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- > HUNT 29 IN THE BAY OF FUNDY
- > MARITIMO 50 IN AUSTRALIA  
(ON THE COVER)

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# MotorBoating

October 2009

Volume 202 Number 9



**EPIC JOURNEY.** Sprague Theobald's Nordhavn 57 runs into ice in the Northwest Passage.

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#### COVER

Mark Burgin photographed the new C50 Sports Cabriolet by Maritimo in the South Pacific, where we sea trialed this luxury yacht from a top Australian builder.



## Into the Passage

In this exclusive account, part two in a series, Sprague Theobald enters the potentially deadly Northwest Passage on *Bagan*, his Nordhavn 57.

BY SPRAGUE THEOBALD

W

e sat ... waited ... and watched.

The harbor of St. Anthony on the northern tip of Newfoundland offered us wonderful protection from the weather systems that rolled over us, but the crew was getting extremely itchy to make the 800-mile crossing to Greenland. Clinton Bolton, our captain, and I had been downloading weather and ice charts for the past several days, and, to our relief, a small window of opportunity for a departure began to present itself — “small” being the operative word. We had two choices: wait for a northwest clearing breeze, which would give us good visibility but also drive heavy amounts of ice into our path, or take advantage of the southwest breeze, which would move some of the ice ashore, away from us, but bring in the all-engulfing seasonal fog, not to mention the continuous gales that are forecast for the Greenland coast.

In “normal” cruising, one has the luxury of simply waiting. Unfortunately, this trip/



expedition/documentary bared little relation to the word “normal.” As we were discovering, a trip to and hopeful transit through the Northwest Passage defies traditional cruising definitions. If we spent time waiting on this end, the autumn ice in the Passage could have shut it down before we got to the other end, or worse, while we were in it. In the meantime, we continued to sit ... wait ... and watch.

### WONDERLAND.

*Bagan* among icebergs the size of skyscrapers en route to the Northwest Passage (top). The crew watches for leads (right).

SPRAGUE THEOBALD



After eight days of bidding our time on the hook, we saw an opening and left St. Anthony for Nuuk, Greenland, about 800 miles to the northeast. For the next three days we enjoyed light winds from the north and all but flat seas. The weather charts predicted a 30-knot breeze to fill in from the south on the fourth and last day of the crossing. The southerly filled in right on time and we had a bumpy entry into Nuuk. Once in, we rafted up against a large work barge, which itself was rafted up to a large, wooden fishing trawler, which was rafted up to yet another trawler, which was secured to a steel bulkhead.

We explored a bit that night and had dinner ashore. Being the capital city of Greenland, Nuuk was large, but I wouldn't say bustling. The people were very eager to answer any questions we had. The surrounding hillsides were populated with very colorful and individual-looking homes and buildings. The lack of timberline was a strong visual reminder that we were truly on our way to the arctic.

We took on fuel the next day, and at 4:30 a.m. we started off for Sisimiut, the second-largest city in Greenland. It was also where Ulli Bonnekamp, our cinematographer, would fly out of. Flying in would be Chauncey Tanton, a professional snowboarder and financial advisor who will help me with filming, and Greg Deascentis, a master diver.

Along the way we kept the good company of a few humpback whales and saw our first "substantial" iceberg. The former I've had the great honor to be among before; the latter simply took my breath away. It's been written thousands of times that these massive bergs are powerful, intimidating, majestic and seemingly alive. Struggle as I may, the best description I can come up with is that these powerful and majestic entities are beyond intimidating and do indeed give the impression of being very much alive. They creak, groan, explode, roll over on a whim and sail along a seemingly

random but extremely determined path and agenda.

Two days after Chauncey and Greg flew into Sisimiut, we headed north up the coast to stage for our crossing to Lancaster Sound and the Passage. We hopped up the coast, making stops at Aasiaat (where we had to pick our way through an extremely tight archipelago of low-lying rocks in pea soup fog) and farther on to Christianshab (where we encountered the Jakobshavn Ice Fjord). Surrounded by icebergs of absolutely indescribable proportions, some larger than



**WELCOME PARTY.** At the Passage entrance, the crew is met by ice and a local.

quite a few city buildings I've seen on Lexington Avenue in Manhattan, we picked our way through this maze, all the while shooting footage.

That evening, while anchored in Nordre Laksebugt, Clinton and I once again downloaded the weather files. What we'd seen earlier as a small weather window was now developing into a large, high-pressure system with big, fat, wide isobars, all resulting in breezes 10 knots or less and from the north. We decided to start the crossing the next morning. That evening, in perfect conditions, we put Greg over the side in his

drysuit to get some underwater shots of a midsize berg that was in the cove with us. I have made hundreds, if not a thousand, dives with Greg, but watching him approach a grounded iceberg with an HD camera in hand had me second-, triple- and quadruple-guessing my decision to put him in the water. (As a documentary producer/expedition leader and I hope a good friend, I was sounding and acting more the part of the nervous mother ... not that the father can't be nervous as well.) Once safely back aboard, we screened the footage and were absolutely staggered by the images Greg shot. Not to be outdone, Chauncey and my son, Sefton, shared footage they'd made earlier while they climbed up to a small ice field and snowboarded down.

Early the next morning we pointed the boat west-ish and started our crossing of Baffin Bay. Four days later, at 8:30 a.m., we crossed the 80th meridian, marking our official "unofficial" entry into the Passage. The trip up to this point basically had the air of a delivery for me, but now that we were in Lancaster Sound, my lifelong dream of attempting to transit the Passage started to flesh itself out into a vivid and very amazing reality. The proverbial icing on the cake was that within minutes of being in the sound, the boat encountered a small pod of orca plying the frigid waters. Not to be outdone by this roaming wolf pack, very shortly afterward we came upon a small gathering of polar bears on the shore, two adults with two cubs.

Seven weeks after leaving Newport, Rhode Island, we were in the Northwest Passage. Writing those words seems surreal to me, but there we were. Now the challenge begins. ❖

*Next month, Theobald's expedition turns deadly when Bagan is closed in by impenetrable ice for two life-changing days. [northwestpassagefilm.com](http://northwestpassagefilm.com)*