



OCEANWIDE
EXPEDITIONS

Lofoten

25 November-02 December 2008

on board

S/V Noorderlicht



The *Noorderlicht* was originally built in 1910, in Flensburg. For most of her life she served as a light vessel on the Baltic. Then, in 1991 the present owners purchased the ship and re-rigged and re-fitted her thoroughly, according to the rules of 'Register Holland'. *Noorderlicht* is 46 metres long and 6.5 metres breadth, a well-balanced, two-masted schooner rig that is able to sail all seas.

With:

Captain:	Ted Broeckhuijzen (Netherlands)
First mate:	Renske Ritzema (Netherlands)
Chef:	Sonja Berkel (Niederlande)
Guide:	Rolf Stange (Germany)

And 20 brave polar explorers from Austria, France, Latvia, The Netherlands, Russia, Switzerland and The United Kingdom

25 November 2008 – Lødingen

Position at 1700: 68°24'N /16°E. Calm, gentle snowfall, 1°C

The first bit of sub-arctic soil that we set our feet on was the the runway of the little airport of Evenes near Harstad, north of Narvik, the largest town in the area. A local bus took us to Lødingen, a small village with a harbour at a place where several large fjords met. We saw two high masts proudly sticking up into the cold air, and soon we went on board the schooner *Noorderlicht*, which would be our home for the next week to come. We had a good look around – everything on board the *Noorderlicht* seemed to breathe a spirit of adventure and tradition, but was very purpose-serving at the same time.

We moved into our cabins, stored our luggage away and then met with the friendly crew. Captain Ted and Rolf welcomed us once again, introduced the ship and her crew, gave us some information about life on board and about some important safety issues. Sonja soon disappeared into the galley to prepare dinner, while Renske gave us a briefing about safety procedures in case disaster would strike, but we were confident it wouldn't.

Finally it was time to try what our chef Sonja had prepared in her little gally. We realised soon that the mealtimes were really something to look forward to, three times every day. In the meantime, we sailed out into Isfjord. Our sub-arctic adventure was about to begin!

We spent a calm night in the harbour of Lødingen, while snowfall calmly covered our ship with a white, soft insulation layer.



A true sub-arctic journey is just about to start!

26 November 2008 – Ofoten Fjord, Vestfjord, Skrova

Position at 0800: 68°24'N /16°E. Gentle snowfall, 0°C

The day started with a *Noorderlicht*-style breakfast, before the firealarm was sounded – neither the engine room nor lunch were going up in flames and smoke, it was only an exercise, and out on deck we were met by our first mate Renske who gave us some more instructions and information about the ship. Dressed with every warm layer we possibly could, we spent the morning on deck, as the *Noorderlicht* worked her way against a light southwesterly breeze, not much at all, but enough to slow us down a bit on our way through the wide fjord called Ofoten and into the even wider Vestfjord. It did not take long until sharp eyes spotted the first eagles. The area seemed to have a good population, as there would be many more sightings during the next days.

But the hope that most of us had secretly kept, viewing Orcas, remained wishful thinking, at least for the moment. The large herring swarms that attract the Orcas had obviously not (yet?) reached the area, and not a single fluke came into view.

In the later afternoon, we entered a sheltered little harbour on the west side of the small island of Skrova. Soon, we were alongside and all of us, including those who had found out that the human body was originally designed for solid ground, were up and about to go for a little walk. We decided to have a look at the largest settlement of the area – an easy choice as there was only one village on the island – and soon found out that there was no risk of getting lost. But the charme of such a small, north-Norwegian fishing village, located on a small island that could only be reached by boat, with a little harbour and its many small, colourfully painted, wooded houses, all covered with snow and under a sky with countless stars, cannot be described – you have to have seen it yourself!

After dinner, things got even better as the first northern light of our voyage was seen – weak, but clearly identifiable. Rolf took the hint and invited us down to the *Noorderlicht* university to give us an introduction to this fascinating phenomenon, which had been high on the wishlist for this trip for many of us. After an explanation of the physics, he also told us about some of the myths and legends that people of the northern countries had told for many generations to explain and interpret this mysterious glow on the polar winter sky.

27 November 2008 – Lofoten: Skrova, Henningsvær

Position at 0800: 68°10'N /14°40'E. Some snowfall, gentle breeze from northeast, -2°C.

The plan for the morning was to cross the island of Skrova and to climb its highest mountain. Soon after breakfast, we went to business, and at 0900 we were ready for our adventure. Walking over two small bridges – the village was actually located on two small skerries just off the "main island" of Skrova – we followed the road and then a snow-covered path

towards the eastern side of the island. Other people cross Greenland or Antarctica, we cross Skrova – just don't tell anybody at home that there is a slight difference regarding the sizes of these places, and it'll sound just as impressive!

After less than one hour, we had reached a lovely little bay with a sand beach and some near-by, deserted houses – at a different season with slightly more attractive temperatures, many of us would certainly have ventured on a swim – to be greeted by a pair of eagles that were circling in the air above us. What a view! We also took the opportunity to arrange a group photo, before we



turned around to start the second part of the adventure, which was an attempt to climb "Skrovahøgda" (Mount Skrova), the summit of which was located at 258 or 281 m above sea level, depending on which map one was using. We agreed on 2800 decimeters.

The track took us up and down some rocky hills and the first ones in the row burnt some serious calories while creating a path in the deep snow. After a while, we got the place that allowed to ascend the summit, a steep, rocky slope, but some fixed ropes made it clear where to go and easy and safe to ascend.



Ascending Skrovahøgda: hard work in deep snow ...



... but the view is certainly worth all of it!

The view from the top was certainly worth the effort: Ofoten Fjord, where we had come from yesterday, in the east, the large and open Vestfjord to the south, "Lofotveggen", the "Lofoten wall" (referring to the mountain range that appears as a wall as you approach from the distance with a ship) in the west and the large, mountaineous island of Hinnøya in the north. Skrova itself with several small, adjacent rocky skerries, shallow bays with green water and the little village was just as scenic. The sky was mostly clear despite this morning's snowfall, and the colours were amazing. We did not miss to put

our names down into the guestbook – to our great disappointment, we had to realize that we were not the first ones to climb this mountain – before we started the way down again, as it was quite cold in the breeze.

We were all back on board just in time for a well-deserved lunch, while the *Noorderlicht* already left the harbour to set course out into Vestfjord. Our next destination was Henningsvær on Austvågøya (Lofoten), but Ted decided to take advantage of the gentle breeze – excellent sailing



Sailing sub-arctic waters in the polar night requires knowledge and experience!

conditions, so soon after lunch, the sails went up into the wind and we turned the bow into Vestfjord, also of course hoping to find some exciting marine wildlife. Only when the sunlight faded, we finally set course due east to Henningsvær, where we arrived shortly before dinner. After dinner, we went for a short walk to explore the village, which for centuries had been one of the most important fishing places in the region. Located on several small islands just off the large island of Austvågøya, Henningsvær is now famous for its scenic appearance with its many small, colourful wooden houses.

In more recent years, a research institution called "Ocean Sounds" had been opened, and Rolf had arranged a presentation for us. At 2000, we were welcomed by a German lady called Heike who had chosen to settle down there and who introduced us with stunning images to the marine wildlife of the area. Her research was focussed on acoustic communication of Orcas and she could tell us that the complexity of her research object was not far from that of human language. The presentation was highly interesting, but unfortunately Heike could not make us very optimistic regarding our chances to see Orcas during the next days: not only that the numbers of Orcas visiting these waters had decreased during recent years, but they had also changed their behaviour. Instead of spending weeks feeding on herring, they just came in briefly to check the availability of food and left again, always travelling at great speed.

28 November 2008 – Lofoten: Henningsvær, Svolvær

Position at 0800: 68°10'N /14°12'E. Some snowfall, gentle breeze from northeast, -2°C.

We took the opportunity to have a look at Henningsvær in "daylight" before we departed at 1100. The plan was to reposition to Svolvær, only a few miles to the north, but as there was very little wind and seas were calm, we took the opportunity to make the best of these good conditions by sailing out into Vestfjord, hoping for whale observations. We spent several hours cruising out into Vestfjord, then northwards towards Skrova and finally, as daylight started to fade, westwards, heading for the



Fish racks in Henningsvær, the Venice of the North

protected harbour of Svolvær where we wanted to spend the night, unfortunately without any sightings of marine mammals despite of combined efforts of all of us on board the *Noorderlicht*. Shortly after 1500 (about half an hour after sunset, in other words), we went alongside in Svolvær. Soon we went on a little walk to explore the town, which is called the "capital" of Lofoten. Indeed it is the biggest place with several thousand inhabitants and it has the largest number of shops, other infrastructure and administration. We had to discover, though, that most of Svolvær's famed installations were closed on a Friday afternoon in late November, but a short walk through the central parts of this sub-arctic metropolis was nevertheless atmospheric.

After dinner, the arrival of the Hurtigruten ship, the coastal post steamer that carries not only letters and postcards, but also passengers and all sorts of goods, motivated the owners of some of the local attractions to open their locations. We made use of this opportunity and went to the

wartime museum, where many sad stories from the days of WWII in this region were told and many uniforms, pictures, weapons and other artefacts were on display. We spent some time to learn about the tragic events of those years, before we went on to lighten our minds up again in "Magic Ice", a combined bar/gallery completely made of ice! The crystal-clear sculptures looked almost like diamonds, and the atmosphere could appropriately be described as "cool".



The Noorderlicht in Svolvær, the "capital" of Lofoten.

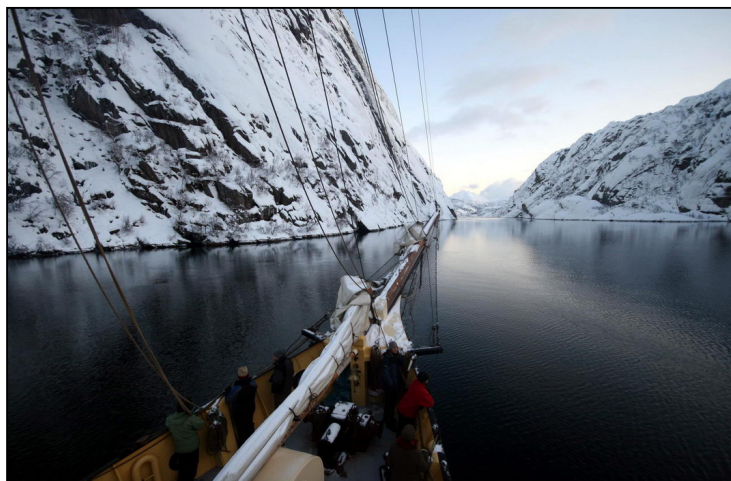
29 November 2008 – Trollfjord, Kabelvåg

Position at 0800: 68°14'N /14°34'E. Calm, some cloud cover, -1°C.

We had considered some hiking in the area between Svolvær and Kabelvåg further south, but the deep, soft snow made this option rather less attractive and we decided to head for the famous Trollfjord, one of the major natural attractions of the area. Heading northeastwards, we left Svolvær behind us and passed Skrova to enter Raftsund, the narrow natural channel that separated Austvågøya (the northeasternmost island in Lofoten) from Hinnøya (Vesterålen). Steep, snow-covered mountains were rising to both sides of Raftsund, and tiny little settlements, or rather loose aggregations of single houses – we were wondering what people might be doing in such isolated places?

Suddenly Sonja appeared with a large tray to treat us with hot chocolate on the outer deck. A very nice idea and excellent to get warm again, very useful as we were all on strict Orca watch, keeping a good watch on the water surface.

Finally Ted steered the *Noorderlicht* towards the steep rockwalls on the western side of Raftsund – or so it seemed at least, until the narrow entrance to Trollsund opened just ahead of us. The landscape that now emerged around us cannot possibly be described with words. Trollfjord has sometimes been described as cut into the rocks with an axe by a giant, and being there, face-to-face with the place, who would say that this might not be true?



Trollfjord, one of the most famous places in Norway.

The entrance was narrower than 100 metres, but further in, the fjord widened to a slightly more open basin, surrounded by a number of peaks towering near 1000 metres above us. Ted stopped the engine, so we could marvel in silence, the most appropriate way of admiring this timeless landscape.

Finally it was lunchtime, and Sonja's good meal got our feet back on the ground again. In the afternoon, we left Raftsund behind us, sailing down the eastern side of Storemolla, so we had circumnavigated this island today, sailing as much of these waters, which are said to have good potential for Orca sightings as daylight allowed. Finally it got dark, and we entered the small harbour of Kabelvåg, south of Svolvær.

We went for a little walk to discover that Kabelvåg was a very picturesque place, but not really big. On the "torget" (market-place), a little christmas market was held in some tents. Some of us made a walk to the church, a relatively large building dating into the 19th century, but located on a place where the oldest church of the area was built. Kabelvåg had indeed a very long local



Viking king Øystein in Kabelvåg.

history, as it was there that the oldest community in the region, called Vågar or Vågar, was situated, and kings, bishops and merchants made this a centre of their activities in northern Norway for centuries during the middle ages. Only in relatively recent years Kabelvåg ("chapel bay") had to give way to Svolvær, that had attracted more functions in the meantime.

Another monument from the old days was the statue of King Øystein, who was standing on a little hill with a good view over Kabelvåg.

In the later afternoon, Rolf invited us to the conference hall on board the *Noorderlicht* to introduce us to his second home Spitsbergen, another remote group of islands, even further north than Lofoten. Stunning photos indeed, and while weeks of hiking across glaciers and large rivers seemed to be more enjoyable from a warm, dry sofa, a ship-based journey in these high-arctic waters was indeed something that some of us might be tempted to in the future.

In the evening, some of us frequented the *Noorderlicht* bar, whilst others ventured on another stroll through Kabelvåg. There was indeed one location that could be attended on a Sunday evening for those who were out after a beer.

30 November 2008 – Vestfjord

Position at 0800: 68°13'N /14°29'E. Cloudy, some snowshowers, northeasterly breeze, -1°C.

Today it was time to turn our stern towards "Lofotveggen", the mountainous backbone of the Lofoten mountains, and to cross Vestfjorden again towards the mainland of Norway. The wind direction was not exactly favourable, but we nevertheless went viking-style across Vestfjord, sails up into the cold, arctic air and criss-crossing back and forth against the wind, all the time hoping for the large dorsal fin of an Orca to be seen between the waves, but unfortunately without success. But we had great views of Lofoten to the west, Vesterålen to the north and the mainland with off-lying islands (mainly Hamarøy) to the east, and the pleasure of a sea-journey under sail.

In the late afternoon, when we approached the somewhat more protected waters of Ofotfjord, Rolf invited us once again for a talk, this time slightly more technical, elaborating on some basic concepts and techniques within geology, to give us an overview of dating techniques and how they should be interpreted to decipher the secrets of Earth history.

In the later afternoon *Noorderlicht* entered the tiny port of Tranøy, a small village on the northern tip of the island of Hamarøya. A village like many others in Scandinavia north of the polar circle, its name was famous because of the Norwegian writer and poet Knud Hamsun, who had received the literature nobel prize in the 1920s, but got later accused for having sympathized with the Norwegian Nazi-party during the war years. Hamsun himself had never made a secret of his inclination towards the fascists – he had met Goebbels and Hitler – but nowadays it is doubted if he had actually been a member of the Norwegian "Quisling" party.

Anyway, apart from a gallery and some small art installations, Tranøy was now again a small fishing village, not too much going on during a Sunday evening in late November. The *Noorderlicht* cinema opened its hatches for a screening of *Deep Blue*, a stunning BBC documentary of the underwater world.

01 December 2008 – Tranøy, Lødingen

Position at 0800: 68°11'N / 15°40'E. Cloudy, some snowshowers, northeasterly breeze, -1°C.

After two rather lazy days, it was time to get some exercise, and after breakfast we ventured on a little walk that should finally take us to the lighthouse on the other side of the island. We discovered that the ship that was on the pier next to us was a museum boat, an old whaling ship with a harpoon gun on the bow.

The islanders seemed to have some sense of humour, as we passed a sign that directed visitors that might be looking for a multistorey car park towards the harbour – 283 empty spaces were announced! This might well be true: we had not seen too many cars going that way.

Soon thereafter we passed Hamsun's gallery, that housed a little exhibition dedicated to the famed poet (but unfortunately closed) and left Tranøy behind us. A sideway took us across the island to the lighthouse ("Tranøy fyr"), that was situated on some small rocky islands which were connected by a bridge. A few houses were standing around the lighthouse; a remote, windswept place where lighthousekeepers of past decades had spent their lives. Today, occasional tourists can spend a night there during the summer season.

A stone near the bridge had a plaque to commemorate the wartime catastrophe of D/S Barøy. The sign says (in Norwegian) "D/S Barøy, owned by O.D.S, went in traffic between Trondheim and Narvik. On 12-9-1941 it took passengers in Skutvik on board, destined for Narvik. At 03.30, it was hit by a torpedo that had been dropped by an English aircraft. D/S Barøy sank quickly off Tranøy lighthouse. The following persons from Hamarøy died: (five Norwegian names and villages). Additionally, 18 of the crew, 54 passengers and 35 Germans died. Only 17 were



The lighthouse near Tranøy.



We were surprised by the art we found anywhere in this nordic landscape.

saved by D/S Skjerstad. Erected by Hamarøy association for local history, 2002." (D/S = Damskip = steam ship, O.D.S. = Ofoten dampskip selskap = Ofoten steamship company).

Large swarms of smaller fish (probably fjord herring) were seen in a little tidal channel under the bridge, mostly hiding in seaweed from several larger fish (cod?) that were chasing them. Also an otter was briefly spotted.

A cold wind blew dark clouds and snowshowers over some low-lying, rocky hills, and on the way back, many took the opportunity to walk on their own to get a more intense feeling of the loneliness of this remote, rather desolated place.

In Tranøy, we still had time to visit a little open-air-exhibition of nature photographs before it was time to get back on board. Soon we had left the harbour behind us. Sails went up, and a friendly breeze blew us with 6-7 knots deeper into Ofotfjord, while we were enjoying lunch. Soon thereafter, warm clothes and binoculars were put into use once again, trying to make the best out of every minute with daylight, hoping for an Orca sighting. Unfortunately, these large dolphins seemed to be hiding elsewhere, so we enjoyed sailing silently with nice views of this sub-arctic landscape on either side until darkness.

In the later afternoon, Rolf called us together for a final briefing where explained the logistical details of disembarkation, before he invited us for a last presentation,

this time quite light-minded, with some images he had taken during a several months long stay in East Greenland, where he had made some good experience with dog sledging.

At dinnertime, we were already alongside in Lødingen, and in the evening, it was time to pack, although rumour had it that some of us went on to explore Monday night life in this sub-arctic metropolis, to find out that this was mostly limited to a beer in the near-by "Bryggen"-hotel.

02 December 2008 – Lødingen

Position at 0800: 68°24'N / 16°E. Weather: sub-arctic. Temperature: cold.

It was hard to say goodbye to the *Noorderlicht*, that had been our home during an exciting week, and to her crew and our fellow passengers. Some of us had to take the bus to the regional airport at Evenes at 08.55, while others had some more time until they followed the same way later.

It was difficult to believe that within a few hours we should be back to the haze and dazzle of big city life in Oslo and soon elsewhere on Earth, but most of us knew already now that this was possibly the first, but definitely not the last visit to the far north.

*Thank you very much for travelling with us!
Best wishes & see you again,
somewhere on either side of the polar circle!*

Rolf made this triplog.

This triplog and the group photo can be downloaded from: www.Spitzbergen.de

For more information, please see
www.oceanwide-expeditions.com
www.noorderlicht.nu

Visit Heike Vester and her **Orca research project**, based in Henningsvær, at
www.ocean-sounds.com

Lectures and presentations:

26 November	Aurora borealis – the Northern Light	Rolf
27 November	The marine environment in the Lofoten area	Heike Vester (Ocean Sounds, Henningsvær)
29 November	Spitsbergen	Rolf
30 November	Time and Earth history – a short introduction to some basic concepts of geology	Rolf
30 November	Deep Blue	Film
01 December	Scoresbysund Hot Dogs. Dog sledging in East Greenland.	Rolf

Sunrise and sunset:

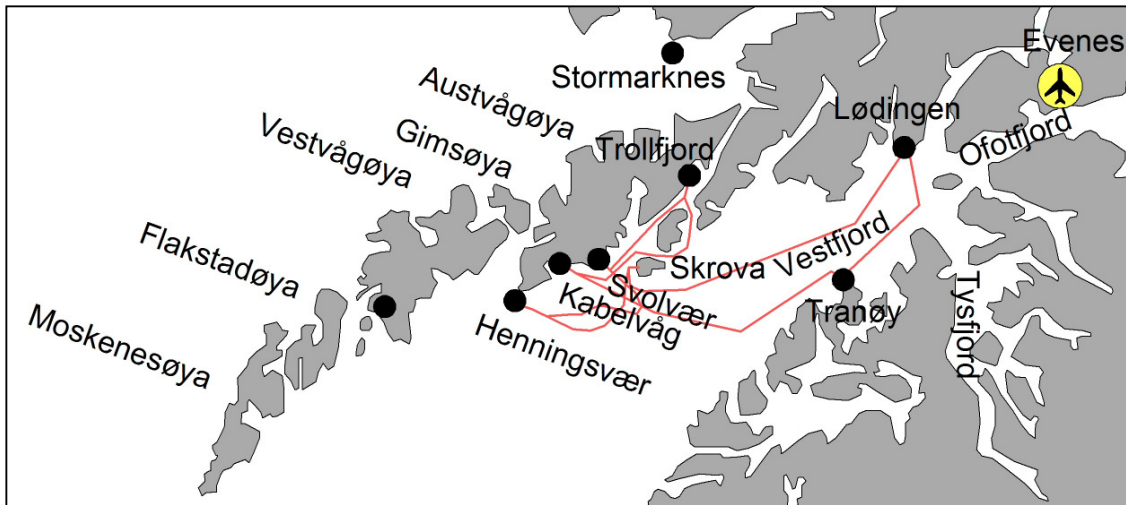
Date	Position	Latitude/Longitude	Sunrise (UTM-1 = local time)	Sunset (UTM-1 = local time)	Sunlight duration hours/minutes
26.11.	Lødingen	68°24'N /16°E	11.02	14.23	3.12
27.11.	Skrova	68°10'N /14°40'E	11.07	14.29	3.22
28.11.	Henningsvær	68°10'N /14°12'E	11.12	14.28	3.16
29.11.	Svolvær	68°14'N /14°34'E	11.14	14.25	3.11
30.11	Kabelvåg	68°13'N /14°29'E	11.13	14.27	3.14
01.12.	Tranøy	68°11'N /15°40'E	10.57	14.34	3.37
02.12.	Lødingen	68°24'N /16°E	-/-	-/-	0



The crew of SV Noorderlicht: Ted, Renske and Sonja ...



... 21 brave polar explorers from eight different countries.



1. Lødingen
2. Skrova
3. Henningsvær
4. Svolvær
5. Trollfjord
6. Kabelvåg
7. Tranøy
8. Lødingen



Never leave the ship without an Orca!

Photo: Aurore Gaiffe