

Through the Northern Sea Route by *Stena Polaris*: A logbook¹

Patrik Svahn

Day 1

Date: September 25, 2013

Position: Vardø, Norway, 70°37' N, 31°10' E

Weather: Rough sea, strong winds, blistering cold

When the Russian ice advisor Sergey and I arrived in Vardø, high up in north-eastern Norway, we were looking forward to finally embark on the *Stena Polaris*—a 65,000 dwt ice-classed tanker. With great excitement, we boarded the small boat that was to take us to the tanker that drifted some nautical miles from shore. We had been warned the previous evening that the weather forecast was quite bad, and we were unsure if we could embark. As we passed the breakwaters, we realized that the small boat could not handle the big waves well. When we saw the *Stena Polaris* vaguely in the horizon, we could already find that she was rolling quite heavily. After approximately 30 minutes of cutting through waves three to four meters high, we finally made it to the *Stena Polaris*, or so I believed, because the saltwater spray all over the boat's windows barely enabled us to glimpse outside. The boat drivers were trying to carefully approach the ship's side where the crew had rigged the pilot ladder as agreed—one meter above the water line. However, in the rough sea, the heavy tanker now rolled from four meters above to four meters below the waterline. As none of us wanted to risk our lives, we canceled our attempts to embark and headed back to the shore.

I asked the two Norwegian boat drivers for their suggestion. They replied in chorus: 'Kirkenes!' (the next port 50 miles to the southwest). I immediately called our agent there to discuss the matter, and he promised to arrange for a launch boat. Thereafter, I called up the master of the *Stena Polaris* on the very high frequency (VHF) radio and instructed him to immediately sail to Kirkenes, a trip that would take the vessel approximately two and a half hours. Unless one wants to enjoy a scenic drive along the coastal road all afternoon, the only way to go from Vardø to Kirkenes is by airplane. Thereafter, we stood in the blistering cold and strong winds, waiting for a taxi to take us to the airport where we managed to mount a DHC-8 aircraft just before it was scheduled to depart.

We arrived in Kirkenes after a 20-minute flight, while the *Stena Polaris* was still at sea and expected to arrive within an hour. However, our agent informed us on the phone that

¹ This chapter is based on original material the author first published online in a series of personal blog entries (<http://www.stenanorthernsearoute.com>). The author and the editor of this volume worked together to revise these texts, forming a comprehensive narrative and including additional information and illustrations. All photographs published in this chapter were taken by Patrik Svahn.

the weather had worsened and the launch had been cancelled. We were disappointed after this news. The agent then suggested taking the vessel into the fjord as the waters there would be calmer, but this implied embarking a pilot. Meanwhile, the captain of the *Stena Polaris* explained that he did not have any charts for this area; hence, he had to navigate far away from the shore. This meant the pilot could not embark. While we waited in a restaurant for hours, the captain ordered electronic charts and calculated a route into the fjord. Now the question was whether there were any pilots available. We waited for another three hours at the restaurant before the agent finally called with the best news we had received all day: the pilot was confirmed. He would pick us up in 45 minutes and take us to the pilot boat by which we would embark the *Stena Polaris*. The waves were calmer here than in Vardø, although still two meters high. However, the vessel lay steadily in the water this time, so we finally managed to climb up the ladder. While the crew hoisted our luggage on board, we walked to the bridge wherein we received a warm welcome onboard the ship from Captain Sasa Stipanovic.

Day 2

Date: September 26, 2013

Position: Southwestern Barents Sea, 72°55' N, 41°58' E

Weather: Rough sea, strong winds

The weather gods were not with us tonight. The wind that was forecast for the night rapidly increased in strength, making the ship roll and pitch madly. Our good night's sleep thus was transformed into a struggle to not fall out of bed and onto the floor. The crew got less than two hours of sleep, and the ship continued to roll through breakfast such that coffee and orange juice almost escaped our cups.

In the morning, I talked to the master, inquiring about the preparation of the voyage. He explained the company's procedures for sailing Arctic waters and the Russian ice advisor's role in helping us navigate the safest possible route through these special waters. I finally made my way to the bridge where the advisor was already busy planning the route with the navigational officer. I looked over their shoulders and observed that the two men conversed in Russian, which was their native language.

Day 3

Date: September 27, 2013

Position: Southeastern Barents Sea, 74°53' N, 49°57' E

Weather: Rough sea at night, then a calm day, sunshine

I woke up at about two o'clock in the morning when the rolling ship threw me out of bed and against the starboard wall of my cabin. This merry game continued all night, but when I looked outside my cabin window in the morning with sleepy eyes, the sea was quiet and the sun had just risen. After breakfast, I had a meeting with the South Korean passengers

onboard: four journalists, one professor, and one representative from the charterers. The charterers' representative expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to ship the first South Korean cargo ever through the Northern Sea Route (NSR). All of them are hoping that the NSR will help South Korea's trade, industry, and ports to grow further in future.

After lunch, I wanted to enjoy the weather, so I took a walk on the deck. It was just 3° C outside, so I had to put on my winter jacket and a hat. I started walking along the starboard side, enjoying the view, then made my way to the forecastle. There, I did what I always do when I am on a ship: I looked down the forward fairlead to see the bulb and the Stena shield, which significantly fronts all Stena ships and, in a way, represents a modern figurehead. I have always been fascinated by the figureheads on old sailers; to see the shield above the bulb breaking the water while hearing nothing, but the waves crashing against this most forward part of the ship is the perfect stress release. When I returned to the bridge, I met the ice advisor who told me that tomorrow we would pass the official border to the NSR.

Day 4

Date: September 28, 2013

Position: Cape Zhelaniya, 76°57' N, 68°34' E

Weather: Calm sea, heavy snowfall

Today, we passed Cape Zhelaniya, a desolate place on the northernmost point of the island of Novaya Zemlya. Its snow-covered hills separate the Barents Sea from the Kara Sea. Thus, the cape marks the western entrance to the NSR. The sea is calm this morning, but very dark clouds hang in the sky. The officer on watch tells me that the snow is coming.

On the bridge, I asked the mate if he had seen any other vessels in the area. He informed me that we were alone except for a few fishing vessels and the icebreaker *Yamal*, which we would shortly meet. *Yamal* is one of the nuclear icebreakers that operate along the NSR. Sergey, our Russian ice advisor, had spoken to the crew of the icebreaker earlier this morning as he usually works as its master when he is not working as an ice advisor. He had learned that the *Yamal* was heading west to Murmansk for repairs. On the radar, I could see both the *Yamal* and dark clouds approaching our position. I went down to my cabin to fetch my camera because I wanted to take some pictures of the icebreaker; when I reached the bridge, so had the snow. We now could not see any further than a ship's length, so the only idea we got of the nuclear icebreaker was a blimp on the radar screen. In his broken English, the ice advisor assured us we would meet another icebreaker as soon as we reached Matisen Strait. Ironically, just about an hour after we had passed the *Yamal*, the snow clouds disappeared and the sun appeared again, giving us some of the best weather we have seen so far.

Day 5

Date: September 29, 2013

Position: Southwestern Kara Sea, 76°54' N, 84°57' E

Weather: Calm sea, grey skies

Today is a grey day, and we are heading on a southwest course across the Kara Sea. The sea is calm, and we are all alone on the waters except for a big whale that passed us this afternoon on our starboard side. We are approaching the rendezvous point with the icebreaker at Matisen Strait.

Last night, we learned that our voyage will be delayed. The convoy we were bound to follow had passed Matisen Strait already, so we will have to drop anchor on arrival and wait for the icebreaker to return. Even though the first section of Matisen Strait has open water and only drifting ice, the NSR administration is very strict regarding safety and thus they will not allow us to pass without icebreaker assistance. Thus, when we arrive tomorrow morning, we will have to wait for approximately two days for the icebreaker to take its convoy to the New Siberian Islands and then return to meet up with us. What should we do to pass the time while at anchorage? First, I thought of fishing, but I do not know what fish one could catch here in these icy cold arctic waters.

Day 6

Date: September 30, 2013

Position: Matisen Strait, 76°20' N, 96°00' E

Weather: Icy cold, drifting ice at sea

Early this morning, the *Stena Polaris* struck ice for the first time on her voyage. The temperature is now below 0° C. For now, we see little more than drifting ice patches on the sea, but in the distance the ice is firming up. We dropped anchor this morning in Matisen Strait, and now we are awaiting the icebreaker.

Unexpected good news reached us: the icebreaker is ready to meet up earlier, so our waiting time is reduced from two days to 14 hours. Our convoy will be composed of the *Stena Polaris* and the M/V *Boris Vilkitsky*, scheduled to arrive at our position at the same time as the icebreaker. Together, we will sail through the first icebreaker assisted part of the route until we reach the New Siberian Islands. Thereafter, we will meet the second icebreaker for the last assisted part of the route.

We expect the ice to become increasingly solid as we sail deeper into the Arctic waters and further from civilization. One feels isolated out here in the middle of nowhere, far from family and everyday life. Our only companions now are the seals that are passing the ship every now and then. All seamen onboard have crossed the Atlantic, the Pacific and the Indian Oceans, sailed through the Panama and Suez Canals, and passed both the Cape of Good Hope and Cape Horn, but none of them has ever sailed the NSR. We are on a journey into the unknown with only each other to cling to.

Day 7

Date: October 1, 2013

Position: Vilkitsky Strait, 77°57' N, 103°35' E

Weather: Ice covered yet calm sea despite very strong winds

Ice as far as the eye can see is what we all woke up to this morning. We are close to the North Pole now and follow the icebreaker *Taymyr* (see photo 1), which is taking us through these waters. It arrived late last night and so did the second vessel in the convoy, the M/V *Boris Vilkitsky*. The three of us began the journey through the ice in the pitch dark night.



Photo 1: Icebreaker Taymyr leading the way

Our ice advisor commands us over the radio, instructing us how to navigate and to watch out for icebergs. The *Taymyr* is a so-called river-class icebreaker, a shallow drafted vessel that can go up small rivers to break ice. With her nuclear powered engine she has a total power of 36.8 MW, so the term *beast* may best describe her nature. She was built in 1989 and has a length overall (LOA) of 152 m and a beam of 29.2 m. The vessel is operated by a crew of 110, including one agent who is instructed to destroy navigational documents and current tables in case of an emergency so no one else might use the information. She needs to refuel her nuclear energy every four years at a price of one billion rubles.

Skipping icebergs and cruising between snow-covered islands, we wonder how anything could survive in this part of the world. The water is freezing cold even though we are traveling in the so-called summertime, and the islands—the only land in our sight—are flat and do not provide any shelter from the strong winds. So far, the only wildlife we have seen has been some seals, a few seagulls, and a whale. However, that was before we entered the particularly harsh part of our journey.

This year, winter is coming earlier than expected, so the ice advisor is surprised to see the amount of ice that has already built up. We learn that there are two types of ice: old and new. We are now cutting through mostly new ice, that is, ice less than one year old and 10 to 50 cm thick. In contrast, old ice has existed for several decades and is very thick, heavy, and strong. Icebergs are made of this material, and thus they are quick to cut a ship's hull (see photo 2). Not that the icebreaker would care. She dances right between the icebergs, and when they are too big to go around, she merely goes straight through them and crushes them, relentlessly propelled by her nuclear engine. This sight makes us feel safe.



Photo 2: Tip of an iceberg composed of old ice

In the afternoon, the weather conditions worsened. The wind picked up even more and finally blew at a steady 20–22 knots, making it unbearable to be outside. Nevertheless, thanks to the ice at sea, the strong winds have little effect on us; our vessel is proceeding

through the icy water like a barge. ‘If this were the North Atlantic, the ship would be rolling like hell,’ Captain Stipanovic laughs.

Day 8

Date: October 2, 2013

Position: Western Laptev Sea, 77°51' N, 108°38' E

Weather: Snowstorm, strong winds, icy cold

After she had guided us through the ice, the *Taymyr* made a swift U-turn and, shortly after, disappeared in the dark night like a ghost ship. We had expected her to escort us until this morning, but the ice conditions lightened and the sea opened up. She is now going back to Matisen Strait to lead the next convoy through the ice, while we are heading toward the New Siberian Islands. There, we will meet her sister ship, the *Vaygach*, for our next transit through the ice. For now, we are all alone, sailing the open waters of the Laptev Sea.

The *Vaygach* is busy with another convoy, so we will drop our anchor for at least two days here in the Laptev Sea and wait for her to guide us through heavy, solid, old ice all along the East Siberian Sea and through Long Strait—considered to be the most dangerous part of the NSR. But we are not worried, only excited.

The temperature today is always below 0° C. The deck of our vessel, usually an intense red color, is slowly turning white (see photo 3). We are in the middle of a snow storm and the winds are still between 20 and 22 knots, just like yesterday. The *Stena Polaris* is slowly rolling from side to side, and in a way, we rather appreciate the calming slow rocking of the ship. There have been long watches with sharp lookouts on the bridge during the passage through the ice, and there will be even more during the next ice passage. The calm rest is welcomed by the crew. During the last passage, there were always two officers and one crew member on watch on the bridge. At least one of the officers must speak Russian to facilitate communication with the icebreakers because they hardly speak English onboard there.

Before the voyage commenced, our vessel’s technical managers, Northern Marine Management, had to make sure that everybody onboard had the proper equipment to transit the NSR. This meant winter clothes, such as warm jackets and pants, and also winter boots, gloves, and hats. In Arctic conditions, a lack of appropriate clothing can cause significant freezing injuries. As the vessel is transiting remote waters, medical assistance is far away.



Photo 3: Stena Polaris' red deck turns white

Day 9

Date: October 3, 2013

Position: Southwestern Laptev Sea, 74°59' N, 122°50' E

Weather: Grey skies, snowstorm, strong winds

The third mate hastily called me to the bridge last night just before midnight. Standing in the blistering cold, the third mate, the captain, and I witnessed the glow of the northern lights—the aurora borealis—their intense green color lighting up the pitch black sky right above our heads. The light was moving and changing shape constantly, like a green fairy dancing slowly across the sky. We, being all alone on the Laptev Sea, felt like she was dancing for us.

When I woke up in the morning, the skies were grey. The dark clouds and the wind that bring the snow are here again. The ship is rolling and pitching slightly in the strong winds; the snow falls for approximately 30 minutes, then stops for 30 minutes, then falls again, and so the game continues. The weather forecast for the Bering Sea does not look good. We expect to meet really heavy storms along our way southward to Korea.

Today, we have passed the mid-point of our voyage. This means that we have covered half of the total distance between Ust Luga and Yeosu. It is yet another quiet day onboard as we are still all alone on the Laptev Sea; everybody onboard has something to do or to work with. The second officer is preparing the charts for the latter part of our voyage on the

bridge; the chief officer is doing research about cargo pumps in the cargo control room; and the third officer is sitting next to him, updating the list for onboard safety equipment. In the crew day room, the two mess men are taking a well-deserved and relaxing break after having served lunch to everyone onboard, while the engineers are conversing in the engine control room. The Korean journalists are busy in the ship's office, writing articles about the NSR and the natural resources that it sustains.

Day 10

Date: October 4, 2013

Position: Anchored in the eastern Laptev Sea, 74°53' N, 135°58' E

Weather: Pancake ice on the sea, sunshine first, then a sudden snowstorm

Pancakes as far as the eye can see! Not for breakfast, though. Pancake ice is what greeted us this morning as we approached the point for our rendezvous with the icebreaker *Vaygach*. This ice structure resembles pancakes floating on the sea, and the sun paints a golden shine across the water between them. I learn that pancake ice is formed when slush ice begins to float together and finally arranges itself in a round shape. The long waves make the pancakes move in a slow rhythm, creating an extraordinary scenery around our vessel (see photo 4).



Photo 4: Pancake ice

Later in the morning, we arrived at our anchoring position where we are to await the *Vaygach*. All ice advisors are calling the icebreakers twice every day, at 09:00 and 21:00 Moscow time. It goes without saying that they communicate only in Russian. The icebreakers then provide all vessels that are to team up in a convoy with news about their status and position. Our ice advisor received bad news on the medium frequency (MF) radio: the *Vaygach* would not reach our position before October 7 at noon Moscow time—in other words, in three days—and there is nothing we can do but wait for her. There are only two icebreakers assisting in these waters, the *Taymyr* and the *Vaygach*. They are taking convoys from west to east and vice versa, implying that when an icebreaker has not yet reached the far eastern end of the passage with a convoy, any vessel will have to wait until the icebreaker has escorted the first convoy and taken the next one back through to the west side of the ice-covered area where we are waiting.

At the same moment that we received this news, a big dark cloud appeared on the horizon. We watched how quickly the snowstorm made its way over the water and the pancake ice toward us with great fascination. After less than three minutes, it was just off our port side, and one minute later, our vessel was completely inside the storm. Thereafter, it disappeared as quickly as it had engulfed us.

Day 11

Date: October 5, 2013

Position: Anchored in the eastern Laptev Sea, 74°53' N, 135°58' E

Weather: Cloudy

Today, we saw three walrus playing just off our starboard side. They enjoyed the few rays of sunshine coming through the thick clouds. Thereafter, they disappeared into the water again. We could see them pop up through the surface farther and farther away from us until they finally disappeared. After witnessing the crew performing drill exercises scheduled for today, I went up to the bridge where I saw the sunset over the Laptev Sea. We heard from the ice advisor today that there is a small chance that *Vaygach* will come in as early as tomorrow evening. We will see tomorrow.

Day 12

Date: October 6, 2013

Position: Anchored in the eastern Laptev Sea, 74°53' N, 135°58' E

Weather: Icy cold

The water is definitely getting colder now, as is the outside temperature. The pancakes are starting to stick together and form one big pancake. Winter is coming ... or was it ever summer? I do not know. All I know is that it is cold and it is getting colder by the day.

At three o'clock in the afternoon, we finally heaved up anchor. The ice advisor had spoken to the crew of the icebreaker *Vaygach*, who advised us to heave and to slowly pro-

ceed eastward to meet them later tonight. Things change quickly in shipping. We were not supposed to meet them, but they wanted to save some time for the convoy to pass through one of the toughest parts of the transit during daylight. As the *Stena Polaris* is a 1A ice-classed tanker, they made an exception and let Captain Stipanovic navigate slowly through the thin ice.

Day 13

Date: October 7, 2013

Position: East Siberian Sea, 72°53' N, 151°44' E

Weather: Snowfall, strong winds, blistering cold, thick old ice at sea

Late last night, we could finally see the *Vaygach* in the dark distant night. She was escorting another vessel, an Aframax tanker, on a westbound course. As soon as she had passed us on our port side, she called up the other vessel and instructed it to proceed on its own. Thereafter, she made a U-turn and headed toward us. She snuck up on our starboard side and proceeded ahead of us. The snow was raging outside, and we could almost not see her when she passed fairly close (see photo 5). We started to follow her as she steamed through the same broken ice trail where she had just escorted the Aframax. We all agreed that it felt good to be moving again, as staying at anchor could become quite dull in the long run. We are now in a convoy with the *M/V Mari Ugland*, a Panamax vessel, and the *Vaygach* leading the way. Today, we also saw our first polar bear. We were all mesmerized by the big creature making its way over the frozen Arctic waters. As they normally live farther up north and not in the waters through which we are steaming, we were extremely lucky to be given the opportunity to see one.

In the morning, we easily steamed through new ice, but in the toughest part of the NSR, which we are approaching now, the ice is much thicker. Behind us, the *M/V Mari Ugland* is constantly lagging. The *Vaygach* constantly calls her on the VHF, instructing her to keep her speed and to not lag more than six cables behind us. The icebreakers are very strict and insist that that you follow their orders as the ice can be tricky and the visibility is poor. Currently, there are icebergs all around us, and even if a vessel is built in conformance with the highest ice class, an iceberg could cause significant damage to the hull. Last year, the *Vaygach* escorted two Finnish icebreakers through the NSR twice.

In the late afternoon, the ice became even thicker. We could see more and more of the grey-colored old ice. At some places, it was up to three meters thick. Old ice closes the channel created by the icebreaker much faster than new ice. Even though we were following the icebreaker just six cables aft, the channel had almost closed again, although it had been created just minutes ago by the *Vaygach*. Our ship jumped a little every time the heavy slabs of old ice smashed against our hull. The ice advisor informs us that this area is known for challenging ice navigation; it is quite difficult to see the difference between old and new ice when everything is covered in snow. The fact that it is dark outside is not helping (see photos 6 and 7).



Photo 5: Following the Vaygach through adverse weather



Photo 6: The Vaygach crushing thick ice



Photo 7: Bulb of the Stena Polaris crushing the ice

Day 14

Date: October 8, 2013

Position: East Siberian Sea, 71°55' N, 161°59' E

Weather: Heavy winds, rough sea

Today is a rather quiet day on board. We are still following the *Vaygach*, which leads us through the waters of the East Siberian Sea. This morning when I came to the bridge, I could see pancake ice around the ship. The spots with old hard ice are still there, but the ice is definitely lighter compared to yesterday. However, we have passed through some tough ice during the night. On many occasions, I felt that our vessel had struck the ice hard; one could feel the whole ship shaking as it hit one of the massive slabs. However, we are confident because the hardest and most dangerous part of the NSR now lies behind us.

Our challenge now is to disembark the ice advisor. In general, the icebreaker would launch a small speed boat that would come alongside our vessel. The ice advisor would then disembark using the pilot ladder, the same way he and I came onboard in Kirkenes. But the weather forecast shows heavy winds, meaning big waves and a heavy swell, so with the failed attempt to embark at Vardø fresh in his memory, the ice advisor is concerned about getting off the *Stena Polaris*. While joking with him that he is certainly welcome to accompany us to South Korea, we can do nothing but hope the weather will improve.

Day 15

Date: October 9, 2013

Position: East Siberian Sea, 70°59' N, 173°45' E

Weather: Calm sea, partly cloudy, sunshine

When I came to the bridge early this morning, the sun had been up for an hour or so, and between the clouds one could see the sunshine. We had become used to the greyish color of the sea and sky, and they often even seemed to melt together. But this morning was different. With this fine weather and the calming wind, there was hardly any swell on the water, so the ice advisor could finally disembark. As the launch boat with him on board left our side, it headed swiftly towards the westbound bulk carrier *Nordic Bothnia*, which was slowly steaming toward our position. The ice advisor would directly transfer onto that vessel to take her through the NSR along the route we had just traveled.

By the afternoon, we were steaming by ourselves through the East Siberian Sea, with no icebreaker to lead the way and no ice advisor to assist. The density of the ice had increased slightly compared to this morning, and now we were surrounded by pancakes again. Before departing, the *Vaygach* had provided us with a heading and instructed us to not steam faster than nine knots while making our way through the final part of the ice belt. Although we have now almost completed the ice-covered part of our trip, we are far from concluding it. The next challenge is to reach the Bering Strait and then cross the rough Bering Sea. We expect hard weather conditions and are doing anything but sitting back and relaxing. It is time for rock 'n' roll, as Captain Stipanovic likes to put it.

Day 16

Date: October 10, 2013

Position: Chukchi Sea, 69°50' N, 176°56' W

Weather: Fine weather, calm sea

I went to the bridge around three o'clock in the afternoon and realized it was already dark outside. But the icy part of our voyage has concluded. We are now completely out of the ice-covered area, and the East Siberian Sea lies open and calm ahead of us. It is a nice day today with little wind as we and the *M/V Mari Ugland* on our starboard side pass the Russian mainland and the Chukotka region. Today, we steer into the Chukchi Sea, the last part of the NSR before we expect to arrive at the Bering Strait tomorrow afternoon. Increasing number of villages are coming up on the charts, and our southwestern heading is leading back to civilization. While I rather enjoyed being in a remote part of the world for two weeks without any access to the Internet, TV, or any of the other media that one takes for granted in everyday life, two weeks of this experience are enough for me. Everyone on board is looking forward to having Internet access again to contact their families and read a newspaper.

Day 17

Date: October 11, 2013

Position: Bering Strait, 66°00' N, 169°00' W

Weather: A warm zero degrees, but strong winds, later some heavy rain

Summer is here! For the first time since we left Vardø two and a half weeks ago, the temperature is above 0° C. In the afternoon, the wind picked up to approximately 30 knots, and we began to feel the rock 'n' roll of the Bering Strait coming closer. We were still a few hours away, and the ship was already rolling. Heavy rain began to pour down on us, and it was raining sideways due to the wind. Nevertheless, the deck of the *Stena Polaris* was regaining its red color as the snow slowly melted away. At about four o'clock in the afternoon, we passed Cape Dezhnyov and entered the Bering Strait. The weather was now slightly worse as the winds had picked up further and it was also completely dark outside.

Day 18

Date: October 12, 2013

Position: Bering Sea, 63°12' N, 175°02' W

Weather: Rough sea

The Bering Sea has asked us for a dance and we delightedly accepted. The swell is coming both from the starboard side and from the aft, thus making the ship slowly roll from side to side (see photo 8). As we expect a storm to hit us the day after tomorrow, we expect the rolling to become worse. We are now proceeding on a southwesterly course across the Bering Sea. This morning the sun rose at half past three in the morning, and it will go down at half past one in the afternoon, so we slightly feel out of sync onboard. It is quite strange to experience these shifting daylight times. One knows that two o'clock in the afternoon is no time to go to bed; still, one starts yawning and feels sleepy. Certainly, our northerly latitude also affects the daylight times. We had the option to change the ship's time further, but made the decision to stop when we were on South Korean time. In my opinion, this was the correct decision as otherwise we would just keep changing the time forward and then back again, leading to even greater confusion.



Photo 8: Stena Polaris rolling in the Bering Sea

Day 19

Date: October 13, 2013

Position: Bering Sea, 61°40' N, 179°55' W

Weather: Fine weather, calm sea, sunshine

Unexpectedly, we are experiencing a beautiful day and fine weather while cruising the Bering Sea. The sun makes the calm sea glow as we steam on a southwesterly course toward South Korea. We are enjoying this fine weather as long as it lasts, but we still expect the storm to hit us tomorrow: the forecast predicts winds of 45 knots. The crew is completely busy, ensuring that all loose items are safely lashed before the storm hits us. Heavy equipment and many items onboard could get loose in heavy weather, with terrible consequences if they do.

Day 20

Date: October 14, 2013

Position: Bering Sea, 59°09' N, 172°49' E

Weather: Stormy, very rough sea

The storm has now hit us. The night was rather quiet, but when I woke up this morning, I could feel the ship moving from side to side. On the stairs that lead to the bridge, I was swung from port to starboard side. I had to hold firmly on to the railing so I would not fall over or down the stairs. When I finally made it up to the bridge, I saw nothing but the angry Bering Sea through all windows, throwing the bow of the *Stena Polaris* ten meters from side to side. The waves smashed against the ship's hull, making her roll from starboard to port and back again. I could see white foam forming on top of the waves, which were up to eight meters high. I was told the wind speed was approximately 50 knots, a clean 10 on the Beaufort scale.

As the swell built up even further in the afternoon, the captain issued a restriction for the deck and ordered all crew members to remain inside. While we expect the storm to be over by tomorrow, the forecast gives us merely one day of fine weather before we expect another storm to hit us.

Day 21

Date: October 15, 2013

Position: Kamchatka Peninsula, 58°18' N, 167°21' E

Weather: Fine weather, sunshine



Photo 9: The snow-covered volcanoes of Kamchatka

The weather is nice and the sea is quiet again. We have now left the Bering Sea. The storm is behind us, and we traverse the North Pacific Ocean, heading south for the Sea of Japan. There is still some swell on the sea after yesterday's storm, but it does not affect our vessel much. The skies are clear and blue, and the sun is shining bright. It also seems that the next storm will not hit us until the day after tomorrow, so we can enjoy two days of fine weather. Moreover, we are not alone anymore. We now sail along the snow-covered volcanoes of the Kamchatka Peninsula (see photo 9). A few vessels passed us on our starboard side today, and a family of whales quickly surfaced to breathe some air before swiftly disappearing into the ocean again.

Day 22

Date: October 16, 2013

Position: The North Pacific Ocean, 50°07' N, 157°20' E

Weather: Stormy, rough sea

I woke up really early this morning, feeling that I was almost falling out of bed. The bad weather was not supposed to come so soon, but the ship was rolling and one had to hold on to things to not fall over. On the Beaufort scale, the storm was a nine, and the wind and the waves were coming on our port bow, so the ship was jumping in a way that it was not two days ago.

The captain informs me that tomorrow will be even worse. Rough weather is nice every now and then as it makes one feel alive, but it becomes tiresome as it disturbs your sleep to the point that one cannot rest properly any more. In two days, we expect to pass La Pérouse Strait. We cross our fingers and hope that the more protected waters of the Sea of Japan will grant us some good weather.

Day 23

Date: October 17, 2013

Position: The North Pacific Ocean, 45°10' N, 152°51' E

Weather: Stormy, rough sea, sunshine, rain later

The weather today is the same as yesterday with strong winds and a big swell, yet the sun is shining. But for the wind, this could have been a really nice morning. We are forced to adjust our course just to keep the ship from rolling too much. A cyclone passed us during the night. Fortunately it did not hit us, but it caused the wind and the waves we are experiencing now. Not too far off our route, two vessels were caught in the cyclone and ran aground. We are making good speed, and the wind is expected to slow down later tonight. Everyone is quite tired and struggles just to stay in bed as the ship rolls. We hope we can all have a good night's sleep after two consecutive days of stormy weather.

In the afternoon, it has begun to rain. Through the rainy windows on the bridge, we can see the waves smash up against the ship's hull as the wind blows them in on our starboard

side. The whole ship is shaking as the great impact of the sea strikes us. Nevertheless, everyone on board is in a good mood, expecting to arrive in South Korea soon.

Day 24

Date: October 18, 2013

Position: La Pérouse Strait, 45°43' N, 142°01' E

Weather: Calm sea

Calm sea at last! This morning when I woke up, I could feel the ship moving smoothly through the water. It was not until early morning that the winds and the sea calmed. But we are grateful that they did so we can catch up on some sleep and perform our duties in a normal way without things flying around us. When I came to the bridge this morning, we were just passing Cape Aniva on our starboard side. This is the first cape one passes on a westbound course through the strait.

Day 25

Date: October 19, 2013

Position: Sea of Japan, 42°14' N, 136°46' E

Weather: Fine weather, blue skies, sunshine

It is another beautiful day as we steam on a southwesterly course across the Sea of Japan. The sun is shining, and the skies are blue. We are all enjoying these last few days of our voyage as we will soon reach our final destination in South Korea. The temperature outside continues to increase. Today, it reached 17° C, so it took us just a week to go from Arctic conditions to spring time. For the first time, I enjoyed my afternoon coffee outside on the bridge. What a feeling to sit outside for a while without fearing frostbite or pneumonia.

Day 26

Date: October 20, 2013

Position: Sea of Japan, 37°57' N, 132°53' E

Weather: Fine weather, quiet sea

Another nice and quiet day as we steam on a southwesterly course. We expect to arrive at Yeosu in South Korea, the final destination of our voyage, tomorrow afternoon. The crew has begun to clean all accommodation and deck areas to make the ship look presentable as it enters the harbor. We expect some rather prominent people to be standing on the jetty and greeting us at a welcome ceremony that is being planned for the ship.

Day 27

Date: October 21, 2013

Position: Coastal waters off Pusan, South Korea, 34°54' N, 129°13' E

Weather: Fine weather, quiet sea

We have sailed for almost 30 days, seeing little, if any, civilization and few other vessels in our vicinity. Suddenly, when I arrived on the bridge this morning, we were passing the city of Pusan, the biggest port and second largest city in South Korea with 3.6 million inhabitants. Pusan is the fifth largest port in the world, so we had to carefully navigate in these busy waters as everything from large container vessels to small fishing boats surrounded the ship. In the afternoon, we slowly approached the anchorage at Yeosu. The Korean passengers prepared to disembark. 'Five shackles on the port anchor,' Captain Stipanovic commanded. The anchor slowly submerged in the water, and at half past three local time it was down.

Day 28

Date: October 22, 2013

Position: Port of Yeosu, South Korea, 34°55' N, 127°55' E

Weather: Fine weather, quiet sea

Today is the final day of our voyage, the day we arrive at the berth at Yeosu, discharging the cargo that we have carried from Ust Luga to South Korea via the NSR. We woke up to a beautiful morning at the anchorage today. At ten o'clock, two pilots climbed up the ladder on the starboard side, and assisted by two tug boats we slowly made our way through the port area to the berth. We continued to enjoy the beautiful scenery that was surrounding us on this final day.

The welcome ceremony was scheduled for three o'clock in the afternoon. The Stena Glovis banners were hung on the side of the ship, and all naval officers changed into their uniforms. Everywhere, people were following Captain Stipanovic like he was a rock star, wanting to talk to him and interview him. The captain and the chief engineer were admired like heroes. They were presented with a floral garland hung around their neck and many gifts while photo shoots went on relentlessly. Twenty reporters crowded around the heroes who had taken the first Korean cargo through the NSR. In the evening, a dinner was held in the grand ballroom of the World Expo Center where numerous round tables had been set and decorated with Stena Glovis flags. Many speeches and toasts were made, and a slideshow of the pictures I created during the voyage was presented. But all great things must come to an end. As I was not heading back to the ship, I said my goodbyes to all the companions with whom I had been on this adventure and I shook their hands with some sadness.