

# Svalbard 2014



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Spitzbergen (Dutch for “pointed mountains”) was first reported in 1596. There was never a native population.

It is not really part of Norway, but is governed by Norway under an international treaty of 1929 which allows other countries access and some development rights.

It is the largest island in the Svalbard Archipelago

# Impact of the Gulf Stream



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We were well North of the North-West passage, but the West coast of Spitzbergen stays fairly free of ice in winter.

## The Crew

- o Neil & Helen McCubbin
  - Owners of Milvina
- o Denis Moonan
- o Pam MacBrayne
  - OCC Rear Commodores
- o [www.McCubbin.ca](http://www.McCubbin.ca)

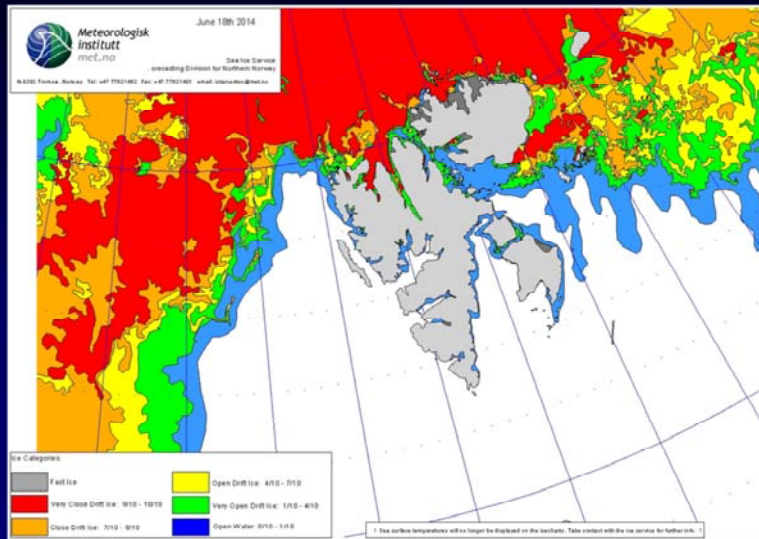


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# First, dodge the major ice



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We visited the office of the Norwegian Ice Service (<http://polarview.met.no/>)

Charts like the above are updated daily. This one is from the time of our voyage

There is traditionally more ice to the SE of Spitzbergen with a long tail to the SW for the Southern Cape, which forces yacht to detour West.

Refer also to "Letters from High Latitudes" which is free on Kindle

## Leave the trees behind in Skjervoy



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We stopped in to borrow a shotgun with single-slug ammo.  
Beautiful and a great jumping off spot with good services.

## Set sail out of Skjervoy



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We had a bumpy start, but a good sailing wind as we left mainland Norway

## Bjornoya (“Bear Island”)



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We saw Bjornoya from 45 miles off, then it disappeared into its usual fog bank.

Although the name means “Bear Island”, bears are rare, because the winter sea-ice has retreated.

Local tidal streams are strong, but we had no problems with them.



## Kvalrossbukta on Bjornoya



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A former whaler's base abandoned in 1908.

The boiler was used to make steam to drive a winch to haul whales up on land for processing, oil extraction etc.

We visited the friendly staff of the radio and weather station on the North Coast



## Landfall on Spitzbergen



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Our first sight of Spitzbergen

We saw, and heard, quite a few whales and whale spouts on the way

## Hornsund



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The southernmost fjord on Spitzbergen is the first stop for most cruisers. It is notorious for strong winds Easterly while outside is calm. Glaciers calving cause lots of drift ice.

## Scientists and Milvina crew



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Milvina's crew with most of the scientists from the Polish Polar research Station

## Little Auk colony, Spitzbergen



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Every white dot is an Auk, not snow.

## Now you see the birds



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Their black and white plumage is good camouflage. Even their eyes disappear in the black

## They can really fly



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## Arctic fox with giant egg



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We saw this fox carrying the egg, presumable to feed young in a hidden den. The egg is half the size of an Auk, so must be from some other bird, probably a Barnacle Goose.



## Svalbard reindeer



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Svalbard reindeer are shorter legged and lighter colour than their mainland cousins.

They are quite tame, with the only predator being polar bears, who cannot normally catch them.

They survive on the sparse moss and lichen, and the occasional blades of grass

## Barentsburg (Little Russia)



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Barentsburg is a Russian coal mining town, and is the only one remaining of several.

Population about 200 today, but many more in the past.

The church seems to be sized for about 25 people, but the brewery has capacity for lots more.

## Most Northern Brewery



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Pub was pleasant but Milvina's crew were the only customers

## Milvina in Longyearbyen harbour



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Longyearbyen is the only real town in Svalbard, and is welcoming to yachts. There is a very modern Arctic museum, which won an award for “best in Europe” in 2008, as well as an excellent older one with mementos of the early Arctic exploration by air.

Check in with Sysselman’s office.

Got permit to buy alcohol. Quantity allowed is judged to keep a miner drunk on his four-day time off, but no more.

## Longyearbyen parking lots



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Lots of snow vehicles parked all over the place.

We never learned why the tracked vehicle has radar.

## A lone hunter/trapper



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Andreas lives alone, despite all the buildings and radio masts.  
He hunts seals in summer, and fur bearing animals in winter when their coats are at their best.



## Pollepynten



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The walrus at Poolepynten are very tame but rather smelly. They live on shellfish harvested from the bottom with their tusks.

Milvina is anchored here along with Sillage, a French Passoa 47, same hull as Milvina.



## Dodging ice



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Working I through the light drift ice was easy.

We avoided any heavy stuff

We had to hunt for a spot sufficiently free of kelp to anchor

Seals and eider ducks liked the spot

## Dahlbrebukta



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One of our nicest anchorages

## This guy wakened when he hit the hull



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He drifted along, asleep, till his bunk clinked against our hull

## Coal train in Ny Alesund



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A relic from early last century

Today, about 40 scientist live here in the winter, and 100 or so in summer

There is a ski-lift for "mountain research purposes"

Ny Aalesund was a favourite base for airship exploration of the Arctic a century ago

## Half the crew heading for the pub



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We had a good evening at the pub on Helen's birthday

Sillage brought a cake to the pub for her, and group of the scientist's fired up their guitars



## Magdalen fjord



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One of many sailors graveyards in Svalbard is in the background. Not much to see

Good anchorage, spectacular but dismal weather when we were there.

Noisy glacier

## Why is some ice blue?



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## Showering is bracing



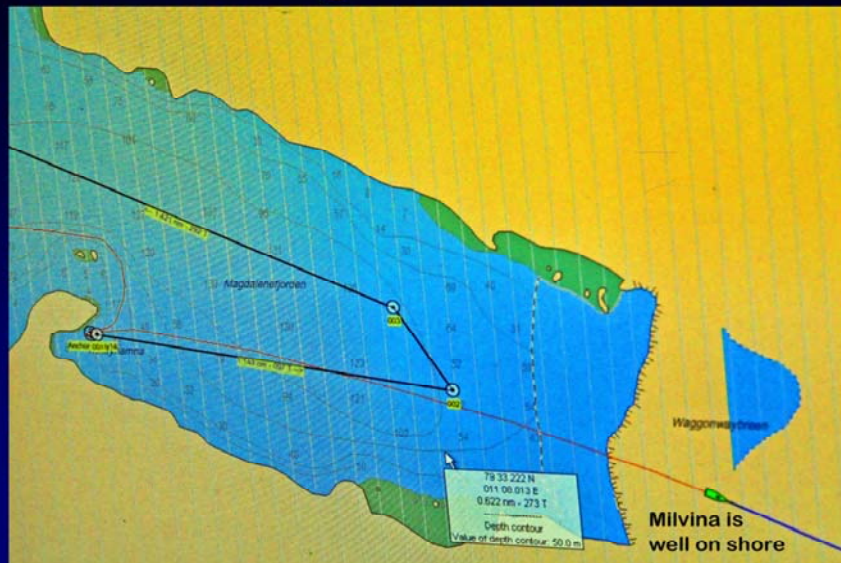
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Denis adds colour to a dismal day

# Proof of glacial recession



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Our chart shows us well up the glacier, although we were actually a couple of hundred yard off the face of it, in 30 metres of water

## Milvina in Magdalenfjord



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## Leaving Magdalen Fjord



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This is a colour photograph

## Local wildlife



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We saw a lot of eider ducks but only these two polar bears  
Snow, rain and ice pellets made photographing these two bears difficult.  
Many of the shots were poor

## Wing and wing near midnight



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We had a nice sail South is Forlandsundet.

## Denis under attack



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The terns objected loudly when we approached their nests

The Pomarine skuas did not like us too much either, but were far less aggressive than the terns.



## Lots of ice, but no trees

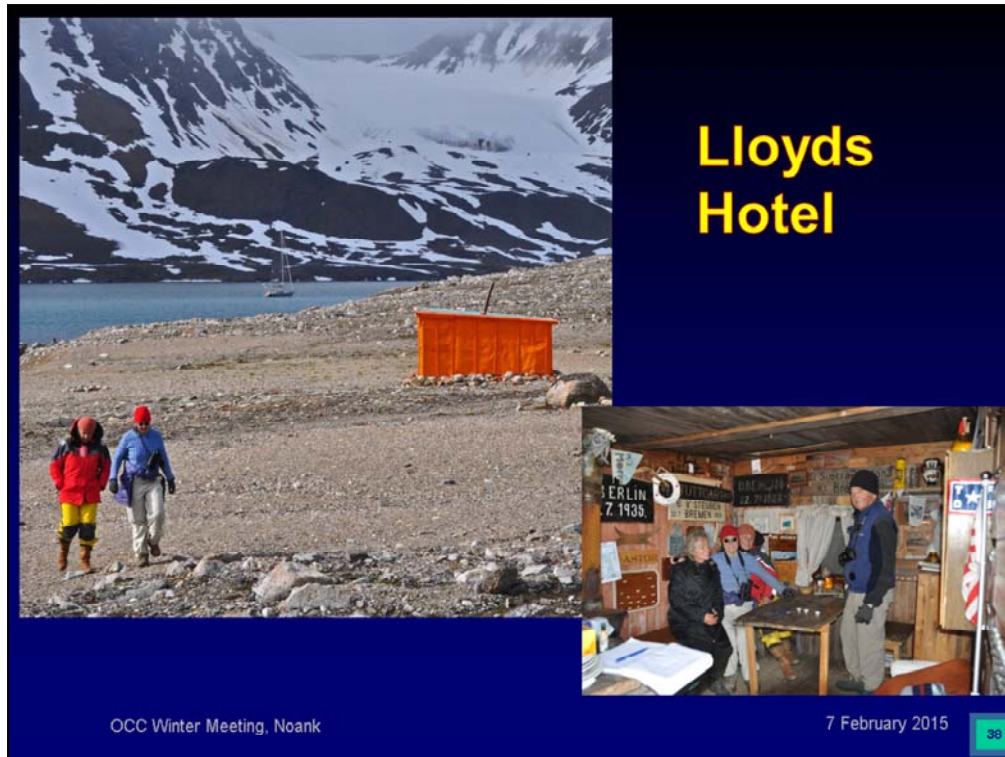


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One of several glaciers in Kongsfjord



Lloyds insurance company has installed refuges for shipwrecked sailors in some remote spots.

Probably obsolete today, it is still stocked, with food and vodka.

Some of the micro cruise ships take their passengers there.

## Whales used to be huge



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Not much left of the old whaling station in Hornsund, except these huge 300 year old bones.

## Plant life healthy in a few spots



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Although barren, there is some plant life, mostly on the bottom

## Our last view of Spitzbergen



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We saw quite a lot of whales, but usually too far away for photographs.

When the whales blew, birds gather around, presumably to eat some of the discharged material.



# Preparation

- Cruising permit from Sysselman (apply at 3 months in advance)
- Search and rescue insurance required (Pantaneus includes it)
- Sailing resume must be approved
- Insurance – not all companies will cover a cruise to Svalbard
- Satphone for data – Iridium only one that works north of 70 deg  
Used for weather [www.yr.no](http://www.yr.no) and ice reports  
WinLink worked well
- Gun – Norway no longer allows rental to foreigners
- Can rent gun in Longyearben but have to have gun permit

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Americans do not have firearm permits  
Additional insurance was about \$200  
Svalbard permits about \$100



## Practicalities

- Some digital charts stop at 70 deg North
  - We used Nobeltec to 80 N. We also had paper charts, but never used
    - Latest Navionics for iPad includes Svalbard
- Cruising Guidebooks – Norwegian Cruising Guide by John Harries
  - [www.norwegiancruisingguide.com](http://www.norwegiancruisingguide.com)
  - *Electronic. About 900 pages if printed*
- RCC Cruising guide to Norway by Judy Lomax
  - <http://www.rccpf.org.uk/publications/europe-a-mediterranean/norway/>
  - *(be sure to buy 3<sup>rd</sup> edition)*
- Captain's Mate (Cruising Association members only)
  
- A good heater, unless you are very tough
  - Both engine heat and diesel fired
- Waterproof gloves and lots of wool and/or fleece