

Lumina through the North West Passage

Rain and more rain and then it stopped

Post 4

They said in Paamiut that they had had more rain recently than in the last 3 years. We wondered why the streets were running with water and you had to wade through puddles on the dock. However the third day being Monday it stopped raining, not because it was Monday of course but just because it stopped. Anyway we made the short walk through the town, past the boarded up apartments and the two supermarkets to the Police station to check into Greenland. This was not a common occurrence in Paamiut it seems as it took the lady behind the desk a while

to find the passport stamp and then a similar time to work out how to change the date on it. Whilst we waited the three policemen in the building responded to a telephone call and rushed out to their land cruiser and sped off into the distance, not that they could get up to much speed as it cant be more than



one mile of road from one side of the settlement to the other. Anyway we got our passports stamped and were officially back in Europe as Greenland seems to be part of Schengen these days.

With the better weather there was much movement in our part of the harbour with various speedboats and dorys coming in to fill up at the fuel dock next to us. On the dock behind us was a shed where there were up to 6 men working, not shouting about what they were doing and indeed they were a bit coy when I went in to see if they had a water tap in there that I might steal some from. It's a shame when people going about their business are obviously worried about what an incomer might think but as far as I was concerned its their business. They were part of the local economy processing seal skins. Quite a few of the local boats seem to be out hunting seals, the rest fishing for halibut where the other money was. The only shame was that the seals didn't



seem to be of any use except for the skin as across the fjord from our dock there were several skinned seal carcasses washed up and the only animal benefiting from them were the seagulls. The supermarket only had the usual meat like you would see at home, alas no whale or seal to be seen!

I have a thing about “remote days” I am not sure if there is a better term for it but essentially a remote day is one where you have not seen another human for the 24 hours apart from whoever you are with. If you think about it, it is pretty rare if achieved at all in normal life. It all started when I was about 20 and went off backpacking between Christmas and New Year to Scotland, after walking into a remote Bothy (climbers shelter) near Ben Alder we had several days without seeing any human. The next time was kayaking in remote Fjordland in New Zealand and apart from that I cannot remember any others. However on this trip we have eclipsed the lot, after leaving Oban we never saw a single person until we got to Paamiut. In those 18 days we never saw a soul, we only actually saw two ships and another three on the AIS (ie within about 20 miles of VHF coverage). I suppose an ocean crossing is a pretty easy way to achieve it but I was surprised how little shipping we had seen—in comparison the North Sea from Scotland to Norway is positively congested, particularly in the middle where all the oil rigs are, and from Norway to Svalbard there was quite a lot of fishing and oil tanker activity.



Paamiut now seems to be a shadow of its former self, Not so many years ago it was the home to some 3000 souls but today its just over a thousand. In the 1980s and 90s there was a big program by the Danish Government to encourage people from outlying settlements like Narssalik where we had been a few days previously to get them to move into larger settlements like Paamiut and they had built big apartment blocks to house them. Unfortunately times have now changed, fish processing probably takes much less labour, or is generally quieter anyway and there were not enough jobs around. People have moved on, either to larger places like Nuuk or to Denmark in search of jobs with better money.

The whole town has seemed to have just old people, or very young families, very few between the ages of 25 and 60. We met one lady whose auntie was the last person to leave Narssalik in the 1980s, they had driven down to the



dock to see the English on their Yacht. I guess all the well looked after houses in these abandoned settlements are now owned by the next generation who come back from Denmark or Nuuk once a year to maintain them and have their holidays there.

It was interesting to see that suddenly on the third day we were in town, people you passed in the street had stopped saying Hei but now nearly always said Hello, word had got around that we were the only tourists in town! We walked out exploring the furthest piece of road that led to the cemetery and beyond followed a little path for a mile or so to a deserted bay with a small iceberg trapped within.

Every now and then a boat would come in or just speed by and occasionally you could hear shots of a rifle—seals are very wary round here! Ben and Indie had gone off on a longer hike to get some altitude to survey the area and we returned for some retail therapy. Carol needed some new salopettes as the old ones had developed an affliction known as “not bloody waterproof anymore”. We headed to the third shop in town that sold everything else apart from food. Here you could buy a barbecue, various hardware, a rifle and probably ammunition although it was not on the shelf as it was in the fuel office! You could also fit yourself out with all the clothing you could desire from underwear to a dark suit, and also of course a good selection of arctic waterproofs.

On the water front, having drawn a blank with the seal skin processors, I was offered the mixer tap in the kitchen at the fuel office or the little blue hut up the road where apparently anyone can go and get water FOC. I probably could have bodged something up to connect to the mixer tap but even then our hoses were not long enough to reach the boat so after a walk round to the other side of the harbour and a visit to the Royal Greenland fish factory I was told that if we came back tomorrow with 250 kroners in cash we could have water there. £30 instead of 30 trips with our jerry can to the kitchen seemed not such a bad idea and anyway it would be interesting to go over to the commercial dock.

The water experience was one of those typical things where there is not much English spoken and you are not sure if someone is coming to sort you out or not. First we went back to the main office and presented out 250 Kr, much to my surprise and after a delay as the guy could not find the account code, we were provided with a proper invoice. Despite being an outlying fish factory in the Royal Greenland portfolio they did things to the letter here. I was then told to move my boat around to just under the big crane and someone would come and help us. Here there was a chap washing down the dock with a big hose who didn't speak any English and didn't seem to want to get rid of his fire hose either so we stood around. After a while and nothing happening I went into another door to see if I could find anyone. It was obviously the staff entrance with lines of clean boots and overalls to change into. I poked my head around the next door and despite bins full of Halibut there was just one guy on a forklift. “Water”, I said and he seemed to have the right idea. By now the outside guy had left his fire hose running on the floor and was unloading a small boat with the crane. I explained that the hose would not reach and was taken to a small shed with various fire hoses. Choosing a smaller diameter I connected it to a smaller tap next to Mr firehose's one and started to unreel it. Seeing this and having finished unloading a couple of bins of halibut from the small boat he came across and said “SAUT”. I was obviously on the wrong water tap and needed the big fire hose one next to it! Eventually by joining couple of big hoses onto his fire hose we got all the way across to Lumina and managed to fill the tanks with good sweet water.



Leaving Paamiut we took a small channel between the rocks that branched off by the wreck of the Greenland Star this was a fishing trawler wrecked in 1984 due to an “inebriated captain”

Out at sea we took the inside passage which like the same in Norway generally is inside the skerries and islands giving some protection from the open sea. There are sporadic markers and you need to keep a good eye on the chart to see where the route goes next as it isn't always obvious. There is also a difference to Norway in that only the route is properly charted with depths so

if you deviate away from it you are on your own!

Our second anchorage was off an abandoned Faroese fishing settlement. There were various sheds with combined living and fish processing areas in the same building. This must have been quite a place at one time as everywhere



was fitted out with electricity and there was a large 3 cylinder Lister generator to provide power. Interesting to see a Lister as the Faroes being part of Denmark would orientate themselves towards a German or Swedish machine rather than British.

Ben and Indie had set off to do some climbing on a crag above the bay and Carol and I first explored the ruins of sheds where we landed and then set off across the island to see another part of the settle-



Cosy bunk beds for the Faeroese fishermen



ment on the other side. Here in a narrow creek with rock walls on either side were the very sad remains. The weather had not been kind to the buildings on this side and every one was blown down to its foundations with only floors and smashed timber roofs and walls to be found. The pilot guide talked about an old wooden jetty that you could tie up to but even this had been damaged beyond use, presumably by floating ice which is a great destroyer of anything like that.



Only the toilet had not been blown away

Back at the boat we enjoyed a quiet evening watching the climbers above us as they prepared to bivvy out for the night. First thing the next day they returned at the appointed time and we continued our journey north. On the way at an "isolated rock", our favourite fishing spot (this being something around 10m deep with deeper water all around) we hit the jackpot with a good haul of 5 large cod. The first two were eaten for lunch and dinner and the others filleted and put in the freezer for later.



You just have to make space for a Lister



We found a fantastically remote anchorage up a small fjord and in the evening I was persuaded that the time had come for me to get dragged up a mountain. A short row ashore and we were off. Following fairly indistinct reindeer tracks we got to the lower slopes and picked our way up the ever steepening ground. Of course the old chap was always at the rear and at one point just as I put my foot down a ptarmigan flew off its nest, not even half a meter away from where I had stepped. Ben and Indie must have passed within a few metres of it and yet it had stayed put, but my clomper was just too close for comfort. After a quick photo of the nest with its 8 eggs I carried on. After the second or third false summit and the top still looking as distant as ever we had our cocoa and a piece of protein fudge we returned by a slightly different route. This took us down snowfields and around crags, always hoping that just beyond was a cliff we could not get down, however Bens good route finding proved up to the mark and we rarely had to backtrack. With the sun low in the sky we returned to the boat at about 12.30am tired but satisfied. The view from the top had been worth the effort.

Ptarmigan nest

Continuing up the coast our next goal was a bay just north of Bluie West Four, a site of one of the WWII American airbases, Bluie being the codeword for Greenland. During that time they set up a number of



Marker stones and posts on the edge of the runway -



bases on both West and East Greenland. Most of them were not used after the war and this is one of the abandoned ones. Running parallel to the bay are some massive dunes of moraine and sand, with a two mile runway on top of it. It was just a gravel strip, all the buildings have been removed which some people prefer, but for the industrial archaeologist a bit disappointing as other similar bases have been left pretty much untouched with vehicles and oil drums to be seen. Here, however there was just the runway with its stone and wood markers at the side and some wheel marks where the big planes had been turned. Unfortunately of all the USAF bases from WWII in Greenland there seems to be little documentation of this one even Wikipedia is pretty scant! https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marrak_Point

By the way, if you haven't noticed it already there is a new blog from Ben on the website as well—same trip different view!