



I quickly learned that Spitzbergen was considerably further north than Cape Horn is south. Spitsbergen is part of a huge archipelago called Svalbard and reaching 80 deg north is just about as far as anyone can sail without it being a highly specialised polar expedition. Very exciting and incredible to think that an ordinary, amateur sailor like me could even consider such an undertaking.

On further investigation, though, it turned out few yachts venture so far north, especially in late spring. However, French skipper Olivier Pitras was offering berths on his yacht Southern Star. He was bound from Tromsø to Longyearbyen on Spitsbergen with a brief stopover on Bjørnøya (Bear Island). A friend, Robert, agreed to join me and we bagged the last two berths on the voyage.

We aimed to leave Tromsø (north Norway) in late May which is really quite early for sailing as ice stretches from the pole as far as Svalbard in winter and only retreats under the relentless glare of the polar 24 hour summer sunlight. Providing the ice had cleared, we would be the first to explore some fjords since the previous brief summer gave way to the ice.

