

## Day 4 - zodiac and helicopter adventures

- Posted by [Kristy](#) on August 16, 2008 at 12:00am

Well, I was right when I predicted every day would hold a new adventure! I accidentally slept in this morning – I woke at 7 and immediately had the sense that if I didn't move fast I might miss something. I got ready for the day in record time and skipped breakfast for the bridge. What a morning – the water was once again like glass – there were clouds, but the day just seemed warm, clear, and most of all, still. The captain asked if I wanted to join some crew to take the zodiac over to Sister's Island to check the navigational aid. By 7:40 I was on a teeny, tiny island of rock, along with very tall Andrew – the bosun's mate and winchman, Shannon, another gutsy seaman, and Christian, a leading seaman from Quebec. I was surprised when I stepped on the rock – it crunched! It seems that the repeated frosts and winters cause the rock to break off in thin layers, like shale. I found some lichen in a few places, and quite a bit of bone – the crew theorized it was from either seal or fox (my students will remember the story of Kayuktuk). I have to keep reminding myself that animals can migrate from one island to another during the winter.

Upon seeing the navigational aid up close, I realized that the aluminum legs are quite large. This one is set in the ground differently than the one crew worked on yesterday. Because it's on rock, they've secured the aluminum legs with just piles of rocks, and then attached guy lines for stability. This tower didn't have to be lowered...Shannon climbed up the slats (with a safety belt) like a monkey, Andrew handed her a longhandled paint roller and she set to work. I was taken with the confidence Andrew, Shannon and Christian had in each other – although Andrew clearly had a great deal of experience and guided Shannon with occasional advice, there was no question but that this was a team. In no time a new coat of neon orange was added. You appreciate neon orange in the Arctic – with a winter vista of misty white, land and sky, blending together, with nothing to see as a landmark, the sight of a bright orange radio tower would be welcome! I also learned these towers have a large radar box at the top. In the meantime I wandered around the island, held my hand in the water for as long as I could (not long!), and listened to the absolute....and I mean absolute....silence. There were no lapping waves, no birds, no anything...I don't think I've ever heard such silence.

Once we got back to the Laurier, it wasn't long until a new adventure was offered me. Len took me, Vija (the assistant commissioner), and Peter, an officer in the navy who's observing the Coast Guard with an eye to the navy also providing icebreakers up here (that's another story!) up in the helicopter. Someone on the bridge, with very good eyes, had spotted a musk ox on a much bigger island not far away – called Edinburgh Island. (I'm sure the Inuit have a different name for it than Edinburgh, but it's not recorded.) The helicopter is truly amazing and so much fun! Many of you know that I'm a fairly cautious person (and that may be understating it), and Vija made sure I was in the front seat, knowing that this may be my only chance to spend time in the Arctic. You feel like you're sitting in a bubble, and we zoomed about – up, down, tilting, hovering....exhilarating! We had barely circled over the island when Len spotted three majestic caribou. Len was incredibly respectful of them – we got quite close, but didn't stay too long – they began to run and we briefly followed them to the side and at a bit of a distance – they were beautiful to watch. They exuded power, and Len explained that even though they looked like they were skimming the surface of the tundra, they were actually running in about 10 inches of thick muck. They looked like they were gracefully flying to me.

We then went on a hunt for the musk ox. Len said usually when you see one there's a whole herd around somewhere, but not this time. Apparently sometimes an old musk ox will be on its own, or possibly this one missed its opportunity to leave the island before the ice melted. We finally picked him out – he was well camouflaged against the Arctic rock. Once again Len was careful to respect the ox...he gave it wide berth as he came around, so that the ox would run away from a rocky ledge and not endanger itself. Len told us that musk ox, when in danger, will first run...but as they begin to tire, they'll turn and fully face their enemy, ready to do battle. That's exactly what this mighty one did...he ran across the lumpy tundra with his mane flowing behind him – so majestic! – and after less than a minute he stopped, turned and faced the helicopter. I could see him stand tall and brace himself. At that point Len veered away, saying quietly to the ox "alright friend, we're

brothers and sisters again.”

These images are seared in my mind.

I was back on the deck by 11:30 – and already so much had happened. I spent most of the afternoon on the bridge, looking at charts and the scenery – putting images to data. We passed the entrance to Bathurst Inlet, and a little while ago we entered Dease Strait – it’s quite a narrow and shallow channel, and we’re traveling quite slowly...we should be in Cambridge Bay by 7 a.m. (I’ll make sure not to sleep in!).

If you watched or heard CBC today, you’ll know that the Sir Wilfred Laurier is carrying two National Parks archeologists and four hydrographers. Starting tomorrow, this icebreaker and crew will be facilitating the search for more Franklin relics....hopefully one of his two ships, the Erebus or the Terror! This is very exciting – there’s been a real buzz about it on the ship. A First Seaman, Mark, will be driving one of the boats for Ryan and Jonathon, the two archeologists, and the hydrographers, along with all the other things that I’m learning a seaman does. Mark was a wreck hunter before he joined the Coast Guard and commutes to work – from the Philipinnes! I’ve been reading up on Franklin – my husband sent me with the book “Ice Blink”, which is the name nineteenth century sailors gave polar mirages caused by light reflected off the pack ice. Ryan has loaned me “Unravelling the Franklin Mystery – Inuit Testimony”, and this expedition is paying particular attention to the stories of Franklin and his crew according to Inuit stories that have been passed down through time. So I have lots of reading...I sat on the deck for awhile this evening, reading, and then gazing out over the water, trying to imagine what it would have been like in 1845, when the winters were even more brutal than they are now.

I learned one other thing today. I’ve been having some trouble with coughing the last couple of days. At first I thought it might be a re-occurrence of a minor asthmatic tendency I have, but it didn’t really seem like that. Roger, one of the hydrographers, suggested that I might be dehydrated, to which there was general agreement. There’s actually a sign posted by the water fountain (which I hadn’t taken a drink from) warning crew and passengers to drink lots of water, because after all, the Arctic is.....a desert. I’m still having a bit of trouble understanding how with all this water around me the air can be so dry, but I started to drink bucketloads of water....and the cough has almost disappeared!

It’s 12:30 and there’s still a warm glow in the sky from the sunset. We’re chugging – no, gliding – along as we steam towards Cambridge Bay.

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