

The Russian Far East - Across the Top of the World  
From Anadyr to Anadyr  
5 to 18 August '09



Heritage Expeditions

53b Montreal Street, PO Box 7218, Christchurch, New Zealand.

Tel: +64 3 365 3500 / Fax: +64 3 365 1300

**Freephone (within NZ): 0800 262 8873**

[info@heritage-expeditions.com](mailto:info@heritage-expeditions.com) / [www.heritage-expeditions.com](http://www.heritage-expeditions.com)

## **Day 1**

**Wednesday, 5 August 2009**

### **Anadyr**

We departed from Anadyr this afternoon with a very full ship, headed around the Bering Straits and north towards the lost world of Wrangel Island. Rodney gave an introductory briefing in the evening to acquaint everybody with the ship, the crew and other staff members. Weather is improving and the seas are calm.

## **Day 2**

**Thursday, 6 August 2009**

### **At sea**

Very calm seas today and Aleks was able to take some brilliant bird reflections on the water. Aleks began a day of lectures with his look at the more than hundred species of birds that occupy these seas. Jenny's lecture titled 'On thin ice' followed, with its look at the life of polar bears. At noon Rodney introduced tomorrow's venue of 'Whale Bone Alley'. Dennis gave a brief interpretation of this archaeological site. At afternoon's end Dennis gave his lecture titled, 'the basis of climate change'.

## **Day 3**

**Friday, 7 August 2009**

### **Yttygran Island, Arakamchechen Island**

With good weather we landed today on Yttygran Island to visit the archaeological site of Whale Bone Alley. We imagined the summer gatherings at this place where many umiaks would be parked upside down near tupiks (tents) nearby. Children would be playing (pirak) on the sedge grounds as trading would be conducted by adults, with exchange of goods and brides. Rituals would be performed of various sorts, coming of age ceremonies for young men and women, totemic appeasement to the sea, the whales and the chaos of the world. Meat would be cached. Nearly everyone here in the summer would leave for other venues by autumn (ukiak - the path to ukiuk (winter)). This site represents an event as much as a place, something that would be looked forward to through the winter. Leaving the archaeological site we sailed east around Yttygran Island looking for whales, achieving a few sightings before returning to the ship for lunch.

In the afternoon we landed at the NE cape of Arakamchechen Island and walked across the tundra to a viewpoint directly above a Walrus beach on the other side of the cape. Our sunny vantage point was excellent for photography as we observed the Walrus below. Returning to the ship we came upon a pod of Orcas which surfaced around us. All in all this was an exceptional wildlife viewing day.

## **Day 4**

**Saturday, 8 August 2009**

### **Cape Dezhnev, Uelen**

This day began with a visit to Cape Dezhnev, the most easterly point of continental Eurasia. We are in the Bering Straits here with the Diomedes off to the east in the fog. We landed on a beach below the lighthouse monument and made our way up the steep slopes to relic buildings from the Soviet period, with most people climbing up to view the monument to Dezhnev. We also visited stone remnants of the village site nearby – the village appears to have been occupied well into the twentieth century.

In the afternoon we visited the village of Uelen. We were taken to a kind of village square where much of the local population had gathered. An abundance of children was in evidence. Ethnically the village is predominantly Chukchi, with Russian influence, and there are a few Eskimo (Inupiat)



**Heritage Expeditions**

53b Montreal Street, PO Box 7218, Christchurch, New Zealand.

Tel: +64 3 365 3500 / Fax: +64 3 365 1300

**Freephone (within NZ): 0800 262 8873**

[info@heritage-expeditions.com](mailto:info@heritage-expeditions.com) / [www.heritage-expeditions.com](http://www.heritage-expeditions.com)

speakers. A traditional dance performance was presented in honour of our visit. The dance and song style was typically Eskimo, similar to what would be seen across the North American arctic all the way to Greenland. Outdoor games were also being played, there were open fire pits for boiling tea water; dogs were running uninhibitedly about, children were interposing themselves with abandon into the adult 'goings on' as the mood of a summer festival engulfed our visiting group. After the dancing we were given a tour of the village, sightseeing the school, the local store and the museum. A master ivory craftsman was observed conducting his work and several in our group made purchases of ivory art work. Many of us had formed emotional attachments to this village by the time of our departure, with a few friendships developing between us and the local people and a group of girls gathering around Nicky at the end not wanting her to go back to the ship

## **Day 5**

**Sunday, 9 August 2009**

### **Kolyuchin Island**

This morning we visited the weather station on Kolyuchin Island. The plateau where the station was located proved to be a splendid vantage point for the observation of bird cliffs, some of the most impressive we have seen on these voyages. Guillemots, kittiwakes, puffins and pelagic cormorants were in evidence among other species. We spent several hours strolling and lounging above the cliffs before returning to the ship for our afternoon lectures. Aleks gave a lecture on sea mammals with comprehensive imagery and Jenny gave a lecture on the ecological crisis for the polar bear with equally elaborate imagery. All around a lot of good material was presented this afternoon. We are at sea now heading for Wrangel Island in earnest.

## **Day 6**

**Monday, 10 August 2009**

### **Wrangel Island**

This morning Dennis gave a lecture titled "How to talk Animism". This kaleidoscopic lecture dealt with the relationships of polysynthetic language and certain recent developments in philosophy and physics. He analyzed Eskimo dance forms in terms of animist symbolism and read some related poetry. By afternoon we had arrived at Wrangel Island and picked up three Russian researchers (Vasili, Irena, Igor) who gave us a lecture on their work, accompanied by some beautiful images. In the evening we sailed toward the Western Cape to escape the fog along the south coast.

## **Day 7**

**Tuesday, 11 August 2009**

### **Wrangel Island - Cape Fomi, Lake Kmo, Cape Ushakola**

In the morning, near Cape Fomi, we cruised in with zodiacs to a beach where we had seen polar bears and musk oxen the night before. Eventually we came upon an adult male bear resting a few hundred meters on the other side of a lagoon from our group. We were able to film him for some time until he walked off into the sea to escape our attention. Later in the day we landed at Lake Kmo and walked along the strand where we were lucky enough to have a variety of bear encounters. There were two family units in the area, each composed of a mother with two cubs. One was observed on a low bluff down the beach to the west and one came from the east approaching Aleks and Leo quite closely as they were attempting to access their zodiacs. Late in the evening at Cape Ushakola we made a zodiac cruise in very choppy seas into the low lying coast that was blocked by a hidden sand spit. The spit ran far enough along that we eventually had to abandon our attempts to reach the coast. We returned to the ship quite wet from spray and happy to have a late dessert to compliment our earlier dinner



**Heritage Expeditions**

53b Montreal Street, PO Box 7218, Christchurch, New Zealand.

Tel: +64 3 365 3500 / Fax: +64 3 365 1300

**Freephone (within NZ): 0800 262 8873**

[info@heritage-expeditions.com](mailto:info@heritage-expeditions.com) / [www.heritage-expeditions.com](http://www.heritage-expeditions.com)

## **Day 8**

**Wednesday, 12 August 2009**

### **Wrangel Island - Dragi Bay**

We arrived at Dragi Bay early in the morning. With high winds and heavy swell an excursion was made to the base of some low cliffs adjacent to a beach. A four year old female bear was resting on a shelf above us, but she soon stirred and walked away. We spent a few moments on the beach observing the rather humble monument to Bartlett's 1914 landing on that shore. From the beach we set out into the tundra, seeing some snow geese on the distant slopes. More bears were sighted but we had no time to approach them. After returning to the ship we soon were heading west along Wrangel's south coast. A drop off of goods was made at a remnant settlement and a landing was made on the central south coast. Our walk in the tundra came upon a snowy owl defending its nest against a predatory pomarine skua. A high lemming population was evident and a group of Brandt Geese was encountered. As always, many people enjoyed seeing the wildflowers of the tundra as they strolled. In the evening we said farewell to our Russian hosts as they returned to their camp to complete their summer work - a large supply of food stuffs went with them compliments of Heritage Expeditions. Tonight we sail back to the Chukotka mainland.

## **Day 9**

**Thursday, 13 August 2009**

### **At Sea, Amguyema River**

Reaching the vast lagoon region along the Chukotka north coast east of Pevek we anchored off the Amguyema River lagoon. Very heavy seas confronted us, but three zodiacs set out to find the river outlet through the extensively sand-barred coast. The lagoon that separated the river mouth from the sea was vast. Inside the lagoon we found an upland tundra island where we could land. In one of the two small ponds on the island we saw a female duck but no further duck identification was positively achieved. The landscape was subtle but attractive to the eye and after two hours we returned to the ship against very heavy seas. Aboard ship a film comparing the lives of brown and aquatic bears was shown with mixed reviews. A summary of the three days off Wrangel was presented in the lecture room. Our grasp of Wrangel history remains fragmentary and more research is warranted. Tonight we continue down the coast for a return visit to Kolyuchin Island.

## **Day 10**

**Friday, 14 August 2009**

### **Kolyuchin Island**

This morning we landed near the east cape of Kolyuchin Island. A rather complex human occupation site occupies the beach here, containing a large midden with several rock caches and a possible old house site. A still functional drying rack was also found near two contemporary dwellings along with a recent grave site. Up high on the plateau were found two old burial sites with reindeer bones apparently ritually associated with the graves. At the cliff edge a large walrus haul out was observed far below. Walking was difficult on the rock fields of the plateau and we needed to exercise great caution returning back to our beach. Those who could not make the trek were escorted by zodiac around the cape to observe the walrus from sea level.

Kolyuchinskaya Inlet was approached later in the afternoon. We set out in zodiacs for the mouth of the inlet and came upon a Russian researcher who had spent the entire summer studying spoon billed sandpiper nesting. He was a charming fellow with lots of good advice, so we landed near his house and set out walking in all directions. Most of the birds are gone now but there was still plenty to see. Along the shore to the west, Grey Whales were observed feeding next to the beach, a phenomenon similar to what we had observed in west Wrangel. The return was in very choppy seas, but all survived the ordeal. Tonight we head for the Bering Straits again on our way back to Anadyr.



**Heritage Expeditions**

53b Montreal Street, PO Box 7218, Christchurch, New Zealand.

Tel: +64 3 365 3500 / Fax: +64 3 365 1300

**Freephone (within NZ): 0800 262 8873**

[info@heritage-expeditions.com](mailto:info@heritage-expeditions.com) / [www.heritage-expeditions.com](http://www.heritage-expeditions.com)

## **Day 11**

**Saturday, 15 August 2009**

### **At sea**

This morning we sailed through the Bering Straits on our way south. Dennis gave a morning lecture titled "Settlement, Exploration and the Future of the Polar Basin". He mapped out the early economic patterns of the region, explaining the impacts of European exploration beginning in the seventeenth century. Touching on the main events of recent exploration and development, he projected a general scenario for the likely happenings through the course of the current century. By the end of the lecture our ship was sailing along the coast of the Russian Diomed Island (Ratmanova) and everyone went up to take a look. The Alaskan mainland at Cape Wales was noticed faintly on the eastern horizon. Before departing the area, the Alaskan Diomed Island, with its small Eskimo village, was distantly observed as well. We continued in the afternoon toward Provideniya.

## **Day 12**

**Sunday, 16 August 2009**

### **Provideniya**

We visited Provideniya this morning, finding the museum curator Igor as affable as ever and welcoming us into his museum. Igor was happy to chat with us about all that we had seen in the course of our voyage. We have more first hand experience now to use in deciphering the various dioramas and historical exhibits. For some, having been here before, this museum is beginning to feel like home. A few visited the Orthodox Church which was conducting Sunday services. Some visited the cemetery at the other side of town. It was a warm, comfortable day and the town as a whole seemed to be in a rather content and friendly mood. By afternoon we were on our way to Egvekinot, our last stop on this expedition.

## **Day 13**

**Monday, 17 August 2009**

### **Egvekinot**

Today we arrived at Egvekinot and piled into our four wheel drive vehicles to set out for the Arctic Circle at the point of the 180th Meridian. We drove through the arctic mountain landscapes of the Chukotka interior on roads that demanded some rugged performance from our vehicles. We saw a grizzly mother with two cubs as well as a few eagles. We stopped here and had lunch in the tundra beside a red post which marks the site of the 180th Meridian on the Arctic Circle. Two samovars made tea. We returned in the late afternoon to re-embark for the last leg of our journey.

## **Day 14**

**Tuesday, 18 August 2009**

### **Anadyr**

The Captain obtained pilot exemption and we sailed into Anadyr harbour, into a reasonably strong westerly wind – but it was still relatively warm. Breakfast was served at 6.30am and we made preparations for disembarkation. The first group (those going on charter flight) disembarked on the north side of the river, others were taken to the town wharf and the majority were flying out tomorrow; and so ended a memorable journey.

Written by Dennis Schmitt



**Heritage Expeditions**

53b Montreal Street, PO Box 7218, Christchurch, New Zealand.

Tel: +64 3 365 3500 / Fax: +64 3 365 1300

**Freephone (within NZ): 0800 262 8873**

[info@heritage-expeditions.com](mailto:info@heritage-expeditions.com) / [www.heritage-expeditions.com](http://www.heritage-expeditions.com)