



DARIEN SAIL & POWER SQUADRON
DISTRICT 2, UNITED STATES POWER SQUADRONS®

Our website: DSPSCT.org
January-February, 2021

Feeling Better Yet?

Well, we made it to 2021.

The coronavirus pandemic is still with us and things are getting worse, if that's possible. But two vaccines have been approved and more are likely coming in the near future. Here in Connecticut, vaccinations for "Phase 1a" – medical first responders, healthcare workers, and residents of long-term care facilities – and "Phase 1b" – individuals 75 years old and older (which includes many DSPS members) – are well underway.

If you're in Phase 1a or you're 75 or older and haven't yet scheduled an appointment to get vaccinated, you should do so now. The longer you wait, the more difficult it may be to get an appointment, as additional categories of individuals become eligible for vaccinations:

Due to high traffic volume at websites and phone lines, eligible residents in Phase 1B may encounter delays scheduling appointments to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Please try back later. Appointment availability is limited based on the limited supply of vaccine that is currently available, but slots will continue to open up as they become available.

If you're 75 or older you can search for vaccination providers here:

<https://portal.ct.gov/Coronavirus/COVID-19-Vaccination---75-and-older>

Most, although not all, vaccination providers in Connecticut participate in the Vaccine Administration Management System (VAMS) run by the CDC. Because attempts to reach providers by telephone will be difficult and involve lengthy hold times, you may prefer to schedule your appointment online using VAMS. Be aware, however, that some providers that use VAMS, such as the Town of Darien, may not appear on the system on any given day.

Register with VAMS here: <https://dphsubmissions.ct.gov/OnlineVaccine/>

Then go here: <https://vams.cdc.gov/vaccineportal/s/login/>



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Speaker Series

Unfortunately, our January 31 speaker, Captain Lada Simek, Educator and Master Scuba Diver, had to cancel. We hope to be able to have Captain Simek present his talk on “The Oceans, Above and Below” at some later date.

Our next speaker event will be at the March 14 Change of Watch. We will hold this event virtually, rather than back at the Darien Nature Center. Again unfortunately, technology has not yet progressed to the point where we can supply drinks, oysters and the other excellent hors d’oeuvres over the Internet. Sorry. 😞

The presentation will be “Arctic Expedition in a Gaff Rigged Schooner” by Mark Andreas, who heads the Sculpture Education Department at the Silvermine Arts Center.

In 2009, Mark was invited on an arctic expedition on the S/V Noorderlicht in the North Atlantic. The expedition was a residency for artists, and included educators and scientists aboard for research.

The Noorderlicht is a 152-foot steel-hulled two-masted gaff-rigged schooner launched in 1910. Mark, an accomplished shipwright and sailor who learned his trade in Connecticut boatyards, was a perfect addition, even though he signed on as a resident artist. His presentation will include pictures taken as they sailed the Svalbard Archipelago, an untouched arctic wilderness found halfway between Norway and the North Pole.



A reporter from NPR was onboard and NPR presented live and direct programs from the Noorderlicht.

Mark is well known among the Western Long Island Catboat Association as a skilled sailor on Malo, and we are looking forward to his presentation at the Change of Watch in March.

Virtual Boating Course



With over a foot of snow on the ground, planning for boating season may seem unlikely but if you, a family member, or a friend needs to get a Connecticut Safe Boating Certificate (“Boating License”), DSPS is presenting a “virtual” Safe Boating Course beginning at 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday, February 23, 2021, and continuing on consecutive Tuesday evenings for five classes plus a review and an exam.

The course is virtual, via Zoom, but may include an on-the-water session later in the spring. Graduates of the course are awarded a diploma that qualifies them for the Connecticut Safe Boating Certificate (which is what Connecticut calls its “boating license”), along with the Coastal Boater Endorsement and the new Safe Water-skiing Endorsement. The Coastal Boater Endorsement recognizes students who complete courses like ours that are more comprehensive than those that just meet the minimum State requirements.

Assuming that the virus situation will be sufficiently improved by late spring or early summer, we plan to have an on-the-water session for the course’s graduates. This day on the water will allow students to practice

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what they learned in the classroom – the use of charts, radios, lines, anchoring, and as much as time will allow.

The virtual course, which begins on February 23, will cover seamanship and basic boat handling, equipment and regulations, an introduction to charts and aids to navigation, basic piloting, and navigation rules. The course is directed at general, practical issues of interest to all boaters, and is not targeted to either power or sail.

Connecticut's Safe Boating Certificate regulations apply to all operators, regardless of age, of vessels registered in the state.

The cost of the class (\$95) and includes the text book and chart, with significant discounts available for multiple members of the same household.

Registration and payment of the fee for the course is a straightforward process. For details, please click the "Info/Registration" button at <https://dpsct.org/>.

You may also send an e-mail to dps.ct@gmail.com for further information or to receive a schedule of classes listing the topics that will be discussed on each date.

Whale Hunting on an Umiak in Alaska

As a young Alaskan, I was one of the very few white people to go on a traditional whale hunt with Eskimos.

My wife Angeles had attended a boarding school in Madrid, and during a reunion of her classmates, I spoke at length with Jose Antonio Martin Mateos, a producer for "Emportada," a Spanish informative documentary show for RTVE. He was very interested in Alaska, and we discussed doing a program on Alaska. About a month later, Jose Antonio called. He had approval for his one hour documentary and planning began.

Whale hunting was on the top of his list. It had become a hot topic due to recent bans placed on whale hunts by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) in response to the alarming decrease in whale populations. The Commission had authorized limited subsistence whale hunts by Inuit people, allotting each village a certain number of whales.

I started making phone calls, with the thought that Barrow (Utqiagvik), the largest town in the Alaskan Arctic and the northernmost city in the U.S., would be my best bet. The mayor and village elders of Barrow were very apprehensive due to the impositions that the outsiders in the IWC had placed on them. They felt that filming a whale hunt would only make their situation worse. I shifted my interest to Wainwright, a village of about 500 people 80 miles west of Barrow. I contacted the Wainwright Airstrip manager, George, and he made contact with a whaling captain. I explained that our mission was to support the subsistence hunting whales.



With limited game meat provided by migrating herds of caribou, and fishing limited to the three months that ice is off the water, the traditional whale catch is an important source of food. They use all of the whale, meat,

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blubber, intestines, and organs. Bones are used for construction of traditional homes. We explained that our documentary would be aimed at protecting their right to catch whales. The village had been allotted three whales this year and the captain believed that the ice would open and whale hunting would happen at the end of May. We agreed that we would be there on May 27. There would be 24 hours of daylight.

We spent May 26th in Barrow. The next morning, we got on a ski-equipped De Havilland Otter. The pilot approached limping with a cane and a right leg cast, and promptly told me that he had fallen on the ice. This seemed perfectly logical, but I was worried about his ability to operate the rudder pedal with a cast.

As I sat in the co-pilot seat, we went over the mile wide channel of water that had opened from the North Slope to the Arctic Ice Pack. Immediately we saw whales, packed in the narrow channel. The water was crystal clear with the bottom of the sea completely visible. As we approached the airstrip at Wainwright, the channel opened to about double its initial width, still with an abundant whale population.

We landed, and the airstrip manager promptly met us: Jose Antonio, a cameraman, a sound man, and me. Using a snowmobile pulling a sled, George hauled our equipment to the communal hall where we would sleep. Every village has a communal hall, which is an important part of the village. Elders meet there, parties and holidays are celebrated there, and lost strangers are housed there.

Later, an umiak Captain informed us they had successfully caught a whale four days earlier, and three polar bears had been spotted feeding on the leftover carcass. The Captain wanted to get right to work. They had three umiaks about two miles from the village, and were ready to catch a whale (I was informed that they referred to it as a catch and not a hunt). George brought us out to the site. I sat behind him on the snowmobile and the other three sat on the sled towing behind. When we arrived, there was the carcass, along with three umiaks, each about 24 feet long, up on the ice, high and dry.



A umiak is a wood-framed boat with seal skins sewn together, stretched over it, and tied with lines to the inner part of the frame. These boats have a rudder on the stern but no keel. The load of people and equipment make do for ballast, and for greater stability crew and passengers sit on the bottom of the boat with just their heads above the gunwale. These umiaks had wells in them to drop in an outboard motor, a modern addition to an ancient design. Originally, the only supply of wood in the arctic was driftwood because no trees grow in the arctic. Several kayaks were there, also made of wood frames and stretched skins.

The weather was a blessing: the wind was less than 5 knots and the skies were blue with full daylight. The temperature was in the teens and we were excited.

The camera crew and I were assigned to one umiak with four other men. The men were all dressed with seal skin pants, mukluks tied at their upper calf, and seal skin parkas with fur trimmed hoods that were pulled down. Our captain was an older man with a weathered face and eyes like slits on the upper border of his massive cheeks. We dragged our boats to the edge of the ice, climbed in one by one, and paddled out while the captain placed the outboard in the well and started it up. All three boats were up and going. Because of the abundance of whales and the transparency of the water, the whales were easily spotted. The captain of the lead umiak pointed to a whale resting on the surface, and all three boats approached. The camera was on and resting on the cameraman's right shoulder while he steadied himself with his left hand on the gunwale; the sound recorder was running, but we were as quiet as possible. The captain of the lead boat had his spear ready, arm

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cocked back with the spear at eye level and his body twisted. Just 20 feet away the whale awoke and went under with a slap of his tail. The next approach was to sit and wait.

The Bowhead whales, so called due to a large curve of bone on their head that is used to break through arctic ice to get to air, get to be over 50 feet long. Whales were surfacing all around, and it took only about 20 minutes for one to surface next to the poised Captain. His spear went into the whale and the whale dove, pulling a line attached to the point of the spear. The other end of the line was attached to an inflated seal skin which was pulled underwater by the great whale.



Now we had to wait until he resurfaced. We were told that we would see the inflated seal skin first. All three umiaks were equipped with wooden spears with a two-foot metal rod and barbed point ideally designed to pass through a whale's blubber, sink into the muscle, and attach. We sat in silence waiting for the sealskin to surface. All of a sudden, an Eskimo shouted in Inuit and pointed. The boats took off in that direction. The whale surfaced, spouted, and went under, pulling the seal skin down. Again, the skin surfaced, but this time, the time underwater was much shorter. "He's getting tired," we were told. The chase was on and a second spear was thrust into the animal. Within a half hour from start to finish, the whale was caught and was floating on the surface. A line was tied around the tail and the slow process of towing it to the ice began.



Every able-bodied villager was summoned and came with snow machines and dogsleds. The whale was 44 feet long. A large towing strap was placed around the tail, a pulley block with a one-inch line was attached to the strap, and this was attached to a metal stake driven into through the ice to the ground below. Pulling started; everyone was smiling and openly laughing. English was heard much less than Inuit.

Once up on the ice, the blubber was dissected and cut into square chunks about $\frac{1}{16}$ inch thick. Dog sleds and snowmobiles brought the blubber, and later the meat, entrails, and organs back to the village where it was stored in the underground freezers dug into the permafrost. The village was alive, happiness glowed on every face, some delicacies of the fresh meat and entrails were offered. I smiled and took some to be gracious, but did not enjoy it. Traditionally, the whale is divided equally between the villagers, with widows and Captains getting two portions.

A few days later, the Captain of the hunt will throw a Nalakutaq, or party, where he provides food for everyone in the village. Music is played on a qilaut (Eskimo round drum) and dancing acts out the bravery of the hunt and other stories. A blanket toss, where participants are tossed up to 30 feet in the air, and competitive Eskimo sports are played. Everyone has a good time. Alcohol is prohibited in Wainwright and many of the villages. Anyone caught breaking the law can be condemned to confinement in a house on the outskirts of the village. To ensure you don't run away and that you wait until the magistrate flies in for his monthly visit, they confiscate your shoes.

Mark Dam, *Commander*, Darien Sail & Power Squadron

Whale Hunting is prohibited by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) to everyone with the exception of the Inuit people. The Inuit include the aboriginals of Alaska, Siberia, Canada, and Greenland. In Canada, Inuit is the preferred name of these people, whereas Eskimo is still used and preferred by most natives in Alaska.