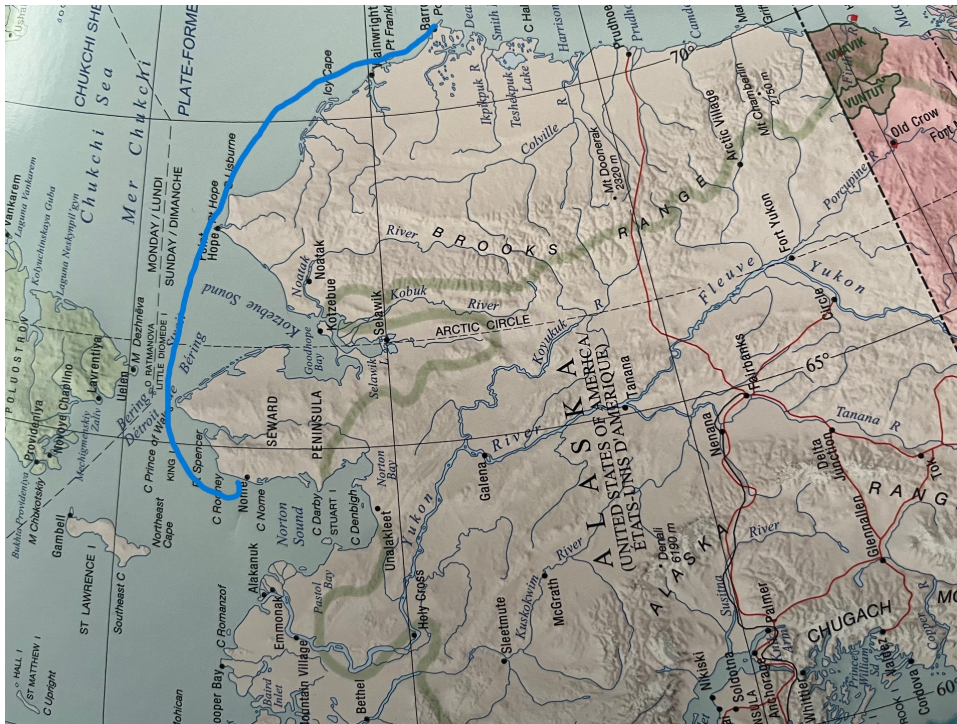


# Lumina through the North West Passage

## North West Passage Complete !

### Point Barrow to Nome

#### Post 17



Point Barrow is a major turning point in the North West Passage as this is where you start to turn south away from the icy wastes and back to the world we know. We rounded the point, a low spit of shingle with the settlement of Barrow with 25kn of wind and hoisted the genoa (foresail) however our joy at sailing was short-lived as the angle was not really there and the engine was soon back on.

We continued like this for the remaining four days down to Nome, occasionally the genoa

was hoisted if the wind angle looked helpful but in general we didn't get much from it. Essentially the remaining 530 miles to Nome followed this shingle beach with the occasional headland and slight change of direction.

The one notable aside on this part of the journey is crossing the Arctic Circle for the second time this year, this time going south and this is the point where you officially finish the North West Passage. However it's just a mark on the map and we still have many miles to go. To mariners the North West Passage is a route from the Atlantic to the Pacific, however it seems to have been hijacked these days by pseudo explorers and expeditioners who, in the act of making good film footage or "charity" events seem to want to get away with just doing a small part of the route to further their aims of allegedly completing something apparently rigorous. In recent years there have been a number of kayaking and rowing trips in the centre part of the passage who I am sure are very proud of their achievements but unlike Lumina you won't find them on the official list maintained by the Scott





Polar Institute in Cambridge. We will eventually find ourselves on that list somewhere just over the 400th transit. Whilst this sounds like a large number it is EVER! And includes icebreakers, commercial vessels and cruise ships that are now regularly doing the route. According to one of our fellow yachtsmen we will be around the 169th sailing vessel and only the second Boreal yacht to complete.

There are a few salient lessons that I have learnt about this voyage, the first being that if we left Greenland at the beginning of August that it would be plain sailing all the way through as most of the

ice would have melted by then and we would be unlikely to be seriously held up—untrue.

The second would be that once ice clears from a part of the passage that it is then clear for the season—untrue, as it moves around much more than I anticipated and re-blocks areas that were a few days before were clear. Global warming has meant that more of the arctic is thawing each year, but it still freezes each winter. This means that there is more one year old ice around which breaks up more easily. This



floats around and down into the area around King William Island and James Ross Strait actually making it more difficult these days for small vessels than maybe 20 years ago. It is no coincidence that this is the area where the franklin ships ended up. This year no yachts made it round the inside of King William Island via Gjoa Haven, traditionally the normal route for our type of vessels due to unusual ice conditions, so all is not as one might think up there.

Third would be the stress on the skipper. It can't be underestimated how it is to have to make decisions all the time based on experience you are gaining by the day as you go along. Some people will say you need the experience before you go but, whilst you could do the trip as crew for another boat first, there is nothing quite like carrying the can yourself. Its quite something to daily make decisions that could have dire consequences for you, crew and an uninsured boat. There is no backup here and you have to look after yourself 100%. You generally get the experience 5 mins after you realised you needed it!



Continuing south as we passed Price of Wales point we were just a few miles away from the Diomed Islands, Little and Great, with the international date line passing between them and also the border between Russia and USA. Some of the boats went out to sea and cut down between them but Carol was not so keen on brushing with the Ruskies so we cut the corner a bit and kept to near the coast. Eventually after 8 1/2 days almost continuous motoring from Tuktoyaktuk we arrived at the port of Nome on around lunchtime on the 12th of September.

The harbour was full of gold diving boats, tugs with enormous barges and four yachts from our fleet. The harbour master was extremely helpful and had made space for us on a pontoon. It was a real treat not to have to climb up a high dock wall or across numerous fishing or cargo ships to get to the shore. There was even a hose with free water, the first we had seen since Scotland.

Eager to set foot on dry land, we had not been in but a few minutes and Homeland Security was with us. Carol was just trying to put in our entry on their website and, before it had stopped saying it was pending, he was there. Despite the reputation of US border officials, this chap was completely the opposite, was very happy with our paperwork and once he had made a phone call, the app miraculously had us checked in. With a stamp in our passport we were free to go.



It was a beautiful sunny day and we strolled into town. The roads were sometimes tarred but all the minor ones are not, however the mud must get everywhere as even the metalled roads were quite dusty when a truck passed. As with most places up here it has obviously seen more prosperous days with the properties being a mixture of those semi derelict to the fairly well looked after. Unlike the other arctic settlements, there are quite a number of old buildings, especially in the centre of town giving it the real gold rush feeling. This is in fact rightly so as whilst the gold rush of the last century and before has passed there is still plenty of gold fever here. Technology now allows the itinerant gold miner to get himself a second hand pontoon party boat from Florida, fit it with a powerful pump and a gold sluice



and go diving for gold. There were quite a number of these adapted pontoon boats, usually with some extra floatation bolted on the sides as well, together with some larger vessels but generally all working on the same principle of a catamaran with the sluice mounted in the centre and a big suction hose operated by the diver on the sea floor.

The other show in town is literally a show, as, alongside the gold miners or divers is the filming for the Discovery

Channel. Reality tv is doing well in Nome with a number of the gold boats featured in the regular episodes. We were moored on the pontoon opposite the filming boat which went out one day for a short while. The pressure on them was to somehow produce something like 50 episodes a year so anything out of the ordinary, be it contrived or real cannot be missed. The problem of getting enough footage soon became apparent as they were not out long due to the weather conditions. The gold boats are pretty fragile really and with the need to have a diver on the sea floor all the time as well you can quickly see that they don't actually get to spend much time at sea either due to the weather or the current. However, be it from gold or filming there seems to be plenty of money still to be made here.



*The house that Pat built, complete with fishing boat play house*

With the gold boats in harbour it was a scene of constant activity with repairs and modifications being made to a number of vessels and the shore based industry servicing the fleet looks prosperous as well as this is probably the best equipped port we have seen to handle virtually any job you are likely to want on a boat.

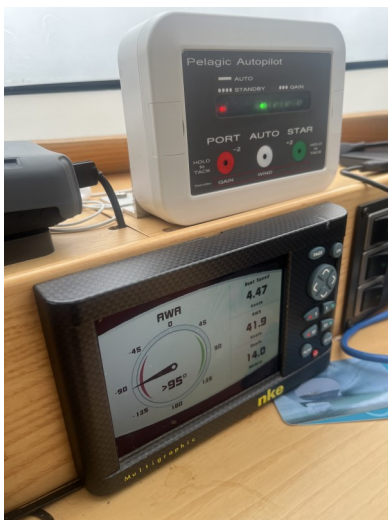
We had our own little job to do, a few days previously having given up hope of getting our own auto pilot to work I had ordered a new stand alone one from a company in California. It had now arrived at a



*The dirt roads soon turn to mud when it rains*

contact we had in Nome from a friend on another boat so we went into town to find them. Pat and Sue we were told were easy to find as they had a wooden fishing boat parked in front of their house and indeed this was true. We knocked on the door and were greeted by them and our package. Some years ago there was an abandoned boat in the harbour and Pat had put a speculative bid on it at the town auction. Seems like the first Sue knew of it was a large crane depositing it in front of their house! Anyway it had apparently been a great playhouse for their girls growing up, one of which is now a marine electrician in Homer where we are heading for the winter.

After a good nights sleep, I set to work removing the old autopilot computer and fitting the new one. The Pelagic Autopilot from Scanmar is remarkably simple, just a control box to go at the helm and another with the power unit to connect to the steering system. It took little over an hour to do the job, the longest part as ever was routing the cables from the position of the computer unit to the helm position



*New autopilot fitted with the old one below, although we still get wind and depth data from it*

in the doghouse. With everything connected it was fired up and immediately worked. With the help of Pat and his workshop he made a lovely couple of aluminium brackets to hold the control box and we were done. The following day we went out for a short sea trial to test it which proved successful. What a fantastic result, between Scanmar, Fedex, and Pat and Sue we were back in action and looking forward to much more relaxed sailing.

There were 8 of the 10 westward NW passage yachts now in town and we did as much socialising as we could. It's a strange thing that although we get to know the others pretty well on the radio but more now on Whatsapp message and phone, a lot of the time we don't actually get to see them in person so everyone made up for this in the bar of the Nugget Inn or on board. We had a great night with Pat and Sue dining on some home sourced moose stew, and another hosted by the Polish boys on Hauru who seem to have an extremely well stocked cellar even after all these months of travelling.



***Amundsen in Nome, next to the finish of the Iditarod Trail and also in Ny-Alesund, Svalbard***



In the centre of the town, almost opposite the Nugget bar is a bust of Amundsen as it was near here in Teller that his famous airship journey over the North Pole in 1926 ended. Today there is a bust identical to the one in the village square at Ny-Alesund in Svalbard that we saw last year. It seemed very fitting that we had sailed between the two points in a year even though we had taken a more roundabout route!

Next is the official end of the Iditarod trail. This route comes all the way from anchorage in south Alaska and today there is a race to commemorate the famous journey made by dogsled teams in the depths of winter to deliver diphtheria vaccine to the children of Nome during an outbreak in January 1925.

So after a few days or R&R we now head out on the last tricky leg of the voyage, down the Bering sea to the Aleutian Islands and then east towards Anchorage and our destination at Homer where Lumina will spend the winter.

[Amundsen flight over the pole](#)

[The Iditarod story](#)

All the best

Tim and Carol

[Website with all the old blogs](#)



***The shed reputed to have held the parts from the dismantled airship before being shipped back to Italy, however it disappeared and no one knows where it ended up***