



Welcome aboard

Around North America



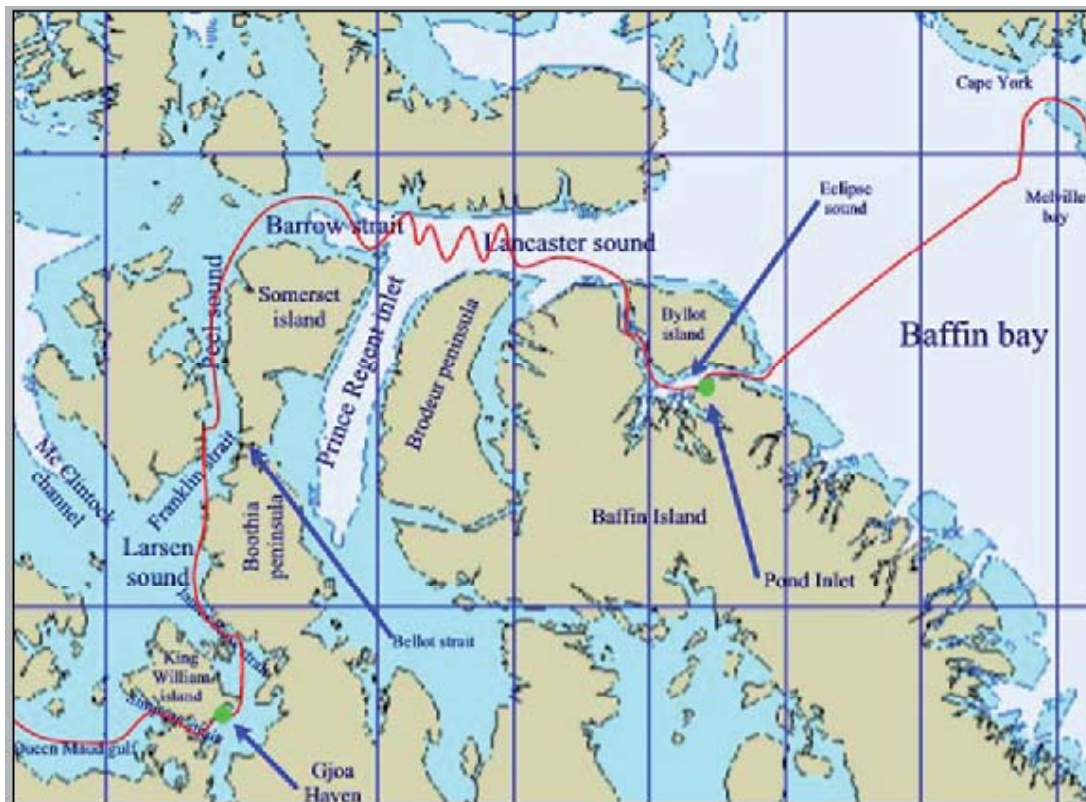
Newsletter N°9 August 2008 1/2

August, 21, 2008

We have just left Gjoa Haven, Nunavut, Canada, headed for the sixth leg of the expedition. A month ago, ice conditions in the Northwest Passage would not have had us predict such a radical debacle. We are experiencing live an alarming illustration of climate change. In our last edition, we wrote that there would be no ceasing watching the ice. We didn't imagine for a second then that this watch, which we have kept relentlessly ever since, would no longer be necessary between Gjoa Haven, on King William Island, and the Gulf of Amundsen to the south of the island of Banks. This represents a distance of 1,150 kilometers. Nevertheless, the past winter has been particularly harsh in the region. We are witnessing a more important oscillation between temperatures in the Canadian Arctic.

On the sea

Before we could reach the Canadian coastline, we had to follow the coast of Greenland all the way to Melville Bay. We were barely forty nautical miles away from Cape York when we were able to turn our way west and then progressively dip south to find the latitude of Pond Inlet. The eclipse on August 1 coincided with our arrival at Baffin. We were at the entrance of « Eclipse Sound » when the sun began to disappear. Ice maps were indicating rather dark perspectives for what was to follow. All the waterways of the Canadian archipelago that we had to cross were blocked by thick one-year old ice organized



in large floes 500 meters to 2 kilometers in length. We left Pond Inlet in this state of mind, entirely prepared to meet adversity and to live intense moments of struggle with the frozen element. It was, however, obvious that we would not be able to go through the Prince Regent Fjord and its shortcut through the straight of Bellot. We thus had to go on in the straight of Lancaster toward the straight of Barrow, so as to veer south into Peel Sound. Just before Franklin Strait, we took refuge at the entrance of a bay in order to wait for better ice conditions. Indeed, Larsen Sound was still iced up and wind was blowing the ice toward the coast of the peninsula of Boothia along which we had to navigate. After fifteen hours spent at this stopover, the new ice map was considerably more reassuring than that of the preceding day. Pierre-Charles, a member of the technical crew who follows our progression in France, wrote two days ago: « seen from these parts, your arrival at Gjoa Haven was impressive. The straight of Franklin had been blocked for weeks and the passage just opened up before you.»

During navigation, we observed narwhals, belugas, hooded seals, ringed seals, five polar bears and snow geese.

L'équipe d'Around North America

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Stopovers

Our stopovers along the way are short, but always rich with encounters. We are going forward with our field investigation. Canadian Inuits have a lot to tell us about the impact of climate change on their country. New animal and plant species, that they had never seen before, are appearing around them. For example, a bat was found in Gjoa Haven three years ago. The tundra is also changing. Vegetation is taller. Mammals have new parasites and insects, thereto unknown in these parts, are colonizing these latitudes. Permafrost is tumbling down in bits. The surface layer, the one that melts during the summer, is getting thicker. Rivers are larger in the spring, but the

wind, which is more present than before, dries everything up during the summer. The ice cap starts melting down earlier and comes back later. Old ice layers, those which survive at least one summer, are becoming more and more scarce. The sudden disappearance of the ice cap has also been noted. This year, it disappeared overnight in front of the village of Pond Inlet. We were surprised by ice maps, but the phenomenon was confirmed by hunters. The wind doubtless plays an important role in this process. Just like in Greenland, we have met a terrific people with a marvelous power to adapt and a huge spirit of hospitality.

The film

Filming of our second documentary started upon our departure from Ilulissat. It will end at Dutch Harbor. Cameraman Philippe Moreau joined us on board at Pond Inlet and will remain with us all the way to Tuktoyaktuk. Delphine Maratier took advantage of Philippe Moreau's presence on board to catch her breath and go back home to her family for a while. This second episode will be more maritime than the first. The sustained rhythm of encounters and meetings during stopovers will pick



up at Sitka in Alaska until the end of the expedition and will allow us to accumulate material for three additional documentaries.



Scientific program

Our soil and water samplings for the study of arthropods and copepods are going their way. They are overseen by Emilie Guegan. Pierre Vanloot from the IUT of Marseille, for his part, has left the boat at Gjoa Haven.

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