Rembrandt van Rijn
Trip to West and North Spitsbergen

18th - 28th June 2025

REMBRANDT VAN RIJN VISITING WEST-NORTHWEST-NORTH-NORTHEAST SPITSBERGEN

R*embrandt sailing* voyage, departing from Longyearbyen, sailing the Northwest and North coast of Spitsbergen in search of birdlife, landscapes and charismatic wildlife on its natural environment.
With 25 Passengers, 2 Oceanwide Guides and 10 Professional Crew.
Our trip took us from Isfjord to the West coast of Spitsbergen and afterwards to the Northwest area of the archipelago.
Sailing along, we set foot on the shores of several amazing spots along the way. Sailing the frigid waters of the island we enjoyed some of the most spectacular sites on this coast, with its mountainous landscapes and glaciers, bircliffs and mountainous landsacapes. We could feel the roughness of the scenery during excursions of different length, difficulty and duration.



MV REMBRANDT VAN RIJN

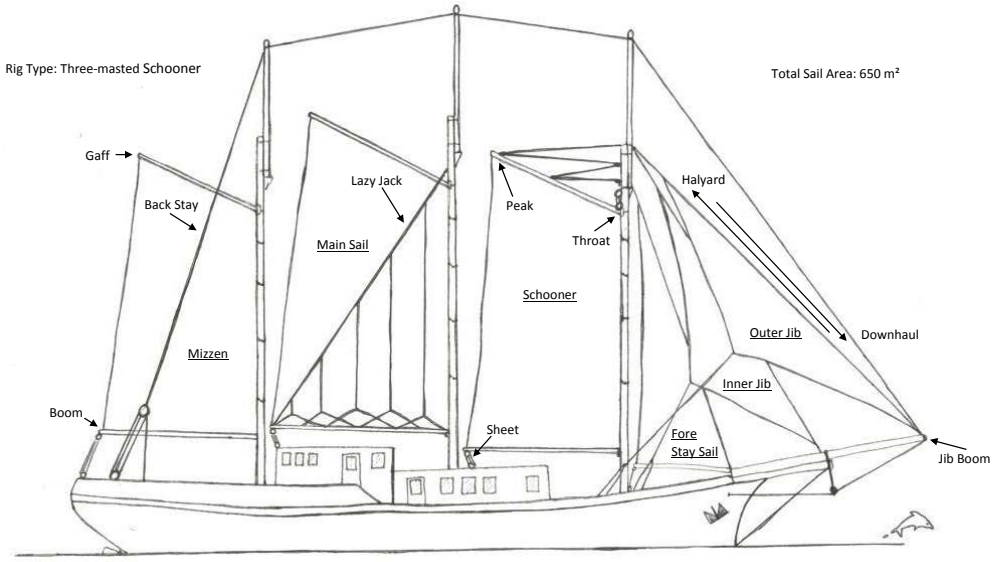
Rembrandt was built in 1924 at the Leiderdorp shipyard in Netherlands. She started her career as ‘Jacoba’ operating as a fishing lugger during four years. In 1928 she was converted on a motor-vessel, fitted with a diesel engine and renamed as‘Anna Marta’. In 1933 a new diesel engine was fitted and she was lengthened and rebuilt as a three-masted schooner. She went through another major rebuilt in 1951, and smaller refurbishing in 1952 and 1957, involving engine changes. In 1962 she was sold and renamed again as ‘Minde’. She was renamed again when she was based in Denmark in 1971, as ‘Klaus D’. During the last rebuilds, the ship was de-rigged and returned to being a motor-vessel, working as a Reefer-ship cargo vessel.
In 1984 and 1985 she was sold a couple more times, being re-named as ‘Enno Doedens Star’. In 1986 two new diesel engines were fitted, followed in 1993 by a rebuild to the three-masted schooner that she is nowadays, at Vlissingen, Netherlands. She was re-named Rembrandt van Rijn. Between 1994-96 she operated cruises to Spitsbergen, and in 1998 she was placed under the management of OceanWide Nautical Services, operating cruises between Panama and the Galapagos Island till 2001. After a period of inactivity she returned to the expedition cruise-trips in 2011.
The ship sails under Vanuatu’s flag, is equipped according to strict international safety regulations and is fitted with modern electronic nautical instrumentation and safety equipment.

EXPEDITION TRIP IN WEST AND NORTH SPITSBERGEN
ON BOARD SV REMBRANDT VAN RIJN

SV Rembrandt van Rijn

Call Sign: YJRJ3, Port of Registry: Port Vila, Vanuatu

Length over all: 56 m, Breadth: 6,70 m, Draught: 3,0 m, Gross Tonnage: 308, Displacement: 420 t, Year built: 1924, Leiderdorp, Netherlands







LONGYEARBYEN: Svalbard's administrative centre Longyearbyen was founded by American entrepreneur John Monroe Longyear in 1906 and is located in Adventfjorden / Isfjorden. Originally used as a mining settlement, the town became the seat of the Governor (called Sysselmannen) in 1926, one year after the Svalbard treaty came into force. Today Mine 7 is the only coal mine that is still in operation and the town's main business is the tourism. Around 2200 people from different nations live year-around in Longyearbyen and the archipelagos airport, hospital and administration are all located in the town.
Some 5 km outside of the town the Svalbard Global Seed Vault is located. The vault inside Plataabergen will receive 4.5 million seed samples from all over the world to safeguard them against global catastrophes.

18th June 2025 Longyearbyen



In Longyearbyen, located at 78° 15' N on the shores of the large fjord system Isfjord, we embarked on an adventurous journey to explore the Western and Northern coasts of the island, their wildlife and landscapes.
Longyearbyen is a contrasting place, sitting between a nature wonder and an Arctic working outpost. Cars roam around the few roads, ever-present snow mobiles lay covered and protected awaiting the next winter, and people walk the streets, locals and many visitors from the other expedition ships and yachts that are here today as well. Home too for a polar university, museum, supermarket, numerous equipment and mountain clothing shops, plus several restaurants and bars. The town is becoming a busy touristic destination, mostly during spring and summer, with increasing number of visitors as well of winter land-based travellers.
Today we could witness this trend with the presence of several others cruise-expedition vessels, sailing ships and yachts that are alongside the main harbour, the floating pier or at anchor in the calm waters of the bay.



Longyearbyen, the capital of Spitsbergen is one of the northernmost villages in the world, counting with an average amount of inhabitants of about 2000. A number of people that experience a great increase during the summer season, when visitors and tourists, both land and ship based fly or sail all the way here.
Rembrandt van Rijn, the sailing ship that will be our home and traveling platform for the next 10 days, rested alongside the town's floating pier since last night.
Despite having a short handover day between the group that is leaving the ship after a trip and ourselves, joining a new one, is ready for this sailing adventure on those "out of the beaten tracks" in the northern lands.
Some people of our group arrived yesterday to the island, some others flew here today in the afternoon, but one way or another we all had a bit of time to explore the settlement before making our way to the ship. She opened her doors for us at about 16:00h. Hotel Manager and the crew welcomed us aboard, invited us for a cup of coffee while waiting for the start of the first meetings of the trip at the ship's dining room.
First the Captain welcomed us aboard and introduced his crew, followed by a brief talk about the life on board and some house rules. Right afterwards came the mandatory safety briefing and abandon ship drill that must be done at departure. Nothing much left but let go our moorings, which happened just at 18:15h. All the interested ones to see the departure joined on deck before dinner was served at 19:00h.
Under the calm weather and sunny skies of today's conditions at Isfjord, we just began our Arctic adventures in Rembrandt. First she will head north to the Forlandsundet, the channel that separates the island of Prins Karls Forland and Spitsbergen. There we plan tomorrow's activities.
The way is smooth and calm, and soon we will get used to be in the land of the continuous daylight, at any time of day or "night". The most enthusiastic of us always have all the time they want to step on deck, binoculars and cameras at hand for the first sightings and photographs of the voyage. The sun never sets here at those high latitudes at this time of the year.
Common eiders, Little auks, Kittiwakes, Barnacle and Pink footed geese, a handful of Puffins and heaps of the elegant Northern fulmars were around as we make our way towards the bay where the glacier Dahl calves onto the sea.











19th June 2025 W SPITSBERGEN - FORLANDSUNDET

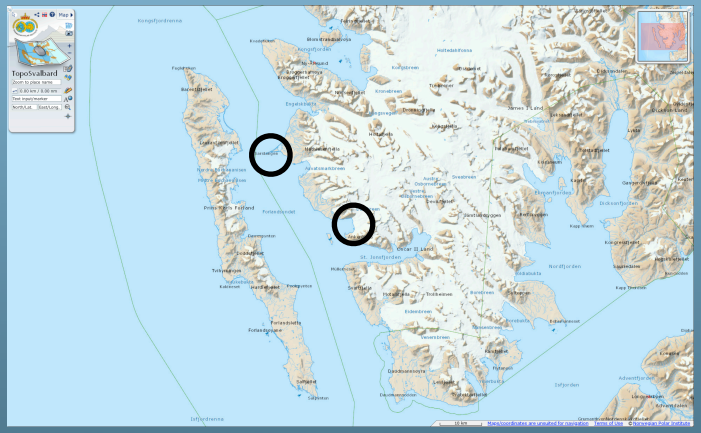
Landings at Dahlbreen and Sarstangen

DATE	19th June 2025					
Time	04:00	08:00	12:00	16:00	20:00	24:00
Position	078° 32.9' N 012° 18.7' E	078° 32.9' N 012° 18.7' E	078° 34.5' N 012° 25.7' E	078° 43.1' N 011° 25.9' E	078° 52.6' N 011° 14.5' E	079° 13.3' N 010° 00.4' E
Wind	NE 1-2	NE1	W1	NW2	NW2	Calm
Temperature (°C)	5	4	5	4	4	5
Weather	Clear	Clear	Clear	Clear	Clear	Clear
Atmospheric Pressure (hPa)		1013	1014	1016	1016	1016
Sea State	Rippled	Rippled	-	Slight	Slight	-
		Anchored at Dahlbreen	Anchor up	Anchored at Sarstangen	Underway	Underway





It was a calm night while we were on the way from Longyearbyen along Isfjord. At the beginning the waters mirror the surroundings and it is windless, later on, as we steer northwards to the Forlandsundet, the water ripples with the light breeze. We are then in this sort of channel that runs between mainland Spitsbergen and the long and mountainous island of Prins Karls Forland.
That was to be the area for today's activities.
And it was just about 04:30h in the early morning when the anchor rattles down and we are set at Dahlbreenbukta, the secluded bay where the glacier Dahl debouches its ice to the sea.
Both the embayment and the glacier are named after the business man and whaling ship owner Thor Dahl (1862-1920), from Sandefjord in Norway.
The morning is sunny and just light airs blow, allowing for great views over the mountains that frame the glacial scenery, and as a highlight of the area, the high calving front of Dahlbreen, the main feature here. It flows down the surrounding peaks and valleys for 15km, and on its way is lined by several other tributary glaciers.
With all that in front of us when we wake up and walk on deck with the first coffee of the day, we are eager to go ashore in this good weather day. But not yet, before our first steps into Spitsbergen wilderness, we need to know the rules and code of conduct when conducting Arctic tourisms. So the day starts with briefings before we get the good to go and make our way to the zodiacs.
They put us ashore at the foot of a chain of hills that extend parallel to the glacier front, at a distance of over a kilometre from it. We are to walk on one of the glacier moraines of Dahl, over the rocks, muddy areas and sediments that once were transported by the ice when this area lay below the thick cover of the glacier.
The rapid melting of the snow that not so long ago blanketed the landscape makes for ponds and muddy zones to avoid as we hike. Here and there is visible too the basement rock, part of the oldest banded gneisses of the island. Their dark colour is beautifully patterned with quartzite intrusions; their rounded and polished shape show the erosion that has suffered for thousands of years under the ice; their scars tells us about the ice loaded with pebbles and rocks that once ran over it, leaving their mark on those hard rocks underneath.
Laying on the beach and the low areas, multitude of bits of ice. Their origin, the glacier itself that sure has been showing some activity through calvings. The swells that the ice-falls produce together with the tidal currents has brought them to pile up along the shoreline. And indeed some calvings occurred during our time ashore. Standing on the top of the hills, sitting in silence, the glacier rumbles and cracks until a good chunk of it falls, growing waves that soon crash against the beach under our feet.
A truly and typical Spitsbergen glacial scenery that we leave behind by lunchtime.



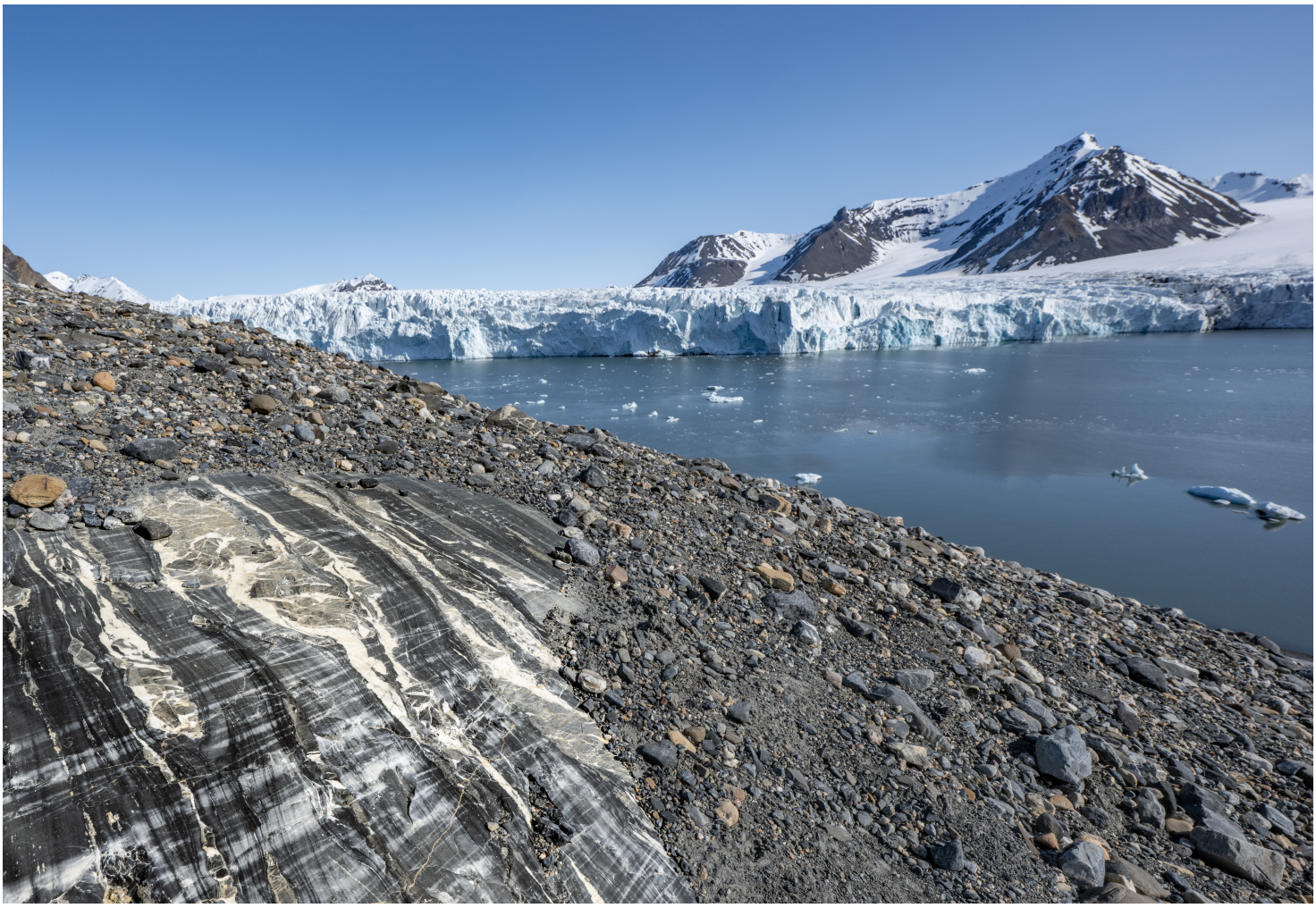
Forlandsundet: 88km long sound, between Prins Karls Forland and Spitsbergen. Named after Charles I (1600-1649), Prince of Wales later King of England.
Area rarely visited despite its position between Longyearbyen and Ny Ålesund. There are large shallows in the area. Only the smaller boats can go through them and most ships have to be on the open waters West of the island Prins Karls Forland.
The narrowest part is also the most shallow, between the points that extend into its wares from mainland (Srastangen) and Murraypynten (Prins Karls Forland). Spectacular scenery with glaciers and mountains both sides of the ship. To its north and Eastwards opens the scenic and large fjord of Kongsfjord.

















Once we are all back on board, the ship bring her anchor home and steers northwards. From here, about a three hours ride brought us to the narrowest bit of Forlandsund. Not just is a constricted passage but also the shallowest of the channel. Barely a meter of water is under the quill for a few moments, then they sea bottom slightly drops on a more evenly way, once Murraybreen at Prins Karls Forland and Sarstangen at mainland are behind us.

A good look at the this flat and elongated sand bar revealed a group of walruses huddling ashore.

Sarstangen is home for quite a regular haul-out of these animals that like the shallow sandy waters of locations such as that one. Landing and walking close to them, having a close encounter with one of the resting groups ashore it is always an unforgettable experience

Zodiac landings must be done in a quiet way and more than 300m away from the haul-out. Then we all walk in a silent slow moving group. Just the proper way to have a top experience, getting the best out of any wildlife landing.

Today an estimated number of 50 to 60 huddle together in a group. Sleeping, resting, digesting their meals, burping and farting they spend their time ashore before they go feeding again on the shallows waters around. Sure rich on invertebrates and their favourite meal, shells and bivalves. Curiously, their enormous bulk, which can amount to 1,500 kg for a male, and 1,000 kg for a female, is sustained on relatively small invertebrates, mainly clams, which they locate while foraging along the sea bottom.

With their highly sensitive facial bristles alert to the slightest movement of mollusk or crustacean, and their tusks like sled runners, walruses seek out food by suction. Once found, the walrus brings its curiously powerful mouth into play. Its dome-shaped oral cavity, powerful lips and facial muscles allow it to suck up clams, suck out the meat and discard the shells. Adults eat a rich diet of up to 45 kg of food daily.

Then they need their rest on land. They are very gregarious animals and positively thigmotactic, needing the body contact of each other.

Dominant walruses (large, with long unbroken tusks) are most successful in entering herds on land, and in keeping positions in them. This results in overrepresentation of subordinates in the periphery, which can get more curious of their surroundings and happenings around their haul-out

Some of them climb up the short beach from the water and fight for a place amongst its colleagues, others just seem to play and socialise in the water. But most interestingly, a few of them swim around and for a while get curious about our group standing at their beach. They look at us from just scarce meters before they go back to where the haul-out is a bit further away. Another one gets really interested by our zodiac left at the beach. It seemed to have really liked it and was not happy to let go its finding.

What we see here in the west coast of Spitsbergen are mainly groups of males, while females and calves prefer the more remote, icy and isolated North East and east of the archipelago.

Lucky day, is not always that humans can have such a beautiful and close encounter with those animals. After a good couple of hours enjoying these charismatic animals it was time to board the zodiacs and make our way back on board for dinner and to keep going on our way north to Spitsbergen NW archipelago.






















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20th June 2025 NW SPITSBERGEN ARCHIPELAGO

Ytre Norskoya, Ships cruising Raudfjord and evening zodiac cruise at Hamiltonbukta (Raudfjord)

DATE	20th June 2025					
Time	04:00	08:00	12:00	16:00	20:00	24:00
Position	079° 35.5' N 010° 19.8' E	079° 49.7' N 011° 24.0' E	079° 49.7' N 011° 24.0' E	079° 45.1' N 012° 07.5' E	079° 48.6' N 011° 52.9' E	079° 53.5' N 012° 46.6' E
Wind	NE3-4	NE3	-	E1-1	N2	NE2
Temperature (°C)	4	2	-	4	4	3
Weather	Clear	Clear	-	Clear	Overcast	Overcast
Atmospheric Pressure (hPa)	1016	1009,0	-	1017	1017	1016
Sea State	-	Slight	-	Glassy	-	Rippled
		Anchored at Ytre Norskoya	Ship cruise	17:00h Anchored at Hamiltonbukta	17:00h Anchored at Hamiltonbukta	Underway

It took the whole of the night to get to the Northwest Archipelago of Spitsbergen. But by the time the breakfast was served we were anchoring at the southern shores of the island Ytre Norskoya. The conditions are pretty calm although a bit of wind blows and there is slight swell, the sun keeps shinning and temperature is about 5ºC.

Soon the zodiacs are launched to find a corner to land amongst the large boulders of the beach covered by a thick layer of fresh snow over the remaining frozen sheet from the last months.

During our last couple of visits ashore a sort of stairs were cut and readied, and today was just necessary to dig them a little before we could set foot ashore.

Once we all managed we made our way following a path around the south side of the island, with the idea to continue on an extended hike along the ridge up the hills that run as the spine Ytre Norskoya to a couple of scenic viewpoints. A few of us found the walk along the well marked path too difficult, so they proffered to stay in the lower area and ask for an early ride back on board.

The way was first trodden by Dutch whalers from 1617 who used the island as a base for their whaling operations. The logistics of the 17th century whaling industry called for on-land stations not too far away from the whale hunting grounds, where the animal could be flensed and the blubber could be rendered into oil ready to transport. Wherever we went on the island, reminders of this heritage were never far out of sight.

We left behind an off limit area where the whalers worked tirelessly carrying up bibles (pieces of blubber) and boiling them down in makeshift ovens. Also there lay 165 graves as witness of how hard was to work here by those times. But even better, on the tundra flats we come across more graves, now with coffins easily visible, even with some human remains inside.

Walking afterward upwards following the whaler's path, soon we all reached a beautiful lookout point, half the way up the island's top. It overlooks a bird cliff where Little auks and Black guillemots nest. Far below, Barnacle geese roam the tundra that gradually is appearing as the winter layer of snow melts. To the north the open ocean stretches. A great place where to realise the harshness of this remote corner of the world and have a glimpse of its cold waters, history and wildlife.

Just around the corner and a bit off the path, we have a look at the cliffs that overlook the north side of Ytre. A sort of a flat platform offers a great spotting place to sit and enjoy the scenery and the numerous birds that live here. Little auks sit closeby, Glaucous gulls always in the lookout and a few Barnacle geese nest on small ledges amidst the rocky walls. A few Puffins fly by. One of them sit atop a pinnacle at scarce distance from us, resting and sleeping, after a while another one seems to claim the spot, yet one more guards its nest at the cliffs in front of us. A close encounter with those beautiful birds. Spitsbergen it is not the best place to see Puffins, that prefer lower latitudes and sea cliffs capped by a thick layer of soil, where they dig their burrows for nesting. Here the soil is not well developed, but instead they use cracks and holes in the rocks. Also temperatures are colder than the areas more into their regular distribution range. But nevertheless some come every year all the way here during their breeding season, migrating south afterwards.

Soon it was time to start our way down to the beach, and once aboard, Rembrandt heaves anchor to reposition to the nearby Raudfjord.

There we spend the afternoon cruising its coastline. This fjord is about 20km ling and 5 wide. On its west side open several small bays all with calving glaciers and surrounded by reefs and shallow waters. As we can see afterwards while we keep cruising around, its eastern side is very different, flatter and with easier slopes leading to some relatively high peaks.

By the end of the afternoon Rembrandt drops anchor at the small bay of Hamiltonbukta.

An early dinner was followed by a sort of unexpected Zodiac cruise along its shores.





























Hamiltonbukta is a highly scenic bay , where the best to do to have the best experience is cruising with our rubber boats.
It is well tucked amongst hard and old gneiss rocks, eroded by numerous glaciers. Despite its relatively small size is impressive. Steep high cliffs guard the south side of the bay. The bird loud noises are heard first, then we realise that these rock walls are the home for a large colony of Brünich's guillemots and Kittiwakes. While most are up on the cliffs, some of them fish while others have a rest on the ice floes, around them numerous Black guillemots.
The weather is still good, though during the afternoon the sunny skies have been clouding up. We cruise under cliffs and peaks that continue framing the scenery, together with 5 glaciers that reach the sea level, all in different stages of their lives.
Fast ice at the head of the bays, remains from a full cover of the fjord in winter, in some areas still blocks the access to the glacier fronts, gradually breaking up and drifting off the fjords. Some of the glaciers have retreated dramatically, mostly in recent years, leaving behind some small islets in the bay. The largest ones and located more offshore are known as Hamiltonøyane.
The retreat of the ice is taking place at an amazing speed in recent years. Some of them are just shadows of what they were just a few decades ago.
In spite of the shrinking of the glaciers, Hamiltonbukta is still a stunningly beautiful place.
A Bearded seal patrols the edge of this ice, not bothered by our zodiacs drifting around its home, another one is resting on the ice on one of the small bays in Hamiltonbukta, and seems to get curious about us, getting into the water and swimming past our boats.
To finish the cruises, the zodiacs steer amongst the shallows of a few of the small islands that pepper the bay. Passing though them it seems we are in a different world of peace and tranquility, the vast scenery has shrieked to the narrow where the zodiacs drive through. The islets are home for countless Arctic terns. Here, a couple of the beautiful Red phalaropes are spotted too.

Back on board Rembrandt heaves anchor and starts her long way eastwards along Spitsbergen Northern coast, towards the next fjord system of the northern coast, Woodfjord/Liefdefjord.







Nordvest-Spitsbergen National Park

The park was established by royal resolution on 1 June 1973

It includes parts of north-west Spitsbergen (Albert I Land and Haakon VII Land) and nearby islands such as Danes Island and Moffen. It contains, among other things, warm springs and remains of volcanoes in Bockfjorden

It is also home to Svalbard's main historical monuments. Whaling stations and burial grounds were established here as early as the 1600s.

The ill-fated balloonist Salomon Andrée took off from Virgohamn for the North Pole in July 1897. In addition there are remains of several Arctic expeditions, for instance in Virgohamna, Danes Island, the launching point for Swedish engineer S. A. Andrée's failed 1897 attempt to reach the North Pole in a hydrogen balloon.

After the balloon crashed in the sea, they made their way to Kvitoya, where their remains were found in the 1930's.

Nordvest-Spitsbergen National Park is a glorious land of mountain peaks, glaciers, and offshore islands.

Ytre Norskøya is situated in the middle of what used to be the Dutch whaling area in the early 1600s, when it all revolved around land-based stations for boiling the whale blubber. The station is situated by the sound Norskøysundet, between the islands of Ytre Norskøya and Indre Norskøya. A sheltered bay offers protection against the weather and a broad beach facilitates landings. Today, the remains of nine blubber ovens lie in a line along the beach in the bay. The area with 165 graves on the island is one of the largest burial grounds in Svalbard.

Raudfjord is the westernmost fjord on Spitsbergen's north coast. It is a small fjord, at least compared to its neighbours further east, Woodfjord and Wijdefjord. Raudfjord is about 20 km long and 5 km wide.

Raudfjord – the name means "Red Bay", which used to be the name in historical times – is a very scenic fjord, and rich in contrasts. Some parts are good for ship or Zodiac cruising, other places afford space for little walks or mountain hikes. Raudfjord is part of the Northwest Spitsbergen National Park.

The geological contrast is the main reason different kinds of landscapes on either side of the fjord: the west side, which consists of hard, uplifted basement rocks, is much steeper and more rugged. The mountains are higher and the inland is heavily glaciated. Depending on how you count, there are 10-12 glaciers that reach sea level on the east side (including the large ones at the bottom of the fjord), framed by more or less near-vertical mountain walls.







21st June 2025 NORTH SPITSBERGEN (Liefdefjord/Woodfjord) Hornbaekpollen landing, ships cruise at Idabreen (Monacobreen) and scouting the western coast of Liefdefjord, setting sail afterwards to Nordaustlandet.

DATE	21st June 2025					
Time	04:00	08:00	12:00	16:00	20:00	24:00
Position	079° 39.1' N 013° 36.1' E	079° 36.4' N 012° 41.1' E	079° 36.4' N 012° 41.1' E	079° 36.4' N 012° 48.7' E	079° 48.7' N 014° 03.3' E	079° 57.3' N 015° 11.1' E
Wind	SW1-2	-	SW1	NE1-3	NW3	E3-4
Temperature (°C)	2	-	5	2	3	3
Weather	Cloudy	-	Partially cloudy	Cloudy	Overcast	Overcast
Atmospheric Pressure (hPa)	1016	-	1015	1015	1015	1014
Sea State	Rippled	-	-	Rippled	Slight	-
	06:30h anchored	Anchored Hornbaekpollen	Anchored Hornbaekpollen		Setting sail	Underway

Today was to be a full Liefdefjord day. This fjord is the western branch of Woodfjorden, north of the King Haakon VII Land. "Liefde" means love in Dutch, and the name comes possibly from the name of the ship "*de Liefde*."
Woodfjorden is a vast fjord that splits into three smaller inner fjords, the Liefdefjorden to the north west, the Bockfjord to the South West and the end of the Woodfjorden. Geologically the area consist of old red sandstone. The red layers are mostly prominent in the southern part of Woodfjord south of Liefdefjord. The rocks further north are rather grey.
The whole of the fjord was a traditional hunting area for Norwegian trappers. Nothing is left from many of the oldest huts, some of which were destroyed by German forces during the World War II.
A large passenger ship also belonging to OceanWide sits at anchor at the popular "Texas Bar" close to our position in the morning at the neighbour bay of Hornbækpollen.
Although called Texas Bar, we are talking about a small hut built in 1927 by the well known trapper Hilmar Nois and his uncle Martin Pettersen Nois. Despite it has the promising name of "Texas Bar", do not expect cowboys or beverages (even though a couple of Whiskey bottles remain inside the hut), but the scenery and walking opportunities are great. The hut, which is now owned by the Syssselmannen, is in good shape and occasionally used by field scientists or locals from Longyearbyen who get there with snowmobiles during the spring season.
Hornbækpollen is a secluded little bay, allowing for a landing from where to start an extended hike. First over the snow, then along the large moraines of the glacier Erikbreen that encircle a meltwater lagoon where it debouches its ice. One of the few cases where this feature of a calving glacier front ending up in a lagoon up the hills is easily accessible in the island.
Along the way, we came across multitude of Polar bear, Reindeer and Fox tracks, and up the hills we crossed paths with two coupes of Svalbard Rock ptarmigans. Females have already moulted to their summer brown and well camouflaged colour, while males still remain practically white. Not afraid of us at all, they even let the group approach. At the background of it all, amongst the high peaks of the head of the fjord, the large Monaco glacier shines now and then in the sun.
Nowadays as a neighbour to Monaco glacier, but in the past joined together in a massive glacier front, is Idabreen. After lunch we are already there, cruising along with the ship this large glacier tugged in-between high mountains, with a tall calving front. Often, and today is not an exception, thousands of Kittiwakes feed just under the ice cliffs. Here, englacial rivers debouch into the sea, producing a mixing of waters, turbulence, and with it upwelling of minerals and nutrients that are the base of the food web. From them feed planktonic plants and animals, which bring also small fish and crustaceans, that at the time feed the large number of birds that we today we see here.
For a while we all enjoy the glacial scenery before Rembrandt resumes her way off Liedfefjord towards the open waters of North Spitsbergen. On the way she slows down, she makes her way along the shallow shoreline. On her decks many scout the surroundings binoculars, telescope and large camera lenses at hand. The efforts reveal a great amount of reindeers, a couple of Minke whales and a swimming walrus.
Later on, when we get off the fjord the wind is fair to set sail. After dinner hands are called on deck to pull ropes and his canvas.
Main, Schooner, Staysail and Inner jib are set with the goos help many, and soon Rembrandt stops her engines and makes way under sail only. Her course set eastwards, all the way to Nordaustlandet, the neighbour island of Spitsbergen and the remote areas of the Polar Desert.

























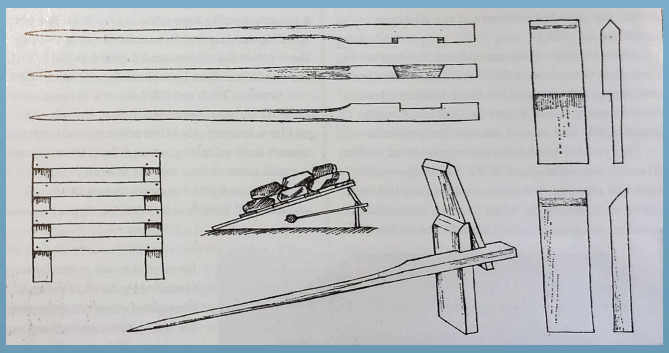












Norwegian trappers. Their primary target was to catch as many polar foxes and bears as possible and to sell the fur in Norway. Additionally, down of Eider ducks were collected and sometimes they also hunted Belugas. Other species such as reindeer, seals and ptarmigans were mostly taken for local use. The reason to winter was the fact that only the winter fur brought good profit, whereas the summer fur was comparatively worthless.

Deadfall traps were set up with the opening into the wind to prevent them from being filled with snow. The trap's wooden panel measures about 1×1 metre. It is placed on the ground and propped up with a trigger mechanism consisting of two vertical and one horizontal stick. The bait – blubber or a ptarmigan head – is positioned at the inner end of the horizontal rod. Rocks are placed on the wooden panel. When a fox takes the bait, the trigger mechanism collapses and the panel falls onto the animal, killing it.









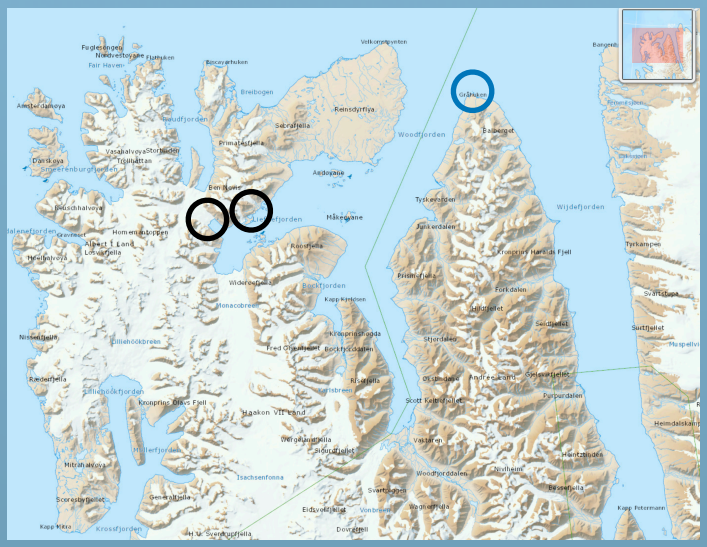












Woodfjiord

One of the most colourful corners of the island, the striking aesthetics of Woodfjorden and it's branches Liefdefjorden & Bockfjorden, are the result of some unique geological features. In addition to the familiar blues, whites and greys of the glaciers and snowy peaks that we expect to see around the island, Woodfjorden is distinguished by unusual red cliffs, formed of iron-rich 'Old Red' sandstone from the Devonian period (360-415 million years ago). In fact, at this time Svalbard was actually somewhere near the equator and the fossils of prehistoric fish can be found in the rock, giving an insight into the geological history of the island. Meanwhile, at the southern end of Bockfjorden, evidence of ancient volcanic activity can be observed at the remains of three volcanoes, the most prominent of which being Sverrefjellet. Despite its cone-like shape, typical of an active volcano, Sverrefjellet last erupted 100,000 - 250,000 years ago but has since been shaped by glaciers. Before its slopes, at Jotunkjeldene, Sinter Terraces add even more colour to the vistas of this area. These are carbonate deposits formed by geothermal 'hot' springs that transport minerals up from the bedrock. The resulting mounds or 'terraces' are streaked with vibrant colours and are home to unique and delicate ecosystems. The springs are no longer what we would call 'hot' but still do not freeze, even in the winter. Thermophilous (warm-loving) vegetation thrives here, including several species not found anywhere else on Svalbard.

The Woodfjorden area has its fair share of human history also, known to whalers since the early 1600s. In 1614 an English Whaler named the fjord 'Wiches Sound', Thomas Edge (another English Whaler) first mapped the coastal areas in 1625, while the name Liefde came from the Dutch. It seems this area was mostly used as a burial ground, with many graves of 17th and 18th century whalers found along the shores. In addition to the whalers, evidence can be found of the Russian Pomors using the area for hunting and trapping.

More recently, Norwegian hunters and trappers from the 1800s and 1900s built several cabins for overwintering, the most famous being those built by the trapper Hilmar Nois in the 1920s. Around the same time, in 1924, the first research and mapping expedition to take aerial photographs of the Svalbard Archipelago took place, based in Worsleyhamna.

Gråhuken
Christiane Ritter



Summer 1934, Spitsbergen. Christiane Ritter disembarks with her suitcases on a bleak, desolate beach. The only passenger to leave the luxury cruise ship Lyngen, Ritter is already wondering what she's doing here. She had been planning this trip for several weeks. Her husband, Hermann, had asked her to join him in the remote lands of the Far North, where he was about to embark on a new season as a trapper. Christiane packed her bags with the bare essentials, and left her comfortable home in Vienna on a hot July day, dressed in ski boots. Her friends and family, worried about the trip, accompanied her to the train station, but made no secret of their disapproval. "My husband, they said, deserved to be slapped in the face for dragging me into such an adventure."

Arriving in wild, icy, isolated Spitsbergen, she discovers a cabin that could not be more Spartan, a somewhat hirsute husband and Karl, her husband's trapping companion who, surprise, surprise, will share the couple's cabin.

"No, the Arctic does not yield its secret for the price of a ship's ticket. You must live through the long night, the storms, and the destruction of human pride. You must have gazed on the deadness of all things to grasps their livingness. In the return of light, in the magic of the ice, in the life-rhythm of the animals observed in the wilderness, in the natural laws of all being, revealed here in their completeness, lies the secret of the Arctic and the overpowering beauty of its lands."

Christiane Ritter. A Woman in the Polar Night













22nd June 2025 NORDAUSTLANDET
Franklin Fjord zodiac cruise and landing at Murchinsonfjord (Kinnvika)

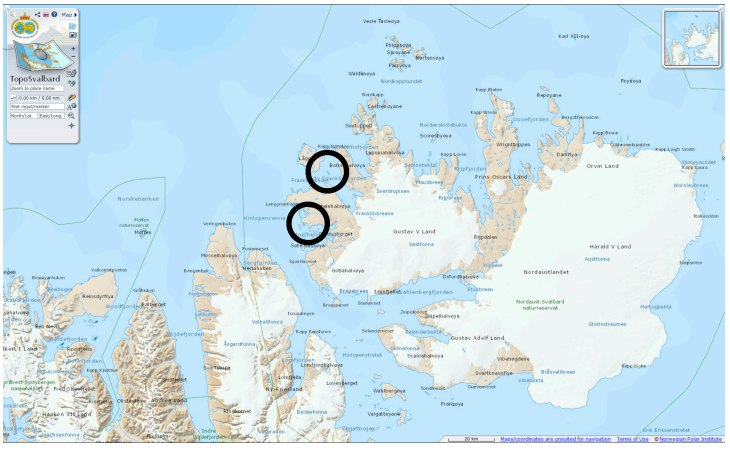
DATE	22nd June 2025					
Time	04:00	08:00	12:00	16:00	20:00	24:00
Position	080° 11.0' N 017° 09.7' E	080° 12.7' N 018° 36.0' E	080° 15.2' N 018° 37.8' E	080° 01.5' N 017° 44.2' E	080° 00.6' N 017° 51.5' E	080° 02.6' N 015° 26.8' E
Wind	W 4-5	W 4	-	WNW 4-5	NW 3	NNW 2
Temperature (°C)	3	1	-	3	5	2
Weather	Cloudy	Overcast	-	Cloudy	Overcast	Overcast
Atmospheric Pressure (hPa)	1013	1013	-	1013	1013	1012
Sea State	Smooth	Slight	-	Smooth	Moderate	-
	Underway	08:35h Anchored 080° 15.2' N 018° 37.8' E	Heaving anchor	Anchor 17:40h Kinnvika	Underway	Underway

Under sail first, then using our engines from the early morning, Rembrandt makes her way Eastwards at a good speed. Her goal is to sail pass the northern coast of Spitsbergen and steer towards the more remote and distant island of Nordaustlandet.
And so, by the time breakfast was called, the ship is already dealing with the uncharted waters of Franklinfjord. Just about when the inlet ends and a couple of shallows and rocky capes mark the beginning of Lady Franklinfjord, lays the sharp edge of the sea ice that still covers great part of those large bays.
A place rarely visited because of the mostly uncharted waters in the fjord and its closest surrounding.
The branches of this system are named after the explorer John Franklin and his devoted wife Jane.
It was in 1845 when Franklin set sail with the sturdily built ships Erebus and Terror in search of the Northwest Passage.
After two years and no word from the expedition, Lady Franklin urged the Admiralty to send a search party. Because the crew carried supplies for three years, the Admiralty waited another year before launching a search and offering a £20,000 reward for finding the expedition. The money and Franklin's fame led to many searches, all unfruitful.
We will have to wait until 1854 when the Scottish explorer John Rae, while surveying the Boothia Peninsula for the Hudson's Bay Company, discovered the true fate of the Franklin party. Both ships had become icebound, and the men had tried to reach safety on foot but none had made it alive.

Here, far away from those stories but still in the area that bears such an illustrious name, in the remoteness of Nordaustlandet, we are completely alone, The morning is cold, windy and the seas are not flat, but anyway we set off on zodiacs for a cruise close to the ice edge of the fast-ice. Here and there the border is broken up in large and heavy floes which we try to navigate though but they prove to be too stubborn to move with our boats. At a bit of distance walruses haul-out atop of it. Even further into the ice seals rest, they must have dug out a breathing hole for themselves, so far from the edge as they are.
A morning of adventures into the ice of the far north, in a proper Arctic fashioned weather. Once on board, a hot coffee and a good lunch afterwards outs for us, as we sit in the dinning room talking about our last polar experiences.
What was about to come now was a long navigation in the swell and wind to reach Murchinsonfjord late in the afternoon.
Murchisonfjord is a rather small fjord on the western side of Nordaustland, about 15 km long and 10 km wide. It is named after Sir Roderick Murchison, an English 19th century geographer.
Many islands pepper its waters and its lands are barren, belonging to the climate area of the Polar Desert.
Here is the place where we plan our evening landing, Kinnvika, the well sheltered bay home for the Finish and Swedish scientific station during the International Geophysical Year 1957/58. The station was abandoned after the research. It was re-used again in 2007/08 during the scientific efforts for the International Polar Year. The buildings, no less than 10, are spread over some area in case one of them would catch fire and it is still possible to visit some of them.

It was time to drop anchor when suddenly a crew member spotted something in motion ashore. Binoculars at hand he soon identified a mother and cub Polar bears!
It has taken a few days and many hours of scouting to find such charismatic creatures during the trip. The call is made and we all join on deck to have a look at them. At first they both walk around, but soon the mother, suited with a GPS collar and a number marked over her back, looks for a shelter place amongst rocks to take a nap. The year old cub follows and they both end sleeping until it is time for us to leave. No chances for a landing having them straight there at the landing site.
Impressive animals they are. The world's largest land carnivores. For many people they have become a symbol of Arctic wilderness. Like the Arctic they have come to represent, polar bears are beautiful, but dangerous. Also they can make you take the risk of overlook the beauty of the Arctic itself. They have the ability to blind many on an obsessive search that can draw a dark shadow over the rest of activities, walks and visits during a trip. Wilderness is not a zoo, nature rules here, and we have to learn how to appreciate every moment in such lands.
Out of total subpopulation of about 3000 animals in the whole of the Barents Sea, just 10% remain around the coasts of Svalbard year-round rather than hunting on the pack ice edge. We know more about the Svalbard bears than the ice-edge ones because most of the scientific efforts are made during the work in the island. Some are captured and marked for research purposes, like the female we spotted today. She probably is one of those staying in the island, which means that the faster retreating of the sea ice is shortening the hunting season, which could leave her with less fatreserves to survive the winter and provide milk for fast-growing cubs.
Anyway, a fantastic sight, an unforgettable moment of our trip. After that the ship have a long way ahead, going back to Spitsbergen Northwest corner. But it was worth the long stretch for a day like today, truly polar journey.

























23rd June 2025 NW SPITSBERGEN ARCHIPELAGO
Landing at Frambreen (Smeerenburgfjord) in the morning. Combined landing in the afternoon in Virgohamna (Danksoya) and Smeerenburg (Amsterdamoya)

DATE	23rd June 2025					
Time	04:00	08:00	12:00	16:00	20:00	24:00
Position	079° 55.1' N 012° 55.62' E	079° 46.1' N 011° 07.7' E	079° 43.6' N 010° 58.4' E	079° 43.3' N 010° 54.1' E	079° 36.1' N 010° 44.5' E	079° 20.2' N 010° 39.5' E
Wind	-	W2	-	NE2	NE2	NNW 2
Temperature (°C)	-	2	-	5	5	5
Weather	-	Rainy	-	Cloudy	Overcast	Overcast
Atmospheric Pressure (hPa)	-	1012	-	1012	1013	1012
Sea State	-	Slight	-	Rippled	Rippled	Smooth
	Underway	Anchoring 08:55h 079° 43.1' N 011° 09.6' E Frambreen	Anchoring 12:24h 079° 43.3' N 010° 54.1' E Virgohamna	Anchored	Underway	Underway

Smeerenburgfjord, one of the main fjords of the Northwest Spitsbergen corner and popular amongst tourist-expedition vessels, lays the scenic embayment of Frambukta, with the glacier of the same name calving onto the shallow waters of the bay. Both are named after Nansen's ship, the Fram. Her crew actually landed at this point in Spitsbergen in 1896 after drifting across the Polar Basin during her expedition 1893-1896.

The short landing brought a couple of good surprises. Next to where we set foot ashore, the bones of a Beluga. Close to it a wonderful Walrus skeleton, with its head clean and still with its ivory tusks, and its stiff and thick skin just laid at the side. Just a few meters ahead, the remains of a seal. It looks like this spot it's been home for several Polar bear feasts in the past.

Along the low lying rocky moraine of the glacier Fram that shows its vertical ice cliffs at the background, multitude of Arctic trees start to look for their nesting sites, just a handful of them seem to have already laid their eggs. Soon they will not allow anybody to walk amongst their eggs and chicks. Today they spend their time in courtship, fishing and resting. They just arrived from the Antarctic regions where they have been feeding during the Austral summer.

Afterwards what was in the planning was a combination of closeby landings, both loaded with historical baggage Virgohamna, and Smeerenburg. Both located facing the shallow and narrow channel between Amsterdamhoya and Dankshoya (Danksegatet) and one in either of the islands.

At Virgohamna soon the multitude of scattered remains catch our attention, the area was first used by the Dutch as early as 1633 (perhaps earlier), in combination with the neighbour area of Smeerenburg, at a flat tip of Amsterdamhoya. But part of the historical highlights here are the stories of the early North Pole exploration.

It was when the vessel SS Virgo, from Swedish engineer and explorer Salomon August Andrée's reach this spot for his 1896 expedition. He built a balloon hangar here this year, on his attempts to reach the North Pole by balloon. First trip was a short one, forced to come back on adverse winds. Not deterred he came back in 1897, and early in July made a fatal attempt to reach the pole. A 3 days flight that ended up crashing on the pack ice, over 2 moths of struggles to reach land afterwards, and finally being stranded at the remote island of Kvitoya, the northeastmost island of Spitsbergen archipelago. There the three explorers that tried this adventure died, their remains not to be found until 33 years later.

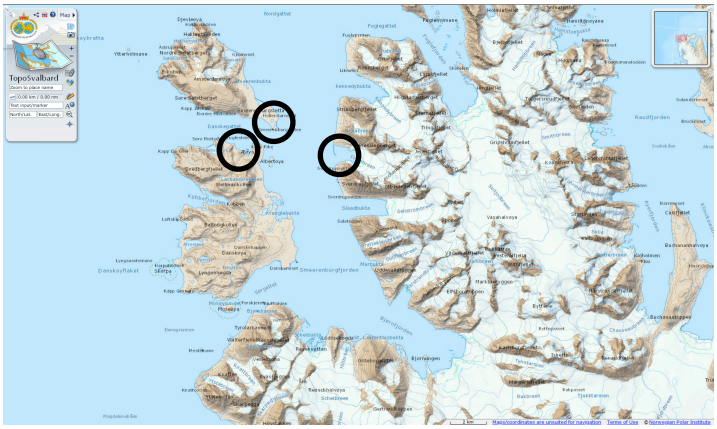
In 1906, this very same place saw the efforts of the American Walter Wellman, who tried to reach the pole by airship. The hangar was not completed until August, too late for an attempt to reach the pole. Wellman returned the following summer, but again failed to reach the North Pole. He tried again in 1909, but again couldn't make it. Smart enough he needed his attempts and lived to explain it.

Once we respectfully walked amongst all this remains left for the nature to take with the years, and still working as an open air museum, the zodiacs drove us across the narrow channel from this spot at Dankshoya to Smeerenburg at Amsterdamhoya.

Smeerenburg is a Dutch word literally meaning "blubber town". It was a whaling settlement founded in 1619 as one of Europe's northernmost outposts. It lived its peak in the 1630's, when as many as 400 men worked here and about 15 ships were anchored at the bay, but soon, the Bowhead whale population was decimated. The base decline began already in the 1940's and was completely abandoned around 1660. By then, the whaling had become more and more pelagic, the whales around the coastline already wiped out. With this came to the processing of the blubber and the rendering into oil on board the ships, with no need for these sort of land facilities.

But still nowadays in the site remain the foundations of blubber ovens, a capstan and timber that was used for the buildings that once stood here. Flat land surrounded by shallow coast also offer perfect resting spot for walruses. A relatively small haul-out can be often find here, and today there they were, lying all together next to the whaling remains.

For a while we can approach them and enjoy a great observation. Then suddenly a Polar bear is spotted behind us at the distance. The animal slowly approach, stopping now and then, sniffing the air and rolling on the snow to dry itself after a swim. Time to pack and evacuate the beach, trying to avoid any confrontation. Once all in the zodiacs and from a respectful distance we drift around enjoying a great sight, until the animal starts swimming across Danksegatet. Then we embark Rembrandt for a last view of the bear coming back ashore at the distance, before we resume our way southwards to Krossfjord.
























OCEANWIDE
EXPEDITIONS

































