To Greenland

In the summer of 2024, during our sailing trip to Scoresbysund in Greenland, I regularly reported on our journey and published those updates on my Blog as well as on the Dutch Zeilersforum.

These posts have been compiled in this PDF.

Wishing you an enjoyable read.

Content:

To Greenland

Entirely against my usual habit, I am completely ready six weeks before departure. Packed are one heavy bag with diving gear, another bag with sleeping bags and shoes, bag number 3 with polar boots and sailing clothing, and bag number 4 with clothing divided into trousers, shirts, warm sweaters, a small bag with a variety of gloves, a small bag with underwear, and a small bag with various head coverings, plus the toiletry bag.

The diving gear may be needed to solve any emergencies around the propeller—hopefully it will remain unused. I have carefully stowed all of this in the forepeak of *Norna Biron,* the yacht of muy friend Joost. The drone, action cams, and camera will get a spot in one of the lockers in Norna's forward cabin. The onboard library has been supplemented with various reading material.

However, *Norna Biron* is leaving without me—and without Edmond, friend and third crew member. We will only travel six weeks later, flying with Transavia via Schiphol to Reykjavík in Iceland, where Joost's friends, who make up the crew, will disembark and we will come aboard.

This preparation does feel strange. So much pre-departure bustle, departure stress, packed and ready—but not departing.

It leaves a sense of emptiness. In the meantime, I sometimes reach for things and find them gone. Oh right, the cameras are already away.

Work on my own boat is progressing poorly, hampered by countless small but time-consuming chores. My motivation has waned; my thoughts are already much more on the upcoming trip.

Intermezzo

Then an email arrives from a sailing friend, asking whether I would be interested in a delivery job: moving a sailboat from a small Belgian marina near Thorn to Woudsend in Friesland. A motor trip along the major rivers, with the mast laid flat over the boat. Well, actually, I'm quite up for that, so I sign on for this enjoyable distraction.

The last time I sailed on the major rivers was 50 years ago, paddling a (self-built) canoe from the Ardennes to Hilversum.

Darn—my sailing gear and sleeping bag are already on their way to Iceland. Well, an old

sleeping bag is still around, and since this trip will be under engine power, I'll only need some simple rain gear.

The journey took a week and was quite enjoyable. The hardest part was the section on the river Waal going upstream between the river Maas and the connection to the river IJssel. Pretty intense, actually—very busy with large inland shipping vessels and push barges, lots of counter-current. The boat speed didn't get above 1.5 knots, sometimes nearly at a standstill. A police RIB came alongside to check if everything was OK, which was great. We were choosing the wrong side of the river to reduce the counter-current, and now I also understand how those blue signs used by inland shipping work. The ships pass each other "blue on blue," meaning they both sail on the "wrong" side and display a blue sign. Upstream takes the inside bend, downstream the outside bend.

The rest of the trip along the lovely river IJssel, going downstream, made up for a lot. Although a week of chugging along on the engine was quite long enough as well.

Reykjavik

Every day I see *Norna Biron* move a little further on the map. From Lelystad via Scotland, the Orkneys, and the Faroes, they're now on their way to Iceland. I can already see what's coming. The wind is steering *Norna* toward the north of Iceland, which means that Reykjavík—our agreed meeting point—isn't going to happen. I had really been looking forward to the sail from Reykjavík to Ísafjörður. But that's not going to happen now. It'll be flying, with Icelandair.

Our springboard to Scoresby Sound in Greenland is Ísafjörður in the North West of Iceland. We were there on our previous trip as well. That's where we caught COVID and recovered in another Icelandic town, Siglufjörður. Incidentally, that's also the town where the chilling Netflix series *Trapped* takes place. Highly recommended!

Travelling without luggage is quite convenient. Only the iPad, a toothbrush, clean underwear, and a warm sweater go into the small backpack. Checking in digitally without hold baggage means you can go straight to security. As usual, my backpack gets pulled aside to have its contents checked. It turns out to be the cables and a charger that triggered the alert.

On Saturday, July 27, we're flying with Transavia in a chartered aircraft—not a Transavia plane. Where a Boeing lost a wall panel a few months ago, the outline of that panel is now covered on the inside with duct tape. In the exact same spot—bizarre. Apparently to reinforce the mounting of the interior panels.

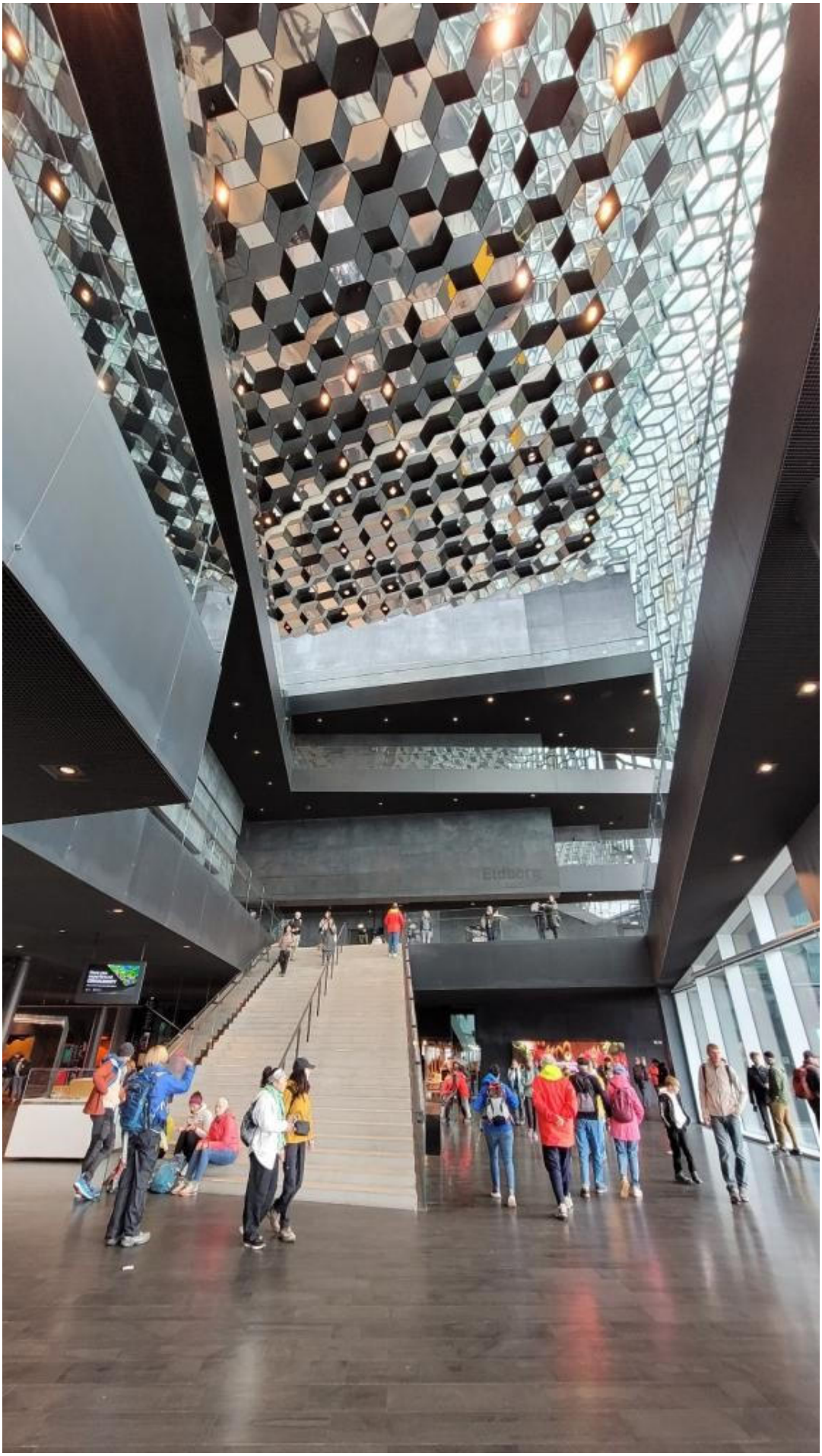
Fortunately, it's not a Boeing, and this is purely coincidental :)

We're in luck. The airport is about a 45-minute drive from Reykjavík, and we get a lift from Petra, whom Edmond got talking to on the plane. She's being picked up by her son, and there's room for us in the car as well. We're dropped off in the centre of Reykjavík, right across from the guesthouse we booked for the night.

Following the directions in the email, we end up in a small room with a double bed instead of the two single beds we reserved. We like each other, but not *that* much. Edmond calls the host and explains that we're not lovers, and that's why we booked two separate beds

After some back-and-forth, we get rebooked into a suite. Well, that's definitely a lot better. We throw ourselves into the Reykjavík Saturday-night festivities. Lots of people on the streets, lots of music, lots of noise, and also lots of police. One drink in a somewhat quieter pub is enough before we call it a night.

Hallgrimskirkja, de grootste kerk van IJsland



Opera gebouw

On Sunday afternoon we fly to Ísafjörður, so we still have some time for sightseeing before we walk over to the “Domestic Airport.”

I’ve been to Reykjavík twice before, but never got farther than this airport. The first time was for a fuel stop with a single-engine Piper (a Piper Saratoga with a piston engine) on the way from Hilversum to Chicago, and the second time also with a single-engine Piper (a Piper Malibu with a turbine engine) on the way from Spokane to Hilversum.

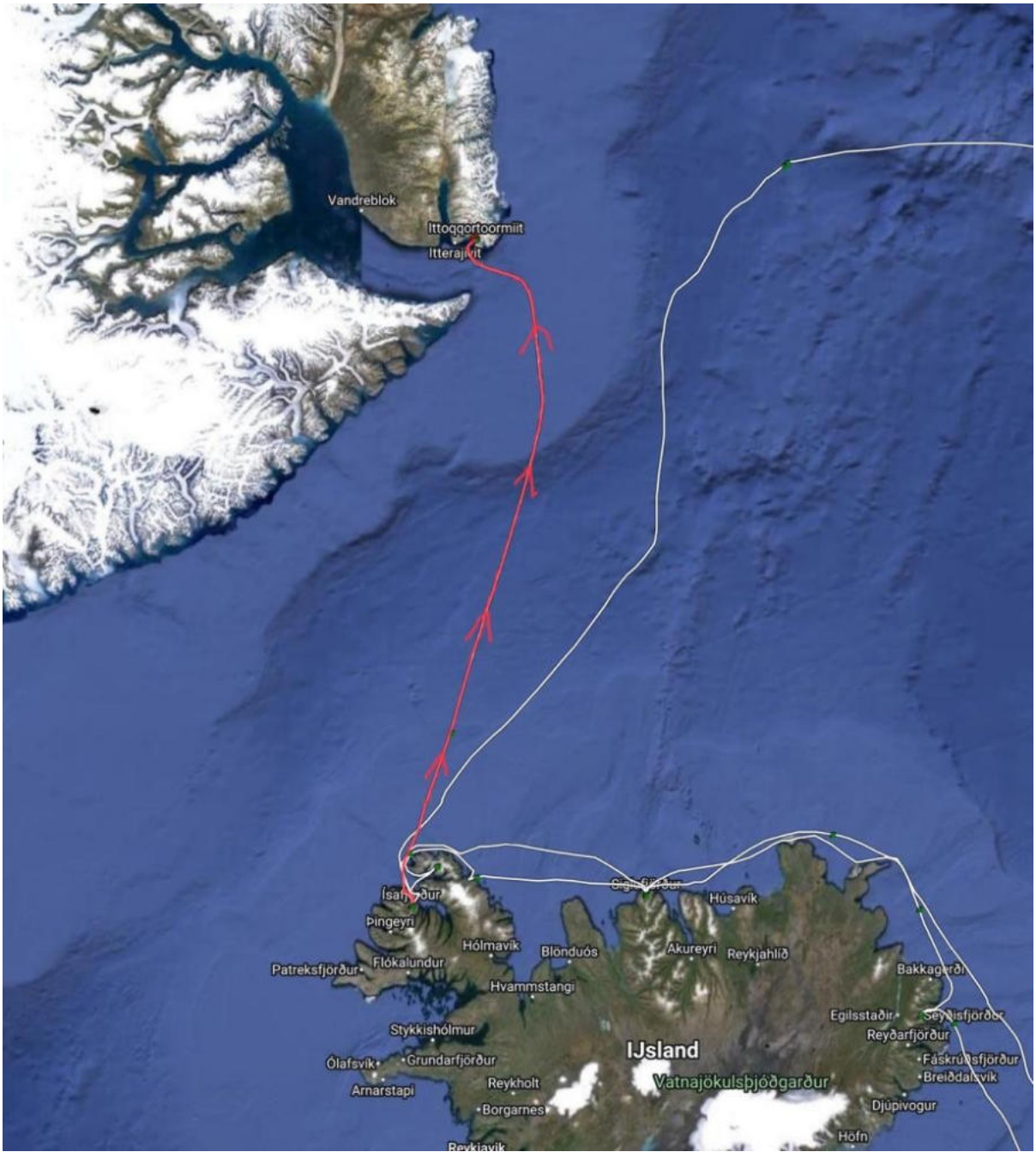
Those were different times and different adventures ;)

In just 40 minutes, Icelandair’s small Bombardier drops us off on the runway at Ísafjörður. The shuttle bus takes us to the quay alongside *Norna Biron*, where Joost is already waiting for us and has prepared a lavish Mexican dinner on board.

Ittoqqortoormiit

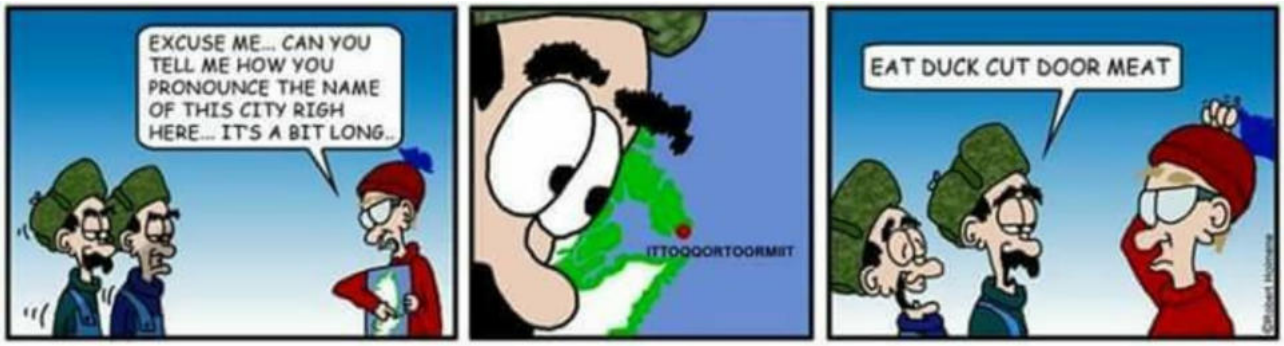
Bad weather is on the way. A deepening depression over or just south of Iceland will bring us northerly storm winds starting Wednesday. From Monday to Wednesday the wind strength and direction will be quite variable. It's only a short weather window, and we'll have to use the engine most of the time to make progress. Not going would mean waiting at least another week. The ice conditions are favourable.

Monday morning, we set off. It becomes a small armada—an American and an Englishman are heading the same way. In Bolungarvík, a small town 6 miles further on, we fill up *Norna* completely, including a few jerrycans: a total of just under 1,000 litres of diesel.



For me, it’s “bucket duty” on watch. It takes me a full day to get my sea legs, and I’m forced to skip both happy hour and dinner. My entire stomach contents have by now become fish food.

All this time, visibility is poor because of low-hanging mist. As the Greenland coast gets closer, the suspense grows over who will be the first to spot an iceberg. That honour goes to the skipper. Well—*iceberg*… at first they’re just small floating chunks of ice. But they keep getting bigger. The final stretch is real slalom work, picking a path to find a navigable passage. Joost steers, Edmond gives directions from the bow, and I keep an eye on the course on the chart. Nothing to seein the mist outside.



Our final destination is Ittoqqortoormiit (phonetically pronounced as “eat duck cut door meat”), which lies on the northern shore of the 20-nautical-mile-wide entrance to Scoresbysund. It has about 370 inhabitants.

If the visibility we have matches what the ice charts indicate, we should still be able to handle the yellow-marked areas (open drift ice, 4–7/10ths). That’s somewhat reassuring

Arming Ourselves

People here say something unusual is going on with the polar bears at the moment. There are a lot of them, and they’re coming ever closer in search of food. Just a few days ago, two polar bears wandered into the village of Ittoqqortoormiit — and were shot. Last week, a dead whale drifted onto the coast, attracting 67(?!) polar bears that came to feed on the carcass. This, according to the local police officer — a very helpful guy, from whom we’re asking information about how to obtain a rifle.

You can buy them in the local supermarket. Unfortunately, the rifles still in stock are too small in calibre and therefore unsuitable. According to the officer, one of his colleagues has a suitable rifle for sale. He’s going to look into it. At the local tourist office, it’s also

possible to rent a rifle. The price is steep: 200 kr per day. For three weeks, that quickly adds up to more than 560 euros.

We head back to the police station. Unfortunately, it turns out that the colleague's rifle has already been sold. A pity. But the officer says he'll ask around among the local residents to see if anyone is willing to sell or rent out their rifle. After all, everyone here has one or more rifles at home. He's an exceptionally helpful guy who says our safety is his main concern.

There's no mention of permits or of whether we are actually capable of handling a rifle. It's all very easy, and completely different from Svalbard, where a lot of administrative and practical requirements had to be met. (See my earlier story about that.)

Back on the boat, we get a phone call from the officer. He has found an Inuit who is willing to rent out a rifle. He has directed the young man (21 years old, as we later learn — a carpenter and hunter) to the white boat anchored outside.

Later in the evening, a small boat with two Inuit does indeed come alongside. One of them is happy to have a beer; the other only wants water. We quickly agree on the price. After a bit of haggling, it comes out to about 25% less than the usual rates. Still a lot of money, but we're happy to give the young man this opportunity. One of the two briefly returns to shore to fetch his girlfriend (for support). She speaks better English, and via online banking we transfer the amount to his account. He should receive it within one business day. They're satisfied, and the rifle—with scope and sufficient .30-06 ammunition—stays aboard *Norna*.

Fully loaded, as I later discovered.

By the way, the rifle is strictly a last resort. We also have flares, pepper spray, and a signal pistol to scare off any polar bear we might encounter. According to the experienced locals, the signal pistol seems to offer the best chance of deterring one.

As an aside: in Europe you must declare whether you have weapons on board, and if so, they are taken into custody by the local authorities. For example, the Englishman in Ísafjörður had to surrender his two rifles for safekeeping. When he was leaving, problems arose. Apparently his paperwork wasn't in order, and he couldn't get the rifles back. He has to return to the UK in person to sort everything out and then reclaim his weapons from the Icelandic authorities. Having weapons on board is always a hassle in Europe.

He was therefore forced to rent weapons here as well — one for himself, and one for the climbers who are heading into the inland for several weeks.

Rest Day

Yesterday we occasionally had to keep the anchor chain clear of drifting ice. Not the kind of ice you can simply push aside, but really large floes — and now and then some beautiful sculptural pieces. By using the dinghy with the outboard engine to pull sideways on the bow, and by pushing with boat hooks from the foredeck, we managed to keep the chain free of ice.

The weather this Friday morning is drizzly. It's quite windy. The expected storm is raging somewhere between us and Iceland but seems less severe than previously forecast. Here, we hardly notice it. We haven't seen more than 20 knots of wind yet. We are nicely sheltered behind the weather shore, which also means that most of the ice has now been blown out of our bay. The "cruise ship" on the horizon — a huge iceberg — has been in the same spot for days. It's probably grounded.

Out at sea, there's now a real cruise ship, the *World Voyager*. Beautiful, comfortable, warm, and equipped with every convenience. I wonder how the passengers visiting Ittoqqortoormiit experience it. There are no sights, shops, or restaurants—except for a tiny shop with only packaged goods. I haven't seen any tourist trinkets either. Is it a cold, barren place, or pure natural wilderness? They are brought ashore in survival suits and life jackets via RIBs. I wonder how the locals benefit from this; there's almost nothing to spend money on.

Tomorrow we're heading further into Scoresbysund. The hunter has now received the rental fee in his account.

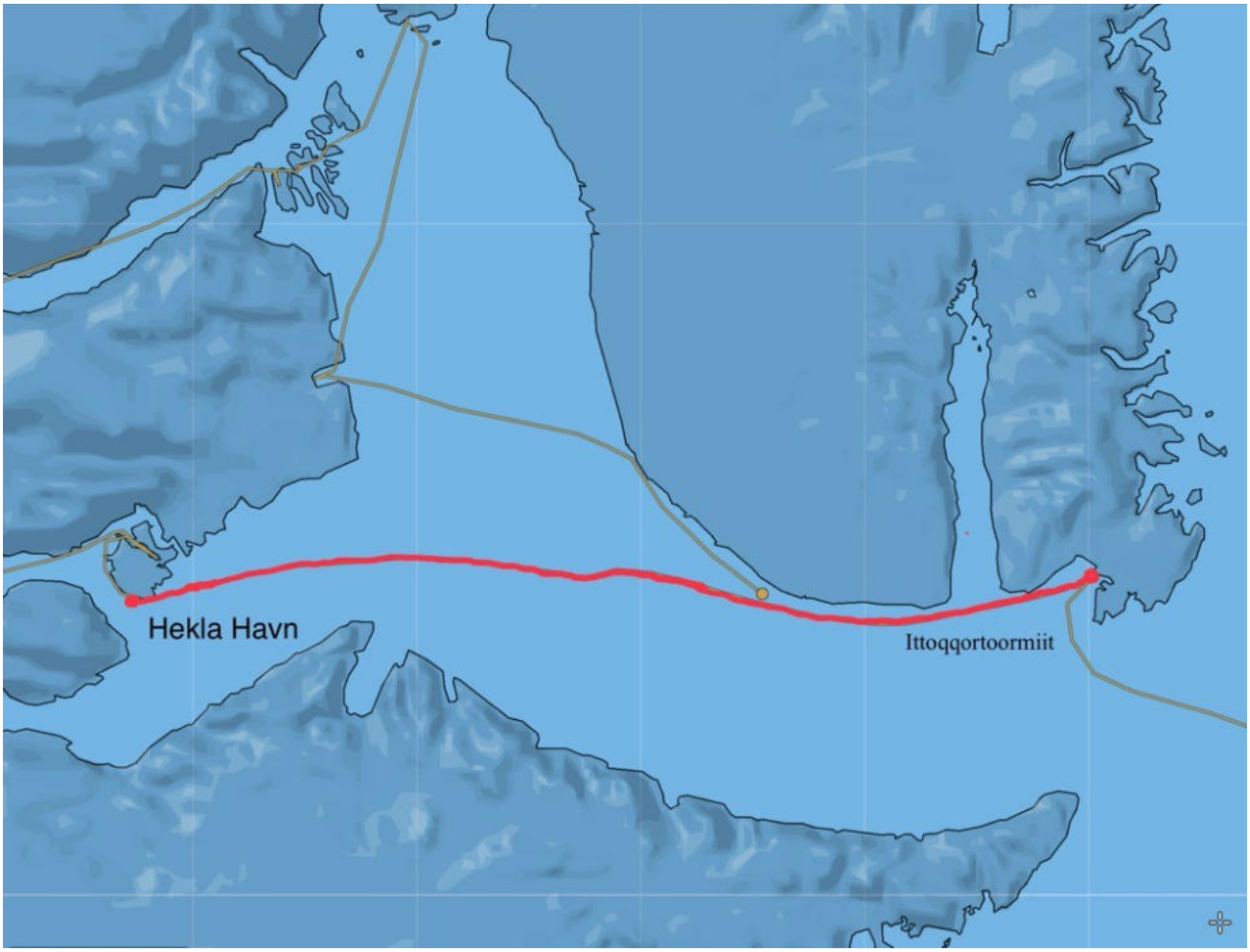
Just some more beautiful pictures:

Scoresbysund

We stayed an extra two days in Ittoqqortoormiit. Using the dinghy, we explored the nearby drifting ice floes and took some beautiful photos.

The spare jerrycans of diesel were emptied into the main tank, and we refill them at the fuel station on a somewhat prominent cape further along in Ittoqqortoormiit. It's quite a walk with heavy jerrycans, so we take the small dinghy there. There's no proper landing place, and there's also some significant swell. The four now-filled jerrycans, 20 litres each,

are lowered along the rock wall into the small boat on a rope. Quite an operation, but it works.



Our next destination is Hekla Havn, an anchorage located on Danmark Ø, an island at the beginning of the Fønfjord and just south of Milne Land. Over 80 nautical miles westward through Scoresbysund.

On the way there, we encounter the real giants—icebergs as large as apartment buildings or cruise ships. They are enormously impressive formations of ice thousands of years old, originating from the glaciers in the west, the direction we're sailing.

(Later in the trip, we see even larger icebergs that could fit multiple apartment buildings and cruise ships at once.)

Of course, we don’t skip our daily “Happy Hour” around 5:00 PM while on the way to Hekla Havn.

Father and son Scoresby were whalers. In 1822, the east coast between 69°N and 75°N was extensively charted by son Scoresby. This corrected the maps of the time, which had drawn the coast 7 to 14 degrees too far east. He named Scoresbysund after his father. He also used the names of other family members and scientific colleagues to name capes, islands, and the mainland, such as Liverpool Land, Jameson Land, Milne Land, Cape Tobin, and Cape Brewster.

By modern standards, the charts are still unreliable, at least in terms of any detail they provide.

We initially sail past Hekla Havn. Looking a bit into the sun, the coast appears as an unbroken mountain wall. According to the digital charts on board, we're sailing on land. The charts are still based on measurements from long before the GPS era. They provide no detail. It seems as if we've sailed past, so we turn back, keeping a little closer to the coast now, with icebergs on starboard and the shore on port, watching the depth sounder carefully—which still shows great depths.

We slide into a small bay, but it doesn't match the Hekla Havn shown on the pilot chart. Back into open water, we search for the next inlet, keeping an eye on the GPS coordinates and comparing them with those of Hekla Havn.

Then a passage appears, and the charming Hekla Bay opens on port. We anchor not far from the shore in 12 meters of water, which shallows sharply toward the shore and deepens in the opposite direction. In effect, we're anchoring on a slope.

We go ashore and try out the firearms.

I've removed the scope from the rifle. For hunting, a scope is indispensable, but as a last resort for protection against a polar bear, it only gets in the way. Unfortunately, the little aiming pin at the start of the barrel is missing.

Edmond shoots first, at a piece of floating ice about 20 meters away. Wow, what a bang, and what power. My ears are ringing, leaving a high-pitched whistle. Edmond shoots just over it.

Then I chamber the rifle. The empty casing flies out, the next round rises, and I slide it into the barrel. My shot also misses, this time just in front of it. The water jumps, sending up a big splash from the impact. The bang is deafening again, though the recoil isn't too bad.

Then we try the Nico flares. It's a round plastic magazine with six red flare cartridges, ready to fire once you slide the lever from "Safe" to "Fire." The handle is essentially one big trigger. A slight squeeze and *Boom!* Not bad at all — quite a bang, with smoke and fire. Fired almost horizontally, the projectile disappears into the water about 200 meters away.

Then my signal pistol, calibre 4, which means 1" (25 mm) rounds. Over the years I've fired it more often, but always into the air, never aimed. I aim at a rock about 15 meters away. The projectile ricochets off the rock with tremendous force, exactly where I aimed. The remainder falls into the water about 100 meters farther on and continues to smoulder for a while.

We decide not to test the bear-spray canister.

All in all, not bad. The only thing we really have to watch out for is not pulling the bolt too far back when reloading the rifle — if you do, it comes out. The locking mechanism that's supposed to prevent that is a bit loose. We can't load more than four rounds in advance, at least not if we want to keep it half-loaded. "Half-loaded" means there's no round in the chamber. You achieve that by pressing down the top cartridge with your thumb while sliding the bolt over it. Learned in Svalbard. In hindsight, I think the shooting instructor in Biddinghuizen should have told us that. Back then, his explanation was limited to using the safety catch.

Even in Hekla Havn, we stay an extra day to explore the surroundings. Of course, a “cairn” has to be built, a well-known phenomenon in the climbing world and sometimes lifesaving as a landmark.

Our goal is to round Milne Land, a large island on the west side of Scoresbysund. The Rødefjord to the west is the narrowest part and also the area from which the icebergs come, originating from the glaciers in Vestfjord, Harefjord, and Rypefjord. This is also the area that becomes navigable last—if it becomes navigable at all. Rounding Milne Land counterclockwise would give us a bit more time in that regard than clockwise. Nevertheless, we decide on clockwise. If it turns out badly, we can always turn back.

On the other side of Danmark Ø lies another fjord, which almost cuts the island in two. We believe—and know from the pilot—that the end of that fjord offers a good anchorage. It’s only about 20 nautical miles away. Instead of heading port from Fønfjord, as the start of the clockwise round, we head starboard into Rensund. Mighty icebergs lie at the entrance again, and we want to film *Norna Biron* from the dinghy. Lately, its outboard engine has been a bit moody, and this time the Japanese motor refuses to start. Cleaning the spark plug helped previously, but this time even that doesn’t work.

We continue on. Later at the anchorage, we’ll have to tinker with it to see what’s wrong.

The small fjord is quickly completely free of ice and ends about four miles farther on in a narrow strip of land. It forms the divide between this fjord and the larger body of water on the eastern side of Danmark Ø. We anchor once again on a steep underwater slope, in 15 meters of water. During his long hike to one of the surrounding peaks, Edmond restores a cairn he finds there. More like a “Stone Man”—it was quite a large structure, according to Edmond.

The dinghy's outboard undergoes a careful inspection. We suspect the ignition, since we can't detect any spark in the spark plug, freshly cleaned yet again. Systematic investigation: that's what's needed. Then Joost appears with a user manual. After the usual warnings and disclaimers, I soon spot something on one of the pages that I hadn't recognized before.

A fuel valve. Joost is inside. I don't say anything to Edmond just yet. I open the valve, give the cord a pull, and the thing sputters to life. Quickly shut it off again, because it's hanging from the davits and not in the water. I point out the valve to Edmond—shame outweighs euphoria. The technically complex troubleshooting story we were about to spin for Joost is instantly punctured.

"Yes, a fuel valve. Of course it has a fuel valve! I always turn that off," says Joost, as if we're a pair of fools. Which, in this case, we are. Now Joost just needs to learn how *not* to flood that stubborn Japanese engine every time he starts it…

The icebergs that ran aground at the beginning of this small fjord are still there. We bring *Norna* to a halt, and Edmond and I take the dinghy. We guide Joost on board *Norna* over the radio, directing which way to sail, while we search for a cinematic location ourselves—close to an iceberg. We estimate its height at roughly 2.5 times the height of *Norna*'s mast, so about 60 meters. Gigantic, and Joost steers *Norna* gracefully past it. We communicate via the walkie-talkie: "Another shot like this… now like that… yes, do that one… again past that ice pillar."

Cut! That's enough.

Our next goal is an anchorage over 40 miles farther on, on the west side of Fønfjord: Ankervig, where the fjord bends north and becomes the Rødefjord. In that bend, at the foot of Hjörnedal, a small river flows out. The slight current it generates helps deflect the ice

into Fønfjord. We are sailing directly into it, which is visible from the increasing amount of ice. Still, it’s not a problem for us—there’s plenty of room to avoid the ice.

It becomes a magnificent passage, against a light wind, so entirely under engine. On both sides of the imposing straight fjord, enormous walls of granite and basalt rise steeply. We estimate them at least 1,000 meters high. Between them are vertical clefts, valleys, and paths carved by glaciers that have long since retreated from the water. At the tops, overhanging glaciers mark the edge of the ice cap.

The gently sloping landscape on the outer bend from Fønfjord to Rødefjord suggests that it might be shallow near the coast. But the opposite is true. The water remains deep and flat. We anchor again near the shore in 15 meters of sandy or loamy water. A few huts have been built on land—most belonging to local Inuit hunters, and two small buildings for scientists studying narwhals.

Except for a few musk oxen, there’s no one around. It’s deserted. At 28°15′, this is the westernmost position we’ve reached so far in our Scoresbysund adventure. We probably won’t go much farther west.

The ice floes all keep a resolute distance of about 300 meters from shore. The icebergs are even farther out.

Today, Wednesday, August 7, we are still anchored in Ankervig, on the outer bend in the west of Fønfjord. I remain on board while Edmond and Joost go ashore, each on their own walk—Edmond a bit higher up than Joost. I use the time to write this piece, occasionally scanning the surroundings with binoculars. Do I see bare male behinds? Indeed, it’s Joost paddling in a mountain stream.

In the distance, high up on the mountains of the mainland, we can see the Greenland ice cap. Magnificent!

Ternivigene and Bjørne Øer

We are anchored in Ternivigene, a quiet little bay, just a stone’s throw from the immense glacier that marks the beginning of Harefjord.

For the next leg of our Milne Land circumnavigation, we have left the anchorage at Ankervig and are now entering the most challenging stretch. Challenging, that is, in terms of ice. Several glaciers converge here, resulting in hundreds of enormous icebergs, along with many smaller siblings. From sea level, it seems impossible to get through—but up close, it always turns out to be manageable.

In the busiest section, we have to steer sharply to avoid the ice floes. I briefly launch the drone, but apparently I don’t focus enough. I lose track of it—I can’t see the boat, and I don’t know whether it’s coming toward me or flying further away. A moment of miscommunication, both with the remote control or app and the drone—which startles me even more—and within my own brain, where, normally, a pretty good sense of direction is usually latent.

Not right now. Fortunately, Edmond spots the drone flying in the distance, and I regain a bit of focus—although capturing beautiful footage is no longer a priority.

From Aliexpress, I bought a small plastic stick and attached it to the bottom of the drone, allowing Edmond to pluck it out of the air.

Norna meanders calmly through the many ice floes. We no longer try to push the smaller ones aside. The larger ones, which we really don't want to hit, sometimes push back slightly. One iceberg is quiet, producing only some suctioning sounds with small waves. Another is noisy, with a constant crackling and popping—like skating over ice that's still too thin, leaving new cracks behind you. Some in the distance are truly dramatic, as if a thunderstorm has erupted, with rumbling and booming from large chunks of ice breaking free.

Unfortunately, the sun isn’t shining, and the sky is overcast. You can see it in the photos—dull, gray tones. Quite unlike reality, which is much harder to capture in a photograph.

We followed the 40-mile-long Rødefjord, meandering among hundreds of icebergs and thousands of ice floes. On starboard, immense granite-like mountains rise steeply from the water. On port, further along the fjord, rugged, steeply rising mountains of a reddish rock formation appear. It reminds me of the old Westerns with those rugged red cliffs. Further along port side, they look more like the icy expedition films from the far north.

Quite a contrast.

Because of the heavy ice, this route is often blocked at the mouth of Vestfjord, one of the main sources of the many icebergs. A Milne Land circumnavigation is therefore often hindered far into the season, or even made completely impossible. Not this time. It’s

sufficiently open for us. We even have the impression that we are the first boat of the year to make this round.

Our destination today is an anchorage right next to the glacier in Harefjord. The bay is again deep and slopes steeply toward the shore. We anchor at a depth of 20 meters, but drift over 10 meters. Further toward the shore, it quickly becomes shallow. To keep *Norna Biron* in place, we also run two lines to the shore.

We stay here another day to explore the surroundings. On the shore, a few musk oxen graze with a calf. Edmond is off exploring the mountain, while Joost and I are in the salon when we feel *Norna* touch the bottom briefly. The wind has picked up, pushing us closer to the shore, to the area where we earlier saw the seabed become shallow quickly.

We decide to let the two shore lines slip, after first untying the beginning of the lines from the drums they were wound on. The tension on the port aft line is too great to release it from the cleat. Despite wrapping the smooth line multiple times around the cleat, it keeps slipping. The engine must be used to take the tension off—and that works. They are floating Dyneema lines, red in color.

Now that the stern is free, we want to hoist the anchor.

The dinghy is tied alongside *Norna* on her port side, near where the guardrail is secured between two stanchions with a pelican hook. This makes it easy to release, which is why it’s our favorite boarding and disembarking spot. This time, however, it’s on a slightly too-long line. Also, the port-side exhaust of *Norna* is nearby, shooting a water fountain upward. A low jetty would have been soaked in no time—but now it’s our dinghy that has maneuvered directly underneath. The boat is nearly filled to the brim before we notice it. We catch it just in time, before the poor thing goes under. Joost pulls on the bow line of the dinghy to relieve the tension, and I untie the knot attaching it to the stanchion. Then I drag

the now very heavy dinghy forward a bit. It's still floating, and all is fine. We quickly hoist the anchor.

A little farther out, toward the center of the bay, we drop the anchor again in 20 meters of water and let out extra chain. Edmond, on shore, is near the released port aft line and hauls it in. I pick up Edmond in the dinghy, and we head to the far side of the bay to retrieve the other aft line—but it's gone, having slipped free from the sling it was tied around a rock.

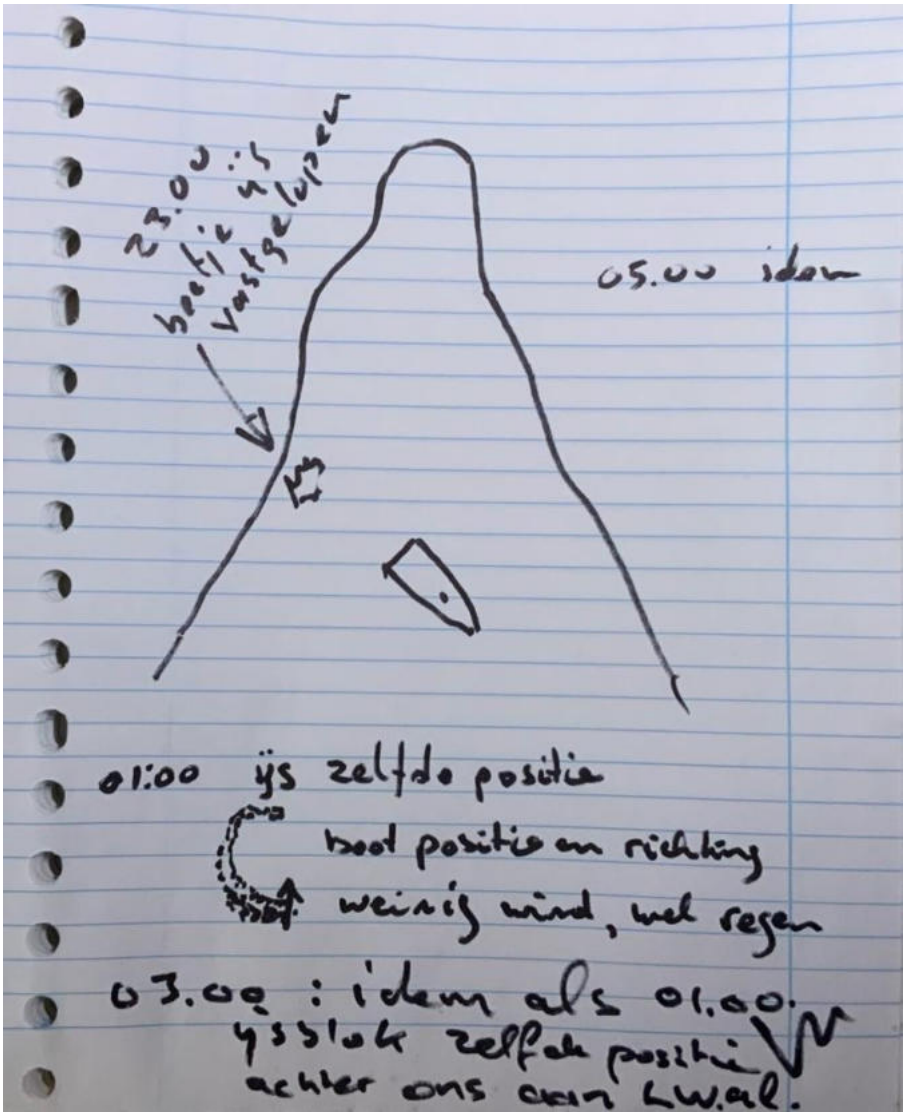
Oops. That Dyneema is slippery, as we're reminded.

With the dinghy, we search the entire shore to the middle of the bay, but the line is nowhere to be found. Edmond goes ashore again (easier said than done—only rocks and significant swell on the leeward side) to try to spot the red floating line from above.

Then Joost calls from *Norna*. He sees the line floating, less than 100 meters from the boat. I pick up Edmond again (again, easier said than done), and we find the line exactly where Joost indicated.

The icebergs outside remain neatly lined up, stranded on the shallows that the bay now lies behind. Broken-off pieces of ice are now drifting toward us as well. The largest has already run aground some distance from the shore on starboard of *Norna*. It's not ideal, so we all decide to set alarms. I am the last to go to my bunk at 11:00 PM, after first sketching a quick map of the bay, *Norna*'s position, and the ice.

Joost sets his alarm for 1:00 AM, Edmond for 3:00 AM, and I set mine again for 5:00 AM. Fortunately, not much has changed on my sketch of the situation, except that the ice block has significantly decreased in size overnight.



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Saturday, August 10.

It's raining, and it promises to be a gray day. There are two suitable anchorages here. We occupy one, while in the other bay the *Perola del Mar*, a

two-masted sailing vessel, has anchored overnight—the first boat we've encountered in these parts.

On the AIS, we see the cruise ship *Seabourn Venture* entering Rødefjord in the direction we've just come from. They stop, lower a few RIBs, and later turn back. Perhaps the ice further on toward Vestfjord is too dense for them? I can imagine that. Where we can easily navigate around those enormous icebergs and ice floes, it's more difficult for a ship of that size, I would think—depending, of course, on the percentage of open water, which wasn't much there.

As we sail through Øfjord toward our next anchorage at Bjørne Øer, the cruise ship remains about 13 miles behind us, following our course. It's a pity that the weather is so gray and hazy. The steep rock walls on both sides of *Norna* rise to heights of up to 2,000 meters—unbelievably imposing, full of deep clefts, inlets, and ravines. They are fed by dozens of glaciers, many of which reach the water's edge, ending in spectacularly steep glacier cliffs.

The tops of the mountains remain shrouded in clouds. Even halfway down, a bank of clouds drifts through the clefts, inlets, and ravines, creating the most beautiful shapes.

As we proceed further into Øfjord, the ice concentration decreases. By 7:00 PM, we reach Bjørne Øer, having successfully rounded Milne Land, at least along its most challenging side.

Bjørne Øer, or Bear Island

After this rather cold and wet day, we anchor in Bjørne Øer, a group of islands on the northeast side of Milne Land, in the bay of Jyttes Havn, well sheltered within the southwesternmost island.

Sunday, August 11.

It's finally a beautiful day again—sun-drenched, blue skies. We get up early with the intention of taking a substantial walk, or a climb in my case.

I have fantastic Arctic boots, bought at an outdoor shop near Brugge (Belgium)—Muck Boots, made of the thickest neoprene available. I hate cold feet. They have Vibram soles/profiles. I don't know much about that, but according to the experts, they're "top of the bill." A must-have. In any case, I can walk very well in them—on ice, moss, vegetation, rocks, and loose stones. Perfect and very warm.

The only drawback is that my lower leg, from the knee down, has become completely stiff due to the tall, rigid boot. There's no movement, not even at the ankles. This can be tricky if, for some reason, the leg can't be lifted high enough to get the foot past an obstacle. The dinghy cockpit, for example, is such a tight spot, where the booted foot can easily get caught. If the moving boat then also contributes to the foot snagging, you end up taking a dip. As happened in Hekla Havn—fortunately, the damage was limited to a soaking. Equipment barely got wet and could be dried quickly.

Since then, I've been extra cautious when stepping in or out onto a "beach," or whatever passes for one.

We've kept our combustible waste separate from the non-combustible. We now carry it along to burn it—a perfect occasion to try out Joost's newest ice bear defense weapon: a Molotov cocktail. It works—a nice pop and a good start for the fire to burn the trash.

The polar bear farther off behind that rock seems to be laughing. He does remind us to bring the burned remains back on board, which we, of course, do.

Edmond takes me under his wing for the climb up the mountain, with two walking sticks that help a lot. I learn a great deal but also worry about the descent. Considering how steep some sections are—both for climbing and walking (for Edmond). On the way down, we make quite a detour, sometimes searching for a route I can manage.

Another beautiful experience.

After our mountain walk, we return to the boat around 2:00 PM and, surprisingly, see three AIS targets, all outside Milne Land: the cruise ship *Exploris One* (108 m), a 16 m pleasure yacht (227751210), and another (270833000).

The *Exploris One* passes along the other side of the island. Joost has been out in the dinghy for some time and has gone out of sight. The *Exploris One* has two RIBs moving ahead and anchors at the head of "our bay." I imagine I see Joost in the white dinghy near the hatch open on the freeboard of *Exploris One*. Edmond and I speculate about what he might be doing there—begging for cigarettes, being offered a shower, or returning with fresh supplies.

Unfortunately, Joost appears on the opposite shore of the bay and hasn't been near the ship at all. Meanwhile, passengers are being moved by RIBs—no idea where to—and later return. I also see some floating objects, like kayaks, being hoisted back aboard the ship.

Monday, August 13

It’s another sun-drenched day, although some thin cloud cover drifts in by the afternoon.

We decide to explore the Bjørne Øer island group more closely. From the limited chart data, a few bays can be identified, and we opt to poke around through the narrow passages. In one tighter channel, roughly in the middle, some rocks rise above the water. To the right of them lies an ice floe apparently grounded there. To the left of the rocks, we see strong current ripples. There seems to be a shallow threshold, shallower on the left than on the right.

Edmond and I go out in the dinghy to sound the depths with a traditional lead line, between the rocks and the grounded ice floe, where it looks deepest. Using the lead, we measure a depth of about 6 meters. I’m not comfortable taking *Norna* through here. Without current it would be fine, but now there’s a following current of at least 2 knots. If the keel hits something, the current would push the boat further onto it. Edmond suggests letting the current carry us from the 6 m line, with the lead line hanging straight down, eventually reaching a length of about 10 meters. The bottom is no longer felt, and I feel reassured.

Via the radio, we signal Joost that he can navigate through, keeping the grounded ice floe close to starboard. Joost’s echo sounder shows a minimum depth of 5 meters, which soon deepens to 60 m and more.

We take the opportunity to film *Norna* as she passes.

Then a loud crack and a bit of a scare. The ice floe decides to slim down, and a large piece breaks off, disturbing the balance. The floe tips over. We are close by in the dinghy and quickly move away.

It wasn’t too bad—a small floe of only a few tons. Edmond managed to film part of it.

After this passage, we reach a larger body of water, almost entirely surrounded by islands, with a few exits to the outside. For the large icebergs that have entered here, it’s like a graveyard. As we’ve often seen, they are neatly stranded along the shallower parts of this area.

They are again impressive icebergs, and since we’re still in the dinghy, we direct Joost on *Norna* to navigate along and between the icebergs, which, of course, is filmed.

We drop the anchor in the bay, behind the stranded icebergs, at a depth of about 20 meters.

It’s noticeably busier with boats in this part of Scoresbysund. On AIS, we see another cruise ship, and over the VHF we hear a Polish yacht.

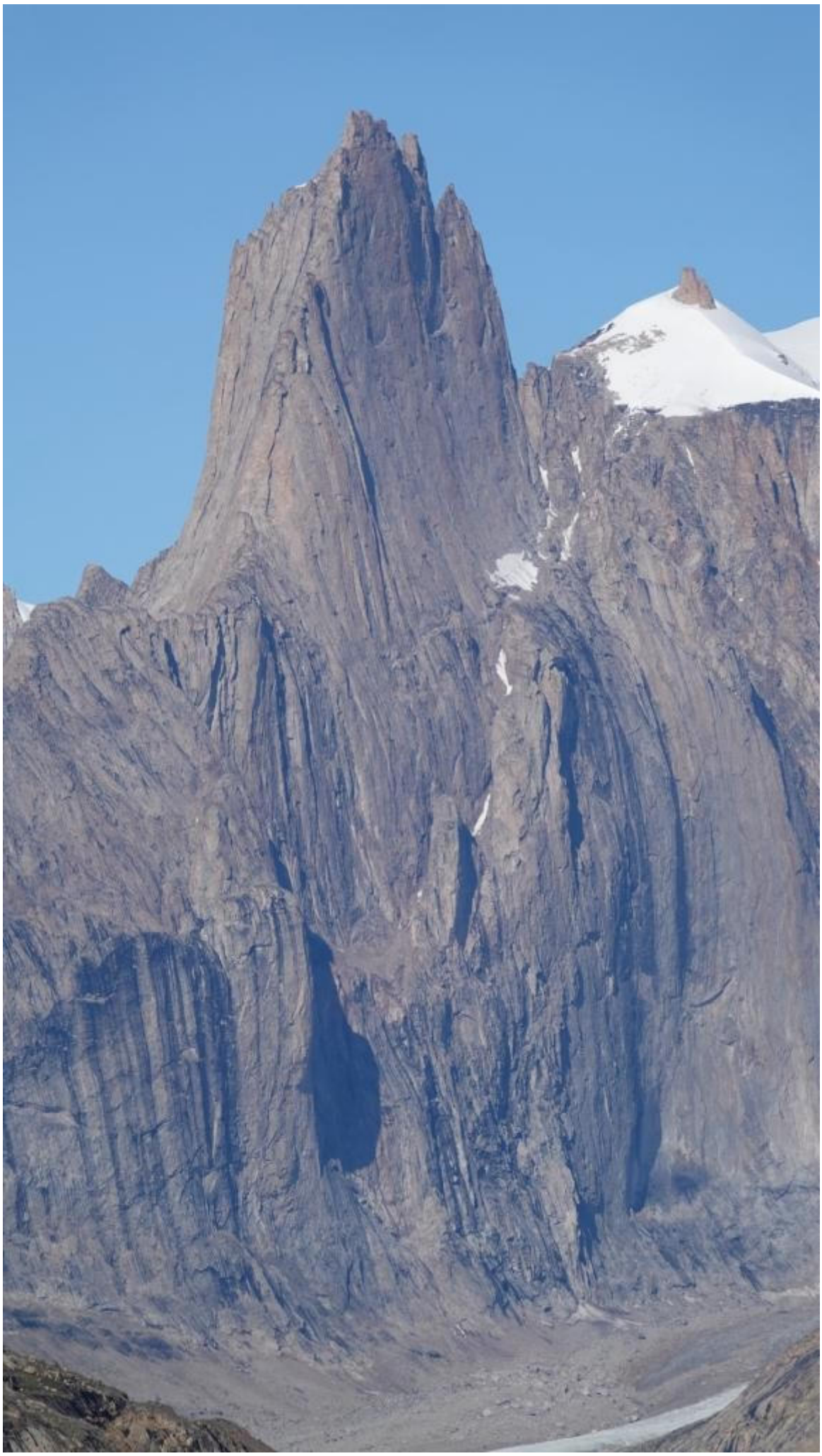
Joost and Edmond go ashore. I stay on board to share our adventures with you through this post. Edmond, as usual, goes on a long walk and returns with stunning photos. Joost builds a pointed cairn to mark *Norna*’s presence in the bay as a safe beacon for future anchorers, and lights a small fire again—this time with smoke signals.

The cairn receives Edmond’s approval.

About 200 meters ahead of us lies a gigantic iceberg, which from this angle looks like the Sydney Opera House from the back. Many of the other ice sculptures here also resemble such forms. The slanting, fanning-out surfaces appear to be the result of the many positions this iceberg has experienced over its life, spanning months or even years.

With a drink in hand, some snacks, the sun still shining brightly, a view of the white “Opera House” iceberg and equally fascinating companions nearby, surrounded by a mountainous landscape that—with its sharp peaks—reminds one of Spitsbergen, and the sweetly soft tones of Norah Jones playing in the background, we tell each other that it has indeed been another beautiful day.

Bjørne Øer archipel.



Sydkap

Still within the Bjørne Øer archipelago, we've found another quiet little bay where we've dropped anchor for the night. The bay is (or was) completely free of ice. In one of the two entrances to this bay, a large iceberg has run aground.

With a loud crash, like thunder without the lightning, a piece of ice broke off from that iceberg. There’s some rumbling afterward, and then it becomes quiet again. The event announces itself not only with the roar but also with a swelling swell, which soon subsides. This is followed by slushy ice and loose ice floes, both large and small. The biggest ones could still give us trouble, but we are just outside the main current and wind, so most of it drifts past us. For safety, we hoist the dinghy back aboard.

After two days of beautiful weather, it has now turned colder again, with stronger winds from the west. Our enthusiasm to set off the next morning still needs to build a bit.

We find the next little bay after about two hours of poking around in the channels between the islands. We move at a crawl because this area isn't charted. I keep watch from the bow. Sending the dinghy ahead to sound the depths isn't necessary here. There's little to no current, and everywhere we navigate is deep enough. Not as deep as in the previous days—the depth varies between roughly 15 and 25 meters. Shallow compared to the outer parts of this island group, where the fjords reach depths of several hundred to over a thousand meters.

At night, we are awakened by the boat rocking. In this otherwise calm bay, it's an unusual movement. Apparently, a piece of one of the distant icebergs has broken off. It must have been a large chunk, coming from afar and generating fairly strong waves, since it woke us.

Now that the cause has been identified and we've confirmed we are still safely positioned, we return to our bunks to get the rest of the night's sleep. Well, "night" by the clock—the outside is barely dark. It still doesn't get properly dark here. The sun sets but quickly rises again.

Wednesday, August 14

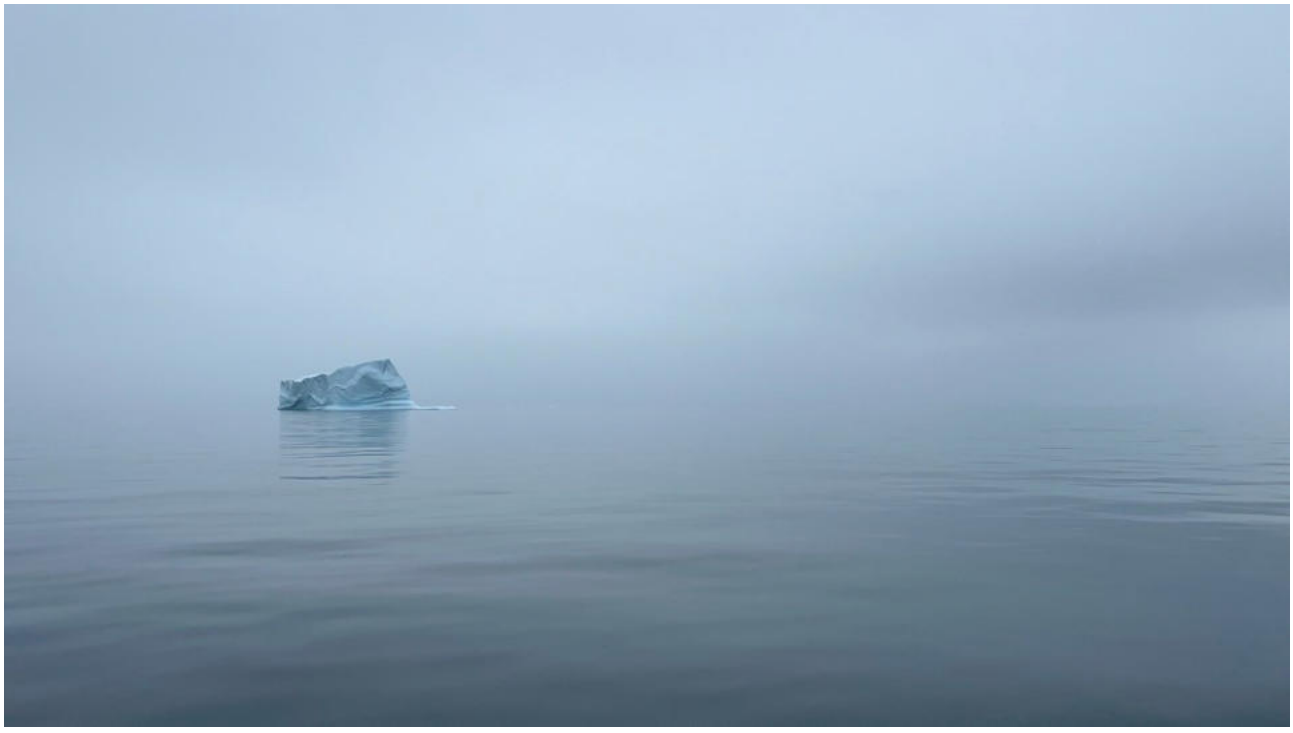
Where the Nordvestfjord, Øfjord, and Hall Bredning converge, we cross over to Sydkap.

Yesterday, the V-belt on the engine was squeaking—a sign it could use a bit of tightening. Before we depart, Joost spends about an hour in the engine room to take care of that task.

On the AIS, we spot another ship. It turns out to be the **Fram**, an expedition vessel from the Norwegian company Hurtigruten. We also encountered this cruise ship in Spitsbergen, two years ago. As we pass the northernmost island on our port side, we can see the Fram in the distance. It is anchored there, and a RIB is heading toward this largest island of the archipelago—likely an excursion for interested passengers. Here, the remains of dwellings from a centuries-old Inuit civilization can still be found.

On the way to Sydkap, we encounter massive icebergs—the largest we've seen so far. They are enormous in size. The glacier pushes the ice down the valley, and it just keeps coming. At the point where the water begins, these icebergs are formed as chunks of ice that have broken loose.

The three icebergs we encounter now are of a completely different caliber—more like pieces of glacier than ordinary icebergs. They stretch for hundreds of meters, with the wild appearance of a glacier wall. Once adrift, the game begins: drifting, colliding, melting, breaking apart, and balancing. This process creates new icebergs, each of which is still impressively large in its own right.



It’s hazy. The gray sky occasionally seems to dissolve into the flat, equally gray water. The horizon disappears, giving the illusion that the icebergs in the distance are floating.

Until the wind, bringing a ripple of new waves, shatters that illusion.

It’s drizzling—not continuously, but enough to get completely soaked.

In 20 meters of water, right in front of a small hut on the shore, we drop the anchor. Joost heads ashore to check things out—rowing, which says a lot about his relationship with the outboard motor.

Thursday, August 15

This anchorage at Sydkap is a bit less sheltered than the previous one. The icebergs remain at a distance, as it's too shallow for them here. The offshore wind also drifts the loose ice away from us. During the day, the icebergs shift slightly—moving past us astern and alongside wherever they still have room to drift.

On the shore of our bay at Sydkap stand two wooden cabins, clearly having seen better days. One is completely dilapidated and still contains, among other things, a rusty diesel generator—a hefty two-cylinder Lister. The other cabin is in better condition and watertight. In the “living room” there’s a wood-burning stove, a small kitchen with a gas stove, and two bedrooms. Here and there on the walls are names written by previous visitors or users of the cabin—hunters, mainly of musk oxen. In the cupboards are some packaged food items, and there is also some ammunition lying around, of various calibers.

By now, our visits ashore are invariably accompanied by making a fire, courtesy of fire-master Joost. On one of the surrounding hills, Joost and I build a **cairn**—the largest and tallest one so far.

On the rocks by the shore lie two fairly large, shiny gas tanks—empty. They clash with the panoramic photo I want to take. So I untie them from the meters-long ropes they're secured with and stow them under the foundation of the red cabin.

Back on the boat, after enjoying a nice bowl of mustard soup, I think about going fishing for a bit. There hasn't been much opportunity yet, let alone any catch. But it starts raining again, so I head back into the cabin, where Joost has just fired up the stove.

In the book about Scoresbysund that we have on board, I read a bit about the place where we are now. There are also photos of the cabin in its better days, showing cozy, homely scenes.

It turns out that fish are caught here by setting out a net. I realize that the two gas tanks had actually been serving as anchors for that purpose.

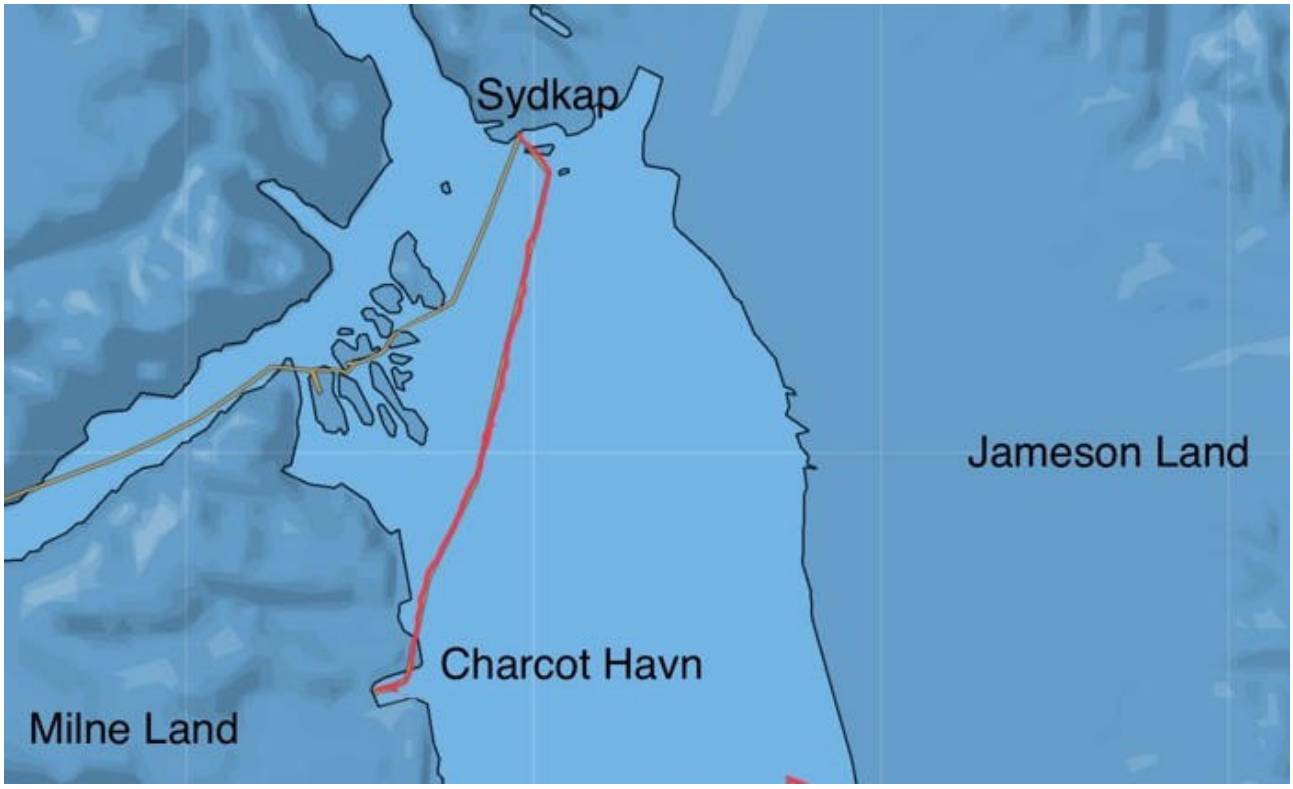
Well, next time a net is set out here, they'll still be easy to find. I haven't hidden them that well after all.

In the meantime, Joost and I have built the biggest cairn ever.

Back to Ittoqqortoormiit

Friday, August 16.

In the bay, we are joined by the **Fram**, the expedition ship from the Norwegian company Hurtigruten. They weigh anchor and sail past us. We also lift our anchor and make another loop around the island situated in the middle in front of Sydkap. Beyond that, we set course for Charcot Havn, an inlet on the east side of Milne Land.



On the AIS, we see that the Fram has the same destination. We sail in parallel.

One of the three enormous icebergs we saw the day before yesterday has now split in two. The two pieces leave a wide trail of “growlers” and smaller ice floes behind.

Fram goes around them, while we, inch by inch, navigate straight through.

The anchor goes down in Charcot Havn, a broad inlet and bay on the east side of Milne Land at the foot of the Charcot Glacier. The glacier has already retreated far from the waterline, leaving a low plain of mud and sand behind it. Numerous small streams run through it into the sea, forming something like a river delta. This turns the seawater brown.

It has been raining all day. My favorite jacket, bought at CVI in Den Oever and beloved for its warmth, proves to be not as waterproof as I thought. It will take several days before it's dry again. For now, I have to fall back on the sail jacket in all this rain.

Fram arrived later and anchored behind us. Again, several ribs are lowered into the water and head for the southern shore to go ashore. Over the VHF, we hear someone reporting on the "large amounts of goose droppings," a term we could never have come up with ourselves for the huge quantity of goose feces apparently found there.

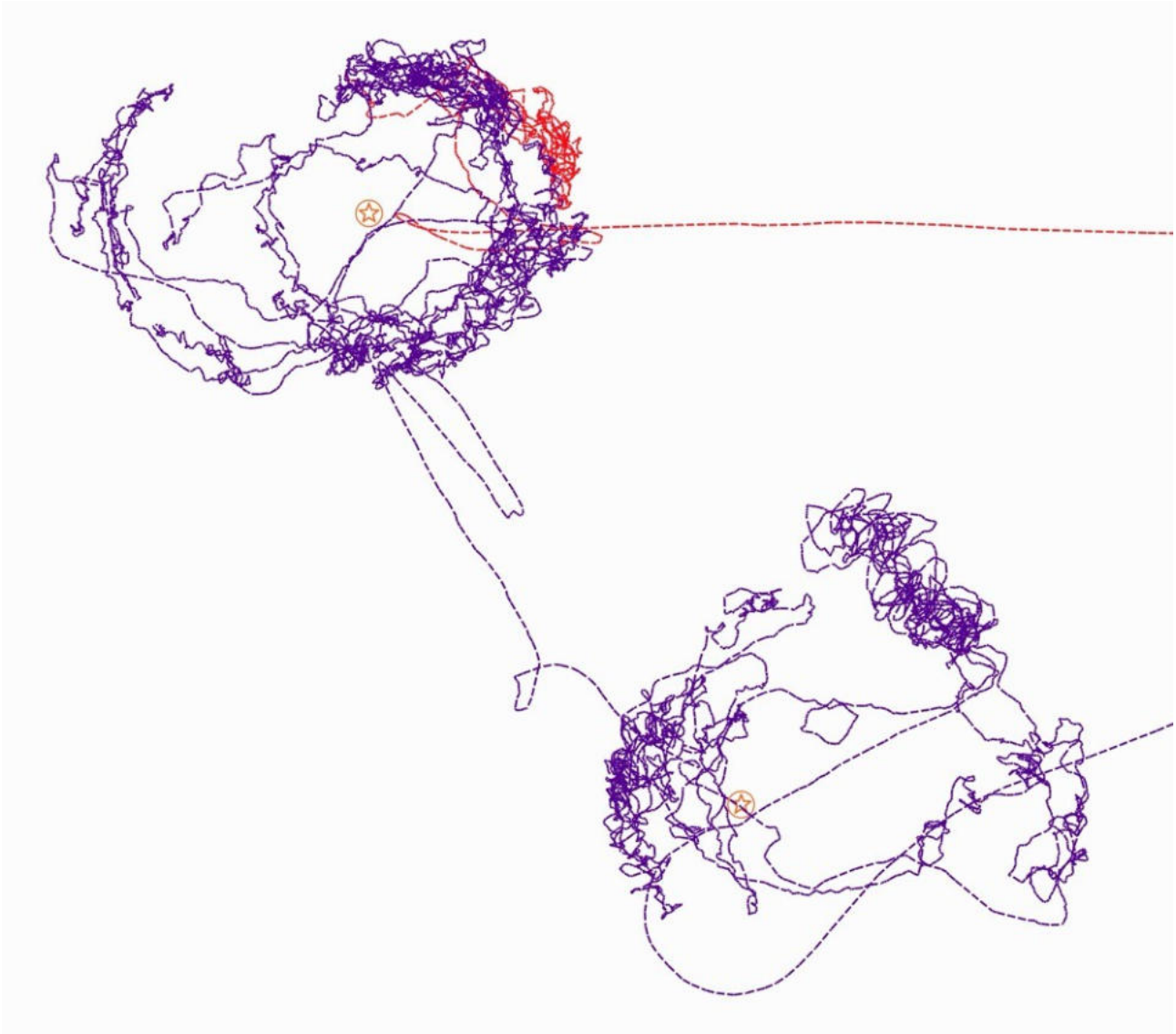
Saturday

Joost and Edmond go ashore. The area doesn't appeal much to me, and with the weather still grim, I stay aboard. It continues to drizzle, everything is gray and cold. I pick up a book, *Sailing to Leningrad* by Roger Foxall, from the days when the Iron Curtain still existed. A gift from one of my sailing friends on the Zeilersforum, it comes in handy now.

As usual, we lie safely beyond the reach of the large icebergs. Smaller pieces can still reach us, depending on the wind direction. Today the wind has shifted onshore and strengthened considerably.

During the Saturday evening film (*Interstellar*) in Norna's onboard cinema, a fragment from one of the icebergs drifts against the bow and anchor chain.

Time for a break and some action outside. Using our two extended pike poles, we first push Norna free from the ice. To prevent the chunk of ice from drifting over our anchor, we pay out more chain and maneuver so that the chain remains clear. Once the anchor is free again, we retrieve the chain until the bow is close to the ice block. The final bit of the operation requires carefully loosening the anchor, with just enough space to get it on board.

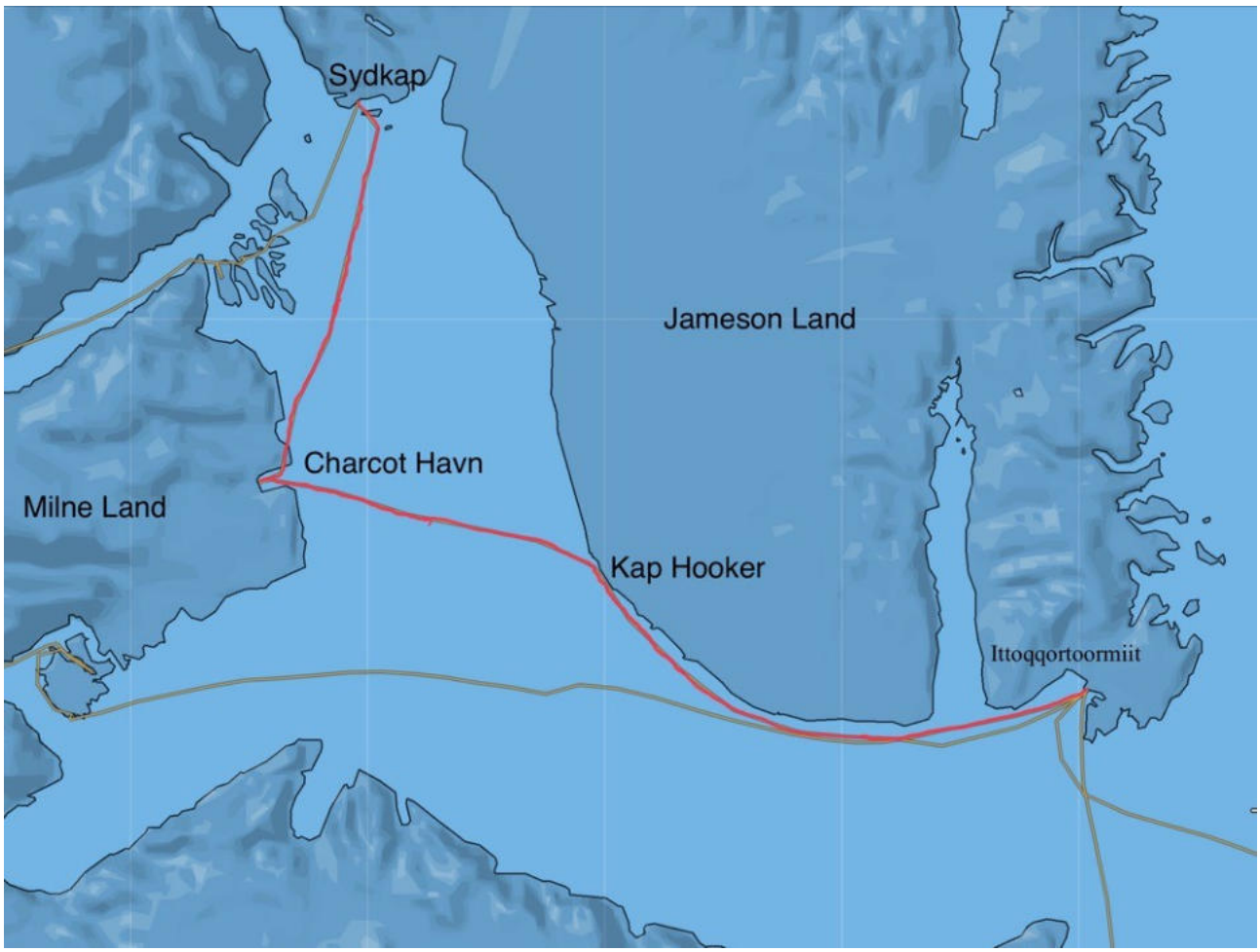


The images from anchor watch are addictive and sometimes have a hypnotic effect on the skipper.

100 meters further, the anchor goes down again and we finish watching the movie. During the night, we keep anchor watch, meaning we take turns every 2 hours to check position and ice. It stays calm, and no maneuvers are needed for the rest of the night. Incidentally, the nights are visibly getting darker each day.

Sunday, August 18 – weighing anchor

Today's goal is a few potential anchorages on the west coast of Jameson Land. To get there, we cross the wide waters of Hall Bredning, a distance of about 30 miles. We sail again through an armada of icebergs, which display the most fantastic shapes and sizes. As we proceed southeast, the density decreases. What remains are a few dozen icebergs instead of the hundreds we saw further northwest.



Beyond the 200 m depth line and in sight of the coast, the depth suddenly drops sharply. Where it had long been 30–50 m deep, it now goes down toward 10 m or less. We are still about 500 m from the shore and slow down. I go forward to see if the bottom is coming into view. Too late—we run aground, fortunately in mud. Full throttle astern and a few bumps later, we free ourselves and return to deeper water. Norna has a long, continuous keel with a lot of surface area; you really don't want to get stuck with that. But at least the speed was low in time.

Our plan to find an anchorage near Cape Hooker falls apart. The bays exist but are completely unsuitable. Hundreds of meters from the shore it is too shallow for us. Further options for overnight stays are lacking—the first is just short of Ittoqqortoormiit. So we decide to continue the roughly 45 miles to Ittoqqortoormiit. We stay offshore, generally keeping about 100 m under the keel. The boundary between deep and shallow—say around 50 m—can be clearly seen by the position of the stranded icebergs.

Apart from the icebergs, it feels like the Markermeer, boring sailing south along the Oostvaardersdijk. Not that Jameson Land has a dike, but the shoreline is straight with steeply rising land or rocks behind it. Behind that, the terrain is flat. The dark profile of the coast on the port side runs in a perfectly straight and endless line to the horizon. In this large inner bay of Scoresbysund, there is a strong countercurrent of 2–3 knots. I wonder how the icebergs further out still manage to drift toward the sea.

Early in the morning of Monday, 19 August, around 01:00, we finally drop anchor at Ittoqqortoormiit. Ittoqqortoormiit at night, with its yellow-lit paths, the entire setting, and the cold, evokes a Christmas feeling for me. There is no ice left here, except for a few large icebergs stranded further out or still drifting toward the sea.
It isn't until almost 03:00 that I finally make my way to the bunk. Such a safe arrival calls for savoring the moment with a good drink and conversation.

Although Norna has a bathtub on board, it is filled with supplies, so bathing on the boat isn't an option. Hygiene is maintained somewhat with a generous stock of baby wipes. My last proper shower was three weeks ago in Iceland—much needed. Here onshore, we can use a kind of communal facility with showers, toilets, washing machines, and a meeting space. Not everyone here apparently has those amenities at home.

The journey through Scoresbysund was mostly under motor, occasionally aided by sails when the wind was favorable. Diesel needs topping up, so a tanker has been ordered. We weigh anchor to reposition closer to the tanker, anchoring bow out with a line aft to the quay.

Before heading back to the inhabited world, we plan one more visit to Jan Mayen, a small island in the Arctic Sea, which was a highlight for me during our previous Arctic circumnavigation. There is no proper harbor, and Jan Mayen is so remote that we need a period of relatively stable weather, which will be challenging.

The new weather GRIB doesn’t look favorable for Jan Mayen. It’s a continuous succession of depressions with storm-force winds, one after the other. Unfortunately, we have to decide to skip Jan Mayen. Instead, the plan is to explore the north coast of Iceland more thoroughly. Two years ago, we bypassed this and sailed directly from Siglufjörður to the Faroe Islands.

This afternoon, we weigh anchor to get ahead of the strong winds from the next depression and to reach northern Iceland in time—most likely Siglufjörður again.

Siglufjörður

We arrived in a rainy and stormy Siglufjörður after a fast crossing from Ittoqqortoormiit. In the first 24 hours, we covered 165 nautical miles, totaling 280 miles in 37 hours. There was a strong beam wind, occasionally gusting up to 35 knots. Gradually, the sails were reefed down to 2 reefs in the mainsail and a furled jib. It was a bumpy ride.

Last glimpse of Ittoqqortoormiit.

Last icebergs I saw on the route to Iceland.

During my watch on the dark evening, while reading a book in the warm salon of Norna, there was suddenly a huge bang followed by a deathly silence. I realized that we had been hit by an enormous wave. The galley floor was wet. The cockpit window couldn't fully hold back the water because the two clamping screws weren't tightened enough.

Anything that wasn't secured had been displaced. Even the iPad had been knocked out of its holder. I rushed outside and looked up, but saw nothing unusual. Norna slowly started moving again. Back inside, I assumed the sleepers in the fore cabin would be awake by now—but no, they were still snoring away.

Well, a bit rough, but otherwise "business as usual."

Edmond takes over the watch at midnight. All the years we've sailed as a trio, we've kept the same watch schedule: 3 hours on, 6 hours off, in the fixed order Joost, Henny, Edmond, Joost, Henny, Edmond, and so on. It's very comfortable and has the advantage of an automatic "time shift," so you're not on the same hours each day—it shifts forward by three hours daily.

I head to my bunk and try to sleep. Lying on my side doesn't work. On my stomach or back is better, giving more resistance to the rolling of the boat. It's too rough to say you're rocked to sleep; quite the opposite.

Earlier than the end of my free watch, Joost shakes me awake. Apparently, I had still fallen into a deep sleep. Joost had to shake me hard before I realized it wasn't the boat tossing me around, but him.

Unfortunately, I still had to hold my morning pee. The toilet was clogged. Overnight, Edmond had to fish his own … well, you get the picture. I can imagine more pleasant chores..

Siglufjörður comes into view. Edmond is still sleeping, and Joost and I lower the mainsail so that we sail into the fjord only on the reefed jib. Once the engine starts, Edmond joins us in the cockpit. Unlike anchoring, which has been our routine for the past weeks, now there's more work to do: fenders and mooring lines need to be taken out of the forepeak and prepared for docking. We tie up at the pier in front of the hotel, where we've stayed before.

After the usual chaos, we try to catch up on some sleep. Unfortunately, it's short-lived. Two police officers come to take photos of the ship's documents, at the request of the customs office in Siglufjörður.

Meanwhile, Edmond gets to work unclogging the toilet. The cause of the blockage is surprising: there's a potato inside, coming from the net hanging above the bath (?!)

Wow, that was quite a jolt indeed.

New protocol for the voyage: toilet lid stays closed.

Meanwhile, the storm and rain howl around the boat. After some initial hiccups with the 4G connection, the signal has now strengthened enough that, from the warm and dry salon of Norna, I’m able to publish the stories above.

Grimsey and Raufarhöfn

From Siglufjörður, we set a northeast course to Grimsey, about 30 nautical miles away. Grimsey, also known as the “Bird Island,” is famous both for its numerous seabird species—including Iceland’s largest puffin colony—and for its location directly on the Arctic Circle. It is the only part of Iceland that lies partly within the Arctic Circle. The population numbers around 25 in winter and about 50 in summer, according to the native (and young) operator of the island’s sole restaurant, right next to the harbor. The island covers approximately 5.3 square kilometers.

Bird hunting and egg collecting—both for consumption—were, alongside farming, the main activities on Grimsey.

Nowadays, this has shifted to modern fishing methods and processing, including for international markets. Tourism has also become an important source of income. Birdwatchers, in particular, are drawn to Grimsey, taking advantage of the island’s air and ferry connections.


Grímsey
Hiking trails
Road
Century Stones
Fótur
Arctic Circle Marker (current) – Orbis et Globus
Básavík
Básabjarg
Sandurinn
Stekkjarvík
Básasker
Arctic Circle Marker (original)
Básar
Skollatjaldurfjós
Vænghóll
Miðgarðabjarg
Sandvíkurbjarg
Sveinsstaðabjarg
Langavík
Gjögur
Flatasker
Hólatjörn
Shop / Restaurant
Gullsól
Gallerí Sól
Müli
Miðgarðar
Sveinsstaðir
Sveinagarðar
Grenivíkurbjarg
Borgir
Grímsey
3 kist.
25 mín.
Dalvík
Akureyri
Basalt columns
Grenivík
Flesjar
Roundtrip distances from the harbour to:
Km / Miles
Walking (approx.)
Arctic Circle marker(current) Orbis et Globus 3,8 / 2,4 3 hrs.
Arctic Circle marker (original) 1,3 / 0,8 30 min.
Lighthouse 2,3 / 1,4 1.5 hrs.
Church 1,2 / 0,7 40 min.

That cute little bird appears on the menu as “Lightly fried puffin breast.” I just couldn’t bring myself to order that, so I safely went for the “Fish & Chips.”

We don’t have much time to explore the island further. Before the wind shifts to come from the east, we want to head that way. Our destination is Raufarhöfn, just over 50 miles away, which also claims the reputation of being the northernmost village in Iceland—but on the mainland.

Raufarhöfn, after Siglufjörður, was Iceland's second most important herring port. Today, only the many empty paved areas and a series of black-and-white photos along the harbor recall a once-thriving and prosperous era.

The village itself is mostly deserted, yet it still has a few hotels with guests. Judging by the occasional camper driving by, this northernmost settlement seems to be one of those "must-visit" places after all.

Behind us on the hill rises the Arctic version of Stonehenge, **Heimskautsgerðið**, or **The Arctic Henge**. A remarkable artwork of stacked basalt blocks, designed so that the

(midnight) sun can play through its openings, casting light and shadows across the cardinal points.

The small **swimming pool with hot tub and sauna** further along in the village offers a moment of luxury. For sailors, this feels like an unprecedented indulgence.

Where to next? Options include:

- Exploring Iceland further with day trips along the North and East coasts.
- A 350-mile passage across the North Atlantic to the **Faroe Islands**.
- Or a hefty 650-mile journey to the west coast above Bergen, **Norway**.

The long-term weather grib gives insight:

- Day trips are feasible, but heading south afterward looks poor for the coming days, with storms expected along the east coast, causing potential extra downtime.
- The Faroe Islands are possible, but timing is tight due to southeast headwinds later in the week.
- Norway looks most favorable weather-wise despite the long distance — a challenging but rewarding passage.

Norway offers something new, a departure from the routes Norna Biron has previously taken between Iceland and the Netherlands.

After analyzing the latest morning grib, the decision is made.

You can see the outcome here: forecast.predictwind.com/tracking/display/NornaBiron

Norway.

So, it’s Norway.

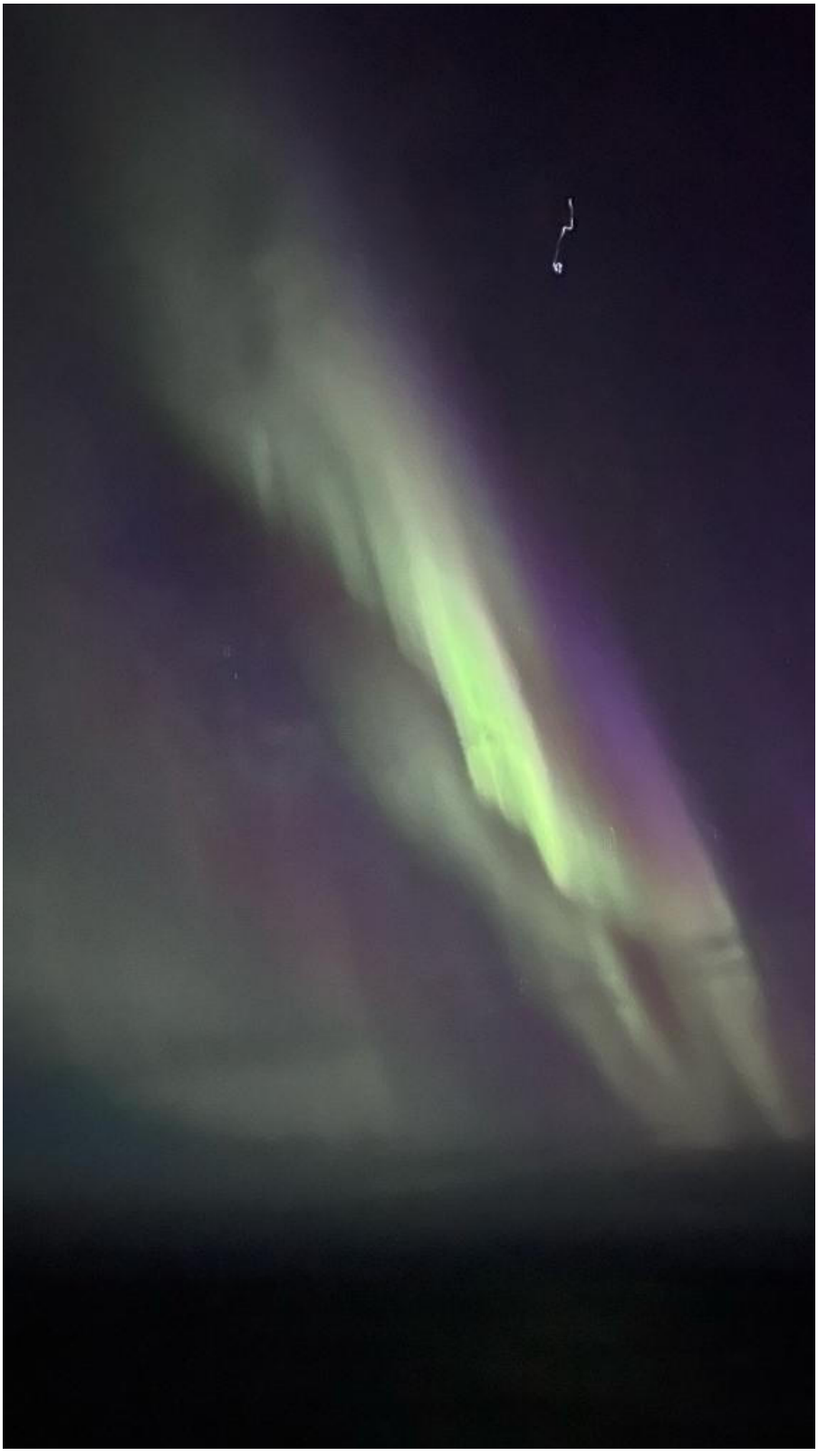
Raufarhöfn, Wednesday, August 28. It is cold, wet, and harsh. The motivation to depart isn't high yet. Still, it's important not to dawdle given the weather forecast. We need to be well out at sea in time to stay ahead of the expected storm along Iceland's east coast. We have to give each other a little push, and eventually, we depart at 14:00—an hour earlier than planned because the wind had veered slightly sooner.

With the gradually veering wind, we sail on a too-northern course to keep the sails full. The wind will shift further, so eventually, we'll have to gybe. By now, we are well past the Langanes headland in northeast Iceland, so it no longer obstructs our new course.

In the early morning of Thursday, Joost wakes us. His watch has been brightened by the Northern Lights overhead—broad green streaks and patches across the starry sky above our wake. Spectacular and mysterious all at once.

For all of us this is the first time we see this phenomenon with our own eyes..

When I take over Joost's watch at 3.00 a.m., it is gone and the sky is cloudy again.



In terms of course, ever since the last gybe we've been heading more toward the Faroe Islands than toward Norway. The wind is also becoming increasingly "aft," forcing me to steer higher to keep the sails filled. We need to gybe again, but I'll wait until Edmond relieves me at 06:00. After all, doing it with the two of us is easier and safer than doing it alone.

The sheets for the jib and the mainsheet are on the aft deck. When the heater is running, the chimney cap also has to come off. Then: roll in the jib a bit, release the preventer, haul in the mainsheet, gybe, ease the mainsheet, bring the preventer to the other bow, tension the preventer, unroll the jib again and tension the jib sheet, put the chimney cap back on, set the new course and trim the sails for that course. Altogether, with two people, it's done in about 20 minutes.

Ever since our departure, the cargo ship "Varnebank" has been sailing right near us, matching our speed. Its destination is listed as "For orders," so apparently it has no cargo.

Progress is excellent, with 140 miles covered in the first 24 hours.

Friday, August 30 begins with a blue sky, a blue sea, and white crests. The evening watch (21:00–24:00) had already been beautiful, with a clear sky and sparkling stars. It wasn't like that the whole time. For me it began at 21:00 in total darkness. Soon the moon appeared, and with it the longing to witness the Northern Lights again. With this endless starry sky, the conditions were perfect. At midnight Edmond relieves me. Unfortunately, the Northern Lights do not return.

We are heading due north, about 130 miles above the Faroe Islands in the Norwegian Sea, when we prepare to gybe for the fourth time. Having to gybe regularly is called "running downwind in tacks" (afkruisen) in sailors' jargon. It's nicer, faster, and safer than sailing dead downwind.

The wind continues to veer slightly, allowing us to get onto a better course toward Norway. The wind also gradually increases. Although everything is going well, I start thinking about reefing—specifically the second reef. The first reef was put in yesterday. And as it goes: once you think about reefing, you should do it. I wait for Edmond to relieve me at 09:00 so we can tackle the job together.

Turn up 20 degrees, ease the main halyard while lowering the sail to the second reef cringle. Hook in the cringle, tension the halyard, pull in the reefing line down to the boom, then bear away 20 degrees to the old course. A bit of fine-tuning of the mainsheet and preventer, and the reef is done. Just a few minutes' work.

As the day goes on, the blue sky is gradually replaced by cloud cover. It's not cold. The wind continues to veer so that eventually we can sail on a beam reach. And so Norna keeps gliding on, in a steady rhythm, heeling over her port side—comfortable sailing. At 14:00 I note a run of 150 miles over the past 24 hours, our second day at sea. Our destination is still 350 miles ahead. The sea is empty. After the last fishing vessel yesterday evening, we haven't seen another ship. The cargo ship Varnebank must have received new orders, because it has disappeared from sight.

There's a recurring loud knock again. It's not the bottles in the saloon table—there are several tea towels wrapped around them to prevent rattling. We open the storage

compartments in and behind the benches to locate the knock. Nothing. Mainsheet on deck—no. Loose jib sheet—no. Well then, but the knocking spirit keeps knocking.

While looking for a jar of olives, I finally spot the culprit: a glass jar of Greek peppers. It's been there for quite a while (five years), but apparently decided it was time to make its presence known with knocking sounds.

I wake up to the sun's rays, which shine through the little window beside my bunk and warm my sleeping bag pleasantly. It has actually turned into a radiant day with a blue sky. The temperature is also noticeably higher than in previous days, although the sea temperature, at 11 degrees, is still a bit disappointing.

In any case, my thermal underwear goes back into the cupboard—no longer needed. I also swap my double-layer ski pants for jeans. Nice. Norna is still sailing comfortably and manages 165 miles on the third day.

Norway, here we come.

Joost replaces the Icelandic courtesy flag with the Norwegian one.

Norwegian chart in the plotter—we're excited.

It is probably my last night watch. I'm running out of the reading material I brought along, but I find a few e-books still sitting in the iPad library — among them *"Herinneringen van een Bramzijgertje"* by Jan de Hartog. It reads easily.

I replace Oosterdam, the fishing village on the Zuiderzee where the story takes place, with Huizen. A town I know well, and one I recognize in the descriptions.

The leftover snacks from happy hour also find their way into my stomach, and before I know it, my watch is already over. I'm not tired; sleeping has become more like resting.

So how does this actually work on a multi-day passage? The boat must be kept going day and night — course, sail trim, tactics, eating, drinking, sleeping, and, well, using the toilet. For that we use a watch system of three hours on, six hours off. There are three of us, so it's a comfortable setup that allows plenty of sleep. The three-hour watch means being responsible for the boat's progress.

Another advantage of the 3–6 system is that the shift moves three hours later each day. So if you had the dog watch from midnight to 03:00, the next day it's 03:00–06:00. That way everyone gets to see a sunset or sunrise. If there *is* any sun at all. Unfortunately, on this whole trip we've been shortchanged in that regard. We hear the same thing from people ashore. It's been a very poor summer weather-wise, and at these high latitudes the season is already short.

Sailing is wonderful — steering, trimming, gybing, tacking, endlessly staring out over the beautifully blue ocean, decorated with lovely white crests, sometimes perched on a swell that resembles a mountain landscape. Enjoying how the boat glides gracefully off each wave, again and again, in a rhythm that never stops, never bores. In my dreams I even see sun-worshipping bikinis stretched out on the foredeck. Just like in the brochures…

Unfortunately, those moments are rare, and as far as I know we have no bikinis onboard. No, we don't actually steer — the autopilot does the job 99% of the time. Trimming, yes,

every now and then when a change in wind or course requires it. Enjoying the play between wind and waves, yes. But only briefly, because it’s too cold, too wet, or simply too featureless under a monochrome haze. Which, in its own way, sometimes also has its charm.

No, the saloon of Norna is the place where “the man in charge” carries out his command of the ship. With one eye keeping track of other vessels via AIS, and with the other reading a book or watching a film. Any other movement or sound sends him hurrying to the cockpit to see whether action is needed regarding course or sail trim. Usually it comes down to tightening or easing a sheet a little, and perhaps making a small course correction to keep the ride comfortable or better aligned with the planned route. Apart from that, periodically scanning the sea and the boat confirms the feeling that all is well and nothing lies in our path.

There is also a big difference between being able to walk on deck in slippers, or having to crawl across it wrapped up against cutting cold, driving rain, and waves sweeping over the bow in order to get things done.

Just as expected, the wind dies almost completely during the fourth day and then shifts against us. Sailing is no longer possible, so the last 100 miles will have to be done under engine. On an otherwise completely flat sea—flat, but with a swell that Norna can roll on.

Again it becomes a sun-drenched day, and the little headwind that remains carries warmth with it. The sea temperature also joins in, having risen to 16.5 degrees. We grow lazy and drowsy, but that’s rather nice after all those bleak days.

The diesel supply turns out—somewhat unexpectedly—to be finite after all.

The filters are clogging up because sludge from the bottom of the tank is being sucked in.

Fortunately, there is an intermediate day tank, so the engine itself isn’t affected.

Still, the day tank can no longer be filled enough to cover the remaining 100 miles under power.

The heater’s diesel tank provides the solution.

We’re able to siphon off enough fuel from it to reach the coast of Norway.

The Norwegian coast first reveals itself through the highest mountain peaks—
and an increase in production platforms. We pass a few of them, but the largest cluster we leave just to the south of us. It is 23:30, or 01:30 local time, when we moor at the former ferry pier of Burlandet, a jetty with a diesel pump.

We did, however, shorten our destination because of the diesel shortage.

Bulandet

It didn’t become Fedje after all, but Bulandet, located farther north—an island group that is also called *the Venice of the North*.

It is a lovely little place. The supermarket here at the harbour is open 24 hours a day. During the day it is staffed, but in the evening and at night you open the sliding doors by inserting your credit card into a machine, and you are expected to pay for your groceries with the self-scan system.

That too is Norway. I love it.

The weather is going to change.

Back Home

Approaching Norway feels like the start of the journey back home. For now, we've left the cold and harsh weather behind. Bulandet gives us a preview of what's to come. The weather is pleasantly warm, and sunglasses are a must.

The hundreds of inhabited islands in this archipelago, most of them connected by a bridge, invite further exploration. I can pick a rented bike from a nearby shed. The first bike I take has a handlebar set a bit too low, but unfortunately I can't get the Allen bolt to turn and adjust it, despite having brought the proper tools from Norna.

So I go back and pick another bike. Unfortunately, each bike has some problem: the gears don't work, the brakes don't work, the chain slips, or it simply doesn't ride well. In the end, I go back to the first bike, since everything seemed functional on it. I decide to live with the

low handlebar. I pedal toward the far northeastern edge of the archipelago, where a ferry docks to maintain connections to the other islands and the mainland.

Halfway along, I run into Edmond, who is taking a walk to a rocky cape. I am more curious about where this path leads. The left pedal on my bike has developed play on the crank—the Allen bolt is loose. Using a somewhat suitable stone, I try to tighten the bolt, but it only works moderately. I have to stop a few more times to retighten it. I'm no bike mechanic, but I can tell something is missing: the bolt keeps loosening itself as I pedal.

Next to the ferry there's also a small harbor with a few yachts. Of course, sailors carry tools on board, and a German sailor lends me the right Allen key to properly secure the crank on the bottom bracket.

Unfortunately, the good fortune doesn't last long. Long story short, I end up cycling mostly with one pedal, walking up the hills and bridges, and riding down again using gravity. And then I realize I've cycled much farther than I thought.

It doesn’t dampen my enjoyment, and I take pleasure in the many green-scented inlets, waterways, and beautiful vistas. It is somewhat tiring, though.

Sailing inland along the outer islands of the Norwegian coast is very different from being out at sea. Out there, you’re alone, and the swells have a big impact on life on board. Here, behind the shelter of the islands, it’s calmer, although it can still blow quite strongly —usually against us, sometimes with us. The engine has to work hard to push us further south. We deliberately seek out the narrower passages between the islands. It’s simply fun and adds variety. We pass cottages, houses, villas, and small piers built here and there

among the greenery and on the rocks. All little private paradises, I think to myself. Transport is by motorboat—everyone here seems to have one.

We are close to the Sognefjord, Norway's longest fjord at 115 nautical miles. I would like to sail far into it someday. I've done something similar before in the not much shorter Hardangerfjord and have fond memories of that. We keep chugging along, but in reality, one could spend years on a sailing holiday here without seeing it all. And it's just three days' sail from the Netherlands.

For the first night after Bulandet, we choose an anchorage at the back of a small inlet called Vikingevågen, on the southeast side of Byrksnesøyna. It is completely still, just like the water.

Bergen

Bergen is our next destination. Here we truly come back among people. The contrast couldn't be greater: a busy city, busy people, drunk people, confused people, can collectors, and beggars. And it is incredibly warm.

On our way there, the amount of development along the shores and on the islands steadily increases, until entire suburbs have formed on the hillsides. Just before Bergen lies the Nordhordland Bridge, a pontoon bridge that has replaced Norway's busy ferry connection between Salhus and Flatøy since 1994. A cable-stayed bridge with a viaduct leading to the pontoon bridge provides 32 meters of clearance for unimpeded passage. Soon afterward, the harbors of Bergen appear, where we find a spot at the quay of the historic Vågen, right in the middle of the medieval city center.

Comfortably familiar—both Joost and I have stayed here before with previous boats. Along Vågen lies Bryggen, a row of Hanseatic trading houses that has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1979. Norna becomes part of the scene as well, photographed hundreds of times by the many tourists strolling by, often from the cruise ships docked elsewhere in Bergen's harbor.

The evenings at the Vågen quay are especially noisy—not just from the shore, but also from the majority of motor yachts at anchor, whose crews are holding their own parties on

board. After around eleven o’clock, it quiets down. Later in the night, only a few drunkards make occasional noise.

We indulge in the pleasures of the big city, including fish (and whale steak) from the Bergen fish market, just around the corner from where we are moored.

For walking, I find the route along the slowly ascending “Fløysfingene” trails a sufficient workout to deserve taking the cable car back down.

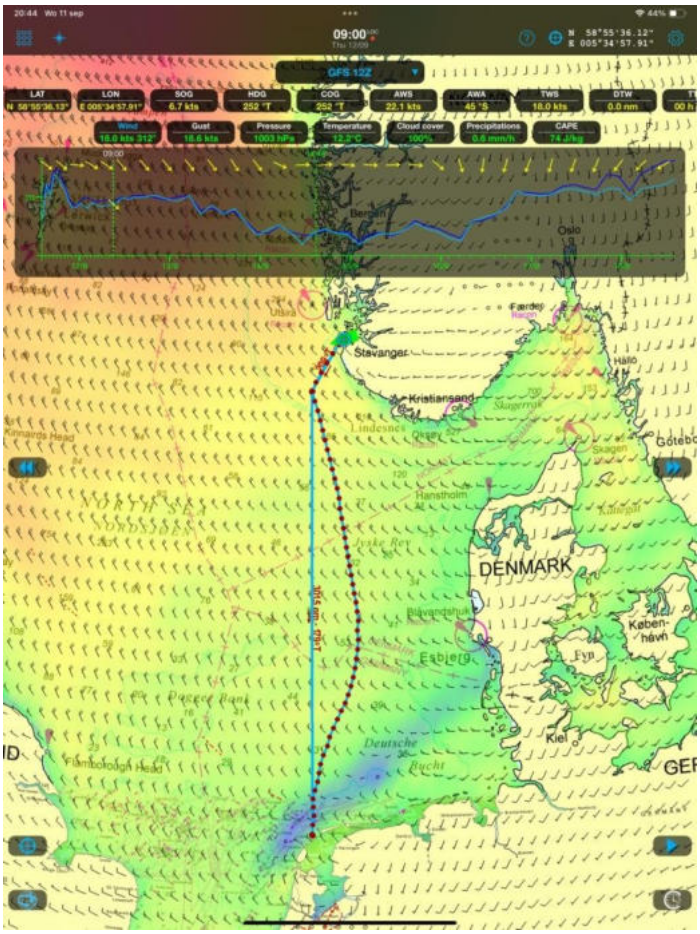
After the bustle of the “big city,” the next stop is the picturesque and tiny Kvalvåg Havn. In Bergen, we had already met Annet and Rainier from the “Sea of Time.” They are here as well, and it’s a pleasant reunion. Just as we are thinking about what to have for dinner, Annet invites us to join them for the evening meal. That invitation is not taken lightly, and we gladly accept. Fun, cozy, and delicious.

The next morning, we say goodbye to the “Sea of Time” and her hospitable crew. We set off for Haugesund and moor at the floating pier just before the bridge. There’s some

discussion about whether we'll fit under the bridge. In theory, we just do, but we're not going to test it in practice. The Italian restaurant on the quay serves more than excellent pizzas. This becomes our last "dining out" meal in Norway.

Spot the location: where is the "No Bullshit Just Sailing YouTube Norwegian"?

In the meantime, we are keeping a close eye on the weather forecasts. At our final stop in Tananger, we will definitely have to stay an extra day due to an expected storm. After that, the crossing to the Netherlands doesn't look too bad.



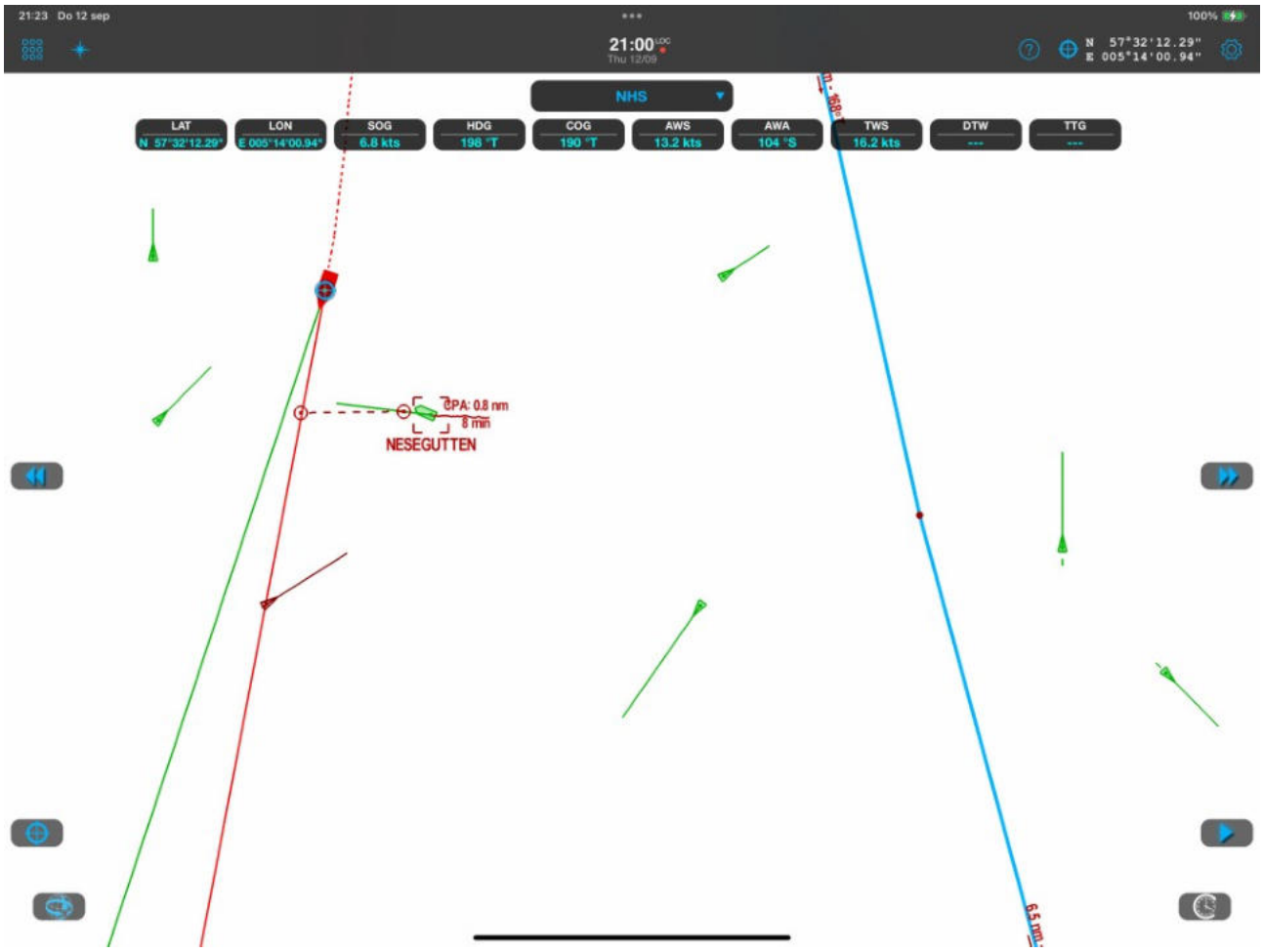
Based on the latest reports, we will depart tomorrow morning, Thursday, September 12, and should be able to reach the Stortemelk (the approach channel to the Wadden Sea) near Vlieland sometime on Saturday.

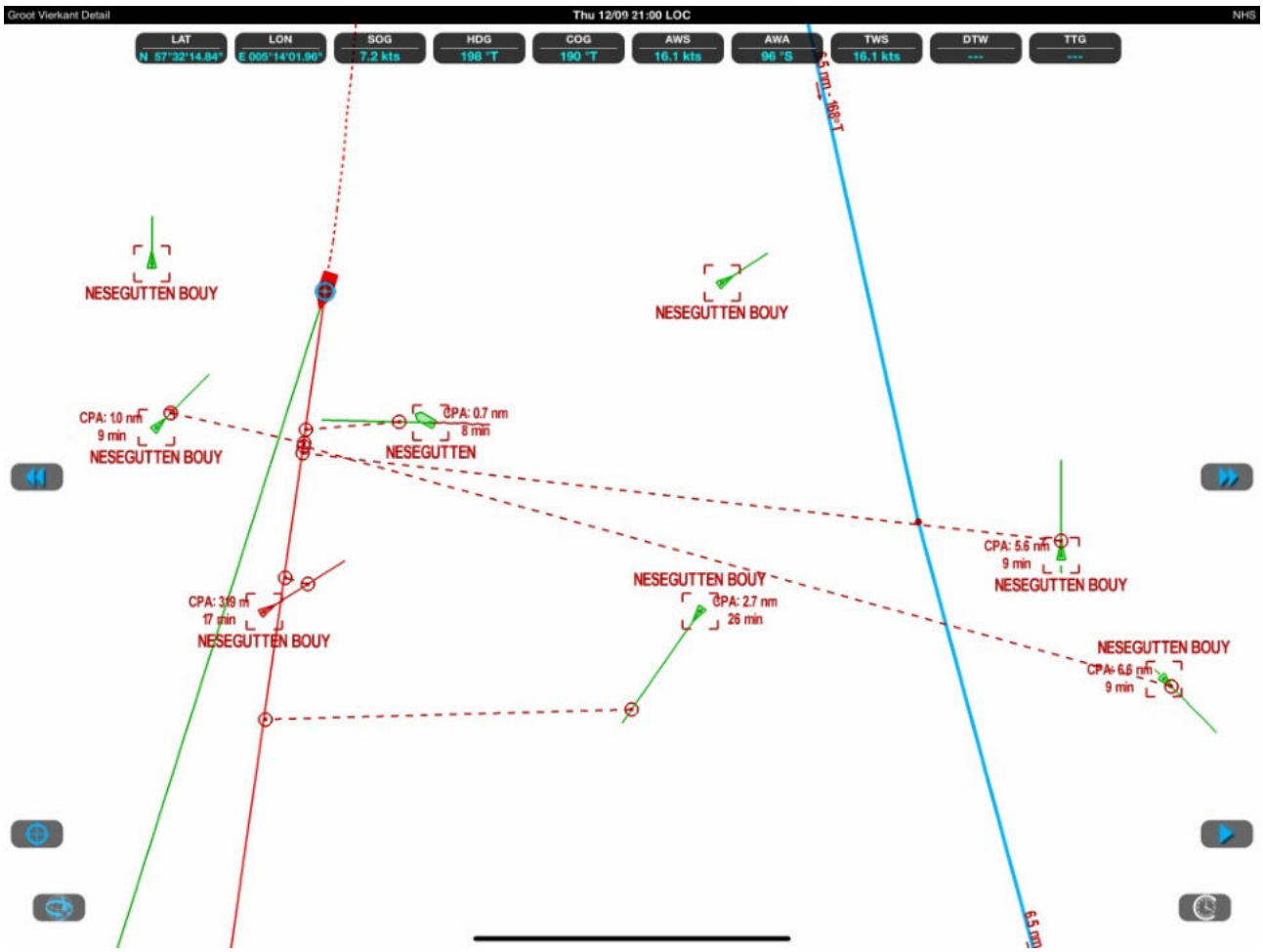
Here's a picture of the GRIB based on the GFS model from today at 12:00. We plan to depart tomorrow around 09:00. The horizontal bar shows the expected wind along the route. Doesn't look too bad.

Everything comes to an end.

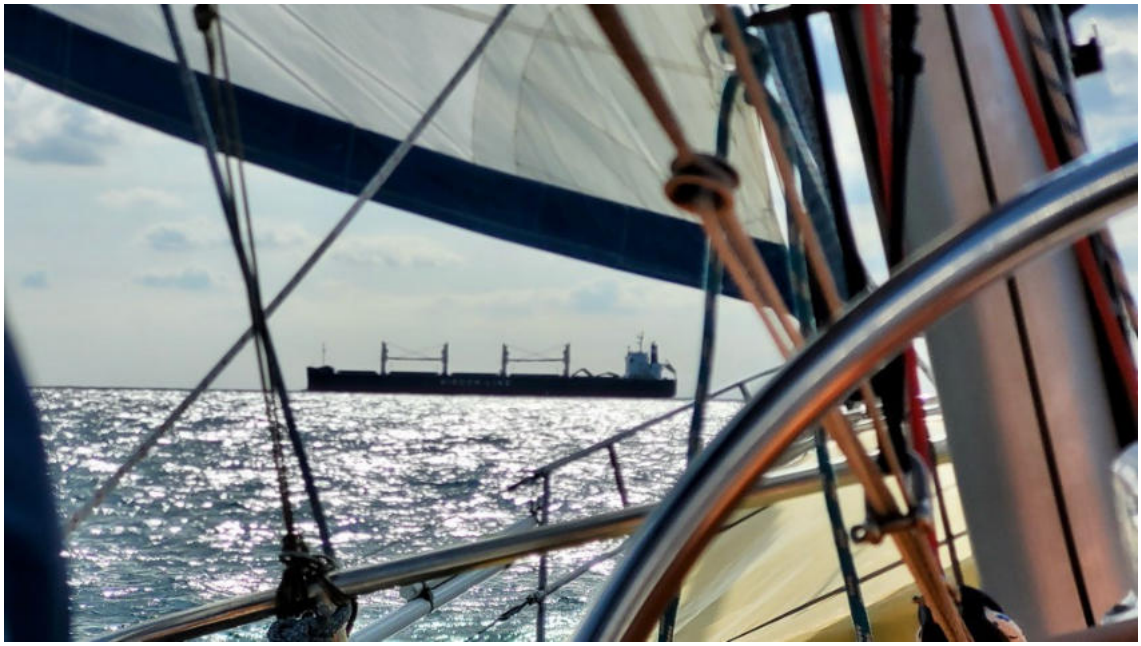
The GRIB promised a nicely sailed journey home. Except that the wind was a bit stronger than forecast, that promise was completely fulfilled. We departed with two reefs in the mainsail and a reefed jib, and with a steady beam wind we managed a first-day run of 160 miles. The sea state was very high—giants of peaks and troughs—which made sleeping on a broad reach somewhat challenging.

A friendly Norwegian fisherman hailed us. It was the *Nesegutten*. He reported that he was fishing and therefore had limited maneuverability, and asked whether we would pass in front of or behind him. Our course was somewhat zigzagging, with a CPA (closest point of approach) ranging from a few meters to half a mile, and we had already decided to pass in front. I could understand his caution. Passing behind wasn't an option, as that would have required a gybe. When asked, the skipper confirmed that the other AIS targets were actually deployed buoys. Quite remarkable, such a cooperative fisherman.





We've encountered AIS fishing buoys before. This time, they were clearly identifiable as buoys belonging to the *Nesegutten*. But sometimes that's not the case, and they are much harder to identify. With an anchor set at a depth of 100 meters, such a buoy can even drift at a speed of up to 1 knot with a variable course. At first glance, it can seem like an invisible fisherman. Up close, at a modest distance, there's nothing to be seen.

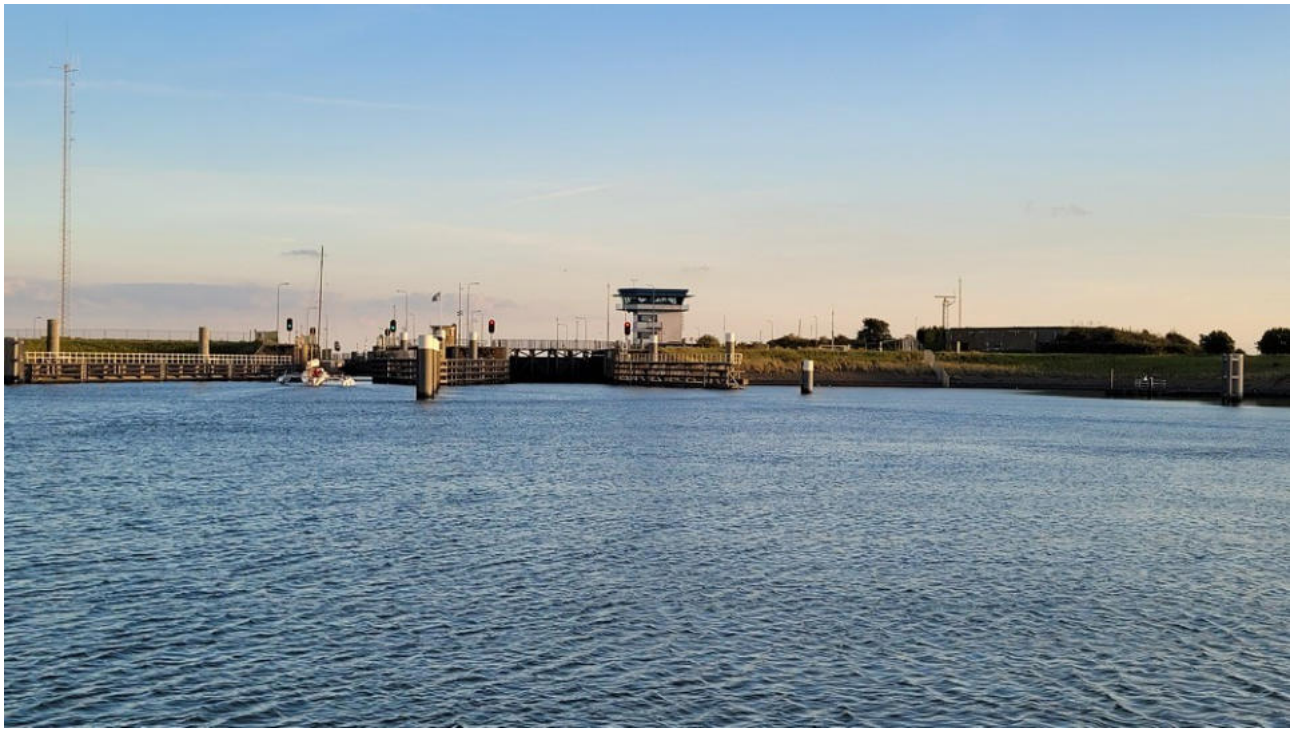


The second 24-hour period brings us another 150 miles, with less wind and lower seas. Gradually, all the reefs are taken out, and we also set the staysail. On the route to the Skagerrak, traffic is busy, so it's important to stay alert for crossing cargo ships. Occasionally, a ship will alter its course a few degrees to keep a safe distance from us. In such cases, it's crucial to maintain course and speed so that the other vessel can anticipate our movements.

If that's not possible—for example, if the wind suddenly drops—it's better to make a clear course change yourself. Otherwise, it could become very confusing for the other ship.

During my night watch, I steer a course between 165 and 180 degrees. This allows the sails to remain full on a broad reach in the now light and variable wind. I didn't notice crossing the northern shipping lane, as I was deep in dreamland. The southern shipping lane, with the coast of Vlieland in sight, also poses no problems.

The sun is shining, the wind has picked up again, and with a gybe we enter the Stortemelk. The current has now turned in our favor, which is a welcome advantage in the Wadden Sea.



After three months at sea, Norna returns to the fresh waters of the IJsselmeer. The Kornwerderzand lock swiftly lifts us into the IJsselmeer, together with a beautiful trimaran. Just a few more hours, and we are back in her (and my) home port, Lelystad.

Thus comes to an end our wonderful journey.

With greetings from Joost, Edmond, and -yours truly- Henny