



OCEANWIDE
EXPEDITIONS

Arctic Basecamp

1st July - 10th July 2014
on board the

M/V Plancius



MV Plancius was named after the Dutch astronomer, cartographer, geologist and vicar Petrus Plancius (1552-1622). *Plancius* was built in 1976 as an oceanographic research vessel for the Royal Dutch Navy and was named *Hr. Ms. Tydeman*. The ship sailed for the Royal Dutch Navy until June 2004 when she was purchased by Oceanwide Expeditions and completely refit in 2007, being converted into a 114-passenger expedition vessel. *Plancius* is 89m (267 feet) long, 14.5m (43 feet) wide and has a maximum draft of 5m, with an Ice Strength rating of 1D, top speed of 12+ knots and three diesel engines generating 1230hp each.

with

Captain Evgeny Levakov and his International Crew

Expedition Leader – Kelvin Murray (Scotland)

Assistant Expedition Leader – Katja Riedel (Germany/New Zealand)

Guide/Lecturer – Brent Houston (USA)

Guide/Lecturer – Michelle van Dijk (Netherlands)

Guide/Lecturer – Matthias Kopp (Germany)

Guide/Lecturer – Rupert Pilkington (Scotland)

Guide/Lecturer – Sandra Petrowitz (Germany)

Dive Master – Henrik Enckell (Sweden)

Dive Guide – Erin McFadden (Scotland)

Dive Guide – Peter Larson (Sweden)

Kayak Guide – Pete Gwatkin (UK)

Photography Guide – Oliver Richter (Germany)

and

Hotel Manager – Michael Thallium (Spain)

Assistant Hotel Manager – Thijs de Lint (Netherlands)

Head Chef – Heinz Hacker (Austria)

Sous Chef – Sean Steele (Canada)

Ship's Physician – Ninette van Es (Netherlands)

Welcome onboard Plancius!

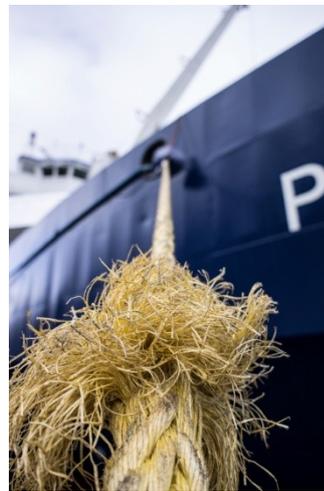
Day 1 – Tuesday 1st July 2014

Embarkation – Longyearbyen, Svalbard

GPS 20.00h Position: 078°12.0'N / 014°12.4'E

Weather: Cloudy Wind: WSW 5. Sea State: Moderate. Temperature: +8°C

Longyearbyen feels like it should be somewhere else. It has a shopping centre and a post office, a supermarket and a school, but really, it is far far away from what people call civilisation. However, for us it was not far enough; we wanted to experience real remote places. So in the afternoon we boarded the *Plancius* to take us on an adventurous voyage along the west coast of Svalbard.



The excitement soared when the lines were finally released and *Plancius* pulled away from the quay. For many it was the fulfilment of a life-long dream. Once on board expedition leader Kelvin and hotel manager Michael introduced us to the comforts of our floating home. After that we listened to a safety briefing by first officer Tuomo. This lifeboat drill required us to muster in the lounge in our bright orange life jackets. The lifeboats, however, looked terribly uncomfortable and we took solace in the knowledge that with Evgeny Levakov we scored a captain that had more than 20 years experience in polar waters. The sparkling wine at the Captains

Cocktail was a good beginning and the chefs followed suit by providing us with a fantastic first dinner on board. The real treat, however, was served after the dessert – whales! We were lucky that just two hours after leaving the port we had our first wildlife encounter. Two fin whales were spotted and we had the privilege to spend some time with these amazing creatures. They are the fastest swimming whales and with a top speed of 25 kts they could easily outswim the *Plancius* which does a mere 13 kts with tailwind and a pushing tide. When they surfaced close to the

ship we could see their different coloured jaws. The right jaw of a fin whale is white, while the left one is much darker. It is assumed that they use the lighter side to dazzle fish and herd them together in a tight column to devour them more easily in one big gulp. After some time we left them and continued on our way north. As a last program point for the day we received our rubber boots and zodiac life jackets. By now most of us were ready for bed and the sea rocked us to sleep and sang a gentle lullaby.



Day 2 – Wednesday 2nd July 2014

Kongsfjord & Ny-Ålesund

GPS 8.00h Position: 078°57.8'N / 011°51.7'E

Weather: Cloudy **Wind:** SE 1. **Sea State:** Slight. **Temperature:** +5°C

In the morning we were anchored just offshore the end of Kongsfjord between two tide-water glaciers. We scrambled up a scree slope, an old lateral moraine from when the glaciers had been advancing. Some stunning views in nice sunlight greeted us near the top of the moraine where spectacular reflections were mirrored in the calm water ahead of the glacier front. Although the area had only just been open from the melting snow, there were already a few saxifrage and moss campion plants in bloom among



the mud and stones. Towards the end of the hike, a halo, a coloured ring around the sun in a clouded sky was visible, creating some eerie photos and a filter making our last few photos all the more vibrant.

After lunch *Plancius* sailed a short distance to our next location in Kongsfjord. The Zodiacs were lowered again to begin our afternoon landing at the pier in Ny-Ålesund, some of us went on a short hike with Michelle and Rupert to the Airship Mast. The mast was used to hold Amundsen and Nobile's Airship *Norge* before it set out on its flight across the North Pole in 1926. Others walked around the town on the lookout for birds. Purple sandpipers, Red-throated divers, one Ivory gull, and plenty of Arctic terns were spotted. Many people took the chance to send postcards from the small post office in the town and most of us picked up some Arctic souvenirs from the lovely shop.



Day 3 – Thursday 3rd July 2014

Tinayrebukta

GPS 08.00h Position: 079°12.05'N / 012°05.20'E

Weather: Cloudy **Wind:** var. 0-1.

Sea State: Calm. **Temperature:** +7°C

After breakfast, the hikers, kayakers, divers and photographers left the *Plancius* on their morning excursions. The short and medium hikers set off along the shore on the south side of the bay, while the long hikers went by Zodiac to a start point that would allow them to hike in one direction to where the other groups had departed from. The kayakers paddled across the bay, in full view of the glacier, while the long hikers were afforded a spectacular view of the glacier at the head of Tinayrebukta, and the surrounding mountains, as they reached the ridge above where the other hikers and the photographers had gone ashore. The snow, which had inhibited access to much of the area until recently, had been melting quite rapidly, allowing us to walk between islands of rock and wet moss and soil. After lunch back on the ship, we deployed the Zodiacs for a

cruise to look for wildlife along the north shore of the bay, while the divers set off to Kong Haakon's Halvøy, which separates Tinayrebukta from Krossfjorden. Idling along, we saw guillemots, kittiwakes, barnacle and pink-footed geese, an Arctic skua and some very obliging puffins, as well as a number of reindeer on the buttressed slopes beneath the cliffs. On the west side of Kong Haakon's Halvøy, there were some low cliffs that offered good views of



more puffins and provided opportunities to photograph them in the air, as they came and went. At one point a bearded seal appeared, spending a bit more time at quite close proximity than they normally do.



The ship picked us up at the bird cliff, and after hoisting the Zodiacs, we set sail up Krossfjorden to the impressive seven kilometre-wide calving front of the Lilliehöökreen at the head of the fjord. The scale of the place may have been hard for some to comprehend, but no one could fail to be impressed at the massive glacier framed against the surrounding mountains and with its parent snowfield rising above it.

As we sailed away from the Lilliehöökreen, towards the entrance to Krossfjorden and Kongsfjorden where we would turn north into the Greenland Sea, there was a sense of excitement that we would soon reach the north coast of Spitsbergen and the pack ice a little beyond it.

Day 4 – Friday 4th July 2014

Fuglefjord & In the Ice

GPS 8.00h Position: 079°49.3'N / 011°17.3'E

Weather: Fog **Wind:** NW 5. **Sea State:** Slight. **Temperature:** +2°C

Our expedition staff had planned a day at the north-western corner of Spitsbergen, an area with plenty small islands. We anchored north of Sallyhamna. It was quite windy and foggy in the area, but further into Fuglefjord it seemed to be better. All of us – divers, kayakers and zodiac cruisers – left the ship, warmly dressed up. So we headed into the Fuglefjord following the shoreline, cruising around those small rocky islands.

Next to the shoreline a lot of Polar Bear tracks were quite obvious. We looked forward to finding the big animal to which they belonged, so we watched and watched and while searching enjoyed the great scenery which cleared up a little bit when we were coming closer to the huge glacier in the inner part of the fjord named Svitjodbreen named after a region in eastern central Sweden. A sailing vessel and another small ship that cruised the inner part of the fjord gave a good impression of the height of the glacier front (approximately 50 meters high). On our way, we met some ice originating from the glacier.



After two hours we were about to return to the ship when Michelle spotted a Polar Bear on Fugleøya – it was resting, looking up from time to time. Hadn't Michelle seen it raise its head we would never have known that it was there which showed us how easy it is to actually overlook such a huge animal.

Back on board lunch had been served and we found time for a cup of tea or coffee afterwards. The captain moved the ship to the island of Ytre Norskøya which was to be our next stop with various possible hiking options. We were told that bears were quite often seen in the area, and soon our expedition staff spotted a mother bear with a young cub. It was great observing them: they were walking, climbing, playing and probably eating as well next to bird colonies.



A few minutes later the staff offered us the possibility of watching these iconic animals from another perspective by approaching them using our zodiacs. At first they were quite active but later both fell asleep. The hiking was of course cancelled, however, we made use of the early time of the season and the promising ice chart and headed north in the direction of the sea-ice. In the meantime Rupert gave an interesting introduction to the life of the Polar

Bear with a lot of information. The pack ice was close to the shore and so soon we found ourselves in the real habitat of Polar Bear, and it looked great with all the ice around us. For most of us it was the first contact and experience with that kind of ice.



A lot of people scanned ice floe by ice floe searching for something yellowish with legs and an obvious head. Soon a bear was spotted indeed. The captain steered the *Plancius* gently closer to the male bear in good shape. We spent a great time with the bear observing what he was doing. He sat down, watched us and after a while lay down and probably fell asleep. After dinner we were still in the pack ice searching for wildlife. A lot of kittiwakes followed the ship taking advantage of the twisted ice flows with the upcoming small creatures. Later that night another bear was spotted – he was sleeping peacefully on

a big piece of ice. What a great adventurous day with in total five Polar Bears in different situations!

Day 5 – Saturday 5th July 2014

Sorgfjord & Alkefjellet

GPS 8.00h Position: 079°56.1'N / 016°43.16'E

Weather: Cloudy **Wind:** SE 2. **Sea State:** Calm. **Temperature:** +5°C

Sorgfjorden is a nice sheltered bay that was already known by the early whalers in the 17th century. Its earliest known name is *Beere Bay* in 1660, which translates into Bear Bay. In 1693, the world's northernmost sea battle took place here when a Dutch fleet of 40 whalers was attacked by three French warships. 13 Dutch ships were captured, the rest escaped. Since then the name of the bay was changed into *Treurenberg Bay*, Treurenberg being Dutch for 'hill of grieve'. When Norway got sovereignty over Spitsbergen in 1925, they decided to translate all names into Norwegian, so the bay was called *Sorgfjord*.

When we visited the bay, the divers went to dive at the west side and four groups went for a walk at the east side. Most of us got the chance to try out snow shoes and indeed it was much easier to go with than without. After an energetic hike the medium and the long walking groups went to *Krosshaugen* (cross hill) to take a look at the Dutch whalers graves. Michelle explained that scurvy was the most common cause of death. Because all sailors were on a diet of ship's biscuit, salted meat and fish they did not get enough vitamin C which caused scurvy. When a man died during the crossing from Holland to Spitsbergen,



the body was kept in a coffin filled with saw dust. After the ship arrived at Spitsbergen the dead would be buried. Quite a few burial sites are known. The most famous are *Jan Donker* (now known as Gravneset) in Magdalenefjord and *Grave Point & Doodemans Eylandt* in the Smeerenburgfjord (now known as *Likneset & Likholmen*). The total of the graves found on these points amount to several hundreds.

After lunch the souvenir shop was opened and all kinds of Arctic souvenirs were sold. While we sailed through Hinlopenstretet, Michelle gave a lecture on the history of early whaling on Spitsbergen. It started 400 years ago when the waters around Spitsbergen were so full of whales that ships had difficulties sailing through. Unfortunately, due to whaling the Right whales are now nearly extinct.



The afternoon activity was filled with laughter. We went for a zodiac cruise along the bird cliffs of Alkefjellet. Brunnich's Guillemots were all over the place, in the air, at the cliffs, on the water, and under water. Judging by the sound you could have thought that they were laughing at us. Higher up there were some kittiwakes nesting and on top of every basalt pillar, a Glaucous gull was looking for some unfortunate guillemots to feed on. Also two Great skuas were flying around for the same purpose. And last but not least we were lucky to see an Arctic fox – yes, again it was another beautiful day in the Arctic!

Day 6 – Sunday 6th July 2014

Hamiltonbukta & Alicehamna

GPS 8.00h Position: 079°49.0'N / 011°58.0'E

Weather: Cloudy **Wind:** var. 1. **Sea State:** Calm. **Temperature:** +7°C

This morning we woke up in Raudfjord – the “Red Fjord”, named after the red Devonian Sandstone that can be found on the Eastern side of the fjord. A Zodiac cruise in Hamiltonbukta took us past amazing glaciers and towering sea-bird cliffs, but the highlight was the polar bear that was spotted on the coast. From the safety of the Zodiacs we could watch it trotting along the foreshore. We were shocked when we saw that there was a dead polar bear cub not far from the shore, but the adult male bear had only a short sniff and then walked on. We lost sight of him when he went into the water and started to swim around the cliffs, so we resumed our cruise, listened to the shrieks of the kittiwakes high in the cliffs, heard the sound of colliding ice pieces close to the glacier and generally soaked up the atmosphere, ignoring our toes and fingers which got colder and colder.



Katja Riedel/Snowmad

After lunch another landing was planned, this time just on the opposite site of the fjord in Bruceneset. It was drizzling when we went ashore. The long hikers walked off with their snowshoes, climbing the slopes behind the landing site. Since it was very foggy the climb to the top was abandoned, especially after some relatively fresh polar bear tracks were found. However, a bit later it cleared and the bum slide down the slopes was certainly worth the effort. Back at the beach an old trapper hut was inspected, and after the kayakers had seen a bear on the opposite site near the glacier the zodiacs were busy shuttling people back and forth. There were actually two bears: One female with a radio collar which was ripping into the carcasses of a White-beaked dolphin, and only a bit further, on another island,



Katja Riedel/Snowmad



Katja Riedel/Snowmad

a male bear tore off pieces of a different dolphin carcass. Christmas had come early for these bears with such a generous supply of food. Talking about food, later on board a fantastic Arctic BBQ awaited us with mulled wine, steaks, music and dance which finished off this eventful day.

However, one special feat has to be mentioned, as some really brave souls threw themselves into the icy water at the beach at Bruceneset. Some yelled, some suffered quietly, some spectators just shook their heads at this madness, but everybody had a lot of fun.

Day 7 – Monday 7th July 2014

14th July Glacier & Fuglehuken

GPS 8.00h Position: 79°07.4'N / 011°46.4'E

Weather: Cloudy Wind: ENE 2. Sea State: Slight. Temperature: +7°C

This morning we were anchored off the very scenic 14th of July Glacier, an active tide-water glacier which lived up to that name as it calved a few very big pieces into the sea, one of them right as we were overlooking the top of the glacier front! The hike up on the left side of the moraine afforded us some amazing views, as well



as a pass by a very cooperative bearded seal, basking in the sun just offshore. The kayakers cruised by and had amazing views of the ice and another seal. To the left of the landing were the famous “hanging gardens” where mosses and lichens, grasses and flowers all carpeted the landscape. Michelle was there to point out the varieties of plants, and a wonderful snow bunting was nesting right in the middle of the green.

At Fuglehuken, the northern-most tip of Prins Karls Forland, we went ashore to do some hiking in the afternoon. While some of us gained some height and climbed up towards the bird cliffs to overlook the shore, others wandered along the coast. Reindeer were grazing in the lush tundra, and we stopped to have a look at an old cabin and a bear trap. Ponds, puddles and driftwood held many a photo opportunity, and towards the end of our landing the lucky ones among us even spotted an Arctic fox that moved along the slopes quite quickly.



Day 8 – Tuesday 8th July 2014

Bellsund: Camp Millar & Forsbladodden

GPS 08.00h Position: 77°44.4'N / 014°23.3'E

Weather: Fog Wind: NE 2. Sea State: Slight. Temperature: +7°C

We had fine weather for our landing in Bellsund today – the mountains on the southern shore were slightly occluded by thin mist that was brightly lit by sunlight struggling to break through it. Beyond our landing site, the crescent-shaped beach gave way to grass and moss covered tundra that rose up through tallus-littered buttresses and scree slopes to jagged snow-covered peaks standing sentinel along the shores.



We set off across the tundra in the hope of having a close look at some of the reindeer we could see on the slopes. On the way, we passed the decaying wagons and tramways of an old mining enterprise, which though long-abandoned had been well-preserved in the dry Arctic air. The Reindeer were quite relaxed, providing excellent opportunities for photography of the large-antlered males, females and calves from this spring, and we were able to get quite near to them without scaring them off. After a long look at the reindeer, we scrambled a little way up the steep, rocky slopes to a Little auk colony where we could sit quietly amongst the rocks and

watch the birds flying in and landing all around us. From the slopes we were also afforded beautiful views out across Bellsund.



After lunch, we had to change our plan for the afternoon excursion due to the fact that there was a very large polar bear on the beach close to Bamsebu where we had intended to land. We watched the bear for a while before moving the ship to an alternative landing-site only to discover that it was too windy and had too much swell to land there. Coming up with a Plan 'C', we decided to go to Forsbladodden for a short excursion, where we were able to land without too much difficulty. Splitting into two groups, we hiked across the tundra flats to rocky outcroppings above the beach before doubling-back to the Zodiacs, which picked us up a little

further along the shore than where we had landed. On our way, we collected quite some plastic debris that had washed ashore: nets, floats, bottles, and even a slightly damaged orange boot.

Day 9 – Wednesday 9th July 2014

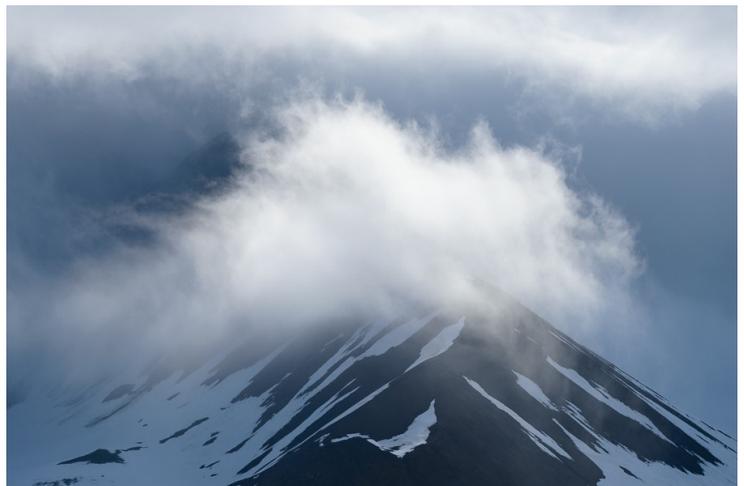
Poolepynten & Ymerbukta

GPS 08.00h Position: 078°27.5'N / 011°54.0'E

Weather: Fog Wind: SSE 5. Sea State: Moderate. Temperature: +7°C

A grey, overcast morning with poor visibility saw us off the east coast of Prins Karls Forlandet approaching Poolepynten. This sandy spit is a well-known haul-out place for walrus which we hoped to visit after breakfast. However, by the time we got there conditions had deteriorated, and fog, wind gusts and quite a long swell prevented us from going ashore. The captain managed to get the *Plancius* fairly close nevertheless, and from the outer decks, the bridge and the lounge we got quite a good view of the walrus on shore. Afterwards, we learned more about those amazing animals in a recap given by Matthias, and Brent talked about the Little auks we had seen, heard and watched yesterday in Bellsund. This was followed by a talk by Michelle who gave us a round-up on the flower species we had seen on our trip.

Meanwhile, *Plancius* sailed into Isfjorden in an attempt to escape the southerly winds that had prevented us from going ashore at Poolepynten. When we arrived at Alkhornet, we found that wind and swell had ceased indeed; however, the fog seemed to follow *Plancius* so we heaved up anchor again and went on to Ymerbukta. While we waited for the fog to lift, Rupert gave a lecture about the conservation and management of polar bears. Since the fog still seemed to be persistent, we chose to move into the fjord closer to the glacier Esmarkbreen. Here we dropped the zodiacs for what unexpectedly became a highlight of the trip: While glacier fronts are always a spectacular sight, Esmarkbreen rewarded us with amazing conditions, photogenic light, fine views and a huge calving while we were out in the zodiacs. King Eider ducks were seen, and white clouds wafted around the peaked mountain tops – what a final to our voyage!



After we came back on board, we turned in our rubber boots that had served us so well, and then it was time to celebrate the voyage with a few words from Kelvin, a slide show of the trip, and a toast from the Captain. After another delicious dinner, some stayed to celebrate even more at the bar, while others stole a few hours sleep before their *very* early morning flight!

Day 10 – Thursday 10th July 2014

Disembarkation in Longyearbyen

GPS 08.00h Position: 078°14.1'N / 015°35.3'E

Weather: Fog Wind: SW 2. Sea State: Slight. Temperature: +8°C

Disembarkation day in Longyearbyen – on the pier we bade farewell to many of the new friends we made over the past ten days, and we had one last look at the *Plancius*, the ship that took us on such an incredible voyage north. This trip will last us a lifetime – in our memories, our imaginations, and in our dreams.

Thank you all for such a wonderful voyage, for your company and enthusiasm. We hope to see you again in the future, wherever that might be!

Total distance sailed on our voyage: **896 nautical miles**

Most northerly point on our voyage: **080°06.746'N, 010°33.4' E**

On behalf of Oceanwide Expeditions, Captain Evgeny Levakov, Expedition Leader Kelvin Murray and all the crew and staff, it has been a pleasure travelling with you.



World's Leading Polar
Expedition Operator