

Spitsbergen

Triplog



s/v Antigua

September 4 - 14. 2014

The SV Antigua was built in 1957 in Thorne (UK) and served for many years as a fishing vessels, until it was completely re-built in the early 1990s in the Netherlands as a barkentine and equipped as a passenger ship. A barkentine has three masts with square sails on the foremast.

with

Captain – Joachim Schiel

First Mate – Linda Eitelhuber

Second Mate – Ismael Ramonde

Chef – Alex Hülsmann

Chief Service – Nadine Hugo

Service – Jana Maxova

Service – Bart Ensing

Expedition leader – Michelle van Dijk

Guide – Charlotte Caffrey

September 3.

Longyearbyen

Position at 14 o'clock: 78°14' N 15°36' E

Temperature: 6 °C

Shortly before 2 p.m. most of the passengers arrive at s/v Antigua, a blue sailing vessel that was going to be our home for the upcoming ten days. We all had to visit our captain Joachim at the wheel house. After that we were welcomed inside with coffee or tea and biscuits. Captain Joachim introduced the crew and gave us a board-safety briefing telling that we are not allowed to fall overboard or make bonfires on the ship. Then our expedition leader Michelle took over and gave a brief introduction. By the time she was finished, the fire alarm sounded and we had to dress warm, get our life jackets and come to the deck. Now we were ready to leave. At around 7 all of a sudden a big blow was seen. It turned out to be a blue whale. We were very lucky, because the blue whale was very friendly, staying around the ship, coming very close and besides showing its fluke it was also rolling over and showing the flippers.

After dinner it was movie time. Our ship Antigua is part of AECO (Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators) and therefore a little movie was shown about the do's and don'ts on land.

While sailing out of Isfjord, we enjoyed the scenery with the sugared mountains in the beautiful evening light.



September 5.

St. Jonsfjord & sailing Forlandsund

Position at 8 o'clock: 78°31,3' N 012°51,2' E

Temperature: 6 °C – cloudy – no wind



We awoke to a magical panorama of glaciers, low lying mists and a calm sea carpeted in iceblocks. St. Johns fjord had already proven interesting with Tina and Janis spotting arctic fox and reindeer from the bow. After breakfast and some additional safety and what to wear briefings we were ready for our first arctic landing and what a pretty sight to see!

All went ashore together and enjoyed an informative talk from Michelle on the life of the Spitsbergen trapper, together with his toilet habits! After looking over the trappers hut Michelle took the hikers up the ridge for glorious views of the surrounding glaciers, whilst Charlotte took the rest of the group to explore the tundra flowers, lichens and sit and observe the reindeer from a hill observation point. The reindeer were particularly interesting: a large male with two more elegant females. The male boasted magnificent antlers but they were bright red as a result of the shedding of its skin which draped the horns and fell limply into the face of the stag.

We later visited the graves of English whalers which had most likely met their end through scurvy. Pink footed geese flew overhead whilst along the grey pebble shoreline, Purple sandpipers were busy in the seaweed foraging for small insects and invertebrates- no doubt to fuel them for their forthcoming long journey south.



After lunch Plan A was to head to Hermans Island where skuas are known to breed but it was clear on our approach that we had a welcome party that was not so welcome but wonderful to spot. A large male bear was patrolling the shore and we instead took the Antigua as close as shallow waters permitted to view him. He was a sad looking bear, we decided he was lonely and blue...

The bear was a big tick building on the exhilaration of yesterdays blue whale!

In the evening everyone remarked on a truly remarkable trip...and it was only the first full day of the voyage !

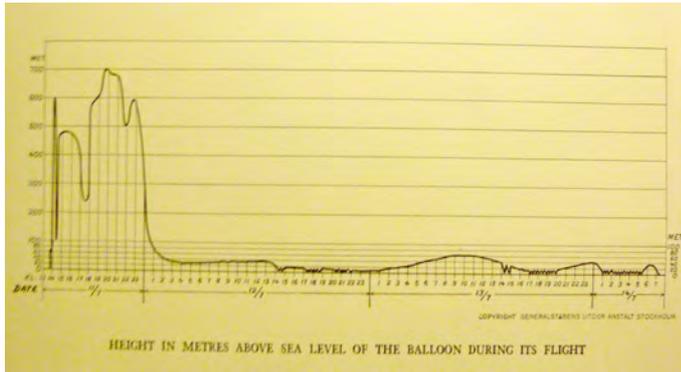
September 6.

Virgohamna & Smeerenburg

Position at 8 o'clock: 70°43,5' N 010°54,4' E

Temperature: 5,5 °C – light snow – Windforce 3-4

To land at Virgohamna is something special. The place is very restricted and only small groups with a special permission from the gouvernor are allowed to land. Virgohamna has a rich history. It is named after the ship of Salomon August Andrée, a Swede that try to fly to the North Pole using a balloon. His first attempt was in 1896, but the winds were never in his favor, so he had to come back the next year. In 1897 Andrée tried again. Together with engineer Knut Fraenkel and meteorologist Nils Strindberg. Unfortunately



it all went wrong. The rope to steer got loose and so also the ballast was gone. The balloon went up to a height of 600 meters. Ice formed on the balloon and due to the extra weight it lost height, then ballast was trown overboard and it went up again. This repeated, in the end the basket caught water and was to heavy to get up again.

Also journalist Walter Wellman tried to reach the North Pole from Virgohamna. He used the house that was build by Sir Spike who went to overwinter in Virgohamna a few years earlier. The oldest remains in this open air museum are the mounts that once were the blubber ovens of the Harlinger cookery around 1636. While one group was on land, the other half was zodiac cruising the bay looking at world's northernmost harbour seal colony. But seals were not the only wildlife we got to see, we were very lucky to see a blue fox, which are rare at Spitsbergen.



During lunch someone spotted a walruss in the water and it didn't take long before the salon was empty and everyone was out on deck. But not only in the water, also on land at Smeerenburg, our landing site for the afternoon, there was a group of walruses laying on the beach.

Michelle and Charlotte took us in one big line towards the group of walruses and when we got there some of the young males became active and did some play-fighting. We watched it until we were all very cold. A few of use went back to the ship, eleven people went with Charlotte for a short walk around the blubber ovens and then back to the walruses, and twelve persons went with Michelle for a long walk to the

beach at the other side where the Dutch monument is. At the beach some bear tracks were found of an adult and a cub.

Shortly before dinner, Charlotte gave a lecture on seals & walrus.

September 7.

Raudfjorden

Position at 8 o'clock: 79°44,4' N 012°12,3' E

Temperature: 0 °C – overcast – Windforce 2



Yesterday evening we had entered the 20km Raudfjord, lined with glaciers along both sides and terminated by the beautiful Raudfjordbreen.

By late evening a thin blanket of snow covered the ship sufficient for some snowball fights to commence. The early view in stark black and white was breath-taking.

After breakfast the short walk group explored the trapper hut of Stockholm Sven, the shoreline, the Bruceneset peninsula and strolled towards the lake Richardvatnet. For the longer hikers, an ascent towards the summit of the 350m high Solanderfjell. We paced our ascent and at one of our viewing we celebrated with a well earned rest.

This vantage point provided 360 degree stunning views – a spectacular fjord lined with glaciers along its length. Photographs followed more photographs together with a much appreciated attempt to enjoy 2 mins silence! Later to be followed by a rendition of Happy Birthday to Bert who celebrated his birthday in style at the top of the World. We kept a good pace for our route down and skirted the log-strewn lake before once more returning to Antigua-just in time for lunch.



After lunch we set the sails and headed west with fine winds towards the east and our next stop leiforden. In the evening Bert generously treated us all to a birthday drink and a slice of his birthday cake before admiring the stunning supermon which rose behind a glacier before we headed to bed.



September 8.

Liefdefjord: Monacobreen & Texas Bar + Gråhuken

Position at 8 o'clock: 79°34,3' N 012°50,3' E

Temperature: 2 °C – overcast – no wind



Liefdefjord is Dutch, it means 'Fjord of Love'.

Overnight we had anchored between the Lerner islands and during breakfast we sailed towards the Monaco glacier. The captain steered the ship in front of it, so we could have a full view of this magnificent glacier and its 5km calving front. According to the chart, we were actually sailing inside Monacobreen. The glacier was quite active and calved a few times. Because of the calm weather we could stay a long time outside before getting cold. Elisa climbed the mast and many others followed her.

The changing light was impressive and when the sun broke through the clouds we all enjoyed even more.



During lunch we sailed towards Texas Bar. Michelle opened the cabin so everyone could have a look inside. There was a special request for a drink at the bar, so 27 beers and a bottle of schnapps were taken to the bar. At the bar also a group picture was taken before we split up for our walks. Charlotte took the short through the valley to a lovely small waterfall. The long walk went 250 m up the Wulfberg some steep passages had to be taken, but all the effort was rewarded by the view over the Liefdefjord. Back at Texas Bar the remained beers were drunk and we had the party started.

Coming back onboard, a special Texas Bar-cocktail was sold:

- 2cl Ballentines whisky
- orange juice
- ½ slice of lemon
- ½ slice of orange dipped in brown sugar
- drop of Blue Curacao
- Monaco glacier ice



It was Stefan's birthday. This had to be celebrated, so after dinner Nadine brought in a very tasty chocolate birthday cake.

But this was not the only birthday present Stefan got. On our way out of the Liefdefjord captain Jo spotted two bears, a mother and her cub of this year. We had to sail back around Stationøyane to get a closer look, but it was worth it.

Around 11.30 we passed Gråhuken, in the twilight a cabin was visible. This is the trapper hut were Christiane Ritter overwintered with her husband during the early '20s. About this wintering she wrote the book 'A woman in the Polar night.'

September 9.

Magdalenefjord: Gravneset

Position at 8 o'clock: 79°33,5' N 011°02,7' E

Temperature: 3,5 °C – blue sky – no wind

Magdalenefjord greeted us with stunning sheer mountains and glistening glaciers. The ship moored surrounded by panoramic beauty. We split into two groups after breakfast, Charlotte took the long hike to set foot on the glacier, whilst Michelle set off with the shorter group to admire the coast and intricate ice shapes scattering the shoreline. We spotted a Pomarine Skua along the way. In the light snowfall we saw many fox tracks, sometimes meeting with and rapidly splitting from those of the snow bunting. The latter were observed in the half frozen ponds along our path whilst black guillemots and ducks were noted swimming close to the shore. The long group set foot on the glacier and erupted into a snowball fight in front of three imposing and impressive glacier fronts. We headed back to the ship to be greeted in the zodiac by a bearded seal. He did not show as much interest in us as we in him and gave us a good splash with the tail before diving below the waves.



After a hearty soup lunch we headed west towards our next stop Lilliehöökreen. The weather was stunning though conditions not perfect to hoist the sails. We cruised along the West coast of Spitsbergen and had a good view at 'the seven glaciers'. These glaciers were already known in the early whaling times and were numbered one to seven. Michelle gave an informative talk on polar bears following which we enjoyed the glorious mountain scenery: reindeer at least 15 dotting the landscape, Minke off the starboard bow...and once we had turned the corner blue whales –again! The blue was joined close by what we thought might be a sei whale though a good view could not confirm. We all scrambled into (a wonderful) dinner at the end of which Michelle came in to tell us about a humpback on the bow-literally. As we watched it feed and dive for almost an hour we were awestruck by the sunset lighting up the surrounding mountainside a surreal deep crimson. A very memorable evening indeed, spent in the shelter of the narrow bay called Signehamna.

September 10.

Krossfjord: Lilliehöökreen & Tinayrebukta

Position at 8 o'clock: 79°16,4' N 011°32,5' E

Temperature: 3,5 °C – foggy – No Wind



Overnight we had anchored in Signehamna, a sheltered bay on the west side of Lilliehöökfjord. During breakfast the anchor was heaved and we got closer to the Lilliehöökglacier. On our way we saw a bearded seal on an ice floe and we sailed close by. Around the ship we could see that new ice was formed in the last nights. The water was flat calm and the mountains around the fjord were reflected in the water. After captain Jo had parked the ship 800 meter in front of the glacier, Tina & Angus climbed up the mast to enjoy the view from a different angle. All of a sudden we heard a rumble and a major calving took place. One after the other piece came down and created a two meter wave. Captain commended everybody to leave the midship's deck, because it could be possible that the wave would wet it. The ship pitched and the bravehearts in the mast at to cling on. Over the last two years the glacier front retreated 400 meters.

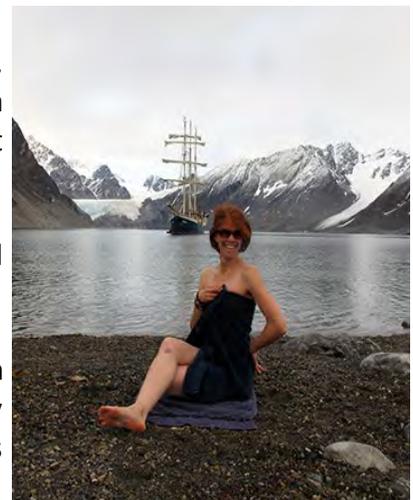


On our way to Tinayrebukta two foxes were spotted. Both of them were almost white. They sat on the beach and therefor we could get very close with our ship.

Around 2 p.m. the group of long hikers were brought to Fanciullipynten near Camp Zoey. Camp Zoey was build in 1911 for Ernest Mansfield and his Northern Exploring Company and named after his daughter. These days it is still in use by the people of Ny Ålesund. The walk went over some 220 meter high mountains and a frozen river. We saw a lot of reindeer grazing on the last flowers. The other half of the passengers sailed with Antigua into Tinayrebukta and went a little closer towards the Tinayreglacier. At the moment the ship arrived, the glacier calved. Afterwards, the second group went for walk too. When the hikers came back, some of them needed a refreshment. Towels were ordered from the ship and Eliza, Tim & Berit went for a dip (in the sea). The brave bathers got an applause and a cup of hot tea with schnapps.

On our way out of the fjord we met 'our' blue whales again and spend almost 2 hours with them.

When we arrived in Ny Ålesund to stay overnight, a young Dutch researcher named Ben Frederiks, came onboard to tell about daily life in world's northernmost settlement and the project he was working on.



September 11.

Kongsfjord: Ny Ålesund & Blomstrandhalvøya

Position at 8 o'clock: 78°55,7' N 011°56,1' E

Temperature: 5 °C – overcast – no wind



After breakfast guests headed out independently to the shop and later on met at the statue of Amundsen. Here Michelle related the incredible story of this heroic explorers life. We later stood and listened to the rest of the story whilst standing close to the 35m high zeppelin mooring mast. She told the story of his challenge of crossing the north pole alongside Italian Nobile and his little dog Titina. Their expedition was a success despite Byrd in his Fokker having claimed he had piped Amundsen at the post and flown to the pole and back before him.

We enjoyed a slow walk around the site and were able to tick ptarmigans from our ever growing species list. Someone had already spotted an ivory gull at the village. Walking back we noted that a breeding pair of Arctic terns were at a pond and guarding a very late chick.

Lunch was enjoyed onboard after which we arrived at Blomstrandhalvøya. Here Charlotte related the story of Ernest Mansfield and his unsuccessful attempts to mine marble, which later turned out to be of too low quality to be commercially viable.

We observed the rusted machinery the Northern Exploration Company had left behind. Michelle then took the long group across the 361 meter high mountain tops to enjoy some spectacular views of the surrounding glaciers and valleys. Charlotte took a short group then a medium group for a beautiful walk to enjoy the waterfall, spectacular views over Kongsfjorden and close encounters with reindeer, red throated divers and arctic terns on a tranquil pond.



Once all were aboard we headed south whilst Michelle gave an interesting talk on the Discovery and Geopolitical status of Spitsbergen.

September 12.

Adventfjord & Skansbukta

Position at 8 o'clock: 78°14,8' N 015°40,7' E

Temperature: 4,5 °C – overcast – No wind

Over night we had sailed to Adventfjord because Christina felt and had to see world's northernmost dentist. Charlotte took everybody else to Hiorthhamn across Longyearbyen. Remains are still found from the early mining era. At that time they even had imported muskoxes from Greenland. But muskox have the same diet as reindeer and therefor they died out. While the muskoxes were still allive Hiorthhamn was called Muskoxhamn, but after they extincted the old name was taken in use again.



At noon everyone was back on board again and Antigua set course to Skansbukta. Skans means fortress and when we saw the mountain we knew why the it was called so.

Charlotte took the long hike out over the hill in the western direction. Michelle showed the others around the old gypsum mine. Also an old boat was beached.

After we came back on board, we had to get dressed for Captain's Cocktail at 6.30 pm. This was followed by Captain's dinner. Our chef Alex made a lovely dinner and the service did its very best by serving at the table.



After dinner the party continued to the early hours.

September 13.

Billefjord: Pyramiden & Nordenskiöldbreen

Position at 8 o'clock: 78°39,3' N 016°23' E

Temperature: 8 °C – rain – Windforce 2

Overnight we had moored at Pyramiden. The morning- after the Captains dinner was spent exploring this deserted Russian mining town. Led by our memorable guide Sasha, sightseeing highlights included sitting around the empty swimming pool watching the Russians compete, playing the grand piano in complete darkness in the theatre, strolling through the kitchen equipment in the bakery and enjoying a hair-of-the-dog vodka in the Russian Bar.



We wandered back to the ship in time for lunch. Heading towards glacier we came upon a lone polar bear resting on the hillside. Captain brought the scope to the lower deck for all to get a better view. Onwards to the glacier we continued to look for a polar bear mother and cub which had been spotted by another vessel earlier. At the glacier front we admired the deep blue ice caves and crevasses of the glacier front before turning around for our final homeward stretch to Longyearbyen.



September 14.

Longyearbyen

Position at 8 o'clock: 78°14' N 15°36' E

Temperature: 7 °C – Sunny – No wind

After a final, good Antigua-style breakfast it was finally time to say goodbye during the morning. Hard to believe that the trip had come to an end and that so much beautiful arctic experience could fit into a mere 11 days!

Most of us had another couple of hours to explore Longyearbyen and to go shopping before a bus would take us to the airport, others spent another night or two in town. Many of us knew already now that this was not our last visit to the Arctic.



Triplog is by Michelle and Charlotte.

Photographs by Michelle and Charlotte.

This triplog can be found on <http://www.spitsbergen-svalbard.nl> & <http://www.aqua-firma.com>

The SV *Antigua* will continue to sail in Spitsbergen's waters in the years to come; the other sailing ships of the Tallship Company fleet, *Mare Frisium*, *Artemis*, *Elisabeth* and *Atlantis*, sail the North Sea, the Baltic Sea, the IJsselmeer and the Canary Islands.

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