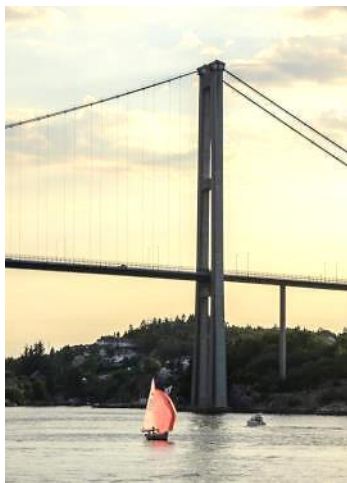


## Bergen - Norway

Thursday, 31<sup>st</sup> May 2018

The sun baked down, “cracking the flags” as we basked in record temperatures. All around the city Norwegians were sweltering in the unaccustomed heat. Alongside the quay, we handed in our passports, received identity cards, and got ice cool apple juice to welcome us all aboard. Luggage had been sent ahead and was awaiting at the cabin doors, but there was no time to unpack! First we had the task of orienting ourselves to the ship, finding the way forward to the bows (pointy end) and aft to the stern (not pointy end), leaving ashore the terms left and right and using port and starboard (Hint: There’s no PORT - LEFT in the bottle...).

We were welcomed to the Discovery Lounge with some tea time treats. Then we heard a briefing from the Ship’s Safety Officer Artem Singur and completed the mandatory SOLAS (Safety Of Life At Sea). G Apprentice Neil Rabjohn demonstrated how to put on the large orange life jacket and a survival suit affectionately called the “Gumby Suit,” which we hopefully never need.



Our Brazilian Hotel Manager Josiane Aparecida da Silva (“Josi”) introduced the leaders of her team; Purser Laurence, Chef Tony, Storekeeper Richard, Bartender Randle, Head Waiter Jona Lynn, Laundryman Albert, and Head Steward Warren. Expedition Leader, Jonathan Green, gave us details of the trip and a brief introduction to his expedition team. They will bring spectacular vistas to life with details of the flora, fauna, history, art, geology and life in the places we will be visiting. Shore Excursion Manager Susan Adie provided a flavor of things to come with the itinerary for the next day. With fair weather predicted (hopefully all the way to Tromso) we will have options galore for historical tours, nature trails, birding spots, and an array of UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Such glories to unfold!

Our time in Bergen had drawn to a close but we were waiting the arrival of a guest whose flights had been delayed. With a short sea passage this did not impact our programme and we all gathered for our evening meal in the restaurant before heading down to pick up our red Expedition parkas from the Discovery Lounge. We were on our way out through the small islands around Bergen by about 8:30 pm.

After all that excitement everybody headed to their cabins for a good night’s rest and dreams of experiences to come over the next few days.

Submitted by: Mike Scotting, Geologist

Photos: a) Lifeboat Muster, b) Sailing out of Bergen, both by John Kernan

## Flåm and Urnes Stavkirke

Friday, 1<sup>st</sup> June 2018

As the saying goes, “The Captain is in charge of the ship, but the guests are in charge of the weather”. A big thank you to all the new guests for bringing such a glorious sunny day with you on holiday!



We started out early this morning in Aurlandsfjord, to experience the unique Flåm rail trip that is 20 km in length with 20 tunnels, and twists and turns its way up the mountain. The work to build the tracks was started in 1923, and the line opened in 1940 for steam trains and electric trains in 1944. When we got to the second to the last stop, the Valtnahalsen Hotel 811 meters over the ocean, we were treated to Norwegian waffles, served with jam and sour cream, and a welcoming cup of coffee. We had travelled through a narrow valley with many spectacular waterfalls and viewed Huldra dancing at the waterfall. There is a myth

that she is part human, with a cow’s tail, and tries to lure men into the water.

After lunch and ice-cream cones on the stern deck, we had our Zodiac safety briefing, as this is mandatory for making a landing by Zodiac. The ship repositioned and in flat calm waters we had our first ride to the shore in a Zodiac, to visit the World Heritage site of Urnes Stavkirke. Our landing was at a small pier with wonderful wooden boats and a bright red shed, reflecting in the calm waters. We walked through a small farm with apple trees and strawberry plantations, trees with lush new leaves, flowers in bloom and birds singing in the trees.



The Urnes Stavkirke is in the most beautiful setting with a small cemetery, yellow flowers and some shade trees. Two guides’s that lead a tour, with all the facts and figures relating to this 1130AD church. This beautiful church has massive wooden beams, is partly painted inside and has a few religious icons. The outside panels were heavily carved with Celtic designs from many centuries ago. A small “honesty” snack shop and a very informative museum were open for our enjoyment.

We ended the day with Pablo’s fantastic guitar skills in the Polar Bear Bar. We were not facing an early wake-up call, so many guests enjoyed staying out on deck or listening to Pablo’s music, enjoying the long Norwegian evening.

Submitted by: Yvonne Ankerman, Artist in residence  
Photos by Yvonne: a) Flåm Railway and b) Urnes Stavkirke

Olden, Norway

Saturday, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2018



Norway is a country that defines the northwestern edge of Europe. It is justly envisioned as a land of fjords, high mountains, glaciers, snow and Nordic skiing. The Aurora Borealis, long nights, and bitter cold describe its winters. For the third straight day none of those images had a place in our collective reality. It is well known that an arm of the Gulf Stream keeps this land, one of the happiest of nations, swaddled in temperatures that at similar latitudes in North America or Siberia plunge to below zero. But this was something else altogether. The day dawned bold, bright and blue. The mercury climbed to the high 20s. Shorts and T-shirts were donned. It felt more like the Bahamas than a land of snows.

Even with stunning fjord land scenery, this morning was at sea and thus a perfect time to kick off our sojourn's educational component. Geologist Mike Scotting began with the "Geology of the Caledonia Mountain Range." From Norway to Great Britain and across "the pond" to the Appalachian Mountains certain regions of the North Atlantic are detailed by mountains. They are old, having been thrust up during a period of great mountain building known as the Caledonian Orogeny. Ornithologist Lyn Mair followed with a talk entitled "Some Song Birds of Norway." We had heard them and seen a few during our first couple of days aboard and ashore, but identification had eluded most of us. Historian Carol Francis rounded out the morning's program "More than Just Vikings." Celebrated in history and exploited by Hollywood, the Viking age was more characterized by whole families leaving Norway to flee the rath of kings and to find farmland elsewhere, than going on "a Viking" in search of weak towns to raid, and strong towns where they could trade.



During lunch, the *G Expedition* slipped quietly alongside the pier in Olden, and we shortly boarded buses for the drive to Briksdalbreen, a scenic glacier showing signs of serious recent decay. The first part of our drive was in the stunning scenery of the Olden Valley. Numerous waterfalls fell from steep snow-capped mountains and fed into valley lakes that were teeming with salmon according to our local guides! Our driver provided us with stories of the farms and people living along the valley. Once at the entrance to the park, we quickly jumped out to begin the walk up to the glacier's terminus. Wildflowers bloomed along the walkway. Some of us hopped onto the Troll Cars and got a lift to the top. The Troll Cars were all driven and owned by one family from the valley so we were beginning to get a sense of the tight-knit community in this fjord. Once at the top, we had amazing views of the glacier, the air crisp and clear! But the offer of cakes and coffee convinced everyone that it was time to walk back to the restaurant and the buses.



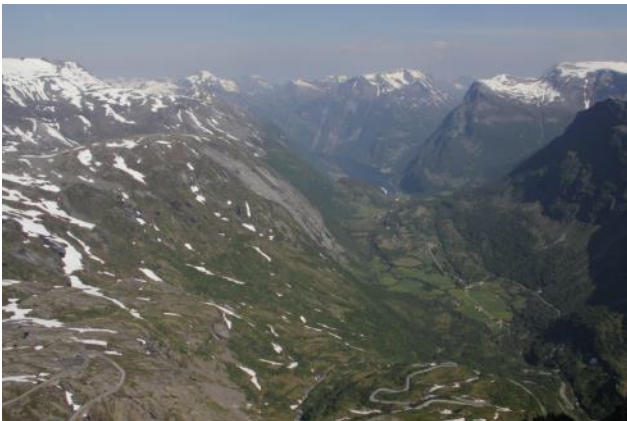
Submitted by: John Kernan, Biologist / Photographer in Residence

Photos: a) Gazing across the lake to the realm of glaciers, b) Troll car crossing the bridge over the valley's signature waterfall, c) YriNeset

## Geiranger, Runde Island

Sunday, 3rd June 2018

The weather system was holding and yet another glorious day dawned for us as *G Expedition* made her way along the scenically spectacular fjord to the small town of Geiranger. The first group to disembark by zodiac were those going on the long hike. The steep winding trail took them up to a waterfall at an elevation of about 350 meters above the town. It was a special experience to actually be behind the waterfall. Most of us then boarded our coaches for the ride up to Eagles Bend where we admired the view of the Seven Sisters Waterfall, the fjord and the village of Geiranger in the distance. It was another 45 minutes of expansive views before we reached the summit of Dalsnibba at 1500 meters. As we drove higher than 800 meters, the trees and flowers gave way to alpine scenery with short grass, mossy banks and patches of snow.



Due to the heat of the last few weeks much of the snow was melting fast and there were many gushing waterfalls tumbling down the mountain sides. The Djupvatnet Lake was almost ice free and the reflections of mountains and snow were magnificent. It was surprisingly warm at the top of Dalsnibba with clear views all the way down the mountain to the fjord where our ship, at anchor, was a tiny dot in the distance.

The next destination was the well appointed Fjord Centre a little way out of town. There was time to look around the museum and some of us walked down the hill back to the pier where zodiacs were ready to return us to the ship. A small group of us spent the morning having a zodiac cruise along the fjord getting really close to the Seven Sisters Waterfall and this was followed by free time in town. Shortly after lunch, the Captain slowed down and we had time to get fairly close up to the waterfalls cascading down from a height the mountains.

The education program continued with John giving a talk on whales, Yvonne held an art workshop, Lyn gave a short talk about the birds we may see on the small islands of Norway and John finished off with a condensed talk about photography. After dinner of an Italian Buffet, Expedition Leader Jonathan announced that we had arrived close to the small island of Runde, a bird breeding area. Northern Gannets were circling by the hundreds while flocks of Puffins and Common Guillemots were flying by like little clockwork toys. Northern Fulmars, Great Skuas, Shags and various gulls were also spotted. All were nesting on the steep, inaccessible, white-stained, cliffs. The day ended with Pablo playing his alluring guitar music in the Polar Bear Bar.



Submitted by: Lyn Mair, Ornithologist

Photos by Lyn: a) The view from Dalsnibba and b) Northern Gannet

**Trondheim, Norway**

**Monday, 4<sup>th</sup> May, 2018**

Expedition Leader Jonathan Green woke us gently from our slumber with news that the weather had change and outside air temperature had taken a dip to 6°C, a more normal condition for coastal Norway. We were headed for a day of exploring Trondheim, the third largest city in Norway. Trondheim is Norway's oldest city (it was settled over 1000 years ago).



However, it is also its youngest city with a large percentage of its population associated with the university in town. It is graced by a lively oceanic waterfront, a meandering river winding through its heart, gentle and verdant hills, and historic architecture. The land beyond the city's boundaries stretches for miles through forests and pastoral meadows to distant snow-capped peaks.

Today all three buses went to the Sverreborg Folk Museum. One group of guests went to the museum first and then to the Nidaros Cathedral for a tour. Two buses left for a hike through the forest and past several lovely lakes above the city, and then went to the museum. We heard tales of Norway's first capital city, named by Olav Tryggvason, the Viking lord of Þrónðheimr. Trondheim was the likely starting point for Leif Ericson on his voyage to discover the Americas. Our buses wound between wooden houses and warehouses, homes to kings and merchants. Built in both Romanesque and Gothic style, the cathedral loomed large above all other buildings with its spire grasping for the sky. Embellished with figures of saints and sinners, it burned several times in the midst of a flammable parish.

When we got to Sverreborg, we saw clear differences in the lives of wealthy foreign merchants, and both wealthy and poor rural Norwegian. A highlight of the museum was a special section on the Sami people who shared these coasts with the Norwegians. Our guide showed us silver belts, made for the Sami by Norwegian silversmiths and paid for with Sami trade items. There was always a lot of contact between the Sami and Norwegian groups even though their cultures were mostly separate. We then headed to the City Section of beautiful wood homes built by Danish merchants and aristocrats to show off their wealth in the late 1700s. These homes were moved when the museum was opened over 100 years ago to save them, as Trondheim has suffered many fires. We also went up to a mountain farm, with an elaborate party house decorated by beautiful rose paintings, and sampled the porridge that the poor people of the 1700s ate daily, sometimes as their only meal.

After the tours, we had an opportunity to have lunch in town on our own and explore the city. The old city bridge lead to the colorful Hansa waterfront stilt buildings along the river. When we got back to the ship, Historian Carol wore her beautiful Norwegian bunad or national costume at recap. In the evening, Guy told about his experiences as warden of the Aldabra World Heritage Park in the Seychelles.



Submitted by: Susan Adie, Expedition Operations Manager

Photos by Susan: a) the old city bridge in Trondheim, and b) Hansa waterfront buildings.

## Torghatten & Vega Island

Tuesday, 5<sup>th</sup> June 2018

The weather had finally changed. Clouds, stiff breezes and cool air were par for the course. It was beginning to feel like we were actually in Norway. As our vessel left the protected waters of Trondheim the previous evening, the ship was quickly exposed to winds and short-period swells rolling in from the northwest. As the *G Expedition* weighed anchor to head north, a light drizzle had started to fall, speckling the windows with a thin, wet fog. By morning, conditions had not changed; winds were still brisk and the light rain was steady. The low pressure cell seemed to be shadowing our course. Dawn was gray over the island of Torget, a camping haven whose centerpiece is the famous 'holed mountain', Torghatten.

Our goal was a hike to, and perhaps through, the great hole in the mountain carved by water, ice, and time to form a geological marvel. Hikes were parceled to accommodate all skill levels. A short walk down a narrow road brought us to the trail - a track of dirt and sand, loose rocks, and well-graded boulder steps. The reward was a spectacle to behold. Pictures and words cannot capture the scale of the 'hole' or tunnel, eroded through the tough, metamorphic parent mountain. Most returned the way they came, while the more intrepid opted to pass through the mighty warren and down the less-traveled back side. The path was steep and slippery at the beginning, however, with caution, all negotiated the treacherous area to emerge into the gently-graded band of temperate forest. Descending below the low canopy, the hikers stepped onto farmland and beach flats for the final stretch back to the landing site. While the hikers were exploring Torghatten, other guests took Zodiac rides around Brønnøysund, and a third group explored the town with a short bus trip and peak at the stone church in town.



During lunch, the *G Expedition* cruised slowly southwards a bit offshore to the group of Vega Islands, an archipelago comprising the main island of Vega and its constellation of some 6,500 smaller islands and islets. G Adventures added the stop to our itinerary last year, and the visit did not disappoint. The islands are famous (and recently designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site) for their millennia-old practice of eider down harvesting. The afternoon sky was gray and drizzly, and the winds were up a bit.

After lunch, we took Zodiacs ashore to the town of Nes where there were a number of activities for our attention. Two small museums showcased island life. The local population of Common Eider Ducks is concentrated on the more inaccessible outer islands, which are more protected from predators and off limits to visitors. Most of us saw a presentation on the birds and the practice of down harvesting which provided welcome insight. An interactive presentation on collecting and cooking local seashore edibles (with the opportunity to taste) proved illuminating. Some guests took a shorter nature walk, while a lengthy nature hike through the forest to the island's interior was also a highlight. We celebrated the day with waffles and coffee at the local Nes Café.

Submitted by: John Kernan, Biologist / Photographer in Residence  
Photos by John: a) The 'great hole' of Torghatten, b) Vega Island harbor

## Svartisen, Vikingen & Lovund

Wednesday, 6<sup>th</sup> June 2018



During the morning the *G Expedition* was in transit towards Svartisen, where the glacier Engabreen ends at the lowest point of any glacier on the European mainland. Svartisen is part of the Saltfjellet-Svartisen national park, located in the Saltfjell mountain range. We awoke to a placid scene at anchor in the fjord near Svartisen. Calm seas surrounded us with blue skies pocked by scattered clouds, soon parted to reveal a blazing sun. It was difficult to fathom that in such a setting and under such conditions we were very near to the Arctic Circle. The long hikers took off first and quickly moved toward their goal – the valley's great glacier, Engabreen. The rest of us walked leisurely along the pathway or took the region's only bus to the chalet by the lake. The hikers made it to the glacier face as the rest of us walked or enjoyed lefse and waffles at the chalet.

The clump birch forest ecosystem was alive with a mixture of spring flowers blooming like "hvitvise" which is an anemone, Mountain Avens, and Pink Moss Campion. And the sun was glistening like diamonds across the flat waters of the fresh water lake below the glacier. It was difficult to leave the idealic scene at the chalet to return to the ship – but return we did – finally! Along the way we enjoyed the cows and calves happy to be out of their barns at last.

Once all were back on the ship, we made our way south through the fjord past another stunning landscape of mountains, islands, and waterfront homes and farms. In short time the *G Expedition* officially crossed the Arctic Circle with a champagne toast astride Vikingen Island where a monument stands to mark this famous line of latitude. The Captain blasted the horn to signify the event as we threw down our libations!

During the afternoon the skies grew cloudier, and the winds and swells increased. In the late afternoon, Captain brought the ship to anchor outside the protected harbor at Lovund Island. At 1.5 miles wide and 2 miles long it is a stately plug of metamorphic rock girdled by a hamlet of some 500 residents garnering a robust living from farming Atlantic Salmon.

Within an Arctic chill, lively winds, and a gathering rain we fanned out to explore the island with local guides. The Black-legged Kittiwake colony near the harbor proved to be a highlight. The small cliff face that provides nesting habitat was easily accessible, and gave us dynamic viewing. The island's museum, showcasing a history of life by and on the sea, was well appointed and informative. A short walk towards the northern rim of the island brought us to an Atlantic Puffin colony. Though in overall decline throughout their range, their numbers here were impressive. However, they were easier to spot through the spotting scope.



Submitted by: John Kernan, Biologist / Photographer in Residence

Photos: a) Engabreen by Carol Francis, b) Kittiwakes at Lovund by John Kernan

## Lofoten Islands

Thursday, 7<sup>th</sup> June 2018

The day began with the sun coming out! We moved via the mudroom into the Zodiacs towards another day of exploration. Beginning at the small village of Å (last letter of Norwegian alphabet), we got an introduction to Tørrfisk, the cod dried by the cold and the wind which has been the primary source of income for the Lofoten Islands for centuries.



We were lucky to travel by bus from south to north of the islands, instead of a short tour like many tourists get. After a beautiful photo stop in Reine, we arrived to Nusfjord, a preserved slice of Lofoten fishing history. The pier-side cabins maintain the atmosphere of the working class life, albeit with a fresh lick of red and yellow paint. The fisherman may have moved out but the kittiwakes have since taken up residence. These seabirds make fine use of the ledges and windowsills of this small fishing community.

After a delicious buffet lunch, we continued on to Borg where we visited the Lofotr Viking Museum. Our guide Christian told of the myths and sometimes mischaracterized history of the Vikings, and explained their gods and world view. The museum is based on the longest Viking longhouse ever excavated, with a reconstruction of the 83 meter chieftain's house abandoned about 950 AD. The exhibits included weaving, wood carving, and we found weapons, helmets and armour ready for us to try on. Some of us had time for a film on Viking life, while others enjoyed shopping at the unique gift shop at the museum.

Our next stop was the small community of Henningsvær. The art gallery offered works of art which reflected the Lofoten landscape done by talented painters. Those who strolled through town enjoyed fine views of the harbour and cod drying on the racks. There was breath-taking scenery in ample measure for the entirety of our drive. Gun-metal colored peaks driven up from the sea protected humble villages and homesteads from the open ocean.

After dinner, the captain took us into the narrow Trollfjord for a peek into this spectacular and narrow fjord. With not much clearance on either side, our *G Expedition* was able to make it inside, pivot on its axis and cruise back out of the fjord. The Captain and the elements put on a good show for us!

To end the day, musician Pablo Cantua got things rocking in the Polar Bear bar! Salud!



Submitted by: Neil Rabjohn

Photos by Neil Rabjohn: a) Nusfjord Harbor. b) The Sweet Smell of Stockfish



## Expedition Day at Sea

Friday, 8<sup>th</sup> June 2018

On this morning, many of us rose peacefully from our beds without the help of one of Jonathan's famous wake-up calls. Those who did sleep in might have been woken later by one of the many broadcasts announcing sightings of the many sperm whales seen at all points around the ship.



Our Captain Juraj skillfully navigated the still high swells by keeping the ship at a decent speed so as to balance keeping us in sight of the whales and to limit rocking. Most guests were up on deck equipped with the longest lenses our carry-on luggage would allow. We were the billowing blows or the unique tail flukes as the whales descended. It was a magical way to kick off World Ocean's Day. Our location was the Bleik Canyon, a submarine canyon which serves a bountiful feeding ground for these giants of the sea.

Our day at sea continued with insightful presentations by our expedition leader, Jonathan Green, our visiting scientist, Carl Ballantine and our ornithologist, Lyn Mair. Jonathan introduced us to the mysteries of the whale shark populations in Ecuador and the work he and his team do there to solve the mystery of where these creatures give birth safely and find a protected area for their young to grow up. Many questions remain for this research. Carl gave us an introduction into the king crab and later in the recap took us through both the riches to be earned by and the enormous efforts involved in raising salmon here in Norway. Lyn allowed us to meet some of her favourite birds typically found off the Norwegian coast.

After lunch, our incredible crew was able to swiftly lower our fleet of Zodiacs. We headed out to the island of Heløya to see wildlife up close and personal. As we cruised the bird cliffs, we spotted Common or Harbour Porpoises, several large Kittiwake colonies, huge numbers of Cormorants, and a sea eagle hunting in the area.



In the evening, many guests attended the last section of "Blue Planet II: Our Blue Planet," featuring a segment on the Whale Shark with our own Jonathan Green going down in a submersible. All in all, it's been a great way to celebrate World Ocean's Day.

Submitted by: Neil Rabjohn

Photos by Neil Rabjohn: a) Cameras at the Ready b) Sperm Whale in Bleik Canyon

Tromsø, Norway

Saturday, 9<sup>th</sup> June 2018



The day dawned cool and gray. Scattered clouds brought occasional sprinkles of rain. Fog clung heavily to the mountaintops that girdle this scenic city above the Arctic Circle. With a population of 74,000, Tromsø is the largest city in northern Norway, and is also an active starting point for Arctic expeditions. It is a university city, and yet has deep Norse and Sami traditions. The city is warmer than most other places located on the same latitude, due to the warming effect of the Gulf Stream. Tromsø is even

milder than places much farther south of it elsewhere in the world, such as on the Hudson Bay and in Far East Russia, with the warm-water current allowing for both relatively mild winters and tree growth in spite of its very high latitude.

The city center of Tromsø contains the highest number of old wooden houses in Northern Norway, the oldest house dating from 1789. The city boasts numerous attractions, and is a cultural center for its region, with several festivals taking place in the summer. The more intrepid guests boarded the first bus and were spirited off to the cable car just above the Arctic Cathedral. A hike to the top of a hill beyond the cable car's high point afforded stunning views of the city and its surroundings. The rest of us explored the city center, Polar Museum, Polaria and Botanical Garden. The latter features plants from most continents around the globe. Of special interest were the plants which grow at much different latitudes but much higher elevations, such as the plants from the Himalayas.

Polaria is the world's most northerly aquarium. Rather than a scientific aquarium such as the one in Bergen in the Norwegian midlands, Polaria, which opened in May 1998, is designed to be an educational experience particularly for children. Most displays focus on the islands of Svalbard. There is a five-screen panoramic cinema, an "Arctic Walkway" area containing displays of polar exploration equipment, stuffed animals and simulated permafrost, many conventional aquaria displaying local marine life as well as open tanks and display tanks containing rock-shore animals, baby fish and other child-friendly exhibits. Its centerpiece is an open pool containing two Bearded Seals and two Harbor Seals. These are trained and feeding time is popular, as much to keep the animals active and healthy as for public entertainment. The seal enclosure has a submerged walkway in a transparent tunnel across the bottom, allowing close access to the animals in their natural environment. The striking design of the building represents ice floes that have been pressed up on land by the rough seas of the Arctic. This attractive piece of modern architecture echoes the Arctic Cathedral across the harbor.

Our day concluded with an Embrace the Bizarre Extravaganza, which was definitely bizarre, and a rousing performance by the ship's crew band, The Monkey Eating Eagles, in the Polar Bear Bar. We had a record conga line out on the back deck of the ship, and many spirited guests on the dance floor, for a great party!



Submitted by: John Kernan, Biologist / Photographer in Residence

Photos: a) Arctic Cathedral and the harbor, by John. B) Party in the Polar Bear Bar, by Neil

## Barents Sea and Bjørnøya

Sunday, 10th June 2018

It was a delight to wake up at our own pace and eat a leisurely breakfast before joining Expedition Leader Jonathan for the AECO briefing on guidelines to keep ourselves and the environment safe. Jonathan took this opportunity to show us maps of ice distribution over the last month. Shockingly little ice had formed over the winter; comparison between ice extent in 2017 and this year demonstrated how different this year's conditions are. Polar Bears depend largely on sea ice to feed so this means that their habitat and livelihood are at risk.



We then proceeded to the mudroom where we cleaned our outer gear including a vacuum session of velcro on our jackets, trousers and backpacks. Biosecurity ensures that we minimise the risk of introducing more foreign organisms to Svalbard. This was followed by Dr. Tom Smith's lecture on his scientific work in the Arctic. We learned about his seal lair detection work with Labradors, as well as Polar Bear sources of food such as ring seals, bearded seals, harp seals, belugas and narwhals. Just after lunch, Yvonne hosted another wonderful art class in the polar bear bar. It was a lovely

way to reflect on what we have seen-landscapes and species-over the last week.

We then sailed along Bjørnøya though the conditions were not good enough for us to be able to launch the Zodiacs. Bjørnøya was named by the Dutch explorer Barentsz in 1596 as he mapped the island on his attempt to cross to Asia via the Arctic. It is the southernmost island of the Svalbard archipelago and an important breeding ground for Northern Fulmars, Glaucous Gulls, Common and Brunnich's Guillemot, and small numbers of Puffins and Gannets. Those who spent time on the open deck at the back of the Polar Bear Bar were delighted with the Northern Fulmars and Kittiwakes gliding within a meter of the ship. We could see the full tube nose system of the Fulmars without binoculars!



As we sailed further north, we joined Mike for an explanation of the formation of glaciers and their role in shaping the landscape we will be seeing in the coming days. Carol gave a history lecture on early explorers of Spitsbergen as it was known until the Norwegians gained sovereignty in 1920-25. The day ended with a good laugh as we took part in the Arctic Quiz, expertly prepared by John.

Submitted by: Sarah Auffret, Expedition Staff

Photos by Sarah: a) Biosecurity Vacuum, and b) Northern Fulmar gliding by the ship

## Gnålodden and Brepollen

Monday, 11<sup>th</sup> June 2018

The visibility was good as we approached Hornsund, the most southerly fjord of Spitsbergen. Snowy mountains, huge glaciers, and hundreds of rocky islets dominated the 10 km wide entrance to the 30 km long fjord. After breakfast our trusty Zodiacs took us ashore at Gnålodden on the northern side of this spectacular fjord. The bare rocky mountain cliff was heaving with birdlife and the slopes leading upwards were covered in green mossy beds and brilliant Purple Saxifrage, a small ground creeping plant. On closer inspection we could also see some not quite open tiny yellow flowers, the Tufted Saxifrage. We had to be careful where we walked, to avoid stepping on these slow growing little plants.



A continual humming noise came from the cliffs as thousands of Black-legged Kittiwakes and Brünnich's Guillemot had their nests up there, as did several other species of seabirds. The old trapper's cabin was a picturesque sight and Carol opened up the door so we were able to see the inside of this tiny wooden building. It must have a terrible squash inside for several men and one woman, Wanny Woldstad, the first female trapper. Some of us spent time in the zodiacs, cruising along the shoreline with many swimming Common Eider Ducks in sight and a few Little Auks. Regardless of your position, the sky was constantly filled with birds flying by; the Kittiwakes were getting mud from the pond to bind their seaweed nests together and Brünnich's Guillemots were in small flocks with their furiously fast wingbeats. Barnacle Geese were by the pond. A chilly easterly wind cooled us down a little.

In the afternoon, a short repositioning took us to the end of the fjord into an area known as Brepollen. Here, we went exploring in our Zodiacs. The scenery was breathtaking as we were surrounded on three sides by a massive unbroken glacier system. We circled around icebergs, many of which had remnants of ground up rocks and sand as they slowly moved down to the sea over the centuries. Weird wonderful ice sculptures were photogenic with a backdrop of snowy mountains. Arctic Terns and an Ivory Gull were the highlight for some. A large group of Kittiwakes was feeding where a glacier had recently calved. The day closed with another wonderful performance by 'magic fingers' Pablo and his guitar, in the Polar Bear Bar.



Submitted by: Lyn Mair, Ornithologist

Photos by Lyn: a) Purple Saxifrage and the bird cliff and b) Ice sculpture in Brepollen.

**Akseløya/Bamsebu - Svalbard**

**Tuesday, 12<sup>th</sup> June 2018**

We awoke to find our floating home entering the fjord of Bellsund. Formed by the collision of continents in the Caledonian Orogeny, the Permian rocks creating the island of Akseløya have been bent and twisted to lie vertical. The dip of the rocks in this basin decreases rapidly to the east until they lie in near original horizontal position. A hard band of interbedded mudstones and limestones form a barrier to the flow of the sea into this inlet and create a tidal race on either end of the island.

On the eastward side of the island, we received an exciting call from the inimitable ice captain Sergey Nesterov. He had spotted a large pod of the little white whale, the beluga. They were feeding in the fast flowing tidal waters, moving in their pods to take a series of breaths at the surface. Then they would dive for about five minutes to feed before re-



surfacing. Later in the day at recap, Dr. Tom Smith gave an overview of his ground-breaking work researching the biology and relationships of the beluga whales in the north of Canada. It was an incredible heart-lifting experience to be surrounded by these fantastic mammals.

The afternoon brought forth a new set of marine mammals, although perhaps ours were less



well adapted to this polar environment. They were a group of intrepid polar plungers! We had been able to land at a trappers hut at Bamsebu. Here we saw the stark reminders of the beluga whaling industry in Svalbard during the 1930's with bones of belugas and boats littering the foreshore. After a brief relocation from this gloomy landing site to a more sheltered, almost tropical beach, a group of fourteen guests and one staff (Carol) decided to brave the icy waters. Following the bathing guests, a couple of Expedition Team members suffered an rite of passage and took to the waters. Bravo to Neil and Pablo!

In the evening we celebrated the Independence Day of the Phillipines with a Phillipino buffet dinner. Then a large crowd joined Sarah in the Discovery Lounge to hear about her time as Base Leader for the Penguin Post Office at Port Lockroy in Antarctica.

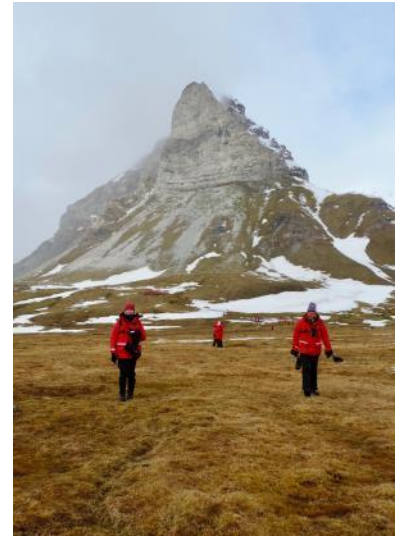
Submitted by: Mike Scotting, Geologist

Photos: a) Beluga Soup, by Mike Scotting b) Polar Plunge, by Yvonne Ankerman

## Alkhornet & Ekmanfjorden, Svalbard

Wednesday, 13<sup>th</sup> June 2018

As we ate breakfast this morning, we passed by the beautiful horn shaped mountain of Alkhornet. Our anchorage was in very still water in Trygghamna (Norwegian for “Safe Harbor”) off the main section of Isfjorden, and afforded us a very smooth ride to shore. Outside temperatures were cool, and there was still some snow on the ground, unlike our first landings in Svalbard where spring had already arrived. The low clouds held off long enough for the landing and afforded great views over the fjord and snowy mountains. One cooperative reindeer was not far from the top point of the landing, and another three bounded away from near Jonathan in his lonely perch to the east side of the landing out of sight. Several Snow Buntings were quite charming as they were singing and searching for food. Kittiwakes flew overhead with beaks full of mud and seaweed to build up their nests, Barnacle Geese were in big numbers and some of us witnessed a huge Glaucous Gull trying to eat an injured Kittiwake.



Right after lunch we attended a disembarkation briefing with Jenny, who gave detailed instructions for leaving the ship. In the afternoon, we repositioned to Ekmanfjorden, named for a Swedish patron of polar expedition and now part of the Northern Isfjord National Park.



We used our fleet of Zodiacs so the entire group could go out at one time. To increase our chances of finding wildlife, we were scouting in two different areas initially. On the very far side of an island in the fjord, the first group of Zodiacs spotted a large Polar Bear, quite dirty in color and ambling along the shore. The second group of six Zodiacs scouted first by the ice on the other side of the fjord. Some of these Zodiacs caught up to the first group before the bear ambled behind a small ridge

and disappeared. This was a bitter disappointment for those still moving up into position to see him. Many Common Eider ducks were seen, a Long-tailed Skua rapidly flew by and some of us watched a Bearded Seal pop its head out of the water for a short while.

The evening finished on a high note with Captain Juraj Zekan’s Farewell Cocktail. The Crew sang us their goodbye song to the tune of “Leaving on a Jet Plane,” the raffle was drawn for Yvonne’s stunning chart, the Auction for the trip flag was held and we finished with the slide show of our voyage. We have seen coastal Norway starting with a heat wave, and we have ended in the cool Arctic with a polar bear and light snow flurries for 2381 miles. What a trip!

Submitted by: Carol Francis, Historian

Photos: a) Alkhornet tundra by Carol, b) Polar Bear by Jonathan Green