



CRUISING CLUB OF AMERICA publication Essential Passage Guide to The Viking Route

A Review by Andrew Wilkes RCC

I had the pleasure of reading the CCA's *Essential Passage Guide to The Viking Route* whilst sailing on passage to 'The Viking Route' (Scotland to Iceland) in July 2023. The next time I make this trip, I will leave armed with lots of new useful information as a result of reading this book.

The book follows on from Dr William Strassberg's meticulous passage planning for one or more cruises following the 'Viking Route' - the voyages taken by Norse explorers in the 12-14th centuries. These were from Scandinavia to the Færoe Islands, Iceland, Greenland and on to North America. The book may be inspired by the events of 1,400 years ago but the content is thoroughly up to date. It comprises thirteen chapters and has two appendices concerning medical matters.

The first eight chapters have been written by Dr William Strassberg and a number of specialists in their fields. This half of the book is essentially about passage planning in high latitudes and the chapter headings are:

Passage Planning in northern waters: this sets the scene and covers routes and timings which, given the varying ice regimes, is essential information.

Weather: a very informative chapter by W. Frank Bohlen, much of which would also be useful when planning a cruise in other areas of the world. I learnt about the importance of the 500mb chart and there are interesting sections about weather models, currents, tidal streams, passage planning charts, wave height forecasts, the Greenlandic and Canadian ice regimes and a clear explanation of why we get fog at sea.

Ice and Arctic Navigation: some of this information is also covered in other publications (Arctic and Northern Waters and High Latitude Sailing). It has been written by Steve Brown who is an accomplished high latitude sailor. As is typical of Steve, it is comprehensive, informative with clear explanations and up to date information.

Gear and Equipment: this covers some items which are particularly important in high latitudes (survival suits, flotation suits, tuks etc) as well as more general advanced long distance cruising equipment.

Communications: many of the subjects covered in this chapter will be useful to well found yachts cruising in any part of the world.

Safety in High Latitudes: A Man Overboard (MOB) incident is especially dangerous in arctic waters for obvious reasons. This chapter, written by Mark Roye, covers the subject in detail. It has been clearly written by someone who is well informed and thorough - exactly what is required.

Leadership and Safety: I find terms like 'Crew Resource Management' (CRM) and 'SBAR' (Situation, Background, Assessment and Recommendation) a bit scary! However, in essence, Dr Strassberg is saying that the hierarchical management styles of Captain Blyth and Lord Franklin don't work anymore. Perhaps they never did - it wasn't a good outcome for those gentlemen! It is far safer, more efficient and (I think) more enjoyable if good teamwork and easy communication are fostered. Definitely worth reading and acting upon.

Overwintering: this chapter offers suggestions for leaving the boat in Iceland, Greenland, Scotland and Newfoundland as well as general advice. It also includes words of wisdom from Bob Shepton about being iced in and overwintering onboard in a remote anchorage.

Chapters 9 to 12 cover 'Essential Harbors' in the Færoe Islands, Iceland, Greenland, Newfoundland and Labrador. It is not comprehensive as many smaller harbours and anchorages in each region are not included. Each chapter is, however, very informative and well written. Harbours are described in detail and each section includes an overview, approaches, anchoring/docking, 'for the boat', 'for the crew', tourist advice, history and some alternative anchorages.

The final chapter, the Viking Age of Expansion, is a well written and easy to read history of the Viking Route. It will be of great interest to anyone sailing these waters and many others besides.

Sources of further information and web site addresses appear throughout the book.

Bob Shepton wrote the Foreword and, in it, he asks the question 'So, why another guide?' He ends his Foreword with the conclusion: 'This is a valuable additional resource for Arctic sailors of whatever vintage, and I strongly recommend it.' I agree.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading the Viking Route. I am sure the authors will agree that it does not replace pilot books, guides and sailing directions - it is something different. It is informative, well written and I will be recommending it to anyone thinking of sailing in these waters.

Andrew Wilkes
Author of the Pilotage Foundation's *Arctic and Northern Waters*

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Further details :

<https://rccpf.org.uk/pilots/224/CCA-Essentials-Passage-Guide-to-The-Viking-Route>