

# Newfoundland & Labrador Cruise: Trip Report

## July 15 – 25, 2017



**Aboard the Akademik Sergey Vavilov**

**With Local Expert Cruise Guides from One Ocean Expeditions, Peg Abbott, host, and 11 participants: Phillip, Gingy, Bud, Susan, Shyamala, Susan, Ty, Cindy, Dave, Jenny, and Julie**

### **Sat., July 15, 2017      Sydney / The Fortress of Louisbourg**

All of our group arrived either early or in time on the arrival day, though poor Phillip was lacking a suitcase; thankfully it would appear by afternoon, much to his relief. Peg met with those that wanted to for breakfast, and a walk by the seawall close to the hotel. We saw our few first birds: Song Sparrows, a Swamp Sparrow, Yellow Warbler, and a couple of Red-eyed Vireos. The real treat was to find two American Mink, playful youngsters that tussled on the sea wall, coming out several times into view. Shyamala and Susan got photos, fun!



We walked over to Wentworth Park where scores of Black Duck were gathered. There was an exercise class going on, so we did some people-

watching as well as bird watching, and then picked up a few more avian species. Time passed quickly and we needed to get back to pack up so we quit, watching Black-capped Chickadees feeding young in a nest as we walked back.

We boarded the bus to the Fortress of Louisbourg, well worth visiting and not far from Sydney. The site is impressive on the edge of the sea, with many restored buildings, lines of cannons, and period furnishings.



Numerous people around the site were there to reenact the day to day life, and a café served period food in pewter dishes. A man played the Hurdy-Gurdy while children danced, a merry summer day for all to learn their history.

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The site was huge, so it was hard for all the birders to find each other, but in time we wandered much of the site, noting Savannah and Song Sparrows in good number, Common Yellowthroats in wetland patches, two lovely Common Loons in the harbor, and in a wet meadow section, Peg and Phillip found two Nelson's (Sharp-tailed) Sparrows, both singing males that posed for some time.

We met back at 3:30 to head back to the dock at Sydney, where we had to pass through a security inspection to board the ship. Once cleared we headed out to sea, with some 240 KM or more to travel to our site in the morning; the Captain wanted to be underway. It was lovely to be on the water, wind in our hair, off for a grand adventure. Black Guillemots, Common Murre, and a lone Great Blue Heron saw us out to sea. Tonight, we would cross the Cabot Strait that divides the Gulf of St. Lawrence from the Atlantic Ocean, leaving Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, to arrive by morning to Newfoundland.

Lobster for all that wanted it tonight! The dining room was already a merry place, and we looked forward to meeting a well-traveled and interesting group of people, 88 passengers on board, many of them Canadian. Adventure was calling as we were lulled to sleep by a full day and the sea.

### **Sun., July 16, 2017      Morning at Sea / Gros Morne National Park**

Morning came with bright clear skies and blessedly calm seas. We had crossed the strait in darkness and by breakfast we were traveling north up the western coast of Newfoundland. The horizon was a long ridgeline of mountains with softly curved tops, rounded by glaciers. As we made our way north, we found the mountains to reach a more dramatic height; glacial U-shaped drainages carved through the steeper landscape.



Several of us met up on the bridge for early morning birding, some earlier than others as not all had adjusted to the ½ hour time change. We had lots of blue skies ahead, and expansive ocean in view. Along the coast, the geology of the terrain became more intriguing.



The birds were not plentiful, perhaps drawn more to the straits we had passed over where currents mix up the waters creating richer food chains, but we did find a pretty steady stream of birds: mostly Northern Gannet, Black-legged Kittiwake, and Herring Gull, punctuated by the occasional alcid, all distant but

probably Common Murres. As we made continuous progress north we also encountered a few Black Guillemot.

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A few lucky ones were on the bridge just after breakfast when a southbound Humpback Whale was encountered very close to the ship. It did a nice dive, showing off the white of its under-tail flukes, neat!

The morning was one of navigation, so we had a fine introductory talk on the history of the West Coast of Newfoundland by Sean Cadigan. He had an excellent progression of maps, and walked us through times of Vikings and their contact with native peoples, the era of European domination, and the influence of this period that carries to present times. The talk was very well-received and inspired lots of questions and participation by the audience. We also had a mandatory Zodiac briefing to know what to expect going ashore, and Boris, our cruise director, did a maps and chart session to show us our routing.



Lunch was special since it was Sunday — we had roast lamb, baked chicken, or a vegetarian tart, a delicious quinoa salad with pistachios, dates, and beets, yum! There were cooked veggies and fresh salad and a tart, with delicious fruit crumble to follow.

At 2:00 PM we headed ashore to see the geologically interesting Tablelands feature and the impressive Gros Morne National Park Visitor Center. We landed at the gateway village of Trout River, mingling with the locals as we waited for transportation shifts on the area's lone school bus. The Tablelands held several hikes varied in length so all could stretch their legs as they desired. Soils

made for an arid landscape that was quite striking.

Our birders opted to have more time where there were still-lush forests, anxious to tally some new species. While spread out, we got a good cumulative list going on a walk down from the Visitor Centre, including species such as Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Common Yellowthroat, Pine Siskin, Blackpoll Warbler, Purple Finch, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher and more. Rod, our European friend, was thrilled to log his first American Robin. Bud caught a great shot of a Lincoln's Sparrow and both American Crow and Common Raven were squawking.

The Tablelands was very stark, mineral soils not conducive to plants, but those there were special, including many Pitcher Plants in bloom.

Time passed quickly; we were not yet used to the Zodiac loading and unloading, but soon would rise to the occasion with more efficiency. Some discovered an ice-cream shop with the added advantage of having Wi-Fi, a luxury in such a remote region and the last we'd see for a while.

Dinner was a crazy affair with way-too-long announcements and





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recap — this was quickly fixed on future nights, but made for a long day today. A few from our crew made the night's entertainment, a Fireside Chat on Marine Superstitions.

### **Mon., July 17     Newfoundland Coast / L'Anse Aux Meadows / Icebergs & More**

We woke to thick fog, and worried a bit about our day, all for naught as by afternoon it cleared to lovely, bright skies. Annie hosted yoga down in the presentation room, as she would on many subsequent mornings. It was very popular so a bit tight, but fun and a great way to stretch and start the day for those participating.



The morning was navigating along the coast, with two talks given. The first was a show and tell by the ship's photographer Martin, a talented young man that used drones and other techniques for some really unique shots. He was involved in a project called "Thank-you Canada" in honor of the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. The second was an introduction to the Birds

of East Canada by Simon, our very nice shipboard bird specialist.

Our highlight today was seeing the first UNESCO World Heritage Site (CHECK THIS), established to showcase and protect archeological remains of an extensive Viking settlement in the new world. Gingy had been reading *Eric's Daughter*, which she said made the site all the more vivid for her. We could see the site from the sea as we came into anchorage.



Getting this many on and off the ship took some patience, but we all learned to grip the sailor's arm and get seated on the Zodiacs, our drivers all very safety conscious about telling us what to do if we had a man overboard. With luck, we had absolutely calm seas so we learned in easy conditions and all came ashore with ease.

We had a good bit of walking up to the site, walking off our rich desserts and ample meals. There were American Tree Sparrows calling; we scoped them and Savannah Sparrows along the way. Once at the site, Brian suggested we talk a loop path that would reach the visitor center

along a ridge. His pointing indicated it was close, but it turned out to be a mile and a half! For those that veered off this way it was a fun and unexpected walk through a series of small ponds and open meadows, many in flower, but pretty quiet for birds. We did find Red-breasted Merganser on a pond, and several singing Blackpoll Warblers. There were lovely views back on the sea, and small willow and Dwarf Birch shrubbery thick with catkins.

Jenny joined us coming from the visitor center, just in time to spot a pair of Northern Harriers carrying prey, exchanging prey, obviously with a nest down in a low spot of the boreal forest and meadow edge. We walked

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towards the forest, hoping the trees would bring us some additional species. Peg “pished” to encourage the sparrows (Fox, American Tree, and Savannah were seen) and up came the head of a Moose! It was a young male,



great in size but not yet adorned with a full rack, his velvet antlers with one prong emerging. He seemed curious but was at a distance enough to relax and feed, and it was great to watch him. Several Blackpoll Warblers perched up at close range.

The site’s visitor center was packed full of information, artifacts, and a diorama of the site. Ty commented that the reenactors really added to the story for him, explaining what life might have been like there. Almost all their needs were

served at this time, food in the form of fish, berries, and moose, wood for ships and fuel, and perhaps most important, bog iron that could be harvested to make tools. This was a village of families but we still marveled at the struggle of life, and the close sod-brick quarters they could close themselves into during storms.

Time passed quickly ... the birders lingered to the last Zodiac and were rewarded to see a Short-eared Owl swooping over open meadows near the village en route home. Those that got aboard the ship had their own treat, a Humpback Whale breaching right off the ship for quite a long time, great viewing!



The ship was welcoming upon our return and Chris was ready with happy hour in the bar. Dinner was a choice of Rack of Lamb or Fish, with lots of vegetables, and a luscious potato salad full of lobster.



### **Tues., July 18      Morning at Sea / Labrador / Battle Harbor**

We had a good way to go, still on almost calm seas, so it was a morning of lectures. For these, we split into two sessions, Port Side in one room and Starboard in the other, then switched. Marco spoke about the Great Whales, covering identification, life history, distribution, and ecological aspects of their lives; Bud described it as terrific. A guest on the ship, John Geiger, author of several books, talked about one of them, *The Third Man Factor*, where climbers and explorers describe the very

vivid sensation of someone appearing to help them in dire situations, crediting this presence with saving them. He used Shackleton, Lindberg, and other well-known people to describe the situations, then talked about how he discovered many others who experienced this presence while working on this book and its sequel, *The Angel Factor*.



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This afternoon was delightful, we entered a stunning harbor through a narrow opening, a one way passage the called the Tickle, that schooners of olden days must have navigated with care. Once through the narrows there was room to moor up to 19 old-time schooners. The rock in the entry was full of dikes and sills, called migmatite by Susan our geologist, obviously very old and compressed by earth's forces; she described it as stirred up rock soup.

The harbor followed a fault line and the edges were shear on one side, highly pattered. Rounding the corner of this natural beauty we found a perfect Labrador village, painted cottages perched at the sea edge, many of them white with red trim, some weathered and full of character. The locals were out to greet us. Many of the buildings were restored and open for viewing, including a charming small church with stained glass windows, and the old mercantile, now selling warm gloves, mittens, local jewelry, and cards. Sean gathered a group from the ship and gave a lively history of the Grenville Mission, the first medical mission to Labrador, where Dr. Grenville visited in 1892. Appalled by the poverty and lack of services for local fishing communities, he returned to Britain to fundraise for an outfitted medical ship and returned to visit 87 communities up and down the coast, serving almost 800 people in this remote part of the world from the base at Battle Harbor. Eventually the region's first hospital was here, as well as a thriving fishing community.



We disembarked on a jetty, and walked up to see the biggest fish drying rack of the area, an impressive weathered structure that the town was framed around. The Canadian flag waved proudly in the wind, we saw them at all our locations. A building called the Loft was open for those that wanted to visit, serving from the bar — a fireplace showed its many years of use. There was signage around a walking route for those that wanted to explore at their own pace, and about half the group stretched their legs on a walk around the island.



A few new birds were spotted, American Pipit and Horned Lark, as well as Common Terns in the harbor. But the main attractions here were rocks, and they were spectacular. LIST The other fascinating element here was the wildflower bloom — plants of the arctic, including Butterwort, a carnivorous plant of high or northern locations.



There were two cemeteries, located on fault lines where soil accumulated and it was possible to dig on the island. They were

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sad; several graves of young children lay adorned with lambs and poignant phrases. But there were also graves of those with long lives, lived more remotely than many of us could imagine, transport only that of the sea.

Julie described the place as one where every view was a picture postcard. We were lucky to visit on a “bluebird” day with great weather to enjoy the splendid views.

Back on the ship we set sail for a long jump up to Hopedale, which we’d reach the following afternoon. Icebergs were common and a favorite for viewing. Our bird crew kept watch from the deck and overall it had been a day of little action. Peg hosted a cocktail party for our Naturalist Journeys group to get to know each other better in the library, and during this time they spotted a pod of Common Puffins, a Thick-billed Murre, our first Sooty Shearwater, and several Red Phalaropes from the bridge — we could only hope we’d repeat this exciting sighting in coming days!

Dinner was a choice of duck, fish, or a roasted cauliflower dish and all seemed pleased, filling out with a rich Red Velvet cake or chocolate ice-cream. The evening gathering was great fun, with the staff transforming themselves into musicians: Simon on the mandolin, Julia on the fiddle, Martin on the guitar. They were joined by several of the passengers, David Gray a professional musician, and with ease they mingled songs and styles, fun!



### **Wed., July 19 Morning at Sea / Hopedale Community Visit**

The morning once again brought calm seas, this time almost like glass, so spotting seabirds was easy. Though



there were few, we did get looks at Atlantic Puffin and Arctic Skua (Parasitic Jaeger) at a distance. There were numerous Black Guillemot and our first Glaucous Gull among the usual trio of Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls, and Black-legged Kittiwake. Eventually a Razorbill was seen at fairly close range.

Lectures this morning were by Aaron on Polar Bears, drawing from his work at Churchill, Manitoba, to larger topics of origin, population numbers and management, and the possible impacts of climate change. Sean discussed with expertise the tensions between Labrador and neighboring Newfoundland and Quebec, past and present, giving us a better feel for local politics and situations.



The day got steadily grayer, and eventually drizzly as we started to get close to a series of islands marking the passage into Hopedale’s harbor. Layer after layer of low lying islands, made up of some of Earth’s oldest rock (4.6-billion years!) cast reflections, and Cindy was busy on deck taking photos to later inspire her paintings. We saw several harp seals in the water, about a dozen Common Loon, and a Red-throated Loon as well. The islands looked as if the ice had just pulled away, under the

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gray skies a bit forbidding.

Hopedale itself looked prosperous from a distance, a much larger town than we'd encountered for several days, with many colorful buildings. In person on a gray, rainy day it felt like many an arctic town where every oil drum and piece of machinery that ever made it there had never left. There was a grocery with very expensive common items, a Royal Canadian Post Office, government buildings, a museum and a church with a community very proud of its almost 200-year-old heritage.



The region has a series of Moravian missions, and this church was built in Europe and shipped over as a kit to assemble, so long ago its timbers were assembled with pegs. The downstairs room was the sanctuary, decorated with children's art and plastic flowers, and with an organ and evidence of a choir. The upstairs was an ill-

maintained labyrinth of rooms that served as Sunday Schools, and on days that cruise ships arrived, a place to display crafts and local carvings.



The lay minister greeted us, a lovely woman that has been in the community for 20 years. She spoke of the challenges she faces, the joys and sorrows, particularly catching her voice as she talked about the suicide rate in the region's youth, problems with addiction, lifting up as she described the band they were renewing interest in, and the 200 young children now in the school.

Hopedale is currently about 800 persons, fishing the main occupation, and its residents show a growing interest in the crafts and carving. A large government assembly building was open for us to see, an Inn served hot coffee, and the upstairs of the church held crafts and carvings. The crafts were mainly mittens, slippers, and keychains, the carvings were from soapstone, several very good. Fathers and sons seemed to be the carvers, women and daughters sold crafts. It was nice to converse and study their weathered faces, see their smiles when a purchase was made. Outside the rain precluded many from further exploring or lingering, but some ventured off to the museum and on to the public assembly building, where Ty said the children were playing their native games. The

Zodiacs were ready when we were, and all appreciated Chris setting up a makeshift bar on deck to serve us hot cider, with or without rum, as we returned to the ship.



### **Thurs., July 20 Morning at Sea / Torngat National Park — Saglek Fjord**

The coastline was very dramatic this morning, making for a pleasant time atop the ship or in the bow, just gawking at the scenery. The light show was elegant, as today we had a band of puffy clouds (to Phil, our landscape photographer's delight) to adorn the mountains. There were Glaucous Gulls joining the

Herring Gulls and Black Guillemots at sea, and in we picked up a few new species including one Sooty Shearwater



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and some Red-necked Phalaropes. Numbers of birds were not high, but we kept watch on the wings of the bridge, regardless.

A decision was made to skip going into Hebron, a historical site of some sadness — the ghostly remains of an Inuit community that was forced to resettle in the 1960s. We watched a film of a reunion held there as part of reconciliation — a very moving documentary about former residents returning for a visit, finding what little remained of their homes, but coming together to share memories and stories, a time of healing. Many from this village had gone to Hopedale and we first learned of the story there. We did not stop in part due to a storm front heading our way, and the allure of an afternoon of sun for the first of the majestic fjords of Torngat took priority. The Captain was also growing concerned about how much ice was present beyond the Torngats and wanted a cushion of time as progress might be slowed.

Once we turned into the fjord, Jenny and Peg did an eBird log for the trip up the fjord, from 1:30 PM to 4:00 PM. Few records have been entered for this area, so we wanted to participate. Our results were slim, with Common and Red-throated Loon and Common Eider being the main addition to Black-legged Kittiwakes and gulls. One treat was the spotting of a female Black Bear with two small cubs of the year, but she was frightened by our far-off ship and high-tailed up a near vertical scree slope. What a glimpse into how wild this area is, that from such a distance we could cause her fear.

People enjoyed the upper decks, and today the photographers



were busy. One of the guest photographers, Joe, was taking a photo every four seconds as we went along, with plans to stitch together a video of the event. He also had a Go Pro mounted on the rail, fun and high tech photography. Bud was busy with his lens on the bow, tucked in from the wind with Gingy and Julie. Susan was once again just thrilled by the rocks, patterned this time by major folding, wow!

At 5:00 we launched the kayaks and zodiacs to go exploring. We'd reached the end of a fjord and enjoyed the chance to explore the estuary of this deeply U-shaped glacier carved valley. Black Duck and four female Harlequins flew quickly from the reeds, and Brian spotted some Green-winged Teal. Franco, in the first Zodiac, put up over a dozen Red-breasted Mergansers. Much of the attention was drawn to another Black Bear sighting, this one did not have cubs and did not show any alarm; it was digging furiously in a lush patch of vegetation, about half way up the stately mountainside. On a small sandbar, we found a Semipalmated Plover in bright plumage, calling and returning to the same spot, most likely on a nest



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so we let her be. She had plenty to eat, the mosquitos here were swarming and the size of big mayflies — the first we'd seen for the trip.



Dinner was a choice of roast lamb, lemon sole, or an eggplant steak served with sautéed vegetables. Dessert was a mango panacotta with strawberries. As usual, people scattered to cabins or gathered in the bar, a few lingered on deck — the sunset light was soft and pretty as we retraced the path out the fjord, 51 miles in length! The plan was to reposition to another, even longer fjord for the following day. Torngat is one of Canada's newest national parks and still largely inaccessible, so access via the fjords by ship was a real treat.

### **Fri., July 21      Torngat National Park — Nachlek Fjord**

We woke to dramatic skies, more sun than cloud, but with clouds present decorating tall, rounded, and carved mountains. It was striking to see the glacial landscape so dramatic on this ancient rock, with U-shaped valleys either hanging or coming right to the sea. Huge hanging valleys still had snow, and some of the snow clung to water courses filling them in with white all the way down to the edge of the sea. We had parked off the longest fjord of the cruise to keep the dramatic scenery as a morning highlight.



Each day, Annie led a yoga session below deck in the presentation room, and up on the bridge the usual early birds were up watching birds and enjoying coffee with the marvelous views on deck from the Bridge wings or the lounge. A few earnest ones, including Shyamala, started the day in the gym, on the elliptical to get in a workout.

Entering Nachlek Fjord we saw Black Guillemot, Common Eider, both Bearded and Harp Seals, and a variety of gulls. The grandeur of scale in the mountainsides was hard to take in. We glided up the smooth water channel for much of the morning, marveling at rock and sky.



Sadly, the local park guides (required for us to land) were all busy putting up their Base Camp, so we were not able to land for hikes and were limited to Zodiac cruises. For seeing wildlife, this was okay ... but our hikers were disappointed. The kayakers were eager to paddle, and did.

We were able to see a Caribou on the distant beach, and later near that same beach, Harlequin Ducks and a nesting Semi-palmated Plover. Rafts of Black Duck were tight-knit together in the quiet coves, they paddled away from us on the water, in their molt plumage and not able to fly.

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The weather deteriorated throughout the afternoon, and it was starting to feel like the Arctic! We had to gear up to go out, and even suited up we got chilled as the storm moved in. Chris welcoming us back aboard with hot chocolate and Baileys was most welcomed.

### **Sat., July 22      Morning at Sea to the top of Labrador / The Knight & Button Islands**

We woke to gray skies, but with birds swirling about the ship, a nice change in the seabird activity level. 90% of the birds were

Northern Fulmars, and we had many approaching the ship at close range. With their big eyes, they seem kind and engaging. About 10% of the fulmars were the gray, or blue, phase and the rest were white phase with bright white heads. Mixed in with the abundant fulmars were Black-legged Kittiwakes, Thick-billed Murres, and the occasional Herring Gull.

Those rising early could see the outline of the coastal mountains in the distance, but fog was dancing around them and soon closed in to very limited visibility. The effect of blustery weather kept us off the coast at sea. The Captain had planned to approach the Button Islands, known for some wicked currents, this morning in daylight so all could see. Our speed was slow, allowing for some great views of the birds.



Breakfast, as usual, was served buffet-style with loads of variety, and by the time we finished we still had a few hours to get to our anchorage on the south side of the Button Islands. The naturalists offered two lectures. One was by Aaron on Pinnipeds, introducing us to the various seals we could see. The other was by John Geiger, guest author on the ship, telling about the adventures and misadventures of the Franklin exploration team doomed in the Northwest Passage (a tale of horror and terror...). Peg did a couple of sea watches for eBird, counting each individual of the various species for a timed session. It was more sporting now, as we tallied birds numbering several 100 now, at least in the category of Northern Fulmar. Several helped, including Simon, Brian, Rod, and Jenny, the regulars, and for Peg the highlight was catching a photo of three King Eider in flight at about 11:15 AM.





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By lunch it was cold, bone-chilling cold for those standing out on deck. We reckoned this was the near-Arctic after all – this morning we'd passed 60 degrees north latitude. At 2:00 PM we loaded Zodiacs, and with so much clothing on we all looked like penguins approaching the gangway, so layered up to stay warm. But adventure was calling, this was officially Polar Bear country!

We headed across to the Button Islands, marvelous and foreboding at the same time, rounded monoliths of twisted rock, wearing colors of brown and gray, with dark lichen being the main plant lifeform. Ribs of rock running through the ancient layers bent in all directions.

But seals cheered us on the way, popping up in pods of 10 – 20 as we crossed, one Ribbon Seal and many, many harp seals. They were great fun to watch, truly cavorting with great splashing and curiosity causing them to look and travel our way.

Our eagle eye guides spotted a Polar Bear on shore, resting on the rocks, but once we approached it disappeared quickly. Amazing that in such a remote and far off spot they were still wary of mankind. Further exploring revealed a female Polar Bear with three cubs obviously on the move, some of the boats watched her swim, get out of the water and shake like a big dog. There was discussion as to if she was on the move from the male bear seen earlier, or from our presence, but either way they really covered some ground. We watched then climb rapidly up to the ridgeline to go over it and disappear out of site. Topography was such that we followed the shoreline but could not get another view; scenery, deep blue-ice icebergs, and cavorting seals had to do!



We also saw Iceland Gull, Black Guillemot and Red-throated Loon, but as weather conditions deteriorated we felt the need to go in, it was a decidedly Arctic Day! Everyone enjoyed this day of exploring, so wild and remote are these islands. Susan got some closeup views of more geology. Currents around the island were impressive, pushing our Zodiacs about, making wild patterns on the water; the current edge a magnet for life forms, especially seabirds and Harp Seals. We all had questions about winter ice conditions and if there was a land bridge to the islands. Our naturalists assured us that yes, there was, it was ALL frozen up here! We agreed that in exploring the Arctic one has to be very tough to weather and wind, as there was no easy

invitation here! Peg had shared a 1935 Natural History Magazine print about a party of explorers dropped off on the island for two weeks as that expedition went on north, almost impossible to imagine. Over cocktails we talked about our gear versus theirs and shuddered to think of it!

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### Sun., July 23      A Day of Ice / Polar Bears

Our route once in the Arctic had to be determined by ice, and while we wanted to go to Monumental Island in search of Walrus, the ice would not allow it. Our Captain received daily ice maps in great detail — a color mosaic indicating the density on a scale. We knew our ship was rated for much of the conditions but not the red, and there was still a lot of red on that map! At our briefing, they assured us we would get through, but it would be slow going, about 2 – 3 nautical miles per hour. The Canadian government keeps close tabs on ships here, with three ice-breakers in position to guide, and the need for an escort determined for each ship passing through.



Indeed, we saw two cargo ships headed for Iquluit that had to have an ice-breaker escort. Our captain wanted to avoid that; if we were assigned an escort there would be no stopping, and we wanted very much to have time with Polar Bears. For everyone on the ship, time within the ice totally surrounded by large mats of pancake ice, was just an amazing experience. This was the Arctic before only imagined. The ice was fascinating, in places dense and joined with pressure ridges making pathways.

We saw a few seals hauled out and on high alert for Polar Bears. A large contingent of staff and guests were on deck looking throughout the day, and finally in the afternoon Marco was successful. The announcement was made, “Polar Bear” and all came out on deck. Thankfully we had lots of telescopes as the sighting was not close, but at the distance it occurred, the bear seemed not even aware of us and we could watch it work the pressure ridges of piled ice, listening and smelling for seals. It was a huge bear, likely a male and it covered ground effortlessly. Everyone had a search image now, of size, and their yellowish color that stands out against white snow.

Not long after we found a female with two cubs, also a good 500 meters or more off the ship. The cubs stuck tight to her, occasionally having to make a romp across a flat stretch to catch up as she moved in this terrain with such ease. It was marvelous to watch them for some time.



The ship could not go into the dense ice they seemed to prefer, but we positioned for the best view possible. We got “bear dot” photos, but they were *our* bear dot photos and we were happy!

The day passed quickly, despite not be able to get off the ship; the ice realm was so unique, intriguing, and remarkably changing and beautiful. Bergie bits, the last remnants of icebergs, shone a lustrous blue on their undersides. We heard the ice, as the ship literally pushed chunks off to the side as we made our way slowly through. Martin, our photographer, hung his camera over the bow to show the cutting mechanism of the ship that helped us chop up the ice.

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We started this day of ice in gorgeous early sunlight, then descended into fog, then back into sun as we made our way to a blue-striped horizon. The Captain, monitoring charts, could see a massive block of ice to the north, and wanted to get into Frobisher Bay before it had the chance to shift and possibly block our passageway. For us it was a full day in the ice, a chance for many to experience a world one can only imagine

or see on a nature film, here it was laid out before us — an ice immersion. Somehow the time had disappeared, and we had just one more day.

At 5:30 PM the One Ocean staff hosted an auction up in the lounge to benefit the One Ocean Foundation charities, particularly the cause of reducing plastics in the sea, and it was fun. The staff liberally poured champagne and served our tables with plates of cheese and fruit. Ben officiated, and two of our group, David Welch and Cynthia Wister, both fine artists, had donated artwork to the cause. Treasures included these two paintings, local sweets, knitted goods, and the chart of our route. It was fun.



And then a surprise, the announcement to bundle up as dinner was to be outside! Why leave the ice for a minute on a now-sunny evening!! It was a perfect non-windy night, but still chilly so we all bundled well. Chair seats were cold, but the staff had fun and goofy hats to make it festive, and as always conversation ran freely. The chef and his team barbecued on the spot, beef steaks, ribs, vegetables, shrimp, and fish. Yum!

Then, more fun! Tonight was music night in the Deck 6 lounge and we all enjoyed it thoroughly. The makeshift band of staff and guests knew many tunes in common and invited us to join in. There were ballads and fiddle tunes, and Marco did a jig.

Simon was prime on the mandolin, there were three guitars,

Julia played a mean and expert fiddle, and Kaeylen joined in with her full and marvelous voice. This musical talent added so much to our voyage!

Finally, nature was not to be outdone. This evening's sunset was a world-class one with streaks of light playing on the mountains and water, wow!



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**July 24, 2017      Frobisher Bay**



Sean tells us there are three time zones in Labrador, and as the far north is on the same time as Ottawa, we all turned our clocks back an hour today. We woke to still sea conditions, the ship having found a quiet spot in



Frobisher Bay out of the ice to be safe.

Charles

Francis Hall Bay is where we were moored, and was named for an explorer important to finding key artifacts of the lost Franklin expedition. Handy to have two keen historians on board!



As we had missed hiking in the Torngats due to lack of the local guides and our gnarly weather, many on the ship were itching to stretch their legs and today they had a chance. A group

dubbed the “chargers” took off with David, a certified mountain guide, to get to a height in the landscape for superlative views. Others enjoyed a naturalist’s foray, feasting their eyes on wildflowers that included a fireweed relative often called River Beauty, a lot of Dryas, Arctic Cotton, and more. Simon led a birding group, on which there was a quick flyby of a female Lapland Longspur, and several American Pipit sightings. One small group elected to explore by Zodiac and the allure of going into a series of bays proved to be a thrill. From the water, this scenery was *so* grand in scale! One bay led back to the edge of the glacier as it met the sea, a cove complete with a lovely waterfall and blue ice — stunning. Several of the hiking groups and the kayakers later got to this bay, too. The Zodiac crew explored two more bays down, to a deep cut in the rock walls that had quiet water. Here they found some 200 or more Common Eider collected together, likely heading into their time of molt, but still able to fly. They did so in long lines, making bands of color of water, rock, birds, and sky. Memorable!

The Captain needed us to be on our way to go up the fjord to Iquluit by 1:00 PM, as there was a narrow passage required and we needed to be there at the slack tide due to the power of currents — that was 7:00 PM. This was big, grand country! For the rest of the afternoon, we cruised along, heading inland as the mountains gentled. Despite our vigilant viewing, birds were few. Peg spied a small group of Red Phalarope and otherwise it was the standard quartet of Black Guillemot, Thick-billed Murre, Herring and Glaucous Gulls.



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Could it really be our final evening? At 6:30 PM in the Deck 6 lounge, the staff prepared a recap of our route, complete with maps, and Martin presented a slide show, of which we all got copies on a thumb drive as a souvenir of the trip. The breadth of scenery we'd experienced was there before us, a trip of many extremes to savor, from the lush environment of L'Anse Aux Meadows to the stark high arctic once we reached northern Labrador and crossed to Baffin Island. They set it to music and it included many of the passengers as well as scenery and wildlife. Lots of smiles, fun!

Tonight was the Captain's Dinner. Peg got a table for our group of 12, but the Captain was busy navigating the narrows, so we had to enjoy a merry time without him. After dinner, several went to the Upper Deck to take in the views and enjoy each other's company before our adieu in the morning.

### July 25 Farewell at Iqaluit

The ship was still as we woke, anchored off the capital city of Nunavut, Iqaluit. It was a perfectly still morning; on one side of the ship bits of ice floated about, the other a city built on a hillside, vibrant and growing, several outlying sections helped house the 8000 people that call this far northern place home. Tugs pushed loads of cargo in containers to a big ship and came back with more, the tide here is about 10 vertical feet and tug activity indicated we were in the high part of the cycle.

We landed on a stone beach, able to keep dry, and we all felt blessed by the sun as our luggage came across in mesh bags lowered to the Zodiacs. Buses were waiting for us to go to the local museum to learn of the city and its history. They had excellent exhibits and people from a local outfitter on hand to answer questions. One exhibit was very moving, portraits of elders taken by youth, with a bit of the story of their lives by each one. Many of the faces were so weathered and full of character, each held its own story but together they wove a happiness of life that was wonderful to see. Hunting success and full bellies was a reoccurring happy theme.

The shop did a brisk business with our crowd — carvings, art prints, and jewelry were all popular finds. They also had a calendar of Inuit Art that was charming and affordable, nice to take back home. Some just enjoyed a walk



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about town. The local parliament meets in a building shaped like an igloo; the local school looks like an oversized iceberg. There was a big store that had Tim Horton's donuts, groceries, furniture, household gear, and more. There was an optics shop, dental shop, various services for the community, and several other galleries. Our time was short and soon they were calling us to go to the airport, but it was nice to have time to see an Arctic city that seemed to be thriving and catch a bit of how their lives might work.

Several of the staff left with us, others were arriving, and another full boat of passengers, eager to see more of this remote part of Canada. Phil from our group was continuing on and we will be eager to hear his stories. Our flock would split into those staying by the airport to head out early the next day, and those going into Ottawa to enjoy some of this city's fine museums and events of the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

We met some wonderful people on the ship. It was nice to have the support of our group within the group, but also a bit hard to hold it together, best to go with the flow and mingle with all, enjoy the full experience of the cruise according to interest and ability, then gather for meals and social time. Our keen birders often found each other on the open-air wings of the bridge, looking ahead, scanning and scanning. There we adopted a few others, Rod Standing was a regular alongside Peg and Jenny Bowman of our group, also Brian Ratliffe of Quest, Simon Boyles from the UK; together they kept pretty much an around the clock watch in the daylight hours, fortified by others that would join us. Once in Polar Bear country we had lots of other help! Birds were not plentiful, but iconic of the north. Treats included King Eider, Dovekie, Glaucous Gulls in good number, Iceland Gulls, and one



silly Mourning Dove that may prove to be a northern record. The early morning call of Common Loons in Torngat Fjords will be a lasting memory.

And oh, those elusive bears! We looked in all the places they had luck in voyages before, but sadly struck out in Torngat, though several Black Bears vied for our attention. It was in the Button Islands we found them, six in one day! A few of the boats had just amazing views, others got there for the end of a mother bear and two cubs climb up

a ridgeline, but we all got to see them. Then on the pack ice we bruised our eyeballs searching, finally successful, amazing to watch them in their realm.

As memorable as the scenery was our young, but enthusiastic crew. They were constantly ready to help, always eager to recognize a need, happy to run up and down the flights of stairs to get things you might need, happy to walk with someone along a slippery stretch of path, extending an arm to securely seat you on the Zodiac. The staff ate with us and always enlivened the conversations. Vanessa was an elegant Hotel Manager, and Julia and Chris ran a very friendly and efficient bar.





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For the educational program, Sean Cadigan was by far the most gifted lecturer. His grasp of Labrador history was thorough and he wrapped 200 years of events into a world context with ease. We all enjoyed his presentations, both on shore and on board. Franco has been an Arctic aficionado for many years, working on Devon and Ellesmere Islands as



well as the ship, so his lectures were grounded in experience and they were good. Aaron packed his lectures with information, and our guest lecturer, author John Geiger added a nice dimension.



Travel stretches time, and for all of us, 10 days with no world news, little to no email, and a simple rhythm of meals, excursions, lectures, and social time was wonderful. That we left a port with trees and greenery and ended in one with rock and sky gave such a grand dimension to the voyage.

Some headed into Ottawa, the capital city of Canada, to see the Parliament, river pathway, and museums. Others spent the night by the airport and headed more directly home. The transition back to green, and busyness, traffic, and a city was a bit disorienting. Peg found a quote at the National Art Gallery that summed up the feel of the great north we had experienced.

“We are on the fringe of the great North and its living whiteness., ... its resignations and release, its call and answer, its cleansing, rhythms.”

— S. Harris, 1929

Until the next adventure!



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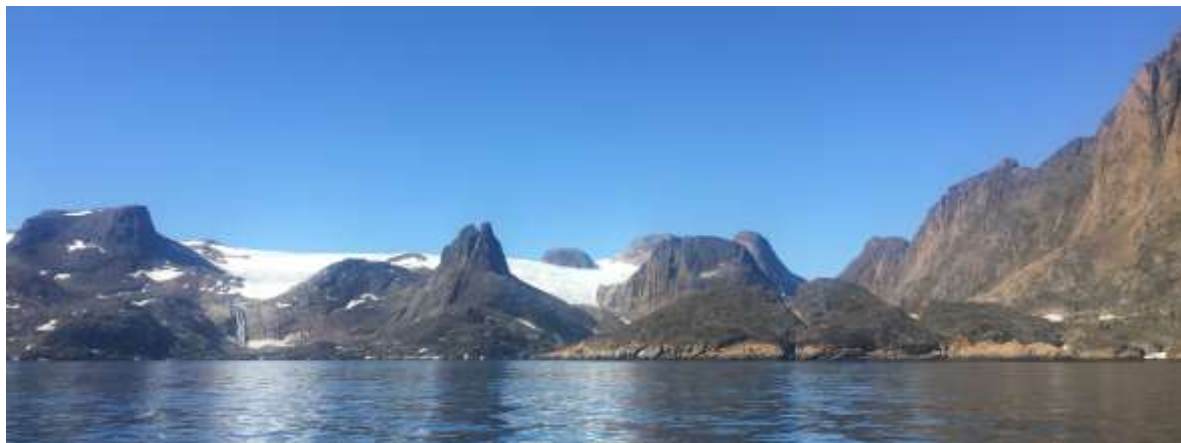


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Photos: Semipalmated Plover, Thick-billed Murres, Sign at Iqaluit in Three Languages, Jenny Bowman. Common Yellowthroat female, David Welch. All other photos by Peg Abbott.



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