

Lumina through the North West Passage

Past the point of no return?

Post 14



By popular demand, a map! Blue line is what is covered this week

Finally we left Fort Ross as one apparently should, two hours before high tide so that the current is going with you though Bellot Strait. There was, by now, even more ice that had made its way through from the other side as it seems that the current flows against us most of the time. On the other side the ice charts had been showing this area of ice that was moving towards the entrance, and also past it further north.

So we set off in the company of a couple of other



Beothuk, he first Eastbound vessel of the year

yachts, with one remaining because they didn't like the look of the weather forecast in the coming hours. Initially there was not much ice but as we neared the region of Magpie Rock, the most feared part of the channel the water became rather confused with the smaller chunks of ice seemingly to move differently to the larger ones. However, this was not too much of an issue to us as we could avoid them, however a



Lumina taken from Beothuk on a rather gloomy afternoon amongst the ice in Peel Sound

little later on there was a more dense band coming up. We managed to see a narrow gap and nudged our way in, and then powered on opening it up to get through. The other two yachts followed us. Then, as we were nearing the end of the channel after a couple of hours, we got a call that one of the yachts following us was going to put their drone up to see where we should go as we neared the entrance. We drifted with the following wind and current at 2kn or so for about half an hour, all the time getting further in front of them. Eventually they started

moving and we were told that there may be a gap close to the rocks on the right of the entrance. To us it looked like there was a better option to go straight out and this was what we did, round the outside of a small island and then heading North in clearer water to skirt round the band of ice flowing up from the south. We continued to follow the edge of the ice for an hour or so and as it became more open there was a rather nice motor cruiser coming towards us, not the sort of thing you would see on the Norfolk Broads but 1400hp motor yacht with three stories. We had just pushed our way through the solid ice on the edge of the ice field into the more broken area beyond and they radioed us to say if we made our way towards where they were coming through it was a bit clearer there. As we got close, the skipper radioed us to say the he had a good pic of us and he would send it to Victor. Now this is where one realises how small the world is up here, we had no previous contact with the guy and yet he knew that if he sent the picture to Victor, the fellow who is the Ocean Cruising Clubs honorary ice pilot for the arctic and keeps in contact with us, that it would get to us, and indeed a few hours later I get an email from good old Victor with the picture. After weaving our way through the ice for about 5 or 6 miles we finally got out the other side and headed for a bay to shelter from the forthcoming wind.

Voyager had elected to stay put in Depot Bay at Fort Ross and as we anchored in the gloom of evening and looked at our phones we got a whole lot of pictures from them of the ice that was now flowing up through the Bellot Strait and filling that anchorage. The next day was stormy as expected so we sat tight in our anchorage, the only notable event being a solitary bear gradually making its way around the bay. In the evening we had some contact with the other two boats in our anchorage and the consensus was that we should head off at around 4am so that about 24 hours later we would enter the next icefield which looked very big on the ice chart and currently completely blocked the route with 2-3 tenths ice cover—

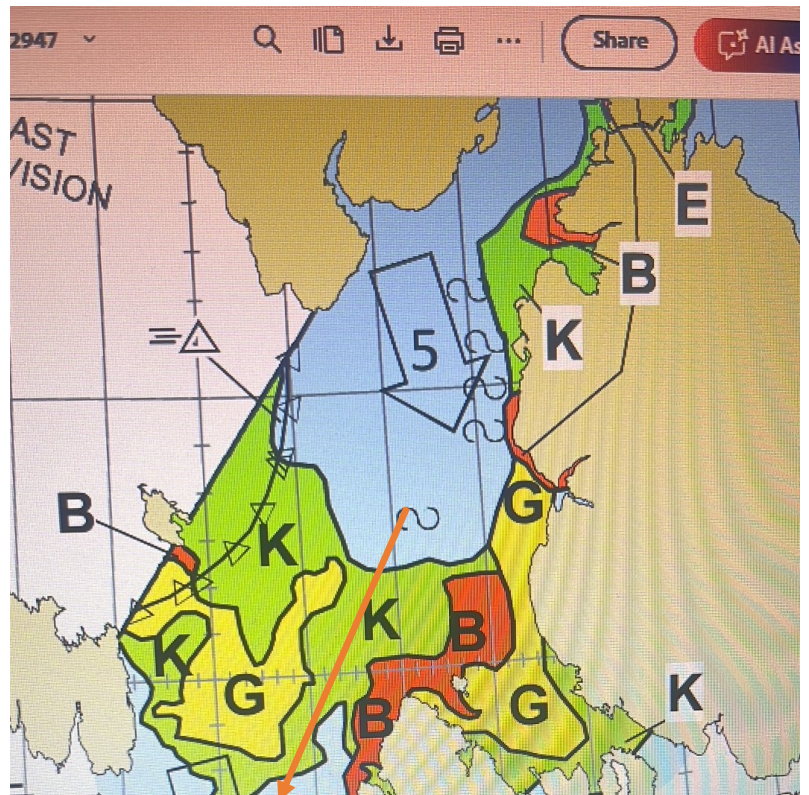


Cosy from inside our doghouse is the best way to view the ice!

just about the limit for a yacht to find its way through.

Starting out in thick fog we motored for many hours until eventually the wind we were waiting for from behind gradually built and we were sailing at last. Overnight we continued on towards the icefield with the new ice chart being even more uninviting than the last and in the early light we started to pick out a few isolated bits of ice. My main worry was that in previous cases where we had arrived at the ice, the actual edge of it was often almost completely solid and you had to find somewhere not too wide and just

push your way in. Here, however, the rules were different, we had a following wind driving us down towards it, and now the swell was running at least 1m high. Any contact with the ice in this was a definite no. Luckily the isolated bergs became gradually more frequent but there was not definite edge of solid ice. They were however very intimidating thick chunks bouncing in the waves and definitely to be avoided at all costs. The further we got in, the less the swell became and we could relax a bit as it did not appear to be getting any thicker. Somehow, despite leaving the bay last we had overtaken the other two yachts so now we were sending them coordinates of where we entered the ice and how bad it was. There was much relief in the air. After an hour or two the ice really thinned and we had the ridiculous situation of definitely being



Our route

ing in a green coloured area on the ice chart and yet we could see none from horizon to horizon. However the bergs started to become more frequent and there were defined bands of close ice to be navigated round. We attempted to meet up with Lumi, a yacht we have been corresponding with for some time who were coming the other way, but they were in much thicker ice, just a few miles to our west and the boat they were with did not want to make the detour to link up. We, therefore, continued on and eventually it cleared and we set course for Cambridge Bay.

As we were coming through the ice field our friends on Voyager had decided with another yacht that had



Evening or morning? They are still only an hour or so apart!

by then arrived at Fort Ross, to make a break for it. However, Bellot Strait had more ice in it than three days earlier when we made it through. They were in front and suddenly there were worried voices on the radio from the French yacht. They were stuck and then the ice moved and actually lifted the boat up. They were extremely worried and Voyager turned to go and assist them. Fortunately, by the time they had returned the miles or so separating them they had extricated themselves and both yachts returned to Fort Ross with the french sustaining a dent in the side to show for it. Interesting they were in the vicinity of the famous Magpie Rock, and it was near there that we saw some worrying movements in the ice and also where a boat was lost in 2018 with the occupants surviving on an ice flow for many hours before getting rescued. A couple of days later Voyager made another successful attempt but the french stayed behind, we thought perhaps they had lost their nerve and would go back east, but

after another day they came through safely.

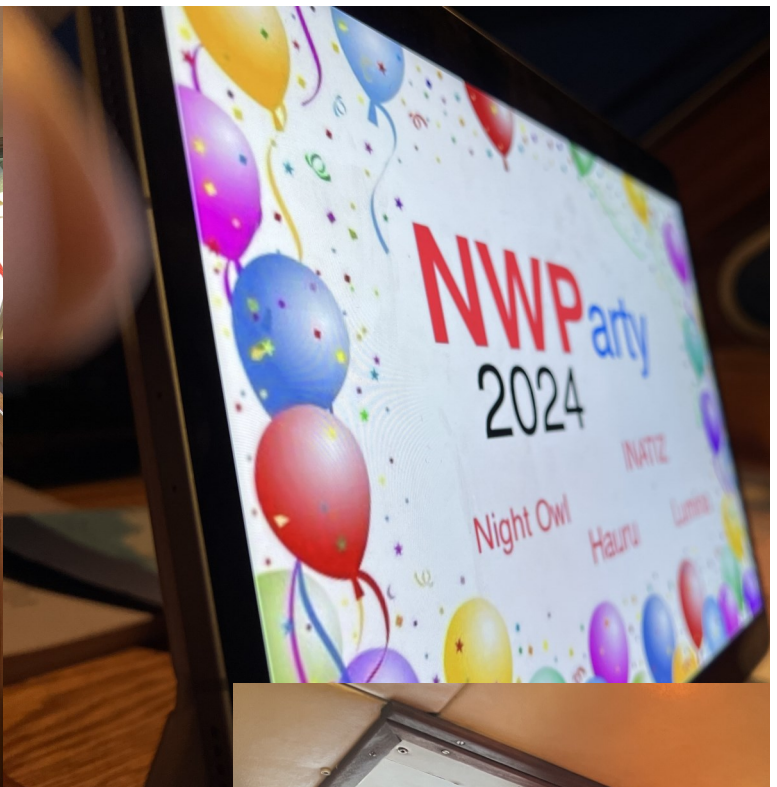
We arrived in Cambridge Bay on a Friday evening, a really handy time if you want a quick re-fuel and move on as nothing then happens till Monday, but it gave us a chance to wind down after the stressful two and a half day voyage and anyway, we now joined Abel Tasman on the dock who we had not seen since Pond Inlet. During the night the other two yachts with us arrived making four. Always up for a challenge I had taken up my favourite spot on such docks, just round on the inside of the piling where everybody else thinks its too shallow. Whilst this does have certain advantages as you don't have to climb over other boats to get ashore, or have other people climbing over your boat because space usually dictates that boats are rafted 2 or 3 deep, it does have one disadvantage in that you have to deal



Cambridge Bay

with the local children. We don't mind talking to them but they also like to throw stones, but a swift word from Carol seems to do the trick.

Saturday passed quickly, much of the morning was spent watching the passengers from the Hurtigruten cruise ship being ferried to and from the beach in front of us and talking with sailors who are now too old for their own boat but take interesting cruises to the places they never got to. We then had a walk around the town, and a visit to the newly opened Canadian High Arctic Research Station, a wonderfully expensive modern building clad in golden copper, in quite a contrast to the general American shanty town look of the rest of the place. In the evening we sampled a Musk Ox burger in the town's café with some other crews and then retired to the Polish boat Inatiz to celebrate the birthday of the skipper. Now, you would be forgiven to make the same mistake as I did in thinking that Inatiz meant something in Polish but alas you would be wrong as it was an English boat built in Ipswich and the original owner was possibly In-a-tiz during its build.



The Poles know how to party and we helped them out with a donation from our cellar of a Scandinavian brew called Aquavit. This had been brought to Newent by some visiting Round Tablers, and later on donated to me to take on the boat. It's a rather acquired taste which probably had something to do with its convoluted journey to Cambridge Bay. However, when you have had a few already and in the right company it goes down a treat. Suffice to say that the bottle was dry by the time we dragged ourselves across the dock to Lumina in the early hours.

Having heard rumours of crazy costs getting a fuel truck to the dock, out came the bikes on Sunday and we cycled a couple of



Birthday Boy



Cycle tour of the arctic

miles out towards the airport where the fuel tanks and a public filling station was. This was to check out the feasibility of taking the boat round, mooring just off the shore and then carrying cans from the fuel station back to the boat. It was about 150m to the shore and I thought that for the \$500 charge for the fuel truck, it would be worth the effort.

On the return trip to the boat we took what looked like it was the old road which passed the “Many Pebbles Golf Course”

No one was playing and the facilities were pretty basic. I sus-

pect that you would get some really interesting bounces as your ball landed on the rough stony ground. There didn't seem to be any difference between the fairway, rough or “green” as it was all just rough stony ground with little or no vegetation.

Back at the boat I did a bit of “hunter and gathering”, well I did a deal with a fisherman coming in for his biggest arctic char for a few dollars and then soon after, the yacht Voyager arrived. With a few phone calls, Sean from Voyager somehow managed to get the

manager of the local hotel to make some pizzas and in what seemed like no time they were delivered to the dock and everyone then convened on Lumina for another good night.



The Many Pebbles Golf Course



Impromptu pizza

With other boats still debating if they could do a deal with the fuel company to spread the call out charge I thought that from what I had heard they would not be successful and with the office not opening before 10, and the fuel station opening at 8, I was set on circumventing the situation. Therefore at 07.30 we slipped the lines and motored across to the creek where the fuel tanks were, unloaded out 8 drums into the dinghy and carried them up to the fuel pumps. We would need to do two full trips to replenish our reserves, needing

about 400 litres. As luck would have it, a chap that we had been talking to on the dock the previous evening was filling his truck at the same time and he took the first 8 down to the shore for us. These were then ferried out to the boat in the dinghy in two loads and siphoned into the main tank. We then returned to the pump station to fill again and were pleasantly rewarded by Maciek and Karolina from Inatiz who had rented a truck for a couple of days and seeing that we had escaped the dock had come to see how we were doing. They then took the second batch down to the shore for us meaning we needed to do no carrying at all and had saved \$500. They were going to do the same as us except take the fuel back to the dock to make it even easier.



So that ends another chapter and one which really turns the corner. Now we are through all the ice a new one starts, the race to Alaska. Without the worry of “will the ice open or not” we now just have to get some miles under the keel. Its about 1600 miles to Nome and almost the same again to Seward near Anchorage where we intend to leave the boat. The maths are not difficult, we would do maybe 120 or so miles in a 24 hour period of continuous motoring or sailing. The autumn is nearly upon us, getting darker earlier every day and the dwarf birch and willow are already turning yellow and tales of autumn gales in the Bering Strait are nagging in the back of my mind!

Apart from that everything is going really well, we have plenty of supplies, most things on the boat are holding up well and we are able to handle everything we have come across so far.

Best Wishes

Tim and Carol

[Website with all the old Blogs and tracker page](#)