

Things we wished we knew but didn't find easily elsewhere.

Timing:

Simple really – leave Greenland from Upernavik around 1st August. Any earlier and you will definitely be spending time waiting for the ice. We got to Pond Inlet around the 4th August and they said a fortnight before there was ice right across the fjord. See the tracker page to get dates we were at specific places. The most problematic area in 2024 was Victoria Strait as the more commonly used route for yachts via Gjoa Haven did not open at all.

Planning

Join the OCC – they have a wealth of information and contacts including the famous Victor who acts as “mother hen” during the season

Ice

Whilst there are ice charts available for Greenland, Canada and Alaska they give you a general idea of the conditions. Remember that they are made by people looking at satellite images and are also at least a day old when you see them. Also we felt that different people might be doing them on different days and they might have slightly different interpretations of what they are seeing and may like us get confused by cloud formations too. We saw much more ice than the charts showed in some places and less than charted in others.

It is commonly written that this strait or that area opens on a given date on different years and might be expected to “open” soon. If you hear somewhere is “open” it does not necessarily mean that it will stay that way. Unlike other places where when the ice has gone it is clear for the rest of the season, in the NWP this is not necessarily the case as there is a lot of ice just floating about to try and make your life more difficult. So if you can get through a given area, go for it, don't hang around for a better sailing wind for instance.

It is said that Bellot Strait can get choked with ice at any time – believe it! Whilst we were in Fort Ross there was ice continually moving northwards up Peel Sound with some coming through Bellot to Fort Ross. If you see ice coming through the Strait it will circulate round in the anchorage at Fort Ross making anchoring difficult. If there is ice in Bellot, then there is probably more in Peel Sound. We went through with two others, leaving a fourth boat at Fort Ross as they thought the wind would make better sailing the next day. Three days later they managed to get through.. In Peel Sound we had to do a big detour to the north to get round the floe.

Stress

Don't underestimate the stress on the Skipper, he will have to continually make decisions that could be life and or boat threatening and with any help maybe a day or so away, and your boat probably uninsured the whole process is not for the faint hearted. You need to balance the ever disappearing season, against being too gung-ho getting you into bad situations or alternatively being too uncertain and consequently waiting so long that opportunities are lost.

Fuel

We found Diesel readily available in Pond Inlet, Cambridge Bay and Toktuyaktuk. Don't arrive on a Friday afternoon if you can help it as you will wait till Monday. Whilst fuel from a truck is slightly cheaper per Litre than at the pump, at Pond Inlet they charged \$100 and Cambridge Bay \$500 for the truck to come (and it did not make any difference if there was more than one vessel fuelled together. We paid the \$100 at Pond but anchored by the fuel station at Cambridge Bay and ferried our cans to the fuel station at Cambridge Bay. It was only about 150m to walk, we did two trips and got a lift down with the full cans both times. There are lots of scare stories about shortages of fuel but as the locals are mainly using petrol in outboards and trucks it may be old news that diesel may be short. We motored / motor sailed all the way from Tuk to Nome, about 1300 miles. We had about 1600 miles range with our main tank and cans on deck.

Food

Take all you think you need, but there are excellent supermarkets in all settlements in Greenland, Canada and Alaska with everything you could desire including fresh veg even if it is expensive.

Crew

Choose your crew wisely and get to know them before you invite them on. It's a long time to be on passage and whilst you can do changes at most places it will be expensive and new crew members at short notice may be difficult due to visa problems.

Visas

Check what you need. We had to get full visa for US. Wait times for interviews are very long and we ended up going to Dublin rather than London as the wait there was 180 days. Check your crews requirements too. We heard of one person having to fly from Pond inlet to New York and back just so that he could enter Canada by air as he didn't have the right visa at the cost of many \$ thousands. If you try and enter Alaska without the correct paperwork it is even worse with a minimum fine and a once in a lifetime waiver (if they are feeling friendly that day). Explore how you can check in on line as this makes the Border forces very happy when they come to check you as they then don't have to do so much paperwork. Greenland was the most laid back – just go to a police station

Polar Bear Protection

We bought a rifle in a supermarket in Greenland where they are readily available without any paperwork for foreigners. The only problem is what to do with it afterwards. If you are thinking of doing the NWP west to east in 2025 please get in touch with us directly

Insurance

If you are the sort of person who thinks he needs insurance for your boat then this trip is not for you. We had Garmin search and Rescue and general world wide health cover.

Spares

Take everything you have and more. Work on the principle that nothing will be available locally, and getting something sent may take too long and if critical, may end up with you trying to overwinter and possibly losing the boat. If you have an older boat, think the age of the engine, you will probably put at least 1000 hours on it. In 2023 one boat had to be towed to Inuvik where it overwintered due to engine problems and in 2024 one had to get a new injector pump flown in person with someone bringing it in their luggage as this was the only way to get it quick enough. Think about what you can make do without if you cant fix it. We progressively lost our autopilot. Everyone knows that you wont be able to steer to the compass but we eventually could not use ours at all and ended up steering by hand (using the + - buttons on the autopilot) between Cambridge Bay and Nome. At least we did not have to steer by hand outside but it was very tiring with just two on board. We got a replacement sent to Nome but thought it is a definite requirement to have. The replacement is by Pelagic and needs no integration with the other electronics on your boat making it a perfect backup.

Anything else - just contact us via the website form on yachtlumina.co.uk