

Spitsbergen - Realm of the Polar Bear

Naturetrek Tour Report

25 June - 6 July 2018



Female Polar Bear with large cub by Peter Dunn



Arctic Fox by Martin Beaton



Black Guillemot by Ed Drewitt



Boreal Jacobs Ladder by Martin Beaton

Report compiled by Guides and Leaders
Images by Peter Dunn, Ed Drewitt & Martin Beaton



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Ortelius Crew:	Captain Mika Appel and International Crew of 52,		
Including:	Toni Salo	Finland	First Officer
	Matei Mocanu	Romania	Second Officer
	Igor Nazarov	Russia	Third Officer
	Andy Mangilit	Philippines	Third Officer
	Aleksandr Bondarev	Lithuania	Chief Engineer
	Sebastian Duma	Romania	Hotel Manager
	Sava Savov	Bulgaria	Assistant Hotel Manager
	Heinz Hacker	Austria	Head Chef
	Ivan Ivanonic	Serbia	Sous Chef
Expedition Staff:	Jan Belgers	The Netherlands	Expedition Leader
	Christophe Gouraud	France	Assistant Expedition Leader
Expedition Guides:	Arjen Drost	The Netherlands	
	Claudio Ghiglione	Italy	
	Szymon Niezabitowski	Poland	
	Iain Rudkin	UK	
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	Melissa Scott	USA	
Ship's Doctor:	Moniek Mestrom	The Netherlands	

Introduction

M/V *Ortelius* was named after the Dutch cartographer Abraham Ortelius (1527-1598) who published the first modern world atlas, the *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (Theatre of the World) in 1570. MV *Ortelius* was built in 1989 in Gdynia, Poland, as a research vessel for the Russian Academy of Science and was named *Marina Svetaeva*. In 2011 she was purchased by Oceanwide Expeditions. The vessel was re-flagged and renamed *Ortelius*. Now the ship is sailing as a 125-passenger vessel. *Ortelius* is 91 m long, 17,6 m wide and has a maximum draft of 5,80 m, with an Ice Strength rating of UL1/1A, top speed of 12 knots and one diesel engine generating 3200 kW.

Day 1

Monday 25th June

Various UK and International Airports to Oslo

The majority of the group left the UK, with others from the United States and India and we overnighted in Oslo.

Day 2

Tuesday 26th June

Embarkation, Longyearbyen

GPS position at 1600: 78°14'N, 015°37'E. Air Temp: 10°C Cloudy Wind: N 2 Sea state: port

Our adventure began with our check-in at Oslo, for the flight to Longyearbyen via Tromsø, which went

smoothly with the use of a group check-in desk supplied by the airline. As we were leaving a country that was part of the Schengen Agreement we had to disembark at Tromsø for passport checks and safety checks of hand luggage before re-boarding the plane and onwards to Longyearbyen

At Longyearbyen airport our luggage was placed in a large panel van for onwards transmission to the vessel whilst we were taken into the town for a coffee and a short look around before we headed down to the quay. This year M/V *Ortelius*, our comfortable floating home for the next ten days, was moored at the quayside so we were able to walk straight onto ship and to our rooms where our luggage was waiting.

Since Longyearbyen's foundation, as a coal mining settlement in 1906 by John Munro Longyear, it has been the start point for many historic and pioneering expeditions. With all guests and their baggage safely on board, we departed in the late afternoon. Our cruise started with foggy conditions but the weather changed rapidly and became sunny and calm. We cruised into the Isfjord and just an hour after our departure we saw different whales on the horizon along our route. We reduced the speed of the ship in order to enjoy the moment with up to five Blue Whales surfacing in calm, glassy waters.

For this reason, we had no time for briefings and introductions and we decided to do them the next morning as with every zodiac cruise or landing. The evening continued with the required safety talk, drinks and high hopes for a successful voyage. Expedition Leader Jan, together with the Captain and the Expedition staff proposed a toast to our expedition aboard M/V *Ortelius*.

Day 3

Wednesday 27th June

Kongsfjorden: Sigridholmen and Ny-Ålesund

GPS position at 0800: 78°56.9'N, 010°32.2'E. Air Temp: 5°C Rain, fog Wind: NNW 4 Sea state: swell 3-4

During the night we moved along the West coast of Spitsbergen and in the morning, we found ourselves at the northern tip of Prins Karls Forland. Just after the wake-up call our first bears of the cruise were announced, a female Polar Bear and one cub in the far distance walking on land. What a start in the day! Shortly after breakfast, we gather in the lecture room with Jan for a mandatory briefing on environmental guidelines, zodiac operations and Polar Bear safety. We also received information about our potential landing at New London at Blomstrandhalvøya. After that we saw our expedition team move from the ship into the zodiacs, they were prepared for a landing. Unfortunately, there was too much swell at the gangway to insure a safe landing at Ny London. The plan B was a ships cruise into the Kongsfjord to see the mighty Kongsbreen (glacier).

This plan turned out to be extremely successful, as we found a female Polar Bear with two cubs on an island called Sigridholmen, a bird sanctuary. Polar Bears are known to feed on eggs and chicks of breeding birds on such islands and they can do great damage to the population. We all were able to observe the bears very well from the ship, we even saw them chasing Barnacle Geese away from their nests and feeding on their eggs. After lunch we went to an information meeting about the research village Ny-Ålesund, the world's most northerly settlement. It used to be a mining village until 1962 when the last out of several mining accidents took place. At that time the mine was owned by Norway, and eventually the prime minister of Norway had to resign due to lack of safety precautions in the mine. Nowadays the village is inhabited by numerous scientists, especially during summer, along with Barnacle Geese, Grey (Red) Phalaropes, Arctic Terns and other wildlife. We had a nice walk

around the village, visited the local shop and posted mail at the world's northernmost post office. Many of us saw an Ivory Gull next to the dog kennels. These gulls are scavengers and probably attracted by the dog's food.

Some of us took the short trip to the airship mast where the Norwegian arctic hero, Roald Amundsen, had his final stop before he made the first transpolar flight with the zeppelin N-1 in 1926. Situated close to the mast we heard from Arjen about the competition between Amundsen and Umberto Nobile and the following tragedy which led to the death of Amundsen in 1928.

Prior to dinner we enjoyed a recap where our expedition team and the Naturetrek leaders introduced themselves and gave us some information on the trip. After dinner we proceeded further north, and we were all excited for what the morning after would bring.

Day 4

Thursday 28th June

Liefdefjorden

GPS position at 0800: 79°34.9'N, 012°38.4'W. Air Temp: 4°C Overcast Wind: NW 4 Sea state: 3

After a reasonable night we turned into Liefdefjorden during the early hours, where the sea state reduced and conditions were ideal for a landing. After breakfast and our daily briefing, we experience our first taste of entering the zodiacs and were shuttled to the shingle of Idabukta. Here we divided into four groups each accompanied by two guides with rifles as a safety measure should any unseen Polar Bears appear. Three groups headed up the hill over the tundra to explore the higher altitude whilst a more leisurely group checked the lower slopes for plants and a chance to try some landscape art.

All groups saw Arctic Skuas, as two pairs were nesting in the area and although we kept our distance so not to disturb them, one decided it would warn us by diving at the head of our expedition leader! Eventually a male Rock Ptarmigan showed well to most and there was a continuous procession of Black-legged Kittiwakes carrying nesting material up the fjord and Arctic Terns patrolled the shoreline. The botanists found Purple Saxifrage, Mountain Avens, Polar Fir Clubmoss, Golden Whitlow Grass and Sulphur-coloured Buttercup.

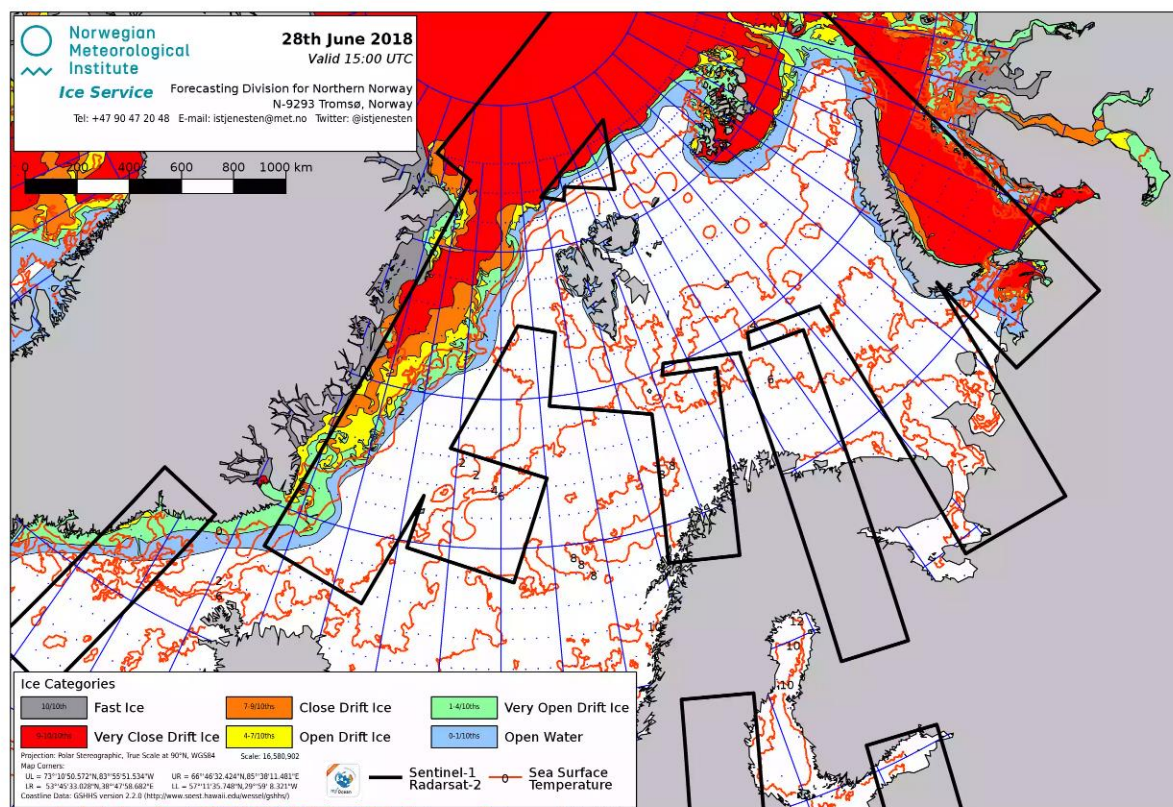
The more adventurous headed along the moraine to photograph the Monaco glacier.

After a couple of hours exploring this tundra landscape with its magnificent backdrop we were shuttled back to the Ortelius in time for another splendid lunch.

Having been suitably refreshed and rested we donned our waterproof and warm gear again, this time for a zodiac ride round the Andøyan Islands. The first of these had a high population of breeding Grey Phalaropes, with at least six feeding in the shallows along the shore and more on the tundra. A pair of Great Skuas (Bonxies) were not welcome and were being mobbed by Arctic Terns and Arctic Skuas. A good number of Black Guillemot were in the sea and a summer plumaged male Long-tailed Duck kept flying past us, with another pair reported. As we approached a distant island some of the zodiacs found a group of Eider, many were Common but also four magnificently coloured King Eider. There were another three Kings with Common Eider further along the shore and an immature male was found by one boat group.

We had succeeded in our quest and eventually one by one the zodiacs appeared from behind islands and made their way back to the ship for a drying down and a hot drink.

The Ortelius took a short trip further into the fjord to view the Monaco Glacier before our daily roundup of events, checklist and dinner. That evening we set sail for the pack ice, heading North West towards Greenland.



At around 10pm we got the call from Jan that we were approaching Moffen Island, a known breeding site of Sabine's Gull so we donned our warm clothes and headed for various view points on the boat. Most obvious were a group of sleeping Walrus, the first for the tour and then a shout of "Sabine's Gull in the surf" alerted us. After a few heart-stopping moments trying to locate the bird from a moving boat in amongst a feeding flock of Kittiwakes, we all saw the diagnostic, black, white and grey triangles on the upper wing and the black head. Even more surprising was that there were at least five feeding amongst the Kittiwakes, and at one point two were the closest birds to the boat!

A cracking way to end the day, new birds for many and broad smiles for all.

Day 5

Friday 29th June

Pack-Ice Day 1

GPS position at 0800: 81°10.9'N, 010°01.9'E Air Temp: 1°C Overcast Wind: N 6 Sea state: 5/ice

This morning, when we woke up, we were still in open water. But soon the first bits and pieces of sea ice appeared. Slowly the captain brought the Ortelius deeper into the ice and soon we found ourselves in a completely white world. What a magic sight! White sea ice as far as the eye can see. Only broken every now and

then by a little bit of open water around the many floes. We had to sail all the way up to **81°30'N** to get here, but it was well worth it.

The ice wasn't exactly what was expected, the ice cover was great, but it was all broken up in smaller pieces and it was quite thin. Many of us spent a lot of time outside, enjoying this high Arctic scenery and joined the expedition team in their search for wildlife. Even though many eyes were searching, not a lot was found. A few Ringed and Bearded Seals and now and then a small group of Harp Seals was seen, but not the animal everybody was hoping for. This was made up however by the large numbers of Ivory Gulls that were seen throughout the day around the ship. Every now and then they would pass by the ship, calling at each other, probably in the search for food. Apart from these pure white gulls, Kittiwakes, Brunnich's Guillemots and Little Auks were seen and a few Arctic Terns, who extended their 70.000km long migration with another couple of 100km's by leaving their breeding grounds on Spitsbergen behind and making it all the way up to the pack ice.

The weather was a nice mixture of sun, overcast and fog, often emphasising the remoteness of the place. In the afternoon Arjen gave a lecture about Polar Bears, followed a little later by one from Barbara about the sea ice ecosystem. It was interesting to hear about these different animals and their relation, but most of us really wanted to be outside, watching the sea ice. During the day we did find some thicker ice and a few larger floes and even some tracks that showed us Polar Bears should be around. But the King of the Arctic didn't seem to want to show himself to us today.

During recap, the species list was short, so there was more time for other information. Barbara told us a little about Bearded Seals and Christophe told the story of Ivory Gulls, who even seem to breed on icebergs!

As we would stay in the ice for another day, the evening and night were also spent in the ice. With the later, the light was wonderful, a real treat for the photographers among us. A dark phase Pomarine Skua was seen during the evening; the first of the trip and unusual in that the great majority of 'poms' (over 80%) tend to be pale phase birds. As there always was the possibility of bears showing up and as the sun doesn't set at all at this time of year, a watch system was put in place for the expedition team and Naturetrek leaders, so we wouldn't miss a thing at night.

Day 6

Saturday 30th June

Pack-Ice Day 2

GPS position at 0800: 81°37.9'N, 011°22.4'E. Air Temp: 2°C Overcast. Wind: NW 4 Sea state: ice

The night was spent cruising through the pack ice in a broadly north-easterly direction, keeping a watch for bears and other marine mammals. The weather was good with plenty of sunny spells between patches of mist and light fog. The height of the morning sun above the horizon gave several opportunities to see a 'fogbow' – the hazy and rather more diffuse equivalent of a rainbow. During the morning the dark phase Pomarine Skua from the previous evening made another appearance, clearly having followed the ship through the night. We were then treated to three pale phase Pomarine Skuas flying around the ship and settling on the ice at very close quarters, giving great opportunities for photographs.

An Ivory Gull was seen and photographed by one of the guests showing what appeared to be fresh blood on the outer primaries, suggesting it had recently fed on an animal carcass. This and fresh Polar Bear footprints indicated a bear kill may be close by so our vessel circled the area on the lookout. Sadly, no bears were found but it brought us to our most northerly point of the trip at **81°44.0'N**.

Shortly after this we changed course to head back towards Svalbard. A Bearded Seal was seen on an ice floe to the starboard side and allowed close views. Some passengers saw a couple of Harp Seals, and Ringed Seals were also seen. By dinner time we had reached the edge of the pack ice and as we left it behind us, in sunny but breezy conditions, a whale blow was sighted and two Blue Whales were seen, affording good views for a short while.

Day 7

Sunday 1st July

Alkefjellet

GPS position at 0800: 79°44.2'N, 018°19.9'E. Air Temp: 8°C Cloudy. Wind: NW 5 Sea state: 4

After heading back south-east overnight we were in the strait of Hinlopenstretet by breakfast and moving south to Alkefjellet just after breakfast. The scenery outside was stunning. While the wind had followed us down the strait, the sea state and wind were better than first thought and we were able to board the Zodiacs at 9.30am. In glorious sunshine and 13°C, we all set out on a Zodiac cruise, first visiting a large glacier of the Odin Jökulen ice cap that runs down to the sea. Waterfalls of meltwater and greening cliff slopes were colourful in the bright sunshine while Brünnich's Guillemots and Kittiwakes nested close by. Much of the cliffs are of an intrusion of 100-150 million year old dark rock, dolerite (basalt magma) contrasting with horizontal layers of older creamy marble. Following along the 100-metre high cliffs we looked on in awe at over 60, 000 breeding pairs of Brünnich's Guillemots. This is one of the most impressive places in Spitsbergen to view these guillemots breeding at such close proximity, packed tightly together on narrow rock ledges. The rock ledges are only just wide enough for a bird to lay its single egg. The guillemots were sitting or standing tight over eggs. Above us were incredible swirling numbers of guillemots and Kittiwakes, the latter nesting amongst and at higher levels on the cliffs.

Before we explored further the call came for Artic Foxes; two were making their way along the slopes, visible when they crossed some snowy patches. Their mix of light and dark summer fur made them incredibly cryptic against the mosaic of rocks and snow. A little later another fox was burying an egg before looking at us, nipping into a small cave hole and then heading up the slope to chew on a guillemot leg. We left it as it continued foraging along the slopes.

Feeling very warm now in the sunny conditions, we focused back on the guillemots and Kittiwakes and sailed along admiring their impressive numbers and behaviour. Kittiwakes were collecting soggy mud and vegetation on the slopes before taking them back to their nests. Many of the guillemots were sleeping while others were squabbling, sometimes falling in the sea together with a big splash and noise. The noises and smells were remarkable; those guillemots sat on the ledge beneath others were quickly white-washed with guano. Some were nesting just a metre or two up from the sea water. The cliff walls were painted with cream-pink guano – an indication of the range of marine invertebrates that the seabirds are feeding on. In the sunshine above, hundreds of Kittiwakes soared while the guillemots moved in and out of the rocks like an incredibly busy airport. Many were arriving back from the pack ice full of food and ready to take over incubation while others were swapping

duties and heading out to sea to feed themselves. Amongst the guillemots several Glaucous Gulls were sat on nests, also incubating eggs. Three were on a slope pecking at a dead auk. On the water guillemots were swimming close to the boat. At one point, a river of soft ice came down through a gulley in the rocks and saw 10s of birds suddenly fly out from the cliff ledges and over our heads.

After half the Zodiacs had headed back to Ortelius, the remaining three watched a Glaucous Gull feeding on a dead Kittiwake. Another gull arrived and displaced the first. Then a Great Skua arrived and displaced the gull. Its thick, sharp bill soon got to work plucking feathers and devouring the Kittiwakes. Shortly after two more Great Skuas arrived and circled round; they didn't stay and one was chased off by the dominant one feeding. While all this was happening a group of guillemots swam closer, as if curious. As a Glaucous Gull also edged closer the skua raised its wings to see it off. Nearby a Fulmar circled round and cautiously landed, moving closer also to feed on the dead Kittiwake. When the skua took off towards it the Fulmar raised its wings to look much larger than it was.

Back on the boat, a few people who had stayed behind also saw two flocks of up to 30 Pink-footed Geese in total fly past and a few Barnacle Geese on top of the cliffs.

By 12.30pm everyone was back on board for lunch and we headed south to Torellneset in Nordaustlandet. The scenery was beautiful – bright white snow caps and flat, mirror-like water. While another unscheduled boat visited nearby Walruses they also spotted a Polar Bear that arrived on the peninsula before heading back out to sea. The bear was swimming quickly and very distant; it looked like a small moving iceberg with a black tip (its nose). By mid-afternoon and a wait out on deck in all our warm clothes, we were able to disembark and headed for the Walrus colony nearby and the polar desert. We split into four groups and rotated around the landscape so each group had time with the Walruses. The landscape here is that of a polar desert with little rain or snow. Plant growth is limited to small scraps of vegetation in which Svalbard Poppy, Polar Mouse Ear and Arctic Saxifrage are the most frequent. Lichens cover the stones and mosses mark the lines of snow melt. During the two and a half hours we spotted at least two Arctic Foxes, one still with its white, furry winter coat, up on the higher raised beaches. They were just as curious of us as we were of them. An Arctic Skua that had been chasing Kittiwakes and terns flew in land, right over our heads and a Red-throated Diver flew over the sea giving good views. Out on the sea near the beach half a dozen Walruses made their way to the colony on land, their loud blows of breath and long bodies appear like small whales at first until you see them round faces and wide, curly back flippers.

Back with the colony of Walruses on the beach, we were able to see over 200 animals resting up, sleeping side by side. There was never a completely calm moment as the Walruses were busy scratching, sizing each other up or making noises. Many were just fast asleep. Many had pink necks and flippers where the blood was near the surface of the skin to help keep them cool. Some had long tusks, others small ones, some were wonky and others straight and neat. Those bigger, older males had scarred 'manes' with tubercles or warty skin, while most had various scratches and scars; some had bloody bases to their tusks. And all had a 'moustache' of stiff whiskers or vibrissae around their mouths to help them feel for food under water; some had longer whiskers than others. This group was mainly young and older males, with some females in amongst them with smoother, paler skin and shorter tusks. Usually there are 20 – 30 Walruses here; the large number seen today was thought to be due to the lack of ice in the strait for the Walruses to lay on; therefore they have all hauled out together on the beach.

By 7.30pm we were all back at Ortelius for dinner and met again at 9pm to for some short, entertaining and fascinating talks on Walruses and Brünnich's Guillemots by Barbara and Christophe.

Towards midnight we continued to head south and east reaching the glacier of the ice cap Austfonna where we hoped to stop for a short while to admire and photograph. The ice cliff here is 170km long, the longest glacial front in the northern hemisphere. However, the call came in from another ship that a Polar Bear and her cub were at a kill on an iceberg (GPS position at 1am: (79°17'N, 025°06'E)). We continued to follow the ice front and reached the bears at 1am; those who were asleep were quickly on deck! At first the bears were hidden from most of us; the clue to their presence was a few gulls stood on top of an iceberg. As the ship slowly crept round the iceberg we were presented with a mother Polar Bear and her large cub, around 18 months old. They had popped up to see who we were. The iceberg was quite a scene with blood all over the ice – they had devoured a seal, probably a Ringed Seal based on the size of the carcass and the pattern of the remaining skin. The iceberg was an icy stage in front of us and the bears had been busy moving the seal around; there was very little of it left. We watched as the pair licked up the remaining fat from the skin before returning to crunch the ribs as we left them an hour later. During our time with the two we watched as they licked their paws and nosed around at any remaining parts of the seal. The young animal's face was covered in blood while the mother was cleaner with a darker muzzle. At one point the large cub took one leg of the seal to the iceberg's edge and dropped it into the sea. It looked with surprise as its remaining prize floated away; it looked as though it would jump in after it and thought better of it. Meanwhile, Glaucous Gulls and an Ivory Gull pecked at any fleshy titbits. On the left of the iceberg the long intestine was laid out like a piece of rope – a Glaucous Gull was attempting to eat the whole length!

By just after 2am we headed towards the channel between the islands of Barentsøya and Edgeøya, where would be spending time tomorrow.

Day 8

Monday 2nd July

Barentsøya & Edgeøya

GPS position at 0800: 78°24.1'N, 022°27.6'E. Air Temp: 5°C Cloudy. Wind: NNW 5 Sea state: 3

The previous evening saw us voyage along the mighty ice front of Bråsvellbreen with us due to leave sometime during the evening but fortuitous contact with a fellow ship and the subsequent sighting of two bears caused us to change our plans. However as previously outlined after an hour of observing these magnificent animals in the light from the midnight sun we had to move on.

What in all seriousness felt like only five minutes later, we were gearing up for a landing at Sundneset on the south western tip of Barentsøya; the fourth largest island of the Svalbard archipelago. A big draw for the ships compliment was the King Eider ducks known to frequent the area as well as the Red-throated Diver. Both were spotted on the wee lake closest to the landing site. As we were leaving, those awaiting the latter zodiacs were treated to a spectacular King Eider flyby mere meters overhead. Throughout the entire landing, keen eyes were kept on a substantially sized male bear spotted a few kilometres away. Contentedly snoozing, it showed little interest in us though was well aware of our presence and serves to remind us only too well that we really are in the kingdom of the bear! This is also a marvellous place for plants: Dwarf Golden Saxifrage was found adjacent

to a small scree slope and large areas of Marsh Saxifrage were just about to flower. Towards the lakes we found the Polar Stoloniferous Saxifrage and a small specimen of the Polar Saxifrage.

Sundneset and Kapp Lee are the respective north and south sentinels demarcating the western limits of Freemansundet. It was fitting therefore that having visited the northern gatepost, we should visit the southern. Dolerittneset is a lovely peninsula a few kilometres south of Kapp Lee on Edgeøya, Barentsøya's larger sibling. Both islands are similar geologically with volcanic intrusions cutting through the sedimentary layers. The result is rounded hilltops with steeper, glacially carved crags punctuating their flanks. Beneath these at Dolerittneset lies a verdant landscape with flowers aplenty amidst areas of softer ground due to the seasonal melt. These structurally unsound patches can leave you with a sinking feeling and are very fragile so best avoided. The Glacier Crowfoot was found on the higher slopes and both Alpine and Dwarf Saxifrage near the Pomor ruins

As we weaved our way from the landing site past Pomor ruins, ancient whale bones and chaotic dolerite escarpments we came across a number of photographically accommodating Reindeer, grazing seemingly nonstop, testament to their lives being lived very much by feast or by famine. Pausing only for a lovely encounter with a Rock Ptarmigan, we descended finally to the beach to pay a visit to the Walrus. Historically a large haulout, these animals were very systematically and brutally hunted to near extinction - sometimes hundreds within the space of hours. Whilst numbers are nowhere near what they once were, the population is slowly recovering and it is always a joy to spend time with this rather unique creature and indeed in this area of Svalbard.

Day 9

Tuesday 3rd July

Hornsund

GPS position at 0800: 76°49.5'N, 015°15.3'E. Air Temp: 5°C Cloudy. Wind: NW 4 Sea state: 3-4

After a night sail we arrived early morning (8.00 am) at the entrance to Hornsund. The snow-covered mountains which rise steeply from the shore were clothed in cloud lending a sense of atmosphere to this spectacular Arctic landscape.

Our programme this morning was a ships cruise in the inner Fiord of Hornsund. Approaching the first glacier we spotted a distant Polar Bear moving from a small ice berg into the water. We spent some time observing the bear moving backwards and forwards across the form of the glacier presumably looking for seals. Although challenging to maintain good views it was great to see this natural behaviour. Moving away from the bear we continued sailing in Hornsund looking for Polar Bear and Beluga.

In the afternoon we explored the two branches of Burgerbukta, the northern section of Hornsund, by zodiac. The zodiac cruise enabled us to manoeuvre gently through the ice listening to the lapping of water against the small ice flows and to the gentle popping of the ice when held close to the ear. Black Guillemot were seen along with Fulmar washing with a strange wing flapping display on the water and several ice flows had numbers of resting Kittiwakes. After our zodiac cruise we landed at Gnålodden below the spectacular cliffs with their breeding colonies of Kittiwake and Brunnich's Guillemots. An Arctic Fox was seen scavenging below the bird cliffs and the slopes above the beach were clothed with small arctic flowers including Purple Saxifrage, Tufted

Saxifrage, Alpine Saxifrage, Arctic Saxifrage, Alpine Cress and the Highland Brook Saxifrage adjacent to the small stream. However, all too soon it was time to return to the ship to continue our cruise.

We had a really nice evening enjoying a BBQ and even some dancing on the heli-deck with beautiful landscapes and lights in Burgerbukta.

Day 10

Wednesday 4th July

Bellsund

GPS position at 0800: 77°35.8'N, 014°29.7'E. Air Temp: 7°C Overcast. Wind: SE 2 Sea state: 2

Just as we woke for breakfast, we arrived to the mouth of Bellsund. Our landing this morning took us ashore at the sight of an old beluga whale station and also the site of early mineral exploration. We set off in our groups to explore the area and immediately were surprised by a young Reindeer heading toward us from over the rise. It put on a little show of prancing around, sometimes coming nearer but eventually trotting off out of sight. We were fortunate to have this little visit. From there we moved off in our separate directions to learn about the area. Lovely tundra plants delighted the botanists with Polar Saxifrage, Polar Cress and Arctic Saxifrage, while the birders got to visit with Rock Ptarmigan and Arctic Skua. More Reindeer were seen further up on the slopes of the mountains while out in the bay, two Harbour Seals rested on a rock. We did come upon a sight that is rarely seen on our excursions – the remains of a Polar Bear whose demise was found upon this beautiful sight. Looking more closely, we could surmise that this bear was an older female by looking at the size of the paw and the worn claws. Who is to know how this bear met its end but it is good to remember that the cycle of life moves on. Then, just as we were moving toward the boats, one group found themselves mired in knee deep mud. I suppose it is not truly a trip to Svalbard without a true arctic mud bath and some of those guests will have a real story to tell!

After a lovely lunch back on board, we made a landing at Ingeborgfjellet. WoW! What a fantastic end to an epic journey. A nice herd of Reindeer greeted us right off the zodiacs while the expedition staff took off to scout the Little Auk colony. There were thousands of these hearty little birds flying round and round above our heads. The staff reported back that there was a mystery afoot – there were no Little Auks at home in the rocks above. Then we saw why. An Arctic Fox was lurking about hoping for some food for its own young and perhaps something to cache for winter. We were very patient and the sound of the birds flying over our heads brought smiles to our faces. Eventually they did begin to land around us, staying for just a little while before launching into flight again. After a bit, some decided to explore the other inhabitants of the area and departed for a walk. Those that patiently waited were rewarded with several more landings and some wonderful opportunities for photographs. Those that went for a walk were also not disappointed as the Reindeer were particularly tolerant of us and a very confident Arctic Fox provided the groups with great views. Highland Brook Saxifrage was common alongside the small streams along with Marsh Saxifrage. Upon return to the ship, it was time to return our rubber boots and ready ourselves for our final meal together. After dinner, we met one last time in the bar for a final recap of our time aboard and a chance to say farewell to our captain and crew.

Day 11

Thursday 5th July

Disembarkation, Longyearbyen & flight to Oslo

GPS position at 0800: 78°14'N, 015°37'E.

Way too soon our Arctic journey came to an end and what a remarkable week it was! After the last breakfast on board, it was time to say goodbye, not before a Humpback Whale was spotted in the fjord, lunge-feeding.

Goodbye to our ship and its crew and staff, goodbye to our new friends. We could look back on an impressive trip, and all of us had many memories of wildlife and spectacular scenery during our days in the ice, our Zodiac-cruising activities and our shore landings. We met really nice people during this cruise and we hope to see them again somewhere, someday!

Most spent the morning in Longyearbyen, some shopping some finding the final plants for the list, such as Boreal Jacobs Ladder and the Svalbard Buttercup and many going to see the Humpback Whale which performed very close to the shore..

The flight to Oslo was again via Tromsø where we had to pass through customs with all our luggage (similar to the USA) and we arrived on time into the capital city.

Most overnighted here before continuing their journeys onwards to their home countries, some stayed for a day or two to explore Oslo but one thing was common throughout, everyone agreed that this had been a magical trip into the Arctic. Highly successful with 11 bear sightings, some wonderful animal, bird and plant encounters all set against some of the most peaceful and thought provoking scenery we had ever seen.

Thank you all for joining us on this Arctic adventure, for your great company, good humour and enthusiasm. We hope to see you again in the future, wherever that might be!

Total distance sailed: 1,320 Nautical Miles

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Species Lists

Mammals (✓=recorded but not counted; D = dead))

	Common name	Scientific name	June/July									
			26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3	4	5
1	Arctic Fox	<i>Vulpes lagopus</i>		1				5	1	1	2	1
2	Polar Bear	<i>Ursus maritimus</i>		5				1	4	1	1D	
3	Walrus	<i>Odobenus rosmarus</i>			7			200	20			
4	Bearded Seal	<i>Erignathus barbatus</i>			1	1	1		1			
5	Harp Seal	<i>Pagophilus groenlandicus</i>				2	1	3	2			
6	Harbour Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>	1	5					1		2	1
7	Ringed Seal	<i>Pusa hispida</i>				3	2			1		
8	Svalbard Reindeer	<i>Rangifer tarandus platyrhynchus</i>		✓				3	✓	3	30	✓
9	Blue Whale	<i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>	5				3					
10	Humpback Whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>					1					1

Birds

1	Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>			9			11	2			
2	Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>	✓	✓				2	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>		12	6			3	15	✓		
4	Northern Pintail (or hybrid)	<i>Anas acuta</i>										2
5	King Eider	<i>Somateria spectabilis</i>	3	20	7				10	1	5	
6	Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>		3	2				16			
8	Rock Ptarmigan	<i>Lagopus muta</i>			1				1		1	
9	Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>		3	1				3	1	2	
10	Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		2								1
12	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		3	1							
13	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>							1			
14	Purple Sandpiper	<i>Calidris maritima</i>		8	2			2	10		✓	✓
15	Red Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus fulicarius</i>						2	20			2
16	Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
17	Ivory Gull	<i>Pagophila eburnea</i>		1		25	12	1	4	1		
18	Sabine's Gull	<i>Xema sabini</i>			5							
19	Glaucous Gull	<i>Larus hyperboreus</i>	✓	✓	✓	10	5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
20	Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	✓	✓	✓	2	3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
21	Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>		2	8			3				
22	Pomarine Skua	<i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i>				1	4	2	2			
23	Arctic Skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>		4	8			2	4	2	5	2
24	Little Auk	<i>Alle alle</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	4	✓	✓	✓
25	Brunnich's Guillemot	<i>Uria lomvia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
26	Black Guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
27	Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>	3	5	1	1				✓		1
28	Snow Bunting	<i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Plant List

The number in brackets corresponds with the number given on the Ocean wide map at the end of the report

Scientifics names	English name	Location
Pteridophytes	Ferns and their allies	
Equisetaceae	Horsetail Family	
<i>Equisetum arvense</i> ssp. <i>boreale</i>	Arctic Horsetail	Longyearbyen (1)
Lycopodiaceae	Clubmoss Family	
<i>Huperzia arctic</i>	Polar Fir Clubmoss	Idabukta (6)
Angiosperms	Flowering Plants	
Asteraceae	Daisy Family	
<i>Taraxacum arcticum</i>	Arctic Dandelion	Longyearbyen (20)
Brassicaceae	Cabbage Family	
<i>Braya glabella</i> ssp. <i>purpurascens</i>	Purplish Braya	Idabukta (6)
<i>Cardamine bellidifolia</i> ssp. <i>bellidifolia</i>	Alpine Cress,	Burgerbukta (17)
<i>Cardamine pratensis</i> ssp. <i>angustifolia</i>	Polar Cress	Dolerittneset (15)
<i>Cochlearia groenlandica</i>	Polar Scurvygrass	Ny Ålesund (5)
<i>Draba alpina</i>	Golden Whitlow-grass	Ny Ålesund (5)
<i>Draba oxycarpa</i>	Pale Whitlow-grass	Longyearbyen (1)
<i>Draba arctica</i> ssp. <i>arctica</i>	Mealy Whitlow-grass	Longyearbyen (1)
<i>Draba glabella</i>	Scree Whitlow-grass	Idabukta (6)
<i>Draba fladnizensis</i>	White Artic Whitlow-grass	Longyearbyen (1)
<i>Draba subcapitata</i>	Hemispherical Whitlow-grass	Longyearbyen (20)
<i>Draba norvegica</i>	Rock Whitlow-grass	Idabukta (6)
Caryophyllaceae	Pink Family	
<i>Arenaria pseudofrigida</i>	Fringed Sandwort	Dolerittneset (15)
<i>Cerastium arcticum</i>	Arctic Mouse-ear	Longyearbyen (1)
<i>Cerastium regelii</i>	Polar Mouse-ear	Torrelneset (12)
<i>Honkenya peploides</i> ssp. <i>diffusa</i>	Sea Sandwort	Dolerittneset (15)
<i>Minuartia biflora</i>	Tufted Sandwort	Idabukta (6)
<i>Minuartia rubella</i>	Mountain Sandwort	
<i>Silene acaulis</i>	Moss Campion Common	Longyearbyen (1)
<i>Silene involucrata</i> ssp. <i>furcata</i>	Arctic White Campion	Longyearbyen (1)
<i>Stellaria crassipes</i>	Tundra Chickweed	Longyearbyen (20)
<i>Stellaria humifusa</i>	Arctic Chickweed	Longyearbyen (20)
<i>Sagina nivalis</i>	Snow Pearlwort	Torrelneset (12)
Ericaceae	Heather Family	
<i>Cassiope tetragona</i>	Arctic Whit Bell Heather	Longyearbyen (1)
Papaveraceae	Poppy Family	
<i>Papaver dahlianum</i>	Svalbard Poppy	Longyearbyen (1)
Polemoniaceae	Jacob's Ladder Family	
<i>Polemonium angustifolium</i>	Boreal Jacob's Ladder	Longyearbyen (20)
Polygonaceae	Knotweed Family	
<i>Polygonum viviparum</i>	Alpine Bistort	Longyearbyen (1)

Scientific names	English name	Location
<i>Koenigia islandica</i>	Iceland-purslane	Dolerittneset (15)
<i>Oxyria digyna</i>	Mountain Sorrel	Longyearbyen (20)
Ranunculaceae	Buttercup Family	
<i>Coptidium X spitsbergense</i>	Svalbard Buttercup	Longyearbyen (20)
<i>Ranunculus hyperboreus ssp. arnellii</i>	Tundra buttercup	Longyearbyen (20)
<i>Ranunculus sulphureus</i>	Sulphur-coloured buttercup	Idabukta (6)
<i>Ranunculus pygmaeus</i>	Pygmy Buttercup	Sundneset (14)
<i>Ranunculus glacialis</i>	Glacier Buttercup	Dolerittneset (15)
Roseaceae	Rose Family	
<i>Potentilla hyparctica</i>	Arctic Cinquefoil	Longyearbyen (1)
<i>Potentilla pulchella</i>	Tufted Cinquefoil	Sundneset (14)
Salicaceae	Willow Family	
<i>Salix polaris</i>	Polar Willow	Longyearbyen (1)
Saxifragaceae	Saxifrage Family	
<i>Chrysosplenium tetrandrum</i>	Dwarf Golden-saxifrage	Sundneset (14)
<i>Micranthes hieracifolia</i>	Hawkweed-leaved saxifrage	Idabukta (6)
<i>Micranthes nivalis</i>	Alpine Saxifrage	Sundneset (14)
<i>Micranthes tenuis</i>	Dwarf saxifrage	Sundneset (14)
<i>Saxifraga aurea</i>	Arctic Saxifrage	Torellneset (12)
<i>Saxifraga cernua</i>	Drooping Saxifrage	Idabukta (6)
<i>Saxifraga cespitosa ssp. cespitosa</i>	Tufted Saxifrage	Longyearbyen (1)
<i>Saxifraga hirculus</i>	Marsh Saxifrage	Sundneset (14)
<i>Saxifraga hyperborea</i>	Polar Saxifrage	Torellneset (12)
<i>Saxifraga oppositifolia</i>	Purple Saxifrage	Longyearbyen (1)
<i>Saxifraga platysepala</i>	Polar Stoloniferous Saxifrage	Sundneset (14)
<i>Saxifraga rivularis ssp. rivularis</i>	Highland Brook Saxifrage	Burgerbukta (17)
Scrophulariaceae	Figwort Family	
<i>Pedicularis hirsuta</i>	Hairy Lousewort	Longyearbyen (1)
Liliidae		
Cyperaceae		
<i>Carex nardina ssp. hepburnii</i>	Cushion Sedge, Nard Sedge	Idabukta (6)
<i>Carex rupestris</i>	Rock Sedge	Idabukta (6)
<i>Eriophorum scheuchzeri ssp. articum</i>	Polar Cotton Grass	Longyearbyen (1)
Juncaceae	Rush Family	
<i>Juncus biglumis</i>	Two-flowered Rush	Bellsund (18)
<i>Luzula arcuata ssp. arcuata</i>	Curved Wood-rush	Longyearbyen (1)
<i>Luzula confusa</i>	Northern Wood-rush	Idabukta (6)
<i>Luzula wahlenbergii</i>	Reindeer Wood-rush	Burgerbukta (17)
Poaceae	Grass Family	
<i>Alopecurus ovatus (magellanicus)</i>	Polar foxtail	Longyearbyen (1)
<i>Deschampsia alpina</i>	Alpine Hair-grass	Dolerittneset (15)
<i>Dupontia fisheri</i>	Tundra Grass	Longyearbyen (1)
<i>Dupontia psilosantha</i>	Outspread Tundra Grass	Longyearbyen (1)
<i>Phippisia algida</i>	Spiked Snow-grass	Dolerittneset (15)

Scientific names

Poa alpina var. *vivipara*
Poa arctica ssp. *arctica*

English name

Viviparous Alpine Meadow-grass
 Arctic Meadow-grass

Location

Idabukta (6)
 Idabukta (6)



Walrus by Ed Drewitt



Grey (Red) Phalarope by Martin Beaton



Blue Whale by Peter Dunn



Purple Saxifrage by Martin Beaton



Svalbard Reindeer by Martin Beaton



Black-legged Kittiwake by Ed Drewitt



Ivory Gulls on pack ice by Peter Dunn

Map of the Route



Paintings by Chris Rose (acrylic on paper)

Completed on the spot, in a limited time frame in spiral-bound watercolour pads



Monaco Glacier by Chris Rose



Sea Ice landscape by Chris Rose