

## GREENLAND 2017

### Rear Commodore Simon Currin

(*Shimshal II* was launched in 2006, commissioned by Simon and Sally to take them around the world in comfort and safety. Built by CR Yachts Sweden AB, she is a 48ft (14.6m) cutter, with 14ft 8in (4.5m) beam and 7ft 3in (2.2m) draught.

She left Scotland in 2015 and spent the next two winters in Iceland, with future plans including further time in Greenland before continuing to Canada and the USA. Follow Shimshal's travels at <https://voyagesofshimshal.blogspot.pt/p/blog-page.html>.)

We always knew that the ice would ultimately determine the nature of our 2017 Greenlandic cruise, and had hoped for a repetition of the previous summer when the whole coast of East Greenland was ice free by mid July. We had calculated that with the seven weeks we had available we might do a grand tour of Greenland's east and west coasts, leaving *Shimshal* in the care of Aasiaat Shipyard on the southern shores of Disko Bay to endure an arctic winter at 68°42'N.

However, close scrutiny of ice charts in June and July revealed that 2017 was going to be a return to more 'normal' ice conditions. We rejoined *Shimshal* in Ísafjörður, Iceland, where a handful of rugged, high-latitude boats were mustering for their own Greenland adventures. Amongst them was the beautifully crafted *SV Destiny* and her OCC owners Andy and Janice Fennymore-White. Between them they had lavished extraordinary care and attention into building

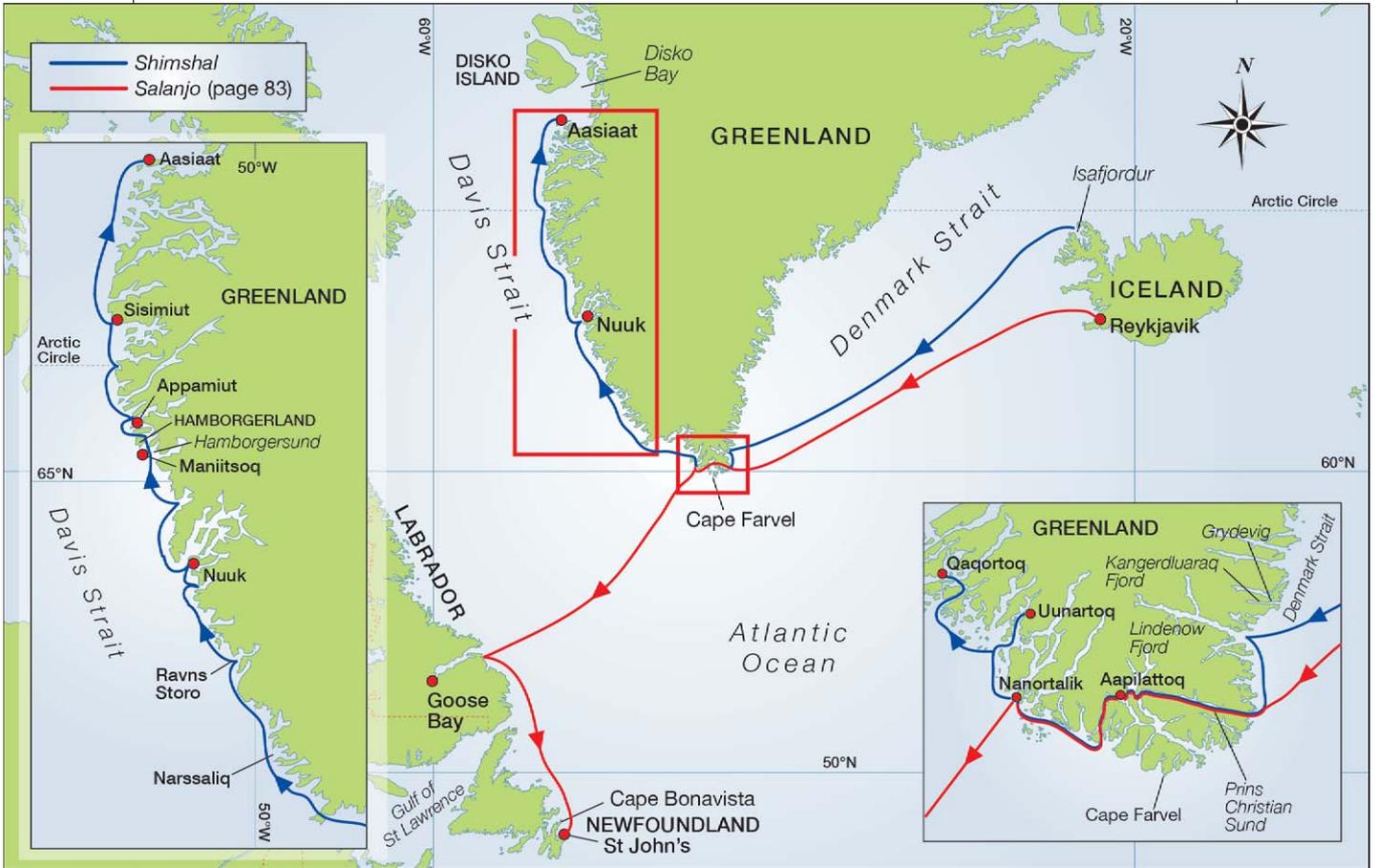


*Rear Commodore Simon Currin*

their deluxe, aluminium, go-anywhere home in the Arctic.\* Our plans had initially coincided with theirs but, with more time available, they could afford to await better ice conditions on the east coast.

We decided to aim for a direct passage to Prins Christian Sund and forgo our cherished trip down the east coast. Before cruising south, though, the crews of *Destiny* and *Shimshal* took their polar bear self-protection guns to a hilltop rifle range and blasted

\* See *You're not Sailors, are you?* by Andrew and Janice Fennymore-White, page 191.





*Shimshal at  
Grydevig*

away at some targets. As with boat preparation, the crew of *Shimshal* was considerably outgunned by the crew of *Destiny*.

Our ice-enforced change of plan happily meant that our cruise was now synchronised with that of *SV Alchemy*. Dick and Ginger Stevenson had chosen to sail back to North America via Greenland and were awaiting a weather slot for the crossing of the Denmark Strait some 200 miles south of us in Reykjavik. Independently, we both chose the same promising weather slot for the 620 mile passage southwest, even though both crews knew that Prins Christian Sund was still closed by ice. Both boats had near-perfect conditions, with a northeasterly breeze pushing us along that dropped away to nothing for our arrival on Greenland's remote, icebound coast.



*And from shore  
level...*



*Simon and Sally (Shimshal), and Ginger and Dick (Alchemy)*

On passage we received daily ice updates by e-mail from our long-suffering friend on vacation in Mallorca. By day he built sandcastles with his kids but by night, with a glass of merlot in hand, he sat by the swimming pool culling the internet for satellite photos and ice charts and sent them on to us in a suitably compressed format.

With a couple of hundred miles to go it became evident that our hoped-for improvement in the ice wasn't happening as fast as we could have wished – we had received a helicopter photograph of the eastern end of Prins Christian Sund that clearly showed it clogged with 9/10 ice. On *Shimshal* we pondered whether to turn south and abandon any attempt at a landfall on the east coast, heading instead for a distant waypoint 100 miles south of Cape Farvel. But poring over the plethora of fresh images and charts we had on board, we spied a 15 mile ice-free section of coast about 30 miles north of Prins Christian Sund, so altered course for a little-known anchorage in Kangerdluarq Fjord called Grydevig.

The wind disappeared as we closed the fabulously spectacular coastline, just as PredictWind had said it would. Sadly fog rolled in minutes before we entered the fjord, so we went 5 miles back offshore and hove-to ... where we had to endure being drifted south with the icebergs at 2 knots by the frigid East Greenland Current. A glorious sunrise was our reward as we motored north to regain the miles lost to the current overnight. Tentatively we poked our nose into the uncharted fjord and dodged our way through a conveyor-belt of icebergs all marching, like gleaming warriors, against us. This was picture-perfect Greenland lit up by the early morning sun.

The anchorage was strewn with ice and it was a struggle to manoeuvre ourselves into



*Towing away icebergs*

a suitable spot. In the end we dropped the anchor in 26m and reversed into a narrow, stony gap, stopping ourselves from swinging with four stout lines ashore. These created a perfect web to lure in passing ice, and we spent much of our time in the following days dealing with these over-friendly beasts. We invented new ways of taming them, the most successful of which was to lasso them and haul them, with improvised block and tackle, to a nearby rock where we tied them off until they slipped their noose and came back for more of the same punishment. One iceberg, which we named Houdini, escaped three times before we let him go on our last day. A bit of him lived on in our deep freeze though, to cool the drinks aboard – an icy remnant and reminder of a slippery customer whom we now think of with affection. Cheers, Houdini!



*Poling off Houdini*

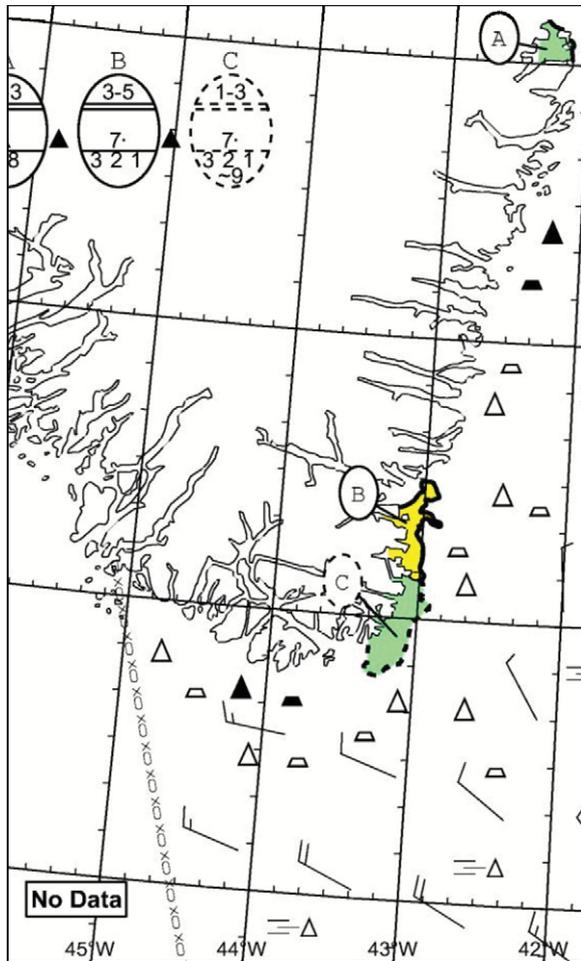


*Sally prepared for the elements*

Nursing our mosquito bites, and exhausted by the long passage and the uncertainty of such a challenging landfall, we collapsed into our bunks. Our sleep however was broken by the VHF which proclaimed, “*Shimshal, Shimshal this is Alchemy*”. We had e-mailed Dick and Ginger news of our safe arrival and they were following us in. Thus began an impossibly remote and impromptu OCC rendezvous and cruise in company. For six days we enjoyed perfect weather in that wonderfully spectacular fjord whilst we got daily



*Fog and ice on Greenland's southwest coast*



**1-3/10 ice around  
the entrance to Prins  
Christian Sund on 6th  
August**

ice updates. Finally both crews figured that, by going offshore, we could avoid the 2-4/10 ice blocking the Lindenow Fjord, and then squeeze in through the less dense 1-3/10 ice obscuring the eastern approach to Prins Christian Sund.

We left the anchorage with *Shimshal* in the lead and *Alchemy* close behind. There was now much less ice around than when we had arrived a week earlier, but nevertheless, as we passed the southern shores of Lindenow Fjord, it presented a seemingly impenetrable barrier. Our hearts sank. Were we, after all, going to be forced to do that long haul south to clear the icy and infamously stormy Cape Farvel?

We persevered, and gradually the ice thinned a little until, with our hearts racing, we turned at right-angles into the pack-ice towards the weather-smoothed rocky ramparts of the Sound's eastern approach. Mercifully the wind and the seas did not complicate our passage and we were able to dodge and weave our way through to gain the entrance. It was with considerable relief that we dropped the anchor off the famous weather station. Ice prevented us docking, so we went ashore by dinghy and enjoyed internet and coffee with the resident work party. The lonely station has not been permanently manned since 2016.

*Harebells*





*Maniitsoq*

Meanwhile, emboldened by their recent icy encounters and with airline connections to make, Alchemy raced ahead with the tide through the narrows at considerable speed. Shimshal caught up with her again in fog-bound Nanortalik and then again in Qaqortoq before finally parting company. We still had to negotiate 700 miles of intricate pilotage up the west coast to Shimshal's icy wintering spot, while Dick and Ginger had a narrowing weather slot to cross to Newfoundland. It had been an enchanting and memorable encounter.

Sadly the fog dominated the next few days of *Shimshal's* voyage. There were memorable sunny spots such as the delightful and spectacular hot springs at Uunartoq and the wonderful morning we spent ashore at Ravns Storo. Mainly, though, we were threading our way northwards through the plethora of rocks, islands and islets that make



*The Eternal Fjord*



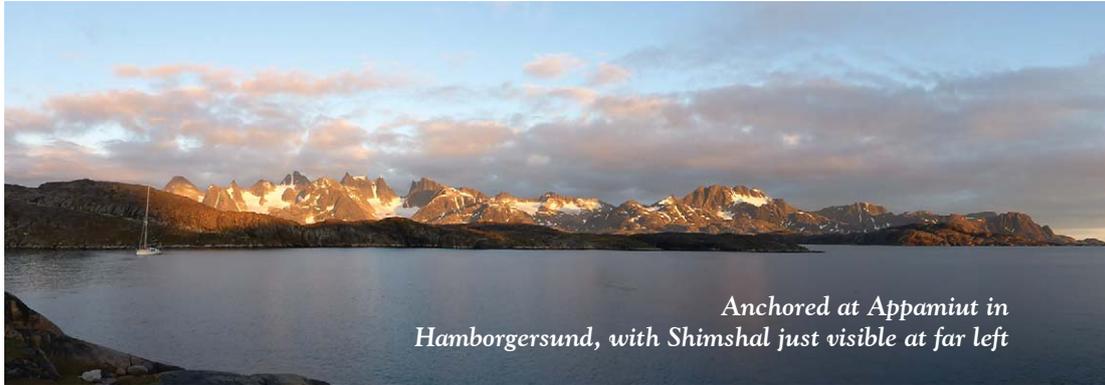
up Greenland's inner leads. Often the visibility was less than 100m, which tested our nerves and our concentration. Mostly the charts were pretty good, but our voyage was punctuated by periods of intense anxiety when the sounder, unpredictably, shallowed to dangerous and uncharted depths. Cruising here is not for the faint-hearted.

In southwest Greenland our nights at anchor were usually disturbed by a nudge from an inquisitive growler. This would inevitably evoke a response with our jousting pole and comical scenes according to the night attire worn! Often the mosquitoes also chose these moments of preoccupation to pounce, leaving the skipper's bared legs peppered with bites.

The ice from the east coast gets pushed around Cape Farvel and then back up the west coast. The big calving glaciers in the northwest send their ice north, whereupon it spins south to the coasts of Baffin Island and Labrador. As we gained Greenland's middle latitudes the icebergs, therefore, became scarce and so we were emboldened to make some overnight passages a few miles off shore, albeit at a reduced speed for fear of collision.

We paused at Bangs Havn, Narssaliq and the ruined Faroese fishing station at Ravns Storo before a glorious dawn approach to Nuuk, with swirls of mist streaking the sunlit mountains. After a couple of days of internet, museums and rest we pressed north again to Torvqussaq, Maniitsoq and the Eternal Fjord. Whilst keen to explore the massive network of fjords reaching deep into Greenland, we had to keep an eye on the advancing season as we had flights booked home – and to work – on 2 September, and had to allow time to put *Shimshal* to bed in Aasiaat for the harsh Arctic winter. There she would be ashore but frozen-in until May at the earliest.

The scenic feast really began as we sailed through Hamborgersund and tucked into the stunning anchorage at Appamiut. Ashore we were rewarded with the perfect panorama of glaciated rocky peaks that was Hamborgerland, glistening in the afternoon sun. At last the drone was deployed and we made a spectacular video of this breathtakingly beautiful place. It is claimed to be Greenland's most beautiful anchorage, but those of us lucky enough to have been to Scoresby Sound could probably just about trump it with Jettys Havn on Bear Island. Nevertheless, that sunlit evening was a highlight of our summer's cruise.



*Anchored at Appamiut in  
Hamborgersund, with Shimshal just visible at far left*

Our final port for the season was Aasiaat, the capital of North Greenland. We crept into the shipyard's dock at low tide with a minuscule amount of water under the keel. We were booked to haul out for the winter, and were delighted to meet Martina and Michael Haferkamp whose exquisitely-prepared high-latitude cruiser *Polaris* was also booked to overwinter in the yard. They are veterans of ten seasons in Greenland, and Michael has made some astonishing drone video and photographs of their arctic adventures. Remarkable people in remarkable places.

Our 2017 cruise had been wonderfully remote, challenging and spectacular but, as is usual, it had been made all the more memorable by the boats and their crews we met and with whom we shared some of those experiences. We had only come to know about

***Berthed alongside *Polaris* ready for haulout at Aasiaat  
(with a wreck protecting our stern)***



the presence and plans of fellow OCC boats through the OCC Fleet Map and Forum. We had used the Club's Facebook page to source charts, and we had searched the Club's database to compile a comprehensive dossier of OCC writings, wisdom and experiences to inform our cruise. Having spent so long working on the Club's digital resources, it was very satisfying for me to see them add such zest to our summer cruise.

