

*Sylvia:*

**Monday 1 June 2015**

This morning we woke to an overcast day – and probably a bit colder than previous. We are at the Northern tip of Spitsbergen in an area called Mossellbukta. Roger and I opted for the long walk while Joel opted for a medium walk and some kayaking. Today is the first day I have been really cold – our walk was slow (in my opinion way too slow with too much stopping – Roger commented that I was starting to get my grumpy face on) particularly given the cold wind. We had initially intended to do a longer hike but came across bear tracks that were about a day old and so decided to stick to a safer route closer to the landing area.



We did see a large number of purple sandpipers and eider ducks as well as a couple of snow buntings and a very distant reindeer. The highlight was the remains of Nordenskiöld's 1872-73 Arctic Expedition where Magnus provided some interesting story behind the ill-fated expedition where the entire ship ended up trapped in the ice due to a farewell party they were giving for the scientists. It seems the scientists were fairly well catered for but the ship's crew must have had a fairly miserable winter – although all survived.



During the afternoon we sailed into Liefdefjorden and came across large areas of fast ice (ice still secured to shore). Here we saw a few polar bears although all a little distant.

My favourite was a mother and cub where the cub stood up on its hind legs for quite some time and almost seemed to be waving at us.



This area has a huge number of glaciers and is quite stunning.

After massages and dinner we cruised by Moffen Island, a very flat, barren and icy place that is frequented by walrus. We were not able to land or do zodiac cruises as the area is protected but did see many, many walrus, piled in heaps on the island and swimming in the water. A fitting end to another great day.



*Roger:*

**Tuesday 2 June 2015**

We woke as we cruised into Krossfjorden, yet another stunning spot with snow covered mountains rising up out of the not too deep blue sea. There is a large glacier at the end of the bay. It's zero degrees under a clear blue sky with a slight breeze.

We opt for the long walk. Heading out first on two zodiacs we land on a shingle beach 10 minutes down the coast. Barnacle geese cruise by to investigate the visitors. Eric and Carl are there to take us on the stroll up the hill. Rifle and flare pistol almost at the ready Eric leads out. They have scouted the area for polar bears. Getting up the hill a bit we are looking into a huge glacier that has retreated from the sea leaving moulins (cone shape piles of shingle) behind it.



As we head up a bit higher a lone reindeer is spotted above us. We head out to the right and soon are above a mob of 20 plus reindeer. The females are still in hard antler, the males who are in a separate group are in velvet. Interestingly these are the only deer species in which the female grows antler. The female has antlers during the winter so it can fight the males off in order to get food for the baby it is carrying. The male goes into hard antler in mid-summer so it can fight over the females during the autumn rut. As a mob of curious bucks approach us to within 100 yards Carl tells us that when Norway signed the treaty to claim Svalbard in the early 1920s reindeer had been hunted close to extinction. Since then there has been a ban on hunting and there are now approximately 30,000 of them roaming the islands.





It's our last stroll ashore so there is a lot of chatting and photo taking as we reach a high point around 400m above where the ship is moored. On the way down Sylvia gets her boot stuck in the snow as it is a little deep in places.



Back on board around noon we cruise off through the fjord to view more glaciers dropping into the sea. At 1315 we had a briefing about ship departure tomorrow morning, pink tags on bags for those of us on charter flight to Oslo tomorrow. They are really well organised around here.

At 1615 Fred gave a talk on the history of polar subs - the first with oars tested in the Thames in 1629 and it sort of worked.

Captain's cocktail hour at 1730 with a talk from him on how we had covered 2565 N miles since leaving Bergen, crossed in and out of the Arctic Circle 6 times and crossed the 80th latitude 6 times, burned off 400 gal of fuel per day and, to cap it off, used 15000 gal of desalinated water per day. They can make 30,000 gal per day.

After a dinner which included a desert with cloudberries, which are tiny and you get one per plant so some poor bugger had done a lot of picking them, Joel and I were standing on the back deck finishing a cigar and having a port when Joel spotted a whale of the port stern. The captain spins the ship around like it's a fizz boat and the chase is on. It turns out to be a pair of blue whales. These are the largest mammals ever to have graced the planet. We raced up onto the deck above the bridge and got some great pics. Sylvia is hugely excited as it has been a lifelong dream of hers to see one of these animals.



Bags packed we are ready for our arrival in Longyearbyen early tomorrow morning.

*Sylvia:*

**Wednesday 3 June 2015**

We were up bright and early this morning as all bags had to be outside the cabin doors before 6:45am ready for our disembarkation process. A quick breakfast and we headed off to board our coaches for the tour around Longyearbyen. This definitely fell into the category of time-filling. Longyearbyen is a small, bleak town, the major population area in Svalbard. There is a large university engaged in Arctic research and several coal mines

although most of these are now abandoned. We drove around, saw a few buildings, visited the local art gallery and spent some time in the museum, then had lunch at a local hotel before heading to the airport for our roughly 3 hour flight to Oslo. One of those necessary but uninspiring travel days.

We are staying tonight at the Airport Hotel in Oslo and head off to Iceland first thing in the morning.