

Travellers Club Meeting – 6<sup>th</sup> March 2011

**Colin Sale: “Adventuring Around Svalbard - Norway's Spitsbergen & Other High Arctic Islands”**



I am pleased to report that 40 people were in attendance at the first travellers Club meeting of 2011 held on Sunday 6 March including a couple from Victoria and some first timers. Colin Sale was the presenter and spoke about his travels to Norway, and the country’s Arctic Territory of Svalbard in particular, which he had undertaken in July-August 2010. He commenced this by showing a selection of pictures covering the beauty of Oslo including street scenes, gardens, harbour and major buildings like the Royal Palace, new and old Opera Houses, and City Hall. We then headed for the Svalbard, learning that it is an Island Archipelago which only became officially Norwegian Territory by International Treaty in 1925, has a total area larger than Denmark, and a population of only 2,500. After its discovery in 1596, it became an important area for the hunting of polar bears, arctic foxes, and oil-bearing marine animals, but coal mining became a new industry in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Longyearbyen is the territory’s capital, and this is located on Spitsbergen, the largest island of Svalbard. Previously a coal-mining centre, this biggest town is now an important Arctic Research Centre where all the evidence is pointing to the continuation of Global Warming.

Colin then took us on a magnificent 9-day pictorial “Realm of the Polar Bear Cruise” around Spitsbergen and other islands, in and out of fiords, and to many large glaciers calving ice bergs, and seeing much of the wildlife which is now protected – a great variety of nesting sea birds (puffins, guillemots, auk, barnacle geese, glaucous gulls, kittiwakes, etc), herds of wild Svalbard reindeer, a total of 14 polar bears, several whales, and numerous groups of seals and walrus. Visits were made to the two other small towns on Spitsbergen – Ny-Alesund – the jumping off point for early exploration to the North

Pole, and Barentsberg – a Russian coal-mining town. It was from Ny-Alesund, that Norway's famous explorer Roald Amundsen (who had, in 1911, been first to reach the South Pole) took off in an Air Ship in 1926 and was first to reach the North Pole and cross to Alaska, and from where Italian Umberto Nobile attempted the same in 1928, but crashed before returning with the loss of 8 crew and not being rescued from a make-shift camp on the pack ice, for over a month. The shore excursion in Barentsberg included a short Russian cultural show in their large recreational and theatre complex.

Back on the Norwegian mainland, Colin took us on a short tour of the Open Air Museum in Oslo with its collection of old farm houses from different parts of Norway, and then on a 3-day scenic tour called "Norway in a Nutshell" which he had booked on the Internet before leaving Australia – a train journey from Oslo west through farmlands, forests and beautiful lakes, and over the high tundra country to Myrdal; the descent from there on another train down a deep glacial valley with many waterfalls from hanging valleys; a ferry trip from there at Flam down the spectacular Sogne Fiord to the old city of Bergen with its preserved World Heritage port, 13<sup>th</sup> century castle, and timber waterfront buildings; and a return trip back to Oslo on the train. Colin's power-point presentation of superb photos and amplified commentary (lapel microphone) was enthusiastically applauded. The people present enjoyed the whole of this arm-chair travel experience very much indeed. Thanks Colin!

'Ela Taranto