



Spitsbergen & East Greenland

on board the

M/V Plancius



MV *Plancius* was named after the Dutch astronomer, cartographer, geologist and minister 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*. She sailed for the Royal Dutch Navy until June 2004 when she was purchased by Oceanwide Expeditions and completely refitted in 2007. She was converted into a 114-passenger expedition vessel with an Ice Strength rating of 1D, top speed of 12+ knots and 3 diesel engines generating 1230 hp each. *Plancius* is 89 m (267 feet) long, 14.5 m (43 feet) wide and has a maximum draft of 5m.

Captain Evgeny Levakov

and his international crew of 44

including

Chief Officer:	Vladimir Plotnikov	[Russia]
Second Officer:	Anika Albrecht	[Germany]
Third Officer:	Luis Oroceo	[Philippines]
Chief Engineer:	Sebastian Alexandru	[Rumania]
Hotel Manager:	Robert McGillivray	[Netherlands]
Chief Steward:	Thijs de Lint	[Netherlands]
Head Chef:	Heinz Hacker	[Austria]
Sous Chef:	Sean Steele	[Canada]
Ship's Physician:	Ninette van Es	[Netherlands]

and

Expedition Team Leader:	Rinie van Meurs	[Netherlands]
Assist. Expedition Leader:	Katja Riedel	[Germany/New Zealand]
Expedition Guide:	Tobias Brehm	[Germany]
Expedition Guide:	Sandra Petrowitz	[Germany]
Expedition Guide:	Irene Kastner	[Germany]
Expedition Guide:	Michelle van Dijk	[Netherlands]
Expedition Guide:	James Cresswell	[United Kingdom]
Expedition Guide:	Victoria Salem	[United Kingdom]

welcome you on board!

Day 1 – Thursday September 3, 2015

Longyearbyen, Svalbard: Embarkation

1600 GPS position: 78°13.7'N / 015°36.1'E

Wind: NE 4. Sea: 3. Weather: cloudy. Temperature: +4°C

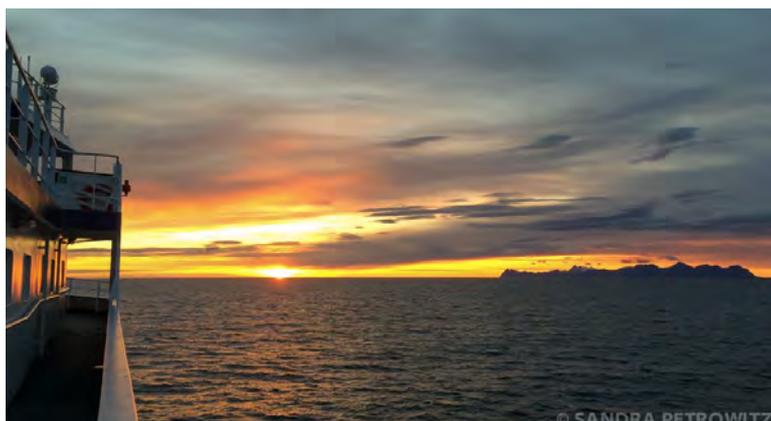


Longyearbyen has been the starting point for many historic and pioneering expeditions since its foundation as a coal-mining settlement in 1906 by John Munro Longyear. It was to become the starting point for our voyage to the Arctic as well! Our journey began with boarding our comfortable floating home for the next 10 days – the *M/V Plancius*. Once we had climbed the gangway, the first thing we did was check in with Hotel Manager Robert and Chief Steward Thijs; then we found the coffee machine on Deck 5 and thus fortified, started unpacking.

Soon we were called to an Information session in the Lounge, followed by an important, mandatory safety briefing and lifeboat drill; wearing our bright orange life-jackets, we made our way out on deck to the lifeboats, briefed by Second Officer Anika. Let's hope we don't need to do this again!



Meanwhile, *Plancius* had cast off and we had started on our journey, so a good time to be out on deck. At 7 pm we gathered together in the Lounge again, this time for a toast to the trip with our Captain Evgeny Levakov and a chance to meet all the Expedition Staff. This event was followed by a sumptuous dinner, a wonderful sunset and great views as we sailed north up the Spitsbergen coast.



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Day 2 – Friday September 4, 2015

Smeerenburgfjord/Smeerenburgreen, NW Islands

0800 GPS position: 79°34.9'N / 010°31.8'E

Wind: N 5. Sea: slight. Weather: snow/overcast. Temperature: +1°C

'Good morning, good morning. It is 7.15 am, we are in the North-West of Spitsbergen and it is beautiful outside. We have a fresh breeze and the temperature is +1°C'. That was the wake-up call from our Expedition Leader Rinie.

After a good breakfast we were invited out on deck, because the ship was sailing through the narrow passage of Sjørgattet. Fresh snow sugared the surrounding mountains, and it was still snowing. - Welcome to the Arctic!



To warm up again after standing outside, we got ourselves a cup of coffee or tea in the Lounge. But we had to be quick as the ship was now heading through the Smeerenburgfjord towards the impressive Smeerenburgreen (or glacier). Rinie told us that the islands in front of this glacier appeared, due to glacial retreat, only ten years ago. Also the pale, fresh lateral moraines on each side show the same enormous retreat.



When the ship had turned around and sailed out of the fjord again, it was time to get our Wellington boots. We were called, deck by deck to come to the boot room and collect a pair of boots. Half-way through this process, a call came from the bridge: 'We have two bears at 3 o' clock (to the ship) walking along the shore. It is a mother and cub'.

Wow!!! A bear sighting within 24 hours of departure.

The captain did his very best to bring the ship as close to the shore as possible. The bears gave a full show: sitting, rolling, scratching, walking and swimming. We were impressed by the speed these animals can make.

After the rest of the boots were handed out, we received the mandatory AECO & Zodiac briefing, essential to know how to operate correctly and safely in the Arctic.

In the afternoon we made a landing at Smeerenburg on Amsterdamøya. Smeerenburg was an old whaling station, in use between 1614 and 1654 approximately, and its name means 'blubber town'.



Blubber is the fat from a whale. It was boiled down to oil ('rendered') and shipped to Europe, because of lack of vegetable oil to supply a growing population. We could still see the remains of these blubber ovens.

But it was not the only reason to visit Smeerenburg. There were also walrus hauls on the beach. We saw big bulls with large tusks, lying lazily on

the pebbly sand, occasionally scratching somnolently with a flipper, sometimes raising a sleepy head and gazing around.

They were not bothered by the falling snow and fresh breeze. But we were getting cold standing around, so Rinie gave us the choice between going back to the ship or joining a short walk around the lagoon. Some people went back, but most of us stayed, knowing that we would be on the ship for the next two days.



All of a sudden Rinie saw an Arctic fox and called everyone to come nearer. But then it went out of sight - until Michelle saw it again, with a freshly-caught Barnacle goose in its jaws, flapping its



wings and trying to escape. But the fox held on and pulled the goose away from the shore. Luckily for us, the fox started straight in on this fresh feast, still standing near the lagoon and it was so preoccupied that it did not bother about us. So we could all take pictures of this 'blue' fox (no white, winter coat yet).

Back on board we were invited into the Lounge for a Recap & Briefing, in which Barbara explained a few things about the Atlantic walrus and Rinie prepared us mentally for two days at sea by promising a late get-up in the morning.

What a great day it was. What a perfect start to our polar adventure.

Day 3 – Saturday September 5, 2015

En route to East Greenland

0800 GPS position: 77°51.5'N / 000°51.3'E

Wind: SW 3. Sea: slight. Weather: partly cloudy. Temperature: +4°C

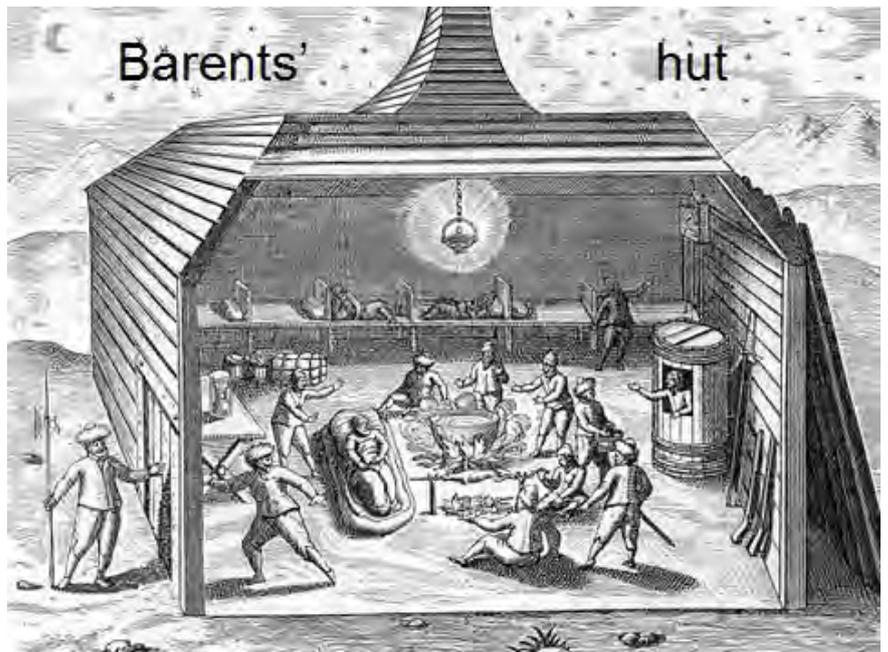
Today was the first of two sea days and we made good progress in the night. We were able to have a lie-in, with breakfast being served from 8.15 – 9.15 am. This gave many of us a chance to catch up on the sleep we lost whilst travelling to Longyearbyen from the four corners of the Earth!



After a stroll out on deck to enjoy the sea views, we headed up to the Lounge on Deck 5, got a coffee from the machine and settled down to listen to a much-anticipated talk (since our bear sighting yesterday). Expedition Leader Rinie was there to charm us with his images and pass on his knowledge about 'Polar Bears, their reproduction, denning, cub-raising and survival'. These marine mammals

are amazingly well-adapted to their lives in the pack ice and we were fascinated to hear how they coped with the harsh environment and (in the case of the long-suffering female) reared the next generation.

There was a bit more photo-editing time, or chance to chat to fellow-passengers before lunch at 12.30 pm, which was a tasty chicken dish. In mid-afternoon Victoria was in the Lounge to tell us about 'The History of Svalbard'. She covered from the initial discovery of Spitsbergen by the Dutch in 1596, through the whaling, hunting and trapping eras, on into the age of exploration and science, to the 1920 Svalbard Treaty (by which Norway gained sovereignty over Svalbard) and right up to the mining and tourist industries of today. It turns out that Svalbard is an isolated archipelago of islands with a surprisingly varied and significant history.





By this stage most passengers had discovered the bridge on Deck 6 – the best place on the whole ship for watching *Plancius'* progress. Today's weather changed throughout the day, from cloudy, to sunny, to wet and back again. And we were outside to enjoy it whatever the conditions, knowing that we had a warm ship to step back into at any time.

To help us capture these magic moments along the way, James was in the Lounge at 5 pm to give us some photographic tips, so that we can take the most impressive pictures possible to remind us of this voyage for a very long time to come. Now we know who to ask if we have technical questions too!

Just before dinner we had our daily Recap & Briefing, during which Rinie gave us the weather forecast for tomorrow (possibly a little more movement in the night and early morning) and reported on our future plans upon arrival in East Greenland. James talked about the glaciers of Svalbard, and reminded us of how they are all in retreat at the present time; and Henryk (with Polar News) expounded on how, for convenience, we divide up the world into Northern and Southern Hemispheres, with latitude and longitude lines to measure our position on the earth's surface. The zero degree parallel of latitude is fixed by the laws of nature, but the zero degree meridian of longitude can be located anywhere, and has only fairly recently settled down in the UK – at Greenwich, in SE London.

Then it was time for dinner. There was a convivial atmosphere in both the dining room and the galley, as we celebrated a successful first sea day and looked forward to the luxury of gaining an hour's sleep tonight, since we will put our watches and clocks back an hour at bedtime.



Day 4 – Sunday September 6, 2015

En route to East Greenland

0800 GPS position: 74°24.3'N / 013°27.4'W

Wind: N 6. Sea: 5. Weather: cloudy. Temperature: +4°C

Overnight we passed through a small weather front, giving the ship a slight roll, which was already reducing by breakfast time.

Our first talk of the morning was on 'Arctic plant adaptation', given by Michelle. This insightful talk explained how plants can survive so far north, with images of Arctic willow, saxifrage and poppies among others. We also



learned that there are flying insects (though no bees) to fertilize the flora, but that other



methods are often necessary too. And we even learned that too much water (except in the case of Cotton grass) kills plants more often than too little, which might explain the demise of house plants back home.

By the time the talk had finished the weather conditions were clear again and the sea was becoming calm. In the air following the ship were fulmars and kittiwakes and on the water we saw the occasional Little auk.

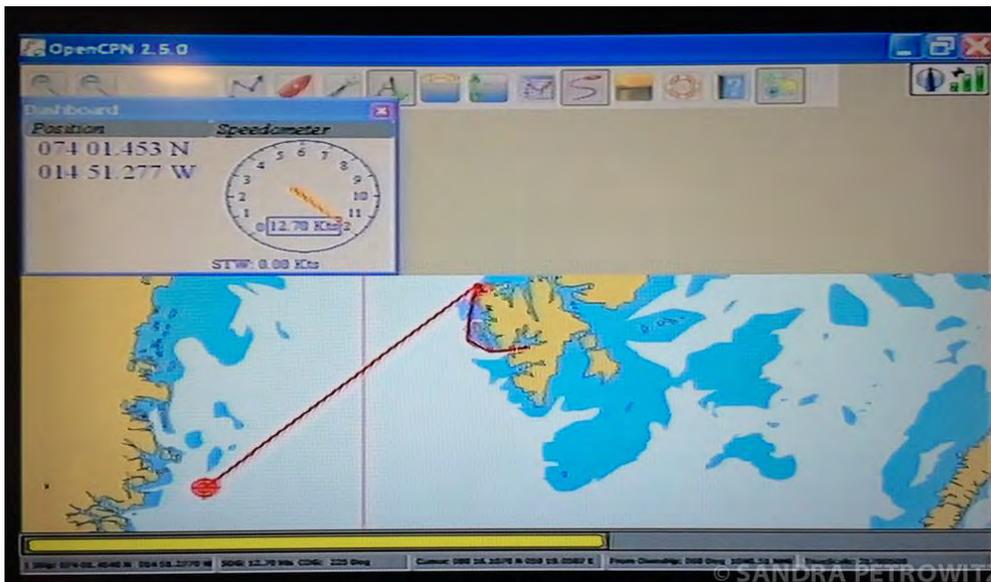
After lunch it was James's turn to tell us all about the 'Geology of East Greenland'. This was a story 4.6 billion years in the making, and contained lots of scenic photos of the amazing areas we are about to visit.



During James's talk the ship was running into the first patches of sea ice which became progressively thicker and thicker, and the distant mountains of the Greenland coast came into view. The floes contained both first year and multi-year ice, and have been carried down the east coast of Greenland from the Arctic Ocean by ocean currents. We happily donned our jackets, hats and gloves and spent time out in the sunshine gazing at the ice, admiring our captain's skill and taking atmospheric pictures.



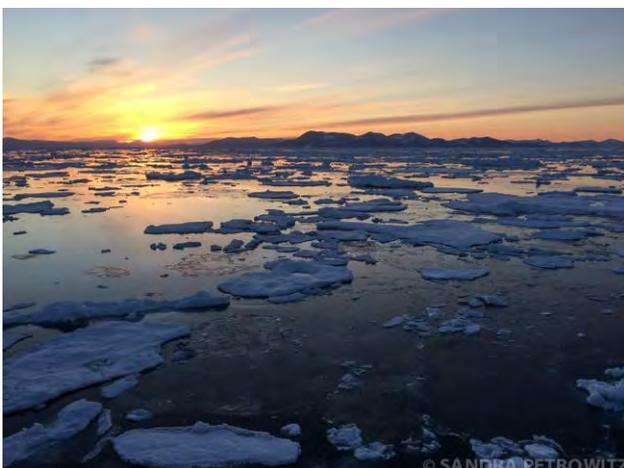
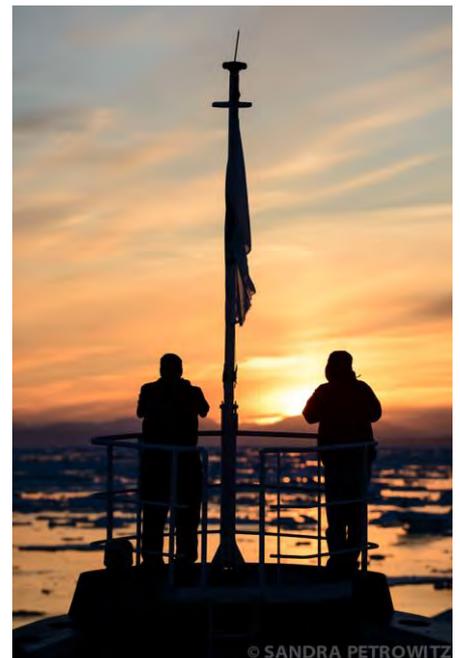
This beautiful ice will slow us down somewhat, but then careful followers of our progress towards the east coast of Greenland will have observed that we are doing quite well.



At 6 pm Katja gave a very adventurous talk about her experiences on a 220km skiing expedition in North West Svalbard - particularly fascinating since we have just come from that area. This was shortly followed by Recap, in which Katja again spoke, this time explaining the chemistry and formation of sea ice, whilst Victoria told us about the historical significance of the Danes and

Norwegians trapping foxes at Myggbukta (a weather radio station - 'Mosquito Bay' in Mackenzie Bay) in the 1920s and 1930s; Myggbukta is one of tomorrow's landing options.

That evening after dinner there was an incredible sunset; we were all out on deck photographing the ice floes and distant Greenland mountains, which were bathed in a wonderful orange light that just went on and on getting better as wispy clouds lit up after the departure of the sun itself.



There was something of a celebratory gathering at the bar after this – we were on a high, eager to chat about our fresh experiences of ice navigation. Captain

Evgeny wisely opted to stop for the evening and wait for dawn tomorrow before proceeding through the increasingly dense pack ice. And we gained an hour again, which provided even more motivation for just one more drink.

Day 5 – Monday September 7, 2015

Myggbukta & in the Ice to Sofia Sund, East Greenland

0800 GPS position: 73°18.2'N / 020°18.5'W

Wind: NE 3. Sea: 1. Weather: foggy. Temperature: -2°C



As colourful as last night's sunset was, correspondingly grey was this morning when we woke. The world was covered by a blanket of fog. It created a true Arctic atmosphere. Visibility of 300-400 metres did not give away where the water ended and the sky began. The ice floes around the ship were joined together by fresh sea ice. Some ice floes showed polar bear tracks, others had little

puddles of water on top. The sea chart on the bridge spelled out in large letters: "HOLD WITH HOPE" - the rather dramatic name of the area we were sailing in.

Because of thicker-than-expected sea ice conditions, a landing at Myggbukta would not be possible, so it was on to Plan B! At 10 o'clock our fellow passenger, Michael Archer, gave a presentation about his trips to both North & South Poles. Most of us were full of admiration, whilst not quite wanting to emulate him... Soon after that it was time for lunch – certainly a whole lot tastier than the fatty pemmican bars providing Michael's staple food on his polar adventures.

At 3 pm, James gave a presentation about glaciers and icebergs, which consist of fresh water; he was just moving on to the subject of sea ice (formed from salt water) when the skies cleared; we were all eager to go out on deck to enjoy the sun and the beautiful surroundings of the Sofiabugt, so James will continue his talk at a later stage.

Suddenly, vistas of mountains, sea and ice were all around us. Well, we are on

an expedition ship, so Rinie had a word with the hotel department and arranged for dinner to be pushed back to 8.30 pm, thus giving us a chance to make an unplanned landing.



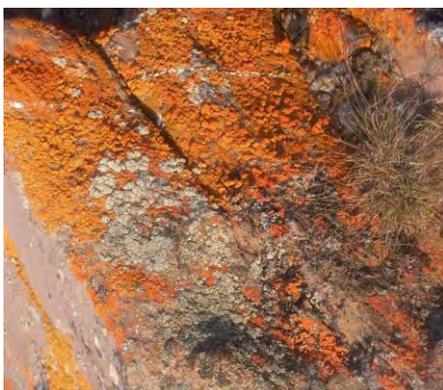
So at about 5 pm we all got ready to land near Celsiusfjellet, a place where many fish fossils have been found, especially high up in the layers of red rock. Here we divided into three groups according to the speed and distances we intended to walk, and off we went.



We found the soft, very expensive wool of a Musk ox on the tundra, and a little later we saw these impressive big, woolly animals themselves. Two summer groups were seen, containing a bull, a few cows and a calf each. There were also a few Arctic hares around, but it was hard to recognise them without binoculars. The very lucky amongst us even saw a lemming or Arctic fox.



Anyway, we could all enjoy the beauty of the scenery, dominated by old red sandstone which was deposited 400 million years ago. Slightly more recent (though incredibly slow-growing) were the lichens growing on it; the bright orange Jewel lichen, especially, was to be seen in its full glory in the low-angled sunlight.



The vascular plants were interesting too. We walked over willow and birch trees, as they were only ten centimetres high! And although the main flowering season is almost over, we still found some Alpine Mouse-ear chickweed, Northern thrift and willow herb, the national flower of



Greenland.

Back on board we enjoyed our dinner all the more for the exercise and there was quite a buzz in the bar afterwards.

Day 6 – Tuesday September 8, 2015

Blomsterbugten & Segelsällskapet

0800 GPS position: 73°19.1'N / 025°28.2'W

Wind: NE 3. Sea: 2. Weather: cloudy. Temperature: +3°C



Those of us who were up and about at 6 am witnessed a beautiful sunrise in Eleonore Bugt! Those of us who weren't, were woken by Rinie at 7.15 am, delighted to discover that the weather was behaving much better than yesterday. Many photos were taken out on deck even before breakfast.

Once we'd drunk our morning coffee we met in the Lounge for a briefing about the morning's landing at Blomsterbugten, a bay full of flowers in summer, some of which

lingered on to mingle with the encroaching autumn reds and yellows of low-growing Arctic trees.



A short zodiac ride brought us to land on a pebbly beach, where we split into the hiking group, medium-walkers and those up for a leisurely stroll nearer the shore. The small building we saw immediately to the left of the landing site was a well-maintained little Trappers' Hut, which for nearly 100 years has been used as a temporary shelter by local hunters and trappers – named 'Wolf Bay Hut'.

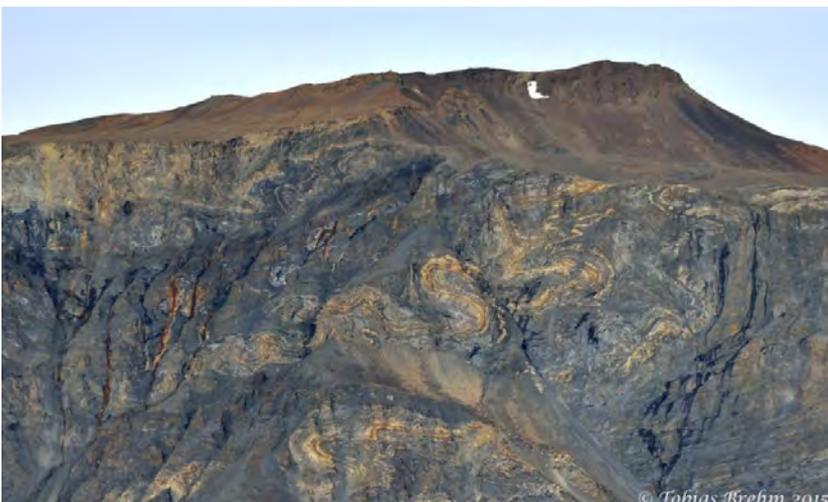




Whichever walk we chose, the views were spectacular. Snow buntings flitted round our heads and most groups glimpsed Muskoxen on distant slopes (a skull and a hoof were seen much closer up!), and even the occasional far-off flash of an Arctic hare in motion. Whenever we stopped to enjoy the scenery, people lay at full length on the ground to photograph the flora at close range, or chose a convenient



boulder to perch on for a rest and from which to contemplate nature. Animal droppings (mostly from Muskox) were inspected with close interest and attention, and Tobias and James were needed on several occasions to explain geological features – such as striking polygonal arrangements of black rocks and a green streak of malachite, both of which we met with on the way back to the landing site.



Back on *Plancius*, we didn't linger over lunch. James's voice came over the PA system to remind us to look outside at the ROCKS. Both he and Tobias were in their element, out on deck much of the afternoon as we sailed Antarctic Sound and on into Kong Oscar Fjord. This route took us past magnificently-coloured, rock-layered mountains, swirling into folds, constantly changing – rocks of notable beauty and interest

even to the non-geologically minded! With a pleasing logic, these rainbow-coloured rocks have been named the Eleonore Bay formation; we learned that they formed in tropical, shallow marine conditions from 900 to 500 million years ago.



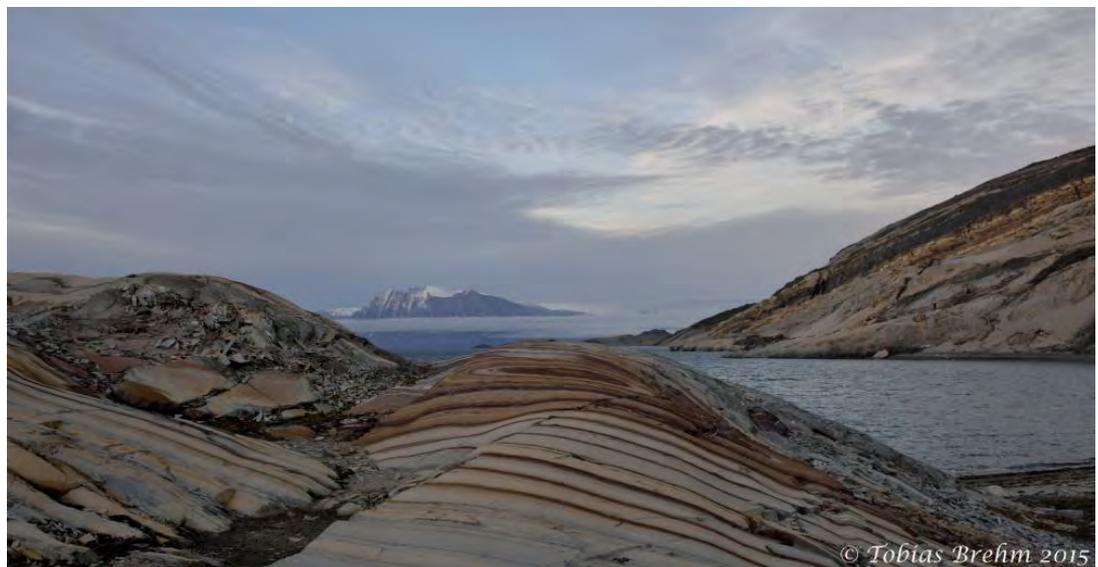
Visibility remained good even though the sun became veiled as the day progressed. From time to time Rinie announced where we had got to on the map as we sailed towards our evening landing in Segelsällskapet Fjord. This translates as 'The Royal (Swedish) Yacht Club' Fjord, which is rather a disappointing name for the site of such an amazing geological phenomenon. As our daily programme put it: 'Here you can not only look at the geology, but also walk on it.'

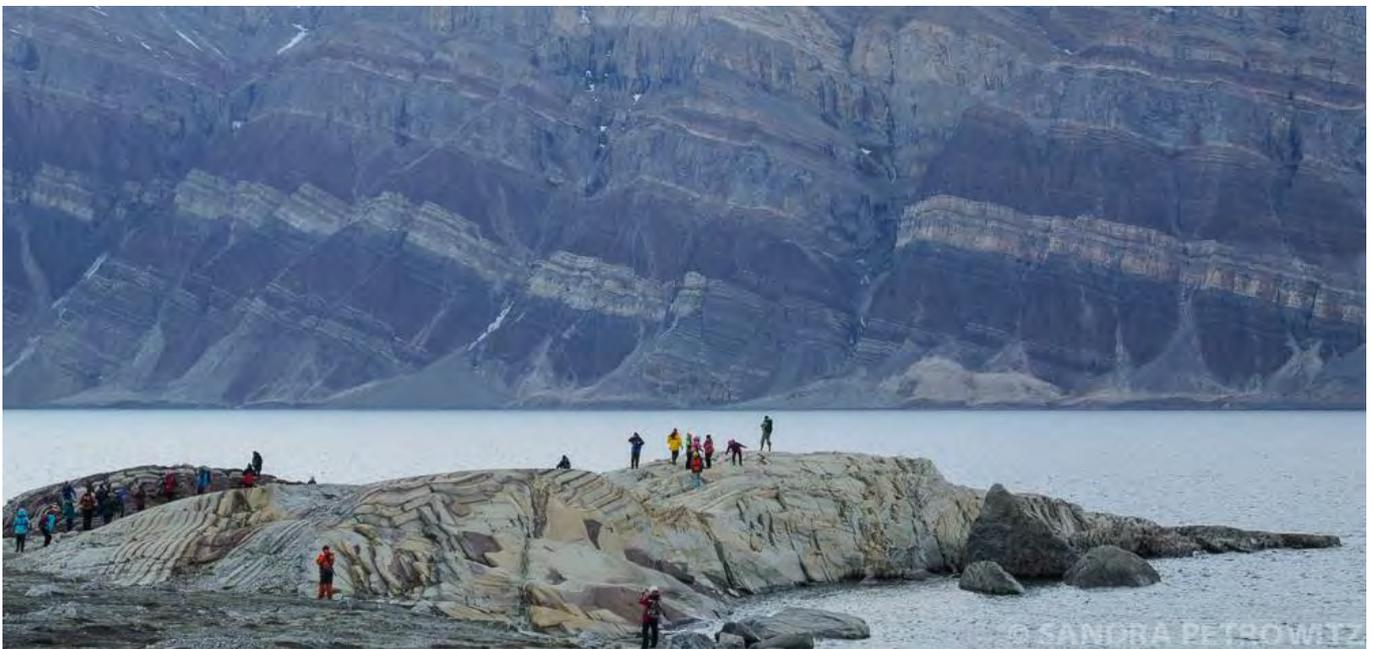
We had an early Recap & Briefing, during which Rinie gave us all necessary information about the evening's landing, Katja spoke on the origin of fog bows or halos round the sun – which most of us had witnessed that very afternoon - and our two on-board geologists spoke respectively about the rocks we had just seen and the rocks we were about to see, which certainly whetted our appetites for later.



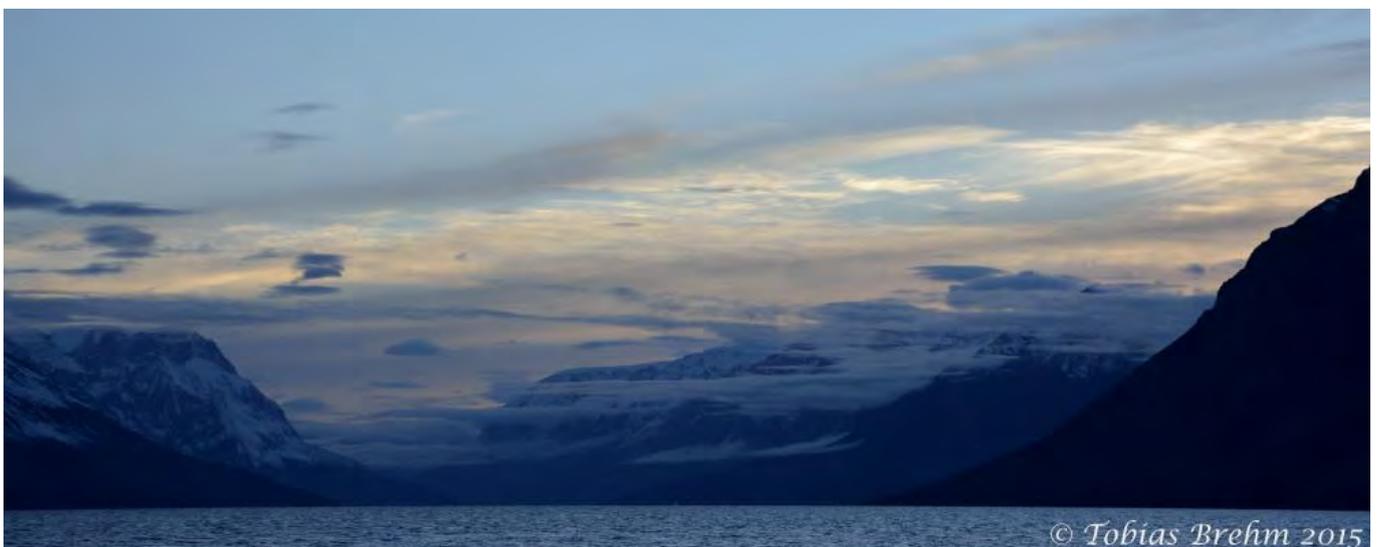
Dinner was quicker than usual and by about 7.45 pm we were back in our cabins, changing for our late outing. Gun-carriers stood at critical points around a perimeter within which we were free to wander. For the next 75 minutes we roamed freely over the terrain, feasting our eyes on, climbing on top of and snapping photo after photo of candy-striped rocks which looked good enough to eat! At one point a pink and white tongue of rock ran straight out into the sea, looking more like a stick of melting toffee through the ripples, than the ancient rock we knew it to be. James and Tobias were kept busy explaining what had caused the formations and how long ago they had appeared. As the evening light darkened

into dusk and the sky turned a gentle pink our photos just became more and more artistic, with silhouetted figures providing scale and human contrast to this otherwise deserted, but exceptionally beautiful natural landscape – visited by so few.





We were all back on board (with tags turned!) by 9.30 pm. Too wide awake to head straight to bed, many of us gathered for a drink in the bar in order to exchange opinions and impressions of our experiences today – thank you to Rosi for being there for us until late!



Day 7 – Wednesday September 9, 2015

En route to Scoresby Sund

0800 GPS position: 72°08.4'N / 023°16.5'W

Wind: S 2. Sea: 1. Weather: cloudy. Temperature: +3°C



Katja Riedel Snowmad Photography

Today we awoke to the sound of crunching ice. We were approaching Antarctic Havn, at the mouth of Kong Oscar Fjord and our intended landing site for this morning. The sea was still and grey between the floes and the sky was cloud-covered. Sea ice is beautiful, but inconvenient for *Planicius*; our trusty ship can navigate successfully (if slowly and carefully) through ice that is not packed together too tightly by wind and current, but it takes time. The sensible decision was made by the captain and Rinie that it would be unwise to linger here and devote significant time and effort to an attempted landing. As the latest sea ice charts show considerably more and thicker ice lying along the route to Scoresby Sund, the sooner we got

underway, the better. So we tore up the daily programme and wrote a new one, in which gazing at sea ice and listening to lectures took priority.



Katja Riedel Snowmad Photography

Around 9.30 am we were surprised and delighted to see that it was snowing outside – huge, thick flakes were rapidly settling on railings, benches and people. All of a sudden this group of mature, well-travelled adults was behaving like kids – stealing someone's polar bear toy and building it a den/igloo just outside the Lounge, scraping together enough snow to make snowballs...we certainly belong to the generation that grew up playing outside, not glued to a computer screen!

Once the first excitement was over, Victoria began her talk, entitled 'Three amazing Greenland explorers: Kane, Nansen and Peary'. These three men all had a strong connection with

Greenland, though only Nansen (Norwegian) was really interested in exploring the country for its own sake (he made the first ever crossing of the Greenland icecap with a small group, in 1888). Both Kane (1853) and Peary (1891 – 1909) used Greenland as a stepping stone in their efforts to conquer the North Pole. Kane probably didn't get further north than about 79°30', though he was the first to set eyes on the huge Humboldt glacier and realise how ice could have shaped the landscape during the Ice Ages. As for Robert Peary, we will never know for sure if he reached the North Pole or not; many books have been written for and against him. But the tales of polar explorers' exploits, how they fought fierce seas, pack ice, intense cold, polar bear attack and starvation continue to fascinate us, whatever their technical achievements. So many men lost their lives trying to conquer the icy north.

There was just time before lunch to indulge in a bit of retail therapy at reception. Suddenly, a shop full of polar souvenirs appeared out of nowhere! There was quite a scramble to examine all of the goodies on display and of course, since we don't have to settle our bills until the end of the trip, it hardly felt as if we were spending money at all...



By lunchtime *Plancius* was out of the fjord in the open sea and - for the first time in our voyage - rolling a little. There

was still a lot of sea ice and our bridge officers were forced to sail a long way round a big tongue of sea ice at one point – so this morning's decision was wise.

In the afternoon, James gave a presentation entitled 'Polar Climate Crisis', which was all about the changing climate in Antarctica and the Arctic and what the future might hold – depressing stuff, but a subject all of us need to think about in our changing world.

Later on – at the start of a two-hour 'Happy Hour' at the bar - Katja and Sandra chaired a polar quiz, with a bottle of champagne as the prize. Passengers met this surprise activity with much enthusiasm, though on occasion attempted to argue over the correct answer, forgetting that 'the judges' decision is final!' Ice, polar bears, geology, history and trivia all featured in the questions the expedition staff had come up with.



Happy hour continued on into our Recap & Briefing, at which Barbara gave us an account of the major bird sightings we have had/can expect to have and Sandra talked about how the places we visit got their names. Rinie also took this opportunity to update us on our progress towards Scoresby Sund (we are back on schedule), and then it was time for another enjoyable dinner.

Day 8 – Thursday September 10, 2015

Scoresby Sund: Sydkap

0800 GPS position: 70°37.8'N / 024°14.0'W

Wind: N3. Sea: 2. Weather: cloudy. Temperature: -2°C

Low clouds and a temperature of -2°C, that was how the day started. At 9.30 am we were all invited into the lounge, so that Rinie could explain the ice chart and how far we sailed during the night. This year there is much more drift ice than in September for the last few years.

Every now and then we were distracted by big icebergs, as we sailed along Hall Bredning. Its original name was Hall's Inlet, named thus by William Scoresby junior in 1822, after Basil Hall. Thanks go to Captain Evgeny and our bridge



team for guiding us through the ice safely – and for still taking the time to answer our questions!

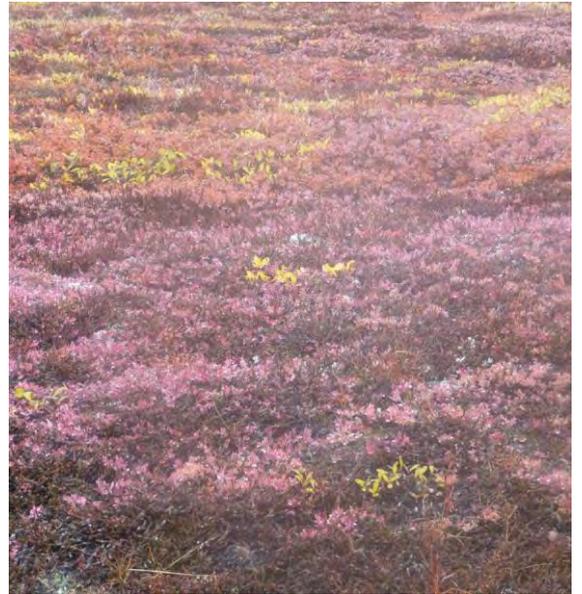


had a good view of all the grounded icebergs around us, whichever group we joined. There were more flowers and thicker vegetation covering the ground here than we had found during our previous landings; this is partly because this landing spot is well-sheltered, but also because of the extra nutrition provided by the presence of people, even though they moved on hundreds of years ago.

In the afternoon we landed at Sydkap (South Cape). This is a very special place, as we can find archaeological remains of the Thule culture here. The fast hiking group took off, and Victoria explained to the others about the remains of the settlement and how the people lived between 900 -1500 AD. We could still see that their houses were built partly underground, which gave good insulation in winter.

The afternoon had started wet and rainy, but the sky soon cleared and we





Back at the ship it was Recap time. Katja told us about the Daugaard-Jensen Gletscher, which is one of the main iceberg producers. It produces 10 km² icebergs annually. Victoria followed on by telling us a little more not only about the Thule, but also about the earlier Dorset and Pre-Dorset cultures. Despite their chronological proximity, there was a distinct genetic and cultural break between them.



Irene had the last word; she tried to teach us Greenlandic. But it all sounded double Dutch to us! At least, now we know that for the Greenlanders there is no difference between past and present or male and female. No wonder even the sled dogs have trouble understanding commands spoken in different Greenlandic dialects.

There was no time left for Rinie, because the BBQ-on-deck was awaiting us. At first we were a bit sceptical about having a BBQ in these Arctic weather conditions. But the food and the music were good, and we found out that dancing is a perfect way to keep yourself warm. It turned into a great party and we danced the night away, surrounded by icebergs in the dusk.



Day 9 – Friday September 11, 2015

Scoresby Sund: Ø Fjord and Rypefjord

0800 GPS position: 71°17.0'N / 025°09.6'W

Wind: S2. Sea: 1. Weather: overcast. Temperature: +1°C



This morning started off overcast and foggy – no sign that we were in sight of land at all. But the icebergs were fantastic – so many and so varied in form. And as soon as we began our scenic zodiac ship-cruise down Ø Fjord, everything changed as if by magic. Suddenly, there was a ball of light burning through the mist, which gradually lifted to reveal glimpses of huge mountains behind the icebergs; in places a thin veil of cloud strips still clung to the rugged landscape. Whether we were in possession of the hugest camera lens imaginable, an ordinary point-and-shoot or even just an i-phone, we braved the wind (which was certainly blowing!) to try and capture permanent memories of this magnificent fjord. Here was an

iceberg arch, there was a banded mountain slope, its snow-white upper layers towering above *Plancius*. By the end of the morning there was blue sky everywhere and we went into lunch exhilarated by the scenery so far and very much looking forward to this afternoon's landings and hikes.

At about 2.30 pm we arrived at the spot chosen for this afternoon's activities; by now we were in Rypefjord and facing a magnificent glacier front. After our briefing with Rinie in the Lounge we got



into our layers quickly (we are professionals now); in fact we could have done with fewer layers, since we spent most of the afternoon stripping them off again! The landing site was a perfect spot – laid out before our eyes were blue sky, blue sea, mountain chains, several different kinds of rock and a spectacular Greenland 'garden' of autumnal vegetation and mushrooms. It was difficult to take a bad photo.



All groups – leisurely, medium or hiking – made it a priority to get some elevation in order to appreciate the view to the full. One moment our attention was on the horizon – maybe the glacier or a towering



iceberg; the next we were focused on the carpet of bright foliage beneath our feet. Even the medium and hiking groups, who were enjoying a good leg-stretch, made stopping and absorbing the beauty and the silence all around us a priority. Later, James explained the difference between the striking Augean granite we were walking over (often striped with lichens) and the noticeable grey hummocks of uniform sediment visible along the shoreline; these were once the floor of the

fjord, which was glaciated until relatively recently and is still rising slowly due to isostatic rebound.

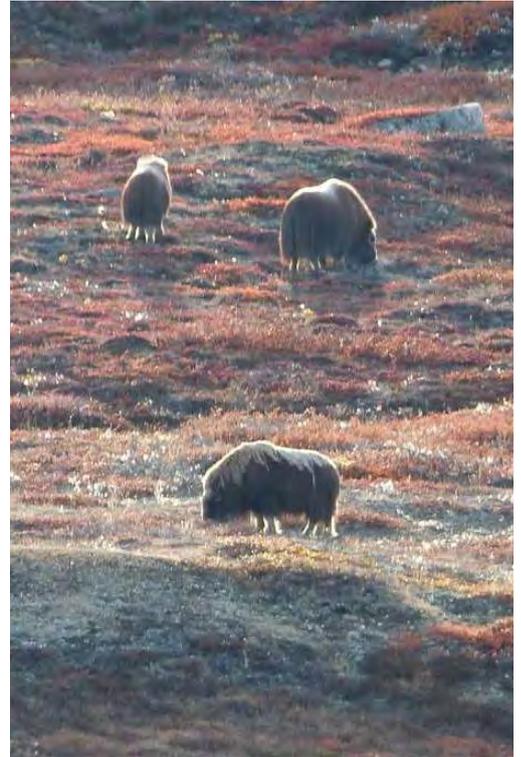
It was such a glorious day that both medium and hiking groups decided to sit and rest and enjoy a period of total silence at one of the best viewing spots. This was appreciated by all – no chat, clicking cameras, ripping Velcro or rummaging in rucksacks. We lost ourselves in the moment...



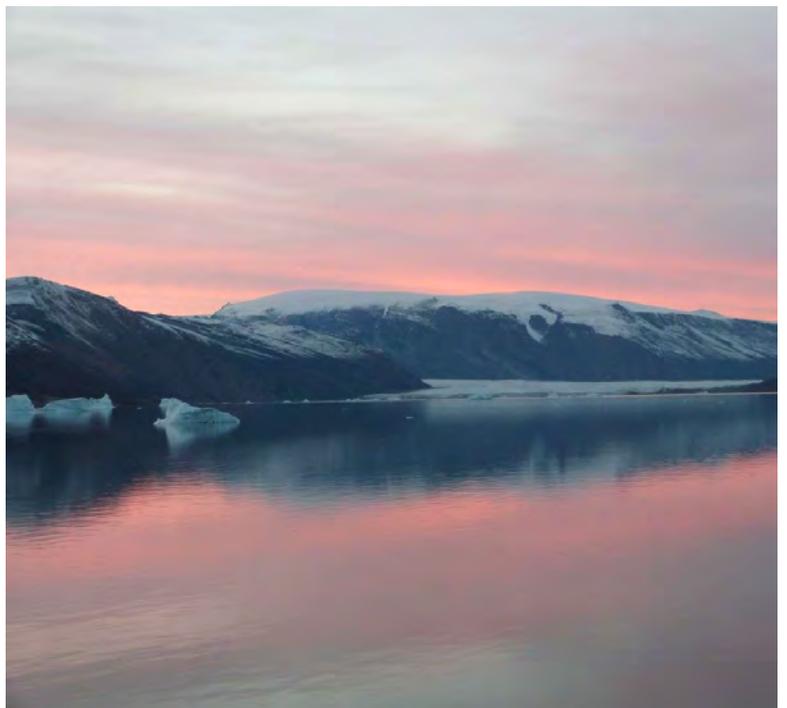


As we reached the level of a higher plateau, we found pools of water reflecting the sky, single boulders (glacial erratics) balanced on the sky-line, a Muskox skull lying on the ground and finally three live Muskoxen grazing their way along the plain beneath us, seemingly unaware of our eyes watching their every step. Fortunately we are not hunters!

We crossed and recrossed a small stream on our way back to the landing site and paused on the final slope to admire *Plancius* floating jewel-like below us, ringed by icebergs. It was a short trek to the new zodiac-shuttling site – a falling tide left the nearer part of the shore too shallow for us to operate. By the time we were back on board, having made the most of the long, warm afternoon it was too late for a Recap & Briefing. For most of us there was just



time for a quick drink at Rosi's bar before heading down to dinner. We remained at anchor all night, so were in an excellent position from which to enjoy the sunset during and after dinner, the sky turning delicately pink behind the mountains.



Day 10 – Saturday September 12, 2015

Scoresby Sund: Rødefjord, Røde Ø & Føn fjord

0800 GPS position: 70°59.7'N / 027°43.7'W

Wind: calm. Sea: calm. Weather: rainy. Temperature: +4°C



We awoke this morning to low cloud and rain again, what a shame! After such an amazing afternoon yesterday, why did the weather have to change back again? This morning's plan was to sail down Røde Fjord marvelling at the red mountains and white icebergs. However, in this low cloud the mountains were not looking their best. But all was not lost; the flat light made the icebergs

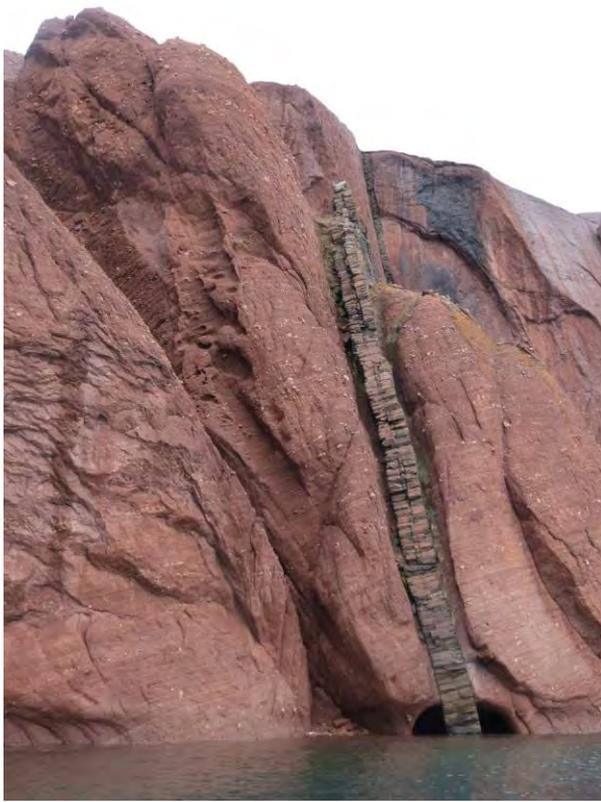
look incredible. Some were an electric blue, and they came in all sorts of shapes and sizes. As we progressed down the fjord, the density of icebergs became greater and greater and some of us wondered if we would be able to make it all the way to Røde Island. However Captain Evgeny was driving the ship almost like a zodiac, dodging in and out of the iceberg chicane.



Just as lunch was finishing we got there, and took over the anchorage of a sailing ship that was



conveniently leaving the site as we arrived. By now the weather was clearing and the rain was stopping. After Rinie's briefing, we all boarded the zodiacs for an incredible cruise around the icebergs and Red Island (Røde Island), which is indeed red, and cut by huge basaltic dykes. The intense colour comes from sediments of Carboniferous and Permian age, which were laid



down in desert conditions, thus allowing the development of haematite. The brilliant red of the rock and some strange and magnificent rock formations, together with the huge concentration of icebergs grounded by the shallow water round the island, made for a very special zodiac cruise. In and amongst these wondrous iceberg forms were seals swimming about and diving down as they hunted for food.

After a little over an hour and a half the zodiacs came to land in a small bay on the north of the island, and we were



able to climb to the top of a high (and steep!) ridge. From this viewpoint we gazed out over the iceberg graveyard we had just cruised through, seeing it from a bird's-eye view, which gave us quite a different perspective on Røde Fjord. We were reluctant to descend to normality after this, but eventually had to go back to our beloved *Plancius* for Recap & Briefing, followed by dinner. Katja talked about blue, striped, dimpled, dirty and rolling icebergs followed by Irene on the



Danish Sirius Dog Patrol and how to get a job with them in East Greenland!

Given the rainy start to the day, it turned out a real treat in the end and we went in to dinner well-contented.



Day 11 – Sunday September 13, 2015

Scoresby Sund: Hurry Inlet & Ittoqqortoormiit

0800 GPS position: 70°24.2'N / 022°46.6'W

Wind: S2. Sea: 1. Weather: cloudy. Temperature: +4°C

Today's early birds were treated to a beautiful sunrise, with coloured skies above the water, the light broken up by the icebergs.



Our first landing for today was planned to be at Kap Stewart, but when the first staff boat set off to prepare the landing site, we could see the whole zodiac disappearing behind large breakers. With swell like that, it was impossible to make a landing. The staff came back on board, and we instead went for a ship's cruise through Hurry Inlet.

The sun was shining, so those who found a wind-sheltered spot on deck spent the morning outside, enjoying the sun. The views of tabular mountains were stunning, complete with different coloured horizontal lines and steep V-shaped clefts, down some of which a little stream ran.

Amongst us was a lady who enjoyed the view also, but for a different reason. Hurry Inlet was her home in the spring and summer of 1974. In that year, Dittie followed her beloved, an ornithologist, to Greenland to work as his field assistant for the season. At recap, she told us how she was brought to the hut by dog sledge, that it was a bad year for lemmings, and that it was not always easy to survive. We already knew that in this region people ate seal and whale meat, but we learned that even Glaucous gull was considered edible then.

The people from Scoresbysund (now Ittoqqortoormiit) had been very helpful to Dittie 40 years ago. She was happy to be able to visit the town again in the afternoon and we shared her enjoyment, as we were very curious to see our first Greenlandic settlement on



the east coast. Before landing, Rinie and Katja told us the do's and don'ts; they encouraged us to buy local products to support the community, but discouraged us from buying products made from endangered species – anyway, illegal to take home for most people.



Once landed in Ittoqqortoormiit we were handed a map by smiling local children, and spent the afternoon exploring the various locations marked on it - a local handicraft-shop, a souvenir shop, church, museum,



Pourquoi Pas memorial (to French explorer Charcot) and lots of sled dogs; there were even some cute puppies playing in the snow. At different places, there were local guides to answer our questions. They were walking around in T-shirts and told us that it was the warmest day of the year – certainly, everyone had washing hung out to dry. At the tourist office we could try a piece of muskox meat - interesting! It was a lovely sunny afternoon and we could have stayed a little longer, but at 5.30 pm it was time to go in order to make it to Akureyri on time.



As we sailed away from Ittoqqortoormiit and East Greenland, we partook of a wonderful drink out on deck – hot chocolate with rum and cream. Sometimes Robert and Thijs have very good ideas!

We enjoyed the most perfect sunset as we dined, afterwards. Between the main course and dessert we were introduced to all the Hotel Staff who work so hard for our wellbeing, many of them behind the scenes. It was good to be able to applaud their efforts. And of course Rosi was in the bar for us after dinner until late, as ever.



Day 12 – Monday September 14, 2015

At sea, en route to Iceland

0800 GPS position: 68°12.1'N / 020°07.9'W

Wind: NNE 8. Sea: 7. Weather: overcast. Temperature: +1°C

During the night *Plancius* started rocking and rolling in earnest and we were grateful to Rinie for warning us to secure our cabins; we woke up to an impressive ocean swell – invigorating for some, but rather uncomfortable for others. Breakfast was slightly less well-attended than usual as some of us chose to have a lazy start to the day, preferring our beds to fighting our way round the ship! The Lounge was made safe for us by long, sturdy ropes stretched between the pillars so that we could claw our way between the coffee machine and seating without disaster.



curiosity.

At 10 am we met a man who is usually hidden in the bowels of the ship – Chief Engineer Sebastian Alexandru, who gave us an enjoyable illustrated talk on 'The secrets of the engine room', ably translated into German by Sandra. Together they took us on a virtual tour of the engine room – we almost felt we were there and we now have a much better idea of what happens down in this command centre, 24-hours a day. There were lots of questions afterwards, as Seb had piqued our

After this Robert came over the PA system and announced everyone's favourite activity of the trip; over the next hour and a half we were called deck-by-deck to reception to settle our shipboard accounts – provided we were feeling well enough. Even if the number of euros wasn't staggering, we were

(staggering), as we clung on to the reception desk for dear life. This was all good practice for arriving in the Dining room safe and sound for lunch at 12.30 pm. Fortunately, the dining room staff served us with both



cauliflower soup and Nasi Goreng rather than allowing us to help ourselves as usual. Still, there were some especially big waves and some hilarious incidents. One bemused passenger travelled a long way from his table until his chair came to rest (still upright) against the window...and his soup bowl was still held upright in his hand without any of it spilling!

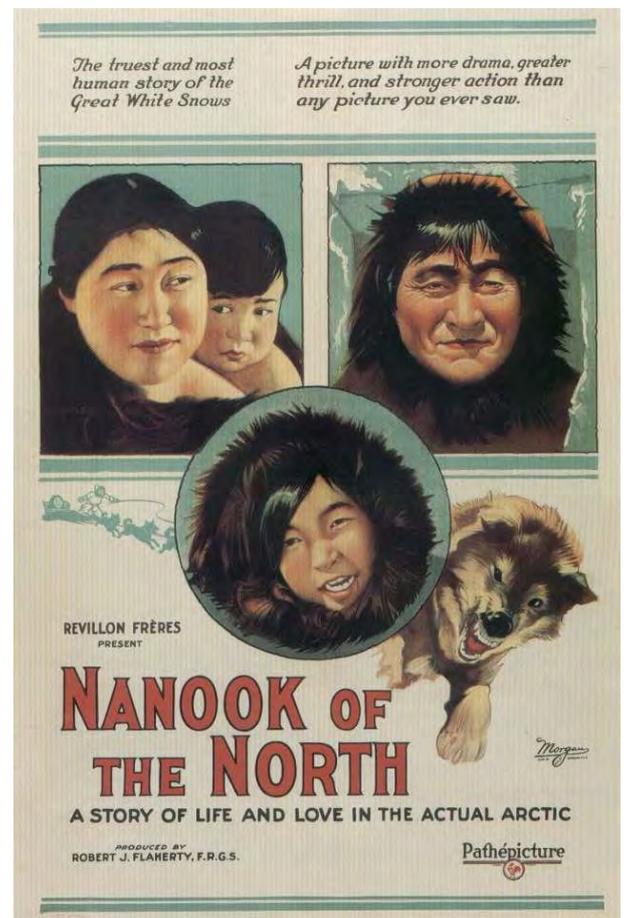
After a bit of a siesta the brave and well-balanced came to the Lounge to hear Irene talk about her lifelong passion – ‘Sled dogs – Hard workers,

elite sport stars and true companions’. She gave us a lively and highly-personalised account of how she shares her life with her working dogs, speaking of training pups and lead-dogs, taking care of her huskies and how best to work co-operatively as a team. She inspired us all, even the non-dog-lovers amongst us.

Then it was time for tea, and at 5.30 pm a very famous Arctic film was shown – ‘Nanook of the North’, a black-and-white film which appeared in 1922. It was full of memorable images of the Inuit on the cusp of change, but still able to live a traditional life of hunting and subsistence in the harsh Arctic environment.

Plancius’ motion was beginning to calm a little by this stage, though trying to pack our clothes was still challenging. Dinner was postponed until 8 pm so that we could enjoy it to the full, and then we all met in the Lounge for one last time, for a farewell briefing. We were joined by Captain Evgeny Levakov, who led us in a toast to a successful voyage for all concerned. We have come a long way since leaving Longyearbyen together.

And so we settled down to sleep in our cabins for the last time this trip. Sweet Dreams.



Day 13 – Tuesday September 15, 2015

Akureyri, Iceland: Disembarkation

0800 GPS position: 65°41.1'N / 018°04.6'W

This morning we heard our last wake-up call from Rinie. We will miss his daily pre-breakfast information!

We made sure to leave our luggage outside the cabin before we went down to breakfast, which was at the civilized time of 8 – 9 am. 9 am was departure time. First we identified our luggage on the pier and then the majority of us boarded buses for Reykjavik, making sure we were headed for the



correct hotel...We have plenty to think about during the six-hour journey through Iceland's spectacular scenery. Then the time will have come for us to say goodbye and start on the journey homeward. Maybe we will meet again on either *Plancius* or *Ortelius* – and perhaps in Antarctica next time?

Thank you all for such a great voyage, for your excellent company, good humour and enthusiasm!

We hope to see you again in the future, wherever that might be.

Total distance sailed on our voyage: 1894 nm /3508 km



World's Leading Polar Expedition Operator

On behalf of Oceanwide Expeditions, Captain Evgeny Levakov, Expedition Leader Rinie van Meurs, Hotel Manager Robert McGillivray and all the crew and staff, it has been a pleasure travelling with you.