

ON BOARD WITH THE 'DEADLIEST CATCH' CREW

» *The right mix: traditional cruising  
and modern technology P. 34*

# SOUNDINGS

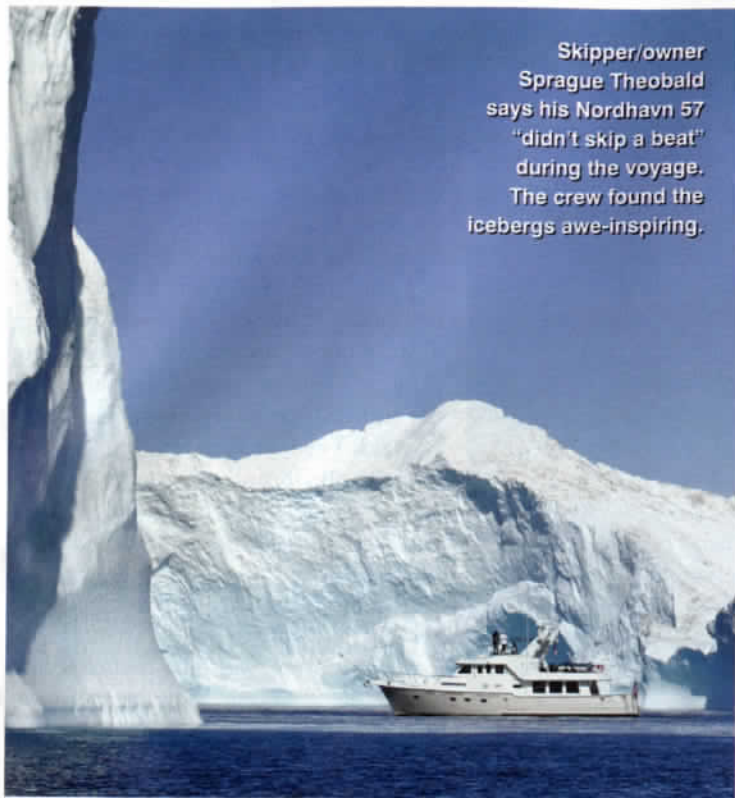
REAL BOATS, REAL BOATERS

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**PHOTO  
ISSUE**

*The best of our 'Real Boats,  
Real Boaters Photo Contest'*

**75%** of the earth is covered in water  
**WE'VE GOT YOUR BOAT!**

Skipper/owner Sprague Theobald says his Nordhavn 57 "didn't skip a beat" during the voyage. The crew found the icebergs awe-inspiring.



# The Northwest Passage in a Nordhavn

*A filmmaker completes an 8,500-mile transit to document the effects of climate change on the region*

**By Elizabeth Ellis**

STAFF WRITER

**S**prague Theobald had never seen ice like this. "Ice before was something you would skate on or slip and fall on, but this ice was so powerful ... you couldn't help feel like it had a very strong personality," he says.

This fall Theobald and crew completed an 8,500-

They picked up Theobald's son, Sefton, in Halifax, Nova Scotia. From Halifax they made stops in Woods Island Harbor and Sandwich Bay in Newfoundland; Sisimut, Greenland, where friend Greg DeAscentis joined the crew; and Beechy Island, Resolute, Gjoa Haven and Cambridge Bay in the Canadian territory of Nunavut. Stops in Alaska included Barrow, Nome and Sitka before

hear the ice screeching and groaning from inside the boat; it was just deafening," he says. "When we were trapped that night and couldn't go forward or backward or sideways, we went to bed, and the next morning [DeAscentis] went over the side with the high-def camera to see what damage had been done to the hull. He came back up shaking his head — there wasn't a scratch on the gel-

mile, 4-1/2-month transit of the Northwest Passage, arriving Nov. 5 in Seattle aboard his Nordhavn 57, Bagan. Theobald, 58, a filmmaker who owns Newport, R.I.-based Hole in the Wall Film & Video Productions, undertook the voyage to film his next documentary, "The Northwest Passage," which will detail his concerns about the effects of global warming on that part of the world.

Theobald was a longtime competitive sailor before a back injury forced him to switch to powerboats in 1993. "I've been around boats for 55 years or so, and things make more sense on the water for me than they do on land," he says.

He hired Capt. Clinton Bolton to join him for the voyage because filming and taking a 57-foot passagemaker through the Arctic ice would be too much for one person to handle. He and Bolton, along with Theobald's stepdaughter Dominique Tanton, left June 15 from Newport.



A whale breaches in the wild Arctic.

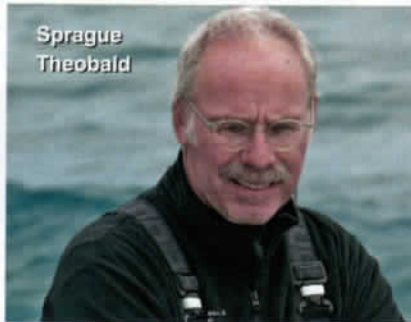
ending the trip in Seattle.

Though they were fully provisioned, they picked up fresh foods such as fruit and milk when they stopped. They refueled in Greenland, Cambridge Bay, Nome and Sitka. For most of the voyage, Sprague had four crewmembers on board.

Theobald also interviewed indigenous people to "document firsthand the environmental and political changes they have experienced in their lifetimes." Locals say the ice in the passage was the most concentrated it has been in 10 years, with chunks breaking off and gathering in the narrow arteries.

Theobald doesn't believe the Northwest Passage will be opened up for shipping — a topic of debate with the melting of the polar ice cap — because the ice doesn't melt fast enough, and the cost of using ice breakers to keep the waterway clear would be prohibitively high. Also, Nunavut islanders typically drive over the ice in winter, says Theobald, so they are reluctant to see their "ice roads" broken up.

Bagan was a solid passagemaker, says Theobald, though the Nordhavn was put to something of a test when it spent two days trapped in ice 50 miles north of Gjoa Haven, Nunavut. "I could



Sprague Theobald

coat. I was astounded."

All DeAscentis found was a 4-inch gash about 3/4 inch deep on Bagan's bulbous bow. Aside from that — and a hydraulic leak — the 1999 Nordhavn 57 "didn't skip a beat," Theobald says.

The filmmaker purchased Bagan in 2007 from the Nordhavn brokerage in Dana Point, Calif. The passagemaker weighs

60 tons, rides a full-displacement hull that's 3 to 4 inches thick and is powered by 310-hp Luger. She carries 2,000 gallons of diesel for a range of 3,800 miles at 7 to 8 knots. Theobald says he took advantage of currents as much as possible to conserve fuel, and never had to use the 75-hp wing engine.

Upgrades made for the voyage include satellite Internet capability, forward-looking Interphase sonar, two radars, a satellite phone and a watermaker that can produce 30 gallons an hour. Bagan holds 250 gallons of fresh water, and she was provisioned with roughly 2 tons of food.

Theobald ran Nobeltec charts on a PC interfaced with one of three Furuno GPS units. The equipment list also included three VHF radios, two EPIRBs, two hand-held GPS units, a life raft and five survival suits. "We also installed a very large Espar heater," says Theobald.

The crew also had two five-man tents and a portable stove in case an emergency forced them to

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leave the boat. A SPOT Satellite Messenger updated the vessel's position to their Web site several times a day, which allowed visitors to follow Bagan's progress.

The voyage was obviously a great accomplishment, but there was an unexpected reward: It allowed Theobald to reconnect with his family. Bolton left the expedition at Nome, with Theobald taking over the navigation, and DeAscentis left at Sitka because of family obligations. Theobald finished the voyage with Dominique, Sefton and stepson Chaunce Tanton, who was picked up in Barrow, Alaska.

"This trip was the first time in 15 years we were all under the same roof, and at the end of it we were as tight a family as you ever could imagine," he says.

For a full account of the trip, visit [www.northwestpassagefilm.com](http://www.northwestpassagefilm.com). ■

*Editor's note: Look for a multimedia piece, including video from the voyage, in the next Dispatches, Soundings' free e-newsletter. Sign up to receive Dispatches at [www.soundingsonline.com](http://www.soundingsonline.com).*