

AN INAUSPICIOUS START

We arrived in Tromsø to bitterly cold, severe gale force winds. The yacht was excellent, 75ft long with three oil fired heaters and a wide deck to work her in safety. Our two bunk cabin was at the stern and I was relieved that Olivier immediately offered an extra sleeping bag and blankets to add to my -10°C bag, which just wasn't up to the challenge.

Our first trip was from Tromsø, through the inner fjords north and east, to Lyngen, a spur of the mainland (P2). This was a cold motor sail and I was very grateful for the complete all round canopy that had been fitted to sail the North West Passage. She



Southern Star at rest pre-voyage.

has an extensive library of books on polar exploration and it was daunting to be on a yacht that is one of the first (of the still very few) that have sailed the Passage - particularly when reading of the many explorers who had paid such a high price in their attempts in the past.

Nevertheless, even in these sheltered waters it was a cold job to forsake the modest comfort of the canopy to scrape the sleet off the windscreen to see our way ahead and we were grateful to reach our destination of Lyngen.

THE BARENTS SEA

After a day the weather had moderated and we headed north beyond the shelter of the fjords into the Barents Sea. Shaking sleet off the warps before coiling them forced me to change my usual strategy. Normally I take gloves off to handle gear so they are dry when I want them, but in these conditions I reverted to a pair of thermal gloves under a pair of red builder's gloves from a DIY shop. I think they make an excellent combination as you can have spare thermals drying ready to rotate into use and the builders gloves are wind and waterproof at about £2 a pair.

Once clear of Arnøy and Fugløy we were out in the Barents Sea and settled into watches of three hours on and six off. As a volunteer on Tall Ships Youth Trust Challenger Yachts this is a real luxury and it was reassuring to know I had plenty of time

to thaw out and rest before the next watch. The crew consisted of Skipper (Olivier), Mate (Giles) and Cook (Tony) with nine of us making up the passage crew. Robert and I were teamed with Dominique who, thankfully, had a good grasp of English. Everyone but the two of us were French so by and large that was the language spoken. We have a smattering of French but I wouldn't recommend the trip to a single non-French-speaking sailor, as it could be quite lonely. The crew were competent sailors, all with either their own boats or plenty of sea time from other trips. I don't think it's the place for a first time sail.

We met a head wind and a quartering sea left over from the previous gales making an uncomfortable passage over the shallow Nordvest Banken as we cleared the North Cape of Norway, already beyond 70° N (P3). The wide, airy saloon had been excellent in harbour but now needed a sturdy rope strung

"I EXPERIMENTED WITH VARIOUS COMBINATIONS OF CLOTHES UNTIL I HAD ON ALL THE THERMALS I'D BROUGHT."



Robert with his 3am cod.



Bear (or should that be 'bare') Island.

across to prevent us being thrown about. The weather was cold and grey with no discernible horizon in any direction. Taking half hour shifts on the helm we saw little in the way of shipping and I experimented with various combinations of clothing until I had on all the thermals I had brought and was now very nearly warm. We were really grateful for Tony's copious supply of flasks of hot tea and strong coffee.

FISH FOR TEA

By early Thursday morning we were approaching the Southern tip of Bear Island and all agreed there had to be a misspelling as the only word for the place was 'bare'. On the East side of the island huge broken cliffs of Antarctic fjellet give way to a deep