

LOG OF MV POLAR STAR

ROUND THE RUGGED ROCK

17-28 September 2006



Words and pictures by John Harrison

Birdlist by John Sparks

Map by Leon Normore

MV Polar Star
ROUND THE RUGGED ROCK
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Captain	Adam Boczek
Chief Engineer	Boguslaw Radomski
Chief Officer	Jedrzej Marsz
First Engineer	Wojciech Zieba
Second Officer	Janusz Korwel
Hotel Manager	Natasha Hanson
Assistant HM	Rita Hivecovics
Head Chef	Paul McDougall
Office Assistant	Evelyn Røren
Doctor	Judy Forbes
Expedition Leader	Damon Stanwell-Smith
Assistant EL	Mark Whittington
Staff	John Harrison
	Ulrich Lohsiger
	Robert Neville
	Doug Nixon
	Leon Normore
	John Sparks



Sunday 17 September

St John's, Nova Scotia

Midday position 47°33'N 52°42'W



We boarded the M/V Polar Star, in pleasant warm weather, at her berth in downtown St John's, a picturesque port and busy administrative centre. Brightly painted wooden houses, some of them old enough to have survived the great fire of 1892, decorated the steep streets rising from the waterfront. We found our cabins and then the Observation Lounge where our Expedition Leader Damon introduced Captain Adam, and the team of crew and staff who would look after us for the coming cruise. We were then entertained by a gift from the people of St John's, the father and son musical team of Fergus O'Byrne, Senior and Junior, who sang traditional songs of the area, and of the sea.

It was a busy evening since, to prepare for sailing, and landings the next day, safety drills and procedures had to be gone through. At 18:15, first Officer Jed took us through the steps to follow in the unlikely event of a major incident. We were discouraged from hanging

clothing on the smoke-sensors, and tried to remember the codes of the two main signals. Then a practice drill sent us up on deck to put on the boxy orange life-jackets that would be our buoyancy aids should we need to abandon ship. If they match the rest of your clothing you probably need to change your tailor.

This was followed by the Captain's Welcome Aboard Dinner, which we could still enjoy in the comfort and safety of the harbour, as our 18:00 departure was only across the dock to the bunkering facility where we took on fuel. Afterwards, we familiarised ourselves with the procedures for using safely the zodiac boats, and then, at 22:00, it was time to cast off for real.

Monday 18 September

Bonavista and cruising north

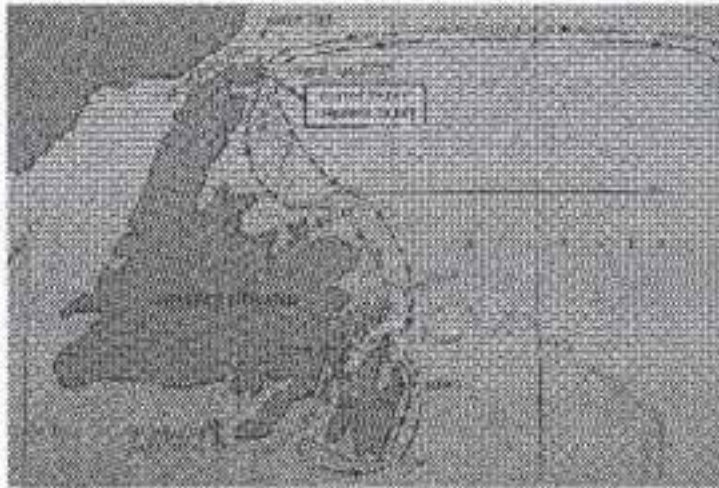
Midday position 48°38'N 53°07'W

Our first visit was a tour of Bonavista and its environs, for which the highlight for history buffs was seeing the 'Mathew' replica. This was John Cabot's ship for his 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 their claims 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. No shipmate left an account. All our information is third hand. What happened on his first voyage is largely surmised, and he vanished on his second voyage, in 1498.

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. The king would provide a ship, but no cash. 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. It 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, and took

possession for England. He saw no people but observed snares and fish-ners. He admitted he dared not explore beyond cross-bow range from his 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. The interpretation was superb, something Canadian museums do very well. Bonavista Lighthouse was another destination, where those with a limited interest in the engineering of rotating light bulbs could simply admire the view, reflecting on all the lives saved by such a simple idea. Enactors in period costume showed us what life in the lighthouse was like: not bad apart



from having to spend fifteen minutes, every two hours of the night, winding up the weights that powered the revolution of the six lights, two red, one white, repeated.

In the afternoon, there was time to relax before John Harrison's lecture 'Meet the Vikings', which charted the expansion of the peoples of modern Norway and Denmark around much of Europe, even entering the court of the Emperor of Constantinople as his Varangian guard. Their final phase of expansion took them across the North Atlantic to Iceland, Greenland, and finally, the proof awaiting us in two days' time at L'Anse-aux-Meadows, to the New World. The land was first walked on by Leif Eriksson and his men and women, five hundred years before the other fellow with the name beginning with C.

Recap previewed our visit to Fogo Island, a place not

even Newfies get to, and also allowed Richard to tell fascinating cameos of his first work helping his dad in the cod fishery from age 13.

After dinner we changed course to make a more direct course to Fogo and the ship began to roll more. Those who had a few more drinks listening to Richard's main job as musical entertainer soon couldn't tell the difference.

Throughout the day and evening, Leach's storm petrels kept turning up in odd corners of the decks. They are attracted by the lights, and if stunned or confused, often just waddle off to the nearest corner and wait quietly to recover and appraise matters. Their legs are weak and they cannot flit around to size things up, and being burrowing nesters, a dark corner crevice feels quite safe. As your log writer turned off the light to go to sleep, he heard a fluttering from the corner of the room, and found his final petrel of the day. It must have come in through the window, and hidden until, encouraged by the sudden darkness, it came out to plan its escape.

Tuesday 19 September

Fogo island

Midday position 49°42'N 54°17'W

The night was spent restfully in the lee of the island which was our destination for the following day. Fogo was referred to by the Portuguese as early as the beginning of the 16th century. It soon became a fishing base for both French and English seasonal fleets, and especially Basques. It now has a greatly reduced industry based on snow crabs, fished for in round pots shaped like lampshades, and lobsters, caught in what looked like adapted wooden crates. There is also shrimping, and many of us were able to see squid-jigging, which is not Richard's new dance number, but a rapid way of catching these cephalopods on artificial lures lowered by simple hand-wound spools over the side of traditional dories. A pair were operating off Brimstone Head, and soon radioed other boats to cash in on a nice shoal, if that is the collective noun for these tentacled wonders.

We had a little more trouble sorting out the landing. A swell that was manageable when our scout boat went ashore just after eight, grew larger, and it was hard to hold the ship in a position where we could shelter either of the sidegates. Captain Adam turned the *Polar Star* on its axis and moved us delicately inside the rock-strewn entrance and gave us and our zodiac drivers an easier job to drive inshore, under the small road-bridge, and round to the right into the small but well-equipped fishing harbour.



In the morning, we took a look round the town, its handsome churches, and the classic Newfoundland one-roomed schoolhouse, used until 1965, and now preserved with the desks, books and slates from its period past. There was some chance to shop, especially if you like coming back from holiday and giving people unknown items of ship's chandlery, and leaving it up to them to work out what they are for.

Most opted to go back to ship for lunch, though a few stayed in town to try the seafood restaurants. Afterwards, we returned ready to attack the hills. Three walks were led by staff up to different viewpoints around the town. Some saw the site where a very early Marconi transmission was made, a few made the

desperately dangerous journey to Brimstone Head which the Flat Earth Society has named as one of the four corners of the flat earth. The warning sign tracks the death toll: 0. If you think that not enough people have a sense of humour about their beliefs, this was probably the hike for you. All are reported to have returned. (But why were the staff hiding unused life-jackets in the bow-box of the last zodiac? Were there a few empty spaces at dinner?)

Wednesday 20 September

St Anthony and L'Anse aux Meadows

Midday position 51°22'N 55°35'W

We arrived on a mild and breezy morning with low cloud 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 the Viking archaeology and replica homesteads at L'Anse aux Meadows and Norstead. 08:30 was announced by a steam whistle blowing just behind the Co-op. Must be when they switch on the coffee machine.

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, around the year 1000AD. 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 hinged bronze pin, now displayed in the Visitor Centre, 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 less than three kilos of iron during their stay, just enough for running repairs. The lack of damage or any other changes to most of the buildings, and the small size of the

middens, also suggest a brief stay of just a few winters, perhaps ten years at most. In the Norstead reconstruction we could also see the 'Snorri', a replica *knarr* or trading vessel, very stoutly built, in Maine, USA. It was these vessels, not the more familiar slender war-ships, that were the backbone of their trading and exploration. After one abortive attempt ended with a broken steerboard (a primitive rudder), the 'Snorri' sailed successfully from Greenland to the New World.

We ate our packed lunches wherever we could find a bit of shelter, or a spot near the fire in one of the snug replica houses. We then 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, Wilfred 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. Last zodiac was at 16:00, but we lay at anchor a little longer in the pretty bay. After Happy Hour, recap and briefing and then dinner, those with any energy left were treated to Doug's lecture 'An Introduction to Archaeology: What archaeologists Do, How and Why?' outlining what archaeologists do, and the basic principles of field work investigation.



Thursday 21 September
Battle Harbour
Midday position 52°02'N 55°39'W

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



The morning began with thick fog surrounding the ship as, anchored off Battle Harbour, among the fractured islands and convoluted peninsulas of the coast of Labrador, at the northern entrance to the Strait of Belle Isle. We could see nothing of Battle Harbour, or as we would soon learn to say: Baddlarber. There was a long sea swell, and despite the fog, a strong breeze. We were able to anchor just off the mouth of the harbour and send a scout boat, loaded to the gunnels with nautical experience and GPSs to argue its way to and from the harbour, assisted by Jed on the bridge radio. When we followed, 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. The fog was already lifting. 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.

We toured the restored warehouses and workshops that took in the fresh cod, gutted, headed and dried it on the stave 'flake' behind, a remnant part of what was once the largest in Labrador. 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-slinging muddied the rest of both men's careers.

Boardwalks took up to the church/schoolhouse, designed by English ecclesiastical architect William Grey in 1848 but not completed until 1857. Many people's 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.



We took on board some welcome guests from the national and regional tourist agencies and Parks Canada. They wanted a closer look at how local tourism including cruise ships could help develop the local economy. Cindy was able to show us ashore at our afternoon landing at Red Bay, an interesting bottle-shaped harbour where we were able to slip the 'Polar Star' past Saddle Island, the loose cork in the bottle's neck, and into The Basin behind.

Red Bay has a long and famous history which is only just beginning to be fully explored. Basque whalers came here in the first quarter of the 16th century. Whaling skills had been passed down from Scandinavia by Norse migrations: the very name harpoon is from the Norman French 'arpoi' for a grappling iron or hook. The Basques, occupying the north of modern Spain, and the French coast around Biarritz, became the premier exponents, in

demand across Europe from the early Middle Ages onwards. They were so successful that the Northern Right Whales became depleted and also changed their migration routes to avoid the coastal waters in which they were hunted. Basques exploiting the Grand Banks of Newfoundland for cod to feed the markets for dried fish throughout the Catholic European world, discovered new whaling grounds, of the Greenland and Right whales, to the north and south of Newfoundland.

They made seasonal settlements at Red Bay from the 1540s into the early 17th century. Ships came over killing whales and rendering the blubber into oil on shore try-works. It was barrelled up and taken home, making great profits. One galleon, preparing hurriedly to sail, dragged its moorings and was wrecked when fully provisioned for the voyage. The

archaeology had proved fascinating and includes a whale-boat used for the actual harpooning, and a ceramic jar identical to one painting in a Vdlásquez interior of around 1620. The history was beautifully presented in small venues around the community, including a whale whose length outstayed the potential welcome of its new home, and had to be curtailed. Last zodiac at 18:00 was extended to give time for us to explore it all.

After dinner, the film of novel 'The Shipping News' by E. Annie Proulx was shown to those with lighter than air eyelids who could fight the pleasant tiredness of a day of fresh air and fresh discoveries. The heavyweight cast, real actors as opposed to stars, did justice to a story which had extra resonance for us having spent time in this special place.

Friday 22 September

Cruising to Woody Point

Midday position 50°25'N 57°41'W

Around midnight we left the shelter of our harbour and, repassing through the narrow entrance were caught by an exceptional gust of wind which took our bow and lightly grounded the 'Polar Star'. Ballast was pumped out of the forward areas and we were able to go full astern and eventually pull away. The strength of the ship's icebreaker construction prevented us suffering any physical damage.

This delayed our sailing south, and, throughout the day, we were further hampered by strong westerly winds. However the sun was bright and the sky clear: typical September weather for Labrador and Newfoundland. The winds continued to rise to Force 8, with white horses on deep indigo waves. While very pretty, this meant that our first-choice landing at Port au Choix would be exposed to the weather, and it was decided to cut out losses and make straight for Bonne Bay to be ready for Gros Morne National Park the next day. A lecture programme was drawn up, and, within half an hour, John Harrison was giving a talk 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. The industry is a reflection of how often man acts against his long term interests, never mind that of his quarry. The talk was supplemented shortly afterwards by the film 'Rounding the Horn.' It was made as a silent movie in 1929 by the young seaman and amateur photographer Irving Johnstone, who, as a retired square-rigger captain in 1980, made a breathless

commentary on it. The ship in which he made his maiden voyage was the 'Peking' one of the famous Flying P line owned by Hamburg company Laeisz of Hamburg. It was a powerful ship of three thousand tons working the nitrate trade to Chile. One of the firm's ships, the 'Padua' is still a Russian sail-training vessel renamed the 'Kruzemstern'.

After lunch, Leon continued the lecture programme with 'The Geological Evolution of Newfoundland'. He explained the movement of continental plates which determines the continuing evolution of continental land masses. The Labrador-Newfoundland area comprises four principal regions, one of which contains the quite exceptional formations

around Gros Morne. The ancient ocean of Iapetus was closed up as two supercontinents collided during the Caledonian Orogeny over 400 million years ago. Huge pieces of the earth's mantle and oceanic crust, seldom exposed for direct examination, were lifted up onto the continental plates and still form mountains. It is an extremely rare exposure of the Mohorovicic Discontinuity between the crust and the mantle.

John Sparks concluded an educational day with 'Skywatching', a lively look at the natural history of clouds and the weather they foretell. The wind was dropping a little as we turned into the Y-shaped fjord which travels into the heart of the National Park, and anchored off Woody Point in Bonne Bay. Zodiacs were lowered and we enjoyed a cruise along the opposing shore before dinner. Woods of white and black pine rose up steeply, and soon a juvenile bald eagle was seen above the ridge, and, shortly afterwards, a mature bird. Some were lucky enough to see ospreys, and there were occasional swallows darting around us. The light over the entrance to the fjord was dramatic, with amber cumulus contrasting with low grey stratus hugging the mountains and threatening rain. We went around the corner at the junction of the fjords and admired the cliffs rising straight from the water, before heading for home. The threatened rain now materialised right in our zodiac drivers' faces as we gratefully turned our backs to the weather and sped back.

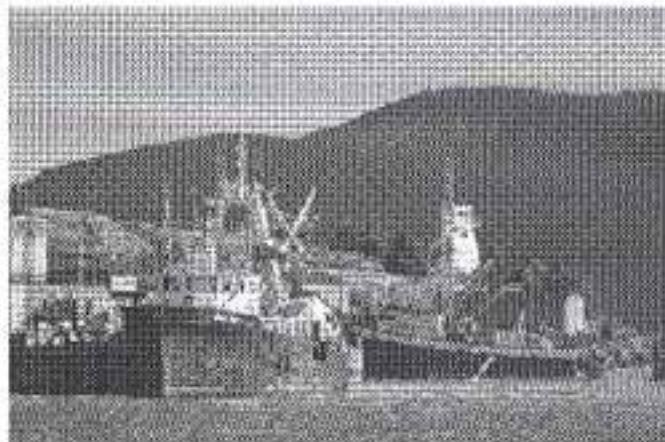
After Happy Hour, we were briefed about our forthcoming day-long visit to Gros Morne, and tours of the engine room were organised, one marketed for geeks who could try to outwit the Chief Engineer with obscure quests for knowledge, and one for normal people.

Saturday 23 September

Gros Morne National Park

Midday position 49°30'N 57°55'W

The weather had changed dramatically for the better and our zodiac ride to shore was in sunshine which had already taken the chill from the air. Woody Cove is a small settlement drawn out over the rare agricultural land running along the shore. We picked up our coaches and made a tour of the town, ending at the Roberts' House, a pretty timber property from the 1890s, furnished largely in period style,



including the pedal-powered boy-racer car and delightful chrome-trimmed perambulator. With our local guides we toured the park, reaching Trout River for lunchtime, eating our packed lunches on or around the boardwalk running along the shore. On the hill above was an old sea-stack left high and dry by isostasy, or the upwards rebound of the land since the end of the Ice Age, following the removal of the burden of ice.

We reboarded to visit the Tablelands and walk on the geology that makes the Park a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Local guides Kim and Sheldon took us on a gentle hike up the trail and explained the geological formations and their effect on the landscape and flora around us. The dominant brown-weathered rock was the peridotite,

full of iron and manganese, which makes up the earth's mantle. It was interleaved with veins of serpentinite, a beautiful slightly greasy rock, similar to soapstone in texture, which cracks into a snakeskin-like pattern, and can be polished to a high finish. Just down the valley was grey rock, and between them was the Mohorovicic Discontinuity, where you could stand virtually with one foot on the earth's crust and the other on its mantle. The peridotite is almost free of calcium and life for plants, and even lichens, is very difficult, so soil scarcely forms. The Tablelands are bald and bare, contrasting sharply with the adjacent rocks, which support forests. Some smart specialised plants were making a living there, including the pitcher plant, whose purple leaves are folded to hold water and trap insects to digest, and thereby supplement the soil's meagre fare.

We descended to the Discovery Centre, and looked at the fine interpretive material there, and browsed the shop for books, maps and souvenirs. We could then either walk or ride down to the harbour to return to ship. The weather had held fair all day, and really enhanced our experience. There was time to relax before Happy Hour and recap. After dinner the BBC Blue Planet film 'Frozen Seas' concluded a busy day, except for a few hardies who stayed up to help Richard sing and play the evening to a close.

Sunday 24 September

Ramea Island

Midday position 47°32'N 57°40'W

An eight o'clock breakfast helped us recoup energies. The weather was grey but calm and shortly after breakfast we were visited by a small group of white-beaked dolphins who rode the pressure wave close to the bulb of our bow, breaking almost clear of the water. Ulrich gave a talk: 'Beyond Divers' Eyes'. It described, from personal experience, the exciting technology used by modern oceanographers and marine scientists to explore and study the abyss. John Sparks continued 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 against the way in which we still treat extinction as if it has a remedy.

After lunch, in fine sunshine, we anchored off Ramea Island and made a long zodiac run into a tickle and found the wittily named Ship Harbour which serves Ramea Island. Waiting on the floating wooden jetty to greet us was a very large Puffin which, it later turned out, had swallowed a local lady. There was a warm welcome waiting us at the Fire Hall, where a local politician demonstrated the almost-lost art of a brief and to-the-point speech. May it prove infectious.

Some short walks were offered around the town and its environs, and the museum-cum-shop was open, with fine knitwear featuring strongly in the retail offerings. We then made our way to the Community Centre where a traditional tea was weighing down the trestles. Home-made cakes, tarts and goodies of all descriptions helped us while away the long hours



between large meals. Slices of moose, provided by the puffin lady were an interesting sampler. A local musical trio led dancing, and Rich made his way around the room letting

those who enquired know he was on good terms with the drummer. (They had a electrical rhythm box providing the beat). Then a general challenge was issued to take the final step and become honorary Newfoundlanders, or be *scratched in*. Volunteers were given strange clothes, and dosed with various local foods and drinks, some easier to identify than others. Once the *scrach*, or rum, had been downed, the penultimate ritual of kissing the cod was undertaken with more enthusiasm than seemed necessary. It was a mere bagatelle to graduate as a fully-fledged local by kneeling on the floor in public, and being cuffed on the neck by an oar while promising to tell no more Newfie jokes.

We returned to ship, six with new Newfie passports, and sailed for our overnight destination in Grey River fjord. To enter through the narrow gate of the fjord safely, we had to get there in daylight, which we just did. The passage was dramatic, with a rippling V-shape of disturbed water marking the turbulent meeting of the waters of the fjord and the open sea. In gathering gloom, beneath steep, wooded flanks disappearing into the low cloud, we ghosted past the small settlement of Grey River, which would be our destination next morning, and sailed to the junction of the two arms of the fjord to anchor for the night.

Monday 25 September

Grey River and François

Middy position 47°36'N 57°04'W

It was another one of those mornings: grey, damp and windy. In the shelter of our night anchorage, winds of 40 knots had largely passed us by, but it was gusty enough to enable drivers on the four mile zodiac ride back down the fjord to offer a free facial exfoliation service on the way. The reception committee, led by Sean, had fixed up the pole boat-launching ramp with plywood sheets to make a beach-style landing possible for us. While we explored the sleepy little village of Grey River, their schoolchildren got ready to ride back and look over the 'Polar Star'. We were surprised to see cars parked in gardens despite there being no streets. They are kept there simply for visits to the main island made using the car ferry. The rain began again, but there was a warm welcome in the Fire Hall, and more mounds of delicious home cooking served to musical accompaniment on the guitar, mouth organ and squeeze box.

Reboarding the zodiacs, we could either go straight to the ship or brave the squalls to journey up the north-east arm of the fjord. The reward was spectacular, steeply wooded slopes, vertiginous waterfalls and massive, bastion-like cliffs. On the way back, the short choppy waves gave us a good shower, and the wind made raising the zodiacs 'on the hook' an exciting challenge.



Over lunch, we relocated a short but eventful distance to François, coping with a beam sea that caught the galley unprepared, and an Australian accent was heard to say 'Bless my cotton socks, we appear to have had

a mishap.' Or some-thing similar. We anchored close to the shore, as the draught of our ship, at 7 metres was ominously close to the depth of water available at the quay. The mayor, Kim Courtney and her reception party greeted us on the quay and we made our self-guided walks in and, most spectacularly, above the town. From Charles's Head, there were long views out to sea and down on the town, which fills the limited flat land at the head of the fjord, and even goes out to sea on stilts to find more room. We returned to ship with special guests from the town, including local couple Liz and Cody Dumford, who last month lost their house in the 165 knot winds brought by Hurricane Florence. After a barbecue supper, Mark revealed new talents for extracting money from people as he turned auctioneer to sell items kindly donated by the passengers, staff, and the ship. Pride of place went to the ship's Canadian flag, used throughout this cruise, and signed by crew and staff. It fetched a fantastic \$250.

The hospitality was reciprocated as we went ashore to a traditional kitchen party at the community centre: more cakes and ale. There was dancing enjoyed both as a participation and a spectator sport especially when Ulrich hit the floor, showing himself to be half-man, half Swiss army penknife, appendages flying in all directions. My guess is a minimum of two weeks for a full recovery. The festivities went on until 23:00, when we made our way back to the jetty, and, the wind stilled at last, made a gentle passage over to the ship beneath a starry sky.

Tuesday 26 September

St Pierre and Miquelon

Midday position 46°47'N 56°09'W



It was the turn of the sun to come out, though the breeze remained with us and kept the morning cool. We docked at the island of St Pierre off the Burin Peninsula, and took a zodiac cruise to the historic site of Sailor's Island, where operations were made unnecessarily interesting by the close attention of a dredger. Local guides gave us a tour describing the traditional life of Basque fisherman there. The whole area is technically French, and we left Canada to visit it.

Many immigrants were Bretons, and, when we transferred by zodiac to the town, we saw the old-fashioned lace curtains still popular in Brittany. Those familiar with the cool grey granite villages of that region would not have recognised the gaudily-painted houses. There was no white-with-a-hint-of-rose here. Mauves rubbed shoulders with greens, orange walls with purple windows, and we were dazzled by many other eye-catching camera-begging combinations. We remembered our French and names like boulangerie and épicerie came to mind. We put them in sentences, like: la boulangerie est fermé. L'épicerie est fermé. The town had been attacked by that pernicious cultural disease: the French lunch hour. Shop doorbells clanged shut, Renaults were driven into the suburbs, the church bell tolled twelve, and we were left with the streets to ourselves. Many enjoyed stretching their legs with a twenty-minute



walk back to the ship. There was a late lunch aboard, and then time to relax. During that time, we completed more Canadian Immigration forms to re-enter Canada. We stood in line agreeing how extremely necessary this wasn't. I'm scanning a set of forms onto my laptop so I can print them off at will. There was a visit from five white-beaked dolphins who bow-rode for five minutes. Not long after, a group of pilot whales appeared, recognisable by their small size, for whales, and swift movement. A Minke also showed briefly, then more dolphins.

The afternoon was rounded off by a talk given by Ulrich entitled 'Marine and Offshore resources: Facts, Trends and Concerns', a broad overview of marine resources using case studies relevant to our trip.

Happy Hour, and Recap and Briefing took us through to dinner, with the BBC Blue Planet classic, 'Seasonal Seas' as a digestif.

Wednesday 27 September

Louisbourg

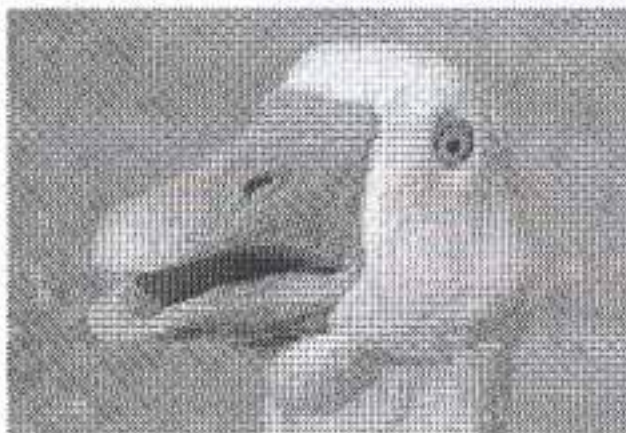
Midday position 45°54'N 59°58'W



Another clear sunny morning broke in the bay off Louisbourg where we anchored to go ashore to the largest replica historic site in North America. Unfortunately, the scout boat discovered that there was no replica pontoon to replace the one recently destroyed by storms. We welcomed aboard the ship's owner, Martin Karlsen and other head office staff, and re-jigged our operation as a beach landing in the sheltered bay adjoining the fort. Louisbourg had quite a brief life, but it was a useful one, protecting a cod-fishing industry that was three times the size of the Canadian fur trade. It was founded by the French in 1713, the fortifications were captured by the British in 1758 and blown up by them in 1760. From 1961 onwards, it was re-built as it had been on the outbreak of war in 1744.

Local guides led tour groups, but we could also explore on our own, and meet people in full period costume describing life in the town and fort. A fifth of the town has been reconstructed, using the same materials as the original, which makes it difficult and expensive to maintain.

The interiors have been painstakingly furnished in the style of the day, including people with skills like lace-weaving and animal husbandry at work as they would have been over 250 years before. The soldiers' lives were tough and discipline severe, but punishments in civil society were often brutal or plain savage by modern standards; there were still



public executions.

As we returned to ship, it was a fine warm day, in fact, it was plain hot. There was time to relax after dinner and maybe think about packing. Accounts were there to be settled and we discovered just how much we had enjoyed ourselves. At three o'clock, there was a photo presentation of images taken by staff during our cruise. John Sparks then gave a short presentation on the marvellous journeys the 'Polar Star' makes down to Antarctica, the Last Continent. Richard accompanied the pictures on the guitar.

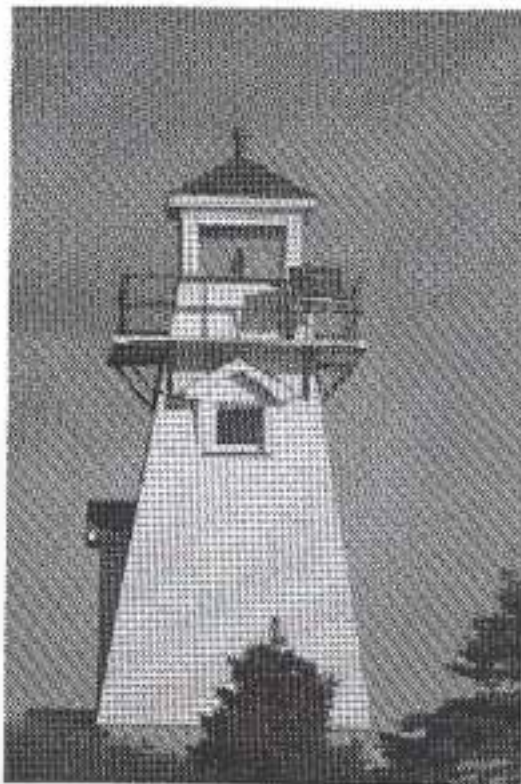
All too soon, it was time for the Captain's Farewell Dinner, a carvery supper in the Observation Lounge. We drank our goodbyes and toasted: 'To the next time!'

Thursday 27 September

Halifax

Midday position 44°39'N 63°35'W

Our final day saw us anchored in Halifax harbour. One thing about travelling by sea, at least your luggage doesn't get lost during the journey. We checked our luggage on the dock and took the waiting taxis, coaches and other chariots onwards towards our final destinations. We had sailed 1291 nautical miles, and cumulatively extended our waistlines by a similar number of inches.



Birds Seen

Listed by John Sparks

American Black Duck
American Crow
American Robin
Bald Eagle
Belted Kingfisher
Blue Jay
Double-Crested Cormorant
European Starling
Fulmar
Gannet

Great Cormorant
Greater Black-Backed Gull
Greater Yellowlegs
Great Loon
Great Shearwater
Great Skua
Guillemot
Herring Gull
House Sparrow
Kittiwake
Leach's Storm Petrel
Mallard
Northern Phalarope
Osprey
Red-Breasted Merganser
Sanderling
Savannah Sparrow
Song Sparrow
Water Pipit

Speaking of rare birds, apologies for mis-typing Richard's name as Robert on the staff list, and not noticing it until the first pages were printed.

ROUTE OF MV POLAR STAR
AROUND
THE RUGGED ROCK

1291 Nautical Miles

17 September - 28 September 2006

