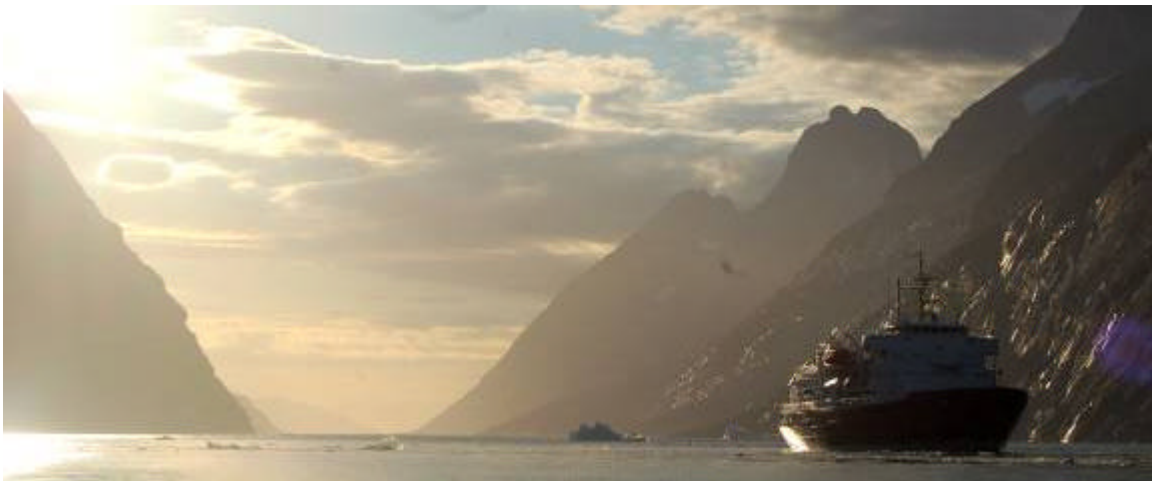


**LOG OF MV POLAR STAR**  
***THE VIKING TRAIL TO***  
***THE AMERICAS***  
**31 August – 9 September 2006**



**and**  
**THE LURE OF NORTH-**  
**EAST CANADA**  
**THROUGH TIME**  
**9-17 September 2006**

**written by John Harrison**

**MV Polar Star**  
**THE REMOTE COAST OF EAST GREENLAND**  
**19– 31 AUGUST 2006**

Captain	Adam Boczek
Chief Engineer	Zenon Berger
Chief Officer	Jedrzej Marsz
First Engineer	Wojciech Zieba
Second Officer	Korwel Janusz
Hotel Manager	Natasha Hanson
Head Chef	Paul McDougall
Office Assistant	Evelyn Røren
Doctor	Judy Forbes
Expedition Leader	Hannah Lawson
Staff	Anja Fleig
	John Harrison
	Ulrich Lobsiger
	Doug Nixon
	John Sparks
From Iqaluit	Leon Noremore
	Robert

**Thursday 31 August**

**Reykjavik Iceland**

**Midday position 64°09'N 21°56'E**

Flying north from our home countries, (apart from a few lucky ones, staying onboard after a successful cruise around East Greenland) we entered the realm of the Arctic. At dockside right by the city centre of Reykjavik, the capital of Iceland, we came upon our new floating home, the *MV Polar Star*. Some had arrived early and taken time to look round the city, or visit the geothermal delights of the Blue Lagoon, or perhaps taken the Golden Circle tour, absorbing sulphurous geysers, waterfall spray, plate tectonics and nascent democracy, in a grand sweep.

There was a slight delay in our final passengers boarding but the anchor was lifted around 18:30, and in bright and breezy weather we began our expedition, which was eventually to take us through Western Greenland and to Baffin Island. We found the Observation Lounge where we met Captain Adam, Expedition Leader Hannah and the team of staff, then began to find our way about the rest of the ship. The mandatory safety briefing from First Officer Jed followed. We donned the bright orange life-jackets and mustered under the lifeboats for the drill. It was then time to find the dining room and enjoy our first meal onboard. The forecast was for a quiet night, with rest extended one hour by putting back the clocks.

**Friday 1 September**

**Denmark Strait**

**Midday position 62°56'N 29°03'W**

The ship made a little motion during the night, and the morning found us with a regular swell, but most made it to breakfast. There were a few white horses, and fulmars had joined us to glide round the ship playing on the air currents thrown up by the hull. During the morning we had a talk by John Sparks on 'Winged Seafarers of the Far North' describing the avian life we might see. The good news for those suffering information overload was that the total number

of sea bird species in the world is not much more than 300, and polar regions have fewer than most. Doug Nixon then gave 'An Introduction to Archaeology' outlining what archaeologists do, and the basic principles of field work investigation.

Most people were beginning to find their sea legs in time to brace themselves for John Harrison's lecture on 'The History of Whaling', and man's relationship with these leviathans. The techniques for whaling changed little from the earliest recorded voyages up until the invention, in the late nineteenth century, of mechanically fired harpoons designed to kill on impact. Happy Hour at the bar then followed, before our first recap and briefing, then dinner. The evening was rounded off by a showing of 'The Seasonal Seas' from the acclaimed BBC Blue Planet series. Before going to bed, we were advised to put back our clocks one hour, buying us an extra hour's sleep.

## **Saturday 2 September**

### **Approaching East Greenland**

#### **Midday position 61°04'N 38°14'W**

The morning continued grey, but a little calmer than the night before. Our lecture schedule brought us Viðar's presentation on the politics of the Viking emergence in 'The Viking Age in Scandinavia'. There were no nations, in the modern sense of states with impersonal and enduring institutions, rather power was based on personal networks and alliances of a much more feudal nature.

After lunch, John Harrison introduced the Gregory Peck film Moby Dick, the sea-sequences of which were filmed in his home city of Cardiff. The film is true not only to the superb novel, published at the height of the American sperm whale fishery's wealth in 1851, but also to the industry itself, with the details at sea, and the hunting techniques faithfully observed. The climax of the film as the great white whale breaches for Ahab's final, fatal attack, was undermined with perfect comic timing, by the bridge using the PA system complete with



opening 'bing-bong' to announce a whale off the starboard side. The DVD was paused, theatre-goers flocked to the rail in biting winds to see nothing among the white horses, then ran back inside to watch Ahab get his cetacean come-uppance.

After tea, Anja gave a talk on the formation, structure and behaviour of glacier ice: 'Ice is Nice'. Some of the closing slides showing the retreat of glaciers in Argentina and Switzerland were rather worrying, but they came with a health warning: glacial retreat is not the full story, and elsewhere there is evidence of stable temperatures, or

even cooling. Before dinner we had recap and briefing, focussing on our first zodiac cruise the next day, though most passengers were veterans of the famous little craft. Dinner was also interrupted by a safety message from Captain Adam, warning of rising northerly winds. Deck 3 portholes were secured, and outside decks 3 and 4 were declared out of bounds. However our scheduled entrance to the fjords at 03:00 was likely to put an end to the motion. After dinner, John Sparks gave a none-too-serious look at improving camera technique, with his talk: 'In Focus.'

We went to bed with the wind whistling outside, rocked by the grey waters of the Denmark Strait. Those Vikings in open boats were tough people.

## **Sunday 3 September**

## **Prins Christian Sund and Nanortalik**

### **Midday position 59°57'N 44°47'W**

It was an early start, initially under cloudy conditions, but, a few minutes before 06:00, our zodiac drivers were ready waiting in the waters of Prins Christian Sund off the Semerunerit Glacier. Although marked on the charts as a tidewater glacier, one whose terminus floats on the sea, it had retreated so that most of the front was on bare rock clear of the water. The face calved frequently during the first twenty minutes or so, before quietening down. The glacier lay in a hanging valley whose floor was suspended several hundred metres above the surface of the fjord's waters. Although the charts recorded only some 50 metres of water at our anchorage, the sonar found 170 metres. There were glaucous and Icelandic gulls in some numbers, and black ravens, the stalker of Norse battlefields and national bird of Greenland.

On return we had good appetites for breakfast. At 11:00, Anja gave her lecture 'Eis is Nice' for the German speaking passengers. English readers can probably translate without assistance. The middle of the day was glorious: very warm sunshine with a light breeze

At we docked at the little harbour of Nanortalik, in time to start going ashore to the small yacht harbour earlier than advertised. Niels Jensen from the local tourist office came to the jetty to lead a short guided walk, and tell us about his adoptive home of 37 years. Nanortalik was first established at nearby Sissarisoq in 1797, but began moving here in 1830, houses being physically transferred. Early buildings used local stone, but when easy supplies dried up, around 1890, most were built in timber. The population is now around 1500 souls.

The walk ended at the old harbour whose surrounding buildings, including a dwelling, a bakery and two whale-processing buildings, now comprise a fascinating museum. It provided insights into traditional agriculture and fishing, including whaling. There was also an exhibit on the first hospital, and a strange lookout post on a rock, mounted by a wooden stair, and topped by a flagpole bearing the red and white Greenlandic flag. Although it was Sunday, the souvenir shops at the museum and in the town were open. Many of the objects were derived from seals and other marine mammals, which meant consulting CITES regulations (Commission on



International Trade in Endangered Species) and national restrictions from our home nations before purchasing. At 16:00 there was a performance at the small church by the local choir singing in Greenlandic. Some were dressed in the ornate and colourful traditional dress, with beads, sealskin, and fine leatherwork. The cloud cover was returning and the wind freshening as we ran shuttles back to ship, ably assisted by young boys from the

town who grow up knowing far more about boats than they do about cars, which seems a better priority in life. We sailed north, and were treated, after recap and dinner, to an informal talk by John Harrison on Icelandic and Viking Sagas, from a writer's perspective. After outlining the types of saga, and the preservation of the manuscripts over centuries, John used the example of 'Laxdaela Saga' to illustrate the dramatic skills and psychological insight of the author in writing a family saga about one of the major founding dynasties of Icelandic farmers and settlers.

## **Monday 4 September**

### **Brattahlid and Garðar (Igaliku)**

### **Midday position 61°09'N 45°30' W**

Our introduction to the day was later and gentler today. We were anchored in a placid fjord overlooking the settlement now called Qassarsuk but famous the world over to Norse enthusiasts as Brattahlid, the home of Erik, or Eirik, the Red, coloniser of Greenland, and his son Leif, one of the two strong candidates for discovering Vinland and hence the New World. (The other was Bjarni Herjolfsson, who was mocked on return from a cruise where he got lost and observed the coast but made little or no effort to land.) We knew the heritage was not forgotten when our zodiacs dropped us at a small, modern jetty where a rigid-bottomed inflatable groaning under the weight of two 115HP Mercury engines sported along its side the name Leif Eriksson.

At the road, Viðar gave an introduction to the ruins, competing valiantly with a large tractor left outside the shop with its engine running. Then we walked along the shore, passing a sturdy, small horse tethered in a meadow: a descendant of those brought over by the Vikings. We passed by the main farmhouse of Erik the Red, attributed to him because of its superior size and wealth. It is now only lines of low walls, in classic Norwegian longhouse style, but over that flagstone step passed the man who is now chiefly credited with the first European account of seeing Baffin Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, and meeting the *Skraelings* of 'Savages' as the Vikings scornfully called all Native peoples. We were met at the reconstructed farmhouse and church of Tjodhilde by Ingebjörg, an Icelandic lady in period Norse dress, holding large iron keys shaped like runes. She explained that the replica church was of an original sited opposite the modern church. It is now just a small horseshoe shape in the grass, but its significance was immense. Leif had returned from the court of King Olaf Tryggvasson in the second half of the 990s with a mission to Christianise Iceland and Greenland. His mother Tjodhilde, possibly an Irish woman already familiar with the new faith, embraced it and turfed out her husband Erik banning him from house and bed until he was baptised. He soon came round, but was never an active Christian. The tiny church she built was the first in all



Greenland. The farmhouse, although only a partial reconstruction of a more complex dwelling was nevertheless a fine and attractive looking home, although modern lighting made it seem more airy and light than any Viking blubber lamps could have done. Outside, the sun gradually came out and lit up the view down the fjord that Erik and Leif would have seen whenever their restless eyes turned seawards.

Last zodiac was at noon, then we sailed a short distance into the neighbouring fjord and landed at Ittilek, a sheltered bay where the hay crop already stood bound in white plastic spotted with the droppings of Greenland wheatears which perched cockily on them. These birds are a sub-species of Britain's northern wheatear, with stronger flight muscles and longer wings to equip them for the long migration they would shortly undertake to Spain, probably flying directly there without a break, before moving on to N Africa. We hiked, or took lifts in local pick-ups to the little town of Igaliko, which has the ruins of the Cathedral of the Fjords: Garðar.

Over the pass, at around 130 metres, a large dark bird took leisurely flight over us: a juvenile white-tailed fish eagle: a marvellous sight.

John Harrison and Viðar gave talks explaining the functions of the different ecclesiastical and farm building half-buried under thick tussocky grass. Unfortunately for posterity, the rest of the walls were in view all around the town, robbed to build new houses for settlers in the eighteenth century. The fields were irrigated from ditches that diverted water from the hills above into small reservoirs. The evening was calm and warm as we left a shore scattered with stones, John Harrison explained, from 1.1 billion-year-old sandstones: a quarter the age of the earth.

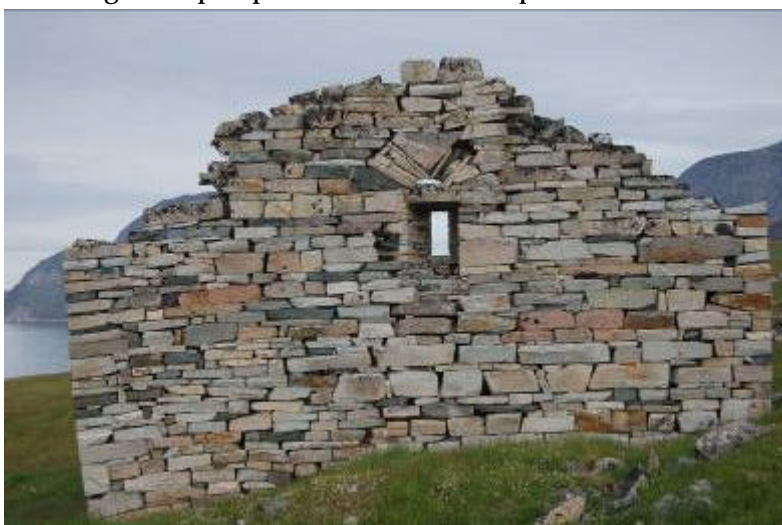
In recap, John Sparks described the migration of the wheatears we had seen, and the plumage changes of the Lapland buntings, whose males display rich dark feathers on the chest and face but, after the breeding season, both sexes appear as rather plain birds. After dinner we heard a presentation from Viðar on 'Norse Communities in Greenland', outlining the colonisation and demise of the settlements over a period of 450 years.

## **Tuesday 5 September**

### **Hvalsey and Qaqortoq (Juliansháb)**

#### **Midday position 60°40'N 45°58' W**

After all our fine weather, the morning was grey and rainy as we arrived at Hvalsey or 'whale island'. The fjord is the site of a Norse settlement granted to Thorkell Farsek, cousin of Erik the Red, and contains a fine and well-preserved church. We landed alongside a small wooden jetty, too high for our zodiacs to use and walked the short distance up the path to the farmhouse and church. The present church probably replaced an earlier one, and was built around 1200 or soon after. Few finds have been associated with it, due in part, no doubt, to the crudeness of early investigations on the site. The last records we have for the site recall the wedding of a prosperous Icelandic couple, Thorstein Olafsson and Sigrid Björnsdottir, who



were only here because their ship had been blown off course. They later returned to Iceland. Interestingly, the banns for their wedding were obtained from the cathedral at Garðar where we had been the previous afternoon. More sinisterly, there are records of a trial and conviction for witchcraft which resulted in a burning. John Harrison and Viðar explained the various elements of the ruins. The farm buildings beyond the

church were more modest than we had seen the day before at either Brattahlid or Garðar. At the other end of the complex was a formal hall where the most important resident would entertain his guests. Even so, its stonework was not as fine as that of the church.

It seems from archaeological evidence that the settlement persisted for some fifty years after the last written documents, but its end was mysterious. Later visitors found not a soul here, the farm animals were wandering wild, and there were few bodies or recent graves to suggest either strife or epidemic had ravaged them. They may have left willingly for Vinland or Iceland (if the latter, there is no record of them arriving). Another possibility is that they were seized by visiting ships as slaves or hostages, perhaps by Moors or Portuguese.

The rain continued and there were few lingering onshore as the time for last zodiac arrived at 11:00. We set sail for our afternoon destination, the town of Qaqortoq, formerly known as Juliansháb. Even in the rain, its picturesque buildings were glowing with bright colours. The zodiac ride into a small floating jetty was enlivened by avoiding the large icebergs which floated both at the entrance and inside, among the fishing vessels, small cargo ships and dredgers. Less easy to see were the pallets, lumps of wood and general rubbish they left in the water behind them. We were met at the quay by our local guides who led some on a town tour while others explored on their own. The lady at the museum waived the \$4 entrance fee because, she said, she was so pleased to see the rain. The rooms contained many interesting artefacts about local life, including a fine photographic exhibition. In the rear garden there was also a replica of a traditional winter house, made from turf, with a flat roof. The walls were over four feet thick, and the simple interior was surprisingly snug and clean. Raised wooden platforms made

comfortable beds with sealskin spreads beneath the bedding. The souvenir shop also had a good range of books for those starved of fresh reading material, and there was a supermarket for more earthly needs. It was well-stocked but expensive.

The rain finally eased by late afternoon. After dinner some short films on Greenland life were shown. We were leaving Greenland, and the Davis Strait offered the possibility of rougher seas, but the winds stayed modest and we had a gentle introduction to the famed old whaling grounds named after the outstanding English navigator John Davis.

## **Wednesday 6 September**

### **Cruising Davis Strait**

#### **Midday position 60°50'N 51°52' W**

Just after breakfast, we had a visit from a school of white-beaked dolphins off our port bow, with a couple of strays close in by the starboard bow. Then there was a lecture programme beginning with Viðar's 'The Book of Settlement', an examination of how the Icelanders produced a unique formal record of the founding of their commonwealth. It has survived and forms an invaluable source of information. However comparison of the earlier and later versions show that they say as much about their own times as about the times they purport to describe, and we see the settlement age through a lens whose distortions are problematic for historians. The end of the lecture was punctuated by another display of white-beaked dolphins. Ulrich continued the morning with a presentation on his oceanographic work gathering images for surveying pipelines and recording wildlife. Some of the cameras and techniques he developed pioneered non-invasive filming with equipment that blended in with the natural environment.

The movie 'The Day After Tomorrow' was shown, a fictional take on climate change with fine special effects. Around 16:00 there was great excitement as pilot whales appeared with more dolphins. Captain Adam slowed the ship and turned back to where the location of the school was marked by a flock of fulmars. One whale was seen spy-hopping, bringing its head out of the water to observe us. There seemed to be at least two males, and the rest were females and immature animals.

John Sparks ended the afternoon with 'Skywatching', a lively look at the natural history of clouds and the weather they foretell. Happy Hour began at six, and was concluded by a circumnavigation of a large tabular iceberg whose high point was occupied by a flock of fulmars. The side walls exhibited beautiful drapery-like patterns in the ice. The evening closed with another episode from the Blue Planet series entitled 'The Deep', and the clocks went back one hour.

## **Thursday 7 September**

### **Cruising the Davis Strait**

#### **Midday position 61°05'N 60°19'W**

Our second day at sea was little less smooth, but still fine sailing for the Davis Strait.

#### **John Davis**

The Davis Strait is named after an Elizabethan seaman as well known in his own day as Francis Drake, Walter Raleigh and John Hawkins. Another Devon man, he made improvements to the primitive cross-staff used to make measurements of the altitude of the sun, and invented the backstaff, which avoided altogether the need to stare at the sun to take a reading. Instead the captain turned his back to the sun and read where the shadow of a cross-staff fell on a calibrated scale. This took all the eyestrain out of the observations, which had resulted in many old captains being half-blind.

He was the first seaman to meet and trade on West Greenland, meeting Inuit there on 29 or 30 July 1585. The locals had not come prepared for trading, but to obtain iron and other articles they sold the clothes they stood in and the kayaks they arrived in. In 1592 his

reputation was unfairly ruined when, in terrible weather  
court favourite Sir Thomas Cavendish with whom he  
Knowing he had to run before the storm, he did not  
sighting the Falklands, the first navigator to clearly c  
returned to England. Meanwhile Cavendish, a dandy w  
Spanish galleon, and entered Plymouth under silk sails,  
Perversely, England and Elizabeth never forgave him fo  
two sons abandoned him, he went back to sea and was ki

Hannah gave a talk entitled 'Fins, Flippers and Flukes' about the marine mammals of the Arctic and their different strategies for keeping warm and alive in what to man is a very hostile environment. At 11:00, Viðar too a look at 'Vikings in Fact and Fiction'. The image of Vikings has spawned many myths and stories, not all of which stand up to serious scrutiny. Viðar untangled the truth.

At 15:30 John Sparks gave a talk which sounded like a venture into the realms of the fanciful or plain spurious, but was not. In 'Quest for the Pink Seagull', he described his personal ambition to follow up the tale of the rare pink gull named (eventually) after John Ross, one of 'Barrow's Boys': the superfluous Royal Naval officers sent to explore when no longer needed after the defeat of Napoleon in 1815. His odyssey took him to the great river estuaries of northern Siberia. Afterwards, the other half of the husband and wife team, Sally, gave a talk on keeping notebooks during a journey, and how to enliven a record of a journey.

At 18:00 there was a reception in the Observation Lounge for the Elder Hostel Group which was invaded by two gatecrashers from another time, in the form of Vikings Viðar and Lawrienne. After dinner, the result of John's Siberian project was shown in an episode from the BBC series 'Realm of the Russian Bear.' A final treat was in store for those who stayed up a little bit later, when Doug reported the appearance of the Northern Lights. Much of the sky was covered in curtains of mostly white light.



## **Friday 8 September**

### **Resolution and Lower Savage Islands and Frobisher Bay**

#### **Midday position 61°42'N 65°45'W**

The morning seas were calm and getting still calmer as we came into the lee of Baffin Island, named after English navigator William Baffin. A humpback whale appeared and Captain Adam turned the ship round to get a better look, but the animal sounded with a flurry of its tail and vanished into the deep. In the afternoon we had tours of the engine room to see where all the power comes from that moves, lights and heats our ship.

Later in the afternoon we began to enjoy the low, sporadically sunlit, coast of Resolution Island at the entrance to Frobisher Bay, in the south east of Baffin Island. Soon we were passing Gabriel Island memorialising the name of Martin Frobisher's ship.

#### **Martin Frobisher**

The three voyages of Martin Frobisher are among the strangest episodes in the troubled history of a search for the North West Passage through which European ships could sail to the markets of the Orient. The real motivation of this ex-pirate was looking for gold. His first voyage in 1576 began with three ships, but one was lost in a storm and a second turned back after taking a strong dislike to the pack ice off south east Greenland. Frobisher sailed into the bay that bears his name and collected rock samples. Back home he announced that he had gold ore, and that the bay he had stayed in was the mouth of the long sought-for passage. After several attempts, he persuaded some assayers to 'confirm' the ore as gold. He returned the next year, and then overwintered with a massive expedition of 400 men and fifteen ships in 1578. The Queen paid half the cost and waved goodbye to his ship from her Greenwich Palace on the River Thames in London. He wintered on Kodlunarn Island on the north side of the entrance to the bay; it means White Man's Island. He returned with 1,350 tons of rock of no value whatsoever. Discredited, he had made his last voyage to the



At 16:30 Doug gave a talk 'The Past and Present of Aboriginal People' dealing with the various cultures in the Newfoundland and Labrador areas up into the modern era. Because most materials they used are fugitive, very little is known beyond the houses and weapons of these peoples. After briefing for our next day, dinner was enjoyed episodically by some who could not quite bear to leave the deck, and the wonderful evening light. A full moon rose over the peninsula to our starboard, in an almost cloudless sky. The evening entertainment was the film 'Tidal Seas.'

## **Saturday 9 September**

### **Iqaluit and Frobisher Bay**

#### **Midday position 63°43'N 68°30'W**

The final day of the cruise took us to Iqaluit, capital of Nunavut, the region to which some autonomy has been ceded to Native peoples. The head of Frobisher Bay was strewn with rocks and shoals. It didn't trouble Martin Frobisher because he never made it this far, declaring nevertheless that this 'strait' led to the riches of Cathay. The morning was chill with a light frost on deck and the thermometer skulking at 3°C. Due to a slight misunderstanding about local time, Hannah found that we were ready an hour early and had plenty of time to pass through Canadian customs and immigration procedures. We reached the breakwater after a long, bracing zodiac ride and disembarked, alongside passengers from the cruise ship *Explorer*, on a long rocky quay. When we walked to the shoreward end we found only a narrow neck of rocks connecting us to the land; the spring tides of nearly ten metres had also surprised local agent Eric, and left his estate car up to the wheels in water. Luggage for passengers leaving, and new staff Leon, Richard and George arriving, was ferried to and fro by zodiac. Soon the tide began falling and we walked to the tourism centre and museum, or looked around the frontier-town streets. The museum contained fine examples of traditional and modern carving, some of the latter for sale. A carver was at work at the door of the tourist centre and library, working on reindeer antler jewellery with modeller's power tools.

It was here that we picked up the yellow school buses to take us to Silvia Grinnel Territorial Park on the edge of town. There we had talks from local guides including a botany trail by Matty who had led an all-woman team that walked to the North Pole, and written about her experiences in the book *On Thin Ice*. There were views over the falls through which the Arctic char we ate for lunch make their way upstream to spawn. There was also caribou stew: not something to mention to the kids next Christmas when fondly reviewing the year. Traditional brown and white bannock bread would be much safer ground.

Buses took us back for a town tour, including the prison where inmates are not only allowed out, but lent guns to go shooting for their families. A new hospital and fine administrative offices for government administration and justice were springing up. We left town to visit Apex, a relic of the Cold War days when the Inuit and Caucasian communities were rigidly segregated. On the shore were small wooden buildings which were interesting relics of the company that was fundamental in opening up the north, known to its 'servants', as its employees were called, just by its initials: HBC.

#### **The Hudson's Bay Company**

Founded in London by rich and secretive merchants in 1670, Hudson's Bay Company was a private concern constituted to explore and exploit the wealth of the uncharted regions of what is now northern Canada. It was granted a Royal Charter: a concession to trade issued personally by the monarch, and later renewed by Parliament. Its charter was so secret that even Members of Parliament had great trouble getting sight of it. It was incredibly wide in scope, granting 'the whole Trade and Commerce of all those Seas, Streights, and Bays, Rivers lakes and Creeks, and sounds, in whatsoever Latitude they may be, that lie within the Entrance of Hudson's Streights.' Its remit stretched as far west as the foothills of the Rockies. Most shareholders were unknown, and Sir Bibye Lake, the Governor of the

Company (Equivalent to a modern CEO) did not employments.

The way in which it was run would have far-reaching. The Bay was only free enough of ice to be navigable for onwards. Small forts were set up around its shores, p sustained by trade with local peoples, especially the C managers, who ran these forts and their trade, had operators. They began to study how local people survi the seasonal movements of game. Many adopted nativ greatest of these factors was Orkneyman John Rae recruited for being tough, hardworking and sober. Rae had witnessed the last struggles of John Franklin's fata West passage. He took the unwelcome news of the England, and, critical of such large, unwieldy Naval e Fridtjof Nansen and promoted the fast and light s dramatically vindicated in Amundsen's dash to beat Scot

When the tour finished, we could opt either to shop, or to go directly to the causeway on the opposite side of the bay to where we landed, to pick up zodiacs. The breakwater used in the morning being redundant, having no water left around it to break. For a few, this was their final day, and we said farewell as they made their way to the airport. Amazingly it has the second biggest runway in North America, being one of the potential landing places for the Space Shuttle.

In the evening, after introducing new staff at briefing and recap, there was a Knud Rasmussen film, 'The Wedding of Palo', about an Inuit Feud. In the bar, Richard tried out the acoustics with some tunes on his guitar.

## **Sunday 10 September**

### **Akpatok Island, Ungava Bay**

#### **Midday position 60°36'N 67°25'W**

John Sparks began the morning's talks with 'The Great Auk, an Ornithological Tragedy' a look at how greed and thoughtless exploitation made this large, flightless bird extinct. Having sacrificed flight for efficiency underwater, it was, in effect, the northern penguin, and probably gave its name, which means 'white head' in Welsh, to the penguin of the south. Although amusingly told, John's tale was a sober warning for how we still treat extinction as if it has a remedy.

Leon Noremore gave us an introduction to the geology of Newfoundland and Labrador. We would be seeing some very old rocks at the east end of the great shield that dominates the region. It is also rich in minerals; most are present. Lunch was enlivened by shots being fired, but all in a good cause. We were beginning landings in areas where bears were likely to be encountered, and staff were re-familiarising themselves with the firearms to be carried ashore, along with scarers, like small flares, which it is hoped will not have to be used in earnest.

The limestone bedded cliffs of Akpatok came into view soon after, and at the foot of them, another cruise ship: the *Alexander von Humboldt*, named after the German scholar dubbed 'the last great polymath, in the last age in which it was possible to be a true polymath. He was a true product of the Age of Enlightenment.

We headed further south for our landing place on the east side of the island. Landing plans were announced, then shortly rescinded as First Officer Jed spotted a Polar bear climbing the flank of the valley where we had intended to land. The landing rapidly metamorphosed into a zodiac cruise below the fascinating cliffs. They were Ordovician in age, about 450 million years old, perhaps with still older Cambrian rocks beneath. Because of the stability of this region over eons, the bedding planes were almost perfectly horizontal and offer an excellent opportunity to study the exact sequence in which rocks are laid down. The region contains two of these world stratotypes, to which rocks collected from all over the world are referred to place them in the geological record.



We zodiaced ashore into a slight syncline or basin in the bedding, but minds soon turned to wildlife as a polar bear was seen on the shore. It walked along the head of the beach, and after a while, we saw it was reacting to our presence and we withdrew out to sea. As soon as we pulled back closer the behaviour was repeated so we let it be. A brief landing was possible on a small shingle beach where various gastropods and other fossils were found. The re-boarding of the zodiacs was like a scene

from Saving Private Ryan, but we all got back to ship safe and mostly dry. At recap, John Spark's pictures showed that the bear we had seen on the beach was quite lean.

Later, there were also songs from Richard, many of local origin including some of his own. After dinner the film 'People of the Sea' was shown about communities in Newfoundland and Labrador.

## **Monday 11 September**

### **Rahmah Bay and Saglek Bay**

#### **Midday position 60°36'N 67°25'W**

The coast was clearly visible on an overcast morning as we headed down the Atlantic coast of Labrador towards Ramah Bay. Viðar gave a lecture on 'Vikings and Old Norse'. The language of the Vikings is preserved not only in the sagas, but in modern Icelandic, which is very similar, and in other dialect speech in small communities of the North Atlantic.

Later in the morning we turned into the shelter of one of the larger inlets called Rahmah where in 1871, the Moravian missionaries from Germany set up a base, and later were joined by the Hudson's Bay Company. The small flat area beneath the mountains looked very peaceful. The mission was abandoned in 1908, and its buildings had been reduced to stone, brick and turf footprints in grass which is encroaching on them every year and eroding them from memory. John gave a talk on the history of the mysterious trading company, and he and Doug, and everyone else, tried their hand at being amateur archaeologists (okay, Doug is a professional), and identifying what buildings might have been where. Later photographic evidence from Hopedale confirmed the basic analysis made on site. To keep our marksmen alert, there was a bear high up on the ridge, but it blithely ignored our landings and continued feeding in a vegetarian fashion, to our relief. On a less scary level a vole, or possibly a mouse, was observed to still have a home in the ruins. During the landing the wind got up and short steep waves made the return trip a damp one for some. We had warming soup to start lunch and then a rest for several hours as the ship transferred to our afternoon landing site.

The afternoon became very dark, beneath low cloud. The staff boarded a scout boat and headed off into an inlet. Soon there was excited radio chat and the sighting of two polar bears in the shallows of a cove turned the landing at a Dorset cultural site into a zodiac cruise with a quest to find the bears. The zodiacs were loaded and waited at the entrance to the inlet so that early arrivals would not startle them for the later ones. We proceeded cautiously inside but painstaking searching could not relocate them. All that was left were a few shaky pictures grabbed before the staff zodiac turned back. We did however see another powerful shape mounting the hill: a large caribou with impressive antlers.

The evening dinner was a barbecue which, despite clearing skies and sudden bursts of sunlit colour on the hills, was an event for stoical collectors of outdoor eateries. Most people enjoyed in the Observation Lounge. At least the salad didn't get warm.

## **Tuesday 12 September**

### **Hebron Mission and Mugford Tickle**

#### **Midday position 58°14'N 62°27'W**

The grey buildings of the Moravian Mission which closed here in 1959 after some one hundred years, fitted in perfectly with the spare, rocky coast and the huge cool grey skies above. We landed on rocks below a wind-ruined house with a seaward wall missing. The church complex had been stripped out for restoration, and the new material was already stacked inside ready for use. Richard led a hike up to the rocky ridge above the settlement, which gave a fine view of the bay.



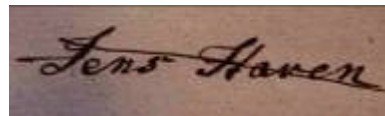
The visit was very special for Ingbert Teichmann and his wife. His mother, born just over a hundred years ago, was a superintendent of the church and his aunt and uncle died here after just a year of life, and were buried a short walk away across a little inlet, in the old cemetery. Friedrich Bohlmann lived just a year, from May 1905 to October 1906, while Beate Bohlmann graced the earth for just a day. One gravestone in the newer cemetery, further along, seemed a testament to the Spanish Influenza pandemic which ravaged the world after the First World War. Three people from one family,

none old, had died within a week. The pandemic killed more people than the war. The ground was strewn with dwarf alder and bright autumn berries, including blueberries. Lawrienne was the only one to test the water with a short swim and a swift sprint back to her clothes. Another visitor was a little more comfortable with the waters: a Minke whale showed in the bay as our zodiacs took us back to the ship.

In the afternoon we cruised through a spectacular bare landscape to Mugford Tickle, a five-mile stretch of water squeezed between mountains of the Kaumajet Range. The chart beguilingly translated the looming mass of Kikkertaujak to our right as an 'almost island', and so it was, joined to the mainland by a sliver of low land before rising to a peak of 4300 feet. We set down the zodiacs in a breeze that quickened out of nowhere, after arriving in a nearly flat calm. Towering cliffs of basalt, including fine examples of pillow lava, extruded under the sea, sat on foundations of ancient gneiss. In contrast, the water around teemed with delicate ctenophores. These cone jellies, or sea gooseberries are relatives of the jellyfish, and live by stunning plankton with two long frills of tentacles which they retract into their body to digest their catch. Ribs along their bodies refracted light and looked as if pulses of lights were tripping along them. Other sightings were long-tailed duck and a very tolerant purple sandpiper, who returned our stares from a shadowed overhang in the rock. Some boats later saw seals, probably harbour or ringed seals. While we cruised up to the bases of long, sparkling waterfalls, the *Polar Star* swept through the Tickle and waited at the south-west end in McDonald Bay. The breeze stiffened up and obliged us to tack across and then into the waves to cut down on spray as we returned to the sidegate.

After dinner, there was a showing of another episode of the BBC John Sparks-inspired series 'Realm of the Russian Bear' this was the desert episode. There was a fiery sunset and a brisk evening wind. This was not felt in the bar where Richard and Chicago Bob sang songs of Labrador and elsewhere until midnight.

**Wednesday 13 September**  
**Hopedale and Cruising South**  
**Midday position 55°27'N 60°12'W**



We woke to find a very different landscape outside our portholes: lower lying and greener. In bright warm sunshine we sped in to land at the community of Hopedale, established in the early nineteenth century by Moravians and now inhabited by 800 people, the majority of whom are of Inuit stock. Our guides greeted us at the dock and took us to the church, completed in 1865, and gave us an introduction to the Moravian Church and the founding of the community in 1782. It was begun in the first wave of settlements under the direction of Jens Haven.

We split into two groups, one beginning with the old churchyard, the other going next door to the museum based in one of the oldest buildings east of Quebec. This told the story of the Moravians and of the community of Hopedale, and its fishing and fur trades. After an initial tragedy, where six men were lost, presumed murdered, the Moravians were welcomed by the Inuit who proved receptive to their message, and pious servants of the church.

Modern crafts were on sale at the Community Centre, including not only soapstone sculptures and fine leather and beadwork, but more consumable delights like fruit tarts made with local berries. We then climbed the little hill to the large modern school and were entertained in the sports hall by the school choir. Teenage students gave exhibitions of skill and strength, many of the displays based on wild animal mannerisms: like musk ox trials of strength.

We were invited to participate: it was ideal for those feeling short of new and different ways of looking

foolish in public. Hannah volunteered the staff for the seal race. This involved lying face down on the floor and immobilising all parts of the body usually employed for forward locomotion. Participants then haul themselves across the floor using only their arms. John Harrison managed to keep going until the finishing line but would have been a long way behind the two local boys who showed us how to do properly. John is still waiting for the promised prize of a bucket of fresh fish.

In hot sunshine we returned to ship and had scarcely got out of the harbour when a Minke whale was spotted. It swam to type, swiftly drawing away from us. There was an afternoon at leisure, which many used for sunbathing. Marine mammals stayed around us for much of the afternoon and early evening. Firstly, a local boat, circling, alerted us to a dolphin, that may have been separated from its school, and which these hunters were trying to shoot. Life is very different in societies that hunt rather than farm but I don't suppose too many on board were disappointed at their failure. At 16:30 there was a talk by Doug describing historic contact and likely relations in 'The Norse and the Natives'. For a period of such symbolic importance, there is remarkably little evidence to flesh out likely events. The sea became very calm, and an ideal theatre for the show put on by humpback whales arriving and staying with us. Minkes also, for once decided we were not threatening and swam alongside. White-beaked dolphins performed aerobatics, but were a chorus to the main event: the humpbacks stole the show, finally saying farewell with the characteristic hunching of the back before raising their massive flukes aloft and sounding.

In all this, recap and briefing got overtaken by events, and Richard must have been longing for the whales to smell a lot of fish somewhere just over the horizon. But after dinner he kept the bar singing until after midnight.

#### The Moravian Church

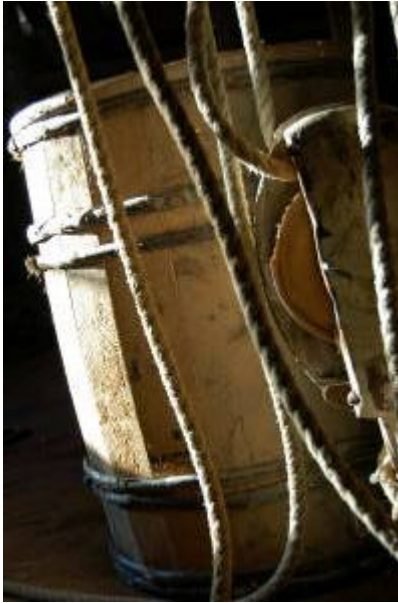
Jan Hus was a Prague priest born in 1369 who preached against the established Catholic Church, saying it must reform and be a servant of the people, not their master. The sacrament of taking wine and bread must be available to all, and the Bible should be available in the language of the congregation, not hidden behind the barrier of Latin. He was burnt at the stake at Lake Constance (Bodensee) in 1415, but his teaching radicalised many who were offended by the Church's preoccupation with worldly wealth.

Adopting the name they are still formally known by today *Unitas Fratrum*, the Union of Brothers, they created a stronghold for dissidents in Moravia, in the modern Czech Republic, and commonly became known as Moravians. They received the protection and support of Count Zinzendorf of Saxony, who used his connections with the Danish Court to promote Moravian missions around the world. They were especially interested in bringing the Gospel to native peoples who had never heard it. The missionaries study of Inuit language and culture in Greenland, soon brought them to Labrador, where numerous missions were set up from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

## Thursday 14 September Battle Harbour

## Midday position 52°47'N 55°32'W

'Salmon is salmon, but cod is fish!' Battle Harbour saying



Morning talks began with Viðar's 'Vikings', an examination of the Viking presence in North America, followed by Leon's 'Geological Evolution', a look at the geological development of the complex and rich geological provinces of Labrador and Newfoundland. The ship continued cruising until early afternoon when, among the fractured islands and convoluted peninsulas of the coast, we could see from the bridge, the masts on the hill overlooking Battle Harbour, or as we would soon learn to say: Bad Dularber. There was a long sea swell, probably the left-overs from weather systems further south. But we were able to anchor just off the mouth of the harbour and, after an experiment with the port sidegate, switch to the more sheltered water on the starboard lee. An interesting zodiac ride took us across the grain of the swell, and threaded us through the narrow harbour entrance into the placid shelter of the tickle. We were met at the little wooden dock by local employees and volunteers of the Battle Harbour Historic Trust, which formed in 1990 and took over the village from its

last commercial operator after the moratorium on cod-fishing put an end to the traditional economy.

While a guitarist played folk songs, we were given a tour of the restored warehouses and workshops that took in the fresh cod, gutted, headed and dried it on the stave 'field' behind. Fresh water would injure the drying fish, so it had to be brought in when it rained. It took five sunny days to dry out the fish, but it might be five months before you had five sunny days. The place was opened up by a firm from Poole, Dorset on the south coast of England, who came here in 1775 and by 1785 had established it first as a sealing centre. The guides still showed clear traces of rural southern English accents of the nineteenth century. Thomas Hardy's characters may not have talked so differently.

This tiny place came to world attention in 1909 when the American explorer Peary, fresh back from his attempt on the North Pole, held a press conference here, in the top loft of the salthouse, while the Marconi telegraph station signalled in Frederick Cook's rival claims. Posterity has generally decided that Cook definitely did not get there, and Peary got pretty close but perhaps not exactly there, as he claimed, but it's still open to debate. The public dirt-sliding muddied the rest of both men's careers.

Our walk then took us along the boardwalk and up to the church/schoolhouse, designed by English ecclesiastical architect William Grey in 1848 but not completed until 1857. The tour closed at the period-piece general store where the points of interest included Erik's Red, a beer from St John's, Newfoundland. Don't knock the culture till you've drunk it.

Recap and briefing prepared us for our visit next day to L'Anse aux Meadows, as did the after-dinner film of the same name. We moved the clocks forward half an hour to SNT (Standard Newfie Time). I expect you have already made your own jokes about simultaneously moving the calendar back 100 years.

## Friday 15 September

### St Anthony and L'Anse aux Meadows

Midday position 51°21'N 55°34'W

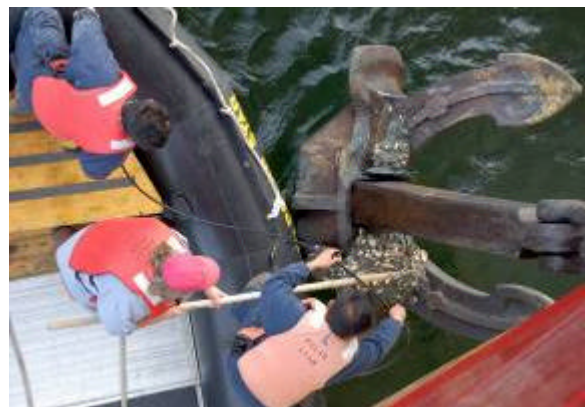
We arrived on a bright breezy morning in the fine natural harbour of Snantny which for some reason is spelled St Anthony. A zodiac sprint took us to the dock adjacent to the Grenfell Centre where we picked up our coaches for the trip to Norstead and L'Anse aux Meadows. The countryside looked different because it had a regular supply of trees, the first we'd seen for some time. We passed the house rented by author E Annie Proulx when she was researching and writing her award-winning book 'The Shipping News', and were soon, depending on which bus we were in, at either the replica village of Norstead or the original Viking site of L'Anse aux Meadows.

In 1960, lawyer turned writer, Norwegian Helge Ingstad followed up suggestions by locals that there old Native remains just above the beach. He was investigating the theory that the sagas 'Erik the Red' and 'Greenlanders' Saga' (also known as the Vinland Sagas) described real voyages to the New World nearly half a millennium before Christopher Columbus. L'Anse aux Meadows was one of a number of bays which answered the rather vague descriptions of the sagas. His wife, professional archaeologist Anne Stine Ingstad excavated the site and unearthed, as we saw, eight buildings, including a smithy. In the hearth of one was a pin which held together not just clothing, but the very specific theory, first put forward by Newfoundland businessman William F Munn, that Erik the Red had landed and stayed for a time at L'Anse aux Meadows. It is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

From here, Erik's men had explored the coast, encountered the locals they called Skraelings, or 'wretches', and, in typical Viking fashion, made enemies of them by needless violence. They would have found it hard to live self-sufficiently: the English failed to do so at Roanoke over 500 years later, and for the same reason: they were too far from their supply of goods and could not live effectively from the land.

The footprints of the buildings lie on a terrace now about a hundred metres inshore. In the replica smithy, iron was extracted from the bog-ores just as the Vikings had done, eking out just three kilos of iron during their stay, just enough for running repairs. The lack of damage or any other changes to the buildings, and the small size of the middens, also suggest a brief stay of just a few winters. In the Norstead reconstruction we could also see the 'Snorri', a replica *knarr* or trading vessel, very stoutly built, in Maine, USA. After one abortive attempt ended with a broken steerboard (a primitive rudder), it sailed successfully from Greenland to the New World. We ate our packed lunches in the warmth of beautiful sunshine and took our buses back to town, laden with replica Viking goods of every description. There we visited the Grenfell Centre and House, memorials to the selfless work carried out by the doctor, William Grenfell who brought hospitals and schools to the fishing communities of Newfoundland. He died in 1940, and his house is now being continually improved as artefacts with a connection to him and his family are garnered from round the town.

Our departure was delayed by a steel cable hooked by our anchor fluke. A visit from Hannah, a zodiac, and two ABs sorted it out and we sailed south for our final day of adventures. Robert and birthday boy Richard sang during Happy Hour and after dinner Anja gave a fascinating account of her journeys in 'Travelling in the North Atlantic', describing in words and photos the islands of not only the north Atlantic but the European Arctic. Robert and Richard continued to play and sing in the bar until late, assisted from time to time by other staff and passengers.



**Friday 15 September**

**Bonavista**

**Midday position 48°39'N 53°08'W**

The weather was grey and damp as we gathered for our departure briefing in the Observation Lounge, enlivened by a tale from Laurienne of a luggage-tagging event in which a life, and her person dignity were both nearly lost. Ulrich then gave a talk 'In Cod We Trust(ed)' describing how a great fishery was so badly over-exploited that a complete moratorium has had to be imposed on the former staple fish of chip-shop suppers. The politics were depressing.

We had lunch early so we could depart promptly for a tour of Bonavista and its environs, for which the highlight, at least for the historian who is writing this log, was seeing the 'Mathew' replica. This was John Cabot's ship in a voyage of 1497 which deserves to be better known. It was one of a number of professionally executed expeditions, including that of Frenchman Jacques Cartier into the St Lawrence, which, if they had been seized on by their monarchs, would have resulted in a very different history for North America. Instead they were distracted by wars of religion, ironically funded on the Spanish side, by the loot from Mexico and Peru.

#### John Cabot

John Cabot was the first visitor to N America after the Norse. We have no portrait of him, no written description, no letter, no scrap of handwriting, or signature. What happened on his first voyage is largely surmised, and he vanished on his second voyage, in 1498. No shipmate left an account. All our information is third hand.

He was born by 1453, possibly in 1451, like Columbus. He was certainly Italian, probably Genoese, in that dialect, Caboto means a coastal trader. He couldn't interest Seville or Lisbon in a shorter, high-latitude route to the Indies, so he went to London which was at the priciest, western limit of the Spice Route trade. The omens weren't good: Henry VII had turned down Columbus. Cabot was at the English Court in late 1495 and got Royal letters patent to have authority over new lands discovered, subject to the Crown taking 20%: the Royal Fifth. But the king gave no money. Cabot settled in Bristol, Britain's second port, with 10,000 people.



On his first voyage, he took just one small ship, the Mathew, 50 tons. They left around 20 May 1497, and went there and back in 11 weeks, a record which stood for a century. Took 35 days to sight land, on 24 June 1497. 300 years later a voyage of 40 days was still considered good. He arrived in north Newfoundland, close to L'Anse aux Meadows, 496 years after Erik the Red. They landed, took possession for England. He saw no people but observed snares and fish-nets. He admitted he dared not explore beyond cross-bow range from ship, and never landed again.

There was also a tour of the Ryan Premises, giving a history of the sealing and cod industries, a commerce of international importance in its heyday. Bonavista Lighthouse was another destination, where those with a limited interest in the engineering of rotating lightbulbs could simply admire the view, reflecting on all the lives saved by such a basically simple idea.

After the delights of the Captain's Farewell Dinner, there was a final chance to ruin Robert's fine guitar playing with enthusiastic singing, which we did with relish. Luggage was put out ready for the morning, and we prepared to take leave of a memorable cruise. We had sailed 3221 nautical miles and taken a similar number of photographs.

May your pictures and your memories be clear!