



NORTH WEST PASSAGE TRANSIT – Presented by Paul Kerrigan.

On Wednesday 22nd June we were treated to a fascinating talk by Paul Kerrigan. Organised by the Cruising committee, and attended by a full house of over 100 members and guests, Paul related his experience of a North West Passage transit on the yacht Drina. Drina is owned and skippered by member Michael Thurston, who has over 40 years of extensive cruising experience.

Paul, who has over 30,000 miles of cruising experience, was delighted to share with his intrigued audience, what he referred to as "his little adventure", where his most precious item of equipment was a pair of Ugg boots, kindly given to him by Bruce Gould!

Drina's transit of the North West passage was logged as over 7,400 nautical miles through Route 6, East to West, and involved pack ice, ice bergs, fog, bright clear sun, polar bears, tearing currents and glorious scenery. Paul described the trip as being three phases - Approach, Wait, and Escape. He briefly described the Approach and Escape, but the talk focussed on the Wait; which was a fair bit of anchorage time, talking with shore support, weather and ice forecasting, and a lot of fast paced trips to get through the weather and ice windows in very tricky passages.

At one point, Drina was trapped in pack floes for 3 days and 4 nights and the crew had to seriously consider whether they could continue. As they contemplated packing for a helicopter rescue, on the 4th night, the westerly wind came in and the outgoing tide cleared the floes, the ice retreating faster than they could sail out of the bay!

Their final challenge to make the Escape was an inability to find diesel, as most equipment in the high latitudes runs on jet fuel. However, as they were becoming desperate, with ice closing in fast behind, and not enough fuel to get them over the top of Alaska, a friendly local tug was happy to transfer 1.8 tonnes of diesel for free!

The Escape turned into a helter skelter ride in 35-50 knot storm conditions, but fortunately a following wind, and Drina completed her transit at Cape Barrow on 16 September.

The audience was entranced for the whole session, not least by the superb photography and video footage of this fascinating "little adventure"!

