



Expedition Log Around Spitsbergen

5th – 15th July 2006

M/V Grigoriy Mikheev

ГРИГОРИЙ МИХЕЕВ



The *Grigoriy Mikheev* was built in 1990 in Finland and was designed as an ice strengthened hydrographical vessel. Of steel construction, measuring 65,3m (210 ft) long, 12.7m (42 ft) wide, with a displacement of 2,000 tons, she is ideal for the Polar Regions. This former research vessel of the Hydrographical Department of Russia in St. Petersburg is manned by an enthusiastic Russian crew so we know that we are in extremely capable hands. During the northern winter she cruises the water of the Antarctic Peninsula.

With

**Captain – Aleksandr Pruss
and his Russian Crew of 18**

including

1st Mate - Zodiac Driver: Andrey Postnikov
2nd Mate - Zodiac Driver: Valeriy Kovalev
3rd Mate - Zodiac Driver: Andrey Ivanov
Radio Engineer - Zodiac Driver: Roman Aleksakhin
Able Seaman - Zodiac Driver: Ruslan Kuzmenko
Able Seaman - Zodiac Driver: Igor Voyko
Cabin Stewardess: Alina Zurikhina
Cabin Stewardess: Marina Tattar
Dining Room Stewardess: Lyudmila Santimova
Dining Room Stewardess: Nataliya Dudinskaya

and

Expedition Leader: Rolf Stange (Germany)
Guide/Lecturer: Delphine Aurès (France)
Guide/Lecturer: Troels Jacobsen (Denmark)
Hotel Manager: Jan de Ceuster (Belgium)
Head Chef: Nathan Russ (New Zealand)
Sous Chef: Beverley Howlett (UK)
Ship's Physician: Dr. Mathias Heintz (Germany)
Wildwatch Tours escort: Peter Jones (UK)
Grand Nord escort: Stephane Niveau (France)

And 47 of us from Belgium, Canada, France, Italy, UK, and USA

5th July 2006 – Longyearbyen

Position at 17.00: 78°14' N / 15°39' E

Air temperature: 8°C, light westerly, cloudy.

Most of us arrived in Svalbard by plane in the afternoon. Our expedition staff picked us all up in the airport and took us by bus to down town Longyearbyen for a couple of hours of exploration of this high arctic metropolis.

The ship was lying alongside the pier when we arrived for boarding at 16.00 and everybody acquainted themselves with their new home for the next ten days. We also met our fellow travellers and our Expedition Leader, Rolf Stange, for an introduction to the rest of the staff. The ship set sail at 19.00 and most were on deck to see the departure. Just after leaving we underwent the compulsory and important lifeboat drill; warm clothes, bright orange life jackets and then up to the lifeboats. Our officers and guides explained the procedure. We decided right then that we would better never have to use those life-boats in earnest. Having successfully completed the drill we settled down for dinner. Many of us enjoyed the views in the early evening as we headed out of the massive Isfjord and north on the west side of mountainous Prins Karls Forland.

6th July 2006 – Krossfjord: Fjortende Julibukta, Kongsfjord: Ny Ålesund and Kongsvegen glacier

Position at 06.45: 79°01' N / 11°02' E

Air temperature: 7°C, calm, mostly cloudy.

The morning wake up call came late in the morning at 7.00. Our good ship *Grigoriy Mikheev* was heading into Kongsfjorden (Kings Bay) where we were to visit the northern most town in the world: Ny Ålesund at 78°56' N. In the morning however, we made our first landing in the adjacent Krossfjord in a bay called Fjortende Julibukta (14th of July Bay), named in honour of the French National Day by an Expedition by the Duke of Monaco in the early 20th Century. Here we started out with a bit of zodiac cruising along a small but very nice cliff inhabited by a small bird colony. There are much larger bird colonies in Svalbard than here, but it is one of the very few places this far north where one can find the Razorbill nesting. Also, on the upper



part of the cliffs, we saw Puffins, which are also not very numerous so far to the north. Plenty of Brünnichs Guillemots, and some nesting Glaucous Gulls with chicks were also to be seen here. One Glaucous Gull even took a Kittywake in mid air before eating

it on the slope. Dramatic scenes on our first landing! Further into the bay we landed below a much larger and higher bird cliff (mostly Brünnichs Guillemot and Kittiwakes), which had given nutrition enough for a multitude of flora to grow here. For Svalbard standards this is like a tropical rainforest! Several Snow Buntings were curiously following every move we

made among the great many species of mosses, lichens, grasses, etc. The tundra landscape also offered a few Arctic Skuas and a lot of Barnacle Geese with goslings following close by their parents.

Boarding the zodiacs again our guides had already spotted a few Bearded Seals on ice floes in the bay. That was to be a great close encounter with this the second largest seal in the Arctic. Amazingly enough it did not seem to want to leave its floe and carefully we managed to get very close to one of them. We also zodiac cruised along Fjortende Julibreen (bre=glacier), which was very impressive. Just as we had headed out after the landing a large piece of ice calved just a few minutes after all five zodiacs had come into the best viewing position. How lucky can one be! This was not the last great glacier of the day, but first we paid Ny Ålesund a visit.

Ny Ålesund is a small community consisting of scientists from all over the world who conduct a variety of research in the fields of atmospheric studies, glaciology, biology etc. A short walk took us into the centre of this historic village passing several Barnacle Geese with lots of goslings. Also, numerous Common Eiders with small chicks was seen around the coast. Just as we entered the settlement itself we saw the first small Arctic Fox cub running close to a row of yellow houses. It turned out to be a lot more than just one; in fact nine cubs ran around their den, which was located below one of the houses. It was a truly remarkable experience to see these very young cubs playing around with each other at about 10 meters distance.



Opposite the small shop is an interesting little museum about the early days of Ny Ålesund, when coal mining determined everything here. Life must have been hard for the miners in these harsh conditions; work was usually carried out in a kneeling position deep under the surface. The museum also explained all the modern research conducted from this place. Ny Ålesund also has the northern most post office in

the world (so they claim).

We also headed for the lattice mast erected in the early part of the 20th century by the intrepid explorers Amundsen and Nobile, who tried to reach the North Pole by a dirigible airship in 1926 and 1928. The mast is only a few hundred meters from the settlement but our expedition staff insisted that everybody stayed close to the rifle in case of an unwanted Polar Bear encounter. Luckily there were no polar bears around and we could enjoy the stunning scenery. Rolfs brought the English speaking lot to the mast and gave an in depth talk about the historic perspectives of polar exploration involving Ny Ålesund. Delphine took all the French speaking to the mast providing similar information a little later. After the first history lecture of the trip we took a round trip along the tundra before heading back to town.

After dinner we headed deeper inside Kongsfjorden in order to explore the impressive Kongsvegen glacier. Our captain took the ship very close the southern glacier front giving us the best possible view. Several larger icebergs, which had recently calved from the glacier, could be seen. Normally quite unusual phenomena here in Svalbard as there are no great iceberg producing glaciers here. We also saw a small Ringed Seal on an ice floe nervously looking our way. Beautiful blue “bergy-bits” were shining in the fantastic evening sun. Just as

the captain had brought the ship in close proximity a large piece of ice calved just next to us. The noise, splash, and waves gave an impressive hint of the enormous forces nature works with; our second large calving of the day. After this great experience the ship headed towards the fjord entrance and to the north.

7th July 2006 – Møffen, Liefdefjord: Mushamna, Andøyanen, and Monacobreen

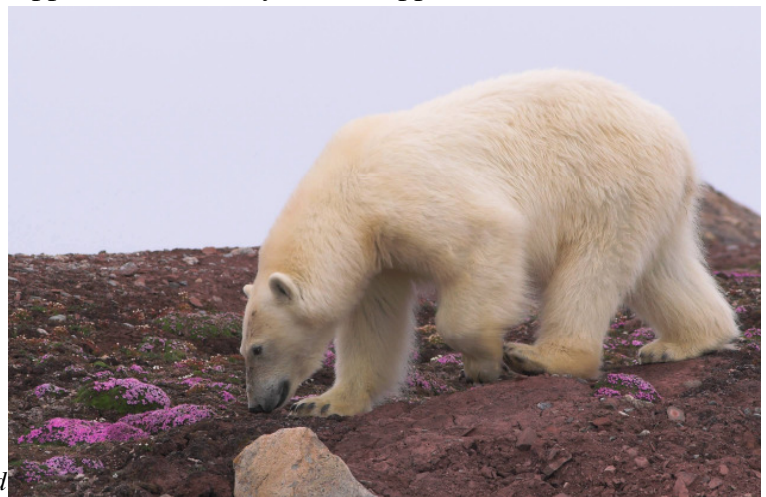
Position at 06.45: 79°59' N / 14°00' E

Air temperature: 5°C, calm, cloudy.

The morning wake-up call came relatively early at 6.30 o'clock as we were approaching Møffen island at 80°N. Møffen is a very famous island, possibly named after the Dutch term of disapproving Germans! Now it is a natural reserve with a substantial number of Walrus hauled out throughout the ice free season and access is restricted to the winter time between 15 May and 15 September. However, we are allowed to move into 300 meters distance and our captain skilfully did so. We got a really good overview of the southern part of the island and saw at least 100 Walrus in groups here and there along with quite a few in the water near the beach.

During breakfast the *Mikheev* continued south into the Woodfjord/Liefdefjord and here things again started to heat up. Our first landing of the day was on the eastern shore of Wood Fjord at Mushamna. Here, a trappers hut located, which is still in use. One can apply to the Sysselmann (governor of Svalbard) to spend 12 months here after vigorous health and mental testing. The waiting list is long, so you better sign up soon if interested! We went ashore well away from the trappers hut to give the "locals" their privacy and walked quickly away from the beach and away from the constantly attacking Arctic Terns. Down the beach we saw a group of Brent Geese milling about; the first of the season for the Mikheev staff. We split up into two groups shortly after. Rolf went hiking on the tundra with the enthusiastic hikers and Delphine and Troels took the leisurely walkers for a slow and comfortable stroll looking at flowers and enjoying the view over the fjord. The hikers had a really good encounter with a pair of Arctic Skuas trying to lure them away from the nest, while the strolling lot was fortunate to get a visit from the trappers. A married couple had lived in the hut for just over 11 months and the wife came with one of the dogs for a chat. She gave a lot of interesting information about the life as a trapper in the area. Among other things she told that they had had approximately 200 Polar Bear visits in the past 11 months!

Obviously that really lit the Polar Bear fever among us all. The afternoon's excursion to Andøyanen (Duck Islands) was not to disappoint us. Already on the approach to the islands Rolf saw a Polar Bear on one of the small islands. Also, two Minke Whales were spotted although only shortly. The zodiacs were launched and everybody was hoping for a close encounter. Indeed, the bear was quite cooperative as it was scavenging for birds nests around the small island. It more or less followed the shoreline and so did we. Our first Polar Bear encounter was a great success. Grey



Around Svalbard onboard

Phalaropes were also spotted on the island. We then headed south in an attempt to find more bears and an island without bears to land on. The latter turned out to be rather difficult. Rolf had two zodiacs search one half of an island and three zodiacs took the other half. No need to take chances when so many bears are normally present here. True enough two more bears were spotted on that very island. Both searching for the smallest bit of food be it eggs, chicks or any old dead bird. The third bear was first in line for a visit which turned out to be equally successful as the first one. Less than 50 meters distance without scaring it is certainly worth while. It even raided an Eider Ducks nest only a few hundred meters from us. The distressed Eider female displayed a very interesting behaviour as she walked around pretending to have a broken wing. The bear didn't buy the performance and the duck lost its clutch. The second bear, which we initially spotted in the interior, suddenly appeared to walk towards the shore. This bear turned out to be the most successful of the day. It was completely ignorant of our presence just 20 meters or so away while it toured the coastline. The odd look in our direction was all the interest it gave us. What a fantastic experience!! We finally found an island with no bears on it and made a short landing. The small island was curiously enough divided between Arctic Terns on the western half and a pair of Great Skuas on the eastern half. As soon as the skuas approached the invisible dividing line the Arctic Terns attacked. As soon as we humans approached the eastern "line" the skuas took a low flight close to us.

The reddish rocks of the islands consist of app. 350 mio. years old (Devonian) "Old Red" sediment layers, which can also be found at other places around the world such as East Greenland and Scotland.

The plant life was also thriving on this small island. Beside the numerous lichens and mosses of different colours, flowering species were in full bloom and included Spider Plants, Bog Saxifrage, Arctic Poppy and Woolly Lousewort. We all had a great landing at the lush tundra enjoying all that nature can offer here in the high arctic.

During dinner we proceeded further into the fjord and just as the main course was served, our hotel manager Jan spotted a Polar Bear on an ice floe from a port hole in the bar! He even managed to take a picture, which rapidly persuaded Rolf to make the announcement, and turn the ship around in the hope of a closer look. It turned out to be feeding on an almost eaten seal. Everybody left the delicious Duck that our cooks had prepared for us, to look at Polar Bear no. 4 of the day. For some reason the bear seemed to smell us from quite a distance, decided it was too much and swam away. Maybe it did not like the smell of our kitchen!? Leaving the swimming bear (as we always do), dinner could continue. It was however not the end of the evening. The Monaco Glacier at the end of Leifde Fjord is one of the most spectacular glaciers in Svalbard, and after dinner our captain had sailed us quite close to this magnificent glacier front. We were once again fortunate to see bits and pieces fall off and with hundreds of Kittiwakes feeding close to the calving glacier the setting was quite extraordinary. What a fantastic day it had been!

8th July 2006 – Hinlopen Strait: Alkefjellet and Torellneset

Position at 06.45: 79°36' N / 18°28' E

Air temperature: 6°C, calm, cloudy.

During the night the *Mikheev* had relocated to the famous bird cliff Alkefjellet south of the Lomfjorden in the Hinlopen Strait. Here, some 100.000 Brünnichs Guillemots nest among the towering basalt pillars.

Overnight the weather had turned a bit to the worse and the morning offered low cloud. This did, however, not deter us from a zodiac cruise along this magnificent bird cliff. It is indeed a



fantastic place to zodiac cruise as the water is deep right up to the sheer cliff face and the birds in places nest only a few meters above sea level. High in the hills we also saw an Arctic Fox sniffing around for anything eatable. It is quite incredible to see how agile they are on the steep cliff sides and the narrow ledges. The fox certainly found what it came for as it suddenly was on a ledge with a number of nesting guillemots. Soon after we saw it run away with an egg.

Not only Brünnichs Guillemots nest here. The Glaucous Gulls and Kittiwakes are also plentiful here, although obviously not in such great numbers. The Glaucous Gull is one of the largest predatory/scavenging birds in the arctic, and here they live the good life with plenty of prey around. Alkefjellet however, has more than wildlife to offer. The spectacular basalt columns upon which the birds nest is part of an intrusion of basalt in the otherwise limestone rock. This intrusion occurred 150-100 million of years ago and has now left the interface between the two rock types almost knife sharp as a text book example of the incredible forces of nature. After about 1½ hours cruising we headed back to the ship wet and somewhat

cold but none of the less content with the morning's experience.

We came back to the ship relatively early and before lunch Rolf and Troels had a recap of the geology and the guillemots for the English speaking in the bar and Delphine gave a lecture about the *Seabirds of Svalbard* in French in the dinning room.

During lunch we steamed south east towards Torellneset on the south west corner of Nordaustlandet. The area is known to be quite desert like with very little vegetation. However, one big attraction is to be found here too: Walrus. About 15 likely all male Walrus was hauled out on the beach close to a small sandy point. We landed on the beach at a distance of some 500 m and made a land approach. We then proceeded in orderly fashion along the beach in order to get a little closer to the hauled out animals. We got to about 60 meters of them and enjoyed the massive animals occasionally quarrelling a bit swinging around there large tusks towards each other. The hierarchy is clear in such a wallow. The biggest males have the say and the privilege of the best spots. Sometimes however, it takes a little convincing for the others to realize.

When we came back Troels held a lecture in English entitled *The Walrus* and Delphine took over by lecturing on *The Pinnipeds of Svalbard* in French.

During the late afternoon we sailed northwards towards the large fjord of Wahlenbergfjorden in the east of Nordaustlandet, the second largest island in the archipelago. We had a long way to go for the next day's adventure far to the north so no landing was intended. However, we made a short ships cruise around the fjord in the completely calm waters hoping to find some

ice and thereby wildlife. There was no longer any ice in the fjord system and we left again enjoying the magnificent scenery in the great evening light.

9th July 2006 – The Polar pack ice

Position at 07.30: 81°25' N / 20°12' E

Air temperature: 4°C, light breeze, high cloud.



During the night we had steadily steamed north headed for the pack ice where we would spend the day. At the wake up call we were well north of Ross Island, the northern most island in Europe, and we had already left the sea chart and ventured into uncharted waters. The European continental plate was to the south and we had entered the deep waters of the Polar Basin. The pack ice was still not in sight, which meant that we could all have a peaceful breakfast. At 8.45 o'clock we met the first ice at 81°39' N. There were a lot of different seals on and around the ice: Harp Seals, Ringed Seals, and Bearded Seals were spotted. We even got a few close encounters with Bearded Seals on ice floes. Notable birds such as a Sabine's Gull at 81°50' N was spotted among the many Kittiwakes and Fulmars, which followed the ship all the way gorging themselves in small crustaceans and fish in the turbulent waters behind our propeller. A number of Arctic Skuas were seen as well as a few Pomarine Skuas (both light and dark morph).

Just before lunch we crossed 82° N in great visibility with a toast on the bow.

After lunch Rolf decided to make a little zodiac cruise in the ice. We had proceeded to 82°03', when the zodiacs were launched.

The sun was shining leaving the icy landscape in a magical light. It was truly a magnificent experience cruising around the relatively loose pack ice. In the ice we saw a few Ivory Gulls and strangely enough a Great Black-backed Gull at 82°03' N. The northern most position on the trip was reached by at least two of the zodiacs. By coincidence they reached 82°04' N – just 886 km from the North Pole!

Back on the ship Jan hat yet again prepared a little something to warm us all up. Hot chocolate with a squeeze of rum was just the right thing after such a zodiac cruise.

The *Grigoriy Mikheev* then ventured further to the east just inside the pack ice in an attempt to find more wildlife. We were not to be disappointed as Troels suddenly spotted a Polar Bear on an ice floe. The weather was still spectacular as the captain carefully approached the bear that clearly had just been awakened from a nap. It was not particularly disturbed by our presence but still choose to walk slowly along the ice. At one stage the bear went into the water, which



Around Svalbard onboard Grigoriy Mikheev from 5 – 15 July 2006

it seemingly found a bit unpleasant at first. Slowly it went with the hind legs first as if the water was a bit too cold. Obviously this is not the case but it still quickly climbed another ice floe. Polar Bears are very particular about their fur and try to keep in good condition at all times. One of the ways of doing that is to dry themselves by rolling around the snow and ice after having been in the water. In this way salt is also “washed” out of the fur. This was exactly what our bear started doing. Several times it rolled around in the snow causing a serious inflation in photos taken on the trip! Bear no. 5 was a great experience to end our adventure in the Polar pack ice. We headed out of the ice quickly after our bear encounter and set a course to the southeast. There was quite a distance to cover in order to get to the Kvitøya (White Island) in far northeast of Svalbard, where the next day’s excursions were planned.

10th July 2006 – Kvitøya and Storøya

Position at 07.30: 80°22' N / 30°01' E

Air temperature: 2°C, fresh breeze, sleet/snow.

The day started in sleet in the far north east corner of the archipelago near Kvitøya (White Island). Boarding the zodiacs the sleet turned into snow as we headed closer to our landing site at Andréeneset on the southwest corner of the island. The zodiac ride in was quite interesting as we were followed by a small group of inquisitive Walrus. They were mostly females and calves vindicating the notion that they are reclaiming some of their former breeding grounds further to the west. The island is some 400 meters high and covers 682 km² and the vast majority of it is covered by a huge icecap. Kvitøya is indeed a place really far away from absolutely everything. The impressions are difficult to describe as everything is so alien to just about anything else on planet earth. The lichens and algae which grow here are to a certain extent strange looking and seem unlike anything else. The snow fall ended just as we landed. We had to cross a few snowfields loaded with melt water before reaching the memorial for the Andrée expedition just next to their old camp site and the former grave of Strindberg, who is now buried with the two other members in Stockholm. In what was once their make shift hut, there now was a few remains of a dead Polar Bear including a large skull. Most of their campsite was still covered in snow but the bundle of rock making out Strindbergs grave was just visible and the monument itself was free of snow. After visiting the memorial one zodiac went back to the ship whereas the rest of us took a walk inland in order to set foot on the large icecap. Heading back to the landing site Troels had relocated the remains of a dead Polar Bear killed and completely eaten last year by another bear. A part of the fur was lying clear to see and touch and the complete head was sticking out of the snow in dramatic fashion. Also on the return several ribs and vertebra from an ancient whale was spotted. Presumably much older than the 17th Century whaling remains found elsewhere in Svalbard as it was lying quite far inland and somewhat above sea level. The land rising after the melting of the innumerable millions of tons of ice from the last ice age must have placed the whale bones here. The island seems to be void of life but in fact it is not so at all. Several species of birds nest here: Arctic terns in particular and we saw both Purple Sandpiper, Kittywakes, and a large group of app. 30 Pomarine Skua.

After lunch Troels lectured on *The History and Exploration of Svalbard* with emphasis on the Andrée expedition skilfully translated by our one and only Delphine.

The day was far from over as we approached Storøya (Large Island) just off the northeast coast of Nordaustlandet. Almost equally alien looking as Kvitøya, Storøya is also very often infested by Polar Bears making landings rather difficult. Walrus also very often haul out here. Landing or not, we were certainly not to be disappointed. We started off in a small bay on the



northern side of the island and came no further. Already from the ship Walrus had been spotted both in the water and hauled out on land. Our expedition staff had also located three Polar Bears on the near coast. The weather had turned to the better and even bit of blue sky was to be seen among the heavy cloud and fog banks drifting to and from. It turned out to be an unforgettable experience for all. We started out with the Walrus hauled out on some rocks just off shore and a large group of at least twenty bulls, females and calves in the water getting more and more trusting as time past. Everybody got a great look at these impressive animals from less than ten meters at times. Indeed, they got so confident that our zodiac drivers occasionally had back off to keep a certain distance. That was just part of this fantastic display of wildlife Storøya had to offer this late afternoon. On the shore we finally counted five Polar Bears within a small area (totalling ten so far on the trip!). Our guides thought that we had to do with a mother and two 2½-year old cubs almost ready to be “kicked out from home”. On top of that we had a sleeping adult who just raised its head once during our excursion and a very poor looking youngster (1½-year old perhaps?) that lay on the beach hardly capable of lifting its head as one of the others came right up to it and investigated. Surely this animal would not live for very much longer. Three of the bears on the beach at less than 50 meters distance from the zodiacs and still a group of ten or so Walrus right up and down the zodiacs being increasingly curious. Not to mention the small Walrus haulout only 50 meters from the resting bears – truly amazing. One could hardly figure out where to point the camera as things were happening everywhere all the time! As we returned to the ship the clouds and fog came in again and as *Mikheev* headed southwest the wind picked up reminding us that we were on a ship in the high Arctic.

After dinner Rolf and Delphine had a short briefing on the following day’s events as well as a lecture on *Ice* in English and French respectively.

11th July 2006 – Barentsøya: Spjutnes and Edgeøya: Kapp Lee

Position at 07.00: 78°22' N / 22°35' E

Air temperature: 7°C, calm, overcast.

Fog! Curse of the Polar summer. Throughout the night we had sailed westwards more or less following the southern coast of Nordaustlandet. At the wakeup call it was still good visibility but as soon as we entered Freemansundet, which is the narrow strait between Barentsøya and Edgeøya, the fog lay heavily on us. Our first landing site was suppose to be Sundneset on the southwest corner of Barentsøya but those plans had to be abandoned due to thick fog. Rolf decided to try “right around the corner” at a small peninsula called Spjutnes. Getting there took an additional hour or so and in the meantime Troels held a lecture on *The Polar Bear*.

The fog was still thick but had lifted just enough for us to make a landing. No long hikes this time but a very enjoyable stroll on the rich tundra. We split into a French and an English speaking group to ease the language barrier and headed slowly down the coast. Despite the fog we thoroughly enjoyed the multitude of flowers here. Several saxifrages species like the tufted, the drooping, the purple, the bog and the hawkweed-leaved saxifrage, as well as the Svalbard poppy, different species of buttercups, the hairy lousewort. The French group settled down enjoying a silent moment on a beautiful natural carpet made of mosses of different kind as well as willow species (the highest tree of all Svalbard growing to about 3 cm high!). We also found numerous large antlers from Reindeer but only the English group spotted a few in the mist.

Optimism concerning the weather conditions for our afternoon landing was not exactly great as we headed towards the north-western corner of Edgeøya for a landing at Dolorittneset, also known as Kapp Lee. Without the fog it is a stunningly beautiful place with high steeply sloping mountains and plains of rich tundra. It is also a known Walrus haulout site. Additionally, quite a bit of history can be told about this place. Just next to our landing site the remains of an old Pomore hut can be seen. These old Russian trappers came and were some of the earliest to over winter in Svalbard. Historians even debate if the Pomores discovered Svalbard before Willem Barentz in 1596. The fog was still lying quite heavy all around with very little of the landscape visible as we climbed a rocky ridge and got an overview over a small collection of huts and equipment. The most interesting of these huts was a small round wooden building erected by the joint Swedish-Russian Arc of the Meridian Expedition of 1899-1902. The expedition is not very famous as nobody died, but was in fact one of the most successful scientific expeditions to the Arctic of the day. Just adjacent to the huts about 20 Walrus were hauled out. Barely to be recognized due to the fog to begin with but after



a while the miracle we all had hoped for began: The fog started to lift! The sun seemed to gain a hold creating an arch in the fog – a mix between a “sun dog” and a rainbow and the snow covered hills suddenly became visible. After some 15 minutes watching the change in weather unfolding the fantastic landscape, Rolf decided to split us up in groups. Delphine would take a group down on the plain behind the huts to look at old remains of the extensive Walrus hunt from earlier centuries were as Rolf took a group walkers higher up in the tundra on the prowl for good views and Reindeer. They did indeed get a good look at a few Reindeer at relatively short distance. Troels stayed behind with the dedicated photographing Walrus fans. It turned out to be an absolutely great landing in the sun after a rather worrying start in the fog. After dinner Delphine (in French) and Rolf and Troels (in English) held a short briefing on tomorrows plans as well as a recap on Reindeer.

12th July 2006 – Southwest Edgeøya: Andréetangen, Tusenøyane: Delitschøya

Position at 07.00: 77°23' N / 22°22' E

Air temperature: 6°C, calm, sunny.

We woke up to great weather for the days activities on the southwest of Edgeøya. We had anchored west off Andréetangen, which was our first landing site of the day. Andréetangen is not named after the famous Swede but after Karl Andrée, a German geographer from the 19th Century. We cruised towards our intended landing site seeing quite a few Walrus in the water. It was a beautiful morning with the stunning scenery bathed in sunlight as we approached land. Soon we saw the old Norwegian trappers hut where we were supposed to land but we got a bit of a surprise. Between 200 and 250 Walrus had hauled in two large wallows very close to the hut making a landing there impossible. In close vicinity of the Walrus some 50 Pink Footed Geese were milling around as well. Instead we cruised around a spit and landed on a small beach opposite the hut. Our expedition team where very surprised that such a massive presence of Walrus was to be found here. Indeed, it was the largest that any of our three guides had ever seen in Svalbard! Unfortunately they were very nervous before we even tried to approach, leading Rolf to the decision to keep a good distance from the animals. It may very well be a quite new (or rather reclaimed) haul out site and driving them in the water could mean that they might leave the haulout for good. This was not a risk our staff was willing to take. Nevertheless, we had good views of this massive concentration of wildlife at a distance. There was also a small pond with a few Long-tailed Ducks swimming around giving us a good chance to observe them as well. We then continued with the original plan of splitting into the three groups. One went hiking with Troels on the tundra plain, a slightly slower group went with Delphine in more or less the same direction, and Rolf took the leisurely party pondering around the beach for a while before sailing them back to the ship. It was a great morning landing in a spectacular setting on a flat tundra plain with melt water rivers flowing from the mountainous inland. The tundra was not at all as rich as we had seen on previous occasions. Despite a multitude of different vegetation mosses were dominant here in the very moist conditions. It was clear to see that the place had previously been used for hunting both Walrus and Polar Bears as bones from both species lay scattered here and there. Arriving back at the landing site most carried some sort of garbage collected on the beaches to be returned to the ship. Lots of garbage comes to the shores of Svalbard by way of the Gulf Stream. It is very unfortunate to see such polluting but at least we did our small part in the clean up. We cannot save Svalbard from garbage but at least we tried.

In the afternoon we were to land on a small island very close to Andr  etangen called Delitsch  ya. Delitsch was another German geographer from the same Century. Our expedition team was aware that on this island there were some of the best preserved blubber ovens from the 17th Century whaling period to be found. Rolf had spent lunch scouting the island for the precise location of the ovens and had found a small beach with two double-ovens conveniently located close to the shore. We landed there in the belief that these ovens were indeed the famous, best-preserved ones within Svalbard. However, there was more to come. Still, they were indeed very well preserved and the story of the whaling period was told using them as practical illustration. The principal quarry of the whalers was the Greenland or Bowhead Whale, which was hunted to the verge of extinction and has not since recovered in numbers. It is in the family of the Right Whales, as they were the right one to pursue, being a slow-moving animal, which could be approached closely. Whalers worked from quite small sailing ships and made voyages of several years. The actual pursuit and capture of the whales was accomplished from rowing boats carrying about six men. Once the boat had managed to approach within a few meters of a gentle giant, hand harpoons were thrown into its body, and when the whale was finally exhausted it was killed with hand lances. The Bowhead whales were towed back to camp, where the oil and the baleen were extracted. Now only the few remains of this once important economic society remains.



We pondered around the site trying to imagine how the place must have been like almost 400 years ago as Rolf told the story of the whalers. Rolf then decided to split us up in a French and an English speaking group to walk a bit on this rather small basalt island. The vegetation was again dominated by mosses and lichens and yet different from

the landing in the morning only a few miles away. Delphine and Rolf went with the French speaking towards a pond on the central part of the island and Troels led the English speaking in a slightly different direction towards the same pond. Climbing a small ridge Troels suddenly spotted another set of blubber ovens in even better condition, which also fitted the picture in the newspaper better. We all headed to the new site and were stunned by how well preserved this double oven was. Located just above the oven were the foundations of a house with an adjacent foundation of what could have been a small storage room. What an exciting way to end a great day!

13th June 2006 – Hornsund

Position at 07.30: 76°50' N / 15°20' E

Air temperature: 6°C, strong breeze, overcast.

We had covered more than 150 nautical miles during the night and were once again on the west coast of Spitsbergen. This time in the southwest close to the large Hornsund fjord

system. We had hoped for a normal morning landing in a bay on the southern side of the fjord but due to strong winds this had to be cancelled. Instead, we headed across to the northern side ships cruising the beautiful glaciers of Burgerbukta. Although sheltered from the wind there was little shelter from the rain that was pouring down here. Most of us stayed on the bridge to look at the almost vertical cliff sides and the large glacier front where bits and pieces kept falling.

Hornsund and most of its topographical features were named by the Austrian count Wilczek's expedition to Spitsbergen and Novaya Zemlya in 1872. We manage to get 500 m inside the Paierlglaicer at the end of Vestre Burgerbukta (West Burgerbukta) – according to the measurement on the chart that is. The extent of the glacier is likely last measured in 1990. The depth was more than 160 meters and assuming that the ice is resting on the bedrock and extending about 20 meters above the surface, some 160 mio m³ of ice has melted off since the chart was produced.

The *Mikheev* continued to cruise into the Austre Burgerbukta, and Selbukta before stopping at the entrance of the innermost bay of Hornsund called Brepollen just before lunch. During this time the weather had cleared somewhat and the wind had gone down. Rolf and Stephane also held a lecture on glaciers in English and French respectively.

“And then down in falls came the rain”. Although not quite as much as the author of the famous poem wanted to illustrate, the clouds were low and the rain started again after lunch. The ship cruised in between the many “bergy bits” recently calved from the mighty glaciers of Storbreen (Great Glacier), Hornbreen, Svalsibreen, and Mendeleevbreen, which all terminate in this area. The captain and his officers on watch once again skilfully navigated close to a couple of these massive ice fronts, which once again proved to have retreated dramatically since the chart had last been updated. At the turning point close to the 4 kilometres wide front of Storbreen, we were almost one nautical mile inside the glacier according to the chart; more than 1.5 kilometres!



Turning to the other grand glacier, Hornbreen, the captain brought us even closer to the glacier front indeed. The rain had stopped and made the outside decks somewhat more pleasant places to be than earlier. On a very low part of the glacier some

old Polar Bear tracks had been spotted and since the depth was ample to go close we came within 10 meters of the front. Spectacular by any standard and it just got better as our doctor Mathias suddenly started talking to Delphine in German (which she does not understand). Eventually she saw what he meant: A mother with two small cubs walking on top of the

heavily crevassed glacier. Sensational! Our expedition team had many times told us that Polar Bears can be found anywhere and here was the proof. Initially, it looked like she was coming down towards us but she changed her mind and headed up and out of sight. It was a short but sweet sight of bears no. 10, 11, and 12.

After the bear encounter, the *Mikheev* headed for the small bay of Samarinvågen where we boarded the zodiacs for a cruise along the glacier front. Although it initially rained a bit it was completely calm and thoroughly enjoyable. Bits and pieces dropped once in a while as we cruised past on our last zodiac encounter with glaciers of the trip.

Shortly after returning to the ship it was dinner time. This dinner however, was not quite as normal as it consisted of a BBQ on the aft deck with the spectacular glacier fronts as back drop. Not a bad view for our second last meal!

14th June 2006 – Isfjord: Alkhornet and Skansbukta

Position at 07.30: 78°04' N / 13°23' E

Air temperature: 7°C, light breeze, mostly cloudy

The last day had come and we were back in Isfjord and for the first time crossing our own track from ten days ago. Our first landing was to be at Alkhornet on the northern side of Isfjord. Alkhornet is famous for its majestic high cliff with thousands of birds nesting, but also for the lush tundra below the rocks. Here we went ashore in nice weather, cloudy but calm, and were immediately greeted by a pair of Glaucous Gulls and there rather large chicks close by. We started all together and headed along the mossy tundra to get a bit closer to a few grazing Reindeer. They were quite cooperative and soon the initial four became seven including both mature males with large antlers and females and yearling calves. We slowly followed the Reindeer along the tundra in order to reach a small ridge, which is often inhabited by a fox family. On the way between the many Reindeer photo options we saw impressive frost patterned ground with rather deep natural trenches around caused by ice wedges below. It is not always the leading party that gets all the good stuff as was very well proven this morning. The trailing lot suddenly saw an Arctic Fox appearing and it just kept coming closer and closer. It was a very curious fox indeed and ended up less than ten meters from the slowest of us. That was just to be the first encounter with foxes of the day as we later saw the cubs at the rocky ridge that our guides had told us about. Looking at the foxes we had visitors coming by: a large Reindeer male with great big antlers came right up to us, grazed and looked at us with the typical puzzled look of a Reindeer and left in an orderly fashion. It was time to split up in groups. Some of us would like to stretch our legs a bit and Rolf organized it so that the keen photographers could stay around the fox cubs and hope for closer encounters whereas Troels climbed up the slope to steeper grounds for the fantastic view and a lot more Reindeer close up and personal. Rolf later took a more leisurely party around the tundra leaving Delphine with the foxes. We could have asked for nothing more this morning. Some had cautiously asked about our chance for Reindeers and others would have liked more foxes on the trip. Everybody got all of that and lots of it!



During lunch we started the second last leg of our trip. The *Mikheev* headed further into the Isfjord where we would visit Skansbukta. It was a bit of a sail before the landing and in the meantime Jan settled all accounts and Delphine organized an engine room tour.

Skansbukta is a small bay with high mountains all around. Once gybson was mined here and the old remains of railway and other mining equipment is still to be seen. The railway is build on the debris of the mine itself and runs from the old mine shaft in the hill side to the coast. Now of course everything is in decay and the mine shaft has been sealed off to prevent accidents. The mine is located in the middle of the beach and on the southern side is a relatively modern private hut and on the northern side an old shipwreck high on the beach. High on the mountain side a Kittywake colony would surely keep visitors to the hut awake at night. On the hillside we also found a dead Arctic Fox, which obviously had died during winter since it still hat its winter fur. Here was a good chance to see why the long tail of the fox do not freeze in winter: incredible thick fur keeps it warm in all conditions. It was a really nice and relaxing last landing as everybody could do their own thing at their own pace. The rifles were spread out so that there was plenty of time to botanise, enjoy the scenery and explore the historical remains in between them.

After dinner there was still time to see one last glacier. The ship cruised along the mighty Nordenskiöldbreen. An amazing end to a very successful trip.

15th July 2006 – Loneyearbyen

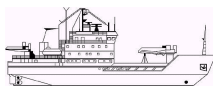
Position at 09.00: 78°14' N / 15°39' E

Everybody left the ship at 9 am and headed to town for hotel check in. All had one more day to comprehend the events of the last 10 days as no flights were leaving this particular day. It is always sad to leave after a good experience but the memories will live on.





- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Fjortende Julibukta | 14. Sundneset |
| 2. Ny Ålesund | 15. Spjutneset |
| 3. Kongsvegen | 16. Kap Leet |
| 4. Moffen | 17. Andréetangen |
| 5. Mushamna | 18. Delitschøya |
| 6. Andøyane | 19. Gåshamna |
| 7. Monacobreen | 20. Vestre & Austre Burgerbukta |
| 8. Alkefjellet | 21. Brepollen |
| 9. Torellneset | 22. Samarinvågen |
| 10. Wahlenbergbreen | 23. Alkhornet |
| 11. Ice / 82°N | 24. Skansbukta |
| 12. Kvitøya | 25. Nordenskjöldbreen |
| 13. Storøya | |

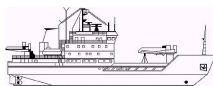


Species list for Round Spitsbergen aboard Grigoriy Mikheev

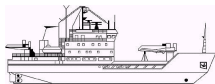
5-15 July 2006

Liste des espèces animales observées durant le voyage autour du
Spitzberg à bord du Grigory Mikheev du 5 au 15 juillet 2006

Common English Name	Nom Français	Latin name
Red-throated diver	Plongeon catmarin	<i>Gavia stellata</i>
Northern Fulmar	Fulmar arctique	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>
Pink-footed Goose	Oie à bec court	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>
Barnacle Goose	Bernache nonnette	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>
Brent Goose	Bernache cravant	<i>Branta bernicla</i>
Common Eider	Eider à duvet	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>
Long-tailed Duck	Harelda de miquelon	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>
Ringed Plover	Grand gravelot	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
Sanderling	Bécasseau sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>
Purple Sandpiper	Bécasseau violet	<i>Calidris maritima</i>
Grey Phalarope	Phalarope à bec étroit	<i>Phalaropus fulicarius</i>
Arctic Skua	Labbe parasite	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>
Great Skua	Grand labbe	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>
Pomarine Skua	Labbe pomarin	<i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i>
Long-tailed Skua	Labbe à longue queue	<i>Stercorarius longicaudis</i>
Great Black-backed Gull	Goéland marin	<i>Larus marinus</i>
Glaucous Gull	Goéland bourgmestre	<i>Larus hyperboreus</i>
Kittiwake	Mouette tridactyle	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>
Ivory Gull	Mouette ivoire	<i>Pagophila eburnea</i>
Sabine's Gull	Mouette de Sabine	<i>Rissa sabini</i>
Arctic Tern	Sterne arctique	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>
Brunnich's Guillemot	Guillemot de Brunnich	<i>Uria lomvia</i>
Black Guillemot	Guillemot à miroir	<i>Cepphus grylle</i>
Little Auk	Mergule nain	<i>Alle alle</i>
Razorbill	Pingouin torda	<i>Alca torda</i>
Atlantic Puffin	Macareux moine	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>
Snow Bunting	Bruant des neiges	<i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>
Walrus	Morse	<i>Odobenus rosmarus</i>
Bearded seal	Phoque barbu	<i>Erignathus barbatus</i>
Ringed seal	Phoque annelé	<i>Phoca hispida</i>
Harp seal	Phoque du Groenland	<i>Pagophilus groenlandicus</i>
Polar Bear	Ours polaire	<i>Ursus maritimus</i>
Arctic Fox	Renard polaire	<i>Alopex lagopus</i>
Svalbard Reindeer	Renne du Svalbard	<i>Rangifer tarandus platyrhynchus</i>
Minke whale	Petit rorqual	<i>Balaenoptera acurostrata</i>



Latin name	English common name	Nom français
<i>Salix polaris</i>	Polar Willow	Saule nain
<i>Salix reticulata</i>	Net-leaved willow	Saule réticulé
<i>Ranunculus nivalis</i>	Snow Buttercup	Renoncule des neiges
<i>Ranunculus lapponicus</i>	Lapland Buttercup	Renoncule lapone
<i>Ranunculus hyperboreus</i>	Arctic Buttercup	Renoncule hyperboréale
<i>Ranunculus sulphureus</i>	Sulphur-coloured Buttercup	Renoncule sulfureuse
<i>Ranunculus pygmaeus</i>	Pigmy Buttercup	Renoncule naine
<i>Ranunculus pedatifidus</i>	Lobed Buttercup	Renoncule à pétales lobés.
<i>Dryas octopetala</i>	Mountain Avens	Dryade à huit pétales
<i>Saxifraga aizoides</i>	Yellow Mountain Saxifrage	Saxifrage jaune des montagnes
<i>Saxifraga hieracifolia</i>	Hawkweed-leaved Saxifrage	Saxifrage à feuilles épervières
<i>Saxifraga oppositifolia</i>	Purple Saxifrage	Saxifrage à feuilles opposées
<i>Saxifraga nivalis</i>	Alpine Saxifrage	Saxifrage arctique
<i>Saxifraga hirculus</i>	Bog Saxifrage	Saxifrage oeil de bouc
<i>Saxifraga cernua</i>	Drooping Saxifrage	Saxifrage penchée
<i>Saxifraga rivularis</i>	Brook Saxifrage	Saxifrage des ruisseaux
<i>Saxifraga cespitosa</i>	Tufted Saxifrage	Saxifrage cespiteuse
<i>Papaver dahlianum</i>	Svalbard Poppy	Pavot arctique
<i>Polygonum viviparum</i>	Viviparous Knotweed	Renouée vivipare
<i>Oxyria digyna</i>	Mountain Sorrel	Oxyria à deux carpelles
<i>Minuartia rubella</i>	Alpine Sandwre	Minuartia rougeâtre
<i>Silene acaulis</i>	Moss Campion	Silène acaule
<i>Cassiope tetragona</i>	White Arctic Bell-heather	Cassiopé tétragone
<i>Pedicularis hirsute</i>	Hairy Lousewort	Pédiculaire hirsute
<i>Pedicularis dasyantha</i>	Woolly Lousewort	Pédiculaire laineuse
<i>Silene wahlbergella</i>	Nodding Lychnis	Mellandrie
<i>Cochlearia officinalis</i>	Scurvy-Grass	Cransson officinal
<i>Braya purpurascens</i>	Purplish Braya	Braya sp
<i>Stellaria crassipes</i>	Chickweed	Stellaire sp
<i>Stellaria Himifusa</i>	Arctic Chickweed	Stellaire sp
<i>Cerastium arcticum</i>	Arctic Mouse-Ear Chickweed	Ceraiste arctique
<i>Draba sp.</i>	Arctic Whitlow-grass	Drave
<i>Potentilla pulchella</i>	Tufted Cinquefoil	Potentille sp.
<i>Potentilla hyparctica</i>	Arctic Cinquefoil	Potentille sp.



Total length of this trip
1441,5 nm / 2669,7 km / 1668,6 statute miles

Text by Troels
Photos by Troels
Map by Rolf
Species list and e-mail list by Delphine
Drawing by Placido Castaldi
Staff hero pics by various

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