



RCC PILOTAGE FOUNDATION

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ARCTIC AND NORTHERN WATERS

Ch 4 The North East Passage

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By Paddy Barry and Jane Russell

With thanks to Jarlath Cunnane and Vladimir Ivankiv for their contributions



Northabout in ice off the Taymyr Peninsula © Jarlath Cunnane

The RCC Pilotage Foundation is grateful to Jane Russell who has compiled this publication following consultation with yachtsmen with great experience of these waters. Planning and timing are essential when passage-making here; it is strongly advised that experience of ice should be gained as an apprentice before venturing into these remote waters as skipper. Attention is drawn to the [preamble pages](#) and the [Cautions for yachts in Arctic waters](#).

Caution: These notes are a result of consultations with experienced Arctic sailors. Information gained is selective and not definitive and result from conditions encountered at the time of yachtsmen's visits. Plans do not represent the results of recent survey and should be used with caution. Reasonable endeavours have been made to ensure the accuracy of the information but it may be out of date, be changed or be revised without notice. The RCC Pilotage Foundation and the authors publish these notes in the hope that they will be of some help to mariners but the safety of a vessel depends ultimately on the judgment of the skipper who should assess all information, published or unpublished.

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4.1 A brief history of the North East Passage (or Northern Sea Route)



For interactive Google Map version, click on pin.

The key to the North East Passage is the section of the route that crosses over the top of the Taymyr Peninsula. This is the most northerly point of the route and, even in recent years, has continued to be an area liable to remain frozen in throughout the year.

Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld made the first successful passage all the way from west to east along the entire route of the North East Passage on the *Vega* in 1878. In 1893 Fridtjof Nansen sailed the *Fram* from Norway as far as the New Siberian Islands, but his sights were set on the North Pole and he never intended to head any further east. Nevertheless, the *Fram* was only the second vessel to have made it so far along the North East Passage. Thirty years later, Amundsen's ship, *Maud*, sailed the passage eastwards over several years. In 1932 Otto Schmidt sailed all the way from Archangel to the Bering Strait in one season without wintering. The Northern Sea Route was thereafter considered to be open and the 'Administration of the Northern Sea Route' was set up to supervise navigation and develop Arctic ports. Many of these ports have since been abandoned, however the diminishing sea ice in recent summers has created renewed interest in the commercial viability of the North East Passage. The relevance of this to yachts is the possibility that ports and services along the route will be re-developed. Conversely, it may mean that the already difficult procedures and regulations will become even more stringent.

In 2002 Eric Brossier was the first person to transit in a sailing yacht in only one season. But since then, despite the generally more favourable summer ice conditions, only a handful of sailing yachts have successfully completed the route without being cargoed (see table below):

Transits of the North East Passage in vessels less than 30m

Any further information to add to this table would be very welcome. 'Contact Us' on www.rccpf.org.uk

YEAR	VESSEL	REGISTRY	MASTER	ROUTE
1991-1993	<i>Yakutia</i>	Russia		West
		1991 Tiksi-Chukotka, 1992 Cargoed back to Tiksi, 1993 Tiksi-Murmansk		
1998-1999	<i>Apostol Andrey</i> (16.2 m yacht)	Russia	Nikolay Latau	West
				Wintered Tiksi
2000-2002	<i>Sibir</i>	Russia	Sergei Cherbakov	East
				Two winters
2002	<i>Vagabond</i> (15.3 m yacht)	France	Eric Brossier	East
				Circumnavigated the Arctic.
2002	<i>Dagmar Aaen</i> (27 m yacht)	Germany	Arved Fuchs	East
				Circumnavigated the Arctic.
2004-2005	<i>Northabout</i> (14.9m yacht)	Ireland	Jarlath Cunnane	West
				Wintered Khatanga. Circumnavigated the Arctic.
2010	<i>Peter 1</i> (18.5 m yacht)	Russia	Daniel Gavrilov	East
				Circumnavigated the Arctic in one season
2010	<i>Northern Passage</i> (9.6 m trimaran)	Norway	Borge Ousland	East
				Circumnavigated the Arctic in one season
Others that were cargoed, thereby not completing the passage 'on their own keel':				
2003-2004	<i>Campina</i> (Steel yacht)	Netherlands	Henke de Velde	West
2007	<i>Barrabas</i> (12m yacht)	UK	Adrian Flanagan	West

The landscape of the North East Passage

These lands are not celebrated for their scenic character. The coastal terrain along the North East Passage is tundra. It is bleak, treeless and largely featureless. Rivers drain the interior flowing northward into the Arctic seas. Their entrances are mostly deltaic in character, requiring detailed navigation. The groups of islands along the North East Passage offer some relief from the physical tedium, mainly as markers of progress but also as reminders of the historical discoverers who first came upon them.

Cities along the route, which in reality are broken down and largely abandoned towns, occur every 500 miles or so. Settlements and old polar stations exist sporadically, also mostly abandoned. During Stalin's great northern expansion of the 1950's and subsequently during the Cold War these were places of importance. Perhaps they will rise once more if the ice recedes more permanently.



Northabout on the river at Khatanga © Jarlath Cunnane

Ice Conditions

As discussed in 'Planning for an Arctic Voyage', a general trend towards diminishing ice cover does not necessarily mean that all sections of a passage will be ice free in any given year. Prevailing winds may create bottlenecks of sea ice and totally block the route. Ice conditions along much of the route are generally comparable to those of the North West Passage. However some sections are likely to be worse. The region of Cape Chelyuskin is usually particularly tough, with a narrow but persistent finger of ice preventing passage. Nuclear icebreakers are on station there in order to get the commercial shipping through. You might, with permission, 'hitch a ride' in the clear water behind such a convoy. However,

trailing an icebreaker is not an experience to be taken on lightly. The blocks of ice spewed out in their wake are a potentially lethal bombardment for a small sailing yacht.

Ice charts are available from the University of Bremen website, which covers Russian waters.

Go to: <http://www.seaice.de/> Click on Sea Ice Maps or go direct to:

<http://iup.physik.uni-bremen.de:8084/amsr/>



'Hitching a ride' in the clear water behind a convoy © Jarlath Cunnane

Weather Forecasts

Worldwide Marine Radiofacsimile Broadcast Schedules include broadcast schedules for MURMANSK (Russia), PEVEK, (Chutotka Peninsula), KODIAK (USA), TOKYO (Japan), HONOLULU (Hawaii), IQALUIT, RESOLUTE, INUVIK, HALIFAX, SYDNEY (all in Canada) and is available at:

<http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/marine/rfax.pdf>

Weather reports from stations all around the Arctic are available at:

<http://www.athropolis.com/map2.htm>

Procedures and Regulations

The North East Passage is one and a half times longer than the North West Passage. This fact alone is a good indication of the challenges involved in completing the voyage, but it only partly explains the very small numbers of successful transits. It may well be the bureaucratic barriers that pose the biggest challenge for yachtsmen:

The Russian people are friendly, generous and sociable. However, to the first time visitor they may sometimes appear to be reserved and defensive until you have established a relationship. In the lands bounding the North East Passage, you will meet a wide variety of people including indigenous people - former hunters and herders, whose traditional way of life still remains, although much diminished. You will also come up against seemingly unbending officialdom. They are just doing their job as they see it, and they take their jobs seriously. Don't make quick judgements based on western standards. Try to see things from their position, don't rush or lose your cool. They are wonderful people. It's their turf. Enjoy life with them, assimilate the history, the landscape and the people and you will make progress.

Visas

All visitors, including children, must have a valid visa before arrival and these will only be issued by an official source. The Russian Foreign Office now requires that visitors should apply for their visas at the countries of their permanent residence.

Visas are required for each visit and are only given after an invitation is received from a recognised body or person registered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Russian Consulates no longer accept invitations issued by Yacht Clubs. Vladimir Ivankiv is the Honorary Port Representative for the RCC and the OCC Port Officer in Saint Petersburg. He is currently able to arrange invitations at €30/person. For each crew member he will need: Full Name, Passport Number, Date of Birth, and Nationality. For the boat he will need: LOA, Breadth, Width, Draught (Air Draught for those going inland), Registration Number, Sail Number (if any), Colour of Hull, Call Sign, Home Port.

Contact via: vladimir@sailrussia.spb.ru or vladimirivankiv@yahoo.com

Most Russian Consulates accept visa invitations sent attached via email.

Indicate the duration of your visit. Tourist Visas are valid for only one visit, for the stated port and for a specific time (but not longer than one month), so it is advisable to be generous in your request for dates so that you can fit your visit into the permitted period. With a single tourist visa you are free to travel within the Russian Federation for a period stated in your visa.

Double/Multiple entry 3, 6 or 12 months Business visas can be arranged on request. These are more expensive, but are likely to be necessary for yachts attempting a transit of the North East Passage.

For useful websites start with:

<http://ru.vfsglobal.co.uk/>

<http://www.russialink.org.uk/embassy/>

<http://www.russianvisas.org/>

Permit to transit the Northern Sea Route

Begin the process at least 12 months in advance of your intended departure.

1. The Russian Partner

All contact with the Authorities must be conducted by the 'Russian Partner'; not through, not with, but by the Russian Partner. Such a partner is not easy to find. Be prepared to visit Moscow, and use all your available wit and contacts to seek one out. The partner should ideally be a business company with one specified person who is prepared to submit the Applications, follow progress, deal with delays and requests for additional information and communicate with you (in your language). Mutual trust is essential. A Russian business approach requires certain payments up front. Overall, expect to pay the Russian Partner about \$3,000 to \$5,000 for his actual time and real expenses. This is not extortionate and reflects the time and effort required.

2. The Application for a Permit

Take the Application with you to Moscow to give to the Russian Partner. The Application will all be in Russian and will run to about 40 pages. Make six hard copies and carry a copy on a memory stick for making any changes. It may not be easy to get guidance in advance on what information exactly is required. So include everything you think might possibly be of interest. The Border Guard, the FSB, the Department of Tourism, the Murmansk Shipping Company (who are the operators of shipping in the North East Passage, including the icebreakers) and the Northern Sea Route Administration (NSRA) will all have a part in processing your application. It is the NSRA who collate the many agencies and finally sign off on the Permit. The key figure at present is Mr. Monko.

The information in your Application should include:

- Sailing CV of combined crew and vessel: You will have to convince of your capabilities. Even a North West Passage transit or similar experience under your belt may not be sufficient to persuade. Bear in mind that the Russians are premier in ice. It is they who pioneered the scientific ice-island stations, have floating nuclear power plants, and whose nuclear icebreakers are used by western oil companies when any serious towing in ice is required off the north shore of Alaska. They may not be as easily impressed as you might hope. Notwithstanding apparent reluctance, the Russian authorities genuinely want to see successful small boat transits of the North East Passage. They want to open this up to international commercial shipping, and small boat transits demonstrate that feasibility.
- Port of Entry - either Murmansk if going west to east, or Anadyr if going east to west.
- Details of your Route
- Stopping Locations
- Timing
- Map in Cyrillic (Readily available in Moscow)
- Boat Description and Drawings/Pictures, with emphasis on adequacy.
- Crew:
 - Names of crew
 - Names of spouses

Occupations of each
Place of employment
Date of Birth
Place of Birth
Citizenship

Bear in mind that the Russian Federation has 89 separate jurisdictions, citizenships and many races and you are simply describing how you fit into their system. Provide employer references, phone numbers and addresses (postal and email), so that they may validate your application. Include photocopies of passport details.

It is Mr Monko at the Northern Sea Route Administration (NSRA) in Moscow who eventually issues the Permit.

Do not expect to receive the Permit until the very last moment. If your transit runs into further years, you will need a further Permit annually.

3. Murmansk Shipping Company

The Murmansk Shipping Company controls and directs all shipping on the Northern Sea Route, from nuclear ice-breakers to yachts. Mr Nicolai Babich, a most experienced Arctic sea captain, has been the key man in the past. He will require from you a sat-phone call daily, for you to give your position and conditions. He will give you the forecasts for weather and ice. If he gives advice, take it. He is intimately familiar with the territory, including shelter. If going west to east it would be well worth visiting him in Murmansk pre-departure. If going east to west try to see him during one of your Permit visits to Moscow.

4. The Ice Pilot

It is probable that a condition of your Permit is that you have aboard a Russian Ice Pilot, who will be nominated by the NSRA. He will be an old Arctic sea captain, perhaps retired, perhaps now working at a desk and glad to get back to sea again. You will pay direct to the Ice Pilot and the amount should be by agreement prior to departure. Expect to pay about €3,000 to €5,000 plus all his fares, costs and any shore accommodation/meals. The Ice Pilot may or may not be familiar with the route and the chances are that he has worked only part of it. In any event his big ship experience is of little value to you, as small boat ice navigation is entirely different. It is the Ice Pilot who will speak daily to Murmansk.

Having an Ice Pilot on board raises certain issues that should be thought through and discussed in advance. There may be significant differences of approach, any number of misunderstandings and disagreements about 'who is in charge'. The presence of the Ice Pilot may appear to be a burden. However, they are professional seamen, who recognise that the function of the Pilot is to advise and that of the Captain to decide. The Ice Pilot can be of considerable assistance in dealing with local officialdom along the way. Perhaps most importantly, in acting as your interpreter along the way, your pilot will open up to you the friendships, the places, the landscapes and the history which should be integral to your cruise, here as anywhere.

Local Officials

The Russian Federation is comprised of 89 Republics, each to a large degree autonomous, and its officialdom is equally so. From the northern coastline Moscow is very far (and several time zones) away, making daytime phone communication difficult. Emailed communication (if available) usually requires an overnight response time. Do not place any reliance on your Moscow documentation or status. Impress with your own presence and confidence. Whenever possible go straight to 'the man at the top'. That way you will have one set of negotiations and all the minor negotiations will be dealt with according to his or her system. If you start to negotiate with the first official you encounter you may well have to endure repeat negotiations up several rungs of the ladder. And you may also be expected to 'ease the path of bureaucracy' at every stage.

Russian Language

It is imperative that you have your own Russian speaker amongst the crew. Even with your own linguist on board it is often hard enough to understand what is going on. Without one, confusion will reign.



Negotiations at Dikson dock ©Jarlath Cunanne

Costs

Obvious en route costs are diesel, any fresh stores you can buy or café meals you are lucky enough to come by. Russian Roubles are the currency of choice for small and modest purchases, US Dollars are the preferred currency for larger cash transactions. At the risk of getting it wrong, it is suggested that a 15 metre vessel should have available as a minimum about € 5,000 worth of Russian roubles and about the same in US \$. A doubling of that, for contingency, would be prudent. Note that the official position is not to change too much into roubles at any one time, nor to carry large amounts of foreign currency in cash. However, the reality is that on the Northern Sea Route you may not have access to currency exchanges.

The *Northabout* experience, both in Moscow and in the North, was that 'backsheesh' was neither demanded or required; but that occasional unsolicited payments were readily accepted and appreciated.

Diesel

Northabout was able to obtain diesel in the ports visited. The trade was usually with ship's captains and sometimes with ship's engineers. The currency was a combination of Irish whisky, vodka, and US Dollars.

Water

Water may have to be paid for: in Anadyr water cost *Northabout* more per litre than diesel.

Provisioning

Food was available in the ports, mainly in the form of tinned supplies, although fresh fish and caribou were sometimes available.

4.2 The North East Passage of *Northabout* (2004 – 2005)

Told as a series of Newsletters by members of the crew

Extracts are edited by Jane Russell, taken with permission from: <http://www.northabout.com/>

The *Northabout* Crew

Jarlath Cunnane – Owner/Skipper

Paddy Barry – Expedition Leader

Michael Brogan – Doctor

Kevin Cronin – Finance

Colm Brogan - Fluent Russian speaker

Gary Finnegan - Freelance cameraman

Rory Casey – IT and Electronics

Vladislav Lashkevich Samoilovich (know as Slava) – Ice Pilot

Also: Brendan Minish – Base station radio operator

The North East Passage Route

The distances are great, with exposure to ice for nearly 3000 miles, and with three major ice choke points or bottlenecks at New Siberian Islands, Viltitsky Strait, and at Yugorski Shar at the southern end of Novaya Zemlya. The total distance from our start point at Prince Rupert, on Canada's west coast where *Northabout* has wintered, to our destination at Westport, Ireland is 7,500 miles. We can break that distance down into 6 legs:

- Prince Rupert to Providenya (Russia) 1,800 miles
- Providenya to Bering Strait 200 miles
- Bering Strait to New Siberian Islands (East Siberian Sea) 1,100 miles
- New Siberian Islands to Vilkitsky Strait (Laptev Sea) 615 miles
- Viltitsky Strait to Yugorski Shar Strait. (Kara Sea) 1,100 miles
- Yugorski Shar to Westport via Northern Route 2,200 miles
- Yugorski Shar to Westport via Baltic Sea. 2,900 miles

At the White Sea we have a choice of route, the conventional and more direct route is north of Norway, Shetland Islands, and thence towards Ireland, or alternatively we can take the White Sea - Baltic Canal, which leads south to St. Petersburg, through the Baltic Sea, and continue through Scotland's Caledonian Canal, towards Ireland. This latter route would enable us to sail later in the season in more sheltered waters, giving us an opportunity to see more of Russia, particularly the remarkable city of St Petersburg. If time permits we would like to visit the new EU member States; Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland whom we are welcoming into the European Union this year.

The White Sea - Baltic Canal

The White Sea Canal is 227 kilometres long, and was built during the years 1931 to 1933 on Stalin's insistence, mainly to enable the Baltic fleet have easy access to the White Sea. This was the first large-scale use of prison labour in modern Russia and was to be the model on which the infamous Gulags were subsequently based. It is believed that over 100,000 men were forced to work on the project. During construction the annual death rate was in the region of two per cent of the workforce, starved or worked to death. Excavation was done mainly by hand; no major machinery was made available. The final cost was 101 Million Roubles.

Progress Report No. 1, 2004

There are several differences between the North East Passage and the North West Passage:

- The distance is 50% greater

- The lands bordering the passage area are barren and devoid of interest

- The prevailing currents flow eastward- against us!

- The languages spoken are those of the northern nomads and Russian- we are not fluent!

- The permit from the authorities is going to be very difficult to obtain

Preparations

The permit process requires that all contact with the authorities be through a Russian partner. Amongst the many conditions to obtain the permit, we will have to take with us an ice-pilot supplied by the Murmansk Shipping Company. It took us a long time to make the connection, but last December we met Alexey Zhdanov and Vladimir Bestugin who we are glad to have as our partners. We met the Department of Economic Development and Trade people several times. Alexey has been doing a great job for us. In March, Colm, our Russian-speaking crewman and Alexey met the Northern Sea Route Administration people. In Moscow, as elsewhere, good personal relationships are the key to progress.

Northabout is now in good shape and ready to go. We have shipped 3 crates to Prince Rupert containing polar clothing, musical instruments, rations, engine spare parts and equipment. On July 1st we plan to set sail across the Gulf of Alaska and northwards through the Bering Sea to Provideniya, our Russian port of entry and our starting point for the North East Passage. The Russians call this the Northern Sea Route. Depending on permits and weather conditions we will begin the passage proper about August 1st. Next progress report will be in early July.

Progress Report No. 2

At Sea, Gulf Of Alaska - Friday July 9th

We are two days out into the Gulf of Alaska, ploughing a bumpy furrow into headwinds, but it's great to be on our way at last. The paperwork over the last few months was something else, mostly in getting the 3 month Russian visas stamped into our passports. The all important permit to sail our boat in Russian waters has arrived in Dublin. Dutch Harbour in the Aleutian Islands is just under 1,000 Miles ahead. There we will top up our diesel tanks and hopefully (essentially) collect Jarlath's and Paddy's two passports, being couriered out with Russian visas.

Progress Report No. 3

Dutch Harbor, Unalaska Island - Saturday July 17th

Our 1,300 mile passage across the Gulf of Alaska was uneventful, after we settled in. Mostly we motored in light winds and flat seas. For about a day and a half we had good wind and the silence under sail was delightful. Surprising was the effect of the 'Seamounts'. We passed over Dickins Seamount, with 400 metres of water over it, to suffer very rough water as the half-knot Alaska Current upwelled. Thereafter we set our course to avoid Seamounts!

Approaching Unalaska the tides are considerable, the Pilot Book telling of 6 to 9 knots, with whirlpools, tide-rips and bad stuff. We chose Unimak Pass, and had no bother, other than a few hours of contrary tide. The first Aluetian Islands we met were very like the Faroes, windswept and green with not a house, not a hut, not even a sheep, in sight. Snow lay in the gullies and on the higher ground. With about 40 miles to go I thought I saw whales inshore of us breaching their spent air, but no, they were 'williways', gusts lifting the water off the sea. Soon we were battling into it, full oilies on now, speed down to 3 knots, sometimes even less as waves broke over us. No joke.

As darkness fell we nosed into the shelter of Dutch Harbor, the copper domes of the old Russian Orthodox Church at the head of the bay in sight. Passing by a big Crabber, our Irish tricolour flying, a shout of 'Up Killybegs' came from her deck!

Monday

We're still here and restive to be on our way, but the wind is still blowing freshly from the north-west, exactly where we need to go. But yesterday was a fantastic day walking on the hills. It was actually sunny and hot.

Progress Report No. 4

Tuesday July 27th

An email came in to the boat last Thursday night. We had been at sea for a day and a half, the contrary wind had eased and we were settling into the passage:

"The Federal Border Guard Service (FPS) has informed the Irish Embassy in Moscow that it has NOT given clearance for the voyage of "Northabout" and that, until such time as such clearance is issued, the boat and its crew WILL NOT BE WELCOME."

God Almighty! What now?

The options were to alter course for Nome, Alaska, to heave to at sea until the Permit could be sorted, or to go back to Dutch Harbour. We chose the fourth option - to keep going, and our Iridium Sat-Phone began to hop.

Since our visit to Moscow last December to lodge our Application, all 60 pages of it translated into Russian, we had known that this was no foregone conclusion. But Colm had twice been to Moscow since, been to the heart of the system, with our good partner Alexey Zdanov, and we thought we had the Permit sorted.

And it was, but we didn't know it until a couple of days later, when we were about 40 miles westward of Glory of Russia Cape on Saint Matthew Island.

What lifting of anxiety as we carried on, crossed the International Dateline and sat round the cabin table to a 'Dateline Dinner'--and a very fine and relaxed meal it was. The wind now filled the sails from the starboard quarter, what a relief to be able to cut the engine. Our windvane steered the boat as we cracked, yarned and then brought out the music. Our watches passed easily, 3 hours on, in pairs, 6 hours off, no hardship about that. The nights grew brighter, on that day before we made Anadyr I rigged a 'curtain' over the portholes in my cabin, for darkness - Arctic nights again! About 100 miles out, the weather closed in, fog all round. The sea water grew brown. We were seeing the effect of the Anadyr River, 700 miles of it discharging.

With GPS, radar and sounder we were within 5 miles and still had seen nothing, not a ship, no shore. The VHF radio begun to come alive, in Russian naturally enough. The big test came, my call to Anadyr Radio - all my efforts at learning Russian now about to be put to the test. And it seemed to work, they acknowledged our call and asked that we change to Channel 15. There we heard nothing!

Anyway it didn't matter, we were now in the estuary, and could see where we were going, very industrial indeed, with the tower blocks of this 10,000 population capital of Chukotka on the hill behind. The berth we took, the only one we could see, was open to the wind and waves, getting lines ashore and tied required some acrobatics.

Then it began, the men in uniform. How I wished Colm, Russian speaker, was here. My Best Wishes and Greetings from Ireland didn't seem to cut much ice with these men. I was taken in a van through the town to a gate where the sentry, armed, saluted and waved us through. Tales from Solzhenitsyn passed through my mind. The room I was taken to had printed on its door 'Major', at least that's what I think it said. He couldn't have been more helpful over the next couple of hours as he explained that Chukotka was a 'closed' area and that we shouldn't be here - the communication from Moscow had not been so good. I explained, as best I could, that the rest of our crew would be arriving in from Moscow that evening with our Permit, our Russian speaker and with our State Ice Pilot. I think the Major phoned Moscow, even with the 9 hour time difference, and I was given documents, formalities completed. Great smiles all round and on the way back to the boat we stopped at a bank so I could change dollars to roubles.

In the meantime, back on the boat, curious visitors were starting to call. They don't get too many sailing boats here - none at all in fact. One man had come from the Airport and was able to tell us that our Irish friends had arrived. Their story of their flights and baggage retrieval would fill a page.

We're taking on diesel and water. Tomorrow we hope to be on our way.

Progress Report No. 5

Leaving Saint Laurence Bay - Friday Night, July 30th 2004

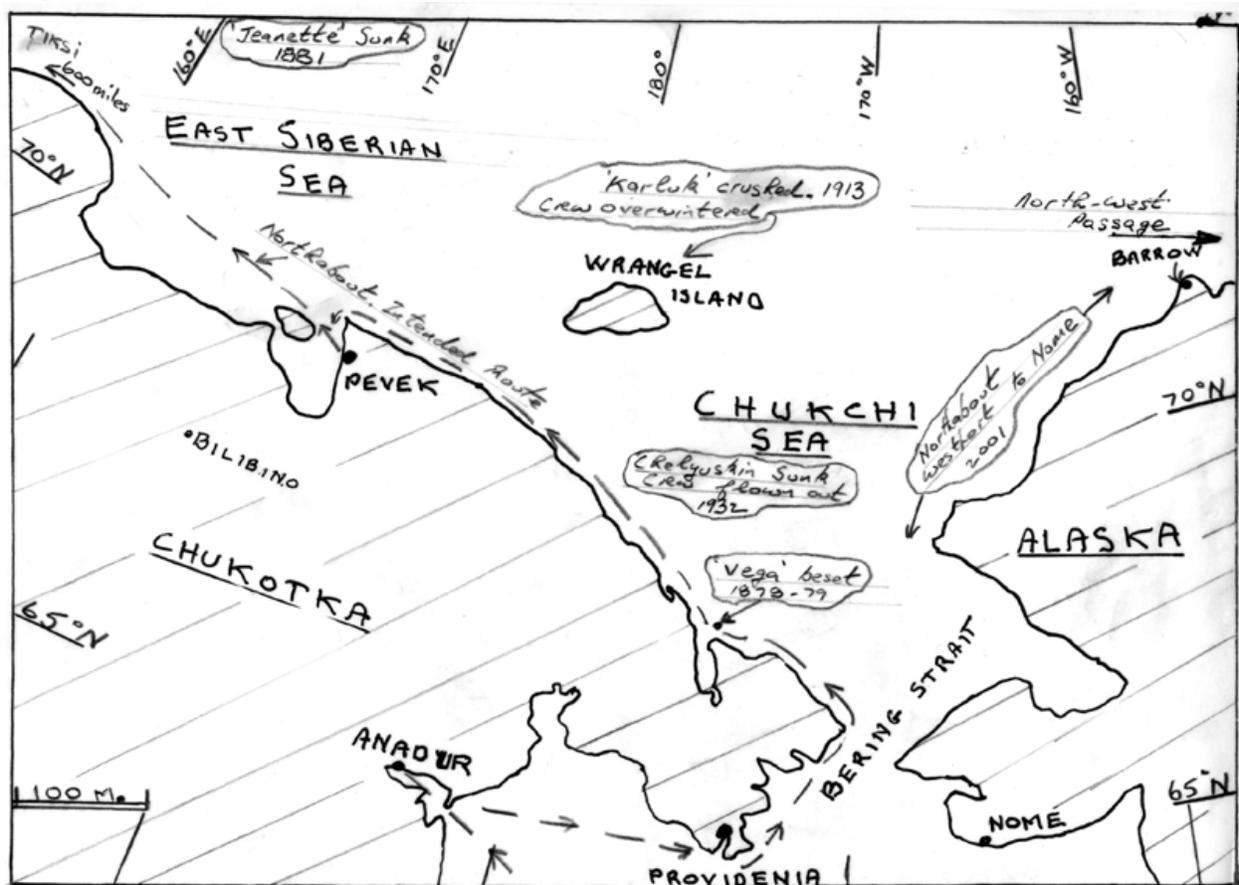
An Australian TV Crew, whom we had met in Anadyr, had told us that they were flying on to a whaling festival here. We had high hopes of having an interesting time in a native Chukchi village, lots of people coming in from other villages, an antidote to downtown Anadyr. For two days, 350 miles, we had made good time, the prospect of the festival lending wings to our passage. There are two main groups of rural

Chukchi, the inland reindeer people and the shore people, fishermen and whalers. It was these latter that we expected to meet.

The bay was so named by Captain James Cook when he came in here to anchor on St. Laurence's Day, whenever that is. Captain Bob Bartlett had in May of 1914 sledged across its frozen water as he went for help to rescue his shipwrecked men from the stricken ship *Karluk*.

We rounded into the bay, only to find a very industrial town, which might charitably be described as being 'not in the best of condition'. The radar antennas and domes on the hill behind are presumably military. Slava, our IcePilot, spoke to someone there on the Radio. We heard the word 'documents' - No Sir, we've had enough of that for the time being. We raised sail again and put to sea.

Map 1



To go back to our time in Anadyr, our Port of Entry into Russia. On the second day the formalities continued. In fact they never stopped. By the time we had satisfied all entry requirements, we were planning our departure - probably for 6 A.M on the next day, Wednesday. Not a hope! We had got our diesel tanks filled, but the water tanker hadn't turned up. And the process of Clearing and paying for the diesel and water took another half day. Interestingly, the water cost as much as the diesel.

But in all of this the people were as friendly as could be. Nikolay Kovalskiy, Port Captain, gave us a great run down on the area, both on the maps in his office and driving us around.

Now again at sea, we're settling well in. We've had no hard weather yet. Slava seems happy. Talking about survival, he had a lovely Russian phrase, "The last thing that goes is hope".

Cape Dezhneva, the most easterly point in Asia at the Bering Strait, is now 30 miles ahead. There we will turn north-westward, and hope that the Sea-Ice Gods will be good to us.

One of the thrills of the Arctic is the diversity of the wildlife and it's hard to beat the unexpected appearance of a whale blowing close to the boat for a shiver down the spine. Sometimes it's just a flitting encounter but when they really perform it's something special. As I write, a large whale surfaces on our starboard bow followed by two boats [Umiaks] of Chuchki, out of nowhere? We follow at a discreet distance. This is the Whaling season and hunting is allowed in the traditional way with agreed quotas per habitation per year. This Whale seems to have escaped, for the moment at least. In the last 3 days we have seen Beluga, Bowheads and Humpback. Plus all the usual birds, including a Stellars Sea Eagle chasing a flock of Auks. We will hopefully cross the Arctic Circle later tonight and into the territory of the Walrus, Ice [Polar] Bear, and many of God's other smaller, but equally exotic creatures. It's a privilege to be here at 65°48'N 170°06'W.

Progress Report No. 6

Stuck in Mys Schmidt - Wednesday August 4th

We rounded Cape Dezhneva, the most easterly point in Asia, last Friday night, not that we saw much of it through the fog. Big Diomedede Island lay 19 miles to seaward, now just home to twenty Border Guardsmen, the local population having been moved out during the Cold War. By mid-day Saturday we approached the bay where Amundsen had been forced by ice to overwinter the *Maud* in 1920 / 21. Our Admiralty Pilot Book said that "there was reported to be a polar station and a trading station in this vicinity".

Indeed there was. We anchored off the one mile long sandy beach, near to where some local boats were pulled up. About 20 or 30 houses lined the shore, some in better condition than others. The locals, all Chukchi, were most welcoming. We met the Mayor, who, in his office, gave us a run down. Yes, he had heard of Amundsen and his ship, the *Maud*, which had spent the winter here. No, he didn't know whether Amundsen had any 'padruga' (girlfriend) ashore. The local population lived mostly by Whaling (permitted is 3 per year), Walrus (30 per year) and Sealing (unlimited). Pretty basic living I'd say. Although, they did have a twice-monthly helicopter service to 'outside'.

We ran into a local boatman. He showed us round the buildings of the landing place for a former Dolstroi gulag, 30 kilometres inland.

We passed Cape Vankarem, with its small village. It was here that Captain Bob Bartlett came ashore in April 1913, over the ice from Wrangel Island. The crew of the ice-crushed *Karluk* had spent a most awful winter on that island. We have four or five dozen books in our 'library'. We began rereading of Bartlett's effort to get help for those left behind, those still alive. His two month sledging journey back to

Provideniya Bay, about 500 miles with the swings and roundabouts, stands with the epics of Shackleton and Valerian Albanov.

On Sunday, 05.00 hours, we saw the ice-blink, that white reflection in the sky telling of ice ahead. A half hour later we saw the white line on the horizon. We altered course towards inshore, where the ice might be lighter. As we did, we saw what we first thought to be dirty ice. But this was sea ice, not like glacier land ice which often picks up dirt. And it wasn't dirt, it was walrus, about a dozen of them, sunning themselves. We got within about twenty metres of them before they took to the water, still showing their hairy whiskers and long tusks.



For the next twenty hours we weaved our way along by the shore, in a light following wind, going through about 3/10 ice. For every mile made good we travelled about four or five, with the 'shimmyen' this way and that. At 3 am, in fog with visibility down to about 200 metres, we anchored, 100 metres off the shore. The buildings of Mys Schmidta were faintly visible. One man at a time stood anchor watch. Welcoming sleep for all others.

Mys Schmidt was grand for the first day, pretty broken down as it is. The military have gone, leaving behind a town in decay, and a much depleted population. Though there are some grand people, the landlady of the 'gastanitzta' where we had a dinner on Monday night, the 3 lads up from Omsk doing some building work had a lovely Russian sound to their singing. Sasha, a state physicist, took some of us

out to see his laboratory where he monitors atmospheric radiation. Urei Dundev Aleksangro, is the airport manager, but more interestingly, local historian. Through his efforts there is a monument in the square to, of all people, Captain James Cook, who voyaged to here in 1778. He couldn't get any further westward. Neither could the Russian yacht 'Apostle Andrew', which, five years ago, spent 25 days on anchor here.

Why do we feel as we do? Yesterday was a grand day for travelling, but the forecast wasn't good, so we stayed put. As it happens, today is breezy, our anchor dragged early this morning and we had quite a job getting it and its chain out from under the ice floes. We moved a couple of miles up the beach and are tied to a grounded ice floe. At least it WAS grounded, now it too has started to move.

PROGRESS REPORT No. 7

Monday August 9th.

We're at Longitude 164°E, just after passing Cape Baranoff. We're in clear water, four o'clock in the afternoon and going gallant. Yesterday it was a different story. I had written:

"Anxious now is the going off the north side of Ostrov Ayon. It's foggy with the vis. down to about 200 metres. We're just inside the edge of the pack ice. The leads through which we're going are short and twisty, exits invisible. This is far from our 'Long Mile Road' lead of a few days ago. A couple of times this watch we've had to reverse our track to get out of dead-ends. And it's cold, very cold, in the fog. We have full cold weather 'battledress' on now, Thermal long-johns, comfy mid layer and waterproof outer layer - and it's all needed. No waltzing or weaving through the ice now. It's all hard work on deck and anxiety below." And it got worse!

However there's no reason why you should have to suffer our repetitive chronicle, and we are making fair old progress and that's the main thing.

Let us tell you a bit about the good time we had in the town of Pevek; that most unlikely place for any fun - talk about a broken down place. Its population of 13,000 is reduced to 2,000. Even the walking-wounded seem to have gone south.

Last Friday night about 11, we arrived and we tied the boat to the jetty, a sunken barge. An hour later, formalities were cleared and with rapid step we went looking for a bar, a hotel or a caf. Most unlikely it seemed, as we stepped along broken paths and passed empty apartment blocks. One doorway had three people standing outside. We approached -and heard music. In we went, Caf Romashka. The joint was jumpin', loud music, drink, dancing. We quickly got the hang of it!

Next day, sluggishly in a drizzly sort of a day, I walked up the hill behind the town. It took an hour and a half, so it must be about 700 metres high. Several groups were out on the tundra picking berries and mushrooms. In the valley off to one side was a group sitting round a fire. I stayed a wary distance off. Coming down, they were still there. They waved me over. They were six men and three women, having a picnic in the rain. The table was loaded with food of all sorts, fish, reindeer, flavoured berries, cheeses. It was insisted that I eat. I was thirsty and they gave me a cup of soda water, or so I thought - pure raw vodka it was. And now, as a guest, I had to drink up! They were geologists, mostly from Ukania. It was a birthday party.

Down in the caf, things were in full swing. There was a table of ourselves, another of a big family birthday group, another of policemen. This was an older crowd altogether than last night's teeny boppers. Our new Russian friends toasted us and we them, repeatedly!

Next day, that was yesterday, we took on diesel and left.

To keep in out of the ice, we're generally following the line of the coast. Even though it's longer, it's faster in the long run. Our next destination is the town of Tiksi, 800 miles westward from Pevek, passing through Proliv Laptev and leaving Novi Siberski Ostrovi to starboard.

Here is some basic Russian:

Ostrov: Island

Guba: Bay

Mys: Cape or Headland - remember Mys Schmidt.

Proliv: Strait

Severnay: North

Novi: New

Our effective progress is most easily measured by reference to our Longitude. At present, this is 164°E. This is the number we've got to keep reducing.

PROGRESS REPORT No. 8

Thursday, August 12th

We're into The Laptev Sea, approaching Tiksi, now less than 200 miles away, and that will be half way. So it's about time that we thanked Alexey Zhdanov, Lodestar Travel, and Vladimir Vestugin. They are our Moscow Partners, whose work for us in getting the Permission made this all this possible. 'Bolshoi Spaciba' Alexey i Vladimir!

There's history in the islands, the seas and the rivers all around us. However, the ice-reports show very heavy ice beyond Tiksi. We expect that we have plenty of sitting-around-time waiting for it to open and can be talking about history then.

Let's tell you how our day goes. We're on 3 hour watches, 3 on and, in theory, 6 hours off. One watch is Jarlath, Rory and Gary. (Gary Finnegan is the cameraman, who stood in for John Murray at short notice. Gary doesn't seem to be regretting it yet!) There's Michael and Kevin. And there's myself, Colm and Slava. (Slava is the Ice-Pilot, required in our Permit. He sat-phones Murmansk twice a day, giving our position.) Suppose you're on at 4 am. You get a shake about 15 minutes before, crawl out of the sleeping bag, legs over the side of the bunk and pull on your black thermal long johns (if you haven't slept in them). Pull on your next layer of nice cosy red 'midlayer' 'Volvos'. (Thank you Volvo!) And then put on your Dubarry boots. I hadn't intended this to be a commercial, but thanks Mick.

As you come up into the main cabin, you'd look out to see what sort of a day it is: Foggy or not? Ice around? Going under sail or engine? It's mostly engine, but if there's any good wind, the sail goes up. One of the lads from the going off-watch will be making a cup of tea, or more likely pouring out a

whisky. It may be the start of your day, but it's the end of theirs. You put on your heavy outer oilies, gloves and hat and up you go to the cockpit. There would be a brief word or two about position and course being steered, wind or ice and then you're on your own, the sun already up in the morning sky. It's bright all the time, just a bit dusky at night. The boat's yours for the next 3 hours. Sometimes if we'd be going along in shallow water, close to the shore, to try to keep in out of the ice, the depth sounder has to be watched big-time. The boat has a lifting centreboard, but we still don't want to be banging it off the bottom. Breakfast varies; for us its mostly 'kasha', porridge to you. Slava adds all sorts of concoctions to his, but in fairness he has taken well to our non-Russian diet. I could add thanks here to various Irish food suppliers, but enough 's enough, for the time being at any rate. Your main ration of sleep, about five hours, is got during your 'night' off-watch. The rest you'd get in off-watch catnaps during the day, by inclination or opportunity. As I think I said before, it's quite social from mid-day to after dinner, eight or nine o'clock. Then it quiets down, and no, we don't anchor at night! Our food is good, not all tins by a long shot. We've loads of rice, pasta, salmon and char in our ice-box. Rory and Michael are our pedigree cooks, Kevin bakes bread in our big oven, we lesser souls do wash-up, all in salt water to conserve our fresh water. Some of the sea water is decidedly silty, coming out from the big Siberian rivers, the Kolmya, the Indigirka and the Lena coming up shortly.

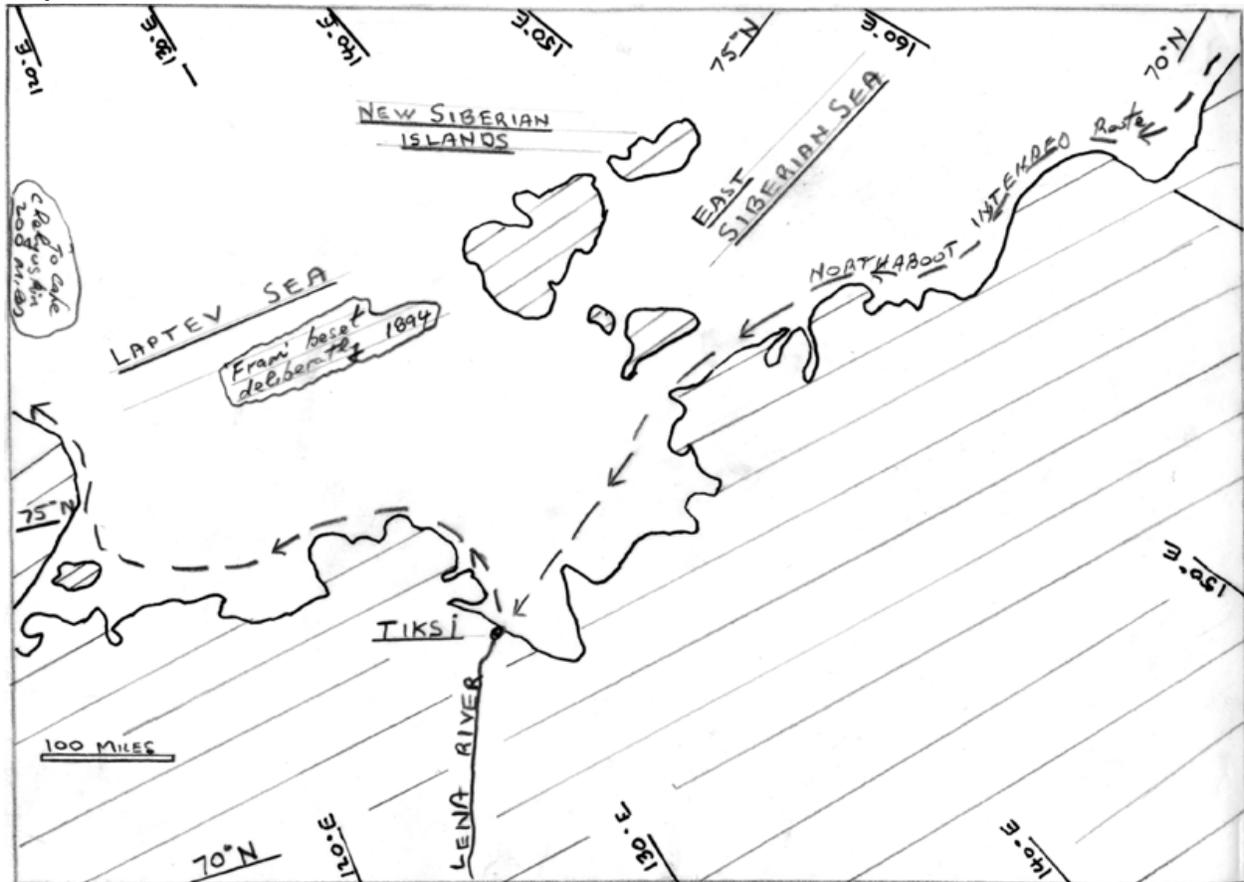
We passed an icebreaker going the other direction this morning, leading 3 vessels, eastbound. The convoy was out in the deepwater Laptev Strait. We were inshore, out of the ice. Slava spoke to them on VHF radio, she was the 10,000 ton 'Vorudkin'.

Of seabirds there are very few, some kittywake-like fellows, some snow-buntings who have lost their way-they are a land bird, they shouldn't be here, must be something else! In a dead end ice lead a couple of days ago there were a HUGE number of seals bopping about and breathing. I was worried that this was a sign of scarcity of sea and that we would be trapped in this very dense ice. Maybe I should have been more worried about polar bear. These feed on seal - you see we've no gun for bear protection. We couldn't legitimately bring a gun in to Russia, thought that it would be no bother to buy one here. And it isn't, except for the red tape, and we've had quite enough of that, so we're taking our chances with the bear.

Charlie Brower of Barrow, Alaska in ' Fifty Years Below Zero', wrote: "The bear was almost on top of him when he fired. And then he only wounded the animal. Too far away to help, we watched as the man fired his other barrel, then started to run for his life. He hadn't a chance. The bear just struck him a casual blow on the head, followed by one bite under the arm, leaving him dead" What a lovely finish to this report!



Map 2



PROGRESS REPORT No. 9

Saturday, August 14th, 71° 53.2'N, 133° 08.9'E

At anchor in bight south of BUOR KYAYO (Yakutian translation is Cape Big Nose!). After a long frustrating 24 hour spell, during which we travelled 100 miles, but made only 20 miles towards our destination - the supply town of Tiksi. From early morning, we tried to find our way through the ice, but as it thickened around us (up to 7/10's), we had to retreat. Tiksi is proving elusive, especially as it is only 80 miles away, but we now sit tight and wait.

PROGRESS REPORT No. 10

Tuesday, Early morning, August 17th

All day Saturday and Sunday we lay at anchor, the wind blowing cold from the north and, outside the shelter of our bay, the ice coming down with it. We could just make out the distant shore through the rain and mist. We called it 'Impatience Bay', but we did all get plenty of sleep, badly needed. Yesterday morning, first awake, at seven, found the wind to have dropped, though it was still foggy. In jig-time we had the anchor up and were on our way. Unfortunately to very little avail. After twelve hours of heavy

going we had covered only 10 miles, poling, pushing and poking through the ice. This area is normally well clear of ice by this time of year, but for us the prospects for progress looked very poor.

Then on the VHF radio we heard the talk, with increasing volume and clarity. Slava got on to them; a convoy of five vessels being lead by an ice-breaker, 'Kapitan Babichef 'was coming our way, and bound for Tiksi! Our first concern was that, in the fog, we might be run over. And then, would it ever be possible? The Captain of the ice-breaker agreed that we could tuck in behind the stern of the last vessel, IF we could manage to. The ice-breaker and convoy, as they came abeam of us out of the fog, was like something in a war-film, maybe the Murmansk Run. And we did get in behind them. As the last ship passed, her side a wall of steel, with lumps of ice leppin' up all round, we revved up and in behind her we went. Now four or five hours later, the stern of the tanker 'Lena Nef', (Lena Oil), is still 100 metres ahead of us. We just can't believe our luck!!





Slava, Our ice pilot

One of the conditions of our permit to sail the North East Passage is that we are accompanied by an approved Russian ice pilot. Our pilot is Vladislav Lashkevich who goes by the name of Slava. Slava is 60 years old, grey haired with a splendid mustache and is short and stout. He was born in Moscow and grew up in Siberia and has been an ice pilot for 23 years. When speaking he can become very animated with very eloquent hand gestures and facial expressions. During an impromptu music session he stole the show by doing a Cossack-style dance on the deck, showing remarkable agility, with sinuous dance steps that would not be out of place at the Bolshoi. We first met him in Moscow when he turned up in full uniform with black blazer resplendent with gold braid and buttons and carrying an officious looking briefcase. Now that he has settled aboard we seldom see the full regalia but it is very effective when dealing with the authorities when we have to call into port such as harbour masters, border guards and police.

Having a person such as Slava aboard a small boat like *Northabout* is a totally new experience to us. Compatibility of the group is vital on a voyage such as this and the introduction of an outsider has the potential to be very disruptive. Similarly, it must be extremely difficult for him, used to working on big ships among his fellow Russians, to find himself on a small boat among an eccentric bunch of Irishmen. The principal source of potential friction is the interpretation of his responsibility and authority vis a vis that of our expedition leader and skipper. After a few fraught exchanges it is now accepted that his role is advisory and *Northabout's* leaders are the ultimate decision makers. However it is recognised that his knowledge and experience of this area is immense and consensus is always sought and mostly achieved. The most difficult part of our journey is still ahead and we are very happy that Slava has settled in so well on *Northabout* and we will be able to tackle the challenges to come as a team, all with the same objectives.

PROGRESS REPORT No. 11

We're on our way again, and much as we were glad to reach Tiksi, we're even more pleased to leave it behind. I don't even want to write about it - it's pitiful, this once busy town, now virtually empty.

We took on water, diesel and some fresh food. We bought two buckets, for taking aboard sea-water for washing-up. The handle had pulled out of the last one. In Tiksi we caught up with the Dutch boat 'Campina'. She had started last year on the Passage, but got no further. Her owner, Henk De Velde, spent the winter aboard. Campina also left today and we agreed to stay in radio contact.

Right now, it's a lovely night, bright of course, as we sail northwards, about 5 miles off the many mouths of the Lena River. The sky is a light grey and it's not too cold at about plus four degrees.

This afternoon Kevin cast a wreath, he had made from grass, on the sea and we said a prayer, for Jerome Collins. Jerome Collins, Civil Engineer, emigrated from Cork to America in 1864. There he worked on railroad construction and later as a reporter for the New York Herald. It was in this capacity that he joined the expedition ship 'Jeanette', bound for the North Pole. In September 1879, Jeanette, with 32 men aboard, was frozen in near Wrangel Island, north of our Mys Schmidt stopover. All winter the ship drifted, caught in the ice, the men weakening. The following June the ship was crushed and sank. The men took to the ice. For a month they hauled 3 rowing boats over that rough ice, reaching the New Siberian Islands, bleak and uninhabited. In September the three boats began the 250- mile journey to the mouth of the Lena River. A gale separated the boats. One landed near a settlement at the mouth of the river and they were saved. Collins' boat landed 120 miles north in a delta wasteland. The third boat was lost. On that barren coast Collins and his remaining companions froze and starved to death. The following spring, a search party found and buried them.

As for ourselves, we're now looking at a couple of days of ice free sailing, and then it appears, from the information that we have, that we'll be mixing it with the ice again.

Sunday Morning. 4 A.M

The above didn't go out yesterday because of poor radio atmospheric conditions.

We've moved along. The delta of the River Lena is behind us. It's a grey morning - aren't they all. But not bad, +2 ° and no fog for now. Colm and myself are on watch until six, then its Michael and Kevin. The wind is blowing Force 4 from our starboard bow, the north-west. We have the full headsail drawing, with the engine at medium revs, and are making 7 knots. There is only occasional ice, just enough to keep the helmsman alert. We now expect to meet the ice later today.

PROGRESS REPORT No. 12

24th of August, 2004

After dinner last night we were sitting around the cabin table playing cards. We were well fed and all seemed well with our world. It's hard now to see why we were so complacent, possibly because we had made good time since leaving the Lena River delta behind. The ice had not materialised where expected and we had got on a further fifty or so miles. The previous evening we had tied to a floe at the ice edge to await improvement. A cargo vessel, also bound westward, lay about a half mile away. The day had been as pleasant and sunny as could be, doing some film shots under sail around the loose ice, followed by swimming - yes, the ten second arctic plunge. Before dinner fog had come down and the ice around had thickened. No matter, tomorrow would be all right, and the cargo vessel was still around.

In the middle of the hand, a VHF call came in for us, the ship was moving out. You never saw such a transformation! In minutes we were fully geared up and on deck. The ship had moved off, now about a half mile off through very thick ice. With engine revving and manic poling, we bashed, swerved, screwed and twisted our way up to her stern, to follow her out the mile or so to the ice edge. Her big propellers churned, water swirled and as she moved off lumps of ice, house sized, leapt up around us back about 100 feet behind. Right under her stern seemed marginally better. Did we have to do this? Yes we did, otherwise we might be stuck for days, even for a week. In under the stern we got, but found it impossible to hold our bow on line. As she used one propeller and then the other we were thrown about into the ice on either side. They offered us a line – a big hawser. We took it through our puny stemhead and made fast, our bow about 30 feet from her stern. Now what were we in for?

I'll shorten the story. From 9 O' clock last night until about 3 O' clock today, we were hammered, our poor boat was bashed with ice of every make and shape. Depth charges in reverse rose under us, floes beside rattled against us, brash swirled and jammed our rudder. Our centreboard, half up, was driven up further by impact. This ship was not going to the ice edge at all, but was forcing her way through the ice choked strait south of Ostrov Bolshoi Byegichev. This was our way too, but could we or should we be doing this? Very high risk, but the alternative was to sit for a week or maybe more. We stuck with it, changing helmsman and bowman every half hour.

The end came tranquil. The sea cleared, the ship picked up speed to about six knots. We parcelled a bottle of Irish, our brochure and some money in a water proof bag, passed it up their stern, and cast off the line. She continued, bound up the Khatangski River, we altered course to the northwest. Her siren gave three goodbye long hoots. And we don't even know her captain's name.

Well, we won't be doing that again. But we have made the ground. We're going to anchor shortly, over on the west side of this bay, at 74°30'N. We'll sleep well tonight. And tomorrow, the wind already blowing westerly off the land of the Taymyrski Penninsula, should allow us to get upwards towards seventy six degrees north.

Northabout In Ice. Jarlath and Slava On Deck



Northabout through the Ice. 24th of August 2004



Map 3



PROGRESS REPORT No. 13

8 A.M. Friday Morning. 27th August.

On Wednesday, we made 68 miles. Yesterday we made 12 miles, in light snow. Not bad, or not very good, depending on how you look at it. The east side of the Taymyrski Peninsula, where we are, is clogged with heavy ice. The wind was blowing westerly, moving the ice out a little. By opportunity we groped along the shore, so close that we saw a polar bear at the water's edge. That was about five miles back. Now we're stuck again, anchored in 3 metres, with solid ice ahead. The bad news is that the winds for the next 5 days are forecast east and north east, which will pin ice to the shore. The good news is that we're only 150 miles now from Cape Chelyuskin, and right now it's clear water beyond. The Irish Flag on our stern is frozen solid.

PROGRESS REPORT No. 14

It has been a very eventful couple of days in the Arctic. Since we got out of the thick ice, courtesy of the Russian tanker, and took a real hammering in the process, things took a nasty turn. When we checked the bilges we found that we had taken on a lot of water! We had a leak!!!! We had to do an inspection, so all the floorboards came up, and a leak was spotted. It was coming from the depth gauge - only one of 2 designed holes in the hull (the other one is for the outlet for the loo!) During all the battering the flange on the gauge got cracked, and was leaking. We were able to pump out the bilges, but it was not a good situation. We were so remote, and the chance was that maybe it would get worse. On top of all of that, the ice closed in on us the night before last, and we had to drop an anchor. Gloom set in, the worst possible thoughts were thought! All those disaster stories I had read about the various Arctic expeditions that had gone wrong, all of a sudden, didn't seem so far away! Even the weather forecast was going against us, telling us that we wouldn't be able to move for at least 3 days.

The next morning (remember we had seen the polar bear about 5 miles down the coast) Mick, Jarlath and myself went ashore for a walk in the tundra - cabin fever was setting in, and we wanted to stretch the legs. In the absence of a gun (we tried unsuccessfully to buy one in Anadyr), each one was given a hand-held flare. If a polar bear comes at you, you pull the cord, and the flare burns very brightly - you see them all the time at the soccer matches. I was delighted when I saw the expiry date on my flare as October 1990!!!! In the other hand was the VHF.

Anyway, the walk was great, and we climbed some cliffs that gave us a great view of the route ahead - and it was blocked solid. On the way back, we came upon a lovely lagoon, with a deep entrance and a smooth gravel bottom and steep sides. It was the ideal dry-dock. The best men were put on the job - luckily I was the apprentice. We had to dry out the front of the boat, take out the depth gauge, put on a gasket, and then replace it. If we didn't dry out, then water would come pouring in, and we would not be able to replace the gauge. Calculations were done, and we went in at the top of the tide, drove the boat up on the shore, and waited for low water. While on shore, we gathered driftwood, built a bonfire and had the dinner outside, followed by a few beers. It is hard to relax, when you are looking over your shoulder for "the white fellas".

At eight o' clock this morning, Jarlath and myself were inside (with the floorboards up) and Paddy was outside in a wetsuit - digging in the mud. We had no gasket so Jarlath cut two gaskets out of an old wellie. Anyway it worked - beautifully! The bilge is now dry, and we are on our way again - we are getting closer to Chelyuskin - but the ice is also getting thicker.



Wildlife update

As we were sitting around the fire on the beach, time approaching midnight, one of the lads spotted a large hairy animal strolling lazily across the tundra within 200 metres of us. It was a Muskox bull. His low set horns and long hairy coat trailing to the ground gave him a prehistoric look. He sat on top of the hill for an hour silhouetted against the sky looking down at us, and eventually took off. He appeared again next morning as we were leaving. We saw two more along the coast. Muskox was introduced to the Taymyr peninsula in the 1970s and the population has increased to a sustainable level since then.

Polar Bear; One of the greatest thrills of the Arctic has got to be getting close to a Polar [Ice] Bear. Last week as we made our way north along the Taymyr peninsula within 50 Metres of the shore, there he was sitting at the top of the beach, a massive Bear. It was our first sighting of a bear on this trip. All cameras were out within seconds. We were fascinated by his sheer size. We turned the boat towards him and the beach. He slowly walked towards us and sat at the waters edge staring straight at us and started sniffing the air. We didn't dare get any closer. He stood his ground as we sailed off into the distance having had a very rare and special encounter. Since this episode we are very wary of going ashore. We don't have a gun which probably is just as well. We carry flares hopefully to scare them off and stay close to the Boat. This majestic animal must be respected. Walrus; The very first pod of about 12 Walrus was in the East Siberian Seas as we first approached the ice. Again they were massive and the Bulls are very protective of their harem and at this time of year, big babies. In the last week we have been seeing many more family groups as we go further North. Other animals include whiter than white Arctic Fox, Bearded Seals, Beluga and many unidentified Whales, Lemmings etc. Birds; The most beautiful to me is the Snowy Owl. They sit on high ground in the tundra (meaning treeless plain). It is not difficult to get close. Seen also Skuas, Kittiwake, Ivory Gull, Glaucous Gull, Terns, and many more yet to

be identified. The Taymyr peninsula is part of the Great Arctic Nature Reserve set aside to protect the wildlife and way of life of the 8,000 Indigenous people. Long may it live!

PROGRESS REPORT No. 15

Almost Midnight, Wednesday Sept.1st.

Unfortunately, there's little progress to report, none at all in fact. For the last four days we've been pinned down, with heavy polar pack ice all ahead, right in to the shore. You might think that, that being so, we've been idle, just hanging around, nicely anchored, waiting. Not so. We've not been in the one spot for more than a few hours at a time, anchored to floes, constantly moving as the ice blows around and down on us. And to complicate matters, some of the ground we've had to cover while dodging ice has been shallow. Earlier this evening, for about 2 hours, we were travelling in water less than two and a half metres deep; going aground four times, all in water very exposed to nearby ice blowing down on us. Happily, we're now anchored in the shelter of an island where the ice shouldn't bother us, not for another day or so anyhow. The outlook is that we're going to be here for several days more before the polar pack will move out of our way, we hope!

You might think that this would have us in very bad form. Not at all. Frustrated and impatient certainly, but our cooking is good, from our diminishing stock, and our spirits remain high and determined. Up the way from where we now are, Amundson was iced in on the *Maud* on September 17th, 1918. One of his crew insisted on leaving, a 400 mile overland trip to Dickson. Amundson called for a volunteer to go with him. Every man volunteered! Not a happy ship.

We had a visit from another polar bear. He/she came to within about 10 feet of the boat - far too close.



PROGRESS REPORT No. 16

Waiting time is over. Winter freeze-up is coming early. 3 a.m. Monday, Grease-ice covered the sea surface. The rudder was iced solid. The anchor chain had 4 inches of ice around it. It was minus eight degrees. The forecast from Murmansk had been right. Hard polar pack to the north of us was now being congealed by freeze-up. Ice records for the last seven years, in this area, show that conditions continue to improve until mid-September, with freeze-up not starting until October. We'd met a 'bad' ice-year, now compounded by early freeze-up. This year, it seems, is one of the worst on record.

We broke out and urgently set course south. What now?

Our primary option appears to be to over-winter the boat on the River Khatanga. Our information is that there is a town, 350 miles south, 100 miles up the river, with some facilities, a crane we hope, and an airport with some sort of service to the 'outside'.

The Dutch boat 'Campina' had been a couple of hundred miles behind us before we had been stopped ten days ago. Two days ago she radioed that she had got serious ice-damage to her rudder and her steering and that she was arranging rescue through her Dutch-Russian Sponsor Company Campina.

We're now attempting to approach her, slowed to 3 knots now by the thickening grease ice through which we plough. We intend to stand by her until her rescue vessel arrives.

There is one unlikely alternative for us, a very long shot. There's a 30,000 ton freighter being led by the nuclear ice-breaker 'Vaygach' in the area. We've had radio contact with 'Vaygach'. We're trying to negotiate a 'sealift' on one of those two-about as likely as the Dublin-Cork train stopping for a hitch-hiker. Unlikely it may seem, but in the Russian Arctic, all things are possible. In these conditions we are fortunate in having a strong crew in good heart and a sound boat. In a couple of days we should know, and we'll report, on how it's working out.

Ice on Northabout's Anchor Chain September 6th



PROGRESS REPORT No. 17

We're on our way to Khatanga.

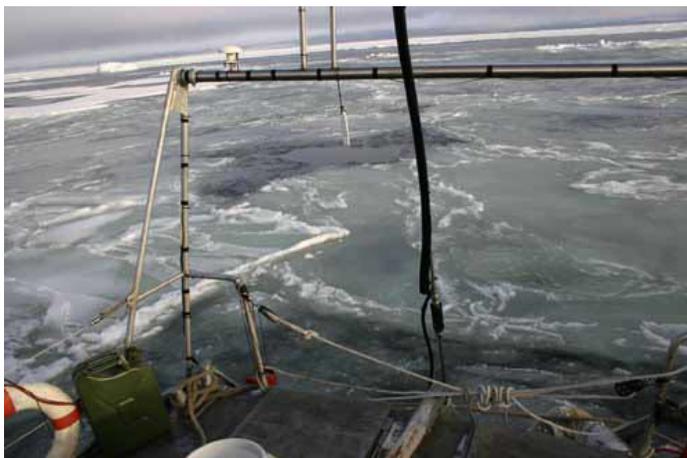
On Tuesday night we towed the disabled Dutch yacht Campina over to the freighter 'Orucheniski' - a demanding operation for Jarlath at the helm, in fresh wind, in open sea, ice-floes moving, and all in the dark. Probably the most high-risk part of it for us was the retrieval by Rory of our grapnel ice anchors mooring us to the grounded floe where we were tied. The footing was very slippery on the icy floe. Even with ice axe protection to get a bite to hold on to, we all were glad to have our anchors and men, back aboard.

Over the previous one and a half days, under the radio direction of the nuclear icebreaker 'Vaygach', we had gone in through ice, pulled Campina off the floe to which she was tied, towed her about 30 miles to the location where her rescue sea-lift would take place; all of this through grease ice and young ice. The grease ice is a mush about two inches thick when the sea first starts to freeze. Young ice is the next development. This turns into a harder skin, still soft, but slowing boat movement and particularly manoeuvrability. Kevin and Michael went aboard Campina to help during the tow. The speed was generally only 2 knots when moving well. Because Campina's rudder was bent sideways she wouldn't tow straight and veered off to one side. We countered this as best possible by adjusting our towing bridle and backing a headsail on Campina.

During all of this we considered our own options. The polar pack to the north had got heavier, the sea was freezing around us. Definitely time to get out. We decided not to pursue the 'sealift' option onwards. None of us were enthusiastic about the concept, not to mind the probable cost. We had always said that this was a two year project, plus or minus. Of course we had hoped that by going hard at it (and with luck) that we would do the Passage in one year. Not to be!

Incidentally, we hear that the North West Passage never opened this year either. Franklin Strait remained clogged. Four east-going boats, two of whom had already overwintered in Cambridge Bay, had to return there, and two west-going boats had to retreat.

Now we all are enthusiastic about coming back next year and finishing the Passage in more normal ice conditions.



Young Ice Forming Around *Northabout*

Thursday, mid-afternoon.

We're in the Khatanga River. Big River! We weren't charted for this, and you really need to be. It's full of shallows and sandbanks. By radio, Slava made local contact, and a 'pilot' boat passed charts to us, putting a fine dent in our hull as she did so with some inelegant manoeuvring. It's about 90 miles to go now. We'll be there sometime tomorrow morning. We hear that Khatanga is an old and interesting place and we're looking forward to stretching our legs. The big thing of course is to get the boat safely laid-up and then to get a flight to the 'outside'.

PROGRESS REPORT No. 18

Tuesday Sept 14th, 2004

This morning, the Tupilov 154 flight to Moscow lifted slowly from Khatanga. The tundra, reddish grass, yellow birch and willow, shimmering water of lakes and waterways spread before us. Behind us, the town and its dockside disappeared, we had been there since last Friday morning - 4 days during which we had managed to;

- (a) organise secure winter storage for the boat
- (b) get on a flight out to Moscow
- (c) meet some great people and have a good time

Khatanga is the main northern town for the province of Krasnoyarsky, having a hinterland the size of France & Germany combined. Its population is 3,000, and unlike the other northern towns we saw, it has a vibrant community of Russian and Dolgan indigenous people. Coal mining nearby, 200 kilometers, is the main industry now that the military have mostly gone. Khatanga is the "basecamp" to North Polar expeditions. It also is "home" to a 26,000 year old fossilized, now-extinct Mammoth. We played and sang in the restaurant and in the school, met interesting and hospitable people and their families, visited their homes, drove and walked out in the tundra. In parallel, the weekly flight was going out on Tuesday (although the last week's one did not run!). So, there was an urgency in getting the boat "lay-up" done. We couldn't book our flights out until our boat was secure. And secure she is! With mast unstopped by Sunday night, she was lifted into a large steel river barge, the barge hatch-covers fixed (and welded). There, the barge (with *Northabout* within) will stay in the frozen river until the river ice breaks up next June.

As we head for Moscow and home, we look forward to our return. We pulled back from an impenetrable wall of ice, and apart from some bruises to boat and crew, we'll be in good shape to take it on again, next year. We'll be working over the winter on improving our communications and flow of information for next year to best inform the critical decisions that have to be made about going forward, or retreating as we approach Cape Chelyuskin again. I am optimistic about our prospects. It was a happy boat, despite the strains.

Medical Emergencies

Dr. Michael Brogan's thoughts on a possible medical emergency - As the ship's doctor, one of my main concerns sailing in remote regions is serious injury or illness to any crewmember, with which I could not deal, and may require hospitalisation. The high Arctic is one of the remote regions on the planet. There

is the occasional passing ship, making a delivery to one of the few habitations of Mys Schmidt, Tiksi or Pevek, or upriver to Khatanga. Going further north, (77 degrees latitude) towards Cape Chelyuskin, you are very much on your own. However, radio communication is not a problem. There is daily contact with North Sea Route Administration in Murmansk, who control the 3-4 icebreakers that work the areas where they are needed. VHF works up to 40 miles. Shortwave radio works to greater distances (to Mayo). Assuming an icebreaker is available, it would possibly take 2 days to reach us and another 2 days to get to a habitation with a hospital and possibly an airport. It could possibly link up with a helicopter from the mainland shortening the time. A more serious medical emergency would be dealt with in Makutia or Krasnoyarsk - both 4 hours flights. We found Russian sailors very friendly, helpful and especially resourceful. I would be confident that any emergency would be dealt with competently, but in a "Russian" way - i.e. we would probably not fully know what is going to happen, until it happens. For Northabout 2005, I will be doing an extensive medical on all of the crew, myself included. I will review medicines and medical equipment on board, to allow greater flexibility in dealing with any possible medical situation. I am happy to report that a healthy crew is now returning to Ireland.

We need to complete our report with a very special thanks to Mr Nikolay Monko (Northern Sea Route Administration), Mr. Nicolay Babitch (Murmansk Shipping Company), Alexey Shadanov (Lodestar Travel) and Mr Slava Samoilovich (State Ice Pilot).

Lifting *Northabout* Into the Barge for Winter Storage



Progress Report No. 1, 2005

The Siberian winter was a cold one. Very cold - a real Russian winter. The Russian ice-men say that that's a good thing. They say that cold winters are followed by hot summers, and that's what we need to pour the hot rivers northward to melt the Arctic ice. We hope only that the cold, which went to minus 57 degrees in Khatanga, hasn't damaged *Northabout* in her winter berth within the frozen-in hull of the big river barge. In Nome, Alaska she came safely through a winter which went to minus 40 degrees. Our friends in Khatanga tell us that the river should be clear of ice and flowing by June 12th.

Colm is now working in Moscow and he's talking to our old friends in the Northern Sea Route Administration. We hope to get the Permit by extension of last years, rather than go through the whole process again.

Last year in Khatanga we asked why we couldn't just lift the boat onto the riverbank for the winter? The answer we were given was that, apart from any security problems, the river rises 10 metres, yes ,33 feet!, during meltdown. What happens is that around now the big melt begins inland, for several thousand miles. The meltwater begins to run big time under the river-ice, bulging it upward. Then the river ice is broken upward by the water-pressure and the ice begins to flow - big lumps the size of houses. A few days later much of this ice gets grounded on the shallows where the river meets the sea. This huge build up in effect becomes a dam, with the river building up behind it. A few days later, wham, the dam bursts and the river takes off, water and ice flying seaward. By June 12th all should be placid, or so we're told! And *Northabout* will be launched.

The sea ice won't start to crackup until the beginning of August, so there's no point in getting started before then.

Progress Report 2, July 2005

A Lufthansa flight took us to Moscow and from there, a 5 hour Kras-Air flight to Krasnoyarsk, another four and a half hour flight to Norilsk, and the final leg a 2 hour flight to Khatanga. The border guards at Norilsk, were not happy with our visitor's visa and held us for over an hour while we were checked out. Eventually they were satisfied that we were no threat to the state and allowed us to continue our journey. 'Welcome to Russia' said the officer in charge. We had the same difficulty on landing at Khatanga. With the inevitable delays between flights and checks at airports, two very tired crew checked into the hotel in Khatanga on Tuesday 14th June. Showers, hot water or flush toilets were not available in the hotel, which worsened our mood.

The town was in the process of recovering from the severe (minus 57 degree) winter. Heating and water pipes were being replaced, and the dirt roads re-surfaced. Next morning a visit to the harbour brought more surprises, Valodia, our barge-man was out of town, nobody knew for how long, or the location of the barge containing *Northabout*. The river was in full spate, and the harbour area was unrecognisable under an estimated 10 metres of meltwater. With the help of our friend Vladimir and the assistant harbour master, we were assured of assistance in the morning. 'Maybe tomorrow' was a phrase we were to hear many times over the next two weeks.

It was 16th June before we saw *Northabout*, still snug in its barge which was moored downstream. The harbour tug brought us out for a quick look, with a promise to bring us out to work on her in the

morning. The engine started immediately, despite the on-board min/max thermometer recording a lowest winter temperature of minus 36 degrees. The only casualties to the frost were Colm's celebratory cache of champagne and the hot water calorifier, ruptured by ice. No more hot showers on this trip, though we hope Colm will re-stock!



The constant north wind force 6 to 7 against the river flow of 5 to 6 knots created a dangerous chop. The temperature generally was in the region of +2 to 3 degrees, with the novelty of 24 hour daylight.

In the morning after a couple of hours work, the tug came back to take us and other ships' crew ashore, concerned for our safety, severe winds were forecast for the afternoon. Maybe tomorrow ok. As the days passed, Tom, the ships engineer, got through the list of work, including fitting the new depth sounder transducer and other work below the waterline. Try as we might we could not get any commitment on a launch date. Eventually a contract to launch was signed, and we waited patiently. The lack of communication frustrating and exacerbated by our lack of Russian.

On 22nd June our barge was moved and moored alongside the floating crane. Tom and I were ready from early morning with slings in place. We waited and waited, and in the evening as we were about to give up hope of a launch, the crane crew swung into action and *Northabout* was in the water on the ninth day after our arrival in Khatanga. Stepping the mast was difficult in the windy conditions but was accomplished without any panic. The only damage was the loss of the VHF antenna.

On a lighter note, the waiting time was spent stocktaking the food on board, and to our delight, Tom found the missing stash of cheese, under Paddy's bunk, matured and in perfect condition.

Northabout is now at anchor on the Khatanga River in the care of our good friend Vladimir Yurchenko. Without his help in dealing with officials and in translation, Tom and I would have literally been up the creek. The crew are all looking forward to returning to Khatanga in August and resuming our attempt on the North East Passage.

PROGRESS REPORT NO.3

August 14th

SUNDAY IN KHATANGA:

For two weeks now the wind has been blowing from the northeast, pulling the sea-ice down onto the Laptev Sea along the Taimyr peninsula, exactly where we want to go. So here we are, ready to boogie, and sitting tight. There's no point in leaving the (relative) comfort of Khatanga until there is prospect of at least some clear water.

However impatient we may be, we can't but feel for the crew of the ship anchored out in the river, the 'Toliaty'. She came in last Summer, discharged her cargo but needed her propeller repaired, and is only now ready to go back round Cape Chelyuskin, her crew aboard since last year.

The fortnight before we left Dublin was as frustrating as to make you 'burst out cryin', as each morning we waited for the documents from Moscow so as to get our Russian 3-month visas. When eventually they did come, they were incorrectly dated. Only with the help of the Dept. of Foreign Affairs in Dublin did the visas come right, with five minutes to Russian Embassy 'closing time'. The flight to Moscow, via Warsaw, was uneventful. Our Partner met us with a minibus and painlessly conveyed us to a high grade hotel. They knew the Irish! 400 soccer supporters had stayed there and were well remembered! The Northern Sea Route Permit was yet another exercise in heroics and last-minute bureaucracies despite months of preparation. On Monday afternoon Colm went, with our Partner, to collect the Permit - not a hope! Much changing of documents, to be re-provided, and even on Tuesday the issuing of this vital document was far from straightforward. Fair play to Colm Brogan for his Herculean work.

Three time-zones east of Moscow, in the Siberian Republic of Krasnoyarski, the tundra rose to meet us, green among the lakes, as we flew in low under the cloud. As we touched down, so did some of the planes ceiling. Khatanga airport and hotel were as ever. We brought *Northabout* in from anchor where our friend Vladimir had minded her since Tom and Jarlath's visit in June. Alongside, Jarlath and myself choose to vacate the hotel in favour of the comfort of the boat, an unusual twist; at least the toilet in the boat has water! It's about 8 degrees and raining. The night dulls for about three hours, not yet darkening. We're diesel-ed up, sails bent on, food stores topped up and ready to go. The wind is due to change to the south in about 3 days time, then we'll be down the river and away-we hope!

PROGRESS REPORT NO. 4

WEDNESDAY August 17th, leaving Khatanga.

"To travel in the Arctic is to wait", and do we know that. The wind has gone to the south-west along the Taimyr peninsula, and that's good, but will it be good enough to move the ice? We're leaving Khatanga tomorrow morning, going down the big river and into the 'Zaliv', the Bay. We may not get very far in the

Bay because we're hearing of a Tanker coming in from Tiksi making slow going of it, even with the icebreaker 'Kapitan Babicheff' leading.

This morning we saw migrating reindeer swimming across the river; a stag leading and the rest closely bunched about 10 metres behind. We followed, not too close, as they stepped out of the river and trotted up the bank and away across the tundra.

The other big animal we saw was the Mammoth, this one long dead, 23,000 years ago in fact. These furry elephant-like creatures with the long curved tusks once roamed these northern lands in great numbers. With the warm up after the ice age they declined into extinction. Frenchman Bernard Boeges has made a lifetime's work of their study. Here in an ice-cave in Khatanga, hewn into the cliff above where we're moored, he has brought his finds from all over the north. He showed us his 'centrepiece', a full mammoth, horns sticking out but body still largely encased in the frozen soil in which she has been entombed all these thousands of years. Bernard works in cooperation with Russian academia and French scientists.

We must express our appreciation to our Partner Alexey Zhdanov of Lodestar Travel in Moscow who arranged our Visas and Permit, together with his wife Irena and friend Vladimir Vestugin. Without their professional help we'd never have started. And here in Khatanga, Vladimir Yurchenko and his wife Natalia have been a constant help. This may not seem like much of a 'progress' report, but as they say, 'all journeys begin with one step'. We're taking that tomorrow.



Progress report 5

21st August 2005

The Fire Station siren wailed, a ship in the river hooted as last Thursday morning we left Khatanga and began our river journey. A half dozen people waved us good-bye. Well might the hooters toot; we had left a lot of money in Khatanga!

The river flowed at 3 knots, each of its twisting sections marked by transit marks on shore, the shallows and blind channels in wait for the unvigilant. With our borrowed River Pilot chart book we ticked them off. That night we passed a reindeer swimming and the river ferry 'Taimur', going upriver, old friends. She flashed her lights in salute; we waved our thanks. Around midnight we passed a native Dolgan village, all in darkness, save one light down at the river bank.

In Friday's early light the river widened and grew shallow as, our 31 sections completed, the 'Zaliv' (Bay) spread north-eastwards before us. A brisk wind filled our sails and gave us 7 knots-mighty to be on our way. All day it blew a fresh force 5 from the north-west. There was going to be ice ahead, but this just might blow it out enough from the shore to let us by. It continued through the night. There was a little more light than last night, just a dullness for about 3 hours. South west of Bolshoi Begicheff Ostrov (Island) we met the oil-tanker bringing in the annual supply, several days overdue. She, led by a river ice-breaker, had had a hard slow time breaking through the ice.

By Saturday evening we had made great progress up the barren east coast of the Taimyr Peninsula. There was ice, but with only an occasional 'fight' for us through bands about ½ mile wide. Ice is never nearly so bad when you can see clear water on the other side. By mid-afternoon we were at latitude 75 degrees 50 minutes, only about 30 miles short of last years 'furthest north', so hard won then.

At 16.00 hours our log reads "We've just had sat-phone contact with Nicolay Babich (our Murmansk 'Controller'). Babich says:"There's heavy ice inshore ahead." "The Atomic I/B (Ice-Breaker) 'Sovietskiy Sojuz' is stationed 70 miles from us, offshore." He gave us its lat/long. Recommends that we should alter course towards it, working as best we can through the ice.

We took his recommendation, but with considerable misgivings. Much of *Northabout's* success in getting through ice is due to her shallow draft (with centreboard up), which allows us to scrape along, inshore of ice, where bigger vessels can't go. Going offshore we fought ice all the way. By 22.00 we had come to a full-stop. We just couldn't make any further progress in what was now 8/10 ice with occasional bands, now none. We were faced with the prospect of sitting tight in the ice, waiting out a change, days indefinite. Or going backwards, if we could, to the sheltered area of Martha Island, where we had spent 11 frustrating days last year.

We chose a third option! We radioed 'Sovietski Sojuz', 2nd Generation Nuclear. " Hello Lads, How's it goin'? Not too bad in the ice-breaker, is that a fact! Not great for us - seein' as how you ask. Any chance of an oul dig out? " Not a hope, they had never heard of us, had no Instructions. Well, we sat-phoned Murmansk, got hold of Mr. Babich (not bad for a Saturday night), and our Slava turned on the charm, and how. Over the next hour the communication was hot. Tension filled our cabin. Outside, the ice filled in around us in a light fog. Silence. Then, midnight, came the word. The I/B would be on its way, at 18 knots, through the ice - what a machine! At 3am this morning it broke through, did a wheelie, big

wheelie, the water churned around us, house sized ice lumps jumping around us. What had we brought on ourselves? More than we could chew??

VHF radios rat-tat-tatted, her wash streamed back around us, her beam jets blew and the ice cleared a clear channel, about 40 metres wide.

And off we went, at 7 knots through the solid field of broken, densely packed grey. Some gulls and a harassing skua appeared, fishing in the churned water. Our sounder showed only about 3 metres, even though we knew it to be 50 metres deep - the cavitation from the big ships propellers was doing that. Her stern lights, 70 metres ahead, burned through the thickened fog. Our engine didn't falter. At 07.30 this Sunday morning we were out of the ice, into the open calm Laptev Sea. She hove to, we went alongside, diminutive, exchanged greetings and bagged presents, sent down and up on lines and we were on our way.

It snowed earlier. Now, it's 1pm, the air is minus two degrees, and we're moving fast and hard along the Saint Nicholas Sea-Route, 295 degrees, towards Proliv Vilkitski. Cape Chelyuskin, Cape Horn of the North, is only 110 miles away.

Rory and Jarlath on Watch



Tuesday August 23rd, On Anchor at Bolshevik Island.

Guba Solnechova (Sun Bay) Northern Siberian Islands (78°11'N / 102°57'E)

There's a book: 'The Uttermost Place on Earth', written about Tierra Del Fuego. No it's not! This is. And we're glad and relieved to be here. We're on anchor in this sheltered bay, as the wind rises and the ice thunders downwind outside in Proliv Vilkitski (Vilkitski Strait). Early yesterday morning euphoria reigned. We posed for our cameras, and raised our glasses. Cape Chelyuskin Polar Station, with its ½ dozen buildings, antennas and oil tanks was a couple of miles across the broken ice, access possible, but dodgy. We stayed out.

Our information was that the way forward was fairly clear of ice. With confidence we plotted our course, through Vilkitski Strait and out into the Kara Sea. It was not to be. Every direction we turned, we met with dead ends. Even from the vantage of high on the mast you can see only about three miles. Ice, viewed from a distance, always looks impenetrable. Very often, on close approach, the white line is seen to consist of floes with open water between, three tenths or maybe only two tenths of the sea surface being ice covered. This is called 3/10 ice or 2/10, easily navigated; although it often concentrates in bands, not so navigable. Nonetheless, by evening we had made about thirty five miles.

Two events then coincided: We could get no further and a sat-phone call from Murmansk warned of a rising north-west gale, or possibly even storm, and an associated changing ice situation; pack ice, 10/10, sweeping in with it. They suggested that we make for the shelter of this bay on the south side of Bolshevik Island - more easily said than done, as the ice had already thickened around us. That it was twenty five miles backwards from whence we had come was now incidental. Some of the way back was easy enough, but some most definitely was not. We hope that the banging and scraping hasn't done damage to our centreboard and rudder. Several times both were seen to jump as we drove through tight ice, engine revving and poles pushing. The grim prospect of being swept back eastwards into the Laptev Sea lent strength and urgency to our efforts. At 00.30 hours this morning we dropped anchor, and here we are.

Northabout in Sun Bay



PROGRESS REPORT NO.7

Friday August 26th, Sun Bay.

Snow on the ground, and on the deck, on anchor we've swung in close to the shore as the wind has veered around to the north-east and eased. The sun is shining and visibility is good - a sparkling Siberian

day. The gale is over and the outside thermometer shows it still minus two degrees. We're on our fourth day here. A 100 mile band of ice now blocks our way, where there was none last week.

Initially on coming in here we considered it no bad thing to have a break from the constant 'bashing-on'. Now we are impatient to be on the go again. One convoy went through westwards yesterday, a nuclear I/B with an ice-class Survey Vessel. Standing by outside our bay is the non ice-class freighter 'Toliat', awaiting better ice conditions.

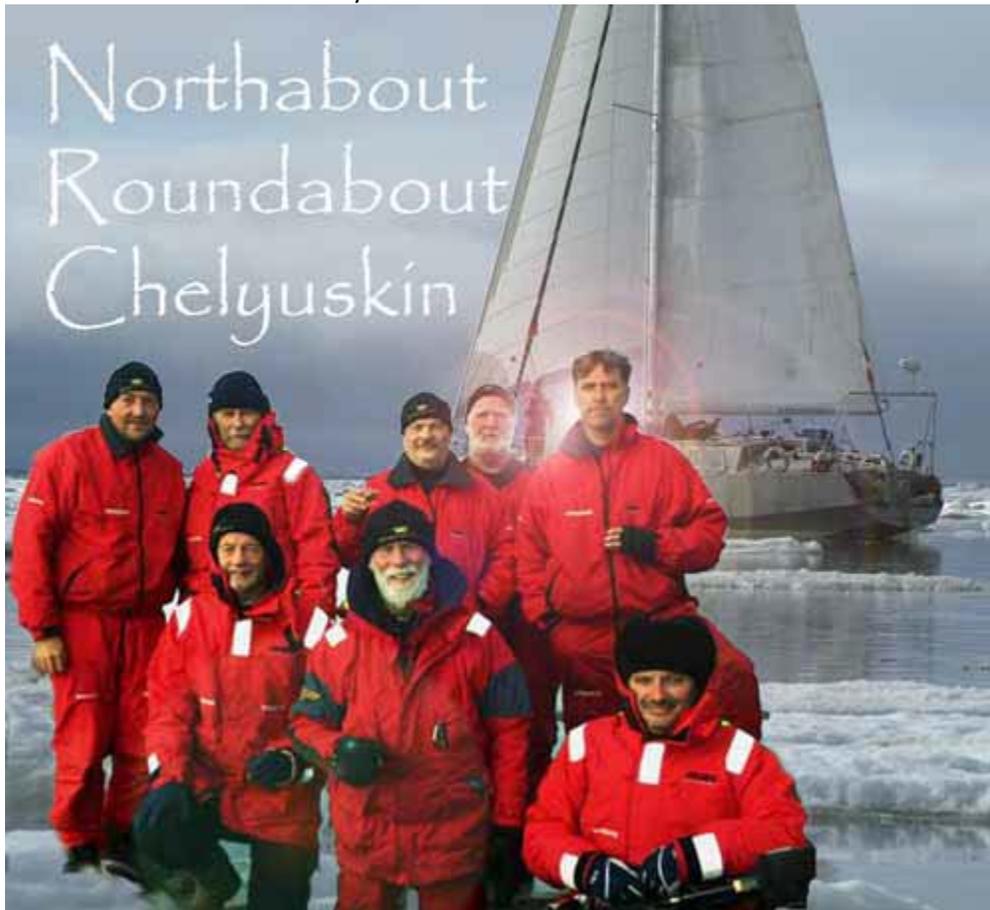
Slava is comfortable and confident about us, and with his colleagues on the ice-breakers. And we with him. As they say in Russian - 'bceo kharasho' - everything's grand!

PROGRESS REPORT NO 8

August 28th. Into the Kara Sea

We're lashing' down the Kara Sea. Yesterday sfternoon, as we went 'sightseeing' in our Bay, a call came from the icebreaker 'Vaigach' -"Let's Go! There's a convoy being assembled" Three hours later, we were back at Cape Chelyuskin, last in line of a convoy led by I/B 'Vaigach', to break and push the ice, followed by I/B 'Soviet Soyuski with her beam air jets pushing out the ice to form a channel. Two nuclear icebreakers! At one stage we passed a mammy bear an her two cubs jumping around on the ice, as we passed. We're through the ice now and goin' gallant for Dikson.

Northabout Roundabout Chelyuskin



PROGRESS REPORT NO.9

Wednesday August 31st, Goin' for Novaya Zemlya, south end.

We stopped into Dikson as planned and the less said about that unfortunate place the better. However we got our diesel there and filled our water tank, all in very fast order. And come to think of it the craic we had in the café-bar that opened up specially for us on the Monday night wasn't at all bad. We'd had a 'banya' in the afternoon and maybe it was the euphoria of being so clean!

24 hours after arriving we were to sea again, in the fog. This is a foggy place. All around the mouth of the Yenesei River it's foggy 15 days in the month at this time of the year. With our GPS and Radar and electronic charts the fog is not a problem. Unless of course one of the freight vessels coming down the river from the huge mines of Norilsk happened to be converging! It hasn't happened, the Yenesei and the River Ob are behind us, it's sunny and warm.

It wasn't so in 1912 for our hero Valerian Albanov. He was first officer on the 'Saint Anna'. They intended to traverse the North East Passage to the Pacific Ocean. 'Saint Anna' became trapped near here in the ice of the Kara Sea, and drifted northwards towards the Pole for one and a half years. Albanov, leading 13 men, left 'Saint Anna' and made an epic three month journey over ice and sea to safety in Franz Joseph Land. His story is in the book 'In the Land of White Death' - charming! Happily ice is no longer a problem for us, just wind and weather now.

It's 800 miles to Murmansk, we'll be passing Novaya Zemlya, but can't stop there. It's high security and all that, and maybe somewhat radioactive too, between nuclear testing and occasional dumping of the bad stuff. Our current problem, isn't there always something, is that in 6 days, Tuesday next, there's a forecast for the father and mother of a westerly gale. We are trying to get to Murmansk before it hits. So we're hammering on, into headwinds at the moment, using engine and sail, when it helps, trying to cover ground fast. Happy days, if uncomfortable.

Northabout at Dikson Docks



Motorbike Outside Dikson Bany



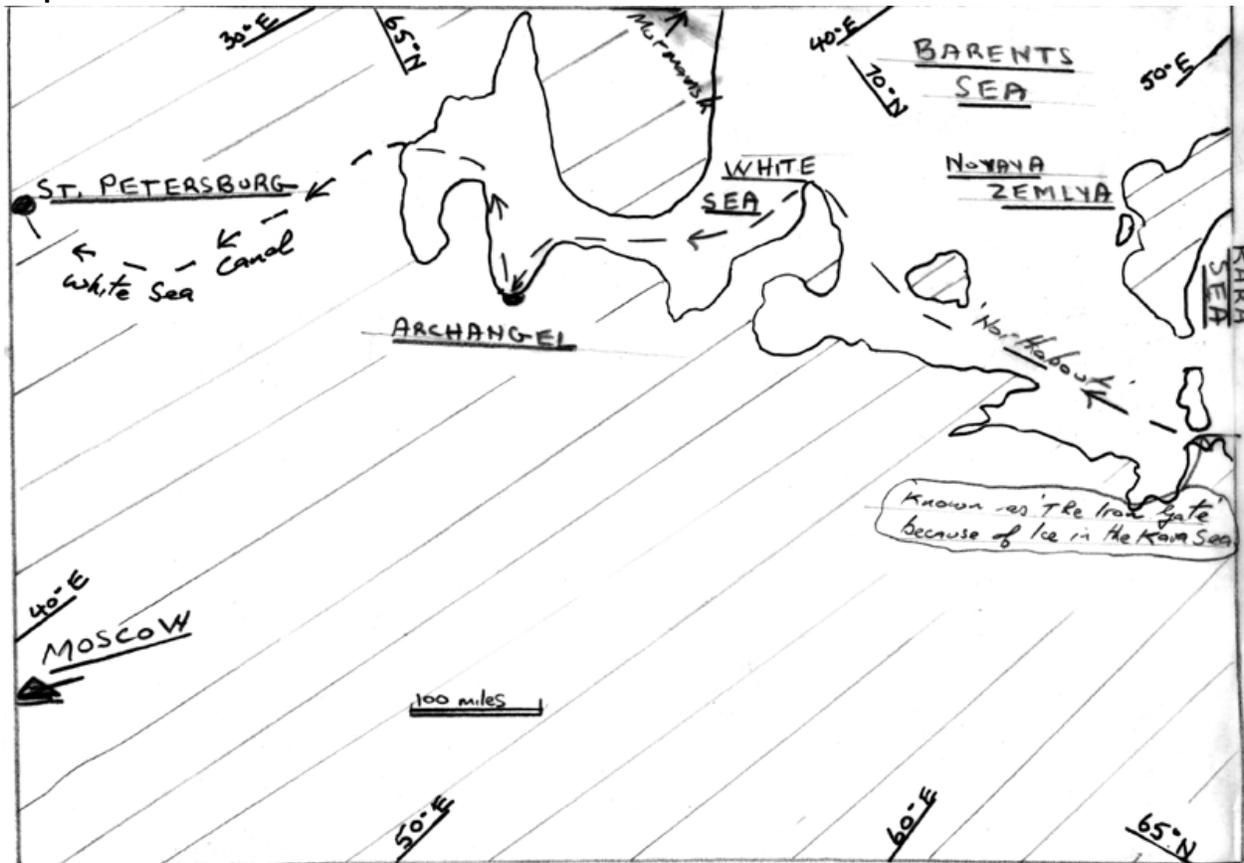
September 1st, White Island (Kvitoya or Ostrav Byely)

White Island is a low lying tract of land about 20 miles in diameter, cut off from the Yamal Peninsula by the narrow Malygin Strait. We went ashore there yesterday. The sandy beach on the north shore was littered with massive driftwood, some of which was washed far inshore by northerly storms and ice. On the horizon to the south we could see the silhouette of reindeer grazing on the tundra, and to the east, a lone muskox. The birds were agitated as we invaded their territory. Gaggles of geese flew overhead, as ever out of range. To the native Nentsy/ Samoyed population, this is their Sacred Ground. We didn't find any evidence of their presence, but there, 200 metres in from the shore, was a Light Tower, constructed of wood, and probably containing a small nuclear cell. We stayed well clear.

White Island Tree Stump



Map 4



AURORA BOREALIS

Night sky viewing has been disappointing so far. A combination of long Arctic days and fog have allowed us only an occasional glimpse of the moon and none of the stars. Now that we are at lower latitudes and the nights are getting longer and darker we expect to do better. Last night we were rewarded for our long wait. A clear night, only the thinnest sliver of a moon sitting on the horizon and real darkness setting in after a glorious sunset. All the stars, planets and constellations we are familiar with, slowly flooded into view. At about 1am the Aurora started its display. And it was spectacular! A white trail arched across the sky from west to east over the top of our mast and sail. It was shimmering and shivering like a curtain in a breeze. Other patterns formed. Streaks of light, white brush strokes lightly daubed in groups on the steel blue sky, circles and whorls and undulations of all shapes. And within each pattern - a wild pulsing and vibrating. The dominant colour was white but at the fringes there were flashes of reds and greens. It was mesmerising. We watched for over an hour as the great celestial artist wielded his brush and stroked the sky with wraith-like patterns and curtains of light. It stopped suddenly and did not appear again.

PROGRESS REPORT No 12

Sunday, mid-day, September 3rd.

We're 130 miles from the entry to Murmansk Fjord. And the laptop is bouncing on the cabin table as we're hammering into a Force 7 north-westerly. The day is fine up in the cockpit, blue skies and white clouds, the sea whitewashed with scattered foam, fulmars gliding and a strong wake behind us. We're not sparing the diesel or the sailcloth, as we're trying to get into the fjord before a strong southerly hits us, due tonight. We've had good conditions since we passed Novaya Zemlya and got into the Barents Sea. We were saying "We'll pay for this yet". Then again, maybe we've paid for it already.

Tromso, in Norway, is 400 miles onward from Murmansk.

PROGRESS REPORT No. 13

Monday Sept 5th

We're going up Murmansk Fjord, the North East Passage behind us. Come raise your glass with us, or better still, a bottle.

PROGRESS REPORT No. 14

Thursday Sep. 8th, The Paper Curtain

Murmansk was all abuzz! A lively city of half a million people, working and going about their business. Our heads are now clearing from the mixture of paperwork and alcohol induced euphoria. Nicolay Babich, who is controller of the Russian icebreaker fleet is the most impressive of men. And he couldn't have been more hospitable when we visited his headquarters and had dinner later. He, built like one of his icebreakers, is a true Russian man of the north, "a direct descendant of 1740 explorer Semon Chelyuskin and 1914 man Valerian Albanov, he who had sailed from the very same Murmansk harbour, we were honoured to be in his company".

Slava is gone, back to Moscow.

The Iron Curtain is gone, but replaced by The Paper Curtain. It took a day and a half to get clearance for our exit, which happened last night, dark and raining as we left.

Now we're in Norwegian waters off the islands of Vardo.

Just spoke to Vardo Radio: "Very welcome, no problem, sail on".

Northabout arriving in Tromso

