

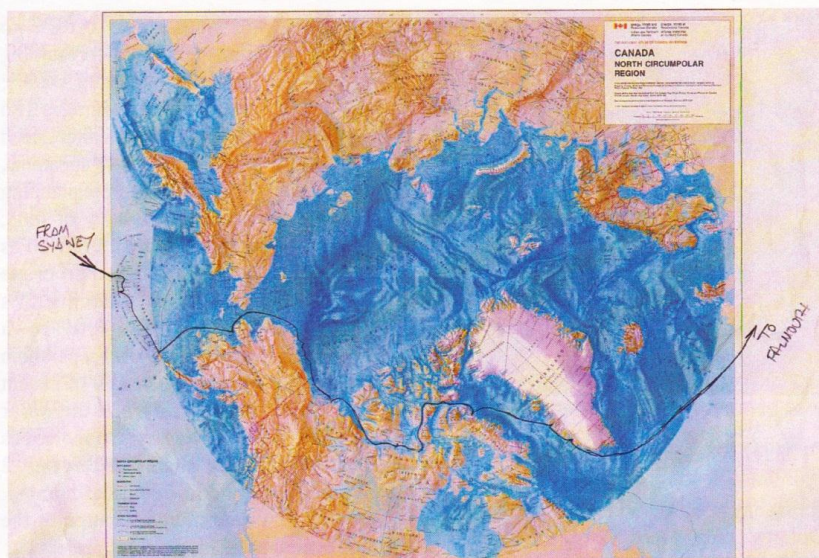


July 2010

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Sailing through the North West Passage

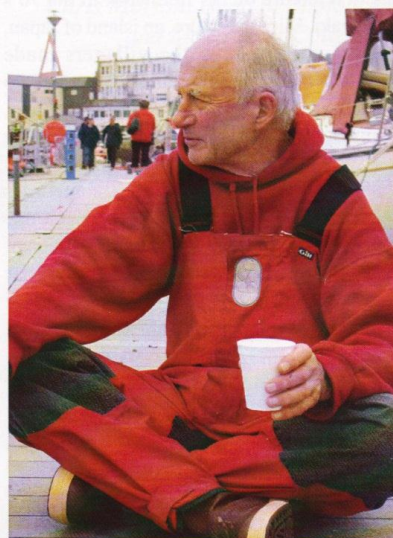
It seems appropriate that a token for the controlled purchase of alcohol was collected during a voyage conceived in a bar. Pete Crozier and I had completed a world circumnavigation in 2005 in a 10 metre sailing yacht, Berrimilla 2, during which we had been talking with Leroy Chiao, then the Commander of the International Space Station. Way south approaching Cape Horn, he was our nearest neighbour every 90 minutes or so in orbit 300km above. Leroy retired from NASA shortly after he returned to earth and became a Professor at Louisiana State University (LSU). In 2007, he invited us to contribute to a Symposium on Risk, using our voyage as an analogue for a journey into deep space. After the symposium, in the Varsity pub at LSU with Leroy and other participants, Pascal Lee (google him!) drew a map in my notebook and invited us to rendezvous with his team at the Houghton Mars Project Camp on Devon Island in the N.W. Passage (NWP) to view the total eclipse on August 1st 2008. It seemed like a neat idea and some calculations on a beer mat showed it was feasible, so Pascal added us to his 2008 HMP programme and I went home to some intensive research and planning.



Hence the token – Elk Lodge is the only public place in CB where alcohol may be consumed and then only under very strict control.

We waited there for the ice to break in Queen Maud and Peel Sounds and slipped through the gaps in thick pink midnight fog. Scary. On the way we sailed through Simpson Strait, once crossed on foot by the few straggling survivors of the Franklin Expedition, their ghosts poignant reminders of the death and suffering that had preceded us. More ice and out into Barrow Strait and Lancaster Sound, where we were within 40 miles of our rendezvous with Pascal but already delayed by the ice and a couple of weeks late, with drifting icebergs and freezing rain we decided, sadly, to keep going. My daughter Eleanor was on Devon Island for the eclipse – which nobody saw anyway because it was cloudy!

We completed our Arctic Circle to Arctic Circle NWP transit in Davis Strait – 31 days of the most amazing experiences – a whale surfacing under the boat, ice, foggy pinkouts, swimming bears, belugas, the old



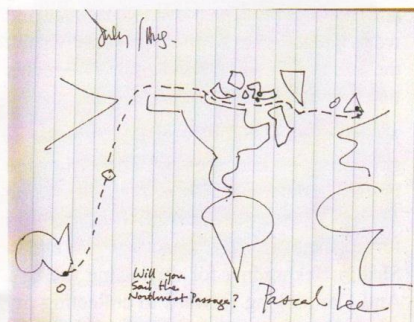
"Grizzled Old Seadog": Alex arrives in Falmouth

and the new DEW lines, wonderful people, the aurora and the exhilaration of becoming part of the history of the place.

Later in Greenland, we found the most expensive beer I have ever drunk. Further south, we took shelter in Paamiut whose smell of fish lingered through the thoroughly unpleasant Atlantic crossing that followed. We arrived in Falmouth on September 21st to complete the voyage.

We became the 77th vessel ever to complete the NWP transit and ours was the 114th transit since Amundsen's in 1903-6. We became the first vessel to sail from Australia to the UK via the NWP and we think we are also the first vessel to circumnavigate via the NWP under sail.

Alex Whitworth, Australia.



Pascal Lee's map drawn in Alex's notebook

Scroll forward to April 10, 2008. Pete couldn't go so that day, Corrie McQueen and I left Sydney for a non stop 63 day voyage up the Pacific to Adak in the Aleutians, then Dutch Harbour, where Kimbra Lindus joined us. From Dutch to Nome, waiting for the ice to break at Point Barrow, then through the Bering Strait - two oceans, two continents, two superpowers a few hundred yards apart at the Diomed Islands. Across the Arctic Circle, traditional starting point for NWP transits, through the ice in the Beaufort Sea, across Alaska, past Demarcation Point into Canada, a brief stop in Tuktoyaktuk and on through Amundsen Gulf to Cambridge Bay where we were greeted by the RCMP and left in no doubt as to the rules concerning the use of alcohol.



Intrepid voyagers: Alex, Kimbra Lindus & Corrie McQueen