

Spitsbergen



s/v Antigua

September 22 – 30. 2018

The *s/v 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.

Captain – Kevin Ludwig

replaced by – Mick van der Sluis

First Mate – Marijn Achterkamp

Second Mate – Annet Achterkamp

Deck hand – Chantal Cörenzig

Chef – Piet Litjens

Chief Service – Jana Maxova

Service – Janine Jungermann

Service – Janin Dornbusch

replaced by – Melissa Berl

Expedition leader – Michelle van Dijk

Guide – Frigga Kruse

Photography-guide – Alexander Lembke

September 22.

Longyearbyen

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

Temperature: 3 °C – Partly cloudy – Wind force 2, East North-east.

Around 2 pm 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 the wheel house to sign in. After that we were welcomed inside with coffee or tea and cookies. Captain Kevin introduced the crew, told us about life on board, followed by the board-safety briefing. Thereafter, expedition leader Michelle gave the mandatory AECO-briefing, and told us the do's and don'ts on land.

Also, she told us more about the program for the upcoming week.



Because of a storm, that had raged over Europe before and now reached the Arctic, expedition-cruise ship *Togo*, had bought flight tickets for all their passengers, as they could not sail to Tromsø. Icebreaker *Oden* did a similar thing, they were underway from the North pole and sought shelter for the storm. They also ended up in Longyearbyen, to wait until the rage is gone. Also they had bought flight tickets for all the researchers on board.

For us, this storm meant that we would not be able to leave Isfjord.





Around 5 pm, we had left the pier and sailed towards Tempelfjord. We all enjoyed the view of the snow covered mountains.

The cold made us hungry, and at 7 it was dinner time. Immediately we recognised the skills of our chef Piet. A salad, different curries to choose from, and fruit salad and mouse for dessert!





Right after dinner we arrived in front of Tunabreen. It was a special feeling to be in front of a glacier and to hear the sound of the ice around the ship. Our mate Marijn and photographer Alexander joined forces and caught some ice for our drinks. While we all enjoyed our first adventure, the captain had to change the plans for the night. The wind had picked up to wind force 4, and at our planned anchorage, it seemed even more. Therefore we sailed into the next fjord to seek a bit of shelter in Skansbukta.



September 23.

Billefjord: Skansbukta & Pyramiden

Position at 8 o'clock: 78°31,4' N 16°01,8' E

Temperature: 3 °C - Overcast – Wind force 5, West



comfortable night in this sheltered bay. In the early morning hours, when many of us were woken up by a rocking motion, it became clear that this had been a wise choice: the wind had picked up markedly. In fact, it was positively stormy. We wondered just how bad it was out on the Isfjord, or worse, out on the open sea.





We did not rush into our first landing. Firstly, we needed to go through our zodiac briefing without which we would not be able to board the zodiacs to go to shore. Then Kevin and Michelle wanted to see how the gusts of wind would develop. If they picked up, it would be too dangerous to lower the zodiacs onto the water. However, we were very lucky both on the way out and later on the way back to the ship. We grabbed two windless windows of opportunity, and off we went (which was no guarantee that we did not get splashed by the waves...).





Skansbukta is a small bay framed by steep-sided mountains of beautifully striped sedimentary rocks. The geology is the reason for the archaeological remains which we visited here. Frigga gave us an insight into the origin of evaporites such as gypsum that crystallise out of evaporating seawater. If this happens again and again over a long time, thick layers of minerals can build up. Gypsum is an economic mineral which is needed in the manufacture of cement. So in 1918, a Norwegian company made a first attempt to mine here; a second attempt was made in the 1930s. Neither attempt were profitable.

Alex gave an account of the wooden hut that dates back to the mining activities but is still in use today by the hunting and fishing club of Longyearbyen. Members can hire it. Most of us could envisage spending a few days here in all peace and quiet, reading all the books we've always wanted to pick up but never had the time to. Then we walked across to the former mine entrance, which was barred for safety reasons, the railway embankment with its twisted rusty tracks, and the stockpile, which all hinted at industrial logic in a demanding Arctic landscape. A wooden ship wreck is said to have functioned as a lighter between the shore and a larger seaworthy vessel.





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After lunch, we spent a few more hours at anchor in Skansbukta to make sure that we were safe – not least from seasickness – before heading for our next destination. This time was filled easily with lively conversation about the morning's landing and the imposing surroundings.

Alex then offered his first photography lecture on this journey. He gave a few handy tips on how to see a landscape and to choose our images.

We lifted the anchor and set course for Pyramiden. Pyramiden is a former Russian coal mining town which was its heyday between World War II and 1998. Today, it is mostly abandoned with the exception of a handful of maintenance staff and guides who look after inquisitive tourists such as ourselves. It is possible to stay in a hotel here, but to walk around by yourself is too risky – there could be a polar bear behind or even inside any of the abandoned buildings.

Our evening's programme comprised of two options. Guarded by Michelle, one group walked straight up into the town at nightfall and into the hotel's bar to sample some fine Russian beer and vodka. Alex bravely led the other group up onto the wind-swept crane by the pier to get a feel for the vastness of the area and to, challenged by the encroaching darkness, try to capture the mood in a photograph. Naturally, this group, too, later headed up to the bar for a deserved drink. Many of us saw our first polar foxes who had made the town their home.

On the walk back to the ship, we looked over our shoulders more than once. Could there be a bear somewhere in the dark?



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September 24.

Billefjord: Pyramiden, Nordenskiöldbreen & Brucebyen

Position at 8 o'clock: 78°39,3' N 16°22,9' E

Temperature: 6 °C – overcast – Wind force 1, West



Overnight *Antigua* moored to the old coal pier and the weather calmed down. This morning we walked in one big group and explored the ghost town Pyramiden. Alex, our knowledgeable guide, led us into a building close to the harbour. It had some interesting rooms, most of them were just empty spaces, but one small room had wall covered with green velvet wallpaper.





Then we continued our walk towards town. We learned that the miners were here on a five year contract, and that most of them liked the relatively free and good life here, compared to what they had back home in the Soviet Union. It was a family community, with a school, kindergarten, cultural house, swimming pool, and many other facilities.

The main guided walk ended near the hotel. There we split up into two groups, the building-group, who was up to explore the mechanics workshop and the fox-group, for those who wanted to spend some more time with the Arctic foxes that were sighted close to the hotel. The Arctic fox comes in two colour morphs; the white, which is white in the winter and grey brown in the summer, and the “blue”, which is dark grey both in winter and in summer. We were very lucky to see them both, and even be able to get them both into one picture. The two groups met again at the hotel, where some of us enjoyed a coffee at the bar, while others bought some souvenirs in the souvenir shop.





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During lunch we left the ghost town behind us and cruised to Adolfbukta, where the massive glacier Nordenskiöldbreen is located. Captain Kevin steered *Antigua* close to the glacier front, which has a wavelike surface and is completely crevassed.



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After we spend half an hour in front of the glacier, we turned away to do a landing at the south side of Adolfbukta. There are the remains of an old Scottish settlement called Brucebyen. The Scotsman William Spiers Bruce, led the Scottish Spitsbergen Syndicate, and tried to explore coal. Our guide Frigga, who did her PhD on the British mining history, told us all about the settlement. After this interesting story, we split up into two groups. One group went with Michelle to take a look at the drilling tower, and do some leg stretching. The other group stayed with Frigga and Alexander to think, see, and take images in the best possible way.



September 25.

Ekmanfjord: Coraholmen & Yoldiabukta: Wahlenbergbreen

Position at 8 o'clock: 78°41,6' N 014°37,6' E

Temperature: 4°C – Overcast – Wind force 1, North-east



Over night, the *Antigua* had relocated to the small island of Coraholmen deep in the Ekmanfjord. We slept soundly, and those early birds who were first on deck felt drawn off the ship and onto the island by the enticing light and Arctic calm. But we had to be patient until after breakfast.

Unlike most other beaches in Svalbard, our little landing site was littered with bivalves and... corals? No, not corals; these were branching pieces of calcified algae. They had not been washed up out of the water. Instead they had come forward out of the eroding moraine that framed the beach. We would see much more of this moraine on our walk.

We set off as one large group to go fossil-hunting in the shale along the shore. Michelle explained that the name Coraholmen hints at the fossil *Productus cora*, and Frigga added that this was a type of shell, a brachiopod, which no longer exists today. After some searching, we found one or two brachiopods, but corals and ammonites seemed somewhat more common.

After the group split up, Frigga's long hikers set a course across the tundra towards the other side of the island. They were lucky to meet two curious reindeer, already changing into their winter coats, before heading into the reddish moraines that marked the former extent of a glacier. This moon landscape was like a labyrinth. It was full of small lakes at different heights, now frozen over, and our course zigzagged this way and that on the return to the landing beach – where a frantic cleaning of muddy boots ensued.

Meanwhile, the photography group with Alex and Michelle focused first on the last remaining flowers: the tufted saxifrage (*Saxifraga cespitosa*) in an attempt to capture the hardiness of such plants against the Arctic backdrop. Naturally, the landscape lured the telescopes and the reddish moraine with its lakes was a challenged the photographers were only too happy to accept.



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After lunch, the wind blew in our direction of travel, an important prerequisite of sailing. So the motor went off and sails went up, and for the best part of two hours, we moved forward in peace and quiet until we finally reached the Wahlenbergreen.



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The Wahlenbergreen is a glacier that has been surging over in recent years. Because of this increased forward motion, the glacier front calves more often, and as our ship was approaching, Kevin dodged more and more little icebergs in the water. When he found an area of open water, two zodiacs went into the water: the first of two groups was ready to zodiac-cruise along the glacier front and into the floating icy shapes. The difference between the groups could not be greater: what began as calm water with a mirror-like surface in which we could enjoy the reflections of the surrounding mountains turned into a mini snow storm for the second group. No less enjoyable, mind. The atmosphere on board in the snow drift and fading light was positively christmassy.





A cosy modd ensued after dinner in the lounge when Alex gave the next of his photograph talks. On this occasion, he explained how we westerners read images. Apparently, there are cultural differences, but roughly speaking, we start at the top left and work our way in a clockwise direction around the picture. We would get a chance to try this out over the next few days. While Alex spoke, the *Antigua* arrived in Dicksonfjord just off Lyckholmdalen, and we spent the night at anchor.



September 26.

Dicksonfjord: Lyckholmdalen & Kapp Smith

Position at 8 o'clock: 78°35,4' N 015°06,5' E

Temperature: -1 °C – overcast – Wind force 3, North North-west





Also this morning, we were welcomed by a froze landscape. Dicksonfjord is surrounded by majestic mountains. The snow powdered cover intensified the horizontal lines of the different layers, that built these mountains. After a shallow landing we split again into two groups. The group of Frigga and Alex did some serious photography. An empty lorry in the river bed was their first goal, but they also made it up into the valley.





Michelle took the long hike deeper into the valley. Their first stop was at an old beach wall, as there were 15 reindeer grazing. We did our utter best not to disturb them. It worked, a small group became curious. They came closer to check us out. It was a lovely experience too see these reindeer in their natural environment, focussing on the last food for the winter would set in. While walking deeper into the valley, the hikers found out that the distance to cover, seemed further than it appeared at sight. Although the end of the valley did not look so far away, the group never reached it. At the farthest point the group enjoyed some minutes of Arctic silence. On the way back, they found some reindeer antlers, covered by snow. The river bed was not completely frozen yet, so after a good attempt, the decision was to head back the same way as the way into the valley.





After lunch a new area was to be explored: Kapp Smith. None of the guides had been there before, but it was known for its history, and we booked an expedition-cruise, so this would be an expedition landing.



The history that is here to be found, come from different eras. Like many other places in the Isfjorden and otherwise on Spitsbergen, Kapp Smith is a complex cultural and historical environment with remains of several operations from different periods of time in Spitsbergen's history.



Most likely, the Russian Pomors were the first, they were hunting and trapping on Spitsbergen in the 1700's. The foundation of the Russian cross is clearly noticeable and well marked in the terrain. The cross in itself is gone, but the remains of the base of the cross lie in the centre of a cairn.

Kapp Smith also contains monuments from other periods in Spitsbergen's history. In the middle of the headland lies a monument, which was erected by a mapping expedition by air in the summer of 1936. Aerial photography was carried out. The work was very successful, and almost two thirds of the archipelago was photographed from the air. There were 19 trips in all with a combined flight time of 86 hours. The survey was carried out using one of the aircrafts belonging to the Norwegian Navy, and the pilot was Commander Gösta Wendelbo and lieutenant Sigurd Sivertsen while Luncke was the in-flight photographer and the expedition leader. The inscription on the monument tells of this:

ERECTED BY THE FIRST
MAPPING EXPEDITION USING
AN AEROPLANE IN THE
SUMMER OF 1936
G. WENDELBO
B. LUNCKE
S. SIVERTSEN
TH. SMAALAND
A. EKEDAL
A.O. SCHIBBYE
A.S. THOMLE

The cabins that were build for this expedition, were already a few months later, reused by trapper Arthur Oxaas. He only needed one cabin, so he kept one, and took the other cabins down, to rebuild them at other places.



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But this outing was more than just history.

The light was gorgeous for the photographers, and Michelle & Frigga found a dead polar bear cub.



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We were back on the ship, but this lovely day was not over yet. The vault of heaven had something more for us in store.... Blue skies, fairy moon & Northern lights!



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September 27.

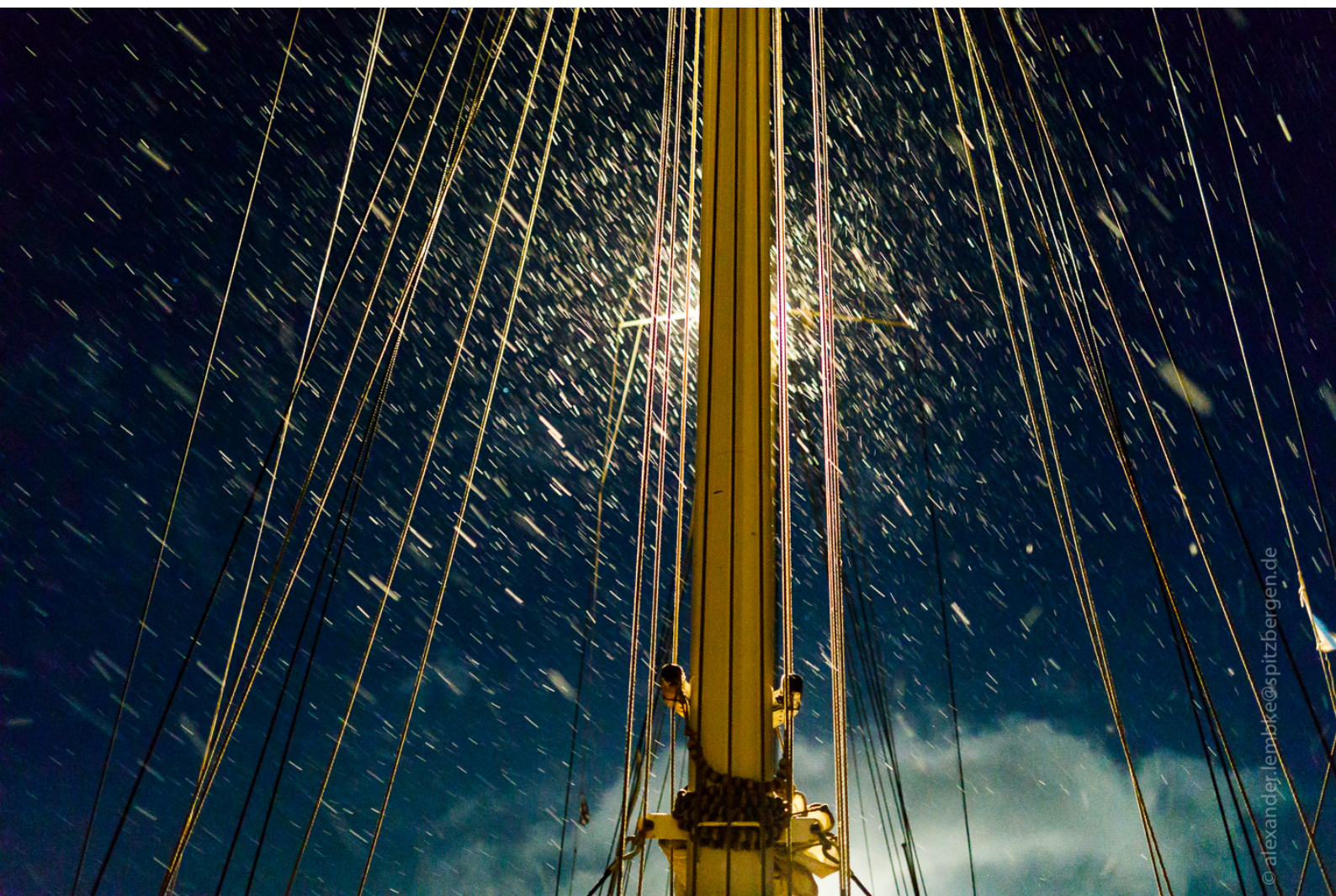
Trygghamna & Kapp Thordsen: Svenskehuset

Position at 8 o'clock: 78°14,8' N 013°50,8' E

Temperature: -3 °C – Sunny – Wind force 2, North-west

We woke up in Trygghamna, the safe haven. Though we had reached our most westerly position on this trip so far, we soon heard that we would not land here: Kevin had received some bad news from home, and the day's programme would be planned around getting him and Janin to the airport in Longyearbyen while not leaving the *Antigua* without a captain.

A solution presented itself in this lucky form: the Dutch sailing vessel *Noorderlicht* was at Pyramiden with two captains on board. So we set course for Kapp Thordsen, from where the crews would affect a rendezvous by zodiac in order to exchange crew members. We were to gain a captain while Annet would leave us to fill in as an officer on the *Noorderlicht*.



The voyage east was a very beautiful one: the clouds had mostly disappeared, and a bright sun was lighting up the snowy mountains framing the wide Isfjord. The breeze was friendly, and we made swift progress. Most of us braved the cold on deck to soak up this wintry wonderland. It was comforting to know that a warming cup of coffee or tea was only ever a few steps away. Mid-morning, Michelle gave us an update on the situation, which was followed by a third photography lecture from Alex. Very fittingly, he spoke about the effects of light.



After lunch, we boarded the zodiacs. Destination Kapp Thordsen, Svenskehuset: the Swedish house. Michelle had given us some background information on the Swedish explorer and scientist A. E. Nordenskiöld, who had wanted to exploit the mineral deposits at this location. Again, the attempt was unprofitable. Also known as the Ghost House, a party of ship-wrecked sealers were once forced to overwinter here, but 15 of them died, probably of lead poisoning. They are buried in a grave nearby. What a fate.





Immediately after landing, we faced the challenge of literally crawling up the steep slope to the tundra above (a challenge we would face again on our way back). Once we had managed, we split into three groups. Frigga lead a long walk across the tundra, onto the plateau made of consolidated magma and down a dry stream bed. Michelle's group did a very similar, shorter walk but in an anticlockwise direction. Alex' photographers stayed close to the main attraction, the very large wooden house with some interesting details inside and out. The interplay between clouds, sun, and snow drifts was too mesmerizing to put into words. We hope that our pictures will do the job of reviving this mood back home.

When the sun had set, we watched the light-hearted Dutch movie with the fitting title: When the light comes. How many of us would have done this, call any unknown Spitsbergen trapper to spend a whole Arctic winter with him?!



September 28.

Trygghamna & Alkhornet

Position at 8 o'clock: 78°14,8' N 013°50,8' E

Temperature: -2 °C – Partly clouded – Wind force 2, North-west



We woke up in the safe haven Trygghamna for a second time on this trip. Wind and weather were excellent. This time surely we would land. During breakfast, the *Antigua* lifted the anchor to feel her way deeper into the shallow bay and towards the glacier. At low tide, rocks were sticking out of the water everywhere, and the zodiac drive to shore was a lengthy but very enjoyable one. We observed Arctic foxes searching the foreshore for anything edible as well as common seals hauled out onto their favourite boulders to rest.

On land, we again split into our three groups. Michelle's long hikers at once set off across the moraine in order to walk onto the glacier itself. In places, the ice was very slippery – but what did we expect from ice?! Frigga took the short hikers along the exposed foreshore and into the glacial lagoon. At very bend, our view and perspective changed. The photo moments presented themselves every few steps. Of course, Alex' serious photographers quickly realised this, too. From the outset, *Antigua* was bathed in the most dramatic light amongst snowy showers, and when the sun poured over the mountains and the glacier front, it was difficult to decide where to look first... where to look again... where to linger. An exquisite scene of Arctic blues. Just when we had managed to tear ourselves away, an enormous needle of ice came crashing down at the glacier front and created an additional polar spectacle.





Our luck today continued when Alkhornet, too, was trenched in light, colour, and calm. We went ashore in two groups, the long hikers following Alex and the shorter walk led by Michelle, to take a closer look at this imposing bird cliff and its surroundings. The breeding season was over, and the birds had returned to the open sea. Throughout summer, they bring nutrients from the sea to the land, and as a result, the turf and the tundra vegetation build up to remarkable thicknesses. Loads of reindeer feed here, and naturally, the serious photographers among us thought we were all walking too fast to take serious photos ;) We also saw climate change in action where the underground ice wedges have now melted, causing massive cracks in the soil and exposing the thick turf layers.





So we found ourselves wandering, watching, pointing, talking... when Frigga, as so often, lifted her binoculars to scan the landscape – and spotted a sleeping polar bear! We all experienced this moment of unfolding emergency slightly differently but certainly intensely, as we realised in our discussions later on board. Michelle briefed her group that there was a bear lying fairly hidden amongst some rocks while Frigga asked Alex via the radio to return to the ship immediately. We evacuated swiftly but calmly, like it should be.





The afternoon's programme was adjusted to an attempt to spot the polar bear from the ship. And not only for us, but also for *Noorderlicht*. Their group was also on shore in Trygghamna, and had planned to walk to Alkhornet. So. They also called back their group and joined us to have a look at the Polar bear. The few photos that had been taken on land showed precious little: maybe it was a sleeping bear, maybe it wasn't. We would have another look. And indeed, once the *Antigua* got closer, we could see the bear through our binoculars and cameras. It certainly helped that he lifted his head once in a while. But that was all the action he had in store for us today.

It was still light after we had crossed the mouth of Isfjord and moored at the Russian coal mining town of Barentsburg. There was a reason why we were moored for the night. The kitchen crew had prepared a 'grand buffet', and with the swell coming in from the open sea, we had to find a calm place to be able to enjoy it.





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We knew that we would explore Barentsburg next the morning; but this evening, after all we had been through, some of us made their way up to the brewery to enjoy the Russian hospitality. We walked back in darkness through the slight snow.



September 29.

Grønfjord: Barentsburg & Ymerbukta

Position at 8 o'clock: 78°03,8 N 014°12,0 E

Temperature: -2 °C – partly clouded – Wind force 2, North



Another glorious day in the Arctic. Which for some of the early birds began with clearing the snow off the decks. Everywhere we looked the mountains had been covered in white over night and the climbing sun began to touch their very tops before reaching deeper into the valleys. Whichever walk we wanted to join this morning, they all started with climbing the 254 wooden steps into Barentsburg proper.

As the name suggests, the mining town has Dutch origins but was bought by the Russian Trust Arktikugol in 1932 already. The Soviet architecture is easy to spot, Lenin's bust in front of the slogan "Our goal – communism" a clear message. Against the background of dwindling coal prices, today's commercial activities are branching out into tourism, which will play a pivotal role in the survival of the town.

On the pier, our guides were advertising their various walks. No one believed Frigga's promise of fresh bananas on the long hike, but since she would be sticking to the tracks out of town towards the former whaling station and radio facility of Finneset, she attracted some adventurous hikers and set off. Out on the point, Michiel and Gwen shared some Dutch stropwafels with which we "toasted" to Vincent's birthday. Definitely a day to remember. Meanwhile, Michelle gave a city tour with any interesting historical facts while Alex zoomed in on Arctic urban design. When Frigga later radioed with the question where to find her fellow guides, they'd all found their way into the hotel bar for a warming cup of coffee.



After lunch, we again set course for Alkhornet. What if our polar bear was still there, and what if he was more active this time? While we were awarded some wondrous Arctic scenery once more, we were disappointed on the polar bear front. So we continued on our way to Ymerbukta, where we would be landing one last time on this journey.





Ymer was a giant in Norse mythology. In his bay, we firstly walked a little along the shore, where glistening pieces of glacier ice drew our attention. We then clambered into the moraine and onto a ridge with the question where Michelle was leading us. The answer presented itself on top of the ridge. The glacier opened up in front of us, cradled by mountains which now caught the vaning sunlight but soon let go: the moon rose and an icy polar night fell.

Soon, the lights of Longyearbyen sparkled in the distance, slowly but only too surely coming closer. Among the passenger, the first sentimental phrases could be heard. Could this otherworldly experience in Spitsbergen already be over?



September 30.

Longyearbyen

Position at 8 o'clock: 78°13,7' N 15°36,7' E

Temperature: -7 °C – Clear skies – Wind force 1, East

After a final, good *Antigua*-style breakfast it was finally time to say goodbye. In the morning we had some time to explore Longyearbyen, but we could leave our luggage on deck. At 12.30 pm a bus picked us up at the pier, and brought us to the airport. Hard to believe that the trip had come to an end, and that so much beautiful Arctic experience could fit into our photographs!

Many of us knew already now that this was not our last visit to the Arctic.



Triplog is written by Michelle van Dijk and Frigga Kruse.

Photographs by Alexander Lembke.

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

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

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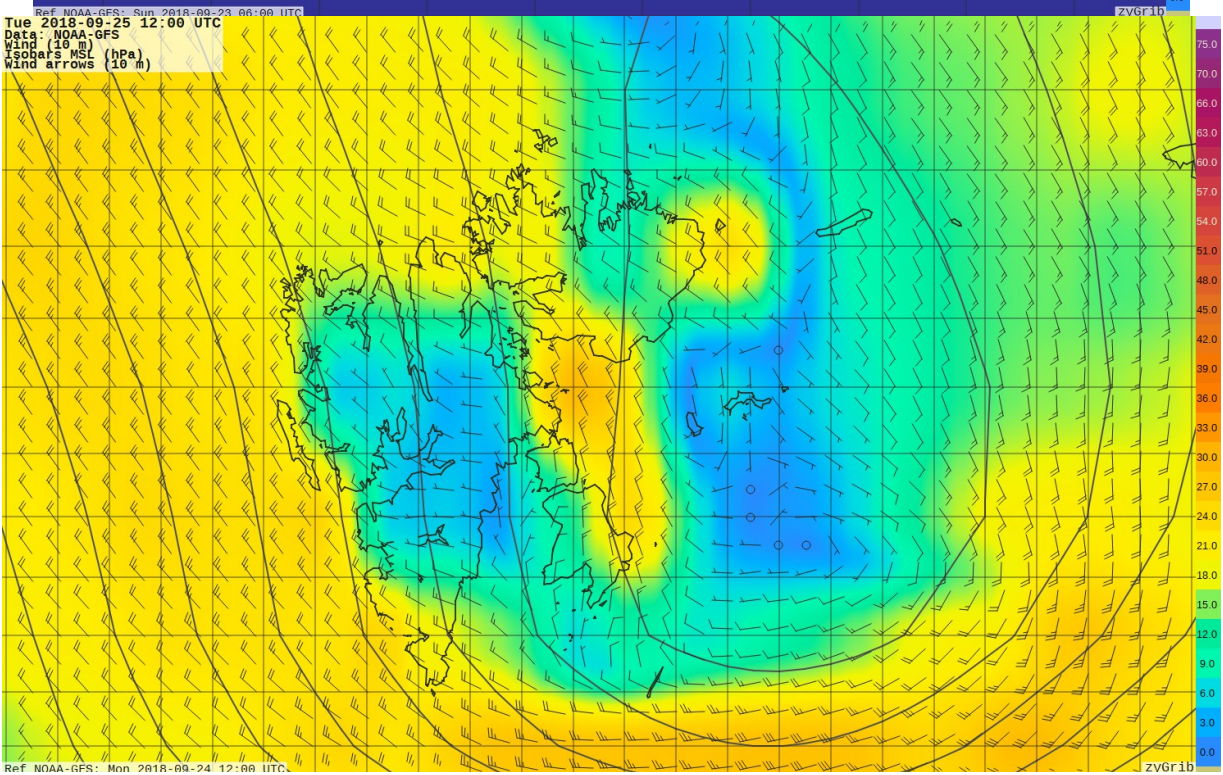
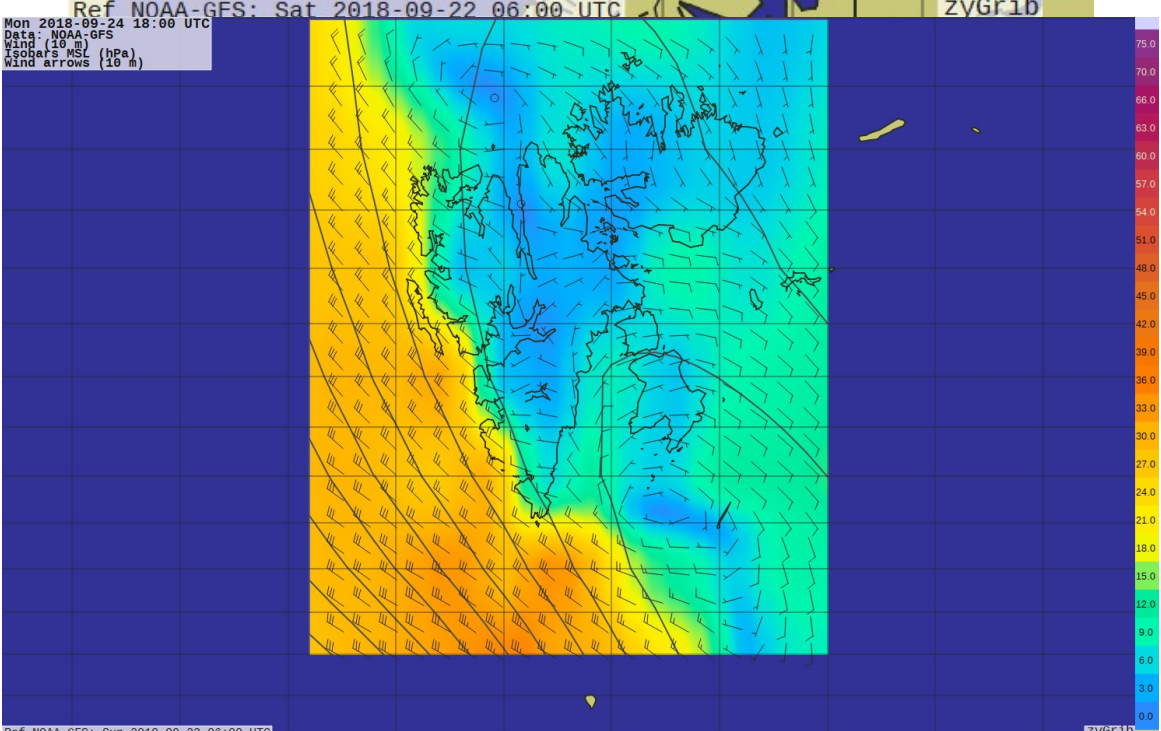
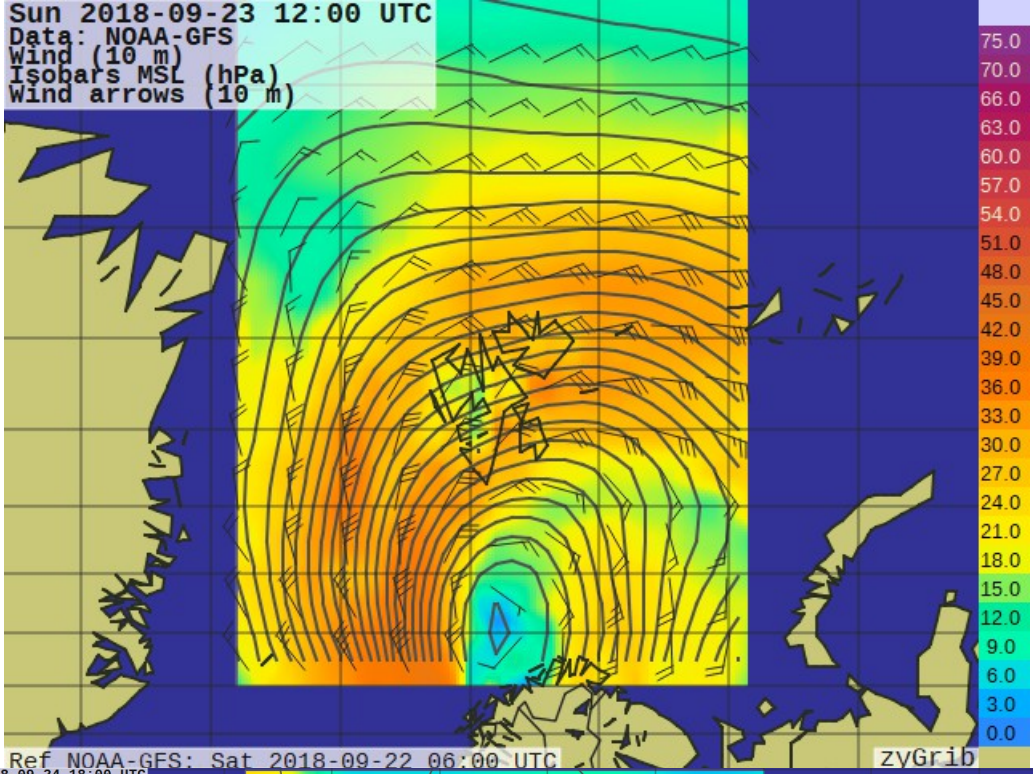
http://www.tallship-company.com

Lectures, Emphasis & Sailing		
23 September	Introduction to photography	Alexander
25 September	Sailing	
	Reading images	Alexander
26 September	Pomors (on Kapp Smith)	Frigga
	Discovery of Spitsbergen & Geopolitics today	Michelle
27 September	Sailing	
	Quality of light	Alexander
	When the light comes	movie
29 September	Evaluation of photographs	Alexander



Route





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