

## Mike's Reports

### **Mail from Alex**

July 10. 2017

Dear friends,

I am very lucky to have very good crew on board Mike, and English man speaking Swiss German fluently volunteered to write the English log of the journey, which went so far without trouble and with a very good understanding between us. I believe Mike's reports are much better than the German reports I write. Therefore German speaking friends get it as well.

### **Mike's Reports**

#### **Monday 3rd July**

Silmaril with her crew of three (the Skipper Alex, Hanspeter and Mike) set off motoring from Lewisporte, Newfoundland in the early afternoon. Sunny weather and very light breeze accompanied us out towards the Bay of Exploits. First (small) iceberg sighted north of Indian Islands.

Between Indian Islands and Knights the breeze stiffened and we could set the main to test the rigging. After an hour we motored on up to South Samson Island where we anchored for the night behind the small island in Western Harbour. A gentle first leg of 15nm and a beautiful anchor spot to round up the first day!

#### **Tuesday 4th July**

After casting off at 09.30 we spent the sunny, calm morning motor-sailing out into Notre Dame Bay. Occasional Iceberg sightings, but no problems.

At around 13.00hrs the wind built up to blow a force 5 from NE, the temperature dropped and it started raining. Perfect for sailing! Genoa and main at reef 2 set and off we went! Sailed across the bay to arrive at Snook's Arm at 16.30.

In Snook's Arm we moored at the (abandoned) wharf, found electricity but no water. The village seemed inhabited but we only saw one "native".

37nm with a bit everything! Including an introduction to adventurous mooring at rather deteriorated wharves!

#### **Wednesday 5th July**

Early start (05.45) with a light following wind up the coast and around Cape St. John in the sun across the bay to Englee in Canada Bay. After around 3 hours we could set the genoa and rev back the motor to motor-sail at between 6 and 7kts for most of the day.

Arrived at Englee at 17.00 after deciding to go around the island and enter from the north and moor at the Govt. Wharf. Unfortunately, the wharf is under construction and we had little choice but to moor up on the east side at a completely dilapidated quay where we risked life and limb climbing over rocks, old fishing equipment and gaping holes every time we left the boat. Later we discovered that we could have entered from the south and moored at the marine centre. This would have saved us at least 30 minutes time and would have been much more comfortable as a mooring. Oh well! One is always wiser afterwards!

After a good 65nm leg, we found Englee to be a small friendly fishing community with a well-stocked store and even a café with internet!

### **Thursday 6th July**

Another early start to make sure of getting to St. Anthony in good time. After a tricky manoeuvre to get away from "our building site quay" we were faced with strong NW winds coming over the hills gusting to over 40kts in Canada Bay. The 45 minutes it took us to struggle out of the bay woke us up nicely!

After a couple of hours, we had enough of a following wind to set the genoa and sail on up to St. Anthony. Arriving in the St. Anthony Arm we were suddenly greeted by warm (almost 20C) NW wind which increased to around 20Kts to "help" us moor up at the Govt. Wharf. Once again, this wharf turned out to be in a very poor state and despite two other motorboats there, we spent an hour fixing the water hose!

In the evening we walked out to the lighthouse and had an excellent meal there at the restaurant. After another 56nm it was good to walk a while on solid ground and fill our bellies with tasty food.

### **Friday 7th July**

Day spent in St. Anthony. Shopping, checking engine, refuelling and communicating with the "outside world".

### **Saturday 8th July**

6 o'clock start to motor up the coast to White Point and then over the Belle Isle Straits to Battle Harbour. Either not enough wind or then wind directly from behind lead us to motor almost all the way. One small spell of wind around 10-15Kts prompt us to put the sails up, but the whole exercise lasts only around 2 hours and then we were back motoring.

Our first fishing (line towed behind boat) result this morning was not a happy one! One common seagull decided to have a nibble at the hook and unfortunately got itself caught. After dragging the line, lure and bird back to the boat, we sent the poor chap to a watery grave. R.I.P. seagull!

Our arrival at the Labrador coast was witnessed by a couple of very large icebergs and plenty of growlers which we managed to navigate around with no problems. Slightly more adventurous was our approach to Battle Harbour from the south. This involved negotiating the "South Tickle", which is a very narrow and shallow channel into Battle Harbour from the South. Most ships go around and come in from the North, but we were told that there was enough depth for Silmaril and with Hanspeter positioned on the bow and Alex and Mike at the helm steering, consulting the depth readings and following the detailed track. The currents from the rear were not easy to judge and the whole channel (tickle) consists of an S-bend, but once we had committed ourselves there was no room for faint hearted turning back. With at times only 40cm to spare under the keel we made it!

So after 11 hours and around 60sm we moored up at the historic wharf of Battle Harbour. The whole place is a living museum and a genuine highlight on anyone's itinerary. Facilities are good (but no propane!!) and the welcome warm and friendly. Only two other visitors were on the island and we had dinner together with them in the museum canteen. They turned out to be a young couple from Lenzburg in Switzerland, just a few kilometers from where we three live(d)! Small world

### **Sunday, 9th July**

A well-earned day of rest in Battle Harbour! And a very tasty breakfast of poached eggs on salmon cakes in the canteen. Despite the temperature and mist (both hanging very low!) we had a very pleasant day doing small chores on the boat, writing emails, walking around the Battle Island and visiting the various buildings which are open to the public and stuffed with exhibits from the fishing industry and earlier life on the island. Many informative posters tell first-hand tales of shipwrecks, domestic and public hardships and how the island functioned in days gone by. Battle Island should be on anyone's Labrador itinerary. During the day the guys employed by the Battle Harbour Trust helped us out with a canister of diesel and two canisters of drinking water which they filled up in St. Mary's Harbour around the bay.

During the day four visitors arrived on the island and one other sailing yacht. Only two of the visitors stayed on the island and the sailing yacht sailed off in the early evening to find an anchorage on the opposite side of the bay. The young crew of the (Norwegian registered) yacht consisted of two Norwegians a Swede and a Brit. They too want to cross over to Greenland and are waiting for a suitable weather window. We exchanged a few stories and found out that they have been on the so-called "milk-run": Norway-Canaries-Caribbean-Labrador-Greenland-Iceland-Norway for around 18 months. This is classified as a relatively slow run! They filmed their arrival in Battle Harbour from a drone. We thankfully copied the file because Silmaril (and her crew) play supporting roles in the film.

### **Monday 10th July**

From Battle Harbour we intend to sail up to Cartwright in 3 legs in three days: 1) Eagle Cove, 2) Black Tickle/Salmon Bite, 3) Cartwright.

We leave Battle Harbour early and with poor SE winds we motor most of the way. At around 10.30 we try sailing for an hour but the winds drop again. So we settle down for an uneventful day motoring. Along the way we successfully "fish" a small lump of iceberg to save for our nightcap. We arrive at Eagle Cove in good time and drop the anchor. Increasing winds in the cove and an insecure anchor-holding lead us to decide to lift the anchor and complete our second leg in day 1. A big decision as it means getting to Black Tickle/Salmon Bite at 20.30; but the days are long up here and we will have enough light to complete the approach.

We motor up the Squasho Run, a relatively narrow channel around 2sm long with 2kts current running against us. Once we arrived in the channel it started to rain and did not stop until we reached Black Tickle/Salmon Bite. Horizontal, icy rain kept us wet and not so merry for the rest of the day. At least our arrival was dry!

Black Tickle/Salmon Bite (two merged settlements, hence the double name) used to be a small fishing community with a functioning wharf. The relatively recently renovated wharf closed two years ago and the community is the object of a government relocation programme. The community doctor is no longer there, only 17 children attend the school and no employment prospects at all contribute to a pretty sad picture. How these communities survive at all is a mystery. In summer they have one ferry a week, in winter they drive around 100kms over the ice to get fuel and supplies. An airfield in the vicinity also provides a bit of relief, weather permitting.

So with no electricity and no water but with the heating full on to dry out we settled down for a steak dinner preceded by a whisky on real iceberg ice. A warming end to a long, chilly, damp trip of over 75nm.

### **Tuesday, 11th July**

Another early start on a dry, calm and sunny morning. In the perfectly smooth waters of the bay outside Black Tickle/Salmon Bite we fill up the tank with two canisters of diesel. Whilst we were doing this we saw a whale lazily blowing its spout about 100m from the Silmaril. After this we have another spectacularly uneventful but very warm and sunny day motoring up to Cartwright. Like yesterday we try another one hour of sailing around midday but with no great satisfaction. In the sun and calm seas between the islands we witness a number of mirages in which the coastline appears stretched vertically by means of the warm air and reflection in the water. What look like the white cliffs of Dover one minute collapse into a thin line of stones the next.

At 17.30 we arrive in Cartwright. Another small town with a recently closed wharf (no electricity or water again!) Black flies and a couple of Cartwright residents greet us. Dinner on the boat and an earlyish night. Tomorrow we will sit out the forecast storm and see what this community has to offer.

### **Wednesday, 12th July**

Waking up to a treacherous climb up the unrepaired wharf wall (low tide!) and a very brisk breeze coming in from the Southwest lead us to spend some time arranging the mooring lines for all eventualities. At the end of almost one hour's work we are satisfied and can enjoy our breakfast before going out to discover Cartwright. This is a small town with around 570 inhabitants, which centres around a fish processing plant. Although the wharf is officially closed and hence no electricity or water, there are many fishing vessels going about the business unloading at the plant and moving over to the wharf to complete repairs and check equipment. It is the end of the crab season and so the wharf is full of crab pots piled up waiting to be stored away for next season. The crab harvest (as they say here in Canada) has been a success this year. The fishermen have earned top prices for their snow crab. We hear that landing a full quota can bring way over \$100'000. The fishermen are now waiting for the turbot season to begin in August.

On arriving back from successfully buying shrimps at the fish plant, unsuccessfully trying to get an internet connection at the school library (closed for the Summer break) but finding a good connection in the pub (no beer until 6pm!) we find we have new neighbours! During the day the exploration sailing yacht Vagabond has moored up alongside us. The Vagabond has quite a reputation as a purpose built yacht for extreme conditions. A visit to their website ([vagabond.fr](http://vagabond.fr)) is well worthwhile. We exchange a few stories and tips with France, Eric and their two daughters before retiring to our scrumptious shrimp dinner courtesy of Hanspeter.

### **Thursday, 13th July**

Another day in Cartwright and an important one. We decide to leave straight from here to cross the Labrador Sea to Greenland. The decision whether to leave on Friday, 14th or Saturday, 15th is left until the weather reports and forecasts we can receive in the evening at the pub (after 6pm!).

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We spend the day preparing for the crossing, having a wonderfully hot shower at the fish plant and pre-cooking a couple of meals for the trip.

In the evening we decide to leave early the next morning, so as to be able to follow an area of low pressure across the Labrador Sea. So after a warming bowl of homemade carrot soup, we retire relatively early so as to be ready for the departure.

### **Friday, 14th July**

Bastille day for France and departure day for Silmaril. We cast off at 05.30 and motor out between the islands and bays before setting the sails at 07.30. Much to our frustration, the wind does not remain stable and we have to continue under engine at 09.30. The rest of the day is spent under motor with occasional help from the genoa. The weather is overcast, the slight wind blows directly behind us and the Labrador Current is against us. All in all a cold, grey day only warmed up by a hearty bowl of chili con carne and livened up by our first sighting of puffins. We are now shifting on to a 4-hour rota system: 4 hours sleep, 4 hours standby and 4 hours on watch. So the four or so days it will take us for the crossing will blend into a series of 4 hour blocks.

### **Saturday, Sunday, Monday, 15th - 17th July**

With our 4-hour rotation scheme we settle down to crossing the Sea of Labrador. Destination Paamiut. We benefit from following winds but on Sunday we have to motor for most of the day as our speed over ground slows drastically as the wind speeds drop.

Nights are short up here in the North. The sun sets at around 22.00 but the sunset's orange afterglow remains on the horizon for another couple of hours whilst it slowly moves east. It only gets really dark for three hours before the dawn light (this time silver grey in colour) splits the horizon. By the change of shift at 04.00 we are already working in a dim light with no need for lamps at all.

We are accompanied by a couple of pairs of seagulls and their young. The birds circle the boat, skimming over the waves and occasionally "land" on the water to let us sail on by and then take off on their circling again. We are not 100% sure, but they do seem to be the same individual birds all the way across, but how they nourish themselves remains a mystery.

Our course takes us to the Northeast and we soon pass 60°N! However, by Monday, 17th our weather data shows that a nasty front is building up and descending on our route from the North. At first we decide to try and sail further North to get behind it, but all this achieves is a strong headwind and impossible sailing conditions as Silmaril has to slam her way over the oncoming waves. After a short spell of the roller-coaster ride, we decide to change course and destination altogether and head in an easterly direction to a town called Qaqortoq further to the South of Paamiut. This decision proves to be advantageous in many ways: we avoid the front, we can sail right into and through the night with good winds at a good average speed of more than 6 knots and by 22.30 we see the peaks of the mountains on the aptly named Cape Desolation around 80nm northwest of Qaqortoq. Our heating in the boat is not functioning, so the cold temperatures bite even more than expected. It is difficult to get warm, but we are optimistic the problem can be solved once we are moored in Qaqortoq.

### **Tuesday, 18th July**

A long approach motoring on calm, smooth seas into Qaqortoq is finally rewarded with a mooring at the container quay next to two Norwegian yachts, which had arrived the day before. Qaqortoq is a pretty 3'200 inhabitant town of very colourfully painted houses clinging to a hillside leading down to the port. Our new Norwegian neighbours tell us we have just missed another Swiss yacht which has departed towards the Prins Christian Sund passage through the fjords at the southernmost tip of Greenland, despite this being still blocked with ice at the eastern end.

So we have sailed around 600nm in just under five days and four nights. It was a cold and at times wet passage and we are glad to get into a secure harbour, toast our arrival with last drop or two of Canadian whisky, eat a good warm meal and retire to the pub, not to continue drinking (!) but to get a stable internet connection. Hanspeter decides to get a room in the hotel, so that we can all benefit from a hot shower in the morning.

Tomorrow we hope to discover a bit more of our new and unplanned port of call Qaqortoq.

### **Wednesday, 19th July**

Hot showers all round and a good breakfast! What luxury! A good start to a day that ends with a hint of frustration. The heating problems have been diagnosed, but not yet solved. We will have to wait until tomorrow to comb Qaqortoq for the necessary valves and tubes to ensure that when the engine runs it does suck diesel from the heating system and vice versa. Otherwise we spend a rainy day in Qaqortoq checking in with the laid back but very helpful local police, finding where we can find water and diesel, locating the town laundry, exchanging money (Danish Kroner) and getting a Greenland sim card.

A cruise ship, the Marco Polo, with around 700 passengers, stops and anchors next to the iceberg outside the harbour in the afternoon. All the passengers are ferried across to the town quay and swarm out through the town huddling under umbrellas and all dressed in multiple layers of sometimes outrageously brightly coloured outdoor clothing. We find out they have exactly five hours of freedom before being ferried back to their ship again. They had been expecting to be cruising up the fjords to view the calving glaciers, but their captain had informed them that pack-ice and fog was preventing them. Everyone we heard this from added that they were not sure whether they believed this disappointing news about their cruise. Could this discontent and disbelief be leading to a "Mutiny on the Marco Polo"?!

In the evening the young Norwegians we met in Battle Harbour arrived! So there are now four yachts in the harbour. A late drink exchanging tales of the crossing from Labrador with our young friends ends our first day in Qaqortoq.

### **Thursday, Friday, Saturday, 20th-22nd July**

A couple of factors have lead us to the decision to stay on in Qaqortoq (pronounced kakORtok) for a few days, so this report will now take on a more thematic structure rather than a strictly chronological one.

So why are we staying here for a while? ....

The biggest consideration is the exceptional ice situation around Cape Farvel. The locals tell us the ice at the cape and on the southeast coast disappeared weeks ago but the latest ice charts show that it has come back down from the

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northeast coast in force. This means that the eastern exit of Prins Christian Sund (the safe inland way of navigating through fjords to get around the southernmost tip of Greenland) is blocked with ice. Sailing around Cape Farvel to the South is not advised as this is classified as one of the world's more dangerous capes because the strong currents transporting the ice down from the Northeast meet the prevailing weather systems and winds which usually come in from the Northwest. Even sailing out the recommended 100-200nm to the South to avoid this collision of currents and winds does not seem feasible because many icebergs have been sighted far out at sea.

Getting the Silmaril ready for the next stage of our journey and more specifically hunting down the necessary bits and pieces of tubes, valves and clips here in Qaqortoq just takes time. By Friday afternoon everything is back in perfect working order thanks to Alex's persistence and skill. We have been helped by extremely friendly people in all the workshops and stores we have visited. We have been ferried around in a pick up truck in search of a piece of tubing for the heating and we have been given a helping hand by the Danish Navy (see below) to fill up our water tanks.

On Thursday and Friday Qaqortoq experienced Summer! Brilliant sunshine and high temperatures (12°C!) transform the town. Everyone sits outside, promenades along the harbour wall and treats themselves to ice creams. We do not want to miss this surprise bout of summertime and after a cool fruity smoothy on the cafe terrace, Hanspeter and Mike take a 3 hour hike around lake Tasersuaq just behind Qaqortoq to the Northwest. The terrain is similar to alpine terrain in Switzerland, only here in Greenland we can see the coastline with its icebergs and feel the sea mist rolling in through the valley. Breathtaking and unique!

Our little community of vessels moored on the container dock changes as the days pass. The three Norwegian sailing yachts depart and head southeast to Uunartoq island (between here and the Prins Christian Sund), where they plan to take advantage of the hot springs there. This is definitely a point on our itinerary when we head down there too. A Danish naval patrol vessel arrived and moored up next to us. The boat had a crew of 13 very relaxed and friendly Danish sailors. The boat is on its last 5-year patrol in Greenland waters before finally returning to Denmark to be retired and replaced by a more modern ship. We could feel how sad the crew were when they told us this. They have apparently become quite attached to "their" little patrol boat. After a night alone on the quay, Silmaril is joined by the Irena Arctica on Saturday. She is a container ship measuring around 110m. A bit of a squeeze with the mooring lines but now we are safely tucked behind the towering red bow of a container ship!

### **Sunday, 23rd July**

Had it not been for the terrible weather, we would have left today. The whole day was rainy, foggy and windy in Qaqortoq and the conditions outside at sea were even worse. So we decided to have a "lazy Sunday", reading and catching up on contacts with the rest of the world. Before commencing a gripping description of our lazy Sunday, it is worth noting that despite the weather, the harbour was very busy. The Danish navy and the container ship both left and a small tanker arrived. We were also joined by and formed a raft with a

Greenlandic motorboat and an American couple on a sailing yacht returning to Lake Superior from Preston in England via Iceland, Greenland and Canada. Later on another yacht crewed by two Germans on their way back to Hamburg from the north west coast of Greenland joined our merry band in the harbour.

Our Sunday was punctuated by a number of adjustments and re-adjustments to our mooring lines as the wind increased and the other yachts had to move to make room for the tanker. Other "interruptions" included a gift of around one kilo of prawns from our Greenland raft neighbours. We consumed these (prawns, not neighbours) surprisingly (sic) quickly. We also sifted through the various weather forecasts and reports in which we learned that Prins Christian Sund is still officially closed by ice, but despite this our American couple entered and got through. All this is very confusing and we will have to keep an eye on the situation as we move south later in the week. Our day of rest was crowned by high drama as the tanker tried to reverse off the quay and could not quite get enough momentum to maneuver properly. After struggling with the high winds she slowly came back to touch the quay head-on in order to be able to lever herself into a better angle to reverse out into clear waters. It seemed like half the population of Qaqortoq arrived at the harbour to witness this extraordinary maneuver. Everyone knew better than the poor soul up on the bridge how to do it better. They finally got out and the hubble-bubble on the quay deflated as Qaqortoq (including ourselves...after five days here we consider ourselves part of the town!) drifted back off to bed.

### **Monday, 24th July**

Today we leave Qaqortoq! Diesel and water filled, last emails written and weather data downloaded, farewells all round we motor slowly out of Qaqortoq for the first time since last Tuesday evening. It was a long stay and we all three are itching to get going again.

Our first day takes us just around the corner only 10nm up an inlet to a place called Hvalsey. Here we anchor for the night near a small at present uninhabited sheep farm. The surrounding countryside is difficult to describe, at once challenging and magical. The high cliffs and mountains and sweeping green slopes beg answers as to how they were formed in a geological sense, how they were inhabited up to the middle ages and how they must look for most of the year when covered in snow and ice. As the sun goes down but still lightens the skies the atmosphere changes with the hours: wisps of mist, an orange glow behind the hills, a purple patch of cloudless sky behind a distant mountain, the bleating of sheep and quacking of ducks all fill the enormous tranquility and isolation of this place. Tomorrow we will explore the remains of the old Norse settlement and see the ruins of the large church which was built around 1300. The day rounds up with a feast of freshly caught cod which seem to bite the hooks on Alex's jigging line as soon as puts it into the water.

### **Tuesday, 25th July**

We wake up to a wonderfully clear and crisp morning at anchor in a deserted lake/fjord. We are alone here in Hvalsey!. Overnight, as the tide retreated a large stone which was charted some 100m to the West appears to the East very near the Silmaril just above water level and shows us that we had been disturbingly close to running aground as we searched for the best anchorage last night!



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We row across to the shore in the dinghy and spend around 3 hours on land. Opposite our anchorage there is an apparently abandoned farm, which we later find out is occasionally used as an agricultural research base. Dotted further to north are a couple of very small, uninhabited houses which are probably used in season by sheep farmers. On the far shore we spot five sheep grazing on the sparse grass.

After a short hike to the West we come across what in Greenlandic is called Qaqortukuluup oqaluffia nunaatilissuullu nunaqarfia. What we see are the ruins of Hvalsey church and the Omagnate's settlement. This is an important archeological site as it documents the centre of the old Norse settlement which at its peak consisted of around thirty dwellings at this flat, fertile end of the fjord. We read once again that no-one really knows why the Norse settlers disappeared from the area in the 14th century. One theory is that they were attacked and driven out by Inuits from the north. Another theory is that they left as the average temperatures dropped and life too difficult for them. As the clouds close in and the wind-chill increases the second theory seem more plausible to us! We leave the site and return cold but safe to the Silmaril thanks to an heroic row across the turning tide and the now swirling currents by Hanspeter.

The rest of the day is spent motoring back past Qatartoq around to Narsaq. This is a small town, similar to Qaqortoq but with a population of just 1,300. Here we moor up in the protected harbour just opposite the biggest slaughterhouse and meat processing plant in Greenland. This does not sound very attractive, but in fact we are not at all disturbed by the blue building, which appears much like a scaled down warehouse than an industrial plant. No electricity and no water but a safe haven for the night after a shortish leg of around 35nm.

### **Wednesday, 26th July**

A day in Narsaq. Today is overcast and there is a little rain in the morning. We explore the town, which is spread out to encompass two small inlets: one with the harbour and docking facilities for fishing boats and ferries and a smaller one with jetties for private motor boats. Most interesting for us was our visit to the tiny but very informative museum which showed how the Inuits lived up until the mid twentieth century. How the men managed to fit into, let alone hunt seals in their sleek one-man kayaks escapes us! The women went hunting in boats too and supported the men in their hunting. Women's boats were called Umiaqs, carried up to six to eight women and were flat bottomed to make it possible to drag up the shore and invert to use them as provisional huts.

After the museum we retire to the hotel for food and a hot shower. On the way back to the harbour we see that the Narsaq cultural centre's (another even smaller scaled down warehouse-type building) door is open. We go in and have an interesting chat with the young curator there. He is Danish and has been in Narsaq for four years. As an employee of the municipality of Narsaq he manages the museum and the cultural centre. Once again we hear some disturbing information about Greenland and its people: more than 25% unemployment, high rates of suicide, frequent cases of incest and a government which seems to be aiming towards independence from Denmark even if this would mean a reduction in the already precariously low living standards for the majority of the population. Denmark's maintenance of Greenland costs billions and seems

to function simultaneously as Greenland's umbilical cord and its rusty chains. A Gordian knot which no-one seems to be able to unravel!

Tomorrow we head northeast up the fjord to Nassarsuaq where we hope to visit Eric the Red's settlement and encounter our first glacier. The natural beauty of Greenland will, we trust, bring us back to another more positive reality!

### **Thursday 27th July**

Our departure out of Narsaq had to first be negotiated with a small iceberg (about the size of a piano) which had found its way into the harbour overnight. Without too much persuasion it squeezed itself into another corner and we could slip out without any risk.

Our aim for today is to go up the Y-shaped Tunilliarfik fjord and then try and see the glacier which breaks into its eastern arm called Qooqut. Arriving at the split in the fjord we quickly realise that there is no way we can motor further as the broken glacier ice gets denser and denser defeating even Alex's slalom steering skills. We later learn that the glacier produces over 200'000 tons of ice per day so it was not surprising that it fills the fjord for a length of around 10 kilometers. Sliding slowly through the hundreds of ice clumps varying in size from the size of a teacup to the dimensions of a detached house is a magical experience. The ice is constantly being moved by the currents and wind, it is melting and breaking up and each iceberg has its own shape and character. Some are smooth others jagged, some like blocks and some sculptured like fantastic animals, some white, others blue and the very hard ones are transparent. It is eerily quiet. The loudest sound is the snap and crackle of melting ice as it expands, cracks and drips. I have not heard anything like it since my last bowl of Kellogs Rice Crispies. We are very lucky as all this takes place under a clear blue sky and brilliant sunshine that just about manages to compensate for the cold air in the ice field.

We give up trying to get further up Qooqut and turn up the western arm of the fjord and motor (still dodging icebergs) to anchor at Qassiarsuk on the western shore. Just a kilometer to the North of Qassiarsuk is Brattahlid, an Old Norse settlement where Eric the Red and his wife Thjodhild lived in the early 11th century. A local guide named Maria (!) shows us around the replicas of Eric the Red's long house and the tiny chapel he had built for his wife. Maria interlaces her tour with references to the sagas, historical facts and even stories from her own family - what a privilege to have such a guide! It was Eric the Red who named this land "Greenland" and in this corner of the enormous white country one can see why. The countryside between the fjords and mountains is flat, green and fertile. Sheep farming is the most important activity and we are told that the reason why there are no bothersome black flies and mosquitos here is that they do not like Sheep urine! So now we know: no more chemicals, the best repellent comes out of the back end of a sheep . . .

I will refrain from going into a detailed account of what Maria told us but I will note an update on the mystery of the disappearance of the Norsemen from Greenland. We now have at least five theories: a) the worsening climatic conditions; b) attacks by Inuits from the North; c) an outbreak of the plague; d) the increased need for farmers "back home" in Scandinavia as a consequence of the plague there or e) the dip in demand for the only big export from Greenland at the time, namely oil derived from seal blubber, as the end of the wars in Europe freed up trade routes to the South and to alternative sources of

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oil for burning. Theory a) seems to be out of favour because the Norsemen stayed here in Greenland during the coldest period in the 12th Century. We lift anchor and motor just 2nm across the fjord to Nassarsuaq. Here we moor at the quay, ready to explore the old 2nd World War American Airbase tomorrow.

### **Friday, 28th July**

Another gloriously sunny day! We walk the 1 kilometre from the quay to the group of buildings, which calls itself Nassarsuaq City. During the 2nd World War, after the USA and Denmark signed a contract by which the USA became responsible for the defence of Greenland, the Americans built three airbases in the country. Nassarsuaq was one of these and was known as Blue West One. Within less than a year between 1941 and 1942 they erected a complete town housing hundreds of personnel, a major hospital and of course a very busy airfield. During the war over 10'000 airplanes landed and took off from this airfield as they refuelled on their way from the USA to Europe and back. The dimensions of the project and activity at this airfield are dizzying. Today (the Americans left in the 1950's) we do not see much evidence of this once bustling town. There is still an airport serving mostly inland flights and with one connection to Iceland, a cafe, a shop and a museum. In the airport we meet two employees of the Danish Meteorological Institute (DMI)'s Ice Patrol. They fill us in as to how they gather information on ice conditions around the Greenland coast by flying over the coast taking aerial photographs, combining this with satellite imagery and gps information on the bigger icebergs and how they publish it via their Ice Charts. These charts are one of the most important navigational tools when sailing around this coast. We hear from them that the Ice Patrol at Nassarsuaq airport is to be soon disbanded, as the DMI wants to provide the same service using only satellite pictures. When we here how much the current operation costs (eg. 3'000 Euros per hour of helicopter flight) it is not surprising that the DMI is looking for ways of saving.

We leave Nassarsuaq at around noon and motor off down the fjord and back south to Qaqortoq. This journey takes us around 8 hours and we only manage to get the sails out for approximately 40 minutes due to lack of or adverse winds. On the map we note that as the crow flies the journey would have been less than 40kms. We are not complaining! An afternoon and evening travelling through the fjords in bright sunshine was worth every minute.

What a contrastful experience we have had! The visit to Eric the Red soaked in culture, sagas and human history stretching over hundreds of years and then on the other side of the fjord a modern phenomenon of a major airfield being stamped out of the ground within one year, around five years of brash, noisy beehive-like activity which then disappears almost as fast as it came. Despite the contrasts and dimensions of both era's will leave their mark in Greenland's history.

So now at 8 O'clock in the evening we are back in Qaqortoq where we will refuel and wait for better news on the ice conditions through the Prins Christian Sund.

### **Saturday, 29th July**

Another day in Qaqortoq. We spend the day refuelling with diesel, filling up the water tanks, doing our laundry on deck and catching up on emails and weather reports in the good old trusty pub. The pub is where we get our internet link

and although Alex has problems getting a connection on his laptop which means a longer than expected sojourn in our favourite watering hole (!) we manage to download and send everything we need.

Thanks to the warmth of the sunshine our laundry is dry when we get back on board. An improvised yellow Thai curry with tofu (not a typical Greenlandic dish) from Silamril's galley and a decision to move on down to the hot springs at Unartoq brings our last day in Qaqortoq to a close.

### **Sunday, 30th July**

We leave the harbour at 07:30 gently feeling our way out in very thick fog. At its worst we see no more than 30 m in any direction. Motoring very slowly and with the help of the radar and one man positioned at the bow we move out of the bay to round Akia, the island to the South of Qaqortoq. We motor for around 40nm in very poor visibility, avoiding icebergs and their broken off growlers and icy and bergy bits. Within a couple of minutes the air clears and we find ourselves in Unartoq fjord surrounded by majestic, snow topped mountains and blue skies. The sea mist is still hanging on the hills and on the other side of Unartoq island. After anchoring in a small bay to the East of the island we launch the dinghy to get on land and find the famous hot springs. Unfortunately we first walk in the wrong direction and spend an hour searching the (very small) island for the springs. So much for our navigation skills on land! After moving around to the next beach with the dinghy we finally stumble across the hot springs with the two(!) changing huts. Alex had to go back and check on the dinghy, but I suspect he is not too disappointed at missing out on stripping down in less than 5°C with a biting wind to jump into a small (around 10m in diameter) pond of warm (ca. 25°C) water.

Hanspeter and Mike take the plunge into, or rather sit down in the 50cm deep pool for 10 minutes of absolute heavenly warmth before taking the even colder step of climbing out, drying off and getting dressed as quickly as imaginably possible. A chilly adventure but well worth the effort! As I write this report neither of us show any signs of having caught a cold, so it must have been healthy!

The sea mist descends once more as we eat our supper and have an earlyish night at anchor in clam waters.

### **Monday, 31st July**

Fog again this morning! We have to creep away from our anchorage and again rely heavily on our gps, charts, radar and especially Hanspeter who stands watch on the bow of the boat. The slow progress through the mist allows us time for reflection and one omission from yesterday's report springs to mind: whilst walking in the wrong direction to find the hot springs I saw an arctic fox in its dark brown/black summer fur lolloping away from me between the rocks. We have noted on many occasions that there is really very little wildlife to be seen along the Greenland coast, so to see a surprisingly large fox (around two to three times the size of a domestic cat) was a remarkable event. During the day when the visibility is good we occasionally see a curious seal or two poking its snout out of the water to see who is in their waters. There are always a few seagulls circling around and very rarely we spot a guillemot or two diving away when we get too close. Otherwise Greenland seems not only sparsely inhabited by humans but is also hardly teeming with wildlife.

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Our objective for the day is to reach Nanortalik which is about 40nm away. It is the last town before entering the western approach to Prins Christian Sund. At 11 O'clock the fog raises and we find ourselves in the middle of what Hanspeter called "the alps dropped into the ocean". High peaks, steep cliffs, dramatic screes and swathes of green on the saddles and slopes of the surrounding countryside accompany us all the way to Nanortalik. We arrive in the early evening and moor up at the dock, which smells of rotten fish! Either due to a changing wind or our noses getting used to it, we soon smell nothing and we go into the village to do a bit of shopping and get some diesel fuel. In the evening we eat dinner at the only hotel in Nanortalik. It turns out to be a rather good meal of roast lamb, green beans and potatoes. This is not exactly what we ordered and was not even on the menu. After being told that half the items on the menu were not available, we settled for hamburgers. 15 minutes later we were informed that we could not have hamburgers because they had no salad! So we reluctantly chose chicken wings only to be told 15 minutes later that there were no chicken wings! And so in the end (after another long wait) we received lamb. Maybe we are just a bit too spoilt with regard to service standards, but the whole episode did seem somewhat curious! We get back to the Silmaril and find our single-handed Norwegian sailor who we met in Narsaq and Qaqortoq moored up alongside us. We decide to sail together for the passage through the Prins Christian Sund and on to Iceland. It will be good to have the company!

### **Tuesday, 1st August**

The Swiss National Day today, but no alphorns to wake us up in the morning, just a 2m high iceberg tapping gently on the stern of the Silmaril! We manage to push it away using the 4m long pieces of wood we picked up back in Cartwright for exactly this purpose! We call the pieces of wood our toothpicks, and they certainly come in handy today!

The weather is sunny and calm again and we set off with Lars on his yacht called Pomona around 100m behind us.

We take what is known as the inner lead around to the entrance to the Sund. This means weaving in and out of the small islands along the coast and we squeeze the yachts through narrow and quite shallow passages whilst curving around icebergs. A wonderful day on the water! The landscape is breathtaking offering us everything from bizarrely shaped mountain peaks reaching from water level up to over 1'500m, waterfalls tumbling down from the ice fields up in the mountains, vertical walls of rock looming over us right down to picturesque inlets and natural harbours along the shore. As well as the landscape the sea and the fjords are dotted with spectacular icebergs and the clicking of our cameras hardly abates as we spin around from one photo opportunity to the next. The sun shines all day and once in the Torssuqataq fjord we even get enough wind from behind to put out the genoa to help us speed along towards our next "port of call" in Augpilagtoq. Augpilagtoq is a very small village in a minute inlet just off the northern side of the fjord. It has a population of less than 100 but still sports a shop and diesel supplies. We arrive here at around 17.00 after another 40nm and once we are moored up on the very short dock we see not only Lars coming in through the narrow entrance to the inlet behind us but a Dutch sailing boat too. We make a raft of the three boats and find out that the Dutch boat has just arrived from Iceland coming in

through the southerly approach to Prins Christian Sund. We have a phonecall with the Ice Patrol booked for tomorrow at 10 O'clock and then we will hear whether the conditions will allow us to complete the Sund and start our passage to Iceland tomorrow or not.

So whilst we hold fire on our decision how to proceed and wait the latest weather and ice reports, we invite Lars to join us in eating a hearty portion of spaghetti.

### **Wednesday, 2nd August**

We are waiting for the latest Ice Patrol report and so spend the morning replacing the diesel we used yesterday so that we are ready to go whenever we want. We find some more apples in the Aappilattoq shop, but that is all! We do not really need anything else; our provisions are good! However, it is odd to go to a supermarket and find that you can get anything you need for fishing and seal hunting (including rifles and ammunition) but only a few basic ingredients for a family meal.

We receive a visit from 4 young kids who are curious to see the boat. They all clamber down into the saloon and through a mixture of gestures, smiles and Swiss chocolate we manage to communicate with them. The Swiss chocolate was probably a mistake as they turned up later in the day asking for more! So there it is! We do not leave Aappilattoq today because the weather report is not in our favour. The Ice Patrol has bad weather back in Nassarssuaq, despite it being fantastically sunny here, so they will only fly over the Prins Christian Sund tomorrow and only then be able to give us an accurate picture of the ice conditions.

We wander around the village and see a couple of locals, but not many. As it says in our guide: Aappilattoq is a community in decline. Despite a functioning school, a church, a shop and a well equipped but empty fish factory we can confirm that the place definitely looks like it is on its last legs.

With great expectations for tomorrow, we have an early night after pushing away the odd iceberg or two, which had crept up to the harbour through the narrow entrance to the inlet and are threatening the boat.

### **Thursday, 3rd August**

Today is the day! We decide, together with our Norwegian single-handed sailing friend Lars, that we are going to set off and listen to the report along the way. But our departure is delayed yet again! The wind is blowing strongly into the harbour and has positioned two large icebergs right at the entrance. We wait for another 30 minutes to make sure they are no longer moving and then squeeze ourselves through the narrowest of gaps between the icebergs and the rocks. Quite a start to what turns out to be a magical day.

We turn into the fjord system, which leads us through to the Atlantic at the eastern exit of Prins Christian Sund. The way through the fjords provides us once more with breathtaking scenery on a brilliantly sunny day. How lucky we are with the weather! Soaring mountains, glaciers, waterfalls, ravines, you name it, we saw it! We spend the whole day pointing out fascinating details of the landscape to each other until we reach the last couple of miles to the exit. Our friends from the Ice Patrol fly overhead and call us up on VHF radio to tell us there is ice in the Prins Christian Sund and at the exit. They tell us that we can get through the fjord by staying on the south side. Unfortunately they cannot tell

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us much about the ice outside the exit because there is a thick bank of fog. So we decide to stop at the abandoned weather station at the exit and decide what to do then. When we arrive there we are disappointed to find the small quay completely blocked with ice. Even a local trawler cannot get through the ice to tie up there. So we decide (still with Lars) to head out directly through the fog and ice and start the passage to Iceland. This decision is not an easy one. It is 18.30 and although we still have at least 5 hours of daylight, the combination of fog and ice is not one we want to sail through. So it is with trepidation that we set off. As I write this it is 22:00 and we have had no ice for at around two hours. The fog is still present, but the radar is doing a grand job! Hanspeter did a great job steering through the icebergs and growlers in very poor visibility. So we are now on course to Iceland! As on the last passage from Labrador, we are switching over to a four-hour rhythm and so the next report will come from Reykjavik in Iceland, where we hope to be on August 8th or 9th!

### **Friday to Tuesday, 4th to 8th August**

We arrived in Reykjavik Tuesday (yesterday) afternoon and after mooring at the "Concert Hall Marina", a shower and a good meal we have just caught up with a bit of sleep. Now the report for the past 5 days can be written.

Our exit from Prins Christian Sund was, as already mentioned, slow and enveloped in thick fog as night fell on Thursday. One of our last impressions of Greenland was a lone seal sitting on a flat iceberg very close to the Silmaril as we glided by in the fog. It was almost as if he/she was asked to bid us farewell by the Greenland tourist office. Just the perfect way to say goodbye to Greenland!

For the next 48 hours we had no wind, but at least the sea fog lifted. Motoring along for such a long time with little hope of wind for the rest of the trip, we all individually and collectively calculated our projected fuel consumption to Reykjavik a number of times. We always came to the same conclusion: "we have just enough", but this did not stop us from calculating again and again. Finally, on Sunday morning at around 04:00 we had enough wind to turn the motor off and sail. This put a stop to our mathematical musings and finally gave us something physical to do on board. This kept us both warm and concentrated after two days and three nights of relative monotonous motoring in cold temperatures. Sunday and Monday saw us sailing at good speeds of around 6 knots with good winds from North to Northwest. We occasionally even saw the sun, but otherwise it was cloudy and grey. At times the clouds hung low, causing the new wind speeds and directions to keep us on our toes. With regard to the sea conditions, we had spells of 2m high waves coming at us from the North, but otherwise the seas posed few problems. It was interesting to note how the sea temperature rose from under 1 to over 8 degrees, the further Northwest we travelled. We were, at last, feeling the influence of the golf stream.

On Tuesday morning we had our first glimps of Iceland on the horizon. The approach from the West meant that we headed towards the southwest corner of Iceland and so we saw land both ahead of us and to the North. As the morning proceeded the winds picked up and shifted on to our starboard side. We set the sails accordingly and almost "flew" into Reykjavik with a good constant 15-17 knots of wind. This great end to our passage would have been perfect, if it had not been for the heavy rain, which did not let up until almost midnight. Arriving

after almost 700nms since leaving Aappilattoq meant that we hardly noticed getting soaked for the last few hours.

So we have completed our longest passage. Having heard from other boats, we were lucky to have been able to get through and out of the Prins Christian Sund without being totally blocked by ice. Our "friends" in the Ice Patrol helicopter helped us a lot there. We were accompanied by our single-handed sailor Lars who constantly remained within a couple of nautical miles of us throughout the passage. Our sprits remained high and we quickly settled into our 4-hour rhythm. Thanks to the calm seas for the first 48 hours and the good steady sailing later, we were able to eat more regularly and better than on our passage from Labrador to Greenland. Looking back, it is quite amazing (sic) what we managed to concoct over the last five days. Here are a couple of examples: chili con carne, couscous, pasta with tuna fish and salami, sauerkraut with potatoes and ham. The only thing we hoped for but did not have was a freshly caught fish. Maybe next time!

We have heard that the weather towards the Faroe Islands is bad for the next few days, so we will be staying here in Reykjavik for a while until we can plan our next passages. The very small marina is right next to the new modern concert hall building. We have not consulted the programm yet, but I am not sure I can imagine us attending an opera in our sailing gear!

### **Wednesday, 9th August**

Day one in Reykjavik. We spend half the day cleaning the boat, washing and drying clothes using the yacht club's facilities and generally "arriving" in Iceland. The yacht club's facilities (showers toilets and laundry room) are housed in a two-storey building made out of seven containers. It was supposed to be their provisional quarters, but seems to have become a permanent fixture, which is well and truly fused (rusted) onto the quay. But we are not complaining! Everything works and despite the mild sulphur aroma of the hot showers we appreciate the luxury after our North Atlantic crossing.

The rest of the day is spent exploring the town. The weather is sunny but any warmth is negated by a bitterly cold wind blowing in off the sea. Reykjavik is a bustling town! It seems to be mostly devoted to serving the masses of tourists who fill the streets as they search for Icelandic pullovers, outdoor equipment, cuddly puffins and café lattes. The restaurants and cafes are all spilling into the streets, as they try to catch the sun. If it were not for the number of people wearing clothing suitable for arctic conditions, the atmosphere would be almost Mediterranean. There are, however, a couple of brave (or crazy) souls who wear shorts and T-shirts! Reykjavik is also a somewhat eccentric town!

### **Thursday, 10th August**

We attend an organ and double base concert at the Hallgrimskirkja at midday. This church is built entirely of concrete and boasts an impressive spire which looks like Iceland's Scandinavian design answer to the Familia Sagrada in Barcelona: pure and simple in its lines but fundamentally the same shape! The concert provides us with a wonderful oasis of moving music. We all benefit from this break in our daily activities and afterwards calmly and serenely wander down through the sunny town, hardly noticing the thronging crowds, towards a late lunch by the fish harbor.



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We walk through three belts of Reykjavik: new modern buildings, which are mostly still under construction around the harbor, a belt of older converted warehouses and offices and smaller more colourful, individual wooden houses in the more picturesque areas. It is not an elegant town but it does have its pretty corners.

After a short siesta back on the boat we head off into town with our Norwegian friend Lars for a liquid supper with good live music in a small Irish pub (yes, Reykjavik, like all capital cities in the world, has a couple of these too) called the Drunk Rabbit.

### **Friday, 11th August**

Over a very good brunch in the town centre we decide today that we will set off for Vestmannaeyjar (a small group of islands to the south of Iceland) tomorrow. So we spend most of the day preparing the Silmaril and shopping for a few provisions. Amongst other items we try to find fermented shark or Hþkarl, which is billed as Iceland's most traditional dish. Hþkarl is, however, a seasonal product and at the moment not to be found in the shops and supermarkets. Maybe we will find it tomorrow morning in the flea market before we leave. Any description of Iceland should include a mention of the extortionately high prices. Iceland is famous for being expensive and the prices downtown in Reykjavik are very very high. We find prices in the big supermarkets outside the centre are, however, not too exaggerated. The bad reputation probably does stem from the tourist areas in the centre of Reykjavik, otherwise it would be hard to imagine how Icelanders could manage to maintain such a high standard of living after their financial collapse a couple of years ago.

We settle for a supper on the Silmaril this evening, using up some of the provisions we have need to consume before they are fed to the fish. An oriental seafood rice dish emerges which, apart from the chewy shrimps, turned out quite tasty. The lesson here is: if you are using dried shrimps, let them soak for a very long time before cooking!

### **Saturday, 12th August**

Today we intend to sail to the Vestermann Islands to the Southeast of Reykjavik. This will cover over 100nms of the passage to the Faroe Islands or Hoefn on the Southeast coast of Iceland. Once in the Vestermann Islands we will decide whether to sail East to the Faroes or Northeast to Hoefn. At the moment, we have seen that the weather develops rather quickly in this part of the globe, so the Vestermann Islands will give us a vantage from where we can pick the route according to how the weather develops. Going to Hoefn would allow us to make the Faroes in two steps and would also allow us to visit the glaciers nearby. Going straight to the Faroes would be a longer passage and involve being very sure of our weather window.

Before we leave we all need to go into town for the last time. Hanspeter is searching for good bread, Alex is looking for gas bottles for our "re-entry" into Europe and I will search one last time for H·karl. We all find what we need and after replenishing our diesel tanks and canisters we set sail at 14.30. The passage to the Vestermann Islands should last around 20 hours, so we should arrive tomorrow morning.

Just outside Reykjavik harbor Hanspeter sets our course to follow the track Alex has planned into the navigation system. We quickly discover that the autopilot has left its senses! On certain headings it seems to steer 180° in the opposite direction, on others it remains stable and on others it gradually turns off course going all over the place. We try all we can to adjust and correct this anomaly by rebooting the system, re-aligning the autopilot, turning in circles to re-calibrate and generally racking our brains to figure out what the problem might be. All this does not help and so after almost 3 hours and just over 10nms we turn into the next port of call called Hafnafjordur. This is a pleasant small marina within the harbour of the third largest town in Iceland. The unofficial harbourmaster called Markus gives us the key to the club house and we immediately feel at home.

We spend the evening going through all the different possible explanations for our navigation problems and in listing everything we did in Reykjavik that might have had an effect on the boat's systems. Alex remembers having to sew a small Icelandic flag to fly as a courtesy flag during our stay here. In doing this he stowed the sewing kit including a bag full of assorted scissors in a portside cupboard. We discover that the so-called flux gate (the magnetoscope which provides the information for the autopilot) is situated right next to this cupboard and the presence of the scissors disturbed the flux gate. With the autopilot on, just moving the scissors resulted in the rudder turning up to 20°! We retire for the night full of hope that we have found and solved the problem!

### **Sunday, 13th August**

Today we will find out if the scissor-saga has a happy end. After so much sifting through different possibilities and moving stuff around the boat, Alex needs time to re-establish a semblance of order on board. So Hanspeter and I walk up to the nearby swimming pool and enjoy a swim in the geothermically heated waters. Alongside the main pool there are three hot pools. We spend a couple of minutes in the one labelled 41°-43° but decide not to let ourselves slow cook for today!

At 13.00 we cast off and head into the main harbour basin to perform our circles in order to re-calibrate the autopilot. Unfortunately, our scissors solution does not have the desired effect and we are back to square one. So after saying goodbye to Markus an hour earlier, we are welcomed once more by his broad grin and a new set of keys.

The rest of the day is spent with Alex and Hanspeter checking everything through again and replacing the computer unit. This seems to get us on the right track but as soon as we hook it all up and turn on the autopilot there is a short circuit and the whole thing fails again. On top of this, they cannot locate exactly where the short circuit happened. It looks like we have to wait until tomorrow morning when we can ask the Raymarine dealer for assistance.

Whilst Alex and Hanspeter work on the Silmaril I spend an hour in the town Museum learning about the development of Hafnafjordur as Iceland's oldest trading port. Danes, English and Germans all spent time here as settlers and traders. During the 19th and 20th centuries the town acted as a pioneer in the development of Iceland's educational system, often competing with Reykjavik. During the Second World War, the town together with Reykjavik, was

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occupied by the British forces as a defensive measure. Today the town itself has a mixed atmosphere of small pretty wood-framed houses clad in coloured corrugated iron and somewhat ugly new buildings housing shops and offices. On the one hand, it would be good to explore the town and what it has to offer, on the other hand we are itching to get this problem solved and on our way again. Tomorrow we will hopefully see our way forward.

### **Monday, 14th August**

Things are looking up! This morning Alex went to the Raymarine dealer located just 200 metres from the Hafnarfjorur marina and got a great deal on a complete new autopilot system which they just happened to have in stock. What a stroke of luck! Our work is thus cut out for the next few hours (and days?). Silmaril is now going to get a new flux gate, a new linear drive, a new control unit, a new converter to "translate" signals from the original and still functioning main navigation system to the new generation autopilot system and a lot of new cables, connectors and junctions.

Alex maps out what is to be replaced, what is to be kept, what is to be located where and how all the connections can be made. In the end, this work offers an opportunity to optimise some of the existing positioning and cabling too. We "plan out" all the necessary tasks and start. I will spare you poor readers all the details but suffice it to say that we make good progress throughout the day whilst respecting the minimum number of regular breaks for tea and biscuits and even a bowl of soup for lunch. In the evening, we walk into the small town and eat an excellent but expensive dinner in the local "Steakhus".

### **Tuesday, 15th August**

More of the same: making space, removing panels, feeding cables through holes and corners you would not believe exist and connecting/soldering/binding them into place and then putting everything back into place again. By the evening we have completed 99% of the work and decide to finish off tomorrow morning, test the new system and leave Hafnarfjodur for the Vestermann Islands off the south coast of Iceland.

### **Wednesday, 16th August**

It is a sunny day today and after tidying up the boat, running the tests on the quay, a shower and a coffee we decide to set off and do the final tests/calibrations on the way. Well, after so much frustration we are all optimistic and are happy to cast off early in the afternoon and look forward to arriving in the Vestermann Islands tomorrow morning. Unfortunately, we do not reckon with Murphy's Law.

The new autopilot works in "auto" mode. This means that we can use the autopilot to take us along a straight course given by the compass. If, however, we want to use the "trackí" mode which takes information from the GPS and steers the boat according to waypoints along a route which Alex defines on the main navigation system the new autopilot politely informs us that it has no navigational data to do this. The problem is annoying (especially with a shiny new and expensive autopilot) but should not stop us from sailing onwards. We want to make sure, though, that we do not need to get back to Hafnarfjordur to exchange anything. Alex works the telephone to try and find some advice from

Raymarine. We do not get a clear answer from either the dealer in Hafnarfjordur or from Raymarine, Germany or from Raymarine USA, so we decide to continue to the Vestermann Islands.

We sail into the night and navigate around the southwestern tip of Iceland. We do not have much wind but are rewarded with a glorious sunset, dolphin- and whale-sightings and a view of the famous Blue Lagoon geo-thermic power station from the sea. Tomorrow morning, we land in the Vestermann Island and will plan our last leg of the trip to the Faroe Islands from there.