumptious assortment of breakfast goodies. Safety Officer Sergei explained in detail the myriad knobs, screens, buttons, and switches that keep the stately *Greg Mortimer* moving across the globe in such fine fashion. Hopefully we all went away with a better understanding and appreciation of the inner workings of the vessel and what a gorgeous, state-of-the-art bridge, coupled with incredible professionalism and dedication by the officers to provide for a safe and thrilling journey for us all.

Gaby blew in on a breeze and delivered a fog clearing discussion on Arctic and global meteorology, really breaking down the components which drive the weather and climate patterns on this amazing sphere we inhabit. This was just the basics of what some folks spend a lifetime attempting to comprehend, the sky's the limit if you want to dive deeper into this connection of air, sea and land!

Speaking of, citizen science made great strides forward today. Our second cloud survey was attended by another record-breaking group of participants with a much more exciting sky to challenge us as we drifted through the Globe Observer app, attempting to beam up data to NASA to help them ground(sea)-truth the satellite images they have of the tops of the clouds looking down through the troposphere. The enthusiasm of the participants was fantastic, not to mention getting to have some insight into what science is really like with technical issues

and challenges of definitions as well as different insights, opinions and perspectives of a group of people all observing the same thing and yet trying to come to consensus.

Colby introduced the eBird survey as we conducted a short 20-minute transect mostly observing northern fulmars and the sleek gannets along with a few hitch-hiking passerines bound for who knows where.

Just when our brains thought we could absorb no more, Albert introduced us all to the wonderful and mysterious world of whales. We were then rewarded with a cornucopia of cocoa decadence by the Willie Wonka on the ship who had created some chocolate themed delights for afternoon tea.

As the sun set with a glorious show of colours, many of us pondered where we have been and where we are headed. The excitement is palpable as phase II, the Norwegian Coast, unfolds before us.



Rørvik/Brønnøysund, Norway

DAY 6 | Monday 22nd May 2023

Position at 0600 on 22nd May

Latitude: 64°44,1'N

Longitude: 010°57,3'W

Course: 059°

Speed: 11.7 knots

Wind Speed: E3

Barometer: 1036

Air Temp: 8°C

The grand show is eternal. There is always a sunrise somewhere. The dew is never dried at once. A shower is forever falling. Vapour is ever rising. Eternal sunrise, eternal sunset. Eternal dawn and glowing, on sea and continents and islands, each in its turn as the earth rolls. And for this I am forever grateful to be alive.

—John Muir

The *MV Greg Mortimer* arrived at the Norwegian Coast this morning. Expeditioners awoke to a rare treat for this part of the world: A shining sun, blue skies, and mild to warm weather! After an early breakfast, everyone disembarked at the town of Rørvik, a quaint fishing village of just 3,100 people.

Unique to Rørvik is a beautiful museum centered around fishing history. We discovered old vessels and equipment in a former boathouse, enjoyed art by a local oil painter, and explored the former residence of one of the industry's most successful fishermen. One unexpected highlight was photographing nesting kittiwakes that had taken up residence on the old boathouses along the canal.

By late morning we set sail once again and began navigating through small islands and passages as we transited northward. The sunny conditions were perfect for being out on deck and passengers and guides alike made the most of the opportunity. A highlight for many was the photography workshop led by Aurora's Photography Leader Michael, who inspired creative landscape and seascape photos and offered tips for sharp images of the many white-tailed sea eagles flying about. Other activities were citizen science programs centered on seabird and cloud surveys.

By mid-afternoon our next objective came into full view; the magnificent Torghatten. This monolith of granite is renowned for a natural window that runs completely through the rock it is comprised of. Norwegian legend says that the hole was created by an arrow that was meant to kill a king's daughter. But the king threw his hat into the air and the arrow pierced the hat instead of the girl. As the hat fell to the ground, the sun rose and turned it to stone, and it became Torghatten.

Before long we made land and arrived at the trailhead marking the route to the window. The short trail through birch forests was challenging but well worth the effort. Expansive views of the coastline dominated the upper portions of the trail, and we witnessed a substantial selection of the nearly 10,000 islands that comprise the



immediate coastal area. At the top of the trail, most people were curious about the window and views on the other side of the mountain. A rocky trail led us through the window, which measures 166m long, 78m high, and 28m wide.

Back on the ship this evening, one final event awaits us: In a few hours, close to midnight, we will sail across the Arctic Circle. We will not see the sun set again until we leave Svalbard to return home. Northward we go!



Lofoten, Norway

DAY 7 | Tuesday 23rd May 2023

Position at 0600 on 23rd May

Latitude: 67°36,1'N

Longitude: 013°17,5'W

Course: 349°

Speed: 12 knots

Wind Speed: SSW 3

Barometer: 12 knots

Air Temp: 5°C

Few people know how to take a walk. The qualifications... are endurance... an eye for nature, good humour, vast curiosity, good speech, good silence, and nothing too much.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

After a quiet night at sea, we on the *Greg Mortimer* woke up in the legendary archipelago of the Lofoten Islands on the pier of a little fishing village called Reine. Reine is known as the setting of the perfect 'Lofoten Island postcard', with its maze of little islands interconnected by bridges, situated in crystal waters and surrounded by a landscape of rugged mountains shaped by long-gone glaciers.

After a little free time to wander and look at the artifacts and displays housed in the museum, the buses took us back to the *Greg Mortimer*, waiting for us on the pier at Leknes. What a day! But it was not over yet, with dinner tonight a beautiful barbeque outside on Deck 8. Crazy hats, retro music, good food, good fun, good mood, good people!

As we jumped on the bus after breakfast, beauty was all around us. There were signs of a rich life and culture, with thousands of headless cod strung over wooden racks to dry, tied by the tail in pairs. Here, everything is about fishing and the magical cod season that has brought fishermen here to these Arctic waters for centuries. Even the typical red houses perched along the shore, called rorbu, are inherited from a past when fishermen used them to sleep in them after long hours at sea. Today, they are rented to tourists as summer houses.

The bus ride took us along the main road which connects the islands variously by arched bridges and under-channel tunnels. Our guides told us local legends of trolls turning into stone and about the local life and its evolution. The Lofoten islands today are a tourist paradise where one can practice hiking, rock climbing, surfing or kite surfing; a place of mountains at the beach.

Our first activity was a hike from Uttakleiv around a cape to beautiful Haukland Beach. The four-kilometre walk was a nice opportunity to appreciate the landscape or do a bit of birdwatching.

Michael took the chance to collect everyone for a group photo in this stunning setting.

The bus took us onward to the Lofotr museum for a voyage into the past. In 1981, the archaeological remains of a Viking farm were discovered here, including the longest Viking longhouse ever discovered, at 83 metres long and 10 metres wide. Since then, a reproduction of the building has been created and opened as a museum.

We entered the house and took our places at long tables along the wall, from where we could admire wooden sculptures of household gods, decoratively carved wooden pillars, and the central pit fire where huge cauldrons of lamb and vegetable stew for our lunch hung on chains: Viking food in a Viking house. The guide gave us a very interesting speech about the life and traditions of the people back then, including even a traditional song joined by two women, also dressed in traditional garb.



Trollfjorden/Andenes, Norway

DAY 8 | Wednesday 24th May 2023

Position at 0600 on 24th May

Latitude: 68°18,0'N

Longitude: 014°38,2'W

Course: 035°

Speed: 10.9 knots

Wind Speed: S 5/6

Barometer: 1019

Air Temp: 6°C

Tumble and rumble, and grumble and snort,
Like a whale to starboard, a whale to port;
Tumble and rumble, and grumble and snort,
and the steamer steams thro' the sea, love!

—Sydney Thompson Dobell

We awoke early in the morning on the 24th of May to a stunning sight: the entrance to one of the most famous and scenic fjords in all of Norway: Trollfjord. Upon our arrival at the mouth of the fjord, the weather was relatively calm so our trusty ship, the *MV Greg Mortimer* made its way into the inlet's narrow channel.

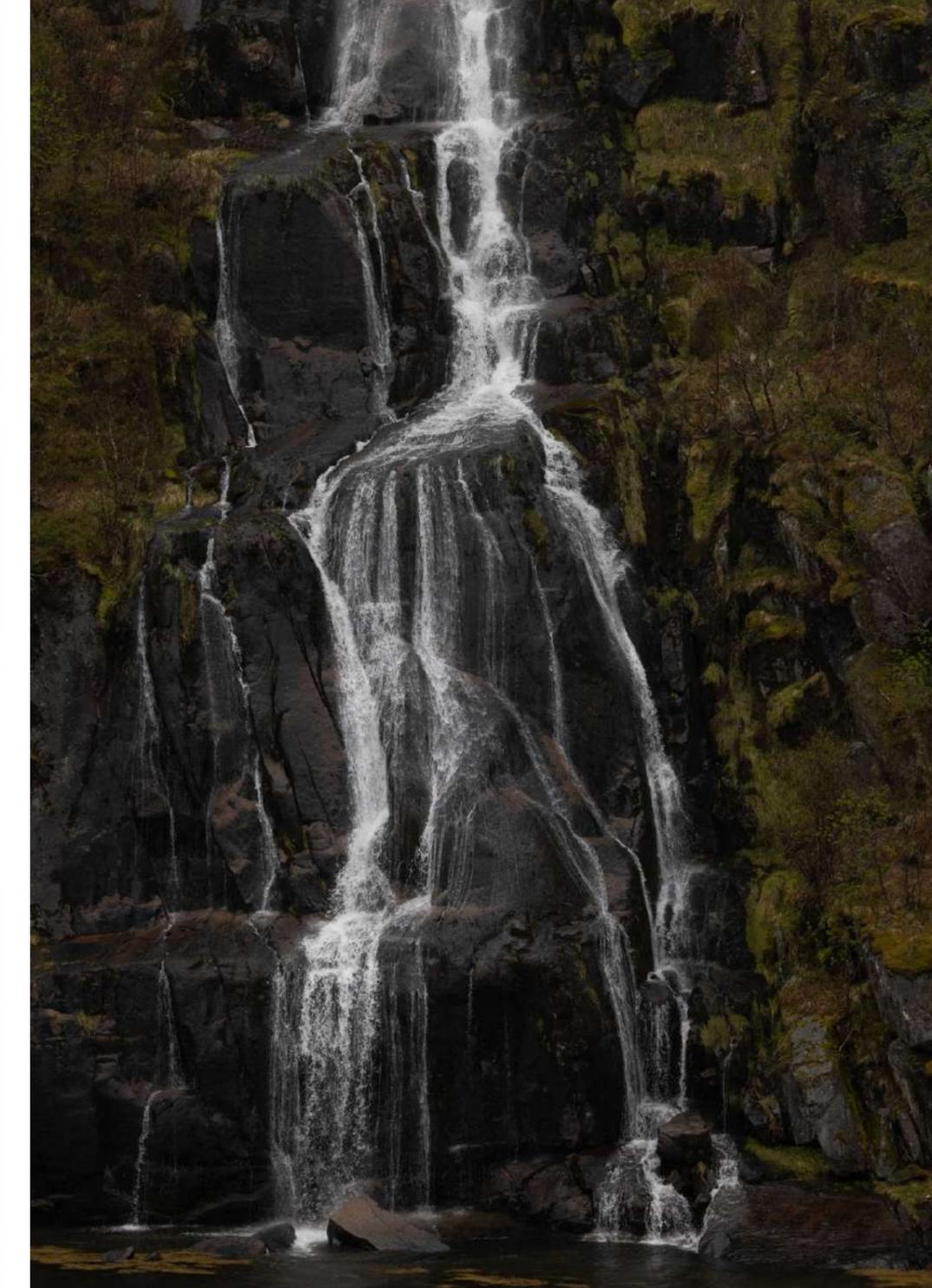
With steep cliffs up to 1,000 metres high towering overhead, our ship's captain masterfully steered the vessel toward the back side of the less-than-100-metre-wide fjord. But just as we neared the narrowest part of the fjord, the winds picked up and our bridge officers' skill became ever the more apparent as they steered the ship forward past rocks that were just a few metres away. Once we reached the end of the fjord, we all watched with amazement as the ship spun around and sailed back toward more open waters.

After departing Trollfjord, we made our way further north as we began our passage to our next destination: Bjørnøya, and ultimately, Svalbard. Along the way, we enjoyed a busy schedule of lectures and activities, including a talk by Christophe on the adventures of Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen; cloud and bird spotting with Hans and Colby; afternoon tea with our galley team, and an introduction to Svalbard with Albert.

As the day wore on, our ship sailed into ever-more open waters, but before we were clear of Norway's stunning fjords, we had a few more exciting experiences in store.

First, we came across a steep and jagged bird cliff that was home to thousands of nesting kittiwakes. The channel housing the bird cliff was so narrow that it felt like you could reach out and touch it as we sailed past. To add to the wonder of the moment, the sun decided to grace us with its presence, and we were even treated to a handful of rainbows, including an elusive double bow.

Later in the day, as we approached a very deep underwater canyon, we took some time to enjoy a bit of whale watching. Although the seas were very rough, we did manage to spot a small group of sperm whales, which clearly didn't mind the big waves and heavy winds.



At Sea

DAY 9 | Thursday 25th May 2023

Position at 0600 on 25th May

Latitude: 71°04,0'N

Longitude: 016°59,0'W

Course: 015°

Speed: 8.9 knots

Wind Speed: SSW 8/9

Barometer: 1003

Air Temp: 2°C

Nothing is weaker than water. Yet nothing overcomes immovable objects as water does. There is no substitute. Thus weakness overcomes strength and gentleness overcomes rigidity. No one denies it and no one tries it.

—Laotse, The Book of Tao

Our first full day at sea after departing the rugged shores of coastal Norway started just how the previous night had ended: rocking and rolling in the big swells and heavy winds that initially welcomed us into the northern Atlantic Ocean.

Some of our number managed to brave the rough weather and make the journey to the restaurant where a scrumptious breakfast buffet awaited. After breakfast was but a distant memory, we gathered up in the lecture room for the first talk of the day—an introduction to glaciers with one of our naturalists, Colby.

Once we got our fill of all things icy and cold, we took a moment to enjoy a cup of coffee and even a cookie or two before regrouping in the lecture room for another bit of morning entertainment. This time, we were treated to a lecture on the history of women in Svalbard from Gaby where we got a look at a side of the archipelago's history that's not often told.

Next up, we had lunch in the restaurant, which, as per usual, was as delectable as can be. With full stomachs and happy demeanours, we headed back again into the lecture hall—but this time for a very important chat about being responsible tourists in Svalbard. During this talk, we learned about best behaviors for visiting the Arctic and we got insight into how we can keep ourselves—and the polar bears—safe during our travels. Afterward, we took a moment to biosecure our clothing and equipment so we can avoid introducing diseases and non-native species to Svalbard.

Since a few hours had already passed since lunch, it was time for a bit of a snack, this time in the form of afternoon tea at the Elephant Island Bar. While there, many of us took time to learn about some of Aurora's other expedition offerings while others joined Michael in the lecture room to get tips on how to best handle lighting while taking stunning photographs.

The evening wrapped up with yet another exciting recap and briefing and a yummy dinner in the restaurant. Following dinner, many of us enjoyed popcorn and the movie *Nautilus* in the lecture room.

As we headed ever north, the sun began to shine upon the *MV Greg Mortimer*. We eventually reached the rocky shores of Bjørnøya toward the latter part of the night and got the chance to appreciate this rarely seen island before continuing our journey to Spitsbergen. Onward and northward we go!



Svalbard

DAY 10 | Friday 26th May 2023

Position at 0600 on 26th May

Latitude: 75°49'0" N

Longitude: 019°12'7" W

Course: 001°

Speed: 13 knots

Wind Speed: W 5/6

Barometer: 999

Air Temp: -2°C

A Journey is a person in itself, no two are alike, and all plans, safeguards, policies and coercion are fruitless. We find after years of struggle that we do not take a trip; a trip takes us.

—John Steinbeck

Overnight, as we were deep in slumber, Captain Maxim steered the good ship *Greg Mortimer* north of Bear Island and up the east coast of Spitsbergen. Greg woke us up with a gentle wakeup call and we were met with a chilly grey scene outside; -3 degrees celsius outside our cabin windows as the ship raced towards the ice, pushed along by a tail wind.

As we devoured a delicious breakfast prepared by our galley team, the topic of conversation at the breakfast table revolved around the growing anticipation of reaching the ice.

The day's activities commenced with Colby delivering the much anticipated lecture on Isbjorn: A Natural History of the Polar Bear. Colby used a combination of his personal experience operating in polar bear habitats in combination with a stunning collection of images to help illustrate the plight of the polar bear.

Colby did a brilliant job of covering the four main elements of a polar bear, being:

- As the marine bear it relies on the frozen sea as habitat;
- As the ice bear it has special adaptations that allow it to thrive out on the ice, even in the dead of winter;
- As the wandering bear it requires a sizeable chunk of wilderness, yet stays within the boundaries of its sub-population; and
- As the white bear we are reminded that it is seasonally forced from its icy realm onto solid ground, yet has special traits that allow it to endure on land for periods of time.

Next up in the lecture theatre was Gaby with 'Sea Ice'. Gaby was able to clearly illustrate the fundamentals of what sea ice is, being: frozen sea water, which floats on the surface of the ocean (in both the Arctic and Antarctic) and has a huge effect on the polar environments. Gaby was only halfway through her lecture before Greg's voice echoed through the ships PA system, advising that sea ice had been spotted in the distance. With our newfound knowledge about sea ice, we raced for the observation decks where we were met with a wide expanse of loose brash ice stretching out in front of the ship and a very brisk wind that required us to put on another warm layer or two!

Throughout the afternoon we continued to sail through the sea ice, with a number of bearded seals and walrus spotted on the ice floes. Greg and the team continued to scan the sea ice for the elusive Polar Bear and discussed options for a post-dinner Zodiac cruise.

After another delicious dinner prepared by the galley team we donned our warmest clothes and wet weather gear and ventured out into the Zodiacs to explore Hambergbukta, home to a large glacial face. As we set off from the *Greg Mortimer* we were met with a vast expanse of brash ice extending two miles out from the glacial face. The string of Zodiacs separated into their pairs and headed off in different directions along the line of brash ice, with northern fulmars, glaucous gulls, kittiwakes, guillemots and eider ducks spotted as well as a group of walrus out on the ice. Upon returning to the *Greg Mortimer*, we found that the brash ice was quickly engulfing the ship, with the Zodiacs having to skilfully navigate their way through the narrow passages in the ice.

Once we were all safely back onboard, Captain Maxim nosed the ship back out into open waters where the gentle waves rocked us to sleep.



Horsund, Svalbard

DAY 11 | Saturday 27th May 2023

Position at 0600 on 27th May

Latitude: 76°53'4" N

Longitude: 015°13'8" W

Course: 062°

Speed: 8.5 knots

The three great elemental sounds in nature are the sound of rain, the sound of wind in a primeval wood, and the sound of outer ocean on a beach. I have heard them all, and of the three elemental voices, that of the ocean is the most awesome, beautiful and varied.

—Henry Beston

After a long sail around the South Cape of Svalbard during the night of the 26th, we had the privilege of awakening in Hornsund on a moody, foggy morning. After a hearty breakfast we readied ourselves to take to the Zodiacs for a morning exploring inlet of Samarinvågen and its glacier. We were welcomed to the western side of Spitsbergen by calm and completely flat seas, with small ice floes recently broken off from the nearby fast ice.

We dressed warmly for the Zodiacs to deal with the late spring weather that is typical here at this time of year; grey, snowy, and three degrees below zero. As we drove toward the head of the fjord, we followed the coastline hoping for the great white bear to be in the area. On our way we encountered a plethora of seabirds; fulmars, eiders, puffins, skuas, black guillemots and the ubiquitous kittiwakes.

Eventually we reached the fast ice and could witness the spring melt: small floes detaching from the continuous fast ice and a huge amount of brown ice algae being released into the water column by the melting ice. We could get no closer to the glacier front without getting hopelessly entangled in the ice floes.

After a great morning, we made it safely back to the ship, excited for the best hot chocolate of our lives. After warming up on board and enjoying delicious tacos for lunch, we quickly sailed a few glaciers westward towards Gåshamna. There we had the chance to set foot on the island of Spitsbergen for the first time. It was also our first landing since crossing the stormy Barents Sea from Lofoten. We landed on an exquisite sandy beach, surrounded by snowy peaks dramatically appearing and disappearing as the fog rolled in and out. We explored the surrounding area, visiting an old Russian-Swedish science station. We were amazed by how small the cabin was in which these men overwintered. It must have been a truly harsh experience living through the dark Arctic winter in that tiny hut.

This was followed by a mellow beach walk, getting our first steps on the frozen tundra. After a few hours, cold and tired, it was time to head back to enjoy the comfort the ship, sparing another thought for the dedicated physicists who overwintered here. To finish the day we sailed slowly along the ragged and icy coast of Hornsund, looking for

Wind Speed: ENE 3
Barometer: 1013

Air Temp: -3°C

the elusive polar bear. Instead we were greeted by a lonely Arctic fox, running along the edge of the fast ice; saw bearded seals loafing on the ice, and last thing this evening watched a small pod of beluga whales. Another great day for the books.



Bamsebu & Camp Miller, Svalbard

DAY 12 | Sunday 28th May 2023

Position at 0600 on 28th May

Latitude: 77°34'6" N

Longitude: 014°05'2" W

Course: 066°

Speed: 7.2 knots

Wind Speed: SSE 3

Barometer: 1021

Air Temp: -1°C

Let us probe the silent places, let us see what luck betide us; let us journey to a land I know. There's a whisper on the night wind, there's a star a gleam to guide us, and the wild is calling calling...let us go.

—Robert Service

Reindeer, King Eiders and Walrus...Oh My!

"Good Morning Good People," rang out as curtains were excitedly whisked open to unveil a stunningly gorgeous 'Bluebird Day' in Van Keulenford, Bellsundet. As the anchor chain clinked and clanked on its journey to the depths, we gazed out upon yet more spectacular Svalbard scenery.

Once we set foot on land we divided into hiking groups, beginning at the 65 square foot (20 square metre) cabin named Bamsebu in Ingebrigtsenbukta, built originally as a base for hunting beluga whales. Here Hilde Falun Strom and Sunniva Sorby, both in their 60's, lived in from August 2019 to May 2020. Braving the extreme Arctic winter and collecting data as citizen scientists, they made history becoming the first women to overwinter in Svalbard without men. I look forward to reading their book, 'Hearts in the Ice'. I think we can all appreciate what an accomplishment this was after our two hour slog across the recently exposed tundra goop in the brisk air of late May. After a few close calls, all Muck boots returned safely for their biosecurity baths.

Along the way we encountered snow buntings, barnacle geese (oddly named for a bizarre interpretative relationship with the gooseneck barnacle in the 12th century which classified them as fish, suitable to be eaten on Fridays), hovering purple sandpipers, and scampering sanderlings. While looping wide for a better view of the reindeer, we spied old fox traps and fox tracks amongst the lichen-covered rocks. The sparseness of the landscape begged the question of how these 130-198 pound (60-90 kg) creatures could scrape a living from the meagre plant offerings. Reindeer are the only deer in which both sexes sport antlers. Their adaptations to survive the harsh winters include a thick coat with hollow hairs that trap their heat, hairy muzzles, short ears and tails to avoid frostbite, and broad hooves which splay out for support on snow.

After lunch we were treated to a brilliant snowy wonder-scape in Fridjofhamna, a bay on the northern side of Van Mijenfjorden. It was named after a hunting vessel used during the Swedish naturalist and geologist Torell's expedition to Spitzbergen in 1858. Word spread rapidly of an unexpected sighting of walrus as we hurriedly



prepared for a Zodiac cruise. We were all afforded fabulous views of these creatures as we 'caroueled' past these enormous creatures, the males exceeding 3,000 pounds (900 kg). Their Latin name *Odobenus* means 'toothwalker', for the ivory tools used to haul themselves onto ice floes. Cruising along the fast-ice we spotted a group of king eider ducks in spectacular breeding plumage, much to the delight of all.

Colby gave a thought-provoking recap on reindeer and Albert discussed one of his favourite topics, the beluga whale, which we were fortunate to see last night near Burgerbukta in Hornsund.

We should all sleep well tonight, perhaps dreaming of the elusive isbjørn.



Isfjorden, Svalbard

DAY 13 | Monday 29th May 2023

Position at 0600 on 29th May

Latitude: 78°23'0" N

Longitude: 014°49'0" W

Course: 009°

Speed: 8.1 knots

Wind Speed: E6

Barometer: 1021

Air Temp: -3°C

Often I feel I go to some distant region of the world to be reminded of who I really am. There is no mystery about why this should be so. Stripped of your daily routines ... you are forced into direct experience. Such direct experience inevitably makes you aware of who it is that is having the experience.

—Michael Crichton, 1988

Sometimes the weather just doesn't do what is forecasted... and today that was a very good thing! After departing Bellsund last evening, the *Greg Mortimer* sailed northward into Isfjord. We woke to an incredible scene from the observation lounge; an enormous glacial face pouring into the sea, with a backdrop of snow-capped mountains and mostly blue sky. Operations soon began and we found ourselves Zodiac cruising amongst blue icebergs along the shoreline. King eider, reindeer, and polar bear tracks made for an interesting cruise, and guide Chris even collected some clear glacial ice in anticipation of evening cocktails.

One thing that still remained elusive on this voyage was the polar bear, and so our Expedition Leader Greg Mortimer made the call to head into Dickson Fjord for a late morning look. To everyone's delight we found a lot of remaining sea ice, and upon it was, you guessed it, a polar bear! Everyone was delighted to watch the bear out on the ice with a seal carcass, as seabirds congregated to secure some leftovers. And if that wasn't exciting enough on its own, the location proved to be our highest-latitude point, at 78.3 degrees north. Eventually the bear wandered off toward the adjacent valley, no doubt ready for a long nap.

Back on board, the expedition team offered activities like cloud and bird surveys for citizen science programs, while others spent time in the lounge editing photos. With the weather still holding and plenty of time left in the day, Greg hatched plans for yet another outing.

We sailed deeper into the mountainous Isfjord system to a location known as Skansbukta. This proved to be a wonderful final excursion, complete with reindeer and towering bird cliffs. Expeditioners had excellent photographic opportunities and ample time to explore the historic mine area and an old shipwreck. Some even hiked to a high point to enjoy sweeping views of the bird cliffs and sprawling valley at the head of the small bay.

As this eventful final day finally wound down, the galley crew put the final touches on a celebratory meal. Captain Maxim hosted cocktails; photography guide Michael screened a wonderful compilation of images he had



Longyearbyen, Svalbard

DAY 14 | Tuesday 30th May 2023

Position at 0600 on 30th May

Latitude: 78°18'6"N

Longitude: 015°31'2"E

Course: 202°

Speed: 7.2 knots

Wind Speed: SW3

Barometer: 1015

Air Temp: -1°C

Men love to wander and that is the seed of our science.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Our day started with a classic morning wake up call beginning with the all so familiar “good morning, good people” from our beloved expedition leader, Greg. After breakfast we all gathered together on deck 4 to say goodbye or, rather, “see you later” to our fellow expeditioners, many of whom had transformed unwittingly from acquaintances to good friends. It was a strange feeling to bid farewell to our expedition family after almost two weeks onboard our faithful steed, the *Greg Mortimer*. Many hugs were given and received, and more than a few promises of future catch ups could be heard amongst our crowd that buzzed with the enthusiasm that only those who had shared such an experience as we had could emit.

The entire Aurora Expeditions team and the ship’s crew would like to thank you for joining us on our adventurous explorations crossing the Arctic circle. We hope to see you on the high seas again someday in the near future!



Bird and Mammal Sightings - Scotland

Bird Species	May				
	17	18	19	20	21
Northern Fulmar	●	●	●	●	●
Gannet		●	●	●	●
Shag	●	●	●	●	
Cormorant		●	●	●	●
Grey Heron		●			●
Common Eider				●	●
Mallard	●		●	●	
Ringed Plover		●	●		
Redshank		●			
Snipe			●		
Oystercatcher	●	●	●	●	●
Turnstone		●	●		
Curlew		●	●	●	
Great Skua		●		●	
Herring Gull	●	●	●	●	●
Great Black-backed Gull		●		●	
Lesser Black-backed Gull				●	
Black-Headed Gull			●		
Kittiwake		●	●	●	●
Arctic Tern		●			
Common Guillemot	●	●	●		
Razorbill (ib)		●		●	
Atlantic Puffin		●		●	
Pigeon (Rock Dove)	●	●	●		
Barn Swallow	●		●	●	
Wren		●			
Wheatear (ib)		●		●	

Bird Species	May				
	17	18	19	20	21
Meadow Pipit				●	●
Starling (ib)			●	●	
House Sparrow				●	
Skylark			●	●	●
Carrion Crow			●	●	
Raven			●		
Willow Warbler					●

Mammal Species	May				
	17	18	19	20	21
Common Seal			●		
Unidentified Dolphin	●				

Bird and Mammal Sightings - Norway and Svalbard

Bird Species	May							
	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
Northern Fulmar		●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Great shearwater			●					
Northern Gannet	●							
Pink-footed Goose		●	●		●	●	●	●
Barnacle Goose						●	●	●
Brent Goose							●	
Common Eider	●	●	●		●	●	●	●
King Eider							●	●
Red-breasted Merganser	●	●						
Long-tailed Duck (Oldsquaw)							●	●
European Shag		●	●		●			
White Tailed Eagle	●	●	●					
Willow Ptarmigan		●						
Oystercatcher	●	●	●					
Curlew		●						
Purple Sandpiper						●	●	●
Arctic Skua					●	●	●	●
Great Skua							●	
Herring Gull	●	●	●					
Glaucous Gull					●	●	●	●
Kittiwake	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Arctic Tern	●	●			●	●		●
Common Guillemot			●					
Brunich's Guillemot				●	●	●	●	●
Black Guillemot				●	●	●	●	●
Little Auk					●	●	●	
Atlantic Puffin					●	●	●	●

Bird Species	May							
	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
Great Tit		●						
White Wagtail		●	●					
Snow Bunting						●	●	●
Raven			●					
Arctic Warbler				●				
Willow warbler			●					
Common chiffchaff			●					

Mammal Species	May							
	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
Arctic Fox						●		●
Reindeer						●	●	●
Polar Bear								●
Ringed Seal							●	●
Bearded Seal					●	●	●	●
Walrus						●	●	
Beluga						●		

WILD SCOTLAND Scottish Isles

Sites visited
A Aberdeen
B Fair Isle
C Jarlshof
D Kirkwall
E Hermaness Nature Reserve







Expeditioners:

- | | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Carole Beales | Greg Edwards | Alison Peters |
| Narelle Bouveng | Lorraine Edwards | Louise Quinn |
| Peter Buck | Ian Evans | Raimondo Restelli |
| Ros Buck | Steve Goedecke | Mike Salter |
| Anne Burgess | Kim Goedecke | Mary Salter |
| Mark Burgess | Lori Greenawalt | Andrew Settle |
| David Butel | Alan Grisdale | Laura Stone |
| Jannette Butel | Susan Grisdale | Steven Stone |
| Stewart Butel | Lucas Horrobin | Mary Sutton |
| Toni Butel | Alexander Hunyor | Marilynne Talbot |
| Mary Chan | Gregory Knight | Paul Talbot |
| Pete Cherry | Angela Loftus-Hills | Trudy Thomson |
| Lesley Cotterill | Andy Mac Leod | Ross Tristram |
| Ann Davies | Amy Mac Leod | Merril Tristram |
| Theresa De Mestre | Janelle Morton | James Waley |
| Jill Downie | Allan Murray | Jillian Whitney |
| Julie Edwards | Brian Norris | |
| Noel Edwards | Anne Norris | |

Expedition Team:

- Expedition Leader: Greg Mortimer
- Assistant Expedition Leader: Ashley Perrin
- Expedition Leader Famil: Christophe Bouchoux
- Onboard Expedition Manager: Samantha Deer
- Firearms Manager: Jeff Nagel
- Firearms Manager Trainee: Piotr Damski
- Naturalist: Chris Todd
- PTGA Assessor: Colby Brokvist
- Glaciologist: Gaby Pilson
- Marine Biologist: Albert Michaud
- E-Team Photography Guide: Michael Baynes
- Expedition Medic: Hans Bruning
- Zodiac Master: Sergei Andronov
- Onboard Expedition Assistant: Ana Prado Padró

Senior Officers & Heads of Department:

- | | |
|---|---|
| Master: Maxim Makarovskiy | Chief Purser: Willie Lirio |
| Chief Officer: Andrey Zakalashnyuk | Executive Chef: Edgar Mangliano |
| 3rd Officer: Andrii Mezentsev | Head Waiter: Allan Liscaro |
| Safety Officer: Sergii Voina | IT Officer: Ihor Yesmienieiev |
| Bosun: Giovanni Dela Torre | Receptionist: Ana Gabriela Fernandez Araujo |
| Deck Cadet: Goncalo Alexandra Saraiva Aniceto Costa | Head Stateroom: Roniel Garcia |
| Deck Cadet: Miguel Saraiva Delgado | Able Seaman: Bobby Payumo |
| Ship Doctor: Andres Felipe Peralta Cuervo | Able Seaman: Hardik Dipakbhai Rao |
| Ship Doctor: Anzor Chomakhidze | Able Seaman: Tim Kitson |
| Chief Engineer: Dimitar Vasilev | Able Seaman: Joel Noble |
| Hotel Director: Pascal Joubin | Able Seaman: Ajay Kumar FNU |

Photography thanks to:

- Michael Baynes
- Raimondo Restelli

