Does your route follow the successful route of Raoul Amundsen?

Yes! The Into the NWP itinerary includes a number of key sites from previous Amundsen expeditions. Personally, Amundsen is one of my favourites. His navigation skills were impeccable and he adapted Inuit techniques into all of his operations. The most important site in my opinion is Uqsuqtuuq (Gjoa Haven). Amundsen was here from winter of 1903 to summer of 1905. During these two years he bonded and learned from Netsilik (Inuit) and made a number of major scientific discoveries. Gjoa was also the name of Amundsen's ship, hence the name Gjoa Haven. During the summer of 1905 the ice lifted and Amundsen was able to complete the Northwest Passage. I believe he was the first to successfully navigate all the way through the NWP but that may up for debate, depending on your definition of the NW Passage.

I spent time on James Bay pre Cambridge. The black flies were frightful. Are they up in the Arctic as well?

Thank you for your kind comment. James Bay, the Barren Lands west of Hudson Bay, and basically anywhere in the sub-Arctic near the tree line definitely feature horrendous black flies and mosquitos during the summer months. We used to call that "mixed grill". Mercifully the whole NW Passage trip from Kangerlussuaq, Greenland to Kugluktuk, Nunavut takes place both well above the tree line and therefore north of where one finds black flies, and in late-August/early September when the colder weather will have killed most of them off.

How strenuous will the shore trips be - eg how far, how much climbing?

Adventure Canada expeditions are intended for people in reasonably good health. However, we are able to accommodate guests who use canes and walkers, and offer complimentary walking sticks to borrow for excursions, but we are not wheelchair-accessible. While our average traveller is between 55 and 75 years of age, it is not uncommon that we have children, as well as people in their 90s join us. Different paces are welcome, as we are able to cater to a wide range of activity and mobility levels on excursions. How far and how high is determined by the traveller, you do not have to go far or high if you do not want to. Excursions often require the use of zodiacs to access remote places with no pier or dock for the ship to pull alongside. This means that in order to disembark the ship, one must be able to navigate a flight of stairs down to the gangway and step into a Zodiac (with assistance).

What did you think of 'The Terror' on TV?

I thought it was an interesting program, but not very historically accurate. Definitely a Hollywood production.
The photos showed a variety of plants. Do these plants only thrive in the Arctic and do they only flower at certain times of the year / in certain (cold!) temperatures?

All of the plants shown were photographed in the Canadian or Greenlandic Arctic however a number also occur in the sub-Arctic (e.g. Dwarf Willow) or in coastal regions further south (e.g. Seashore Camomile). In the Arctic the flowering plants are at their showiest during the peak summer period (late July to August), whereas the autumnal colours of the tundra peak in late August to early September (aka during our transit of the NW Passage).

Is there much seasickness among passengers?

You will be happy to learn that the Ocean Endeavour is a sturdy, ice-strengthened ship equipped with two stabilizers to balance the ship in unruly sea conditions. On rougher sea days, you may feel a sway on board. It is often a gentle and predictable sway, and doesn't typically bother many people. But, some people are more sensitive to the motion. If you are a first time cruiser or know you struggle with motion sickness, there are simple precautions you can take to ensure you’re feeling good on board - like packing the appropriate medications/wrist bands/patches and selecting a cabin on the lower decks of the ship, such as deck 4 or 5.

For how many years has the NW passage been open to shipping, and during this time has it been open every year?

One of the earliest transits of the NW passage for shipping/commerce (versus exploration) was the voyage of the USS Manhattan in August of 1969. Built as an ordinary oil tanker, it was refitted with an ice-breaker bow for the NW Passage trip, but even then it required the assistance of a number of Canadian and American icebreakers. An attempt in winter proved unsuccessful. Otherwise, parts of the NW Passage are utilized by what is called "Sealift" which comprises vessels owned by the Government of Nunavut and provide a vital link for all Nunavut communities and their residents to obtain their annual re-supply of goods and materials needed throughout the year. This remains the most economical way to transport bulk goods (e.g. construction material, vehicles, groceries, fuel) to the Arctic. Other than that, expedition cruise ships comprise the rest of the summer traffic through the NW Passage. While parts of the passage have been open every year since 1969, not all parts have been open every year and the duration has also varied considerably.

What was the most dangerous situation you have ever experienced on an expedition?

Of all the possible threats in the arctic I feel the sea ice has the largest impact our safety. Thankfully we have over 30 years of experience in the Arctic and travel with trained ice navigators. The most dangerous experience I encountered throughout my Arctic expeditions was a small yatch caught in sea ice. The crew needed to abandon ship, thankfully the Canadian Coast Guard was able to rescue everyone!
We saw lots of sunshine in the presentation, but what’s the bad weather like?

As mentioned after the presentation, the Arctic in the summer is generally characterised by a high-pressure cell that sits over the Canadian Arctic Archipelago and tends to favour fair weather and blue skies. However the exact location of the high-pressure cell varies from year to year, and of course it doesn’t preclude local weather fronts and low-pressure cells from moving through, generally from west to east. When this happens, generally in the guise of a ‘3-day system’, the weather can turn foggy, cold, and wet. But the sun always returns for close to 24 hours in the summer.

Is it easier to do the geology on the Trans-Hudson than on the Himalaya? Or is it the case that the parallels tell you more?

Interesting question. The great advantage of doing geological field work in the Arctic is the fact that much of it can be walked. The terrain may be rugged but it is rarely completely inaccessible. The great disadvantage is the cost. To access the Arctic requires flying up from southern Canada to a staging location (generally Iqaluit in the eastern Canadian Arctic, Yellowknife in the western Canadian Arctic, or Resolute in the high Arctic). From there access to a field area is generally with Twin Otters mounted on “tundra tires” as shown during the presentation. And once in the field area of interest, a helicopter is required to ferry people to and from work/traverse. The costs come in the form of the fixed- and rotary-wing support, and significantly, the fuel required for the aircrafts. The great advantage of doing field work in the Himalaya is that access is relatively easy and inexpensive, given the number of airports along the mountain belt, and the fact that a good jeep will get you to most places. The big disadvantage is of course the topography, which makes much of the mountain belt inaccessible to direct geological observations (unless you are a mountain climber). Ultimately, the best course of action is to do fieldwork in both areas: the Arctic to document what a mountain belt looks like at deeper erosion levels (aka the roots of the mountain belt), and the Himalaya to document what an active mountain belt looks like at higher erosion levels (aka the top levels of the mountain belt). It really takes both “views” to reconstruct and fully constrain the geometry and evolution of a collisional mountain belt.

Would there be an opportunity to meet with the locals and their elders during the trip?

Yes! Meaningful cultural exchange is a very important part of our programs. Everywhere we travel, we are privileged to work with the people who call the region home—not just on shore, but also aboard. Regional representatives are at the heart of our shipboard staff. Their culture, language, and local understanding of life and the land are woven into our programming, deepening the connections we form as we go.