

Spitsbergen

Triplog



s/v Noorderlicht



September 18 - 25. 2014

The *SV Noorderlicht* was built as a three mast-schooner *Kalkgrund* in 1910 in Flensburg (D) and served for many years as a light ship, to warn other ships for the shallows. In 1992 it was bought by Ted van Broeckhuysen & Gert Ritzema, who had it completely re-built in the Netherlands 1992 into the expedition-sailing ship as it is known today.

with

Captain – Ted van Broeckhuysen

First Mate – Jeroen van Zal

Second Mate – Kees Eveleens

Chef – Saskia van der Sluis

Expedition leader – Michelle van Dijk

September 18.

Longyearbyen

Position at 17 o'clock: 78°14' N 15°36' E

Temperature: 0 °C

Shortly before 5 pm most of the passengers arrive at s/v Noorderlicht, a red sailing vessel that was going to be our home for the upcoming seven days. We were welcomed inside, guide Michelle told us our cabin numbers, and after that there was coffee, tea and biscuits. Captain Ted introduced the crew and first mate Jeroen gave us a board-safety briefing telling that we



are not allowed to fall overboard and how to put on our life vest in case of emergency. Then our expedition leader Michelle took over and gave a briefing about de don'ts and do's on land. 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.

Because of the rough sea the plan was to sail north first, otherwise life on board would be miserable, and that is not what we want on our holiday.

We could even set some sail while sailing through Isfjord, that also helps to make the movement of the ship smoother as the wind presses the ship deeper in to the waves.

We enjoyed dinner and the scenery with the sugared mountains.

When it got dark we went inside for a cup of tea and coffee and got to know our fellow passengers onboard.



September 19.

Billefjord: Pyramiden & Nordenskiöldbreen

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

Temperature: 1 °C – overcast – Windforce 2



Overnight we had moored at Pyramiden.

At the foot of the mountain lays the Russian settlement named after the mountain Pyramiden. It was a coal mining settlement that was abandoned in 1998. The coal here comes from the Carboniferous (when Spitsbergen was situated near the Equator) and is 300 million years older than the coal around Longyearbyen. Michelle guided us around the city. You could still feel the vibe of the past and it was easy to imagine that the people were happy here.



We strolled along the culture club with remains of glorious sport and musical events. Standing in front of the old mining office, where also the KGB had their department we wondered what the monument in front of it was about. We walked towards it and asked the help of Tatyana, who is Russian. She explained that it was for the fallen soldiers that fought for the patriotic war 1941-1945. A little later a white fox came down the road and looked at us at only a few of us were lucky to see it. We ended our walk in the hotel, to warm up and have a zip of Russian vodka. Local guide Sacha opened upon request the little souvenir shop for us.

Over the old wooden walkways, we wandered back to the ship in time for lunch.

Heading towards glacier we cruised along the shores of Petuniabukta to enjoy the view and hope to spot a polar bear on the hillside. Håkan managed to find one, but unfortunately it was hiding before most of us could find it. Onwards to the Nordenskiöld-glacier we continued to look for a polar bear mother and cub which had been spotted by another vessel earlier, but we did not find it. At the glacier front we admired the deep blue ice caves and crevasses of the glacier front before turning around for our stretch to Bellsund.

When we passed Gipshuken, mate Jeroen came running in shouting 'Whale'. It turned out to be a blue whale, the largest mammal of our planet. Despite the cold we watched it swimming around the ship. Also another whale was sighted at the other site of the fjord. Of course we checked it out. It turned out to be a fin whale. We felt very lucky!



September 20.

Ymerbukta: Esmarkbreen & sailing to Bellsund

Position at 8 o'clock: 78°16,6' N 013°59' E

Temperature: 1°C – overcast – no wind



We awoke to a magical panorama of glaciers, sugared mountains and a calm sea carpeted in iceblocks. Ymerbukta had already proven interesting. All went ashore together and enjoyed three curious seals swimming around and checking us out. All of a sudden we heard noise and a big piece of ice from the glacier came down. It created a big wave.

Michelle took the group up the ridge for glorious views of the glacier. On our way we saw lots of fox tracks. Because of the fresh snow it was not always easy but when we were at the top, the sun broke through and put the glacier into another light.

On our way down we had some fun in and with the snow when we tried to slide down. Young Ohad found his own way by rolling down.



We walked a few steps up on the glacier and passed two glacier lakes on the way back. Before we were picked up by the dinghy we took another look at the bergy bits that were stranded at the beach.

In the afternoon we sailed towards Bellsund. The weather was beautiful so we all spend this time on deck until our captain Ted started a talk at 4 p.m.. He told us the history of our ship. How the Flensburg was used as a light ship and later converted into a hotel, a club boat and a piece of rust. At this stage captain Ted and his companion Gert felt in love with her. They bought it and restored it into the beautiful *Noorderlicht*.

One hour later it was Michelle's turn to lecture. She explained the situation around the discovery of Spitsbergen and the geopolitical state of today.



Shortly before dinner we enjoyed the most beautiful sunset of the year.

We had made a schedule for Northern Lights watch-keeping over night and it worked well, because shortly after midnight the bell was rung by Silvia who spotted it.



September 21.

Bellsund: Recherchefjord & Åhlstrandodden

Position at 8 o'clock: 77°29,8' N 014°34,3' E

Temperature: -2 °C – clear sky – Windforce 3-4

Overnight we had anchored in Recherchefjord so we had a calm and quiet night.

In the morning while sailing a bit closer to our landing beach, we already spotted bear tracks in the snow. This was the reason that Michelle went ashore first to check if the coast was clear. When she had clarified the area we all followed her for a stroll around the peninsula that created a lagoon. The beach was full of glacier ice, so we picked a goodlooking one for our drinks later. When we dropped the ice near the blue bag with our life vests, all of a sudden something white was spotted next to the ship. It turned out to be a beluga (white whale), and it was not alone. In total we saw around 25 belugas swimming from the entrance of the lagoon to the east side of the fjord where they remained stationary. We walked a little higher up on one of the hills close to the shore to get a better view. After we spend some time with the belugas, we continued our walk along the shore at the glacier side. There, all of a sudden we saw a fox sleeping in the snow, close to us. It had the size of a cat and was yellowish white. The bigger animal with the same colour, we did not see, but the tracks were clear enough and fresh.





During lunch we sailed to Åhlstrandodden where we landed at Fleur de Lyshamna. From there we first went to the old boats before we walked over to a hut called Bamsebu. On our way we saw many remains from the old beluga-hunting-times. But we also saw a ptarmigan family and about 25 reindeer grazing on the tundra.



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Again Silvia rang the bell around midnight because of Northern Lights and it was even stronger than the night before, so most of us managed to frame it.

September 22.

Bellsund: Van Keulehamna, Midterhuken & Akseløya

Position at 8 o'clock: 77°36,9' N 014°55,8' E

Temperature: 1 °C – sunny – Windforce 3-4 NE



We spend a calm night in Van Keulehamna which was also the landing site for the morning. Again we saw reindeer of which one was a very small calf, so we wondered if it would survive the winter. On a rock close to the sea shore we saw many teeth, but even the veterinaries among us could not tell from which animal they originated. The origin of our other findings were easier to guess, as we found two shoes, a helmet and two fenders. The fenders will be reused by our ship Noorderlicht.

After lunch we made a little ships cruise through Mariasundet along Midterhuken, an extraordinary looking mountain. The lines of the different layers were extra visible because of the snow and Michelle explained that this was caused by a crash between Spitsbergen and Greenland around 60 million years ago.



In the afternoon we went ashore at Akseløya, but already at the landing site we saw fresh bear tracks of a mother and cub so Kees joined us with a second rifle for extra safety. We walked between the different layers of the same kind that we saw on the mountain before. It was an out of this world experience. Some layers contained fossil shells. At our walk we saw even more, but a little older bear tracks and four ptarmigans.

Back on board our chef Saskia had cooked us a delicious meal again. We already knew she was good, but this 'rijst tafel' made us speechless.

After dinner Michelle gave a lecture on Polar bears, so we learned about their behaviour, reproduction and how to see if it is male or female.



September 23.

Van Mijenfjord: Fridtjovhamna & Berzeliusdalen

Position at 8 o'clock: 77°46,2' N 014°36,1' E

Temperature: 4 °C – overcast – windforce 5 SO

Overnight we had anchored in the sheltered Fridtjovhamna because some southerly winds were expected. In the morning it was already windforce 5 and we were happy to go ashore at a sheltered beach in this goodlooking bay. We walked over the side moraines towards the broad Berzeliusdalen. Because of the temperature of +4 °C the snow was sticky and good for making snow balls and a snowman. So of course we had to build a snowman. But for some of us it was the first time, so we used the expertise of Tatyana who grew up in the Siberian snow. It became a very nice snowman with a chocolate nose!



When we could view over Berzeliusdalen we made a break to enjoy the beautiful scenery and reindeer. At the shoreline in the distance we saw an old boat. This was our next target. It turned to be a lovely photo motive, so again we took our time before walking back.

The walk back was along the shore. We passed the trapper station of Tommy Sandal. Some seals hang next to it and they had attracted polar bears, because we saw tracks all over the place.

Shortly before lunch we set sail and sailed towards Barentsburg.

The wind had picked up a bit into a fresh breeze with windforce 6. This in combination with a swell with 4 meter waves, made that most of us did not feel so fresh. But shortly before dinner we arrived in Barentsburg and everybody could smile again.



September 24.

Grønfjord: Barentsburg

Position at 8 o'clock: 78°03,8' N 014°11,9' E

Temperature: 5 °C – overcast – windforce 2 SE



At nine o'clock Michelle started a guide tour around the town. She told us the history of Barentsburg from 1912 until today. We also visited the orthodox chapel that was built in the late nineties. When we saw the wall paintings at the school, Tatyana explained the stories that were illustrated. We continued towards the science centre of Barentsburg. A young and modern looking scientist just came out of one of the buildings and it looked a kind of funny in contrast with the old buildings.

The city tour ended at the renewed hotel where we posted and stamped our postcards and had a drink at the bar. Of course we had to try the locally brewed beer. Upon request they opened the souvenir shop for us, so we could buy some souvenirs before getting back on board.

When we left Barentsburg we set sail again and sailed into Isfjorden for our last part towards Longyearbyen. At 3 pm Kees opened the s/v Noorderlicht-souvenirshop with T-shirts and mugs.

Our dinner was by surprise a Captain's dinner with candles on the table and a free drink.



September 25.

Longyearbyen

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

Temperature: 4 °C – overcast – No wind

After a final, good Noorderlicht-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 7 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 by Michelle van Dijk
Photographs by Michelle van Dijk & Silvia Wagenhuber

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

Lectures, Aurora & Sailing

19/Sep	Sailing Billefjord
20/Sep	Sailing to Bellsund
	Lecture: s/v Noorderlicht (Ted)
	Lecture: Discovery of Spitsbergen
	Aurora borealis
21/Sep	Aurora borealis
22/Sep	Lecture: Polar bears
23/Sep	Sailing to Barentsburg
24/Sep	Sailing Isfjord

