

Hall of Fame - Chris and Jess Bray

The Teleport story part one

By Graham Cox

Chris Bray (1983 -) and Jess Bray (1987 -)
The *Teleport* story: Part One

Chris Bray had what many sailors would consider the ideal childhood, sailing around the world for 5 years with his family aboard *Starship*, the aluminium yacht designed and built by his father, Andrew, an engineer and yachting journalist. Chris grew up to become an acclaimed wildlife photographer, specialising in photographic safaris, and developed a reputation as an intrepid adventurer, with two land-based Arctic expeditions under his belt, plus a voyage across the Southern Ocean on a friend's yacht from Australia to Patagonia. He also runs a photography school in Sydney.

Shortly after returning from his second Arctic expedition, he met Jess Taunton, an experienced wilderness guide and the world's greatest optimist. They quickly established a powerful bond and have gone on to become a very effective expeditionary team. They acquired *Teleport* unexpectedly while on a cycling tour of Tasmania, when a friend offered it to them very cheaply, with an interest-free loan.

Part of the temptation was that the boat lay in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Chris had been thinking about returning to the Arctic on a boat. Their intention was to sail through the Northwest Passage over a couple of seasons, using their photographic skills to document the voyage. This resulted in a widely-read blog, a number of articles, some in prestigious journals, plus a series of breathtaking videos, which not only showcase their expedition but also the virtues of the boat and rig.



The planned route...

Luckily, the boat they unintentionally acquired was the ideal vessel for their circumstances, if not necessarily



Chris and Jess Bray

the ideal boat for Arctic exploring. *Teleport* is a North Atlantic 29, designed by Blondie Hasler in conjunction with Angus Primrose, and could be described as a larger sister to Blondie's junk-rigged Folkboat, *Jester*. The boat, originally named *Marco Polo*, was beautifully built in one-inch thick, cold-moulded cedar by JRA member, Jim Creighton, but had unfortunately been neglected in the years since Jim sold her.

Junk rig, with its ease of handling and ability to be repaired with basic tools in remote locations, plus the internal control station with its twin *Jester* pram-hoods, proved to be a winning combination. It is hard to imagine a small, cheap, conventionally designed and rigged yacht that could make this voyage. Chris and Jess were so impressed that they intend to build a larger junk-rigged expedition yacht in a few years' time, after they have established their business affairs, and return to the Arctic for extended periods.

Many people said it was crazy to take a small wooden boat into those ice-bound waters, but Chris was used to people telling him his ideas were impossible. He now admits that he overestimated his sailing experience and was over confident before the trip. He came to realise that he was only a kid when he sailed around the world and hadn't learned much. Even his trip across the Southern Ocean as crew did not prepare him for the rigours of skippering his own vessel. And Jess had no sailing experience at all.

They spent the northern summer of 2010 frantically refitting the boat, cutting out rot and delaminated areas, renewing the fibreglass sheathing on deck and cockpit, remodelling the interior, and getting the rusty, 1976 vintage, 8hp Sabb diesel running. Chris's one regret, later, was that he did not take the opportunity to replace the engine when he could. It was to cause them a lot of grief.



Teleport - ready for new adventures

They had just enough time before winter closed in to launch the boat for brief sea trials, taking her out a couple of times in very bad conditions and putting her to a white-knuckle test, to see if anything would break. Satisfied that the boat was basically sound, they stored her ashore for the winter, returning in early 2011. The plan for that year was to complete the fitting out and sail as far as Cambridge Bay on Victoria Island, half way through the NW Passage, before the onset of the following winter.

By the time they sailed out of Halifax on the 19th of June, 2011, bound for Cambridge Bay via Newfoundland, Greenland and Baffin Island, *Teleport* was fitted with radar, wind generator, solar panel, AIS transceiver linked to a chartplotter, other GPS units, autopilot, diesel heater, and a reinforced inflatable dinghy, suitable for Arctic exploration. They also carried a cheap inflatable dinghy, which they always took ashore with them in a box in the Arctic, in case a polar bear chewed the primary dinghy, as they apparently have a habit of doing.

Heading NE up the coast of Nova Scotia towards Cape Breton, the 10-15 knot wind was light and dead astern, causing *Teleport* to roll heavily. When the wind eased, they suffered a couple of accidental gybes, during one of which a sheet wrapped itself around one of the GPS antennae and ripped it out of the deck. The antenna was temporarily duct-taped back in place and a guard-hoop fitted to protect it from further mishap. The learning curve in junk-rig handling had begun.

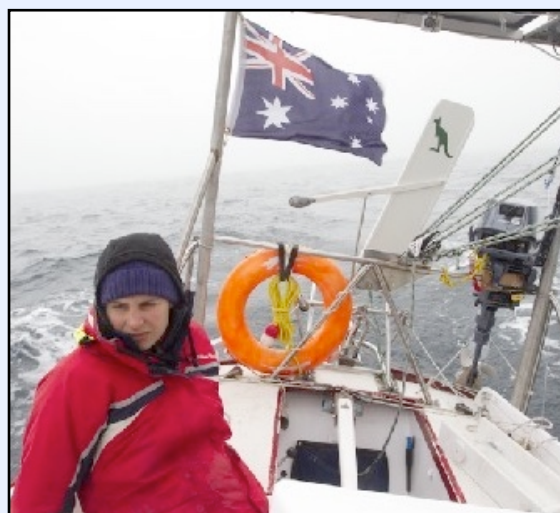
Tuesday the 21st of June was the summer solstice, and also Chris's 28th birthday. Jess was seasick and sleeping, so celebrations were put on hold, but Chris had an enjoyable sail, reefing a panel or two as the wind rose to 20 knots, listening to music and admiring the starry sky. They eventually moored in St. Peters, Cape Breton Island, before locking up into the Bras d'Or Lake. Here they met Bob and Kathy Groves, JRA members from the junk-rigged *Easygo*, and other voyaging sailors.

A few days later they were off across the Cabot Strait to Newfoundland. They were thrilled to be visited by a Minke whale and to see numerous Atlantic Puffins flying past the boat. The wind rose to 20-25 knots and somehow, in the middle of the night, the yard got jammed behind the lazyjacks, necessitating a visit to the deck. Working on the exposed deck, Chris was grateful for the fresh anti-skid paint Jess had applied before leaving Halifax, but in the process he fell heavily and injured his knee, which remained painful for many days.

Then the sail pulled away from the plastic track attaching it to the yard, requiring the sail to be lowered and extra lashings fitted. They then hoisted a couple of panels and rocketed off into the darkness at 7 knots. Neither of them got much sleep that night and Jess was briefly seasick. They took comfort that the AIS Watchmate alerted them to the position of nearby ships, and broadcast *Teleport's* position. Several ships acknowledged them via VHF radio. They covered 120 miles in less than 24 hours, making landfall on the south coast of Newfoundland in the morning.

After they had slept for a few hours in the small harbour of Codry, the wind died off and they motored slowly up the west coast of the island. They were delighted by visits from dolphins, and by a Minke whale outside Little Port that came right up to investigate them. They found the locals extremely friendly, inviting them into their homes, pressing fresh-baked bread on them, and driving them around. In Port Saunders they were persuaded to buy a pair of insulated dry-suits that the locals swear by.

They had now crossed over the line on their chart that marks the southern limit of sea ice, so were trying not to travel at night. Leaving Port Saunders, they sighted their first iceberg, about 15-20 metres high. Later, after passing the island's northernmost headland on their way to St Anthony, they saw another large iceberg, and



Fog in the Labrador Sea - beware of icebergs

a bergy bit, as the fog closed in and strong winds cranked up their stress levels.

St Anthony was their last port in Newfoundland before jumping off for Greenland. There was a band of sea ice about 100 miles wide to the north. Rather than head directly north for the Greenland coast, which would take them into the thick of it, they decided to



The first iceberg - off Belle Is, Newfoundland

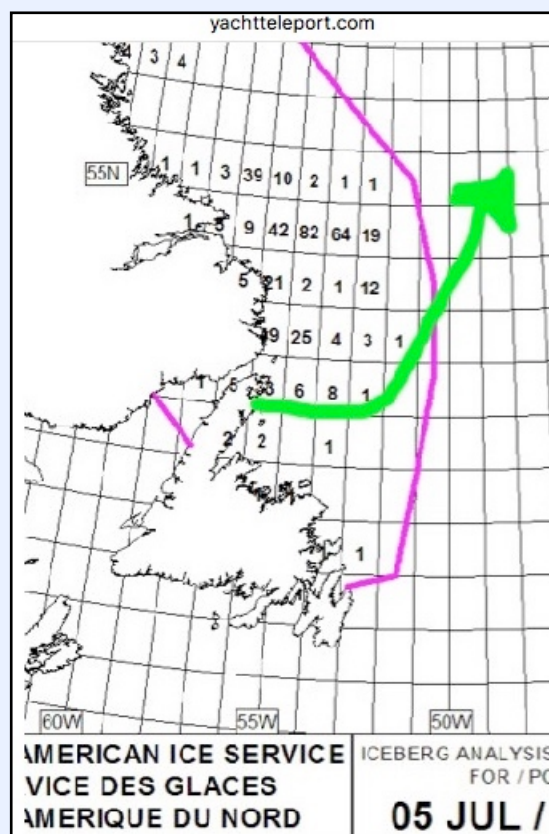
head east initially, hopefully getting clear of the worst concentration of ice in daylight. They had to wait some time for a suitable weather window, as endless lows with 45 knot winds screamed across the Labrador Sea.

Finally a 6-7 day weather window opened up, but they were delayed by discovering a leak in their 200l water bladder. They lost critical time trying to repair it, but they still thought they had enough time to cover the 600 miles to Greenland's Kap Desolation, 200 miles south of their ultimate destination of Nuuk, before the next storm arrived.

By nightfall they had passed 19 icebergs, bergy bits and growlers, and then spent a stressful night shining their powerful LED torch ahead, looking for more ice. Even when trying to rest below, when off-watch, they were jolted fearfully awake by every thump of wave against hull. The ice disappeared after two days and the weather was pleasant, if numbingly cold. There were a few calm periods, when they motored to try and stay ahead of the approaching bad weather.

On the evening of the third day, the wind rose and the barometer fell. For 48 hours they battled gale-force winds with just one panel of the sail up. Jess was sea-sick and Chris tried to hide his anxiety from her as he listened to the creaking and cracking of the hull as it crested the waves. Then the barometer rose and the wind eased to 10 knots, filling them with relief.

The relief was short-lived. The following day the barometer started falling again, and Chris downloaded



The area enclosed by the magenta marks shows the 'extent of the band of sea ice'. The green arrow is Teleport's route to get around it.

the latest GRIB files on his Iridium satellite phone, noting with dismay that two low-pressure systems were combining and heading their way. The next 3 days proved to be a nightmare. They were later told by a passing cruise ship that they had weathered hurricane-force winds and 12 metre seas.

Teleport was hove-to with just one panel of the sail up. For a while, they were driven back towards Canada. Waves crashed over the boat, knocking her down so that they could see green water through the leeward portholes while the windward ones were pale blue, covered in breaking seas.

At times, Chris was convinced the dinghy and fuel bladder had been torn from the deck, and would have a quick look out through one of the Pram-hoods, amazed to see them still in place. The AIS and the masthead lights stopped working. They huddled on the floor and Jess was so sea-sick and dehydrated that Chris began to fear for her wellbeing. The interior smelled of vomit.

Amazingly, Teleport survived without serious damage, though the leaky water-bladder finally gave up the ghost, leaving them with only their 50l backup bladder. This, luckily, was a well-made unit from Turtle-Pac. After the storm, they cleaned up the boat, and were grateful to finally approach the coast of

Greenland, looking forward to a rest and the opportunity to top up with fresh water from a glacier.

Unfortunately, they discovered that the pack ice extended 20 miles offshore, blocking their access. The cruise ship that gave them details about the storm also gave them an ice report and said they would have to proceed direct to Nuuk, which was accessible. They had about 4 days to get there before the next bout of bad weather struck.

They initially sailed in the day and hove-to for the short Arctic nights. One morning they woke to discover they had drifted in among some bergy bits and had to beat a hasty retreat into clear water under power. Then the engine spluttered and stopped. It had run out of fuel, but after refuelling and bleeding the system, it refused to start again. Chris eventually discovered there was water in the cylinder.

It took 9 gruelling hours, working in the bilge as the boat rolled, to strip the motor down, change the oil and get it started. Then the starter-motor seized, forcing Chris to hand-start the engine, which he eventually managed to do, although it was more difficult than usual. They decided to keep it running until they got into Nuuk. They also discovered the variable-pitch propeller was not working and the motor was stuck in forward gear. Thankfully it was not stuck in reverse!



The troublesome Sabb engine

They arrived in Nuuk 12 days out of Halifax, just ahead of the next storm. The last miles became a race against the clock, continuing on through the hours of darkness despite the risk of hitting stray ice. This did not stop them from lowering the dinghy on the last day so that Chris could photograph *Teleport* sailing past a spectacular iceberg. Being consummate professionals, they seldom missed an opportunity to document interesting situations, even in moments of stress.

Two weeks were spent in Nuuk, largely working on the boat's engine. Once again the locals were extremely friendly. The customs officer stamped their passports to clear them into the country, and then promptly stamped the next page to clear them out whenever they were ready to leave. He and the local police officer then drove Chris and Jess into town with *Teleport's* heavy starter-motor and took them to a repair shop.

The ancient starter motor was beyond repair though amazingly the shop had a spare, probably the only one in Greenland. Unfortunately, when the engine was eventually repaired and running again, this new unit overheated, probably due to the fact that the old regulator was no longer working and the unit could not provide a charge. From this point on, the engine had to be hand-started.

The Sabb diesel proved to have a hole rusted through the water jacket, allowing water into the cylinder. After Chris had lugged the heavy head up 200 steps from the harbour into town, a mechanic showed him how to repair it with epoxy putty.

After lifting *Teleport* precariously out of the water with a local crane, it was discovered that the problem with being stuck in forward was not caused by the variable-pitch propeller but by the pitch box or clutch. This required lifting the engine out and removing the unit. After failing to free up the frozen linkage, Chris and Jess lugged the heavy box up the steps to an engineering shop where it was eventually loosened. Chris then spent 2 days filing and sanding the linkage until it moved freely.

It took 5 days of back-breaking work, assisted by an English engineer, Les, off another yacht, to get the engine back in and running, but Chris was delighted to



Lifting Teleport out to check the prop

find that it now started easily and that the variable-pitch mechanism worked better than ever.

After looking at the GRIB files, they left Nuuk the next day, along with Les and his partner, Ali, who planned to sail as far north as Disko Bugt. The original intention was to take an inshore route, but after Les and Ali bumped into an uncharted rock (a constant threat in these poorly-charted waters) they headed out the long way.

Chris and Jess then decided to sail directly to Disko Bugt, both because of the poorly-charted coast, and because of the loss of time in Nuuk. The Arctic summer is short and they had a long way to go. Les and Ali lost their yacht in a storm a few weeks later, fortunately without loss of life.



Sailing into Illulissat

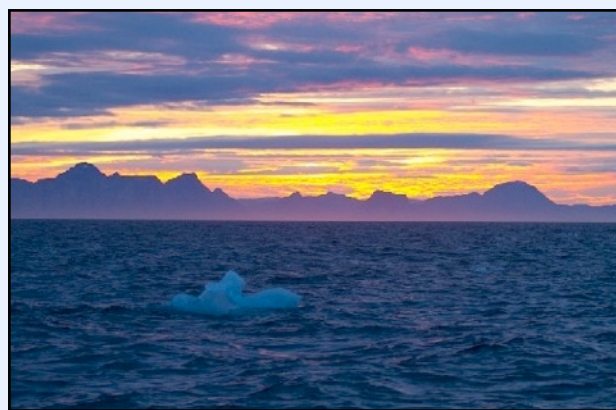
Fresh S-SE winds drove them quickly north for two days, with *Teleport*, deeply-reefed, rolling heavily in the rising sea. On the second day out they crossed the Arctic Circle. 90 miles south of Disko Bugt, the wind eased and they motored on, passing inside a group of islands, through a well-charted passage that cut 20 miles off their trip. They saw numerous seals, several humpback whales and a number of icebergs. They were delighted that Jess did not feel sick on this passage, having managed to get a good supply of medication from a visiting cruise ship in Nuuk.

After a night anchored off the colourful village of Egedesminde, they motored across a berg-strewn Disko Bugt towards the town of Jakobshavn, a busy fishing port and home to 5,000 sled dogs, which are bred here. Their barking is so loud it can be heard above the roar of large chunks of ice breaking off the nearby Isfjord Glacier. These then become the latest bergs, drifting off into the ocean. The waves caused by the ice falling into the sea sometimes invade the harbour, causing a rise and fall of the sea level by as much as 2 metres.

Initially the approach to the harbour seemed blocked by ice but they eventually found a way around the bergs and into the small harbour, as the midnight sun

turned the sculpted bergs into impossibly beautiful hues of pink and orange. Inside the harbour, small dinghies were ferrying ashore loads of halibut or seal meat, and one fishing boat was soon selling chunks of whale meat to waiting locals. Most of the empty berths were occupied, amusingly, by large chunks of ice, looking for all the world like they wanted to be boats, but Chris and Jess eventually found a vacant berth, secured *Teleport*, and fell into a contented sleep at 0300.

They slept in for a change, and then went ashore to explore and photograph their surroundings. The Greenlandic sled-dog puppies, which were free to wander the town (older dogs have to be chained up) were adorable, and the view of the glacier from the nearby hillside breathtaking. The huge number of bergs on the ocean, through which they must soon pass, was both beautiful and awe-inspiring.



Sunrise off the coast of Greenland

The night before they left, a 10m bergy bit managed to jostle its way in through the narrow harbour entrance. This looked amusing until it headed directly for *Teleport*. They managed to slip their lines and move to another berth just in time. When they left the next morning, on the 5th of August, the bergy bit was snugly moored in *Teleport's* old berth.

The passage from Ilulissat to Sarqaq, on the northern shores of Disko Bugt, was dense with ice. Luckily there was no wind and they were able to motor gingerly through, sometimes reversing and looking for another opening, sometimes being bumped by growlers, with Jess on the bows with the boathook, fending off. They arrived at 2400, bathed once more in the orange glow of the midnight sun.

As they approached the anchorage, they were surprised to see the masts of three other yachts, including a large French schooner, *La Louise*. The owner and skipper of this schooner, Thierry Dubois, is a legendary French sailor who has raced around the world solo three times. He was once rescued by the Australian Navy in the Southern Ocean, when the keel of his yacht broke off and the vessel capsized. The navy found him kneeling on the upturned hull of his

yacht, holding onto the rudders in 12m seas. These days he takes eco-tourists on Arctic adventures.

Chris and Jess had hardly lain down to sleep when the sound of ice crashing into *Teleport* brought them hastily on deck. The crews of the other yachts were on deck too, and they spent most of the night fending off ice floes that drifted into the harbour. In the background behind the headland, they could hear the explosions and roars from nearby bergs, creating yet more bergy bits presumably headed for the harbour. When fended off with the boathook, these bergy bits often banged or audibly cracked. The icebergs are evidently under huge internal stress, accounting for the explosive way ice calves off them.



Jess fending off ice in the harbour

The next day was windless and they motored on beneath a cloudless, deep-blue sky. There was less ice and the sea was calm. At one point they discovered the perfect berg, with a large arch in it, and Chris got into the dinghy to capture the iconic image of this expedition - of *Teleport*, green hull and tan sail etched against the Arctic sky, perfectly framed by the dazzling-white iceberg's arch.

Later that day they saw *La Louise* anchored in a bay and edged carefully in. There are no soundings on the charts here and you never know when you are going to find a rock. The crew of *La Louise* came on deck and waved them in, directing them around a rocky shoal that they had already found the hard way.

The next night the two yachts shared an anchorage again and Thierry invited Chris and Jess to dinner. Besides being a legendary sailor, Thierry is also a magnificent cook and a great raconteur. Unfortunately, *La Louise* was heading south after this, so they parted ways, but Chris and Jess agreed that their days in

Disko Bugt had been the highlight of their cruise so far.

In one anchorage, when they went ashore to fill their water containers from a melt-water stream, they discovered some Mountain Sorel, a sweet-tasting local plant filled with vitamin C. They collected some and put it in their paella that night. During previous Arctic expeditions, Chris and his sled buddy, Clark, had eaten this plant whenever they were lucky enough to find it.

This anchorage was unusually green, with beautiful wildflowers. Much of the landscape elsewhere was barren, with frequent landslides, one of which they witnessed, stripping the hillsides of vegetation.

Their last stop in Greenland was at Upernavik, the most northern town with services on the west coast. They had now travelled 2,200 miles from Halifax, about 60% of the planned 3,700 miles they hoped to navigate this season. From here, it was back to Canada, across Baffin Bay to Pond Inlet on Baffin Island, a 400 mile ocean passage. They hoped the ocean would be kinder to them this time. At this latitude, protected by the Arctic High, the ocean is usually less stormy in summer, though there was a 100 by 150 mile lump of pack ice they would have to skirt on the way.

Their first challenge came even before leaving harbour, when Chris snapped off a hollow bolt on the engine through which oil passes to the oil filter. It was impossible to buy such a specialised part in Upernavik, and the engine was useless without it. Amazingly, the local mechanic silver-soldered it back together. "We fix everything," he said with a broad grin, which almost matched the grin Chris gave him in return. Another week's delay would have put an end to the NW Passage transit this season.



Teleport framed by a spectacular arched iceberg



Sailing off SW coast of Greenland

The weather was calmer than the perfect sailing winds the GRIB files promised, but their 4 day passage was peaceful. They had to motor for a lot of it, which meant hand-steering in the absence of a working autopilot, but the seas were calm, with blue skies and little fog. They could see the icebergs and growlers in their path mostly, and thanks to ice-charts emailed to them by Jess's brother, Kev, and Chris's sled buddy, Clark, they safely passed about 15 miles beneath the region of pack ice. They made bread, played cards, counted seals, slept, steered, and dreamed of all the things they had to look forward to in Canada - not least of all a new electric autopilot hopefully waiting at the post office on Baffin Island!

Passing through the small gap between Baffin and Bylot Islands, they officially entered the NW Passage and came to anchor at Pond Inlet, where, as Chris puts it, not only is there no pond, but no discernible sheltered anchorage. *Teleport* bobbed and rocked in the swell as they launched the dinghy and headed for the surf-fringed beach. Baffin Island, though, was spectacularly beautiful, with high, snow-capped mountains, and glaciers in every valley sparkling in the sunlight.

The autopilot was eventually located in the back of the post office, and 300l of diesel loaded aboard by using every available spare container, along with their 100l bladder, which they took to the beach to be filled by the local fuel tanker. The bladder had to be hoisted aboard with *Teleport's* halyard, but by evening they were ready to leave.

They had been looking forward to a hot shower, but the receptionist at Pond Inlet's only hotel just laughed at them when they asked if they could buy one. They could have boiled a kettle and used the portable camp shower they carried aboard, but had no desire to strip

off for a shower in the nippy cockpit. They got by with baby-wipes.

They left the next morning for Tay Bay, about 85 miles away. This is the place where Alvah Simon wintered over alone aboard his yacht, *Roger Henry*, some years ago, together with his famous cat which was known to swim between boats in tropical anchorages. Alvah's book, *North to the Night*, was both an inspiration for Chris and Jess and a source of valuable information.

Along the way, they practiced firing the shotgun, in case they were attacked by a polar bear. It was the first time Jess had fired a gun and the noise was almost as bad as the recoil. They came across a pod of about 10 Orcas, or killer whales. They silenced the engine and slid quietly towards them. At first, the whales ignored them, but then a few came over to investigate, a couple charged the hull, but dove beneath the keel at the last moment, and one even nudged *Teleport*, which Chris captured on film, using his waterproof Gopro camera lashed to the boathook.



An orca heading for Teleport

They arrived in Tay Bay at 0300 the next morning, and after a short sleep went ashore to explore and collect water. They walked towards the glacier but gave up after a couple of hours when it didn't get any closer. They saw some polar bear tracks but not the real thing, and some fossils. Then they returned aboard. They had to keep moving. The short Arctic summer was almost over.

From Tay Bay they sailed to Port Leopold, about 175 miles away, at the top of Prince Regent Inlet. At midday they reached their highest latitude, 73° 52'N, and shortly afterwards saw their first polar bear. Later they saw another yacht heading the other way but could not raise it on the radio. They arrived at Port Leopold at 0500 the next morning.

On the shore, they sighted a large polar bear feasting on the carcass of a small Beluga whale. Eventually it ambled off and Chris had a wild idea. He wanted to go ashore and set up one of his Gopro cameras, in its



Filling up with water from a glacier river, Tay Bay

waterproof housing, set to take photos automatically every minute or so, with the idea he would get some awesome photos of the bear feeding when it returned.

They managed to get ashore and set it up, with a great deal of anxiety in case the bear returned while they were there, and then retreated to the boat. Chris was gleeful when the bear returned, and couldn't wait until he could retrieve the camera. However, a gale blew up that afternoon and it was morning before they could get shore again. Even then, getting ashore in the dinghy was perilous and nerve-wracking in the strong wind.

At first he couldn't find the camera, but eventually found the badly-chewed battery, then the mangled camera, all the while worrying about the bear. The waterproof housing was nowhere to be seen. Apparently Gopro camera housings are waterproof and shockproof, but not bear-proof. Chris managed to extract the memory card from the camera later, but was disappointed to discover that there wasn't a single bear image on it! Just some lovely, low-angled shots of seagulls.



One of the pram-hood hatches on Teleport

The wind was still howling, but once they had laboriously hauled up the chain by hand and battled out of the bay, it was behind them. They surfed merrily along under just a couple of panels of sail, perfectly under control and saving precious diesel fuel, while they kept watch beneath the snug protection of the pramhoods. They covered 140 miles in less than 24 hours.

They anchored for one night in Fort Ross, a Hudson's Bay Trading Company outpost that was abandoned in 1948, after the pack ice had blocked supply ships from reaching it for two successive years. Despite dropping the pick at 2200, and needing to leave the next morning at 0500, they managed a quick run ashore to visit the survival hut that is all that remains here now. It is filled with supplies for stranded travellers, plus a fascinating visitors' book that the *Teleport* crew duly made an entry in.



Hudson's Bay Trading Post hut boarded up against bears

They had to leave at 0500 to negotiate Bellot Strait, a narrow passage which is beset by fierce tides. In order to get through before the favourable ebb tide robbed them of steerage-way, they had to initially stem the last of the flood. There is an unmarked, barely-submerged hazard in the middle of this 18-mile passage, Magpie Rock. It sometimes creates a whirlpool that has been known to suck vessels down onto it. All went according to plan, they edged past the rock at slack water, hoisted the sail as the ebb tide began to gather speed beneath them, and shot out the other end at 1030.

They arrived at the Tasmania Islands (the irony was probably not lost on them) just at sunset, noting that there was now the beginning of darkness as the summer drew to a close. They were lucky to avoid an



Inside the trading post at Fort Ross

uncharted rocky shoal that rose up abruptly from 65m of water, and then had difficulty finding a suitable anchorage for the night. They eventually anchored in 12m of water in a narrow inlet with minimal swinging room. But it was calm and they were exhausted, so they put out minimal scope on the anchor chain and slept.

They had the Vespers AIS Watchmate anchor alarm set, plus their alarm clock, but slept right through until midday. By this stage of the voyage, exhaustion and accumulated stress were taking a toll. They both suffered from disturbed sleep, vivid dreams and nightmares. Chris's nightmares were often about polar bears. When he finally awoke that morning and looked out of the hatch, he was staring right into the eyes of a large polar bear on the nearest point of land.

Normally, the route from here passes under King William Island to Gjoa Haven, then to Victoria Island. The discovery of this route is what opened up the NW Passage to small ships. The more direct route, through McClintock Channel, is usually blocked with ice and only icebreakers can get through. This is the area where Franklin's expedition was lost. But this year was extraordinarily ice-free. Reports showed that McClintock Channel had only 1/10 ice cover, so they decided to attempt it, cutting 200 miles off the trip.

They had a trouble-free passage, possibly the first yacht to negotiate McClintock Channel, coming to anchor in a small bay on the SE coast the next morning. They saw very little ice, except a few bergy bits as they approached Victoria Island. They experienced a short period of genuine darkness, however, so decided that for the last 90 miles to Cambridge Bay they would only sail in daylight, not wanting to push their luck.

At Anderson Bay, another uncharted anchorage, they nosed gingerly in and anchored in 3m of crystal-clear water. Ashore, an unusual meowing sound turned out to be a cute little Arctic fox that appeared to be calling out to them, and waited for them to approach and have

a chat. After a while, disappointed perhaps that they had no snacks, it disappeared down a burrow.

The next morning there was ice on the decks and in the crevices of the sail cover. The days were rapidly shortening. But shortly after midday, they dropped the sail for the last time that season and brought *Teleport* alongside the wharf at Cambridge Bay, where two old friends of Chris's were waiting to take their mooring lines. It was the 31st of August and their journey was over for that year. Within days, it was snowing heavily and ice was moving into the bays.

For Chris, returning to Cambridge Bay was a bit like coming home, as this was the 5th time he'd visited here. *Teleport* was craned out for the winter and stored in a cradle that Chris built with lumber supplied by his friends. They would continue their passage in 2012.

Chris Bray is the author of The 1000 Hour Day, about his previous Arctic expeditions. In 2004 the Australian Geographic Society gave him their Young Adventurer of the Year award. Since 2011 he has been on their board of Councillors, the youngest member ever elected. He is a committee member of the Australia and New Zealand chapter of the Explorers Club, worked as a photographer for Australian Geographic, and was appointed Australian ambassador for digital photography by Canon. During a break from the Teleport expedition, Chris and Jess were married on top of a mountain in Tasmania (wedding guests had to climb the mountain). They are currently developing an eco-resort in a National Park on Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean; and hope eventually to return to the Arctic on a new junk-rigged expedition yacht. The outstanding blog and videos of Teleport's voyage can be viewed at www.yachtteleport.com.



To be continued in February.



All snuggled up for the winter, Teleport in Cambridge Bay, Victoria Island

Teleport - through the Northwest Passage

The adventure continues . . .

By Graham Cox

Chris and Jess Bray Part Two

When Chris and Jess arrived back in Cambridge Bay in late June 2012, the ice was just starting to recede from the bay. *Teleport* had survived the raging blizzards and -60° temperatures without too much damage, just some chafe from the tarp lashings, which had worn grooves in the fibreglass sheathing. The bilges were drier than when they left.



Jess climbing aboard for the first time after the winter

The ice looked like a solid mass when they flew across to Victoria Island from the Canadian mainland, but they knew they'd have to prepare the boat quickly, in order to make the most of the brief Arctic summer. One of the big jobs to be done was fitting a new head onto the ancient Sabb diesel, along with a new injector and temperature gauge. They were delighted to find the motor started and ran better than ever.

Because a fresh-water river runs into Cambridge Bay, the ice clears out of there much sooner than it does in the passage itself, so they were able to launch after a couple of weeks, only to discover they were sinking, albeit rather slowly. Every time they looked in the bilge, there was water in it. Eventually Chris found water seeping through the laminated planking. The surrounding timber felt sound, and it was only about four litres a day, so they decided they would just have to live with it until they got to Nome, their next winter destination.

July was a busy month, what with preparing the boat, exploring, wildlife encounters, and partying with friends. The most important event took place one evening on nearby Mount Pelly. Chris had secretly gone there the day before, written the words "Marry Me" in large, light-coloured stones on the hillside, and built a small table and chairs from other rocks, overlooking his message.

He then persuaded Jess to spend the night camping there. While Jess was setting up the campsite, he snuck off and lit some candles at the table, then led Jess to the site. When she finally noticed the stone message, he went down on one knee and offered her a ring. The ring was just a stainless-steel hose clamp (one size fits all) but Jess was delighted to accept.



The spot where Chris asked Jess the question

They departed Cambridge Bay on the 30th of July, after a farewell party that lasted most of the night, being sent off by most of their friends waving from the jetty. The forecast was for several days of light easterlies, ideal for reaching their first destination, Holman, now called Ulukhaktok, a bit less than 400 nm away, or approximately 4 days teleporting.

They were accompanied at the start by their friend Luc, a French singlehander. Luc's yacht, *Roxanne*, had also wintered in Cambridge Bay, though not in a cradle, just leaning over against a pile of rocks Luc had built up beneath the vessel. After passing Luc a chocolate muffin, they watched him motorsail away, being content instead to waft along, enjoying the silence.

Later the wind died and they were forced to motor as well, pleased to discover that the variable-pitch propeller could be pitched further than it had been before. Now they could happily make 6 knots at 85% of maximum engine revs. They settled into their watch routines, enjoying the calm weather and smooth seas.

It was sobering to note that there were no longer 24 hours of high-summer daylight. The sun now dipped below the horizon for a brief period each night. The days would continue to get shorter, reminding them that they needed to keep moving.

On the second day, the following wind picked up to 15 knots and they rocketed off under squared-off sail, making a record-setting 130 miles in one 24 hour period. Without stays to restrict how far out the sail can be squared, this sort of sailing is both effortless and safe, with little chance of an accidental gybe, barring an extreme, sudden wind shift. At times, they reefed a panel when it gusted up a bit, then re-hoisted again as soon as it eased. Jess soon became quite confident in doing this on her own.

The seas built up after a while and *Teleport* rolled heavily, which made cooking and other tasks something of a challenge. Chris tied the pan to the stove but the fish fillets still tried to leap out. Luckily, Jess was not seasick on this leg and they both enjoyed the passage, with the large, orange orb of the full moon rising out of the sea behind them, and days filled with sunshine and blue skies.

On the third day, the wind increased to 20-25 knots and they sailed on under reduced canvas, arriving at Holman/Ulukhaktok later that day, ahead of schedule. It was too rough to anchor in Queen's Bay, so they went around the corner to nearby King's Bay, dropping the pick in 6m of clear water, surrounded by majestic mountains. Setting the anchor alarm, they turned in for a much-needed rest.

The next morning they went ashore, amazed to discover that many people in this remote settlement of 400 people had been following them on Facebook, and were awaiting their arrival. One old seal hunter, Harold, came aboard *Teleport* with his huge sled dog, the biggest dog that had ever been down below, but perfectly behaved. Harold lives on a small offshore island during the summer months, bringing seals in to the market in his 6m canoe. He has a workshop in



Harold's boat

town where he makes and repairs guns for locals in the winter months.

Roxanne, despite being 32ft LOA, arrived 26 hours after *Teleport*. This was partially because junk rig is more efficient downwind than other rigs, barring squaresails, and partially because Luc was singlehanding without a mechanical self-steering gear (windvane). He was having difficulties with his autopilot; these units don't work too well in polar regions, due to the proximity of the magnetic pole. *Teleport's* new Simrad TP22 tillerpilot functioned reasonably ok, provided they kept an eye on it. In fresh winds they used their Hasler-Gibb servo-pendulum windvane. It is an old unit, an original version 1, but works flawlessly.

After fitting their tracking device, which had arrived too late in Cambridge Bay but was helpfully delivered to Ulukhaktok by a friendly pilot, they set off for De Salis Bay in the Banks Archipelago, the most westerly Arctic islands, hoping to reach Gillet Bay on the mainland, where there is an abandoned Hudson Bay Trading Post, before a massive low, heading their way, brought gale-force headwinds.



A great Inukshuk near Holman

At Ulukhaktok they had been given the carcass of a male king eider duck, still sporting its magnificent plumage. Having often admired these birds, they felt bad about eating it, though it was delicious. Chris admits that when he now admires them flying past, he regrets a little that they are so tantalisingly out of reach.

On the way to the Banks Islands, they encountered the first ice seen that summer. Unlike the Greenland ice, these floes were made from saltwater, but they had the same magical sheen and translucent colours. While photographing the largest floe, the camera lens jammed and they put their heads together to solve the problem. A sudden windshift caused an accidental gybe, sending *Teleport* careering towards the ice, and there was temporary chaos until they got the boat back on course.

They sailed into De Salis Bay at 0200 hours, just as the sun rose above the mountains, burning off the thickest fog they had ever seen. It was, Chris joked, so thick he couldn't see his hand in his pocket. Bathed in a beautiful orange glow, they eased their way into the bay and dropped anchor in 3m of water, reversing hard under engine to dig in the anchor, and then folded down their double bunk for a good sleep.

Jess and Chris spent two days exploring this bay, hiking 5km inland. They saw plenty of fresh fox, caribou and polar bear tracks, but never saw any wildlife. They then set sail for Cape Parry, with a forecast for fresh westerly winds, but found themselves instead beating into a southerly. This wind would have been ideal to head for their next destination, Tuktoyaktuk, but they wanted to catch up with Luc at Cape Parry, so bashed on, motor-sailing to windward, hoping for a change.

The change finally came just as they made landfall at Cape Parry, only to discover that Luc had already left for Tuktoyaktuk. Cape Parry seemed a desolate place. They were keen to catch up with Luc, so they only slept for 4 hours before heading back out. The belated westerly was, yet again, a headwind.

Teleport bashed on, motor-sailing at 20° to the wind, against a rough sea, with a persistent cross-swell throwing them about. Jess succumbed once again to seasickness, and even Chris felt ill after he inadvertently allowed the diesel tank to run dry. The motor stopped and he had to bleed the engine to get it started again.

At 0200 hours one night, Jess called Chris to see a pod of bowhead whales. Adults grow up to 18m long. Some had babies with them. These whales frequently raise their tails, so *Teleport*, drifting quietly with engine off and sheet eased, was soon surrounded by tails slapping the water. Some of the whales came within 10m of *Teleport*. Later, people asked them if they had been scared, since these whales are known to be aggressive. Chris notes that next time they will be.



A massive bowhead whale dives in front of Teleport

They also crossed tacks with a singlehanded sailor, Brad, on the 56ft yacht, *Tranquilo*, which sped past, heading downwind. After a few days of bashing to windward, they rounded the headland and surfed through the shallow channel into Tuktoyaktuk with the wind and swell behind them, touching 11 knots at times.



The sign says it all . . .

Chris was kept busy at the helm, dodging logs and sometimes entire trees that spewed out of the mouth of the nearby Mackenzie River, turning the sea brown with silt. Luckily, the coastguard had re-installed the channel beacons, because the chartplotter proved to be woefully inaccurate. At times, it showed *Teleport* passing over shoals and across land. The depth-sounder, reassuringly, showed they never had less than 3m of water beneath them.

At the dock they were greeted by Luc, who not only had warps and fenders ready, but a steaming hot lunch waiting in *Roxanne's* saloon. There were two other yachts anchored off this small settlement (population 900), heading east through the NW Passage. After exchanging information, charts and pilot books, these yachts headed off to take advantage of the prevailing westerly.

The GRIB files (if you believe them) predicted easterly winds on the following Tuesday, allowing *Teleport* and *Roxanne* to head for Herschel Island, Canada, approximately 130 NM away, then to tiny Barter Island, Alaska, approximately 100 miles further on. From there it is a lengthy 280 mile hop to Barrow, where they should be able to sneak into the shallow lagoon. Here they would wait for the most crucial weather window of all, to get safely through the dreaded Bering Strait to Nome, a 500 mile passage with nowhere decent to hide.

After an overnight sail, weaving between chunks of sea ice and logs in thick fog, they sighted the cliffs rimming Herschel Island, dropping anchor in snug Pauline Cove at 1400. Ashore they met the rangers, had a hot shower in their sauna, saw a caribou and a

musk ox, and examined the ice slump, which is caused by the ice cliffs melting, causing the thin layer of topsoil and peat to fall into the sea.



Musk ox

The fauna on this island varies from year to year, depending on what creatures are there when the sea ice melts, trapping them there for the summer. It was believed there were no polar bears that summer, but Chris and Jess saw one on their way out of the anchorage the next day, radioing in their sighting to the rangers, who located the bear soon after.

The passage to Barter Island brought unpredicted headwinds (so much for the GRIB files), periods of rain, lots of sea ice and logs. They also saw some beluga whales in the distance. The weather dampened their celebration about reaching Alaska, but Chris made up for it by baking a delicious loaf of cheese and herb bread in the pressure cooker. Approaching their anchorage, *Roxanne* and *Teleport* were able to photograph each other sailing through the ice.



Barter Island

Despite being unable to locate the channel into Barter Island's inner anchorage, they spent a quiet night anchored off. Ashore, there is a small settlement of 300 people, surrounded by high fences to keep the snow drifts from burying the houses. There were also a lot of polar bears, who are attracted by the carcasses of the bowhead whales that the local Inuit hunt each season.

Always keen to get some good photos, Chris and Luc approached the beach in *Teleport's* inflatable dinghy, towing a go-pro camera behind them on a piece of Styrofoam attached to a fishing line, hoping some bears might swim out to investigate. Failing to attract the bears' attention, Chris darted ashore and left the camera on the beach, with the fishing line going back to the dinghy.

A young bear came over and put the camera in its mouth. After much yelling from Chris and Luc, and revving their outboard motor, the bear got alarmed and spat the camera out. Chris began reeling it in, but immediately the camera began skittering over the beach, the bear pounced. They finally got the camera back, only to discover that it had run out of film shortly after the bear put it in its mouth. Still, they got some great footage.



Another camera gone west?

The next day they sailed 90 miles to Cross Island. The weather was changeable, with two long cloudbanks rolling over them, causing sudden wind shifts of 180°. It was also getting dangerously dark for a few hours around midnight now. They had to claw their way into the anchorage after sunset, anxiously looking for ice. What appeared to be a lump of ice turned out to be a large mama polar bear and her cub, swimming towards *Teleport*. They decided that from now, if they could not reach shelter before sunset, they would heave-to in open water and drift for the short Arctic nights.

However, they were delighted to have time to explore these out of the way places, something that is not possible if one makes the transit of the NW Passage in

one season. Cross Island was particularly special for Chris, as it is detailed in an old book given to him when he was a boy by his father, Andrew, who had in turn received it from his uncle when he was young.

Arctic Hunter, written by Bud Helmericks, recounts Bud's adventures living among the Alaskan Inuit in the early years of the 20th century. It is full of sketches and diagrams, including a map of Cross Island that is better than the one on *Teleport's* charts. It marks where he found a grave with some spears in it, and the skeletal remains of a man, with 4 puncture holes in his skull, killed by a polar bear.

That night, thinking about this, and about the mama bear that swam out to *Teleport* with her cub, they took below the bundle of drying fish that usually hung in the cockpit, and barricaded themselves inside the cabin.

The next morning they encountered at least 10 polar bears on the beach, and launched their dinghy to have a closer look. One, a mama bear with her cub, stood up on her hind legs to get a better look at the interlopers. She was about 12ft tall. Chris and Jess decided discretion was the better part of valour, retreating to the safety of *Teleport*.

On the way to Thetis Island, 45 miles further on, they came across more polar bears on an ice floe. They anchored next to *Roxanne* at Thetis Island just before sunset. The anchorage was surrounded by oil rigs, which lit up the night sky like distant cities. Their GPS chartplotter showed *Teleport* anchored in the middle of the island.

From now on, as they cruised south through Alaskan waters, they would frequently have oil rigs in sight, often three or four at a time. Once they sailed through a seismic survey area, where the surveyors were setting off air explosives to map the seafloor. The explosions sent shockwaves through *Teleport's* hull, and there were no whales or other wildlife in sight.

The next leg to Barrow Island produced ideal sailing conditions, with 15-20 knot winds dead astern, and no ice or logs to contend with. *Teleport* barrelled along under squared-out sail, outrunning the bigger *Roxanne*, despite Luc flying his spinnaker. Chris and Jess passed the time playing cards, filming, and listening to music, delighting in the effortless sailing, enjoying the silence. It was pleasant not having the diesel thumping away, which it seemed to have done too often in recent days.

After briefly anchoring just inside the Elson lagoon, which proved rough in the prevailing conditions, they relocated to the anchorage off Barrow's township, where there was marginally better shelter. Getting ashore entailed hair-raising surf landings in the inflatable dinghy. Getting back out with loads of fuel was an even bigger challenge, but they learned fast and only got seriously wet once.

Later they relocated back into the lagoon when the wind changed, waiting there several days for a good weather window to make the 500 mile crossing to Nome. They finally left on the 30th of August, rounded the most northerly point of Alaska, and headed south, rocketing along at 6.5 knots before a 15-20 knot breeze.

It wasn't long before they had a friendly visit from the US Coastguard Cutter, *Bertholf*. The radio operator congratulated them on their successful transit of the NW Passage, and commented on how beautiful the junk rig looked, saying that there were several envious sailors aboard *Bertholf*.

By mid-afternoon the wind had picked up to 20 knots, then ramped up to 25, and then to a solid 30 by the evening. This was a bit disconcerting, as the GRIB files showed that it would only be around 15-20 at this stage, and was predicted to continue increasing.

The seas built fast, and Chris and Jess quickly reefed the sail. Eventually they only had one panel up, still rocketing along at an average of 6-7 knots. *Teleport* began surfing on the wave crests, sometimes reaching 12 knots. The old Hasler-Gibb self-steering gear continued to steer flawlessly without broaching.

The wind stayed at around 28-30 knots for the next 24 hours, by which time the waves were quite impressive. They roared past, breaking, crumbling and imploding upon themselves, leaving cavernous areas of frothy white water around the boat. The seas were quite confused, perhaps due to an opposing current or leftover swell. Every now and again a large set would charge in from a completely different angle, wreaking havoc.



Wild sea

It was only a matter of time before *Teleport* was caught in the wrong spot at the wrong time. They suffered a couple of unintentional gybes, and some waves broke into the cockpit, forcing them to put in the washboards. Other waves broke across the deck and threatened to rip off the dinghy (under which they still had their 100 litre flexible tank of diesel), but thankfully nothing was washed away.

They made terrific speed, smashing their daily-distance record, sailing 155 miles from midnight to midnight. Chris even considered a drogue at one point. Poor Jess was unfortunately seasick again (part anxiety, part motion they think), her only relief coming when she was asleep, so Chris did his best to let her sleep, and encouraged her to try and keep some fluids and soft food down. He kept the watch on his own for two nights.

The winds finally abated early on the third day, dropping to 20 knots. The depressing blanket of grey clouds softened and fractured, revealing the Aurora - the Northern Lights - as shifting, bright green veils of light in the pre-dawn. The constant motion of the boat prevented Chris from getting any decent photos, but it was still great to see them, and his relief that the gale was spent was intense.

Jess got up to gaze at the Aurora, and the easing of the weather marked the start of her recovery. It took another full day for her to get completely better, as the seas took their time to calm, but eventually she was able to resume watch-keeping, allowing Chris to get some sleep and enjoy her company. Even when off-watch in that kind of weather, though, Chris finds it difficult to sleep.

Passing Point Hope, they headed towards the Bering Strait, motor-sailing at times in failing winds, trying to stem an adverse current and get through the strait before another storm arrived. This area has a fearsome reputation in storm-force conditions. They were surrounded by thousands of shearwaters and puffins, wheeling and diving into the sea. Chris got a great photo of a whale that surfaced in the midst of the wheeling flocks, mouth agape, feeding on the krill.

The GRIB files showed another storm approaching, with 35 knot winds predicted to blow for days. As they went through Bering Strait, the wind began gusting above 25 knots but the seas remained calm. To port loomed Alaska, and to starboard, through foggy clouds, they could see the coast of Russia. That night they were once more engulfed in a maelstrom of wind and waves, but luckily this time Jess did not get sick, and soon they were approaching the gold-rush town of Nome, passing little home-made houseboats with suction pipes down to divers on the seabed.

Amazingly, after this long, boisterous passage, they found themselves entering Nome's breakwaters alongside Luc on *Roxanne*. The boats were soon tied up to a pontoon where they were welcomed by Rolland, Deb and their daughters, a local family who had sailed through the Passage in 2009 and settled here. This family showered them with hospitality and were indispensable in the debacle that followed, as they tried to arrange hoisting the boats out for the winter.

Basically, none of the local crane operators wanted to touch yachts, having had too many problems before. The only crane that might be available this season would not be ready until long after Chris and Jess's commitments in Australia fell due, and might not be there at all the following season. They briefly contemplated sailing around Alaska to Seaward, another 10 days at sea, or being hauled out at Naknek, 570 miles distant. Naknek looked good until they received a quote of \$7,000 for the haulout.

They asked Phil, a local fisherman, if they could use the hydraulic cradle he co-owned with two other fishermen. One partner agreed, but the third refused because of previous dramas. Yachts have very different underwater profiles to fishing boats and there had been accidents. One yachtsman even sued the fishermen.



Being transported to the boatyard

Eventually, with the invaluable assistance of Rolland and Phil, they located a rusty old trailer. Phil set to work immediately, welding on steel struts and making timber pads. It took three trucks, chained together, to haul *Teleport* out, but not before punching a small hole in her hull. Then, with her keel scraping the ground, she was eased along to the storage yard. *Roxanne* soon followed. Despite days of hard work, nobody would accept payment for their services.

Arriving at Nome was a momentous time for Chris and Jess. They were lauded as the youngest couple to transit the NW Passage, and Chris the youngest skipper. *Teleport* was the first junk-rigged yacht to make the transit, and one of the smallest. They had become engaged to be married along the way, in what must rate as the most romantic marriage proposal ever. The Australian media picked up on the story and aired the first of several news items, culminating in a short documentary, in which the junk-rigged *Teleport* played a prominent role.

They also met up again with David Cowper, and his crew, Jayne, on his ice-rated, aluminium motor yacht, *Polar Bound*. The last time they had seen him was in Cambridge Bay on his 4th transit of the NW Passage,

and now he had completed a 5th. This time he had rocketed through in just 16 days, making the passage from England to Nome in little more than a month, with just one stop in Greenland, burning about 5 tonnes of diesel along the way. Chris and Jess admired his achievement, but were much happier with their own style of voyaging.

Despite a slow start to the summer thaw, the ice this year had retreated more than ever, opening up several new channels through the Passage. This, as Chris notes, not only threatens the existence of wildlife, in particular of polar bears, but increases the likelihood of oil and gas development. Unlike Antarctica, there are no international treaties protecting the Arctic.

After a hasty day winterising the boat, Chris and Jess flew out to Sydney, with Rolland offering to look after the boats in their absence, including shrink-wrapping *Teleport*, which they were unable to do themselves, given the time and weather constraints.

They returned in June 2013 for another season. After some hectic refitting, including making epoxy repairs to the leaky bilge that had dried out nicely during the winter, the precarious trailer trip was re-enacted in reverse. *Teleport* once again made it safely into the water, despite bits falling off the rusty old trailer along the way. These Arctic haulouts proved by far to be the most hazardous undertakings of the entire expedition.

It was great to be afloat again. At times they could see humpback whales out on the horizon, and one night an otter played around *Teleport*. They managed to find time to explore the area and photograph local wildlife. After celebrating Chris's 30th birthday, they set sail on July 2nd. They were sad, as usual, to leave behind so many extraordinary friends, not to mention the delicious food from Pingo Bakery and Seafood House. This café is run by Phil's wife, Erica. If you ever go to Nome, don't miss out on Erica's halibut and king crab seafood omelettes.

They had some new toys this season. Chris was looking forward to playing with his towable, waterproof camera housing, and a sophisticated quadrocopter drone. Already a highly-acclaimed wildlife photographer, he hoped to get even better images this season.

It was a cold, windy, overcast, rainy day when they left, and the 120 mile passage to St Lawrence Island began with a beat into steep, messy seas. Poor Jess immediately succumbed to seasickness, despite medication. They decided it was induced by anxiety, the familiar smells of wet clothing and musty cabin having too many associations with difficult times, like the severe gale between Halifax and Greenland in 2011. Jess is plucky, however, and never considered giving up.

After a couple of delightful, sunny days exploring ashore, they left St Lawrence Island for the 200 mile run to St Matthew Island on 5th July. The forecast for northerly winds soon evaporated and once again they found themselves beating. The wind rose to 21 knots, and *Teleport* hardly made headway, even with the engine running. Jess was seasick again.

Exhausted after standing watch for 7 hours at a time, Chris altered course away from the wind, abandoning the secure anchorage he was aiming for, and headed to the NW tip of the island. When the depth sounder showed the seabed rising from 200 to 35ft, they dropped anchor at 2000 hours in thick fog, trusting that the island was to windward, as the chart plotter indicated.

The fog then thinned a little, giving them a glimpse of the island, so they launched the dinghy, despite their exhaustion, and made a brief foray ashore. They followed a small, ice-cold stream up a mossy slope pitted with lemming holes, and discovered a mini glacier, before returning to *Teleport's* snug cabin, setting the anchor alarm, and falling into a deep sleep.

The next day dawned with brilliant sunshine, revealing a majestic, uninhabited island, with steep orange cliffs, a wide variety of birds wheeling around curiously, and seals popping up to stare at the boat. Later they saw a large fox ashore, and a gigantic whale out to sea. The days they spent here were among the most memorable of the voyage.



A large fox

After riding out a 35 knot gale for two days, with *Teleport* bucking and sheering around, testing their 15kg Rocna anchor, they set sail for St Paul Island, another 200 miles to the south, home to one of the largest fur seal populations on earth. It was a gruelling 52 hour sail to windward, but luckily they were mostly able to lay the course. The seas were rough, and Chris felt a little nauseous. Amazingly, dosed to the eyeballs with medication, Jess did not feel sick at all, and this

greatly boosted her confidence. From then on, she coped well with rough-weather sailing.

In dense fog, they clawed their way through the breakwaters into St Paul's harbour, trusting the chartplotter. The fog thinned briefly, giving them an unnerving glimpse of a rusting shipwreck on the rocky headland. They had to weave through large beds of kelp and fishing boats that loomed out of the fog, surrounded by wheeling birds and curious seals.

Eventually they came gratefully alongside a wharf near the fish-processing plant, delighted with the prospect of standing down the watch and having a good sleep. This wharf features in the documentary series, *The Deadliest Catch*, about the Bering Sea crab fishery, a series that gives a good insight into how tough conditions can be in this part of the world.

St Paul's proved to be another welcoming island, where numerous people invited them into their homes for meals, or brought hot food to the boat. They met Michelle, Chair of the Alaskan chapter of the Explorers Club. Chris had spent the last four years as Chair of the Australian/New Zealand Chapter, so they knew a lot of the same people.

They were invited to attend the local fur seal harvest. They were devastated to learn that the seals are clubbed to death, in keeping with indigenous hunting practice, but it turned out to be humane and quick, unlike the bloody slaughter in some places like Japan, and only a few seals were taken.

They then sailed south 40 miles to St George Island, where a local woman, Karen, fed them home-made pizza and gave them a 1,000 year-old semi-fossilised seal tooth. Karen is typical of the larger-than-life people one meets up there. She lives in a self-built shack near the harbour, has done environmental work in places like Mongolia, and had recently bought a small yacht in Hawaii to further her horizons.

The 190 mile passage to Unalaska/Dutch Harbour was a peaceful sail, whooshing along at 5 knots, with clear skies for the first day and glittering phosphorescence at night. They saw humpback whales, albatross and porpoises. The second day brought thick fog and they were grateful for their AIS and radar, as there was quite a bit of shipping around.

Dutch Harbour was well-sheltered, with so many bald eagles that they looked like flocks of giant, mutant seagulls. Chris and Jess were looking forward to some gentle sailing from here on, exploring the Aleutian Islands that stretch westwards from Alaska. Despite the fierce tidal passes they would have to negotiate, hopefully at slack water, the days of 200 mile passages were temporarily behind them.

They soon had a rude awakening. After a boisterous transit of Derbin Strait, they discovered a deep low

was heading their way with strong easterly winds. The anchorage they had chosen was unsuitable, so they made a dash overnight through Unimak Pass, 70 miles to Dora Harbour, which has reasonable depths and a sandy bottom with good holding.

Unimak Pass is a major shipping route, and they spent the night dodging ships traveling at 18 knots, grateful for their AIS transceiver. The ships they spoke to all said they could clearly see *Teleport* on their AIS screens and would keep clear.

There were 10 fishing boats sheltering in Dora Harbour, and they were very hospitable to the crew of *Teleport*. The wind gusted up to 55 knots, and although one fishing boat dragged anchor, *Teleport* came through unscathed, apart from the Australian ensign looking more frayed than ever. They also had a close encounter with a grizzly bear here. It tried to avoid them by making the same detour they did. Coming face to face was a tense moment; then the bear turned and bolted.

From here they made a stressful 45 mile passage to King's Cove in thick fog, dodging ships, fishing boats, nets, whales and kelp. Then they sailed 75 miles to Sand Point with a good breeze, the night being marked by a vivid blue, phosphorescent wake.

The days were getting warmer now, and sometimes they could sail without wearing their down jackets. Nightfall was around 2300, with sunrise coming around 0600. The fog began to reduce, allowing them to admire the glaciated mountains, though there were still no trees.

Time was running out for the season. After riding out another gale at Sand Point, tied safely to a wharf this time, they left with a forecast of good following winds, intending to sail 250 miles direct to Geographic Bay on the Alaskan mainland. There was still a heavy swell running outside the harbour. *Teleport* rolled heavily, but was making good time, averaging 6 knots.

Suddenly there was a loud bang from the rig, and *Teleport's* sail tumbled to the deck, with the yard and top battens trailing in the sea. The halyard remained at the top of the mast. The yard's metal halyard sling-plate, built to the design shown in PJR, had broken. This design is prone to breakage. Many junk sailors have replaced this item with a lashing.

Turning *Teleport* around and seeking shelter in nearby Grosvold Bay on Korovin Island, Chris climbed the mast using two prussic knots on the mast-lift (luckily, Jess knew how to set these up). Jess tailed the ghosher halyard, which was attached to Chris's harness as a back-up. He was able to retrieve the halyard, and the next morning they replaced the broken metal sling with a lashing, delighted to discover subsequently that this worked perfectly. As Chris says, one of the

wonderful aspects of junk rig is that most things can be fixed with bits of string!

The next day they sighted a pod of 10-15 fin whales, among the biggest of the species, and also saw humpback whales, dolphins, albatross and other birds. They were becoming enamoured with birds, one might almost say they had become twitchers. Both began keeping lists of what types they had seen.

In Geographic Harbour they joined a group of enthusiastic photographers who were taking pictures of grizzly bears hunting for salmon. The bears were so engrossed in hunting the fish that they ignored the humans, though one did get curious about Chris, who was sitting down, and ambled up for a closer look. He was instructed to stand up, upon which the bear retreated.

Despite being enchanted with this place, they had to leave too soon and make their way to Seldovia, where *Teleport* was hauled out for the winter after a short cruise with Jess's parents, Max and Judith. 2013 had been a less stressful year for them, after two seasons in the Arctic. However, they realised they had been lucky with their transit of the NW Passage. In August 2013, the ice had still not melted in the middle of the Passage. Many yachts turned back that year.

They returned to *Teleport* in early June 2014, just for a month, as they had to return to Sydney, Australia, for their wedding in August, which took place on top of a mountain in Tasmania. Guests had to bring warm clothes and hiking boots!

They cruised Prince William Sound, enjoying spectacular, if often very deep, anchorages, including anchoring close to Chenega Glacier in Icy Bay, surrounded by seals basking on small ice floes. Great chunks of ice calved off the glacier at times, and one of these triggered a displacement wave that forced them to run madly up the beach, pulling the dinghy behind them.

Teleport once again wintered in Seldovia, and in 2015 they sailed down through the Gulf of Alaska. One of the places they visited was Lituya Bay. In 1958, an earthquake caused a mountainside to collapse into the sea here, triggering the largest tsunami ever recorded, 600m (1800ft) high. You can still see a clear demarcation on the mountainside, where the trees below 600m are younger than those above. Amazingly, one of the boats anchored in the bay survived.

The Inside Passage, as it is known, proved to be a delightful cruising area, with whales, bears, berries, myriad anchorages, and even cell-phone coverage! Not having enough time to explore it all, they made their way south 350 miles to Prince Rupert. Many bays have floating public docks where boats can moor for free. There were an increasing number of recreational

vessels, something they were no longer used to, but they met some interesting characters and had a busy social life. At Baranof Warm Springs they enjoyed long soaks in the thermal pools.



Thermal pool or jacuzzi?

Eventually, re-hoisting the Canadian flag, they brought *Teleport* into Prince Rupert, where they enjoyed a relaxed welcome from Canadian Customs and left *Teleport* for another winter. For the first time, they could leave her afloat. Having decided to sell the boat, rather than sail on towards Australia, they sadly took off their personal gear and put her on the market.

It had been a grand 5 years, filled with adventure, world records, romance, wildlife and friendship. *Teleport* was not the right boat to keep in Arctic waters permanently, which is what they now want to do. They hope to develop their business (photography classes, photographic safaris, and an eco-lodge on Christmas Island) for a few years, before acquiring a larger, aluminium junk schooner. Then they plan to return to these waters they love so much.

