

OCTOBER 6, 1988

The closer we came to the straits leading out of Hudson Bay, the rougher the sea became. At a landing at Native Point, an abandoned village, we had quite a time of it boarding the zodacs in the pitching waves. Once on shore, however, a group of Inuits had come across land to meet us, and not only butchered and roasted a caribou, but had also boiled up a pot of whale skin and fried a batch of bannock camp bread to the golden color of good pancakes.

Along with four big caribou ribs, I added a generous portion of whale meat to my training program. We had already been forewarned that the passage across Davis Strait to Greenland was likely to be a stormy one. Nothing stabilizes the stomach for ocean travel better than food from the creatures that swim in and upon the waters, and the versatile effects of a sea mammal are the best remedy of all.

By evening on the day of the feast, we were brought under test. Before the ship had barely begun to roll, people were clamoring for anti-seasick pills and pouring out of the dining room for their cabins. I was too preoccupied eating the first course of cold Nova Scotia salmon dressed in what I took to be a watercress mayonnaise to count the sick call; however, from the looks of the space left in the dining salon, it was a sizable evacuation.

Next morning the winds had subsided and the waters were smooth enough to allow disembarkation off Button Islands, which are located on the furthestmost northern tip of Labrador.

I was on the first zodiac to be launched. As we passed around the stem of the ship, a fuselage of sleet pelted our parkas. But before we had lost heart in the low overcast, the sailor steering the outboard spotted a polar bear running along the water's edge on the rock ledges of a scraggly, rock cliff. Right at hand, small harbor seals began to bob up to look us over; between the boat and the shore, a whale arched his back out of the water several times to make what we supposed was a deep dive.

When the polar bear dove from the rocks and began to swim parallel to the shore, we were hanging on to the safety rope by crooking our arms and wildly shooting our cameras in it's direction. A drenching swell caused one lady to pitch forward on the boat. Among the 12 of us, we must have shot 400 frames before the bear started climbing up a trail.

It takes a lot of dry toast and hot tea for most folks to sail these waters. Once I learned to eat things like whale and sword fish, I haven't been seasick one time. I was right about the watercress mayonnaise. Don't overlook it the next time you have cold salmon.