

Summer 2022, an Arctic tour with Norna Biron.

This travel story is a sequence of the on-board written and published episodes on my blog <https://framsblog.wordpress.com> and the redirection to Zeilersforum.nl.



Henny van Oortmarssen
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False start.

May 24, 2022

On Monday morning, I'm already at the egg farmer's place by 8:00 AM to load up on freshly laid eggs. At my request, he has selected them separately for me this morning; at most, they are only a few hours old. Then, I purchase the final fresh groceries at Albert Heijn. We won't get scurvy anytime soon. With a few kisses, I bid farewell to my admiral. The plan is to be back by mid-September.



The IJsselmeer is mostly flat, and if the wind picks up later, it's right against us. High tide in Kornwerd is at 4:00 PM, and we don't want to miss it. So, we chug along on the motor, give each other a high five, we're on our way. The new Suunto GPS compass, combined with the autopilot, still needs some fine-tuning. It seems to be struggling with too many NMEA messages. While Joost tinkers with that, I'll find a fixed spot on board for my personal belongings.



The well-wishers can't seem to get enough and come to the lock in Kornwerderzand. Can I have another kiss, but more importantly, she also brought the forgotten survival suits. What a treasure. Henny Jr. has also come along. Safety first, of course.

As soon as Norna Biron tastes the salty water, the engine starts running a bit irregularly. We try to ignore it. When we later turn onto the Blauwe Slenk past the Pollendam, there's quite a bit of wind by now, right against us, of course, along with a lot, a whole lot, of rain. She's not enjoying it anymore, and both the RPM and speed are noticeably dropping now. Giving it extra throttle doesn't make a difference. A new diesel filter doesn't improve things either. We quickly decide to turn back to Harlingen. After all, that's where we have the means to change the loyal Deutz diesel's mind.



The kind bridge operator holds the bridge to the Noorderhaven open for us for no reason. Unaware of this, we are in the engine room addressing the Deutz. Since we're somewhat in the way, she comes over to us. "Yes, sorry, we do want to come in," and with a friendly gesture, she opens the bridge once again. Deutz doesn't let us down yet, allowing us to choose a spot along the quay with the bow turned towards the direction of the pouring rain and wind.

We think/hope to remedy the issue by replacing the fine filter, thoroughly bleeding the system once again, and installing a new air filter. The latter is not so simple. It's not available in the various stores and workshops in Harlingen but can be ordered. The delivery time is the end of the week, but the part is in stock in Hasselt.

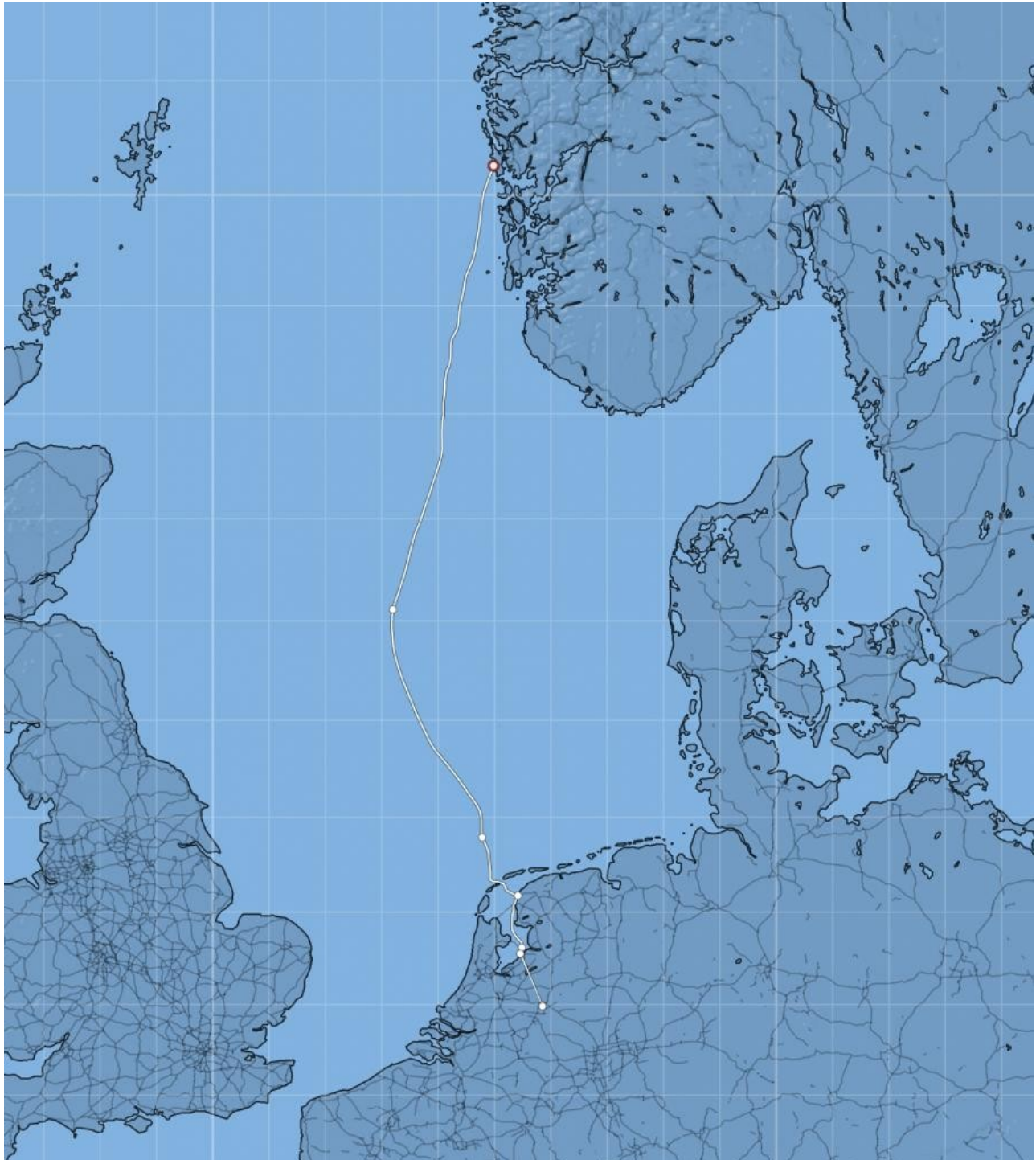
Now, on Tuesday afternoon, Joost is on his way with a rental car to pick up the filter, and I'm taking care of some household chores. One of them is coating the eggs with a layer of Vaseline, as it seems to improve their shelf life.



Taelavåg Norway

May 27, 2022

On Tuesday evening at 8:00 PM, we depart from Harlingen. The new filters are installed, and the diesel has been bled. Tied to the pier with the propeller in action, we run the engine for a test. It goes well. Even unloaded, the engine speed is higher than before. We believe that the cause may have been the clogged air filter. The Deutz simply felt a bit suffocated.



In contrast to last night, it's dry and sunny now—a beautiful evening. When leaving Stortemelk, the seaworthiness of the crew is quite tested in the

choppy waters. What a washing machine again. It's a bit too much for me, and an improperly secured bucket with some brought drinks spills over, letting the bottles roll freely across the cabin floor. The port wine bottle breaks, and its contents join the eggs under the floor. They can handle it, but the egg cartons turn to pulp. It must have been a mess to clean up. I missed it. Joost took the first watch while I immediately fell asleep in my bunk, suppressing any rising nausea.

It smells like a bar.

The crossing of the 2nd DW route is my responsibility. We cross exactly perpendicular after the split. Where it was busy with many ships before, there is none in sight during our crossing. Convenient. We maintain a watch system of 3 hours on and 3 hours off. We dash north with an initial day's distance of about 180 miles. Not bad; the weather gods are favorable to us on a close-hauled course with 20-25 knots of wind. Sometimes a bit more, but Norna Biron is enjoying it.

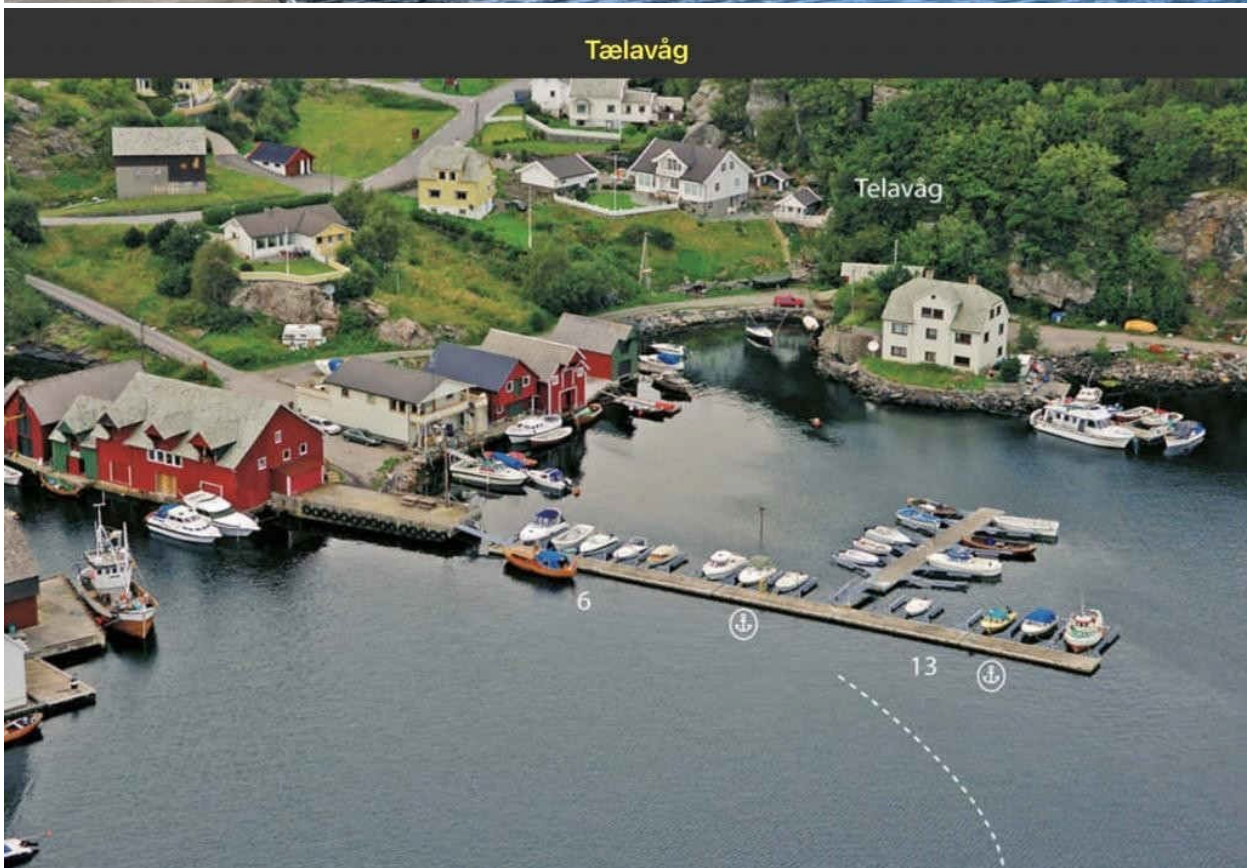
In the past, whenever something broke, it always happened during my watch. Now it's Joost's turn, although he wakes me up from a deep sleep to take the helm. The autopilot is no longer working. Judging by the grinding sound, it's something mechanical. Joost, familiar with the anatomy of the autopilot, quickly disassembles it, and the parts are laid out on the cabin table. It turns out the 4 gears of the planetary gear system are worn out. Not surprising, given the heavy work the autopilot had to do on the journey from Greece. With 4 new gears from Norna's seemingly inexhaustible parts inventory, the autopilot takes over after about 2 hours of tinkering.

On the second day at sea, the wind shrinks and weakens. Occasionally, the mainsail makes a hefty slap; there's no preventer yet. It's too much for the mainsheet block, which breaks. Joost catches one of the now wildly swinging boom's reef lines and manages to somewhat control it, finally letting it rest on the new "mik." I made that "mik" in my garage last winter, intending to securely fix the boom when the mainsail is lowered but also to prevent the boom from swinging off and hitting the satellite antennas on the starboard ventilation shaft. A new mainsheet block is quickly fashioned, and now, together with the preventer, it keeps the boom in check. When I wake up, it's already done. We agree that Joost will wake me up for such a dangerous task to assist.

After a period of strong winds and two reefs in the mainsail, the speed drops below 2 knots, and I start the engine to make better progress. When the wind seems to pick up again after about two hours, I turn off the engine and unfurl the jib. Just as I adjust the sheet tension and plan to put the propeller in neutral, the sheet block breaks with a bang. The large Wichard shackle is bent, and the pin is missing. It hangs on the lower lifeline and bends the stanchion behind it. I gradually release the tension while simultaneously furling the jib. The backstay attachment was also on, and it now swings wildly back and forth. I also secure it temporarily with a knot to the lifeline. Now to unfurl the staysail to keep Norna under control. While I look for a suitable shackle, Joost comes up. My watch is over again, and Joost will make sure the sheet block is fixed.

Hmm, that narrow warm bunk feels good again.

The new weather forecast shows that the expected strong headwind will arrive sooner. This prompts us to head for Tælavåg near Bergen. Not entirely coincidental, Joost has been there before.



Arctic Circle

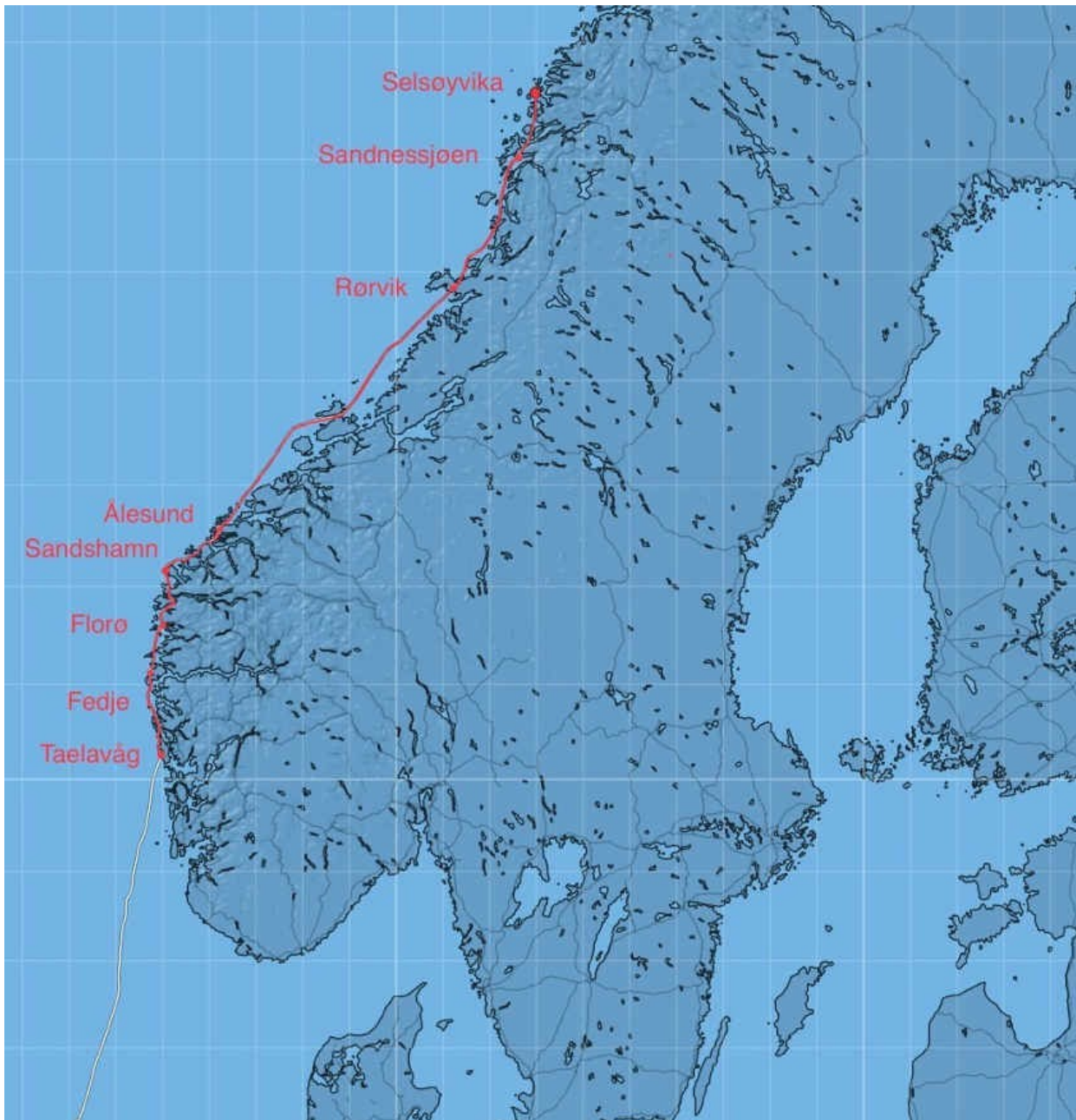
June 5, 2022

Today, Sunday, June 5, around 4:00 PM, we reached our first milestone of the journey, the Arctic Circle. Although I kept a keen lookout, there's nothing resembling a circle to be seen, but there is a monument in the form of a globe on a rocky islet to port. It's not precisely on the Arctic Circle, as that is still half a mile further at 66.33 degrees.



We dock in the tiny harbor of Selsøyvika at 66.34 North. As far as I'm concerned, it's also located on the Arctic Circle. Unfortunately, the skipper of Norna Biron insists on the tradition of baptizing the crew in the cold waters of the Arctic Circle for those crossing this meridian for the first time.

Unfortunately, it's not his first time. I argue that we are right on top of it and haven't crossed it yet, thus demanding a bit of a delay. Given that I've already had to endure a solemn speech from the skipper when passing the Arctic Circle monument, some leniency is granted.



The route after Taelavåg is alternately along the islands and on open sea. There are quite a few motor hours, but especially in the last few days, there has been a strong wind from behind, ranging from 20 to 40 knots.

A chat with the German neighbors on Fedje informs us that we must not miss the Pernille café. They have excellent Fish & Chips. A Google search tells us they close at 6:00 PM. So, we'll be skipping happy hour and rushing to the café. The ferry to the other side demands an unclear payment that we can't figure out, so we have to take a detour. It's a 20-minute brisk walk. The German couple wasn't exaggerating; the Fish & Chips are excellent and pair well with an IPA beer.

We can also settle the harbor fee here and pay for the ferry, which is activated

through the bill and an SMS from the bartender. Joost gets to operate the chain hoist.



Another highlight on Fedje is the shower. I also advise Joost to make use of it. Not a hint, but advice—note the difference. The experience is warm, clean, and enjoyable.



Between Florø and Sandshamn lies the most infamous cape in Norway, Stadlandet. Swell and strong winds can lead to dangerous conditions around the cape. To make maritime traffic safer, a gigantic tunnel project has been initiated —2200 meters long, 50 meters high, and 36 meters wide. Luckily for us, we sail around the cape on a calm, gently rippling sea.





Ålesund looks charming but is quite tourist-oriented. The two gigantic cruise ships at the dock have unleashed their passengers on the town. The estimated 10,000 people overcrowd the streets. Honestly, I get tired of it pretty quickly.

The downside of the tourist route, meandering through countless islands in day trips, is that progress is slow. We decide to sail overnight to reach Rørvik, 210 nautical miles away. Well, what is night anyway? It doesn't really get dark here anymore. However, you see warnings everywhere in the chart for "dangerous waves." Not surprising when you see how many rocks rise from the seabed but still provide enough depth to sail over. We are dealing with a slight headwind, but I can imagine that it would be challenging with stormy winds against the tide.

The past two days have been delightful but lazy sailing, trailing the partly furled jib with a strong wind on our stern. On the route from Rørvik to Sandnessjøen, the speed never dropped below 8.5 knots, frequently exceeding 10 knots. It is noticeably colder now, around 7 degrees Celsius during the day.

During our dinner conversation tonight, we discuss whether to stay for another day or continue sailing tomorrow. The skipper interprets the weather forecast in a way that favors staying for an extra day. I suspect him of subtly steering towards the ever-growing to-do list.

Ørnes

June 9, 2022

Staying an extra day in Selsøvik turned out to be a good idea. It's a rustic spot right on the Arctic Circle, and it invites exploration of the surroundings. It also provides an opportunity to tackle some deferred tasks.



Selsøvik

In the evening, I check my email again and come across yet another unpleasant message from Colligo, the creator of "Rigging reduced to its elegant essentials." I've been working with them for months to order the right hardware for my mast. A simple inquiry for advice on the components I need for my mast has led to numerous adjustments to the quotes. Long story short, after a long period of silence, my query about it leads to new changes.

The email I send in response keeps me awake. Trying to sleep with a frustrated mind doesn't work. Fortunately, Norna's heater is still gently burning, and I get out of my bunk to review everything again.

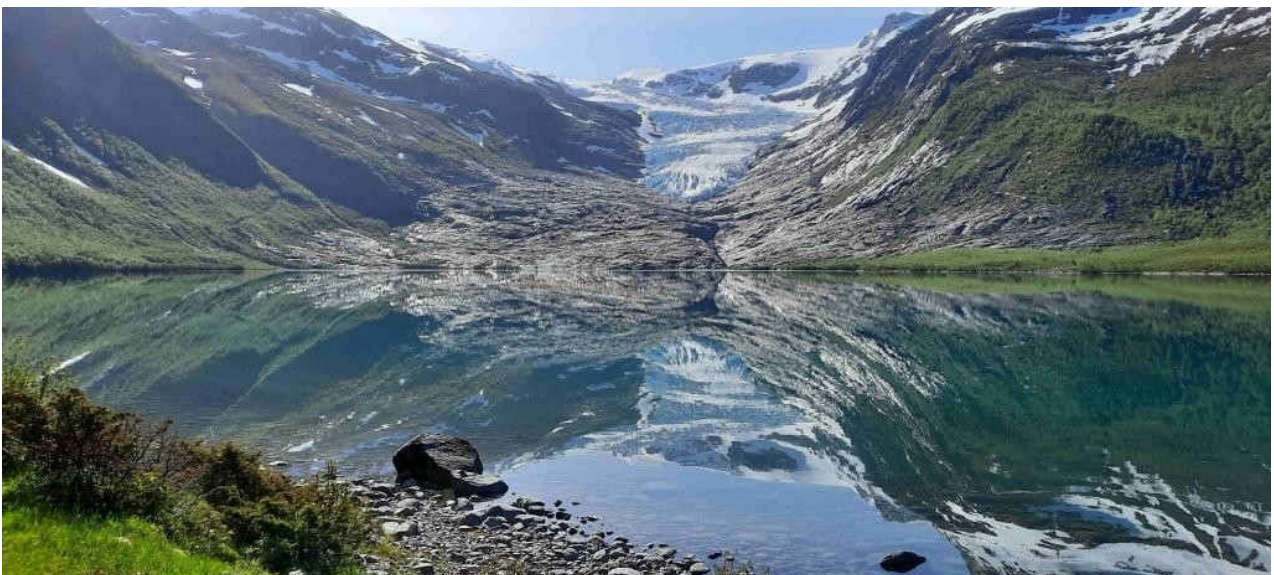
At 4:00 AM in the morning, I get up and email them my findings. It turns out, as it often does, to be a miscommunication.

They need to increase their quote by over \$1,000 to provide the right materials and quantities. As a sailing friend clarified for me over the phone, "excellent, knowledgeable, and extremely innovative group but not so strong commercially." I slept well and promptly paid the "payment link" I received the next day.

Hopefully, things will finally get on track now.



The day starts off gray with some rain, but gradually, the sun breaks through. The forecast for the coming days promises beautiful weather—blue skies and plenty of sunshine, ideal for exploring the Holandsfjorden. There's also a southerly wind, although its direction is heavily influenced by the mountains and narrow passages. We sail Norna silently between numerous rocks and larger islands against a backdrop of rugged, snow-covered mountains. Gliding into the Holandsfjord is a breathtaking experience—so beautiful. The emotions you feel in such a place cannot be captured, but the camera clicks incessantly. And what it was all about unfolds almost at the end of the fjord: the sight of the Svartisen glacier slowly emerging behind the mountain to starboard.



Here lies one of the 60 branches of the Svartisen glacier. It is the lowest-lying glacier on the European mainland and the second-largest glacier in Norway, covering an area of about 370 km². However, it's no longer the glacier depicted in many photos found on the internet. The glacier has retreated significantly.

Well, that's quite a reality check regarding the impacts of climate change.



Swartisen

The small dock where we moor is fully occupied with other boats. Therefore, we dock outside next to an American boat, a robust custom-built aluminum vessel. They are on their way from Miami, undertaking their own Arctic Ocean journey.

The dock gathering is international, including an Englishman, a Swiss, a Belgian, and an Australian. The only Norwegian boat is the shuttle between this dock and Holandsvika, a small mile back into the fjord. The boat transports hikers who embark on the journey to the glacier. The boat operator also collects the harbor fees, runs a kiosk offering snacks while docked, and rents out mountain bikes. The hikers pay NOK 210 for the short 10-minute crossing. It seems like a decent business model, but well, he has to make it in just a few months.

On Norna Biron, we feel exceptionally rich and privileged to experience this overwhelming nature with our own boat. A 5.5 km gravel path takes us along a freshwater lake to the foot of the glacier outlet—or where it used to be. Now, we still have about 2 km to go through the rugged, eroded rock landscape of basalt and granite, interspersed with white limestone, quartz, rusty iron-bearing rock, all displaying the most beautiful patterns and layers.

As we get closer to the ice, it also gets colder. In the sun and in motion, the T-shirt is comfortable. In the shadow or with the wind from the glacier, the fleece jacket goes back on.





I attempt to use the DJI drone I brought along, but unfortunately, the app claims to have a bug and refuses to start. I suspect that an update to my Samsung phone is responsible for this issue. Since the Chinese have been removed from the Play Store, the DJI app must be downloaded from a DJI site. Despite my Samsung phone's stern warnings about security risks, I manage to download a new version. However, setting everything up again feels like a bit too much, especially here at this icy edge. I limit the drone to a short flight. It's a bit disappointing.



I'm a bit apprehensive about the descent. Climbing up allows me to be more considerate of my injured leg (knee injury and a small tear in the hamstring) than during the descent. I'm being careful and notice that the years are starting to take their toll. By the end of the afternoon, we are back on the boat.

Fishing hasn't been very successful. The other "yachties" on the jetty are also trying their luck but aren't catching anything either. So, it's not just me, a non-

fisherman, but the fish that either aren't there or aren't biting.

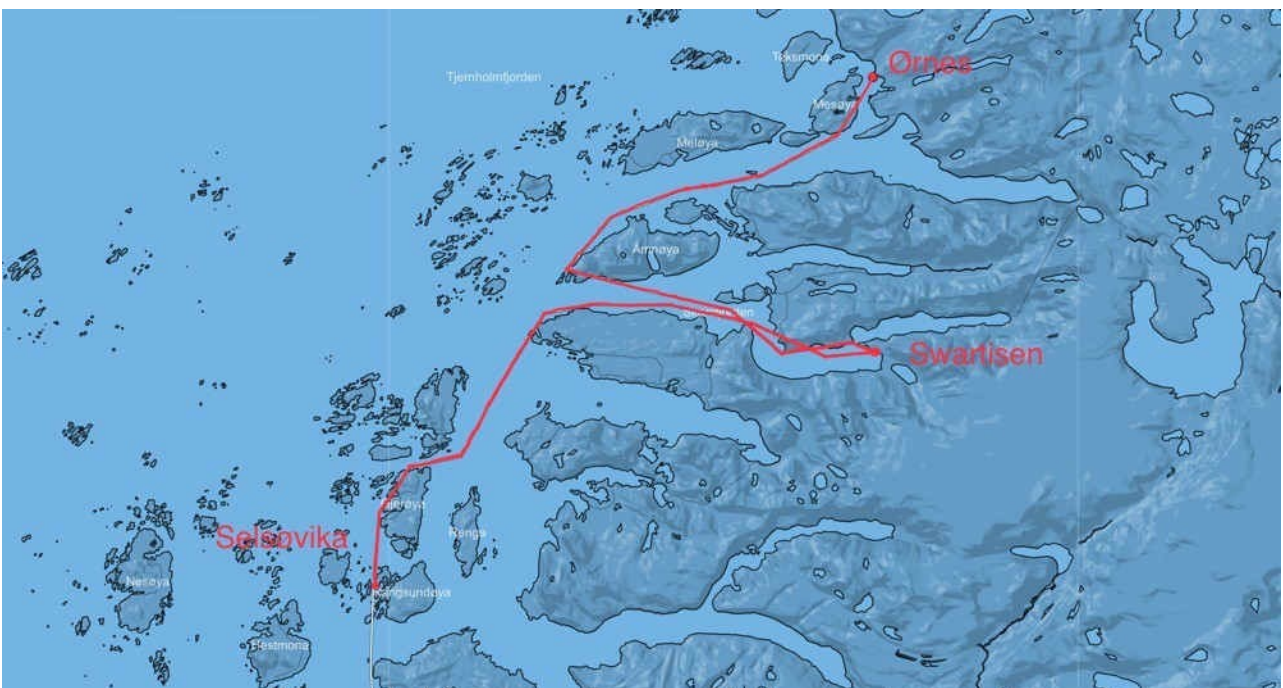
I find it striking how little animal life we see. No fish, no birds except for the occasional seagull. That's not what I had imagined.

We aim to be in Bødo by Monday, July 13th, to provision, buy an extra sleeping bag, and welcome our third crew member (Edmond) on Wednesday, June 15th. Therefore, we'll be making some short hops in the coming days.



Ørnes

Today, we are in Ørnes, and we have already explored the surroundings a bit. I realize that I might have pushed my injury a bit too much yesterday, and I resolve to take it a bit easier.

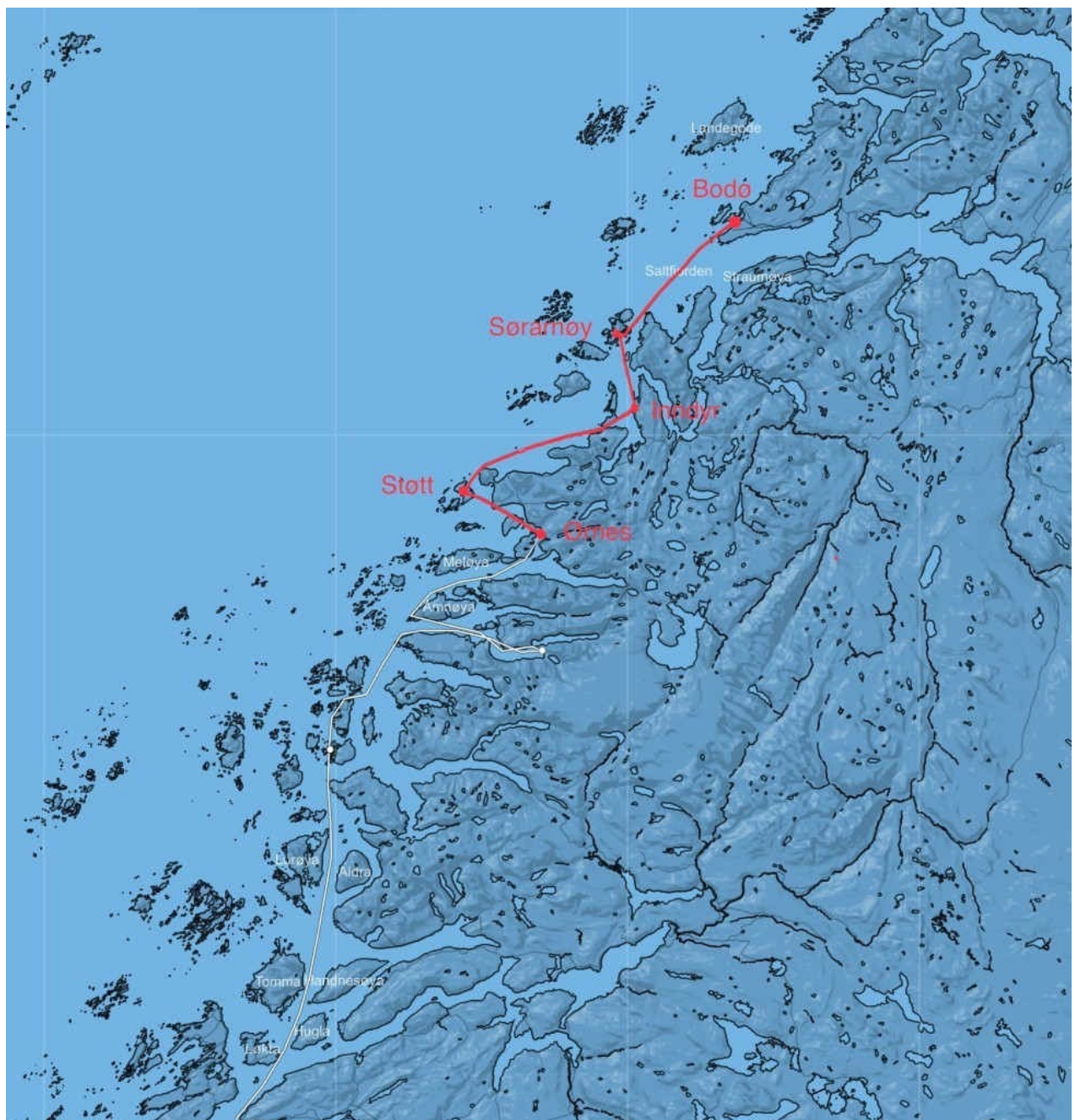


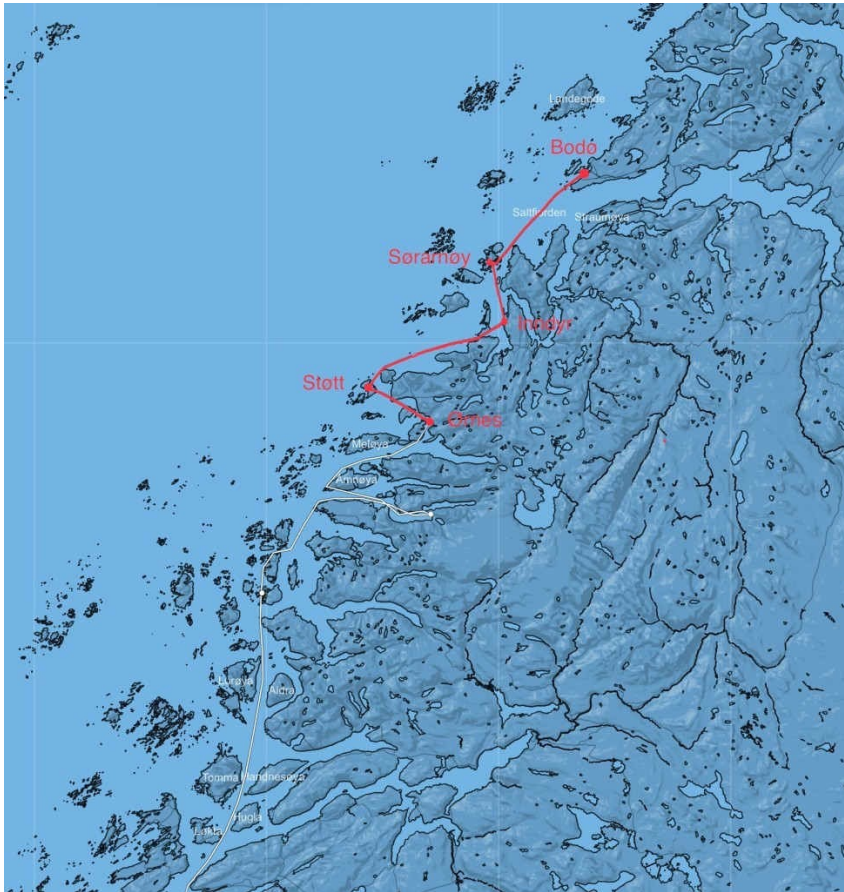
Bodø

June 13, 2022

Beautifully on schedule, we arrived in Bodø this afternoon. On schedule because we still have time tomorrow for new and fresh provisioning and to clean Norna shipshape again. Taking a shower and doing some laundry wouldn't hurt either. On Wednesday the 15th, our third crew member (Edmond) arrives at Bodø airport. Bodø is, in fact, our first destination. The three of us will then continue the rest of our Arctic tour, heading from here to the Lofoten and then to our second goal, Svalbard, or Spitsbergen.

The segments after Svartisen are characterized by short hops of around 10 nautical miles. Ørnes was the first, followed by Støtt, Inndyr, Sørarnøya, and now the longest segment of 14 miles to Bodø.





Ørnes, Inndyr, and Bodø are also intermediate stops for the Hurtigruten, which announces both its arrival and departure with a loud ship's horn. The Hurtigruten along the northern coast is often referred to as "the most beautiful sea voyage in the world" and belongs to the list of iconic routes such as the

Orient Express and Route 66. We are doing it under our own sail. How beautiful is that!



Støtt (30 inhabitants) is a small island on the outer side of the Helgeland coast and originally served as an old trading post. The current 4th and 5th generation owners actively operate the island, offering accommodation in authentically restored buildings, outdoor activities, a welcoming harbor with good Wi-Fi (the first on our journey so far), and an excellent restaurant called Gammalbikken. The menu is chef's choice but always with local ingredients and fish, in our case, freshly caught halibut. In my opinion, it deserves a Michelin star, if only for the quality and price. We agree with the enthusiastic owner that he will give us a tour of the museum on the attic of the restaurant the next day. All very worthwhile.





Sørarnøya

Inndyr in the Sørfjord with 650 inhabitants and Sørarnøya on the island of the same name with less than 200 inhabitants are small, quiet villages, Inndyr being a bit more bustling than Sørarnøya. They seem deserted, and the only people we encounter are usually men walking their dogs. It is certainly picturesque, but I quickly run out of things to explore.

The gnawed apple core is not appreciated by the seagulls and is disdainfully spit out. Before leaving Sørarnøya, I decide to try fishing again. Unfortunately, the lid of the fishing box isn't secured properly, and a significant portion of its contents, including my favorite paravanes, end up at the bottom of the harbor.

Oh well, I didn't have much luck with fishing anyway. Before my fishing enthusiast friend (Edmond) comes on board, I want to have at least caught something. As luck would have it, he casts his line and immediately gets a bite.



Sørfjord

Navigating between the islands and rocks, we find our way out towards Bodø. While inside, I consult the chart (Navionics) once again, and everything seems to be fine. Until the engine suddenly goes into reverse. There's an electricity cable over the water with a clearance height of 20m, too low for Norna.

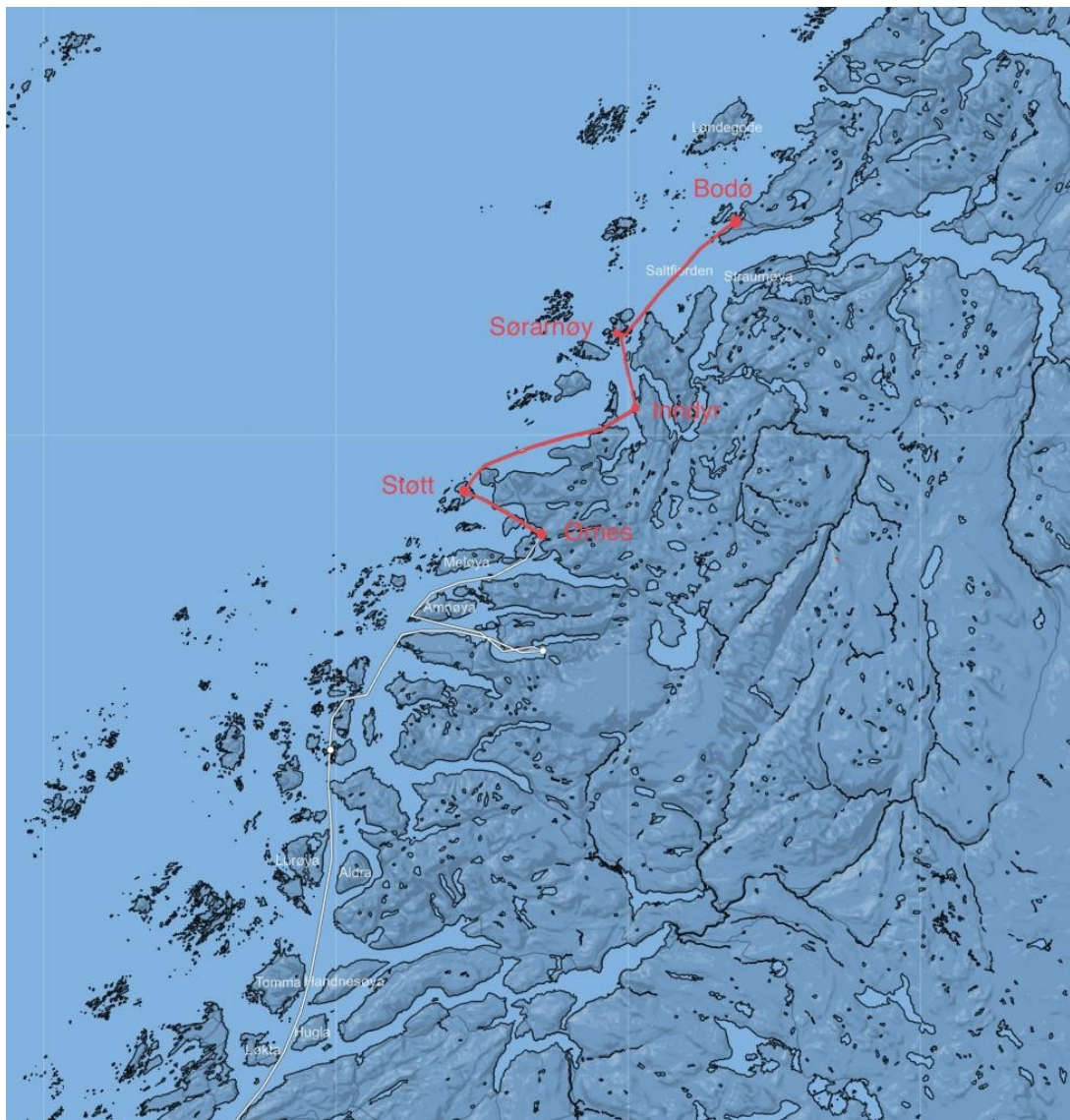
My "Vestas moment" on the chart is redeemed by Joost outside, as he first spots the sign on the shore and then the thin wire in the air. Zooming in on the chart indeed reveals a thin red line with a clearance height of 20m. It reminds us of last year when, near Skudeneshavn in Southern Norway, we wanted to take a shortcut, but the power cable of the lighthouse light at a height of 20m also obstructed our passage.

So, keep looking up and pay close attention while navigating between the islands and rocks.

This afternoon, we made an exploratory round in the center of Bodø for groceries tomorrow. We both found something in an outlet store — Joost got new shoes, and I got an extra sleeping bag. Both for a reasonable price and a lot of convenience.

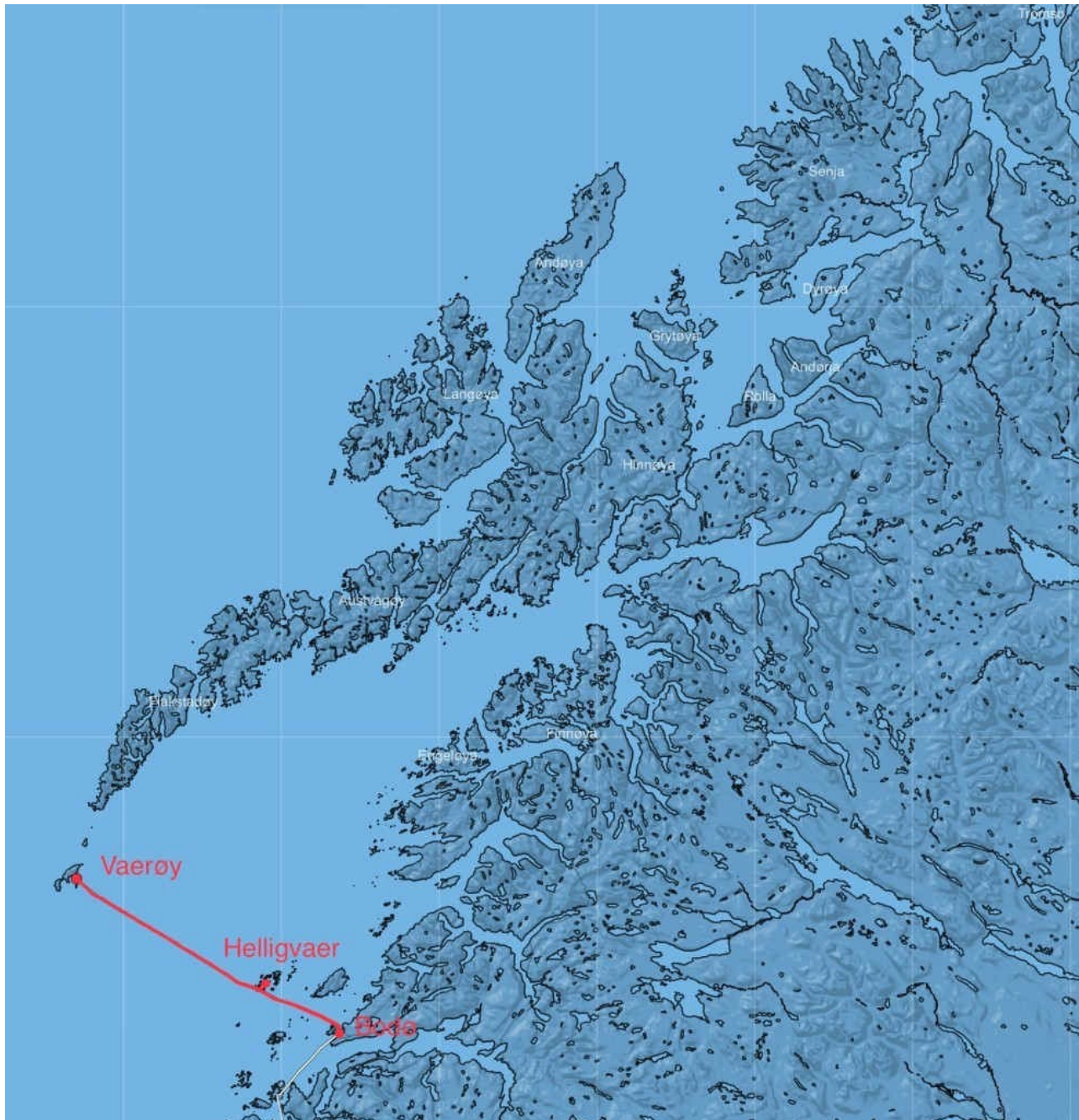


Back at the boat, we bought fresh shrimp from a fisherman to be used in a rice dish with shrimp sauce. On the dock, people are actively fishing. I think I'll give it another try after dinner.



Lofoten

June 16, 2022



In Bodø, the crew is complete with Edmond's arrival. From here on, the rest of the journey will be continued with the three of us.

His flight was not without obstacles. In Bergen, his connecting flight to Bodø was canceled. Through two other flights with a layover in the much more northern Tromsø, he finally lands in Bodø, albeit much later. Bodø Airport is within walking distance of the harbor.

While I wait for Edmond in the airport arrivals hall, Joost prepares dinner. We plan to depart for Sørvaer tonight, an island that is part of the Helligvaer archipelago, about 10 nautical miles from Bodø. Edmond notices our visible breaths. What a contrast to the warm Netherlands he left this morning. Flying gives a climate shock, unlike a much slower means of transport like a sailboat,

where you gradually adapt to the changing climate. I am sensitive to the cold and am somewhat concerned about it. Nevertheless, I notice that my body is gradually adapting to the lower temperatures. I don't feel as cold as I did at the beginning of the journey.

Edmond has brought beautiful sunny weather, unfortunately without wind. The contrast with his stressful day could not be greater now. Life on board Norna Biron is so much slower. Slowly but steadily, Norna's Deutz pushes us towards the nearby archipelago. On the way, we see the first puffins. Quirky birds that always make me very happy. The feeling is not mutual because as soon as they see us, they dive underwater. The mountain peaks in the background become sharper and more pointed.



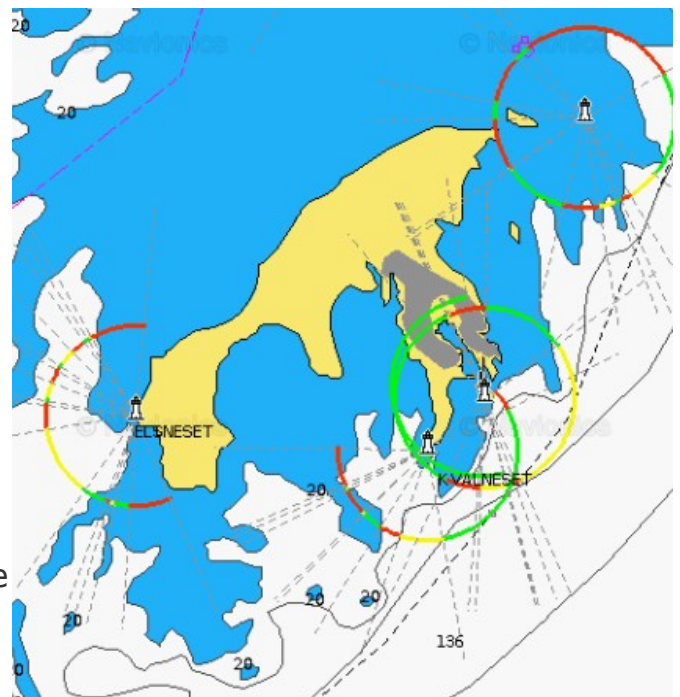
Sørvaer

Around 23:00, we arrive in a very picturesque landscape. The scattered fishing boats moored here and there betray an active fishing community. The low sun, calmness, and the oil-smooth water have an almost enchanting effect on us. Could this be a harbinger of what awaits us further? Joost and I can't get enough of it, reveling in the overwhelming tranquility of the surroundings. Edmond, on the other hand, appreciates it but is exhausted in his bunk after a tiring travel day and stressful final workdays.



Today, we continue crossing the Vestfjorden towards Vaerøy, which is 35 nautical miles to the northwest—our first Lofoten island. We're still motoring as there is no wind.

Vaerøy is the second southernmost inhabited island of the Lofoten archipelago. The island somewhat resembles a dinosaur, with its head pointing southwest and several promontories forming the legs. I realize that a long-cherished dream, sailing to the Lofoten, has now become a reality. It leaves me speechless.





We are in Røstnesvågen, the old center of Vaerøy, which is dominated by numerous drying racks for stockfish. We can already smell it as we enter the area. It turns out that Norway's largest producers of stockfish are located here.

The fish, mostly cod but sometimes also mackerel, is gutted and beheaded before being hung on racks, known as *hjell*, to dry—hence the name stockfish. The cold air flowing through prevents the fish from spoiling. The drying process takes about three months, after which the fish is further dried until it becomes rock hard. Only about 20% of the original weight remains.

Honestly, it's not to my liking; I can't find it appetizing.



Vaerøy is also the origin of a unique dog breed, the Lundehund.

This breed is a zoological rarity due to having six toes on each paw. Additionally, the dog can completely close its ear canals by folding its ears. The breed lived in isolation for hundreds of years and was used in the hunting of puffins.

As puffins are now a protected species and can no longer be part of the menu, the hunting practice has ceased. This is also true for sea eagles. Fishermen considered sea eagles a threat to the fish population, especially during late winter and spring when fishing is crucial. In the fall, they captured sea eagles with their bare hands to kill them. Hunters would hide and lure the eagles with bait attached to a string until they could gradually pull the feeding eagle into the hideout and break its neck.

The practice of capturing sea eagles persisted until the 1960s.



The dead sea eagle at the bottom right of the photo apparently had bad luck after all.



Longyearbyen, Spitsbergen(Svalbard) Saturday June 26, 2022

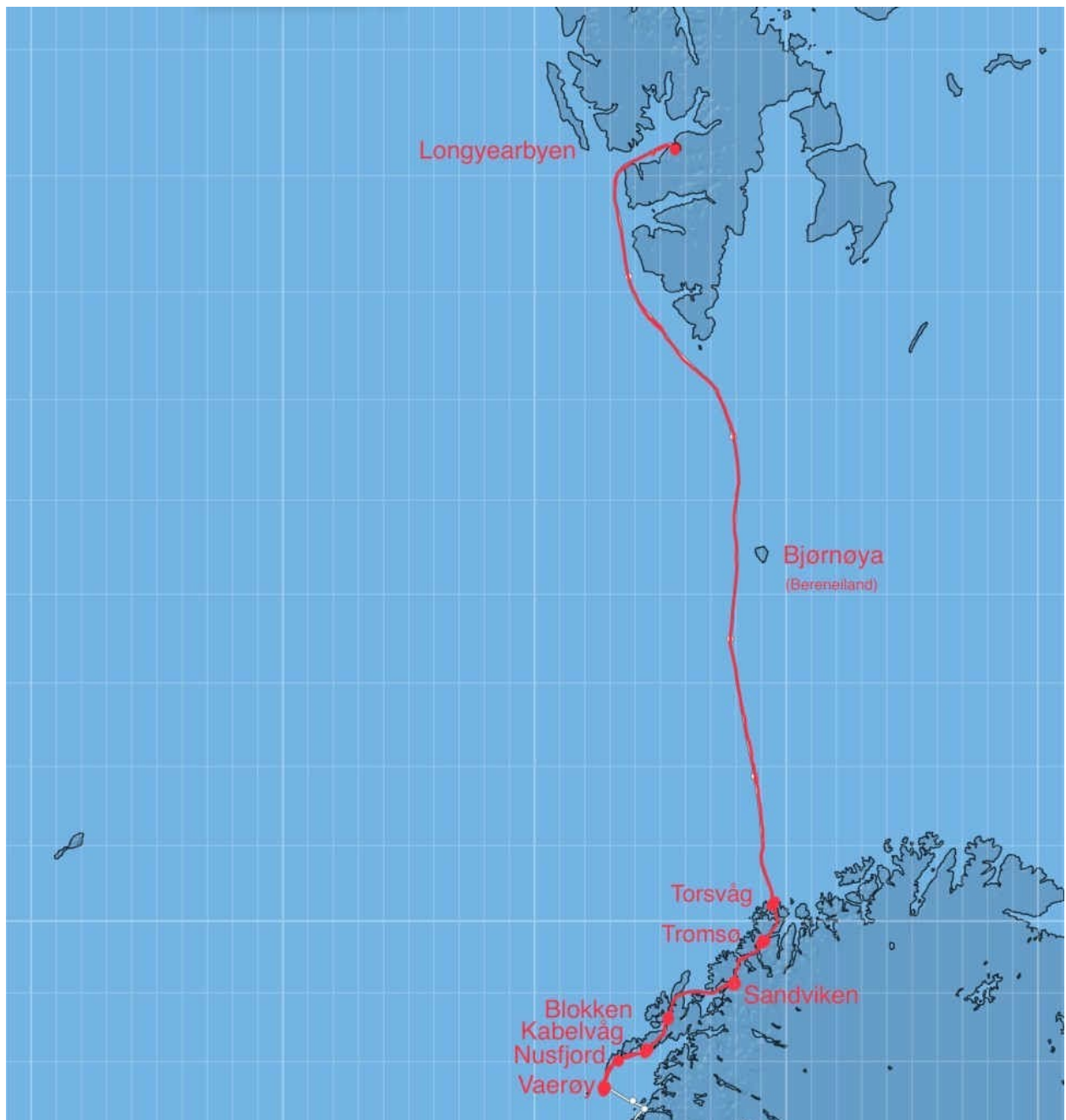
June 26, 2022



Longyearbyen



We made a smooth crossing of the Barents Sea and, around 10:00 PM, after a sun-drenched day, we moored at the pier in Longyearbyen. The last 100 miles in sight of the Spitsbergen coast to starboard. Definitely a milestone in our journey.



A week ago, we departed from Vaerøy in the far southwest of the Lofoten Islands. In day trips, we navigate through the Lofoten, mainly relying on the

motor. Occasionally, we hoist a sail. The wind is highly variable and usually against us. It intensifies from sea gaps, then changes direction, sometimes opposing us from a mountain slope.

Norna isn't exactly a boat designed for easy navigation in narrow waters. However, while motoring against the wind, I realize what fantastic sailing water this is, and it fuels my deep-rooted desire and promise to my spouse. Once Fram is seaworthy, one of our first major journeys will be to the Lofoten Islands.

I consider this as a sort of initial exploration.

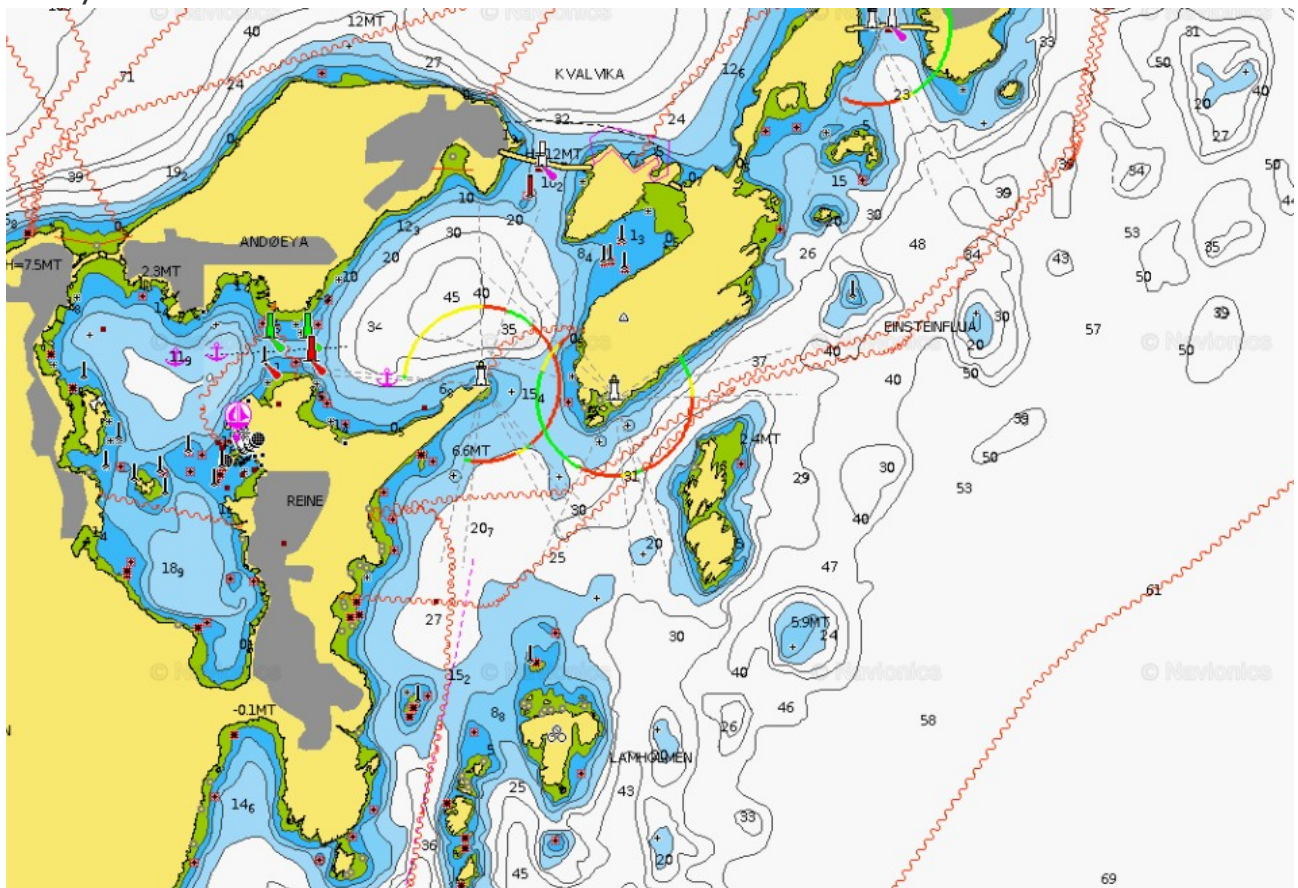




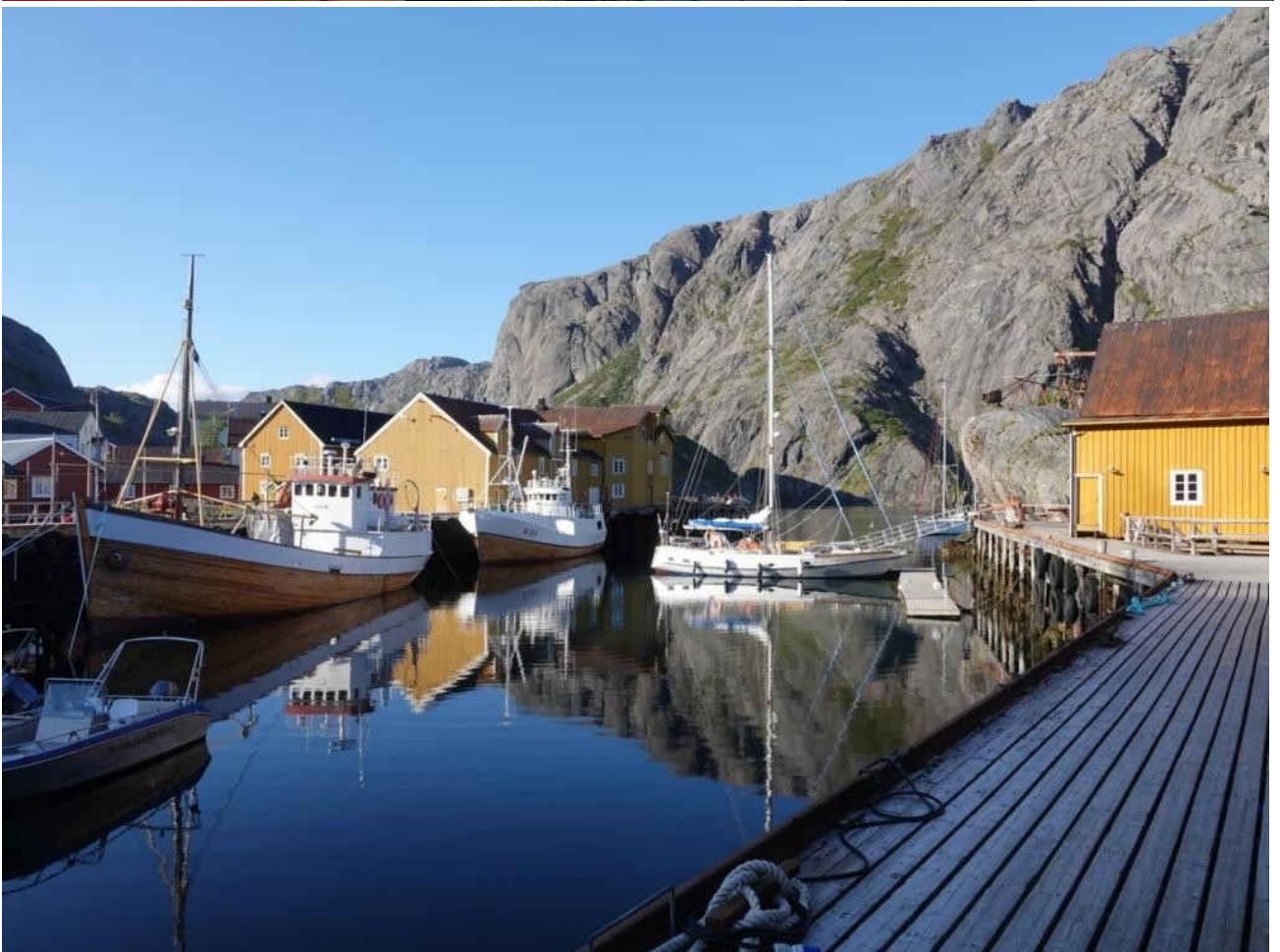
Reine

If you're looking for photos of the Lofoten, you'll find them of Reine. We already agreed that you should actually avoid all the places along the E10, the highway connecting all the islands. These are mainly tourist-frequented villages, making them crowded and less authentic.

The E10 itself is populated by campers of all shapes and sizes, with regular cars being in the minority. However, Reine is a must-see, so we drive in, snap photos like a bunch of Japanese tourists, then turn around and continue our journey.



Nusfjord



Not very consistently, we moor in Nusfjord. Although not directly on the E10, many take the exit to visit this "Marken of Norway." This is not meant negatively. Similar to Marken in the Netherlands, it has an authentic character with red-brown and yellow houses instead of the green ones. As in many other Norwegian harbors, the houses are connected to each other via walkways over a wooden framework.

The depth in the harbor seems a bit dubious for Norna's 2.5m draft, so we don't dock at the long pier but perpendicular to it. This way, she stretches across the harbor, blocking the entrance for about 2/3. We get the impression that the two fishing boats on the other side are more for ambiance than actually going out.

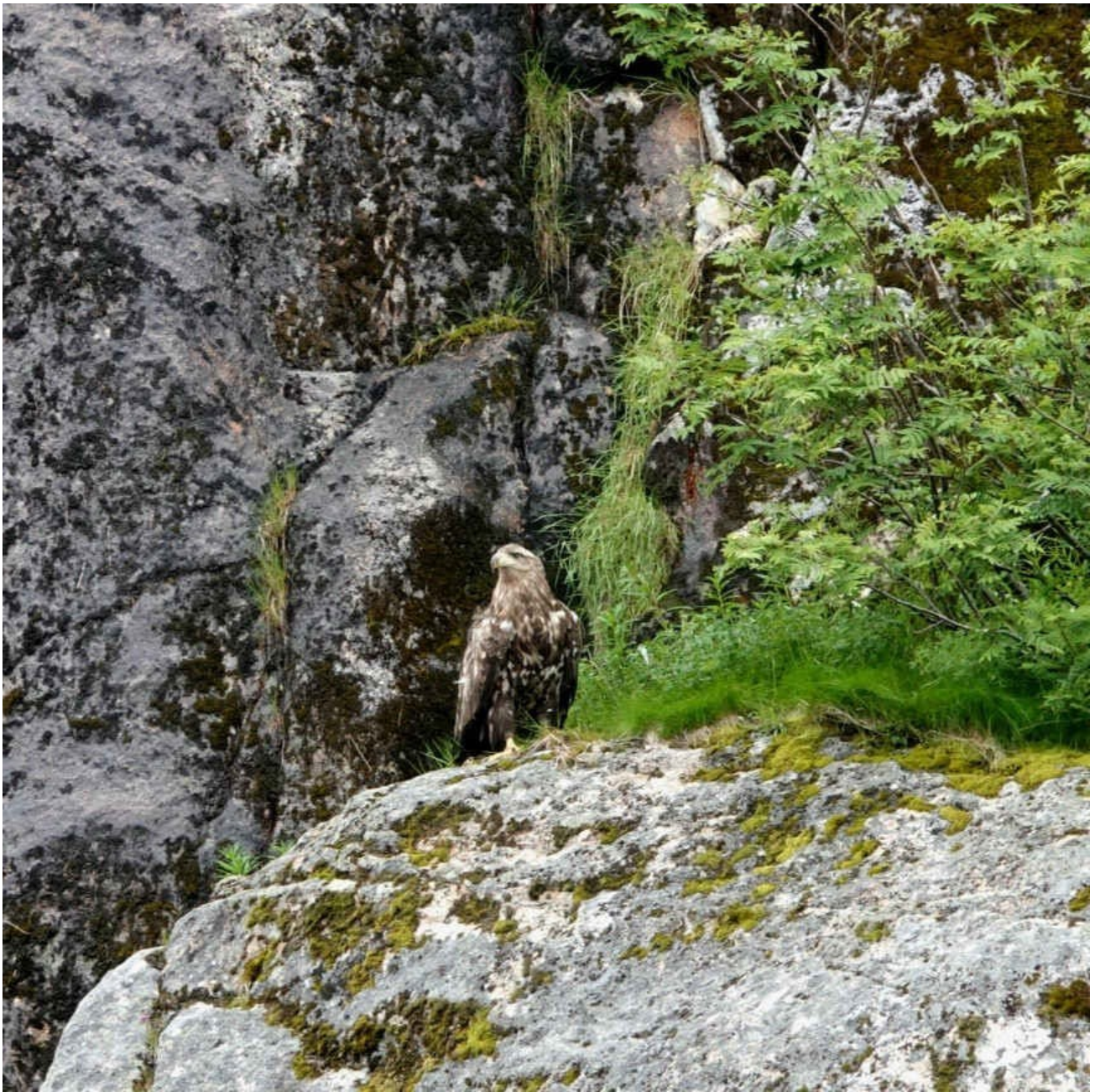
Anyway, a yacht can still pass through. We become part of the attraction ourselves. It's certainly picturesque.

Trollfjord



On our tourist route, as I like to call it because we deliberately navigate through many islands and narrow passages with rocks just a few meters away, we must not skip the Trollfjord, as it is on our route northward. The numerous RIBs filled with tourists in Ferrari red or Signal yellow survival suits racing past us at +30 knots prove that we're getting close. With inscriptions like "Trollfjord & Sea Eagle RIB Safari," there's no ambiguity about their destination. A bit further, they each race to port. Apparently, that's the entrance to the Trollfjord. And that's correct. By the time we enter, the RIBs are already coming out. Time equals money, right? We sail almost to the end, take some photos, and turn around as well. Nice to have seen and very photogenic.

Even I manage to capture several sea eagles with the camera, although they were quite far away. That evening, we drop anchor for the first time in Blokken. Blokken is a small sheltered bay with a spot in the back where it's not too deep to anchor.





Sea Eagle

After another night in the otherwise deserted Sandvika, we find a pontoon with a diesel pump just behind the bridge at Finnsnes. The nearby town also provides an opportunity to get some last fresh groceries and to take a shower. Hmm, it's been a long time, and I could really use a good scrub.

Unfortunately, the diesel pump's machine doesn't accept any of our collection

of payment cards, distributed among the three of us. This is now the second time that cheaper diesel slips through our fingers. The price here is 17.8 NOK, which is 0.50 NOK less than where we tanked earlier. We can't find another diesel pump in the immediate vicinity. Calling at Tromsø seems like the best option, fulfilling the skipper's wish to depart from Tromsø to the far north. I was more inclined to go with the right weather window and leave when it suits us. The favorable window seems imminent, and for that, we need to slow down a bit. A small detour via Tromsø fits perfectly into that scenario. Meanwhile, it's getting cold, windy, and rainy. I take on the 38nm journey to Tromsø, well-bundled up in Norna's small cockpit. The visibility is occasionally very poor, and it requires careful attention. Somehow, I enjoy this little trip.

All that can be seen is shades of gray as Norna maneuvers among the many rocks, beacons, and islands. Nothing of the snow-covered mountains and green hills is visible; everything is equally dull and gray. The men are inside, reading and dozing, occasionally checking if I need anything or want to be relieved. "No, it's going well like this," I shout while trying to keep my hands warm in my jacket pockets.

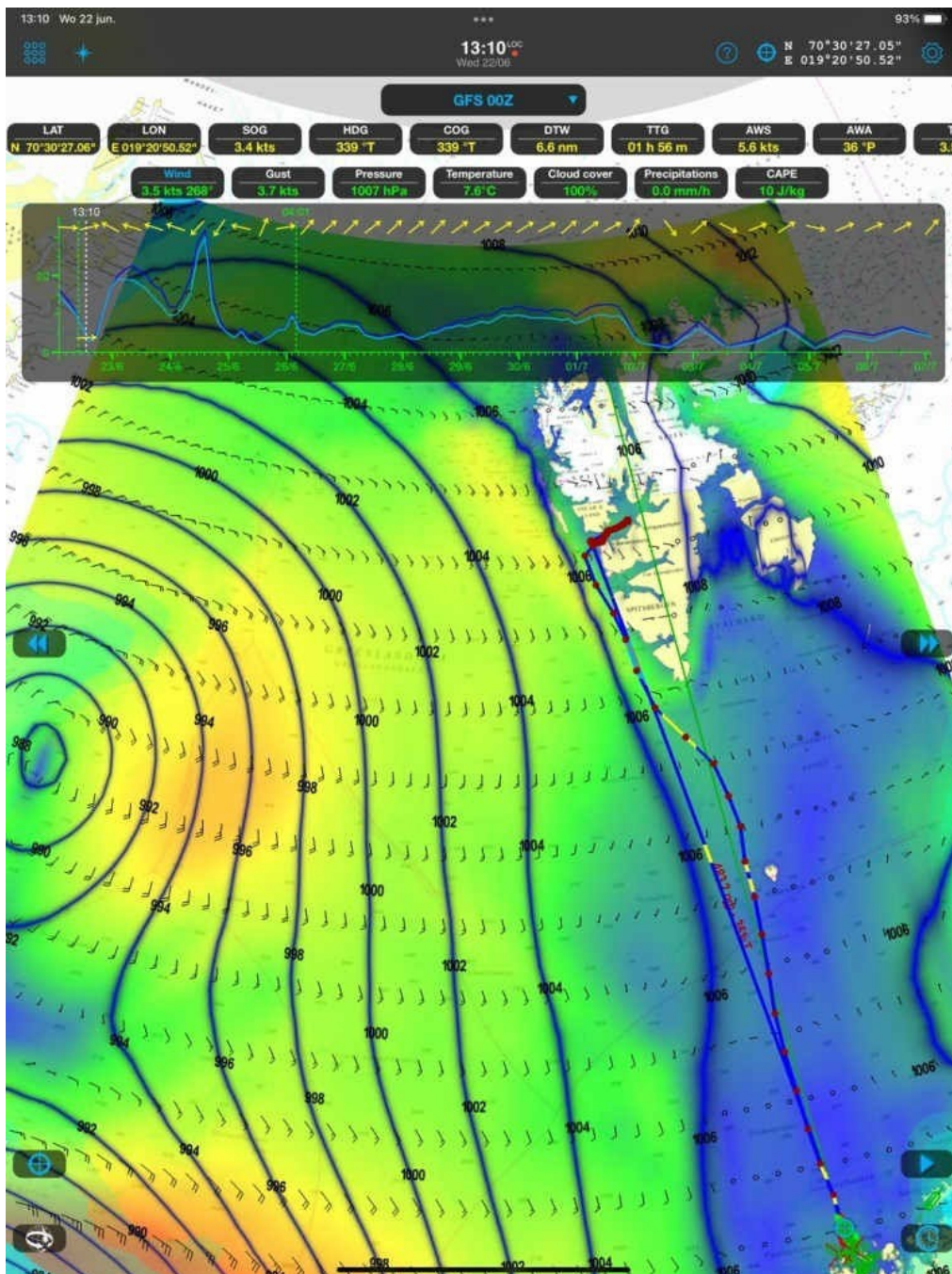


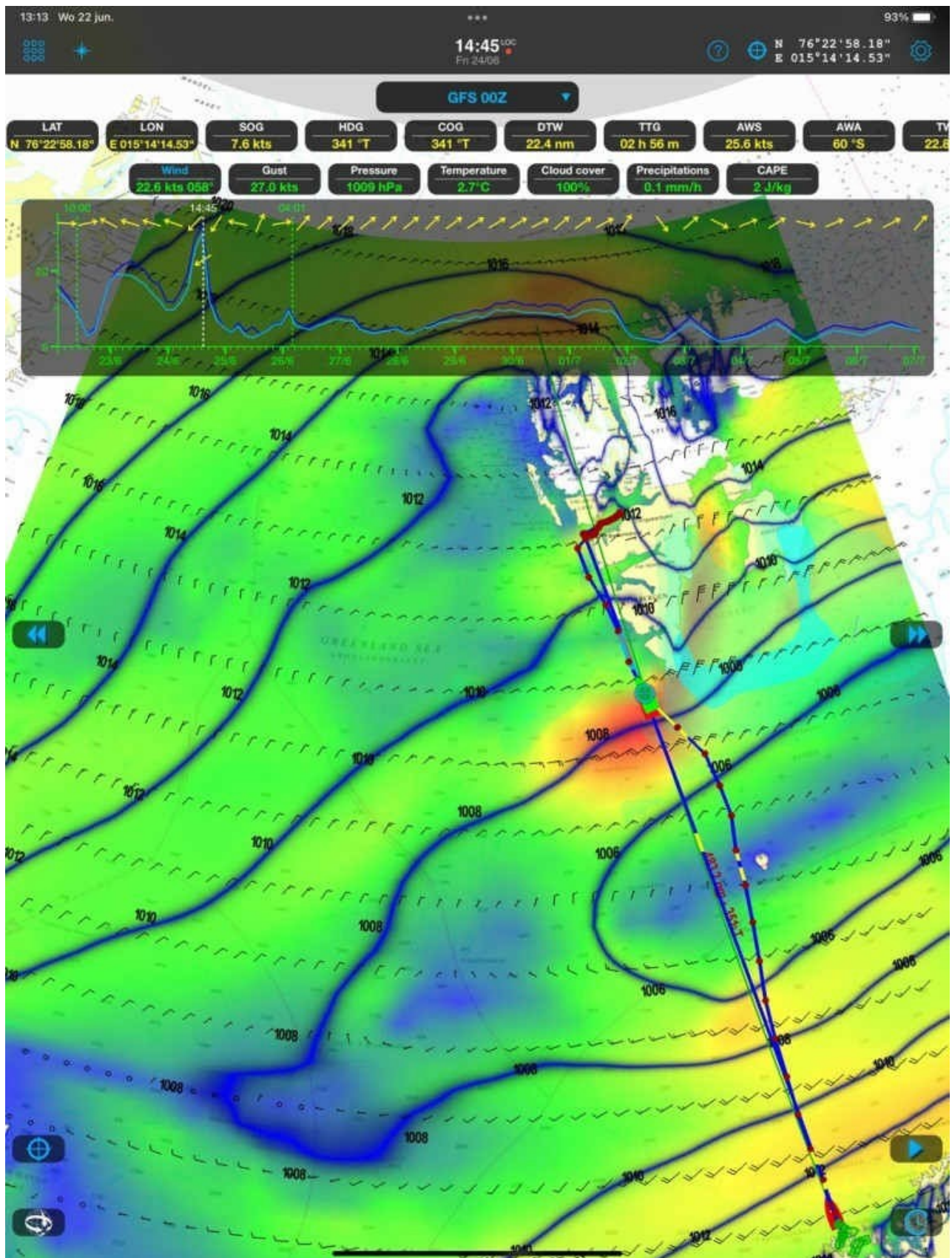
Before reaching the wide Balsfjord, in the north of it lies Tromsø, we pass through the narrow passage Rystraumen. The speed briefly increases to 11 knots with a water speed of about 5.5 knots. As we approach Tromsø, Joost takes over from me. I enjoy taking off my wet gear, hanging out in the engine room to dry, peeling a banana, and warming up in the salon.

Looking outside is not an option as all the windows are fogged up. When I hear the engine's RPM change, I put on my still-wet sailing suit again and see a few large oil tanks on the shore with the word BUNKER on them. We dock at a concrete pier, but unfortunately, there is no diesel pump here. There is also

what looks like an abandoned bunker station a little further, but it seems to have hoses not meant for Norna. We set course for the marina a bit further down; there should be a diesel pump there. Then, on the port side, we spot another pontoon, this time with a diesel dispenser. The price is 20.60 NOK, and there's a sticker saying "colored diesel prohibited for motor vehicles." My VISA works here, and 8000 NOK worth of diesel goes into the tank.

Routing model June 22 at 13:10





Routing model June 24 at 14:45

We discuss, it's 07:00PM, it's cold and raining. Do we continue or stay here for another night? My suggestion to continue gets approval from the others. I make a call and send a message home, letting them know that our journey to Spitsbergen has truly begun. My watch begins at midnight, which is also the time to collectively review the latest Grib weather forecast. They don't look bad, although there's little wind until the end of the day. Therefore, we decide to slow

down a bit with a stopover in Torsvåg. It's a bit of an adjustment. We've prepared everything for a 4-day sea journey, the deck is cleared, and then we decide to visit a harbor. However, a few hours of sleep sound nice. In my dream, we're sailing, apparently in very calm weather. I try to feel the boat's movements, but I sense nothing. I wake up. Oh right, we're still at the pier in Torsvåg.



On June 22 at 9:00 AM, it's all hands on deck. We're setting sail. The few extra hours of rest in Torsvåg were necessary to avoid the worst of the strong winds under Spitsbergen and to limit the engine hours at the beginning. The strong wind under Spitsbergen is still about 4 days away, and much can change during that time.

In some way, this departure feels different from previous sea journeys. We're crossing the Barents Sea, and that sounds different from a trip across the North Sea. After hoisting the sails, I grab a few more hours of sleep. I barely notice when the engine starts again due to insufficient wind. I can sleep well with that sound, and before I know it, it's already 12:00 PM, my time for this watch. The sun is shining, it's warm out of the wind, but there's still a biting cold component. Nevertheless, it's coming from the wrong direction and is too mild. The Barents Sea actually seems suspiciously similar to our own North Sea.

In the salon, I continue reading the e-book I started yesterday. Occasionally, something rolls, making noise. Soon, it starts to irritate me, and I search for the culprit in the saloon table, where I think the sound is coming from. Hey, everything is stable there, with a few towels in between. Aha, it's coming from the starboard bench. But there's nothing there that could cause the noise. Let's take another look in the saloon table. No, everything is secure. The egg carton

next to the whiskey bottle in the cupboard is still there, protecting the bottle from rolling. In the port bench, there are no bottles, but I check anyway. Nothing there, of course. "Clang... boom" again, and I realize just now that it's the mainsheet above my head on the aft deck. The wind has decreased even more, and the mainsheet could be tighter.



Sun at night

At the end of this first day on the Barents Sea, I have the watch again from 9:00 to 12:00 PM. Sailing towards the sun over a sunlit sea and under a clear blue sky, the sun is now ahead of us at 11 o'clock in the Northern sky. The sun revolves in a complete circle around us and stays well above the horizon. On our northern course, you can read the time of the watch change by the sun's position, North and South, or 24:00 and 12:00, it is in line with the boat's longitudinal axis, at 3:00 and 21:00 respectively, it is athwartships in the East or West. When I hand over the watch to Edmond at 24:00, the sun is right in front of the bow above the horizon, now somewhat hidden behind the clouds. The nights are no longer nights. Even the twilight is missing. In the middle of the sea, it remains a unique and, for me, a new experience to see the sun in the sky for 24 hours straight. The wind has gradually increased, and with a speed of 7-8 knots, we are racing northward.

On June 23 at 02:00PM, the first visible marine life is spotted by Joost, dolphins, and whales. Bear Island to starboard. The wind increases to over 20 knots with gusts up to 29. The jib is away, and the staysail is set along with one reef in the mainsail. When handing over my watch to Edmond, we put in a second reef in the mainsail. In my sleeping bag, my hands smell like rubber, yuck. It must come from the new work gloves

that I purchased months ago at CIV in Den Oever and am now using for the first time. "Maxx Grip Winter Safe" is written on them, which does not prevent me from having icy fingers again in no time. While Edmond takes command of Norna, I crawl into the sleeping bag, where I first pre-warm my cold hands in the armpits before letting them slide to the warmest spot.

Gradually, it gets colder. I feel like I need to get used to it and try not to overdress. I think I can always put on more layers later. The extra sleeping bag purchased in Bodø is still unused in its packaging. However, I have been wearing merino thermal underwear all this time, which I also keep on inside the sleeping bag. I mostly suffer from cold hands. Of course, I have various types and sizes of gloves with me, but hiding my hands in the pockets of my sailing jacket or in the sleeves of the fleece vest works better. After climbing out of my bunk with some acrobatics and attempting to put on my already very damp jeans, Joost appears with a new ski pants, saying, "from Lidl" he says, "for €19,-" with a big smile. The double-layered pants fit me perfectly and immediately feel warmer. Just before departure, I had gone looking for such pants but unfortunately couldn't find any.



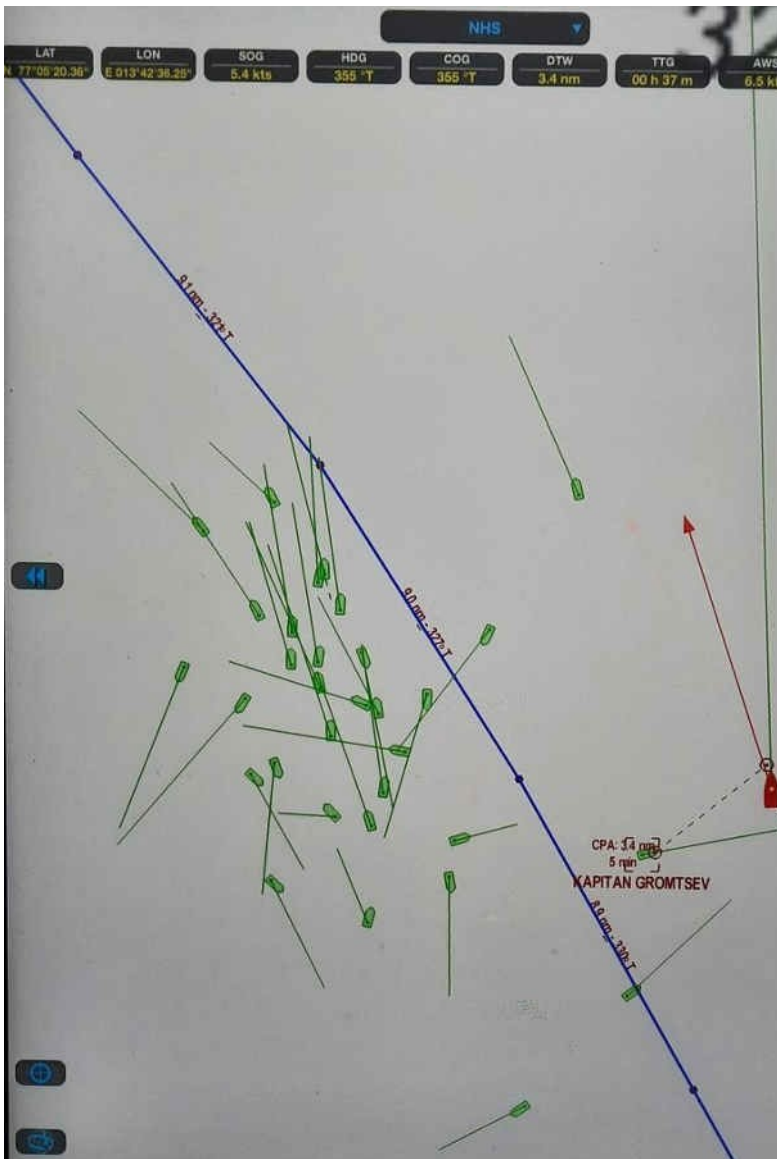
On Watch

As we head north, it gets colder and colder. Inside, it's around 2 degrees Celsius now. Sitting out the watch becomes cold due to the lack of movement. In the sleeping bag, I now keep the ski pants on. According to the gibs, the wind will become very light overnight. Between 23:00 tonight and 5:00 tomorrow morning, the wind drops to about 3 knots. Time to start the engine, time for a bit more warmth, and if the sea calms down a bit, maybe we can even turn on the heater.

I think of the words of sailor and doctor Kees den Hartoog, who sailed single-handed to Greenland with his boat Senta (which I later took over):

"Don't suspect me of masochistic tendencies. Those who know me better know differently. But to become a good offshore sailor, it's not enough to make summer trips to England or the Baltic Sea. The sailor should occasionally choose challenging routes, alone or with a small crew, and accept setbacks on such a journey as necessary training and education."

A sailing trip like this one to the Arctic Ocean provides entirely new experiences, all while I dislike cold, snow, and ice—quite the opposite of my travel companions. I learn from it, adapt, and feel enriched.



AIS enemies

We are sailing towards a whole herd of fishermen, about 30 of them. Not small boats, but vessels ranging from 50 to 80 meters in length. The seafloor here rises from over 2000 meters deep to 200 meters, and in some places, it's 50 to 20 meters deep. They are all fishing clustered together. Norwegians as well as Russians with names like KAPITAN DURACHENKO, MYS CHIKHACHEVA, VASILY GOLOVNIN, MYS KORSAKOVA, and many others. We stay just east of them. The boats that seem to be on a collision course on AIS, however, promptly turn around to return on their opposite course, not wanting to stray too far from what seems to be rich fishing waters. We are not bothered by them in this way.



Coast of Spitsbergen (Svalbard)

Sleeping is once again difficult in this turbulent sea. The anticipated drop in wind never happens. We are making huge slides. I manage to fall asleep, but I'm often awake due to the tossing in my bunk. Now I'm awake because I need to pee. Oh no, I really don't feel like it now and try to ignore it. I turn over once more (easier said than done) and bury myself again in the sleeping bag to warm up the cold side of my face. Just as I'm well settled, I hear Joost.

"Wake up, it's your turn, it's 3:00 AM. And take a look out of your porthole, the southwest coast of Spitsbergen is in sight."

Normally, I have covered the porthole with a second pillow. One, to darken the light, and two, to insulate the cold window. Something I've been doing since we were in Norway. Lying against the cold glass is not pleasant. Outside, I take a photo of the rugged, mist-grayed, pointed mountains on the horizon. It's beautiful.

It's still icy cold; the wind has decreased to about 15 knots and is further diminishing. The two reefs are still in. I consider shaking them out, but it's unnecessary now. Suddenly, the wind is almost gone, and what little remains comes directly from the front. Shift the propeller out of feathering mode, set the throttle, start the engine, furl the jib, release the preventer, and center the

boom. An hour later, the wind picks up again to 25-28 knots, and the procedure is reversed. Engine at idle, unfurl the jib, attach the preventer, furl and trim the jib, engine in neutral and off, shift the propeller back into feathering mode, and we're off again with about 8 knots on the log.





Happy Hour on deck with a cold beer and peanuts.

When I take over Joost's watch on Saturday, June 25, at 12 noon, the world has completely changed. No wind, calm water, radiant sun high in the sky directly above our wake, a clear blue sky, the black-gray mountains with veins of snow rising from the sea to starboard. Edmond reports a whale in the distance. The heater is already on inside. That's possible now with this nearly ripple-free sea. My extra warm clothes come off too, and it's still comfortable with just a T-shirt, inside. Before the routine glance outside, I put on a sweater. For the first time, we also have happy hour outside under a shining sun to port. 4G completes the happiness. The view is enchanting.

ETA Longyearbyen is tonight (Saturday night) at 10 PM.

Armament soap.

June 27, 2022

Outside the civilized areas in Spitsbergen, the kings of the Arctic reign—Polar Bears, which can pose a threat to humans. Although their main food source is seals, they won't hesitate to consider a human as a potential meal. Therefore, in those areas, one must be prepared not to become lunch for the polar bear. It is essential to carry deterrents to scare off polar bears. Additionally, it is strongly recommended to be armed with a gun in case the deterrents prove insufficient in extreme situations.

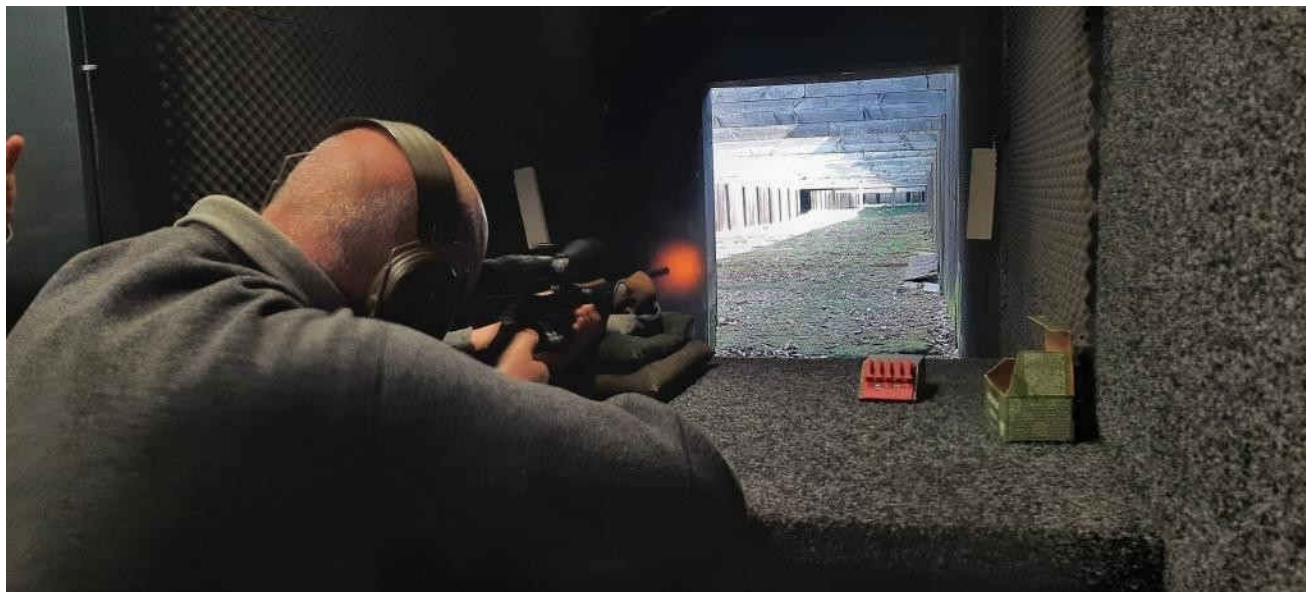
However, there is a problem as polar bears are a protected species. The necessity of the latter resort will be investigated by the Sysselmannen (local authorities), with high fines looming if the need cannot be sufficiently demonstrated.

Our "deterrents" include, aside from shouting, waving, and the skipper advancing with his secret weapon, my signal pistol with caliber 4 cartridges, and a "Nico Signal Flare gun" for each of us.

I dutifully renew my permit for the signal pistol every year. In the past, this was a simple matter, costing a tenner per year, gladly paid with a friendly chat with the firearms and ammunition service agents. Nowadays, since the shooting incident in Alphen a/d Rijn, things have changed, including periodic home checks. What has remained, until recently, is the friendly chat with the on-duty agents and the exchange of some tall tales. However, even that is now gone since the renewal of the gun permit goes through a clinical digital process, almost seven times the cost. Every year, I contemplate whether I should renew, but with this journey ahead, I'm glad I did. Over the years, I've shot all my ammunition. As far as I could find out, it's no longer available in the Netherlands, but I did find it in Belgium, at an outdoor shop near Bruges. We turned it into a delightful day in Bruges, including the purchase of the original Muckbooth boots in Arctic edition at the same outdoor shop.

With my Dutch gun permit and the annual personal screening, I thought I was sufficiently documented to apply for a permit from The Governor of Svalbard to rent a weapon in Spitsbergen. It is also required to demonstrate sufficient proficiency in handling such a weapon. For the latter, we did some shooting exercises with a heavy-caliber hunting rifle under guidance at Dorhout Mees in Biddinghuizen. We had a fun afternoon, received a certificate of proficiency (for what it's worth), and, for the first time in my life, shot with a real gun (I

was declared unsuitable for military service). At the shooting range of Dorhout Mees in Biddinghuizen. Practice makes perfect, but as will later be revealed, too much fun and too little attention paid to the weapon.



The processing of the data by The Governor takes at least 10 weeks, so I have everything processed on the website of De Sysselmannen by mid-February. Unfortunately, just before departure, I receive an email from the Police Chief Inspector:

Refers to your application for a loan license for firearms for polar bear protection on Svalbard. The Governor on Svalbard is requesting an extended and exhaustive police certificate for the last five years from the country in which you live. This certificate cannot be older than three months old. The documentation must be in English or Norwegian, and you are responsible for translating the document into English or Norwegian by using an approved translator. Your application will remain pending until this has been sent to us.

My own permit is apparently insufficient, and I interpret the above as a "Certificate of Good Conduct" (Verklaring Omtrent Gedrag - VOG). As a Dutch resident, this can be easily requested via a website, but I can't use that. It turns out that non-EU residents can submit a form with much more information through the municipality. So, I'll use that. I called the municipality of Lelystad to make an appointment, but unfortunately, they are too busy to help me, and an appointment can only be made at the earliest in mid-June. Sh*t, by then, we'll already be in Spitsbergen.

However, the municipality turns out to be only a pass-through, and after a call to the Ministry of Justice, I can also email the form directly. In the absence of a better option, I choose the profile "become a member of a shooting association." I point out the urgency to the friendly lady at the Ministry of Justice and request her to email the VOG since I will be traveling. And oh, can the VOG be drafted in the English language. "Unfortunately, sir,

we only send it to your home address and in the Dutch language." Hmm, that's a setback because then I also have to use a sworn translation agency. Somewhere in the middle of Norway, I receive the VOG. My spouse has scanned it and emailed it to me. At the bottom of the document is a concise English translation:

The Minister for Legal Protection has conducted an investigation into the conduct of the person named in this Certificate and declares that, in view of the risk to society in relation to the purpose for which the certificate has been requested and considering the interests of the person concerned, the investigation has not resulted in any objections to this person in connection with the specific profile mentioned above or the job features indicated on the reverse of this Certificate. The Minister is therefore hereby pleased to issue this Certificate of Conduct, pursuant to section 28 of the Dutch Judicial Data and Criminal Records Act.

That should be sufficient, I think. I forward the document to the Police Chief Inspector and refer to the concise English summary at the bottom of the page. Saves me the hassle of dealing with a translation agency, not to mention the costs involved, as it's charged per word, I understand.

A week later, I receive the long-awaited positive response. If I also want to pay the fees, he will send the permit by email as soon as their accounting confirms the payment. The second-to-last hitch comes up when I try to make the payment (in NOK). My mobile banking doesn't support it, as it only allows transfers in Euros. It works through Internet banking, but for that, I need the card reader, which is at home. Anyway, my wife at home handles it, and another week later, I receive the final document: the permit I need to show to the gun rental provider.

In Longyearbyen, there are two sports shops that are authorized to rent guns. Tomorrow, we plan to leave, so today, the second day in Longyearbyen and after visiting the North Pole Museum, I walk to the nearest sports shop and ask if they also rent guns. Of course, I have all the paperwork and permits with me, but the lady in charge of the guns protests when she sees me searching on my phone. "*No mail but hardcopy*," she says sternly, looking at me suspiciously. Well, that's a great start. With reluctance, she takes my phone to read the document from the Police Chief Inspector. She has to admit that it's okay.

She gives me the choice between a modern lightweight gun or a cheaper and heavier older model. I opt for the first one, considering it also needs to be carried for a longer time during a hike. To my surprise, I have to take a practical test, answer tricky questions about the operation of the specific weapon (after all, aren't all guns fundamentally the same?), and then fall into the trap question of how to transport the weapon. I had just put in a dummy bullet, and she catches me off guard.

The increased tension between us doesn't help either. I walked in entirely unprepared and, in my naivety, thought that with my excellent references, I would simply get a gun.

"I'm not feeling comfortable to give you this rifle. You can shoot people to dead. So sorry, NO."

I react timidly with "No people but Polar Bears," but it's too late. There's nothing I can argue, and I recognize my attitude towards women who feel the need to assert themselves. Stupid, stupid, didn't even think about it.

"Do you need anything more," and in confusion, I say yes, still looking for a good ski-pant-like layer under my sailing suit. Still a bit shaken, I buy an excessively expensive pair of pants. Well, good quality, I think, and it's worth the cost. Sulking from this embarrassment, I walk back to the boat. Oh, she added, don't bother trying the other shop either because you have to pass the same proficiency test there.

Come on, I just let myself be fooled by that "....". On the boat, I search for a few YouTube videos for beginners. Less than fifteen minutes later, I'm on my way again, this time to the other shop, hoping they haven't had any contact with each other. No tourist jacket this time, but my rugged sailing jacket with matching boots. I walk straight up like a real Trapper, once again, to a lady in front of the gun rack, and proudly declare that I want to rent the cheapest gun they have. After checking my paperwork and approving it, she walks to the back and returns with a heavy Mauser from World War II.

Before she can say anything, I grab the gun from her hands, put my finger behind the barrel at the front of the chamber, checking if there's no bullet, try the cocking mechanism once, and notice that there's a lot of play in the mechanism. Well, I understand that it's an old gun, what does it cost, actually? And, oh yes, this safety catch works differently than I'm used to. I feel like I've gained some ground with her and hope to have taken a lot of wind out of her sails. Fortunately, she starts demonstrating how to load the gun, something the other lady in the first shop flatly refused, claiming I should know that. But now, it's in response to my question about the safety catch.

"Don't use it, it is not reliable, instead...." I look at her suspiciously. *"A half-loaded gun is much safer,"* she says somewhat bewildered, and once again, to my great delight, she demonstrates with dummy bullets. After removing them, she puts them on the counter and looks at me. I look back with an inquisitive gaze. *"Now you,"* she says, and with feigned confidence, I load the weapon as if it's my everyday routine.

After some administrative tasks, going through our travel plans, and mentioning that we'll be back in about 4 weeks to return the gun. "But it could be delayed by a week, so don't start a Search And Rescue operation when I'm delayed with returning the rifle," I say jokingly.

She completely understands, and after some more casual chit-chat, I walk out onto the street with a heavy Mauser over my shoulder. Only the bayonet is missing.

Of course, the chamber is open, so everyone can see that the gun is (still) not loaded, and I pose no danger to my surroundings. I have 10 rounds of ammunition with me and assume I'll return with the same number.



Meeting with Lisa

July 1, 2022

Thousands of years ago, she fell from God's heaven as a fetus to grow and strengthen in the high mountains of Svalbard. Her name was Lisa. She wasn't alone but rather accompanied by many brothers and sisters. They grew together into an enormous, inhumanly large, and cold body with only one purpose – the water's edge, much like newly hatched turtle babies on a distant tropical beach. Although humanity shudders at the thought, that water's edge is gradually getting closer. With Lisa, this process has taken at least 5000 years, if not longer. Talk about patience! But love knows no time, for that is what she seeks. The Earth, warmed by the comfort of human presence, has less and less trouble letting Lisa and her siblings go to delight the lonely sailor.

Finally, the day comes when she embarks on her destiny. The launching is accompanied by an enormous splash and a corresponding tidal wave because she has become quite a hefty lady by now. However, it is not very gentle. Brothers and sisters, still at home with their parents, watch with a lot of noise

and creaking. "We want that too!" you hear them jealously shout through the roar. While they also try to free themselves with loud audible cracks from mother's womb, they wish Lisa a safe journey. "Fair winds!"

Finally, driven by wind and currents, she moves toward the open sea. Most of her brothers and sisters also manage to slowly but surely merge with the ocean from which they originally came. However, they still try to be caressed by the sailor in his boat. This still works with our sailboats, although some meanies have sharp gaff hooks. But those big steel brutes, they ruthlessly turn them into minced meat. It's logical that humanity rebels against this. The brutal violence inflicted on creations shaped by nature rightly provokes strong resistance. Extinction is, after all, also lurking. Like so much nature that has already been destroyed. They are rogues you should stay away from as much as possible. "And if that doesn't work, at least grab a tiller or propeller blade," is their mother's last wish.

After being locked up for centuries, Lisa is overwhelmed by the surrounding natural beauty. Her age doesn't prevent her from behaving like a naive teenage girl. The ocean is still miles away, and she decides to explore that challenging coast from a closer perspective. Unlike her sisters and brothers, she doesn't choose the safe, open water, as their mother taught them. No, her desire for adventure and love conquers her fears. Her parents are already far away, but her grandfather can enjoy and follow her adventures, both curious and protective.



Then she spots a tiny mast. Could that be one of those boats with people she has longed for all this time? It almost certainly must be, and she adjusts her course, heading straight for a gravel bank. She knows from her upbringing that she should stay in deeper waters and that the coast can only bring trouble. But at the same time, she remembers the words of her grandfather. He once said that if she wanted

to live longer but also more dangerously, she should run aground. "You're strong enough for it," he mischievously said, "and I'll make sure your love is reciprocated." Lisa knows that the majority of her well-filled body is underwater and confidently steers toward the coast.



Once grounded, she makes herself beautiful and attractive. She allows the waves to perfect her curves, then rolls onto her other side to let the sun work on her glitters there as well. She wholeheartedly indulges in a slimming treatment that only makes her more beautiful. With the brown mud that surrounds her, she enhances her appearance even more. Oh, how beautiful she is. Radiant in the sunlight, her body takes on beautiful shades of blue, white, and sometimes even semi-transparent, almost translucent.



"Yes, it's working," she says to herself with a blissful feeling, and she sees people approaching. One with a menacing-looking gun, another in a dreadful red suit, and a third in a stylish blue jacket. "I must have that one," she thinks to herself. Her parents must not know, but grandpa is her safe haven, and she seeks His advice. "I will take care of you, my child," HE replies. Not only does HE make the water rise, but HE also turns the wind 180 degrees, making it offshore instead of onshore. Lisa breaks free and now steers resolutely toward that small white boat. She reads "Norna Biron" on the bow.

Meanwhile, grandpa has also listened to the man in the blue jacket and instructs Lisa not to touch the anchor chain. The man in the blue jacket doesn't seem entirely reassured, as he keeps a close eye on Lisa. She gets closer and now begins to parade more provocatively around Norna Biron. Not just to admire the sturdy boat from all angles but also to express her love to the man in the blue jacket. The same man she saw on the beach this afternoon. She allows herself to be admired from all sides but decisively keeps her most intimate parts out of sight and underwater. It works! Her love is reciprocated, and from that moment on, the two never lose sight of each other.



Earlier that day, the crew of the Norna Biron decides to go ashore. Like a group of excited teenagers, they step out of the wobbly dinghy and have themselves photographed with all the weaponry they have brought. It's very dangerous here, after all, and they don't want to be devoured by wild beasts. And the danger is indeed present. The wild animals see and smell the humans before the reverse.

Three of them are already descending from the high hills. They chase the three men all the way to the tip of the peninsula. Clever, they have nowhere to go except towards the water or end up as a ready-made lunch. To satisfy

their hunger-inducing curiosity, they get closer and closer. Their sense of smell is much better developed than their eyesight. They don't see the gun on the shoulder of one of them. However, they suddenly catch a whiff of gunpowder. Oh no, they've had encounters with that before, and it didn't end well for their father back then. "Clear out!" shouts the biggest boss of the three, and they are gone.

However, the Norna crew is more fixated on the stranded icebergs. They are shaped into the most beautiful forms by the waves. Thanks to the beautiful and sheltered cove, they pose no danger to the anchored Norna. "Nice spot," they say to each other. When the skipper sees in one of the icebergs an outline of beautiful feminine shapes, he can't take his eyes off it. Walking back, it seems as if he is no longer himself. He has talked about Arctic madness, but people always thought he was joking.



"Come on, Joost," I say. "Let's head back." We also take a look at the Trapper's hut. The heavily barricaded windows and doors have sharp points due to the protruding nails and barbed wire, intended to dissuade overly curious polar bears. On the way here, we already saw a trail of large, deep paw prints. They certainly give me the shivers.

High in the mountains, we spot three reindeer and take some blurry photos with a telephoto lens. However, this proves to be unnecessary. The animals are even more curious than we are and quickly approach us. At a respectful distance, they follow every step we take. Sometimes, their eagerness to get closer seems to outweigh their fear of us. It's only when Edmond gets serious about taking pictures with his camera that they increase the distance. They find that man lying flat on his stomach a bit intimidating.



It remains difficult not to take photos. The nature around us is so overwhelming; we are walking in a postcard that keeps changing shape and color. I even take the drone out of the bag and film a round through the bay. Back on board, after yet another culinary masterpiece from Norna's galley, we relax, evaluate this fantastic day, and check the map to plan for tomorrow. Joost is restless, we joke about anchor watch. Well, it's so safe and quiet here.

Then we notice that we have rotated 180 degrees. Norna's bow is now pointing towards the unprotected side of the bay. Hey, that iceberg in the distance has come loose and is now heading towards us.

It's a new experience for all of us.

That iceberg probably won't have any trouble with Norna's 30 tons, but we don't think it would be wise the other way around. However, it should not get hooked on the anchor chain in any way, as that doesn't seem like a good idea.



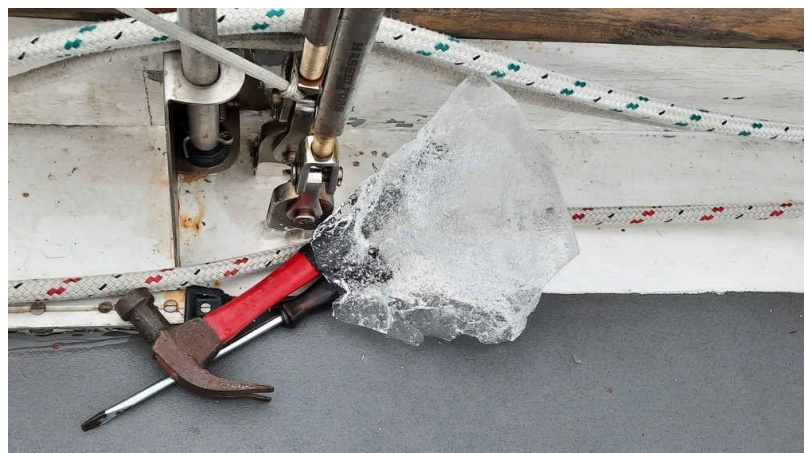
That night, Joost develops a special relationship with the ice chunk that keeps circling around the boat. It's as if it wants something from us but also stays at a safe distance. I suddenly recall that charter sailboat in Longyearbyen with the inscription "*Discover your inner explorer,*" but at that time, I didn't have a clear picture of it. Now Joost seems absent, in a kind of meditation, in a trance deeply immersed in the spiritual All. It seems that way. Physically present but mentally somewhere else, he realizes that the beautiful ice chunk outside the boat is named "Lisa." He pronounces it with a somewhat blurry gaze towards the infinite, looking at nothing in particular.



Back on Earth, he expresses his love for Lisa and demands that she belongs only to him. According to Joost, not everything needs to be shared among sailors.

Just like in memory of a loved one on their deathbed, a lock of hair is cut and then preserved in a special place,

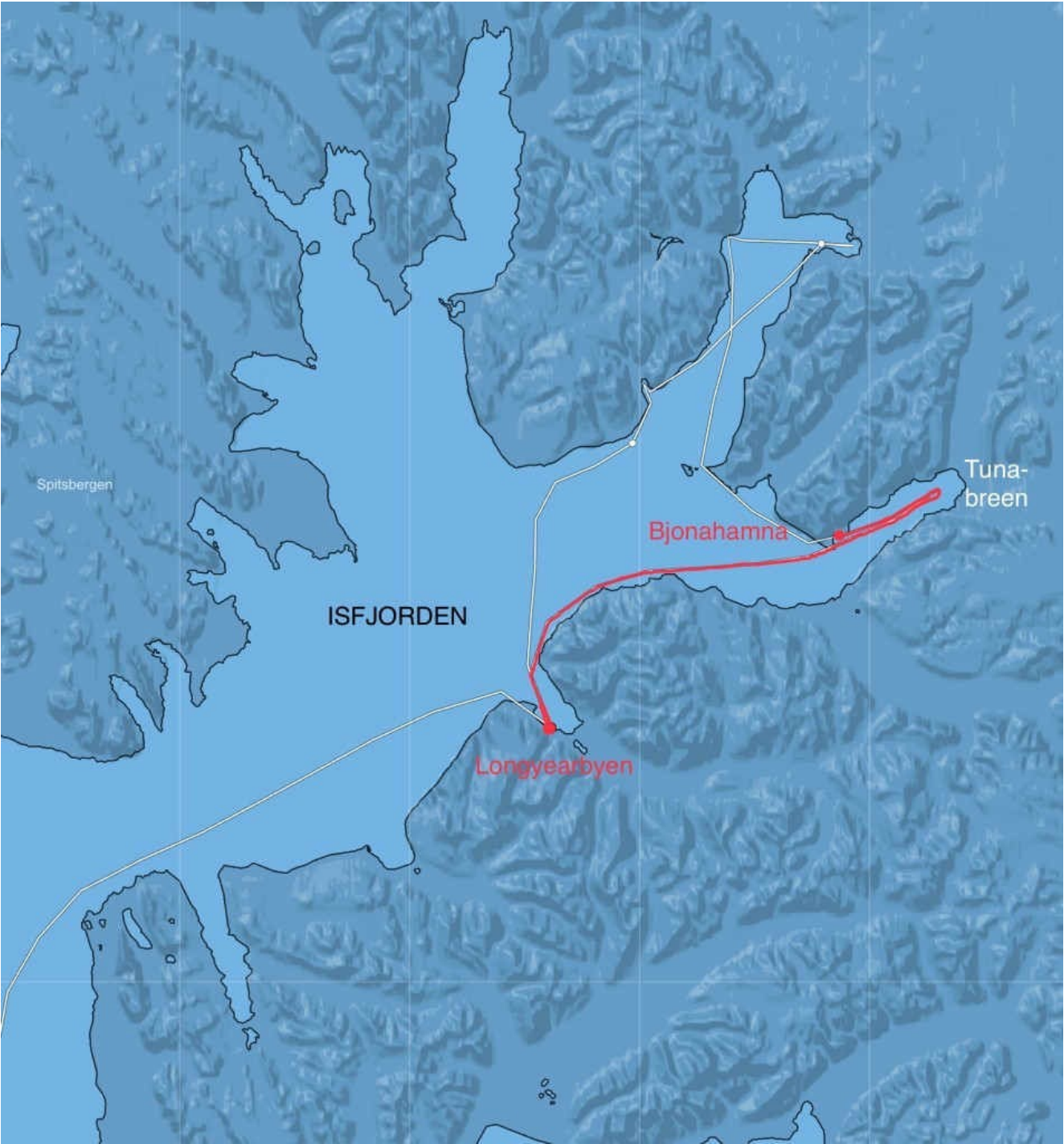
Joost steps into the Portland Purdy (the dinghy), rows to Lisa, and chips off one of her glittering limbs. 'For the whiskey tonight,' he says, seemingly without any compassion. But a little later, there's an undeniable tear, one of happiness.



And so, the more than 5000-year-old Lisa meets an inglorious end, in a glass of whiskey, only to be unabashedly returned to the ocean through the skipper's pee tube. We will never forget her.

Bjonahamna

July 1, 2022





Bjonahamna (the bay where we met Lisa) is our first destination after Longyearbyen. Bjonahamna, at a sailing distance of just under 25 nautical miles from Longyearbyen, is located on the southwest coast of Tempelfjorden at the base of Temple mountain.



The steep mountains with their columns resemble a temple, hence the similarity in the name. They are also called cathedrals. We recognize various figures in the columns, from monkey heads to familiar human faces and even Moais (Easter Island statues). It all depends on the position of the sun, your viewing angle, and the resulting shadows that the rock formations reveal.



On starboard, we see Villa Fredheim. The hunting cabin, built by Hilmar Nøis, also known as the king of Sassen. Fredheim was an important depot for him and other hunters. Nøis and his family lived there from 1920, raised children, and experienced 38 winters.



On the opposite side of Fredheim, at the foot of the Templet mountain, there are also a few hunters' huts that were used by Nøis and other hunters in the past. They are closed to tourists like us and barricaded with heavy shutters and doors fitted with protruding nails and barbed wire to keep polar bears out.



In the midst of this nature and history, Norna dropped her anchor in Bjonahamna, a beautifully sheltered bay. Most of the ice chunks from the Tunabreen glacier miss it, but a few touch the lower shore at the southwestern boundary of Bjonahamna. If the wind changes, they can pose a threat to the anchored boat.



We go ashore to stretch our legs and explore along the waterfront.

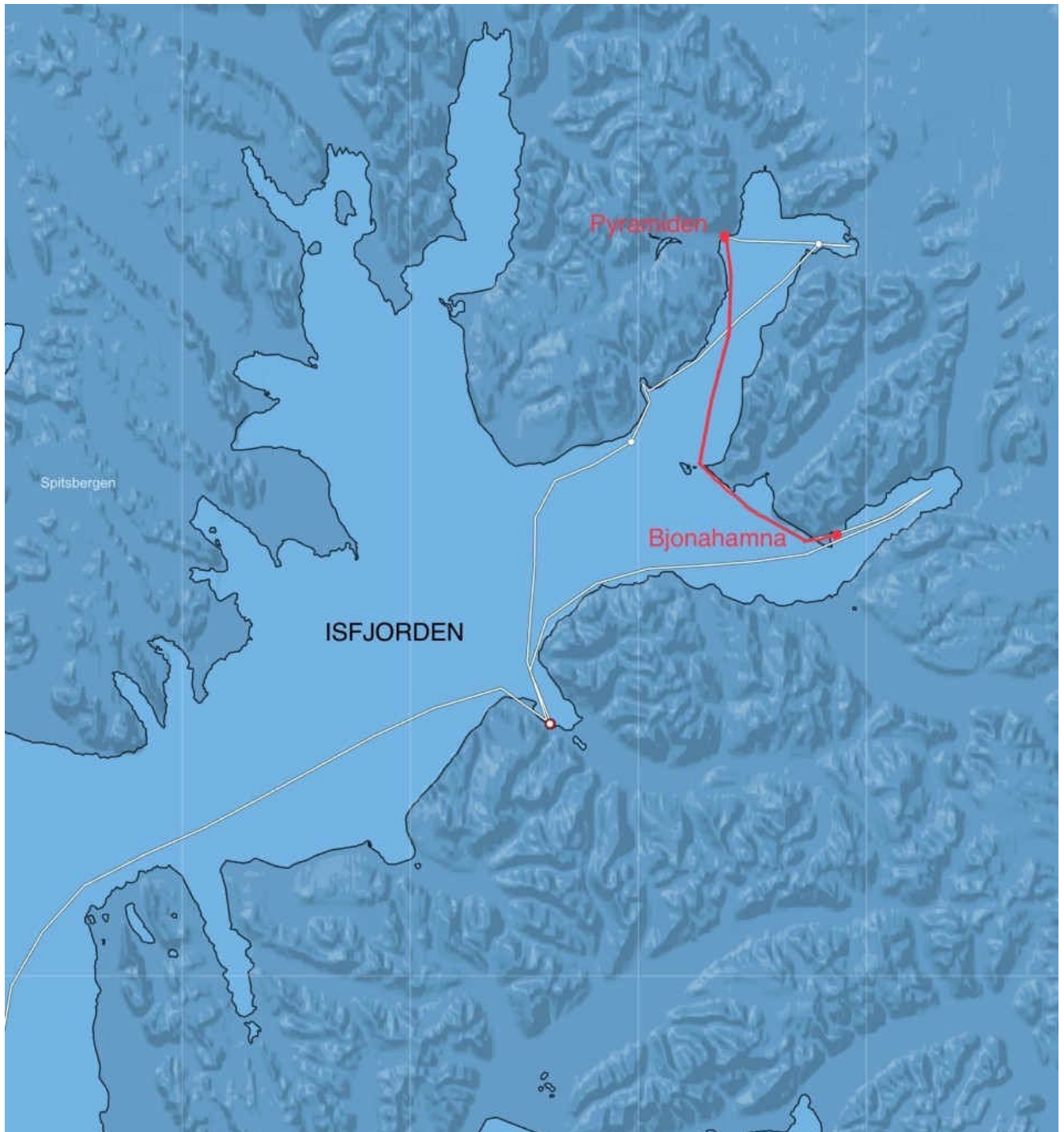


The Tunabreen glacier, about 6 nm. further than Bjonahamna, marks the end of the navigable Templefjorden.



Pyramiden.

July 2, 2022



At the back of the Billefjorden, on the northwest shore, lies Pyramiden, a disused Russian settlement named after the geometric shape of the adjacent mountain of the same name. The area was annexed by the Swedes around 1910 due to the promising coal mining possibilities. However, the geological conditions of the mountains made mining less profitable than initially thought. In 1927, they sold their rights to the Russian mining company.



Docked at the old transshipment port

The Russians built Pyramiden based on efficiency for coal mining. They also aimed to demonstrate to capitalist Europe that a communist society could thrive. By providing good facilities and salaries, they made it attractive for workers to come and work so far above the Arctic Circle. For leisure, there was a sports center, a swimming pool, library, museum, cinema, and theater. Children could attend school, and there was even a daycare center. Everything was in place for a good standard of living for the miners.

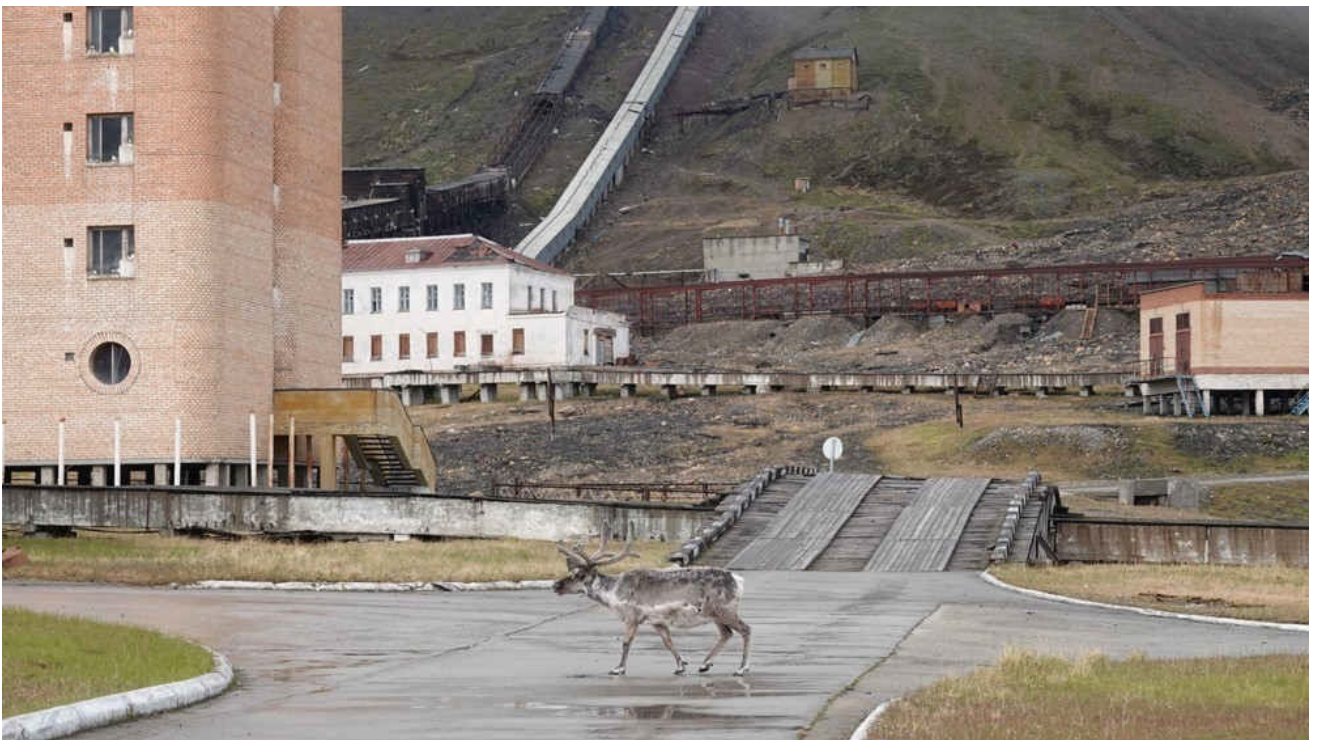
The climate and harsh weather conditions brought the residents of Pyramiden closer together, and they started taking care of each other. They began producing vegetables, meat, milk, and eggs, precisely as the Soviets wanted. For the residents of Pyramiden, this self-sufficiency in food production was tax-free and thus cheaper than importing from Russia.





The wooden buildings, many in a dilapidated state or collapsed, date back to the 1950s and earlier. Most of the stone buildings are from the 1970s and later, constructed in a distinct Soviet style.

In all of Pyramiden, there was only one point where you could connect with the outside world: the 'telephone place.' Here, an old phone from the Soviet era still hangs. It hasn't worked for years, but the location still rightfully retains its old name: only here can you catch a weak signal from Norwegian mobile providers.



The Russians also encountered problems with the challenging ore extraction due to the geological composition of the ground. Every few meters, they had to hack through hard rock, which yielded nothing but required a lot of energy and time. It doesn't seem to have been very profitable. Of the 9 million tons of ore extracted, 8 million were exported, and 1 million was burned in the local coal power plant. The mine's operation only ceased in 1998. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Pyramiden was completely abandoned and remained a kind of ghost town until 2007.



Where Pyramiden once had over 1000 inhabitants in productive times, nowadays, in the summer season, there are about 15 to 20. In the winter, half of that. Some buildings are maintained for housing, a bar, and a hotel. Daily, tourists are brought in from Longyearbyen, and they receive a brief guided tour under the supervision of an armed guide. The guide is armed because the danger of polar bears is present here as well. There are more polar bears than residents.

We are on our own and armed, so we are allowed to explore on our own as long as we stay away from everything, do not enter buildings (even if they are open), and stick to the marked paths. Of course, we comply with that (not). With respect for the heritage, we look at everything but don't touch anything.

What an impressive complex. We feel like we've stepped into a sort of time machine that ends in the late era of the Soviet Union. Walking through the village, dilapidated buildings, workshops, sheds, and even at the entrance to the mines, you get the idea that the residents and workers had to leave the city abruptly. Objects, writings, photos, newspapers, tools, a half-drunk bottle of alcohol, machine parts, etc., are scattered here and there.



You feel the presence of the Soviet doctrine everywhere. Lenin watches over his people, looking out over the main street with a view of the enormous Nordenskiöldbreen glacier at the end of the Adolfbukta fjord in the distance. Lenin stands with his back to the large sports complex. To his left is the swimming pool. On either side of the street, there are barracks in Siberian style. One of them, at the beginning, is still in use. When we get behind the swimming pool, Lenin can no longer see us, just like the guard at the beginning of the main street. We climb the old mine entrance that begins a little further on, at least for the low, dilapidated part. The tunnel with rail tracks and a climbing path extends infinitely high. Its roof disappears into the low-hanging clouds. The wooden railing is polished smooth by the many

hands it must have served. On the wall, there are yellowed VCA posters that, even if you can't read, clearly illustrate how to work safely in the mine.



Just like most other buildings, the seagulls have also annexed this dilapidated structure. Their noise and stench dominate the fresh air. However, their population is thinning out, as revealed by research conducted by students

whom Edmond approaches. In previous years, the population was much larger, and they are investigating the cause. Some seagulls are equipped with transmitters for tracking. They primarily obtain their food from



the glaciers, flying distances of 200 to 400 km to do so.



Of course, we don't skip the hotel bar. There's even the possibility to stay overnight. Weapons are not allowed inside for safety reasons, so they go into the safe. Just like in all other public buildings and shops in Svalbard, it's customary to take off your shoes. The lounge is as you would expect from a Soviet lounge. Educational books and games surround the area, heroic certificates from former mine bosses, Asian-inspired light fixtures, a pristine wooden parquet floor in various patterns, an abundance of geometric ornaments and decorations in wood and plaster, and soft leather armchairs where you can sink in completely. With an excellent IPA beer on tap, a talkative Russian, and a friendly but somewhat reserved Russian woman, our happiness is complete.



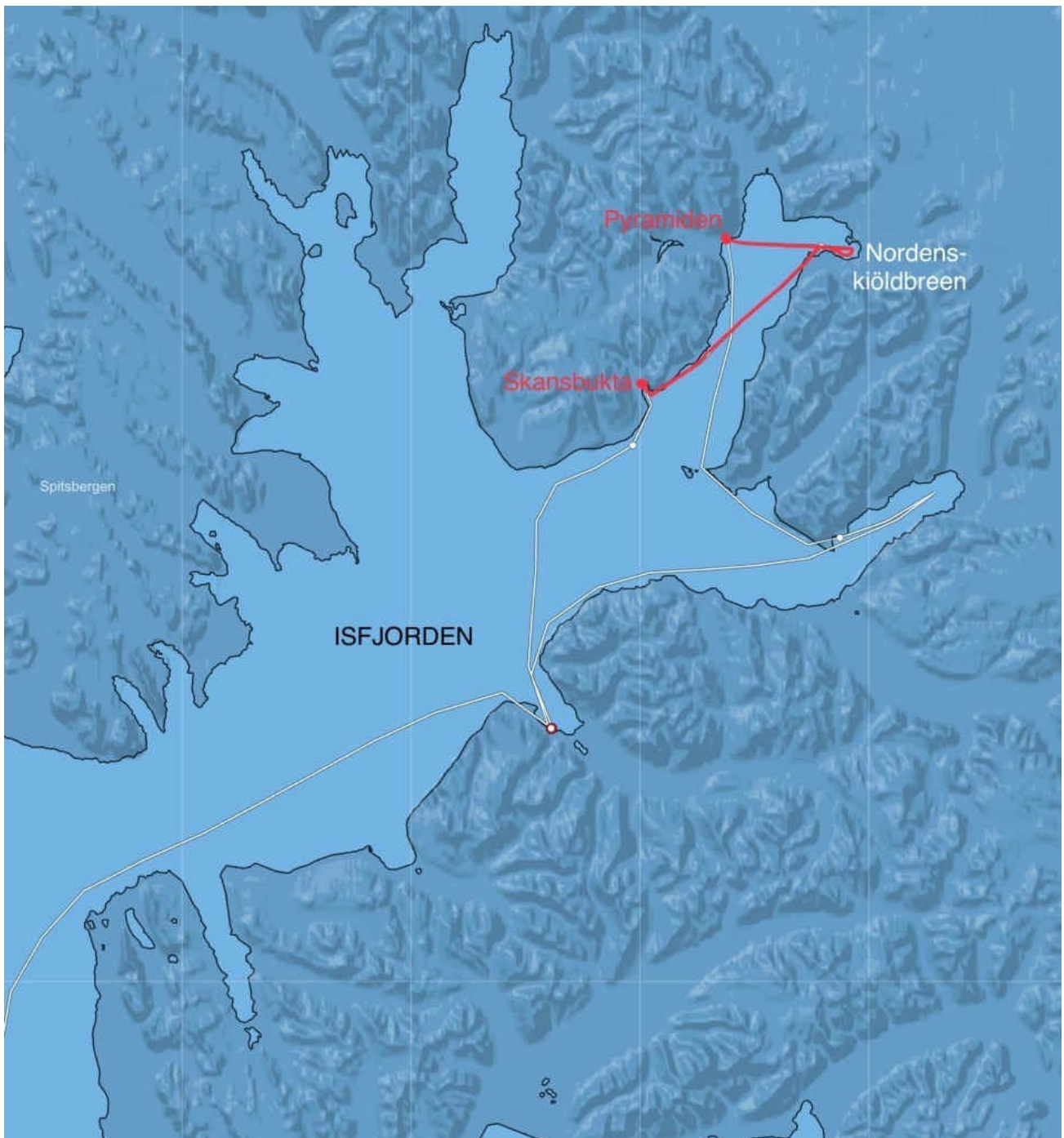
What are they still doing here, you wonder. The predominantly young Russian team dedicates themselves with heart and soul to maintaining Pyramiden. A new oil-fired heating plant has been built. Of course, tourist income helps to keep this going. However, it seems more like a geopolitical choice not to give up this piece of Russia on Svalbard. Just like Barentsburg, where we will go later. It's a political situation that the Russian we speak to cares little, if anything, about. For a moment, the war feels close again, which is also noticed here due to the boycotts that affect this Russian Pyramiden team. The Norwegian colleagues on Svalbard seem to be in a difficult position. Apparently, they reluctantly have to implement anti-Russian measures. This is obviously hard when the Russians are also your colleagues. The sense of solidarity seems strong. Our Russian friend enthusiastically talks about their team and Pyramiden, avoiding discussions about the hierarchical structure in which he has to work and live, and completely steering clear of political topics. He doesn't even mention his name, this devoted Lenin supporter.



Skansbukta

July 2, 2022

From Pyramiden, we set out for Skansbukta. But first, we visit the enormous Nordenskiöldbreen glacier on the other side of Pyramiden and at the end of Adolfbukta. We get close, navigating through an "unsurveyed area," but it seems deep enough and likely without obstacles. The drone comes out of the bag, and I capture footage as far as I dare fly towards the glacier. (To be continued)







Skansbukta is located in the outer part of the Billefjord and is situated in a bay that is protected from the wind in most directions. We drop anchor and lower the Purdey into the water again.





Edmond feels the urge to climb and goes on his way. Joost and I decide to stay on the beach. On the opposite side of where we are, we spot a trapper's hut and the wreckage of a boat. When we try to walk around, it turns out to be more challenging and farther than we thought. We sink deep into the sticky clay, and we have underestimated the distance. Moreover, it's questionable whether we can return when the tide comes in. The wise choice is to go back to the Purdey and cross the bay by boat.



On the other side of the bay, we visit the remnants of the gypsum mine that was once active here. The impressive cliffs of Stansen tower high above us.





Meanwhile, the wind has significantly increased, and the short waves in the bay have correspondingly grown higher. We are now departing from the leeward side towards the Norna at anchor, and it becomes a wet and cold venture. Throughout the journey, we haven't had such a challenging ride before.

Here are a few beautiful cloud formations:



Barentsburg

July 6, 2022

3 Juli 2022

Earlier, I had a completely different idea about "Barentsburg" in Spitsbergen. Something like a dilapidated settlement, so to speak. But the opposite is true. Barentsburg turns out to be a small industrial town that is still in operation with its current 200 residents.



Since 1921, this place has been named Barentsburg, as a tribute to the Dutch navigator Willem Barentsz who discovered Spitsbergen in 1596. The Dutch Spitsbergen Company intended to undertake large-scale mining operations. However, due to financial difficulties, this never materialized.

The Dutch left the mine and the settlement they had established guarded by a small number of people. One of them was Sjef van Dongen, who returned to the Netherlands in 1928 as a hero due to his rescue attempt of the stranded Italian polar explorer Umberto Nobile with his Zeppelin, the N2 Italia.

The Italian expedition was an attempt at revenge for the earlier Zeppelin expedition a few years before with the Norge, whose success had been claimed by Roald Amundsen, and therefore by Norway. A rescue attempt that, incidentally, ended in failure for Sjef van Dongen and proved fatal for Roald Amundsen, who, like many others, had also organized a rescue expedition for Nobile.



Barentsburg was sold in 1932 to the Soviet State Enterprise Trust Arktikugol for a fraction of the costs that the Dutch had already invested in it. During the Cold War, it turned out to be an excellent location for spying on the West, especially Norway. According to the Svalbard Treaty, to which Barentsburg was also subject, no military activities were allowed, so the interception of radio traffic was supposed to have only a civilian purpose. (?/!)



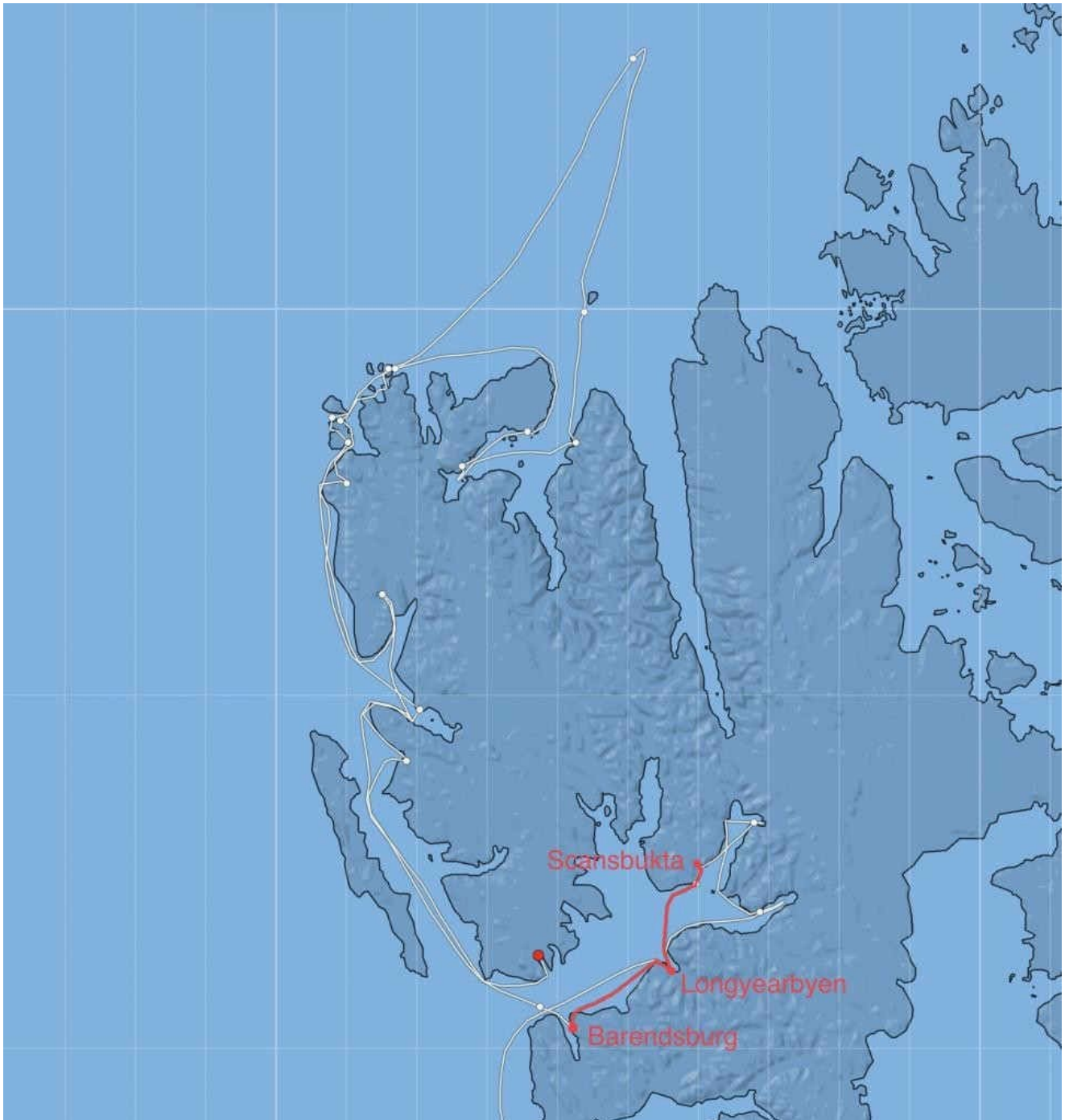
Barentsburg currently has around 200 residents, of whom 150 are actively involved in mining operations. Of course, Lenin is also watching over here.



Krasniy Medved is the beer brewery with a restaurant and bar. The water for the brewery comes from the nearby glacier and is transported by boat in the form of ice blocks. The brown and blonde beers, brewed with the addition of water from ancient glacier ice, taste excellent. Incidentally, the drinking water for Barentsburg comes from a lake on the other side of the fjord. A kilometer-long water pipeline has been laid for it, ending at a pumping station on the fjord's edge, from where it is further pumped to Barentsburg.



The wooden and typically Orthodox chapel was erected in memory of the 141 people, including miners and their families, who died in the plane crash in 1996 above Adventdalen. From Barentsburg, we head towards Ny-Ålesund further north.



Ny-Ålesund en Ny-London

July 7, 2022

4 Juli 2022

From Barentsburg, we sail straight to Ny-Ålesund, passing through Forlandsunde with the long stretch of Prins Karls Forland on the port side.



and on the starboard side is Oscar II Land.



Here, on our windward side, or rather, I smell, my first whale, probably a Northern Bottlenose whale. Approximately halfway, across the entire width of the Forlandsunde, there is a shallow area with a navigable track for us of around 3m. depth. Deeper-draft ships heading north or south must therefore sail along the outside (west side) of Prins Karls Forland. I get a track width of 3m. from Joost (!?) so that should work. 😊



At Kvadehuken(*), a flat protruding headland so named by Dutch whalers, we make a 3/4 U-turn starboard out of the Kongsfjorden. A breathtaking view of Kongsbreen, Kronebreen, and Kongsvegen, three glaciers that converge in the southeast corner of the Kongsfjorden, unfolds. Icebergs and ice floes in all shapes, sizes, and the most beautiful forms are now coming toward us.

(*)"Kvadehuken" can be translated to English as "Bad Corner" or "Evil Point."

On the starboard side lies Ny-Ålesund, almost invisible in this overwhelming nature, as a small settlement. Opposite it, on the port side, is the island of Blomstrandhalvøa with Ny-London.



Ny-Ålesund, one of the northernmost inhabited settlements, is indeed a place as I had imagined it, spacious and desolate with scattered buildings. The origin here also lies in mining, which, however, ceased in 1962 following a series of serious fatal accidents that affected the miners.





Nowadays, Ny-Ålesund is the center of Arctic scientific research. The houses are inhabited by scientists from all corners of the world. Of course, the Dutch are not absent, and there is a representation from the University of Groningen. Their residence is recognizable by the plastic tulips next to the front door. Other flags than the Norwegian ones are prohibited here. We speak with Dr. Maarten Loonen, the head lecturer, who tells us in a very engaging manner about their scientific work here, which has been ongoing for 33 years at this location.



Ny-Ålesund itself is super neat, tidy, and without decaying remnants or waste. The surroundings are littered with various instruments and measuring setups for researchers. In between, a reindeer grazes. Diesel refueling is 1 euro per liter cheaper than in Norway or the Netherlands. Filling up the tank to the brim (about 1000 liters) is therefore worthwhile here. We can't dispose of our waste here, except for glass for the glass container, so it goes back into the boat. I think all waste is kept indoors here to avoid tempting hungry polar bears.



My special interest lies in Ny-Ålesund as the departure point for North Pole expeditions at the beginning of the 20th century. Roald Amundsen was the first to reach the North Pole. The expedition departed from Ny-Ålesund in 1926 with the airship Norge to fly over the North Pole, dropping flags from Norway (expedition leader), the USA (financier), and Italy (Zeppelin), and then landing in the north of Alaska. The starting point of the airship can still be recognized by the existing steel mast structure to which the Zeppelin was attached. The enormous hangar built for the Zeppelin did not survive a storm, after which the wood was reused in various buildings.



Roald Amundsen

In 1925, the attempt to reach the North Pole by airplane (the N24 and N25) failed, and later in 1928, the airship Italia led by Umberto Nobile also crashed, resulting in the loss of half of its crew. A large-scale rescue operation was launched for Nobile, involving multiple countries with a total of 1500 people, including 22 airplanes, 15 ships, and 2 dog sled teams. Nobile was rescued after spending 48 days on the ice, thanks to the Russian icebreaker Krassin.

Sjef van Dongen from Barentsburg manned one of the two dog sled teams. He did not find Nobile and had to be rescued himself after a heroic journey. Back in the Netherlands, he was hailed as a polar hero.

Roald Amundsen also departed with an airplane from Tromsø to search for Nobile. Unfortunately, Amundsen lost his life when his plane crashed into the Barents Sea, somewhere between Tromsø and Bear Island. The rescue of Nobile was significant news at that time, making headlines in newspapers.



In the northernmost post office in the world, I send a few postcards. Although the postage stamp is canceled with a special postmark, I also use a few other stamps and stamp the back of the card with them. There's just enough space to write "Much love," etc.

Ny-London. North of Ny-Ålesund lies the island of Blomstrandhalvøa with the former settlement Ny-London. Here, we find the remnants of mining from 1911, also known as the marble fairy tale. The island, colloquially referred to as the marble island, seemed very promising for marble extraction at the time. The quality was expected to be excellent. Unfortunately, the yield was disappointing, and the quality turned out to be less than desired. By 1920, it was all over, and the fairy tale came to an end. What remains is now considered a valuable legacy from the early industrial period in Spitsbergen.



While crossing the fjord, we navigate between the drifting ice floes from starboard to port. We give them names like Swanny, Space Shuttle, Big Bertha, the Chinese, and others that I won't mention here. At least now we can name them instead of saying, "that one over there" or no, "the other one."

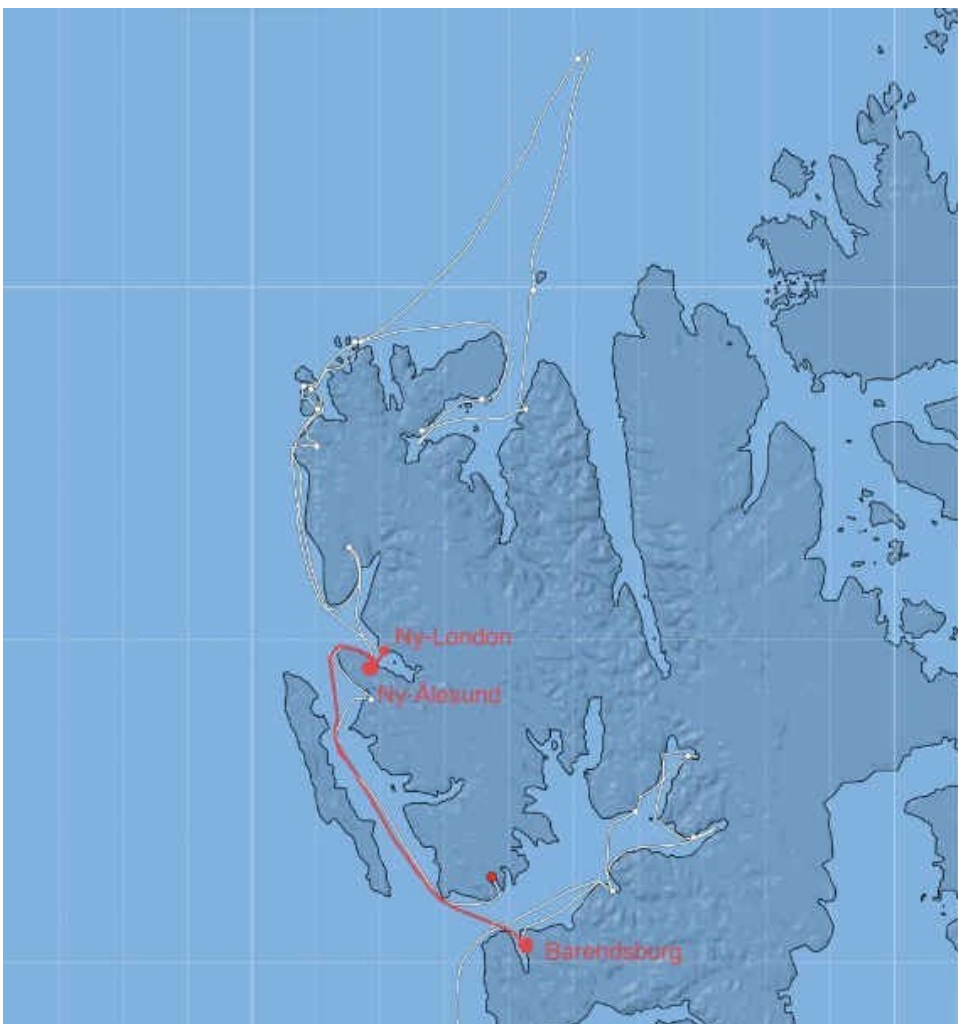


We go ashore with the boat and explore the surroundings, the industrial remnants from the marble era, and two remaining (and renovated) cabins from that period. The other structures, after a period of being a ghost town, were dismantled in 1933 and transported to Ny-Ålesund for reuse in the construction there. Edmond continues alone up the mountain, taking the weapon with him. A little later, the island is flooded with about a hundred tourists from a cruise ship, albeit under strict and armed

supervision. Their footprint is somewhat larger than ours.



We leave our anchor bay, Peirsonhamna, heading northwest towards the islands of Danskøya and Amsterdamoya in Svalbard.



To the North.

July 7, 2022

5-6 Juli 2022



We leave our anchor bay, Peirsonhamna, heading northwest towards the islands of Danskøya and Amsterdamoya in Svalbard.





Heading due north, we follow the coast of Albert I Land, known as the coast of the seven glaciers. Passing Magdalenefjorden on starboard, we enter Sørgattet and anchor in the bay beneath Danskeneset, in the southeast of Danskøya. Most of the ice floes from the Smeerenburgbreen drift past, flowing out of the Smeerenburgfjord. A few come into our bay. The boom ends have been equipped with pike points, allowing us to fend off any intrusive ice floes from Norna if necessary, but it proves unnecessary as they just miss us.



On the north side of Danskøya lies Virgohamna, one of Spitsbergen's most important historical sites. The oldest historical remnants are from the Dutch whalers, who called it "de Harlinger Kokerij" and established it in 1636. Around the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, Virgohamna, now named after the steamship "Virgo" of the Swede Salomon August Andrée, became the base for several attempts to reach the North Pole. After an earlier failed attempt in 1896, Andrée, along with two others, departed in 1897 in a hot air balloon toward the North Pole. They were never heard from again. It wasn't until 1933 that the remnants of the expedition and the bodies of the crew were found on Kvitøya island.

A few years later, Walter Wellman attempted a similar expedition from Virgohamna, but with a Zeppelin. Three times, in 1906, 1907, and 1909, these expeditions failed. It was only 20 years later that Roald Amundsen succeeded in reaching the North Pole with the Zeppelin "Norge."

We sail between Amsterdamøya and Danskøya, with "Smeerenburg" to starboard, following a course line indicated on the chart to keep us clear of shallows. Immediately after this passage, Virgohamna is on the port side. Unfortunately, the anchorage is too exposed under the current weather conditions, so we decide to look for another anchorage. We find one on the west side of Danskøya in Kobbefjord. After cautiously navigating through a very shallow section, which serves as a barrier for deeper-draft vessels to the bay beyond, we drop anchor close to the shore. For us, it's the ideal

anchorage, with sandy ground, in this far eastern corner of the fjord. A curious seal pops its black head above the water surface to see where all that sudden commotion is coming from.



Just before the shallow passage to the basin in the far eastern corner, where we dropped anchor, there is a small island named "Postholmen." During the whaling period, this island served as a "post office." Whalers on hunting expeditions would leave their mail for home here, which would then be picked up by the ships returning home.



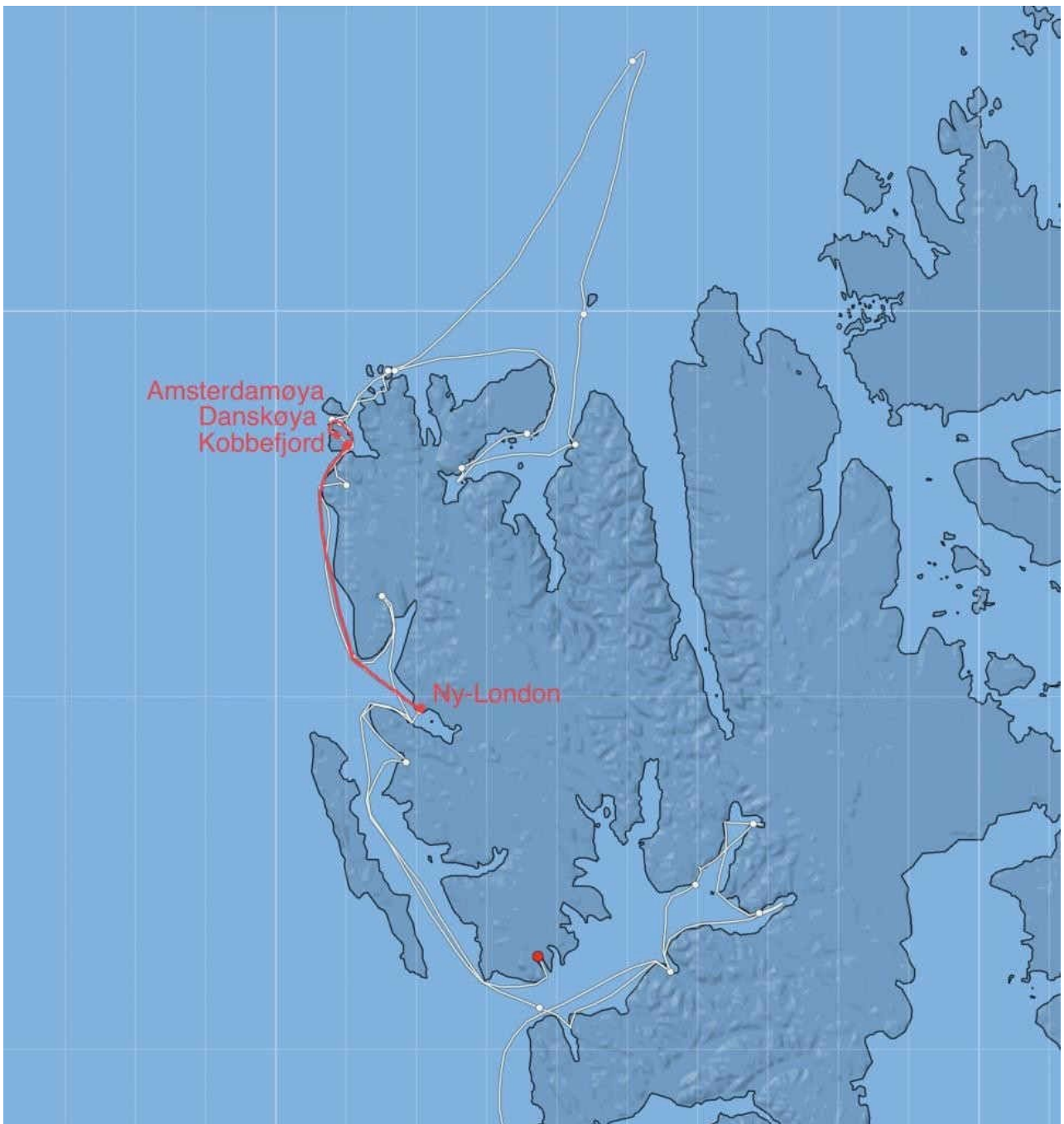
The wind, not particularly strong in itself, funnels through the mountains here and then, with multiplied force, gusts over our anchored bay, occasionally prompting Norna to realign herself behind her anchor more forcefully.

On the VHF radio, we hear that a polar bear has been spotted at our anchorage from yesterday. Edmond takes beautiful photos of anchored Norna from the top of the mountain. We wave down to him, and with a telephoto lens, we can spot him among the rocky peaks.



Ship's council. We actually want to go to Virgohamna and Smeerenburg, but the weather conditions are still the same as yesterday, so not ideal for anchoring there. Therefore, we decide to sail a bit further north and east, along the north of Spitsbergen.

We depart this evening on July 7, just before 19:00, from our anchorage in Kobbefjord towards Liefdefjorden, where we will arrive tonight or in the early hours of Friday, taking advantage of the expected westward shift in the wind.



Liefdefjorden

July 8, 2022

At seven o'clock in the evening, we depart from Kobbefjord. It will be a longer journey again, extending into the night, so we immediately reinstate our watch schedule. On the furthest point of land in Smeerenburg (where I lost my favorite hat yesterday), a group of walrus is sunbathing

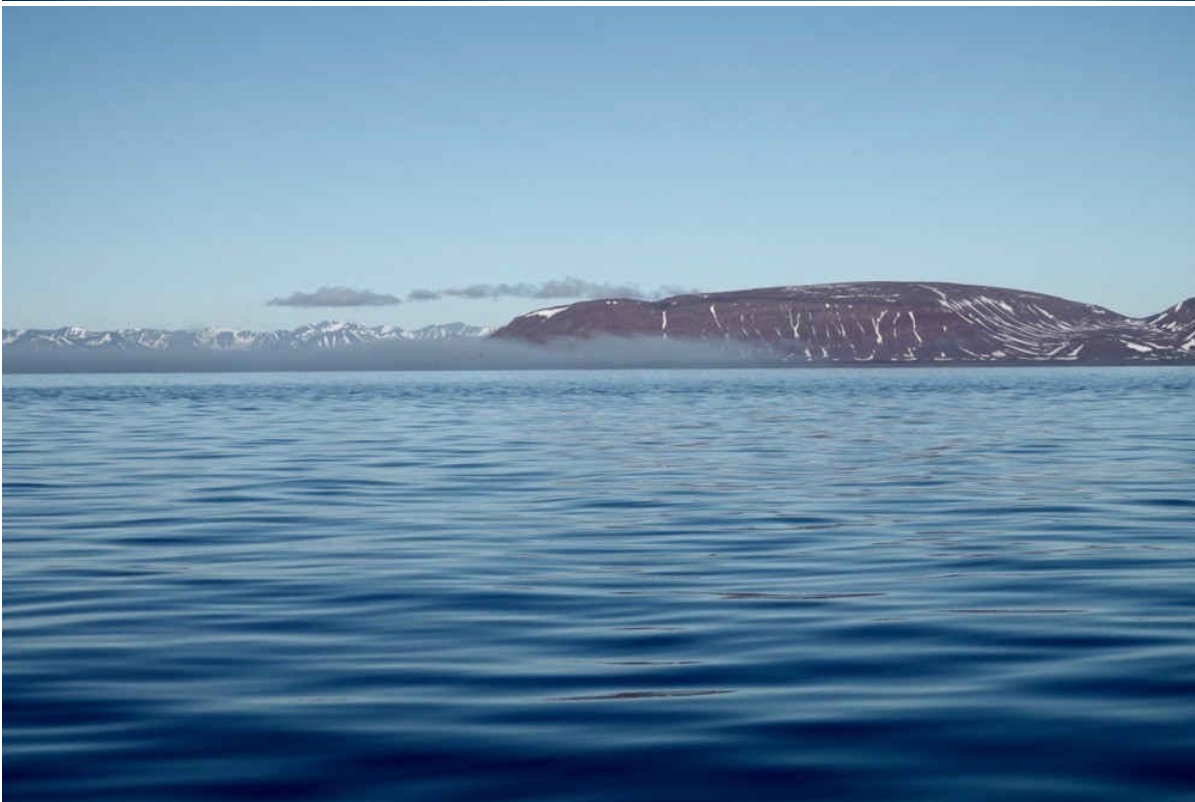


The boss is lying by the water, keeping an eye on his harem. We are sailing on a northwesterly course, leaving the Smeerenburgfjord and heading towards "Fair Haven," so named because of the numerous sheltered waters between the islands.



We pass through the narrow strait between Udkiken (translation=Lookout) and Norskøysund and head into open water. By that time, at 9 PM, it's my turn for watch duty. Unfortunately, the wind completely dies down, and under a radiant sun, the sea turns into a smooth surface.





On the very sharp horizon, a narrow strip of white clouds hangs above the water. Ahead, there is a dark gray band over the water. It seems distant but at some point, it also appears between us and the coast. It looks like a wall of mist that we could sail into at any moment. It has a mystical quality. But every time I think I can touch it, it becomes transparent, and I can see through it.



However, it becomes cold and humid. The sun continues to shine unabated, standing high above the horizon. Again, I spot a whale, but when I try to take a photo, it, whether he or she, stays away and doesn't return. At midnight, I wake up Edmond to take over the watch. At 3:00 in the morning, we anchor in Worsleyhamna. By then, I am already deep in dreamland and don't experience it anymore..





In the morning, we lower the dinghy using a repaired spinnaker halyard. It got jammed in the block at the top of the mast yesterday. Edmond fixed a new block at the top. Onshore, there's a lot of washed-up wood, but also a significant amount of plastic. The trapper's hut is called "Villa Oxford," and Joost signs the guestbook. We also spot paw prints of a polar bear.



At the end of the morning, we set sail and continue further into Liefdefjord. The number of icebergs and ice floes increases significantly. They originate from the at least 4 km wide glacier wall of the Monacobreen. Joost and Edmond try the ice hook. It works in the sense that Norna is pushed away. The ice floe doesn't budge.



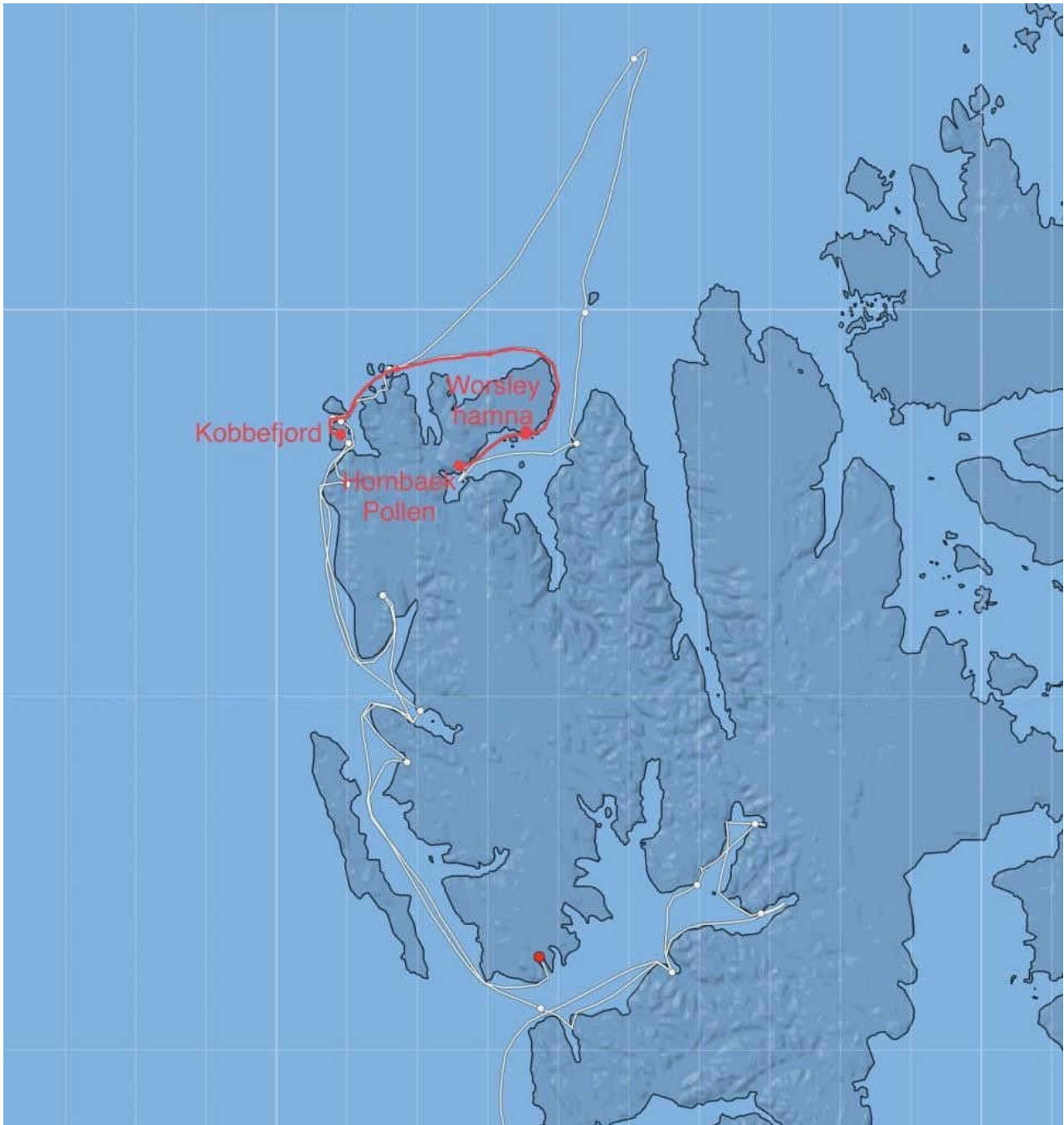
We anchor in a small sheltered bay, Hornbaekpollen, slightly south of the Trapper's hut "Texas Bar." Under Edmond's guidance (an experienced climber), I climb the steep moraine wall formed by the Erikbreen glacier. I never thought I could climb such a steep mountain of loose rocks. What a beautiful experience this is! Once we get over it, we reach the glacier and go up a bit. First through some loose snow and later over ribbed ice.

It's actually indescribable and unphotographable how overwhelming this is.



Back on the boat, Joost has already prepared the food. I am still somewhat stunned by everything, release the drone for a moment, but it actually only provides a pale reflection of what I have just seen and experienced.





Mushamna.

July 10, 2022

Saturday morning, July 9th, we weigh anchor. The destination is the anchor bay Mushamna on the east side of Woodfjorden. Yesterday evening, we heard through the VHF radio that a polar bear family had been spotted on an island across from where we are anchored. The cruise ships share such interesting information among themselves to please their guests. Afterward, they launch a few RIBs (rigid-hulled inflatable boats) to get a closer look.

It's quite remarkable how many cruise ships actually navigate these waters. Not the enormous giants, but usually in a size ranging from 50 to 150 meters. A Dutch shipping company is also actively participating with vessels like the Plancius, Ortelius, and other "us" ships. We saw the Plancius on AIS departing with the destination "ICE EDGE," a location that is also on our itinerary.



Before heading to Mushamna, we first venture deeper into the Liefdefjord, stopping just before, well, about 1000 meters away from the ice wall of the Monacobreen glacier.



To get there, we navigate between icebergs and floes. It's manageable, there's quite a bit of space between them. We feel like there was more ice yesterday. Looking backward, it seems like an ice field with all those floes we've passed. One of the namesakes of my boat, the "FRAM," is also there, an expedition ship from Hurtigruten.



Turned around and heading towards Mushamna, the engine can be turned off, and the jib is set. Now, with a fair wind on the quarter, we tack again between the ice floes.



Portside is the Erikbreen glacier that I examined closely with Edmond. Starboard side are the islets where the polar bear family was spotted yesterday. Now there is nothing to be seen.





Mushamna is a virtually enclosed bay. A narrow passage, no wider than about 10 meters, connects the bay to the fjord. Once inside, we anchor in the northeast corner, just off the Toreldallen delta. Due to visual deception, the bay seems to be above the sea when looking from the inside over the fjord on the outside. It's like a little lake. Further exploration is postponed until Sunday.





Sunday, July 10.

While Joost and Edmond take a walk along the coast towards the hunter's cabin at Mattilasodden, I launch the drone. I'm getting more skilled with it, and I dare to fly further away. Still, if the signal is lost for a moment, I have a small moment of panic. It remains exciting. The control is only through the screen on the phone, and as a novice drone pilot, I first try to orient myself, where is the sun, and where is the boat, so I know how to fly back. Now that the dinghy is away, I have a nice landing spot on the foredeck.



July 10, Tonight, after dinner, we head towards the polar ice. Let's see how far north we can go. The weather is favorable, with a south wind pushing us north and a north wind for the return journey south. If everything goes well...



Polar Ice.

July 11, 2022

Yesterday evening, we lifted anchor and left Mushamna, heading northeast towards the polar ice. We pass by the island "Moffen," a nature reserve and an important resting place for walrus. We observe a large group on the south side of the island. Access to the lagoon-shaped island is prohibited between May and September, and there is a minimum distance of 300 meters from the coast.



Today, on July 11th, we arrived at the Arctic ice edge around 11AM in the morning, earlier than expected, at a latitude of 80°37' North. Last week, we had hoped to reach 81° North, but the ice has shifted about 30 miles southward over the past week, according to the satellite ice map we receive.

The ice forms a nearly continuous front of ice floes, with solid pack ice further ahead. When observed from above with the drone, it appears that there is still quite a bit of open water between the ice floes. However, we prioritize safety and maintain a distance. Only small pieces of ice are floating around us. Along the ice edge, a whale briefly makes an appearance.



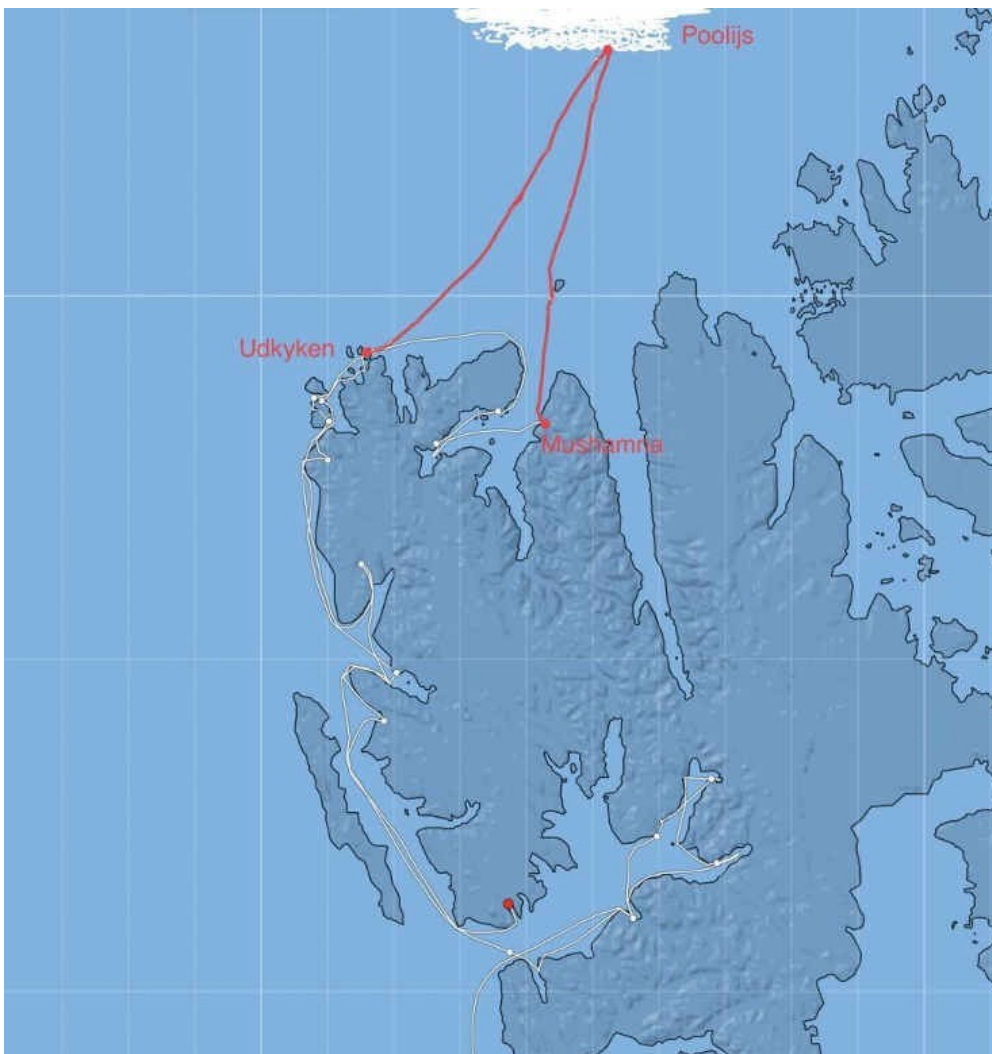
With this, we have reached the northernmost position of our journey. It's powerful to achieve this on our own keel. What an enormous experience!

It has suddenly become ice-cold. A fantastic feeling, perhaps strange to say by me. The ice makes itself heard through its movements in the water. I feel that we are truly at "the edge" of the inhabited world, as far as we can go. The North Pole is only 563 nautical miles away.

As far as you can see, and that is very far in this clear air, you only see one vast ice expanse. To the south, the coastline of Ny-Friesland and Albert I land, about 60 nautical miles away, is still sharply defined on the horizon. It's so clear, despite the cloudy sky.



We float around for an hour, take photos, and release the drone. It's an impressive and magical hour that I won't soon forget. Then, we turn the bow back to the southwest and head towards "Fair Haven."



Virgohamna

July 13, 2022

Udkyken, the mountain, is located on the island of Ytre Norskøya, one of the islands in this area also known as "Fair Haven." We dropped anchor on the south side of it.



The island was one of the important whaling stations in the first half of the 17th century. The remains of nine blubber ovens can still be found along the shore. The burial mound is one of Spitsbergen's largest historical cemeteries with 165 graves. Human remains and clothing items from 50 graves have been removed and are now on display in the museum as part of the Smeerenburg collection.





Walking and scrambling to the easternmost point of the island, aptly named "Utkykpunten" (Outlook Point), we come across another grave with remnants of what was once a coffin.





Weighing anchor, we embark on a meandering journey through numerous islands towards Holmiabreen. There, we can get very close until we touch the ground in this still quite extensive "unsurveyed area."





Subsequently, we set a course for Fuglefjorden, which is already clearly defined in the distance due to the numerous floating ice pieces originating from Svitjordbreen. It turns out to be less imposing when you're right in the middle of it, as most chunks are small.



I am wondering if I would dare to sail through here with my own boat. I am thinking about the extra aramid reinforcement I have applied to the bow and bottom. It should be possible, I believe, with caution and gentle maneuvering.

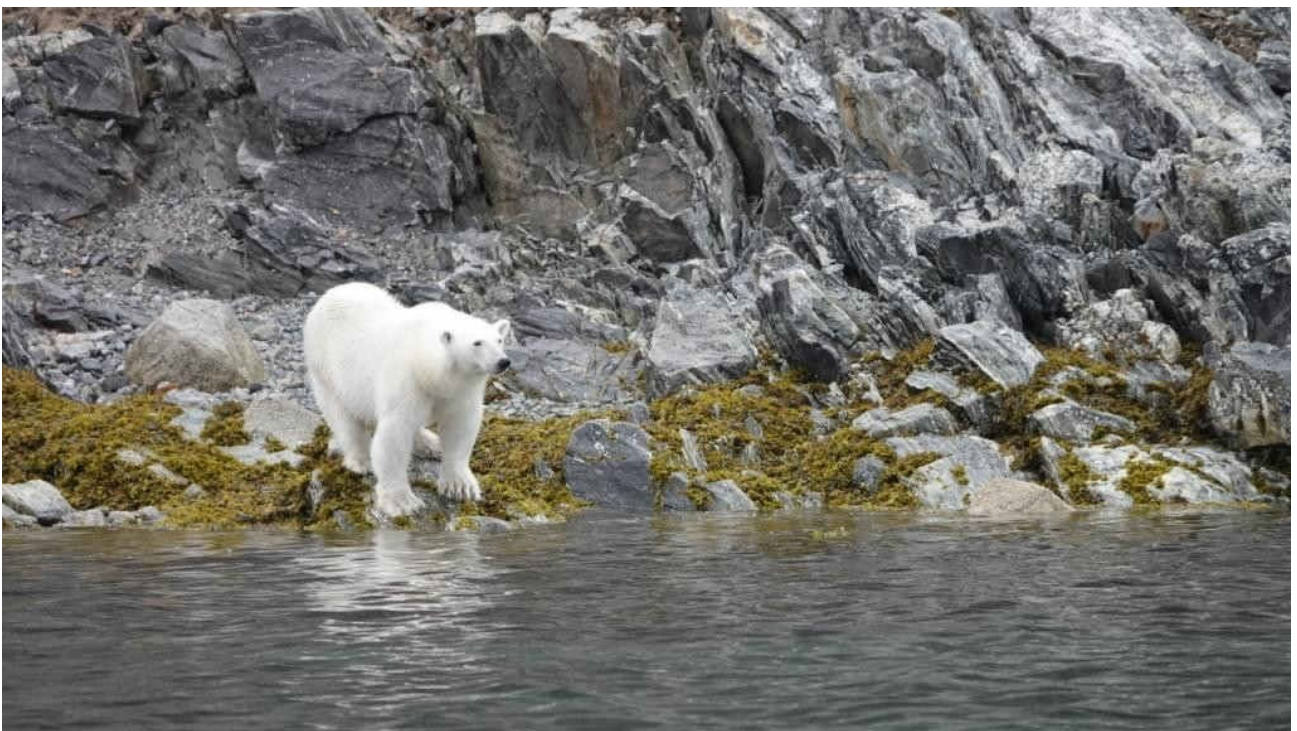


After rounding Fuglepynten, we cross the Smeerenburgfjord to Danskegattet, the passage between Amsterdamøya to starboard and Danskøya to port. The group of walrus is still there (on Smeerenburg). A little further, Virgohamna opens to port, our destination for today.





We drop the anchor far back in the bay. It's too late to go ashore. However, I launch the drone and orient myself to the remains of the Wellman expedition. By the way, the above photo is not from the drone but taken by Edmond, standing on top of Holandberget. Norna Biron is visible as a white dot, just to the right of the island.



The morning of Wednesday, July 13, we are awakened by knocking on the hull. It's a RIB (Rigid Inflatable Boat) from a nearby cruise ship, alerting us to a polar bear on the shore. Indeed, he or she is very close to us on the shore, calmly surveying potential future snacks. Behind a boulder, there is already some prey.



It seems to be the same seal from last night. We'll wait a bit before going ashore. Incidentally, that is strictly prohibited unless you have obtained permission from the Syssemmannen in advance. And we have that. In the preparations in the Netherlands, Joost arranged that with foresight for the period from July 9th to 13th! "Just in time" so.

We'll wait a bit before visiting the historical sites ashore. However, we explore the island that roughly divides the bay. Here too, remnants of blubber ovens and graves can be found. There is also a small hut with shelter.

On the way back, we leave the dinghy where this morning the polar bear was watching us. The last thing we saw was him or her climbing the mountain slope and then disappearing out of sight. Incidentally, he does that with great ease, which diminishes the illusion for the mountaineers among us that being on top of the mountain keeps you safe from bears.

Virgohamna is one of Spitsbergen's most important historical cultural sites. To somewhat protect the remnants of past activities here, landing is restricted. This doesn't take away the fact that before us, at least 100,000 visitors have been here, leaving little behind.



Our first visit ashore is to the "spoils" of the polar bear. Indeed, it turns out to be a seal. What remains is a gnawed skeleton. The harp seal skin, which we saw him pulling and eating, is still there with some meat and fat.

In our east-to-west path, we find the remnants of:

- Andrée's balloon expedition to the North Pole, 1896 and 1897 – graves of Dutch whalers from the 17th century
- House of Arnold Pike 1888
- Whale oil ovens of the "Harlingen Kokerij" 1636
- Walter Wellman's Zeppelin expedition to the North Pole in 1906, 1907, and 1909

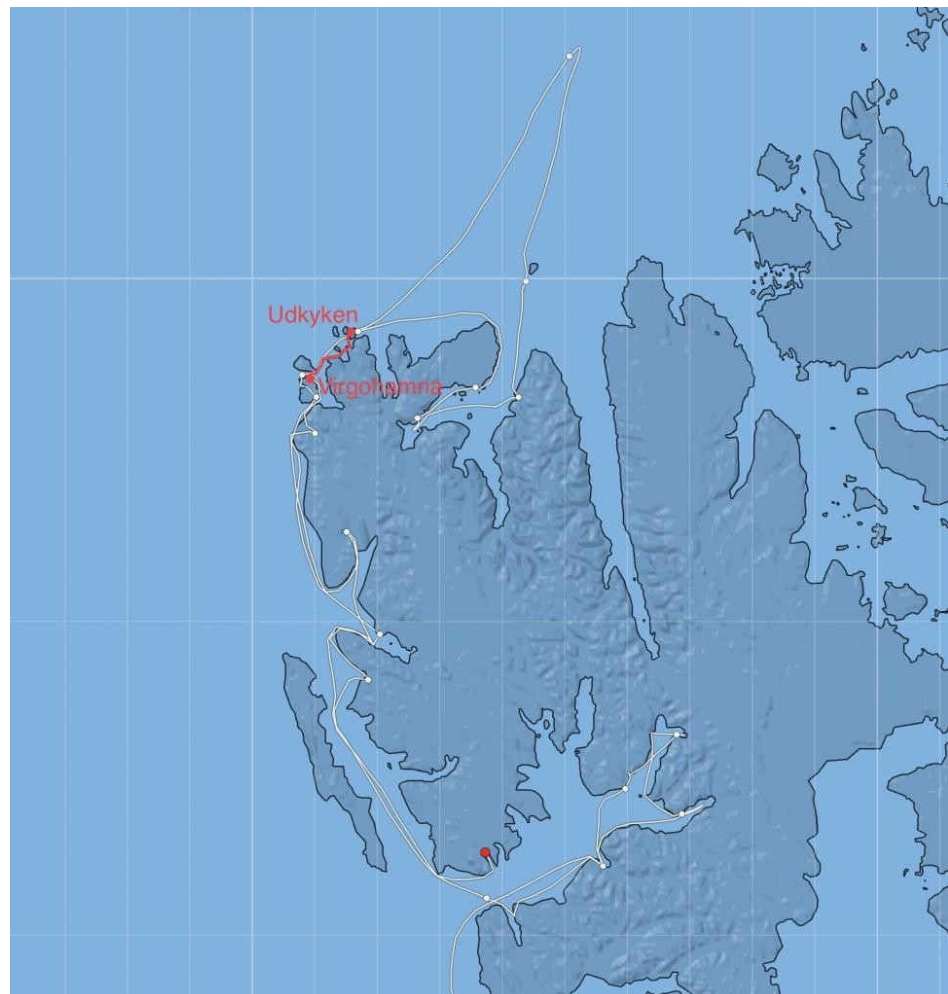
Of course, we keep a sharp eye on the surroundings due to the presence of the polar bear. In the distance, every patch of snow seems like a polar bear. Knowing that it's there makes such a walk feel different than when you are unaware. We make jokes about it. That polar bear is surely watching us closely from behind a rock, waiting for the right moment to strike... and so on.

On the mountainside, one spot is less white than the others. It's also moving. There, we've spotted our polar bear again. We continue the walk in a western direction toward the remains of Wellman's expedition and then head back to the dinghy. We don't want to take the risk of the polar bear coming between us and the dinghy. After all, safety comes first.



Back on the boat, I launch the drone to see if I can still spot the polar bear. It turns out, he is still lying in the same spot on the mountainside. It's an excellent rocky point with a kind of moss bed. I stay at a considerable distance and zoom in. However, he senses something, not sure what it is, gives a roar, rubs his eyes, scratches his belly, turns around, and continues with what he was doing - sleeping.

Just before I want to send this post, the polar bear shows himself again on our side of the mountain. I wonder if he will come closer to us again. The sealskin still has some tasty treats in it.



Smeerenburg.

July 14, 2022

Smeerenburg, a notable piece of Dutch glory, was the center of whaling in the first half of the 17th century. It was Willem Barentsz, the discoverer of Spitsbergen, who, upon returning to Holland, recounted the abundance of whales in the fjords of Spitsbergen. They had to navigate through them; there were so many.

However, it wasn't until 1614 that the Amsterdam Chamber of Commerce began to explore the possibilities of whaling in Spitsbergen. The oil extracted from whales was a crucial ingredient for various products such as soap, textiles, lubricants, fuels, paint, and more. The baleen, or whalebone, was used, among other things, in corsets to shape the distribution of fat in the female body for a more appealing form.



Smeerenburg

Gradually, on the southeastern headland of Amsterdamoya, an area emerged where whales were processed into oil. Initially, temporary camps were set up, but later, accommodations were built for the stay of seasonal workers, storage of supplies, and workshops. Since the Dutch lacked experience in whaling and its processing, they brought along Basques who had been involved in whale hunting in Southern Europe for centuries. The "art" was learned from these Spanish specialists and adapted.

In a short time, there was a kind of "gold rush" for whales with inevitable conflicts between different parties and countries. Conflicts are never good for trade. The necessary warships for protection only had a negative impact on profitability. Therefore, driven by the Dutch entrepreneurial spirit, a treaty was established among countries, granting Holland a monopoly for the waters north of the Magdalenefjorden and England south of it. Other countries, such as Norway and Denmark, had their claims in different parts of the archipelago.



Smeerenburg originated as the Dutch settlement for whaling. During its heyday, about 200 people worked there. Each winter, they returned home, and upon their return the following year, something had usually been plundered by competitors or destroyed by winter storms.

Overwintering, to maintain and guard the settlement, proved unsuccessful. Overwinterers died from cold and hunger. The ships that came to Spitsbergen were essentially cargo ships with about 6 boats on board. The ships remained anchored under Smeerenburg throughout the entire whaling season. The boats were used to bring in the whales. They hunted the Greenland whale, a large, sluggish creature and a poor swimmer. These whales were abundant in the area, had the desired thick layer of blubber, and conveniently floated when killed. They were the ideal whale for the whalers.



Tryworks

The tryworks (traanovens(*)) were situated as close as possible to the waterfront, where the whales were pulled ashore and cut into pieces. The pieces of blubber were melted in a large copper kettle (2 to 3 meters in diameter), which was set up in a ring of stones. The distilled oil was filtered once more and then stored in barrels on board the ships.

(*)Tryworks were facilities used for processing whale blubber into oil during the whaling industry's heyday. They consisted of large cauldrons or boilers where the blubber extracted from whales was heated to extract oil. The process involved boiling or "trying out" the blubber to separate the oil, which was then collected and stored.

The stench must have been unbearable for us civilized Westerners, but the seasonal workers did not know much else. Presumably, life in Holland was not much better. The found remnants of clothing were surprisingly well-preserved after 400 years, not only due to the cold climate but also because of the impregnation with oil, fumes, and fats.

Around 1640, the easily catchable whales in and around Spitsbergen were depleted, and the hunt gradually moved to open sea. This change led to a different treatment of the whales. The whales were tied alongside the ship, cut into pieces, and stored on board. Only back in Holland was the stored blubber processed into oil. This gradually rendered the land-based ovens and processing capacity obsolete. From the second half of the 17th century, whaling became entirely sea-based, and Smeerenburg was abandoned. There was no longer a need for safe harbors, and Spitsbergen lost its position in whaling.

Along the edges of the polar ice, whaling then experienced a tremendous boom, with many European countries participating. By the end of the 18th century, it was over, and the Greenland whale was practically extinct.



We are still anchored in Virgohamna. Last night, Edmond climbed to the top of Hollanderberget on his own, and at its southeastern base lies Smeerenburg.



In the meantime, Joost and I are visited by the Sysselmannen (*). Two nice young guys who, after some insistence, are up for a cup of coffee in Norna's salon. In principle, they inspect all ships, including ours. Our permits are requested, examined, and copied; they ask about how we handle safety, where we've been, where we're going, how we communicate, etc.

(*)The Sysselmannen is the Norwegian term for the Governor of Svalbard. The Sysselmannen is the highest authority on Svalbard and is responsible for maintaining law and order, safety, and environmental protection on the islands. They also handle matters related to permits, inspections, and various administrative functions. The term "Sysselmannen" translates to "the district governor" in English.

Everything on Norna Biron is in perfect order, and they compliment us for that. They reveal that they camp in a hut near Magdalenefjorden for a month, coincidentally our destination for the next day. They conduct their inspections from there using a fast RIB. After a month, they are replaced by the next team.

We exchange some questions and answers about the polar bear we saw here and the general threat. They also agree that my signal pistol is the best defense mechanism. The flare creates a lot of noise and fire, which is more effective in deterring polar bears than a gunshot. Directed shooting, which rarely or never seems to occur, is only for extreme life-threatening situations.



Thursday morning, July 14th, Edmond and I cross the Sørgattet again with the dinghy, with Smeerenburg as our destination. It's an enormously large open area, once again with fresh prints of polar bear paws. The structures of the buildings are barely visible, mostly reduced to foundation remnants. Along the water, we see the remains of tryworks, mainly consisting of bricks and a hardened mixture of oil, fat, blubber, and sand, forming a circular shape that merely outlines the contours of the trywork. What a mess it must have been

there. Living and working in a hostile environment surrounded by intense smells, oil, fat, rotting meat, and blubber, is hardly imaginable, but it happened here.



At the very tip of Smeerenburg, the same group of walrus we spotted from the water earlier is still present.



Back on the boat, we lift the anchor and head towards Magdalenefjorden on another sun-drenched day. Outside, it's a warm 12°C, scorching in the sun. Inside, it's too warm.

Magdalenefjorden.

July 16, 2022

It's not far to sail from Virgohamna. Magdalenefjord is a "must-see" site, and this is reinforced as we sail into it. The view of multiple glaciers becomes commonplace. Of course, in the distance, we spot another cruise ship anchored in front of one of the glaciers to let its passengers disembark.



We take a short round. The once massive Waggonwaybreen glacier has retreated far, just like the glaciers on either side. Once, this was one large continuous glacier wall. It is still depicted as such on our nautical chart. We can deduce from the markings on the mountain ridges approximately how far the vertical glacier wall used to extend.



In the last 20 years, the glaciers here have also shrunk enormously. We see the largest icebergs we've encountered so far. They are like entire islands. You could easily dock and step ashore, but we manage to resist that temptation.

The cruise tourists in the RIBs are wearing those hospital face masks. It's a strange sight, really. What was that for again? We realize that we've been cut off from all the news for weeks. Oh yes, that was Corona, does that still exist?

Our world is currently simple and small, overwhelmingly beautiful, and both comfortable and challenging.

We anchor behind the headland of Graveneset, out of the path of the ice floes and just in front of the hut of the Sysselmannen. It's called Trinityhamna here. We are welcomed with loud snorting and breathing, accompanied by the foul smell of Walrus breath. Wally the walrus swims around the boat for a while, apparently curious about the new visitors in his territory. He seems to find it all okay but stays nearby.

<https://youtu.be/Ld1pWvR2yKw?si=SFBLcdKbZoa4qJM>(short Wally vid)



We visit Graveneset, originally an English whaling station with remnants of various ovens and a massive burial mound with about 130 graves, mainly dating back to the 17th and 18th centuries. There isn't much left. The deceased were buried in wooden coffins with a stone cover, as deep as the permafrost allowed. Due to further permafrost expansion, the coffins were pushed back up. Polar bears knew how to deal with them, but souvenir hunters, especially in the 20th century, also caused a lot of damage. Nowadays, there is a fence around it with a strong request not to enter the area.



Back on the boat, Edmond takes a refreshing dip, and Joost chips some ice from a stray ice floe for our whiskey. Today, once again, is a sun-drenched day.

While Wally does some laps around the boat, our happy hour becomes one of those moments of bliss.



Signehamna en Engelsbukta

July 17, 2022

The Magdalenefjord fades away as our next destination is Signehamna in the Lilliehöökfjorden. I spend the journey there writing a story based on a few keywords I had jotted down in Bodø. The endlessly passing blue waters of the Arctic Ocean on the starboard side now provide enough inspiration to craft a readable tale.



I will need a few more days before I post it.....



Signahamna is a bay on the port side of the fjord as we sail towards the enormous Lilliehöökbreenn glacier. I believe it is the largest glacier we have seen so far, with an almost 10 km wide glacier front. We navigate through numerous ice floes until we can turn to port towards the bay of Signahamna. Due to its location, sideways from the fjord, the bay remains mostly free of drifting ice.



Hidden behind the first hill of Signehamna are the remnants of a German weather station from World War II. Established in 1941 by the Germans to gather crucial weather information for their war machine in the North Atlantic Ocean. Due to its location just behind the hill, the station was not visible from the fjord. The operation did not last long, as the station was discovered and destroyed in 1943. What remains today is a heap of rusty old iron, wood, and some textiles here and there. On the iron drum, it is still clearly readable that it originated from the *Kriegsmarine*.



The next morning, we continue southward. We refuel with cheap diesel in Ny-Ålesund, where Joost succumbs to the broad-hipped harbor mistress and pays the linehandler's fee. Okay, she did handle our lines.

I seize the opportunity to dash to the only store in Ny-Ålesund for a new cap. They only have one model on the shelf, with "79°N Ny-Ålesund" on it. My favorite cap was snatched by a mean gust of wind and now lies somewhere on the coast north of Virgoamna, opposite Smeerenburg. When our descendants, 400 years from now, place the permafrost-preserved cap, recognized as a typical headgear from the early 21st century, in a museum, the question will always linger about the faintly visible "200 myls" logo (= singlehanded race in NL) on the front of the cap in Svalbard.

I bought two, one as a backup. Because well-prepared things last a long time. They are always the things you need when you don't have them. After all, with tire repair kits in your bicycle bag, you are unlikely to get a flat tire. That's why, in the rainiest city in Norway, Bergen, I always carry an umbrella. Then it stays dry. So, two caps, and I won't lose it again.

(The somewhat morbid joke on board revolves around a carefully folded white sheet stored in the forepeak. It is tied together with a piece of rough hemp rope and packed in a spacious plastic bag, the size of a sleeping bag.)

It's crowded in the harbor of Ny-Ålesund. There is a "small" French IOR pastry at the pier, with a nice young couple on board. They left about the same time as us but from France. While we mainly use diesel instead of sails here, it's the opposite for them. Their engine is old and rickety; they can't carry much fuel either, but the boat sails like the wind.



Who said again that you can only visit these waters with large, sturdy, strong ships made of thick metal? After this brief delay, we continue and anchor a few hours further south in the bay of Engelsbukta. Here, the English processed whales and walrus into oil in the 17th century.

On Sunday morning, Edmond and I head towards the Comfortlessbreen glacier with the dinghy. I receive lesson 2 in climbing a glacier and also in walking with poles. We pull the boat a bit ashore and secure it higher up to a large trunk of old driftwood. Two Skuas fly around us, curious about what we are going to do.



Once you've got the rhythm with the poles, it's just like "walking" on the elliptical machine. Don't think too much about it and just do it. It helps me a lot, and now I can maintain a faster pace. Naturally, I maintain much better balance over the uneven ice, the little hills, the valleys, the streams, over larger and smaller stones. What a beautiful experience again, and I let go of all preconceptions about walkers with poles in one fell swoop.



Streams of water run everywhere, leaving the surrounding ice transparent. Large but narrow cracks run across the ice. Only at the bottom, we encounter a crack that is about half a meter wide and perhaps five to six meters deep. The ice is easy to walk on and predominantly white. From a distance, it looks like snow, but it isn't. It's all ice. We follow the moraine track created by the buildup of rocky debris. From a distance, these are the wide brown bands resembling cart tracks that you often see running over glaciers. On either side of the ice and at the bottom, mountains of stacked rocks can form.

On top of the glacier, the view is phenomenal. On one side, the sea deep below. Norna's mast is just visible. On the other side, an enormous white ice expanse, as far as the eye can see, punctuated only by sporadic pointed

mountain peaks. I feel like continuing to walk. To the other side of the ice cap. But, of course, that's not possible. Nevertheless, this makes me want more!

Walking downhill requires a slightly different technique with the poles, which I also manage to control reasonably well. However, Edmond thinks my steps are too big. Well, that's just the way I am and difficult to change. I'm doing my best.

When, a very long time ago, I sailed to England for the first time with my first sailboat, we anchored near Pinn Mill. We rowed to the shore with the dinghy and tied it to the terrace railing of the 'Butt & Oyster,' the well-known pub in Pinn Mill, a little upstream from the River Orwell from Harwich. Those who have sailed to England know exactly what I mean. When we left the pub after 'the last round' around eleven at night, possibly with a bit too much alcohol in our blood, the dinghy was still neatly in place on the terrace. Only the water was gone. All the water was gone! The ebb had shifted the waterline about 300 meters further down. What remains in the intervening area, between us and that waterline, is nothing but mud. Here, I learned for the first time why the English, for a situation like this, have given such an evocative description to that mud, 'Glorious Mud.'

The nighttime journey to the edge of the water, dragging a heavy dinghy that still refuses to float when wet, because that's another 100 meters further, wading through the water, until it's deep enough to let the water flow into the boots from the top, if the boots haven't gotten stuck in the mud earlier and are already filled with mud, that journey, or rather, that mud fight, with that 'Glorious Mud,' if you manage to win that to then row to your anchored boat, is glorious. A rich experience that no one can take away from you, and it marks you for life. You don't want to experience that again.

40 years later, in Spitsbergen, to my horror, I see that the dinghy is high and dry, on the shore. The water has withdrawn about 20 meters. But as far as I can see, the seagulls are standing on the water here and there. Damn, the little bay that borders our landing place is incredibly shallow everywhere. Why didn't we notice that earlier?

We have two options. One, we camp here until this afternoon and wait until the water is high enough again, or two, we attempt to get the dinghy to deeper water.

We opt for the latter.

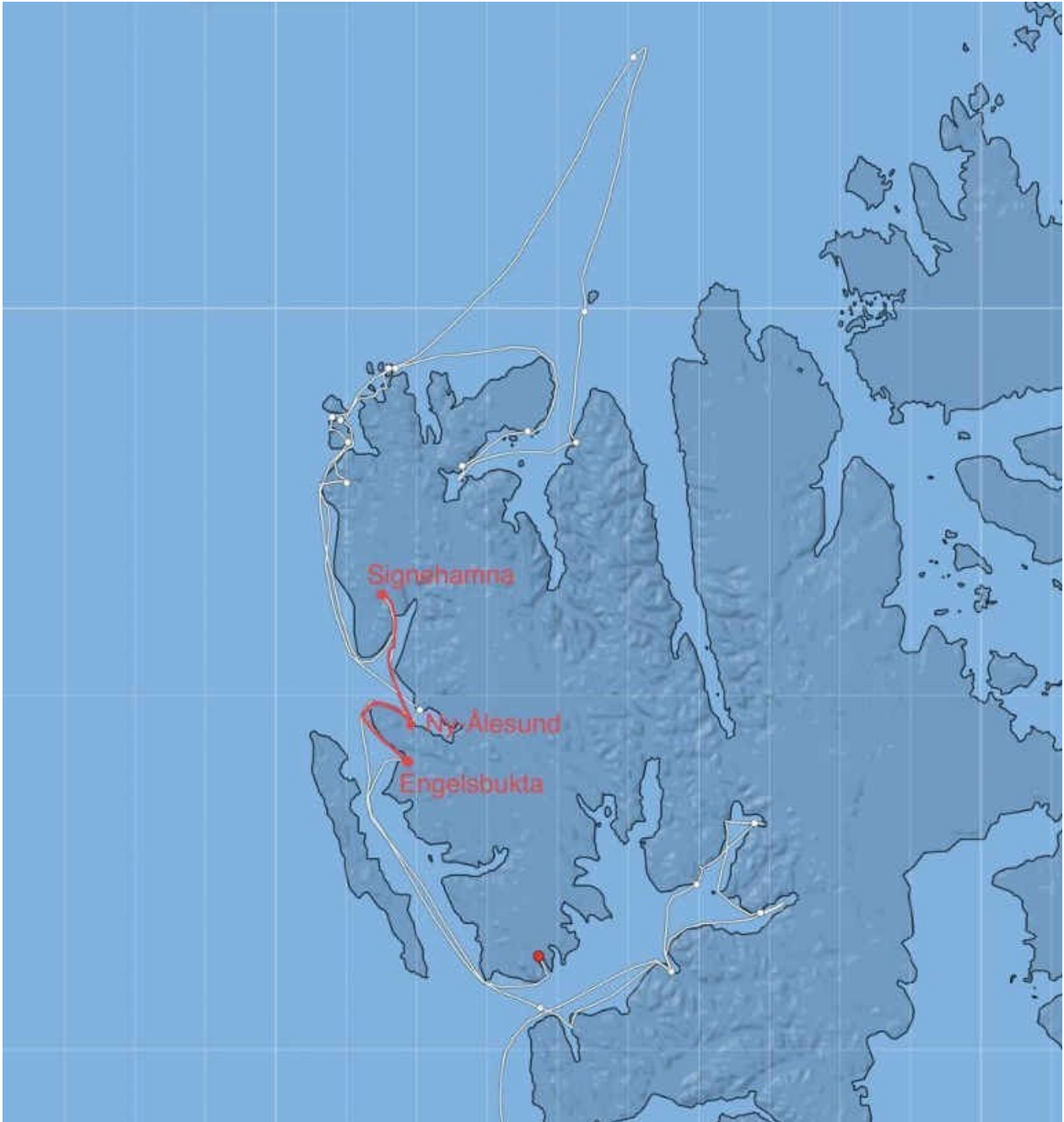


Based on the ripples and ripples in the water, the position of the seagulls, and some stream fraying, we figure out the likely direction of the shortest distance to deeper water. I have high boots on, but Edmond only has hiking shoes. We drag the dinghy to the water's edge and discuss the plan. I can stand in the mud just fine but not for too long because my boots keep sinking deeper into the mud and get stuck. It's going to be quite a task, and the water is too cold to endure for long without boots. Therefore, I'll try it alone. The dinghy isn't floating, but the mud is soft, and I try to pull it forward. It works, but the boat is too heavy for me alone. So, I take the outboard motor off and place it, along with the spare fuel tank, on the shore. The idea is that once the dinghy is afloat, I'll row to a deeper section of the shore where Edmond, who stays on land, will bring the motor.

Without the motor, the dinghy is much lighter, making a significant difference. While pulling, I head towards the hoped-for deeper water. If that works, the next problem is taking the necessary steps, given the slowly increasing depth. Each time, one of my two feet gets stuck in the mud, hindering progress. It becomes challenging again, but deeper water is in sight, probably another 20 meters. Then suddenly, Edmond is back. Apparently, he couldn't bear watching the struggle any longer and comes to help me on the last stretch, now in his underwear. It works; the dinghy floats, and like a child jumping onto a floating air mattress from behind, I give it a shove and hop on, paddling with my feet. We're afloat again. Edmond wades back to the shore, and I row to a deeper part of the coast, which is quite a bit further away. I arrive (much) earlier than Edmond with the outboard motor on his back. Such a thing becomes heavy. I walk towards him to take over the last part.

Engelsbukta, Glorious Mud, I should have been warned.

Back on Norna Biron, after rinsing everything off and changing into dry clothes, we enjoy another hour of this sun-soaked Sunday in Norna's cockpit with a cup of coffee and a stroopwafel. Around one in the afternoon, we weigh anchor, heading further south.



Longyearbyen (2)

July 19, 2022

We are back in Longyearbyen. Cleaning up, returning the rifle, shopping for the next leg towards Jan Mayen and Greenland, and updating the 'socials,' including the Zeilersforum. Thanks to the available internet in Longyearbyen, I can now add photos to the previous 'text-only messages' sent via the Iridium satellite.



After being away from civilization for 3 weeks, it feels, oddly enough, a bit like coming home. I hadn't had the chance to write anything about Longyearbyen earlier. It is located on the southwest Adventfjord and serves as the administrative center and capital of Spitsbergen. This fjord is a branch of the Isfjorden, a large and wide fjord that extends further into smaller fjords in all directions.

This entire fjord region preserves Svalbard's most important historical and cultural remnants. The oldest traces of human activity come from the whalers of the 17th and 18th centuries.



Mining, particularly coal mining, was the reason why a mining town was founded at the current location of Longyearbyen by the Arctic Coal Company of Boston in 1906. The American businessman Longyear saw the commercial potential and intended to sell the company after the successful up-and-running facility. Ten years after its founding, the entire location was taken over by Store Norske Spitsbergen Kulkompani AS (SNSK). The Norwegians significantly expanded both the mine's production, infrastructure, and housing over the years.



Already in the 19th century, there was some tourism. Today, after the reduction of mining activities, it has become a significant source of income. Key developments that have promoted tourism include the construction of the airport in 1975, the reorganization of SNSK into the travel agency Spitsbergen Travel, and the opening of the Svalbard Polar Hotel in 1995. The tourism industry has become essential for maintaining a modern city and serves as the foundation for numerous shops, hotels, restaurants, cultural activities, or guiding activities such as hikes, sightseeing tours, and visits to neighboring glaciers. With dog sledding, horses, skis, fast RIBs, ferry boats, or snowmobiles, everything is available to adventurous tourists.

Another economic pillar is scientific research. The airport, port, and other logistical services have made Longyearbyen attractive for both Norwegian scientists and international Arctic research. The University of Svalbard offers four educational and research directions for its international students: Arctic Biology, Arctic Geology, Arctic Geophysics, and Arctic Technology.

In line with the Svalbard Treaty, the world's largest commercial download station for satellite data, recognizable by 31 large white antenna domes, located atop Platåberget, is only used for civilian purposes. Positioned at 78 degrees North, it covers all 14 orbits that a polar satellite makes during a 24-hour period. *The Svalbard Treaty*, also known as the *Spitsbergen Treaty*, is an international agreement dating back to 1920.

After the whales were exterminated in the 17th and 18th centuries, countries lost interest in Spitsbergen. The islands themselves became a new hunting ground, now for hunters focusing mainly on reindeer and polar bears. Hunting is primarily carried out by individuals, especially from Norway and Russia, and does not have the same dramatic consequences as whaling. The hunters operate independently and have little need for any form of governance.

At the end of the 19th century, interest in the polar regions, including Spitsbergen, began to grow. It quickly became evident that Spitsbergen had rich coal deposits. This discovery soon led to a modest version of the "Gold Rush." Countries and companies claimed large parts of Spitsbergen for mining purposes. The lack of effective governance then became a problem.

Therefore, in 1920, nine countries, including the Netherlands, signed the Svalbard Treaty. The oversight of compliance with this treaty was conditionally granted to Norway. Norway was required to allow residents of the countries that signed the treaty the freedom to engage in economic activities in Spitsbergen and the surrounding sea areas. Additionally, the archipelago could not be used for military purposes, or it would be limited, and Norway's ability to levy taxes was restricted. Since then, 30 other countries have joined the treaty.

So far, only Norway and Russia have actually exercised their rights.



De Okkenklokker

July 21, 2022



The ice chunk that drifted past Magdalenefjord last week suddenly reminded me of our encounter with a special man on the quay of Bodø, a classic rough diamond. He approached us because he saw the Dutch flag fluttering on the stern of Norna Biron. Norna Biron had already caught his eye from a distance, and he found it to be a particularly unique boat model. That's why he came over for a closer look. "You don't see that often, or rather, never," he said. "It's a 48ft. one-off built in steel," Joost replied.

He could have easily been an old sailor, wild white hair, a gray stubble beard, a nicotine-brown mustache, a half-worn seaman's shirt with paint splatters, a rope around his waist to hold up his faded blue pants, rusty steel protruding from the reinforced nose through the leather of his worn work shoes, yellow teeth with one missing canine tooth where he smoked his pipe, deep-set eyes as blue as the Arctic sea around us, and hands as big as shovels. They felt like sandpaper when I shook his hand, trying to squeeze back just as hard, ignoring the pain. Despite his advanced age, he looked strong and healthy.

But the man was from the Dutch province Drenthe and introduced himself as Olde Melle, "but you can call me Melle," he said. He wasn't a sailor at all; it turned out he had worked in the natural stone industry his entire life. "And made many one-offs too," he told us, pointing to some natural stone ornaments on the quay.

I had indeed noticed those. Quite amusing, they are intricately crafted chunks of granite that the sun can play games with. Depending on the sun's position, the shadow effect is always surprisingly different. There are seven of them lined up on the quay at a distance of about 50 meters.

Melle pointed to the granite blocks. His work is not always well-appreciated. "I come from Veenhuizen," he said, "and have always been fascinated by the dolmens from a young age. Such ingeniously stacked blocks of stone, with passages, caves, and holes." Apparently, the seed for a career in natural stone was planted back then.

"There was no more space for me in the Netherlands," he said, weary of the struggle for recognition, and he eventually settled here in Bodø, close to his beloved Norwegian granite, living off his AOW and a meager pension. Nevertheless, very honored that a former work of his is now exhibited here on the quay of Bodø. Although unfortunately not complete, but still...

We were also honored by this chance encounter. With the "master himself," his name engraved on a copper plaque on the base of one of the granite ornaments, another unique experience on our journey north.

His passion for his craft was evident in his entire demeanor. The craftsmanship literally radiated from him. He immediately impressed us. He was an "okkenklokke" in his profession, and we nodded in understanding. "What a special profession," Edmond said, starting to inquire more about it. As curious as we were. You don't hear that often, "okkenklokke." "Okkenklokke," he corrected Edmond. Thus, a very interesting conversation unfolded in a relaxed atmosphere. The old man had apparently found the right conversation partners in us to tell his life story. So special that I quickly noted down some key points back on the boat to later write this story and share it here.

Melle is still very much a man of the old school, of the old craft, a craftsman who learned the trade from his master, no talk but holes, or whatever it's called. His story reveals a lot of know-how and love for the geology of his material and the properties that arise from it. According to him, if you want to work a material as a craftsman, you need to have all the knowledge about it. Composition, origin, structure, and also history. For example, he received some chunks of granite from his former employer, whose founder had once been present as a spectator at the historic Zeppelin expedition to the North Pole, from Ny-Ålesund on Spitsbergen. However, the granite doesn't come from there but from another historical place, Virgohamna, also on Spitsbergen. His boss's great-grandfather had been there at the time, also on the invitation of the Swedish king.

Now it became interesting because after the discourse about his material, of which I don't remember the details, he is now talking about areas we also plan to visit. What a coincidence, or does that not exist? In any case, coincidence or not, his ocean-blue eyes, deeply set beneath brushes of eyebrows, started to sparkle. He seemed to become completely happy and became increasingly open-hearted towards us.

Due to increasing mechanization and digitization, he unfortunately ended up unemployed, despite his craftsmanship. "The youth of today has different interests than learning another real manual labor trade. We old-timers are dying out," he said.

I could relate to that. Even in my profession, in construction, true craftsmanship is becoming extinct and is being replaced by mechanized prefab constructions and semi-finished parts that, like Ikea structures, only need to be assembled.

He nodded in agreement, looked sadly at the ground, and said, 'I had to be on unemployment benefits for years. Yet, I had pretty good job application letters. Without boasting, I always tried to translate my passion for the job into words.'

Apparently, that worked because he was often invited for interviews. However, he never made it to the second round in those job application procedures. When it came down to it, they just didn't need a craftsman like him anymore. Or it didn't fit the type of work they were doing. Or the position of an "okkenklokker" had already been filled by someone else.

After unemployment benefits come social assistance. 'I absolutely wanted to avoid that,' he continued, 'and, although beneath my level, after all, I'm no schoolboy anymore, I signed up with Tempo-Team. You know, that Tempo employment agency.'

Apparently, Tempo-Team quickly realized what a special craftsman they had on their hands. And what a unique trade he practiced. Melle apparently marketed himself well and immediately received recognition for his craftsmanship and specialization. The current job market also lacks mentors like Melle, so yes, they saw great potential in him.

Then he starts talking about Bekker Natuursteen in Loosdrecht. Well, that's quite a coincidence. I know that company well and have dealt with them a lot in my career. It's an old family business that has been built up by many generations into the current comprehensive natural stone company. The current Mr. Bekker, also a former alderman in the municipality of Loosdrecht (before it was called Wijdmeren), is the great-grandson of the founder Becker. In the late 18th century, he was already famous for the high-quality marble he supplied to the Russian Tsar in St. Petersburg and later also to the Norwegian king. He was, at the invitation of the Norwegian king, one of the well-wishers of the legendary Zeppelin expedition to the North Pole led by Roald Amundsen.

Suddenly, it clicked for me. Coincidence doesn't exist, does it?

When I once wanted to finalize a large order at Bekker's office and came to his executive office with his salesperson (whose name escapes me), I noticed, besides the many African hunting trophies, a few framed black-and-white photos on the chic, oak-ornamented wall. These were images of North Pole expeditions in the early 20th century.

I was still quite inexperienced, and I didn't dare take the opportunity to ask him about it. Bekker was not known as a social person who was up for small talk. Knowing his reputation, I was still overwhelmed by his arrogant demeanor. Sitting in large Chesterfield armchairs, with Bekker puffing on a large, smoky cigar, his face sternly jutting forward, if he were smaller, the

resemblance to Churchill could emerge, we had to negotiate to get the signatures. I was totally taken aback, and looking back now with the knowledge I have, I think I may have bought too expensive. While at the time, still a bit awkward in a suit and tie, I felt quite uncomfortable in the situation; I later understood how important posture and attitude can be in business negotiations. A good lesson, for which I am now quite grateful to Bekker, and that's when my interest in early North Pole expeditions was awakened.

After World War II, the name was changed to Bekker. There's a whole story about that, which Melle was quite mysterious about. I didn't know that and only know it as Bekker. To let him continue his story, I didn't press further.

The current company still supplies and processes all types of natural stone. From gravestones to chic facade panels, from countertops to sinks and bathtubs. Praised on the most prestigious superyachts for their beautiful veined marble wall panels, glassy finishes, and granite cabin tables. Mr. Bekker, the great-grandson of the company's founder, great-grandfather Becker, is a familiar face at major superyacht builders like Huisman, Oceanco, and Feadship. Even Prince Bernhard (R.I.P) considered him one of his best friends. That was Bekker. Was, because he's no longer with us (R.I.P.)

Tempo-Team apparently introduced Melle to Bekker, who was immediately very curious about such a rare craftsman, who the temp agency had already recommended as a kind of old-fashioned super craftsman. A diesel engine that, once he set his mind on something, continues until a fabulously beautiful piece of work is finished. There aren't many like him left in that industry. Most are now in a care home.

It seemed to click between Melle and Bekker. 'It scared me a bit. Such a powerful man in my trade, could I live up to that?' he wondered. Because his profession as an "okkenklokker" was still quite challenging to integrate into such a company. He needed time to come into his own with a new employer.

Bekker seemed to have understood all of this. I think he didn't want to let such a craftsman slip away at any cost. But Melle apparently had doubts because he hadn't laid all his cards on the table at that time. Therefore, he asked Bekker if he could first look around for a few weeks to get a feel for the atmosphere, to see if he could express himself there, and so on. Bekker's company already had one advantage. It was located by the water. I didn't understand why he mentioned that, but it was apparently important to him.

It didn't come out very clearly from his story, or he didn't want to appear too boastful to us, but it seems like Tempo-Team also pushed quite a bit at Bekker. After all, both organizations could benefit a lot from an "okkenklokker" like Melle. I think that's when he realized that he could make some demands. After all, it's not just about salary, or rather not at all. It's primarily about joy in your work, having the right resources, appreciation from your employer, and obtaining space for personal responsibility. Of course, appropriate compensation is also necessary, that goes without saying. Joost and I nodded approvingly.

Edmond, as a conscious lone wolf, played dumb for a while.

The then workshop at the Bekker location in Loosdrecht turned out to be too small for Melle's activities. Mr. Bekker fully understood the situation. However, as the alderman of the municipality of Loosdrecht, he had to adhere to regulations. The permit for an expansion would take many months, and he did not want to wait that long, apparently afraid of losing Melle to the competition. Therefore, he suggested to Melle to set up a temporary shed. He rented it from Aluhallen to bind Melle to him and be able to sign the employment contract.

A part of the parking lot, along the water, was sacrificed for this purpose. New tools were purchased, compressed air was installed, the latest hydraulic equipment was ordered, and the newest model water-cooled saws were installed, along with drills, polishing disks, and so on. Bekker took this matter seriously. The fact that the shed had no windows was not a problem for Melle, even a nice side effect, although he didn't mention it. But the lighting had to meet at least the labor law standards, and there had to be enough battery-powered inspection lamps. There had been issues in the past. Melle wanted to arrange it according to his ideas and demanded exclusive use of his temporary shed. Temporarily, of course, because by the time the final expansion was realized, Melle could easily integrate his work with others. As per the agreement, a few months would have passed, and they would know what to do for the actual expansion.

Meanwhile, Bekker had already announced the hiring of this craftsman, through their website and trade journals, creating high expectations. Colleagues looked on enviously and reluctantly praised Bekker for his acquisition. A good "okkenklokker" (granite sculptor) is indeed rare. For Bekker, it was the crowning achievement.

The most challenging part was obtaining the granite for Melle's work, which he had demanded before signing the employment contract to join "the Bekker Natuursteen family." Not so much the type but the size. To showcase his work as an "okkenklokker," he needed a solid block of granite about 20x20x20 meters; larger would be fine, but certainly not much smaller.

This seems bizarre to me now as I write it down. I suspect that Bekker was already losing control to Melle at that time, but to prevent any misunderstandings and save face, he still had such a granite block made. It was too large for transport, so it was assembled in the shed from smaller blocks of about 4x4x4 meters. Creating strong and durable adhesive connections in natural stone was also one of Bekker's specialties, and many small pieces make one big one.

To Melle's disappointment, the granite did not come from Norway, as they couldn't supply it in that size, but from a quarry in Italy. Unfortunately, that was how it was, and Melle had to accept it. Knowing that he had already negotiated with Bekker to the bottom.

That was the last time Bekker and his staff saw the temporary shed from the inside. When Melle told us all this, a light bulb went off in my head. I vaguely remember that Bekker had an enormous batch of large granite blocks on his property. At that time, I thought they were going to cut sheet material from it. For graves or something. I didn't follow up on that.

To make a long story short, Melle got to work, but no one really knew what he was doing. The work seemed very delicate, and he kept his lips sealed, along with the key to the door in his pocket. No one was allowed inside; access was strictly forbidden, even for Bekker. Weeks passed with sawing, drilling, chiseling, grinding, and escaping compressed air sounds like an old steam machine. Curiosity about what was happening inside grew week by week. The shrill high-frequency noise was bone-chilling, causing shivers down the spine. Even Bekker and his employees' sleep was put to the test, plagued by nightmares where the dental executioner with his mean drills caused revolting pains. After one such dream, this time about Melle sawing through his breastbone with a small but sharp water-cooled circular saw, and all his staff making a run for it, and Bekker waking up sweating from the high-pitched whining sound of the circular saw, or was it now a drill, he had had enough.

Melle is on a roll, completely animated, and we listen breathlessly. Several details I can verify from my own memory and are recognizable. The more he talks about Bekker, the more I understand the situations I didn't grasp back then. Although the puzzle isn't complete yet, I can connect more and more pieces.

Melle continues. He had to face the boss. Bekker had had enough, and he was given another four weeks, after which he had to bring his work outside. 'Mr. Bekker,' Melle continued, 'I assure you that I will not disappoint you. You have researched my reputation, and it's so great that I cannot risk it. I assure you, Mr. Bekker, that after the unveiling of my work, your company 'Bekker Natuursteen Loosdrecht' and yourself as the director will be back on the map. Maybe even worldwide.'

Bekker was delighted, and that prospect had undoubtedly already tainted his entrepreneurial spirit. 'I also asked him to reserve a 150-ton crane for a certain date. I forgot the exact date, but it was about 5 weeks after we spoke,' Melle continued. Bekker immediately understood that such a grand event needed the attention it deserved. He invited all his friends and important business relations to be present on that day for the unveiling of his "okkenklokker's" work. As a board member of the Regenboogzeilers club (Local rather elitist yacht club), the other gentlemen from the board and the honorary members of the club were naturally also on the list. Our Queen Beatrix was asked to perform the unveiling, but unfortunately, that didn't fit into her schedule on such short notice. Her personal envoy, whose name escaped Melle, suggested putting forward her son and heir to the throne, Willem Alexander, to cut the ribbon. He had to start taking on some public duties anyway. This was such a great opportunity.

For Mr. Bekker, it was a tremendous honor that the unveiling now also had a royal touch. He already dreamed of a knighthood. The NOS had acquired exclusive rights for a documentary about Dekker and his "okkenklokker." Maartje van Weegen would be present to report. It was going to be a day of celebration. The entire region would be turned upside down. Somewhat reluctantly, he hired the regular clients of (formerly) Best End Bar for event security. Lee Towers (famous Dutch singer and former crane operator) was booked. Not only to perform his fabulous song "You Never Walk Alone" but also to operate the large 150-ton crane. In the finale, he would then sing the song 'Massive Rock.' Lee thought it was fantastic, and the invitation was certainly not lost on him. He even wanted to come for free. Just to be there.

When the time finally came, the stands were built, the crane was positioned, and the ribbon was connected to a clever construction. Bekker became somewhat nervous. He would have preferred a dress rehearsal, but Melle was beaming and assured him that everything would go well.

On the big day, when Crown Prince Willem Alexander cut the ribbon, an ingenious hydraulic system ensured that all cotter pins under the shed's four walls were pulled out, after which they gracefully, as in a slow-motion film, fell to the sides. At the same time, Lee lifted the roof off with his crane. It seemed like a magic trick by Hans Klok (famous Dutch magician), but this really happened. The invitees cheered and clapped, looking in utter amazement at Melle's shining creation. Lee started singing the song "Massive Rock" from his crane cabin. The enormous solid granite cube of 20x20x20 meters revealed itself in its full glory, expertly crafted by Melle into a massive, surreal giant block of airy holes and granite. You could look through it from all sides. Large holes, small holes, corridors, grooves, even more holes, and other openings. The longer you looked, the more holes you could see. The sun created the most fantastic shadow creations. The effect was, to say the least, striking and at the same time too bizarre for words. All the holes, grooves, and caves were not only connected internally but also meticulously polished. What an incredible job that must have been.

What a job and what holes; it became an unforgettable spectacle. However, the climax of the show was yet to come because, in the meantime, Melle had attached the crane's hoist to the top of the block and through one of the holes. While everyone was still in ecstasy, and some were near fainting, he gave Lee Towers the order to hoist his entire work and turn it to the right above the water. The sunbeams were scattered in an incredibly impressive way through the polished holes in all directions. It was magical. As the crane turned, a phenomenal play of shadows emerged in all directions, almost against the laws of nature. The reflective water surface reflected the bent sunbeams in all the colors of the rainbow.

Suddenly, unexpectedly, or maybe hoped for by some, the hoist released the enormous granite hole-cheese structure. Someone screamed, panic threatened for a moment. While Melle was telling us this, he took on a mischievous pose, removed the pipe from his mouth, and made a pulling motion with it. He had tied the sling to the crane with a slipknot. By pulling on

that rope, the whole thing tumbled down.

I suddenly got the image of that auction where a Banksy artwork went for millions only to be destroyed afterward by a built-in paper shredder in front of everyone.

It must have been a similar spectacle.

I suddenly saw a brilliant man standing in front of me. Just like that, in the wild, here on the quay of Bodø.

The granite hole-cheese fell straight into the water. In response, Lee Towers stopped singing. He was shocked and almost choked on his golden microphone.

A shockwave went through the guests, but also through the water, due to the enormous splash caused by Melle's artwork. While Willem Alexander had to run back quickly to keep his feet dry, the company's emergency responders were trying to resuscitate Bekker (fruitlessly, as it will later be revealed). Everyone was shocked and especially dumbfounded. They only had eyes for the more and more emerging bubbles from the water. Like a sort of wake, but then vertical, they indicated the path of the sinking granite block. They even rose above the water surface, burst like a soap bubble, and made a sound. A deathly silence fell. Lee T. in the crane, thinking he had dropped that granite block, seemed to die at that moment and bit the microphone in half.

The silence was broken by the sound in those bubbles. First very softly, then louder, and louder, and even louder until it became a deafening noise concert of...

Well, here Olde Melle's story stopped. With his pipe still in his hand, he had almost choked trying to mimic it.

Only then did it become clear what the work of the "okkenklokker" meant for the world...

[Continue reading.....](#)

Jan Mayen

July 27, 2022

THERE IS A WAR GOING ON !
THIS IS A MILITARY AREA !
YOU ARE NOT ALLOWED TO BE HERE !

The Boquito(*), rushing out of the firefighting red SUV, makes himself even taller and puffs out his chest to emphasize his words.

WHO ARE YOU ?

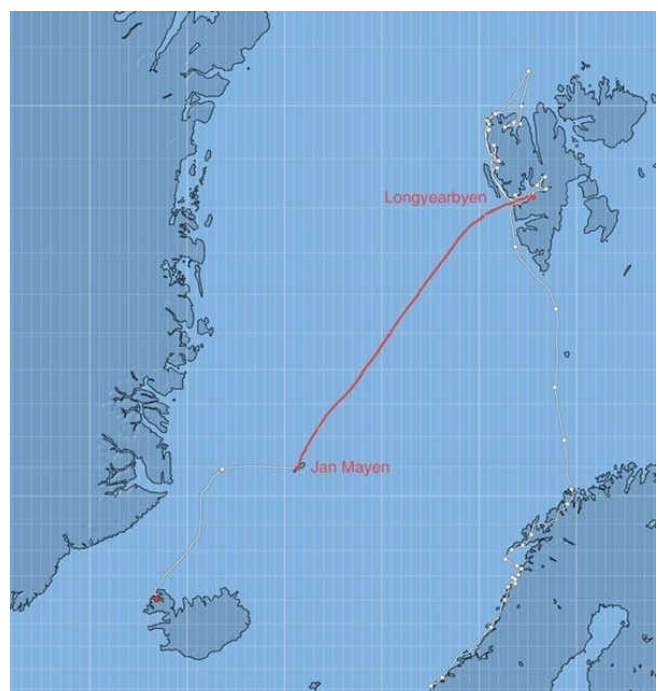
WHERE DO YOU COME FROM ?

(*)Infamous brutal gorilla in Amsterdam Zoo



This morning, July 26th, around 7 o'clock, we dropped our anchor in Kvalrossbukta (Walrus Bay) on the northwest coast of Jan Mayen, after a sailing journey of over four and a half days.

On July 21st, around 16:00, we departed from Longyearbyen.





Jan Mayen, a Dutch polar island? Unfortunately, we let that opportunity slip away. In the 1930s, Norway annexed the island, something they had not achieved with Spitsbergen. What has remained, in contrast to Spitsbergen, which was renamed Svalbard, is the Dutch name. In search of a shorter route to the East Indies, the island was accidentally "discovered" on the return journey from Spitsbergen towards Iceland by the namesake Captain Jan Jacobsz. May from Schellinkhout. Not that he was the only "discoverer"; both before and after him, others also claimed the discovery and gave it a name. An important cartographer of that time depicted Jan Mayen, causing the other names to be forgotten. The ship had brought whalers from Spitsbergen, and they saw the rich possibilities of whaling on the newly discovered island. The waters around it were full of whales, seemingly waiting to be slaughtered. And so it happened. On the lava beach, the animals were processed into oil. Houses and blubber ovens were built, the remains of which are still clearly visible today. This location may have been even more productive than Smeerenburg. However, seasonal work was hindered by looting and storms in the winter season. Just like on Spitsbergen, attempts were made to overwinter on Jan Mayen to protect the location from plunderers. It ended badly for Outgert Jacobsz. from Grootebroek and his six companions. Due to cold, hunger, and disease, they did not survive that winter in 1634.



Only in 1930 was a memorial stone placed on the beach of Walrus Bay for Outgert and his mates. A stone that had already been made in 1912 and was supposed to be placed but, due to circumstances, fell into oblivion and eventually ended up on the Nieuwmarkt in Amsterdam. A memorial stone that no one remembered the purpose of until a member of the Geographic Society unraveled the mystery. To show some national pride, a navy ship was sent to finally place the memorial stone.

Around 1670, all whales were exterminated, and the island was abandoned and "forgotten" by the Dutch.

That island is our destination. We depart from Longyearbyen and then motor out of Isfjorden in complete calm. It is windless, but according to the latest weather forecast, the wind will come. We organize our watches again, with shifts of 3 hours on and 6 hours off in the order we are now accustomed to: Joost-Henny-Edmond-Joost-Henny-Edmond-Joost, and so on.



During my watch from 3 to 6 AM, a modest breeze of just under 10 knots picks up, close to the wind. I set the full sail, hoist the mainsail, unfurl the staysail, and also roll out the jib. Later, the wind shifts, intensifies to 15-20 knots, and we sail close-hauled with a boat speed of 7.5-8 knots. Wonderful sailing. This lasts until the morning of July 23. Then, the wind dies down, the mainsail comes down, and only the jib remains, accompanied by a little bit of motoring.

Unfortunately, the wind disappears entirely, and it is the engine that propels Norna towards Jan Mayen. Although very modestly, at less than 800 RPM and with a steeper-pitched propeller (Hundested adjustable propeller), we achieve 4.5 knots. A thrifty setting. In Greenland, we expect to do a lot of motoring in the ice, and the first refueling opportunity is only in Iceland.

Every now and then, there are ripples, but not enough to effectively hoist a sail. The sea is completely calm, with only a slight swell. Around us, the sea is empty and majestic at the same time. Clouds on the razor-sharp horizon, in all shades of gray and white, sometimes a bit yellowish, hover above the sea. A typical phenomenon at high latitudes. It is an ever-changing spectacle.

One might say such a journey is boring, but that is far from the truth. It is difficult to grasp the remote corner of the earth we are sailing in and what awaits us. While it's a bit exaggerated to say that I have to pinch myself to realize this, it is undoubtedly a unique experience. We come across a lot of driftwood, mostly entire tree trunks. It seems to come from Siberia. We had already noticed the abundance of wood on the beaches in Spitsbergen.



Via the Iridium satellite, we regularly fetch gribbs with weather information. Based on that, we continuously develop various scenarios for the routing to be followed. Alternatives are also considered, such as skipping Jan Mayen and heading directly to Greenland. Two consecutive low-pressure systems with accompanying high winds largely determine our course of action. In addition to downloading the gribbs, we also obtain the most recent ice chart for Greenland. This also factors into the scenarios. The ice situation is not very favorable yet, but it changes every day, both positively and negatively. A day later, the variables are different again; it remains a puzzle. On the last day of the crossing, we decide definitively to go to Jan Mayen, also to avoid arriving too early in Greenland and encountering a depression with high winds there.



Happy Hour on July 25th. We eagerly gaze at the horizon directly in front of us. Who will be the first to spot the Beerenberg volcano on Jan Mayen? That honor falls to me. At eleven o'clock in the evening, I spot land at 11 o'clock. It is the lower part of the Beerenberg, the rest is shrouded in clouds. The mountain will remain veiled in mist later that night, as is usually the case. For a brief moment, a glacier is visible, and an hour before dropping anchor, I briefly see the 2277-meter-high summit of the Beerenberg emerging above the clouds in the background. That's it. The highest peak north of the Arctic Circle remains shrouded in mist.



The Brielle Tower is a prominent rock marking the west side of Kvalrossbukta (Walrus Bay). As the name suggests, it is named after the tower in Brielle (Dutch fortified town in the province of South Holland). As we turn in that direction, two whales continue undisturbed with their breakfast, and a couple of puffins flutter away from Norna's suddenly rising bow. Although the anchorage is leeward, it is not a problem due to the low wind and calm sea. The expectation is that the wind will shift to the southeast and increase in strength overnight. Walrus Bay provides the ideal shelter for that.



Just like in Svalbard, Jan Mayen is not freely accessible. A request must be submitted well in advance to apply for a permit. However, if the visit lasts no longer than 24 hours, it can also be arranged with the Station Commander. At least, that's our interpretation of the Sailing Directions.

We discuss whether to call on VHF16 or just go ashore and walk to the Station Commander, about 10 km away on the other side of the island. Since we want to stretch our legs and explore the surroundings, we opt for the latter.

Edmond and I take that on for our account. Joost walks a short distance with us but prefers to stay on the boat.



Jan Mayen is volcanic. Unfortunately, the volcano itself remains hidden in the clouds, but the landscape shines in a combination of black and luminous green. As we pass over the first hill, an enormous space opens up ahead. At first, I think I'm looking at the sea and wonder what the sunlit, glistening white streaks are. Initially, I consider foam on the water. Or is it drift ice? I can't figure it out. Edmond brings me back to reality. It's not the ocean but an enormous flat area as far as the eye can see. What is glimmering is the washed-up wood spread across the entire expanse, especially whole tree trunks. The sea begins much farther away.





On the right side of the path we are walking on, we have now arrived on the south side of the island, there is a mountainous landscape with volcanic rock in all shapes, types, and sizes. When the sun briefly breaks through the clouds, the mountains take on a velvety appearance in black, green, and burgundy red. What a world. Comparisons with the landscape in the film adaptation of *Lord of the Rings* come to mind. *Gollum* could emerge from behind a rock at any moment. How grand, desolate, and empty. I inhale the polar wind and enjoy this walk intensely. My fellow walker is no less thrilled and makes expansive gestures. Like a cow let loose to frolic in the pasture after a long winter in the barn. That's how it feels.



Then we see a flashing light in the distance. It turns out to be part of a series of lights indicating the beginning of a runway. To call it an airport is an exaggeration. At the end of the gravel runway stands a hangar and a small control tower. A little further, we see a wooden building where people are painting. The dog, not accustomed to strangers, is restrained, and we chat with one of them. He advises us to first call on channel 16 since this is military territory. Channel 16 is relayed to Bodø, and we explain our intentions.

A few moments later, we see a large dust cloud coming towards us at high speed in the distance. At the front of it, a red SUV is driving. Boquito is not one to talk, let alone joke with. The lady on the VHF keeps calling that someone is on their way to us. Boquito has alerted the Commander, and he is also on his way to us. So we have to wait for a while, while he meanwhile suggests the most ominous consequences of our illegal presence. We keep our distance and act clueless.

A little later, a military green SUV arrives, at a much calmer pace. Boquito is sent away, and we have a conversation with the driver of the SUV, apparently the Station Commander. A relaxed guy. By now, we have adjusted our story a bit. We were on our way to Greenland and hoped to obtain a better ice chart on Jan Mayen. It was not a preconceived plan, so we couldn't ask for permission in advance. What remains is our idea of the maximum stay of 24 hours and the simpler local procedure to do that legally. Unfortunately, we seem to have misunderstood that. Apparently, due to the war, some things have been tightened.

Still, he is interested in our journey, where we have been, where we are going, when we think we'll be back home, what we thought of Spitsbergen, if we had seen any polar bears, etc. Regarding the latter, they found a dead polar bear a few weeks ago. It was uncertain whether it was already on the island or had washed ashore dead. Polar bears can, in fact, travel quite well from the ice to Jan Mayen. Then I bring up the ice chart. However, they are not so focused on that and consult the same sources as we do. But he is willing to see if he can download a recent chart for us. In the same building where we passed earlier and where people were painting. But we must also immediately return to the boat, may not disembark anymore, and must be gone by tomorrow morning at 10:00 am at the latest.

We promise that.

"Is that you?" he asks as he looks at my passport. Apparently, the resemblance is not as good after 2 months in the wild. After taking down my personal details, he drives away, and we walk back as well. The building he has now entered turns out to be the meteorological office, at least that's what is written on a wooden sign above the door. Stupid, actually, that we apparently didn't get that in the conversation with "the painter." A long way further, he catches up with us and gives us some printouts of the ice chart

from July 25. We already had them, don't need them, but the resolution is much better. Of course, we don't say that but thank him for the service.

Just as I am about to take out the drone to capture some beautiful shots of this prehistoric environment, the sun hides behind a cloud, and the wind picks up. So, let's postpone it for now, which turns into cancellation. The sun doesn't come back. The two cooks on board have already prepared an excellent dinner again. Throughout the trip, we mainly eat from the fresh supplies. Canned food is hardly used. Tonight we make an exception for dessert. Pineapple slices with Greek yogurt. I limit my galley activities to eating, washing up, and cleaning.

Wednesday morning, July 27, 10 AM

We depart towards Greenland. We are not in a hurry. Tomorrow, a low-pressure area will pass right over us with quite a bit of N to NE wind. So, beam wind that we should be able to handle well with just the staysail. More importantly, we are concerned about the wind on arrival in Scoresbysund. The ice situation there is still uncertain, so it's nice not to have too much wind. The escape route to Iceland, in case it fails to enter Scoresbysund due to ice, also looks good in terms of wind.

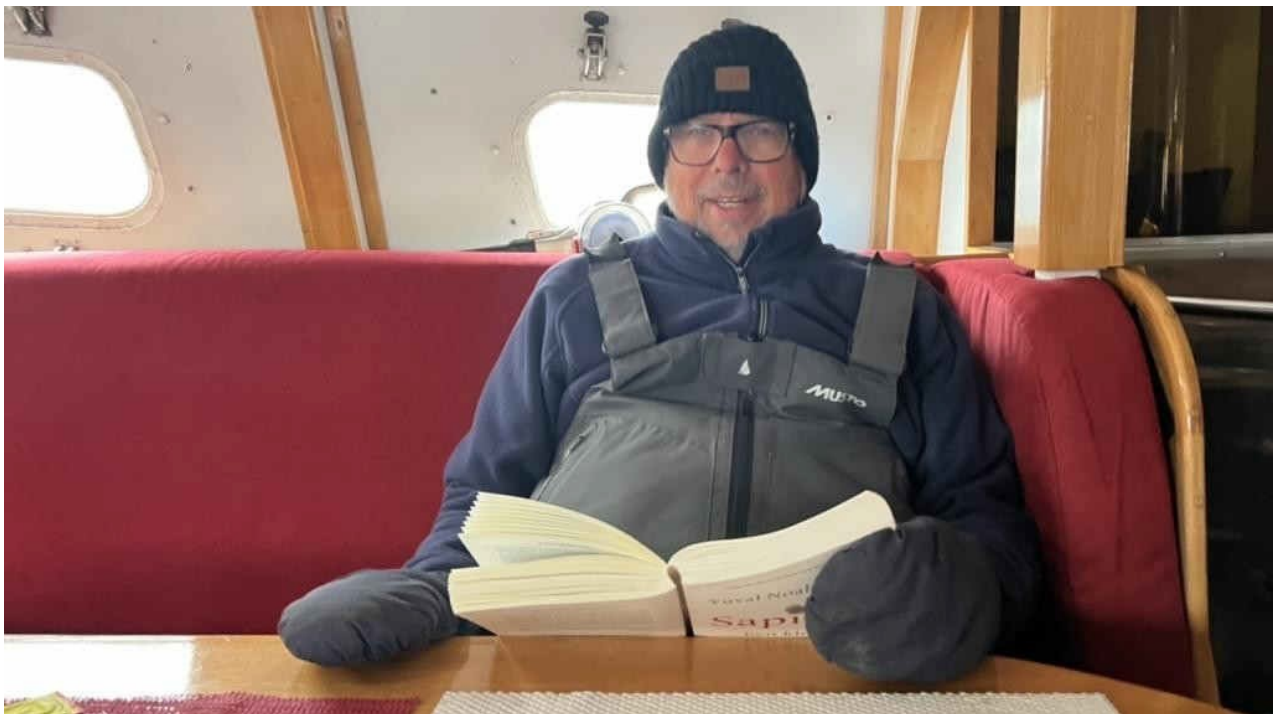
We're going. (to be continued)

Ice-trap

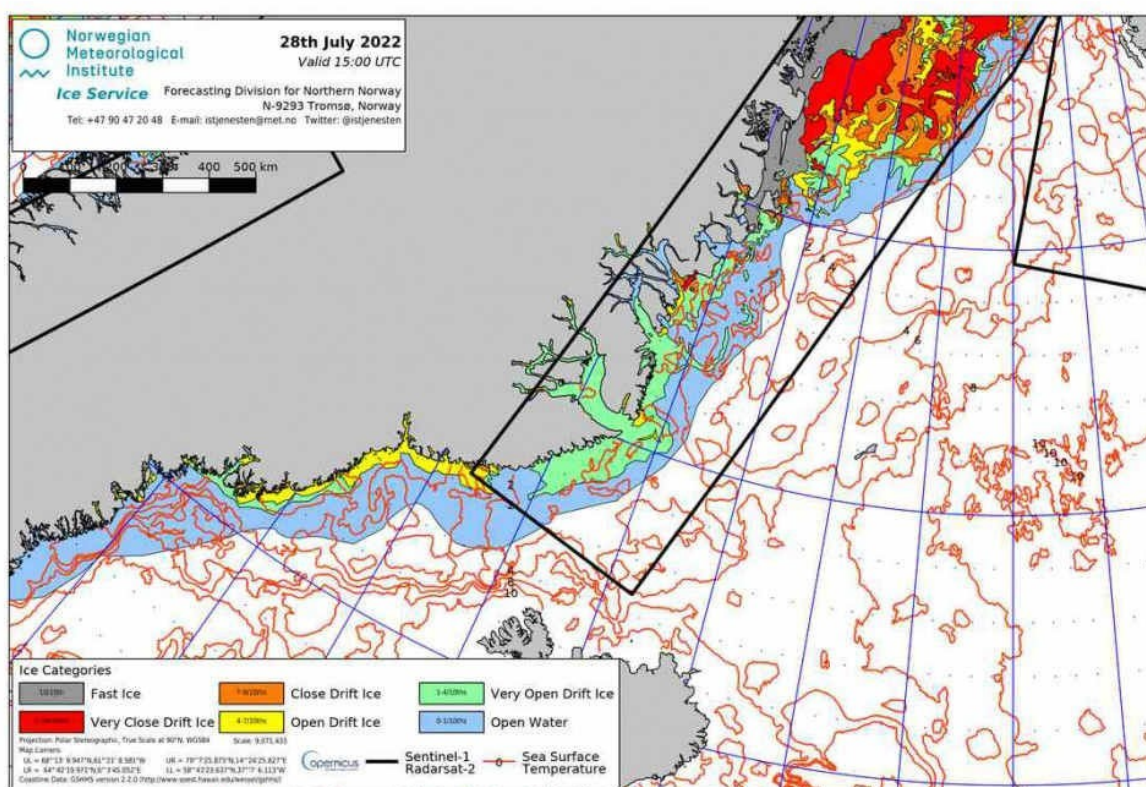
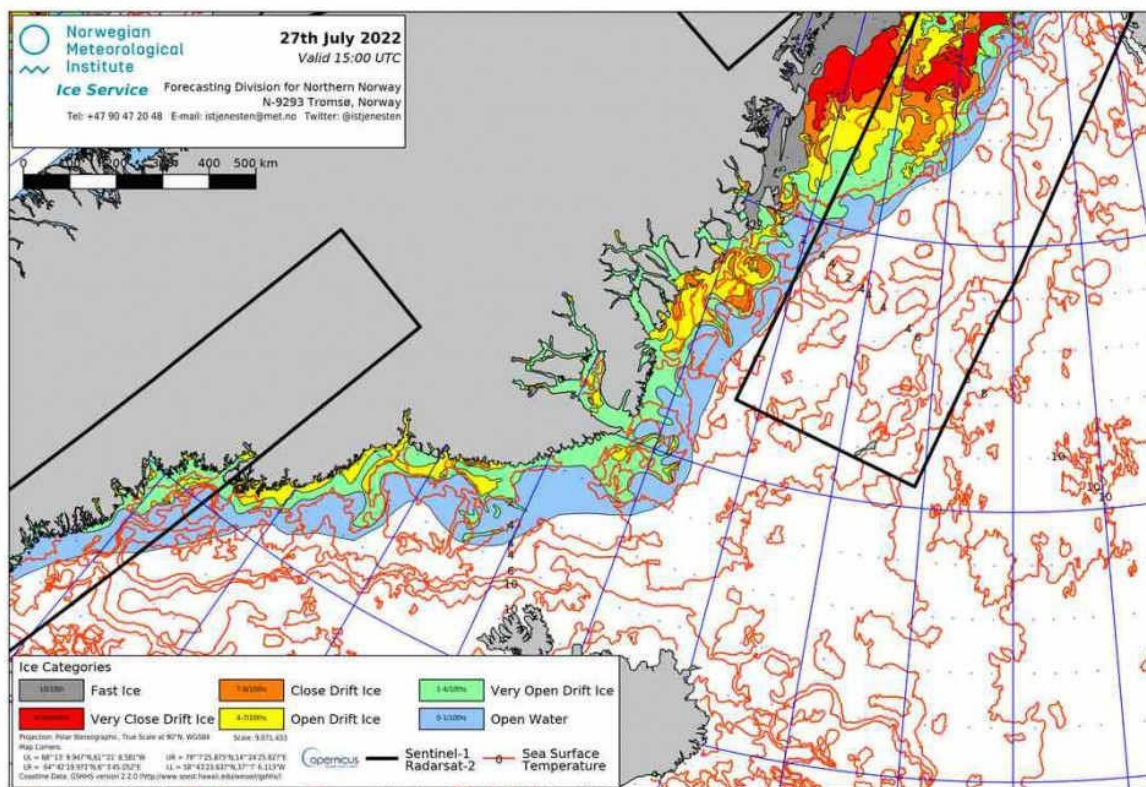
July 29, 2022

Just after anchoring in the Walrus Bay of Jan Mayen, the Commander comes through on the VHF. He apparently kept a close eye on us and now wishes us a safe journey. Nice guy. For now, there is little to no wind. It doesn't matter; we're not in a hurry. But the speed naturally picks up as the wind increases. We seem to be attractive to the storm petrels. They swoop around us, settle on the water just in front of us, let Norna pass by at a short distance with a curious look, then take off again and sit in the water a little further, waiting for us to pass by again. Quite amusing; I hadn't seen this before. Oh, wait, delicious smells are coming from the galley; that must be it.

During the night, it becomes stormy with an annoying irregular swell. With only the small jib, we make progress, but it's not comfortable. When you are almost thrown out of your bunk regularly, despite the preventer, sleeping becomes very difficult.



For the stove, the rocking and rolling are too much. It goes out, making it very cold. My second sleeping bag comes out of the closet for the first time. I also put on the ski pants I bought in Longyearbyen over my trousers, followed by the sailing pants. With extra socks in the neoprene boots, an additional fleece sweater, a hat, gloves, and a good book, it's no longer cold in Norna's salon.



On July 28th, Joost has registered us with the Greenlandic Coast Guard via email, as the protocol prescribes. At 4:00 PM, we receive a new ice chart. It hasn't improved, rather worsened. The new weather forecast doesn't promise much either. We have to slow down again and heave to for a while. We are still 100 miles away from the Greenlandic coast and about 40 miles from the first ice. This means there is theoretically a 60-mile stretch of navigable ice

ahead of us. But what does navigable mean? We haven't encountered 40% ice (according to the ice chart) before. There is also a very dense ice field just north of the entrance to Scoresbysund. If that continues to move southward in the coming days, it could block the entrance to Scoresbysund. The wind will be 20-25 knots from the north, which we find too much for navigating in the ice. Currently, we are in dense fog. All in all, not pleasant.

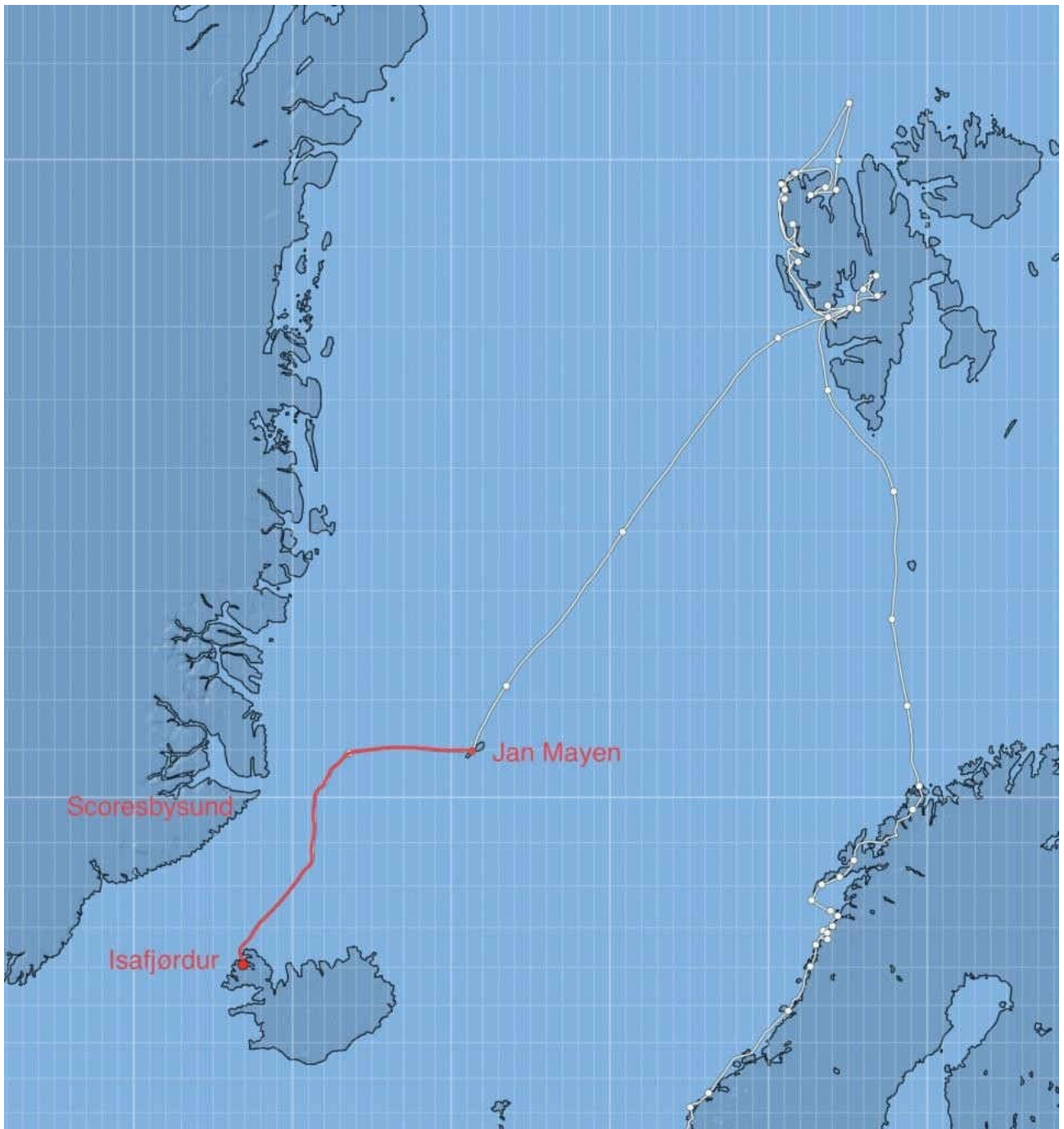
Then we have plan B, the escape route, sailing south towards Iceland. In the previous days, that seemed comfortable. Another storm depression is coming with 50 knots of wind, but that's later. We would still have enough time to avoid it.

With good visibility, little wind, and a view of a safe plan B, we might have ventured into the ice. Edmond had already envisaged a position on the second spreader as a lookout. But nothing is as changeable as the weather. That storm comes earlier. This means that if we're fooling around in the ice and can't get into Scoresbysund, our escape route is dominated by a storm, albeit from the right direction, but 50 knots is a bit much. We don't have a plan C.

We decide not to fall into that trap, hoist the jib, and set a course northwest. Iceland. We inform the Greenlandic Coast Guard again.

It's unfortunate, but that's how it is. In any case, we feel comfortable again. We haven't delved into the Icelandic coast much yet, but we'll have enough time in the coming days. We need to make some progress to avoid that storm depression.

So, Scoresbysund is off the table for this year, and since my glass is always half full, we now have a new goal for the future.



Ísafjörður - Siglufjörður

August 8, 2022

It was a good decision to abandon the destination Scoresbysund before reaching the Greenlandic ice and divert towards Iceland. The goal is Ísafjörður, located on the Skutulsfjörður fjord, a branch of the Ísafjarðardjúp, in the northwest of Iceland. Sailing has to be interspersed with motoring due to insufficient wind. We encounter two gigantic icebergs, with a day in between. There is no danger as long as you keep a good lookout and pass them on the windward side.



The last stretches are always the toughest. The sea and wind create a struggle to pass the capes of Straumnes and Horn. We briefly consider an alternative, easing the sheets towards a destination in a more easterly direction, but decide to push on for a few more hours.



Ísafjörður turns out to be a charming fishing town. When we arrive, there is a lot of activity on the quay. We dock in the last available spot where we just fit. In the bay, there is a French 60-footer at anchor with the intention of also mooring in this spot. The skipper was already in talks with the other boats to shift a bit so that he could fit in between. Naturally, we make room for him, cast off, and then come alongside him on the outer side.



The customs officer has been waiting for us for a while. We already notified the Icelandic Coast Guard via (satellite) email yesterday and again via VHF just before entry. The operator on the other end of the VHF immediately knew who we were; she had the email in front of her. As a precaution, we hide a few bottles of strong liquor deep in Norna's storage compartments, but it's not necessary. The customs officer is very easygoing. "How much alcohol do you have with you?" he asks. "Not enough," we reply, "most of it is already gone." He's fine with that. "Tobacco?" he inquires. With two non-smokers and one trying to quit with an e-cigarette, it's an unnecessary question. Despite our email notification with all our details, everything is repeated on various forms, for which he apologizes, as they haven't been sufficiently digitized yet. He notes that we Europeans always adhere to the rules. Most of their work is with Americans and Australians, who all too often disregard the protocols. This is interesting since the Icelandic protocols pale in comparison to what is required in their home countries. After clearance, we are free to go wherever we want. When leaving Iceland, we will have to clear out again. The AIS must remain on. Without AIS, you have to report your position to the Coast Guard every three hours.



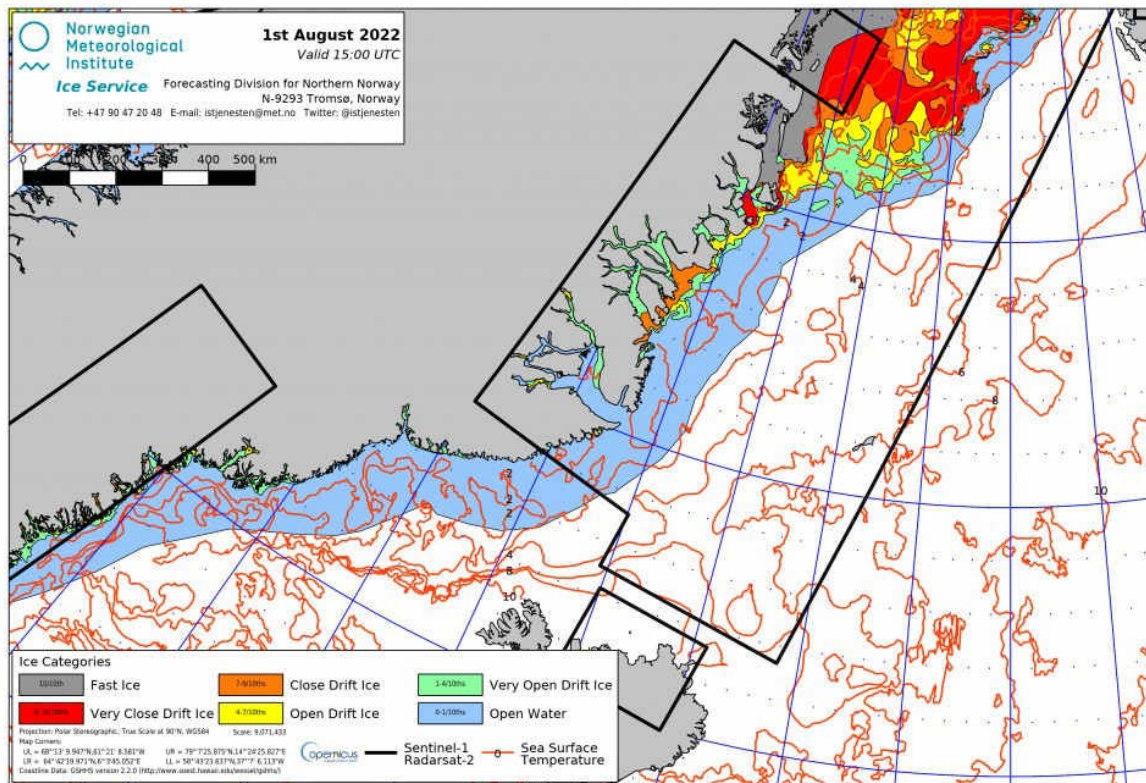
For us at the dock lies one of my heroes from the previous century, the French sailor Isabelle Autissier (1956) with her Ade II, a 15m aluminum sailing yacht. Isabelle was the first woman to sail solo around the world in a racing context, in the 1990-1991 BOC Challenge. In the next race four years later, she was also present, but then her Ecureuil Poitou Charentes II was dismasted and heavily damaged 900 miles south of Australia. In 1998-1999, she participated again, but her 60ft. PRB capsized and sank 1,900 miles west of Cape Horn. She was rescued by fellow competitor Giovanni Soldini. Since 2006, she has been the president of the French World Wildlife Fund.



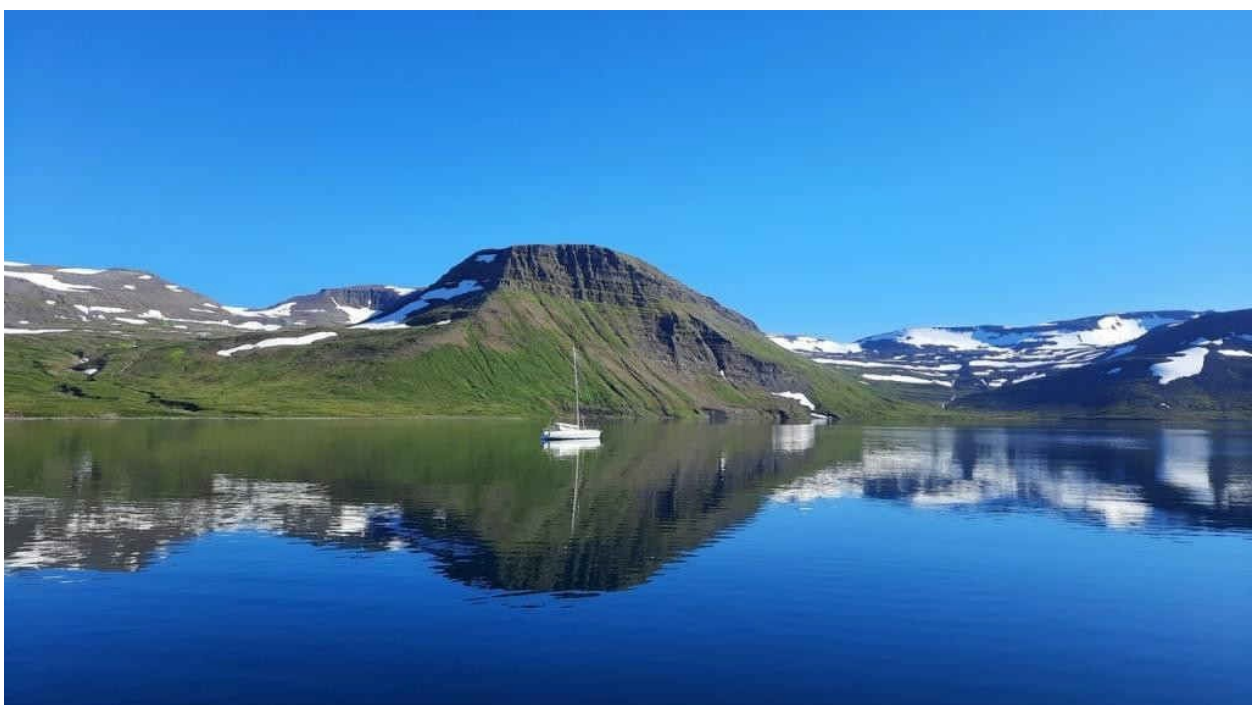
After such a long time at sea, a few days of rest are quite enjoyable. Despite the bustling atmosphere upon arrival, the village seems deserted during the rainy days that follow, although it doesn't hinder the arrival and departure of cruise ships. Cruise guests typically take buses to explore the inland, as there isn't much to do here.

Except for one thing – a fantastic fish restaurant that has one seating for lunch and two for dinner, fully booked at all times. There's no menu, only a buffet with a variety of fish dishes. Guests sit at long tables with wooden benches.

We find ourselves at a quite enjoyable international table, accompanied by businessmen from the fishing industry. Yet another culinary highlight.



Ísafjörður appears to be the departure port for Greenland sailors as well. Several boats are waiting here for the right moment to cross over to Greenland. The ice chart looks much more favorable now, with only a maximum of 10% drift ice. For a moment, we toy with the idea of going after all, but we decide otherwise. We opt to spend more time exploring the north and east coasts of Iceland.



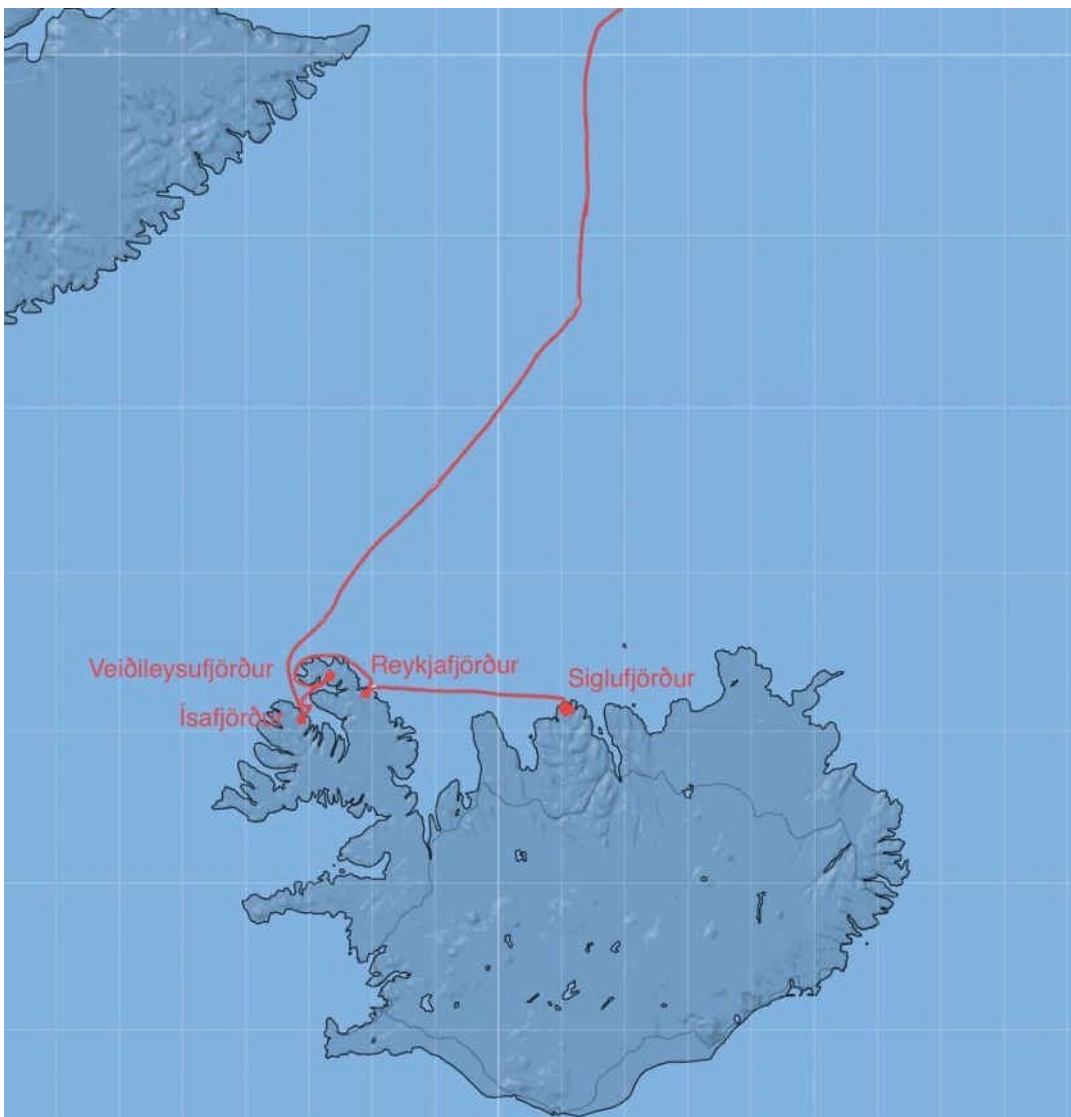
On August 4th, we cast off for a short sailing trip to the Veiðileysufjörður fjord with its idyllic bay. We are not alone for long. In the evening, another yacht anchors nearby. The next morning, we weigh anchor to navigate around Straumnes and Horn, the northern counterpart of Cape Horn, on a sea as smooth as oil. We then drop anchor in Reykjafjörður.



The swell in the bay causes substantial surf along the coast. Not suitable for landing, but perfect for being gently rocked to sleep. With too many appealing destination choices, each equally attractive, we ultimately decide to make a substantial move to Siglufjörður, located 90 miles away. This small fishing town was once the herring capital of the North Atlantic. In the Síldarminjasafnið, a red wooden building on the quay, the present herring museum is housed, preserving memories of the herring industry through visuals and audio materials. I experience the same sense of vicarious shame as with the Dutch whaling in the 17th century, where, within a span of about 60-70 years, the entire whale population was exterminated. Three hundred years later, a similar fate has befallen the herring here—all for the sake of the immense profits associated with fish oil and fishmeal, the ultimate destiny of the herring.



Meanwhile, Norna Biron has transformed into a sickbay. Only Edmond has managed to avoid a virus that has afflicted Joost and me. Coughing, sore throat, fever, and headache are our fate here in Siglufjörður, and we reminisce about the bustling seafood restaurant in Ísafjörður. Where else could we have contracted this?



IJsland - Faeröer

August 19, 2022

What do you think of when it comes to a North Atlantic crossing with a sailboat? Hardship, cold, storms, and rough seas. They are heroes, those sailors who take on such a challenge, at least in my eyes.



After two of us felt increasingly unwell, we decided to do a self-test, with the above result – all three are positive





After about 6 days, things are looking up. Edmond has already climbed all the peaks around Siglufjörður, and we feel well enough to continue sailing. Iceland feels different than I had imagined. It's beautiful here, and the villages are charming and simple. It's not because of that. Could it be because this is where the return journey begins? Or have we been spoiled by the many earlier impressions? Or is it the frailty in my body? I'm eager to move on and leave the East Coast of Iceland for another time. Perhaps it'll be charming on a future visit



Siglufjörður

We quickly agree; we're leaving from here, Siglufjörður in the north of Iceland, directly to the Faroe Islands. The weather looks good enough. At around four in the morning, we cast off.



450 miles across the North Atlantic to the Faroe Islands. We've been there before, but that time we approached from the southeast; now, it's from the northwest. That makes a difference. For the first time in two months of the Midnight Sun, we see the moon with a beautiful red moonrise, and it truly becomes night. The Arctic Circle is already well behind us. Only the beautiful Northern Lights and cloud formations still accompany us. What a magnificent spectacle once again.



Nothing grueling, no wilderness, and comfortable temperatures. The crossing is very relaxed. Winds at 10, occasionally 15 knots from the south, gradually veering, allowing us to sail in a large arc toward the Faroe Islands. The ocean proves to be gentle to us. Norna glides over it extremely comfortably. The course, high on the usually light wind, with the autopilot steering to the wind vane, couldn't have been better. The waves ripple toward us in great regularity. The preventer, which is supposed to keep me in bed, remains unused. In sight of the highest peaks of the Faroe Islands, the wind disappears, and the engine has to propel us further. The current helps us to arrive right in front of the Kalsoe Fjord, and at the right tidal moment, we enter the fjord. We dock in the small harbor of Leirvík on the morning of August 15.



Leirvík

After a farmers night(*), we cast off around noon on the 16th and head out with the current towards Tórshavn. We've been here before, so it already feels like familiar territory. Where they were still renovating the quay last year, that work has now been completed. It looks beautiful and fresh, and there is still a spot available right in the heart of the city.

(*)Dutch expression for sleeping like a log")



Tórshavn

With Edmond, I embark on another, for my standards ambitious, hike over the 351m high Kirkjubøreyn to the historical town of Kirkjubøur. The scenic views along the way once again provide us with an overwhelming impression of this rugged landscape.



Just before the village, my attention is drawn to a beautifully crafted Colin Archer yacht, about 10 meters long. It is perched high in the grassland and appears to be an abandoned restoration project. Everything that can go wrong with epoxy (or polyester, I can't stand to see that anymore) is clearly visible in that yacht. It's quite incomprehensible, especially considering all the beautiful clinker-built or lapstrake sloops, Viking ships, and fishing boats sailing here, where, of course, not a drop of epoxy can be found. On the other hand, you also see additions and structures in plywood here, and I think, why not use epoxy in those cases.

A narrow perspective when it comes to boatbuilding and epoxy is not unfamiliar to me 😊

I forgot to take pictures.



Kirkjubøur is a village with only a few houses and seems to be a tourist attraction. One of the houses, covered with a grass roof, has been inhabited since the 12th century, making it the oldest continuously inhabited house in the world. Additionally, there is the unfinished church ruin of the Magnus Cathedral from the 13th century.



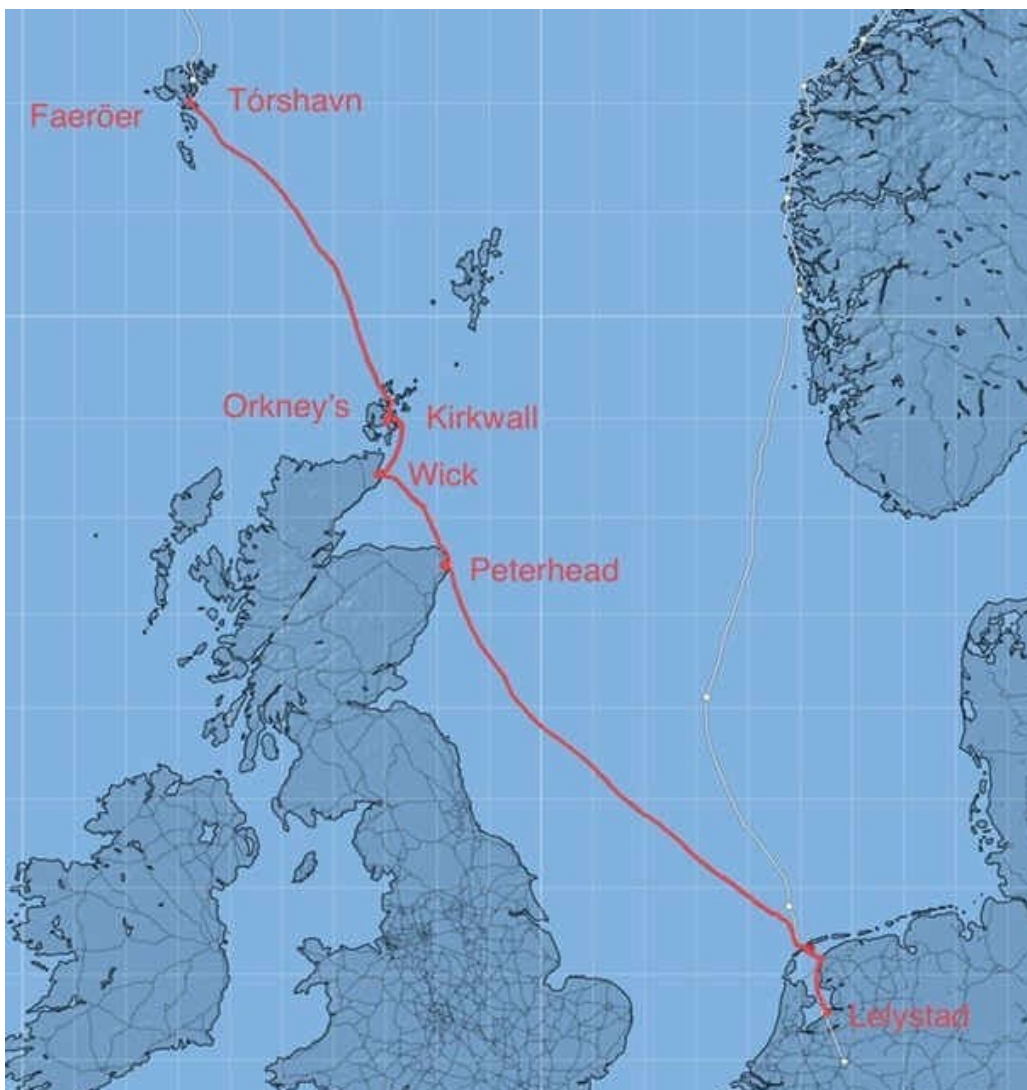
More than 12 km. one way, but the same distance back, gives me somewhat wobbly legs and muscle pain the next day during the final descent. However, there is enough time for recovery. A low-pressure area lingering between us and Iceland brings strong winds from the wrong direction, keeping us a few days longer in Tórshavn. We aim to head to the Orkney Islands, and it seems that departing tomorrow evening (20/8) will work out.

Loetje of het Wad

August 30, 2022

On August 28th, under a sun-drenched North Sea, we let Norna sail southward with a delightful breeze. During our first Happy Hour on the last sea voyage to Lelystad, we discuss the course to be followed. The gribbs (weather charts) show in the coming days a further eastward veering NNE wind, gradually increasing to almost 20 knots on the last day of August. Perfect conditions and also a reason to start the homeward journey instead of visiting more English coastal towns. Are we going to sail between Vlieland and Terschelling through the Wadden Sea and then enter the IJsselmeer, or are we going to have a nice steak at Loetje in the Amsterdam Marina? The latter option means a course to IJmuiden and then through the North Sea Canal to the IJsselmeer. Although this is a bit of a detour with extra locks, it comes with an extra day of rest in Amsterdam.

We haven't decided yet



After our stop in Tórshavn in the Faroe Islands, there were still several options for the course back home. Two of them, via the Shetland Islands and/or via Norway, we already did last year. Unanimously, the decision is made to visit Kirkwall on the Orkney Islands, which is 220 miles away. A nice place to spend a few days.



The crossing from the Faroe Islands to the Orkney Islands proceeds once again very comfortably under a favorable wind and calm sea. It's delightful to be back in "England." Wick, on the mainland of Scotland, will be the next port. Since Brexit, there is a need for clearance again. This is merely an administrative procedure. Prior to arrival, a form must be filled out online with boat and personal details, along with the expected time and port of arrival. In the harbor, with the yellow quarantine flag below the guest flag, a phone call to Yachtline follows. After the telephone clearance, the yellow Q flag can be lowered.

To have the tide in our favor, we depart Kirkwall in the late afternoon. During my watch in the evening, we round Mull Head in a very confused sea with high waves. It's a bit bumpy around the cape, but once rounded, it becomes calmer. I stay close to the coast and sneak behind a shallow area to the passage between the islands of Copinsay and Horse of Copinsay, which is five miles away. A rain shower obscures the islands from view, but as we get closer, it clears up, and the rocks become visible again in the now dark evening. By taking this route, we avoid the overfalls further out at sea. The current is strong here, and I have to steer significantly to avoid being sucked into the west side of the Copinsay passage. An hour later, I wake up Edmond for his watch, feeling satisfied as I head to my bunk.



Wick also played a significant role as England's main herring port. The museum testifies to a massive fishing fleet of at least 800 ships. However, our own fishing endeavors hadn't been very successful.

After a substantial portion of the contents of my fishing tackle box found its way to the seabed in Norway due to a poorly sealed lid, the enthusiasm for fishing had greatly diminished. However, in Kirkwall, I managed to acquire a good paravane and some lures. With these, this afternoon turned out to be successful, as I reeled in four sizable mackerels.





Somewhere, I read an article about filleting freshly caught fish. Particularly, the process of killing and cleaning the fish can result in a bloody mess on the deck. However, there's a cleaner method: letting the fish die (preferably in a bag), not cleaning it but directly cutting off the fillets. This reduces the mess significantly, though it might result in slightly less yield. The onboard fish fillet expert is Edmond, who skillfully slices beautiful fillets. What remains is a complete fish, stripped of its fillets, and is recycled overboard. Apart from a slightly bloody cutting board, it's a fairly clean operation.



From Wick, we sail to Peterhead. We arrive precisely at low tide, making the marina temporarily inaccessible due to insufficient depth. Norna has a draft of 2.5m, just a bit too much. Port Control guides us to the fishing harbor, where we find a spot at the quay close to the village.

Peterhead turns out to be a charming place. The large seaport initially gave a different impression, but Peterhead exudes a cozy and friendly atmosphere. The next day, we move to the marina, where the harbor master immediately invites us to the Friday night BBQ. He says, "Bring only your own drinks." Later, while doing the final grocery shopping of the journey, I decide to grab a few burgers just in case. It turns out unnecessary—the BBQ offers an abundance of hamburgers, sausages, hotdogs, homemade rollmops, along with salads, bread, and more. In short, it's well-organized and very enjoyable. After the BBQ, we leave the marina around 11:00 PM, heading towards the Netherlands—the last sea voyage of our journey.



The almost 400-mile sea journey proceeds comfortably and swiftly on the starboard tack with a northeast breeze. It's a beautiful sail. By Monday afternoon, August 29th, we're already above the Dogger Bank. The decision has been made to return home via the Wadden Sea. The shipping routes above the islands kept us quite busy last night; it was crowded.



At the outbound buoy of the Stortemelk above Vlieland, where we began our sea journey to the north, the circle is complete. That was this morning around 7:30. Instead of steaks at Loetje, we'll have sole fillets tonight at Aan 't Water in the Flevomarina Lelystad.

This concludes the last update.

The track of the entire journey can be reviewed in the image below and the link forecast.predictwind.com/tracking/display/NornaBiron/

