

# The First Voyage of Lumina – post 10

## Sailing in Svalbard

War time weather in Svalbard an 80 degrees North

During the WWII there was much activity in the North Atlantic and one of the things lacking that we take for granted these days was weather forecasts. Today we just download the latest forecast via satellite to our iPhone and it gives a pretty accurate picture of what is happening for the next 10 days. This is now based on computer models getting information from many different sources. Back then information was scant and so the Germans set up a secret weather station on Svalbard and manned it for a couple of years before it was discovered. Today it is a pretty well known site and if there was the top 10 list of historic sites then it would probably be on it. Essentially at a place called Signehamna a group of Germans were dropped off from a U boat or ship complete with a hut, radio station and meteorological equipment, food and fuel for the winter. They built the hut and radio station out of sight over a small hill from the cove where we landed. “over a small hill” was the only information we had and we followed an indistinct path up to a lake where there was a left or right option. We followed the left and the path petered out. Whilst we were looking around for anything that fitted the bill and finding several flat places that might have had huts but if they did, then it had been cleared up very well. Then over the other side of the lake we saw a couple of people walking. Eventually we met up and it was the two girls from the Syssemann that we had seen in Ny-Alesund to check our documents. They were mapping the paths and directed us to the site, over a different small hill...

Whatever had been there had been pretty comprehensively destroyed. There were just bits of wood, fuel cans and other things like parts of batteries, wire, cooking stove and pans etc lying around. Whether it had just been looted, deliberately destroyed or shelled from the Norwegian ship that discovered the site I am unsure, but it was just a random area of junk and broken bits of wood, not the derelict or tumbledown huts that you see in other places. The cold and fairly dry nature of Svalbard is a great preserver and apart from some surface rust on the fuel drums, everything just looked as if something catastrophic had happened maybe just a couple of years ago.

The station had operated covertly for nearly two years and during a small exchange of shots a German was killed. Shortly afterwards the Norwegian ship that discovered the place was also discovered by a German U boat that had



come to relieve the station occupants. The ship was sunk by the U Boat and one Norwegian died. More info on what happened to the survivors I cannot find.



All that is left of the German weather station

A little further down the Fjord is another meteorological site. Ebeltoftamna predated Signehamna by several decades but maybe their knowledge of the area helped the Germans choose it for their wartime activities. This was the site of one of the earliest scientific stations on Svalbard. Das Deutsche Observatorium collected meteorological information between 1912 and 1914 for Count Zeppelin with the aim of investigating the area for use by airship expeditions. Ultimately the war put a stop to it and the building was moved to Ny-Alesund. Today just the foundations and some graves from early whalers are to be seen. It is quite remarkable how wood is preserved here as these graves are maybe 300 years old and yet the timber is as good as the day it was put down. We then had an enjoyable evening meeting up with fellow Boreal 47 owners we had spoken to on the radio a couple of times whilst in Svalbard. They were moored close by and had already been further north but been stopped by the ice.

The following day we continued north and finished up in a delightful little anchorage next to a hut that is now the northern base for the Sysselemann. The two men who had this posting for the summer came and had a chat and checked our papers. It seems this is the most desirable posting for remoteness. Later we saw one of them having a wash in the sea complete with gun left on the shore. I suspect it is a mandatory item for them to take at all times and you wouldn't think the risk was that great, but they did say they had a mother and cub walking past the cabin a couple of days previously...





Sallyhamna was our next anchorage, once again near a hut. This one was built by a trapper who lived there for several years with his wife Sally. At the time they were trying to hunt Polar bears and whilst the husband was away a bear came and she shot it through the peephole in the door – it was the largest bear they got that year. Today it housed a girl who had been dropped off by a ship for a weeks stay. We gave her a packet of biscuits for disturbing her solitude. She was normally an expedition guide on the ships and told us a few tales of behind the scenes negotiations as to how they don't all end up at the same place at the same time.

### ***The Sysselmeister field officers came to check our papers***

From SallyHamna we set off out to sea so that we could cross the magical 80 degrees of latitude. For once the wind was in our favour and not only that there was enough to sail. We headed out into the misty ocean and soon land had disappeared behind us. Our course was one diagonal to the shore so that we could come back in further East to another fjord system. A week ago, "Wings" the boat we had met the other day had tried the same thing but come upon pack ice, however the wind we had would be pushing it back and info we got from the girl in SallyHamna suggested that it had probably broken up. At 11.28 we passed the mythical line, took pictures of the plotter to show the reading and turned for land. As with all things that are just lines or points on a map it was not a particularly wonderful place, just a bit of cold grey sea just like any other around there. Mid afternoon we entered



Woodfjord and continued for a few miles to anchor outside a hut called Villa Oxford at WorlseyHamna. The hut had been built originally using the box that a small airplane had been delivered there in for an expedition doing aerial photography of the area in 1924. Later a trapper built the hut and it is today one of the refuge huts, maintained and stocked by the Sysselmann. The expedition had been led by George Binney from Oxford so whether it was named after him by the lucky

trapper or just that it maybe had Oxford written on the side of the box we can only surmise.

Further in on a side branch called Liefdefjorden is a piece of pure Svalbard. Another hut built by a trapper about the same time and now called the Texas Bar. It is well stocked with a variety of spirits and visitors are expected to reciprocate. Whilst there may be a few



***The worlds most northerly Bar – no cash taken!***



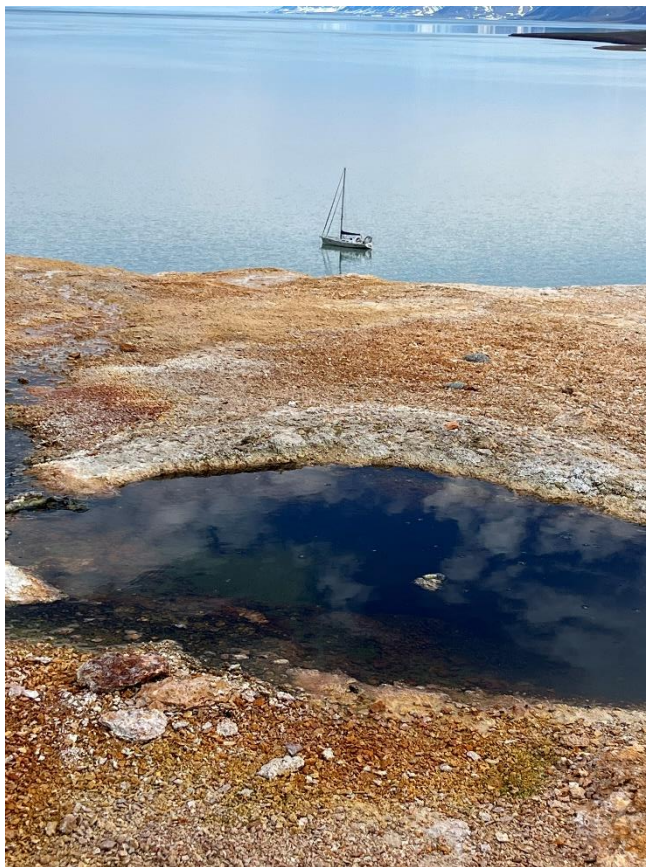
independent travellers like ourselves going there, the main visitors seem to be from the cruise ships and know doubt a bottle or two comes from the bar each time they arrive. We were treated to the full-on Svalbard experience because just as we arrived a ship was disgorging its contents into zodiacs to arrive on the beach a little later. We got chatting to



one of the guides and there were five groups, all graded into different abilities as he put it from the fittest to the trolley pushers, but to be fair to them there were no trollies on the beach! After the hired guns had been out scouting the area, each group set off in a different direction for their walk, then they would come back for a tot at the hut before returning to the ship for canapes later in the afternoon know doubt.

We set off across the fjord, leaving the regimented lines of hikers going in different directions all wearing their logo covered expedition jackets to another interesting oddity called Vulcanhamna. We anchored for the night in the quietest place we have had all trip, behind a shingle spit with absolutely no swell and hardly any wind, giving a very peaceful night.

This was the site of an extinct volcano and also a Pingo. Well, we came to the conclusion that the pingo, a subterranean cone of ice had probably melted as we could not see anything amongst the moraine so we turned out attention to the volcanic feature, some hot springs. Up on the mountainside you could see where the hot water had been coming out forming the characteristic white/yellow deposits that would be familiar to anyone who has been to Iceland or New Zealand. We anchored close by and took the dinghy ashore and headed up the hill. The signs were promising and obviously at some time a lot of water had been coming down the hillside. However, when we got to there the “hot pool” was more of a hot basin and whilst reasonably warm was certainly not the great steaming pools that you find in Rotorua and certainly not a bathing pool.



***The camera does not lie, or does it?***



### ***The not so exciting rather slightly warm pool***

After the excitement of the hot pool we headed back towards the entrance of the fjord stopping mid afternoon to anchor in a lovely lagoon formed by a shingle bank that had grown from both directions leaving just a small gap to enter through. In the late afternoon the wind dropped and without a breeze it felt warm again and we went onto the shore to have a fire and burn up a few bits of plastic we found amongst the shingle. Plenty of driftwood and lots of evidence of the ice pushing the shingle up. The force of wind blown ice must be considerable and you could see evidence of its bulldozing capabilities quite high up the shingle bank. We have seen no sea ice at all despite all the reports from just a week or so ago, so when it breaks up it must happen pretty quickly, and with the right wind get all blown out to sea.

This was the furthest distance from home that we will be. We have travelled 2627 nautical miles (slightly more than in normal miles) and been to 80 degrees north. For the interested, Newent is about the same distance from the Arctic Circle to the South as we are to the North of it. Anyway we have now turned for home.... See you later

Tim and Carol