



OCEANWIDE
EXPEDITIONS

Expedition Log North Spitsbergen

20th – 27th June 2008

On board

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 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 – Ditte Hendrichsen (Denmark)
Guide/Lecturer – Michelle van Dijk (Holland)
Purser – Caroline van Dijk (Holland)
Chef – Jocelyn Wilson (New Zealand)
Sous Chef – Ryan Murray (New Zealand)
Doctor – Dr. Katharina Odenbach (Germany)

20th of June – Longyearbyen – Isfjord

Position at 5 p.m.: 78° 15' N/15° 36' E

Air temperature: 6° C, bright sunshine

Our first experience of Spitsbergen was the high Arctic metropolis of Longyearbyen, the largest settlement on the archipelago with a population of about 2000 people. We were picked up in the airport by two of our guides, Michelle van Dijk from the Netherlands and Ditte Hendrichsen from Denmark, who took us to the center of Longyearbyen where we spent a couple of hours before making our way down to the pier where we were welcomed by Rolf Stange, our expedition leader from Germany. Since the *Professor Multanovskiy* was anchored in the fjord, we had our very first experiences in the zodiacs, which we certainly came to see much more of during the next week.



Upon arrival we were all gathered in the bar, where we were introduced to our hotel manager Caroline van Dijk from the Netherlands. Soon it was also time for the compulsory introduction to safety and lifeboat procedures on board and shortly after we found ourselves in the lifeboats, with warm clothes and life jackets. Finally, it was time for a first, good and well-deserved *Multanovskiy*-dinner, prepared by our two chefs Jocelyn Wilson and Ryan Murray, both from New Zealand. In the evening we left Longyearbyen and we had time to unpack, settle down and relax.

21st of June – Kongsfjord, Ny Ålesund

Position at 7:00 a.m.: 78° 57' N/11° 56' E

Air temperature: 6° C, flat, calm, sunshine

We woke up to the most beautiful morning imaginable. The sun was glittering in the calm sea, the Kongsfjorden glacier could be seen from a distance, and the northern fulmars were paying the ship several visits in perfect light conditions. The three peaks which characterise Kongsfjorden were towering at the end of the fjord. They are named Svea, Nora and Dana, after the three Scandinavian countries. After breakfast it was time for another safety briefing, this time about Zodiac procedures and how to behave in polar bear country. Then it was time for our first landing, in nothing less than London!! This London, however was somewhat





more tranquil. The area is called Blomstrandshalvøya (Blomstrand peninsula). In fact Blomstrandsøya (Blomstrands Island) would be a more appropriate name now a day, as the glacier connecting the mainland and the island has retreated in later years, detaching the island from its mainland connection. We landed on the beach and had a look at the two old huts, which are still being used occasionally by scientists from Ny Ålesund. Old boilers and industrial leftovers from the mining time are still standing as they were left, and utterly out of place, with

the snowclad mountains as a backdrop. Camp Mansfield is an old mining place, which is also known as Ny London (New London), where the English entrepreneur Ernest Mansfield once tried to mine marble. He managed to raise a great sum of money from wealthy investors in Britain by convincing them that he had found an entire island of marble of the highest quality. He established the quarry and related infrastructure and machinery from 1911-1920 but only sent one load of marble to Britain. When it arrived it had all fallen into pieces due to minute cracks. Despite his eccentricity, Mansfield was very popular amongst local hunters who could always rely on his help if they needed supplies or something else.

We split into three groups which took off with each their armed guide. Michelle stayed near the beach with those who wanted to stay around and have a closer look at the area, while Rolf went off on a hike with those who wanted to cover a larger area, and have a look at Kongsfjorden from above. Meanwhile, Ditte went off with the birdwatchers and some of the photographers to some small ponds behind the ridge which often has a pair of Red-throated Diver. No Red-throated Diver this time, though, but long-tailed skuas, pinkfooted geese, arctic terns and long-tailed ducks. When we met up at Camp Mansfield again, one of the friendly Svalbard reindeer appeared, and stayed around long enough for several photos being taken.



The second stop of the day was a visit to Ny Ålesund, the northernmost settlement in the world at 78° 56' N.



Ny Ålesund was established as a coalmine in 1916, but now functions as a scientific village, a rather unique place. It houses a small community 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, with the local souvenir shop and the northernmost post office. 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 high methane content of the





coal. The mining was finally stopped in 1961/62, after an accident where 21 people died and which forced the the Norwegian government to resign.

After the stop at the shops, we had time to explore the settlement and go birdwatching. Arctic terns, Glaucous gulls, Long-tailed duck, and most exciting of all: an Ivory gull. For those less keen on birdwatching, Ditte took us for a walk around town, talking about how research is conducted in the Arctic, and why, and later Rolf

took over talking about North Pole expeditions, many of which had Ny Ålesund as their starting point. We headed for the iron tower erected in the early part of the 20th 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. No bear appeared, though, but instead both an Arctic fox and a reindeer were seen. With perfect timing the last of us were back on the *Professor Multanovskiy* 18.55, with five minutes to dinner.



However, the day was not over yet, during dinner we sailed to the bottom of Kongsfjorden to have a closer look at the majestic front of the Kongsvegen (King's way) glacier. The sun was shining from behind of us, lighting up the glacier and the water was almost completely calm mirroring the surrounding mountains. The glaciers had been rather active over the last few days; the glacier front was blue, and several small icebergs were floating in the fjord.

22st of June – Magdalenefjord – the pack ice

Position at 6:45 a.m.: 79° 31' N/10° 33' E

Air temperature: 7° C, flat, calm, clear visibility

Wildlife watching is serious business, and does not leave much time to sleep – around midnight a group of six whales were seen surfacing and blowing from a distance, and only a few hours later, around five o'clock the first birdwatchers were on the deck. The Arctic midnight sun enables wildlife observations 24 hours a day.

While we had our breakfast Rolf and Ditte explored the opportunity to go ashore in Hamburgbukta, where Rolf knew there is a Little Auk colony. It turned out that the coast was still covered with a high, vertical snow wall which made landings impossible, but there was no reason for that to spoil the good spirit: We continued into Magdalenefjord, to have a look at the glacier, and on the way both seal and walrus was spotted from the deck.



The walrus-sightings were to get much more impressive, 'though. Soon a small group of walrus were seen hauled out on the ice, and 15 minutes later we found ourselves in the Zodiacs to go and have a closer look. We approached slowly, carefully observing the behaviour of the animals. They seemed utterly uninterested in our presence, and with the engines



turned off, and all being quiet, we drifted around for a while to watch. It was a small group of four animals, lying closely together on the ice. Occasionally one would lift its head briefly or use a flipper to scratch it self on the belly. They are amazing animals.

From Magdalenefjord we headed northwest towards the pack ice. Soon icefloes were drifting past, and seals were spotted both in the water and on

the ice. Also whales were seen from a distance. With many people on the watch, we had good chances of spotting anything interesting.



Throughout the afternoon people watched from the bridge. The weather was getting worse, with rain and overcast. We saw several seals, both on the ice and in the water. Most of them were harp seals, the black head and saddle clearly visible from a distance. Everybody was hoping for a polar bear, and several tracks were observed, but no bears were seen. In late afternoon, Rolf announced that we would go for Zodiac cruise into the ice, and shortly after we all found ourselves in the boats. We cruised around between the ice floats and were able to come very near the ice. We could see

the the *Professor Multanovskiy* from a distance, towering between the ice.

Suddenly things got exciting. Two Zodiacs had entered a gap between two ice floats to look more closely at some particularly blue ice. After a little while, the gap started to narrow, and they had to move out, but it was already getting difficult to turn the Zodiacs. While waiting for the other Zodiac to turn and move out, the ice gap between the ice floats narrowed further, and slowly Dittes Zodiac got stuck on the ice. Now began a small rescue operation, under the instruction of Roman, one of the Russian officers, while Rolf kept pushing another icefloe away with his boat, keeping the passage open. The motor of Dittes Zodiac was turned off and pulled up to prevent damage, and the rope from one of the other Zodiacs tied to it to pull it off. When this did not work, yet another Zodiac was called to aid, and with the help of two Zodiacs and a paddle we finally managed to pull the Zodiac off the ice and out of the ice gap. The whole operation was undramatic (an throughly photographed) but it made it very clear why the Zodiacs always go in groups when cruising and bring radios and rifles. For those of us who might have felt a little nervous – a short glimpse at our



expedition leader's face, who was obviously enjoying the situation, taking pictures of the boats between the icefloes and telling stories about heroic expeditions that got lost in the ice with a wide smile, was enough to convince most of us that the situation was actually not more dangerous than any little traffic jam. In the end, all of us enjoyed the thought of having been stuck in the polar pack, although 15 to 20 minutes were certainly preferable opposed to, for example, those more than 2 full years that Nansen's *Fram* (intentionally) spent in the ice during her crossing of the Arctic Ocean (1893-96).

Upon arrival at the ship we were met by a delicious smell of barbeque on the deck. It takes more than a bit of rain to stop a group of Arctic explorers, so we ate our dinner wearing woollen hats and mittens, while watching the ice around us. Also the Russian crew joined the party, with dancing and music. From a distance we could see the ship *Oden*, carrying a royal group of passengers; the crownprincess of Sweden and the crownprinses of Norway and Denmark.

23st of June – Krossfjord, Prins Karls Forland, Engelskbukta

Position at 7:00 a.m.: 79° 19' N/11° 39' E

Air temperature: 5° C, overcast

We woke up to the magnificent view of the Lilliehöökglacier as a semi-circle around us. The glacier front is approximately 8 km wide, and 35 meters at the highest point, and it is an impressive sight indeed. After a little while the *Professor Multanovskiy* turned around, but we stayed in the fjordsystem of Krossfjorden for most of the morning. After breakfast we all went in the Zodiacs, to have a closer look at the Kollerglacier. The mountain tops were covered in clouds, and the background behind the glacier was hidden in the clouds. When we approached the coast we saw a group of seven reindeer on the tundra, one of them with a small calf. They trotted away over the ridge, but a few of them came back and watched us from a distance.

We cruised along the front of the glacier for a while, giving everybody a good chance to take photographs. The glacier must have been quite active during the last few days, for there were several large blue areas, of freshly exposed ice, and we heard rather than saw a small calving of ice, near the waterfront. At some point all five Zodiacs turned the engines off, and we just sat their in the complete quietness for a while. The mountain slopes around us were dark, with streches of pale green. The summers has started and the vegetation only has a short time window to complete their growth and flowering, before the winter sets in again.



Initially we had planned a visit in Fjortende Julibukta (fourteenth of July bay) rather than

Kollerfjord, but had changed plans because of the presence of another ship there (pirates!). We had hoped to find a little seabird cliff near sea level in Kollerfjord, and Rolf was frequently scanning the rocky slopes around us, but without luck. Meanwhile, we suddenly found that we and not the wildlife was the objects of observation. A very curious bearded seal kept us under close observation. It popped up between the boats, looked at us curiously. At times it was just 10 meters away, and at one point it dived and came up just a 1 meter from one of the Zodiacs, the nostrils opening and closing. It stayed around for 20 minutes and it





certainly was thoroughly photographed from all angles. Meanwhile a group of kitiwakes had decided to take a rest on a particularly blue piece of ice, and we slowly approached, the Zodiacs bow by bow.

Finally we made a brief landing on Regnardneset, near an old trapping station known as Lloyds hotel, and went for a walk along the beach. On this site big cruise ships occasionally set large numbers of passengers ashore, and the tundra was almost completely worn away for the first couple of hundred meters from the landing site, emphasizing what major impact human disturbance has on the fragile Arctic environment. As soon as we had left the beach area behind us, the vegetation cover appeared to be much more complete again. The afternoon was the time for several plans, and just as many changes. Initially we aimed for a walrus site on the northeast side of Prins Karls Forland, but this was clearly too exposed, as strong southerly winds were

blowing through Forlandsund, and thus straight onto the landing site. The same winds prevented a landing on the north tip of Prins Karls Forland, which houses Svalbards only colony of harbour seals. But anticipating that the wildlife would eventually present itself, we made use of the time we had, and prepared ourselves as well as possible, when Ditte and Rolf gave lectures on the natural history of walruses and Polar bears.



In the evening we finally had some luck with our plans for a landing, when we were zodiaced to Engelsbukta (English bay) to have a look at the Comfortlessbreen glacier. We landed in a small glacial lagoon, scattered with stranded pieces of ice, and went for walked to the glacier, where we suddenly found ourselves in the middle of an amazing ice age landscape. The steep rim of the glacier, resting above sea level on the ground, indicated that it was actually advancing rather than retreating.



24th of June – the pack ice – northernmost position 79° 43' N

Position at 7:30 a.m.: 79° 30' N/9° 54' E

Air temperature: 4° C, overcast, some swell, no ice, 10 nautical miles to coast

Today we got our polar bear!! During the night the *Professor Multanovski* had taken us north again, and we were sailing along the ice. There was a certain anxiety on the bridge – we had already spent one day in the pack ice without seeing any polar bears, and we all knew that this was our chance. With the number of binoculars and spotting scopes on the look out we were quite certain to see any polar bear if it was around, but what if it wasn't. Rolf had just told us the day before how they cover huge distances, migrating over the ice and we had no way of knowing whether one might have decided to spend the midsommer days in this corner of the pole.

Three seals were spotted on the ice at a distance, transforming into three skuas as we approached. Suddenly Peter saw the bear. All binoculars turned in the same direction followed by several 'Oh yes', 'there it is', 'where do you see it?', 'just there, in the 2 o'clock direction behind the open water by the big lump of ice sticking up'. Given that we were in open sea, completely surrounded by ice floats, this



was a somewhat vague discription, but what do you do, when there are no other landmarks than trying to describe the shape of various ice blocks.

The polar bear was walking slowly over the ice. The crew turned the ship sailing slowly towards it. It did not seem to be in a hurry, nor did it seem worried about our presence. We were down wind from the bear. At first it laid down on the ice, not moving for a while, then it stretched and rolled in the snow. It jumped over a bit of open water, made a rather half-hearted attempt to reach two glaucous gulls on a outcrop of ice, then climbed on the ice. At one time, it was less than 200 meters away. We practiced our newly acquired skills in indentifying

male and female polar bears, and assisted by Rolf came to the conclusion that it was a sub-adult female. After a while she turned her back to us a left over the ice, occasionally swimming.

The ice edge turned out to be a good place wildlife. In the afternoon, we had several observations of whales, including minke whale, fin whales and even a killer whale. Also several large groups of harp seals were seen, some numbering 40 or more individuals.

At 15:45 at a position of 79° 43' N/8° 59', Michelle made an announcement that a large whale had been seen very near the ship. It surfaced again, then again a few minutes later. First a blow, then a rounded back, the the classical tail out of the water. A blue whale. Maybe 100 meters from the ship. Large, with a small dorsal fin, far back, a characteristic blueish mingled colouration, and the sheer size of the animal. The engine was stopped and we drifted, while the whale surfaced several times around us, allowing ample time for photograhps to be taken. The Russian crew member, Sasha; who had first spotted it, received several grateful thanks.



The whale observations continued throughout the afternoon, either from comfort at the bridge, or from the deck, where Caroline arranged for rich supplies of hot chocolate and rum to keep people warm. A planned talk about the history of Svalbard was postponed, as a humpbacked whale appeared, which rounded off the observations of the day.

25st of June – Poolepynten – Tordenskjoldbukta

Position at 7:30 a.m.: 78° 13' N/12° 20' E

Southern Forlandssund, 14 nm tp Poolepynten, estimated time of arrival: 9:00 a.m. Air temperature: 6° C, overcast, good visibility, almost calm



Our planned visit to the Walrus colony on Poolepynten was postponed by the presense of a ‘pirate ship’ in the bay. Since apparently many people were worn out by the excitement the day before, we quite appreciated a quiet morning, the only activity being Ditte giving a lecture on Arctic foxes. Due to the pirate ship, the schedule for the entire day changed. After lunch, take one, we were shipped to the beach. Upon landing Rolf instructed us to stay together, be very quiet and not stray in front of the group. We walked slowly along the beach, stopping frequently to observe the walrus and make sure they were not disturbed by our presence. It took a good deal of time to get there, but our patience paid off. A large group of walrus, 70-100 individuals, were lying at the haul-out. They did not appear to take any notice of us, but were lying quietly on the beach, 30 meters away from us. Suddenly we found that were the

objects of curious tourists – a group of six walrus swam closer when they discovered us. The walrus were observing us, splashing in the water, diving, then popping up again. They were maybe five meters from the beach. Whereas Rolf had made it very clear that we would not go any closer to the ones on the haul-out, it was quite a different story when it was the walrus approaching us.

In the afternoon we did what turned out to be one of our most enjoyable landings of the entire voyage, on the coast of Tordenskjoldbukta. From a distance the coast looked bleak, and the wind was picking up. Rolf had made it crystal clear that the hiking group would be hiking, and we took off at a high pace to burn some calories. No time for photographs or lazy enjoyment of the landscape to begin with. It was not all hiking though, for a group of reindeer with curious calves



arrived, taking a good look at the visitors. Also the group of hikers with a more moderate pace had a close encounter with reindeer and Michelle told us to crouch and be very still, not

to scare them away. Meanwhile the third group took at different approach. Although there were several reindeer around, a pair of grey phalaropes in evening light attracted more attention. Although this was supposed to be a slow group, the pace suddenly increased somewhat – a King eider on the water – stunning.

26th of June – Flinholmen

Position at 7:00 a.m.: 78° 22' N/15° 36' E

Air temperature: 6° C, strong wind from NE



Our last full day on board the *Professor Multanovskiy*. Most of us landed at Flinholmen, a small island in Isfjord, formed by the movements of the

Sefströmbreen (- glacier), while others went ashore on the mainland, to go for a longer hike with Michelle. We headed towards a nice waterfall, but changed plans as a group of pink-footed geese were breeding, and we didn't want to disturb them. The hike provided some excitement, as we at some point had to go through deep snow, which involved some balancing one one leg, while trying to dig out our boots which were stuck surprisingly tightly in the snow.



Meanwhile, on Flinholmen some of us went with our living encyclopedia, Rolf, who told us enthusiastically about the geology of the area, while allowing ample time to watch the breeding geese and take photographs. Our guides had conveniently ordered Long-tailed ducks, Grey Phalarope, King Eiders and even a Turnstone, to keep us entertained.

The moderate walkers went with Ditte. Most of Flinholmen consists of hills of red moraine, with small ponds and snow patches scattered in between. Red moraine can be muddy. Very muddy, indeed. When a lady got stuck, two gentlemen immediately rushed to aid her, unfortunately getting themselves caught in mud



in the process. With the aid of a woolen jumper and a snow patch as stepping stones to prevent them from getting further into the mud, we eventually got all three of them out, first without boots, later retrieving them from the mud one by one. One boot, however was particularly stubborn, though, so eventually Ditte buried both arms in the cold mud and dug it out, balancing on the edge of the snow to avoid getting in herself. The rest of the group watched, giggling, from the top of the neighbouring moraine top and the event was, of course, richly photographed and enjoyed by most.

When returning to the beach, the tide was going out, and once more we all gave a hand in pushing out the Zodiacs, giving our drivers a helping hand.

The last landing of our high Arctic voyage was at Skansbukta. A 'skanse' is a Scandinavian name for a fortress or military look-out, so the bay has clearly got its name from the magnificent vertical cliffs, rising below the beach. Just as our first day in Longyerbyen, the weather was bright and sunny, and we spend a gorgeous afternoon, just pottering around on the beach, while our Russian crew evidently had great fun sliding down the snow slopes. Skansbukta is the site of yet another failed mining attempt, this time for gypsym/anhydrite/ The railtracks and heaps of anhydrite are scattered over the beach, and provided good photography opportunities, as did the myriads of little flowers, primarely purple saxifrage. When we arrived, the tundra was still barren, just emerging from the snow covers of winter and spring, but during our week here, the flowers have blossomed, taking advantage of the warm and sunny days to complete their cycle in the short Arctic summer. The lasts ones of us to leave got the dis/pleasure of watching our three guides going for a plunge, with the backdrop of the snowclad mountains. They did not stay in the water for long 'though...From the Zodiacs we had a great view to the cliffs of Skansbukta, before we finally turned towards the *Professor Multanovski* to prepare for our departure.

27th of June – Longyearbyen

78° 13' N/15° 36' E

Weather: bright and windy

As usual, Rolf's voice roused us from a restful slumber. After breakfast it was time to bid farewell to newly made friends amongst other guests, staff and crew. Our high Arctic adventure had come to an end, but the Arctic bug had bitten most of us, and many plans were already being made for new adventures in the high latitudes.

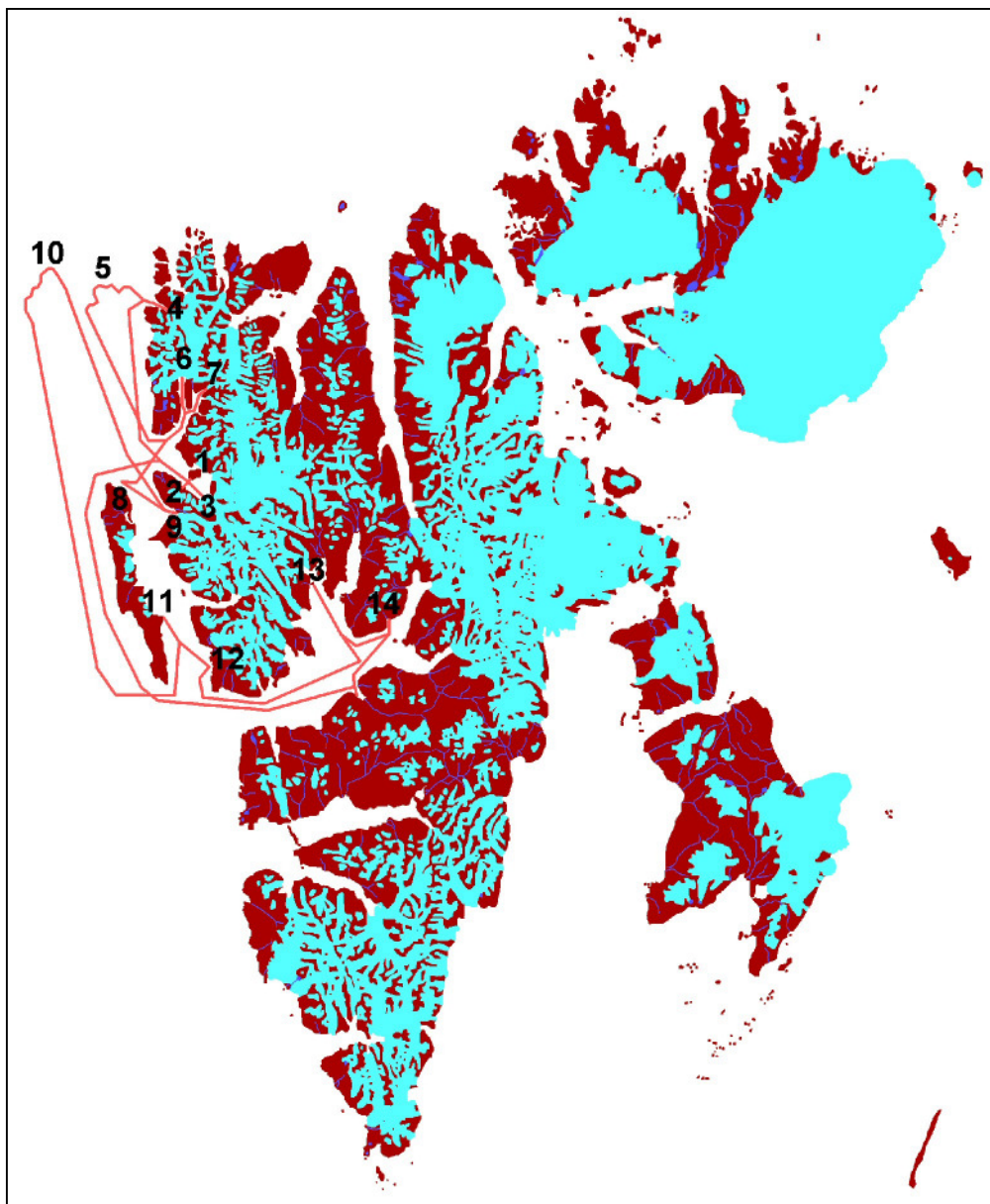
Total length of this trip

662.8 nautical miles = 1227.51 km

Text, map and pictures by Ditte and Rolf. Michelle kept the overview.

Thanks to all of you who added photos from Flinholmen!

This triplog and the group photo can be downloaded with colour fotos from www.spitzbergen.de



1. Kongsfjord: Blomstrandhalvøya (Ny London)
2. Kongsfjord: Ny Ålesund
3. Kongsfjord: Kongsvegen glacier
4. Magdalenefjord
5. Ice is nice!
6. Krossfjord: Lilliehöökreen glacier
7. Krossfjord: Kollerfjord
8. Strong wind off northern Prins Karls Forland
9. Engelskbukta: Comfortlessbreen glacier
10. More ice is even nicer!
11. Prins Karls Forland: Poolepynten
12. Tordenskioldbukta
13. Alkhornet
14. Isfjord (Tempelfjord): Diabasodden
15. Isfjord (Billefjord): Skansbukta