

Roger:

Saturday 30 May 2015

You don't hear people around here saying they work from daylight till dusk. Through the light night we headed north up the east side of the Spitsbergen Island which seems to be all snow covered mountains rising straight out of the sea.

Pulling up alongside Hamburgbukta Island we disembarked but not before the guides had scouted the shore for polar bears. They take these things pretty seriously. Looking at the size of the one we saw yesterday I can understand why. Arriving on shore we were kept in tight groups. Each guide carried a flare pistol and a 3006 Remington or Ruger bolt action rifle. The bear attack drill is stand behind guide while he first fires flare pistol to scare bear off. As a last resort the guide will shoot the bear in the chest. If he misses I guess we just hope the bear is not too hungry so he will just eat the guide.

We head off on the long walk with Carl's group. We stroll over a small hill and down the other side where we are buzzed constantly by Little Auks a smaller version of a Guillemot. There must be millions of these things here. They have arrived here in the last few weeks to nest. The steep hillsides right up to the top of the mountains are covered with them. Groups of them all take off together and fly circuits out over the sea. Groups vary in size from ten to sometimes thousands. It's like they are all coordinated.





We stroll out for a mile or so then back and around the bay we had arrived in. There are fresh arctic fox tracks in the snow. I have a pretty good idea why they are hanging around. Apparently they stash the excess birds they catch to feed on during the winter. Some harbour seals play in water in front of us sticking their heads up and looking at us from time to time.



Back on board as we steamed further north some walrus are spotted so the captain in normal style turns the boat toward them following them for some time as they walrused around.



It's a stunning sunny day at 3 degrees it's t-shirt and shorts weather. Around 3 after negotiating the Sorgattet Passage we arrived at Damskoya fjord, fed by a large glacier. We opted for a kayak around the place.



As we were re-boarding the ship from the kayak Eric a naturalist and photographer instructor who had given some great tips on camera use to us over the past few days, asked for volunteers for some research he is undertaking. This involved the polar plunge

which was to take place shortly. "Would you guys be prepared to stay in the water for a minute?" Sylvia, Joel and I all said "yes". Fifteen minutes later the call comes over the speaker system "all those taking part in the polar plunge report to the mud room with robes". We wander down expecting at least half the 148 passengers to be there. There must be a lot of smart people on this ship as a mere 21 turned up.

Most jumped in and were immediately dragged out. We got to jump in after having our resting pulse taken then hung onto a rope submerged to the neck for over a minute. On exiting the water our pulse was taken again. Joel and I both went in a second time. There was lots of ice floating nearby but it wasn't as cold as I expected, reportedly about 4 degrees.



The view from our window after the polar plunge.

Underway again heading north - I checked our position at 2330hrs to find we were at 80 degrees and 5 minutes - 595 nautical miles from the north pole. There is no ice in sight, the guy on the bridge tells me they have never been this far north before at this time of the year as it is usually iced up here.