



ADVENTURE
CANADA

INTO THE NORTHWEST PASSAGE 2019



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August 17 – September 2, 2019

Aboard the *Ocean Endeavour*

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GREENLAND

NUNAVUT

CANADA

Beechey Island
Dundas Harbour

Peel Sound

Franklin Strait

Victoria Island
Cambridge Bay

Buchan Gulf

East coast of
Baffin Island

Kugluktuk
Port Epworth

Qikiqtarjuaq

Disko Fjord
Eqp Sermia

Sisimiut
Nordre Stromfjord
Kangerlussuaq

Ilulissat

"The person who leaves is not the person who returns."

Traveller's motto



DAY 1 – SATURDAY, AUGUST 17

Kangerlussuaq

Coordinates: 66°57'N 50°57'W

Weather: Sunny, calm

Pure Sunshine

It was pouring in Toronto, but everything else in the day was pure sunshine. Buses left on time, planes left on time, refueling in Iqaluit proceeded seamlessly, the Greenland weather was perfect, Zodiacs swiftly taxied passengers to the ship, and everyone was on board on time. "Don't expect this to happen all the time," our expedition leader MJ joked during his first briefing, as we sipped the fruit punch cocktails that are an Adventure Canada tradition on our first night aboard the vessel.

Before we left Kangerlussuaq we did the lifeboat drill, then settled into the Polaris Restaurant for dinner. Although it had been a long day, musicians Colleen Nakashuk (Aasiva) and Jerry Gordon Laisa performed an impromptu concert in the Nautilus Lounge. The sun set around 10:00 p.m., and the long Arctic twilight deepened as the ship steamed out of the 160 kilometre-long Sondre Stromfjord. Night owls were eventually rewarded for their patience, as green northern lights danced overhead. For the many of us who had never seen the aurora borealis, a major highlight was already ticked off the list within the first few hours.



DAY 2 – SUNDAY, AUGUST 18

Sisimiut, Greenland

Coordinates: 66°94'N 53°68'W

Weather: Sunny, with the lightest of breezes and brief, moody periods of fog.

Full Immersion

Another jam-packed, full-immersion day began with a 7:30 a.m. wake-up call—no sleeping in on this vacation. After our first expedition briefing from MJ, our Inuit resource staff welcomed us to the North with a traditional lighting of the qulliq, or oil lamp. Meanwhile, our captain manoeuvred the *Ocean Endeavour* beside the pier at Sisimiut, the second largest town in Greenland, after the capital, Nuuk. An all-day visit followed, beginning with a walking tour with local guides. Among other things, we learned that the colourful houses in Greenland towns used to be colour-coded, depending on their function: hospitals were painted yellow, police buildings black, stores red, fish plants blue, and so on. Nowadays, the colours have no guaranteed meaning, although you do need approval from the municipality before you can paint your home a particular colour.

We also learned that Sisimiut has only traditional Greenlandic sled dogs—no other breeds, to maintain genetic purity. It also has the northernmost water fountains in the world, in a pond near the cultural centre at the far end of town.

Our birders spotted exotic northern species almost immediately: the common





redpoll (a sparrow-like bird with a red blotch on its chest), and the northern wheatear, the only songbird that breeds in North America and migrates to Africa. Dwarf fireweed and tall Arctic poppies grew in yards while dandelions showed their adaptability by reaching this far north.

We learned a new word today when some of us looked into a shop selling local clothing: qiviut—the inner fur of the muskox, the world's warmest wool, seven times warmer than a sheep's.

While we soaked in these exotic sights, John Houston beetled down to the local meat market to try to pick up what Northerners call country food. He scored big with eight caribou chunks that Ben Glare, the *Ocean Endeavour's* chef, turned into steaks. At dinner the next day, 136 people ordered the caribou.

We returned to the ship in time for a demonstration of local kayaking prowess. One of the world's foremost experts flipped and flipped back up with his paddle in various positions—every maneuver demonstrated on both sides showing, importantly, ambidexterity. He even rolled up without a paddle by using his arms as levers.

Some of us dressed up for the Captain's Welcome, others came au naturel, which in this case meant casual clothing rather than nothing at all.

DAY 3 – MONDAY, AUGUST 19

Nordre Stromfjord

Coordinates: 66°016'N 60°65'W

Weather: Mostly sunny, flat and calm water

First Footsteps on the Tundra

Adventure travel is less of a vacation than an intense experience of a different world. On the *Ocean Endeavour*, every minute is packed, or can be, if we choose. Today began with a 7:30 a.m. wakeup, followed by a light breakfast, as the ship nosed into Nordre Stromfjord—also known as Nassuttooq Fjord. Distribution of rubber boots for the wet Zodiac landings was completed within thirty minutes—an Adventure Canada record. Another quick bite, and then we boarded shuttles to shore for our first tundra walk.

Glorious weather and gentle terrain made this an ideal introduction to Arctic trekking. It was an exploratory hike, since Adventure Canada hadn't been in this spot before—just at the mouth of the fjord. Rachel ten Bruggencate, our archaeologist, stationed herself at the cluster of archaeology sites near the beach, amid fox traps, qammaqs (sod houses), and stone caches.

The name of the fjord in Kalaallisut (Greenlandic, a dialect of Inuktitut) means "place of many hooved animals". Although we didn't see any living specimens, signs of their recent passage abounded: old muskox droppings, discarded caribou

antlers, bones, even the partial carcass of a caribou that had died not long ago.

Besides ungulate signs, the kayakers saw an arctic hare on the mossy hillside. The distinctive curved tubes of ptarmigan droppings abounded on the rocky benches further up. Here too, was the best fox trap our resource staff had ever seen—all that was missing was the bit of sinew that triggered the trap rock to fall over the entrance when the fox ventured inside and tugged on the bait.

After supper, our first scheduled concert featured Aasiva's beautiful voice.

We have sailed further north, and though we're a day closer to autumn, the sun set three minutes later tonight than the night before.



DAY 4 – TUESDAY, AUGUST 20

Ilulissat

Coordinates: 69°22'N 59°01'W

Weather: Sunny, warm

Iceberg Town

Perfect weather turned a great day into a fabulous one in Ilulissat, formerly Jakobshavn. The sun blazed down, the wind held off, and the air was crisp but mild. Because there were no big icebergs in front of the harbour, the *Ocean Endeavour* was able to creep almost to the three Knob sign—the cautionary notice alerting boats motoring into the harbour to slow down.

Fin whales had already been sighted from the ship, but the ninety-minute Zodiac cruise also showed us humpback whales lunge-feeding, plus a close view of the towering icebergs, each a unique sculpture.



A small number of people forewent the ship lunch to eat in town; others ate in the now-familiar Polaris Restaurant, but all eventually made their way 1.5 kilometres by shuttle or foot to the boardwalk leading to the icefjord. A brass plaque on one of the slats of the boardwalk marked the entry into the World



Heritage Site part of town. A roughly one-kilometre stroll past an archaeology site brought us to a set of stairs and a scramble over rocks to a look over the icefjord. On our way we spotted a warning sign telling us not to go down to the beach because of potentially instant tsunamis from nearby icebergs breaking apart.



Not even a kayak, it seemed, could find a passage between those giant icebergs hung up on the shallow moraine that snagged their hidden underparts. The Sermeq Kujalleq glacier, one of the most active in the world, was well up the fjord and invisible from this vantage point, although a number of us took a prearranged helicopter tour to the great river of ice that spawns all these monsters.

On a perfect afternoon, we could hang comfortably for hours around the benches and picnic table, soaking up the view or listening to geologist extraordinaire Marc St-Onge. Wandering the 2.5 kilometres back to town, some stopped at the Glacier Shop, where you could buy everything from postcards to locally designed (but made in Portugal) T-shirts, to \$3,000 sealskin parkas, while others hung a left to Knud Rasmussen's old house, now a museum of this early twentieth century explorer-ethnographer.

Back on the ship, some of us had just enough steam left to watch Navarana K'avigak introduce *Vanishing Point*, the film in which she was involved, contrasting some of the differences between Canadian and Greenlandic Inuit, set against the background of the great Qitdlarssuaq migration of the mid-nineteenth century, which stitched together those two cultures, geographically separated by 2,000 kilometres, by creating an eternal family connection.

DAY 5 – WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 21

Eqip Sermia

Coordinates: 69°45'N 49°52'W

Weather: More of the fabulous same weather

Calving, Cruising, Hiking, and BBQ

The Eqip Sermia Glacier lies within a little fjord—although nothing in this imposing land truly qualifies as "little"—on the back side of Disko Island and a little north of Ilulissat. Its broken, vertical face leads into the sea opposite our landing site on gently sloping rocks. Bergy bits cover the surface of the fjord near the glacier. After the staff landing party put ashore, the glacier rumbled and giant pieces on its eastern edge splashed into the water. For five minutes, nothing happened; then the waves reached our landing site, making it inaccessible for more than half an hour. A planned landing turned temporarily into a Zodiac cruise, as we waited for the glacier to simmer down, which it eventually did, for all who wanted to go ashore for some hiking.

The unstable ice was not the only highlight: a gyrfalcon looked down at us from a nearby cliff top. This large falcon is highly prized by Middle Eastern falconers, especially the white-phase variety in the eastern Arctic (they're grey in the west). We learned that years ago, smugglers tried to export the eggs (kept warm in an incubation vest under their clothes) via Learjets from the Middle East that



turned up in Iqaluit. A single white-phase gyr egg reportedly fetched \$100,000. Thankfully, that operation was stopped.

The weather remained incredible, although a front of clouds moving from the southwest hinted that our perfect conditions might change in a day or so.

Still, the warmth on the back deck of the ship belied our Arctic location, as the hard-working hotel staff put on a BBQ lunch spread outside. After this banquet we went back inside to take in the afternoon talks on plants and Greenland explorers.

Wine flowed freely in the restaurant tonight, as we began our themed tables with the Adventure Canada and Extreme Arctic Adventure tables.

DAY 6 – THURSDAY, AUGUST 22

Disko Fjord

Coordinates: 67°27'N 53°42'W

Weather: Mild, calm, high overcast

Tundra Trekkies

Around wake-up time, the ship edged into Disko Fjord, on the west side of Disko Island—Big Island, in the Greenlandic language. For the first time, hikers had a choice of groups to join rather than wander within a prescribed perimeter, with interpretative stations. Groups included an advanced party that would strive to hike at least ten kilometres in the 3.5 hours available—final tally was twelve kilometres—and an intermediate group that would cover just a little less ground. Those whose interests were botany, geology, photography, etc. could spend the morning with our experts in those disciplines out on the land.

A common loon gave its distinctive eerie call and Canada geese honked as the Zodiacs nosed into the shallow bay. The tide was rising, so it would be an easy out but a picky approach through the shallows for drivers. The hard, dry tundra was good walking, except on side slopes, where spongy tussocks like soft beachballs were challenging. A few insects noticed our presence, but they were mostly friendly, non-biting flies. Given Greenland's warm weather, it is surprising that none of the North's infamous mosquitoes, blackflies, no-see-



ums, sandflies, or stouts disturbed any of our excursions abroad on this world's largest island.

The plant lovers spotted a Lapland rosebay, its beautiful purple flower still in bloom. A type of rhododendron, it is common in gardens, and our horticulturalists had no idea it could grow so small. Some prickly saxifrage was also still in flower. Boletus mushrooms—medium-sized, toast-brown, often with cracked caps—showed up again, as they have on every hike. They are edible and very tasty when fried in butter.



A full slate of presentations in the afternoon merged seamlessly into the nightly recap. The highlight was a clear and reassuring synopsis from MJ on the state of the ice in the Northwest Passage. Prince Regent Inlet, the *Endeavour's* usual route, remains choked with stubborn ice, but Peel Sound, on the west side of Somerset Island, looked largely open. A major windstorm coming up the Passage might wreak havoc for a few days but break up the larger ice floes. All in all, an encouraging report.

Tonight was Disko Night, and John the Disko Jockey spun out old standards like "Dancing Queen" and "YMCA" as all ages danced.

Tonight, too, the clocks returned to Eastern Daylight Time, as the ship hurried the 263 nautical miles from Disko to Baffin Island and the town of Qikiqtarjuaq (Big Island). Navarana pointed out that we were making our way from one Big Island (Disko) to another.

DAY 7 – FRIDAY, AUGUST 23

Qikiqtarjuaq

Coordinates: 67°42'N 63°49'W

Weather: Sunny, a light south breeze

Welcome to Nunavut

As we drew around the north tip of Broughton Island and into the channel leading to Qikiqtarjuaq, what did we spot but our first polar bear, wandering the tundra.



It was a distant bear, a small white dot through binoculars and a shaky, shaggy figure with legs through the spotting scope, but the real thing.

The customs clearance proceeded quickly and soon we hustled by Zodiac into the town's sheltered harbour. All felt the warm reception, but Aasiva most of all: she was met by a passel of awestruck kids, who swarmed her and followed her around. Eventually, these little groupies were awarded by some of Aasiva's songs at the community centre.

A Canadian Arctic settlement has a different history than a Greenlandic village and a simpler feel: gravel rather than paved roads, for one. Prefab houses shipped by sealift—the once-a-year cargo ship that visits every Arctic community in late summer. That's how the pickups, quads, and snowmobiles come in; it's also, for those who think ahead, a comparatively economical way to buy a year's supply of non-perishables like flour, sugar, etc., rather than purchasing them a kilo at a time at the Northern store or Co-op.

Komatiks—wooden cargo sleds pulled by snowmobiles, were very long here in Qik, indicating good, flat sea ice in winter. In other places (Iqaluit, for example) the komatiks are 1/2 or 1/3 the length, since they must maneuver through rough ice caused by the high tides. Here, the tides are less than a metre and—to use a paddling analogy—you want a good-tracking sea kayak rather than a whitewater kayak that twists and turns nimbly.

After the brief town tour, many of us chose to hike to the inukshuk atop the low hill overlooking town. Others poked into the Northern store, or bought little treats that somehow the *Endeavour* has shockingly neglected to supply, like a Klondike ice cream bar or salt and vinegar potato chips.

Some of our Inuit crew and local folks demonstrated Inuit games at the community centre—various high kicks, the leg throw, the muskox competition. Then the music started, and we were surprised to see the local love of lively jigs, which had been learned long ago from Scottish whalers.





Jerry Gordon Laisa's moving concert in the evening had more sober elements, as he shared a song about five friends who had committed suicide. When he was growing up, he thought that was normal; only much later did he realize that it wasn't, or shouldn't be.

DAY 8 – SATURDAY, AUGUST 24

East coast of Baffin Island

Coordinates: 69°23'N 66°33'W

Weather: High overcast, 25-knot offshore winds

Off or On?

Some consider a ship day as an off day, but on the *Ocean Endeavour*, you can be as off or as on as you choose. As we steamed up the fjord-riven east coast of Baffin Island, positioned nine to twenty-six nautical miles offshore to follow known soundings, a flurry of workshops and onboard talks gave the day an intellectual focus. For some of us, it was also a chance to allow the sore muscles from the longer hikes two days ago to recover; on the first big hike of the year, most of the stiffness and soreness comes on the second day, not the first.



John Houston's workshop on Inuit art in the reception area, next to his display of carvings, was incredibly well attended. Meanwhile, in an apt parallel, Marc St-Onge discussed the sculptures from a mineral perspective. Soapstone, he explained, is often a general term for the three types of carving stone: fine-grained argillite, marble, and the classic green-black soapstone, which comes from heated, pressurized rock in which water has been infused.

This being the “Cribbage Cruise”—lots of keen players—a big session was held, with about five boards in play. Since this wasn't a tournament, there were no overall winners but lots of fun and ribbing. Botanist Carolyn Mallory led a watercolor session; Marc Hebert discussed the fine points of spotting wildlife through binoculars; there was a session on GPS use with Jassin Godard, aka “Jazz”; one on field guides with Krista Gooderham and even Ukelele 101 with Aasiva.

Later in the afternoon, Inuit games in the Nautilus Lounge included the high kicks, leg wrestling, and endurance test of the owl hop, in which you hop in place on one foot with the other foot curled behind the knee of the hopping leg. Whoever keeps hopping the longest wins. Alana Bradley-Swan narrowly edged out Krista for the championship, indicating that determination, pain, and endurance all contribute to success in the owl hop.

Dinner included a choice of exquisite Arctic char, picked up just yesterday in Qikiqtarjuaq.

DAY 9 – SUNDAY, AUGUST 25

Buchan Gulf

Coordinates: 71°41'N 75°17'W

Weather: Sunny, calm in some spots, breezy in others

Cliffs, Polar Bears, and Narwhals

By morning, the *Ocean Endeavour* had neared the north end of Baffin Island as we turned into Buchan Gulf, named for the former Governor General of Canada, John Buchan, who wrote the popular pre-WWII thriller, *The 39 Steps*. The Gulf funneled into three high-walled fjords: Icy Arm, Quernbiter Fjord, and Cambridge Fjord to the south. We nosed into the smallest and most northerly of them, Icy Arm, looking for a landing spot to launch a series of hikes.

As we were about to change into our hiking togs, Dawson Freeze spotted two polar bears at our proposed site. They were distant, but on this glorious, mild Arctic morning, most of us flocked out on the top deck and managed to see what looked like a mother and cub, lounging about on the rocky slopes.

Unfortunately, this meant that the hike in that spot was off. MJ sent a Zodiac to scout the head of the arm for an alternative, but it was just a boulder field, not sensible walking terrain. The morning thus turned into a rich ship's cruise in a spectacular fjordscape. After drinking our fill with these bears, the ship turned around and began to work its way past the Executioner Cliffs and into Quernbiter



Fjord. Here, pods of narwhal fed at the foot of the cliffs. Sailing up the fjord, we saw pod after pod of narwhal. It's rare to sight even a few individuals; this was a bonanza. The sharp-eyed staff also saw five other polar bears during the morning, and although they were even further away and more elusive than the first two, this brought the morning polar bear tally to seven.

Marc St-Onge, our geologist, was of course in raptures about the 3.2 billion-year-old "Early skin of the earth" that we were beholding. Slender glaciers occupied narrow, shadowy couloirs; higher up, in the sunshine, the beginnings of the local





ice cap. Here, the informal "glacier line" was about 3,200 feet: below that, bare rock. Above that, glacier or ice cap.

As we sailed north toward Devon Island, the afternoon passed in a series of talks, including the poignant discussion on Inuit health and well-being, in which we were again reminded of the terrible suicide epidemic in the North.

We passed Bylot Island, with its thick-billed murre colony in the evening; guillemots—as open-water birds they're less common in fjords and bays—had begun to appear. The evening ended with Arctic Bluff, a game where four liars occasionally told the truth and the audience tried to ferret them out.

DAY 10 – MONDAY, AUGUST 26

Dundas Harbour

Coordinates: 74°34'N 82°28'W

Weather: Overcast breaking into sunshine; light winds

Tattoos of the Chin

Landfall on the world's largest uninhabited island was more difficult than expected. Why? Why else? A polar bear was lounging just below the flagpole on the hill near Dundas Harbour. It kind of disappeared, but its presence in the vicinity forced us to shift landing spots to a safe area across the shallow bay.

Now that we'd almost reached our farthest north, and were ten days closer to the fall equinox, temperatures had dropped to just above freezing around wake-up. Morning cloud soon dissipated, however, leaving a mild southerly chop but an otherwise sunny day, with rags of fog drifting over the Cambrian (or is it Precambrian?) parts of the hills, just below the limestone caps that the Inuit called Tattoos of the Chin, and which gave Devon Island its Inuktitut name, Tallurutuip.

After a brief Zodiac cruise around the RCMP shore, we hiked across to the hiking spot. Such different tundra from Greenland: no spongy, half-inflated beach balls (aka tussocks) to walk over. Instead, dry, firm, modestly vegetated ground. Some irregular terrain, with a narrow stream or two to cross, but the ridges where the bear guards patrolled remained accessible.







While we enjoyed a very late lunch, the *Ocean Endeavour* headed to neighbouring Croker Bay to cruise for wildlife. We weren't disappointed: walrus, surprisingly close, made the day for many of us. This also marked our farthest point north on this expedition: $74^{\circ}47'$. (Beechey Island reaches a close $74^{\circ}43'$).

At the briefing, MJ showed us the latest ice charts. The recent storm had nudged a narrow arm of thick ice across middle Peel Sound, right in our course. As we chugged the south coast of Devon Island toward Beechey Island and deeper into the Franklin story, we waited expectantly to see whether, like Roald Amundsen and Henry Larsen, we would make it through the Northwest Passage, or whether like John Franklin, William Parry, and others, we would not.

DAY 11 – TUESDAY, AUGUST 27

Beechey Island

Coordinates: 74°43'N 91°45'W

Weather: Very overcast, +1°C, 20-knot wind

Brrrr on Beechey

Welcome to the Barren Wedge, that part of the High Arctic where cool temperatures, fog, and wind make this place seem like, well, the Arctic that southerners imagine. The wind blows 300 days a year in nearby Resolute, and Beechey Island—though a sensible harbour for a nineteenth-century expedition, presented a similar inhospitable face this morning. Few plants grow on its shaley shores; you have to be a botanist to notice that any plants grow there at all.

And yet—and yet—we were all so looking forward to Beechey. It was the first site where we would truly connect with the Franklin saga. Here, in 1845-6, Franklin's two ships, the HMS *Erebus* and *Terror*, overwintered in what is now called Erebus and Terror Bay. That winter, three men died of suspected tuberculosis, aggravated by a

poor diet. William Braine, John Torrington, and John Hartnell are still buried here on this forlorn beach, and though the original headstones have been replaced with replicas, the genuinely haunted flavour of this place remains. Cans from



the food that they and subsequent searchers ate are everywhere, 170 years later.

A bumpy Zodiac ride in the twenty-knot wind brought us ashore. Many of us started with the graves, then trekked a gravelly beach over to Northumberland House, built in 1852 by Captain WJS Pullen (one of many searchers that year looking for Franklin), and equipped with stores and coal in case any of Franklin's men had survived. Just above the remains of the site is the Franklin memorial, a marble slab left by Leopold McClintock in 1858, and given to him by none other than Lady Franklin herself.

A white-phase gyrfalcon flew over the ruins of Northumberland House; then a peregrine falcon. Two polar bears had been spotted in a gully on the far side of the bay, but they remained distant, observable only by extremely sharp eyes with long optical instruments.

A presentation on the Northwest Passage and Franklin in the afternoon gave an overview of the quest and the tragedy. But all of us were wondering, "Would we get through the Passage or be turned back?" MJ gave the answer at his briefing—we were going for it! The Canadian Coast Guard icebreaker *Terry Fox* was standing by to help us through the ice if we needed it. We were to miss the site of the sunken *Erebus* itself because of a violent three-day storm in that area, but Kugluktuk, here we come!

The Adventurers & Explorers theme party after dinner featured everyone from women explorers Robyn Davidson and Mina Hubbard to Eric and the irrepressible Strawberry Moose!

DAY 12 – WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 28

Peel Sound

Coordinates: 72°33'N 96°23'W

Weather: Rain, overcast

The Unforeseen Rendez-Vous

Rain poured onto the slick pontoons of the Zodiacs as we began to disembark into Flexure Bay on Prince of Wales Island. At the head of the little bay, dozens, perhaps hundreds of belugas cavorted in the shallows. As they breached to breathe, their white backs looked like waves breaking on shore. But we hadn't begun to approach them before the Zodiac cruise was suddenly cancelled. One of our fellow passengers needed to be evacuated, and search and rescue authorities needed us to double back toward Resolute as soon as possible. Here, a plane would transport him to the nearest hospital in Iqaluit, Nunavut's capital, on southern Baffin Island.

So we made our about-face and began to steam north with all haste. MJ and his core staff dealt with the complicated logistics; with so many people, and so many moving parts, and outside agencies like the Coast Guard Search and Rescue thrown into the mix, he kept us updated about schedule changes throughout the day. Impromptu workshops and talks enriched the day. At the north end of Peel Sound, we rendezvoused with the Coast Guard icebreaker *Des*



Groseilliers, named after a Quebec voyageur/explorer. (Another icebreaker is named after his partner Pierre Radisson.) The icebreaker sent a tender to pick up our fellow passenger and take him back to their vessel. There, accompanied by a nurse, he would fly on the *Des Groseillier's* helicopter to Resolute, to catch a military plane dispatched by Search and Rescue to Iqaluit.

Thereupon we turned south again down Peel Sound for our postponed meeting with the icebreaker *Terry Fox*, which would guide us through the pack ice in southern Peel Sound.

DAY 13 – THURSDAY, AUGUST 29

Peel Sound

Coordinates: 72°33'N 96°23'W

Weather: Overcast, light wind

Into Franklin Strait

The day began bright and early; well, not exactly bright, as 6:00 a.m. is dusky at this time of year. The experience was dazzling, though, as we piled into the Zodiacs for a pre-breakfast cruise into Flexure Bay to get a closer look at yesterday's belugas. Fewer than the day before fed and frolicked in the shallows but there were still plenty for us to see. Carefully, speaking in whispers and spooling down the outboards not to disturb the whales with engine noise, we drifted toward them. Finally, we were close enough that they looked not like breaking waves but like small, snowy cetaceans.



We could not spend too much time with the whales, as we had to hurry south for our meeting with the coast guard icebreaker *Terry Fox*, which would guide us through the pack ice that recent southerly winds had collected at the narrowing of Peel Sound, around the latitude of Bellot Strait. The red-and-white ship looked tiny compared to our vessel, but its can-opener bow and powerful engines cut through the few bands of thick ice that would have foiled a vessel of our ice class. Another cruise ship, the 550-passenger *Roald Amundsen*, followed in our wake.



Although we couldn't pause, we had the incredibly good fortune to pass near an ice floe where a mother polar bear and her two cubs studied us curiously. Although we've already seen over a dozen bears, they have all been on land, distant, unintimidating, recognizable only as moving white dots on the landscape. This was an intimate sighting, and several of us notched stunning images of the threesome.

Proceeding through at ten knots, thanks to the clear passage provided by the *Terry Fox*, we abruptly emerged after twenty-five nautical miles into ice-free Franklin Strait—an ironic name for a place with clear sailing just north of where that expedition met disaster in the ice.

DAY 14 – FRIDAY, AUGUST 30

Queen Maud Gulf

Coordinates: 69°04'N 103°02'W

Weather: Sun/cloud, light wind

Full Steam Ahead

Last night for the first time, the sea pitched enough for night table drawers to slide noisily open and closed (unless hooked shut). Toward wake-up, as we exited open Victoria Strait and cruised along the south coast of Victoria Island, calm was restored.

There is a bite of winter in the air now, perhaps from the advancing season, perhaps from the gnarlier weather in this part of the Arctic compared to Greenland or eastern Baffin. Temperatures hover just above freezing; wind chill equivalents hover just below it. The sun has become a stranger, peeking out only now and then from a crack in a solid bank of low grey clouds.

With our delays in Peel Sound, we have a lot of ground to cover in the remaining days of the expedition, and the *Endeavour* hurried toward Ikalutuuttiaq (Cambridge Bay). With 1,750 people, it is the fourth largest town in Nunavut, after Iqaluit, Rankin Inlet, and Arviat. We arrived in the hamlet just before 3:00 p.m., after a morning of workshops. Brief squalls sent graupel flying. (These are pellets like hail but made of snow.) Then periods of calm. We trekked over to the just-opened CHARS (Canadian High Arctic Research Station), a jazzy \$200 million facility that will both host

scientists and allow them to process and analyze some of the results of their field work.

Then we visited the town's Heritage Centre, notable for its beautiful displays of Inuit art and crafts: exquisite kamiks (sealskin boots) on one wall, and in the lobby, the weathered wheel from Amundsen's ship, the *Maud*—recently raised from its shallow grave in the harbour and transported to Norway. After Amundsen sailed the Northwest Passage in the *Gjoa*, he built the *Maud*, which successfully sailed the passage before being sold to the Hudson's Bay Company. The ship eventually froze into the ice on an Arctic trip and sank soon after, but in 2017 was towed back to Norway where it is now exhibited.

Back on the ship, young people from Cambridge Bay, plus some of our resource staff, demonstrated more Inuit games, including the painful "Fishhook", where the two competitors hook a finger into the mouth of their opponent and pull until one gives up from the discomfort.

The charity auction rounded off our evening. Danny, in his best speed-talking, hog-auctioneer style, wielded the gavel with typical panache. The world's oldest rock and rarest mineral, brought by Marc St-Onge, was among the big-ticket items. Marc also threw in a pair of his underwear to, um, sweeten the deal.



DAY 15 – SATURDAY, AUGUST 31

Queen Maud Gulf

Coordinates: 68°28'N 110°31'W

Weather: NNW wind, light and overcast

Arctic Abundance

Steaming along the south coast of Victoria Island, we reached the peninsula ending in Lady Franklin Point. We shuttled in Zodiacs over choppy seas to land, where we began a series of hikes inland or along the coast. Victoria Island is the geographic opposite of northeast Baffin: as flat as Buchan Gulf was precipitous.

On the other hand, the plant growth in the western Arctic is closer to Greenland's than to the polar desert of places like Devon Island and north Baffin. This was also our first stop where wildlife was, at times, abundant. Numerous caribou bones and antlers spoke to the Dolphin and Union herd, which at this time of year begin to gather on the south shore of Victoria Island, waiting for the sea to freeze





enough to make their annual migration south to the mainland. Muskox scat and fox remains lay on the grassy, pancake-flat tundra.

Birders added several species to their trip list. A snowy owl perched on the ground, gazing thoughtfully west. Sandhill cranes flew overhead with raucous "Krawwws". A Pacific loon with chicks reminded us that we really were now far west, and a rough-legged hawk, swans, a V of Canada geese...You get the picture.

Most hikes began with a trek up to a single boulder left by retreating glaciers. Archaeological sites such as meat caches and "play houses"—small stone rings which Inuit kids had made, attested to how Inuit footprints really are everywhere in the Arctic.

DAY 16 – SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 1

Kugluktuk

Coordinates: 67°43'N 111°56'W

Weather: Sun, cloud, snow squalls, breezy

Homeward Bound

Another early rise, as we enjoyed a last Arctic hike amid the stromatolites of Port Epworth on the south coast of Coronation Gulf, a half-day away from Kugluktuk and the end of the trail, at least for now. Just before the Zodiacs launched, a snow squall—one of several this morning—whipped through. Winter is in the air, and the balmy temperatures of Greenland are a distant memory.

Stromatolites—fossilized algae colonies responsible for oxygen production in the early earth—were the main draw. "We are all here because they were all there," explained Marc. For hikers, the wildly beautiful views from the clifftops over a surreal landscape of flat slabs interspersed with ponds and connected by ribbons of tundra were worth the soggy and sometimes challenging trudge through streams, over rocks, and across swamp tussocks. Two solid treks in a row have pleasantly tired us and nicely rounded off the expedition. Our ten kayakers, meanwhile, took advantage of the lop to surf for the first time.

Despite the chilly morning, and with wet feet from the hike and snow that flew sideways, a small but dauntless group of swimmers braved the four-degree

Celsius waters of Coronation Gulf for a Polar Swim, thus earning, according to host Danny Catt, awards of boundless value.

In the afternoon, things accelerated as the expedition wound up. The mandatory disembarkation briefing bookended the mandatory lifeboat drill on our first afternoon so long ago. At a longer recap, several shared how the doors of perception had opened further for them on this trip. We toasted our gallant captain, Donael Soto, who had successfully guided us through the Passage. MJ was presented with the First Annual Flexpedition Award for his "Fluidity in planning and decision making". Navarana sang lovely chants in a Northwest Greenland style.

And now we pack. But more than souvenirs and our luggage, we take home tons of memories.

EXPEDITION STAFF

EXPEDITION LEADER	MATHEW JAMES BRADLEY – SWAN
CRUISE DIRECTOR	BRITTANY MANLEY
HOST	DANNY CATT
ASSISTANT EXPEDITION LEADER	JULIE BERNIER
ASSISTANT CRUISE DIRECTOR	ELLIE CLIN
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CULTURALIST	RANDY EDMUNDS
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EXPLORER & AUTHOR	JERRY KOBALENKO
BOTANIST	CAROLYN MALLORY
SEA BIRD BIOLOGIST	MARK MALLORY
GEOLOGIST	MARC ST – ONGE
NATURALIST	KRISTA GOODERHAM
MARINE BIOLOGIST	SHANE KEEGAN
PHOTOGRAPHER AND NATURALIST	DENNIS MINTY
MUSICIAN	COLLEEN NAKASHUK (AASIVA)
MUSICIAN	JERRY GORDON LAISA
EXPEDITION SPECIALIST	DEVON BAYLY – JONES

GIFT SHOP MANAGER	JESSICA WINTERS
KAYAK GUIDE	DAWSON FREEZE
KAYAK GUIDE	CAMERON DALINGHAUS
EXPEDITION TEAM	KLAUS KIESEWETTER
EXPEDITION TEAM	KELLY WALSH
EXPEDITION TEAM	JASSIN GODARD
EXPEDITION TEAM	ROBERT COMEAU
EXPEDITION TEAM	JIM NARRAWAY
EXPEDITION TEAM	MARC HEBERT
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