

# YOUR CRUISING STORIES

Danny Drahos is MD of Go West Sailing, a Largs-based RYA Training Centre and adventure sail company: [www.gowestsailing.com](http://www.gowestsailing.com)



Global Surveyor, a 70ft Aleutian with extra thick steel hull and seven watertight compartments – set amidst a picture perfect view



Crew of Global Surveyor 2020



The colourful metropolis of eastern Greenland – Tasiilaq

## Unforgiving wonderland

Danny Drahos leads a sailing expedition to Greenland on *Global Surveyor*, a 70ft steel-hull Aleutian

The midnight sun is shining when the first iceberg emerges on our port bow, glinting in the light. Soon they are all around us. 'Land ahoy' sounds from on deck, Greenland shimmers into view with steep mountains covered by ice and snow. The atmosphere on board is electric, with *Global Surveyor* flying at 10 knots through moderate seas, music in the cockpit while Bob is cooking. It's late July and we had set sail from our crew meeting point of Ólafsvík, Iceland, the previous day. We have 10 crew on board. Everyone has sailed with us before so departure preparation was easy for this trip with just a brief introduction needed before the safety briefing. The forecast is favourable with northerly wind up to F7 – ideal conditions for our 50-ton yacht. The first 24 hours are sunny, with winds as predicted. We average 7 knots. As we

send our first report to Joint Arctic Command, dolphins and whales dance just 10 metres from the bow. On our second night, thick fog descends – as expected for this part of the Denmark Strait. Our watch routine is two people on for two hours; one at the helm while the other monitors the radar screen and keeps a lookout. As we approach land, we also start an ice watch from the bow.

### EXPLORING DURING A PANDEMIC

Around 0300 we pass Kulusuk, with its rocky southern shoreline. We are bound for Tasiilaq, Eastern Greenland's capital with 1,600 inhabitants. By 0600, on day three, we have reached the Kong Oscar fjord, old harbour in Tasiilaq. As always, I'm stunned by the beauty of this colourful town with its flower-covered rocks. A message arrives via Iridium from our shore support, my partner, Victoria. Our COVID-19 re-test has been arranged in a

local hospital. We record a warm 18° in Tasiilaq, yet outside the fjord is freezing. Test taken, we are free to go but told to: 'not do any hugging with native folk'. Well, that is easy enough so off we trek into the mountains for a bracing swim in a freezing lake in the Valley of Flowers. The next day we sail for Sermilik fjord and are soon negotiating icebergs and rocks in almost completely uncharted territory. The ice thickness increases until we are moving at just one knot. It's a real wonderland – unforgiving but beautiful. It's day five and Bob wakes me at 0200 to say two large icebergs are approaching on a flood tide, about 20 minutes away. Five minutes later I'm on deck and the icebergs are at our bow, touching our anchor chain. Keen to save our 145kg CQR, I raise the anchor, by which time our bowsprit is sticking into the iceberg. We reverse back, the ice is piling up and our escape route narrowing. Four of us are on deck, the rest

are sleeping; missing our exciting escape. Navigating the ice, it takes eight hours to cover 15 miles. Once we pass our previous night's anchorage we drive our bow into a small flat iceberg for a break. We have reached Tiniteqilaq, a village of 60 inhabitants with million-dollar views over the fjord. Its harbour is enclosed by a little bay with a narrow, rocky entrance. Nothing is charted and at high water, the depth was just over three metres in places – our draft is 2.95. I save the track in my plotter's memory to reduce stress on the way out.

### FRESH FISH AND STUNNING VISTAS

This is a village of hunters and fishermen. The local shop is marked by a flag with two polar bears. Expecting dried fish and a few cans of food, everyone is impressed by the variety on offer. After a hot shower in the local service-house, we navigate the narrow Ikaasartivaq fjord which connects Sermiliq with Anmassalik fjord. An anchorage in a small



Mighty icebergs of eastern Greenland



Anchoring in Sermiligaaq fjord beside Knud Rasmussen Glacier - where icebergs are born

bay behind Kungmit village protects us from the substantial winds. We have reached an abandoned US air base and wander around the Second World War vehicles – well preserved in the dry climate – before enjoying a makeshift barbecue on the beach, feasting on freshly caught cod. Around 2200, we continue on to a bay with calendar-worthy views of Knud Rasmussen glacier, an Inuit hunting hut and sandy beach. Dinner is a stunning halibut cooked by Bob. We wake to find the bay full of small icebergs, which have been blown in overnight. Sailing towards Sermiligaaq fjord we stop the boat under a side stream so some of the crew can climb the narrow land



A whale playing close to our starboard bow

between two glaciers for the view. Petr takes the others on a dinghy ride to the main glacier. I keep the boat in relatively free water while maintaining radio contact with both parties. After a few hours they are ready to come back, but the dinghy group are almost locked in by ice. I use *Global Surveyor's* hull to push the growlers out of the way. Peter uses his drone to guide me through the ice to collect the climbers. I find myself impressed by the quality of the Jotun paint – there are very few scratches on the hull.

### A RELUCTANT FAREWELL

At 2200 our CQR goes down with 450kg of chain in Ikaasak anchorage. We are ready for our first night without ice watch, as a shallow bar at the bay's entrance does not allow anything significant to enter. It is our last day in Greenland. Most of the crew explore ashore while a few of us replace the sail in a breeze. A few hours and bruises later, our shiny new canvas is set. Two runs ashore with jerry cans fill our tanks with 200 litres of iceberg-fresh water – ready for the sail across to Iceland. The rest of the crew return late afternoon. In the allegedly abandoned village they had found an Inuit family with dozens of dogs and seven children. Unfortunately, due to the latest rules they were not allowed to go near them. At 2200 we set sail for the ocean. Greenland I hope to see you again soon.