

THE ADVENTURE CONTINUED...

Clare Thorpe

(In 2013, 32-year old skipper James Boyce and 27-year old first mate Clare Thorpe sailed *Elinca*, a Challenge 67, from the UK to Antarctica and South Georgia and back (see ADVENTURE2013: Journey to the End of the World, in *Flying Fish* 2014/2). Sixty-five crew joined the adventure across 12 legs of the journey, the majority of them from the 'pre-kids and pre-mortgage' stage of life. Thankfully, all returned safely, some back to their old jobs and others to new starts having resigned ahead of the nine-month expedition. For a few months the returned wanderers sailed desks and enjoyed home comforts, but before long the itchy feet began and 'Where are we going next?' e-mails started flying again. Follow their blog at www.arcticsailing2016.co.uk.)

There were some obstacles to overcome before we could set out again. Our beloved *Elinca* had been sold so we were in need of a new ship, and with the inevitable onset of mortgages (but not yet children) taking time off work was more challenging and the next trip needed to be shorter and closer to home. Our solution came in the form of the *Anna-Margaretha*, a Dutch-registered steel ketch big enough to carry 15 people and built for high latitude sailing. Her owners Heinz and Greet planned to spend the summer in Spitzbergen, and agreed to charter their boat to us after that for six weeks, to bring her home via the long route: Tromsø (Norway) – Scoresbysund (Greenland) – Iceland – Faeroe Islands – Scotland – Netherlands.

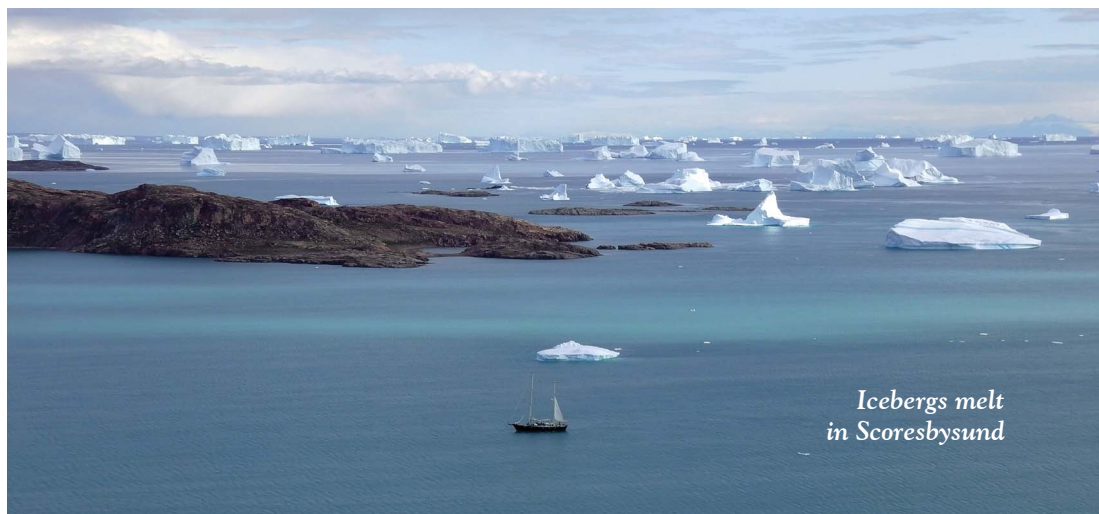




*Anne-Margaretha
where she was
built to sail*

For our trip north we needed to brush up on skills not needed in the Antarctic – polar bear safety and glacier mountaineering skills – as this trip was going to be about walking as much as about sailing. We trained with rifles and shotguns at the National Rifle Association in Bisley where our instructors quickly identified those of us with some ability who might be able to put the bullets in the right end and stand a chance of hitting a bear in a crisis. Next we spent a couple of weekends in Wales and at our home in the Peak District brushing up on snow and ice rescue skills in case of a walking accident.

Our destination, Scoresbysund, though not the most remote Greenland destination, is on the less visited east coast and has the added challenge that it is often blocked by ice brought down from the north on the east Greenland current. In fact in 2015 few yachts made it into the fjord at all as it was so choked with ice. However, we need not have worried, as 2016 saw the highest temperatures on record and unprecedented



*Icebergs melt
in Scoresbysund*



Sharp shooting: target practice before heading ashore

melting meaning that only the biggest icebergs were left to see. These majestic monsters, mostly grounded in the shallower water, glistened in the blazing sun with rivers of melt-water cascading from them and were liable to split in two at a glance. The snow line was up well above 1000m, meaning a fair hike over rocky terrain before there was any call for crampons.

James and I organised our journey north as we had our journey south – with everyone chipping in to cover the costs and the onboard work. With 15 able seamen/women we were able to run a luxurious watch system of four hours on and eight hours off, leaving plenty of time for our favourite pastime, cooking. Inspired by the great British bake-off we made fresh bread every day. We also tried our hand at all the local delicacies



Will bakes bread for 15 crew – we got through at least two loaves a day



Jan Mayen shrouded in cloud

including fresh-caught cod, musk ox, seal and arctic char. We drew the line at narwhal and shark – although we found both for sale, we couldn't bring ourselves to eat creatures we had come so far to see alive. As usual there was not enough time and everywhere we stopped we wished we had two weeks longer. We were delighted to find that the north held as much treasure as the south. With far too much to fit into a short article, I have chosen just four highlights.

A brief stop at the remote island of Jan Mayen which, although the 2277m peak was shrouded almost completely in cloud, was still quite amazing. With 35 knots on the beam the sail there was fast – we covered 240 miles in the first 24 hours and made the sail from Tromsø to Jan Mayen in under three days. The wind had died down to less than 10 knots by the time we sighted the island, allowing us to anchor briefly on its northwest side. We were greeted by the base commander, crammed into the back of quite a small jeep, and



driven up a dirt track for coffee and a tour of the Norwegian research base. That evening we landed two fat Atlantic cod for tea.

Zoe and Will catch our dinner



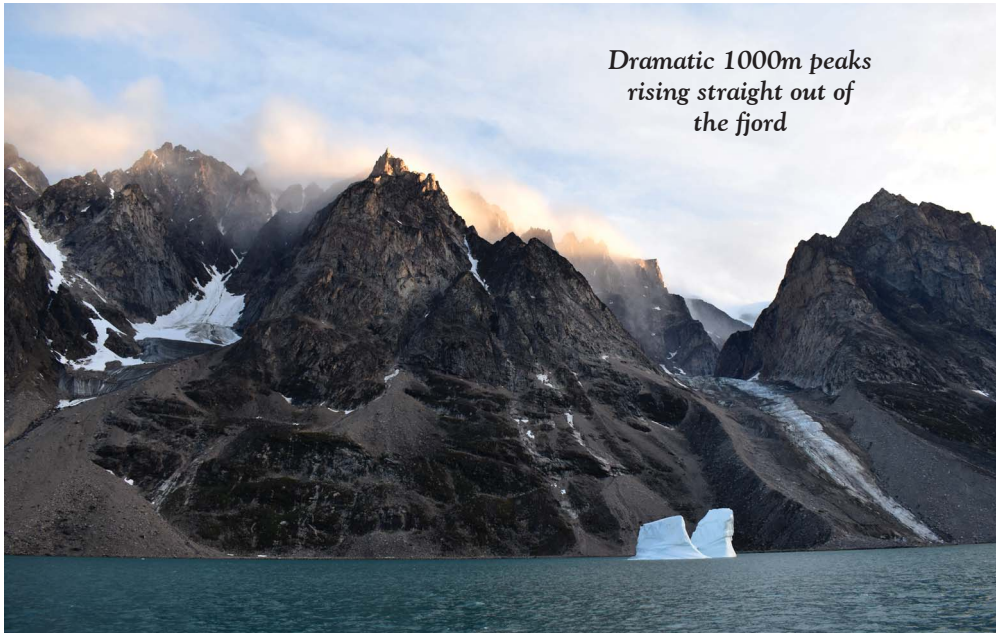
Sunset turns the snow line pink

A day in Greenland when, after celebrating our crewmember Zoe's 30th birthday with gin and tonic with traditional iceberg ice, and a feast of musk ox, a polar bear-shaped *piñata** and anchor-shaped biscuits, we swam in the surprisingly warm (11°C) brackish water (so many glaciers discharge into Scoresbysund that it is no longer salty). Then we picked our way through the tightly packed ice calving off Rolligebrae, a very fast moving glacier, and once through to the other side anchored in the lee of a huge red sandstone rock that we scrambled up in time to watch the sun set over the iceberg graveyard. See page 42 for a chartlet of Scoresbysund.)



* a container made of papier-mâché, pottery or cloth, which is decorated and filled with small toys and/or sweets, then broken as part of a ceremony or celebration.





*Dramatic 1000m peaks
rising straight out of
the fjord*

Icelandic highlights have to be our time spent in the beautiful ex-fishing village of Siglufjörður on the north coast.. We attempted a beautiful, slightly hair-raising ridge walk that took us above the cloud level up the side of the steep mountains that encircled the fjord. The boat was a tiny dot next to the herring museum that commemorates when Siglufjörður was 'herring capital of the world'. The nights started to close in as we headed south, and as we set sail for the Faeroes, Iceland waved us



*Above the cloud-line on
a sharp Iceland ridge*



Stunning Icelandic scenery

goodbye with four hours of northern lights to brighten up the 0000–0400 watch. The dancing green lights were just as spectacular as we had seen on television, and a bank of cloud over the land told us that probably only those out at sea were being treated to this particular show.



We reached the Faeroe Islands in the dark, using the radar to navigate between sheer cliffs into Vestmanna. Inadvertently our arrival coincided with what we termed ‘bird massacre week’, when the newly-fledged fulmars make their leaps from the cliffs to the sea, only to be scooped up in their hundreds by local fishermen. In the early morning the village was lined with small fires and the air pervaded by the smell of burning feathers. Even with the presence of a large supermarket, the locals remain true to tradition when it comes to the killing of both birds and the pilot whales which occasionally stray through the islands. These traditions are less popular with the younger generation, who head over to Denmark for university and are developing a more ‘mainland’ view on wildlife preservation. Feeling lucky to have our own boat, we organised a magical sunset dinner cruise to watch the fulmars and puffins on the 700m cliffs. Needless to say we were eating chicken from the supermarket and only shooting the puffins with our cameras.

Inland in the Faeroe Islands



Our little group has shared storms and seasickness for over ten years now, egging each other on to greater and greater distances and bigger and bigger dreams. The time has come to rein in our ambitions – at least for a while. There are babies on the way, and we’ve called a temporary halt to ocean sailing but with plans to cast off again as soon as it is practical. Round the world 2030 does sound catchy...

