

# ARCTIC ADVENTURES 2009

*Heart of the Arctic Expedition Log*



*September 16 - 26, 2009*

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# EXPEDITION LOG

## *Day One: Wednesday, September 16 – Ottawa to Kangerlussuaq*

Up in the cool dark Ottawa morning, packing bags for a 4:45 luggage pickup, and a 5:15 boarding of the bus to the airport for the 7AM flight to Kangerlussuaq. Arriving at the airport we learned that the plane wouldn't be available until 8:30, which would have afforded us 90 precious minutes of additional sleep. On the other hand, the 45 boxes of fresh fruit and vegetables for the ship didn't arrive at the airport until after 7, so we will be getting better food as recompense for our lost sleep.

The three hour flight to Iqaluit was mostly above cloud, passed in sleep and enjoying a marvelous brunch. We broke through the cloud over Frobisher Bay during the approach to the airstrip, above brown rocky hills, grey water studded with reefs and small islands, then the muddy low-tide foreshore and suddenly we were over the houses and businesses of Iqaluit. During the refueling stop we didn't leave the plane but were entertained by musicians Daniel and Mary Anne, who were learning to play together and getting acquainted with each other's repertoire. We were soon off again on the one hour flight to Greenland, and through clear skies we flew up Sondre Stromfiord towards the airstrip at its head. A light dusting of new snow covered the upper half of the mountains that stretched off in all directions, and we had a brief glimpse of the gleaming inland icecap. With the local police and immigration officers off duty (reputedly on a training exercise) we bypassed passport control and were bussed directly to the ship waiting at the head of tide about 10 km from the airport. The road passed through a forest of waist-high willow and ankle-high birch trees, all in brilliant autumn colours. A quick trip by zodiac took us to the ship anchored off the shore, and we explored our new home while awaiting the delivery of luggage and vegetables—which were in a truck with a flat tire somewhere on the road from the airport. Everything finally came together with an introductory gathering in the lounge, at which we were introduced to the varied members of the staff, and by the time that we sat to dinner the ship had raised anchor and was steaming slowly westward through the dusk.



Our unpacking and intentions of an early night were interrupted by the announcement that northern lights were visible. By 10 pm the aurora had brightened to a sinuous trail leading the ship down the fiord, and by 11 this was extending upward as curtains of green with hints of red and purple against the background of brilliant stars. Despite our long day, the exhibition was too intriguing to ignore, and many of us stayed up far too late.

## *Day Two: Thursday, September 17 – Sisimiut*

Sometime after midnight the ship had reached the mouth of the fiord and turned northward along the coast. When we awoke to a grey morning and a temperature of 2°C (36°F) we were approaching our next stop at Sisimiut, where we dropped anchor during breakfast. After a search for a landing-stage among the shipping and small boats that filled the harbour, we began ferrying ashore and wandering around the community. Sisimiut (once Holsteinsborg) is the second largest community in Greenland, and is obviously thriving with several fishing boats in the harbour, a busy freight terminal, and many folks going to work by car and bicycle. Brilliantly-painted houses scattered over the sides of steep rocky hills set the scene for a community that is a piece of

Europe on the wrong side of the Atlantic, and also the expression of a local culture that has long adapted to the global world. An excellent small museum traced the history of the region for the past 4500 years, with an emphasis on the period since the arrival of Moravian missionaries during the early 1700s. Different periods were represented by a log-built store built in 1764, another built in 1825, and a recently reconstructed house with walls of piled turf and stone slabs, furnished as it would have been during the earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century and evocative of the traditional way of life in this community. Further up the hill we discovered a cafe serving excellent coffee and pastries, and a little farther the hunters' meat market where bins of muskox meat and codfish were overwhelmed by the skin, blubber and meat of a freshly caught whale that was being butchered. Kayak construction was demonstrated in a workshop beside the harbour, and when we arrived back on the ship we were entertained by two kayak-acrobats who demonstrated various maneuvers to right an overturned kayak at sea—involving twisting the paddle with one or both hands, using the short wooden spear-throwing board, even with the paddle held under the boat. Most impressive was a coordinated series of five continuous rolls. We were especially impressed that the kayaker's, although wearing wetsuits, had bare hands throughout the half-hour exhibition.



During lunch the anchor came up and we began steaming northward towards our next stop, with a light roll over a somewhat lumpy sea. Dennis Minty, wearing his naturalist hat, presented an overview of the Arctic ecosystem and explained the more fascinating and unique aspects of the polar world, illustrated by his outstanding photographs. In the evening we were entertained with a concert by Daniel Payne, demonstrating his virtuosity on fiddle, accordion, wooden flute and voice in the interpretation of the traditional music of his Newfoundland home.



### *Day Three: Friday, September 18 – Ilulissat*

Woke to a cloudy morning, a temperature of 1°C (34°F) and a view of nearby icebergs. Breakfast was interrupted by the sighting of two Humpback whales surfacing and blowing beside a massive berg off the stern of the ship. After breakfast we boarded the zodiacs for a cruise through the outer edges of the Ilulissat Ice Fiord, which is fed by the fastest moving glacier in Greenland and which produces many of the bergs that float northward along the coast, then down the coasts of Baffin Island, Labrador and Newfoundland. There is a good chance that the berg that sank the *Titanic* came from this fiord, and for an hour we cruised slowly through a maze of towering white

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peaks. Ice-blue tints deepened to azure depths in caves and crevasses, and the calm water mirrored the ice looming above us. Small flocks of Glaucous gulls and a single Blackbacked gull rode the icebergs, and ravens from the nearby town had discovered a patch of blood on the ice where a seal had apparently been shot. Drifting in the tidal current that began to carry the smaller growlers and bergy bits out to sea, we eventually found our way to open water. On our way back to the ship we visited the fleet of local fishermen in small boats, who were hauling longlines, shaking a good catch of Greenland halibut from their hooks, and who interrupted their work in order to pose for photos.



After briefly revisiting the ship to warm up, we went ashore to visit the town of Ilulissat, which we found to be just as thriving and full of activity as Sisimiut. Some took the long walk to the archaeological sites located at Sermermiut adjacent to the ice fiord, where the remains of Inuit houses five or six centuries old were hidden beneath a cover of grass and snow. More spectacular was the view of the ice from the nearby hills, the same bergs among which we had cruised this morning but now seen from above. This location has been declared a World Natural Heritage Site by UNESCO, and the reason for the designation is obvious to those who contemplated the spectacular scenery and the forces of climate that produces it.



In the afternoon Bob McGhee gave a lecture on the Arctic as a place that lives in the imagination, perceived through the filter of myths and travellers' tales that have accumulated over the centuries. This was followed by a Welcome to Nunavut by our Inuit companions Aaju, Jolly, Kananginak and John. This included a ceremonial lighting of a *kudlik*, the oil lamp that heated traditional Inuit houses, explanations of Inuit welcoming ceremony, and stories involving travelers and newcomers to the Inuit lands.

This was the evening of the Captain's welcoming cocktail and dinner party, where excellent food and drink were supplemented by a fashion show featuring sealskin clothing designed by Aaju and presented by models selected from the passengers and crew. After dinner the scene degenerated into the Fourth Annual Disko in Disko Bay, where polyester clothing, fright wigs and disco music were given a brief revival before once again being consigned to fashion hell.

## ***Day Four: Saturday, September 19 – Cape Dyer***

We were rocked to sleep last night by the light rolling of the ship through the long swells of Davis Strait, and by morning we were out of sight of land on our way towards the Baffin Island coast. The day's activities begun with

a lecture by passenger Angus Hamilton on his early work mapping the Arctic with Canada's Geodetic Survey. This was followed by a sale of works produced by Adventure Canada and the staff, and a discussion by Aaju and Kananginak on the traditional Inuit justice system. A sighting of Minke whales drew people to the upper decks to briefly experience the climate of the far northwestern Atlantic, and to discover the mountainous coast of Baffin Island rising above the western horizon.

After lunch the skies began to clear as we turned southward to take advantage of the current running parallel to the coast. We had made land at Cape Dyer, a high jagged headland topped with the screens and domes of the Distant Early Warning radar station, a relic of the Cold War. The coast to the southward was a continuous line of high dark cliffs backed by the snow-covered peaks of higher mountains. The sea was calm, and a few massive icebergs gleamed in the sunlight. Mary Ann began a musical session that was soon interrupted by an announcement from the Captain that orcas were sighted off the bow. The room quickly emptied, and on deck we were treated to the sight of a pod of about eight killer whales: one large male with a high dorsal fin, a smaller male, a few females and a couple of calves. For half an hour we watched them feeding or playing—one of the calves rolled over on the surface—then they swam under the ship to give the photographers a close-up shot before breaking into two groups and making off in different directions. We felt very fortunate to have experienced such a close encounter with large and powerful animals, and it took some time to get ourselves organized enough to go below and continue the interrupted concert. This was followed by Dave Reid's talk on life in a northern community, illustrated with images and stories from his work in Pond Inlet.

The evening's entertainment was provided by John Houston's touching film *Stories in Stone*, tracing his family



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history from their early 1950s move to Cape Dorset until his mother's death and return to Cape Dorset in 1997.

## *Day Five: Sunday, September 20 – Pangnirtung*

Still coasting southwards during the morning, in a calm sea and a temperature of 1°C (34°F). Had a late Sunday morning brunch while awaiting the Canadian Customs officers who arrived at the ship by zodiac as we dropped anchor off the community of Pangnirtung. The village lies on rising ground between the narrow fiord and the mountains, and we arrived as the lowest tide of the year was going out leaving a muddy foreshore scattered with grounded hunting boats. After wading ashore we headed for the cultural centre of the town: the Uqqurmiut Inuit Arts Centre, the Angmarlik Centre with its museum, and the Parks Canada Interpretation Centre. The Arts Centre was the focus of shoppers, presenting an array of stone sculptures, tapestries and other textile arts, and the print shop with its stacks of prints and artist Andrew Qappik who on the spot created a print that had been promised on an earlier Adventure Canada voyage. After a tour around the town by knowledgeable local guides, many of us left for a hike up the side of the mountain behind the community. In the warm sunshine the autumn tundra resembled a brilliant carpet. We discovered delicious blueberries and crowberries, and attained a fine view down the fiord and into the snowy ranges of Auyuittuq National Park. Returning to town we were treated to tea and freshly baked bannock in the Elders' Room of the Angmarlik Centre, made last-minute purchases, and waded out to the zodiacs on a rapidly rising tide.



Afternoon tea prepared us for a talk by Susan Evans on the World Wildlife Fund's activities and plans for future work in the Arctic regions, which included some dire information on the local effects of climate change as well as surprisingly optimistic views on what could be done to change the current course of human impact on the climate of the earth. After recap and dinner, Gerald McMaster presented a talk on the new gallery of Canadian art which he developed at the Art Gallery of Ontario, in which Inuit, First Peoples and Western art share space in order to explore themes of history and myth.

## *Day Six: Monday, September 21 – Monumental Island*

Woke to a warmer morning at 3°C (38°F) with a complex multi-layered sky and a range of low coastal hills to starboard. We soon learned that the ship was running a couple of hours slow due to an opposing tidal current. Morning talks about polar bears were presented by Kananginak and Dave Reid, stressing the intelligence and capabilities of the animals, as well as concerns regarding their future in a warming climate. This was followed by a preposterous talk by Bob McGhee, linking mediaeval politics with the sixteenth century Frobisher ventures

to this specific area and modern nonsense regarding secret knowledge and ancient mysteries.

The skies cleared as we approached Monumental Island, an isolated column of rock standing several kilometers from the coast of Baffin Island, surrounded by a scatter of small cone-shaped islets. These islets are commonly home to a large herd of walrus, but a zodiac reconnaissance showed none in residence this week. In warm sunshine and a light swell we boarded zodiacs for a tour around the main island, and were rewarded by the sight of two polar bears sunning themselves on the steep southern slopes. One of the boats also spotted two swimming walrus, and the island's resident raven also made an appearance. We returned to the ship with memories of brilliant seas rolling against a shore of twisted rocks.



An illustrated lecture by Carol Heppenstall celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of print making in the community of Cape Dorset, and increased our anticipation of this week's visit to the community. As dinner began, the ship entered the tidal current off the mouth of Frobisher Bay and began pitching into high swells. Dinner attendance was a bit lighter than usual, as was participation in the following musical session by Mary Anne and Daniel. By bedtime the swells were subsiding, and we passed a comfortable night.



## *Day Seven: Tuesday, September 22 – Kimmirut*

Morning was foggy with a temperature of 3°C (38°F), as we steamed along the south coast of Baffin Island toward the community of Kimmirut. Gerald McMaster's talk focused on the representation of native peoples in popular entertainment and in museum settings, and the recent appearance of self-representation among Inuit and First Peoples. The sun broke out as we entered Kimmirut Fiord, a remarkably picturesque narrow and twisting passage between high rocky hills. After lunch we travelled by zodiac from the ship to the shore at the community of Kimmirut, where we were met by hospitable guides and offered tours of the community. This was followed by welcoming speeches at the community centre, a demonstration of Arctic sports—the high kick, knuckle-hop, and other trials of strength and skill—then throat singing and drumming. The welcome was answered by the presentation to the community of hockey equipment gathered by Michelle Valberg and Joan Weinman from their sources around Ottawa.

Leaving the building, we were led to a large white tent where, sheltered from a biting wind, women were making and serving bannock. Outside the tent lay a seal that was butchered as we watched and samples offered to the visitors—most of whom tried a taste of meat, heart or liver. We then visited the gallery where a selection of wonderful sculptures were offered for sale, and walked about town on our own.

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Our return to the ship was followed by a song session led by Aaju Peter, for the benefit of the community members who were visiting the ship, and then a talk by John Houston on Inuit concepts of space and time. In the evening we watched John Houston's recent film on his father, an interesting contrast to his first film on the life of his mother.

### *Day Eight: Wednesday, September 23 – Cape Dorset (Kinngait)*

A cold and foggy morning at 0°C (32°F), with low overcast and a brief fall of driving snow. By noon we had left the cloud behind, and were steaming west toward Cape Dorset through a cold sparkling sea. The time was passed with a panel discussion on current conditions in Nunavut, led by Kananginak, Jolly, John, Aaju and Dave, who answered a variety of questions from the audience. Susan Evans then presented a talk on how the World Wildlife Federation plans to deal with expected climatic change in the polar world, and Dennis Minty gave his celebrated and useful lecture on photographic techniques.

In the early afternoon we dropped anchor off Kinngait (Cape Dorset) and went ashore where we were met by guides and taken for walking tours of the village. This included visits to the Interpretive Centre, the viewpoint overlooking the original village, and the Kinngait Co-op art studios and gallery. Here most of us spent an hour or more meeting local artists, looking at, purchasing and envying the prints and sculptures on display. We then walked to the Community Centre where we were treated to an exhibit of traditional throat-singing by a pair of teenage girls and also by a pair of elders who have been practicing the art for many decades. This was followed by a barbecue provided by the ship's crew, presentation of a cake in celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Kinngait Studios, and a walk to the low-tide shore. We returned to the ship in the deep dusk, through a choppy sea and stinging winds, glad to be warm and dry for dinner. A late and hurriedly improvised game of Call My Arctic Bluff ended the day.

### *Day Nine: Thursday, September 24 – Kangiqsujuaq*

Another calm night of peaceful sleep, waking to a cold grey morning with new snow on the hills of Nunavik off the starboard bow. Bob McGhee gave a talk on Inuit History, a bazaar was held presenting the works of staff aboard the



ship, and Aaju Peter gave an impassioned and very sensible talk on Inuit sealing, the anti-sealing movement, and its impact on the economy of Inuit families and communities.

During lunch the ship drew closer to shore and entered the bay of Kangiqsujaq, surrounded by high snow-covered hills rising in all directions. We ferried ashore, landing on a stony lee shore with choppy seas and a rapidly falling tide—the wettest landing of the trip so far. After the unkempt communities of Nunavut, this Nunavik town impressed us with its paved roads, well designed public buildings, and general well-tended appearance. The impression of economic well-being was reinforced in the park interpretation centre, a professionally designed museum of local history and geography. A tour of the town showed the surrounding hills at their best, with the sun breaking through and highlighting pieces of distant scenery in blinding white. In the community centre we were treated to tea and bannock, smoked fish, raw seal meat, and a delicious mixture of berries, fish eggs and oil. After speeches, an informative public interview with an elder, and throat-singing demonstration, the afternoon degenerated into an indoor soccer game featuring the Adventurer Clippers and a pick-up team of locals and ship people. After a long and hard-played game the Clippers lost on a penalty shootout, probably the best result ever achieved by an Adventure Canada team in the annals of these competitions.

In late afternoon we returned to the ship in a bumpy zodiac ride, just in time for dinner, and in the evening those still awake watched John Houston's film *Diet of Souls*.

#### **Day Ten: Friday, September 25 – Akpatok Island**

Woke to a grey overcast morning with a northwesterly wind and light chop but the temperature up to 5°C (42°F). The morning panel discussion on life in the north was interrupted by the announcement that five bears had been sighted along the nearby shore of Akpatok Island. We launched the zodiacs and followed a mother bear with a first-year cub, who eventually found a gully to escape from the narrow shore and the boats hovering offshore. The coast is an almost-continuous line of sheer limestone cliffs over 100 metres in height, topped by a high plateau, and with very little vegetation growing on the barren cliffs and scree slopes.



At one spot we stopped to watch a snow-fall: a thin veil of a waterfall in which the water froze to sleet before it slid down the rocks as the base. At another spot we took the boats into a small barren lagoon behind a gravel beach, and landed for a brief stretch. Returning to the ship through a headwind and spray, we endured the Polar Swim in which a number of passengers jumped or dove into the sea from the gangplank, with a few of the more adventurous jumping from the bridge deck.

A warm-up and lunch was followed by the presentation of information on tomorrow's disembarkation, and the dawning realization that the trip was almost over. Matthew followed up with two Adventure Canada traditions: a history of the corporation and its unique approach to adventure travel, and the Hank Williams Memorial Country & Western Dance.

Passengers were treated to the Captain's Farewell Cocktail and Dinner, and the evening ended with a variety show featuring The Once and Future Elvis, Kananginak's *inuktituut* version of a Hank Williams song, and other entertainments.

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## *Into the Heart of the Arctic by Christopher Collmorgen*

*Twas the night before Kuujjuaq and all through the ship  
Not a person was stirring through the swells and the dips  
All the clients were sleeping, tucked tight in their berths  
Dreaming of Arctic adventures filled with merr'ment and  
mirth.*

*I'd just settled in with a nightcap or two  
Of a 21 year old whiskey (called Knockando)  
When outside of my cabin there arose such a clatter  
That I leapt from my berth to see what was the matter.*

*I flung open my door to the hall and did I see  
But the crew of our comp'ny, rerevising the itiner'y  
They were all riled up, in a heated debate,  
"Let's wake them at 5!" "No, let's do it at 8!"*

*"Let the odds line up first" "No, the evens are due"  
"What time's the last zodiac?" "I've not got a clue!"  
"Where are we going? To an island? To town?"  
"Which way is up and which way is down?"*

*Matthew, the fashion disaster - so vogue  
Bellowed "What shall we feed them?" and answered in  
brogue*

*Dave from Pond Inlet "I don't care what it is.  
So long as it all looks and tastes like haggis."*

*"Where's my Oh Henry bar?" Stephan did cry out  
He stamped his big feet, crossed his arms and did pout  
But nobody listened, no one paid him much note  
Too frantic'ly running round all o'er the boat.*

*This went on for a while, them spinning like tops  
It reminded me somewhat of the old Keystone Cops.  
"Ship of Fools" is a term that might form quick in one's  
head*

*An unfair assessment - I know - so I reflected instead*

*Upon things we had done o'er the past week and a bit  
With Adventure Canada 'board the good Clipper ship  
A cast of adventurous comedians  
At the 60th par'lell and 73rd meridian.*



*Carol, the expert on carvings and prints  
Gave us guidance us spending our dollars and cents  
And John shared with us freely his wisdom and lore  
Of growing up Inuit on the Cape Dorset shore.*

*And Aaju, young elder, she taught us to sing  
Accomp'ned by Mar'Yann and Daniel on strings  
"Haa ha ha silatsiavak," we belted with glee  
Meant to honour the language was instead butchery*

*Susan talked of the Double-U Double-U Eff  
Dennis made photos in super high def  
Bob delivered a lecture on archaeology  
Gerald spoke about art and a new way to see.*



*Kangerlussuaq, Sisimiut, and Ilulissat bound  
Crossed the Davis to Pang up the Cumberland Sound  
Zodiacs at Mon'mental, quick stop in Kim'rut  
Afternoon in Cape Dorset, Wakem Bay for some foot.*

*We've seen glaciers and icebergs and sled dogs galore  
Watched bears from short distance, hamlets ashore  
Humpbacks and orcas, and minkes astern  
Oh, in the north there is so much to learn.*



*By now the crew settled, immersed in routine  
Working together like a seal-oiled machine  
To prepare for us one last day out on the boat  
And ensure we would end on a truly high note.*

*I felt grateful now, having been here with these guys  
They truly are stellar, like big Arctic skies  
Happy to help us to see what we could  
And take back with us mem'ries to our South  
neighborhood.*

*A tear built in my eye as I considered the thought  
That soon would be over this trip I had sought  
And back in my office, in no time I'd be  
Wishing instead I was up north and back out at sea.*

*I crept back to my berth and fell asleep right away  
Dreaming of what I would see the next day  
And I rose with a smile when I heard without warning  
"Good morning. Good morning. Good morning."*



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## *Day Eleven: Saturday, September 26 – Kuujjuaq*

An early wakeup call and a reported sighting of trees on shore brought us on deck to find the ship steaming slowly up the narrow estuary of the Kuujjuaq River in a mix of sunshine and rainshowers. The anchor dropped at 8:45, and the morning passed in final packing, clearing of cabins, breakfast and goodbyes. Aaju gave a talk on traditional Inuit tattooing, based on research that she undertook before committing herself as a model for the reintroduction of the ancient art. Young Sam cleaned up on prizes in the tinfoil-star contest, and shortly after noon the zodiacs were back from delivering baggage to the dock at Kuujjuaq. They had been delayed by the low tidal conditions that had prevented them from reaching the dock, but by the time passengers boarded zodiacs the tide was running full bore into the estuary and facing a 20 knot wind that kicked up quite a chop. The ride from ship to shore took almost an hour of slow and careful driving, and showers of spray that gradually tasted less and less of salt as we advanced up the river. We reached the dock in warm and sunny conditions and managed to dry out slightly before boarding busses for the airport. The drive was through a landscape of small green spruce and yellow larches set off by brilliant red shrubs, quite alien after the tundra and bare rock landscapes of the past ten days. The floor of one valley boasted a wide array of wrecked trucks, snowmobiles and quads—and our driver explained that this was “Kuujjuaq’s Canadian Tire Store” where mechanics went to obtain spare parts.

The FirstAir jet, its tailfin painted with a huge white bear, was waiting to transport us back to a world where food, shelter and spare parts rarely required direct individual effort. We carried with us an impression of a northern world where skill and ingenuity were still of paramount importance; where we had encountered beauty in the blue crystalline fantasies of glacier ice, in the brilliant formal dress of orcas cutting through a icy green sea, and in the muted colours of prints emerging from the workshops of Inuit communities. Would it be a relief or a disappointment to land in the warm Ottawa dusk?



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