

*Roger:*

**Friday 22 May**

After steaming through the night again we anchored off the island of Smola. It's 6 degrees C blowing 15 to 20 knots.

We choose the morning walking activity. At 0815 we are loaded 10 at a time onto Zodiacs and ferried the 800m to the wharf at the local fishing harbour. From there we stroll over the golf course onto the hinterland. Once totally tree free, this island ran sheep and cattle which grazed on the heather. Pine trees were planted here some years ago and are now spreading as they grow wild. There are also some 80 wind turbines on the 280 square kilometre island.





Having returned for lunch we opt for the afternoon trip to the abandoned fishing village - now mainly holiday homes. Back into a Zodiac we head back to the same wharf we had been taken to in the morning. The boatman then realises we are at the wrong place. We head back out again back past the ship in rather choppy seas the spray from the wind soaking and freezing us all.

Arriving on the abandoned fishing village island we are led by a troll (well in the coat he was wearing he looked like one) to the local chapel. A historian proceeds to explain how Norway had been inhabited some 3500 years ago. He goes on to explain how the vikings had started the fish trade around 700 AD. This particular island was originally inhabited in the 1400s when the Dutch were trading fish out of Norway. In 1900 when motorised boats and telegraph came along people moved back to the mainland.

While waiting for the boat back (in the biting wind) a local lady showed us through her holiday home originally one of the fishing village houses some 200 years old. Back in the day one person owned all the buildings and businesses on the island, the fisherman rented and were beholden to the owner. Our zodiac trip back to the ship wasn't uneventful either – running out of petrol in pouring rain, winds and swells nearby some rocks created some interesting discussion but they had a spare tank on board and got us going again in no time.

Back on the ship a local singing group entertained us with mainly Irish songs.

At dinner we were joined by naturalist Keith Larson. Based in Abisko Sweden he seemed to be a bit of an expert on climate change. Looks like buying a beach house is not a good idea right now.

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*Sylvia:*

### **Saturday 23 May**

A bit of a sleep in this morning. The wake-up announcement over the loud speaker didn't come until 7am. This morning we are at Vega Island, a group of some 6,000 islands where the locals provide shelter for Eider ducks in return for half their eggs and

the ability to collect the eiderdown after the chicks leave the nest. These are flat, low-lying islands that a few thousand years ago were more than a kilometer under ice. Like yesterday, the island was once treeless but now the government is paying for the removal of the wilding Spruce trees.

The “long” hike this morning (approx. 6.5km) passed through some pretty grassland with good views over the fjords and small lakes. We also passed houses with cod hanging out to dry. Lots of birdlife as well and we had a much appreciated opportunity to actually stretch our legs and walk at our own pace. We are certainly among the younger guests on board so our ideas of walking pace and “hard” or “long” hikes are different but the guests are generally well travelled and interesting and we have been having many enlightening conversations.



We sat up in the observation lounge for lunch while we sailed to Lomsdal/Visten National Park, a beautiful fjord area on the mainland of coastal Norway. We all opted for different activities. I opted for the “long” 4-mile hike which ended up being the best walk so far on the trip with some good steepish sections, up to the snowline. The only downside was the nearly constant hail and biting wind which made for some slippery walking conditions and poor views but I thoroughly enjoyed the walk nonetheless – definitely troll territory. Roger opted for the medium walk (or womble as he termed it) as he had to be back on board for a massage by 5pm. Joel opted for a zodiac cruise and enjoyed the fjord from a different angle.



In the evening we were joined for dinner by Carl, the naturalist who has been guiding most of the long hikes. He has a long history with the Norwegian Forest Service and regaled us with plenty of stories about his experiences including ridding South Georgia Island of reindeer.

All-in-all another pleasant day aboard.

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*Roger:*

**Sunday 24 May**

Waking early now in the Arctic Circle we lay in bed watching the cliff walls of the Melfjord drift by. After breakfast we embarked in the Zodiac for the hard walk. The ship is parked only meters from the shore as the water goes deep really quickly here.



Carl Kilander, a naturalist and former Forester with whom we dined last night is leading four of us up the valley. During dinner the previous evening he told us how he and a team had removed some 6000 Reindeer from South Georgia. Seventeen of these had been released by Norwegian whalers in 1905. They were kept under control until the end of whaling in the 60s. Fred at 84, the oldest by far in our party, seems to keep up okay. We wandered up the valley to the snow line spotting ptarmigan, brambling, a few other birds and a short tailed weasel. There was a bit of moose sign around.





We got back in time to take an inflatable kayak for a blat around the rather large bay.





The trip south back down the fjord was spectacular with vertical cliffs at times only meters from the boat. We even took a detour up another arm to check out an even bigger waterfall. The pilot nosed the ship to only 10m from the cliff face.





Heading back out to the coast Alfred S McLaren gave a talk. Captain of a Nuclear Sub in 1970 they did a 180-day mission under the north pole and on to the Siberian ice shelf where they surveyed the whole thing. Apparently the Russians only found out about it when he wrote a book on the trip 10 or so years ago.

After dinner heading north again we arrived at Traena island right on the Arctic Circle. We were able to disembark straight on to the wharf this time. A stroll around revealed a pretty little town with a globe situated right on the Arctic Circle.

As we head to bed we continue north through the night which is no longer night but light all night.

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