



OCEANWIDE  
EXPEDITIONS

## Expedition Log North Spitsbergen

15<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2007

aboard the

*M/V Professor Multanovskiy*



The *Professor Multanovskiy* is an ex-research vessel from the Arctic and Antarctic Institute in St. Petersburg, Russia. She was built in 1983 in Finland, and was designed as an ice-strengthened ship. She measures 71.6 metres (236 ft) in length and 12.8 metres (42 ft) across the beam. She draws 4.5 metres (15 ft) which enables her to move through relatively shallow waters. Her tonnage is metric 2140 metric tonnes. Oceanwide Expeditions is fully responsible for the management and operation of the *Professor Multanovskiy*.

Professor Boris Pompeevich Multanovskiy was born in the Russia in 1876. He was a famous long-range weather forecaster. Not only did he have a ship named after him, but also a beautiful mountain on the Kamchatka Peninsula. He died in 1938.

With

**Captain: Igor Stetsun, Russia**  
and his crew of 19 from St. Petersburg, Russia

and

Expedition Leader – Rolf Stange (Germany)  
Guide/Lecturer – Elke Lindner (Germany)  
Guide/Lecturer – Rico Behlke (Germany/Svalbard)  
Purser – Charly Gores (Germany/South Africa)  
Chefs – Ben Vidmar (USA) & Richi Arokiasamy (Malaysia)  
Doctor – Dr. Klaus Schuur (Germany)

**And 43 of us from Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, South Africa, Spain, UK, USA**

### **15<sup>th</sup> June 2007 – Longyearbyen - Tempelfjord**

Position at 5 p.m.: 78° 14' N/15° 39' E

Air temperature: 8° C, light westerly, light cloud

In the evening we left the Norwegian settlement of Longyearbyen. We were happy to finish all the



mandatory briefings and safety exercises, including trying on our life-preservers and testing out the lifeboats, before dinner. We were then able to get out on deck to enjoy the beautiful scenery of our first day in the Arctic, as we cruised away from Longyearbyen. The first part of our voyage took us eastward to the scenic Tempelfjord. At the entrance of the fjord there is a high, steep, flat-topped mountain from which this fjord takes its name.

On the south side of the fjord, at the entrance into *Sassendalen* (Sassen Valley) which is one of the big valleys on Spitsbergen, we could see the old hut known by the name of 'Fredheim', which belonged to the famous trapper Hilmar Nois. He used this hut for more than 20 years. A few kilometres to the west, *Vindodden* was visible. This is an area with around 20 huts belonging to inhabitants of Longyearbyen who use them on weekend trips. At the very end of the fjord the Tuna Glacier (deeply crevassed, with a 50 meter front) and the 'Von Post Glacier' (gentle slope) impressed with their connected glacier-front in the distance.

Later on, we returned to Longyearbyen in order to pick up two guests who arrived with the night flight from Oslo. Ready at last, the *Multanovskiy* sailed west following the *Isfjord* (Ice Fjord) towards our next destination.

### **16<sup>th</sup> June 2007 –Forlandssund: St. Jonsfjord and Prins Karls Forland**

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

Air temperature: 8° C, light westerly, light cloud

In the early afternoon we arrived in *St Jonsfjord*, a beautiful inlet not often visited by cruise ships. Upon entering the inner part of the fjord, we witnessed snow-covered slopes glittering in the afternoon sunlight. Many photographs were taken from the decks when some seals were spotted on the ice floes

nearby. We went ashore on the northern shore of the fjord in order to make our first high arctic landing. On the way we passed a single Bearded seal, which seemed not to be bothered our presence.

At *Gjertsenodden* we went ashore close to the moraine of *Gaffelbreen* (Fork Glacier). Nearby there is an old trapper's hut. It still seemed to be in use; maybe for shelter. It was used in the 1920s for one or two seasons. Here, we divided into three groups: one group for longer-distance walkers, one for the passengers who like the sound of silence, and another for those who wanted to take pictures or who wanted to hear some general information about various relevant subjects.



In the far distance, at the very end of a steep slope, five reindeer were spotted by some eagle eyes. We asked ourselves what they might be doing there in the middle of a stony polar desert. When some of us stayed long enough at

the edge of the coastal cliff, a ringed seal became curious and came quite close. In the meantime, we continued our walk across the tundra where we saw the pink blossoms of purple saxifrage.

We arrived back on board just in time for lunch. Meanwhile, our vessel headed towards our afternoon destination, Prins Karls Forland. Back in the Forlandssund we were looking for walrus, which have a couple of resting sites along this coastline. We did not find any at the first site, but still we enjoyed the beautiful views of several hanging glaciers on this island. We were very lucky at the second site. Just before launching the Zodiacs, a humpback whale was sighted from the bridge. From there we could also see a group of walrus lying on the outermost tip of *Poolepynten*. Soon afterwards, we began the



landing operations, which brought us ashore at a good distance from the walruses' resting site. After detailed instructions by our expedition leader Rolf, about how to approach walruses ashore without disturbing them, we made a very slow approach towards these giants. On our way we had to step over quite a

lot of driftwood, large amounts of which are found along the coast of Spitsbergen. This driftwood originates in Siberia, where the big Russian rivers transport them to the Arctic Ocean. Many kittiwakes were gathered on some of the timber that we had to pass. It was quite a sight to watch them flying up together and settling back down again on the next



trunk. We had good views of the walruses. When we came to our closest distance we could count more than thirty animals. But also we were observed; a few walruses circled around us in the water and studied the

colourful group of human beings ashore. Blue sky, sunshine and the glittering mountain provided a great backdrop for our photographs.

We planned to take the Zodiac directly back to the ship, but on the way we were met by the humpback whale we spotted earlier. He came up close to the boats and seemed to be quite





curious. This encounter crowned the day's experiences. For those who still had not had enough, Elke presented a late-evening lecture about walrus after dinner.

## 17<sup>th</sup> June 2007 – Magdalenefjord - Smeerenburgfjord: Smeerenburg and Smeerenburgreen - Raudfjord

Position at 6:45 a.m.: 79° 34' N/10° 39' E

Air temperature: 6° C, no clouds, no wind

The view of the amazing scenery of *Magdalenefjord* was our reward for the early wakeup call at 06:45



a.m.. Usually this fjord is the place where large cruise ships sometimes disembark hundreds of passengers at a tiny landing spot during the summer season. When we were there, the *Multanovskiy* was the only ship except for a little sailboat, the *Arctica*. Our journey took us behind the little of peninsula *Gravneset* (Grave Nose) which contains one of the largest burial grounds from the whaling period on Svalbard numbering some 130 graves. The graves range in age from the early 17<sup>th</sup> – up to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century.

During breakfast we got underway towards *Amsterdamøya* for a landing at *Smeerenburg*, which is a Dutch name meaning “Blubbertown”. In good

weather we arrived in *Smeerenburgfjord* with *Amsterdamøya* marking its western entrance. This island is famous for the remains of the Dutch whaling station of *Smeerenburg*, which was in operation during the early 1600s. Already from on board the *Multanovskiy* we could observe a lonely walrus on the beach, which we visited right after making our landing. We had learned how to approach such animals the previous day, so Rolf gave us instructions on how to behave at historical sites, since this one has already suffered severe damage from both harsh weather and human plundering. After a brief look at the lonely walrus, who appeared to have quite a bad injury on its snout, we had a look at four old blubber ovens where the whale blubber was cooked and the oil extracted. Only the foundations of these ovens are still visible but, together with Rolf's historical talk, gave us a lively picture of the life in *Smeerenburg* during those early whaling years. In contrast to rather exaggerated stories that claimed that *Smeerenburg* had up to 20,000 inhabitants, archaeological excavations have shown that at most 150-200 men were living there. *Smeerenburg* was only used for a short time and was closed already by the 1660s, after the whales became almost extinct in the waters off Svalbard's west coast. (Interestingly, the local hard-rock band in Longyearbyen is called *Smeerenburg*!)



During the landing we also observed the rich birdlife of the area. Eider ducks passed by our group several times – both on the water and in the air. An Arctic skua hassled a kittiwake as it returned from foraging, while a glaucous gull acted as observer and umpire. Finally some of us stalked two Sanderlings with our cameras, as they foraged in the belt of algae on the shoreline.



After a hearty lunch, some rest was well deserved. Some napped, while others enjoyed the amazing surroundings of *Smeerenburgfjord* in the magnificent weather. This was a good time also to prepare for the early afternoon Zodiac cruise in the inner part of *Smeerenburgfjord*, also called *Bjørnfjord* (Bear Fjord). We did not see any bears,

but there was another surprise awaiting us. The inner *Bjørnfjord* is not charted: since 1966, the glacier had retreated about 4 kilometres. For safety reasons, it was not possible to sail far into the fjord with

our ship. Using all five of our Zodiacs we slowly approached the *Smeerenburg* Glacier where we could observe that small islands in front of the glacier clearly showed signs of having been covered by it during earlier times. The rocks were rather rounded, but we could also see small streaks which were caused by the glacier's movement over the rock. Along this rocky coast it appeared that quite a number of arctic terns have their breeding area. They seemed not to have begun breeding yet but were in quite a romantic mood. One partner was waiting for the other, which would come with small presents of food aimed to impress; it was quite an amusing sight.

In the Zodiacs, we gradually made our way along the glacier-front from west to east and, after observing some minor calving action, our patience was rewarded by the sight of a huge piece of the approximately twenty metre-high glacier-front falling into the sea. This created a good-sized wave that made our Zodiacs move gently after it had passed a field of ice, from earlier calving events. But there was also something else in the water apart from the ice: white backs slowly rose and fell at the water's surface, punctuated by regular blows. We were seeing our first beluga whales! Here at the glacier-front they most likely find good feeding conditions, attracted by the crustaceans which feed on the minerals and nutrients carried out from under the glacier by currents of meltwater. Our launches stayed for a while within the field of small glacier ice. Everywhere we heard the sound of cracking ice, when it either is melting or just bumping into the next icy neighbour – the sound of an arctic symphony.

Back on the *Multanovskiy* we left the *Smeerenburgfjord*. After dinner, we entered the *Raudfjord* (Red Fjord), to look at the splendid scenery. Despite the fog banks that rose and fell around the mountains and glaciers, we managed to catch a final glimpse of the glittering, icy landscape, before we changed our course back toward the northeast. Soon we entered another fog bank. As we went to bed, it was our hope to wake up tomorrow close to the pack ice.

### 18<sup>th</sup> June 2007 – Northernmost Position: in the Pack Ice

Position at 7:30 a.m.: 80° 23' N/16° 48' E

Air temperature: 5° C, calm and sunny

When we woke up this morning, the *Multanovskiy* had taken position close to the edge of the zone of drift ice. After breakfast, the ship slowly moved into the loose drift ice. Bearded seals that were relaxing and sunbathing on small ice floe allowed us to come quite close, so we were able to get some good pictures. After a while the first of us went down to the bar for a warming coffee or tea, when suddenly a minke whale was spotted a few hundred metres in front of the ship which got all of us back on deck again. Because the whale stayed with us for a while, we were able study the rather different dorsal fin of this whale in comparison with the humpback whale we had seen two days ago. At one point, a light brown animal was spotted far away. It was first taken for a walrus, but turned to be another bearded seal.



It was also worth looking south towards Spitsbergen, where an optical phenomenon, similar to a mirage and common in the arctic was visible. The mountains of the main island appeared to be vertically stretched and distorted (as in a funhouse mirror) and in places seemed to hover above the water.



At noon, we reached the limit of the pack ice and thus the northernmost position of our journey (80° 36' N;16° 21' E). Of course, we had to celebrate the occasion and did so with a toast of aquavit which, care of Charly, materialized on the foredeck. Rolf pointed out that the North Pole was only 9° 24' on latitude, or 1044 kilometres, away from our position. To put it another way, the North Pole was closer to us than the nearest MacDonalds. From here on the ship would be taking us southwards again. Shortly after this little celebration lunch was





served. After that we continued our wildlife observations and a few more seals were spotted on the ice. Some were even swimming close to the ship, being rather curious. Shortly after 3 p.m., the Zodiacs were launched for a cruise in the drift ice, which made it easier to have a look at small structures in the ice. We enjoyed all the different forms and colours of the ice floes. Some of them were moving quite fast, while others seemed to stay at one place. Sometimes small, weathered icebergs would suddenly start to roll, as a piece fell off and they sought to regain equilibrium. At one

larger ice floe some of us observed the clearly visible tracks of a polar bear. At times, a number of guillemots circled the Zodiacs curiously and fulmars also flew by quite closely. In a moment of silence we took pleasure in the sounds and light around us. Back on board Charly, our hotel manager, welcomed us with some hot chocolate. Just perfect after an icy zodiac cruise! Before dinner our expedition leader Rolf rounded the day off with the daily recap and a briefing about tomorrow's plans. Some of us still needed to learn more about the Arctic and met with Elke in the lecture room in the late evening for a lecture about sea ice and the many tiny, but important, creatures that are dependant on it.

### 19<sup>th</sup> June 2007 – Hinlopen Strait, Alkefjellet, Drift Ice, Sparreneset

Position at 6:45 a.m.: 79° 38' N/18° 42' E

Air temperature: 4° C, calm, partly overcast



This morning found us in an area we did not expect to be able to reach. Usually the *Hinlopen Strait* is blocked by ice at this time of year. Fortunately for us, it was not blocked, so

we were able to see its marvellous scenery. The coastline, consisting of table mountains, was covered with a thick layer of glacial ice. There was still a great deal of snow everywhere and the part of the coast where we had been planning to go this morning appeared to be locked in a belt of drift ice. After breakfast, we boarded our Zodiacs and found our way through the labyrinth of loosepack ice. Some of us spotted a bearded seal in the water. Soon, we were captivated by the breathtaking sight of thousands

of Brünnich's guillemots that gathered in the areas of open water between the ice floes. Thousands more of these birds filled the sky near the nesting cliffs. Here and there, guillemots were gathered on ice floes, resembling little penguins rather. In fact, these birds resemble penguins in several ways, including sounding and smelling like them. We continued towards the towering basalt cliffs of the coast. At some places the glacier on top of the cliffs was looking down on the birds and us as if it would observe the scenery. Soon we got very close to the first breeding birds, where they were crouching close together on thin stony shelves, protecting their eggs and taking very little notice of us. We used the opportunity to fill to capacity our memory cards and use up our rolls of film, snapping shot of guillemots swimming, flying, resting, diving, landing and taking off; single birds, birds in groups; on guano-stained ice and rock. The basalt cliffs are a perfect place for guillemots to breed, but there are also other inhabitants: barnacle geese, snow buntings, kittiwakes and glaucous gulls, the latter being the main predator of guillemot eggs and chicks. Before we returned to the ship, we visited an impressive glacier descending between the gorgeous basalt cliffs. There, we were interrupted by a radio call from Igor, one of our Russian Zodiac drivers, who had spotted a polar fox on the ice! Soon



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all of our Zodiacs had gathered nearby, so that we all had a chance to see the fox, although by this point it was at some distance from our position. It must be a rich feeding ground for him under the bird cliffs!

Back on board, we continued along the *Hinlopen Strait* southwards until we reached the *Fosterøyane*, where we enjoyed the drift ice one last time before we returned back north – to the only entrance and exit the strait offered today. On our journey towards the landing spot for the day, the *Sparreneset*, the *Multanovskiy* was overtaken by a familiar sight in Svalbardian waters, the Norwegian ship *Nordstjernen*, an old postal ship which served the *Hurtigruten* along the Norwegian coast. Now it is often used for cruises around Spitsbergen.

In the afternoon we reached *Sparreneset*. The landing was quite an adventure, as we had to climb up a snowy bank before we reached solid ground. Here we encountered the real polar desert. Except for some eider ducks, there was almost no life to see at all. We split up into groups, either following the coastline or climbing up the slopes. With a clear eye we spotted the first plant on the ground. Very often they grow in moist and sheltered places or on old organic material such as reindeer bones that provide them with shelter and nutrients. Here and there, we found the purple saxifrage in flower. In some places, we counted up to six different species of lichens, although there must be many more. So despite the desert conditions, the environment turned out to provide a fair variety of living things. Even mosquitoes were seen in several small clouds! We made a



longer photo stop at a canyon nearby. Covered with snow on one side and with a shining blue melt-water pond at the bottom, it was a magnificent sight. Some of us found reindeer droppings and tracks of polar fox, but they were the only signs of animal life, aside from the song of several snow buntings. There is not much for animals to live on in this harsh polar desert. When we came back to the beach, we found that the tide had risen and it was another adventure to get aboard the Zodiacs. But by sitting down and sliding or stepping

carefully, we were able safely to leave the landing site. Through calm, foggy, mystical waters we returned to our vessel.

We finished our day with a briefing about the day to follow and information about Earth's climate given by Rolf and Rico, which was followed by a long and intensive discussion on the topic.

## 20<sup>th</sup> June 2007 – Liefdefjord: Andøyane, Texas Bar, Monaco Glacier

Position at 7:30 a.m.: 79° 41' N/13° 50' E

Air temperature: 8° C, calm, overcast, reduced visibility

During breakfast we jumped up from our tables when we heard the announcement, "There are belugas swimming in the nine o'clock position." Soon after breakfast, we were planning our excursion. Another announcement just before leaving the ship told us that we would start with a Zodiac cruise, due to the sighting of a polar bear at one of the islands nearby. This announcement was what almost everyone on board had been waiting for all week. Very soon, we were heading for the island where the animal had been seen, and there he was: the King of the Arctic! He was standing right at the shoreline, watching us as we





watched him. There was not an idle camera, and we got some very good shots at close range. After a while he no longer wanted to be an actor on our stage and went off, disappearing behind a hill. We cruised along the island's shoreline and had a second glimpse of the bear. We also saw a number of bird species we had not yet observed during the trip. Some grey phalaropes were paddling along by the shore. Unusually, the female of this species is more brightly coloured than the male, since the male takes care of the eggs and so needs proper camouflage for the job. Red-throated divers were swimming on the mirror-like sea, but took off when we came closer. Later we split our Zodiac-fleet up into groups and went for a scouting trip around the neighbouring island, where we planned a landing. Before making the landing, we had to make sure that no bear would cause us any trouble while we were on shore. On our way we saw many eider ducks, some pink-footed geese, divers, as well as a few king eider ducks. Once ashore we were able to get warm again with a bit of exercise. There were hundreds of arctic terns in the area where we landed. Rico, our polar bear watch, standing on a nearby hill, was being attacked by several of these birds. When we had walked a little bit we understood why: we were near a nesting area, where the eggs lay on the bare tundra, depending only on their cryptic colouration – and the dive-bombing adults - for protection. Different than yesterday, we also went over polygon ground. This time it was quite muddy and very red in colour. In the depressions between the polygons there was rich tundra vegetation, made possible by the shelter and moisture these spots provided. Suddenly, there was a radio call from Rolf: someone in his group had spotted a second bear, this time on the island where we had landed; but fortunately at a good distance. After a while we went back to our Zodiacs and hoped to get a closer sighting of this bear from the water.



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After we had seen the second bear on the beach, we headed back to the ship, but before we boarded we spotted a large group of beluga whales close by. Instead of boarding the ship immediately, we went closer to the whales and stopped the engines. The sight was incredible: dozens of white backs slowly rose and fell at the water's surface. We clearly heard the animals breathing. Marvellous! Curiosity brought them closer. A few grey backs identified the young individuals. In all we counted more than sixty individuals! This was a breathtaking experience.

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After lunch Rolf and Rico went for a spin in the Zodiac in order to scout out our next excursion. In the meantime, thick fog banks reduced the visibility a lot so we could not see the shoreline at all. The islands we actually wanted to cruise around by Zodiac were still trapped in ice. However, Rolf and Rico found a suitable landing place at the opposite side of the fjord close to an old trapper's hut named

'Texas Bar'. Unfortunately the bar was closed, so we had to make do by enjoying the rich flowering vegetation in front of it. For our walk we climbed a hill behind the hut and crossed some snowfields that made the hike more challenging. The fog lifted somewhat, so we were able to enjoy the beautiful scenery: the clouds, the sun and the snow-covered mountains were a rather spectacular sight. In the far distance some reindeer were observed. Still we had to cross many snowfields in order to get where we were headed. Here we came across a lot of animal tracks, such as





footprints of reindeer and geese, but also huge ones from polar bear. After two hours we went back to the ship and headed for the inner part of *Liefdefjord*. There we met heavy fog and an interesting pattern of rotten ice that still covered



the whole area. The captain stopped the *Multanovskiy* and Charly, the chefs and the crew prepared a really delicious BBQ for us on the foredeck. Just in time the fog lifted and the tops of the mountains appeared mysteriously. Charly's glühwein got the party started. The gained calories were lost again to Russian and Latin American rhythms.



## 21<sup>st</sup> June 2007 – Kongsfjord, Ny Ålesund

Position at 7:00 a.m.: 79° 05' N/11° 04' E

Air temperature: 5° C, calm, overcast

This morning we arrived in Ny Ålesund, the northernmost town in the world: at 78° 56' N. The mountains around us were still covered by snow and the scenery presented rather a black and white picture. We soon discovered that it was not only our ship which had the idea to visit this little scientific community, which formerly was a coal mining settlement. A large cruise ship with almost 800 passengers was at anchor in the harbour already. As we landed in our Zodiacs (cruise ship passengers were being shuttled ashore to the main pier by tender and were busy taking photos of our landing), we felt as real expeditioners. How different one can experience the Arctic can be from another. By contrast, one could not help but think that the right choice was the *Multanovskiy*.

Ny Ålesund is a small community made up of scientists from all over the world who conduct a variety of research in the fields of atmospheric studies, glaciology, biology and related subjects. A short walk took us into the centre of this historic village. On the way we passed several barnacle geese. Some of us spotted a polar fox between the buildings, which did not seem to care about the unusual number of people crowding the town. There was also an interesting little museum about the early days of Ny Ålesund, when coal mining was everything here. Life must have been hard for the miners in these harsh conditions. Work was usually carried out in a kneeling position deep inside the mountain, as the coal seam was deep in the permafrost, below sea level. There were many casualties over the years because of the necessity of using dynamite to get at the coal.



We headed for the iron tower erected in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the intrepid explorers Amundsen and Nobile, who reached the North Pole by dirigible airship in 1926. The tower was used again during a second expedition in 1928, also led by Nobile. 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 unexpected polar bear encounter. Luckily there were none around this time, but there were a few reindeer.

Before lunch, our Captain weighed anchor and set our course out of *Kongsfjorden* again. We still had a lot of miles to go before we reached Longyearbyen and thus, the end of our fabulous trip.





**Total length of this trip**  
**835 nm / 1545 km / 960 statute miles**

**On behalf of Oceanwide Expeditions we wish you a safe journey home  
and hope to see you again sometimes,  
maybe in another polar region.**

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