



OCEANWIDE
EXPEDITIONS

Polar Bear Special

30th June – 7th July 2016

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 89 m (267 feet) long, 14.5 m (43 feet) wide and has a maximum draft of 5 m, with an Ice Strength rating of 1D, top speed of 12+ knots and three diesel engines generating 1230 hp each.

Captain Evgeny Levakov

and his international crew

of 46

including:

Chief Officer:	Artur Iakovlev	[Russia]
Second Officer:	Anika Albrecht	[Germany]
Third Officer:	Warren Villanueva	[Philippines]
Chief Engineer:	Teunis van't Verlaat	[Netherlands]
Hotel Manager:	André van der Haak	[Netherlands]
Assist. Hotel Manager:	Katrin Völker	[Germany]
Head Chef:	Heinz Hacker	[Austria]
Sous Chef:	Ivan Yuriychuk	[Ukraine]
Ship's Physician:	Jörg Brommer	[Germany]
and		
Expedition Leader:	Christian Engelke	[Germany/Norway]
Assist. Expedition Leader:	Michelle van Dijk	[Netherlands/Spitsbergen]
Expedition Guide:	Tobias Brehm	[Germany]
Expedition Guide:	Miriam Marquardt	[Germany/Spitsbergen]
Expedition Guide:	Beau Pruneau	[US/Canada/Germany]
Expedition Guide:	Steffi Sutter	[Switzerland]
Expedition Guide:	Bill Smith	[Scotland]
Expedition Guide:	Peter Walthard	[Switzerland]

Welcome you on board!

Day 1 – Thursday 30th June 2016

Embarkation – Longyearbyen

GPS 1600 Position: 78°14.1' N/ 015°38.3'E

After spending a few hours in Spitsbergen's capital Longyearbyen, we could board Plancius at 16.00h. This was going to be our home for the next week.

We were welcomed by hotel manager André, and brought to our cabin by his staff. Our luggage was already there.

When everyone was onboard, we were invited to the panorama lounge, to get briefed about safety, and life onboard the ship. This was followed by exercising the 'abandon ship drill'.

Dinner was served after all the mandatory things were done. And just when the main course was served, a whale was sighted. It wasn't even a common whale, but a Blue whale. The largest animal that has ever lived on our planet.



We forgot about dinner instantly and ran out to take pictures. The captain also showed his skills, by staying around these whales (it turned out to be more than one) for at least an hour. So we all had both time to eat and to observe.

What a start of the trip!



Day 2 – Friday 1st July 2016

Smeerenburg & Raudfjord

GPS 0800 Position: 79°30.5'N / 010°27.7'E

Wind: Light Air **Sea State:** calm **Weather:** fog **Temperature:** 5°C.

The day dawned misty, the tendrils of fog sweeping the sides of the mighty Plancius as she gracefully glided through the sea. The morning was relaxed, preparing the guests for the excitement ahead with the mandatory briefings, explaining how to enter and exit the zodiacs, how to behave on land, and most exciting: the rubber boots were handed out! With fine fanfare and hoopla everyone received their muck boots, appropriately named considering the muck & mud they would be soon subjected to. And just in time! A bear was sighted, near the island of Smeerenburg where we hoped to make a short landing. After all the passengers were informed about the going-ons, zodiacs were systematically dropped and tied off at gangway by the B&B's, Beau & Bill, to save time and maximize efficiency. And soon we were off! Heading towards the bear, who was slowly making her way along the shoreline in search of eggs or carcasses, or anything at all that might be edible for that matter. For she was in rather poor condition, mostly just skin and bones with very little fat or muscle mass, her skin a strong shade of yellow as she desperately searched for something to snack on. Eventually she turned her attention to the zodiacs, curious things they were, large black floating blobs with colourful creatures pointing black sticks making so many click click clicks! She decided to hop in the water, and slowly made her way across the small bay towards the mainland on the other side, rolling in the snow with joy as she came to the other side. And then it was time to give her space, and to make a short landing on Smeerenburg! A jolly good frolic that was, having a first class view of the old oil ovens used in the whaling days for reducing the fat down to oil. And then back to the mighty Plancius, just in time for lunch!



In the afternoon we turned our attention northward, heading to Raudfjord for another landing, this time spending longer on shore splitting ourselves into 3 groups. While the beach combers were content to patter around the shoreline with Christian & Miriam, the speedy mountain goats headed towards a peak with Tobias, Steffi, & Bill in hot pursuit. The remainder decided to take the middle ground, heading off with Michelle, Beau, & Peter to climb a gentler peak, giving out plenty of information along the way about the various examples of excrement found. And then it was time to head back to the ship and stuff ourselves with food from our wonderful Chef! A fantastic ending to a wonderful first full day, anticipation high as to what may lay around the next corner...

Day 3 – Saturday 2 July 2016

Sea-ice

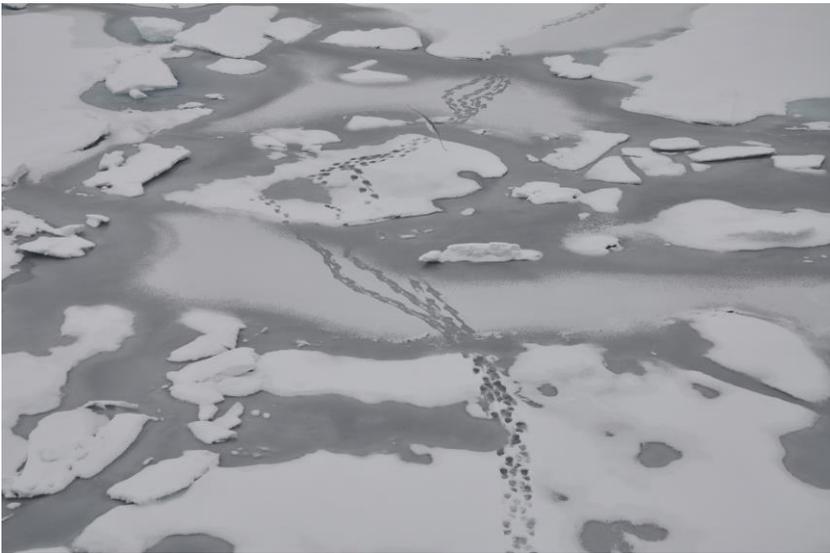
GPS 0800 Position: 80°47.7'N / 014°12.0'E

Wind: WSW 3 **Sea State:** Calm **Weather:** Mist **Temperature:** 5°C.

A slight shudder, a grinding noise, a bang...we awoke to ice...lots of ic!

Plancius slid gently into a mist shrouded sea covered in disintegrating floes.

Evidence of the melting sea ice was all around as large dark pools of water covered many of the sections of pancake ice. Visibility was greatly reduced, down to 100 metres at times....therefore hunting for polar bear in this environment was like hunting for a 'needle in a haystack'.



Passengers were excited however by this new experience. For most, their first encounter with a frozen sea. They crowded the rails, cameras clicking watching ice tilt and long cracks suddenly open as the bow of the vessel sliced through each flow. Fulmars dived and wheeled around Plancius, swooping down to pluck krill from the disturbed water and diminutive polar cod stranded on the surface of the tilted flows. At this location, it was all one-year ice, mostly modest blocks with no growth on the underside. Wildlife sightings were restricted to a solitary bearded and a few ringed seals plus an interesting assortment of birds... Arctic Tern, Ivory Gull, Kittywake, Northern Fulmar, Arctic Skua, Glaucous Gull, Brunnichs Guillemot, Common Guillemot, Little Auk.

Highlights – sighting of a 'fog bow'...a mysterious light effect in the landscape and the odd polar bear track.

Stimulating lectures provided interesting information – Whaling in Svalbard and Micro biology in ice. Eventually late in the evening the fog cleared for our first sight of the sun as Plancius headed south for our next day programme in the Hinlopen in search of bears.

Day 4 – Sunday 3rd July 2016

Alkefjellet & Bjørnsundet

GPS 0800 Position: 79°34.3'N / 018°36.2'E

Wind: SSE 3 Sea State: Calm Weather: Cloudy Temperature: 5°C.



“The early bird catches the worm”, but not for the worm rather for the birds was the morning call today a bit earlier than the last days. We were at Alkefjellet (=auk mountain), an impressive bird cliff in the Hinlopen Strait. Every summer several thousands of Brünnich’s guillemots (*Uria lomvia*) are nesting at this cliff. The Brünnich’s guillemots is a very common seabird in the northern hemisphere and it is especially numerous in the Svalbard region. They arrive Svalbard in April/May and stay in their colonies until

July/early August.

We left Plancius around 8.30 am with 10 zodiacs and moved close to the cliffs along the shore. It was amazing to see in what kind of narrow and dense space the birds were nesting. In between the Brünnich guillemots were also some black-legged kittiwakes (*Rissa tridactyla*) and black guillemots (*Cepphus grylle*) nesting, while larger glaucous gulls (*Larus hyperboreus*) could be observed attacking the guillemots. The sound and the smell of the birds at the cliff were an interesting spectacle and some people were even lucky to spot an arctic fox (*Alopex lagopus*) at one of the cliff sides. Time was passing by and we were returning to Plancius after a short view on a glacier, to continue our travel towards Bjørnesundet (=Bear Sound).



Travelling further south into the Hinlopen Strait, we were very lucky to get a view on a walrus with its calf. They were both lying on an ice floe, but leaving into the water by our arrival.

The Bjørnesund was giving us what its name is promising. We meet a polar bear female with its teenaged cub standing on a little island. The zodiaks were sent out and we were lucky, both bears showed up on one of the ridges and we got a pretty nice view of them. The teenager was very curious and even came down to the shoreline. It seemed it was almost about to jump into the water to check out this weird black floating devices with a lot of tasty humans inside. After millions of pictures taken and some conversations between mom and kid, they vanished behind the ridge and we were driving back to the mothership to have BBQ on deck.



Day 5 – Monday 4th July 2016

Edgeøya

GPS 0800 Position: 78°13.7'N / 022°01.7'E

Wind: SW 5-6 **Sea State:** Moderate **Weather:** Overcast **Temperature:** 5°C.

It is not often that you have a bear for breakfast, but today we had.

'Plan A' was to land near a canyon full of nesting kittiwakes, but we were not the only one that were interested. Just before the scout boats were dropped, a bear walked out of the canyon.

Most likely he had some eggs for breakfast. And a little to the west there was a suspicious white dot in the moraines, which not much later moved his head. Clearly this was a no go for landing, but the captain found a place for anchoring, so we could watch the bears a little longer and finish our breakfast. Not only were there two polar bears, but also there were two reindeer grazing the tundra. It became very interesting when one of these reindeers slowly moved in the direction of the polar bear. Also the polar bear moved in the direction of the reindeer. But the bear was not good in hiding, and the reindeer moved away very quickly.

The ship repositioned to an alternative landing site named Rinderdalen, but also there was a bear laying not far from the beach.

The next alternative was Peter's lecture on glaciers and crevasses. It was very interesting and followed by a long discussion and lunch.

In the afternoon we had planned to land on Kapp Lee, but the weather conditions were not good and there was so much swell that we would make it flying from the zodiac into the huts.

In front of the huts, there were about six big sausages. These sausages were walrus.

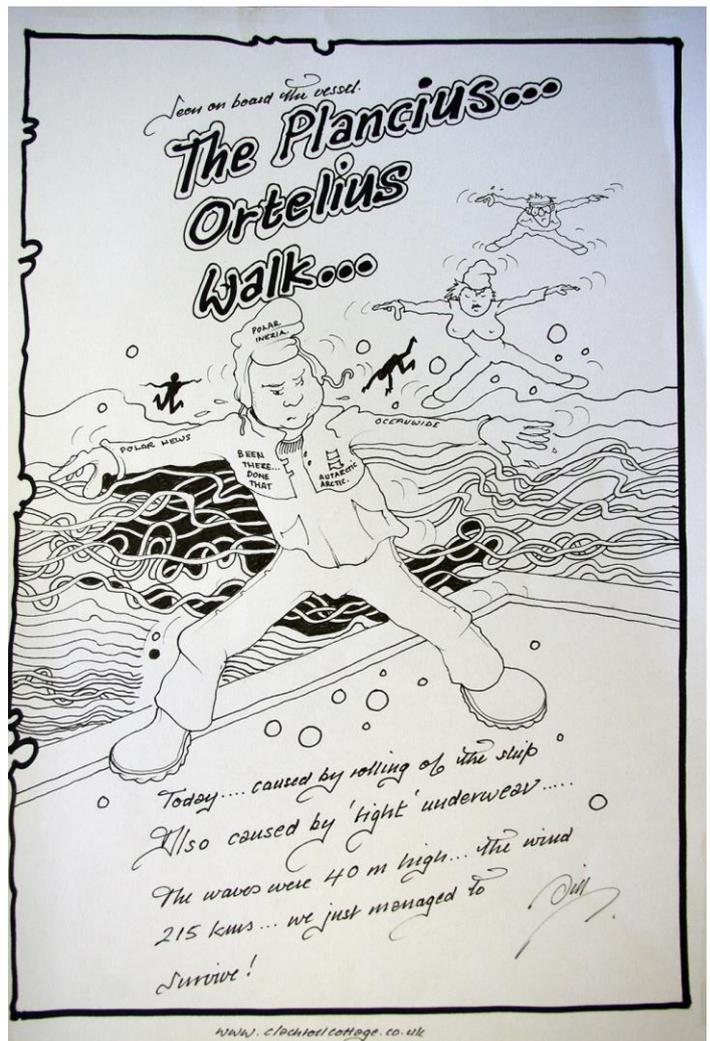
Then it was time for Tobias, to tell us more about the geology of Spitsbergen. Geological, Spitsbergen is a very interesting place, because over the past 1200 million years, it drifted slowly from the Antarctic to the Arctic. Who would have thought that? It also had different climates, therefore we still can find coal and other fossils.

Recap was split into two different languages and took a little longer than usual.

Michelle started off with some information about the polar bear counting project in 1968/69, which led to protection of Polar bears on Spitsbergen.

Bill had some old photographs of sealing ships, Beau spoke about other Arctic animals, and Christian showed the plans for the next day.

Our last challenge was dinner..... Not everybody made it.



Day 6 – Tuesday 5th July 2016

Samarinvågen & Gåshamna

GPS 0800 Position: 77°02.7'N / 016°22.8'E

Wind: NW 3 **Sea State:** Smooth **Weather:** Fog **Temperature:** 4°C.

The day dawned upon the mighty Plancius, the sun shining with all its might through the sparse clouds scattered across the beautiful blue sky. A wondrous occasion it was, as the previous day had been full of misty clouds and rain. The plan? To zodiac cruise in Burgerbukta, to get closer to glaciers in order to scrutinize the smaller details that abound in the ice. Too late! The fog rolled in and we raised our hands in despair at the bad luck. But not to worry! Samarinvågen lay around the corner, outside of the misty zone and resplendent in all its glory. To the zodiacs! Shouted our intrepid leader Christian. As one by one the zodiacs were lowered into the deep blue yonder, they then slowly made their way towards the far glacial wall that lay before them. Beautifully warm it was, and the sun shone upon the layers of stone and sediments that made up the old venerable mountains surrounding the glacier. Old Red sandstone mixed in with marble layers, it made a beautiful sight as Tobias, finally in his element, spread his hands in joy and pontificated from his zodiac throne. Belugas were spotted, but alas were on their way out of the bay and into the fjords, not wanting to hang around too closely to the strange black objects floating in the water around them, exuding this strange smelly fog. A small young bearded seal was also spotted, nervous it was, however regained its calm and slowly ventured forth to inspect these creatures in its habitat.



And then it was time for lunch! More food is never a bad thing, surely the chef would agree! After lunch 'twas to be a landing, at Gåshamna no less, the bay of geese. Alas no geese were to be found, that is until Michelle found a nesting goose on the rocks near the shoreline not far from the hiking path! The speedy mountain goats headed off with Christian, Beau, & Peter, while the more relaxed strayed along with Michelle, Miriam, & Bill. The beachcombers were content to patter along the shoreline, scouting for various miniscule things that were to be found in

abundance. Ahoy ho! Shouted Michelle, the belugas were back! This time swimming along the shoreline not far from where the middle group was, everyone had a chance this time to see them. The mountain goats had a lovely view from near the top of the mountain, where they could survey the whole bay beneath them, first class sights to the white whales in the water. Then slowly everyone made their way back to the beach, where another surprise was in store: a polar plunge! A fantastic way to end off the day, the brave shed their layers of gore-tex and thermals and dove in, anticipation high as to who would stay out longer! As the day came to an end, Plancius slowly made its way back out towards open sea, the passengers wondering what could possibly lay around the next corner...



Day 7 – Wednesday 6th July 2016

Poolepynten and Alkhornet

GPS 0800 Position: 78°25.9'N / 011°55.9'E

Wind: N 3 **Sea State:** Smooth **Weather:** Clear **Temperature:** 7°C.

Another big sky day...as passengers awoke to a magnificent morning. Plancius motored gently into the southern end of Prins Karls Forland bound for the walrus haul-out at Poolepynten. The ship anchored and passengers were ferried ashore in two groups.

One went directly to the walrus whilst the other group walked along the edge of the ponds looking for interesting bird life and examining the flotsam and jetsam discarded along the shore line. The scattered bones of whales served as a reminder to passengers that the area was once under enormous glaciers and the land rebounded once the weight of ice had melted. Hence the raised beaches throughout Svalbard.



Beau delivered an excellent lecture on Polar bears to both English and German speaking groups.

In the afternoon Plancius repositioned for a landing at the bird cliffs of Alkhornet .

Zodiacs ferried all passengers to the beach where they were split into three groups for a variety of walks. The sighting of reindeer, two foxes and a wide variety of birds in such a superb landscape, ensured that this landing was a delightful last activity to the voyage.

The Captain led the toast before dinner and thanks were expressed to all for yet another highly successful Oceanwide Expedition. Passengers were delighted.

Day 8 – Thursday 7th July 2016

Disembarkation in Longyearbyen

GPS 0800 Position: 78°12.2' N/ 015°37'E

After 8 days we were back from where we had started, Longyearbyen. It was sad to say good-bye to all the beautiful places we had visited and to disembark Plancius, the ship that had been our comfortable, cosy home for an unforgettable journey to the North.

But at the same time we were richer in memories and knowledge about the Arctic and its wildlife. We have had special and incredible experiences, taken hundreds of pictures and made new friends. We shared truly unique moments, we talked and we laughed with each other. This trip will last us a lifetime – in our memories, in our imaginations, and in our dreams.

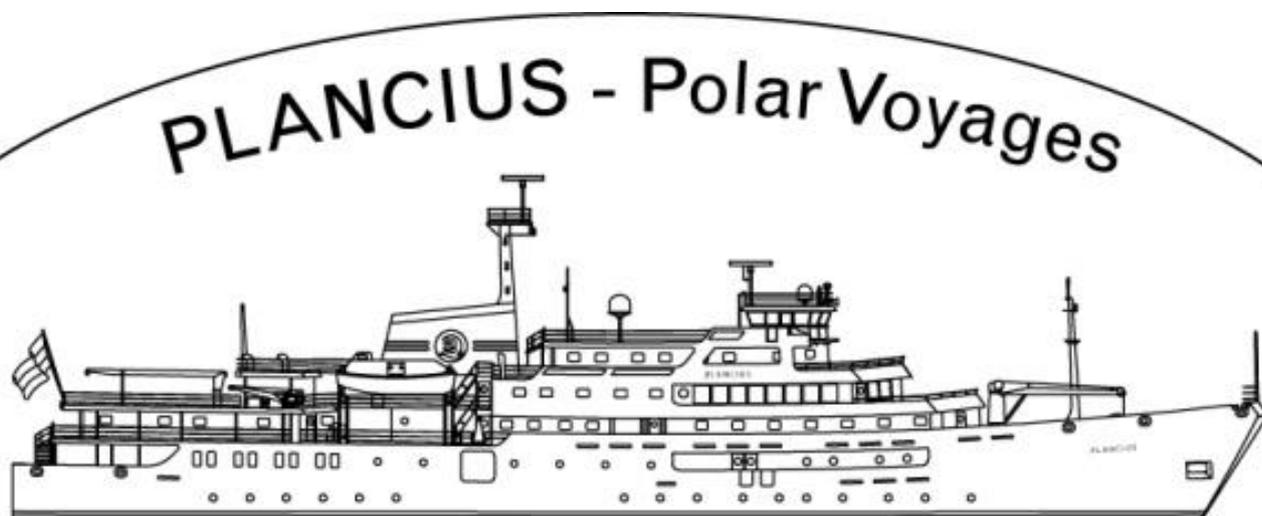
Thank you all for such a wonderful voyage, for your company, good humour and enthusiasm. We hope to see you again in the future, wherever that might be!

Total distance sailed on our voyage:

898 Nautical miles
1663 Kilometres

Furthest North Point: 80°53.7`N / 014°32.0`E

On behalf of Oceanwide Expeditions, Captain Evgeny Levakov, Expedition Leader Christian Engelke, Hotel Manager Andre van der Haak and all the crew and staff, it has been a pleasure travelling with you.



PLANCIUS - Polar Voyages

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