

bay offering superb anchorage that is fully sheltered from the west. A long island called Makeholmen dominates a spur of islands running from the north closing the bay to swell from the NE making it the only place to be on this barren coast. Just further north the tallest mountain, Miseryfjellet Urd nears 2000ft giving an idea of the scale here, yet the rest of the island is a low plateau strewn with lakes.

Despite it being broad daylight at 3am we all went to bed except Robert who fancied a spot of fishing. We rose the following morning to the prospect of an excellent fresh cod dinner (note: fishing in the bay itself is not permitted).

SEA ICE

By late Saturday evening we were approaching Sorkapp an island to the south of Spitsbergen but the sea ice was far too dense. The Norwegian Met Office issue a daily ice chart and that is vital reading for anyone sailing in this region. We had known in advance where the ice would be and despite being driven west we were confident we would be able to



The ever-changing glacier.



turn north to run up the coast. Nevertheless, it was a great photo opportunity for those not on ice watch and I'm grateful to Francoise and Isobelle for their sharp photographs in such grey conditions. Wildlife thrives in these cold waters and we saw seals lazing on the floes whilst dolphins zipped underneath. Whales signalled their presence with blow spouts before rolling slowly over and flicking their tails in the air. After a while the ice became just more ice and the duty watch were abandoned as everyone off-watch sought warmth below.

The sea ice extended from the eastern coast, round the Southern tip of Spitsbergen and some way north leaving Hornsund completely icebound and inaccessible. We continued north up the West Coast of Spitsbergen past miles of snow-covered mountains of Wedel Yarlsberg Land before Bellsund finally opened up clear of ice to the east of us.

Bellsund is the outer fjord leading to two huge fjords and is separated from inner Mijenfjorden by a narrow island of Akseloya. Fortunately there is passage round both ends with the north being much cleaner so we headed for a northern feeder fjord called Fridtjohamna where we anchored. Here I learned another navigational lesson. Looking at the actual ice wall where the glacier tumbled into the sea just didn't match the chart and disorientated me. But it's obvious when you think about it; the ice wall changes with the seasons amplified by the climatic changes over the years making for a highly mobile coast. Once that was clear in my head I could recognise the dramatic scenery with Ytterdalsgubben towering 3000ft to the west surrounded by a chain of more modest 2000ft peaks with equally unpronounceable names. ■

